THE G. K. CHESTERTON COLLECTION

50 BOOKS

G. K. CHESTERTON
INDEX

GILBERT KEITH CHESTERTON
—NON-FICTION—
HERETICS
ORTHODOXY
WHAT’S WRONG WITH THE WORLD
WHAT I SAW IN AMERICA
THE NEW JERUSALEM
IRISH IMPRESSIONS
A SHORT HISTORY OF ENGLAND
EUGENICS AND OTHER EVILS
THE SUPERSTITION OF DIVORCE
THE APPETITE OF TYRANNY
THE CRIMES OF ENGLAND
THE BLATCHFORD CONTROVERSIES
THE VICTORIAN AGE IN LITERATURE
A MISCELLANY OF MEN
ALARMS AND DISCURSIONS
ALL THINGS CONSIDERED
THE DEFENDANT
TREMENDOUS TRIFLES
VARIED TYPES
UTOPIA OF USURERS AND OTHER ESSAYS
A CHESTERTON CALENDAR
ESSAYS I BY CHESTERTON
ESSAYS II BY CHESTERTON
ESSAYS III BY CHESTERTON

—FICTION—
THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN
THE WISDOM OF FATHER BROWN
THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY
THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH
THE NAPOLEON OF NOTTING HILL
THE FLYING INN
MANALIVE
THE BALL AND THE CROSS
THE CLUB OF QUEER TRADES
THE TREES OF PRIDE
THE DONNINGTON AFFAIR
OTHER SHORT STORIES

—BIOGRAPHY—
CHARLES DICKENS
APPRECIATIONS AND CRITICISMS OF THE WORKS OF CHARLES DICKENS
GEORGE BERNARD SHAW
ROBERT BROWNING
LORD KITCHENER

—POETRY—
THE BALLAD OF THE WHITE HORSE
THE BALLAD OF SAINT BARBARA
THE WILD KNIGHT AND OTHER POEMS
WINE, WATER AND SONG
GREYBEARDS AT PLAY
GILBERT KEITH CHESTERTON

Gilbert Keith Chesterton (29 May 1874—14 June 1936) better known as G.K. Chesterton, was an English writer, lay theologian, poet, philosopher, dramatist, journalist, orator, literary and art critic, biographer, and Christian apologist. Chesterton is often referred to as the “prince of paradox.” Time magazine, in a review of a biography of Chesterton, observed of his writing style: “Whenever possible Chesterton made his points with popular sayings, proverbs, allegories—first carefully turning them inside out.”

Chesterton is well known for his fictional priest-detective Father Brown, and for his reasoned apologetics. Even some of those who disagree with him have recognized the wide appeal of such works as Orthodoxy. Chesterton, as a political thinker, cast aspersions on both Progressivism and Conservatism, saying, “The whole modern world has divided itself into Conservatives and Progressives. The business of Progressives is to go on making mistakes. The business of the Conservatives is to prevent the mistakes from being corrected.” Chesterton routinely referred to himself as an “orthodox” Christian, and came to identify this position more and more with Catholicism, eventually converting to Roman Catholicism from High Church Anglicanism. George Bernard Shaw, Chesterton’s “friendly enemy” according to Time, said of him, “He was a man of colossal genius.” Biographers have identified him as a successor to such Victorian authors as Matthew Arnold, Thomas Carlyle, John Henry Cardinal Newman, and John Ruskin.

EARLY LIFE

Born in Campden Hill in Kensington, London, Chesterton was baptized at the age of one month into the Church of England, though his family themselves were irregularly practising Unitarians. According to his autobiography, as a young man Chesterton became fascinated with the occult and, along with his brother Cecil, experimented with Ouija boards.

Chesterton was educated at St Paul’s School, then attended the Slade School
of Art in order to become an illustrator. The Slade is a department of University College London, where Chesterton also took classes in literature, but did not complete a degree in either subject.

FAMILY LIFE

In 1901 Chesterton married Frances Blogg, and the marriage lasted the rest of his life. Chesterton credited Frances with leading him back to Anglicanism, though he later considered Anglicanism as a “pale imitation.” He entered full communion with the Roman Catholic Church in 1922.

CAREER

In 1896 Chesterton began working for the London publisher Redway, and T. Fisher Unwin, where he remained until 1902. During this period he also undertook his first journalistic work as a freelance art and literary critic. In 1902 the Daily News gave him a weekly opinion column, followed in 1905 by a weekly column in The Illustrated London News, for which he continued to write for the next thirty years.

Chesterton early showed a great interest in and talent for art. He had planned to become an artist and his writing shows a vision that clothed abstract ideas in concrete and memorable images. Even his fiction contained carefully concealed parables. Father Brown is perpetually correcting the incorrect vision of the bewildered folks at the scene of the crime and wandering off at the end with the criminal to exercise his priestly role of recognition and repentance. For example, in the story “The Flying Stars,” Father Brown entreats the character Flambeau to give up his life of crime: “There is still youth and honour and humour in you; don’t fancy they will last in that trade. Men may keep a sort of level of good, but no man has ever been able to keep on one level of evil. That road goes down and down. The kind man drinks and turns cruel; the frank man kills and lies about it. Many a man I’ve known started like you to be an honest outlaw, a merry robber of the rich, and ended stamped into slime.”

Chesterton loved to debate, often engaging in friendly public disputes with such men as George Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Bertrand Russell and Clarence Darrow. According to his autobiography, he and Shaw played cowboys in a silent film that was never released.
VISUAL WIT

Chesterton was a large man, standing 6 feet 4 inches (1.93 m) and weighing around 286 pounds (130 kg). His girth gave rise to a famous anecdote. During the First World War a lady in London asked why he was not “out at the Front”; he replied, “If you go round to the side, you will see that I am.” On another occasion he remarked to his friend George Bernard Shaw, “To look at you, anyone would think a famine had struck England.” Shaw retorted, “To look at you, anyone would think you have caused it.” P. G. Wodehouse once described a very loud crash as “a sound like Chesterton falling onto a sheet of tin.”

Chesterton usually wore a cape and a crumpled hat, with a swordstick in hand, and a cigar hanging out of his mouth. He had a tendency to forget where he was supposed to be going and miss the train that was supposed to take him there. It is reported that on several occasions he sent a telegram to his wife Frances from some distant (and incorrect) location, writing such things as “Am in Market Harborough. Where ought I to be?” to which she would reply, “Home.” Because of these instances of absent-mindedness and of Chesterton being extremely clumsy as a child, there has been speculation that Chesterton had undiagnosed developmental coordination disorder.

RADIO

In 1931, the BBC, invited Chesterton to give a series of radio talks. He accepted, tentatively at first. However, from 1932 until his death, Chesterton delivered over 40 talks per year. He was allowed (and encouraged) to improvise on the scripts. This allowed his talks to maintain an intimate character, as did the decision to allow his wife and secretary to sit with him during his broadcasts.

The talks were very popular. A BBC official remarked, after Chesterton’s death, that “in another year or so, he would have become the dominating voice from Broadcasting House.”

DEATH AND VENERATION

Chesterton died of congestive heart failure on the morning of 14 June 1936, at his home in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire. His last known words were a greeting spoken to his wife. The homily at Chesterton’s Requiem Mass in Westminster Cathedral, London, was delivered by Ronald Knox on 27 June
1936. Knox said, “All of this generation has grown up under Chesterton’s influence so completely that we do not even know when we are thinking Chesterton.” He is buried in Beaconsfield in the Catholic Cemetery. Chesterton’s estate was probated at £28,389, approximately equivalent in 2012 terms to £1.3 million.

Near the end of his life, Pope Pius XI invested Chesterton as Knight Commander with Star of the Papal Order of St. Gregory the Great. The Chesterton Society has proposed that he be beatified. He is remembered liturgically on 13 June by the Episcopal Church (USA), with a provisional feast day as adopted at the 2009 General Convention.

WRITING

Chesterton wrote around 80 books, several hundred poems, some 200 short stories, 4000 essays, and several plays. He was a literary and social critic, historian, playwright, novelist, Catholic theologian and apologist, debater, and mystery writer. He was a columnist for the Daily News, the Illustrated London News, and his own paper, G. K.’s Weekly; he also wrote articles for the Encyclopædia Britannica, including the entry on Charles Dickens and part of the entry on Humour in the 14th edition (1929). His best-known character is the priest-detective Father Brown, who appeared only in short stories, while The Man Who Was Thursday is arguably his best-known novel. He was a convinced Christian long before he was received into the Catholic Church, and Christian themes and symbolism appear in much of his writing. In the United States, his writings on distributism were popularized through The American Review, published by Seward Collins in New York.

Of his nonfiction, Charles Dickens: A Critical Study (1906) has received some of the broadest-based praise. According to Ian Ker (The Catholic Revival in English Literature, 1845–1961, 2003), “In Chesterton’s eyes Dickens belongs to Merry, not Puritan, England”; Ker treats Chesterton’s thought in Chapter 4 of that book as largely growing out of his true appreciation of Dickens, a somewhat shop-soiled property in the view of other literary opinions of the time.

Chesterton’s writings consistently displayed wit and a sense of humour. He employed paradox, while making serious comments on the world, government, politics, economics, philosophy, theology and many other topics.

VIEWS AND CONTEMPORARIES
Chesterton’s writing has been seen by some analysts as combining two earlier strands in English literature. Dickens’ approach is one of these. Another is represented by Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw, whom Chesterton knew well: satirists and social commentators following in the tradition of Samuel Butler, vigorously wielding paradox as a weapon against complacent acceptance of the conventional view of things.

Chesterton’s style and thinking were all his own, however, and his conclusions were often opposed to those of Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw. In his book Heretics, Chesterton has this to say of Wilde: “The same lesson [of the pessimistic pleasure-seeker] was taught by the very powerful and very desolate philosophy of Oscar Wilde. It is the carpe diem religion; but the carpe diem religion is not the religion of happy people, but of very unhappy people. Great joy does not gather the rosebuds while it may; its eyes are fixed on the immortal rose which Dante saw.” More briefly, and with a closer approximation of Wilde’s own style, he writes in Orthodoxy concerning the necessity of making symbolic sacrifices for the gift of creation: “Oscar Wilde said that sunsets were not valued because we could not pay for sunsets. But Oscar Wilde was wrong; we can pay for sunsets. We can pay for them by not being Oscar Wilde.”

Chesterton and Shaw were famous friends and enjoyed their arguments and discussions. Although rarely in agreement, they both maintained good will toward and respect for each other. However, in his writing, Chesterton expressed himself very plainly on where they differed and why. In Heretics he writes of Shaw:

After belabouring a great many people for a great many years for being unprogressive, Mr. Shaw has discovered, with characteristic sense, that it is very doubtful whether any existing human being with two legs can be progressive at all. Having come to doubt whether humanity can be combined with progress, most people, easily pleased, would have elected to abandon progress and remain with humanity. Mr. Shaw, not being easily pleased, decides to throw over humanity with all its limitations and go in for progress for its own sake. If man, as we know him, is incapable of the philosophy of progress, Mr. Shaw asks, not for a new kind of philosophy, but for a new kind of man. It is rather as if a nurse had tried a rather bitter food for some years on a baby, and on discovering that it was not suitable, should not throw away the food and ask for a new food, but throw the baby out of window, and ask for a new baby.

Shaw represented the new school of thought, modernism, which was rising at
the time. Chesterton’s views, on the other hand, became increasingly more focused towards the Church. In Orthodoxy he writes: “The worship of will is the negation of will . . . If Mr. Bernard Shaw comes up to me and says, ‘Will something,’ that is tantamount to saying, ‘I do not mind what you will,’ and that is tantamount to saying, ‘I have no will in the matter.’ You cannot admire will in general, because the essence of will is that it is particular.”

This style of argumentation is what Chesterton refers to as using ‘Uncommon Sense’—that is, that the thinkers and popular philosophers of the day, though very clever, were saying things that were nonsensical. This is illustrated again in Orthodoxy: “Thus when Mr. H. G. Wells says (as he did somewhere), ‘All chairs are quite different,’ he utters not merely a misstatement, but a contradiction in terms. If all chairs were quite different, you could not call them ‘all chairs.’” Or, again from Orthodoxy:

The wild worship of lawlessness and the materialist worship of law end in the same void. Nietzsche scales staggering mountains, but he turns up ultimately in Tibet. He sits down beside Tolstoy in the land of nothing and Nirvana. They are both helpless—one because he must not grasp anything, and the other because he must not let go of anything. The Tolstoyan’s will is frozen by a Buddhist instinct that all special actions are evil. But the Nietzsche’s will is quite equally frozen by his view that all special actions are good; for if all special actions are good, none of them are special. They stand at the crossroads, and one hates all the roads and the other likes all the roads. The result is—well, some things are not hard to calculate. They stand at the crossroads.

Another contemporary and friend from schooldays was Edmund Bentley, inventor of the clerihew. Chesterton himself wrote clerihews and illustrated his friend’s first published collection of poetry, Biography for Beginners (1905), which popularized the clerihew form. Chesterton was also godfather to Bentley’s son, Nicolas, and opened his novel The Man Who Was Thursday with a poem written to Bentley.

THE CHESTERBELLOC

Chesterton is often associated with his close friend, the poet and essayist Hilaire Belloc. George Bernard Shaw coined the name Chesterbelloc for their partnership, and this stuck. Though they were very different men, they shared many beliefs; Chesterton eventually joined Belloc in the Catholic faith, and both voiced criticisms of capitalism and socialism. They instead espoused a third
way: distributism. G. K.’s Weekly, which occupied much of Chesterton’s energy in the last 15 years of his life, was the successor to Belloc’s New Witness, taken over from Cecil Chesterton, Gilbert’s brother, who died in World War I.

LITERARY

Chesterton’s The Everlasting Man contributed to C. S. Lewis’s conversion to Christianity. In a letter to Sheldon Vanauken (14 December 1950) Lewis calls the book “the best popular apologetic I know,” and to Rhonda Bodle he wrote (31 December 1947) “the [very] best popular defence of the full Christian position I know is GK Chesterton’s The Everlasting Man.” The book was also cited in a list of 10 books that “most shaped his vocational attitude and philosophy of life.”

Chesterton was a very early and outspoken critic of eugenics. Eugenics and Other Evils represents one of the first book length oppositions to the Eugenics movement that began to gain momentum in England during the early 1900s.

Chesterton’s 1906 biography of Charles Dickens was largely responsible for creating a popular revival for Dickens’s work as well as a serious reconsideration of Dickens by scholars.

Chesterton’s novel The Man Who Was Thursday inspired the Irish Republican leader Michael Collins with the idea: “If you didn’t seem to be hiding nobody hunted you out.”

Etienne Gilson praised Chesterton’s Aquinas volume as follows: “I consider it as being, without possible comparison, the best book ever written on Saint Thomas . . . the few readers who have spent twenty or thirty years in studying St. Thomas Aquinas, and who, perhaps, have themselves published two or three volumes on the subject, cannot fail to perceive that the so-called ‘wit’ of Chesterton has put their scholarship to shame.”

Chesterton’s column in the Illustrated London News on 18 September 1909 had a profound effect on Mahatma Gandhi. P. N. Furbank asserts that Gandhi was “thunderstruck” when he read it, while Martin Green notes that “Gandhi was so delighted with this that he told Indian Opinion to reprint it.”

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, author of seventy books, identified Chesterton as the stylist who had the greatest impact on his own writing, stating in his autobiography Treasure in Clay “The greatest influence in writing was G. K. Chesterton who never used a useless word, who saw the value of a paradox, and avoided what was trite.”
Canadian Media Guru Marshall McLuhan was heavily influenced by Chesterton; McLuhan said the book What’s Wrong with the World changed his life in terms of ideas and religion.

Neil Gaiman has stated that he grew up reading Chesterton in his school’s library, and that The Napoleon of Notting Hill was an important influence on his own book Neverwhere, which used a quote from it as an epigraph. Gaiman also based the character Gilbert, from the comic book The Sandman, on Chesterton, and the novel he co-wrote with Terry Pratchett is dedicated to him.

Argentine author and essayist Jorge Luis Borges cited Chesterton as a major influence on his own fiction. In an interview with Richard Burgin during the late 1960s, Borges said, “Chesterton knew how to make the most of a detective story.”

Chesterton’s fence is the principle that reforms should not be made until the reasoning behind the existing state of affairs is understood. The quotation is from Chesterton’s 1929 book The Thing: Why I am a Catholic, in the chapter entitled “The Drift from Domesticity”: “In the matter of reforming things, as distinct from deforming them, there is one plain and simple principle; a principle which will probably be called a paradox. There exists in such a case a certain institution or law; let us say, for the sake of simplicity, a fence or gate erected across a road. The more modern type of reformer goes gaily up to it and says, “I don’t see the use of this; let us clear it away.” To which the more intelligent type of reformer will do well to answer: “If you don’t see the use of it, I certainly won’t let you clear it away. Go away and think. Then, when you can come back and tell me that you do see the use of it, I may allow you to destroy it.”

OTHER

Dale Ahlquist founded the American Chesterton Society in 1996 to explore and promote his writings:

In 2008, a Catholic high school, Chesterton Academy, opened in the Minneapolis area.

In 2012, a crater on the planet Mercury was named Chesterton after the author.

In the Fall of 2014, a Catholic high school, G.K. Chesterton Academy of Chicago, is set to open in Highland Park, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago.

A fictionalized GK Chesterton is the central character in the Young Chesterton Chronicles, a series of young adult adventure novels written by John
McNichol, and published by Sophia Institute Press and Bezalel Books.

Chesterton wrote the hymn O God of Earth and Altar which was printed in The Commonwealth and then included in the English Hymnal in 1906. Several lines of the hymn are sung in the beginning of the song Revelations by the British heavy metal band Iron Maiden on their 1983 album Piece of Mind. Lead singer Bruce Dickinson in an interview stated “I have a fondness for hymns. I love some of the ritual, the beautiful words, Jerusalem and there was another one, with words by G.K. Chesterton O God of Earth and Altar—very fire and brimstone: ‘Bow down and hear our cry.’ I used that for an Iron Maiden song, Revelations. In my strange and clumsy way I was trying to say look its all the same stuff.”
GILBERT KEITH CHESTERTON
—NON-FICTION—

INDEX

—NON-FICTION—

HERETICS

ORTHODOXY

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE WORLD

WHAT I SAW IN AMERICA

THE NEW JERUSALEM

IRISH IMPRESSIONS

A SHORT HISTORY OF ENGLAND

EUGENICS AND OTHER EVILS

THE SUPERSTITION OF DIVORCE

THE APPETITE OF TYRANNY

THE CRIMES OF ENGLAND

THE BLATCHFORD CONTROVERSIES

THE VICTORIAN AGE IN LITERATURE

A MISCELLANY OF MEN

ALARMS AND DISCURSIONS

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

THE DEFENDANT

TREMENDOUS TRIFLES

VARIED TYPES

UTOPIA OF USURERS AND OTHER ESSAYS

A CHESTERTON CALENDAR

ESSAYS I BY CHESTERTON
ESSAYS II BY CHESTERTON

ESSAYS III BY CHESTERTON
HERETICS

G. K. CHESTERTON
### TABLE OF CONTENTS

**INDEX**

**HERETICS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TABLE OF CONTENTS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTORY REMARKS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ORTHODOXY</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td><strong>ON THE NEGATIVE SPIRIT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td><strong>ON MR. RUDYARD KIPLING AND MAKING THE WORLD SMALL</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td><strong>MR. BERNARD SHAW</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td><strong>MR. H. G. WELLS AND THE GIANTS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td><strong>CHRISTMAS AND THE AESTHETES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td><strong>OMAR AND THE SACRED VINE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td><strong>THE MILDNESS OF THE YELLOW PRESS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX</td>
<td><strong>THE MOODS OF MR. GEORGE MOORE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td><strong>ON SANDALS AND SIMPLICITY</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XI</td>
<td><strong>SCIENCE AND THE SAVAGES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XII</td>
<td><strong>PAGANISM AND MR. LOWES DICKINSON</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIII</td>
<td><strong>CELTS AND CELTOPHILES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XIV</td>
<td><strong>ON CERTAIN MODERN WRITERS AND THE INSTITUTION OF THE FAMILY</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
XV
ON SMART NOVELISTS AND THE SMART SET

XVI
ON MR. MCCABE AND A DIVINE FRIVOLITY

XVII
ON THE WIT OF WHISTLER

XVIII
THE FALLACY OF THE YOUNG NATION

XIX
SLUM NOVELISTS AND THE SLUMS

XX
CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ORTHODOXY
INTRODUCTORY REMARKS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ORTHODOXY

Nothing more strangely indicates an enormous and silent evil of modern society than the extraordinary use which is made nowadays of the word “orthodox.” In former days the heretic was proud of not being a heretic. It was the kingdoms of the world and the police and the judges who were heretics. He was orthodox. He had no pride in having rebelled against them; they had rebelled against him. The armies with their cruel security, the kings with their cold faces, the decorous processes of State, the reasonable processes of law—all these like sheep had gone astray. The man was proud of being orthodox, was proud of being right. If he stood alone in a howling wilderness he was more than a man; he was a church. He was the centre of the universe; it was round him that the stars swung. All the tortures torn out of forgotten hells could not make him admit that he was heretical. But a few modern phrases have made him boast of it. He says, with a conscious laugh, “I suppose I am very heretical,” and looks round for applause. The word “heresy” not only means no longer being wrong; it practically means being clear-headed and courageous. The word “orthodoxy” not only no longer means being right; it practically means being wrong. All this can mean one thing, and one thing only. It means that people care less for whether they are philosophically right. For obviously a man ought to confess himself crazy before he confesses himself heretical. The Bohemian, with a red tie, ought to pique himself on his orthodoxy. The dynamiter, laying a bomb, ought to feel that, whatever else he is, at least he is orthodox.

It is foolish, generally speaking, for a philosopher to set fire to another philosopher in Smithfield Market because they do not agree in their theory of the universe. That was done very frequently in the last decadence of the Middle Ages, and it failed altogether in its object. But there is one thing that is infinitely more absurd and unpractical than burning a man for his philosophy. This is the habit of saying that his philosophy does not matter, and this is done universally in the twentieth century, in the decadence of the great revolutionary period. General theories are everywhere contemned; the doctrine of the Rights of Man is dismissed with the doctrine of the Fall of Man. Atheism itself is too theological for us to-day. Revolution itself is too much of a system; liberty itself is too much
of a restraint. We will have no generalizations. Mr. Bernard Shaw has put the
view in a perfect epigram: “The golden rule is that there is no golden rule.” We
are more and more to discuss details in art, politics, literature. A man’s opinion
on tramcars matters; his opinion on Botticelli matters; his opinion on all things
does not matter. He may turn over and explore a million objects, but he must not
find that strange object, the universe; for if he does he will have a religion, and
be lost. Everything matters—except everything.

Examples are scarcely needed of this total levity on the subject of cosmic
philosophy. Examples are scarcely needed to show that, whatever else we think
of as affecting practical affairs, we do not think it matters whether a man is a
pessimist or an optimist, a Cartesian or a Hegelian, a materialist or a spiritualist.
Let me, however, take a random instance. At any innocent tea-table we may
easily hear a man say, “Life is not worth living.” We regard it as we regard the
statement that it is a fine day; nobody thinks that it can possibly have any serious
effect on the man or on the world. And yet if that utterance were really believed,
the world would stand on its head. Murderers would be given medals for saving
men from life; firemen would be denounced for keeping men from death;
poisons would be used as medicines; doctors would be called in when people
were well; the Royal Humane Society would be rooted out like a horde of
assassins. Yet we never speculate as to whether the conversational pessimist will
strengthen or disorganize society; for we are convinced that theories do not
matter.

This was certainly not the idea of those who introduced our freedom. When
the old Liberals removed the gags from all the heresies, their idea was that
religious and philosophical discoveries might thus be made. Their view was that
cosmic truth was so important that every one ought to bear independent
testimony. The modern idea is that cosmic truth is so unimportant that it cannot
matter what any one says. The former freed inquiry as men loose a noble hound;
the latter frees inquiry as men fling back into the sea a fish unfit for eating.
Never has there been so little discussion about the nature of men as now, when,
for the first time, any one can discuss it. The old restriction meant that only the
orthodox were allowed to discuss religion. Modern liberty means that nobody is
allowed to discuss it. Good taste, the last and vilest of human superstitions, has
succeeded in silencing us where all the rest have failed. Sixty years ago it was
bad taste to be an avowed atheist. Then came the Bradlaughites, the last religious
men, the last men who cared about God; but they could not alter it. It is still bad
taste to be an avowed atheist. But their agony has achieved just his—that now it
is equally bad taste to be an avowed Christian. Emancipation has only locked the saint in the same tower of silence as the heresiarch. Then we talk about Lord Anglesey and the weather, and call it the complete liberty of all the creeds.

But there are some people, nevertheless—and I am one of them—who think that the most practical and important thing about a man is still his view of the universe. We think that for a landlady considering a lodger, it is important to know his income, but still more important to know his philosophy. We think that for a general about to fight an enemy, it is important to know the enemy’s numbers, but still more important to know the enemy’s philosophy. We think the question is not whether the theory of the cosmos affects matters, but whether in the long run, anything else affects them. In the fifteenth century men cross-examined and tormented a man because he preached some immoral attitude; in the nineteenth century we feted and flattered Oscar Wilde because he preached such an attitude, and then broke his heart in penal servitude because he carried it out. It may be a question which of the two methods was the more cruel; there can be no kind of question which was the more ludicrous. The age of the Inquisition has not at least the disgrace of having produced a society which made an idol of the very same man for preaching the very same things which it made him a convict for practising.

Now, in our time, philosophy or religion, our theory, that is, about ultimate things, has been driven out, more or less simultaneously, from two fields which it used to occupy. General ideals used to dominate literature. They have been driven out by the cry of “art for art’s sake.” General ideals used to dominate politics. They have been driven out by the cry of “efficiency,” which may roughly be translated as “politics for politics’ sake.” Persistently for the last twenty years the ideals of order or liberty have dwindled in our books; the ambitions of wit and eloquence have dwindled in our parliaments. Literature has purposely become less political; politics have purposely become less literary. General theories of the relation of things have thus been extruded from both; and we are in a position to ask, “What have we gained or lost by this extrusion? Is literature better, is politics better, for having discarded the moralist and the philosopher?”

When everything about a people is for the time growing weak and ineffective, it begins to talk about efficiency. So it is that when a man’s body is a wreck he begins, for the first time, to talk about health. Vigorous organisms talk not about their processes, but about their aims. There cannot be any better proof of the physical efficiency of a man than that he talks cheerfully of a journey to the end
of the world. And there cannot be any better proof of the practical efficiency of a
nation than that it talks constantly of a journey to the end of the world, a journey
to the Judgment Day and the New Jerusalem. There can be no stronger sign of a
course material health than the tendency to run after high and wild ideals; it is in
the first exuberance of infancy that we cry for the moon. None of the strong men
in the strong ages would have understood what you meant by working for
efficiency. Hildebrand would have said that he was working not for efficiency,
but for the Catholic Church. Danton would have said that he was working not for
efficiency, but for liberty, equality, and fraternity. Even if the ideal of such men
were simply the ideal of kicking a man downstairs, they thought of the end like
men, not of the process like paralytics. They did not say, “Efficiently elevating
my right leg, using, you will notice, the muscles of the thigh and calf, which are
in excellent order, I—” Their feeling was quite different. They were so filled
with the beautiful vision of the man lying flat at the foot of the staircase that in
that ecstasy the rest followed in a flash. In practice, the habit of generalizing and
idealizing did not by any means mean worldly weakness. The time of big
theories was the time of big results. In the era of sentiment and fine words, at the
end of the eighteenth century, men were really robust and effective. The
sentimentalists conquered Napoleon. The cynics could not catch De Wet. A
hundred years ago our affairs for good or evil were wielded triumphantly by
rhetoricians. Now our affairs are hopelessly muddled by strong, silent men. And
just as this repudiation of big words and big visions has brought forth a race of
small men in politics, so it has brought forth a race of small men in the arts. Our
modern politicians claim the colossal license of Caesar and the Superman, claim
that they are too practical to be pure and too patriotic to be moral; but the upshot
of it all is that a mediocrity is Chancellor of the Exchequer. Our new artistic
philosophers call for the same moral license, for a freedom to wreck heaven and
earth with their energy; but the upshot of it all is that a mediocrity is Poet
Laureate. I do not say that there are no stronger men than these; but will any one
say that there are any men stronger than those men of old who were dominated
by their philosophy and steeped in their religion? Whether bondage be better
than freedom may be discussed. But that their bondage came to more than our
freedom it will be difficult for any one to deny.

The theory of the unmorality of art has established itself firmly in the strictly
artistic classes. They are free to produce anything they like. They are free to
write a “Paradise Lost” in which Satan shall conquer God. They are free to write
a “Divine Comedy” in which heaven shall be under the floor of hell. And what
have they done? Have they produced in their universality anything grander or more beautiful than the things uttered by the fierce Ghibbeline Catholic, by the rigid Puritan schoolmaster? We know that they have produced only a few roundels. Milton does not merely beat them at his piety, he beats them at their own irreverence. In all their little books of verse you will not find a finer defiance of God than Satan’s. Nor will you find the grandeur of paganism felt as that fiery Christian felt it who described Faranata lifting his head as in disdain of hell. And the reason is very obvious. Blasphemy is an artistic effect, because blasphemy depends upon a philosophical conviction. Blasphemy depends upon belief and is fading with it. If any one doubts this, let him sit down seriously and try to think blasphemous thoughts about Thor. I think his family will find him at the end of the day in a state of some exhaustion.

Neither in the world of politics nor that of literature, then, has the rejection of general theories proved a success. It may be that there have been many moonstruck and misleading ideals that have from time to time perplexed mankind. But assuredly there has been no ideal in practice so moonstruck and misleading as the ideal of practicality. Nothing has lost so many opportunities as the opportunism of Lord Rosebery. He is, indeed, a standing symbol of this epoch—the man who is theoretically a practical man, and practically more unpractical than any theorist. Nothing in this universe is so unwise as that kind of worship of worldly wisdom. A man who is perpetually thinking of whether this race or that race is strong, of whether this cause or that cause is promising, is the man who will never believe in anything long enough to make it succeed. The opportunist politician is like a man who should abandon billiards because he was beaten at billiards, and abandon golf because he was beaten at golf. There is nothing which is so weak for working purposes as this enormous importance attached to immediate victory. There is nothing that fails like success.

And having discovered that opportunism does fail, I have been induced to look at it more largely, and in consequence to see that it must fail. I perceive that it is far more practical to begin at the beginning and discuss theories. I see that the men who killed each other about the orthodoxy of the Homoousion were far more sensible than the people who are quarrelling about the Education Act. For the Christian dogmatists were trying to establish a reign of holiness, and trying to get defined, first of all, what was really holy. But our modern educationists are trying to bring about a religious liberty without attempting to settle what is religion or what is liberty. If the old priests forced a statement on mankind, at least they previously took some trouble to make it lucid. It has been left for the
modern mobs of Anglicans and Nonconformists to persecute for a doctrine without even stating it.

For these reasons, and for many more, I for one have come to believe in going back to fundamentals. Such is the general idea of this book. I wish to deal with my most distinguished contemporaries, not personally or in a merely literary manner, but in relation to the real body of doctrine which they teach. I am not concerned with Mr. Rudyard Kipling as a vivid artist or a vigorous personality; I am concerned with him as a Heretic—that is to say, a man whose view of things has the hardihood to differ from mine. I am not concerned with Mr. Bernard Shaw as one of the most brilliant and one of the most honest men alive; I am concerned with him as a Heretic—that is to say, a man whose philosophy is quite solid, quite coherent, and quite wrong. I revert to the doctrinal methods of the thirteenth century, inspired by the general hope of getting something done.

Suppose that a great commotion arises in the street about something, let us say a lamp-post, which many influential persons desire to pull down. A grey-clad monk, who is the spirit of the Middle Ages, is approached upon the matter, and begins to say, in the arid manner of the Schoolmen, “Let us first of all consider, my brethren, the value of Light. If Light be in itself good—” At this point he is somewhat excusably knocked down. All the people make a rush for the lamp-post, the lamp-post is down in ten minutes, and they go about congratulating each other on their unmediaeval practicality. But as things go on they do not work out so easily. Some people have pulled the lamp-post down because they wanted the electric light; some because they wanted old iron; some because they wanted darkness, because their deeds were evil. Some thought it not enough of a lamp-post, some too much; some acted because they wanted to smash municipal machinery; some because they wanted to smash something. And there is war in the night, no man knowing whom he strikes. So, gradually and inevitably, today, to-morrow, or the next day, there comes back the conviction that the monk was right after all, and that all depends on what is the philosophy of Light. Only what we might have discussed under the gas-lamp, we now must discuss in the dark.
II

ON THE NEGATIVE SPIRIT

Much has been said, and said truly, of the monkish morbidity, of the hysteria which as often gone with the visions of hermits or nuns. But let us never forget that this visionary religion is, in one sense, necessarily more wholesome than our modern and reasonable morality. It is more wholesome for this reason, that it can contemplate the idea of success or triumph in the hopeless fight towards the ethical ideal, in what Stevenson called, with his usual startling felicity, “the lost fight of virtue.” A modern morality, on the other hand, can only point with absolute conviction to the horrors that follow breaches of law; its only certainty is a certainty of ill. It can only point to imperfection. It has no perfection to point to. But the monk meditating upon Christ or Buddha has in his mind an image of perfect health, a thing of clear colours and clean air. He may contemplate this ideal wholeness and happiness far more than he ought; he may contemplate it to the neglect of exclusion of essential THINGS he may contemplate it until he has become a dreamer or a driveller; but still it is wholeness and happiness that he is contemplating. He may even go mad; but he is going mad for the love of sanity. But the modern student of ethics, even if he remains sane, remains sane from an insane dread of insanity.

The anchorite rolling on the stones in a frenzy of submission is a healthier person fundamentally than many a sober man in a silk hat who is walking down Cheapside. For many such are good only through a withering knowledge of evil. I am not at this moment claiming for the devotee anything more than this primary advantage, that though he may be making himself personally weak and miserable, he is still fixing his thoughts largely on gigantic strength and happiness, on a strength that has no limits, and a happiness that has no end. Doubtless there are other objections which can be urged without unreason against the influence of gods and visions in morality, whether in the cell or street. But this advantage the mystic morality must always have—it is always jollier. A young man may keep himself from vice by continually thinking of disease. He may keep himself from it also by continually thinking of the Virgin Mary. There may be question about which method is the more reasonable, or even about which is the more efficient. But surely there can be no question about which is the more wholesome.
I remember a pamphlet by that able and sincere secularist, Mr. G. W. Foote, which contained a phrase sharply symbolizing and dividing these two methods. The pamphlet was called BEER AND BIBLE, those two very noble things, all the nobler for a conjunction which Mr. Foote, in his stern old Puritan way, seemed to think sardonic, but which I confess to thinking appropriate and charming. I have not the work by me, but I remember that Mr. Foote dismissed very contemptuously any attempts to deal with the problem of strong drink by religious offices or intercessions, and said that a picture of a drunkard’s liver would be more efficacious in the matter of temperance than any prayer or praise. In that picturesque expression, it seems to me, is perfectly embodied the incurable morbidity of modern ethics. In that temple the lights are low, the crowds kneel, the solemn anthems are uplifted. But that upon the altar to which all men kneel is no longer the perfect flesh, the body and substance of the perfect man; it is still flesh, but it is diseased. It is the drunkard’s liver of the New Testament that is marred for us, which we take in remembrance of him.

Now, it is this great gap in modern ethics, the absence of vivid pictures of purity and spiritual triumph, which lies at the back of the real objection felt by so many sane men to the realistic literature of the nineteenth century. If any ordinary man ever said that he was horrified by the subjects discussed in Ibsen or Maupassant, or by the plain language in which they are spoken of, that ordinary man was lying. The average conversation of average men throughout the whole of modern civilization in every class or trade is such as Zola would never dream of printing. Nor is the habit of writing thus of these things a new habit. On the contrary, it is the Victorian prudery and silence which is new still, though it is already dying. The tradition of calling a spade a spade starts very early in our literature and comes down very late. But the truth is that the ordinary honest man, whatever vague account he may have given of his feelings, was not either disgusted or even annoyed at the candour of the moderns. What disgusted him, and very justly, was not the presence of a clear realism, but the absence of a clear idealism. Strong and genuine religious sentiment has never had any objection to realism; on the contrary, religion was the realistic thing, the brutal thing, the thing that called names. This is the great difference between some recent developments of Nonconformity and the great Puritanism of the seventeenth century. It was the whole point of the Puritans that they cared nothing for decency. Modern Nonconformist newspapers distinguish themselves by suppressing precisely those nouns and adjectives which the founders of Nonconformity distinguished themselves by flinging at kings and queens. But if
it was a chief claim of religion that it spoke plainly about evil, it was the chief claim of all that it spoke plainly about good. The thing which is resented, and, as I think, rightly resented, in that great modern literature of which Ibsen is typical, is that while the eye that can perceive what are the wrong things increases in an uncanny and devouring clarity, the eye which sees what things are right is growing mistier and mistier every moment, till it goes almost blind with doubt. If we compare, let us say, the morality of the DIVINE COMEDY with the morality of Ibsen’s GHOSTS, we shall see all that modern ethics have really done. No one, I imagine, will accuse the author of the INFERNO of an Early Victorian prudishness or a Podsnapian optimism. But Dante describes three moral instruments—Heaven, Purgatory, and Hell, the vision of perfection, the vision of improvement, and the vision of failure. Ibsen has only one—Hell. It is often said, and with perfect truth, that no one could read a play like GHOSTS and remain indifferent to the necessity of an ethical self-command. That is quite true, and the same is to be said of the most monstrous and material descriptions of the eternal fire. It is quite certain the realists like Zola do in one sense promote morality—they promote it in the sense in which the hangman promotes it, in the sense in which the devil promotes it. But they only affect that small minority which will accept any virtue of courage. Most healthy people dismiss these moral dangers as they dismiss the possibility of bombs or microbes. Modern realists are indeed Terrorists, like the dynamiters; and they fail just as much in their effort to create a thrill. Both realists and dynamiters are well-meaning people engaged in the task, so obviously ultimately hopeless, of using science to promote morality.

I do not wish the reader to confuse me for a moment with those vague persons who imagine that Ibsen is what they call a pessimist. There are plenty of wholesome people in Ibsen, plenty of good people, plenty of happy people, plenty of examples of men acting wisely and things ending well. That is not my meaning. My meaning is that Ibsen has throughout, and does not disguise, a certain vagueness and a changing attitude as well as a doubting attitude towards what is really wisdom and virtue in this life—a vagueness which contrasts very remarkably with the decisiveness with which he pounces on something which he perceives to be a root of evil, some convention, some deception, some ignorance. We know that the hero of GHOSTS is mad, and we know why he is mad. We do also know that Dr. Stockman is sane; but we do not know why he is sane. Ibsen does not profess to know how virtue and happiness are brought about, in the sense that he professes to know how our modern sexual tragedies are brought
about. Falsehood works ruin in THE PILLARS OF SOCIETY, but truth works equal ruin in THE WILD DUCK. There are no cardinal virtues of Ibsenism. There is no ideal man of Ibsen. All this is not only admitted, but vaunted in the most valuable and thoughtful of all the eulogies upon Ibsen, Mr. Bernard Shaw’s QUINTESSENCE OF IBSENISM. Mr. Shaw sums up Ibsen’s teaching in the phrase, “The golden rule is that there is no golden rule.” In his eyes this absence of an enduring and positive ideal, this absence of a permanent key to virtue, is the one great Ibsen merit. I am not discussing now with any fullness whether this is so or not. All I venture to point out, with an increased firmness, is that this omission, good or bad, does leave us face to face with the problem of a human consciousness filled with very definite images of evil, and with no definite image of good. To us light must be henceforward the dark thing—the thing of which we cannot speak. To us, as to Milton’s devils in Pandemonium, it is darkness that is visible. The human race, according to religion, fell once, and in falling gained knowledge of good and of evil. Now we have fallen a second time, and only the knowledge of evil remains to us.

A great silent collapse, an enormous unspoken disappointment, has in our time fallen on our Northern civilization. All previous ages have sweated and been crucified in an attempt to realize what is really the right life, what was really the good man. A definite part of the modern world has come beyond question to the conclusion that there is no answer to these questions, that the most that we can do is to set up a few notice-boards at places of obvious danger, to warn men, for instance, against drinking themselves to death, or ignoring the mere existence of their neighbours. Ibsen is the first to return from the baffled hunt to bring us the tidings of great failure.

Every one of the popular modern phrases and ideals is a dodge in order to shirk the problem of what is good. We are fond of talking about “liberty”; that, as we talk of it, is a dodge to avoid discussing what is good. We are fond of talking about “progress”; that is a dodge to avoid discussing what is good. We are fond of talking about “education”; that is a dodge to avoid discussing what is good. The modern man says, “Let us leave all these arbitrary standards and embrace liberty.” This is, logically rendered, “Let us not decide what is good, but let it be considered good not to decide it.” He says, “Away with your old moral formulae; I am for progress.” This, logically stated, means, “Let us not settle what is good; but let us settle whether we are getting more of it.” He says, “Neither in religion nor morality, my friend, lie the hopes of the race, but in education.” This, clearly expressed, means, “We cannot decide what is good, but
Mr. H.G. Wells, that exceedingly clear-sighted man, has pointed out in a recent work that this has happened in connection with economic questions. The old economists, he says, made generalizations, and they were (in Mr. Wells’s view) mostly wrong. But the new economists, he says, seem to have lost the power of making any generalizations at all. And they cover this incapacity with a general claim to be, in specific cases, regarded as “experts,” a claim “proper enough in a hairdresser or a fashionable physician, but indecent in a philosopher or a man of science.” But in spite of the refreshing rationality with which Mr. Wells has indicated this, it must also be said that he himself has fallen into the same enormous modern error. In the opening pages of that excellent book MANKIND IN THE MAKING, he dismisses the ideals of art, religion, abstract morality, and the rest, and says that he is going to consider men in their chief function, the function of parenthood. He is going to discuss life as a “tissue of births.” He is not going to ask what will produce satisfactory saints or satisfactory heroes, but what will produce satisfactory fathers and mothers. The whole is set forward so sensibly that it is a few moments at least before the reader realises that it is another example of unconscious shirking. What is the good of begetting a man until we have settled what is the good of being a man? You are merely handing on to him a problem you dare not settle yourself. It is as if a man were asked, “What is the use of a hammer?” and answered, “To make hammers”; and when asked, “And of those hammers, what is the use?” answered, “To make hammers again.” Just as such a man would be perpetually putting off the question of the ultimate use of carpentry, so Mr. Wells and all the rest of us are by these phrases successfully putting off the question of the ultimate value of the human life.

The case of the general talk of “progress” is, indeed, an extreme one. As enunciated today, “progress” is simply a comparative of which we have not settled the superlative. We meet every ideal of religion, patriotism, beauty, or brute pleasure with the alternative ideal of progress—that is to say, we meet every proposal of getting something that we know about, with an alternative proposal of getting a great deal more of nobody knows what. Progress, properly understood, has, indeed, a most dignified and legitimate meaning. But as used in opposition to precise moral ideals, it is ludicrous. So far from it being the truth that the ideal of progress is to be set against that of ethical or religious finality, the reverse is the truth. Nobody has any business to use the word “progress” unless he has a definite creed and a cast-iron code of morals. Nobody can be
progressive without being doctrinal; I might almost say that nobody can be progressive without being infallible—at any rate, without believing in some infallibility. For progress by its very name indicates a direction; and the moment we are in the least doubtful about the direction, we become in the same degree doubtful about the progress. Never perhaps since the beginning of the world has there been an age that had less right to use the word “progress” than we. In the Catholic twelfth century, in the philosophic eighteenth century, the direction may have been a good or a bad one, men may have differed more or less about how far they went, and in what direction, but about the direction they did in the main agree, and consequently they had the genuine sensation of progress. But it is precisely about the direction that we disagree. Whether the future excellence lies in more law or less law, in more liberty or less liberty; whether property will be finally concentrated or finally cut up; whether sexual passion will reach its sanest in an almost virgin intellectualism or in a full animal freedom; whether we should love everybody with Tolstoy, or spare nobody with Nietzsche;—these are the things about which we are actually fighting most. It is not merely true that the age which has settled least what is progress is this “progressive” age. It is, moreover, true that the people who have settled least what is progress are the most “progressive” people in it. The ordinary mass, the men who have never troubled about progress, might be trusted perhaps to progress. The particular individuals who talk about progress would certainly fly to the four winds of heaven when the pistol-shot started the race. I do not, therefore, say that the word “progress” is unmeaning; I say it is unmeaning without the previous definition of a moral doctrine, and that it can only be applied to groups of persons who hold that doctrine in common. Progress is not an illegitimate word, but it is logically evident that it is illegitimate for us. It is a sacred word, a word which could only rightly be used by rigid believers and in the ages of faith.
III

ON MR. RUDYARD KIPLING AND MAKING THE WORLD SMALL

There is no such thing on earth as an uninteresting subject; the only thing that can exist is an uninterested person. Nothing is more keenly required than a defence of bores. When Byron divided humanity into the bores and bored, he omitted to notice that the higher qualities exist entirely in the bores, the lower qualities in the bored, among whom he counted himself. The bore, by his starry enthusiasm, his solemn happiness, may, in some sense, have proved himself poetical. The bored has certainly proved himself prosaic.

We might, no doubt, find it a nuisance to count all the blades of grass or all the leaves of the trees; but this would not be because of our boldness or gaiety, but because of our lack of boldness and gaiety. The bore would go onward, bold and gay, and find the blades of grass as splendid as the swords of an army. The bore is stronger and more joyous than we are; he is a demigod—nay, he is a god. For it is the gods who do not tire of the iteration of things; to them the nightfall is always new, and the last rose as red as the first.

The sense that everything is poetical is a thing solid and absolute; it is not a mere matter of phraseology or persuasion. It is not merely true, it is ascertainable. Men may be challenged to deny it; men may be challenged to mention anything that is not a matter of poetry. I remember a long time ago a sensible sub-editor coming up to me with a book in his hand, called “Mr. Smith,” or “The Smith Family,” or some such thing. He said, “Well, you won’t get any of your damned mysticism out of this,” or words to that effect. I am happy to say that I undeceived him; but the victory was too obvious and easy. In most cases the name is unpoetical, although the fact is poetical. In the case of Smith, the name is so poetical that it must be an arduous and heroic matter for the man to live up to it. The name of Smith is the name of the one trade that even kings respected, it could claim half the glory of that arma virumque which all epics acclaimed. The spirit of the smithy is so close to the spirit of song that it has mixed in a million poems, and every blacksmith is a harmonious blacksmith.

Even the village children feel that in some dim way the smith is poetic, as the grocer and the cobbler are not poetic, when they feast on the dancing sparks and deafening blows in the cavern of that creative violence. The brute repose of
Nature, the passionate cunning of man, the strongest of earthly metals, the wierdest of earthly elements, the unconquerable iron subdued by its only conqueror, the wheel and the ploughshare, the sword and the steam-hammer, the arraying of armies and the whole legend of arms, all these things are written, briefly indeed, but quite legibly, on the visiting-card of Mr. Smith. Yet our novelists call their hero “Aylmer Valence,” which means nothing, or “Vernon Raymond,” which means nothing, when it is in their power to give him this sacred name of Smith—this name made of iron and flame. It would be very natural if a certain hauteur, a certain carriage of the head, a certain curl of the lip, distinguished every one whose name is Smith. Perhaps it does; I trust so. Whoever else are parvenus, the Smiths are not parvenus. From the darkest dawn of history this clan has gone forth to battle; its trophies are on every hand; its name is everywhere; it is older than the nations, and its sign is the Hammer of Thor. But as I also remarked, it is not quite the usual case. It is common enough that common things should be poetical; it is not so common that common names should be poetical. In most cases it is the name that is the obstacle. A great many people talk as if this claim of ours, that all things are poetical, were a mere literary ingenuity, a play on words. Precisely the contrary is true. It is the idea that some things are not poetical which is literary, which is a mere product of words. The word “signal-box” is unpoetical. But the thing signal-box is not unpoetical; it is a place where men, in an agony of vigilance, light blood-red and sea-green fires to keep other men from death. That is the plain, genuine description of what it is; the prose only comes in with what it is called. The word “pillar-box” is unpoetical. But the thing pillar-box is not unpoetical; it is the place to which friends and lovers commit their messages, conscious that when they have done so they are sacred, and not to be touched, not only by others, but even (religious touch!) by themselves. That red turret is one of the last of the temples. Posting a letter and getting married are among the few things left that are entirely romantic; for to be entirely romantic a thing must be irrevocable. We think a pillar-box prosaic, because there is no rhyme to it. We think a pillar-box unpoetical, because we have never seen it in a poem. But the bold fact is entirely on the side of poetry. A signal-box is only called a signal-box; it is a house of life and death. A pillar-box is only called a pillar-box; it is a sanctuary of human words. If you think the name of “Smith” prosaic, it is not because you are practical and sensible; it is because you are too much affected with literary refinements. The name shouts poetry at you. If you think of it otherwise, it is because you are steeped and sodden with verbal reminiscences, because you
remember everything in Punch or Comic Cuts about Mr. Smith being drunk or Mr. Smith being henpecked. All these things were given to you poetical. It is only by a long and elaborate process of literary effort that you have made them prosaic.

Now, the first and fairest thing to say about Rudyard Kipling is that he has borne a brilliant part in thus recovering the lost provinces of poetry. He has not been frightened by that brutal materialistic air which clings only to words; he has pierced through to the romantic, imaginative matter of the things themselves. He has perceived the significance and philosophy of steam and of slang. Steam may be, if you like, a dirty by-product of science. Slang may be, if you like, a dirty by-product of language. But at least he has been among the few who saw the divine parentage of these things, and knew that where there is smoke there is fire—that is, that wherever there is the foulest of things, there also is the purest. Above all, he has had something to say, a definite view of things to utter, and that always means that a man is fearless and faces everything. For the moment we have a view of the universe, we possess it.

Now, the message of Rudyard Kipling, that upon which he has really concentrated, is the only thing worth worrying about in him or in any other man. He has often written bad poetry, like Wordsworth. He has often said silly things, like Plato. He has often given way to mere political hysteria, like Gladstone. But no one can reasonably doubt that he means steadily and sincerely to say something, and the only serious question is, What is that which he has tried to say? Perhaps the best way of stating this fairly will be to begin with that element which has been most insisted by himself and by his opponents—I mean his interest in militarism. But when we are seeking for the real merits of a man it is unwise to go to his enemies, and much more foolish to go to himself.

Now, Mr. Kipling is certainly wrong in his worship of militarism, but his opponents are, generally speaking, quite as wrong as he. The evil of militarism is not that it shows certain men to be fierce and haughty and excessively warlike. The evil of militarism is that it shows most men to be tame and timid and excessively peaceable. The professional soldier gains more and more power as the general courage of a community declines. Thus the Pretorian guard became more and more important in Rome as Rome became more and more luxurious and feeble. The military man gains the civil power in proportion as the civilian loses the military virtues. And as it was in ancient Rome so it is in contemporary Europe. There never was a time when nations were more militarist. There never was a time when men were less brave. All ages and all epics have sung of arms
and the man; but we have effected simultaneously the deterioration of the man
and the fantastic perfection of the arms. Militarism demonstrated the decadence
of Rome, and it demonstrates the decadence of Prussia.

And unconsciously Mr. Kipling has proved this, and proved it admirably. For
in so far as his work is earnestly understood the military trade does not by any
means emerge as the most important or attractive. He has not written so well
about soldiers as he has about railway men or bridge builders, or even
journalists. The fact is that what attracts Mr. Kipling to militarism is not the idea
of courage, but the idea of discipline. There was far more courage to the square
mile in the Middle Ages, when no king had a standing army, but every man had
a bow or sword. But the fascination of the standing army upon Mr. Kipling is not
courage, which scarcely interests him, but discipline, which is, when all is said
and done, his primary theme. The modern army is not a miracle of courage; it
has not enough opportunities, owing to the cowardice of everybody else. But it is
really a miracle of organization, and that is the truly Kiplingite ideal. Kipling’s
subject is not that valour which properly belongs to war, but that
interdependence and efficiency which belongs quite as much to engineers, or
sailors, or mules, or railway engines. And thus it is that when he writes of
engineers, or sailors, or mules, or steam-engines, he writes at his best. The real
poetry, the “true romance” which Mr. Kipling has taught, is the romance of the
division of labour and the discipline of all the trades. He sings the arts of peace
much more accurately than the arts of war. And his main contention is vital and
valuable. Every thing is military in the sense that everything depends upon
obedience. There is no perfectly epicurean corner; there is no perfectly
irresponsible place. Everywhere men have made the way for us with sweat and
submission. We may fling ourselves into a hammock in a fit of divine
carelessness. But we are glad that the net-maker did not make the hammock in a
fit of divine carelessness. We may jump upon a child’s rocking-horse for a joke.
But we are glad that the carpenter did not leave the legs of it unglued for a joke.
So far from having merely preached that a soldier cleaning his side-arm is to be
adored because he is military, Kipling at his best and clearest has preached that
the baker baking loaves and the tailor cutting coats is as military as anybody.

Being devoted to this multitudinous vision of duty, Mr. Kipling is naturally a
cosmopolitan. He happens to find his examples in the British Empire, but almost
any other empire would do as well, or, indeed, any other highly civilized
country. That which he admires in the British army he would find even more
apparent in the German army; that which he desires in the British police he
would find flourishing, in the French police. The ideal of discipline is not the whole of life, but it is spread over the whole of the world. And the worship of it tends to confirm in Mr. Kipling a certain note of worldly wisdom, of the experience of the wanderer, which is one of the genuine charms of his best work.

The great gap in his mind is what may be roughly called the lack of patriotism—that is to say, he lacks altogether the faculty of attaching himself to any cause or community finally and tragically; for all finality must be tragic. He admires England, but he does not love her; for we admire things with reasons, but love them without reasons. He admires England because she is strong, not because she is English. There is no harshness in saying this, for, to do him justice, he avows it with his usual picturesque candour. In a very interesting poem, he says that—

“If England was what England seems”
— that is, weak and inefficient; if England were not what (as he believes) she is—that is, powerful and practical—

“How quick we’d chuck ‘er! But she ain’t!”

He admits, that is, that his devotion is the result of a criticism, and this is quite enough to put it in another category altogether from the patriotism of the Boers, whom he hounded down in South Africa. In speaking of the really patriotic peoples, such as the Irish, he has some difficulty in keeping a shrill irritation out of his language. The frame of mind which he really describes with beauty and nobility is the frame of mind of the cosmopolitan man who has seen men and cities.

“For to admire and for to see,
For to be’old this world so wide.”

He is a perfect master of that light melancholy with which a man looks back on having been the citizen of many communities, of that light melancholy with which a man looks back on having been the lover of many women. He is the philanderer of the nations. But a man may have learnt much about women in flirtations, and still be ignorant of first love; a man may have known as many lands as Ulysses, and still be ignorant of patriotism.

Mr. Rudyard Kipling has asked in a celebrated epigram what they can know of England who know England only. It is a far deeper and sharper question to ask, “What can they know of England who know only the world?” for the world does not include England any more than it includes the Church. The moment we care for anything deeply, the world—that is, all the other miscellaneous interests—
becomes our enemy. Christians showed it when they talked of keeping one’s self “unspotted from the world;” but lovers talk of it just as much when they talk of the “world well lost.” Astronomically speaking, I understand that England is situated on the world; similarly, I suppose that the Church was a part of the world, and even the lovers inhabitants of that orb. But they all felt a certain truth—the truth that the moment you love anything the world becomes your foe. Thus Mr. Kipling does certainly know the world; he is a man of the world, with all the narrowness that belongs to those imprisoned in that planet. He knows England as an intelligent English gentleman knows Venice. He has been to England a great many times; he has stopped there for long visits. But he does not belong to it, or to any place; and the proof of it is this, that he thinks of England as a place. The moment we are rooted in a place, the place vanishes. We live like a tree with the whole strength of the universe.

The globe-trotter lives in a smaller world than the peasant. He is always breathing, an air of locality. London is a place, to be compared to Chicago; Chicago is a place, to be compared to Timbuctoo. But Timbuctoo is not a place, since there, at least, live men who regard it as the universe, and breathe, not an air of locality, but the winds of the world. The man in the saloon steamer has seen all the races of men, and he is thinking of the things that divide men—diet, dress, decorum, rings in the nose as in Africa, or in the ears as in Europe, blue paint among the ancients, or red paint among the modern Britons. The man in the cabbage field has seen nothing at all; but he is thinking of the things that unite men—hunger and babies, and the beauty of women, and the promise or menace of the sky. Mr. Kipling, with all his merits, is the globe-trotter; he has not the patience to become part of anything. So great and genuine a man is not to be accused of a merely cynical cosmopolitanism; still, his cosmopolitanism is his weakness. That weakness is splendidly expressed in one of his finest poems, “The Sestina of the Tramp Royal,” in which a man declares that he can endure anything in the way of hunger or horror, but not permanent presence in one place. In this there is certainly danger. The more dead and dry and dusty a thing is the more it travels about; dust is like this and the thistle-down and the High Commissioner in South Africa. Fertile things are somewhat heavier, like the heavy fruit trees on the pregnant mud of the Nile. In the heated idleness of youth we were all rather inclined to quarrel with the implication of that proverb which says that a rolling stone gathers no moss. We were inclined to ask, “Who wants to gather moss, except silly old ladies?” But for all that we begin to perceive that the proverb is right. The rolling stone rolls echoing from rock to rock; but the
rolling stone is dead. The moss is silent because the moss is alive.

The truth is that exploration and enlargement make the world smaller. The telegraph and the steamboat make the world smaller. The telescope makes the world smaller; it is only the microscope that makes it larger. Before long the world will be cloven with a war between the telescopists and the microscopists. The first study large things and live in a small world; the second study small things and live in a large world. It is inspiring without doubt to whizz in a motor-car round the earth, to feel Arabia as a whirl of sand or China as a flash of rice-fields. But Arabia is not a whirl of sand and China is not a flash of rice-fields. They are ancient civilizations with strange virtues buried like treasures. If we wish to understand them it must not be as tourists or inquirers, it must be with the loyalty of children and the great patience of poets. To conquer these places is to lose them. The man standing in his own kitchen-garden, with fairyland opening at the gate, is the man with large ideas. His mind creates distance; the motor-car stupidly destroys it. Moderns think of the earth as a globe, as something one can easily get round, the spirit of a schoolmistress. This is shown in the odd mistake perpetually made about Cecil Rhodes. His enemies say that he may have had large ideas, but he was a bad man. His friends say that he may have been a bad man, but he certainly had large ideas. The truth is that he was not a man essentially bad, he was a man of much geniality and many good intentions, but a man with singularly small views. There is nothing large about painting the map red; it is an innocent game for children. It is just as easy to think in continents as to think in cobble-stones. The difficulty comes in when we seek to know the substance of either of them. Rhodes’ prophecies about the Boer resistance are an admirable comment on how the “large ideas” prosper when it is not a question of thinking in continents but of understanding a few two-legged men. And under all this vast illusion of the cosmopolitan planet, with its empires and its Reuter’s agency, the real life of man goes on concerned with this tree or that temple, with this harvest or that drinking-song, totally uncomprehended, totally untouched. And it watches from its splendid parochialism, possibly with a smile of amusement, motor-car civilization going its triumphant way, outstripping time, consuming space, seeing all and seeing nothing, roaring on at last to the capture of the solar system, only to find the sun cockney and the stars suburban.
IV

MR. BERNARD SHAW

In the glad old days, before the rise of modern morbidities, when genial old Ibsen filled the world with wholesome joy, and the kindly tales of the forgotten Emile Zola kept our firesides merry and pure, it used to be thought a disadvantage to be misunderstood. It may be doubted whether it is always or even generally a disadvantage. The man who is misunderstood has always this advantage over his enemies, that they do not know his weak point or his plan of campaign. They go out against a bird with nets and against a fish with arrows. There are several modern examples of this situation. Mr. Chamberlain, for instance, is a very good one. He constantly eludes or vanquishes his opponents because his real powers and deficiencies are quite different to those with which he is credited, both by friends and foes. His friends depict him as a strenuous man of action; his opponents depict him as a coarse man of business; when, as a fact, he is neither one nor the other, but an admirable romantic orator and romantic actor. He has one power which is the soul of melodrama—the power of pretending, even when backed by a huge majority, that he has his back to the wall. For all mobs are so far chivalrous that their heroes must make some show of misfortune—that sort of hypocrisy is the homage that strength pays to weakness. He talks foolishly and yet very finely about his own city that has never deserted him. He wears a flaming and fantastic flower, like a decadent minor poet. As for his bluffness and toughness and appeals to common sense, all that is, of course, simply the first trick of rhetoric. He fronts his audiences with the venerable affectation of Mark Antony—

“I am no orator, as Brutus is;
But as you know me all, a plain blunt man.”

It is the whole difference between the aim of the orator and the aim of any other artist, such as the poet or the sculptor. The aim of the sculptor is to convince us that he is a sculptor; the aim of the orator, is to convince us that he is not an orator. Once let Mr. Chamberlain be mistaken for a practical man, and his game is won. He has only to compose a theme on empire, and people will say that these plain men say great things on great occasions. He has only to drift in the large loose notions common to all artists of the second rank, and people will say
that business men have the biggest ideals after all. All his schemes have ended in smoke; he has touched nothing that he did not confuse. About his figure there is a Celtic pathos; like the Gaels in Matthew Arnold’s quotation, “he went forth to battle, but he always fell.” He is a mountain of proposals, a mountain of failures; but still a mountain. And a mountain is always romantic.

There is another man in the modern world who might be called the antithesis of Mr. Chamberlain in every point, who is also a standing monument of the advantage of being misunderstood. Mr. Bernard Shaw is always represented by those who disagree with him, and, I fear, also (if such exist) by those who agree with him, as a capering humorist, a dazzling acrobat, a quick-change artist. It is said that he cannot be taken seriously, that he will defend anything or attack anything, that he will do anything to startle and amuse. All this is not only untrue, but it is, glaringly, the opposite of the truth; it is as wild as to say that Dickens had not the boisterous masculinity of Jane Austen. The whole force and triumph of Mr. Bernard Shaw lie in the fact that he is a thoroughly consistent man. So far from his power consisting in jumping through hoops or standing on his head, his power consists in holding his own fortress night and day. He puts the Shaw test rapidly and rigorously to everything that happens in heaven or earth. His standard never varies. The thing which weak-minded revolutionists and weak-minded Conservatives really hate (and fear) in him, is exactly this, that his scales, such as they are, are held even, and that his law, such as it is, is justly enforced. You may attack his principles, as I do; but I do not know of any instance in which you can attack their application. If he dislikes lawlessness, he dislikes the lawlessness of Socialists as much as that of Individualists. If he dislikes the fever of patriotism, he dislikes it in Boers and Irishmen as well as in Englishmen. If he dislikes the vows and bonds of marriage, he dislikes still more the fiercer bonds and wilder vows that are made by lawless love. If he laughs at the authority of priests, he laughs louder at the pomposity of men of science. If he condemns the irresponsibility of faith, he condemns with a sane consistency the equal irresponsibility of art. He has pleased all the bohemians by saying that women are equal to men; but he has infuriated them by suggesting that men are equal to women. He is almost mechanically just; he has something of the terrible quality of a machine. The man who is really wild and whirling, the man who is really fantastic and incalculable, is not Mr. Shaw, but the average Cabinet Minister. It is Sir Michael Hicks-Beach who jumps through hoops. It is Sir Henry Fowler who stands on his head. The solid and respectable statesman of that type does really leap from position to position; he is really ready to defend
anything or nothing; he is really not to be taken seriously. I know perfectly well what Mr. Bernard Shaw will be saying thirty years hence; he will be saying what he has always said. If thirty years hence I meet Mr. Shaw, a reverent being with a silver beard sweeping the earth, and say to him, “One can never, of course, make a verbal attack upon a lady,” the patriarch will lift his aged hand and fell me to the earth. We know, I say, what Mr. Shaw will be, saying thirty years hence. But is there any one so darkly read in stars and oracles that he will dare to predict what Mr. Asquith will be saying thirty years hence?

The truth is, that it is quite an error to suppose that absence of definite convictions gives the mind freedom and agility. A man who believes something is ready and witty, because he has all his weapons about him. He can apply his test in an instant. The man engaged in conflict with a man like Mr. Bernard Shaw may fancy he has ten faces; similarly a man engaged against a brilliant duellist may fancy that the sword of his foe has turned to ten swords in his hand. But this is not really because the man is playing with ten swords, it is because he is aiming very straight with one. Moreover, a man with a definite belief always appears bizarre, because he does not change with the world; he has climbed into a fixed star, and the earth whizzes below him like a zoetrope. Millions of mild black-coated men call themselves sane and sensible merely because they always catch the fashionable insanity, because they are hurried into madness after madness by the maelstrom of the world.

People accuse Mr. Shaw and many much sillier persons of “proving that black is white.” But they never ask whether the current colour-language is always correct. Ordinary sensible phraseology sometimes calls black white, it certainly calls yellow white and green white and reddish-brown white. We call wine “white wine” which is as yellow as a Blue-coat boy’s legs. We call grapes “white grapes” which are manifestly pale green. We give to the European, whose complexion is a sort of pink drab, the horrible title of a “white man”—a picture more blood-curdling than any spectre in Poe.

Now, it is undoubtedly true that if a man asked a waiter in a restaurant for a bottle of yellow wine and some greenish-yellow grapes, the waiter would think him mad. It is undoubtedly true that if a Government official, reporting on the Europeans in Burmah, said, “There are only two thousand pinkish men here” he would be accused of cracking jokes, and kicked out of his post. But it is equally obvious that both men would have come to grief through telling the strict truth. That too truthful man in the restaurant; that too truthful man in Burmah, is Mr. Bernard Shaw. He appears eccentric and grotesque because he will not accept
the general belief that white is yellow. He has based all his brilliancy and solidity upon the hackneyed, but yet forgotten, fact that truth is stranger than fiction. Truth, of course, must of necessity be stranger than fiction, for we have made fiction to suit ourselves.

So much then a reasonable appreciation will find in Mr. Shaw to be bracing and excellent. He claims to see things as they are; and some things, at any rate, he does see as they are, which the whole of our civilization does not see at all. But in Mr. Shaw’s realism there is something lacking, and that thing which is lacking is serious.

Mr. Shaw’s old and recognized philosophy was that powerfully presented in “The Quintessence of Ibsenism.” It was, in brief, that conservative ideals were bad, not because they were conservative, but because they were ideals. Every ideal prevented men from judging justly the particular case; every moral generalization oppressed the individual; the golden rule was there was no golden rule. And the objection to this is simply that it pretends to free men, but really restrains them from doing the only thing that men want to do. What is the good of telling a community that it has every liberty except the liberty to make laws? The liberty to make laws is what constitutes a free people. And what is the good of telling a man (or a philosopher) that he has every liberty except the liberty to make generalizations. Making generalizations is what makes him a man. In short, when Mr. Shaw forbids men to have strict moral ideals, he is acting like one who should forbid them to have children. The saying that “the golden rule is that there is no golden rule,” can, indeed, be simply answered by being turned round. That there is no golden rule is itself a golden rule, or rather it is much worse than a golden rule. It is an iron rule; a fetter on the first movement of a man.

But the sensation connected with Mr. Shaw in recent years has been his sudden development of the religion of the Superman. He who had to all appearance mocked at the faiths in the forgotten past discovered a new god in the unimaginable future. He who had laid all the blame on ideals set up the most impossible of all ideals, the ideal of a new creature. But the truth, nevertheless, is that any one who knows Mr. Shaw’s mind adequately, and admires it properly, must have guessed all this long ago.

For the truth is that Mr. Shaw has never seen things as they really are. If he had he would have fallen on his knees before them. He has always had a secret ideal that has withered all the things of this world. He has all the time been silently comparing humanity with something that was not human, with a monster
from Mars, with the Wise Man of the Stoics, with the Economic Man of the Fabians, with Julius Caesar, with Siegfried, with the Superman. Now, to have this inner and merciless standard may be a very good thing, or a very bad one, it may be excellent or unfortunate, but it is not seeing things as they are. It is not seeing things as they are to think first of a Briareus with a hundred hands, and then call every man a cripple for only having two. It is not seeing things as they are to start with a vision of Argus with his hundred eyes, and then jeer at every man with two eyes as if he had only one. And it is not seeing things as they are to imagine a demigod of infinite mental clarity, who may or may not appear in the latter days of the earth, and then to see all men as idiots. And this is what Mr. Shaw has always in some degree done. When we really see men as they are, we do not criticise, but worship; and very rightly. For a monster with mysterious eyes and miraculous thumbs, with strange dreams in his skull, and a queer tenderness for this place or that baby, is truly a wonderful and unnerving matter. It is only the quite arbitrary and priggish habit of comparison with something else which makes it possible to be at our ease in front of him. A sentiment of superiority keeps us cool and practical; the mere facts would make, our knees knock under as with religious fear. It is the fact that every instant of conscious life is an unimaginable prodigy. It is the fact that every face in the street has the incredible unexpectedness of a fairy-tale. The thing which prevents a man from realizing this is not any clear-sightedness or experience, it is simply a habit of pedantic and fastidious comparisons between one thing and another. Mr. Shaw, on the practical side perhaps the most humane man alive, is in this sense inhumane. He has even been infected to some extent with the primary intellectual weakness of his new master, Nietzsche, the strange notion that the greater and stronger a man was the more he would despise other things. The greater and stronger a man is the more he would be inclined to prostrate himself before a periwinkle. That Mr. Shaw keeps a lifted head and a contemptuous face before the colossal panorama of empires and civilizations, this does not in itself convince one that he sees things as they are. I should be most effectively convinced that he did if I found him staring with religious astonishment at his own feet. “What are those two beautiful and industrious beings,” I can imagine him murmuring to himself, “whom I see everywhere, serving me I know not why? What fairy godmother bade them come trotting out of elfland when I was born? What god of the borderland, what barbaric god of legs, must I propitiate with fire and wine, lest they run away with me?”

The truth is, that all genuine appreciation rests on a certain mystery of
humility and almost of darkness. The man who said, “Blessed is he that expecteth nothing, for he shall not be disappointed,” put the eulogy quite inadequately and even falsely. The truth “Blessed is he that expecteth nothing, for he shall be gloriously surprised.” The man who expects nothing sees redder roses than common men can see, and greener grass, and a more startling sun. Blessed is he that expecteth nothing, for he shall possess the cities and the mountains; blessed is the meek, for he shall inherit the earth. Until we realize that things might not be we cannot realize that things are. Until we see the background of darkness we cannot admire the light as a single and created thing. As soon as we have seen that darkness, all light is lightening, sudden, blinding, and divine. Until we picture nonentity we underrate the victory of God, and can realize none of the trophies of His ancient war. It is one of the million wild jests of truth that we know nothing until we know nothing.

Now this is, I say deliberately, the only defect in the greatness of Mr. Shaw, the only answer to his claim to be a great man, that he is not easily pleased. He is an almost solitary exception to the general and essential maxim, that little things please great minds. And from this absence of that most uproarious of all things, humility, comes incidentally the peculiar insistence on the Superman. After belabouring a great many people for a great many years for being unprogressive, Mr. Shaw has discovered, with characteristic sense, that it is very doubtful whether any existing human being with two legs can be progressive at all. Having come to doubt whether humanity can be combined with progress, most people, easily pleased, would have elected to abandon progress and remain with humanity. Mr. Shaw, not being easily pleased, decides to throw over humanity with all its limitations and go in for progress for its own sake. If man, as we know him, is incapable of the philosophy of progress, Mr. Shaw asks, not for a new kind of philosophy, but for a new kind of man. It is rather as if a nurse had tried a rather bitter food for some years on a baby, and on discovering that it was not suitable, should not throw away the food and ask for a new food, but throw the baby out of window, and ask for a new baby. Mr. Shaw cannot understand that the thing which is valuable and lovable in our eyes is man—the old beer-drinking, creed-making, fighting, failing, sensual, respectable man. And the things that have been founded on this creature immortally remain; the things that have been founded on the fancy of the Superman have died with the dying civilizations which alone have given them birth. When Christ at a symbolic moment was establishing His great society, He chose for its corner-stone neither the brilliant Paul nor the mystic John, but a shuffler, a snob a coward—in a
word, a man. And upon this rock He has built His Church, and the gates of Hell have not prevailed against it. All the empires and the kingdoms have failed, because of this inherent and continual weakness, that they were founded by strong men and upon strong men. But this one thing, the historic Christian Church, was founded on a weak man, and for that reason it is indestructible. For no chain is stronger than its weakest link.
MR. H. G. WELLS AND THE GIANTS

We ought to see far enough into a hypocrite to see even his sincerity. We ought to be interested in that darkest and most real part of a man in which dwell not the vices that he does not display, but the virtues that he cannot. And the more we approach the problems of human history with this keen and piercing charity, the smaller and smaller space we shall allow to pure hypocrisy of any kind. The hypocrites shall not deceive us into thinking them saints; but neither shall they deceive us into thinking them hypocrites. And an increasing number of cases will crowd into our field of inquiry, cases in which there is really no question of hypocrisy at all, cases in which people were so ingenuous that they seemed absurd, and so absurd that they seemed disingenuous.

There is one striking instance of an unfair charge of hypocrisy. It is always urged against the religious in the past, as a point of inconsistency and duplicity, that they combined a profession of almost crawling humility with a keen struggle for earthly success and considerable triumph in attaining it. It is felt as a piece of humbug, that a man should be very punctilious in calling himself a miserable sinner, and also very punctilious in calling himself King of France. But the truth is that there is no more conscious inconsistency between the humility of a Christian and the rapacity of a Christian than there is between the humility of a lover and the rapacity of a lover. The truth is that there are no things for which men will make such herculean efforts as the things of which they know they are unworthy. There never was a man in love who did not declare that, if he strained every nerve to breaking, he was going to have his desire. And there never was a man in love who did not declare also that he ought not to have it. The whole secret of the practical success of Christendom lies in the Christian humility, however imperfectly fulfilled. For with the removal of all question of merit or payment, the soul is suddenly released for incredible voyages. If we ask a sane man how much he merits, his mind shrinks instinctively and instantaneously. It is doubtful whether he merits six feet of earth. But if you ask him what he can conquer—he can conquer the stars. Thus comes the thing called Romance, a purely Christian product. A man cannot deserve adventures; he cannot earn dragons and hippogriffs. The mediaeval Europe which asserted humility gained Romance; the civilization which gained Romance has gained the habitable
globe. How different the Pagan and Stoical feeling was from this has been admirably expressed in a famous quotation. Addison makes the great Stoic say—

“'Tis not in mortals to command success;
But we’ll do more, Sempronius, we’ll deserve it.”

But the spirit of Romance and Christendom, the spirit which is in every lover, the spirit which has bestridden the earth with European adventure, is quite opposite. 'Tis not in mortals to deserve success. But we’ll do more, Sempronius; we’ll obtain it.

And this gay humility, this holding of ourselves lightly and yet ready for an infinity of unmerited triumphs, this secret is so simple that every one has supposed that it must be something quite sinister and mysterious. Humility is so practical a virtue that men think it must be a vice. Humility is so successful that it is mistaken for pride. It is mistaken for it all the more easily because it generally goes with a certain simple love of splendour which amounts to vanity. Humility will always, by preference, go clad in scarlet and gold; pride is that which refuses to let gold and scarlet impress it or please it too much. In a word, the failure of this virtue actually lies in its success; it is too successful as an investment to be believed in as a virtue. Humility is not merely too good for this world; it is too practical for this world; I had almost said it is too worldly for this world.

The instance most quoted in our day is the thing called the humility of the man of science; and certainly it is a good instance as well as a modern one. Men find it extremely difficult to believe that a man who is obviously uprooting mountains and dividing seas, tearing down temples and stretching out hands to the stars, is really a quiet old gentleman who only asks to be allowed to indulge his harmless old hobby and follow his harmless old nose. When a man splits a grain of sand and the universe is turned upside down in consequence, it is difficult to realize that to the man who did it, the splitting of the grain is the great affair, and the capsizing of the cosmos quite a small one. It is hard to enter into the feelings of a man who regards a new heaven and a new earth in the light of a by-product. But undoubtedly it was to this almost eerie innocence of the intellect that the great men of the great scientific period, which now appears to be closing, owed their enormous power and triumph. If they had brought the heavens down like a house of cards their plea was not even that they had done it on principle; their quite unanswerable plea was that they had done it by accident. Whenever there was in them the least touch of pride in what they had done, there was a good ground for
attacking them; but so long as they were wholly humble, they were wholly victorious. There were possible answers to Huxley; there was no answer possible to Darwin. He was convincing because of his unconsciousness; one might almost say because of his dulness. This childlike and prosaic mind is beginning to wane in the world of science. Men of science are beginning to see themselves, as the fine phrase is, in the part; they are beginning to be proud of their humility. They are beginning to be aesthetic, like the rest of the world, beginning to spell truth with a capital T, beginning to talk of the creeds they imagine themselves to have destroyed, of the discoveries that their forbears made. Like the modern English, they are beginning to be soft about their own hardness. They are becoming conscious of their own strength—that is, they are growing weaker. But one purely modern man has emerged in the strictly modern decades who does carry into our world the clear personal simplicity of the old world of science. One man of genius we have who is an artist, but who was a man of science, and who seems to be marked above all things with this great scientific humility. I mean Mr. H. G. Wells. And in his case, as in the others above spoken of, there must be a great preliminary difficulty in convincing the ordinary person that such a virtue is predicable of such a man. Mr. Wells began his literary work with violent visions—visions of the last pangs of this planet; can it be that a man who begins with violent visions is humble? He went on to wilder and wilder stories about carving beasts into men and shooting angels like birds. Is the man who shoots angels and carves beasts into men humble? Since then he has done something bolder than either of these blasphemies; he has prophesied the political future of all men; prophesied it with aggressive authority and a ringing decision of detail. Is the prophet of the future of all men humble? It will indeed be difficult, in the present condition of current thought about such things as pride and humility, to answer the query of how a man can be humble who does such big things and such bold things. For the only answer is the answer which I gave at the beginning of this essay. It is the humble man who does the big things. It is the humble man who does the bold things. It is the humble man who has the sensational sights vouchsafed to him, and this for three obvious reasons: first, that he strains his eyes more than any other men to see them; second, that he is more overwhelmed and uplifted with them when they come; third, that he records them more exactly and sincerely and with less adulteration from his more commonplace and more conceited everyday self. Adventures are to those to whom they are most unexpected—that is, most romantic. Adventures are to the shy: in this sense adventures are to the unadventurous.
Now, this arresting, mental humility in Mr. H. G. Wells may be, like a great many other things that are vital and vivid, difficult to illustrate by examples, but if I were asked for an example of it, I should have no difficulty about which example to begin with. The most interesting thing about Mr. H. G. Wells is that he is the only one of his many brilliant contemporaries who has not stopped growing. One can lie awake at night and hear him grow. Of this growth the most evident manifestation is indeed a gradual change of opinions; but it is no mere change of opinions. It is not a perpetual leaping from one position to another like that of Mr. George Moore. It is a quite continuous advance along a quite solid road in a quite definable direction. But the chief proof that it is not a piece of fickleness and vanity is the fact that it has been upon the whole in advance from more startling opinions to more humdrum opinions. It has been even in some sense an advance from unconventional opinions to conventional opinions. This fact fixes Mr. Wells’s honesty and proves him to be no poseur. Mr. Wells once held that the upper classes and the lower classes would be so much differentiated in the future that one class would eat the other. Certainly no paradoxical charlatan who had once found arguments for so startling a view would ever have deserted it except for something yet more startling. Mr. Wells has deserted it in favour of the blameless belief that both classes will be ultimately subordinated or assimilated to a sort of scientific middle class, a class of engineers. He has abandoned the sensational theory with the same honourable gravity and simplicity with which he adopted it. Then he thought it was true; now he thinks it is not true. He has come to the most dreadful conclusion a literary man can come to, the conclusion that the ordinary view is the right one. It is only the last and wildest kind of courage that can stand on a tower before ten thousand people and tell them that twice two is four.

Mr. H. G. Wells exists at present in a gay and exhilarating progress of conservativism. He is finding out more and more that conventions, though silent, are alive. As good an example as any of this humility and sanity of his may be found in his change of view on the subject of science and marriage. He once held, I believe, the opinion which some singular sociologists still hold, that human creatures could successfully be paired and bred after the manner of dogs or horses. He no longer holds that view. Not only does he no longer hold that view, but he has written about it in “Mankind in the Making” with such smashing sense and humour, that I find it difficult to believe that anybody else can hold it either. It is true that his chief objection to the proposal is that it is physically impossible, which seems to me a very slight objection, and almost
negligible compared with the others. The one objection to scientific marriage which is worthy of final attention is simply that such a thing could only be imposed on unthinkable slaves and cowards. I do not know whether the scientific marriage-mongers are right (as they say) or wrong (as Mr. Wells says) in saying that medical supervision would produce strong and healthy men. I am only certain that if it did, the first act of the strong and healthy men would be to smash the medical supervision.

The mistake of all that medical talk lies in the very fact that it connects the idea of health with the idea of care. What has health to do with care? Health has to do with carelessness. In special and abnormal cases it is necessary to have care. When we are peculiarly unhealthy it may be necessary to be careful in order to be healthy. But even then we are only trying to be healthy in order to be careless. If we are doctors we are speaking to exceptionally sick men, and they ought to be told to be careful. But when we are sociologists we are addressing the normal man, we are addressing humanity. And humanity ought to be told to be recklessness itself. For all the fundamental functions of a healthy man ought emphatically to be performed with pleasure and for pleasure; they emphatically ought not to be performed with precaution or for precaution. A man ought to eat because he has a good appetite to satisfy, and emphatically not because he has a body to sustain. A man ought to take exercise not because he is too fat, but because he loves foils or horses or high mountains, and loves them for their own sake. And a man ought to marry because he has fallen in love, and emphatically not because the world requires to be populated. The food will really renovate his tissues as long as he is not thinking about his tissues. The exercise will really get him into training so long as he is thinking about something else. And the marriage will really stand some chance of producing a generous-blooded generation if it had its origin in its own natural and generous excitement. It is the first law of health that our necessities should not be accepted as necessities; they should be accepted as luxuries. Let us, then, be careful about the small things, such as a scratch or a slight illness, or anything that can be managed with care. But in the name of all sanity, let us be careless about the important things, such as marriage, or the fountain of our very life will fail.

Mr. Wells, however, is not quite clear enough of the narrower scientific outlook to see that there are some things which actually ought not to be scientific. He is still slightly affected with the great scientific fallacy; I mean the habit of beginning not with the human soul, which is the first thing a man learns about, but with some such thing as protoplasm, which is about the last. The one
defect in his splendid mental equipment is that he does not sufficiently allow for the stuff or material of men. In his new Utopia he says, for instance, that a chief point of the Utopia will be a disbelief in original sin. If he had begun with the human soul—that is, if he had begun on himself—he would have found original sin almost the first thing to be believed in. He would have found, to put the matter shortly, that a permanent possibility of selfishness arises from the mere fact of having a self, and not from any accidents of education or ill-treatment. And the weakness of all Utopias is this, that they take the greatest difficulty of man and assume it to be overcome, and then give an elaborate account of the overcoming of the smaller ones. They first assume that no man will want more than his share, and then are very ingenious in explaining whether his share will be delivered by motor-car or balloon. And an even stronger example of Mr. Wells’s indifference to the human psychology can be found in his cosmopolitanism, the abolition in his Utopia of all patriotic boundaries. He says in his innocent way that Utopia must be a world-state, or else people might make war on it. It does not seem to occur to him that, for a good many of us, if it were a world-state we should still make war on it to the end of the world. For if we admit that there must be varieties in art or opinion what sense is there in thinking there will not be varieties in government? The fact is very simple. Unless you are going deliberately to prevent a thing being good, you cannot prevent it being worth fighting for. It is impossible to prevent a possible conflict of civilizations, because it is impossible to prevent a possible conflict between ideals. If there were no longer our modern strife between nations, there would only be a strife between Utopias. For the highest thing does not tend to union only; the highest thing, tends also to differentiation. You can often get men to fight for the union; but you can never prevent them from fighting also for the differentiation. This variety in the highest thing is the meaning of the fierce patriotism, the fierce nationalism of the great European civilization. It is also, incidentally, the meaning of the doctrine of the Trinity.

But I think the main mistake of Mr. Wells’s philosophy is a somewhat deeper one, one that he expresses in a very entertaining manner in the introductory part of the new Utopia. His philosophy in some sense amounts to a denial of the possibility of philosophy itself. At least, he maintains that there are no secure and reliable ideas upon which we can rest with a final mental satisfaction. It will be both clearer, however, and more amusing to quote Mr. Wells himself.

He says, “Nothing endures, nothing is precise and certain (except the mind of a pedant). . . . Being indeed!—there is no being, but a universal becoming of
individualities, and Plato turned his back on truth when he turned towards his museum of specific ideals.” Mr. Wells says, again, “There is no abiding thing in what we know. We change from weaker to stronger lights, and each more powerful light pierces our hitherto opaque foundations and reveals fresh and different opacities below.” Now, when Mr. Wells says things like this, I speak with all respect when I say that he does not observe an evident mental distinction. It cannot be true that there is nothing abiding in what we know. For if that were so we should not know it all and should not call it knowledge. Our mental state may be very different from that of somebody else some thousands of years back; but it cannot be entirely different, or else we should not be conscious of a difference. Mr. Wells must surely realize the first and simplest of the paradoxes that sit by the springs of truth. He must surely see that the fact of two things being different implies that they are similar. The hare and the tortoise may differ in the quality of swiftness, but they must agree in the quality of motion. The swiftest hare cannot be swifter than an isosceles triangle or the idea of pinkness. When we say the hare moves faster, we say that the tortoise moves. And when we say of a thing that it moves, we say, without need of other words, that there are things that do not move. And even in the act of saying that things change, we say that there is something unchangeable.

But certainly the best example of Mr. Wells’s fallacy can be found in the example which he himself chooses. It is quite true that we see a dim light which, compared with a darker thing, is light, but which, compared with a stronger light, is darkness. But the quality of light remains the same thing, or else we should not call it a stronger light or recognize it as such. If the character of light were not fixed in the mind, we should be quite as likely to call a denser shadow a stronger light, or vice versa. If the character of light became even for an instant unfixed, if it became even by a hair’s-breadth doubtful, if, for example, there crept into our idea of light some vague idea of blueness, then in that flash we have become doubtful whether the new light has more light or less. In brief, the progress may be as varying as a cloud, but the direction must be as rigid as a French road. North and South are relative in the sense that I am North of Bournemouth and South of Spitzbergen. But if there be any doubt of the position of the North Pole, there is in equal degree a doubt of whether I am South of Spitzbergen at all. The absolute idea of light may be practically unattainable. We may not be able to procure pure light. We may not be able to get to the North Pole. But because the North Pole is unattainable, it does not follow that it is indefinable. And it is only because the North Pole is not indefinable that we can
make a satisfactory map of Brighton and Worthing.

In other words, Plato turned his face to truth but his back on Mr. H. G. Wells, when he turned to his museum of specified ideals. It is precisely here that Plato shows his sense. It is not true that everything changes; the things that change are all the manifest and material things. There is something that does not change; and that is precisely the abstract quality, the invisible idea. Mr. Wells says truly enough, that a thing which we have seen in one connection as dark we may see in another connection as light. But the thing common to both incidents is the mere idea of light—which we have not seen at all. Mr. Wells might grow taller and taller for unending aeons till his head was higher than the loneliest star. I can imagine his writing a good novel about it. In that case he would see the trees first as tall things and then as short things; he would see the clouds first as high and then as low. But there would remain with him through the ages in that starry loneliness the idea of tallness; he would have in the awful spaces for companion and comfort the definite conception that he was growing taller and not (for instance) growing fatter.

And now it comes to my mind that Mr. H. G. Wells actually has written a very delightful romance about men growing as tall as trees; and that here, again, he seems to me to have been a victim of this vague relativism. “The Food of the Gods” is, like Mr. Bernard Shaw’s play, in essence a study of the Superman idea. And it lies, I think, even through the veil of a half-pantomimic allegory, open to the same intellectual attack. We cannot be expected to have any regard for a great creature if he does not in any manner conform to our standards. For unless he passes our standard of greatness we cannot even call him great. Nietzsche summed up all that is interesting in the Superman idea when he said, “Man is a thing which has to be surpassed.” But the very word “surpass” implies the existence of a standard common to us and the thing surpassing us. If the Superman is more manly than men are, of course they will ultimately deify him, even if they happen to kill him first. But if he is simply more supermanly, they may be quite indifferent to him as they would be to another seemingly aimless monstrosity. He must submit to our test even in order to overawe us. Mere force or size even is a standard; but that alone will never make men think a man their superior. Giants, as in the wise old fairy-tales, are vermin. Supermen, if not good men, are vermin.

“The Food of the Gods” is the tale of “Jack the Giant-Killer” told from the point of view of the giant. This has not, I think, been done before in literature; but I have little doubt that the psychological substance of it existed in fact. I have
little doubt that the giant whom Jack killed did regard himself as the Superman. It is likely enough that he considered Jack a narrow and parochial person who wished to frustrate a great forward movement of the life-force. If (as not unfrequently was the case) he happened to have two heads, he would point out the elementary maxim which declares them to be better than one. He would enlarge on the subtle modernity of such an equipment, enabling a giant to look at a subject from two points of view, or to correct himself with promptitude. But Jack was the champion of the enduring human standards, of the principle of one man one head and one man one conscience, of the single head and the single heart and the single eye. Jack was quite unimpressed by the question of whether the giant was a particularly gigantic giant. All he wished to know was whether he was a good giant—that is, a giant who was any good to us. What were the giant’s religious views; what his views on politics and the duties of the citizen? Was he fond of children—or fond of them only in a dark and sinister sense? To use a fine phrase for emotional sanity, was his heart in the right place? Jack had sometimes to cut him up with a sword in order to find out. The old and correct story of Jack the Giant-Killer is simply the whole story of man; if it were understood we should need no Bibles or histories. But the modern world in particular does not seem to understand it at all. The modern world, like Mr. Wells is on the side of the giants; the safest place, and therefore the meanest and the most prosaic. The modern world, when it praises its little Caesars, talks of being strong and brave: but it does not seem to see the eternal paradox involved in the conjunction of these ideas. The strong cannot be brave. Only the weak can be brave; and yet again, in practice, only those who can be brave can be trusted, in time of doubt, to be strong. The only way in which a giant could really keep himself in training against the inevitable Jack would be by continually fighting other giants ten times as big as himself. That is by ceasing to be a giant and becoming a Jack. Thus that sympathy with the small or the defeated as such, with which we Liberals and Nationalists have been often reproached, is not a useless sentimentalism at all, as Mr. Wells and his friends fancy. It is the first law of practical courage. To be in the weakest camp is to be in the strongest school. Nor can I imagine anything that would do humanity more good than the advent of a race of Supermen, for them to fight like dragons. If the Superman is better than we, of course we need not fight him; but in that case, why not call him the Saint? But if he is merely stronger (whether physically, mentally, or morally stronger, I do not care a farthing), then he ought to have to reckon with us at least for all the strength we have. It we are weaker than he, that is no reason
why we should be weaker than ourselves. If we are not tall enough to touch the giant’s knees, that is no reason why we should become shorter by falling on our own. But that is at bottom the meaning of all modern hero-worship and celebration of the Strong Man, the Caesar the Superman. That he may be something more than man, we must be something less.

Doubtless there is an older and better hero-worship than this. But the old hero was a being who, like Achilles, was more human than humanity itself. Nietzsche’s Superman is cold and friendless. Achilles is so foolishly fond of his friend that he slaughters armies in the agony of his bereavement. Mr. Shaw’s sad Caesar says in his desolate pride, “He who has never hoped can never despair.” The Man-God of old answers from his awful hill, “Was ever sorrow like unto my sorrow?” A great man is not a man so strong that he feels less than other men; he is a man so strong that he feels more. And when Nietzsche says, “A new commandment I give to you, ‘be hard,’” he is really saying, “A new commandment I give to you, ‘be dead.’” Sensibility is the definition of life.

I recur for a last word to Jack the Giant-Killer. I have dwelt on this matter of Mr. Wells and the giants, not because it is specially prominent in his mind; I know that the Superman does not bulk so large in his cosmos as in that of Mr. Bernard Shaw. I have dwelt on it for the opposite reason; because this heresy of immoral hero-worship has taken, I think, a slighter hold of him, and may perhaps still be prevented from perverting one of the best thinkers of the day. In the course of “The New Utopia” Mr. Wells makes more than one admiring allusion to Mr. W. E. Henley. That clever and unhappy man lived in admiration of a vague violence, and was always going back to rude old tales and rude old ballads, to strong and primitive literatures, to find the praise of strength and the justification of tyranny. But he could not find it. It is not there. The primitive literature is shown in the tale of Jack the Giant-Killer. The strong old literature is all in praise of the weak. The rude old tales are as tender to minorities as any modern political idealist. The rude old ballads are as sentimentally concerned for the under-dog as the Aborigines Protection Society. When men were tough and raw, when they lived amid hard knocks and hard laws, when they knew what fighting really was, they had only two kinds of songs. The first was a rejoicing that the weak had conquered the strong, the second a lamentation that the strong had, for once in a way, conquered the weak. For this defiance of the statu quo, this constant effort to alter the existing balance, this premature challenge to the powerful, is the whole nature and inmost secret of the psychological adventure which is called man. It is his strength to disdain strength. The forlorn hope is not
only a real hope, it is the only real hope of mankind. In the coarsest ballads of the greenwood men are admired most when they defy, not only the king, but what is more to the point, the hero. The moment Robin Hood becomes a sort of Superman, that moment the chivalrous chronicler shows us Robin thrashed by a poor tinker whom he thought to thrust aside. And the chivalrous chronicler makes Robin Hood receive the thrashing in a glow of admiration. This magnanimity is not a product of modern humanitarianism; it is not a product of anything to do with peace. This magnanimity is merely one of the lost arts of war. The Henleyites call for a sturdy and fighting England, and they go back to the fierce old stories of the sturdy and fighting English. And the thing that they find written across that fierce old literature everywhere, is “the policy of Majuba.”
VI

CHRISTMAS AND THE AESTHETES

The world is round, so round that the schools of optimism and pessimism have been arguing from the beginning whether it is the right way up. The difficulty does not arise so much from the mere fact that good and evil are mingled in roughly equal proportions; it arises chiefly from the fact that men always differ about what parts are good and what evil. Hence the difficulty which besets “undenominational religions.” They profess to include what is beautiful in all creeds, but they appear to many to have collected all that is dull in them. All the colours mixed together in purity ought to make a perfect white. Mixed together on any human paint-box, they make a thing like mud, and a thing very like many new religions. Such a blend is often something much worse than any one creed taken separately, even the creed of the Thugs. The error arises from the difficulty of detecting what is really the good part and what is really the bad part of any given religion. And this pathos falls rather heavily on those persons who have the misfortune to think of some religion or other, that the parts commonly counted good are bad, and the parts commonly counted bad are good.

It is tragic to admire and honestly admire a human group, but to admire it in a photographic negative. It is difficult to congratulate all their whites on being black and all their blacks on their whiteness. This will often happen to us in connection with human religions. Take two institutions which bear witness to the religious energy of the nineteenth century. Take the Salvation Army and the philosophy of Auguste Comte.

The usual verdict of educated people on the Salvation Army is expressed in some such words as these: “I have no doubt they do a great deal of good, but they do it in a vulgar and profane style; their aims are excellent, but their methods are wrong.” To me, unfortunately, the precise reverse of this appears to be the truth. I do not know whether the aims of the Salvation Army are excellent, but I am quite sure their methods are admirable. Their methods are the methods of all intense and hearty religions; they are popular like all religion, military like all religion, public and sensational like all religion. They are not reverent any more than Roman Catholics are reverent, for reverence in the sad and delicate meaning of the term reverence is a thing only possible to infidels. That beautiful twilight you will find in Euripides, in Renan, in Matthew Arnold; but in men
who believe you will not find it—you will find only laughter and war. A man cannot pay that kind of reverence to truth solid as marble; they can only be reverent towards a beautiful lie. And the Salvation Army, though their voice has broken out in a mean environment and an ugly shape, are really the old voice of glad and angry faith, hot as the riots of Dionysus, wild as the gargoyles of Catholicism, not to be mistaken for a philosophy. Professor Huxley, in one of his clever phrases, called the Salvation Army “corybantic Christianity.” Huxley was the last and noblest of those Stoics who have never understood the Cross. If he had understood Christianity he would have known that there never has been, and never can be, any Christianity that is not corybantic.

And there is this difference between the matter of aims and the matter of methods, that to judge of the aims of a thing like the Salvation Army is very difficult, to judge of their ritual and atmosphere very easy. No one, perhaps, but a sociologist can see whether General Booth’s housing scheme is right. But any healthy person can see that banging brass cymbals together must be right. A page of statistics, a plan of model dwellings, anything which is rational, is always difficult for the lay mind. But the thing which is irrational any one can understand. That is why religion came so early into the world and spread so far, while science came so late into the world and has not spread at all. History unanimously attests the fact that it is only mysticism which stands the smallest chance of being understood of the people. Common sense has to be kept as an esoteric secret in the dark temple of culture. And so while the philanthropy of the Salvationists and its genuineness may be a reasonable matter for the discussion of the doctors, there can be no doubt about the genuineness of their brass bands, for a brass band is purely spiritual, and seeks only to quicken the internal life. The object of philanthropy is to do good; the object of religion is to be good, if only for a moment, amid a crash of brass.

And the same antithesis exists about another modern religion—I mean the religion of Comte, generally known as Positivism, or the worship of humanity. Such men as Mr. Frederic Harrison, that brilliant and chivalrous philosopher, who still, by his mere personality, speaks for the creed, would tell us that he offers us the philosophy of Comte, but not all Comte’s fantastic proposals for pontiffs and ceremonials, the new calendar, the new holidays and saints’ days. He does not mean that we should dress ourselves up as priests of humanity or let off fireworks because it is Milton’s birthday. To the solid English Comtist all this appears, he confesses, to be a little absurd. To me it appears the only sensible part of Comtism. As a philosophy it is unsatisfactory. It is evidently
impossible to worship humanity, just as it is impossible to worship the Savile Club; both are excellent institutions to which we may happen to belong. But we perceive clearly that the Savile Club did not make the stars and does not fill the universe. And it is surely unreasonable to attack the doctrine of the Trinity as a piece of bewildering mysticism, and then to ask men to worship a being who is ninety million persons in one God, neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance.

But if the wisdom of Comte was insufficient, the folly of Comte was wisdom. In an age of dusty modernity, when beauty was thought of as something barbaric and ugliness as something sensible, he alone saw that men must always have the sacredness of mummery. He saw that while the brutes have all the useful things, the things that are truly human are the useless ones. He saw the falsehood of that almost universal notion of to-day, the notion that rites and forms are something artificial, additional, and corrupt. Ritual is really much older than thought; it is much simpler and much wilder than thought. A feeling touching the nature of things does not only make men feel that there are certain proper things to say; it makes them feel that there are certain proper things to do. The more agreeable of these consist of dancing, building temples, and shouting very loud; the less agreeable, of wearing green carnations and burning other philosophers alive. But everywhere the religious dance came before the religious hymn, and man was a ritualist before he could speak. If Comtism had spread the world would have been converted, not by the Comtist philosophy, but by the Comtist calendar. By discouraging what they conceive to be the weakness of their master, the English Positivists have broken the strength of their religion. A man who has faith must be prepared not only to be a martyr, but to be a fool. It is absurd to say that a man is ready to toil and die for his convictions when he is not even ready to wear a wreath round his head for them. I myself, to take a corpus vile, am very certain that I would not read the works of Comte through for any consideration whatever. But I can easily imagine myself with the greatest enthusiasm lighting a bonfire on Darwin Day.

That splendid effort failed, and nothing in the style of it has succeeded. There has been no rationalist festival, no rationalist ecstasy. Men are still in black for the death of God. When Christianity was heavily bombarded in the last century upon no point was it more persistently and brilliantly attacked than upon that of its alleged enmity to human joy. Shelley and Swinburne and all their armies have passed again and again over the ground, but they have not altered it. They have not set up a single new trophy or ensign for the world’s merriment to rally to.
They have not given a name or a new occasion of gaiety. Mr. Swinburne does not hang up his stocking on the eve of the birthday of Victor Hugo. Mr. William Archer does not sing carols descriptive of the infancy of Ibsen outside people’s doors in the snow. In the round of our rational and mournful year one festival remains out of all those ancient gaieties that once covered the whole earth. Christmas remains to remind us of those ages, whether Pagan or Christian, when the many acted poetry instead of the few writing it. In all the winter in our woods there is no tree in glow but the holly.

The strange truth about the matter is told in the very word “holiday.” A bank holiday means presumably a day which bankers regard as holy. A half-holiday means, I suppose, a day on which a schoolboy is only partially holy. It is hard to see at first sight why so human a thing as leisure and larkiness should always have a religious origin. Rationally there appears no reason why we should not sing and give each other presents in honour of anything—the birth of Michael Angelo or the opening of Euston Station. But it does not work. As a fact, men only become greedily and gloriously material about something spiritualistic. Take away the Nicene Creed and similar things, and you do some strange wrong to the sellers of sausages. Take away the strange beauty of the saints, and what has remained to us is the far stranger ugliness of Wandsworth. Take away the supernatural, and what remains is the unnatural.

And now I have to touch upon a very sad matter. There are in the modern world an admirable class of persons who really make protest on behalf of that antiqua pulchritudo of which Augustine spoke, who do long for the old feasts and formalities of the childhood of the world. William Morris and his followers showed how much brighter were the dark ages than the age of Manchester. Mr. W. B. Yeats frames his steps in prehistoric dances, but no man knows and joins his voice to forgotten choruses that no one but he can hear. Mr. George Moore collects every fragment of Irish paganism that the forgetfulness of the Catholic Church has left or possibly her wisdom preserved. There are innumerable persons with eye-glasses and green garments who pray for the return of the maypole or the Olympian games. But there is about these people a haunting and alarming something which suggests that it is just possible that they do not keep Christmas. It is painful to regard human nature in such a light, but it seems somehow possible that Mr. George Moore does not wave his spoon and shout when the pudding is set alight. It is even possible that Mr. W. B. Yeats never pulls crackers. If so, where is the sense of all their dreams of festive traditions? Here is a solid and ancient festive tradition still plying a roaring trade in the
streets, and they think it vulgar. If this is so, let them be very certain of this, that they are the kind of people who in the time of the maypole would have thought the maypole vulgar; who in the time of the Canterbury pilgrimage would have thought the Canterbury pilgrimage vulgar; who in the time of the Olympian games would have thought the Olympian games vulgar. Nor can there be any reasonable doubt that they were vulgar. Let no man deceive himself; if by vulgarity we mean coarseness of speech, rowdiness of behaviour, gossip, horseplay, and some heavy drinking, vulgarity there always was wherever there was joy, wherever there was faith in the gods. Wherever you have belief you will have hilarity, wherever you have hilarity you will have some dangers. And as creed and mythology produce this gross and vigorous life, so in its turn this gross and vigorous life will always produce creed and mythology. If we ever get the English back on to the English land they will become again a religious people, if all goes well, a superstitious people. The absence from modern life of both the higher and lower forms of faith is largely due to a divorce from nature and the trees and clouds. If we have no more turnip ghosts it is chiefly from the lack of turnips.
A new morality has burst upon us with some violence in connection with the problem of strong drink; and enthusiasts in the matter range from the man who is violently thrown out at 12.30, to the lady who smashes American bars with an axe. In these discussions it is almost always felt that one very wise and moderate position is to say that wine or such stuff should only be drunk as a medicine. With this I should venture to disagree with a peculiar ferocity. The one genuinely dangerous and immoral way of drinking wine is to drink it as a medicine. And for this reason, if a man drinks wine in order to obtain pleasure, he is trying to obtain something exceptional, something he does not expect every hour of the day, something which, unless he is a little insane, he will not try to get every hour of the day. But if a man drinks wine in order to obtain health, he is trying to get something natural; something, that is, that he ought not to be without; something that he may find it difficult to reconcile himself to being without. The man may not be seduced who has seen the ecstasy of being ecstatic; it is more dazzling to catch a glimpse of the ecstasy of being ordinary. If there were a magic ointment, and we took it to a strong man, and said, “This will enable you to jump off the Monument,” doubtless he would jump off the Monument, but he would not jump off the Monument all day long to the delight of the City. But if we took it to a blind man, saying, “This will enable you to see,” he would be under a heavier temptation. It would be hard for him not to rub it on his eyes whenever he heard the hoof of a noble horse or the birds singing at daybreak. It is easy to deny one’s self festivity; it is difficult to deny one’s self normality. Hence comes the fact which every doctor knows, that it is often perilous to give alcohol to the sick even when they need it. I need hardly say that I do not mean that I think the giving of alcohol to the sick for stimulus is necessarily unjustifiable. But I do mean that giving it to the healthy for fun is the proper use of it, and a great deal more consistent with health.

The sound rule in the matter would appear to be like many other sound rules—a paradox. Drink because you are happy, but never because you are miserable. Never drink when you are wretched without it, or you will be like the grey-faced gin-drinker in the slum; but drink when you would be happy without it, and you will be like the laughing peasant of Italy. Never drink because you need it, for
this is rational drinking, and the way to death and hell. But drink because you do not need it, for this is irrational drinking, and the ancient health of the world.

For more than thirty years the shadow and glory of a great Eastern figure has lain upon our English literature. Fitzgerald’s translation of Omar Khayyam concentrated into an immortal poignancy all the dark and drifting hedonism of our time. Of the literary splendour of that work it would be merely banal to speak; in few other of the books of men has there been anything so combining the gay pugnacity of an epigram with the vague sadness of a song. But of its philosophical, ethical, and religious influence which has been almost as great as its brilliancy, I should like to say a word, and that word, I confess, one of uncompromising hostility. There are a great many things which might be said against the spirit of the Rubaiyat, and against its prodigious influence. But one matter of indictment towers ominously above the rest—a genuine disgrace to it, a genuine calamity to us. This is the terrible blow that this great poem has struck against sociability and the joy of life. Some one called Omar “the sad, glad old Persian.” Sad he is; glad he is not, in any sense of the word whatever. He has been a worse foe to gladness than the Puritans.

A pensive and graceful Oriental lies under the rose-tree with his wine-pot and his scroll of poems. It may seem strange that any one’s thoughts should, at the moment of regarding him, fly back to the dark bedside where the doctor doles out brandy. It may seem stranger still that they should go back to the grey wastrel shaking with gin in Houndsditch. But a great philosophical unity links the three in an evil bond. Omar Khayyam’s wine-bibbing is bad, not because it is wine-bibbing. It is bad, and very bad, because it is medical wine-bibbing. It is the drinking of a man who drinks because he is not happy. His is the wine that shuts out the universe, not the wine that reveals it. It is not poetical drinking, which is joyous and instinctive; it is rational drinking, which is as prosaic as an investment, as unsavoury as a dose of camomile. Whole heavens above it, from the point of view of sentiment, though not of style, rises the splendour of some old English drinking-song—

“Then pass the bowl, my comrades all,
And let the zider vlow.”

For this song was caught up by happy men to express the worth of truly worthy things, of brotherhood and garrulity, and the brief and kindly leisure of the poor. Of course, the great part of the more stolid reproaches directed against the Omarite morality are as false and babyish as such reproaches usually are. One
critic, whose work I have read, had the incredible foolishness to call Omar an atheist and a materialist. It is almost impossible for an Oriental to be either; the East understands metaphysics too well for that. Of course, the real objection which a philosophical Christian would bring against the religion of Omar, is not that he gives no place to God, it is that he gives too much place to God. His is that terrible theism which can imagine nothing else but deity, and which denies altogether the outlines of human personality and human will.

“The ball no question makes of Ayes or Noes,
But Here or There as strikes the Player goes;
And He that tossed you down into the field,
He knows about it all—he knows—he knows.”

A Christian thinker such as Augustine or Dante would object to this because it ignores free-will, which is the valour and dignity of the soul. The quarrel of the highest Christianity with this scepticism is not in the least that the scepticism denies the existence of God; it is that it denies the existence of man.

In this cult of the pessimistic pleasure-seeker the Rubaiyat stands first in our time; but it does not stand alone. Many of the most brilliant intellects of our time have urged us to the same self-conscious snatching at a rare delight. Walter Pater said that we were all under sentence of death, and the only course was to enjoy exquisite moments simply for those moments’ sake. The same lesson was taught by the very powerful and very desolate philosophy of Oscar Wilde. It is the carpe diem religion; but the carpe diem religion is not the religion of happy people, but of very unhappy people. Great joy does, not gather the rosebuds while it may; its eyes are fixed on the immortal rose which Dante saw. Great joy has in it the sense of immortality; the very splendour of youth is the sense that it has all space to stretch its legs in. In all great comic literature, in “Tristram Shandy” or “Pickwick,” there is this sense of space and incorruptibility; we feel the characters are deathless people in an endless tale.

It is true enough, of course, that a pungent happiness comes chiefly in certain passing moments; but it is not true that we should think of them as passing, or enjoy them simply “for those moments’ sake.” To do this is to rationalize the happiness, and therefore to destroy it. Happiness is a mystery like religion, and should never be rationalized. Suppose a man experiences a really splendid moment of pleasure. I do not mean something connected with a bit of enamel, I mean something with a violent happiness in it—an almost painful happiness. A man may have, for instance, a moment of ecstasy in first love, or a moment of victory in battle. The lover enjoys the moment, but precisely not for the
moment’s sake. He enjoys it for the woman’s sake, or his own sake. The warrior enjoys the moment, but not for the sake of the moment; he enjoys it for the sake of the flag. The cause which the flag stands for may be foolish and fleeting; the love may be calf-love, and last a week. But the patriot thinks of the flag as eternal; the lover thinks of his love as something that cannot end. These moments are filled with eternity; these moments are joyful because they do not seem momentary. Once look at them as moments after Pater’s manner, and they become as cold as Pater and his style. Man cannot love mortal things. He can only love immortal things for an instant.

Pater’s mistake is revealed in his most famous phrase. He asks us to burn with a hard, gem-like flame. Flames are never hard and never gem-like—they cannot be handled or arranged. So human emotions are never hard and never gem-like; they are always dangerous, like flames, to touch or even to examine. There is only one way in which our passions can become hard and gem-like, and that is by becoming as cold as gems. No blow then has ever been struck at the natural loves and laughter of men so sterilizing as this carpe diem of the aesthetes. For any kind of pleasure a totally different spirit is required; a certain shyness, a certain indeterminate hope, a certain boyish expectation. Purity and simplicity are essential to passions—yes even to evil passions. Even vice demands a sort of virginity.

Omar’s (or Fitzgerald’s) effect upon the other world we may let go, his hand upon this world has been heavy and paralyzing. The Puritans, as I have said, are far jollier than he. The new ascetics who follow Thoreau or Tolstoy are much livelier company; for, though the surrender of strong drink and such luxuries may strike us as an idle negation, it may leave a man with innumerable natural pleasures, and, above all, with man’s natural power of happiness. Thoreau could enjoy the sunrise without a cup of coffee. If Tolstoy cannot admire marriage, at least he is healthy enough to admire mud. Nature can be enjoyed without even the most natural luxuries. A good bush needs no wine. But neither nature nor wine nor anything else can be enjoyed if we have the wrong attitude towards happiness, and Omar (or Fitzgerald) did have the wrong attitude towards happiness. He and those he has influenced do not see that if we are to be truly gay, we must believe that there is some eternal gaiety in the nature of things. We cannot enjoy thoroughly even a pas-de-quatre at a subscription dance unless we believe that the stars are dancing to the same tune. No one can be really hilarious but the serious man. “Wine,” says the Scripture, “maketh glad the heart of man,” but only of the man who has a heart. The thing called high spirits is possible
only to the spiritual. Ultimately a man cannot rejoice in anything except the nature of things. Ultimately a man can enjoy nothing except religion. Once in the world’s history men did believe that the stars were dancing to the tune of their temples, and they danced as men have never danced since. With this old pagan eudaemonism the sage of the Rubaiyat has quite as little to do as he has with any Christian variety. He is no more a Bacchanal than he is a saint. Dionysus and his church was grounded on a serious joie-de-vivre like that of Walt Whitman. Dionysus made wine, not a medicine, but a sacrament. Jesus Christ also made wine, not a medicine, but a sacrament. But Omar makes it, not a sacrament, but a medicine. He feasts because life is not joyful; he revels because he is not glad. “Drink,” he says, “for you know not whence you come nor why. Drink, for you know not when you go nor where. Drink, because the stars are cruel and the world as idle as a humming-top. Drink, because there is nothing worth trusting, nothing worth fighting for. Drink, because all things are lapsed in a base equality and an evil peace.” So he stands offering us the cup in his hand. And at the high altar of Christianity stands another figure, in whose hand also is the cup of the vine. “Drink” he says “for the whole world is as red as this wine, with the crimson of the love and wrath of God. Drink, for the trumpets are blowing for battle and this is the stirrup-cup. Drink, for this my blood of the new testament that is shed for you. Drink, for I know of whence you come and why. Drink, for I know of when you go and where.”
VIII

THE MILDNESS OF THE YELLOW PRESS

There is a great deal of protest made from one quarter or another nowadays against the influence of that new journalism which is associated with the names of Sir Alfred Harmsworth and Mr. Pearson. But almost everybody who attacks it attacks on the ground that it is very sensational, very violent and vulgar and startling. I am speaking in no affected contrariety, but in the simplicity of a genuine personal impression, when I say that this journalism offends as being not sensational or violent enough. The real vice is not that it is startling, but that it is quite insupportably tame. The whole object is to keep carefully along a certain level of the expected and the commonplace; it may be low, but it must take care also to be flat. Never by any chance in it is there any of that real plebeian pungency which can be heard from the ordinary cabman in the ordinary street. We have heard of a certain standard of decorum which demands that things should be funny without being vulgar, but the standard of this decorum demands that if things are vulgar they shall be vulgar without being funny. This journalism does not merely fail to exaggerate life—it positively underrates it; and it has to do so because it is intended for the faint and languid recreation of men whom the fierceness of modern life has fatigued. This press is not the yellow press at all; it is the drab press. Sir Alfred Harmsworth must not address to the tired clerk any observation more witty than the tired clerk might be able to address to Sir Alfred Harmsworth. It must not expose anybody (anybody who is powerful, that is), it must not offend anybody, it must not even please anybody, too much. A general vague idea that in spite of all this, our yellow press is sensational, arises from such external accidents as large type or lurid headlines. It is quite true that these editors print everything they possibly can in large capital letters. But they do this, not because it is startling, but because it is soothing. To people wholly weary or partly drunk in a dimly lighted train, it is a simplification and a comfort to have things presented in this vast and obvious manner. The editors use this gigantic alphabet in dealing with their readers, for exactly the same reason that parents and governesses use a similar gigantic alphabet in teaching children to spell. The nursery authorities do not use an A as big as a horseshoe in order to make the child jump; on the contrary, they use it to put the child at his ease, to make things smoother and more evident. Of the same
character is the dim and quiet dame school which Sir Alfred Harmsworth and Mr. Pearson keep. All their sentiments are spelling-book sentiments—that is to say, they are sentiments with which the pupil is already respectfully familiar. All their wildest posters are leaves torn from a copy-book.

Of real sensational journalism, as it exists in France, in Ireland, and in America, we have no trace in this country. When a journalist in Ireland wishes to create a thrill, he creates a thrill worth talking about. He denounces a leading Irish member for corruption, or he charges the whole police system with a wicked and definite conspiracy. When a French journalist desires a frisson there is a frisson; he discovers, let us say, that the President of the Republic has murdered three wives. Our yellow journalists invent quite as unscrupulously as this; their moral condition is, as regards careful veracity, about the same. But it is their mental calibre which happens to be such that they can only invent calm and even reassuring things. The fictitious version of the massacre of the envoys of Pekin was mendacious, but it was not interesting, except to those who had private reasons for terror or sorrow. It was not connected with any bold and suggestive view of the Chinese situation. It revealed only a vague idea that nothing could be impressive except a great deal of blood. Real sensationalism, of which I happen to be very fond, may be either moral or immoral. But even when it is most immoral, it requires moral courage. For it is one of the most dangerous things on earth genuinely to surprise anybody. If you make any sentient creature jump, you render it by no means improbable that it will jump on you. But the leaders of this movement have no moral courage or immoral courage; their whole method consists in saying, with large and elaborate emphasis, the things which everybody else says casually, and without remembering what they have said. When they brace themselves up to attack anything, they never reach the point of attacking anything which is large and real, and would resound with the shock. They do not attack the army as men do in France, or the judges as men do in Ireland, or the democracy itself as men did in England a hundred years ago. They attack something like the War Office—something, that is, which everybody attacks and nobody bothers to defend, something which is an old joke in fourth-rate comic papers. Just as a man shows he has a weak voice by straining it to shout, so they show the hopelessly unsensational nature of their minds when they really try to be sensational. With the whole world full of big and dubious institutions, with the whole wickedness of civilization staring them in the face, their idea of being bold and bright is to attack the War Office. They might as well start a campaign against the weather, or form a secret society in
order to make jokes about mothers-in-law. Nor is it only from the point of view of particular amateurs of the sensational such as myself, that it is permissible to say, in the words of Cowper’s Alexander Selkirk, that “their tameness is shocking to me.” The whole modern world is pining for a genuinely sensational journalism. This has been discovered by that very able and honest journalist, Mr. Blatchford, who started his campaign against Christianity, warned on all sides, I believe, that it would ruin his paper, but who continued from an honourable sense of intellectual responsibility. He discovered, however, that while he had undoubtedly shocked his readers, he had also greatly advanced his newspaper. It was bought—first, by all the people who agreed with him and wanted to read it; and secondly, by all the people who disagreed with him, and wanted to write him letters. Those letters were voluminous (I helped, I am glad to say, to swell their volume), and they were generally inserted with a generous fulness. Thus was accidentally discovered (like the steam-engine) the great journalistic maxim—that if an editor can only make people angry enough, they will write half his newspaper for him for nothing.

Some hold that such papers as these are scarcely the proper objects of so serious a consideration; but that can scarcely be maintained from a political or ethical point of view. In this problem of the mildness and tameness of the Harmsworth mind there is mirrored the outlines of a much larger problem which is akin to it.

The Harmsworthian journalist begins with a worship of success and violence, and ends in sheer timidity and mediocrity. But he is not alone in this, nor does he come by this fate merely because he happens personally to be stupid. Every man, however brave, who begins by worshipping violence, must end in mere timidity. Every man, however wise, who begins by worshipping success, must end in mere mediocrity. This strange and paradoxical fate is involved, not in the individual, but in the philosophy, in the point of view. It is not the folly of the man which brings about this necessary fall; it is his wisdom. The worship of success is the only one out of all possible worships of which this is true, that its followers are foredoomed to become slaves and cowards. A man may be a hero for the sake of Mrs. Gallup’s ciphers or for the sake of human sacrifice, but not for the sake of success. For obviously a man may choose to fail because he loves Mrs. Gallup or human sacrifice; but he cannot choose to fail because he loves success. When the test of triumph is men’s test of everything, they never endure long enough to triumph at all. As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is a mere flattery or platitude; it is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins
to be a strength at all. Like all the Christian virtues, it is as unreasonable as it is indispensable.

It was through this fatal paradox in the nature of things that all these modern adventurers come at last to a sort of tedium and acquiescence. They desired strength; and to them to desire strength was to admire strength; to admire strength was simply to admire the statu quo. They thought that he who wished to be strong ought to respect the strong. They did not realize the obvious verity that he who wishes to be strong must despise the strong. They sought to be everything, to have the whole force of the cosmos behind them, to have an energy that would drive the stars. But they did not realize the two great facts—first, that in the attempt to be everything the first and most difficult step is to be something; second, that the moment a man is something, he is essentially defying everything. The lower animals, say the men of science, fought their way up with a blind selfishness. If this be so, the only real moral of it is that our unselfishness, if it is to triumph, must be equally blind. The mammoth did not put his head on one side and wonder whether mammoths were a little out of date. Mammoths were at least as much up to date as that individual mammoth could make them. The great elk did not say, “Cloven hoofs are very much worn now.” He polished his own weapons for his own use. But in the reasoning animal there has arisen a more horrible danger, that he may fail through perceiving his own failure. When modern sociologists talk of the necessity of accommodating one’s self to the trend of the time, they forget that the trend of the time at its best consists entirely of people who will not accommodate themselves to anything. At its worst it consists of many millions of frightened creatures all accommodating themselves to a trend that is not there. And that is becoming more and more the situation of modern England. Every man speaks of public opinion, and means by public opinion, public opinion minus his opinion. Every man makes his contribution negative under the erroneous impression that the next man’s contribution is positive. Every man surrenders his fancy to a general tone which is itself a surrender. And over all the heartless and fatuous unity spreads this new and wearisome and platitudinous press, incapable of invention, incapable of audacity, capable only of a servility all the more contemptible because it is not even a servility to the strong. But all who begin with force and conquest will end in this.

The chief characteristic of the “New journalism” is simply that it is bad journalism. It is beyond all comparison the most shapeless, careless, and colourless work done in our day.
I read yesterday a sentence which should be written in letters of gold and adamant; it is the very motto of the new philosophy of Empire. I found it (as the reader has already eagerly guessed) in Pearson’s Magazine, while I was communing (soul to soul) with Mr. C. Arthur Pearson, whose first and suppressed name I am afraid is Chilperic. It occurred in an article on the American Presidential Election. This is the sentence, and every one should read it carefully, and roll it on the tongue, till all the honey be tasted.

“A little sound common sense often goes further with an audience of American working-men than much high-flown argument. A speaker who, as he brought forward his points, hammered nails into a board, won hundreds of votes for his side at the last Presidential Election.”

I do not wish to soil this perfect thing with comment; the words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo. But just think for a moment of the mind, the strange inscrutable mind, of the man who wrote that, of the editor who approved it, of the people who are probably impressed by it, of the incredible American working-man, of whom, for all I know, it may be true. Think what their notion of “common sense” must be! It is delightful to realize that you and I are now able to win thousands of votes should we ever be engaged in a Presidential Election, by doing something of this kind. For I suppose the nails and the board are not essential to the exhibition of “common sense;” there may be variations. We may read—

“A little common sense impresses American working-men more than high-flown argument. A speaker who, as he made his points, pulled buttons off his waistcoat, won thousands of votes for his side.” Or, “Sound common sense tells better in America than high-flown argument. Thus Senator Budge, who threw his false teeth in the air every time he made an epigram, won the solid approval of American working-men.” Or again, “The sound common sense of a gentleman from Earlswood, who stuck straws in his hair during the progress of his speech, assured the victory of Mr. Roosevelt.”

There are many other elements in this article on which I should love to linger. But the matter which I wish to point out is that in that sentence is perfectly revealed the whole truth of what our Chamberlainites, hustlers, hustlers, Empire-builders, and strong, silent men, really mean by “commonsense.” They mean knocking, with deafening noise and dramatic effect, meaningless bits of iron into a useless bit of wood. A man goes on to an American platform and behaves like a mountebank fool with a board and a hammer; well, I do not blame him; I might even admire him. He may be a dashing and quite decent strategist. He may be a
fine romantic actor, like Burke flinging the dagger on the floor. He may even (for all I know) be a sublime mystic, profoundly impressed with the ancient meaning of the divine trade of the Carpenter, and offering to the people a parable in the form of a ceremony. All I wish to indicate is the abyss of mental confusion in which such wild ritualism can be called “sound common sense.” And it is in that abyss of mental confusion, and in that alone, that the new Imperialism lives and moves and has its being. The whole glory and greatness of Mr. Chamberlain consists in this: that if a man hits the right nail on the head nobody cares where he hits it to or what it does. They care about the noise of the hammer, not about the silent drip of the nail. Before and throughout the African war, Mr. Chamberlain was always knocking in nails, with ringing decisiveness. But when we ask, “But what have these nails held together? Where is your carpentry? Where are your contented Outlanders? Where is your free South Africa? Where is your British prestige? What have your nails done?” then what answer is there? We must go back (with an affectionate sigh) to our Pearson for the answer to the question of what the nails have done: “The speaker who hammered nails into a board won thousands of votes.”

Now the whole of this passage is admirably characteristic of the new journalism which Mr. Pearson represents, the new journalism which has just purchased the Standard. To take one instance out of hundreds, the incomparable man with the board and nails is described in the Pearson’s article as calling out (as he smote the symbolic nail), “Lie number one. Nailed to the Mast! Nailed to the Mast!” In the whole office there was apparently no compositor or office-boy to point out that we speak of lies being nailed to the counter, and not to the mast. Nobody in the office knew that Pearson’s Magazine was falling into a stale Irish bull, which must be as old as St. Patrick. This is the real and essential tragedy of the sale of the Standard. It is not merely that journalism is victorious over literature. It is that bad journalism is victorious over good journalism.

It is not that one article which we consider costly and beautiful is being ousted by another kind of article which we consider common or unclean. It is that of the same article a worse quality is preferred to a better. If you like popular journalism (as I do), you will know that Pearson’s Magazine is poor and weak popular journalism. You will know it as certainly as you know bad butter. You will know as certainly that it is poor popular journalism as you know that the Strand, in the great days of Sherlock Holmes, was good popular journalism. Mr. Pearson has been a monument of this enormous banality. About everything he says and does there is something infinitely weak-minded. He clamours for home
trades and employs foreign ones to print his paper. When this glaring fact is pointed out, he does not say that the thing was an oversight, like a sane man. He cuts it off with scissors, like a child of three. His very cunning is infantile. And like a child of three, he does not cut it quite off. In all human records I doubt if there is such an example of a profound simplicity in deception. This is the sort of intelligence which now sits in the seat of the sane and honourable old Tory journalism. If it were really the triumph of the tropical exuberance of the Yankee press, it would be vulgar, but still tropical. But it is not. We are delivered over to the bramble, and from the meanest of the shrubs comes the fire upon the cedars of Lebanon.

The only question now is how much longer the fiction will endure that journalists of this order represent public opinion. It may be doubted whether any honest and serious Tariff Reformer would for a moment maintain that there was any majority for Tariff Reform in the country comparable to the ludicrous preponderance which money has given it among the great dailies. The only inference is that for purposes of real public opinion the press is now a mere plutocratic oligarchy. Doubtless the public buys the wares of these men, for one reason or another. But there is no more reason to suppose that the public admires their politics than that the public admires the delicate philosophy of Mr. Crosse or the darker and sterner creed of Mr. Blackwell. If these men are merely tradesmen, there is nothing to say except that there are plenty like them in the Battersea Park Road, and many much better. But if they make any sort of attempt to be politicians, we can only point out to them that they are not as yet even good journalists.
IX

THE MOODS OF MR. GEORGE MOORE

Mr. George Moore began his literary career by writing his personal confessions; nor is there any harm in this if he had not continued them for the remainder of his life. He is a man of genuinely forcible mind and of great command over a kind of rhetorical and fugitive conviction which excites and pleases. He is in a perpetual state of temporary honesty. He has admired all the most admirable modern eccentrics until they could stand it no longer. Everything he writes, it is to be fully admitted, has a genuine mental power. His account of his reason for leaving the Roman Catholic Church is possibly the most admirable tribute to that communion which has been written of late years. For the fact of the matter is, that the weakness which has rendered barren the many brilliances of Mr. Moore is actually that weakness which the Roman Catholic Church is at its best in combating. Mr. Moore hates Catholicism because it breaks up the house of looking-glasses in which he lives. Mr. Moore does not dislike so much being asked to believe in the spiritual existence of miracles or sacraments, but he does fundamentally dislike being asked to believe in the actual existence of other people. Like his master Pater and all the aesthetes, his real quarrel with life is that it is not a dream that can be moulded by the dreamer. It is not the dogma of the reality of the other world that troubles him, but the dogma of the reality of this world.

The truth is that the tradition of Christianity (which is still the only coherent ethic of Europe) rests on two or three paradoxes or mysteries which can easily be impugned in argument and as easily justified in life. One of them, for instance, is the paradox of hope or faith—that the more hopeless is the situation the more hopeful must be the man. Stevenson understood this, and consequently Mr. Moore cannot understand Stevenson. Another is the paradox of charity or chivalry that the weaker a thing is the more it should be respected, that the more indefensible a thing is the more it should appeal to us for a certain kind of defence. Thackeray understood this, and therefore Mr. Moore does not understand Thackeray. Now, one of these very practical and working mysteries in the Christian tradition, and one which the Roman Catholic Church, as I say, has done her best work in singling out, is the conception of the sinfulness of pride. Pride is a weakness in the character; it dries up laughter, it dries up
wonder, it dries up chivalry and energy. The Christian tradition understands this; therefore Mr. Moore does not understand the Christian tradition.

For the truth is much stranger even than it appears in the formal doctrine of the sin of pride. It is not only true that humility is a much wiser and more vigorous thing than pride. It is also true that vanity is a much wiser and more vigorous thing than pride. Vanity is social—it is almost a kind of comradeship; pride is solitary and uncivilized. Vanity is active; it desires the applause of infinite multitudes; pride is passive, desiring only the applause of one person, which it already has. Vanity is humorous, and can enjoy the joke even of itself; pride is dull, and cannot even smile. And the whole of this difference is the difference between Stevenson and Mr. George Moore, who, as he informs us, has “brushed Stevenson aside.” I do not know where he has been brushed to, but wherever it is I fancy he is having a good time, because he had the wisdom to be vain, and not proud. Stevenson had a windy vanity; Mr. Moore has a dusty egoism. Hence Stevenson could amuse himself as well as us with his vanity; while the richest effects of Mr. Moore’s absurdity are hidden from his eyes.

If we compare this solemn folly with the happy folly with which Stevenson belaunds his own books and berates his own critics, we shall not find it difficult to guess why it is that Stevenson at least found a final philosophy of some sort to live by, while Mr. Moore is always walking the world looking for a new one. Stevenson had found that the secret of life lies in laughter and humility. Self is the gorgon. Vanity sees it in the mirror of other men and lives. Pride studies it for itself and is turned to stone.

It is necessary to dwell on this defect in Mr. Moore, because it is really the weakness of work which is not without its strength. Mr. Moore’s egoism is not merely a moral weakness, it is a very constant and influential aesthetic weakness as well. We should really be much more interested in Mr. Moore if he were not quite so interested in himself. We feel as if we were being shown through a gallery of really fine pictures, into each of which, by some useless and discordant convention, the artist had represented the same figure in the same attitude. “The Grand Canal with a distant view of Mr. Moore,” “Effect of Mr. Moore through a Scotch Mist,” “Mr. Moore by Firelight,” “Ruins of Mr. Moore by Moonlight,” and so on, seems to be the endless series. He would no doubt reply that in such a book as this he intended to reveal himself. But the answer is that in such a book as this he does not succeed. One of the thousand objections to the sin of pride lies precisely in this, that self-consciousness of necessity destroys self-revelation. A man who thinks a great deal about himself will try to
be many-sided, attempt a theatrical excellence at all points, will try to be an encyclopaedia of culture, and his own real personality will be lost in that false universalism. Thinking about himself will lead to trying to be the universe; trying to be the universe will lead to ceasing to be anything. If, on the other hand, a man is sensible enough to think only about the universe; he will think about it in his own individual way. He will keep virgin the secret of God; he will see the grass as no other man can see it, and look at a sun that no man has ever known. This fact is very practically brought out in Mr. Moore’s “Confessions.” In reading them we do not feel the presence of a clean-cut personality like that of Thackeray and Matthew Arnold. We only read a number of quite clever and largely conflicting opinions which might be uttered by any clever person, but which we are called upon to admire specifically, because they are uttered by Mr. Moore. He is the only thread that connects Catholicism and Protestantism, realism and mysticism—he or rather his name. He is profoundly absorbed even in views he no longer holds, and he expects us to be. And he intrudes the capital “I” even where it need not be intruded—even where it weakens the force of a plain statement. Where another man would say, “It is a fine day,” Mr. Moore says, “Seen through my temperament, the day appeared fine.” Where another man would say “Milton has obviously a fine style,” Mr. Moore would say, “As a stylist Milton had always impressed me.” The Nemesis of this self-centred spirit is that of being totally ineffectual. Mr. Moore has started many interesting crusades, but he has abandoned them before his disciples could begin. Even when he is on the side of the truth he is as fickle as the children of falsehood. Even when he has found reality he cannot find rest. One Irish quality he has which no Irishman was ever without—pugnacity; and that is certainly a great virtue, especially in the present age. But he has not the tenacity of conviction which goes with the fighting spirit in a man like Bernard Shaw. His weakness of introspection and selfishness in all their glory cannot prevent him fighting; but they will always prevent him winning.
ON SANDALS AND SIMPLICITY

The great misfortune of the modern English is not at all that they are more boastful than other people (they are not); it is that they are boastful about those particular things which nobody can boast of without losing them. A Frenchman can be proud of being bold and logical, and still remain bold and logical. A German can be proud of being reflective and orderly, and still remain reflective and orderly. But an Englishman cannot be proud of being simple and direct, and still remain simple and direct. In the matter of these strange virtues, to know them is to kill them. A man may be conscious of being heroic or conscious of being divine, but he cannot (in spite of all the Anglo-Saxon poets) be conscious of being unconscious.

Now, I do not think that it can be honestly denied that some portion of this impossibility attaches to a class very different in their own opinion, at least, to the school of Anglo-Saxonism. I mean that school of the simple life, commonly associated with Tolstoy. If a perpetual talk about one’s own robustness leads to being less robust, it is even more true that a perpetual talking about one’s own simplicity leads to being less simple. One great complaint, I think, must stand against the modern upholders of the simple life—the simple life in all its varied forms, from vegetarianism to the honourable consistency of the Doukhobors. This complaint against them stands, that they would make us simple in the unimportant things, but complex in the important things. They would make us simple in the things that do not matter—that is, in diet, in costume, in etiquette, in economic system. But they would make us complex in the things that do matter—in philosophy, in loyalty, in spiritual acceptance, and spiritual rejection. It does not so very much matter whether a man eats a grilled tomato or a plain tomato; it does very much matter whether he eats a plain tomato with a grilled mind. The only kind of simplicity worth preserving is the simplicity of the heart, the simplicity which accepts and enjoys. There may be a reasonable doubt as to what system preserves this; there can surely be no doubt that a system of simplicity destroys it. There is more simplicity in the man who eats caviar on impulse than in the man who eats grape-nuts on principle. The chief error of these people is to be found in the very phrase to which they are most attached—“plain living and high thinking.” These people do not stand in need of, will
not be improved by, plain living and high thinking. They stand in need of the contrary. They would be improved by high living and plain thinking. A little high living (I say, having a full sense of responsibility, a little high living) would teach them the force and meaning of the human festivities, of the banquet that has gone on from the beginning of the world. It would teach them the historic fact that the artificial is, if anything, older than the natural. It would teach them that the loving-cup is as old as any hunger. It would teach them that ritualism is older than any religion. And a little plain thinking would teach them how harsh and fanciful are the mass of their own ethics, how very civilized and very complicated must be the brain of the Tolstoyan who really believes it to be evil to love one’s country and wicked to strike a blow.

A man approaches, wearing sandals and simple raiment, a raw tomato held firmly in his right hand, and says, “The affections of family and country alike are hindrances to the fuller development of human love;” but the plain thinker will only answer him, with a wonder not untinged with admiration, “What a great deal of trouble you must have taken in order to feel like that.” High living will reject the tomato. Plain thinking will equally decisively reject the idea of the invariable sinfulness of war. High living will convince us that nothing is more materialistic than to despise a pleasure as purely material. And plain thinking will convince us that nothing is more materialistic than to reserve our horror chiefly for material wounds.

The only simplicity that matters is the simplicity of the heart. If that be gone, it can be brought back by no turnips or cellular clothing; but only by tears and terror and the fires that are not quenched. If that remain, it matters very little if a few Early Victorian armchairs remain along with it. Let us put a complex entree into a simple old gentleman; let us not put a simple entree into a complex old gentleman. So long as human society will leave my spiritual inside alone, I will allow it, with a comparative submission, to work its wild will with my physical interior. I will submit to cigars. I will meekly embrace a bottle of Burgundy. I will humble myself to a hansom cab. If only by this means I may preserve to myself the virginity of the spirit, which enjoys with astonishment and fear. I do not say that these are the only methods of preserving it. I incline to the belief that there are others. But I will have nothing to do with simplicity which lacks the fear, the astonishment, and the joy alike. I will have nothing to do with the devilish vision of a child who is too simple to like toys.

The child is, indeed, in these, and many other matters, the best guide. And in nothing is the child so righteously childlike, in nothing does he exhibit more
accurately the sounder order of simplicity, than in the fact that he sees everything with a simple pleasure, even the complex things. The false type of naturalness harps always on the distinction between the natural and the artificial. The higher kind of naturalness ignores that distinction. To the child the tree and the lamp-post are as natural and as artificial as each other; or rather, neither of them are natural but both supernatural. For both are splendid and unexplained. The flower with which God crowns the one, and the flame with which Sam the lamplighter crowns the other, are equally of the gold of fairy-tales. In the middle of the wildest fields the most rustic child is, ten to one, playing at steam-engines. And the only spiritual or philosophical objection to steam-engines is not that men pay for them or work at them, or make them very ugly, or even that men are killed by them; but merely that men do not play at them. The evil is that the childish poetry of clockwork does not remain. The wrong is not that engines are too much admired, but that they are not admired enough. The sin is not that engines are mechanical, but that men are mechanical.

In this matter, then, as in all the other matters treated in this book, our main conclusion is that it is a fundamental point of view, a philosophy or religion which is needed, and not any change in habit or social routine. The things we need most for immediate practical purposes are all abstractions. We need a right view of the human lot, a right view of the human society; and if we were living eagerly and angrily in the enthusiasm of those things, we should, ipso facto, be living simply in the genuine and spiritual sense. Desire and danger make every one simple. And to those who talk to us with interfering eloquence about Jaeger and the pores of the skin, and about Plasmon and the coats of the stomach, at them shall only be hurled the words that are hurled at fops and gluttons, “Take no thought what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink, or wherewithal ye shall be clothed. For after all these things do the Gentiles seek. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” Those amazing words are not only extraordinarily good, practical politics; they are also superlatively good hygiene. The one supreme way of making all those processes go right, the processes of health, and strength, and grace, and beauty, the one and only way of making certain of their accuracy, is to think about something else. If a man is bent on climbing into the seventh heaven, he may be quite easy about the pores of his skin. If he harnesses his waggon to a star, the process will have a most satisfactory effect upon the coats of his stomach. For the thing called “taking thought,” the thing for which the best modern word is “rationalizing,” is in its nature, inapplicable to all plain and
urgent things. Men take thought and ponder rationalistically, touching remote things—things that only theoretically matter, such as the transit of Venus. But only at their peril can men rationalize about so practical a matter as health.
A permanent disadvantage of the study of folk-lore and kindred subjects is that the man of science can hardly be in the nature of things very frequently a man of the world. He is a student of nature; he is scarcely ever a student of human nature. And even where this difficulty is overcome, and he is in some sense a student of human nature, this is only a very faint beginning of the painful progress towards being human. For the study of primitive race and religion stands apart in one important respect from all, or nearly all, the ordinary scientific studies. A man can understand astronomy only by being an astronomer; he can understand entomology only by being an entomologist (or, perhaps, an insect); but he can understand a great deal of anthropology merely by being a man. He is himself the animal which he studies. Hence arises the fact which strikes the eye everywhere in the records of ethnology and folk-lore—the fact that the same frigid and detached spirit which leads to success in the study of astronomy or botany leads to disaster in the study of mythology or human origins. It is necessary to cease to be a man in order to do justice to a microbe; it is not necessary to cease to be a man in order to do justice to men. That same suppression of sympathies, that same waving away of intuitions or guess-work which make a man preternaturally clever in dealing with the stomach of a spider, will make him preternaturally stupid in dealing with the heart of man. He is making himself inhuman in order to understand humanity. An ignorance of the other world is boasted by many men of science; but in this matter their defect arises, not from ignorance of the other world, but from ignorance of this world. For the secrets about which anthropologists concern themselves can be best learnt, not from books or voyages, but from the ordinary commerce of man with man. The secret of why some savage tribe worships monkeys or the moon is not to be found even by travelling among those savages and taking down their answers in a note-book, although the cleverest man may pursue this course. The answer to the riddle is in England; it is in London; nay, it is in his own heart. When a man has discovered why men in Bond Street wear black hats he will at the same moment have discovered why men in Timbuctoo wear red feathers. The mystery in the heart of some savage wardance should not be studied in books of scientific travel; it should be studied at a subscription ball. If a man
desires to find out the origins of religions, let him not go to the Sandwich Islands; let him go to church. If a man wishes to know the origin of human society, to know what society, philosophically speaking, really is, let him not go into the British Museum; let him go into society.

This total misunderstanding of the real nature of ceremonial gives rise to the most awkward and dehumanized versions of the conduct of men in rude lands or ages. The man of science, not realizing that ceremonial is essentially a thing which is done without a reason, has to find a reason for every sort of ceremonial, and, as might be supposed, the reason is generally a very absurd one—absurd because it originates not in the simple mind of the barbarian, but in the sophisticated mind of the professor. The teemed man will say, for instance, “The natives of Mumbojumbo Land believe that the dead man can eat and will require food upon his journey to the other world. This is attested by the fact that they place food in the grave, and that any family not complying with this rite is the object of the anger of the priests and the tribe.” To any one acquainted with humanity this way of talking is topsy-turvy. It is like saying, “The English in the twentieth century believed that a dead man could smell. This is attested by the fact that they always covered his grave with lilies, violets, or other flowers. Some priestly and tribal terrors were evidently attached to the neglect of this action, as we have records of several old ladies who were very much disturbed in mind because their wreaths had not arrived in time for the funeral.” It may be of course that savages put food with a dead man because they think that a dead man can eat, or weapons with a dead man because they think that a dead man can fight. But personally I do not believe that they think anything of the kind. I believe they put food or weapons on the dead for the same reason that we put flowers, because it is an exceedingly natural and obvious thing to do. We do not understand, it is true, the emotion which makes us think it obvious and natural; but that is because, like all the important emotions of human existence it is essentially irrational. We do not understand the savage for the same reason that the savage does not understand himself. And the savage does not understand himself for the same reason that we do not understand ourselves either.

The obvious truth is that the moment any matter has passed through the human mind it is finally and for ever spoilt for all purposes of science. It has become a thing incurably mysterious and infinite; this mortal has put on immortality. Even what we call our material desires are spiritual, because they are human. Science can analyse a pork-chop, and say how much of it is phosphorus and how much is protein; but science cannot analyse any man’s wish
for a pork-chop, and say how much of it is hunger, how much custom, how much nervous fancy, how much a haunting love of the beautiful. The man’s desire for the pork-chop remains literally as mystical and ethereal as his desire for heaven. All attempts, therefore, at a science of any human things, at a science of history, a science of folk-lore, a science of sociology, are by their nature not merely hopeless, but crazy. You can no more be certain in economic history that a man’s desire for money was merely a desire for money than you can be certain in hagiology that a saint’s desire for God was merely a desire for God. And this kind of vagueness in the primary phenomena of the study is an absolutely final blow to anything in the nature of a science. Men can construct a science with very few instruments, or with very plain instruments; but no one on earth could construct a science with unreliable instruments. A man might work out the whole of mathematics with a handful of pebbles, but not with a handful of clay which was always falling apart into new fragments, and falling together into new combinations. A man might measure heaven and earth with a reed, but not with a growing reed.

As one of the enormous follies of folk-lore, let us take the case of the transmigration of stories, and the alleged unity of their source. Story after story the scientific mythologists have cut out of its place in history, and pinned side by side with similar stories in their museum of fables. The process is industrious, it is fascinating, and the whole of it rests on one of the plainest fallacies in the world. That a story has been told all over the place at some time or other, not only does not prove that it never really happened; it does not even faintly indicate or make slightly more probable that it never happened. That a large number of fishermen have falsely asserted that they have caught a pike two feet long, does not in the least affect the question of whether any one ever really did so. That numberless journalists announce a Franco-German war merely for money is no evidence one way or the other upon the dark question of whether such a war ever occurred. Doubtless in a few hundred years the innumerable Franco-German wars that did not happen will have cleared the scientific mind of any belief in the legendary war of ’70 which did. But that will be because if folklore students remain at all, their nature will be unchanged; and their services to folk-lore will be still as they are at present, greater than they know. For in truth these men do something far more godlike than studying legends; they create them.

There are two kinds of stories which the scientists say cannot be true, because everybody tells them. The first class consists of the stories which are told
everywhere, because they are somewhat odd or clever; there is nothing in the world to prevent their having happened to somebody as an adventure any more than there is anything to prevent their having occurred, as they certainly did occur, to somebody as an idea. But they are not likely to have happened to many people. The second class of their “myths” consist of the stories that are told everywhere for the simple reason that they happen everywhere. Of the first class, for instance, we might take such an example as the story of William Tell, now generally ranked among legends upon the sole ground that it is found in the tales of other peoples. Now, it is obvious that this was told everywhere because whether true or fictitious it is what is called “a good story;” it is odd, exciting, and it has a climax. But to suggest that some such eccentric incident can never have happened in the whole history of archery, or that it did not happen to any particular person of whom it is told, is stark impudence. The idea of shooting at a mark attached to some valuable or beloved person is an idea doubtless that might easily have occurred to any inventive poet. But it is also an idea that might easily occur to any boastful archer. It might be one of the fantastic caprices of some story-teller. It might equally well be one of the fantastic caprices of some tyrant. It might occur first in real life and afterwards occur in legends. Or it might just as well occur first in legends and afterwards occur in real life. If no apple has ever been shot off a boy’s head from the beginning of the world, it may be done tomorrow morning, and by somebody who has never heard of William Tell.

This type of tale, indeed, may be pretty fairly paralleled with the ordinary anecdote terminating in a repartee or an Irish bull. Such a retort as the famous “je ne vois pas la necessite” we have all seen attributed to Talleyrand, to Voltaire, to Henri Quatre, to an anonymous judge, and so on. But this variety does not in any way make it more likely that the thing was never said at all. It is highly likely that it was really said by somebody unknown. It is highly likely that it was really said by Talleyrand. In any case, it is not any more difficult to believe that the mot might have occurred to a man in conversation than to a man writing memoirs. It might have occurred to any of the men I have mentioned. But there is this point of distinction about it, that it is not likely to have occurred to all of them. And this is where the first class of so-called myth differs from the second to which I have previously referred. For there is a second class of incident found to be common to the stories of five or six heroes, say to Sigurd, to Hercules, to Rustem, to the Cid, and so on. And the peculiarity of this myth is that not only is it highly reasonable to imagine that it really happened to one
hero, but it is highly reasonable to imagine that it really happened to all of them. Such a story, for instance, is that of a great man having his strength swayed or thwarted by the mysterious weakness of a woman. The anecdotal story, the story of William Tell, is as I have said, popular, because it is peculiar. But this kind of story, the story of Samson and Delilah of Arthur and Guinevere, is obviously popular because it is not peculiar. It is popular as good, quiet fiction is popular, because it tells the truth about people. If the ruin of Samson by a woman, and the ruin of Hercules by a woman, have a common legendary origin, it is gratifying to know that we can also explain, as a fable, the ruin of Nelson by a woman and the ruin of Parnell by a woman. And, indeed, I have no doubt whatever that, some centuries hence, the students of folk-lore will refuse altogether to believe that Elizabeth Barrett eloped with Robert Browning, and will prove their point up to the hilt by the unquestionable fact that the whole fiction of the period was full of such elopements from end to end.

Possibly the most pathetic of all the delusions of the modern students of primitive belief is the notion they have about the thing they call anthropomorphism. They believe that primitive men attributed phenomena to a god in human form in order to explain them, because his mind in its sullen limitation could not reach any further than his own clownish existence. The thunder was called the voice of a man, the lightning the eyes of a man, because by this explanation they were made more reasonable and comfortable. The final cure for all this kind of philosophy is to walk down a lane at night. Any one who does so will discover very quickly that men pictured something semi-human at the back of all things, not because such a thought was natural, but because it was supernatural; not because it made things more comprehensible, but because it made them a hundred times more incomprehensible and mysterious. For a man walking down a lane at night can see the conspicuous fact that as long as nature keeps to her own course, she has no power with us at all. As long as a tree is a tree, it is a top-heavy monster with a hundred arms, a thousand tongues, and only one leg. But so long as a tree is a tree, it does not frighten us at all. It begins to be something alien, to be something strange, only when it looks like ourselves. When a tree really looks like a man our knees knock under us. And when the whole universe looks like a man we fall on our faces.
Of the New Paganism (or neo-Paganism), as it was preached flamboyantly by Mr. Swinburne or delicately by Walter Pater, there is no necessity to take any very grave account, except as a thing which left behind it incomparable exercises in the English language. The New Paganism is no longer new, and it never at any time bore the smallest resemblance to Paganism. The ideas about the ancient civilization which it has left loose in the public mind are certainly extraordinary enough. The term “pagan” is continually used in fiction and light literature as meaning a man without any religion, whereas a pagan was generally a man with about half a dozen. The pagans, according to this notion, were continually crowning themselves with flowers and dancing about in an irresponsible state, whereas, if there were two things that the best pagan civilization did honestly believe in, they were a rather too rigid dignity and a much too rigid responsibility. Pagans are depicted as above all things inebriate and lawless, whereas they were above all things reasonable and respectable. They are praised as disobedient when they had only one great virtue—civic obedience. They are envied and admired as shamelessly happy when they had only one great sin—despair.

Mr. Lowes Dickinson, the most pregnant and provocative of recent writers on this and similar subjects, is far too solid a man to have fallen into this old error of the mere anarchy of Paganism. In order to make hay of that Hellenic enthusiasm which has as its ideal mere appetite and egotism, it is not necessary to know much philosophy, but merely to know a little Greek. Mr. Lowes Dickinson knows a great deal of philosophy, and also a great deal of Greek, and his error, if error he has, is not that of the crude hedonist. But the contrast which he offers between Christianity and Paganism in the matter of moral ideals—a contrast which he states very ably in a paper called “How long halt ye?” which appeared in the Independent Review—does, I think, contain an error of a deeper kind. According to him, the ideal of Paganism was not, indeed, a mere frenzy of lust and liberty and caprice, but was an ideal of full and satisfied humanity. According to him, the ideal of Christianity was the ideal of asceticism. When I say that I think this idea wholly wrong as a matter of philosophy and history, I am not talking for the moment about any ideal Christianity of my own, or even
of any primitive Christianity undefiled by after events. I am not, like so many modern Christian idealists, basing my case upon certain things which Christ said. Neither am I, like so many other Christian idealists, basing my case upon certain things that Christ forgot to say. I take historic Christianity with all its sins upon its head; I take it, as I would take Jacobinism, or Mormonism, or any other mixed or unpleasing human product, and I say that the meaning of its action was not to be found in asceticism. I say that its point of departure from Paganism was not asceticism. I say that its point of difference with the modern world was not asceticism. I say that St. Simeon Stylites had not his main inspiration in asceticism. I say that the main Christian impulse cannot be described as asceticism, even in the ascetics.

Let me set about making the matter clear. There is one broad fact about the relations of Christianity and Paganism which is so simple that many will smile at it, but which is so important that all moderns forget it. The primary fact about Christianity and Paganism is that one came after the other. Mr. Lowes Dickinson speaks of them as if they were parallel ideals—even speaks as if Paganism were the newer of the two, and the more fitted for a new age. He suggests that the Pagan ideal will be the ultimate good of man; but if that is so, we must at least ask with more curiosity than he allows for, why it was that man actually found his ultimate good on earth under the stars, and threw it away again. It is this extraordinary enigma to which I propose to attempt an answer.

There is only one thing in the modern world that has been face to face with Paganism; there is only one thing in the modern world which in that sense knows anything about Paganism: and that is Christianity. That fact is really the weak point in the whole of that hedonistic neo-Paganism of which I have spoken. All that genuinely remains of the ancient hymns or the ancient dances of Europe, all that has honestly come to us from the festivals of Phoebus or Pan, is to be found in the festivals of the Christian Church. If any one wants to hold the end of a chain which really goes back to the heathen mysteries, he had better take hold of a festoon of flowers at Easter or a string of sausages at Christmas. Everything else in the modern world is of Christian origin, even everything that seems most anti-Christian. The French Revolution is of Christian origin. The newspaper is of Christian origin. The anarchists are of Christian origin. Physical science is of Christian origin. The attack on Christianity is of Christian origin. There is one thing, and one thing only, in existence at the present day which can in any sense accurately be said to be of pagan origin, and that is Christianity.

The real difference between Paganism and Christianity is perfectly summed
up in the difference between the pagan, or natural, virtues, and those three virtues of Christianity which the Church of Rome calls virtues of grace. The pagan, or rational, virtues are such things as justice and temperance, and Christianity has adopted them. The three mystical virtues which Christianity has not adopted, but invented, are faith, hope, and charity. Now much easy and foolish Christian rhetoric could easily be poured out upon those three words, but I desire to confine myself to the two facts which are evident about them. The first evident fact (in marked contrast to the delusion of the dancing pagan)—the first evident fact, I say, is that the pagan virtues, such as justice and temperance, are the sad virtues, and that the mystical virtues of faith, hope, and charity are the gay and exuberant virtues. And the second evident fact, which is even more evident, is the fact that the pagan virtues are the reasonable virtues, and that the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity are in their essence as unreasonable as they can be.

As the word “unreasonable” is open to misunderstanding, the matter may be more accurately put by saying that each one of these Christian or mystical virtues involves a paradox in its own nature, and that this is not true of any of the typically pagan or rationalist virtues. Justice consists in finding out a certain thing due to a certain man and giving it to him. Temperance consists in finding out the proper limit of a particular indulgence and adhering to that. But charity means pardoning what is unpardonable, or it is no virtue at all. Hope means hoping when things are hopeless, or it is no virtue at all. And faith means believing the incredible, or it is no virtue at all.

It is somewhat amusing, indeed, to notice the difference between the fate of these three paradoxes in the fashion of the modern mind. Charity is a fashionable virtue in our time; it is lit up by the gigantic firelight of Dickens. Hope is a fashionable virtue to-day; our attention has been arrested for it by the sudden and silver trumpet of Stevenson. But faith is unfashionable, and it is customary on every side to cast against it the fact that it is a paradox. Everybody mockingly repeats the famous childish definition that faith is “the power of believing that which we know to be untrue.” Yet it is not one atom more paradoxical than hope or charity. Charity is the power of defending that which we know to be indefensible. Hope is the power of being cheerful in circumstances which we know to be desperate. It is true that there is a state of hope which belongs to bright prospects and the morning; but that is not the virtue of hope. The virtue of hope exists only in earthquake and, eclipse. It is true that there is a thing crudely called charity, which means charity to the deserving poor; but charity to the
deserving is not charity at all, but justice. It is the undeserving who require it, and the ideal either does not exist at all, or exists wholly for them. For practical purposes it is at the hopeless moment that we require the hopeful man, and the virtue either does not exist at all, or begins to exist at that moment. Exactly at the instant when hope ceases to be reasonable it begins to be useful. Now the old pagan world went perfectly straightforward until it discovered that going straightforward is an enormous mistake. It was nobly and beautifully reasonable, and discovered in its death-pang this lasting and valuable truth, a heritage for the ages, that reasonableness will not do. The pagan age was truly an Eden or golden age, in this essential sense, that it is not to be recovered. And it is not to be recovered in this sense again that, while we are certainly jollier than the pagans, and much more right than the pagans, there is not one of us who can, by the utmost stretch of energy, be so sensible as the pagans. That naked innocence of the intellect cannot be recovered by any man after Christianity; and for this excellent reason, that every man after Christianity knows it to be misleading. Let me take an example, the first that occurs to the mind, of this impossible plainness in the pagan point of view. The greatest tribute to Christianity in the modern world is Tennyson’s “Ulysses.” The poet reads into the story of Ulysses the conception of an incurable desire to wander. But the real Ulysses does not desire to wander at all. He desires to get home. He displays his heroic and unconquerable qualities in resisting the misfortunes which baulk him; but that is all. There is no love of adventure for its own sake; that is a Christian product. There is no love of Penelope for her own sake; that is a Christian product. Everything in that old world would appear to have been clean and obvious. A good man was a good man; a bad man was a bad man. For this reason they had no charity; for charity is a reverent agnosticism towards the complexity of the soul. For this reason they had no such thing as the art of fiction, the novel; for the novel is a creation of the mystical idea of charity. For them a pleasant landscape was pleasant, and an unpleasant landscape unpleasant. Hence they had no idea of romance; for romance consists in thinking a thing more delightful because it is dangerous; it is a Christian idea. In a word, we cannot reconstruct or even imagine the beautiful and astonishing pagan world. It was a world in which common sense was really common.

My general meaning touching the three virtues of which I have spoken will now, I hope, be sufficiently clear. They are all three paradoxical, they are all three practical, and they are all three paradoxical because they are practical. It is the stress of ultimate need, and a terrible knowledge of things as they are, which
led men to set up these riddles, and to die for them. Whatever may be the meaning of the contradiction, it is the fact that the only kind of hope that is of any use in a battle is a hope that denies arithmetic. Whatever may be the meaning of the contradiction, it is the fact that the only kind of charity which any weak spirit wants, or which any generous spirit feels, is the charity which forgives the sins that are like scarlet. Whatever may be the meaning of faith, it must always mean a certainty about something we cannot prove. Thus, for instance, we believe by faith in the existence of other people.

But there is another Christian virtue, a virtue far more obviously and historically connected with Christianity, which will illustrate even better the connection between paradox and practical necessity. This virtue cannot be questioned in its capacity as a historical symbol; certainly Mr. Lowes Dickinson will not question it. It has been the boast of hundreds of the champions of Christianity. It has been the taunt of hundreds of the opponents of Christianity. It is, in essence, the basis of Mr. Lowes Dickinson’s whole distinction between Christianity and Paganism. I mean, of course, the virtue of humility. I admit, of course, most readily, that a great deal of false Eastern humility (that is, of strictly ascetic humility) mixed itself with the main stream of European Christianity. We must not forget that when we speak of Christianity we are speaking of a whole continent for about a thousand years. But of this virtue even more than of the other three, I would maintain the general proposition adopted above. Civilization discovered Christian humility for the same urgent reason that it discovered faith and charity—that is, because Christian civilization had to discover it or die.

The great psychological discovery of Paganism, which turned it into Christianity, can be expressed with some accuracy in one phrase. The pagan set out, with admirable sense, to enjoy himself. By the end of his civilization he had discovered that a man cannot enjoy himself and continue to enjoy anything else. Mr. Lowes Dickinson has pointed out in words too excellent to need any further elucidation, the absurd shallowness of those who imagine that the pagan enjoyed himself only in a materialistic sense. Of course, he enjoyed himself, not only intellectually even, he enjoyed himself morally, he enjoyed himself spiritually. But it was himself that he was enjoying; on the face of it, a very natural thing to do. Now, the psychological discovery is merely this, that whereas it had been supposed that the fullest possible enjoyment is to be found by extending our ego to infinity, the truth is that the fullest possible enjoyment is to be found by reducing our ego to zero.

Humility is the thing which is for ever renewing the earth and the stars. It is
humility, and not duty, which preserves the stars from wrong, from the unpardonable wrong of casual resignation; it is through humility that the most ancient heavens for us are fresh and strong. The curse that came before history has laid on us all a tendency to be weary of wonders. If we saw the sun for the first time it would be the most fearful and beautiful of meteors. Now that we see it for the hundredth time we call it, in the hideous and blasphemous phrase of Wordsworth, “the light of common day.” We are inclined to increase our claims. We are inclined to demand six suns, to demand a blue sun, to demand a green sun. Humility is perpetually putting us back in the primal darkness. There all light is lightning, startling and instantaneous. Until we understand that original dark, in which we have neither sight nor expectation, we can give no hearty and childlike praise to the splendid sensationalism of things. The terms “pessimism” and “optimism,” like most modern terms, are unmeaning. But if they can be used in any vague sense as meaning something, we may say that in this great fact pessimism is the very basis of optimism. The man who destroys himself creates the universe. To the humble man, and to the humble man alone, the sun is really a sun; to the humble man, and to the humble man alone, the sea is really a sea. When he looks at all the faces in the street, he does not only realize that men are alive, he realizes with a dramatic pleasure that they are not dead.

I have not spoken of another aspect of the discovery of humility as a psychological necessity, because it is more commonly insisted on, and is in itself more obvious. But it is equally clear that humility is a permanent necessity as a condition of effort and self-examination. It is one of the deadly fallacies of Jingo politics that a nation is stronger for despising other nations. As a matter of fact, the strongest nations are those, like Prussia or Japan, which began from very mean beginnings, but have not been too proud to sit at the feet of the foreigner and learn everything from him. Almost every obvious and direct victory has been the victory of the plagiarist. This is, indeed, only a very paltry by-product of humility, but it is a product of humility, and, therefore, it is successful. Prussia had no Christian humility in its internal arrangements; hence its internal arrangements were miserable. But it had enough Christian humility slavishly to copy France (even down to Frederick the Great’s poetry), and that which it had the humility to copy it had ultimately the honour to conquer. The case of the Japanese is even more obvious; their only Christian and their only beautiful quality is that they have humbled themselves to be exalted. All this aspect of humility, however, as connected with the matter of effort and striving for a standard set above us, I dismiss as having been sufficiently pointed out by
almost all idealistic writers.

It may be worth while, however, to point out the interesting disparity in the matter of humility between the modern notion of the strong man and the actual records of strong men. Carlyle objected to the statement that no man could be a hero to his valet. Every sympathy can be extended towards him in the matter if he merely or mainly meant that the phrase was a disparagement of hero-worship. Hero-worship is certainly a generous and human impulse; the hero may be faulty, but the worship can hardly be. It may be that no man would be a hero to his valet. But any man would be a valet to his hero. But in truth both the proverb itself and Carlyle’s stricture upon it ignore the most essential matter at issue. The ultimate psychological truth is not that no man is a hero to his valet. The ultimate psychological truth, the foundation of Christianity, is that no man is a hero to himself. Cromwell, according to Carlyle, was a strong man. According to Cromwell, he was a weak one.

The weak point in the whole of Carlyle’s case for aristocracy lies, indeed, in his most celebrated phrase. Carlyle said that men were mostly fools. Christianity, with a surer and more reverent realism, says that they are all fools. This doctrine is sometimes called the doctrine of original sin. It may also be described as the doctrine of the equality of men. But the essential point of it is merely this, that whatever primary and far-reaching moral dangers affect any man, affect all men. All men can be criminals, if tempted; all men can be heroes, if inspired. And this doctrine does away altogether with Carlyle’s pathetic belief (or any one else’s pathetic belief) in “the wise few.” There are no wise few. Every aristocracy that has ever existed has behaved, in all essential points, exactly like a small mob. Every oligarchy is merely a knot of men in the street—that is to say, it is very jolly, but not infallible. And no oligarchies in the world’s history have ever come off so badly in practical affairs as the very proud oligarchies—the oligarchy of Poland, the oligarchy of Venice. And the armies that have most swiftly and suddenly broken their enemies in pieces have been the religious armies—the Moslem Armies, for instance, or the Puritan Armies. And a religious army may, by its nature, be defined as an army in which every man is taught not to exalt but to abase himself. Many modern Englishmen talk of themselves as the sturdy descendants of their sturdy Puritan fathers. As a fact, they would run away from a cow. If you asked one of their Puritan fathers, if you asked Bunyan, for instance, whether he was sturdy, he would have answered, with tears, that he was as weak as water. And because of this he would have borne tortures. And this virtue of humility, while being practical enough to win battles, will always
be paradoxical enough to puzzle pedants. It is at one with the virtue of charity in this respect. Every generous person will admit that the one kind of sin which charity should cover is the sin which is inexcusable. And every generous person will equally agree that the one kind of pride which is wholly damnable is the pride of the man who has something to be proud of. The pride which, proportionally speaking, does not hurt the character, is the pride in things which reflect no credit on the person at all. Thus it does a man no harm to be proud of his country, and comparatively little harm to be proud of his remote ancestors. It does him more harm to be proud of having made money, because in that he has a little more reason for pride. It does him more harm still to be proud of what is nobler than money—intellect. And it does him most harm of all to value himself for the most valuable thing on earth—goodness. The man who is proud of what is really creditable to him is the Pharisee, the man whom Christ Himself could not forbear to strike.

My objection to Mr. Lowes Dickinson and the reassertors of the pagan ideal is, then, this. I accuse them of ignoring definite human discoveries in the moral world, discoveries as definite, though not as material, as the discovery of the circulation of the blood. We cannot go back to an ideal of reason and sanity. For mankind has discovered that reason does not lead to sanity. We cannot go back to an ideal of pride and enjoyment. For mankind has discovered that pride does not lead to enjoyment. I do not know by what extraordinary mental accident modern writers so constantly connect the idea of progress with the idea of independent thinking. Progress is obviously the antithesis of independent thinking. For under independent or individualistic thinking, every man starts at the beginning, and goes, in all probability, just as far as his father before him. But if there really be anything of the nature of progress, it must mean, above all things, the careful study and assumption of the whole of the past. I accuse Mr. Lowes Dickinson and his school of reaction in the only real sense. If he likes, let him ignore these great historic mysteries—the mystery of charity, the mystery of chivalry, the mystery of faith. If he likes, let him ignore the plough or the printing-press. But if we do revive and pursue the pagan ideal of a simple and rational self-completion we shall end—where Paganism ended. I do not mean that we shall end in destruction. I mean that we shall end in Christianity.
XIII

CELTS AND CELTOPHILES

Science in the modern world has many uses; its chief use, however, is to provide long words to cover the errors of the rich. The word “kleptomania” is a vulgar example of what I mean. It is on a par with that strange theory, always advanced when a wealthy or prominent person is in the dock, that exposure is more of a punishment for the rich than for the poor. Of course, the very reverse is the truth. Exposure is more of a punishment for the poor than for the rich. The richer a man is the easier it is for him to be a tramp. The richer a man is the easier it is for him to be popular and generally respected in the Cannibal Islands. But the poorer a man is the more likely it is that he will have to use his past life whenever he wants to get a bed for the night. Honour is a luxury for aristocrats, but it is a necessity for hall-porters. This is a secondary matter, but it is an example of the general proposition I offer—the proposition that an enormous amount of modern ingenuity is expended on finding defences for the indefensible conduct of the powerful. As I have said above, these defences generally exhibit themselves most emphatically in the form of appeals to physical science. And of all the forms in which science, or pseudo-science, has come to the rescue of the rich and stupid, there is none so singular as the singular invention of the theory of races.

When a wealthy nation like the English discovers the perfectly patent fact that it is making a ludicrous mess of the government of a poorer nation like the Irish, it pauses for a moment in consternation, and then begins to talk about Celts and Teutons. As far as I can understand the theory, the Irish are Celts and the English are Teutons. Of course, the Irish are not Celts any more than the English are Teutons. I have not followed the ethnological discussion with much energy, but the last scientific conclusion which I read inclined on the whole to the summary that the English were mainly Celtic and the Irish mainly Teutonic. But no man alive, with even the glimmering of a real scientific sense, would ever dream of applying the terms “Celtic” or “Teutonic” to either of them in any positive or useful sense.

That sort of thing must be left to people who talk about the Anglo-Saxon race, and extend the expression to America. How much of the blood of the Angles and Saxons (whoever they were) there remains in our mixed British, Roman,
German, Dane, Norman, and Picard stock is a matter only interesting to wild antiquaries. And how much of that diluted blood can possibly remain in that roaring whirlpool of America into which a cataract of Swedes, Jews, Germans, Irishmen, and Italians is perpetually pouring, is a matter only interesting to lunatics. It would have been wiser for the English governing class to have called upon some other god. All other gods, however weak and warring, at least boast of being constant. But science boasts of being in a flux for ever; boasts of being unstable as water.

And England and the English governing class never did call on this absurd deity of race until it seemed, for an instant, that they had no other god to call on. All the most genuine Englishmen in history would have yawned or laughed in your face if you had begun to talk about Anglo-Saxons. If you had attempted to substitute the ideal of race for the ideal of nationality, I really do not like to think what they would have said. I certainly should not like to have been the officer of Nelson who suddenly discovered his French blood on the eve of Trafalgar. I should not like to have been the Norfolk or Suffolk gentleman who had to expound to Admiral Blake by what demonstrable ties of genealogy he was irrevocably bound to the Dutch. The truth of the whole matter is very simple. Nationality exists, and has nothing in the world to do with race. Nationality is a thing like a church or a secret society; it is a product of the human soul and will; it is a spiritual product. And there are men in the modern world who would think anything and do anything rather than admit that anything could be a spiritual product.

A nation, however, as it confronts the modern world, is a purely spiritual product. Sometimes it has been born in independence, like Scotland. Sometimes it has been born in dependence, in subjugation, like Ireland. Sometimes it is a large thing cohering out of many smaller things, like Italy. Sometimes it is a small thing breaking away from larger things, like Poland. But in each and every case its quality is purely spiritual, or, if you will, purely psychological. It is a moment when five men become a sixth man. Every one knows it who has ever founded a club. It is a moment when five places become one place. Every one must know it who has ever had to repel an invasion. Mr. Timothy Healy, the most serious intellect in the present House of Commons, summed up nationality to perfection when he simply called it something for which people will die, As he excellently said in reply to Lord Hugh Cecil, “No one, not even the noble lord, would die for the meridian of Greenwich.” And that is the great tribute to its purely psychological character. It is idle to ask why Greenwich should not
cohere in this spiritual manner while Athens or Sparta did. It is like asking why a
man falls in love with one woman and not with another.

Now, of this great spiritual coherence, independent of external circumstances,
or of race, or of any obvious physical thing, Ireland is the most remarkable
example. Rome conquered nations, but Ireland has conquered races. The
Norman has gone there and become Irish, the Scotchman has gone there and
become Irish, the Spaniard has gone there and become Irish, even the bitter
soldier of Cromwell has gone there and become Irish. Ireland, which did not
exist even politically, has been stronger than all the races that existed
scientifically. The purest Germanic blood, the purest Norman blood, the purest
blood of the passionate Scotch patriot, has not been so attractive as a nation
without a flag. Ireland, unrecognized and oppressed, has easily absorbed races,
as such trifles are easily absorbed. She has easily disposed of physical science,
as such superstitions are easily disposed of. Nationality in its weakness has been
stronger than ethnology in its strength. Five triumphant races have been
absorbed, have been defeated by a defeated nationality.

This being the true and strange glory of Ireland, it is impossible to hear
without impatience of the attempt so constantly made among her modern
sympathizers to talk about Celts and Celticism. Who were the Celts? I defy
anybody to say. Who are the Irish? I defy any one to be indifferent, or to pretend
not to know. Mr. W. B. Yeats, the great Irish genius who has appeared in our
time, shows his own admirable penetration in discarding altogether the argument
from a Celtic race. But he does not wholly escape, and his followers hardly ever
escape, the general objection to the Celtic argument. The tendency of that
argument is to represent the Irish or the Celts as a strange and separate race, as a
tribe of eccentrics in the modern world immersed in dim legends and fruitless
dreams. Its tendency is to exhibit the Irish as odd, because they see the fairies. Its
trend is to make the Irish seem weird and wild because they sing old songs and
join in strange dances. But this is quite an error; indeed, it is the opposite of the
truth. It is the English who are odd because they do not see the fairies. It is the
inhabitants of Kensington who are weird and wild because they do not sing old
songs and join in strange dances. In all this the Irish are not in the least strange
and separate, are not in the least Celtic, as the word is commonly and popularly
used. In all this the Irish are simply an ordinary sensible nation, living the life of
any other ordinary and sensible nation which has not been either sodden with
smoke or oppressed by money-lenders, or otherwise corrupted with wealth and
science. There is nothing Celtic about having legends. It is merely human. The
Germans, who are (I suppose) Teutonic, have hundreds of legends, wherever it happens that the Germans are human. There is nothing Celtic about loving poetry; the English loved poetry more, perhaps, than any other people before they came under the shadow of the chimney-pot and the shadow of the chimney-pot hat. It is not Ireland which is mad and mystic; it is Manchester which is mad and mystic, which is incredible, which is a wild exception among human things. Ireland has no need to play the silly game of the science of races; Ireland has no need to pretend to be a tribe of visionaries apart. In the matter of visions, Ireland is more than a nation, it is a model nation.
ON CERTAIN MODERN WRITERS AND THE INSTITUTION OF THE FAMILY

The family may fairly be considered, one would think, an ultimate human institution. Every one would admit that it has been the main cell and central unit of almost all societies hitherto, except, indeed, such societies as that of Lacedaemon, which went in for “efficiency,” and has, therefore, perished, and left not a trace behind. Christianity, even enormous as was its revolution, did not alter this ancient and savage sanctity; it merely reversed it. It did not deny the trinity of father, mother, and child. It merely read it backwards, making it run child, mother, father. This it called, not the family, but the Holy Family, for many things are made holy by being turned upside down. But some sages of our own decadence have made a serious attack on the family. They have impugned it, as I think wrongly; and its defenders have defended it, and defended it wrongly. The common defence of the family is that, amid the stress and fickleness of life, it is peaceful, pleasant, and at one. But there is another defence of the family which is possible, and to me evident; this defence is that the family is not peaceful and not pleasant and not at one.

It is not fashionable to say much nowadays of the advantages of the small community. We are told that we must go in for large empires and large ideas. There is one advantage, however, in the small state, the city, or the village, which only the wilfully blind can overlook. The man who lives in a small community lives in a much larger world. He knows much more of the fierce varieties and uncompromising divergences of men. The reason is obvious. In a large community we can choose our companions. In a small community our companions are chosen for us. Thus in all extensive and highly civilized societies groups come into existence founded upon what is called sympathy, and shut out the real world more sharply than the gates of a monastery. There is nothing really narrow about the clan; the thing which is really narrow is the clique. The men of the clan live together because they all wear the same tartan or are all descended from the same sacred cow; but in their souls, by the divine luck of things, there will always be more colours than in any tartan. But the men of the clique live together because they have the same kind of soul, and their narrowness is a narrowness of spiritual coherence and contentment, like that
which exists in hell. A big society exists in order to form cliques. A big society is a society for the promotion of narrowness. It is a machinery for the purpose of guarding the solitary and sensitive individual from all experience of the bitter and bracing human compromises. It is, in the most literal sense of the words, a society for the prevention of Christian knowledge.

We can see this change, for instance, in the modern transformation of the thing called a club. When London was smaller, and the parts of London more self-contained and parochial, the club was what it still is in villages, the opposite of what it is now in great cities. Then the club was valued as a place where a man could be sociable. Now the club is valued as a place where a man can be unsociable. The more the enlargement and elaboration of our civilization goes on the more the club ceases to be a place where a man can have a noisy argument, and becomes more and more a place where a man can have what is somewhat fantastically called a quiet chop. Its aim is to make a man comfortable, and to make a man comfortable is to make him the opposite of sociable. Sociability, like all good things, is full of discomforts, dangers, and renunciations. The club tends to produce the most degraded of all combinations—the luxurious anchorite, the man who combines the self-indulgence of Lucullus with the insane loneliness of St. Simeon Stylites.

If we were to-morrow morning snowed up in the street in which we live, we should step suddenly into a much larger and much wilder world than we have ever known. And it is the whole effort of the typically modern person to escape from the street in which he lives. First he invents modern hygiene and goes to Margate. Then he invents modern culture and goes to Florence. Then he invents modern imperialism and goes to Timbuctoo. He goes to the fantastic borders of the earth. He pretends to shoot tigers. He almost rides on a camel. And in all this he is still essentially fleeing from the street in which he was born; and of this flight he is always ready with his own explanation. He says he is fleeing from his street because it is dull; he is lying. He is really fleeing from his street because it is a great deal too exciting. It is exciting because it is exacting; it is exacting because it is alive. He can visit Venice because to him the Venetians are only Venetians; the people in his own street are men. He can stare at the Chinese because for him the Chinese are a passive thing to be stared at; if he stares at the old lady in the next garden, she becomes active. He is forced to flee, in short, from the too stimulating society of his equals—of free men, perverse, personal, deliberately different from himself. The street in Brixton is too glowing and overpowering. He has to soothe and quiet himself among tigers and vultures,
camels and crocodiles. These creatures are indeed very different from himself. But they do not put their shape or colour or custom into a decisive intellectual competition with his own. They do not seek to destroy his principles and assert their own; the stranger monsters of the suburban street do seek to do this. The camel does not contort his features into a fine sneer because Mr. Robinson has not got a hump; the cultured gentleman at No. 5 does exhibit a sneer because Robinson has not got a dado. The vulture will not roar with laughter because a man does not fly; but the major at No. 9 will roar with laughter because a man does not smoke. The complaint we commonly have to make of our neighbours is that they will not, as we express it, mind their own business. We do not really mean that they will not mind their own business. If our neighbours did not mind their own business they would be asked abruptly for their rent, and would rapidly cease to be our neighbours. What we really mean when we say that they cannot mind their own business is something much deeper. We do not dislike them because they have so little force and fire that they cannot be interested in themselves. We dislike them because they have so much force and fire that they can be interested in us as well. What we dread about our neighbours, in short, is not the narrowness of their horizon, but their superb tendency to broaden it. And all aversions to ordinary humanity have this general character. They are not aversions to its feebleness (as is pretended), but to its energy. The misanthropes pretend that they despise humanity for its weakness. As a matter of fact, they hate it for its strength.

Of course, this shrinking from the brutal vivacity and brutal variety of common men is a perfectly reasonable and excusable thing as long as it does not pretend to any point of superiority. It is when it calls itself aristocracy or aestheticism or a superiority to the bourgeoisie that its inherent weakness has in justice to be pointed out. Fastidiousness is the most pardonable of vices; but it is the most unpardonable of virtues. Nietzsche, who represents most prominently this pretentious claim of the fastidious, has a description somewhere—a very powerful description in the purely literary sense—of the disgust and disdain which consume him at the sight of the common people with their common faces, their common voices, and their common minds. As I have said, this attitude is almost beautiful if we may regard it as pathetic. Nietzsche’s aristocracy has about it all the sacredness that belongs to the weak. When he makes us feel that he cannot endure the innumerable faces, the incessant voices, the overpowering omnipresence which belongs to the mob, he will have the sympathy of anybody who has ever been sick on a steamer or tired in a crowded omnibus. Every man
has hated mankind when he was less than a man. Every man has had humanity in his eyes like a blinding fog, humanity in his nostrils like a suffocating smell. But when Nietzsche has the incredible lack of humour and lack of imagination to ask us to believe that his aristocracy is an aristocracy of strong muscles or an aristocracy of strong wills, it is necessary to point out the truth. It is an aristocracy of weak nerves.

We make our friends; we make our enemies; but God makes our next-door neighbour. Hence he comes to us clad in all the careless terrors of nature; he is as strange as the stars, as reckless and indifferent as the rain. He is Man, the most terrible of the beasts. That is why the old religions and the old scriptural language showed so sharp a wisdom when they spoke, not of one’s duty towards humanity, but one’s duty towards one’s neighbour. The duty towards humanity may often take the form of some choice which is personal or even pleasurable. That duty may be a hobby; it may even be a dissipation. We may work in the East End because we are peculiarly fitted to work in the East End, or because we think we are; we may fight for the cause of international peace because we are very fond of fighting. The most monstrous martyrdom, the most repulsive experience, may be the result of choice or a kind of taste. We may be so made as to be particularly fond of lunatics or specially interested in leprosy. We may love negroes because they are black or German Socialists because they are pedantic. But we have to love our neighbour because he is there—a much more alarming reason for a much more serious operation. He is the sample of humanity which is actually given us. Precisely because he may be anybody he is everybody. He is a symbol because he is an accident.

Doubtless men flee from small environments into lands that are very deadly. But this is natural enough; for they are not fleeing from death. They are fleeing from life. And this principle applies to ring within ring of the social system of humanity. It is perfectly reasonable that men should seek for some particular variety of the human type, so long as they are seeking for that variety of the human type, and not for mere human variety. It is quite proper that a British diplomatist should seek the society of Japanese generals, if what he wants is Japanese generals. But if what he wants is people different from himself, he had much better stop at home and discuss religion with the housemaid. It is quite reasonable that the village genius should come up to conquer London if what he wants is to conquer London. But if he wants to conquer something fundamentally and symbolically hostile and also very strong, he had much better remain where he is and have a row with the rector. The man in the suburban
street is quite right if he goes to Ramsgate for the sake of Ramsgate—a difficult thing to imagine. But if, as he expresses it, he goes to Ramsgate “for a change,” then he would have a much more romantic and even melodramatic change if he jumped over the wall into his neighbours garden. The consequences would be bracing in a sense far beyond the possibilities of Ramsgate hygiene.

Now, exactly as this principle applies to the empire, to the nation within the empire, to the city within the nation, to the street within the city, so it applies to the home within the street. The institution of the family is to be commended for precisely the same reasons that the institution of the nation, or the institution of the city, are in this matter to be commended. It is a good thing for a man to live in a family for the same reason that it is a good thing for a man to be besieged in a city. It is a good thing for a man to live in a family in the same sense that it is a beautiful and delightful thing for a man to be snowed up in a street. They all force him to realize that life is not a thing from outside, but a thing from inside. Above all, they all insist upon the fact that life, if it be a truly stimulating and fascinating life, is a thing which, of its nature, exists in spite of ourselves. The modern writers who have suggested, in a more or less open manner, that the family is a bad institution, have generally confined themselves to suggesting, with much sharpness, bitterness, or pathos, that perhaps the family is not always very congenial. Of course the family is a good institution because it is uncongenial. It is wholesome precisely because it contains so many divergencies and varieties. It is, as the sentimentalists say, like a little kingdom, and, like most other little kingdoms, is generally in a state of something resembling anarchy. It is exactly because our brother George is not interested in our religious difficulties, but is interested in the Trocadero Restaurant, that the family has some of the bracing qualities of the commonwealth. It is precisely because our uncle Henry does not approve of the theatrical ambitions of our sister Sarah that the family is like humanity. The men and women who, for good reasons and bad, revolt against the family, are, for good reasons and bad, simply revolting against mankind. Aunt Elizabeth is unreasonable, like mankind. Papa is excitable, like mankind Our youngest brother is mischievous, like mankind. Grandpapa is stupid, like the world; he is old, like the world.

Those who wish, rightly or wrongly, to step out of all this, do definitely wish to step into a narrower world. They are dismayed and terrified by the largeness and variety of the family. Sarah wishes to find a world wholly consisting of private theatricals; George wishes to think the Trocadero a cosmos. I do not say, for a moment, that the flight to this narrower life may not be the right thing for
the individual, any more than I say the same thing about flight into a monastery. But I do say that anything is bad and artificial which tends to make these people succumb to the strange delusion that they are stepping into a world which is actually larger and more varied than their own. The best way that a man could test his readiness to encounter the common variety of mankind would be to climb down a chimney into any house at random, and get on as well as possible with the people inside. And that is essentially what each one of us did on the day that he was born.

This is, indeed, the sublime and special romance of the family. It is romantic because it is a toss-up. It is romantic because it is everything that its enemies call it. It is romantic because it is arbitrary. It is romantic because it is there. So long as you have groups of men chosen rationally, you have some special or sectarian atmosphere. It is when you have groups of men chosen irrationally that you have men. The element of adventure begins to exist; for an adventure is, by its nature, a thing that comes to us. It is a thing that chooses us, not a thing that we choose. Falling in love has been often regarded as the supreme adventure, the supreme romantic accident. In so much as there is in it something outside ourselves, something of a sort of merry fatalism, this is very true. Love does take us and transfigure and torture us. It does break our hearts with an unbearable beauty, like the unbearable beauty of music. But in so far as we have certainly something to do with the matter; in so far as we are in some sense prepared to fall in love and in some sense jump into it; in so far as we do to some extent choose and to some extent even judge—in all this falling in love is not truly romantic, is not truly adventurous at all. In this degree the supreme adventure is not falling in love. The supreme adventure is being born. There we do walk suddenly into a splendid and startling trap. There we do see something of which we have not dreamed before. Our father and mother do lie in wait for us and leap out on us, like brigands from a bush. Our uncle is a surprise. Our aunt is, in the beautiful common expression, a bolt from the blue. When we step into the family, by the act of being born, we do step into a world which is incalculable, into a world which has its own strange laws, into a world which could do without us, into a world that we have not made. In other words, when we step into the family we step into a fairy-tale.

This colour as of a fantastic narrative ought to cling to the family and to our relations with it throughout life. Romance is the deepest thing in life; romance is deeper even than reality. For even if reality could be proved to be misleading, it still could not be proved to be unimportant or unimpressive. Even if the facts are
false, they are still very strange. And this strangeness of life, this unexpected and even perverse element of things as they fall out, remains incurably interesting. The circumstances we can regulate may become tame or pessimistic; but the “circumstances over which we have no control” remain god-like to those who, like Mr. Micawber, can call on them and renew their strength. People wonder why the novel is the most popular form of literature; people wonder why it is read more than books of science or books of metaphysics. The reason is very simple; it is merely that the novel is more true than they are. Life may sometimes legitimately appear as a book of science. Life may sometimes appear, and with a much greater legitimacy, as a book of metaphysics. But life is always a novel. Our existence may cease to be a song; it may cease even to be a beautiful lament. Our existence may not be an intelligible justice, or even a recognizable wrong. But our existence is still a story. In the fiery alphabet of every sunset is written, “to be continued in our next.” If we have sufficient intellect, we can finish a philosophical and exact deduction, and be certain that we are finishing it right. With the adequate brain-power we could finish any scientific discovery, and be certain that we were finishing it right. But not with the most gigantic intellect could we finish the simplest or silliest story, and be certain that we were finishing it right. That is because a story has behind it, not merely intellect which is partly mechanical, but will, which is in its essence divine. The narrative writer can send his hero to the gallows if he likes in the last chapter but one. He can do it by the same divine caprice whereby he, the author, can go to the gallows himself, and to hell afterwards if he chooses. And the same civilization, the chivalric European civilization which asserted freewill in the thirteenth century, produced the thing called “fiction” in the eighteenth. When Thomas Aquinas asserted the spiritual liberty of man, he created all the bad novels in the circulating libraries.

But in order that life should be a story or romance to us, it is necessary that a great part of it, at any rate, should be settled for us without our permission. If we wish life to be a system, this may be a nuisance; but if we wish it to be a drama, it is an essential. It may often happen, no doubt, that a drama may be written by somebody else which we like very little. But we should like it still less if the author came before the curtain every hour or so, and forced on us the whole trouble of inventing the next act. A man has control over many things in his life; he has control over enough things to be the hero of a novel. But if he had control over everything, there would be so much hero that there would be no novel. And the reason why the lives of the rich are at bottom so tame and uneventful is
simply that they can choose the events. They are dull because they are omnipotent. They fail to feel adventures because they can make the adventures. The thing which keeps life romantic and full of fiery possibilities is the existence of these great plain limitations which force all of us to meet the things we do not like or do not expect. It is vain for the supercilious moderns to talk of being in uncongenial surroundings. To be in a romance is to be in uncongenial surroundings. To be born into this earth is to be born into uncongenial surroundings, hence to be born into a romance. Of all these great limitations and frameworks which fashion and create the poetry and variety of life, the family is the most definite and important. Hence it is misunderstood by the moderns, who imagine that romance would exist most perfectly in a complete state of what they call liberty. They think that if a man makes a gesture it would be a startling and romantic matter that the sun should fall from the sky. But the startling and romantic thing about the sun is that it does not fall from the sky. They are seeking under every shape and form a world where there are no limitations—that is, a world where there are no outlines; that is, a world where there are no shapes. There is nothing baser than that infinity. They say they wish to be, as strong as the universe, but they really wish the whole universe as weak as themselves.
ON SMART NOVELISTS AND THE SMART SET

In one sense, at any rate, it is more valuable to read bad literature than good literature. Good literature may tell us the mind of one man; but bad literature may tell us the mind of many men. A good novel tells us the truth about its hero; but a bad novel tells us the truth about its author. It does much more than that, it tells us the truth about its readers; and, oddly enough, it tells us this all the more the more cynical and immoral be the motive of its manufacture. The more dishonest a book is as a book the more honest it is as a public document. A sincere novel exhibits the simplicity of one particular man; an insincere novel exhibits the simplicity of mankind. The pedantic decisions and definable readjustments of man may be found in scrolls and statute books and scriptures; but men’s basic assumptions and everlasting energies are to be found in penny dreadfuls and halfpenny novelettes. Thus a man, like many men of real culture in our day, might learn from good literature nothing except the power to appreciate good literature. But from bad literature he might learn to govern empires and look over the map of mankind.

There is one rather interesting example of this state of things in which the weaker literature is really the stronger and the stronger the weaker. It is the case of what may be called, for the sake of an approximate description, the literature of aristocracy; or, if you prefer the description, the literature of snobbishness. Now if any one wishes to find a really effective and comprehensible and permanent case for aristocracy well and sincerely stated, let him read, not the modern philosophical conservatives, not even Nietzsche, let him read the Bow Bells Novelettes. Of the case of Nietzsche I am confessedly more doubtful. Nietzsche and the Bow Bells Novelettes have both obviously the same fundamental character; they both worship the tall man with curling moustaches and herculean bodily power, and they both worship him in a manner which is somewhat feminine and hysterical. Even here, however, the Novelette easily maintains its philosophical superiority, because it does attribute to the strong man those virtues which do commonly belong to him, such virtues as laziness and kindliness and a rather reckless benevolence, and a great dislike of hurting the weak. Nietzsche, on the other hand, attributes to the strong man that scorn against weakness which only exists among invalids. It is not, however, of the
secondary merits of the great German philosopher, but of the primary merits of the Bow Bells Novelettes, that it is my present affair to speak. The picture of aristocracy in the popular sentimental novelette seems to me very satisfactory as a permanent political and philosophical guide. It may be inaccurate about details such as the title by which a baronet is addressed or the width of a mountain chasm which a baronet can conveniently leap, but it is not a bad description of the general idea and intention of aristocracy as they exist in human affairs. The essential dream of aristocracy is magnificence and valour; and if the Family Herald Supplement sometimes distorts or exaggerates these things, at least, it does not fall short in them. It never errs by making the mountain chasm too narrow or the title of the baronet insufficiently impressive. But above this sane reliable old literature of snobbishness there has arisen in our time another kind of literature of snobbishness which, with its much higher pretensions, seems to me worthy of very much less respect. Incidentally (if that matters), it is much better literature. But it is immeasurably worse philosophy, immeasurably worse ethics and politics, immeasurably worse vital rendering of aristocracy and humanity as they really are. From such books as those of which I wish now to speak we can discover what a clever man can do with the idea of aristocracy. But from the Family Herald Supplement literature we can learn what the idea of aristocracy can do with a man who is not clever. And when we know that we know English history.

This new aristocratic fiction must have caught the attention of everybody who has read the best fiction for the last fifteen years. It is that genuine or alleged literature of the Smart Set which represents that set as distinguished, not only by smart dresses, but by smart sayings. To the bad baronet, to the good baronet, to the romantic and misunderstood baronet who is supposed to be a bad baronet, but is a good baronet, this school has added a conception undreamed of in the former years—the conception of an amusing baronet. The aristocrat is not merely to be taller than mortal men and stronger and handsomer; he is also to be more witty. He is the long man with the short epigram. Many eminent, and deservedly eminent, modern novelists must accept some responsibility for having supported this worst form of snobbishness—an intellectual snobbishness. The talented author of “Dodo” is responsible for having in some sense created the fashion as a fashion. Mr. Hichens, in the “Green Carnation,” reaffirmed the strange idea that young noblemen talk well; though his case had some vague biographical foundation, and in consequence an excuse. Mrs. Craigie is considerably guilty in the matter, although, or rather because, she has combined
the aristocratic note with a note of some moral and even religious sincerity. When you are saving a man’s soul, even in a novel, it is indecent to mention that he is a gentleman. Nor can blame in this matter be altogether removed from a man of much greater ability, and a man who has proved his possession of the highest of human instinct, the romantic instinct—I mean Mr. Anthony Hope. In a galloping, impossible melodrama like “The Prisoner of Zenda,” the blood of kings fanned an excellent fantastic thread or theme. But the blood of kings is not a thing that can be taken seriously. And when, for example, Mr. Hope devotes so much serious and sympathetic study to the man called Tristram of Blent, a man who throughout burning boyhood thought of nothing but a silly old estate, we feel even in Mr. Hope the hint of this excessive concern about the oligarchic idea. It is hard for any ordinary person to feel so much interest in a young man whose whole aim is to own the house of Blent at the time when every other young man is owning the stars.

Mr. Hope, however, is a very mild case, and in him there is not only an element of romance, but also a fine element of irony which warns us against taking all this elegance too seriously. Above all, he shows his sense in not making his noblemen so incredibly equipped with impromptu repartee. This habit of insisting on the wit of the wealthier classes is the last and most servile of all the servilities. It is, as I have said, immeasurably more contemptible than the snobbishness of the novelette which describes the nobleman as smiling like an Apollo or riding a mad elephant. These may be exaggerations of beauty and courage, but beauty and courage are the unconscious ideals of aristocrats, even of stupid aristocrats.

The nobleman of the novelette may not be sketched with any very close or conscientious attention to the daily habits of noblemen. But he is something more important than a reality; he is a practical ideal. The gentleman of fiction may not copy the gentleman of real life; but the gentleman of real life is copying the gentleman of fiction. He may not be particularly good-looking, but he would rather be good-looking than anything else; he may not have ridden on a mad elephant, but he rides a pony as far as possible with an air as if he had. And, upon the whole, the upper class not only especially desire these qualities of beauty and courage, but in some degree, at any rate, especially possess them. Thus there is nothing really mean or sycophantic about the popular literature which makes all its marquises seven feet high. It is snobbish, but it is not servile. Its exaggeration is based on an exuberant and honest admiration; its honest admiration is based upon something which is in some degree, at any rate, really
there. The English lower classes do not fear the English upper classes in the least; nobody could. They simply and freely and sentimentally worship them. The strength of the aristocracy is not in the aristocracy at all; it is in the slums. It is not in the House of Lords; it is not in the Civil Service; it is not in the Government offices; it is not even in the huge and disproportionate monopoly of the English land. It is in a certain spirit. It is in the fact that when a navvy wishes to praise a man, it comes readily to his tongue to say that he has behaved like a gentleman. From a democratic point of view he might as well say that he had behaved like a viscount. The oligarchic character of the modern English commonwealth does not rest, like many oligarchies, on the cruelty of the rich to the poor. It does not even rest on the kindness of the rich to the poor. It rests on the perennial and unfailing kindness of the poor to the rich.

The snobbishness of bad literature, then, is not servile; but the snobbishness of good literature is servile. The old-fashioned halfpenny romance where the duchesses sparkled with diamonds was not servile; but the new romance where they sparkle with epigrams is servile. For in thus attributing a special and startling degree of intellect and conversational or controversial power to the upper classes, we are attributing something which is not especially their virtue or even especially their aim. We are, in the words of Disraeli (who, being a genius and not a gentleman, has perhaps primarily to answer for the introduction of this method of flattering the gentry), we are performing the essential function of flattery which is flattering the people for the qualities they have not got. Praise may be gigantic and insane without having any quality of flattery so long as it is praise of something that is noticeably in existence. A man may say that a giraffe’s head strikes the stars, or that a whale fills the German Ocean, and still be only in a rather excited state about a favourite animal. But when he begins to congratulate the giraffe on his feathers, and the whale on the elegance of his legs, we find ourselves confronted with that social element which we call flattery. The middle and lower orders of London can sincerely, though not perhaps safely, admire the health and grace of the English aristocracy. And this for the very simple reason that the aristocrats are, upon the whole, more healthy and graceful than the poor. But they cannot honestly admire the wit of the aristocrats. And this for the simple reason that the aristocrats are not more witty than the poor, but a very great deal less so. A man does not hear, as in the smart novels, these gems of verbal felicity dropped between diplomatists at dinner. Where he really does hear them is between two omnibus conductors in a block in Holborn. The witty peer whose impromptus fill the books of Mrs. Craigie or
Miss Fowler, would, as a matter of fact, be torn to shreds in the art of conversation by the first boot-black he had the misfortune to fall foul of. The poor are merely sentimental, and very excusably sentimental, if they praise the gentleman for having a ready hand and ready money. But they are strictly slaves and sycophants if they praise him for having a ready tongue. For that they have far more themselves.

The element of oligarchical sentiment in these novels, however, has, I think, another and subtler aspect, an aspect more difficult to understand and more worth understanding. The modern gentleman, particularly the modern English gentleman, has become so central and important in these books, and through them in the whole of our current literature and our current mode of thought, that certain qualities of his, whether original or recent, essential or accidental, have altered the quality of our English comedy. In particular, that stoical ideal, absurdly supposed to be the English ideal, has stiffened and chilled us. It is not the English ideal; but it is to some extent the aristocratic ideal; or it may be only the ideal of aristocracy in its autumn or decay. The gentleman is a Stoic because he is a sort of savage, because he is filled with a great elemental fear that some stranger will speak to him. That is why a third-class carriage is a community, while a first-class carriage is a place of wild hermits. But this matter, which is difficult, I may be permitted to approach in a more circuitous way.

The haunting element of ineffectualness which runs through so much of the witty and epigrammatic fiction fashionable during the last eight or ten years, which runs through such works of a real though varying ingenuity as “Dodo,” or “Concerning Isabel Carnaby,” or even “Some Emotions and a Moral,” may be expressed in various ways, but to most of us I think it will ultimately amount to the same thing. This new frivolity is inadequate because there is in it no strong sense of an unuttered joy. The men and women who exchange the repartees may not only be hating each other, but hating even themselves. Any one of them might be bankrupt that day, or sentenced to be shot the next. They are joking, not because they are merry, but because they are not; out of the emptiness of the heart the mouth speaketh. Even when they talk pure nonsense it is a careful nonsense—a nonsense of which they are economical, or, to use the perfect expression of Mr. W. S. Gilbert in “Patience,” it is such “precious nonsense.” Even when they become light-headed they do not become light-hearted. All those who have read anything of the rationalism of the moderns know that their Reason is a sad thing. But even their unreason is sad.

The causes of this incapacity are also not very difficult to indicate. The chief
of all, of course, is that miserable fear of being sentimental, which is the meanest of all the modern terrors—meaner even than the terror which produces hygiene. Everywhere the robust and uproarious humour has come from the men who were capable not merely of sentimentalism, but a very silly sentimentalism. There has been no humour so robust or uproarious as that of the sentimentalist Steele or the sentimentalist Sterne or the sentimentalist Dickens. These creatures who wept like women were the creatures who laughed like men. It is true that the humour of Micawber is good literature and that the pathos of little Nell is bad. But the kind of man who had the courage to write so badly in the one case is the kind of man who would have the courage to write so well in the other. The same unconsciousness, the same violent innocence, the same gigantesque scale of action which brought the Napoleon of Comedy his Jena brought him also his Moscow. And herein is especially shown the frigid and feeble limitations of our modern wits. They make violent efforts, they make heroic and almost pathetic efforts, but they cannot really write badly. There are moments when we almost think that they are achieving the effect, but our hope shrivels to nothing the moment we compare their little failures with the enormous imbecilities of Byron or Shakespeare.

For a hearty laugh it is necessary to have touched the heart. I do not know why touching the heart should always be connected only with the idea of touching it to compassion or a sense of distress. The heart can be touched to joy and triumph; the heart can be touched to amusement. But all our comedians are tragic comedians. These later fashionable writers are so pessimistic in bone and marrow that they never seem able to imagine the heart having any concern with mirth. When they speak of the heart, they always mean the pangs and disappointments of the emotional life. When they say that a man’s heart is in the right place, they mean, apparently, that it is in his boots. Our ethical societies understand fellowship, but they do not understand good fellowship. Similarly, our wits understand talk, but not what Dr. Johnson called a good talk. In order to have, like Dr. Johnson, a good talk, it is emphatically necessary to be, like Dr. Johnson, a good man—to have friendship and honour and an abysmal tenderness. Above all, it is necessary to be openly and indecently humane, to confess with fulness all the primary pities and fears of Adam. Johnson was a clear-headed humorous man, and therefore he did not mind talking seriously about religion. Johnson was a brave man, one of the bravest that ever walked, and therefore he did not mind avowing to any one his consuming fear of death.

The idea that there is something English in the repression of one’s feelings is
one of those ideas which no Englishman ever heard of until England began to be
governed exclusively by Scotchmen, Americans, and Jews. At the best, the idea
is a generalization from the Duke of Wellington—who was an Irishman. At the
worst, it is a part of that silly Teutonism which knows as little about England as
it does about anthropology, but which is always talking about Vikings. As a
matter of fact, the Vikings did not repress their feelings in the least. They cried
like babies and kissed each other like girls; in short, they acted in that respect
like Achilles and all strong heroes the children of the gods. And though the
English nationality has probably not much more to do with the Vikings than the
French nationality or the Irish nationality, the English have certainly been the
children of the Vikings in the matter of tears and kisses. It is not merely true that
all the most typically English men of letters, like Shakespeare and Dickens,
Richardson and Thackeray, were sentimentalists. It is also true that all the most
typically English men of action were sentimentalists, if possible, more
sentimental. In the great Elizabethan age, when the English nation was finally
hammered out, in the great eighteenth century when the British Empire was
being built up everywhere, where in all these times, where was this symbolic
stoical Englishman who dresses in drab and black and represses his feelings?
Were all the Elizabethan palladins and pirates like that? Were any of them like
that? Was Grenville concealing his emotions when he broke wine-glasses to
pieces with his teeth and bit them till the blood poured down? Was Essex
restraining his excitement when he threw his hat into the sea? Did Raleigh think
it sensible to answer the Spanish guns only, as Stevenson says, with a flourish of
insulting trumpets? Did Sydney ever miss an opportunity of making a theatrical
remark in the whole course of his life and death? Were even the Puritans Stoics?
The English Puritans repressed a good deal, but even they were too English to
repress their feelings. It was by a great miracle of genius assuredly that Carlyle
contrived to admire simultaneously two things so irreconcilably opposed as
silence and Oliver Cromwell. Cromwell was the very reverse of a strong, silent
man. Cromwell was always talking, when he was not crying. Nobody, I suppose,
will accuse the author of “Grace Abounding” of being ashamed of his feelings.
Milton, indeed, it might be possible to represent as a Stoic; in some sense he was
a Stoic, just as he was a prig and a polygamist and several other unpleasant and
heathen things. But when we have passed that great and desolate name, which
may really be counted an exception, we find the tradition of English
emotionalism immediately resumed and unbrokenly continuous. Whatever may
have been the moral beauty of the passions of Etheridge and Dorset, Sedley and
Buckingham, they cannot be accused of the fault of fastidiously concealing them. Charles the Second was very popular with the English because, like all the jolly English kings, he displayed his passions. William the Dutchman was very unpopular with the English because, not being an Englishman, he did hide his emotions. He was, in fact, precisely the ideal Englishman of our modern theory; and precisely for that reason all the real Englishmen loathed him like leprosy. With the rise of the great England of the eighteenth century, we find this open and emotional tone still maintained in letters and politics, in arts and in arms. Perhaps the only quality which was possessed in common by the great Fielding, and the great Richardson was that neither of them hid their feelings. Swift, indeed, was hard and logical, because Swift was Irish. And when we pass to the soldiers and the rulers, the patriots and the empire-builders of the eighteenth century, we find, as I have said, that they were, If possible, more romantic than the romancers, more poetical than the poets. Chatham, who showed the world all his strength, showed the House of Commons all his weakness. Wolfe walked about the room with a drawn sword calling himself Caesar and Hannibal, and went to death with poetry in his mouth. Clive was a man of the same type as Cromwell or Bunyan, or, for the matter of that, Johnson—that is, he was a strong, sensible man with a kind of running spring of hysteria and melancholy in him. Like Johnson, he was all the more healthy because he was morbid. The tales of all the admirals and adventurers of that England are full of braggadocio, of sentimentality, of splendid affectation. But it is scarcely necessary to multiply examples of the essentially romantic Englishman when one example towers above them all. Mr. Rudyard Kipling has said complacently of the English, “We do not fall on the neck and kiss when we come together.” It is true that this ancient and universal custom has vanished with the modern weakening of England. Sydney would have thought nothing of kissing Spenser. But I willingly concede that Mr. Broderick would not be likely to kiss Mr. Arnold-Foster, if that be any proof of the increased manliness and military greatness of England. But the Englishman who does not show his feelings has not altogether given up the power of seeing something English in the great sea-hero of the Napoleonic war. You cannot break the legend of Nelson. And across the sunset of that glory is written in flaming letters for ever the great English sentiment, “Kiss me, Hardy.”

This ideal of self-repression, then, is, whatever else it is, not English. It is, perhaps, somewhat Oriental, it is slightly Prussian, but in the main it does not come, I think, from any racial or national source. It is, as I have said, in some sense aristocratic; it comes not from a people, but from a class. Even aristocracy,
I think, was not quite so stoical in the days when it was really strong. But whether this unemotional ideal be the genuine tradition of the gentleman, or only one of the inventions of the modern gentleman (who may be called the decayed gentleman), it certainly has something to do with the unemotional quality in these society novels. From representing aristocrats as people who suppressed their feelings, it has been an easy step to representing aristocrats as people who had no feelings to suppress. Thus the modern oligarchist has made a virtue for the oligarchy of the hardness as well as the brightness of the diamond. Like a sonneteer addressing his lady in the seventeenth century, he seems to use the word “cold” almost as a eulogy, and the word “heartless” as a kind of compliment. Of course, in people so incurably kind-hearted and babyish as are the English gentry, it would be impossible to create anything that can be called positive cruelty; so in these books they exhibit a sort of negative cruelty. They cannot be cruel in acts, but they can be so in words. All this means one thing, and one thing only. It means that the living and invigorating ideal of England must be looked for in the masses; it must be looked for where Dickens found it—Dickens among whose glories it was to be a humorist, to be a sentimentalist, to be an optimist, to be a poor man, to be an Englishman, but the greatest of whose glories was that he saw all mankind in its amazing and tropical luxuriance, and did not even notice the aristocracy; Dickens, the greatest of whose glories was that he could not describe a gentleman.
ON MR. MCCABE AND A DIVINE FRIVOLITY

A critic once remonstrated with me saying, with an air of indignant reasonableness, “If you must make jokes, at least you need not make them on such serious subjects.” I replied with a natural simplicity and wonder, “About what other subjects can one make jokes except serious subjects?” It is quite useless to talk about profane jesting. All jesting is in its nature profane, in the sense that it must be the sudden realization that something which thinks itself solemn is not so very solemn after all. If a joke is not a joke about religion or morals, it is a joke about police-magistrates or scientific professors or undergraduates dressed up as Queen Victoria. And people joke about the police-magistrate more than they joke about the Pope, not because the police-magistrate is a more frivolous subject, but, on the contrary, because the police-magistrate is a more serious subject than the Pope. The Bishop of Rome has no jurisdiction in this realm of England; whereas the police-magistrate may bring his solemnity to bear quite suddenly upon us. Men make jokes about old scientific professors, even more than they make them about bishops—not because science is lighter than religion, but because science is always by its nature more solemn and austere than religion. It is not I; it is not even a particular class of journalists or jesters who make jokes about the matters which are of most awful import; it is the whole human race. If there is one thing more than another which any one will admit who has the smallest knowledge of the world, it is that men are always speaking gravely and earnestly and with the utmost possible care about the things that are not important, but always talking frivolously about the things that are. Men talk for hours with the faces of a college of cardinals about things like golf, or tobacco, or waistcoats, or party politics. But all the most grave and dreadful things in the world are the oldest jokes in the world—being married; being hanged.

One gentleman, however, Mr. McCabe, has in this matter made to me something that almost amounts to a personal appeal; and as he happens to be a man for whose sincerity and intellectual virtue I have a high respect, I do not feel inclined to let it pass without some attempt to satisfy my critic in the matter. Mr. McCabe devotes a considerable part of the last essay in the collection called “Christianity and Rationalism on Trial” to an objection, not to my thesis, but to
my method, and a very friendly and dignified appeal to me to alter it. I am much inclined to defend myself in this matter out of mere respect for Mr. McCabe, and still more so out of mere respect for the truth which is, I think, in danger by his error, not only in this question, but in others. In order that there may be no injustice done in the matter, I will quote Mr. McCabe himself. “But before I follow Mr. Chesterton in some detail I would make a general observation on his method. He is as serious as I am in his ultimate purpose, and I respect him for that. He knows, as I do, that humanity stands at a solemn parting of the ways. Towards some unknown goal it presses through the ages, impelled by an overmastering desire of happiness. To-day it hesitates, lightheartedly enough, but every serious thinker knows how momentous the decision may be. It is, apparently, deserting the path of religion and entering upon the path of secularism. Will it lose itself in quagmires of sensuality down this new path, and pant and toil through years of civic and industrial anarchy, only to learn it had lost the road, and must return to religion? Or will it find that at last it is leaving the mists and the quagmires behind it; that it is ascending the slope of the hill so long dimly discerned ahead, and making straight for the long-sought Utopia? This is the drama of our time, and every man and every woman should understand it.

“Mr. Chesterton understands it. Further, he gives us credit for understanding it. He has nothing of that paltry meanness or strange density of so many of his colleagues, who put us down as aimless iconoclasts or moral anarchists. He admits that we are waging a thankless war for what we take to be Truth and Progress. He is doing the same. But why, in the name of all that is reasonable, should we, when we are agreed on the momentousness of the issue either way, forthwith desert serious methods of conducting the controversy? Why, when the vital need of our time is to induce men and women to collect their thoughts occasionally, and be men and women—nay, to remember that they are really gods that hold the destinies of humanity on their knees—why should we think that this kaleidoscopic play of phrases is inopportune? The ballets of the Alhambra, and the fireworks of the Crystal Palace, and Mr. Chesterton’s Daily News articles, have their place in life. But how a serious social student can think of curing the thoughtlessness of our generation by strained paradoxes; of giving people a sane grasp of social problems by literary sleight-of-hand; of settling important questions by a reckless shower of rocket-metaphors and inaccurate ‘facts,’ and the substitution of imagination for judgment, I cannot see.”

I quote this passage with a particular pleasure, because Mr. McCabe certainly
cannot put too strongly the degree to which I give him and his school credit for their complete sincerity and responsibility of philosophical attitude. I am quite certain that they mean every word they say. I also mean every word I say. But why is it that Mr. McCabe has some sort of mysterious hesitation about admitting that I mean every word I say; why is it that he is not quite as certain of my mental responsibility as I am of his mental responsibility? If we attempt to answer the question directly and well, we shall, I think, have come to the root of the matter by the shortest cut.

Mr. McCabe thinks that I am not serious but only funny, because Mr. McCabe thinks that funny is the opposite of serious. Funny is the opposite of not funny, and of nothing else. The question of whether a man expresses himself in a grotesque or laughable phraseology, or in a stately and restrained phraseology, is not a question of motive or of moral state, it is a question of instinctive language and self-expression. Whether a man chooses to tell the truth in long sentences or short jokes is a problem analogous to whether he chooses to tell the truth in French or German. Whether a man preaches his gospel grotesquely or gravely is merely like the question of whether he preaches it in prose or verse. The question of whether Swift was funny in his irony is quite another sort of question to the question of whether Swift was serious in his pessimism. Surely even Mr. McCabe would not maintain that the more funny “Gulliver” is in its method the less it can be sincere in its object. The truth is, as I have said, that in this sense the two qualities of fun and seriousness have nothing whatever to do with each other, they are no more comparable than black and triangular. Mr. Bernard Shaw is funny and sincere. Mr. George Robey is funny and not sincere. Mr. McCabe is sincere and not funny. The average Cabinet Minister is not sincere and not funny.

In short, Mr. McCabe is under the influence of a primary fallacy which I have found very common in men of the clerical type. Numbers of clergymen have from time to time reproached me for making jokes about religion; and they have almost always invoked the authority of that very sensible commandment which says, “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.” Of course, I pointed out that I was not in any conceivable sense taking the name in vain. To take a thing and make a joke out of it is not to take it in vain. It is, on the contrary, to take it and use it for an uncommonly good object. To use a thing in vain means to use it without use. But a joke may be exceedingly useful; it may contain the whole earthly sense, not to mention the whole heavenly sense, of a situation. And those who find in the Bible the commandment can find in the
Bible any number of the jokes. In the same book in which God’s name is fenced from being taken in vain, God himself overwhelms Job with a torrent of terrible levities. The same book which says that God’s name must not be taken vainly, talks easily and carelessly about God laughing and God winking. Evidently it is not here that we have to look for genuine examples of what is meant by a vain use of the name. And it is not very difficult to see where we have really to look for it. The people (as I tactfully pointed out to them) who really take the name of the Lord in vain are the clergymen themselves. The thing which is fundamentally and really frivolous is not a careless joke. The thing which is fundamentally and really frivolous is a careless solemnity. If Mr. McCabe really wishes to know what sort of guarantee of reality and solidity is afforded by the mere act of what is called talking seriously, let him spend a happy Sunday in going the round of the pulpits. Or, better still, let him drop in at the House of Commons or the House of Lords. Even Mr. McCabe would admit that these men are solemn—more solemn than I am. And even Mr. McCabe, I think, would admit that these men are frivolous—more frivolous than I am. Why should Mr. McCabe be so eloquent about the danger arising from fantastic and paradoxical writers? Why should he be so ardent in desiring grave and verbose writers? There are not so very many fantastic and paradoxical writers. But there are a gigantic number of grave and verbose writers; and it is by the efforts of the grave and verbose writers that everything that Mr. McCabe detests (and everything that I detest, for that matter) is kept in existence and energy. How can it have come about that a man as intelligent as Mr. McCabe can think that paradox and jesting stop the way? It is solemnity that is stopping the way in every department of modern effort. It is his own favourite “serious methods;” it is his own favourite “momentousness;” it is his own favourite “judgment” which stops the way everywhere. Every man who has ever headed a deputation to a minister knows this. Every man who has ever written a letter to the Times knows it. Every rich man who wishes to stop the mouths of the poor talks about “momentousness.” Every Cabinet minister who has not got an answer suddenly develops a “judgment.” Every sweater who uses vile methods recommends “serious methods.” I said a moment ago that sincerity had nothing to do with solemnity, but I confess that I am not so certain that I was right. In the modern world, at any rate, I am not so sure that I was right. In the modern world solemnity is the direct enemy of sincerity. In the modern world sincerity is almost always on one side, and solemnity almost always on the other. The only answer possible to the fierce and glad attack of sincerity is the miserable answer of solemnity. Let Mr.
McCabe, or any one else who is much concerned that we should be grave in order to be sincere, simply imagine the scene in some government office in which Mr. Bernard Shaw should head a Socialist deputation to Mr. Austen Chamberlain. On which side would be the solemnity? And on which the sincerity?

I am, indeed, delighted to discover that Mr. McCabe reckons Mr. Shaw along with me in his system of condemnation of frivolity. He said once, I believe, that he always wanted Mr. Shaw to label his paragraphs serious or comic. I do not know which paragraphs of Mr. Shaw are paragraphs to be labelled serious; but surely there can be no doubt that this paragraph of Mr. McCabe’s is one to be labelled comic. He also says, in the article I am now discussing, that Mr. Shaw has the reputation of deliberately saying everything which his hearers do not expect him to say. I need not labour the inconclusiveness and weakness of this, because it has already been dealt with in my remarks on Mr. Bernard Shaw. Suffice it to say here that the only serious reason which I can imagine inducing any one person to listen to any other is, that the first person looks to the second person with an ardent faith and a fixed attention, expecting him to say what he does not expect him to say. It may be a paradox, but that is because paradoxes are true. It may not be rational, but that is because rationalism is wrong. But clearly it is quite true that whenever we go to hear a prophet or teacher we may or may not expect wit, we may or may not expect eloquence, but we do expect what we do not expect. We may not expect the true, we may not even expect the wise, but we do expect the unexpected. If we do not expect the unexpected, why do we go there at all? If we expect the expected, why do we not sit at home and expect it by ourselves? If Mr. McCabe means merely this about Mr. Shaw, that he always has some unexpected application of his doctrine to give to those who listen to him, what he says is quite true, and to say it is only to say that Mr. Shaw is an original man. But if he means that Mr. Shaw has ever professed or preached any doctrine but one, and that his own, then what he says is not true. It is not my business to defend Mr. Shaw; as has been seen already, I disagree with him altogether. But I do not mind, on his behalf offering in this matter a flat defiance to all his ordinary opponents, such as Mr. McCabe. I defy Mr. McCabe, or anybody else, to mention one single instance in which Mr. Shaw has, for the sake of wit or novelty, taken up any position which was not directly deducible from the body of his doctrine as elsewhere expressed. I have been, I am happy to say, a tolerably close student of Mr. Shaw’s utterances, and I request Mr. McCabe, if he will not believe that I mean anything else, to believe that I mean
this challenge.

All this, however, is a parenthesis. The thing with which I am here immediately concerned is Mr. McCabe’s appeal to me not to be so frivolous. Let me return to the actual text of that appeal. There are, of course, a great many things that I might say about it in detail. But I may start with saying that Mr. McCabe is in error in supposing that the danger which I anticipate from the disappearance of religion is the increase of sensuality. On the contrary, I should be inclined to anticipate a decrease in sensuality, because I anticipate a decrease in life. I do not think that under modern Western materialism we should have anarchy. I doubt whether we should have enough individual valour and spirit even to have liberty. It is quite an old-fashioned fallacy to suppose that our objection to scepticism is that it removes the discipline from life. Our objection to scepticism is that it removes the motive power. Materialism is not a thing which destroys mere restraint. Materialism itself is the great restraint. The McCabe school advocates a political liberty, but it denies spiritual liberty. That is, it abolishes the laws which could be broken, and substitutes laws that cannot. And that is the real slavery.

The truth is that the scientific civilization in which Mr. McCabe believes has one rather particular defect; it is perpetually tending to destroy that democracy or power of the ordinary man in which Mr. McCabe also believes. Science means specialization, and specialization means oligarchy. If you once establish the habit of trusting particular men to produce particular results in physics or astronomy, you leave the door open for the equally natural demand that you should trust particular men to do particular things in government and the coercing of men. If, you feel it to be reasonable that one beetle should be the only study of one man, and that one man the only student of that one beetle, it is surely a very harmless consequence to go on to say that politics should be the only study of one man, and that one man the only student of politics. As I have pointed out elsewhere in this book, the expert is more aristocratic than the aristocrat, because the aristocrat is only the man who lives well, while the expert is the man who knows better. But if we look at the progress of our scientific civilization we see a gradual increase everywhere of the specialist over the popular function. Once men sang together round a table in chorus; now one man sings alone, for the absurd reason that he can sing better. If scientific civilization goes on (which is most improbable) only one man will laugh, because he can laugh better than the rest.

I do not know that I can express this more shortly than by taking as a text the
single sentence of Mr. McCabe, which runs as follows: “The ballets of the Alhambra and the fireworks of the Crystal Palace and Mr. Chesterton’s Daily News articles have their places in life.” I wish that my articles had as noble a place as either of the other two things mentioned. But let us ask ourselves (in a spirit of love, as Mr. Chadband would say), what are the ballets of the Alhambra? The ballets of the Alhambra are institutions in which a particular selected row of persons in pink go through an operation known as dancing. Now, in all commonwealths dominated by a religion—in the Christian commonwealths of the Middle Ages and in many rude societies—this habit of dancing was a common habit with everybody, and was not necessarily confined to a professional class. A person could dance without being a dancer; a person could dance without being a specialist; a person could dance without being pink. And, in proportion as Mr. McCabe’s scientific civilization advances—that is, in proportion as religious civilization (or real civilization) decays—the more and more “well trained,” the more and more pink, become the people who do dance, and the more and more numerous become the people who don’t. Mr. McCabe may recognize an example of what I mean in the gradual discrediting in society of the ancient European waltz or dance with partners, and the substitution of that horrible and degrading oriental interlude which is known as skirt-dancing. That is the whole essence of decadence, the effacement of five people who do a thing for fun by one person who does it for money. Now it follows, therefore, that when Mr. McCabe says that the ballets of the Alhambra and my articles “have their place in life,” it ought to be pointed out to him that he is doing his best to create a world in which dancing, properly speaking, will have no place in life at all. He is, indeed, trying to create a world in which there will be no life for dancing to have a place in. The very fact that Mr. McCabe thinks of dancing as a thing belonging to some hired women at the Alhambra is an illustration of the same principle by which he is able to think of religion as a thing belonging to some hired men in white neckties. Both these things are things which should not be done for us, but by us. If Mr. McCabe were really religious he would be happy. If he were really happy he would dance.

Briefly, we may put the matter in this way. The main point of modern life is not that the Alhambra ballet has its place in life. The main point, the main enormous tragedy of modern life, is that Mr. McCabe has not his place in the Alhambra ballet. The joy of changing and graceful posture, the joy of suiting the swing of music to the swing of limbs, the joy of whirling drapery, the joy of standing on one leg,—all these should belong by rights to Mr. McCabe and to
me; in short, to the ordinary healthy citizen. Probably we should not consent to
go through these evolutions. But that is because we are miserable moderns and
rationalists. We do not merely love ourselves more than we love duty; we
actually love ourselves more than we love joy.

When, therefore, Mr. McCabe says that he gives the Alhambra dances (and
my articles) their place in life, I think we are justified in pointing out that by the
very nature of the case of his philosophy and of his favourite civilization he
gives them a very inadequate place. For (if I may pursue the too flattering
parallel) Mr. McCabe thinks of the Alhambra and of my articles as two very odd
and absurd things, which some special people do (probably for money) in order
to amuse him. But if he had ever felt himself the ancient, sublime, elemental,
human instinct to dance, he would have discovered that dancing is not a
frivolous thing at all, but a very serious thing. He would have discovered that it
is the one grave and chaste and decent method of expressing a certain class of
emotions. And similarly, if he had ever had, as Mr. Shaw and I have had, the
impulse to what he calls paradox, he would have discovered that paradox again
is not a frivolous thing, but a very serious thing. He would have found that
paradox simply means a certain defiant joy which belongs to belief. I should
regard any civilization which was without a universal habit of uproarious
dancing as being, from the full human point of view, a defective civilization.
And I should regard any mind which had not got the habit in one form or another
of uproarious thinking as being, from the full human point of view, a defective
mind. It is vain for Mr. McCabe to say that a ballet is a part of him. He should be
part of a ballet, or else he is only part of a man. It is in vain for him to say that he
is “not quarrelling with the importation of humour into the controversy.” He
ought himself to be importing humour into every controversy; for unless a man
is in part a humorist, he is only in part a man. To sum up the whole matter very
simply, if Mr. McCabe asks me why I import frivolity into a discussion of the
nature of man, I answer, because frivolity is a part of the nature of man. If he
asks me why I introduce what he calls paradoxes into a philosophical problem, I
answer, because all philosophical problems tend to become paradoxical. If he
objects to my treating of life riotously, I reply that life is a riot. And I say that the
Universe as I see it, at any rate, is very much more like the fireworks at the
Crystal Palace than it is like his own philosophy. About the whole cosmos there
is a tense and secret festivity—like preparations for Guy Fawkes’ day. Eternity
is the eve of something. I never look up at the stars without feeling that they are
the fires of a schoolboy’s rocket, fixed in their everlasting fall.
ON THE WIT OF WHISTLER

That capable and ingenious writer, Mr. Arthur Symons, has included in a book of essays recently published, I believe, an apologia for “London Nights,” in which he says that morality should be wholly subordinated to art in criticism, and he uses the somewhat singular argument that art or the worship of beauty is the same in all ages, while morality differs in every period and in every respect. He appears to defy his critics or his readers to mention any permanent feature or quality in ethics. This is surely a very curious example of that extravagant bias against morality which makes so many ultra-modern aesthetes as morbid and fanatical as any Eastern hermit. Unquestionably it is a very common phrase of modern intellectualism to say that the morality of one age can be entirely different to the morality of another. And like a great many other phrases of modern intellectualism, it means literally nothing at all. If the two moralities are entirely different, why do you call them both moralities? It is as if a man said, “Camels in various places are totally diverse; some have six legs, some have none, some have scales, some have feathers, some have horns, some have wings, some are green, some are triangular. There is no point which they have in common.” The ordinary man of sense would reply, “Then what makes you call them all camels? What do you mean by a camel? How do you know a camel when you see one?” Of course, there is a permanent substance of morality, as much as there is a permanent substance of art; to say that is only to say that morality is morality, and that art is art. An ideal art critic would, no doubt, see the enduring beauty under every school; equally an ideal moralist would see the enduring ethic under every code. But practically some of the best Englishmen that ever lived could see nothing but filth and idolatry in the starry piety of the Brahmin. And it is equally true that practically the greatest group of artists that the world has ever seen, the giants of the Renaissance, could see nothing but barbarism in the ethereal energy of Gothic.

This bias against morality among the modern aesthetes is nothing very much paraded. And yet it is not really a bias against morality; it is a bias against other people’s morality. It is generally founded on a very definite moral preference for a certain sort of life, pagan, plausible, humane. The modern aesthete, wishing us to believe that he values beauty more than conduct, reads Mallarme, and drinks
absinthe in a tavern. But this is not only his favourite kind of beauty; it is also his favourite kind of conduct. If he really wished us to believe that he cared for beauty only, he ought to go to nothing but Wesleyan school treats, and paint the sunlight in the hair of the Wesleyan babies. He ought to read nothing but very eloquent theological sermons by old-fashioned Presbyterian divines. Here the lack of all possible moral sympathy would prove that his interest was purely verbal or pictorial, as it is; in all the books he reads and writes he clings to the skirts of his own morality and his own immorality. The champion of l’art pour l’art is always denouncing Ruskin for his moralizing. If he were really a champion of l’art pour l’art, he would be always insisting on Ruskin for his style.

The doctrine of the distinction between art and morality owes a great part of its success to art and morality being hopelessly mixed up in the persons and performances of its greatest exponents. Of this lucky contradiction the very incarnation was Whistler. No man ever preached the impersonality of art so well; no man ever preached the impersonality of art so personally. For him pictures had nothing to do with the problems of character; but for all his fiercest admirers his character was, as a matter of fact far more interesting than his pictures. He gloried in standing as an artist apart from right and wrong. But he succeeded by talking from morning till night about his rights and about his wrongs. His talents were many, his virtues, it must be confessed, not many, beyond that kindness to tried friends, on which many of his biographers insist, but which surely is a quality of all sane men, of pirates and pickpockets; beyond this, his outstanding virtues limit themselves chiefly to two admirable ones—courage and an abstract love of good work. Yet I fancy he won at last more by those two virtues than by all his talents. A man must be something of a moralist if he is to preach, even if he is to preach unmorality. Professor Walter Raleigh, in his “In Memoriam: James McNeill Whistler,” insists, truly enough, on the strong streak of an eccentric honesty in matters strictly pictorial, which ran through his complex and slightly confused character. “He would destroy any of his works rather than leave a careless or inexpressive touch within the limits of the frame. He would begin again a hundred times over rather than attempt by patching to make his work seem better than it was.”

No one will blame Professor Raleigh, who had to read a sort of funeral oration over Whistler at the opening of the Memorial Exhibition, if, finding himself in that position, he confined himself mostly to the merits and the stronger qualities of his subject. We should naturally go to some other type of composition for a
proper consideration of the weaknesses of Whistler. But these must never be omitted from our view of him. Indeed, the truth is that it was not so much a question of the weaknesses of Whistler as of the intrinsic and primary weakness of Whistler. He was one of those people who live up to their emotional incomes, who are always taut and tingling with vanity. Hence he had no strength to spare; hence he had no kindness, no geniality; for geniality is almost definable as strength to spare. He had no god-like carelessness; he never forgot himself; his whole life was, to use his own expression, an arrangement. He went in for "the art of living"—a miserable trick. In a word, he was a great artist; but emphatically not a great man. In this connection I must differ strongly with Professor Raleigh upon what is, from a superficial literary point of view, one of his most effective points. He compares Whistler’s laughter to the laughter of another man who was a great man as well as a great artist. "His attitude to the public was exactly the attitude taken up by Robert Browning, who suffered as long a period of neglect and mistake, in those lines of ‘The Ring and the Book’—

"‘Well, British Public, ye who like me not,
(God love you!) and will have your proper laugh
At the dark question; laugh it! I’d laugh first.’

“Mr. Whistler,” adds Professor Raleigh, “always laughed first.” The truth is, I believe, that Whistler never laughed at all. There was no laughter in his nature; because there was no thoughtlessness and self-abandonment, no humility. I cannot understand anybody reading ‘The Gentle Art of Making Enemies’ and thinking that there is any laughter in the wit. His wit is a torture to him. He twists himself into arabesques of verbal felicity; he is full of a fierce carefulness; he is inspired with the complete seriousness of sincere malice. He hurts himself to hurt his opponent. Browning did laugh, because Browning did not care; Browning did not care, because Browning was a great man. And when Browning said in brackets to the simple, sensible people who did not like his books, "God love you!” he was not sneering in the least. He was laughing—that is to say, he meant exactly what he said.

There are three distinct classes of great satirists who are also great men—that is to say, three classes of men who can laugh at something without losing their souls. The satirist of the first type is the man who, first of all enjoys himself, and then enjoys his enemies. In this sense he loves his enemy, and by a kind of exaggeration of Christianity he loves his enemy the more the more he becomes an enemy. He has a sort of overwhelming and aggressive happiness in his
assertion of anger; his curse is as human as a benediction. Of this type of satire the great example is Rabelais. This is the first typical example of satire, the satire which is voluble, which is violent, which is indecent, but which is not malicious. The satire of Whistler was not this. He was never in any of his controversies simply happy; the proof of it is that he never talked absolute nonsense. There is a second type of mind which produces satire with the quality of greatness. That is embodied in the satirist whose passions are released and let go by some intolerable sense of wrong. He is maddened by the sense of men being maddened; his tongue becomes an unruly member, and testifies against all mankind. Such a man was Swift, in whom the saeva indignatio was a bitterness to others, because it was a bitterness to himself. Such a satirist Whistler was not. He did not laugh because he was happy, like Rabelais. But neither did he laugh because he was unhappy, like Swift.

The third type of great satire is that in which he satirist is enabled to rise superior to his victim in the only serious sense which superiority can bear, in that of pitying the sinner and respecting the man even while he satirises both. Such an achievement can be found in a thing like Pope’s “Atticus” a poem in which the satirist feels that he is satirising the weaknesses which belong specially to literary genius. Consequently he takes a pleasure in pointing out his enemy’s strength before he points out his weakness. That is, perhaps, the highest and most honourable form of satire. That is not the satire of Whistler. He is not full of a great sorrow for the wrong done to human nature; for him the wrong is altogether done to himself.

He was not a great personality, because he thought so much about himself. And the case is stronger even than that. He was sometimes not even a great artist, because he thought so much about art. Any man with a vital knowledge of the human psychology ought to have the most profound suspicion of anybody who claims to be an artist, and talks a great deal about art. Art is a right and human thing, like walking or saying one’s prayers; but the moment it begins to be talked about very solemnly, a man may be fairly certain that the thing has come into a congestion and a kind of difficulty.

The artistic temperament is a disease that afflicts amateurs. It is a disease which arises from men not having sufficient power of expression to utter and get rid of the element of art in their being. It is healthful to every sane man to utter the art within him; it is essential to every sane man to get rid of the art within him at all costs. Artists of a large and wholesome vitality get rid of their art easily, as they breathe easily, or perspire easily. But in artists of less force, the
thing becomes a pressure, and produces a definite pain, which is called the artistic temperament. Thus, very great artists are able to be ordinary men—men like Shakespeare or Browning. There are many real tragedies of the artistic temperament, tragedies of vanity or violence or fear. But the great tragedy of the artistic temperament is that it cannot produce any art.

Whistler could produce art; and in so far he was a great man. But he could not forget art; and in so far he was only a man with the artistic temperament. There can be no stronger manifestation of the man who is a really great artist than the fact that he can dismiss the subject of art; that he can, upon due occasion, wish art at the bottom of the sea. Similarly, we should always be much more inclined to trust a solicitor who did not talk about conveyancing over the nuts and wine. What we really desire of any man conducting any business is that the full force of an ordinary man should be put into that particular study. We do not desire that the full force of that study should be put into an ordinary man. We do not in the least wish that our particular law-suit should pour its energy into our barrister’s games with his children, or rides on his bicycle, or meditations on the morning star. But we do, as a matter of fact, desire that his games with his children, and his rides on his bicycle, and his meditations on the morning star should pour something of their energy into our law-suit. We do desire that if he has gained any especial lung development from the bicycle, or any bright and pleasing metaphors from the morning star, that the should be placed at our disposal in that particular forensic controversy. In a word, we are very glad that he is an ordinary man, since that may help him to be an exceptional lawyer.

Whistler never ceased to be an artist. As Mr. Max Beerbohm pointed out in one of his extraordinarily sensible and sincere critiques, Whistler really regarded Whistler as his greatest work of art. The white lock, the single eyeglass, the remarkable hat—these were much dearer to him than any nocturnes or arrangements that he ever threw off. He could throw off the nocturnes; for some mysterious reason he could not throw off the hat. He never threw off from himself that disproportionate accumulation of aestheticism which is the burden of the amateur.

It need hardly be said that this is the real explanation of the thing which has puzzled so many dilettante critics, the problem of the extreme ordinariness of the behaviour of so many great geniuses in history. Their behaviour was so ordinary that it was not recorded; hence it was so ordinary that it seemed mysterious. Hence people say that Bacon wrote Shakespeare. The modern artistic temperament cannot understand how a man who could write such lyrics as
Shakespeare wrote, could be as keen as Shakespeare was on business transactions in a little town in Warwickshire. The explanation is simple enough; it is that Shakespeare had a real lyrical impulse, wrote a real lyric, and so got rid of the impulse and went about his business. Being an artist did not prevent him from being an ordinary man, any more than being a sleeper at night or being a diner at dinner prevented him from being an ordinary man.

All very great teachers and leaders have had this habit of assuming their point of view to be one which was human and casual, one which would readily appeal to every passing man. If a man is genuinely superior to his fellows the first thing that he believes in is the equality of man. We can see this, for instance, in that strange and innocent rationality with which Christ addressed any motley crowd that happened to stand about Him. “What man of you having a hundred sheep, and losing one, would not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which was lost?” Or, again, “What man of you if his son ask for bread will he give him a stone, or if he ask for a fish will he give him a serpent?” This plainness, this almost prosaic camaraderie, is the note of all very great minds.

To very great minds the things on which men agree are so immeasurably more important than the things on which they differ, that the latter, for all practical purposes, disappear. They have too much in them of an ancient laughter even to endure to discuss the difference between the hats of two men who were both born of a woman, or between the subtly varied cultures of two men who have both to die. The first-rate great man is equal with other men, like Shakespeare. The second-rate great man is on his knees to other men, like Whitman. The third-rate great man is superior to other men, like Whistler.
THE FALLACY OF THE YOUNG NATION

To say that a man is an idealist is merely to say that he is a man; but, nevertheless, it might be possible to effect some valid distinction between one kind of idealist and another. One possible distinction, for instance, could be effected by saying that humanity is divided into conscious idealists and unconscious idealists. In a similar way, humanity is divided into conscious ritualists and unconscious ritualists. The curious thing is, in that example as in others, that it is the conscious ritualism which is comparatively simple, the unconscious ritual which is really heavy and complicated. The ritual which is comparatively rude and straightforward is the ritual which people call “ritualistic.” It consists of plain things like bread and wine and fire, and men falling on their faces. But the ritual which is really complex, and many coloured, and elaborate, and needlessly formal, is the ritual which people enact without knowing it. It consists not of plain things like wine and fire, but of really peculiar, and local, and exceptional, and ingenious things—things like door-mats, and door-knockers, and electric bells, and silk hats, and white ties, and shiny cards, and confetti. The truth is that the modern man scarcely ever gets back to very old and simple things except when he is performing some religious mummery. The modern man can hardly get away from ritual except by entering a ritualistic church. In the case of these old and mystical formalities we can at least say that the ritual is not mere ritual; that the symbols employed are in most cases symbols which belong to a primary human poetry. The most ferocious opponent of the Christian ceremonials must admit that if Catholicism had not instituted the bread and wine, somebody else would most probably have done so. Any one with a poetical instinct will admit that to the ordinary human instinct bread symbolizes something which cannot very easily be symbolized otherwise; that wine, to the ordinary human instinct, symbolizes something which cannot very easily be symbolized otherwise. But white ties in the evening are ritual, and nothing else but ritual. No one would pretend that white ties in the evening are primary and poetical. Nobody would maintain that the ordinary human instinct would in any age or country tend to symbolize the idea of evening by a white necktie. Rather, the ordinary human instinct would, I imagine, tend to symbolize evening by cravats with some of the colours of the sunset, not white neckties, but
tawny or crimson neckties—neckties of purple or olive, or some darkened gold. Mr. J. A. Kensit, for example, is under the impression that he is not a ritualist. But the daily life of Mr. J. A. Kensit, like that of any ordinary modern man, is, as a matter of fact, one continual and compressed catalogue of mystical mummeries and flummery. To take one instance out of an inevitable hundred: I imagine that Mr. Kensit takes off his hat to a lady; and what can be more solemn and absurd, considered in the abstract, than, symbolizing the existence of the other sex by taking off a portion of your clothing and waving it in the air? This, I repeat, is not a natural and primitive symbol, like fire or food. A man might just as well have to take off his waistcoat to a lady; and if a man, by the social ritual of his civilization, had to take off his waistcoat to a lady, every chivalrous and sensible man would take off his waistcoat to a lady. In short, Mr. Kensit, and those who agree with him, may think, and quite sincerely think, that men give too much incense and ceremonial to their adoration of the other world. But nobody thinks that he can give too much incense and ceremonial to the adoration of this world. All men, then, are ritualists, but are either conscious or unconscious ritualists. The conscious ritualists are generally satisfied with a few very simple and elementary signs; the unconscious ritualists are not satisfied with anything short of the whole of human life, being almost insanely ritualistic. The first is called a ritualist because he invents and remembers one rite; the other is called an anti-ritualist because he obeys and forgets a thousand. And a somewhat similar distinction to this which I have drawn with some unavoidable length, between the conscious ritualist and the unconscious ritualist, exists between the conscious idealist and the unconscious idealist. It is idle to inveigh against cynics and materialists—there are no cynics, there are no materialists. Every man is idealistic; only it so often happens that he has the wrong ideal. Every man is incurably sentimental; but, unfortunately, it is so often a false sentiment. When we talk, for instance, of some unscrupulous commercial figure, and say that he would do anything for money, we use quite an inaccurate expression, and we slander him very much. He would not do anything for money. He would do some things for money; he would sell his soul for money, for instance; and, as Mirabeau humorously said, he would be quite wise “to take money for muck.” He would oppress humanity for money; but then it happens that humanity and the soul are not things that he believes in; they are not his ideals. But he has his own dim and delicate ideals; and he would not violate these for money. He would not drink out of the soup-tureen, for money. He would not wear his coat-tails in front, for money. He would not spread a report that he had softening of
the brain, for money. In the actual practice of life we find, in the matter of ideals, exactly what we have already found in the matter of ritual. We find that while there is a perfectly genuine danger of fanaticism from the men who have unworlly ideals, the permanent and urgent danger of fanaticism is from the men who have worldly ideals.

People who say that an ideal is a dangerous thing, that it deludes and intoxicates, are perfectly right. But the ideal which intoxicates most is the least idealistic kind of ideal. The ideal which intoxicates least is the very ideal ideal; that sobers us suddenly, as all heights and precipices and great distances do. Granted that it is a great evil to mistake a cloud for a cape; still, the cloud, which can be most easily mistaken for a cape, is the cloud that is nearest the earth. Similarly, we may grant that it may be dangerous to mistake an ideal for something practical. But we shall still point out that, in this respect, the most dangerous ideal of all is the ideal which looks a little practical. It is difficult to attain a high ideal; consequently, it is almost impossible to persuade ourselves that we have attained it. But it is easy to attain a low ideal; consequently, it is easier still to persuade ourselves that we have attained it when we have done nothing of the kind. To take a random example. It might be called a high ambition to wish to be an archangel; the man who entertained such an ideal would very possibly exhibit asceticism, or even frenzy, but not, I think, delusion. He would not think he was an archangel, and go about flapping his hands under the impression that they were wings. But suppose that a sane man had a low ideal; suppose he wished to be a gentleman. Any one who knows the world knows that in nine weeks he would have persuaded himself that he was a gentleman; and this being manifestly not the case, the result will be very real and practical dislocations and calamities in social life. It is not the wild ideals which wreck the practical world; it is the tame ideals.

The matter may, perhaps, be illustrated by a parallel from our modern politics. When men tell us that the old Liberal politicians of the type of Gladstone cared only for ideals, of course, they are talking nonsense—they cared for a great many other things, including votes. And when men tell us that modern politicians of the type of Mr. Chamberlain or, in another way, Lord Rosebery, care only for votes or for material interest, then again they are talking nonsense—these men care for ideals like all other men. But the real distinction which may be drawn is this, that to the older politician the ideal was an ideal, and nothing else. To the new politician his dream is not only a good dream, it is a reality. The old politician would have said, “It would be a good thing if there
were a Republican Federation dominating the world.” But the modern politician does not say, “It would be a good thing if there were a British Imperialism dominating the world.” He says, “It is a good thing that there is a British Imperialism dominating the world;” whereas clearly there is nothing of the kind. The old Liberal would say “There ought to be a good Irish government in Ireland.” But the ordinary modern Unionist does not say, “There ought to be a good English government in Ireland.” He says, “There is a good English government in Ireland;” which is absurd. In short, the modern politicians seem to think that a man becomes practical merely by making assertions entirely about practical things. Apparently, a delusion does not matter as long as it is a materialistic delusion. Instinctively most of us feel that, as a practical matter, even the contrary is true. I certainly would much rather share my apartments with a gentleman who thought he was God than with a gentleman who thought he was a grasshopper. To be continually haunted by practical images and practical problems, to be constantly thinking of things as actual, as urgent, as in process of completion—these things do not prove a man to be practical; these things, indeed, are among the most ordinary signs of a lunatic. That our modern statesmen are materialistic is nothing against their being also morbid. Seeing angels in a vision may make a man a supernaturalist to excess. But merely seeing snakes in delirium tremens does not make him a naturalist.

And when we come actually to examine the main stock notions of our modern practical politicians, we find that those main stock notions are mainly delusions. A great many instances might be given of the fact. We might take, for example, the case of that strange class of notions which underlie the word “union,” and all the eulogies heaped upon it. Of course, union is no more a good thing in itself than separation is a good thing in itself. To have a party in favour of union and a party in favour of separation is as absurd as to have a party in favour of going upstairs and a party in favour of going downstairs. The question is not whether we go up or down stairs, but where we are going to, and what we are going, for? Union is strength; union is also weakness. It is a good thing to harness two horses to a cart; but it is not a good thing to try and turn two hansom cabs into one four-wheeler. Turning ten nations into one empire may happen to be as feasible as turning ten shillings into one half-sovereign. Also it may happen to be as preposterous as turning ten terriers into one mastiff. The question in all cases is not a question of union or absence of union, but of identity or absence of identity. Owing to certain historical and moral causes, two nations may be so united as upon the whole to help each other. Thus England and Scotland pass
their time in paying each other compliments; but their energies and atmospheres run distinct and parallel, and consequently do not clash. Scotland continues to be educated and Calvinistic; England continues to be uneducated and happy. But owing to certain other Moral and certain other political causes, two nations may be so united as only to hamper each other; their lines do clash and do not run parallel. Thus, for instance, England and Ireland are so united that the Irish can sometimes rule England, but can never rule Ireland. The educational systems, including the last Education Act, are here, as in the case of Scotland, a very good test of the matter. The overwhelming majority of Irishmen believe in a strict Catholicism; the overwhelming majority of Englishmen believe in a vague Protestantism. The Irish party in the Parliament of Union is just large enough to prevent the English education being indefinitely Protestant, and just small enough to prevent the Irish education being definitely Catholic. Here we have a state of things which no man in his senses would ever dream of wishing to continue if he had not been bewitched by the sentimentalism of the mere word “union.”

This example of union, however, is not the example which I propose to take of the ingrained futility and deception underlying all the assumptions of the modern practical politician. I wish to speak especially of another and much more general delusion. It pervades the minds and speeches of all the practical men of all parties; and it is a childish blunder built upon a single false metaphor. I refer to the universal modern talk about young nations and new nations; about America being young, about New Zealand being new. The whole thing is a trick of words. America is not young, New Zealand is not new. It is a very discussable question whether they are not both much older than England or Ireland.

Of course we may use the metaphor of youth about America or the colonies, if we use it strictly as implying only a recent origin. But if we use it (as we do use it) as implying vigour, or vivacity, or crudity, or inexperience, or hope, or a long life before them or any of the romantic attributes of youth, then it is surely as clear as daylight that we are duped by a stale figure of speech. We can easily see the matter clearly by applying it to any other institution parallel to the institution of an independent nationality. If a club called “The Milk and Soda League” (let us say) was set up yesterday, as I have no doubt it was, then, of course, “The Milk and Soda League” is a young club in the sense that it was set up yesterday, but in no other sense. It may consist entirely of moribund old gentlemen. It may be moribund itself. We may call it a young club, in the light of the fact that it was founded yesterday. We may also call it a very old club in the light of the fact
that it will most probably go bankrupt to-morrow. All this appears very obvious when we put it in this form. Any one who adopted the young-community delusion with regard to a bank or a butcher’s shop would be sent to an asylum. But the whole modern political notion that America and the colonies must be very vigorous because they are very new, rests upon no better foundation. That America was founded long after England does not make it even in the faintest degree more probable that America will not perish a long time before England. That England existed before her colonies does not make it any the less likely that she will exist after her colonies. And when we look at the actual history of the world, we find that great European nations almost invariably have survived the vitality of their colonies. When we look at the actual history of the world, we find, that if there is a thing that is born old and dies young, it is a colony. The Greek colonies went to pieces long before the Greek civilization. The Spanish colonies have gone to pieces long before the nation of Spain—nor does there seem to be any reason to doubt the possibility or even the probability of the conclusion that the colonial civilization, which owes its origin to England, will be much briefer and much less vigorous than the civilization of England itself. The English nation will still be going the way of all European nations when the Anglo-Saxon race has gone the way of all fads. Now, of course, the interesting question is, have we, in the case of America and the colonies, any real evidence of a moral and intellectual youth as opposed to the indisputable triviality of a merely chronological youth? Consciously or unconsciously, we know that we have no such evidence, and consciously or unconsciously, therefore, we proceed to make it up. Of this pure and placid invention, a good example, for instance, can be found in a recent poem of Mr. Rudyard Kipling’s. Speaking of the English people and the South African War Mr. Kipling says that “we fawned on the younger nations for the men that could shoot and ride.” Some people considered this sentence insulting. All that I am concerned with at present is the evident fact that it is not true. The colonies provided very useful volunteer troops, but they did not provide the best troops, nor achieve the most successful exploits. The best work in the war on the English side was done, as might have been expected, by the best English regiments. The men who could shoot and ride were not the enthusiastic corn merchants from Melbourne, any more than they were the enthusiastic clerks from Cheapside. The men who could shoot and ride were the men who had been taught to shoot and ride in the discipline of the standing army of a great European power. Of course, the colonials are as brave and athletic as any other average white men. Of course, they acquitted
themselves with reasonable credit. All I have here to indicate is that, for the purposes of this theory of the new nation, it is necessary to maintain that the colonial forces were more useful or more heroic than the gunners at Colenso or the Fighting Fifth. And of this contention there is not, and never has been, one stick or straw of evidence.

A similar attempt is made, and with even less success, to represent the literature of the colonies as something fresh and vigorous and important. The imperialist magazines are constantly springing upon us some genius from Queensland or Canada, through whom we are expected to smell the odours of the bush or the prairie. As a matter of fact, any one who is even slightly interested in literature as such (and I, for one, confess that I am only slightly interested in literature as such), will freely admit that the stories of these geniuses smell of nothing but printer’s ink, and that not of first-rate quality. By a great effort of Imperial imagination the generous English people reads into these works a force and a novelty. But the force and the novelty are not in the new writers; the force and the novelty are in the ancient heart of the English. Anybody who studies them impartially will know that the first-rate writers of the colonies are not even particularly novel in their note and atmosphere, are not only not producing a new kind of good literature, but are not even in any particular sense producing a new kind of bad literature. The first-rate writers of the new countries are really almost exactly like the second-rate writers of the old countries. Of course they do feel the mystery of the wilderness, the mystery of the bush, for all simple and honest men feel this in Melbourne, or Margate, or South St. Pancras. But when they write most sincerely and most successfully, it is not with a background of the mystery of the bush, but with a background, expressed or assumed, of our own romantic cockney civilization. What really moves their souls with a kindly terror is not the mystery of the wilderness, but the Mystery of a Hansom Cab.

Of course there are some exceptions to this generalization. The one really arresting exception is Olive Schreiner, and she is quite as certainly an exception that proves the rule. Olive Schreiner is a fierce, brilliant, and realistic novelist; but she is all this precisely because she is not English at all. Her tribal kinship is with the country of Teniers and Maarten Maartens—that is, with a country of realists. Her literary kinship is with the pessimistic fiction of the continent; with the novelists whose very pity is cruel. Olive Schreiner is the one English colonial who is not conventional, for the simple reason that South Africa is the one English colony which is not English, and probably never will be. And, of course,
there are individual exceptions in a minor way. I remember in particular some
Australian tales by Mr. McIlwain which were really able and effective, and
which, for that reason, I suppose, are not presented to the public with blasts of a
trumpet. But my general contention if put before any one with a love of letters,
will not be disputed if it is understood. It is not the truth that the colonial
civilization as a whole is giving us, or shows any signs of giving us, a literature
which will startle and renovate our own. It may be a very good thing for us to
have an affectionate illusion in the matter; that is quite another affair. The
colonies may have given England a new emotion; I only say that they have not
given the world a new book.

Touching these English colonies, I do not wish to be misunderstood. I do not
say of them or of America that they have not a future, or that they will not be
great nations. I merely deny the whole established modern expression about
them. I deny that they are “destined” to a future. I deny that they are “destined”
to be great nations. I deny (of course) that any human thing is destined to be
anything. All the absurd physical metaphors, such as youth and age, living and
dying, are, when applied to nations, but pseudo-scientific attempts to conceal
from men the awful liberty of their lonely souls.

In the case of America, indeed, a warning to this effect is instant and essential.
America, of course, like every other human thing, can in spiritual sense live or
die as much as it chooses. But at the present moment the matter which America
has very seriously to consider is not how near it is to its birth and beginning, but
how near it may be to its end. It is only a verbal question whether the American
civilization is young; it may become a very practical and urgent question
whether it is dying. When once we have cast aside, as we inevitably have after a
moment’s thought, the fanciful physical metaphor involved in the word “youth,”
what serious evidence have we that America is a fresh force and not a stale one?
It has a great many people, like China; it has a great deal of money, like defeated
Carthage or dying Venice. It is full of bustle and excitability, like Athens after its
ruin, and all the Greek cities in their decline. It is fond of new things; but the old
are always fond of new things. Young men read chronicles, but old men read
newspapers. It admires strength and good looks; it admires a big and barbaric
beauty in its women, for instance; but so did Rome when the Goth was at the
gates. All these are things quite compatible with fundamental tedium and decay.
There are three main shapes or symbols in which a nation can show itself
essentially glad and great—by the heroic in government, by the heroic in arms,
and by the heroic in art. Beyond government, which is, as it were, the very shape
and body of a nation, the most significant thing about any citizen is his artistic attitude towards a holiday and his moral attitude towards a fight—that is, his way of accepting life and his way of accepting death.

Subjected to these eternal tests, America does not appear by any means as particularly fresh or untouched. She appears with all the weakness and weariness of modern England or of any other Western power. In her politics she has broken up exactly as England has broken up, into a bewildering opportunism and insincerity. In the matter of war and the national attitude towards war, her resemblance to England is even more manifest and melancholy. It may be said with rough accuracy that there are three stages in the life of a strong people. First, it is a small power, and fights small powers. Then it is a great power, and fights great powers. Then it is a great power, and fights small powers, but pretends that they are great powers, in order to rekindle the ashes of its ancient emotion and vanity. After that, the next step is to become a small power itself.

England exhibited this symptom of decadence very badly in the war with the Transvaal; but America exhibited it worse in the war with Spain. There was exhibited more sharply and absurdly than anywhere else the ironic contrast between the very careless choice of a strong line and the very careful choice of a weak enemy. America added to all her other late Roman or Byzantine elements the element of the Caracallan triumph, the triumph over nobody.

But when we come to the last test of nationality, the test of art and letters, the case is almost terrible. The English colonies have produced no great artists; and that fact may prove that they are still full of silent possibilities and reserve force. But America has produced great artists. And that fact most certainly proves that she is full of a fine futility and the end of all things. Whatever the American men of genius are, they are not young gods making a young world. Is the art of Whistler a brave, barbaric art, happy and headlong? Does Mr. Henry James infect us with the spirit of a schoolboy? No; the colonies have not spoken, and they are safe. Their silence may be the silence of the unborn. But out of America has come a sweet and startling cry, as unmistakable as the cry of a dying man.
XIX

SLUM NOVELISTS AND THE SLUMS

Odd ideas are entertained in our time about the real nature of the doctrine of human fraternity. The real doctrine is something which we do not, with all our modern humanitarianism, very clearly understand, much less very closely practise. There is nothing, for instance, particularly undemocratic about kicking your butler downstairs. It may be wrong, but it is not unfraternal. In a certain sense, the blow or kick may be considered as a confession of equality: you are meeting your butler body to body; you are almost according him the privilege of the duel. There is nothing, undemocratic, though there may be something unreasonable, in expecting a great deal from the butler, and being filled with a kind of frenzy of surprise when he falls short of the divine stature. The thing which is really undemocratic and unfraternal is not to expect the butler to be more or less divine. The thing which is really undemocratic and unfraternal is to say, as so many modern humanitarians say, “Of course one must make allowances for those on a lower plane.” All things considered indeed, it may be said, without undue exaggeration, that the really undemocratic and unfraternal thing is the common practice of not kicking the butler downstairs.

It is only because such a vast section of the modern world is out of sympathy with the serious democratic sentiment that this statement will seem to many to be lacking in seriousness. Democracy is not philanthropy; it is not even altruism or social reform. Democracy is not founded on pity for the common man; democracy is founded on reverence for the common man, or, if you will, even on fear of him. It does not champion man because man is so miserable, but because man is so sublime. It does not object so much to the ordinary man being a slave as to his not being a king, for its dream is always the dream of the first Roman republic, a nation of kings.

Next to a genuine republic, the most democratic thing in the world is a hereditary despotism. I mean a despotism in which there is absolutely no trace whatever of any nonsense about intellect or special fitness for the post. Rational despotism—that is, selective despotism—is always a curse to mankind, because with that you have the ordinary man misunderstood and misgoverned by some prig who has no brotherly respect for him at all. But irrational despotism is always democratic, because it is the ordinary man enthroned. The worst form of
slavery is that which is called Caesarism, or the choice of some bold or brilliant man as despot because he is suitable. For that means that men choose a representative, not because he represents them, but because he does not. Men trust an ordinary man like George III or William IV, because they are themselves ordinary men and understand him. Men trust an ordinary man because they trust themselves. But men trust a great man because they do not trust themselves. And hence the worship of great men always appears in times of weakness and cowardice; we never hear of great men until the time when all other men are small.

Hereditary despotism is, then, in essence and sentiment democratic because it chooses from mankind at random. If it does not declare that every man may rule, it declares the next most democratic thing; it declares that any man may rule. Hereditary aristocracy is a far worse and more dangerous thing, because the numbers and multiplicity of an aristocracy make it sometimes possible for it to figure as an aristocracy of intellect. Some of its members will presumably have brains, and thus they, at any rate, will be an intellectual aristocracy within the social one. They will rule the aristocracy by virtue of their intellect, and they will rule the country by virtue of their aristocracy. Thus a double falsity will be set up, and millions of the images of God, who, fortunately for their wives and families, are neither gentlemen nor clever men, will be represented by a man like Mr. Balfour or Mr. Wyndham, because he is too gentlemanly to be called merely clever, and just too clever to be called merely a gentleman. But even an hereditary aristocracy may exhibit, by a sort of accident, from time to time some of the basically democratic quality which belongs to a hereditary despotism. It is amusing to think how much conservative ingenuity has been wasted in the defence of the House of Lords by men who were desperately endeavouring to prove that the House of Lords consisted of clever men. There is one really good defence of the House of Lords, though admirers of the peerage are strangely coy about using it; and that is, that the House of Lords, in its full and proper strength, consists of stupid men. It really would be a plausible defence of that otherwise indefensible body to point out that the clever men in the Commons, who owed their power to cleverness, ought in the last resort to be checked by the average man in the Lords, who owed their power to accident. Of course, there would be many answers to such a contention, as, for instance, that the House of Lords is largely no longer a House of Lords, but a House of tradesmen and financiers, or that the bulk of the commonplace nobility do not vote, and so leave the chamber to the prigs and the specialists and the mad old gentlemen with hobbies. But on
some occasions the House of Lords, even under all these disadvantages, is in some sense representative. When all the peers flocked together to vote against Mr. Gladstone’s second Home Rule Bill, for instance, those who said that the peers represented the English people, were perfectly right. All those dear old men who happened to be born peers were at that moment, and upon that question, the precise counterpart of all the dear old men who happened to be born paupers or middle-class gentlemen. That mob of peers did really represent the English people—that is to say, it was honest, ignorant, vaguely excited, almost unanimous, and obviously wrong. Of course, rational democracy is better as an expression of the public will than the haphazard hereditary method. While we are about having any kind of democracy, let it be rational democracy. But if we are to have any kind of oligarchy, let it be irrational oligarchy. Then at least we shall be ruled by men.

But the thing which is really required for the proper working of democracy is not merely the democratic system, or even the democratic philosophy, but the democratic emotion. The democratic emotion, like most elementary and indispensable things, is a thing difficult to describe at any time. But it is peculiarly difficult to describe it in our enlightened age, for the simple reason that it is peculiarly difficult to find it. It is a certain instinctive attitude which feels the things in which all men agree to be unspeakably important, and all the things in which they differ (such as mere brains) to be almost unspeakably unimportant. The nearest approach to it in our ordinary life would be the promptitude with which we should consider mere humanity in any circumstance of shock or death. We should say, after a somewhat disturbing discovery, “There is a dead man under the sofa.” We should not be likely to say, “There is a dead man of considerable personal refinement under the sofa.” We should say, “A woman has fallen into the water.” We should not say, “A highly educated woman has fallen into the water.” Nobody would say, “There are the remains of a clear thinker in your back garden.” Nobody would say, “Unless you hurry up and stop him, a man with a very fine ear for music will have jumped off that cliff.” But this emotion, which all of us have in connection with such things as birth and death, is to some people native and constant at all ordinary times and in all ordinary places. It was native to St. Francis of Assisi. It was native to Walt Whitman. In this strange and splendid degree it cannot be expected, perhaps, to pervade a whole commonwealth or a whole civilization; but one commonwealth may have it much more than another commonwealth, one civilization much more than another civilization. No community, perhaps, ever had it so much as
the early Franciscans. No community, perhaps, ever had it so little as ours.

Everything in our age has, when carefully examined, this fundamentally undemocratic quality. In religion and morals we should admit, in the abstract, that the sins of the educated classes were as great as, or perhaps greater than, the sins of the poor and ignorant. But in practice the great difference between the mediaeval ethics and ours is that ours concentrate attention on the sins which are the sins of the ignorant, and practically deny that the sins which are the sins of the educated are sins at all. We are always talking about the sin of intemperate drinking, because it is quite obvious that the poor have it more than the rich. But we are always denying that there is any such thing as the sin of pride, because it would be quite obvious that the rich have it more than the poor. We are always ready to make a saint or prophet of the educated man who goes into cottages to give a little kindly advice to the uneducated. But the medieval idea of a saint or prophet was something quite different. The mediaeval saint or prophet was an uneducated man who walked into grand houses to give a little kindly advice to the educated. The old tyrants had enough insolence to despoil the poor, but they had not enough insolence to preach to them. It was the gentleman who oppressed the slums; but it was the slums that admonished the gentleman. And just as we are undemocratic in faith and morals, so we are, by the very nature of our attitude in such matters, undemocratic in the tone of our practical politics. It is a sufficient proof that we are not an essentially democratic state that we are always wondering what we shall do with the poor. If we were democrats, we should be wondering what the poor will do with us. With us the governing class is always saying to itself, “What laws shall we make?” In a purely democratic state it would be always saying, “What laws can we obey?” A purely democratic state perhaps there has never been. But even the feudal ages were in practice thus far democratic, that every feudal potentate knew that any laws which he made would in all probability return upon himself. His feathers might be cut off for breaking a sumptuary law. His head might be cut off for high treason. But the modern laws are almost always laws made to affect the governed class, but not the governing. We have public-house licensing laws, but not sumptuary laws. That is to say, we have laws against the festivity and hospitality of the poor, but no laws against the festivity and hospitality of the rich. We have laws against blasphemy—that is, against a kind of coarse and offensive speaking in which nobody but a rough and obscure man would be likely to indulge. But we have no laws against heresy—that is, against the intellectual poisoning of the whole people, in which only a prosperous and prominent man would be likely to be
successful. The evil of aristocracy is not that it necessarily leads to the infliction of bad things or the suffering of sad ones; the evil of aristocracy is that it places everything in the hands of a class of people who can always inflict what they can never suffer. Whether what they inflict is, in their intention, good or bad, they become equally frivolous. The case against the governing class of modern England is not in the least that it is selfish; if you like, you may call the English oligarchs too fantastically unselfish. The case against them simply is that when they legislate for all men, they always omit themselves.

We are undemocratic, then, in our religion, as is proved by our efforts to “raise” the poor. We are undemocratic in our government, as is proved by our innocent attempt to govern them well. But above all we are undemocratic in our literature, as is proved by the torrent of novels about the poor and serious studies of the poor which pour from our publishers every month. And the more “modern” the book is the more certain it is to be devoid of democratic sentiment.

A poor man is a man who has not got much money. This may seem a simple and unnecessary description, but in the face of a great mass of modern fact and fiction, it seems very necessary indeed; most of our realists and sociologists talk about a poor man as if he were an octopus or an alligator. There is no more need to study the psychology of poverty than to study the psychology of bad temper, or the psychology of vanity, or the psychology of animal spirits. A man ought to know something of the emotions of an insulted man, not by being insulted, but simply by being a man. And he ought to know something of the emotions of a poor man, not by being poor, but simply by being a man. Therefore, in any writer who is describing poverty, my first objection to him will be that he has studied his subject. A democrat would have imagined it.

A great many hard things have been said about religious slumming and political or social slumming, but surely the most despicable of all is artistic slumming. The religious teacher is at least supposed to be interested in the costermonger because he is a man; the politician is in some dim and perverted sense interested in the costermonger because he is a citizen; it is only the wretched writer who is interested in the costermonger merely because he is a costermonger. Nevertheless, so long as he is merely seeking impressions, or in other words copy, his trade, though dull, is honest. But when he endeavours to represent that he is describing the spiritual core of a costermonger, his dim vices and his delicate virtues, then we must object that his claim is preposterous; we must remind him that he is a journalist and nothing else. He has far less psychological authority even than the foolish missionary. For he is in the literal
and derivative sense a journalist, while the missionary is an eternalist. The missionary at least pretends to have a version of the man’s lot for all time; the journalist only pretends to have a version of it from day to day. The missionary comes to tell the poor man that he is in the same condition with all men. The journalist comes to tell other people how different the poor man is from everybody else.

If the modern novels about the slums, such as novels of Mr. Arthur Morrison, or the exceedingly able novels of Mr. Somerset Maugham, are intended to be sensational, I can only say that that is a noble and reasonable object, and that they attain it. A sensation, a shock to the imagination, like the contact with cold water, is always a good and exhilarating thing; and, undoubtedly, men will always seek this sensation (among other forms) in the form of the study of the strange antics of remote or alien peoples. In the twelfth century men obtained this sensation by reading about dog-headed men in Africa. In the twentieth century they obtained it by reading about pig-headed Boers in Africa. The men of the twentieth century were certainly, it must be admitted, somewhat the more credulous of the two. For it is not recorded of the men in the twelfth century that they organized a sanguinary crusade solely for the purpose of altering the singular formation of the heads of the Africans. But it may be, and it may even legitimately be, that since all these monsters have faded from the popular mythology, it is necessary to have in our fiction the image of the horrible and hairy East-ender, merely to keep alive in us a fearful and childish wonder at external peculiarities. But the Middle Ages (with a great deal more common sense than it would now be fashionable to admit) regarded natural history at bottom rather as a kind of joke; they regarded the soul as very important. Hence, while they had a natural history of dog-headed men, they did not profess to have a psychology of dog-headed men. They did not profess to mirror the mind of a dog-headed man, to share his tenderest secrets, or mount with his most celestial musings. They did not write novels about the semi-canine creature, attributing to him all the oldest morbidities and all the newest fads. It is permissible to present men as monsters if we wish to make the reader jump; and to make anybody jump is always a Christian act. But it is not permissible to present men as regarding themselves as monsters, or as making themselves jump. To summarize, our slum fiction is quite defensible as aesthetic fiction; it is not defensible as spiritual fact.

One enormous obstacle stands in the way of its actuality. The men who write it, and the men who read it, are men of the middle classes or the upper classes; at least, of those who are loosely termed the educated classes. Hence, the fact that
it is the life as the refined man sees it proves that it cannot be the life as the unrefined man lives it. Rich men write stories about poor men, and describe them as speaking with a coarse, or heavy, or husky enunciation. But if poor men wrote novels about you or me they would describe us as speaking with some absurd shrill and affected voice, such as we only hear from a duchess in a three-act farce. The slum novelist gains his whole effect by the fact that some detail is strange to the reader; but that detail by the nature of the case cannot be strange in itself. It cannot be strange to the soul which he is professing to study. The slum novelist gains his effects by describing the same grey mist as draping the dingy factory and the dingy tavern. But to the man he is supposed to be studying there must be exactly the same difference between the factory and the tavern that there is to a middle-class man between a late night at the office and a supper at Pagani’s. The slum novelist is content with pointing out that to the eye of his particular class a pickaxe looks dirty and a pewter pot looks dirty. But the man he is supposed to be studying sees the difference between them exactly as a clerk sees the difference between a ledger and an edition de luxe. The chiaroscuro of the life is inevitably lost; for to us the high lights and the shadows are a light grey. But the high lights and the shadows are not a light grey in that life any more than in any other. The kind of man who could really express the pleasures of the poor would be also the kind of man who could share them. In short, these books are not a record of the psychology of poverty. They are a record of the psychology of wealth and culture when brought in contact with poverty. They are not a description of the state of the slums. They are only a very dark and dreadful description of the state of the slummers. One might give innumerable examples of the essentially unsympathetic and unpopular quality of these realistic writers. But perhaps the simplest and most obvious example with which we could conclude is the mere fact that these writers are realistic. The poor have many other vices, but, at least, they are never realistic. The poor are melodramatic and romantic in grain; the poor all believe in high moral platitudes and copy-book maxims; probably this is the ultimate meaning of the great saying, “Blessed are the poor.” Blessed are the poor, for they are always making life, or trying to make life like an Adelphi play. Some innocent educationalists and philanthropists (for even philanthropists can be innocent) have expressed a grave astonishment that the masses prefer shilling shockers to scientific treatises and melodramas to problem plays. The reason is very simple. The realistic story is certainly more artistic than the melodramatic story. If what you desire is deft handling, delicate proportions, a unit of artistic atmosphere, the realistic story
has a full advantage over the melodrama. In everything that is light and bright and ornamental the realistic story has a full advantage over the melodrama. But, at least, the melodrama has one indisputable advantage over the realistic story. The melodrama is much more like life. It is much more like man, and especially the poor man. It is very banal and very inartistic when a poor woman at the Adelphi says, “Do you think I will sell my own child?” But poor women in the Battersea High Road do say, “Do you think I will sell my own child?” They say it on every available occasion; you can hear a sort of murmur or babble of it all the way down the street. It is very stale and weak dramatic art (if that is all) when the workman confronts his master and says, “I’m a man.” But a workman does say “I’m a man” two or three times every day. In fact, it is tedious, possibly, to hear poor men being melodramatic behind the footlights; but that is because one can always hear them being melodramatic in the street outside. In short, melodrama, if it is dull, is dull because it is too accurate. Somewhat the same problem exists in the case of stories about schoolboys. Mr. Kipling’s “Stalky and Co.” is much more amusing (if you are talking about amusement) than the late Dean Farrar’s “Eric; or, Little by Little.” But “Eric” is immeasurably more like real school-life. For real school-life, real boyhood, is full of the things of which Eric is full—priggishness, a crude piety, a silly sin, a weak but continual attempt at the heroic, in a word, melodrama. And if we wish to lay a firm basis for any efforts to help the poor, we must not become realistic and see them from the outside. We must become melodramatic, and see them from the inside. The novelist must not take out his notebook and say, “I am an expert.” No; he must imitate the workman in the Adelphi play. He must slap himself on the chest and say, “I am a man.”
CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF
ORTHODOXY

Whether the human mind can advance or not, is a question too little discussed, for nothing can be more dangerous than to found our social philosophy on any theory which is debatable but has not been debated. But if we assume, for the sake of argument, that there has been in the past, or will be in the future, such a thing as a growth or improvement of the human mind itself, there still remains a very sharp objection to be raised against the modern version of that improvement. The vice of the modern notion of mental progress is that it is always something concerned with the breaking of bonds, the effacing of boundaries, the casting away of dogmas. But if there be such a thing as mental growth, it must mean the growth into more and more definite convictions, into more and more dogmas. The human brain is a machine for coming to conclusions; if it cannot come to conclusions it is rusty. When we hear of a man too clever to believe, we are hearing of something having almost the character of a contradiction in terms. It is like hearing of a nail that was too good to hold down a carpet; or a bolt that was too strong to keep a door shut. Man can hardly be defined, after the fashion of Carlyle, as an animal who makes tools; ants and beavers and many other animals make tools, in the sense that they make an apparatus. Man can be defined as an animal that makes dogmas. As he piles doctrine on doctrine and conclusion on conclusion in the formation of some tremendous scheme of philosophy and religion, he is, in the only legitimate sense of which the expression is capable, becoming more and more human. When he drops one doctrine after another in a refined scepticism, when he declines to tie himself to a system, when he says that he has outgrown definitions, when he says that he disbelieves in finality, when, in his own imagination, he sits as God, holding no form of creed but contemplating all, then he is by that very process sinking slowly backwards into the vagueness of the vagrant animals and the unconsciousness of the grass. Trees have no dogmas. Turnips are singularly broad-minded.

If then, I repeat, there is to be mental advance, it must be mental advance in the construction of a definite philosophy of life. And that philosophy of life must be right and the other philosophies wrong. Now of all, or nearly all, the able
modern writers whom I have briefly studied in this book, this is especially and pleasingly true, that they do each of them have a constructive and affirmative view, and that they do take it seriously and ask us to take it seriously. There is nothing merely sceptically progressive about Mr. Rudyard Kipling. There is nothing in the least broad minded about Mr. Bernard Shaw. The paganism of Mr. Lowes Dickinson is more grave than any Christianity. Even the opportunism of Mr. H. G. Wells is more dogmatic than the idealism of anybody else. Somebody complained, I think, to Matthew Arnold that he was getting as dogmatic as Carlyle. He replied, “That may be true; but you overlook an obvious difference. I am dogmatic and right, and Carlyle is dogmatic and wrong.” The strong humour of the remark ought not to disguise from us its everlasting seriousness and common sense; no man ought to write at all, or even to speak at all, unless he thinks that he is in truth and the other man in error. In similar style, I hold that I am dogmatic and right, while Mr. Shaw is dogmatic and wrong. But my main point, at present, is to notice that the chief among these writers I have discussed do most sanely and courageously offer themselves as dogmatists, as founders of a system. It may be true that the thing in Mr. Shaw most interesting to me, is the fact that Mr. Shaw is wrong. But it is equally true that the thing in Mr. Shaw most interesting to himself, is the fact that Mr. Shaw is right. Mr. Shaw may have none with him but himself; but it is not for himself he cares. It is for the vast and universal church, of which he is the only member.

The two typical men of genius whom I have mentioned here, and with whose names I have begun this book, are very symbolic, if only because they have shown that the fiercest dogmatists can make the best artists. In the fin de siecle atmosphere every one was crying out that literature should be free from all causes and all ethical creeds. Art was to produce only exquisite workmanship, and it was especially the note of those days to demand brilliant plays and brilliant short stories. And when they got them, they got them from a couple of moralists. The best short stories were written by a man trying to preach Imperialism. The best plays were written by a man trying to preach Socialism. All the art of all the artists looked tiny and tedious beside the art which was a byproduct of propaganda.

The reason, indeed, is very simple. A man cannot be wise enough to be a great artist without being wise enough to wish to be a philosopher. A man cannot have the energy to produce good art without having the energy to wish to pass beyond it. A small artist is content with art; a great artist is content with nothing except everything. So we find that when real forces, good or bad, like Kipling and G. B.
S., enter our arena, they bring with them not only startling and arresting art, but very startling and arresting dogmas. And they care even more, and desire us to care even more, about their startling and arresting dogmas than about their startling and arresting art. Mr. Shaw is a good dramatist, but what he desires more than anything else to be is a good politician. Mr. Rudyard Kipling is by divine caprice and natural genius an unconventional poet; but what he desires more than anything else to be is a conventional poet. He desires to be the poet of his people, bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh, understanding their origins, celebrating their destiny. He desires to be Poet Laureate, a most sensible and honourable and public-spirited desire. Having been given by the gods originality—that is, disagreement with others—he desires divinely to agree with them. But the most striking instance of all, more striking, I think, even than either of these, is the instance of Mr. H. G. Wells. He began in a sort of insane infancy of pure art. He began by making a new heaven and a new earth, with the same irresponsible instinct by which men buy a new necktie or button-hole. He began by trifling with the stars and systems in order to make ephemeral anecdotes; he killed the universe for a joke. He has since become more and more serious, and has become, as men inevitably do when they become more and more serious, more and more parochial. He was frivolous about the twilight of the gods; but he is serious about the London omnibus. He was careless in “The Time Machine,” for that dealt only with the destiny of all things; but he is careful, and even cautious, in “Mankind in the Making,” for that deals with the day after to-morrow. He began with the end of the world, and that was easy. Now he has gone on to the beginning of the world, and that is difficult. But the main result of all this is the same as in the other cases. The men who have really been the bold artists, the realistic artists, the uncompromising artists, are the men who have turned out, after all, to be writing “with a purpose.” Suppose that any cool and cynical art-critic, any art-critic fully impressed with the conviction that artists were greatest when they were most purely artistic, suppose that a man who professed ably a humane aestheticism, as did Mr. Max Beerbohm, or a cruel aestheticism, as did Mr. W. E. Henley, had cast his eye over the whole fictional literature which was recent in the year 1895, and had been asked to select the three most vigorous and promising and original artists and artistic works, he would, I think, most certainly have said that for a fine artistic audacity, for a real artistic delicacy, or for a whiff of true novelty in art, the things that stood first were “Soldiers Three,” by a Mr. Rudyard Kipling; “Arms and the Man,” by a Mr. Bernard Shaw; and “The Time Machine,” by a man called Wells. And all
these men have shown themselves ingrainedly didactic. You may express the matter if you will by saying that if we want doctrines we go to the great artists. But it is clear from the psychology of the matter that this is not the true statement; the true statement is that when we want any art tolerably brisk and bold we have to go to the doctrinaires.

In concluding this book, therefore, I would ask, first and foremost, that men such as these of whom I have spoken should not be insulted by being taken for artists. No man has any right whatever merely to enjoy the work of Mr. Bernard Shaw; he might as well enjoy the invasion of his country by the French. Mr. Shaw writes either to convince or to enrage us. No man has any business to be a Kiplingite without being a politician, and an Imperialist politician. If a man is first with us, it should be because of what is first with him. If a man convinces us at all, it should be by his convictions. If we hate a poem of Kipling’s from political passion, we are hating it for the same reason that the poet loved it; if we dislike him because of his opinions, we are disliking him for the best of all possible reasons. If a man comes into Hyde Park to preach it is permissible to hoot him; but it is discourteous to applaud him as a performing bear. And an artist is only a performing bear compared with the meanest man who fancies he has anything to say.

There is, indeed, one class of modern writers and thinkers who cannot altogether be overlooked in this question, though there is no space here for a lengthy account of them, which, indeed, to confess the truth, would consist chiefly of abuse. I mean those who get over all these abysses and reconcile all these wars by talking about “aspects of truth,” by saying that the art of Kipling represents one aspect of the truth, and the art of William Watson another; the art of Mr. Bernard Shaw one aspect of the truth, and the art of Mr. Cunningham Grahame another; the art of Mr. H. G. Wells one aspect, and the art of Mr. Coventry Patmore (say) another. I will only say here that this seems to me an evasion which has not even had the sense to disguise itself ingeniously in words. If we talk of a certain thing being an aspect of truth, it is evident that we claim to know what is truth; just as, if we talk of the hind leg of a dog, we claim to know what is a dog. Unfortunately, the philosopher who talks about aspects of truth generally also asks, “What is truth?” Frequently even he denies the existence of truth, or says it is inconceivable by the human intelligence. How, then, can he recognize its aspects? I should not like to be an artist who brought an architectural sketch to a builder, saying, “This is the south aspect of Sea-View Cottage. Sea-View Cottage, of course, does not exist.” I should not even like
very much to have to explain, under such circumstances, that Sea-View Cottage might exist, but was unthinkable by the human mind. Nor should I like any better to be the bungling and absurd metaphysician who professed to be able to see everywhere the aspects of a truth that is not there. Of course, it is perfectly obvious that there are truths in Kipling, that there are truths in Shaw or Wells. But the degree to which we can perceive them depends strictly upon how far we have a definite conception inside us of what is truth. It is ludicrous to suppose that the more sceptical we are the more we see good in everything. It is clear that the more we are certain what good is, the more we shall see good in everything.

I plead, then, that we should agree or disagree with these men. I plead that we should agree with them at least in having an abstract belief. But I know that there are current in the modern world many vague objections to having an abstract belief, and I feel that we shall not get any further until we have dealt with some of them. The first objection is easily stated.

A common hesitation in our day touching the use of extreme convictions is a sort of notion that extreme convictions specially upon cosmic matters, have been responsible in the past for the thing which is called bigotry. But a very small amount of direct experience will dissipate this view. In real life the people who are most bigoted are the people who have no convictions at all. The economists of the Manchester school who disagree with Socialism take Socialism seriously. It is the young man in Bond Street, who does not know what socialism means much less whether he agrees with it, who is quite certain that these socialist fellows are making a fuss about nothing. The man who understands the Calvinist philosophy enough to agree with it must understand the Catholic philosophy in order to disagree with it. It is the vague modern who is not at all certain what is right who is most certain that Dante was wrong. The serious opponent of the Latin Church in history, even in the act of showing that it produced great infamies, must know that it produced great saints. It is the hard-headed stockbroker, who knows no history and believes no religion, who is, nevertheless, perfectly convinced that all these priests are knaves. The Salvationist at the Marble Arch may be bigoted, but he is not too bigoted to yearn from a common human kinship after the dandy on church parade. But the dandy on church parade is so bigoted that he does not in the least yearn after the Salvationist at the Marble Arch. Bigotry may be roughly defined as the anger of men who have no opinions. It is the resistance offered to definite ideas by that vague bulk of people whose ideas are indefinite to excess. Bigotry may be called the appalling frenzy of the indifferent. This frenzy of the indifferent is in truth a
terrible thing; it has made all monstrous and widely pervading persecutions. In this degree it was not the people who cared who ever persecuted; the people who cared were not sufficiently numerous. It was the people who did not care who filled the world with fire and oppression. It was the hands of the indifferent that lit the faggots; it was the hands of the indifferent that turned the rack. There have come some persecutions out of the pain of a passionate certainty; but these produced, not bigotry, but fanaticism—a very different and a somewhat admirable thing. Bigotry in the main has always been the pervading omnipotence of those who do not care crushing out those who care in darkness and blood.

There are people, however, who dig somewhat deeper than this into the possible evils of dogma. It is felt by many that strong philosophical conviction, while it does not (as they perceive) produce that sluggish and fundamentally frivolous condition which we call bigotry, does produce a certain concentration, exaggeration, and moral impatience, which we may agree to call fanaticism. They say, in brief, that ideas are dangerous things. In politics, for example, it is commonly urged against a man like Mr. Balfour, or against a man like Mr. John Morley, that a wealth of ideas is dangerous. The true doctrine on this point, again, is surely not very difficult to state. Ideas are dangerous, but the man to whom they are least dangerous is the man of ideas. He is acquainted with ideas, and moves among them like a lion-tamer. Ideas are dangerous, but the man to whom they are most dangerous is the man of no ideas. The man of no ideas will find the first idea fly to his head like wine to the head of a teetotaller. It is a common error, I think, among the Radical idealists of my own party and period to suggest that financiers and business men are a danger to the empire because they are so sordid or so materialistic. The truth is that financiers and business men are a danger to the empire because they can be sentimental about any sentiment, and idealistic about any ideal, any ideal that they find lying about. Just as a boy who has not known much of women is apt too easily to take a woman for the woman, so these practical men, unaccustomed to causes, are always inclined to think that if a thing is proved to be an ideal it is proved to be the ideal. Many, for example, avowedly followed Cecil Rhodes because he had a vision. They might as well have followed him because he had a nose; a man without some kind of dream of perfection is quite as much of a monstrosity as a noseless man. People say of such a figure, in almost feverish whispers, “He knows his own mind,” which is exactly like saying in equally feverish whispers, “He blows his own nose.” Human nature simply cannot subsist without a hope and aim of some kind; as the sanity of the Old Testament truly said, where there
is no vision the people perisheth. But it is precisely because an ideal is necessary to man that the man without ideals is in permanent danger of fanaticism. There is nothing which is so likely to leave a man open to the sudden and irresistible inroad of an unbalanced vision as the cultivation of business habits. All of us know angular business men who think that the earth is flat, or that Mr. Kruger was at the head of a great military despotism, or that men are graminivorous, or that Bacon wrote Shakespeare. Religious and philosophical beliefs are, indeed, as dangerous as fire, and nothing can take from them that beauty of danger. But there is only one way of really guarding ourselves against the excessive danger of them, and that is to be steeped in philosophy and soaked in religion.

Briefly, then, we dismiss the two opposite dangers of bigotry and fanaticism, bigotry which is a too great vagueness and fanaticism which is a too great concentration. We say that the cure for the bigot is belief; we say that the cure for the idealist is ideas. To know the best theories of existence and to choose the best from them (that is, to the best of our own strong conviction) appears to us the proper way to be neither bigot nor fanatic, but something more firm than a bigot and more terrible than a fanatic, a man with a definite opinion. But that definite opinion must in this view begin with the basic matters of human thought, and these must not be dismissed as irrelevant, as religion, for instance, is too often in our days dismissed as irrelevant. Even if we think religion insoluble, we cannot think it irrelevant. Even if we ourselves have no view of the ultimate verities, we must feel that wherever such a view exists in a man it must be more important than anything else in him. The instant that the thing ceases to be the unknowable, it becomes the indispensable. There can be no doubt, I think, that the idea does exist in our time that there is something narrow or irrelevant or even mean about attacking a man’s religion, or arguing from it in matters of politics or ethics. There can be quite as little doubt that such an accusation of narrowness is itself almost grotesquely narrow. To take an example from comparatively current events: we all know that it was not uncommon for a man to be considered a scarecrow of bigotry and obscurantism because he distrusted the Japanese, or lamented the rise of the Japanese, on the ground that the Japanese were Pagans. Nobody would think that there was anything antiquated or fanatical about distrusting a people because of some difference between them and us in practice or political machinery. Nobody would think it bigoted to say of a people, “I distrust their influence because they are Protectionists.” No one would think it narrow to say, “I lament their rise because they are Socialists, or Manchester Individualists, or strong believers in militarism and conscription.” A
difference of opinion about the nature of Parliaments matters very much; but a
difference of opinion about the nature of sin does not matter at all. A difference
of opinion about the object of taxation matters very much; but a difference of
opinion about the object of human existence does not matter at all. We have a
right to distrust a man who is in a different kind of municipality; but we have no
right to mistrust a man who is in a different kind of cosmos. This sort of
enlightenment is surely about the most unenlightened that it is possible to
imagine. To recur to the phrase which I employed earlier, this is tantamount to
saying that everything is important with the exception of everything. Religion is
exactly the thing which cannot be left out—because it includes everything. The
most absent-minded person cannot well pack his Gladstone-bag and leave out
the bag. We have a general view of existence, whether we like it or not; it alters
or, to speak more accurately, it creates and involves everything we say or do,
whether we like it or not. If we regard the Cosmos as a dream, we regard the
Fiscal Question as a dream. If we regard the Cosmos as a joke, we regard St.
Paul’s Cathedral as a joke. If everything is bad, then we must believe (if it be
possible) that beer is bad; if everything be good, we are forced to the rather
fantastic conclusion that scientific philanthropy is good. Every man in the street
must hold a metaphysical system, and hold it firmly. The possibility is that he
may have held it so firmly and so long as to have forgotten all about its
existence.

This latter situation is certainly possible; in fact, it is the situation of the whole
modern world. The modern world is filled with men who hold dogmas so
strongly that they do not even know that they are dogmas. It may be said even
that the modern world, as a corporate body, holds certain dogmas so strongly
that it does not know that they are dogmas. It may be thought “dogmatic,” for
instance, in some circles accounted progressive, to assume the perfection or
improvement of man in another world. But it is not thought “dogmatic” to
assume the perfection or improvement of man in this world; though that idea of
progress is quite as unproved as the idea of immortality, and from a rationalistic
point of view quite as improbable. Progress happens to be one of our dogmas,
and a dogma means a thing which is not thought dogmatic. Or, again, we see
nothing “dogmatic” in the inspiring, but certainly most startling, theory of
physical science, that we should collect facts for the sake of facts, even though
they seem as useless as sticks and straws. This is a great and suggestive idea, and
its utility may, if you will, be proving itself, but its utility is, in the abstract, quite
as disputable as the utility of that calling on oracles or consulting shrines which
is also said to prove itself. Thus, because we are not in a civilization which believes strongly in oracles or sacred places, we see the full frenzy of those who killed themselves to find the sepulchre of Christ. But being in a civilization which does believe in this dogma of fact for facts’ sake, we do not see the full frenzy of those who kill themselves to find the North Pole. I am not speaking of a tenable ultimate utility which is true both of the Crusades and the polar explorations. I mean merely that we do see the superficial and aesthetic singularity, the startling quality, about the idea of men crossing a continent with armies to conquer the place where a man died. But we do not see the aesthetic singularity and startling quality of men dying in agonies to find a place where no man can live—a place only interesting because it is supposed to be the meeting-place of some lines that do not exist.

Let us, then, go upon a long journey and enter on a dreadful search. Let us, at least, dig and seek till we have discovered our own opinions. The dogmas we really hold are far more fantastic, and, perhaps, far more beautiful than we think. In the course of these essays I fear that I have spoken from time to time of rationalists and rationalism, and that in a disparaging sense. Being full of that kindliness which should come at the end of everything, even of a book, I apologize to the rationalists even for calling them rationalists. There are no rationalists. We all believe fairy-tales, and live in them. Some, with a sumptuous literary turn, believe in the existence of the lady clothed with the sun. Some, with a more rustic, elvish instinct, like Mr. McCabe, believe merely in the impossible sun itself. Some hold the undemonstrable dogma of the existence of God; some the equally undemonstrable dogma of the existence of the man next door.

Truths turn into dogmas the instant that they are disputed. Thus every man who utters a doubt defines a religion. And the scepticism of our time does not really destroy the beliefs, rather it creates them; gives them their limits and their plain and defiant shape. We who are Liberals once held Liberalism lightly as a truism. Now it has been disputed, and we hold it fiercely as a faith. We who believe in patriotism once thought patriotism to be reasonable, and thought little more about it. Now we know it to be unreasonable, and know it to be right. We who are Christians never knew the great philosophic common sense which inheres in that mystery until the anti-Christian writers pointed it out to us. The great march of mental destruction will go on. Everything will be denied. Everything will become a creed. It is a reasonable position to deny the stones in the street; it will be a religious dogma to assert them. It is a rational thesis that
we are all in a dream; it will be a mystical sanity to say that we are all awake. Fires will be kindled to testify that two and two make four. Swords will be drawn to prove that leaves are green in summer. We shall be left defending, not only the incredible virtues and sanities of human life, but something more incredible still, this huge impossible universe which stares us in the face. We shall fight for visible prodigies as if they were invisible. We shall look on the impossible grass and the skies with a strange courage. We shall be of those who have seen and yet have believed.
ORTHODOXY

G. K. CHESTERTON
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**INDEX**

**ORTHODOXY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION IN DEFENCE OF EVERYTHING ELSE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>THE MANIAC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>THE SUICIDE OF THOUGHT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>THE ETHICS OF ELFLAND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>THE FLAG OF THE WORLD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>THE PARADOXES OF CHRISTIANITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>THE ETERNAL REVOLUTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>THE ROMANCE OF ORTHODOXY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX</td>
<td>AUTHORITY AND THE ADVENTURER</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I

INTRODUCTION IN DEFENCE OF EVERYTHING ELSE

THE only possible excuse for this book is that it is an answer to a challenge. Even a bad shot is dignified when he accepts a duel. When some time ago I published a series of hasty but sincere papers, under the name of “Heretics,” several critics for whose intellect I have a warm respect (I may mention specially Mr. G.S.Street) said that it was all very well for me to tell everybody to affirm his cosmic theory, but that I had carefully avoided supporting my precepts with example. “I will begin to worry about my philosophy,” said Mr. Street, “when Mr. Chesterton has given us his.” It was perhaps an incautious suggestion to make to a person only too ready to write books upon the feeblest provocation. But after all, though Mr. Street has inspired and created this book, he need not read it. If he does read it, he will find that in its pages I have attempted in a vague and personal way, in a set of mental pictures rather than in a series of deductions, to state the philosophy in which I have come to believe. I will not call it my philosophy; for I did not make it. God and humanity made it; and it made me.

I have often had a fancy for writing a romance about an English yachtsman who slightly miscalculated his course and discovered England under the impression that it was a new island in the South Seas. I always find, however, that I am either too busy or too lazy to write this fine work, so I may as well give it away for the purposes of philosophical illustration. There will probably be a general impression that the man who landed (armed to the teeth and talking by signs) to plant the British flag on that barbaric temple which turned out to be the Pavilion at Brighton, felt rather a fool. I am not here concerned to deny that he looked a fool. But if you imagine that he felt a fool, or at any rate that the sense of folly was his sole or his dominant emotion, then you have not studied with sufficient delicacy the rich romantic nature of the hero of this tale. His mistake was really a most enviable mistake; and he knew it, if he was the man I take him for. What could be more delightful than to have in the same few minutes all the fascinating terrors of going abroad combined with all the humane security of coming home again? What could be better than to have all the fun of discovering South Africa without the disgusting necessity of landing there? What could be more glorious than to brace one’s self up to discover New South Wales and then
realize, with a gush of happy tears, that it was really old South Wales. This at least seems to me the main problem for philosophers, and is in a manner the main problem of this book. How can we contrive to be at once astonished at the world and yet at home in it? How can this queer cosmic town, with its many-legged citizens, with its monstrous and ancient lamps, how can this world give us at once the fascination of a strange town and the comfort and honour of being our own town?

To show that a faith or a philosophy is true from every standpoint would be too big an undertaking even for a much bigger book than this; it is necessary to follow one path of argument; and this is the path that I here propose to follow. I wish to set forth my faith as particularly answering this double spiritual need, the need for that mixture of the familiar and the unfamiliar which Christendom has rightly named romance. For the very word “romance” has in it the mystery and ancient meaning of Rome. Any one setting out to dispute anything ought always to begin by saying what he does not dispute. Beyond stating what he proposes to prove he should always state what he does not propose to prove. The thing I do not propose to prove, the thing I propose to take as common ground between myself and any average reader, is this desirability of an active and imaginative life, picturesque and full of a poetical curiosity, a life such as western man at any rate always seems to have desired. If a man says that extinction is better than existence or blank existence better than variety and adventure, then he is not one of the ordinary people to whom I am talking. If a man prefers nothing I can give him nothing. But nearly all people I have ever met in this western society in which I live would agree to the general proposition that we need this life of practical romance; the combination of something that is strange with something that is secure. We need so to view the world as to combine an idea of wonder and an idea of welcome. We need to be happy in this wonderland without once being merely comfortable. It is THIS achievement of my creed that I shall chiefly pursue in these pages.

But I have a peculiar reason for mentioning the man in a yacht, who discovered England. For I am that man in a yacht. I discovered England. I do not see how this book can avoid being egotistical; and I do not quite see (to tell the truth) how it can avoid being dull. Dulness will, however, free me from the charge which I most lament; the charge of being flippant. Mere light sophistry is the thing that I happen to despise most of all things, and it is perhaps a wholesome fact that this is the thing of which I am generally accused. I know nothing so contemptible as a mere paradox; a mere ingenious defence of the
indefensible. If it were true (as has been said) that Mr. Bernard Shaw lived upon paradox, then he ought to be a mere common millionaire; for a man of his mental activity could invent a sophistry every six minutes. It is as easy as lying; because it is lying. The truth is, of course, that Mr. Shaw is cruelly hampered by the fact that he cannot tell any lie unless he thinks it is the truth. I find myself under the same intolerable bondage. I never in my life said anything merely because I thought it funny; though of course, I have had ordinary human vainglory, and may have thought it funny because I had said it. It is one thing to describe an interview with a gorgon or a griffin, a creature who does not exist. It is another thing to discover that the rhinoceros does exist and then take pleasure in the fact that he looks as if he didn’t. One searches for truth, but it may be that one pursues instinctively the more extraordinary truths. And I offer this book with the heartiest sentiments to all the jolly people who hate what I write, and regard it (very justly, for all I know), as a piece of poor clowning or a single tiresome joke.

For if this book is a joke it is a joke against me. I am the man who with the utmost daring discovered what had been discovered before. If there is an element of farce in what follows, the farce is at my own expense; for this book explains how I fancied I was the first to set foot in Brighton and then found I was the last. It recounts my elephantine adventures in pursuit of the obvious. No one can think my case more ludicrous than I think it myself; no reader can accuse me here of trying to make a fool of him: I am the fool of this story, and no rebel shall hurl me from my throne. I freely confess all the idiotic ambitions of the end of the nineteenth century. I did, like all other solemn little boys, try to be in advance of the age. Like them I tried to be some ten minutes in advance of the truth. And I found that I was eighteen hundred years behind it. I did strain my voice with a painfully juvenile exaggeration in uttering my truths. And I was punished in the fittest and funniest way, for I have kept my truths: but I have discovered, not that they were not truths, but simply that they were not mine. When I fancied that I stood alone I was really in the ridiculous position of being backed up by all Christendom. It may be, Heaven forgive me, that I did try to be original; but I only succeeded in inventing all by myself an inferior copy of the existing traditions of civilized religion. The man from the yacht thought he was the first to find England; I thought I was the first to find Europe. I did try to found a heresy of my own; and when I had put the last touches to it, I discovered that it was orthodoxy.

It may be that somebody will be entertained by the account of this happy
fiasco. It might amuse a friend or an enemy to read how I gradually learnt from
the truth of some stray legend or from the falsehood of some dominant
philosophy, things that I might have learnt from my catechism—if I had ever
learnt it. There may or may not be some entertainment in reading how I found at
last in an anarchist club or a Babylonian temple what I might have found in the
nearest parish church. If any one is entertained by learning how the flowers of
the field or the phrases in an omnibus, the accidents of politics or the pains of
youth came together in a certain order to produce a certain conviction of
Christian orthodoxy, he may possibly read this book. But there is in everything a
reasonable division of labour. I have written the book, and nothing on earth
would induce me to read it.

I add one purely pedantic note which comes, as a note naturally should, at the
beginning of the book. These essays are concerned only to discuss the actual fact
that the central Christian theology (sufficiently summarized in the Apostles’
Creed) is the best root of energy and sound ethics. They are not intended to
discuss the very fascinating but quite different question of what is the present
seat of authority for the proclamation of that creed. When the word “orthodoxy”
is used here it means the Apostles’ Creed, as understood by everybody calling
himself Christian until a very short time ago and the general historic conduct of
those who held such a creed. I have been forced by mere space to confine myself
to what I have got from this creed; I do not touch the matter much disputed
among modern Christians, of where we ourselves got it. This is not an
ecclesiastical treatise but a sort of slovenly autobiography. But if any one wants
my opinions about the actual nature of the authority, Mr. G.S.Street has only to
throw me another challenge, and I will write him another book.
II

THE MANIAC

Thoroughly worldly people never understand even the world; they rely altogether on a few cynical maxims which are not true. Once I remember walking with a prosperous publisher, who made a remark which I had often heard before; it is, indeed, almost a motto of the modern world. Yet I had heard it once too often, and I saw suddenly that there was nothing in it. The publisher said of somebody, “That man will get on; he believes in himself.” And I remember that as I lifted my head to listen, my eye caught an omnibus on which was written “Hanwell.” I said to him, “Shall I tell you where the men are who believe most in themselves? For I can tell you. I know of men who believe in themselves more colossally than Napoleon or Caesar. I know where flames the fixed star of certainty and success. I can guide you to the thrones of the Supermen. The men who really believe in themselves are all in lunatic asylums.” He said mildly that there were a good many men after all who believed in themselves and who were not in lunatic asylums. “Yes, there are,” I retorted, “and you of all men ought to know them. That drunken poet from whom you would not take a dreary tragedy, he believed in himself. That elderly minister with an epic from whom you were hiding in a back room, he believed in himself. If you consulted your business experience instead of your ugly individualistic philosophy, you would know that believing in himself is one of the commonest signs of a rotter. Actors who can’t act believe in themselves; and debtors who won’t pay. It would be much truer to say that a man will certainly fail, because he believes in himself. Complete self-confidence is not merely a sin; complete self-confidence is a weakness. Believing utterly in one’s self is a hysterical and superstitious belief like believing in Joanna Southcote: the man who has it has ‘Hanwell’ written on his face as plain as it is written on that omnibus.” And to all this my friend the publisher made this very deep and effective reply, “Well, if a man is not to believe in himself, in what is he to believe?” After a long pause I replied, “I will go home and write a book in answer to that question.” This is the book that I have written in answer to it.

But I think this book may well start where our argument started—in the neighbourhood of the mad-house. Modern masters of science are much impressed with the need of beginning all inquiry with a fact. The ancient masters
of religion were quite equally impressed with that necessity. They began with
the fact of sin—a fact as practical as potatoes. Whether or no man could be
washed in miraculous waters, there was no doubt at any rate that he wanted
washing. But certain religious leaders in London, not mere materialists, have
begun in our day not to deny the highly disputable water, but to deny the
indisputable dirt. Certain new theologians dispute original sin, which is the only
part of Christian theology which can really be proved. Some followers of the
Reverend R.J.Campbell, in their almost too fastidious spirituality, admit divine
sinlessness, which they cannot see even in their dreams. But they essentially
deny human sin, which they can see in the street. The strongest saints and the
strongest sceptics alike took positive evil as the starting-point of their argument.
If it be true (as it certainly is) that a man can feel exquisite happiness in skinning
a cat, then the religious philosopher can only draw one of two deductions. He
must either deny the existence of God, as all atheists do; or he must deny the
present union between God and man, as all Christians do. The new theologians
seem to think it a highly rationalistic solution to deny the cat.

In this remarkable situation it is plainly not now possible (with any hope of a
universal appeal) to start, as our fathers did, with the fact of sin. This very fact
which was to them (and is to me) as plain as a pikestaff, is the very fact that has
been specially diluted or denied. But though moderns deny the existence of sin, I
do not think that they have yet denied the existence of a lunatic asylum. We all
agree still that there is a collapse of the intellect as unmistakable as a falling
house. Men deny hell, but not, as yet, Hanwell. For the purpose of our primary
argument the one may very well stand where the other stood. I mean that as all
thoughts and theories were once judged by whether they tended to make a man
lose his soul, so for our present purpose all modern thoughts and theories may be
judged by whether they tend to make a man lose his wits.

It is true that some speak lightly and loosely of insanity as in itself attractive.
But a moment’s thought will show that if disease is beautiful, it is generally
some one else’s disease. A blind man may be picturesque; but it requires two
eyes to see the picture. And similarly even the wildest poetry of insanity can
only be enjoyed by the sane. To the insane man his insanity is quite prosaic,
because it is quite true. A man who thinks himself a chicken is to himself as
ordinary as a chicken. A man who thinks he is a bit of glass is to himself as dull
as a bit of glass. It is the homogeneity of his mind which makes him dull, and
which makes him mad. It is only because we see the irony of his idea that we
think him even amusing; it is only because he does not see the irony of his idea
that he is put in Hanwell at all. In short, oddities only strike ordinary people. Oddities do not strike odd people. This is why ordinary people have a much more exciting time; while odd people are always complaining of the dulness of life. This is also why the new novels die so quickly, and why the old fairy tales endure for ever. The old fairy tale makes the hero a normal human boy; it is his adventures that are startling; they startle him because he is normal. But in the modern psychological novel the hero is abnormal; the centre is not central. Hence the fiercest adventures fail to affect him adequately, and the book is monotonous. You can make a story out of a hero among dragons; but not out of a dragon among dragons. The fairy tale discusses what a sane man will do in a mad world. The sober realistic novel of to-day discusses what an essential lunatic will do in a dull world.

Let us begin, then, with the mad-house; from this evil and fantastic inn let us set forth on our intellectual journey. Now, if we are to glance at the philosophy of sanity, the first thing to do in the matter is to blot out one big and common mistake. There is a notion adrift everywhere that imagination, especially mystical imagination, is dangerous to man’s mental balance. Poets are commonly spoken of as psychologically unreliable; and generally there is a vague association between wreathing laurels in your hair and sticking straws in it. Facts and history utterly contradict this view. Most of the very great poets have been not only sane, but extremely business-like; and if Shakespeare ever really held horses, it was because he was much the safest man to hold them. Imagination does not breed insanity. Exactly what does breed insanity is reason. Poets do not go mad; but chess-players do. Mathematicians go mad, and cashiers; but creative artists very seldom. I am not, as will be seen, in any sense attacking logic: I only say that this danger does lie in logic, not in imagination. Artistic paternity is as wholesome as physical paternity. Moreover, it is worthy of remark that when a poet really was morbid it was commonly because he had some weak spot of rationality on his brain. Poe, for instance, really was morbid; not because he was poetical, but because he was specially analytical. Even chess was too poetical for him; he disliked chess because it was full of knights and castles, like a poem. He avowedly preferred the black discs of draughts, because they were more like the mere black dots on a diagram. Perhaps the strongest case of all is this: that only one great English poet went mad, Cowper. And he was definitely driven mad by logic, by the ugly and alien logic of predestination. Poetry was not the disease, but the medicine; poetry partly kept him in health. He could sometimes forget the red and thirsty hell to which his hideous
necessitarianism dragged him among the wide waters and the white flat lilies of
the Ouse. He was damned by John Calvin; he was almost saved by John Gilpin. Every where we see that men do not go mad by dreaming. Critics are much madder than poets. Homer is complete and calm enough; it is his critics who tear him into extravagant tatters. Shakespeare is quite himself; it is only some of his critics who have discovered that he was somebody else. And though St. John the Evangelist saw many strange monsters in his vision, he saw no creature so wild as one of his own commentators. The general fact is simple. Poetry is sane because it floats easily in an infinite sea; reason seeks to cross the infinite sea, and so make it finite. The result is mental exhaustion, like the physical exhaustion of Mr. Holbein. To accept everything is an exercise, to understand everything a strain. The poet only desires exaltation and expansion, a world to stretch himself in. The poet only asks to get his head into the heavens. It is the logician who seeks to get the heavens into his head. And it is his head that splits.

It is a small matter, but not irrelevant, that this striking mistake is commonly supported by a striking misquotation. We have all heard people cite the celebrated line of Dryden as “Great genius is to madness near allied.” But Dryden did not say that great genius was to madness near allied. Dryden was a great genius himself, and knew better. It would have been hard to find a man more romantic than he, or more sensible. What Dryden said was this, “Great wits are oft to madness near allied”; and that is true. It is the pure promptitude of the intellect that is in peril of a breakdown. Also people might remember of what sort of man Dryden was talking. He was not talking of any unworldly visionary like Vaughan or George Herbert. He was talking of a cynical man of the world, a sceptic, a diplomatist, a great practical politician. Such men are indeed to madness near allied. Their incessant calculation of their own brains and other people’s brains is a dangerous trade. It is always perilous to the mind to reckon up the mind. A flippant person has asked why we say, “As mad as a hatter.” A more flippant person might answer that a hatter is mad because he has to measure the human head.

And if great reasoners are often maniacal, it is equally true that maniacs are commonly great reasoners. When I was engaged in a controversy with the CLARION on the matter of free will, that able writer Mr. R.B.Suthers said that free will was lunacy, because it meant causeless actions, and the actions of a lunatic would be causeless. I do not dwell here upon the disastrous lapse in determinist logic. Obviously if any actions, even a lunatic’s, can be causeless, determinism is done for. If the chain of causation can be broken for a madman, it
can be broken for a man. But my purpose is to point out something more practical. It was natural, perhaps, that a modern Marxian Socialist should not know anything about free will. But it was certainly remarkable that a modern Marxian Socialist should not know anything about lunatics. Mr. Suthers evidently did not know anything about lunatics. The last thing that can be said of a lunatic is that his actions are causeless. If any human acts may loosely be called causeless, they are the minor acts of a healthy man; whistling as he walks; slashing the grass with a stick; kicking his heels or rubbing his hands. It is the happy man who does the useless things; the sick man is not strong enough to be idle. It is exactly such careless and causeless actions that the madman could never understand; for the madman (like the determinist) generally sees too much cause in everything. The madman would read a conspiratorial significance into those empty activities. He would think that the lopping of the grass was an attack on private property. He would think that the kicking of the heels was a signal to an accomplice. If the madman could for an instant become careless, he would become sane. Every one who has had the misfortune to talk with people in the heart or on the edge of mental disorder, knows that their most sinister quality is a horrible clarity of detail; a connecting of one thing with another in a map more elaborate than a maze. If you argue with a madman, it is extremely probable that you will get the worst of it; for in many ways his mind moves all the quicker for not being delayed by the things that go with good judgment. He is not hampered by a sense of humour or by charity, or by the dumb certainties of experience. He is the more logical for losing certain sane affections. Indeed, the common phrase for insanity is in this respect a misleading one. The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason.

The madman’s explanation of a thing is always complete, and often in a purely rational sense satisfactory. Or, to speak more strictly, the insane explanation, if not conclusive, is at least unanswerable; this may be observed specially in the two or three commonest kinds of madness. If a man says (for instance) that men have a conspiracy against him, you cannot dispute it except by saying that all the men deny that they are conspirators; which is exactly what conspirators would do. His explanation covers the facts as much as yours. Or if a man says that he is the rightful King of England, it is no complete answer to say that the existing authorities call him mad; for if he were King of England that might be the wisest thing for the existing authorities to do. Or if a man says that he is Jesus Christ, it is no answer to tell him that the world denies his divinity;
for the world denied Christ’s.

Nevertheless he is wrong. But if we attempt to trace his error in exact terms, we shall not find it quite so easy as we had supposed. Perhaps the nearest we can get to expressing it is to say this: that his mind moves in a perfect but narrow circle. A small circle is quite as infinite as a large circle; but, though it is quite as infinite, it is not so large. In the same way the insane explanation is quite as complete as the sane one, but it is not so large. A bullet is quite as round as the world, but it is not the world. There is such a thing as a narrow universality; there is such a thing as a small and cramped eternity; you may see it in many modern religions. Now, speaking quite externally and empirically, we may say that the strongest and most unmistakable MARK of madness is this combination between a logical completeness and a spiritual contraction. The lunatic’s theory explains a large number of things, but it does not explain them in a large way. I mean that if you or I were dealing with a mind that was growing morbid, we should be chiefly concerned not so much to give it arguments as to give it air, to convince it that there was something cleaner and cooler outside the suffocation of a single argument. Suppose, for instance, it were the first case that I took as typical; suppose it were the case of a man who accused everybody of conspiring against him. If we could express our deepest feelings of protest and appeal against this obsession, I suppose we should say something like this: “Oh, I admit that you have your case and have it by heart, and that many things do fit into other things as you say. I admit that your explanation explains a great deal; but what a great deal it leaves out! Are there no other stories in the world except yours; and are all men busy with your business? Suppose we grant the details; perhaps when the man in the street did not seem to see you it was only his cunning; perhaps when the policeman asked you your name it was only because he knew it already. But how much happier you would be if you only knew that these people cared nothing about you! How much larger your life would be if your self could become smaller in it; if you could really look at other men with common curiosity and pleasure; if you could see them walking as they are in their sunny selfishness and their virile indifference! You would begin to be interested in them, because they were not interested in you. You would break out of this tiny and tawdry theatre in which your own little plot is always being played, and you would find yourself under a freer sky, in a street full of splendid strangers.” Or suppose it were the second case of madness, that of a man who claims the crown, your impulse would be to answer, “All right! Perhaps you know that you are the King of England; but why do you care? Make one
magnificent effort and you will be a human being and look down on all the kings of the earth.” Or it might be the third case, of the madman who called himself Christ. If we said what we felt, we should say, “So you are the Creator and Redeemer of the world: but what a small world it must be! What a little heaven you must inhabit, with angels no bigger than butterflies! How sad it must be to be God; and an inadequate God! Is there really no life fuller and no love more marvellous than yours; and is it really in your small and painful pity that all flesh must put its faith? How much happier you would be, how much more of you there would be, if the hammer of a higher God could smash your small cosmos, scattering the stars like spangles, and leave you in the open, free like other men to look up as well as down!”

And it must be remembered that the most purely practical science does take this view of mental evil; it does not seek to argue with it like a heresy but simply to snap it like a spell. Neither modern science nor ancient religion believes in complete free thought. Theology rebukes certain thoughts by calling them blasphemous. Science rebukes certain thoughts by calling them morbid. For example, some religious societies discouraged men more or less from thinking about sex. The new scientific society definitely discourages men from thinking about death; it is a fact, but it is considered a morbid fact. And in dealing with those whose morbidity has a touch of mania, modern science cares far less for pure logic than a dancing Dervish. In these cases it is not enough that the unhappy man should desire truth; he must desire health. Nothing can save him but a blind hunger for normality, like that of a beast. A man cannot think himself out of mental evil; for it is actually the organ of thought that has become diseased, ungovernable, and, as it were, independent. He can only be saved by will or faith. The moment his mere reason moves, it moves in the old circular rut; he will go round and round his logical circle, just as a man in a third-class carriage on the Inner Circle will go round and round the Inner Circle unless he performs the voluntary, vigorous, and mystical act of getting out at Gower Street. Decision is the whole business here; a door must be shut for ever. Every remedy is a desperate remedy. Every cure is a miraculous cure. Curing a madman is not arguing with a philosopher; it is casting out a devil. And however quietly doctors and psychologists may go to work in the matter, their attitude is profoundly intolerant—as intolerant as Bloody Mary. Their attitude is really this: that the man must stop thinking, if he is to go on living. Their counsel is one of intellectual amputation. If thy HEAD offend thee, cut it off; for it is better, not merely to enter the Kingdom of Heaven as a child, but to enter it as an imbecile,
rather than with your whole intellect to be cast into hell—or into Hanwell.

Such is the madman of experience; he is commonly a reasoner, frequently a successful reasoner. Doubtless he could be vanquished in mere reason, and the case against him put logically. But it can be put much more precisely in more general and even aesthetic terms. He is in the clean and well-lit prison of one idea: he is sharpened to one painful point. He is without healthy hesitation and healthy complexity. Now, as I explain in the introduction, I have determined in these early chapters to give not so much a diagram of a doctrine as some pictures of a point of view. And I have described at length my vision of the maniac for this reason: that just as I am affected by the maniac, so I am affected by most modern thinkers. That unmistakable mood or note that I hear from Hanwell, I hear also from half the chairs of science and seats of learning to-day; and most of the mad doctors are mad doctors in more senses than one. They all have exactly that combination we have noted: the combination of an expansive and exhaustive reason with a contracted common sense. They are universal only in the sense that they take one thin explanation and carry it very far. But a pattern can stretch for ever and still be a small pattern. They see a chess-board white on black, and if the universe is paved with it, it is still white on black. Like the lunatic, they cannot alter their standpoint; they cannot make a mental effort and suddenly see it black on white.

Take first the more obvious case of materialism. As an explanation of the world, materialism has a sort of insane simplicity. It has just the quality of the madman’s argument; we have at once the sense of it covering everything and the sense of it leaving everything out. Contemplate some able and sincere materialist, as, for instance, Mr. McCabe, and you will have exactly this unique sensation. He understands everything, and everything does not seem worth understanding. His cosmos may be complete in every rivet and cog-wheel, but still his cosmos is smaller than our world. Somehow his scheme, like the lucid scheme of the madman, seems unconscious of the alien energies and the large indifference of the earth; it is not thinking of the real things of the earth, of fighting peoples or proud mothers, or first love or fear upon the sea. The earth is so very large, and the cosmos is so very small. The cosmos is about the smallest hole that a man can hide his head in.

It must be understood that I am not now discussing the relation of these creeds to truth; but, for the present, solely their relation to health. Later in the argument I hope to attack the question of objective verity; here I speak only of a phenomenon of psychology. I do not for the present attempt to prove to Haeckel
that materialism is untrue, any more than I attempted to prove to the man who thought he was Christ that he was labouring under an error. I merely remark here on the fact that both cases have the same kind of completeness and the same kind of incompleteness. You can explain a man’s detention at Hanwell by an indifferent public by saying that it is the crucifixion of a god of whom the world is not worthy. The explanation does explain. Similarly you may explain the order in the universe by saying that all things, even the souls of men, are leaves inevitably unfolding on an utterly unconscious tree—the blind destiny of matter. The explanation does explain, though not, of course, so completely as the madman’s. But the point here is that the normal human mind not only objects to both, but feels to both the same objection. Its approximate statement is that if the man in Hanwell is the real God, he is not much of a god. And, similarly, if the cosmos of the materialist is the real cosmos, it is not much of a cosmos. The thing has shrunk. The deity is less divine than many men; and (according to Haeckel) the whole of life is something much more grey, narrow, and trivial than many separate aspects of it. The parts seem greater than the whole.

For we must remember that the materialist philosophy (whether true or not) is certainly much more limiting than any religion. In one sense, of course, all intelligent ideas are narrow. They cannot be broader than themselves. A Christian is only restricted in the same sense that an atheist is restricted. He cannot think Christianity false and continue to be a Christian; and the atheist cannot think atheism false and continue to be an atheist. But as it happens, there is a very special sense in which materialism has more restrictions than spiritualism. Mr. McCabe thinks me a slave because I am not allowed to believe in determinism. I think Mr. McCabe a slave because he is not allowed to believe in fairies. But if we examine the two vetoes we shall see that his is really much more of a pure veto than mine. The Christian is quite free to believe that there is a considerable amount of settled order and inevitable development in the universe. But the materialist is not allowed to admit into his spotless machine the slightest speck of spiritualism or miracle. Poor Mr. McCabe is not allowed to retain even the tiniest imp, though it might be hiding in a pimpernel. The Christian admits that the universe is manifold and even miscellaneous, just as a sane man knows that he is complex. The sane man knows that he has a touch of the beast, a touch of the devil, a touch of the saint, a touch of the citizen. Nay, the really sane man knows that he has a touch of the madman. But the materialist’s world is quite simple and solid, just as the madman is quite sure he is sane. The materialist is sure that history has been simply and solely a chain of
causation, just as the interesting person before mentioned is quite sure that he is simply and solely a chicken. Materialists and madmen never have doubts.

Spiritual doctrines do not actually limit the mind as do materialistic denials. Even if I believe in immortality I need not think about it. But if I disbelieve in immortality I must not think about it. In the first case the road is open and I can go as far as I like; in the second the road is shut. But the case is even stronger, and the parallel with madness is yet more strange. For it was our case against the exhaustive and logical theory of the lunatic that, right or wrong, it gradually destroyed his humanity. Now it is the charge against the main deductions of the materialist that, right or wrong, they gradually destroy his humanity; I do not mean only kindness, I mean hope, courage, poetry, initiative, all that is human. For instance, when materialism leads men to complete fatalism (as it generally does), it is quite idle to pretend that it is in any sense a liberating force. It is absurd to say that you are especially advancing freedom when you only use free thought to destroy free will. The determinists come to bind, not to loose. They may well call their law the “chain” of causation. It is the worst chain that ever fettered a human being. You may use the language of liberty, if you like, about materialistic teaching, but it is obvious that this is just as inapplicable to it as a whole as the same language when applied to a man locked up in a mad-house. You may say, if you like, that the man is free to think himself a poached egg. But it is surely a more massive and important fact that if he is a poached egg he is not free to eat, drink, sleep, walk, or smoke a cigarette. Similarly you may say, if you like, that the bold determinist speculator is free to disbelieve in the reality of the will. But it is a much more massive and important fact that he is not free to raise, to curse, to thank, to justify, to urge, to punish, to resist temptations, to incite mobs, to make New Year resolutions, to pardon sinners, to rebuke tyrants, or even to say “thank you” for the mustard.

In passing from this subject I may note that there is a queer fallacy to the effect that materialistic fatalism is in some way favourable to mercy, to the abolition of cruel punishments or punishments of any kind. This is startlingly the reverse of the truth. It is quite tenable that the doctrine of necessity makes no difference at all; that it leaves the flogger flogging and the kind friend exhorting as before. But obviously if it stops either of them it stops the kind exhortation. That the sins are inevitable does not prevent punishment; if it prevents anything it prevents persuasion. Determinism is quite as likely to lead to cruelty as it is certain to lead to cowardice. Determinism is not inconsistent with the cruel treatment of criminals. What it is (perhaps) inconsistent with is the generous
treatment of criminals; with any appeal to their better feelings or encouragement in their moral struggle. The determinist does not believe in appealing to the will, but he does believe in changing the environment. He must not say to the sinner, “Go and sin no more,” because the sinner cannot help it. But he can put him in boiling oil; for boiling oil is an environment. Considered as a figure, therefore, the materialist has the fantastic outline of the figure of the madman. Both take up a position at once unanswerable and intolerable.

Of course it is not only of the materialist that all this is true. The same would apply to the other extreme of speculative logic. There is a sceptic far more terrible than he who believes that everything began in matter. It is possible to meet the sceptic who believes that everything began in himself. He doubts not the existence of angels or devils, but the existence of men and cows. For him his own friends are a mythology made up by himself. He created his own father and his own mother. This horrible fancy has in it something decidedly attractive to the somewhat mystical egoism of our day. That publisher who thought that men would get on if they believed in themselves, those seekers after the Superman who are always looking for him in the looking-glass, those writers who talk about impressing their personalities instead of creating life for the world, all these people have really only an inch between them and this awful emptiness. Then when this kindly world all round the man has been blackened out like a lie; when friends fade into ghosts, and the foundations of the world fail; then when the man, believing in nothing and in no man, is alone in his own nightmare, then the great individualistic motto shall be written over him in avenging irony. The stars will be only dots in the blackness of his own brain; his mother’s face will be only a sketch from his own insane pencil on the walls of his cell. But over his cell shall be written, with dreadful truth, “He believes in himself.”

All that concerns us here, however, is to note that this panegoistic extreme of thought exhibits the same paradox as the other extreme of materialism. It is equally complete in theory and equally crippling in practice. For the sake of simplicity, it is easier to state the notion by saying that a man can believe that he is always in a dream. Now, obviously there can be no positive proof given to him that he is not in a dream, for the simple reason that no proof can be offered that might not be offered in a dream. But if the man began to burn down London and say that his housekeeper would soon call him to breakfast, we should take him and put him with other logicians in a place which has often been alluded to in the course of this chapter. The man who cannot believe his senses, and the man who cannot believe anything else, are both insane, but their insanity is
proved not by any error in their argument, but by the manifest mistake of their whole lives. They have both locked themselves up in two boxes, painted inside with the sun and stars; they are both unable to get out, the one into the health and happiness of heaven, the other even into the health and happiness of the earth. Their position is quite reasonable; nay, in a sense it is infinitely reasonable, just as a threepenny bit is infinitely circular. But there is such a thing as a mean infinity, a base and slavish eternity. It is amusing to notice that many of the moderns, whether sceptics or mystics, have taken as their sign a certain eastern symbol, which is the very symbol of this ultimate nullity. When they wish to represent eternity, they represent it by a serpent with his tail in his mouth. There is a startling sarcasm in the image of that very unsatisfactory meal. The eternity of the material fatalists, the eternity of the eastern pessimists, the eternity of the supercilious theosophists and higher scientists of to-day is, indeed, very well presented by a serpent eating his tail, a degraded animal who destroys even himself.

This chapter is purely practical and is concerned with what actually is the chief mark and element of insanity; we may say in summary that it is reason used without root, reason in the void. The man who begins to think without the proper first principles goes mad; he begins to think at the wrong end. And for the rest of these pages we have to try and discover what is the right end. But we may ask in conclusion, if this be what drives men mad, what is it that keeps them sane? By the end of this book I hope to give a definite, some will think a far too definite, answer. But for the moment it is possible in the same solely practical manner to give a general answer touching what in actual human history keeps men sane. Mysticism keeps men sane. As long as you have mystery you have health; when you destroy mystery you create morbidity. The ordinary man has always been sane because the ordinary man has always been a mystic. He has permitted the twilight. He has always had one foot in earth and the other in fairyland. He has always left himself free to doubt his gods; but (unlike the agnostic of to-day) free also to believe in them. He has always cared more for truth than for consistency. If he saw two truths that seemed to contradict each other, he would take the two truths and the contradiction along with them. His spiritual sight is stereoscopic, like his physical sight: he sees two different pictures at once and yet sees all the better for that. Thus he has always believed that there was such a thing as fate, but such a thing as free will also. Thus he believed that children were indeed the kingdom of heaven, but nevertheless ought to be obedient to the kingdom of earth. He admired youth because it was
young and age because it was not. It is exactly this balance of apparent contradictions that has been the whole buoyancy of the healthy man. The whole secret of mysticism is this: that man can understand everything by the help of what he does not understand. The morbid logician seeks to make everything lucid, and succeeds in making everything mysterious. The mystic allows one thing to be mysterious, and everything else becomes lucid. The determinist makes the theory of causation quite clear, and then finds that he cannot say “if you please” to the housemaid. The Christian permits free will to remain a sacred mystery; but because of this his relations with the housemaid become of a sparkling and crystal clearness. He puts the seed of dogma in a central darkness; but it branches forth in all directions with abounding natural health. As we have taken the circle as the symbol of reason and madness, we may very well take the cross as the symbol at once of mystery and of health. Buddhism is centripetal, but Christianity is centrifugal: it breaks out. For the circle is perfect and infinite in its nature; but it is fixed for ever in its size; it can never be larger or smaller. But the cross, though it has at its heart a collision and a contradiction, can extend its four arms for ever without altering its shape. Because it has a paradox in its centre it can grow without changing. The circle returns upon itself and is bound. The cross opens its arms to the four winds; it is a signpost for free travellers.

Symbols alone are of even a cloudy value in speaking of this deep matter; and another symbol from physical nature will express sufficiently well the real place of mysticism before mankind. The one created thing which we cannot look at is the one thing in the light of which we look at everything. Like the sun at noonday, mysticism explains everything else by the blaze of its own victorious invisibility. Detached intellectualism is (in the exact sense of a popular phrase) all moonshine; for it is light without heat, and it is secondary light, reflected from a dead world. But the Greeks were right when they made Apollo the god both of imagination and of sanity; for he was both the patron of poetry and the patron of healing. Of necessary dogmas and a special creed I shall speak later. But that transcendentalism by which all men live has primarily much the position of the sun in the sky. We are conscious of it as of a kind of splendid confusion; it is something both shining and shapeless, at once a blaze and a blur. But the circle of the moon is as clear and unmistakable, as recurrent and inevitable, as the circle of Euclid on a blackboard. For the moon is utterly reasonable; and the moon is the mother of lunatics and has given to them all her name.
III

THE SUICIDE OF THOUGHT

The phrases of the street are not only forcible but subtle: for a figure of speech can often get into a crack too small for a definition. Phrases like “put out” or “off colour” might have been coined by Mr. Henry James in an agony of verbal precision. And there is no more subtle truth than that of the everyday phrase about a man having “his heart in the right place.” It involves the idea of normal proportion; not only does a certain function exist, but it is rightly related to other functions. Indeed, the negation of this phrase would describe with peculiar accuracy the somewhat morbid mercy and perverse tenderness of the most representative moderns. If, for instance, I had to describe with fairness the character of Mr. Bernard Shaw, I could not express myself more exactly than by saying that he has a heroically large and generous heart; but not a heart in the right place. And this is so of the typical society of our time.

The modern world is not evil; in some ways the modern world is far too good. It is full of wild and wasted virtues. When a religious scheme is shattered (as Christianity was shattered at the Reformation), it is not merely the vices that are let loose. The vices are, indeed, let loose, and they wander and do damage. But the virtues are let loose also; and the virtues wander more wildly, and the virtues do more terrible damage. The modern world is full of the old Christian virtues gone mad. The virtues have gone mad because they have been isolated from each other and are wandering alone. Thus some scientists care for truth; and their truth is pitiless. Thus some humanitarians only care for pity; and their pity (I am sorry to say) is often untruthful. For example, Mr. Blatchford attacks Christianity because he is mad on one Christian virtue: the merely mystical and almost irrational virtue of charity. He has a strange idea that he will make it easier to forgive sins by saying that there are no sins to forgive. Mr. Blatchford is not only an early Christian, he is the only early Christian who ought really to have been eaten by lions. For in his case the pagan accusation is really true: his mercy would mean mere anarchy. He really is the enemy of the human race—because he is so human. As the other extreme, we may take the acrid realist, who has deliberately killed in himself all human pleasure in happy tales or in the healing of the heart. Torquemada tortured people physically for the sake of moral truth. Zola tortured people morally for the sake of physical truth. But in Torquemada’s
time there was at least a system that could to some extent make righteousness and peace kiss each other. Now they do not even bow. But a much stronger case than these two of truth and pity can be found in the remarkable case of the dislocation of humility.

It is only with one aspect of humility that we are here concerned. Humility was largely meant as a restraint upon the arrogance and infinity of the appetite of man. He was always outstripping his mercies with his own newly invented needs. His very power of enjoyment destroyed half his joys. By asking for pleasure, he lost the chief pleasure; for the chief pleasure is surprise. Hence it became evident that if a man would make his world large, he must be always making himself small. Even the haughty visions, the tall cities, and the toppling pinnacles are the creations of humility. Giants that tread down forests like grass are the creations of humility. Towers that vanish upwards above the loneliest star are the creations of humility. For towers are not tall unless we look up at them; and giants are not giants unless they are larger than we. All this gigantesque imagination, which is, perhaps, the mightiest of the pleasures of man, is at bottom entirely humble. It is impossible without humility to enjoy anything—even pride.

But what we suffer from to-day is humility in the wrong place. Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction; where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. Nowadays the part of a man that a man does assert is exactly the part he ought not to assert—himself. The part he doubts is exactly the part he ought not to doubt—the Divine Reason. Huxley preached a humility content to learn from Nature. But the new sceptic is so humble that he doubts if he can even learn. Thus we should be wrong if we had said hastily that there is no humility typical of our time. The truth is that there is a real humility typical of our time; but it so happens that it is practically a more poisonous humility than the wildest prostrations of the ascetic. The old humility was a spur that prevented a man from stopping; not a nail in his boot that prevented him from going on. For the old humility made a man doubtful about his efforts, which might make him work harder. But the new humility makes a man doubtful about his aims, which will make him stop working altogether.

At any street corner we may meet a man who utters the frantic and blasphemous statement that he may be wrong. Every day one comes across somebody who says that of course his view may not be the right one. Of course
his view must be the right one, or it is not his view. We are on the road to producing a race of men too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table. We are in danger of seeing philosophers who doubt the law of gravity as being a mere fancy of their own. Scoffers of old time were too proud to be convinced; but these are too humble to be convinced. The meek do inherit the earth; but the modern sceptics are too meek even to claim their inheritance. It is exactly this intellectual helplessness which is our second problem.

The last chapter has been concerned only with a fact of observation: that what peril of morbidity there is for man comes rather from his reason than his imagination. It was not meant to attack the authority of reason; rather it is the ultimate purpose to defend it. For it needs defence. The whole modern world is at war with reason; and the tower already reels.

The sages, it is often said, can see no answer to the riddle of religion. But the trouble with our sages is not that they cannot see the answer; it is that they cannot even see the riddle. They are like children so stupid as to notice nothing paradoxical in the playful assertion that a door is not a door. The modern latitudinarians speak, for instance, about authority in religion not only as if there were no reason in it, but as if there had never been any reason for it. Apart from seeing its philosophical basis, they cannot even see its historical cause. Religious authority has often, doubtless, been oppressive or unreasonable; just as every legal system (and especially our present one) has been callous and full of a cruel apathy. It is rational to attack the police; nay, it is glorious. But the modern critics of religious authority are like men who should attack the police without ever having heard of burglars. For there is a great and possible peril to the human mind: a peril as practical as burglary. Against it religious authority was reared, rightly or wrongly, as a barrier. And against it something certainly must be reared as a barrier, if our race is to avoid ruin.

That peril is that the human intellect is free to destroy itself. Just as one generation could prevent the very existence of the next generation, by all entering a monastery or jumping into the sea, so one set of thinkers can in some degree prevent further thinking by teaching the next generation that there is no validity in any human thought. It is idle to talk always of the alternative of reason and faith. Reason is itself a matter of faith. It is an act of faith to assert that our thoughts have any relation to reality at all. If you are merely a sceptic, you must sooner or later ask yourself the question, “Why should ANYTHING go right; even observation and deduction? Why should not good logic be as misleading as bad logic? They are both movements in the brain of a bewildered
ape?” The young sceptic says, “I have a right to think for myself.” But the old sceptic, the complete sceptic, says, “I have no right to think for myself. I have no right to think at all.”

There is a thought that stops thought. That is the only thought that ought to be stopped. That is the ultimate evil against which all religious authority was aimed. It only appears at the end of decadent ages like our own: and already Mr. H.G.Wells has raised its ruinous banner; he has written a delicate piece of scepticism called “Doubts of the Instrument.” In this he questions the brain itself, and endeavours to remove all reality from all his own assertions, past, present, and to come. But it was against this remote ruin that all the military systems in religion were originally ranked and ruled. The creeds and the crusades, the hierarchies and the horrible persecutions were not organized, as is ignorantly said, for the suppression of reason. They were organized for the difficult defence of reason. Man, by a blind instinct, knew that if once things were wildly questioned, reason could be questioned first. The authority of priests to absolve, the authority of popes to define the authority, even of inquisitors to terrify: these were all only dark defences erected round one central authority, more undemonstrable, more supernatural than all—the authority of a man to think. We know now that this is so; we have no excuse for not knowing it. For we can hear scepticism crashing through the old ring of authorities, and at the same moment we can see reason swaying upon her throne. In so far as religion is gone, reason is going. For they are both of the same primary and authoritative kind. They are both methods of proof which cannot themselves be proved. And in the act of destroying the idea of Divine authority we have largely destroyed the idea of that human authority by which we do a long-division sum. With a long and sustained tug we have attempted to pull the mitre off pontifical man; and his head has come off with it.

Lest this should be called loose assertion, it is perhaps desirable, though dull, to run rapidly through the chief modern fashions of thought which have this effect of stopping thought itself. Materialism and the view of everything as a personal illusion have some such effect; for if the mind is mechanical, thought cannot be very exciting, and if the cosmos is unreal, there is nothing to think about. But in these cases the effect is indirect and doubtful. In some cases it is direct and clear; notably in the case of what is generally called evolution.

Evolution is a good example of that modern intelligence which, if it destroys anything, destroys itself. Evolution is either an innocent scientific description of how certain earthly things came about; or, if it is anything more than this, it is an
attack upon thought itself. If evolution destroys anything, it does not destroy religion but rationalism. If evolution simply means that a positive thing called an ape turned very slowly into a positive thing called a man, then it is stingless for the most orthodox; for a personal God might just as well do things slowly as quickly, especially if, like the Christian God, he were outside time. But if it means anything more, it means that there is no such thing as an ape to change, and no such thing as a man for him to change into. It means that there is no such thing as a thing. At best, there is only one thing, and that is a flux of everything and anything. This is an attack not upon the faith, but upon the mind; you cannot think if there are no things to think about. You cannot think if you are not separate from the subject of thought. Descartes said, “I think; therefore I am.” The philosophic evolutionist reverses and negatives the epigram. He says, “I am not; therefore I cannot think.”

Then there is the opposite attack on thought: that urged by Mr. H.G.Wells when he insists that every separate thing is “unique,” and there are no categories at all. This also is merely destructive. Thinking means connecting things, and stops if they cannot be connected. It need hardly be said that this scepticism forbidding thought necessarily forbids speech; a man cannot open his mouth without contradicting it. Thus when Mr. Wells says (as he did somewhere), “All chairs are quite different,” he utters not merely a misstatement, but a contradiction in terms. If all chairs were quite different, you could not call them “all chairs.”

Akin to these is the false theory of progress, which maintains that we alter the test instead of trying to pass the test. We often hear it said, for instance, “What is right in one age is wrong in another.” This is quite reasonable, if it means that there is a fixed aim, and that certain methods attain at certain times and not at other times. If women, say, desire to be elegant, it may be that they are improved at one time by growing fatter and at another time by growing thinner. But you cannot say that they are improved by ceasing to wish to be elegant and beginning to wish to be oblong. If the standard changes, how can there be improvement, which implies a standard? Nietzsche started a nonsensical idea that men had once sought as good what we now call evil; if it were so, we could not talk of surpassing or even falling short of them. How can you overtake Jones if you walk in the other direction? You cannot discuss whether one people has succeeded more in being miserable than another succeeded in being happy. It would be like discussing whether Milton was more puritanical than a pig is fat.

It is true that a man (a silly man) might make change itself his object or ideal.
But as an ideal, change itself becomes unchangeable. If the change-worshipper wishes to estimate his own progress, he must be sternly loyal to the ideal of change; he must not begin to flirt gaily with the ideal of monotony. Progress itself cannot progress. It is worth remark, in passing, that when Tennyson, in a wild and rather weak manner, welcomed the idea of infinite alteration in society, he instinctively took a metaphor which suggests an imprisoned tedium. He wrote —

“Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change.”

He thought of change itself as an unchangeable groove; and so it is. Change is about the narrowest and hardest groove that a man can get into.

The main point here, however, is that this idea of a fundamental alteration in the standard is one of the things that make thought about the past or future simply impossible. The theory of a complete change of standards in human history does not merely deprive us of the pleasure of honouring our fathers; it deprives us even of the more modern and aristocratic pleasure of despising them.

This bald summary of the thought-destroying forces of our time would not be complete without some reference to pragmatism; for though I have here used and should everywhere defend the pragmatist method as a preliminary guide to truth, there is an extreme application of it which involves the absence of all truth whatever. My meaning can be put shortly thus. I agree with the pragmatists that apparent objective truth is not the whole matter; that there is an authoritative need to believe the things that are necessary to the human mind. But I say that one of those necessities precisely is a belief in objective truth. The pragmatist tells a man to think what he must think and never mind the Absolute. But precisely one of the things that he must think is the Absolute. This philosophy, indeed, is a kind of verbal paradox. Pragmatism is a matter of human needs; and one of the first of human needs is to be something more than a pragmatist. Extreme pragmatism is just as inhuman as the determinism it so powerfully attacks. The determinist (who, to do him justice, does not pretend to be a human being) makes nonsense of the human sense of actual choice. The pragmatist, who professes to be specially human, makes nonsense of the human sense of actual fact.

To sum up our contention so far, we may say that the most characteristic current philosophies have not only a touch of mania, but a touch of suicidal mania. The mere questioner has knocked his head against the limits of human thought; and cracked it. This is what makes so futile the warnings of the orthodox and the boasts of the advanced about the dangerous boyhood of free
thought. What we are looking at is not the boyhood of free thought; it is the old age and ultimate dissolution of free thought. It is vain for bishops and pious bigwigs to discuss what dreadful things will happen if wild scepticism runs its course. It has run its course. It is vain for eloquent atheists to talk of the great truths that will be revealed if once we see free thought begin. We have seen it end. It has no more questions to ask; it has questioned itself. You cannot call up any wilder vision than a city in which men ask themselves if they have any selves. You cannot fancy a more sceptical world than that in which men doubt if there is a world. It might certainly have reached its bankruptcy more quickly and cleanly if it had not been feebly hampered by the application of indefensible laws of blasphemy or by the absurd pretence that modern England is Christian. But it would have reached the bankruptcy anyhow. Militant atheists are still unjustly persecuted; but rather because they are an old minority than because they are a new one. Free thought has exhausted its own freedom. It is weary of its own success. If any eager freethinker now hails philosophic freedom as the dawn, he is only like the man in Mark Twain who came out wrapped in blankets to see the sun rise and was just in time to see it set. If any frightened curate still says that it will be awful if the darkness of free thought should spread, we can only answer him in the high and powerful words of Mr. Belloc, “Do not, I beseech you, be troubled about the increase of forces already in dissolution. You have mistaken the hour of the night: it is already morning.” We have no more questions left to ask. We have looked for questions in the darkest corners and on the wildest peaks. We have found all the questions that can be found. It is time we gave up looking for questions and began looking for answers.

But one more word must be added. At the beginning of this preliminary negative sketch I said that our mental ruin has been wrought by wild reason, not by wild imagination. A man does not go mad because he makes a statue a mile high, but he may go mad by thinking it out in square inches. Now, one school of thinkers has seen this and jumped at it as a way of renewing the pagan health of the world. They see that reason destroys; but Will, they say, creates. The ultimate authority, they say, is in will, not in reason. The supreme point is not why a man demands a thing, but the fact that he does demand it. I have no space to trace or expound this philosophy of Will. It came, I suppose, through Nietzsche, who preached something that is called egoism. That, indeed, was simpleminded enough; for Nietzsche denied egoism simply by preaching it. To preach anything is to give it away. First, the egoist calls life a war without mercy, and then he takes the greatest possible trouble to drill his enemies in war.
To preach egoism is to practise altruism. But however it began, the view is common enough in current literature. The main defence of these thinkers is that they are not thinkers; they are makers. They say that choice is itself the divine thing. Thus Mr. Bernard Shaw has attacked the old idea that men’s acts are to be judged by the standard of the desire of happiness. He says that a man does not act for his happiness, but from his will. He does not say, “Jam will make me happy,” but “I want jam.” And in all this others follow him with yet greater enthusiasm. Mr. John Davidson, a remarkable poet, is so passionately excited about it that he is obliged to write prose. He publishes a short play with several long prefaces. This is natural enough in Mr. Shaw, for all his plays are prefaces: Mr. Shaw is (I suspect) the only man on earth who has never written any poetry. But that Mr. Davidson (who can write excellent poetry) should write instead laborious metaphysics in defence of this doctrine of will, does show that the doctrine of will has taken hold of men. Even Mr. H.G.Wells has half spoken in its language; saying that one should test acts not like a thinker, but like an artist, saying, “I FEEL this curve is right,” or “that line SHALL go thus.” They are all excited; and well they may be. For by this doctrine of the divine authority of will, they think they can break out of the doomed fortress of rationalism. They think they can escape.

But they cannot escape. This pure praise of volition ends in the same break up and blank as the mere pursuit of logic. Exactly as complete free thought involves the doubting of thought itself, so the acceptation of mere “willing” really paralyzes the will. Mr. Bernard Shaw has not perceived the real difference between the old utilitarian test of pleasure (clumsy, of course, and easily misstated) and that which he propounds. The real difference between the test of happiness and the test of will is simply that the test of happiness is a test and the other isn’t. You can discuss whether a man’s act in jumping over a cliff was directed towards happiness; you cannot discuss whether it was derived from will. Of course it was. You can praise an action by saying that it is calculated to bring pleasure or pain to discover truth or to save the soul. But you cannot praise an action because it shows will; for to say that is merely to say that it is an action. By this praise of will you cannot really choose one course as better than another. And yet choosing one course as better than another is the very definition of the will you are praising.

The worship of will is the negation of will. To admire mere choice is to refuse to choose. If Mr. Bernard Shaw comes up to me and says, “Will something,” that is tantamount to saying, “I do not mind what you will,” and that is tantamount to
saying, “I have no will in the matter.” You cannot admire will in general, because the essence of will is that it is particular. A brilliant anarchist like Mr. John Davidson feels an irritation against ordinary morality, and therefore he invokes will—will to anything. He only wants humanity to want something. But humanity does want something. It wants ordinary morality. He rebels against the law and tells us to will something or anything. But we have willed something. We have willed the law against which he rebels.

All the will-worshippers, from Nietzsche to Mr. Davidson, are really quite empty of volition. They cannot will, they can hardly wish. And if any one wants a proof of this, it can be found quite easily. It can be found in this fact: that they always talk of will as something that expands and breaks out. But it is quite the opposite. Every act of will is an act of self-limitation. To desire action is to desire limitation. In that sense every act is an act of self-sacrifice. When you choose anything, you reject everything else. That objection, which men of this school used to make to the act of marriage, is really an objection to every act. Every act is an irrevocable selection and exclusion. Just as when you marry one woman you give up all the others, so when you take one course of action you give up all the other courses. If you become King of England, you give up the post of Beadle in Brompton. If you go to Rome, you sacrifice a rich suggestive life in Wimbledon. It is the existence of this negative or limiting side of will that makes most of the talk of the anarchic will-worshippers little better than nonsense. For instance, Mr. John Davidson tells us to have nothing to do with “Thou shalt not”; but it is surely obvious that “Thou shalt not” is only one of the necessary corollaries of “I will.” “I will go to the Lord Mayor’s Show, and thou shalt not stop me.” Anarchism adjures us to be bold creative artists, and care for no laws or limits. But it is impossible to be an artist and not care for laws and limits. Art is limitation; the essence of every picture is the frame. If you draw a giraffe, you must draw him with a long neck. If, in your bold creative way, you hold yourself free to draw a giraffe with a short neck, you will really find that you are not free to draw a giraffe. The moment you step into the world of facts, you step into a world of limits. You can free things from alien or accidental laws, but not from the laws of their own nature. You may, if you like, free a tiger from his bars; but do not free him from his stripes. Do not free a camel of the burden of his hump: you may be freeing him from being a camel. Do not go about as a demagogue, encouraging triangles to break out of the prison of their three sides. If a triangle breaks out of its three sides, its life comes to a lamentable end. Somebody wrote a work called “The Loves of the Triangles”; I
never read it, but I am sure that if triangles ever were loved, they were loved for being triangular. This is certainly the case with all artistic creation, which is in some ways the most decisive example of pure will. The artist loves his limitations: they constitute the THING he is doing. The painter is glad that the canvas is flat. The sculptor is glad that the clay is colourless.

In case the point is not clear, an historic example may illustrate it. The French Revolution was really an heroic and decisive thing, because the Jacobins willed something definite and limited. They desired the freedoms of democracy, but also all the vetoes of democracy. They wished to have votes and NOT to have titles. Republicanism had an ascetic side in Franklin or Robespierre as well as an expansive side in Danton or Wilkes. Therefore they have created something with a solid substance and shape, the square social equality and peasant wealth of France. But since then the revolutionary or speculative mind of Europe has been weakened by shrinking from any proposal because of the limits of that proposal. Liberalism has been degraded into liberality. Men have tried to turn “revolutionise” from a transitive to an intransitive verb. The Jacobin could tell you not only the system he would rebel against, but (what was more important) the system he would NOT rebel against, the system he would trust. But the new rebel is a Sceptic, and will not entirely trust anything. He has no loyalty; therefore he can never be really a revolutionist. And the fact that he doubts everything really gets in his way when he wants to denounce anything. For all denunciation implies a moral doctrine of some kind; and the modern revolutionist doubts not only the institution he denounces, but the doctrine by which he denounces it. Thus he writes one book complaining that imperial oppression insults the purity of women, and then he writes another book (about the sex problem) in which he insults it himself. He curses the Sultan because Christian girls lose their virginity, and then curses Mrs. Grundy because they keep it. As a politician, he will cry out that war is a waste of life, and then, as a philosopher, that all life is waste of time. A Russian pessimist will denounce a policeman for killing a peasant, and then prove by the highest philosophical principles that the peasant ought to have killed himself. A man denounces marriage as a lie, and then denounces aristocratic profligates for treating it as a lie. He calls a flag a bauble, and then blames the oppressors of Poland or Ireland because they take away that bauble. The man of this school goes first to a political meeting, where he complains that savages are treated as if they were beasts; then he takes his hat and umbrella and goes on to a scientific meeting, where he proves that they practically are beasts. In short, the modern
revolutionist, being an infinite sceptic, is always engaged in undermining his own mines. In his book on politics he attacks men for trampling on morality; in his book on ethics he attacks morality for trampling on men. Therefore the modern man in revolt has become practically useless for all purposes of revolt. By rebelling against everything he has lost his right to rebel against anything.

It may be added that the same blank and bankruptcy can be observed in all fierce and terrible types of literature, especially in satire. Satire may be mad and anarchic, but it presupposes an admitted superiority in certain things over others; it presupposes a standard. When little boys in the street laugh at the fatness of some distinguished journalist, they are unconsciously assuming a standard of Greek sculpture. They are appealing to the marble Apollo. And the curious disappearance of satire from our literature is an instance of the fierce things fading for want of any principle to be fierce about. Nietzsche had some natural talent for sarcasm: he could sneer, though he could not laugh; but there is always something bodiless and without weight in his satire, simply because it has not any mass of common morality behind it. He is himself more preposterous than anything he denounces. But, indeed, Nietzsche will stand very well as the type of the whole of this failure of abstract violence. The softening of the brain which ultimately overtook him was not a physical accident. If Nietzsche had not ended in imbecility, Nietzscheism would end in imbecility. Thinking in isolation and with pride ends in being an idiot. Every man who will not have softening of the heart must at last have softening of the brain.

This last attempt to evade intellectualism ends in intellectualism, and therefore in death. The sortie has failed. The wild worship of lawlessness and the materialist worship of law end in the same void. Nietzsche scales staggering mountains, but he turns up ultimately in Tibet. He sits down beside Tolstoy in the land of nothing and Nirvana. They are both helpless—one because he must not grasp anything, and the other because he must not let go of anything. The Tolstoyan’s will is frozen by a Buddhist instinct that all special actions are evil. But the Nietzscheite’s will is quite equally frozen by his view that all special actions are good; for if all special actions are good, none of them are special. They stand at the crossroads, and one hates all the roads and the other likes all the roads. The result is—well, some things are not hard to calculate. They stand at the crossroads.

Here I end (thank God) the first and dullest business of this book—the rough review of recent thought. After this I begin to sketch a view of life which may not interest my reader, but which, at any rate, interests me. In front of me, as I
close this page, is a pile of modern books that I have been turning over for the
purpose—a pile of ingenuity, a pile of futility. By the accident of my present
detachment, I can see the inevitable smash of the philosophies of Schopenhauer
and Tolstoy, Nietzsche and Shaw, as clearly as an inevitable railway smash
could be seen from a balloon. They are all on the road to the emptiness of the
asylum. For madness may be defined as using mental activity so as to reach
mental helplessness; and they have nearly reached it. He who thinks he is made
of glass, thinks to the destruction of thought; for glass cannot think. So he who
wills to reject nothing, wills the destruction of will; for will is not only the
choice of something, but the rejection of almost everything. And as I turn and
tumble over the clever, wonderful, tiresome, and useless modern books, the title
of one of them rivets my eye. It is called “Jeanne d’Arc,” by Anatole France. I
have only glanced at it, but a glance was enough to remind me of Renan’s “Vie
de Jesus.” It has the same strange method of the reverent sceptic. It discredits
supernatural stories that have some foundation, simply by telling natural stories
that have no foundation. Because we cannot believe in what a saint did, we are
to pretend that we know exactly what he felt. But I do not mention either book in
order to criticise it, but because the accidental combination of the names called
up two startling images of Sanity which blasted all the books before me. Joan of
Arc was not stuck at the crossroads, either by rejecting all the paths like Tolstoy,
or by accepting them all like Nietzsche. She chose a path, and went down it like
a thunderbolt. Yet Joan, when I came to think of her, had in her all that was true
either in Tolstoy or Nietzsche, all that was even tolerable in either of them. I
thought of all that is noble in Tolstoy, the pleasure in plain things, especially in
plain pity, the actualities of the earth, the reverence for the poor, the dignity of
the bowed back. Joan of Arc had all that and with this great addition, that she
endured poverty as well as admiring it; whereas Tolstoy is only a typical
aristocrat trying to find out its secret. And then I thought of all that was brave
and proud and pathetic in poor Nietzsche, and his mutiny against the emptiness
and timidity of our time. I thought of his cry for the ecstatic equilibrium of
danger, his hunger for the rush of great horses, his cry to arms. Well, Joan of Arc
had all that, and again with this difference, that she did not praise fighting, but
fought. We KNOW that she was not afraid of an army, while Nietzsche, for all
we know, was afraid of a cow. Tolstoy only praised the peasant; she was the
peasant. Nietzsche only praised the warrior; she was the warrior. She beat them
both at their own antagonistic ideals; she was more gentle than the one, more
violent than the other. Yet she was a perfectly practical person who did
something, while they are wild speculators who do nothing. It was impossible
that the thought should not cross my mind that she and her faith had perhaps
some secret of moral unity and utility that has been lost. And with that thought
came a larger one, and the colossal figure of her Master had also crossed the
theatre of my thoughts. The same modern difficulty which darkened the subject-
matter of Anatole France also darkened that of Ernest Renan. Renan also divided
his hero’s pity from his hero’s pugnacity. Renan even represented the righteous
anger at Jerusalem as a mere nervous breakdown after the idyllic expectations of
Galilee. As if there were any inconsistency between having a love for humanity
and having a hatred for inhumanity! Altruists, with thin, weak voices, denounce
Christ as an egoist. Egoists (with even thinner and weaker voices) denounce Him
as an altruist. In our present atmosphere such cavils are comprehensible enough.
The love of a hero is more terrible than the hatred of a tyrant. The hatred of a
hero is more generous than the love of a philanthropist. There is a huge and
heroic sanity of which moderns can only collect the fragments. There is a giant
of whom we see only the lopped arms and legs walking about. They have torn
the soul of Christ into silly strips, labelled egoism and altruism, and they are
equally puzzled by His insane magnificence and His insane meekness. They
have parted His garments among them, and for His vesture they have cast lots;
though the coat was without seam woven from the top throughout.
IV

THE ETHICS OF ELFLAND

When the business man rebukes the idealism of his office-boy, it is commonly in some such speech as this: “Ah, yes, when one is young, one has these ideals in the abstract and these castles in the air; but in middle age they all break up like clouds, and one comes down to a belief in practical politics, to using the machinery one has and getting on with the world as it is.” Thus, at least, venerable and philanthropic old men now in their honoured graves used to talk to me when I was a boy. But since then I have grown up and have discovered that these philanthropic old men were telling lies. What has really happened is exactly the opposite of what they said would happen. They said that I should lose my ideals and begin to believe in the methods of practical politicians. Now, I have not lost my ideals in the least; my faith in fundamentals is exactly what it always was. What I have lost is my old childlike faith in practical politics. I am still as much concerned as ever about the Battle of Armageddon; but I am not so much concerned about the General Election. As a babe I leapt up on my mother’s knee at the mere mention of it. No; the vision is always solid and reliable. The vision is always a fact. It is the reality that is often a fraud. As much as I ever did, more than I ever did, I believe in Liberalism. But there was a rosy time of innocence when I believed in Liberals.

I take this instance of one of the enduring faiths because, having now to trace the roots of my personal speculation, this may be counted, I think, as the only positive bias. I was brought up a Liberal, and have always believed in democracy, in the elementary liberal doctrine of a self-governing humanity. If any one finds the phrase vague or threadbare, I can only pause for a moment to explain that the principle of democracy, as I mean it, can be stated in two propositions. The first is this: that the things common to all men are more important than the things peculiar to any men. Ordinary things are more valuable than extraordinary things; nay, they are more extraordinary. Man is something more awful than men; something more strange. The sense of the miracle of humanity itself should be always more vivid to us than any marvels of power, intellect, art, or civilization. The mere man on two legs, as such, should be felt as something more heartbreaking than any music and more startling than any caricature. Death is more tragic even than death by starvation. Having a nose is
more comic even than having a Norman nose.

This is the first principle of democracy: that the essential things in men are the things they hold in common, not the things they hold separately. And the second principle is merely this: that the political instinct or desire is one of these things which they hold in common. Falling in love is more poetical than dropping into poetry. The democratic contention is that government (helping to rule the tribe) is a thing like falling in love, and not a thing like dropping into poetry. It is not something analogous to playing the church organ, painting on vellum, discovering the North Pole (that insidious habit), looping the loop, being Astronomer Royal, and so on. For these things we do not wish a man to do at all unless he does them well. It is, on the contrary, a thing analogous to writing one’s own love-letters or blowing one’s own nose. These things we want a man to do for himself, even if he does them badly. I am not here arguing the truth of any of these conceptions; I know that some moderns are asking to have their wives chosen by scientists, and they may soon be asking, for all I know, to have their noses blown by nurses. I merely say that mankind does recognize these universal human functions, and that democracy classes government among them. In short, the democratic faith is this: that the most terribly important things must be left to ordinary men themselves—the mating of the sexes, the rearing of the young, the laws of the state. This is democracy; and in this I have always believed.

But there is one thing that I have never from my youth up been able to understand. I have never been able to understand where people got the idea that democracy was in some way opposed to tradition. It is obvious that tradition is only democracy extended through time. It is trusting to a consensus of common human voices rather than to some isolated or arbitrary record. The man who quotes some German historian against the tradition of the Catholic Church, for instance, is strictly appealing to aristocracy. He is appealing to the superiority of one expert against the awful authority of a mob. It is quite easy to see why a legend is treated, and ought to be treated, more respectfully than a book of history. The legend is generally made by the majority of people in the village, who are sane. The book is generally written by the one man in the village who is mad. Those who urge against tradition that men in the past were ignorant may go and urge it at the Carlton Club, along with the statement that voters in the slums are ignorant. It will not do for us. If we attach great importance to the opinion of ordinary men in great unanimity when we are dealing with daily matters, there is no reason why we should disregard it when we are dealing with history or fable.
Tradition may be defined as an extension of the franchise. Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death. Democracy tells us not to neglect a good man’s opinion, even if he is our groom; tradition asks us not to neglect a good man’s opinion, even if he is our father. I, at any rate, cannot separate the two ideas of democracy and tradition; it seems evident to me that they are the same idea. We will have the dead at our councils. The ancient Greeks voted by stones; these shall vote by tombstones. It is all quite regular and official, for most tombstones, like most ballot papers, are marked with a cross.

I have first to say, therefore, that if I have had a bias, it was always a bias in favour of democracy, and therefore of tradition. Before we come to any theoretic or logical beginnings I am content to allow for that personal equation; I have always been more inclined to believe the ruck of hard-working people than to believe that special and troublesome literary class to which I belong. I prefer even the fancies and prejudices of the people who see life from the inside to the clearest demonstrations of the people who see life from the outside. I would always trust the old wives’ fables against the old maids’ facts. As long as wit is mother wit it can be as wild as it pleases.

Now, I have to put together a general position, and I pretend to no training in such things. I propose to do it, therefore, by writing down one after another the three or four fundamental ideas which I have found for myself, pretty much in the way that I found them. Then I shall roughly synthesise them, summing up my personal philosophy or natural religion; then I shall describe my startling discovery that the whole thing had been discovered before. It had been discovered by Christianity. But of these profound persuasions which I have to recount in order, the earliest was concerned with this element of popular tradition. And without the foregoing explanation touching tradition and democracy I could hardly make my mental experience clear. As it is, I do not know whether I can make it clear, but I now propose to try.

My first and last philosophy, that which I believe in with unbroken certainty, I learnt in the nursery. I generally learnt it from a nurse; that is, from the solemn and star-appointed priestess at once of democracy and tradition. The things I believed most then, the things I believe most now, are the things called fairy tales. They seem to me to be the entirely reasonable things. They are not
fantasies: compared with them other things are fantastic. Compared with them religion and rationalism are both abnormal, though religion is abnormally right and rationalism abnormally wrong. Fairyland is nothing but the sunny country of common sense. It is not earth that judges heaven, but heaven that judges earth; so for me at least it was not earth that criticised elfland, but elfland that criticised the earth. I knew the magic beanstalk before I had tasted beans; I was sure of the Man in the Moon before I was certain of the moon. This was at one with all popular tradition. Modern minor poets are naturalists, and talk about the bush or the brook; but the singers of the old epics and fables were supernaturalists, and talked about the gods of brook and bush. That is what the moderns mean when they say that the ancients did not “appreciate Nature,” because they said that Nature was divine. Old nurses do not tell children about the grass, but about the fairies that dance on the grass; and the old Greeks could not see the trees for the dryads.

But I deal here with what ethic and philosophy come from being fed on fairy tales. If I were describing them in detail I could note many noble and healthy principles that arise from them. There is the chivalrous lesson of “Jack the Giant Killer”; that giants should be killed because they are gigantic. It is a manly mutiny against pride as such. For the rebel is older than all the kingdoms, and the Jacobin has more tradition than the Jacobite. There is the lesson of “Cinderella,” which is the same as that of the Magnificat—EXALTAVIT HUMILES. There is the great lesson of “Beauty and the Beast”; that a thing must be loved BEFORE it is loveable. There is the terrible allegory of the “Sleeping Beauty,” which tells how the human creature was blessed with all birthday gifts, yet cursed with death; and how death also may perhaps be softened to a sleep. But I am not concerned with any of the separate statutes of elfland, but with the whole spirit of its law, which I learnt before I could speak, and shall retain when I cannot write. I am concerned with a certain way of looking at life, which was created in me by the fairy tales, but has since been meekly ratified by the mere facts.

It might be stated this way. There are certain sequences or developments (cases of one thing following another), which are, in the true sense of the word, reasonable. They are, in the true sense of the word, necessary. Such are mathematical and merely logical sequences. We in fairyland (who are the most reasonable of all creatures) admit that reason and that necessity. For instance, if the Ugly Sisters are older than Cinderella, it is (in an iron and awful sense) NECESSARY that Cinderella is younger than the Ugly Sisters. There is no
getting out of it. Haeckel may talk as much fatalism about that fact as he pleases: it really must be. If Jack is the son of a miller, a miller is the father of Jack. Cold reason decrees it from her awful throne: and we in fairyland submit. If the three brothers all ride horses, there are six animals and eighteen legs involved: that is true rationalism, and fairyland is full of it. But as I put my head over the hedge of the elves and began to take notice of the natural world, I observed an extraordinary thing. I observed that learned men in spectacles were talking of the actual things that happened—dawn and death and so on—as if THEY were rational and inevitable. They talked as if the fact that trees bear fruit were just as NECESSARY as the fact that two and one trees make three. But it is not. There is an enormous difference by the test of fairyland; which is the test of the imagination. You cannot IMAGINE two and one not making three. But you can easily imagine trees not growing fruit; you can imagine them growing golden candlesticks or tigers hanging on by the tail. These men in spectacles spoke much of a man named Newton, who was hit by an apple, and who discovered a law. But they could not be got to see the distinction between a true law, a law of reason, and the mere fact of apples falling. If the apple hit Newton’s nose, Newton’s nose hit the apple. That is a true necessity: because we cannot conceive the one occurring without the other. But we can quite well conceive the apple not falling on his nose; we can fancy it flying ardently through the air to hit some other nose, of which it had a more definite dislike. We have always in our fairy tales kept this sharp distinction between the science of mental relations, in which there really are laws, and the science of physical facts, in which there are no laws, but only weird repetitions. We believe in bodily miracles, but not in mental impossibilities. We believe that a Beanstalk climbed up to Heaven; but that does not at all confuse our convictions on the philosophical question of how many beans make five.

Here is the peculiar perfection of tone and truth in the nursery tales. The man of science says, “Cut the stalk, and the apple will fall”; but he says it calmly, as if the one idea really led up to the other. The witch in the fairy tale says, “Blow the horn, and the ogre’s castle will fall”; but she does not say it as if it were something in which the effect obviously arose out of the cause. Doubtless she has given the advice to many champions, and has seen many castles fall, but she does not lose either her wonder or her reason. She does not muddle her head until it imagines a necessary mental connection between a horn and a falling tower. But the scientific men do muddle their heads, until they imagine a necessary mental connection between an apple leaving the tree and an apple
reaching the ground. They do really talk as if they had found not only a set of marvellous facts, but a truth connecting those facts. They do talk as if the connection of two strange things physically connected them philosophically. They feel that because one incomprehensible thing constantly follows another incomprehensible thing the two together somehow make up a comprehensible thing. Two black riddles make a white answer.

In fairyland we avoid the word “law”; but in the land of science they are singularly fond of it. Thus they will call some interesting conjecture about how forgotten folks pronounced the alphabet, Grimm’s Law. But Grimm’s Law is far less intellectual than Grimm’s Fairy Tales. The tales are, at any rate, certainly tales; while the law is not a law. A law implies that we know the nature of the generalisation and enactment; not merely that we have noticed some of the effects. If there is a law that pick-pockets shall go to prison, it implies that there is an imaginable mental connection between the idea of prison and the idea of picking pockets. And we know what the idea is. We can say why we take liberty from a man who takes liberties. But we cannot say why an egg can turn into a chicken any more than we can say why a bear could turn into a fairy prince. As IDEAS, the egg and the chicken are further off from each other than the bear and the prince; for no egg in itself suggests a chicken, whereas some princes do suggest bears. Granted, then, that certain transformations do happen, it is essential that we should regard them in the philosophic manner of fairy tales, not in the unphilosophic manner of science and the “Laws of Nature.” When we are asked why eggs turn to birds or fruits fall in autumn, we must answer exactly as the fairy godmother would answer if Cinderella asked her why mice turned to horses or her clothes fell from her at twelve o’clock. We must answer that it is MAGIC. It is not a “law,” for we do not understand its general formula. It is not a necessity, for though we can count on it happening practically, we have no right to say that it must always happen. It is no argument for unalterable law (as Huxley fancied) that we count on the ordinary course of things. We do not count on it; we bet on it. We risk the remote possibility of a miracle as we do that of a poisoned pancake or a world-destroying comet. We leave it out of account, not because it is a miracle, and therefore an impossibility, but because it is a miracle, and therefore an exception. All the terms used in the science books, “law,” “necessity,” “order,” “tendency,” and so on, are really unintellectual, because they assume an inner synthesis, which we do not possess. The only words that ever satisfied me as describing Nature are the terms used in the fairy books, “charm,” “spell,” “enchantment.” They express the arbitrariness of the fact and
its mystery. A tree grows fruit because it is a MAGIC tree. Water runs downhill because it is bewitched. The sun shines because it is bewitched.

I deny altogether that this is fantastic or even mystical. We may have some mysticism later on; but this fairy-tale language about things is simply rational and agnostic. It is the only way I can express in words my clear and definite perception that one thing is quite distinct from another; that there is no logical connection between flying and laying eggs. It is the man who talks about “a law” that he has never seen who is the mystic. Nay, the ordinary scientific man is strictly a sentimentalist. He is a sentimentalist in this essential sense, that he is soaked and swept away by mere associations. He has so often seen birds fly and lay eggs that he feels as if there must be some dreamy, tender connection between the two ideas, whereas there is none. A forlorn lover might be unable to dissociate the moon from lost love; so the materialist is unable to dissociate the moon from the tide. In both cases there is no connection, except that one has seen them together. A sentimentalist might shed tears at the smell of apple-blossom, because, by a dark association of his own, it reminded him of his boyhood. So the materialist professor (though he conceals his tears) is yet a sentimentalist, because, by a dark association of his own, apple-blossoms remind him of apples. But the cool rationalist from fairyland does not see why, in the abstract, the apple tree should not grow crimson tulips; it sometimes does in his country.

This elementary wonder, however, is not a mere fancy derived from the fairy tales; on the contrary, all the fire of the fairy tales is derived from this. Just as we all like love tales because there is an instinct of sex, we all like astonishing tales because they touch the nerve of the ancient instinct of astonishment. This is proved by the fact that when we are very young children we do not need fairy tales: we only need tales. Mere life is interesting enough. A child of seven is excited by being told that Tommy opened a door and saw a dragon. But a child of three is excited by being told that Tommy opened a door. Boys like romantic tales; but babies like realistic tales—because they find them romantic. In fact, a baby is about the only person, I should think, to whom a modern realistic novel could be read without boring him. This proves that even nursery tales only echo an almost pre-natal leap of interest and amazement. These tales say that apples were golden only to refresh the forgotten moment when we found that they were green. They make rivers run with wine only to make us remember, for one wild moment, that they run with water. I have said that this is wholly reasonable and even agnostic. And, indeed, on this point I am all for the higher agnosticism; its
better name is Ignorance. We have all read in scientific books, and, indeed, in all romances, the story of the man who has forgotten his name. This man walks about the streets and can see and appreciate everything; only he cannot remember who he is. Well, every man is that man in the story. Every man has forgotten who he is. One may understand the cosmos, but never the ego; the self is more distant than any star. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God; but thou shalt not know thyself. We are all under the same mental calamity; we have all forgotten our names. We have all forgotten what we really are. All that we call common sense and rationality and practicality and positivism only means that for certain dead levels of our life we forget that we have forgotten. All that we call spirit and art and ecstasy only means that for one awful instant we remember that we forget.

But though (like the man without memory in the novel) we walk the streets with a sort of half-witted admiration, still it is admiration. It is admiration in English and not only admiration in Latin. The wonder has a positive element of praise. This is the next milestone to be definitely marked on our road through fairyland. I shall speak in the next chapter about optimists and pessimists in their intellectual aspect, so far as they have one. Here I am only trying to describe the enormous emotions which cannot be described. And the strongest emotion was that life was as precious as it was puzzling. It was an ecstasy because it was an adventure; it was an adventure because it was an opportunity. The goodness of the fairy tale was not affected by the fact that there might be more dragons than princesses; it was good to be in a fairy tale. The test of all happiness is gratitude; and I felt grateful, though I hardly knew to whom. Children are grateful when Santa Claus puts in their stockings gifts of toys or sweets. Could I not be grateful to Santa Claus when he put in my stockings the gift of two miraculous legs? We thank people for birthday presents of cigars and slippers. Can I thank no one for the birthday present of birth?

There were, then, these two first feelings, indefensible and indisputable. The world was a shock, but it was not merely shocking; existence was a surprise, but it was a pleasant surprise. In fact, all my first views were exactly uttered in a riddle that stuck in my brain from boyhood. The question was, “What did the first frog say?” And the answer was, “Lord, how you made me jump!” That says succinctly all that I am saying. God made the frog jump; but the frog prefers jumping. But when these things are settled there enters the second great principle of the fairy philosophy.

Any one can see it who will simply read “Grimm’s Fairy Tales” or the fine
collections of Mr. Andrew Lang. For the pleasure of pedantry I will call it the Doctrine of Conditional Joy. Touchstone talked of much virtue in an “if”; according to elfin ethics all virtue is in an “if.” The note of the fairy utterance always is, “You may live in a palace of gold and sapphire, if you do not say the word ‘cow’”; or “You may live happily with the King’s daughter, if you do not show her an onion.” The vision always hangs upon a veto. All the dizzy and colossal things conceded depend upon one small thing withheld. All the wild and whirling things that are let loose depend upon one thing that is forbidden. Mr. W.B. Yeats, in his exquisite and piercing elfin poetry, describes the elves as lawless; they plunge in innocent anarchy on the unbridled horses of the air—

“Ride on the crest of the dishevelled tide, And dance upon the mountains like a flame.”

It is a dreadful thing to say that Mr. W.B. Yeats does not understand fairyland. But I do say it. He is an ironical Irishman, full of intellectual reactions. He is not stupid enough to understand fairyland. Fairies prefer people of the yokel type like myself; people who gape and grin and do as they are told. Mr. Yeats reads into elfland all the righteous insurrection of his own race. But the lawlessness of Ireland is a Christian lawlessness, founded on reason and justice. The Fenian is rebelling against something he understands only too well; but the true citizen of fairyland is obeying something that he does not understand at all. In the fairy tale an incomprehensible happiness rests upon an incomprehensible condition. A box is opened, and all evils fly out. A word is forgotten, and cities perish. A lamp is lit, and love flies away. A flower is plucked, and human lives are forfeited. An apple is eaten, and the hope of God is gone.

This is the tone of fairy tales, and it is certainly not lawlessness or even liberty, though men under a mean modern tyranny may think it liberty by comparison. People out of Portland Gaol might think Fleet Street free; but closer study will prove that both fairies and journalists are the slaves of duty. Fairy godmothers seem at least as strict as other godmothers. Cinderella received a coach out of Wonderland and a coachman out of nowhere, but she received a command—which might have come out of Brixton—that she should be back by twelve. Also, she had a glass slipper; and it cannot be a coincidence that glass is so common a substance in folk-lore. This princess lives in a glass castle, that princess on a glass hill; this one sees all things in a mirror; they may all live in glass houses if they will not throw stones. For this thin glitter of glass everywhere is the expression of the fact that the happiness is bright but brittle, like the substance most easily smashed by a housemaid or a cat. And this fairy-
tale sentiment also sank into me and became my sentiment towards the whole world. I felt and feel that life itself is as bright as the diamond, but as brittle as the window-pane; and when the heavens were compared to the terrible crystal I can remember a shudder. I was afraid that God would drop the cosmos with a crash.

Remember, however, that to be breakable is not the same as to be perishable. Strike a glass, and it will not endure an instant; simply do not strike it, and it will endure a thousand years. Such, it seemed, was the joy of man, either in elfland or on earth; the happiness depended on NOT DOING SOMETHING which you could at any moment do and which, very often, it was not obvious why you should not do. Now, the point here is that to ME this did not seem unjust. If the miller’s third son said to the fairy, “Explain why I must not stand on my head in the fairy palace,” the other might fairly reply, “Well, if it comes to that, explain the fairy palace.” If Cinderella says, “How is it that I must leave the ball at twelve?” her godmother might answer, “How is it that you are going there till twelve?” If I leave a man in my will ten talking elephants and a hundred winged horses, he cannot complain if the conditions partake of the slight eccentricity of the gift. He must not look a winged horse in the mouth. And it seemed to me that existence was itself so very eccentric a legacy that I could not complain of not understanding the limitations of the vision when I did not understand the vision they limited. The frame was no stranger than the picture. The veto might well be as wild as the vision; it might be as startling as the sun, as elusive as the waters, as fantastic and terrible as the towering trees.

For this reason (we may call it the fairy godmother philosophy) I never could join the young men of my time in feeling what they called the general sentiment of REVOLT. I should have resisted, let us hope, any rules that were evil, and with these and their definition I shall deal in another chapter. But I did not feel disposed to resist any rule merely because it was mysterious. Estates are sometimes held by foolish forms, the breaking of a stick or the payment of a peppercorn: I was willing to hold the huge estate of earth and heaven by any such feudal fantasy. It could not well be wilder than the fact that I was allowed to hold it at all. At this stage I give only one ethical instance to show my meaning. I could never mix in the common murmur of that rising generation against monogamy, because no restriction on sex seemed so odd and unexpected as sex itself. To be allowed, like Endymion, to make love to the moon and then to complain that Jupiter kept his own moons in a harem seemed to me (bred on fairy tales like Endymion’s) a vulgar anti-climax. Keeping to one woman is a
small price for so much as seeing one woman. To complain that I could only be married once was like complaining that I had only been born once. It was incommensurate with the terrible excitement of which one was talking. It showed, not an exaggerated sensibility to sex, but a curious insensibility to it. A man is a fool who complains that he cannot enter Eden by five gates at once. Polygamy is a lack of the realization of sex; it is like a man plucking five pears in mere absence of mind. The aesthetes touched the last insane limits of language in their eulogy on lovely things. The thistledown made them weep; a burnished beetle brought them to their knees. Yet their emotion never impressed me for an instant, for this reason, that it never occurred to them to pay for their pleasure in any sort of symbolic sacrifice. Men (I felt) might fast forty days for the sake of hearing a blackbird sing. Men might go through fire to find a cowslip. Yet these lovers of beauty could not even keep sober for the blackbird. They would not go through common Christian marriage by way of recompense to the cowslip. Surely one might pay for extraordinary joy in ordinary morals. Oscar Wilde said that sunsets were not valued because we could not pay for sunsets. But Oscar Wilde was wrong; we can pay for sunsets. We can pay for them by not being Oscar Wilde.

Well, I left the fairy tales lying on the floor of the nursery, and I have not found any books so sensible since. I left the nurse guardian of tradition and democracy, and I have not found any modern type so sanely radical or so sanely conservative. But the matter for important comment was here: that when I first went out into the mental atmosphere of the modern world, I found that the modern world was positively opposed on two points to my nurse and to the nursery tales. It has taken me a long time to find out that the modern world is wrong and my nurse was right. The really curious thing was this: that modern thought contradicted this basic creed of my boyhood on its two most essential doctrines. I have explained that the fairy tales founded in me two convictions; first, that this world is a wild and startling place, which might have been quite different, but which is quite delightful; second, that before this wildness and delight one may well be modest and submit to the queerest limitations of so queer a kindness. But I found the whole modern world running like a high tide against both my tendernesses; and the shock of that collision created two sudden and spontaneous sentiments, which I have had ever since and which, crude as they were, have since hardened into convictions.

First, I found the whole modern world talking scientific fatalism; saying that everything is as it must always have been, being unfolded without fault from the
beginning. The leaf on the tree is green because it could never have been anything else. Now, the fairy-tale philosopher is glad that the leaf is green precisely because it might have been scarlet. He feels as if it had turned green an instant before he looked at it. He is pleased that snow is white on the strictly reasonable ground that it might have been black. Every colour has in it a bold quality as of choice; the red of garden roses is not only decisive but dramatic, like suddenly spilt blood. He feels that something has been DONE. But the great determinists of the nineteenth century were strongly against this native feeling that something had happened an instant before. In fact, according to them, nothing ever really had happened since the beginning of the world. Nothing ever had happened since existence had happened; and even about the date of that they were not very sure.

The modern world as I found it was solid for modern Calvinism, for the necessity of things being as they are. But when I came to ask them I found they had really no proof of this unavoidable repetition in things except the fact that the things were repeated. Now, the mere repetition made the things to me rather more weird than more rational. It was as if, having seen a curiously shaped nose in the street and dismissed it as an accident, I had then seen six other noses of the same astonishing shape. I should have fancied for a moment that it must be some local secret society. So one elephant having a trunk was odd; but all elephants having trunks looked like a plot. I speak here only of an emotion, and of an emotion at once stubborn and subtle. But the repetition in Nature seemed sometimes to be an excited repetition, like that of an angry schoolmaster saying the same thing over and over again. The grass seemed signalling to me with all its fingers at once; the crowded stars seemed bent upon being understood. The sun would make me see him if he rose a thousand times. The recurrences of the universe rose to the maddening rhythm of an incantation, and I began to see an idea.

All the towering materialism which dominates the modern mind rests ultimately upon one assumption; a false assumption. It is supposed that if a thing goes on repeating itself it is probably dead; a piece of clockwork. People feel that if the universe was personal it would vary; if the sun were alive it would dance. This is a fallacy even in relation to known fact. For the variation in human affairs is generally brought into them, not by life, but by death; by the dying down or breaking off of their strength or desire. A man varies his movements because of some slight element of failure or fatigue. He gets into an omnibus because he is tired of walking; or he walks because he is tired of sitting
still. But if his life and joy were so gigantic that he never tired of going to Islington, he might go to Islington as regularly as the Thames goes to Sheerness. The very speed and ecstasy of his life would have the stillness of death. The sun rises every morning. I do not rise every morning; but the variation is due not to my activity, but to my inaction. Now, to put the matter in a popular phrase, it might be true that the sun rises regularly because he never gets tired of rising. His routine might be due, not to a lifelessness, but to a rush of life. The thing I mean can be seen, for instance, in children, when they find some game or joke that they specially enjoy. A child kicks his legs rhythmically through excess, not absence, of life. Because children have abounding vitality, because they are in spirit fierce and free, therefore they want things repeated and unchanged. They always say, “Do it again”; and the grown-up person does it again until he is nearly dead. For grown-up people are not strong enough to exult in monotony. But perhaps God is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, “Do it again” to the sun; and every evening, “Do it again” to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we. The repetition in Nature may not be a mere recurrence; it may be a theatrical ENCORE. Heaven may ENCORE the bird who laid an egg. If the human being conceives and brings forth a human child instead of bringing forth a fish, or a bat, or a griffin, the reason may not be that we are fixed in an animal fate without life or purpose. It may be that our little tragedy has touched the gods, that they admire it from their starry galleries, and that at the end of every human drama man is called again and again before the curtain. Repetition may go on for millions of years, by mere choice, and at any instant it may stop. Man may stand on the earth generation after generation, and yet each birth be his positively last appearance.

This was my first conviction; made by the shock of my childish emotions meeting the modern creed in mid-career. I had always vaguely felt facts to be miracles in the sense that they are wonderful: now I began to think them miracles in the stricter sense that they were WILFUL. I mean that they were, or might be, repeated exercises of some will. In short, I had always believed that the world involved magic: now I thought that perhaps it involved a magician. And this pointed a profound emotion always present and subconscious; that this world of ours has some purpose; and if there is a purpose, there is a person. I had always felt life first as a story: and if there is a story there is a story-teller.
But modern thought also hit my second human tradition. It went against the fairy feeling about strict limits and conditions. The one thing it loved to talk about was expansion and largeness. Herbert Spencer would have been greatly annoyed if any one had called him an imperialist, and therefore it is highly regrettable that nobody did. But he was an imperialist of the lowest type. He popularized this contemptible notion that the size of the solar system ought to over-awe the spiritual dogma of man. Why should a man surrender his dignity to the solar system any more than to a whale? If mere size proves that man is not the image of God, then a whale may be the image of God; a somewhat formless image; what one might call an impressionist portrait. It is quite futile to argue that man is small compared to the cosmos; for man was always small compared to the nearest tree. But Herbert Spencer, in his headlong imperialism, would insist that we had in some way been conquered and annexed by the astronomical universe. He spoke about men and their ideals exactly as the most insolent Unionist talks about the Irish and their ideals. He turned mankind into a small nationality. And his evil influence can be seen even in the most spirited and honourable of later scientific authors; notably in the early romances of Mr. H.G.Wells. Many moralists have in an exaggerated way represented the earth as wicked. But Mr. Wells and his school made the heavens wicked. We should lift up our eyes to the stars from whence would come our ruin.

But the expansion of which I speak was much more evil than all this. I have remarked that the materialist, like the madman, is in prison; in the prison of one thought. These people seemed to think it singularly inspiring to keep on saying that the prison was very large. The size of this scientific universe gave one no novelty, no relief. The cosmos went on for ever, but not in its wildest constellation could there be anything really interesting; anything, for instance, such as forgiveness or free will. The grandeur or infinity of the secret of its cosmos added nothing to it. It was like telling a prisoner in Reading gaol that he would be glad to hear that the gaol now covered half the county. The warder would have nothing to show the man except more and more long corridors of stone lit by ghastly lights and empty of all that is human. So these expanders of the universe had nothing to show us except more and more infinite corridors of space lit by ghastly suns and empty of all that is divine.

In fairyland there had been a real law; a law that could be broken, for the definition of a law is something that can be broken. But the machinery of this cosmic prison was something that could not be broken; for we ourselves were only a part of its machinery. We were either unable to do things or we were
destined to do them. The idea of the mystical condition quite disappeared; one can neither have the firmness of keeping laws nor the fun of breaking them. The largeness of this universe had nothing of that freshness and airy outbreak which we have praised in the universe of the poet. This modern universe is literally an empire; that is, it was vast, but it is not free. One went into larger and larger windowless rooms, rooms big with Babylonian perspective; but one never found the smallest window or a whisper of outer air.

Their infernal parallels seemed to expand with distance; but for me all good things come to a point, swords for instance. So finding the boast of the big cosmos so unsatisfactory to my emotions I began to argue about it a little; and I soon found that the whole attitude was even shallower than could have been expected. According to these people the cosmos was one thing since it had one unbroken rule. Only (they would say) while it is one thing, it is also the only thing there is. Why, then, should one worry particularly to call it large? There is nothing to compare it with. It would be just as sensible to call it small. A man may say, “I like this vast cosmos, with its throng of stars and its crowd of varied creatures.” But if it comes to that why should not a man say, “I like this cosy little cosmos, with its decent number of stars and as neat a provision of live stock as I wish to see”? One is as good as the other; they are both mere sentiments. It is mere sentiment to rejoice that the sun is larger than the earth; it is quite as sane a sentiment to rejoice that the sun is no larger than it is. A man chooses to have an emotion about the largeness of the world; why should he not choose to have an emotion about its smallness?

It happened that I had that emotion. When one is fond of anything one addresses it by diminutives, even if it is an elephant or a life-guardsman. The reason is, that anything, however huge, that can be conceived of as complete, can be conceived of as small. If military moustaches did not suggest a sword or tusks a tail, then the object would be vast because it would be immeasurable. But the moment you can imagine a guardsman you can imagine a small guardsman. The moment you really see an elephant you can call it “Tiny.” If you can make a statue of a thing you can make a statuette of it. These people professed that the universe was one coherent thing; but they were not fond of the universe. But I was frightfully fond of the universe and wanted to address it by a diminutive. I often did so; and it never seemed to mind. Actually and in truth I did feel that these dim dogmas of vitality were better expressed by calling the world small than by calling it large. For about infinity there was a sort of carelessness which was the reverse of the fierce and pious care which I felt touching the
pricelessness and the peril of life. They showed only a dreary waste; but I felt a sort of sacred thrift. For economy is far more romantic than extravagance. To them stars were an unending income of halfpence; but I felt about the golden sun and the silver moon as a schoolboy feels if he has one sovereign and one shilling.

These subconscious convictions are best hit off by the colour and tone of certain tales. Thus I have said that stories of magic alone can express my sense that life is not only a pleasure but a kind of eccentric privilege. I may express this other feeling of cosmic cosiness by allusion to another book always read in boyhood, “Robinson Crusoe,” which I read about this time, and which owes its eternal vivacity to the fact that it celebrates the poetry of limits, nay, even the wild romance of prudence. Crusoe is a man on a small rock with a few comforts just snatched from the sea: the best thing in the book is simply the list of things saved from the wreck. The greatest of poems is an inventory. Every kitchen tool becomes ideal because Crusoe might have dropped it in the sea. It is a good exercise, in empty or ugly hours of the day, to look at anything, the coal-scuttle or the book-case, and think how happy one could be to have brought it out of the sinking ship on to the solitary island. But it is a better exercise still to remember how all things have had this hair-breadth escape: everything has been saved from a wreck. Every man has had one horrible adventure: as a hidden untimely birth he had not been, as infants that never see the light. Men spoke much in my boyhood of restricted or ruined men of genius: and it was common to say that many a man was a Great Might-Have-Been. To me it is a more solid and startling fact that any man in the street is a Great Might-Not-Have-Been.

But I really felt (the fancy may seem foolish) as if all the order and number of things were the romantic remnant of Crusoe’s ship. That there are two sexes and one sun, was like the fact that there were two guns and one axe. It was poignantly urgent that none should be lost; but somehow, it was rather fun that none could be added. The trees and the planets seemed like things saved from the wreck: and when I saw the Matterhorn I was glad that it had not been overlooked in the confusion. I felt economical about the stars as if they were sapphires (they are called so in Milton’s Eden): I hoarded the hills. For the universe is a single jewel, and while it is a natural cant to talk of a jewel as peerless and priceless, of this jewel it is literally true. This cosmos is indeed without peer and without price: for there cannot be another one.

Thus ends, in unavoidable inadequacy, the attempt to utter the unutterable things. These are my ultimate attitudes towards life; the soils for the seeds of
doctrine. These in some dark way I thought before I could write, and felt before I could think: that we may proceed more easily afterwards, I will roughly recapitulate them now. I felt in my bones; first, that this world does not explain itself. It may be a miracle with a supernatural explanation; it may be a conjuring trick, with a natural explanation. But the explanation of the conjuring trick, if it is to satisfy me, will have to be better than the natural explanations I have heard. The thing is magic, true or false. Second, I came to feel as if magic must have a meaning, and meaning must have some one to mean it. There was something personal in the world, as in a work of art; whatever it meant it meant violently. Third, I thought this purpose beautiful in its old design, in spite of its defects, such as dragons. Fourth, that the proper form of thanks to it is some form of humility and restraint: we should thank God for beer and Burgundy by not drinking too much of them. We owed, also, an obedience to whatever made us. And last, and strangest, there had come into my mind a vague and vast impression that in some way all good was a remnant to be stored and held sacred out of some primordial ruin. Man had saved his good as Crusoe saved his goods: he had saved them from a wreck. All this I felt and the age gave me no encouragement to feel it. And all this time I had not even thought of Christian theology.
THE FLAG OF THE WORLD

When I was a boy there were two curious men running about who were called the optimist and the pessimist. I constantly used the words myself, but I cheerfully confess that I never had any very special idea of what they meant. The only thing which might be considered evident was that they could not mean what they said; for the ordinary verbal explanation was that the optimist thought this world as good as it could be, while the pessimist thought it as bad as it could be. Both these statements being obviously raving nonsense, one had to cast about for other explanations. An optimist could not mean a man who thought everything right and nothing wrong. For that is meaningless; it is like calling everything right and nothing left. Upon the whole, I came to the conclusion that the optimist thought everything good except the pessimist, and that the pessimist thought everything bad, except himself. It would be unfair to omit altogether from the list the mysterious but suggestive definition said to have been given by a little girl, “An optimist is a man who looks after your eyes, and a pessimist is a man who looks after your feet.” I am not sure that this is not the best definition of all. There is even a sort of allegorical truth in it. For there might, perhaps, be a profitable distinction drawn between that more dreary thinker who thinks merely of our contact with the earth from moment to moment, and that happier thinker who considers rather our primary power of vision and of choice of road.

But this is a deep mistake in this alternative of the optimist and the pessimist. The assumption of it is that a man criticises this world as if he were house-hunting, as if he were being shown over a new suite of apartments. If a man came to this world from some other world in full possession of his powers he might discuss whether the advantage of midsummer woods made up for the disadvantage of mad dogs, just as a man looking for lodgings might balance the presence of a telephone against the absence of a sea view. But no man is in that position. A man belongs to this world before he begins to ask if it is nice to belong to it. He has fought for the flag, and often won heroic victories for the flag long before he has ever enlisted. To put shortly what seems the essential matter, he has a loyalty long before he has any admiration.

In the last chapter it has been said that the primary feeling that this world is strange and yet attractive is best expressed in fairy tales. The reader may, if he
likes, put down the next stage to that bellicose and even jingo literature which commonly comes next in the history of a boy. We all owe much sound morality to the penny dreadfuls. Whatever the reason, it seemed and still seems to me that our attitude towards life can be better expressed in terms of a kind of military loyalty than in terms of criticism and approval. My acceptance of the universe is not optimism, it is more like patriotism. It is a matter of primary loyalty. The world is not a lodging-house at Brighton, which we are to leave because it is miserable. It is the fortress of our family, with the flag flying on the turret, and the more miserable it is the less we should leave it. The point is not that this world is too sad to love or too glad not to love; the point is that when you do love a thing, its gladness is a reason for loving it, and its sadness a reason for loving it more. All optimistic thoughts about England and all pessimistic thoughts about her are alike reasons for the English patriot. Similarly, optimism and pessimism are alike arguments for the cosmic patriot.

Let us suppose we are confronted with a desperate thing—say Pimlico. If we think what is really best for Pimlico we shall find the thread of thought leads to the throne or the mystic and the arbitrary. It is not enough for a man to disapprove of Pimlico: in that case he will merely cut his throat or move to Chelsea. Nor, certainly, is it enough for a man to approve of Pimlico: for then it will remain Pimlico, which would be awful. The only way out of it seems to be for somebody to love Pimlico: to love it with a transcendental tie and without any earthly reason. If there arose a man who loved Pimlico, then Pimlico would rise into ivory towers and golden pinnacles; Pimlico would attire herself as a woman does when she is loved. For decoration is not given to hide horrible things: but to decorate things already adorable. A mother does not give her child a blue bow because he is so ugly without it. A lover does not give a girl a necklace to hide her neck. If men loved Pimlico as mothers love children, arbitrarily, because it is THEIRS, Pimlico in a year or two might be fairer than Florence. Some readers will say that this is a mere fantasy. I answer that this is the actual history of mankind. This, as a fact, is how cities did grow great. Go back to the darkest roots of civilization and you will find them knotted round some sacred stone or encircling some sacred well. People first paid honour to a spot and afterwards gained glory for it. Men did not love Rome because she was great. She was great because they had loved her.

The eighteenth-century theories of the social contract have been exposed to much clumsy criticism in our time; in so far as they meant that there is at the back of all historic government an idea of content and co-operation, they were
demonstrably right. But they really were wrong, in so far as they suggested that
men had ever aimed at order or ethics directly by a conscious exchange of
interests. Morality did not begin by one man saying to another, “I will not hit
you if you do not hit me”; there is no trace of such a transaction. There IS a trace
of both men having said, “We must not hit each other in the holy place.” They
gained their morality by guarding their religion. They did not cultivate courage.
They fought for the shrine, and found they had become courageous. They did not
cultivate cleanliness. They purified themselves for the altar, and found that they
were clean. The history of the Jews is the only early document known to most
Englishmen, and the facts can be judged sufficiently from that. The Ten
Commandments which have been found substantially common to mankind were
merely military commands; a code of regimental orders, issued to protect a
certain ark across a certain desert. Anarchy was evil because it endangered the
sanctity. And only when they made a holy day for God did they find they had
made a holiday for men.

If it be granted that this primary devotion to a place or thing is a source of
creative energy, we can pass on to a very peculiar fact. Let us reiterate for an
instant that the only right optimism is a sort of universal patriotism. What is the
matter with the pessimist? I think it can be stated by saying that he is the cosmic
anti-patriot. And what is the matter with the anti-patriot? I think it can be stated,
without undue bitterness, by saying that he is the candid friend. And what is the
matter with the candid friend? There we strike the rock of real life and
immutable human nature.

I venture to say that what is bad in the candid friend is simply that he is not
candid. He is keeping something back—his own gloomy pleasure in saying
unpleasant things. He has a secret desire to hurt, not merely to help. This is
certainly, I think, what makes a certain sort of anti-patriot irritating to healthy
citizens. I do not speak (of course) of the anti-patriotism which only irritates
feverish stockbrokers and gushing actresses; that is only patriotism speaking
plainly. A man who says that no patriot should attack the Boer War until it is
over is not worth answering intelligently; he is saying that no good son should
warn his mother off a cliff until she has fallen over it. But there is an anti-patriot
who honestly angers honest men, and the explanation of him is, I think, what I
have suggested: he is the uncandid candid friend; the man who says, “I am sorry
to say we are ruined,” and is not sorry at all. And he may be said, without
rhetoric, to be a traitor; for he is using that ugly knowledge which was allowed
him to strengthen the army, to discourage people from joining it. Because he is
allowed to be pessimistic as a military adviser he is being pessimistic as a recruiting sergeant. Just in the same way the pessimist (who is the cosmic anti-patriot) uses the freedom that life allows to her counsellors to lure away the people from her flag. Granted that he states only facts, it is still essential to know what are his emotions, what is his motive. It may be that twelve hundred men in Tottenham are down with smallpox; but we want to know whether this is stated by some great philosopher who wants to curse the gods, or only by some common clergyman who wants to help the men.

The evil of the pessimist is, then, not that he chastises gods and men, but that he does not love what he chastises—he has not this primary and supernatural loyalty to things. What is the evil of the man commonly called an optimist? Obviously, it is felt that the optimist, wishing to defend the honour of this world, will defend the indefensible. He is the jingo of the universe; he will say, “My cosmos, right or wrong.” He will be less inclined to the reform of things; more inclined to a sort of front-bench official answer to all attacks, soothing every one with assurances. He will not wash the world, but whitewash the world. All this (which is true of a type of optimist) leads us to the one really interesting point of psychology, which could not be explained without it.

We say there must be a primal loyalty to life: the only question is, shall it be a natural or a supernatural loyalty? If you like to put it so, shall it be a reasonable or an unreasonable loyalty? Now, the extraordinary thing is that the bad optimism (the whitewashing, the weak defence of everything) comes in with the reasonable optimism. Rational optimism leads to stagnation: it is irrational optimism that leads to reform. Let me explain by using once more the parallel of patriotism. The man who is most likely to ruin the place he loves is exactly the man who loves it with a reason. The man who will improve the place is the man who loves it without a reason. If a man loves some feature of Pimlico (which seems unlikely), he may find himself defending that feature against Pimlico itself. But if he simply loves Pimlico itself, he may lay it waste and turn it into the New Jerusalem. I do not deny that reform may be excessive; I only say that it is the mystic patriot who reforms. Mere jingo self-contentment is commonest among those who have some pedantic reason for their patriotism. The worst jingoes do not love England, but a theory of England. If we love England for being an empire, we may overrate the success with which we rule the Hindoos. But if we love it only for being a nation, we can face all events: for it would be a nation even if the Hindoos ruled us. Thus also only those will permit their patriotism to falsify history whose patriotism depends on history. A man who
loves England for being English will not mind how she arose. But a man who
loves England for being Anglo-Saxon may go against all facts for his fancy. He
may end (like Carlyle and Freeman) by maintaining that the Norman Conquest
was a Saxon Conquest. He may end in utter unreason—because he has a reason.
A man who loves France for being military will palliate the army of 1870. But a
man who loves France for being France will improve the army of 1870. This is
exactly what the French have done, and France is a good instance of the working
paradox. Nowhere else is patriotism more purely abstract and arbitrary; and
nowhere else is reform more drastic and sweeping. The more transcendental is
your patriotism, the more practical are your politics.
Perhaps the most everyday instance of this point is in the case of women; and
their strange and strong loyalty. Some stupid people started the idea that because
women obviously back up their own people through everything, therefore
women are blind and do not see anything. They can hardly have known any
women. The same women who are ready to defend their men through thick and
thin are (in their personal intercourse with the man) almost morbidly lucid about
the thinness of his excuses or the thickness of his head. A man’s friend likes him
but leaves him as he is: his wife loves him and is always trying to turn him into
somebody else. Women who are utter mystics in their creed are utter cynics in
their criticism. Thackeray expressed this well when he made Pendennis’ mother,
who worshipped her son as a god, yet assume that he would go wrong as a man.
She undervalued his virtue, though she overvalued his value. The devotee is entirely
free to criticise; the fanatic can safely be a sceptic. Love is not blind; that is the
last thing that it is. Love is bound; and the more it is bound the less it is blind.
This at least had come to be my position about all that was called optimism,
pessimism, and improvement. Before any cosmic act of reform we must have a
cosmic oath of allegiance. A man must be interested in life, then he could be
disinterested in his views of it. “My son give me thy heart”; the heart must be
fixed on the right thing: the moment we have a fixed heart we have a free hand. I
must pause to anticipate an obvious criticism. It will be said that a rational
person accepts the world as mixed of good and evil with a decent satisfaction
and a decent endurance. But this is exactly the attitude which I maintain to be
defective. It is, I know, very common in this age; it was perfectly put in those
quiet lines of Matthew Arnold which are more piercingly blasphemous than the
shrieks of Schopenhauer—
“Enough we live:—and if a life, With large results so little rife, Though
bearable, seem hardly worth This pomp of worlds, this pain of birth.”
I know this feeling fills our epoch, and I think it freezes our epoch. For our Titanic purposes of faith and revolution, what we need is not the cold acceptance of the world as a compromise, but some way in which we can heartily hate and heartily love it. We do not want joy and anger to neutralize each other and produce a surly contentment; we want a fiercer delight and a fiercer discontent. We have to feel the universe at once as an ogre’s castle, to be stormed, and yet as our own cottage, to which we can return at evening.

No one doubts that an ordinary man can get on with this world: but we demand not strength enough to get on with it, but strength enough to get it on. Can he hate it enough to change it, and yet love it enough to think it worth changing? Can he look up at its colossal good without once feeling acquiescence? Can he look up at its colossal evil without once feeling despair? Can he, in short, be at once not only a pessimist and an optimist, but a fanatical pessimist and a fanatical optimist? Is he enough of a pagan to die for the world, and enough of a Christian to die to it? In this combination, I maintain, it is the rational optimist who fails, the irrational optimist who succeeds. He is ready to smash the whole universe for the sake of itself.

I put these things not in their mature logical sequence, but as they came: and this view was cleared and sharpened by an accident of the time. Under the lengthening shadow of Ibsen, an argument arose whether it was not a very nice thing to murder one’s self. Grave moderns told us that we must not even say “poor fellow,” of a man who had blown his brains out, since he was an enviable person, and had only blown them out because of their exceptional excellence. Mr. William Archer even suggested that in the golden age there would be penny-in-the-slot machines, by which a man could kill himself for a penny. In all this I found myself utterly hostile to many who called themselves liberal and humane. Not only is suicide a sin, it is the sin. It is the ultimate and absolute evil, the refusal to take an interest in existence; the refusal to take the oath of loyalty to life. The man who kills a man, kills a man. The man who kills himself, kills all men; as far as he is concerned he wipes out the world. His act is worse (symbolically considered) than any rape or dynamite outrage. For it destroys all buildings: it insults all women. The thief is satisfied with diamonds; but the suicide is not: that is his crime. He cannot be bribed, even by the blazing stones of the Celestial City. The thief compliments the things he steals, if not the owner of them. But the suicide insults everything on earth by not stealing it. He defiles every flower by refusing to live for its sake. There is not a tiny creature in the cosmos at whom his death is not a sneer. When a man hangs himself on a tree,
the leaves might fall off in anger and the birds fly away in fury: for each has received a personal affront. Of course there may be pathetic emotional excuses for the act. There often are for rape, and there almost always are for dynamite. But if it comes to clear ideas and the intelligent meaning of things, then there is much more rational and philosophic truth in the burial at the crossroads and the stake driven through the body, than in Mr. Archer’s suicidal automatic machines. There is a meaning in burying the suicide apart. The man’s crime is different from other crimes—for it makes even crimes impossible.

About the same time I read a solemn flippancy by some free thinker: he said that a suicide was only the same as a martyr. The open fallacy of this helped to clear the question. Obviously a suicide is the opposite of a martyr. A martyr is a man who cares so much for something outside him, that he forgets his own personal life. A suicide is a man who cares so little for anything outside him, that he wants to see the last of everything. One wants something to begin: the other wants everything to end. In other words, the martyr is noble, exactly because (however he renounces the world or execrates all humanity) he confesses this ultimate link with life; he sets his heart outside himself: he dies that something may live. The suicide is ignoble because he has not this link with being: he is a mere destroyer; spiritually, he destroys the universe. And then I remembered the stake and the crossroads, and the queer fact that Christianity had shown this weird harshness to the suicide. For Christianity had shown a wild encouragement of the martyr. Historic Christianity was accused, not entirely without reason, of carrying martyrdom and asceticism to a point, desolate and pessimistic. The early Christian martyrs talked of death with a horrible happiness. They blasphemed the beautiful duties of the body: they smelt the grave afar off like a field of flowers. All this has seemed to many the very poetry of pessimism. Yet there is the stake at the crossroads to show what Christianity thought of the pessimist.

This was the first of the long train of enigmas with which Christianity entered the discussion. And there went with it a peculiarity of which I shall have to speak more markedly, as a note of all Christian notions, but which distinctly began in this one. The Christian attitude to the martyr and the suicide was not what is so often affirmed in modern morals. It was not a matter of degree. It was not that a line must be drawn somewhere, and that the self-slayer in exaltation fell within the line, the self-slayer in sadness just beyond it. The Christian feeling evidently was not merely that the suicide was carrying martyrdom too far. The Christian feeling was furiously for one and furiously against the other:
these two things that looked so much alike were at opposite ends of heaven and hell. One man flung away his life; he was so good that his dry bones could heal cities in pestilence. Another man flung away life; he was so bad that his bones would pollute his brethren’s. I am not saying this fierceness was right; but why was it so fierce?

Here it was that I first found that my wandering feet were in some beaten track. Christianity had also felt this opposition of the martyr to the suicide: had it perhaps felt it for the same reason? Had Christianity felt what I felt, but could not (and cannot) express—this need for a first loyalty to things, and then for a ruinous reform of things? Then I remembered that it was actually the charge against Christianity that it combined these two things which I was wildly trying to combine. Christianity was accused, at one and the same time, of being too optimistic about the universe and of being too pessimistic about the world. The coincidence made me suddenly stand still.

An imbecile habit has arisen in modern controversy of saying that such and such a creed can be held in one age but cannot be held in another. Some dogma, we are told, was credible in the twelfth century, but is not credible in the twentieth. You might as well say that a certain philosophy can be believed on Mondays, but cannot be believed on Tuesdays. You might as well say of a view of the cosmos that it was suitable to half-past three, but not suitable to half-past four. What a man can believe depends upon his philosophy, not upon the clock or the century. If a man believes in unalterable natural law, he cannot believe in any miracle in any age. If a man believes in a will behind law, he can believe in any miracle in any age. Suppose, for the sake of argument, we are concerned with a case of thaumaturgic healing. A materialist of the twelfth century could not believe it any more than a materialist of the twentieth century. But a Christian Scientist of the twentieth century can believe it as much as a Christian of the twelfth century. It is simply a matter of a man’s theory of things. Therefore in dealing with any historical answer, the point is not whether it was given in our time, but whether it was given in answer to our question. And the more I thought about when and how Christianity had come into the world, the more I felt that it had actually come to answer this question.

It is commonly the loose and latitudinarian Christians who pay quite indefensible compliments to Christianity. They talk as if there had never been any piety or pity until Christianity came, a point on which any mediaeval would have been eager to correct them. They represent that the remarkable thing about Christianity was that it was the first to preach simplicity or self-restraint, or
inwardness and sincerity. They will think me very narrow (whatever that means) if I say that the remarkable thing about Christianity was that it was the first to preach Christianity. Its peculiarity was that it was peculiar, and simplicity and sincerity are not peculiar, but obvious ideals for all mankind. Christianity was the answer to a riddle, not the last truism uttered after a long talk. Only the other day I saw in an excellent weekly paper of Puritan tone this remark, that Christianity when stripped of its armour of dogma (as who should speak of a man stripped of his armour of bones), turned out to be nothing but the Quaker doctrine of the Inner Light. Now, if I were to say that Christianity came into the world specially to destroy the doctrine of the Inner Light, that would be an exaggeration. But it would be very much nearer to the truth. The last Stoics, like Marcus Aurelius, were exactly the people who did believe in the Inner Light. Their dignity, their weariness, their sad external care for others, their incurable internal care for themselves, were all due to the Inner Light, and existed only by that dismal illumination. Notice that Marcus Aurelius insists, as such introspective moralists always do, upon small things done or undone; it is because he has not hate or love enough to make a moral revolution. He gets up early in the morning, just as our own aristocrats living the Simple Life get up early in the morning; because such altruism is much easier than stopping the games of the amphitheatre or giving the English people back their land. Marcus Aurelius is the most intolerable of human types. He is an unselfish egoist. An unselfish egoist is a man who has pride without the excuse of passion. Of all conceivable forms of enlightenment the worst is what these people call the Inner Light. Of all horrible religions the most horrible is the worship of the god within. Any one who knows any body knows how it would work; any one who knows any one from the Higher Thought Centre knows how it does work. That Jones shall worship the god within him turns out ultimately to mean that Jones shall worship Jones. Let Jones worship the sun or moon, anything rather than the Inner Light; let Jones worship cats or crocodiles, if he can find any in his street, but not the god within. Christianity came into the world firstly in order to assert with violence that a man had not only to look inwards, but to look outwards, to behold with astonishment and enthusiasm a divine company and a divine captain. The only fun of being a Christian was that a man was not left alone with the Inner Light, but definitely recognized an outer light, fair as the sun, clear as the moon, terrible as an army with banners.

All the same, it will be as well if Jones does not worship the sun and moon. If he does, there is a tendency for him to imitate them; to say, that because the sun
burns insects alive, he may burn insects alive. He thinks that because the sun
gives people sun-stroke, he may give his neighbour measles. He thinks that
because the moon is said to drive men mad, he may drive his wife mad. This
ugly side of mere external optimism had also shown itself in the ancient world.
About the time when the Stoic idealism had begun to show the weaknesses of
pessimism, the old nature worship of the ancients had begun to show the
enormous weaknesses of optimism. Nature worship is natural enough while the
society is young, or, in other words, Pantheism is all right as long as it is the
worship of Pan. But Nature has another side which experience and sin are not
slow in finding out, and it is no flippancy to say of the god Pan that he soon
showed the cloven hoof. The only objection to Natural Religion is that somehow
it always becomes unnatural. A man loves Nature in the morning for her
innocence and amiability, and at nightfall, if he is loving her still, it is for her
darkness and her cruelty. He washes at dawn in clear water as did the Wise Man
of the Stoics, yet, somehow at the dark end of the day, he is bathing in hot bull’s
blood, as did Julian the Apostate. The mere pursuit of health always leads to
something unhealthy. Physical nature must not be made the direct object of
obedience; it must be enjoyed, not worshipped. Stars and mountains must not be
taken seriously. If they are, we end where the pagan nature worship ended.
Because the earth is kind, we can imitate all her cruelties. Because sexuality is
sane, we can all go mad about sexuality. Mere optimism had reached its insane
and appropriate termination. The theory that everything was good had become
an orgy of everything that was bad.

On the other side our idealist pessimists were represented by the old remnant
of the Stoics. Marcus Aurelius and his friends had really given up the idea of any
god in the universe and looked only to the god within. They had no hope of any
virtue in nature, and hardly any hope of any virtue in society. They had not
enough interest in the outer world really to wreck or revolutionise it. They did
not love the city enough to set fire to it. Thus the ancient world was exactly in
our own desolate dilemma. The only people who really enjoyed this world were
busy breaking it up; and the virtuous people did not care enough about them to
knock them down. In this dilemma (the same as ours) Christianity suddenly
stepped in and offered a singular answer, which the world eventually accepted as
THE answer. It was the answer then, and I think it is the answer now.

This answer was like the slash of a sword; it sundered; it did not in any sense
sentimentally unite. Briefly, it divided God from the cosmos. That transcendence
and distinctness of the deity which some Christians now want to remove from
Christianity, was really the only reason why any one wanted to be a Christian. It was the whole point of the Christian answer to the unhappy pessimist and the still more unhappy optimist. As I am here only concerned with their particular problem, I shall indicate only briefly this great metaphysical suggestion. All descriptions of the creating or sustaining principle in things must be metaphorical, because they must be verbal. Thus the pantheist is forced to speak of God in all things as if he were in a box. Thus the evolutionist has, in his very name, the idea of being unrolled like a carpet. All terms, religious and irreligious, are open to this charge. The only question is whether all terms are useless, or whether one can, with such a phrase, cover a distinct IDEA about the origin of things. I think one can, and so evidently does the evolutionist, or he would not talk about evolution. And the root phrase for all Christian theism was this, that God was a creator, as an artist is a creator. A poet is so separate from his poem that he himself speaks of it as a little thing he has “thrown off.” Even in giving it forth he has flung it away. This principle that all creation and procreation is a breaking off is at least as consistent through the cosmos as the evolutionary principle that all growth is a branching out. A woman loses a child even in having a child. All creation is separation. Birth is as solemn a parting as death.

It was the prime philosophic principle of Christianity that this divorce in the divine act of making (such as severs the poet from the poem or the mother from the new-born child) was the true description of the act whereby the absolute energy made the world. According to most philosophers, God in making the world enslaved it. According to Christianity, in making it, He set it free. God had written, not so much a poem, but rather a play; a play he had planned as perfect, but which had necessarily been left to human actors and stage-managers, who had since made a great mess of it. I will discuss the truth of this theorem later. Here I have only to point out with what a startling smoothness it passed the dilemma we have discussed in this chapter. In this way at least one could be both happy and indignant without degrading one’s self to be either a pessimist or an optimist. On this system one could fight all the forces of existence without deserting the flag of existence. One could be at peace with the universe and yet be at war with the world. St. George could still fight the dragon, however big the monster bulked in the cosmos, though he were bigger than the mighty cities or bigger than the everlasting hills. If he were as big as the world he could yet be killed in the name of the world. St. George had not to consider any obvious odds or proportions in the scale of things, but only the original secret of their design.
He can shake his sword at the dragon, even if it is everything; even if the empty heavens over his head are only the huge arch of its open jaws.

And then followed an experience impossible to describe. It was as if I had been blundering about since my birth with two huge and unmanageable machines, of different shapes and without apparent connection—the world and the Christian tradition. I had found this hole in the world: the fact that one must somehow find a way of loving the world without trusting it; somehow one must love the world without being worldly. I found this projecting feature of Christian theology, like a sort of hard spike, the dogmatic insistence that God was personal, and had made a world separate from Himself. The spike of dogma fitted exactly into the hole in the world—it had evidently been meant to go there—and then the strange thing began to happen. When once these two parts of the two machines had come together, one after another, all the other parts fitted and fell in with an eerie exactitude. I could hear bolt after bolt over all the machinery falling into its place with a kind of click of relief. Having got one part right, all the other parts were repeating that rectitude, as clock after clock strikes noon. Instinct after instinct was answered by doctrine after doctrine. Or, to vary the metaphor, I was like one who had advanced into a hostile country to take one high fortress. And when that fort had fallen the whole country surrendered and turned solid behind me. The whole land was lit up, as it were, back to the first fields of my childhood. All those blind fancies of boyhood which in the fourth chapter I have tried in vain to trace on the darkness, became suddenly transparent and sane. I was right when I felt that roses were red by some sort of choice: it was the divine choice. I was right when I felt that I would almost rather say that grass was the wrong colour than say it must by necessity have been that colour: it might verily have been any other. My sense that happiness hung on the crazy thread of a condition did mean something when all was said: it meant the whole doctrine of the Fall. Even those dim and shapeless monsters of notions which I have not been able to describe, much less defend, stepped quietly into their places like colossal caryatides of the creed. The fancy that the cosmos was not vast and void, but small and cosy, had a fulfilled significance now, for anything that is a work of art must be small in the sight of the artist; to God the stars might be only small and dear, like diamonds. And my haunting instinct that somehow good was not merely a tool to be used, but a relic to be guarded, like the goods from Crusoe’s ship—even that had been the wild whisper of something originally wise, for, according to Christianity, we were indeed the survivors of a wreck, the crew of a golden ship that had gone down
before the beginning of the world.

But the important matter was this, that it entirely reversed the reason for optimism. And the instant the reversal was made it felt like the abrupt ease when a bone is put back in the socket. I had often called myself an optimist, to avoid the too evident blasphemy of pessimism. But all the optimism of the age had been false and disheartening for this reason, that it had always been trying to prove that we fit in to the world. The Christian optimism is based on the fact that we do NOT fit in to the world. I had tried to be happy by telling myself that man is an animal, like any other which sought its meat from God. But now I really was happy, for I had learnt that man is a monstrosity. I had been right in feeling all things as odd, for I myself was at once worse and better than all things. The optimist’s pleasure was prosaic, for it dwelt on the naturalness of everything; the Christian pleasure was poetic, for it dwelt on the unnaturalness of everything in the light of the supernatural. The modern philosopher had told me again and again that I was in the right place, and I had still felt depressed even in acquiescence. But I had heard that I was in the WRONG place, and my soul sang for joy, like a bird in spring. The knowledge found out and illuminated forgotten chambers in the dark house of infancy. I knew now why grass had always seemed to me as queer as the green beard of a giant, and why I could feel homesick at home.
VI

THE PARADOXES OF CHRISTIANITY

The real trouble with this world of ours is not that it is an unreasonable world, nor even that it is a reasonable one. The commonest kind of trouble is that it is nearly reasonable, but not quite. Life is not an illogicality; yet it is a trap for logicians. It looks just a little more mathematical and regular than it is; its exactitude is obvious, but its inexactitude is hidden; its wildness lies in wait. I give one coarse instance of what I mean. Suppose some mathematical creature from the moon were to reckon up the human body; he would at once see that the essential thing about it was that it was duplicate. A man is two men, he on the right exactly resembling him on the left. Having noted that there was an arm on the right and one on the left, a leg on the right and one on the left, he might go further and still find on each side the same number of fingers, the same number of toes, twin eyes, twin ears, twin nostrils, and even twin lobes of the brain. At last he would take it as a law; and then, where he found a heart on one side, would deduce that there was another heart on the other. And just then, where he most felt he was right, he would be wrong.

It is this silent swerving from accuracy by an inch that is the uncanny element in everything. It seems a sort of secret treason in the universe. An apple or an orange is round enough to get itself called round, and yet is not round after all. The earth itself is shaped like an orange in order to lure some simple astronomer into calling it a globe. A blade of grass is called after the blade of a sword, because it comes to a point; but it doesn’t. Everywhere in things there is this element of the quiet and incalculable. It escapes the rationalists, but it never escapes till the last moment. From the grand curve of our earth it could easily be inferred that every inch of it was thus curved. It would seem rational that as a man has a brain on both sides, he should have a heart on both sides. Yet scientific men are still organizing expeditions to find the North Pole, because they are so fond of flat country. Scientific men are also still organizing expeditions to find a man’s heart; and when they try to find it, they generally get on the wrong side of him.

Now, actual insight or inspiration is best tested by whether it guesses these hidden malformations or surprises. If our mathematician from the moon saw the two arms and the two ears, he might deduce the two shoulder-blades and the two
halves of the brain. But if he guessed that the man’s heart was in the right place, then I should call him something more than a mathematician. Now, this is exactly the claim which I have since come to propound for Christianity. Not merely that it deduces logical truths, but that when it suddenly becomes illogical, it has found, so to speak, an illogical truth. It not only goes right about things, but it goes wrong (if one may say so) exactly where the things go wrong. Its plan suits the secret irregularities, and expects the unexpected. It is simple about the simple truth; but it is stubborn about the subtle truth. It will admit that a man has two hands, it will not admit (though all the Modernists wail to it) the obvious deduction that he has two hearts. It is my only purpose in this chapter to point this out; to show that whenever we feel there is something odd in Christian theology, we shall generally find that there is something odd in the truth.

I have alluded to an unmeaning phrase to the effect that such and such a creed cannot be believed in our age. Of course, anything can be believed in any age. But, oddly enough, there really is a sense in which a creed, if it is believed at all, can be believed more fixedly in a complex society than in a simple one. If a man finds Christianity true in Birmingham, he has actually clearer reasons for faith than if he had found it true in Mercia. For the more complicated seems the coincidence, the less it can be a coincidence. If snowflakes fell in the shape, say, of the heart of Midlothian, it might be an accident. But if snowflakes fell in the exact shape of the maze at Hampton Court, I think one might call it a miracle. It is exactly as of such a miracle that I have since come to feel of the philosophy of Christianity. The complication of our modern world proves the truth of the creed more perfectly than any of the plain problems of the ages of faith. It was in Notting Hill and Battersea that I began to see that Christianity was true. This is why the faith has that elaboration of doctrines and details which so much distresses those who admire Christianity without believing in it. When once one believes in a creed, one is proud of its complexity, as scientists are proud of the complexity of science. It shows how rich it is in discoveries. If it is right at all, it is a compliment to say that it’s elaborately right. A stick might fit a hole or a stone a hollow by accident. But a key and a lock are both complex. And if a key fits a lock, you know it is the right key.

But this involved accuracy of the thing makes it very difficult to do what I now have to do, to describe this accumulation of truth. It is very hard for a man to defend anything of which he is entirely convinced. It is comparatively easy when he is only partially convinced. He is partially convinced because he has found this or that proof of the thing, and he can expound it. But a man is not
really convinced of a philosophic theory when he finds that something proves it. He is only really convinced when he finds that everything proves it. And the more converging reasons he finds pointing to this conviction, the more bewildered he is if asked suddenly to sum them up. Thus, if one asked an ordinary intelligent man, on the spur of the moment, “Why do you prefer civilization to savagery?” he would look wildly round at object after object, and would only be able to answer vaguely, “Why, there is that bookcase... and the coals in the coal-scuttle... and pianos... and policemen.” The whole case for civilization is that the case for it is complex. It has done so many things. But that very multiplicity of proof which ought to make reply overwhelming makes reply impossible.

There is, therefore, about all complete conviction a kind of huge helplessness. The belief is so big that it takes a long time to get it into action. And this hesitation chiefly arises, oddly enough, from an indifference about where one should begin. All roads lead to Rome; which is one reason why many people never get there. In the case of this defence of the Christian conviction I confess that I would as soon begin the argument with one thing as another; I would begin it with a turnip or a taximeter cab. But if I am to be at all careful about making my meaning clear, it will, I think, be wiser to continue the current arguments of the last chapter, which was concerned to urge the first of these mystical coincidences, or rather ratifications. All I had hitherto heard of Christian theology had alienated me from it. I was a pagan at the age of twelve, and a complete agnostic by the age of sixteen; and I cannot understand any one passing the age of seventeen without having asked himself so simple a question. I did, indeed, retain a cloudy reverence for a cosmic deity and a great historical interest in the Founder of Christianity. But I certainly regarded Him as a man; though perhaps I thought that, even in that point, He had an advantage over some of His modern critics. I read the scientific and sceptical literature of my time—all of it, at least, that I could find written in English and lying about; and I read nothing else; I mean I read nothing else on any other note of philosophy. The penny dreadfuls which I also read were indeed in a healthy and heroic tradition of Christianity; but I did not know this at the time. I never read a line of Christian apologetics. I read as little as I can of them now. It was Huxley and Herbert Spencer and Bradlaugh who brought me back to orthodox theology. They sowed in my mind my first wild doubts of doubt. Our grandmothers were quite right when they said that Tom Paine and the free-thinkers unsettled the mind. They do. They unsettled mine horribly. The rationalist made me question
whether reason was of any use whatever; and when I had finished Herbert Spencer I had got as far as doubting (for the first time) whether evolution had occurred at all. As I laid down the last of Colonel Ingersoll’s atheistic lectures the dreadful thought broke across my mind, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.” I was in a desperate way.

This odd effect of the great agnostics in arousing doubts deeper than their own might be illustrated in many ways. I take only one. As I read and re-read all the non-Christian or anti-Christian accounts of the faith, from Huxley to Bradlaugh, a slow and awful impression grew gradually but graphically upon my mind—the impression that Christianity must be a most extraordinary thing. For not only (as I understood) had Christianity the most flaming vices, but it had apparently a mystical talent for combining vices which seemed inconsistent with each other. It was attacked on all sides and for all contradictory reasons. No sooner had one rationalist demonstrated that it was too far to the east than another demonstrated with equal clearness that it was much too far to the west. No sooner had my indignation died down at its angular and aggressive squareness than I was called up again to notice and condemn its enervating and sensual roundness. In case any reader has not come across the thing I mean, I will give such instances as I remember at random of this self-contradiction in the sceptical attack. I give four or five of them; there are fifty more.

Thus, for instance, I was much moved by the eloquent attack on Christianity as a thing of inhuman gloom; for I thought (and still think) sincere pessimism the unpardonable sin. Insincere pessimism is a social accomplishment, rather agreeable than otherwise; and fortunately nearly all pessimism is insincere. But if Christianity was, as these people said, a thing purely pessimistic and opposed to life, then I was quite prepared to blow up St. Paul’s Cathedral. But the extraordinary thing is this. They did prove to me in Chapter I. (to my complete satisfaction) that Christianity was too pessimistic; and then, in Chapter II., they began to prove to me that it was a great deal too optimistic. One accusation against Christianity was that it prevented men, by morbid tears and terrors, from seeking joy and liberty in the bosom of Nature. But another accusation was that it comforted men with a fictitious providence, and put them in a pink-and-white nursery. One great agnostic asked why Nature was not beautiful enough, and why it was hard to be free. Another great agnostic objected that Christian optimism, “the garment of make-believe woven by pious hands,” hid from us the fact that Nature was ugly, and that it was impossible to be free. One rationalist had hardly done calling Christianity a nightmare before another began to call it a
fool’s paradise. This puzzled me; the charges seemed inconsistent. Christianity could not at once be the black mask on a white world, and also the white mask on a black world. The state of the Christian could not be at once so comfortable that he was a coward to cling to it, and so uncomfortable that he was a fool to stand it. If it falsified human vision it must falsify it one way or another; it could not wear both green and rose-coloured spectacles. I rolled on my tongue with a terrible joy, as did all young men of that time, the taunts which Swinburne hurled at the dreariness of the creed—

“Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilaean, the world has grown gray with Thy breath.”

But when I read the same poet’s accounts of paganism (as in “Atalanta”), I gathered that the world was, if possible, more gray before the Galilean breathed on it than afterwards. The poet maintained, indeed, in the abstract, that life itself was pitch dark. And yet, somehow, Christianity had darkened it. The very man who denounced Christianity for pessimism was himself a pessimist. I thought there must be something wrong. And it did for one wild moment cross my mind that, perhaps, those might not be the very best judges of the relation of religion to happiness who, by their own account, had neither one nor the other.

It must be understood that I did not conclude hastily that the accusations were false or the accusers fools. I simply deduced that Christianity must be something even weirder and wickeder than they made out. A thing might have these two opposite vices; but it must be a rather queer thing if it did. A man might be too fat in one place and too thin in another; but he would be an odd shape. At this point my thoughts were only of the odd shape of the Christian religion; I did not allege any odd shape in the rationalistic mind.

Here is another case of the same kind. I felt that a strong case against Christianity lay in the charge that there is something timid, monkish, and unmanly about all that is called “Christian,” especially in its attitude towards resistance and fighting. The great sceptics of the nineteenth century were largely virile. Bradlaugh in an expansive way, Huxley, in a reticent way, were decidedly men. In comparison, it did seem tenable that there was something weak and over patient about Christian counsels. The Gospel paradox about the other cheek, the fact that priests never fought, a hundred things made plausible the accusation that Christianity was an attempt to make a man too like a sheep. I read it and believed it, and if I had read nothing different, I should have gone on believing it. But I read something very different. I turned the next page in my agnostic manual, and my brain turned up-side down. Now I found that I was to hate
Christianity not for fighting too little, but for fighting too much. Christianity, it seemed, was the mother of wars. Christianity had deluged the world with blood. I had got thoroughly angry with the Christian, because he never was angry. And now I was told to be angry with him because his anger had been the most huge and horrible thing in human history; because his anger had soaked the earth and smoked to the sun. The very people who reproached Christianity with the meekness and non-resistance of the monasteries were the very people who reproached it also with the violence and valour of the Crusades. It was the fault of poor old Christianity (somehow or other) both that Edward the Confessor did not fight and that Richard Coeur de Leon did. The Quakers (we were told) were the only characteristic Christians; and yet the massacres of Cromwell and Alva were characteristic Christian crimes. What could it all mean? What was this Christianity which always forbade war and always produced wars? What could be the nature of the thing which one could abuse first because it would not fight, and second because it was always fighting? In what world of riddles was born this monstrous murder and this monstrous meekness? The shape of Christianity grew a queerer shape every instant.

I take a third case; the strangest of all, because it involves the one real objection to the faith. The one real objection to the Christian religion is simply that it is one religion. The world is a big place, full of very different kinds of people. Christianity (it may reasonably be said) is one thing confined to one kind of people; it began in Palestine, it has practically stopped with Europe. I was duly impressed with this argument in my youth, and I was much drawn towards the doctrine often preached in Ethical Societies—I mean the doctrine that there is one great unconscious church of all humanity founded on the omnipresence of the human conscience. Creeds, it was said, divided men; but at least morals united them. The soul might seek the strangest and most remote lands and ages and still find essential ethical common sense. It might find Confucius under Eastern trees, and he would be writing “Thou shalt not steal.” It might decipher the darkest hieroglyphic on the most primeval desert, and the meaning when deciphered would be “Little boys should tell the truth.” I believed this doctrine of the brotherhood of all men in the possession of a moral sense, and I believe it still—with other things. And I was thoroughly annoyed with Christianity for suggesting (as I supposed) that whole ages and empires of men had utterly escaped this light of justice and reason. But then I found an astonishing thing. I found that the very people who said that mankind was one church from Plato to Emerson were the very people who said that morality had changed altogether,
and that what was right in one age was wrong in another. If I asked, say, for an altar, I was told that we needed none, for men our brothers gave us clear oracles and one creed in their universal customs and ideals. But if I mildly pointed out that one of men’s universal customs was to have an altar, then my agnostic teachers turned clean round and told me that men had always been in darkness and the superstitions of savages. I found it was their daily taunt against Christianity that it was the light of one people and had left all others to die in the dark. But I also found that it was their special boast for themselves that science and progress were the discovery of one people, and that all other peoples had died in the dark. Their chief insult to Christianity was actually their chief compliment to themselves, and there seemed to be a strange unfairness about all their relative insistence on the two things. When considering some pagan or agnostic, we were to remember that all men had one religion; when considering some mystic or spiritualist, we were only to consider what absurd religions some men had. We could trust the ethics of Epictetus, because ethics had never changed. We must not trust the ethics of Bossuet, because ethics had changed. They changed in two hundred years, but not in two thousand.

This began to be alarming. It looked not so much as if Christianity was bad enough to include any vices, but rather as if any stick was good enough to beat Christianity with. What again could this astonishing thing be like which people were so anxious to contradict, that in doing so they did not mind contradicting themselves? I saw the same thing on every side. I can give no further space to this discussion of it in detail; but lest any one supposes that I have unfairly selected three accidental cases I will run briefly through a few others. Thus, certain sceptics wrote that the great crime of Christianity had been its attack on the family; it had dragged women to the loneliness and contemplation of the cloister, away from their homes and their children. But, then, other sceptics (slightly more advanced) said that the great crime of Christianity was forcing the family and marriage upon us; that it doomed women to the drudgery of their homes and children, and forbade them loneliness and contemplation. The charge was actually reversed. Or, again, certain phrases in the Epistles or the marriage service, were said by the anti-Christians to show contempt for woman’s intellect. But I found that the anti-Christians themselves had a contempt for woman’s intellect; for it was their great sneer at the Church on the Continent that “only women” went to it. Or again, Christianity was reproached with its naked and hungry habits; with its sackcloth and dried peas. But the next minute Christianity was being reproached with its pomp and its ritualism; its shrines of porphyry and
its robes of gold. It was abused for being too plain and for being too coloured. Again Christianity had always been accused of restraining sexuality too much, when Bradlaugh the Malthusian discovered that it restrained it too little. It is often accused in the same breath of prim respectability and of religious extravagance. Between the covers of the same atheistic pamphlet I have found the faith rebuked for its disunion, “One thinks one thing, and one another,” and rebuked also for its union, “It is difference of opinion that prevents the world from going to the dogs.” In the same conversation a free-thinker, a friend of mine, blamed Christianity for despising Jews, and then despised it himself for being Jewish.

I wished to be quite fair then, and I wish to be quite fair now; and I did not conclude that the attack on Christianity was all wrong. I only concluded that if Christianity was wrong, it was very wrong indeed. Such hostile horrors might be combined in one thing, but that thing must be very strange and solitary. There are men who are misers, and also spendthrifts; but they are rare. There are men sensual and also ascetic; but they are rare. But if this mass of mad contradictions really existed, quakerish and bloodthirsty, too gorgeous and too thread-bare, austere, yet pandering preposterously to the lust of the eye, the enemy of women and their foolish refuge, a solemn pessimist and a silly optimist, if this evil existed, then there was in this evil something quite supreme and unique. For I found in my rationalist teachers no explanation of such exceptional corruption. Christianity (theoretically speaking) was in their eyes only one of the ordinary myths and errors of mortals. THEY gave me no key to this twisted and unnatural badness. Such a paradox of evil rose to the stature of the supernatural. It was, indeed, almost as supernatural as the infallibility of the Pope. An historic institution, which never went right, is really quite as much of a miracle as an institution that cannot go wrong. The only explanation which immediately occurred to my mind was that Christianity did not come from heaven, but from hell. Really, if Jesus of Nazareth was not Christ, He must have been Antichrist.

And then in a quiet hour a strange thought struck me like a still thunderbolt. There had suddenly come into my mind another explanation. Suppose we heard an unknown man spoken of by many men. Suppose we were puzzled to hear that some men said he was too tall and some too short; some objected to his fatness, some lamented his leanness; some thought him too dark, and some too fair. One explanation (as has been already admitted) would be that he might be an odd shape. But there is another explanation. He might be the right shape. Outrageously tall men might feel him to be short. Very short men might feel him
to be tall. Old bucks who are growing stout might consider him insufficiency
filled out; old beaux who were growing thin might feel that he expanded beyond
the narrow lines of elegance. Perhaps Swedes (who have pale hair like tow) called him a dark man, while negroes considered him distinctly blonde. Perhaps (in short) this extraordinary thing is really the ordinary thing; at least the normal thing, the centre. Perhaps, after all, it is Christianity that is sane and all its critics that are mad—in various ways. I tested this idea by asking myself whether there was about any of the accusers anything morbid that might explain the accusation. I was startled to find that this key fitted a lock. For instance, it was certainly odd that the modern world charged Christianity at once with bodily austerity and with artistic pomp. But then it was also odd, very odd, that the modern world itself combined extreme bodily luxury with an extreme absence of artistic pomp. The modern man thought Becket’s robes too rich and his meals too poor. But then the modern man was really exceptional in history; no man before ever ate such elaborate dinners in such ugly clothes. The modern man found the church too simple exactly where modern life is too complex; he found the church too gorgeous exactly where modern life is too dingy. The man who disliked the plain fasts and feasts was mad on entrees. The man who disliked vestments wore a pair of preposterous trousers. And surely if there was any insanity involved in the matter at all it was in the trousers, not in the simply falling robe. If there was any insanity at all, it was in the extravagant entrees, not in the bread and wine.

I went over all the cases, and I found the key fitted so far. The fact that Swinburne was irritated at the unhappiness of Christians and yet more irritated at their happiness was easily explained. It was no longer a complication of diseases in Christianity, but a complication of diseases in Swinburne. The restraints of Christians saddened him simply because he was more hedonist than a healthy man should be. The faith of Christians angered him because he was more pessimist than a healthy man should be. In the same way the Malthusians by instinct attacked Christianity; not because there is anything especially anti-Malthusian about Christianity, but because there is something a little anti-human about Malthusianism.

Nevertheless it could not, I felt, be quite true that Christianity was merely sensible and stood in the middle. There was really an element in it of emphasis and even frenzy which had justified the secularists in their superficial criticism. It might be wise, I began more and more to think that it was wise, but it was not merely worldly wise; it was not merely temperate and respectable. Its fierce
crusaders and meek saints might balance each other; still, the crusaders were very fierce and the saints were very meek, meek beyond all decency. Now, it was just at this point of the speculation that I remembered my thoughts about the martyr and the suicide. In that matter there had been this combination between two almost insane positions which yet somehow amounted to sanity. This was just such another contradiction; and this I had already found to be true. This was exactly one of the paradoxes in which sceptics found the creed wrong; and in this I had found it right. Madly as Christians might love the martyr or hate the suicide, they never felt these passions more madly than I had felt them long before I dreamed of Christianity. Then the most difficult and interesting part of the mental process opened, and I began to trace this idea darkly through all the enormous thoughts of our theology. The idea was that which I had outlined touching the optimist and the pessimist; that we want not an amalgam or compromise, but both things at the top of their energy; love and wrath both burning. Here I shall only trace it in relation to ethics. But I need not remind the reader that the idea of this combination is indeed central in orthodox theology. For orthodox theology has specially insisted that Christ was not a being apart from God and man, like an elf, nor yet a being half human and half not, like a centaur, but both things at once and both things thoroughly, very man and very God. Now let me trace this notion as I found it.

All sane men can see that sanity is some kind of equilibrium; that one may be mad and eat too much, or mad and eat too little. Some moderns have indeed appeared with vague versions of progress and evolution which seeks to destroy the MESON or balance of Aristotle. They seem to suggest that we are meant to starve progressively, or to go on eating larger and larger breakfasts every morning for ever. But the great truism of the MESON remains for all thinking men, and these people have not upset any balance except their own. But granted that we have all to keep a balance, the real interest comes in with the question of how that balance can be kept. That was the problem which Paganism tried to solve: that was the problem which I think Christianity solved and solved in a very strange way.

Paganism declared that virtue was in a balance; Christianity declared it was in a conflict: the collision of two passions apparently opposite. Of course they were not really inconsistent; but they were such that it was hard to hold simultaneously. Let us follow for a moment the clue of the martyr and the suicide; and take the case of courage. No quality has ever so much addled the brains and tangled the definitions of merely rational sages. Courage is almost a
contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die. "He that will lose his life, the same shall save it," is not a piece of mysticism for saints and heroes. It is a piece of everyday advice for sailors or mountaineers. It might be printed in an Alpine guide or a drill book. This paradox is the whole principle of courage; even of quite earthly or quite brutal courage. A man cut off by the sea may save his life if he will risk it on the precipice.

He can only get away from death by continually stepping within an inch of it. A soldier surrounded by enemies, if he is to cut his way out, needs to combine a strong desire for living with a strange carelessness about dying. He must not merely cling to life, for then he will be a coward, and will not escape. He must not merely wait for death, for then he will be a suicide, and will not escape. He must seek his life in a spirit of furious indifference to it; he must desire life like water and yet drink death like wine. No philosopher, I fancy, has ever expressed this romantic riddle with adequate lucidity, and I certainly have not done so. But Christianity has done more: it has marked the limits of it in the awful graves of the suicide and the hero, showing the distance between him who dies for the sake of living and him who dies for the sake of dying. And it has held up ever since above the European lances the banner of the mystery of chivalry: the Christian courage, which is a disdain of death; not the Chinese courage, which is a disdain of life.

And now I began to find that this duplex passion was the Christian key to ethics everywhere. Everywhere the creed made a moderation out of the still crash of two impetuous emotions. Take, for instance, the matter of modesty, of the balance between mere pride and mere prostration. The average pagan, like the average agnostic, would merely say that he was content with himself, but not insolently self-satisfied, that there were many better and many worse, that his deserts were limited, but he would see that he got them. In short, he would walk with his head in the air; but not necessarily with his nose in the air. This is a manly and rational position, but it is open to the objection we noted against the compromise between optimism and pessimism—the "resignation" of Matthew Arnold. Being a mixture of two things, it is a dilution of two things; neither is present in its full strength or contributes its full colour. This proper pride does not lift the heart like the tongue of trumpets; you cannot go clad in crimson and gold for this. On the other hand, this mild rationalist modesty does not cleanse the soul with fire and make it clear like crystal; it does not (like a strict and searching humility) make a man as a little child, who can sit at the feet of the
grass. It does not make him look up and see marvels; for Alice must grow small if she is to be Alice in Wonderland. Thus it loses both the poetry of being proud and the poetry of being humble. Christianity sought by this same strange expedient to save both of them.

It separated the two ideas and then exaggerated them both. In one way Man was to be haughtier than he had ever been before; in another way he was to be humbler than he had ever been before. In so far as I am Man I am the chief of creatures. In so far as I am a man I am the chief of sinners. All humility that had meant pessimism, that had meant man taking a vague or mean view of his whole destiny—all that was to go. We were to hear no more the wail of Ecclesiastes that humanity had no pre-eminence over the brute, or the awful cry of Homer that man was only the saddest of all the beasts of the field. Man was a statue of God walking about the garden. Man had pre-eminence over all the brutes; man was only sad because he was not a beast, but a broken god. The Greek had spoken of men creeping on the earth, as if clinging to it. Now Man was to tread on the earth as if to subdue it. Christianity thus held a thought of the dignity of man that could only be expressed in crowns rayed like the sun and fans of peacock plumage. Yet at the same time it could hold a thought about the abject smallness of man that could only be expressed in fasting and fantastic submission, in the gray ashes of St. Dominic and the white snows of St. Bernard. When one came to think of ONE’S SELF, there was vista and void enough for any amount of bleak abnegation and bitter truth. There the realistic gentleman could let himself go—as long as he let himself go at himself. There was an open playground for the happy pessimist. Let him say anything against himself short of blaspheming the original aim of his being; let him call himself a fool and even a damned fool (though that is Calvinistic); but he must not say that fools are not worth saving. He must not say that a man, QUA man, can be valueless. Here, again in short, Christianity got over the difficulty of combining furious opposites, by keeping them both, and keeping them both furious. The Church was positive on both points. One can hardly think too little of one’s self. One can hardly think too much of one’s soul.

Take another case: the complicated question of charity, which some highly uncharitable idealists seem to think quite easy. Charity is a paradox, like modesty and courage. Stated baldly, charity certainly means one of two things—pardoning unpardonable acts, or loving unlovable people. But if we ask ourselves (as we did in the case of pride) what a sensible pagan would feel about such a subject, we shall probably be beginning at the bottom of it. A sensible
pagan would say that there were some people one could forgive, and some one couldn’t: a slave who stole wine could be laughed at; a slave who betrayed his benefactor could be killed, and cursed even after he was killed. In so far as the act was pardonable, the man was pardonable. That again is rational, and even refreshing; but it is a dilution. It leaves no place for a pure horror of injustice, such as that which is a great beauty in the innocent. And it leaves no place for a mere tenderness for men as men, such as is the whole fascination of the charitable. Christianity came in here as before. It came in startlingly with a sword, and clove one thing from another. It divided the crime from the criminal. The criminal we must forgive unto seventy times seven. The crime we must not forgive at all. It was not enough that slaves who stole wine inspired partly anger and partly kindness. We must be much more angry with theft than before, and yet much kinder to thieves than before. There was room for wrath and love to run wild. And the more I considered Christianity, the more I found that while it had established a rule and order, the chief aim of that order was to give room for good things to run wild.

Mental and emotional liberty are not so simple as they look. Really they require almost as careful a balance of laws and conditions as do social and political liberty. The ordinary aesthetic anarchist who sets out to feel everything freely gets knotted at last in a paradox that prevents him feeling at all. He breaks away from home limits to follow poetry. But in ceasing to feel home limits he has ceased to feel the “Odyssey.” He is free from national prejudices and outside patriotism. But being outside patriotism he is outside “Henry V.” Such a literary man is simply outside all literature: he is more of a prisoner than any bigot. For if there is a wall between you and the world, it makes little difference whether you describe yourself as locked in or as locked out. What we want is not the universality that is outside all normal sentiments; we want the universality that is inside all normal sentiments. It is all the difference between being free from them, as a man is free from a prison, and being free of them as a man is free of a city. I am free from Windsor Castle (that is, I am not forcibly detained there), but I am by no means free of that building. How can man be approximately free of fine emotions, able to swing them in a clear space without breakage or wrong? THIS was the achievement of this Christian paradox of the parallel passions. Granted the primary dogma of the war between divine and diabolic, the revolt and ruin of the world, their optimism and pessimism, as pure poetry, could be loosened like cataracts.

St. Francis, in praising all good, could be a more shouting optimist than Walt
Whitman. St. Jerome, in denouncing all evil, could paint the world blacker than Schopenhauer. Both passions were free because both were kept in their place. The optimist could pour out all the praise he liked on the gay music of the march, the golden trumpets, and the purple banners going into battle. But he must not call the fight needless. The pessimist might draw as darkly as he chose the sickening marches or the sanguine wounds. But he must not call the fight hopeless. So it was with all the other moral problems, with pride, with protest, and with compassion. By defining its main doctrine, the Church not only kept seemingly inconsistent things side by side, but, what was more, allowed them to break out in a sort of artistic violence otherwise possible only to anarchists. Meekness grew more dramatic than madness. Historic Christianity rose into a high and strange COUP DE THEATRE of morality—things that are to virtue what the crimes of Nero are to vice. The spirits of indignation and of charity took terrible and attractive forms, ranging from that monkish fierceness that scourged like a dog the first and greatest of the Plantagenets, to the sublime pity of St. Catherine, who, in the official shambles, kissed the bloody head of the criminal. Poetry could be acted as well as composed. This heroic and monumental manner in ethics has entirely vanished with supernatural religion. They, being humble, could parade themselves: but we are too proud to be prominent. Our ethical teachers write reasonably for prison reform; but we are not likely to see Mr. Cadbury, or any eminent philanthropist, go into Reading Gaol and embrace the strangled corpse before it is cast into the quicklime. Our ethical teachers write mildly against the power of millionaires; but we are not likely to see Mr. Rockefeller, or any modern tyrant, publicly whipped in Westminster Abbey.

Thus, the double charges of the secularists, though throwing nothing but darkness and confusion on themselves, throw a real light on the faith. It is true that the historic Church has at once emphasised celibacy and emphasised the family; has at once (if one may put it so) been fiercely for having children and fiercely for not having children. It has kept them side by side like two strong colours, red and white, like the red and white upon the shield of St. George. It has always had a healthy hatred of pink. It hates that combination of two colours which is the feeble expedient of the philosophers. It hates that evolution of black into white which is tantamount to a dirty gray. In fact, the whole theory of the Church on virginity might be symbolized in the statement that white is a colour: not merely the absence of a colour. All that I am urging here can be expressed by saying that Christianity sought in most of these cases to keep two colours
coexistent but pure. It is not a mixture like russet or purple; it is rather like a shot silk, for a shot silk is always at right angles, and is in the pattern of the cross.

So it is also, of course, with the contradictory charges of the anti-Christians about submission and slaughter. It IS true that the Church told some men to fight and others not to fight; and it IS true that those who fought were like thunderbolts and those who did not fight were like statues. All this simply means that the Church preferred to use its Supermen and to use its Tolstoyans. There must be SOME good in the life of battle, for so many good men have enjoyed being soldiers. There must be SOME good in the idea of non-resistance, for so many good men seem to enjoy being Quakers. All that the Church did (so far as that goes) was to prevent either of these good things from ousting the other. They existed side by side. The Tolstoyans, having all the scruples of monks, simply became monks. The Quakers became a club instead of becoming a sect. Monks said all that Tolstoy says; they poured out lucid lamentations about the cruelty of battles and the vanity of revenge. But the Tolstoyans are not quite right enough to run the whole world; and in the ages of faith they were not allowed to run it. The world did not lose the last charge of Sir James Douglas or the banner of Joan the Maid. And sometimes this pure gentleness and this pure fierceness met and justified their juncture; the paradox of all the prophets was fulfilled, and, in the soul of St. Louis, the lion lay down with the lamb. But remember that this text is too lightly interpreted. It is constantly assured, especially in our Tolstoyan tendencies, that when the lion lies down with the lamb the lion becomes lamb-like. But that is brutal annexation and imperialism on the part of the lamb. That is simply the lamb absorbing the lion instead of the lion eating the lamb. The real problem is—Can the lion lie down with the lamb and still retain his royal ferocity? THAT is the problem the Church attempted; THAT is the miracle she achieved.

This is what I have called guessing the hidden eccentricities of life. This is knowing that a man’s heart is to the left and not in the middle. This is knowing not only that the earth is round, but knowing exactly where it is flat. Christian doctrine detected the oddities of life. It not only discovered the law, but it foresaw the exceptions. Those underrate Christianity who say that it discovered mercy; any one might discover mercy. In fact every one did. But to discover a plan for being merciful and also severe—THAT was to anticipate a strange need of human nature. For no one wants to be forgiven for a big sin as if it were a little one. Any one might say that we should be neither quite miserable nor quite happy. But to find out how far one MAY be quite miserable without making it
impossible to be quite happy—that was a discovery in psychology. Any one might say, “Neither swagger nor grovel”; and it would have been a limit. But to say, “Here you can swagger and there you can grovel”—that was an emancipation.

This was the big fact about Christian ethics; the discovery of the new balance. Paganism had been like a pillar of marble, upright because proportioned with symmetry. Christianity was like a huge and ragged and romantic rock, which, though it sways on its pedestal at a touch, yet, because its exaggerated excrescences exactly balance each other, is enthroned there for a thousand years. In a Gothic cathedral the columns were all different, but they were all necessary. Every support seemed an accidental and fantastic support; every buttress was a flying buttress. So in Christendom apparent accidents balanced. Becket wore a hair shirt under his gold and crimson, and there is much to be said for the combination; for Becket got the benefit of the hair shirt while the people in the street got the benefit of the crimson and gold. It is at least better than the manner of the modern millionaire, who has the black and the drab outwardly for others, and the gold next his heart. But the balance was not always in one man’s body as in Becket’s; the balance was often distributed over the whole body of Christendom. Because a man prayed and fasted on the Northern snows, flowers could be flung at his festival in the Southern cities; and because fanatics drank water on the sands of Syria, men could still drink cider in the orchards of England. This is what makes Christendom at once so much more perplexing and so much more interesting than the Pagan empire; just as Amiens Cathedral is not better but more interesting than the Parthenon. If any one wants a modern proof of all this, let him consider the curious fact that, under Christianity, Europe (while remaining a unity) has broken up into individual nations. Patriotism is a perfect example of this deliberate balancing of one emphasis against another emphasis. The instinct of the Pagan empire would have said, “You shall all be Roman citizens, and grow alike; let the German grow less slow and reverent; the Frenchmen less experimental and swift.” But the instinct of Christian Europe says, “Let the German remain slow and reverent, that the Frenchman may the more safely be swift and experimental. We will make an equipoise out of these excesses. The absurdity called Germany shall correct the insanity called France.”

Last and most important, it is exactly this which explains what is so inexplicable to all the modern critics of the history of Christianity. I mean the monstrous wars about small points of theology, the earthquakes of emotion about a gesture or a word. It was only a matter of an inch; but an inch is
everything when you are balancing. The Church could not afford to swerve a hair’s breadth on some things if she was to continue her great and daring experiment of the irregular equilibrium. Once let one idea become less powerful and some other idea would become too powerful. It was no flock of sheep the Christian shepherd was leading, but a herd of bulls and tigers, of terrible ideals and devouring doctrines, each one of them strong enough to turn to a false religion and lay waste the world. Remember that the Church went in specifically for dangerous ideas; she was a lion tamer. The idea of birth through a Holy Spirit, of the death of a divine being, of the forgiveness of sins, or the fulfilment of prophecies, are ideas which, any one can see, need but a touch to turn them into something blasphemous or ferocious. The smallest link was let drop by the artificers of the Mediterranean, and the lion of ancestral pessimism burst his chain in the forgotten forests of the north. Of these theological equalisations I have to speak afterwards. Here it is enough to notice that if some small mistake were made in doctrine, huge blunders might be made in human happiness. A sentence phrased wrong about the nature of symbolism would have broken all the best statues in Europe. A slip in the definitions might stop all the dances; might wither all the Christmas trees or break all the Easter eggs. Doctrines had to be defined within strict limits, even in order that man might enjoy general human liberties. The Church had to be careful, if only that the world might be careless.

This is the thrilling romance of Orthodoxy. People have fallen into a foolish habit of speaking of orthodoxy as something heavy, humdrum, and safe. There never was anything so perilous or so exciting as orthodoxy. It was sanity: and to be sane is more dramatic than to be mad. It was the equilibrium of a man behind madly rushing horses, seeming to stoop this way and to sway that, yet in every attitude having the grace of statuary and the accuracy of arithmetic. The Church in its early days went fierce and fast with any warhorse; yet it is utterly unhistoric to say that she merely went mad along one idea, like a vulgar fanaticism. She swerved to left and right, so exactly as to avoid enormous obstacles. She left on one hand the huge bulk of Arianism, buttressed by all the worldly powers to make Christianity too worldly. The next instant she was swerving to avoid an orientalism, which would have made it too unworldly. The orthodox Church never took the tame course or accepted the conventions; the orthodox Church was never respectable. It would have been easier to have accepted the earthly power of the Arians. It would have been easy, in the Calvinistic seventeenth century, to fall into the bottomless pit of predestination.
It is easy to be a madman: it is easy to be a heretic. It is always easy to let the age have its head; the difficult thing is to keep one’s own. It is always easy to be a modernist; as it is easy to be a snob. To have fallen into any of those open traps of error and exaggeration which fashion after fashion and sect after sect set along the historic path of Christendom—that would indeed have been simple. It is always simple to fall; there are an infinity of angles at which one falls, only one at which one stands. To have fallen into any one of the fads from Gnosticism to Christian Science would indeed have been obvious and tame. But to have avoided them all has been one whirling adventure; and in my vision the heavenly chariot flies thundering through the ages, the dull heresies sprawling and prostrate, the wild truth reeling but erect.
THE ETERNAL REVOLUTION

The following propositions have been urged: First, that some faith in our life is required even to improve it; second, that some dissatisfaction with things as they are is necessary even in order to be satisfied; third, that to have this necessary content and necessary discontent it is not sufficient to have the obvious equilibrium of the Stoic. For mere resignation has neither the gigantic levity of pleasure nor the superb intolerance of pain. There is a vital objection to the advice merely to grin and bear it. The objection is that if you merely bear it, you do not grin. Greek heroes do not grin: but gargoyles do—because they are Christian. And when a Christian is pleased, he is (in the most exact sense) frightfully pleased; his pleasure is frightful. Christ prophesied the whole of Gothic architecture in that hour when nervous and respectable people (such people as now object to barrel organs) objected to the shouting of the gutter-snipes of Jerusalem. He said, “If these were silent, the very stones would cry out.” Under the impulse of His spirit arose like a clamorous chorus the facades of the mediaeval cathedrals, thronged with shouting faces and open mouths. The prophecy has fulfilled itself: the very stones cry out.

If these things be conceded, though only for argument, we may take up where we left it the thread of the thought of the natural man, called by the Scotch (with regrettable familiarity), “The Old Man.” We can ask the next question so obviously in front of us. Some satisfaction is needed even to make things better. But what do we mean by making things better? Most modern talk on this matter is a mere argument in a circle—that circle which we have already made the symbol of madness and of mere rationalism. Evolution is only good if it produces good; good is only good if it helps evolution. The elephant stands on the tortoise, and the tortoise on the elephant.

Obviously, it will not do to take our ideal from the principle in nature; for the simple reason that (except for some human or divine theory), there is no principle in nature. For instance, the cheap anti-democrat of to-day will tell you solemnly that there is no equality in nature. He is right, but he does not see the logical addendum. There is no equality in nature; also there is no inequality in nature. Inequality, as much as equality, implies a standard of value. To read aristocracy into the anarchy of animals is just as sentimental as to read
Both aristocracy and democracy are human ideals: the one saying that all men are valuable, the other that some men are more valuable. But nature does not say that cats are more valuable than mice; nature makes no remark on the subject. She does not even say that the cat is enviable or the mouse pitiable. We think the cat superior because we have (or most of us have) a particular philosophy to the effect that life is better than death. But if the mouse were a German pessimist mouse, he might not think that the cat had beaten him at all. He might think he had beaten the cat by getting to the grave first. Or he might feel that he had actually inflicted frightful punishment on the cat by keeping him alive. Just as a microbe might feel proud of spreading a pestilence, so the pessimistic mouse might exult to think that he was renewing in the cat the torture of conscious existence. It all depends on the philosophy of the mouse. You cannot even say that there is victory or superiority in nature unless you have some doctrine about what things are superior. You cannot even say that the cat scores unless there is a system of scoring. You cannot even say that the cat gets the best of it unless there is some best to be got.

We cannot, then, get the ideal itself from nature, and as we follow here the first and natural speculation, we will leave out (for the present) the idea of getting it from God. We must have our own vision. But the attempts of most moderns to express it are highly vague.

Some fall back simply on the clock: they talk as if mere passage through time brought some superiority; so that even a man of the first mental calibre carelessly uses the phrase that human morality is never up to date. How can anything be up to date?—a date has no character. How can one say that Christmas celebrations are not suitable to the twenty-fifth of a month? What the writer meant, of course, was that the majority is behind his favourite minority—or in front of it. Other vague modern people take refuge in material metaphors; in fact, this is the chief mark of vague modern people. Not daring to define their doctrine of what is good, they use physical figures of speech without stint or shame, and, what is worst of all, seem to think these cheap analogies are exquisitely spiritual and superior to the old morality. Thus they think it intellectual to talk about things being “high.” It is at least the reverse of intellectual; it is a mere phrase from a steeple or a weathercock. “Tommy was a good boy” is a pure philosophical statement, worthy of Plato or Aquinas. “Tommy lived the higher life” is a gross metaphor from a ten-foot rule.

This, incidentally, is almost the whole weakness of Nietzsche, whom some are representing as a bold and strong thinker. No one will deny that he was a
poetical and suggestive thinker; but he was quite the reverse of strong. He was not at all bold. He never put his own meaning before himself in bald abstract words: as did Aristotle and Calvin, and even Karl Marx, the hard, fearless men of thought. Nietzsche always escaped a question by a physical metaphor, like a cheery minor poet. He said, “beyond good and evil,” because he had not the courage to say, “more good than good and evil,” or, “more evil than good and evil.” Had he faced his thought without metaphors, he would have seen that it was nonsense. So, when he describes his hero, he does not dare to say, “the purer man,” or “the happier man,” or “the sadder man,” for all these are ideas; and ideas are alarming. He says “the upper man,” or “over man,” a physical metaphor from acrobats or alpine climbers. Nietzsche is truly a very timid thinker. He does not really know in the least what sort of man he wants evolution to produce. And if he does not know, certainly the ordinary evolutionists, who talk about things being “higher,” do not know either.

Then again, some people fall back on sheer submission and sitting still. Nature is going to do something some day; nobody knows what, and nobody knows when. We have no reason for acting, and no reason for not acting. If anything happens it is right: if anything is prevented it was wrong. Again, some people try to anticipate nature by doing something, by doing anything. Because we may possibly grow wings they cut off their legs. Yet nature may be trying to make them centipedes for all they know.

Lastly, there is a fourth class of people who take whatever it is that they happen to want, and say that that is the ultimate aim of evolution. And these are the only sensible people. This is the only really healthy way with the word evolution, to work for what you want, and to call THAT evolution. The only intelligible sense that progress or advance can have among men, is that we have a definite vision, and that we wish to make the whole world like that vision. If you like to put it so, the essence of the doctrine is that what we have around us is the mere method and preparation for something that we have to create. This is not a world, but rather the material for a world. God has given us not so much the colours of a picture as the colours of a palette. But he has also given us a subject, a model, a fixed vision. We must be clear about what we want to paint. This adds a further principle to our previous list of principles. We have said we must be fond of this world, even in order to change it. We now add that we must be fond of another world (real or imaginary) in order to have something to change it to.

We need not debate about the mere words evolution or progress: personally I
prefer to call it reform. For reform implies form. It implies that we are trying to shape the world in a particular image; to make it something that we see already in our minds. Evolution is a metaphor from mere automatic unrolling. Progress is a metaphor from merely walking along a road—very likely the wrong road. But reform is a metaphor for reasonable and determined men: it means that we see a certain thing out of shape and we mean to put it into shape. And we know what shape.

Now here comes in the whole collapse and huge blunder of our age. We have mixed up two different things, two opposite things. Progress should mean that we are always changing the world to suit the vision. Progress does mean (just now) that we are always changing the vision. It should mean that we are slow but sure in bringing justice and mercy among men: it does mean that we are very swift in doubting the desirability of justice and mercy: a wild page from any Prussian sophist makes men doubt it. Progress should mean that we are always walking towards the New Jerusalem. It does mean that the New Jerusalem is always walking away from us. We are not altering the real to suit the ideal. We are altering the ideal: it is easier.

Silly examples are always simpler; let us suppose a man wanted a particular kind of world; say, a blue world. He would have no cause to complain of the slightness or swiftness of his task; he might toil for a long time at the transformation; he could work away (in every sense) until all was blue. He could have heroic adventures; the putting of the last touches to a blue tiger. He could have fairy dreams; the dawn of a blue moon. But if he worked hard, that high-minded reformer would certainly (from his own point of view) leave the world better and bluer than he found it. If he altered a blade of grass to his favourite colour every day, he would get on slowly. But if he altered his favourite colour every day, he would not get on at all. If, after reading a fresh philosopher, he started to paint everything red or yellow, his work would be thrown away: there would be nothing to show except a few blue tigers walking about, specimens of his early bad manner. This is exactly the position of the average modern thinker. It will be said that this is avowedly a preposterous example. But it is literally the fact of recent history. The great and grave changes in our political civilization all belonged to the early nineteenth century, not to the later. They belonged to the black and white epoch when men believed fixedly in Toryism, in Protestantism, in Calvinism, in Reform, and not unfrequently in Revolution. And whatever each man believed in he hammered at steadily, without scepticism: and there was a time when the Established Church might have fallen, and the House of Lords
nearly fell. It was because Radicals were wise enough to be constant and consistent; it was because Radicals were wise enough to be Conservative. But in the existing atmosphere there is not enough time and tradition in Radicalism to pull anything down. There is a great deal of truth in Lord Hugh Cecil’s suggestion (made in a fine speech) that the era of change is over, and that ours is an era of conservation and repose. But probably it would pain Lord Hugh Cecil if he realized (what is certainly the case) that ours is only an age of conservation because it is an age of complete unbelief. Let beliefs fade fast and frequently, if you wish institutions to remain the same. The more the life of the mind is unhinged, the more the machinery of matter will be left to itself. The net result of all our political suggestions, Collectivism, Tolstoyanism, Neo-Feudalism, Communism, Anarchy, Scientific Bureaucracy—the plain fruit of all of them is that the Monarchy and the House of Lords will remain. The net result of all the new religions will be that the Church of England will not (for heaven knows how long) be disestablished. It was Karl Marx, Nietzsche, Tolstoy, Cunninghame Graham, Bernard Shaw and Auberon Herbert, who between them, with bowed gigantic backs, bore up the throne of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

We may say broadly that free thought is the best of all the safeguards against freedom. Managed in a modern style the emancipation of the slave’s mind is the best way of preventing the emancipation of the slave. Teach him to worry about whether he wants to be free, and he will not free himself. Again, it may be said that this instance is remote or extreme. But, again, it is exactly true of the men in the streets around us. It is true that the negro slave, being a debased barbarian, will probably have either a human affection of loyalty, or a human affection for liberty. But the man we see every day—the worker in Mr. Gradgrind’s factory, the little clerk in Mr. Gradgrind’s office—he is too mentally worried to believe in freedom. He is kept quiet with revolutionary literature. He is calmed and kept in his place by a constant succession of wild philosophies. He is a Marxian one day, a Nietzsche the next day, a Superman (probably) the next day; and a slave every day. The only thing that remains after all the philosophies is the factory. The only man who gains by all the philosophies is Gradgrind. It would be worth his while to keep his commercial helotry supplied with sceptical literature. And now I come to think of it, of course, Gradgrind is famous for giving libraries. He shows his sense. All modern books are on his side. As long as the vision of heaven is always changing, the vision of earth will be exactly the same. No ideal will remain long enough to be realized, or even partly realized. The modern young man will never change his environment; for he will always
change his mind.

This, therefore, is our first requirement about the ideal towards which progress is directed; it must be fixed. Whistler used to make many rapid studies of a sitter; it did not matter if he tore up twenty portraits. But it would matter if he looked up twenty times, and each time saw a new person sitting placidly for his portrait. So it does not matter (comparatively speaking) how often humanity fails to imitate its ideal; for then all its old failures are fruitful. But it does frightfully matter how often humanity changes its ideal; for then all its old failures are fruitless. The question therefore becomes this: How can we keep the artist discontented with his pictures while preventing him from being vitally discontented with his art? How can we make a man always dissatisfied with his work, yet always satisfied with working? How can we make sure that the portrait painter will throw the portrait out of window instead of taking the natural and more human course of throwing the sitter out of window?

A strict rule is not only necessary for ruling; it is also necessary for rebelling. This fixed and familiar ideal is necessary to any sort of revolution. Man will sometimes act slowly upon new ideas; but he will only act swiftly upon old ideas. If I am merely to float or fade or evolve, it may be towards something anarchic; but if I am to riot, it must be for something respectable. This is the whole weakness of certain schools of progress and moral evolution. They suggest that there has been a slow movement towards morality, with an imperceptible ethical change in every year or at every instant. There is only one great disadvantage in this theory. It talks of a slow movement towards justice; but it does not permit a swift movement. A man is not allowed to leap up and declare a certain state of things to be intrinsically intolerable. To make the matter clear, it is better to take a specific example. Certain of the idealistic vegetarians, such as Mr. Salt, say that the time has now come for eating no meat; by implication they assume that at one time it was right to eat meat, and they suggest (in words that could be quoted) that some day it may be wrong to eat milk and eggs. I do not discuss here the question of what is justice to animals. I only say that whatever is justice ought, under given conditions, to be prompt justice. If an animal is wronged, we ought to be able to rush to his rescue. But how can we rush if we are, perhaps, in advance of our time? How can we rush to catch a train which may not arrive for a few centuries? How can I denounce a man for skinning cats, if he is only now what I may possibly become in drinking a glass of milk? A splendid and insane Russian sect ran about taking all the cattle out of all the carts. How can I pluck up courage to take the horse out of my
hansom-cab, when I do not know whether my evolutionary watch is only a little fast or the cabman’s a little slow? Suppose I say to a sweater, “Slavery suited one stage of evolution.” And suppose he answers, “And sweating suits this stage of evolution.” How can I answer if there is no eternal test? If sweaters can be behind the current morality, why should not philanthropists be in front of it? What on earth is the current morality, except in its literal sense—the morality that is always running away?

Thus we may say that a permanent ideal is as necessary to the innovator as to the conservative; it is necessary whether we wish the king’s orders to be promptly executed or whether we only wish the king to be promptly executed. The guillotine has many sins, but to do it justice there is nothing evolutionary about it. The favourite evolutionary argument finds its best answer in the axe. The Evolutionist says, “Where do you draw the line?” the Revolutionist answers, “I draw it HERE: exactly between your head and body.” There must at any given moment be an abstract right and wrong if any blow is to be struck; there must be something eternal if there is to be anything sudden. Therefore for all intelligible human purposes, for altering things or for keeping things as they are, for founding a system for ever, as in China, or for altering it every month as in the early French Revolution, it is equally necessary that the vision should be a fixed vision. This is our first requirement.

When I had written this down, I felt once again the presence of something else in the discussion: as a man hears a church bell above the sound of the street. Something seemed to be saying, “My ideal at least is fixed; for it was fixed before the foundations of the world. My vision of perfection assuredly cannot be altered; for it is called Eden. You may alter the place to which you are going; but you cannot alter the place from which you have come. To the orthodox there must always be a case for revolution; for in the hearts of men God has been put under the feet of Satan. In the upper world hell once rebelled against heaven. But in this world heaven is rebelling against hell. For the orthodox there can always be a revolution; for a revolution is a restoration. At any instant you may strike a blow for the perfection which no man has seen since Adam. No unchanging custom, no changing evolution can make the original good anything but good. Man may have had concubines as long as cows have had horns: still they are not a part of him if they are sinful. Men may have been under oppression ever since fish were under water; still they ought not to be, if oppression is sinful. The chain may seem as natural to the slave, or the paint to the harlot, as does the plume to the bird or the burrow to the fox; still they are not, if they are sinful.
lift my prehistoric legend to defy all your history. Your vision is not merely a fixture: it is a fact.” I paused to note the new coincidence of Christianity: but I passed on.

I passed on to the next necessity of any ideal of progress. Some people (as we have said) seem to believe in an automatic and impersonal progress in the nature of things. But it is clear that no political activity can be encouraged by saying that progress is natural and inevitable; that is not a reason for being active, but rather a reason for being lazy. If we are bound to improve, we need not trouble to improve. The pure doctrine of progress is the best of all reasons for not being a progressive. But it is to none of these obvious comments that I wish primarily to call attention.

The only arresting point is this: that if we suppose improvement to be natural, it must be fairly simple. The world might conceivably be working towards one consummation, but hardly towards any particular arrangement of many qualities. To take our original simile: Nature by herself may be growing more blue; that is, a process so simple that it might be impersonal. But Nature cannot be making a careful picture made of many picked colours, unless Nature is personal. If the end of the world were mere darkness or mere light it might come as slowly and inevitably as dusk or dawn. But if the end of the world is to be a piece of elaborate and artistic chiaroscuro, then there must be design in it, either human or divine. The world, through mere time, might grow black like an old picture, or white like an old coat; but if it is turned into a particular piece of black and white art—then there is an artist.

If the distinction be not evident, I give an ordinary instance. We constantly hear a particularly cosmic creed from the modern humanitarians;

I use the word humanitarian in the ordinary sense, as meaning one who upholds the claims of all creatures against those of humanity. They suggest that through the ages we have been growing more and more humane, that is to say, that one after another, groups or sections of beings, slaves, children, women, cows, or what not, have been gradually admitted to mercy or to justice. They say that we once thought it right to eat men (we didn’t); but I am not here concerned with their history, which is highly unhistorical. As a fact, anthropophagy is certainly a decadent thing, not a primitive one. It is much more likely that modern men will eat human flesh out of affectation than that primitive man ever ate it out of ignorance. I am here only following the outlines of their argument, which consists in maintaining that man has been progressively more lenient, first to citizens, then to slaves, then to animals, and then (presumably) to plants. I
think it wrong to sit on a man. Soon, I shall think it wrong to sit on a horse. Eventually (I suppose) I shall think it wrong to sit on a chair. That is the drive of the argument. And for this argument it can be said that it is possible to talk of it in terms of evolution or inevitable progress. A perpetual tendency to touch fewer and fewer things might—one feels, be a mere brute unconscious tendency, like that of a species to produce fewer and fewer children. This drift may be really evolutionary, because it is stupid.

Darwinism can be used to back up two mad moralities, but it cannot be used to back up a single sane one. The kinship and competition of all living creatures can be used as a reason for being insanely cruel or insanely sentimental; but not for a healthy love of animals. On the evolutionary basis you may be inhumane, or you may be absurdly humane; but you cannot be human. That you and a tiger are one may be a reason for being tender to a tiger. Or it may be a reason for being as cruel as the tiger. It is one way to train the tiger to imitate you, it is a shorter way to imitate the tiger. But in neither case does evolution tell you how to treat a tiger reasonably, that is, to admire his stripes while avoiding his claws.

If you want to treat a tiger reasonably, you must go back to the garden of Eden. For the obstinate reminder continued to recur: only the supernatural has taken a sane view of Nature. The essence of all pantheism, evolutionism, and modern cosmic religion is really in this proposition: that Nature is our mother. Unfortunately, if you regard Nature as a mother, you discover that she is a stepmother. The main point of Christianity was this: that Nature is not our mother: Nature is our sister. We can be proud of her beauty, since we have the same father; but she has no authority over us; we have to admire, but not to imitate. This gives to the typically Christian pleasure in this earth a strange touch of lightness that is almost frivolity. Nature was a solemn mother to the worshippers of Isis and Cybele. Nature was a solemn mother to Wordsworth or to Emerson. But Nature is not solemn to Francis of Assisi or to George Herbert. To St. Francis, Nature is a sister, and even a younger sister: a little, dancing sister, to be laughed at as well as loved.

This, however, is hardly our main point at present; I have admitted it only in order to show how constantly, and as it were accidentally, the key would fit the smallest doors. Our main point is here, that if there be a mere trend of impersonal improvement in Nature, it must presumably be a simple trend towards some simple triumph. One can imagine that some automatic tendency in biology might work for giving us longer and longer noses. But the question is, do we want to have longer and longer noses? I fancy not; I believe that we most
of us want to say to our noses, “thus far, and no farther; and here shall thy proud point be stayed:” we require a nose of such length as may ensure an interesting face. But we cannot imagine a mere biological trend towards producing interesting faces; because an interesting face is one particular arrangement of eyes, nose, and mouth, in a most complex relation to each other. Proportion cannot be a drift: it is either an accident or a design. So with the ideal of human morality and its relation to the humanitarians and the anti-humanitarians. It is conceivable that we are going more and more to keep our hands off things: not to drive horses; not to pick flowers. We may eventually be bound not to disturb a man’s mind even by argument; not to disturb the sleep of birds even by coughing. The ultimate apotheosis would appear to be that of a man sitting quite still, nor daring to stir for fear of disturbing a fly, nor to eat for fear of incommoding a microbe. To so crude a consummation as that we might perhaps unconsciously drift. But do we want so crude a consummation? Similarly, we might unconsciously evolve along the opposite or Nietzschean line of development—superman crushing superman in one tower of tyrants until the universe is smashed up for fun. But do we want the universe smashed up for fun? Is it not quite clear that what we really hope for is one particular management and proposition of these two things; a certain amount of restraint and respect, a certain amount of energy and mastery? If our life is ever really as beautiful as a fairy-tale, we shall have to remember that all the beauty of a fairy-tale lies in this: that the prince has a wonder which just stops short of being fear. If he is afraid of the giant, there is an end of him; but also if he is not astonished at the giant, there is an end of the fairy-tale. The whole point depends upon his being at once humble enough to wonder, and haughty enough to defy. So our attitude to the giant of the world must not merely be increasing delicacy or increasing contempt: it must be one particular proportion of the two—which is exactly right. We must have in us enough reverence for all things outside us to make us tread fearfully on the grass. We must also have enough disdain for all things outside us, to make us, on due occasion, spit at the stars. Yet these two things (if we are to be good or happy) must be combined, not in any combination, but in one particular combination. The perfect happiness of men on the earth (if it ever comes) will not be a flat and solid thing, like the satisfaction of animals. It will be an exact and perilous balance; like that of a desperate romance. Man must have just enough faith in himself to have adventures, and just enough doubt of himself to enjoy them.

This, then, is our second requirement for the ideal of progress. First, it must be
fixed; second, it must be composite. It must not (if it is to satisfy our souls) be the mere victory of some one thing swallowing up everything else, love or pride or peace or adventure; it must be a definite picture composed of these elements in their best proportion and relation. I am not concerned at this moment to deny that some such good culmination may be, by the constitution of things, reserved for the human race. I only point out that if this composite happiness is fixed for us it must be fixed by some mind; for only a mind can place the exact proportions of a composite happiness. If the beatification of the world is a mere work of nature, then it must be as simple as the freezing of the world, or the burning up of the world. But if the beatification of the world is not a work of nature but a work of art, then it involves an artist. And here again my contemplation was cloven by the ancient voice which said, “I could have told you all this a long time ago. If there is any certain progress it can only be my kind of progress, the progress towards a complete city of virtues and dominations where righteousness and peace contrive to kiss each other. An impersonal force might be leading you to a wilderness of perfect flatness or a peak of perfect height. But only a personal God can possibly be leading you (if, indeed, you are being led) to a city with just streets and architectural proportions, a city in which each of you can contribute exactly the right amount of your own colour to the many coloured coat of Joseph.”

Twice again, therefore, Christianity had come in with the exact answer that I required. I had said, “The ideal must be fixed,” and the Church had answered, “Mine is literally fixed, for it existed before anything else.” I said secondly, “It must be artistically combined, like a picture”; and the Church answered, “Mine is quite literally a picture, for I know who painted it.” Then I went on to the third thing, which, as it seemed to me, was needed for an Utopia or goal of progress. And of all the three it is infinitely the hardest to express. Perhaps it might be put thus: that we need watchfulness even in Utopia, lest we fall from Utopia as we fell from Eden.

We have remarked that one reason offered for being a progressive is that things naturally tend to grow better. But the only real reason for being a progressive is that things naturally tend to grow worse. The corruption in things is not only the best argument for being progressive; it is also the only argument against being conservative. The conservative theory would really be quite sweeping and unanswerable if it were not for this one fact. But all conservatism is based upon the idea that if you leave things alone you leave them as they are. But you do not. If you leave a thing alone you leave it to a torrent of change. If
you leave a white post alone it will soon be a black post. If you particularly want
it to be white you must be always painting it again; that is, you must be always
having a revolution. Briefly, if you want the old white post you must have a new
white post. But this which is true even of inanimate things is in a quite special
and terrible sense true of all human things. An almost unnatural vigilance is
really required of the citizen because of the horrible rapidity with which human
institutions grow old. It is the custom in passing romance and journalism to talk
of men suffering under old tyrannies. But, as a fact, men have almost always
suffered under new tyrannies; under tyrannies that had been public liberties
hardly twenty years before. Thus England went mad with joy over the patriotic
monarchy of Elizabeth; and then (almost immediately afterwards) went mad
with rage in the trap of the tyranny of Charles the First. So, again, in France the
monarchy became intolerable, not just after it had been tolerated, but just after it
had been adored. The son of Louis the well-beloved was Louis the guillotined.
So in the same way in England in the nineteenth century the Radical
manufacturer was entirely trusted as a mere tribune of the people, until suddenly
we heard the cry of the Socialist that he was a tyrant eating the people like bread.
So again, we have almost up to the last instant trusted the newspapers as organs
of public opinion. Just recently some of us have seen (not slowly, but with a
start) that they are obviously nothing of the kind. They are, by the nature of the
case, the hobbies of a few rich men. We have not any need to rebel against
antiquity; we have to rebel against novelty. It is the new rulers, the capitalist or
the editor, who really hold up the modern world. There is no fear that a modern
king will attempt to override the constitution; it is more likely that he will ignore
the constitution and work behind its back; he will take no advantage of his
kingly power; it is more likely that he will take advantage of his kingly
powerlessness, of the fact that he is free from criticism and publicity. For the
king is the most private person of our time. It will not be necessary for any one
to fight again against the proposal of a censorship of the press. We do not need a
censorship of the press. We have a censorship by the press.

This startling swiftness with which popular systems turn oppressive is the
third fact for which we shall ask our perfect theory of progress to allow. It must
always be on the look out for every privilege being abused, for every working
right becoming a wrong. In this matter I am entirely on the side of the
revolutionists. They are really right to be always suspecting human institutions;
they are right not to put their trust in princes nor in any child of man. The
chieftain chosen to be the friend of the people becomes the enemy of the people;
the newspaper started to tell the truth now exists to prevent the truth being told. Here, I say, I felt that I was really at last on the side of the revolutionary. And then I caught my breath again: for I remembered that I was once again on the side of the orthodox.

Christianity spoke again and said: “I have always maintained that men were naturally backsliders; that human virtue tended of its own nature to rust or to rot; I have always said that human beings as such go wrong, especially happy human beings, especially proud and prosperous human beings. This eternal revolution, this suspicion sustained through centuries, you (being a vague modern) call the doctrine of progress. If you were a philosopher you would call it, as I do, the doctrine of original sin. You may call it the cosmic advance as much as you like; I call it what it is—the Fall.”

I have spoken of orthodoxy coming in like a sword; here I confess it came in like a battle-axe. For really (when I came to think of it) Christianity is the only thing left that has any real right to question the power of the well-nurtured or the well-bred. I have listened often enough to Socialists, or even to democrats, saying that the physical conditions of the poor must of necessity make them mentally and morally degraded. I have listened to scientific men (and there are still scientific men not opposed to democracy) saying that if we give the poor healthier conditions vice and wrong will disappear. I have listened to them with a horrible attention, with a hideous fascination. For it was like watching a man energetically sawing from the tree the branch he is sitting on. If these happy democrats could prove their case, they would strike democracy dead. If the poor are thus utterly demoralized, it may or may not be practical to raise them. But it is certainly quite practical to disfranchise them. If the man with a bad bedroom cannot give a good vote, then the first and swiftest deduction is that he shall give no vote. The governing class may not unreasonably say: “It may take us some time to reform his bedroom. But if he is the brute you say, it will take him very little time to ruin our country. Therefore we will take your hint and not give him the chance.” It fills me with horrible amusement to observe the way in which the earnest Socialist industriously lays the foundation of all aristocracy, expatiating blandly upon the evident unfitness of the poor to rule. It is like listening to somebody at an evening party apologising for entering without evening dress, and explaining that he had recently been intoxicated, had a personal habit of taking off his clothes in the street, and had, moreover, only just changed from prison uniform. At any moment, one feels, the host might say that really, if it was as bad as that, he need not come in at all. So it is when the ordinary
Socialist, with a beaming face, proves that the poor, after their smashing experiences, cannot be really trustworthy. At any moment the rich may say, “Very well, then, we won’t trust them,” and bang the door in his face. On the basis of Mr. Blatchford’s view of heredity and environment, the case for the aristocracy is quite overwhelming. If clean homes and clean air make clean souls, why not give the power (for the present at any rate) to those who undoubtedly have the clean air? If better conditions will make the poor more fit to govern themselves, why should not better conditions already make the rich more fit to govern them? On the ordinary environment argument the matter is fairly manifest. The comfortable class must be merely our vanguard in Utopia.

Is there any answer to the proposition that those who have had the best opportunities will probably be our best guides? Is there any answer to the argument that those who have breathed clean air had better decide for those who have breathed foul? As far as I know, there is only one answer, and that answer is Christianity. Only the Christian Church can offer any rational objection to a complete confidence in the rich. For she has maintained from the beginning that the danger was not in man’s environment, but in man. Further, she has maintained that if we come to talk of a dangerous environment, the most dangerous environment of all is the commodious environment. I know that the most modern manufacture has been really occupied in trying to produce an abnormally large needle. I know that the most recent biologists have been chiefly anxious to discover a very small camel. But if we diminish the camel to his smallest, or open the eye of the needle to its largest—if, in short, we assume the words of Christ to have meant the very least that they could mean, His words must at the very least mean this—that rich men are not very likely to be morally trustworthy. Christianity even when watered down is hot enough to boil all modern society to rags. The mere minimum of the Church would be a deadly ultimatum to the world. For the whole modern world is absolutely based on the assumption, not that the rich are necessary (which is tenable), but that the rich are trustworthy, which (for a Christian) is not tenable. You will hear everlastingly, in all discussions about newspapers, companies, aristocracies, or party politics, this argument that the rich man cannot be bribed. The fact is, of course, that the rich man is bribed; he has been bribed already. That is why he is a rich man. The whole case for Christianity is that a man who is dependent upon the luxuries of this life is a corrupt man, spiritually corrupt, politically corrupt, financially corrupt. There is one thing that Christ and all the Christian saints have said with a sort of savage monotony. They have said simply that to be rich
is to be in peculiar danger of moral wreck. It is not demonstrably un-Christian to kill the rich as violators of definable justice. It is not demonstrably un-Christian to crown the rich as convenient rulers of society. It is not certainly un-Christian to rebel against the rich or to submit to the rich. But it is quite certainly un-Christian to trust the rich, to regard the rich as more morally safe than the poor. A Christian may consistently say, “I respect that man’s rank, although he takes bribes.” But a Christian cannot say, as all modern men are saying at lunch and breakfast, “a man of that rank would not take bribes.” For it is a part of Christian dogma that any man in any rank may take bribes. It is a part of Christian dogma; it also happens by a curious coincidence that it is a part of obvious human history. When people say that a man “in that position” would be incorruptible, there is no need to bring Christianity into the discussion. Was Lord Bacon a bootblack? Was the Duke of Marlborough a crossing sweeper? In the best Utopia, I must be prepared for the moral fall of any man in any position at any moment; especially for my fall from my position at this moment.

Much vague and sentimental journalism has been poured out to the effect that Christianity is akin to democracy, and most of it is scarcely strong or clear enough to refute the fact that the two things have often quarrelled. The real ground upon which Christianity and democracy are one is very much deeper. The one specially and peculiarly un-Christian idea is the idea of Carlyle—the idea that the man should rule who feels that he can rule. Whatever else is Christian, this is heathen. If our faith comments on government at all, its comment must be this—that the man should rule who does NOT think that he can rule. Carlyle’s hero may say, “I will be king”; but the Christian saint must say “Nolo episcopari.” If the great paradox of Christianity means anything, it means this—that we must take the crown in our hands, and go hunting in dry places and dark corners of the earth until we find the one man who feels himself unfit to wear it. Carlyle was quite wrong; we have not got to crown the exceptional man who knows he can rule. Rather we must crown the much more exceptional man who knows he can’t.

Now, this is one of the two or three vital defences of working democracy. The mere machinery of voting is not democracy, though at present it is not easy to effect any simpler democratic method. But even the machinery of voting is profoundly Christian in this practical sense—that it is an attempt to get at the opinion of those who would be too modest to offer it. It is a mystical adventure; it is specially trusting those who do not trust themselves. That enigma is strictly peculiar to Christendom. There is nothing really humble about the abnegation of
the Buddhist; the mild Hindoo is mild, but he is not meek. But there is something psychologically Christian about the idea of seeking for the opinion of the obscure rather than taking the obvious course of accepting the opinion of the prominent. To say that voting is particularly Christian may seem somewhat curious. To say that canvassing is Christian may seem quite crazy. But canvassing is very Christian in its primary idea. It is encouraging the humble; it is saying to the modest man, “Friend, go up higher.” Or if there is some slight defect in canvassing, that is in its perfect and rounded piety, it is only because it may possibly neglect to encourage the modesty of the canvasser.

Aristocracy is not an institution: aristocracy is a sin; generally a very venial one. It is merely the drift or slide of men into a sort of natural pomposity and praise of the powerful, which is the most easy and obvious affair in the world.

It is one of the hundred answers to the fugitive perversion of modern “force” that the promptest and boldest agencies are also the most fragile or full of sensibility. The swiftest things are the softest things. A bird is active, because a bird is soft. A stone is helpless, because a stone is hard. The stone must by its own nature go downwards, because hardness is weakness. The bird can of its nature go upwards, because fragility is force. In perfect force there is a kind of frivolity, an airiness that can maintain itself in the air. Modern investigators of miraculous history have solemnly admitted that a characteristic of the great saints is their power of “levitation.” They might go further; a characteristic of the great saints is their power of levity. Angels can fly because they can take themselves lightly. This has been always the instinct of Christendom, and especially the instinct of Christian art. Remember how Fra Angelico represented all his angels, not only as birds, but almost as butterflies. Remember how the most earnest mediaeval art was full of light and fluttering draperies, of quick and capering feet. It was the one thing that the modern Pre-raphaelites could not imitate in the real Pre-raphaelites. Burne-Jones could never recover the deep levity of the Middle Ages. In the old Christian pictures the sky over every figure is like a blue or gold parachute. Every figure seems ready to fly up and float about in the heavens. The tattered cloak of the beggar will bear him up like the rayed plumes of the angels. But the kings in their heavy gold and the proud in their robes of purple will all of their nature sink downwards, for pride cannot rise to levity or levitation. Pride is the downward drag of all things into an easy solemnity. One “settles down” into a sort of selfish seriousness; but one has to rise to a gay self-forgetfulness. A man “falls” into a brown study; he reaches up at a blue sky. Seriousness is not a virtue. It would be a heresy, but a much more
sensible heresy, to say that seriousness is a vice. It is really a natural trend or lapse into taking one’s self gravely, because it is the easiest thing to do. It is much easier to write a good TIMES leading article than a good joke in PUNCH. For solemnity flows out of men naturally; but laughter is a leap. It is easy to be heavy: hard to be light. Satan fell by the force of gravity.

Now, it is the peculiar honour of Europe since it has been Christian that while it has had aristocracy it has always at the back of its heart treated aristocracy as a weakness—generally as a weakness that must be allowed for. If any one wishes to appreciate this point, let him go outside Christianity into some other philosophical atmosphere. Let him, for instance, compare the classes of Europe with the castes of India. There aristocracy is far more awful, because it is far more intellectual. It is seriously felt that the scale of classes is a scale of spiritual values; that the baker is better than the butcher in an invisible and sacred sense. But no Christianity, not even the most ignorant or perverse, ever suggested that a baronet was better than a butcher in that sacred sense. No Christianity, however ignorant or extravagant, ever suggested that a duke would not be damned. In pagan society there may have been (I do not know) some such serious division between the free man and the slave. But in Christian society we have always thought the gentleman a sort of joke, though I admit that in some great crusades and councils he earned the right to be called a practical joke. But we in Europe never really and at the root of our souls took aristocracy seriously. It is only an occasional non-European alien (such as Dr. Oscar Levy, the only intelligent Nietzscheite) who can even manage for a moment to take aristocracy seriously. It may be a mere patriotic bias, though I do not think so, but it seems to me that the English aristocracy is not only the type, but is the crown and flower of all actual aristocracies; it has all the oligarchical virtues as well as all the defects. It is casual, it is kind, it is courageous in obvious matters; but it has one great merit that overlaps even these. The great and very obvious merit of the English aristocracy is that nobody could possibly take it seriously.

In short, I had spelled out slowly, as usual, the need for an equal law in Utopia; and, as usual, I found that Christianity had been there before me. The whole history of my Utopia has the same amusing sadness. I was always rushing out of my architectural study with plans for a new turret only to find it sitting up there in the sunlight, shining, and a thousand years old. For me, in the ancient and partly in the modern sense, God answered the prayer, “Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings.” Without vanity, I really think there was a moment when I could have invented the marriage vow (as an institution) out of my own head;
but I discovered, with a sigh, that it had been invented already. But, since it would be too long a business to show how, fact by fact and inch by inch, my own conception of Utopia was only answered in the New Jerusalem, I will take this one case of the matter of marriage as indicating the converging drift, I may say the converging crash of all the rest.

When the ordinary opponents of Socialism talk about impossibilities and alterations in human nature they always miss an important distinction. In modern ideal conceptions of society there are some desires that are possibly not attainable: but there are some desires that are not desirable. That all men should live in equally beautiful houses is a dream that may or may not be attained. But that all men should live in the same beautiful house is not a dream at all; it is a nightmare. That a man should love all old women is an ideal that may not be attainable. But that a man should regard all old women exactly as he regards his mother is not only an unattainable ideal, but an ideal which ought not to be attained. I do not know if the reader agrees with me in these examples; but I will add the example which has always affected me most. I could never conceive or tolerate any Utopia which did not leave to me the liberty for which I chiefly care, the liberty to bind myself. Complete anarchy would not merely make it impossible to have any discipline or fidelity; it would also make it impossible to have any fun. To take an obvious instance, it would not be worth while to bet if a bet were not binding. The dissolution of all contracts would not only ruin morality but spoil sport. Now betting and such sports are only the stunted and twisted shapes of the original instinct of man for adventure and romance, of which much has been said in these pages. And the perils, rewards, punishments, and fulfilments of an adventure must be real, or the adventure is only a shifting and heartless nightmare. If I bet I must be made to pay, or there is no poetry in betting. If I challenge I must be made to fight, or there is no poetry in challenging. If I vow to be faithful I must be cursed when I am unfaithful, or there is no fun in vowing. You could not even make a fairy tale from the experiences of a man who, when he was swallowed by a whale, might find himself at the top of the Eiffel Tower, or when he was turned into a frog might begin to behave like a flamingo. For the purpose even of the wildest romance results must be real; results must be irrevocable. Christian marriage is the great example of a real and irrevocable result; and that is why it is the chief subject and centre of all our romantic writing. And this is my last instance of the things that I should ask, and ask imperatively, of any social paradise; I should ask to be kept to my bargain, to have my oaths and engagements taken seriously; I should
ask Utopia to avenge my honour on myself.

All my modern Utopian friends look at each other rather doubtfully, for their ultimate hope is the dissolution of all special ties. But again I seem to hear, like a kind of echo, an answer from beyond the world. “You will have real obligations, and therefore real adventures when you get to my Utopia. But the hardest obligation and the steepest adventure is to get there.”
VIII

THE ROMANCE OF ORTHODOXY

It is customary to complain of the bustle and strenuousness of our epoch. But in truth the chief mark of our epoch is a profound laziness and fatigue; and the fact is that the real laziness is the cause of the apparent bustle. Take one quite external case; the streets are noisy with taxicabs and motorcars; but this is not due to human activity but to human repose. There would be less bustle if there were more activity, if people were simply walking about. Our world would be more silent if it were more strenuous. And this which is true of the apparent physical bustle is true also of the apparent bustle of the intellect. Most of the machinery of modern language is labour-saving machinery; and it saves mental labour very much more than it ought. Scientific phrases are used like scientific wheels and piston-rods to make swifter and smoother yet the path of the comfortable. Long words go rattling by us like long railway trains. We know they are carrying thousands who are too tired or too indolent to walk and think for themselves. It is a good exercise to try for once in a way to express any opinion one holds in words of one syllable. If you say “The social utility of the indeterminate sentence is recognized by all criminologists as a part of our sociological evolution towards a more humane and scientific view of punishment,” you can go on talking like that for hours with hardly a movement of the gray matter inside your skull. But if you begin “I wish Jones to go to gaol and Brown to say when Jones shall come out,” you will discover, with a thrill of horror, that you are obliged to think. The long words are not the hard words, it is the short words that are hard. There is much more metaphysical subtlety in the word “damn” than in the word “degeneration.”

But these long comfortable words that save modern people the toil of reasoning have one particular aspect in which they are especially ruinous and confusing. This difficulty occurs when the same long word is used in different connections to mean quite different things. Thus, to take a well-known instance, the word “idealist” has one meaning as a piece of philosophy and quite another as a piece of moral rhetoric. In the same way the scientific materialists have had just reason to complain of people mixing up “materialist” as a term of cosmology with “materialist” as a moral taunt. So, to take a cheaper instance, the man who hates “progressives” in London always calls himself a “progressive” in
South Africa.

A confusion quite as unmeaning as this has arisen in connection with the word “liberal” as applied to religion and as applied to politics and society. It is often suggested that all Liberals ought to be freethinkers, because they ought to love everything that is free. You might just as well say that all idealists ought to be High Churchmen, because they ought to love everything that is high. You might as well say that Low Churchmen ought to like Low Mass, or that Broad Churchmen ought to like broad jokes. The thing is a mere accident of words. In actual modern Europe a freethinker does not mean a man who thinks for himself. It means a man who, having thought for himself, has come to one particular class of conclusions, the material origin of phenomena, the impossibility of miracles, the improbability of personal immortality and so on. And none of these ideas are particularly liberal. Nay, indeed almost all these ideas are definitely illiberal, as it is the purpose of this chapter to show.

In the few following pages I propose to point out as rapidly as possible that on every single one of the matters most strongly insisted on by liberalisers of theology their effect upon social practice would be definitely illiberal. Almost every contemporary proposal to bring freedom into the church is simply a proposal to bring tyranny into the world. For freeing the church now does not even mean freeing it in all directions. It means freeing that peculiar set of dogmas loosely called scientific, dogmas of monism, of pantheism, or of Arianism, or of necessity. And every one of these (and we will take them one by one) can be shown to be the natural ally of oppression. In fact, it is a remarkable circumstance (indeed not so very remarkable when one comes to think of it) that most things are the allies of oppression. There is only one thing that can never go past a certain point in its alliance with oppression—and that is orthodoxy. I may, it is true, twist orthodoxy so as partly to justify a tyrant. But I can easily make up a German philosophy to justify him entirely.

Now let us take in order the innovations that are the notes of the new theology or the modernist church. We concluded the last chapter with the discovery of one of them. The very doctrine which is called the most old-fashioned was found to be the only safeguard of the new democracies of the earth. The doctrine seemingly most unpopular was found to be the only strength of the people. In short, we found that the only logical negation of oligarchy was in the affirmation of original sin. So it is, I maintain, in all the other cases.

I take the most obvious instance first, the case of miracles. For some extraordinary reason, there is a fixed notion that it is more liberal to disbelieve in
miracles than to believe in them. Why, I cannot imagine, nor can anybody tell me. For some inconceivable cause a “broad” or “liberal” clergyman always means a man who wishes at least to diminish the number of miracles; it never means a man who wishes to increase that number. It always means a man who is free to disbelieve that Christ came out of His grave; it never means a man who is free to believe that his own aunt came out of her grave. It is common to find trouble in a parish because the parish priest cannot admit that St. Peter walked on water; yet how rarely do we find trouble in a parish because the clergyman says that his father walked on the Serpentine? And this is not because (as the swift secularist debater would immediately retort) miracles cannot be believed in our experience. It is not because “miracles do not happen,” as in the dogma which Matthew Arnold recited with simple faith. More supernatural things are ALLEGED to have happened in our time than would have been possible eighty years ago. Men of science believe in such marvels much more than they did: the most perplexing, and even horrible, prodigies of mind and spirit are always being unveiled in modern psychology. Things that the old science at least would frankly have rejected as miracles are hourly being asserted by the new science. The only thing which is still old-fashioned enough to reject miracles is the New Theology. But in truth this notion that it is “free” to deny miracles has nothing to do with the evidence for or against them. It is a lifeless verbal prejudice of which the original life and beginning was not in the freedom of thought, but simply in the dogma of materialism. The man of the nineteenth century did not disbelieve in the Resurrection because his liberal Christianity allowed him to doubt it. He disbelieved in it because his very strict materialism did not allow him to believe it. Tennyson, a very typical nineteenth century man, uttered one of the instinctive truisms of his contemporaries when he said that there was faith in their honest doubt. There was indeed. Those words have a profound and even a horrible truth. In their doubt of miracles there was a faith in a fixed and godless fate; a deep and sincere faith in the incurable routine of the cosmos. The doubts of the agnostic were only the dogmas of the monist.

Of the fact and evidence of the supernatural I will speak afterwards. Here we are only concerned with this clear point; that in so far as the liberal idea of freedom can be said to be on either side in the discussion about miracles, it is obviously on the side of miracles. Reform or (in the only tolerable sense) progress means simply the gradual control of matter by mind. A miracle simply means the swift control of matter by mind. If you wish to feed the people, you may think that feeding them miraculously in the wilderness is impossible—but
you cannot think it illiberal. If you really want poor children to go to the seaside, you cannot think it illiberal that they should go there on flying dragons; you can only think it unlikely. A holiday, like Liberalism, only means the liberty of man. A miracle only means the liberty of God. You may conscientiously deny either of them, but you cannot call your denial a triumph of the liberal idea. The Catholic Church believed that man and God both had a sort of spiritual freedom. Calvinism took away the freedom from man, but left it to God. Scientific materialism binds the Creator Himself; it chains up God as the Apocalypse chained the devil. It leaves nothing free in the universe. And those who assist this process are called the “liberal theologians.”

This, as I say, is the lightest and most evident case. The assumption that there is something in the doubt of miracles akin to liberality or reform is literally the opposite of the truth. If a man cannot believe in miracles there is an end of the matter; he is not particularly liberal, but he is perfectly honourable and logical, which are much better things. But if he can believe in miracles, he is certainly the more liberal for doing so; because they mean first, the freedom of the soul, and secondly, its control over the tyranny of circumstance. Sometimes this truth is ignored in a singularly naive way, even by the ablest men. For instance, Mr. Bernard Shaw speaks with hearty old-fashioned contempt for the idea of miracles, as if they were a sort of breach of faith on the part of nature: he seems strangely unconscious that miracles are only the final flowers of his own favourite tree, the doctrine of the omnipotence of will. Just in the same way he calls the desire for immortality a paltry selfishness, forgetting that he has just called the desire for life a healthy and heroic selfishness. How can it be noble to wish to make one’s life infinite and yet mean to wish to make it immortal? No, if it is desirable that man should triumph over the cruelty of nature or custom, then miracles are certainly desirable; we will discuss afterwards whether they are possible.

But I must pass on to the larger cases of this curious error; the notion that the “liberalising” of religion in some way helps the liberation of the world. The second example of it can be found in the question of pantheism—or rather of a certain modern attitude which is often called immanentism, and which often is Buddhism. But this is so much more difficult a matter that I must approach it with rather more preparation.

The things said most confidently by advanced persons to crowded audiences are generally those quite opposite to the fact; it is actually our truisms that are untrue. Here is a case. There is a phrase of facile liberality uttered again and
again at ethical societies and parliaments of religion: “the religions of the earth differ in rites and forms, but they are the same in what they teach.” It is false; it is the opposite of the fact. The religions of the earth do not greatly differ in rites and forms; they do greatly differ in what they teach. It is as if a man were to say, “Do not be misled by the fact that the CHURCH TIMES and the FREETHINKER look utterly different, that one is painted on vellum and the other carved on marble, that one is triangular and the other heptagonal; read them and you will see that they say the same thing.” The truth is, of course, that they are alike in everything except in the fact that they don’t say the same thing. An atheist stockbroker in Surbiton looks exactly like a Swedenborgian stockbroker in Wimbledon. You may walk round and round them and subject them to the most personal and offensive study without seeing anything Swedenborgian in the hat or anything particularly godless in the umbrella. It is exactly in their souls that they are divided. So the truth is that the difficulty of all the creeds of the earth is not as alleged in this cheap maxim: that they agree in meaning, but differ in machinery. It is exactly the opposite. They agree in machinery; almost every great religion on earth works with the same external methods, with priests, scriptures, altars, sworn brotherhoods, special feasts. They agree in the mode of teaching; what they differ about is the thing to be taught. Pagan optimists and Eastern pessimists would both have temples, just as Liberals and Tories would both have newspapers. Creeds that exist to destroy each other both have scriptures, just as armies that exist to destroy each other both have guns.

The great example of this alleged identity of all human religions is the alleged spiritual identity of Buddhism and Christianity. Those who adopt this theory generally avoid the ethics of most other creeds, except, indeed, Confucianism, which they like because it is not a creed. But they are cautious in their praises of Mahommedanism, generally confining themselves to imposing its morality only upon the refreshment of the lower classes. They seldom suggest the Mahommedan view of marriage (for which there is a great deal to be said), and towards Thugs and fetish worshippers their attitude may even be called cold. But in the case of the great religion of Gautama they feel sincerely a similarity.

Students of popular science, like Mr. Blatchford, are always insisting that Christianity and Buddhism are very much alike, especially Buddhism. This is generally believed, and I believed it myself until I read a book giving the reasons for it. The reasons were of two kinds: resemblances that meant nothing because they were common to all humanity, and resemblances which were not
resemblances at all. The author solemnly explained that the two creeds were alike in things in which all creeds are alike, or else he described them as alike in some point in which they are quite obviously different. Thus, as a case of the first class, he said that both Christ and Buddha were called by the divine voice coming out of the sky, as if you would expect the divine voice to come out of the coal-cellar. Or, again, it was gravely urged that these two Eastern teachers, by a singular coincidence, both had to do with the washing of feet. You might as well say that it was a remarkable coincidence that they both had feet to wash. And the other class of similarities were those which simply were not similar. Thus this reconciler of the two religions draws earnest attention to the fact that at certain religious feasts the robe of the Lama is rent in pieces out of respect, and the remnants highly valued. But this is the reverse of a resemblance, for the garments of Christ were not rent in pieces out of respect, but out of derision; and the remnants were not highly valued except for what they would fetch in the rag shops. It is rather like alluding to the obvious connection between the two ceremonies of the sword: when it taps a man’s shoulder, and when it cuts off his head. It is not at all similar for the man. These scraps of puerile pedantry would indeed matter little if it were not also true that the alleged philosophical resemblances are also of these two kinds, either proving too much or not proving anything. That Buddhism approves of mercy or of self-restraint is not to say that it is specially like Christianity; it is only to say that it is not utterly unlike all human existence. Buddhists disapprove in theory of cruelty or excess because all sane human beings disapprove in theory of cruelty or excess. But to say that Buddhism and Christianity give the same philosophy of these things is simply false. All humanity does agree that we are in a net of sin. Most of humanity agrees that there is some way out. But as to what is the way out, I do not think that there are two institutions in the universe which contradict each other so flatly as Buddhism and Christianity.

Even when I thought, with most other well-informed, though unscholarly, people, that Buddhism and Christianity were alike, there was one thing about them that always perplexed me; I mean the startling difference in their type of religious art. I do not mean in its technical style of representation, but in the things that it was manifestly meant to represent. No two ideals could be more opposite than a Christian saint in a Gothic cathedral and a Buddhist saint in a Chinese temple. The opposition exists at every point; but perhaps the shortest statement of it is that the Buddhist saint always has his eyes shut, while the Christian saint always has them very wide open. The Buddhist saint has a sleek
and harmonious body, but his eyes are heavy and sealed with sleep. The mediaeval saint’s body is wasted to its crazy bones, but his eyes are frightfully alive. There cannot be any real community of spirit between forces that produced symbols so different as that. Granted that both images are extravagances, are perversions of the pure creed, it must be a real divergence which could produce such opposite extravagances. The Buddhist is looking with a peculiar intentness inwards. The Christian is staring with a frantic intentness outwards. If we follow that clue steadily we shall find some interesting things.

A short time ago Mrs. Besant, in an interesting essay, announced that there was only one religion in the world, that all faiths were only versions or perversions of it, and that she was quite prepared to say what it was. According to Mrs. Besant this universal Church is simply the universal self. It is the doctrine that we are really all one person; that there are no real walls of individuality between man and man. If I may put it so, she does not tell us to love our neighbours; she tells us to be our neighbours. That is Mrs. Besant’s thoughtful and suggestive description of the religion in which all men must find themselves in agreement. And I never heard of any suggestion in my life with which I more violently disagree. I want to love my neighbour not because he is I, but precisely because he is not I. I want to adore the world, not as one likes a looking-glass, because it is one’s self, but as one loves a woman, because she is entirely different. If souls are separate love is possible. If souls are united love is obviously impossible. A man may be said loosely to love himself, but he can hardly fall in love with himself, or, if he does, it must be a monotonous courtship. If the world is full of real selves, they can be really unselfish selves. But upon Mrs. Besant’s principle the whole cosmos is only one enormously selfish person.

It is just here that Buddhism is on the side of modern pantheism and immanence. And it is just here that Christianity is on the side of humanity and liberty and love. Love desires personality; therefore love desires division. It is the instinct of Christianity to be glad that God has broken the universe into little pieces, because they are living pieces. It is her instinct to say “little children love one another” rather than to tell one large person to love himself. This is the intellectual abyss between Buddhism and Christianity; that for the Buddhist or Theosophist personality is the fall of man, for the Christian it is the purpose of God, the whole point of his cosmic idea. The world-soul of the Theosophists asks man to love it only in order that man may throw himself into it. But the divine centre of Christianity actually threw man out of it in order that he might
love it. The oriental deity is like a giant who should have lost his leg or hand and be always seeking to find it; but the Christian power is like some giant who in a strange generosity should cut off his right hand, so that it might of its own accord shake hands with him. We come back to the same tireless note touching the nature of Christianity; all modern philosophies are chains which connect and fetter; Christianity is a sword which separates and sets free. No other philosophy makes God actually rejoice in the separation of the universe into living souls. But according to orthodox Christianity this separation between God and man is sacred, because this is eternal. That a man may love God it is necessary that there should be not only a God to be loved, but a man to love him. All those vague theosophical minds for whom the universe is an immense melting-pot are exactly the minds which shrink instinctively from that earthquake saying of our Gospels, which declare that the Son of God came not with peace but with a sundering sword. The saying rings entirely true even considered as what it obviously is; the statement that any man who preaches real love is bound to beget hate. It is as true of democratic fraternity as a divine love; sham love ends in compromise and common philosophy; but real love has always ended in bloodshed. Yet there is another and yet more awful truth behind the obvious meaning of this utterance of our Lord. According to Himself the Son was a sword separating brother and brother that they should for an aeon hate each other. But the Father also was a sword, which in the black beginning separated brother and brother, so that they should love each other at last.

This is the meaning of that almost insane happiness in the eyes of the mediaeval saint in the picture. This is the meaning of the sealed eyes of the superb Buddhist image. The Christian saint is happy because he has verily been cut off from the world; he is separate from things and is staring at them in astonishment. But why should the Buddhist saint be astonished at things?—since there is really only one thing, and that being impersonal can hardly be astonished at itself. There have been many pantheist poems suggesting wonder, but no really successful ones. The pantheist cannot wonder, for he cannot praise God or praise anything as really distinct from himself. Our immediate business here, however, is with the effect of this Christian admiration (which strikes outwards, towards a deity distinct from the worshipper) upon the general need for ethical activity and social reform. And surely its effect is sufficiently obvious. There is no real possibility of getting out of pantheism, any special impulse to moral action. For pantheism implies in its nature that one thing is as good as another; whereas action implies in its nature that one thing is greatly preferable to
another. Swinburne in the high summer of his scepticism tried in vain to wrestle with this difficulty. In “Songs before Sunrise,” written under the inspiration of Garibaldi and the revolt of Italy he proclaimed the newer religion and the purer God which should wither up all the priests of the world:

“What doest thou now Looking Godward to cry I am I, thou art thou, I am low, thou art high, I am thou that thou seekest to find him, find thou but thyself, thou art I.”

Of which the immediate and evident deduction is that tyrants are as much the sons of God as Garibaldis; and that King Bomba of Naples having, with the utmost success, “found himself” is identical with the ultimate good in all things. The truth is that the western energy that dethrones tyrants has been directly due to the western theology that says “I am I, thou art thou.” The same spiritual separation which looked up and saw a good king in the universe looked up and saw a bad king in Naples. The worshippers of Bomba’s god dethroned Bomba. The worshippers of Swinburne’s god have covered Asia for centuries and have never dethroned a tyrant. The Indian saint may reasonably shut his eyes because he is looking at that which is I and Thou and We and They and It. It is a rational occupation: but it is not true in theory and not true in fact that it helps the Indian to keep an eye on Lord Curzon. That external vigilance which has always been the mark of Christianity (the command that we should WATCH and pray) has expressed itself both in typical western orthodoxy and in typical western politics: but both depend on the idea of a divinity transcendent, different from ourselves, a deity that disappears. Certainly the most sagacious creeds may suggest that we should pursue God into deeper and deeper rings of the labyrinth of our own ego. But only we of Christendom have said that we should hunt God like an eagle upon the mountains: and we have killed all monsters in the chase.

Here again, therefore, we find that in so far as we value democracy and the self-renewing energies of the west, we are much more likely to find them in the old theology than the new. If we want reform, we must adhere to orthodoxy: especially in this matter (so much disputed in the counsels of Mr. R.J.Campbell), the matter of insisting on the immanent or the transcendent deity. By insisting specially on the immanence of God we get introspection, self-isolation, quietism, social indifference—Tibet. By insisting specially on the transcendence of God we get wonder, curiosity, moral and political adventure, righteous indignation—Christendom. Insisting that God is inside man, man is always inside himself. By insisting that God transcends man, man has transcended himself.

If we take any other doctrine that has been called old-fashioned we shall find
the case the same. It is the same, for instance, in the deep matter of the Trinity. Unitarians (a sect never to be mentioned without a special respect for their distinguished intellectual dignity and high intellectual honour) are often reformers by the accident that throws so many small sects into such an attitude. But there is nothing in the least liberal or akin to reform in the substitution of pure monotheism for the Trinity. The complex God of the Athanasian Creed may be an enigma for the intellect; but He is far less likely to gather the mystery and cruelty of a Sultan than the lonely god of Omar or Mahomet. The god who is a mere awful unity is not only a king but an Eastern king. The HEART of humanity, especially of European humanity, is certainly much more satisfied by the strange hints and symbols that gather round the Trinitarian idea, the image of a council at which mercy pleads as well as justice, the conception of a sort of liberty and variety existing even in the inmost chamber of the world. For Western religion has always felt keenly the idea “it is not well for man to be alone.” The social instinct asserted itself everywhere as when the Eastern idea of hermits was practically expelled by the Western idea of monks. So even asceticism became brotherly; and the Trappists were sociable even when they were silent. If this love of a living complexity be our test, it is certainly healthier to have the Trinitarian religion than the Unitarian. For to us Trinitarians (if I may say it with reverence)—to us God Himself is a society. It is indeed a fathomless mystery of theology, and even if I were theologian enough to deal with it directly, it would not be relevant to do so here. Suffice it to say here that this triple enigma is as comforting as wine and open as an English fireside; that this thing that bewilders the intellect utterly quiets the heart: but out of the desert, from the dry places and the dreadful suns, come the cruel children of the lonely God; the real Unitarians who with scimitar in hand have laid waste the world. For it is not well for God to be alone.

Again, the same is true of that difficult matter of the danger of the soul, which has unsettled so many just minds. To hope for all souls is imperative; and it is quite tenable that their salvation is inevitable. It is tenable, but it is not specially favourable to activity or progress. Our fighting and creative society ought rather to insist on the danger of everybody, on the fact that every man is hanging by a thread or clinging to a precipice. To say that all will be well anyhow is a comprehensible remark: but it cannot be called the blast of a trumpet. Europe ought rather to emphasize possible perdition; and Europe always has emphasized it. Here its highest religion is at one with all its cheapest romances. To the Buddhist or the eastern fatalist existence is a science or a plan, which must end
up in a certain way. But to a Christian existence is a STORY, which may end up in any way. In a thrilling novel (that purely Christian product) the hero is not eaten by cannibals; but it is essential to the existence of the thrill that he MIGHT be eaten by cannibals. The hero must (so to speak) be an eatable hero. So Christian morals have always said to the man, not that he would lose his soul, but that he must take care that he didn’t. In Christian morals, in short, it is wicked to call a man “damned” : but it is strictly religious and philosophic to call him damnable.

All Christianity concentrates on the man at the cross-roads. The vast and shallow philosophies, the huge syntheses of humbug, all talk about ages and evolution and ultimate developments. The true philosophy is concerned with the instant. Will a man take this road or that?—that is the only thing to think about, if you enjoy thinking. The aeons are easy enough to think about, any one can think about them. The instant is really awful: and it is because our religion has intensely felt the instant, that it has in literature dealt much with battle and in theology dealt much with hell. It is full of DANGER, like a boy’s book: it is at an immortal crisis. There is a great deal of real similarity between popular fiction and the religion of the western people. If you say that popular fiction is vulgar and tawdry, you only say what the dreary and well-informed say also about the images in the Catholic churches. Life (according to the faith) is very like a serial story in a magazine: life ends with the promise (or menace) “to be continued in our next.” Also, with a noble vulgarity, life imitates the serial and leaves off at the exciting moment. For death is distinctly an exciting moment.

But the point is that a story is exciting because it has in it so strong an element of will, of what theology calls free-will. You cannot finish a sum how you like. But you can finish a story how you like. When somebody discovered the Differential Calculus there was only one Differential Calculus he could discover. But when Shakespeare killed Romeo he might have married him to Juliet’s old nurse if he had felt inclined. And Christendom has excelled in the narrative romance exactly because it has insisted on the theological free-will. It is a large matter and too much to one side of the road to be discussed adequately here; but this is the real objection to that torrent of modern talk about treating crime as disease, about making a prison merely a hygienic environment like a hospital, of healing sin by slow scientific methods. The fallacy of the whole thing is that evil is a matter of active choice whereas disease is not. If you say that you are going to cure a profligate as you cure an asthmatic, my cheap and obvious answer is, “Produce the people who want to be asthmatics as many people want to be
profligates.” A man may lie still and be cured of a malady. But he must not lie
still if he wants to be cured of a sin; on the contrary, he must get up and jump
about violently. The whole point indeed is perfectly expressed in the very word
which we use for a man in hospital; “patient” is in the passive mood; “sinner” is
in the active. If a man is to be saved from influenza, he may be a patient. But if
he is to be saved from forging, he must be not a patient but an IMPATIENT. He
must be personally impatient with forgery. All moral reform must start in the
active not the passive will.

Here again we reach the same substantial conclusion. In so far as we desire the
definite reconstructions and the dangerous revolutions which have distinguished
European civilization, we shall not discourage the thought of possible ruin; we
shall rather encourage it. If we want, like the Eastern saints, merely to
contemplate how right things are, of course we shall only say that they must go
right. But if we particularly want to MAKE them go right, we must insist that
they may go wrong.

Lastly, this truth is yet again true in the case of the common modern attempts
to diminish or to explain away the divinity of Christ. The thing may be true or
not; that I shall deal with before I end. But if the divinity is true it is certainly
terribly revolutionary. That a good man may have his back to the wall is no more
than we knew already; but that God could have his back to the wall is a boast for
all insurgents for ever. Christianity is the only religion on earth that has felt that
omnipotence made God incomplete. Christianity alone has felt that God, to be
wholly God, must have been a rebel as well as a king. Alone of all creeds,
Christianity has added courage to the virtues of the Creator. For the only courage
worth calling courage must necessarily mean that the soul passes a breaking
point—and does not break. In this indeed I approach a matter more dark and
awful than it is easy to discuss; and I apologise in advance if any of my phrases
fall wrong or seem irreverent touching a matter which the greatest saints and
thinkers have justly feared to approach. But in that terrific tale of the Passion
there is a distinct emotional suggestion that the author of all things (in some
unthinkable way) went not only through agony, but through doubt. It is written,
“Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.” No; but the Lord thy God may tempt
Himself; and it seems as if this was what happened in Gethsemane. In a garden
Satan tempted man: and in a garden God tempted God. He passed in some
superhuman manner through our human horror of pessimism. When the world
shook and the sun was wiped out of heaven, it was not at the crucifixion, but at
the cry from the cross: the cry which confessed that God was forsaken of God.
And now let the revolutionists choose a creed from all the creeds and a god from all the gods of the world, carefully weighing all the gods of inevitable recurrence and of unalterable power. They will not find another god who has himself been in revolt. Nay, (the matter grows too difficult for human speech,) but let the atheists themselves choose a god. They will find only one divinity who ever uttered their isolation; only one religion in which God seemed for an instant to be an atheist.

These can be called the essentials of the old orthodoxy, of which the chief merit is that it is the natural fountain of revolution and reform; and of which the chief defect is that it is obviously only an abstract assertion. Its main advantage is that it is the most adventurous and manly of all theologies. Its chief disadvantage is simply that it is a theology. It can always be urged against it that it is in its nature arbitrary and in the air. But it is not so high in the air but that great archers spend their whole lives in shooting arrows at it—yes, and their last arrows; there are men who will ruin themselves and ruin their civilization if they may ruin also this old fantastic tale. This is the last and most astounding fact about this faith; that its enemies will use any weapon against it, the swords that cut their own fingers, and the firebrands that burn their own homes. Men who begin to fight the Church for the sake of freedom and humanity end by flinging away freedom and humanity if only they may fight the Church. This is no exaggeration; I could fill a book with the instances of it. Mr. Blatchford set out, as an ordinary Bible-smasher, to prove that Adam was guiltless of sin against God; in manoeuvring so as to maintain this he admitted, as a mere side issue, that all the tyrants, from Nero to King Leopold, were guiltless of any sin against humanity. I know a man who has such a passion for proving that he will have no personal existence after death that he falls back on the position that he has no personal existence now. He invokes Buddhism and says that all souls fade into each other; in order to prove that he cannot go to heaven he proves that he cannot go to Hartlepool. I have known people who protested against religious education with arguments against any education, saying that the child’s mind must grow freely or that the old must not teach the young. I have known people who showed that there could be no divine judgment by showing that there can be no human judgment, even for practical purposes. They burned their own corn to set fire to the church; they smashed their own tools to smash it; any stick was good enough to beat it with, though it were the last stick of their own dismembered furniture. We do not admire, we hardly excuse, the fanatic who wrecks this world for love of the other. But what are we to say of the fanatic who
wrecks this world out of hatred of the other? He sacrifices the very existence of humanity to the non-existence of God. He offers his victims not to the altar, but merely to assert the idleness of the altar and the emptiness of the throne. He is ready to ruin even that primary ethic by which all things live, for his strange and eternal vengeance upon some one who never lived at all.

And yet the thing hangs in the heavens unhurt. Its opponents only succeed in destroying all that they themselves justly hold dear. They do not destroy orthodoxy; they only destroy political and common courage sense. They do not prove that Adam was not responsible to God; how could they prove it? They only prove (from their premises) that the Czar is not responsible to Russia. They do not prove that Adam should not have been punished by God; they only prove that the nearest sweater should not be punished by men. With their oriental doubts about personality they do not make certain that we shall have no personal life hereafter; they only make certain that we shall not have a very jolly or complete one here. With their paralysing hints of all conclusions coming out wrong they do not tear the book of the Recording Angel; they only make it a little harder to keep the books of Marshall & Snelgrove. Not only is the faith the mother of all worldly energies, but its foes are the fathers of all worldly confusion. The secularists have not wrecked divine things; but the secularists have wrecked secular things, if that is any comfort to them. The Titans did not scale heaven; but they laid waste the world.
IX

AUTHORITY AND THE ADVENTURER

The last chapter has been concerned with the contention that orthodoxy is not only (as is often urged) the only safe guardian of morality or order, but is also the only logical guardian of liberty, innovation and advance. If we wish to pull down the prosperous oppressor we cannot do it with the new doctrine of human perfectibility; we can do it with the old doctrine of Original Sin. If we want to uproot inherent cruelties or lift up lost populations we cannot do it with the scientific theory that matter precedes mind; we can do it with the supernatural theory that mind precedes matter. If we wish specially to awaken people to social vigilance and tireless pursuit of practise, we cannot help it much by insisting on the Immanent God and the Inner Light: for these are at best reasons for contentment; we can help it much by insisting on the transcendent God and the flying and escaping gleam; for that means divine discontent. If we wish particularly to assert the idea of a generous balance against that of a dreadful autocracy we shall instinctively be Trinitarian rather than Unitarian. If we desire European civilization to be a raid and a rescue, we shall insist rather that souls are in real peril than that their peril is ultimately unreal. And if we wish to exalt the outcast and the crucified, we shall rather wish to think that a veritable God was crucified, rather than a mere sage or hero. Above all, if we wish to protect the poor we shall be in favour of fixed rules and clear dogmas. The RULES of a club are occasionally in favour of the poor member. The drift of a club is always in favour of the rich one.

And now we come to the crucial question which truly concludes the whole matter. A reasonable agnostic, if he has happened to agree with me so far, may justly turn round and say, “You have found a practical philosophy in the doctrine of the Fall; very well. You have found a side of democracy now dangerously neglected wisely asserted in Original Sin; all right. You have found a truth in the doctrine of hell; I congratulate you. You are convinced that worshippers of a personal God look outwards and are progressive; I congratulate them. But even supposing that those doctrines do include those truths, why cannot you take the truths and leave the doctrines? Granted that all modern society is trusting the rich too much because it does not allow for human weakness; granted that orthodox ages have had a great advantage because (believing in the Fall) they
did allow for human weakness, why cannot you simply allow for human weakness without believing in the Fall? If you have discovered that the idea of damnation represents a healthy idea of danger, why can you not simply take the idea of danger and leave the idea of damnation? If you see clearly the kernel of common-sense in the nut of Christian orthodoxy, why cannot you simply take the kernel and leave the nut? Why cannot you (to use that cant phrase of the newspapers which I, as a highly scholarly agnostic, am a little ashamed of using) why cannot you simply take what is good in Christianity, what you can define as valuable, what you can comprehend, and leave all the rest, all the absolute dogmas that are in their nature incomprehensible?” This is the real question; this is the last question; and it is a pleasure to try to answer it.

The first answer is simply to say that I am a rationalist. I like to have some intellectual justification for my intuitions. If I am treating man as a fallen being it is an intellectual convenience to me to believe that he fell; and I find, for some odd psychological reason, that I can deal better with a man’s exercise of freewill if I believe that he has got it. But I am in this matter yet more definitely a rationalist. I do not propose to turn this book into one of ordinary Christian apologetics; I should be glad to meet at any other time the enemies of Christianity in that more obvious arena. Here I am only giving an account of my own growth in spiritual certainty. But I may pause to remark that the more I saw of the merely abstract arguments against the Christian cosmology the less I thought of them. I mean that having found the moral atmosphere of the Incarnation to be common sense, I then looked at the established intellectual arguments against the Incarnation and found them to be common nonsense. In case the argument should be thought to suffer from the absence of the ordinary apologetic I will here very briefly summarise my own arguments and conclusions on the purely objective or scientific truth of the matter.

If I am asked, as a purely intellectual question, why I believe in Christianity, I can only answer, “For the same reason that an intelligent agnostic disbelieves in Christianity.” I believe in it quite rationally upon the evidence. But the evidence in my case, as in that of the intelligent agnostic, is not really in this or that alleged demonstration; it is in an enormous accumulation of small but unanimous facts. The secularist is not to be blamed because his objections to Christianity are miscellaneous and even scrappy; it is precisely such scrappy evidence that does convince the mind. I mean that a man may well be less convinced of a philosophy from four books, than from one book, one battle, one landscape, and one old friend. The very fact that the things are of different kinds
increases the importance of the fact that they all point to one conclusion. Now, the non-Christianity of the average educated man to-day is almost always, to do him justice, made up of these loose but living experiences. I can only say that my evidences for Christianity are of the same vivid but varied kind as his evidences against it. For when I look at these various anti-Christian truths, I simply discover that none of them are true. I discover that the true tide and force of all the facts flows the other way. Let us take cases. Many a sensible modern man must have abandoned Christianity under the pressure of three such converging convictions as these: first, that men, with their shape, structure, and sexuality, are, after all, very much like beasts, a mere variety of the animal kingdom; second, that primeval religion arose in ignorance and fear; third, that priests have blighted societies with bitterness and gloom. Those three anti-Christian arguments are very different; but they are all quite logical and legitimate; and they all converge. The only objection to them (I discover) is that they are all untrue. If you leave off looking at books about beasts and men, if you begin to look at beasts and men then (if you have any humour or imagination, any sense of the frantic or the farcical) you will observe that the startling thing is not how like man is to the brutes, but how unlike he is. It is the monstrous scale of his divergence that requires an explanation. That man and brute are like is, in a sense, a truism; but that being so like they should then be so insanely unlike, that is the shock and the enigma. That an ape has hands is far less interesting to the philosopher than the fact that having hands he does next to nothing with them; does not play knuckle-bones or the violin; does not carve marble or carve mutton. People talk of barbaric architecture and debased art. But elephants do not build colossal temples of ivory even in a roccoco style; camels do not paint even bad pictures, though equipped with the material of many camel’s-hair brushes. Certain modern dreamers say that ants and bees have a society superior to ours. They have, indeed, a civilization; but that very truth only reminds us that it is an inferior civilization. Who ever found an ant-hill decorated with the statues of celebrated ants? Who has seen a bee-hive carved with the images of gorgeous queens of old? No; the chasm between man and other creatures may have a natural explanation, but it is a chasm. We talk of wild animals; but man is the only wild animal. It is man that has broken out. All other animals are tame animals; following the rugged respectability of the tribe or type. All other animals are domestic animals; man alone is ever undomestic, either as a profligate or a monk. So that this first superficial reason for materialism is, if anything, a reason for its opposite; it is exactly where biology
It would be the same if I examined the second of the three chance rationalist arguments; the argument that all that we call divine began in some darkness and terror. When I did attempt to examine the foundations of this modern idea I simply found that there were none. Science knows nothing whatever about pre-historic man; for the excellent reason that he is pre-historic. A few professors choose to conjecture that such things as human sacrifice were once innocent and general and that they gradually dwindled; but there is no direct evidence of it, and the small amount of indirect evidence is very much the other way. In the earliest legends we have, such as the tales of Isaac and of Iphigenia, human sacrifice is not introduced as something old, but rather as something new; as a strange and frightful exception darkly demanded by the gods. History says nothing; and legends all say that the earth was kinder in its earliest time. There is no tradition of progress; but the whole human race has a tradition of the Fall. Amusingly enough, indeed, the very dissemination of this idea is used against its authenticity. Learned men literally say that this pre-historic calamity cannot be true because every race of mankind remembers it. I cannot keep pace with these paradoxes.

And if we took the third chance instance, it would be the same; the view that priests darken and embitter the world. I look at the world and simply discover that they don’t. Those countries in Europe which are still influenced by priests, are exactly the countries where there is still singing and dancing and coloured dresses and art in the open-air. Catholic doctrine and discipline may be walls; but they are the walls of a playground. Christianity is the only frame which has preserved the pleasure of Paganism. We might fancy some children playing on the flat grassy top of some tall island in the sea. So long as there was a wall round the cliff’s edge they could fling themselves into every frantic game and make the place the noisiest of nurseries. But the walls were knocked down, leaving the naked peril of the precipice. They did not fall over; but when their friends returned to them they were all huddled in terror in the centre of the island; and their song had ceased.

Thus these three facts of experience, such facts as go to make an agnostic, are, in this view, turned totally round. I am left saying, “Give me an explanation, first, of the towering eccentricity of man among the brutes; second, of the vast human tradition of some ancient happiness; third, of the partial perpetuation of such pagan joy in the countries of the Catholic Church.” One explanation, at any rate, covers all three: the theory that twice was the natural order interrupted by
some explosion or revelation such as people now call “psychic.” Once Heaven came upon the earth with a power or seal called the image of God, whereby man took command of Nature; and once again (when in empire after empire men had been found wanting) Heaven came to save mankind in the awful shape of a man. This would explain why the mass of men always look backwards; and why the only corner where they in any sense look forwards is the little continent where Christ has His Church. I know it will be said that Japan has become progressive. But how can this be an answer when even in saying “Japan has become progressive,” we really only mean, “Japan has become European”? But I wish here not so much to insist on my own explanation as to insist on my original remark. I agree with the ordinary unbelieving man in the street in being guided by three or four odd facts all pointing to something; only when I came to look at the facts I always found they pointed to something else.

I have given an imaginary triad of such ordinary anti-Christian arguments; if that be too narrow a basis I will give on the spur of the moment another. These are the kind of thoughts which in combination create the impression that Christianity is something weak and diseased. First, for instance, that Jesus was a gentle creature, sheepish and unworldly, a mere ineffectual appeal to the world; second, that Christianity arose and flourished in the dark ages of ignorance, and that to these the Church would drag us back; third, that the people still strongly religious or (if you will) superstitious—such people as the Irish—are weak, impractical, and behind the times. I only mention these ideas to affirm the same thing: that when I looked into them independently I found, not that the conclusions were unphilosophical, but simply that the facts were not facts. Instead of looking at books and pictures about the New Testament I looked at the New Testament. There I found an account, not in the least of a person with his hair parted in the middle or his hands clasped in appeal, but of an extraordinary being with lips of thunder and acts of lurid decision, flinging down tables, casting out devils, passing with the wild secrecy of the wind from mountain isolation to a sort of dreadful demagogy; a being who often acted like an angry god—and always like a god. Christ had even a literary style of his own, not to be found, I think, elsewhere; it consists of an almost furious use of the A FORTIORI. His “how much more” is piled one upon another like castle upon castle in the clouds. The diction used ABOUT Christ has been, and perhaps wisely, sweet and submissive. But the diction used by Christ is quite curiously gigantesque; it is full of camels leaping through needles and mountains hurled into the sea. Morally it is equally terrific; he called himself a sword of slaughter,
and told men to buy swords if they sold their coats for them. That he used other even wilder words on the side of non-resistance greatly increases the mystery; but it also, if anything, rather increases the violence. We cannot even explain it by calling such a being insane; for insanity is usually along one consistent channel. The maniac is generally a monomaniac. Here we must remember the difficult definition of Christianity already given; Christianity is a superhuman paradox whereby two opposite passions may blaze beside each other. The one explanation of the Gospel language that does explain it, is that it is the survey of one who from some supernatural height beholds some more startling synthesis.

I take in order the next instance offered: the idea that Christianity belongs to the Dark Ages. Here I did not satisfy myself with reading modern generalisations; I read a little history. And in history I found that Christianity, so far from belonging to the Dark Ages, was the one path across the Dark Ages that was not dark. It was a shining bridge connecting two shining civilizations. If any one says that the faith arose in ignorance and savagery the answer is simple: it didn’t. It arose in the Mediterranean civilization in the full summer of the Roman Empire. The world was swarming with sceptics, and pantheism was as plain as the sun, when Constantine nailed the cross to the mast. It is perfectly true that afterwards the ship sank; but it is far more extraordinary that the ship came up again: repainted and glittering, with the cross still at the top. This is the amazing thing the religion did: it turned a sunken ship into a submarine. The ark lived under the load of waters; after being buried under the debris of dynasties and clans, we arose and remembered Rome. If our faith had been a mere fad of the fading empire, fad would have followed fad in the twilight, and if the civilization ever re-emerged (and many such have never re-emerged) it would have been under some new barbaric flag. But the Christian Church was the last life of the old society and was also the first life of the new. She took the people who were forgetting how to make an arch and she taught them to invent the Gothic arch. In a word, the most absurd thing that could be said of the Church is the thing we have all heard said of it. How can we say that the Church wishes to bring us back into the Dark Ages? The Church was the only thing that ever brought us out of them.

I added in this second trinity of objections an idle instance taken from those who feel such people as the Irish to be weakened or made stagnant by superstition. I only added it because this is a peculiar case of a statement of fact that turns out to be a statement of falsehood. It is constantly said of the Irish that they are impractical. But if we refrain for a moment from looking at what is said
about them and look at what is DONE about them, we shall see that the Irish are not only practical, but quite painfully successful. The poverty of their country, the minority of their members are simply the conditions under which they were asked to work; but no other group in the British Empire has done so much with such conditions. The Nationalists were the only minority that ever succeeded in twisting the whole British Parliament sharply out of its path. The Irish peasants are the only poor men in these islands who have forced their masters to disgorge. These people, whom we call priest-ridden, are the only Britons who will not be squire-ridden. And when I came to look at the actual Irish character, the case was the same. Irishmen are best at the specially HARD professions—the trades of iron, the lawyer, and the soldier. In all these cases, therefore, I came back to the same conclusion: the sceptic was quite right to go by the facts, only he had not looked at the facts. The sceptic is too credulous; he believes in newspapers or even in encyclopedias. Again the three questions left me with three very antagonistic questions. The average sceptic wanted to know how I explained the namby-pamby note in the Gospel, the connection of the creed with mediaeval darkness and the political impracticability of the Celtic Christians. But I wanted to ask, and to ask with an earnestness amounting to urgency, “What is this incomparable energy which appears first in one walking the earth like a living judgment and this energy which can die with a dying civilization and yet force it to a resurrection from the dead; this energy which last of all can inflame a bankrupt peasantry with so fixed a faith in justice that they get what they ask, while others go empty away; so that the most helpless island of the Empire can actually help itself?”

There is an answer: it is an answer to say that the energy is truly from outside the world; that it is psychic, or at least one of the results of a real psychical disturbance. The highest gratitude and respect are due to the great human civilizations such as the old Egyptian or the existing Chinese. Nevertheless it is no injustice for them to say that only modern Europe has exhibited incessantly a power of self-renewal recurring often at the shortest intervals and descending to the smallest facts of building or costume. All other societies die finally and with dignity. We die daily. We are always being born again with almost indecent obstetrics. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that there is in historic Christendom a sort of unnatural life: it could be explained as a supernatural life. It could be explained as an awful galvanic life working in what would have been a corpse. For our civilization OUGHT to have died, by all parallels, by all sociological probability, in the Ragnorak of the end of Rome. That is the weird inspiration of
our estate: you and I have no business to be here at all. We are all REVENANTS; all living Christians are dead pagans walking about. Just as Europe was about to be gathered in silence to Assyria and Babylon, something entered into its body. And Europe has had a strange life—it is not too much to say that it has had the JUMPS—ever since.

I have dealt at length with such typical triads of doubt in order to convey the main contention—that my own case for Christianity is rational; but it is not simple. It is an accumulation of varied facts, like the attitude of the ordinary agnostic. But the ordinary agnostic has got his facts all wrong. He is a non-believer for a multitude of reasons; but they are untrue reasons. He doubts because the Middle Ages were barbaric, but they weren’t; because Darwinism is demonstrated, but it isn’t; because miracles do not happen, but they do; because monks were lazy, but they were very industrious; because nuns are unhappy, but they are particularly cheerful; because Christian art was sad and pale, but it was picked out in peculiarly bright colours and gay with gold; because modern science is moving away from the supernatural, but it isn’t, it is moving towards the supernatural with the rapidity of a railway train.

But among these million facts all flowing one way there is, of course, one question sufficiently solid and separate to be treated briefly, but by itself; I mean the objective occurrence of the supernatural. In another chapter I have indicated the fallacy of the ordinary supposition that the world must be impersonal because it is orderly. A person is just as likely to desire an orderly thing as a disorderly thing. But my own positive conviction that personal creation is more conceivable than material fate, is, I admit, in a sense, undiscussable. I will not call it a faith or an intuition, for those words are mixed up with mere emotion, it is strictly an intellectual conviction; but it is a PRIMARY intellectual conviction like the certainty of self and of the good of living. Any one who likes, therefore, may call my belief in God merely mystical; the phrase is not worth fighting about. But my belief that miracles have happened in human history is not a mystical belief at all; I believe in them upon human evidences as I do in the discovery of America. Upon this point there is a simple logical fact that only requires to be stated and cleared up. Somehow or other an extraordinary idea has arisen that the disbelievers in miracles consider them coldly and fairly, while believers in miracles accept them only in connection with some dogma. The fact is quite the other way. The believers in miracles accept them (rightly or wrongly) because they have evidence for them. The disbelievers in miracles deny them (rightly or wrongly) because they have a doctrine against them. The open, obvious,
democratic thing is to believe an old apple-woman when she bears testimony to a miracle, just as you believe an old apple-woman when she bears testimony to a murder. The plain, popular course is to trust the peasant’s word about the ghost exactly as far as you trust the peasant’s word about the landlord. Being a peasant he will probably have a great deal of healthy agnosticism about both. Still you could fill the British Museum with evidence uttered by the peasant, and given in favour of the ghost. If it comes to human testimony there is a choking cataract of human testimony in favour of the supernatural. If you reject it, you can only mean one of two things. You reject the peasant’s story about the ghost either because the man is a peasant or because the story is a ghost story. That is, you either deny the main principle of democracy, or you affirm the main principle of materialism—the abstract impossibility of miracle. You have a perfect right to do so; but in that case you are the dogmatist. It is we Christians who accept all actual evidence—it is you rationalists who refuse actual evidence being constrained to do so by your creed. But I am not constrained by any creed in the matter, and looking impartially into certain miracles of mediaeval and modern times, I have come to the conclusion that they occurred. All argument against these plain facts is always argument in a circle. If I say, “Mediaeval documents attest certain miracles as much as they attest certain battles,” they answer, “But mediaevals were superstitious”; if I want to know in what they were superstitious, the only ultimate answer is that they believed in the miracles. If I say “a peasant saw a ghost,” I am told, “But peasants are so credulous.” If I ask, “Why credulous?” the only answer is—that they see ghosts. Iceland is impossible because only stupid sailors have seen it; and the sailors are only stupid because they say they have seen Iceland. It is only fair to add that there is another argument that the unbeliever may rationally use against miracles, though he himself generally forgets to use it.

He may say that there has been in many miraculous stories a notion of spiritual preparation and acceptance: in short, that the miracle could only come to him who believed in it. It may be so, and if it is so how are we to test it? If we are inquiring whether certain results follow faith, it is useless to repeat wearyly that (if they happen) they do follow faith. If faith is one of the conditions, those without faith have a most healthy right to laugh. But they have no right to judge. Being a believer may be, if you like, as bad as being drunk; still if we were extracting psychological facts from drunkards, it would be absurd to be always taunting them with having been drunk. Suppose we were investigating whether angry men really saw a red mist before their eyes. Suppose sixty excellent
householders swore that when angry they had seen this crimson cloud: surely it would be absurd to answer “Oh, but you admit you were angry at the time.” They might reasonably rejoin (in a stentorian chorus), “How the blazes could we discover, without being angry, whether angry people see red?” So the saints and ascetics might rationally reply, “Suppose that the question is whether believers can see visions—even then, if you are interested in visions it is no point to object to believers.” You are still arguing in a circle—in that old mad circle with which this book began.

The question of whether miracles ever occur is a question of common sense and of ordinary historical imagination: not of any final physical experiment. One may here surely dismiss that quite brainless piece of pedantry which talks about the need for “scientific conditions” in connection with alleged spiritual phenomena. If we are asking whether a dead soul can communicate with a living it is ludicrous to insist that it shall be under conditions in which no two living souls in their senses would seriously communicate with each other. The fact that ghosts prefer darkness no more disproves the existence of ghosts than the fact that lovers prefer darkness disproves the existence of love. If you choose to say, “I will believe that Miss Brown called her fiance a periwinkle or, any other endearing term, if she will repeat the word before seventeen psychologists,” then I shall reply, “Very well, if those are your conditions, you will never get the truth, for she certainly will not say it.” It is just as unscientific as it is unphilosophical to be surprised that in an unsympathetic atmosphere certain extraordinary sympathies do not arise. It is as if I said that I could not tell if there was a fog because the air was not clear enough; or as if I insisted on perfect sunlight in order to see a solar eclipse.

As a common-sense conclusion, such as those to which we come about sex or about midnight (well knowing that many details must in their own nature be concealed) I conclude that miracles do happen. I am forced to it by a conspiracy of facts: the fact that the men who encounter elves or angels are not the mystics and the morbid dreamers, but fishermen, farmers, and all men at once coarse and cautious; the fact that we all know men who testify to spiritualistic incidents but are not spiritualists, the fact that science itself admits such things more and more every day. Science will even admit the Ascension if you call it Levitation, and will very likely admit the Resurrection when it has thought of another word for it. I suggest the Regalvanisation. But the strongest of all is the dilemma above mentioned, that these supernatural things are never denied except on the basis either of anti-democracy or of materialist dogmatism—I may say materialist
mysticism. The sceptic always takes one of the two positions; either an ordinary man need not be believed, or an extraordinary event must not be believed. For I hope we may dismiss the argument against wonders attempted in the mere recapitulation of frauds, of swindling mediums or trick miracles. That is not an argument at all, good or bad. A false ghost disproves the reality of ghosts exactly as much as a forged banknote disproves the existence of the Bank of England—if anything, it proves its existence.

Given this conviction that the spiritual phenomena do occur (my evidence for which is complex but rational), we then collide with one of the worst mental evils of the age. The greatest disaster of the nineteenth century was this: that men began to use the word “spiritual” as the same as the word “good.” They thought that to grow in refinement and uncorporeality was to grow in virtue. When scientific evolution was announced, some feared that it would encourage mere animality. It did worse: it encouraged mere spirituality. It taught men to think that so long as they were passing from the ape they were going to the angel. But you can pass from the ape and go to the devil. A man of genius, very typical of that time of bewilderment, expressed it perfectly. Benjamin Disraeli was right when he said he was on the side of the angels. He was indeed; he was on the side of the fallen angels. He was not on the side of any mere appetite or animal brutality; but he was on the side of all the imperialism of the princes of the abyss; he was on the side of arrogance and mystery, and contempt of all obvious good. Between this sunken pride and the towering humilities of heaven there are, one must suppose, spirits of shapes and sizes. Man, in encountering them, must make much the same mistakes that he makes in encountering any other varied types in any other distant continent. It must be hard at first to know who is supreme and who is subordinate. If a shade arose from the under world, and stared at Piccadilly, that shade would not quite understand the idea of an ordinary closed carriage. He would suppose that the coachman on the box was a triumphant conqueror, dragging behind him a kicking and imprisoned captive. So, if we see spiritual facts for the first time, we may mistake who is uppermost. It is not enough to find the gods; they are obvious; we must find God, the real chief of the gods. We must have a long historic experience in supernatural phenomena—in order to discover which are really natural. In this light I find the history of Christianity, and even of its Hebrew origins, quite practical and clear. It does not trouble me to be told that the Hebrew god was one among many. I know he was, without any research to tell me so. Jehovah and Baal looked equally important, just as the sun and the moon looked the same size. It is only
slowly that we learn that the sun is immeasurably our master, and the small moon only our satellite. Believing that there is a world of spirits, I shall walk in it as I do in the world of men, looking for the thing that I like and think good. Just as I should seek in a desert for clean water, or toil at the North Pole to make a comfortable fire, so I shall search the land of void and vision until I find something fresh like water, and comforting like fire; until I find some place in eternity, where I am literally at home. And there is only one such place to be found.

I have now said enough to show (to any one to whom such an explanation is essential) that I have in the ordinary arena of apologetics, a ground of belief. In pure records of experiment (if these be taken democratically without contempt or favour) there is evidence first, that miracles happen, and second that the nobler miracles belong to our tradition. But I will not pretend that this curt discussion is my real reason for accepting Christianity instead of taking the moral good of Christianity as I should take it out of Confucianism.

I have another far more solid and central ground for submitting to it as a faith, instead of merely picking up hints from it as a scheme. And that is this: that the Christian Church in its practical relation to my soul is a living teacher, not a dead one. It not only certainly taught me yesterday, but will almost certainly teach me to-morrow. Once I saw suddenly the meaning of the shape of the cross; some day I may see suddenly the meaning of the shape of the mitre. One fine morning I saw why windows were pointed; some fine morning I may see why priests were shaven. Plato has told you a truth; but Plato is dead. Shakespeare has startled you with an image; but Shakespeare will not startle you with any more. But imagine what it would be to live with such men still living, to know that Plato might break out with an original lecture to-morrow, or that at any moment Shakespeare might shatter everything with a single song. The man who lives in contact with what he believes to be a living Church is a man always expecting to meet Plato and Shakespeare to-morrow at breakfast. He is always expecting to see some truth that he has never seen before. There is one only other parallel to this position; and that is the parallel of the life in which we all began. When your father told you, walking about the garden, that bees stung or that roses smelt sweet, you did not talk of taking the best out of his philosophy. When the bees stung you, you did not call it an entertaining coincidence. When the rose smelt sweet you did not say “My father is a rude, barbaric symbol, enshrining (perhaps unconsciously) the deep delicate truths that flowers smell.” No: you believed your father, because you had found him to be a living fountain of facts, a thing
that really knew more than you; a thing that would tell you truth to-morrow, as well as to-day. And if this was true of your father, it was even truer of your mother; at least it was true of mine, to whom this book is dedicated. Now, when society is in a rather futile fuss about the subjection of women, will no one say how much every man owes to the tyranny and privilege of women, to the fact that they alone rule education until education becomes futile: for a boy is only sent to be taught at school when it is too late to teach him anything. The real thing has been done already, and thank God it is nearly always done by women. Every man is womanised, merely by being born. They talk of the masculine woman; but every man is a feminised man. And if ever men walk to Westminster to protest against this female privilege, I shall not join their procession.

For I remember with certainty this fixed psychological fact; that the very time when I was most under a woman’s authority, I was most full of flame and adventure. Exactly because when my mother said that ants bit they did bite, and because snow did come in winter (as she said); therefore the whole world was to me a fairyland of wonderful fulfilments, and it was like living in some Hebraic age, when prophecy after prophecy came true. I went out as a child into the garden, and it was a terrible place to me, precisely because I had a clue to it: if I had held no clue it would not have been terrible, but tame. A mere unmeaning wilderness is not even impressive. But the garden of childhood was fascinating, exactly because everything had a fixed meaning which could be found out in its turn. Inch by inch I might discover what was the object of the ugly shape called a rake; or form some shadowy conjecture as to why my parents kept a cat.

So, since I have accepted Christendom as a mother and not merely as a chance example, I have found Europe and the world once more like the little garden where I stared at the symbolic shapes of cat and rake; I look at everything with the old elvish ignorance and expectancy. This or that rite or doctrine may look as ugly and extraordinary as a rake; but I have found by experience that such things end somehow in grass and flowers. A clergyman may be apparently as useless as a cat, but he is also as fascinating, for there must be some strange reason for his existence. I give one instance out of a hundred; I have not myself any instinctive kinship with that enthusiasm for physical virginity, which has certainly been a note of historic Christianity. But when I look not at myself but at the world, I perceive that this enthusiasm is not only a note of Christianity, but a note of Paganism, a note of high human nature in many spheres. The Greeks felt virginity when they carved Artemis, the Romans when they robed the vestals,
the worst and wildest of the great Elizabethan playwrights clung to the literal purity of a woman as to the central pillar of the world. Above all, the modern world (even while mocking sexual innocence) has flung itself into a generous idolatry of sexual innocence—the great modern worship of children. For any man who loves children will agree that their peculiar beauty is hurt by a hint of physical sex. With all this human experience, allied with the Christian authority, I simply conclude that I am wrong, and the church right; or rather that I am defective, while the church is universal. It takes all sorts to make a church; she does not ask me to be celibate. But the fact that I have no appreciation of the celibates, I accept like the fact that I have no ear for music. The best human experience is against me, as it is on the subject of Bach. Celibacy is one flower in my father’s garden, of which I have not been told the sweet or terrible name. But I may be told it any day.

This, therefore, is, in conclusion, my reason for accepting the religion and not merely the scattered and secular truths out of the religion. I do it because the thing has not merely told this truth or that truth, but has revealed itself as a truth-telling thing. All other philosophies say the things that plainly seem to be true; only this philosophy has again and again said the thing that does not seem to be true, but is true. Alone of all creeds it is convincing where it is not attractive; it turns out to be right, like my father in the garden. Theosophists for instance will preach an obviously attractive idea like re-incarnation; but if we wait for its logical results, they are spiritual superciliousness and the cruelty of caste. For if a man is a beggar by his own pre-natal sins, people will tend to despise the beggar. But Christianity preaches an obviously unattractive idea, such as original sin; but when we wait for its results, they are pathos and brotherhood, and a thunder of laughter and pity; for only with original sin we can at once pity the beggar and distrust the king. Men of science offer us health, an obvious benefit; it is only afterwards that we discover that by health, they mean bodily slavery and spiritual tedium. Orthodoxy makes us jump by the sudden brink of hell; it is only afterwards that we realise that jumping was an athletic exercise highly beneficial to our health. It is only afterwards that we realise that this danger is the root of all drama and romance. The strongest argument for the divine grace is simply its ungraciousness. The unpopular parts of Christianity turn out when examined to be the very props of the people. The outer ring of Christianity is a rigid guard of ethical abnegations and professional priests; but inside that inhuman guard you will find the old human life dancing like children, and drinking wine like men; for Christianity is the only frame for pagan freedom.
But in the modern philosophy the case is opposite; it is its outer ring that is obviously artistic and emancipated; its despair is within.

And its despair is this, that it does not really believe that there is any meaning in the universe; therefore it cannot hope to find any romance; its romances will have no plots. A man cannot expect any adventures in the land of anarchy. But a man can expect any number of adventures if he goes travelling in the land of authority. One can find no meanings in a jungle of scepticism; but the man will find more and more meanings who walks through a forest of doctrine and design. Here everything has a story tied to its tail, like the tools or pictures in my father’s house; for it is my father’s house. I end where I began—at the right end. I have entered at last the gate of all good philosophy. I have come into my second childhood.

But this larger and more adventurous Christian universe has one final mark difficult to express; yet as a conclusion of the whole matter I will attempt to express it. All the real argument about religion turns on the question of whether a man who was born upside down can tell when he comes right way up. The primary paradox of Christianity is that the ordinary condition of man is not his sane or sensible condition; that the normal itself is an abnormality. That is the inmost philosophy of the Fall. In Sir Oliver Lodge’s interesting new Catechism, the first two questions were: “What are you?” and “What, then, is the meaning of the Fall of Man?” I remember amusing myself by writing my own answers to the questions; but I soon found that they were very broken and agnostic answers. To the question, “What are you?” I could only answer, “God knows.” And to the question, “What is meant by the Fall?” I could answer with complete sincerity, “That whatever I am, I am not myself.” This is the prime paradox of our religion; something that we have never in any full sense known, is not only better than ourselves, but even more natural to us than ourselves. And there is really no test of this except the merely experimental one with which these pages began, the test of the padded cell and the open door. It is only since I have known orthodoxy that I have known mental emancipation. But, in conclusion, it has one special application to the ultimate idea of joy.

It is said that Paganism is a religion of joy and Christianity of sorrow; it would be just as easy to prove that Paganism is pure sorrow and Christianity pure joy. Such conflicts mean nothing and lead nowhere. Everything human must have in it both joy and sorrow; the only matter of interest is the manner in which the two things are balanced or divided. And the really interesting thing is this, that the pagan was (in the main) happier and happier as he approached the earth, but
sadder and sadder as he approached the heavens. The gaiety of the best Paganism, as in the playfulness of Catullus or Theocritus, is, indeed, an eternal gaiety never to be forgotten by a grateful humanity. But it is all a gaiety about the facts of life, not about its origin. To the pagan the small things are as sweet as the small brooks breaking out of the mountain; but the broad things are as bitter as the sea. When the pagan looks at the very core of the cosmos he is struck cold. Behind the gods, who are merely despotic, sit the fates, who are deadly. Nay, the fates are worse than deadly; they are dead. And when rationalists say that the ancient world was more enlightened than the Christian, from their point of view they are right. For when they say “enlightened” they mean darkened with incurable despair. It is profoundly true that the ancient world was more modern than the Christian. The common bond is in the fact that ancients and moderns have both been miserable about existence, about everything, while mediaevals were happy about that at least. I freely grant that the pagans, like the moderns, were only miserable about everything—they were quite jolly about everything else. I concede that the Christians of the Middle Ages were only at peace about everything—they were at war about everything else. But if the question turn on the primary pivot of the cosmos, then there was more cosmic contentment in the narrow and bloody streets of Florence than in the theatre of Athens or the open garden of Epicurus. Giotto lived in a gloomier town than Euripides, but he lived in a gayer universe.

The mass of men have been forced to be gay about the little things, but sad about the big ones. Nevertheless (I offer my last dogma defiantly) it is not native to man to be so. Man is more himself, man is more manlike, when joy is the fundamental thing in him, and grief the superficial. Melancholy should be an innocent interlude, a tender and fugitive frame of mind; praise should be the permanent pulsation of the soul. Pessimism is at best an emotional half-holiday; joy is the uproarious labour by which all things live. Yet, according to the apparent estate of man as seen by the pagan or the agnostic, this primary need of human nature can never be fulfilled. Joy ought to be expansive; but for the agnostic it must be contracted, it must cling to one corner of the world. Grief ought to be a concentration; but for the agnostic its desolation is spread through an unthinkable eternity. This is what I call being born upside down. The sceptic may truly be said to be topsy-turvy; for his feet are dancing upwards in idle ecstasies, while his brain is in the abyss. To the modern man the heavens are actually below the earth. The explanation is simple; he is standing on his head; which is a very weak pedestal to stand on. But when he has found his feet again
he knows it. Christianity satisfies suddenly and perfectly man’s ancestral instinct for being the right way up; satisfies it supremely in this; that by its creed joy becomes something gigantic and sadness something special and small. The vault above us is not deaf because the universe is an idiot; the silence is not the heartless silence of an endless and aimless world. Rather the silence around us is a small and pitiful stillness like the prompt stillness in a sick-room. We are perhaps permitted tragedy as a sort of merciful comedy: because the frantic energy of divine things would knock us down like a drunken farce. We can take our own tears more lightly than we could take the tremendous levities of the angels. So we sit perhaps in a starry chamber of silence, while the laughter of the heavens is too loud for us to hear.

Joy, which was the small publicity of the pagan, is the gigantic secret of the Christian. And as I close this chaotic volume I open again the strange small book from which all Christianity came; and I am again haunted by a kind of confirmation. The tremendous figure which fills the Gospels towers in this respect, as in every other, above all the thinkers who ever thought themselves tall. His pathos was natural, almost casual. The Stoics, ancient and modern, were proud of concealing their tears. He never concealed His tears; He showed them plainly on His open face at any daily sight, such as the far sight of His native city. Yet He concealed something. Solemn supermen and imperial diplomatists are proud of restraining their anger. He never restrained His anger. He flung furniture down the front steps of the Temple, and asked men how they expected to escape the damnation of Hell. Yet He restrained something. I say it with reverence; there was in that shattering personality a thread that must be called shyness. There was something that He hid from all men when He went up a mountain to pray. There was something that He covered constantly by abrupt silence or impetuous isolation. There was some one thing that was too great for God to show us when He walked upon our earth; and I have sometimes fancied that it was His mirth.
WHAT’S WRONG WITH THE WORLD

G. K. CHESTERTON
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE WORLD

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION

PART ONE
THE HOMELESSNESS OF MAN

I
THE MEDICAL MISTAKE

II
WANTED, AN UNPRACTICAL MAN

III
THE NEW HYPOCRITE

IV
THE FEAR OF THE PAST

V
THE UNFINISHED TEMPLE

VI
THE ENEMIES OF PROPERTY

VII
THE FREE FAMILY

VIII
THE WILDNESS OF DOMESTICITY

IX
HISTORY OF HUDGE AND GUDGE

X
OPPRESSION BY OPTIMISM

XI
THE HOMELESSNESS OF JONES

PART TWO
IMPERIALISM, OR THE MISTAKE ABOUT MAN

I
THE CHARM OF JINGOISM

II
WISDOM AND THE WEATHER

III
THE COMMON VISION

IV
THE INSANE NECESSITY

PART THREE
FEMINISM, OR THE MISTAKE ABOUT WOMAN

I
THE UNMILITARY SUFFRAGETTE

II
THE UNIVERSAL STICK

III
THE EMANCIPATION OF DOMESTICITY

IV
THE ROMANCE OF THRIFT

V
THE COLDNESS OF CHLOE

VI
THE PEDANT AND THE SAVAGE

VII
THE MODERN SURRENDER OF WOMAN

VIII
THE BRAND OF THE FLEUR–DE–LIS

IX
SINCERITY AND THE GALLOWS

X
THE HIGHER ANARCHY

XI
THE QUEEN AND THE SUFFRAGETTES

XII
THE MODERN SLAVE

PART FOUR
EDUCATION: OR THE MISTAKE ABOUT THE CHILD
THE DREADFUL DUTY OF GUDGE

IV
A LAST INSTANCE

V
CONCLUSION

THREE NOTES

I
ON FEMALE SUFFRAGE

II
ON CLEANLINESS IN EDUCATION

III
ON PEASANT PROPRIETORSHIP
DEDICATION

To C. F G. Masterman, M. P. My Dear Charles, I originally called this book “What is Wrong,” and it would have satisfied your sardonic temper to note the number of social misunderstandings that arose from the use of the title. Many a mild lady visitor opened her eyes when I remarked casually, “I have been doing ‘What is Wrong’ all this morning.” And one minister of religion moved quite sharply in his chair when I told him (as he understood it) that I had to run upstairs and do what was wrong, but should be down again in a minute. Exactly of what occult vice they silently accused me I cannot conjecture, but I know of what I accuse myself; and that is, of having written a very shapeless and inadequate book, and one quite unworthy to be dedicated to you. As far as literature goes, this book is what is wrong and no mistake.

It may seem a refinement of insolence to present so wild a composition to one who has recorded two or three of the really impressive visions of the moving millions of England. You are the only man alive who can make the map of England crawl with life; a most creepy and enviable accomplishment. Why then should I trouble you with a book which, even if it achieves its object (which is monstrously unlikely) can only be a thundering gallop of theory?

Well, I do it partly because I think you politicians are none the worse for a few inconvenient ideals; but more because you will recognise the many arguments we have had, those arguments which the most wonderful ladies in the world can never endure for very long. And, perhaps, you will agree with me that the thread of comradeship and conversation must be protected because it is so frivolous. It must be held sacred, it must not be snapped, because it is not worth tying together again. It is exactly because argument is idle that men (I mean males) must take it seriously; for when (we feel), until the crack of doom, shall we have so delightful a difference again? But most of all I offer it to you because there exists not only comradeship, but a very different thing, called friendship; an agreement under all the arguments and a thread which, please God, will never break.

Yours always,

G. K. Chesterton.
PART ONE

THE HOMELESSNESS OF MAN
THE MEDICAL MISTAKE

A book of modern social inquiry has a shape that is somewhat sharply defined. It begins as a rule with an analysis, with statistics, tables of population, decrease of crime among Congregationalists, growth of hysteria among policemen, and similar ascertained facts; it ends with a chapter that is generally called “The Remedy.” It is almost wholly due to this careful, solid, and scientific method that “The Remedy” is never found. For this scheme of medical question and answer is a blunder; the first great blunder of sociology. It is always called stating the disease before we find the cure. But it is the whole definition and dignity of man that in social matters we must actually find the cure before we find the disease.

The fallacy is one of the fifty fallacies that come from the modern madness for biological or bodily metaphors. It is convenient to speak of the Social Organism, just as it is convenient to speak of the British Lion. But Britain is no more an organism than Britain is a lion. The moment we begin to give a nation the unity and simplicity of an animal, we begin to think wildly. Because every man is a biped, fifty men are not a centipede. This has produced, for instance, the gaping absurdity of perpetually talking about “young nations” and “dying nations,” as if a nation had a fixed and physical span of life. Thus people will say that Spain has entered a final senility; they might as well say that Spain is losing all her teeth. Or people will say that Canada should soon produce a literature; which is like saying that Canada must soon grow a new moustache. Nations consist of people; the first generation may be decrepit, or the ten thousandth may be vigorous. Similar applications of the fallacy are made by those who see in the increasing size of national possessions, a simple increase in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. These people, indeed, even fall short in subtlety of the parallel of a human body. They do not even ask whether an empire is growing taller in its youth, or only growing fatter in its old age. But of all the instances of error arising from this physical fancy, the worst is that we have before us: the habit of exhaustively describing a social sickness, and then propounding a social drug.

Now we do talk first about the disease in cases of bodily breakdown; and that for an excellent reason. Because, though there may be doubt about the way in which the body broke down, there is no doubt at all about the shape in which it
should be built up again. No doctor proposes to produce a new kind of man, with a new arrangement of eyes or limbs. The hospital, by necessity, may send a man home with one leg less: but it will not (in a creative rapture) send him home with one leg extra. Medical science is content with the normal human body, and only seeks to restore it.

But social science is by no means always content with the normal human soul; it has all sorts of fancy souls for sale. Man as a social idealist will say “I am tired of being a Puritan; I want to be a Pagan,” or “Beyond this dark probation of Individualism I see the shining paradise of Collectivism.” Now in bodily ills there is none of this difference about the ultimate ideal. The patient may or may not want quinine; but he certainly wants health. No one says “I am tired of this headache; I want some toothache,” or “The only thing for this Russian influenza is a few German measles,” or “Through this dark probation of catarrh I see the shining paradise of rheumatism.” But exactly the whole difficulty in our public problems is that some men are aiming at cures which other men would regard as worse maladies; are offering ultimate conditions as states of health which others would uncompromisingly call states of disease. Mr. Belloc once said that he would no more part with the idea of property than with his teeth; yet to Mr. Bernard Shaw property is not a tooth, but a toothache. Lord Milner has sincerely attempted to introduce German efficiency; and many of us would as soon welcome German measles. Dr. Saleeby would honestly like to have Eugenics; but I would rather have rheumatics.

This is the arresting and dominant fact about modern social discussion; that the quarrel is not merely about the difficulties, but about the aim. We agree about the evil; it is about the good that we should tear each other’s eyes out. We all admit that a lazy aristocracy is a bad thing. We should not by any means all admit that an active aristocracy would be a good thing. We all feel angry with an irreligious priesthood; but some of us would go mad with disgust at a really religious one. Everyone is indignant if our army is weak, including the people who would be even more indignant if it were strong. The social case is exactly the opposite of the medical case. We do not disagree, like doctors, about the precise nature of the illness, while agreeing about the nature of health. On the contrary, we all agree that England is unhealthy, but half of us would not look at her in what the other half would call blooming health. Public abuses are so prominent and pestilent that they sweep all generous people into a sort of fictitious unanimity. We forget that, while we agree about the abuses of things, we should differ very much about the uses of them. Mr. Cadbury and I would
agree about the bad public house. It would be precisely in front of the good public–house that our painful personal fracas would occur.

I maintain, therefore, that the common sociological method is quite useless: that of first dissecting abject poverty or cataloguing prostitution. We all dislike abject poverty; but it might be another business if we began to discuss independent and dignified poverty. We all disapprove of prostitution; but we do not all approve of purity. The only way to discuss the social evil is to get at once to the social ideal. We can all see the national madness; but what is national sanity? I have called this book “What Is Wrong with the World?” and the upshot of the title can be easily and clearly stated. What is wrong is that we do not ask what is right.
II

WANTED, AN UNPRACTICAL MAN

There is a popular philosophical joke intended to typify the endless and useless arguments of philosophers; I mean the joke about which came first, the chicken or the egg? I am not sure that properly understood, it is so futile an inquiry after all. I am not concerned here to enter on those deep metaphysical and theological differences of which the chicken and egg debate is a frivolous, but a very felicitous, type. The evolutionary materialists are appropriately enough represented in the vision of all things coming from an egg, a dim and monstrous oval germ that had laid itself by accident. That other supernatural school of thought (to which I personally adhere) would be not unworthily typified in the fancy that this round world of ours is but an egg brooded upon by a sacred unbegotten bird; the mystic dove of the prophets. But it is to much humbler functions that I here call the awful power of such a distinction. Whether or no the living bird is at the beginning of our mental chain, it is absolutely necessary that it should be at the end of our mental chain. The bird is the thing to be aimed at—not with a gun, but a life–bestowing wand. What is essential to our right thinking is this: that the egg and the bird must not be thought of as equal cosmic occurrences recurring alternatively forever. They must not become a mere egg and bird pattern, like the egg and dart pattern. One is a means and the other an end; they are in different mental worlds. Leaving the complications of the human breakfast–table out of account, in an elemental sense, the egg only exists to produce the chicken. But the chicken does not exist only in order to produce another egg. He may also exist to amuse himself, to praise God, and even to suggest ideas to a French dramatist. Being a conscious life, he is, or may be, valuable in himself. Now our modern politics are full of a noisy forgetfulness; forgetfulness that the production of this happy and conscious life is after all the aim of all complexities and compromises. We talk of nothing but useful men and working institutions; that is, we only think of the chickens as things that will lay more eggs. Instead of seeking to breed our ideal bird, the eagle of Zeus or the Swan of Avon, or whatever we happen to want, we talk entirely in terms of the process and the embryo. The process itself, divorced from its divine object, becomes doubtful and even morbid; poison enters the embryo of everything; and our politics are rotten eggs.
Idealism is only considering everything in its practical essence. Idealism only means that we should consider a poker in reference to poking before we discuss its suitability for wife-beating; that we should ask if an egg is good enough for practical poultry-rearing before we decide that the egg is bad enough for practical politics. But I know that this primary pursuit of the theory (which is but pursuit of the aim) exposes one to the cheap charge of fiddling while Rome is burning. A school, of which Lord Rosebery is representative, has endeavored to substitute for the moral or social ideals which have hitherto been the motive of politics a general coherency or completeness in the social system which has gained the nick-name of “efficiency.” I am not very certain of the secret doctrine of this sect in the matter. But, as far as I can make out, “efficiency” means that we ought to discover everything about a machine except what it is for. There has arisen in our time a most singular fancy: the fancy that when things go very wrong we need a practical man. It would be far truer to say, that when things go very wrong we need an unpractical man. Certainly, at least, we need a theorist. A practical man means a man accustomed to mere daily practice, to the way things commonly work. When things will not work, you must have the thinker, the man who has some doctrine about why they work at all. It is wrong to fiddle while Rome is burning; but it is quite right to study the theory of hydraulics while Rome is burning.

It is then necessary to drop one’s daily agnosticism and attempt rerum cognoscere causas. If your aeroplane has a slight indisposition, a handy man may mend it. But, if it is seriously ill, it is all the more likely that some absent-minded old professor with wild white hair will have to be dragged out of a college or laboratory to analyze the evil. The more complicated the smash, the whiter-haired and more absent-minded will be the theorist who is needed to deal with it; and in some extreme cases, no one but the man (probably insane) who invented your flying-ship could possibly say what was the matter with it.

“Efficiency,” of course, is futile for the same reason that strong men, will-power and the superman are futile. That is, it is futile because it only deals with actions after they have been performed. It has no philosophy for incidents before they happen; therefore it has no power of choice. An act can only be successful or unsuccessful when it is over; if it is to begin, it must be, in the abstract, right or wrong. There is no such thing as backing a winner; for he cannot be a winner when he is backed. There is no such thing as fighting on the winning side; one fights to find out which is the winning side. If any operation has occurred, that operation was efficient. If a man is murdered, the murder was efficient. A
tropical sun is as efficient in making people lazy as a Lancashire foreman bully in making them energetic. Maeterlinck is as efficient in filling a man with strange spiritual tremors as Messrs. Crosse and Blackwell are in filling a man with jam. But it all depends on what you want to be filled with. Lord Rosebery, being a modern skeptic, probably prefers the spiritual tremors. I, being an orthodox Christian, prefer the jam. But both are efficient when they have been effected; and inefficient until they are effected. A man who thinks much about success must be the drowsiest sentimentalist; for he must be always looking back. If he only likes victory he must always come late for the battle. For the man of action there is nothing but idealism.

This definite ideal is a far more urgent and practical matter in our existing English trouble than any immediate plans or proposals. For the present chaos is due to a sort of general oblivion of all that men were originally aiming at. No man demands what he desires; each man demands what he fancies he can get. Soon people forget what the man really wanted first; and after a successful and vigorous political life, he forgets it himself. The whole is an extravagant riot of second bests, a pandemonium of pis–aller. Now this sort of pliability does not merely prevent any heroic consistency, it also prevents any really practical compromise. One can only find the middle distance between two points if the two points will stand still. We may make an arrangement between two litigants who cannot both get what they want; but not if they will not even tell us what they want. The keeper of a restaurant would much prefer that each customer should give his order smartly, though it were for stewed ibis or boiled elephant, rather than that each customer should sit holding his head in his hands, plunged in arithmetical calculations about how much food there can be on the premises. Most of us have suffered from a certain sort of ladies who, by their perverse unselfishness, give more trouble than the selfish; who almost clamor for the unpopular dish and scramble for the worst seat. Most of us have known parties or expeditions full of this seething fuss of self–effacement. From much meaner motives than those of such admirable women, our practical politicians keep things in the same confusion through the same doubt about their real demands. There is nothing that so much prevents a settlement as a tangle of small surrenders. We are bewildered on every side by politicians who are in favor of secular education, but think it hopeless to work for it; who desire total prohibition, but are certain they should not demand it; who regret compulsory education, but resignedly continue it; or who want peasant proprietorship and therefore vote for something else. It is this dazed and floundering opportunism
that gets in the way of everything. If our statesmen were visionaries something practical might be done. If we ask for something in the abstract we might get something in the concrete. As it is, it is not only impossible to get what one wants, but it is impossible to get any part of it, because nobody can mark it out plainly like a map. That clear and even hard quality that there was in the old bargaining has wholly vanished. We forget that the word “compromise” contains, among other things, the rigid and ringing word “promise.” Moderation is not vague; it is as definite as perfection. The middle point is as fixed as the extreme point.

If I am made to walk the plank by a pirate, it is vain for me to offer, as a common–sense compromise, to walk along the plank for a reasonable distance. It is exactly about the reasonable distance that the pirate and I differ. There is an exquisite mathematical split second at which the plank tips up. My common–sense ends just before that instant; the pirate’s common–sense begins just beyond it. But the point itself is as hard as any geometrical diagram; as abstract as any theological dogma.
III

THE NEW HYPOCRITE

But this new cloudy political cowardice has rendered useless the old English compromise. People have begun to be terrified of an improvement merely because it is complete. They call it utopian and revolutionary that anyone should really have his own way, or anything be really done, and done with. Compromise used to mean that half a loaf was better than no bread. Among modern statesmen it really seems to mean that half a loaf is better than a whole loaf.

As an instance to sharpen the argument, I take the one case of our everlasting education bills. We have actually contrived to invent a new kind of hypocrite. The old hypocrite, Tartuffe or Pecksniff, was a man whose aims were really worldly and practical, while he pretended that they were religious. The new hypocrite is one whose aims are really religious, while he pretends that they are worldly and practical. The Rev. Brown, the Wesleyan minister, sturdily declares that he cares nothing for creeds, but only for education; meanwhile, in truth, the wildest Wesleyanism is tearing his soul. The Rev. Smith, of the Church of England, explains gracefully, with the Oxford manner, that the only question for him is the prosperity and efficiency of the schools; while in truth all the evil passions of a curate are roaring within him. It is a fight of creeds masquerading as policies. I think these reverend gentlemen do themselves wrong; I think they are more pious than they will admit. Theology is not (as some suppose) expunged as an error. It is merely concealed, like a sin. Dr. Clifford really wants a theological atmosphere as much as Lord Halifax; only it is a different one. If Dr. Clifford would ask plainly for Puritanism and Lord Halifax ask plainly for Catholicism, something might be done for them. We are all, one hopes, imaginative enough to recognize the dignity and distinctness of another religion, like Islam or the cult of Apollo. I am quite ready to respect another man’s faith; but it is too much to ask that I should respect his doubt, his worldly hesitations and fictions, his political bargain and make–believe. Most Nonconformists with an instinct for English history could see something poetic and national about the Archbishop of Canterbury as an Archbishop of Canterbury. It is when he does the rational British statesman that they very justifiably get annoyed. Most Anglicans with an eye for pluck and simplicity could admire Dr. Clifford as a
Baptist minister. It is when he says that he is simply a citizen that nobody can possibly believe him.

But indeed the case is yet more curious than this. The one argument that used to be urged for our creedless vagueness was that at least it saved us from fanaticism. But it does not even do that. On the contrary, it creates and renews fanaticism with a force quite peculiar to itself. This is at once so strange and so true that I will ask the reader's attention to it with a little more precision.

Some people do not like the word “dogma.” Fortunately they are free, and there is an alternative for them. There are two things, and two things only, for the human mind, a dogma and a prejudice. The Middle Ages were a rational epoch, an age of doctrine. Our age is, at its best, a poetical epoch, an age of prejudice. A doctrine is a definite point; a prejudice is a direction. That an ox may be eaten, while a man should not be eaten, is a doctrine. That as little as possible of anything should be eaten is a prejudice; which is also sometimes called an ideal. Now a direction is always far more fantastic than a plan. I would rather have the most archaic map of the road to Brighton than a general recommendation to turn to the left. Straight lines that are not parallel must meet at last; but curves may recoil forever. A pair of lovers might walk along the frontier of France and Germany, one on the one side and one on the other, so long as they were not vaguely told to keep away from each other. And this is a strictly true parable of the effect of our modern vagueness in losing and separating men as in a mist.

It is not merely true that a creed unites men. Nay, a difference of creed unites men—so long as it is a clear difference. A boundary unites. Many a magnanimous Moslem and chivalrous Crusader must have been nearer to each other, because they were both dogmatists, than any two homeless agnostics in a pew of Mr. Campbell's chapel. “I say God is One,” and “I say God is One but also Three,” that is the beginning of a good quarrelsome, manly friendship. But our age would turn these creeds into tendencies. It would tell the Trinitarian to follow multiplicity as such (because it was his “temperament”), and he would turn up later with three hundred and thirty-three persons in the Trinity. Meanwhile, it would turn the Moslem into a Monist: a frightful intellectual fall. It would force that previously healthy person not only to admit that there was one God, but to admit that there was nobody else. When each had, for a long enough period, followed the gleam of his own nose (like the Dong) they would appear again; the Christian a Polytheist, and the Moslem a Panegoist, both quite mad, and far more unfit to understand each other than before.
It is exactly the same with politics. Our political vagueness divides men, it does not fuse them. Men will walk along the edge of a chasm in clear weather, but they will edge miles away from it in a fog. So a Tory can walk up to the very edge of Socialism, if he knows what is Socialism. But if he is told that Socialism is a spirit, a sublime atmosphere, a noble, indefinable tendency, why, then he keeps out of its way; and quite right too. One can meet an assertion with argument; but healthy bigotry is the only way in which one can meet a tendency. I am told that the Japanese method of wrestling consists not of suddenly pressing, but of suddenly giving way. This is one of my many reasons for disliking the Japanese civilization. To use surrender as a weapon is the very worst spirit of the East. But certainly there is no force so hard to fight as the force which it is easy to conquer; the force that always yields and then returns. Such is the force of a great impersonal prejudice, such as possesses the modern world on so many points. Against this there is no weapon at all except a rigid and steely sanity, a resolution not to listen to fads, and not to be infected by diseases.

In short, the rational human faith must armor itself with prejudice in an age of prejudices, just as it armoured itself with logic in an age of logic. But the difference between the two mental methods is marked and unmistakable. The essential of the difference is this: that prejudices are divergent, whereas creeds are always in collision. Believers bump into each other; whereas bigots keep out of each other’s way. A creed is a collective thing, and even its sins are sociable. A prejudice is a private thing, and even its tolerance is misanthropic. So it is with our existing divisions. They keep out of each other’s way; the Tory paper and the Radical paper do not answer each other; they ignore each other. Genuine controversy, fair cut and thrust before a common audience, has become in our special epoch very rare. For the sincere controversialist is above all things a good listener. The really burning enthusiast never interrupts; he listens to the enemy’s arguments as eagerly as a spy would listen to the enemy’s arrangements. But if you attempt an actual argument with a modern paper of opposite politics, you will find that no medium is admitted between violence and evasion. You will have no answer except slanging or silence. A modern editor must not have that eager ear that goes with the honest tongue. He may be deaf and silent; and that is called dignity. Or he may be deaf and noisy; and that is called slashing journalism. In neither case is there any controversy; for the whole object of modern party combatants is to charge out of earshot.

The only logical cure for all this is the assertion of a human ideal. In dealing
with this, I will try to be as little transcendental as is consistent with reason; it is enough to say that unless we have some doctrine of a divine man, all abuses may be excused, since evolution may turn them into uses. It will be easy for the scientific plutocrat to maintain that humanity will adapt itself to any conditions which we now consider evil. The old tyrants invoked the past; the new tyrants will invoke the future evolution has produced the snail and the owl; evolution can produce a workman who wants no more space than a snail, and no more light than an owl. The employer need not mind sending a Kaffir to work underground; he will soon become an underground animal, like a mole. He need not mind sending a diver to hold his breath in the deep seas; he will soon be a deep-sea animal. Men need not trouble to alter conditions, conditions will so soon alter men. The head can be beaten small enough to fit the hat. Do not knock the fetters off the slave; knock the slave until he forgets the fetters. To all this plausible modern argument for oppression, the only adequate answer is, that there is a permanent human ideal that must not be either confused or destroyed. The most important man on earth is the perfect man who is not there. The Christian religion has specially uttered the ultimate sanity of Man, says Scripture, who shall judge the incarnate and human truth. Our lives and laws are not judged by divine superiority, but simply by human perfection. It is man, says Aristotle, who is the measure. It is the Son of Man, says Scripture, who shall judge the quick and the dead.

Doctrine, therefore, does not cause dissensions; rather a doctrine alone can cure our dissensions. It is necessary to ask, however, roughly, what abstract and ideal shape in state or family would fulfil the human hunger; and this apart from whether we can completely obtain it or not. But when we come to ask what is the need of normal men, what is the desire of all nations, what is the ideal house, or road, or rule, or republic, or king, or priesthood, then we are confronted with a strange and irritating difficulty peculiar to the present time; and we must call a temporary halt and examine that obstacle.
IV

THE FEAR OF THE PAST

The last few decades have been marked by a special cultivation of the romance of the future. We seem to have made up our minds to misunderstand what has happened; and we turn, with a sort of relief, to stating what will happen—which is (apparently) much easier. The modern man no longer presents the memoirs of his great grandfather; but is engaged in writing a detailed and authoritative biography of his great–grandson. Instead of trembling before the specters of the dead, we shudder abjectly under the shadow of the babe unborn. This spirit is apparent everywhere, even to the creation of a form of futurist romance. Sir Walter Scott stands at the dawn of the nineteenth century for the novel of the past; Mr. H. G. Wells stands at the dawn of the twentieth century for the novel of the future. The old story, we know, was supposed to begin: “Late on a winter’s evening two horsemen might have been seen—.” The new story has to begin: “Late on a winter’s evening two aviators will be seen—.” The movement is not without its elements of charm; there is something spirited, if eccentric, in the sight of so many people fighting over again the fights that have not yet happened; of people still glowing with the memory of tomorrow morning. A man in advance of the age is a familiar phrase enough. An age in advance of the age is really rather odd.

But when full allowance has been made for this harmless element of poetry and pretty human perversity in the thing, I shall not hesitate to maintain here that this cult of the future is not only a weakness but a cowardice of the age. It is the peculiar evil of this epoch that even its pugnacity is fundamentally frightened; and the Jingo is contemptible not because he is impudent, but because he is timid. The reason why modern armaments do not inflame the imagination like the arms and emblazonments of the Crusades is a reason quite apart from optical ugliness or beauty. Some battleships are as beautiful as the sea; and many Norman nosepieces were as ugly as Norman noses. The atmospheric ugliness that surrounds our scientific war is an emanation from that evil panic which is at the heart of it. The charge of the Crusades was a charge; it was charging towards God, the wild consolation of the braver. The charge of the modern armaments is not a charge at all. It is a rout, a retreat, a flight from the devil, who will catch the hindmost. It is impossible to imagine a mediaeval knight talking of longer
and longer French lances, with precisely the quivering employed about larger and larger German ships. The man who called the Blue Water School the “Blue Funk School” uttered a psychological truth which that school itself would scarcely essentially deny. Even the two–power standard, if it be a necessity, is in a sense a degrading necessity. Nothing has more alienated many magnanimous minds from Imperial enterprises than the fact that they are always exhibited as stealthy or sudden defenses against a world of cold rapacity and fear. The Boer War, for instance, was colored not so much by the creed that we were doing something right, as by the creed that Boers and Germans were probably doing something wrong; driving us (as it was said) to the sea. Mr. Chamberlain, I think, said that the war was a feather in his cap and so it was: a white feather.

Now this same primary panic that I feel in our rush towards patriotic armaments I feel also in our rush towards future visions of society. The modern mind is forced towards the future by a certain sense of fatigue, not unmixed with terror, with which it regards the past. It is propelled towards the coming time; it is, in the exact words of the popular phrase, knocked into the middle of next week. And the goad which drives it on thus eagerly is not an affectation for futurity. Futurity does not exist, because it is still future. Rather it is a fear of the past; a fear not merely of the evil in the past, but of the good in the past also. The brain breaks down under the unbearable virtue of mankind. There have been so many flaming faiths that we cannot hold; so many harsh heroisms that we cannot imitate; so many great efforts of monumental building or of military glory which seem to us at once sublime and pathetic. The future is a refuge from the fierce competition of our forefathers. The older generation, not the younger, is knocking at our door. It is agreeable to escape, as Henley said, into the Street of By–and–Bye, where stands the Hostelry of Never. It is pleasant to play with children, especially unborn children. The future is a blank wall on which every man can write his own name as large as he likes; the past I find already covered with illegible scribbles, such as Plato, Isaiah, Shakespeare, Michael Angelo, Napoleon. I can make the future as narrow as myself; the past is obliged to be as broad and turbulent as humanity. And the upshot of this modern attitude is really this: that men invent new ideals because they dare not attempt old ideals. They look forward with enthusiasm, because they are afraid to look back.

Now in history there is no Revolution that is not a Restoration. Among the many things that leave me doubtful about the modern habit of fixing eyes on the future, none is stronger than this: that all the men in history who have really done anything with the future have had their eyes fixed upon the past. I need not
mention the Renaissance, the very word proves my case. The originality of Michael Angelo and Shakespeare began with the digging up of old vases and manuscripts. The mildness of poets absolutely arose out of the mildness of antiquaries. So the great mediaeval revival was a memory of the Roman Empire. So the Reformation looked back to the Bible and Bible times. So the modern Catholic movement has looked back to patristic times. But that modern movement which many would count the most anarchic of all is in this sense the most conservative of all. Never was the past more venerated by men than it was by the French Revolutionists. They invoked the little republics of antiquity with the complete confidence of one who invokes the gods. The Sans–culottes believed (as their name might imply) in a return to simplicity. They believed most piously in a remote past; some might call it a mythical past. For some strange reason man must always thus plant his fruit trees in a graveyard. Man can only find life among the dead. Man is a misshapen monster, with his feet set forward and his face turned back. He can make the future luxuriant and gigantic, so long as he is thinking about the past. When he tries to think about the future itself, his mind diminishes to a pin point with imbecility, which some call Nirvana. To–morrow is the Gorgon; a man must only see it mirrored in the shining shield of yesterday. If he sees it directly he is turned to stone. This has been the fate of all those who have really seen fate and futurity as clear and inevitable. The Calvinists, with their perfect creed of predestination, were turned to stone. The modern sociological scientists (with their excruciating Eugenics) are turned to stone. The only difference is that the Puritans make dignified, and the Eugenists somewhat amusing, statues.

But there is one feature in the past which more than all the rest defies and depresses the moderns and drives them towards this featureless future. I mean the presence in the past of huge ideals, unfulfilled and sometimes abandoned. The sight of these splendid failures is melancholy to a restless and rather morbid generation; and they maintain a strange silence about them—sometimes amounting to an unscrupulous silence. They keep them entirely out of their newspapers and almost entirely out of their history books. For example, they will often tell you (in their praises of the coming age) that we are moving on towards a United States of Europe. But they carefully omit to tell you that we are moving away from a United States of Europe, that such a thing existed literally in Roman and essentially in mediaeval times. They never admit that the international hatreds (which they call barbaric) are really very recent, the mere breakdown of the ideal of the Holy Roman Empire. Or again, they will tell you
that there is going to be a social revolution, a great rising of the poor against the rich; but they never rub it in that France made that magnificent attempt, unaided, and that we and all the world allowed it to be trampled out and forgotten. I say decisively that nothing is so marked in modern writing as the prediction of such ideals in the future combined with the ignoring of them in the past. Anyone can test this for himself. Read any thirty or forty pages of pamphlets advocating peace in Europe and see how many of them praise the old Popes or Emperors for keeping the peace in Europe. Read any armful of essays and poems in praise of social democracy, and see how many of them praise the old Jacobins who created democracy and died for it. These colossal ruins are to the modern only enormous eyesores. He looks back along the valley of the past and sees a perspective of splendid but unfinished cities. They are unfinished, not always through enmity or accident, but often through fickleness, mental fatigue, and the lust for alien philosophies. We have not only left undone those things that we ought to have done, but we have even left undone those things that we wanted to do.

It is very currently suggested that the modern man is the heir of all the ages, that he has got the good out of these successive human experiments. I know not what to say in answer to this, except to ask the reader to look at the modern man, as I have just looked at the modern man—in the looking–glass. Is it really true that you and I are two starry towers built up of all the most towering visions of the past? Have we really fulfilled all the great historic ideals one after the other, from our naked ancestor who was brave enough to kill a mammoth with a stone knife, through the Greek citizen and the Christian saint to our own grandfather or great–grandfather, who may have been sabred by the Manchester Yeomanry or shot in the ’48? Are we still strong enough to spear mammoths, but now tender enough to spare them? Does the cosmos contain any mammoth that we have either speared or spared? When we decline (in a marked manner) to fly the red flag and fire across a barricade like our grandparents, are we really declining in deference to sociologists—or to soldiers? Have we indeed outstripped the warrior and passed the ascetical saint? I fear we only outstrip the warrior in the sense that we should probably run away from him. And if we have passed the saint, I fear we have passed him without bowing.

This is, first and foremost, what I mean by the narrowness of the new ideas, the limiting effect of the future. Our modern prophetic idealism is narrow because it has undergone a persistent process of elimination. We must ask for new things because we are not allowed to ask for old things. The whole position
is based on this idea that we have got all the good that can be got out of the ideas of the past. But we have not got all the good out of them, perhaps at this moment not any of the good out of them. And the need here is a need of complete freedom for restoration as well as revolution.

We often read nowadays of the valor or audacity with which some rebel attacks a hoary tyranny or an antiquated superstition. There is not really any courage at all in attacking hoary or antiquated things, any more than in offering to fight one’s grandmother. The really courageous man is he who defies tyrannies young as the morning and superstitions fresh as the first flowers. The only true free-thinker is he whose intellect is as much free from the future as from the past. He cares as little for what will be as for what has been; he cares only for what ought to be. And for my present purpose I specially insist on this abstract independence. If I am to discuss what is wrong, one of the first things that are wrong is this: the deep and silent modern assumption that past things have become impossible. There is one metaphor of which the moderns are very fond; they are always saying, “You can’t put the clock back.” The simple and obvious answer is “You can.” A clock, being a piece of human construction, can be restored by the human finger to any figure or hour. In the same way society, being a piece of human construction, can be reconstructed upon any plan that has ever existed.

There is another proverb, “As you have made your bed, so you must lie on it”; which again is simply a lie. If I have made my bed uncomfortable, please God I will make it again. We could restore the Heptarchy or the stage coaches if we chose. It might take some time to do, and it might be very inadvisable to do it; but certainly it is not impossible as bringing back last Friday is impossible. This is, as I say, the first freedom that I claim: the freedom to restore. I claim a right to propose as a solution the old patriarchal system of a Highland clan, if that should seem to eliminate the largest number of evils. It certainly would eliminate some evils; for instance, the unnatural sense of obeying cold and harsh strangers, mere bureaucrats and policemen. I claim the right to propose the complete independence of the small Greek or Italian towns, a sovereign city of Brixton or Brompton, if that seems the best way out of our troubles. It would be a way out of some of our troubles; we could not have in a small state, for instance, those enormous illusions about men or measures which are nourished by the great national or international newspapers. You could not persuade a city state that Mr. Beit was an Englishman, or Mr. Dillon a desperado, any more than you could persuade a Hampshire Village that the village drunkard was a teetotaller or
the village idiot a statesman. Nevertheless, I do not as a fact propose that the Browns and the Smiths should be collected under separate tartans. Nor do I even propose that Clapham should declare its independence. I merely declare my independence. I merely claim my choice of all the tools in the universe; and I shall not admit that any of them are blunted merely because they have been used.
THE UNFINISHED TEMPLE

The task of modern idealists indeed is made much too easy for them by the fact that they are always taught that if a thing has been defeated it has been disproved. Logically, the case is quite clearly the other way. The lost causes are exactly those which might have saved the world. If a man says that the Young Pretender would have made England happy, it is hard to answer him. If anyone says that the Georges made England happy, I hope we all know what to answer. That which was prevented is always impregnable; and the only perfect King of England was he who was smothered. Exactly because Jacobitism failed we cannot call it a failure. Precisely because the Commune collapsed as a rebellion we cannot say that it collapsed as a system. But such outbursts were brief or incidental. Few people realize how many of the largest efforts, the facts that will fill history, were frustrated in their full design and come down to us as gigantic cripples. I have only space to allude to the two largest facts of modern history: the Catholic Church and that modern growth rooted in the French Revolution.

When four knights scattered the blood and brains of St. Thomas of Canterbury, it was not only a sign of anger but of a sort of black admiration. They wished for his blood, but they wished even more for his brains. Such a blow will remain forever unintelligible unless we realise what the brains of St. Thomas were thinking about just before they were distributed over the floor. They were thinking about the great mediaeval conception that the church is the judge of the world. Becket objected to a priest being tried even by the Lord Chief Justice. And his reason was simple: because the Lord Chief Justice was being tried by the priest. The judiciary was itself sub judice. The kings were themselves in the dock. The idea was to create an invisible kingdom, without armies or prisons, but with complete freedom to condemn publicly all the kingdoms of the earth. Whether such a supreme church would have cured society we cannot affirm definitely; because the church never was a supreme church. We only know that in England at any rate the princes conquered the saints. What the world wanted we see before us; and some of us call it a failure. But we cannot call what the church wanted a failure, simply because the church failed. Tracy struck a little too soon. England had not yet made the great Protestant discovery that the king can do no wrong. The king was whipped in the
cathedral; a performance which I recommend to those who regret the unpopularity of church-going. But the discovery was made; and Henry VIII scattered Becket’s bones as easily as Tracy had scattered his brains.

Of course, I mean that Catholicism was not tried; plenty of Catholics were tried, and found guilty. My point is that the world did not tire of the church’s ideal, but of its reality. Monasteries were impugned not for the chastity of monks, but for the unchastity of monks. Christianity was unpopular not because of the humility, but of the arrogance of Christians. Certainly, if the church failed it was largely through the churchmen. But at the same time hostile elements had certainly begun to end it long before it could have done its work. In the nature of things it needed a common scheme of life and thought in Europe. Yet the mediaeval system began to be broken to pieces intellectually, long before it showed the slightest hint of falling to pieces morally. The huge early heresies, like the Albigenses, had not the faintest excuse in moral superiority. And it is actually true that the Reformation began to tear Europe apart before the Catholic Church had had time to pull it together. The Prussians, for instance, were not converted to Christianity at all until quite close to the Reformation. The poor creatures hardly had time to become Catholics before they were told to become Protestants. This explains a great deal of their subsequent conduct. But I have only taken this as the first and most evident case of the general truth: that the great ideals of the past failed not by being outlived (which must mean over-lived), but by not being lived enough. Mankind has not passed through the Middle Ages. Rather mankind has retreated from the Middle Ages in reaction and rout. The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried.

It is, of course, the same in the case of the French Revolution. A great part of our present perplexity arises from the fact that the French Revolution has half succeeded and half failed. In one sense, Valmy was the decisive battle of the West, and in another Trafalgar. We have, indeed, destroyed the largest territorial tyrannies, and created a free peasantry in almost all Christian countries except England; of which we shall say more anon. But representative government, the one universal relic, is a very poor fragment of the full republican idea. The theory of the French Revolution presupposed two things in government, things which it achieved at the time, but which it has certainly not bequeathed to its imitators in England, Germany, and America. The first of these was the idea of honorable poverty; that a statesman must be something of a stoic; the second was the idea of extreme publicity. Many imaginative English writers, including
Carlyle, seem quite unable to imagine how it was that men like Robespierre and Marat were ardently admired. The best answer is that they were admired for being poor—poor when they might have been rich.

No one will pretend that this ideal exists at all in the haute politique of this country. Our national claim to political incorruptibility is actually based on exactly the opposite argument; it is based on the theory that wealthy men in assured positions will have no temptation to financial trickery. Whether the history of the English aristocracy, from the spoliation of the monasteries to the annexation of the mines, entirely supports this theory I am not now inquiring; but certainly it is our theory, that wealth will be a protection against political corruption. The English statesman is bribed not to be bribed. He is born with a silver spoon in his mouth, so that he may never afterwards be found with the silver spoons in his pocket. So strong is our faith in this protection by plutocracy, that we are more and more trusting our empire in the hands of families which inherit wealth without either blood or manners. Some of our political houses are parvenue by pedigree; they hand on vulgarity like a coat of arms. In the case of many a modern statesman to say that he is born with a silver spoon in his mouth, is at once inadequate and excessive. He is born with a silver knife in his mouth. But all this only illustrates the English theory that poverty is perilous for a politician.

It will be the same if we compare the conditions that have come about with the Revolution legend touching publicity. The old democratic doctrine was that the more light that was let in to all departments of State, the easier it was for a righteous indignation to move promptly against wrong. In other words, monarchs were to live in glass houses, that mobs might throw stones. Again, no admirer of existing English politics (if there is any admirer of existing English politics) will really pretend that this ideal of publicity is exhausted, or even attempted. Obviously public life grows more private every day. The French have, indeed, continued the tradition of revealing secrets and making scandals; hence they are more flagrant and palpable than we, not in sin but in the confession of sin. The first trial of Dreyfus might have happened in England; it is exactly the second trial that would have been legally impossible. But, indeed, if we wish to realise how far we fall short of the original republican outline, the sharpest way to test it is to note how far we fall short even of the republican element in the older regime. Not only are we less democratic than Danton and Condorcet, but we are in many ways less democratic than Choiseul and Marie Antoinette. The richest nobles before the revolt were needy middle-class people
compared with our Rothschilds and Roseberys. And in the matter of publicity the old French monarchy was infinitely more democratic than any of the monarchies of today. Practically anybody who chose could walk into the palace and see the king playing with his children, or paring his nails. The people possessed the monarch, as the people possess Primrose Hill; that is, they cannot move it, but they can sprawl all over it. The old French monarchy was founded on the excellent principle that a cat may look at a king. But nowadays a cat may not look at a king; unless it is a very tame cat. Even where the press is free for criticism it is only used for adulation. The substantial difference comes to something uncommonly like this: Eighteenth century tyranny meant that you could say “The K_ of Br_rd is a profligate.” Twentieth century liberty really means that you are allowed to say “The King of Brentford is a model family man.”

But we have delayed the main argument too long for the parenthetical purpose of showing that the great democratic dream, like the great mediaeval dream, has in a strict and practical sense been a dream unfulfilled. Whatever is the matter with modern England it is not that we have carried out too literally, or achieved with disappointing completeness, either the Catholicism of Becket or the equality of Marat. Now I have taken these two cases merely because they are typical of ten thousand other cases; the world is full of these unfulfilled ideas, these uncompleted temples. History does not consist of completed and crumbling ruins; rather it consists of half–built villas abandoned by a bankrupt–builder. This world is more like an unfinished suburb than a deserted cemetery.
VI

THE ENEMIES OF PROPERTY

But it is for this especial reason that such an explanation is necessary on the very threshold of the definition of ideals. For owing to that historic fallacy with which I have just dealt, numbers of readers will expect me, when I propound an ideal, to propound a new ideal. Now I have no notion at all of propounding a new ideal. There is no new ideal imaginable by the madness of modern sophists, which will be anything like so startling as fulfilling any one of the old ones. On the day that any copybook maxim is carried out there will be something like an earthquake on the earth. There is only one thing new that can be done under the sun; and that is to look at the sun. If you attempt it on a blue day in June, you will know why men do not look straight at their ideals. There is only one really startling thing to be done with the ideal, and that is to do it. It is to face the flaming logical fact, and its frightful consequences. Christ knew that it would be a more stunning thunderbolt to fulfil the law than to destroy it. It is true of both the cases I have quoted, and of every case. The pagans had always adored purity: Athena, Artemis, Vesta. It was when the virgin martyrs began defiantly to practice purity that they rent them with wild beasts, and rolled them on red–hot coals. The world had always loved the notion of the poor man uppermost; it can be proved by every legend from Cinderella to Whittington, by every poem from the Magnificat to the Marseillaise. The kings went mad against France not because she idealized this ideal, but because she realized it. Joseph of Austria and Catherine of Russia quite agreed that the people should rule; what horrified them was that the people did. The French Revolution, therefore, is the type of all true revolutions, because its ideal is as old as the Old Adam, but its fulfilment almost as fresh, as miraculous, and as new as the New Jerusalem.

But in the modern world we are primarily confronted with the extraordinary spectacle of people turning to new ideals because they have not tried the old. Men have not got tired of Christianity; they have never found enough Christianity to get tired of. Men have never wearied of political justice; they have wearied of waiting for it.

Now, for the purpose of this book, I propose to take only one of these old ideals; but one that is perhaps the oldest. I take the principle of domesticity: the ideal house; the happy family, the holy family of history. For the moment it is
only necessary to remark that it is like the church and like the republic, now chiefly assailed by those who have never known it, or by those who have failed to fulfil it. Numberless modern women have rebelled against domesticity in theory because they have never known it in practice. Hosts of the poor are driven to the workhouse without ever having known the house. Generally speaking, the cultured class is shrieking to be let out of the decent home, just as the working class is shouting to be let into it.

Now if we take this house or home as a test, we may very generally lay the simple spiritual foundations of the idea. God is that which can make something out of nothing. Man (it may truly be said) is that which can make something out of anything. In other words, while the joy of God be unlimited creation, the special joy of man is limited creation, the combination of creation with limits. Man’s pleasure, therefore, is to possess conditions, but also to be partly possessed by them; to be half-controlled by the flute he plays or by the field he digs. The excitement is to get the utmost out of given conditions; the conditions will stretch, but not indefinitely. A man can write an immortal sonnet on an old envelope, or hack a hero out of a lump of rock. But hacking a sonnet out of a rock would be a laborious business, and making a hero out of an envelope is almost out of the sphere of practical politics. This fruitful strife with limitations, when it concerns some airy entertainment of an educated class, goes by the name of Art. But the mass of men have neither time nor aptitude for the invention of invisible or abstract beauty. For the mass of men the idea of artistic creation can only be expressed by an idea unpopular in present discussions—the idea of property. The average man cannot cut clay into the shape of a man; but he can cut earth into the shape of a garden; and though he arranges it with red geraniums and blue potatoes in alternate straight lines, he is still an artist; because he has chosen. The average man cannot paint the sunset whose colors he admires; but he can paint his own house with what color he chooses, and though he paints it pea green with pink spots, he is still an artist; because that is his choice. Property is merely the art of the democracy. It means that every man should have something that he can shape in his own image, as he is shaped in the image of heaven. But because he is not God, but only a graven image of God, his self-expression must deal with limits; properly with limits that are strict and even small.

I am well aware that the word “property” has been defied in our time by the corruption of the great capitalists. One would think, to hear people talk, that the Rothchilds and the Rockefellers were on the side of property. But obviously they
are the enemies of property; because they are enemies of their own limitations. They do not want their own land; but other people’s. When they remove their neighbor’s landmark, they also remove their own. A man who loves a little triangular field ought to love it because it is triangular; anyone who destroys the shape, by giving him more land, is a thief who has stolen a triangle. A man with the true poetry of possession wishes to see the wall where his garden meets Smith’s garden; the hedge where his farm touches Brown’s. He cannot see the shape of his own land unless he sees the edges of his neighbor’s. It is the negation of property that the Duke of Sutherland should have all the farms in one estate; just as it would be the negation of marriage if he had all our wives in one harem.
VII

THE FREE FAMILY

As I have said, I propose to take only one central instance; I will take the institution called the private house or home; the shell and organ of the family. We will consider cosmic and political tendencies simply as they strike that ancient and unique roof. Very few words will suffice for all I have to say about the family itself. I leave alone the speculations about its animal origin and the details of its social reconstruction; I am concerned only with its palpable omnipresence. It is a necessity far mankind; it is (if you like to put it so) a trap for mankind. Only by the hypocritical ignoring of a huge fact can any one contrive to talk of “free love”; as if love were an episode like lighting a cigarette, or whistling a tune. Suppose whenever a man lit a cigarette, a towering genie arose from the rings of smoke and followed him everywhere as a huge slave. Suppose whenever a man whistled a tune he “drew an angel down” and had to walk about forever with a seraph on a string. These catastrophic images are but faint parallels to the earthquake consequences that Nature has attached to sex; and it is perfectly plain at the beginning that a man cannot be a free lover; he is either a traitor or a tied man. The second element that creates the family is that its consequences, though colossal, are gradual; the cigarette produces a baby giant, the song only an infant seraph. Thence arises the necessity for some prolonged system of co-operation; and thence arises the family in its full educational sense.

It may be said that this institution of the home is the one anarchist institution. That is to say, it is older than law, and stands outside the State. By its nature it is refreshed or corrupted by indefinable forces of custom or kinship. This is not to be understood as meaning that the State has no authority over families; that State authority is invoked and ought to be invoked in many abnormal cases. But in most normal cases of family joys and sorrows, the State has no mode of entry. It is not so much that the law should not interfere, as that the law cannot. Just as there are fields too far off for law, so there are fields too near; as a man may see the North Pole before he sees his own backbone. Small and near matters escape control at least as much as vast and remote ones; and the real pains and pleasures of the family form a strong instance of this. If a baby cries for the moon, the policeman cannot procure the moon—but neither can he stop the baby. Creatures
so close to each other as husband and wife, or a mother and children, have powers of making each other happy or miserable with which no public coercion can deal. If a marriage could be dissolved every morning it would not give back his night’s rest to a man kept awake by a curtain lecture; and what is the good of giving a man a lot of power where he only wants a little peace? The child must depend on the most imperfect mother; the mother may be devoted to the most unworthy children; in such relations legal revenges are vain. Even in the abnormal cases where the law may operate, this difficulty is constantly found; as many a bewildered magistrate knows. He has to save children from starvation by taking away their breadwinner. And he often has to break a wife’s heart because her husband has already broken her head. The State has no tool delicate enough to deracinate the rooted habits and tangled affections of the family; the two sexes, whether happy or unhappy, are glued together too tightly for us to get the blade of a legal penknife in between them. The man and the woman are one flesh —yes, even when they are not one spirit. Man is a quadruped. Upon this ancient and anarchic intimacy, types of government have little or no effect; it is happy or unhappy, by its own sexual wholesomeness and genial habit, under the republic of Switzerland or the despotism of Siam. Even a republic in Siam would not have done much towards freeing the Siamese Twins.

The problem is not in marriage, but in sex; and would be felt under the freest concubinage. Nevertheless, the overwhelming mass of mankind has not believed in freedom in this matter, but rather in a more or less lasting tie. Tribes and civilizations differ about the occasions on which we may loosen the bond, but they all agree that there is a bond to be loosened, not a mere universal detachment. For the purposes of this book I am not concerned to discuss that mystical view of marriage in which I myself believe: the great European tradition which has made marriage a sacrament. It is enough to say here that heathen and Christian alike have regarded marriage as a tie; a thing not normally to be sundered. Briefly, this human belief in a sexual bond rests on a principle of which the modern mind has made a very inadequate study. It is, perhaps, most nearly paralleled by the principle of the second wind in walking.

The principle is this: that in everything worth having, even in every pleasure, there is a point of pain or tedium that must be survived, so that the pleasure may revive and endure. The joy of battle comes after the first fear of death; the joy of reading Virgil comes after the bore of learning him; the glow of the sea–bather comes after the icy shock of the sea bath; and the success of the marriage comes after the failure of the honeymoon. All human vows, laws, and contracts are so
many ways of surviving with success this breaking point, this instant of potential surrender.

In everything on this earth that is worth doing, there is a stage when no one would do it, except for necessity or honor. It is then that the Institution upholds a man and helps him on to the firmer ground ahead. Whether this solid fact of human nature is sufficient to justify the sublime dedication of Christian marriage is quite an other matter, it is amply sufficient to justify the general human feeling of marriage as a fixed thing, dissolution of which is a fault or, at least, an ignominy. The essential element is not so much duration as security. Two people must be tied together in order to do themselves justice; for twenty minutes at a dance, or for twenty years in a marriage In both cases the point is, that if a man is bored in the first five minutes he must go on and force himself to be happy. Coercion is a kind of encouragement; and anarchy (or what some call liberty) is essentially oppressive, because it is essentially discouraging. If we all floated in the air like bubbles, free to drift anywhere at any instant, the practical result would be that no one would have the courage to begin a conversation. It would be so embarrassing to start a sentence in a friendly whisper, and then have to shout the last half of it because the other party was floating away into the free and formless ether. The two must hold each other to do justice to each other. If Americans can be divorced for “incompatibility of temper” I cannot conceive why they are not all divorced. I have known many happy marriages, but never a compatible one. The whole aim of marriage is to fight through and survive the instant when incompatibility becomes unquestionable. For a man and a woman, as such, are incompatible.
THE WILDNESS OF DOMESTICITY

In the course of this crude study we shall have to touch on what is called the problem of poverty, especially the dehumanized poverty of modern industrialism. But in this primary matter of the ideal the difficulty is not the problem of poverty, but the problem of wealth. It is the special psychology of leisure and luxury that falsifies life. Some experience of modern movements of the sort called “advanced” has led me to the conviction that they generally repose upon some experience peculiar to the rich. It is so with that fallacy of free love of which I have already spoken; the idea of sexuality as a string of episodes. That implies a long holiday in which to get tired of one woman, and a motor car in which to wander looking for others; it also implies money for maintenances. An omnibus conductor has hardly time to love his own wife, let alone other people’s. And the success with which nuptial estrangements are depicted in modern “problem plays” is due to the fact that there is only one thing that a drama cannot depict—that is a hard day’s work. I could give many other instances of this plutocratic assumption behind progressive fads. For instance, there is a plutocratic assumption behind the phrase “Why should woman be economically dependent upon man?” The answer is that among poor and practical people she isn’t; except in the sense in which he is dependent upon her. A hunter has to tear his clothes; there must be somebody to mend them. A fisher has to catch fish; there must be somebody to cook them. It is surely quite clear that this modern notion that woman is a mere “pretty clinging parasite,” “a plaything,” etc., arose through the somber contemplation of some rich banking family, in which the banker, at least, went to the city and pretended to do something, while the banker’s wife went to the Park and did not pretend to do anything at all. A poor man and his wife are a business partnership. If one partner in a firm of publishers interviews the authors while the other interviews the clerks, is one of them economically dependent? Was Hodder a pretty parasite clinging to Stoughton? Was Marshall a mere plaything for Snelgrove?

But of all the modern notions generated by mere wealth the worst is this: the notion that domesticity is dull and tame. Inside the home (they say) is dead decorum and routine; outside is adventure and variety. This is indeed a rich man’s opinion. The rich man knows that his own house moves on vast and
soundless wheels of wealth, is run by regiments of servants, by a swift and silent ritual. On the other hand, every sort of vagabondage of romance is open to him in the streets outside. He has plenty of money and can afford to be a tramp. His wildest adventure will end in a restaurant, while the yokel’s tamest adventure may end in a police-court. If he smashes a window he can pay for it; if he smashes a man he can pension him. He can (like the millionaire in the story) buy an hotel to get a glass of gin. And because he, the luxurious man, dictates the tone of nearly all “advanced” and “progressive” thought, we have almost forgotten what a home really means to the overwhelming millions of mankind.

For the truth is, that to the moderately poor the home is the only place of liberty. Nay, it is the only place of anarchy. It is the only spot on the earth where a man can alter arrangements suddenly, make an experiment or indulge in a whim. Everywhere else he goes he must accept the strict rules of the shop, inn, club, or museum that he happens to enter. He can eat his meals on the floor in his own house if he likes. I often do it myself; it gives a curious, childish, poetic, picnic feeling. There would be considerable trouble if I tried to do it in an A.b.c. tea–shop. A man can wear a dressing gown and slippers in his house; while I am sure that this would not be permitted at the Savoy, though I never actually tested the point. If you go to a restaurant you must drink some of the wines on the wine list, all of them if you insist, but certainly some of them. But if you have a house and garden you can try to make hollyhock tea or convolvulus wine if you like. For a plain, hard–working man the home is not the one tame place in the world of adventure. It is the one wild place in the world of rules and set tasks. The home is the one place where he can put the carpet on the ceiling or the slates on the floor if he wants to. When a man spends every night staggering from bar to bar or from music–hall to music–hall, we say that he is living an irregular life. But he is not; he is living a highly regular life, under the dull, and often oppressive, laws of such places. Some times he is not allowed even to sit down in the bars; and frequently he is not allowed to sing in the music–halls. Hotels may be defined as places where you are forced to dress; and theaters may be defined as places where you are forbidden to smoke. A man can only picnic at home.

Now I take, as I have said, this small human omnipotence, this possession of a definite cell or chamber of liberty, as the working model for the present inquiry. Whether we can give every English man a free home of his own or not, at least we should desire it; and he desires it. For the moment we speak of what he wants, not of what he expects to get. He wants, for instance, a separate house; he
does not want a semi–detached house. He may be forced in the commercial race to share one wall with another man. Similarly he might be forced in a three–legged race to share one leg with another man; but it is not so that he pictures himself in his dreams of elegance and liberty. Again, he does not desire a flat. He can eat and sleep and praise God in a flat; he can eat and sleep and praise God in a railway train. But a railway train is not a house, because it is a house on wheels. And a flat is not a house, because it is a house on stilts. An idea of earthy contact and foundation, as well as an idea of separation and independence, is a part of this instructive human picture.

I take, then, this one institution as a test. As every normal man desires a woman, and children born of a woman, every normal man desires a house of his own to put them into. He does not merely want a roof above him and a chair below him; he wants an objective and visible kingdom; a fire at which he can cook what food he likes, a door he can open to what friends he chooses. This is the normal appetite of men; I do not say there are not exceptions. There may be saints above the need and philanthropists below it. Opalstein, now he is a duke, may have got used to more than this; and when he was a convict may have got used to less. But the normality of the thing is enormous. To give nearly everybody ordinary houses would please nearly everybody; that is what I assert without apology. Now in modern England (as you eagerly point out) it is very difficult to give nearly everybody houses. Quite so; I merely set up the desideratum; and ask the reader to leave it standing there while he turns with me to a consideration of what really happens in the social wars of our time.
IX

HISTORY OF HUDGE AND GUDGE

There is, let us say, a certain filthy rookery in Hoxton, dripping with disease and honeycombed with crime and promiscuity. There are, let us say, two noble and courageous young men, of pure intentions and (if you prefer it) noble birth; let us call them Hudge and Gudge. Hudge, let us say, is of a bustling sort; he points out that the people must at all costs be got out of this den; he subscribes and collects money, but he finds (despite the large financial interests of the Hudges) that the thing will have to be done on the cheap if it is to be done on the spot. He therefore, runs up a row of tall bare tenements like beehives; and soon has all the poor people bundled into their little brick cells, which are certainly better than their old quarters, in so far as they are weather proof, well ventilated and supplied with clean water. But Gudge has a more delicate nature. He feels a nameless something lacking in the little brick boxes; he raises numberless objections; he even assails the celebrated Hudge Report, with the Gudge Minority Report; and by the end of a year or so has come to telling Hudge heatedly that the people were much happier where they were before. As the people preserve in both places precisely the same air of dazed amiability, it is very difficult to find out which is right. But at least one might safely say that no people ever liked stench or starvation as such, but only some peculiar pleasures en tangled with them. Not so feels the sensitive Gudge. Long before the final quarrel (Hudge v. Gudge and Another), Gudge has succeeded in persuading himself that slums and stinks are really very nice things; that the habit of sleeping fourteen in a room is what has made our England great; and that the smell of open drains is absolutely essential to the rearing of a viking breed.

But, meanwhile, has there been no degeneration in Hudge? Alas, I fear there has. Those maniacally ugly buildings which he originally put up as unpretentious sheds barely to shelter human life, grow every day more and more lovely to his deluded eye. Things he would never have dreamed of defending, except as crude necessities, things like common kitchens or infamous asbestos stoves, begin to shine quite sacredly before him, merely because they reflect the wrath of Gudge. He maintains, with the aid of eager little books by Socialists, that man is really happier in a hive than in a house. The practical difficulty of keeping total strangers out of your bedroom he describes as Brotherhood; and the necessity for
climbing twenty–three flights of cold stone stairs, I dare say he calls Effort. The net result of their philanthropic adventure is this: that one has come to defending indefensible slums and still more indefensible slum–landlords, while the other has come to treating as divine the sheds and pipes which he only meant as desperate. Gudge is now a corrupt and apoplectic old Tory in the Carlton Club; if you mention poverty to him he roars at you in a thick, hoarse voice something that is conjectured to be “Do ’em good!” Nor is Hudge more happy; for he is a lean vegetarian with a gray, pointed beard and an unnaturally easy smile, who goes about telling everybody that at last we shall all sleep in one universal bedroom; and he lives in a Garden City, like one forgotten of God.

Such is the lamentable history of Hudge and Gudge; which I merely introduce as a type of an endless and exasperating misunderstanding which is always occurring in modern England. To get men out of a rookery men are put into a tenement; and at the beginning the healthy human soul loathes them both. A man’s first desire is to get away as far as possible from the rookery, even should his mad course lead him to a model dwelling. The second desire is, naturally, to get away from the model dwelling, even if it should lead a man back to the rookery. But I am neither a Hudgian nor a Gudgian; and I think the mistakes of these two famous and fascinating persons arose from one simple fact. They arose from the fact that neither Hudge nor Gudge had ever thought for an instant what sort of house a man might probably like for himself. In short, they did not begin with the ideal; and, therefore, were not practical politicians.

We may now return to the purpose of our awkward parenthesis about the praise of the future and the failures of the past. A house of his own being the obvious ideal for every man, we may now ask (taking this need as typical of all such needs) why he hasn’t got it; and whether it is in any philosophical sense his own fault. Now, I think that in some philosophical sense it is his own fault, I think in a yet more philosophical sense it is the fault of his philosophy. And this is what I have now to attempt to explain.

Burke, a fine rhetorician, who rarely faced realities, said, I think, that an Englishman’s house is his castle. This is honestly entertaining; for as it happens the Englishman is almost the only man in Europe whose house is not his castle. Nearly everywhere else exists the assumption of peasant proprietorship; that a poor man may be a landlord, though he is only lord of his own land. Making the landlord and the tenant the same person has certain trivial advantages, as that the tenant pays no rent, while the landlord does a little work. But I am not concerned with the defense of small proprietorship, but merely with the fact that it exists
almost everywhere except in England. It is also true, however, that this estate of small possession is attacked everywhere today; it has never existed among ourselves, and it may be destroyed among our neighbors. We have, therefore, to ask ourselves what it is in human affairs generally, and in this domestic ideal in particular, that has really ruined the natural human creation, especially in this country.

Man has always lost his way. He has been a tramp ever since Eden; but he always knew, or thought he knew, what he was looking for. Every man has a house somewhere in the elaborate cosmos; his house waits for him waist deep in slow Norfolk rivers or sunning itself upon Sussex downs. Man has always been looking for that home which is the subject matter of this book. But in the bleak and blinding hail of skepticism to which he has been now so long subjected, he has begun for the first time to be chilled, not merely in his hopes, but in his desires. For the first time in history he begins really to doubt the object of his wanderings on the earth. He has always lost his way; but now he has lost his address.

Under the pressure of certain upper–class philosophies (or in other words, under the pressure of Hudge and Gudge) the average man has really become bewildered about the goal of his efforts; and his efforts, therefore, grow feeble and feebler. His simple notion of having a home of his own is derided as bourgeois, as sentimental, or as despicably Christian. Under various verbal forms he is recommended to go on to the streets—which is called Individualism; or to the work–house—which is called Collectivism. We shall consider this process somewhat more carefully in a moment. But it may be said here that Hudge and Gudge, or the governing class generally, will never fail for lack of some modern phrase to cover their ancient predominance. The great lords will refuse the English peasant his three acres and a cow on advanced grounds, if they cannot refuse it longer on reactionary grounds. They will deny him the three acres on grounds of State Ownership. They will forbid him the cow on grounds of humanitarianism.

And this brings us to the ultimate analysis of this singular influence that has prevented doctrinal demands by the English people. There are, I believe, some who still deny that England is governed by an oligarchy. It is quite enough for me to know that a man might have gone to sleep some thirty years ago over the day’s newspaper and woke up last week over the later newspaper, and fancied he was reading about the same people. In one paper he would have found a Lord Robert Cecil, a Mr. Gladstone, a Mr. Lyttleton, a Churchill, a Chamberlain, a
Trevelyan, an Acland. In the other paper he would find a Lord Robert Cecil, a Mr. Gladstone, a Mr. Lyttleton, a Churchill, a Chamberlain, a Trevelyan, an Acland. If this is not being governed by families I cannot imagine what it is. I suppose it is being governed by extraordinary democratic coincidences.
But we are not here concerned with the nature and existence of the aristocracy, but with the origin of its peculiar power, why is it the last of the true oligarchies of Europe; and why does there seem no very immediate prospect of our seeing the end of it? The explanation is simple though it remains strangely unnoticed. The friends of aristocracy often praise it for preserving ancient and gracious traditions. The enemies of aristocracy often blame it for clinging to cruel or antiquated customs. Both its enemies and its friends are wrong. Generally speaking the aristocracy does not preserve either good or bad traditions; it does not preserve anything except game. Who would dream of looking among aristocrats anywhere for an old custom? One might as well look for an old costume! The god of the aristocrats is not tradition, but fashion, which is the opposite of tradition. If you wanted to find an old–world Norwegian head–dress, would you look for it in the Scandinavian Smart Set? No; the aristocrats never have customs; at the best they have habits, like the animals. Only the mob has customs.

The real power of the English aristocrats has lain in exactly the opposite of tradition. The simple key to the power of our upper classes is this: that they have always kept carefully on the side of what is called Progress. They have always been up to date, and this comes quite easy to an aristocracy. For the aristocracy are the supreme instances of that frame of mind of which we spoke just now. Novelty is to them a luxury verging on a necessity. They, above all, are so bored with the past and with the present, that they gape, with a horrible hunger, for the future.

But whatever else the great lords forgot they never forgot that it was their business to stand for the new things, for whatever was being most talked about among university dons or fussy financiers. Thus they were on the side of the Reformation against the Church, of the Whigs against the Stuarts, of the Baconian science against the old philosophy, of the manufacturing system against the operatives, and (to–day) of the increased power of the State against the old–fashioned individualists. In short, the rich are always modern; it is their business. But the immediate effect of this fact upon the question we are studying is somewhat singular.
In each of the separate holes or quandaries in which the ordinary Englishman has been placed, he has been told that his situation is, for some particular reason, all for the best. He woke up one fine morning and discovered that the public things, which for eight hundred years he had used at once as inns and sanctuaries, had all been suddenly and savagely abolished, to increase the private wealth of about six or seven men. One would think he might have been annoyed at that; in many places he was, and was put down by the soldiery. But it was not merely the army that kept him quiet. He was kept quiet by the sages as well as the soldiers; the six or seven men who took away the inns of the poor told him that they were not doing it for themselves, but for the religion of the future, the great dawn of Protestantism and truth. So whenever a seventeenth century noble was caught pulling down a peasant’s fence and stealing his field, the noble pointed excitedly at the face of Charles I or James II (which at that moment, perhaps, wore a cross expression) and thus diverted the simple peasant’s attention. The great Puritan lords created the Commonwealth, and destroyed the common land. They saved their poorer countrymen from the disgrace of paying Ship Money, by taking from them the plow money and spade money which they were doubtless too weak to guard. A fine old English rhyme has immortalized this easy aristocratic habit—

You prosecute the man or woman Who steals the goose from off the common, But leave the larger felon loose Who steals the common from the goose.

But here, as in the case of the monasteries, we confront the strange problem of submission. If they stole the common from the goose, one can only say that he was a great goose to stand it. The truth is that they reasoned with the goose; they explained to him that all this was needed to get the Stuart fox over seas. So in the nineteenth century the great nobles who became mine-owners and railway directors earnestly assured everybody that they did not do this from preference, but owing to a newly discovered Economic Law. So the prosperous politicians of our own generation introduce bills to prevent poor mothers from going about with their own babies; or they calmly forbid their tenants to drink beer in public inns. But this insolence is not (as you would suppose) howled at by everybody as outrageous feudalism. It is gently rebuked as Socialism. For an aristocracy is always progressive; it is a form of going the pace. Their parties grow later and later at night; for they are trying to live to–morrow.
XI

THE HOMELESSNESS OF JONES

Thus the Future of which we spoke at the beginning has (in England at least) always been the ally of tyranny. The ordinary Englishman has been duped out of his old possessions, such as they were, and always in the name of progress. The destroyers of the abbeys took away his bread and gave him a stone, assuring him that it was a precious stone, the white pebble of the Lord’s elect. They took away his maypole and his original rural life and promised him instead the Golden Age of Peace and Commerce inaugurated at the Crystal Palace. And now they are taking away the little that remains of his dignity as a householder and the head of a family, promising him instead Utopias which are called (appropriately enough) “Anticipations” or “News from Nowhere.” We come back, in fact, to the main feature which has already been mentioned. The past is communal: the future must be individualist. In the past are all the evils of democracy, variety and violence and doubt, but the future is pure despotism, for the future is pure caprice. Yesterday, I know I was a human fool, but to–morrow I can easily be the Superman.

The modern Englishman, however, is like a man who should be perpetually kept out, for one reason after another, from the house in which he had meant his married life to begin. This man (Jones let us call him) has always desired the divinely ordinary things; he has married for love, he has chosen or built a small house that fits like a coat; he is ready to be a great grandfather and a local god. And just as he is moving in, something goes wrong. Some tyranny, personal or political, suddenly debars him from the home; and he has to take his meals in the front garden. A passing philosopher (who is also, by a mere coincidence, the man who turned him out) pauses, and leaning elegantly on the railings, explains to him that he is now living that bold life upon the bounty of nature which will be the life of the sublime future. He finds life in the front garden more bold than bountiful, and has to move into mean lodgings in the next spring. The philosopher (who turned him out), happening to call at these lodgings, with the probable intention of raising the rent, stops to explain to him that he is now in the real life of mercantile endeavor; the economic struggle between him and the landlady is the only thing out of which, in the sublime future, the wealth of nations can come. He is defeated in the economic struggle, and goes to the
workhouse. The philosopher who turned him out (happening at that very moment to be inspecting the workhouse) assures him that he is now at last in that golden republic which is the goal of mankind; he is in an equal, scientific, Socialistic commonwealth, owned by the State and ruled by public officers; in fact, the commonwealth of the sublime future.

Nevertheless, there are signs that the irrational Jones still dreams at night of this old idea of having an ordinary home. He asked for so little, and he has been offered so much. He has been offered bribes of worlds and systems; he has been offered Eden and Utopia and the New Jerusalem, and he only wanted a house; and that has been refused him.

Such an apologue is literally no exaggeration of the facts of English history. The rich did literally turn the poor out of the old guest house on to the road, briefly telling them that it was the road of progress. They did literally force them into factories and the modern wage-slavery, assuring them all the time that this was the only way to wealth and civilization. Just as they had dragged the rustic from the convent food and ale by saying that the streets of heaven were paved with gold, so now they dragged him from the village food and ale by telling him that the streets of London were paved with gold. As he entered the gloomy porch of Puritanism, so he entered the gloomy porch of Industrialism, being told that each of them was the gate of the future. Hitherto he has only gone from prison to prison, nay, into darkening prisons, for Calvinism opened one small window upon heaven. And now he is asked, in the same educated and authoritative tones, to enter another dark porch, at which he has to surrender, into unseen hands, his children, his small possessions and all the habits of his fathers.

Whether this last opening be in truth any more inviting than the old openings of Puritanism and Industrialism can be discussed later. But there can be little doubt, I think, that if some form of Collectivism is imposed upon England it will be imposed, as everything else has been, by an instructed political class upon a people partly apathetic and partly hypnotized. The aristocracy will be as ready to “administer” Collectivism as they were to administer Puritanism or Manchesterism; in some ways such a centralized political power is necessarily attractive to them. It will not be so hard as some innocent Socialists seem to suppose to induce the Honorable Tomnoddy to take over the milk supply as well as the stamp supply—at an increased salary. Mr. Bernard Shaw has remarked that rich men are better than poor men on parish councils because they are free from “financial timidity.” Now, the English ruling class is quite free from financial timidity. The Duke of Sussex will be quite ready to be Administrator of
Sussex at the same screw. Sir William Harcourt, that typical aristocrat, put it quite correctly. “We” (that is, the aristocracy) “are all Socialists now.”

But this is not the essential note on which I desire to end. My main contention is that, whether necessary or not, both Industrialism and Collectivism have been accepted as necessities—not as naked ideals or desires. Nobody liked the Manchester School; it was endured as the only way of producing wealth. Nobody likes the Marxian school; it is endured as the only way of preventing poverty. Nobody’s real heart is in the idea of preventing a free man from owning his own farm, or an old woman from cultivating her own garden, any more than anybody’s real heart was in the heartless battle of the machines. The purpose of this chapter is sufficiently served in indicating that this proposal also is a pis aller, a desperate second best—like teetotalism. I do not propose to prove here that Socialism is a poison; it is enough if I maintain that it is a medicine and not a wine.

The idea of private property universal but private, the idea of families free but still families, of domesticity democratic but still domestic, of one man one house —this remains the real vision and magnet of mankind. The world may accept something more official and general, less human and intimate. But the world will be like a broken–hearted woman who makes a humdrum marriage because she may not make a happy one; Socialism may be the world’s deliverance, but it is not the world’s desire.
PART TWO

IMPERIALISM, OR THE MISTAKE ABOUT MAN
I

THE CHARM OF JINGOISM

I have cast about widely to find a title for this section; and I confess that the word “Imperialism” is a clumsy version of my meaning. But no other word came nearer; “Militarism” would have been even more misleading, and “The Superman” makes nonsense of any discussion that he enters. Perhaps, upon the whole, the word “Caesarism” would have been better; but I desire a popular word; and Imperialism (as the reader will perceive) does cover for the most part the men and theories that I mean to discuss.

This small confusion is increased, however, by the fact that I do also disbelieve in Imperialism in its popular sense, as a mode or theory of the patriotic sentiment of this country. But popular Imperialism in England has very little to do with the sort of Caesarean Imperialism I wish to sketch. I differ from the Colonial idealism of Rhodes’ and Kipling; but I do not think, as some of its opponents do, that it is an insolent creation of English harshness and rapacity. Imperialism, I think, is a fiction created, not by English hardness, but by English softness; nay, in a sense, even by English kindness.

The reasons for believing in Australia are mostly as sentimental as the most sentimental reasons for believing in heaven. New South Wales is quite literally regarded as a place where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest; that is, a paradise for uncles who have turned dishonest and for nephews who are born tired. British Columbia is in strict sense a fairyland, it is a world where a magic and irrational luck is supposed to attend the youngest sons. This strange optimism about the ends of the earth is an English weakness; but to show that it is not a coldness or a harshness it is quite sufficient to say that no one shared it more than that gigantic English sentimentalist—the great Charles Dickens. The end of “David Copperfield” is unreal not merely because it is an optimistic ending, but because it is an Imperialistic ending. The decorous British happiness planned out for David Copperfield and Agnes would be embarrassed by the perpetual presence of the hopeless tragedy of Emily, or the more hopeless farce of Micawber. Therefore, both Emily and Micawber are shipped off to a vague colony where changes come over them with no conceivable cause, except the climate. The tragic woman becomes contented and the comic man becomes responsible, solely as the result of a sea voyage and the first sight of a kangaroo.
To Imperialism in the light political sense, therefore, my only objection is that it is an illusion of comfort; that an Empire whose heart is failing should be specially proud of the extremities, is to me no more sublime a fact than that an old dandy whose brain is gone should still be proud of his legs. It consoles men for the evident ugliness and apathy of England with legends of fair youth and heroic strenuousness in distant continents and islands. A man can sit amid the squalor of Seven Dials and feel that life is innocent and godlike in the bush or on the veldt. Just so a man might sit in the squalor of Seven Dials and feel that life was innocent and godlike in Brixton and Surbiton. Brixton and Surbiton are “new”; they are expanding; they are “nearer to nature,” in the sense that they have eaten up nature mile by mile. The only objection is the objection of fact. The young men of Brixton are not young giants. The lovers of Surbiton are not all pagan poets, singing with the sweet energy of the spring. Nor are the people of the Colonies when you meet them young giants or pagan poets. They are mostly Cockneys who have lost their last music of real things by getting out of the sound of Bow Bells. Mr. Rudyard Kipling, a man of real though decadent genius, threw a theoretic glamour over them which is already fading. Mr. Kipling is, in a precise and rather startling sense, the exception that proves the rule. For he has imagination, of an oriental and cruel kind, but he has it, not because he grew up in a new country, but precisely because he grew up in the oldest country upon earth. He is rooted in a past—an Asiatic past. He might never have written “Kabul River” if he had been born in Melbourne.

I say frankly, therefore (lest there should be any air of evasion), that Imperialism in its common patriotic pretensions appears to me both weak and perilous. It is the attempt of a European country to create a kind of sham Europe which it can dominate, instead of the real Europe, which it can only share. It is a love of living with one’s inferiors. The notion of restoring the Roman Empire by oneself and for oneself is a dream that has haunted every Christian nation in a different shape and in almost every shape as a snare. The Spanish are a consistent and conservative people; therefore they embodied that attempt at Empire in long and lingering dynasties. The French are a violent people, and therefore they twice conquered that Empire by violence of arms. The English are above all a poetical and optimistic people; and therefore their Empire is something vague and yet sympathetic, something distant and yet dear. But this dream of theirs of being powerful in the uttermost places, though a native weakness, is still a weakness in them; much more of a weakness than gold was to Spain or glory to Napoleon. If ever we were in collision with our real brothers
and rivals we should leave all this fancy out of account. We should no more dream of pitting Australian armies against German than of pitting Tasmanian sculpture against French. I have thus explained, lest anyone should accuse me of concealing an unpopular attitude, why I do not believe in Imperialism as commonly understood. I think it not merely an occasional wrong to other peoples, but a continuous feebleness, a running sore, in my own. But it is also true that I have dwelt on this Imperialism that is an amiable delusion partly in order to show how different it is from the deeper, more sinister and yet more persuasive thing that I have been forced to call Imperialism for the convenience of this chapter. In order to get to the root of this evil and quite un–English Imperialism we must cast back and begin anew with a more general discussion of the first needs of human intercourse.
II

WISDOM AND THE WEATHER

It is admitted, one may hope, that common things are never commonplace. Birth is covered with curtains precisely because it is a staggering and monstrous prodigy. Death and first love, though they happen to everybody, can stop one’s heart with the very thought of them. But while this is granted, something further may be claimed. It is not merely true that these universal things are strange; it is moreover true that they are subtle. In the last analysis most common things will be found to be highly complicated. Some men of science do indeed get over the difficulty by dealing only with the easy part of it: thus, they will call first love the instinct of sex, and the awe of death the instinct of self-preservation. But this is only getting over the difficulty of describing peacock green by calling it blue. There is blue in it. That there is a strong physical element in both romance and the Memento Mori makes them if possible more baffling than if they had been wholly intellectual. No man could say exactly how much his sexuality was colored by a clean love of beauty, or by the mere boyish itch for irrevocable adventures, like running away to sea. No man could say how far his animal dread of the end was mixed up with mystical traditions touching morals and religion. It is exactly because these things are animal, but not quite animal, that the dance of all the difficulties begins. The materialists analyze the easy part, deny the hard part and go home to their tea.

It is complete error to suppose that because a thing is vulgar therefore it is not refined; that is, subtle and hard to define. A drawing-room song of my youth which began “In the gloaming, O, my darling,” was vulgar enough as a song; but the connection between human passion and the twilight is none the less an exquisite and even inscrutable thing. Or to take another obvious instance: the jokes about a mother-in-law are scarcely delicate, but the problem of a mother-in-law is extremely delicate. A mother-in-law is subtle because she is a thing like the twilight. She is a mystical blend of two inconsistent things—law and a mother. The caricatures misrepresent her; but they arise out of a real human enigma. “Comic Cuts” deals with the difficulty wrongly, but it would need George Meredith at his best to deal with the difficulty rightly. The nearest statement of the problem perhaps is this: it is not that a mother-in-law must be nasty, but that she must be very nice.
But it is best perhaps to take in illustration some daily custom we have all heard despised as vulgar or trite. Take, for the sake of argument, the custom of talking about the weather. Stevenson calls it “the very nadir and scoff of good conversationalists.” Now there are very deep reasons for talking about the weather, reasons that are delicate as well as deep; they lie in layer upon layer of stratified sagacity. First of all it is a gesture of primeval worship. The sky must be invoked; and to begin everything with the weather is a sort of pagan way of beginning everything with prayer. Jones and Brown talk about the weather: but so do Milton and Shelley. Then it is an expression of that elementary idea in politeness—equality. For the very word politeness is only the Greek for citizenship. The word politeness is akin to the word policeman: a charming thought. Properly understood, the citizen should be more polite than the gentleman; perhaps the policeman should be the most courtly and elegant of the three. But all good manners must obviously begin with the sharing of something in a simple style. Two men should share an umbrella; if they have not got an umbrella, they should at least share the rain, with all its rich potentialities of wit and philosophy. “For He maketh His sun to shine . . . .” This is the second element in the weather; its recognition of human equality in that we all have our hats under the dark blue spangled umbrella of the universe. Arising out of this is the third wholesome strain in the custom; I mean that it begins with the body and with our inevitable bodily brotherhood. All true friendliness begins with fire and food and drink and the recognition of rain or frost. Those who will not begin at the bodily end of things are already prigs and may soon be Christian Scientists. Each human soul has in a sense to enact for itself the gigantic humility of the Incarnation. Every man must descend into the flesh to meet mankind.

Briefly, in the mere observation “a fine day” there is the whole great human idea of comradeship. Now, pure comradeship is another of those broad and yet bewildering things. We all enjoy it; yet when we come to talk about it we almost always talk nonsense, chiefly because we suppose it to be a simpler affair than it is. It is simple to conduct; but it is by no means simple to analyze. Comradeship is at the most only one half of human life; the other half is Love, a thing so different that one might fancy it had been made for another universe. And I do not mean mere sex love; any kind of concentrated passion, maternal love, or even the fiercer kinds of friendship are in their nature alien to pure comradeship. Both sides are essential to life; and both are known in differing degrees to everybody of every age or sex. But very broadly speaking it may still be said that women stand for the dignity of love and men for the dignity of comradeship. I
mean that the institution would hardly be expected if the males of the tribe did not mount guard over it. The affections in which women excel have so much more authority and intensity that pure comradeship would be washed away if it were not rallied and guarded in clubs, corps, colleges, banquets and regiments. Most of us have heard the voice in which the hostess tells her husband not to sit too long over the cigars. It is the dreadful voice of Love, seeking to destroy Comradeship.

All true comradeship has in it those three elements which I have remarked in the ordinary exclamation about the weather. First, it has a sort of broad philosophy like the common sky, emphasizing that we are all under the same cosmic conditions. We are all in the same boat, the “winged rock” of Mr. Herbert Trench. Secondly, it recognizes this bond as the essential one; for comradeship is simply humanity seen in that one aspect in which men are really equal. The old writers were entirely wise when they talked of the equality of men; but they were also very wise in not mentioning women. Women are always authoritarian; they are always above or below; that is why marriage is a sort of poetical see–saw. There are only three things in the world that women do not understand; and they are Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. But men (a class little understood in the modern world) find these things the breath of their nostrils; and our most learned ladies will not even begin to understand them until they make allowance for this kind of cool camaraderie. Lastly, it contains the third quality of the weather, the insistence upon the body and its indispensable satisfaction. No one has even begun to understand comradeship who does not accept with it a certain hearty eagerness in eating, drinking, or smoking, an uproarious materialism which to many women appears only hoggish. You may call the thing an orgy or a sacrament; it is certainly an essential. It is at root a resistance to the superciliousness of the individual. Nay, its very swaggering and howling are humble. In the heart of its rowdiness there is a sort of mad modesty; a desire to melt the separate soul into the mass of unpretentious masculinity. It is a clamorous confession of the weakness of all flesh. No man must be superior to the things that are common to men. This sort of equality must be bodily and gross and comic. Not only are we all in the same boat, but we are all seasick.

The word comradeship just now promises to become as fatuous as the word “affinity.” There are clubs of a Socialist sort where all the members, men and women, call each other “Comrade.” I have no serious emotions, hostile or otherwise, about this particular habit: at the worst it is conventionality, and at the best flirtation. I am convinced here only to point out a rational principle. If you
choose to lump all flowers together, lilies and dahlias and tulips and chrysanthemums and call them all daisies, you will find that you have spoiled the very fine word daisy. If you choose to call every human attachment comradship, if you include under that name the respect of a youth for a venerable prophetess, the interest of a man in a beautiful woman who baffles him, the pleasure of a philosophical old fogy in a girl who is impudent and innocent, the end of the meanest quarrel or the beginning of the most mountainous love; if you are going to call all these comradship, you will gain nothing, you will only lose a word. Daisies are obvious and universal and open; but they are only one kind of flower. Comradship is obvious and universal and open; but it is only one kind of affection; it has characteristics that would destroy any other kind. Anyone who has known true comradship in a club or in a regiment, knows that it is impersonal. There is a pedantic phrase used in debating clubs which is strictly true to the masculine emotion; they call it “speaking to the question.” Women speak to each other; men speak to the subject they are speaking about. Many an honest man has sat in a ring of his five best friends under heaven and forgotten who was in the room while he explained some system. This is not peculiar to intellectual men; men are all theoretical, whether they are talking about God or about golf. Men are all impersonal; that is to say, republican. No one remembers after a really good talk who has said the good things. Every man speaks to a visionary multitude; a mystical cloud, that is called the club.

It is obvious that this cool and careless quality which is essential to the collective affection of males involves disadvantages and dangers. It leads to spitting; it leads to coarse speech; it must lead to these things so long as it is honorable; comradship must be in some degree ugly. The moment beauty is mentioned in male friendship, the nostrils are stopped with the smell of abominable things. Friendship must be physically dirty if it is to be morally clean. It must be in its shirt sleeves. The chaos of habits that always goes with males when left entirely to themselves has only one honorable cure; and that is the strict discipline of a monastery. Anyone who has seen our unhappy young idealists in East End Settlements losing their collars in the wash and living on tinned salmon will fully understand why it was decided by the wisdom of St. Bernard or St. Benedict, that if men were to live without women, they must not live without rules. Something of the same sort of artificial exactitude, of course, is obtained in an army; and an army also has to be in many ways monastic; only that it has celibacy without chastity. But these things do not apply to normal
married men. These have a quite sufficient restraint on their instinctive anarchy in the savage common–sense of the other sex. There is only one very timid sort of man that is not afraid of women.
III

THE COMMON VISION

Now this masculine love of an open and level camaraderie is the life within all democracies and attempts to govern by debate; without it the republic would be a dead formula. Even as it is, of course, the spirit of democracy frequently differs widely from the letter, and a pothouse is often a better test than a Parliament. Democracy in its human sense is not arbitrament by the majority; it is not even arbitrament by everybody. It can be more nearly defined as arbitrament by anybody. I mean that it rests on that club habit of taking a total stranger for granted, of assuming certain things to be inevitably common to yourself and him. Only the things that anybody may be presumed to hold have the full authority of democracy. Look out of the window and notice the first man who walks by. The Liberals may have swept England with an over–whelming majority; but you would not stake a button that the man is a Liberal. The Bible may be read in all schools and respected in all law courts; but you would not bet a straw that he believes in the Bible. But you would bet your week’s wages, let us say, that he believes in wearing clothes. You would bet that he believes that physical courage is a fine thing, or that parents have authority over children. Of course, he might be the millionth man who does not believe these things; if it comes to that, he might be the Bearded Lady dressed up as a man. But these prodigies are quite a different thing from any mere calculation of numbers. People who hold these views are not a minority, but a monstrosity. But of these universal dogmas that have full democratic authority the only test is this test of anybody. What you would observe before any newcomer in a tavern—that is the real English law. The first man you see from the window, he is the King of England.

The decay of taverns, which is but a part of the general decay of democracy, has undoubtedly weakened this masculine spirit of equality. I remember that a roomful of Socialists literally laughed when I told them that there were no two nobler words in all poetry than Public House. They thought it was a joke. Why they should think it a joke, since they want to make all houses public houses, I cannot imagine. But if anyone wishes to see the real rowdy egalitarianism which is necessary (to males, at least) he can find it as well as anywhere in the great old tavern disputes which come down to us in such books as Boswell’s Johnson. It is
worth while to mention that one name especially because the modern world in its morbidity has done it a strange injustice. The demeanor of Johnson, it is said, was “harsh and despotic.” It was occasionally harsh, but it was never despotic. Johnson was not in the least a despot; Johnson was a demagogue, he shouted against a shouting crowd. The very fact that he wrangled with other people is proof that other people were allowed to wrangle with him. His very brutality was based on the idea of an equal scrimmage, like that of football. It is strictly true that he bawled and banged the table because he was a modest man. He was honestly afraid of being overwhelmed or even overlooked. Addison had exquisite manners and was the king of his company; he was polite to everybody; but superior to everybody; therefore he has been handed down forever in the immortal insult of Pope—

“Like Cato, give his little Senate laws And sit attentive to his own applause.”

Johnson, so far from being king of his company, was a sort of Irish Member in his own Parliament. Addison was a courteous superior and was hated. Johnson was an insolent equal and therefore was loved by all who knew him, and handed down in a marvellous book, which is one of the mere miracles of love.

This doctrine of equality is essential to conversation; so much may be admitted by anyone who knows what conversation is. Once arguing at a table in a tavern the most famous man on earth would wish to be obscure, so that his brilliant remarks might blaze like the stars on the background of his obscurity. To anything worth calling a man nothing can be conceived more cold or cheerless than to be king of your company. But it may be said that in masculine sports and games, other than the great game of debate, there is definite emulation and eclipse. There is indeed emulation, but this is only an ardent sort of equality. Games are competitive, because that is the only way of making them exciting. But if anyone doubts that men must forever return to the ideal of equality, it is only necessary to answer that there is such a thing as a handicap. If men exulted in mere superiority, they would seek to see how far such superiority could go; they would be glad when one strong runner came in miles ahead of all the rest. But what men like is not the triumph of superiors, but the struggle of equals; and, therefore, they introduce even into their competitive sports an artificial equality. It is sad to think how few of those who arrange our sporting handicaps can be supposed with any probability to realize that they are abstract and even severe republicans.

No; the real objection to equality and self–rule has nothing to do with any of these free and festive aspects of mankind; all men are democrats when they are
happy. The philosophic opponent of democracy would substantially sum up his position by saying that it “will not work.” Before going further, I will register in passing a protest against the assumption that working is the one test of humanity. Heaven does not work; it plays. Men are most themselves when they are free; and if I find that men are snobs in their work but democrats on their holidays, I shall take the liberty to believe their holidays. But it is this question of work which really perplexes the question of equality; and it is with that that we must now deal. Perhaps the truth can be put most pointedly thus: that democracy has one real enemy, and that is civilization. Those utilitarian miracles which science has made are anti–democratic, not so much in their perversion, or even in their practical result, as in their primary shape and purpose. The Frame–Breaking Rioters were right; not perhaps in thinking that machines would make fewer men workmen; but certainly in thinking that machines would make fewer men masters. More wheels do mean fewer handles; fewer handles do mean fewer hands. The machinery of science must be individualistic and isolated. A mob can shout round a palace; but a mob cannot shout down a telephone. The specialist appears and democracy is half spoiled at a stroke.
IV

THE INSANE NECESSITY

The common conception among the dregs of Darwinian culture is that men have slowly worked their way out of inequality into a state of comparative equality. The truth is, I fancy, almost exactly the opposite. All men have normally and naturally begun with the idea of equality; they have only abandoned it late and reluctantly, and always for some material reason of detail. They have never naturally felt that one class of men was superior to another; they have always been driven to assume it through certain practical limitations of space and time.

For example, there is one element which must always tend to oligarchy—or rather to despotism; I mean the element of hurry. If the house has caught fire a man must ring up the fire engines; a committee cannot ring them up. If a camp is surprised by night somebody must give the order to fire; there is no time to vote it. It is solely a question of the physical limitations of time and space; not at all of any mental limitations in the mass of men commanded. If all the people in the house were men of destiny it would still be better that they should not all talk into the telephone at once; nay, it would be better that the silliest man of all should speak uninterrupted. If an army actually consisted of nothing but Hanibals and Napoleons, it would still be better in the case of a surprise that they should not all give orders together. Nay, it would be better if the stupidest of them all gave the orders. Thus, we see that merely military subordination, so far from resting on the inequality of men, actually rests on the equality of men. Discipline does not involve the Carlylean notion that somebody is always right when everybody is wrong, and that we must discover and crown that somebody. On the contrary, discipline means that in certain frightfully rapid circumstances, one can trust anybody so long as he is not everybody. The military spirit does not mean (as Carlyle fancied) obeying the strongest and wisest man. On the contrary, the military spirit means, if anything, obeying the weakest and stupidest man, obeying him merely because he is a man, and not a thousand men. Submission to a weak man is discipline. Submission to a strong man is only servility.

Now it can be easily shown that the thing we call aristocracy in Europe is not in its origin and spirit an aristocracy at all. It is not a system of spiritual degrees and distinctions like, for example, the caste system of India, or even like the old
Greek distinction between free men and slaves. It is simply the remains of a military organization, framed partly to sustain the sinking Roman Empire, partly to break and avenge the awful onslaught of Islam. The word Duke simply means Colonel, just as the word Emperor simply means Commander–in–Chief. The whole story is told in the single title of Counts of the Holy Roman Empire, which merely means officers in the European army against the contemporary Yellow Peril. Now in an army nobody ever dreams of supposing that difference of rank represents a difference of moral reality. Nobody ever says about a regiment, “Your Major is very humorous and energetic; your Colonel, of course, must be even more humorous and yet more energetic.” No one ever says, in reporting a mess–room conversation, “Lieutenant Jones was very witty, but was naturally inferior to Captain Smith.” The essence of an army is the idea of official inequality, founded on unofficial equality. The Colonel is not obeyed because he is the best man, but because he is the Colonel. Such was probably the spirit of the system of dukes and counts when it first arose out of the military spirit and military necessities of Rome. With the decline of those necessities it has gradually ceased to have meaning as a military organization, and become honeycombed with unclean plutocracy. Even now it is not a spiritual aristocracy—it is not so bad as all that. It is simply an army without an enemy—billeted upon the people.

Man, therefore, has a specialist as well as comrade–like aspect; and the case of militarism is not the only case of such specialist submission. The tinker and tailor, as well as the soldier and sailor, require a certain rigidity of rapidity of action: at least, if the tinker is not organized that is largely why he does not tink on any large scale. The tinker and tailor often represent the two nomadic races in Europe: the Gipsy and the Jew; but the Jew alone has influence because he alone accepts some sort of discipline. Man, we say, has two sides, the specialist side where he must have subordination, and the social side where he must have equality. There is a truth in the saying that ten tailors go to make a man; but we must remember also that ten Poets Laureate or ten Astronomers Royal go to make a man, too. Ten million tradesmen go to make Man himself; but humanity consists of tradesmen when they are not talking shop. Now the peculiar peril of our time, which I call for argument’s sake Imperialism or Caesarism, is the complete eclipse of comradeship and equality by specialism and domination.

There are only two kinds of social structure conceivable—personal government and impersonal government. If my anarchic friends will not have rules—they will have rulers. Preferring personal government, with its tact and
flexibility, is called Royalism. Preferring impersonal government, with its dogmas and definitions, is called Republicanism. Objecting broadmindedly both to kings and creeds is called Bosh; at least, I know no more philosophic word for it. You can be guided by the shrewdness or presence of mind of one ruler, or by the equality and ascertained justice of one rule; but you must have one or the other, or you are not a nation, but a nasty mess. Now men in their aspect of equality and debate adore the idea of rules; they develop and complicate them greatly to excess. A man finds far more regulations and definitions in his club, where there are rules, than in his home, where there is a ruler. A deliberate assembly, the House of Commons, for instance, carries this mummery to the point of a methodical madness. The whole system is stiff with rigid unreason; like the Royal Court in Lewis Carroll. You would think the Speaker would speak; therefore he is mostly silent. You would think a man would take off his hat to stop and put it on to go away; therefore he takes off his hat to walk out and puts it on to stop in. Names are forbidden, and a man must call his own father “my right honorable friend the member for West Birmingham.” These are, perhaps, fantasies of decay: but fundamentally they answer a masculine appetite. Men feel that rules, even if irrational, are universal; men feel that law is equal, even when it is not equitable. There is a wild fairness in the thing—as there is in tossing up.

Again, it is gravely unfortunate that when critics do attack such cases as the Commons it is always on the points (perhaps the few points) where the Commons are right. They denounce the House as the Talking–Shop, and complain that it wastes time in wordy mazes. Now this is just one respect in which the Commons are actually like the Common People. If they love leisure and long debate, it is because all men love it; that they really represent England. There the Parliament does approach to the virile virtues of the pothouse.

The real truth is that adumbrated in the introductory section when we spoke of the sense of home and property, as now we speak of the sense of counsel and community. All men do naturally love the idea of leisure, laughter, loud and equal argument; but there stands a specter in our hall. We are conscious of the towering modern challenge that is called specialism or cut–throat competition—Business. Business will have nothing to do with leisure; business will have no truck with comradeship; business will pretend to no patience with all the legal fictions and fantastic handicaps by which comradeship protects its egalitarian ideal. The modern millionaire, when engaged in the agreeable and typical task of sacking his own father, will certainly not refer to him as the right honorable
clerk from the Laburnum Road, Brixton. Therefore there has arisen in modern life a literary fashion devoting itself to the romance of business, to great demigods of greed and to fairyland of finance. This popular philosophy is utterly despotic and anti-democratic; this fashion is the flower of that Caesarism against which I am concerned to protest. The ideal millionaire is strong in the possession of a brain of steel. The fact that the real millionaire is rather more often strong in the possession of a head of wood, does not alter the spirit and trend of the idolatry. The essential argument is “Specialists must be despots; men must be specialists. You cannot have equality in a soap factory; so you cannot have it anywhere. You cannot have comradeship in a wheat corner; so you cannot have it at all. We must have commercial civilization; therefore we must destroy democracy.” I know that plutocrats have seldom sufficient fancy to soar to such examples as soap or wheat. They generally confine themselves, with fine freshness of mind, to a comparison between the state and a ship. One anti-democratic writer remarked that he would not like to sail in a vessel in which the cabin-boy had an equal vote with the captain. It might easily be urged in answer that many a ship (the Victoria, for instance) was sunk because an admiral gave an order which a cabin-boy could see was wrong. But this is a debating reply; the essential fallacy is both deeper and simpler. The elementary fact is that we were all born in a state; we were not all born on a ship; like some of our great British bankers. A ship still remains a specialist experiment, like a diving-bell or a flying ship: in such peculiar perils the need for promptitude constitutes the need for autocracy. But we live and die in the vessel of the state; and if we cannot find freedom camaraderie and the popular element in the state, we cannot find it at all. And the modern doctrine of commercial despotism means that we shall not find it at all. Our specialist trades in their highly civilized state cannot (it says) be run without the whole brutal business of bossing and sacking, “too old at forty” and all the rest of the filth. And they must be run, and therefore we call on Caesar. Nobody but the Superman could descend to do such dirty work.

Now (to reiterate my title) this is what is wrong. This is the huge modern heresy of altering the human soul to fit its conditions, instead of altering human conditions to fit the human soul. If soap boiling is really inconsistent with brotherhood, so much the worst for soap-boiling, not for brotherhood. If civilization really cannot get on with democracy, so much the worse for civilization, not for democracy. Certainly, it would be far better to go back to village communes, if they really are communes. Certainly, it would be better to do without soap rather than to do without society. Certainly, we would sacrifice
all our wires, wheels, systems, specialties, physical science and frenzied finance for one half-hour of happiness such as has often come to us with comrades in a common tavern. I do not say the sacrifice will be necessary; I only say it will be easy.
PART THREE

FEMINISM, OR THE MISTAKE ABOUT WOMAN
I

THE UNMILITARY SUFFRAGETTE

It will be better to adopt in this chapter the same process that appeared a piece of mental justice in the last. My general opinions on the feminine question are such as many suffragists would warmly approve; and it would be easy to state them without any open reference to the current controversy. But just as it seemed more decent to say first that I was not in favor of Imperialism even in its practical and popular sense, so it seems more decent to say the same of Female Suffrage, in its practical and popular sense. In other words, it is only fair to state, however hurriedly, the superficial objection to the Suffragettes before we go on to the really subtle questions behind the Suffrage.

Well, to get this honest but unpleasant business over, the objection to the Suffragettes is not that they are Militant Suffragettes. On the contrary, it is that they are not militant enough. A revolution is a military thing; it has all the military virtues; one of which is that it comes to an end. Two parties fight with deadly weapons, but under certain rules of arbitrary honor; the party that wins becomes the government and proceeds to govern. The aim of civil war, like the aim of all war, is peace. Now the Suffragettes cannot raise civil war in this soldierly and decisive sense; first, because they are women; and, secondly, because they are very few women. But they can raise something else; which is altogether another pair of shoes. They do not create revolution; what they do create is anarchy; and the difference between these is not a question of violence, but a question of fruitfulness and finality. Revolution of its nature produces government; anarchy only produces more anarchy. Men may have what opinions they please about the beheading of King Charles or King Louis, but they cannot deny that Bradshaw and Cromwell ruled, that Carnot and Napoleon governed. Someone conquered; something occurred. You can only knock off the King’s head once. But you can knock off the King’s hat any number of times. Destruction is finite, obstruction is infinite: so long as rebellion takes the form of mere disorder (instead of an attempt to enforce a new order) there is no logical end to it; it can feed on itself and renew itself forever. If Napoleon had not wanted to be a Consul, but only wanted to be a nuisance, he could, possibly, have prevented any government arising successfully out of the Revolution. But such a proceeding would not have deserved the dignified name of rebellion.
It is exactly this unmilitant quality in the Suffragettes that makes their superficial problem. The problem is that their action has none of the advantages of ultimate violence; it does not afford a test. War is a dreadful thing; but it does prove two points sharply and unanswerably—numbers, and an unnatural valor. One does discover the two urgent matters; how many rebels there are alive, and how many are ready to be dead. But a tiny minority, even an interested minority, may maintain mere disorder forever. There is also, of course, in the case of these women, the further falsity that is introduced by their sex. It is false to state the matter as a mere brutal question of strength. If his muscles give a man a vote, then his horse ought to have two votes and his elephant five votes. The truth is more subtle than that; it is that bodily outbreak is a man’s instinctive weapon, like the hoofs to the horse or the tusks to the elephant. All riot is a threat of war; but the woman is brandishing a weapon she can never use. There are many weapons that she could and does use. If (for example) all the women nagged for a vote they would get it in a month. But there again, one must remember, it would be necessary to get all the women to nag. And that brings us to the end of the political surface of the matter. The working objection to the Suffragette philosophy is simply that overmastering millions of women do not agree with it. I am aware that some maintain that women ought to have votes whether the majority wants them or not; but this is surely a strange and childish case of setting up formal democracy to the destruction of actual democracy. What should the mass of women decide if they do not decide their general place in the State? These people practically say that females may vote about everything except about Female Suffrage.

But having again cleared my conscience of my merely political and possibly unpopular opinion, I will again cast back and try to treat the matter in a slower and more sympathetic style; attempt to trace the real roots of woman’s position in the western state, and the causes of our existing traditions or perhaps prejudices upon the point. And for this purpose it is again necessary to travel far from the modern topic, the mere Suffragette of today, and to go back to subjects which, though much more old, are, I think, considerably more fresh.
II

THE UNIVERSAL STICK

Cast your eye round the room in which you sit, and select some three or four things that have been with man almost since his beginning; which at least we hear of early in the centuries and often among the tribes. Let me suppose that you see a knife on the table, a stick in the corner, or a fire on the hearth. About each of these you will notice one speciality; that not one of them is special. Each of these ancestral things is a universal thing; made to supply many different needs; and while tottering pedants nose about to find the cause and origin of some old custom, the truth is that it had fifty causes or a hundred origins. The knife is meant to cut wood, to cut cheese, to cut pencils, to cut throats; for a myriad ingenious or innocent human objects. The stick is meant partly to hold a man up, partly to knock a man down; partly to point with like a finger–post, partly to balance with like a balancing pole, partly to trifle with like a cigarette, partly to kill with like a club of a giant; it is a crutch and a cudgel; an elongated finger and an extra leg. The case is the same, of course, with the fire; about which the strangest modern views have arisen. A queer fancy seems to be current that a fire exists to warm people. It exists to warm people, to light their darkness, to raise their spirits, to toast their muffins, to air their rooms, to cook their chestnuts, to tell stories to their children, to make checkered shadows on their walls, to boil their hurried kettles, and to be the red heart of a man’s house and that hearth for which, as the great heathens said, a man should die.

Now it is the great mark of our modernity that people are always proposing substitutes for these old things; and these substitutes always answer one purpose where the old thing answered ten. The modern man will wave a cigarette instead of a stick; he will cut his pencil with a little screwing pencil–sharpener instead of a knife; and he will even boldly offer to be warmed by hot water pipes instead of a fire. I have my doubts about pencil–sharpeners even for sharpening pencils; and about hot water pipes even for heat. But when we think of all those other requirements that these institutions answered, there opens before us the whole horrible harlequinade of our civilization. We see as in a vision a world where a man tries to cut his throat with a pencil–sharpener; where a man must learn single–stick with a cigarette; where a man must try to toast muffins at electric lamps, and see red and golden castles in the surface of hot water pipes.
The principle of which I speak can be seen everywhere in a comparison between the ancient and universal things and the modern and specialist things. The object of a theodolite is to lie level; the object of a stick is to swing loose at any angle; to whirl like the very wheel of liberty. The object of a lancet is to lance; when used for slashing, gashing, ripping, lopping off heads and limbs, it is a disappointing instrument. The object of an electric light is merely to light (a despicable modesty); and the object of an asbestos stove . . . I wonder what is the object of an asbestos stove? If a man found a coil of rope in a desert he could at least think of all the things that can be done with a coil of rope; and some of them might even be practical. He could tow a boat or lasso a horse. He could play cat’s–cradle, or pick oakum. He could construct a rope–ladder for an eloping heiress, or cord her boxes for a travelling maiden aunt. He could learn to tie a bow, or he could hang himself. Far otherwise with the unfortunate traveller who should find a telephone in the desert. You can telephone with a telephone; you cannot do anything else with it. And though this is one of the wildest joys of life, it falls by one degree from its full delirium when there is nobody to answer you. The contention is, in brief, that you must pull up a hundred roots, and not one, before you uproot any of these hoary and simple expedients. It is only with great difficulty that a modern scientific sociologist can be got to see that any old method has a leg to stand on. But almost every old method has four or five legs to stand on. Almost all the old institutions are quadrupeds; and some of them are centipedes.

Consider these cases, old and new, and you will observe the operation of a general tendency. Everywhere there was one big thing that served six purposes; everywhere now there are six small things; or, rather (and there is the trouble), there are just five and a half. Nevertheless, we will not say that this separation and specialism is entirely useless or inexcusable. I have often thanked God for the telephone; I may any day thank God for the lancet; and there is none of these brilliant and narrow inventions (except, of course, the asbestos stove) which might not be at some moment necessary and lovely. But I do not think the most austere upholder of specialism will deny that there is in these old, many–sided institutions an element of unity and universality which may well be preserved in its due proportion and place. Spiritually, at least, it will be admitted that some all–round balance is needed to equalize the extravagance of experts. It would not be difficult to carry the parable of the knife and stick into higher regions. Religion, the immortal maiden, has been a maid–of–all–work as well as a servant of mankind. She provided men at once with the theoretic laws of an
unalterable cosmos and also with the practical rules of the rapid and thrilling
game of morality. She taught logic to the student and told fairy tales to the
children; it was her business to confront the nameless gods whose fears are on all
flesh, and also to see the streets were spotted with silver and scarlet, that there
was a day for wearing ribbons or an hour for ringing bells. The large uses of
religion have been broken up into lesser specialities, just as the uses of the hearth
have been broken up into hot water pipes and electric bulbs. The romance of
ritual and colored emblem has been taken over by that narrowest of all trades,
modern art (the sort called art for art’s sake), and men are in modern practice
informed that they may use all symbols so long as they mean nothing by them.
The romance of conscience has been dried up into the science of ethics; which
may well be called decency for decency’s sake, decency unborn of cosmic
energies and barren of artistic flower. The cry to the dim gods, cut off from
ethics and cosmology, has become mere Psychical Research. Everything has
been sundered from everything else, and everything has grown cold. Soon we
shall hear of specialists dividing the tune from the words of a song, on the
ground that they spoil each other; and I did once meet a man who openly
advocated the separation of almonds and raisins. This world is all one wild
divorce court; nevertheless, there are many who still hear in their souls the
thunder of authority of human habit; those whom Man hath joined let no man
sunder.

This book must avoid religion, but there must (I say) be many, religious and
irreligious, who will concede that this power of answering many purposes was a
sort of strength which should not wholly die out of our lives. As a part of
personal character, even the moderns will agree that many–sidedness is a merit
and a merit that may easily be overlooked. This balance and universality has
been the vision of many groups of men in many ages. It was the Liberal
Education of Aristotle; the jack–of–all–trades artistry of Leonardo da Vinci and
his friends; the august amateurishness of the Cavalier Person of Quality like Sir
William Temple or the great Earl of Dorset. It has appeared in literature in our
time in the most erratic and opposite shapes, set to almost inaudible music by
Walter Pater and enunciated through a foghorn by Walt Whitman. But the great
mass of men have always been unable to achieve this literal universality,
because of the nature of their work in the world. Not, let it be noted, because of
the existence of their work. Leonardo da Vinci must have worked pretty hard; on
the other hand, many a government office clerk, village constable or elusive
plumber may do (to all human appearance) no work at all, and yet show no signs
of the Aristotelian universalism. What makes it difficult for the average man to be a universalist is that the average man has to be a specialist; he has not only to learn one trade, but to learn it so well as to uphold him in a more or less ruthless society. This is generally true of males from the first hunter to the last electrical engineer; each has not merely to act, but to excel. Nimrod has not only to be a mighty hunter before the Lord, but also a mighty hunter before the other hunters. The electrical engineer has to be a very electrical engineer, or he is outstripped by engineers yet more electrical. Those very miracles of the human mind on which the modern world prides itself, and rightly in the main, would be impossible without a certain concentration which disturbs the pure balance of reason more than does religious bigotry. No creed can be so limiting as that awful adjuration that the cobbler must not go beyond his last. So the largest and wildest shots of our world are but in one direction and with a defined trajectory: the gunner cannot go beyond his shot, and his shot so often falls short; the astronomer cannot go beyond his telescope and his telescope goes such a little way. All these are like men who have stood on the high peak of a mountain and seen the horizon like a single ring and who then descend down different paths towards different towns, traveling slow or fast. It is right; there must be people traveling to different towns; there must be specialists; but shall no one behold the horizon? Shall all mankind be specialist surgeons or peculiar plumbers; shall all humanity be monomaniac? Tradition has decided that only half of humanity shall be monomaniac. It has decided that in every home there shall be a tradesman and a Jack–of–all–trades. But it has also decided, among other things, that the Jack–of–all–trades shall be a Jill–of–all–trades. It has decided, rightly or wrongly, that this specialism and this universalism shall be divided between the sexes. Cleverness shall be left for men and wisdom for women. For cleverness kills wisdom; that is one of the few sad and certain things.

But for women this ideal of comprehensive capacity (or common–sense) must long ago have been washed away. It must have melted in the frightful furnaces of ambition and eager technicality. A man must be partly a one–idead man, because he is a one–weaponed man—and he is flung naked into the fight. The world’s demand comes to him direct; to his wife indirectly. In short, he must (as the books on Success say) give “his best”; and what a small part of a man “his best” is! His second and third best are often much better. If he is the first violin he must fiddle for life; he must not remember that he is a fine fourth bagpipe, a fair fifteenth billiard–cue, a foil, a fountain pen, a hand at whist, a gun, and an image of God.
III

THE EMANCIPATION OF DOMESTICITY

And it should be remarked in passing that this force upon a man to develop one feature has nothing to do with what is commonly called our competitive system, but would equally exist under any rationally conceivable kind of Collectivism. Unless the Socialists are frankly ready for a fall in the standard of violins, telescopes and electric lights, they must somehow create a moral demand on the individual that he shall keep up his present concentration on these things. It was only by men being in some degree specialist that there ever were any telescopes; they must certainly be in some degree specialist in order to keep them going. It is not by making a man a State wage–earner that you can prevent him thinking principally about the very difficult way he earns his wages. There is only one way to preserve in the world that high levity and that more leisurely outlook which fulfils the old vision of universalism. That is, to permit the existence of a partly protected half of humanity; a half which the harassing industrial demand troubles indeed, but only troubles indirectly. In other words, there must be in every center of humanity one human being upon a larger plan; one who does not “give her best,” but gives her all.

Our old analogy of the fire remains the most workable one. The fire need not blaze like electricity nor boil like boiling water; its point is that it blazes more than water and warms more than light. The wife is like the fire, or to put things in their proper proportion, the fire is like the wife. Like the fire, the woman is expected to cook: not to excel in cooking, but to cook; to cook better than her husband who is earning the coke by lecturing on botany or breaking stones. Like the fire, the woman is expected to tell tales to the children, not original and artistic tales, but tales—better tales than would probably be told by a first–class cook. Like the fire, the woman is expected to illuminate and ventilate, not by the most startling revelations or the wildest winds of thought, but better than a man can do it after breaking stones or lecturing. But she cannot be expected to endure anything like this universal duty if she is also to endure the direct cruelty of competitive or bureaucratic toil. Woman must be a cook, but not a competitive cook; a school mistress, but not a competitive schoolmistress; a house–decorator but not a competitive house–decorator; a dressmaker, but not a competitive dressmaker. She should have not one trade but twenty hobbies; she, unlike the
man, may develop all her second bests. This is what has been really aimed at from the first in what is called the seclusion, or even the oppression, of women. Women were not kept at home in order to keep them narrow; on the contrary, they were kept at home in order to keep them broad. The world outside the home was one mass of narrowness, a maze of cramped paths, a madhouse of monomaniacs. It was only by partly limiting and protecting the woman that she was enabled to play at five or six professions and so come almost as near to God as the child when he plays at a hundred trades. But the woman’s professions, unlike the child’s, were all truly and almost terribly fruitful; so tragically real that nothing but her universality and balance prevented them being merely morbid. This is the substance of the contention I offer about the historic female position. I do not deny that women have been wronged and even tortured; but I doubt if they were ever tortured so much as they are tortured now by the absurd modern attempt to make them domestic empresses and competitive clerks at the same time. I do not deny that even under the old tradition women had a harder time than men; that is why we take off our hats. I do not deny that all these various female functions were exasperating; but I say that there was some aim and meaning in keeping them various. I do not pause even to deny that woman was a servant; but at least she was a general servant.

The shortest way of summarizing the position is to say that woman stands for the idea of Sanity; that intellectual home to which the mind must return after every excursion on extravagance. The mind that finds its way to wild places is the poet’s; but the mind that never finds its way back is the lunatic’s. There must in every machine be a part that moves and a part that stands still; there must be in everything that changes a part that is unchangeable. And many of the phenomena which moderns hastily condemn are really parts of this position of the woman as the center and pillar of health. Much of what is called her subservience, and even her pliability, is merely the subservience and pliability of a universal remedy; she varies as medicines vary, with the disease. She has to be an optimist to the morbid husband, a salutary pessimist to the happy–go–lucky husband. She has to prevent the Quixote from being put upon, and the bully from putting upon others. The French King wrote—

“Toujours femme varie Bien fol qui s’y fie,”

but the truth is that woman always varies, and that is exactly why we always trust her. To correct every adventure and extravagance with its antidote in common–sense is not (as the moderns seem to think) to be in the position of a spy or a slave. It is to be in the position of Aristotle or (at the lowest) Herbert
Spencer, to be a universal morality, a complete system of thought. The slave flatters; the complete moralist rebukes. It is, in short, to be a Trimmer in the true sense of that honorable term; which for some reason or other is always used in a sense exactly opposite to its own. It seems really to be supposed that a Trimmer means a cowardly person who always goes over to the stronger side. It really means a highly chivalrous person who always goes over to the weaker side; like one who trims a boat by sitting where there are few people seated. Woman is a trimmer; and it is a generous, dangerous and romantic trade.

The final fact which fixes this is a sufficiently plain one. Supposing it to be conceded that humanity has acted at least not unnaturally in dividing itself into two halves, respectively typifying the ideals of special talent and of general sanity (since they are genuinely difficult to combine completely in one mind), it is not difficult to see why the line of cleavage has followed the line of sex, or why the female became the emblem of the universal and the male of the special and superior. Two gigantic facts of nature fixed it thus: first, that the woman who frequently fulfilled her functions literally could not be specially prominent in experiment and adventure; and second, that the same natural operation surrounded her with very young children, who require to be taught not so much anything as everything. Babies need not to be taught a trade, but to be introduced to a world. To put the matter shortly, woman is generally shut up in a house with a human being at the time when he asks all the questions that there are, and some that there aren’t. It would be odd if she retained any of the narrowness of a specialist. Now if anyone says that this duty of general enlightenment (even when freed from modern rules and hours, and exercised more spontaneously by a more protected person) is in itself too exacting and oppressive, I can understand the view. I can only answer that our race has thought it worth while to cast this burden on women in order to keep common—sense in the world. But when people begin to talk about this domestic duty as not merely difficult but trivial and dreary, I simply give up the question. For I cannot with the utmost energy of imagination conceive what they mean. When domesticity, for instance, is called drudgery, all the difficulty arises from a double meaning in the word. If drudgery only means dreadfully hard work, I admit the woman drudges in the home, as a man might drudge at the Cathedral of Amiens or drudge behind a gun at Trafalgar. But if it means that the hard work is more heavy because it is trifling, colorless and of small import to the soul, then as I say, I give it up; I do not know what the words mean. To be Queen Elizabeth within a definite area, deciding sales, banquets, labors and holidays; to be Whiteley within a certain
area, providing toys, boots, sheets, cakes and books, to be Aristotle within a certain area, teaching morals, manners, theology, and hygiene; I can understand how this might exhaust the mind, but I cannot imagine how it could narrow it. How can it be a large career to tell other people’s children about the Rule of Three, and a small career to tell one’s own children about the universe? How can it be broad to be the same thing to everyone, and narrow to be everything to someone? No; a woman’s function is laborious, but because it is gigantic, not because it is minute. I will pity Mrs. Jones for the hugeness of her task; I will never pity her for its smallness.

But though the essential of the woman’s task is universality, this does not, of course, prevent her from having one or two severe though largely wholesome prejudices. She has, on the whole, been more conscious than man that she is only one half of humanity; but she has expressed it (if one may say so of a lady) by getting her teeth into the two or three things which she thinks she stands for. I would observe here in parenthesis that much of the recent official trouble about women has arisen from the fact that they transfer to things of doubt and reason that sacred stubbornness only proper to the primary things which a woman was set to guard. One’s own children, one’s own altar, ought to be a matter of principle—or if you like, a matter of prejudice. On the other hand, who wrote Junius’s Letters ought not to be a principle or a prejudice, it ought to be a matter of free and almost indifferent inquiry. But take an energetic modern girl secretary to a league to show that George III wrote Junius, and in three months she will believe it, too, out of mere loyalty to her employers. Modern women defend their office with all the fierceness of domesticity. They fight for desk and typewriter as for hearth and home, and develop a sort of wolfish wifehood on behalf of the invisible head of the firm. That is why they do office work so well; and that is why they ought not to do it.
IV

THE ROMANCE OF THRIFT

The larger part of womankind, however, have had to fight for things slightly more intoxicating to the eye than the desk or the typewriter; and it cannot be denied that in defending these, women have developed the quality called prejudice to a powerful and even menacing degree. But these prejudices will always be found to fortify the main position of the woman, that she is to remain a general overseer, an autocrat within small compass but on all sides. On the one or two points on which she really misunderstands the man’s position, it is almost entirely in order to preserve her own. The two points on which woman, actually and of herself, is most tenacious may be roughly summarized as the ideal of thrift and the ideal of dignity.

Unfortunately for this book it is written by a male, and these two qualities, if not hateful to a man, are at least hateful in a man. But if we are to settle the sex question at all fairly, all males must make an imaginative attempt to enter into the attitude of all good women toward these two things. The difficulty exists especially, perhaps, in the thing called thrift; we men have so much encouraged each other in throwing money right and left, that there has come at last to be a sort of chivalrous and poetical air about losing sixpence. But on a broader and more candid consideration the case scarcely stands so.

Thrift is the really romantic thing; economy is more romantic than extravagance. Heaven knows I for one speak disinterestedly in the matter; for I cannot clearly remember saving a half–penny ever since I was born. But the thing is true; economy, properly understood, is the more poetic. Thrift is poetic because it is creative; waste is unpoetic because it is waste. It is prosaic to throw money away, because it is prosaic to throw anything away; it is negative; it is a confession of indifference, that is, it is a confession of failure. The most prosaic thing about the house is the dustbin, and the one great objection to the new fastidious and aesthetic homestead is simply that in such a moral menage the dustbin must be bigger than the house. If a man could undertake to make use of all things in his dustbin he would be a broader genius than Shakespeare. When science began to use by–products; when science found that colors could be made out of coaltar, she made her greatest and perhaps her only claim on the real respect of the human soul. Now the aim of the good woman is to use the by–
products, or, in other words, to rummage in the dustbin.

A man can only fully comprehend it if he thinks of some sudden joke or expedient got up with such materials as may be found in a private house on a rainy day. A man’s definite daily work is generally run with such rigid convenience of modern science that thrift, the picking up of potential helps here and there, has almost become unmeaning to him. He comes across it most (as I say) when he is playing some game within four walls; when in charades, a hearthrug will just do for a fur coat, or a tea–cozy just do for a cocked hat; when a toy theater needs timber and cardboard, and the house has just enough firewood and just enough bandboxes. This is the man’s occasional glimpse and pleasing parody of thrift. But many a good housekeeper plays the same game every day with ends of cheese and scraps of silk, not because she is mean, but on the contrary, because she is magnanimous; because she wishes her creative mercy to be over all her works, that not one sardine should be destroyed, or cast as rubbish to the void, when she has made the pile complete.

The modern world must somehow be made to understand (in theology and other things) that a view may be vast, broad, universal, liberal and yet come into conflict with another view that is vast, broad, universal and liberal also. There is never a war between two sects, but only between two universal Catholic Churches. The only possible collision is the collision of one cosmos with another. So in a smaller way it must be first made clear that this female economic ideal is a part of that female variety of outlook and all–round art of life which we have already attributed to the sex: thrift is not a small or timid or provincial thing; it is part of that great idea of the woman watching on all sides out of all the windows of the soul and being answerable for everything. For in the average human house there is one hole by which money comes in and a hundred by which it goes out; man has to do with the one hole, woman with the hundred. But though the very stinginess of a woman is a part of her spiritual breadth, it is none the less true that it brings her into conflict with the special kind of spiritual breadth that belongs to the males of the tribe. It brings her into conflict with that shapeless cataract of Comradeship, of chaotic feasting and deafening debate, which we noted in the last section. The very touch of the eternal in the two sexual tastes brings them the more into antagonism; for one stands for a universal vigilance and the other for an almost infinite output. Partly through the nature of his moral weakness, and partly through the nature of his physical strength, the male is normally prone to expand things into a sort of eternity; he always thinks of a dinner party as lasting all night; and he always
thinks of a night as lasting forever. When the working women in the poor districts come to the doors of the public houses and try to get their husbands home, simple minded “social workers” always imagine that every husband is a tragic drunkard and every wife a broken–hearted saint. It never occurs to them that the poor woman is only doing under coarser conventions exactly what every fashionable hostess does when she tries to get the men from arguing over the cigars to come and gossip over the teacups. These women are not exasperated merely at the amount of money that is wasted in beer; they are exasperated also at the amount of time that is wasted in talk. It is not merely what goeth into the mouth but what cometh out the mouth that, in their opinion, defileth a man. They will raise against an argument (like their sisters of all ranks) the ridiculous objection that nobody is convinced by it; as if a man wanted to make a body–slave of anybody with whom he had played single–stick. But the real female prejudice on this point is not without a basis; the real feeling is this, that the most masculine pleasures have a quality of the ephemeral. A duchess may ruin a duke for a diamond necklace; but there is the necklace. A coster may ruin his wife for a pot of beer; and where is the beer? The duchess quarrels with another duchess in order to crush her, to produce a result; the coster does not argue with another coster in order to convince him, but in order to enjoy at once the sound of his own voice, the clearness of his own opinions and the sense of masculine society. There is this element of a fine fruitlessness about the male enjoyments; wine is poured into a bottomless bucket; thought plunges into a bottomless abyss. All this has set woman against the Public House—that is, against the Parliament House. She is there to prevent waste; and the “pub” and the parliament are the very palaces of waste. In the upper classes the “pub” is called the club, but that makes no more difference to the reason than it does to the rhyme. High and low, the woman’s objection to the Public House is perfectly definite and rational, it is that the Public House wastes the energies that could be used on the private house.

As it is about feminine thrift against masculine waste, so it is about feminine dignity against masculine rowdiness. The woman has a fixed and very well–founded idea that if she does not insist on good manners nobody else will. Babies are not always strong on the point of dignity, and grown–up men are quite unpresentable. It is true that there are many very polite men, but none that I ever heard of who were not either fascinating women or obeying them. But indeed the female ideal of dignity, like the female ideal of thrift, lies deeper and may easily be misunderstood. It rests ultimately on a strong idea of spiritual
isolation; the same that makes women religious. They do not like being melted down; they dislike and avoid the mob. That anonymous quality we have remarked in the club conversation would be common impertinence in a case of ladies. I remember an artistic and eager lady asking me in her grand green drawing–room whether I believed in comradeship between the sexes, and why not. I was driven back on offering the obvious and sincere answer “Because if I were to treat you for two minutes like a comrade you would turn me out of the house.” The only certain rule on this subject is always to deal with woman and never with women. “Women” is a profligate word; I have used it repeatedly in this chapter; but it always has a blackguard sound. It smells of oriental cynicism and hedonism. Every woman is a captive queen. But every crowd of women is only a harem broken loose.

I am not expressing my own views here, but those of nearly all the women I have known. It is quite unfair to say that a woman hates other women individually; but I think it would be quite true to say that she detests them in a confused heap. And this is not because she despises her own sex, but because she respects it; and respects especially that sanctity and separation of each item which is represented in manners by the idea of dignity and in morals by the idea of chastity.
THE COLDNESS OF CHLOE

We hear much of the human error which accepts what is sham and what is real. But it is worth while to remember that with unfamiliar things we often mistake what is real for what is sham. It is true that a very young man may think the wig of an actress is her hair. But it is equally true that a child yet younger may call the hair of a negro his wig. Just because the woolly savage is remote and barbaric he seems to be unnaturally neat and tidy. Everyone must have noticed the same thing in the fixed and almost offensive color of all unfamiliar things, tropic birds and tropic blossoms. Tropic birds look like staring toys out of a toy-shop. Tropic flowers simply look like artificial flowers, like things cut out of wax. This is a deep matter, and, I think, not unconnected with divinity; but anyhow it is the truth that when we see things for the first time we feel instantly that they are fictive creations; we feel the finger of God. It is only when we are thoroughly used to them and our five wits are wearied, that we see them as wild and objectless; like the shapeless tree–tops or the shifting cloud. It is the design in Nature that strikes us first; the sense of the crosses and confusions in that design only comes afterwards through experience and an almost eerie monotony. If a man saw the stars abruptly by accident he would think them as festive and as artificial as a firework. We talk of the folly of painting the lily; but if we saw the lily without warning we should think that it was painted. We talk of the devil not being so black as he is painted; but that very phrase is a testimony to the kinship between what is called vivid and what is called artificial. If the modern sage had only one glimpse of grass and sky, he would say that grass was not as green as it was painted; that sky was not as blue as it was painted. If one could see the whole universe suddenly, it would look like a bright–colored toy, just as the South American hornbill looks like a bright–colored toy. And so they are—both of them, I mean.

But it was not with this aspect of the startling air of artifice about all strange objects that I meant to deal. I mean merely, as a guide to history, that we should not be surprised if things wrought in fashions remote from ours seem artificial; we should convince ourselves that nine times out of ten these things are nakedly and almost indecently honest. You will hear men talk of the frosted classicism of Corneille or of the powdered pomposities of the eighteenth century, but all these
phrases are very superficial. There never was an artificial epoch. There never was an age of reason. Men were always men and women: and their two generous appetites always were the expression of passion and the telling of truth. We can see something stiff and quaint in their mode of expression, just as our descendants will see something stiff and quaint in our coarsest slum sketch or our most naked pathological play. But men have never talked about anything but important things; and the next force in femininity which we have to consider can be considered best perhaps in some dusty old volume of verses by a person of quality.

The eighteenth century is spoken of as the period of artificiality, in externals at least; but, indeed, there may be two words about that. In modern speech one uses artificiality as meaning indefinitely a sort of deceit; and the eighteenth century was far too artificial to deceive. It cultivated that completest art that does not conceal the art. Its fashions and costumes positively revealed nature by allowing artifice; as in that obvious instance of a barbering that frosted every head with the same silver. It would be fantastic to call this a quaint humility that concealed youth; but, at least, it was not one with the evil pride that conceals old age. Under the eighteenth century fashion people did not so much all pretend to be young, as all agree to be old. The same applies to the most odd and unnatural of their fashions; they were freakish, but they were not false. A lady may or may not be as red as she is painted, but plainly she was not so black as she was patched.

But I only introduce the reader into this atmosphere of the older and franker fictions that he may be induced to have patience for a moment with a certain element which is very common in the decoration and literature of that age and of the two centuries preceding it. It is necessary to mention it in such a connection because it is exactly one of those things that look as superficial as powder, and are really as rooted as hair.

In all the old flowery and pastoral love–songs, those of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries especially, you will find a perpetual reproach against woman in the matter of her coldness; ceaseless and stale similes that compare her eyes to northern stars, her heart to ice, or her bosom to snow. Now most of us have always supposed these old and iterant phrases to be a mere pattern of dead words, a thing like a cold wall–paper. Yet I think those old cavalier poets who wrote about the coldness of Chloe had hold of a psychological truth missed in nearly all the realistic novels of today. Our psychological romancers perpetually represent wives as striking terror into their husbands by rolling on
the floor, gnashing their teeth, throwing about the furniture or poisoning the coffee; all this upon some strange fixed theory that women are what they call emotional. But in truth the old and frigid form is much nearer to the vital fact. Most men if they spoke with any sincerity would agree that the most terrible quality in women, whether in friendship, courtship or marriage, was not so much being emotional as being unemotional.

There is an awful armor of ice which may be the legitimate protection of a more delicate organism; but whatever be the psychological explanation there can surely be no question of the fact. The instinctive cry of the female in anger is noli me tangere. I take this as the most obvious and at the same time the least hackneyed instance of a fundamental quality in the female tradition, which has tended in our time to be almost immeasurably misunderstood, both by the cant of moralists and the cant of immoralists. The proper name for the thing is modesty; but as we live in an age of prejudice and must not call things by their right names, we will yield to a more modern nomenclature and call it dignity. Whatever else it is, it is the thing which a thousand poets and a million lovers have called the coldness of Chloe. It is akin to the classical, and is at least the opposite of the grotesque. And since we are talking here chiefly in types and symbols, perhaps as good an embodiment as any of the idea may be found in the mere fact of a woman wearing a skirt. It is highly typical of the rabid plagiarism which now passes everywhere for emancipation, that a little while ago it was common for an “advanced” woman to claim the right to wear trousers; a right about as grotesque as the right to wear a false nose. Whether female liberty is much advanced by the act of wearing a skirt on each leg I do not know; perhaps Turkish women might offer some information on the point. But if the western woman walks about (as it were) trailing the curtains of the harem with her, it is quite certain that the woven mansion is meant for a perambulating palace, not for a perambulating prison. It is quite certain that the skirt means female dignity, not female submission; it can be proved by the simplest of all tests. No ruler would deliberately dress up in the recognized fetters of a slave; no judge would appear covered with broad arrows. But when men wish to be safely impressive, as judges, priests or kings, they do wear skirts, the long, trailing robes of female dignity. The whole world is under petticoat government; for even men wear petticoats when they wish to govern.
VI

THE PEDANT AND THE SAVAGE

We say then that the female holds up with two strong arms these two pillars of civilization; we say also that she could do neither, but for her position; her curious position of private omnipotence, universality on a small scale. The first element is thrift; not the destructive thrift of the miser, but the creative thrift of the peasant; the second element is dignity, which is but the expression of sacred personality and privacy. Now I know the question that will be abruptly and automatically asked by all that know the dull tricks and turns of the modern sexual quarrel. The advanced person will at once begin to argue about whether these instincts are inherent and inevitable in woman or whether they are merely prejudices produced by her history and education. Now I do not propose to discuss whether woman could now be educated out of her habits touching thrift and dignity; and that for two excellent reasons. First it is a question which cannot conceivably ever find any answer: that is why modern people are so fond of it. From the nature of the case it is obviously impossible to decide whether any of the peculiarities of civilized man have been strictly necessary to his civilization. It is not self–evident (for instance), that even the habit of standing upright was the only path of human progress. There might have been a quadrupedal civilization, in which a city gentleman put on four boots to go to the city every morning. Or there might have been a reptilian civilization, in which he rolled up to the office on his stomach; it is impossible to say that intelligence might not have developed in such creatures. All we can say is that man as he is walks upright; and that woman is something almost more upright than uprightness.

And the second point is this: that upon the whole we rather prefer women (nay, even men) to walk upright; so we do not waste much of our noble lives in inventing any other way for them to walk. In short, my second reason for not speculating upon whether woman might get rid of these peculiarities, is that I do not want her to get rid of them; nor does she. I will not exhaust my intelligence by inventing ways in which mankind might unlearn the violin or forget how to ride horses; and the art of domesticity seems to me as special and as valuable as all the ancient arts of our race. Nor do I propose to enter at all into those formless and floundering speculations about how woman was or is regarded in
the primitive times that we cannot remember, or in the savage countries which
we cannot understand. Even if these people segregated their women for low or
barbaric reasons it would not make our reasons barbaric; and I am haunted with
a tenacious suspicion that these people’s feelings were really, under other forms,
very much the same as ours. Some impatient trader, some superficial missionary,
wants across an island and sees the squaw digging in the fields while the man is
playing a flute; and immediately says that the man is a mere lord of creation and
the woman a mere serf. He does not remember that he might see the same thing
in half the back gardens in Brixton, merely because women are at once more
conscientious and more impatient, while men are at once more quiescent and
more greedy for pleasure. It may often be in Hawaii simply as it is in Hoxton.
That is, the woman does not work because the man tells her to work and she
obeys. On the contrary, the woman works because she has told the man to work
and he hasn’t obeyed. I do not affirm that this is the whole truth, but I do affirm
that we have too little comprehension of the souls of savages to know how far it
is untrue. It is the same with the relations of our hasty and surface science, with
the problem of sexual dignity and modesty. Professors find all over the world
fragmentary ceremonies in which the bride affects some sort of reluctance, hides
from her husband, or runs away from him. The professor then pompously
proclaims that this is a survival of Marriage by Capture. I wonder he never says
that the veil thrown over the bride is really a net. I gravely doubt whether women
ever were married by capture I think they pretended to be; as they do still.

It is equally obvious that these two necessary sanctities of thrift and dignity
are bound to come into collision with the wordiness, the wastefulness, and the
perpetual pleasure-seeking of masculine companionship. Wise women allow for
the thing; foolish women try to crush it; but all women try to counteract it, and
they do well. In many a home all round us at this moment, we know that the
nursery rhyme is reversed. The queen is in the counting-house, counting out the
money. The king is in the parlor, eating bread and honey. But it must be strictly
understood that the king has captured the honey in some heroic wars. The
quarrel can be found in moldering Gothic carvings and in crabbed Greek
manuscripts. In every age, in every land, in every tribe and village, has been
waged the great sexual war between the Private House and the Public House. I
have seen a collection of mediaeval English poems, divided into sections such as
“Religious Carols,” “Drinking Songs,” and so on; and the section headed,
“Poems of Domestic Life” consisted entirely (literally, entirely) of the
complaints of husbands who were bullied by their wives. Though the English
was archaic, the words were in many cases precisely the same as those which I have heard in the streets and public houses of Battersea, protests on behalf of an extension of time and talk, protests against the nervous impatience and the devouring utilitarianism of the female. Such, I say, is the quarrel; it can never be anything but a quarrel; but the aim of all morals and all society is to keep it a lovers’ quarrel.
VII

THE MODERN SURRENDER OF WOMAN

But in this corner called England, at this end of the century, there has happened a strange and startling thing. Openly and to all appearance, this ancestral conflict has silently and abruptly ended; one of the two sexes has suddenly surrendered to the other. By the beginning of the twentieth century, within the last few years, the woman has in public surrendered to the man. She has seriously and officially owned that the man has been right all along; that the public house (or Parliament) is really more important than the private house; that politics are not (as woman had always maintained) an excuse for pots of beer, but are a sacred solemnity to which new female worshipers may kneel; that the talkative patriots in the tavern are not only admirable but enviable; that talk is not a waste of time, and therefore (as a consequence, surely) that taverns are not a waste of money. All we men had grown used to our wives and mothers, and grandmothers, and great aunts all pouring a chorus of contempt upon our hobbies of sport, drink and party politics. And now comes Miss Pankhurst with tears in her eyes, owning that all the women were wrong and all the men were right; humbly imploring to be admitted into so much as an outer court, from which she may catch a glimpse of those masculine merits which her erring sisters had so thoughtlessly scorned.

Now this development naturally perturbs and even paralyzes us. Males, like females, in the course of that old fight between the public and private house, had indulged in overstatement and extravagance, feeling that they must keep up their end of the see-saw. We told our wives that Parliament had sat late on most essential business; but it never crossed our minds that our wives would believe it. We said that everyone must have a vote in the country; similarly our wives said that no one must have a pipe in the drawing room. In both cases the idea was the same. “It does not matter much, but if you let those things slide there is chaos.” We said that Lord Huggins or Mr. Buggins was absolutely necessary to the country. We knew quite well that nothing is necessary to the country except that the men should be men and the women women. We knew this; we thought the women knew it even more clearly; and we thought the women would say it. Suddenly, without warning, the women have begun to say all the nonsense that we ourselves hardly believed when we said it. The solemnity of politics; the necessity of votes; the necessity of Huggins; the necessity of Buggins; all these
flow in a pellucid stream from the lips of all the suffragette speakers. I suppose in every fight, however old, one has a vague aspiration to conquer; but we never wanted to conquer women so completely as this. We only expected that they might leave us a little more margin for our nonsense; we never expected that they would accept it seriously as sense. Therefore I am all at sea about the existing situation; I scarcely know whether to be relieved or enraged by this substitution of the feeble platform lecture for the forcible curtain–lecture. I am lost without the trenchant and candid Mrs. Caudle. I really do not know what to do with the prostrate and penitent Miss Pankhurst. This surrender of the modern woman has taken us all so much by surprise that it is desirable to pause a moment, and collect our wits about what she is really saying.

As I have already remarked, there is one very simple answer to all this; these are not the modern women, but about one in two thousand of the modern women. This fact is important to a democrat; but it is of very little importance to the typically modern mind. Both the characteristic modern parties believed in a government by the few; the only difference is whether it is the Conservative few or Progressive few. It might be put, somewhat coarsely perhaps, by saying that one believes in any minority that is rich and the other in any minority that is mad. But in this state of things the democratic argument obviously falls out for the moment; and we are bound to take the prominent minority, merely because it is prominent. Let us eliminate altogether from our minds the thousands of women who detest this cause, and the millions of women who have hardly heard of it. Let us concede that the English people itself is not and will not be for a very long time within the sphere of practical politics. Let us confine ourselves to saying that these particular women want a vote and to asking themselves what a vote is. If we ask these ladies ourselves what a vote is, we shall get a very vague reply. It is the only question, as a rule, for which they are not prepared. For the truth is that they go mainly by precedent; by the mere fact that men have votes already. So far from being a mutinous movement, it is really a very Conservative one; it is in the narrowest rut of the British Constitution. Let us take a little wider and freer sweep of thought and ask ourselves what is the ultimate point and meaning of this odd business called voting.
VIII

THE BRAND OF THE FLEUR–DE–LIS

Seemingly from the dawn of man all nations have had governments; and all nations have been ashamed of them. Nothing is more openly fallacious than to fancy that in ruder or simpler ages ruling, judging and punishing appeared perfectly innocent and dignified. These things were always regarded as the penalties of the Fall; as part of the humiliation of mankind, as bad in themselves. That the king can do no wrong was never anything but a legal fiction; and it is a legal fiction still. The doctrine of Divine Right was not a piece of idealism, but rather a piece of realism, a practical way of ruling amid the ruin of humanity; a very pragmatist piece of faith. The religious basis of government was not so much that people put their trust in princes, as that they did not put their trust in any child of man. It was so with all the ugly institutions which disfigure human history. Torture and slavery were never talked of as good things; they were always talked of as necessary evils. A pagan spoke of one man owning ten slaves just as a modern business man speaks of one merchant sacking ten clerks: “It’s very horrible; but how else can society be conducted?” A mediaeval scholastic regarded the possibility of a man being burned to death just as a modern business man regards the possibility of a man being starved to death: “It is a shocking torture; but can you organize a painless world?” It is possible that a future society may find a way of doing without the question by hunger as we have done without the question by fire. It is equally possible, for the matter of that, that a future society may reestablish legal torture with the whole apparatus of rack and fagot. The most modern of countries, America, has introduced with a vague savor of science, a method which it calls “the third degree.” This is simply the extortion of secrets by nervous fatigue; which is surely uncommonly close to their extortion by bodily pain. And this is legal and scientific in America. Amateur ordinary America, of course, simply burns people alive in broad daylight, as they did in the Reformation Wars. But though some punishments are more inhuman than others there is no such thing as humane punishment. As long as nineteen men claim the right in any sense or shape to take hold of the twentieth man and make him even mildly uncomfortable, so long the whole proceeding must be a humiliating one for all concerned. And the proof of how poignantly men have always felt this lies in the fact that the headsman and the
hangman, the jailors and the torturers, were always regarded not merely with fear but with contempt; while all kinds of careless smitters, bankrupt knights and swashbucklers and outlaws, were regarded with indulgence or even admiration. To kill a man lawlessly was pardoned. To kill a man lawfully was unpardonable. The most bare–faced duelist might almost brandish his weapon. But the executioner was always masked.

This is the first essential element in government, coercion; a necessary but not a noble element. I may remark in passing that when people say that government rests on force they give an admirable instance of the foggy and muddled cynicism of modernity. Government does not rest on force. Government is force; it rests on consent or a conception of justice. A king or a community holding a certain thing to be abnormal, evil, uses the general strength to crush it out; the strength is his tool, but the belief is his only sanction. You might as well say that glass is the real reason for telescopes. But arising from whatever reason the act of government is coercive and is burdened with all the coarse and painful qualities of coercion. And if anyone asks what is the use of insisting on the ugliness of this task of state violence since all mankind is condemned to employ it, I have a simple answer to that. It would be useless to insist on it if all humanity were condemned to it. But it is not irrelevant to insist on its ugliness so long as half of humanity is kept out of it.

All government then is coercive; we happen to have created a government which is not only coercive; but collective. There are only two kinds of government, as I have already said, the despotic and the democratic. Aristocracy is not a government, it is a riot; that most effective kind of riot, a riot of the rich. The most intelligent apologists of aristocracy, sophists like Burke and Nietzsche, have never claimed for aristocracy any virtues but the virtues of a riot, the accidental virtues, courage, variety and adventure. There is no case anywhere of aristocracy having established a universal and applicable order, as despots and democracies have often done; as the last Caesars created the Roman law, as the last Jacobins created the Code Napoleon. With the first of these elementary forms of government, that of the king or chieftain, we are not in this matter of the sexes immediately concerned. We shall return to it later when we remark how differently mankind has dealt with female claims in the despotic as against the democratic field. But for the moment the essential point is that in self–governing countries this coercion of criminals is a collective coercion. The abnormal person is theoretically thumped by a million fists and kicked by a million feet. If a man is flogged we all flogged him; if a man is hanged, we all
hanged him. That is the only possible meaning of democracy, which can give any meaning to the first two syllables and also to the last two. In this sense each citizen has the high responsibility of a rioter. Every statute is a declaration of war, to be backed by arms. Every tribunal is a revolutionary tribunal. In a republic all punishment is as sacred and solemn as lynching.
IX

SINCERITY AND THE GALLOWS

When, therefore, it is said that the tradition against Female Suffrage keeps women out of activity, social influence and citizenship, let us a little more soberly and strictly ask ourselves what it actually does keep her out of. It does definitely keep her out of the collective act of coercion; the act of punishment by a mob. The human tradition does say that, if twenty men hang a man from a tree or lamp–post, they shall be twenty men and not women. Now I do not think any reasonable Suffragist will deny that exclusion from this function, to say the least of it, might be maintained to be a protection as well as a veto. No candid person will wholly dismiss the proposition that the idea of having a Lord Chancellor but not a Lady Chancellor may at least be connected with the idea of having a headsman but not a headswoman, a hangman but not a hangwoman. Nor will it be adequate to answer (as is so often answered to this contention) that in modern civilization women would not really be required to capture, to sentence, or to slay; that all this is done indirectly, that specialists kill our criminals as they kill our cattle. To urge this is not to urge the reality of the vote, but to urge its unreality. Democracy was meant to be a more direct way of ruling, not a more indirect way; and if we do not feel that we are all jailers, so much the worse for us, and for the prisoners. If it is really an unwomanly thing to lock up a robber or a tyrant, it ought to be no softening of the situation that the woman does not feel as if she were doing the thing that she certainly is doing. It is bad enough that men can only associate on paper who could once associate in the street; it is bad enough that men have made a vote very much of a fiction. It is much worse that a great class should claim the vote be cause it is a fiction, who would be sickened by it if it were a fact. If votes for women do not mean mobs for women they do not mean what they were meant to mean. A woman can make a cross on a paper as well as a man; a child could do it as well as a woman; and a chimpanzee after a few lessons could do it as well as a child. But nobody ought to regard it merely as making a cross on paper; everyone ought to regard it as what it ultimately is, branding the fleur–de–lis, marking the broad arrow, signing the death warrant. Both men and women ought to face more fully the things they do or cause to be done; face them or leave off doing them.

On that disastrous day when public executions were abolished, private
executions were renewed and ratified, perhaps forever. Things grossly unsuited
to the moral sentiment of a society cannot be safely done in broad daylight; but I
see no reason why we should not still be roasting heretics alive, in a private
room. It is very likely (to speak in the manner foolishly called Irish) that if there
were public executions there would be no executions. The old open-air
punishments, the pillory and the gibbet, at least fixed responsibility upon the
law; and in actual practice they gave the mob an opportunity of throwing roses
as well as rotten eggs; of crying “Hosannah” as well as “Crucify.” But I do not
like the public executioner being turned into the private executioner. I think it is
a crooked oriental, sinister sort of business, and smells of the harem and the
divan rather than of the forum and the market place. In modern times the official
has lost all the social honor and dignity of the common hangman. He is only the
bearer of the bowstring.

Here, however, I suggest a plea for a brutal publicity only in order to
emphasize the fact that it is this brutal publicity and nothing else from which
women have been excluded. I also say it to emphasize the fact that the mere
modern veiling of the brutality does not make the situation different, unless we
openly say that we are giving the suffrage, not only because it is power but
because it is not, or in other words, that women are not so much to vote as to
play voting. No suffragist, I suppose, will take up that position; and a few
suffragists will wholly deny that this human necessity of pains and penalties is
an ugly, humiliating business, and that good motives as well as bad may have
helped to keep women out of it. More than once I have remarked in these pages
that female limitations may be the limits of a temple as well as of a prison, the
disabilities of a priest and not of a pariah. I noted it, I think, in the case of the
pontifical feminine dress. In the same way it is not evidently irrational, if men
decided that a woman, like a priest, must not be a shedder of blood.
THE HIGHER ANARCHY

But there is a further fact; forgotten also because we moderns forget that there is a female point of view. The woman’s wisdom stands partly, not only for a wholesome hesitation about punishment, but even for a wholesome hesitation about absolute rules. There was something feminine and perversely true in that phrase of Wilde’s, that people should not be treated as the rule, but all of them as exceptions. Made by a man the remark was a little effeminate; for Wilde did lack the masculine power of dogma and of democratic cooperation. But if a woman had said it it would have been simply true; a woman does treat each person as a peculiar person. In other words, she stands for Anarchy; a very ancient and arguable philosophy; not anarchy in the sense of having no customs in one’s life (which is inconceivable), but anarchy in the sense of having no rules for one’s mind. To her, almost certainly, are due all those working traditions that cannot be found in books, especially those of education; it was she who first gave a child a stuffed stocking for being good or stood him in the corner for being naughty. This unclassified knowledge is sometimes called rule of thumb and sometimes motherwit. The last phrase suggests the whole truth, for none ever called it fatherwit.

Now anarchy is only tact when it works badly. Tact is only anarchy when it works well. And we ought to realize that in one half of the world—the private house—it does work well. We modern men are perpetually forgetting that the case for clear rules and crude penalties is not self–evident, that there is a great deal to be said for the benevolent lawlessness of the autocrat, especially on a small scale; in short, that government is only one side of life. The other half is called Society, in which women are admittedly dominant. And they have always been ready to maintain that their kingdom is better governed than ours, because (in the logical and legal sense) it is not governed at all. “Whenever you have a real difficulty,” they say, “when a boy is bumptious or an aunt is stingy, when a silly girl will marry somebody, or a wicked man won’t marry somebody, all your lumbering Roman Law and British Constitution come to a standstill. A snub from a duchess or a slanging from a fish–wife are much more likely to put things straight.” So, at least, rang the ancient female challenge down the ages until the recent female capitulation. So streamed the red standard of the higher anarchy.
until Miss Pankhurst hoisted the white flag.

It must be remembered that the modern world has done deep treason to the eternal intellect by believing in the swing of the pendulum. A man must be dead before he swings. It has substituted an idea of fatalistic alternation for the mediaeval freedom of the soul seeking truth. All modern thinkers are reactionaries; for their thought is always a reaction from what went before. When you meet a modern man he is always coming from a place, not going to it. Thus, mankind has in nearly all places and periods seen that there is a soul and a body as plainly as that there is a sun and moon. But because a narrow Protestant sect called Materialists declared for a short time that there was no soul, another narrow Protestant sect called Christian Science is now maintaining that there is no body. Now just in the same way the unreasonable neglect of government by the Manchester School has produced, not a reasonable regard for government, but an unreasonable neglect of everything else. So that to hear people talk to-day one would fancy that every important human function must be organized and avenged by law; that all education must be state education, and all employment state employment; that everybody and everything must be brought to the foot of the august and prehistoric gibbet. But a somewhat more liberal and sympathetic examination of mankind will convince us that the cross is even older than the gibbet, that voluntary suffering was before and independent of compulsory; and in short that in most important matters a man has always been free to ruin himself if he chose. The huge fundamental function upon which all anthropology turns, that of sex and childbirth, has never been inside the political state, but always outside of it. The state concerned itself with the trivial question of killing people, but wisely left alone the whole business of getting them born. A Eugenist might indeed plausibly say that the government is an absent-minded and inconsistent person who occupies himself with providing for the old age of people who have never been infants. I will not deal here in any detail with the fact that some Eugenists have in our time made the maniacal answer that the police ought to control marriage and birth as they control labor and death. Except for this inhuman handful (with whom I regret to say I shall have to deal with later) all the Eugenists I know divide themselves into two sections: ingenious people who once meant this, and rather bewildered people who swear they never meant it—nor anything else. But if it be conceded (by a breezier estimate of men) that they do mostly desire marriage to remain free from government, it does not follow that they desire it to remain free from everything. If man does not control the marriage market by law, is it controlled at all?
the answer is broadly that man does not control the marriage market by law, but
the woman does control it by sympathy and prejudice. There was until lately a
law forbidding a man to marry his deceased wife’s sister; yet the thing happened
constantly. There was no law forbidding a man to marry his deceased wife’s
scullery–maid; yet it did not happen nearly so often. It did not happen because
the marriage market is managed in the spirit and by the authority of women; and
women are generally conservative where classes are concerned. It is the same
with that system of exclusiveness by which ladies have so often contrived (as by
a process of elimination) to prevent marriages that they did not want and even
sometimes procure those they did. There is no need of the broad arrow and the
fleur–de lis, the turnkey’s chains or the hangman’s halter. You need not strangle
a man if you can silence him. The branded shoulder is less effective and final
than the cold shoulder; and you need not trouble to lock a man in when you can
lock him out.

The same, of course, is true of the colossal architecture which we call infant
education: an architecture reared wholly by women. Nothing can ever overcome
that one enormous sex superiority, that even the male child is born closer to his
mother than to his father. No one, staring at that frightful female privilege, can
quite believe in the equality of the sexes. Here and there we read of a girl
brought up like a tom–boy; but every boy is brought up like a tame girl. The
flesh and spirit of femininity surround him from the first like the four walls of a
house; and even the vaguest or most brutal man has been womanized by being
born. Man that is born of a woman has short days and full of misery; but nobody
can picture the obscenity and bestial tragedy that would belong to such a
monster as man that was born of a man.
XI

THE QUEEN AND THE SUFFRAGETTES

But, indeed, with this educational matter I must of necessity embroil myself later. The fourth section of discussion is supposed to be about the child, but I think it will be mostly about the mother. In this place I have systematically insisted on the large part of life that is governed, not by man with his vote, but by woman with her voice, or more often, with her horrible silence. Only one thing remains to be added. In a sprawling and explanatory style has been traced out the idea that government is ultimately coercion, that coercion must mean cold definitions as well as cruel consequences, and that therefore there is something to be said for the old human habit of keeping one–half of humanity out of so harsh and dirty a business. But the case is stronger still.

Voting is not only coercion, but collective coercion. I think Queen Victoria would have been yet more popular and satisfying if she had never signed a death warrant. I think Queen Elizabeth would have stood out as more solid and splendid in history if she had not earned (among those who happen to know her history) the nickname of Bloody Bess. I think, in short, that the great historic woman is more herself when she is persuasive rather than coercive. But I feel all mankind behind me when I say that if a woman has this power it should be despotic power—not democratic power. There is a much stronger historic argument for giving Miss Pankhurst a throne than for giving her a vote. She might have a crown, or at least a coronet, like so many of her supporters; for these old powers are purely personal and therefore female. Miss Pankhurst as a despot might be as virtuous as Queen Victoria, and she certainly would find it difficult to be as wicked as Queen Bess, but the point is that, good or bad, she would be irresponsible—she would not be governed by a rule and by a ruler. There are only two ways of governing: by a rule and by a ruler. And it is seriously true to say of a woman, in education and domesticity, that the freedom of the autocrat appears to be necessary to her. She is never responsible until she is irresponsible. In case this sounds like an idle contradiction, I confidently appeal to the cold facts of history. Almost every despotic or oligarchic state has admitted women to its privileges. Scarcely one democratic state has ever admitted them to its rights. The reason is very simple: that something female is endangered much more by the violence of the crowd. In short, one Pankhurst is
an exception, but a thousand Pankhursts are a nightmare, a Bacchic orgie, a Witches Sabbath. For in all legends men have thought of women as sublime separately but horrible in a herd.
THE MODERN SLAVE

Now I have only taken the test case of Female Suffrage because it is topical and concrete; it is not of great moment for me as a political proposal. I can quite imagine anyone substantially agreeing with my view of woman as universalist and autocrat in a limited area; and still thinking that she would be none the worse for a ballot paper. The real question is whether this old ideal of woman as the great amateur is admitted or not. There are many modern things which threaten it much more than suffragism; notably the increase of self–supporting women, even in the most severe or the most squalid employments. If there be something against nature in the idea of a horde of wild women governing, there is something truly intolerable in the idea of a herd of tame women being governed. And there are elements in human psychology that make this situation particularly poignant or ignominous. The ugly exactitudes of business, the bells and clocks the fixed hours and rigid departments, were all meant for the male: who, as a rule, can only do one thing and can only with the greatest difficulty be induced to do that. If clerks do not try to shirk their work, our whole great commercial system breaks down. It is breaking down, under the inroad of women who are adopting the unprecedented and impossible course of taking the system seriously and doing it well. Their very efficiency is the definition of their slavery. It is generally a very bad sign when one is trusted very much by one’s employers. And if the evasive clerks have a look of being blackguards, the earnest ladies are often something very like blacklegs. But the more immediate point is that the modern working woman bears a double burden, for she endures both the grinding officialism of the new office and the distracting scrupulosity of the old home. Few men understand what conscientiousness is. They understand duty, which generally means one duty; but conscientiousness is the duty of the universalist. It is limited by no work days or holidays; it is a lawless, limitless, devouring decorum. If women are to be subjected to the dull rule of commerce, we must find some way of emancipating them from the wild rule of conscience. But I rather fancy you will find it easier to leave the conscience and knock off the commerce. As it is, the modern clerk or secretary exhausts herself to put one thing straight in the ledger and then goes home to put everything straight in the house.
This condition (described by some as emancipated) is at least the reverse of my ideal. I would give woman, not more rights, but more privileges. Instead of sending her to seek such freedom as notoriously prevails in banks and factories, I would design specially a house in which she can be free. And with that we come to the last point of all; the point at which we can perceive the needs of women, like the rights of men, stopped and falsified by something which it is the object of this book to expose.

The Feminist (which means, I think, one who dislikes the chief feminine characteristics) has heard my loose monologue, bursting all the time with one pent-up protest. At this point he will break out and say, “But what are we to do? There is modern commerce and its clerks; there is the modern family with its unmarried daughters; specialism is expected everywhere; female thrift and conscientiousness are demanded and supplied. What does it matter whether we should in the abstract prefer the old human and housekeeping woman; we might prefer the Garden of Eden. But since women have trades they ought to have trades unions. Since women work in factories, they ought to vote on factory–acts. If they are unmarried they must be commercial; if they are commercial they must be political. We must have new rules for a new world—even if it be not a better one.” I said to a Feminist once: “The question is not whether women are good enough for votes: it is whether votes are good enough for women.” He only answered: “Ah, you go and say that to the women chain–makers on Cradley Heath.”

Now this is the attitude which I attack. It is the huge heresy of Precedent. It is the view that because we have got into a mess we must grow messier to suit it; that because we have taken a wrong turn some time ago we must go forward and not backwards; that because we have lost our way we must lose our map also; and because we have missed our ideal, we must forget it. “There are numbers of excellent people who do not think votes unfeminine; and there may be enthusiasts for our beautiful modern industry who do not think factories unfeminine.” But if these things are unfeminine it is no answer to say that they fit into each other. I am not satisfied with the statement that my daughter must have unwomanly powers because she has unwomanly wrongs. Industrial soot and political printer’s ink are two blacks which do not make a white. Most of the Feminists would probably agree with me that womanhood is under shameful tyranny in the shops and mills. But I want to destroy the tyranny. They want to destroy womanhood. That is the only difference.

Whether we can recover the clear vision of woman as a tower with many
windows, the fixed eternal feminine from which her sons, the specialists, go forth; whether we can preserve the tradition of a central thing which is even more human than democracy and even more practical than politics; whether, in word, it is possible to re-establish the family, freed from the filthy cynicism and cruelty of the commercial epoch, I shall discuss in the last section of this book. But meanwhile do not talk to me about the poor chain-makers on Cradley Heath. I know all about them and what they are doing. They are engaged in a very wide-spread and flourishing industry of the present age. They are making chains.
PART FOUR

EDUCATION: OR THE MISTAKE ABOUT THE CHILD
I

THE CALVINISM OF TO–DAY

When I wrote a little volume on my friend Mr. Bernard Shaw, it is needless to say that he reviewed it. I naturally felt tempted to answer and to criticise the book from the same disinterested and impartial standpoint from which Mr. Shaw had criticised the subject of it. I was not withheld by any feeling that the joke was getting a little obvious; for an obvious joke is only a successful joke; it is only the unsuccessful clowns who comfort themselves with being subtle. The real reason why I did not answer Mr. Shaw’s amusing attack was this: that one simple phrase in it surrendered to me all that I have ever wanted, or could want from him to all eternity. I told Mr. Shaw (in substance) that he was a charming and clever fellow, but a common Calvinist. He admitted that this was true, and there (so far as I am concerned) is an end of the matter. He said that, of course, Calvin was quite right in holding that “if once a man is born it is too late to damn or save him.” That is the fundamental and subterranean secret; that is the last lie in hell.

The difference between Puritanism and Catholicism is not about whether some priestly word or gesture is significant and sacred. It is about whether any word or gesture is significant and sacred. To the Catholic every other daily act is dramatic dedication to the service of good or of evil. To the Calvinist no act can have that sort of solemnity, because the person doing it has been dedicated from eternity, and is merely filling up his time until the crack of doom. The difference is something subtler than plum–puddings or private theatricals; the difference is that to a Christian of my kind this short earthly life is intensely thrilling and precious; to a Calvinist like Mr. Shaw it is confessedly automatic and uninteresting. To me these threescore years and ten are the battle. To the Fabian Calvinist (by his own confession) they are only a long procession of the victors in laurels and the vanquished in chains. To me earthly life is the drama; to him it is the epilogue. Shavians think about the embryo; Spiritualists about the ghost; Christians about the man. It is as well to have these things clear.

Now all our sociology and eugenics and the rest of it are not so much materialist as confusedly Calvinist, they are chiefly occupied in educating the child before he exists. The whole movement is full of a singular depression about what one can do with the populace, combined with a strange disembodied
gayety about what may be done with posterity. These essential Calvinists have, indeed, abolished some of the more liberal and universal parts of Calvinism, such as the belief in an intellectual design or an everlasting happiness. But though Mr. Shaw and his friends admit it is a superstition that a man is judged after death, they stick to their central doctrine, that he is judged before he is born.

In consequence of this atmosphere of Calvinism in the cultured world of to-day, it is apparently necessary to begin all arguments on education with some mention of obstetrics and the unknown world of the prenatal. All I shall have to say, however, on heredity will be very brief, because I shall confine myself to what is known about it, and that is very nearly nothing. It is by no means self-evident, but it is a current modern dogma, that nothing actually enters the body at birth except a life derived and compounded from the parents. There is at least quite as much to be said for the Christian theory that an element comes from God, or the Buddhist theory that such an element comes from previous existences. But this is not a religious work, and I must submit to those very narrow intellectual limits which the absence of theology always imposes. Leaving the soul on one side, let us suppose for the sake of argument that the human character in the first case comes wholly from parents; and then let us curtly state our knowledge rather than our ignorance.
II

THE TRIBAL TERROR

Popular science, like that of Mr. Blatchford, is in this matter as mild as old wives’ tales. Mr. Blatchford, with colossal simplicity, explained to millions of clerks and workingmen that the mother is like a bottle of blue beads and the father is like a bottle of yellow beads; and so the child is like a bottle of mixed blue beads and yellow. He might just as well have said that if the father has two legs and the mother has two legs, the child will have four legs. Obviously it is not a question of simple addition or simple division of a number of hard detached “qualities,” like beads. It is an organic crisis and transformation of the most mysterious sort; so that even if the result is unavoidable, it will still be unexpected. It is not like blue beads mixed with yellow beads; it is like blue mixed with yellow; the result of which is green, a totally novel and unique experience, a new emotion. A man might live in a complete cosmos of blue and yellow, like the “Edinburgh Review”; a man might never have seen anything but a golden cornfield and a sapphire sky; and still he might never have had so wild a fancy as green. If you paid a sovereign for a bluebell; if you spilled the mustard on the blue-books; if you married a canary to a blue baboon; there is nothing in any of these wild weddings that contains even a hint of green. Green is not a mental combination, like addition; it is a physical result like birth. So, apart from the fact that nobody ever really understands parents or children either, yet even if we could understand the parents, we could not make any conjecture about the children. Each time the force works in a different way; each time the constituent colors combine into a different spectacle. A girl may actually inherit her ugliness from her mother’s good looks. A boy may actually get his weakness from his father’s strength. Even if we admit it is really a fate, for us it must remain a fairy tale. Considered in regard to its causes, the Calvinists and materialists may be right or wrong; we leave them their dreary debate. But considered in regard to its results there is no doubt about it. The thing is always a new color; a strange star. Every birth is as lonely as a miracle. Every child is as uninvited as a monstrosity.

On all such subjects there is no science, but only a sort of ardent ignorance; and nobody has ever been able to offer any theories of moral heredity which justified themselves in the only scientific sense; that is that one could calculate
on them beforehand. There are six cases, say, of a grandson having the same
twitch of mouth or vice of character as his grandfather; or perhaps there are
sixteen cases, or perhaps sixty. But there are not two cases, there is not one case,
there are no cases at all, of anybody betting half a crown that the grandfather will
have a grandson with the twitch or the vice. In short, we deal with heredity as we
deal with omens, affinities and the fulfillment of dreams. The things do happen,
and when they happen we record them; but not even a lunatic ever reckons on
them. Indeed, heredity, like dreams and omens, is a barbaric notion; that is, not
necessarily an untrue, but a dim, groping and un-systematized notion. A civilized
man feels himself a little more free from his family. Before Christianity these
tales of tribal doom occupied the savage north; and since the Reformation and
the revolt against Christianity (which is the religion of a civilized freedom)
savagery is slowly creeping back in the form of realistic novels and problem
plays. The curse of Rougon–Macquart is as heathen and superstitious as the
curse of Ravenswood; only not so well written. But in this twilight barbaric
sense the feeling of a racial fate is not irrational, and may be allowed like a
hundred other half emotions that make life whole. The only essential of tragedy
is that one should take it lightly. But even when the barbarian deluge rose to its
highest in the madder novels of Zola (such as that called “The Human Beast,” a
gross libel on beasts as well as humanity), even then the application of the
hereditary idea to practice is avowedly timid and fumbling. The students of
heredity are savages in this vital sense; that they stare back at marvels, but they
dare not stare forward to schemes. In practice no one is mad enough to legislate
or educate upon dogmas of physical inheritance; and even the language of the
thing is rarely used except for special modern purposes, such as the endowment
of research or the oppression of the poor.
III

THE TRICKS OF ENVIRONMENT

After all the modern clatter of Calvinism, therefore, it is only with the born child that anybody dares to deal; and the question is not eugenics but education. Or again, to adopt that rather tiresome terminology of popular science, it is not a question of heredity but of environment. I will not needlessly complicate this question by urging at length that environment also is open to some of the objections and hesitations which paralyze the employment of heredity. I will merely suggest in passing that even about the effect of environment modern people talk much too cheerfully and cheaply. The idea that surroundings will mold a man is always mixed up with the totally different idea that they will mold him in one particular way. To take the broadest case, landscape no doubt affects the soul; but how it affects it is quite another matter. To be born among pine–trees might mean loving pine–trees. It might mean loathing pine–trees. It might quite seriously mean never having seen a pine–tree. Or it might mean any mixture of these or any degree of any of them. So that the scientific method here lacks a little in precision. I am not speaking without the book; on the contrary, I am speaking with the blue book, with the guide–book and the atlas. It may be that the Highlanders are poetical because they inhabit mountains; but are the Swiss prosaic because they inhabit mountains? It may be the Swiss have fought for freedom because they had hills; did the Dutch fight for freedom because they hadn’t? Personally I should think it quite likely. Environment might work negatively as well as positively. The Swiss may be sensible, not in spite of their wild skyline, but be cause of their wild skyline. The Flemings may be fantastic artists, not in spite of their dull skyline, but because of it.

I only pause on this parenthesis to show that, even in matters admittedly within its range, popular science goes a great deal too fast, and drops enormous links of logic. Nevertheless, it remains the working reality that what we have to deal with in the case of children is, for all practical purposes, environment; or, to use the older word, education. When all such deductions are made, education is at least a form of will–worship; not of cowardly fact–worship; it deals with a department that we can control; it does not merely darken us with the barbarian pessimism of Zola and the heredity–hunt. We shall certainly make fools of ourselves; that is what is meant by philosophy. But we shall not merely make
beasts of ourselves; which is the nearest popular definition for merely following
the laws of Nature and cowering under the vengeance of the flesh. Education
contains much moonshine; but not of the sort that makes mere mooncalves and
idiots the slaves of a silver magnet, the one eye of the world. In this decent arena
there are fads, but not frenzies. Doubtless we shall often find a mare’s nest; but it
will not always be the nightmare’s.
IV

THE TRUTH ABOUT EDUCATION

When a man is asked to write down what he really thinks on education, a certain gravity grips and stiffens his soul, which might be mistaken by the superficial for disgust. If it be really true that men sickened of sacred words and wearied of theology, if this largely unreasoning irritation against “dogma” did arise out of some ridiculous excess of such things among priests in the past, then I fancy we must be laying up a fine crop of cant for our descendants to grow tired of. Probably the word “education” will some day seem honestly as old and objectless as the word “justification” now seems in a Puritan folio. Gibbon thought it frightfully funny that people should have fought about the difference between the “Homousion” and the “Homoiousion.” The time will come when somebody will laugh louder to think that men thundered against Sectarian Education and also against Secular Education; that men of prominence and position actually denounced the schools for teaching a creed and also for not teaching a faith. The two Greek words in Gibbon look rather alike; but they really mean quite different things. Faith and creed do not look alike, but they mean exactly the same thing. Creed happens to be the Latin for faith.

Now having read numberless newspaper articles on education, and even written a good many of them, and having heard deafening and indeterminate discussion going on all around me almost ever since I was born, about whether religion was part of education, about whether hygiene was an essential of education, about whether militarism was inconsistent with true education, I naturally pondered much on this recurring substantive, and I am ashamed to say that it was comparatively late in life that I saw the main fact about it.

Of course, the main fact about education is that there is no such thing. It does not exist, as theology or soldiering exist. Theology is a word like geology, soldiering is a word like soldering; these sciences may be healthy or no as hobbies; but they deal with stone and kettles, with definite things. But education is not a word like geology or kettles. Education is a word like “transmission” or “inheritance”; it is not an object, but a method. It must mean the conveying of certain facts, views or qualities, to the last baby born. They might be the most trivial facts or the most preposterous views or the most offensive qualities; but if they are handed on from one generation to another they are education. Education
is not a thing like theology, it is not an inferior or superior thing; it is not a thing in the same category of terms. Theology and education are to each other like a love-letter to the General Post Office. Mr. Fagin was quite as educational as Dr. Strong; in practice probably more educational. It is giving something—perhaps poison. Education is tradition, and tradition (as its name implies) can be treason.

This first truth is frankly banal; but it is so perpetually ignored in our political prosing that it must be made plain. A little boy in a little house, son of a little tradesman, is taught to eat his breakfast, to take his medicine, to love his country, to say his prayers, and to wear his Sunday clothes. Obviously Fagin, if he found such a boy, would teach him to drink gin, to lie, to betray his country, to blaspheme and to wear false whiskers. But so also Mr. Salt the vegetarian would abolish the boy’s breakfast; Mrs. Eddy would throw away his medicine; Count Tolstoi would rebuke him for loving his country; Mr. Blatchford would stop his prayers, and Mr. Edward Carpenter would theoretically denounce Sunday clothes, and perhaps all clothes. I do not defend any of these advanced views, not even Fagin’s. But I do ask what, between the lot of them, has become of the abstract entity called education. It is not (as commonly supposed) that the tradesman teaches education plus Christianity; Mr. Salt, education plus vegetarianism; Fagin, education plus crime. The truth is, that there is nothing in common at all between these teachers, except that they teach. In short, the only thing they share is the one thing they profess to dislike: the general idea of authority. It is quaint that people talk of separating dogma from education. Dogma is actually the only thing that cannot be separated from education. It is education. A teacher who is not dogmatic is simply a teacher who is not teaching.
AN EVIL CRY

The fashionable fallacy is that by education we can give people something that we have not got. To hear people talk one would think it was some sort of magic chemistry, by which, out of a laborious hotchpotch of hygienic meals, baths, breathing exercises, fresh air and freehand drawing, we can produce something splendid by accident; we can create what we cannot conceive. These pages have, of course, no other general purpose than to point out that we cannot create anything good until we have conceived it. It is odd that these people, who in the matter of heredity are so sullenly attached to law, in the matter of environment seem almost to believe in miracle. They insist that nothing but what was in the bodies of the parents can go to make the bodies of the children. But they seem somehow to think that things can get into the heads of the children which were not in the heads of the parents, or, indeed, anywhere else.

There has arisen in this connection a foolish and wicked cry typical of the confusion. I mean the cry, “Save the children.” It is, of course, part of that modern morbidity that insists on treating the State (which is the home of man) as a sort of desperate expedient in time of panic. This terrified opportunism is also the origin of the Socialist and other schemes. Just as they would collect and share all the food as men do in a famine, so they would divide the children from their fathers, as men do in a shipwreck. That a human community might conceivably not be in a condition of famine or shipwreck never seems to cross their minds. This cry of “Save the children” has in it the hateful implication that it is impossible to save the fathers; in other words, that many millions of grown-up, sane, responsible and self-supporting Europeans are to be treated as dirt or debris and swept away out of the discussion; called dipsomaniacs because they drink in public houses instead of private houses; called unemployables because nobody knows how to get them work; called dullards if they still adhere to conventions, and called loafers if they still love liberty. Now I am concerned, first and last, to maintain that unless you can save the fathers, you cannot save the children; that at present we cannot save others, for we cannot save ourselves. We cannot teach citizenship if we are not citizens; we cannot free others if we have forgotten the appetite of freedom. Education is only truth in a state of transmission; and how can we pass on truth if it has never come into our hand?
Thus we find that education is of all the cases the clearest for our general purpose. It is vain to save children; for they cannot remain children. By hypothesis we are teaching them to be men; and how can it be so simple to teach an ideal manhood to others if it is so vain and hopeless to find one for ourselves?

I know that certain crazy pedants have attempted to counter this difficulty by maintaining that education is not instruction at all, does not teach by authority at all. They present the process as coming, not from the outside, from the teacher, but entirely from inside the boy. Education, they say, is the Latin for leading out or drawing out the dormant faculties of each person. Somewhere far down in the dim boyish soul is a primordial yearning to learn Greek accents or to wear clean collars; and the schoolmaster only gently and tenderly liberates this imprisoned purpose. Sealed up in the newborn babe are the intrinsic secrets of how to eat asparagus and what was the date of Bannockburn. The educator only draws out the child’s own unapparent love of long division; only leads out the child’s slightly veiled preference for milk pudding to tarts. I am not sure that I believe in the derivation; I have heard the disgraceful suggestion that “educator,” if applied to a Roman schoolmaster, did not mean leading our young functions into freedom; but only meant taking out little boys for a walk. But I am much more certain that I do not agree with the doctrine; I think it would be about as sane to say that the baby’s milk comes from the baby as to say that the baby’s educational merits do. There is, indeed, in each living creature a collection of forces and functions; but education means producing these in particular shapes and training them to particular purposes, or it means nothing at all. Speaking is the most practical instance of the whole situation. You may indeed “draw out” squeals and grunts from the child by simply poking him and pulling him about, a pleasant but cruel pastime to which many psychologists are addicted. But you will wait and watch very patiently indeed before you draw the English language out of him. That you have got to put into him; and there is an end of the matter.
VI

AUTHORITY THE UNAVOIDABLE

But the important point here is only that you cannot anyhow get rid of authority in education; it is not so much (as poor Conservatives say) that parental authority ought to be preserved, as that it cannot be destroyed. Mr. Bernard Shaw once said that he hated the idea of forming a child’s mind. In that case Mr. Bernard Shaw had better hang himself; for he hates something inseparable from human life. I only mentioned educere and the drawing out of the faculties in order to point out that even this mental trick does not avoid the inevitable idea of parental or scholastic authority. The educator drawing out is just as arbitrary and coercive as the instructor pouring in; for he draws out what he chooses. He decides what in the child shall be developed and what shall not be developed. He does not (I suppose) draw out the neglected faculty of forgery. He does not (so far at least) lead out, with timid steps, a shy talent for torture. The only result of all this pompous and precise distinction between the educator and the instructor is that the instructor pokes where he likes and the educator pulls where he likes. Exactly the same intellectual violence is done to the creature who is poked and pulled. Now we must all accept the responsibility of this intellectual violence. Education is violent; because it is creative. It is creative because it is human. It is as reckless as playing on the fiddle; as dogmatic as drawing a picture; as brutal as building a house. In short, it is what all human action is; it is an interference with life and growth. After that it is a trifling and even a jocular question whether we say of this tremendous tormentor, the artist Man, that he puts things into us like an apothecary, or draws things out of us, like a dentist.

The point is that Man does what he likes. He claims the right to take his mother Nature under his control; he claims the right to make his child the Superman, in his image. Once flinch from this creative authority of man, and the whole courageous raid which we call civilization wavers and falls to pieces. Now most modern freedom is at root fear. It is not so much that we are too bold to endure rules; it is rather that we are too timid to endure responsibilities. And Mr. Shaw and such people are especially shrinking from that awful and ancestral responsibility to which our fathers committed us when they took the wild step of becoming men. I mean the responsibility of affirming the truth of our human tradition and handing it on with a voice of authority, an unshaken voice. That is
the one eternal education; to be sure enough that something is true that you dare to tell it to a child. From this high audacious duty the moderns are fleeing on every side; and the only excuse for them is, (of course,) that their modern philosophies are so half-baked and hypothetical that they cannot convince themselves enough to convince even a newborn babe. This, of course, is connected with the decay of democracy; and is somewhat of a separate subject. Suffice it to say here that when I say that we should instruct our children, I mean that we should do it, not that Mr. Sully or Professor Earl Barnes should do it. The trouble in too many of our modern schools is that the State, being controlled so specially by the few, allows cranks and experiments to go straight to the schoolroom when they have never passed through the Parliament, the public house, the private house, the church, or the marketplace. Obviously, it ought to be the oldest things that are taught to the youngest people; the assured and experienced truths that are put first to the baby. But in a school to–day the baby has to submit to a system that is younger than himself. The flopping infant of four actually has more experience, and has weathered the world longer, than the dogma to which he is made to submit. Many a school boasts of having the last ideas in education, when it has not even the first idea; for the first idea is that even innocence, divine as it is, may learn something from experience. But this, as I say, is all due to the mere fact that we are managed by a little oligarchy; my system presupposes that men who govern themselves will govern their children. To–day we all use Popular Education as meaning education of the people. I wish I could use it as meaning education by the people.

The urgent point at present is that these expansive educators do not avoid the violence of authority an inch more than the old school masters. Nay, it might be maintained that they avoid it less. The old village schoolmaster beat a boy for not learning grammar and sent him out into the playground to play anything he liked; or at nothing, if he liked that better. The modern scientific schoolmaster pursues him into the playground and makes him play at cricket, because exercise is so good for the health. The modern Dr. Busby is a doctor of medicine as well as a doctor of divinity. He may say that the good of exercise is self–evident; but he must say it, and say it with authority. It cannot really be self–evident or it never could have been compulsory. But this is in modern practice a very mild case. In modern practice the free educationists forbid far more things than the old–fashioned educationists. A person with a taste for paradox (if any such shameless creature could exist) might with some plausibility maintain concerning all our expansion since the failure of Luther’s frank paganism and its
replacement by Calvin’s Puritanism, that all this expansion has not been an expansion, but the closing in of a prison, so that less and less beautiful and humane things have been permitted. The Puritans destroyed images; the Rationalists forbade fairy tales. Count Tostoi practically issued one of his papal encyclicals against music; and I have heard of modern educationists who forbid children to play with tin soldiers. I remember a meek little madman who came up to me at some Socialist soiree or other, and asked me to use my influence (have I any influence?) against adventure stories for boys. It seems they breed an appetite for blood. But never mind that; one must keep one’s temper in this madhouse. I need only insist here that these things, even if a just deprivation, are a deprivation. I do not deny that the old vetoes and punishments were often idiotic and cruel; though they are much more so in a country like England (where in practice only a rich man decrees the punishment and only a poor man receives it) than in countries with a clearer popular tradition—such as Russia. In Russia flogging is often inflicted by peasants on a peasant. In modern England flogging can only in practice be inflicted by a gentleman on a very poor man. Thus only a few days ago as I write a small boy (a son of the poor, of course) was sentenced to flogging and imprisonment for five years for having picked up a small piece of coal which the experts value at 5d. I am entirely on the side of such liberals and humanitarians as have protested against this almost bestial ignorance about boys. But I do think it a little unfair that these humanitarians, who excuse boys for being robbers, should denounce them for playing at robbers. I do think that those who understand a guttersnipe playing with a piece of coal might, by a sudden spurt of imagination, understand him playing with a tin soldier. To sum it up in one sentence: I think my meek little madman might have understood that there is many a boy who would rather be flogged, and unjustly flogged, than have his adventure story taken away.
VII

THE HUMILITY OF MRS. GRUNDY

In short, the new education is as harsh as the old, whether or no it is as high. The freest fad, as much as the strictest formula, is stiff with authority. It is because the humane father thinks soldiers wrong that they are forbidden; there is no pretense, there can be no pretense, that the boy would think so. The average boy’s impression certainly would be simply this: “If your father is a Methodist you must not play with soldiers on Sunday. If your father is a Socialist you must not play with them even on week days.” All educationists are utterly dogmatic and authoritarian. You cannot have free education; for if you left a child free you would not educate him at all. Is there, then, no distinction or difference between the most hide-bound conventionalists and the most brilliant and bizarre innovators? Is there no difference between the heaviest heavy father and the most reckless and speculative maiden aunt? Yes; there is. The difference is that the heavy father, in his heavy way, is a democrat. He does not urge a thing merely because to his fancy it should be done; but, because (in his own admirable republican formula) “Everybody does it.” The conventional authority does claim some popular mandate; the unconventional authority does not. The Puritan who forbids soldiers on Sunday is at least expressing Puritan opinion; not merely his own opinion. He is not a despot; he is a democracy, a tyrannical democracy, a dingy and local democracy perhaps; but one that could do and has done the two ultimate virile things—fight and appeal to God. But the veto of the new educationist is like the veto of the House of Lords; it does not pretend to be representative. These innovators are always talking about the blushing modesty of Mrs. Grundy. I do not know whether Mrs. Grundy is more modest than they are; but I am sure she is more humble.

But there is a further complication. The more anarchic modern may again attempt to escape the dilemma by saying that education should only be an enlargement of the mind, an opening of all the organs of receptivity. Light (he says) should be brought into darkness; blinded and thwarted existences in all our ugly corners should merely be permitted to perceive and expand; in short, enlightenment should be shed over darkest London. Now here is just the trouble; that, in so far as this is involved, there is no darkest London. London is not dark at all; not even at night. We have said that if education is a solid substance, then
there is none of it. We may now say that if education is an abstract expansion there is no lack of it. There is far too much of it. In fact, there is nothing else.

There are no uneducated people. Everybody in England is educated; only most people are educated wrong. The state schools were not the first schools, but among the last schools to be established; and London had been educating Londoners long before the London School Board. The error is a highly practical one. It is persistently assumed that unless a child is civilized by the established schools, he must remain a barbarian. I wish he did. Every child in London becomes a highly civilized person. But here are so many different civilizations, most of them born tired. Anyone will tell you that the trouble with the poor is not so much that the old are still foolish, but rather that the young are already wise. Without going to school at all, the gutter–boy would be educated. Without going to school at all, he would be over–educated. The real object of our schools should be not so much to suggest complexity as solely to restore simplicity. You will hear venerable idealists declare we must make war on the ignorance of the poor; but, indeed, we have rather to make war on their knowledge. Real educationists have to resist a kind of roaring cataract of culture. The truant is being taught all day. If the children do not look at the large letters in the spelling–book, they need only walk outside and look at the large letters on the poster. If they do not care for the colored maps provided by the school, they can gape at the colored maps provided by the Daily Mail. If they tire of electricity, they can take to electric trams. If they are unmoved by music, they can take to drink. If they will not work so as to get a prize from their school, they may work to get a prize from Prizy Bits. If they cannot learn enough about law and citizenship to please the teacher, they learn enough about them to avoid the policeman. If they will not learn history forwards from the right end in the history books, they will learn it backwards from the wrong end in the party newspapers. And this is the tragedy of the whole affair: that the London poor, a particularly quick–witted and civilized class, learn everything tail foremost, learn even what is right in the way of what is wrong. They do not see the first principles of law in a law book; they only see its last results in the police news. They do not see the truths of politics in a general survey. They only see the lies of politics, at a General Election.

But whatever be the pathos of the London poor, it has nothing to do with being uneducated. So far from being without guidance, they are guided constantly, earnestly, excitedly; only guided wrong. The poor are not at all neglected, they are merely oppressed; nay, rather they are persecuted. There are
no people in London who are not appealed to by the rich; the appeals of the rich shriek from every hoarding and shout from every hustings. For it should always be remembered that the queer, abrupt ugliness of our streets and costumes are not the creation of democracy, but of aristocracy. The House of Lords objected to the Embankment being disfigured by trams. But most of the rich men who disfigure the street–walls with their wares are actually in the House of Lords. The peers make the country seats beautiful by making the town streets hideous. This, however, is parenthetical. The point is, that the poor in London are not left alone, but rather deafened and bewildered with raucous and despotic advice. They are not like sheep without a shepherd. They are more like one sheep whom twenty–seven shepherds are shouting at. All the newspapers, all the new advertisements, all the new medicines and new theologies, all the glare and blare of the gas and brass of modern times—it is against these that the national school must bear up if it can. I will not question that our elementary education is better than barbaric ignorance. But there is no barbaric ignorance. I do not doubt that our schools would be good for uninstructed boys. But there are no uninstructed boys. A modern London school ought not merely to be clearer, kindlier, more clever and more rapid than ignorance and darkness. It must also be clearer than a picture postcard, cleverer than a Limerick competition, quicker than the tram, and kindlier than the tavern. The school, in fact, has the responsibility of universal rivalry. We need not deny that everywhere there is a light that must conquer darkness. But here we demand a light that can conquer light.
I will take one case that will serve both as symbol and example: the case of color. We hear the realists (those sentimental fellows) talking about the gray streets and the gray lives of the poor. But whatever the poor streets are they are not gray; but motley, striped, spotted, piebald and patched like a quilt. Hoxton is not aesthetic enough to be monochrome; and there is nothing of the Celtic twilight about it. As a matter of fact, a London gutter-boy walks unscathed among furnaces of color. Watch him walk along a line of hoardings, and you will see him now against glowing green, like a traveler in a tropic forest; now black like a bird against the burning blue of the Midi; now passant across a field gules, like the golden leopards of England. He ought to understand the irrational rapture of that cry of Mr. Stephen Phillips about “that bluer blue, that greener green.” There is no blue much bluer than Reckitt’s Blue and no blacking blacker than Day and Martin’s; no more emphatic yellow than that of Colman’s Mustard. If, despite this chaos of color, like a shattered rainbow, the spirit of the small boy is not exactly intoxicated with art and culture, the cause certainly does not lie in universal grayness or the mere starving of his senses. It lies in the fact that the colors are presented in the wrong connection, on the wrong scale, and, above all, from the wrong motive. It is not colors he lacks, but a philosophy of colors. In short, there is nothing wrong with Reckitt’s Blue except that it is not Reckitt’s. Blue does not belong to Reckitt, but to the sky; black does not belong to Day and Martin, but to the abyss. Even the finest posters are only very little things on a very large scale. There is something specially irritant in this way about the iteration of advertisements of mustard: a condiment, a small luxury; a thing in its nature not to be taken in quantity. There is a special irony in these starving streets to see such a great deal of mustard to such very little meat. Yellow is a bright pigment; mustard is a pungent pleasure. But to look at these seas of yellow is to be like a man who should swallow gallons of mustard. He would either die, or lose the taste of mustard altogether.

Now suppose we compare these gigantic trivialities on the hoardings with those tiny and tremendous pictures in which the mediaevals recorded their dreams; little pictures where the blue sky is hardly longer than a single sapphire, and the fires of judgment only a pigmy patch of gold. The difference here is not
merely that poster art is in its nature more hasty than illumination art; it is not
even merely that the ancient artist was serving the Lord while the modern artist
is serving the lords. It is that the old artist contrived to convey an impression that
colors really were significant and precious things, like jewels and talismanic
stones. The color was often arbitrary; but it was always authoritative. If a bird
was blue, if a tree was golden, if a fish was silver, if a cloud was scarlet, the
artist managed to convey that these colors were important and almost painfully
intense; all the red red–hot and all the gold tried in the fire. Now that is the spirit
touching color which the schools must recover and protect if they are really to
give the children any imaginative appetite or pleasure in the thing. It is not so
much an indulgence in color; it is rather, if anything, a sort of fiery thrift. It
fenced in a green field in heraldry as straitly as a green field in peasant
proprietorship. It would not fling away gold leaf any more than gold coin; it
would not heedlessly pour out purple or crimson, any more than it would spill
good wine or shed blameless blood. That is the hard task before educationists in
this special matter; they have to teach people to relish colors like liquors. They
have the heavy business of turning drunkards into wine tasters. If even the
twentieth century succeeds in doing these things, it will almost catch up with the
twelfth.

The principle covers, however, the whole of modern life. Morris and the
merely aesthetic mediaevalists always indicated that a crowd in the time of
Chaucer would have been brightly clad and glittering, compared with a crowd in
the time of Queen Victoria. I am not so sure that the real distinction is here.
There would be brown frocks of friars in the first scene as well as brown bowlers
of clerks in the second. There would be purple plumes of factory girls in the
second scene as well as purple lenten vestments in the first. There would be
white waistcoats against white ermine; gold watch chains against gold lions. The
real difference is this: that the brown earth–color of the monk’s coat was
instinctively chosen to express labor and humility, whereas the brown color of
the clerk’s hat was not chosen to express anything. The monk did mean to say
that he robed himself in dust. I am sure the clerk does not mean to say that he
crowsns himself with clay. He is not putting dust on his head, as the only diadem
of man. Purple, at once rich and somber, does suggest a triumph temporarily
eclipsed by a tragedy. But the factory girl does not intend her hat to express a
triumph temporarily eclipsed by a tragedy; far from it. White ermine was meant
to express moral purity; white waistcoats were not. Gold lions do suggest a
flaming magnanimity; gold watch chains do not. The point is not that we have
lost the material hues, but that we have lost the trick of turning them to the best advantage. We are not like children who have lost their paint box and are left alone with a gray lead–pencil. We are like children who have mixed all the colors in the paint–box together and lost the paper of instructions. Even then (I do not deny) one has some fun.

Now this abundance of colors and loss of a color scheme is a pretty perfect parable of all that is wrong with our modern ideals and especially with our modern education. It is the same with ethical education, economic education, every sort of education. The growing London child will find no lack of highly controversial teachers who will teach him that geography means painting the map red; that economics means taxing the foreigner, that patriotism means the peculiarly un–English habit of flying a flag on Empire Day. In mentioning these examples specially I do not mean to imply that there are no similar crudities and popular fallacies upon the other political side. I mention them because they constitute a very special and arresting feature of the situation. I mean this, that there were always Radical revolutionists; but now there are Tory revolutionists also. The modern Conservative no longer conserves. He is avowedly an innovator. Thus all the current defenses of the House of Lords which describe it as a bulwark against the mob, are intellectually done for; the bottom has fallen out of them; because on five or six of the most turbulent topics of the day, the House of Lords is a mob itself; and exceedingly likely to behave like one.
IX

THE NEED FOR NARROWNESS

Through all this chaos, then we come back once more to our main conclusion. The true task of culture to-day is not a task of expansion, but very decidedly of selection—and rejection. The educationist must find a creed and teach it. Even if it be not a theological creed, it must still be as fastidious and as firm as theology. In short, it must be orthodox. The teacher may think it antiquated to have to decide precisely between the faith of Calvin and of Laud, the faith of Aquinas and of Swedenborg; but he still has to choose between the faith of Kipling and of Shaw, between the world of Blatchford and of General Booth. Call it, if you will, a narrow question whether your child shall be brought up by the vicar or the minister or the popish priest. You have still to face that larger, more liberal, more highly civilized question, of whether he shall be brought up by Harmsworth or by Pearson, by Mr. Eustace Miles with his Simple Life or Mr. Peter Keary with his Strenuous Life; whether he shall most eagerly read Miss Annie S. Swan or Mr. Bart Kennedy; in short, whether he shall end up in the mere violence of the S. D. F., or in the mere vulgarity of the Primrose League. They say that nowadays the creeds are crumbling; I doubt it, but at least the sects are increasing; and education must now be sectarian education, merely for practical purposes. Out of all this throng of theories it must somehow select a theory; out of all these thundering voices it must manage to hear a voice; out of all this awful and aching battle of blinding lights, without one shadow to give shape to them, it must manage somehow to trace and to track a star.

I have spoken so far of popular education, which began too vague and vast and which therefore has accomplished little. But as it happens there is in England something to compare it with. There is an institution, or class of institutions, which began with the same popular object, which has since followed a much narrower object, but which had the great advantage that it did follow some object, unlike our modern elementary schools.

In all these problems I should urge the solution which is positive, or, as silly people say, “optimistic.” I should set my face, that is, against most of the solutions that are solely negative and abolitionist. Most educators of the poor seem to think that they have to teach the poor man not to drink. I should be quite content if they teach him to drink; for it is mere ignorance about how to drink
and when to drink that is accountable for most of his tragedies. I do not propose (like some of my revolutionary friends) that we should abolish the public schools. I propose the much more lurid and desperate experiment that we should make them public. I do not wish to make Parliament stop working, but rather to make it work; not to shut up churches, but rather to open them; not to put out the lamp of learning or destroy the hedge of property, but only to make some rude effort to make universities fairly universal and property decently proper.

In many cases, let it be remembered, such action is not merely going back to the old ideal, but is even going back to the old reality. It would be a great step forward for the gin shop to go back to the inn. It is incontrovertibly true that to mediaevalize the public schools would be to democratize the public schools. Parliament did once really mean (as its name seems to imply) a place where people were allowed to talk. It is only lately that the general increase of efficiency, that is, of the Speaker, has made it mostly a place where people are prevented from talking. The poor do not go to the modern church, but they went to the ancient church all right; and if the common man in the past had a grave respect for property, it may conceivably have been because he sometimes had some of his own. I therefore can claim that I have no vulgar itch of innovation in anything I say about any of these institutions. Certainly I have none in that particular one which I am now obliged to pick out of the list; a type of institution to which I have genuine and personal reasons for being friendly and grateful: I mean the great Tudor foundations, the public schools of England. They have been praised for a great many things, mostly, I am sorry to say, praised by themselves and their children. And yet for some reason no one has ever praised them the one really convincing reason.
THE CASE FOR THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The word success can of course be used in two senses. It may be used with reference to a thing serving its immediate and peculiar purpose, as of a wheel going around; or it can be used with reference to a thing adding to the general welfare, as of a wheel being a useful discovery. It is one thing to say that Smith’s flying machine is a failure, and quite another to say that Smith has failed to make a flying machine. Now this is very broadly the difference between the old English public schools and the new democratic schools. Perhaps the old public schools are (as I personally think they are) ultimately weakening the country rather than strengthening it, and are therefore, in that ultimate sense, inefficient. But there is such a thing as being efficiently inefficient. You can make your flying ship so that it flies, even if you also make it so that it kills you. Now the public school system may not work satisfactorily, but it works; the public schools may not achieve what we want, but they achieve what they want. The popular elementary schools do not in that sense achieve anything at all. It is very difficult to point to any guttersnipe in the street and say that he embodies the ideal for which popular education has been working, in the sense that the fresh-faced, foolish boy in “Eton” does embody the ideal for which the headmasters of Harrow and Winchester have been working. The aristocratic educationists have the positive purpose of turning out gentlemen, and they do turn out gentlemen, even when they expel them. The popular educationists would say that they had the far nobler idea of turning out citizens. I concede that it is a much nobler idea, but where are the citizens? I know that the boy in “Eton” is stiff with a rather silly and sentimental stoicism, called being a man of the world. I do not fancy that the errand-boy is rigid with that republican stoicism that is called being a citizen. The schoolboy will really say with fresh and innocent hauteur, “I am an English gentleman.” I cannot so easily picture the errand-boy drawing up his head to the stars and answering, “Romanus civis sum.” Let it be granted that our elementary teachers are teaching the very broadest code of morals, while our great headmasters are teaching only the narrowest code of manners. Let it be granted that both these things are being taught. But only one of them is being learned.

It is always said that great reformers or masters of events can manage to bring
about some specific and practical reforms, but that they never fulfill their visions or satisfy their souls. I believe there is a real sense in which this apparent platitude is quite untrue. By a strange inversion the political idealist often does not get what he asks for, but does get what he wants. The silent pressure of his ideal lasts much longer and reshapes the world much more than the actualities by which he attempted to suggest it. What perishes is the letter, which he thought so practical. What endures is the spirit, which he felt to be unattainable and even unutterable. It is exactly his schemes that are not fulfilled; it is exactly his vision that is fulfilled. Thus the ten or twelve paper constitutions of the French Revolution, which seemed so business-like to the framers of them, seem to us to have flown away on the wind as the wildest fancies. What has not flown away, what is a fixed fact in Europe, is the ideal and vision. The Republic, the idea of a land full of mere citizens all with some minimum of manners and minimum of wealth, the vision of the eighteenth century, the reality of the twentieth. So I think it will generally be with the creator of social things, desirable or undesirable. All his schemes will fail, all his tools break in his hands. His compromises will collapse, his concessions will be useless. He must brace himself to bear his fate; he shall have nothing but his heart’s desire.

Now if one may compare very small things with very great, one may say that the English aristocratic schools can claim something of the same sort of success and solid splendor as the French democratic politics. At least they can claim the same sort of superiority over the distracted and fumbling attempts of modern England to establish democratic education. Such success as has attended the public schoolboy throughout the Empire, a success exaggerated indeed by himself, but still positive and a fact of a certain indisputable shape and size, has been due to the central and supreme circumstance that the managers of our public schools did know what sort of boy they liked. They wanted something and they got something; instead of going to work in the broad-minded manner and wanting everything and getting nothing.

The only thing in question is the quality of the thing they got. There is something highly maddening in the circumstance that when modern people attack an institution that really does demand reform, they always attack it for the wrong reasons. Thus many opponents of our public schools, imagining themselves to be very democratic, have exhausted themselves in an unmeaning attack upon the study of Greek. I can understand how Greek may be regarded as useless, especially by those thirsting to throw themselves into the cut throat commerce which is the negation of citizenship; but I do not understand how it
can be considered undemocratic. I quite understand why Mr. Carnegie has a hatred of Greek. It is obscurely founded on the firm and sound impression that in any self-governing Greek city he would have been killed. But I cannot comprehend why any chance democrat, say Mr. Quelch, or Mr. Will Crooks, I or Mr. John M. Robertson, should be opposed to people learning the Greek alphabet, which was the alphabet of liberty. Why should Radicals dislike Greek? In that language is written all the earliest and, Heaven knows, the most heroic history of the Radical party. Why should Greek disgust a democrat, when the very word democrat is Greek?

A similar mistake, though a less serious one, is merely attacking the athletics of public schools as something promoting animalism and brutality. Now brutality, in the only immoral sense, is not a vice of the English public schools. There is much moral bullying, owing to the general lack of moral courage in the public-school atmosphere. These schools do, upon the whole, encourage physical courage; but they do not merely discourage moral courage, they forbid it. The ultimate result of the thing is seen in the egregious English officer who cannot even endure to wear a bright uniform except when it is blurred and hidden in the smoke of battle. This, like all the affectations of our present plutocracy, is an entirely modern thing. It was unknown to the old aristocrats. The Black Prince would certainly have asked that any knight who had the courage to lift his crest among his enemies, should also have the courage to lift it among his friends. As regards moral courage, then it is not so much that the public schools support it feebly, as that they suppress it firmly. But physical courage they do, on the whole, support; and physical courage is a magnificent fundamental. The one great, wise Englishman of the eighteenth century said truly that if a man lost that virtue he could never be sure of keeping any other. Now it is one of the mean and morbid modern lies that physical courage is connected with cruelty. The Tolstoian and Kiplingite are nowhere more at one than in maintaining this. They have, I believe, some small sectarian quarrel with each other, the one saying that courage must be abandoned because it is connected with cruelty, and the other maintaining that cruelty is charming because it is a part of courage. But it is all, thank God, a lie. An energy and boldness of body may make a man stupid or reckless or dull or drunk or hungry, but it does not make him spiteful. And we may admit heartily (without joining in that perpetual praise which public-school men are always pouring upon themselves) that this does operate to the removal of mere evil cruelty in the public schools. English public school life is extremely like English public life,
for which it is the preparatory school. It is like it specially in this, that things are either very open, common and conventional, or else are very secret indeed. Now there is cruelty in public schools, just as there is kleptomania and secret drinking and vices without a name. But these things do not flourish in the full daylight and common consciousness of the school, and no more does cruelty. A tiny trio of sullen–looking boys gather in corners and seem to have some ugly business always; it may be indecent literature, it may be the beginning of drink, it may occasionally be cruelty to little boys. But on this stage the bully is not a braggart. The proverb says that bullies are always cowardly, but these bullies are more than cowardly; they are shy.

As a third instance of the wrong form of revolt against the public schools, I may mention the habit of using the word aristocracy with a double implication. To put the plain truth as briefly as possible, if aristocracy means rule by a rich ring, England has aristocracy and the English public schools support it. If it means rule by ancient families or flawless blood, England has not got aristocracy, and the public schools systematically destroy it. In these circles real aristocracy, like real democracy, has become bad form. A modern fashionable host dare not praise his ancestry; it would so often be an insult to half the other oligarchs at table, who have no ancestry. We have said he has not the moral courage to wear his uniform; still less has he the moral courage to wear his coat–of–arms. The whole thing now is only a vague hotch–potch of nice and nasty gentlemen. The nice gentleman never refers to anyone else’s father, the nasty gentleman never refers to his own. That is the only difference, the rest is the public–school manner. But Eton and Harrow have to be aristocratic because they consist so largely of parvenues. The public school is not a sort of refuge for aristocrats, like an asylum, a place where they go in and never come out. It is a factory for aristocrats; they come out without ever having perceptibly gone in. The poor little private schools, in their old–world, sentimental, feudal style, used to stick up a notice, “For the Sons of Gentlemen only.” If the public schools stuck up a notice it ought to be inscribed, “For the Fathers of Gentlemen only.” In two generations they can do the trick.
XI

THE SCHOOL FOR HYPOCRITES

These are the false accusations; the accusation of classicism, the accusation of cruelty, and the accusation of an exclusiveness based on perfection of pedigree. English public–school boys are not pedants, they are not torturers; and they are not, in the vast majority of cases, people fiercely proud of their ancestry, or even people with any ancestry to be proud of. They are taught to be courteous, to be good tempered, to be brave in a bodily sense, to be clean in a bodily sense; they are generally kind to animals, generally civil to servants, and to anyone in any sense their equal, the jolliest companions on earth. Is there then anything wrong in the public–school ideal? I think we all feel there is something very wrong in it, but a blinding network of newspaper phraseology obscures and entangles us; so that it is hard to trace to its beginning, beyond all words and phrases, the faults in this great English achievement.

Surely, when all is said, the ultimate objection to the English public school is its utterly blatant and indecent disregard of the duty of telling the truth. I know there does still linger among maiden ladies in remote country houses a notion that English schoolboys are taught to tell the truth, but it cannot be maintained seriously for a moment. Very occasionally, very vaguely, English schoolboys are told not to tell lies, which is a totally different thing. I may silently support all the obscene fictions and forgeries in the universe, without once telling a lie. I may wear another man’s coat, steal another man’s wit, apostatize to another man’s creed, or poison another man’s coffee, all without ever telling a lie. But no English school–boy is ever taught to tell the truth, for the very simple reason that he is never taught to desire the truth. From the very first he is taught to be totally careless about whether a fact is a fact; he is taught to care only whether the fact can be used on his “side” when he is engaged in “playing the game.” He takes sides in his Union debating society to settle whether Charles I ought to have been killed, with the same solemn and pompous frivolity with which he takes sides in the cricket field to decide whether Rugby or Westminster shall win. He is never allowed to admit the abstract notion of the truth, that the match is a matter of what may happen, but that Charles I is a matter of what did happen—or did not. He is Liberal or Tory at the general election exactly as he is Oxford or Cambridge at the boat race. He knows that sport deals with the unknown; he
has not even a notion that politics should deal with the known. If anyone really
doubts this self–evident proposition, that the public schools definitely discourage
the love of truth, there is one fact which I should think would settle him.
England is the country of the Party System, and it has always been chiefly run by
public–school men. Is there anyone out of Hanwell who will maintain that the
Party System, whatever its conveniences or inconveniences, could have been
created by people particularly fond of truth?
The very English happiness on this point is itself a hypocrisy. When a man
really tells the truth, the first truth he tells is that he himself is a liar. David said
in his haste, that is, in his honesty, that all men are liars. It was afterwards, in
some leisurely official explanation, that he said the Kings of Israel at least told
the truth. When Lord Curzon was Viceroy he delivered a moral lecture to the
Indians on their reputed indifference to veracity, to actuality and intellectual
honor. A great many people indignantly discussed whether orientals deserved to
receive this rebuke; whether Indians were indeed in a position to receive such
severe admonition. No one seemed to ask, as I should venture to ask, whether
Lord Curzon was in a position to give it. He is an ordinary party politician; a
party politician means a politician who might have belonged to either party.
Being such a person, he must again and again, at every twist and turn of party
strategy, either have deceived others or grossly deceived himself. I do not know
the East; nor do I like what I know. I am quite ready to believe that when Lord
Curzon went out he found a very false atmosphere. I only say it must have been
something startlingly and chokingly false if it was falser than that English
atmosphere from which he came. The English Parliament actually cares for
everything except veracity. The public–school man is kind, courageous, polite,
clean, companionable; but, in the most awful sense of the words, the truth is not
in him.
This weakness of untruthfulness in the English public schools, in the English
political system, and to some extent in the English character, is a weakness
which necessarily produces a curious crop of superstitions, of lying legends, of
evident delusions clung to through low spiritual self–indulgence. There are so
many of these public–school superstitions that I have here only space for one of
them, which may be called the superstition of soap. It appears to have been
shared by the ablutionary Pharisees, who resembled the English public–school
aristocrats in so many respects: in their care about club rules and traditions, in
their offensive optimism at the expense of other people, and above all in their
unimaginative plodding patriotism in the worst interests of their country. Now
the old human common sense about washing is that it is a great pleasure. Water (applied externally) is a splendid thing, like wine. Sybarites bathe in wine, and Nonconformists drink water; but we are not concerned with these frantic exceptions. Washing being a pleasure, it stands to reason that rich people can afford it more than poor people, and as long as this was recognized all was well; and it was very right that rich people should offer baths to poor people, as they might offer any other agreeable thing—a drink or a donkey ride. But one dreadful day, somewhere about the middle of the nineteenth century, somebody discovered (somebody pretty well off) the two great modern truths, that washing is a virtue in the rich and therefore a duty in the poor. For a duty is a virtue that one can’t do. And a virtue is generally a duty that one can do quite easily; like the bodily cleanliness of the upper classes. But in the public-school tradition of public life, soap has become creditable simply because it is pleasant. Baths are represented as a part of the decay of the Roman Empire; but the same baths are represented as part of the energy and rejuvenation of the British Empire. There are distinguished public school men, bishops, dons, headmasters, and high politicians, who, in the course of the eulogies which from time to time they pass upon themselves, have actually identified physical cleanliness with moral purity. They say (if I remember rightly) that a public-school man is clean inside and out. As if everyone did not know that while saints can afford to be dirty, seducers have to be clean. As if everyone did not know that the harlot must be clean, because it is her business to captivate, while the good wife may be dirty, because it is her business to clean. As if we did not all know that whenever God’s thunder cracks above us, it is very likely indeed to find the simplest man in a muck cart and the most complex blackguard in a bath.

There are other instances, of course, of this oily trick of turning the pleasures of a gentleman into the virtues of an Anglo-Saxon. Sport, like soap, is an admirable thing, but, like soap, it is an agreeable thing. And it does not sum up all mortal merits to be a sportsman playing the game in a world where it is so often necessary to be a workman doing the work. By all means let a gentleman congratulate himself that he has not lost his natural love of pleasure, as against the blase, and unchildlike. But when one has the childlike joy it is best to have also the childlike unconsciousness; and I do not think we should have special affection for the little boy who ever lastingly explained that it was his duty to play Hide and Seek and one of his family virtues to be prominent in Puss in the Corner.

Another such irritating hypocrisy is the oligarchic attitude towards mendicity
as against organized charity. Here again, as in the case of cleanliness and of athletics, the attitude would be perfectly human and intelligible if it were not maintained as a merit. Just as the obvious thing about soap is that it is a convenience, so the obvious thing about beggars is that they are an inconvenience. The rich would deserve very little blame if they simply said that they never dealt directly with beggars, because in modern urban civilization it is impossible to deal directly with beggars; or if not impossible, at least very difficult. But these people do not refuse money to beggars on the ground that such charity is difficult. They refuse it on the grossly hypocritical ground that such charity is easy. They say, with the most grotesque gravity, “Anyone can put his hand in his pocket and give a poor man a penny; but we, philanthropists, go home and brood and travail over the poor man’s troubles until we have discovered exactly what jail, reformatory, workhouse, or lunatic asylum it will really be best for him to go to.” This is all sheer lying. They do not brood about the man when they get home, and if they did it would not alter the original fact that their motive for discouraging beggars is the perfectly rational one that beggars are a bother. A man may easily be forgiven for not doing this or that incidental act of charity, especially when the question is as genuinely difficult as is the case of mendicity. But there is something quite pestilently Pecksniffian about shrinking from a hard task on the plea that it is not hard enough. If any man will really try talking to the ten beggars who come to his door he will soon find out whether it is really so much easier than the labor of writing a check for a hospital.
THE STALENESS OF THE NEW SCHOOLS

For this deep and disabling reason therefore, its cynical and abandoned indifference to the truth, the English public school does not provide us with the ideal that we require. We can only ask its modern critics to remember that right or wrong the thing can be done; the factory is working, the wheels are going around, the gentlemen are being produced, with their soap, cricket and organized charity all complete. And in this, as we have said before, the public school really has an advantage over all the other educational schemes of our time. You can pick out a public–school man in any of the many companies into which they stray, from a Chinese opium den to a German Jewish dinner–party. But I doubt if you could tell which little match girl had been brought up by undenominational religion and which by secular education. The great English aristocracy which has ruled us since the Reformation is really, in this sense, a model to the moderns. It did have an ideal, and therefore it has produced a reality.

We may repeat here that these pages propose mainly to show one thing: that progress ought to be based on principle, while our modern progress is mostly based on precedent. We go, not by what may be affirmed in theory, but by what has been already admitted in practice. That is why the Jacobites are the last Tories in history with whom a high–spirited person can have much sympathy. They wanted a specific thing; they were ready to go forward for it, and so they were also ready to go back for it. But modern Tories have only the dullness of defending situations that they had not the excitement of creating. Revolutionists make a reform, Conservatives only conserve the reform. They never reform the reform, which is often very much wanted. Just as the rivalry of armaments is only a sort of sulky plagiarism, so the rivalry of parties is only a sort of sulky inheritance. Men have votes, so women must soon have votes; poor children are taught by force, so they must soon be fed by force; the police shut public houses by twelve o’clock, so soon they must shut them by eleven o’clock; children stop at school till they are fourteen, so soon they will stop till they are forty. No gleam of reason, no momentary return to first principles, no abstract asking of any obvious question, can interrupt this mad and monotonous gallop of mere progress by precedent. It is a good way to prevent real revolution. By this logic of events, the Radical gets as much into a rut as the Conservative. We meet one
hoary old lunatic who says his grandfather told him to stand by one stile. We meet another hoary old lunatic who says his grandfather told him only to walk along one lane.

I say we may repeat here this primary part of the argument, because we have just now come to the place where it is most startlingly and strongly shown. The final proof that our elementary schools have no definite ideal of their own is the fact that they so openly imitate the ideals of the public schools. In the elementary schools we have all the ethical prejudices and exaggerations of Eton and Harrow carefully copied for people to whom they do not even roughly apply. We have the same wildly disproportionate doctrine of the effect of physical cleanliness on moral character. Educators and educational politicians declare, amid warm cheers, that cleanliness is far more important than all the squabbles about moral and religious training. It would really seem that so long as a little boy washes his hands it does not matter whether he is washing off his mother’s jam or his brother’s gore. We have the same grossly insincere pretense that sport always encourages a sense of honor, when we know that it often ruins it. Above all, we have the same great upperclass assumption that things are done best by large institutions handling large sums of money and ordering everybody about; and that trivial and impulsive charity is in some way contemptible. As Mr. Blatchford says, “The world does not want piety, but soap—and Socialism.” Piety is one of the popular virtues, whereas soap and Socialism are two hobbies of the upper middle class.

These “healthy” ideals, as they are called, which our politicians and schoolmasters have borrowed from the aristocratic schools and applied to the democratic, are by no means particularly appropriate to an impoverished democracy. A vague admiration for organized government and a vague distrust of individual aid cannot be made to fit in at all into the lives of people among whom kindness means lending a saucepan and honor means keeping out of the workhouse. It resolves itself either into discouraging that system of prompt and patchwork generosity which is a daily glory of the poor, or else into hazy advice to people who have no money not to give it recklessly away. Nor is the exaggerated glory of athletics, defensible enough in dealing with the rich who, if they did not romp and race, would eat and drink unwholesomely, by any means so much to the point when applied to people, most of whom will take a great deal of exercise anyhow, with spade or hammer, pickax or saw. And for the third case, of washing, it is obvious that the same sort of rhetoric about corporeal daintiness which is proper to an ornamental class cannot, merely as it stands, be
applicable to a dustman. A gentleman is expected to be substantially spotless all the time. But it is no more discreditable for a scavenger to be dirty than for a deep-sea diver to be wet. A sweep is no more disgraced when he is covered with soot than Michael Angelo when he is covered with clay, or Bayard when he is covered with blood. Nor have these extenders of the public-school tradition done or suggested anything by way of a substitute for the present snobbish system which makes cleanliness almost impossible to the poor; I mean the general ritual of linen and the wearing of the cast-off clothes of the rich. One man moves into another man’s clothes as he moves into another man’s house. No wonder that our educationists are not horrified at a man picking up the aristocrat’s second-hand trousers, when they themselves have only taken up the aristocrat’s second-hand ideas.
There is one thing at least of which there is never so much as a whisper inside
the popular schools; and that is the opinion of the people. The only persons who
seem to have nothing to do with the education of the children are the parents.
Yet the English poor have very definite traditions in many ways. They are
hidden under embarrassment and irony; and those psychologists who have
disentangled them talk of them as very strange, barbaric and secretive things.
But, as a matter of fact, the traditions of the poor are mostly simply the traditions
of humanity, a thing which many of us have not seen for some time. For
instance, workingmen have a tradition that if one is talking about a vile thing it is
better to talk of it in coarse language; one is the less likely to be seduced into
excusing it. But mankind had this tradition also, until the Puritans and their
children, the Ibsenites, started the opposite idea, that it does not matter what you
say so long as you say it with long words and a long face. Or again, the educated
classes have tabooed most jesting about personal appearance; but in doing this
they taboo not only the humor of the slums, but more than half the healthy
literature of the world; they put polite nose-bags on the noses of Punch and
Bardolph, Stiggins and Cyrano de Bergerac. Again, the educated classes have
adopted a hideous and heathen custom of considering death as too dreadful to
talk about, and letting it remain a secret for each person, like some private
malformation. The poor, on the contrary, make a great gossip and display about
bereavement; and they are right. They have hold of a truth of psychology which
is at the back of all the funeral customs of the children of men. The way to lessen
sorrow is to make a lot of it. The way to endure a painful crisis is to insist very
much that it is a crisis; to permit people who must feel sad at least to feel
important. In this the poor are simply the priests of the universal civilization; and
in their stuffy feasts and solemn chattering there is the smell of the baked meats
of Hamlet and the dust and echo of the funeral games of Patroclus.

The things philanthropists barely excuse (or do not excuse) in the life of the
laboring classes are simply the things we have to excuse in all the greatest
monuments of man. It may be that the laborer is as gross as Shakespeare or as
garrulous as Homer; that if he is religious he talks nearly as much about hell as
Dante; that if he is worldly he talks nearly as much about drink as Dickens. Nor
is the poor man without historic support if he thinks less of that ceremonial washing which Christ dismissed, and rather more of that ceremonial drinking which Christ specially sanctified. The only difference between the poor man of to–day and the saints and heroes of history is that which in all classes separates the common man who can feel things from the great man who can express them. What he feels is merely the heritage of man. Now nobody expects of course that the cabmen and coal–heavers can be complete instructors of their children any more than the squires and colonels and tea merchants are complete instructors of their children. There must be an educational specialist in loco parentis. But the master at Harrow is in loco parentis; the master in Hoxton is rather contra parentem. The vague politics of the squire, the vaguer virtues of the colonel, the soul and spiritual yearnings of a tea merchant, are, in veritable practice, conveyed to the children of these people at the English public schools. But I wish here to ask a very plain and emphatic question. Can anyone alive even pretend to point out any way in which these special virtues and traditions of the poor are reproduced in the education of the poor? I do not wish the coster’s irony to appeal as coarsely in the school as it does in the tap room; but does it appear at all? Is the child taught to sympathize at all with his father’s admirable cheerfulness and slang? I do not expect the pathetic, eager pietas of the mother, with her funeral clothes and funeral baked meats, to be exactly imitated in the educational system; but has it any influence at all on the educational system? Does any elementary schoolmaster accord it even an instant’s consideration or respect? I do not expect the schoolmaster to hate hospitals and C.O.S. centers so much as the schoolboy’s father; but does he hate them at all? Does he sympathize in the least with the poor man’s point of honor against official institutions? Is it not quite certain that the ordinary elementary schoolmaster will think it not merely natural but simply conscientious to eradicate all these rugged legends of a laborious people, and on principle to preach soap and Socialism against beer and liberty? In the lower classes the school master does not work for the parent, but against the parent. Modern education means handing down the customs of the minority, and rooting out the customs of the majority. Instead of their Christlike charity, their Shakespearean laughter and their high Homeric reverence for the dead, the poor have imposed on them mere pedantic copies of the prejudices of the remote rich. They must think a bathroom a necessity because to the lucky it is a luxury; they must swing Swedish clubs because their masters are afraid of English cudgels; and they must get over their prejudice against being fed by the parish, because aristocrats feel no shame about being
fed by the nation.
XIV

FOLLY AND FEMALE EDUCATION

It is the same in the case of girls. I am often solemnly asked what I think of the new ideas about female education. But there are no new ideas about female education. There is not, there never has been, even the vestige of a new idea. All the educational reformers did was to ask what was being done to boys and then go and do it to girls; just as they asked what was being taught to young squires and then taught it to young chimney sweeps. What they call new ideas are very old ideas in the wrong place. Boys play football, why shouldn’t girls play football; boys have school colors, why shouldn’t girls have school–colors; boys go in hundreds to day–schools, why shouldn’t girls go in hundreds to day–schools; boys go to Oxford, why shouldn’t girls go to Oxford—in short, boys grow mustaches, why shouldn’t girls grow mustaches—that is about their notion of a new idea. There is no brain–work in the thing at all; no root query of what sex is, of whether it alters this or that, and why, anymore than there is any imaginative grip of the humor and heart of the populace in the popular education. There is nothing but plodding, elaborate, elephantine imitation. And just as in the case of elementary teaching, the cases are of a cold and reckless inappropriateness. Even a savage could see that bodily things, at least, which are good for a man are very likely to be bad for a woman. Yet there is no boy’s game, however brutal, which these mild lunatics have not promoted among girls. To take a stronger case, they give girls very heavy home–work; never reflecting that all girls have home–work already in their homes. It is all a part of the same silly subjugation; there must be a hard stick–up collar round the neck of a woman, because it is already a nuisance round the neck of a man. Though a Saxon serf, if he wore that collar of cardboard, would ask for his collar of brass.

It will then be answered, not without a sneer, “And what would you prefer? Would you go back to the elegant early Victorian female, with ringlets and smelling–bottle, doing a little in water colors, dabbling a little in Italian, playing a little on the harp, writing in vulgar albums and painting on senseless screens? Do you prefer that?” To which I answer, “Emphatically, yes.” I solidly prefer it to the new female education, for this reason, that I can see in it an intellectual design, while there is none in the other. I am by no means sure that even in point of practical fact that elegant female would not have been more than a match for
most of the inelegant females. I fancy Jane Austen was stronger, sharper and shrewder than Charlotte Bronte; I am quite certain she was stronger, sharper and shrewder than George Eliot. She could do one thing neither of them could do: she could coolly and sensibly describe a man. I am not sure that the old great lady who could only smatter Italian was not more vigorous than the new great lady who can only stammer American; nor am I certain that the bygone duchesses who were scarcely successful when they painted Melrose Abbey, were so much more weak–minded than the modern duchesses who paint only their own faces, and are bad at that. But that is not the point. What was the theory, what was the idea, in their old, weak water–colors and their shaky Italian? The idea was the same which in a ruder rank expressed itself in home–made wines and hereditary recipes; and which still, in a thousand unexpected ways, can be found clinging to the women of the poor. It was the idea I urged in the second part of this book: that the world must keep one great amateur, lest we all become artists and perish. Somebody must renounce all specialist conquests, that she may conquer all the conquerors. That she may be a queen of life, she must not be a private soldier in it. I do not think the elegant female with her bad Italian was a perfect product, any more than I think the slum woman talking gin and funerals is a perfect product; alas! there are few perfect products. But they come from a comprehensible idea; and the new woman comes from nothing and nowhere. It is right to have an ideal, it is right to have the right ideal, and these two have the right ideal. The slum mother with her funerals is the degenerate daughter of Antigone, the obstinate priestess of the household gods. The lady talking bad Italian was the decayed tenth cousin of Portia, the great and golden Italian lady, the Renascence amateur of life, who could be a barrister because she could be anything. Sunken and neglected in the sea of modern monotony and imitation, the types hold tightly to their original truths. Antigone, ugly, dirty and often drunken, will still bury her father. The elegant female, vapid and fading away to nothing, still feels faintly the fundamental difference between herself and her husband: that he must be Something in the City, that she may be everything in the country.

There was a time when you and I and all of us were all very close to God; so that even now the color of a pebble (or a paint), the smell of a flower (or a firework), comes to our hearts with a kind of authority and certainty; as if they were fragments of a muddled message, or features of a forgotten face. To pour that fiery simplicity upon the whole of life is the only real aim of education; and closest to the child comes the woman—she understands. To say what she
understands is beyond me; save only this, that it is not a solemnity. Rather it is a towering levity, an uproarious amateurishness of the universe, such as we felt when we were little, and would as soon sing as garden, as soon paint as run. To smatter the tongues of men and angels, to dabble in the dreadful sciences, to juggle with pillars and pyramids and toss up the planets like balls, this is that inner audacity and indifference which the human soul, like a conjurer catching oranges, must keep up forever. This is that insanely frivolous thing we call sanity. And the elegant female, drooping her ringlets over her water–colors, knew it and acted on it. She was juggling with frantic and flaming suns. She was maintaining the bold equilibrium of inferiorities which is the most mysterious of superiorities and perhaps the most unattainable. She was maintaining the prime truth of woman, the universal mother: that if a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly.
PART FIVE

THE HOME OF MAN
I

THE EMPIRE OF THE INSECT

A cultivated Conservative friend of mine once exhibited great distress because in a gay moment I once called Edmund Burke an atheist. I need scarcely say that the remark lacked something of biographical precision; it was meant to. Burke was certainly not an atheist in his conscious cosmic theory, though he had not a special and flaming faith in God, like Robespierre. Nevertheless, the remark had reference to a truth which it is here relevant to repeat. I mean that in the quarrel over the French Revolution, Burke did stand for the atheistic attitude and mode of argument, as Robespierre stood for the theistic. The Revolution appealed to the idea of an abstract and eternal justice, beyond all local custom or convenience. If there are commands of God, then there must be rights of man. Here Burke made his brilliant diversion; he did not attack the Robespierre doctrine with the old mediaeval doctrine of jus divinum (which, like the Robespierre doctrine, was theistic), he attacked it with the modern argument of scientific relativity; in short, the argument of evolution. He suggested that humanity was everywhere molded by or fitted to its environment and institutions; in fact, that each people practically got, not only the tyrant it deserved, but the tyrant it ought to have. “I know nothing of the rights of men,” he said, “but I know something of the rights of Englishmen.” There you have the essential atheist. His argument is that we have got some protection by natural accident and growth; and why should we profess to think beyond it, for all the world as if we were the images of God! We are born under a House of Lords, as birds under a house of leaves; we live under a monarchy as niggers live under a tropic sun; it is not their fault if they are slaves, and it is not ours if we are snobs. Thus, long before Darwin struck his great blow at democracy, the essential of the Darwinian argument had been already urged against the French Revolution. Man, said Burke in effect, must adapt himself to everything, like an animal; he must not try to alter everything, like an angel. The last weak cry of the pious, pretty, half–artificial optimism and deism of the eighteenth century came in the voice of Sterne, saying, “God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.” And Burke, the iron evolutionist, essentially answered, “No; God tempers the shorn lamb to the wind.” It is the lamb that has to adapt himself. That is, he either dies or becomes a particular kind of lamb who likes standing in a draught.
The subconscious popular instinct against Darwinism was not a mere offense at the grotesque notion of visiting one’s grandfather in a cage in the Regent’s Park. Men go in for drink, practical jokes and many other grotesque things; they do not much mind making beasts of themselves, and would not much mind having beasts made of their forefathers. The real instinct was much deeper and much more valuable. It was this: that when once one begins to think of man as a shifting and alterable thing, it is always easy for the strong and crafty to twist him into new shapes for all kinds of unnatural purposes. The popular instinct sees in such developments the possibility of backs bowed and hunch–backed for their burden, or limbs twisted for their task. It has a very well–grounded guess that whatever is done swiftly and systematically will mostly be done by a successful class and almost solely in their interests. It has therefore a vision of inhuman hybrids and half–human experiments much in the style of Mr. Wells’s “Island of Dr. Moreau.” The rich man may come to breeding a tribe of dwarfs to be his jockeys, and a tribe of giants to be his hall–porters. Grooms might be born bow–legged and tailors born cross–legged; perfumers might have long, large noses and a crouching attitude, like hounds of scent; and professional wine–tasters might have the horrible expression of one tasting wine stamped upon their faces as infants. Whatever wild image one employs it cannot keep pace with the panic of the human fancy, when once it supposes that the fixed type called man could be changed. If some millionaire wanted arms, some porter must grow ten arms like an octopus; if he wants legs, some messenger–boy must go with a hundred trotting legs like a centipede. In the distorted mirror of hypothesis, that is, of the unknown, men can dimly see such monstrous and evil shapes; men run all to eye, or all to fingers, with nothing left but one nostril or one ear. That is the nightmare with which the mere notion of adaptation threatens us. That is the nightmare that is not so very far from the reality.

It will be said that not the wildest evolutionist really asks that we should become in any way unhuman or copy any other animal. Pardon me, that is exactly what not merely the wildest evolutionists urge, but some of the tamest evolutionists too. There has risen high in recent history an important cultus which bids fair to be the religion of the future—which means the religion of those few weak–minded people who live in the future. It is typical of our time that it has to look for its god through a microscope; and our time has marked a definite adoration of the insect. Like most things we call new, of course, it is not at all new as an idea; it is only new as an idolatry. Virgil takes bees seriously but I doubt if he would have kept bees as carefully as he wrote about them. The wise
king told the sluggard to watch the ant, a charming occupation—for a sluggard. But in our own time has appeared a very different tone, and more than one great man, as well as numberless intelligent men, have in our time seriously suggested that we should study the insect because we are his inferiors. The old moralists merely took the virtues of man and distributed them quite decoratively and arbitrarily among the animals. The ant was an almost heraldic symbol of industry, as the lion was of courage, or, for the matter of that, the pelican of charity. But if the mediaevals had been convinced that a lion was not courageous, they would have dropped the lion and kept the courage; if the pelican is not charitable, they would say, so much the worse for the pelican. The old moralists, I say, permitted the ant to enforce and typify man’s morality; they never allowed the ant to upset it. They used the ant for industry as the lark for punctuality; they looked up at the flapping birds and down at the crawling insects for a homely lesson. But we have lived to see a sect that does not look down at the insects, but looks up at the insects, that asks us essentially to bow down and worship beetles, like ancient Egyptians.

Maurice Maeterlinck is a man of unmistakable genius, and genius always carries a magnifying glass. In the terrible crystal of his lens we have seen the bees not as a little yellow swarm, but rather in golden armies and hierarchies of warriors and queens. Imagination perpetually peers and creeps further down the avenues and vistas in the tubes of science, and one fancies every frantic reversal of proportions; the earwig striding across the echoing plain like an elephant, or the grasshopper coming roaring above our roofs like a vast aeroplane, as he leaps from Hertfordshire to Surrey. One seems to enter in a dream a temple of enormous entomology, whose architecture is based on something wilder than arms or backbones; in which the ribbed columns have the half-crawling look of dim and monstrous caterpillars; or the dome is a starry spider hung horribly in the void. There is one of the modern works of engineering that gives one something of this nameless fear of the exaggerations of an underworld; and that is the curious curved architecture of the under ground railway, commonly called the Twopenny Tube. Those squat archways, without any upright line or pillar, look as if they had been tunnelled by huge worms who have never learned to lift their heads. It is the very underground palace of the Serpent, the spirit of changing shape and color, that is the enemy of man.

But it is not merely by such strange aesthetic suggestions that writers like Maeterlinck have influenced us in the matter; there is also an ethical side to the business. The upshot of M. Maeterlinck’s book on bees is an admiration, one
might also say an envy, of their collective spirituality; of the fact that they live only for something which he calls the Soul of the Hive. And this admiration for the communal morality of insects is expressed in many other modern writers in various quarters and shapes; in Mr. Benjamin Kidd’s theory of living only for the evolutionary future of our race, and in the great interest of some Socialists in ants, which they generally prefer to bees, I suppose, because they are not so brightly colored. Not least among the hundred evidences of this vague insectolatry are the floods of flattery poured by modern people on that energetic nation of the Far East of which it has been said that “Patriotism is its only religion”; or, in other words, that it lives only for the Soul of the Hive. When at long intervals of the centuries Christendom grows weak, morbid or skeptical, and mysterious Asia begins to move against us her dim populations and to pour them westward like a dark movement of matter, in such cases it has been very common to compare the invasion to a plague of lice or incessant armies of locusts. The Eastern armies were indeed like insects; in their blind, busy destructiveness, in their black nihilism of personal outlook, in their hateful indifference to individual life and love, in their base belief in mere numbers, in their pessimistic courage and their atheistic patriotism, the riders and raiders of the East are indeed like all the creeping things of the earth. But never before, I think, have Christians called a Turk a locust and meant it as a compliment. Now for the first time we worship as well as fear; and trace with adoration that enormous form advancing vast and vague out of Asia, faintly discernible amid the mystic clouds of winged creatures hung over the wasted lands, thronging the skies like thunder and discoloring the skies like rain; Beelzebub, the Lord of Flies.

In resisting this horrible theory of the Soul of the Hive, we of Christendom stand not for ourselves, but for all humanity; for the essential and distinctive human idea that one good and happy man is an end in himself, that a soul is worth saving. Nay, for those who like such biological fancies it might well be said that we stand as chiefs and champions of a whole section of nature, princes of the house whose cognizance is the backbone, standing for the milk of the individual mother and the courage of the wandering cub, representing the pathetic chivalry of the dog, the humor and perversity of cats, the affection of the tranquil horse, the loneliness of the lion. It is more to the point, however, to urge that this mere glorification of society as it is in the social insects is a transformation and a dissolution in one of the outlines which have been specially the symbols of man. In the cloud and confusion of the flies and bees is growing
fainter and fainter, as is finally disappearing, the idea of the human family. The hive has become larger than the house, the bees are destroying their captors; what the locust hath left, the caterpillar hath eaten; and the little house and garden of our friend Jones is in a bad way.
II

THE FALLACY OF THE UMBRELLA STAND

When Lord Morley said that the House of Lords must be either mended or ended, he used a phrase which has caused some confusion; because it might seem to suggest that mending and ending are somewhat similar things. I wish specially to insist on the fact that mending and ending are opposite things. You mend a thing because you like it; you end a thing because you don’t. To mend is to strengthen. I, for instance, disbelieve in oligarchy; so I would no more mend the House of Lords than I would mend a thumbscrew. On the other hand, I do believe in the family; therefore I would mend the family as I would mend a chair; and I will never deny for a moment that the modern family is a chair that wants mending. But here comes in the essential point about the mass of modern advanced sociologists. Here are two institutions that have always been fundamental with mankind, the family and the state. Anarchists, I believe, disbelieve in both. It is quite unfair to say that Socialists believe in the state, but do not believe in the family; thousands of Socialists believe more in the family than any Tory. But it is true to say that while anarchists would end both, Socialists are specially engaged in mending (that is, strengthening and renewing) the state; and they are not specially engaged in strengthening and renewing the family. They are not doing anything to define the functions of father, mother, and child, as such; they are not tightening the machine up again; they are not blackening in again the fading lines of the old drawing. With the state they are doing this; they are sharpening its machinery, they are blackening in its black dogmatic lines, they are making mere government in every way stronger and in some ways harsher than before. While they leave the home in ruins, they restore the hive, especially the stings. Indeed, some schemes of labor and Poor Law reform recently advanced by distinguished Socialists, amount to little more than putting the largest number of people in the despotic power of Mr. Bumble. Apparently, progress means being moved on—by the police.

The point it is my purpose to urge might perhaps be suggested thus: that Socialists and most social reformers of their color are vividly conscious of the line between the kind of things that belong to the state and the kind of things that belong to mere chaos or uncoercible nature; they may force children to go to school before the sun rises, but they will not try to force the sun to rise; they will
not, like Canute, banish the sea, but only the sea-bathers. But inside the outline of the state their lines are confused, and entities melt into each other. They have no firm instinctive sense of one thing being in its nature private and another public, of one thing being necessarily bond and another free. That is why piece by piece, and quite silently, personal liberty is being stolen from Englishmen, as personal land has been silently stolen ever since the sixteenth century.

I can only put it sufficiently curtly in a careless simile. A Socialist means a man who thinks a walking-stick like an umbrella because they both go into the umbrella-stand. Yet they are as different as a battle-ax and a bootjack. The essential idea of an umbrella is breadth and protection. The essential idea of a stick is slenderness and, partly, attack. The stick is the sword, the umbrella is the shield, but it is a shield against another and more nameless enemy—the hostile but anonymous universe. More properly, therefore, the umbrella is the roof; it is a kind of collapsible house. But the vital difference goes far deeper than this; it branches off into two kingdoms of man’s mind, with a chasm between. For the point is this: that the umbrella is a shield against an enemy so actual as to be a mere nuisance; whereas the stick is a sword against enemies so entirely imaginary as to be a pure pleasure. The stick is not merely a sword, but a court sword; it is a thing of purely ceremonial swagger. One cannot express the emotion in any way except by saying that a man feels more like a man with a stick in his hand, just as he feels more like a man with a sword at his side. But nobody ever had any swelling sentiments about an umbrella; it is a convenience, like a door scraper. An umbrella is a necessary evil. A walking-stick is a quite unnecessary good. This, I fancy, is the real explanation of the perpetual losing of umbrellas; one does not hear of people losing walking sticks. For a walking-stick is a pleasure, a piece of real personal property; it is missed even when it is not needed. When my right hand forgets its stick may it forget its cunning. But anybody may forget an umbrella, as anybody might forget a shed that he has stood up in out of the rain. Anybody can forget a necessary thing.

If I might pursue the figure of speech, I might briefly say that the whole Collectivist error consists in saying that because two men can share an umbrella, therefore two men can share a walking-stick. Umbrellas might possibly be replaced by some kind of common awnings covering certain streets from particular showers. But there is nothing but nonsense in the notion of swinging a communal stick; it is as if one spoke of twirling a communal mustache. It will be said that this is a frank fantasia and that no sociologists suggest such follies. Pardon me if they do. I will give a precise parallel to the case of confusion of
sticks and umbrellas, a parallel from a perpetually reiterated suggestion of reform. At least sixty Socialists out of a hundred, when they have spoken of common laundries, will go on at once to speak of common kitchens. This is just as mechanical and unintelligent as the fanciful case I have quoted. Sticks and umbrellas are both stiff rods that go into holes in a stand in the hall. Kitchens and washhouses are both large rooms full of heat and damp and steam. But the soul and function of the two things are utterly opposite. There is only one way of washing a shirt; that is, there is only one right way. There is no taste and fancy in tattered shirts. Nobody says, “Tompkins likes five holes in his shirt, but I must say, give me the good old four holes.” Nobody says, “This washerwoman rips up the left leg of my pyjamas; now if there is one thing I insist on it is the right leg ripped up.” The ideal washing is simply to send a thing back washed. But it is by no means true that the ideal cooking is simply to send a thing back cooked. Cooking is an art; it has in it personality, and even perversity, for the definition of an art is that which must be personal and may be perverse. I know a man, not otherwise dainty, who cannot touch common sausages unless they are almost burned to a coal. He wants his sausages fried to rags, yet he does not insist on his shirts being boiled to rags. I do not say that such points of culinary delicacy are of high importance. I do not say that the communal ideal must give way to them. What I say is that the communal ideal is not conscious of their existence, and therefore goes wrong from the very start, mixing a wholly public thing with a highly individual one. Perhaps we ought to accept communal kitchens in the social crisis, just as we should accept communal cat’s–meat in a siege. But the cultured Socialist, quite at his ease, by no means in a siege, talks about communal kitchens as if they were the same kind of thing as communal laundries. This shows at the start that he misunderstands human nature. It is as different as three men singing the same chorus from three men playing three tunes on the same piano.
In the quarrel earlier alluded to between the energetic Progressive and the obstinate Conservative (or, to talk a tenderer language, between Hudge and Gudge), the state of cross-purposes is at the present moment acute. The Tory says he wants to preserve family life in Cindertown; the Socialist very reasonably points out to him that in Cindertown at present there isn’t any family life to preserve. But Hudge, the Socialist, in his turn, is highly vague and mysterious about whether he would preserve the family life if there were any; or whether he will try to restore it where it has disappeared. It is all very confusing. The Tory sometimes talks as if he wanted to tighten the domestic bonds that do not exist; the Socialist as if he wanted to loosen the bonds that do not bind anybody. The question we all want to ask of both of them is the original ideal question, “Do you want to keep the family at all?” If Hudge, the Socialist, does want the family he must be prepared for the natural restraints, distinctions and divisions of labor in the family. He must brace himself up to bear the idea of the woman having a preference for the private house and a man for the public house. He must manage to endure somehow the idea of a woman being womanly, which does not mean soft and yielding, but handy, thrifty, rather hard, and very humorous. He must confront without a quiver the notion of a child who shall be childish, that is, full of energy, but without an idea of independence; fundamentally as eager for authority as for information and butter-scotch. If a man, a woman and a child live together any more in free and sovereign households, these ancient relations will recur; and Hudge must put up with it. He can only avoid it by destroying the family, driving both sexes into sexless hives and hordes, and bringing up all children as the children of the state—like Oliver Twist. But if these stern words must be addressed to Hudge, neither shall Gudge escape a somewhat severe admonition. For the plain truth to be told pretty sharply to the Tory is this, that if he wants the family to remain, if he wants to be strong enough to resist the rending forces of our essentially savage commerce, he must make some very big sacrifices and try to equalize property. The overwhelming mass of the English people at this particular instant are simply too poor to be domestic. They are as domestic as they can manage; they are much more domestic than the governing class; but they cannot get what good there
was originally meant to be in this institution, simply because they have not got enough money. The man ought to stand for a certain magnanimity, quite lawfully expressed in throwing money away: but if under given circumstances he can only do it by throwing the week’s food away, then he is not magnanimous, but mean. The woman ought to stand for a certain wisdom which is well expressed in valuing things rightly and guarding money sensibly; but how is she to guard money if there is no money to guard? The child ought to look on his mother as a fountain of natural fun and poetry; but how can he unless the fountain, like other fountains, is allowed to play? What chance have any of these ancient arts and functions in a house so hideously topsy–turvy; a house where the woman is out working and the man isn’t; and the child is forced by law to think his schoolmaster’s requirements more important than his mother’s? No, Gudge and his friends in the House of Lords and the Carlton Club must make up their minds on this matter, and that very quickly. If they are content to have England turned into a beehive and an ant–hill, decorated here and there with a few faded butterflies playing at an old game called domesticity in the intervals of the divorce court, then let them have their empire of insects; they will find plenty of Socialists who will give it to them. But if they want a domestic England, they must “shell out,” as the phrase goes, to a vastly greater extent than any Radical politician has yet dared to suggest; they must endure burdens much heavier than the Budget and strokes much deadlier than the death duties; for the thing to be done is nothing more nor less than the distribution of the great fortunes and the great estates. We can now only avoid Socialism by a change as vast as Socialism. If we are to save property, we must distribute property, almost as sternly and sweepingly as did the French Revolution. If we are to preserve the family we must revolutionize the nation.
IV

A LAST INSTANCE

And now, as this book is drawing to a close, I will whisper in the reader’s ear a horrible suspicion that has sometimes haunted me: the suspicion that Hudge and Gudge are secretly in partnership. That the quarrel they keep up in public is very much of a put–up job, and that the way in which they perpetually play into each other’s hands is not an everlasting coincidence. Gudge, the plutocrat, wants an anarchic industrialism; Hudge, the idealist, provides him with lyric praises of anarchy. Gudge wants women–workers because they are cheaper; Hudge calls the woman’s work “freedom to live her own life.” Gudge wants steady and obedient workmen, Hudge preaches teetotalism—to workmen, not to Gudge—Gudge wants a tame and timid population who will never take arms against tyranny; Hudge proves from Tolstoi that nobody must take arms against anything. Gudge is naturally a healthy and well–washed gentleman; Hudge earnestly preaches the perfection of Gudge’s washing to people who can’t practice it. Above all, Gudge rules by a coarse and cruel system of sacking and sweating and bi–sexual toil which is totally inconsistent with the free family and which is bound to destroy it; therefore Hudge, stretching out his arms to the universe with a prophetic smile, tells us that the family is something that we shall soon gloriously outgrow.

I do not know whether the partnership of Hudge and Gudge is conscious or unconscious. I only know that between them they still keep the common man homeless. I only know I still meet Jones walking the streets in the gray twilight, looking sadly at the poles and barriers and low red goblin lanterns which still guard the house which is none the less his because he has never been in it.
CONCLUSION

Here, it may be said, my book ends just where it ought to begin. I have said that the strong centers of modern English property must swiftly or slowly be broken up, if even the idea of property is to remain among Englishmen. There are two ways in which it could be done, a cold administration by quite detached officials, which is called Collectivism, or a personal distribution, so as to produce what is called Peasant Proprietorship. I think the latter solution the finer and more fully human, because it makes each man as somebody blamed somebody for saying of the Pope, a sort of small god. A man on his own turf tastes eternity or, in other words, will give ten minutes more work than is required. But I believe I am justified in shutting the door on this vista of argument, instead of opening it. For this book is not designed to prove the case for Peasant Proprietorship, but to prove the case against modern sages who turn reform to a routine. The whole of this book has been a rambling and elaborate urging of one purely ethical fact. And if by any chance it should happen that there are still some who do not quite see what that point is, I will end with one plain parable, which is none the worse for being also a fact.

A little while ago certain doctors and other persons permitted by modern law to dictate to their shabbier fellow–citizens, sent out an order that all little girls should have their hair cut short. I mean, of course, all little girls whose parents were poor. Many very unhealthy habits are common among rich little girls, but it will be long before any doctors interfere forcibly with them. Now, the case for this particular interference was this, that the poor are pressed down from above into such stinking and suffocating underworlds of squalor, that poor people must not be allowed to have hair, because in their case it must mean lice in the hair. Therefore, the doctors propose to abolish the hair. It never seems to have occurred to them to abolish the lice. Yet it could be done. As is common in most modern discussions the unmentionable thing is the pivot of the whole discussion. It is obvious to any Christian man (that is, to any man with a free soul) that any coercion applied to a cabman’s daughter ought, if possible, to be applied to a Cabinet Minister’s daughter. I will not ask why the doctors do not, as a matter of fact apply their rule to a Cabinet Minister’s daughter. I will not ask, because I know. They do not because they dare not. But what is the excuse they would
urge, what is the plausible argument they would use, for thus cutting and clipping poor children and not rich? Their argument would be that the disease is more likely to be in the hair of poor people than of rich. And why? Because the poor children are forced (against all the instincts of the highly domestic working classes) to crowd together in close rooms under a wildly inefficient system of public instruction; and because in one out of the forty children there may be offense. And why? Because the poor man is so ground down by the great rents of the great ground landlords that his wife often has to work as well as he. Therefore she has no time to look after the children, therefore one in forty of them is dirty. Because the workingman has these two persons on top of him, the landlord sitting (literally) on his stomach, and the schoolmaster sitting (literally) on his head, the workingman must allow his little girl’s hair, first to be neglected from poverty, next to be poisoned by promiscuity, and, lastly, to be abolished by hygiene. He, perhaps, was proud of his little girl’s hair. But he does not count.

Upon this simple principle (or rather precedent) the sociological doctor drives gayly ahead. When a crapulous tyranny crushes men down into the dirt, so that their very hair is dirty, the scientific course is clear. It would be long and laborious to cut off the heads of the tyrants; it is easier to cut off the hair of the slaves. In the same way, if it should ever happen that poor children, screaming with toothache, disturbed any schoolmaster or artistic gentleman, it would be easy to pull out all the teeth of the poor; if their nails were disgustingly dirty, their nails could be plucked out; if their noses were indecently blown, their noses could be cut off. The appearance of our humbler fellow–citizen could be quite strikingly simplified before we had done with him. But all this is not a bit wilder than the brute fact that a doctor can walk into the house of a free man, whose daughter’s hair may be as clean as spring flowers, and order him to cut it off. It never seems to strike these people that the lesson of lice in the slums is the wrongness of slums, not the wrongness of hair. Hair is, to say the least of it, a rooted thing. Its enemy (like the other insects and oriental armies of whom we have spoken) sweep upon us but seldom. In truth, it is only by eternal institutions like hair that we can test passing institutions like empires. If a house is so built as to knock a man’s head off when he enters it, it is built wrong.

The mob can never rebel unless it is conservative, at least enough to have conserved some reasons for rebelling. It is the most awful thought in all our anarchy, that most of the ancient blows struck for freedom would not be struck at all to–day, because of the obscurcation of the clean, popular customs from which they came. The insult that brought down the hammer of Wat Tyler might
now be called a medical examination. That which Virginius loathed and avenged as foul slavery might now be praised as free love. The cruel taunt of Foulon, “Let them eat grass,” might now be represented as the dying cry of an idealistic vegetarian. Those great scissors of science that would snip off the curls of the poor little school children are ceaselessly snapping closer and closer to cut off all the corners and fringes of the arts and honors of the poor. Soon they will be twisting necks to suit clean collars, and hacking feet to fit new boots. It never seems to strike them that the body is more than raiment; that the Sabbath was made for man; that all institutions shall be judged and damned by whether they have fitted the normal flesh and spirit. It is the test of political sanity to keep your head. It is the test of artistic sanity to keep your hair on.

Now the whole parable and purpose of these last pages, and indeed of all these pages, is this: to assert that we must instantly begin all over again, and begin at the other end. I begin with a little girl’s hair. That I know is a good thing at any rate. Whatever else is evil, the pride of a good mother in the beauty of her daughter is good. It is one of those adamantine tendernesses which are the touchstones of every age and race. If other things are against it, other things must go down. If landlords and laws and sciences are against it, landlords and laws and sciences must go down. With the red hair of one she–urchin in the gutter I will set fire to all modern civilization. Because a girl should have long hair, she should have clean hair; because she should have clean hair, she should not have an unclean home: because she should not have an unclean home, she should have a free and leisureed mother; because she should have a free mother, she should not have an usurious landlord; because there should not be an usurious landlord, there should be a redistribution of property; because there should be a redistribution of property, there shall be a revolution. That little urchin with the gold–red hair, whom I have just watched toddling past my house, she shall not be lopped and lamed and altered; her hair shall not be cut short like a convict’s; no, all the kingdoms of the earth shall be hacked about and mutilated to suit her. She is the human and sacred image; all around her the social fabric shall sway and split and fall; the pillars of society shall be shaken, and the roofs of ages come rushing down, and not one hair of her head shall be harmed.
THREE NOTES
ON FEMALE SUFFRAGE

Not wishing to overload this long essay with too many parentheses, apart from its thesis of progress and precedent, I append here three notes on points of detail that may possibly be misunderstood.

The first refers to the female controversy. It may seem to many that I dismiss too curtly the contention that all women should have votes, even if most women do not desire them. It is constantly said in this connection that males have received the vote (the agricultural laborers for instance) when only a minority of them were in favor of it. Mr. Galsworthy, one of the few fine fighting intellects of our time, has talked this language in the “Nation.” Now, broadly, I have only to answer here, as everywhere in this book, that history is not a toboggan slide, but a road to be reconsidered and even retraced. If we really forced General Elections upon free laborers who definitely disliked General Elections, then it was a thoroughly undemocratic thing to do; if we are democrats we ought to undo it. We want the will of the people, not the votes of the people; and to give a man a vote against his will is to make voting more valuable than the democracy it declares.

But this analogy is false, for a plain and particular reason. Many voteless women regard a vote as unwomanly. Nobody says that most voteless men regarded a vote as unmanly. Nobody says that any voteless men regarded it as unmanly. Not in the stillest hamlet or the most stagnant fen could you find a yokel or a tramp who thought he lost his sexual dignity by being part of a political mob. If he did not care about a vote it was solely because he did not know about a vote; he did not understand the word any better than Bimetallism. His opposition, if it existed, was merely negative. His indifference to a vote was really indifference.

But the female sentiment against the franchise, whatever its size, is positive. It is not negative; it is by no means indifferent. Such women as are opposed to the change regard it (rightly or wrongly) as unfeminine. That is, as insulting certain affirmative traditions to which they are attached. You may think such a view prejudiced; but I violently deny that any democrat has a right to override such prejudices, if they are popular and positive. Thus he would not have a right to make millions of Moslems vote with a cross if they had a prejudice in favor of
voting with a crescent. Unless this is admitted, democracy is a farce we need scarcely keep up. If it is admitted, the Suffragists have not merely to awaken an indifferent, but to convert a hostile majority.
ON CLEANLINESS IN EDUCATION

On re-reading my protest, which I honestly think much needed, against our heathen idolatry of mere ablution, I see that it may possibly be misread. I hasten to say that I think washing a most important thing to be taught both to rich and poor. I do not attack the positive but the relative position of soap. Let it be insisted on even as much as now; but let other things be insisted on much more. I am even ready to admit that cleanliness is next to godliness; but the moderns will not even admit godliness to be next to cleanliness. In their talk about Thomas Becket and such saints and heroes they make soap more important than soul; they reject godliness whenever it is not cleanliness. If we resent this about remote saints and heroes, we should resent it more about the many saints and heroes of the slums, whose unclean hands cleanse the world. Dirt is evil chiefly as evidence of sloth; but the fact remains that the classes that wash most are those that work least. Concerning these, the practical course is simple; soap should be urged on them and advertised as what it is—a luxury. With regard to the poor also the practical course is not hard to harmonize with our thesis. If we want to give poor people soap we must set out deliberately to give them luxuries. If we will not make them rich enough to be clean, then emphatically we must do what we did with the saints. We must reverence them for being dirty.
III

ON PEASANT PROPRIETORSHIP

I have not dealt with any details touching distributed ownership, or its possibility in England, for the reason stated in the text. This book deals with what is wrong, wrong in our root of argument and effort. This wrong is, I say, that we will go forward because we dare not go back. Thus the Socialist says that property is already concentrated into Trusts and Stores: the only hope is to concentrate it further in the State. I say the only hope is to unconcentrate it; that is, to repent and return; the only step forward is the step backward.

But in connection with this distribution I have laid myself open to another potential mistake. In speaking of a sweeping redistribution, I speak of decision in the aim, not necessarily of abruptness in the means. It is not at all too late to restore an approximately rational state of English possessions without any mere confiscation. A policy of buying out landlordism, steadily adopted in England as it has already been adopted in Ireland (notably in Mr. Wyndham’s wise and fruitful Act), would in a very short time release the lower end of the see-saw and make the whole plank swing more level. The objection to this course is not at all that it would not do, only that it will not be done. If we leave things as they are, there will almost certainly be a crash of confiscation. If we hesitate, we shall soon have to hurry. But if we start doing it quickly we have still time to do it slowly.

This point, however, is not essential to my book. All I have to urge between these two boards is that I dislike the big Whiteley shop, and that I dislike Socialism because it will (according to Socialists) be so like that shop. It is its fulfilment, not its reversal. I do not object to Socialism because it will revolutionize our commerce, but because it will leave it so horribly the same.
WHAT I SAW IN AMERICA

G. K. CHESTERTON
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**INDEX**

**WHAT I SAW IN AMERICA**

- TABLE OF CONTENTS
- WHAT IS AMERICA?
- A MEDITATION IN A NEW YORK HOTEL
- A MEDITATION IN BROADWAY
- IRISH AND OTHER INTERVIEWERS
- SOME AMERICAN CITIES
- IN THE AMERICAN COUNTRY
- THE AMERICAN BUSINESS MAN
- PRESIDENTS AND PROBLEMS
- PROHIBITION IN FACT AND FANCY
- FADS AND PUBLIC OPINION
- THE EXTRAORDINARY AMERICAN
- THE REPUBLICAN IN THE RUINS
- IS THE ATLANTIC NARROWING?
- LINCOLN AND LOST CAUSES
- WELLS AND THE WORLD STATE
- A NEW MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT
- THE SPIRIT OF AMERICA
- THE SPIRIT OF ENGLAND
- THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY
WHAT IS AMERICA?

I have never managed to lose my old conviction that travel narrows the mind. At least a man must make a double effort of moral humility and imaginative energy to prevent it from narrowing his mind. Indeed there is something touching and even tragic about the thought of the thoughtless tourist, who might have stayed at home loving Laplanders, embracing Chinamen, and clasping Patagonians to his heart in Hampstead or Surbiton, but for his blind and suicidal impulse to go and see what they looked like. This is not meant for nonsense; still less is it meant for the silliest sort of nonsense, which is cynicism. The human bond that he feels at home is not an illusion. On the contrary, it is rather an inner reality. Man is inside all men. In a real sense any man may be inside any men. But to travel is to leave the inside and draw dangerously near the outside. So long as he thought of men in the abstract, like naked toiling figures in some classic frieze, merely as those who labour and love their children and die, he was thinking the fundamental truth about them. By going to look at their unfamiliar manners and customs he is inviting them to disguise themselves in fantastic masks and costumes. Many modern internationalists talk as if men of different nationalities had only to meet and mix and understand each other. In reality that is the moment of supreme danger—the moment when they meet. We might shiver, as at the old euphemism by which a meeting meant a duel.

Travel ought to combine amusement with instruction; but most travellers are so much amused that they refuse to be instructed. I do not blame them for being amused; it is perfectly natural to be amused at a Dutchman for being Dutch or a Chinaman for being Chinese. Where they are wrong is that they take their own amusement seriously. They base on it their serious ideas of international instruction. It was said that the Englishman takes his pleasures sadly; and the pleasure of despising foreigners is one which he takes most sadly of all. He comes to scoff and does not remain to pray, but rather to excommunicate. Hence in international relations there is far too little laughing, and far too much sneering. But I believe that there is a better way which largely consists of laughter; a form of friendship between nations which is actually founded on differences. To hint at some such better way is the only excuse of this book.

Let me begin my American impressions with two impressions I had before I went to America. One was an incident and the other an idea; and when taken together they illustrate the attitude I mean. The first principle is that nobody
should be ashamed of thinking a thing funny because it is foreign; the second is that he should be ashamed of thinking it wrong because it is funny. The reaction of his senses and superficial habits of mind against something new, and to him abnormal, is a perfectly healthy reaction. But the mind which imagines that mere unfamiliarity can possibly prove anything about inferiority is a very inadequate mind. It is inadequate even in criticising things that may really be inferior to the things involved here. It is far better to laugh at a negro for having a black face than to sneer at him for having a sloping skull. It is proportionally even more preferable to laugh rather than judge in dealing with highly civilised peoples. Therefore I put at the beginning two working examples of what I felt about America before I saw it; the sort of thing that a man has a right to enjoy as a joke, and the sort of thing he has a duty to understand and respect, because it is the explanation of the joke.

When I went to the American consulate to regularise my passports, I was capable of expecting the American consulate to be American. Embassies and consulates are by tradition like islands of the soil for which they stand; and I have often found the tradition corresponding to a truth. I have seen the unmistakable French official living on omelettes and a little wine and serving his sacred abstractions under the last palm-trees fringing a desert. In the heat and noise of quarrelling Turks and Egyptians, I have come suddenly, as with the cool shock of his own shower-bath, on the listless amiability of the English gentleman. The officials I interviewed were very American, especially in being very polite; for whatever may have been the mood or meaning of Martin Chuzzlewit, I have always found Americans by far the politest people in the world. They put in my hands a form to be filled up, to all appearance like other forms I had filled up in other passport offices. But in reality it was very different from any form I had ever filled up in my life. At least it was a little like a freer form of the game called ‘Confessions’ which my friends and I invented in our youth; an examination paper containing questions like, ‘If you saw a rhinoceros in the front garden, what would you do?’ One of my friends, I remember, wrote, ‘Take the pledge.’ But that is another story, and might bring Mr. Pussyfoot Johnson on the scene before his time.

One of the questions on the paper was, ‘Are you an anarchist?’ To which a detached philosopher would naturally feel inclined to answer, ‘What the devil has that to do with you? Are you an atheist?’ along with some playful efforts to cross-examine the official about what constitutes an ἀρχηγός. Then there was the question, ‘Are you in favour of subverting the government of the United States
by force?’ Against this I should write, ‘I prefer to answer that question at the end of my tour and not the beginning.’ The inquisitor, in his more than morbid curiosity, had then written down, ‘Are you a polygamist?’ The answer to this is, ‘No such luck’ or ‘Not such a fool,’ according to our experience of the other sex. But perhaps a better answer would be that given to W. T. Stead when he circulated the rhetorical question, ‘Shall I slay my brother Boer?’—the answer that ran, ‘Never interfere in family matters.’ But among many things that amused me almost to the point of treating the form thus disrespectfully, the most amusing was the thought of the ruthless outlaw who should feel compelled to treat it respectfully. I like to think of the foreign desperado, seeking to slip into America with official papers under official protection, and sitting down to write with a beautiful gravity, ‘I am an anarchist. I hate you all and wish to destroy you.’ Or, ‘I intend to subvert by force the government of the United States as soon as possible, sticking the long sheath-knife in my left trouser-pocket into Mr. Harding at the earliest opportunity.’ Or again, ‘Yes, I am a polygamist all right, and my forty-seven wives are accompanying me on the voyage disguised as secretaries.’ There seems to be a certain simplicity of mind about these answers; and it is reassuring to know that anarchists and polygamists are so pure and good that the police have only to ask them questions and they are certain to tell no lies.

Now that is a model of the sort of foreign practice, founded on foreign problems, at which a man’s first impulse is naturally to laugh. Nor have I any intention of apologising for my laughter. A man is perfectly entitled to laugh at a thing because he happens to find it incomprehensible. What he has no right to do is to laugh at it as incomprehensible, and then criticise it as if he comprehended it. The very fact of its unfamiliarity and mystery ought to set him thinking about the deeper causes that make people so different from himself, and that without merely assuming that they must be inferior to himself.

Superficially this is rather a queer business. It would be easy enough to suggest that in this America has introduced a quite abnormal spirit of inquisition; an interference with liberty unknown among all the ancient despotisms and aristocracies. About that there will be something to be said later; but superficially it is true that this degree of officialism is comparatively unique. In a journey which I took only the year before I had occasion to have my papers passed by governments which many worthy people in the West would vaguely identify with corsairs and assassins; I have stood on the other side of Jordan, in the land ruled by a rude Arab chief, where the police looked so like brigands that
one wondered what the brigands looked like. But they did not ask me whether I had come to subvert the power of the Shereef; and they did not exhibit the faintest curiosity about my personal views on the ethical basis of civil authority. These ministers of ancient Moslem despotism did not care about whether I was an anarchist; and naturally would not have minded if I had been a polygamist. The Arab chief was probably a polygamist himself. These slaves of Asiatic autocracy were content, in the old liberal fashion, to judge me by my actions; they did not inquire into my thoughts. They held their power as limited to the limitation of practice; they did not forbid me to hold a theory. It would be easy to argue here that Western democracy persecutes where even Eastern despotism tolerates or emancipates. It would be easy to develop the fancy that, as compared with the sultans of Turkey or Egypt, the American Constitution is a thing like the Spanish Inquisition.

Only the traveller who stops at that point is totally wrong; and the traveller only too often does stop at that point. He has found something to make him laugh, and he will not suffer it to make him think. And the remedy is not to unsay what he has said, not even, so to speak, to unlaugh what he has laughed, not to deny that there is something unique and curious about this American inquisition into our abstract opinions, but rather to continue the train of thought, and follow the admirable advice of Mr. H. G. Wells, who said, ‘It is not much good thinking of a thing unless you think it out.’ It is not to deny that American officialism is rather peculiar on this point, but to inquire what it really is which makes America peculiar, or which is peculiar to America. In short, it is to get some ultimate idea of what America is; and the answer to that question will reveal something much deeper and grander and more worthy of our intelligent interest.

It may have seemed something less than a compliment to compare the American Constitution to the Spanish Inquisition. But oddly enough, it does involve a truth; and still more oddly perhaps, it does involve a compliment. The American Constitution does resemble the Spanish Inquisition in this: that it is founded on a creed. America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed. That creed is set forth with dogmatic and even theological lucidity in the Declaration of Independence; perhaps the only piece of practical politics that is also theoretical politics and also great literature. It enunciates that all men are equal in their claim to justice, that governments exist to give them that justice, and that their authority is for that reason just. It certainly does condemn anarchism, and it does also by inference condemn atheism, since it clearly names
the Creator as the ultimate authority from whom these equal rights are derived. Nobody expects a modern political system to proceed logically in the application of such dogmas, and in the matter of God and Government it is naturally God whose claim is taken more lightly. The point is that there is a creed, if not about divine, at least about human things.

Now a creed is at once the broadest and the narrowest thing in the world. In its nature it is as broad as its scheme for a brotherhood of all men. In its nature it is limited by its definition of the nature of all men. This was true of the Christian Church, which was truly said to exclude neither Jew nor Greek, but which did definitely substitute something else for Jewish religion or Greek philosophy. It was truly said to be a net drawing in of all kinds; but a net of a certain pattern, the pattern of Peter the Fisherman. And this is true even of the most disastrous distortions or degradations of that creed; and true among others of the Spanish Inquisition. It may have been narrow touching theology, it could not confess to being narrow about nationality or ethnology. The Spanish Inquisition might be admittedly Inquisitorial; but the Spanish Inquisition could not be merely Spanish. Such a Spaniard, even when he was narrower than his own creed, had to be broader than his own empire. He might burn a philosopher because he was heterodox; but he must accept a barbarian because he was orthodox. And we see, even in modern times, that the same Church which is blamed for making sages heretics is also blamed for making savages priests. Now in a much vaguer and more evolutionary fashion, there is something of the same idea at the back of the great American experiment; the experiment of a democracy of diverse races which has been compared to a melting-pot. But even that metaphor implies that the pot itself is of a certain shape and a certain substance; a pretty solid substance. The melting-pot must not melt. The original shape was traced on the lines of Jeffersonian democracy; and it will remain in that shape until it becomes shapeless. America invites all men to become citizens; but it implies the dogma that there is such a thing as citizenship. Only, so far as its primary ideal is concerned, its exclusiveness is religious because it is not racial. The missionary can condemn a cannibal, precisely because he cannot condemn a Sandwich Islander. And in something of the same spirit the American may exclude a polygamist, precisely because he cannot exclude a Turk.

Now for America this is no idle theory. It may have been theoretical, though it was thoroughly sincere, when that great Virginian gentleman declared it in surroundings that still had something of the character of an English countryside. It is not merely theoretical now. There is nothing to prevent America being
literally invaded by Turks, as she is invaded by Jews or Bulgars. In the most exquisitely inconsequent of the Bab Ballads, we are told concerning Pasha Bailey Ben:—

One morning knocked at half-past eight
A tall Red Indian at his gate.
In Turkey, as you 'r' p'rops aware,
Red Indians are extremely rare.

But the converse need by no means be true. There is nothing in the nature of things to prevent an emigration of Turks increasing and multiplying on the plains where the Red Indians wandered; there is nothing to necessitate the Turks being extremely rare. The Red Indians, alas, are likely to be rarer. And as I much prefer Red Indians to Turks, not to mention Jews, I speak without prejudice; but the point here is that America, partly by original theory and partly by historical accident, does lie open to racial admixtures which most countries would think incongruous or comic. That is why it is only fair to read any American definitions or rules in a certain light, and relatively to a rather unique position. It is not fair to compare the position of those who may meet Turks in the back street with that of those who have never met Turks except in the Bab Ballads. It is not fair simply to compare America with England in its regulations about the Turk. In short, it is not fair to do what almost every Englishman probably does; to look at the American international examination paper, and laugh and be satisfied with saying, ‘We don’t have any of that nonsense in England.’

We do not have any of that nonsense in England because we have never attempted to have any of that philosophy in England. And, above all, because we have the enormous advantage of feeling it natural to be national, because there is nothing else to be. England in these days is not well governed; England is not well educated; England suffers from wealth and poverty that are not well distributed. But England is English; esto perpetua. England is English as France is French or Ireland Irish; the great mass of men taking certain national traditions for granted. Now this gives us a totally different and a very much easier task. We have not got an inquisition, because we have not got a creed; but it is arguable that we do not need a creed, because we have got a character. In any of the old nations the national unity is preserved by the national type. Because we have a type we do not need to have a test.

Take that innocent question, ‘Are you an anarchist?’ which is intrinsically quite as impudent as ‘Are you an optimist?’ or ‘Are you a philanthropist?’ I am not discussing here whether these things are right, but whether most of us are in
a position to know them rightly. Now it is quite true that most Englishmen do not find it necessary to go about all day asking each other whether they are anarchists. It is quite true that the phrase occurs on no British forms that I have seen. But this is not only because most of the Englishmen are not anarchists. It is even more because even the anarchists are Englishmen. For instance, it would be easy to make fun of the American formula by noting that the cap would fit all sorts of bald academic heads. It might well be maintained that Herbert Spencer was an anarchist. It is practically certain that Auberon Herbert was an anarchist. But Herbert Spencer was an extraordinarily typical Englishman of the Nonconformist middle class. And Auberon Herbert was an extraordinarily typical English aristocrat of the old and genuine aristocracy. Every one knew in his heart that the squire would not throw a bomb at the Queen, and the Nonconformist would not throw a bomb at anybody. Every one knew that there was something subconscious in a man like Auberon Herbert, which would have come out only in throwing bombs at the enemies of England; as it did come out in his son and namesake, the generous and unforgotten, who fell flinging bombs from the sky far beyond the German line. Every one knows that normally, in the last resort, the English gentleman is patriotic. Every one knows that the English Nonconformist is national even when he denies that he is patriotic. Nothing is more notable indeed than the fact that nobody is more stamped with the mark of his own nation than the man who says that there ought to be no nations. Somebody called Cobden the International Man; but no man could be more English than Cobden. Everybody recognises Tolstoy as the iconoclast of all patriotism; but nobody could be more Russian than Tolstoy. In the old countries where there are these national types, the types may be allowed to hold any theories. Even if they hold certain theories, they are unlikely to do certain things. So the conscientious objector, in the English sense, may be and is one of the peculiar by-products of England. But the conscientious objector will probably have a conscientious objection to throwing bombs.

Now I am very far from intending to imply that these American tests are good tests, or that there is no danger of tyranny becoming the temptation of America. I shall have something to say later on about that temptation or tendency. Nor do I say that they apply consistently this conception of a nation with the soul of a church, protected by religious and not racial selection. If they did apply that principle consistently, they would have to exclude pessimists and rich cynics who deny the democratic ideal; an excellent thing but a rather improbable one. What I say is that when we realise that this principle exists at all, we see the
whole position in a totally different perspective. We say that the Americans are
doing something heroic, or doing something insane, or doing it in an unworkable
or unworthy fashion, instead of simply wondering what the devil they are doing.

When we realise the democratic design of such a cosmopolitan commonwealth, and compare it with our insular reliance or instincts, we see at once why such a thing has to be not only democratic but dogmatic. We see why in some points it tends to be inquisitive or intolerant. Any one can see the practical point by merely transferring into private life a problem like that of the two academic anarchists, who might by a coincidence be called the two Herberts. Suppose a man said, ‘Buffle, my old Oxford tutor, wants to meet you; I wish you’d ask him down for a day or two. He has the oddest opinions, but he’s very stimulating.’ It would not occur to us that the oddity of the Oxford don’s opinions would lead him to blow up the house; because the Oxford don is an English type. Suppose somebody said, ‘Do let me bring old Colonel Robinson down for the week-end; he’s a bit of a crank but quite interesting.’ We should not anticipate the colonel running amuck with a carving-knife and offering up human sacrifice in the garden; for these are not among the daily habits of an old English colonel; and because we know his habits, we do not care about his opinions. But suppose somebody offered to bring a person from the interior of Kamskatka to stay with us for a week or two, and added that his religion was a very extraordinary religion, we should feel a little more inquisitive about what kind of religion it was. If somebody wished to add a Hairy Ainu to the family party at Christmas, explaining that his point of view was so individual and interesting, we should want to know a little more about it and him. We should be tempted to draw up as fantastic an examination paper as that presented to the emigrant going to America. We should ask what a Hairy Ainu was, and how hairy he was, and above all what sort of Ainu he was. Would etiquette require us to ask him to bring his wife? And if we did ask him to bring his wife, how many wives would he bring? In short, as in the American formula, is he a polygamist? Merely as a point of housekeeping and accommodation the question is not irrelevant. Is the Hairy Ainu content with hair, or does he wear any clothes? If the police insist on his wearing clothes, will he recognise the authority of the police? In short, as in the American formula, is he an anarchist?

Of course this generalisation about America, like other historical things, is subject to all sorts of cross divisions and exceptions, to be considered in their place. The negroes are a special problem, because of what white men in the past did to them. The Japanese are a special problem, because of what men fear that
they in the future may do to white men. The Jews are a special problem, because of what they and the Gentiles, in the past, present, and future, seem to have the habit of doing to each other. But the point is not that nothing exists in America except this idea; it is that nothing like this idea exists anywhere except in America. This idea is not internationalism; on the contrary it is decidedly nationalism. The Americans are very patriotic, and wish to make their new citizens patriotic Americans. But it is the idea of making a new nation literally out of any old nation that comes along. In a word, what is unique is not America but what is called Americanisation. We understand nothing till we understand the amazing ambition to Americanise the Kamskatkan and the Hairy Ainu. We are not trying to Anglicise thousands of French cooks or Italian organ-grinders. France is not trying to Gallicise thousands of English trippers or German prisoners of war. America is the one place in the world where this process, healthy or unhealthy, possible or impossible, is going on. And the process, as I have pointed out, is not internationalisation. It would be truer to say it is the nationalisation of the internationalised. It is making a home out of vagabonds and a nation out of exiles. This is what at once illuminates and softens the moral regulations which we may really think faddist or fanatical. They are abnormal; but in one sense this experiment of a home for the homeless is abnormal. In short, it has long been recognised that America was an asylum. It is only since Prohibition that it has looked a little like a lunatic asylum.

It was before sailing for America, as I have said, that I stood with the official paper in my hand and these thoughts in my head. It was while I stood on English soil that I passed through the two stages of smiling and then sympathising; of realising that my momentary amusement, at being asked if I were not an Anarchist, was partly due to the fact that I was not an American. And in truth I think there are some things a man ought to know about America before he sees it. What we know of a country beforehand may not affect what we see that it is; but it will vitally affect what we appreciate it for being, because it will vitally affect what we expect it to be. I can honestly say that I had never expected America to be what nine-tenths of the newspaper critics invariably assume it to be. I never thought it was a sort of Anglo-Saxon colony, knowing that it was more and more thronged with crowds of very different colonists. During the war I felt that the very worst propaganda for the Allies was the propaganda for the Anglo-Saxons. I tried to point out that in one way America is nearer to Europe than England is. If she is not nearer to Bulgaria, she is nearer to Bulgars; if she is not nearer to Bohemia, she is nearer to Bohemians. In my New York hotel the
The head waiter in the dining-room was a Bohemian; the head waiter in the grill-room was a Bulgar. Americans have nationalities at the end of the street which for us are at the ends of the earth. I did my best to persuade my countrymen not to appeal to the American as if he were a rather dowdy Englishman, who had been rusticking in the provinces and had not heard the latest news about the town. I shall record later some of those arresting realities which the traveller does not expect; and which, in some cases I fear, he actually does not see because he does not expect. I shall try to do justice to the psychology of what Mr. Belloc has called ‘Eye-Openers in Travel.’ But there are some things about America that a man ought to see even with his eyes shut. One is that a state that came into existence solely through its repudiation and abhorrence of the British Crown is not likely to be a respectful copy of the British Constitution. Another is that the chief mark of the Declaration of Independence is something that is not only absent from the British Constitution, but something which all our constitutionalists have invariably thanked God, with the jolliest boasting and bragging, that they had kept out of the British Constitution. It is the thing called abstraction or academic logic. It is the thing which such jolly people call theory; and which those who can practise it call thought. And the theory or thought is the very last to which English people are accustomed, either by their social structure or their traditional teaching. It is the theory of equality. It is the pure classic conception that no man must aspire to be anything more than a citizen, and that no man should endure to be anything less. It is by no means especially intelligible to an Englishman, who tends at his best to the virtues of the gentleman and at his worst to the vices of the snob. The idealism of England, or if you will the romance of England, has not been primarily the romance of the citizen. But the idealism of America, we may safely say, still revolves entirely round the citizen and his romance. The realities are quite another matter, and we shall consider in its place the question of whether the ideal will be able to shape the realities or will merely be beaten shapeless by them. The ideal is besieged by inequalities of the most towering and insane description in the industrial and economic field. It may be devoured by modern capitalism, perhaps the worst inequality that ever existed among men. Of all that we shall speak later. But citizenship is still the American ideal; there is an army of actualities opposed to that ideal; but there is no ideal opposed to that ideal. American plutocracy has never got itself respected like English aristocracy. Citizenship is the American ideal; and it has never been the English ideal. But it is surely an ideal that may stir some imaginative generosity and respect in an Englishman, if he will
condescend to be also a man. In this vision of moulding many peoples into the visible image of the citizen, he may see a spiritual adventure which he can admire from the outside, at least as much as he admires the valour of the Moslems and much more than he admires the virtues of the Middle Ages. He need not set himself to develop equality, but he need not set himself to misunderstand it. He may at least understand what Jefferson and Lincoln meant, and he may possibly find some assistance in this task by reading what they said. He may realise that equality is not some crude fairy tale about all men being equally tall or equally tricky; which we not only cannot believe but cannot believe in anybody believing. It is an absolute of morals by which all men have a value invariable and indestructible and a dignity as intangible as death. He may at least be a philosopher and see that equality is an idea; and not merely one of these soft-headed sceptics who, having risen by low tricks to high places, drink bad champagne in tawdry hotel lounges, and tell each other twenty times over, with unwearied iteration, that equality is an illusion.

In truth it is inequality that is the illusion. The extreme disproportion between men, that we seem to see in life, is a thing of changing lights and lengthening shadows, a twilight full of fancies and distortions. We find a man famous and cannot live long enough to find him forgotten; we see a race dominant and cannot linger to see it decay. It is the experience of men that always returns to the equality of men; it is the average that ultimately justifies the average man. It is when men have seen and suffered much and come at the end of more elaborate experiments, that they see men as men under an equal light of death and daily laughter; and none the less mysterious for being many. Nor is it in vain that these Western democrats have sought the blazonry of their flag in that great multitude of immortal lights that endure behind the fires we see, and gathered them into the corner of Old Glory whose ground is like the glittering night. For veritably, in the spirit as well as in the symbol, suns and moons and meteors pass and fill our skies with a fleeting and almost theatrical conflagration; and wherever the old shadow stoops upon the earth, the stars return.
A MEDITATION IN A NEW YORK HOTEL

All this must begin with an apology and not an apologia. When I went wandering about the States disguised as a lecturer, I was well aware that I was not sufficiently well disguised to be a spy. I was even in the worst possible position to be a sight-seer. A lecturer to American audiences can hardly be in the holiday mood of a sight-seer. It is rather the audience that is sight-seeing; even if it is seeing a rather melancholy sight. Some say that people come to see the lecturer and not to hear him; in which case it seems rather a pity that he should disturb and distress their minds with a lecture. He might merely display himself on a stand or platform for a stipulated sum; or be exhibited like a monster in a menagerie. The circus elephant is not expected to make a speech. But it is equally true that the circus elephant is not allowed to write a book. His impressions of travel would be somewhat sketchy and perhaps a little overspecialised. In merely travelling from circus to circus he would, so to speak, move in rather narrow circles. Jumbo the great elephant (with whom I am hardly so ambitious as to compare myself), before he eventually went to the Barnum show, passed a considerable and I trust happy part of his life in Regent’s Park. But if he had written a book on England, founded on his impressions of the Zoo, it might have been a little disproportionate and even misleading in its version of the flora and fauna of that country. He might imagine that lions and leopards were commoner than they are in our hedgerows and country lanes, or that the head and neck of a giraffe was as native to our landscapes as a village spire. And that is why I apologise in anticipation for a probable lack of proportion in this work. Like the elephant, I may have seen too much of a special enclosure where a special sort of lions are gathered together. I may exaggerate the territorial, as distinct from the vertical space occupied by the spiritual giraffe; for the giraffe may surely be regarded as an example of Uplift, and is even, in a manner of speaking, a high-brow. Above all, I shall probably make generalisations that are much too general; and are insufficient through being exaggerative. To this sort of doubt all my impressions are subject; and among them the negative generalisation with which I shall begin this rambling meditation on American hotels.

In all my American wanderings I never saw such a thing as an inn. They may exist; but they do not arrest the traveller upon every road as they do in England and in Europe. The saloons no longer existed when I was there, owing to the
recent reform which restricted intoxicants to the wealthier classes. But we feel that the saloons have been there; if one may so express it, their absence is still present. They remain in the structure of the street and the idiom of the language. But the saloons were not inns. If they had been inns, it would have been far harder even for the power of modern plutocracy to root them out. There will be a very different chase when the White Hart is hunted to the forests or when the Red Lion turns to bay. But people could not feel about the American saloon as they will feel about the English inns. They could not feel that the Prohibitionist, that vulgar chucker-out, was chucking Chaucer out of the Tabard and Shakespeare out of the Mermaid. In justice to the American Prohibitionists it must be realised that they were not doing quite such desecration; and that many of them felt the saloon a specially poisonous sort of place. They did feel that drinking-places were used only as drug-shops. So they have effected the great reconstruction, by which it will be necessary to use only drug-shops as drinking-places. But I am not dealing here with the problem of Prohibition except in so far as it is involved in the statement that the saloons were in no sense inns. Secondly, of course, there are the hotels. There are indeed. There are hotels toppling to the stars, hotels covering the acreage of villages, hotels in multitudinous number like a mob of Babylonian or Assyrian monuments; but the hotels also are not inns.

Broadly speaking, there is only one hotel in America. The pattern of it, which is a very rational pattern, is repeated in cities as remote from each other as the capitals of European empires. You may find that hotel rising among the red blooms of the warm spring woods of Nebraska, or whitened with Canadian snows near the eternal noise of Niagara. And before touching on this solid and simple pattern itself, I may remark that the same system of symmetry runs through all the details of the interior. As one hotel is like another hotel, so one hotel floor is like another hotel floor. If the passage outside your bedroom door, or hallway as it is called, contains, let us say, a small table with a green vase and a stuffed flamingo, or some trifle of the sort, you may be perfectly certain that there is exactly the same table, vase, and flamingo on every one of the thirty-two landings of that towering habitation. This is where it differs most perhaps from the crooked landings and unexpected levels of the old English inns, even when they call themselves hotels. To me there was something weird, like a magic multiplication, in the exquisite sameness of these suites. It seemed to suggest the still atmosphere of some eerie psychological story. I once myself entertained the notion of a story, in which a man was to be prevented from entering his house
(the scene of some crime or calamity) by people who painted and furnished the
next house to look exactly like it; the assimilation going to the most fantastic
lengths, such as altering the numbering of houses in the street. I came to
America and found an hotel fitted and upholstered throughout for the enactment
of my phantasmal fraud. I offer the skeleton of my story with all humility to
some of the admirable lady writers of detective stories in America, to Miss
Carolyn Wells, or Miss Mary Roberts Rhinehart, or Mrs. A. K. Green of the
unforgotten Leavenworth Case. Surely it might be possible for the
unsophisticated Nimrod K. Moose, of Yellow Dog Flat, to come to New York
and be entangled somehow in this net of repetitions or recurrences. Surely
something tells me that his beautiful daughter, the Rose of Red Murder Gulch,
might seek for him in vain amid the apparently unmistakable surroundings of the
thirty-second floor, while he was being quietly butchered by the floor-clerk on
the thirty-third floor, an agent of the Green Claw (that formidable organisation);
and all because the two floors looked exactly alike to the virginal Western eye.
The original point of my own story was that the man to be entrapped walked into
his own house after all, in spite of it being differently painted and numbered,
simply because he was absent-minded and used to taking a certain number of
mechanical steps. This would not work in the hotel; because a lift has no habits.
It is typical of the real tameness of machinery, that even when we talk of a man
turning mechanically we only talk metaphorically; for it is something that a
mechanism cannot do. But I think there is only one real objection to my story of
Mr. Moose in the New York hotel. And that is unfortunately a rather fatal one. It
is that far away in the remote desolation of Yellow Dog, among those outlying
and outlandish rocks that almost seem to rise beyond the sunset, there is
undoubtedly an hotel of exactly the same sort, with all its floors exactly the
same.

Anyhow the general plan of the American hotel is commonly the same, and,
as I have said, it is a very sound one so far as it goes. When I first went into one
of the big New York hotels, the first impression was certainly its bigness. It was
called the Biltmore; and I wondered how many national humorists had made the
obvious comment of wishing they had built less. But it was not merely the
Babylonian size and scale of such things, it was the way in which they are used.
They are used almost as public streets, or rather as public squares. My first
impression was that I was in some sort of high street or market-place during a
carnival or a revolution. True, the people looked rather rich for a revolution and
rather grave for a carnival; but they were congested in great crowds that moved
slowly like people passing through an overcrowded railway station. Even in the
dizzy heights of such a sky-scaper there could not possibly be room for all those
people to sleep in the hotel, or even to dine in it. And, as a matter of fact, they
did nothing whatever except drift into it and drift out again. Most of them had no
more to do with the hotel than I have with Buckingham Palace. I have never
been in Buckingham Palace, and I have very seldom, thank God, been in the big
hotels of this type that exist in London or Paris. But I cannot believe that mobs
are perpetually pouring through the Hotel Cecil or the Savoy in this fashion,
calmly coming in at one door and going out of the other. But this fact is part of
the fundamental structure of the American hotel; it is built upon a compromise
that makes it possible. The whole of the lower floor is thrown open to the public
streets and treated as a public square. But above it and all round it runs another
floor in the form of a sort of deep gallery, furnished more luxuriously and
looking down on the moving mobs beneath. No one is allowed on this floor
except the guests or clients of the hotel. As I have been one of them myself, I
trust it is not unsympathetic to compare them to active anthropoids who can
climb trees, and so look down in safety on the herds or packs of wilder animals
wandering and prowling below. Of course there are modifications of this
architectural plan, but they are generally approximations to it; it is the plan that
seems to suit the social life of the American cities. There is generally something
like a ground floor that is more public, a half-floor or gallery above that is more
private, and above that the bulk of the block of bedrooms, the huge hive with its
innumerable and identical cells.

The ladder of ascent in this tower is of course the lift, or, as it is called, the
elevator. With all that we hear of American hustle and hurry it is rather strange
that Americans seem to like more than we do to linger upon long words. And
indeed there is an element of delay in their diction and spirit, very little
understood, which I may discuss elsewhere. Anyhow they say elevator when we
say lift, just as they say automobile when we say motor and stenographer when
we say typist, or sometimes (by a slight confusion) typewriter. Which reminds
me of another story that never existed, about a man who was accused of having
murdered and dismembered his secretary when he had only taken his typing
machine to pieces; but we must not dwell on these digressions. The Americans
may have another reason for giving long and ceremonious titles to the lift. When
first I came among them I had a suspicion that they possessed and practised a
new and secret religion, which was the cult of the elevator. I fancied they
worshipped the lift, or at any rate worshipped in the lift. The details or data of
this suspicion it were now vain to collect, as I have regretfully abandoned it, except in so far as they illustrate the social principles underlying the structural plan of the building. Now an American gentleman invariably takes off his hat in the lift. He does not take off his hat in the hotel, even if it is crowded with ladies. But he always so salutes a lady in the elevator; and this marks the difference of atmosphere. The lift is a room, but the hotel is a street. But during my first delusion, of course, I assumed that he uncovered in this tiny temple merely because he was in church. There is something about the very word elevator that expresses a great deal of his vague but idealistic religion. Perhaps that flying chapel will eventually be ritualistically decorated like a chapel; possibly with a symbolic scheme of wings. Perhaps a brief religious service will be held in the elevator as it ascends; in a few well-chosen words touching the Utmost for the Highest. Possibly he would consent even to call the elevator a lift, if he could call it an uplift. There would be no difficulty, except what I cannot but regard as the chief moral problem of all optimistic modernism. I mean the difficulty of imagining a lift which is free to go up, if it is not also free to go down.

I think I know my American friends and acquaintances too well to apologise for any levity in these illustrations. Americans make fun of their own institutions; and their own journalism is full of such fanciful conjectures. The tall building is itself artistically akin to the tall story. The very word sky-scraper is an admirable example of an American lie. But I can testify quite as eagerly to the solid and sensible advantages of the symmetrical hotel. It is not only a pattern of vases and stuffed flamingoes; it is also an equally accurate pattern of cupboards and baths. It is a dignified and humane custom to have a bathroom attached to every bedroom; and my impulse to sing the praises of it brought me once at least into a rather quaint complication. I think it was in the city of Dayton; anyhow I remember there was a Laundry Convention going on in the same hotel, in a room very patriotically and properly festooned with the stars and stripes, and doubtless full of promise for the future of laundering. I was interviewed on the roof, within earshot of this debate, and may have been the victim of some association or confusion; anyhow, after answering the usual questions about Labour, the League of Nations, the length of ladies’ dresses, and other great matters, I took refuge in a rhapsody of warm and well-deserved praise of American bathrooms. The editor, I understand, running a gloomy eye down the column of his contributor’s ‘story,’ and seeing nothing but metaphysical terms such as justice, freedom, the abstract disapproval of sweating, swindling, and the like, paused at last upon the ablutionary allusion, and his eye brightened. ‘That’s
the only copy in the whole thing,’ he said, ‘A Bath-Tub in Every Home.’ So these words appeared in enormous letters above my portrait in the paper. It will be noted that, like many things that practical men make a great point of, they miss the point. What I had commended as new and national was a bathroom in every bedroom. Even feudal and moss-grown England is not entirely ignorant of an occasional bath-tub in the home. But what gave me great joy was what followed. I discovered with delight that many people, glancing rapidly at my portrait with its prodigious legend, imagined that it was a commercial advertisement, and that I was a very self-advertising commercial traveller. When I walked about the streets, I was supposed to be travelling in bath-tubs. Consider the caption of the portrait, and you will see how similar it is to the true commercial slogan: ‘We offer a Bath-Tub in Every Home.’ And this charming error was doubtless clinched by the fact that I had been found haunting the outer courts of the temple of the ancient Guild of Lavenders. I never knew how many shared the impression; I regret to say that I only traced it with certainty in two individuals. But I understand that it included the idea that I had come to the town to attend the Laundry Convention, and had made an eloquent speech to that senate, no doubt exhibiting my tubs.

Such was the penalty of too passionate and unrestrained an admiration for American bathrooms; yet the connection of ideas, however inconsequent, does cover the part of social practice for which these American institutions can really be praised. About everything like laundry or hot and cold water there is not only organisation, but what does not always or perhaps often go with it, efficiency. Americans are particular about these things of dress and decorum; and it is a virtue which I very seriously recognise, though I find it very hard to emulate. But with them it is a virtue; it is not a mere convention, still less a mere fashion. It is really related to human dignity rather than to social superiority. The really glorious thing about the American is that he does not dress like a gentleman; he dresses like a citizen or a civilised man. His Puritanic particularity on certain points is really detachable from any definite social ambitions; these things are not a part of getting into society but merely of keeping out of savagery. Those millions and millions of middling people, that huge middle class especially of the Middle West, are not near enough to any aristocracy even to be sham aristocrats, or to be real snobs. But their standards are secure; and though I do not really travel in a bath-tub, or believe in the bath-tub philosophy and religion, I will not on this matter recoil misanthropically from them: I prefer the tub of Dayton to the tub of Diogenes. On these points there is really something a
million times better than efficiency, and that is something like equality.

In short, the American hotel is not America; but it is American. In some respects it is as American as the English inn is English. And it is symbolic of that society in this among other things: that it does tend too much to uniformity; but that that very uniformity disguises not a little natural dignity. The old Romans boasted that their republic was a nation of kings. If we really walked abroad in such a kingdom, we might very well grow tired of the sight of a crowd of kings, of every man with a gold crown on his head or an ivory sceptre in his hand. But it is arguable that we ought not to grow tired of the repetition of crowns and sceptres, any more than of the repetition of flowers and stars. The whole imaginative effort of Walt Whitman was really an effort to absorb and animate these multitudinous modern repetitions; and Walt Whitman would be quite capable of including in his lyric litany of optimism a list of the nine hundred and ninety-nine identical bathrooms. I do not sneer at the generous effort of the giant; though I think, when all is said, that it is a criticism of modern machinery that the effort should be gigantic as well as generous.

While there is so much repetition there is little repose. It is the pattern of a kaleidoscope rather than a wall-paper; a pattern of figures running and even leaping like the figures in a zoetrope. But even in the groups where there was no hustle there was often something of homelessness. I do not mean merely that they were not dining at home; but rather that they were not at home even when dining, and dining at their favourite hotel. They would frequently start up and dart from the room at a summons from the telephone. It may have been fanciful, but I could not help feeling a breath of home, as from a flap or flutter of St. George’s Cross, when I first sat down in a Canadian hostelry, and read the announcement that no such telephonic or other summonses were allowed in the dining-room. It may have been a coincidence, and there may be American hotels with this merciful proviso and Canadian hotels without it; but the thing was symbolic even if it was not evidential. I felt as if I stood indeed upon English soil, in a place where people liked to have their meals in peace.

The process of the summons is called ‘paging,’ and consists of sending a little boy with a large voice through all the halls and corridors of the building, making them resound with a name. The custom is common, of course, in clubs and hotels even in England; but in England it is a mere whisper compared with the wail with which the American page repeats the formula of ‘Calling Mr. So and So.’ I remember a particularly crowded parterre in the somewhat smoky and oppressive atmosphere of Pittsburg, through which wandered a youth with a
voice the like of which I have never heard in the land of the living, a voice like the cry of a lost spirit, saying again and again for ever, ‘Carling Mr. Anderson.’ One felt that he never would find Mr. Anderson. Perhaps there never had been any Mr. Anderson to be found. Perhaps he and every one else wandered in an abyss of bottomless scepticism; and he was but the victim of one out of numberless nightmares of eternity, as he wandered a shadow with shadows and wailed by impassable streams. This is not exactly my philosophy, but I feel sure it was his. And it is a mood that may frequently visit the mind in the centres of highly active and successful industrial civilisation.

Such are the first idle impressions of the great American hotel, gained by sitting for the first time in its gallery and gazing on its drifting crowds with thoughts equally drifting. The first impression is of something enormous and rather unnatural, an impression that is gradually tempered by experience of the kindliness and even the tameness of so much of that social order. But I should not be recording the sensations with sincerity, if I did not touch in passing the note of something unearthly about that vast system to an insular traveller who sees it for the first time. It is as if he were wandering in another world among the fixed stars; or worse still, in an ideal Utopia of the future.

Yet I am not certain; and perhaps the best of all news is that nothing is really new. I sometimes have a fancy that many of these new things in new countries are but the resurrections of old things which have been wickedly killed or stupidly stunted in old countries. I have looked over the sea of little tables in some light and airy open-air café; and my thoughts have gone back to the plain wooden bench and wooden table that stands solitary and weather-stained outside so many neglected English inns. We talk of experimenting in the French café, as of some fresh and almost impudent innovation. But our fathers had the French café, in the sense of the free-and-easy table in the sun and air. The only difference was that French democracy was allowed to develop its café, or multiply its tables, while English plutocracy prevented any such popular growth. Perhaps there are other examples of old types and patterns, lost in the old oligarchy and saved in the new democracies. I am haunted with a hint that the new structures are not so very new; and that they remind me of something very old. As I look from the balcony floor the crowds seem to float away and the colours to soften and grow pale, and I know I am in one of the simplest and most ancestral of human habitations. I am looking down from the old wooden gallery upon the courtyard of an inn. This new architectural model, which I have described, is after all one of the oldest European models, now neglected in
Europe and especially in England. It was the theatre in which were enacted innumerable picaresque comedies and romantic plays, with figures ranging from Sancho Panza to Sam Weller. It served as the apparatus, like some gigantic toy set up in bricks and timber, for the ancient and perhaps eternal game of tennis. The very terms of the original game were taken from the inn courtyard, and the players scored accordingly as they hit the buttery-hatch or the roof. Singular speculations hover in my mind as the scene darkens and the quadrangle below begins to empty in the last hours of night. Some day perhaps this huge structure will be found standing in a solitude like a skeleton; and it will be the skeleton of the Spotted Dog or the Blue Boar. It will wither and decay until it is worthy at last to be a tavern. I do not know whether men will play tennis on its ground floor, with various scores and prizes for hitting the electric fan, or the lift, or the head waiter. Perhaps the very words will only remain as part of some such rustic game. Perhaps the electric fan will no longer be electric and the elevator will no longer elevate, and the waiter will only wait to be hit. But at least it is only by the decay of modern plutocracy, which seems already to have begun, that the secret of the structure even of this plutocratic palace can stand revealed. And after long years, when its lights are extinguished and only the long shadows inhabit its halls and vestibules, there may come a new noise like thunder; of D’Artagnan knocking at the door.
A MEDITATION IN BROADWAY

When I had looked at the lights of Broadway by night, I made to my American friends an innocent remark that seemed for some reason to amuse them. I had looked, not without joy, at that long kaleidoscope of coloured lights arranged in large letters and sprawling trade-marks, advertising everything, from pork to pianos, through the agency of the two most vivid and most mystical of the gifts of God; colour and fire. I said to them, in my simplicity, ‘What a glorious garden of wonders this would be, to any one who was lucky enough to be unable to read.’

Here it is but a text for a further suggestion. But let us suppose that there does walk down this flaming avenue a peasant, of the sort called scornfully an illiterate peasant; by those who think that insisting on people reading and writing is the best way to keep out the spies who read in all languages and the forgers who write in all hands. On this principle indeed, a peasant merely acquainted with things of little practical use to mankind, such as ploughing, cutting wood, or growing vegetables, would very probably be excluded; and it is not for us to criticise from the outside the philosophy of those who would keep out the farmer and let in the forger. But let us suppose, if only for the sake of argument, that the peasant is walking under the artificial suns and stars of this tremendous thoroughfare; that he has escaped to the land of liberty upon some general rumour and romance of the story of its liberation, but without being yet able to understand the arbitrary signs of its alphabet. The soul of such a man would surely soar higher than the sky-scrapers, and embrace a brotherhood broader than Broadway. Realising that he had arrived on an evening of exceptional festivity, worthy to be blazoned with all this burning heraldry, he would please himself by guessing what great proclamation or principle of the Republic hung in the sky like a constellation or rippled across the street like a comet. He would be shrewd enough to guess that the three festoons fringed with fiery words of somewhat similar pattern stood for ‘Government of the People, For the People, By the People’; for it must obviously be that, unless it were ‘Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.’ His shrewdness would perhaps be a little shaken if he knew that the triad stood for ‘Tang Tonic To-day; Tang Tonic To-morrow; Tang Tonic All the Time.’ He will soon identify a restless ribbon of red lettering, red hot and rebellious, as the saying, ‘Give me liberty or give me death.’ He will fail to identify it as the equally famous saying, ‘Skyoline Has Gout Beaten to a
Frazzle.’ Therefore it was that I desired the peasant to walk down that grove of fiery trees, under all that golden foliage, and fruits like monstrous jewels, as innocent as Adam before the Fall. He would see sights almost as fine as the flaming sword or the purple and peacock plumage of the seraphim; so long as he did not go near the Tree of Knowledge.

In other words, if once he went to school it would be all up; and indeed I fear in any case he would soon discover his error. If he stood wildly waving his hat for liberty in the middle of the road as Chunk Chutney picked itself out in ruby stars upon the sky, he would impede the excellent but extremely rigid traffic system of New York. If he fell on his knees before a sapphire splendour, and began saying an Ave Maria under a mistaken association, he would be conducted kindly but firmly by an Irish policeman to a more authentic shrine. But though the foreign simplicity might not long survive in New York, it is quite a mistake to suppose that such foreign simplicity cannot enter New York. He may be excluded for being illiterate, but he cannot be excluded for being ignorant, nor for being innocent. Least of all can he be excluded for being wiser in his innocence than the world in its knowledge. There is here indeed more than one distinction to be made. New York is a cosmopolitan city; but it is not a city of cosmopolitans. Most of the masses in New York have a nation, whether or no it be the nation to which New York belongs. Those who are Americanised are American, and very patriotically American. Those who are not thus nationalised are not in the least internationalised. They simply continue to be themselves; the Irish are Irish; the Jews are Jewish; and all sorts of other tribes carry on the traditions of remote European valleys almost untouched. In short, there is a sort of slender bridge between their old country and their new, which they either cross or do not cross, but which they seldom simply occupy. They are exiles or they are citizens; there is no moment when they are cosmopolitans. But very often the exiles bring with them not only rooted traditions, but rooted truths.

Indeed it is to a great extent the thought of these strange souls in crude American garb that gives a meaning to the masquerade of New York. In the hotel where I stayed the head waiter in one room was a Bohemian; and I am glad to say that he called himself a Bohemian. I have already protested sufficiently, before American audiences, against the pedantry of perpetually talking about Czecho-Slovakia. I suggested to my American friends that the abandonment of the word Bohemian in its historical sense might well extend to its literary and figurative sense. We might be expected to say, ‘I’m afraid Henry has got into very Czecho-Slovakian habits lately,’ or ‘Don’t bother to dress; it’s quite a
Czecho-Slovakian affair.’ Anyhow my Bohemian would have nothing to do with such nonsense; he called himself a son of Bohemia, and spoke as such in his criticisms of America, which were both favourable and unfavourable. He was a squat man, with a sturdy figure and a steady smile; and his eyes were like dark pools in the depth of a darker forest, but I do not think he had ever been deceived by the lights of Broadway.

But I found something like my real innocent abroad, my real peasant among the sky-signs, in another part of the same establishment. He was a much leaner man, equally dark, with a hook nose, hungry face, and fierce black moustaches. He also was a waiter, and was in the costume of a waiter, which is a smarter edition of the costume of a lecturer. As he was serving me with clam chowder or some such thing, I fell into speech with him and he told me he was a Bulgar. I said something like, ‘I’m afraid I don’t know as much as I ought to about Bulgaria. I suppose most of your people are agricultural, aren’t they?’ He did not stir an inch from his regular attitude, but he slightly lowered his low voice and said, ‘Yes. From the earth we come and to the earth we return; when people get away from that they are lost.’

To hear such a thing said by the waiter was alone an epoch in the life of an unfortunate writer of fantastic novels. To see him clear away the clam chowder like an automaton, and bring me more iced water like an automaton or like nothing on earth except an American waiter (for piling up ice is the cold passion of their lives), and all this after having uttered something so dark and deep, so starkly incongruous and so startlingly true, was an indescribable thing, but very like the picture of the peasant admiring Broadway. So he passed, with his artificial clothes and manners, lit up with all the ghastly artificial light of the hotel, and all the ghastly artificial life of the city; and his heart was like his own remote and rocky valley, where those unchanging words were carved as on a rock.

I do not profess to discuss here at all adequately the question this raises about the Americanisation of the Bulgar. It has many aspects, of some of which most Englishmen and even some Americans are rather unconscious. For one thing, a man with so rugged a loyalty to land could not be Americanised in New York; but it is not so certain that he could not be Americanised in America. We might almost say that a peasantry is hidden in the heart of America. So far as our impressions go, it is a secret. It is rather an open secret; covering only some thousand square miles of open prairie. But for most of our countrymen it is something invisible, unimagined, and unvisited; the simple truth that where all
those acres are there is agriculture, and where all that agriculture is there is considerable tendency towards distributive or decently equalised property, as in a peasantry. On the other hand, there are those who say that the Bulgar will never be Americanised, that he only comes to be a waiter in America that he may afford to return to be a peasant in Bulgaria. I cannot decide this issue, and indeed I did not introduce it to this end. I was led to it by a certain line of reflection that runs along the Great White Way, and I will continue to follow it. The criticism, if we could put it rightly, not only covers more than New York but more than the whole New World. Any argument against it is quite as valid against the largest and richest cities of the Old World, against London or Liverpool or Frankfort or Belfast. But it is in New York that we see the argument most clearly, because we see the thing thus towering into its own turrets and breaking into its own fireworks.

I disagree with the aesthetic condemnation of the modern city with its sky-scrapers and sky-signs. I mean that which laments the loss of beauty and its sacrifice to utility. It seems to me the very reverse of the truth. Years ago, when people used to say the Salvation Army doubtless had good intentions, but we must all deplore its methods, I pointed out that the very contrary is the case. Its method, the method of drums and democratic appeal, is that of the Franciscans or any other march of the Church Militant. It was precisely its aims that were dubious, with their dissenting morality and despotic finance. It is somewhat the same with things like the sky-signs in Broadway. The aesthete must not ask me to mingle my tears with his, because these things are merely useful and ugly. For I am not specially inclined to think them ugly; but I am strongly inclined to think them useless. As a matter of art for art’s sake, they seem to me rather artistic. As a form of practical social work they seem to me stark stupid waste. If Mr. Bilge is rich enough to build a tower four hundred feet high and give it a crown of golden crescents and crimson stars, in order to draw attention to his manufacture of the Paradise Tooth Paste or The Seventh Heaven Cigar, I do not feel the least disposition to thank him for any serious form of social service. I have never tried the Seventh Heaven Cigar; indeed a premonition moves me towards the belief that I shall go down to the dust without trying it. I have every reason to doubt whether it does any particular good to those who smoke it, or any good to anybody except those who sell it. In short Mr. Bilge’s usefulness consists in being useful to Mr. Bilge, and all the rest is illusion and sentimentalism. But because I know that Bilge is only Bilge, shall I stoop to the profanity of saying that fire is only fire? Shall I blaspheme crimson stars any more than crimson
sunsets, or deny that those moons are golden any more than that this grass is green? If a child saw these coloured lights, he would dance with as much delight as at any other coloured toys; and it is the duty of every poet, and even of every critic, to dance in respectful imitation of the child. Indeed I am in a mood of so much sympathy with the fairy lights of this pantomime city, that I should be almost sorry to see social sanity and a sense of proportion return to extinguish them. I fear the day is breaking, and the broad daylight of tradition and ancient truth is coming to end all this delightful nightmare of New York at night. Peasants and priests and all sorts of practical and sensible people are coming back into power, and their stern realism may wither all these beautiful, unsubstantial, useless things. They will not believe in the Seventh Heaven Cigar, even when they see it shining as with stars in the seventh heaven. They will not be affected by advertisements, any more than the priests and peasants of the Middle Ages would have been affected by advertisements. Only a very soft-headed, sentimental, and rather servile generation of men could possibly be affected by advertisements at all. People who are a little more hard-headed, humorous, and intellectually independent, see the rather simple joke; and are not impressed by this or any other form of self-praise. Almost any other men in almost any other age would have seen the joke. If you had said to a man in the Stone Age, ‘Ugg says Ugg makes the best stone hatchets,’ he would have perceived a lack of detachment and disinterestedness about the testimonial. If you had said to a medieval peasant, ‘Robert the Bowyer proclaims, with three blasts of a horn, that he makes good bows,’ the peasant would have said, ‘Well, of course he does,’ and thought about something more important. It is only among people whose minds have been weakened by a sort of mesmerism that so transparent a trick as that of advertisement could ever have been tried at all. And if ever we have again, as for other reasons I cannot but hope we shall, a more democratic distribution of property and a more agricultural basis of national life, it would seem at first sight only too likely that all this beautiful superstition will perish, and the fairyland of Broadway with all its varied rainbows fade away. For such people the Seventh Heaven Cigar, like the nineteenth-century city, will have ended in smoke. And even the smoke of it will have vanished.

But the next stage of reflection brings us back to the peasant looking at the lights of Broadway. It is not true to say in the strict sense that the peasant has never seen such things before. The truth is that he has seen them on a much smaller scale, but for a much larger purpose. Peasants also have their ritual and ornament, but it is to adorn more real things. Apart from our first fancy about the
peasant who could not read, there is no doubt about what would be apparent to a peasant who could read, and who could understand. For him also fire is sacred, for him also colour is symbolic. But where he sets up a candle to light the little shrine of St. Joseph, he finds it takes twelve hundred candles to light the Seventh Heaven Cigar. He is used to the colours in church windows showing red for martyrs or blue for madonnas; but here he can only conclude that all the colours of the rainbow belong to Mr. Bilge. Now upon the aesthetic side he might well be impressed; but it is exactly on the social and even scientific side that he has a right to criticise. If he were a Chinese peasant, for instance, and came from a land of fireworks, he would naturally suppose that he had happened to arrive at a great firework display in celebration of something; perhaps the Sacred Emperor’s birthday, or rather birthnight. It would gradually dawn on the Chinese philosopher that the Emperor could hardly be born every night. And when he learnt the truth the philosopher, if he was a philosopher, would be a little disappointed . . . possibly a little disdainful.

Compare, for instance, these everlasting fireworks with the damp squibs and dying bonfires of Guy Fawkes Day. That quaint and even queer national festival has been fading for some time out of English life. Still, it was a national festival, in the double sense that it represented some sort of public spirit pursued by some sort of popular impulse. People spent money on the display of fireworks; they did not get money by it. And the people who spent money were often those who had very little money to spend. It had something of the glorious and fanatical character of making the poor poorer. It did not, like the advertisements, have only the mean and materialistic character of making the rich richer. In short, it came from the people and it appealed to the nation. The historical and religious cause in which it originated is not mine; and I think it has perished partly through being tied to a historical theory for which there is no future. I think this is illustrated in the very fact that the ceremonial is merely negative and destructive. Negation and destruction are very noble things as far as they go, and when they go in the right direction; and the popular expression of them has always something hearty and human about it. I shall not therefore bring any fine or fastidious criticism, whether literary or musical, to bear upon the little boys who drag about a bolster and a paper mask, calling out

Guy Fawkes Guy
Hit him in the eye.

But I admit it is a disadvantage that they have not a saint or hero to crown in
effigy as well as a traitor to burn in effigy. I admit that popular Protestantism has become too purely negative for people to wreathe in flowers the statue of Mr. Kensit or even of Dr. Clifford. I do not disguise my preference for popular Catholicism; which still has statues that can be wreathed in flowers. I wish our national feast of fireworks revolved round something positive and popular. I wish the beauty of a Catherine Wheel were displayed to the glory of St. Catherine. I should not especially complain if Roman candles were really Roman candles. But this negative character does not destroy the national character; which began at least in disinterested faith and has ended at least in disinterested fun. There is nothing disinterested at all about the new commercial fireworks. There is nothing so dignified as a dingy guy among the lights of Broadway. In that thoroughfare, indeed, the very word guy has another and milder significance. An American friend congratulated me on the impression I produced on a lady interviewer, observing, ‘She says you’re a regular guy.’ This puzzled me a little at the time. ‘Her description is no doubt correct,’ I said, ‘but I confess that it would never have struck me as specially complimentary.’ But it appears that it is one of the most graceful of compliments, in the original American. A guy in America is a colourless term for a human being. All men are guys, being endowed by their Creator with certain . . . but I am misled by another association. And a regular guy means, I presume, a reliable or respectable guy. The point here, however, is that the guy in the grotesque English sense does represent the dilapidated remnant of a real human tradition of symbolising real historic ideals by the sacramental mystery of fire. It is a great fall from the lowest of these lowly bonfires to the highest of the modern sky-signs. The new illumination does not stand for any national ideal at all; and what is yet more to the point, it does not come from any popular enthusiasm at all. That is where it differs from the narrowest national Protestantism of the English institution. Mobs have risen in support of No Popery; no mobs are likely to rise in defence of the New Puffery. Many a poor crazy Orangeman has died saying, ‘To Hell with the Pope’; it is doubtful whether any man will ever, with his last breath, frame the ecstatic words, ‘Try Hugby’s Chewing Gum.’ These modern and mercantile legends are imposed upon us by a mercantile minority, and we are merely passive to the suggestion. The hypnotist of high finance or big business merely writes his commands in heaven with a finger of fire. All men really are guys, in the sense of dummies. We are only the victims of his pyrotechnic violence; and it is he who hits us in the eye.

This is the real case against that modern society that is symbolised by such art
and architecture. It is not that it is toppling, but that it is top-heavy. It is not that it is vulgar, but rather that it is not popular. In other words, the democratic ideal of countries like America, while it is still generally sincere and sometimes intense, is at issue with another tendency, an industrial progress which is of all things on earth the most undemocratic. America is not alone in possessing the industrialism, but she is alone in emphasising the ideal that strives with industrialism. Industrial capitalism and ideal democracy are everywhere in controversy; but perhaps only here are they in conflict. France has a democratic ideal; but France is not industrial. England and Germany are industrial; but England and Germany are not really democratic. Of course when I speak here of industrialism I speak of great industrial areas; there is, as will be noted later, another side to all these countries; there is in America itself not only a great deal of agricultural society, but a great deal of agricultural equality; just as there are still peasants in Germany and may some day again be peasants in England. But the point is that the ideal and its enemy the reality are here crushed very close to each other in the high, narrow city; and that the sky-scaper is truly named because its top, towering in such insolence, is scraping the stars off the American sky, the very heaven of the American spirit.

That seems to me the main outline of the whole problem. In the first chapter of this book, I have emphasised the fact that equality is still the ideal though no longer the reality of America. I should like to conclude this one by emphasising the fact that the reality of modern capitalism is menacing that ideal with terrors and even splendours that might well stagger the wavering and impressionable modern spirit. Upon the issue of that struggle depends the question of whether this new great civilisation continues to exist, and even whether any one cares if it exists or not. I have already used the parable of the American flag, and the stars that stand for a multitudinous equality; I might here take the opposite symbol of these artificial and terrestrial stars flaming on the forehead of the commercial city; and note the peril of the last illusion, which is that the artificial stars may seem to fill the heavens, and the real stars to have faded from sight. But I am content for the moment to reaffirm the merely imaginative pleasure of those dizzy turrets and dancing fires. If those nightmare buildings were really all built for nothing, how noble they would be! The fact that they were really built for something need not unduly depress us for a moment, or drag down our soaring fancies. There is something about these vertical lines that suggests a sort of rush upwards, as of great cataracts topsy-turvy. I have spoken of fireworks, but here I should rather speak of rockets. There is only something underneath the mind
murmuring that nothing remains at last of a flaming rocket except a falling stick. I have spoken of Babylonian perspectives, and of words written with a fiery finger, like that huge unhuman finger that wrote on Belshazzar’s wall. . . . But what did it write on Belshazzar’s wall? . . . I am content once more to end on a note of doubt and a rather dark sympathy with those many-coloured solar systems turning so dizzily, far up in the divine vacuum of the night.

‘From the earth we come and to the earth we return; when people get away from that they are lost.’
IRISH AND OTHER INTERVIEWERS

It is often asked what should be the first thing that a man sees when he lands in a foreign country; but I think it should be the vision of his own country. At least when I came into New York Harbour, a sort of grey and green cloud came between me and the towers with multitudinous windows, white in the winter sunlight; and I saw an old brown house standing back among the beech-trees at home, the house of only one among many friends and neighbours, but one somehow so sunken in the very heart of England as to be unconscious of her imperial or international position, and out of the sound of her perilous seas. But what made most clear the vision that revisited me was something else. Before we touched land the men of my own guild, the journalists and reporters, had already boarded the ship like pirates. And one of them spoke to me in an accent that I knew; and thanked me for all I had done for Ireland. And it was at that moment that I knew most vividly that what I wanted was to do something for England.

Then, as it chanced, I looked across at the statue of Liberty, and saw that the great bronze was gleaming green in the morning light. I had made all the obvious jokes about the statue of Liberty. I found it had a soothing effect on earnest Prohibitionists on the boat to urge, as a point of dignity and delicacy, that it ought to be given back to the French, a vicious race abandoned to the culture of the vine. I proposed that the last liquors on board should be poured out in a pagan libation before it. And then I suddenly remembered that this Liberty was still in some sense enlightening the world, or one part of the world; was a lamp for one sort of wanderer, a star of one sort of seafarer. To one persecuted people at least this land had really been an asylum; even if recent legislation (as I have said) had made them think it a lunatic asylum. They had made it so much their home that the very colour of the country seemed to change with the infusion; as the bronze of the great statue took on a semblance of the wearing of the green.

It is a commonplace that the Englishman has been stupid in his relations with the Irish; but he has been far more stupid in his relations with the Americans on the subject of the Irish. His propaganda has been worse than his practice; and his defence more ill-considered than the most indefensible things that it was intended to defend. There is in this matter a curious tangle of cross-purposes, which only a parallel example can make at all clear. And I will note the point here, because it is some testimony to its vivid importance that it was really the first I had to discuss on American soil with an American citizen. In a double
sense I touched Ireland before I came to America. I will take an imaginary instance from another controversy; in order to show how the apology can be worse than the action. The best we can say for ourselves is worse than the worst that we can do.

There was a time when English poets and other publicists could always be inspired with instantaneous indignation about the persecuted Jews in Russia. We have heard less about them since we heard more about the persecuting Jews in Russia. I fear there are a great many middle-class Englishmen already who wish that Trotsky had been persecuted a little more. But even in those days Englishmen divided their minds in a curious fashion; and unconsciously distinguished between the Jews whom they had never seen, in Warsaw, and the Jews whom they had often seen in Whitechapel. It seemed to be assumed that, by a curious coincidence, Russia possessed not only the very worst Anti-Semites but the very best Semites. A moneylender in London might be like Judas Iscariot; but a moneylender in Moscow must be like Judas Maccabaeus.

Nevertheless there remained in our common sense an unconscious but fundamental comprehension of the unity of Israel; a sense that some things could be said, and some could not be said, about the Jews as a whole. Suppose that even in those days, to say nothing of these, an English protest against Russian Anti-Semitism had been answered by the Russian Anti-Semites, and suppose the answer had been somewhat as follows:—‘It is all very well for foreigners to complain of our denying civic rights to our Jewish subjects; but we know the Jews better than they do. They are a barbarous people, entirely primitive, and very like the simple savages who cannot count beyond five on their fingers. It is quite impossible to make them understand ordinary numbers, to say nothing of simple economics. They do not realise the meaning or the value of money. No Jew anywhere in the world can get into his stupid head the notion of a bargain, or of exchanging one thing for another. Their hopeless incapacity for commerce or finance would retard the progress of our people, would prevent the spread of any sort of economic education, would keep the whole country on a level lower than that of the most prehistoric methods of barter. What Russia needs most is a mercantile middle class; and it is unjust to ask us to swamp its small beginnings in thousands of these rude tribesmen, who cannot do a sum of simple addition, or understand the symbolic character of a threepenny bit. We might as well be asked to give civic rights to cows and pigs as to this unhappy, half-witted race who can no more count than the beasts of the field. In every intellectual exercise they are hopelessly incompetent; no Jew can play chess; no Jew can learn
languages; no Jew has ever appeared in the smallest part in any theatrical performance; no Jew can give or take any pleasure connected with any musical instrument. These people are our subjects; and we understand them. We accept full responsibility for treating such troglodytes on our own terms.’

It would not be entirely convincing. It would sound a little far-fetched and unreal. But it would sound exactly like our utterances about the Irish, as they sound to all Americans, and rather especially to Anti-Irish Americans. That is exactly the impression we produce on the people of the United States when we say, as we do say in substance, something like this: ‘We mean no harm to the poor dear Irish, so dreamy, so irresponsible, so incapable of order or organisation. If we were to withdraw from their country they would only fight among themselves; they have no notion of how to rule themselves. There is something charming about their unpracticability, about their very incapacity for the coarse business of politics. But for their own sakes it is impossible to leave these emotional visionaries to ruin themselves in the attempt to rule themselves. They are like children; but they are our own children, and we understand them. We accept full responsibility for acting as their parents and guardians.’

Now the point is not only that this view of the Irish is false, but that it is the particular view that the Americans know to be false. While we are saying that the Irish could not organise, the Americans are complaining, often very bitterly, of the power of Irish organisation. While we say that the Irishman could not rule himself, the Americans are saying, more or less humorously, that the Irishman rules them. A highly intelligent professor said to me in Boston, ‘We have solved the Irish problem here; we have an entirely independent Irish Government.’ While we are complaining, in an almost passionate manner, of the impotence of mere cliques of idealists and dreamers, they are complaining, often in a very indignant manner, of the power of great gangs of bosses and bullies. There are a great many Americans who pity the Irish, very naturally and very rightly, for the historic martyrdom which their patriotism has endured. But there are a great many Americans who do not pity the Irish in the least. They would be much more likely to pity the English; only this particular way of talking tends rather to make them despise the English. Thus both the friends of Ireland and the foes of Ireland tend to be the foes of England. We make one set of enemies by our action, and another by our apology.

It is a thing that can from time to time be found in history; a misunderstanding that really has a moral. The English excuse would carry much more weight if it had more sincerity and more humility. There are a considerable number of
people in the United States who could sympathise with us, if we would say frankly that we fear the Irish. Those who thus despise our pity might possibly even respect our fear. The argument I have often used in other places comes back with prodigious and redoubled force, after hearing anything of American opinion; the argument that the only reasonable or reputable excuse for the English is the excuse of a patriotic sense of peril; and that the Unionist, if he must be a Unionist, should use that and no other. When the Unionist has said that he dare not let loose against himself a captive he has so cruelly wronged, he has said all that he has to say; all that he has ever had to say; all that he will ever have to say. He is like a man who has sent a virile and rather vindictive rival unjustly to penal servitude; and who connives at the continuance of the sentence, not because he himself is particularly vindictive, but because he is afraid of what the convict will do when he comes out of prison. This is not exactly a moral strength, but it is a very human weakness; and that is the most that can be said for it. All other talk, about Celtic frenzy or Catholic superstition, is cant invented to deceive himself or to deceive the world. But the vital point to realise is that it is cant that cannot possibly deceive the American world. In the matter of the Irishman the American is not to be deceived. It is not merely true to say that he knows better. It is equally true to say that he knows worse. He knows vices and evils in the Irishman that are entirely hidden in the hazy vision of the Englishman. He knows that our unreal slanders are inconsistent even with the real sins. To us Ireland is a shadowy Isle of Sunset, like Atlantis, about which we can make up legends. To him it is a positive ward or parish in the heart of his huge cities, like Whitechapel; about which even we cannot make legends but only lies. And, as I have said, there are some lies we do not tell even about Whitechapel. We do not say it is inhabited by Jews too stupid to count or know the value of a coin.

The first thing for any honest Englishman to send across the sea is this; that the English have not the shadow of a notion of what they are up against in America. They have never even heard of the batteries of almost brutal energy, of which I had thus touched a live wire even before I landed. People talk about the hypocrisy of England in dealing with a small nationality. What strikes me is the stupidity of England in supposing that she is dealing with a small nationality; when she is really dealing with a very large nationality. She is dealing with a nationality that often threatens, even numerically, to dominate all the other nationalities of the United States. The Irish are not decaying; they are not unpractical; they are scarcely even scattered; they are not even poor. They are
the most powerful and practical world-combination with whom we can decide to be friends or foes; and that is why I thought first of that still and solid brown house in Buckinghamshire, standing back in the shadow of the trees.

Among my impressions of America I have deliberately put first the figure of the Irish-American interviewer, standing on the shore more symbolic than the statue of Liberty. The Irish interviewer’s importance for the English lay in the fact of his being an Irishman, but there was also considerable interest in the circumstance of his being an interviewer. And as certain wild birds sometimes wing their way far out to sea and are the first signal of the shore, so the first Americans the traveller meets are often American interviewers; and they are generally birds of a feather, and they certainly flock together. In this respect, there is a slight difference in the etiquette of the craft in the two countries, which I was delighted to discuss with my fellow craftsmen. If I could at that moment have flown back to Fleet Street I am happy to reflect that nobody in the world would in the least wish to interview me. I should attract no more attention than the stone griffin opposite the Law Courts; both monsters being grotesque but also familiar. But supposing for the sake of argument that anybody did want to interview me, it is fairly certain that the fact of one paper publishing such an interview would rather prevent the other papers from doing so. The repetition of the same views of the same individual in two places would be considered rather bad journalism; it would have an air of stolen thunder, not to say stage thunder.

But in America the fact of my landing and lecturing was evidently regarded in the same light as a murder or a great fire, or any other terrible but incurable catastrophe, a matter of interest to all pressmen concerned with practical events. One of the first questions I was asked was how I should be disposed to explain the wave of crime in New York. Naturally I replied that it might possibly be due to the number of English lecturers who had recently landed. In the mood of the moment it seemed possible that, if they had all been interviewed, regrettable incidents might possibly have taken place. But this was only the mood of the moment, and even as a mood did not last more than a moment. And since it has reference to a rather common and a rather unjust conception of American journalism, I think it well to take it first as a fallacy to be refuted, though the refutation may require a rather longer approach.

I have generally found that the traveller fails to understand a foreign country, through treating it as a tendency and not as a balance. But if a thing were always tending in one direction it would soon tend to destruction. Everything that merely progresses finally perishes. Every nation, like every family, exists upon a
compromise, and commonly a rather eccentric compromise; using the word ‘eccentric’ in the sense of something that is somehow at once crazy and healthy. Now the foreigner commonly sees some feature that he thinks fantastic without seeing the feature that balances it. The ordinary examples are obvious enough. An Englishman dining inside a hotel on the boulevards thinks the French eccentric in refusing to open a window. But he does not think the English eccentric in refusing to carry their chairs and tables out on to the pavement in Ludgate Circus. An Englishman will go poking about in little Swiss or Italian villages, in wild mountains or in remote islands, demanding tea; and never reflects that he is like a Chinaman who should enter all the wayside public-houses in Kent and Sussex and demand opium. But the point is not merely that he demands what he cannot expect to enjoy; it is that he ignores even what he does enjoy. He does not realise the sublime and starry paradox of the phrase, vin ordinaire, which to him should be a glorious jest like the phrase ‘common gold’ or ‘daily diamonds.’ These are the simple and self-evident cases; but there are many more subtle cases of the same thing; of the tendency to see that the nation fills up its own gap with its own substitute; or corrects its own extravagance with its own precaution. The national antidote generally grows wild in the woods side by side with the national poison. If it did not, all the natives would be dead. For it is so, as I have said, that nations necessarily die of the undiluted poison called progress.

It is so in this much-abused and over-abused example of the American journalist. The American interviewers really have exceedingly good manners for the purposes of their trade, granted that it is necessary to pursue their trade. And even what is called their hustling method can truly be said to cut both ways, or hustle both ways; for if they hustle in, they also hustle out. It may not at first sight seem the very warmest compliment to a gentleman to congratulate him on the fact that he soon goes away. But it really is a tribute to his perfection in a very delicate social art; and I am quite serious when I say that in this respect the interviewers are artists. It might be more difficult for an Englishman to come to the point, particularly the sort of point which American journalists are supposed, with some exaggeration, to aim at. It might be more difficult for an Englishman to ask a total stranger on the spur of the moment for the exact inscription on his mother’s grave; but I really think that if an Englishman once got so far as that he would go very much farther, and certainly go on very much longer. The Englishman would approach the churchyard by a rather more wandering woodland path; but if once he had got to the grave I think he would have much
more disposition, so to speak, to sit down on it. Our own national temperament would find it decidedly more difficult to disconnect when connections had really been established. Possibly that is the reason why our national temperament does not establish them. I suspect that the real reason that an Englishman does not talk is that he cannot leave off talking. I suspect that my solitary countrymen, hiding in separate railway compartments, are not so much retiring as a race of Trappists as escaping from a race of talkers.

However this may be, there is obviously something of practical advantage in the ease with which the American butterfly flits from flower to flower. He may in a sense force his acquaintance on us, but he does not force himself on us. Even when, to our prejudices, he seems to insist on knowing us, at least he does not insist on our knowing him. It may be, to some sensibilities, a bad thing that a total stranger should talk as if he were a friend, but it might possibly be worse if he insisted on being a friend before he would talk like one. To a great deal of the interviewing, indeed much the greater part of it, even this criticism does not apply; there is nothing which even an Englishman of extreme sensibility could regard as particularly private; the questions involved are generally entirely public, and treated with not a little public spirit. But my only reason for saying here what can be said even for the worst exceptions is to point out this general and neglected principle; that the very thing that we complain of in a foreigner generally carries with it its own foreign cure. American interviewing is generally very reasonable, and it is always very rapid. And even those to whom talking to an intelligent fellow creature is as horrible as having a tooth out may still admit that American interviewing has many of the qualities of American dentistry.

Another effect that has given rise to this fallacy, this exaggeration of the vulgarity and curiosity of the press, is the distinction between the articles and the headlines; or rather the tendency to ignore that distinction. The few really untrue and unscrupulous things I have seen in American ‘stories’ have always been in the headlines. And the headlines are written by somebody else; some solitary and savage cynic locked up in the office, hating all mankind, and raging and revenging himself at random, while the neat, polite, and rational pressman can safely be let loose to wander about the town.

For instance, I talked to two decidedly thoughtful fellow journalists immediately on my arrival at a town in which there had been some labour troubles. I told them my general view of Labour in the very largest and perhaps the vaguest historical outline; pointing out that the one great truth to be taught to the middle classes was that Capitalism was itself a crisis, and a passing crisis;
that it was not so much that it was breaking down as that it had never really stood up. Slaveries could last, and peasantry could last; but wage-earning communities could hardly even live, and were already dying.

All this moral and even metaphysical generalisation was most fairly and most faithfully reproduced by the interviewer, who had actually heard it casually and idly spoken. But on the top of this column of political philosophy was the extraordinary announcement in enormous letters, ‘Chesterton Takes Sides in Trolley Strike.’ This was inaccurate. When I spoke I not only did not know that there was any trolley strike, but I did not know what a trolley strike was. I should have had an indistinct idea that a large number of citizens earned their living by carrying things about in wheel-barrows, and that they had desisted from the beneficent activities. Any one who did not happen to be a journalist, or know a little about journalism, American and English, would have supposed that the same man who wrote the article had suddenly gone mad and written the title. But I know that we have here to deal with two different types of journalists; and the man who writes the headlines I will not dare to describe; for I have not seen him except in dreams.

Another innocent complication is that the interviewer does sometimes translate things into his native language. It would not seem odd that a French interviewer should translate them into French; and it is certain that the American interviewer sometimes translates them into American. Those who imagine the two languages to be the same are more innocent than any interviewer. To take one out of the twenty examples, some of which I have mentioned elsewhere, suppose an interviewer had said that I had the reputation of being a nut. I should be flattered but faintly surprised at such a tribute to my dress and dashing exterior. I should afterwards be sobered and enlightened by discovering that in America a nut does not mean a dandy but a defective or imbecile person. And as I have here to translate their American phrase into English, it may be very defensible that they should translate my English phrases into American. Anyhow they often do translate them into American. In answer to the usual question about Prohibition I had made the usual answer, obvious to the point of dullness to those who are in daily contact with it, that it is a law that the rich make knowing they can always break it. From the printed interview it appeared that I had said, ‘Prohibition! All matter of dollar sign.’ This is almost avowed translation, like a French translation. Nobody can suppose that it would come natural to an Englishman to talk about a dollar, still less about a dollar sign—whatever that may be. It is exactly as if he had made me talk about the Skelt and
Stevenson Toy Theatre as ‘a cent plain, and two cents coloured’ or condemned a parsimonious policy as dime-wise and dollar-foolish. Another interviewer once asked me who was the greatest American writer. I have forgotten exactly what I said, but after mentioning several names, I said that the greatest natural genius and artistic force was probably Walt Whitman. The printed interview is more precise; and students of my literary and conversational style will be interested to know that I said, ‘See here, Walt Whitman was your one real red-blooded man.’ Here again I hardly think the translation can have been quite unconscious; most of my intimates are indeed aware that I do not talk like that, but I fancy that the same fact would have dawned on the journalist to whom I had been talking. And even this trivial point carries with it the two truths which must be, I fear, the rather monotonous moral of these pages. The first is that America and England can be far better friends when sharply divided than when shapelessly amalgamated. These two journalists were false reporters, but they were true translators. They were not so much interviewers as interpreters. And the second is that in any such difference it is often wholesome to look beneath the surface for a superiority. For ability to translate does imply ability to understand; and many of these journalists really did understand. I think there are many English journalists who would be more puzzled by so simple an idea as the plutocratic foundation of Prohibition. But the American knew at once that I meant it was a matter of dollar sign; probably because he knew very well that it is.

Then again there is a curious convention by which American interviewing makes itself out much worse than it is. The reports are far more rowdy and insolent than the conversations. This is probably a part of the fact that a certain vivacity, which to some seems vitality and to some vulgarity, is not only an ambition but an ideal. It must always be grasped that this vulgarity is an ideal even more than it is a reality. It is an ideal when it is not a reality. A very quiet and intelligent young man, in a soft black hat and tortoise-shell spectacles, will ask for an interview with unimpeachable politeness, wait for his living subject with unimpeachable patience, talk to him quite sensibly for twenty minutes, and go noiselessly away. Then in the newspaper next morning you will read how he beat the bedroom door in, and pursued his victim on to the roof or dragged him from under the bed, and tore from him replies to all sorts of bald and ruthless questions printed in large black letters. I was often interviewed in the evening, and had no notion of how atrociously I had been insulted till I saw it in the paper next morning. I had no notion I had been on the rack of an inquisitor until I saw it in plain print; and then of course I believed it, with a faith and docility
unknown in any previous epoch of history. An interesting essay might be written upon points upon which nations affect more vices than they possess; and it might deal more fully with the American pressman, who is a harmless clubman in private, and becomes a sort of highway-robber in print.

I have turned this chapter into something like a defence of interviewers, because I really think they are made to bear too much of the burden of the bad developments of modern journalism. But I am very far from meaning to suggest that those bad developments are not very bad. So far from wishing to minimise the evil, I would in a real sense rather magnify it. I would suggest that the evil itself is a much larger and more fundamental thing; and that to deal with it by abusing poor journalists, doing their particular and perhaps peculiar duty, is like dealing with a pestilence by rubbing at one of the spots. What is wrong with the modern world will not be righted by attributing the whole disease to each of its symptoms in turn; first to the tavern and then to the cinema and then to the reporter’s room. The evil of journalism is not in the journalists. It is not in the poor men on the lower level of the profession, but in the rich men at the top of the profession; or rather in the rich men who are too much on top of the profession even to belong to it. The trouble with newspapers is the Newspaper Trust, as the trouble might be with a Wheat Trust, without involving a vilification of all the people who grow wheat. It is the American plutocracy and not the American press. What is the matter with the modern world is not modern headlines or modern films or modern machinery. What is the matter with the modern world is the modern world; and the cure will come from another.
SOME AMERICAN CITIES

There is one point, almost to be called a paradox, to be noted about New York; and that is that in one sense it is really new. The term very seldom has any relevance to the reality. The New Forest is nearly as old as the Conquest, and the New Theology is nearly as old as the Creed. Things have been offered to me as the new thought that might more properly be called the old thoughtlessness; and the thing we call the New Poor Law is already old enough to know better. But there is a sense in which New York is always new; in the sense that it is always being renewed. A stranger might well say that the chief industry of the citizens consists of destroying their city; but he soon realises that they always start it all over again with undiminished energy and hope. At first I had a fancy that they never quite finished putting up a big building without feeling that it was time to pull it down again; and that somebody began to dig up the first foundations while somebody else was putting on the last tiles. This fills the whole of this brilliant and bewildering place with a quite unique and unparalleled air of rapid ruin. Ruins spring up so suddenly like mushrooms, which with us are the growth of age like mosses, that one half expects to see ivy climbing quickly up the broken walls as in the nightmare of the Time Machine, or in some incredibly accelerated cinema.

There is no sight in any country that raises my own spirits so much as a scaffolding. It is a tragedy that they always take the scaffolding away, and leave us nothing but a mere building. If they would only take the building away and leave us a beautiful scaffolding, it would in most cases be a gain to the loveliness of earth. If I could analyse what it is that lifts the heart about the lightness and clarity of such a white and wooden skeleton, I could explain what it is that is really charming about New York; in spite of its suffering from the curse of cosmopolitanism and even the provincial superstition of progress. It is partly that all this destruction and reconstruction is an unexhausted artistic energy; but it is partly also that it is an artistic energy that does not take itself too seriously. It is first because man is here a carpenter; and secondly because he is a stage carpenter. Indeed there is about the whole scene the spirit of scene-shifting. It therefore touches whatever nerve in us has since childhood thrilled at all theatrical things. But the picture will be imperfect unless we realise something which gives it unity and marks its chief difference from the climate and colours of Western Europe. We may say that the back-scene remains the same. The sky
remained, and in the depths of winter it seemed to be blue with summer; and so clear that I almost flattered myself that clouds were English products like primroses. An American would probably retort on my charge of scene-shifting by saying that at least he only shifted the towers and domes of the earth; and that in England it is the heavens that are shifty. And indeed we have changes from day to day that would seem to him as distinct as different magic-lantern slides; one view showing the Bay of Naples and the next the North Pole. I do not mean, of course, that there are no changes in American weather; but as a matter of proportion it is true that the most unstable part of our scenery is the most stable part of theirs. Indeed we might almost be pardoned the boast that Britain alone really possesses the noble thing called weather; most other countries having to be content with climate. It must be confessed, however, that they often are content with it. And the beauty of New York, which is considerable, is very largely due to the clarity that brings out the colours of varied buildings against the equal colour of the sky. Strangely enough I found myself repeating about this vista of the West two vivid lines in which Mr. W. B. Yeats has called up a vision of the East:—And coloured like the eastern birds

At evening in their rainless skies.

To invoke a somewhat less poetic parallel, even the untravelled Englishman has probably seen American posters and trade advertisements of a patchy and gaudy kind, in which a white house or a yellow motor-car are cut out as in cardboard against a sky like blue marble. I used to think it was only New Art, but I found that it is really New York.

It is not for nothing that the very nature of local character has gained the nickname of local colour. Colour runs through all our experience; and we all know that our childhood found talismanic gems in the very paints in the paint-box, or even in their very names. And just as the very name of ‘crimson lake’ really suggested to me some sanguine and mysterious mere, dark yet red as blood, so the very name of ‘burnt sienna’ became afterwards tangled up in my mind with the notion of something traditional and tragic; as if some such golden Italian city had really been darkened by many conflagrations in the wars of mediaeval democracy. Now if one had the caprice of conceiving some city exactly contrary to one thus seared and seasoned by fire, its colour might be called up to a childish fancy by the mere name of ‘raw umber’; and such a city is New York. I used to be puzzled by the name of ‘raw umber,’ being unable to imagine the effect of fried umber or stewed umber. But the colours of New York are exactly in that key; and might be adumbrated by phrases like raw pink or raw
yellow. It is really in a sense like something uncooked; or something which the satiric would call half-baked. And yet the effect is not only beautiful, it is even delicate. I had no name for this nuance; until I saw that somebody had written of ‘the pastel-tinted towers of New York’; and I knew that the name had been found. There are no paints dry enough to describe all that dry light; and it is not a box of colours but of crayons. If the Englishman returning to England is moved at the sight of a block of white chalk, the American sees rather a bundle of chalks. Nor can I imagine anything more moving. Fairy tales are told to children about a country where the trees are like sugar-sticks and the lakes like treacle, but most children would feel almost as greedy for a fairyland where the trees were like brushes of green paint and the hills were of coloured chalks.

But here what accentuates this arid freshness is the fragmentary look of the continual reconstruction and change. The strong daylight finds everywhere the broken edges of things, and the sort of hues we see in newly-turned earth or the white sections of trees. And it is in this respect that the local colour can literally be taken as local character. For New York considered in itself is primarily a place of unrest, and those who sincerely love it, as many do, love it for the romance of its restlessness. A man almost looks at a building as he passes to wonder whether it will be there when he comes back from his walk; and the doubt is part of an indescribable notion, as of a white nightmare of daylight, which is increased by the very numbering of the streets, with its tangle of numerals which at first makes an English head reel. The detail is merely a symbol; and when he is used to it he can see that it is, like the most humdrum human customs, both worse and better than his own. ’271 West 52nd Street’ is the easiest of all addresses to find, but the hardest of all addresses to remember. He who is, like myself, so constituted as necessarily to lose any piece of paper he has particular reason to preserve, will find himself wishing the place were called ‘Pine Crest’ or ‘Heather Crag’ like any unobtrusive villa in Streatham. But his sense of some sort of incalculable calculations, as of the vision of a mad mathematician, is rooted in a more real impression. His first feeling that his head is turning round is due to something really dizzy in the movement of a life that turns dizzily like a wheel. If there be in the modern mind something paradoxical that can find peace in change, it is here that it has indeed built its habitation or rather is still building and unbuilding it. One might fancy that it changes in everything and that nothing endures but its invisible name; and even its name, as I have said, seems to make a boast of novelty.

That is something like a sincere first impression of the atmosphere of New
York. Those who think that is the atmosphere of America have never got any farther than New York. We might almost say that they have never entered America, any more than if they had been detained like undesirable aliens at Ellis Island. And indeed there are a good many undesirable aliens detained in Manhattan Island too. But of that I will not speak, being myself an alien with no particular pretensions to be desirable. Anyhow, such is New York; but such is not the New World. The great American Republic contains very considerable varieties, and of these varieties I necessarily saw far too little to allow me to generalise. But from the little I did see, I should venture on the generalisation that the great part of America is singularly and even strikingly unlike New York. It goes without saying that New York is very unlike the vast agricultural plains and small agricultural towns of the Middle West, which I did see. It may be conjectured with some confidence that it is very unlike what is called the Wild and sometimes the Woolly West, which I did not see. But I am here comparing New York, not with the newer states of the prairie or the mountains, but with the other older cities of the Atlantic coast. And New York, as it seems to me, is quite vitally different from the other historic cities of America. It is so different that it shows them all for the moment in a false light, as a long white searchlight will throw a light that is fantastic and theatrical upon ancient and quiet villages folded in the everlasting hills. Philadelphia and Boston and Baltimore are more like those quiet villages than they are like New York.

If I were to call this book ‘The Antiquities of America,’ I should give rise to misunderstanding and possibly to annoyance. And yet the double sense in such words is an undeserved misfortune for them. We talk of Plato or the Parthenon or the Greek passion for beauty as parts of the antique, but hardly of the antiquated. When we call them ancient it is not because they have perished, but rather because they have survived. In the same way I heard some New Yorkers refer to Philadelphia or Baltimore as ‘dead towns.’ They mean by a dead town a town that has had the impudence not to die. Such people are astonished to find an ancient thing alive, just as they are now astonished, and will be increasingly astonished, to find Poland or the Papacy or the French nation still alive. And what I mean by Philadelphia and Baltimore being alive is precisely what these people mean by their being dead; it is continuity; it is the presence of the life first breathed into them and of the purpose of their being; it is the benediction of the founders of the colonies and the fathers of the republic. This tradition is truly to be called life; for life alone can link the past and the future. It merely means that as what was done yesterday makes some difference to-day, so what is done
to-day will make some difference to-morrow. In New York it is difficult to feel that any day will make any difference. These moderns only die daily without power to rise from the dead. But I can truly claim that in coming into some of these more stable cities of the States I felt something quite sincerely of that historic emotion which is satisfied in the eternal cities of the Mediterranean. I felt in America what many Americans suppose can only be felt in Europe. I have seldom had that sentiment stirred more simply and directly than when I saw from afar off, above the vast grey labyrinth of Philadelphia, great Penn upon his pinnacle like the graven figure of a god who had fashioned a new world; and remembered that his body lay buried in a field at the turning of a lane, a league from my own door.

For this aspect of America is rather neglected in the talk about electricity and headlines. Needless to say, the modern vulgarity of avarice and advertisement sprawls all over Philadelphia or Boston; but so it does over Winchester or Canterbury. But most people know that there is something else to be found in Canterbury or Winchester; many people know that it is rather more interesting; and some people know that Alfred can still walk in Winchester and that St. Thomas at Canterbury was killed but did not die. It is at least as possible for a Philadelphian to feel the presence of Penn and Franklin as for an Englishman to see the ghosts of Alfred and of Becket. Tradition does not mean a dead town; it does not mean that the living are dead but that the dead are alive. It means that it still matters what Penn did two hundred years ago or what Franklin did a hundred years ago; I never could feel in New York that it mattered what anybody did an hour ago. And these things did and do matter. Quakerism is not my favourite creed; but on that day when William Penn stood unarmed upon that spot and made his treaty with the Red Indians, his creed of humanity did have a triumph and a triumph that has not turned back. The praise given to him is not a priggish fiction of our conventional history, though such fictions have illogically curtailed it. The Nonconformists have been rather unfair to Penn even in picking their praises; and they generally forget that toleration cuts both ways and that an open mind is open on all sides. Those who deify him for consenting to bargain with the savages cannot forgive him for consenting to bargain with the Stuarts. And the same is true of the other city, yet more closely connected with the tolerant experiment of the Stuarts. The state of Maryland was the first experiment in religious freedom in human history. Lord Baltimore and his Catholics were a long march ahead of William Penn and his Quakers on what is now called the path of progress. That the first religious toleration ever granted in
the world was granted by Roman Catholics is one of those little informing
details with which our Victorian histories did not exactly teem. But when I went
into my hotel at Baltimore and found two priests waiting to see me, I was moved
in a new fashion, for I felt that I touched the end of a living chain. Nor was the
impression accidental; it will always remain with me with a mixture of gratitude
and grief, for they brought a message of welcome from a great American whose
name I had known from childhood and whose career was drawing to its close;
for it was but a few days after I left the city that I learned that Cardinal Gibbons
was dead.

On the top of a hill on one side of the town stood the first monument raised
after the Revolution to Washington. Beyond it was a new monument saluting in
the name of Lafayette the American soldiers who fell fighting in France in the
Great War. Between them were steps and stone seats, and I sat down on one of
them and talked to two children who were clambering about the bases of the
monument. I felt a profound and radiant peace in the thought that they at any rate
were not going to my lecture. It made me happy that in that talk neither they nor
I had any names. I was full of that indescribable waking vision of the
strangeness of life, and especially of the strangeness of locality; of how we find
places and lose them; and see faces for a moment in a far-off land, and it is
equally mysterious if we remember and mysterious if we forget. I had even
stirring in my head the suggestion of some verses that I shall never finish—

If I ever go back to Baltimore
The city of Maryland.

But the poem would have to contain far too much; for I was thinking of a
thousand things at once; and wondering what the children would be like twenty
years after and whether they would travel in white goods or be interested in oil,
and I was not untouched (it may be said) by the fact that a neighbouring shop
had provided the only sample of the substance called ‘tea’ ever found on the
American continent; and in front of me soared up into the sky on wings of stone
the column of all those high hopes of humanity a hundred years ago; and beyond
there were lighted candles in the chapels and prayers in the ante-chambers,
where perhaps already a Prince of the Church was dying. Only on a later page
can I even attempt to comb out such a tangle of contrasts, which is indeed the
tangle of America and this mortal life; but sitting there on that stone seat under
that quiet sky, I had some experience of the thronging thousands of living
thoughts and things, noisy and numberless as birds, that give its everlasting
vivacity and vitality to a dead town.

Two other cities I visited which have this particular type of traditional character, the one being typical of the North and the other of the South. At least I may take as convenient anti-types the towns of Boston and St. Louis; and we might add Nashville as being a shade more truly southern than St. Louis. To the extreme South, in the sense of what is called the Black Belt, I never went at all. Now English travellers expect the South to be somewhat traditional; but they are not prepared for the aspects of Boston in the North which are even more so. If we wished only for an antic of antithesis, we might say that on one side the places are more prosaic than the names and on the other the names are more prosaic than the places. St. Louis is a fine town, and we recognise a fine instinct of the imagination that set on the hill overlooking the river the statue of that holy horseman who has christened the city. But the city is not as beautiful as its name; it could not be. Indeed these titles set up a standard to which the most splendid spires and turrets could not rise, and below which the commercial chimneys and sky-signs conspicuously sink. We should think it odd if Belfast had borne the name of Joan of Arc. We should be slightly shocked if the town of Johannesburg happened to be called Jesus Christ. But few have noted a blasphemy, or even a somewhat challenging benediction, to be found in the very name of San Francisco.

But on the other hand a place like Boston is much more beautiful than its name. And, as I have suggested, an Englishman’s general information, or lack of information, leaves him in some ignorance of the type of beauty that turns up in that type of place. He has heard so much about the purely commercial North as against the agricultural and aristocratic South, and the traditions of Boston and Philadelphia are rather too tenuous and delicate to be seen from across the Atlantic. But here also there are traditions and a great deal of traditionalism. The circle of old families, which still meets with a certain exclusiveness in Philadelphia, is the sort of thing that we in England should expect to find rather in New Orleans. The academic aristocracy of Boston, which Oliver Wendell Holmes called the Brahmins, is still a reality though it was always a minority and is now a very small minority. An epigram, invented by Yale at the expense of Harvard, describes it as very small indeed:

Here is to jolly old Boston, the home of the bean and the cod,
Where Cabots speak only to Lowells, and Lowells speak only to God.

But an aristocracy must be a minority, and it is arguable that the smaller it is the
better. I am bound to say, however, that the distinguished Dr. Cabot, the present representative of the family, broke through any taboo that may tie his affections to his Creator and to Miss Amy Lowell, and broadened his sympathies so indiscriminately as to show kindness and hospitality to so lost a being as an English lecturer. But if the thing is hardly a limit it is very living as a memory; and Boston on this side is very much a place of memories. It would be paying it a very poor compliment merely to say that parts of it reminded me of England; for indeed they reminded me of English things that have largely vanished from England. There are old brown houses in the corners of squares and streets that are like glimpses of a man’s forgotten childhood; and when I saw the long path with posts where the Autocrat may be supposed to have walked with the schoolmistress, I felt I had come to the land where old tales come true.

I pause in this place upon this particular aspect of America because it is very much missed in a mere contrast with England. I need not say that if I felt it even about slight figures of fiction, I felt it even more about solid figures of history. Such ghosts seemed particularly solid in the Southern States, precisely because of the comparative quietude and leisure of the atmosphere of the South. It was never more vivid to me than when coming in, at a quiet hour of the night, into the comparatively quiet hotel at Nashville in Tennessee, and mounting to a dim and deserted upper floor where I found myself before a faded picture; and from the dark canvas looked forth the face of Andrew Jackson, watchful like a white eagle.

At that moment, perhaps, I was in more than one sense alone. Most Englishmen know a good deal of American fiction, and nothing whatever of American history. They know more about the autocrat of the breakfast-table than about the autocrat of the army and the people, the one great democratic despot of modern times; the Napoleon of the New World. The only notion the English public ever got about American politics they got from a novel, Uncle Tom’s Cabin; and to say the least of it, it was no exception to the prevalence of fiction over fact. Hundreds of us have heard of Tom Sawyer for one who has heard of Charles Sumner; and it is probable that most of us could pass a more detailed examination about Toddy and Budge than about Lincoln and Lee. But in the case of Andrew Jackson it may be that I felt a special sense of individual isolation; for I believe that there are even fewer among Englishmen than among Americans who realise that the energy of that great man was largely directed towards saving us from the chief evil which destroys the nations to-day. He sought to cut down, as with a sword of simplicity, the new and nameless
enormity of finance; and he must have known, as by a lightning flash, that the people were behind him, because all the politicians were against him. The end of that struggle is not yet; but if the bank is stronger than the sword or the sceptre of popular sovereignty, the end will be the end of democracy. It will have to choose between accepting an acknowledged dictator and accepting dictation which it dare not acknowledge. The process will have begun by giving power to people and refusing to give them their titles; and it will have ended by giving the power to people who refuse to give us their names.

But I have a special reason for ending this chapter on the name of the great popular dictator who made war on the politicians and the financiers. This chapter does not profess to touch on one in twenty of the interesting cities of America, even in this particular aspect of their relation to the history of America, which is so much neglected in England. If that were so, there would be a great deal to say even about the newest of them; Chicago, for instance, is certainly something more than the mere pork-packing yard that English tradition suggests; and it has been building a boulevard not unworthy of its splendid position on its splendid lake. But all these cities are defiled and even diseased with industrialism. It is due to the Americans to remember that they have deliberately preserved one of their cities from such defilement and such disease. And that is the presidential city, which stands in the American mind for the same ideal as the President; the idea of the Republic that rises above modern money-getting and endures. There has really been an effort to keep the White House white. No factories are allowed in that town; no more than the necessary shops are tolerated. It is a beautiful city; and really retains something of that classical serenity of the eighteenth century in which the Fathers of the Republic moved. With all respect to the colonial place of that name, I do not suppose that Wellington is particularly like Wellington. But Washington really is like Washington.

In this, as in so many things, there is no harm in our criticising foreigners, if only we would also criticise ourselves. In other words, the world might need even less of its new charity, if it had a little more of the old humility. When we complain of American individualism, we forget that we have fostered it by ourselves having far less of this impersonal ideal of the Republic or commonwealth as a whole. When we complain, very justly, for instance, of great pictures passing into the possession of American magnates, we ought to remember that we paved the way for it by allowing them all to accumulate in the possession of English magnates. It is bad that a public treasure should be in the possession of a private man in America, but we took the first step in lightly
letting it disappear into the private collection of a man in England. I know all
about the genuine national tradition which treated the aristocracy as constituting
the state; but these very foreign purchases go to prove that we ought to have had
a state independent of the aristocracy. It is true that rich Americans do
sometimes covet the monuments of our culture in a fashion that rightly revolts us
as vulgar and irrational. They are said sometimes to want to take whole buildings
away with them; and too many of such buildings are private and for sale. There
were wilder stories of a millionaire wishing to transplant Glastonbury Abbey and
similar buildings as if they were portable shrubs in pots. It is obvious that it is
nonsense as well as vandalism to separate Glastonbury Abbey from Glastonbury.
I can understand a man venerating it as a ruin; and I can understand a man
despising it as a rubbish-heap. But it is senseless to insult a thing in order to
idolatrise it; it is meaningless to desecrate the shrine in order to worship the
stones. That sort of thing is the bad side of American appetite and ambition; and
we are perfectly right to see it not only as a deliberate blasphemy but as an
unconscious buffoonery. But there is another side to the American tradition,
which is really too much lacking in our own tradition. And it is illustrated in this
idea of preserving Washington as a sort of paradise of impersonal politics
without personal commerce. Nobody could buy the White House or the
Washington Monument; it may be hinted (as by an inhabitant of Glastonbury)
that nobody wants to; but nobody could if he did want to. There is really a
certain air of serenity and security about the place, lacking in every other
American town. It is increased, of course, by the clear blue skies of that half-
southern province, from which smoke has been banished. The effect is not so
much in the mere buildings, though they are classical and often beautiful. But
whatever else they have built, they have built a great blue dome, the largest
dome in the world. And the place does express something in the inconsistent
idealism of this strange people; and here at least they have lifted it higher than
all the sky-scrapers, and set it in a stainless sky.
IN THE AMERICAN COUNTRY

The sharpest pleasure of a traveller is in finding the things which he did not expect, but which he might have expected to expect. I mean the things that are at once so strange and so obvious that they must have been noticed, yet somehow they have not been noted. Thus I had heard a thousand things about Jerusalem before I ever saw it; I had heard rhapsodies and disparagements of every description. Modern rationalistic critics, with characteristic consistency, had blamed it for its accumulated rubbish and its modern restoration, for its antiquated superstition and its up-to-date vulgarity. But somehow the one impression that had never pierced through their description was the simple and single impression of a city on a hill, with walls coming to the very edge of slopes that were almost as steep as walls; the turreted city which crowns a cone-shaped hill in so many mediaeval landscapes. One would suppose that this was at once the plainest and most picturesque of all the facts; yet somehow, in my reading, I had always lost it amid a mass of minor facts that were merely details. We know that a city that is set upon a hill cannot be hid; and yet it would seem that it is exactly the hill that is hid; though perhaps it is only hid from the wise and the understanding. I had a similar and simple impression when I discovered America. I cannot avoid the phrase; for it would really seem that each man discovers it for himself.

Thus I had heard a great deal, before I saw them, about the tall and dominant buildings of New York. I agree that they have an instant effect on the imagination; which I think is increased by the situation in which they stand, and out of which they arose. They are all the more impressive because the building, while it is vertically so vast, is horizontally almost narrow. New York is an island, and has all the intensive romance of an island. It is a thing of almost infinite height upon very finite foundations. It is almost like a lofty lighthouse upon a lonely rock. But this story of the sky-scrapers, which I had often heard, would by itself give a curiously false impression of the freshest and most curious characteristic of American architecture. Told only in terms of these great towers of stone and brick in the big industrial cities, the story would tend too much to an impression of something cold and colossal like the monuments of Asia. It would suggest a modern Babylon altogether too Babylonian. It would imply that a man of the new world was a sort of new Pharaoh, who built not so much a pyramid as a pagoda of pyramids. It would suggest houses built by mammoths
out of mountains; the cities reared by elephants in their own elephantine school of architecture. And New York does recall the most famous of all sky-scrapers—the tower of Babel. She recalls it none the less because there is no doubt about the confusion of tongues. But in truth the very reverse is true of most of the buildings in America. I had no sooner passed out into the suburbs of New York on the way to Boston than I began to see something else quite contrary and far more curious. I saw forests upon forests of small houses stretching away to the horizon as literal forests do; villages and towns and cities. And they were, in another sense, literally like forests. They were all made of wood. It was almost as fantastic to an English eye as if they had been all made of cardboard. I had long outlived the silly old joke that referred to Americans as if they all lived in the backwoods. But, in a sense, if they do not live in the woods, they are not yet out of the wood.

I do not say this in any sense as a criticism. As it happens, I am particularly fond of wood. Of all the superstitions which our fathers took lightly enough to love, the most natural seems to me the notion it is lucky to touch wood. Some of them affect me the less as superstitions, because I feel them as symbols. If humanity had really thought Friday unlucky it would have talked about bad Friday instead of good Friday. And while I feel the thrill of thirteen at a table, I am not so sure that it is the most miserable of all human fates to fill the places of the Twelve Apostles. But the idea that there was something cleansing or wholesome about the touching of wood seems to me one of those ideas which are truly popular, because they are truly poetic. It is probable enough that the conception came originally from the healing of the wood of the Cross; but that only clinches the divine coincidence. It is like that other divine coincidence that the Victim was a carpenter, who might almost have made His own cross. Whether we take the mystical or the mythical explanation, there is obviously a very deep connection between the human working in wood and such plain and pathetic mysticism. It gives something like a touch of the holy childishness to the tale, as if that terrible engine could be a toy. In the same fashion a child fancies that mysterious and sinister horse, which was the downfall of Troy, as something plain and staring, and perhaps spotted, like his own rocking-horse in the nursery.

It might be said symbolically that Americans have a taste for rocking-horses, as they certainly have a taste for rocking-chairs. A flippant critic might suggest that they select rocking-chairs so that, even when they are sitting down, they need not be sitting still. Something of this restlessness in the race may really be
involved in the matter; but I think the deeper significance of the rocking-chair may still be found in the deeper symbolism of the rocking-horse. I think there is behind all this fresh and facile use of wood a certain spirit that is childish in the good sense of the word; something that is innocent, and easily pleased. It is not altogether untrue, still less is it unfriendly, to say that the landscape seems to be dotted with dolls’ houses. It is the true tragedy of every fallen son of Adam that he has grown too big to live in a doll’s house. These things seem somehow to escape the irony of time by not even challenging it; they are too temporary even to be merely temporal. These people are not building tombs; they are not, as in the fine image of Mrs. Meynell’s poem, merely building ruins. It is not easy to imagine the ruins of a doll’s house; and that is why a doll’s house is an everlasting habitation. How far it promises a political permanence is a matter for further discussion; I am only describing the mood of discovery; in which all these cottages built of lath, like the palaces of a pantomime, really seemed coloured like the clouds of morning; which are both fugitive and eternal.

There is also in all this an atmosphere that comes in another sense from the nursery. We hear much of Americans being educated on English literature; but I think few Americans realise how much English children have been educated on American literature. It is true, and it is inevitable, that they can only be educated on rather old-fashioned American literature. Mr. Bernard Shaw, in one of his plays, noted truly the limitations of the young American millionaire, and especially the staleness of his English culture; but there is necessarily another side to it. If the American talked more of Macaulay than of Nietzsche, we should probably talk more of Emerson than of Ezra Pound. Whether this staleness is necessarily a disadvantage is, of course, a different question. But, in any case, it is true that the old American books were often the books of our childhood, even in the literal sense of the books of our nursery. I know few men in England who have not left their boyhood to some extent lost and entangled in the forests of Huckleberry Finn. I know few women in England, from the most revolutionary Suffragette to the most carefully preserved Early Victorian, who will not confess to having passed a happy childhood with the Little Women of Miss Alcott. Helen’s Babies was the first and by far the best book in the modern scriptures of baby-worship. And about all this old-fashioned American literature there was an undefinable savour that satisfied, and even fed, our growing minds. Perhaps it was the smell of growing things; but I am far from certain that it was not simply the smell of wood. Now that all the memory comes back to me, it seems to come back heavy in a hundred forms with the fragrance and the touch of timber. There
was the perpetual reference to the wood-pile, the perpetual background of the woods. There was something crude and clean about everything; something fresh and strange about those far-off houses, to which I could not then have put a name. Indeed, many things become clear in this wilderness of wood, which could only be expressed in symbol and even in fantasy. I will not go so far as to say that it shortened the transition from Log Cabin to White House; as if the White House were itself made of white wood (as Oliver Wendell Holmes said), ‘that cuts like cheese, but lasts like iron for things like these.’ But I will say that the experience illuminates some other lines by Holmes himself:—

Little I ask, my wants are few,
I only ask a hut of stone.

I should not have known, in England, that he was already asking for a good deal even in asking for that. In the presence of this wooden world the very combination of words seems almost a contradiction, like a hut of marble, or a hovel of gold.

It was therefore with an almost infantile pleasure that I looked at all this promising expansion of fresh-cut timber and thought of the housing shortage at home. I know not by what incongruous movement of the mind there swept across me, at the same moment, the thought of things ancestral and hoary with the light of ancient dawns. The last war brought back body-armour; the next war may bring back bows and arrows. And I suddenly had a memory of old wooden houses in London; and a model of Shakespeare’s town.

It is possible indeed that such Elizabethan memories may receive a check or a chill when the traveller comes, as he sometimes does, to the outskirts of one of these strange hamlets of new frame-houses, and is confronted with a placard inscribed in enormous letters, ‘Watch Us Grow.’ He can always imagine that he sees the timbers swelling before his eyes like pumpkins in some super-tropical summer. But he may have formed the conviction that no such proclamation could be found outside Shakespeare’s town. And indeed there is a serious criticism here, to any one who knows history; since the things that grow are not always the things that remain; and pumpkins of that expansiveness have a tendency to burst. I was always told that Americans were harsh, hustling, rather rude and perhaps vulgar; but they were very practical and the future belonged to them. I confess I felt a fine shade of difference; I liked the Americans; I thought they were sympathetic, imaginative, and full of fine enthusiasms; the one thing I could not always feel clear about was their future. I believe they were happier in
their frame-houses than most people in most houses; having democracy, good education, and a hobby of work; the one doubt that did float across me was something like, ‘Will all this be here at all in two hundred years?’ That was the first impression produced by the wooden houses that seemed like the waggons of gipsies; it is a serious impression, but there is an answer to it. It is an answer that opens on the traveller more and more as he goes westward, and finds the little towns dotted about the vast central prairies. And the answer is agriculture. Wooden houses may or may not last; but farms will last; and farming will always last.

The houses may look like gipsy caravans on a heath or common; but they are not on a heath or common. They are on the most productive and prosperous land, perhaps, in the modern world. The houses might fall down like shanties, but the fields would remain; and whoever tills those fields will count for a great deal in the affairs of humanity. They are already counting for a great deal, and possibly for too much, in the affairs of America. The real criticism of the Middle West is concerned with two facts, neither of which has been yet adequately appreciated by the educated class in England. The first is that the turn of the world has come, and the turn of the agricultural countries with it. That is the meaning of the resurrection of Ireland; that is the meaning of the practical surrender of the Bolshevist Jews to the Russian peasants. The other is that in most places these peasant societies carry on what may be called the Catholic tradition. The Middle West is perhaps the one considerable place where they still carry on the Puritan tradition. But the Puritan tradition was originally a tradition of the town; and the second truth about the Middle West turns largely on its moral relation to the town. As I shall suggest presently, there is much in common between this agricultural society of America and the great agricultural societies of Europe. It tends, as the agricultural society nearly always does, to some decent degree of democracy. The agricultural society tends to the agrarian law. But in Puritan America there is an additional problem, which I can hardly explain without a periphrasis.

There was a time when the progress of the cities seemed to mock the decay of the country. It is more and more true, I think, to-day that it is rather the decay of the cities that seems to poison the progress and promise of the countryside. The cinema boasts of being a substitute for the tavern, but I think it a very bad substitute. I think so quite apart from the question about fermented liquor. Nobody enjoys cinemas more than I, but to enjoy them a man has only to look and not even to listen, and in a tavern he has to talk. Occasionally, I admit,
has to fight; but he need never move at the movies. Thus in the real village inn
are the real village politics, while in the other are only the remote and unreal
metropolitan politics. And those central city politics are not only cosmopolitan
politics but corrupt politics. They corrupt everything that they reach, and this is
the real point about many perplexing questions.

For instance, so far as I am concerned, it is the whole point about feminism
and the factory. It is very largely the point about feminism and many other
callings, apparently more cultured than the factory, such as the law court and the
political platform. When I see women so wildly anxious to tie themselves to all
this machinery of the modern city my first feeling is not indignation, but that
dark and ominous sort of pity with which we should see a crowd rushing to
embark in a leaking ship under a lowering storm. When I see wives and mothers
going in for business government I not only regard it as a bad business but as a
bankrupt business. It seems to me very much as if the peasant women, just
before the French Revolution, had insisted on being made duchesses or (as is
quite as logical and likely) on being made dukes.

It is as if those ragged women, instead of crying out for bread, had cried out
for powder and patches. By the time they were wearing them they would be the
only people wearing them. For powder and patches soon went out of fashion, but
bread does not go out of fashion. In the same way, if women desert the family
for the factory, they may find they have only done it for a deserted factory. It
would have been very unwise of the lower orders to claim all the privileges of
the higher orders in the last days of the French monarchy. It would have been
very laborious to learn the science of heraldry or the tables of precedence when
all such things were at once most complicated and most moribund. It would be
tiresome to be taught all those tricks just when the whole bag of tricks was
coming to an end. A French satirist might have written a fine apologue about
Jacques Bonhomme coming up to Paris in his wooden shoes and demanding to
be made Gold Stick in Waiting in the name of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity;
but I fear the stick in waiting would be waiting still.

One of the first topics on which I heard conversation turning in America was
that of a very interesting book called Main Street, which involves many of these
questions of the modern industrial and the eternal feminine. It is simply the
story, or perhaps rather the study than the story, of a young married woman in
one of the multitudinous little towns on the great central plains of America; and
of a sort of struggle between her own more restless culture and the provincial
prosperity of her neighbours. There are a number of true and telling suggestions
in the book, but the one touch which I found tingling in the memory of many readers was the last sentence, in which the master of the house, with unshaken simplicity, merely asks for the whereabouts of some domestic implement; I think it was a screw-driver. It seems to me a harmless request, but from the way people talked about it one might suppose he had asked for a screw-driver to screw down the wife in her coffin. And a great many advanced persons would tell us that wooden house in which she lived really was like a wooden coffin. But this appears to me to be taking a somewhat funereal view of the life of humanity.

For, after all, on the face of it at any rate, this is merely the life of humanity, and even the life which all humanitarians have striven to give to humanity. Revolutionists have treated it not only as the normal but even as the ideal. Revolutionary wars have been waged to establish this; revolutionary heroes have fought, and revolutionary martyrs have died, only to build such a wooden house for such a worthy family. Men have taken the sword and perished by the sword in order that the poor gentleman might have liberty to look for his screw-driver. For there is here a fact about America that is almost entirely unknown in England. The English have not in the least realised the real strength of America. We in England hear a great deal, we hear far too much, about the economic energy of industrial America, about the money of Mr. Morgan, or the machinery of Mr. Edison. We never realise that while we in England suffer from the same sort of successes in capitalism and clockwork, we have not got what the Americans have got; something at least to balance it in the way of a free agriculture, a vast field of free farms dotted with small freeholders. For the reason I shall mention in a moment, they are not perhaps in the fullest and finest sense a peasantry. But they are in the practical and political sense a pure peasantry, in that their comparative equality is a true counterweight to the toppling injustice of the towns.

And, even in places like that described as Main Street, that comparative equality can immediately be felt. The men may be provincials, but they are certainly citizens; they consult on a common basis. And I repeat that in this, after all, they do achieve what many prophets and righteous men have died to achieve. This plain village, fairly prosperous, fairly equal, untaxed by tyrants and untroubled by wars, is after all the place which reformers have regarded as their aim; whenever reformers have used their wits sufficiently to have any aim. The march to Utopia, the march to the Earthly Paradise, the march to the New Jerusalem, has been very largely the march to Main Street. And the latest modern sensation is a book written to show how wretched it is to live there.
All this is true, and I think the lady might be more contented in her coffin, which is more comfortably furnished than most of the coffins where her fellow creatures live. Nevertheless, there is an answer to this, or at least a modification of it. There is a case for the lady and a case against the gentleman and the screwdriver. And when we have noted what it really is, we have noted the real disadvantage in a situation like that of modern America, and especially the Middle West. And with that we come back to the truth with which I started this speculation; the truth that few have yet realised, but of which I, for one, am more and more convinced—that industrialism is spreading because it is decaying; that only the dust and ashes of its dissolution are choking up the growth of natural things everywhere and turning the green world grey.

In this relative agricultural equality the Americans of the Middle West are far in advance of the English of the twentieth century. It is not their fault if they are still some centuries behind the English of the twelfth century. But the defect by which they fall short of being a true peasantry is that they do not produce their own spiritual food, in the same sense as their own material food. They do not, like some peasants, create other kinds of culture besides the kind called agriculture. Their culture comes from the great cities; and that is where all the evil comes from.

If a man had gone across England in the Middle Ages, or even across Europe in more recent times, he would have found a culture which showed its vitality by its variety. We know the adventures of the three brothers in the old fairy tales who passed across the endless plain from city to city, and found one kingdom ruled by a wizard and another wasted by a dragon, one people living in castles of crystal and another sitting by fountains of wine. These are but legendary enlargements of the real adventures of a traveller passing from one patch of peasantry to another, and finding women wearing strange head-dresses and men singing new songs.

A traveller in America would be somewhat surprised if he found the people in the city of St. Louis all wearing crowns and crusading armour in honour of their patron saint. He might even feel some faint surprise if he found all the citizens of Philadelphia clad in a composite costume, combining that of a Quaker with that of a Red Indian, in honour of the noble treaty of William Penn. Yet these are the sort of local and traditional things that would really be found giving variety to the valleys of mediaeval Europe. I myself felt a perfectly genuine and generous exhilaration of freedom and fresh enterprise in new places like Oklahoma. But you would hardly find in Oklahoma what was found in Oberammergau. What
goes to Oklahoma is not the peasant play, but the cinema. And the objection to
the cinema is not so much that it goes to Oklahoma as that it does not come from
Oklahoma. In other words, these people have on the economic side a much
closer approach than we have to economic freedom. It is not for us, who have
allowed our land to be stolen by squires and then vulgarised by sham squires, to
sneer at such colonists as merely crude and prosaic. They at least have really
kept something of the simplicity and, therefore, the dignity of democracy; and
that democracy may yet save their country even from the calamities of wealth
and science.

But, while these farmers do not need to become industrial in order to become
industrious, they do tend to become industrial in so far as they become
intellectual. Their culture, and to some great extent their creed, do come along
the railroads from the great modern urban centres, and bring with them a blast of
death and a reek of rotting things. It is that influence that alone prevents the
Middle West from progressing towards the Middle Ages.

For, after all, linked up in a hundred legends of the Middle Ages, may be
found a symbolic pattern of hammers and nails and saws; and there is no reason
why they should not have also sanctified screw-drivers. There is no reason why
the screw-driver that seemed such a trifle to the author should not have been
borne in triumph down Main Street like a sword of state, in some pageant of the
Guild of St. Joseph of the Carpenters or St. Dunstan of the Smiths. It was the
Catholic poetry and piety that filled common life with something that is lacking
in the worthy and virile democracy of the West. Nor are Americans of
intelligence so ignorant of this as some may suppose. There is an admirable
society called the Mediaevalists in Chicago; whose name and address will strike
many as suggesting a certain struggle of the soul against the environment. With
the national heartiness they blazon their note-paper with heraldry and the hues of
Gothic windows; with the national high spirits they assume the fancy dress of
friars; but any one who should essay to laugh at them instead of with them
would find out his mistake. For many of them do really know a great deal about
mediaevalism; much more than I do, or most other men brought up on an island
that is crowded with its cathedrals. Something of the same spirit may be seen in
the beautiful new plans and buildings of Yale, deliberately modelled not on
classical harmony but on Gothic irregularity and surprise. The grace and energy
of the mediaeval architecture resurrected by a man like Mr. R. A. Cram of
Boston has behind it not merely artistic but historical and ethical enthusiasm; an
enthusiasm for the Catholic creed which made mediaeval civilisation. Even on
the huge Puritan plains of the Middle West the influence strays in the strangest fashion. And it is notable that among the pessimistic epitaphs of the Spoon River Anthology, in that churchyard compared with which most churchyards are cheery, among the suicides and secret drinkers and monomaniacs and hideous hypocrites of that happy village, almost the only record of respect and a recognition of wider hopes is dedicated to the Catholic priest.

But Main Street is Main Street in the main. Main Street is Modern Street in its multiplicity of mildly half-educated people; and all these historic things are a thousand miles from them. They have not heard the ancient noise either of arts or arms; the building of the cathedral or the marching of the crusade. But at least they have not deliberately slandered the crusade and defaced the cathedral. And if they have not produced the peasant arts, they can still produce the peasant crafts. They can sow and plough and reap and live by these everlasting things; nor shall the foundations of their state be moved. And the memory of those colossal fields, of those fruitful deserts, came back the more readily into my mind because I finished these reflections in the very heart of a modern industrial city, if it can be said to have a heart. It was in fact an English industrial city, but it struck me that it might very well be an American one. And it also struck me that we yield rather too easily to America the dusty palm of industrial enterprise, and feel far too little apprehension about greener and fresher vegetables. There is a story of an American who carefully studied all the sights of London or Rome or Paris, and came to the conclusion that ‘it had nothing on Minneapolis.’ It seems to me that Minneapolis has nothing on Manchester. There were the same grey vistas of shops full of rubber tyres and metallic appliances; a man felt that he might walk a day without seeing a blade of grass; the whole horizon was so infinite with efficiency. The factory chimneys might have been Pittsburg; the sky-signs might have been New York. One looked up in a sort of despair at the sky, not for a sky-sign but in a sense for a sign, for some sentence of significance and judgment; by the instinct that makes any man in such a scene seek for the only thing that has not been made by men. But even that was illogical, for it was night, and I could only expect to see the stars, which might have reminded me of Old Glory; but that was not the sign that oppressed me. All the ground was a wilderness of stone and all the buildings a forest of brick; I was far in the interior of a labyrinth of lifeless things. Only, looking up, between two black chimneys and a telegraph pole, I saw vast and far and faint, as the first men saw it, the silver pattern of the Plough.
THE AMERICAN BUSINESS MAN

It is a commonplace that men are all agreed in using symbols, and all differ about the meaning of the symbols. It is obvious that a Russian republican might come to identify the eagle as a bird of empire and therefore a bird of prey. But when he ultimately escaped to the land of the free, he might find the same bird on the American coinage figuring as a bird of freedom. Doubtless, he might find many other things to surprise him in the land of the free, and many calculated to make him think that the bird, if not imperial, was at least rather imperious. But I am not discussing those exceptional details here. It is equally obvious that a Russian reactionary might cross the world with a vow of vengeance against the red flag. But that authoritarian might have some difficulties with the authorities, if he shot a man for using the red flag on the railway between Willesden and Clapham Junction.

But, of course, the difficulty about symbols is generally much more subtle than in these simple cases. I have remarked elsewhere that the first thing which a traveller should write about is the thing which he has not read about. It may be a small or secondary thing, but it is a thing that he has seen and not merely expected to see.

I gave the example of the great multitude of wooden houses in America; we might say of wooden towns and wooden cities. But after he has seen such things, his next duty is to see the meaning of them; and here a great deal of complication and controversy is possible. The thing probably does not mean what he first supposes it to mean on the face of it; but even on the face of it, it might mean many different and even opposite things.

For instance, a wooden house might suggest an almost savage solitude; a rude shanty put together by a pioneer in a forest; or it might mean a very recent and rapid solution of the housing problem, conducted cheaply and therefore on a very large scale. A wooden house might suggest the very newest thing in America or one of the very oldest things in England. It might mean a grey ruin at Stratford or a white exhibition at Earl’s Court.

It is when we come to this interpretation of international symbols that we make most of the international mistakes. Without the smallest error of detail, I will promise to prove that Oriental women are independent because they wear trousers, or Oriental men subject because they wear skirts. Merely to apply it to this case, I will take the example of two very commonplace and trivial objects of
modern life—a walking stick and a fur coat.

As it happened, I travelled about America with two sticks, like a Japanese nobleman with his two swords. I fear the simile is too stately. I bore more resemblance to a cripple with two crutches or a highly ineffectual version of the devil on two sticks. I carried them both because I valued them both, and did not wish to risk losing either of them in my erratic travels. One is a very plain grey stick from the woods of Buckinghamshire, but as I took it with me to Palestine it partakes of the character of a pilgrim’s staff. When I can say that I have taken the same stick to Jerusalem and to Chicago, I think the stick and I may both have a rest. The other, which I value even more, was given me by the Knights of Columbus at Yale, and I wish I could think that their chivalric title allowed me to regard it as a sword.

Now, I do not know whether the Americans I met, struck by the fastidious foppery of my dress and appearance, concluded that it is the custom of elegant English dandies to carry two walking sticks. But I do know that it is much less common among Americans than among Englishmen to carry even one. The point, however, is not merely that more sticks are carried by Englishmen than by Americans; it is that the sticks which are carried by Americans stand for something entirely different.

In America a stick is commonly called a cane, and it has about it something of the atmosphere which the poet described as the nice conduct of the clouded cane. It would be an exaggeration to say that when the citizens of the United States see a man carrying a light stick, they deduce that if he does that he does nothing else. But there is about it a faint flavour of luxury and lounging, and most of the energetic citizens of this energetic society avoid it by instinct.

Now, in an Englishman like myself, carrying a stick may imply lounging, but it does not imply luxury, and I can say with some firmness that it does not imply dandyism. In a great many Englishmen it means the very opposite even of lounging. By one of those fantastic paradoxes which are the mystery of nationality, a walking stick often actually means walking. It frequently suggests the very reverse of the Beau with his clouded cane; it does not suggest a town type, but rather specially a country type. It rather implies the kind of Englishman who tramps about in lanes and meadows and knocks the tops off thistles. It suggests the sort of man who has carried the stick through his native woods, and perhaps even cut it in his native woods.

There are plenty of these vigorous loungers, no doubt, in the rural parts of America, but the idea of a walking stick would not especially suggest them to
Americans; it would not call up such figures like a fairy wand. It would be easy to trace back the difference to many English origins, possibly to aristocratic origins, to the idea of the old squire, a man vigorous and even rustic, but trained to hold a useless staff rather than a useful tool. It might be suggested that American citizens do at least so far love freedom as to like to have their hands free. It might be suggested, on the other hand, that they keep their hands for the handles of many machines. And that the hand on a handle is less free than the hand on a stick or even a tool. But these again are controversial questions and I am only noting a fact.

If an Englishman wished to imagine more or less exactly what the impression is, and how misleading it is, he could find something like a parallel in what he himself feels about a fur coat. When I first found myself among the crowds on the main floor of a New York hotel, my rather exaggerated impression of the luxury of the place was largely produced by the number of men in fur coats, and what we should consider rather ostentatious fur coats, with all the fur outside.

Now an Englishman has a number of atmospheric but largely accidental associations in connection with a fur coat. I will not say that he thinks a man in a fur coat must be a wealthy and wicked man; but I do say that in his own ideal and perfect vision a wealthy and wicked man would wear a fur coat. Thus I had the sensation of standing in a surging mob of American millionaires, or even African millionaires; for the millionaires of Chicago must be like the Knights of the Round Table compared with the millionaires of Johannesburg.

But, as a matter of fact, the man in the fur coat was not even an American millionaire, but simply an American. It did not signify luxury, but rather necessity, and even a harsh and almost heroic necessity. Orson probably wore a fur coat; and he was brought up by bears, but not the bears of Wall Street. Eskimos are generally represented as a furry folk; but they are not necessarily engaged in delicate financial operations, even in the typical and appropriate occupation called freezing out. And if the American is not exactly an arctic traveller rushing from pole to pole, at least he is often literally fleeing from ice to ice. He has to make a very extreme distinction between outdoor and indoor clothing. He has to live in an icehouse outside and a hothouse inside; so hot that he may be said to construct an icehouse inside that. He turns himself into an icehouse and warms himself against the cold until he is warm enough to eat ices. But the point is that the same coat of fur which in England would indicate the sybarite life may here very well indicate the strenuous life; just as the same walking stick which would here suggest a lounger would in England suggest a
plodder and almost a pilgrim.

And these two trifles are types which I should like to put, by way of proviso and apology, at the very beginning of any attempt at a record of any impressions of a foreign society. They serve merely to illustrate the most important impression of all, the impression of how false all impressions may be. I suspect that most of the very false impressions have come from the careful record of very true facts. They have come from the fatal power of observing the facts without being able to observe the truth. They came from seeing the symbol with the most vivid clarity and being blind to all that it symbolises. It is as if a man who knew no Greek should imagine that he could read a Greek inscription because he took the Greek R for an English P or the Greek long E for an English H. I do not mention this merely as a criticism on other people’s impressions of America, but as a criticism on my own. I wish it to be understood that I am well aware that all my views are subject to this sort of potential criticism, and that even when I am certain of the facts I do not profess to be certain of the deductions.

In this chapter I hope to point out how a misunderstanding of this kind affects the common impression, not altogether unfounded, that the Americans talk about dollars. But for the moment I am merely anxious to avoid a similar misunderstanding when I talk about Americans. About the dogmas of democracy, about the right of a people to its own symbols, whether they be coins or customs, I am convinced, and no longer to be shaken. But about the meaning of those symbols, in silver or other substances, I am always open to correction. That error is the price we pay for the great glory of nationality. And in this sense I am quite ready, at the start, to warn my own readers against my own opinions.

The fact without the truth is futile; indeed the fact without the truth is false. I have already noted that this is especially true touching our observations of a strange country; and it is certainly true touching one small fact which has swelled into a large fable. I mean the fable about America commonly summed up in the phrase about the Almighty Dollar. I do not think the dollar is almighty in America; I fancy many things are mightier, including many ideals and some rather insane ideals. But I think it might be maintained that the dollar has another of the attributes of deity. If it is not omnipotent it is in a sense omnipresent. Whatever Americans think about dollars, it is, I think, relatively true that they talk about dollars. If a mere mechanical record could be taken by the modern machinery of dictaphones and stenography, I do not think it probable that the mere word ‘dollars’ would occur more often in any given number of American
conversations than the mere word ‘pounds’ or ‘shillings’ in a similar number of English conversations. And these statistics, like nearly all statistics, would be utterly useless and even fundamentally false. It is as if we should calculate that the word ‘elephant’ had been mentioned a certain number of times in a particular London street, or so many times more often than the word ‘thunderbolt’ had been used in Stoke Poges. Doubtless there are statisticians capable of carefully collecting those statistics also; and doubtless there are scientific social reformers capable of legislating on the basis of them. They would probably argue from the elephantine imagery of the London street that such and such a percentage of the householders were megalomaniacs and required medical care and police coercion. And doubtless their calculations, like nearly all such calculations, would leave out the only important point; as that the street was in the immediate neighbourhood of the Zoo, or was yet more happily situated under the benignant shadow of the Elephant and Castle. And in the same way the mechanical calculation about the mention of dollars is entirely useless unless we have some moral understanding of why they are mentioned. It certainly does not mean merely a love of money; and if it did, a love of money may mean a great many very different and even contrary things. The love of money is very different in a peasant or in a pirate, in a miser or in a gambler, in a great financier or in a man doing some practical and productive work. Now this difference in the conversation of American and English business men arises, I think, from certain much deeper things in the American which are generally not understood by the Englishman. It also arises from much deeper things in the Englishman, of which the Englishman is even more ignorant.

To begin with, I fancy that the American, quite apart from any love of money, has a great love of measurement. He will mention the exact size or weight of things, in a way which appears to us as irrelevant. It is as if we were to say that a man came to see us carrying three feet of walking stick and four inches of cigar. It is so in cases that have no possible connection with any avarice or greed for gain. An American will praise the prodigal generosity of some other man in giving up his own estate for the good of the poor. But he will generally say that the philanthropist gave them a 200-acre park, where an Englishman would think it quite sufficient to say that he gave them a park. There is something about this precision which seems suitable to the American atmosphere; to the hard sunlight, and the cloudless skies, and the glittering detail of the architecture and the landscape; just as the vaguer English version is consonant to our mistier and more impressionist scenery. It is also connected perhaps with something more
boyish about the younger civilisation; and corresponds to the passionate particularity with which a boy will distinguish the uniforms of regiments, the rigs of ships, or even the colours of tram tickets. It is a certain godlike appetite for things, as distinct from thoughts.

But there is also, of course, a much deeper cause of the difference; and it can easily be deduced by noting the real nature of the difference itself. When two business men in a train are talking about dollars I am not so foolish as to expect them to be talking about the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas. But if they were two English business men I should not expect them to be talking about business. Probably it would be about some sport; and most probably some sport in which they themselves never dreamed of indulging. The approximate difference is that the American talks about his work and the Englishman about his holidays. His ideal is not labour but leisure. Like every other national characteristic, this is not primarily a point for praise or blame; in essence it involves neither and in effect it involves both. It is certainly connected with that snobbishness which is the great sin of English society. The Englishman does love to conceive himself as a sort of country gentleman; and his castles in the air are all castles in Scotland rather than in Spain. For, as an ideal, a Scotch castle is as English as a Welsh rarebit or an Irish stew. And if he talks less about money I fear it is sometimes because in one sense he thinks more of it. Money is a mystery in the old and literal sense of something too sacred for speech. Gold is a god; and like the god of some agnostics has no name and is worshipped only in his works. It is true in a sense that the English gentleman wishes to have enough money to be able to forget it. But it may be questioned whether he does entirely forget it. As against this weakness the American has succeeded, at the price of a great deal of crudity and clatter, in making general a very real respect for work. He has partly disenchanted the dangerous glamour of the gentleman, and in that sense has achieved some degree of democracy; which is the most difficult achievement in the world.

On the other hand, there is a good side to the Englishman’s day-dream of leisure, and one which the American spirit tends to miss. It may be expressed in the word ‘holiday’ or still better in the word ‘hobby.’ The Englishman, in his character of Robin Hood, really has got two strings to his bow. Indeed the Englishman really is well represented by Robin Hood; for there is always something about him that may literally be called outlawed, in the sense of being extra-legal or outside the rules. A Frenchman said of Browning that his centre was not in the middle; and it may be said of many an Englishman that his heart
is not where his treasure is. Browning expressed a very English sentiment when he said:—

I like to know a butcher paints,
A baker rhymes for his pursuit,
Candlestick-maker much acquaints
His soul with song, or haply mute
Blows out his brains upon the flute.

Stevenson touched on the same insular sentiment when he said that many men he knew, who were meat-salesmen to the outward eye, might in the life of contemplation sit with the saints. Now the extraordinary achievement of the American meat-salesman is that his poetic enthusiasm can really be for meat sales; not for money but for meat. An American commercial traveller asked me, with a religious fire in his eyes, whether I did not think that salesmanship could be an art. In England there are many salesmen who are sincerely fond of art; but seldom of the art of salesmanship. Art is with them a hobby; a thing of leisure and liberty. That is why the English traveller talks, if not of art, then of sport. That is why the two city men in the London train, if they are not talking about golf, may be talking about gardening. If they are not talking about dollars, or the equivalent of dollars, the reason lies much deeper than any superficial praise or blame touching the desire for wealth. In the English case, at least, it lies very deep in the English spirit. Many of the greatest English things have had this lighter and looser character of a hobby or a holiday experiment. Even a masterpiece has often been a by-product. The works of Shakespeare come out so casually that they can be attributed to the most improbable people; even to Bacon. The sonnets of Shakespeare are picked up afterwards as if out of a wastepaper basket. The immortality of Dr. Johnson does not rest on the written leaves he collected, but entirely on the words he wasted, the words he scattered to the winds. So great a thing as Pickwick is almost a kind of accident; it began as something secondary and grew into something primary and pre-eminent. It began with mere words written to illustrate somebody else’s pictures; and swelled like an epic expanded from an epigram. It might almost be said that in the case of Pickwick the author began as the servant of the artist. But, as in the same story of Pickwick, the servant became greater than the master. This incalculable and accidental quality, like all national qualities, has its strength and weakness; but it does represent a certain reserve fund of interests in the Englishman’s life; and distinguishes him from the other extreme type, of the millionaire who works till he drops, or who drops because he stops working. It is
the great achievement of American civilisation that in that country it really is not
cant to talk about the dignity of labour. There is something that might almost be
called the sanctity of labour; but it is subject to the profound law that when
anything less than the highest becomes a sanctity, it tends also to become a
superstition. When the candlestick-maker does not blow out his brains upon the
flute there is always a danger that he may blow them out somewhere else, owing
to depressed conditions in the candlestick market.

Now certainly one of the first impressions of America, or at any rate of New
York, which is by no means the same thing as America, is that of a sort of mob
of business men, behaving in many ways in a fashion very different from that of
the swarms of London city men who go up every day to the city. They sit about
in groups with Red-Indian gravity, as if passing the pipe of peace; though, in
fact, most of them are smoking cigars and some of them are eating cigars. The
latter strikes me as one of the most peculiar of transatlantic tastes, more peculiar
than that of chewing gum. A man will sit for hours consuming a cigar as if it
were a sugar-stick; but I should imagine it to be a very disagreeable sugar-stick.
Why he attempts to enjoy a cigar without lighting it I do not know; whether it is
a more economical way of carrying a mere symbol of commercial conversation;
or whether something of the same queer outlandish morality that draws such a
distinction between beer and ginger beer draws an equally ethical distinction
between touching tobacco and lighting it. For the rest, it would be easy to make
a merely external sketch full of things equally strange; for this can always be
done in a strange country. I allow for the fact of all foreigners looking alike; but
I fancy that all those hard-featured faces, with spectacles and shaven jaws, do
look rather alike, because they all like to make their faces hard. And with the
mention of their mental attitude we realise the futility of any such external
sketch. Unless we can see that these are something more than men smoking
cigars and talking about dollars we had much better not see them at all.

It is customary to condemn the American as a materialist because of his
worship of success. But indeed this very worship, like any worship, even devil-
worship, proves him rather a mystic than a materialist. The Frenchman who
retires from business when he has money enough to drink his wine and eat his
omelette in peace might much more plausibly be called a materialist by those
who do not prefer to call him a man of sense. But Americans do worship success
in the abstract, as a sort of ideal vision. They follow success rather than money;
they follow money rather than meat and drink. If their national life in one sense
is a perpetual game of poker, they are playing excitedly for chips or counters as
well as for coins. And by the ultimate test of material enjoyment, like the enjoyment of an omelette, even a coin is itself a counter. The Yankee cannot eat chips as the Frenchman can eat chipped potatoes; but neither can he swallow red cents as the Frenchman swallows red wine. Thus when people say of a Yankee that he worships the dollar, they pay a compliment to his fine spirituality more true and delicate than they imagine. The dollar is an idol because it is an image; but it is an image of success and not of enjoyment.

That this romance is also a religion is shown in the fact that there is a queer sort of morality attached to it. The nearest parallel to it is something like the sense of honour in the old duelling days. There is not a material but a distinctly moral savour about the implied obligation to collect dollars or to collect chips. We hear too much in England of the phrase about ‘making good’; for no sensible Englishman favours the needless interlarding of English with scraps of foreign languages. But though it means nothing in English, it means something very particular in American. There is a fine shade of distinction between succeeding and making good, precisely because there must always be a sort of ethical echo in the word good. America does vaguely feel a man making good as something analogous to a man being good or a man doing good. It is connected with his serious self-respect and his sense of being worthy of those he loves. Nor is this curious crude idealism wholly insincere even when it drives him to what some of us would call stealing; any more than the duellist’s honour was insincere when it drove him to what some would call murder. A very clever American play which I once saw acted contained a complete working model of this morality. A girl was loyal to, but distressed by, her engagement to a young man on whom there was a sort of cloud of humiliation. The atmosphere was exactly what it would have been in England if he had been accused of cowardice or card-sharping. And there was nothing whatever the matter with the poor young man except that some rotten mine or other in Arizona had not ‘made good.’ Now in England we should either be below or above that ideal of good. If we were snobs, we should be content to know that he was a gentleman of good connections, perhaps too much accustomed to private means to be expected to be businesslike. If we were somewhat larger-minded people, we should know that he might be as wise as Socrates and as splendid as Bayard and yet be unfitted, perhaps one should say therefore be unfitted, for the dismal and dirty gambling of modern commerce. But whether we were snobbish enough to admire him for being an idler, or chivalrous enough to admire him for being an outlaw, in neither case should we ever really and in our hearts despise him for being a failure. For it is this inner
verdict of instinctive idealism that is the point at issue. Of course there is nothing new, or peculiar to the new world, about a man’s engagement practically failing through his financial failure. An English girl might easily drop a man because he was poor, or she might stick to him faithfully and defiantly although he was poor. The point is that this girl was faithful but she was not defiant; that is, she was not proud. The whole psychology of the situation was that she shared the weird worldly idealism of her family, and it was wounded as her patriotism would have been wounded if he had betrayed his country. To do them justice, there was nothing to show that they would have had any real respect for a royal duke who had inherited millions; what the simple barbarians wanted was a man who could ‘make good.’ That the process of making good would probably drag him through the mire of everything bad, that he would make good by bluffing, lying, swindling, and grinding the faces of the poor, did not seem to trouble them in the least. Against this fanaticism there is this shadow of truth even in the fiction of aristocracy; that a gentleman may at least be allowed to be good without being bothered to make it.

Another objection to the phrase about the almighty dollar is that it is an almighty phrase, and therefore an almighty nuisance. I mean that it is made to explain everything, and to explain everything much too well; that is, much too easily. It does not really help people to understand a foreign country; but it gives them the fatal illusion that they do understand it. Dollars stood for America as frogs stood for France; because it was necessary to connect particular foreigners with something, or it would be so easy to confuse a Moor with a Montenegrin or a Russian with a Red Indian. The only cure for this sort of satisfied familiarity is the shock of something really unfamiliar. When people can see nothing at all in American democracy except a Yankee running after a dollar, then the only thing to do is to trip them up as they run after the Yankee, or run away with their notion of the Yankee, by the obstacle of certain odd and obstinate facts that have no relation to that notion. And, as a matter of fact, there are a number of such obstacles to any such generalisation; a number of notable facts that have to be reconciled somehow to our previous notions. It does not matter for this purpose whether the facts are favourable or unfavourable, or whether the qualities are merits or defects; especially as we do not even understand them sufficiently to say which they are. The point is that we are brought to a pause, and compelled to attempt to understand them rather better than we do. We have found the one thing that we did not expect; and therefore the one thing that we cannot explain. And we are moved to an effort, probably an unsuccessful effort, to explain it.
For instance, Americans are very unpunctual. That is the last thing that a critic expects who comes to condemn them for hustling and haggling and vulgar ambition. But it is almost the first fact that strikes the spectator on the spot. The chief difference between the humdrum English business man and the hustling American business man is that the hustling American business man is always late. Of course there is a great deal of difference between coming late and coming too late. But I noticed the fashion first in connection with my own lectures; touching which I could heartily recommend the habit of coming too late. I could easily understand a crowd of commercial Americans not coming to my lectures at all; but there was something odd about their coming in a crowd, and the crowd being expected to turn up some time after the appointed hour. The managers of these lectures (I continue to call them lectures out of courtesy to myself) often explained to me that it was quite useless to begin properly until about half an hour after time. Often people were still coming in three-quarters of an hour or even an hour after time. Not that I objected to that, as some lecturers are said to do; it seemed to me an agreeable break in the monotony; but as a characteristic of a people mostly engaged in practical business, it struck me as curious and interesting. I have grown accustomed to being the most unbusinesslike person in any given company; and it gave me a sort of dizzy exaltation to find I was not the most unpunctual person in that company. I was afterwards told by many Americans that my impression was quite correct; that American unpunctuality was really very prevalent, and extended to much more important things. But at least I was not content to lump this along with all sorts of contrary things that I did not happen to like, and call it America. I am not sure of what it really means, but I rather fancy that though it may seem the very reverse of the hustling, it has the same origin as the hustling. The American is not punctual because he is not punctilious. He is impulsive, and has an impulse to stay as well as an impulse to go. For, after all, punctuality belongs to the same order of ideas as punctuation; and there is no punctuation in telegrams. The order of clocks and set hours which English business has always observed is a good thing in its own way; indeed I think that in a larger sense it is better than the other way. But it is better because it is a protection against hustling, not a promotion of it. In other words, it is better because it is more civilised; as a great Venetian merchant prince clad in cloth of gold was more civilised; or an old English merchant drinking port in an oak-panelled room was more civilised; or a little French shopkeeper shutting up his shop to play dominoes is more civilised. And the reason is that the American has the romance of business and is
monomaniac, while the Frenchman has the romance of life and is sane. But the romance of business really is a romance, and the Americans are really romantic about it. And that romance, though it revolves round pork or petrol, is really like a love-affair in this; that it involves not only rushing but also lingering.

The American is too busy to have business habits. He is also too much in earnest to have business rules. If we wish to understand him, we must compare him not with the French shopkeeper when he plays dominoes, but with the same French shopkeeper when he works the guns or mans the trenches as a conscript soldier. Everybody used to the punctilious Prussian standard of uniform and parade has noticed the roughness and apparent laxity of the French soldier, the looseness of his clothes, the unsightliness of his heavy knapsack, in short his inferiority in every detail of the business of war except fighting. There he is much too swift to be smart. He is much too practical to be precise. By a strange illusion which can lift pork-packing almost to the level of patriotism, the American has the same free rhythm in his romance of business. He varies his conduct not to suit the clock but to suit the case. He gives more time to more important and less time to less important things; and he makes up his time-table as he goes along. Suppose he has three appointments; the first, let us say, is some mere trifle of erecting a tower twenty storeys high and exhibiting a sky-sign on the top of it; the second is a business discussion about the possibility of printing advertisements of soft drinks on the table-napkins at a restaurant; the third is attending a conference to decide how the populace can be prevented from using chewing-gum and the manufacturers can still manage to sell it. He will be content merely to glance at the sky-sign as he goes by in a trolley-car or an automobile; he will then settle down to the discussion with his partner about the table-napkins, each speaker indulging in long monologues in turn; a peculiarity of much American conversation. Now if in the middle of one of these monologues, he suddenly thinks that the vacant space of the waiter’s shirt-front might also be utilised to advertise the Gee Whiz Ginger Champagne, he will instantly follow up the new idea in all its aspects and possibilities, in an even longer monologue; and will never think of looking at his watch while he is rapturously looking at his waiter. The consequence is that he will come late into the great social movement against chewing-gum, where an Englishman would probably have arrived at the proper hour. But though the Englishman’s conduct is more proper, it need not be in all respects more practical. The Englishman’s rules are better for the business of life, but not necessarily for the life of business. And it is true that for many of these Americans business is the business
of life. It is really also, as I have said, the romance of life. We shall admire or deplore this spirit, accordingly as we are glad to see trade irradiated with so much poetry, or sorry to see so much poetry wasted on trade. But it does make many people happy, like any other hobby; and one is disposed to add that it does fill their imaginations like any other delusion. For the true criticism of all this commercial romance would involve a criticism of this historic phase of commerce. These people are building on the sand, though it shines like gold, and for them like fairy gold; but the world will remember the legend about fairy gold. Half the financial operations they follow deal with things that do not even exist; for in that sense all finance is a fairy tale. Many of them are buying and selling things that do nothing but harm; but it does them good to buy and sell them. The claim of the romantic salesman is better justified than he realises. Business really is romance; for it is not reality.

There is one real advantage that America has over England, largely due to its livelier and more impressionable ideal. America does not think that stupidity is practical. It does not think that ideas are merely destructive things. It does not think that a genius is only a person to be told to go away and blow his brains out; rather it would open all its machinery to the genius and beg him to blow his brains in. It might attempt to use a natural force like Blake or Shelley for very ignoble purposes; it would be quite capable of asking Blake to take his tiger and his golden lions round as a sort of Barnum’s Show, or Shelley to hang his stars and haloed clouds among the lights of Broadway. But it would not assume that a natural force is useless, any more than that Niagara is useless. And there is a very definite distinction here touching the intelligence of the trader, whatever we may think of either course touching the intelligence of the artist. It is one thing that Apollo should be employed by Admetus, although he is a god. It is quite another thing that Apollo should always be sacked by Admetus, because he is a god. Now in England, largely owing to the accident of a rivalry and therefore a comparison with France, there arose about the end of the eighteenth century an extraordinary notion that there was some sort of connection between dullness and success. What the Americans call a bonehead became what the English call a hard-headed man. The merchants of London evinced their contempt for the fantastic logicians of Paris by living in a permanent state of terror lest somebody should set the Thames on fire. In this as in much else it is much easier to understand the Americans if we connect them with the French who were their allies than with the English who were their enemies. There are a great many Franco-American resemblances which the practical Anglo-Saxons are of course
too hard-headed (or boneheaded) to see. American history is haunted with the shadow of the Plebiscitary President; they have a tradition of classical architecture for public buildings. Their cities are planned upon the squares of Paris and not upon the labyrinth of London. They call their cities Corinth and Syracuse, as the French called their citizens Epaminondas and Timoleon. Their soldiers wore the French kepi; and they make coffee admirably, and do not make tea at all. But of all the French elements in America the most French is this real practicality. They know that at certain times the most businesslike of all qualities is ‘l’audace, et encore de l’audace, et toujours de l’audace.’ The publisher may induce the poet to do a pot-boiler; but the publisher would cheerfully allow the poet to set the Mississippi on fire, if it would boil his particular pot. It is not so much that Englishmen are stupid as that they are afraid of being clever; and it is not so much that Americans are clever as that they do not try to be any stupider than they are. The fire of French logic has burnt that out of America as it has burnt it out of Europe, and of almost every place except England. This is one of the few points on which English insularity really is a disadvantage. It is the fatal notion that the only sort of commonsense is to be found in compromise, and that the only sort of compromise is to be found in confusion. This must be clearly distinguished from the commonplace about the utilitarian world not rising to the invisible values of genius. Under this philosophy the utilitarian does not see the utility of genius, even when it is quite visible. He does not see it, not because he is a utilitarian, but because he is an idealist whose ideal is dullness. For some time the English aspired to be stupid, prayed and hoped with soaring spiritual ambition to be stupid. But with all their worship of success, they did not succeed in being stupid. The natural talents of a great and traditional nation were always breaking out in spite of them. In spite of the merchants of London, Turner did set the Thames on fire. In spite of our repeatedly explained preference for realism to romance, Europe persisted in resounding with the name of Byron. And just when we had made it perfectly clear to the French that we despised all their flamboyant tricks, that we were a plain prosaic people and there was no fantastic glory or chivalry about us, the very shaft we sent against them shone with the name of Nelson, a shooting and a falling star.
PRESIDENTS AND PROBLEMS

All good Americans wish to fight the representatives they have chosen. All good Englishmen wish to forget the representatives they have chosen. This difference, deep and perhaps ineradicable in the temperaments of the two peoples, explains a thousand things in their literature and their laws. The American national poet praised his people for their readiness ‘to rise against the never-ending audacity of elected persons.’ The English national anthem is content to say heartily, but almost hastily, ‘Confound their politics,’ and then more cheerfully, as if changing the subject, ‘God Save the King.’ For this is especially the secret of the monarch or chief magistrate in the two countries. They arm the President with the powers of a King, that he may be a nuisance in politics. We deprive the King even of the powers of a President, lest he should remind us of a politician. We desire to forget the never-ending audacity of elected persons; and with us therefore it really never does end. That is the practical objection to our own habit of changing the subject, instead of changing the ministry. The King, as the Irish wit observed, is not a subject; but in that sense the English crowned head is not a King. He is a popular figure intended to remind us of the England that politicians do not remember; the England of horses and ships and gardens and good fellowship. The Americans have no such purely social symbol; and it is rather the root than the result of this that their social luxury, and especially their sport, are a little lacking in humanity and humour. It is the American, much more than the Englishman, who takes his pleasures sadly, not to say savagely.

The genuine popularity of constitutional monarchs, in parliamentary countries, can be explained by any practical example. Let us suppose that great social reform, The Compulsory Haircutting Act, has just begun to be enforced. The Compulsory Haircutting Act, as every good citizen knows, is a statute which permits any person to grow his hair to any length, in any wild or wonderful shape, so long as he is registered with a hairdresser who charges a shilling. But it imposes a universal close-shave (like that which is found so hygienic during a curative detention at Dartmoor) on all who are registered only with a barber who charges threepence. Thus, while the ornamental classes can continue to ornament the street with Piccadilly weepers or chin-beards if they choose, the working classes demonstrate the care with which the State protects them by going about in a fresher, cooler, and cleaner condition; a condition which has the further advantage of revealing at a glance that outline of the criminal skull, which is so
common among them. The Compulsory Haircutting Act is thus in every way a compact and convenient example of all our current laws about education, sport, liquor and liberty in general. Well, the law has passed and the masses, insensible to its scientific value, are still murmuring against it. The ignorant peasant maiden is averse to so extreme a fashion of bobbing her hair; and does not see how she can even be a flapper with nothing to flap. Her father, his mind already poisoned by Bolshevists, begins to wonder who the devil does these things, and why. In proportion as he knows the world of to-day, he guesses that the real origin may be quite obscure, or the real motive quite corrupt. The pressure may have come from anybody who has gained power or money anyhow. It may come from the foreign millionaire who owns all the expensive hairdressing saloons; it may come from some swindler in the cutlery trade who has contracted to sell a million bad razors. Hence the poor man looks about him with suspicion in the street; knowing that the lowest sneak or the loudest snob he sees may be directing the government of his country. Anybody may have to do with politics; and this sort of thing is politics. Suddenly he catches sight of a crowd, stops, and begins wildly to cheer a carriage that is passing. The carriage contains the one person who has certainly not originated any great scientific reform. He is the only person in the commonwealth who is not allowed to cut off other people’s hair, or to take away other people’s liberties. He at least is kept out of politics; and men hold him up as they did an unspotted victim to appease the wrath of the gods. He is their King, and the only man they know is not their ruler. We need not be surprised that he is popular, knowing how they are ruled.

The popularity of a President in America is exactly the opposite. The American Republic is the last mediaeval monarchy. It is intended that the President shall rule, and take all the risks of ruling. If the hair is cut he is the haircutter, the magistrate that bears not the razor in vain. All the popular Presidents, Jackson and Lincoln and Roosevelt, have acted as democratic despots, but emphatically not as constitutional monarchs. In short, the names have become curiously interchanged; and as a historical reality it is the President who ought to be called a King.

But it is not only true that the President could correctly be called a King. It is also true that the King might correctly be called a President. We could hardly find a more exact description of him than to call him a President. What is expected in modern times of a modern constitutional monarch is emphatically that he should preside. We expect him to take the throne exactly as if he were taking the chair. The chairman does not move the motion or resolution, far less
vote it; he is not supposed even to favour it. He is expected to please everybody by favouring nobody. The primary essentials of a President or Chairman are that he should be treated with ceremonial respect, that he should be popular in his personality and yet impersonal in his opinions, and that he should actually be a link between all the other persons by being different from all of them. This is exactly what is demanded of the constitutional monarch in modern times. It is exactly the opposite to the American position; in which the President does not preside at all. He moves; and the thing he moves may truly be called a motion; for the national idea is perpetual motion. Technically it is called a message; and might often actually be called a menace. Thus we may truly say that the King presides and the President reigns. Some would prefer to say that the President rules; and some Senators and members of Congress would prefer to say that he rebels. But there is no doubt that he moves; he does not take the chair or even the stool, but rather the stump.

Some people seem to suppose that the fall of President Wilson was a denial of this almost despotic ideal in America. As a matter of fact it was the strongest possible assertion of it. The idea is that the President shall take responsibility and risk; and responsibility means being blamed, and risk means the risk of being blamed. The theory is that things are done by the President; and if things go wrong, or are alleged to go wrong, it is the fault of the President. This does not invalidate, but rather ratifies the comparison with true monarchs such as the mediaeval monarchs. Constitutional princes are seldom deposed; but despots were often deposed. In the simpler races of sunnier lands, such as Turkey, they were commonly assassinated. Even in our own history a King often received the same respectful tribute to the responsibility and reality of his office. But King John was attacked because he was strong, not because he was weak. Richard the Second lost the crown because the crown was a trophy, not because it was a trifle. And President Wilson was deposed because he had used a power which is such, in its nature, that a man must use it at the risk of deposition. As a matter of fact, of course, it is easy to exaggerate Mr. Wilson’s real unpopularity, and still more easy to exaggerate Mr. Wilson’s real failure. There are a great many people in America who justify and applaud him; and what is yet more interesting, who justify him not on pacifist and idealistic, but on patriotic and even military grounds. It is especially insisted by some that his demonstration, which seemed futile as a threat against Mexico, was a very far-sighted preparation for the threat against Prussia. But in so far as the democracy did disagree with him, it was but the occasional and inevitable result of the theory by
which the despot has to anticipate the democracy.

Thus the American King and the English President are the very opposite of each other; yet they are both the varied and very national indications of the same contemporary truth. It is the great weariness and contempt that have fallen upon common politics in both countries. It may be answered, with some show of truth, that the new American President represents a return to common politics; and that in that sense he marks a real rebuke to the last President and his more uncommon politics. And it is true that many who put Mr. Harding in power regard him as the symbol of something which they call normalcy; which may roughly be translated into English by the word normality. And by this they do mean, more or less, the return to the vague capitalist conservatism of the nineteenth century. They might call Mr. Harding a Victorian if they had ever lived under Victoria. Perhaps these people do entertain the extraordinary notion that the nineteenth century was normal. But there are very few who think so, and even they will not think so long. The blunder is the beginning of nearly all our present troubles. The nineteenth century was the very reverse of normal. It suffered a most unnatural strain in the combination of political equality in theory with extreme economic inequality in practice. Capitalism was not a normalcy but an abnormalcy. Property is normal, and is more normal in proportion as it is universal. Slavery may be normal and even natural, in the sense that a bad habit may be second nature. But Capitalism was never anything so human as a habit; we may say it was never anything so good as a bad habit. It was never a custom; for men never grew accustomed to it. It was never even conservative; for before it was even created wise men had realised that it could not be conserved. It was from the first a problem; and those who will not even admit the Capitalist problem deserve to get the Bolshevist solution. All things considered, I cannot say anything worse of them than that.

The recent Presidential election preserved some trace of the old Party System of America; but its tradition has very nearly faded like that of the Party System of England. It is easy for an Englishman to confess that he never quite understood the American Party System. It would perhaps be more courageous in him, and more informing, to confess that he never really understood the British Party System. The planks in the two American platforms may easily be exhibited as very disconnected and ramshackle; but our own party was as much of a patchwork, and indeed I think even more so. Everybody knows that the two American factions were called ‘Democrat’ and ‘Republican.’ It does not at all cover the case to identify the former with Liberals and the latter with
Conservatives. The Democrats are the party of the South and have some true tradition from the Southern aristocracy and the defence of Secession and State Rights. The Republicans rose in the North as the party of Lincoln, largely condemning slavery. But the Republicans are also the party of Tariffs, and are at least accused of being the party of Trusts. The Democrats are the party of Free Trade; and in the great movement of twenty years ago the party of Free Silver. The Democrats are also the party of the Irish; and the stones they throw at Trusts are retorted by stones thrown at Tammany. It is easy to see all these things as curiously sporadic and bewildering; but I am inclined to think that they are as a whole more coherent and rational than our own old division of Liberals and Conservatives. There is even more doubt nowadays about what is the connecting link between the different items in the old British party programmes. I have never been able to understand why being in favour of Protection should have anything to do with being opposed to Home Rule; especially as most of the people who were to receive Home Rule were themselves in favour of Protection. I could never see what giving people cheap bread had to do with forbidding them cheap beer; or why the party which sympathises with Ireland cannot sympathise with Poland. I cannot see why Liberals did not liberate public-houses or Conservatives conserve crofters. I do not understand the principle upon which the causes were selected on both sides; and I incline to think that it was with the impartial object of distributing nonsense equally on both sides. Heaven knows there is enough nonsense in American politics too; towering and tropical nonsense like a cyclone or an earthquake. But when all is said, I incline to think that there was more spiritual and atmospheric cohesion in the different parts of the American party than in those of the English party; and I think this unity was all the more real because it was more difficult to define. The Republican party originally stood for the triumph of the North, and the North stood for the nineteenth century; that is for the characteristic commercial expansion of the nineteenth century; for a firm faith in the profit and progress of its great and growing cities, its division of labour, its industrial science, and its evolutionary reform. The Democratic party stood more loosely for all the elements that doubted whether this development was democratic or was desirable; all that looked back to Jeffersonian idealism and the serene abstractions of the eighteenth century, or forward to Bryanite idealism and some simplified Utopia founded on grain rather than gold. Along with this went, not at all unnaturally, the last and lingering sentiment of the Southern squires, who remembered a more rural civilisation that seemed by comparison romantic. Along with this
went, quite logically, the passions and the pathos of the Irish, themselves a rural civilisation, whose basis is a religion or what the nineteenth century tended to call a superstition. Above all, it was perfectly natural that this tone of thought should favour local liberties, and even a revolt on behalf of local liberties, and should distrust the huge machine of centralised power called the Union. In short, something very near the truth was said by a suicidally silly Republican orator, who was running Blaine for the Presidency, when he denounced the Democratic party as supported by ‘Rome, rum, and rebellion.’ They seem to me to be three excellent things in their place; and that is why I suspect that I should have belonged to the Democratic party, if I had been born in America when there was a Democratic party. But I fancy that by this time even this general distinction has become very dim. If I had been an American twenty years ago, in the time of the great Free Silver campaign, I should certainly never have hesitated for an instant about my sympathies or my side. My feelings would have been exactly those that are nobly expressed by Mr. Vachell Lindsay, in a poem bearing the characteristic title of ‘Bryan, Bryan, Bryan, Bryan.’ And, by the way, nobody can begin to sympathise with America whose soul does not to some extent begin to swing and dance to the drums and gongs of Mr. Vachell Lindsay’s great orchestra; which has the note of his whole nation in this: that a refined person can revile it a hundred times over as violent and brazen and barbarous and absurd, but not as insincere; there is something in it, and that something is the soul of many million men. But the poet himself, in the political poem referred to, speaks of Bryan’s fall over Free Silver as ‘defeat of my boyhood, defeat of my dream’; and it is only too probable that the cause has fallen as well as the candidate. The William Jennings Bryan of later years is not the man whom I should have seen in my youth, with the visionary eyes of Mr. Vachell Lindsay. He has become a commonplace Pacifist, which is in its nature the very opposite of a revolutionist; for if men will fight rather than sacrifice humanity on a golden cross, it cannot be wrong for them to resist its being sacrificed to an iron cross. I came into very indirect contact with Mr. Bryan when I was in America, in a fashion that made me realise how hard it has become to recover the illusions of a Bryanite. I believe that my lecture agent was anxious to arrange a debate, and I threw out a sort of loose challenge to the effect that woman’s suffrage had weakened the position of woman; and while I was away in the wilds of Oklahoma my lecture agent (a man of blood-curdling courage and enterprise) asked Mr. Bryan to debate with me. Now Mr. Bryan is one of the greatest orators of modern history, and there is no conceivable reason why he should trouble to
debate with a wandering lecturer. But as a matter of fact he expressed himself in the most magnanimous and courteous terms about my personal position, but said (as I understood) that it would be improper to debate on female suffrage as it was already a part of the political system. And when I heard that, I could not help a sigh; for I recognised something that I knew only too well on the front benches of my own beloved land. The great and glorious demagogue had degenerated into a statesman. I had never expected for a moment that the great orator could be bothered to debate with me at all; but it had never occurred to me, as a general moral principle, that two educated men were for ever forbidden to talk sense about a particular topic, because a lot of other people had already voted on it. What is the matter with that attitude is the loss of the freedom of the mind. There can be no liberty of thought unless it is ready to unsettle what has recently been settled, as well as what has long been settled. We are perpetually being told in the papers that what is wanted is a strong man who will do things. What is wanted is a strong man who will undo things; and that will be a real test of strength.

Anyhow, we could have believed, in the time of the Free Silver fight, that the Democratic party was democratic with a small d. In Mr. Wilson it was transfigured, his friends would say into a higher and his foes into a hazier thing. And the Republican reaction against him, even where it has been healthy, has also been hazy. In fact, it has been not so much the victory of a political party as a relapse into repose after certain political passions; and in that sense there is a truth in the strange phrase about normalcy; in the sense that there is nothing more normal than going to sleep. But an even larger truth is this; it is most likely that America is no longer concentrated on these faction fights at all, but is considering certain large problems upon which those factions hardly troubled to take sides. They are too large even to be classified as foreign policy distinct from domestic policy. They are so large as to be inside as well as outside the state. From an English standpoint the most obvious example is the Irish; for the Irish problem is not a British problem, but also an American problem. And this is true even of the great external enigma of Japan. The Japanese question may be a part of foreign policy for America, but it is a part of domestic policy for California. And the same is true of that other intense and intelligent Eastern people, the genius and limitations of which have troubled the world so much longer. What the Japs are in California, the Jews are in America. That is, they are a piece of foreign policy that has become imbedded in domestic policy; something which is found inside but still has to be regarded from the outside. On these great
international matters I doubt if Americans got much guidance from their party system; especially as most of these questions have grown very recently and rapidly to enormous size. Men are left free to judge of them with fresh minds. And that is the truth in the statement that the Washington Conference has opened the gates of a new world.

On the relations to England and Ireland I will not attempt to dwell adequately here. I have already noted that my first interview was with an Irishman, and my first impression from that interview a vivid sense of the importance of Ireland in Anglo-American relations; and I have said something of the Irish problem, prematurely and out of its proper order, under the stress of that sense of urgency. Here I will only add two remarks about the two countries respectively. A great many British journalists have recently imagined that they were pouring oil upon the troubled waters, when they were rather pouring out oil to smooth the downward path; and to turn the broad road to destruction into a butter-slide. They seem to have no notion of what to do, except to say what they imagine the very stupidest of their readers would be pleased to hear, and conceal whatever the most intelligent of their readers would probably like to know. They therefore informed the public that ‘the majority of Americans’ had abandoned all sympathy with Ireland, because of its alleged sympathy with Germany; and that this majority of Americans was now ardently in sympathy with its English brothers across the sea. Now to begin with, such critics have no notion of what they are saying when they talk about the majority of Americans. To anybody who has happened to look in, let us say, on the city of Omaha, Nebraska, the remark will have something enormous and overwhelming about it. It is like saying that the majority of the inhabitants of China would agree with the Chinese Ambassador in a preference for dining at the Savoy rather than the Ritz. There are millions and millions of people living in those great central plains of the North American Continent of whom it would be nearer the truth to say that they have never heard of England, or of Ireland either, than to say that their first emotional movement is a desire to come to the rescue of either of them. It is perfectly true that the more monomaniac sort of Sinn Feiner might sometimes irritate this innocent and isolated American spirit by being pro-Irish. It is equally true that a traditional Bostonian or Virginian might irritate it by being pro-English. The only difference is that large numbers of pure Irishmen are scattered in those far places, and large numbers of pure Englishmen are not. But it is truest of all to say that neither England nor Ireland so much as crosses the mind of most of them once in six months. Painting up large notices of ‘Watch Us Grow,’
making money by farming with machinery, together with an occasional hold-up with six-shooters and photographs of a beautiful murderess or divorcée, fill up the round of their good and happy lives, and fleet the time carelessly as in the golden age.

But putting aside all this vast and distant democracy, which is the real ‘majority of Americans,’ and confining ourselves to that older culture on the eastern coast which the critics probably had in mind, we shall find the case more comforting but not to be covered with cheap and false comfort. Now it is perfectly true that any Englishman coming to this eastern coast, as I did, finds himself not only most warmly welcomed as a guest, but most cordially complimented as an Englishman. Men recall with pride the branches of their family that belong to England or the English counties where they were rooted; and there are enthusiasms for English literature and history which are as spontaneous as patriotism itself. Something of this may be put down to a certain promptitude and flexibility in all American kindness, which is never sufficiently stodgy to be called good nature. The Englishman does sometimes wonder whether if he had been a Russian, his hosts would not have remembered remote Russian aunts and uncles and disinterred a Muscovite great-grandmother; or whether if he had come from Iceland, they would not have known as much about Icelandic sagas and been as sympathetic about the absence of Icelandic snakes. But with a fair review of the proportions of the case he will dismiss this conjecture, and come to the conclusion that a number of educated Americans are very warmly and sincerely sympathetic with England.

What I began to feel, with a certain creeping chill, was that they were only too sympathetic with England. The word sympathetic has sometimes rather a double sense. The impression I received was that all these chivalrous Southerners and men mellow with Bostonian memories were rallying to England. They were on the defensive; and it was poor old England that they were defending. Their attitude implied that somebody or something was leaving her undefended, or finding her indefensible. The burden of that hearty chorus was that England was not so black as she was painted; it seemed clear that somewhere or other she was being painted pretty black. But there was something else that made me uncomfortable; it was not only the sense of being somewhat boisterously forgiven; it was also something involving questions of power as well as morality. Then it seemed to me that a new sensation turned me hot and cold; and I felt something I have never before felt in a foreign land. Never had my father or my grandfather known that sensation; never during the great and complex and
perhaps perilous expansion of our power and commerce in the last hundred years had an Englishman heard exactly that note in a human voice. England was being pitied. I, as an Englishman, was not only being pardoned but pitied. My country was beginning to be an object of compassion, like Poland or Spain. My first emotion, full of the mood and movement of a hundred years, was one of furious anger. But the anger has given place to anxiety; and the anxiety is not yet at an end.

It is not my business here to expound my view of English politics, still less of European politics or the politics of the world; but to put down a few impressions of American travel. On many points of European politics the impression will be purely negative; I am sure that most Americans have no notion of the position of France or the position of Poland. But if English readers want the truth, I am sure this is the truth about their notion of the position of England. They are wondering, or those who are watching are wondering, whether the term of her success is come and she is going down the dark road after Prussia. Many are sorry if this is so; some are glad if it is so; but all are seriously considering the probability of its being so. And herein lay especially the horrible folly of our Black-and-Tan terrorism over the Irish people. I have noted that the newspapers told us that America had been chilled in its Irish sympathies by Irish detachment during the war. It is the painful truth that any advantage we might have had from this we ourselves immediately proceeded to destroy. Ireland might have put herself wrong with America by her attitude about Belgium, if England had not instantly proceeded to put herself more wrong by her attitude towards Ireland. It is quite true that two blacks do not make a white; but you cannot send a black to reproach people with tolerating blackness; and this is quite as true when one is a Black Brunswicker and the other a Black-and-Tan. It is true that since then England has made surprisingly sweeping concessions; concessions so large as to increase the amazement that the refusal should have been so long. But unfortunately the combination of the two rather clinches the conception of our decline. If the concession had come before the terror, it would have looked like an attempt to emancipate, and would probably have succeeded. Coming so abruptly after the terror, it looked only like an attempt to tyrannise, and an attempt that failed. It was partly an inheritance from a stupid tradition, which tried to combine what it called firmness with what it called conciliation; as if when we made up our minds to soothe a man with a five-pound note, we always took care to undo our own action by giving him a kick as well. The English politician has often done that; though there is nothing to be said of such a fool,
except that he has wasted a fiver. But in this case he gave the kick first, received a kicking in return, and then gave up the money; and it was hard for the bystanders to say anything except that he had been badly beaten. The combination and sequence of events seems almost as if it were arranged to suggest the dark and ominous parallel. The first action looked only too like the invasion of Belgium, and the second like the evacuation of Belgium. So that vast and silent crowd in the West looked at the British Empire, as men look at a great tower that has begun to lean. Thus it was that while I found real pleasure, I could not find unrelieved consolation in the sincere compliments paid to my country by so many cultivated Americans; their memories of homely corners of historic counties from which their fathers came, of the cathedral that dwarfs the town, or the inn at the turning of the road. There was something in their voices and the look in their eyes which from the first disturbed me. So I have heard good Englishmen, who died afterwards the death of soldiers, cry aloud in 1914, ‘It seems impossible, of those jolly Bavarians!’ or, ‘I will never believe it, when I think of the time I had at Heidelberg!’

But there are other things besides the parallel of Prussia or the problem of Ireland. The American press is much freer than our own; the American public is much more familiar with the discussion of corruption than our own; and it is much more conscious of the corruption of our politics than we are. Almost any man in America may speak of the Marconi Case; many a man in England does not even know what it means. Many imagine that it had something to do with the propriety of politicians speculating on the Stock Exchange. So that it means a great deal to Americans to say that one figure in that drama is ruling India and another is ruling Palestine. And this brings me to another problem, which is also dealt with much more openly in America than in England. I mention it here only because it is a perfect model of the misunderstandings in the modern world. If any one asks for an example of exactly how the important part of every story is left out, and even the part that is reported is not understood, he could hardly have a stronger case than the story of Henry Ford of Detroit.

When I was in Detroit I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Ford, and it really was a pleasure. He is a man quite capable of views which I think silly to the point of insanity; but he is not the vulgar benevolent boss. It must be admitted that he is a millionaire; but he cannot really be convicted of being a philanthropist. He is not a man who merely wants to run people; it is rather his views that run him, and perhaps run away with him. He has a distinguished and sensitive face; he really invented things himself, unlike most men who profit by
inventions; he is something of an artist and not a little of a fighter. A man of that
type is always capable of being wildly wrong, especially in the sectarian
atmosphere of America; and Mr. Ford has been wrong before and may be wrong
now. He is chiefly known in England for a project which I think very
preposterous; that of the Peace Ship, which came to Europe during the war. But
he is not known in England at all in connection with a much more important
campaign, which he has conducted much more recently and with much more
success; a campaign against the Jews like one of the Anti-Semitic campaigns of
the Continent. Now any one who knows anything of America knows exactly
what the Peace Ship would be like. It was a national combination of imagination
and ignorance, which has at least some of the beauty of innocence. Men living in
those huge, hedgeless inland plains know nothing about frontiers or the tragedy
of a fight for freedom; they know nothing of alarum and armaments or the peril
of a high civilisation poised like a precious statue within reach of a mailed fist.
They are accustomed to a cosmopolitan citizenship, in which men of all bloods
mingle and in which men of all creeds are counted equal. Their highest moral
boast is humanitarianism; their highest mental boast is enlightenment. In a word,
they are the very last men in the world who would seem likely to pride
themselves on a prejudice against the Jews. They have no religion in particular,
except a sincere sentiment which they would call ‘true Christianity,’ and which
specially forbids an attack on the Jews. They have a patriotism which prides
itself on assimilating all types, including the Jews. Mr. Ford is a pure product of
this pacific world, as was sufficiently proved by his pacifism. If a man of that
sort has discovered that there is a Jewish problem, it is because there is a Jewish
problem. It is certainly not because there is an Anti-Jewish prejudice. For if there
had been any amount of such racial and religious prejudice, he would have been
about the very last sort of man to have it. His particular part of the world would
have been the very last place to produce it. We may well laugh at the Peace Ship,
and its wild course and inevitable shipwreck; but remember that its very
wildness was an attempt to sail as far as possible from the castle of Front-de-
Bœuf. Everything that made him Anti-War should have prevented him from
being Anti-Semite. We may mock him for being mad on peace; but we cannot
say that he was so mad on peace that he made war on Israel.

It happened that, when I was in America, I had just published some studies on
Palestine; and I was besieged by Rabbis lamenting my ‘prejudice.’ I pointed out
that they would have got hold of the wrong word, even if they had not got hold
of the wrong man. As a point of personal autobiography, I do not happen to be a
man who dislikes Jews; though I believe that some men do. I have had Jews among my most intimate and faithful friends since my boyhood, and I hope to have them till I die. But even if I did have a dislike of Jews, it would be illogical to call that unlike a prejudice. Prejudice is a very lucid Latin word meaning the bias which a man has before he considers a case. I might be said to be prejudiced against a Hairy Ainu because of his name, for I have never been on terms of such intimacy with him as to correct my preconceptions. But if after moving about in the modern world and meeting Jews, knowing Jews, doing business with Jews, and reading and hearing about Jews, I came to the conclusion that I did not like Jews, my conclusion certainly would not be a prejudice. It would simply be an opinion; and one I should be perfectly entitled to hold; though as a matter of fact I do not hold it. No extravagance of hatred merely following on experience of Jews can properly be called a prejudice.

Now the point is that this new American Anti-Semitism springs from experience and nothing but experience. There is no prejudice for it to spring from. Or rather the prejudice is all the other way. All the traditions of that democracy, and very creditable traditions too, are in favour of toleration and a sort of idealistic indifference. The sympathies in which these nineteenth-century people were reared were all against Front-de-Bœuf and in favour of Rebecca. They inherited a prejudice against Anti-Semitism; a prejudice of Anti-Anti-Semitism. These people of the plains have found the Jewish problem exactly as they might have struck oil; because it is there, and not even because they were looking for it. Their view of the problem, like their use of the oil, is not always satisfactory; and with parts of it I entirely disagree. But the point is that the thing which I call a problem, and others call a prejudice, has now appeared in broad daylight in a new country where there is no priestcraft, no feudalism, no ancient superstition to explain it. It has appeared because it is a problem; and those are the best friends of the Jews, including many of the Jews themselves, who are trying to find a solution. That is the meaning of the incident of Mr. Henry Ford of Detroit; and you will hardly hear an intelligible word about it in England.

The talk of prejudice against the Japs is not unlike the talk of prejudice against the Jews. Only in this case our indifference has really the excuse of ignorance. We used to lecture the Russians for oppressing the Jews, before we heard the word Bolshevist and began to lecture them for being oppressed by the Jews. In the same way we have long lectured the Californians for oppressing the Japs, without allowing for the possibility of their foreseeing that the oppression may soon be the other way. As in the other case, it may be a persecution but it is not a
prejudice. The Californians know more about the Japanese than we do; and our own colonists when they are placed in the same position generally say the same thing. I will not attempt to deal adequately here with the vast international and diplomatic problems which arise with the name of the new power in the Far East. It is possible that Japan, having imitated European militarism, may imitate European pacifism. I cannot honestly pretend to know what the Japanese mean by the one any more than by the other. But when Englishmen, especially English Liberals like myself, take a superior and censorious attitude towards Americans and especially Californians, I am moved to make a final remark. When a considerable number of Englishmen talk of the grave contending claims of our friendship with Japan and our friendship with America, when they finally tend in a sort of summing up to dwell on the superior virtues of Japan, I may be permitted to make a single comment.

We are perpetually boring the world and each other with talk about the bonds that bind us to America. We are perpetually crying aloud that England and America are very much alike, especially England. We are always insisting that the two are identical in all the things in which they most obviously differ. We are always saying that both stand for democracy, when we should not consent to stand their democracy for half a day. We are always saying that at least we are all Anglo-Saxons, when we are descended from Romans and Normans and Britons and Danes, and they are descended from Irishmen and Italians and Slavs and Germans. We tell a people whose very existence is a revolt against the British Crown that they are passionately devoted to the British Constitution. We tell a nation whose whole policy has been isolation and independence that with us she can bear safely the White Man’s Burden of universal empire. We tell a continent crowded with Irishmen to thank God that the Saxon can always rule the Celt. We tell a populace whose very virtues are lawless that together we uphold the Reign of Law. We recognise our own law-abiding character in people who make laws that neither they nor anybody else can abide. We congratulate them on clinging to all they have cast away, and on imitating everything which they came into existence to insult. And when we have established all these nonsensical analogies with a nonexistent nation, we wait until there is a crisis in which we really are at one with America, and then we falter and threaten to fail her. In a battle where we really are of one blood, the blood of the great white race throughout the world, when we really have one language, the fundamental alphabet of Cadmus and the script of Rome, when we really do represent the same reign of law, the common conscience of Christendom and the morals of
men baptized, when we really have an implicit faith and honour and type of freedom to summon up our souls as with trumpets—then many of us begin to weaken and waver and wonder whether there is not something very nice about little yellow men, whose heroic stories revolve round polygamy and suicide, and whose heroes wore two swords and worshipped the ancestors of the Mikado.
I went to America with some notion of not discussing Prohibition. But I soon found that well-to-do Americans were only too delighted to discuss it over the nuts and wine. They were even willing, if necessary, to dispense with the nuts. I am far from sneering at this; having a general philosophy which need not here be expounded, but which may be symbolised by saying that monkeys can enjoy nuts but only men can enjoy wine. But if I am to deal with Prohibition, there is no doubt of the first thing to be said about it. The first thing to be said about it is that it does not exist. It is to some extent enforced among the poor; at any rate it was intended to be enforced among the poor; though even among them I fancy it is much evaded. It is certainly not enforced among the rich; and I doubt whether it was intended to be. I suspect that this has always happened whenever this negative notion has taken hold of some particular province or tribe. Prohibition never prohibits. It never has in history; not even in Moslem history; and it never will. Mahomet at least had the argument of a climate and not the interest of a class. But if a test is needed, consider what part of Moslem culture has passed permanently into our own modern culture. You will find the one Moslem poem that has really pierced is a Moslem poem in praise of wine. The crown of all the victories of the Crescent is that nobody reads the Koran and everybody reads the Rubaiyat.

Most of us remember with satisfaction an old picture in Punch, representing a festive old gentleman in a state of collapse on the pavement, and a philanthropic old lady anxiously calling the attention of a cabman to the calamity. The old lady says, ‘I’m sure this poor gentleman is ill,’ and the cabman replies with fervour, ‘Ill! I wish I ‘ad ‘alf ‘is complaint.’

We talk about unconscious humour; but there is such a thing as unconscious seriousness. Flippancy is a flower whose roots are often underground in the subconsciousness. Many a man talks sense when he thinks he is talking nonsense; touches on a conflict of ideas as if it were only a contradiction of language, or really makes a parallel when he means only to make a pun. Some of the Punch jokes of the best period are examples of this; and that quoted above is a very strong example of it. The cabman meant what he said; but he said a great deal more than he meant. His utterance contained fine philosophical doctrines and distinctions of which he was not perhaps entirely conscious. The spirit of the English language, the tragedy and comedy of the condition of the English
people, spoke through him as the god spoke through a teraph-head or brazen mask of oracle. And the oracle is an omen; and in some sense an omen of doom.

Observe, to begin with, the sobriety of the cabman. Note his measure, his moderation; or to use the yet truer term, his temperance. He only wishes to have half the old gentleman’s complaint. The old gentleman is welcome to the other half, along with all the other pomps and luxuries of his superior social station. There is nothing Bolshevist or even Communist about the temperance cabman. He might almost be called Distributist, in the sense that he wishes to distribute the old gentleman’s complaint more equally between the old gentleman and himself. And, of course, the social relations there represented are very much truer to life than it is fashionable to suggest. By the realism of this picture Mr. Punch made amends for some more snobbish pictures, with the opposite social moral. It will remain eternally among his real glories that he exhibited a picture in which the cabman was sober and the gentleman was drunk. Despite many ideas to the contrary, it was emphatically a picture of real life. The truth is subject to the simplest of all possible tests. If the cabman were really and truly drunk he would not be a cabman, for he could not drive a cab. If he had the whole of the old gentleman’s complaint, he would be sitting happily on the pavement beside the old gentleman; a symbol of social equality found at last, and the levelling of all classes of mankind. I do not say that there has never been such a monster known as a drunken cabman; I do not say that the driver may not sometimes have approximated imprudently to three-quarters of the complaint, instead of adhering to his severe but wise conception of half of it. But I do say that most men of the world, if they spoke sincerely, could testify to more examples of helplessly drunken gentlemen put inside cabs than of helplessly drunken drivers on top of them. Philanthropists and officials, who never look at people but only at papers, probably have a mass of social statistics to the contrary; founded on the simple fact that cabmen can be cross-examined about their habits and gentlemen cannot. Social workers probably have the whole thing worked out in sections and compartments, showing how the extreme intoxication of cabmen compares with the parallel intoxication of costermongers; or measuring the drunkenness of a dustman against the drunkenness of a crossing-sweeper. But there is more practical experience embodied in the practical speech of the English; and in the proverb that says ‘as drunk as a lord.’

Now Prohibition, whether as a proposal in England or a pretence in America, simply means that the man who has drunk less shall have no drink, and the man who has drunk more shall have all the drink. It means that the old gentleman
shall be carried home in the cab drunker than ever; but that, in order to make it quite safe for him to drink to excess, the man who drives him shall be forbidden to drink even in moderation. That is what it means; that is all it means; that is all it ever will mean. It tends to that in Moslem countries; where the luxurious and advanced drink champagne, while the poor and fanatical drink water. It means that in modern America; where the wealthy are all at this moment sipping their cocktails, and discussing how much harder labourers can be made to work if only they can be kept from festivity. This is what it means and all it means; and men are divided about it according to whether they believe in a certain transcendental concept called ‘justice,’ expressed in a more mystical paradox as the equality of men. So long as you do not believe in justice, and so long as you are rich and really confident of remaining so, you can have Prohibition and be as drunk as you choose.

I see that some remarks by the Rev. R. J. Campbell, dealing with social conditions in America, are reported in the press. They include some observations about Sinn Fein in which, as in most of Mr. Campbell’s allusions to Ireland, it is not difficult to detect his dismal origin, or the acrid smell of the smoke of Belfast. But the remarks about America are valuable in the objective sense, over and above their philosophy. He believes that Prohibition will survive and be a success, nor does he seem himself to regard the prospect with any special disfavour. But he frankly and freely testifies to the truth I have asserted; that Prohibition does not prohibit, so far as the wealthy are concerned. He testifies to constantly seeing wine on the table, as will any other grateful guest of the generous hospitality of America; and he implies humorously that he asked no questions about the story told him of the old stocks in the cellars. So there is no dispute about the facts; and we come back as before to the principles. Is Mr. Campbell content with a Prohibition which is another name for Privilege? If so, he has simply absorbed along with his new theology a new morality which is different from mine. But he does state both sides of the inequality with equal logic and clearness; and in these days of intellectual fog that alone is like a ray of sunshine.

Now my primary objection to Prohibition is not based on any arguments against it, but on the one argument for it. I need nothing more for its condemnation than the only thing that is said in its defence. It is said by capitalists all over America; and it is very clearly and correctly reported by Mr. Campbell himself. The argument is that employees work harder, and therefore employers get richer. That this idea should be taken calmly, by itself, as the test
of a problem of liberty, is in itself a final testimony to the presence of slavery. It shows that people have completely forgotten that there is any other test except the servile test. Employers are willing that workmen should have exercise, as it may help them to do more work. They are even willing that workmen should have leisure; for the more intelligent capitalists can see that this also really means that they can do more work. But they are not in any way willing that workmen should have fun; for fun only increases the happiness and not the utility of the worker. Fun is freedom; and in that sense is an end in itself. It concerns the man not as a worker but as a citizen, or even as a soul; and the soul in that sense is an end in itself. That a man shall have a reasonable amount of comedy and poetry and even fantasy in his life is part of his spiritual health, which is for the service of God; and not merely for his mechanical health, which is now bound to the service of man. The very test adopted has all the servile implication; the test of what we can get out of him, instead of the test of what he can get out of life.

Mr. Campbell is reported to have suggested, doubtless rather as a conjecture than a prophecy, that England may find it necessary to become teetotal in order to compete commercially with the efficiency and economy of teetotal America. Well, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there was in America one of the most economical and efficient of all forms of labour. It did not happen to be feasible for the English to compete with it by copying it. There were so many humanitarian prejudices about in those days. But economically there seems to be no reason why a man should not have prophesied that England would be forced to adopt American Slavery then, as she is urged to adopt American Prohibition now. Perhaps such a prophet would have prophesied rightly. Certainly it is not impossible that universal Slavery might have been the vision of Calhoun as universal Prohibition seems to be the vision of Campbell. The old England of 1830 would have said that such a plea for slavery was monstrous; but what would it have said of a plea for enforced water-drinking? Nevertheless, the nobler Servile State of Calhoun collapsed before it could spread to Europe. And there is always the hope that the same may happen to the far more materialistic Utopia of Mr. Campbell and Soft Drinks.

Abstract morality is very important; and it may well clear the mind to consider what would be the effect of Prohibition in America, if it were introduced there. It would, of course, be a decisive departure from the tradition of the Declaration of Independence. Those who deny that are hardly serious enough to demand attention. It is enough to say that they are reduced to minimising that document
in defence of Prohibition, exactly as the slave-owners were reduced to
minimising it in defence of Slavery. They are reduced to saying that the Fathers
of the Republic meant no more than that they would not be ruled by a king. And
they are obviously open to the reply which Lincoln gave to Douglas on the
slavery question; that if that great charter was limited to certain events in the
eighteenth century, it was hardly worth making such a fuss about in the
nineteenth—or in the twentieth. But they are also open to another reply which is
even more to the point, when they pretend that Jefferson’s famous preamble only
means to say that monarchy is wrong. They are maintaining that Jefferson only
meant to say something that he does not say at all. The great preamble does not
say that all monarchical government must be wrong; on the contrary, it rather
implies that most government is right. It speaks of human governments in
genral as justified by the necessity of defending certain personal rights. I see no
reason whatever to suppose that it would not include any royal government that
does defend those rights. Still less do I doubt what it would say of a republican
government that does destroy those rights.

But what are those rights? Sophists can always debate about their degree; but
even sophists cannot debate about their direction. Nobody in his five wits will
deny that Jeffersonian democracy wished to give the law a general control in
more public things, but the citizens a more general liberty in private things.
Wherever we draw the line, liberty can only be personal liberty; and the most
personal liberties must at least be the last liberties we lose. But to-day they are
the first liberties we lose. It is not a question of drawing the line in the right
place, but of beginning at the wrong end. What are the rights of man, if they do
not include the normal right to regulate his own health, in relation to the normal
risks of diet and daily life? Nobody can pretend that beer is a poison as prussic
acid is a poison; that all the millions of civilised men who drank it all fell down
dead when they had touched it. Its use and abuse is obviously a matter of
judgment; and there can be no personal liberty, if it is not a matter of private
judgment. It is not in the least a question of drawing the line between liberty and
licence. If this is licence, there is no such thing as liberty. It is plainly impossible
to find any right more individual or intimate. To say that a man has a right to a
vote, but not a right to a voice about the choice of his dinner, is like saying that
he has a right to his hat but not a right to his head.

Prohibition, therefore, plainly violates the rights of man, if there are any rights
of man. What its supporters really mean is that there are none. And in suggesting
this, they have all the advantages that every sceptic has when he supports a
negation. That sort of ultimate scepticism can only be retorted upon itself, and we can point out to them that they can no more prove the right of the city to be oppressive than we can prove the right of the citizen to be free. In the primary metaphysics of such a claim, it would surely be easier to make it out for a single conscious soul than for an artificial social combination. If there are no rights of men, what are the rights of nations? Perhaps a nation has no claim to self-government. Perhaps it has no claim to good government. Perhaps it has no claim to any sort of government or any sort of independence. Perhaps they will say that is not implied in the Declaration of Independence. But without going deep into my reasons for believing in natural rights, or rather in supernatural rights (and Jefferson certainly states them as supernatural), I am content here to note that a man’s treatment of his own body, in relation to traditional and ordinary opportunities for bodily excess, is as near to his self-respect as social coercion can possibly go; and that when that is gone there is nothing left. If coercion applies to that, it applies to everything; and in the future of this controversy it obviously will apply to everything. When I was in America, people were already applying it to tobacco. I never can see why they should not apply it to talking. Talking often goes with tobacco as it goes with beer; and what is more relevant, talking may often lead both to beer and tobacco. Talking often drives a man to drink, both negatively in the form of nagging and positively in the form of bad company. If the American Puritan is so anxious to be a censor morum, he should obviously put a stop to the evil communications that really corrupt good manners. He should reintroduce the Scold’s Bridle among the other Blue Laws for a land of blue devils. He should gag all gay deceivers and plausible cynics; he should cut off all flattering lips and the tongue that speaketh proud things. Nobody can doubt that nine-tenths of the harm in the world is done simply by talking. Jefferson and the old democrats allowed people to talk, not because they were unaware of this fact, but because they were fettered by this old fancy of theirs about freedom and the rights of man. But since we have already abandoned that doctrine in a final fashion, I cannot see why the new principle should not be applied intelligently; and in that case it would be applied to the control of conversation. The State would provide us with forms already filled up with the subjects suitable for us to discuss at breakfast; perhaps allowing us a limited number of epigrams each. Perhaps we should have to make a formal application in writing, to be allowed to make a joke that had just occurred to us in conversation. And the committee would consider it in due course. Perhaps it would be effected in a more practical fashion, and the private
citizens would be shut up as the public-houses were shut up. Perhaps they would all wear gags, which the policeman would remove at stated hours; and their mouths would be opened from one to three, as now in England even the public-houses are from time to time accessible to the public. To some this will sound fantastic; but not so fantastic as Jefferson would have thought Prohibition. But there is one sense in which it is indeed fantastic, for by hypothesis it leaves out the favouritism that is the fundamental of the whole matter. The only sense in which we can say that logic will never go so far as this is that logic will never go the length of equality. It is perfectly possible that the same forces that have forbidden beer may go on to forbid tobacco. But they will in a special and limited sense forbid tobacco—-but not cigars. Or at any rate not expensive cigars. In America, where large numbers of ordinary men smoke rather ordinary cigars, there would be doubtless a good opportunity of penalising a very ordinary pleasure. But the Havanas of the millionaire will be all right. So it will be if ever the Puritans bring back the Scold’s Bridle and the statutory silence of the populace. It will only be the populace that is silent. The politicians will go on talking.

These I believe to be the broad facts of the problem of Prohibition; but it would not be fair to leave it without mentioning two other causes which, if not defences, are at least excuses. The first is that Prohibition was largely passed in a sort of fervour or fever of self-sacrifice, which was a part of the passionate patriotism of America in the war. As I have remarked elsewhere, those who have any notion of what that national unanimity was like will smile when they see America made a model of mere international idealism. Prohibition was partly a sort of patriotic renunciation; for the popular instinct, like every poetic instinct, always tends at great crises to great gestures of renunciation. But this very fact, while it makes the inhumanity far more human, makes it far less final and convincing. Men cannot remain standing stiffly in such symbolical attitudes; nor can a permanent policy be founded on something analogous to flinging a gauntlet or uttering a battle-cry. We might as well expect all the Yale students to remain through life with their mouths open, exactly as they were when they uttered the college yell. It would be as reasonable as to expect them to remain through life with their mouths shut, while the wine-cup which has been the sacrament of all poets and lovers passed round among all the youth of the world. This point appeared very plainly in a discussion I had with a very thoughtful and sympathetic American critic, a clergyman writing in an Anglo-Catholic magazine. He put the sentiment of these healthier Prohibitionists, which had so
much to do with the passing of Prohibition, by asking, ‘May not a man who is asked to give up his blood for his country be asked to give up his beer for his country?’ And this phrase clearly illuminates all the limitations of the case. I have never denied, in principle, that it might in some abnormal crisis be lawful for a government to lock up the beer, or to lock up the bread. In that sense I am quite prepared to treat the sacrifice of beer in the same way as the sacrifice of blood. But is my American critic really ready to treat the sacrifice of blood in the same way as the sacrifice of beer? Is bloodshed to be as prolonged and protracted as Prohibition? Is the normal noncombatant to shed his gore as often as he misses his drink? I can imagine people submitting to a special regulation, as I can imagine them serving in a particular war. I do indeed despise the political knavery that deliberately passes drink regulations as war measures and then preserves them as peace measures. But that is not a question of whether drink and drunkenness are wrong, but of whether lying and swindling are wrong. But I never denied that there might need to be exceptional sacrifices for exceptional occasions; and war is in its nature an exception. Only, if war is the exception, why should Prohibition be the rule? If the surrender of beer is worthy to be compared to the shedding of blood, why then blood ought to be flowing for ever like a fountain in the public squares of Philadelphia and New York. If my critic wants to complete his parallel, he must draw up rather a remarkable programme for the daily life of the ordinary citizens. He must suppose that, through all their lives, they are paraded every day at lunch time and prodded with bayonets to show that they will shed their blood for their country. He must suppose that every evening, after a light repast of poison gas and shrapnel, they are made to go to sleep in a trench under a permanent drizzle of shell-fire. It is surely obvious that if this were the normal life of the citizen, the citizen would have no normal life. The common sense of the thing is that sacrifices of this sort are admirable but abnormal. It is not normal for the State to be perpetually regulating our days with the discipline of a fighting regiment; and it is not normal for the State to be perpetually regulating our diet with the discipline of a famine. To say that every citizen must be subject to control in such bodily things is like saying that every Christian ought to tear himself with red-hot pincers because the Christian martyrs did their duty in time of persecution. A man has a right to control his body, though in a time of martyrdom he may give his body to be burned; and a man has a right to control his bodily health, though in a state of siege he may give his body to be starved. Thus, though the patriotic defence was a sincere defence, it is a defence that comes back on the defenders like a
boomerang. For it proves only that Prohibition ought to be ephemeral, unless war ought to be eternal.

The other excuse is much less romantic and much more realistic. I have already said enough of the cause which is really realistic. The real power behind Prohibition is simply the plutocratic power of the pushing employers who wish to get the last inch of work out of their workmen. But before the progress of modern plutocracy had reached this stage, there was a predetermining cause for which there was a much better case. The whole business began with the problem of black labour. I have not attempted in this book to deal adequately with the question of the negro. I have refrained for a reason that may seem somewhat sensational; that I do not think I have anything particularly valuable to say or suggest. I do not profess to understand this singularly dark and intricate matter; and I see no use in men who have no solution filling up the gap with sentimentalism. The chief thing that struck me about the coloured people I saw was their charming and astonishing cheerfulness. My sense of pathos was appealed to much more by the Red Indians; and indeed I wish I had more space here to do justice to the Red Indians. They did heroic service in the war; and more than justified their glorious place in the day-dreams and nightmares of our boyhood. But the negro problem certainly demands more study than a sight-seer could give it; and this book is controversial enough about things that I have really considered, without permitting it to exhibit me as a sight-seer who shoots at sight. But I believe that it was always common ground to people of common sense that the enslavement and importation of negroes had been the crime and catastrophe of American history. The only difference was originally that one side thought that, the crime once committed, the only reparation was their freedom; while the other thought that, the crime once committed, the only safety was their slavery. It was only comparatively lately, by a process I shall have to indicate elsewhere, that anything like a positive case for slavery became possible. Now among the many problems of the presence of an alien and at least recently barbaric figure among the citizens, there was a very real problem of drink. Drink certainly has a very exceptionally destructive effect upon negroes in their native countries; and it was alleged to have a peculiarly demoralising effect upon negroes in the United States; to call up the passions that are the particular temptation of the race and to lead to appalling outrages that are followed by appalling popular vengeance. However this may be, many of the states of the American Union, which first forbade liquor to citizens, meant simply to forbid it to negroes. But they had not the moral courage to deny that negroes are citizens.
About all their political expedients necessarily hung the load that hangs so heavy on modern politics; hypocrisy. The superior race had to rule by a sort of secret society organised against the inferior. The American politicians dared not disfranchise the negroes; so they coerced everybody in theory and only the negroes in practice. The drinking of the white men became as much a conspiracy as the shooting by the white horsemen of the Ku-Klux Klan. And in that connection, it may be remarked in passing that the comparison illustrates the idiocy of supposing that the moral sense of mankind will ever support the prohibition of drinking as if it were something like the prohibition of shooting. Shooting in America is liable to take a free form, and sometimes a very horrible form; as when private bravos were hired to kill workmen in the capitalistic interests of that pure patron of disarmament, Carnegie. But when some of the rich Americans gravely tell us that their drinking cannot be interfered with, because they are only using up their existing stocks of wine, we may well be disposed to smile. When I was there, at any rate, they were using them up very fast; and with no apparent fears about the supply. But if the Ku-Klux Klan had started suddenly shooting everybody they didn’t like in broad daylight, and had blandly explained that they were only using up the stocks of their ammunition, left over from the Civil War, it seems probable that there would at least have been a little curiosity about how much they had left. There might at least have been occasional inquiries about how long it was likely to go on. It is even conceivable that some steps might have been taken to stop it.

No steps are taken to stop the drinking of the rich, chiefly because the rich now make all the rules and therefore all the exceptions, but partly because nobody ever could feel the full moral seriousness of this particular rule. And the truth is, as I have indicated, that it was originally established as an exception and not as a rule. The emancipated negro was an exception in the community, and a certain plan was, rightly or wrongly, adopted to meet his case. A law was made professedly for everybody and practically only for him. Prohibition is only important as marking the transition by which the trick, tried successfully on black labour, could be extended to all labour. We in England have no right to be Pharisaic at the expense of the Americans in this matter; for we have tried the same trick in a hundred forms. The true philosophical defence of the modern oppression of the poor would be to say frankly that we have ruled them so badly that they are unfit to rule themselves. But no modern oligarch is enough of a man to say this. For like all virile cynicism it would have an element of humility; which would not mix with the necessary element of hypocrisy. So we proceed,
just as the Americans do, to make a law for everybody and then evade it for ourselves. We have not the honesty to say that the rich may bet because they can afford it; so we forbid any man to bet in any place; and then say that a place is not a place. It is exactly as if there were an American law allowing a negro to be murdered because he is not a man within the meaning of the Act. We have not the honesty to drive the poor to school because they are ignorant; so we pretend to drive everybody; and then send inspectors to the slums but not to the smart streets. We apply the same ingenious principle; and are quite as undemocratic as Western democracy. Nevertheless there is an element in the American case which cannot be present in ours; and this chapter may well conclude upon so important a change.

America can now say with pride that she has abolished the colour bar. In this matter the white labourer and the black labourer have at last been put upon an equal social footing. White labour is every bit as much enslaved as black labour; and is actually enslaved by a method and a model only intended for black labour. We might think it rather odd if the exact regulations about flogging negroes were reproduced as a plan for punishing strikers; or if industrial arbitration issued its reports in the precise terminology of the Fugitive Slave Law. But this is in essentials what has happened; and one could almost fancy some negro orgy of triumph, with the beating of gongs and all the secret violence of Voodoo, crying aloud to some ancestral Mumbo Jumbo that the Poor White Trash was being treated according to its name.
FADS AND PUBLIC OPINION

A foreigner is a man who laughs at everything except jokes. He is perfectly entitled to laugh at anything, so long as he realises, in a reverent and religious spirit, that he himself is laughable. I was a foreigner in America; and I can truly claim that the sense of my own laughable position never left me. But when the native and the foreigner have finished with seeing the fun of each other in things that are meant to be serious, they both approach the far more delicate and dangerous ground of things that are meant to be funny. The sense of humour is generally very national; perhaps that is why the internationalists are so careful to purge themselves of it. I had occasion during the war to consider the rights and wrongs of certain differences alleged to have arisen between the English and American soldiers at the front. And, rightly or wrongly, I came to the conclusion that they arose from the failure to understand when a foreigner is serious and when he is humorous. And it is in the very nature of the best sort of joke to be the worst sort of insult if it is not taken as a joke.

The English and the American types of humour are in one way directly contrary. The most American sort of fun involves a soaring imagination, piling one house on another in a tower like that of a sky-scraper. The most English humour consists of a sort of bathos, of a man returning to the earth his mother in a homely fashion; as when he sits down suddenly on a butter-slide. English farce describes a man as being in a hole. American fantasy, in its more aspiring spirit, describes a man as being up a tree. The former is to be found in the cockney comic songs that concern themselves with hanging out the washing or coming home with the milk. The latter is to be found in those fantastic yarns about machines that turn live pigs into pig-skin purses or burning cities that serve to hatch an egg. But it will be inevitable, when the two come first into contact, that the bathos will sound like vulgarity and the extravagance will sound like boasting.

Suppose an American soldier said to an English soldier in the trenches, ‘The Kaiser may want a place in the sun; I reckon he won’t have a place in the solar system when we begin to hustle.’ The English soldier will very probably form the impression that this is arrogance; an impression based on the extraordinary assumption that the American means what he says. The American has merely indulged in a little art for art’s sake, and abstract adventure of the imagination; he has told an American short story. But the Englishman, not understanding this,
will think the other man is boasting, and reflecting on the insufficiency of the English effort. The English soldier is very likely to say something like, ‘Oh, you’ll be wanting to get home to your old woman before that, and asking for a kipper with your tea.’ And it is quite likely that the American will be offended in his turn at having his arabesque of abstract beauty answered in so personal a fashion. Being an American, he will probably have a fine and chivalrous respect for his wife; and may object to her being called an old woman. Possibly he in turn may be under the extraordinary delusion that talking of the old woman really means that the woman is old. Possibly he thinks the mysterious demand for a kipper carries with it some charge of ill-treating his wife; which his national sense of honour swiftly resents. But the real cross-purposes come from the contrary direction of the two exaggerations, the American making life more wild and impossible than it is, and the Englishman making it more flat and farcical than it is; the one escaping from the house of life by a skylight and the other by a trap-door.

This difficulty of different humours is a very practical one for practical people. Most of those who profess to remove all international differences are not practical people. Most of the phrases offered for the reconciliation of severally patriotic peoples are entirely serious and even solemn phrases. But human conversation is not conducted in those phrases. The normal man on nine occasions out of ten is rather a flippant man. And the normal man is almost always the national man. Patriotism is the most popular of all the virtues. The drier sort of democrats who despise it have the democracy against them in every country in the world. Hence their international efforts seldom go any farther than to effect an international reconciliation of all internationalists. But we have not solved the normal and popular problem until we have an international reconciliation of all nationalists.

It is very difficult to see how humour can be translated at all. When Sam Weller is in the Fleet Prison and Mrs. Weller and Mr. Stiggins sit on each side of the fireplace and weep and groan with sympathy, old Mr. Weller observes, ‘Vell, Sammy, I hope you find your spirits rose by this ‘ere lively visit.’ I have never looked up this passage in the popular and successful French version of Pickwick; but I confess I am curious as to what French past-participle conveys the precise effect of the word ‘rose.’ A translator has not only to give the right translation of the right word but the right translation of the wrong word. And in the same way I am quite prepared to suspect that there are English jokes which an Englishman must enjoy in his own rich and romantic solitude, without asking for the
sympathy of an American. But Englishmen are generally only too prone to claim this fine perception, without seeing that the fine edge of it cuts both ways. I have begun this chapter on the note of national humour because I wish to make it quite clear that I realise how easily a foreigner may take something seriously that is not serious. When I think something in America is really foolish, it may be I that am made a fool of. It is the first duty of a traveller to allow for this; but it seems to be the very last thing that occurs to some travellers. But when I seek to say something of what may be called the fantastic side of America, I allow beforehand that some of it may be meant to be fantastic. And indeed it is very difficult to believe that some of it is meant to be serious. But whether or no there is a joke, there is certainly an inconsistency; and it is an inconsistency in the moral make-up of America which both puzzles and amuses me.

The danger of democracy is not anarchy but convention. There is even a sort of double meaning in the word ‘convention’; for it is also used for the most informal and popular sort of parliament; a parliament not summoned by any king. The Americans come together very easily without any king; but their coming together is in every sense a convention, and even a very conventional convention. In a democracy riot is rather the exception and respectability certainly the rule. And though a superficial sight-seer should hesitate about all such generalisations, and certainly should allow for enormous exceptions to them, he does receive a general impression of unity verging on uniformity. Thus Americans all dress well; one might almost say that American women all look well; but they do not, as compared with Europeans, look very different. They are in the fashion; too much in the fashion even to be conspicuously fashionable. Of course there are patches, both Bohemian and Babylonian, of which this is not true, but I am talking of the general tone of a whole democracy. I have said there is more respectability than riot; but indeed in a deeper sense the same spirit is behind both riot and respectability. It is the same social force that makes it possible for the respectable to boycott a man and for the riotous to lynch him. I do not object to it being called ‘the herd instinct,’ so long as we realise that it is a metaphor and not an explanation.

Public opinion can be a prairie fire. It eats up everything that opposes it; and there is the grandeur as well as the grave disadvantages of a natural catastrophe in that national unity. Pacifists who complained in England of the intolerance of patriotism have no notion of what patriotism can be like. If they had been in America, after America had entered the war, they would have seen something which they have always perhaps subconsciously dreaded, and would then have
beyond all their worst dreams detested; and the name of it is democracy. They would have found that there are disadvantages in birds of a feather flocking together; and that one of them follows on a too complacent display of the white feather. The truth is that a certain flexible sympathy with eccentrics of this kind is rather one of the advantages of an aristocratic tradition. The imprisonment of Mr. Debs, the American Pacifist, which really was prolonged and oppressive, would probably have been shortened in England where his opinions were shared by aristocrats like Mr. Bertrand Russell and Mr. Ponsonby. A man like Lord Hugh Cecil could be moved to the defence of conscientious objectors, partly by a true instinct of chivalry; but partly also by the general feeling that a gentleman may very probably have aunts and uncles who are quite as mad. He takes the matter personally, in the sense of being able to imagine the psychology of the persons. But democracy is no respecter of persons. It is no respecter of them, either in the bad and servile or in the good and sympathetic sense. And Debs was nothing to democracy. He was but one of the millions. This is a real problem, or question in the balance, touching different forms of government; which is, of course, quite neglected by the idealists who merely repeat long words. There was during the war a society called the Union of Democratic Control, which would have been instantly destroyed anywhere where democracy had any control, or where there was any union. And in this sense the United States have most emphatically got a union. Nevertheless I think there is something rather more subtle than this simple popular solidarity behind the assimilation of American citizens to each other. There is something even in the individual ideals that drives towards this social sympathy. And it is here that we have to remember that biological fancies like the herd instinct are only figures of speech, and cannot really cover anything human. For the Americans are in some ways a very self-conscious people. To compare their social enthusiasm to a stampede of cattle is to ask us to believe in a bull writing a diary or a cow looking in a looking-glass. Intensely sensitive by their very vitality, they are certainly conscious of criticism and not merely of a blind and brutal appetite. But the peculiar point about them is that it is this very vividness in the self that often produces the similarity. It may be that when they are unconscious they are like bulls and cows. But it is when they are self-conscious that they are like each other.

Individualism is the death of individuality. It is so, if only because it is an ‘ism.’ Many Americans become almost impersonal in their worship of personality. Where their natural selves might differ, their ideal selves tend to be
the same. Anybody can see what I mean in those strong self-conscious photographs of American business men that can be seen in any American magazine. Each may conceive himself to be a solitary Napoleon brooding at St. Helena; but the result is a multitude of Napoleons brooding all over the place. Each of them must have the eyes of a mesmerist; but the most weak-minded person cannot be mesmerised by more than one millionaire at a time. Each of the millionaires must thrust forward his jaw, offering (if I may say so) to fight the world with the same weapon as Samson. Each of them must accentuate the length of his chin, especially, of course, by always being completely clean-shaven. It would be obviously inconsistent with Personality to prefer to wear a beard. These are of course fantastic examples on the fringe of American life; but they do stand for a certain assimilation, not through brute gregariousness, but rather through isolated dreaming. And though it is not always carried so far as this, I do think it is carried too far. There is not quite enough unconsciousness to produce real individuality. There is a sort of worship of will-power in the abstract, so that people are actually thinking about how they can will, more than about what they want. To this I do think a certain corrective could be found in the nature of English eccentricity. Every man in his humour is most interesting when he is unconscious of his humour; or at least when he is in an intermediate stage between humour in the old sense of oddity and in the new sense of irony. Much is said in these days against negative morality; and certainly most Americans would show a positive preference for positive morality. The virtues they venerate collectively are very active virtues; cheerfulness and courage and vim, otherwise zip, also pep and similar things. But it is sometimes forgotten that negative morality is freer than positive morality. Negative morality is a net of a larger and more open pattern, of which the lines or cords constrict at longer intervals. A man like Dr. Johnson could grow in his own way to his own stature in the net of the Ten Commandments; precisely because he was convinced there were only ten of them. He was not compressed into the mould of positive beauty, like that of the Apollo Belvedere or the American citizen.

This criticism is sometimes true even of the American woman, who is certainly a much more delightful person than the mesmeric millionaire with his shaven jaw. Interviewers in the United States perpetually asked me what I thought of American women, and I confessed a distaste for such generalisations which I have not managed to lose. The Americans, who are the most chivalrous people in the world, may perhaps understand me; but I can never help feeling that there is something polygamous about talking of women in the plural at all;
something unworthy of any American except a Mormon. Nevertheless, I think the exaggeration I suggest does extend in a less degree to American women, fascinating as they are. I think they too tend too much to this cult of impersonal personality. It is a description easy to exaggerate even by the faintest emphasis; for all these things are subtle and subject to striking individual exceptions. To complain of people for being brave and bright and kind and intelligent may not unreasonably appear unreasonable. And yet there is something in the background that can only be expressed by a symbol, something that is not shallowness but a neglect of the subconsciousness and the vaguer and slower impulses; something that can be missed amid all that laughter and light, under those starry candelabra of the ideals of the happy virtues. Sometimes it came over me, in a wordless wave, that I should like to see a sulky woman. How she would walk in beauty like the night, and reveal more silent spaces full of older stars! These things cannot be conveyed in their delicate proportion even in the most detached description. But the same thing was in the mind of a white-bearded old man I met in New York, an Irish exile and a wonderful talker, who stared up at the tower of gilded galleries of the great hotel, and said with that spontaneous movement of style which is hardly heard except from Irish talkers: ‘And I have been in a village in the mountains where the people could hardly read or write; but all the men were like soldiers, and all the women had pride.’

It sounds like a poem about an Earthly Paradise to say that in this land the old women can be more beautiful than the young. Indeed, I think Walt Whitman, the national poet, has a line somewhere almost precisely to that effect. It sounds like a parody upon Utopia, and the image of the lion lying down with the lamb, to say it is a place where a man might almost fall in love with his mother-in-law. But there is nothing in which the finer side of American gravity and good feeling does more honourably exhibit itself than in a certain atmosphere around the older women. It is not a cant phrase to say that they grow old gracefully; for they do really grow old. In this the national optimism really has in it the national courage. The old women do not dress like young women; they only dress better. There is another side to this feminine dignity in the old, sometimes a little lost in the young, with which I shall deal presently. The point for the moment is that even Whitman’s truly poetic vision of the beautiful old women suffers a little from that bewildering multiplicity and recurrence that is indeed the whole theme of Whitman. It is like the green eternity of Leaves of Grass. When I think of the eccentric spinsters and incorrigible grandmothers of my own country, I cannot imagine that any one of them could possibly be mistaken for another, even at a
glance. And in comparison I feel as if I had been travelling in an Earthly Paradise of more decorative harmonies; and I remember only a vast cloud of grey and pink as of the plumage of cherubim in an old picture. But on second thoughts, I think this may be only the inevitable effect of visiting any country in a swift and superficial fashion; and that the grey and pink cloud is probably an illusion, like the spinning prairies scattered by the wheel of the train.

Anyhow there is enough of this equality, and of a certain social unity favourable to sanity, to make the next point about America very much of a puzzle. It seems to me a very real problem, to which I have never seen an answer even such as I shall attempt here, why a democracy should produce fads; and why, where there is so genuine a sense of human dignity, there should be so much of an impossible petty tyranny. I am not referring solely or even specially to Prohibition, which I discuss elsewhere. Prohibition is at least a superstition, and therefore next door to a religion; it has some imaginable connection with moral questions, as have slavery or human sacrifice. But those who ask us to model ourselves on the States which punish the sin of drink forget that there are States which punish the equally shameless sin of smoking a cigarette in the open air. The same American atmosphere that permits Prohibition permits of people being punished for kissing each other. In other words, there are States psychologically capable of making a man a convict for wearing a blue neck-tie or having a green front-door, or anything else that anybody chooses to fancy. There is an American atmosphere in which people may some day be shot for shaking hands, or hanged for writing a post-card.

As for the sort of thing to which I refer, the American newspapers are full of it and there is no name for it but mere madness. Indeed it is not only mad, but it calls itself mad. To mention but one example out of many, it was actually boasted that some lunatics were teaching children to take care of their health. And it was proudly added that the children were ‘health-mad.’ That it is not exactly the object of all mental hygiene to make people mad did not occur to them; and they may still be engaged in their earnest labours to teach babies to be valetudinarians and hypochondriacs in order to make them healthy. In such cases, we may say that the modern world is too ridiculous to be ridiculed. You cannot caricature a caricature. Imagine what a satirist of saner days would have made of the daily life of a child of six, who was actually admitted to be mad on the subject of his own health. These are not days in which that great extravaganza could be written; but I dimly see some of its episodes like uncompleted dreams. I see the child pausing in the middle of a cart-wheel, or
when he has performed three-quarters of a cart-wheel, and consulting a little note-book about the amount of exercise per diem. I see him pausing half-way up a tree, or when he has climbed exactly one-third of a tree; and then producing a clinical thermometer to take his own temperature. But what would be the good of imaginative logic to prove the madness of such people, when they themselves praise it for being mad?

There is also the cult of the Infant Phenomenon, of which Dickens made fun and of which educationalists make fusses. When I was in America another newspaper produced a marvellous child of six who had the intellect of a child of twelve. The only test given, and apparently one on which the experiment turned, was that she could be made to understand and even to employ the word ‘annihilate.’ When asked to say something proving this, the happy infant offered the polished aphorism, ‘When common sense comes in, superstition is annihilated.’ In reply to which, by way of showing that I also am as intelligent as a child of twelve, and there is no arrested development about me, I will say in the same elegant diction, ‘When psychological education comes in, common sense is annihilated.’ Everybody seems to be sitting round this child in an adoring fashion. It did not seem to occur to anybody that we do not particularly want even a child of twelve to talk about annihilating superstition; that we do not want a child of six to talk like a child of twelve, or a child of twelve to talk like a man of fifty, or even a man of fifty to talk like a fool. And on the principle of hoping that a little girl of six will have a massive and mature brain, there is every reason for hoping that a little boy of six will grow a magnificent and bushy beard.

Now there is any amount of this nonsense cropping up among American cranks. Anybody may propose to establish coercive Eugenics; or enforce psychoanalysis—that is, enforce confession without absolution. And I confess I cannot connect this feature with the genuine democratic spirit of the mass. I can only suggest, in concluding this chapter, two possible causes rather peculiar to America, which may have made this great democracy so unlike all other democracies, and in this so manifestly hostile to the whole democratic idea.

The first historical cause is Puritanism; but not Puritanism merely in the sense of Prohibitionism. The truth is that prohibitions might have done far less harm as prohibitions, if a vague association had not arisen, on some dark day of human unreason, between prohibition and progress. And it was the progress that did the harm, not the prohibition. Men can enjoy life under considerable limitations, if they can be sure of their limited enjoyments; but under Progressive Puritanism
we can never be sure of anything. The curse of it is not limitation; it is unlimited limitation. The evil is not in the restriction; but in the fact that nothing can ever restrict the restriction. The prohibitions are bound to progress point by point; more and more human rights and pleasures must of necessity be taken away; for it is of the nature of this futurism that the latest fad is the faith of the future, and the most fantastic fad inevitably makes the pace. Thus the worst thing in the seventeenth-century aberration was not so much Puritanism as sectarianism. It searched for truth not by synthesis but by subdivision. It not only broke religion into small pieces, but it was bound to choose the smallest piece. There is in America, I believe, a large religious body that has felt it right to separate itself from Christendom because it cannot believe in the morality of wearing buttons. I do not know how the schism arose; but it is easy to suppose, for the sake of argument, that there had originally existed some Puritan body which condemned the frivolity of ribbons though not of buttons. I was going to say of badges but not buttons; but on reflection I cannot bring myself to believe that any American, however insane, would object to wearing badges. But the point is that as the holy spirit of progressive prophesy rested on the first sect because it had invented a new objection to ribbons, so that holy spirit would then pass from it to the new sect who invented a further objection to buttons. And from them it must inevitably pass to any rebel among them who shall choose to rise and say that he disapproves of trousers because of the existence of trouser-buttons. Each secession in turn must be right because it is recent, and progress must progress by growing smaller and smaller. That is the progressive theory, the legacy of seventeenth-century sectarianism, the dogma implied in much modern politics, and the evident enemy of democracy. Democracy is reproached with saying that the majority is always right. But progress says that the minority is always right. Progressives are prophets; and fortunately not all the people are prophets. Thus in the atmosphere of this slowly dying sectarianism anybody who chooses to prophesy and prohibit can tyrannise over the people. If he chooses to say that drinking is always wrong, or that kissing is always wrong, or that wearing buttons is always wrong, people are afraid to contradict him for fear they should be contradicting their own great-grandchild. For their superstition is an inversion of the ancestor-worship of China; and instead of vainly appealing to something that is dead, they appeal to something that may never be born.

There is another cause of this strange servile disease in American democracy. It is to be found in American feminism, and feminist America is an entirely different thing from feminine America. I should say that the overwhelming
majority of American girls laugh at their female politicians at least as much as the majority of American men despise their male politicians. But though the aggressive feminists are a minority, they are in this atmosphere which I have tried to analyse; the atmosphere in which there is a sort of sanctity about the minority. And it is this superstition of seriousness that constitutes the most solid obstacle and exception to the general and almost conventional pressure of public opinion. When a fad is frankly felt to be antinational, as was Abolitionism before the Civil War, or Pro-Germanism in the Great War, or the suggestion of racial admixture in the South at all times, then the fad meets far less mercy than anywhere else in the world; it is snowed under and swept away. But when it does not thus directly challenge patriotism or popular ideas, a curious halo of hopeful solemnity surrounds it, merely because it is a fad, but above all if it is a feminine fad. The earnest lady-reformer who really utters a warning against the social evil of beer or buttons is seen to be walking clothed in light, like a prophetess. Perhaps it is something of the holy aureole which the East sees shining around an idiot.

But I think there is another explanation, feminine rather than feminist, and proceeding from normal women and not from abnormal idiots. It is something that involves an old controversy, but one upon which I have not, like so many politicians, changed my opinion. It concerns the particular fashion in which women tend to regard, or rather to disregard, the formal and legal rights of the citizen. In so far as this is a bias, it is a bias in the directly opposite direction from that now lightly alleged. There is a sort of underbred history going about, according to which women in the past have always been in the position of slaves. It is much more to the point to note that women have always been in the position of despots. They have been despotic because they ruled in an area where they had too much common sense to attempt to be constitutional. You cannot grant a constitution to a nursery; nor can babies assemble like barons and extort a Great Charter. Tommy cannot plead a Habeas Corpus against going to bed; and an infant cannot be tried by twelve other infants before he is put in the corner. And as there can be no laws or liberties in a nursery, the extension of feminism means that there shall be no more laws or liberties in a state than there are in a nursery. The woman does not really regard men as citizens but as children. She may, if she is a humanitarian, love all mankind; but she does not respect it. Still less does she respect its votes. Now a man must be very blind nowadays not to see that there is a danger of a sort of amateur science or pseudo-science being made the excuse for every trick of tyranny and interference. Anybody who is not
an anarchist agrees with having a policeman at the corner of the street; but the
danger at present is that of finding the policeman half-way down the chimney or
even under the bed. In other words, it is a danger of turning the policeman into a
sort of benevolent burglar. Against this protests are already being made, and will
increasingly be made, if men retain any instinct of independence or dignity at all.
But to complain of the woman interfering in the home will always sound like
complaining of the oyster intruding into the oyster-shell. To object that she has
too much power over education will seem like objecting to a hen having too
much to do with eggs. She has already been given an almost irresponsible power
over a limited region in these things; and if that power is made infinite it will be
even more irresponsible. If she adds to her own power in the family all these
alien fads external to the family, her power will not only be irresponsible but
insane. She will be something which may well be called a nightmare of the
nursery; a mad mother. But the point is that she will be mad about other
nurseries as well as her own, or possibly instead of her own. The results will be
interesting; but at least it is certain that under this softening influence
government of the people, by the people, for the people, will most assuredly
perish from the earth.

But there is always another possibility. Hints of it may be noted here and there
like muffled gongs of doom. The other day some people preaching some low
trick or other, for running away from the glory of motherhood, were suddenly
silenced in New York; by a voice of deep and democratic volume. The prigs
who potter about the great plains are pygmies dancing round a sleeping giant.
That which sleeps, so far as they are concerned, is the huge power of human
unanimity and intolerance in the soul of America. At present the masses in the
Middle West are indifferent to such fancies or faintly attracted by them, as
fashions of culture from the great cities. But any day it may not be so; some
lunatic may cut across their economic rights or their strange and buried religion;
and then he will see something. He will find himself running like a nigger who
has wronged a white woman or a man who has set the prairie on fire. He will see
something which the politicians fan in its sleep and flatter with the name of the
people, which many reactionaries have cursed with the name of the mob, but
which in any case has had under its feet the crowns of many kings. It was said
that the voice of the people is the voice of God; and this at least is certain, that it
can be the voice of God to the wicked. And the last antics of their arrogance
shall stiffen before something enormous, such as towers in the last words that
Job heard out of the whirlwind; and a voice they never knew shall tell them that
his name is Leviathan, and he is lord over all the children of pride.
THE EXTRAORDINARY AMERICAN

When I was in America I had the feeling that it was far more foreign than France or even than Ireland. And by foreign I mean fascinating rather than repulsive. I mean that element of strangeness which marks the frontier of any fairyland, or gives to the traveller himself the almost eerie title of the stranger. And I saw there more clearly than in countries counted as more remote from us, in race or religion, a paradox that is one of the great truths of travel.

We have never even begun to understand a people until we have found something that we do not understand. So long as we find the character easy to read, we are reading into it our own character. If when we see an event we can promptly provide an explanation, we may be pretty certain that we had ourselves prepared the explanation before we saw the event. It follows from this that the best picture of a foreign people can probably be found in a puzzle picture. If we can find an event of which the meaning is really dark to us, it will probably throw some light on the truth. I will therefore take from my American experiences one isolated incident, which certainly could not have happened in any other country I have ever clapped eyes on. I have really no notion of what it meant. I have heard even from Americans about five different conjectures about its meaning. But though I do not understand it, I do sincerely believe that if I did understand it, I should understand America.

It happened in the city of Oklahoma, which would require a book to itself, even considered as a background. The State of Oklahoma is a district in the south-west recently reclaimed from the Red Indian territory. What many, quite incorrectly, imagine about all America is really true of Oklahoma. It is proud of having no history. It is glowing with the sense of having a great future—and nothing else. People are just as likely to boast of an old building in Nashville as in Norwich; people are just as proud of old families in Boston as in Bath. But in Oklahoma the citizens do point out a colossal structure, arrogantly affirming that it wasn’t there last week. It was against the colours of this crude stage scenery, as of a pantomime city of pasteboard, that the fantastic figure appeared which still haunts me like a walking note of interrogation. I was strolling down the main street of the city, and looking in at a paper-stall vivid with the news of crime, when a stranger addressed me; and asked me, quite politely but with a curious air of having authority to put the question, what I was doing in that city.

He was a lean brown man, having rather the look of a shabby tropical
traveller, with a grey moustache and a lively and alert eye. But the most singular thing about him was that the front of his coat was covered with a multitude of shining metallic emblems made in the shape of stars and crescents. I was well accustomed by this time to Americans adorning the lapels of their coats with little symbols of various societies; it is a part of the American passion for the ritual of comradeship. There is nothing that an American likes so much as to have a secret society and to make no secret of it. But in this case, if I may put it so, the rash of symbolism seemed to have broken out all over the man, in a fashion that indicated that the fever was far advanced. Of this minor mystery, however, his first few sentences offered a provisional explanation. In answer to his question, touching my business in Oklahoma, I replied with restraint that I was lecturing. To which he replied without restraint, but rather with an expansive and radiant pride, ‘I also am lecturing. I am lecturing on astronomy.’

So far a certain wild rationality seemed to light up the affair. I knew it was unusual, in my own country, for the Astronomer Royal to walk down the Strand with his coat plastered all over with the Solar System. Indeed, it was unusual for any English astronomical lecturer to advertise the subject of his lectures in this fashion. But though it would be unusual, it would not necessarily be unreasonable. In fact, I think it might add to the colour and variety of life, if specialists did adopt this sort of scientific heraldry. I should like to be able to recognise an entomologist at sight by the decorative spiders and cockroaches crawling all over his coat and waistcoat. I should like to see a conchologist in a simple costume of shells. An osteopath, I suppose, would be agreeably painted so as to resemble a skeleton, while a botanist would enliven the street with the appearance of a Jack-in-the-Green. So while I regarded the astronomical lecturer in the astronomical coat as a figure distinguishable, by a high degree of differentiation, from the artless astronomers of my island home (enough their simple loveliness for me) I saw in him nothing illogical, but rather an imaginative extreme of logic. And then came another turn of the wheel of topsy-turvydom, and all the logic was scattered to the wind.

Expanding his starry bosom and standing astraddle, with the air of one who owned the street, the strange being continued, ‘Yes, I am lecturing on astronomy, anthropology, archaeology, palaeontology, embryology, eschatology,’ and so on in a thunderous roll of theoretical sciences apparently beyond the scope of any single university, let alone any single professor. Having thus introduced himself, however, he got to business. He apologised with true American courtesy for having questioned me at all, and excused it on the ground
of his own exacting responsibilities. I imagined him to mean the responsibility of simultaneously occupying the chairs of all the faculties already mentioned. But these apparently were trifles to him, and something far more serious was clouding his brow.

‘I feel it to be my duty,’ he said, ‘to acquaint myself with any stranger visiting this city; and it is an additional pleasure to welcome here a member of the Upper Ten.’ I assured him earnestly that I knew nothing about the Upper Ten, except that I did not belong to them; I felt, not without alarm, that the Upper Ten might be another secret society. He waved my abnegation aside and continued, ‘I have a great responsibility in watching over this city. My friend the mayor and I have a great responsibility.’ And then an extraordinary thing happened. Suddenly diving his hand into his breast-pocket, he flashed something before my eyes like a hand-mirror; something which disappeared again almost as soon as it appeared. In that flash I could only see that it was some sort of polished metal plate, with some letters engraved on it like a monogram. But the reward of a studious and virtuous life, which has been spent chiefly in the reading of American detective stories, shone forth for me in that hour of trial; I received at last the prize of a profound scholarship in the matter of imaginary murders in tenth-rate magazines. I remembered who it was who in the Yankee detective yarn flashes before the eyes of Slim Jim or the Lone Hand Crook a badge of metal sometimes called a shield. Assuming all the desperate composure of Slim Jim himself, I replied, ‘You mean you are connected with the police authorities here, don’t you? Well, if I commit a murder here, I’ll let you know.’ Whereupon that astonishing man waved a hand in deprecation, bowed in farewell with the grace of a dancing master; and said, ‘Oh, those are not things we expect from members of the Upper Ten.’

Then that moving constellation moved away, disappearing in the dark tides of humanity, as the vision passed away down the dark tides from Sir Galahad and, starlike, mingled with the stars.

That is the problem I would put to all Americans, and to all who claim to understand America. Who and what was that man? Was he an astronomer? Was he a detective? Was he a wandering lunatic? If he was a lunatic who thought he was an astronomer, why did he have a badge to prove he was a detective? If he was a detective pretending to be an astronomer, why did he tell a total stranger that he was a detective two minutes after saying he was an astronomer? If he wished to watch over the city in a quiet and unobtrusive fashion, why did he blazon himself all over with all the stars of the sky, and profess to give public
lectures on all the subjects of the world? Every wise and well-conducted student of murder stories is acquainted with the notion of a policeman in plain clothes. But nobody could possibly say that this gentleman was in plain clothes. Why not wear his uniform, if he was resolved to show every stranger in the street his badge? Perhaps after all he had no uniform; for these lands were but recently a wild frontier rudely ruled by vigilance committees. Some Americans suggested to me that he was the Sheriff; the regular hard-riding, free-shooting Sheriff of Bret Harte and my boyhood’s dreams. Others suggested that he was an agent of the Ku-Klux Klan, that great nameless revolution of the revival of which there were rumours at the time; and that the symbol he exhibited was theirs. But whether he was a sheriff acting for the law, or a conspirator against the law, or a lunatic entirely outside the law, I agree with the former conjectures upon one point. I am perfectly certain he had something else in his pocket besides a badge. And I am perfectly certain that under certain circumstances he would have handled it instantly, and shot me dead between the gay bookstall and the crowded trams. And that is the last touch to the complexity; for though in that country it often seems that the law is made by a lunatic, you never know when the lunatic may not shoot you for keeping it. Only in the presence of that citizen of Oklahoma I feel I am confronted with the fullness and depth of the mystery of America. Because I understand nothing, I recognise the thing that we call a nation; and I salute the flag.

But even in connection with this mysterious figure there is a moral which affords another reason for mentioning him. Whether he was a sheriff or an outlaw, there was certainly something about him that suggested the adventurous violence of the old border life of America; and whether he was connected with the police or no, there was certainly violence enough in his environment to satisfy the most ardent policeman. The posters in the paper-shop were placarded with the verdict in the Hamon trial; a cause célèbre which reached its crisis in Oklahoma while I was there. Senator Hamon had been shot by a girl whom he had wronged, and his widow demanded justice, or what might fairly be called vengeance. There was very great excitement culminating in the girl’s acquittal. Nor did the Hamon case appear to be entirely exceptional in that breezy borderland. The moment the town had received the news that Clara Smith was free, newsboys rushed down the street shouting, ‘Double stabbing outrage near Oklahoma,’ or ‘Banker’s throat cut on Main Street,’ or otherwise resuming their regular mode of life. It seemed as much as to say, ‘Do not imagine that our local energies are exhausted in shooting a Senator,’ or ‘Come, now, the world is
young, even if Clara Smith is acquitted, and the enthusiasm of Oklahoma is not yet cold.

But my particular reason for mentioning the matter is this. Despite my friend’s mystical remarks about the Upper Ten, he lived in an atmosphere of something that was at least the very reverse of a respect for persons. Indeed, there was something in the very crudity of his social compliment that smacked, strangely enough, of that egalitarian soil. In a vaguely aristocratic country like England, people would never dream of telling a total stranger that he was a member of the Upper Ten. For one thing, they would be afraid that he might be. Real snobbishness is never vulgar; for it is intended to please the refined. Nobody licks the boots of a duke, if only because the duke does not like his boots cleaned in that way. Nobody embraces the knees of a marquis, because it would embarrass that nobleman. And nobody tells him he is a member of the Upper Ten, because everybody is expected to know it. But there is a much more subtle kind of snobbishness pervading the atmosphere of any society trial in England. And the first thing that struck me was the total absence of that atmosphere in the trial at Oklahoma. Mr. Hamon was presumably a member of the Upper Ten, if there is such a thing. He was a member of the Senate or Upper House in the American Parliament; he was a millionaire and a pillar of the Republican party, which might be called the respectable party; he is said to have been mentioned as a possible President. And the speeches of Clara Smith’s counsel, who was known by the delightfully Oklahomite title of Wild Bill McLean, were wild enough in all conscience; but they left very little of my friend’s illusion that members of the Upper Ten could not be accused of crimes. Nero and Borgia were quite presentable people compared with Senator Hamon when Wild Bill McLean had done with him. But the difference was deeper, and even in a sense more delicate than this. There is a certain tone about English trials, which does at least begin with a certain scepticism about people prominent in public life being abominable in private life. People do vaguely doubt the criminality of ‘a man in that position’; that is, the position of the Marquise de Brinvilliers or the Marquis de Sade. Prima facie, it would be an advantage to the Marquis de Sade that he was a marquis. But it was certainly against Hamon that he was a millionaire. Wild Bill did not minimise him as a bankrupt or an adventurer; he insisted on the solidity and size of his fortune, he made mountains out of the ‘Hamon millions,’ as if they made the matter much worse; as indeed I think they do. But that is because I happen to share a certain political philosophy with Wild Bill and other wild buffaloes of the prairies. In other words, there is really present here a
democratic instinct against the domination of wealth. It does not prevent wealth from dominating; but it does prevent the domination from being regarded with any affection or loyalty. Despite the man in the starry coat, the Americans have not really any illusions about the Upper Ten. McLean was appealing to an implicit public opinion when he pelted the Senator with his gold.

But something more is involved. I became conscious, as I have been conscious in reading the crime novels of America, that the millionaire was taken as a type and not an individual. This is the great difference; that America recognises rich crooks as a class. Any Englishman might recognise them as individuals. Any English romance may turn on a crime in high life; in which the baronet is found to have poisoned his wife, or the elusive burglar turns out to be the bishop. But the English are not always saying, either in romance or reality, ‘What’s to be done, if our food is being poisoned by all these baronets?’ They do not murmur in indignation, ‘If bishops will go on burgling like this, something must be done.’ The whole point of the English romance is the exceptional character of a crime in high life. That is not the tone of American novels or American newspapers or American trials like the trial in Oklahoma. Americans may be excited when a millionaire crook is caught, as when any other crook is caught; but it is at his being caught, not at his being discovered. To put the matter shortly, England recognises a criminal class at the bottom of the social scale. America also recognises a criminal class at the top of the social scale. In both, for various reasons, it may be difficult for the criminals to be convicted; but in America the upper class of criminals is recognised. In both America and England, of course, it exists.

This is an assumption at the back of the American mind which makes a great difference in many ways; and in my opinion a difference for the better. I wrote merely fancifully just now about bishops being burglars; but there is a story in New York, illustrating this, which really does in a sense attribute a burglary to a bishop. The story was that an Anglican Lord Spiritual, of the pompous and now rather antiquated school, was pushing open the door of a poor American tenement with all the placid patronage of the squire and rector visiting the cottagers, when a gigantic Irish policeman came round the corner and hit him a crack over the head with a truncheon on the assumption that he was a house-breaker. I hope that those who laugh at the story see that the laugh is not altogether against the policeman; and that it is not only the policeman, but rather the bishop, who had failed to recognise some fine logical distinctions. The bishop, being a learned man, might well be called upon (when he had
sufficiently recovered from the knock on the head) to define what is the exact difference between a house-breaker and a home-visitor; and why the home-visitor should not be regarded as a house-breaker when he will not behave as a guest. An impartial intelligence will be much less shocked at the policeman’s disrespect for the home-visitor than by the home-visitor’s disrespect for the home.

But that story smacks of the western soil, precisely because of the element of brutality there is in it. In England snobbishness and social oppression are much subtler and softer; the manifestations of them at least are more mellow and humane. In comparison there is indeed something which people call ruthless about the air of America, especially the American cities. The bishop may push open the door without an apology, but he would not break open the door with a truncheon; but the Irish policeman’s truncheon hits both ways. It may be brutal to the tenement dweller as well as to the bishop; but the difference and distinction is that it might really be brutal to the bishop. It is because there is after all, at the back of all that barbarism, a sort of a negative belief in the brotherhood of men, a dark democratic sense that men are really men and nothing more, that the coarse and even corrupt bureaucracy is not resented exactly as oligarchic bureaucracies are resented. There is a sense in which corruption is not so narrow as nepotism. It is upon this queer cynical charity, and even humility, that it has been possible to rear so high and uphold so long that tower of brass, Tammany Hall. The modern police system is in spirit the most inhuman in history, and its evil belongs to an age and not to a nation. But some American police methods are evil past all parallel; and the detective can be more crooked than a hundred crooks. But in the States it is not only possible that the policeman is worse than the convict, it is by no means certain that he thinks that he is any better. In the popular stories of O. Henry there are light allusions to tramps being kicked out of hotels which will make any Christian seek relief in strong language and a trust in heaven—not to say in hell. And yet books even more popular than O. Henry’s are those of the ‘sob-sisterhood’ who swim in lachrymose lakes after love-lorn spinsters, who pass their lives in reclaiming and consoling such tramps. There are in this people two strains of brutality and sentimentalism which I do not understand, especially where they mingle; but I am fairly sure they both work back to the dim democratic origin. The Irish policeman does not confine himself fastidiously to bludgeoning bishops; his truncheon finds plenty of poor people’s heads to hit; and yet I believe on my soul he has a sort of sympathy with poor people not to be found in the police of
more aristocratic states. I believe he also reads and weeps over the stories of the spinsters and the reclaimed tramps; in fact, there is much of such pathos in an American magazine (my sole companion on many happy railway journeys) which is not only devoted to detective stories, but apparently edited by detectives. In these stories also there is the honest, popular astonishment at the Upper Ten expressed by the astronomical detective, if indeed he was a detective and not a demon from the dark Red-Indian forests that faded to the horizon behind him. But I have set him as the head and text of this chapter because with these elements of the Third Degree of devilry and the Seventh Heaven of sentimentalism I touch on elements that I do not understand; and when I do not understand, I say so.
THE REPUBLICAN IN THE RUINS

The heathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone; especially to a wood-cut or a lithographic stone. Modern people put their trust in pictures, especially scientific pictures, as much as the most superstitious ever put it in religious pictures. They publish a portrait of the Missing Link as if he were the Missing Man, for whom the police are always advertising; for all the world as if the anthropoid had been photographed before he absconded. The scientific diagram may be a hypothesis; it may be a fancy; it may be a forgery. But it is always an idol in the true sense of an image; and an image in the true sense of a thing mastering the imagination and not the reason. The power of these talismanic pictures is almost hypnotic to modern humanity. We can never forget that we have seen a portrait of the Missing Link; though we should instantly detect the lapse of logic into superstition, if we were told that the old Greek agnostics had made a statue of the Unknown God. But there is a still stranger fashion in which we fall victims to the same trick of fancy. We accept in a blind and literal spirit, not only images of speculation, but even figures of speech. The nineteenth century prided itself on having lost its faith in myths, and proceeded to put all its faith in metaphors. It dismissed the old doctrines about the way of life and the light of the world; and then it proceeded to talk as if the light of truth were really and literally a light, that could be absorbed by merely opening our eyes; or as if the path of progress were really and truly a path, to be found by merely following our noses. Thus the purpose of God is an idea, true or false; but the purpose of Nature is merely a metaphor; for obviously if there is no God there is no purpose. Yet while men, by an imaginative instinct, spoke of the purpose of God with a grand agnosticism, as something too large to be seen, something reaching out to worlds and to eternities, they speak of the purpose of Nature in particular and practical problems of curing babies or cutting up rabbits. This power of the modern metaphor must be understood, by way of an introduction, if we are to understand one of the chief errors, at once evasive and pervasive, which perplex the problem of America.

America is always spoken of as a young nation; and whether or no this be a valuable and suggestive metaphor, very few people notice that it is a metaphor at all. If somebody said that a certain deserving charity had just gone into trousers, we should recognise that it was a figure of speech, and perhaps a rather surprising figure of speech. If somebody said that a daily paper had recently put
its hair up, we should know it could only be a metaphor, and possibly a rather strained metaphor. Yet these phrases would mean the only thing that can possibly be meant by calling a corporate association of all sorts of people ‘young’; that is, that a certain institution has only existed for a certain time. I am not now denying that such a corporate nationality may happen to have a psychology comparatively analogous to the psychology of youth. I am not even denying that America has it. I am only pointing out, to begin with, that we must free ourselves from the talismanic tyranny of a metaphor which we do not recognise as a metaphor. Men realised that the old mystical doctrines were mystical; they do not realise that the new metaphors are metaphorical. They have some sort of hazy notion that American society must be growing, must be promising, must have the virtues of hope or the faults of ignorance, merely because it has only had a separate existence since the eighteenth century. And that is exactly like saying that a new chapel must be growing taller, or that a limited liability company will soon have its second teeth.

Now in truth this particular conception of American hopefulness would be anything but hopeful for America. If the argument really were, as it is still vaguely supposed to be, that America must have a long life before it, because it only started in the eighteenth century, we should find a very fatal answer by looking at the other political systems that did start in the eighteenth century. The eighteenth century was called the Age of Reason; and there is a very real sense in which the other systems were indeed started in a spirit of reason. But starting from reason has not saved them from ruin. If we survey the Europe of to-day with real clarity and historic comprehension, we shall see that it is precisely the most recent and the most rationalistic creations that have been ruined. The two great States which did most definitely and emphatically deserve to be called modern states were Prussia and Russia. There was no real Prussia before Frederick the Great; no real Russian Empire before Peter the Great. Both those innovators recognised themselves as rationalists bringing a new reason and order into an indeterminate barbarism; and doing for the barbarians what the barbarians could not do for themselves. They did not, like the kings of England or France or Spain or Scotland, inherit a sceptre that was the symbol of a historic and patriotic people. In this sense there was no Russia but only an Emperor of Russia. In this sense Prussia was a kingdom before it was a nation; if it ever was a nation. But anyhow both men were particularly modern in their whole mood and mind. They were modern to the extent of being not only anti-traditional, but almost anti-patriotic. Peter forced the science of the West on Russia to the regret
of many Russians. Frederick talked the French of Voltaire and not the German of Luther. The two experiments were entirely in the spirit of Voltairean rationalism; they were built in broad daylight by men who believed in nothing but the light of common day; and already their day is done.

If then the promise of America were in the fact that she is one of the latest births of progress, we should point out that it is exactly the latest born that were the first to die. If in this sense she is praised as young, it may be answered that the young have died young, and have not lived to be old. And if this be confused with the argument that she came in an age of clarity and scepticism, uncontaminated by old superstitions, it could still be retorted that the works of superstition have survived the works of scepticism. But the truth is, of course, that the real quality of America is much more subtle and complex than this; and is mixed not only of good and bad, and rational and mystical, but also of old and new. That is what makes the task of tracing the true proportions of American life so interesting and so impossible.

To begin with, such a metaphor is always as distracting as a mixed metaphor. It is a double-edged tool that cuts both ways; and consequently opposite ways. We use the same word ‘young’ to mean two opposite extremes. We mean something at an early stage of growth, and also something having the latest fruits of growth. We might call a commonwealth young if it conducted all its daily conversation by wireless telegraphy; meaning that it was progressive. But we might also call it young if it conducted all its industry with chipped flints; meaning that it was primitive. These two meanings of youth are hopelessly mixed up when the word is applied to America. But what is more curious, the two elements really are wildly entangled in America. America is in some ways what is called in advance of the times, and in some ways what is called behind the times; but it seems a little confusing to convey both notions by the same word.

On the one hand, Americans often are successful in the last inventions. And for that very reason they are often neglectful of the last but one. It is true of men in general, dealing with things in general, that while they are progressing in one thing, such as science, they are going back in another thing, such as art. What is less fully realised is that this is true even as between different methods of science. The perfection of wireless telegraphy might well be followed by the gross imperfection of wires. The very enthusiasm of American science brings this out very vividly. The telephone in New York works miracles all day long. Replies from remote places come as promptly as in a private talk; nobody cuts
anybody off; nobody says, ‘Sorry you’ve been troubled.’ But then the postal service of New York does not work at all. At least I could never discover it working. Letters lingered in it for days and days, as in some wild village of the Pyrenees. When I asked a taxi-driver to drive me to a post-office, a look of far-off vision and adventure came into his eyes, and he said he had once heard of a post-office somewhere near West Ninety-Seventh Street. Men are not efficient in everything, but only in the fashionable thing. This may be a mark of the march of science; it does certainly in one sense deserve the description of youth. We can imagine a very young person forgetting the old toy in the excitement of a new one.

But on the other hand, American manners contain much that is called young in the contrary sense; in the sense of an earlier stage of history. There are whole patches and particular aspects that seem to me quite Early Victorian. I cannot help having this sensation, for instance, about the arrangement for smoking in the railway carriages. There are no smoking carriages, as a rule; but a corner of each of the great cars is curtained off mysteriously, that a man may go behind the curtain and smoke. Nobody thinks of a woman doing so. It is regarded as a dark, bohemian, and almost brutally masculine indulgence; exactly as it was regarded by the dowagers in Thackeray’s novels. Indeed, this is one of the many such cases in which extremes meet; the extremes of stuffy antiquity and cranky modernity. The American dowager is sorry that tobacco was ever introduced; and the American suffragette and social reformer is considering whether tobacco ought not to be abolished. The tone of American society suggests some sort of compromise, by which women will be allowed to smoke, but men forbidden to do so.

In one respect, however, America is very old indeed. In one respect America is more historic than England; I might almost say more archaeological than England. The record of one period of the past, morally remote and probably irrevocable, is there preserved in a more perfect form as a pagan city is preserved at Pompeii. In a more general sense, of course, it is easy to exaggerate the contrast as a mere contrast between the old world and the new. There is a superficial satire about the millionaire’s daughter who has recently become the wife of an aristocrat; but there is a rather more subtle satire in the question of how long the aristocrat has been aristocratic. There is often much misplaced mockery of a marriage between an upstart’s daughter and a decayed relic of feudalism; when it is really a marriage between an upstart’s daughter and an upstart’s grandson. The sentimental socialist often seems to admit the blue blood
of the nobleman, even when he wants to shed it; just as he seems to admit the
marvellous brains of the millionaire, even when he wants to blow them out. Unfortunatly (in the interests of social science, of course) the sentimental socialist never does go so far as bloodshed or blowing out brains; otherwise the colour and quality of both blood and brains would probably be a disappointment to him. There are certainly more American families that really came over in the Mayflower than English families that really came over with the Conqueror; and an English county family clearly dating from the time of the Mayflower would be considered a very traditional and historic house. Nevertheless, there are ancient things in England, though the aristocracy is hardly one of them. There are buildings, there are institutions, there are even ideas in England which do preserve, as in a perfect pattern, some particular epoch of the past, and even of the remote past. A man could study the Middle Ages in Lincoln as well as in Rouen; in Canterbury as well as in Cologne. Even of the Renaissance the same is true, at least on the literary side; if Shakespeare was later he was also greater than Ronsard. But the point is that the spirit and philosophy of the periods were present in fullness and in freedom. The guildsmen were as Christian in England as they were anywhere; the poets were as pagan in England as they were anywhere. Personally I do not admit that the men who served patrons were freer than those who served patron saints. But each fashion had its own kind of freedom; and the point is that the English, in each case, had the fullness of that kind of freedom. But there was another ideal of freedom which the English never had at all; or, anyhow, never expressed at all. There was another ideal, the soul of another epoch, round which we built no monuments and wrote no masterpieces. You will find no traces of it in England; but you will find them in America.

The thing I mean was the real religion of the eighteenth century. Its religion, in the more defined sense, was generally Deism, as in Robespierre or Jefferson. In the more general way of morals and atmosphere it was rather Stoicism, as in the suicide of Wolfe Tone. It had certain very noble and, as some would say, impossible ideals; as that a politician should be poor, and should be proud of being poor. It knew Latin; and therefore insisted on the strange fancy that the Republic should be a public thing. Its Republican simplicity was anything but a silly pose; unless all martyrdom is a silly pose. Even of the prigs and fanatics of the American and French Revolutions we can often say, as Stevenson said of an American, that ‘thrift and courage glowing in him.’ And its virtue and value for us is that it did remember the things we now most tend to forget; from the
dignity of liberty to the danger of luxury. It did really believe in self-determination, in the self-determination of the self, as well as of the state. And its determination was really determined. In short, it believed in self-respect; and it is strictly true even of its rebels and regicides that they desired chiefly to be respectable. But there were in it the marks of religion as well as respectability; it had a creed; it had a crusade. Men died singing its songs; men starved rather than write against its principles. And its principles were liberty, equality, and fraternity, or the dogmas of the Declaration of Independence. This was the idea that redeemed the dreary negations of the eighteenth century; and there are still corners of Philadelphia or Boston or Baltimore where we can feel so suddenly in the silence its plain garb and formal manners, that the walking ghost of Jefferson would hardly surprise us.

There is not the ghost of such a thing in England. In England the real religion of the eighteenth century never found freedom or scope. It never cleared a space in which to build that cold and classic building called the Capitol. It never made elbow-room for that free if sometimes frigid figure called the Citizen.

In eighteenth-century England he was crowded out, partly perhaps by the relics of better things of the past, but largely at least by the presence of much worse things in the present. The worst things kept out the best things of the eighteenth century. The ground was occupied by legal fictions; by a godless Erastian church and a powerless Hanoverian king. Its realities were an aristocracy of Regency dandies, in costumes made to match Brighton Pavilion; a paganism not frigid but florid. It was a touch of this aristocratic waste in Fox that prevented that great man from being a glorious exception. It is therefore well for us to realise that there is something in history which we did not experience; and therefore probably something in Americans that we do not understand. There was this idealism at the very beginning of their individualism. There was a note of heroic publicity and honourable poverty which lingers in the very name of Cincinnati.

But I have another and special reason for noting this historical fact; the fact that we English never made anything upon the model of a capitol, while we can match anybody with the model of a cathedral. It is far from improbable that the latter model may again be a working model. For I have myself felt, naturally and for a long time, a warm sympathy with both those past ideals, which seem to some so incompatible. I have felt the attraction of the red cap as well as the red cross, of the Marseillaise as well as the Magnificat. And even when they were in furious conflict I have never altogether lost my sympathy for either. But in the
conflict between the Republic and the Church, the point often made against the Church seems to me much more of a point against the Republic. It is emphatically the Republic and not the Church that I venerate as something beautiful but belonging to the past. In fact I feel exactly the same sort of sad respect for the republican ideal that many mid-Victorian free-thinkers felt for the religious ideal. The most sincere poets of that period were largely divided between those who insisted, like Arnold and Clough, that Christianity might be a ruin, but after all it must be treated as a picturesque ruin; and those, like Swinburne, who insisted that it might be a picturesque ruin, but after all it must be treated as a ruin. But surely their own pagan temple of political liberty is now much more of a ruin than the other; and I fancy I am one of the few who still take off their hats in that ruined temple. That is why I went about looking for the fading traces of that lost cause, in the old-world atmosphere of the new world.

But I do not, as a fact, feel that the cathedral is a ruin; I doubt if I should feel it even if I wished to lay it in ruins. I doubt if Mr. M’Cabe really thinks that Catholicism is dying, though he might deceive himself into saying so. Nobody could be naturally moved to say that the crowded cathedral of St. Patrick in New York was a ruin, or even that the unfinished Anglo-Catholic cathedral at Washington was a ruin, though it is not yet a church; or that there is anything lost or lingering about the splendid and spirited Gothic churches springing up under the inspiration of Mr. Cram of Boston. As a matter of feeling, as a matter of fact, as a matter quite apart from theory or opinion, it is not in the religious centres that we now have the feeling of something beautiful but receding, of something loved but lost. It is exactly in the spaces cleared and levelled by America for the large and sober religion of the eighteenth century; it is where an old house in Philadelphia contains an old picture of Franklin, or where the men of Maryland raised above their city the first monument of Washington. It is then that I feel like one who treads alone some banquet hall deserted, whose lights are fled, whose garlands dead, and all save he departed. It is then that I feel as if I were the last Republican.

But when I say that the Republic of the Age of Reason is now a ruin, I should rather say that at its best it is a ruin. At its worst it has collapsed into a death-trap or is rotting like a dunghill. What is the real Republic of our day as distinct from the ideal Republic of our fathers, but a heap of corrupt capitalism crawling with worms; with those parasites, the professional politicians? I was re-reading Swinburne’s bitter but not ignoble poem, ‘Before a Crucifix,’ in which he bids Christ, or the ecclesiastical image of Christ, stand out of the way of the onward
march of a political idealism represented by United Italy or the French Republic. I was struck by the strange and ironic exactitude with which every taunt he flings at the degradation of the old divine ideal would now fit the degradation of his own human ideal. The time has already come when we can ask his Goddess of Liberty, as represented by the actual Liberals, ‘Have you filled full men’s starved-out souls; have you brought freedom on the earth?’ For every engine in which these old free-thinkers firmly and confidently trusted has itself become an engine of oppression and even of class oppression. Its free parliament has become an oligarchy. Its free press has become a monopoly. If the pure Church has been corrupted in the course of two thousand years, what about the pure Republic that has rotted into a filthy plutocracy in less than a hundred?

O, hidden face of man, whereover
The years have woven a viewless veil,
If thou wert verily man’s lover
What did thy love or blood avail?
Thy blood the priests make poison of;
And in gold shekels coin thy love.

Which has most to do with shekels to-day, the priests or the politicians? Can we say in any special sense nowadays that clergymen, as such, make a poison out of the blood of the martyrs? Can we say it in anything like the real sense, in which we do say that yellow journalists make a poison out of the blood of the soldiers? But I understand how Swinburne felt when confronted by the image of the carven Christ, and, perplexed by the contrast between its claims and its consequences, he said his strange farewell to it, hastily indeed, but not without regret, not even really without respect. I felt the same myself when I looked for the last time on the Statue of Liberty.

[In the conclusion of this chapter I mean by the Republic not merely the American Republic, but the whole modern representative system, as in France or even in England.]
IS THE ATLANTIC NARROWING?

A certain kind of question is asked very earnestly in our time. Because of a certain logical quality in it, connected with premises and data, it is very difficult to answer. Thus people will ask what is the hidden weakness in the Celtic race that makes them everywhere fail or fade away; or how the Germans contrived to bring all their organisation into a state of such perfect efficiency; and what was the significance of the recent victory of Prussia. Or they will ask by what stages the modern world has abandoned all belief in miracles; and the modern newspapers ceased to print any news of murders. They will ask why English politics are free from corruption; or by what mental and moral training certain millionaires were enabled to succeed by sheer force of character; in short, they will ask why plutocrats govern well and how it is that pigs fly, spreading their pink pinions to the breeze or delighting us as they twitter and flutter from tree to tree. The logical difficulty of answering these questions is connected with an old story about Charles the Second and a bowl of goldfish, and with another anecdote about a gentleman who was asked, ‘When did you leave off beating your wife?’ But there is something analogous to it in the present discussions about the forces drawing England and America together. It seems as if the reasoners hardly went far enough back in their argument, or took trouble enough to disentangle their assumptions. They are still moving with the momentum of the peculiar nineteenth-century notion of progress; of certain very simple tendencies perpetually increasing and needing no special analysis. It is so with the international rapprochement I have to consider here.

In other places I have ventured to express a doubt about whether nations can be drawn together by an ancient rumour about races; by a sort of prehistoric chit-chat or the gossip of the Stone Age. I have ventured farther; and even expressed a doubt about whether they ought to be drawn together, or rather dragged together, by the brute violence of the engines of science and speed. But there is yet another horrible doubt haunting my morbid mind, which it will be better for my constitution to confess frankly. And that is the doubt about whether they are being drawn together at all.

It has long been a conversational commonplace among the enlightened that all countries are coming closer and closer to each other. It was a conversational commonplace among the enlightened, somewhere about the year 1913, that all wars were receding farther and farther into a barbaric past. There is something
about these sayings that seems simple and familiar and entirely satisfactory when we say them; they are of that consoling sort which we can say without any of the mental pain of thinking what we are saying. But if we turn our attention from the phrases we use to the facts that we talk about, we shall realise at least that there are a good many facts on the other side and examples pointing the other way. For instance, it does happen occasionally, from time to time, that people talk about Ireland. He would be a very hilarious humanitarian who should maintain that Ireland and England have been more and more assimilated during the last hundred years. The very name of Sinn Fein is an answer to it, and the very language in which that phrase is spoken. Curran and Sheil would no more have dreamed of uttering the watchword of ‘Repeal’ in Gaelic than of uttering it in Zulu. Grattan could hardly have brought himself to believe that the real repeal of the Union would actually be signed in London in the strange script as remote as the snaky ornament of the Celtic crosses. It would have seemed like Washington signing the Declaration of Independence in the picture-writing of the Red Indians. Ireland has clearly grown away from England; and her language, literature, and type of patriotism are far less English than they were. On the other hand, no one will pretend that the mass of modern Englishmen are much nearer to talking Gaelic or decorating Celtic crosses. A hundred years ago it was perfectly natural that Byron and Moore should walk down the street arm in arm. Even the sight of Mr. Rudyard Kipling and Mr. W. B. Yeats walking down the street arm in arm would now arouse some remark.

I could give any number of other examples of the same new estrangement of nations. I could cite the obvious facts that Norway and Sweden parted company not very long ago, that Austria and Hungary have again become separate states. I could point to the mob of new nations that have started up after the war; to the fact that the great empires are now nearly all broken up; that the Russian Empire no longer directs Poland, that the Austrian Empire no longer directs Bohemia, that the Turkish Empire no longer directs Palestine. Sinn Fein is the separatism of the Irish. Zionism is the separatism of the Jews. But there is one simple and sufficing example, which is here more to my purpose, and is at least equally sufficient for it. And that is the deepening national difference between the Americans and the English.

Let me test it first by my individual experience in the matter of literature. When I was a boy I read a book like The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table exactly as I read another book like The Book of Snobs. I did not think of it as an American book, but simply as a book. Its wit and idiom were like those of the
English literary tradition; and its few touches of local colour seemed merely accidental, like those of an Englishman who happened to be living in Switzerland or Sweden. My father and my father’s friends were rightly enthusiastic for the book; so that it seemed to come to me by inheritance like Gulliver’s Travels or Tristram Shandy. Its language was as English as Ruskin, and a great deal more English than Carlyle. Well, I have seen in later years an almost equally wide and well-merited popularity of the stories of O. Henry. But never for one moment could I or any one else reading them forget that they were stories by an American about America. The very first fact about them is that they are told with an American accent, that is, in the unmistakable tones of a brilliant and fascinating foreigner. And the same is true of every other recent work of which the fame has managed to cross the Atlantic. We did not say that The Spoon River Anthology was a new book, but that it was a new book from America. It was exactly as if a remarkable realistic novel was reported from Russia or Italy. We were in no danger of confusing it with the ‘Elegy in a Country Churchyard.’ People in England who heard of Main Street were not likely to identify it with a High Street; with the principal thoroughfare in any little town in Berkshire or Buckinghamshire. But when I was a boy I practically identified the boarding-house of the Autocrat with any boarding-house I happened to know in Brompton or Brighton. No doubt there were differences; but the point is that the differences did not pierce the consciousness or prick the illusion. I said to myself, ‘People are like this in boarding-houses,’ not ‘People are like this in Boston.’

This can be seen even in the simple matter of language, especially in the sense of slang. Take, for instance, the delightful sketch in the causerie of Oliver Wendell Holmes; the character of the young man called John. He is the very modern type in every modern country who does specialise in slang. He is the young fellow who is something in the City; the everyday young man of the Gilbertian song, with a stick and a pipe and a half-bred black-and-tan. In every country he is at once witty and commonplace. In every country, therefore, he tends both to the vivacity and the vulgarity of slang. But when he appeared in Holmes’s book, his language was not very different from what it would have been in a Brighton instead of a Boston boarding-house; or, in short, if the young man called John had more commonly been called ‘Arry. If he had appeared in a modern American book, his language would have been almost literally unintelligible. At the least an Englishman would have had to read some of the best sentences twice, as he sometimes has to read the dizzy and involved
metaphors of O. Henry. Nor is it an answer that this depended on the
personalities of the particular writers. A comparison between the real journalism
of the time of Holmes and the real journalism of the time of Henry reveals the
same thing. It is the expansion of a slight difference of style into a luxuriant
difference of idiom; and the process continued indefinitely would certainly
produce a totally different language. After a few centuries the signatures of
American ambassadors would look as fantastic as Gaelic, and the very name of
the Republic be as strange as Sinn Fein.

It is true that there has been on the surface a certain amount of give and take;
or at least, as far as the English are concerned, of take rather than give. But it is
true that it was once all the other way; and indeed the one thing is something like
a just nemesis of the other. Indeed, the story of the reversal is somewhat
singular, when we come to think of it. It began in a certain atmosphere and spirit
of certain well-meaning people who talked about the English-speaking race; and
were apparently indifferent to how the English was spoken, whether in the
accent of a Jamaican negro or a convict from Botany Bay. It was their logical
tendency to say that Dante was a Dago. It was their logical punishment to say
that Disraeli was an Englishman. Now there may have been a period when this
Anglo-American amalgamation included more or less equal elements from
England and America. It never included the larger elements, or the more
valuable elements of either. But, on the whole, I think it true to say that it was
not an allotment but an interchange of parts; and that things first went all one
way and then all the other. People began by telling the Americans that they owed
all their past triumphs to England; which was false. They ended up by telling the
English that they would owe all their future triumphs to America; which is if
possible still more false. Because we chose to forget that New York had been
New Amsterdam, we are now in danger of forgetting that London is not New
York. Because we insisted that Chicago was only a pious imitation of Chiswick,
we may yet see Chiswick an inferior imitation of Chicago. Our Anglo-Saxon
historians attempted that conquest in which Howe and Burgoyne had failed, and
with infinitely less justification on their side. They attempted the great crime of
the Anglicisation of America. They have called down the punishment of the
Americanisation of England. We must not murmur; but it is a heavy punishment.

It may lift a little of its load, however, if we look at it more closely; we shall
then find that though it is very much on top of us, it is only on top. In that sense
such Americanisation as there is is very superficial. For instance, there is a
certain amount of American slang picked up at random; it appears in certain
pushing types of journalism and drama. But we may easily dwell too much on this tragedy; of people who have never spoken English beginning to speak American. I am far from suggesting that American, like any other foreign language, may not frequently contribute to the common culture of the world phrases for which there is no substitute; there are French phrases so used in England and English phrases in France. The word ‘high-brow,’ for instance, is a real discovery and revelation, a new and necessary name for something that walked nameless but enormous in the modern world, a shaft of light and a stroke of lightning. That comes from America and belongs to the world, as much as ‘The Raven’ or The Scarlet Letter or the novels of Henry James belong to the world. In fact, I can imagine Henry James originating it in the throes of self-expression, and bringing out a word like ‘high-browed,’ with a sort of gentle jerk, at the end of searching sentences which groped sensitively until they found the phrase. But most of the American slang that is borrowed seems to be borrowed for no particular reason. It either has no point or the point is lost by translation into another context and culture. It is either something which does not need any grotesque and exaggerative description, or of which there already exists a grotesque and exaggerative description more native to our tongue and soil. For instance, I cannot see that the strong and simple expression ‘Now it is for you to pull the police magistrate’s nose’ is in any way strengthened by saying, ‘Now it is up to you to pull the police magistrate’s nose.’ When Tennyson says of the men of the Light Brigade ‘Theirs but to do and die,’ the expression seems to me perfectly lucid. ‘Up to them to do and die’ would alter the metre without especially clarifying the meaning. This is an example of ordinary language being quite adequate; but there is a further difficulty that even wild slang comes to sound like ordinary language. Very often the English have already as humorous and fanciful idiom of their own, only that through habit it has lost its humour. When Keats wrote the line, ‘What pipes and timbrels, what wild ecstasy!’ I am willing to believe that the American humorist would have expressed the same sentiment by beginning the sentence with ‘Some pipe!’ When that was first said, somewhere in the wilds of Colorado, it was really funny; involving a powerful understatement and the suggestion of a mere sample. If a spinster has informed us that she keeps a bird, and we find it is an ostrich, there will be considerable point in the Colorado satirist saying inquiringly, ‘Some bird?’ as if he were offering us a small slice of a small plover. But if we go back to this root and rationale of a joke, the English language already contains quite as good a joke. It is not necessary to say, ‘Some
bird’; there is a far finer irony in the old expression, ‘Something like a bird.’ It suggests that the speaker sees something faintly and strangely birdlike about a bird; that it remotely and almost irrationally reminds him of a bird; and that there is about ostrich plumes a yard long something like the faint and delicate traces of a feather. It has every quality of imaginative irony, except that nobody even imagines it to be ironical. All that happens is that people get tired of that turn of phrase, take up a foreign phrase and get tired of that, without realising the point of either. All that happens is that a number of weary people who used to say, ‘Something like a bird,’ now say, ‘Some bird,’ with undiminished weariness. But they might just as well use dull and decent English; for in both cases they are only using jocular language without seeing the joke.

There is indeed a considerable trade in the transplantation of these American jokes to England just now. They generally pine and die in our climate, or they are dead before their arrival; but we cannot be certain that they were never alive. There is a sort of unending frieze or scroll of decorative designs unrolled ceaselessly before the British public, about a hen-pecked husband, which is indistinguishable to the eye from an actual self-repeating pattern like that of the Greek Key, but which is imported as if it were as precious and irreplaceable as the Elgin Marbles. Advertisement and syndication make mountains out of the most funny little mole-hills; but no doubt the mole-hills are picturesque enough in their own landscape. In any case there is nothing so national as humour; and many things, like many people, can be humorous enough when they are at home. But these American jokes are boomed as solemnly as American religions; and their supporters gravely testify that they are funny, without seeing the fun of it for a moment. This is partly perhaps the spirit of spontaneous institutionalism in American democracy, breaking out in the wrong place. They make humour an institution; and a man will be set to tell an anecdote as if to play the violin. But when the story is told in America it really is amusing; and when these jokes are reprinted in England they are often not even intelligible. With all the stupidity of the millionaire and the monopolist, the enterprising proprietor prints jokes in England which are necessarily unintelligible to nearly every English person; jokes referring to domestic and local conditions quite peculiar to America. I saw one of these narrative caricatures the other day in which the whole of the joke (what there was of it) turned on the astonishment of a housewife at the absurd notion of not having an ice-box. It is perfectly true that nearly every ordinary American housewife possesses an ice-box. An ordinary English housewife would no more expect to possess an ice-box than to possess an iceberg. And it
would be about as sensible to tow an iceberg to an English port all the way from the North Pole, as to trail that one pale and frigid joke to Fleet Street all the way from the New York papers. It is the same with a hundred other advertisements and adaptations. I have already confessed that I took a considerable delight in the dancing illuminations of Broadway—in Broadway. Everything there is suitable to them, the vast interminable thoroughfare, the toppling houses, the dizzy and restless spirit of the whole city. It is a city of dissolving views, and one may almost say a city in everlasting dissolution. But I do not especially admire a burning fragment of Broadway stuck up opposite the old Georgian curve of Regent Street. I would as soon express sympathy with the Republic of Switzerland by erecting a small Alp, with imitation snow, in the middle of St. James’s Park.

But all this commercial copying is very superficial; and above all, it never copies anything that is really worth copying. Nations never learn anything from each other in this way. We have many things to learn from America; but we only listen to those Americans who have still to learn them. Thus, for instance, we do not import the small farm but only the big shop. In other words, we hear nothing of the democracy of the Middle West, but everything of the plutocracy of the middleman, who is probably as unpopular in the Middle West as the miller in the Middle Ages. If Mr. Elihu K. Pike could be transplanted bodily from the neighbourhood of his home town of Marathon, Neb., with his farm and his frame-house and all its fittings, and they could be set down exactly in the spot now occupied by Selfridge’s (which could be easily cleared away for the purpose), I think we could really get a great deal of good by watching him, even if the watching were inevitably a little too like watching a wild beast in a cage or an insect under a glass case. Urban crowds could collect every day behind a barrier or railing, and gaze at Mr. Pike pottering about all day in his ancient and autochthonous occupations. We could see him growing Indian corn with all the gravity of an Indian; though it is impossible to imagine Mrs. Pike blessing the cornfield in the manner of Minnehaha. As I have said, there is a certain lack of humane myth and mysticism about this Puritan peasantry. But we could see him transforming the maize into pop-corn, which is a very pleasant domestic ritual and pastime, and is the American equivalent of the glory of roasting chestnuts. Above all, many of us would learn for the first time that a man can really live and walk about upon something more productive than a pavement; and that when he does so he can really be a free man, and have no lord but the law. Instead of that, America can give nothing to London but those multiple modern
shops, of which it has too many already. I know that many people entertain the innocent illusion that big shops are more efficient than small ones; but that is only because the big combinations have the monopoly of advertisement as well as trade. The big shop is not in the least remarkable for efficiency; it is only too big to be blamed for its inefficiency. It is secure in its reputation for always sacking the wrong man. A big shop, considered as a place to shop in, is simply a village of small shops roofed in to keep out the light and air; and one in which none of the shopkeepers is really responsible for his shop. If any one has any doubts on this matter, since I have mentioned it, let him consider this fact: that in practice we never do apply this method of commercial combination to anything that matters very much. We do not go to the surgical department of the Stores to have a portion of our brain removed by a delicate operation; and then pass on to the advocacy department to employ one or any of its barristers, when we are in temporary danger of being hanged. We go to men who own their own tools and are responsible for the use of their own talents. And the same truth applies to that other modern method of advertisement, which has also so largely fallen across us like the gigantic shadow of America. Nations do not arm themselves for a mortal struggle by remembering which sort of submarine they have seen most often on the hoardings. They can do it about something like soap, precisely because a nation will not perish by having a second-rate sort of soap, as it might by having a second-rate sort of submarine. A nation may indeed perish slowly by having a second-rate sort of food or drink or medicine; but that is another and much longer story, and the story is not ended yet. But nobody wins a great battle at a great crisis because somebody has told him that Cadgerboy’s Cavalry Is the Best. It may be that commercial enterprise will eventually cover these fields also, and advertisement-agents will provide the instruments of the surgeon and the weapons of the soldier. When that happens, the armies will be defeated and the patients will die. But though we modern people are indeed patients, in the sense of being merely receptive and accepting things with astonishing patience, we are not dead yet; and we have lingering gleams of sanity.

For the best things do not travel. As I appear here as a traveller, I may say with all modesty that the best people do not travel either. Both in England and America the normal people are the national people; and I repeat that I think they are growing more and more national. I do not think the abyss is being bridged by cosmopolitan theories; and I am sure I do not want it bridged by all this slang journalism and blatant advertisement. I have called all that commercial publicity the gigantic shadow of America. It may be the shadow of America, but it is not
the light of America. The light lies far beyond, a level light upon the lands of sunset, where it shines upon wide places full of a very simple and a very happy people; and those who would see it must seek for it.
LINCOLN AND LOST CAUSES

It has already been remarked here that the English know a great deal about past American literature, but nothing about past American history. They do not know either, of course, as well as they know the present American advertising, which is the least important of the three. But it is worth noting once more how little they know of the history, and how illogically that little is chosen. They have heard, no doubt, of the fame and the greatness of Henry Clay. He is a cigar. But it would be unwise to cross-examine any Englishman, who may be consuming that luxury at the moment, about the Missouri Compromise or the controversies with Andrew Jackson. And just as the statesman of Kentucky is a cigar, so the state of Virginia is a cigarette. But there is perhaps one exception, or half-exception, to this simple plan. It would perhaps be an exaggeration to say that Plymouth Rock is a chicken. Any English person keeping chickens, and chiefly interested in Plymouth Rocks considered as chickens, would nevertheless have a hazy sensation of having seen the word somewhere before. He would feel subconsciously that the Plymouth Rock had not always been a chicken. Indeed, the name connotes something not only solid but antiquated; and is not therefore a very tactful name for a chicken. There would rise up before him something memorable in the haze that he calls his history; and he would see the history books of his boyhood and old engravings of men in steeple-crowned hats struggling with sea-waves or Red Indians. The whole thing would suddenly become clear to him if (by a simple reform) the chickens were called Pilgrim Fathers.

Then he would remember all about it. The Pilgrim Fathers were champions of religious liberty; and they discovered America. It is true that he has also heard of a man called Christopher Columbus; but that was in connection with an egg. He has also heard of somebody known as Sir Walter Raleigh; and though his principal possession was a cloak, it is also true that he had a potato, not to mention a pipe of tobacco. Can it be possible that he brought it from Virginia, where the cigarettes come from? Gradually the memories will come back and fit themselves together for the average hen-wife who learnt history at the English elementary schools, and who has now something better to do. Even when the narrative becomes consecutive, it will not necessarily become correct. It is not strictly true to say that the Pilgrim Fathers discovered America. But it is quite as true as saying that they were champions of religious liberty. If we said that they
were martyrs who would have died heroically in torments rather than tolerate any religious liberty, we should be talking something like sense about them, and telling the real truth that is their due. The whole Puritan movement, from the Solemn League and Covenant to the last stand of the last Stuarts, was a struggle against religious toleration, or what they would have called religious indifference. The first religious equality on earth was established by a Catholic cavalier in Maryland. Now there is nothing in this to diminish any dignity that belongs to any real virtues and virilities in the Pilgrim Fathers; on the contrary, it is rather to the credit of their consistency and conviction. But there is no doubt that the note of their whole experiment in New England was intolerance, and even inquisition. And there is no doubt that New England was then only the newest and not the oldest of these colonial experiments. At least two Cavaliers had been in the field before any Puritans. And they had carried with them much more of the atmosphere and nature of the normal Englishman than any Puritan could possibly carry. They had established it especially in Virginia, which had been founded by a great Elizabethan and named after the great Elizabeth. Before there was any New England in the North, there was something very like Old England in the South. Relatively speaking, there is still.

Whenever the anniversary of the Mayflower comes round, there is a chorus of Anglo-American congratulation and comradeship, as if this at least were a matter on which all can agree. But I knew enough about America, even before I went there, to know that there are a good many people there at any rate who do not agree with it. Long ago I wrote a protest in which I asked why Englishmen had forgotten the great state of Virginia, the first in foundation and long the first in leadership; and why a few crabbed Nonconformists should have the right to erase a record that begins with Raleigh and ends with Lee, and incidentally includes Washington. The great state of Virginia was the backbone of America until it was broken in the Civil War. From Virginia came the first great Presidents and most of the Fathers of the Republic. Its adherence to the Southern side in the war made it a great war, and for a long time a doubtful war. And in the leader of the Southern armies it produced what is perhaps the one modern figure that may come to shine like St. Louis in the lost battle, or Hector dying before holy Troy.

Again, it is characteristic that while the modern English know nothing about Lee they do know something about Lincoln; and nearly all that they know is wrong. They know nothing of his Southern connections, nothing of his considerable Southern sympathy, nothing of the meaning of his moderation in
face of the problem of slavery, now lightly treated as self-evident. Above all, they know nothing about the respect in which Lincoln was quite un-English, was indeed the very reverse of English; and can be understood better if we think of him as a Frenchman, since it seems so hard for some of us to believe that he was an American. I mean his lust for logic for its own sake, and the way he kept mathematical truths in his mind like the fixed stars. He was so far from being a merely practical man, impatient of academic abstractions, that he reviewed and revelled in academic abstractions, even while he could not apply them to practical life. He loved to repeat that slavery was intolerable while he tolerated it, and to prove that something ought to be done while it was impossible to do it. This was probably very bewildering to his brother-politicians; for politicians always whitewash what they do not destroy. But for all that this inconsistent consistency beat the politicians at their own game, and this abstracted logic proved the most practical of all. For when the chance did come to do something, there was no doubt about the thing to be done. The thunderbolt fell from the clear heights of heaven; it had not been tossed about and lost like a common missile in the market-place. The matter is worth mentioning, because it has a moral for a much larger modern question. A wise man’s attitude towards industrial capitalism will be very like Lincoln’s attitude towards slavery. That is, he will manage to endure capitalism; but he will not endure a defence of capitalism. He will recognise the value, not only of knowing what he is doing, but of knowing what he would like to do. He will recognise the importance of having a thing clearly labelled in his own mind as bad, long before the opportunity comes to abolish it. He may recognise the risk of even worse things in immediate abolition, as Lincoln did in abolitionism. He will not call all business men brutes, any more than Lincoln would call all planters demons; because he knows they are not. He will regard many alternatives to capitalism as crude and inhuman, as Lincoln regarded John Brown’s raid; because they are. But he will clear his mind from cant about capitalism; he will have no doubt of what is the truth about Trusts and Trade Combines and the concentration of capital; and it is the truth that they endure under one of the ironic silences of heaven, over the pageants and the passing triumphs of hell.

But the name of Lincoln has a more immediate reference to the international matters I am considering here. His name has been much invoked by English politicians and journalists in connection with the quarrel with Ireland. And if we study the matter, we shall hardly admire the tact and sagacity of those journalists and politicians.
History is an eternal tangle of cross-purposes; and we could not take a clearer case, or rather a more complicated case, of such a tangle, than the facts lying behind a political parallel recently mentioned by many politicians. I mean the parallel between the movement for Irish independence and the attempted secession of the Southern Confederacy in America. Superficially any one might say that the comparison is natural enough; and that there is much in common between the quarrel of the North and South in Ireland and the quarrel of the North and South in America. In both cases the South was on the whole agricultural, the North on the whole industrial. True, the parallel exaggerates the position of Belfast; to complete it we must suppose the whole Federal system to have consisted of Pittsburg. In both the side that was more successful was felt by many to be less attractive. In both the same political terms were used, such as the term ‘Union’ and ‘Unionism.’ An ordinary Englishman comes to America, knowing these main lines of American history, and knowing that the American knows the similar main lines of Irish history. He knows that there are strong champions of Ireland in America; possibly he also knows that there are very genuine champions of England in America. By every possible historical analogy, he would naturally expect to find the pro-Irish in the South and the pro-English in the North. As a matter of fact, he finds almost exactly the opposite. He finds Boston governed by Irishmen, and Nashville containing people more pro-English than Englishmen. He finds Virginians not only of British blood, like George Washington, but of British opinions almost worthy of George the Third.

But I do not say this, as will be seen in a moment, as a criticism of the comparative Toryism of the South. I say it as a criticism of the superlative stupidity of English propaganda. On another page I remark on the need for a new sort of English propaganda; a propaganda that should be really English and have some remote reference to England. Now if it were a matter of making foreigners feel the real humours and humanities of England, there are no Americans so able or willing to do it as the Americans of the Southern States. As I have already hinted, some of them are so loyal to the English humanities, that they think it their duty to defend even the English inhumanities. New England is turning into New Ireland. But Old England can still be faintly traced in Old Dixie. It contains some of the best things that England herself has had, and therefore (of course) the things that England herself has lost, or is trying to lose. But above all, as I have said, there are people in these places whose historic memories and family traditions really hold them to us, not by alliance but by affection. Indeed, they have the affection in spite of the alliance. They love us in spite of our
compliments and courtesies and hands across the sea; all our ambassadorial salutations and speeches cannot kill their love. They manage even to respect us in spite of the shady Jew stockbrokers we send them as English envoys, or the ‘efficient’ men, who are sent out to be tactful with foreigners because they have been too tactless with trades unionists. This type of traditional American, North or South, really has some traditions connecting him with England; and though he is now in a very small minority, I cannot imagine why England should wish to make it smaller. England once sympathised with the South. The South still sympathises with England. It would seem that the South, or some elements in the South, had rather the advantage of us in political firmness and fidelity; but it does not follow that that fidelity will stand every shock. And at this moment, and in this matter, of all things in the world, our political propagandists must try to bolster British Imperialism up, by kicking Southern Secession when it is down. The English politicians eagerly point out that we shall be justified in crushing Ireland exactly as Sumner and Stevens crushed the most English part of America. It does not seem to occur to them that this comparison between the Unionist triumph in America and a Unionist triumph in Britain is rather hard upon our particular sympathisers, who did not triumph. When England exults in Lincoln’s victory over his foes, she is exulting in his victory over her own friends. If her diplomacy continues as delicate and chivalrous as it is at present, they may soon be her only friends. England will be defending herself at the expense of her only defenders. But however this may be, it is as well to bear witness to some of the elements of my own experience; and I can answer for it, at least, that there are some people in the South who will not be pleased at being swept into the rubbish heap of history as rebels and ruffians; and who will not, I regret to say, by any means enjoy even being classed with Fenians and Sinn Feiners.

Now touching the actual comparison between the conquest of the Confederacy and the conquest of Ireland, there are, of course, a good many things to be said which politicians cannot be expected to understand. Strange to say, it is not certain that a lost cause was never worth winning; and it would be easy to argue that the world lost very much indeed when that particular cause was lost. These are not days in which it is exactly obvious that an agricultural society was more dangerous than an industrial one. And even Southern slavery had this one moral merit, that it was decadent; it has this one historic advantage, that it is dead. The Northern slavery, industrial slavery, or what is called wage slavery, is not decaying but increasing; and the end of it is not yet. But in any case, it would be
well for us to realise that the reproach of resembling the Confederacy does not ring in all ears as an unanswerable condemnation. It is scarcely a self-evident or sufficient argument, to some hearers, even to prove that the English are as delicate and philanthropic as Sherman, still less that the Irish are as criminal and lawless as Lee. Nor will it soothe every single soul on the American continent to say that the English victory in Ireland will be followed by a reconstruction, like the reconstruction exhibited in the film called ‘The Birth of a Nation.’ And, indeed, there is a further inference from that fine panorama of the exploits of the Ku-Klux Klan. It would be easy, as I say, to turn the argument entirely in favour of the Confederacy. It would be easy to draw the moral, not that the Southern Irish are as wrong as the Southern States, but that the Southern States were as right as the Southern Irish. But upon the whole, I do not incline to accept the parallel in that sense any more than in the opposite sense. For reasons I have already given elsewhere, I do believe that in the main Abraham Lincoln was right. But right in what?

If Lincoln was right, he was right in guessing that there was not really a Northern nation and a Southern nation, but only one American nation. And if he has been proved right, he has been proved right by the fact that men in the South, as well as the North, do now feel a patriotism for that American nation. His wisdom, if it really was wisdom, was justified not by his opponents being conquered, but by their being converted. Now, if the English politicians must insist on this parallel, they ought to see that the parallel is fatal to themselves. The very test which proved Lincoln right has proved them wrong. The very judgment which may have justified him quite unquestionably condemns them. We have again and again conquered Ireland, and have never come an inch nearer to converting Ireland. We have had not one Gettysburg, but twenty Gettysburgs; but we have had no Union. And that is where, as I have remarked, it is relevant to remember that flying fantastic vision on the films that told so many people what no histories have told them. I heard when I was in America rumours of the local reappearance of the Ku-Klux Klan; but the smallness and mildness of the manifestation, as compared with the old Southern or the new Irish case, is alone a sufficient example of the exception that proves the rule. To approximate to any resemblance to recent Irish events, we must imagine the Ku-Klux Klan riding again in more than the terrors of that vision, wild as the wind, white as the moon, terrible as an army with banners. If there were really such a revival of the Southern action, there would equally be a revival of the Southern argument. It would be clear that Lee was right and Lincoln was wrong; that the Southern
States were national and were as indestructible as nations. If the South were as rebellious as Ireland, the North would be as wrong as England.

But I desire a new English diplomacy that will exhibit, not the things in which England is wrong but the things in which England is right. And England is right in England, just as she is wrong in Ireland; and it is exactly that rightness of a real nation in itself that it is at once most difficult and most desirable to explain to foreigners. Now the Irishman, and to some extent the American, has remained alien to England, largely because he does not truly realise that the Englishman loves England, still less can he really imagine why the Englishman loves England. That is why I insist on the stupidity of ignoring and insulting the opinions of those few Virginians and other Southerners who really have some inherited notion of why Englishmen love England; and even love it in something of the same fashion themselves. Politicians who do not know the English spirit when they see it at home, cannot of course be expected to recognise it abroad. Publicists are eloquently praising Abraham Lincoln, for all the wrong reasons; but fundamentally for that worst and vilest of all reasons—that he succeeded. None of them seems to have the least notion of how to look for England in England; and they would see something fantastic in the figure of a traveller who found it elsewhere, or anywhere but in New England. And it is well, perhaps, that they have not yet found England where it is hidden in England; for if they found it, they would kill it.

All I am concerned to consider here is the inevitable failure of this sort of Anglo-American propaganda to create a friendship. To praise Lincoln as an Englishman is about as appropriate as if we were praising Lincoln as an English town. We are talking about something totally different. And indeed the whole conversation is rather like some such cross-purposes about some such word as ‘Lincoln’; in which one party should be talking about the President and the other about the cathedral. It is like some wild bewilderment in a farce, with one man wondering how a President could have a church-spire, and the other wondering how a church could have a chin-beard. And the moral is the moral on which I would insist everywhere in this book; that the remedy is to be found in disentangling the two and not in entangling them further. You could not produce a democrat of the logical type of Lincoln merely out of the moral materials that now make up an English cathedral town, like that on which Old Tom of Lincoln looks down. But on the other hand, it is quite certain that a hundred Abraham Lincolns, working for a hundred years, could not build Lincoln Cathedral. And the farcical allegory of an attempt to make Old Tom and Old Abe embrace to the
glory of the illogical Anglo-Saxon language is but a symbol of something that is always being attempted, and always attempted in vain. It is not by mutual imitation that the understanding can come. It is not by erecting New York skyscrapers in London that New York can learn the sacred significance of the towers of Lincoln. It is not by English dukes importing the daughters of American millionaires that England can get any glimpse of the democratic dignity of American men. I have the best of all reasons for knowing that a stranger can be welcomed in America; and just as he is courteously treated in the country as a stranger, so he should always be careful to treat it as a strange land. That sort of imaginative respect, as for something different and even distant, is the only beginning of any attachment between patriotic peoples. The English traveller may carry with him at least one word of his own great language and literature; and whenever he is inclined to say of anything ‘This is passing strange,’ he may remember that it was no inconsiderable Englishman who appended to it the answer, ‘And therefore as a stranger give it welcome.’
There was recently a highly distinguished gathering to celebrate the past, present, and especially future triumphs of aviation. Some of the most brilliant men of the age, such as Mr. H. G. Wells and Mr. J. L. Garvin, made interesting and important speeches, and many scientific aviators luminously discussed the new science. Among their graceful felicitations and grave and quiet analyses a word was said, or a note was struck, which I myself can never hear, even in the most harmless after-dinner speech, without an impulse to leap up and yell, and smash the decanters and wreck the dinner-table.

Long ago, when I was a boy, I heard it with fury; and never since have I been able to understand any free man hearing it without fury. I heard it when Bloch, and the old prophets of pacifism by panic, preached that war would become too horrible for patriots to endure. It sounded to me like saying that an instrument of torture was being prepared by my dentist, that would finally cure me of loving my dog. And I felt it again when all these wise and well-meaning persons began to talk about the inevitable effect of aviation in bridging the Atlantic, and establishing alliance and affection between England and America.

I resent the suggestion that a machine can make me bad. But I resent quite equally the suggestion that a machine can make me good. It might be the unfortunate fact that a coolness had arisen between myself and Mr. Fitzarlington Blenkinsop, inhabiting the suburban villa and garden next to mine; and I might even be largely to blame for it. But if somebody told me that a new kind of lawn-mower had just been invented, of so cunning a structure that I should be forced to become a bosom-friend of Mr. Blenkinsop whether I liked it or not, I should be very much annoyed. I should be moved to say that if that was the only way of cutting my grass I would not cut my grass, but continue to cut my neighbour. Or suppose the difference were even less defensible; suppose a man had suffered from a trifling shindy with his wife. And suppose somebody told him that the introduction of an entirely new vacuum-cleaner would compel him to a reluctant reconciliation with his wife. It would be found, I fancy, that human nature abhors that vacuum. Reasonably spirited human beings will not be ordered about by bicycles and sewing-machines; and a sane man will not be made good, let alone bad, by the things he has himself made. I have occasionally dictated to a typewriter, but I will not be dictated to by a typewriter, even of the newest and most complicated mechanism; nor have I ever met a typewriter, however
complex, that attempted such a tyranny.

Yet this and nothing else is what is implied in all such talk of the aeroplane annihilating distinctions as well as distances; and an international aviation abolishing nationalities. This and nothing else was really implied in one speaker’s prediction that such aviation will almost necessitate an Anglo-American friendship. Incidentally, I may remark, it is not a true suggestion even in the practical and materialistic sense; and the speaker’s phrase refuted the speaker’s argument. He said that international relations must be more friendly when men can get from England to America in a day. Well, men can already get from England to Germany in a day; and the result was a mutual invitation of which the formalities lasted for five years. Men could get from the coast of England to the coast of France very quickly, through nearly all the ages during which those two coasts were bristling with arms against each other. They could get there very quickly when Nelson went down by that Burford Inn to embark for Trafalgar; they could get there very quickly when Napoleon sat in his tent in that camp at Boulogne that filled England with alarums of invasion. Are these the amiable and pacific relations which will unite England and America, when Englishmen can get to America in a day? The shortening of the distance seems quite as likely, so far as that argument goes, to facilitate that endless guerilla warfare which raged across the narrow seas in the Middle Ages; when French invaders carried away the bells of Rye, and the men of those flats of East Sussex gloriously pursued and recovered them. I do not know whether American privateers, landing at Liverpool, would carry away a few of the more elegant factory chimneys as a substitute for the superstitious symbols of the past. I know not if the English, on ripe reflection, would essay with any enthusiasm to get them back. But anyhow it is anything but self-evident that people cannot fight each other because they are near to each other; and if it were true, there would never have been any such thing as border warfare in the world. As a fact, border warfare has often been the one sort of warfare which it was most difficult to bring under control. And our own traditional position in face of this new logic is somewhat disconcerting. We have always supposed ourselves safer because we were insular and therefore isolated. We have been congratulating ourselves for centuries on having enjoyed peace because we were cut off from our neighbours. And now they are telling us that we shall only enjoy peace when we are joined up with our neighbours. We have pitied the poor nations with frontiers, because a frontier only produces fighting; and now we are trusting to a frontier as the only thing that will produce friendship. But, as a matter of fact, and for a far
deeper and more spiritual reason, a frontier will not produce friendship. Only friendliness produces friendship. And we must look far deeper into the soul of man for the thing that produces friendliness.

But apart from this fallacy about the facts, I feel, as I say, a strong abstract anger against the idea, or what some would call the ideal. If it were true that men could be taught and tamed by machines, even if they were taught wisdom or tamed to amiability, I should think it the most tragic truth in the world. A man so improved would be, in an exceedingly ugly sense, losing his soul to save it. But in truth he cannot be so completely coerced into good; and in so far as he is incompletely coerced, he is quite as likely to be coerced into evil. Of the financial characters who figure as philanthropists and philosophers in such cases, it is strictly true to say that their good is evil. The light in their bodies is darkness, and the highest objects of such men are the lowest objects of ordinary men. Their peace is mere safety, their friendship is mere trade; their international friendship is mere international trade. The best we can say of that school of capitalism is that it will be unsuccessful. It has every other vice, but it is not practical. It has at least the impossibility of idealism; and so far as remoteness can carry it, that Inferno is indeed a Utopia. All the visible manifestations of these men are materialistic; but at least their visions will not materialise. The worst we suffer; but the best we shall at any rate escape. We may continue to endure the realities of cosmopolitan capitalism; but we shall be spared its ideals.

But I am not primarily interested in the plutocrats whose vision takes so vulgar a form. I am interested in the same thing when it takes a far more subtle form, in men of genius and genuine social enthusiasm like Mr. H. G. Wells. It would be very unfair to a man like Mr. Wells to suggest that in his vision the Englishman and the American are to embrace only in the sense of clinging to each other in terror. He is a man who understands what friendship is, and who knows how to enjoy the motley humours of humanity. But the political reconstruction which he proposes is too much determined by this old nightmare of necessitarianism. He tells us that our national dignities and differences must be melted into the huge mould of a World State, or else (and I think these are almost his own words) we shall be destroyed by the instruments and machinery we have ourselves made. In effect, men must abandon patriotism or they will be murdered by science. After this, surely no one can accuse Mr. Wells of an undue tenderness for scientific over other types of training. Greek may be a good thing or no; but nobody says that if Greek scholarship is carried past a certain point, everybody will be torn in pieces like Orpheus, or burned up like Semele, or
poisoned like Socrates. Philosophy, theology and logic may or may not be idle academic studies; but nobody supposes that the study of philosophy, or even of theology, ultimately forces its students to manufacture racks and thumb-screws against their will; or that even logicians need be so alarmingly logical as all that. Science seems to be the only branch of study in which people have to be waved back from perfection as from a pestilence. But my business is not with the scientific dangers which alarm Mr. Wells, but with the remedy he proposes for them; or rather with the relation of that remedy to the foundation and the future of America. Now it is not too much to say that Mr. Wells finds his model in America. The World State is to be the United States of the World. He answers almost all objections to the practicability of such a peace among states, by pointing out that the American States have such a peace, and by adding, truly enough, that another turn of history might easily have seen them broken up by war. The pattern of the World State is to be found in the New World.

Oddly enough, as it seems to me, he proposes almost cosmic conquests for the American Constitution, while leaving out the most successful thing in that Constitution. The point appeared in answer to a question which many, like myself, must have put in this matter; the question of despotism and democracy. I cannot understand any democrat not seeing the danger of so distant and indirect a system of government. It is hard enough anywhere to get representatives to represent. It is hard enough to get a little town council to fulfil the wishes of a little town, even when the townsmen meet the town councillors every day in the street, and could kick them down the street if they liked. What the same town councillors would be like if they were ruling all their fellow-creatures from the North Pole or the New Jerusalem, is a vision of Oriental despotism beyond the towering fancies of Tamberlane. This difficulty in all representative government is felt everywhere, and not least in America. But I think that if there is one truth apparent in such a choice of evils, it is that monarchy is at least better than oligarchy; and that where we have to act on a large scale, the most genuine popularity can gather round a particular person like a Pope or a President of the United States, or even a dictator like Caesar or Napoleon, rather than round a more or less corrupt committee which can only be defined as an obscure oligarchy. And in that sense any oligarchy is obscure. For people to continue to trust twenty-seven men it is necessary, as a preliminary formality, that people should have heard of them. And there are no twenty-seven men of whom everybody has heard as everybody in France had heard of Napoleon, as all Catholics have heard of the Pope or all Americans have heard of the President. I
think the mass of ordinary Americans do really elect their President; and even where they cannot control him at least they watch him, and in the long run they judge him. I think, therefore, that the American Constitution has a real popular institution in the Presidency. But Mr. Wells would appear to want the American Constitution without the Presidency. If I understand his words rightly, he seems to want the great democracy without its popular institution. Alluding to this danger, that the World State might be a world tyranny, he seems to take tyranny entirely in the sense of autocracy. He asks whether the President of the World State would not be rather too tremendous a person, and seems to suggest in answer that there need not even be any such person. He seems to imply that the committee controlling the planet could meet almost without any one in the chair, certainly without any one on the throne. I cannot imagine anything more manifestly made to be a tyranny than such an acephalous aristocracy. But while Mr. Wells’s decision seems to me strange, his reason for it seems to me still more extraordinary.

He suggests that no such dictator will be needed in his World State because ‘there will be no wars and no diplomacy.’ A World State ought doubtless to go round the world; and going round the world seems to be a good training for arguing in a circle. Obviously there will be no wars and no war-diplomacy if something has the power to prevent them; and we cannot deduce that the something will not want any power. It is rather as if somebody, urging that the Germans could only be defeated by unifying the Allied commands under Marshal Foch, had said that after all it need not offend the British Generals because the French supremacy need only be a fiction, the Germans being defeated. We should naturally say that the German defeat would only be a reality because the Allied command was not a fiction. So the universal peace would only be a reality if the World State were not a fiction. And it could not be even a state if it were not a government. This argument amounts to saying, first that the World State will be needed because it is strong, and then that it may safely be weak because it will not be needed.

Internationalism is in any case hostile to democracy. I do not say it is incompatible with it; but any combination of the two will be a compromise between the two. The only purely popular government is local, and founded on local knowledge. The citizens can rule the city because they know the city; but it will always be an exceptional sort of citizen who has or claims the right to rule over ten cities, and these remote and altogether alien cities. All Irishmen may know roughly the same sort of things about Ireland; but it is absurd to say they
all know the same things about Iceland, when they may include a scholar steeped in Icelandic sagas or a sailor who has been to Iceland. To make all politics cosmopolitan is to create an aristocracy of globe-trotters. If your political outlook really takes in the Cannibal Islands, you depend of necessity upon a superior and picked minority of the people who have been to the Cannibal Islands; or rather of the still smaller and more select minority who have come back.

Given this difficulty about quite direct democracy over large areas, I think the nearest thing to democracy is despotism. At any rate I think it is some sort of more or less independent monarchy, such as Andrew Jackson created in America. And I believe it is true to say that the two men whom the modern world really and almost reluctantly regards with impersonal respect, as clothed by their office with something historic and honourable, are the Pope and the President of the United States.

But to admire the United States as the United States is one thing. To admire them as the World State is quite another. The attempt of Mr. Wells to make America a sort of model for the federation of all the free nations of the earth, though it is international in intention, is really as narrowly national, in the bad sense, as the desire of Mr. Kipling to cover the world with British Imperialism, or of Professor Treitschke to cover it with Prussian Pan-Germanism. Not being schoolboys, we no longer believe that everything can be settled by painting the map red. Nor do I believe it can be done by painting it blue with white spots, even if they are called stars. The insufficiency of British Imperialism does not lie in the fact that it has always been applied by force of arms. As a matter of fact, it has not. It has been effected largely by commerce, by colonisation of comparatively empty places, by geographical discovery and diplomatic bargain. Whether it be regarded as praise or blame, it is certainly the truth that among all the things that have called themselves empires, the British has been perhaps the least purely military, and has least both of the special guilt and the special glory that goes with militarism. The insufficiency of British Imperialism is not that it is imperial, let alone military. The insufficiency of British Imperialism is that it is British; when it is not merely Jewish. It is that just as a man is no more than a man, so a nation is no more than a nation; and any nation is inadequate as an international model. Any state looks small when it occupies the whole earth. Any polity is narrow as soon as it is as wide as the world. It would be just the same if Ireland began to paint the map green or Montenegro were to paint it black. The objection to spreading anything all over the world is that, among
other things, you have to spread it very thin.

But America, which Mr. Wells takes as a model, is in another sense rather a warning. Mr. Wells says very truly that there was a moment in history when America might well have broken up into independent states like those of Europe. He seems to take it for granted that it was in all respects an advantage that this was avoided. Yet there is surely a case, however mildly we put it, for a certain importance in the world still attaching to Europe. There are some who find France as interesting as Florida; and who think they can learn as much about history and humanity in the marble cities of the Mediterranean as in the wooden towns of the Middle West. Europe may have been divided, but it was certainly not destroyed; nor has its peculiar position in the culture of the world been destroyed. Nothing has yet appeared capable of completely eclipsing it, either in its extension in America or its imitation in Japan. But the immediate point here is perhaps a more important one. There is now no creed accepted as embodying the common sense of all Europe, as the Catholic creed was accepted as embodying it in mediaeval times. There is no culture broadly superior to all others, as the Mediterranean culture was superior to that of the barbarians in Roman times. If Europe were united in modern times, it would probably be by the victory of one of its types over others, possibly over all the others. And when America was united finally in the nineteenth century, it was by the victory of one of its types over others. It is not yet certain that this victory was a good thing. It is not yet certain that the world will be better for the triumph of the North over the Southern traditions of America. It may yet turn out to be as unfortunate as a triumph of the North Germans over the Southern traditions of Germany and of Europe.

The men who will not face this fact are men whose minds are not free. They are more crushed by Progress than any pietists by Providence. They are not allowed to question that whatever has recently happened was all for the best. Now Progress is Providence without God. That is, it is a theory that everything has always perpetually gone right by accident. It is a sort of atheistic optimism, based on an everlasting coincidence far more miraculous than a miracle. If there be no purpose, or if the purpose permits of human free will, then in either case it is almost insanely unlikely that there should be in history a period of steady and uninterrupted progress; or in other words a period in which poor bewildered humanity moves amid a chaos of complications, without making a single mistake. What has to be hammered into the heads of most normal newspaper-readers to-day is that Man has made a great many mistakes. Modern Man has
made a great many mistakes. Indeed, in the case of that progressive and pioneering character, one is sometimes tempted to say that he has made nothing but mistakes. Calvinism was a mistake, and Capitalism was a mistake, and Teutonism and the flattery of the Northern tribes were mistakes. In the French the persecution of Catholicism by the politicians was a mistake, as they found out in the Great War; when the memory gave Irish or Italian Catholics an excuse for hanging back. In England the loss of agriculture and therefore of food-supply in war, and the power to stand a siege, was a mistake. And in America the introduction of the negroes was a mistake; but it may yet be found that the sacrifice of the Southern white man to them was even more of a mistake.

The reason of this doubt is in one word. We have not yet seen the end of the whole industrial experiment; and there are already signs of it coming to a bad end. It may end in Bolshevism. It is more likely to end in the Servile State. Indeed, the two things are not so different as some suppose, and they grow less different every day. The Bolshevists have already called in Capitalists to help them to crush the free peasants. The Capitalists are quite likely to call in Labour Leaders to whitewash their compromise as social reform or even Socialism. The cosmopolitan Jews who are the Communists in the East will not find it so very hard to make a bargain with the cosmopolitan Jews who are Capitalists in the West. The Western Jews would be willing to admit a nominal Socialism. The Eastern Jews have already admitted that their Socialism is nominal. It was the Bolshevist leader himself who said, ‘Russia is again a Capitalist country.’ But whoever makes the bargain, and whatever is its precise character, the substance of it will be servile. It will be servile in the only rational and reliable sense; that is, an arrangement by which a mass of men are ensured shelter and livelihood, in return for being subjected to a law which obliges them to continue to labour. Of course it will not be called the Servile State; it is very probable that it will be called the Socialist State. But nobody seems to realise how very near all the industrial countries are to it. At any moment it may appear in the simple form of compulsory arbitration; for compulsory arbitration dealing with private employers is by definition slavery. When workmen receive unemployment pay, and at the same time arouse more and more irritation by going on strike, it may seem very natural to give them the unemployment pay for good and forbid them the strike for good; and the combination of those two things is by definition slavery. And Trotsky can beat any Trust magnate as a strike-breaker; for he does not even pretend that his compulsory labour is a free bargain. If Trotsky and the Trust magnate come to a working compromise, that compromise will be a
Servile State. But it will also be the supreme and by far the most constructive and conclusive result of the industrial movement in history; of the power of machinery or money; of the huge populations of the modern cities; of scientific inventions and resources; of all the things before which the agricultural society of the Southern Confederacy went down. But even those who cannot see that commercialism may end in the triumph of slavery can see that the Northern victory has to a great extent ended in the triumph of commercialism. And the point at the moment is that this did definitely mean, even at the time, the triumph of one American type over another American type; just as much as any European war might mean the triumph of one European type over another. A victory of England over France would be a victory of merchants over peasants; and the victory of Northerners over Southerners was a victory of merchants over squires. So that that very unity, which Mr. Wells contrasts so favourably with war, was not only itself due to a war, but to a war which had one of the most questionable and even perilous of the results of war. That result was a change in the balance of power, the predominance of a particular partner, the exaltation of a particular example, the eclipse of excellent traditions when the defeated lost their international influence. In short, it made exactly the same sort of difference of which we speak when we say that 1870 was a disaster to Europe, or that it was necessary to fight Prussia lest she should Prussianise the whole world. America would have been very different if the leadership had remained with Virginia. The world would have been very different if America had been very different. It is quite reasonable to rejoice that the issue went as it did; indeed, as I have explained elsewhere, for other reasons I do on the whole rejoice in it. But it is certainly not self-evident that it is a matter for rejoicing. One type of American state conquered and subjugated another type of American state; and the virtues and value of the latter were very largely lost to the world. So if Mr. Wells insists on the parallel of a United States of Europe, he must accept the parallel of a Civil War of Europe. He must suppose that the peasant countries crush the industrial countries or vice versa; and that one or other of them becomes the European tradition to the neglect of the other. The situation which seems to satisfy him so completely in America is, after all, the situation which would result in Europe if the Germanic Empires, let us say, had entirely arrested the special development of the Slavs; or if the influence of France had really broken off short under a blow from Britain. The Old South had qualities of humane civilisation which have not sufficiently survived; or at any rate have not sufficiently spread. It is true that the decline of the agricultural South has been
considerably balanced by the growth of the agricultural West. It is true, as I have occasion to emphasise in another place, that the West does give the New America something that is nearly a normal peasantry, as a pendant to the industrial towns. But this is not an answer; it is rather an augmentation of the argument. In so far as America is saved it is saved by being patchy; and would be ruined if the Western patch had the same fate as the Southern patch. When all is said, therefore, the advantages of American unification are not so certain that we can apply them to a world unification. The doubt could be expressed in a great many ways and by a great many examples. For that matter, it is already being felt that the supremacy of the Middle West in politics is inflicting upon other localities exactly the sort of local injustice that turns provinces into nations struggling to be free. It has already inflicted what amounts to religious persecution, or the imposition of an alien morality, on the wine-growing civilisation of California. In a word, the American system is a good one as governments go; but it is too large, and the world will not be improved by making it larger. And for this reason alone I should reject this second method of uniting England and America; which is not only Americanising England, but Americanising everything else.

But the essential reason is that a type of culture came out on top in America and England in the nineteenth century, which cannot and would not be tolerated on top of the world. To unite all the systems at the top, without improving and simplifying their social organisation below, would be to tie all the tops of the trees together where they rise above a dense and poisonous jungle, and make the jungle darker than before. To create such a cosmopolitan political platform would be to build a roof above our own heads to shut out the sunlight, on which only usurers and conspirators clad in gold could walk about in the sun. This is no moment when industrial intellectualism can inflict such an artificial oppression upon the world. Industrialism itself is coming to see dark days, and its future is very doubtful. It is split from end to end with strikes and struggles for economic life, in which the poor not only plead that they are starving, but even the rich can only plead that they are bankrupt. The peasantry are growing not only more prosperous but more politically effective; the Russian moujik has held up the Bolshevist Government of Moscow and Petersburg; a huge concession has been made by England to Ireland; the League of Nations has decided for Poland against Prussia. It is not certain that industrialism will not wither even in its own field; it is certain that its intellectual ideas will not be allowed to cover every field; and this sort of cosmopolitan culture is one of its ideas. Industrialism itself
may perish; or on the other hand industrialism itself may survive, by some searching and scientific reform that will really guarantee economic security to all. It may really purge itself of the accidental maladies of anarchy and famine; and continue as a machine, but at least as a comparatively clean and humanely shielded machine; at any rate no longer as a man-eating machine. Capitalism may clear itself of its worst corruptions by such reform as is open to it; by creating humane and healthy conditions for labour, and setting the labouring classes to work under a lucid and recognised law. It may make Pittsburg one vast model factory for all who will model themselves upon factories; and may give to all men and women in its employment a clear social status in which they can be contented and secure. And on the day when that social security is established for the masses, when industrial capitalism has achieved this larger and more logical organisation and found peace at last, a strange and shadowy and ironic triumph, like an abstract apology, will surely hover over all those graves in the Wilderness where lay the bones of so many gallant gentlemen; men who had also from their youth known and upheld such a social stratification, who had the courage to call a spade a spade and a slave a slave.
A NEW MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT

The aim of this book, if it has one, is to suggest this thesis; that the very worst way of helping Anglo-American friendship is to be an Anglo-American. There is only one thing lower, of course, which is being an Anglo-Saxon. It is lower, because at least Englishmen do exist and Americans do exist; and it may be possible, though repulsive, to imagine an American and an Englishman in some way blended together. But if Angles and Saxons ever did exist, they are all fortunately dead now; and the wildest imagination cannot form the weakest idea of what sort of monster would be made by mixing one with the other. But my thesis is that the whole hope, and the only hope, lies not in mixing two things together, but rather in cutting them very sharply asunder. That is the only way in which two things can succeed sufficiently in getting outside each other to appreciate and admire each other. So long as they are different and yet supposed to be the same, there can be nothing but a divided mind and a staggering balance. It may be that in the first twilight of time man and woman walked about as one quadruped. But if they did, I am sure it was a quadruped that reared and bucked and kicked up its heels. Then the flaming sword of some angel divided them, and they fell in love with each other.

Should the reader require an example a little more within historical range, or a little more subject to critical tests, than the above prehistoric anecdote (which I need not say was revealed to me in a vision) it would be easy enough to supply them both in a hypothetical and a historical form. It is obvious enough in a general way that if we begin to subject diverse countries to an identical test, there will not only be rivalry, but what is far more deadly and disastrous, superiority. If we institute a competition between Holland and Switzerland as to the relative grace and agility of their mountain guides, it will be clear that the decision is disproportionately easy; it will also be clear that certain facts about the configuration of Holland have escaped our international eye. If we establish a comparison between them in skill and industry in the art of building dykes against the sea, it will be equally clear that the injustice falls the other way; it will also be clear that the situation of Switzerland on the map has received insufficient study. In both cases there will not only be rivalry but very unbalanced and unjust rivalry; in both cases, therefore, there will not only be enmity but very bitter or insolent enmity. But so long as the two are sharply divided there can be no enmity because there can be no rivalry. Nobody can
argue about whether the Swiss climb mountains better than the Dutch build dykes; just as nobody can argue about whether a triangle is more triangular than a circle is round.

This fancy example is alphabetically and indeed artificially simple; but, having used it for convenience, I could easily give similar examples not of fancy but of fact. I had occasion recently to attend the Christmas festivity of a club in London for the exiles of one of the Scandinavian nations. When I entered the room the first thing that struck my eye, and greatly raised my spirits, was that the room was dotted with the colours of peasant costumes and the specimens of peasant craftsmanship. There were, of course, other costumes and other crafts in evidence; there were men dressed like myself (only better) in the garb of the modern middle classes; there was furniture like the furniture of any other room in London. Now, according to the ideal formula of the ordinary internationalist, these things that we had in common ought to have moved me to a sense of the kinship of all civilisation. I ought to have felt that as the Scandinavian gentleman wore a collar and tie, and I also wore a collar and tie, we were brothers and nothing could come between us. I ought to have felt that we were standing for the same principles of truth because we were wearing the same pair of trousers; or rather, to speak with more precision, similar pairs of trousers. Anyhow, the pair of trousers, that cloven pennon, ought to have floated in fancy over my head as the banner of Europe or the League of Nations. I am constrained to confess that no such rush of emotions overcame me; and the topic of trousers did not float across my mind at all. So far as those things were concerned, I might have remained in a mood of mortal enmity, and cheerfully shot or stabbed the best dressed gentleman in the room. Precisely what did warm my heart with an abrupt affection for that northern nation was the very thing that is utterly and indeed lamentably lacking in my own nation. It was something corresponding to the one great gap in English history, corresponding to the one great blot on English civilisation. It was the spiritual presence of a peasantry, dressed according to its own dignity, and expressing itself by its own creations.

The sketch of America left by Charles Dickens is generally regarded as something which is either to be used as a taunt or covered with an apology. Doubtless it was unduly critical, even of the America of that day; yet curiously enough it may well be the text for a true reconciliation at the present day. It is true that in this, as in other things, the Dickensian exaggeration is itself exaggerated. It is also true that, while it is over-emphasised, it is not allowed for. Dickens tended too much to describe the United States as a vast lunatic asylum;
but partly because he had a natural inspiration and imagination suited to the description of lunatic asylums. As it was his finest poetic fancy that created a lunatic over the garden wall, so it was his fancy that created a lunatic over the western sea. To read some of the complaints, one would fancy that Dickens had deliberately invented a low and farcical America to be a contrast to his high and exalted England. It is suggested that he showed America as full of rowdy bullies like Hannibal Chollop, or ridiculous wind-bags like Elijah Pogram, while England was full of refined and sincere spirits like Jonas Chuzzlewit, Chevy Slime, Montague Tigg, and Mr. Pecksniff. If Martin Chuzzlewit makes America a lunatic asylum, what in the world does it make England? We can only say a criminal lunatic asylum. The truth is, of course, that Dickens so described them because he had a genius for that sort of description; for the making of almost maniacal grotesques of the same type as Quilp or Fagin. He made these Americans absurd because he was an artist in absurdity; and no artist can help finding hints everywhere for his own peculiar art. In a word, he created a laughable Pogram for the same reason that he created a laughable Pecksniff; and that was only because no other creature could have created them.

It is often said that we learn to love the characters in romances as if they were characters in real life. I wish we could sometimes love the characters in real life as we love the characters in romances. There are a great many human souls whom we should accept more kindly, and even appreciate more clearly, if we simply thought of them as people in a story. Martin Chuzzlewit is itself indeed an unsatisfactory and even unfortunate example; for it is, among its author’s other works, a rather unusually harsh and hostile story. I do not suggest that we should feel towards an American friend that exact shade or tint of tenderness that we feel towards Mr. Hannibal Chollop. Our enjoyment of the foreigner should rather resemble our enjoyment of Pickwick than our enjoyment of Pecksniff. But there is this amount of appropriateness even in the particular example; that Dickens did show in both countries how men can be made amusing to each other. So far the point is not that he made fun of America, but that he got fun out of America. And, as I have already pointed out, he applied exactly the same method of selection and exaggeration to England. In the other English stories, written in a more amiable mood, he applied it in a more amiable manner; but he could apply it to an American too, when he was writing in that mood and manner. We can see it in the witty and withering criticism delivered by the Yankee traveller in the musty refreshment room of Mugby Junction; a genuine example of a genuinely American fun and freedom satirising a genuinely British
stuffiness and snobbery. Nobody expects the American traveller to admire the refreshments at Mugby Junction; but he might admire the refreshment at one of the Pickwickian inns, especially if it contained Pickwick. Nobody expects Pickwick to like Pogram; but he might like the American who made fun of Mugby Junction. But the point is that, while he supported him in making fun, he would also think him funny. The two comic characters could admire each other, but they would also be amused at each other. And the American would think the Englishman funny because he was English; and a very good reason too. The Englishman would think the American amusing because he was American; nor can I imagine a better ground for his amusement.

Now many will debate on the psychological possibility of such a friendship founded on reciprocal ridicule, or rather on a comedy of comparisons. But I will say of this harmony of humours what Mr. H. G. Wells says of his harmony of states in the unity of his World State. If it be truly impossible to have such a peace, then there is nothing possible except war. If we cannot have friends in this fashion, then we shall sooner or later have enemies in some other fashion. There is no hope in the pompous impersonalities of internationalism.

And this brings us to the real and relevant mistake of Dickens. It was not in thinking his Americans funny, but in thinking them foolish because they were funny. In this sense it will be noticed that Dickens’s American sketches are almost avowedly superficial; they are descriptions of public life and not private life. Mr. Jefferson Brick had no private life. But Mr. Jonas Chuzzlewit undoubtedly had a private life; and even kept some parts of it exceeding private. Mr. Pecksniff was also a domestic character; so was Mr. Quilp. Mr. Pecksniff and Mr. Quilp had slightly different ways of surprising their families; Mr. Pecksniff by playfully observing ‘Boh!’ when he came home; Mr. Quilp by coming home at all. But we can form no picture of how Mr. Hannibal Chollop playfully surprised his family; possibly by shooting at them; possibly by not shooting at them. We can only say that he would rather surprise us by having a family at all. We do not know how the Mother of the Modern Gracchi managed the Modern Gracchi; for her maternity was rather a public than a private office. We have no romantic moonlit scenes of the love-making of Elijah Pogram, to balance against the love story of Seth Pecksniff. These figures are all in a special sense theatrical; all facing one way and lit up by a public limelight. Their ridiculous characters are detachable from their real characters, if they have any real characters. And the author might perfectly well be right about what is ridiculous, and wrong about what is real. He might be as right in smiling at the
Pograms and the Bricks as in smiling at the Pickwicks and the Boffins. And he might still be as wrong in seeing Mr. Pogram as a hypocrite as the great Buzfuz was wrong in seeing Mr. Pickwick as a monster of revolting heartlessness and systematic villainy. He might still be as wrong in thinking Jefferson Brick a charlatan and a cheat as was that great disciple of Lavater, Mrs. Wilfer, in tracing every wrinkle of evil cunning in the face of Mrs. Boffin. For Mr. Pickwick’s spectacles and gaiters and Mrs. Boffin’s bonnets and boudoir are after all superficial jokes; and might be equally well seen whatever we saw beneath them. A man may smile and smile and be a villain; but a man may also make us smile and not be a villain. He may make us smile and not even be a fool. He may make us roar with laughter and be an exceedingly wise man.

Now that is the paradox of America which Dickens never discovered. Elijah Pogram was far more fantastic than his satirist thought; and the most grotesque feature of Brick and Chollop was hidden from him. The really strange thing was that Pogram probably did say, ‘Rough he may be. So air our bars. Wild he may be. So air our buffalers,’ and yet was a perfectly intelligent and public-spirited citizen while he said it. The extraordinary thing is that Jefferson Brick may really have said, ‘The libation of freedom must sometimes be quaffed in blood,’ and yet Jefferson Brick may have served freedom, resisting unto blood. There really has been a florid school of rhetoric in the United States which has made it quite possible for serious and sensible men to say such things. It is amusing simply as a difference of idiom or costume is always amusing; just as English idiom and English costume are amusing to Americans. But about this kind of difference there can be no kind of doubt. So sturdy not to say stuffy a materialist as Ingersoll could say of so shoddy not to say shady a financial politician as Blaine, ‘Like an arméd warrior, like a pluméd knight, James G. Blaine strode down the hall of Congress, and flung his spear full and true at the shield of every enemy of his country and every traducer of his fair name.’ Compared with that, the passage about bears and buffaloes, which Mr. Pogram delivered in defence of the defaulting post-master, is really a very reasonable and appropriate statement. For bears and buffaloes are wild and rough and in that sense free; while pluméd knights do not throw their lances about like the assegais of Zulus. And the defaulting post-master was at least as good a person to praise in such a fashion as James G. Blaine of the Little Rock Railway. But anybody who had treated Ingersoll or Blaine merely as a fool and a figure of fun would have very rapidly found out his mistake. But Dickens did not know Brick or Chollop long enough to find out his mistake. It need not be denied that, even after a full
understanding, he might still have found things to smile at or to criticise. I do not insist on his admitting that Hannibal Chollop was as great a hero as Hannibal, or that Elijah Pogram was as true a prophet as Elijah. But I do say very seriously that they had something about their atmosphere and situation that made possible a sort of heroism and even a sort of prophecy that were really less natural at that period in that Merry England whose comedy and common sense we sum up under the name of Dickens. When we joke about the name of Hannibal Chollop, we might remember of what nation was the general who dismissed his defeated soldiers at Appomatox with words which the historian has justly declared to be worthy of Hannibal: ‘We have fought through this war together. I have done my best for you.’ It is not fair to forget Jefferson, or even Jefferson Davis, entirely in favour of Jefferson Brick.

For all these three things, good, bad, and indifferent, go together to form something that Dickens missed, merely because the England of his time most disastrously missed it. In this case, as in every case, the only way to measure justly the excess of a foreign country is to measure the defect of our own country. For in this matter the human mind is the victim of a curious little unconscious trick, the cause of nearly all international dislikes. A man treats his own faults as original sin and supposes them scattered everywhere with the seed of Adam. He supposes that men have then added their own foreign vices to the solid and simple foundation of his own private vices. It would astound him to realise that they have actually, by their strange erratic path, avoided his vices as well as his virtues. His own faults are things with which he is so much at home that he at once forgets and assumes them abroad. He is so faintly conscious of them in himself that he is not even conscious of the absence of them in other people. He assumes that they are there so that he does not see that they are not there. The Englishman takes it for granted that a Frenchman will have all the English faults. Then he goes on to be seriously angry with the Frenchman for having dared to complicate them by the French faults. The notion that the Frenchman has the French faults and not the English faults is a paradox too wild to cross his mind.

He is like an old Chinaman who should laugh at Europeans for wearing ludicrous top-hats and curling up their pig-tails inside them; because obviously all men have pig-tails, as all monkeys have tails. Or he is like an old Chinese lady who should justly deride the high-heeled shoes of the West, considering them a needless addition to the sufficiently tight and secure bandaging of the foot; for, of course, all women bind up their feet, as all women bind up their hair.
What these Celestial thinkers would not think of, or allow for, is the wild possibility that we do not have pig-tails although we do have top-hats, or that our ladies are not silly enough to have Chinese feet, though they are silly enough to have high-heeled shoes. Nor should we necessarily have come an inch nearer to the Chinese extravagances even if the chimney-pot hat rose higher than a factory chimney or the high heels had evolved into a sort of stilts. By the same fallacy the Englishman will not only curse the French peasant as a miser, but will also try to tip him as a beggar. That is, he will first complain of the man having the surliness of an independent man, and then accuse him of having the servility of a dependent one. Just as the hypothetical Chinaman cannot believe that we have top-hats but not pig-tails, so the Englishman cannot believe that peasants are not snobs even when they are savages. Or he sees that a Paris paper is violent and sensational; and then supposes that some millionaire owns twenty such papers and runs them as a newspaper trust. Surely the Yellow Press is present everywhere to paint the map yellow, as the British Empire to paint it red. It never occurs to such a critic that the French paper is violent because it is personal, and personal because it belongs to a real and responsible person, and not to a ring of nameless millionaires. It is a pamphlet, and not an anonymous pamphlet. In a hundred other cases the same truth could be illustrated; the situation in which the black man first assumes that all mankind is black, and then accuses the rest of the artificial vice of painting their faces red and yellow, or the hypocrisy of white-washing themselves after the fashion of whitened sepulchres. The particular case of it now before us is that of the English misunderstanding of America; and it is based, as in all these cases, on the English misunderstanding of England.

For the truth is that England has suffered of late from not having enough of the free shooting of Hannibal Chollop; from not understanding enough that the libation of freedom must sometimes be quaffed in blood. The prosperous Englishman will not admit this; but then the prosperous Englishman will not admit that he has suffered from anything. That is what he is suffering from. Until lately at least he refused to realise that many of his modern habits had been bad habits, the worst of them being contentment. For all the real virtue in contentment evaporates, when the contentment is only satisfaction and the satisfaction is only self-satisfaction. Now it is perfectly true that America and not England has seen the most obvious and outrageous official denials of liberty. But it is equally true that it has seen the most obvious flouting of such official nonsense, far more obvious than any similar evasions in England. And nobody
who knows the subconscious violence of the American character would ever be surprised if the weapons of Chollop began to be used in that most lawful lawlessness. It is perfectly true that the libation of freedom must sometimes be drunk in blood, and never more (one would think) than when mad millionaires forbid it to be drunk in beer. But America, as compared with England, is the country where one can still fancy men obtaining the libation of beer by the libation of blood. Vulgar plutocracy is almost omnipotent in both countries; but I think there is now more kick of reaction against it in America than in England. The Americans may go mad when they make laws; but they recover their reason when they disobey them. I wish I could believe that there was as much of that destructive repentance in England; as indeed there certainly was when Cobbett wrote. It faded gradually like a dying fire through the Victorian era; and it was one of the very few realities that Dickens did not understand. But any one who does understand it will know that the days of Cobbett saw the last lost fight for English democracy; and that if he had stood at that turning of the historic road, he would have wished a better fate to the frame-breakers and the fury against the first machinery, and luck to the Luddite fires.

Anyhow, what is wanted is a new Martin Chuzzlewit, told by a wiser Mark Tapley. It is typical of something sombre and occasionally stale in the mood of Dickens when he wrote that book, that the comic servant is not really very comic. Mark Tapley is a very thin shadow of Sam Weller. But if Dickens had written it in a happier mood, there might have been a truer meaning in Mark Tapley’s happiness. For it is true that this illogical good humour amid unreason and disorder is one of the real virtues of the English people. It is the real advantage they have in that adventure all over the world, which they were recently and reluctantly induced to call an Empire. That receptive ridicule remains with them as a secret pleasure when they are colonists—or convicts. Dickens might have written another version of the great romance, and one in which America was really seen gaily by Mark instead of gloomily by Martin. Mark Tapley might really have made the best of America. Then America would have lived and danced before us like Pickwick’s England, a fairyland of happy lunatics and lovable monsters, and we might still have sympathised as much with the rhetoric of Lafayette Kettle as with the rhetoric of Wilkins Micawber, or with the violence of Chollop as with the violence of Boythorn. That new Martin Chuzzlewit will never be written; and the loss of it is more tragic than the loss of Edwin Drood. But every man who has travelled in America has seen glimpses and episodes in that untold tale; and far away on the Red-Indian frontiers or in
the hamlets in the hills of Pennsylvania, there are people whom I met for a few hours or for a few moments, whom I none the less sincerely like and respect because I cannot but smile as I think of them. But the converse is also true; they have probably forgotten me; but if they remember they laugh.
THE SPIRIT OF AMERICA

I suggest that diplomatists of the internationalist school should spend some of their money on staging farces and comedies of cross-purposes, founded on the curious and prevalent idea that England and America have the same language. I know, of course, that we both inherit the glorious tongue of Shakespeare, not to mention the tune of the musical glasses; but there have been moments when I thought that if we spoke Greek and they spoke Latin we might understand each other better. For Greek and Latin are at least fixed, while American at least is still very fluid. I do not know the American language, and therefore I do not claim to distinguish between the American language and the American slang. But I know that highly theatrical developments might follow on taking the words as part of the English slang or the English language. I have already given the example of calling a person ‘a regular guy,’ which in the States is a graceful expression of respect and esteem, but which on the stage, properly handled, might surely lead the way towards a divorce or duel or something lively. Sometimes coincidence merely clinches a mistake, as it so often clinches a misprint. Every proof-reader knows that the worst misprint is not that which makes nonsense but that which makes sense; not that which is obviously wrong but that which is hideously right. He who has essayed to write ‘he got the book,’ and has found it rendered mysteriously as ‘he got the boob’ is pensively resigned. It is when it is rendered quite lucidly as ‘he got the boot’ that he is moved to a more passionate mood of regret. I have had conversations in which this sort of accident would have wholly misled me, if another accident had not come to the rescue. An American friend of mine was telling me of his adventures as a cinema-producer down in the south-west where real Red Indians were procurable. He said that certain Indians were ‘very bad actors.’ It passed for me as a very ordinary remark on a very ordinary or natural deficiency. It would hardly seem a crushing criticism to say that some wild Arab chieftain was not very good at imitating a farmyard; or that the Grand Llama of Thibet was rather clumsy at making paper boats. But the remark might be natural in a man travelling in paper boats, or touring with an invisible farmyard for his menagerie. As my friend was a cinema-producer, I supposed he meant that the Indians were bad cinema actors. But the phrase has really a high and austere moral meaning, which my levity had wholly missed. A bad actor means a man whose actions are bad or morally reprehensible. So that I might have embraced a Red Indian who
was dripping with gore, or covered with atrocious crimes, imagining there was nothing the matter with him beyond a mistaken choice of the theatrical profession. Surely there are here the elements of a play, not to mention a cinema play. Surely a New England village maiden might find herself among the wigwams in the power of the formidable and fiendish ‘Little Blue Bison,’ merely through her mistaken sympathy with his financial failure as a Film Star. The notion gives me glimpses of all sorts of dissolving views of primeval forests and flamboyant theatres; but this impulse of irrelevant theatrical production must be curbed. There is one example, however, of this complication of language actually used in contrary senses, about which the same figure can be used to illustrate a more serious fact.

Suppose that, in such an international interlude, an English girl and an American girl are talking about the fiancé of the former, who is coming to call. The English girl will be haughty and aristocratic (on the stage), the American girl will of course have short hair and skirts and will be cynical; Americans being more completely free from cynicism than any people in the world. It is the great glory of Americans that they are not cynical; for that matter, English aristocrats are hardly ever haughty; they understand the game much better than that. But on the stage, anyhow, the American girl may say, referring to her friend’s fiancé, with a cynical wave of the cigarette, ‘I suppose he’s bound to come and see you.’ And at this the blue blood of the Vere de Veres will boil over; the English lady will be deeply wounded and insulted at the suggestion that her lover only comes to see her because he is forced to do so. A staggering stage quarrel will then ensue, and things will go from bad to worse; until the arrival of an Interpreter who can talk both English and American. He stands between the two ladies waving two pocket dictionaries, and explains the error on which the quarrel turns. It is very simple; like the seed of all tragedies. In English ‘he is bound to come and see you’ means that he is obliged or constrained to come and see you. In American it does not. In American it means that he is bent on coming to see you, that he is irrevocably resolved to do so, and will surmount any obstacle to do it. The two young ladies will then embrace as the curtain falls.

Now when I was lecturing in America I was often told, in a radiant and congratulatory manner, that such and such a person was bound to come and hear me lecture. It seemed a very cruel form of conscription, and I could not understand what authority could have made it compulsory. In the course of discovering my error, however, I thought I began to understand certain American ideas and instincts that lie behind this American idiom. For as I have
urged before, and shall often urge again, the road to international friendship is through really understanding jokes. It is in a sense through taking jokes seriously. It is quite legitimate to laugh at a man who walks down the street in three white hats and a green dressing gown, because it is unfamiliar; but after all the man has some reason for what he does; and until we know the reason we do not understand the story, or even understand the joke. So the outlander will always seem outlandish in custom or costume; but serious relations depend on our getting beyond the fact of difference to the things wherein it differs. A good symbolical figure for all this may be found among the people who say, perhaps with a self-revealing simplicity, that they are bound to go to a lecture.

If I were asked for a single symbolic figure summing up the whole of what seems eccentric and interesting about America to an Englishman, I should be satisfied to select that one lady who complained of Mrs. Asquith’s lecture and wanted her money back. I do not mean that she was typically American in complaining; far from it. I, for one, have a great and guilty knowledge of all that amiable American audiences will endure without complaint. I do not mean that she was typically American in wanting her money; quite the contrary. That sort of American spends money rather than hoards it; and when we convict them of vulgarity we acquit them of avarice. Where she was typically American, summing up a truth individual and indescribable in any other way, is that she used these words: ‘I’ve risen from a sick-bed to come and hear her, and I want my money back.’

The element in that which really amuses an Englishman is precisely the element which, properly analysed, ought to make him admire an American. But my point is that only by going through the amusement can he reach the admiration. The amusement is in the vision of a tragic sacrifice for what is avowedly a rather trivial object. Mrs. Asquith is a candid lady of considerable humour; and I feel sure she does not regard the experience of hearing her read her diary as an ecstasy for which the sick should thus suffer martyrdom. She also is English; and had no other claim but to amuse Americans and possibly to be amused by them. This being so, it is rather as if somebody said, ‘I have risked my life in fire and pestilence to find my way to the music hall,’ or, ‘I have fasted forty days in the wilderness sustained by the hope of seeing Totty Toddles do her new dance.’ And there is something rather more subtle involved here. There is something in an Englishman which would make him feel faintly ashamed of saying that he had fasted to hear Totty Toddles, or risen from a sick-bed to hear Mrs. Asquith. He would feel that it was undignified to confess that he had
wanted mere amusement so much; and perhaps that he had wanted anything so much. He would not like, so to speak, to be seen rushing down the street after Totty Toddles, or after Mrs. Asquith, or perhaps after anybody. But there is something in it distinct from a mere embarrassment at admitting enthusiasm. He might admit the enthusiasm if the object seemed to justify it; he might perfectly well be serious about a serious thing. But he cannot understand a person being proud of serious sacrifices for what is not a serious thing. He does not like to admit that a little thing can excite him; that he can lose his breath in running, or lose his balance in reaching, after something that might be called silly.

Now that is where the American is fundamentally different. To him the enthusiasm itself is meritorious. To him the excitement itself is dignified. He counts it a part of his manhood to fast or fight or rise from a bed of sickness for something, or possibly for anything. His ideal is not to be a lock that only a worthy key can open, but a ‘live wire’ that anything can touch or anybody can use. In a word, there is a difference in the very definition of virility and therefore of virtue. A live wire is not only active, it is also sensitive. Thus sensibility becomes actually a part of virility. Something more is involved than the vulgar simplification of the American as the irresistible force and the Englishman as the immovable post. As a fact, those who speak of such things nowadays generally mean by something irresistible something simply immovable, or at least something unalterable, motionless even in motion, like a cannon ball; for a cannon ball is as dead as a cannon. Prussian militarism was praised in that way—until it met a French force of about half its size on the banks of the Marne. But that is not what an American means by energy; that sort of Prussian energy is only monotony without repose. American energy is not a soulless machine; for it is the whole point that he puts his soul into it. It is a very small box for so big a thing; but it is not an empty box. But the point is that he is not only proud of his energy, he is proud of his excitement. He is not ashamed of his emotion, of the fire or even the tear in his manly eye, when he tells you that the great wheel of his machine breaks four billion butterflies an hour.

That is the point about American sport; that it is not in the least sportive. It is because it is not very sportive that we sometimes say it is not very sporting. It has the vices of a religion. It has all the paradox of original sin in the service of aboriginal faith. It is sometimes untruthful because it is sincere. It is sometimes treacherous because it is loyal. Men lie and cheat for it as they lied for their lords in a feudal conspiracy, or cheated for their chieftains in a Highland feud. We may say that the vassal readily committed treason; but it is equally true that he
readily endured torture. So does the American athlete endure torture. Not only the self-sacrifice but the solemnity of the American athlete is like that of the American Indian. The athletes in the States have the attitude of the athletes among the Spartans, the great historical nation without a sense of humour. They suffer an ascetic régime not to be matched in any monasticism and hardly in any militarism. If any tradition of these things remains in a saner age, they will probably be remembered as a mysterious religious order of fakirs or dancing dervishes, who shaved their heads and fasted in honour of Hercules or Castor and Pollux. And that is really the spiritual atmosphere though the gods have vanished; and the religion is subconscious and therefore irrational. For the problem of the modern world is that it has continued to be religious when it has ceased to be rational. Americans really would starve to win a cocoa-nut shy. They would fast or bleed to win a race of paper boats on a pond. They would rise from a sick-bed to listen to Mrs. Asquith.

But it is the real reason that interests me here. It is certainly not that Americans are so stupid as not to know that cocoa-nuts are only cocoa-nuts and paper boats only made of paper. Americans are, on an average, rather more intelligent than Englishmen; and they are well aware that Hercules is a myth and that Mrs. Asquith is something of a mythologist. It is not that they do not know that the object is small in itself; it is that they do really believe that the enthusiasm is great in itself. They admire people for being impressionable. They admire people for being excited. An American so struggling for some disproportionate trifle (like one of my lectures) really feels in a mystical way that he is right, because it is his whole morality to be keen. So long as he wants something very much, whatever it is, he feels he has his conscience behind him, and the common sentiment of society behind him, and God and the whole universe behind him. Wedged on one leg in a hot crowd at a trivial lecture, he has self-respect; his dignity is at rest. That is what he means when he says he is bound to come to the lecture.

Now the Englishman is fond of occasional larks. But these things are not larks; nor are they occasional. It is the essential of the Englishman’s lark that he should think it a lark; that he should laugh at it even when he does it. Being English myself, I like it; but being English myself, I know it is connected with weaknesses as well as merits. In its irony there is condescension and therefore embarrassment. This patronage is allied to the patron, and the patron is allied to the aristocratic tradition of society. The larks are a variant of laziness because of leisure; and the leisure is a variant of the security and even supremacy of the
gentleman. When an undergraduate at Oxford smashes half a hundred windows he is well aware that the incident is merely a trifle. He can be trusted to explain to his parents and guardians that it was merely a trifle. He does not say, even in the American sense, that he was bound to smash the windows. He does not say that he had risen from a sick-bed to smash the windows. He does not especially think he has risen at all; he knows he has descended (though with delight, like one diving or sliding down the banisters) to something flat and farcical and full of the English taste for the bathos. He has collapsed into something entirely commonplace; though the owners of the windows may possibly not think so. This rather indescribable element runs through a hundred English things, as in the love of bathos shown even in the sound of proper names; so that even the yearning lover in a lyric yearns for somebody named Sally rather than Salome, and for a place called Wapping rather than a place called Westermain. Even in the relapse into rowdiness there is a sort of relapse into comfort. There is also what is so large a part of comfort; carelessness. The undergraduate breaks windows because he does not care about windows, not because he does care about more fresh air like a hygienist, or about more light like a German poet. Still less does he heroically smash a hundred windows because they come between him and the voice of Mrs. Asquith. But least of all does he do it because he seriously prides himself on the energy apart from its aim, and on the will-power that carries it through. He is not ‘bound’ to smash the windows, even in the sense of being bent upon it. He is not bound at all but rather relaxed; and his violence is not only a relaxation but a laxity. Finally, this is shown in the fact that he only smashes windows when he is in the mood to smash windows; when some fortunate conjunction of stars and all the tints and nuances of nature whisper to him that it would be well to smash windows. But the American is always ready, at any moment, to waste his energies on the wilder and more suicidal course of going to lectures. And this is because to him such excitement is not a mood but a moral ideal. As I note in another connection, much of the English mystery would be clear to Americans if they understood the word ‘mood.’ Englishmen are very moody, especially when they smash windows. But I doubt if many Americans understand exactly what we mean by the mood; especially the passive mood.

It is only by trying to get some notion of all this that an Englishman can enjoy the final crown and fruit of all international friendship; which is really liking an American to be American. If we only think that parts of him are excellent because parts of him are English, it would be far more sensible to stop at home
and possibly enjoy the society of a whole complete Englishman. But anybody who does understand this can take the same pleasure in an American being American that he does in a thunderbolt being swift and a barometer being sensitive. He can see that a vivid sensibility and vigilance really radiate outwards through all the ramifications of machinery and even of materialism. He can see that the American uses his great practical powers upon very small provocation; but he can also see that there is a kind of sense of honour, like that of a duellist, in his readiness to be provoked. Indeed, there is some parallel between the American man of action, however vulgar his aims, and the old feudal idea of the gentleman with a sword at his side. The gentleman may have been proud of being strong or sturdy; he may too often have been proud of being thick-headed; but he was not proud of being thick-skinned. On the contrary, he was proud of being thin-skinned. He also seriously thought that sensitiveness was a part of masculinity. It may be very absurd to read of two Irish gentlemen trying to kill each other for trifles, or of two Irish-American millionaires trying to ruin each other for trash. But the very pettiness of the pretext and even the purpose illustrates the same conception; which may be called the virtue of excitability. And it is really this, and not any rubbish about iron will-power and masterful mentality, that redeems with romance their clockwork cosmos and its industrial ideals. Being a live wire does not mean that the nerves should be like wires; but rather that the very wires should be like nerves.

Another approximation to the truth would be to say that an American is really not ashamed of curiosity. It is not so simple as it looks. Men will carry off curiosity with various kinds of laughter and bravado, just as they will carry off drunkenness or bankruptcy. But very few people are really proud of lying on a door-step, and very few people are really proud of longing to look through a key-hole. I do not speak of looking through it, which involves questions of honour and self-control; but few people feel that even the desire is dignified. Now I fancy the American, at least by comparison with the Englishman, does feel that his curiosity is consistent with his dignity, because dignity is consistent with vivacity. He feels it is not merely the curiosity of Paul Pry, but the curiosity of Christopher Columbus. He is not a spy but an explorer; and he feels his greatness rather grow with his refusal to turn back, as a traveller might feel taller and taller as he neared the source of the Nile or the North-West Passage. Many an Englishman has had that feeling about discoveries in dark continents; but he does not often have it about discoveries in daily life. The one type does believe in the indignity and the other in the dignity of the detective. It has nothing to do
with ethics in the merely external sense. It involves no particular comparison in practical morals and manners. It is something in the whole poise and posture of the self; of the way a man carries himself. For men are not only affected by what they are; but still more, when they are fools, by what they think they are; and when they are wise, by what they wish to be.

There are truths that have almost become untrue by becoming untruthful. There are statements so often stale and insincere that one hesitates to use them, even when they stand for something more subtle. This point about curiosity is not the conventional complaint against the American interviewer. It is not the ordinary joke against the American child. And in the same way I feel the danger of it being identified with the cant about ‘a young nation’ if I say that it has some of the attractions, not of American childhood, but of real childhood. There is some truth in the tradition that the children of wealthy Americans tend to be too precocious and luxurious. But there is a sense in which we can really say that if the children are like adults, the adults are like children. And that sense is in the very best sense of childhood. It is something which the modern world does not understand. It is something that modern Americans do not understand, even when they possess it; but I think they do possess it.

The devil can quote Scripture for his purpose; and the text of Scripture which he now most commonly quotes is, ‘The kingdom of heaven is within you.’ That text has been the stay and support of more Pharisees and prigs and self-righteous spiritual bullies than all the dogmas in creation; it has served to identify self-satisfaction with the peace that passes all understanding. And the text to be quoted in answer to it is that which declares that no man can receive the kingdom except as a little child. What we are to have inside is the childlike spirit; but the childlike spirit is not entirely concerned about what is inside. It is the first mark of possessing it that one is interested in what is outside. The most childlike thing about a child is his curiosity and his appetite and his power of wonder at the world. We might almost say that the whole advantage of having the kingdom within is that we look for it somewhere else.
Nine times out of ten a man’s broad-mindedness is necessarily the narrowest thing about him. This is not particularly paradoxical; it is, when we come to think of it, quite inevitable. His vision of his own village may really be full of varieties; and even his vision of his own nation may have a rough resemblance to the reality. But his vision of the world is probably smaller than the world. His vision of the universe is certainly much smaller than the universe. Hence he is never so inadequate as when he is universal; he is never so limited as when he generalises. This is the fallacy in the many modern attempts at a creedless creed, at something variously described as essential Christianity or undenominational religion or a world faith to embrace all the faiths in the world. It is that every sectarian is more sectarian in his unsectarianism than he is in his sect. The emancipation of a Baptist is a very Baptist emancipation. The charity of a Buddhist is a very Buddhist charity, and very different from Christian charity. When a philosophy embraces everything it generally squeezes everything, and squeezes it out of shape; when it digests it necessarily assimilates. When a theosophist absorbs Christianity it is rather as a cannibal absorbs Christian missionaries. In this sense it is even possible for the larger thing to be swallowed by the smaller; and for men to move about not only in a Clapham sect but in a Clapham cosmos under Clapham moon and stars.

But if this danger exists for all men, it exists especially for the Englishman. The Englishman is never so insular as when he is imperial; except indeed when he is international. In private life he is a good friend and in practical politics generally a good ally. But theoretical politics are more practical than practical politics. And in theoretical politics the Englishman is the worst ally the world ever saw. This is all the more curious because he has passed so much of his historical life in the character of an ally. He has been in twenty great alliances and never understood one of them. He has never been farther away from European politics than when he was fighting heroically in the thick of them. I myself think that this splendid isolation is sometimes really splendid; so long as it is isolation and does not imagine itself to be imperialism or internationalism. With the idea of being international, with the idea of being imperial, comes the frantic and farcical idea of being impartial. Generally speaking, men are never so mean and false and hypocritical as when they are occupied in being impartial. They are performing the first and most typical of all the actions of the devil; they
are claiming the throne of God. Even when it is not hypocrisy but only mental confusion, it is always a confusion worse and worse confounded. We see it in the impartial historians of the Victorian Age, who now seem far more Victorian than the partial historians. Hallam wrote about the Middle Ages; but Hallam was far less mediaeval than Macaulay; for Macaulay was at least a fighter. Huxley had more mediaeval sympathies than Herbert Spencer for the same reason; that Huxley was a fighter. They both fought in many ways for the limitations of their own rationalistic epoch; but they were nearer the truth than the men who simply assumed those limitations as rational. The war of the controversionalists was a wider thing than the peace of the arbiters. And in the same way the Englishman never cuts a less convincing figure before other nations than when he tries to arbitrate between them.

I have by this time heard a great deal about the necessity of saving Anglo-American friendship, a necessity which I myself feel rather too strongly to be satisfied with the ambassadorial and editorial style of achieving it. I have already said that the worst style of all is to be Anglo-American; or, as the more illiterate would express, to be Anglo-Saxon. I am more and more convinced that the way for the Englishman to do it is to be English; but to know that he is English and not everything else as well. Thus the only sincere answer to Irish nationalism is English nationalism, which is a reality; and not English imperialism, which is a reactionary fiction, or English internationalism, which is a revolutionary one.

For the English are reviled for their imperialism because they are not imperialistic. They dislike it, which is the real reason why they do it badly; and they do it badly, which is the real reason why they are disliked when they do it. Nobody calls France imperialistic because she has absorbed Brittany. But everybody calls England imperialistic because she has not absorbed Ireland. The Englishman is fixed and frozen for ever in the attitude of a ruthless conqueror; not because he has conquered such people, but because he has not conquered them; but he is always trying to conquer them with a heroism worthy of a better cause. For the really native and vigorous part of what is unfortunately called the British Empire is not an empire at all, and does not consist of these conquered provinces at all. It is not an empire but an adventure; which is probably a much finer thing. It was not the power of making strange countries similar to our own, but simply the pleasure of seeing strange countries because they were different from our own. The adventurer did indeed, like the third son, set out to seek his fortune, but not primarily to alter other people’s fortunes; he wished to trade with people rather than to rule them. But as the other people remained different
from him, so did he remain different from them. The adventurer saw a thousand strange things and remained a stranger. He was the Robinson Crusoe on a hundred desert islands; and on each he remained as insular as on his own island.

What is wanted for the cause of England to-day is an Englishman with enough imagination to love his country from the outside as well as the inside. That is, we need somebody who will do for the English what has never been done for them, but what is done for any outlandish peasantry or even any savage tribe. We want people who can make England attractive; quite apart from disputes about whether England is strong or weak. We want somebody to explain, not that England is everywhere, but what England is anywhere; not that England is or is not really dying, but why we do not want her to die. For this purpose the official and conventional compliments or claims can never get any farther than pompous abstractions about Law and Justice and Truth; the ideals which England accepts as every civilised state accepts them, and violates as every civilised state violates them. That is not the way in which the picture of any people has ever been painted on the sympathetic imagination of the world. Enthusiasts for old Japan did not tell us that the Japs recognised the existence of abstract morality; but that they lived in paper houses or wrote letters with paint-brushes. Men who wished to interest us in Arabs did not confine themselves to saying that they are monotheists or moralists; they filled our romances with the rush of Arab steeds or the colours of strange tents or carpets. What we want is somebody who will do for the Englishman with his front garden what was done for the Jap and his paper house; who shall understand the Englishman with his dog as well as the Arab with his horse. In a word, what nobody has really tried to do is the one thing that really wants doing. It is to make England attractive as a nationality, and even as a small nationality.

For it is a wild folly to suppose that nations will love each other because they are alike. They will never really do that unless they are really alike; and then they will not be nations. Nations can love each other as men and women love each other, not because they are alike but because they are different. It can easily be shown, I fancy, that in every case where a real public sympathy was aroused for some unfortunate foreign people, it has always been accompanied with a particular and positive interest in their most foreign customs and their most foreign externals. The man who made a romance of the Scotch High-lander made a romance of his kilt and even of his dirk; the friend of the Red Indians was interested in picture writing and had some tendency to be interested in scalping. To take a more serious example, such nations as Serbia had been
largely commended to international consideration by the study of Serbian epics, or Serbian songs. The epoch of negro emancipation was also the epoch of negro melodies. Those who wept over Uncle Tom also laughed over Uncle Remus. And just as the admiration for the Redskin almost became an apology for scalping, the mysterious fascination of the African has sometimes almost led us into the fringes of the black forest of Voodoo. But the sort of interest that is felt even in the scalp-hunter and the cannibal, the torturer and the devil-worshipper, that sort of interest has never been felt in the Englishman.

And this is the more extraordinary because the Englishman is really very interesting. He is interesting in a special degree in this special manner; he is interesting because he is individual. No man in the world is more misrepresented by everything official or even in the ordinary sense national. A description of English life must be a description of private life. In that sense there is no public life. In that sense there is no public opinion. There have never been those prairie fires of public opinion in England which often sweep over America. At any rate, there have never been any such popular revolutions since the popular revolutions of the Middle Ages. The English are a nation of amateurs; they are even a nation of eccentrics. An Englishman is never more English than when he is considered a lunatic by the other Englishmen. This can be clearly seen in a figure like Dr. Johnson, who has become national not by being normal but by being extraordinary. To express this mysterious people, to explain or suggest why they like tall hedges and heavy breakfasts and crooked roads and small gardens with large fences, and why they alone among Christians have kept quite consistently the great Christian glory of the open fireplace, here would be a strange and stimulating opportunity for any of the artists in words, who study the souls of strange peoples. That would be the true way to create a friendship between England and America, or between England and anything else; yes, even between England and Ireland. For this justice at least has already been done to Ireland; and as an indignant patriot I demand a more equal treatment for the two nations.

I have already noted the commonplace that in order to teach internationalism we must talk nationalism. We must make the nations as nations less odious or mysterious to each other. We do not make men love each other by describing a monster with a million arms and legs, but by describing the men as men, with their separate and even solitary emotions. As this has a particular application to the emotions of the Englishman, I will return to the topic once more. Now Americans have a power that is the soul and success of democracy, the power of spontaneous social organisation. Their high spirits, their humane ideals are really
creative, they abound in unofficial institutions; we might almost say in unofficial
officialism. Nobody who has felt the presence of all the leagues and guilds and
college clubs will deny that Whitman was national when he said he would build
states and cities out of the love of comrades. When all this communal
enthusiasm collides with the Englishman, it too often seems literally to leave
him cold. They say he is reserved; they possibly think he is rude. And the
Englishman, having been taught his own history all wrong, is only too likely to
take the criticism as a compliment. He admits that he is reserved because he is
stern and strong; or even that he is rude because he is shrewd and candid. But as
a fact he is not rude and not especially reserved; at least reserve is not the
meaning of his reluctance. The real difference lies, I think, in the fact that
American high spirits are not only high but level; that the hilarious American
spirit is like a plateau, and the humorous English spirit like a ragged mountain
range.

The Englishman is moody; which does not in the least mean that the
Englishman is morose. Dickens, as we all feel in reading his books, was
boisterously English. Dickens was moody when he wrote Oliver Twist; but he
was also moody when he wrote Pickwick. That is, he was in another and much
healthier mood. The mood was normal to him in the sense that nine times out of
ten he felt and wrote in that humorous and hilarious mood. But he was, if ever
there was one, a man of moods; and all the more of a typical Englishman for
being a man of moods. But it was because of this, almost entirely, that he had a
misunderstanding with America.

In America there are no moods, or there is only one mood. It is the same
whether it is called hustle or uplift; whether we regard it as the heroic love of
comrades or the last hysteria of the herd instinct. It has been said of the typical
English aristocrats of the Government offices that they resemble certain
ornamental fountains and play from ten till four; and it is true that an
Englishman, even an English aristocrat, is not always inclined to play any more
than to work. But American sociability is not like the Trafalgar fountains. It is
like Niagara. It never stops, under the silent stars or the rolling storms. There
seems always to be the same human heat and pressure behind it; it is like the
central heating of hotels as explained in the advertisements and announcements.
The temperature can be regulated; but it is not. And it is always rather
overpowering for an Englishman, whose mood changes like his own mutable
and shifting sky. The English mood is very like the English weather; it is a
nuisance and a national necessity.
If any one wishes to understand the quarrel between Dickens and the Americans, let him turn to that chapter in Martin Chuzzlewit, in which young Martin has to receive endless defiles and deputations of total strangers each announced by name and demanding formal salutation. There are several things to be noticed about this incident. To begin with, it did not happen to Martin Chuzzlewit; but it did happen to Charles Dickens. Dickens is incorporating almost without alteration a passage from a diary in the middle of a story; as he did when he included the admirable account of the prison petition of John Dickens as the prison petition of Wilkins Micawber. There is no particular reason why even the gregarious Americans should so throng the portals of a perfectly obscure steerage passenger like young Chuzzlewit. There was every reason why they should throng the portals of the author of Pickwick and Oliver Twist. And no doubt they did. If I may be permitted the aleatory image, you bet they did. Similar troops of sociable human beings have visited much more insignificant English travellers in America, with some of whom I am myself acquainted. I myself have the luck to be a little more stodgy and less sensitive than many of my countrymen; and certainly less sensitive than Dickens. But I know what it was that annoyed him about that unending and unchanging stream of American visitors; it was the unending and unchanging stream of American sociability and high spirits. A people living on such a lofty but level tableland do not understand the ups and downs of the English temperament; the temper of a nation of eccentrics or (as they used to be called) of humorists. There is something very national in the very name of the old play of Every Man in His Humour. But the play more often acted in real life is ‘Every Man Out of His Humour.’ It is true, as Matthew Arnold said, that an Englishman wants to do as he likes; but it is not always true even that he likes what he likes. An Englishman can be friendly and yet not feel friendly. Or he can be friendly and yet not feel hospitable. Or he can feel hospitable and yet not welcome those whom he really loves. He can think, almost with tears of tenderness, about people at a distance who would be bores if they came in at the door.

American sociability sweeps away any such subtlety. It cannot be expected to understand the paradox or perversity of the Englishman, who thus can feel friendly and avoid friends. That is the truth in the suggestion that Dickens was sentimental. It means that he probably felt most sociable when he was solitary. In all these attempts to describe the indescribable, to indicate the real but unconscious differences between the two peoples, I have tried to balance my words without the irrelevant bias of praise and blame. Both characteristics
always cut both ways. On one side this comradeship makes possible a certain communal courage, a democratic derision of rich men in high places, that is not easy in our smaller and more stratified society. On the other hand the Englishman has certainly more liberty, if less equality and fraternity. But the richest compensation of the Englishman is not even in the word ‘liberty,’ but rather in the word ‘poetry.’ That humour of escape or seclusion, that genial isolation, that healing of wounded friendship by what Christian Science would call absent treatment, that is the best atmosphere of all for the creation of great poetry; and out of that came ‘bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang’ and ‘Thou wast not made for death, immortal bird.’ In this sense it is indeed true that poetry is emotion remembered in tranquillity; which may be extended to mean affection remembered in loneliness. There is in it a spirit not only of detachment but even of distance; a spirit which does desire, as in the old English rhyme, to be not only over the hills but also far away. In other words, in so far as it is true that the Englishman is an exception to the great truth of Aristotle, it is because he is not so near to Aristotle as he is to Homer. In so far as he is not by nature a political animal, it is because he is a poetical animal. We see it in his relations to the other animals; his quaint and almost illogical love of dogs and horses and dependants whose political rights cannot possibly be defined in logic. Many forms of hunting or fishing are but an excuse for the same thing which the shameless literary man does without any excuse. Sport is speechless poetry. It would be easy for a foreigner, by taking a few liberties with the facts, to make a satire about the sort of silent Shelley who decides ultimately to shoot the skylark. It would be easy to answer these poetic suggestions by saying that he himself might be responsible for ruining the choirs where late the sweet birds sang, or that the immortal bird was likely to be mortal when he was out with his gun. But these international satires are never just; and the real relations of an Englishman and an English bird are far more delicate. It would be equally easy and equally unjust to suggest a similar satire against American democracy; and represent Americans merely as birds of a feather who can do nothing but flock together. But this would leave out the fact that at least it is not the white feather; that democracy is capable of defiance and of death for an idea. Touching the souls of great nations, these criticisms are generally false because they are critical.

But when we are quite sure that we rejoice in a nation’s strength, then and not before we are justified in judging its weakness. I am quite sure that I rejoice in any democratic success without arrière pensée; and nobody who knows me will credit me with a covert sneer at civic equality. And this being granted, I do think
there is a danger in the gregariousness of American society. The danger of democracy is not anarchy; on the contrary, it is monotony. And it is touching this that all my experience has increased my conviction that a great deal that is called female emancipation has merely been the increase of female convention. Now the males of every community are far too conventional; it was the females who were individual and criticised the conventions of the tribe. If the females become conventional also, there is a danger of individuality being lost. This indeed is not peculiar to America; it is common to the whole modern industrial world, and to everything which substitutes the impersonal atmosphere of the State for the personal atmosphere of the home. But it is emphasised in America by the curious contradiction that Americans do in theory value and even venerate the individual. But individualism is still the foe of individuality. Where men are trying to compete with each other they are trying to copy each other. They become featureless by ‘featuring’ the same part. Personality, in becoming a conscious ideal, becomes a common ideal. In this respect perhaps there is really something to be learnt from the Englishman with his turn or twist in the direction of private life. Those who have travelled in such a fashion as to see all the American hotels and none of the American houses are sometimes driven to the excess of saying that the Americans have no private life. But even if the exaggeration has a hint of truth, we must balance it with the corresponding truth; that the English have no public life. They on their side have still to learn the meaning of the public thing, the republic; and how great are the dangers of cowardice and corruption when the very State itself has become a State secret.

The English are patriotic; but patriotism is the unconscious form of nationalism. It is being national without understanding the meaning of a nation. The Americans are on the whole too self-conscious, kept moving too much in the pace of public life, with all its temptations to superficiality and fashion; too much aware of outside opinion and with too much appetite for outside criticism. But the English are much too unconscious; and would be the better for an increase in many forms of consciousness, including consciousness of sin. But even their sin is ignorance of their real virtue. The most admirable English things are not the things that are most admired by the English, or for which the English admire themselves. They are things now blindly neglected and in daily danger of being destroyed. It is all the worse that they should be destroyed, because there is really nothing like them in the world. That is why I have suggested a note of nationalism rather than patriotism for the English; the power of seeing their nation as a nation and not as the nature of things. We say of some ballad from
the Balkans or some peasant costume in the Netherlands that it is unique; but the
good things of England really are unique. Our very isolation from continental
wars and revolutionary reconstructions have kept them unique. The particular
kind of beauty there is in an English village, the particular kind of humour there
is in an English public-house, are things that cannot be found in lands where the
village is far more simply and equally governed, or where the vine is far more
honourably served and praised. Yet we shall not save them by merely sinking
into them with the conservative sort of contentment, even if the commercial
rapacity of our plutocratic reforms would allow us to do so. We must in a sense
get far away from England in order to behold her; we must rise above patriotism
in order to be practically patriotic; we must have some sense of more varied and
remote things before these vanishing virtues can be seen suddenly for what they
are; almost as one might fancy that a man would have to rise to the dizziest
heights of the divine understanding before he saw, as from a peak far above a
whirlpool, how precious is his perishing soul.
THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

The title of this final chapter requires an apology. I do not need to be reminded, alas, that the whole book requires an apology. It is written in accordance with a ritual or custom in which I could see no particular harm, and which gives me a very interesting subject, but a custom which it would be not altogether easy to justify in logic. Everybody who goes to America for a short time is expected to write a book; and nearly everybody does. A man who takes a holiday at Trouville or Dieppe is not confronted on his return with the question, ‘When is your book on France going to appear?’ A man who betakes himself to Switzerland for the winter sports is not instantly pinned by the statement, ‘I suppose your History of the Helvetian Republic is coming out this spring?’ Lecturing, at least my kind of lecturing, is not much more serious or meritorious than ski-ing or sea-bathing; and it happens to afford the holiday-maker far less opportunity of seeing the daily life of the people. Of all this I am only too well aware; and my only defence is that I am at least sincere in my enjoyment and appreciation of America, and equally sincere in my interest in its most serious problem, which I think a very serious problem indeed; the problem of democracy in the modern world. Democracy may be a very obvious and facile affair for plutocrats and politicians who only have to use it as a rhetorical term. But democracy is a very serious problem for democrats. I certainly do not apologise for the word democracy; but I do apologise for the word future. I am no Futurist; and any conjectures I make must be taken with the grain of salt which is indeed the salt of the earth; the decent and moderate humility which comes from a belief in free will. That faith is in itself a divine doubt. I do not believe in any of the scientific predictions about mankind; I notice that they always fail to predict any of the purely human developments of men; I also notice that even their successes prove the same truth as their failures; for their successful predictions are not about men but about machines. But there are two things which a man may reasonably do, in stating the probabilities of a problem, which do not involve any claim to be a prophet. The first is to tell the truth, and especially the neglected truth, about the tendencies that have already accumulated in human history; any miscalculation about which must at least mislead us in any case. We cannot be certain of being right about the future; but we can be almost certain of being wrong about the future, if we are wrong about the past. The other thing that he can do is to note what ideas necessarily go
together by their own nature; what ideas will triumph together or fall together. Hence it follows that this final chapter must consist of two things. The first is a summary of what has really happened to the idea of democracy in recent times; the second a suggestion of the fundamental doctrine which is necessary for its triumph at any time.

The last hundred years has seen a general decline in the democratic idea. If there be anybody left to whom this historical truth appears a paradox, it is only because during that period nobody has been taught history, least of all the history of ideas. If a sort of intellectual inquisition had been established, for the definition and differentiation of heresies, it would have been found that the original republican orthodoxy had suffered more and more from secessions, schisms, and backslidings. The highest point of democratic idealism and conviction was towards the end of the eighteenth century, when the American Republic was ‘dedicated to the proposition that all men are equal.’ It was then that the largest number of men had the most serious sort of conviction that the political problem could be solved by the vote of peoples instead of the arbitrary power of princes and privileged orders. These men encountered various difficulties and made various compromises in relation to the practical politics of their time; in England they preserved aristocracy; in America they preserved slavery. But though they had more difficulties, they had less doubts. Since their time democracy has been steadily disintegrated by doubts; and these political doubts have been contemporary with and often identical with religious doubts. This fact could be followed over almost the whole field of the modern world; in this place it will be more appropriate to take the great American example of slavery. I have found traces in all sorts of intelligent quarters of an extraordinary idea that all the Fathers of the Republic owned black men like beasts of burden because they knew no better, until the light of liberty was revealed to them by John Brown and Mrs. Beecher Stowe. One of the best weekly papers in England said recently that even those who drew up the Declaration of Independence did not include negroes in its generalisation about humanity. This is quite consistent with the current convention, in which we were all brought up; the theory that the heart of humanity broadens in ever larger circles of brotherhood, till we pass from embracing a black man to adoring a black beetle. Unfortunately it is quite inconsistent with the facts of American history. The facts show that, in this problem of the Old South, the eighteenth century was more liberal than the nineteenth century. There was more sympathy for the negro in the school of Jefferson than in the school of Jefferson Davis. Jefferson, in the dark estate of
his simple Deism, said the sight of slavery in his country made him tremble, remembering that God is just. His fellow Southerners, after a century of the world’s advance, said that slavery in itself was good, when they did not go farther and say that negroes in themselves were bad. And they were supported in this by the great and growing modern suspicion that nature is unjust. Difficulties seemed inevitably to delay justice, to the mind of Jefferson; but so they did to the mind of Lincoln. But that the slave was human and the servitude inhuman—that was, if anything, clearer to Jefferson than to Lincoln. The fact is that the utter separation and subordination of the black like a beast was a progress; it was a growth of nineteenth-century enlightenment and experiment; a triumph of science over superstition. It was ‘the way the world was going,’ as Matthew Arnold reverentially remarked in some connection; perhaps as part of a definition of God. Anyhow, it was not Jefferson’s definition of God. He fancied, in his far-off patriarchal way, a Father who had made all men brothers; and brutally unbrotherly as was the practice, such democratical Deists never dreamed of denying the theory. It was not until the scientific sophistries began that brotherhood was really disputed. Gobineau, who began most of the modern talk about the superiority and inferiority of racial stocks, was seized upon eagerly by the less generous of the slave-owners and trumpeted as a new truth of science and a new defence of slavery. It was not really until the dawn of Darwinism, when all our social relations began to smell of the monkey-house, that men thought of the barbarian as only a first and the baboon as a second cousin. The full servile philosophy has been a modern and even a recent thing; made in an age whose invisible deity was the Missing Link. The Missing Link was a true metaphor in more ways than one; and most of all in its suggestion of a chain.

By a symbolic coincidence, indeed, slavery grew more brazen and brutal under the encouragement of more than one movement of the progressive sort. Its youth was renewed for it by the industrial prosperity of Lancashire; and under that influence it became a commercial and competitive instead of a patriarchal and customary thing. We may say with no exaggerative irony that the unconscious patrons of slavery were Huxley and Cobden. The machines of Manchester were manufacturing a great many more things than the manufacturers knew or wanted to know; but they were certainly manufacturing the fetters of the slave, doubtless out of the best quality of steel and iron. But this is a minor illustration of the modern tendency, as compared with the main stream of scepticism which was destroying democracy. Evolution became more and more a vision of the break-up of our brotherhood, till by the end of the
nineteenth century the genius of its greatest scientific romancer saw it end in the anthropophagous antics of the Time Machine. So far from evolution lifting us above the idea of enslaving men, it was providing us at least with a logical and potential argument for eating them. In the case of the American negroes, it may be remarked, it does at any rate permit the preliminary course of roasting them. All this materialistic hardening, which replaced the remorse of Jefferson, was part of the growing evolutionary suspicion that savages were not a part of the human race, or rather that there was really no such thing as the human race. The South had begun by agreeing reluctantly to the enslavement of men. The South ended by agreeing equally reluctantly to the emancipation of monkeys.

That is what had happened to the democratic ideal in a hundred years. Anybody can test it by comparing the final phase, I will not say with the ideal of Jefferson, but with the ideal of Johnson. There was far more horror of slavery in an eighteenth-century Tory like Dr. Johnson than in a nineteenth-century Democrat like Stephen Douglas. Stephen Douglas may be mentioned because he is a very representative type of the age of evolution and expansion; a man thinking in continents, like Cecil Rhodes, human and hopeful in a truly American fashion, and as a consequence cold and careless rather than hostile in the matter of the old mystical doctrines of equality. He ‘did not care whether slavery was voted up or voted down.’ His great opponent Lincoln did indeed care very much. But it was an intense individual conviction with Lincoln exactly as it was with Johnson. I doubt if the spirit of the age was not much more behind Douglas and his westward expansion of the white race. I am sure that more and more men were coming to be in the particular mental condition of Douglas; men in whom the old moral and mystical ideals had been undermined by doubt but only with a negative effect of indifference. Their positive convictions were all concerned with what some called progress and some imperialism. It is true that there was a sincere sectional enthusiasm against slavery in the North; and that the slaves were actually emancipated in the nineteenth century. But I doubt whether the Abolitionists would ever have secured Abolition. Abolition was a by-product of the Civil War; which was fought for quite other reasons. Anyhow, if slavery had somehow survived to the age of Rhodes and Roosevelt and evolutionary imperialism, I doubt if the slaves would ever have been emancipated at all. Certainly if it had survived till the modern movement for the Servile State, they would never have been emancipated at all. Why should the world take the chains off the black man when it was just putting them on the white? And in so far as we owe the change to Lincoln, we owe it to Jefferson.
Exactly what gives its real dignity to the figure of Lincoln is that he stands invoking a primitive first principle of the age of innocence, and holding up the tables of an ancient law, against the trend of the nineteenth century; repeating, ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator, etc.,’ to a generation that was more and more disposed to say something like this: ‘We hold these truths to be probable enough for pragmatists; that all things looking like men were evolved somehow, being endowed by heredity and environment with no equal rights, but very unequal wrongs,’ and so on. I do not believe that creed, left to itself, would ever have founded a state; and I am pretty certain that, left to itself, it would never have overthrown a slave state. What it did do, as I have said, was to produce some very wonderful literary and artistic flights of sceptical imagination. The world did have new visions, if they were visions of monsters in the moon and Martians striding about like spiders as tall as the sky, and the workmen and capitalists becoming two separate species, so that one could devour the other as gaily and greedily as a cat devours a bird. No one has done justice to the meaning of Mr. Wells and his original departure in fantastic fiction; to these nightmares that were the last apocalypse of the nineteenth century. They meant that the bottom had fallen out of the mind at last, that the bridge of brotherhood had broken down in the modern brain, letting up from the chasms this infernal light like a dawn. All had grown dizzy with degree and relativity; so that there would not be so very much difference between eating dog and eating darkie, or between eating darkie and eating dago. There were different sorts of apes; but there was no doubt that we were the superior sort.

Against all this irresistible force stood one immovable post. Against all this dance of doubt and degree stood something that can best be symbolised by a simple example. An ape cannot be a priest, but a negro can be a priest. The dogmatic type of Christianity, especially the Catholic type of Christianity, had riveted itself irrevocably to the manhood of all men. Where its faith was fixed by creeds and councils it could not save itself even by surrender. It could not gradually dilute democracy, as could a merely sceptical or secular democrat. There stood, in fact or in possibility, the solid and smiling figure of a black bishop. And he was either a man claiming the most towering spiritual privileges of a man, or he was the mere buffoonery and blasphemy of a monkey in a mitre. That is the point about Christian and Catholic democracy; it is not that it is necessarily at any moment more democratic, it is that its indestructible minimum of democracy really is indestructible. And by the nature of things that mystical
democracy was destined to survive, when every other sort of democracy was free to destroy itself. And whenever democracy destroying itself is suddenly moved to save itself, it always grasps at rag or tag of that old tradition that alone is sure of itself. Hundreds have heard the story about the mediaeval demagogue who went about repeating the rhyme

When Adam delved and Eve span,
Who was then the gentleman?

Many have doubtless offered the obvious answer to the question, ‘The Serpent.’ But few seem to have noticed what would be the more modern answer to the question, if that innocent agitator went about propounding it. ‘Adam never delved and Eve never span, for the simple reason that they never existed. They are fragments of a Chaldeo-Babylonian mythos, and Adam is only a slight variation of Tag-Tug, pronounced Uttu. For the real beginning of humanity we refer you to Darwin’s Origin of Species.’ And then the modern man would go on to justify plutocracy to the mediaeval man by talking about the Struggle for Life and the Survival of the Fittest; and how the strongest man seized authority by means of anarchy, and proved himself a gentleman by behaving like a cad. Now I do not base my beliefs on the theology of John Ball, or on the literal and materialistic reading of the text of Genesis; though I think the story of Adam and Eve infinitely less absurd and unlikely than that of the prehistoric ‘strongest man’ who could fight a hundred men. But I do note the fact that the idealism of the leveller could be put in the form of an appeal to Scripture, and could not be put in the form of an appeal to Science. And I do note also that democrats were still driven to make the same appeal even in the very century of Science. Tennyson was, if ever there was one, an evolutionist in his vision and an aristocrat in his sympathies. He was always boasting that John Bull was evolutionary and not revolutionary, even as these Frenchmen. He did not pretend to have any creed beyond faintly trusting the larger hope. But when human dignity is really in danger, John Bull has to use the same old argument as John Ball. He tells Lady Clara Vere de Vere that ‘the gardener Adam and his wife smile at the claim of long descent’; their own descent being by no means long. Lady Clara might surely have scored off him pretty smartly by quoting from ‘Maud’ and ‘In Memoriam’ about evolution and the eft that was lord of valley and hill. But Tennyson has evidently forgotten all about Darwin and the long descent of man. If this was true of an evolutionist like Tennyson, it was naturally ten times truer of a revolutionist like Jefferson. The Declaration of Independence
dogmatically bases all rights on the fact that God created all men equal; and it is right; for if they were not created equal, they were certainly evolved unequal.

There is no basis for democracy except in a dogma about the divine origin of man. That is a perfectly simple fact which the modern world will find out more and more to be a fact. Every other basis is a sort of sentimental confusion, full of merely verbal echoes of the older creeds. Those verbal associations are always vain for the vital purpose of constraining the tyrant. An idealist may say to a capitalist, ‘Don’t you sometimes feel in the rich twilight, when the lights twinkle from the distant hamlet in the hills, that all humanity is a holy family?’ But it is equally possible for the capitalist to reply with brevity and decision, ‘No, I don’t,’ and there is no more disputing about it further than about the beauty of a fading cloud. And the modern world of moods is a world of clouds, even if some of them are thunderclouds.

For I have only taken here, as a convenient working model, the case of negro slavery; because it was long peculiar to America and is popularly associated with it. It is more and more obvious that the line is no longer running between black and white but between rich and poor. As I have already noted in the case of Prohibition, the very same arguments of the inevitable suicide of the ignorant, of the impossibility of freedom for the unfit, which were once applied to barbarians brought from Africa are now applied to citizens born in America. It is argued even by industrialists that industrialism has produced a class submerged below the status of emancipated mankind. They imply that the Missing Link is no longer missing, even from England or the Northern States, and that the factories have manufactured their own monkeys. Scientific hypotheses about the feeble-minded and the criminal type will supply the masters of the modern world with more and more excuses for denying the dogma of equality in the case of white labour as well as black. And any man who knows the world knows perfectly well that to tell the millionaires, or their servants, that they are disappointing the sentiments of Thomas Jefferson, or disregarding a creed composed in the eighteenth century, will be about as effective as telling them that they are not observing the creed of St. Athanasius or keeping the rule of St. Benedict.

The world cannot keep its own ideals. The secular order cannot make secure any one of its own noble and natural conceptions of secular perfection. That will be found, as time goes on, the ultimate argument for a Church independent of the world and the secular order. What has become of all those ideal figures from the Wise Man of the Stoics to the democratic Deist of the eighteenth century? What has become of all that purely human hierarchy of chivalry, with its punctilious
pattern of the good knight, its ardent ambition in the young squire? The very name of knight has come to represent the petty triumph of a profiteer, and the very word squire the petty tyranny of a landlord. What has become of all that golden liberality of the Humanists, who found on the high tablelands of the culture of Hellas the very balance of repose in beauty that is most lacking in the modern world? The very Greek language that they loved has become a mere label for snuffy and snobbish dons, and a mere cock-shy for cheap and half-educated utilitarians, who make it a symbol of superstition and reaction. We have lived to see a time when the heroic legend of the Republic and the Citizen, which seemed to Jefferson the eternal youth of the world, has begun to grow old in its turn. We cannot recover the earthly estate of knighthood, to which all the colours and complications of heraldry seemed as fresh and natural as flowers. We cannot re-enact the intellectual experiences of the Humanists, for whom the Greek grammar was like the song of a bird in spring. The more the matter is considered the clearer it will seem that these old experiences are now only alive, where they have found a lodgment in the Catholic tradition of Christendom, and made themselves friends for ever. St. Francis is the only surviving troubadour. St. Thomas More is the only surviving Humanist. St. Louis is the only surviving knight.

It would be the worst sort of insincerity, therefore, to conclude even so hazy an outline of so great and majestic a matter as the American democratic experiment, without testifying my belief that to this also the same ultimate test will come. So far as that democracy becomes or remains Catholic and Christian, that democracy will remain democratic. In so far as it does not, it will become wildly and wickedly undemocratic. Its rich will riot with a brutal indifference far beyond the feeble feudalism which retains some shadow of responsibility or at least of patronage. Its wage-slaves will either sink into heathen slavery, or seek relief in theories that are destructive not merely in method but in aim; since they are but the negations of the human appetites of property and personality. Eighteenth-century ideals, formulated in eighteenth-century language, have no longer in themselves the power to hold all those pagan passions back. Even those documents depended upon Deism; their real strength will survive in men who are still Deists; and the men who are still Deists are more than Deists. Men will more and more realise that there is no meaning in democracy if there is no meaning in anything; and that there is no meaning in anything if the universe has not a centre of significance and an authority that is the author of our rights. There is truth in every ancient fable, and there is here even something of it in the
fancy that finds the symbol of the Republic in the bird that bore the bolts of Jove. Owls and bats may wander where they will in darkness, and for them as for the sceptics the universe may have no centre; kites and vultures may linger as they like over carrion, and for them as for the plutocrats existence may have no origin and no end; but it was far back in the land of legends, where instincts find their true images, that the cry went forth that freedom is an eagle, whose glory is gazing at the sun.
THE NEW JERUSALEM

G. K. CHESTERTON
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

THE NEW JERUSALEM

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

CHAPTER I
THE WAY OF THE CITIES

CHAPTER II
THE WAY OF THE DESERT

CHAPTER III
THE GATES OF THE CITY

CHAPTER IV
THE PHILOSOPHY OF SIGHT-SEEING

CHAPTER V
THE STREETS OF THE CITY

CHAPTER VI
THE GROUPS OF THE CITY

CHAPTER VII
THE SHADOW OF THE PROBLEM

CHAPTER VIII
THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DESERT

CHAPTER IX
THE BATTLE WITH THE DRAGON

CHAPTER X
THE ENDLESS EMPIRE

CHAPTER XI
THE MEANING OF THE CRUSADE

CHAPTER XII
THE FALL OF CHIVALRY

CHAPTER XIII
THE PROBLEM OF ZIONISM

CONCLUSION
PREFACE

This book is only an uncomfortably large note-book; and it has the disadvantages, whether or no it has the advantages, of notes that were taken on the spot. Owing to the unexpected distraction of other duties, the notes were published in a newspaper as they were made on the spot; and are now reproduced in a book as they were published in the newspaper. The only exception refers to the last chapter on Zionism; and even there the book only reverts to the original note-book. A difference of opinion, which divided the writer of the book from the politics of the newspaper, prevented the complete publication of that chapter in that place. I recognise that any expurgated form of it would have falsified the proportions of my attempt to do justice in a very difficult problem; but on re-reading even my own attempt in extenso, I am far from satisfied that the proper proportions are kept. I wrote these first impressions in Palestine, where everybody recognises the Jew as something quite distinct from the Englishman or the European; and where his unpopularity even moved me in the direction of his defence. But I admit it was something of a shock to return to a conventional atmosphere, in which that unpopularity is still actually denied or described as mere persecution. It was more of a shock to realise that this most obscurantist of all types of obscurantism is still sometimes regarded as a sort of liberalism. To talk of the Jews always as the oppressed and never as the oppressors is simply absurd; it is as if men pleaded for reasonable help for exiled French aristocrats or ruined Irish landlords, and forgot that the French and Irish peasants had any wrongs at all. Moreover, the Jews in the West do not seem so much concerned to ask, as I have done however tentatively here, whether a larger and less local colonial development might really transfer the bulk of Israel to a more independent basis, as simply to demand that Jews shall continue to control other nations as well as their own. It might be worth while for England to take risks to settle the Jewish problem; but not to take risks merely to unsettle the Arab problem, and leave the Jewish problem unsolved.

For the rest, there must under the circumstances be only too many mistakes; the historical conjectures, for they can be no more, are founded on authorities sufficiently recognised for me to be permitted to trust them; but I have never pretended to the knowledge necessary to check them. I am aware that there are many disputed points; as for instance the connection of Gerard, the fiery Templar, with the English town of Bideford. I am also aware that some are
sensitive about the spelling of words; and the very proof-readers will sometimes revolt and turn Mahomet into Mohammed. Upon this point, however, I am unrepentant; for I never could see the point of altering a form with historic and even heroic fame in our own language, for the sake of reproducing by an arrangement of our letters something that is really written in quite different letters, and probably pronounced with quite a different accent. In speaking of the great prophet I am therefore resolved to call him Mahomet; and am prepared, on further provocation, to call him Mahound.

G. K. C.
CHAPTER I

THE WAY OF THE CITIES

It was in the season of Christmas that I came out of my little garden in that “field of the beeches” between the Chilterns and the Thames, and began to walk backwards through history to the place from which Christmas came. For it is often necessary to walk backwards, as a man on the wrong road goes back to a sign-post to find the right road. The modern man is more like a traveller who has forgotten the name of his destination, and has to go back whence he came, even to find out where he is going. That the world has lost its way few will now deny; and it did seem to me that I found at last a sort of sign-post, of a singular and significant shape, and saw for a moment in my mind the true map of the modern wanderings; but whether I shall be able to say anything of what I saw, this story must show.

I had said farewell to all my friends, or all those with my own limited number of legs; and nothing living remained but a dog and a donkey. The reader will learn with surprise that my first feeling of fellowship went out to the dog; I am well aware that I lay open my guard to a lunge of wit. The dog is rather like a donkey, or a small caricature of one, with a large black head and long black ears; but in the mood of the moment there was rather a moral contrast than a pictorial parallel. For the dog did indeed seem to stand for home and everything I was leaving behind me, with reluctance, especially that season of the year. For one thing, he is named after Mr. Winkle, the Christmas guest of Mr. Wardle; and there is indeed something Dickensian in his union of domesticity with exuberance. He jumped about me, barking like a small battery, under the impression that I was going for a walk; but I could not, alas, take him with me on a stroll to Palestine. Incidentally, he would have been out of place; for dogs have not their due honour in the East; and this seemed to sharpen my sense of my own domestic sentinel as a sort of symbol of the West. On the other hand, the East is full of donkeys, often very dignified donkeys; and when I turned my attention to the other grotesque quadruped, with an even larger head and even longer ears, he seemed to take on a deep shade of oriental mystery. I know not why these two absurd creatures tangled themselves up so much in my train of thought, like dragons in an illuminated text; or ramped like gargoyles on either side of the gateway of my adventure. But in truth they were in some sense
symbols of the West and the East after all. The dog’s very lawlessness is but an extravagance of loyalty; he will go mad with joy three times on the same day, at going out for a walk down the same road. The modern world is full of fantastic forms of animal worship; a religion generally accompanied with human sacrifice. Yet we hear strangely little of the real merits of animals; and one of them surely is this innocence of all boredom; perhaps such simplicity is the absence of sin. I have some sense myself of the sacred duty of surprise; and the need of seeing the old road as a new road. But I cannot claim that whenever I go out for a walk with my family and friends, I rush in front of them volleying vociferous shouts of happiness; or even leap up round them attempting to lick their faces. It is in this power of beginning again with energy upon familiar and homely things that the dog is really the eternal type of the Western civilisation. And the donkey is really as different as is the Eastern civilisation. His very anarchy is a sort of secrecy; his very revolt is a secret. He does not leap up because he wishes to share my walk, but to follow his own way, as lonely as the wild ass of Scripture. My own beast of burden supports the authority of Scripture by being a very wild ass. I have given him the name of Trotsky, because he seldom trots, but either scampers or stands still. He scampers all over the field when it is necessary to catch him, and stands still when it is really urgent to drive him. He also breaks fences, eats vegetables, and fulfills other functions; between delays and destructions he could ruin a really poor man in a day. I wish this fact were more often remembered, in judging whether really poor men have really been cruel to donkeys. But I assure the reader that I am not cruel to my donkey; the cruelty is all the other way. He kicks the people who try to catch him; and again I am haunted by a dim human parallel. For it seems to me that many of us, in just detestation of the dirty trick of cruelty to animals, have really a great deal of patience with animals; more patience, I fear, than many of us have with human beings. Suppose I had to go out and catch my secretary in a field every morning; and suppose my secretary always kicked me by way of beginning the day’s work; I wonder whether that day’s work would resume its normal course as if nothing had happened. Nothing graver than these grotesque images and groping speculations would come into my conscious mind just then, though at the back of it there was an indescribable sense of regret and parting. All through my wanderings the dog remained in my memory as a Dickensian and domestic emblem of England; and if it is difficult to take a donkey seriously, it ought to be easiest, at least, for a man who is going to Jerusalem.

There was a cloud of Christmas weather on the great grey beech-woods and
the silver cross of the cross-roads. For the four roads that meet in the marketplace of my little town make one of the largest and simplest of such outlines on the map of England; and the shape as it shines on that wooded chart always affects me in a singular fashion. The sight of the cross-roads is in a true sense the sign of the cross. For it is the sign of a truly Christian thing; that sharp combination of liberty and limitation which we call choice. A man is entirely free to choose between right and left, or between right and wrong. As I looked for the last time at the pale roads under the load of cloud, I knew that our civilisation had indeed come to the cross-roads. As the paths grew fainter, fading under the gathering shadow, I felt rather as if it had lost its way in a forest.

It was at the time when people were talking about some menace of the end of the world, not apocalyptic but astronomical; and the cloud that covered the little town of Beaconsfield might have fitted in with such a fancy. It faded, however, as I left the place further behind; and in London the weather, though wet, was comparatively clear. It was almost as if Beaconsfield had a domestic day of judgment, and an end of the world all to itself. In a sense Beaconsfield has four ends of the world, for its four corners are named “ends” after the four nearest towns. But I was concerned only with the one called London End; and the very name of it was like a vision of some vain thing at once ultimate and infinite. The very title of London End sounds like the other end of nowhere, or (what is worse) of everywhere. It suggests a sort of derisive riddle; where does London End? As I came up through the vast vague suburbs, it was this sense of London as a shapeless and endless muddle that chiefly filled my mind. I seemed still to carry the cloud with me; and when I looked up, I almost expected to see the chimney-pots as tangled as the trees.

And in truth if there was now no material fog, there was any amount of mental and moral fog. The whole industrial world symbolised by London had reached a curious complication and confusion, not easy to parallel in human history. It is not a question of controversies, but rather of cross-purposes. As I went by Charing Cross my eye caught a poster about Labour politics, with something about the threat of Direct Action and a demand for Nationalisation. And quite apart from the merits of the case, it struck me that after all the direct action is very indirect, and the thing demanded is many steps away from the thing desired. It is all part of a sort of tangle, in which terms and things cut across each other. The employers talk about “private enterprise,” as if there were anything private about modern enterprise. Its combines are as big as many commonwealths; and things advertised in large letters on the sky cannot plead
the shy privileges of privacy. Meanwhile the Labour men talk about the need to “nationalise” the mines or the land, as if it were not the great difficulty in a plutocracy to nationalise the Government, or even to nationalise the nation. The Capitalists praise competition while they create monopoly; the Socialists urge a strike to turn workmen into soldiers and state officials; which is logically a strike against strikes. I merely mention it as an example of the bewildering inconsistency, and for no controversial purpose. My own sympathies are with the Socialists; in so far that there is something to be said for Socialism, and nothing to be said for Capitalism. But the point is that when there is something to be said for one thing, it is now commonly said in support of the opposite thing. Never since the mob called out, “Less bread! More taxes!” in the nonsense story, has there been so truly nonsensical a situation as that in which the strikers demand Government control and the Government denounces its own control as anarchy. The mob howls before the palace gates, “Hateful tyrant, we demand that you assume more despotic powers”; and the tyrant thunders from the balcony, “Vile rebels, do you dare to suggest that my powers should be extended?” There seems to be a little misunderstanding somewhere.

In truth everything I saw told me that there was a large misunderstanding everywhere; a misunderstanding amounting to a mess. And as this was the last impression that London left on me, so it was the impression I carried with me about the whole modern problem of Western civilisation, as a riddle to be read or a knot to be untied. To untie it it is necessary to get hold of the right end of it, and especially the other end of it. We must begin at the beginning; we must return to our first origins in history, as we must return to our first principles in philosophy. We must consider how we came to be doing what we do, and even saying what we say. As it is, the very terms we use are either meaningless or something more than meaningless, inconsistent even with themselves. This applies, for instance, to the talk of both sides in that Labour controversy, which I merely took in passing, because it was the current controversy in London when I left. The Capitalists say Bolshevism as one might say Boojum. It is merely a mystical and imaginative word suggesting horror. But it might mean many things; including some just and rational things. On the other hand, there could never be any meaning at all in the phrase “the dictatorship of the proletariat.” It is like saying, “the omnipotence of omnibus-conductors.” It is fairly obvious that if an omnibus-conductor were omnipotent, he would probably prefer to conduct something else besides an omnibus. Whatever its exponents mean, it is clearly something different from what they say; and even this verbal inconsistency, this
mere welter of words, is a sign of the common confusion of thought. It is this sort of thing that made London seem like a limbo of lost words, and possibly of lost wits. And it is here we find the value of what I have called walking backwards through history.

It is one of the rare merits of modern mechanical travel that it enables us to compare widely different cities in rapid succession. The stages of my own progress were the chief cities of separate countries; and though more is lost in missing the countries, something is gained in so sharply contrasting the capitals. And again it was one of the advantages of my own progress that it was a progress backwards; that it happened, as I have said, to retrace the course of history to older and older things; to Paris and to Rome and to Egypt, and almost, as it were, to Eden. And finally it is one of the advantages of such a return that it did really begin to clarify the confusion of names and notions in modern society. I first became conscious of this when I went out of the Gare de Lyon and walked along a row of cafes, until I saw again a distant column crowned with a dancing figure; the freedom that danced over the fall of the Bastille. Here at least, I thought, is an origin and a standard, such as I missed in the mere muddle of industrial opportunism. The modern industrial world is not in the least democratic; but it is supposed to be democratic, or supposed to be trying to be democratic. The ninth century, the time of the Norse invasions, was not saintly in the sense of being filled with saints; it was filled with pirates and petty tyrants, and the first feudal anarchy. But sanctity was the only ideal those barbarians had, when they had any at all. And democracy is the only ideal the industrial millions have, when they have any at all. Sanctity was the light of the Dark Ages, or if you will the dream of the Dark Ages. And democracy is the dream of the dark age of industrialism; if it be very much of a dream. It is this which prophets promise to achieve, and politicians pretend to achieve, and poets sometimes desire to achieve, and sometimes only desire to desire. In a word, an equal citizenship is quite the reverse of the reality in the modern world; but it is still the ideal in the modern world. At any rate it has no other ideal. If the figure that has alighted on the column in the Place de la Bastille be indeed the spirit of liberty, it must see a million growths in a modern city to make it wish to fly back again into heaven. But our secular society would not know what goddess to put on the pillar in its place.

As I looked at that sculptured goddess on that classical column, my mind went back another historic stage, and I asked myself where this classic and republican ideal came from, and the answer was equally clear. The place from which it had
come was the place to which I was going; Rome. And it was not until I had reached Rome that I adequately realised the next great reality that simplified the whole story, and even this particular part of the story. I know nothing more abruptly arresting than that sudden steepness, as of streets scaling the sky, where stands, now caséd in tile and brick and stone, that small rock that rose and overshadowed the whole earth; the Capitol. Here in the grey dawn of our history sat the strong Republic that set her foot upon the necks of kings; and it was from here assuredly that the spirit of the Republic flew like an eagle to alight on that far-off pillar in the country of the Gauls. For it ought to be remembered (and it is too often forgotten) that if Paris inherited what may be called the authority of Rome, it is equally true that Rome anticipated all that is sometimes called the anarchy of Paris. The expansion of the Roman Empire was accompanied by a sort of permanent Roman Revolution, fully as furious as the French Revolution. So long as the Roman system was really strong, it was full of riots and mobs and democratic divisions; and any number of Bastilles fell as the temple of the victories rose. But though I had but a hurried glance at such things, there were among them some that further aided the solution of the problem. I saw the larger achievements of the later Romans; and the lesson that was still lacking was plainly there. I saw the Coliseum, a monument of that love of looking on at athletic sports, which is noted as a sign of decadence in the Roman Empire and of energy in the British Empire. I saw the Baths of Caracalla, witnessing to a cult of cleanliness, adduced also to prove the luxury of Ancient Romans and the simplicity of Anglo-Saxons. All it really proves either way is a love of washing on a large scale; which might merely indicate that Caracalla, like other Emperors, was a lunatic. But indeed what such things do indicate, if only indirectly, is something which is here much more important. They indicate not only a sincerity in the public spirit, but a certain smoothness in the public services. In a word, while there were many revolutions, there were no strikes. The citizens were often rebels; but there were men who were not rebels, because they were not citizens. The ancient world forced a number of people to do the work of the world first, before it allowed more privileged people to fight about the government of the world. The truth is trite enough, of course; it is in the single word Slavery, which is not the name of a crime like Simony, but rather of a scheme like Socialism. Sometimes very like Socialism.

Only standing idly on one of those grassy mounds under one of those broken arches, I suddenly saw the Labour problem of London, as I could not see it in London. I do not mean that I saw which side was right, or what solution was
reliable, or any partisan points or repartees, or any practical details about practical difficulties. I mean that I saw what it was; the thing itself and the whole thing. The Labour problem of to-day stood up quite simply, like a peak at which a man looks back and sees single and solid, though when he was walking over it it was a wilderness of rocks. The Labour problem is the attempt to have the democracy of Paris without the slavery of Rome. Between the Roman Republic and the French Republic something had happened. Whatever else it was, it was the abandonment of the ancient and fundamental human habit of slavery; the numbering of men for necessary labour as the normal foundation of society, even a society in which citizens were free and equal. When the idea of equal citizenship returned to the world, it found that world changed by a much more mysterious version of equality. So that London, handing on the lamp from Paris as well as Rome, is faced with a new problem touching the old practice of getting the work of the world done somehow. We have now to assume not only that all citizens are equal, but that all men are citizens. Capitalism attempted it by combining political equality with economic inequality; it assumed the rich could always hire the poor. But Capitalism seems to me to have collapsed; to be not only a discredited ethic but a bankrupt business. Whether we shall return to pagan slavery, or to small property, or by guilds or otherwise get to work in a new way, is not the question here. The question here was the one I asked myself standing on that green mound beside the yellow river; and the answer to it lay ahead of me, along the road that ran towards the rising sun.

What made the difference? What was it that had happened between the rise of the Roman Republic and the rise of the French Republic? Why did the equal citizens of the first take it for granted that there would be slaves? Why did the equal citizens of the second take it for granted that there would not be slaves? How had this immemorial institution disappeared in the interval, so that nobody even dreamed of it or suggested it? How was it that when equality returned, it was no longer the equality of citizens, and had to be the equality of men? The answer is that this equality of men is in more senses than one a mystery. It is a mystery which I pondered as I stood in the corridor of the train going south from Rome. It was at daybreak, and (as it happened) before any one else had risen, that I looked out of the long row of windows across a great landscape grey with olives and still dark against the dawn. The dawn itself looked rather like a row of wonderful windows; a line of low casements unshuttered and shining under the eaves of cloud. There was a curious clarity about the sunrise; as if its sun might be made of glass rather than gold. It was the first time I had seen so closely and
covering such a landscape the grey convolutions and hoary foliage of the olive; and all those twisted trees went by like a dance of dragons in a dream. The rocking railway-train and the vanishing railway-line seemed to be going due east, as if disappearing into the sun; and save for the noise of the train there was no sound in all that grey and silver solitude; not even the sound of a bird. Yet the plantations were mostly marked out in private plots and bore every trace of the care of private owners. It is seldom, I confess, that I so catch the world asleep, nor do I know why my answer should have come to me thus when I was myself only half-awake. It is common in such a case to see some new signal or landmark; but in my experience it is rather the things already grown familiar that suddenly grow strange and significant. A million olives must have flashed by before I saw the first olive; the first, so to speak, which really waved the olive branch. For I remembered at last to what land I was going; and I knew the name of the magic which had made all those peasants out of pagan slaves, and has presented to the modern world a new problem of labour and liberty. It was as if I already saw against the clouds of daybreak that mountain which takes its title from the olive: and standing half visible upon it, a figure at which I did not look. Ex oriente lux; and I knew what dawn had broken over the ruins of Rome.

I have taken but this one text or label, out of a hundred such, the matter of labour and liberty; and thought it worth while to trace it from one blatant and bewildering yellow poster in the London streets to its high places in history. But it is only one example of the way in which a thousand things grouped themselves and fell into perspective as I passed farther and farther from them, and drew near the central origins of civilisation. I do not say that I saw the solution; but I saw the problem. In the litter of journalism and the chatter of politics, it is too much of a puzzle even to be a problem. For instance, a friend of mine described his book, The Path to Rome, as a journey through all Europe that the Faith had saved; and I might very well describe my own journey as one through all Europe that the War has saved. The trail of the actual fighting, of course, was awfully apparent everywhere; the plantations of pale crosses seemed to crop up on every side like growing things; and the first French villages through which I passed had heard in the distance, day and night, the guns of the long battle-line, like the breaking of an endless exterior sea of night upon the very borderland of the world. I felt it most as we passed the noble towers of Amiens, so near the high-water mark of the high tide of barbarism, in that night of terror just before the turning of the tide. For the truth which thus grew clearer with travel is rightly represented by the metaphor of the artillery, as the thunder and surf of a sea
beyond the world. Whatever else the war was, it was like the resistance of something as solid as land, and sometimes as patient and inert as land, against something as unstable as water, as weak as water; but also as strong as water, as strong as water is in a cataract or a flood. It was the resistance of form to formlessness; that version or vision of it seemed to clarify itself more and more as I went on. It was the defence of that same ancient enclosure in which stood the broken columns of the Roman forum and the column in the Paris square, and of all other such enclosures down to the domestic enclosures of my own dog and donkey. All had the same design, the marking out of a square for the experiment of liberty; of the old civic liberty or the later universal liberty. I knew, to take the domestic metaphor, that the watchdog of the West had again proved too strong for the wild dogs of the Orient. For the foes of such creative limits are chaos and old night, whether they are the Northern barbarism that pitted tribal pride and brutal drill against the civic ideal of Paris, or the Eastern barbarism that brought brigands out of the wilds of Asia to sit on the throne of Byzantium. And as in the other case, what I saw was something simpler and larger than all the disputed details about the war and the peace. A man may think it extraordinary, as I do, that the natural dissolution of the artificial German Empire into smaller states should have actually been prevented by its enemies, when it was already accepted in despair by its friends. For we are now trying hard to hold the Prussian system together, having hammered hard for four mortal years to burst it asunder. Or he may think exactly the opposite; it makes no difference to the larger fact I have in mind. A man may think it simply topsy-turvy, as I do, that we should clear the Turks out of Turkey, but leave them in Constantinople. For that is driving the barbarians from their own rude tillage and pasturage, and giving up to them our own European and Christian city; it is as if the Romans annexed Parthia but surrendered Rome. But he may think exactly the opposite; and the larger and simpler truth will still be there. It was that the weeds and wild things had been everywhere breaking into our boundaries, climbing over the northern wall or crawling through the eastern gate, so that the city would soon have been swallowed in the jungle. And whether the lines had been redrawn logically or loosely, or particular things cleared with consistency or caprice, a line has been drawn somewhere and a clearance has been made somehow. The ancient plan of our city has been saved; a city at least capable of containing citizens. I felt this in the chance relics of the war itself; I felt it twenty times more in those older relics which even the war had never touched at all; I felt the change as much in the changeless East as in the ever-changing West. I felt it
when I crossed another great square in Paris to look at a certain statue, which I had last seen hung with crape and such garlands as we give the dead; but on whose plain pedestal nothing now is left but the single word “Strasbourg.” I felt it when I saw words merely scribbled with a pencil on a wall in a poor street in Brindisi; Italia vittoriosa. But I felt it as much or even more in things infinitely more ancient and remote; in those monuments like mountains that still seem to look down upon all modern things. For these things were more than a trophy that had been raised, they were a palladium that had been rescued. These were the things that had again been saved from chaos, as they were saved at Salamis and Lepanto; and I knew what had saved them or at least in what formation they had been saved. I knew that these scattered splendours of antiquity would hardly have descended to us at all, to be endangered or delivered, if all that pagan world had not crystallised into Christendom.

Crossing seas as smooth as pavements inlaid with turquoise and lapis lazuli, and relieved with marble mountains as clear and famous as marble statues, it was easy to feel all that had been pure and radiant even in the long evening of paganism; but that did not make me forget what strong stars had comforted the inevitable night. The historical moral was the same whether these marble outlines were merely “the isles” seen afar off like sunset clouds by the Hebrew prophets, or were felt indeed as Hellas, the great archipelago of arts and arms praised by the Greek poets; the historic heritage of both descended only to the Greek Fathers. In those wild times and places, the thing that preserved both was the only thing that would have permanently preserved either. It was but part of the same story when we passed the hoary hills that held the primeval culture of Crete, and remembered that it may well have been the first home of the Philistines. It mattered the less by now whether the pagans were best represented by Poseidon the deity or by Dagon the demon. It mattered the less what gods had blessed the Greeks in their youth and liberty; for I knew what god had blessed them in their despair. I knew by what sign they had survived the long slavery under Ottoman orientalism; and upon what name they had called in the darkness, when there was no light but the horned moon of Mahound. If the glory of Greece has survived in some sense, I knew why it had ever survived in any sense. Nor did this feeling of our fixed formation fail me when I came to the very gates of Asia and of Africa; when there rose out of the same blue seas the great harbour of Alexandria; where had shone the Pharos like the star of Hellas, and where men had heard from the lips of Hypatia the last words of Plato. I know the Christians tore Hypatia in pieces; but they did not tear Plato in pieces. The wild
men that rode behind Omar the Arab would have thought nothing of tearing every page of Plato in pieces. For it is the nature of all this outer nomadic anarchy that it is capable sooner or later of tearing anything and everything in pieces; it has no instinct of preservation or of the permanent needs of men. Where it has passed the ruins remain ruins and are not renewed; where it has been resisted and rolled back, the links of our long history are never lost. As I went forward the vision of our own civilisation, in the form in which it finally found unity, grew clearer and clearer; nor did I ever know it more certainly than when I had left it behind.

For the vision was that of a shape appearing and reappearing among shapeless things; and it was a shape I knew. The imagination was forced to rise into altitudes infinitely ancient and dizzy with distance, as if into the cold colours of primeval dawns, or into the upper strata and dead spaces of a daylight older than the sun and moon. But the character of that central clearance still became clearer and clearer. And my memory turned again homewards; and I thought it was like the vision of a man flying from Northolt, over that little market-place beside my own door; who can see nothing below him but a waste as of grey forests, and the pale pattern of a cross.
CHAPTER II

THE WAY OF THE DESERT

It may truly be said, touching the type of culture at least, that Egypt has an Egyptian lower class, a French middle class and an English governing class. Anyhow it is true that the civilisations are stratified in this formation, or superimposed in this order. It is the first impression produced by the darkness and density of the bazaars, the line of the lighted cafes and the blaze of the big hotels. But it contains a much deeper truth in all three cases, and especially in the case of the French influence. It is indeed one of the first examples of what I mean by the divisions of the West becoming clearer in the ancient centres of the East. It is often said that we can only appreciate the work of England in a place like India. In so far as this is true, it is quite equally true that we can only appreciate the work of France in a place like Egypt. But this work is of a peculiar and even paradoxical kind. It is too practical to be prominent, and so universal that it is unnoticed.

The French view of the Rights of Man is called visionary; but in practice it is very solid and even prosaic. The French have a unique and successful trick by which French things are not accepted as French. They are accepted as human. However many foreigners played football, they would still consider football an English thing. But they do not consider fencing a French thing, though all the terms of it are still French. If a Frenchman were to label his hostelry an inn or a public house (probably written publicouse) we should think him a victim of rather advanced Anglomania. But when an Englishman calls it an hotel, we feel no special dread of him either as a dangerous foreigner or a dangerous lunatic. We need not recognise less readily the value of this because our own distinction is different; especially as our own distinction is being more distinguished. The spirit of the English is adventure; and it is the essence of adventure that the adventurer does remain different from the strange tribes or strange cities, which he studies because of their strangeness. He does not become like them, as did some of the Germans, or persuade them to become like him, as do most of the French. But whether we like or dislike this French capacity, or merely appreciate it properly in its place, there can be no doubt about the cause of that capacity. The cause is in the spirit that is so often regarded as wildly Utopian and unreal. The cause is in the abstract creed of equality and citizenship; in the possession of
a political philosophy that appeals to all men. In truth men have never looked low enough for the success of the French Revolution. They have assumed that it claims to be a sort of divine and distant thing, and therefore have not noticed it in the nearest and most materialistic things. They have watched its wavering in the senate and never seen it walking in the streets; though it can be seen in the streets of Cairo as in the streets of Paris.

In Cairo a man thinks it English to go into a tea-shop; but he does not think it French to go into a cafe. And the people who go to the tea-shop, the English officers and officials, are stamped as English and also stamped as official. They are generally genial, they are generally generous, but they have the detachment of a governing group and even a garrison. They cannot be mistaken for human beings. The people going to a cafe are simply human beings going to it because it is a human place. They have forgotten how much is French and how much Egyptian in their civilisation; they simply think of it as civilisation. Now this character of the older French culture must be grasped because it is the clue to many things in the mystery of the modern East. I call it an old culture because as a matter of fact it runs back to the Roman culture. In this respect the Gauls really continue the work of the Romans, in making something official which comes at last to be regarded as ordinary. And the great fundamental fact which is incessantly forgotten and ought to be incessantly remembered, about these cities and provinces of the near East, is that they were once as Roman as Gaul.

There is a frivolous and fanciful debate I have often had with a friend, about whether it is better to find one’s way or to lose it, to remember the road or to forget it. I am so constituted as to be capable of losing my way in my own village and almost in my own house. And I am prepared to maintain the privilege to be a poetic one. In truth I am prepared to maintain that both attitudes are valuable, and should exist side by side. And so my friend and I walk side by side along the ways of the world, he being full of a rich and humane sentiment, because he remembers passing that way a few hundred times since his childhood; while to me existence is a perpetual fairy-tale, because I have forgotten all about it. The lamp-post which moves him to a tear of reminiscence wrings from me a cry of astonishment; and the wall which to him is as historic as a pyramid is to me as arresting and revolutionary as a barricade. Now in this, I am glad to say, my temperament is very English; and the difference is very typical of the two functions of the English and the French. But in practical politics the French have a certain advantage in knowing where they are, and knowing it is where they have been before. It is in the Roman Empire.
The position of the English in Egypt or even in Palestine is something of a paradox. The real English claim is never heard in England and never uttered by Englishmen. We do indeed hear a number of false English claims, and other English claims that are rather irrelevant than false. We hear pompous and hypocritical suggestions, full of that which so often accompanies the sin of pride, the weakness of provinciality. We hear suggestions that the English alone can establish anywhere a reign of law, justice, mercy, purity and all the rest of it. We also hear franker and fairer suggestions that the English have after all (as indeed they have) embarked on a spirited and stirring adventure; and that there has been a real romance in the extending of the British Empire in strange lands. But the real case for these semi-eastern occupations is not that of extending the British Empire in strange lands. Rather it is restoring the Roman Empire in familiar lands. It is not merely breaking out of Europe in the search for something non-European. It would be much truer to call it putting Europe together again after it had been broken. It may almost be said of the Britons, considered as the most western of Europeans, that they have so completely forgotten their own history that they have forgotten even their own rights. At any rate they have forgotten the claims that could reasonably be made for them, but which they never think of making for themselves. They have not the faintest notion, for instance, of why hundreds of years ago an English saint was taken from Egypt, or why an English king was fighting in Palestine. They merely have a vague idea that George of Cappadocia was naturalised much in the same way as George of Hanover. They almost certainly suppose that Coeur de Lion in his wanderings happened to meet the King of Egypt, as Captain Cook might happen to meet the King of the Cannibal Islands. To understand the past connection of England with the near East, it is necessary to understand something that lies behind Europe and even behind the Roman Empire; something that can only be conveyed by the name of the Mediterranean. When people talk, for instance, as if the Crusades were nothing more than an aggressive raid against Islam, they seem to forget in the strangest way that Islam itself was only an aggressive raid against the old and ordered civilisation in these parts. I do not say it in mere hostility to the religion of Mahomet; as will be apparent later, I am fully conscious of many values and virtues in it; but certainly it was Islam that was the invasion and Christendom that was the thing invaded. An Arabian gentleman found riding on the road to Paris or hammering on the gates of Vienna can hardly complain that we have sought him out in his simple tent in the desert. The conqueror of Sicily and Spain cannot reasonably express surprise at being an object of morbid curiosity to the
people of Italy and France. In the city of Cairo the stranger feels many of the Moslem merits, but he certainly feels the militaristic character of the Moslem glories. The crown of the city is the citadel, built by the great Saladin but of the spoils of ancient Egyptian architecture; and that fact is in its turn very symbolical. The man was a great conqueror, but he certainly behaved like an invader; he spoiled the Egyptians. He broke the old temples and tombs and built his own out of fragments. Nor is this the only respect in which the citadel of Cairo is set high like a sign in heaven. The sign is also significant because from this superb height the traveller first beholds the desert, out of which the great conquest came.

Every one has heard the great story of the Greeks who cried aloud in triumph when they saw the sea afar off; but it is a stranger experience to see the earth afar off. And few of us, strictly speaking, have ever seen the earth at all. In cultivated countries it is always clad, as it were, in green garments. The first sight of the desert is like the sight of a naked giant in the distance. The image is all the more natural because of the particular formation which it takes, at least as it borders upon the fields of Egypt, and as it is seen from the high places of Cairo. Those who have seen the desert only in pictures generally think of it as entirely flat. But this edge of it at least stands up on the horizon, as a line of wrinkled and hollow hills like the scalps of bald men; or worse, of bald women. For it is impossible not to think of such repulsive images, in spite of real sublimity of the call to the imagination. There is something curiously hostile and inhuman about the first appearance of the motionless surges of that dry and dreadful sea. Afterwards, if the traveller has happened to linger here and there in the outposts of the desert, has seen the British camp at Kantara or the graceful French garden town of Ismailia, he comes to take the desert as a background, and sometimes a beautiful background; a mirror of mighty reflections and changing colours almost as strange as the colours of the sea. But when it is first seen abutting, and as it were, advancing, upon the fields and gardens of humanity, then it looks indeed like an enemy, or a long line of enemies; like a line of tawny wild beasts thus halted with their heads lifted. It is the feeling that such vain and sterile sand can yet make itself into something like a mountain range; and the traveller remembers all the tragedies of the desert, when he lifts up his eyes to those accursed hills, from whence no help can come.

But this is only a first glimpse from a city set among green fields; and is concerned rather with what the desert has been in its relation to men than with what the desert is in itself. When the mind has grown used to its monotony, a
curious change takes place which I have never seen noted or explained by the students of mental science. It may sound strange to say that monotony of its nature becomes novelty. But if any one will try the common experiment of saying some ordinary word such as “moon” or “man” about fifty times, he will find that the expression has become extraordinary by sheer repetition. A man has become a strange animal with a name as queer as that of the gnu; and the moon something monstrous like the moon-calf. Something of this magic of monotony is effected by the monotony of deserts; and the traveller feels as if he had entered into a secret, and was looking at everything from another side. Something of this simplification appears, I think, in the religions of the desert, especially in the religion of Islam. It explains something of the super-human hopes that fill the desert prophets concerning the future; it explains something also about their barbarous indifference to the past.

We think of the desert and its stones as old; but in one sense they are unnaturally new. They are unused, and perhaps unusable. They might be the raw material of a world; only they are so raw as to be rejected. It is not easy to define this quality of something primitive, something not mature enough to be fruitful. Indeed there is a hard simplicity about many Eastern things that is as much crude as archaic. A palm-tree is very like a tree drawn by a child—or by a very futurist artist. Even a pyramid is like a mathematical figure drawn by a schoolmaster teaching children; and its very impressiveness is that of an ultimate Platonic abstraction. There is something curiously simple about the shape in which these colossal crystals of the ancient sands have been cast. It is only when we have felt something of this element, not only of simplicity, but of crudity, and even in a sense of novelty, that we can begin to understand both the immensity and the insufficiency of that power that came out of the desert, the great religion of Mahomet.

In the red circle of the desert, in the dark and secret place, the prophet discovers the obvious things. I do not say it merely as a sneer, for obvious things are very easily forgotten; and indeed every high civilisation decays by forgetting obvious things. But it is true that in such a solitude men tend to take very simple ideas as if they were entirely new ideas. There is a love of concentration which comes from the lack of comparison. The lonely man looking at the lonely palm-tree does see the elementary truths about the palm-tree; and the elementary truths are very essential. Thus he does see that though the palm-tree may be a very simple design, it was not he who designed it. It may look like a tree drawn by a child, but he is not the child who could draw it. He has not command of that
magic slate on which the pictures can come to life, or of that magic green chalk of which the green lines can grow. He sees at once that a power is at work in whose presence he and the palm-tree are alike little children. In other words, he is intelligent enough to believe in God; and the Moslem, the man of the desert, is intelligent enough to believe in God. But his belief is lacking in that humane complexity that comes from comparison. The man looking at the palm-tree does realise the simple fact that God made it; while the man looking at the lamp-post in a large modern city can be persuaded by a hundred sophistical circumlocutions that he made it himself. But the man in the desert cannot compare the palm-tree with the lamp-post, or even with all the other trees which may be better worth looking at than the lamp-post. Hence his religion, though true as far as it goes, has not the variety and vitality of the churches that were designed by men walking in the woods and orchards. I speak here of the Moslem type of religion and not of the oriental type of ornament, which is much older than the Moslem type of religion. But even the oriental type of ornament, admirable as it often is, is to the ornament of a gothic cathedral what a fossil forest is to a forest full of birds. In short, the man of the desert tends to simplify too much, and to take his first truth for the last truth. And as it is with religion so it is with morality. He who believes in the existence of God believes in the equality of man. And it has been one of the merits of the Moslem faith that it felt men as men, and was not incapable of welcoming men of many different races. But here again it was so hard and crude that its very equality was like a desert rather than a field. Its very humanity was inhuman.

But though this human sentiment is rather rudimentary it is very real. When a man in the desert meets another man, he is really a man; the proverbial two-legged fowl without feathers. He is an absolute and elementary shape, like the palm-tree or the pyramid. The discoverer does not pause to consider through what gradations he may have been evolved from a camel. When the man is a mere dot in the distance, the other man does not shout at him and ask whether he had a university education, or whether he is quite sure he is purely Teutonic and not Celtic or Iberian. A man is a man; and a man is a very important thing. One thing redeems the Moslem morality which can be set over against a mountain of crimes; a considerable deposit of common sense. And the first fact of common sense is the common bond of men. There is indeed in the Moslem character also a deep and most dangerous potentiality of fanaticism of the menace of which something may be said later. Fanaticism sounds like the flat contrary of common sense; yet curiously enough they are both sides of the same thing. The fanatic of
the desert is dangerous precisely because he does take his faith as a fact, and not
even as a truth in our more transcendental sense. When he does take up a
mystical idea he takes it as he takes the man or the palm-tree; that is, quite
literally. When he does distinguish somebody not as a man but as a Moslem,
then he divides the Moslem from the non-Moslem exactly as he divides the man
from the camel. But even then he recognises the equality of men in the sense of
the equality of Moslems. He does not, for instance, complicate his conscience
with any sham science about races. In this he has something like an intellectual
advantage over the Jew, who is generally so much his intellectual superior; and
even in some ways his spiritual superior. The Jew has far more moral
imagination and sympathy with the subtler ideals of the soul. For instance, it is
said that many Jews disbelieve in a future life; but if they did believe in a future
life, it would be something more worthy of the genius of Isaiah and Spinoza. The
Moslem Paradise is a very Earthly Paradise. But with all their fine
apprehensions, the Jews suffer from one heavy calamity; that of being a Chosen
Race. It is the vice of any patriotism or religion depending on race that the
individual is himself the thing to be worshipped; the individual is his own ideal,
and even his own idol. This fancy was fatal to the Germans; it is fatal to the
Anglo-Saxons, whenever any of them forswear the glorious name of Englishmen
and Americans to fall into that forlorn description. This is not so when the nation
is felt as a noble abstraction, of which the individual is proud in the abstract. A
Frenchman is proud of France, and therefore may think himself unworthy of
France. But a German is proud of being a German; and he cannot be too
unworthy to be a German when he is a German. In short, mere family pride
flatters every member of the family; it produced the arrogance of the Germans,
and it is capable of producing a much subtler kind of arrogance in the Jews.
From this particular sort of self-deception the more savage man of the desert is
free. If he is not considering somebody as a Moslem, he will consider him as a
man. At the price of something like barbarism, he has at least been saved from
ethnology.

But here again the obvious is a limit as well as a light to him. It does not
permit, for instance, anything fine or subtle in the sentiment of sex. Islam asserts
admirably the equality of men; but it is the equality of males. No one can deny
that a noble dignity is possible even to the poorest, who has seen the Arabs
coming in from the desert to the cities of Palestine or Egypt. No one can deny
that men whose rags are dropping off their backs can bear themselves in a way
befitting kings or prophets in the great stories of Scripture. No one can be
surprised that so many fine artists have delighted to draw such models on the spot, and to make realistic studies for illustrations to the Old and New Testaments. On the road to Cairo one may see twenty groups exactly like that of the Holy Family in the pictures of the Flight into Egypt; with only one difference. The man is riding on the ass.

In the East it is the male who is dignified and even ceremonial. Possibly that is why he wears skirts. I pointed out long ago that petticoats, which some regard as a garb of humiliation for women are really regarded as the only garb of magnificence for men, when they wish to be something more than men. They are worn by kings, by priests, and by judges. The male Moslem, especially in his own family, is the king and the priest and the judge. I do not mean merely that he is the master, as many would say of the male in many Western societies, especially simple and self-governing societies. I mean something more; I mean that he has not only the kingdom and the power but the glory, and even as it were the glamour. I mean he has not only the rough leadership that we often give to the man, but the special sort of social beauty and stateliness that we generally expect only of the woman. What we mean when we say that an ambitious man wants to have a fine woman at the head of the dinner-table, that the Moslem world really means when it expects to see a fine man at the head of the house. Even in the street he is the peacock, coloured much more splendidly than the peahen. Even when clad in comparatively sober and partly European costume, as outside the cafes of Cairo and the great cities, he exhibits this indefinable character not merely of dignity but of pomp. It can be traced even in the tarbouch, the minimum of Turkish attire worn by all the commercial classes; the thing more commonly called in England a fez. The fez is not a sort of smoking cap. It is a tower of scarlet often tall enough to be the head-dress of a priest. And it is a hat one cannot take off to a lady.

This fact is familiar enough in talk about Moslem and oriental life generally; but I only repeat it in order to refer it back to the same simplification which is the advantage and disadvantage of the philosophy of the desert. Chivalry is not an obvious idea. It is not as plain as a pike-staff or as a palm-tree. It is a delicate balance between the sexes which gives the rarest and most poetic kind of pleasure to those who can strike it. But it is not self-evident to a savage merely because he is also a sane man. It often seems to him as much a part of his own coarse common sense that all the fame and fun should go to the sex that is stronger and less tied, as that all the authority should go to the parents rather than the children. Pity for weakness he can understand; and the Moslem is quite
capable of giving royal alms to a cripple or an orphan. But reverence for weakness is to him simply meaningless. It is a mystical idea that is to him no more than a mystery. But the same is true touching what may be called the lighter side of the more civilised sentiment. This hard and literal view of life gives no place for that slight element of a magnanimous sort of play-acting, which has run through all our tales of true lovers in the West. Wherever there is chivalry there is courtesy; and wherever there is courtesy there is comedy. There is no comedy in the desert.

Another quite logical and consistent element, in the very logical and consistent creed we call Mahometanism, is the element that we call Vandalism. Since such few and obvious things alone are vital, and since a half-artistic half-antiquarian affection is not one of these things, and cannot be called obvious, it is largely left out. It is very difficult to say in a few well-chosen words exactly what is now the use of the Pyramids. Therefore Saladin, the great Saracen warrior, simply stripped the Pyramids to build a military fortress on the heights of Cairo. It is a little difficult to define exactly what is a man’s duty to the Sphinx; and therefore the Mamelukes used it entirely as a target. There was little in them of that double feeling, full of pathos and irony, which divided the hearts of the primitive Christians in presence of the great pagan literature and art. This is not concerned with brutal outbreaks of revenge which may be found on both sides, or with chivalrous caprices of toleration, which may also be found on both sides; it is concerned with the inmost mentality of the two religions, which must be understood in order to do justice to either. The Moslem mind never tended to that mystical mode of “loving yet leaving” with which Augustine cried aloud upon the ancient beauty, or Dante said farewell to Virgil when he left him in the limbo of the pagans. The Moslem traditions, unlike the medieval legends, do not suggest the image of a knight who kissed Venus before he killed her. We see in all the Christian ages this combination which is not a compromise, but rather a complexity made by two contrary enthusiasms; as when the Dark Ages copied out the pagan poems while denying the pagan legends; or when the popes of the Renascence imitated the Greek temples while denying the Greek gods. This high inconsistency is inconsistent with Islam. Islam, as I have said, takes everything literally, and does not know how to play with anything. And the cause of the contrast is the historical cause of which we must be conscious in all studies of this kind. The Christian Church had from a very early date the idea of reconstructing a whole civilisation, and even a complex civilisation. It was the attempt to make a new balance, which differed from the old balance of the stoics
of Rome; but which could not afford to lose its balance any more than they. It differed because the old system was one of many religions under one government, while the new was one of many governments under one religion. But the idea of variety in unity remained though it was in a sense reversed. A historical instinct made the men of the new Europe try hard to find a place for everything in the system, however much might be denied to the individual. Christians might lose everything, but Christendom, if possible, must not lose anything. The very nature of Islam, even at its best, was quite different from this. Nobody supposed, even subconsciously, that Mahomet meant to restore ancient Babylon as medievalism vaguely sought to restore ancient Rome. Nobody thought that the builders of the Mosque of Omar had looked at the Pyramids as the builders of St. Peter’s might have looked at the Parthenon. Islam began at the beginning; it was content with the idea that it had a great truth; as indeed it had a colossal truth. It was so huge a truth that it was hard to see it was a half-truth.

Islam was a movement; that is why it has ceased to move. For a movement can only be a mood. It may be a very necessary movement arising from a very noble mood, but sooner or later it must find its level in a larger philosophy, and be balanced against other things. Islam was a reaction towards simplicity; it was a violent simplification, which turned out to be an over-simplification. Stevenson has somewhere one of his perfectly picked phrases for an empty-minded man; that he has not one thought to rub against another while he waits for a train. The Moslem had one thought, and that a most vital one; the greatness of God which levels all men. But the Moslem had not one thought to rub against another, because he really had not another. It is the friction of two spiritual things, of tradition and invention, or of substance and symbol, from which the mind takes fire. The creeds condemned as complex have something like the secret of sex; they can breed thoughts.

An idealistic intellectual remarked recently that there were a great many things in the creed for which he had no use. He might just as well have said that there were a great many things in the Encyclopedia Britannica for which he had no use. It would probably have occurred to him that the work in question was meant for humanity and not for him. But even in the case of the Encyclopedia, it will often be found a stimulating exercise to read two articles on two widely different subjects and note where they touch. In fact there is really a great deal to be said for the man in Pickwick who read first about China and then about metaphysics and combined his information. But however this may be in the famous case of Chinese metaphysics, it is this which is chiefly lacking in
Arabian metaphysics. They suffer, as I have said of the palm-tree in the desert, from a lack of the vitality that comes from complexity, and of the complexity that comes from comparison. They suffer from having been in a single movement in a single direction; from having begun as a mood and ended rather as a mode, that is a mere custom or fashion. But any modern Christian thus criticising the Moslem movement will do well to criticise himself and his world at the same time. For in truth most modern things are mere movements in the same sense as the Moslem movement. They are at best fashions, in which one thing is exaggerated because it has been neglected. They are at worst mere monomanias, in which everything is neglected that one thing may be exaggerated. Good or bad, they are alike movements which in their nature can only move for a certain distance and then stop. Feminism, for instance, is in its nature a movement, and one that must stop somewhere. But the Suffragettes no more established a philosophy of the sexes by their feminism than the Arabs did by their anti-feminism. A woman can find her home on the hustings even less than in the harem; but such movements do not really attempt to find a final home for anybody or anything. Bolshevism is a movement; and in my opinion a very natural and just movement considered as a revolt against the crude cruelty of Capitalism. But when we find the Bolshevists making a rule that the drama “must encourage the proletarian spirit,” it is obvious that those who say so are not only maniacs but, what is more to the point here, are monomaniacs. Imagine having to apply that principle, let us say, to “Charley’s Aunt.” None of these things seek to establish a complete philosophy such as Aquinas founded on Aristotle. The only two modern men who attempted it were Comte and Herbert Spencer. Spencer, I think, was too small a man to do it at all; and Comte was a great enough man to show how difficult it is to do it in modern times. None of these movements can do anything but move; they have not discovered where to rest.

And this fact brings us back to the man of the desert, who moves and does not rest; but who has many superiorities to the restless races of the industrial city. Men who have been in the Manchester movement in 1860 and the Fabian movement in 1880 cannot sneer at a religious mood that lasted for eight hundred years. And those who tolerate the degraded homelessness of the slums cannot despise the much more dignified homelessness of the desert. Nevertheless, the thing is a homelessness and not a home; and there runs through it all the note of the nomad. The Moslem takes literally, as he takes everything, the truth that here we have no abiding city. He can see no meaning in the mysticism of materialism,
the sacramental idea that a French poet expressed so nobly, when he said that our earthly city is the body of the city of God. He has no true notion of building a house, or in our Western sense of recognising the kindred points of heaven and home. Even the exception to this rule is an exception at once terrible and touching. There is one house that the Moslem does build like a house and even a home, often with walls and roof and door; as square as a cottage, as solid as a fort. And that is his grave. A Moslem cemetery is literally like a little village. It is a village, as the saying goes, that one would not care to walk through at night. There is something singularly creepy about so strange a street of houses, each with a door that might be opened by a dead man. But in a less fanciful sense, there is about it something profoundly pathetic and human. Here indeed is the sailor home from sea, in the only port he will consent to call his home; here at last the nomad confesses the common need of men. But even about this there broods the presence of the desert and its dry bones of reason. He will accept nothing between a tent and a tomb.

The philosophy of the desert can only begin over again. It cannot grow; it cannot have what Protestants call progress and Catholics call development. There is death and hell in the desert when it does begin over again. There is always the possibility that a new prophet will rediscover the old truth; will find again written on the red sands the secret of the obvious. But it will always be the same secret, for which thousands of these simple and serious and splendidly valiant men will die. The highest message of Mahomet is a piece of divine tautology. The very cry that God is God is a repetition of words, like the repetitions of wide sands and rolling skies. The very phrase is like an everlasting echo, that can never cease to say the same sacred word; and when I saw afterwards the mightiest and most magnificent of all the mosques of that land, I found that its inscriptions had the same character of a deliberate and defiant sameness. The ancient Arabic alphabet and script is itself at once so elegant and so exact that it can be used as a fixed ornament, like the egg and dart pattern or the Greek key. It is as if we could make a heraldry of handwriting, or cover a wall-paper with signatures. But the literary style is as recurrent as the decorative style; perhaps that is why it can be used as a decorative style. Phrases are repeated again and again like ornamental stars or flowers. Many modern people, for example, imagine that the Athanasian Creed is full of vain repetitions; but that is because people are too lazy to listen to it, or not lucid enough to understand it. The same terms are used throughout, as they are in a proposition of Euclid. But the steps are all as differentiated and progressive as in a
proposition of Euclid. But in the inscriptions of the Mosque whole sentences seem to occur, not like the steps of an argument, but rather like the chorus of a song. This is the impression everywhere produced by this spirit of the sandy wastes; this is the voice of the desert, though the muezzin cries from the high turrets of the city. Indeed one is driven to repeating oneself about the repetition, so overpowering is the impression of the tall horizons of those tremendous plains, brooding upon the soul with all the solemn weight of the self-evident.

There is indeed another aspect of the desert, yet more ancient and momentous, of which I may speak; but here I only deal with its effect on this great religion of simplicity. For it is through the atmosphere of that religion that a man makes his way, as so many pilgrims have done, to the goal of this pilgrimage. Also this particular aspect remained the more sharply in my memory because of the suddenness with which I escaped from it. I had not expected the contrast; and it may have coloured all my after experiences. I descended from the desert train at Ludd, which had all the look of a large camp in the desert; appropriately enough perhaps, for it is the traditional birthplace of the soldier St. George. At the moment, however, there was nothing rousing or romantic about its appearance. It was perhaps unusually dreary; for heavy rain had fallen; and the water stood about in what it is easier to call large puddles than anything so poetic as small pools. A motor car sent by friends had halted beside the platform; I got into it with a not unusual vagueness about where I was going; and it wound its way up miry paths to a more rolling stretch of country with patches of cactus here and there. And then with a curious abruptness I became conscious that the whole huge desert had vanished, and I was in a new land. The dark red plains had rolled away like an enormous nightmare; and I found myself in a fresh and exceedingly pleasant dream.

I know it will seem fanciful; but for a moment I really felt as if I had come home; or rather to that home behind home for which we are all homesick. The lost memory of it is the life at once of faith and of fairy-tale. Groves glowing with oranges rose behind hedges of grotesque cactus or prickly pear; which really looked like green dragons guarding the golden apples of the Hesperides. On each side of the road were such flowers as I had never seen before under the sun; for indeed they seemed to have the sun in them rather than the sun on them. Clusters and crowds of crimson anemones were of a red not to be symbolised in blood or wine; but rather in the red glass that glows in the window dedicated to a martyr. Only in a wild Eastern tale could one picture a pilgrim or traveller finding such a garden in the desert; and I thought of the oldest tale of all and the
garden from which we came. But there was something in it yet more subtle; which there must be in the impression of any earthly paradise. It is vital to such a dream that things familiar should be mixed with things fantastic; as when an actual dream is filled with the faces of old friends. Sparrows, which seem to be the same all over the world, were darting hither and thither among the flowers; and I had the fancy that they were the souls of the town-sparrows of London and the smoky cities, and now gone wherever the good sparrows go. And a little way up the road before me, on the hill between the cactus hedges, I saw a grey donkey trotting; and I could almost have sworn that it was the donkey I had left at home.

He was trotting on ahead of me, and the outline of his erect and elfish ears was dark against the sky. He was evidently going somewhere with great determination; and I thought I knew to what appropriate place he was going, and that it was my fate to follow him like a moving omen. I lost sight of him later, for I had to complete the journey by train; but the train followed the same direction, which was up steeper and steeper hills. I began to realise more clearly where I was; and to know that the garden in the desert that had bloomed so suddenly about me had borne for many desert wanderers the name of the promised land. As the rocks rose higher and higher on every side, and hung over us like terrible and tangible clouds, I saw in the dim grass of the slopes below them something I had never seen before. It was a rainbow fallen upon the earth, with no part of it against the sky, but only the grasses and the flowers shining through its fine shades of fiery colour. I thought this also was like an omen; and in such a mood of idle mysticism there fell on me another accident which I was content to count for a third. For when the train stopped at last in the rain, and there was no other vehicle for the last lap of the journey, a very courteous officer, an army surgeon, gave me a seat in an ambulance wagon; and it was under the shield of the red cross that I entered Jerusalem.

For suddenly, between a post of the wagon and a wrack of rainy cloud I saw it, uplifted and withdrawn under all the arching heavens of its history, alone with its benediction and its blasphemy, the city that is set upon a hill, and cannot be hid.
CHAPTER III

THE GATES OF THE CITY

The men I met coming from Jerusalem reported all sorts of contradictory impressions; and yet my own impression contradicted them all. Their impressions were doubtless as true as mine; but I describe my own because it is true, and because I think it points to a neglected truth about the real Jerusalem. I need not say I did not expect the real Jerusalem to be the New Jerusalem; a city of charity and peace, any more than a city of chrysolite and pearl. I might more reasonably have expected an austere and ascetic place, oppressed with the weight of its destiny, with no inns except monasteries, and these sealed with the terrible silence of the Trappists; an awful city where men speak by signs in the street. I did not need the numberless jokes about Jerusalem to-day, to warn me against expecting this; anyhow I did not expect it, and certainly I did not find it. But neither did I find what I was much more inclined to expect; something at the other extreme. Many reports had led me to look for a truly cosmopolitan town, that is a truly conquered town. I looked for a place like Cairo, containing indeed old and interesting things, but open on every side to new and vulgar things; full of the touts who seem only created for the tourists and the tourists who seem only created for the touts. There may be more of this in the place than pleases those who would idealise it. But I fancy there is much less of it than is commonly supposed in the reaction from such an ideal. It does not, like Cairo, offer the exciting experience of twenty guides fighting for one traveller; of young Turks drinking American cocktails as a protest against Christian wine. The town is quite inconvenient enough to make it a decent place for pilgrims. Or a stranger might have imagined a place even less Western than Cairo, one of those villages of Palestine described in dusty old books of Biblical research. He might remember drawings like diagrams representing a well or a wine-press, rather a dry well, so to speak, and a wine-press very difficult to associate with wine. These hard colourless outlines never did justice to the colour of the East, but even to give it the colour of the East would not do justice to Jerusalem. If I had anticipated the Bagdad of all our dreams, a maze of bazaars glowing with gorgeous wares, I should have been wrong again. There is quite enough of this vivid and varied colour in Jerusalem, but it is not the first fact that arrests the attention, and certainly not the first that arrested mine. I give my own first
impression as a fact, for what it is worth and exactly as it came. I did not expect it, and it was some time before I even understood it. As soon as I was walking inside the walls of Jerusalem, I had an overwhelming impression that I was walking in the town of Rye, where it looks across the flat sea-meadows towards Winchelsea.

As I tried to explain this eccentric sentiment to myself, I was conscious of another which at once completed and contradicted it. It was not only like a memory of Rye, it was mixed with a memory of the Mount St. Michael, which stands among the sands of Normandy on the other side of the narrow seas. The first part of the sensation is that the traveller, as he walks the stony streets between the walls, feels that he is inside a fortress. But it is the paradox of such a place that, while he feels in a sense that he is in a prison, he also feels that he is on a precipice. The sense of being uplifted, and set on a high place, comes to him through the smallest cranny, or most accidental crack in rock or stone; it comes to him especially through those long narrow windows in the walls of the old fortifications; those slits in the stone through which the medieval archers used their bows and the medieval artists used their eyes, with even greater success. Those green glimpses of fields far below or of flats far away, which delight us and yet make us dizzy (by being both near and far) when seen through the windows of Memling, can often be seen from the walls of Jerusalem. Then I remembered that in the same strips of medieval landscape could be seen always, here and there, a steep hill crowned with a city of towers. And I knew I had the mystical and double pleasure of seeing such a hill and standing on it. A city that is set upon a hill cannot be hid; but it is more strange when the hill cannot anywhere be hid, even from the citizen in the city.

Then indeed I knew that what I saw was Jerusalem of the Crusaders; or at least Jerusalem of the Crusades. It was a medieval town, with walls and gates and a citadel, and built upon a hill to be defended by bowmen. The greater part of the actual walls now standing were built by Moslems late in the Middle Ages; but they are almost exactly like the walls that were being built by the Christians at or before that time. The Crusader Edward, afterwards Edward the First, reared such battlements far away among the rainy hills of Wales. I do not know what elements were originally Gothic or what originally Saracenic. The Crusaders and the Saracens constantly copied each other while they combated each other; indeed it is a fact always to be found in such combats. It is one of the arguments against war that are really human, and therefore are never used by humanitarians. The curse of war is that it does lead to more international
imitation; while in peace and freedom men can afford to have national variety. But some things in this country were certainly copied from the Christian invaders, and even if they are not Christian they are in many ways strangely European. The wall and gates which now stand, whatever stood before them and whatever comes after them, carry a memory of those men from the West who came here upon that wild adventure, who climbed this rock and clung to it so perilously from the victory of Godfrey to the victory of Saladin; and that is why this momentary Eastern exile reminded me so strangely of the hill of Rye and of home.

I do not forget, of course, that all these visible walls and towers are but the battlements and pinnacles of a buried city, or of many buried cities. I do not forget that such buildings have foundations that are to us almost like fossils; the gigantic fossils of some other geological epoch. Something may be said later of those lost empires whose very masterpieces are to us like petrified monsters. From this height, after long histories unrecorded, fell the forgotten idol of the Jebusites, on that day when David’s javelin-men scaled the citadel and carried through it, in darkness behind his coloured curtains, the god whose image had never been made by man. Here was waged that endless war between the graven gods of the plain and the invisible god of the mountain; from here the hosts carrying the sacred fish of the Philistines were driven back to the sea from which their worship came. Those who worshipped on this hill had come out of bondage in Egypt and went into bondage in Babylon; small as was their country, there passed before them almost the whole pageant of the old pagan world. All its strange shapes and strong almost cruel colours remain in the records of their prophets; whose lightest phrase seems heavier than the pyramids of Egypt; and whose very words are like winged bulls walking. All this historic or pre-historic interest may be touched on in its turn; but I am not dealing here with the historic secrets unearthed by the study of the place, but with the historic associations aroused by the sight of it. The traveller is in the position of that famous fantastic who tied his horse to a wayside cross in the snow, and afterward saw it dangling from the church-spire of what had been a buried city. But here the cross does not stand as it does on the top of a spire; but as it does on the top of an Egyptian obelisk in Rome,—where the priests have put a cross on the top of the heathen monument; for fear it should walk. I entirely sympathise with their sentiment; and I shall try to suggest later why I think that symbol the logical culmination of heathen as well as Christian things. The traveller in the traveller’s tale looked up at last and saw, from the streets far below, the spire and cross dominating a
Gothic city. If I looked up in a vision and saw it dominating a Babylonian city, that blocked the heavens with monstrous palaces and temples, I should still think it natural that it should dominate. But the point here is that what I saw above ground was rather the Gothic town than the Babylonian; and that it reminded me, if not specially of the cross, at least of the soldiers who took the cross.

Nor do I forget the long centuries that have passed over the place since these medieval walls were built, any more than the far more interesting centuries that passed before they were built. But any one taking exception to the description on that ground may well realise, on consideration, that it is an exception that proves the rule. There is something very negative about Turkish rule; and the best and worst of it is in the word neglect. Everything that lived under the vague empire of Constantinople remained in a state of suspended animation like something frozen rather than decayed, like something sleeping rather than dead. It was a sort of Arabian spell, like that which turned princes and princesses into marble statues in the Arabian Nights. All that part of the history of the place is a kind of sleep; and that of a sleeper who hardly knows if he has slept an hour or a hundred years. When I first found myself in the Jaffa Gate of Jerusalem, my eye happened to fall on something that might be seen anywhere, but which seemed somehow to have a curious significance there. Most people are conscious of some common object which still strikes them as uncommon; as if it were the first fantastic sketch in the sketch-book of nature. I myself can never overcome the sense of something almost unearthly about grass growing upon human buildings. There is in it a wild and even horrible fancy, as if houses could grow hair. When I saw that green hair on the huge stone blocks of the citadel, though I had seen the same thing on any number of ruins, it came to me like an omen or a vision, a curious vision at once of chaos and of sleep. It is said that the grass will not grow where the Turk sets his foot; but it is the other side of the same truth to say that it would grow anywhere but where it ought to grow. And though in this case it was but an accident and a symbol, it was a very true symbol. We talk of the green banner of the Turk having been planted on this or that citadel; and certainly it was so planted with splendid valour and sensational victory. But this is the green banner that he plants on all his high cities in the end.

Therefore my immediate impression of the walls and gates was not contradicted by my consciousness of what came before and what came after that medieval period. It remained primarily a thing of walls and gates; a thing which the modern world does not perhaps understand so well as the medieval world. There is involved in it all that idea of definition which those who do not like it
are fond of describing as dogma. A wall is like rule; and the gates are like the exceptions that prove the rule. The man making it has to decide where his rule will run and where his exception shall stand. He cannot have a city that is all gates any more than a house that is all windows; nor is it possible to have a law that consists entirely of liberties. The ancient races and religions that contended for this city agreed with each other in this, when they differed about everything else. It was true of practically all of them that when they built a city they built a citadel. That is, whatever strange thing they may have made, they regarded it as something to be defined and to be defended.

And from this standpoint the holy city was a happy city; it had no suburbs. That is to say, there are all sorts of buildings outside the wall; but they are outside the wall. Everybody is conscious of being inside or outside a boundary; but it is the whole character of the true suburbs which grow round our great industrial towns that they grow, as it were, unconsciously and blindly, like grass that covers up a boundary line traced on the earth. This indefinite expansion is controlled neither by the soul of the city from within, nor by the resistance of the lands round about. It destroys at once the dignity of a town and the freedom of a countryside. The citizens are too new and numerous for citizenship; yet they never learn what there is to be learned of the ancient traditions of agriculture. The first sight of the sharp outline of Jerusalem is like a memory of the older types of limitation and liberty. Happy is the city that has a wall; and happier still if it is a precipice.

Again, Jerusalem might be called a city of staircases. Many streets are steep and most actually cut into steps. It is, I believe, an element in the controversy about the cave at Bethlehem traditionally connected with the Nativity that the sceptics doubt whether any beasts of burden could have entered a stable that has to be reached by such steps. And indeed to any one in a modern city like London or Liverpool it may well appear odd, like a cab-horse climbing a ladder. But as a matter of fact, if the asses and goats of Jerusalem could not go up and downstairs, they could not go anywhere. However this may be, I mention the matter here merely as adding another touch to that angular profile which is the impression involved here. Strangely enough, there is something that leads up to this impression even in the labyrinth of mountains through which the road winds its way to the city. The hills round Jerusalem are themselves often hewn out in terraces, like a huge stairway. This is mostly for the practical and indeed profitable purpose of vineyards; and serves for a reminder that this ancient seat of civilisation has not lost the tradition of the mercy and the glory of the vine.
But in outline such a mountain looks much like the mountain of Purgatory that Dante saw in his vision, lifted in terraces, like titanic steps up to God. And indeed this shape also is symbolic; as symbolic as the pointed profile of the Holy City. For a creed is like a ladder, while an evolution is only like a slope. A spiritual and social evolution is generally a pretty slippery slope; a miry slope where it is very easy to slide down again.

Such is something like the sharp and even abrupt impression produced by this mountain city; and especially by its wall with gates like a house with windows. A gate, like a window, is primarily a picture-frame. The pictures that are found within the frame are indeed very various and sometimes very alien. Within this frame-work are indeed to be found things entirely Asiatic, or entirely Moslem, or even entirely nomadic. But Jerusalem itself is not nomadic. Nothing could be less like a mere camp of tents pitched by Arabs. Nothing could be less like the mere chaos of colour in a temporary and tawdry bazaar. The Arabs are there and the colours are there, and they make a glorious picture; but the picture is in a Gothic frame, and is seen so to speak through a Gothic window. And the meaning of all this is the meaning of all windows, and especially of Gothic windows. It is that even light itself is most divine within limits; and that even the shining one is most shining, when he takes upon himself a shape.

Such a system of walls and gates, like many other things thought rude and primitive, is really very rationalistic. It turns the town, as it were, into a plan of itself, and even into a guide to itself. This is especially true, as may be suggested in a moment, regarding the direction of the roads leading out of it. But anyhow, a man must decide which way he will leave the city; he cannot merely drift out of the city as he drifts out of the modern cities through a litter of slums. And there is no better way to get a preliminary plan of the city than to follow the wall and fix the gates in the memory. Suppose, for instance, that a man begins in the south with the Zion Gate, which bears the ancient name of Jerusalem. This, to begin with, will sharpen the medieval and even the Western impression first because it is here that he has the strongest sentiment of threading the narrow passages of a great castle; but also because the very name of the gate was given to this south-western hill by Godfrey and Tancred during the period of the Latin kingdom. I believe it is one of the problems of the scholars why the Latin conquerors called this hill the Zion Hill, when the other is obviously the sacred hill. Jerusalem is traditionally divided into four hills, but for practical purposes into two; the lower eastern hill where stood the Temple, and now stands the great Mosque, and the western where is the citadel and the Zion Gate to the south of it. I know nothing
of such questions; and I attach no importance to the notion that has crossed my own mind, and which I only mention in passing, for I have no doubt there are a hundred objections to it. But it is known that Zion or Sion was the old name of the place before it was stormed by David; and even afterwards the Jebusites remained on this western hill, and some compromise seems to have been made with them. Is it conceivable, I wonder, that even in the twelfth century there lingered some local memory of what had once been a way of distinguishing Sion of the Jebusites from Salem of the Jews? The Zion Gate, however, is only a starting-point here; if we go south-eastward from it we descend a steep and rocky path, from which can be caught the first and finest vision of what stands on the other hill to the east. The great Mosque of Omar stands up like a peacock, lustrous with mosaics that are like plumes of blue and green.

Scholars, I may say here, object to calling it the Mosque of Omar; on the petty and pedantic ground that it is not a mosque and was not built by Omar. But it is my fixed intention to call it the Mosque of Omar, and with ever renewed pertinacity to continue calling it the Mosque of Omar. I possess a special permit from the Grand Mufti to call it the Mosque of Omar. He is the head of the whole Moslem religion, and if he does not know, who does? He told me, in the beautiful French which matches his beautiful manners, that it really is not so ridiculous after all to call the place the Mosque of Omar, since the great Caliph desired and even designed such a building, though he did not build it. I suppose it is rather as if Solomon’s Temple had been called David’s Temple. Omar was a great man and the Mosque was a great work, and the two were telescoped together by the excellent common sense of vulgar tradition. There could not be a better example of that great truth for all travellers; that popular tradition is never so right as when it is wrong; and that pedantry is never so wrong as when it is right. And as for the other objection, that the Dome of the Rock (to give it its other name) is not actually used as a Mosque, I answer that Westminster Abbey is not used as an Abbey. But modern Englishmen would be much surprised if I were to refer to it as Westminster Church; to say nothing of the many modern Englishmen for whom it would be more suitable to call it Westminster Museum. And for whatever purposes the Moslems may actually use their great and glorious sanctuary, at least they have not allowed it to become the private house of a particular rich man. And that is what we have suffered to happen, if not to Westminster Abbey, at least to Welbeck Abbey.

The Mosque of Omar (I repeat firmly) stands on the great eastern plateau in place of the Temple; and the wall that runs round to it on the south side of the
city contains only the Dung Gate, on which the fancy need not linger. All along outside this wall the ground falls away into the southern valley; and upon the dreary and stony steep opposite is the place called Acaldama. Wall and valley turn together round the corner of the great temple platform, and confronting the eastern wall, across the ravine, is the mighty wall of the Mount of Olives. On this side there are several gates now blocked up, of which the most famous, the Golden Gate, carries in its very uselessness a testimony to the fallen warriors of the cross. For there is a strange Moslem legend that through this gate, so solemnly sealed up, shall ride the Christian King who shall again rule in Jerusalem. In the middle of the square enclosure rises the great dark Dome of the Rock; and standing near it, a man may see for the first time in the distance, another dome. It lies away to the west, but a little to the north; and it is surmounted, not by a crescent but a cross. Many heroes and holy kings have desired to see this thing, and have not seen it.

It is very characteristic of the city, with its medieval medley and huddle of houses, that a man may first see the Church of the Holy Sepulchre which is in the west, by going as far as possible to the east. All the sights are glimpses; and things far can be visible and things near invisible. The traveller comes on the Moslem dome round a corner; and he finds the Christian dome, as it were, behind his own back. But if he goes on round the wall to the north-east corner of the Court of the Temple, he will find the next entrance; the Gate of St. Stephen. On the slope outside, by a strange and suitable coincidence, the loose stones which lie on every side of the mountain city seemed to be heaped higher; and across the valley on the skirts of the Mount of Olives is the great grey olive of Gethsemane.

On the northern side the valley turns to an artificial trench, for the ground here is higher; and the next or northern gate bears the name of Herod; though it might well bear the name either of Godfrey or Saladin. For just outside it stands a pine-tree, and beside it a rude bulk of stone; where stood these great captains in turn, before they took Jerusalem. Then the wall runs on till it comes to the great Damascus Gate, graven I know not why with great roses in a style wholly heraldic and occidental, and in no way likely to remind us of the rich roses of Damascus; though their name has passed into our own English tongue and tradition, along with another word for the delicate decoration of the sword. But at the first glance, at any rate, it is hard to believe that the roses on the walls are not the Western roses of York or Lancaster, or that the swords which guarded them were not the straight swords of England or of France. Doubtless a deeper
and more solemn memory ought to return immediately to the mind where that gate looks down the great highway; as if one could see, hung over it in the sky for ever, the cloud concealing the sunburst that broods upon the road to Damascus. But I am here only confessing the facts or fancies of my first impression; and again the fancy that came to me first was not of any such alien or awful things. I did not think of damask or damascene or the great Arabian city or even the conversion of St. Paul. I thought of my own little house in Buckinghamshire, and how the edge of the country town where it stands is called Aylesbury End, merely because it is the corner nearest to Aylesbury. That is what I mean by saying that these ancient customs are more rational and even utilitarian than the fashions of modernity. When a street in a new suburb is called Pretoria Avenue, the clerk living there does not set out from his villa with the cheerful hope of finding the road lead him to Pretoria. But the man leaving Aylesbury End does know it would lead him to Aylesbury; and the man going out at the Damascus Gate did know it would lead him to Damascus. And the same is true of the next and last of the old entrances, the Jaffa Gate in the east; but when I saw that I saw something else as well.

I have heard that there is a low doorway at the entrance to a famous shrine which is called the Gate of Humility; but indeed in this sense all gates are gates of humility, and especially gates of this kind. Any one who has ever looked at a landscape under an archway will know what I mean, when I say that it sharpens a pleasure with a strange sentiment of privilege. It adds to the grace of distance something that makes it not only a grace but a gift. Such are the visions of remote places that appear in the low gateways of a Gothic town; as if each gateway led into a separate world; and almost as if each dome of sky were a different chamber. But he who walks round the walls of this city in this spirit will come suddenly upon an exception which will surprise him like an earthquake. It looks indeed rather like something done by an earthquake; an earthquake with a half-witted sense of humour. Immediately at the side of one of these humble and human gateways there is a great gap in the wall, with a wide road running through it. There is something of unreason in the sight which affects the eye as well as the reason. It recalls some crazy tale about the great works of the Wise Men of Gotham. It suggests the old joke about the man who made a small hole for the kitten as well as a large hole for the cat. Everybody has read about it by this time; but the immediate impression of it is not merely an effect of reading or even of reasoning. It looks lop-sided; like something done by a one-eyed giant. But it was done by the last prince of the great Prussian imperial
system, in what was probably the proudest moment in all his life of pride.

What is true has a way of sounding trite; and what is trite has a way of sounding false. We shall now probably weary the world with calling the Germans barbaric, just as we very recently wearied the world with calling them cultured and progressive and scientific. But the thing is true though we say it a thousand times. And any one who wishes to understand the sense in which it is true has only to contemplate that fantasy and fallacy in stone; a gate with an open road beside it. The quality I mean, however, is not merely in that particular contrast; as of a front door standing by itself in an open field. It is also in the origin, the occasion and the whole story of the thing. There is above all this supreme stamp of the barbarian; the sacrifice of the permanent to the temporary. When the walls of the Holy City were overthrown for the glory of the German Emperor, it was hardly even for that everlasting glory which has been the vision and the temptation of great men. It was for the glory of a single day. It was something rather in the nature of a holiday than anything that could be even in the most vainglorious sense a heritage. It did not in the ordinary sense make a monument, or even a trophy. It destroyed a monument to make a procession. We might almost say that it destroyed a trophy to make a triumph. There is the true barbaric touch in this oblivion of what Jerusalem would look like a century after, or a year after, or even the day after. It is this which distinguishes the savage tribe on the march after a victory from the civilised army establishing a government, even if it be a tyranny. Hence the very effect of it, like the effect of the whole Prussian adventure in history, remains something negative and even nihilistic. The Christians made the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Moslems made the Mosque of Omar; but this is what the most scientific culture made at the end of the great century of science. It made an enormous hole. The only positive contribution of the nineteenth century to the spot is an unnaturally ugly clock, at the top of an ornamental tower, or a tower that was meant to be ornamental. It was erected, I believe, to commemorate the reign of Abdul Hamid; and it seems perfectly adapted to its purpose, like one of Sir William Watson’s sonnets on the same subject. But this object only adds a touch of triviality to the much more tremendous negative effect of the gap by the gate. That remains a parable as well as a puzzle, under all the changing skies of day and night; with the shadows that gather tinder the narrow Gate of Humility; and beside it, blank as daybreak and abrupt as an abyss, the broad road that has led already to destruction.

The gap remains like a gash, a sort of wound in the walls; but it only
strengthens by contrast the general sense of their continuity. Save this one angle where the nineteenth century has entered, the vague impression of the thirteenth or fourteenth century rather deepens than dies away. It is supported more than many would suppose even by the figures that appear in the gateways or pass in procession under the walls. The brown Franciscans and the white Dominicans would alone give some colour to a memory of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem; and there are other examples and effects which are less easily imagined in the West. Thus as I look down the street, I see coming out from under an archway a woman wearing a high white head-dress very like those we have all seen in a hundred pictures of tournaments or hunting parties, or the Canterbury Pilgrimage or the Court of Louis XI. She is as white as a woman of the North; and it is not, I think, entirely fanciful to trace a certain freedom and dignity in her movement, which is quite different at least from the shuffling walk of the shrouded Moslem women. She is a woman of Bethlehem, where a tradition, it is said, still claims as a heroic heritage the blood of the Latin knights of the cross. This is, of course, but one aspect of the city; but it is one which may be early noted, yet one which is generally neglected. As I have said, I had expected many things of Jerusalem, but I had not expected this. I had expected to be disappointed with it as a place utterly profaned and fallen below its mission. I had expected to be awed by it; indeed I had expected to be frightened of it, as a place dedicated and even doomed by its mission. But I had never fancied that it would be possible to be fond of it; as one might be fond of a little walled town among the orchards of Normandy or the hop-fields of Kent.

And just then there happened a coincidence that was also something like a catastrophe. I was idly watching, as it moved down the narrow street to one of the dark doorways, the head-dress, like a tower of white drapery, belonging to the Christian woman from the place where Christ was born. After she had disappeared into the darkness of the porch I continued to look vaguely at the porch, and thought how easily it might have been a small Gothic gate in some old corner of Rouen, or even Canterbury. In twenty such places in the town one may see the details that appeal to the same associations, so different and so distant. One may see that angular dogtooth ornament that makes the round Norman gateways look like the gaping mouths of sharks. One may see the pointed niches in the walls, shaped like windows and serving somewhat the purpose of brackets, on which were to stand sacred images possibly removed by the Moslems. One may come upon a small court planted with ornamental trees with some monument in the centre, which makes the precise impression of
something in a small French town. There are no Gothic spires, but there are
numberless Gothic doors and windows; and he who first strikes the place at this
angle, as it were, may well feel the Northern element as native and the Eastern
element as intrusive. While I was thinking all these things, something happened
which in that place was almost a portent.

It was very cold; and there were curious colours in the sky. There had been
chilly rains from time to time; and the whole air seemed to have taken on
something sharper than a chill. It was as if a door had been opened in the
northern corner of the heavens; letting in something that changed all the face of
the earth. Great grey clouds with haloes of lurid pearl and pale-green were
coming up from the plains or the sea and spreading over the towers of the city.
In the middle of the moving mass of grey vapours was a splash of paler vapour;
a wan white cloud whose white seemed somehow more ominous than gloom. It
went over the high citadel like a white wild goose flying; and a few white
feathers fell.

It was the snow; and it snowed day and night until that Eastern city was sealed
up like a village in Norway or Northern Scotland. It rose in the streets till men
might almost have been drowned in it like a sea of solid foam. And the people of
the place told me there had been no such thing seen in it in all recent records, or
perhaps in the records of all its four thousand years.

All this came later; but for me at the moment, looking at the scene in so
dreamy a fashion, it seemed merely like a dramatic conclusion to my dream. It
was but an accident confirming what was but an aspect. But it confirmed it with
a strange and almost supernatural completeness. The white light out of the
window in the north lay on all the roofs and turrets of the mountain town; for
there is an aspect in which snow looks less like frozen water than like solidified
light. As the snow accumulated there accumulated also everywhere those
fantastic effects of frost which seem to fit in with the fantastic qualities of
medieval architecture; and which make an icicle seem like the mere extension of
a gargoyle. It was the atmosphere that has led so many romancers to make
medieval Paris a mere black and white study of night and snow. Something had
redrawn in silver all things from the rude ornament on the old gateways to the
wrinkles on the ancient hills of Moab. Fields of white still spotted with green
swept down into the valleys between us and the hills; and high above them the
Holy City lifted her head into the thunder-clouded heavens, wearing a white
head-dress like a daughter of the Crusaders.
CHAPTER IV

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SIGHT-SEEING

Various cultivated critics told me that I should find Jerusalem disappointing; and I fear it will disappoint them that I am not disappointed. Of the city as a city I shall try to say something elsewhere; but the things which these critics have especially in mind are at once more general and more internal. They concern something tawdry, squalid or superstitious about the shrines and those who use them. Now the mistake of critics is not that they criticise the world; it is that they never criticise themselves. They compare the alien with the ideal; but they do not at the same time compare themselves with the ideal; rather they identify themselves with the ideal. I have met a tourist who had seen the great Pyramid, and who told me that the Pyramid looked small. Believe me, the tourist looked much smaller. There is indeed another type of traveller, who is not at all small in the moral mental sense, who will confess such disappointments quite honestly, as a piece of realism about his own sensations. In that case he generally suffers from the defect of most realists; that of not being realistic enough. He does not really think out his own impressions thoroughly; or he would generally find they are not so disappointing after all. A humorous soldier told me that he came from Derbyshire, and that he did not think much of the Pyramid because it was not so tall as the Peak. I pointed out to him that he was really offering the tallest possible tribute to a work of man in comparing it to a mountain; even if he thought it was a rather small mountain. I suggested that it was a rather large tombstone. I appealed to those with whom I debated in that district, as to whether they would not be faintly surprised to find such a monument during their quiet rambles in a country churchyard. I asked whether each one of them, if he had such a tombstone in the family, would not feel it natural, if hardly necessary, to point it out; and that with a certain pride. The same principle of the higher realism applies to those who are disappointed with the sight of the Sphinx. The Sphinx really exceeds expectations because it escapes expectations. Monuments commonly look impressive when they are high and often when they are distant. The Sphinx is really unexpected, because it is found suddenly in a hollow, and unnaturally near. Its face is turned away; and the effect is as creepy as coming into a room apparently empty, and finding somebody as still as the furniture. Or it is as if one found a lion couchant in that hole in the sand; as
indeed the buried part of the monster is in the form of a couchant lion. If it was a real lion it would hardly be less arresting merely because it was near; nor could the first emotion of the traveller be adequately described as disappointment. In such cases there is generally some profit in looking at the monument a second time, or even at our own sensations a second time. So I reasoned, striving with wild critics in the wilderness; but the only part of the debate which is relevant here can be expressed in the statement that I do think the Pyramid big, for the deep and simple reason that it is bigger than I am. I delicately suggested to those who were disappointed in the Sphinx that it was just possible that the Sphinx was disappointed in them. The Sphinx has seen Julius Caesar; it has very probably seen St. Francis, when he brought his flaming charity to Egypt; it has certainly looked, in the first high days of the revolutionary victories, on the face of the young Napoleon. Is it not barely possible, I hinted to my friends and fellow-tourists, that after these experiences, it might be a little depressed at the sight of you and me? But as I say, I only reintroduce my remarks in connection with a greater matter than these dead things of the desert; in connection with a tomb to which even the Pyramids are but titanic lumber, and a presence greater than the Sphinx, since it is not only a riddle but an answer.

Before I go on to deeper defences of any such cult or culture, I wish first to note a sort of test for the first impressions of an ordinary tourist like myself, to whom much that is really full of an archaic strength may seem merely stiff, or much that really deals with a deep devotional psychology may seem merely distorted. In short I would put myself in the position of the educated Englishman who does quite honestly receive a mere impression of idolatry. Incidentally, I may remark, it is the educated Englishman who is the idolater. It is he who only reverences the place, and does not reverence the reverence for the place. It is he who is supremely concerned about whether a mere object is old or new, or whether a mere ornament is gold or gilt. In other words, it is he who values the visible things rather than the invisible; for no sane man can doubt that invisible things are vivid to the priests and pilgrims of these shrines.

In the midst of emotions that have moved the whole world out of its course, girt about with crowds who will die or do murder for a definition, the educated English gentleman in his blindness bows down to wood and stone. For the only thing wrong about that admirable man is that he is blind about himself.

No man will really attempt to describe his feelings, when he first stood at the gateway of the grave of Christ. The only record relevant here is that I did not feel the reaction, not to say repulsion, that many seem to have felt about its
Either I was particularly fortunate or others are particularly fastidious. The guide who showed me the Sepulchre was not particularly noisy or profane or palpably mercenary; he was rather more than less sympathetic than the same sort of man who might have shown me Westminster Abbey or Stratford-on-Avon. He was a small, solemn, owlish old man, a Roman Catholic in religion; but so far from deserving the charge of not knowing the Bible, he deserved rather a gentle remonstrance against his assumption that nobody else knew it. If there was anything to smile at, in associations so sacred, it was the elaborate simplicity with which he told the first facts of the Gospel story, as if he were evangelising a savage. Anyhow, he did not talk like a cheap-jack at a stall; but rather like a teacher in an infant school. He made it very clear that Jesus Christ was crucified in case any one should suppose he was beheaded; and often stopped in his narrative to repeat that the hero of these events was Jesus Christ, lest we should fancy it was Nebuchadnezzar or the Duke of Wellington. I do not in the least mind being amused at this; but I have no reason whatever for doubting that he may have been a better man than I. I gave him what I should have given a similar guide in my own country; I parted from him as politely as from one of my own countrymen. I also, of course, gave money, as is the custom, to the various monastic custodians of the shrines; but I see nothing surprising about that. I am not quite so ignorant as not to know that without the monastic brotherhoods, supported by such charity, there would not by this time be anything to see in Jerusalem at all. There was only one class of men whose consistent concern was to watch these things, from the age of heathens and heresies to the age of Turks and tourists; and I am certainly not going to sneer at them for doing no practical work, and then refuse to pay them for the practical work they do. For the rest, even the architectural defacement is overstated, the church was burned down and rebuilt in a bad and modern period; but the older parts, especially the Crusaders’ porch, are as grand as the men who made them. The incongruities there are, are those of local colour. In connection, by the way, with what I said about beasts of burden, I mounted a series of steep staircases to the roof of the convent beside the Holy Sepulchre. When I got to the top I found myself in the placid presence of two camels. It would be curious to meet two cows on the roof of a village church. Nevertheless it is the only moral of the chapter interpolated here, that we can meet things quite as curious in our own country.

When the critic says that Jerusalem is disappointing he generally means that
the popular worship there is weak and degraded, and especially that the religious art is gaudy and grotesque. In so far as there is any kind of truth in this, it is still true that the critic seldom sees the whole truth. What is wrong with the critic is that he does not criticise himself. He does not honestly compare what is weak, in this particular world of ideas, with what is weak in his own world of ideas. I will take an example from my own experience, and in a manner at my own expense. If I have a native heath it is certainly Kensington High Street, off which stands the house of my childhood. I grew up in that thorough-fare which Mr. Max Beerbohm, with his usual easy exactitude of phrase, has described as “dapper, with a leaning to the fine arts.” Dapper was never perhaps a descriptive term for myself; but it is quite true that I owe a certain taste for the arts to the sort of people among whom I was brought up. It is also true that such a taste, in various forms and degrees, was fairly common in the world which may be symbolised as Kensington High Street. And whether or no it is a tribute, it is certainly a truth that most people with an artistic turn in Kensington High Street would have been very much shocked, in their sense of propriety, if they had seen the popular shrines of Jerusalem; the sham gold, the garish colours, the fantastic tales and the feverish tumult. But what I want such people to do, and what they never do, is to turn this truth round. I want them to imagine, not a Kensington aesthete walking down David Street to the Holy Sepulchre, but a Greek monk or a Russian pilgrim walking down Kensington High Street to Kensington Gardens. I will not insist here on all the hundred plagues of plutocracy that would really surprise such a Christian peasant; especially that curse of an irreligious society (unknown in religious societies, Moslem as well as Christian) the detestable denial of all dignity to the poor. I am not speaking now of moral but of artistic things; of the concrete arts and crafts used in popular worship. Well, my imaginary pilgrim would walk past Kensington Gardens till his sight was blasted by a prodigy. He would either fall on his knees as before a shrine, or cover his face as from a sacrilege. He would have seen the Albert Memorial. There is nothing so conspicuous in Jerusalem. There is nothing so gilded and gaudy in Jerusalem. Above all, there is nothing in Jerusalem that is on so large a scale and at the same time in so gay and glittering a style. My simple Eastern Christian would almost certainly be driven to cry aloud, “To what superhuman God was this enormous temple erected? I hope it is Christ; but I fear it is Antichrist.” Such, he would think, might well be the great and golden image of the Prince of the World, set up in this great open space to receive the heathen prayers and heathen sacrifices of a lost humanity. I fancy he would feel a desire to be at
home again amid the humble shrines of Zion. I really cannot imagine what he would feel, if he were told that the gilded idol was neither a god nor a demon, but a petty German prince who had some slight influence in turning us into the tools of Prussia.

Now I myself, I cheerfully admit, feel that enormity in Kensington Gardens as something quite natural. I feel it so because I have been brought up, so to speak, under its shadow; and stared at the graven images of Raphael and Shakespeare almost before I knew their names; and long before I saw anything funny in their figures being carved, on a smaller scale, under the feet of Prince Albert. I even took a certain childish pleasure in the gilding of the canopy and spire, as if in the golden palace of what was, to Peter Pan and all children, something of a fairy garden. So do the Christians of Jerusalem take pleasure, and possibly a childish pleasure, in the gilding of a better palace, besides a nobler garden, ornamented with a somewhat worthier aim. But the point is that the people of Kensington, whatever they might think about the Holy Sepulchre, do not think anything at all about the Albert Memorial. They are quite unconscious of how strange a thing it is; and that simply because they are used to it. The religious groups in Jerusalem are also accustomed to their coloured background; and they are surely none the worse if they still feel rather more of the meaning of the colours. It may be said that they retain their childish illusion about their Albert Memorial. I confess I cannot manage to regard Palestine as a place where a special curse was laid on those who can become like little children. And I never could understand why such critics who agree that the kingdom of heaven is for children, should forbid it to be the only sort of kingdom that children would really like; a kingdom with real crowns of gold or even of tinsel. But that is another question, which I shall discuss in another place; the point is for the moment that such people would be quite as much surprised at the place of tinsel in our lives as we are at its place in theirs. If we are critical of the petty things they do to glorify great things, they would find quite as much to criticise (as in Kensington Gardens) in the great things we do to glorify petty things. And if we wonder at the way in which they seem to gild the lily, they would wonder quite as much at the way we gild the weed.

There are countless other examples of course of this principle of self-criticism, as the necessary condition of all criticism. It applies quite as much, for instance, to the other great complaint which my Kensington friend would make after the complaint about paltry ornament; the complaint about what is commonly called backsheesh. Here again there is really something to complain of; though much of
the fault is not due to Jerusalem, but rather to London and New York. The worst superstition of Jerusalem, like the worst profligacy of Paris, is a thing so much invented for Anglo-Saxons that it might be called an Anglo-Saxon institution. But here again the critic could only really judge fairly if he realised with what abuses at home he ought really to compare this particular abuse abroad. He ought to imagine, for example, the feelings of a religious Russian peasant if he really understood all the highly-coloured advertisements covering High Street Kensington Station. It is really not so repulsive to see the poor asking for money as to see the rich asking for more money. And advertisement is the rich asking for more money. A man would be annoyed if he found himself in a mob of millionaires, all holding out their silk hats for a penny; or all shouting with one voice, “Give me money.” Yet advertisement does really assault the eye very much as such a shout would assault the ear. “Budge’s Boots are the Best” simply means “Give me money”; “Use Seraphic Soap” simply means “Give me money.” It is a complete mistake to suppose that common people make our towns commonplace, with unsightly things like advertisements. Most of those whose wares are thus placarded everywhere are very wealthy gentlemen with coronets and country seats, men who are probably very particular about the artistic adornment of their own homes. They disfigure their towns in order to decorate their houses. To see such men crowding and clamouring for more wealth would really be a more unworthy sight than a scramble of poor guides; yet this is what would be conveyed by all the glare of gaudy advertisement to anybody who saw and understood it for the first time. Yet for us who are familiar with it all that gaudy advertisement fades into a background, just as the gaudy oriental patterns fade into a background for those oriental priests and pilgrims. Just as the innocent Kensington gentleman is wholly unaware that his black top hat is relieved against a background, or encircled as by a halo, of a yellow hoarding about mustard, so is the poor guide sometimes unaware that his small doings are dark against the fainter and more fading gold in which are traced only the humbler haloes of the Twelve Apostles.

But all these misunderstandings are merely convenient illustrations and introductions, leading up to the great fact of the main misunderstanding. It is a misunderstanding of the whole history and philosophy of the position; that is the whole of the story and the whole moral of the story. The critic of the Christianity of Jerusalem emphatically manages to miss the point. The lesson he ought to learn from it is one which the Western and modern man needs most, and does not even know that he needs. It is the lesson of constancy. These people may
decorate their temples with gold or with tinsel; but their tinsel has lasted longer than our gold. They may build things as costly and ugly as the Albert Memorial; but the thing remains a memorial, a thing of immortal memory. They do not build it for a passing fashion and then forget it, or try hard to forget it. They may paint a picture of a saint as gaudy as any advertisement of a soap; but one saint does not drive out another saint as one soap drives out another soap. They do not forget their recent idolatries, as the educated English are now trying to forget their very recent idolatry of everything German. These Christian bodies have been in Jerusalem for at least fifteen hundred years. Save for a few years after the time of Constantine and a few years after the First Crusade, they have been practically persecuted all the time. At least they have been under heathen masters whose attitude towards Christendom was hatred and whose type of government was despotism. No man living in the West can form the faintest conception of what it must have been to live in the very heart of the East through the long and seemingly everlasting epoch of Moslem power. A man in Jerusalem was in the centre of the Turkish Empire as a man in Rome was in the centre of the Roman Empire. The imperial power of Islam stretched away to the sunrise and the sunset; westward to the mountains of Spain and eastward towards the wall of China. It must have seemed as if the whole earth belonged to Mahomet to those who in this rocky city renewed their hopeless witness to Christ. What we have to ask ourselves is not whether we happen in all respects to agree with them, but whether we in the same condition should even have the courage to agree with ourselves. It is not a question of how much of their religion is superstition, but of how much of our religion is convention; how much is custom and how much a compromise even with custom; how much a thing made facile by the security of our own society or the success of our own state. These are powerful supports; and the enlightened Englishman, from a cathedral town or a suburban chapel, walks these wild Eastern places with a certain sense of assurance and stability. Even after centuries of Turkish supremacy, such a man feels, he would not have descended to such a credulity. He would not be fighting for the Holy Fire or wrangling with beggars in the Holy Sepulchre. He would not be hanging fantastic lamps on a pillar peculiar to the Armenians, or peering into the gilded cage that contains the brown Madonna of the Copts. He would not be the dupe of such degenerate fables; God forbid. He would not be grovelling at such grotesque shrines; no indeed. He would be many hundred yards away, decorously bowing towards a more distant city; where, above the only formal and official open place in Jerusalem, the mighty mosaics of the Mosque of Omar
proclaim across the valleys the victory and the glory of Mahomet.

That is the real lesson that the enlightened traveller should learn; the lesson about himself. That is the test that should really be put to those who say that the Christianity of Jerusalem is degraded. After a thousand years of Turkish tyranny, the religion of a London fashionable preacher would not be degraded. It would be destroyed. It would not be there at all, to be jeered at by every prosperous tourist out of a train de luxe. It is worth while to pause upon the point; for nothing has been so wholly missed in our modern religious ideals as the ideal of tenacity. Fashion is called progress. Every new fashion is called a new faith. Every faith is a faith which offers everything except faithfulness. It was never so necessary to insist that most of the really vital and valuable ideas in the world, including Christianity, would never have survived at all if they had not survived their own death, even in the sense of dying daily. The ideal was out of date almost from the first day; that is why it is eternal; for whatever is dated is doomed. As for our own society, if it proceeds at its present rate of progress and improvement, no trace or memory of it will be left at all. Some think that this would be an improvement in itself. We have come to live morally, as the Japs live literally, in houses of paper. But they are pavilions made of the morning papers, which have to be burned on the appearance of the evening editions. Well, a thousand years hence the Japs may be ruling in Jerusalem; the modern Japs who no longer live in paper houses, but in sweated factories and slums. They and the Chinese (that much more dignified and democratic people) seem to be about the only people of importance who have not yet ruled Jerusalem. But though we may think the Christian chapels as thin as Japanese tea-houses, they will still be Christian; though we may think the sacred lamps as cheap as Chinese lanterns, they will still be burning before a crucified creator of the world.

But besides this need of making strange cults the test not of themselves but ourselves, the sights of Jerusalem also illustrate the other suggestion about the philosophy of sight-seeing. It is true, as I have suggested, that after all the Sphinx is larger than I am; and on the same principle the painted saints are saintlier than I am, and the patient pilgrims more constant than I am. But it is also true, as in the lesser matter before mentioned, that even those who think the Sphinx small generally do not notice the small things about it. They do not even discover what is interesting about their own disappointment. And similarly even those who are truly irritated by the unfamiliar fashions of worship in a place like Jerusalem, do not know how to discover what is interesting in the very existence of what is irritating. For instance, they talk of Byzantine decay or barbaric
delusion, and they generally go away with an impression that the ritual and symbolism is something dating from the Dark Ages. But if they would really note the details of their surroundings, or even of their sensations, they would observe a rather curious fact about such ornament of such places as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre as may really be counted unworthy of them. They would realise that what they would most instinctively reject as superstitious does not date from what they would regard as the ages of superstition. There really are bad pictures but they are not barbaric pictures; they are florid pictures in the last faded realism of the Renascence. There really is stiff and ungainly decoration, but it is not the harsh or ascetic decoration of a Spanish cloister; it is much more like the pompous yet frivolous decorations of a Parisian hotel. In short, in so far as the shrine has really been defaced it has not been defaced by the Dark Ages, but rather if anything by the Age of Reason. It is the enlightened eighteenth century, which regarded itself as the very noontday of natural culture and common sense, that has really though indirectly laid its disfiguring finger on the dark but dignified Byzantine temple. I do not particularly mind it myself; for in such great matters I do not think taste is the test. But if taste is to be made the test, there is matter for momentary reflection in this fact; for it is another example of the weakness of what may be called fashion. Voltaire, I believe, erected a sort of temple to God in his own garden; and we may be sure that it was in the most exquisite taste of the time. Nothing would have surprised him more than to learn that, fifty years after the success of the French Revolution, almost every freethinker of any artistic taste would think his temple far less artistically admirable than the nearest gargoyle on Notre Dame. Thus it is progress that must be blamed for most of these things: and we ought not to turn away in contempt from something antiquated, but rather recognise with respect and even alarm a sort of permanent man-trap in the idea of being modern. So that the moral of this matter is the same as that of the other; that these things should raise in us, not merely the question of whether we like them, but of whether there is anything very infallible or imperishable about what we like. At least the essentials of these things endure; and if they seem to have remained fixed as effigies, at least they have not faded like fashion-plates.

It has seemed worth while to insert here this note on the philosophy of sight-seeing, however dilatory or disproportionate it may seem. For I am particularly and positively convinced that unless these things can somehow or other be seen in the right historical perspective and philosophical proportion, they are not worth seeing at all. And let me say in conclusion that I can not only respect the
sincerity, but understand the sentiments, of a man who says they are not worth seeing at all. Sight-seeing is a far more difficult and disputable matter than many seem to suppose; and a man refusing it altogether might be a man of sense and even a man of imagination. It was the great Wordsworth who refused to revisit Yarrow; it was only the small Wordsworth who revisited it after all. I remember the first great sight in my own entrance to the Near East, when I looked by accident out of the train going to Cairo, and saw far away across the luminous flats a faint triangular shape; the Pyramids. I could understand a man who had seen it turning his back and retracing his whole journey to his own country and his own home, saying, “I will go no further; for I have seen afar off the last houses of the kings.” I can understand a man who had only seen in the distance Jerusalem sitting on the hill going no further and keeping that vision for ever. It would, of course, be said that it was absurd to come at all, and to see so little. To which I answer that in that sense it is absurd to come at all. It is no more fantastic to turn back for such a fancy than it was to come for a similar fancy. A man cannot eat the Pyramids; he cannot buy or sell the Holy City; there can be no practical aspect either of his coming or going. If he has not come for a poetic mood he has come for nothing; if he has come for such a mood, he is not a fool to obey that mood. The way to be really a fool is to try to be practical about unpractical things. It is to try to collect clouds or preserve moonshine like money. Now there is much to be said for the view that to search for a mood is in its nature moonshine. It may be said that this is especially true in the crowded and commonplace conditions in which most sight-seeing has to be done. It may be said that thirty tourists going together to see a tombstone is really as ridiculous as thirty poets going together to write poems about the nightingale. There would be something rather depressing about a crowd of travellers, walking over hill and dale after the celebrated cloud of Wordsworth; especially if the crowd is like the cloud, and moveth all together if it move at all. A vast mob assembled on Salisbury Plain to listen to Shelley’s skylark would probably (after an hour or two) consider it a rather subdued sort of skylarking. It may be argued that it is just as illogical to hope to fix beforehand the elusive effects of the works of man as of the works of nature. It may be called a contradiction in terms to expect the unexpected. It may be counted mere madness to anticipate astonishment, or go in search of a surprise. To all of which there is only one answer; that such anticipation is absurd, and such realisation will be disappointing, that images will seem to be idols and idols will seem to be dolls, unless there be some rudiment of such a habit of mind as I have tried to suggest
in this chapter. No great works will seem great, and no wonders of the world will seem wonderful, unless the angle from which they are seen is that of historical humility.

One more word may be added of a more practical sort. The place where the most passionate convictions on this planet are concentrated is not one where it will always be wise, even from a political standpoint, to air our plutocratic patronage and our sceptical superiority. Strange scenes have already been enacted round that fane where the Holy Fire bursts forth to declare that Christ is risen; and whether or no we think the thing holy there is no doubt about it being fiery. Whether or no the superior person is right to expect the unexpected, it is possible that something may be revealed to him that he really does not expect. And whatever he may think about the philosophy of sight-seeing, it is not unlikely that he may see some sights.
CHAPTER V

THE STREETS OF THE CITY

When Jerusalem had been half buried in snow for two or three days, I remarked to a friend that I was prepared henceforward to justify all the Christmas cards. The cards that spangle Bethlehem with frost are generally regarded by the learned merely as vulgar lies. At best they are regarded as popular fictions, like that which made the shepherds in the Nativity Play talk a broad dialect of Somerset. In the deepest sense of course this democratic tradition is truer than most history. But even in the cruder and more concrete sense the tradition about the December snow is not quite so false as is suggested. It is not a mere local illusion for Englishmen to picture the Holy Child in a snowstorm, as it would be for the Londoners to picture him in a London fog. There can be snow in Jerusalem, and there might be snow in Bethlehem; and when we penetrate to the idea behind the image, we find it is not only possible but probable. In Palestine, at least in these mountainous parts of Palestine, men have the same general sentiment about the seasons as in the West or the North. Snow is a rarity, but winter is a reality. Whether we regard it as the divine purpose of a mystery or the human purpose of a myth, the purpose of putting such a feast in winter would be just the same in Bethlehem as it would be in Balham. Any one thinking of the Holy Child as born in December would mean by it exactly what we mean by it; that Christ is not merely a summer sun of the prosperous but a winter fire for the unfortunate.

In other words, the semi-tropical nature of the place, like its vulgarity and desecration, can be, and are, enormously exaggerated. But it is always hard to correct the exaggeration without exaggerating the correction. It would be absurd seriously to deny that Jerusalem is an Eastern town; but we may say it was Westernised without being modernised. Anyhow, it was medievalised before it was modernised. And in the same way it would be absurd to deny that Jerusalem is a Southern town, in the sense of being normally out of the way of snowstorms, but the truth can be suggested by saying that it has always known the quality of snow, but not the quantity. And the quantity of snow that fell on this occasion would have been something striking and even sensational in Sussex or Kent. And yet another way of putting the proportions of the thing would be to say that Jerusalem has been besieged more often and by more different kinds of people
than any town upon the globe; that it has been besieged by Jews and Assyrians, Egyptians and Babylonians, Greeks and Romans, Persians and Saracens, Frenchmen and Englishmen; but perhaps never before in all its agony of ages has it ever really been besieged by winter. In this case it was not only snowed on, it was snowed up.

For some days the city was really in a state of siege. If the snow had held for a sufficient number of days it might have been in a state of famine. The railway failed between Jerusalem and the nearest station. The roads were impassable between Jerusalem and the nearest village, or even the nearest suburb. In some places the snow drifted deep enough to bury a man, and in some places, alas, it did actually bury little children; poor little Arabs whose bodies were stiff where they had fallen. Many mules were overwhelmed as if by floods, and countless trees struck down as if by lightning. Even when the snow began at last to melt it only threatened to turn the besieged fortress into a sort of island. A river that men could not ford flowed between Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. Even a man walking about the ordinary streets could easily step up to his knees or up to his waist. Snow stood about like a new system of natural barricades reared in some new type of revolution. I have already remarked that what struck me most about the city was the city wall; but now a new white wall stood all round the city; and one that neither friend nor foe could pass.

But a state of siege, whatever its inconveniences, is exceedingly convenient for a critic and observer of the town. It concentrated all that impression of being something compact and what, with less tragic attendant circumstances, one might call cosy. It fixed the whole picture in a frame even more absolute than the city wall; and it turned the eyes of all spectators inwards. Above all, by its very abnormality it accentuated the normal divisions and differences of the place; and made it more possible to distinguish and describe them like dramatis personae. The parts they played in the crisis of the snow were very like the parts they played in the general crisis of the state. And the very cut and colour of the figures, turban and turbouch, khaki and burnous and gabardine, seemed to stand out more sharply against that blank background of white.

The first fact of course was a fact of contrast. When I said that the city struck me in its historic aspect as being at least as much a memory of the Crusaders as of the Saracens, I did not of course mean to deny the incidental contrasts between this Southern civilisation and the civilisation of Europe, especially northern Europe. The immediate difference was obvious enough when the gold and the gaudy vegetation of so comparatively Asiatic a city were struck by this
strange blast out of the North. It was a queer spectacle to see a great green palm bowed down under a white load of snow; and it was a stranger and sadder spectacle to see the people accustomed to live under such palm-trees bowed down under such unearthly storms. Yet the very manner in which they bore it is perhaps the first fact to be noted among all the facts that make up the puzzling problem of Jerusalem. Odd as it may sound you can see that the true Orientals are not familiar with snow by the very fact that they accept it. They accept it as we should accept being swallowed by an earthquake; because we do not know the answer to an earthquake. The men from the desert do not know the answer to the snow, it seems to them unanswerable. But Christians fight with snow in a double sense; they fight with snow as they fight with snowballs. A Moslem left to himself would no more play with a snowball than make a toy of a thunderbolt. And this is really a type of the true problem that was raised by the very presence of the English soldier in the street, even if he was only shovelling away the snow.

It would be far from a bad thing, I fancy, if the rights and wrongs of these Bible countries could occasionally be translated into Bible language. And I suggest this here, not in the least because it is a religious language, but merely because it is a simple language. It may be a good thing, and in many ways it certainly is a good thing, that the races native to the Near East, to Egypt or Arabia, should come in contact with Western culture; but it will be unfortunate if this only means coming in contact with Western pedantry and even Western hypocrisy. As it is there is only too much danger that the local complaints against the government may be exactly like the official explanations of the government; that is, mere strings of long words with very little meaning involved. In short, if people are to learn to talk English it will be a refreshing finishing touch to their culture if they learn to talk plain English. Of this it would be hard to find a better working model than what may be called scriptural English. It would be a very good thing for everybody concerned if any really unjust or unpopular official were described only in terms taken from the denunciations of Jezebel and Herod. It would especially be a good thing for the official. If it were true it would be appropriate, and if it were untrue it would be absurd. When people are really oppressed, their condition can generally be described in very plain terms connected with very plain things; with bread, with land, with taxes and children and churches. If imperialists and capitalists do thus oppress them, as they most certainly often do, then the condition of those more powerful persons can also be described in few and simple words; such as crime
and sin and death and hell. But when complaints are made, as they are sometimes in Palestine and still more in Egypt, in the elaborate and long-winded style of a leading article, the sympathetic European is apt to remember how very little confidence he has ever felt in his own leading articles. If an Arab comes to me and says, “The stranger from across the sea has taxed me, and taken the corn-sheaves from the field of my fathers,” I do really feel that he towers over me and my perishing industrial civilisation with a terrible appeal to eternal things. I feel he is a figure more enduring than a statue, like the figure of Naboth or of Nathan. But when that simple son of the desert opens his mouth and says, “The self-determination of proletarian class-conscious solidarity as it functions for international reconstruction,” and so on, why then I must confess to the weakness of feeling my sympathies instantly and strangely chilled. I merely feel inclined to tell him that I can talk that sort of pidgin English better than he can. If he modelled himself on the great rebels and revolutionists of the Bible, it would at least be a considerable improvement in his literary style. But as a matter of fact something much more solid is involved than literary style. There is a logic and justice in the distinction, even in the world of ideas. That most people with much more education than the Arab, and therefore much less excuse than the Arab, entirely ignore that distinction, is merely a result of their ignoring ideas, and being satisfied with long words. They like democracy because it is a long word; that is the only thing they do like about it.

People are entitled to self-government; that is, to such government as is self-made. They are not necessarily entitled to a special and elaborate machinery that somebody else has made. It is their right to make it for themselves, but it is also their duty to think of it for themselves. Self-government of a simple kind has existed in numberless simple societies, and I shall always think it a horrible responsibility to interfere with it. But representative government, or theoretically representative government, of an exceedingly complicated kind, may exist in certain complicated societies without their being bound to transfer it to others, or even to admire it for themselves. At any rate, for good or evil, they have invented it themselves. And there is a moral distinction, which is perfectly rational and democratic, between such inventions and the self-evident rights which no man can claim to have invented. If the Arab says to me, “I don’t care a curse for Europe; I demand bread,” the reproach is to me both true and terrible. But if he says, “I don’t care a curse for Europe; I demand French cookery, Italian confectionery, English audit ale,” and so on, I think he is rather an unreasonable Arab. After all, we invented these things; in auctore auctoritas.
And of this problem there is a sort of working model in the presence of the snow in Palestine, especially in the light of the old proverb about the impossibility of snow in Egypt. Palestine is wilder, less wealthy and modernised, more religious and therefore more realistic. The issue between the things only a European can do, and the things no European has the right to do, is much sharper and clearer than the confusions of verbosity. On the one hand the things the English can do are more real things, like clearing away the snow; for the very reason that the English are not here, so to speak, building on a French pavement but on the bare rocks of the Eastern wilds, the contact with Islam and Israel is more simple and direct. And on the other side the discontents and revolts are more real. So far from intending to suggest that the Egyptians have no complaints, I am very far from meaning that they have no wrongs. But curiously enough the wrongs seem to me more real than the complaints. The real case against our Egyptian adventure was stated long ago by Randolph Churchill, when he denounced “a bondholder’s war”; it is in the whole business of collecting debts due to cosmopolitan finance. But a stranger in Egypt hears little denunciation of cosmopolitan finance, and a great deal of drivel in the way of cosmopolitan idealism. When the Palestinians say that usurers menace their land they mean the land they dig; an old actuality and not a new abstraction. Their revolt may be right or wrong, but it is real; and what applies to their revolt applies to their religion. There may well be doubts about whether Egypt is a nation, but there is no doubt that Jerusalem is a city, and the nations have come to its light.

The problem of the snow proved indeed the text for a tale touching the practical politics of the city. The English soldiers cleared the snow away; the Arabs sat down satisfied or stoical with the snow blocking their own doors or loading their own roofs. But the Jews, as the story went, were at length persuaded to clear away the snow in front of them, and then demanded a handsome salary for having recovered the use of their own front doors. The story is not quite fair; and yet it is not so unfair as it seems. Any rational Anti-Semite will agree that such tales, even when they are true, do not always signify an avaricious tradition in Semitism, but sometimes the healthier and more human suggestion of Bolshevism. The Jews do demand high wages, but it is not always because they are in the old sense money-grabbers, but rather in the new sense money-grabbers (as an enemy would put it) men sincerely and bitterly convinced of their right to the surplus of capitalism. There is the same problem in the Jewish colonies in the country districts; in the Jewish explanation of the
employment of Arab and Syrian labour. The Jews argue that this occurs, not because they wish to remain idle capitalists, but because they insist on being properly paid proletarians. With all this I shall deal, however, when I treat of the Jewish problem itself. The point for the moment is that the episode of the snow did in a superficial way suggest the parts played by the three parties and the tales told about them. To begin with, it is right to say that the English do a great many things, as they clear away the snow, simply because nobody else would do them. They did save the oriental inhabitants from some of the worst consequences of the calamity. Probably they sometimes save the inhabitants from something which the inhabitants do not regard as a calamity. It is the danger of all such foreign efficiency that it often saves men who do not want to be saved. But they do in many cases do things from which Moslems profit, but which Moslems by themselves would not propose, let alone perform. And this has a general significance even in our first survey, for it suggests a truth easy to abuse, but I think impossible to ignore. I mean that there is something non-political about Moslem morality. Perverse as it may appear, I suspect that most of their political movements result from their non-political morality. They become politicians because they know they are not political; and feel their simple and more or less healthy life is at a disadvantage, in face of the political supremacy of the English and the political subtlety of the Jews.

For instance, the tradition of Turkish rule is simply a joke. All the stories about it are jokes, and often very good jokes. My own favourite incident is that which is still commemorated in the English cathedral by an enormous hole in the floor. The Turks dug up the pavement looking for concealed English artillery; because they had been told that the bishop had given his blessing to two canons. The bishop had indeed recently appointed two canons to the service of the Church, but he had not secreted them under the floor of the chancel. There was another agreeable incident when the Turkish authorities, by an impulsive movement of religious toleration, sent for a Greek priest to bury Greek soldiers, and told him to take his choice in a heap of corpses of all creeds and colours. But at once the most curious and the most common touch of comedy is the perpetual social introduction to solid and smiling citizens who have been nearly hanged by the Turks. The fortunate gentleman seems still to be regarding his escape with a broad grin. If you were introduced to a polite Frenchman who had come straight from the guillotine, or to an affable American who had only just vacated the electrical chair, you would feel a faint curiosity about the whole story. If a friend introduced somebody, saying, “My friend Robinson; his sentence has been
commuted to penal servitude,” or “My Uncle William, just come from Dartmoor Prison,” your mind and perhaps your lips would faintly form the syllables “What for?” But evidently, under Turkish rule, being hanged was like being knocked down by a cab; it might happen to anybody. This is a parenthesis, since I am only dealing here with the superficial experience of the streets, especially in the snow. But it will be well to safeguard it by saying that this unpolitical carelessness and comprehensiveness of the indiscriminate Turk had its tragic as well as its comic side. It was by no means everybody that escaped hanging; and there was a tree growing outside the Jaffa Gate at which men might still shudder as they pass it in the sunlight. It was what a modern revolutionary poet has called bitterly the Tree of Man’s Making; and what a medieval revolutionary poet called the fruit tree in the orchard of the king. It was the gibbet; and lives have dropped from it like leaves from a tree in autumn. Yet even on the sterner side, we can trace the truth about the Moslem fatalism which seems so alien to political actuality. There was a popular legend or proverb that this terrible tree was in some way bound up with the power of the Turk, and perhaps the Moslem over a great part of the earth. There is nothing more strange about that Moslem fatalism than a certain gloomy magnanimity which can invoke omens and oracles against itself. It is astonishing how often the Turks seem to have accepted a legend or prophecy about their own ultimate failure. De Quincey mentions one of them in the blow that half broke the Palladium of Byzantium. It is said that the Moslems themselves predict the entry of a Christian king of Jerusalem through the Golden Gate. Perhaps that is why they have blocked up the fatal gate; but in any case they dealt in that fashion with the fatal tree. They elaborately bound and riveted it with iron, as if accepting the popular prophecy which declared that so long as it stood the Turkish Empire would stand. It was as if the wicked man of Scripture had daily watered a green bay-tree, to make sure that it should flourish.

In the last chapter I have attempted to suggest a background of the battlemented walls with the low gates and narrow windows which seem to relieve the liveliest of the coloured groups against the neutral tints of the North, and how this was intensified when the neutral tints were touched with the positive hue of snow. In the same merely impressionist spirit I would here attempt to sketch some of the externals of the actors in such a scene, though it is hard to do justice to such a picture even in the superficial matter of the picturesque. Indeed it is hard to be sufficiently superficial; for in the East nearly every external is a symbol. The greater part of it is the gorgeous rag-heap of
Arabian humanity, and even about that one could lecture on almost every coloured rag. We hear much of the gaudy colours of the East; but the most striking thing about them is that they are delicate colours. It is rare to see a red that is merely like a pillar-box, or a blue that is Reckitt’s blue; the red is sure to have the enrichment of tawny wine or blood oranges, and the blue of peacocks or the sea. In short these people are artistic in the sense that used to be called aesthetic; and it is a nameless instinct that preserves these nameless tints. Like all such instincts, it can be blunted by a bullying rationalism; like all such children, these people do not know why they prefer the better, and can therefore be persuaded by sophists that they prefer the worst. But there are other elements emerging from the coloured crowd, which are more significant, and therefore more stubborn. A stranger entirely ignorant of that world would feel something like a chill to the blood when he first saw the black figures of the veiled Moslem women, sinister figures without faces. It is as if in that world every woman were a widow. When he realised that these were not the masked mutes at a very grisly funeral, but merely ladies literally obeying a convention of wearing veils in public, he would probably have a reaction of laughter. He would be disposed to say flippancy that it must be, a dull life, not only for the women but the men; and that a man might well want five wives if he had to marry them before he could even look at them. But he will be wise not to be satisfied with such flippancy, for the complete veiling of the Moslem women of Jerusalem, though not a finer thing than the freedom of the Christian woman of Bethlehem, is almost certainly a finer thing than the more coquettish compromise of the other Moslem women of Cairo. It simply means that the Moslem religion is here more sincerely observed; and this in turn is part of something that a sympathetic person will soon feel in Jerusalem, if he has come from these more commercial cities of the East; a spiritual tone decidedly more delicate and dignified, like the clear air about the mountain city. Whatever the human vices involved, it is not altogether for nothing that this is the holy town of three great religions. When all is said, he will feel that there are some tricks that could not be played, some trades that could not be plied, some shops that could not be opened, within a stone’s throw of the Sepulchre. This indefinable seriousness has its own fantasies of fanaticism or formalism; but if these are vices they are not vulgarities. There is no stronger example of this than the real Jews of Jerusalem, especially those from the ghettos of eastern Europe. They can be immediately picked out by the peculiar wisps of hair worn on each side of the face, like something between curls and whiskers. Sometimes they look strangely
effeminate, like some rococo burlesque of the ringlets of an Early Victorian woman. Sometimes they look considerably more like the horns of a devil; and one need not be an Anti-Semite to say that the face is often made to match. But though they may be ugly, or even horrible, they are not vulgar like the Jews at Brighton; they trail behind them too many primeval traditions and laborious loyalties, along with their grand though often greasy robes of bronze or purple velvet. They often wear on their heads that odd turban of fur worn by the Rabbis in the pictures of Rembrandt. And indeed that great name is not irrelevant; for the whole truth at the back of Zionism is in the difference between the picture of a Jew by Rembrandt and a picture of a Jew by Sargent. For Rembrandt the Rabbi was, in a special and double sense, a distinguished figure. He was something distinct from the world of the artist, who drew a Rabbi as he would a Brahmin. But Sargent had to treat his sitters as solid citizens of England or America; and consequently his pictures are direct provocations to a pogrom. But the light that Rembrandt loved falls not irreverently on the strange hairy haloes that can still be seen on the shaven heads of the Jews of Jerusalem. And I should be sorry for any pogrom that brought down any of their grey wisps or whiskers in sorrow to the grave.

The whole scene indeed, seriousness apart, might be regarded as a fantasia for barbers; for the different ways of dressing the hair would alone serve as symbols of different races and religions. Thus the Greek priests of the Orthodox Church, bearded and robed in black with black towers upon their heads, have for some strange reason their hair bound up behind like a woman’s. In any case they have in their pomp a touch of the bearded bulls of Assyrian sculpture; and this strange fashion of curling if not oiling the Assyrian bull gives the newcomer an indescribable and illogical impression of the unnatural sublimity of archaic art. In the Apocalypse somewhere there is an inspiringly unintelligible allusion to men coming on the earth, whose hair is like the hair of women and their teeth like the teeth of lions. I have never been bitten by an Orthodox clergyman, and cannot say whether his teeth are at all leonine; though I have seen seven of them together enjoying their lunch at an hotel with decorum and dispatch. But the twisting of the hair in the womanish fashion does for us touch that note of the abnormal which the mystic meant to convey in his poetry, and which others feel rather as a recoil into humour. The best and last touch to this topsy-turvydom was given when a lady, observing one of these reverend gentlemen who for some reason did not carry this curious coiffure, exclaimed, in a tone of heartrending surprise and distress, “Oh, he’s bobbed his hair!”
Here again of course even a superficial glance at the pageant of the street should not be content with its comedy. There is an intellectual interest in the external pomp and air of placid power in these ordinary Orthodox parish priests; especially if we compare them with the comparatively prosaic and jog-trot good nature of the Roman monks, called in this country the Latins. Mingling in the same crowd with these black-robed pontiffs can be seen shaven men in brown habits who seem in comparison to be both busy and obscure. These are the sons of St. Francis, who came to the East with a grand simplicity and thought to finish the Crusades with a smile. The spectator will be wise to accept this first contrast that strikes the eye with an impartial intellectual interest; it has nothing to do with personal character, of course, and many Greek priests are as simple in their tastes as they are charming in their manners; while any Roman priests can find as much ritual as they may happen to want in other aspects of their own religion. But it is broadly true that Roman and Greek Catholicism are contrasted in this way in this country; and the contrast is the flat contrary to all our customary associations in the West. In the East it is Roman Catholicism that stands for much that we associate with Protestantism. It is Roman Catholicism that is by comparison plain and practical and scornful of superstition and concerned for social work. It is Greek Catholicism that is stiff with gold and gorgeous with ceremonial, with its hold on ancient history and its inheritance of imperial tradition. In the cant of our own society, we may say it is the Roman who rationalises and the Greek who Romanises. It is the Roman Catholic who is impatient with Russian and Greek childishness, and perpetually appealing for common sense. It is the Greek who defends such childishness as childlike faith and would rebuke such common sense as common scepticism. I do not speak of the theological tenets or even the deeper emotions involved, but only, as I have said, of contrasts visible even in the street. And the whole difference is sufficiently suggested in two phrases I heard within a few days. A distinguished Anglo-Catholic, who has himself much sympathy with the Greek Orthodox traditions, said to me, “After all, the Romans were the first Puritans.” And I heard that a Franciscan, being told that this Englishman and perhaps the English generally were disposed to make an alliance with the Greek Church, had only said by way of comment, “And a good thing too, the Greeks might do something at last.”

Anyhow the first impression is that the Greek is more gorgeous in black than the Roman in colours. But the Greek of course can also appear in colours, especially in those eternal forms of frozen yet fiery colours which we call jewels.
I have seen the Greek Patriarch, that magnificent old gentleman, walking down the street like an emperor in the Arabian Nights, hung all over with historic jewels as thick as beads or buttons, with a gigantic cross of solid emeralds that might have been given him by the green genii of the sea, if any of the genii are Christians. These things are toys, but I am entirely in favour of toys; and rubies and emeralds are almost as intoxicating as that sort of lustrous coloured paper they put inside Christmas crackers. This beauty has been best achieved in the North in the glory of coloured glass; and I have seen great Gothic windows in which one could really believe that the robes of martyrs were giant rubies or the starry sky a single enormous sapphire. But the colours of the West are transparent, the colours of the East opaque. I have spoken of the Arabian Nights, and there is really a touch of them even in the Christian churches, perhaps increased with a tradition of early Christian secrecy. There are glimpses of gorgeously tiled walls, of blue curtains and green doors and golden inner chambers, that are just like the entrance to an Eastern tale. The Orthodox are at least more oriental in the sense of being more ornamental; more flat and decorative. The Romans are more Western, I might even say more modern, in the sense of having more realism even in their ritualism. The Greek cross is a cross; the Roman cross is a crucifix.

But these are deeper matters; I am only trying to suggest a sort of silhouette of the crowd like the similar silhouette of the city, a profile or outline of the heads and hats, like the profile of the towers and spires. The tower that makes the Greek priest look like a walking catafalque is by no means alone among the horns thus fantastically exalted. There is the peaked hood of the Armenian priest, for instance; the stately survival of that strange Monophysite heresy which perpetuated itself in pomp and pride mainly through the sublime accident of the Crusades. That black cone also rises above the crowd with something of the immemorial majesty of a pyramid; and rightly so, for it is typical of the prehistoric poetry by which these places live that some say it is a surviving memory of Ararat and the Ark.

Again the high white headgear of the Bethlehem women, or to speak more strictly of the Bethlehem wives, has already been noted in another connection; but it is well to remark it again among the colours of the crowd, because this at least has a significance essential to all criticism of such a crowd. Most travellers from the West regard such an Eastern city far too much as a Moslem city, like the lady whom Mr. Maurice Baring met who travelled all over Russia, and thought all the churches were mosques. But in truth it is very hard to generalise
about Jerusalem, precisely because it contains everything, and its contrasts are real contrasts. And anybody who doubts that its Christianity is Christian, a thing fighting for our own culture and morals on the borders of Asia, need only consider the concrete fact of these women of Bethlehem and their costume. There is no need to sneer in any unsympathetic fashion at all the domestic institutions of Islam; the sexes are never quite so stupid as some feminists represent; and I dare say a woman often has her own way in a harem as well as in a household. But the broad difference does remain. And if there be one thing, I think, that can safely be said about all Asia and all oriental tribes, it is this; that if a married woman wears any distinctive mark, it is always meant to prevent her from receiving the admiration or even the notice of strange men. Often it is only made to disguise her; sometimes it is made to disfigure her. It may be the masking of the face as among the Moslems; it may be the shaving of the head as among the Jews; it may, I believe, be the blackening of the teeth and other queer expedients among the people of the Far East. But is never meant to make her look magnificent in public; and the Bethlehem wife is made to look magnificent in public. She not only shows all the beauty of her face; and she is often very beautiful. She also wears a towering erection which is as unmistakably meant to give her consequence as the triple tiara of the Pope. A woman wearing such a crown, and wearing it without a veil, does stand, and can only conceivably stand, for what we call the Western view of women, but should rather call the Christian view of women. This is the sort of dignity which must of necessity come from some vague memory of chivalry. The woman may or may not be, as the legend says, a lineal descendant of a Crusader. But whether or no she is his daughter, she is certainly his heiress.

She may be put last among the local figures I have here described, for the special reason that her case has this rather deeper significance. For it is not possible to remain content with the fact that the crowd offers such varied shapes and colours to the eye, when it also offers much deeper divisions and even dilemmas to the intelligence. The black dress of the Moslem woman and the white dress of the Christian woman are in sober truth as different as black and white. They stand for real principles in a real opposition; and the black and white will not easily disappear in the dull grey of our own compromises. The one tradition will defend what it regards as modesty, and the other what it regards as dignity, with passions far deeper than most of our paltry political appetites. Nor do I see how we can deny such a right of defence, even in the case we consider the less enlightened. It is made all the more difficult by the fact that those who
consider themselves the pioneers of enlightenment generally also consider themselves the protectors of native races and aboriginal rights. Whatever view we take of the Moslem Arab, we must at least admit that the greater includes the less. It is manifestly absurd to say we have no right to interfere in his country, but have a right to interfere in his home.

It is the intense interest of Jerusalem that there can thus be two universes in the same street. Indeed there are ten rather than two; and it is a proverb that the fight is not only between Christian and Moslem, but between Christian and Christian. At this moment, it must be admitted, it is almost entirely a fight of Christian and Moslem allied against Jew. But of that I shall have to speak later; the point for the moment is that the varied colours of the streets are a true symbol of the varied colours of the souls. It is perhaps the only modern place where the war waged between ideas has such a visible and vivid heraldry.

And that fact alone may well leave the spectator with one final reflection; for it is a matter in which the modern world may well have to learn something from the motley rabble of this remote Eastern town.

It may be an odd thing to suggest that a crowd in Bond Street or Piccadilly should model itself on this masquerade of religions. It would be facile and fascinating to turn it into a satire or an extravaganza. Every good and innocent mind would be gratified with the image of a bowler hat in the precise proportions of the Dome of St. Paul’s, and surmounted with a little ball and cross, symbolising the loyalty of some Anglican to his mother church. It might even be pleasing to see the street dominated with a more graceful top-hat modelled on the Eiffel Tower, and signifying the wearer’s faith in scientific enterprise, or perhaps in its frequent concomitant of political corruption. These would be fair Western parallels to the head-dresses of Jerusalem; modelled on Mount Ararat or Solomon’s Temple, and some may insinuate that we are not very likely ever to meet them in the Strand. A man wearing whiskers is not even compelled to plead some sort of excuse or authority for wearing whiskers, as the Jew can for wearing ringlets; and though the Anglican clergyman may indeed be very loyal to his mother church, there might be considerable hesitation if his mother bade him bind his hair. Nevertheless a more historical view of the London and Jerusalem crowds will show as far from impossible to domesticate such symbols; that some day a lady’s jewels might mean something like the sacred jewels of the Patriarch, or a lady’s furs mean something like the furred turban of the Rabbi. History indeed will show us that we are not so much superior to them as inferior to ourselves.
When the Crusaders came to Palestine, and came riding up that road from Jaffa where the orange plantations glow on either side, they came with motives which may have been mixed and are certainly disputed. There may have been different theories among the Crusaders; there are certainly different theories among the critics of the Crusaders. Many sought God, some gold, some perhaps black magic. But whatever else they were in search of, they were not in search of the picturesque. They were not drawn from a drab civilisation by that mere thirst for colour that draws so many modern artists to the bazaars of the East. In those days there were colours in the West as well as in the East; and a glow in the sunset as well as in the sunrise. Many of the men who rode up that road were dressed to match the most glorious orange garden and to rival the most magnificent oriental king. King Richard cannot have been considered dowdy, even by comparison, when he rode on that high red saddle graven with golden lions, with his great scarlet hat and his vest of silver crescents. That squire of the comparatively unobtrusive household of Joinville, who was clad in scarlet striped with yellow, must surely have been capable (if I may be allowed the expression) of knocking them in the most magnificent Asiatic bazaar. Nor were these external symbols less significant, but rather more significant than the corresponding symbols of the Eastern civilisation. It is true that heraldry began beautifully as an art and afterwards degenerated into a science. But even in being a science it had to possess a significance; and the Western colours were often allegorical where the Eastern were only accidental. To a certain extent this more philosophical ornament was doubtless imitated; and I have remarked elsewhere on the highly heraldic lions which even the Saracens carved over the gate of St. Stephen. But it is the extraordinary and even exasperating fact that it was not imitated as the most meaningless sort of modern vulgarity is imitated. King Richard’s great red hat embroidered with beasts and birds has not overshadowed the earth so much as the billycock, which no one has yet thought of embroidering with any such natural and universal imagery. The cockney tourist is not only more likely to set out with the intention of knocking them, but he has actually knocked them; and Orientals are imitating the tweeds of the tourist more than they imitated the stripes of the squire. It is a curious and perhaps melancholy truth that the world is imitating our worst, our weariness and our dingy decline, when it did not imitate our best and the high moment of our morning.

Perhaps it is only when civilisation becomes a disease that it becomes an infection. Possibly it is only when it becomes a very virulent disease that it
becomes an epidemic. Possibly again that is the meaning both of cosmopolitanism and imperialism. Anyhow the tribes sitting by Afric’s sunny fountains did not take up the song when Francis of Assisi stood on the very mountain of the Middle Ages, singing the Canticle of the Sun. When Michael Angelo carved a statue in snow, Eskimos did not copy him, despite their large natural quarries or resources. Laplanders never made a model of the Elgin Marbles, with a frieze of reindeers instead of horses; nor did Hottentots try to paint Mumbo Jumbo as Raphael had painted Madonnas. But many a savage king has worn a top-hat, and the barbarian has sometimes been so debased as to add to it a pair of trousers. Explosive bullets and the brutal factory system numbers of advanced natives are anxious to possess. And it was this reflection, arising out of the mere pleasure of the eye in the parti-coloured crowd before me, that brought back my mind to the chief problem and peril of our position in Palestine, on which I touched earlier in this chapter; the peril which is largely at the back both of the just and of the unjust objections to Zionism. It is the fear that the West, in its modern mercantile mood, will send not its best but its worst. The artisan way of putting it, from the point of view of the Arab, is that it will mean not so much the English merchant as the Jewish money-lender. I shall write elsewhere of better types of Jew and the truths they really represent; but the Jewish money-lender is in a curious and complex sense the representative of this unfortunate paradox. He is not only unpopular both in the East and West, but he is unpopular in the West for being Eastern and in the East for being Western. He is accused in Europe of Asiatic crookedness and secrecy, and in Asia of European vulgarity and bounce. I have said a propos of the Arab that the dignity of the oriental is in his long robe; the merely mercantile Jew is the oriental who has lost his long robe, which leads to a dangerous liveliness in the legs. He bustles and hustles too much; and in Palestine some of the unpopularity even of the better sort of Jew is simply due to his restlessness. But there remains a fear that it will not be a question of the better sort of Jew, or of the better sort of British influence. The same ignominious inversion which reproduces everywhere the factory chimney without the church tower, which spreads a cockney commerce but not a Christian culture, has given many men a vague feeling that the influence of modern civilisation will surround these ragged but coloured groups with something as dreary and discoloured, as unnatural and as desolate as the unfamiliar snow in which they were shivering as I watched them. There seemed a sort of sinister omen in this strange visitation that the north had sent them; in the fact that when the north wind blew at last, it had only scattered
on them this silver dust of death.

It may be that this more melancholy mood was intensified by that pale landscape and those impassable ways. I do not dislike snow; on the contrary I delight in it; and if it had drifted as deep in my own country against my own door I should have thought it the triumph of Christmas, and a thing as comic as my own dog and donkey. But the people in the coloured rags did dislike it; and the effects of it were not comic but tragic. The news that came in seemed in that little lonely town like the news of a great war, or even of a great defeat. Men fell to regarding it, as they have fallen too much to regarding the war, merely as an unmixed misery, and here the misery was really unmixed. As the snow began to melt corpses were found in it, homes were hopelessly buried, and even the gradual clearing of the roads only brought him stories of the lonely hamlets lost in the hills. It seemed as if a breath of the aimless destruction that wanders in the world had drifted across us; and no task remained for men but the weary rebuilding of ruins and the numbering of the dead.

Only as I went out of the Jaffa Gate, a man told me that the tree of the hundred deaths, that was the type of the eternal Caliphate of the Crescent, was cast down and lying broken in the snow.
CHAPTER VI

THE GROUPS OF THE CITY

Palestine is a striped country; that is the first effect of landscape on the eye. It runs in great parallel lines wavering into vast hills and valleys, but preserving the parallel pattern; as if drawn boldly but accurately with gigantic chalks of green and grey and red and yellow. The natural explanation or (to speak less foolishly) the natural process of this is simple enough. The stripes are the strata of the rock, only they are stripped by the great rains, so that everything has to grow on ledges, repeating yet again that terraced character to be seen in the vineyards and the staircase streets of the town. But though the cause is in a sense in the ruinous strength of the rain, the hues are not the dreary hues of ruin. What earth there is is commonly a red clay richer than that of Devon; a red clay of which it would be easy to believe that the giant limbs of the first man were made. What grass there is is not only an enamel of emerald, but is literally crowded with those crimson anemones which might well have called forth the great saying touching Solomon in all his glory. And even what rock there is is coloured with a thousand secondary and tertiary tints, as are the walls and streets of the Holy City which is built from the quarries of these hills. For the old stones of the old Jerusalem are as precious as the precious stones of the New Jerusalem; and at certain moments of morning or of sunset, every pebble might be a pearl.

And all these coloured strata rise so high and roll so far that they might be skies rather than slopes. It is as if we looked up at a frozen sunset; or a daybreak fixed for ever with its fleeting bars of cloud. And indeed the fancy is not without a symbolic suggestiveness. This is the land of eternal things; but we tend too much to forget that recurrent things are eternal things. We tend to forget that subtle tones and delicate hues, whether in the hills or the heavens, were to the primitive poets and sages as visible as they are to us; and the strong and simple words in which they describe them do not prove that they did not realise them. When Wordsworth speaks of “the clouds that gather round the setting sun,” we assume that he has seen every shadow of colour and every curve of form; but when the Hebrew poet says “He hath made the clouds his chariot”; we do not always realise that he was full of indescribable emotions aroused by indescribable sights. We vaguely assume that the very sky was plainer in primitive times. We feel as if there had been a fashion in sunsets; or as if dawn
was always grey in the Stone Age or brown in the Bronze Age.

But there is another parable written in those long lines of many-coloured clay and stone. Palestine is in every sense a stratified country. It is not only true in the natural sense, as here where the clay has fallen away and left visible the very ribs of the hills. It is true in the quarries where men dig, in the dead cities where they excavate, and even in the living cities where they still fight and pray. The sorrow of all Palestine is that its divisions in culture, politics and theology are like its divisions in geology. The dividing line is horizontal instead of vertical. The frontier does not run between states but between stratified layers. The Jew did not appear beside the Canaanite but on top of the Canaanite; the Greek not beside the Jew but on top of the Jew; the Moslem not beside the Christian but on top of the Christian. It is not merely a house divided against itself, but one divided across itself. It is a house in which the first floor is fighting the second floor, in which the basement is oppressed from above and attics are besieged from below. There is a great deal of gunpowder in the cellars; and people are by no means comfortable even on the roof. In days of what some call Bolshevism, it may be said that most states are houses in which the kitchen has declared war on the drawing-room. But this will give no notion of the toppling pagoda of political and religious and racial differences, of which the name is Palestine. To explain that it is necessary to give the traveller’s first impressions more particularly in their order, and before I return to this view of the society as stratified, I must state the problem more practically as it presents itself while the society still seems fragmentary.

We are always told that the Turk kept the peace between the Christian sects. It would be nearer the nerve of vital truth to say that he made the war between the Christian sects. But it would be nearer still to say that the war is something not made by Turks but made up by infidels. The tourist visiting the churches is often incredulous about the tall tales told about them; but he is completely credulous about the tallest of all the tales, the tale that is told against them. He believes in a frantic fratricidal war perpetually waged by Christian against Christian in Jerusalem. It freshens the free sense of adventure to wander through those crooked and cavernous streets, expecting every minute to see the Armenian Patriarch trying to stick a knife into the Greek Patriarch; just as it would add to the romance of London to linger about Lambeth and Westminster in the hope of seeing the Archbishop of Canterbury locked in a deadly grapple with the President of the Wesleyan Conference. And if we return to our homes at evening without having actually seen these things with the eye of flesh, the vision has
none the less shone on our path, and led us round many corners with alertness and with hope. But in bald fact religion does not involve perpetual war in the East, any more than patriotism involves perpetual war in the West. What it does involve in both cases is a defensive attitude; a vigilance on the frontiers. There is no war; but there is an armed peace.

I have already explained the sense in which I say that the Moslems are unhistoric or even anti-historic. Perhaps it would be near the truth to say that they are prehistoric. They attach themselves to the tremendous truisms which men might have realised before they had any political experience at all; which might have been scratched with primitive knives of flint upon primitive pots of clay. Being simple and sincere, they do not escape the need for legends; I might almost say that, being honest, they do not escape the need for lies. But their mood is not historic, they do not wish to grapple with the past; they do not love its complexities; nor do they understand the enthusiasm for its details and even its doubts. Now in all this the Moslems of a place like Jerusalem are the very opposite of the Christians of Jerusalem. The Christianity of Jerusalem is highly historic, and cannot be understood without historical imagination. And this is not the strong point perhaps of those among us who generally record their impressions of the place. As the educated Englishman does not know the history of England, it would be unreasonable to expect him to know the history of Moab or of Mesopotamia. He receives the impression, in visiting the shrines of Jerusalem, of a number of small sects squabbling about small things. In short, he has before him a tangle of trivialities, which include the Roman Empire in the West and in the East, the Catholic Church in its two great divisions, the Jewish race, the memories of Greece and Egypt, and the whole Mahometan world in Asia and Africa. It may be that he regards these as small things; but I should be glad if he would cast his eye over human history, and tell me what are the large things. The truth is that the things that meet to-day in Jerusalem are by far the greatest things that the world has yet seen. If they are not important nothing on this earth is important, and certainly not the impressions of those who happen to be bored by them. But to understand them it is necessary to have something which is much commoner in Jerusalem than in Oxford or Boston; that sort of living history which we call tradition.

For instance, the critic generally begins by dismissing these conflicts with the statement that they are all about small points of theology. I do not admit that theological points are small points. Theology is only thought applied to religion; and those who prefer a thoughtless religion need not be so very disdainful of
others with a more rationalistic taste. The old joke that the Greek sects only differed about a single letter is about the lamest and most illogical joke in the world. An atheist and a theist only differ by a single letter; yet theologians are so subtle as to distinguish definitely between the two. But though I do not in any case allow that it is idle to be concerned about theology, as a matter of actual fact these quarrels are not chiefly concerned about theology. They are concerned about history. They are concerned with the things about which the only human sort of history is concerned; great memories of great men, great battles for great ideas, the love of brave people for beautiful places, and the faith by which the dead are alive. It is quite true that with this historic sense men inherit heavy responsibilities and revenges, fury and sorrow and shame. It is also true that without it men die, and nobody even digs their graves.

The truth is that these quarrels are rather about patriotism than about religion, in the sense of theology. That is, they are just such heroic passions about the past as we call in the West by the name of nationalism; but they are conditioned by the extraordinarily complicated position of the nations, or what corresponds to the nations. We of the West, if we wish to understand it, must imagine ourselves as left with all our local loves and family memories unchanged, but the places affected by them intermingled and tumbled about by some almost inconceivable convulsion. We must imagine cities and landscapes to have turned on some unseen pivots, or been shifted about by some unseen machinery, so that our nearest was furthest and our remotest enemy our neighbour. We must imagine monuments on the wrong sites, and the antiquities of one county emptied out on top of another. And we must imagine through all this the thin but tough threads of tradition everywhere tangled and yet everywhere unbroken. We must picture a new map made out of the broken fragments of the old map; and yet with every one remembering the old map and ignoring the new. In short we must try to imagine, or rather we must try to hope, that our own memories would be as long and our own loyalties as steady as the memories and loyalties of the little crowd in Jerusalem; and hope, or pray, that we could only be as rigid, as rabid and as bigoted as are these benighted people. Then perhaps we might preserve all our distinctions of truth and falsehood in a chaos of time and space.

We have to conceive that the Tomb of Napoleon is in the middle of Stratford-on-Avon, and that the Nelson Column is erected on the field of Bannockburn; that Westminster Abbey has taken wings and flown away to the most romantic situation on the Rhine, and that the wooden “Victory” is stranded, like the Ark on Ararat, on the top of the Hill of Tara; that the pilgrims to the shrine of
Lourdes have to look for it in the Island of Runnymede, and that the only existing German statue of Bismarck is to be found in the Pantheon at Paris. This intolerable topsy-turvydom is no exaggeration of the way in which stories cut across each other and sites are imposed on each other in the historic chaos of the Holy City. Now we in the West are very lucky in having our nations normally distributed into their native lands; so that good patriots can talk about themselves without perpetually annoying their neighbours. Some of the pacifists tell us that national frontiers and divisions are evil because they exasperate us to war. It would be far truer to say that national frontiers and divisions keep us at peace. It would be far truer to say that we can always love each other so long as we do not see each other. But the people of Jerusalem are doomed to have difference without division. They are driven to set pillar against pillar in the same temple, while we can set city against city across the plains of the world. While for us a church rises from its foundations as naturally as a flower springs from a flower-bed, they have to bless the soil and curse the stones that stand on it. While the land we love is solid under our feet to the earth’s centre, they have to see all they love and hate lying in strata like alternate night and day, as incompatible and as inseparable. Their entanglements are tragic, but they are not trumpery or accidental. Everything has a meaning; they are loyal to great names as men are loyal to great nations; they have differences about which they feel bound to dispute to the death; but in their death they are not divided.

Jerusalem is a small town of big things; and the average modern city is a big town full of small things. All the most important and interesting powers in history are here gathered within the area of a quiet village; and if they are not always friends, at least they are necessarily neighbours. This is a point of intellectual interest, and even intensity, that is far too little realised. It is a matter of modern complaint that in a place like Jerusalem the Christian groups do not always regard each other with Christian feelings. It is said that they fight each other; but at least they meet each other. In a great industrial city like London or Liverpool, how often do they even meet each other? In a large town men live in small cliques, which are much narrower than classes; but in this small town they live at least by large contacts, even if they are conflicts. Nor is it really true, in the daily humours of human life, that they are only conflicts. I have heard an eminent English clergyman from Cambridge bargaining for a brass lamp with a Syrian of the Greek Church, and asking the advice of a Franciscan friar who was standing smiling in the same shop. I have met the same representative of the Church of England, at a luncheon party with the wildest Zionist Jews, and with
the Grand Mufti, the head of the Moslem religion. Suppose the same Englishman had been, as he might well have been, an eloquent and popular vicar in Chelsea or Hampstead. How often would he have met a Franciscan or a Zionist? Not once in a year. How often would he have met a Moslem or a Greek Syrian? Not once in a lifetime. Even if he were a bigot, he would be bound in Jerusalem to become a more interesting kind of bigot. Even if his opinions were narrow, his experiences would be wide. He is not, as a fact, a bigot, nor, as a fact, are the other people bigots, but at the worst they could not be unconscious bigots. They could not live in such uncorrected complacency as is possible to a larger social set in a larger social system. They could not be quite so ignorant as a broad-minded person in a big suburb. Indeed there is something fine and distinguished about the very delicacy, and even irony, of their diplomatic relations. There is something of chivalry in the courtesy of their armed truce, and it is a great school of manners that includes such differences in morals.

This is an aspect of the interest of Jerusalem which can easily be neglected and is not easy to describe. The normal life there is intensely exciting, not because the factions fight, but rather because they do not fight. Of the abnormal crisis when they did fight, and the abnormal motives that made them fight, I shall have something to say later on. But it was true for a great part of the time that what was picturesque and thrilling was not the war but the peace. The sensation of being in this little town is rather like that of being at a great international congress. It is like that moving and glittering social satire, in which diplomatists can join in a waltz who may soon be joining in a war. For the religious and political parties have yet another point in common with separate nations; that even within this narrow space the complicated curve of their frontiers is really more or less fixed, and certainly not particularly fluctuating. Persecution is impossible and conversion is not at all common. The very able Anglo-Catholic leader, to whom I have already referred, uttered to me a paradox that was a very practical truth. He said he felt exasperated with the Christian sects, not for their fanaticism but for their lack of fanaticism. He meant their lack of any fervour and even of any hope, of converting each other to their respective religions. An Armenian may be quite as proud of the Armenian Church as a Frenchman of the French nation, yet he may no more expect to make a Moslem an Armenian than the Frenchman expects to make an Englishman a Frenchman. If, as we are told, the quarrels could be condemned as merely theological, this would certainly be the very reverse of logical. But as I say, we get much nearer to them by calling them national; and the leaders of the great religions feel much
more like the ambassadors of great nations. And, as I have also said, that ambassadorial atmosphere can be best expressed on the word irony, sometimes a rather tragic irony. At any tea-party or talk in the street, between the rival leaders, there is a natural tendency to that sort of wit which consists in veiled allusion to a very open secret. Each mail feels that there are heavy forces behind a small point, as the weight of the fencer is behind the point of the rapier. And the point can be yet more pointed because the politics of the city, when I was there, included several men with a taste and talent for such polished intercourse; including especially two men whose experience and culture would have been remarkable in any community in the world; the American Consul and the Military Governor of Jerusalem.

If in cataloguing the strata of the society we take first the topmost layer of Western officialism, we might indeed find it not inconvenient to take these two men as representing the chief realities about it. Dr. Glazebrook, the representative of the United States, has the less to do with the internal issues of the country; but his mere presence and history is so strangely picturesque that he might be put among the first reasons for finding the city interesting. He is an old man now, for he actually began life as a soldier in the Southern and Secessionist army, and still keeps alive in every detail, not merely the virtues but the very gestures of the old Southern and Secessionist aristocrat.

He afterward became a clergyman of the Episcopalian Church, and served as a chaplain in the Spanish-American war, then, at an age when most men have long retired from the most peaceful occupations, he was sent out by President Wilson to the permanent battlefield of Palestine. The brilliant services he performed there, in the protection of British and American subjects, are here chiefly interesting as throwing a backward light on the unearthly topsy-turvydom of Turkish rule. There appears in his experiences something in such rule which we are perhaps apt to forget in a vision of stately Eastern princes and gallant Eastern warriors, something more tyrannical even than the dull pigheadedness of Prussianism. I mean the most atrocious of all tortures, which is called caprice. It is the thing we feel in the Arabian tales, when no man knows whether the Sultan is good or bad, and he gives the same Vizier a thousand pounds or a thousand lashes. I have heard Dr. Glazebrook describe a whole day of hideous hesitation, in which fugitives for whom he pleaded were allowed four times to embark and four times were brought back again to their prison. There is something there dizzy as well as dark, a whirlpool in the very heart of Asia; and something wilder than our own worst oppressions in the peril of those men who looked up
and saw above all the power of Asiatic arms, their hopes hanging on a rocking mind like that of a maniac. The tyrant let them go at last, avowedly out of a simple sentiment for the white hair of the consul, and the strange respect that many Moslems feel for the minister of any religion. Once at least the trembling rock of barbaric rule nearly fell on him and killed him. By a sudden movement of lawlessness the Turkish military authorities sent to him, demanding the English documents left in his custody. He refused to give them up; and he knew what he was doing. In standing firm he was not even standing like Nurse Cavell against organised Prussia under the full criticism of organised Europe. He was rather standing in a den of brigands, most of whom had never heard of the international rules they violated. Finally by another freak of friendliness they left him and his papers alone; but the old man had to wait many days in doubt, not knowing what they would do, since they did not know themselves. I do not know what were his thoughts, or whether they were far from Palestine and all possibilities that tyranny might return and reign for ever. But I have sometimes fancied that, in that ghastly silence, he may have heard again only the guns of Lee and the last battle in the Wilderness.

If the mention of the American Consul refers back to the oppression of the past, the mention of the Military Governor brings back all the problems of the present. Here I only sketch these groups as I first found them in the present; and it must be remembered that my present is already past. All this was before the latest change from military to civil government, but the mere name of Colonel Storrs raises a question which is rather misunderstood in relation to that change itself. Many of our journalists, especially at the time of the last and worst of the riots, wrote as if it would be a change from some sort of stiff militarism to a liberal policy akin to parliamentarism. I think this a fallacy, and a fallacy not uncommon in journalism, which is professedly very much up to date, and actually very much behind the times. As a fact it is nearly four years behind the times, for it is thinking in terms of the old small and rigidly professional army. Colonel Storrs is the very last man to be called militaristic in the narrow sense; he is a particularly liberal and enlightened type of the sort of English gentleman who readily served his country in war, but who is rather particularly fitted to serve her in politics or literature. Of course many purely professional soldiers have liberal and artistic tastes; as General Shea, one of the organisers of Palestinian victory, has a fine taste in poetry, or Colonel Popham, then deputy Governor of Jerusalem, an admirable taste in painting. But while it is sometimes forgotten that many soldiers are men, it is now still more strange to forget that
most men are soldiers. I fancy there are now few things more representative than
the British Army; certainly it is much more representative than the British
Parliament. The men I knew, and whom I remember with so much gratitude,
working under General Bols at the seat of government on the Mount of Olives,
were certainly not narrowed by any military professionalism, and had if anything
the mark of quite different professions. One was a very shrewd and humorous
lawyer employed on legal problems about enemy property, another was a young
schoolmaster, with keen and clear ideas, or rather ideals, about education for all
the races in Palestine. These men did not cease to be themselves because they
were all dressed in khaki; and if Colonel Storrs recurs first to the memory, it is
not because he had become a colonel in the trade of soldiering, but because he is
the sort of man who could talk equally about all these other trades and twenty
more. Incidentally, and by way of example, he can talk about them in about ten
languages. There is a story, which whether or no it be true is very typical, that
one of the Zionist leaders made a patriotic speech in Hebrew, and broke off short
in his recollection of this partially revived national tongue; whereupon the
Governor of Jerusalem finished his Hebrew speech for him—whether to exactly
the same effect or not it would be impertinent to inquire. He is a man rather
recalling the eighteenth century aristocrat, with his love of wit and classical
learning; one of that small group of the governing class that contains his uncle,
Harry Cust, and was warmed with the generous culture of George Wyndham. It
was a purely mechanical distinction between the military and civil government
that would lend to such figures the stiffness of a drumhead court martial. And
even those who differed with him accused him in practice, not of militarist lack
of sympathy with any of those he ruled, but rather with too imaginative a
sympathy with some of them. To know these things, however slightly, and then
read the English newspapers afterwards is often amusing enough; but I have only
mentioned the matter because there is a real danger in so crude a differentiation.
It would be a bad thing if a system military in form but representative in fact
gave place to a system representative in form but financial in fact. That is what
the Arabs and many of the English fear; and with the mention of that fear we
come to the next stratum after the official. It must be remembered that I am not
at this stage judging these groups, but merely very rapidly sketching them, like
figures and costumes in the street.

The group standing nearest to the official is that of the Zionists; who are
supposed to have a place at least in our official policy. Among these also I am
happy to have friends; and I may venture to call the official head of the Zionists
an old friend in a matter quite remote from Zionism. Dr. Eder, the President of the Zionist Commission, is a man for whom I conceived a respect long ago when he protested, as a professional physician, against the subjection of the poor to medical interference to the destruction of all moral independence. He criticised with great effect the proposal of legislators to kidnap anybody else’s child whom they chose to suspect of a feeblemindedness they were themselves too feebleminded to define. It was defended, very characteristically, by a combination of precedent and progress; and we were told that it only extended the principle of the lunacy laws. That is to say, it only extended the principle of the lunacy laws to people whom no sane man would call lunatics. It is as if they were to alter the terms of a quarantine law from “lepers” to “light-haired persons”; and then say blandly that the principle was the same. The humour and human sympathy of a Jewish doctor was very welcome to us when we were accused of being Anti-Semites, and we afterwards asked Dr. Eder for his own views on the Jewish problem. We found he was then a very strong Zionist; and this was long before he had the faintest chance of figuring as a leader of Zionism. And this accident is important; for it stamps the sincerity of the small group of original Zionists, who were in favour of this nationalist ideal when all the international Jewish millionaires were against it. To my mind the most serious point now against it is that the millionaires are for it. But it is enough to note here the reality of the ideal in men like Dr. Eder and Dr. Weizmann, and doubtless many others. The only defect that need be noted, as a mere detail of portraiture, is a certain excessive vigilance and jealousy and pertinacity in the wrong place, which sometimes makes the genuine Zionists unpopular with the English, who themselves suffer unpopularity for supporting them. For though I am called an Anti-Semite, there were really periods of official impatience when I was almost the only Pro-Semite in the company. I went about pointing out what was really to be said for Zionism, to people who were represented by the Arabs as the mere slaves of the Zionists.

This group of Arab Anti-Semites may be taken next, but very briefly; for the problem itself belongs to a later page; and the one thing to be said of it here is very simple. I never expected it, and even now I do not fully understand it. But it is the fact that the native Moslems are more Anti-Semitic than the native Christians. Both are more or less so; and have formed a sort of alliance out of the fact. The banner carried by the mob bore the Arabic inscription “Moslems and Christians are brothers.” It is as if the little wedge of Zionism had closed up the cracks of the Crusades.
Of the Christian crowds in that partnership, and the Christian creeds they are proud to inherit, I have already suggested something; it is only as well to note that I have put them out of their strict order in the stratification of history. It is too often forgotten that in these countries the Christian culture is older than the Moslem culture. I for one regret that the old Pax Romana was broken up by the Arabs; and hold that in the long run there was more life in that Byzantine decline than in that Semitic revival. And I will add what I cannot here develop or defend; that in the long run it is best that the Pax Romana should return; and that the suzerainty of those lands at least will have to be Christian, and neither Moslem nor Jewish. To defend it is to defend a philosophy; but I do hold that there is in that philosophy, for all the talk of its persecutions in the past, a possibility of comprehension and many-sided sympathy which is not in the narrow intensity either of the Moslem or the Jew. Christianity is really the right angle of that triangle, and the other two are very acute angles.

But in the meetings that led up to the riots it is the more Moslem part of the mixed crowds that I chiefly remember; which touches the same truth that the Christians are the more potentially tolerant. But many of the Moslem leaders are as dignified and human as many of the Zionist leaders; the Grand Mufti is a man I cannot imagine as either insulting anybody, or being conceivably the object of insult. The Moslem Mayor of Jerusalem was another such figure, belonging also I believe to one of the Arab aristocratic houses (the Grand Mufti is a descendant of Mahomet) and I shall not forget his first appearance at the first of the riotous meetings in which I found myself. I will give it as the first of two final impressions with which I will end this chapter, I fear on a note of almost anarchic noise, the unearthly beating and braying of the Eastern gongs and horns of two fierce desert faiths against each other.

I first saw from the balcony of the hotel the crowd of riotors come rolling up the street. In front of them went two fantastic figures turning like teetotums in an endless dance and twirling two crooked and naked scimitars, as the Irish were supposed to twirl shillelaghs. I thought it a delightful way of opening a political meeting; and I wished we could do it at home at the General Election. I wish that instead of the wearisome business of Mr. Bonar Law taking the chair, and Mr. Lloyd George addressing the meeting, Mr. Law and Mr. Lloyd George would only hop and caper in front of a procession, spinning round and round till they were dizzy, and waving and crossing a pair of umbrellas in a thousand invisible patterns. But this political announcement or advertisement, though more intelligent than our own, had, as I could readily believe, another side to it. I was
told that it was often a prelude to ordinary festivals, such as weddings; and no doubt it remains from some ancient ritual dance of a religious character. But I could imagine that it might sometimes seem to a more rational taste to have too religious a character. I could imagine that those dancing men might indeed be dancing dervishes, with their heads going round in a more irrational sense than their bodies. I could imagine that at some moments it might suck the soul into what I have called in metaphor the whirlpool of Asia, or the whirlwind of a world whipped like a top with a raging monotony; the cyclone of eternity. That is not the sort of rhythm nor the sort of religion by which I myself should hope to save the soul; but it is intensely interesting to the mind and even the eye, and I went downstairs and wedged myself into the thick and thronging press. It surged through the gap by the gate, where men climbed lamp-posts and roared out speeches, and more especially recited national poems in rich resounding voices; a really moving effect, at least for one who could not understand a word that was said. Feeling had already gone as far as knocking Jews’ hats off and other popular sports, but not as yet on any universal and systematic scale; I saw a few of the antiquated Jews with wrinkles and ringlets, peering about here and there; some said as spies or representatives of the Zionists, to take away the Anti-Semitic colour from the meeting. But I think this unlikely; especially as it would have been pretty hard to take it away. It is more likely, I think, that the archaic Jews were really not unamused and perhaps not unsympathetic spectators; for the Zionist problem is complicated by a real quarrel in the Ghetto about Zionism. The old religious Jews do not welcome the new nationalist Jews; it would sometimes be hardly an exaggeration to say that one party stands for the religion without the nation, and the other for the nation without the religion. Just as the old agricultural Arabs hate the Zionists as the instruments of new Western business grab and sharp practice; so the old peddling and pedantic but intensely pious Jews hate the Zionists as the instruments of new Western atheism of free thought. Only I fear that when the storm breaks, such distinctions are swept away.

The storm was certainly rising. Outside the Jaffa Gate the road runs up steeply and is split in two by the wedge of a high building, looking as narrow as a tower and projecting like the prow of a ship. There is something almost theatrical about its position and stage properties, its one high-curtained window and balcony, with a sort of pole or flag-staff; for the place is official or rather municipal. Round it swelled the crowd, with its songs and poems and passionate rhetoric in a kind of crescendo, and then suddenly the curtain of the window rose like the
curtain of the theatre, and we saw on that high balcony the red fez and the tall figure of the Mahometan Mayor of Jerusalem.

I did not understand his Arabic observations; but I know when a man is calming a mob, and the mob did become calmer. It was as if a storm swelled in the night and gradually died away in a grey morning; but there are perpetual mutterings of that storm. My point for the moment is that the exasperations come chiefly from the two extremes of the two great Semitic traditions of monotheism; and certainly not primarily from those poor Eastern Christians of whose fanaticism we have been taught to make fun. From time to time there are gleams of the extremities of Eastern fanaticism which are almost ghastly to Western feeling. They seem to crack the polish of the dignified leaders of the Arab aristocracy and the Zionist school of culture, and reveal a volcanic substance of which only oriental creeds have been made. One day a wild Jewish proclamation is passed from hand to hand, denouncing disloyal Jews who refuse the teaching Hebrew; telling doctors to let them die and hospitals to let them rot, ringing with the old unmistakable and awful accent that bade men dash their children against the stones. Another day the city would be placarded with posters printed in Damascus, telling the Jews who looked to Palestine for a national home that they should find it a national cemetery. And when these cries clash it is like the clash of those two crooked Eastern swords, that crossed and recrossed and revolved like blazing wheels, in the vanguard of the marching mob.

I felt the fullest pressure of the problem when I first walked round the whole of the Haram enclosure, the courts of the old Temple, where the high muezzin towers now stand at every corner, and heard the clear voices of the call to prayer. The sky was laden with a storm that became the snowstorm; and it was the time at which the old Jews beat their hands and mourn over what are believed to be the last stones of the Temple. There was a movement in my own mind that was attuned to these things, and impressed by the strait limits and steep sides of that platform of the mountains; for the sense of crisis is not only in the intensity of the ideals, but in the very conditions of the reality, the reality with which this chapter began. And the burden of it is the burden of Palestine; the narrowness of the boundaries and the stratification of the rock. A voice not of my reason but rather sounding heavily in my heart, seemed to be repeating sentences like pessimistic proverbs. There is no place for the Temple of Solomon but on the ruins of the Mosque of Omar. There is no place for the nation of the Jews but in the country of the Arabs. And these whispers came to me first not as intellectual conclusions upon the conditions of the case, of which I should have much more
to say and to hope; but rather as hints of something immediate and menacing and yet mysterious. I felt almost a momentary impulse to flee from the place, like one who has received an omen. For two voices had met in my ears; and within the same narrow space and in the same dark hour, electric and yet eclipsed with cloud, I had heard Islam crying from the turret and Israel wailing at the wall.
CHAPTER VII

THE SHADOW OF THE PROBLEM

A traveller sees the hundred branches of a tree long before he is near enough to see its single and simple root; he generally sees the scattered or sprawling suburbs of a town long before he has looked upon the temple or the marketplace. So far I have given impressions of the most motley things merely as they came, in chronological and not in logical order; the first flying vision of Islam as a sort of sea, with something both of the equality and the emptiness and the grandeur of its purple seas of sand; the first sharp silhouette of Jerusalem, like Mount St. Michael, lifting above that merely Moslem flood a crag still crowned with the towers of the Crusaders; the mere kaleidoscope of the streets, with little more than a hint of the heraldic meaning of the colours; a merely personal impression of a few of the leading figures whom I happened to meet first, and only the faintest suggestion of the groups for which they stood. So far I have not even tidied up my own first impressions of the place; far less advanced a plan for tidying up the place itself.

In any case, to begin with, it is easy to be in far too much of a hurry about tidying up. This has already been noted in the more obvious case, of all that religious art that bewildered the tourist with its churches full of flat and gilded ikons. Many a man has had the sensation of something as full as a picture gallery and as futile as a lumber-room, merely by not happening to know what is really of value, or especially in what way it is really valued. An Armenian or a Syrian might write a report on his visit to England, saying that our national and especially our naval heroes were neglected, and left to the lowest dregs of the rabble; since the portraits of Benbow and Nelson, when exhibited to the public, were painted on wood by the crudest and most incompetent artists. He would not perhaps fully appreciate the fine shade of social status and utility implied in a public-house sign. He might not realise that the sign of Nelson could be hung on high everywhere, because the reputation of Nelson was high everywhere, not because it was low anywhere; that his bad portrait was really a proof of his good name. Yet the too rapid reformer may easily miss even the simple and superficial parallel between the wooden pictures of admirals and the wooden pictures of angels. Still less will he appreciate the intense spiritual atmosphere, that makes the real difference between an ikon and an inn-sign, and makes the inns of
England, noble and national as they are, relatively the homes of Christian charity but hardly a Christian faith. He can hardly bring himself to believe that Syrians can be as fond of religion as Englishmen of beer.

Nobody can do justice to these cults who has not some sympathy with the power of a mystical idea to transmute the meanest and most trivial objects with a kind of magic. It is easy to talk of superstitiously attaching importance to sticks and stones, but the whole poetry of life consists of attaching importance to sticks and stones; and not only to those tall sticks we call the trees or those large stones we call the mountains. Anything that gives to the sticks of our own furniture, or the stones of our own backyard, even a reflected or indirect divinity is good for the dignity of life; and this is often achieved by the dedication of similar and special things. At least we should desire to see the profane things transfigured by the sacred, rather than the sacred disenchanted by the profane; and it was a prophet walking on the walls of this mountain city, who said that in his vision all the bowls should be as the bowls before the altar, and on every pot in Jerusalem should be written Holy unto the Lord.

Anyhow, this intensity about trifles is not always understood. Several quite sympathetic Englishmen told me merely as a funny story (and God forbid that I should deny that it is funny) the fact of the Armenians or some such people having been allowed to suspend a string of lamps from a Greek pillar by means of a nail, and their subsequent alarm when their nail was washed by the owners of the pillar; a sort of symbol that their nail had finally fallen into the hands of the enemy. It strikes us as odd that a nail should be so valuable or so vivid to the imagination. And yet, to men so close to Calvary, even nails are not entirely commonplace.

All this, regarding a decent delay and respect for religion or even for superstition, is obvious and has already been observed. But before leaving it, we may note that the same argument cuts the other way; I mean that we should not insolently impose our own ideas of what is picturesque any more than our own ideas of what is practical. The aesthete is sometimes more of a vandal than the vandal. The proposed reconstructions of Jerusalem have been on the whole reasonable and sympathetic; but there is always a danger from the activities, I might almost say the antics, of a sort of antiquary who is more hasty than an anarchist. If the people of such places revolt against their own limitations, we must have a reasonable respect for their revolt, and we must not be impatient even with their impatience.

It is their town; they have to live in it, and not we. As they are the only judges
of whether their antiquities are really authorities, so they are the only judges of whether their novelties are really necessities. As I pointed out more than once to many of my friends in Jerusalem, we should be very much annoyed if artistic visitors from Asia took similar liberties in London. It would be bad enough if they proposed to conduct excavations in Pimlico or Paddington, without much reference to the people who lived there; but it would be worse if they began to relieve them of the mere utilitarianism of Chelsea Bridge or Paddington Station. Suppose an eloquent Abyssinian Christian were to hold up his hand and stop the motor-omnibuses from going down Fleet Street on the ground that the thoroughfare was sacred to the simpler locomotion of Dr. Johnson. We should be pleased at the African’s appreciation of Johnson; but our pleasure would not be unmixed. Suppose when you or I are in the act of stepping into a taxi-cab, an excitable Coptic Christian were to leap from behind a lamp-post, and implore us to save the grand old growler or the cab called the gondola of London. I admit and enjoy the poetry of the hansom; I admit and enjoy the personality of the true cabman of the old four-wheeler, upon whose massive manhood descended something of the tremendous tradition of Tony Weller. But I am not so certain as I should like to be, that I should at that moment enjoy the personality of the Copt. For these reasons it seems really desirable, or at least defensible, to defer any premature reconstruction of disputed things, and to begin this book as a mere note-book or sketch-book of things as they are, or at any rate as they appear. It was in this irregular order, and in this illogical disproportion, that things did in fact appear to me, and it was some time before I saw any real generalisation that would reduce my impressions to order. I saw that the groups disagreed, and to some extent why they disagreed, long before I could seriously consider anything on which they would be likely to agree. I have therefore confined the first section of this book to a mere series of such impressions, and left to the last section a study of the problem and an attempt at the solution. Between these two I have inserted a sort of sketch of what seemed to me the determining historical events that make the problem what it is. Of these I will only say for the moment that, whether by a coincidence or for some deeper cause, I feel it myself to be a case of first thoughts being best; and that some further study of history served rather to solidify what had seemed merely a sort of vision. I might almost say that I fell in love with Jerusalem at first sight; and the final impression, right or wrong, served only to fix the fugitive fancy which had seen, in the snow on the city, the white crown of a woman of Bethlehem.

But there is another cause for my being content for the moment, with this
mere chaos of contrasts. There is a very real reason for emphasising those contrasts, and for shunning the temptation to shut our eyes to them even considered as contrasts. It is necessary to insist that the contrasts are not easy to turn into combinations; that the red robes of Rome and the green scarves of Islam will not very easily fade into a dingy russet; that the gold of Byzantium and the brass of Babylon will require a hot furnace to melt them into any kind of amalgam. The reason for this is akin to what has already been said about Jerusalem as a knot of realities. It is especially a knot of popular realities. Although it is so small a place, or rather because it is so small a place, it is a domain and a dominion for the masses. Democracy is never quite democratic except when it is quite direct; and it is never quite direct except when it is quite small. So soon as a mob has grown large enough to have delegates it has grown large enough to have despots; indeed the despots are often much the more representative of the two. Now in a place so small as Jerusalem, what we call the rank and file really counts. And it is generally true, in religions especially, that the real enthusiasm or even fanaticism is to be found in the rank and file. In all intense religions it is the poor who are more religious and the rich who are more irreligious. It is certainly so with the creeds and causes that come to a collision in Jerusalem. The great Jewish population throughout the world did hail Mr. Balfour’s declaration with something almost of the tribal triumph they might have shown when the Persian conqueror broke the Babylonian bondage. It was rather the plutocratic princes of Jewry who long hung back and hesitated about Zionism. The mass of Mahometans really are ready to combine against the Zionists as they might have combined against the Crusades. It is rather the responsible Mahometan leaders who will naturally be found more moderate and diplomatic. This popular spirit may take a good or a bad form; and a mob may cry out many things, right and wrong. But a mob cries out “No Popery”; it does not cry out “Not so much Popery,” still less “Only a moderate admixture of Popery.” It shouts “Three cheers for Gladstone,” it does not shout “A gradual and evolutionary social tendency towards some ideal similar to that of Gladstone.” It would find it quite a difficult thing to shout; and it would find exactly the same difficulty with all the advanced formulae about nationalisation and internationalisation and class-conscious solidarity. No rabble could roar at the top of its voice the collectivist formula of “The nationalisation of all the means of production, distribution, and exchange.” The mob of Jerusalem is no exception to the rule, but rather an extreme example of it. The mob of Jerusalem has cried some remarkable things in its time; but they were not pedantic and they
were not evasive. There was a day when it cried a single word; “Crucify.” It was a thing to darken the sun and rend the veil of the temple; but there was no doubt about what it meant.

This is an age of minorities; of minorities powerful and predominant, partly through the power of wealth and partly through the idolatry of education. Their powers appeared in every crisis of the Great War, when a small group of pacifists and internationalists, a microscopic minority in every country, were yet constantly figuring as diplomatists and intermediaries and men on whose attitude great issues might depend. A man like Mr. Macdonald, not a workman nor a formal or real representative of workmen, was followed everywhere by the limelight; while the millions of workmen who worked and fought were out of focus and therefore looked like a fog. Just as such figures give a fictitious impression of unity between the crowds fighting for different flags and frontiers, so there are similar figures giving a fictitious unity to the crowds following different creeds. There are already Moslems who are Modernists; there have always been a ruling class of Jews who are Materialists. Perhaps it would be true to say about much of the philosophical controversy in Europe, that many Jews tend to be Materialists, but all tend to be Monists, though the best in the sense of being Monotheists. The worst are in a much grosser sense materialists, and have motives very different from the dry idealism of men like Mr. Macdonald, which is probably sincere enough in its way. But with whatever motives, these intermediaries everywhere bridge the chasm between creeds as they do the chasm between countries. Everywhere they exalt the minority that is indifferent over the majority that is interested. Just as they would make an international congress out of the traitors of all nations, so they would make an ecumenical council out of the heretics of all religions.

Mild constitutionalists in our own country often discuss the possibility of a method of protecting the minority. If they will find any possible method of protecting the majority, they will have found something practically unknown to the modern world. The majority is always at a disadvantage; the majority is difficult to idealise, because it is difficult to imagine. The minority is generally idealised, sometimes by its servants, always by itself. But my sympathies are generally, I confess, with the impotent and even invisible majority. And my sympathies, when I go beyond the things I myself believe, are with all the poor Jews who do believe in Judaism and all the Mahometans who do believe in Mahometanism, not to mention so obscure a crowd as the Christians who do believe in Christianity. I feel I have more morally and even intellectually in
common with these people, and even the religions of these people, than with the supercilious negations that make up the most part of what is called enlightenment. It is these masses whom we ought to consider everywhere; but it is especially these masses whom we must consider in Jerusalem. And the reason is in the reality I have described; that the place is like a Greek city or a medieval parish; it is sufficiently small and simple to be a democracy. This is not a university town full of philosophies; it is a Zion of the hundred sieges raging with religions; not a place where resolutions can be voted and amended, but a place where men can be crowned and crucified.

There is one small thing neglected in all our talk about self-determination; and that is determination. There is a great deal more difference than there is between most motions and amendments between the things for which a democracy will vote and the things on which a democracy is determined. You can take a vote among Jews and Christians and Moslems about whether lamp-posts should be painted green or portraits of politicians painted at all, and even their solid unanimity may be solid indifference. Most of what is called self-determination is like that; but there is no self-determination about it. The people are not determined. You cannot take a vote when the people are determined. You accept a vote, or something very much more obvious than a vote.

Now it may be that in Jerusalem there is not one people but rather three or four; but each is a real people, having its public opinion, its public policy, its flag and almost, as I have said, its frontier. It is not a question of persuading weak and wavering voters, at a vague parliamentary election, to vote on the other side for a change, to choose afresh between two middle-class gentlemen, who look exactly alike and only differ on a question about which nobody knows or cares anything. It is a question of contrasts that will almost certainly remain contrasts, except under the flood of some spiritual conversion which cannot be foreseen and certainly cannot be enforced. We cannot enrol these people under our religion, because we have not got one. We can enrol them under our government, and if we are obliged to do that, the obvious essential is that like Roman rule before Christianity, or the English rule in India it should profess to be impartial if only by being irreligious. That is why I willingly set down for the moment only the first impressions of a stranger in a strange country. It is because our first safety is in seeing that it is a strange country; and our present preliminary peril that we may fall into the habit of thinking it a familiar country. It does no harm to put the facts in a fashion that seems disconnected; for the first fact of all is that they are disconnected. And the first danger of all is that we may
allow some international nonsense or newspaper cant to imply that they are connected when they are not. It does no harm, at any rate to start with, to state the differences as irreconcilable. For the first and most unfamiliar fact the English have to learn in this strange land is that differences can be irreconcilable. And again the chief danger is that they may be persuaded that the wordy compromises of Western politics can reconcile them; that such abysses can be filled up with rubbish, or such chasms bridged with cobwebs. For we have created in England a sort of compromise which may up to a certain point be workable in England; though there are signs that even in England that point is approaching or is past. But in any case we could only do with that compromise as we could do without conscription; because an accident had made us insular and even provincial. So in India where we have treated the peoples as different from ourselves and from each other we have at least partly succeeded. So in Ireland, where we have tried to make them agree with us and each other, we have made one never-ending nightmare.

We can no more subject the world to the English compromise than to the English climate; and both are things of incalculable cloud and twilight. We have grown used to a habit of calling things by the wrong names and supporting them by the wrong arguments; and even doing the right thing for the wrong cause. We have party governments which consist of people who pretend to agree when they really disagree. We have party debates which consist of people who pretend to disagree when they really agree. We have whole parties named after things they no longer support, or things they would never dream of proposing. We have a mass of meaningless parliamentary ceremonials that are no longer even symbolic; the rule by which a parliamentarian possesses a constituency but not a surname; or the rule by which he becomes a minister in order to cease to be a member. All this would seem the most superstitious and idolatrous mummary to the simple worshippers in the shrines of Jerusalem. You may think what they say fantastic, or what they mean fanatical, but they do not say one thing and mean another. The Greek may or may not have a right to say he is Orthodox, but he means that he is Orthodox; in a very different sense from that in which a man supporting a new Home Rule Bill means that he is Unionist. A Moslem would stop the sale of strong drink because he is a Moslem. But he is not quite so muddleheaded as to profess to stop it because he is a Liberal, and a particular supporter of the party of liberty. Even in England indeed it will generally be found that there is something more clear and rational about the terms of theology than those of politics and popular science. A man has at least a more logical
notion of what he means when he calls himself an Anglo-Catholic than when he calls himself an Anglo-Saxon. But the old Jew with the drooping ringlets, shuffling in and out of the little black booths of Jerusalem, would not condescend to say he is a child of anything like the Anglo-Saxon race. He does not say he is a child of the Aramaico-Semitic race. He says he is a child of the Chosen Race, brought with thunder and with miracles and with mighty battles out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage. In other words, he says something that means something, and something that he really means. One of the white Dominicans or brown Franciscans, from the great monasteries of the Holy City, may or may not be right in maintaining that a Papacy is necessary to the unity of Christendom. But he does not pass his life in proving that the Papacy is not a Papacy, as many of our liberal constitutionalists pass it in proving that the Monarchy is not a Monarchy. The Greek priests spend an hour on what seems to the sceptic mere meaningless formalities of the preparation of the Mass. But they would not spend a minute if they were themselves sceptics and thought them meaningless formalities, as most modern people do think of the formalities about Black Rod or the Bar of the House. They would be far less ritualistic than we are, if they cared as little for the Mass as we do for the Mace. Hence it is necessary for us to realise that these rude and simple worshippers, of all the different forms of worship, really would be bewildered by the ritual dances and elaborate ceremonial antics of John Bull, as by the superstitious forms and almost supernatural incantations of most of what we call plain English.

Now I take it we retain enough realism and common sense not to wish to transfer these complicated conventions and compromises to a land of such ruthless logic and such rending divisions. We may hope to reproduce our laws, we do not want to reproduce our legal fictions. We do not want to insist on everybody referring to Mr. Peter or Mr. Paul, as the honourable member for Waddy Walleh; because a retiring Parliamentarian has to become Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds, we shall not insist on a retiring Palestinian official becoming Steward of the Moabitic Hundreds. But yet in much more subtle and more dangerous ways we are making that very mistake. We are transferring the fictions and even the hypocrisies of our own insular institutions from a place where they can be tolerated to a place where they will be torn in pieces. I have confined myself hitherto to descriptions and not to criticisms, to stating the elements of the problem rather than attempting as yet to solve it; because I think the danger is rather that we shall underrate the difficulties than overdo the description; that we shall too easily deny the problem rather than that we shall
too severely criticise the solution. But I would conclude this chapter with one practical criticism which seems to me to follow directly from all that is said here of our legal fictions and local anomalies. One thing at least has been done by our own Government, which is entirely according to the ritual or routine of our own Parliament. It is a parliament of Pooh Bah, where anybody may be Lord High Everything Else. It is a parliament of Alice in Wonderland, where the name of a thing is different from what it is called, and even from what its name is called. It is death and destruction to send out these fictions into a foreign daylight, where they will be seen as things and not theories. And knowing all this, I cannot conceive the reason, or even the meaning, of sending out Sir Herbert Samuel as the British representative in Palestine.

I have heard it supported as an interesting experiment in Zionism. I have heard it denounced as a craven concession to Zionism. I think it is quite obviously a flat and violent contradiction to Zionism. Zionism, as I have always understood it, and indeed as I have always defended it, consists in maintaining that it would be better for all parties if Israel had the dignity and distinctive responsibility of a separate nation; and that this should be effected, if possible, or so far as possible, by giving the Jews a national home, preferably in Palestine. But where is Sir Herbert Samuel’s national home? If it is in Palestine he cannot go there as a representative of England. If it is in England, he is so far a living proof that a Jew does not need a national home in Palestine. If there is any point in the Zionist argument at all, you have chosen precisely the wrong man and sent him to precisely the wrong country. You have asserted not the independence but the dependence of Israel, and yet you have ratified the worst insinuations about the dependence of Christendom. In reason you could not more strongly state that Palestine does not belong to the Jews, than by sending a Jew to claim it for the English. And yet in practice, of course, all the Anti-Semites will say he is claiming it for the Jews. You combine all possible disadvantages of all possible courses of action; you run all the risks of the hard Zionist adventure, while actually denying the high Zionist ideal. You make a Jew admit he is not a Jew but an Englishman; even while you allow all his enemies to revile him because he is not an Englishman but a Jew.

Now this sort of confusion or compromise is as local as a London fog. A London fog is tolerable in London, indeed I think it is very enjoyable in London. There is a beauty in that brown twilight as well as in the clear skies of the Orient and the South. But it is simply horribly dangerous for a Londoner to carry his cloud of fog about with him, in the crystalline air about the crags of Zion, or
under the terrible stars of the desert. There men see differences with almost unnatural clearness, and call things by savagely simple names. We in England may consider all sorts of aspects of a man like Sir Herbert Samuel; we may consider him as a Liberal, or a friend of the Fabian Socialists, or a cadet of one of the great financial houses, or a Member of Parliament who is supposed to represent certain miners in Yorkshire, or in twenty other more or less impersonal ways. But the people in Palestine will see only one aspect, and it will be a very personal aspect indeed. For the enthusiastic Moslems he will simply be a Jew; for the enthusiastic Zionists he will not really be a Zionist. For them he will always be the type of Jew who would be willing to remain in London, and who is ready to represent Westminster. Meanwhile, for the masses of Moslems and Christians, he will only be the aggravation in practice of the very thing of which he is the denial in theory. He will not mean that Palestine is not surrendered to the Jews, but only that England is. Now I have nothing as yet to do with the truth of that suggestion; I merely give it as an example of the violent and unexpected reactions we shall produce if we thrust our own unrealities amid the red-hot realities of the Near East; it is like pushing a snow man into a furnace. I have no objection to a snow man as a part of our own Christmas festivities; indeed, as has already been suggested, I think such festivities a great glory of English life. But I have seen the snow melting in the steep places about Jerusalem; and I know what a cataract it could feed.

As I considered these things a deepening disquiet possessed me, and my thoughts were far away from where I stood. After all, the English did not indulge in this doubling of parts and muddling of mistaken identity in their real and unique success in India. They may have been wrong or right but they were realistic about Moslems and Hindoos; they did not say Moslems were Hindoos, or send a highly intelligent Hindoo from Oxford to rule Moslems as an Englishman. They may not have cared for things like the ideal of Zionism; but they understood the common sense of Zionism, the desirability of distinguishing between entirely different things. But I remembered that of late their tact had often failed them even in their chief success in India; and that every hour brought worse and wilder news of their failure in Ireland. I remembered that in the Early Victorian time, against the advice only of the wisest and subtlest of the Early Victorians, we had tied ourselves to the triumphant progress of industrial capitalism; and that progress had now come to a crisis and what might well be a crash. And now, on the top of all, our fine patriotic tradition of foreign policy seemed to be doing these irrational and random things. A sort of fear took hold
of me; and it was not for the Holy Land that I feared.

A cold wave went over me, like that unreasonable change and chill with which a man far from home fancies his house has been burned down, or that those dear to him are dead. For one horrible moment at least I wondered if we had come to the end of compromise and comfortable nonsense, and if at last the successful stupidity of England would topple over like the successful wickedness of Prussia; because God is not mocked by the denial of reason any more than the denial of justice. And I fancied the very crowds of Jerusalem retorted on me words spoken to them long ago; that a great voice crying of old along the Via Dolorosa was rolled back on me like thunder from the mountains; and that all those alien faces are turned against us to-day, bidding us weep not for them, who have faith and clarity and a purpose, but weep for ourselves and for our children.
CHAPTER VIII

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DESERT

There was a story in Jerusalem so true or so well told that I can see the actors in it like figures in coloured costumes on a lighted stage. It occurred during the last days of Turkish occupation, while the English advance was still halted before Gaza, and heroically enduring the slow death of desert warfare. There were German and Austrian elements present in the garrison with the Turks, though the three allies seem to have held strangely aloof from each other. In the Austrian group there was an Austrian lady, “who had some dignity or other,” like Lord Lundy’s grandmother. She was very beautiful, very fashionable, somewhat frivolous, but with fits of Catholic devotion. She had some very valuable Christian virtues, such as indiscriminate charity for the poor and indiscriminate loathing for the Prussians. She was a nurse; she was also a nuisance. One day she was driving just outside the Jaffa Gate, when she saw one of those figures which make the Holy City seem like the eternal crisis of an epic. Such a man will enter the gate in the most ghastly rags as if he were going to be crowned king in the city; with his head lifted as if he saw apocalyptic stars in heaven, and a gesture at which the towers might fall. This man was ragged beyond all that moving rag-heap; he was as gaunt as a gallows tree, and the thing he was uttering with arms held up to heaven was evidently a curse. The lady sent an inquiry by her German servant, whom also I can see in a vision, with his face of wood and his air of still trailing all the heraldic trappings of the Holy Roman Empire. This ambassador soon returned in state and said, “Your Serene High Sublimity (or whatever it is), he says he is cursing the English.” Her pity and patriotism were alike moved; and she again sent the plenipotentiary to discover why he cursed the English, or what tale of wrong or ruin at English hands lay behind the large gestures of his despair. A second time the wooden intermediary returned and said, “Your Ecstatic Excellency (or whatever be the correct form), he says he is cursing the English because they don’t come.”

There are a great many morals to this story, besides the general truth to which it testifies; that the Turkish rule was not popular even with Moslems, and that the German war was not particularly popular even with Turks. When all deductions are made for the patriot as a partisan, and his way of picking up only what pleases him, it remains true that the English attack was very widely regarded
rather as a rescue than an aggression. And what complaint there was really was, in many cases, a complaint that the rescue did not come with a rush; that the English forces had to fall back when they had actually entered Gaza, and could not for long afterwards continue their advance on Jerusalem. This kind of criticism of military operations is always, of course, worthless. In journalists it is generally worthless without being even harmless. There were some in London whose pessimistic wailing was less excusable than that of the poor Arab in Jerusalem; who cursed the English with the addition of being English themselves, who did it, not as he did, before one foreigner, but before all foreign opinion; and who advertised their failure in a sort of rags less reputable than his. No one can judge of a point like the capture and loss of Gaza, unless he knows a huge mass of technical and local detail that can only be known to the staff on the spot; it is not a question of lack of water but of exactly how little water; not of the arrival of reinforcements but of exactly how much reinforcement; not of whether time presses, but of exactly how much time there is. Nobody can know these things who is editing a newspaper at the other end of the world; and these are the things which, for the soldier on the spot, make all the difference between jumping over a paling and jumping over a precipice. Even the latter, as the philosophic relativist will eagerly point out, is only a matter of degree. But this is a parenthesis; for the purpose with which I mentioned the anecdote is something different. It is the text of another and somewhat more elusive truth; some appreciation of which is necessary to a sympathy with the more profound problems of Palestine. And it might be expressed thus; it is a proverb that the Eastern methods seem to us slow; that the Arabs trail along on labouring camels while the Europeans flash by on motors or mono-planes. But there is another and stranger sense in which we do seem to them slow, and they do seem to themselves to have a secret of swiftness. There is a sense in which we here touch the limits of a land of lightning; across which, as in a dream, the motor-car can be seen crawling like a snail.

I have said that there is another side to the desert; though there is something queer in talking of another side to something so bare and big and oppressively obvious. But there is another side besides the big and bare truths, like giant bones, that the Moslem has found there; there is, so to speak, an obverse of the obvious. And to suggest what I mean I must go back again to the desert and the days I spent there, being carted from camp to camp and giving what were courteously described as lectures. All I can say is that if those were lectures, I cannot imagine why everybody is not a lecturer. Perhaps the secret is already
out; and multitudes of men in evening dress are already dotted about the desert, wandering in search of an audience. Anyhow in my own wanderings I found myself in the high narrow house of the Base Commandant at Kantara, the only house in the whole circle of the horizon; and from the wooden balustrade and verandah, running round the top of it, could be seen nine miles of tents. Sydney Smith said that the bulbous domes of the Brighton Pavilion looked as if St. Paul’s Cathedral had come down there and littered; and that grey vista of countless cones looked rather as if the Great Pyramid had multiplied itself on the prolific scale of the herring. Nor was even such a foolish fancy without its serious side; for though these pyramids would pass, the plan of them was also among the mightiest of the works of man; and the king in every pyramid was alive. For this was the great camp that was the pivot of the greatest campaign; and from that balcony I had looked on something all the more historic because it may never be seen again. As the dusk fell and the moon brightened above that great ghostly city of canvas, I had fallen into talk with three or four of the officers at the base; grizzled and hard-headed men talking with all the curious and almost colourless common sense of the soldier. All that they said was objective; one felt that everything they mentioned was really a thing and not merely a thought; a thing like a post or a palm-tree. I think there is something in this of a sympathy between the English and the Moslems, which may have helped us in India and elsewhere. For they mentioned many Moslem proverbs and traditions, lightly enough but not contemptuously, and in particular another of the proverbial prophecies about the term of Turkish power. They said there was an old saying that the Turk would never depart until the Nile flowed through Palestine; and this at least was evidently a proverb of pride and security, like many such; as who should say until the sea is dry or the sun rises in the west. And one of them smiled and made a small gesture as of attention. And in the silence of that moonlit scene we heard the clanking of a pump. The water from the Nile had been brought in pipes across the desert.

And I thought that the symbol was a sound one, apart from all vanities; for this is indeed the special sort of thing that Christendom can do, and that Islam by itself would hardly care to do. I heard more afterwards of that water, which was eventually carried up the hills to Jerusalem, when I myself followed it thither; and all I heard bore testimony to this truth so far as it goes; the sense among the natives themselves of something magic in our machinery, and that in the main a white magic; the sense of all the more solid sort of social service that belongs rather to the West than to the East. When the fountain first flowed in the Holy
City in the mountains, and Father Waggett blessed it for the use of men, it is said that an old Arab standing by said, in the plain and powerful phraseology of his people: “The Turks were here for five hundred years, and they never gave us a cup of cold water.”

I put first this minimum of truth about the validity of Western work because the same conversation swerved slowly, as it were, to the Eastern side. These same men, who talked of all things as if they were chairs and tables, began to talk quite calmly of things more amazing than table-turning. They were as wonderful as if the water had come there like the wind, without any pipes or pumps; or if Father Waggett had merely struck the rock like Moses. They spoke of a solitary soldier at the end of a single telephone wire across the wastes, hearing of something that had that moment happened hundreds of miles away, and then coming upon a casual Bedouin who knew it already. They spoke of the whole tribes moving and on the march, upon news that could only come a little later by the swiftest wires of the white man. They offered no explanation of these things; they simply knew they were there, like the palm-trees and the moon. They did not say it was “telepathy”; they lived much too close to realities for that. That word, which will instantly leap to the lips of too many of my readers, strikes me as merely an evidence of two of our great modern improvements; the love of long words and the loss of common sense. It may have been telepathy, whatever that is; but a man must be almost stunned with stupidity if he is satisfied to say telepathy as if he were saying telegraphy. If everybody is satisfied about how it is done, why does not everybody do it? Why does not a cultivated clergyman in Cornwall make a casual remark to an old friend of his at the University of Aberdeen? Why does not a harassed commercial traveller in Barcelona settle a question by merely thinking about his business partner in Berlin? The common sense of it is, of course, that the name makes no sort of difference; the mystery is why some people can do it and others cannot; and why it seems to be easy in one place and impossible in another. In other words it comes back to that very mystery which of all mysteries the modern world thinks most superstitious and senseless; the mystery of locality. It works back at last to the hardest of all the hard sayings of supernaturalism; that there is such a thing as holy or unholy ground, as divinely or diabolically inspired people; that there may be such things as sacred sites or even sacred stones; in short that the airy nothing of spiritual essence, evil or good, can have quite literally a local habitation and a name.

It may be said in passing that this genius loci is here very much the presiding
It is true that everywhere to-day a parade of the theory of pantheism goes with a considerable practice of particularism; and that people everywhere are beginning to wish they were somewhere. And even where it is not true of men, it seems to be true of the mysterious forces which men are once more studying. The words we now address to the unseen powers may be vague and universal, but the words they are said to address to us are parochial and even private. While the Higher Thought Centre would widen worship everywhere to a temple not made with hands, the Psychical Research Society is conducting practical experiments round a haunted house. Men may become cosmopolitans, but ghosts remain patriots. Men may or may not expect an act of healing to take place at a holy well, but nobody expects it ten miles from the well; and even the sceptic who comes to expose the ghost-haunted churchyard has to haunt the churchyard like a ghost. There may be something faintly amusing about the idea of demi-gods with door-knockers and dinner tables, and demons, one may almost say, keeping the home fires burning. But the driving force of this dark mystery of locality is all the more indisputable because it drives against most modern theories and associations. The truth is that, upon a more transcendental consideration, we do not know what place is any more than we know what time is. We do not know of the unknown powers that they cannot concentrate in space as in time, or find in a spot something that corresponds to a crisis. And if this be felt everywhere, it is necessarily and abnormally felt in those alleged holy places and sacred spots. It is felt supremely in all those lands of the Near East which lie about the holy hill of Zion.

In these lands an impression grows steadily on the mind much too large for most of the recent religious or scientific definitions. The bogus heraldry of Haeckel is as obviously insufficient as any quaint old chronicle tracing the genealogies of English kings through the chiefs of Troy to the children of Noah. There is no difference, except that the tale of the Dark Ages can never be proved, while the travesty of the Darwinian theory can sometimes be disproved. But I should diminish my meaning if I suggested it as a mere score in the Victorian game of Scripture versus Science. Some much larger mystery veils the origins of man than most partisans on either side have realised; and in these strange primeval plains the traveller does realise it. It was never so well expressed as by one of the most promising of those whose literary possibilities were gloriously broken off by the great war; Lieutenant Warre-Cornish who left a strange and striking fragment, about a man who came to these lands with a mystical idea of forcing himself back against the stream of time into the very
fountain of creation. This is a parenthesis; but before resuming the more immediate matter of the supernormal tricks of the tribes of the East, it is well to recognise this very real if much more general historic impression about the particular lands in which they lived. I have called it a historic impression; but it might more truly be called a prehistoric impression. It is best expressed in symbol by saying that the legendary site of the Garden of Eden is in Mesopotamia. It is equally well expressed in concrete experience by saying that, when I was in these parts, a learned man told me that the primitive form of wheat had just, for the first time, been discovered in Palestine.

The feeling that fills the traveller may be faintly suggested thus; that here, in this legendary land between Asia and Europe, may well have happened whatever did happen; that through this Eastern gate, if any, entered whatever made and changed the world. Whatever else this narrow strip of land may seem like, it does really seem, to the spirit and almost to the senses, like the bridge that may have borne across archaic abysses the burden and the mystery of man. Here have been civilisations as old as any barbarism; to all appearance perhaps older than any barbarism. Here is the camel; the enormous unnatural friend of man; the prehistoric pet. He is never known to have been wild, and might make a man fancy that all wild animals had once been tame. As I said elsewhere, all might be a runaway menagerie; the whale a cow that went swimming and never came back, the tiger a large cat that took the prize (and the prize-giver) and escaped to the jungle. This is not (I venture to think) true; but it is true as Pithecanthropus and Primitive Man and all the other random guesses from dubious bits of bone and stone. And the truth is some third thing, too tremendous to be remembered by men. Whatever it was, perhaps the camel saw it; but from the expression on the face of that old family servant, I feel sure that he will never tell.

I have called this the other side of the desert; and in another sense it is literally the other side. It is the other shore of that shifting and arid sea. Looking at it from the West and considering mainly the case of the Moslem, we feel the desert is but a barren border-land of Christendom; but seen from the other side it is the barrier between us and a heathendom far more mysterious and even monstrous than anything Moslem can be. Indeed it is necessary to realise this more vividly in order to feel the virtue of the Moslem movement. It belonged to the desert, but in one sense it was rather a clearance in the cloud that rests upon the desert; a rift of pale but clean light in volumes of vapour rolled on it like smoke from the strange lands beyond. It conceived a fixed hatred of idolatry, partly because its face was turned towards the multitudinous idolatries of the lands of sunrise; and
as I looked Eastward I seemed to be conscious of the beginnings of that other
world; and saw, like a forest of arms or a dream full of faces, the gods of Asia on
their thousand thrones.

It is not a mere romance that calls it a land of magic, or even of black magic.
Those who carry that atmosphere to us are not the romanticists but the realists.
Every one can feel it in the work of Mr. Rudyard Kipling; and when I once
remarked on his repulsive little masterpiece called “The Mark of the Beast,” to a
rather cynical Anglo-Indian officer, he observed moodily, “It’s a beastly story.
But those devils really can do jolly queer things.” It is but to take a
commonplace example out of countless more notable ones to mention the many
witnesses to the mango trick. Here again we have from time to time to weep over
the weak-mindedness that hurriedly dismisses it as the practice of hypnotism. It
is as if people were asked to explain how one unarmed Indian had killed three
hundred men, and they said it was only the practice of human sacrifice. Nothing
that we know as hypnotism will enable a man to alter the eyes in the heads of a
huge crowd of total strangers; wide awake in broad daylight; and if it is
hypnotism, it is something so appallingly magnified as to need a new magic to
explain the explanation; certainly something that explains it better than a Greek
word for sleep. But the impression of these special instances is but one example
of a more universal impression of the Asiatic atmosphere; and that atmosphere
itself is only an example of something vaster still for which I am trying to find
words. Asia stands for something which the world in the West as well as the East
is more and more feeling as a presence, and even a pressure. It might be called
the spiritual world let loose; or a sort of psychical anarchy; a jungle of mango
plants. And it is pressing upon the West also to-day because of the breaking
down of certain materialistic barriers that have hitherto held it back. In plain
words the attitude of science is not only modified; it is now entirely reversed. I
do not say it with mere pleasure; in some ways I prefer our materialism to their
spiritualism. But for good or evil the scientists are now destroying their own
scientific world.

The agnostics have been driven back on agnosticism; and are already
recovering from the shock. They find themselves in a really unknown world
under really unknown gods; a world which is more mystical, or at least more
mysterious. For in the Victorian age the agnostics were not really agnostics.
They might be better described as reverent materialists; or at any rate monists.
They had at least at the back of their minds a clear and consistent concept of
their rather clockwork cosmos; that is why they could not admit the smallest
speck of the supernatural into their clockwork. But to-day it is very hard for a scientific man to say where the supernatural ends or the natural begins, or what name should be given to either. The word agnostic has ceased to be a polite word for atheist. It has become a real word for a very real state of mind, conscious of many possibilities beyond that of the atheist, and not excluding that of the polytheist. It is no longer a question of defining or denying a simple central power, but of balancing the brain in a bewilderment of new powers which seem to overlap and might even conflict. Nature herself has become unnatural. The wind is blowing from the other side of the desert, not now with noble truism “There is no God but God,” but rather with that other motto out of the deeper anarchy of Asia, drawn out by Mr. Kipling, in the shape of a native proverb, in the very story already mentioned; “Your gods and my gods, do you or I know which is the stronger?” There was a mystical story I read somewhere in my boyhood, of which the only image that remains is that of a rose-bush growing mysteriously in the middle of a room. Taking this image for the sake of argument, we can easily fancy a man half-conscious and convinced that he is delirious, or still partly in a dream, because he sees such a magic bush growing irrationally in the middle of his bedroom. All the walls and furniture are familiar and solid, the table, the clock, the telephone, the looking glass or what not; there is nothing unnatural but this one hovering hallucination or optical delusion of green and red. Now that was very much the view taken of the Rose of Sharon, the mystical rose of the sacred tradition of Palestine, by any educated man about 1850, when the rationalism of the eighteenth century was supposed to have found full support in the science of the nineteenth. He had a sentiment about a rose: he was still glad it had fragrance or atmosphere; though he remembered with a slight discomfort that it had thorns. But what bothered him about it was that it was impossible. And what made him think it impossible was it was inconsistent with everything else. It was one solitary and monstrous exception to the sort of rule that ought to have no exceptions. Science did not convince him that there were few miracles, but that there were no miracles; and why should there be miracles only in Palestine and only for one short period? It was a single and senseless contradiction to an otherwise complete cosmos. For the furniture fitted in bit by bit and better and better; and the bedroom seemed to grow more and more solid. The man recognised the portrait of himself over the mantelpiece or the medicine bottles on the table, like the dying lover in Browning. In other words, science so far had steadily solidified things; Newton had measured the walls and ceiling and made a calculus of their three dimensions. Darwin was
already arranging the animals in rank as neatly as a row of chairs, or Faraday the chemical elements as clearly as a row of medicine bottles. From the middle of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth, science was not only making discoveries, but all the discoveries were in one direction. Science is still making discoveries; but they are in the opposite direction.

For things are rather different when the man in the bed next looks at the bedroom. Not only is the rose-bush still very obvious; but the other things are looking very odd. The perspective seems to have gone crooked; the walls seem to vary in measurement till the man thinks he is going mad. The wall-paper has a new pattern, of strange spirals instead of round dots. The table seems to have moved by itself across the room and thrown the medicine bottles out of the window. The telephone has vanished from the wall; the mirror does not reflect what is in front of it. The portrait of himself over the mantelpiece has a face that is not his own.

That is something like a vision of the vital change in the whole trend of natural philosophy in the last twenty or thirty years. It matters little whether we regard it as the deepening or the destruction of the scientific universe. It matters little whether we say that grander abysses have opened in it, or merely that the bottom has fallen out of it. It is quite self-evident that scientific men are at war with wilder and more unfathomable fancies than the facts of the age of Huxley. I attempt no controversy about any of the particular cases: it is the cumulative effect of all of them that makes the impression one of common sense. It is really true that the perspective and dimensions of the man’s bedroom have altered; the disciples of Einstein will tell him that straight lines are curved and perhaps measure more one way than the other; if that is not a nightmare, what is? It is really true that the clock has altered, for time has turned into the fourth dimension or something entirely different; and the telephone may fairly be said to have faded from view in favour of the invisible telepath. It is true that the pattern of the paper has changed, for the very pattern of the world has changed; we are told that it is not made of atoms like the dots but of electrons like the spirals. Scientific men of the first rank have seen a table move by itself, and walk upstairs by itself. It does not matter here whether it was done by the spirits; it is enough that few still pretend that is entirely done by the spiritualists. I am not dealing with doctrines but with doubts; with the mere fact that all these things have grown deeper and more bewildering. Some people really are throwing their medicine bottles out of the window; and some of them at least are working purely psychological cures of a sort that would once have been called
miraculous healing. I do not say we know how far this could go; it is my whole point that we do not know, that we are in contact with numbers of new things of which we know uncommonly little. But the vital point is, not that science deals with what we do not know, but that science is destroying what we thought we did know. Nearly all the latest discoveries have been destructive, not of the old dogmas of religion, but rather of the recent dogmas of science. The conservation of energy could not itself be entirely conserved. The atom was smashed to atoms. And dancing to the tune of Professor Einstein, even the law of gravity is behaving with lamentable levity.

And when the man looks at the portrait of himself he really does not see himself. He sees his Other Self, which some say is the opposite of his ordinary self; his Subconscious Self or his Subliminal Self, said to rage and rule in his dreams, or a suppressed self which hates him though it is hidden from him; or the Alter Ego of a Dual Personality. It is not to my present purpose to discuss the merit of these speculations, or whether they be medicinal or morbid. My purpose is served in pointing out the plain historical fact; that if you had talked to a Utilitarian and Rationalist of Bentham’s time, who told men to follow “enlightened self-interest,” he would have been considerably bewildered if you had replied brightly and briskly, “And to which self do you refer; the subconscious, the conscious, the latently criminal or suppressed, or others that we fortunately have in stock?” When the man looks at his own portrait in his own bedroom, it does really melt into the face of a stranger or flicker into the face of a fiend. When he looks at the bedroom itself, in short, it becomes clearer and clearer that it is exactly this comfortable and solid part of the vision that is altering and breaking up. It is the walls and furniture that are only a dream or memory. And when he looks again at the incongruous rose-bush, he seems to smell as well as see; and he stretches forth his hand, and his finger bleeds upon a thorn.

It will not be altogether surprising if the story ends with the man recovering full consciousness, and finding he has been convalescing in a hammock in a rose-garden. It is not so very unreasonable when you come to think of it; or at least when you come to think of the whole of it. He was not wrong in thinking the whole must be a consistent whole, and that one part seemed inconsistent with the other. He was only wrong about which part was wrong through being inconsistent with the other. Now the whole of the rationalistic doubt about the Palestinian legends, from its rise in the early eighteenth century out of the last movements of the Renascence, was founded on the fixity of facts. Miracles were
monstrosities because they were against natural law, which was necessarily immutable law. The prodigies of the Old Testament or the mighty works of the New were extravagances because they were exceptions; and they were exceptions because there was a rule, and that an immutable rule. In short, there was no rose-tree growing out of the carpet of a trim and tidy bedroom; because rose-trees do not grow out of carpets in trim and tidy bedrooms. So far it seemed reasonable enough. But it left out one possibility; that a man can dream about a room as well as a rose; and that a man can doubt about a rule as well as an exception.

As soon as the men of science began to doubt the rules of the game, the game was up. They could no longer rule out all the old marvels as impossible, in face of the new marvels which they had to admit as possible. They were themselves dealing now with a number of unknown quantities; what is the power of mind over matter; when is matter an illusion of mind; what is identity, what is individuality, is there a limit to logic in the last extremes of mathematics? They knew by a hundred hints that their non-miraculous world was no longer watertight; that floods were coming in from somewhere in which they were already out of their depth, and down among very fantastical deep-sea fishes. They could hardly feel certain even about the fish that swallowed Jonah, when they had no test except the very true one that there are more fish in the sea than ever came out of it. Logically they would find it quite as hard to draw the line at the miraculous draught of fishes. I do not mean that they, or even I, need here depend on those particular stories; I mean that the difficulty now is to draw a line, and a new line, after the obliteration of an old and much more obvious line. Any one can draw it for himself, as a matter of mere taste in probability; but we have not made a philosophy until we can draw it for others. And the modern men of science cannot draw it for others. Men could easily mark the contrast between the force of gravity and the fable of the Ascension. They cannot all be made to see any such contrast between the levitation that is now discussed as a possibility and the ascension which is still derided as a miracle. I do not even say that there is not a great difference between them; I say that science is now plunged too deep in new doubts and possibilities to have authority to define the difference. I say the more it knows of what seems to have happened, or what is said to have happened, in many modern drawing-rooms, the less it knows what did or did not happen on that lofty and legendary hill, where a spire rises over Jerusalem and can be seen beyond Jordan.

But with that part of the Palestinian story which is told in the New Testament I
am not directly concerned till the next chapter; and the matter here is a more general one. The truth is that through a thousand channels something has returned to the modern mind. It is not Christianity. On the contrary, it would be truer to say that it is paganism. In reality it is in a very special sense paganism; because it is polytheism. The word will startle many people, but not the people who know the modern world best. When I told a distinguished psychologist at Oxford that I differed from his view of the universe, he answered, “Why universe? Why should it not be a multiverse?” The essence of polytheism is the worship of gods who are not God; that is, who are not necessarily the author and the authority of all things. Men are feeling more and more that there are many spiritual forces in the universe, and the wisest men feel that some are to be trusted more than others. There will be a tendency, I think, to take a favourite force, or in other words a familiar spirit. Mr. H. G. Wells, who is, if anybody is, a genius among moderns and a modern among geniuses, really did this very thing; he selected a god who was really more like a daemon. He called his book God, the Invisible King; but the curious point was that he specially insisted that his God differed from other people’s God in the very fact that he was not a king. He was very particular in explaining that his deity did not rule in any almighty or infinite sense; but merely influenced, like any wandering spirit. Nor was he particularly invisible, if there can be said to be any degrees in invisibility. Mr. Wells’s Invisible God was really like Mr. Wells’s Invisible Man. You almost felt he might appear at any moment, at any rate to his one devoted worshipper; and that, as if in old Greece, a glad cry might ring through the woods of Essex, the voice of Mr. Wells crying, “We have seen, he hath seen us, a visible God.” I do not mean this disrespectfully, but on the contrary very sympathetically; I think it worthy of so great a man to appreciate and answer the general sense of a richer and more adventurous spiritual world around us. It is a great emancipation from the leaden materialism which weighed on men of imagination forty years ago. But my point for the moment is that the mode of the emancipation was pagan or even polytheistic, in the real philosophical sense that it was the selection of a single spirit, out of many there might be in the spiritual world. The point is that while Mr. Wells worships his god (who is not his creator or even necessarily his overlord) there is nothing to prevent Mr. William Archer, also emancipated, from adoring another god in another temple; or Mr. Arnold Bennett, should he similarly liberate his mind, from bowing down to a third god in a third temple. My imagination rather fails me, I confess, in evoking the image and symbolism of Mr. Bennett’s or Mr. Archer’s idolatries; and if I had to choose between the
three, I should probably be found as an acolyte in the shrine of Mr. Wells. But, anyhow, the trend of all this is to polytheism, rather as it existed in the old civilisation of paganism.

There is the same modern mark in Spiritualism. Spiritualism also has the trend of polytheism, if it be in a form more akin to ancestor-worship. But whether it be the invocation of ghosts or of gods, the mark of it is that it invokes something less than the divine; nor am I at all quarrelling with it on that account. I am merely describing the drift of the day; and it seems clear that it is towards the summoning of spirits to our aid whatever their position in the unknown world, and without any clear doctrinal plan of that world. The most probable result would seem to be a multitude of psychic cults, personal and impersonal, from the vaguest reverence for the powers of nature to the most concrete appeal to crystals or mascots. When I say that the agnostics have discovered agnosticism, and have now recovered from the shock, I do not mean merely to sneer at the identity of the word agnosticism with the word ignorance. On the contrary, I think ignorance the greater thing; for ignorance can be creative. And the thing it can create, and soon probably will create, is one of the lost arts of the world; a mythology.

In a word, the modern world will probably end exactly where the Bible begins. In that inevitable setting of spirit against spirit, or god against god, we shall soon be in a position to do more justice not only to the New Testament, but to the Old Testament. Our descendants may very possibly do the very thing we scoff at the old Jews for doing; grope for and cling to their own deity as one rising above rivals who seem to be equally real. They also may feel him not primarily as the sole or even the supreme but only as the best; and have to abide the miracles of ages to prove that he is also the mightiest. For them also he may at first be felt as their own, before he is extended to others; he also, from the collision with colossal idolatries and towering spiritual tyrannies, may emerge only as a God of Battles and a Lord of Hosts. Here between the dark wastes and the clouded mountain was fought out what must seem even to the indifferent a wrestle of giants driving the world out of its course; Jehovah of the mountains casting down Baal of the desert and Dagon of the sea. Here wandered and endured that strange and terrible and tenacious people who held high above all their virtues and their vices one indestructible idea; that they were but the tools in that tremendous hand. Here was the first triumph of those who, in some sense beyond our understanding, had rightly chosen among the powers invisible, and found their choice a great god above all gods. So the future may suffer not from
the loss but the multiplicity of faith; and its fate be far more like the cloudy and mythological war in the desert than like the dry radiance of theism or monism. I have said nothing here of my own faith, or of that name on which, I am well persuaded, the world will be most wise to call. But I do believe that the tradition founded in that far tribal battle, in that far Eastern land, did indeed justify itself by leading up to a lasting truth; and that it will once again be justified of all its children. What has survived through an age of atheism as the most indestructible would survive through an age of polytheism as the most indispensable. If among many gods it could not presently be proved to be the strongest, some would still know it was the best. Its central presence would endure through times of cloud and confusion, in which it was judged only as a myth among myths or a man among men. Even the old heathen test of humanity and the apparition of the body, touching which I have quoted the verse about the pagan polytheist as sung by the neo-pagan poet, is a test which that incarnate mystery will abide the best. And however much or little our spiritual inquirers may lift the veil from their invisible kings, they will not find a vision more vivid than a man walking unveiled upon the mountains, seen of men and seeing; a visible god.
CHAPTER IX

THE BATTLE WITH THE DRAGON

Lydda or Ludd has already been noted as the legendary birthplace of St. George, and as the camp on the edge of the desert from which, as it happened, I caught the first glimpse of the coloured fields of Palestine that looked like the fields of Paradise. Being an encampment of soldiers, it seems an appropriate place for St. George; and indeed it may be said that all that red and empty land has resounded with his name like a shield of copper or of bronze. The name was not even confined to the cries of the Christians; a curious imaginative hospitality in the Moslem mind, a certain innocent and imitative enthusiasm, made the Moslems also half-accept a sort of Christian mythology, and make an abstract hero of St. George. It is said that Coeur de Lion on these very sands first invoked the soldier saint to bless the English battle-line, and blazon his cross on the English banners. But the name occurs not only in the stories of the victory of Richard, but in the enemy stories that led up to the great victory of Saladin. In that obscure and violent quarrel which let loose the disaster of Hattin, when the Grand Master of the Templars, Gerard the Englishman from Bideford in Devon, drove with demented heroism his few lances against a host, there fell among those radiant fanatics one Christian warrior, who had made with his single sword such a circle of the slain, that the victorious Moslems treated even his dead body as something supernatural; and bore it away with them with honour, saying it was the body of St. George.

But if the purpose of the camp be appropriate to the story of St. George, the position of the camp might be considered appropriate to the more fantastic story of St. George and the Dragon. The symbolic struggle between man and monster might very well take place somewhere where the green culture of the fields meets the red desolation of the desert. As a matter of fact, I dare say, legend locates the duel itself somewhere else, but I am only making use of the legend as a legend, or even as a convenient figure of speech. I would only use it here to make a kind of picture which may clarify a kind of paradox, very vital to our present attitude towards all Palestinian traditions, including those that are more sacred even than St. George. This paradox has already been touched on in the last chapter about polytheistic spirits or superstitions such as surrounded the Old Testament, but it is yet more true of the criticisms and apologetics surrounding
the New Testament. And the paradox is this; that we never find our own religion so right as when we find we are wrong about it. I mean that we are finally convinced not by the sort of evidence we are looking for, but by the sort of evidence we are not looking for. We are convinced when we come on a ratification that is almost as abrupt as a refutation. That is the point about the wireless telegraphy or wordless telepathy of the Bedouins. A supernatural trick in a dingy tribe wandering in dry places is not the sort of supernaturalism we should expect to find; it is only the sort that we do find. These rocks of the desert, like the bones of a buried giant, do not seem to stick out where they ought to, but they stick out, and we fall over them.

Whatever we think of St. George, most people would see a mere fairy-tale in St. George and the Dragon. I dare say they are right; and I only use it here as a figure for the sake of argument. But suppose, for the sake of argument, that a man has come to the conclusion that there probably was such a person as St. George, in spite of all the nonsense about dragons and the chimera with wings and claws that has somehow interwreathed itself with his image. Perhaps he is a little biased by patriotism or other ethical aims; and thinks the saint a good social ideal. Perhaps he knows that early Christianity, so far from being a religion of pacifists, was largely a religion of soldiers. Anyhow he thinks St. George himself a quite sufficiently solid and historical figure; and has little doubt that records or traces can be found of him. Now the point is this; suppose that man goes to the land of the legendary combat; and finds comparatively few or faint traces of the personality of St. George. But suppose he does find, on that very field of combat, the bones of a gigantic monster unlike every other creature except the legendary dragon. Or suppose he only finds ancient Eastern sculptures and hieroglyphics representing maidens, being sacrificed to such a monster, and making it quite clear that even within historic times one of those sacrificed was a princess. It is surely clear that he will be considerably impressed by this confirmation, not of the part he did believe, but actually of the part he did not believe. He has not found what he expected but he has found what he wanted, and much more than he wanted. He has not found a single detail directly in support of St. George. But he had found a very considerable support of St. George and the Dragon.

It is needless to inform the reader, I trust, that I do not think this particular case in the least likely; or that I am only using it for the sake of lucidity. Even as it stands, it would not necessarily make a man believe the traditional story, but it would make him guess that it was some sort of tradition of some sort of truth;
that there was something in it, and much more in it than even he himself had imagined. And the point of it would be precisely that his reason had not anticipated the extent of his revelation. He has proved the improbable, not the probable thing. Reason had already taught him the reasonable part; but facts had taught him the fantastic part. He will certainly conclude that the whole story is very much more valid than anybody has supposed. Now as I have already said, it is not in the least likely that this will happen touching this particular tale of Palestine. But this is precisely what really has happened touching the most sacred and tremendous of all the tales of Palestine. This is precisely what has happened touching that central figure, round which the monster and the champion are alike only ornamental symbols; and by the right of whose tragedy even St. George’s Cross does not belong to St. George. It is not likely to be true of the desert duel between George and the Dragon; but it is already true of the desert duel between Jesus and the Devil. St. George is but a servant and the Dragon is but a symbol, but it is precisely about the central reality, the mystery of Christ and His mastery of the powers of darkness, that this very paradox has proved itself a fact.

Going down from Jerusalem to Jericho I was more than once moved by a flippant and possibly profane memory of the swine that rushed down a steep place into the sea. I do not insist on the personal parallel; for whatever my points of resemblance to a pig I am not a flying pig, a pig with wings of speed and precipitancy; and if I am possessed of a devil, it is not the blue devil of suicide. But the phrase came back into my mind because going down to the Dead Sea does really involve rushing down a steep place. Indeed it gives a strange impression that the whole of Palestine is one single steep place. It is as if all other countries lay flat under the sky, but this one country had been tilted sideways. This gigantic gesture of geography or geology, this sweep as of a universal landslide, is the sort of thing that is never conveyed by any maps or books or even pictures. All the pictures of Palestine I have seen are descriptive details, groups of costume or corners of architecture, at most views of famous places; they cannot give the bottomless vision of this long descent. We went in a little rocking Ford car down steep and jagged roads among ribbed and columned cliffs; but the roads below soon failed us altogether; and the car had to tumble like a tank over rocky banks and into empty river-beds, long before it came to the sinister and discoloured landscapes of the Dead Sea. And the distance looks far enough on the map, and seems long enough in the motor journey, to make a man feel he has come to another part of the world; yet so much is it all a single
fall of land that even when he gets out beyond Jordan in the wild country of the Shereef he can still look back and see, small and faint as if in the clouds, the spire of the Russian church (I fancy) upon the hill of the Ascension. And though the story of the swine is attached in truth to another place, I was still haunted with its fanciful appropriateness to this one, because of the very steepness of this larger slope and the mystery of that larger sea. I even had the fancy that one might fish for them and find them in such a sea, turned into monsters; sea-swine or four-legged fishes, swollen and with evil eyes, grown over with sea-grass for bristles; the ghosts of Gadara.

And then it came back to me, as a curiosity and almost a coincidence, that the same strange story had actually been selected as the text for the central controversy of the Victorian Age between Christianity and criticism. The two champions were two of the greatest men of the nineteenth century; Huxley representing scientific scepticism and Gladstone scriptural orthodoxy. The scriptural champion was universally regarded as standing for the past, if not for the dead past; and the scientific champion as standing for the future, if not the final judgment of the world. And yet the future has been entirely different to anything that anybody expected; and the final judgment may yet reverse all the conceptions of their contemporaries and even of themselves. The philosophical position now is in a very curious way the contrary of the position then. Gladstone had the worst of the argument, and has been proved right. Huxley had the best of the argument, and has been proved wrong. At any rate he has been ultimately proved wrong about the way the world was going, and the probable position of the next generation. What he thought indisputable is disputed; and what he thought dead is rather too much alive.

Huxley was not only a man of genius in logic and rhetoric; he was a man of a very manly and generous morality. Morally he deserves much more sympathy than many of the mystics who have supplanted him. But they have supplanted him. In the more mental fashions of the day, most of what he thought would stand has fallen, and most of what he thought would fall is standing yet. In the Gadarene controversy with Gladstone, he announced it as his purpose to purge the Christian ideal, which he thought self-evidently sublime, of the Christian demonology, which he thought self-evidently ridiculous. And yet if we take any typical man of the next generation, we shall very probably find Huxley’s sublime thing scoffed at, and Huxley’s ridiculous thing taken seriously. I imagine a very typical child of the age succeeding Huxley’s may be found in Mr. George Moore. He has one of the most critical, appreciative and atmospheric
talents of the age. He has lived in most of the sets of the age, and through most of the fashions of the age. He has held, at one time or another, most of the opinions of the age. Above all, he has not only thought for himself, but done it with peculiar pomp and pride; he would consider himself the freest of all freethinkers. Let us take him as a type and a test of what has really happened to Huxley’s analysis of the gold and the dross. Huxley quoted as the indestructible ideal the noble passage in Micah, beginning “He hath shewed thee, O man, that which is good”; and asked scornfully whether anybody was ever likely to suggest that justice was worthless or that mercy was unlovable, and whether anything would diminish the distance between ourselves and the ideals that we reverence. And yet already, perhaps, Mr. George Moore was anticipating Nietzsche, sailing near, as he said, “the sunken rocks about the cave of Zarathustra.” He said, if I remember right, that Cromwell should be admired for his injustice. He implied that Christ should be condemned, not because he destroyed the swine, but because he delivered the sick. In short he found justice quite worthless and mercy quite unlovable; and as for humility and the distance between himself and his ideals, he seemed rather to suggest (at this time at least) that his somewhat varying ideals were only interesting because they had belonged to himself. Some of this, it is true, was only in the Confessions of a Young Man; but it is the whole point here that they were then the confessions of a young man, and that Huxley’s in comparison were the confessions of an old man. The trend of the new time, in very varying degrees, was tending to undermine, not merely the Christian demonology, not merely the Christian theology, not merely the Christian religion, but definitely the Christian ethical ideal, which had seemed to the great agnostic as secure as the stars.

But while the world was mocking the morality he had assumed, it was bringing back the mysticism he had mocked. The next phase of Mr. George Moore himself, whom I have taken as a type of the time, was the serious and sympathetic consideration of Irish mysticism, as embodied in Mr. W. B. Yeats. I have myself heard Mr. Yeats, about that time, tell a story, to illustrate how concrete and even comic is the reality of the supernatural, saying that he knew a farmer whom the fairies had dragged out of bed and beaten. Now suppose Mr. Yeats had told Mr. Moore, then moving in this glamorous atmosphere, another story of the same sort. Suppose he had said that the farmer’s pigs had fallen under the displeasure of some magician of the sort he celebrates, who had conjured bad fairies into the quadrupeds, so that they went in a wild dance down to the village pond. Would Mr. Moore have thought that story any more
incredible than the other? Would he have thought it worse than a thousand other things that a modern mystic may lawfully believe? Would he have risen to his feet and told Mr. Yeats that all was over between them? Not a bit of it. He would at least have listened with a serious, nay, a solemn face. He would think it a grim little grotesque of rustic diablerie, a quaint tale of goblins, neither less nor more improbable than hundreds of psychic fantasies or farces for which there is really a good deal of evidence. He would be ready to entertain the idea if he found it anywhere except in the New Testament. As for the more vulgar and universal fashions that have followed after the Celtic movement, they have left such trifles far behind. And they have been directed not by imaginative artists like Mr. Yeats or even Mr. Moore, but by solid scientific students like Sir William Crookes and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. I find it easier to imagine an evil spirit agitating the legs of a pig than a good spirit agitating the legs of a table. But I will not here enter into the argument, since I am only trying to describe the atmosphere. Whatever has happened in more recent years, what Huxley expected has certainly not happened. There has been a revolt against Christian morality, and where there has not been a return of Christian mysticism, it has been a return of the mysticism without the Christianity. Mysticism itself has returned, with all its moons and twilights, its talismans and spells. Mysticism itself has returned, and brought with it seven devils worse than itself.

But the scientific coincidence is even more strict and close. It affects not only the general question of miracles, but the particular question of possession. This is the very last element in the Christian story that would ever have been selected by the enlightened Christian apologist. Gladstone would defend it, but he would not go out of his way to dwell on it. It is an excellent working model of what I mean by finding an unexpected support, and finding it in an unexpected quarter. It is not theological but psychological study that has brought us back into this dark underworld of the soul, where even identity seems to dissolve or divide, and men are not even themselves. I do not say that psychologists admit the discovery of demoniacs; and if they did they would doubtless call them something else, such as demono-maniacs. But they admit things which seem almost as near to a new supernaturalism, and things quite as incredible to the old rationalism. Dual personality is not so very far from diabolic possession. And if the dogma of subconsciousness allows of agnosticism, the agnosticism cuts both ways. A man cannot say there is a part of him of which he is quite unconscious, and only conscious that it is not in contact with the unknown. He cannot say there is a sealed chamber or cellar under his house, of which he knows nothing
whatever; but that he is quite certain that it cannot have an underground passage leading anywhere else in the world. He cannot say he knows nothing whatever about its size or shape or appearance, except that it certainly does not contain a relic of the finger-joint of St. Catherine of Alexandria, or that it certainly is not haunted by the ghost of King Herod Agrippa. If there is any sort of legend or tradition or plausible probability which says that it is, he cannot call a thing impossible where he is not only ignorant but even unconscious. It comes back therefore to the same reality, that the old compact cosmos depended on a compact consciousness. If we are dealing with unknown quantities, we cannot deny their connection with other unknown quantities. If I have a self of which I can say nothing, how can I even say that it is my own self? How can I even say that I always had it, or that it did not come from somewhere else? It is clear that we are in very deep waters, whether or no we have rushed down a steep place to fall into them.

It will be noted that what we really lack here is not the supernatural but only the healthy supernatural. It is not the miracle, but only the miracle of healing. I warmly sympathise with those who think most of this rather morbid, and nearer the diabolic than the divine, but to call a thing diabolic is hardly an argument against the existence of diabolism. It is still more clearly the case when we go outside the sphere of science into its penumbra in literature and conversation. There is a mass of fiction and fashionable talk of which it may truly be said, that what we miss in it is not demons but the power to cast them out. It combines the occult with the obscene; the sensuality of materialism with the insanity of spiritualism. In the story of Gadara we have left out nothing except the Redeemer, we have kept the devils and the swine.

In other words, we have not found St. George; but we have found the Dragon. We have found in the desert, as I have said, the bones of the monster we did not believe in, more plainly than the footprints of the hero we did. We have found them not because we expected to find them, for our progressive minds look to the promise of something much brighter and even better; not because we wanted to find them, for our modern mood, as well as our human nature, is entirely in favour of more amiable and reassuring things; not because we thought it even possible to find them, for we really thought it impossible so far as we ever thought of it at all. We have found them because they are there; and we are bound to come on them even by falling over them. It is Huxley’s method that has upset Huxley’s conclusion. As I have said, that conclusion itself is completely reversed. What he thought indisputable is disputed; and what he thought
impossible is possible. Instead of Christian morals surviving in the form of humanitarian morals, Christian demonology has survived in the form of heathen demonology. But it has not survived by scholarly traditionalism in the style of Gladstone, but rather by obstinate objective curiosity according to the advice of Huxley. We in the West have “followed our reason as far as it would go,” and our reason has led us to things that nearly all the rationalists would have thought wildly irrational. Science was supposed to bully us into being rationalists; but it is now supposed to be bullying us into being irrationalists. The science of Einstein might rather be called following our unreason as far as it will go, seeing whether the brain will crack under the conception that space is curved, or that parallel straight lines always meet. And the science of Freud would make it essentially impossible to say how far our reason or unreason does go, or where it stops. For if a man is ignorant of his other self, how can he possibly know that the other self is ignorant? He can no longer say with pride that at least he knows that he knows nothing. That is exactly what he does not know. The floor has fallen out of his mind and the abyss below may contain subconscious certainties as well as subconscious doubts. He is too ignorant even to ignore; and he must confess himself an agnostic about whether he is an agnostic.

That is the coil or tangle, at least, which the dragon has reached even in the scientific regions of the West. I only describe the tangle; I do not delight in it. Like most people with a taste for Catholic tradition, I am too much of a rationalist for that; for Catholics are almost the only people now defending reason. But I am not talking of the true relations of reason and mystery, but of the historical fact that mystery has invaded the peculiar realms of reason; especially the European realms of the motor and the telephone. When we have a man like Mr. William Archer, lecturing mystically on dreams and psychoanalysis, and saying it is clear that God did not make man a reasonable creature, those acquainted with the traditions and distinguished record of that dry and capable Scot will consider the fact a prodigy. I confess it never occurred to me that Mr. Archer was of such stuff as dreams are made of; and if he is becoming a mystic in his old age (I use the phrase in a mystical and merely relative sense) we may take it that the occult oriental flood is rising fast, and reaching places that are not only high but dry. But the change is much more apparent to a man who has chanced to stray into those orient hills where those occult streams have always risen, and especially in this land that lies between Asia, where the occult is almost the obvious, and Europe, where it is always returning with a fresher and younger vigour. The truth becomes strangely
luminous in this wilderness between two worlds, where the rocks stand out stark like the very bones of the Dragon.

As I went down that sloping wall or shoulder of the world from the Holy City on the mountain to the buried Cities of the Plain, I seemed to see more and more clearly all this Western evolution of Eastern mystery, and how on this one high place, as on a pivot, the whole purpose of mankind had swerved. I took up again the train of thought which I had trailed through the desert, as described in the last chapter, about the gods of Asia and of the ancient dispensation, and I found it led me along these hills to a sort of vista or vision of the new dispensation and of Christendom. Considered objectively, and from the outside, the story is something such as has already been loosely outlined; the emergence in this immemorial and mysterious land of what was undoubtedly, when thus considered, one tribe among many tribes worshipping one god among many gods, but it is quite as much an evident external fact that the god has become God. Still stated objectively, the story is that the tribe having this religion produced a new prophet, claiming to be more than a prophet. The old religion killed the new prophet; but the new prophet killed the old religion. He died to destroy it, and it died in destroying him. Now it may be reaffirmed equally realistically that there was nothing normal about the case or its consequences. The things that took part in that tragedy have never been the same since, and have never been like anything else in the world. The Church is not like other religions; its very crimes were unique. The Jews are not like other races; they remain as unique to everybody else as they are to themselves. The Roman Empire did not pass like other empires; it did not perish like Babylon and Assyria. It went through a most extraordinary remorse amounting to madness and resuscitation into sanity, which is equally strange in history whether it seems as ghastly as a galvanised corpse or as glorious as a god risen from the dead. The very land and city are not like other lands and cities. The concentration and conflict in Jerusalem to-day, whether we regard them as a reconquest by Christendom or a conspiracy of Jews or a part of the lingering quarrel with Moslems, are alike the effect of forces gathered and loosened in that one mysterious moment in the history of the city. They equally proclaim the paradox of its insignificance and its importance.

But above all the prophet was not and is not like other prophets; and the proof of it is to be found not primarily among those who believe in him, but among those who do not. He is not dead, even where he is denied. What is the use of a modern man saying that Christ is only a thing like Atys or Mithras, when the
next moment he is reproaching Christianity for not following Christ? He does not suddenly lose his temper and talk about our most unmithraic conduct, as he does (very justly as a rule) about our most unchristian conduct. We do not find a group of ardent young agnostics, in the middle of a great war, tried as traitors for their extravagant interpretation of remarks attributed to Atys. It is improbable that Tolstoy wrote a book to prove that all modern ills could be cured by literal obedience to all the orders of Adonis. We do not find wild Bolshevists calling themselves Mithraic Socialists as many of them call themselves Christian Socialists. Leaving orthodoxy and even sanity entirely on one side, the very heresies and insanities of our time prove that after nearly two thousand years the issue is still living and the name is quite literally one to conjure with. Let the critics try to conjure with any of the other names. In the real centres of modern inquiry and mental activity, they will not move even a mystic with the name of Mithras as they will move a materialist with the name of Jesus. There are men who deny God and accept Christ.

But this lingering yet living power in the legend, even for those to whom it is little more than a legend, has another relevancy to the particular point here. Jesus of Nazareth, merely humanly considered, has thus become a hero of humanitarianism. Even the eighteenth-century deists in denying his divinity generally took pains to exalt his humanity. Of the nineteenth-century revolutionists it is really an understatement to say that they exalted him as a man; for indeed they rather exalted him as a superman. That is to say, many of them represented him as a man preaching a decisively superior and ever strange morality, not only in advance of his age but practically in advance of our age. They made of his mystical counsels of perfection a sort of Socialism or Pacifism or Communism, which they themselves still see rather as something that ought to be or that will be; the extreme limit of universal love. I am not discussing here whether they are right or not; I say they have in fact found in the same figure a type of humanitarianism and the care for human happiness. Every one knows the striking and sometimes staggering utterances that do really support and illustrate this side of the teaching. Modern idealists are naturally moved by such things as the intensely poetic paradox about the lilies of the field; which for them has a joy in life and living things like that of Shelley or Whitman, combined with a return to simplicity beyond that of Tolstoy or Thoreau. Indeed I rather wonder that those, whose merely historic or humanistic view of the case would allow of such criticism without incongruity, have not made some study of the purely poetical or oratorical structure of such passages. Certainly there are few finer examples
of the swift architecture of style than that single fragment about the flowers; the almost idle opening of a chance reference to a wild flower, the sudden unfolding of the small purple blossom into pavilions and palaces and the great name of the national history; and then with a turn of the hand like a gesture of scorn, the change to the grass that to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven. Then follows, as so often in the Gospels, the “how much more” which is like a celestial flight of stairs, a ladder of imaginative logic. Indeed this a fortiori, and this power of thinking on three levels, is (I may remark incidentally) a thing very much needed in modern discussion. Many minds apparently cannot stretch to three dimensions, or to thinking that a cube can go beyond a surface as a surface goes beyond a line; for instance, that the citizen is infinitely above all ranks, and yet the soul is infinitely above the citizen. But we are only concerned at the moment with the sides of this many-sided mystery which happen to be really in sympathy with the modern mood. Judged even by our modern tests of emancipated art or ideal economics, it is admitted that Christ understood all that is rather crudely embodied in Socialism or the Simple Life. I purposely insist first on this optimistic, I might almost say this pantheistic or even this pagan aspect of the Christian Gospels. For it is only when we understand that Christ, considered merely as a prophet, can be and is a popular leader in the love of natural things, that we can feel that tremendous and tragic energy of his testimony to an ugly reality, the existence of unnatural things. Instead of taking a text as I have done, take a whole Gospel and read it steadily and honestly and straight through at a sitting, and you will certainly have one impression, whether of a myth or of a man. It is that the exorcist towers above the poet and even the prophet; that the story between Cana and Calvary is one long war with demons. He understood better than a hundred poets the beauty of the flowers of the battle-field; but he came out to battle. And if most of his words mean anything they do mean that there is at our very feet, like a chasm concealed among the flowers, an unfathomable evil.

In short, I would here only hint delicately that perhaps the mind which admittedly knew much of what we think we know about ethics and economics, knew a little more than we are beginning to know about psychology and psychic phenomena. I remember reading, not without amusement, a severe and trenchant article in the Hibbert Journal, in which Christ’s admission of demonology was alone thought enough to dispose of his divinity. The one sentence of the article, which I cherish in my memory through all the changing years, ran thus: “If he was God, he knew there was no such thing as diabolical possession.” It did not
seem to strike the Hibbert critic that this line of criticism raises the question, not of whether Christ is God, but of whether the critic in the Hibbert Journal is God. About that mystery as about the other I am for the moment agnostic; but I should have thought that the meditations of Omniscience on the problem of evil might be allowed, even by an agnostic, to be a little difficult to discover. Of Christ in the Gospels and in modern life I will merely for the moment say this; that if he was God, as the critic put it, it seems possible that he knew the next discovery in science, as well as the last, not to mention (what is more common in rationalistic culture) the last but three. And what will be the next discovery in psychological science nobody can imagine; and we can only say that if it reveals demons and their name is Legion, we can hardly be much surprised now. But at any rate the days are over of Omniscience like that of the Hibbert critic, who knows exactly what he would know if he were God Almighty. What is pain? What is evil? What did they mean by devils? What do we mean by madness? The rising generation, when asked by a venerable Victorian critic and catechist, “What does God know?” will hardly think it unreasonably flippant to answer, “God knows.”

There was something already suggested about the steep scenery through which I went as I thought about these things; a sense of silent catastrophe and fundamental cleavage in the deep division of the cliffs and crags. They were all the more profoundly moving, because my sense of them was almost as subconscious as the subconsciousness about which I was reflecting. I had fallen again into the old habit of forgetting where I was going, and seeing things with one eye off, in a blind abstraction. I awoke from a sort of trance of absentmindedness in a landscape that might well awaken anybody. It might awaken a man sleeping; but he would think he was still in a nightmare. It might wake the dead, but they would probably think they were in hell. Halfway down the slope the hills had taken on a certain pallor which had about it something primitive, as if the colours were not yet created. There was only a kind of cold and wan blue in the level skies which contrasted with wild sky-line. Perhaps we are accustomed to the contrary condition of the clouds moving and mutable and the hills solid and serene; but anyhow there seemed something of the making of a new world about the quiet of the skies and the cold convulsion of the landscape. But if it was between chaos and creation, it was creation by God or at least by the gods, something with an aim in its anarchy. It was very different in the final stage of the descent, where my mind woke up from its meditations. One can only say that the whole landscape was like a leper. It was of a wasting white and silver and grey, with mere dots of decadent vegetation like the green spots of
a plague. In shape it not only rose into horns and crests like waves or clouds, but I believe it actually alters like waves or clouds, visibly but with a loathsome slowness. The swamp is alive. And I found again a certain advantage in forgetfulness; for I saw all this incredible country before I even remembered its name, or the ancient tradition about its nature. Then even the green plague-spots failed, and everything seemed to fall away into a universal blank under the staring sun, as I came, in the great spaces of the circle of a lifeless sea, into the silence of Sodom and Gomorrah.

For these are the foundations of a fallen world, and a sea below the seas on which men sail. Seas move like clouds and fishes float like birds above the level of the sunken land. And it is here that tradition has laid the tragedy of the mighty perversion of the imagination of man; the monstrous birth and death of abominable things. I say such things in no mood of spiritual pride; such things are hideous not because they are distant but because they are near to us; in all our brains, certainly in mine, were buried things as bad as any buried under that bitter sea, and if He did not come to do battle with them, even in the darkness of the brain of man, I know not why He came. Certainly it was not only to talk about flowers or to talk about Socialism. The more truly we can see life as a fairy-tale, the more clearly the tale resolves itself into war with the Dragon who is wasting fairyland. I will not enter on the theology behind the symbol; but I am sure it was of this that all the symbols were symbolic. I remember distinguished men among the liberal theologians, who found it more difficult to believe in one devil than in many. They admitted in the New Testament an attestation to evil spirits, but not to a general enemy of mankind. As some are said to want the drama of Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark, they would have the drama of Hell without the Prince of Darkness. I say nothing of these things, save that the language of the Gospel seems to me to go much more singly to a single issue. The voice that is heard there has such authority as speaks to an army; and the highest note of it is victory rather than peace. When the apostles were first sent forth with their faces to the four corners of the earth, and turned again to acclaim their master, he did not say in that hour of triumph, “All are aspects of one harmonious whole” or “The universe evolves through progress to perfection” or “All things find their end in Nirvana” or “The dewdrop slips into the shining sea.” He looked up and said, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”

Then I looked up and saw in the long jagged lines of road and rock and cleft something of the swiftness of such a thunderbolt. What I saw seemed not so much a scene as an act; as when abruptly Michael barred the passage of the Lord
of Pride. Below me all the empire of evil was splashed and scattered upon the plain, like a wine-cup shattered into a star. Sodom lay like Satan, flat upon the floor of the world. And far away and aloft, faint with height and distance, small but still visible, stood up the spire of the Ascension like the sword of the Archangel, lifted in salute after a stroke.
CHAPTER X

THE ENDLESS EMPIRE

One of the adventures of travel consists, not so much in finding that popular sayings are false, as that they mean more than they say. We cannot appreciate the full force of the phrase until we have seen the fact. We make a picture of the things we do not know out of the things we know; and suppose the traveller’s tale to mean no more abroad than it would at home. If a man acquainted only with English churches is told about certain French churches that they are much frequented, he makes an English picture. He imagines a definite dense crowd of people in their best clothes going all together at eleven o’clock, and all coming back together to lunch. He does not picture the peculiar impression he would gain on the spot; of chance people going in and out of the church all day, sometimes for quite short periods, as if it were a sort of sacred inn. Or suppose a man knowing only English beer-shops hears for the first time of a German beer-garden, he probably does not imagine the slow ritual of the place. He does not know that unless the drinker positively slams down the top of his beer-mug with a resounding noise and a decisive gesture, beer will go on flowing into it as from a natural fountain; the drinking of beer being regarded as the normal state of man, and the cessation of it a decisive and even dramatic departure. I do not give this example in contempt; heaven forbid. I have had so much to say of the inhuman side of Prussianised Germany that I am glad to be able to pay a passing tribute to those more generous German traditions which we hope may revive and make Germany once more a part of Christendom. I merely give it as an instance of the way in which things we have all heard of, like church-going or beer-drinking, in foreign lands, mean much more, and something much more special, than we should infer from our own land. Now this is true of a phrase we have all heard of deserted cities or temples in the Near East: “The Bedouins camp in the ruins.” When I have read a hundred times that Arabs camp in some deserted town or temple near the Nile or the Euphrates, I always thought of gipsies near some place like Stonehenge. They would make their own rude shelter near the stones, perhaps sheltering behind them to light a fire; and for the rest, generations of gipsies might camp there without making much difference. The thing I saw more than once in Egypt and Palestine was much more curious. It was as if the gipsies set to work to refurnish Stonehenge and make it a
commodious residence. It was as if they spread a sort of giant umbrella over the circle of stones, and elaborately hung curtains between them, so as to turn the old Druid temple into a sort of patchwork pavilion. In one sense there is much more vandalism, and in another sense much more practicality; but it is a practicality that always stops short of the true creative independence of going off and building a house of their own. That is the attitude of the Arab; and it runs through all his history. Noble as is his masterpiece of the Mosque of Omar, there is something about it of that patchwork pavilion. It was based on Christian work, it was built with fragments, it was content with things that fastidious architects call fictions or even shams.

I frequently saw old ruined houses of which there only remained two walls of stone, to which the nomads had added two walls of canvas making an exact cube in form with the most startling incongruity in colour. He needs the form and he does not mind the incongruity, nor does he mind the fact that somebody else has done the solid part and he has only done the ramshackle part. You can say that he is nobly superior to jealousy, or that he is without artistic ambition, or that he is too much of a nomad to mind living half in somebody else’s house and half in his own. The real quality is probably too subtle for any simple praise or blame; we can only say that there is in the wandering Moslem a curious kind of limited common sense; which might even be called a short-sighted common sense. But however we define it, that is what can really be traced through Arab conquests and Arab culture in all its ingenuity and insufficiency. That is the note of these nomads in all the things in which they have succeeded and failed. In that sense they are constructive and in that sense unconstructive; in that sense artistic and in that sense inartistic; in that sense practical and in that sense unpractical; in that sense cunning and in that sense innocent. The curtains they would hang round Stonehenge might be of beautifully selected colours. The banners they waved from Stonehenge might be defended with glorious courage and enthusiasm. The prayers they recited in Stonehenge might be essentially worthy of human dignity, and certainly a great improvement on its older associations of human sacrifice. All this is true of Islam and the idolatries and negations are often replaced. But they would not have built Stonehenge; they would scarcely, so to speak, have troubled to lift a stone of Stonehenge. They would not have built Stonehenge; how much less Salisbury or Glastonbury or Lincoln.

That is the element about the Arab influence which makes it, after its ages of supremacy and in a sense of success, remain in a subtle manner superficial. When a man first sees the Eastern deserts, he sees this influence as I first
described it, very present and powerful, almost omnipresent and omnipotent. But I fancy that to me and to others it is partly striking only because it is strange. Islam is so different to Christendom that to see it at all is at first like entering a new world. But, in my own case at any rate, as the strange colours became more customary, and especially as I saw more of the established seats of history, the cities and the framework of the different states, I became conscious of something else. It was something underneath, undestroyed and even in a sense unaltered. It was something neither Moslem nor modern; not merely oriental and yet very different from the new occidental nations from which I came. For a long time I could not put a name to this historical atmosphere. Then one day, standing in one of the Greek churches, one of those houses of gold full of hard highly coloured pictures, I fancied it came to me. It was the Empire. And certainly not the raid of Asiatic bandits we call the Turkish Empire. The thing which had caught my eye in that coloured interior was the carving of a two-headed eagle in such a position as to make it almost as symbolic as a cross. Every one has heard, of course, of the situation which this might well suggest, the suggestion that the Russian Church was far too much of an Established Church and the White Czar encroached upon the White Christ. But as a fact the eagle I saw was not borrowed from the Russian Empire; it would be truer to say that the Empire was borrowed from the eagle. The double eagle is the ancient emblem of the double empire of Rome and of Byzantium; the one head looking to the west and the other to the east, as if it spread its wings from the sunrise to the sunset. Unless I am mistaken, it was only associated with Russia as late as Peter the Great, though it had been the badge of Austria as the representative of the Holy Roman Empire. And what I felt brooding over that shrine and that landscape was something older not only than Turkey or Russia but than Austria itself. I began to understand a sort of evening light that lies over Palestine and Syria; a sense of smooth ruts of custom such as are said to give a dignity to the civilisation of China. I even understood a sort of sleepiness about the splendid and handsome Orthodox priests moving fully robed about the streets. They were not aristocrats but officials; still moving with the mighty routine of some far-off official system. In so far as the eagle was an emblem not of such imperial peace but of distant imperial wars, it was of wars that we in the West have hardly heard of; it was the emblem of official ovations.

When Heracleius rode homewards from the rout of Ispahan With the captives dragged behind him and the eagles in the van.

That is the rigid reality that still underlay the light mastery of the Arab rider;
that is what a man sees, in the patchwork pavilion, when he grows used to the
coloured canvas and looks at the walls of stone. This also was far too great a
thing for facile praise or blame, a vast bureaucracy busy and yet intensely
dignified, the most civilised thing ruling many other civilisations. It was an
endless end of the world; for ever repeating its rich finality. And I myself was
still walking in that long evening of the earth; and Caesar my lord was at
Byzantium.

But it is necessary to remember next that this empire was not always at its
evening. Byzantium was not always Byzantine. Nor was the seat of that power
always in the city of Constantine, which was primarily a mere outpost of the city
of Caesar. We must remember Rome as well as Byzantium; as indeed nobody
would remember Byzantium if it were not for Rome. The more I saw of a
hundred little things the more my mind revolved round that original idea which
may be called the Mediterranean; and the fact that it became two empires, but
remained one civilisation, just as it has become two churches, but remained one
religion.

In this little world there is a story attached to every word; and never more than
when it is the wrong word. For instance, we may say that in certain cases the
word Roman actually means Greek. The Greek Patriarch is sometimes called the
Roman Patriarch; while the real Roman Patriarch, who actually comes from
Rome, is only called the Latin Patriarch, as if he came from any little town in
Latium. The truth behind this confusion is the truth about five hundred very vital
years, which are concealed even from cultivated Englishmen by two vague
falsehoods; the notion that the Roman Empire was merely decadent and the
notion that the Middle Ages were merely dark. As a fact, even the Dark Ages
were not merely dark. And even the Byzantine Empire was not merely
Byzantine. It seems a little unfair that we should take the very title of decay from
that Christian city, for surely it was yet more stiff and sterile when it had become
a Moslem city. I am not so exacting as to ask any one to popularise such a word
as “Constantinopolitan.” But it would surely be a better word for stiffness and
sterility to call it Stamboulish. But for the Moslems and other men of the Near
East what counted about Byzantium was that it still inherited the huge weight of
the name of Rome. Rome had come east and reared against them this Roman
city, and though and priest or soldier who came out of it might be speaking as a
Greek, he was ruling as a Roman. Its critics in these days of criticism may regard
it as a corrupt civilisation. But its enemies in the day of battle only regarded it as
civilisation. Saladin, the greatest of the Saracens, did not call Greek bishops
degenerate dreamers or dingy outcasts, he called them, with a sounder historical instinct, “The monks of the imperial race.” The survival of the word merely means that even when the imperial city fell behind them, they did not surrender their claim to defy all Asia in the name of the Christian Emperor. That is but one example out of twenty, but that is why in this distant place to this day the Greeks who are separated from the see of Rome sometimes bear the strange name of “The Romans.”

Now that civilisation is our civilisation, and we never had any other. We have not inherited a Teutonic culture any more than a Druid culture; not half so much. The people who say that parliaments or pictures or gardens or roads or universities were made by the Teutonic race from the north can be disposed of by the simple question: why did not the Teutonic race make them in the north? Why was not the Parthenon originally built in the neighbourhood of Potsdam, or did ten Hansa towns compete to be the birthplace of Homer? Perhaps they do by this time; but their local illusion is no longer largely shared. Anyhow it seems strange that the roads of the Romans should be due to the inspiration of the Teutons; and that parliaments should begin in Spain because they came from Germany. If I looked about in these parts for a local emblem like that of the eagle, I might very well find it in the lion. The lion is common enough, of course, in Christian art both hagiological and heraldic. Besides the cavern of Bethlehem of which I shall speak presently, is the cavern of St. Jerome, where he lived with that real or legendary lion who was drawn by the delicate humour of Carpaccio and a hundred other religious painters. That it should appear in Christian art is natural; that it should appear in Moslem art is much more singular, seeing that Moslems are in theory forbidden so to carve images of living things. Some say the Persian Moslems are less particular; but whatever the explanation, two lions of highly heraldic appearance are carved over that Saracen gate which Christians call the gate of St. Stephen; and the best judges seem to agree that, like so much of the Saracenic shell of Zion, they were partly at least copied from the shields and crests of the Crusaders.

And the lions graven over the gate of St. Stephen might well be the text for a whole book on the subject. For if they indicate, however indirectly, the presence of the Latins of the twelfth century, they also indicate the earlier sources from which the Latin life had itself been drawn. The two lions are pacing, passant as the heralds would say, in two opposite directions almost as if prowling to and fro. And this also might well be symbolic as well as heraldic. For if the Crusaders brought the lion southward in spite of the conventional fancy of
Moslem decoration, it was only because the Romans had previously brought the lion northward to the cold seas and the savage forests. The image of the lion came from north to south, only because the idea of the lion had long ago come from south to north. The Christian had a symbolic lion he had never seen, and the Moslem had a real lion that he refused to draw. For we could deduce from the case of this single creature the fact that all our civilisation came from the Mediterranean, and the folly of pretending that it came from the North Sea. Those two heraldic shapes over the gate may be borrowed from the Norman or Angevin shield now quartered in the Royal Arms of England. They may have been copied, directly or indirectly, from that great Angevin King of England whose title credited him with the heart of a lion. They may have in some far-off fashion the same ancestry as the boast or jest of our own comic papers when they talk about the British Lion. But why are there lions, though of French or feudal origin, on the flag of England? There might as well be camels or crocodiles, for all the apparent connection with England or with France. Why was an English king described as having the heart of a lion, any more than of a tiger? Why do your patriotic cartoons threaten the world with the wrath of the British Lion; it is really as strange as if they warned it against stimulating the rage of the British rhinoceros. Why did not the French and English princes find in the wild boars, that were the objects of their hunting, the subjects of their heraldry? If the Normans were really the Northmen, the sea-wolves of Scandinavian piracy, why did they not display three wolves on their shields? Why has not John Bull been content with the English bull, or the English bull-dog?

The answer might be put somewhat defiantly by saying that the very name of John Bull is foreign. The surname comes through France from Rome; and the Christian name comes through Rome from Palestine. If there had really been any justification for the Teutonic generalisation, we should expect the surname to be “ox” and not “bull”; and we should expect the hero standing as godfather to be Odin or Siegfried, and not the prophet who lived on locusts in the wilderness of Palestine or the mystic who mused with his burning eyes on the blue seas around Patmos. If our national hero is John Bull and not Olaf the Ox, it is ultimately because that blue sea has run like a blue thread through all the tapestries of our traditions; or in other words because our culture, like that of France or Flanders, came originally from the Mediterranean. And if this is true of our use of the word “bull,” it is obviously even truer of our use of the word “lion.” The later emblem is enough to show that the culture came, not only from the
Mediterranean, but from the southern as well as the northern side of the Mediterranean. In other words, the Roman Empire ran all round the great inland sea; the very name of which meant, not merely the sea in the middle of the land, but more especially the sea in the middle of all the lands that mattered most to civilisation. One of these, and the one that in the long run has mattered most of all, was Palestine.

In this lies the deepest difference between a man like Richard the Lion Heart and any of the countless modern English soldiers in Palestine who have been quite as lion-hearted as he. His superiority was not moral but intellectual; it consisted in knowing where he was and why he was there. It arose from the fact that in his time there remained a sort of memory of the Roman Empire, which some would have re-established as a Holy Roman Empire. Christendom was still almost one commonwealth; and it seemed to Richard quite natural to go from one edge of it that happened to be called England to the opposite edge of it that happened to be called Palestine. We may think him right or wrong in the particular quarrel, we may think him innocent or unscrupulous in his incidental methods; but there is next to no doubt whatever that he did regard himself not merely as conquering but as re-conquering a realm. He was not like a man attacking total strangers on a hitherto undiscovered island. He was not opening up a new country, or giving his name to a new continent, and he could boast none of those ideals of imperial innovation which inspire the more enlightened pioneers, who exterminate tribes or extinguish republics for the sake of a gold-mine or an oil-field. Some day, if our modern educational system is further expanded and enforced, the whole of the past of Palestine may be entirely forgotten; and a traveller in happier days may have all the fresher sentiments of one stepping on a new and nameless soil. Disregarding any dim and lingering legends among the natives, he may then have the honour of calling Sinai by the name of Mount Higgins, or marking on a new map the site of Bethlehem with the name of Brownsville. But King Richard, adventurous as he was, could not experience the full freshness of this sort of adventure. He was not riding into Asia thus romantically and at random; indeed he was not riding into Asia at all. He was riding into Europa Irredenta.

But that is to anticipate what happened later and must be considered later. I am primarily speaking of the Empire as a pagan and political matter; and it is easy to see what was the meaning of the Crusade on the merely pagan and political side. In one sentence, it meant that Rome had to recover what Byzantium could not keep. But something further had happened as affecting
Rome than anything that could be understood by a man standing as I have imagined myself standing, in the official area of Byzantium. When I have said that the Byzantine civilisation seemed still to be reigning, I meant a curious impression that, in these Eastern provinces, though the Empire had been more defeated it has been less disturbed. There is a greater clarity in that ancient air; and fewer clouds of real revolution and novelty have come between them and their ancient sun. This may seem an enigma and a paradox; seeing that here a foreign religion has successfully fought and ruled. But indeed the enigma is also the explanation. In the East the continuity of culture has only been interrupted by negative things that Islam has done. In the West it has been interrupted by positive things that Christendom itself has done. In the West the past of Christendom has its perspective blocked up by its own creations; in the East it is a true perspective of interminable corridors, with round Byzantine arches and proud Byzantine pillars. That, I incline to fancy, is the real difference that a man come from the west of Europe feels in the east of Europe, it is a gap or a void. It is the absence of the grotesque energy of Gothic, the absence of the experiments of parliament and popular representation, the absence of medieval chivalry, the absence of modern nationality. In the East the civilisation lived on, or if you will, lingered on; in the West it died and was reborn. But for a long time, it should be remembered, it must have seemed to the East merely that it died. The realms of Rome had disappeared in clouds of barbaric war, while the realms of Byzantium were still golden and gorgeous in the sun. The men of the East did not realise that their splendour was stiffening and growing sterile, and even the early successes of Islam may not have revealed to them that their rule was not only stiff but brittle. It was something else that was destined to reveal it. The Crusades meant many things; but in this matter they meant one thing, which was like a word carried to them on the great west wind. And the word was like that in an old Irish song: “The west is awake.” They heard in the distance the cries of unknown crowds and felt the earth shaking with the march of mobs; and behind them came the trampling of horses and the noise of harness and of horns of war; new kings calling out commands and hosts of young men full of hope crying out in the old Roman tongue “Id Deus vult,” Rome was risen from the dead.

Almost any traveller could select out of the countless things that he has looked at the few things that he has seen. I mean the things that come to him with a curious clearness; so that he actually sees them to be what he knows them to be. I might almost say that he can believe in them although he has seen them. There can be no rule about this realisation; it seems to come in the most random
fashion; and the man to whom it comes can only speak for himself without any attempt at a critical comparison with others. In this sense I may say that the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem contains something impossible to describe, yet driving me beyond expression to a desperate attempt at description. The church is entered through a door so small that it it might fairly be called a hole, in which many have seen, and I think truly, a symbol of some idea of humility. It is also said that the wall was pierced in this way to prevent the appearance of a camel during divine service, but even that explanation would only repeat the same suggestion through the parable of the needle’s eye. Personally I should guess that, in so far as the purpose was practical, it was meant to keep out much more dangerous animals than camels, as, for instance, Turks. For the whole church has clearly been turned into a fortress, windows are bricked up and walls thickened in some or all of its thousand years of religious war. In the blank spaces above the little doorway hung in old times that strange mosaic of the Magi which once saved the holy place from destruction, in the strange interlude between the decline of Rome and the rise of Mahomet. For when the Persians who had destroyed Jerusalem rode out in triumph to the village of Bethlehem, they looked up and saw above the door a picture in coloured stone, a picture of themselves. They were following a strange star and worshipping an unknown child. For a Christian artist, following some ancient Eastern tradition containing an eternal truth, had drawn the three wise men with the long robes and high head-dresses of Persia. The worshippers of the sun had come westward for the worship of the star. But whether that part of the church were bare and bald as it is now or coloured with the gold and purple images of the Persians, the inside of the church would always be by comparison abruptly dark. As familiarity turns the darkness to twilight, and the twilight to a grey daylight, the first impression is that of two rows of towering pillars. They are of a dark red stone having much of the appearance of a dark red marble; and they are crowned with the acanthus in the manner of the Corinthian school. They were carved and set up at the command of Constantine; and beyond them, at the other end of the church beside the attar, is the dark stairway that descends under the canopies of rock to the stable where Christ was born.

Of all the things I have seen the most convincing, and as it were crushing, were these red columns of Constantine. In explanation of the sentiment there are a thousand things that want saying and cannot be said. Never have I felt so vividly the great fact of our history; that the Christian religion is like a huge bridge across a boundless sea, which alone connects us with the men who made
the world, and yet have utterly vanished from the world. To put it curtly and very crudely on this point alone it was possible to sympathise with a Roman and not merely to admire him. All his pagan remains are but sublime fossils; for we can never know the life that was in them. We know that here and there was a temple to Venus or there an altar to Vesta; but who knows or pretends to know what he really felt about Venus or Vesta? Was a Vestal Virgin like a Christian Virgin, or something profoundly different? Was he quite serious about Venus, like a diabolist, or merely frivolous about Venus, like a Christian? If the spirit was different from ours we cannot hope to understand it, and if the spirit was like ours, the spirit was expressed in images that no longer express it. But it is here that he and I meet; and salute the same images in the end.

In any case I can never recapture in words the waves of sympathy with strange things that went through me in that twilight of the tall pillars, like giants robed in purple, standing still and looking down into that dark hole in the ground. Here halted that imperial civilisation, when it had marched in triumph through the whole world; here in the evening of its days it came trailing in all its panoply in the pathway of the three kings. For it came following not only a falling but a fallen star and one that dived before them into a birthplace darker than a grave. And the lord of the laurels, clad in his sombre crimson, looked down into that darkness, and then looked up, and saw that all the stars in his own sky were dead. They were deities no longer but only a brilliant dust, scattered down the vain void of Lucretius. The stars were as stale as they were strong; they would never die for they had never lived; they were cursed with an incurable immortality that was but the extension of mortality; they were chained in the chains of causation and unchangeable as the dead. There are not many men in the modern world who do not know that mood, though it was not discovered by the moderns; it was the final and seemingly fixed mood of nearly all the ancients. Only above the black hole of Bethlehem they had seen a star wandering like a lost spark; and it had done what the eternal suns and planets could not do. It had disappeared.

There are some who resent the presence of such purple beside the plain stable of the Nativity. But it seems strange that they always rebuke it as if it were a blind vulgarity like the red plush of a parvenu; a mere insensibility to a mere incongruity. For in fact the insensibility is in the critics and not the artists. It is an insensibility not to an accidental incongruity but to an artistic contrast. Indeed it is an insensibility of a somewhat tiresome kind, which can often be noticed in those sceptics who make a science of folk-lore. The mark of them is that they
fail to see the importance of finding the upshot or climax of a tale, even when it is a fairy-tale. Since the old devotional doctors and designers were never tired of insisting on the sufferings of the holy poor to the point of squalor, and simultaneously insisting on the sumptuousness of the subject kings to the point of swagger, it would really seem not entirely improbable that they may have been conscious of the contrast themselves. I confess this is an insensibility, not to say stupidity, in the sceptics and simplifiers, which I find very fatiguing. I do not mind a man not believing a story, but I confess I am bored stiff (if I may be allowed the expression) by a man who can tell a story without seeing the point of the story, considered as a story or even considered as a lie. And a man who sees the rags and the royal purple as a clumsy inconsistency is merely missing the meaning of a deliberate design. He is like a man who should hear the story of King Cophetua and the beggar maid and say doubtfully that it was hard to recognise it as really a mariage de convenance; a phrase which (I may remark in parenthesis but not without passion) is not the French for “a marriage of convenience,” any more than hors d’oeuvre is the French for “out of work”; but may be more rightly rendered in English as “a suitable match.” But nobody thought the match of the king and the beggar maid conventionally a suitable match; and nobody would ever have thought the story worth telling if it had been. It is like saying that Diogenes, remaining in his tub after the offer of Alexander, must have been unaware of the opportunities of Greek architecture; or like saying that Nebuchadnezzar eating grass is clearly inconsistent with court etiquette, or not to be found in any fashionable cookery book. I do not mind the learned sceptic saying it is a legend or a lie; but I weep for him when he cannot see the gist of it, I might even say the joke of it. I do not object to his rejecting the story as a tall story; but I find it deplorable when he cannot see the point or end or upshot of the tall story, the very pinnacle or spire of that sublime tower.

This dull type of doubt clouds the consideration of many sacred things as it does that of the shrine of Bethlehem. It is applied to the divine reality of Bethlehem itself, as when sceptics still sneer at the littleness, the localism, the provincial particularity and obscurity of that divine origin; as if Christians could be confounded and silenced by a contrast which Christians in ten thousand hymns, songs and sermons have incessantly shouted and proclaimed. In this capital case, of course, the same principle holds. A man may think the tale is incredible; but it would never have been told at all if it had not been incongruous. But this particular case of the lesser contrast, that between the imperial pomp and the rustic poverty of the carpenter and the shepherds, is alone
enough to illustrate the strange artistic fallacy involved. If it be the point that an emperor came to worship a carpenter, it is as artistically necessary to make the emperor imperial as to make the carpenter humble; if we wish to make plain people that before this shrine kings are no better than shepherds, it is as necessary that the kings should have crowns as that the shepherds should have crooks. And if modern intellectuals do not know it, it is because nobody has really been mad enough even to try to make modern intellectualism popular. Now this conception of pomp as a popular thing, this conception of a concession to common human nature in colour and symbol, has a considerable bearing on many misunderstandings about the original enthusiasm that spread from the cave of Bethlehem over the whole Roman Empire. It is a curious fact that the moderns have mostly rebuked historic Christianity, not for being narrow, but for being broad. They have rebuked it because it did prove itself the desire of all nations, because it did satisfy the cravings of many creeds, because it did prove itself to idolaters as something as magic as their idols, or did prove itself to patriots something as lovable as their native land. In many other matters indeed, besides this popular art, we may find examples of the same illogical prejudice. Nothing betrays more curiously the bias of historians against the Christian faith than the fact that they blame in Christians the very human indulgences that they have praised in heathens. The same arts and allegories, the same phraseologies and philosophies, which appear first as proofs of heathen health turn up later as proofs of Christian corruption. It was noble of pagans to be pagan, but it was unpardonable of Christians to be paganised. They never tire of telling us of the glory that was Greece, the grandeur that was Rome, but the Church was infamous because it satisfied the Greek intellect and wielded the Roman power.

Now on the first example of the attempt of theology to meet the claims of philosophy I will not here dwell at length. I will only remark in passing that it is an utter fallacy to suggest, as for instance Mr. Wells suggests in his fascinating Outline of History, that the subtleties of theology were a mere falling away from the simplicities of religion. Religion may be better simple for those who find it simple; but there are bound to be many who in any case find it subtle, among those who think about it and especially those who doubt about it. To take an example, there is no saying which the humanitarians of a broad religion more commonly offer as a model of simplicity than that most mystical affirmation “God is Love.” And there is no theological quarrel of the Councils of the Church which they, especially Mr. Wells, more commonly deride as bitter and barren than that at the Council of Nicea about the Co-eternity of the Divine Son. Yet the
subtle statement is simply a metaphysical explanation of the simple statement; and it would be quite possible even to make it a popular explanation, by saying that God could not love when there was nothing to be loved. Now the Church Councils were originally very popular, not to say riotous assemblies. So far from being undemocratic, they were rather too democratic; the real case against them was that they passed by uproarious votes, and not without violence, things that had ultimately to be considered more calmly by experts. But it may reasonably be suggested, I think, that the concentration of the Greek intellect on these things did gradually pass from a popular to a more professional or official thing; and that the traces of it have finally tended to fade from the official religion of the East. It was far otherwise with the more poetical and therefore more practical religion of the West. It was far otherwise with that direct appeal to pathos and affection in the highly coloured picture of the Shepherd and the King. In the West the world not only prolonged its life but recovered its youth. That is the meaning of the movement I have described as the awakening of the West and the resurrection of Rome. And the whole point of that movement, as I propose to suggest, was that it was a popular movement. It had returned with exactly that strange and simple energy that belongs to the story of Bethlehem. Not in vain had Constantine come clad in purple to look down into that dark cave at his feet; nor did the star mislead him when it seemed to end in the entrails of the earth. The men who followed him passed on, as it were, through the low and vaulted tunnel of the Dark Ages; but they had found the way, and the only way, out of that world of death, and their journey ended in the land of the living. They came out into a world more wonderful than the eyes of men have looked on before or after; they heard the hammers of hundreds of happy craftsmen working for once according to their own will, and saw St. Francis walking with his halo a cloud of birds.
CHAPTER XI

THE MEANING OF THE CRUSADE

There are three examples of Western work on the great eastern slope of the Mount of Olives; and they form a sort of triangle illustrating the truth about the different influences of the West on the East. At the foot of the hill is the garden kept by the Franciscans on the alleged site of Gethsemane, and containing the hoary olive that is supposed to be the terrible tree of the agony of Christ. Given the great age and slow growth of the olives, the tradition is not so unreasonable as some may suppose. But whether or not it is historically right, it is not artistically wrong. The instinct, if it was only an instinct, that made men fix upon this strange growth of grey and twisted wood, was a true imaginative instinct. One of the strange qualities of this strange Southern tree is its almost startling hardness; accidentally to strike the branch of an olive is like striking rock. With its stony surface, stunted stature, and strange holes and hollows, it is often more like a grotto than a tree. Hence it does not seem so unnatural that it should be treated as a holy grotto; or that this strange vegetation should claim to stand for ever like a sculptured monument. Even the shimmering or shivering silver foliage of the living olive might well have a legend like that of the aspen; as if it had grown grey with fear from the apocalyptic paradox of a divine vision of death. A child from one of the villages said to me, in broken English, that it was the place where God said his prayers. I for one could not ask for a finer or more defiant statement of all that separates the Christian from the Moslem or the Jew; credo quia impossibile.

Around this terrible spot the Franciscans have done something which will strike many good and thoughtful people as quite fantasticaly inadequate; and which strikes me as fantasticaly but precisely right. They have laid out the garden simply as a garden, in a way that is completely natural because it is completely artificial. They have made flower-beds in the shape of stars and moons, and coloured them with flowers like those in the backyard of a cottage. The combination of these bright patterns in the sunshine with the awful shadow in the centre is certainly an incongruity in the sense of a contrast. But it is a poetical contrast, like that of birds building in a temple or flowers growing on a tomb. The best way of suggesting what I for one feel about it would be something like this; suppose we imagine a company of children, such as those
whom Christ blessed in Jerusalem, afterwards put permanently in charge of a field full of his sorrow; it is probable that, if they could do anything with it, they would do something like this. They might cut it up into quaint shapes and dot it with red daisies or yellow marigolds. I really do not know that there is anything better that grown up people could do, since anything that the greatest of them could do must be, must look quite as small. “Shall I, the gnat that dances in Thy ray, dare to be reverent?” The Franciscans have not dared to be reverent; they have only dared to be cheerful. It may be too awful an adventure of the imagination to imagine Christ in that garden. But there is not the smallest difficulty about imagining St. Francis there; and that is something to say of an institution which is eight hundred years old.

Immediately above this little garden, overshadowing and almost overhanging it, is a gorgeous gilded building with golden domes and minarets glittering in the sun, and filling a splendid situation with almost shameless splendour; the Russian church built over the upper part of the garden, belonging to the Orthodox-Greeks. Here again many Western travellers will be troubled; and will think that golden building much too like a fairy palace in a pantomime. But here again I shall differ from them, though perhaps less strongly. It may be that the pleasure is childish rather than childlike; but I can imagine a child clapping his hands at the mere sight of those great domes like bubbles of gold against the blue sky. It is a little like Aladdin’s Palace, but it has a place in art as Aladdin has a place in literature; especially since it is oriental literature. Those wise missionaries in China who were not afraid to depict the Twelve Apostles in the costume of Chinamen might have built such a church in a land of glittering mosques. And as it is said that the Russian has in him something of the child and something of the oriental, such a style may be quite sincere, and have even a certain simplicity in its splendour. It is genuine of its kind; it was built for those who like it; and those who do not like it can look at something else. This sort of thing may be called tawdry, but it is not what I call meretricious. What I call really meretricious can be found yet higher on the hill; towering to the sky and dominating all the valleys.

The nature of the difference, I think, is worth noting. The German Hospice, which served as a sort of palace for the German Emperor, is a very big building with a very high tower, planned I believe with great efficiency, solidity and comfort, and fitted with a thousand things that mark its modernity compared with the things around, with the quaint garden of the Franciscans or the fantastic temple of the Russians. It is what I can only describe as a handsome building;
rather as the more vulgar of the Victorian wits used to talk about a fine woman. By calling it a handsome building I mean that from the top of its dizzy tower to the bottom of its deepest foundations there is not one line or one tint of beauty. This negative fact, however, would be nothing; it might be honestly ugly and utilitarian like a factory or a prison; but it is not. It is as pretentious as the gilded dome below it; and it is pretentious in a wicked way where the other is pretentious in a good and innocent way. What annoys me about it is that it was not built by children, or even by savages, but by professors; and the professors could profess the art and could not practise it. The architects knew everything about a Romanesque building except how to build it. We feel that they accumulated on that spot all the learning and organisation and information and wealth of the world, to do this one particular thing; and then did it wrong. They did it wrong, not through superstition, not through fanatical exaggeration, not through provincial ignorance, but through pure, profound, internal, intellectual incompetence; that intellectual incompetence which so often goes with intellectual pride. I will mention only one matter out of a hundred. All the columns in the Kaiser’s Chapel are in one way very suitable to their place; every one of them has a swelled head. The column itself is slender but the capital is not only big but bulging; and it has the air of bulging downwards, as if pressing heavily on something too slender to support it. This is false, not to any of the particular schools of architecture about which professors can read in libraries, but to the inmost instinctive idea of architecture itself. A Norman capital can be heavy because the Norman column is thick, and the whole thing expresses an elephantine massiveness and repose. And a Gothic column can be slender, because its strength is energy; and is expressed in its line, which shoots upwards like the life of a tree, like the jet of a fountain or even like the rush of a rocket. But a slender thing beneath, obviously oppressed by a bloated thing above, suggests weakness by one of those miraculous mistakes that are as precisely wrong as masterpieces are precisely right. And to all this is added the intolerable intuition; that the Russians and the Franciscans, even if we credit them with fantastic ignorance, are at least looking up at the sky; and we know how the learned Germans would look down upon them, from their monstrous tower upon the hill.

And this is as true of the moral as of the artistic elements in the modern Jerusalem. To show that I am not unjustly partisan, I will say frankly that I see little to complain of in that common subject of complaint; the mosaic portrait of the Emperor on the ceiling of the chapel. It is but one among many figures; and
it is not an unknown practice to include a figure of the founder in such church decorations. The real example of that startling moral stupidity which marked the barbaric imperialism can be found in another figure of which, curiously enough, considerably less notice seems to have been taken. It is the more remarkable because it is but an artistic shadow of the actual fact; and merely records in outline and relief the temporary masquerade in which the man walked about in broad daylight. I mean the really astounding trick of dressing himself up as a Crusader. That was, under the circumstances, far more ludicrous and lunatic a proceeding than if he had filled the whole ceiling with cherub heads with his own features, or festooned all the walls with one ornamental pattern of his moustaches.

The German Emperor came to Jerusalem under the escort of the Turks, as the ally of the Turks, and solely because of the victory and supremacy of the Turks. In other words, he came to Jerusalem solely because the Crusaders had lost Jerusalem; he came there solely because the Crusaders had been routed, ruined, butchered before and after the disaster of Hattin: because the Cross had gone down in blood before the Crescent, under which alone he could ride in with safety. Under those circumstances to dress up as a Crusader, as if for a fancy dress ball, was a mixture of madness and vulgarity which literally stops the breath. There is no need whatever to blame him for being in alliance with the Turks; hundreds of people have been in alliance with the Turks; the English especially have been far too much in alliance with them. But if any one wants to appreciate the true difference, distinct from all the cant of newspaper nationality, between the English and the Germans (who were classed together by the same newspapers a little time before the war) let him take this single incident as a test. Lord Palmerston, for instance, was a firm friend of the Turks. Imagine Lord Palmerston appearing in chain mail and the shield of a Red Cross Knight.

It is obvious enough that Palmerston would have said that he cared no more for the Crusade than for the Siege of Troy; that his diplomacy was directed by practical patriotic considerations of the moment; and that he regarded the religious wars of the twelfth century as a rubbish heap of remote superstitions. In this he would be quite wrong, but quite intelligible and quite sincere; an English aristocrat of the nineteenth century inheriting from the English aristocrats of the eighteenth century; whose views were simply those of Voltaire. And these things are something of an allegory. For the Voltairean version of the Crusades is still by far the most reasonable of all merely hostile views of the Crusades. If they were not a creative movement of religion, then they were simply a destructive
movement of superstition; and whether we agree with Voltaire in calling it superstition or with Villehardouin in calling it religion, at least both these very clear-headed Frenchmen would agree that the motive did exist and did explain the facts. But just as there is a clumsy German building with statues that at once patronise and parody the Crusaders, so there is a clumsy German theory that at once patronises and minimises the Crusades. According to this theory the essential truth about a Crusade was that it was not a Crusade. It was something that the professors, in the old days before the war, used to call a Teutonic Folk-Wandering. Godfrey and St. Louis were not, as Villehardouin would say, fighting for the truth; they were not even, as Voltaire would say, fighting for what they thought was the truth; this was only what they thought they thought, and they were really thinking of something entirely different. They were not moved either by piety or priestcraft, but by a new and unexpected nomadism. They were not inspired either by faith or fanaticism, but by an unusually aimless taste for foreign travel. This theory that the war of the two great religions could be explained by “Wanderlust” was current about twenty years ago among the historical professors of Germany, and with many of their other views, was often accepted by the historical professors of England. It was swallowed by an earthquake, along with other rubbish, in the year 1914.

Since then, so far as I know, the only person who has been patient enough to dig it up again is Mr. Ezra Pound. He is well known as an American poet; and he is, I believe, a man of great talent and information. His attempt to recover the old Teutonic theory of the Folk-Wandering of Peter the Hermit was expressed, however, in prose; in an article in the New Age. I have no reason to doubt that he was to be counted among the most loyal of our allies; but he is evidently one of those who, quite without being Pro-German, still manage to be German. The Teutonic theory was very Teutonic; like the German Hospice on the hill it was put together with great care and knowledge and it is rotten from top to bottom. I do not understand, for that matter, why that alliance which we enjoy with Mr. Pound should not be treated in the same way as the other historical event; or why the war should not be an example of the Wanderlust. Surely the American Army in France must have drifted eastward merely through the same vague nomadic need as the Christian Army in Palestine. Surely Pershing as well as Peter the Hermit was merely a rather restless gentleman who found his health improved by frequent change of scene. The Americans said, and perhaps thought, that they were fighting for democracy; and the Crusaders said, and perhaps thought, that they were fighting for Christianity. But as we know what the Crusaders meant
better than they did themselves, I cannot quite understand why we do not enjoy the same valuable omniscience about the Americans. Indeed I do not see why we should not enjoy it (for it would be very enjoyable) about any individual American. Surely it was this vague vagabond spirit that moved Mr. Pound, not only to come to England, but in a fashion to come to Fleet Street. A dim tribal tendency, vast and invisible as the wind, carried him and his article like an autumn leaf to alight on the New Age doorstep. Or a blind aboriginal impulse, wholly without rational motive, led him one day to put on his hat, and go out with his article in an envelope and put it in a pillar-box. It is vain to correct by cold logic the power of such primitive appetites; nature herself was behind the seemingly random thoughtlessness of the deed. And now that it is irrevocably done, he can look back on it and trace the large lines of an awful law of averages; wherein it is ruled by a ruthless necessity that a certain number of such Americans should write a certain number of such articles, as the leaves fall or the flowers return.

In plain words, this sort of theory is a blasphemy against the intellectual dignity of man. It is a blunder as well as a blasphemy; for it goes miles out of its way to find a bestial explanation when there is obviously a human explanation. It is as if a man told me that a dim survival of the instincts of a quadruped was the reason of my sitting on a chair with four legs. I answer that I do it because I foresee that there may be grave disadvantages in sitting on a chair with one leg. Or it is as if I were told that I liked to swim in the sea, solely because some early forms of amphibian life came out of the sea on to the shore. I answer that I know why I swim in the sea; and it is because the divine gift of reason tells me that it would be unsatisfactory to swim on the land. In short this sort of vague evolutionary theorising simply amounts to finding an unconvincing explanation of something that needs no explanation. And the case is really quite as simple with great political and religious movements by which man has from time to time changed the world in this or that respect in which he happened to think it would be the better for a change. The Crusade was a religious movement, but it was also a perfectly rational movement; one might almost say a rationalist movement. I could quite understand Mr. Pound saying that such a campaign for a creed was immoral; and indeed it often has been, and now perhaps generally is, quite horribly immoral. But when he implies that it is irrational he has selected exactly the thing which it is not.

It is not enlightenment, on the contrary it is ignorance and insularity, which causes most of us to miss this fact. But it certainly is the fact that religious war is
in itself much more rational than patriotic war. I for one have often defended and even encouraged patriotic war, and should always be ready to defend and encourage patriotic passion. But it cannot be denied that there is more of mere passion, of mere preference and prejudice, in short of mere personal accident, in fighting another nation than in fighting another faith. The Crusader is in every sense more rational than the modern conscript or professional soldier. He is more rational in his object, which is the intelligent and intelligible object of conversion; where the modern militarist has an object much more confused by momentary vanity and one-sided satisfaction. The Crusader wished to make Jerusalem a Christian town; but the Englishman does not wish to make Berlin an English town. He has only a healthy hatred of it as a Prussian town. The Moslem wished to make the Christian a Moslem; but even the Prussian did not wish to make the Frenchman a Prussian. He only wished to make the Frenchman admire a Prussian; and not only were the means he adopted somewhat ill-considered for this purpose, but the purpose itself is looser and more irrational. The object of all war is peace; but the object of religious war is mental as well as material peace; it is agreement. In short religious war aims ultimately at equality, where national war aims relatively at superiority. Conversion is the one sort of conquest in which the conquered must rejoice.

In that sense alone it is foolish for us in the West to sneer at those who kill men when a foot is set in a holy place, when we ourselves kill hundreds of thousands when a foot is put across a frontier. It is absurd for us to despise those who shed blood for a relic when we have shed rivers of blood for a rag. But above all the Crusade, or, for that matter, the Jehad, is by far the most philosophical sort of fighting, not only in its conception of ending the difference, but in its mere act of recognising the difference, as the deepest kind of difference. It is to reverse all reason to suggest that a man’s politics matter and his religion does not matter. It is to say he is affected by the town he lives in, but not by the world he lives in. It is to say that he is altered when he is a fellow-citizen walking under new lamp-posts, but not altered when he is another creature walking under strange stars. It is exactly as if we were to say that two people ought to live in the same house, but it need not be in the same town. It is exactly as if we said that so long as the address included York it did not matter whether it was New York; or that so long as a man is in Essex we do not care whether he is in England.

Christendom would have been entirely justified in the abstract in being alarmed or suspicious at the mere rise of a great power that was not Christian.
Nobody nowadays would think it odd to express regret at the rise of a power because it was Militarist or Socialist or even Protectionist. But it is far more natural to be conscious of a difference, not about the order of battle but the battle of life; not about our definable enjoyment of possessions, but about our much more doubtful possession of enjoyment; not about the fiscal divisions between us and foreigners but about the spiritual divisions even between us and friends. These are the things that differ profoundly with differing views of the ultimate nature of the universe. For the things of our country are often distant; but the things of our cosmos are always near; we can shut our doors upon the wheeled traffic of our native town; but in our own inmost chamber we hear the sound that never ceases; that wheel which Dante and a popular proverb have dared to christen as the love that makes the world go round. For this is the great paradox of life; that there are not only wheels within wheels, but the larger wheels within the smaller. When a whole community rests on one conception of life and death and the origin of things, it is quite entitled to watch the rise of another community founded on another conception as the rise of something certain to be different and likely to be hostile. Indeed, as I have pointed out touching certain political theories, we already admit this truth in its small and questionable examples. We only deny the large and obvious examples.

Christendom might quite reasonably have been alarmed if it had not been attacked. But as a matter of history it had been attacked. The Crusader would have been quite justified in suspecting the Moslem even if the Moslem had merely been a new stranger; but as a matter of history he was already an old enemy. The critic of the Crusade talks as if it had sought out some inoffensive tribe or temple in the interior of Thibet, which was never discovered until it was invaded. They seem entirely to forget that long before the Crusaders had dreamed of riding to Jerusalem, the Moslems had almost ridden into Paris. They seem to forget that if the Crusaders nearly conquered Palestine, it was but a return upon the Moslems who had nearly conquered Europe. There was no need for them to argue by an appeal to reason, as I have argued above, that a religious division must make a difference; it had already made a difference. The difference stared them in the face in the startling transformation of Roman Barbary and of Roman Spain. In short it was something which must happen in theory and which did happen in practice; all expectation suggested that it would be so and all experience said it was so. Having thought it out theoretically and experienced it practically, they proceeded to deal with it equally practically. The first division involved every principle of the science of thought; and the last
developments followed out every principle of the science of war. The Crusade was the counter-attack. It was the defensive army taking the offensive in its turn, and driving back the enemy to his base. And it is this process, reasonable from its first axiom to its last act, that Mr. Pound actually selects as a sort of automatic wandering of an animal. But a man so intelligent would not have made a mistake so extraordinary but for another error which it is here very essential to consider. To suggest that men engaged, rightly or wrongly, in so logical a military and political operation were only migrating like birds or swarming like bees is as ridiculous as to say that the Prohibition campaign in America was only an animal reversion towards lapping as the dog lappeth, or Rowland Hill’s introduction of postage stamps an animal taste for licking as the cat licks. Why should we provide other people with a remote reason for their own actions, when they themselves are ready to tell us the reason, and it is a perfectly reasonable reason?

I have compared this pompous imposture of scientific history to the pompous and clumsy building of the scientific Germans on the Mount of Olives, because it substitutes in the same way a modern stupidity for the medieval simplicity. But just as the German Hospice after all stands on a fine site, and might have been a fine building, so there is after all another truth, somewhat analogous, which the German historians of the Folk-Wanderings might possibly have meant, as distinct from all that they have actually said. There is indeed one respect in which the case of the Crusade does differ very much from modern political cases like prohibition or the penny post. I do not refer to such incidental peculiarities as the fact that Prohibition could only have succeeded through the enormous power of modern plutocracy, or that even the convenience of the postage goes along with an extreme coercion by the police. It is a somewhat deeper difference that I mean; and it may possibly be what these critics mean. But the difference is not in the evolutionary, but rather the revolutionary spirit.

The First Crusade was not a racial migration; it was something much more intellectual and dignified; a riot. In order to understand this religious war we must class it, not so much with the wars of history as with the revolutions of history. As I shall try to show briefly on a later page, it not only had all the peculiar good and the peculiar evil of things like the French Revolution or the Russian Revolution, but it was a more purely popular revolution than either of them. The truly modern mind will of course regard the contention that it was popular as tantamount to a confession that it was animal. In these days when papers and speeches are full of words like democracy and self-determination,
anything really resembling the movement of a mass of angry men is regarded as no better than a stampede of bulls or a scurry of rats. The new sociologists call it the herd instinct, just as the old reactionaries called it the many-headed beast. But both agree in implying that it is hardly worth while to count how many heads there are of such cattle. In face of such fashionable comparisons it will seem comparatively mild to talk of migration as it occurs among birds or insects. Nevertheless we may venture to state with some confidence that both the sociologists and the reactionaries are wrong. It does not follow that human beings become less than human because their ideas appeal to more and more of humanity. Nor can we deduce that men are mindless solely from the fact that they are all of one mind. In plain fact the virtues of a mob cannot be found in a herd of bulls or a pack of wolves, any more than the crimes of a mob can be committed by a flock of sheep or a shoal of herrings. Birds have never been known to besiege and capture an empty cage of an aviary, on a point of principle, merely because it had kept a few other birds in captivity, as the mob besieged and captured the almost empty Bastille, merely because it was the fortress of a historic tyranny. And rats have never been known to die by thousands merely in order to visit a particular trap in which a particular rat had perished, as the poor peasants of the First Crusade died in thousands for a far-off sight of the Sepulchre or a fragment of the true cross. In this sense indeed the Crusade was not rationalistic, if the rat is the only rationalist. But it will seem more truly rational to point out that the inspiration of such a crowd is not in such instincts as we share with the animals, but precisely in such ideas as the animals never (with all their virtues) understand.

What is peculiar about the First Crusade is that it was in quite a new and abnormal sense a popular movement. I might almost say it was the only popular movement there ever was in the world. For it was not a thing which the populace followed; it was actually a thing which the populace led. It was not only essentially a revolution, but it was the only revolution I know of in which the masses began by acting alone, and practically without any support from any of the classes. When they had acted, the classes came in; and it is perfectly true, and indeed only natural, that the masses alone failed where the two together succeeded. But it was the uneducated who educated the educated. The case of the Crusade is emphatically not a case in which certain ideas were first suggested by a few philosophers, and then preached by demagogues to the democracy. This was to a great extent true of the French Revolution; it was probably yet more true of the Russian Revolution; and we need not here pause
upon the fine shade of difference that Rousseau was right and Karl Marx was wrong. In the First Crusade it was the ordinary man who was right or wrong. He came out in a fury at the insult to his own little images or private prayers, as if he had come out to fight with his own domestic poker or private carving-knife. He was not armed with new weapons of wit and logic served round from the arsenal of an academy. There was any amount of wit and logic in the academies of the Middle Ages; but the typical leader of the Crusade was not Abelard or Aquinas but Peter the Hermit, who can hardly be called even a popular leader, but rather a popular flag. And it was his army, or rather his enormous rabble, that first marched across the world to die for the deliverance of Jerusalem.

Historians say that in that huge host of thousands there were only nine knights. To any one who knows even a little of medieval war the fact seems astounding. It is indeed a long exploded fallacy to regard medievalism as identical with feudalism. There were countless democratic institutions, such as the guilds; sometimes as many as twenty guilds in one small town. But it is really true that the military organization of the Middle Ages was almost entirely feudal; indeed we might rather say that feudalism was the name of their military organisation. That so vast a military mass should have attempted to move at all, with only nine of the natural military leaders, seems to me a prodigy of popular initiative. It is as if a parliament were elected at the next general election, in which only two men could afford to read a daily newspaper.

This mob marched against the military discipline of the Moslems and was massacred; or, might I so mystically express it, martyred. Many of the great kings and knights who followed in their tracks did not so clearly deserve any haloes for the simplicity and purity of their motives. The canonisation of such a crowd might be impossible, and would certainly be resisted in modern opinion; chiefly because they indulged their democratic violence on the way by killing various usurers; a course which naturally fills modern society with an anger verging on alarm. A perversity leads me to weep rather more over the many slaughtered peasants than over the few slaughtered usurers; but in any case the peasants certainly were not slaughtered in vain. The common conscience of all classes, in a time when all had a common creed, was aroused, and a new army followed of a very different type of skill and training; led by most of the ablest captains and by some of the most chivalrous gentlemen of the age. For curiously enough, the host contained more than one cultured gentleman who was as simple a Christian as any peasant, and as recklessly ready to be butchered or tortured for the mere name of Christ.
It is a tag of the materialists that the truth about history rubs away the romance of history. It is dear to the modern mind because it is depressing; but it does not happen to be true. Nothing emerges more clearly from a study that is truly realistic, than the curious fact that romantic people were really romantic. It is rather the historical novels that will lead a modern man vaguely to expect to find the leader of the new knights, Godfrey de Bouillon, to have been merely a brutal baron. The historical facts are all in favour of his having been much more like a knight of the Round Table. In fact he was a far better man than most of the knights of the Round Table, in whose characters the fabulist, knowing that he was writing a fable, was tactful enough to introduce a larger admixture of vice. Truth is not only stranger than fiction, but often saintlier than fiction. For truth is real, while fiction is bound to be realistic. Curiously enough Godfrey seems to have been heroic even in those admirable accidents which are generally and perhaps rightly regarded as the trappings of fiction. Thus he was of heroic stature, a handsome red-bearded man of great personal strength and daring; and he was himself the first man over the wall of Jerusalem, like any boy hero in a boy’s adventure story. But he was also, the realist will be surprised to hear, a perfectly honest man, and a perfectly genuine practiser of the theoretical magnanimity of knighthood. Everything about him suggests it; from his first conversion from the imperial to the papal (and popular) cause, to his great refusal of the kinghood of the city he had taken; “I will not wear a crown of gold where my Master wore a crown of thorns.” He was a just ruler, and the laws he made were full of the plainest public spirit. But even if we dismiss all that was written of him by Christian chroniclers because they might be his friends (which would be a pathetic and exaggerated compliment to the harmonious unity of Crusaders and of Christians) he would still remain sufficiently assoiled and crowned with the words of his enemies. For a Saracen chronicler wrote of him, with a fine simplicity, that if all truth and honour had otherwise withered off the earth, there would still remain enough of them so long as Duke Godfrey was alive.

Allied with Godfrey were Tancred the Italian, Raymond of Toulouse with the southern French and Robert of Normandy, the adventurous son of the Conqueror, with the Normans and the English. But it would be an error, I think, and one tending to make the whole subsequent story a thing not so much misunderstood as unintelligible, to suppose that the whole crusading movement had been suddenly and unnaturally stiffened with the highest chivalric discipline. Unless I am much mistaken, a great mass of that army was still very much of a
It is probable a priori, since the great popular movement was still profoundly popular. It is supported by a thousand things in the story of the campaign; the extraordinary emotionalism that made throngs of men weep and wail together, the importance of the demagogue, Peter the Hermit, in spite of his unmilitary character, and the wide differences between the designs of the leaders and the actions of the rank and file. It was a crowd of rude and simple men that cast themselves on the sacred dust at the first sight of the little mountain town which they had tramped for two thousand miles to see. Tancred saw it first from the slope by the village of Bethlehem, which had opened its gates willingly to his hundred Italian knights; for Bethlehem then as now was an island of Christendom in the sea of Islam. Meanwhile Godfrey came up the road from Jaffa, and crossing the mountain ridge, saw also with his living eyes his vision of the world’s desire. But the poorest men about him probably felt the same as he; all ranks knelt together in the dust, and the whole story is one wave of numberless and nameless men. It was a mob that had risen like a man for the faith. It was a mob that had truly been tortured like a man for the faith. It was already transfigured by pain as well as passion. Those that know war in those deserts through the summer months, even with modern supplies and appliances and modern maps and calculations, know that it could only be described as a hell full of heroes. What it must have been to those little local serfs and peasants from the Northern villages, who had never dreamed in nightmares of such landscapes or such a sun, who knew not how men lived at all in such a furnace and could neither guess the alleviations nor get them, is beyond the imagination of man. They arrived dying with thirst, dropping with weariness, lamenting the loss of the dead that rotted along their road; they arrived shrivelled to rags or already raving with fever and they did what they had come to do.

Above all, it is clear that they had the vices as well as the virtues of a mob. The shocking massacre in which they indulged in the sudden relaxation of success is quite obviously a massacre by a mob. It is all the more profoundly revolutionary because it must have been for the most part a French mob. It was of the same order as the Massacre of September, and it is but a part of the same truth that the First Crusade was as revolutionary as the French Revolution. It was of the same order as the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, which was also a piece of purely popular fanaticism, directed against what was also regarded as an antinational aristocracy. It is practically self-evident that the Christian commanders were opposed to it, and tried to stop it. Tancred promised their lives to the Moslems in the mosque, but the mob clearly disregarded him. Raymond of
Toulouse himself saved those in the Tower of David, and managed to send them safely with their property to Ascalon. But revolution with all its evil as well as its good was loose and raging in the streets of the Holy City. And in nothing do we see that spirit of revolution more clearly than in the sight of all those peasants and serfs and vassals, in that one wild moment in revolt, not only against the conquered lords of Islam, but even against the conquering lords of Christendom.

The whole strain of the siege indeed had been one of high and even horrible excitement. Those who tell us to-day about the psychology of the crowd will agree that men who have so suffered and so succeeded are not normal; that their brains are in a dreadful balance which may turn either way. They entered the city at last in a mood in which they might all have become monks; and instead they all became murderers. A brilliant general, who played a decisive part in our own recent Palestinian campaign, told me with a sort of grim humour that he hardly wondered at the story; for he himself had entered Jerusalem in a sort of fury of disappointment; “We went through such a hell to get there, and now it’s spoilt for all of us.” Such is the heavy irony that hangs over our human nature, making it enter the Holy City as if it were the Heavenly City, and more than any earthly city can be. But the struggle which led to the scaling of Jerusalem in the First Crusade was something much wilder and more incalculable than anything that can be conceived in modern war. We can hardly wonder that the crusading crowd saw the town in front of them as a sort of tower full of demons, and the hills around them as an enchanted and accursed land. For in one very real sense it really was so; for all the elements and expedients were alike unknown qualities. All their enemies’ methods were secrets sprung upon them. All their own methods were new things made out of nothing. They wondered alike what would be done on the other side and what could be done on their own side; every movement against them was a stab out of the darkness and every movement they made was a leap in the dark. First, on the one side, we have Tancred trying to take the whole fortified city by climbing up a single slender ladder, as if a man tried to lasso the peak of a mountain. Then we have the flinging from the turrets of a strange and frightful fiery rain, as if water itself had caught fire. It was afterwards known as the Greek Fire and was probably petroleum; but to those who had never seen (or felt) it before it may well have seemed the flaming oil of witchcraft. Then Godfrey and the wiser of the warriors set about to build wooden siege-towers and found they had next to no wood to build them. There was scarcely anything in that rocky waste but the dwarf trees of olive; a poetic fantasy woven about that war in after ages described them as hindered even in
their wood-cutting by the demons of that weird place. And indeed the fancy had an essential truth, for the very nature of the land fought against them; and each of those dwarf trees, hard and hollow and twisted, may well have seemed like a grinning goblin. It is said that they found timbers by accident in a cavern; they tore down the beams from ruined houses; at last they got into touch with some craftsmen from Genoa who went to work more successfully; skinning the cattle, who had died in heaps, and covering the timbers. They built three high towers on rollers, and men and beasts dragged them heavily against the high towers of the city. The catapults of the city answered them, the cataracts of devouring fire came down; the wooden towers swayed and tottered, and two of them suddenly stuck motionless and useless. And as the darkness fell a great flare must have told them that the third and last was in flames.

All that night Godfrey was toiling to retrieve the disaster. He took down the whole tower from where it stood and raised it again on the high ground to the north of the city which is now marked by the pine tree that grows outside Herod’s gate. And all the time he toiled, it was said, sinister sorcerers sat upon the battlements, working unknown marvels for the undoing of the labour of man. If the great knight had a touch of such symbolism on his own side, he might have seen in his own strife with the solid timber something of the craft that had surrounded the birth of his creed, and the sacred trade of the carpenter. And indeed the very pattern of all carpentry is cruciform, and there is something more than an accident in the allegory. The transverse position of the timber does indeed involve many of those mathematical that are analogous to moral truths and almost every structural shape has the shadow of the mystic rood, as the three dimensions have a shadow of the Trinity. Here is the true mystery of equality; since the longer beam might lengthen itself to infinity, and never be nearer to the symbolic shape without the help of the shorter. Here is that war and wedding between two contrary forces, resisting and supporting each other; the meeting-place of contraries which we, by a sort of pietistic pun, still call the crux of the question. Here is our angular and defiant answer to the self-devouring circle of Asia. It may be improbable, though it is far from impossible (for the age was philosophical enough) that a man like Godfrey thus extended the mystical to the metaphysical; but the writer of a real romance about him would be well within his rights in making him see the symbolism of his own tower, a tower rising above him through the clouds of night as if taking hold on the heaven or showing its network of beams black against the daybreak; scaling the skies and open to all the winds, a ladder and a labyrinth, repeating till it was lost in the
twilight the pattern of the sign of the cross.

When dawn was come all those starving peasants may well have stood before the high impregnable walls in the broad daylight of despair. Even their nightmares during the night, of unearthly necromancers looking down at them from the battlements and with signs and spells paralysing all their potential toils, may well have been a sort of pessimistic consolation, anticipating and accounting for failure. The Holy City had become for them a fortress full of fiends, when Godfrey de Bouillon again set himself sword in hand upon the wooden tower and gave the order once more to drag it tottering towards the towers on either side of the postern gate. So they crawled again across the fosse full of the slain, dragging their huge house of timber behind them, and all the blast and din of war broke again about their heads. A hail of bolts hammered such shields as covered them for a canopy, stones and rocks fell on them and crushed them like flies in the mire, and from the engines of the Greek Fire all the torrents of their torment came down on them like red rivers of hell. For indeed the souls of those peasants must have been sickened with something of the topsy-turvydom felt by too many peasants of our own time under the frightful flying batteries of scientific war; a blasphemy of inverted battle in which hell itself has occupied heaven. Something of the vapours vomited by such cruel chemistry may have mingled with the dust of battle, and darkened such light as showed where shattering rocks were rending a roof of shields, to men bowed and blinded as they are by such labour of dragging and such a hailstorm of death. They may have heard through all the racket of nameless noises the high minaret cries of Moslem triumph rising shriller like a wind in shrill pipes, and known little else of what was happening above or beyond them. It was most likely that they laboured and strove in that lower darkness, not knowing that high over their heads, and up above the cloud of battle, the tower of timber and the tower of stone had touched and met in mid-heaven; and great Godfrey, alone and alive, had leapt upon the wall of Jerusalem.
CHAPTER XII

THE FALL OF CHIVALRY

On the back of this book is the name of the New Jerusalem and on the first page of it a phrase about the necessity of going back to the old even to find the new, as a man retraces his steps to a sign-post. The common sense of that process is indeed most mysteriously misunderstood. Any suggestion that progress has at any time taken the wrong turning is always answered by the argument that men idealise the past, and make a myth of the Age of Gold. If my progressive guide has led me into a morass or a man-trap by turning to the left by the red pillar-box, instead of to the right by the blue palings of the inn called the Rising Sun, my progressive guide always proceeds to soothe me by talking about the myth of an Age of Gold. He says I am idealising the right turning. He says the blue palings are not so blue as they are painted. He says they are only blue with distance. He assures me there are spots on the sun, even on the rising sun. Sometimes he tells me I am wrong in my fixed conviction that the blue was of solid sapphires, or the sun of solid gold. In short he assures me I am wrong in supposing that the right turning was right in every possible respect; as if I had ever supposed anything of the sort. I want to go back to that particular place, not because it was all my fancy paints it, or because it was the best place my fancy can paint; but because it was a many thousand times better place than the man-trap in which he and his like have landed me. But above all I want to go back to it, not because I know it was the right place but because I think it was the right turning. And the right turning might possibly have led me to the right place; whereas the progressive guide has quite certainly led me to the wrong one.

Now it is quite true that there is less general human testimony to the notion of a New Jerusalem in the future than to the notion of a Golden Age in the past. But neither of those ideas, whether or no they are illusions, are any answer to the question of a plain man in the plain position of this parable; a man who has to find some guidance in the past if he is to get any good in the future. What he positively knows, in any case, is the complete collapse of the present. Now that is the exact truth about the thing so often rebuked as a romantic and unreal return of modern men to medieval things. They suppose they have taken the wrong turning, because they know they are in the wrong place. To know that, it is necessary not to idealise the medieval world, but merely to realise the modern
world. It is not so much that they suppose the medieval world was above the
average as that they feel sure the modern world is below the average. They do
not start either with the idea that man is meant to live in a New Jerusalem of
pearl and sapphire in the future, or that a man was meant to live in a picturesque
and richly-painted tavern of the past; but with a strong inward and personal
persuasion that a man was not meant to live in a man-trap.

For there is and will be more and more a turn of total change in all our talk
and writing about history. Everything in the past was praised if it had led up to
the present, and blamed if it would have led up to anything else. In short
everybody has been searching the past for the secret of our success. Very soon
everybody may be searching the past for the secret of our failure. They may be
talking in such terms as they use after a motor smash or a bankruptcy; where was
the blunder? They may be writing such books as generals write after a military
defeat; whose was the fault? The failure will be assumed even in being
explained.

For industrialism is no longer a vulgar success. On the contrary, it is now too
tragic even to be vulgar. Under the cloud of doom the modern city has taken on
something of the dignity of Babel or Babylon. Whether we call it the nemesis of
Capitalism or the nightmare of Bolshevism makes no difference; the rich
grumble as much as the poor; every one is discontented, and none more than
those who are chiefly discontented with the discontent. About that discord we
are in perfect harmony; about that disease we all think alike, whatever we think
of the diagnosis or the cure. By whatever process in the past we might have
come to the right place, practical facts in the present and future will prove more
and more that we have come to the wrong place. And for many a premonition
will grow more and more of a probability; that we may or may not await another
century or another world to see the New Jerusalem rebuilt and shining on our
fields; but in the flesh we shall see Babylon fall.

But there is another way in which that metaphor of the forked road will make
the position plain. Medieval society was not the right place; it was only the right
turning. It was only the right road; or perhaps only the beginning of the right
road. The medieval age was very far from being the age in which everything
went right. It would be nearer the truth I mean to call it the age in which
everything went wrong. It was the moment when things might have developed
well, and did develop badly. Or rather, to be yet more exact, it was the moment
when they were developing well, and yet they were driven to develop badly.
This was the history of all the medieval states and of none more than medieval
Jerusalem; indeed there were signs of some serious idea of making it the model medieval state. Of this notion of Jerusalem as the New Jerusalem, of the Utopian aspect of the adventure of the Latin Kingdom, something may be said in a moment. But meanwhile there was a more important part played by Jerusalem, I think, in all that great progress and reaction which has left us the problem of modern Europe. And the suggestion of it is bound up with the former suggestion, about the difference between the goal and the right road that might have led to it. It is bound up with that quality of the civilisation in question, that it was potential rather than perfect; and there is no need to idealise it in order to regret it. This peculiar part played by Jerusalem I mention merely as a suggestion; I might almost say a suspicion. Anyhow, it is something of a guess; but I for one have found it a guide.

Medievalism died, but it died young. It was at once energetic and incomplete when it died, or very shortly before it died. This is not a matter of sympathy or antipathy, but of appreciation of an interesting historic comparison with other historic cases. When the Roman Empire finally failed we cannot of course say that it had done all it was meant to do, for that is dogmatism. We cannot even say it had done all that it might have done, for that is guesswork. But we can say that it had done certain definite things and was conscious of having done them; that it had long and even literally rested on its laurels. But suppose that Rome had fallen when she had only half defeated Carthage, or when she had only half conquered Gaul, or even when the city was Christian but most of the provinces still heathen. Then we should have said, not merely that Rome had not done what she might have done, but that she had not done what she was actually doing. And that is very much the truth in the matter of the medieval civilisation. It was not merely that the medievals left undone what they might have done, but they left undone what they were doing. This potential promise is proved not only in their successes but in their failures. It is shown, for instance, in the very defects of their art. All the crafts of which Gothic architecture formed the framework were developed, not only less than they should have been, but less than they would have been. There is no sort of reason why their sculpture should not have become as perfect as their architecture; there is no sort of reason why their sense of form should not have been as finished as their sense of colour. A statue like the St. George of Donatello would have stood more appropriately under a Gothic than under a Classic arch. The niches were already made for the statues. The same thing is true, of course, not only about the state of the crafts but about the status of the craftsman. The best proof that the system of the guilds had an
undeveloped good in it is that the most advanced modern men are now going back five hundred years to get the good out of it. The best proof that a rich house was brought to ruin is that our very pioneers are now digging in the ruins to find the riches. That the new guildsmen add a great deal that never belonged to the old guildsmen is not only a truth, but is part of the truth I maintain here. The new guildsmen add what the old guildsmen would have added if they had not died young. When we renew a frustrated thing we do not renew the frustration. But if there are some things in the new that were not in the old, there were certainly some things in the old that are not yet visible in the new; such as individual humour in the handiwork. The point here, however, is not merely that the worker worked well but that he was working better; not merely that his mind was free but that it was growing freer. All this popular power and humour was increasing everywhere, when something touched it and it withered away. The frost had struck it in the spring.

Some people complain that the working man of our own day does not show an individual interest in his work. But it will be well to realise that they would be much more annoyed with him if he did. The medieval workman took so individual an interest in his work that he would call up devils entirely on his own account, carving them in corners according to his own taste and fancy. He would even reproduce the priests who were his patrons and make them as ugly as devils; carving anti-clerical caricatures on the very seats and stalls of the clerics. If a modern householder, on entering his own bathroom, found that the plumber had twisted the taps into the images of two horned and grinning fiends, he would be faintly surprised. If the householder, on returning at evening to his house, found the door-knocker distorted into a repulsive likeness of himself, his surprise might even be tinged with disapproval. It may be just as well that builders and bricklayers do not gratuitously attach gargoyles to our smaller residential villas. But well or ill, it is certainly true that this feature of a flexible popular fancy has never reappeared in any school of architecture or any state of society since the medieval decline. The great classical buildings of the Renascence were swept as bare of it as any villa in Balham. But those who best appreciate this loss to popular art will be the first to agree that at its best it retained a touch of the barbaric as well as the popular. While we can admire these matters of the grotesque, we can admit that their work was sometimes unintentionally as well as intentionally grotesque. Some of the carving did remain so rude that the angels were almost as ugly as the devils. But this is the very point upon which I would here insist; the mystery of why men who were so obviously only
beginning should have so suddenly stopped.

Men with medieval sympathies are sometimes accused, absurdly enough, of trying to prove that the medieval period was perfect. In truth the whole case for it is that it was imperfect. It was imperfect as an unripe fruit or a growing child is imperfect. Indeed it was imperfect in that very particular fashion which most modern thinkers generally praise, more than they ever praise maturity. It was something now much more popular than an age of perfection; it was an age of progress. It was perhaps the one real age of progress in all history. Men have seldom moved with such rapidity and such unity from barbarism to civilisation as they did from the end of the Dark Ages to the times of the universities and the parliaments, the cathedrals and the guilds. Up to a certain point we may say that everything, at whatever stage of improvement, was full of the promise of improvement. Then something began to go wrong, almost equally rapidly, and the glory of this great culture is not so much in what it did as in what it might have done. It recalls one of these typical medieval speculations, full of the very fantasy of free will, in which the schoolmen tried to fancy the fate of every herb or animal if Adam had not eaten the apple. It remains, in a cant historical phrase, one of the great might-have-beens of history.

I have said that it died young; but perhaps it would be truer to say that it suddenly grew old. Like Godfrey and many of its great champions in Jerusalem, it was overtaken in the prime of life by a mysterious malady. The more a man reads of history the less easy he will find it to explain that secret and rapid decay of medieval civilisation from within. Only a few generations separated the world that worshipped St. Francis from the world that burned Joan of Arc. One would think there might be no more than a date and a number between the white mystery of Louis the Ninth and the black mystery of Louis the Eleventh. This is the very real historical mystery; the more realistic is our study of medieval things, the more puzzled we shall be about the peculiar creeping paralysis which affected things so virile and so full of hope. There was a growth of moral morbidity as well as social inefficiency, especially in the governing classes; for even to the end the guildsmen and the peasants remained much more vigorous. How it ended we all know; personally I should say that they got the Reformation and deserved it. But it matters nothing to the truth here whether the Reformation was a just revolt and revenge or an unjust culmination and conquest. It is common ground to Catholics and Protestants of intelligence that evils preceded and produced the schism; and that evils were produced by it and have pursued it down to our own day. We know it if only in the one example, that the schism
begat the Thirty Years’ War, and the Thirty Years’ War begat the Seven Years’ War, and the Seven Years’ War begat the Great War, which has passed like a pestilence through our own homes. After the schism Prussia could relapse into heathenry and erect an ethical system external to the whole culture of Christendom. But it can still be reasonably asked what begat the schism; and it can still be reasonably answered; something that went wrong with medievalism.

But what was it that went wrong?

When I looked for the last time on the towers of Zion I had a fixed fancy that I knew what it was. It is a thing that cannot be proved or disproved; it must sound merely an ignorant guess. But I believe myself that it died of disappointment. I believe the whole medieval society failed, because the heart went out of it with the loss of Jerusalem. Let it be observed that I do not say the loss of the war, or even the Crusade. For the war against Islam was not lost. The Moslem was overthrown in the real battle-field, which was Spain; he was menaced in Africa; his imperial power was already stricken and beginning slowly to decline. I do not mean the political calculations about a Mediterranean war. I do not even mean the Papal conceptions about the Holy War. I mean the purely popular picture of the Holy City. For while the aristocratic thing was a view, the vulgar thing was a vision; something with which all stories stop, something where the rainbow ends, something over the hills and far away. In Spain they had been victorious; but their castle was not even a castle in Spain. It was a castle east of the sun and west of the moon, and the fairy prince could find it no more. Indeed that idle image out of the nursery books fits it very exactly. For its mystery was and is in standing in the middle, or as they said in the very centre of the earth. It is east of the sun of Europe, which fills the world with a daylight of sanity, and ripens real and growing things. It is west of the moon of Asia, mysterious and archaic with its cold volcanoes, silver mirror for poets and a most fatal magnet for lunatics.

Anyhow the fall of Jerusalem, and in that sense the failure of the Crusades, had a widespread effect, as I should myself suggest, for the reason I have myself suggested. Because it had been a popular movement, it was a popular disappointment; and because it had been a popular movement, its ideal was an image; a particular picture in the imagination. For poor men are almost always particularists; and nobody has ever seen such a thing as a mob of pantheists. I have seen in some of that lost literature of the old guilds, which is now everywhere coming to light, a list of the stage properties required for some village play, one of those popular plays acted by the medieval trades unions, for
which the guild of the shipwrights would build Noah’s Ark or the guild of the barbers provide golden wigs for the haloes of the Twelve Apostles. The list of those crude pieces of stage furniture had a curious colour of poetry about it, like the impromptu apparatus of a nursery charade; a cloud, an idol with a club, and notably among the rest, the walls and towers of Jerusalem. I can imagine them patiently painted and gilded as a special feature, like the two tubs of Mr. Vincent Crummles. But I can also imagine that towards the end of the Middle Ages, the master of the revels might begin to look at those towers of wood and pasteboard with a sort of pain, and perhaps put them away in a corner, as a child will tire of a toy especially if it is associated with a disappointment or a dismal misunderstanding. There is noticeable in some of the later popular poems a disposition to sulk about the Crusades. But though the popular feeling had been largely poetical, the same thing did in its degree occur in the political realm that was purely practical. The Moslem had been checked, but he had not been checked enough. The whole story of what was called the Eastern Question, and three-quarters of the wars of the modern world, were due to the fact that he was not checked enough.

The only thing to do with unconquerable things is to conquer them. That alone will cure them of invincibility; or what is worse, their own vision of invincibility. That was the conviction of those of us who would not accept what we considered a premature peace with Prussia. That is why we would not listen either to the Tory Pro-Germanism of Lord Lansdowne or the Socialist Pro-Germanism of Mr. Macdonald. If a lunatic believes in his luck so fixedly as to feel sure he cannot be caught, he will not only believe in it still, but believe in it more and more, until the actual instant when he is caught. The longer the chase, the more certain he will be of escaping; the more narrow the escapes, the more certain will be the escape. And indeed if he does escape it will seem a miracle, and almost a divine intervention, not only to the pursued but to the pursuers. The evil thing will chiefly appear unconquerable to those who try to conquer it. It will seem after all to have a secret of success; and those who failed against it will hide in their hearts a secret of failure. It was that secret of failure, I fancy, that slowly withered from within the high hopes of the Middle Ages. Christianity and chivalry had measured their force against Mahound, and Mahound had not fallen; the shadow of his horned helmet, the crest of the Crescent, still lay across their sunnier lands; the Horns of Hattin. The streams of life that flowed to guilds and schools and orders of knighthood and brotherhoods of friars were strangely changed and chilled. So, if the peace had left Prussianism secure even in Prussia,
I believe that all the liberal ideals of the Latins, and all the liberties of the English, and the whole theory of a democratic experiment in America, would have begun to die of a deep and even subconscious despair. A vote, a jury, a newspaper, would not be as they are, things of which it is hard to make the right use, or any use; they would be things of which nobody would even try to make any use. A vote would actually look like a vassal’s cry of “haro,” a jury would look like a joust; many would no more read headlines than blazon heraldic coats. For these medieval things look dead and dusty because of a defeat, which was none the less a defeat because it was more than half a victory.

A curious cloud of confusion rests on the details of that defeat. The Christian captains who acted in it were certainly men on a different moral level from the good Duke Godfrey; their characters were by comparison mixed and even mysterious. Perhaps the two determining personalities were Raymond of Tripoli, a skilful soldier whom his enemies seemed to have accused of being much too skilful a diplomatist; and Renaud of Chatillon, a violent adventurer whom his enemies seem to have accused of being little better than a bandit. And it is the irony of the incident that Raymond got into trouble for making a dubious peace with the Saracens, while Renaud got into trouble by making an equally dubious war on the Saracens. Renaud exacted from Moslem travellers on a certain road what he regarded as a sort of feudal toll or tax, and they regarded as a brigand ransom; and when they did not pay he attacked them. This was regarded as a breach of the truce; but probably it would have been easier to regard Renaud as waging the war of a robber, if many had not regarded Raymond as having made the truce of a traitor. Probably Raymond was not a traitor, since the military advice he gave up to the very instant of catastrophe was entirely loyal and sound, and worthy of so wise a veteran. And very likely Renaud was not merely a robber, especially in his own eyes; and there seems to be a much better case for him than many modern writers allow. But the very fact of such charges being bandied among the factions shows a certain fall from the first days under the headship of the house of Bouillon. No slanderer ever suggested that Godfrey was a traitor; no enemy ever asserted that Godfrey was only a thief. It is fairly clear that there had been a degeneration; but most people hardly realise sufficiently that there had been a very great thing from which to degenerate.

The first Crusades had really had some notion of Jerusalem as a New Jerusalem. I mean they had really had a vision of the place being not only a promised land but a Utopia or even an Earthly Paradise. The outstanding fact and feature which is seldom seized is this: that the social experiment in Palestine
was rather in advance of the social experiments in the rest of Christendom. Having to begin at the beginning, they really began with what they considered the best ideas of their time; like any group of Socialists founding an ideal Commonwealth in a modern colony. A specialist on this period, Colonel Conder of the Palestine Exploration, has written that the core of the Code was founded on the recommendations of Godfrey himself in his “Letters of the Sepulchre”; and he observes concerning it: “The basis of these laws was found in Justinian’s code, and they presented features as yet quite unknown in Europe, especially in their careful provision of justice for the bourgeois and the peasant, and for the trading communes whose fleets were so necessary to the king. Not only were free men judged by juries of their equals, but the same applied to those who were technically serfs and actually aborigines.” The original arrangements of the Native Court seem to me singularly liberal, even by modern standards of the treatment of natives. That in many such medieval codes citizens were still called serfs is no more final than the fact that in many modern capitalist newspapers serfs are still called citizens. The whole point about the villein was that he was a tenant at least as permanent as a peasant. He “went with the land”; and there are a good many hopeless tramps starving in streets, or sleeping in ditches, who might not be sorry if they could go with a little land. It would not be very much worse than homelessness and hunger to go with a good kitchen garden of which you could always eat most of the beans and turnips; or to go with a good cornfield of which you could take a considerable proportion of the corn. There has been many a modern man would have been none the worse for “going” about burdened with such a green island, or dragging the chains of such a tangle of green living things. As a fact, of course, this system throughout Christendom was already evolving rapidly into a pure peasant proprietorship; and it will be long before industrialism evolves by itself into anything so equal or so free. Above all, there appears notably that universal mark of the medieval movement; the voluntary liberation of slaves. But we may willingly allow that something of the earlier success of all this was due to the personal qualities of the first knights fresh from the West; and especially to the personal justice and moderation of Godfrey and some of his immediate kindred. Godfrey died young; his successors had mostly short periods of power, largely through the prevalence of malaria and the absence of medicine. Royal marriages with the more oriental tradition of the Armenian princes brought in new elements of luxury and cynicism; and by the time of the disputed truce of Raymond of Tripoli, the crown had descended to a man named Guy of Lusignan who seems to have been regarded as a somewhat
unsatisfactory character. He had quarrelled with Raymond, who was ruler of Galilee, and a curious and rather incomprehensible concession made by the latter, that the Saracens should ride in arms but in peace round his land, led to alleged Moslem insults to Nazareth, and the outbreak of the furious Templar, Gerard of Bideford, of which mention has been made already. But the most serious threat to them and their New Jerusalem was the emergence among the Moslems of a man of military genius, and the fact that all that land lay now under the shadow of the ambition and ardour of Saladin.

With the breach of the truce, or even the tale of it, the common danger of Christians was apparent; and Raymond of Tripoli repaired to the royal headquarters to consult with his late enemy the king; but he seems to have been almost openly treated as a traitor. Gerard of Bideford, the fanatic who was Grand Master of the Templars, forced the king’s hand against the advice of the wiser soldier, who had pointed out the peril of perishing of thirst in the waterless wastes between them and the enemy. Into those wastes they advanced, and they were already weary and unfit for warfare by the time they came in sight of the strange hills that will be remembered for ever under the name of the Horns of Hattin. On those hills, a few hours later, the last knights of an army of which half had fallen gathered in a final defiance and despair round the relic they carried in their midst, a fragment of the True Cross. In that hour fell, as I have fancied, more hopes than they themselves could number, and the glory departed from the Middle Ages. There fell with them all that New Jerusalem which was the symbol of a new world, all those great and growing promises and possibilities of Christendom of which this vision was the centre, all that “justice for the bourgeois and the peasant, and for the trading communes,” all the guilds that gained their charters by fighting for the Cross, all the hopes of a happier transformation of the Roman Law wedded to charity and to chivalry. There was the first slip and the great swerving of our fate; and in that wilderness we lost all the things we should have loved, and shall need so long a labour to find again.

Raymond of Tripoli had hewn his way through the enemy and ridden away to Tyre. The king, with a few of the remaining nobles, including Renaud de Chatillon, were brought before Saladin in his tent. There occurred a scene strangely typical of the mingled strains in the creed or the culture that triumphed on that day; the stately Eastern courtesy and hospitality; the wild Eastern hatred and self-will. Saladin welcomed the king and gracefully gave him a cup of sherbet, which he passed to Renaud. “It is thou and not I who hast given him to drink,” said the Saracen, preserving the precise letter of the punctilio of
hospitality. Then he suddenly flung himself raving and reviling upon Renaud de Chatillon, and killed the prisoner with his own hands. Outside, two hundred Hospitallers and Templars were beheaded on the field of battle; by one account I have read because Saladin disliked them, and by another because they were Christian priests.

There is a strong bias against the Christians and in favour of the Moslems and the Jews in most of the Victorian historical works, especially historical novels. And most people of modern, or rather of very recent times got all their notions of history from dipping into historical novels. In those romances the Jew is always the oppressed where in reality he was often the oppressor. In those romances the Arab is always credited with oriental dignity and courtesy and never with oriental crookedness and cruelty. The same injustice is introduced into history, which by means of selection and omission can be made as fictitious as any fiction. Twenty historians mention the way in which the maddened Christian mob murdered the Moslems after the capture of Jerusalem, for one who mentions that the Moslem commander commanded in cold blood the murder of some two hundred of his most famous and valiant enemies after the victory of Hattin. The former cannot be shown to have been the act of Tancred, while the latter was quite certainly the act of Saladin. Yet Tancred is described as at best a doubtful character, while Saladin is represented as a Bayard without fear or blame. Both of them doubtless were ordinary faulty fighting men, but they are not judged by an equal balance. It may seem a paradox that there should be this prejudice in Western history in favour of Eastern heroes. But the cause is clear enough; it is the remains of the revolt among many Europeans against their own old religious organisation, which naturally made them hunt through all ages for its crimes and its victims. It was natural that Voltaire should sympathise more with a Brahmin he had never seen than with a Jesuit with whom he was engaged in a violent controversy; and should similarly feel more dislike of a Catholic who was his enemy than of a Moslem who was the enemy of his enemy. In this atmosphere of natural and even pardonable prejudice arose the habit of contrasting the intolerance of the Crusaders with the toleration shown by the Moslems. Now as there are two sides to everything, it would undoubtedly be quite possible to tell the tale of the Crusades, correctly enough in detail, and in such a way as entirely to justify the Moslems and condemn the Crusaders. But any such real record of the Moslem case would have very little to do with any questions of tolerance or intolerance, or any modern ideas about religious liberty and equality. As the modern world does not know what it means itself by
religious liberty and equality, as the moderns have not thought out any logical
tool of toleration at all (for their vague generalisations can always be upset by
twenty tests from Thugs to Christian Science) it would obviously be
unreasonable to expect the moderns to understand the much clearer philosophy
of the Moslems. But some rough suggestion of what was really involved may be
found convenient in this case.

Islam was not originally a movement directed against Christianity at all. It did
not face westwards, so to speak; it faced eastwards towards the idolatries of
Asia. But Mahomet believed that these idols could be fought more successfully
with a simpler kind of creed; one might almost say with a simpler kind of
Christianity. For he included many things which we in the West commonly
suppose not only to be peculiar to Christianity but to be peculiar to Catholicism.
Many things have been rejected by Protestantism that are not rejected by
Mahometanism. Thus the Moslems believe in Purgatory, and they give at least a
sort of dignity to the Mother of Christ. About such things as these they have little
of the bitterness that rankles in the Jews and is said sometimes to become
hideously vitriolic. While I was in Palestine a distinguished Moslem said to a
Christian resident: “We also, as well as you, honour the Mother of Christ. Never
do we speak of her but we call her the Lady Miriam. I dare not tell you what the
Jews call her.”

The real mistake of the Moslems is something much more modern in its
application than any particular or passing persecution of Christians as such. It
lay in the very fact that they did think they had a simpler and saner sort of
Christianity, as do many modern Christians. They thought it could be made
universal merely by being made uninteresting. Now a man preaching what he
thinks is a platitude is far more intolerant than a man preaching what he admits
is a paradox. It was exactly because it seemed self-evident, to Moslems as to
Bolshevists, that their simple creed was suited to everybody, that they wished in
that particular sweeping fashion to impose it on everybody. It was because Islam
was broad that Moslems were narrow. And because it was not a hard religion it
was a heavy rule. Because it was without a self-correcting complexity, it allowed
of those simple and masculine but mostly rather dangerous appetites that show
themselves in a chieftain or a lord. As it had the simplest sort of religion,
monotheism, so it had the simplest sort of government, monarchy. There was
exactly the same direct spirit in its despotism as in its deism. The Code, the
Common Law, the give and take of charters and chivalric vows, did not grow in
that golden desert. The great sun was in the sky and the great Saladin was in his
tent, and he must be obeyed unless he were assassinated. Those who complain of our creeds as elaborate often forget that the elaborate Western creeds have produced the elaborate Western constitutions; and that they are elaborate because they are emancipated. And the real moral of the relations of the two great religions is something much more subtle and sincere than any mere atrocity tales against Turks. It is the same as the moral of the Christian refusal of a Pagan Pantheon in which Christ should rank with Ammon and Apollo. Twice the Christian Church refused what seemed like a handsome offer of a large latitudinarian sort; once to include Christ as a god and once to include him as a prophet; once by the admission of all idols and once by the abandonment of all idols. Twice the Church took the risk and twice the Church survived alone and succeeded alone, filling the world with her own children; and leaving her rivals in a desert, where the idols were dead and the iconoclasts were dying.

But all this history has been hidden by a prejudice more general than the particular case of Saracens and Crusaders. The modern, or rather the Victorian prejudice against Crusaders is positive and not relative; and it would still desire to condemn Tancred if it could not acquit Saladin. Indeed it is a prejudice not so much against Crusaders as against Christians. It will not give to these heroes of religious war the fair measure it gives to the heroes of ordinary patriotic and imperial war. There never was a nobler hero than Nelson, or one more national or more normal. Yet Nelson quite certainly did do what Tancred almost certainly did not do; break his own word by giving up his own brave enemies to execution. If the cause of Nelson in other times comes to be treated as the creed of Tancred has often in recent times been treated, this incident alone will be held sufficient to prove not only that Nelson was a liar and a scoundrel, but that he did not love England at all, did not love Lady Hamilton at all, that he sailed in English ships only to pocket the prize money of French ships, and would as willingly have sailed in French ships for the prize money of English ships. That is the sort of dull dust of gold that has been shaken like the drifting dust of the desert over the swords and the relics, the crosses and the clasped hands of the men who marched to Jerusalem or died at Hattin. In these medieval pilgrims every inconsistency is a hypocrisy; while in the more modern patriots even an infamy is only an inconsistency. I have rounded off the story here with the ruin at Hattin because the whole reaction against the pilgrimage had its origin there; and because it was this at least that finally lost Jerusalem. Elsewhere in Palestine, to say nothing of Africa and Spain, splendid counter-strokes were still being delivered from the West, not the least being the splendid rescue by
Richard of England. But I still think that with the mere name of that tiny town upon the hills the note of the whole human revolution had been struck, was changed and was silent. All the other names were only the names of Eastern towns; but that was nearer to a man than his neighbours; a village inside his village, a house inside his house.

There is a hill above Bethlehem of a strange shape, with a flat top which makes it look oddly like an island, habitable though uninhabited, when all Moab heaves about it and beyond it as with the curves and colours of a sea. Its stability suggests in some strange fashion what may often be felt in these lands with the longest record of culture; that there may be not only a civilisation but even a chivalry older than history. Perhaps the table-land with its round top has a romantic reminiscence of a round table. Perhaps it is only a fantastic effect of evening, for it is felt most when the low skies are swimming with the colours of sunset, and in the shadows the shattered rocks about its base take on the shapes of titanic paladins fighting and falling around it. I only know that the mere shape of the hill and vista of the landscape suggested such visions and it was only afterwards that I heard the local legend, which says it is here that some of the Christian knights made their last stand after they lost Jerusalem and which names this height The Mountain of the Latins.

They fell, and the ages rolled on them the rocks of scorn; they were buried in jests and buffooneries. As the Renascence expanded into the rationalism of recent centuries, nothing seemed so ridiculous as to butcher and bleed in a distant desert not only for a tomb, but an empty tomb. The last legend of them withered under the wit of Cervantes, though he himself had fought in the last Crusade at Lepanto. They were kicked about like dead donkeys by the cool vivacity of Voltaire; who went off, very symbolically, to dance attendance on the new drill-sergeant of the Prussians. They were dissected like strange beasts by the serene disgust of Gibbon, more serene than the similar horror with which he regarded the similar violence of the French Revolution. By our own time even the flippancy has become a platitude. They have long been the butt of every penny-a-liner who can talk of a helmet as a tin pot, of every caricaturist on a comic paper who can draw a fat man falling off a bucking horse; of every pushing professional politician who can talk about the superstitions of the Middle Ages. Great men and small have agreed to contemn them; they were renounced by their children and refuted by their biographers; they were exposed, they were exploded, they were ridiculed and they were right.

They were proved wrong, and they were right. They were judged finally and
forgotten, and they were right. Centuries after their fall the full experience and development of political discovery has shown beyond question that they were right. For there is a very simple test of the truth; that the very thing which was dismissed, as a dream of the ages of faith, we have been forced to turn into a fact in the ages of fact. It is now more certain than it ever was before that Europe must rescue some lordship, or overlordship, of these old Roman provinces. Whether it is wise for England alone to claim Palestine, whether it would be better if the Entente could do so, I think a serious question. But in some form they are reverting for the Roman Empire. Every opportunity has been given for any other empire that could be its equal, and especially for the great dream of a mission for Imperial Islam. If ever a human being had a run for his money, it was the Sultan of the Moslems riding on his Arab steed. His empire expanded over and beyond the great Greek empire of Byzantium; a last charge of the chivalry of Poland barely stopped it at the very gates of Vienna. He was free to unfold everything that was in him, and he unfolded the death that was in him. He reigned and he could not rule; he was successful and he did not succeed. His baffled and retreating enemies left him standing, and he could not stand. He fell finally with that other half-heathen power in the North, with which he had made an alliance against the remains of Roman and Byzantine culture. He fell because barbarism cannot stand; because even when it succeeds it rather falls on its foes and crushes them. And after all these things, after all these ages, with a wearier philosophy, with a heavier heart, we have been forced to do again the very thing that the Crusaders were derided for doing. What Western men failed to do for the faith, other Western men have been forced to do even without the faith. The sons of Tancred are again in Tripoli. The heirs of Raymond are again in Syria. And men from the Midlands or the Northumbrian towns went again through a furnace of thirst and fever and furious fighting, to gain the same water-courses and invest the same cities as of old. They trod the hills of Galilee and the Horns of Hattin threw no shadow on their souls; they crossed dark and disastrous fields whose fame had been hidden from them, and avenged the fathers they had forgotten. And the most cynical of modern diplomatists, making their settlement by the most sceptical of modern philosophies, can find no practical or even temporary solution for this sacred land, except to bring it again under the crown of Coeur de Lion and the cross of St. George.

There came in through the crooked entry beside the great gap in the wall a tall soldier, dismounting and walking and wearing only the dust-hued habit of modern war. There went no trumpet before him, neither did he enter by the
Golden Gate; but the silence of the deserts was full of a phantom acclamation, as when from far away a wind brings in a whisper the cheering of many thousand men. For in that hour a long-lost cry found fulfilment, and something counted irrational returned in the reason of things. And at last even the wise understood, and at last even the learned were enlightened on a need truly and indeed international, which a mob in a darker age had known by the light of nature; something that could be denied and delayed and evaded, but not escaped for ever. Id Deus vult.
CHAPTER XIII

THE PROBLEM OF ZIONISM

There is an attitude for which my friends and I were for a long period rebuked and even reviled; and of which at the present period we are less likely than ever to repent. It was always called Anti-Semitism; but it was always much more true to call it Zionism. At any rate it was much nearer to the nature of the thing to call it Zionism, whether or no it can find its geographical concentration in Zion. The substance of this heresy was exceedingly simple. It consisted entirely in saying that Jews are Jews; and as a logical consequence that they are not Russians or Roumanians or Italians or Frenchmen or Englishmen. During the war the newspapers commonly referred to them as Russians; but the ritual wore so singularly thin that I remember one newspaper paragraph saying that the Russians in the East End complained of the food regulations, because their religion forbade them to eat pork. My own brief contact with the Greek priests of the Orthodox Church in Jerusalem did not permit me to discover any trace of this detail of their discipline; and even the Russian pilgrims were said to be equally negligent in the matter. The point for the moment, however, is that if I was violently opposed to anything, it was not to Jews, but to that sort of remark about Jews; or rather to the silly and craven fear of making it a remark about Jews. But my friends and I had in some general sense a policy in the matter; and it was in substance the desire to give Jews the dignity and status of a separate nation. We desired that in some fashion, and so far as possible, Jews should be represented by Jews, should live in a society of Jews, should be judged by Jews and ruled by Jews. I am an Anti-Semite if that is Anti-Semitism. It would seem more rational to call it Semitism.

Of this attitude, I repeat, I am now less likely than ever to repent. I have lived to see the thing that was dismissed as a fad discussed everywhere as a fact; and one of the most menacing facts of the age. I have lived to see people who accused me of Anti-Semitism become far more Anti-Semitic than I am or ever was. I have heard people talking with real injustice about the Jews, who once seemed to think it an injustice to talk about them at all. But, above all, I have seen with my own eyes wild mobs marching through a great city, raving not only against Jews, but against the English for identifying themselves with the Jews. I have seen the whole prestige of England brought into peril, merely by the trick
of talking about two nations as if they were one. I have seen an Englishman arriving in Jerusalem with somebody he had been taught to regard as his fellow countryman and political colleague, and received as if he had come arm-in-arm with a flaming dragon. So do our frosty fictions fare when they come under that burning sun.

Twice in my life, and twice lately, I have seen a piece of English pedantry bring us within an inch of an enormous English peril. The first was when all the Victorian historians and philosophers had told us that our German cousin was a cousin german and even germane; something naturally near and sympathetic. That also was an identification; that also was an assimilation; that also was a union of hearts. For the second time in a few short years, English politicians and journalists have discovered the dreadful revenge of reality. To pretend that something is what it is not is business that can easily be fashionable and sometimes popular. But the thing we have agreed to regard as what it is not will always abruptly punish and pulverise us, merely by being what it is. For years we were told that the Germans were a sort of Englishman because they were Teutons; but it was all the worse for us when we found out what Teutons really were. For years we were told that Jews were a sort of Englishman because they were British subjects. It is all the worse for us now we have to regard them, not subjectively as subjects, but objectively as objects; as objects of a fierce hatred among the Moslems and the Greeks. We are in the absurd position of introducing to these people a new friend whom they instantly recognise as an old enemy. It is an absurd position because it is a false position; but it is merely the penalty of falsehood.

Whether this Eastern anger is reasonable or not may be discussed in a moment; but what is utterly unreasonable is not the anger but the astonishment; at least it is our astonishment at their astonishment. We might believe ourselves in the view that a Jew is an Englishman; but there was no reason why they should regard him as an Englishman, since they already recognised him as a Jew. This is the whole present problem of the Jew in Palestine; and it must be solved either by the logic of Zionism or the logic of purely English supremacy and, impartiality; and not by what seems to everybody in Palestine a monstrous muddle of the two. But of course it is not only the peril in Palestine that has made the realisation of the Jewish problem, which once suffered all the dangers of a fad, suffer the opposite dangers of a fashion. The same journalists who politely describe Jews as Russians are now very impolitely describing certain Russians who are Jews. Many who had no particular objection to Jews as
Capitalists have a very great objection to them as Bolshevists. Those who had an innocent unconsciousness of the nationality of Eckstein, even when he called himself Eckstein, have managed to discover the nationality of Braunstein, even, when he calls, himself Trotsky. And much of this peril also might easily have been lessened, by the simple proposal to call men and things by their own names.

I will confess, however, that I have no very full sympathy with the new Anti-Semitism which is merely Anti-Socialism. There are good, honourable and magnanimous Jews of every type and rank, there are many to whom I am greatly attached among my own friends in my own rank; but if I have to make a general choice on a general chance among different types of Jews, I have much more sympathy with the Jew who is revolutionary than the Jew who is plutocratic. In other words, I have much more sympathy for the Israelite we are beginning to reject, than for the Israelite we have already accepted. I have more respect for him when he leads some sort of revolt, however narrow and anarchic, against the oppression of the poor, than when he is safe at the head of a great money-lending business oppressing the poor himself. It is not the poor aliens, but the rich aliens I wish we had excluded. I myself wholly reject Bolshevism, not because its actions are violent, but because its very thought is materialistic and mean. And if this preference is true even of Bolshevism, it is ten times truer of Zionism. It really seems to me rather hard that the full storm of fury should have burst about the Jews, at the very moment when some of them at least have felt the call of a far cleaner ideal; and that when we have tolerated their tricks with our country, we should turn on them precisely when they seek in sincerity for their own.

But in order to judge this Jewish possibility, we must understand more fully the nature of the Jewish problem. We must consider it from the start, because there are still many who do not know that there is a Jewish problem. That problem has its proof, of course, in the history of the Jew, and the fact that he came from the East. A Jew will sometimes complain of the injustice of describing him as a man of the East; but in truth another very real injustice may be involved in treating him as a man of the West. Very often even the joke against the Jew is rather a joke against those who have made the joke; that is, a joke against what they have made out of the Jew. This is true especially, for instance, of many points of religion and ritual. Thus we cannot help feeling, for instance, that there is something a little grotesque about the Hebrew habit of putting on a top-hat as an act of worship. It is vaguely mixed up with another line of humour, about another class of Jew, who wears a large number of hats;
and who must not therefore be credited with an extreme or extravagant religious zeal, leading him to pile up a pagoda of hats towards heaven. To Western eyes, in Western conditions, there really is something inevitably fantastic about this formality of the synagogue. But we ought to remember that we have made the Western conditions which startle the Western eyes. It seems odd to wear a modern top-hat as if it were a mitre or a biretta; it seems quaintier still when the hat is worn even for the momentary purpose of saying grace before lunch. It seems quaintest of all when, at some Jewish luncheon parties, a tray of hats is actually handed round, and each guest helps himself to a hat as a sort of hors d’oeuvre. All this could easily be turned into a joke; but we ought to realise that the joke is against ourselves. It is not merely we who make fun of it, but we who have made it funny. For, after all, nobody can pretend that this particular type of head-dress is a part of that uncouth imagery “setting painting and sculpture at defiance” which Renan remarked in the tradition of Hebrew civilisation. Nobody can say that a top-hat was among the strange symbolic utensils dedicated to the obscure service of the Ark; nobody can suppose that a top-hat descended from heaven among the wings and wheels of the flying visions of the Prophets. For this wild vision the West is entirely responsible. Europe has created the Tower of Giotto; but it has also created the topper. We of the West must bear the burden, as best we may, both of the responsibility and of the hat. It is solely the special type and shape of hat that makes the Hebrew ritual seem ridiculous. Performed in the old original Hebrew fashion it is not ridiculous, but rather if anything sublime. For the original fashion was an oriental fashion; and the Jews are orientals; and the mark of all such orientals is the wearing of long and loose draperies. To throw those loose draperies over the head is decidedly a dignified and even poetic gesture. One can imagine something like justice done to its majesty and mystery in one of the great dark drawings of William Blake. It may be true, and personally I think it is true, that the Hebrew covering of the head signifies a certain stress on the fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom, while the Christian uncovering of the head suggests rather the love of God that is the end of wisdom. But this has nothing to do with the taste and dignity of the ceremony; and to do justice to these we must treat the Jew as an oriental; we must even dress him as an oriental.

I have only taken this as one working example out of many that would point to the same conclusion. A number of points upon which the unfortunate alien is blamed would be much improved if he were, not less of an alien, but rather more of an alien. They arise from his being too like us, and too little like himself. It is
obviously the case, for instance, touching that vivid vulgarity in clothes, and especially the colours of clothes, with which a certain sort of Jews brighten the landscape or seascape at Margate or many holiday resorts. When we see a foreign gentleman on Brighton Pier wearing yellow spats, a magenta waistcoat, and an emerald green tie, we feel that he has somehow missed certain fine shades of social sensibility and fitness. It might considerably surprise the company on Brighton Pier, if he were to reply by solemnly unwinding his green necktie from round his neck, and winding it round his head. Yet the reply would be the right one; and would be equally logical and artistic. As soon as the green tie had become a green turban, it might look as appropriate and even attractive as the green turban of any pilgrim of Mecca or any descendant of Mahomet, who walks with a stately air through the streets of Jaffa or Jerusalem. The bright colours that make the Margate Jews hideous are no brighter than those that make the Moslem crowd picturesque. They are only worn in the wrong place, in the wrong way, and in conjunction with a type and cut of clothing that is meant to be more sober and restrained. Little can really be urged against him, in that respect, except that his artistic instinct is rather for colour than form, especially of the kind that we ourselves have labelled good form.

This is a mere symbol, but it is so suitable a symbol that I have often offered it symbolically as a solution of the Jewish problem. I have felt disposed to say: let all liberal legislation stand, let all literal and legal civic equality stand; let a Jew occupy any political or social position which he can gain in open competition; let us not listen for a moment to any suggestions of reactionary restrictions or racial privilege. Let a Jew be Lord Chief justice, if his exceptional veracity and reliability have clearly marked him out for that post. Let a Jew be Archbishop of Canterbury, if our national religion has attained to that receptive breadth that would render such a transition unobjectionable and even unconscious. But let there be one single-clause bill; one simple and sweeping law about Jews, and no other. Be it enacted, by the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal and the Commons in Parliament assembled, that every Jew must be dressed like an Arab. Let him sit on the Woolsack, but let him sit there dressed as an Arab. Let him preach in St. Paul’s Cathedral, but let him preach there dressed as an Arab. It is not my point at present to dwell on the pleasing if flippant fancy of how much this would transform the political scene; of the dapper figure of Sir Herbert Samuel swathed as a Bedouin, or Sir Alfred Mond gaining a yet greater grandeur from the gorgeous and trailing robes of the East. If my image is quaint my intention is
quite serious; and the point of it is not personal to any particular Jew. The point applies to any Jew, and to our own recovery of healthier relations with him. The point is that we should know where we are; and he would know where he is, which is in a foreign land.

This is but a parenthesis and a parable, but it brings us to the concrete controversial matter which is the Jewish problem. Only a few years ago it was regarded as a mark of a blood-thirsty disposition to admit that the Jewish problem was a problem, or even that the Jew was a Jew. Through much misunderstanding certain friends of mine and myself have persisted in disregarding the silence thus imposed; but facts have fought for us more effectively than words. By this time nobody is more conscious of the Jewish problem than the most intelligent and idealistic of the Jews. The folly of the fashion by which Jews often concealed their Jewish names, must surely be manifest by this time even to those who concealed them. To mention but one example of the way in which this fiction falsified the relations of everybody and everything, it is enough to note that it involved the Jews themselves in a quite new and quite needless unpopularity in the first years of the war. A poor little Jewish tailor, who called himself by a German name merely because he lived for a short time in a German town, was instantly mobbed in Whitechapel for his share in the invasion of Belgium. He was cross-examined about why he had damaged the tower of Rheims; and talked to as if he had killed Nurse Cavell with his own pair of shears. It was very unjust; quite as unjust as it would be to ask Bethmann-Hollweg why he had stabbed Eglon or hewn Agag in pieces. But it was partly at least the fault of the Jew himself, and of the whole of that futile and unworthy policy which had led him to call himself Bernstein when his name was Benjamin.

In such cases the Jews are accused of all sorts of faults they have not got; but there are faults that they have got. Some of the charges against them, as in the cases I have quoted concerning religious ritual and artistic taste, are due merely to the false light in which they are regarded. Other faults may also be due to the false position in which they are placed. But the faults exist; and nothing was ever more dangerous to everybody concerned than the recent fashion of denying or ignoring them. It was done simply by the snobbish habit of suppressing the experience and evidence of the majority of people, and especially of the majority of poor people. It was done by confining the controversy to a small world of wealth and refinement, remote from all the real facts involved. For the rich are the most ignorant people on earth, and the best that can be said for them, in cases
like these, is that their ignorance often reaches the point of innocence.

I will take a typical case, which sums up the whole of this absurd fashion. There was a controversy in the columns of an important daily paper, some time ago, on the subject of the character of Shylock in Shakespeare. Actors and authors of distinction, including some of the most brilliant of living Jews, argued the matter from the most varied points of view. Some said that Shakespeare was prevented by the prejudices of his time from having a complete sympathy with Shylock. Some said that Shakespeare was only restrained by fear of the powers of his time from expressing his complete sympathy with Shylock. Some wondered how or why Shakespeare had got hold of such a queer story as that of the pound of flesh, and what it could possibly have to do with so dignified and intellectual a character as Shylock. In short, some wondered why a man of genius should be so much of an Anti-Semite, and some stoutly declared that he must have been a Pro-Semite. But all of them in a sense admitted that they were puzzled as to what the play was about. The correspondence filled column after column and went on for weeks. And from one end of that correspondence to the other, no human being even so much as mentioned the word “usury.” It is exactly as if twenty clever critics were set down to talk for a month about the play of Macbeth, and were all strictly forbidden to mention the word “murder.”

The play called The Merchant of Venice happens to be about usury, and its story is a medieval satire on usury. It is the fashion to say that it is a clumsy and grotesque story; but as a fact it is an exceedingly good story. It is a perfect and pointed story for its purpose, which is to convey the moral of the story. And the moral is that the logic of usury is in its nature at war with life, and might logically end in breaking into the bloody house of life. In other words, if a creditor can always claim a man’s tools or a man’s home, he might quite as justly claim one of his arms or legs. This principle was not only embodied in medieval satires but in very sound medieval laws, which set a limit on the usurer who was trying to take away a man’s livelihood, as the usurer in the play is trying to take away a man’s life. And if anybody thinks that usury can never go to lengths wicked enough to be worthy of so wild an image, then that person either knows nothing about it or knows too much. He is either one of the innocent rich who have never been the victims of money-lenders, or else one of the more powerful and influential rich who are money-lenders themselves.

All this, I say, is a fact that must be faced, but there is another side to the case, and it is this that the genius of Shakespeare discovered. What he did do, and what the medieval satirist did not do, was to attempt to understand Shylock; in
the true sense to sympathise with Shylock the money-lender, as he sympathised with Macbeth the murderer. It was not to deny that the man was an usurer, but to assert that the usurer was a man. And the Elizabethan dramatist does make him a man, where the medieval satirist made him a monster. Shakespeare not only makes him a man but a perfectly sincere and self-respecting man. But the point is this: that he is a sincere man who sincerely believes in usury. He is a self-respecting man who does not despise himself for being a usurer. In one word, he regards usury as normal. In that word is the whole problem of the popular impression of the Jews. What Shakespeare suggested about the Jew in a subtle and sympathetic way, millions of plain men everywhere would suggest about him in a rough and ready way. Regarding the Jew in relation to his ideas about interest, they think either that he is simply immoral; or that if he is moral, then he has a different morality. There is a great deal more to be said about how far this is true, and about what are its causes and excuses if it is true. But it is an old story, surely, that the worst of all cures is to deny the disease.

To recognise the reality of the Jewish problem is very vital for everybody and especially vital for Jews. To pretend that there is no problem is to precipitate the expression of a rational impatience, which unfortunately can only express itself in the rather irrational form of Anti-Semitism. In the controversies of Palestine and Syria, for instance, it is very common to hear the answer that the Jew is no worse than the Armenian. The Armenian also is said to be unpopular as a money-lender and a mercantile upstart; yet the Armenian figures as a martyr for the Christian faith and a victim of the Moslem fury. But this is one of those arguments which really carry their own answer. It is like the sceptical saying that man is only an animal, which of itself provokes the retort, “What an animal!” The very similarity only emphasises the contrast. Is it seriously suggested that we can substitute the Armenian for the Jew in the study of a world-wide problem like that of the Jews? Could we talk of the competition of Armenians among Welsh shop-keepers, or of the crowd of Armenians on Brighton Parade? Can Armenian usury be a common topic of talk in a camp in California and in a club in Piccadilly? Does Shakespeare show us a tragic Armenian towering over the great Venice of the Renascence? Does Dickens show us a realistic Armenian teaching in the thieves’ kitchens of the slums? When we meet Mr. Vernon Vavasour, that brilliant financier, do we speculate on the probability of his really having an Armenian name to match his Armenian nose? Is it true, in short, that all sorts of people, from the peasants of Poland to the peasants of Portugal, can agree more or less upon the special subject of Armenia? Obviously it is not in
the least true; obviously the Armenian question is only a local question of certain
Christians, who may be more avaricious than other Christians. But it is the truth
about the Jews. It is only half the truth, and one which by itself would be very
unjust to the Jews. But it is the truth, and we must realise it as sharply and
clearly as we can. The truth is that it is rather strange that the Jews should be so
anxious for international agreements. For one of the few really international
agreements is a suspicion of the Jews.

A more practical comparison would be one between the Jews and gipsies; for
the latter at least cover several countries, and can be tested by the impressions of
very different districts. And in some preliminary respects the comparison is
really useful. Both races are in different ways landless, and therefore in different
ways lawless. For the fundamental laws are land laws. In both cases a reasonable
man will see reasons for unpopularity, without wishing to indulge any task for
persecution. In both cases he will probably recognise the reality of a racial fault,
while admitting that it may be largely a racial misfortune. That is to say, the
drifting and detached condition may be largely the cause of Jewish usury or
gipsy pilfering; but it is not common sense to contradict the general experience
of gipsy pilfering or Jewish usury. The comparison helps us to clear away some
of the cloudy evasions by which modern men have tried to escape from that
experience. It is absurd to say that people are only prejudiced against the money
methods of the Jews because the medieval church has left behind a hatred of
their religion. We might as well say that people only protect the chickens from
the gipsies because the medieval church undoubtedly condemned fortune-telling.
It is unreasonable for a Jew to complain that Shakespeare makes Shylock and
not Antonio the ruthless money-lender; or that Dickens makes Fagin and not
Sikes the receiver of stolen goods. It is as if a gipsy were to complain when a
novelist describes a child as stolen by the gipsies, and not by the curate or the
mothers’ meeting. It is to complain of facts and probabilities. There may be good
gipsies; there may be good qualities which specially belong to them as gipsies;
many students of the strange race have, for instance, praised a certain dignity
and self-respect among the women of the Romany. But no student ever praised
them for an exaggerated respect for private property, and the whole argument
about gipsy theft can be roughly repeated about Hebrew usury. Above all, there
is one other respect in which the comparison is even more to the point. It is the
essential fact of the whole business, that the Jews do not become national merely
by becoming a political part of any nation. We might as well say that the gipsies
had villas in Clapham, when their caravans stood on Clapham Common.
But, of course, even this comparison between the two wandering peoples fails in the presence of the greater problem. Here again even the attempt at a parallel leaves the primary thing more unique. The gipsies do not become municipal merely by passing through a number of parishes, and it would seem equally obvious that a Jew need not become English merely by passing through England on his way from Germany to America. But the gipsy not only is not municipal, but he is not called municipal. His caravan is not immediately painted outside with the number and name of 123 Laburnam Road, Clapham. The municipal authorities generally notice the wheels attached to the new cottage, and therefore do not fall into the error. The gipsy may halt in a particular parish, but he is not as a rule immediately made a parish councillor. The cases in which a travelling tinker has been suddenly made the mayor of an important industrial town must be comparatively rare. And if the poor vagabonds of the Romany blood are bullied by mayors and magistrates, kicked off the land by landlords, pursued by policemen and generally knocked about from pillar to post, nobody raises an outcry that they are the victims of religious persecution; nobody summons meetings in public halls, collects subscriptions or sends petitions to parliament; nobody threatens anybody else with the organised indignation of the gipsies all over the world. The case of the Jew in the nation is very different from that of the tinker in the town. The moral elements that can be appealed to are of a very different style and scale. No gipsies are millionaires.

In short, the Jewish problem differs from anything like the gipsy problem in two highly practical respects. First, the Jews already exercise colossal cosmopolitan financial power. And second, the modern societies they live in also grant them vital forms of national political power. Here the vagrant is already as rich as a miser and the vagrant is actually made a mayor. As will be seen shortly, there is a Jewish side of the story which leads really to the same ending of the story; but the truth stated here is quite independent of any sympathetic or unsympathetic view of the race in question. It is a question of fact, which a sensible Jew can afford to recognise, and which the most sensible Jews do very definitely recognise. It is really irrational for anybody to pretend that the Jews are only a curious sect of Englishmen, like the Plymouth Brothers or the Seventh Day Baptists, in the face of such a simple fact as the family of Rothschild. Nobody can pretend that such an English sect can establish five brothers, or even cousins, in the five great capitals of Europe. Nobody can pretend that the Seventh Day Baptists are the seven grandchildren of one grandfather, scattered systematically among the warring nations of the earth. Nobody thinks the
Plymouth Brothers are literally brothers, or that they are likely to be quite as powerful in Paris or in Petrograd as in Plymouth.

The Jewish problem can be stated very simply after all. It is normal for the nation to contain the family. With the Jews the family is generally divided among the nations. This may not appear to matter to those who do not believe in nations, those who really think there ought not to be any nations. But I literally fail to understand anybody who does believe in patriotism thinking that this state of affairs can be consistent with it. It is in its nature intolerable, from a national standpoint, that a man admittedly powerful in one nation should be bound to a man equally powerful in another nation, by ties more private and personal even than nationality. Even when the purpose is not any sort of treachery, the very position is a sort of treason. Given the passionately patriotic peoples of the west of Europe especially, the state of things cannot conceivably be satisfactory to a patriot. But least of all can it conceivably be satisfactory to a Jewish patriot; by which I do not mean a sham Englishman or a sham Frenchman, but a man who is sincerely patriotic for the historic and highly civilised nation of the Jews.

For what may be criticised here as Anti-Semitism is only the negative side of Zionism. For the sake of convenience I have begun by stating it in terms of the universal popular impression which some call a popular prejudice. But such a truth of differentiation is equally on both its different sides. Suppose somebody proposes to mix up England and America, under some absurd name like the Anglo-Saxon Empire. One man may say, “Why should the jolly English inns and villages be swamped by these priggish provincial Yankees?” Another may say, “Why should the real democracy of a young country be tied to your snobbish old squirarchy?” But both these views are only versions of the same view of a great American: “God never made one people good enough to rule another.”

The primary point about Zionism is that, whether it is right or wrong, it does offer a real and reasonable answer both to Anti-Semitism and to the charge of Anti-Semitism. The usual phrases about religious persecution and racial hatred are not reasonable answers, or answers at all. These Jews do not deny that they are Jews; they do not deny that Jews may be unpopular; they do not deny that there may be other than superstitious reasons for their unpopularity. They are not obliged to maintain that when a Piccadilly dandy talks about being in the hands of the Jews he is moved by the theological fanaticism that prevails in Piccadilly; or that when a silly youth on Derby Day says he was done by a dirty Jew, he is merely conforming to that Christian orthodoxy which is one of the strict
traditions of the Turf. They are not, like some other Jews, forced to pay so extravagant a compliment to the Christian religion as to suppose it the ruling motive of half the discontented talk in clubs and public-houses, of nearly every business man who suspects a foreign financier, or nearly every working man who grumbles against the local pawn-broker. Religious mania, unfortunately, is not so common. The Zionists do not need to deny any of these things; what they offer is not a denial but a diagnosis and a remedy. Whether their diagnosis is correct, whether their remedy is practicable, we will try to consider later, with something like a fair summary of what is to be said on both sides. But their theory, on the face of it, is perfectly reasonable. It is the theory that any abnormal qualities in the Jews are due to the abnormal position of the Jews. They are traders rather than producers because they have no land of their own from which to produce, and they are cosmopolitans rather than patriots because they have no country of their own for which to be patriotic. They can no more become farmers while they are vagrant than they could have built the Temple of Solomon while they were building the Pyramids of Egypt. They can no more feel the full stream of nationalism while they wander in the desert of nomadism than they could bathe in the waters of Jordan while they were weeping by the waters of Babylon. For exile is the worst kind of bondage. In insisting upon that at least the Zionists have insisted upon a profound truth, with many applications to many other moral issues. It is true that for any one whose heart is set on a particular home or shrine, to be locked out is to be locked in. The narrowest possible prison for him is the whole world.

It will be well to notice briefly, however, how the principle applies to the two Anti-Semitic arguments already considered. The first is the charge of usury and unproductive loans, the second the charge either of treason or of unpatriotic detachment. The charge of usury is regarded, not unreasonably, as only a specially dangerous development of the general charge of uncreative commerce and the refusal of creative manual exercise; the unproductive loan is only a minor form of the unproductive labour. It is certainly true that the latter complaint is, if possible, commoner than the former, especially in comparatively simple communities like those of Palestine. A very honest Moslem Arab said to me, with a singular blend of simplicity and humour, “A Jew does not work; but he grows rich. You never see a Jew working; and yet they grow rich. What I want to know is, why do we not all do the same? Why do we not also do this and become rich?” This is, I need hardly say, an over-simplification. Jews often work hard at some things, especially intellectual things. But the same experience
which tells us that we have known many industrious Jewish scholars, Jewish lawyers, Jewish doctors, Jewish pianists, chess-players and so on, is an experience which cuts both ways. The same experience, if carefully consulted, will probably tell us that we have not known personally many patient Jewish ploughmen, many laborious Jewish blacksmiths, many active Jewish hedgers and ditchers, or even many energetic Jewish hunters and fishermen. In short, the popular impression is tolerably true to life, as popular impressions very often are; though it is not fashionable to say so in these days of democracy and self-determination. Jews do not generally work on the land, or in any of the handicrafts that are akin to the land; but the Zionists reply that this is because it can never really be their own land. That is Zionism, and that has really a practical place in the past and future of Zion.

Patriotism is not merely dying for the nation. It is dying with the nation. It is regarding the fatherland not merely as a real resting-place like an inn, but as a final resting-place, like a house or even a grave. Even the most Jingo of the Jews do not feel like this about their adopted country; and I doubt if the most intelligent of the Jews would pretend that they did. Even if we can bring ourselves to believe that Disraeli lived for England, we cannot think that he would have died with her. If England had sunk in the Atlantic he would not have sunk with her, but easily floated over to America to stand for the Presidency. Even if we are profoundly convinced that Mr. Beit or Mr. Eckstein had patriotic tears in his eyes when he obtained a gold concession from Queen Victoria, we cannot believe that in her absence he would have refused a similar concession from the German Emperor. When the Jew in France or in England says he is a good patriot he only means that he is a good citizen, and he would put it more truly if he said he was a good exile. Sometimes indeed he is an abominably bad citizen, and a most exasperating and execrable exile, but I am not talking of that side of the case. I am assuming that a man like Disraeli did really make a romance of England, that a man like Dernburg did really make a romance of Germany, and it is still true that though it was a romance, they would not have allowed it to be a tragedy. They would have seen that the story had a happy ending, especially for themselves. These Jews would not have died with any Christian nation.

But the Jews did die with Jerusalem. That is the first and last great truth in Zionism. Jerusalem was destroyed and Jews were destroyed with it, men who cared no longer to live because the city of their faith had fallen. It may be questioned whether all the Zionists have all the sublime insanity of the Zealots.
But at least it is not nonsense to suggest that the Zionists might feel like this about Zion. It is nonsense to suggest that they would ever feel like this about Dublin or Moscow. And so far at least the truth both in Semitism and Anti-Semitism is included in Zionism.

It is a commonplace that the infamous are more famous than the famous. Byron noted, with his own misanthropic moral, that we think more of Nero the monster who killed his mother than of Nero the noble Roman who defeated Hannibal. The name of Julian more often suggests Julian the Apostate than Julian the Saint; though the latter crowned his canonisation with the sacred glory of being the patron saint of inn-keepers. But the best example of this unjust historical habit is the most famous of all and the most infamous of all. If there is one proper noun which has become a common noun, if there is one name which has been generalised till it means a thing, it is certainly the name of Judas. We should hesitate perhaps to call it a Christian name, except in the more evasive form of Jude. And even that, as the name of a more faithful apostle, is another illustration of the same injustice; for, by comparison with the other, Jude the faithful might almost be called Jude the obscure. The critic who said, whether innocently or ironically, “What wicked men these early Christians were!” was certainly more successful in innocence than in irony; for he seems to have been innocent or ignorant of the whole idea of the Christian communion. Judas Iscariot was one of the very earliest of all possible early Christians. And the whole point about him was that his hand was in the same dish; the traitor is always a friend, or he could never be a foe. But the point for the moment is merely that the name is known everywhere merely as the name of a traitor. The name of Judas nearly always means Judas Iscariot; it hardly ever means Judas Maccabeus. And if you shout out “Judas” to a politician in the thick of a political tumult, you will have some difficulty in soothing him afterwards, with the assurance that you had merely traced in him something of that splendid zeal and valour which dragged down the tyranny of Antiochus, in the day of the great deliverance of Israel.

Those two possible uses of the name of Judas would give us yet another compact embodiment of the case for Zionism. Numberless international Jews have gained the bad name of Judas, and some have certainly earned it. If you have gained or earned the good name of Judas, it can quite fairly and intelligently be affirmed that this was not the fault of the Jews, but of the peculiar position of the Jews. A man can betray like Judas Iscariot in another man’s house; but a man cannot fight like Judas Maccabeus for another man’s
temple. There is no more truly rousing revolutionary story amid all the stories of mankind, there is no more perfect type of the element of chivalry in rebellion, than that magnificent tale of the Maccabee who stabbed from underneath the elephant of Antiochus and died under the fall of that huge and living castle. But it would be unreasonable to ask Mr. Montagu to stick a knife into the elephant on which Lord Curzon, let us say, was riding in all the pomp of Asiatic imperialism. For Mr. Montagu would not be liberating his own land; and therefore he naturally prefers to interest himself either in operations in silver or in somewhat slower and less efficient methods of liberation. In short, whatever we may think of the financial or social services such as were rendered to England in the affair of Marconi, or to France in the affair of Panama, it must be admitted that these exhibit a humbler and more humdrum type of civic duty, and do not remind us of the more reckless virtues of the Maccabees or the Zealots. A man may be a good citizen of anywhere, but he cannot be a national hero of nowhere; and for this particular type of patriotic passion it is necessary to have a patria. The Zionists therefore are maintaining a perfectly reasonable proposition, both about the charge of usury and the charge of treason, if they claim that both could be cured by the return to a national soil as promised in Zionism.

Unfortunately they are not always reasonable about their own reasonable proposition. Some of them have a most unlucky habit of ignoring, and therefore implicitly denying, the very evil that they are wisely trying to cure. I have already remarked this irritating innocence in the first of the two questions; the criticism that sees everything in Shylock except the point of him, or the point of his knife. How in the politics of Palestine at this moment this first question is in every sense the primary question. Palestine has hardly as yet a patriotism to be betrayed; but it certainly has a peasantry to be oppressed, and especially to be oppressed as so many peasantries have been with usury and forestalling. The Syrians and Arabs and all the agricultural and pastoral populations of Palestine are, rightly or wrongly, alarmed and angered at the advent of the Jews to power; for the perfectly practical and simple reason of the reputation which the Jews have all over the world. It is really ridiculous in people so intelligent as the Jews, and especially so intelligent as the Zionists, to ignore so enormous and elementary a fact as that reputation and its natural results. It may or may not in this case be unjust; but in any case it is not unnatural. It may be the result of persecution, but it is one that has definitely resulted. It may be the consequence of a misunderstanding; but it is a misunderstanding that must itself be understood. Rightly or wrongly, certain people in Palestine fear the coming of
the Jews as they fear the coming of the locusts; they regard them as parasites that feed on a community by a thousand methods of financial intrigue and economic exploitation. I could understand the Jews indignantly denying this, or eagerly disproving it, or best of all, explaining what is true in it while exposing what is untrue. What is strange, I might almost say weird, about the attitude of some quite intelligent and sincere Zionists, is that they talk, write and apparently think as if there were no such thing in the world.

I will give one curious example from one of the best and most brilliant of the Zionists. Dr. Weizmann is a man of large mind and human sympathies; and it is difficult to believe that any one with so fine a sense of humanity can be entirely empty of anything like a sense of humour. Yet, in the middle of a very temperate and magnanimous address on “Zionist Policy,” he can actually say a thing like this, “The Arabs need us with our knowledge, and our experience and our money. If they do not have us they will fall into the hands of others, they will fall among sharks.” One is tempted for the moment to doubt whether any one else in the world could have said that, except the Jew with his strange mixture of brilliancy and blindness, of subtlety and simplicity. It is much as if President Wilson were to say, “Unless America deals with Mexico, it will be dealt with by some modern commercial power, that has trust-magnates and hustling millionaires.” But would President Wilson say it? It is as if the German Chancellor had said, “We must rush to the rescue of the poor Belgians, or they may be put under some system with a rigid militarism and a bullying bureaucracy.” But would even a German Chancellor put it exactly like that? Would anybody put it in the exact order of words and structure of sentence in which Dr. Weizmann has put it? Would even the Turks say, “The Armenians need us with our order and our discipline and our arms. If they do not have us they will fall into the hands of others, they will perhaps be in danger of massacres.” I suspect that a Turk would see the joke, even if it were as grim a joke as the massacres themselves. If the Zionists wish to quiet the fears of the Arabs, surely the first thing to do is to discover what the Arabs are afraid of. And very little investigation will reveal the simple truth that they are very much afraid of sharks; and that in their book of symbolic or heraldic zoology it is the Jew who is adorned with the dorsal fin and the crescent of cruel teeth. This may be a fairy-tale about a fabulous animal; but it is one which all sorts of races believe, and certainly one which these races believe.

But the case is yet more curious than that. These simple tribes are afraid, not only of the dorsal fin and dental arrangements which Dr. Weizmann may say
(with some justice) that he has not got; they are also afraid of the other things which he says he has got. They may be in error, at the first superficial glance, in mistaking a respectable professor for a shark. But they can hardly be mistaken in attributing to the respectable professor what he himself considers as his claims to respect. And as the imagery about the shark may be too metaphorical or almost mythological, there is not the smallest difficulty in stating in plain words what the Arabs fear in the Jews. They fear, in exact terms, their knowledge and their experience and their money. The Arabs fear exactly the three things which he says they need. Only the Arabs would call it a knowledge of financial trickery and an experience of political intrigue, and the power given by hoards of money not only of their own but of other peoples. About Dr. Weizmann and the true Zionists this is self-evidently unjust; but about Jewish influence of the more visible and vulgar kind it has to be proved to be unjust. Feeling as I do the force of the real case for Zionism, I venture most earnestly to implore the Jews to disprove it, and not to dismiss it. But above all I implore them not to be content with assuring us again and again of their knowledge and their experience and their money. That is what people dread like a pestilence or an earthquake; their knowledge and their experience and their money. It is needless for Dr. Weizmann to tell us that he does not desire to enter Palestine like a Junker or drive thousands of Arabs forcibly out of the land; nobody supposes that Dr. Weizmann looks like a Junker; and nobody among the enemies of the Jews says that they have driven their foes in that fashion since the wars with the Canaanites. But for the Jews to reassure us by insisting on their own economic culture or commercial education is exactly like the Junkers reassuring us by insisting on the unquestioned supremacy of their Kaiser or the unquestioned obedience of their soldiers. Men bar themselves in their houses, or even hide themselves in their cellars, when such virtues are abroad in the land.

In short the fear of the Jews in Palestine, reasonable or unreasonable, is a thing that must be answered by reason. It is idle for the unpopular thing to answer with boasts, especially boasts of the very quality that makes it unpopular. But I think it could be answered by reason, or at any rate tested by reason; and the tests by consideration. The principle is still as stated above; that the tests must not merely insist on the virtues the Jews do show, but rather deal with the particular virtues which they are generally accused of not showing. It is necessary to understand this more thoroughly than it is generally understood, and especially better than it is usually stated in the language of fashionable controversy. For the question involves the whole success or failure of Zionism. Many of the Zionists know it;
but I rather doubt whether most of the Anti-Zionists know that they know it. And some of the phrases of the Zionists, such as those that I have noted, too often tend to produce the impression that they ignore when they are not ignorant. They are not ignorant; and they do not ignore in practice; even when an intellectual habit makes them seem to ignore in theory. Nobody who has seen a Jewish rural settlement, such as Rishon, can doubt that some Jews are sincerely filled with the vision of sitting under their own vine and fig-tree, and even with its accompanying lesson that it is first necessary to grow the fig-tree and the vine.

The true test of Zionism may seem a topsy-turvy test. It will not succeed by the number of successes, but rather by the number of failures, or what the world (and certainly not least the Jewish world) has generally called failures. It will be tested, not by whether Jews can climb to the top of the ladder, but by whether Jews can remain at the bottom; not by whether they have a hundred arts of becoming important, but by whether they have any skill in the art of remaining insignificant. It is often noted that the intelligent Israelite can rise to positions of power and trust outside Israel, like Witte in Russia or Rufus Isaacs in England. It is generally bad, I think, for their adopted country; but in any case it is no good for the particular problem of their own country. Palestine cannot have a population of Prime Ministers and Chief Justices; and if those they rule and judge are not Jews, then we have not established a commonwealth but only an oligarchy. It is said again that the ancient Jews turned their enemies into hewers of wood and drawers of water. The modern Jews have to turn themselves into hewers of wood and drawers of water. If they cannot do that, they cannot turn themselves into citizens, but only into a kind of alien bureaucrats, of all kinds the most perilous and the most imperilled. Hence a Jewish state will not be a success when the Jews in it are successful, or even when the Jews in it are statesmen. It will be a success when the Jews in it are scavengers, when the Jews in it are sweeps, when they are dockers and ditchers and porters and hodmen. When the Zionist can point proudly to a Jewish navvy who has not risen in the world, an under-gardener who is not now taking his ease as an upper-gardener, a yokel who is still a yokel, or even a village idiot at least sufficiently idiotic to remain in his village, then indeed the world will come to blow the trumpets and lift up the heads of the everlasting gates; for God will have turned the captivity of Zion.

Zionists of whose sincerity I am personally convinced, and of whose intelligence anybody would be convinced, have told me that there really is, in places like Rishon, something like a beginning of this spirit; the love of the peasant for his land. One lady, even in expressing her conviction of it, called it
“this very un-Jewish characteristic.” She was perfectly well aware both of the need of it in the Jewish land, and the lack of it in the Jewish race. In short she was well aware of the truth of that seemingly topsy-turvy test I have suggested: that of whether men are worthy to be drudges. When a humorous and humane Jew thus accepts the test, and honestly expects the Jewish people to pass it, then I think the claim is very serious indeed, and one not lightly to be set aside. I do certainly think it a very serious responsibility under the circumstances to set it altogether aside. It is our whole complaint against the Jew that he does not till the soil or toil with the spade; it is very hard on him to refuse him if he really says, “Give me a soil and I will till it; give me a spade and I will use it.” It is our whole reason for distrusting him that he cannot really love any of the lands in which he wanders; it seems rather indefensible to be deaf to him if he really says, “Give me a land and I will love it.” I would certainly give him a land or some instalment of the land, (in what general sense I will try to suggest a little later) so long as his conduct on it was watched and tested according to the principles I have suggested. If he asks for the spade he must use the spade, and not merely employ the spade, in the sense of hiring half a hundred men to use spades. If he asks for the soil he must till the soil; that is he must belong to the soil and not merely make the soil belong to him. He must have the simplicity, and what many would call the stupidity of the peasant. He must not only call a spade a spade, but regard it as a spade and not as a speculation. By some true conversion the urban and modern man must be not only on the soil, but of the soil, and free from our urban trick of inventing the word dirt for the dust to which we shall return. He must be washed in mud, that he may be clean.

How far this can really happen it is very hard for anybody, especially a casual visitor, to discover in the present crisis. It is admitted that there is much Arab and Syrian labour employed; and this in itself would leave all the danger of the Jew as a mere capitalist. The Jews explain it, however, by saying that the Arabs will work for a lower wage, and that this is necessarily a great temptation to the struggling colonists. In this they may be acting naturally as colonists, but it is none the less clear that they are not yet acting literally as labourers. It may not be their fault that they are not proving themselves to be peasants; but it is none the less clear that this situation in itself does not prove them to be peasants. So far as that is concerned, it still remains to be decided finally whether a Jew will be an agricultural labourer, if he is a decently paid agricultural labourer. On the other hand, the leaders of these local experiments, if they have not yet shown the higher materialism of peasants, most certainly do not show the lower
materialism of capitalists. There can be no doubt of the patriotic and even poetic spirit in which many of them hope to make their ancient wilderness blossom like the rose. They at least would still stand among the great prophets of Israel, and none the less though they prophesied in vain.

I have tried to state fairly the case for Zionism, for the reason already stated; that I think it intellectually unjust that any attempt of the Jews to regularise their position should merely be rejected as one of their irregularities. But I do not disguise the enormous difficulties of doing it in the particular conditions of Palestine. In fact the greatest of the real difficulties of Zionism is that it has to take place in Zion. There are other difficulties, however, which when they are not specially the fault of Zionists are very much the fault of Jews. The worst is the general impression of a business pressure from the more brutal and businesslike type of Jew, which arouses very violent and very just indignation. When I was in Jerusalem it was openly said that Jewish financiers had complained of the low rate of interest at which loans were made by the government to the peasantry, and even that the government had yielded to them. If this were true it was a heavier reproach to the government than to the Jews. But the general truth is that such a state of feeling seems to make the simple and solid patriotism of a Palestinian Jewish nation practically impossible, and forces us to consider some alternative or some compromise. The most sensible statement of a compromise I heard among the Zionists was suggested to me by Dr. Weizmann, who is a man not only highly intelligent but ardent and sympathetic. And the phrase he used gives the key to my own rough conception of a possible solution, though he himself would probably, not accept that solution.

Dr. Weizmann suggested, if I understood him rightly, that he did not think Palestine could be a single and simple national territory quite in the sense of France; but he did not see why it should not be a commonwealth of cantons after the manner of Switzerland. Some of these could be Jewish cantons, others Arab cantons, and so on according to the type of population. This is in itself more reasonable than much that is suggested on the same side; but the point of it for my own purpose is more particular. This idea, whether it correctly represents Dr. Weizmann’s meaning or no, clearly involves the abandonment of the solidarity of Palestine, and tolerates the idea of groups of Jews being separated from each other by populations of a different type. Now if once this notion be considered admissible, it seems to me capable of considerable extension. It seems possible that there might be not only Jewish cantons in Palestine but Jewish cantons
outside Palestine, Jewish colonies in suitable and selected places in adjacent parts or in many other parts of the world. They might be affiliated to some official centre in Palestine, or even in Jerusalem, where there would naturally be at least some great religious headquarters of the scattered race and religion. The nature of that religious centre it must be for Jews to decide; but I think if I were a Jew I would build the Temple without bothering about the site of the Temple. That they should have the old site, of course, is not to be thought of; it would raise a Holy War from Morocco to the marches of China. But seeing that some of the greatest of the deeds of Israel were done, and some of the most glorious of the songs of Israel sung, when their only temple was a box carried about in the desert, I cannot think that the mere moving of the situation of the place of sacrifice need even mean so much to that historic tradition as it would to many others. That the Jews should have some high place of dignity and ritual in Palestine, such as a great building like the Mosque of Omar, is certainly right and reasonable; for upon no theory can their historic connection be dismissed. I think it is sophistry to say, as do some Anti-Semites, that the Jews have no more right there than the Jebusites. If there are Jebusites they are Jebusites without knowing it. I think it sufficiently answered in the fine phrase of an English priest, in many ways more Anti-Semitic than I: “The people that remembers has a right.” The very worst of the Jews, as well as the very best, do in some sense remember. They are hated and persecuted and frightened into false names and double lives; but they remember. They lie, they swindle, they betray, they oppress; but they remember. The more we happen to hate such elements among the Hebrews the more we admire the manly and magnificent elements among the more vague and vagrant tribes of Palestine, the more we must admit that paradox. The unheroic have the heroic memory; and the heroic people have no memory.

But whatever the Jewish nation might wish to do about a national shrine or other supreme centre, the suggestion for the moment is that something like a Jewish territorial scheme might really be attempted, if we permit the Jews to be scattered no longer as individuals but as groups. It seems possible that by some such extension of the definition of Zionism we might ultimately overcome even the greatest difficulty of Zionism, the difficulty of resettling a sufficient number of so large a race on so small a land. For if the advantage of the ideal to the Jews is to gain the promised land, the advantage to the Gentiles is to get rid of the Jewish problem, and I do not see why we should obtain all their advantage and none of our own. Therefore I would leave as few Jews as possible in other
established nations, and to these I would give a special position best described as privilege; some sort of self-governing enclave with special laws and exemptions; for instance, I would certainly excuse them from conscription, which I think a gross injustice in their case. [Footnote: Of course the privileged exile would also lose the rights of a native.] A Jew might be treated as respectfully as a foreign ambassador, but a foreign ambassador is a foreigner. Finally, I would give the same privileged position to all Jews everywhere, as an alternative policy to Zionism, if Zionism failed by the test I have named; the only true and the only tolerable test; if the Jews had not so much failed as peasants as succeeded as capitalists.

There is one word to be added; it will be noted that inevitably and even against some of my own desires, the argument has returned to that recurrent conclusion, which was found in the Roman Empire and the Crusades. The European can do justice to the Jew; but it must be the European who does it. Such a possibility as I have thrown out, and any other possibility that any one can think of, becomes at once impossible without some idea of a general suzerainty of Christendom over the lands of the Moslem and the Jew. Personally, I think it would be better if it were a general suzerainty of Christendom, rather than a particular supremacy of England. And I feel this, not from a desire to restrain the English power, but rather from a desire to defend it. I think there is not a little danger to England in the diplomatic situation involved; but that is a diplomatic question that it is neither within my power or duty to discuss adequately. But if I think it would be wiser for France and England together to hold Syria and Palestine together rather than separately, that only completes and clinches the conclusion that has haunted me, with almost uncanny recurrence, since I first saw Jerusalem sitting on the hill like a turreted town in England or in France; and for one moment the dark dome of it was again the Templum Domini, and the tower on it was the Tower of Tancred.

Anyhow with the failure of Zionism would fall the last and best attempt at a rationalistic theory of the Jew. We should be left facing a mystery which no other rationalism has ever come so near to providing within rational cause and cure. Whatever we do, we shall not return to that insular innocence and comfortable unconsciousness of Christendom, in which the Victorian agnostics could suppose that the Semitic problem was a brief medieval insanity. In this as in greater things, even if we lost our faith we could not recover our agnosticism. We can never recover agnosticism, any more than any other kind of ignorance. We know that there is a Jewish problem; we only hope that there is a Jewish
solution. If there is not, there is no other. We cannot believe again that the Jew is an Englishman with certain theological theories, any more than we can believe again any other part of the optimistic materialism whose temple is the Albert Memorial. A scheme of guilds may be attempted and may be a failure; but never again can we respect mere Capitalism for its success. An attack may be made on political corruption, and it may be a failure; but never again can we believe that our politics are not corrupt. And so Zionism may be attempted and may be a failure; but never again can we ourselves be at ease in Zion. Or rather, I should say, if the Jew cannot be at ease in Zion we can never again persuade ourselves that he is at ease out of Zion. We can only salute as it passes that restless and mysterious figure, knowing at last that there must be in him something mystical as well as mysterious; that whether in the sense of the sorrows of Christ or of the sorrows of Cain, he must pass by, for he belongs to God.
CONCLUSION

To have worn a large scallop shell in my hat in the streets of London might have been deemed ostentatious, to say nothing of carrying a staff like a long pole; and wearing sandals might have proclaimed rather that I had not come from Jerusalem but from Letchworth, which some identify with the New Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God. Lacking such attributes, I passed through South England as one who might have come from Ramsgate or from anywhere; and the only symbol left to me of my pilgrimage was a cheap ring of metal coloured like copper and brass. For on it was written in Greek characters the word “Jerusalem,” and though it may be less valuable than a brass nail, I do not think you can buy it in the Strand. All those enormous and everlasting things, all those gates of bronze and mosaics of purple and peacock colouring, all those chapels of gold and columns of crimson marble, had all shrivelled up and dwindled down to that one small thread of red metal round my finger. I could not help having a feeling, like Aladdin, that if I rubbed the ring perhaps all those towers would rise again. And there was a sort of feeling of truth in the fancy after all. We talk of the changeless East; but in one sense the impression of it is really rather changing, with its wandering tribes and its shifting sands, in which the genii of the East might well build the palace or the paradise of a day. As I saw the low and solid English cottages rising around me amid damp delightful thickets under rainy skies, I felt that in a deeper sense it is rather we who build for permanence or at least for a sort of peace. It is something more than comfort; a relative and reasonable contentment. And there came back on me like a boomerang a rather indescribable thought which had circled round my head through most of my journey; that Christendom is like a gigantic bronze come out of the furnace of the Near East; that in Asia is only the fire and in Europe the form. The nearest to what I mean was suggested in that very striking book Form and Colour, by Mr. March Philips. When I spoke of the idols of Asia, many moderns may well have murmured against such a description of the ideals of Buddha or Mrs. Besant. To which I can only reply that I do know a little about the ideals, and I think I prefer the idols. I have far more sympathy with the enthusiasm for a nice green or yellow idol, with nine arms and three heads, than with the philosophy ultimately represented by the snake devouring his tail; the awful sceptical argument in a circle by which everything begins and ends in the mind. I would far rather be a fetish worshipper and have a little fun, than be an
oriental pessimist expected always to smile like an optimist. Now it seems to me that the fighting Christian creed is the one thing that has been in that mystical circle and broken out of it, and become something real as well. It has gone westward by a sort of centrifugal force, like a stone from a sling; and so made the revolving Eastern mind, as the Franciscan said in Jerusalem, do something at last.

Anyhow, although I carried none of the trappings of a pilgrim I felt strongly disposed to take the privileges of one. I wanted to be entertained at the firesides of total strangers, in the medieval manner, and to tell them interminable tales of my travels. I wanted to linger in Dover, and try it on the citizens of that town. I nearly got out of the train at several wayside stations, where I saw secluded cottages which might be brightened by a little news from the Holy Land. For it seemed to me that all my fellow-countrymen must be my friends; all these English places had come much closer together after travels that seemed in comparison as vast as the spaces between the stars. The hop-fields of Kent seemed to me like outlying parts of my own kitchen garden; and London itself to be really situated at London End. London was perhaps the largest of the suburbs of Beaconsfield. By the time I came to Beaconsfield itself, dusk was dropping over the beechwoods and the white cross-roads. The distance seemed to grow deeper and richer with darkness as I went up the long lanes towards my home; and in that distance, as I drew nearer, I heard the barking of a dog.
IRISH IMPRESSIONS

G. K. CHESTERTON
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**INDEX**

**IRISH IMPRESSIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>TWO STONES IN A SQUARE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>THE ROOT OF REALITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>THE FAMILY AND THE FEUD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>THE PARADOX OF LABOUR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>THE ENGLISHMAN IN IRELAND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>THE MISTAKE OF ENGLAND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>THE MISTAKE OF IRELAND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>AN EXAMPLE AND A QUESTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX</td>
<td>BELFAST AND THE RELIGIOUS PROBLEM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I

TWO STONES IN A SQUARE

WHEN I had for the first time crossed St. George’s Channel, and for the first time stepped out of a Dublin hotel on to St. Stephen’s Green, the first of all my impressions was that of a particular statue, or rather portion of a statue. I left many traditional mysteries already in my track, but they did not trouble me as did this random glimpse or vision. I have never understood why the Channel is called St. George’s Channel; it would seem more natural to call it St. Patrick’s Channel since the great missionary did almost certainly cross that unquiet sea and look up at those mysterious mountains. And though I should be enchanted, in an abstract artistic sense, to imagine St. George sailing towards the sunset, flying the silver and scarlet colours of his cross, I cannot in fact regard that journey as the most fortunate of the adventures of that flag. Nor, for that matter, do I know why the Green should be called St. Stephen’s Green, nor why the parliamentary enclosure at Westminster is also connected with the first of the martyrs; unless it be because St. Stephen was killed with stones. The stones piled together to make modern political buildings, might perhaps be regarded as a cairn, or heap of missiles, marking the place of the murder of a witness to the truth. And while it seems unlikely that St. Stephen was pelted with statues as well as stones, there are undoubtedly statues that might well kill a Christian at sight. Among these graven stones, from which the saints suffer, I should certainly include some of those figures in frock coats standing opposite St. Stephen’s, Westminster. There are many such statues in Dublin also; but the one with which I am concerned was at first partially veiled from me. And the veil was at least as symbolic as the vision.

I saw what seemed the crooked hind legs of a horse on a pedestal and deduced an equestrian statue, in the somewhat bloated fashion of the early eighteenth century equestrian statues. But the figure, from where I stood, was wholly hidden in the tops of trees growing round it in a ring; masking it with leafy curtains or draping it with leafy banners. But they were green banners, that waved and glittered all about it in the sunlight; and the face they hid was the face of an English king. Or rather, to speak more correctly, a German king.

When laws can stay . . . it was impossible that an old rhyme should not run in my head, and words that appealed to the everlasting revolt of the green things of
the earth. . . .”And when the leaves in summer time their colour dare not show.” The rhyme seemed to reach me out of remote times and find arresting fulfilment, like a prophecy; it was impossible not to feel that I had seen an omen. I was conscious vaguely of a vision of green garlands hung on gray stone; and the wreaths were living and growing, and the stone was dead. Something in the simple substances and elemental colours, in the white sunlight, and the sombre and even secret image, held the mind for a moment in the midst of all the moving city, like a sign given in a dream. I was told that the figure was that of one of the first Georges; but indeed I seemed to know already that it was the White Horse of Hanover that had thus grown gray with Irish weather or green with Irish foliage. I knew only too well, already, that the George who had really crossed the Channel was not the saint. This was one of those German princes whom the English aristocracy used when it made the English domestic polity aristocratic and the English foreign policy German. Those Englishmen who think the Irish are pro–German, or those Irishmen who think the Irish ought to be pro–German, would presumably expect the Dublin populace to have hung the statue of this German deliverer with national flowers and nationalist flags. For some reason, however, I found no traces of Irish tributes round the pedestal of the Teutonic horseman. I wondered how many people in the last fifty years have ever cared about it, or even been conscious of their own carelessness. I wonder how many have ever troubled to look at it, or even trouble not to look at it. If it fell down, I wonder whether anybody would put it up again. I do not know; I only know that Irish gardeners, or some such Irish humorists, had planted trees in a ring round that prancing equestrian figure; trees that had, so to speak, sprung up and choked him, making him more unrecognisable than a Jack–in–the–Green. Jack or George had vanished; but the Green remained.

About a stone’s–throw from this calamity in stone there stood, at the corner of a gorgeously coloured flower–walk, a bust evidently by a modern sculptor with modern symbolic ornament surmounted by the fine falcon face of the poet Mangan; who dreamed and drank and died, a thoughtless and thriftless outcast, in the darkest of the Dublin streets around that place. This individual Irishman really was what we were told that all Irishmen were, hopeless, heedless, irresponsible, impossible, a tragedy of failure. And yet it seemed to be his head that was lifted and not hidden; the gay flowers only showed up this graven image as the green leaves shut out the other; everything around him seemed bright and busy, and told rather of a new time. It was clear that modern men did stop to look at him; indeed modern men had stayed there long enough to make him a
monument. It was almost certain that if his monument fell down, it really would be put up again. I think it very likely there would be competition among advanced modern artistic schools of admitted crankiness and unimpeachable lunacy; that somebody would want to cut out a Cubist Mangan in a style less of stone than of bricks; or to set up a Vorticist Mangan, like a frozen whirlpool, to terrify the children playing in that flowery lane. For when I afterwards went into the Dublin Art Club, or mixed generally in the stimulating society of the intellectuals of the Irish capital, I found a multitude of things which moved both my admiration and amusement. Perhaps the best thing of all was that it was the one society that I have seen where the intellectuals were intellectual. But nothing pleased me more than the fact that even Irish art was taken with a certain Irish pugnacity; as if there could be street fights about aesthetics as there once were about theology. I could almost imagine an appeal for pikes to settle a point about art needlework, or a suggestion of dying on the barricades for a difference about bookbinding. And I could still more easily imagine a sort of ultra–civilised civil war round the half–restored bust of poor Mangan. But it was in a yet plainer and more popular sense that I felt that bust to be the sign of a new world, where the statue of Royal George was only the ruin of an old one. And though I have since seen many much more complex, and many decidedly contradictory things in Ireland, the allegory of those two stone images in that public garden has remained in my memory, and has not been reversed. The Glorious Revolution, the great Protestant Deliverer, the Hanoverian Succession, these things were the very pageant and apotheosis of success. The Whig aristocrat was not merely victorious; it was as a vitor that he asked for victory. The thing was fully expressed in all the florid and insolent statuary of the period, in all those tumid horsemen in Roman uniform and Rococo periwigs shown as prancing in perpetual motion down shouting streets to their triumphs; only to–day the streets are empty and silent, and the horse stands still. Of such a kind was the imperial figure round which the ring of trees had risen, like great green fans to soothe a sultan, or great green curtains to guard him. But it was in a sort of mockery that his pavilion was thus painted with the colour of his conquered enemies. For the king was dead behind his curtains, his voice will be heard no more, and no man will even wish to hear it, while the world endures. The dynastic eighteenth century is dead if anything is dead; and these idols at least are only stones. But only a few yards away, the stone that the builders rejected is really the head of a corner, standing at the corner of a new pathway, coloured and crowded with children and with flowers.
That, I suspect, is the paradox of Ireland in the modern world. Everything that was thought progressive, as a prancing horse, has come to a standstill. Everything that was thought decadent, as a dying drunkard, has risen from the dead. All that seemed to have reached a cul de sac has turned the corner, and stands at the opening of a new road. All that thought itself on a pedestal has found itself up a tree. And that is why those two chance stones seem to me to stand like graven images on either side of the gateway by which a man enters Ireland. And yet I had not left the same small enclosure till I had seen one other sight which was even more symbolic than the flowers near the foot of the poet’s pedestal. A few yards beyond the Mangan bust was a model plot of vegetables, like a kitchen garden with no kitchen or house attached to it, planted out in a patchwork of potatoes, cabbages, and turnips, to prove how much could be done with an acre. And I realised as in a vision that all over the new Ireland that patch is repeated like a pattern; and where there is a real kitchen garden there is also a real kitchen; and it is not a communal kitchen. It is more typical even than the poet and the flowers; for these flowers are also food, and this poetry is also property; property which, when properly distributed, is the poetry of the average man. It was only afterwards that I could realise all the realities to which this accident corresponded; but even this little public experiment, at the first glance, had something of the meaning of a public monument. It was this which the earth itself had reared against the monstrous image of the German monarch; and I might have called this chapter Cabbages and Kings.

My life is passed in making bad jokes and seeing them turn into true prophecies. In the little town in South Bucks, where I live, I remember some talk of appropriate ceremonies in connection with the work of sending vegetables to the Fleet. There was a suggestion that these proceedings should end with “God Save the King,” an amendment by some one (of a more naval turn of mind) to substitute “Rule Britannia;” and the opposition of one individual, claiming to be of Irish extraction, who loudly refused to lend a voice to either. Whatever I retain, in such rural scenes, of the frivolity of Fleet Street led me to suggest that we could all join in singing “The Wearing of the Greens.” But I have since discovered that this remark, like other typical utterances of the village idiot, was in truth inspired; and was a revelation and a vision from across the sea, a vision of what was really being done, not by the village idiots but by the village wise men. For the whole miracle of modern Ireland might well be summed up in the simple change from the word “green” to the word “greens.” Nor would it be true to say that the first is poetical and the second practical. For a green tree is quite
as poetical as a green flag; and no one in touch with history doubts that the waving of the green flag has been very useful to the growing of the green tree. But I shall have to touch upon all such controversial topics later, for those to whom such statements are still controversial. Here I would only begin by recording a first impression as vividly coloured and patchy as a modernist picture; a square of green things growing where they are least expected; the new vision of Ireland. The discovery, for most Englishmen, will be like touching the trees of a faded tapestry, and finding the forest alive and full of birds. It will be as if, on some dry urn or dreary column, figures which had already begun to crumble magically began to move and dance. For culture as well as mere caddishness assumed the decay of these Celtic or Catholic things; there were artists sketching the ruins as well as trippers picnicking in them; and it was not only evidence that a final silence had fallen on the harp of Tara, that it did not play “Tararaboomdeay.” Englishmen believed in Irish decay even when they were large–minded enough to lament it. It might be said that even those who were penitent because the thing was murdered, were quite convinced that it was killed. The meaning of these green and solid things before me is that it is not a ghost that has risen from the grave. A flower, like a flag, might be little more than a ghost; but a fruit has that sacramental solidity which in all mythologies belongs not to a ghost but to a god. This sight of things sustaining, and a beauty that nourishes and does not merely charm, is the premonition of practicality in the miracle of modern Ireland. It is a miracle more marvellous than the resurrection of the dead. It is the resurrection of the body.
II

THE ROOT OF REALITY

THE only excuse of literature is to make things new; and the chief misfortune of journalism is that it has to make them old. What is hurried has to be hackneyed. Suppose a man has to write on a particular subject, let us say America; if he has a day to do it in, it is possible that, in the last afterglow of sunset, he may have discovered at least one thing which he himself really thinks about America. It is conceivable that somewhere under the evening star he may have a new idea, even about the new world. If he has only half an hour in which to write, he will just have time to consult an encyclopaedia and vaguely remember the latest leading articles. The encyclopaedia will be only about a decade out of date; the leading articles will be aeons out of date—having been written under similar conditions of modern rush. If he has only a quarter of an hour in which to write about America, he may be driven in mere delirium and madness to call her his Gigantic Daughter in the west, to talk of the feasibility of Hands Across the Sea, or even to call himself an Anglo–Saxon, when he might as well call himself a Jute. But whatever debasing banality be the effect of business scurry in criticism, it is but one example of a truth that can be tested in twenty fields of experience. If a man must get to Brighton as quickly as possible, he can get there quickest by travelling on rigid rails on a recognised route. If he has time and money for motoring, he will still use public roads; but he will be surprised to find how many public roads look as new and quiet as private roads. If he has time enough to walk, he may find for himself a string of fresh footpaths, each one a fairy—tale. This law of the leisure needed for the awakening of wonder applies, indeed, to things superficially familiar as well as to things superficially fresh. The chief case for old enclosures and boundaries is that they enclose a space in which new things can always be found later, like live fish within the four corners of a net. The chief charm of having a home that is secure is having leisure to feel it as strange.

I have often done the little I could to correct the stale trick of taking things for granted: all the more because it is not even taking them for granted. It is taking them without gratitude; that is, emphatically as not granted. Even one’s own front door, released by one’s own latchkey, should not only open inward on things familiar, but outward on things unknown. Even one’s own domestic
fireside should be wild as well as domesticated; for nothing could be wilder than fire. But if this light of the higher ignorance should shine even on familiar places, it should naturally shine most clearly on the roads of a strange land. It would be well if a man could enter Ireland really knowing that he knows nothing about Ireland; if possible, not even the name of Ireland. The misfortune is that most men know the name too well, and the thing too little. This book would probably be a better book, as well as a better joke, if I were to call the island throughout by some name like Atlantis, and only reveal on the last page that I was referring to Ireland. Englishmen would see a situation of great interest, objects with which they could feel considerable sympathy, and opportunities of which they might take considerable advantage, if only they would really look at the place plain and straight, as they would at some entirely new island, with an entirely new name, discovered by that seafaring adventure which is the real romance of England. In short, he might do something with it, if he would only treat it as an object in front of him, and not as a subject or story left behind him. There will be occasion later to say all that should be said of the need of studying the Irish story. But the Irish story is one thing, and what is called the Irish Question quite another; and in a purely practical sense the best thing the stranger can do is to forget the Irish Question and look at the Irish. If he looked at them simply and steadily, as he would look at the natives of an entirely new nation with a new name, he would become conscious of a very strange but entirely solid fact. He would become conscious of it, as a man in a fairy tale might become conscious that he had crossed the border of fairyland, by such a trifle, as a talking cow or a haystack walking about on legs.

For the Irish Question has never been discussed in England. Men have discussed Home Rule; but those who advocated it most warmly, and as I think wisely, did not even know what the Irish meant by Home. Men have talked about Unionism; but they have never even dared to propose Union. A Unionist ought to mean a man who is not even conscious of the boundary of the two countries; who can walk across the frontier of fairyland, and not even notice the walking haystack. As a fact, the Unionist always shoots at the haystack; though he never hits it. But the limitation is not limited to Unionists; as I have already said, the English Radicals have been quite as incapable of going to the root of the matter. Half the case for Home Rule was that Ireland could not be trusted to the English Home Rulers. They also, to recur to the parable, have been unable to take the talking cow by the horns; for I need hardly say that the talking cow is an Irish bull. What has been the matter with their Irish politics was simply that they
were English politics. They discussed the Irish Question; but they never seriously contemplated the Irish Answer. That is, the Liberal was content with the negative truth, that the Irish should not be prevented from having the sort of law they liked. But the Liberal seldom faced the positive truth, about what sort of law they would like. He instinctively avoided the very imagination of this; for the simple reason that the law the Irish would like is as remote from what is called Liberal as from what is called Unionist. Nor has the Liberal ever embraced it in his broadest liberality, nor the Unionist ever absorbed it into his most complete unification. It remains outside us altogether, a thing to be stared at like a fairy cow; and by far the wisest English visitor is he who will simply stare at it. Sooner or later he will see what it means; which is simply this: that whether it be a case for coercion or emancipation (and it might be used either way) the fact is that a free Ireland would not only not be what we call lawless, but might not even be what we call free. So far from being an anarchy, it would be an orderly and even conservative civilisation—like the Chinese. But it would be a civilisation so fundamentally different from our own, that our own liberals would differ from it as much as our own conservatives. The fair question for an Englishman is whether that fundamental difference would make division dangerous; it has already made union impossible. Now in turning over these notes of so brief a visit, suffering from all the stale scurry of my journalistic trade, I have been in doubt between a chronological and a logical order of events. But I have decided in favour of logic, of the high light that really revealed the picture, and by which I firmly believe that everything else should be seen. And if any one were to ask me what was the sight that struck me most in Ireland, both as strange and as significant, I should know what to reply. I saw it long after I had seen the Irish cities, had felt something of the brilliant bitterness of Dublin and the stagnant optimism of Belfast; but I put it first here because I am certain that without it all the rest is meaningless; that it lies behind all politics, enormous and silent, as the great hills lie beyond Dublin.

I was moving in a hired motor down a road in the North–West, towards the middle of that rainy autumn. I was not moving very fast; because the progress was slowed down to a solemn procession by crowds of families with their cattle and live stock going to the market beyond; which things also are an allegory. But what struck my mind and stuck in it was this: that all down one side of the road, as far as we went, the harvest was gathered in neatly and safely; and all down the other side of the road it was rotting in the rain. Now the side where it was safe was a string of small plots worked by peasant proprietors, as petty by our
standards as a row of the cheapest villas. The land on which all the harvest was wasted was the land of a large modern estate. I asked why the landlord was later with his harvesting than the peasants; and I was told rather vaguely that there had been strikes and similar labour troubles. I did not go into the rights of the matter; but the point here is that, whatever they were, the moral is the same. You may curse the cruel Capitalist landlord or you may rave at the ruffianly Bolshevist strikers; but you must admit that between them they had produced a stoppage, which the peasant proprietorship a few yards off did not produce. You might support either where they conflicted, but you could not deny the sense in which they had combined, and combined to prevent what a few rustics across the road could combine to produce. For all that we in England agree about and disagree about, all for which we fight and all from which we differ, our darkness and our light, our heaven and hell, were there on the left side of the road. On the right side of the road lay something so different that we do not even differ from it. It may be that Trusts are rising like towers of gold and iron, overshadowing the earth and shutting out the sun; but they are only rising on the left side of the road. It may be that Trades Unions are laying labyrinths of international insurrection, cellars stored with the dynamite of a merely destructive democracy; but all that international maze lies to the left side of the road. Employment and unemployment are there; Marx and the Manchester School are there. The left side of the road may even go through amazing transformations of its own; its story may stride across abysses of anarchy; but it will never step across the road. The landlord’s estate may become a sort of Morris Utopia, organised communally by Socialists, or more probably by Guild Socialists. It may (as I fear is much more likely) pass through the stage of an employer’s model village to the condition of an old pagan slave–state. But the peasants across the road would not only refuse the Servile State, but would quite as resolutely refuse the Utopia. Europe may seem to be rent from end to end by the blast of a Bolshevist trumpet, sundering the bourgeois from the proletarian; but the peasant across the road is neither a bourgeois nor a proletarian. England may seem to be rent by an irreconcilable rivalry between Capital and Labour; but the peasant across the road is both a capitalist and a labourer. He is several other curious things; including the man who got his crops in first; who was literally first in the field.

To an Englishman, especially a Londoner, this was like walking to the corner of a London street and finding the policeman in rags, with a patch on his trousers and a smudge on his face; but the crossing–sweeper wearing, a single eyeglass and a suit fresh from a West End tailor. In fact, it was nearly as surprising as a
walking haystack or a talking cow. What was generally dingy, dilatory, and down-at-heels was here comparatively tidy and timely; what was orderly and organised was belated and broken down. For it must be sharply realised that the peasant proprietors succeeded here, not only because they were really proprietors, but because they were only peasants. It was because they were on a small scale that they were a great success. It was because they were too poor to have servants that they grew rich in spite of strikers. It was, so far as it went, the flattest possible contradiction to all that is said in England, both by Collectivists and Capitalists, about the efficiency of the great organisation. For in so far as it had failed, it had actually failed, not only through being great, but through being organised. On the left side of the road the big machine had stopped working, because it was a big machine. The small men were still working, because they were not machines. Such were the strange relations of the two things, that the stars in their courses fought against Capitalism; that the very clouds rolling over that rocky valley warred for its pigmies against its giants. The rain falls alike on the just and the unjust; yet here it had not fallen alike on the rich and poor, It had fallen to the destruction of the rich.

Now I do, as a point of personal opinion, believe that the right side of the road was really the right side of the road. That is, I believe it represented the right side of the question; that these little pottering peasants had got hold of the true secret, which is missed both by Capitalism and Collectivism. But I am not here urging my own preferences on my own country men; and I am not concerned primarily to point out that this is an argument against Capitalism and Collectivism. What I do point out is that it is the fundamental argument against Unionism. Perhaps it is, on that ultimate level, the only argument against Unionism; which is probably why it is never used against Unionists. I mean, of course, that it was never really used against English Unionists by English Home Rulers, in the recriminations of that Irish Question which was really an English Question. The essential demanded of that question was merely that it should be an open question; a thing rather like an open wound. Modern industrial society is fond of problems, and therefore not at all fond of solutions. A consideration of those who really have understood this fundamental fact will be sufficient to show how confusing and useless are the mere party labels in the matter. George Wyndham was a Unionist who was deposed because he was a Home Ruler. Sir Horace Plunkett is a Unionist who is trusted because he is a Home Ruler. By far the most revolutionary piece of Nationalism that was ever really effected for Ireland was effected by Wyndham, who was an English Tory squire. And by far the most
brutal and brainless piece of Unionism that was ever imposed on Ireland was imposed in the name of the Radical theory of Free Trade, when the Irish juries brought in verdicts of wilful murder against Lord John Russell. I say this to show that my sense of a reality is quite apart from the personal accident that I have myself always been a Radical in English politics, as well as a Home Ruler in Irish politics. But I say it even more in order to reaffirm that the English have first to forget all their old formula and look at a new fact. It is not a new fact; but it is new to them.

To realise it, we must not only go outside the British parties but outside the British Empire, outside the very universe of the ordinary Briton. The real question can be easily stated, for it is as simple as it is large. What is going to happen to the peasantry of Europe, or for that matter of the whole world? It would be far better, as I have already suggested, if we could consider it as a new case of some peasantry in Europe, or somewhere else in the world. It would be far better if we ceased to talk of Ireland and Scotland, and began to talk of Ireland and Serbia. Let us, for the sake of our own mental composure, call this unfortunate people Slovenes. But let us realise that these remote Slovenes are, by the testimony of every truthful traveller, rooted in the habit of private property, and now ripening into a considerable private prosperity. It will often be necessary to remember that the Slovenes are Roman Catholics; and that, with that impatient pugnacity which marks the Slovene temperament, they have often employed violence, but always for the restoration of what they regarded as a reasonable system of private property. Now in a hundred determining districts, of which France is the most famous, this system has prospered. It has its own faults as well as its own merits; but it has prospered. What is going to happen to it? I will here confine myself to saying with the most solid confidence what is not going to happen to it. It is not going to be really ruled by Socialists; and it is not going to be really ruled by merchant princes, like those who ruled Venice or like those who rule England.

It is not so much that England ought not to rule Ireland as that England cannot. It is not so much that Englishmen cannot rule Irishmen, as that merchants cannot rule peasants. It is not so much merely that we have dealt benefits to England and blows to Ireland. It is that our benefits for England would be blows to Ireland. And this we already began to admit in practice, before we had even dimly begun to conceive it in theory. We do not merely admit it in special laws against Ireland like the Coercion Acts, or special laws in favour of Ireland like the Land Acts; it is admitted even more by specially exempting Ireland than by
specially studying Ireland. In other words, whatever else the Unionists want, they do not want to unite; they are not quite so mad as that. I cannot myself conceive any purpose in having one parliament except to pass one law; and one law for England and Ireland is simply something that becomes more insanely impossible every day. If the two societies were stationary, they would be sufficiently separate; but they are both moving rapidly in opposite directions. England may be moving towards a condition which some call Socialism, and I call Slavery; but whatever it is, Ireland is speeding farther and farther from it. Whatever it is, the men who manage it will no more be able to manage a European peasantry than the peasants in these mud cabins could manage the Stock Exchange. All attempts, whether imperial or international, to lump these peasants along with some large and shapeless thing called Labour, are part of a cosmopolitan illusion which sees mankind as a map. The world of the International is a pill, as round and as small. It is true that all men want health; but it is certainly not true that all men want the same medicine. Let us allow the cosmopolitan to survey the world from China to Peru; but do not let us allow the chemist to identify Chinese opium and Peruvian bark.

My parallel about the Slovenes was only a fancy; yet I can give a real parallel from the Slavs which is a fact. It was a fact from my own experience in Ireland; and it exactly illustrates the real international sympathies of peasants. Their internationalism has nothing to do with the International. I had not been in Ireland many hours when several people mentioned to me with considerable excitement some news from the Continent. They were not, strange as it may seem, dancing with joy over the disaster of Caporetto, or glowing with admiration of the Crown Prince. Few really rejoiced in English defeats; and none really rejoiced in German victories. It was news about the Bolshevists; but it was not the news of how nobly they had given votes to the Russian women, nor of how savagely they had fired bullets into the Russian princesses. It was the news of a check to the Bolshevists; but it was not a glorification of Kerensky or Korniloff, or any of the newspaper heroes who seem to have satisfied us all, so long as their names began with K and nobody knew anything about them. In short, it was nothing that could be found in all our myriad newspaper articles on the subject. I would give an educated Englishman a hundred guesses about what it was; but even if he knew it, he would not know what it meant.

It had appeared in the little paper about peasant produce so successfully conducted by Mr. George Russell, the celebrated “A. E.,” and it was told me eagerly by the poet himself, by a learned and brilliant Jesuit, and by several other
people, as the great news from Europe. It was simply the news that the Jewish Socialists of the Bolshevist Government had been attempting to confiscate the peasants’ savings in the co-operative banks; and had been forced to desist. And they spoke of it as of a great battle won on the Danube or the Rhine. That is what I mean when I say that these people are of a pattern and belong to a system which cuts across all our own political divisions. They felt themselves fighting the Socialists as fiercely as any Capitalist can feel it; but they not only knew what they were fighting against, but what they were fighting for; which is more than the Capitalist does. I do not know how far modern Europe really shows a menace of Bolshevism, or how far merely a panic of Capitalism. But I know that if any honest resistance has to be offered to mere robbery, the resistance of Ireland will be the most honest, and probably the most important. It may be that international Israel will launch against us out of the East an insane simplification of the unity of Man, as Islam once launched out of the East an insane simplification of the unity of God. If it be so, it is where property is well distributed that it will be well defended. The post of honour will be with those who fight in very truth for their own land. If ever there came such a drive of wild dervishes against us, it would be the chariots and elephants of plutocracy that would roll in confusion and rout; and the squares of the peasant infantry would stand.

Anyhow, the first fact to realise is that we are dealing with a European peasantry; and it would be really better, as I say, to think of it first as a Continental peasantry. There are numberless important inferences from this fact; but there is one point, politically topical and urgent, on which I may well touch here. It will be well to understand about this peasantry something that we generally misunderstand, even about a Continental peasantry. English tourists in France or Italy commonly make the mistake of supposing that the people cheat, because the people bargain, or attempt to bargain. When a peasant asks tenpence for something that is worth fourpence, the tourist misunderstands the whole problem. He commonly solves it by calling the man a thief and paying the tenpence. There are ten thousand errors in this, beginning with the primary error of an oligarchy, of treating a man as a servant when he feels more like a small squire. The peasant does not choose to receive insults; but he never expected to receive tenpence. A man who understood him would simply suggest twopence, in a calm and courteous manner; and the two would eventually meet in the middle at a perfectly just price. There would not be what we call a fixed price at the beginning, but there would be a very firmly fixed price at the end: that is, the
bargain once made would be a sacredly sealed contract. The peasant, so far from cheating, has his own horror of cheating; and certainly his own fury at being cheated. Now in the political bargain with the English, the Irish simply think they have been cheated. They think Home Rule was stolen from them after the contract was sealed; and it will be hard for any one to contradict them. If “le Roi le veut” is not a sacred seal on a contract, what is? The sentiment is stronger because the contract was a compromise. Home Rule was the fourpence and not the tenpence; and, in perfect loyalty to the peasant’s code of honour, they have now reverted to the tenpence. The Irish have now returned in a reaction of anger to their most extreme demands; not because we denied what they demanded, but because we denied what we accepted. As I shall have occasion to note, there are other and wilder elements in the quarrel; but the first fact to remember is that the quarrel began with a bargain, that it will probably have to end with another bargain; and that it will be a bargain with peasants. On the whole, in spite of abominable blunders and bad faith, I think there is still a chance of bargaining, but we must see that there is no chance of cheating. We may haggle like peasants, and remember that their first offer is not necessarily their last. But we must be as honest as peasants; and that is very hard for politicians. The great Parnell, a squire who had many of the qualities of a peasant (qualities the English so wildly misunderstood as to think them English, when they were really very Irish), converted his people from a Fenianism fiercer than Sinn Fein to a Home Rule more moderate than that which sane statesmanship could now offer to Ireland. But the peasants trusted Parnell, not because they thought he was asking for it, but because they thought he could get it. Whatever we decide to give to Ireland, we must give it; it is now worse than useless to promise it. I will say here, once and for all, the hardest thing that an Englishman has to say of his impressions of another great European people: that over all those hills and valleys our word is wind, and our bond is waste paper.

But, in any case, the peasantry remains: and the whole weight of the matter is that it will remain. It is much more certain to remain than any of the commercial or colonial systems that will have to bargain with it. We may honestly think that the British Empire is both more liberal and more lasting than the Austrian Empire, or other large political combinations. But a combination like the Austrian Empire could go to pieces, and ten such combinations could go to pieces, before people like the Serbians ceased to desire to be peasants, and to demand to be free peasants. And the British combination, precisely because it is a combination and not a community, is in its nature more lax and liable to real
schism than this sort of community, which might almost be called a communion. Any attack on it is like an attempt to abolish grass; which is not only the symbol of it in the old national song, but it is a very true symbol of it in any new philosophic history; a symbol of its equality, its ubiquity, its multiplicity, and its mighty power to return. To fight against grass is to fight against God; we can only so mismanage our own city and our own citizenship that the grass grows in our own streets. And even then it is our streets that will be dead; and the grass will still be alive.
III

THE FAMILY AND THE FEUD

THERE was an old joke of my childhood, to the effect that men might be grouped together with reference to their Christian names. I have forgotten the cases then under consideration; but contemporary examples would be sufficiently suggestive to-day. A ceremonial brotherhood—in—arms between Father Bernard Vaughan and Mr. Bernard Shaw seems full of possibilities. I am faintly pleased with the fancy of Mr. Arnold Bennett endeavouring to extract the larger humanities of fiction from the political differences of Mr. Arnold White and Mr. Arnold Lupton. I should pass my own days in the exclusive society of Professor Gilbert Murray and Sir Gilbert Parker; whom I can conceive as differing on some points from each other, and on some points from me. Now there is one odd thing to notice about this old joke; that it might have been taken in a more serious spirit, though in a saner style, in a yet older period. This fantasy of the Victorian Age might easily have been a fact of the Middle Ages. There would have been nothing abnormal in the moral atmosphere of mediaevalism in some feast or pageant celebrating the fellowship of men who had the same patron saint. It seems mad and meaningless now, because the meaning of Christian names has been lost. They have fallen into a kind of chaos and oblivion which is highly typical of our time. I mean that there are still fashions in them, but no longer reasons for them. For a fashion is a custom without a cause. A fashion is a custom to which men cannot get accustomed; simply because it is without a cause. That is why our industrial societies, touching every topic from the cosmos to the coat—collars, are merely swept by a succession of modes which are merely moods. They are customs that fail to be customary. And so, amid all our fashions in Christian names, we have forgotten all that was meant by the custom of Christian names. We have forgotten all the original facts about a Christian name; but, above all, the fact that it was Christian.

Now if we note this process going on in the world of London or Liverpool, we shall see that it has already gone even farther and fared even worse. The surname also is losing its root and therefore its reason. The surname has become as solitary as a nickname. For it might be argued that the first name is meant to be an individual and even isolated thing; but the last name is certainly meant, by all
logic and history, to link a man with his human origins, habits, or habitation. Historically, it was a word taken from the town he lived in or the trade guild to which he belonged; legally it is still the word on which all questions of legitimacy, succession, and testamentary arrangements turn. It is meant to be the corporate name; in that sense it is meant to be the impersonal name, as the other is meant to be the personal name. Yet in the modern mode of industrialism, it is more and more taken in a manner at once lonely and light. Any corporate social system built upon it would seem as much of a joke as the joke about Christian names with which I began. If it would seem odd to require a Thomas to make friends with any other Thomas, it would appear almost as perplexing to insist that any Thompson must love any other Thompson. It may be that Sir Edward Henry, late of the Police Force, does not wish to be confined to the society of Mr. Edward Clodd. But would Sir Edward Henry necessarily have sought the society of Mr. O. Henry, entertaining as that society would have been? Sir John Barker, founder of the great Kensington emporium, need not specially seek out and embrace Mr. John Masefield; but need he, any more swiftly, precipitate himself into the arms of Mr. Granville Barker? This vista of varieties would lead us far; but it is enough to notice, nonsense apart, that the most ordinary English surnames have become unique in their social significance; they stand for the man rather than the race or the origins. Even when they are most common they are not communal. What we call the family name is not now primarily the name of the family. The family itself, as a corporate conception, has already faded into the background, and is in danger of fading from the background. In short, our Christian names are not the only Christian things that we may lose.

Now the second solid fact which struck me in Ireland (after the success of small property and the failure of large organisation) was the fact that the family was in a flatly contrary position. All I have said above, in current language, about the whole trend of the modern world, is directly opposite to the whole trend of the modern Irish world. Not only is the Christian name a Christian name; but (what seems still more paradoxical and even pantomimic) the family name is really a family name. Touching the first of the two, it would be easy to trace out some very interesting truths about it, if they did not divert us from the main truth of this chapter: the second great truth about Ireland. People contrasting the “education” of the two countries, or seeking to extend to the one the thing which is called education in the other, might indeed do worse than study the simple problem of the meaning of Christian names. It might dawn at last, even on educationists, that there is a value in the content as well as the
extent of culture; or (in other words), that knowing nine hundred words is not always more important than knowing what some of them mean. It is strictly and soberly true that any peasant, in a mud cabin in County Clare, when he names his child Michael, may really have a sense of the presence that smote down Satan, the arms and plumage of the paladin of Paradise. I doubt whether it is so overwhelmingly probable that any clerk in any villa on Clapham Common, when he names his son John, has a vision of the holy eagle of the Apocalypse, or even of the mystical cup of the disciple whom Jesus loved. In the face of that simple fact, I have no doubt about which is the more educated man; and even a knowledge of the Daily Mail does not redress the balance. It is often said, and possibly truly, that the peasant named Michael cannot write his own name. But it is quite equally true that the clerk named John cannot read his own name. He cannot read it because it is in a foreign language, and he has never been made to realise what it stands for. He does not know that John means John, as the other man does know that Michael means Michael. In that rigidly realistic sense, the pupil of industrial intellectualism does not even know his own name.

But this is a parenthesis; because the point here is that the man in the street (as distinct from the man in the field) has been separated not only from his private but from his more public description. He has not only forgotten his name, but forgotten his address. In my own view, he is like one of those unfortunate people who wake up with their minds a blank, and therefore cannot find their way home. But whether or no we take this view of the state of things in an industrial society like the English, we must realise firmly that a totally opposite state of things exists in an agricultural society like the Irish. We may put it, if we like, in the form of an unfamiliar and even unfriendly fancy. We may say that the house is greater than the man; that the house is an amiable ogre that runs after and recaptures the man. But the fact is there, familiar or unfamiliar, friendly or unfriendly; and the fact is the family. The family pride is prodigious; though it generally goes along with glowing masses of individual humility. And this family sentiment does attach itself to the family name; so that the very language in which men think is made up of family names. In this the atmosphere is singularly unlike that of England though much more like that of Scotland. Indeed, it will illustrate the impartial recognition of this, apart from any partisan deductions, that it is equally apparent in the place where Ireland and Scotland are supposed to meet. It is equally apparent in Ulster, and even in the Protestant corner of Ulster.

In all the Ulster propaganda I came across, I think the thing that struck me
most sharply was one phrase in one Unionist leading article. It was something that might fairly be called Scottish; something which was really even more Irish; but something which could not in the wildest mood be called English, and therefore could not with any rational meaning be called Unionist. Yet it was part of a passionately sincere, and indeed truly human and historic outburst of the politics of the northeast corner, against the politics of the rest of Ireland. Most of us remember that Sir Edward Carson put into the Government a legal friend of his named Campbell; it was at the beginning of the war, and few of us thought anything of the matter except that it was stupid to give posts to Carsonites at the most delicate crisis of the cause in Ireland. Since then, as we also know, the same Campbell has shown himself a sensible man, which I should translate as a practical Home Ruler; but which is anyhow something more than what is generally meant by a Carsonite. I entertain myself, a profound suspicion that Carson also would very much like to be something more than a Carsonite. But however this may be, his legal friend of whom I speak made an excellent speech, containing some concession to Irish popular sentiment. As might have been expected, there were furious denunciations of him in the press of the Orange party; but not more furious than might have been found in the Morning Post or the Saturday Review. Nevertheless, there was one phrase that I certainly never saw in the Morning Post or the Saturday Review; one phrase I should never expect to see in any English paper, though I might very probably see it in a Scotch paper. It was this sentence, that was read to me from the leading article of a paper in Belfast: “There never was treason yet but a Campbell was at the bottom of it.”

Let anybody imagine an Englishman saying, about some business quarrel, “How like an Atkins!” or “What could you expect of a Wilkinson?” A moment’s reflection will show that it would be even more impossible touching public men in public quarrels. No English Liberal ever connected the earlier exploits of the present Lord Birkenhead with atavistic influences, or the totem of the wide and wandering tribe of Smith. No English patriot traced back the family tree of any English pacifist; or said there was never treason yet but a Pringle was at the bottom of it. It is the indefinite article that is here the definite distinction. It is the expression “a Campbell” which suddenly transforms the scene, and covers the robes of one lawyer with the ten thousand tartans of a whole clan. Now that phrase is the phrase that meets the traveller everywhere in Ireland. Perhaps the next most arresting thing I remember, after the agrarian revolution, was the way in which one poor Irishman happened to speak to me about Sir Roger Casement.
He did not praise him as a deliverer of Ireland; he did not abuse him as a
disgrace to Ireland; he did not say anything of the twenty things one might
expect him to say. He merely referred to the rumour that Casement meant to
become a Catholic just before his execution, and expressed a sort of distant
interest in it. He added: “He’s always been a Black Protestant. All the Casements
are Black Protestants.” I confess that, at the moment of that morbid story, there
seemed to me to be something unearthly about the very idea of there being other
Casements. If ever a man seemed solitary, if ever a man seemed unique to the
point of being unnatural, it was that man on the two or three occasions when I
have seen his sombre handsome face and his wild eyes; a tall, dark figure
walking already in the shadow of a dreadful doom. I do not know if he was a
Black Protestant; but he was a black something; in the sad if not the bad sense
of the symbol. I fancy, in truth, he stood rather for the third of Browning’s famous
triad of rhyming monosyllables. A distinguished Nationalist Member, who
happened to have had a medical training, said to me, “I was quite certain when I
first clapped eyes on him; the man was mad.” Anyhow the man was so unusual,
that it would never have occurred to me or any of my countrymen to talk as if
there were a class or clan of such men. I could almost have imagined he had
been born without father or mother. But for the Irish, his father and mother were
really more important than he was. There is said to be a historical mystery about
whether Parnell made a pun, when he said that the name of Kettle was a
household word in Ireland. Few symbols could now be more contrary than the
name of Kettle and the name of Casement (save for the courage they had in
common); for the younger Kettle, who died so gloriously in France, was a
Nationalist as broad as the other was cramped, and as sane as the other was
crazy. But if the fancy of a punster, following his own delightful vein of
nonsense, should see something quaint in the image of a hundred such Kettles
singing as he sang by a hundred hearths, a more bitter jester, reading that black
and obscure story of the capture on the coast, might utter a similar flippancy
about other Casements, opening on the foam of such very perilous seas, in a land
so truly forlorn. But even if we were not annoyed at the pun, we should be
surprised at the plural. And our surprise would be the measure of the deepest
difference between England and Ireland. To express it in the same idle imagery
it would be the fact that even a casement is a part of a house, as a kettle is a part
of a household. Every word in Irish is a household word.

The English would no more have thought of a plural for the word Gladstone
than for the word God. They would never have imagined Disraeli compassed
about with a great cloud of Disraelis; it would have seemed to them altogether too Apocalyptic, and exaggeration of being on the side of the angels. To this day in England, as I have reason to know, it is regarded as a rabid and insane form of religious persecution to suggest that a Jew very probably comes of a Jewish family. In short, the modern English, while their rulers are willing to give due consideration to Eugenics as a reasonable opportunity for various forms of polygamy and infanticide, are drifting farther and farther from the only consideration of Eugenics that could possibly be fit for Christian men, the consideration of it as an accomplished fact. I have spoken of infanticide; but indeed the ethic involved is rather that of parricide and matricide. To my own taste, the present tendency of social reform would seem to consist of destroying all traces of the parents, in order to study the heredity of the children. But I do not here ask the reader to accept my own tastes or even opinions about these things; I only bear witness to an objective fact about a foreign country. It can be summed up by saying that Parnell is the Parnell for the English; but a Parnell for the Irish.

This is what I mean when I say that English Home Rulers do not know what the Irish mean by home. And this is also what I mean when I say that the society does not fit into any of our social classifications, liberal or conservative. To many Radicals this sense of lineage will appear rank reactionary aristocracy. And it is aristocratic, if we mean by this a pride of pedigree; but it is not aristocratic in the practical and political sense. Strange as it may sound, its practical effect is democratic. It is not aristocratic in the sense of creating an aristocracy. On the contrary, it is perhaps the one force that permanently prevents the creation of an aristocracy, in the manner of the English squirearchy. The reason of this apparent paradox can be put plainly enough in one sentence. If you are really concerned about your relations, you have to be concerned about your poor relations. You soon discover that a considerable number of your second cousins exhibit a strong social tendency to be chimney-sweeps and tinkers. You soon learn the lesson of human equality if you try honestly and consistently to learn any other lesson, even the lesson of heraldry and genealogy. For good or evil, a real working aristocracy has to forget about three-quarters of its aristocrats. It has to discard the poor who have the genteel blood, and welcome the rich who can live the genteel life. If a man is interesting because he is a McCarthy, it is, so far, as he is interesting because he is a man; that is, he is interesting whether he is a duke or a dustman. But if he is interesting because he is Lord FitzArthur and lives at FitzArthur House, then he is interesting when he
has merely bought the house, or when he has merely bought the title. To maintain a squirearchy, it is necessary to admire the new squire; and therefore to forget the old squire. The sense of family is like a dog and follows the family; the sense of oligarchy is like a cat and continues to haunt the house. I am not arguing against aristocracy if the English choose to preserve it in England; I am only making clear the terms on which they hold it, and warning them that a people with a strong family sense will not hold it on any terms. Aristocracy, as it has flourished in England since the Reformation, with not a little national glory and commercial success, is in its very nature built up of broken and desecrated homes. It has to destroy a hundred poor relations to keep up a family. It has to destroy a hundred families to keep up a class.

But if this family spirit is incompatible with what we mean by aristocracy, it is quite as incompatible with three-quarters of what many men praise and preach as democracy. The whole trend of what has been regarded as liberal legislation in England, necessary or unnecessary, defensible and indefensible, has for good or evil been at the expense of the independence of the family, especially of the poor family. From the first most reasonable restraints of the Factory Acts to the last most maniacal antics of interference with other people’s nursery games or Christmas dinners, the whole process has turned sometimes on the pivot of the state, more often on the pivot of the employer, but never on the pivot of the home. All this may be an emancipation; I only point out that Ireland really asked for Home Rule chiefly to be emancipated from this emancipation. But indeed the English politicians, to do them justice, show their consciousness of this by the increasing number of cases in which the other nation is exempted. We may have harried this unhappy people with our persecutions; but at least we spare them our reforms. We have smitten them with plagues; but at least we dare not scourge them with our remedies. The real case against the Union is not merely a case against the Unionists; it is a far stronger case against the Universalists. It is this strange and ironic truth; that a man stands up holding a charter of charity and peace for all mankind; that he lays down a law of enlightened justice for all the nations of the earth, that he claims to behold man from the beginnings of his evolution equal, without any difference between the most distant creeds and colours; that he stands as the orator of the human race whose statute only declares all humanity to be human; and then slightly drops his voice and says, “This Act shall not apply to Ireland.”
IV

THE PARADOX OF LABOUR

MY first general and visual impression of the green island was that it was not green but brown; that it was positively brown with khaki. This is one of those experiences that cannot be confused with expectations; the sort of small thing that is seen but not foreseen in the verbal visions of books and newspapers. I knew, of course, that we had a garrison in Dublin, but I had no notion that it was so obvious all over Dublin. I had no notion that it had been considered necessary to occupy the country in such force, or with so much parade of force. And the first thought that flashed through my mind found words in the single sentence: “How useful these men would have been in the breach at St. Quentin.”

For I went to Dublin towards the end of 1918 and not long after those awful days which led up to the end of the war, and seemed more like the end of the world. There hung still in the imagination, as above a void of horror, that line that was the last chain of the world’s chivalry; and the memory of the day when it seemed that our name and our greatness and our glory went down before the annihilation from the north. Ireland is hardly to blame if she has never known how noble an England was in peril in that hour; or for what beyond any empire we were troubled, when, under a cloud of thick darkness, we almost felt her ancient foundations move upon the floor of the sea. But I, as an Englishman at least, knew it; and it was for England and not for Ireland that I felt this first impatience and tragic irony. I had always doubted the military policy that culminated in Irish conscription, and merely on military grounds. If any policy of the English could deserve to be called in the proverbial sense Irish, I think it was this one. It was wasting troops in Ireland because we wanted them in France. I had the same purely patriotic and even pugnacious sense of annoyance, mingling with my sense of pathos, in the sight of the devastation of the great Dublin street, which had been bombarded by the British troops during the Easter Rebellion. I was distressed that such a cannonade had ever been aimed at the Irish; but even more distressed that it had not been aimed at the Germans. The question of the necessity of the heavy attack, like the question of the necessity of the large army of occupation, is of course bound up with the history of the Easter Rebellion itself. That strange and dramatic event, which came quite as unexpectedly to Nationalist Ireland as to Unionist England, is no part of my own
experiences, and I will not dogmatise on so dark a problem. But I will say in passing that I suspect a certain misunderstanding of its very nature to be common on both sides. Everything seems to point to the paradox that the rebels needed the less to be conquered, because they were actually aiming at being conquered, rather than at being conquerors. In the moral sense they were certainly heroes, but I doubt if they expected to be conquering heroes. They desired to be in the Greek and literal sense martyrs; they wished not so much to win as to witness. They thought that nothing but their dead bodies could really prove that Ireland was not dead. How far this sublime and suicidal ideal was really useful in reviving national enthusiasm, it is for Irishmen to judge; I should have said that the enthusiasm was there anyhow. But if any such action is based on international hopes, as they affect England or a great part of America, it seems to me it is founded on a fallacy about the facts. I shall have occasion to note many English errors about the Irish; and this seems to me a very notable Irish error about the English. If we are often utterly mistaken about their mentality, they were quite equally mistaken about our mistake. And curiously enough, they failed through not knowing the one compliment that we had really always paid them. Their act presupposed that Irish courage needed proof; and it never did. I have heard all the most horrible nonsense talked against Ireland before the war; and I never heard Englishmen doubt Irish military valour. What they did doubt was Irish political sanity. It will be seen at once that the Easter action could only disprove the prejudice they hadn’t got; and actually confirmed the prejudice they had got. The charge against the Irishman was not a lack of boldness, but rather an excess of it. Men were right in thinking him brave, and they could not be more right. But they were wrong in thinking him mad, and they had an excellent opportunity to be more wrong. Then, when the attempt to fight against England developed by its own logic into a refusal to fight for England, men took away the number they first thought of; and were irritated into denying what they had originally never dreamed of doubting. In any case, this was, I think, the temper in which the minority of the true Sinn Feiners sought martyrdom. I for one will never sneer at such a motive; but it would hardly have amounted to so great a movement but for another force that happened to ally itself with them. It is for the sake of this that I have here begun with the Easter tragedy itself; for with the consideration of this we come to the paradox of Irish Labour.

Some of my remarks on the stability and even repose of a peasant society may seem exaggerated in the light of a Labour agitation that breaks out in Ireland as
elsewhere. But I have particular and even personal reasons for regarding that agitation as the exception that proves the rule. It was the background of the peasant landscape that made the Dublin strike the peculiar sort of drama that it was; and this operated in two ways: first, by isolating the industrial capitalist as something exceptional and almost fanatical; and second, by reinforcing the proletariat with a vague tradition of property. My own sympathies were all with Larkin and Connolly as against the late Mr. Murphy; but it is curious to note that even Mr. Murphy was quite a different kind of man from the Lord Something who is the head of a commercial combine in England. He was much more like some morbid prince of the fifteenth century, full of cold anger, not without perverted piety. But the first few words I heard about him in Ireland were full of that vast, vague fact which I have tried to put first among my impressions. I have called it the family; but it covers many cognate things: youth and old friendships, not to mention old quarrels. It might be more fully defined as a realism about origins. The first things I heard about Murphy were facts of his forgotten youth, or a youth that would in England have been forgotten. They were tales about friends of his poorer days, with whom he had set out to push some more or less sentimental vendetta against somebody. Suppose whenever we talked of Harrod’s Stores we heard first about the boyish day-dreams of Harrod. Suppose the mention of Bradshaw’s Railway Guide brought up tales of feud and first love in the early life of Mr. Bradshaw, or even of Mrs. Bradshaw. That is the atmosphere, to be felt rather than described, that a stranger in Ireland feels around him. English journalism and gossip, dealing with English business men, are often precise about the present and prophetic about the future, but seldom communicative about the past; et pour cause. They will tell us where the capitalist is going to, as to the House of Lords, or to Monte Carlo, or inferentially to heaven; but they say as little as possible about where he comes from. In Ireland a man carries the family mansion about with him like a snail; and his father’s ghost follows him like his shadow. Everything good and bad that could be said was said, not only about Murphy but about Murphys. An anecdote of the old Irish Parliament describes an orator as gracefully alluding to the presence of an opponent’s sister in the Ladies’ Gallery, by praying that wrath overtake the whole accursed generation “from the toothless old hag who is grinning in the gallery to the white-livered poltroon who is shivering on the floor.” The story is commonly told as suggesting the rather wild disunion of Irish parties; but it is quite as serious a suggestion of the union of Irish families.

As a matter of fact, the great Dublin Strike, a conflagration of which the
embers were still glowing at the time of my visit, involved another episode which illustrates once again this recurrent principle of the reality of the family in Ireland. Some English Socialists, it may be remembered, moved by an honourable pity for the poor families starving during the strike, made a proposal for taking the children away and feeding them properly in England. I should have thought the more natural course would have been to give money or food to the parents. But the philanthropists, being English and being Socialists, probably had a trust in what is called organisation and a distrust of what is called charity. It is supposed that charity makes a man dependent; though in fact charity makes him independent, as compared with the dreary dependence usually produced by organisation. Charity gives property, and therefore liberty. There is manifestly much more emancipation in giving a beggar a shilling to spend, than in sending an official after him to spend it for him. The Socialists, however, had placidly arranged for the deportation of all the poor children, when they found themselves, to their astonishment, confronted with the red–hot reality called the religion of Ireland. The priests and the families of the faithful organised themselves for a furious agitation, on the ground that the faith would be lost in foreign and heretical homes. They were not satisfied with the assurance, which some of the Socialists earnestly offered, that the faith would not be tampered with; and as a matter of clear thinking, I think they were quite right. Those who offer such a reassurance have never thought about what a religion is. They entertain the extraordinary idea that religion is a topic. They think religion is a thing like radishes, which can be avoided throughout a particular conversation with a particular person, whom the mention of a radish may convulse with anger or agony. But a religion is simply the world a man inhabits. In practice, a Socialist living in Liverpool would not know when he was, or was not tampering with the religion of a child born in Louth. If I were given the complete control of an infant Parsee (which is fortunately unlikely) I should not have the remotest notion of when I was most vitally reflecting on the Parsee system. But common sense, and a comprehension of the meaning of a coherent philosophy, would lead me to suspect that I was reflecting on it every other minute. But I mention the matter here, not in order to enter into any of these disputes, but to give yet another example of the way in which the essentially domestic organisation of Ireland will always rise in rebellion against any other organisation. There is something of a parable in the tales of the old evictions, in which the whole family was besieged and resisted together and the mothers emptied boiling kettles on the besiegers; for any official who interferes with them will certainly


get into hot water. We cannot separate mothers and children in that strange land; we can only return to some of our older historical methods, and massacre them together.

A small incident within my own short experience, however, illustrated the main point involved here; the sense of a peasant base, even of the proletarian attack. And this was exemplified not in any check to Labour, but rather in a success for Labour, in so far as the issue of a friendly and informal debate may be classed with its more solid successes. The business originally began with a sort of loose-jointed literary lecture which I gave in the Dublin Theatre, in connection with which I only mention two incidents in passing, because they both struck me as peculiarly native and national. One concerned only the title of my address, which was “Poetry and Property.” An educated English gentleman, who happened to speak to me before the meeting, said with the air of one who foresees that such jokes will be the death of him, “Well, I have simply given up puzzling about what you can possibly mean, by talking about poetry as something to do with property.” He probably regarded the combination of words as a mere alliterative fantasy, like Peacocks and Paddington, or Polygamy and Potatoes; if indeed he did not regard it as a mere combination of incompatible contrasts, like Popery and Protestants, or Patriotism and Politicians. On the same day an Irishman of similar social standing remarked quite carelessly, “I’ve just seen your subject for to–morrow. I suppose the Socialists won’t agree with you,” or words to that effect. The two terms told him at once, not about the lecture (which was literary if it was anything), but about the whole philosophy underlying the lecture; the whole of that philosophy which the lumbering elephant called by Mr. Shaw the Chester–Belloc laboriously toils to explain in England, under the ponderous title of Distributivism. As Mr. Hugh Law once said, equally truly, about our pitting of patriotism against imperialism, “What is a paradox in England is a commonplace in Ireland.” My actual monologue, however, dealt merely with the witness of poetry to a certain dignity in man’s sense of private possessions, which is certainly not either vulgar ostentation or vulgar greed. The French poet of the Pleiade remembers the slates on his own roof almost as if he could count them; and Mr. W. B. Yeats, in the very wildest vision of a loneliness remote and irresponsible, is careful to make it clear that he knows how many bean–rows make nine. Of course there were people of all parties in the theatre, wild Sinn Feiners and conventional Unionists, but they all listened to my remarks as naturally as they might have all listened to an equally incompetent lecture on Monkeys or on the Mountains of the Moon. There was
not a word of politics, least of all party politics, in that particular speech; it was concerned with a tradition in art, or at the most, in abstract ethics. But the one amusing thing which makes me recall the whole incident was this; that when I had finished, a stalwart, hearty, heavy sort of legal gentleman, a well-known Irish judge I understand, was kind enough to move a vote of thanks to me. And what amused me about him was this: that while I, who am a Radical in sympathy with the revolutionary legend, had delivered a mild essay on minor poets to a placid if bored audience, the judge, who was a pillar of the Castle and a Conservative sworn to law and order, proceeded with the utmost energy and joy to raise a riot. He taunted the Sinn Feiners and dared them to come out; he trailed his coat if ever a man trailed it in this world; he glorified England; not the Allies, but England; splendid England, sublime England (all in the broadest brogue), just, wise, and merciful England, and so on, flourishing what was not even the flag of his own country, and a thing that had not the remotest connection with the subject in hand, any more than the Great Wall of China. I need not say that the theatre was soon in a roar of protests and repartees; which I suppose was what he wanted. He was a jolly old gentleman; and I liked him. But what interested me about him was this; and it is of some importance in the understanding of his nationality. That sort of man exists in England; I know and like scores of him. Often he is a major; often a squire; sometimes a judge; very occasionally a dean. Such a man talks the most ridiculous reactionary nonsense in an apoplectic fashion over his own port wine; and occasionally in a somewhat gasping manner at an avowedly political meeting. But precisely what the English gentleman would not do, and the Irish gentleman did do, would be to make a scene on a non-political occasion; when all he had to do was to move a formal vote of thanks to a total stranger who was talking about Ithaca and Innisfree. An English Conservative would be less likely to do it than an English Radical. The same thing that makes him conventionally political would make him conventionally non-political. He would hate to make too serious a speech on too social an occasion, as he would hate to be in morning-dress when everybody else was in evening-dress. And whatever coat he wore he certainly would not trail it solely in order to make a disturbance, as did that jolly Irish judge. He taught me that the Irishman is never so Irish, as when he is English. He was very like some of the Sinn Feiners who shouted him down; and he would be pleased to know that he helped me to understand them with a greater sympathy.

I have wandered from the subject in speaking of this trifle, thinking it worth while to note the positive and provocative quality of all Irish opinion; but it was
my purpose only to mention this small dispute as leading up to another. I had some further talk about poetry and property with Mr. Yeats at the Dublin Arts Club; and here again I am tempted to irrelevant, but for me interesting matters. For I am conscious throughout of saying less than I could wish of a thousand things, my omission of which is not altogether thoughtless, far less thankless. There have been and will be better sketches than mine of all that attractive society, the paradox of an intelligentsia that is intelligent. I could write a great deal, not only about those I value as my own friends, like Katherine Tynan or Stephen Gwynn, but about men with whom my meeting was all too momentary; about the elvish energy conveyed by Mr. James Stephens; the social greatness of Dr. Gogarty, who was like a literary legend of the eighteenth century; of the unique universalism of A. E., who has something of the presence of William Morris, and a more transcendental type of the spiritual hospitality of Walt Whitman. But I am not in this rough sketch trying to tell Irishmen what they know already, but trying to tell Englishmen some of the large and simple things that they do not know. The large matter concerned here is Labour; and I have only paused upon the other points because they were the steps which accidentally led up to my first meeting with this great force. And it was none the less a fact in support of my argument, because it was something of a joke against myself.

On the occasion I have mentioned, a most exhilarating evening at the Arts Club, Mr. Yeats asked me to open a debate at the Abbey Theatre, defending property on its more purely political side. My opponent was one of the ablest of the leaders of Liberty Hall, the famous stronghold of Labour politics in Dublin, Mr. Johnson, an Englishman like myself, but one deservedly popular with the proletarian Irish. He made a most admirable speech, to which I mean no disparagement when I say that I think his personal popularity had even more weight than his personal eloquence. My own argument was confined to the particular value of small property as a weapon of militant democracy; and was based on the idea that the citizen resisting injustice could find no substitute for private property, for every other impersonal power, however democratic in theory, must be bureaucratic in form. I said, as a flippant figure of speech, that committing property to any officials, even guild officials, was like having to leave one’s legs in the cloakroom along with one’s stick or umbrella. The point is that a man may want his legs at any minute, to kick a man or to dance with a lady; and recovering them may be postponed by any hitch, from the loss of the ticket to the criminal flight of the official. So in a social crisis, such as a strike, a
man must be ready to act without officials who may hamper or betray him; and I asked whether many more strikes would not have been successful, if each striker had owned so much as a kitchen garden to help him to live. My opponent replied that he had always been in favour of such a reserve of proletarian property, but preferred it to be communal rather than individual; which seems to me to leave my argument where it was; for what is communal must be official, unless it is to be chaotic. Two minor jokes, somewhat at my expense, remain in my memory; I appear to have caused some amusement by cutting a pencil with a very large Spanish knife, which I value (as it happens) as the gift of an Irish priest who is a friend of mine, and which may therefore also be regarded as a symbolic weapon, a sort of sword of the spirit. Whether the audience thought I was about to amputate my own legs in illustration of my own metaphor, or that I was going to cut Mr. Johnson’s throat in fury at finding no reply to his arguments, I do not know. The other thing which struck me as funny was an excellent retort by Mr. Johnson himself, who had said something about the waste of property on guns, and who interrupted my remark that there would never be a good revolution without guns, by humorously calling out, “Treason.” As I told him afterwards, few scenes would be more artistic than that of an Englishman, sent over to recruit for the British army, being collared and given up to justice (or injustice) by a Pacifist from Liberty Hall. But all throughout the proceedings I was conscious, as I say, of a very real popular feeling supporting the mere personality of my opponent; as in the ovation he received before he spoke at all, or the applause given to a number of his topical asides, allusions which I could not always understand. After the meeting a distinguished Southern Unionist, who happens to own land outside Dublin, said to me, “Of course, Johnson has just had a huge success in his work here. Liberty Hall has just done something that has really never been done before in the whole Trade Union movement. He has really managed to start a Trade Union for agricultural labourers. I know, because I’ve had to meet their demands. You know how utterly impossible it has always been really to found a union of agricultural labourers in England.” I did know it; and I also knew why it had been possible to found one in Ireland. It had been possible for the very reason I had been urging all the evening; that behind the Irish proletariat there had been the tradition of an Irish peasantry. In their families, if not in themselves, there had been some memory of the personal love of the land. But it seemed to me an interesting irony that even my own defeat was an example of my own doctrine; and that the truth on my side was proved by the popularity of the other side. The agricultural guild was due to a wind of
freedom that came into that dark city from very distant fields; and the truth that even these rolling stones of homeless proletarianism had been so lately loosened from the very roots of the mountains.

In Ireland even the industrialism is not industrial. That is what I mean by saying that Irish Labour is the exception that proves the rule. That is why it does not contradict my former generalisation that our capitalist crisis is on the English side of the road. The Irish agricultural labourers can become guildsman because they would like to become peasants. They think of rich and poor in the manner that is as old as the world; the manner of Ahab and Naboth. It matters little in a peasant society whether Ahab takes the vineyard privately as Ahab or officially as King of Israel. It will matter as little in the long run, even in the other kind of society, whether Naboth has a wage to work in the vineyard, or a vote that is supposed in some way to affect the vineyard. What he desires to have is the vineyard; and not in apologetic cynicism or vulgar evasions that business is business, but in thunder, as from a secret throne comes the awful voice out of the vineyard; the voice of this manner of man in every age and nation: “The Lord forbid that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee.”
V

THE ENGLISHMAN IN IRELAND

WITH no desire to decorate my travels with too tall a traveller’s tale, I must record the fact that I found one point upon which all Irishmen were agreed. It was the fact that, for some reason or other, there had been a very hopeful beginning of Irish volunteering at the beginning of the war; and that, for some reason or other, this had failed in the course of the war. The reasons alleged differed widely with the moods of men; some had regarded the beginnings with hope and some with suspicion; some had lived to regard the failure with a bitter pleasure, and some with a generous pain. The different factions gave different explanations of why the thing had stopped; but they all agreed that it had begun. The Sinn Feiner said that the people soon found they had been lured into a Saxon trap, set for them by smooth, subservient Saxons like Mr. Devlin and Mr. Tim Healy. The Belfast citizen suggested that the Popish priest had terrorised the peasants when they tried to enlist, producing a thumbscrew from his pocket and a portable rack from his handbag. The Parliamentary Nationalist blamed both Sinn Fein and the persecution of Sinn Fein. The British Government officials, if they did not exactly blame themselves, at least blamed each other. The ordinary Southern Unionist (who played many parts of a more or less sensible sort, including that of a Home Ruler) generally agreed with the ordinary Nationalist that the Government’s recruiting methods had been as bad as its cause was good. But it is manifest that multitudes at the beginning of the war thought it really had a very good cause; and moreover a very good chance.

The extraordinary story of how that chance was lost may find mention on a later page. I will begin by touching on the first incident that befell me personally in connection with the same enterprise. I went to Ireland at the request of Irish friends who were working warmly for the Allied cause, and who conceived (I fear in far too flattering a spirit) that I might at least be useful as an Englishman who had always sympathised as warmly with the Irish cause. I am under no illusions that I should ever be efficient at such work in any case; and under the circumstances I had no great hopes of doing much, where men like Sir Horace Plunkett and Captain Stephen Gwynne, far more competent, more self-sacrificing, and more well-informed than I, could already do comparatively little. It was too late. A hundredth part of the brilliant constancy and tragic
labours of these men might easily, at the beginning of the war, have given us a
great Irish army. I need not explain the motives that made me do the little I could
do; they were the same that at that moment made millions of better men do
masses of better work. Physical accident prevented my being useful in France,
and a sort of psychological accident seemed to suggest that I might possibly be
useful in Ireland; but I did not see myself as a very serious figure in either field.
Nothing could be serious in such a case except perhaps a conviction; and at least
my conviction about the great war has never wavered by a hair. Delenda est—and
it is typical of the power of Berlin that one must break off for want of a Latin
name for it. Being an Englishman, I hoped primarily to help England; but not
being a congenital idiot, I did not primarily ask an Irishman to help England.
There was obviously something much more reasonable to ask him to do. I hope I
should in any case have done my best for my own country. But the cause was
more than any country; in a sense it was too good for any country. The Allies
were more right than they realised. Nay, they hardly had a right to be so right as
they were. The modern Babylon of capitalistic states was hardly worthy to go on
such a crusade against the heathen; as perhaps decadent Byzantium was hardly
worthy to defend the Cross against the Crescent. But we are glad that it did
defend the Cross against the Crescent. Nobody is sorry that Sobieski relieved
Vienna; nobody wishes that Alfred had not won in Wessex. The cause that
conquered is the only cause that survived. We see now that its enemy was not a
cause but a chaos; and that is what history will say of the strange and recent
boiling up of barbaric imperialism, a whirlpool whose hollow centre was Berlin.
This is where the extreme Irish were really wrong; perhaps really wrong for the
first time. I entirely sympathise with their being in revolt against the British
Government. I am in revolt in most ways against the British Government myself.
But politics are a fugitive thing in the face of history. Does anybody want to be
fixed for ever on the wrong side at the Battle of Marathon, through a quarrel
with some Archon whose very name is forgotten? Does anybody want to be
remembered as a friend of Attila, through a breach of friendship with Aetius? In
any case, it was with a profound conviction that if Prussia won, Europe must
perish, and that if Europe perished England and Ireland must perish together,
that I went to Dublin in those dark days of the last year of the war; and it so
happened that the first occasion when I was called upon for any expression of
opinion was at a very pleasant luncheon party given to the representatives of the
British Dominions, who were then on an official tour in the country inspecting
its conditions. What I said is of no importance except as leading up to later
events; but it may be noted that though I was speaking perhaps indirectly to Irishmen, I was speaking directly, if not to Englishmen, at least to men in the more English tradition of the majority of the Colonies. I was speaking, if not to Unionists, at least largely to Imperialists.

Now I have forgotten, I am happy to say, the particular speech that I made, but I can repeat the upshot of it here, not only as part of the argument, but as part of the story. The line I took generally in Ireland was an appeal to the Irish principle, yet the reverse of a mere approval of the Irish action, or inaction. It postulated that while the English had missed a great opportunity of justifying themselves to the Irish, the Irish had also missed a similar opportunity of justifying themselves to the English. But it specially emphasised this; that what had been lost was not primarily a justification against England, but a joke against England. I pointed out that an Irishman missing a joke against an Englishman was a tragedy, like a lost battle. And there was one thing, and one thing only, which had stopped the Irishman from laughing, and saved the Englishman from being laughable. The one and only thing that rescued England from ridicule was Sinn Fein. Or, at any rate, that element in Sinn Fein which was pro–German, or refused to be anti–German. Nothing imaginable under the stars except a pro–German Irishman could at that moment have saved the face of a (very recently) pro–German Englishman.

The reason for this is obvious enough. England in 1914 encountered or discovered a colossal crime of Prussianised Germany. But England could not discover the German crime without discovering the English blunder. The blunder was, of course, a perfectly plain historical fact; that England made Prussia. England was the historic, highly civilised western state, with Roman foundations and chivalric memories; Prussia was originally a petty and boorish principality used by England and Austria in the long struggle against the greatness of France. Now in that long struggle Ireland had always been on the side of France. She had only to go on being on the side of France, and the Latin tradition generally, to behold her own truth triumph over her own enemies. In a word, it was not a question of whether Ireland should become anti–German, but merely of whether she should continue to be anti–German. It was a question of whether she should suddenly become pro–German, at the moment when most other pro–Germans were discovering that she had been justified all along. But England, at the beginning of her last and most lamentable quarrel with Ireland, was by no means in so strong a controversial position. England was right; but she could only prove she was right by proving she was wrong. In one sense, and
with all respect to her right action in the matter, she had to be ridiculous in order to be right.

But the joke against the English was even more obvious and topical. And as mine was only meant for a light speech after a friendly lunch, I took the joke in its lightest and most fanciful form, and touched chiefly on the fantastic theory of the Teuton as the master of the Celt. For the supreme joke was this: that the Englishman has not only boasted of being an Englishman; he has actually boasted of being a German. As the modern mind began to doubt the superiority of Calvinism to Catholicism, all English books, papers, and speeches were filled more and more with a Teutonism which substituted a racial for a religious superiority. It was felt to be a more modern and even a more progressive principle of distinction, to insist on ethnology rather than theology; for ethnology was supposed to be a science. Unionism was simply founded on Teutonism. Hence the ordinary honest, patriotic Unionist was in a highly humorous fix, when he had suddenly to begin denouncing Teutonism as mere terrorism. If all superiority belonged to the Teuton, the supreme superiority must clearly belong to the most Teutonic Teuton. If I claim the right to kick Mr. Bernard Shaw on the specific ground that I am fatter than he is, it is obvious that I look rather a fool if I am suddenly kicked by somebody who is fatter still. When the earth shakes under the advancing form of one coming against me out of the east who is fatter than I (for I called upon the Irish imagination to embrace so monstrous a vision), it is clear that whatever my relations to the rest of the world, in my relations to Mr. Bernard Shaw I am rather at a disadvantage. Mr. Shaw, at any rate, is rather in a position to make game of me; of which it is not inconceivable that he might avail himself. I might have accumulated a vast mass of learned sophistries and journalistic catchwords, which had always seemed to me to justify the connection between waxing fat and kicking. I might have proved from history that the leaders had always been fat men, like William the Conqueror, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Charles Fox. I might have proved from physiology that fatness is a proof of the power of organic assimilation and digestion; or from comparative zoology that the elephant is the wisest of the beasts. In short, I might be able to adduce many arguments in favour of my position. Only, unfortunately, they would now all become arguments against my position. Everything I had ever urged against my old enemy could be urged much more forcibly against me by my new enemy. And my position touching the great adipose theory would be exactly like England’s position touching the equally sensible Teutonic theory. If Teutonism was creative culture, then on our own
showing the German was better than the Englishman. If Teutonism was barbarism, then on our own showing the Englishman was more barbaric than the Irishman. The real answer, of course, is that we were not Teutons but only the dupes of Teutonism; but some were so wholly duped that they would do anything rather than own themselves dupes. These unfortunates, while they are already ashamed of being Teutons, are still proud of not being Celts.

There is only one thing that could save my dignity in such an undignified fix as I have fancied here. It is that Mr. Bernard Shaw himself should come to my rescue. It is that Mr. Bernard Shaw himself should declare in favour of the corpulent conqueror from the east; that he should take seriously all the fads and fallacies of that fat–headed superman. That, and that alone, would ensure all my own fads and fallacies being not only forgotten but forgiven. There is present to my imagination, I regret to say, a wild possibility that this is what Mr. Bernard Shaw might really do. Anyhow, this is what a certain number of his countrymen really did. It will be apparent, I think, from these pages that I do not believe in the stage Irishman. I am under no delusion that the Irishman is soft–headed and sentimental, or even illogical and inconsequent. Nine times out of ten, the Irishman is not only more clear–headed, but even more cool–headed than the Englishman. But I think it is true, as Mr. Max Beerbohm once suggested to me in connection with Mr. Shaw himself, that there is a residual perversity in the Irishman, which comes after and not before the analysis of a question. There is at the last moment a cold impatience in the intellect, an irony which returns on itself and rends itself; the subtlety of a suicide. However this may be, some of the lean men, instead of making a fool of the fat man, did begin almost to make a hero of the fatter man; to admire his vast curves as almost cosmic lines of development. I have seen Irish–American pamphlets which took quite seriously (or, I prefer to think, pretended to take quite seriously) the ridiculous romance about the Teutonic tribes having revived and refreshed civilisation after the fall of the Roman Empire. They revived civilisation very much as they restored Louvain or reconstructed the Lusitania. It was a romance which the English for a short time adopted as a convenience, but from which the Irish have continually suffered as from a curse. It was a suicidal perversity that they themselves, in their turn, should perpetuate their permanent curse as a temporary convenience. That was the worst error of the Irish, or of some of the best of the Irish. That is why the Easter Rising was really a black and insane blunder. It was not because it involved the Irish in a military defeat; it was because it lost the Irish a great controversial victory. The rebel deliberately let the tyrant out of a trap; out of the
grinning jaws of the gigantic trap of a joke.

Many of the most extreme Nationalists knew this well; it was what Kettle probably meant when he suggested an Anglo–Irish history called “The Two Fools”; and of course I do not mean that. I said all this in my very casual and rambling speech. But it was based on this idea, that men had missed the joke against England, and that now unfortunately the joke was rather against Ireland. It was Ireland that was now missing a great historical opportunity for lack of humour and imagination, as England had missed it a moment before. If the Irish would laugh at the English and help the English, they would win all along the line. In the real history of the German problem, they would inherit all the advantages of having been right from the first. It was now not so much a question of Ireland consenting to follow England’s lead as of England being obliged to follow Ireland’s lead. These are the principles, which I thought, and still think, the only possible principles to form the basis of a recruiting appeal in Ireland. But on the particular occasion in question I naturally took the matter much more lightly; hoping that the two jokes might, as it were, cancel out, and leave the two countries quits and in a better humour. And I devoted nearly all my remarks to testifying that the English had really, in the mass, shed the cruder Teutonism that had excused the cruelties of the past. I said that Englishmen were anything but proud of the past government of Ireland; that the mass of men of all parties were far more modest and humane in their view of Ireland than most Irishmen seem to suppose. And I ended with words which I only quote here from memory, because they happen to be the text of the curious incident which followed: “This is no place for us to boast. We stand here in the valley of our humiliation, where the flag we love has done very little that was not evil; and where its victories have been far more disastrous than defeats;” and I concluded with some general expression of the hope (which I still entertain) that two lands so much loved, by those who know them best, are not meant to hate each other for ever.

A day or two afterwards a distinguished historian who is a professor at Trinity College, Mr. Alison Phillips, wrote an indignant letter to the Irish Times. He announced that he was not in the valley of humiliation; and warmly contradicted the report that he was, as he expressed it, “sitting in sackcloth and ashes.” He remarked, if I remember right, that I was middle–class, which is profoundly true; and he generally resented my suggestions as a shameful attack upon my fellow Englishmen. This both amused and puzzled me; for of course I had not been attacking Englishmen, but defending them; I had merely been assuring the Irish
that the English were not so black, or so red, as they were painted in the vision of “England’s cruel red.” I had not said there what I have said here, about the anomaly and absurdity of England in Ireland; I had only said that Ireland had suffered rather from the Teutonic theory than the English temper; and that the English temper, experienced at close quarters, was really quite ready for a reconciliation with Ireland. Nor indeed did Mr. Alison Phillips really complain especially of my denouncing the English, but rather of my way of defending them. He did not so much mind being charged with the vice of arrogance. What he could not bear was being charged with the virtue of humility. What worried him was not so much the supposition of our doing wrong, as that anybody should conceive it possible that we were sorry for doing wrong. After all, he probably reasoned, it may not be easy for an eminent historical scholar actually to deny that certain tortures have taken place, or certain perjuries been proved; but there is really no reason why he should admit that the memory of using torture or perjury has so morbid an effect on the mind. Therefore he naturally desired to correct any impression that might arise, to the effect that he had been seen in the valley of humiliation, like a man called Christian.

But there was one fancy that lingered in the mind over and above the fun of the thing; and threw a sort of random ray of conjecture upon all that long international misunderstanding which it is so hard to understand. Was it possible, I thought, that this had happened before, and that I was caught in the treadmill of recurrence? It may be that whenever, throughout the centuries, a roughly representative and fairly good–humoured Englishman has spoken to the Irish as thousands of such Englishmen feel about them, some other Englishman on the spot has hastened to explain that the English are not going in for sackcloth and ashes, but only for phylacteries and the blowing of their own trumpets before them. Perhaps whenever one Englishman said that the English were not so black as they were painted in the past, another Englishman always rushed forward to prove that the English were not so white as they were painted on the present occasion. And after all it was only Englishman against Englishman, one word against another; and there were many superiorities on the side which refused to believe in English sympathy or self–criticism. And very few of the Irish, I fear, understood the simple fact of the matter, or the real spiritual excuses of the party thus praising spiritual pride. Few understood that I represented large numbers of amiable Englishmen in England, while Mr. Phillips necessarily represented a small number of naturally irritable Englishmen in Ireland. Few, I fancy, sympathised with him so much as I do; for I know very well that he was
not merely feeling as an Englishman, but as an exile.
VI

THE MISTAKE OF ENGLAND

I MET one hearty Unionist, not to say Coercionist in Ireland, in such a manner as to talk to him at some length; one quite genial and genuine Irish gentleman, who was solidly on the side of the system of British government in Ireland. This gentleman had been shot through the body by the British troops in their efforts to suppress the Easter Rebellion. The matter just missed being tragic; but since it did, I cannot help feeling it as slightly comic. He assured me with great earnestness that the rebels had been guilty of the most calculated cruelties; and that they must have done their bloody deeds in the coldest blood. But since he is himself a solid and (I am happy to say) a living demonstration that the firing even on his own side must have been rather wild, I am inclined to give the benefit of the doubt also to the less elaborately educated marksmen. When disciplined troops destroy people so much at random, it would seem unreasonable to deny that rioters may possibly have been riotous. I hardly think he was, or even professed to be, a person of judicial impartiality; and it is entirely to his honour that he was, on principle, so much more indignant with the rioters who did not shoot him than with the other rioters who did. But I venture to introduce him here not so much as an individual as an allegory. The incident seems to me to set forth, in a pointed, lucid, and picturesque form, exactly what the British military government really succeeded in doing in Ireland. It succeeded in half–killing its friends, and affording an intelligent but somewhat inhumane amusement to all its enemies. The fire–eater held his fire–arm in so contorted a posture as to give the wondering spectator a simple impression of suicide.

Let it be understood that I speak here, not of tyranny thwarting Irish desires, but solely of our own stupidity in thwarting our own desires. I shall discuss elsewhere the alleged presence or absence of practical oppression in Ireland; here I am only continuing from the last chapter my experiences of the recruiting campaign. I am concerned now, as I was concerned then, with the simple business matter of getting a big levy of soldiers from Ireland. I think it was Sir Francis Vane, one of the few really valuable public servants in the matter (I need not say he was dismissed for having been proved right), who said that the mere sight of some representative Belgian priests and nuns might have produced
something like a crusade. The matter seems to have been mostly left to elderly English landlords; and it would be cruel to record their adventures. It will be enough that I found, for a positive fact, that these unhappy gentlemen had displayed throughout Ireland a poster consisting only of the Union Jack and the appeal, “Is not this your flag? Come and fight for it!” It faintly recalls something we all learnt in the Latin grammar about questions that expect the answer no. These remarkable recruiting-sergeants did not realise, I suppose, what an extraordinary thing this was, not merely in Irish opinion, but generally in international opinion. Over a great part of the globe, it would sound like a story that the Turks had placarded Armenia with the Crescent of Islam, and asked all the Christians who were not yet massacred whether they did not love the flag. I really do not believe that the Turks would be so stupid as to do it. Of course it may be said that such an impression or association is mere slander and sedition, that there is no reason to be tender to such reasonable emotions at all, that men ought to do their duty to that flag whatever is put upon that poster; in short, that it is the duty of an Irishman to be a patriotic Englishman, or whatever it is that he is expected to be. But this view, however logical and clear, can only be used logically and clearly as an argument for conscription. It is simply muddle-headed to apply it to any appeal for volunteers anywhere, in Ireland or England. The whole object of a recruiting poster, or any poster, is to be attractive; it is picked out in words or colours to be picturesquely and pointedly attractive. If it lowers you to make an attractive offer, do not make it; but do not deliberately make it, and deliberately make it repulsive. If a certain medicine is so mortally necessary and so mortally nasty, that it must be forced on everybody by the policeman, call the policeman. But do not call an advertisement agent to push it like a patent medicine, solely by means of “publicity” and “suggestion,” and then confine him strictly to telling the public how nasty it is.

But the British blunder in Ireland was a much deeper and more destructive thing. It can be summed up in one sentence; that whether or no we were as black as we were painted, we actually painted ourselves much blacker than we were. Bad as we were, we managed to look much worse than we were. In a horrible unconsciousness we re-enacted history through sheer ignorance of history. We were foolish enough to dress up, and to play up, to the part of a villain in a very old tragedy. We clothed ourselves almost carelessly in fire and sword; and if the fire had been literally stage-fire or the sword a wooden sword, the merely artistic blunder would have been quite as bad. For instance, I soon came on the traces of a quarrel about some silly veto in the schools, against Irish children
wearing green rosettes. Anybody with a streak of historical imagination would have avoided a quarrel in that particular case about that particular colour. It is touching the talisman, it is naming the name, it is striking the note of another relation in which we were in the wrong, to the confusion of a new relation in which we were in the right. Anybody of common sense, considering any other case, can see the almost magic force of these material coincidences. If the English armies in France in 1914 considered themselves justified for some reason in executing some Frenchwoman, they would perhaps be indiscreet if they killed her (however logically) tied to a stake in the market-place of Rouen. If the people of Paris rose in the most righteous revolt against the most corrupt conspiracy of some group of the wealthy French Protestants, I should strongly advise them not to fix the date for the vigil of St. Bartholomew, or to go to work with white scarfs tied round their arms. Many of us hope to see a Jewish commonwealth reconstituted in Palestine; and we could easily imagine some quarrel in which the government of Jerusalem was impelled to punish some Greek or Latin pilgrim or monk. The Jews might even be right in the quarrel and the Christian wrong. But it may be hinted that the Jews would be ill-advised if they actually crowned him with thorns, and killed him on a hill just outside Jerusalem. Now we must know by this time, or the sooner we know it the better, that the whole mind of that European society which we have helped to save, and in which we have henceforth a part right of control, regards the Anglo-Irish story as one of these black and white stories in a history book. It sees the tragedy of Ireland as simply and clearly as the tragedy of Christ or Joan of Arc. There may have been more to be said on the coercive side than the culture of the Continent understands. So there was a great deal more than is usually admitted, to be said on the side of the patriotic democracy which condemned Socrates; and a very great deal to be said on the side of the imperial aristocracy which would have crushed Washington. But these disputes will not take Socrates from his niche among the pagan saints, or Washington from his pedestal among the republican heroes. After a certain testing time, substantial justice is always done to the men who stood in some unmistakable manner for liberty and light, against contemporary caprice and fashionable force and brutality. In this intellectual sense, in the only competent intellectual courts, there is already justice to Ireland. In the wide daylight of this world-wide fact, we or our representatives must get into a quarrel with children, of all people, and about the colour green, of all things in the world. It is an exact working model of the mistake I mean. It is the more brutal because it is not strictly cruel; and yet instantly revives the
memories of cruelty. There need be nothing wrong with it in the abstract, or in a less tragic atmosphere where the symbols were not talismans. A schoolmaster in the prosperous and enlightened town of Eatanswill might not unpardonably protest against the school–children parading in class the Buff and Blue favours of Mr. Simpkin and Mr. Slumkey. But who but a madman would not see that to say that word, or make that sign, in Ireland, was like giving a signal for keening, and the lament over lost justice that is lifted in the burden of the noblest of national songs; that to point to that rag of that colour was to bring back all the responsibilities and realities of that reign of terror when we were, quite literally, hanging men and women too for wearing of the green? We were not literally hanging these children. As a matter of mere utility, we should have been more sensible if we had been.

But the same fact took an even more fantastic form. We not only dressed up as our ancestors, but we actually dressed up as our enemies. I need hardly state my own conviction that the Pacifist trick of lumping the abuses of one side along with the abominations of the other, was a shallow pedantry come of sheer ignorance of the history of Europe and the barbarians. It was quite false that the English evil was exactly the same as the German. It was quite false; but the English in Ireland laboured long and devotedly to prove it was quite true. They were not content with borrowing old uniforms from the Hessians of 1798, they borrowed the newest and neatest uniforms from the Prussians of 1914. I will give only one story that I was told, out of many, to show what I mean. There was a sort of village musical festival at a place called Cullen in County Cork, at which there were naturally national songs and very possibly national speeches. That there was a sort of social atmosphere, which its critics would call Sinn Fein, is exceedingly likely; for that now exists all over Ireland, and especially that part of Ireland. If we wish to prevent it being expressed at all, we must not only forbid all public meetings, but all private meetings, and even the meeting of husband and wife in their own house. Still there might have been a case, on coercionist lines, for forbidding this public meeting. There might be a case, on coercionist lines, for imprisoning all the people who attended it; or a still clearer case, on those lines, for imprisoning all the people in Ireland. But the coercionist authorities did not merely forbid the meeting; which would mean something. They did not arrest the people at the meeting; which would mean something. They did not blow the whole meeting to hell with big guns; which would also mean something. What they did was this. They caused a military aeroplane to jerk itself backwards and forwards in a staggering fashion just over the heads of
the people, making as much noise as possible to drown the music, and dropping flare rockets and fire in various somewhat dangerous forms in the neighbourhood of any men, women, and children who happened to be listening to the music. The reader will note with what exquisite art, and fine fastidious selection, the strategist has here contrived to look as Prussian as possible without securing any of the advantages of Prussianism. There was a certain amount of real danger to the children; but not very much. There was about as much as there generally has been when boys have been flogged for playing the fool with fireworks. But by laboriously climbing hundreds of feet into the air, in an enormous military machine, these ingenious people managed to make themselves a meteor in heaven and a spectacle to all the earth; the English raining fire on women and children just as the Germans did. I repeat that they did not actually destroy children, though they did endanger them; for playing with fireworks is always playing with fire. And I repeat that, as a mere matter of business, it would have been more sensible if they had destroyed children. That would at least have had the human meaning that has run through a hundred massacres: “wolf–cubs who would grow into wolves.” It might at least have the execrable excuse of decreasing the number of rebels. What they did would quite certainly increase it.

An artless Member of Parliament, whose name I forget, attempted an apology for this half–witted performance. He interposed in the Unionist interests, when the Nationalists were asking questions about the matter; and said with much heat, “May I ask whether honest and loyal subjects have anything to fear from British aeroplanes?” I have often wondered what he meant. It seems possible that he was in the mood of that mediaeval fanatic who cried, “God will know his own”; and that he himself would fling any sort of flaming bolts about anywhere, believing that they would always be miraculously directed towards the heads harbouring, at that moment, the most incorrect political opinions. Or perhaps he meant that loyal subjects are so superbly loyal that they do not mind being accidentally burnt alive, so long as they are assured that the fire was dropped on them by government officials out of a government apparatus. But my purpose here is not to fathom such a mystery, but merely to fix the dominant fact of the whole situation; that the government copied the theatricality of Potsdam even more than the tyranny of Potsdam. In that incident, the English laboriously reproduced all the artificial accessories of the most notorious crimes of Germany; the flying men, the flame, the selection of a mixed crowd, the selection of a popular festival. They had every part of it, except the point of it. It
was as if the whole British army in Ireland had dressed up in spiked helmets and spectacles, merely that they might look like Prussians. It was even more as if a man had walked across Ireland on three gigantic stilts, taller than the trees and visible from the most distant village, solely that he might look like one of those unhuman monsters from Mars, striding about on their iron tripods in the great nightmare of Mr. Wells. Such was our educational efficiency, that, before the end, multitudes of simple Irish people really had about the English invasion the same particular psychological reaction that multitudes of simple English people had about the German invasion. I mean that it seemed to come not only from outside the nation, but from outside the world. It was unearthly in the strict sense in which a comet is unearthly. It was the more appallingly alien for coming close; it was the more outlandish the farther it went inland. These Christian peasants have seen coming westward out of England what we saw coming westward out of Germany. They saw science in arms; which turns the very heavens into hells.

I have purposely put these fragmentary and secondary impressions before any general survey of Anglo–Irish policy in the war. I do so, first, because I think a record of the real things, that seemed to bulk biggest to any real observer at any real moment, is often more useful than the setting forth of theories he may have made up before he saw any realities at all. But I do it in the second place because the more general summaries of our statesmanship, or lack of statesmanship, are so much more likely to be found elsewhere. But if we wish to comprehend the queer cross–purposes, it will be well to keep always in mind a historical fact I have mentioned already; the reality of the old Franco–Irish Entente. It lingers alive in Ireland; and especially the most Irish parts of Ireland. In the fiercely Fenian city of Cork, walking round the Young Ireland monument that seems to give revolt the majesty of an institution, a man told me that German bands had been hooted and pelted in those streets out of an indignant memory of 1870. And an eminent scholar in the same town, referring to the events of the same “terrible year,” said to me: “In 1870 Ireland sympathised with France and England with Germany; and as usual, Ireland was right!” But if they were right when we were wrong, they only began to be wrong when we were right. A sort of play or parable might be written to show that this apparent paradox is a very genuine piece of human psychology. Suppose there are two partners named John and James; that James has always been urging the establishment of a branch of the business in Paris. Long ago John quarrelled with this furiously as a foreign fad; but he has since forgotten all about it; for the letters from James bored him so
much that he has not opened any of them for years. One fine day John, finding himself in Paris, conceives the original idea of a Paris branch; but he is conscious in a confused way of having quarrelled with his partner, and vaguely feels that his partner would be an obstacle to anything. John remembers that James was always cantankerous, and forgets that he was cantankerous in favour of this project, and not against it. John therefore sends James a telegram, of a brevity amounting to brutality, simply telling him to come in with no nonsense about it; and when he has no instant reply, sends a solicitor’s letter to be followed by a writ. How James will take it depends very much on James. How he will hail this happy confirmation of his own early opinions will depend on whether James is an unusually patient and charitable person. And James is not. He is unfortunately the very man, of all men in the world, to drop his own original agreement and everything else into the black abyss of disdain, which now divides him from the man who has the impudence to agree with him. He is the very man to say he will have nothing to do with his own original notion, because it is now the belated notion of a fool. Such a character could easily be analysed in any good novel; such conduct would readily be believed in any good play. It could not be believed when it happened in real life. And it did happen in real life; the Paris project was the sense of the safety of Paris as the pivot of human history; the abrupt telegram was the recruiting campaign, and the writ was conscription.

As to what Irish conscription was, or rather would have been, I cannot understand any visitor in Ireland having the faintest doubt, unless (as is often the case) his tour was so carefully planned as to permit him to visit everything in Ireland except the Irish. Irish conscription was a piece of rank raving madness which was fortunately stopped, with other bad things, by the blow of Foch at the second battle of the Marne. It could not possibly produce at the last moment allies on whom we could depend; and it would have lost us the whole sympathy of the allies on whom we at that moment depended. I do not mean that American soldiers would have mutinied; though Irish soldiers might have done so; I mean something much worse. I mean that the whole mood of America would have altered, and there would have been some kind of compromise with German tyranny, in sheer disgust at a long exhibition of English tyranny. Things would have happened in Ireland, week after week, and month after month, such as the modern imagination has not seen except where Prussia has established hell. We should have butchered women and children; they would have made us butcher them. We should have killed priests, and probably the best priests. It could not
be better stated than in the words of an Irishman, as he stood with me in a high terraced garden outside Dublin, looking towards that unhappy city, who shook his head and said sadly, “They will shoot the wrong bishop.”

Of the meaning of this huge furnace of defiance I shall write when I write of the national idea itself. I am concerned here not for their nation but for mine; and especially with its peril from Prussia and its help from America. And it is simply a question of considering what these real things are really like. Remember that the American Republic is practically founded on the fact, or fancy, that England is a tyrant. Remember that it was being ceaselessly swept with new waves of immigrant Irishry telling tales (too many of them true, though not all,) of the particular cases in which England had been a tyrant. It would be hard to find a parallel to explain to Englishmen the effect of awakening traditions so truly American by a prolonged display of England as the tyrant in Ireland. A faint approximation might be found if we imagined the survivors of Victorian England, steeped in the tradition of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, watching the American troops march through London. Suppose they noted that the negro troops alone had to march in chains, with a white man in a broad-brimmed hat walking beside them and flourishing a whip. Scenes far worse than that would have followed Irish conscription; but the only purpose of this chapter is to show that scenes quite as stupid marked every stage of Irish recruitment. For it certainly would not have reassured the traditional sympathisers with Uncle Tom to be told that the chains were only a part of the uniform, or that the niggers moved not at the touch of the whip, but only at the crack of it.

Such was our practical policy; and the single and sufficient comment on it can be found in a horrible whisper which can scarcely now be stilled. It is said, with a dreadful plausibility, that the Unionists were deliberately trying to prevent a large Irish recruitment, which would certainly have meant reconciliation and reform. In plain words, it is said, that they were willing to be traitors to England, if they could only still be tyrants to Ireland. Only too many facts can be made to fit in with this; but for me it is still too hideous to be easily believed. But whatever our motives in doing it, there is simply no doubt whatever about what we did, in this matter of the Pro–Germans in Ireland. We did not crush the Pro–Germans; we did not convert them or coerce them; or educate them or exterminate them or massacre them. We manufactured them; we turned them out patiently, steadily, and systematically as if from a factory; we made them exactly as we made munitions. It needed no little social science to produce in any kind of Irishman, any kind of sympathy with Prussia; but we were equal to the task.
What concerns me here, however, is that we were busy at the same work among the Irish–Americans, and ultimately among all the Americans. And that would have meant, as I have already noted, the thing that I always feared; the dilution of the policy of the Allies. Anything that looked like a prolonged Prussianism in Ireland would have meant a compromise; that is, a perpetuated Prussianism in Europe. I know that some who agree with me in other matters disagree with me in this; but I should indeed be ashamed if, having to say so often where I think my country was wrong, I did not say as plainly where I think she was right. The notion of a compromise was founded on the coincidence of recent national wars which were only about the terms of peace, not about the type of civilisation. But there do recur, at longer historic intervals, universal wars of religion, not concerned with what one nation shall do, but with what all nations shall be. They recommence until they are finished, in things like the fall of Carthage or the rout of Attila. It is quite true that history is for the most part a plain road, which the tribes of men must travel side by side, bargaining at the same markets or worshipping at the same shrines, fighting and making friends again; and wisely making friends quickly. But we need only see the road stretch but a little farther, from a hill but a little higher, to see that sooner or later it comes always to another place, where stands a winged image of Victory; and the ways divide.
THE MISTAKE OF IRELAND

THERE is one phrase which certain Irishmen sometimes use in conversation, which indicates the real mistake that they sometimes make in controversy. When the more bitter sort of Irishman is at last convinced of the existence of the less bitter sort of Englishman, who does realise that he ought not to rule a Christian people by alternations of broken heads and broken promises, the Irishman has sometimes a way of saying, “I am sure you must have Irish blood in your veins.” Several people told me so when I denounced Irish conscription, a thing ruinous to the whole cause of the Alliance. Some told me so even when I re-called the vile story of ’98; a thing damned by the whole opinion of the world. I assured them in vain that I did not need to have Irish blood in my veins in order to object to having Irish blood on my hands. So far as I know, I have not one single drop of Irish blood in my veins. I have some Scottish blood; and some which, judging merely by a name in the family, must once have been French blood. But the determining part of it is purely English, and I believe East Anglian, at the flattest and farthest extreme from the Celtic fringe. But I am here concerned, not with whether it is true, but with why they should want to prove it is true. One would think they would want to prove precisely the opposite. Even if they were exaggerative and unscrupulous, they should surely seek to show that an Englishman was forced to condemn England, rather than that an Irishman was inclined to support Ireland. As it is, they are labouring to destroy the impartiality and even the independence of their own witness. It does not support, but rather surrenders Irish rights, to say that only the Irish can see that there are Irish wrongs. It is confessing that Ireland is a Celtic dream and delusion, a cloud of sunset mistaken for an island. It is admitting that such a nation is only a notion, and a nonsensical notion; but in reality it is this notion about Irish blood that is nonsensical. Ireland is not an illusion; and her wrongs are not the subjective fancies of the Irish. Irishmen did not dream that they were evicted out of house and home by the ruthless application of a land law no man now dares to defend. It was not a nightmare that dragged them from their beds; nor were they sleepwalkers when they wandered as far as America. Skeffington did not have a delusion that he was being shot for keeping the peace; the shooting was objective, as the Prussian professors would say; as objective as the Prussian
militarists could desire. The delusions were admittedly peculiar to the British official whom the British Government selected to direct operations on so important an occasion. I could understand it if the Imperialists took refuge in the Celtic cloud, conceived Colthurst as full of a mystic frenzy like the chieftain who fought with the sea, pleaded that Piggott was a poet whose pen ran away with him, or that Sergeant Sheridan romanced like a real stage Irishman. I could understand it if they declared that it was merely in the elvish ecstasy described by Mr. Yeats that Sir Edward Carson, that famous First Lord of the Admiralty, rode on the top of the dishevelled wave; and Mr. Walter Long, that great Agricultural Minister, danced upon the mountains like a flame. It is far more absurd to suggest that no man can see the green flag unless he has some green in his eye. In truth this association between an Irish sympathy and an Irish ancestry, is just as insulting as the old jibe of Buckingham, about an Irish interest or an Irish understanding.

It may seem fanciful to say of the Irish nationalists that they are sometimes too Irish to be national. Yet this is really the case in those who would turn nationality from a sanctity to a secret. That is, they are turning it from something which every one else ought to respect, to something which no one else can understand. Nationalism is a nobler thing even than patriotism; for nationalism appeals to a law of nations; it implies that a nation is a normal thing, and therefore one of a number of normal things. It is impossible to have a nation without Christendom; as it is impossible to have a citizen without a city. Now normally speaking this is better understood in Ireland than in England; but the Irish have an opposite exaggeration and error; and tend in some cases to the cult of real insularity. In this sense it is true to say that the error is indicated in the very name of Sinn Fein. But I think it is even more encouraged, in a cloudier and therefore more perilous fashion, by much that is otherwise valuable in the cult of the Celts and the study of the old Irish language. It is a great mistake for a man to defend himself as a Celt when he might defend himself as an Irishman. For the former defence will turn on some tricky question of temperament, while the latter will turn on the central pivot of morals. Celticism, by itself, might lead to all the racial extravagances which have lately led more barbaric races a dance. Celts also might come to claim, not that their nation is a normal thing, but that their race is a unique thing. Celts also might end by arguing not for an equality founded on the respect for boundaries, but for an aristocracy founded on the ramification of blood. Celts also might come to pitting the prehistoric against the historic, the heathen against the Christian, and in that sense the barbaric against
the civilised. In that sense I confess I do not care about Celts; they are too like Teutons.

Now of course every one knows that there is practically no such danger of Celtic Imperialism. Mr. Lloyd George will not attempt to annex Brittany as a natural part of Britain. No Tories, however antiquated, will extend their empire in the name of the Buff and Blue of the Ancient Britons. Nor is there the least likelihood that the Irish will overrun Scotland on the plea of an Irish origin for the old name of the Scots; or that they will set up an Irish capital at Stratford–on–Avon merely because avon is the Celtic word for water. That is the sort of thing that Teutonic ethnologists do; but Celts are not quite so stupid as that, even when they are ethnologists. It may be suggested that this is because even prehistoric Celts seem to have been rather more civilised than historic Teutons. And indeed I have seen ornaments and utensils in the admirable Dublin museum, suggestive of a society of immense antiquity, and much more advanced in the arts of life than the Prussians were, only a few centuries ago. For instance, there was actually what appeared to be a safety razor. I doubt if the godlike Goths had much use for a razor; or if they had, if it was altogether safe. Nor am I so dull as not to be stirred to an imaginative sympathy with the instinct of modern Irish poetry to praise this primordial and mysterious order, even as a sort of pagan paradise; and that not as regarding a legend as a sort of lie, but a tradition as a sort of truth. It is but another hint of a suggestion, huge, yet hidden; that civilisation is older than barbarism; and that the further we go back into pagan origins, the nearer we come to the great Christian origin of the Fall. But whatever credit or sympathy be due to the cult of Celtic origins in its proper place, it is none of these things that really prevents Celticism from being a barbarous imperialism like Teutonism. The thing that prevents imperialism is nationalism. It was exactly because Germany was not a nation that it desired more and more to be an empire. For a patriot is a sort of lover, and a lover is a sort of artist; and the artist will always love a shape too much to wish it to grow shapeless, even in order to grow large. A group of Teutonic tribes will not care how many other tribes they destroy or absorb; and Celtic tribes when they were heathen may have acted, for all I know, in the same way. But the civilised Irish nation, a part and product of Christendom, has certainly no desire to be entangled with other tribes or to have its outlines blurred with great blots like Liverpool and Glasgow, as well as Belfast. In that sense it is far too self–conscious to be selfish. Its individuality may, as I shall suggest, make it too insular; it will not make it too imperial. This is a merit in nationalism too little
noted; that even what is called its narrowness is not merely a barrier to invasion, but a barrier to expansion. Therefore, with all respect to the prehistoric Celts, I feel more at home with the good if sometimes mad Christian gentleman of the Young Ireland movement, or even the Easter Rebellion. I should feel more safe with Meagher of the Sword than with the primitive Celt of the safety razor. The microscopic meanness of the Mid–Victorian English writers, when they wrote about Irish patriots, could see nothing but a very small joke in modern rebels thinking themselves worthy to take the titles of antique kings; but the only doubt I should have, if I had any, is whether the heathen kings were worthy of the Christian rebels. I am much more sure of the heroism of the modern Fenians than of the ancient ones.

Of the artistic side of the cult of the Celts I do not especially speak here. And indeed its importance, especially to the Irish, may easily be exaggerated. Mr. W. B. Yeats long ago dissociated himself from a merely racial theory of Irish poetry; and Mr. W. B. Yeats thinks as hard as he talks. I often entirely disagree with him; but I disagree far more with the people who find him a poetical opiate, where I always find him a logical stimulant. For the rest, Celticism in some aspects is largely a conspiracy for leading the Englishman a dance, if it be a fairy dance. I suspect that many names and announcements are printed in Gaelic, not because Irishmen can read them, but because Englishmen can’t. The other great modern mystic in Dublin, “A. E.,” entertained us first by telling an English lady present that she would never resist the Celtic atmosphere, struggle how she might, but would soon be wandering in the mountain mists with a fillet round her head; which fate had apparently overtaken the son or nephew of an Anglican bishop who had strayed into those parts. The English lady, whom I happen to know rather well, made the characteristic announcement that she would go to Paris when she felt it coming on. But it seemed to me that such drastic action was hardly necessary, and that there was comparatively little cause for alarm; seeing that the mountain mists certainly had not had that effect on the people who happen to live in the mountains. I knew that A. E. knew, even better than I did, that Irish peasants do not wander about in fillets, or indeed wander about at all, having plenty of much better work to do. And since the Celtic atmosphere had no perceptible effect on the Celts, I felt no alarm about its effect on the Saxons. But the only thing involved, by way of an effect on the Saxons, was a practical joke on the Saxons; which may, however, have lasted longer in the case of the bishop’s nephew than it did in mine. Anyhow, I continued to move about (like Atalanta in Calydon) with unchapleted hair, with unfilleted cheek; and
found a sufficient number of Irish people in the same condition to prevent me from feeling shy. In a word, all that sort of thing is simply Mr. Russell’s humour, especially his good humour, which is of a golden and godlike sort. And a man would be very much misled by the practical joke if he does not realise that the joker is a practical man. On the desk in front of him as he spoke were business papers of reports and statistics, much more concerned with fillets of veal than fillets of vision. That is the essential fact about all this side of such men in Ireland. We may think the Celtic ghost a turnip ghost; but we can only doubt the reality of the ghost; there is no doubt of the reality of the turnip.

But if the Celtic pose be a piece of the Celtic ornament, the spirit that produced it does also produce some more serious tendencies to the segregation of Ireland, one might almost say the secretion of Ireland.

In this sense, it is true that there is too much separatism in Ireland. I do not speak of separation from England; which, as I have said, happened long ago in the only serious sense, and is a condition to be assumed, not a conclusion to be avoided. Nor do I mean separation from a federation of free states unfortunately known as the British Empire; for that is a conclusion that could still be avoided with a little common sense and common honesty in our own politics. I mean separation from Europe, from the common Christian civilisation by whose law the nations live. I would be understood as speaking here of exceptions rather than the rule; for the rule is rather the other way. The Catholic religion, the most fundamental fact in Ireland, is itself a permanent communication with the Continent. So, as I have said, is the free peasantry which is so often the economic expression of the same faith. Mr. James Stephens, himself a spiritually detached man of genius, told me with great humour a story which is also at least a symbol. A Catholic priest, after a convivial conversation and plenty of good wine, said to him confidentially: “You ought to be a Catholic. You can be saved without being a Catholic; but you can’t be Irish without being a Catholic.”

Nevertheless, the exceptions are large enough to be dangers; and twice lately, I think, they have brought Ireland into danger. This is the age of minorities; of groups that rule rather than represent. And the two largest parties in Ireland, though more representative than most parties in England, were too much affected, I fancy, by the modern fashion, expressed in the world of fads by being Celtic rather than Catholic. They were just a little too insular to accept the old unconscious wave of Christendom; the Crusade. But the case was more extraordinary than that. They were even too insular to appreciate, not so much their own international needs, as their own international importance. It may seem
a strange paradox to say that both nationalist parties underrated Ireland as a nation. It may seem a more startling paradox to say that in this the most nationalist was the least national. Yet I think I can explain, however roughly, what I mean by saying that this is so.

It is primarily Sinn Fein, or the extreme national party, which thus relatively failed to realise that Ireland is a nation. At least it failed in nationalism exactly so far as it failed to intervene in the war of the nations against Prussian imperialism. For its argument involved, unconsciously, the proposition that Ireland is not a nation; that Ireland is a tribe or a settlement, or a chance sprinkling of aborigines. If the Irish were savages oppressed by the British Empire, they might well be indifferent to the fate of the British Empire; but as they were civilised men, they could not be indifferent to the fate of civilisation. The Kaffirs might conceivably be better off if the whole system of white colonisation, Boer and British, broke down and disappeared altogether. The Irish might sympathise with the Kaffirs; but they would not like to be classed with the Kaffirs. Hottentots might have a sort of Hottentot happiness if the last European city had fallen in ruins, or the last European had died in torments. But the Irish would never be Hottentots, even if they were Pro–Hottentots. In other words, if the Irish were what Cromwell thought they were, they might well confine their attention to Hell and Connaught; and have no sympathy to spare for France. But if the Irish are what Wolfe Tone thought they were, they must be interested in France, as he was interested in France. In short, if the Irish are barbarians, they need not trouble about other barbarians sacking the cities of the world; but if they are citizens, they must trouble about the cities that are sacked. This is the deep and real reason why their alienation from the Allied cause was a disaster for their own national cause. It was not because it gave fools a chance of complaining that they were Anti–English. It was because it gave much cleverer people the chance of complaining that they were Anti–European. I entirely agree that the alienation was chiefly the fault of the English Government; I even agree that it required an abnormal imaginative magnanimity for an Irishman to do his duty to Ireland, in spite of being so insolently told to do it. But it is none the less true that Ireland to–day would be ten thousand miles nearer her deliverance if the Irishman could have made that effort; if he had realised that the thing ought to be done, not because such rulers wanted it, but rather although they wanted it.

But the much more curious fact is this. There were any number of Irishmen, and those among the most Irish, who did realise this; who realised it with so sublime a sincerity as to fight for their own enemies against the world’s enemies;
and consent at once to be insulted by the English and killed by the Germans. The Redmonds and the old Nationalist party, if they have indeed failed, have the right to be reckoned among the most heroic of all the heroic failures of Ireland. If theirs is a lost cause, it is wholly worthy of a land where lost causes are never lost. But the old guard of Redmond did also in its time, I fancy, fall into the same particular and curious error; but in a more subtle way and on a seemingly remote subject. They also, whose motives like those of the Sinn Feiners were entirely noble, did in one sense fail to be national, in the sense of appreciating the international importance of a nation. In their case it was a matter of English and not European politics; and as their case was much more complicated, I speak with much less confidence about it. But I think there was a highly determining time in politics when certain Irishmen got on to the wrong side in English politics, as other Irishmen afterwards got on to the wrong side in European politics. And by the wrong side, in both cases, I not only mean the side that was not consistent with the truth, but the side that was not really congenial to the Irish. A man may act against the body, even the main body, of his nation; but if he acts against the soul of his nation, even to save it, he and his nation suffer.

I can best explain what I mean by reaffirming the reality which an English visitor really found in Irish politics, towards the end of the war. It may seem odd to say that the most hopeful fact I found, for Anglo–Irish relations, was the fury with which the Irish were all accusing the English of perjury and treason. Yet this was my solid and sincere impression; the happiest omen was the hatred aroused by the disappointment over Home Rule. For men are not furious unless they are disappointed of something they really want; and men are not disappointed except about something they were really ready to accept. If Ireland had been entirely in favour of entire separation, the loss of Home Rule would not be felt as a loss, but if anything as an escape. But it is felt bitterly and savagely as a loss; to that at least I can testify with entire certainty. I may or may not be right in the belief I build on it; but I believe it would still be felt as a gain; that Dominion Home Rule would in the long run satisfy Ireland. But it would satisfy her if it were given to her, not if it were promised to her. As it is, the Irish regard our government simply as a liar who has broken his word; I cannot express how big and black that simple idea bulks in the landscape and blocks up the road. And without professing to regard it as quite so simple, I regard it as substantially true. It is, upon any argument, an astounding thing the King, Lords, and Commons of a great nation should record on its statute–book that a law exists, and then illegally reverse it in answer to the pressure of private persons. It is, and
must be, for the people benefited by the law, an act of treason. The Irish were not wrong in thinking it an act of treason, even in the sense of treachery and trickery. Where they were wrong, I regret to say, was in talking of it as if it were the one supreme solitary example of such trickery; when the whole of our politics were full of such tricks. In short, the loss of justice for Ireland was simply a part of the loss of justice in England; the loss of all moral authority in government, the loss of the popularity of Parliament, the secret plutocracy which makes it easy to take a bribe or break a pledge, the corruption that can pass unpopular laws or promote discredited men. The lawgiver cannot enforce his law because, whether or no the law be popular, the lawgiver is wholly unpopular, and is perpetually passing wholly unpopular laws. Intrigue has been substituted for government; and the public man cannot appeal to the public because all the most important part of his policy is conducted in private. The modern politician conducts his public life in private. He sometimes condescends to make up for it by affecting to conduct his private life in public. He will put his baby or his birthday book into the illustrated papers; it is his dealings with the colossal millions of the cosmopolitan millionaires that he puts in his pocket or his private safe. We are allowed to know all about his dogs and cats; but not about those larger and more dangerous animals, his bulls and bears.

Now there was a moment when England had an opportunity of breaking down this Parliamentary evil, as Europe afterwards had an opportunity (which it fortunately took) of breaking down the Prussian evil. The corruption was common to both parties; but the chance of exposing it happened to occur under the rule of a Home Rule party; which the Nationalists supported solely for the sake of Home Rule. In the Marconi Case they consented to whitewash the tricks of Jew jobbers whom they must have despised; just as some of the Sinn Feiners afterwards consented to whitewash the wickedness of Prussian bullies whom they also must have despised. In both cases the motive was wholly disinterested and even idealistic. It was the practicality that was unpractical. I was one of a small group which protested against the hushing up of the Marconi affair, but we always did justice to the patriotic intentions of the Irish who allowed it. But we based our criticism of their strategy on the principle of falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus. The man who will cheat you about one thing will cheat you about another. The men who will lie to you about Marconi, will lie to you about Home Rule. The political conventions that allow of dealing in Marconis at one price for the party, and another price for oneself, are conventions that also allow of telling one story to Mr. John Redmond and another to Sir Edward Carson. The man
who will imply one state of things when talking at large in Parliament, and another state of things when put into a witness-box in court, is the same sort of man who will promise an Irish settlement in the hope that it may fail; and then withdraw it for fear it should succeed. Among the many muddle-headed modern attempts to coerce the Christian poor to the Moslem dogma about wine and beer, one was concerned with abuse by loafers or tipplers of the privilege of the Sunday traveller. It was suggested that the travellers’ claims were in every sense travellers’ tales. It was therefore proposed that the limit of three miles should be extended to six; as if it were any harder for a liar to say he had walked six miles than three. The politicians might be as ready to promise to walk the six miles to an Irish Republic as the three miles to an Irish Parliament. But Sinn Fein is mistaken in supposing that any change of theoretic claim meets the problem of corruption. Those who would break their word to Redmond would certainly break it to De Valera. We urged all these things on the Nationalists whose national cause we supported; we asked them to follow their larger popular instincts, break down a corrupt oligarchy, and let a real popular parliament in England give a real popular parliament to Ireland. With entirely honourable motives, they adhered to the narrower conception of their national duty. They sacrificed everything for Home Rule; even their own profoundly national emotion of contempt. For the sake of Home Rule, or the solemn promise of Home Rule, they kept such men in power; and for their reward they found that such men were still in power; and Home Rule was gone.

What I mean about the Nationalist Party, and what may be called its prophetic shadow of the Sinn Fein mistake, may well be symbolised in one of the noblest figures of that party or any party. An Irish poet, talking to me about the pointed diction of the Irish peasant, said he had recently rejoiced in the society of a drunken Kerry farmer, whose conversation was a litany of questions about everything in heaven and earth, each ending with a sort of chorus of “Will ye tell me that now?” And at the end of all he said abruptly, “Did ye know Tom Kettle?” and on my friend the poet assenting, the farmer said, as if in triumph, “And why are so many people alive that ought to be dead, and so many people dead that ought to be alive? Will ye tell me that now?” That is not unworthy of an old heroic poem, and therefore not unworthy of the hero and poet of whom it was spoken. “Patroclus died, who was a better man than you.” Thomas Michael Kettle was perhaps the greatest example of that greatness of spirit which was so ill rewarded on both sides of the channel and of the quarrel, which marked Redmond’s brother and so many of Redmond’s followers. He was a wit, a
scholar, an orator, a man ambitious in all the arts of peace; and he fell fighting
the barbarians because he was too good a European to use the barbarians against
England, as England a hundred years before had used the barbarians against
Ireland. There is nothing to be said of such things except what the drunken
farmer said, unless it be a verse from a familiar ballad on a very remote topic,
which happens to express my own most immediate feelings about politics and
reconstruction after the decimation of the great war.

“The many men so beautiful And they all dead did lie And a thousand
thousand slimy things Lived on, and so did I.”

It is not a reflection that adds any inordinate self–satisfaction to the fact of
one’s own survival.

In turning over a collection of Kettle’s extraordinary varied and vigorous
writings, which contain some of the most pointed and piercing criticisms of
materialism, of modern capitalism and mental and moral anarchism generally, I
came on a very interesting criticism of myself and my friends in our Marconi
agitation; a suggestion, on a note of genial cynicism, that we were asking for an
impossible political purity; a suggestion which, knowing it to be patriotic, I will
venture to call pathetic. I will not now return on such disagreements, a man with
whom I so universally agree; but it will not be unfair to find here an exact
illustration of what I mean by saying that the national leaders, so far from merely
failing as wild Irishmen, only failed when they were not instinctive enough, that
is, not Irish enough. Kettle was a patriot whose impulse was practical and whose
policy was impolitic. Here also the Nationalist underrated the importance of the
intervention of his own nationality. Kettle left a fine and even terrible poem,
asking if his sacrifices were in vain, and whether he and his people were again
being betrayed. I think nobody can deny that he was betrayed; and it was not by
the English soldiers with whom he marched to war, but by those very English
politicians with whom he sacrificed so much to remain at peace. No man will
ever dare to say his death in battle was in vain, not only because in the highest
sense it could never be, but because even in the lowest sense it was not. He hated
the icy insolence of Prussia; and that ice is broken, and already as weak as water.
As Carlyle said of a far lesser thing, that at least will never through unending
ages insult the face of the sun any more. The point is here that if any part of his
fine work was in vain, it was certainly not the reckless romantic part; it was
precisely the plodding parliamentary part. None can say that the weary marching
and counter–marching in France was a thing thrown away; not only in the sense
which consecrates all footprints along such a via crucis, or highway of the army
of martyrs; but also in the perfectly practical sense, that the army was going somewhere, and that it got there. But it might possibly be said that the weary marching and counter-marching at Westminster, in and out of a division lobby, belonged to what the French call the salle des pas perdus. If anything was practical it was the visionary adventure; if anything was unpractical it was the practical compromise. He and his friends were betrayed by the men whose corruptions they had contempuously condoned, far more than by the men whose bigotries they had indignantly denounced. There darkened about them treason and disappointment, and he that was the happiest died in battle; and one who knew and loved him spoke to me for a million others in saying: “And now we will not give you a dead dog until you keep your word.”
VIII

AN EXAMPLE AND A QUESTION

WE all had occasion to rejoice at the return of Sherlock Holmes when he was supposed to be dead; and I presume we may soon rejoice in his return even when he is really dead. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, in his widespread new campaign in favour of Spiritualism, ought at least to delight us with the comedy of Holmes as a control and Watson as a medium. But I have for the moment a use for the great detective not concerned with the psychical side of the question. Of that I will only say, in passing, that in this as in many other cases, I find myself in agreement with an authority about where the line is drawn between good and bad, but have the misfortune to think his good bad, and his bad good. Sir Arthur explains that he would lift Spiritualism to a graver and more elevated plane of idealism; and that he quite agrees with his critics that the mere tricks with tables and chairs are grotesque and vulgar. I think this quite true if turned upside down, like the table. I do not mind the grotesque and vulgar part of Spiritualism; what I object to is the grave and elevating part. After all, a miracle is a miracle and means something; it means that Materialism is nonsense. But it is not true that a message is always a message; and it sometimes only means that Spiritualism is also nonsense. If the table at which I am now writing takes to itself wings and flies out of the window, perhaps carrying me along with it, the incident will arouse in me a real intelligent interest, verging on surprise. But if the pen with which I am writing begins to scrawl all by itself, the sort of things I have seen in spirit writing; if it begins to say that all things are aspects of universal purity and peace, and so on, why, then I shall not only be annoyed, but also bored. If a great man like the late Sir William Crookes says a table went walking upstairs, I am impressed by the news; but not by news from nowhere to the effect that all men are perpetually going upstairs, up a spiritual staircase which seems to be as mechanical and labour-saving as a moving staircase at Charing Cross. Moreover, even a benevolent spirit might conceivably throw the furniture about merely for fun; whereas I doubt if anything but a devil from hell would say that all things are aspects of purity and peace.

But I am here taking from the Spiritualistic articles a text that has nothing to do with Spiritualism. In a recent contribution to Nash’s Magazine, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle remarks very truly that the modern world is weary and wicked and
in need of a religion; and he gives examples of its more typical and terrible corruptions. It is perhaps natural that he should revert to the case of the Congo, and talk of it in the torrid fashion which recalls the days when Morel and Casement had some credit in English politics. We have since had an opportunity of judging the real attitude of a man like Morel in the plainest case of black and white injustice that the world has ever seen. It was at once a replica and a reversal of the position expressed in the Pious Editor’s Creed; and might roughly be rendered in similar language.

“I do believe in Freedom’s cause Ez fur away ez tropics are; But Belgians caught in Prussia’s claws To me less tempting topics are. It’s wal agin a foreign king To rouse the chapel’s rigours; But Liberty’s a kind of thing We only owe to niggers.”

He had of course a lurid denunciation of the late King Leopold, of which I will only say that, uttered by a Belgian about the Belgian king in his own land and lifetime, it would be highly courageous and largely correct; but that the parallel test is how much truth was told by British journalists about British Kings in their own land and lifetime; and that until we can pass that test, such denunciations do us very little good. But what interests me in the matter at the moment is this. Sir Arthur feels it right to say something about British corruptions, and passes from the Congo to Putumayo, touching a little more lightly; for even the most honest Britons have an unconscious trick of touching more lightly on the case of British capitalists. He says that our capitalists were not guilty of direct cruelty, but of an attitude careless and even callous. But what strikes me is that Sir Arthur, with his taste for such protests and inquiries, need not have wandered quite so far from his own home as the forests of South America.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is an Irishman; and in his own country, within my own memory there occurred a staggering and almost incredible crime, or series of crimes, which were worthier than anything in the world of the attention of Sherlock Holmes in fiction, or Conan Doyle in reality. It always will be a tribute to the author of Sherlock Holmes that he did, about the same time, do such good work in reality. He made an admirable plea for Adolf Beck and Oscar Slater; he was also connected, I remember, with the reversal of a miscarriage of justice in a case of cattle–mutilation. And all this, while altogether to his credit, makes it seem all the more strange that his talents could not be used for, and in, his own home and native country, in a mystery that had the dimensions of a monstrosity, and which did involve, if I remember right, a question of cattle–maiming. Anyhow, it was concerned with moonlighters and the charges made against
them, such as the common one of cutting off the tails of cows. I can imagine Sherlock Holmes on such a quest, keen-eyed and relentless, finding the cloven hoof of some sinister and suspected cow. I can imagine Dr. Watson, like the cow’s tail, always behind. I can imagine Sherlock Holmes remarking, in a light allusive fashion, that he himself had written a little monograph on the subject of cows’ tails; with diagrams and tables solving the great traditional problem of how many cows’ tails would reach the moon; a subject of extraordinary interest to moonlighters. And I can still more easily imagine him saying afterwards, having resumed the pipe and dressing-gown of Baker Street, “A remarkable little problem, Watson. In some of its features it was perhaps more singular than any you have been good enough to report. I do not think that even the Tooting Trouser-Stretching Mystery, or the singular little affair of the Radium Toothpick, offered more strange and sensational developments.” For if the celebrated pair had really tracked out the Irish crime I have in mind, they would have found a story which, considered merely as a detective story, is by far the most dramatic and dreadful of modern times. Like nearly all such sensational stories, it traced the crime to somebody far higher in station and responsibility than any of those suspected. Like many of the most sensational of them, it actually traced the crime to the detective who was investigating it. For if they had really crawled about with a magnifying glass, studying the supposed footprints of the peasants incriminated, they would have found they were made by the boots of the policeman. And the boots of a policeman, one feels, are things that even Watson might recognise.

I have told the astounding story of Sergeant Sheridan before; and I shall often tell it again. Hardly any English people know it; and I shall go on telling it in the hope that all English people may know it some day. It ought to be first in every collection of causes celebres, in every book about criminals, in every book of historical mysteries; and on its merits it would be. It is not in any of them. It is not there because there is a motive, in all modern British plutocracy, against finding the big British miscarriages of justice where they are really to be found; and that is a great deal nearer than Putumayo. It is a place far more appropriate to the exploits of the family of the Doyles. It is called Ireland; and in that place a powerful British official named Sheridan had been highly successful in the imperial service by convicting a series of poor Irishmen of agrarian crimes. It was afterwards discovered that the British official had carefully committed every one of the crimes himself; and then, with equal foresight, perjured himself to imprison innocent men, one of whom lost his reason. Any one who does not
know the story will naturally ask what punishment was held adequate for such a Neronian monster; I will tell him. He was bowed out of the country like a distinguished stranger, his expenses politely paid; as if he had been delivering a series of instructive lectures; and he is now probably smoking a cigar in an American hotel, and much more comfortable than any poor policeman who has done his duty. I defy anybody to deny him a place in our literature about great criminals. Charles Peace escaped many times before conviction; Sheridan escaped altogether after conviction. Jack the Ripper was safe because he was undiscovered; Sheridan was discovered and was still safe. But I only repeat the matter here for two reasons. First, we may call our rule in Ireland what we like; we may call it the Union when there is no union; we may call it Protestant ascendancy when we are no longer Protestants; or Teutonic lordship when we could only be ashamed of being Teutons. But this is what it is; and everything else is waste of words. And second, because an Irish investigator of cattle-maiming, so oblivious of the Irish cow, is in some danger of figuring as an Irish bull.

Anyhow, that is the real and remarkable story of Sergeant Sheridan, and I put it first because it is the most practical test of the practical question of whether Ireland is misgoverned. It is strictly a fair test; for it is a test by the minimum and an argument a fortiori. A British official in Ireland can run a career of crime, punishing innocent people for his own felonies; and when he is found out, he is found to be above the law. This may seem like putting things at the worst, but it is really putting them at the best. This story was not told us on the word of a wild Irish Fenian, or even a responsible Irish Nationalist. It was told, word for word as I have told it, by the Unionist Minister in charge of the matter and reporting it, with regret and shame, to Parliament. He was not one of the worst Irish Secretaries, who might be responsible for the worst regime; on the contrary, he was by far the best. If even he could only partially restrain or reveal such things, there can be no deduction in common sense except that in the ordinary way such things go on gaily in the dark, with nobody to reveal and nobody to restrain them. It was not something done in those dark days of torture and terrorism, which happened in Ireland a hundred years ago; and which Englishmen talk of as having happened a million years ago. It was something that happened quite recently, in my own mature manhood, about the time that the better things like the Land Acts were already before the world. I remember writing to the Westminster Gazette to emphasise it when it occurred; but it seems to have passed out of memory in an almost half-witted fashion. But that peephole into
hell has afforded me, ever since a horrible amusement, when I hear the Irish softly rebuked for remembering old unhappy, far-off things and wrongs done in the Dark Ages. Thus I was especially amused to find the Rev. R. J. Campbell saying that “Ireland has been petted and coddled more than any other part of the British Isles”; because Mr. Campbell was chiefly famous for a comfortable creed himself, for saying that evil is only “a shadow where light should be”; and there is no doubt here of his throwing a very black shadow where light is very much required. I will conceive the policeman at the corner of the street in which Mr. Campbell resides, as in the habit of killing a crossing-sweeper every now and then for his private entertainment, burgling the houses of Mr. Campbell’s neighbours, cutting off the tails of their carriage horses, and otherwise disporting himself by moonlight a fairy. It is his custom to visit the consequences of each of these crimes upon the Rev. R. J. Campbell, whom he arrests at intervals, successfully convicts by perjury, and proceeds to coddle in penal servitude. But I have another reason for mentioning Mr. Campbell, a gentleman whom I heartily respect in many other aspects; and the reason is connected with his name, as it occurs in another connection on another page. It shows how in anything, but especially in anything coming from Ireland, the old facts of family and faith outweigh a million modern philosophies. The words in Who’s Who—“Ulster Protestant of Scottish ancestry”—give the really Irish and the really honourable reason for Mr. Campbell’s extraordinary remark. A man may preach for years, with radiant universalism, that many waters cannot quench love; but Boyne Water can. Mr. Campbell appears very promptly with what Kettle called “a bucketful of Boyne, to put the sunrise out.” I will not take the opportunity of saying, like the Ulsterman, that there never was treason yet but a Campbell was at the bottom of it. But I will say that there never was Modernism yet, but a Calvinist was at the bottom of it. The Old Theology is much livelier than the New Theology.

Many other such true tales could be told; but what we need here is a sort of test. This tale is a test; because it is the best that could be said, about the best that could be done, by the best Englishman ruling Ireland, in face of the English system established there; and it is the best, or at any rate the most, that we can know about that system. Another truth which might also serve as a test, is this: to note among the responsible English not only their testimony against each other, but their testimony against themselves. I mean the consideration of how very rapidly we realise that our own conduct in Ireland has been infamous, not in the remote past, but in the very recent past. I have lived just long enough to see the
wheel come full circle inside one generation; when I was a schoolboy, the sort of Kensington middle class, to which I belong, was nearly solidly resisting, not only the first Home Rule Bill, but any suggestion that the Land League had a leg to stand on, or that the landlords need do anything but get their rents or kick out their tenants. The whole Unionist Press, which was three-quarters of the Press, simply supported Clanricarde, and charged any one who did not do so with supporting the Clan–na–Gael. Mr. Balfour was simply admired for enforcing the system, which it is his real apologia to have tried to end, or at least to have allowed Wyndham to end. I am not yet far gone in senile decay; but already I have lived to hear my countrymen talk about their own blind policy in the time of the Land League, exactly as they talked before of their blind policy in the time of the Limerick Treaty. The shadow on our past shifts forward as we advance into the future; and always seems to end just behind us. I was told in my youth that the age–long misgovernment of Ireland lasted down to about 1870; it is now agreed among all intelligent people that it lasted at least down to about 1890. A little common sense, after a hint like the Sheridan Case, will lead one to suspect the simple explanation that it is going on still.

Now I heard scores of such stories as the Sheridan story in Ireland, many of which I mention elsewhere; but I do not mention them here because they cannot be publicly tested; and that for a very simple reason. We must accept all the advantages and disadvantages of a rule of absolute and iron militarism. We cannot impose silence and then sift stories; we cannot forbid argument and then ask for proof; we cannot destroy rights and then discover wrongs. I say this quite impartially in the matter of militarism itself. I am far from certain that soldiers are worse rulers than lawyers and merchants; and I am quite certain that a nation has a right to give abnormal power to its soldiers in time of war. I only say that a soldier, if he is a sensible soldier, will know what he is doing and therefore what he cannot do; that he cannot gag a man and then cross-examine him, any more than he can blow out his brains and then convince his intelligence. There may be–humanly speaking, there must be–a mass of injustices in the militaristic government of Ireland. The militarism itself may be the least of them; but it must involve the concealment of all the rest.

It has been remarked above that establishing militarism is a thing which a nation had a right to do, and (what is not at all the same thing) which it may be right in doing. But with that very phrase “a nation,” we collide of course with the whole real question; the alleged abstract wrong about which the Irish talk much more than about their concrete wrongs. I have put first the matters mentioned
above, because I wish to make clear, as a matter of common sense, the
impression of any reasonable outsider that they certainly have concrete wrongs.
But even those who doubt it, and say that the Irish have no concrete grievance
but only a sentiment of Nationalism, fall into a final and very serious error about
the nature of the thing called Nationalism, and even the meaning of the word
“concrete.” For the truth is that, in dealing with a nation, the grievance which is
most abstract of all is also the one which is most concrete of all.

Not only is patriotism a part of practical politics, but it is more practical than
any politics. To neglect it, and ask only for grievances, is like counting the
clouds and forgetting the climate. To neglect it, and think only of laws, is like
seeing the landmarks and never seeing the landscape.

It will be found that the denial of nationality is much more of a daily nuisance
than the denial of votes or the denial of juries. Nationality is the most practical
thing, because so many things are national without being political, or without
being legal. A man in a conquered country feels it when he goes to market or
even goes to church, which may be more often than he goes to law; and the
harvest is more general than the General Election. Altering the flag on the roof is
like altering the sun in the sky; the very chimney–pots and lamp–posts look
different. Nay, after a certain interval of occupation, they are different. As a man
would know he was in a land of strangers before he knew it was a land of
savages, so he knows a rule is alien long before he knows it is oppressive. It is
not necessary for it to add injury to insult.

For instance, when I first walked about Dublin, I was disposed to smile at the
names of the streets being gravely inscribed in Gaelic as well as English. I will
not here discuss the question of what is called the Irish language, the only
arguable case against which is that it is not the Irish language. But at any rate it
is not the English language, and I have come to appreciate more imaginatively
the importance of that fact. It may be used rather as a weapon than a tool; but it
is a national weapon if it is not a national tool. I see the significance of having
something which the eye commonly encounters, as it does a chimney–pot or a
lamp–post; but which is like a chimney reared above an Irish hearth or a lamp to
light an Irish road. I see the point of having a solid object in the street to remind
an Irishman that he is in Ireland, as a red pillar–box reminds an Englishman that
he is in England. But there must be a thousand things as practical as pillar–boxes
which remind an Irishman that, if he is in his country, it is not yet a free country;
everything connected with the principal seat of government reminds him of it
perpetually. It may not be easy for an Englishman to imagine how many of such
daily details there are. But there is, after all, one very simple effort of the fancy, which would fix the fact for him for ever. He has only to imagine that the Germans have conquered London.

A brilliant writer who has earned the name of a Pacifist, and even a Pro–German, once propounded to me his highly personal and even perverse type of internationalism by saying, as a sort of unanswerable challenge, “Wouldn’t you rather be ruled by Goethe than by Walter Long?” I replied that words could not express the wild love and loyalty I should feel for Mr. Walter Long, if the only alternative were Goethe. I could not have put my own national case in a clearer or more compact form. I might occasionally feel inclined to kill Mr. Long; but under the approaching shadow of Goethe, I should feel more inclined to kill myself. That is the deathly element in denationalisation; that it poisons life, itself, the most real of all realities. But perhaps the best way of putting the point conversationally is to say that Goethe would certainly put up a monument to Shakespeare. I would sooner die than walk past it every day of my life. And in the other case of the street inscriptions, it is well to remember that these things, which we also walk past every day, are exactly the sort of things that always have, in a nameless fashion, the national note. If the Germans conquered London, they would not need to massacre me or even enslave me, in order to annoy me; it would be quite enough that their notices were in a German style, if not in a German language. Suppose I looked up in an English railway carriage, and saw these words written in English exactly as I have seen them in a German railway carriage written in German: “The outleaning of the body from the window of the carriage is because of the therewith bound up life’s danger strictly prohibited.” It is not rude. It would certainly be impossible to complain that it is curt. I should not be annoyed by its brutality and brevity; but on the contrary by its elaborateness and even its laxity. But if it does not exactly shine in lucidity, it gives a reason; which after all is a very reasonable thing to do. By every cosmopolitan test, it is more polite than the sentence I have read in my childhood: “Wait until the train stops.” This is curt; this might be called rude; but it never annoyed me in the least. The nearest I can get to defining my sentiment is to say that I can sympathise with the Englishman who wrote the English notice. Having a rude thing to write, he wrote it as quickly as he could, and went home to his tea; or preferably to his beer. But what is too much for me, an overpowering vision, is the thought of that German calmly sitting down to compose that sentence like a sort of essay. It is the thought of him serenely waving away the one important word till the very end of the sentence, like the
Day of Judgment to the end of the world. It is perhaps the mere thought that he did not break down in the middle of it, but endured to the end; or that he could afterwards calmly review it, and see that sentence go marching by, like the whole German army. In short, I do not object to it because it is dictatorial or despotic or bureaucratic or anything of the kind; but simply because it is German.

Because it is German I do not object to it in Germany. Because it is German I should violently revolt against it in England. I do not revolt against the command to wait until the train stops, not because it is less rude, but because it is the kind of rudeness I can understand. The official may be treating me casually, but at least he is not treating himself seriously. And so, in return, I can treat him and his notice not seriously but casually. I can neglect to wait until the train stops, and fall down on the platform; as I did on the platform of Wolverhampton, to the permanent damage of that fine structure. I can, by a stroke of satiric genius, truly national and traditional, the dexterous elimination of a single letter, alter the maxim to “Wait until the rain stops.” It is a jest as profoundly English as the weather to which it refers. Nobody would be tempted to take such a liberty with the German sentence; not only because he would be instantly imprisoned in a fortress, but because he would not know at which end to begin.

Now this is the truth which is expressed, though perhaps very imperfectly, in things like the Gaelic lettering on streets in Dublin. It will be wholesome for us who are English to realise that there is almost certainly an English way of putting things, even the most harmless things, which appears to an Irishman quite as ungainly, unnatural, and ludicrous as that German sentence appears to me. As the famous Frenchman did not know when he was talking prose, the official Englishman does not know when he is talking English. He unconsciously assumes that he is talking Esperanto. Imperialism is not an insanity of patriotism; it is merely an illusion of cosmopolitanism.

For the national note of the Irish language is not peculiar to what used to be called the Erse language. The whole nation used the tongue common to both nations with a difference far beyond a dialect. It is not a difference of accent, but a difference of style; which is generally a difference of soul. The emphasis, the elision, the short cuts and sharp endings of speech, show a variety which may be almost unnoticeable but is none the less untranslatable. It may be only a little more weight on a word, or an inversion allowable in English but abounding in Irish; but we can no more copy it than copy the compactness of the French on or the Latin ablative absolute. The commonest case of what I mean, for instance, is
the locution that lingers in my mind with an agreeable phrase from one of Mr. Yeats’s stories: “Whom I shall yet see upon the hob of hell, and them screeching.” It is an idiom that gives the effect of a pointed postscript, a parting kick or sting in the tail of the sentence, which is unfathomably national. It is noteworthy and even curious that quite a crowd of Irishmen, who quoted to me with just admiration the noble ending of Kathleen–na–Hulahan, where the newcomer is asked if he has seen the old woman who is the tragic type of Ireland going out, quoted his answer in that form, “I did not. But I saw a young woman; and she walking like a queen.” I say it is curious; because I have since been told that in the actual book (which I cannot lay my hand on at the moment) a more classic English idiom is used. It would generally be most unwise to alter the diction of such a master of style as Mr. Yeats: though indeed it is possible that he altered it himself, as he has sometimes done, and not always, I think, for the better. But whether this form came from himself or from his countrymen, it was very redolent of his country. And there was something inspiring in thus seeing, as it were before one’s eyes, literature becoming legend. But a hundred other examples could be given, even from my own short experience, of such fine turns of language, nor are the finest necessarily to be found in literature. It is perfectly true, though prigs may overwork and snobs underrate the truth, that in a country like this the peasants can talk like poets. When I was on the wild coast of Donegal, an old unhappy woman who had starved through the famines and the evictions, was telling a lady the tales of those times; and she mentioned quite naturally one that might have come straight out of times so mystical that we should call them mythical; that some travellers had met a poor wandering woman with a baby in those great gray rocky wastes, and asked her who she was. And she answered, “I am the Mother of God, and this is Himself; and He is the boy you will all be wanting at the last.”

There is more in that story than can be put into any book, even on a matter in which its meaning plays so deep a part; and it seems almost profane to analyse it however sympathetically. But if any one wishes to know what I mean by the untranslatable truth which makes a language national, it will be worth while to look at the mere diction of that speech, and note how its whole effect turns on certain phrases and customs which happen to be peculiar to the nation. It is well known that in Ireland the husband or head of the house is always called “himself”; nor is it peculiar to the peasantry, but adopted, if partly in jest, by the gentry. A distinguished Dublin publicist, a landlord and leader among the more national aristocracy, always called me “himself” when he was talking to my
wife. It will be noted how a sort of shadow of that common meaning mingles with the more shining significance of its position in a sentence where it is also strictly logical, in the sense of theological. All literary style, especially national style, is made up of such coincidences; which are a spiritual sort of puns. That is why style is untranslatable; because it is possible to render the meaning, but not the double meaning. There is even a faint differentiation in the half–humorous possibilities of the word “boy”; another wholly national nuance. Say instead, “And He is the child” and it is something perhaps stiffer, and certainly quite different. Take away, “This is Himself” and simply substitute “This is He”; and it is a piece of pedantry ten thousand miles from the original. But above all it has lost its note of something domestic. All roads in Ireland, of fact or folk–lore, of theology or grammar, lead us back to that door and hearth of the household, that fortress of the family which is the key–fortress of the whole strategy of the island. The Irish Catholics, like other Christians, admit a mystery in the Holy Trinity, but they may almost be said to admit an experience in the Holy Family. Their historical experience, alas, has made it seem to them not unnatural that the Holy Family should be a homeless family. They also have found that there was no room for them at the inn, or anywhere but in the jail; they also have dragged their new–born babes out of their cradles, and trailed in despair along the road to Egypt, or at least along the road to exile. They also have heard in the dark and the distance behind them, the noise of the horsemen of Herod.

Now it is this sensation of stemming a stream, of ten thousand things all pouring one way, labels, titles, monuments, metaphors, modes of address, assumptions in controversy, that make an Englishman in Ireland know that he is in a strange land. Nor is he merely bewildered, as among a medley of strange things. On the contrary, if he has any sense, he soon finds them unified and simplified to a single impression; as if he were talking to a strange person. He cannot define it because nobody can define a person; and nobody can define a nation. He can only see it, smell it, hear it, handle it, bump into it, fall over it, kill it, be killed for it, or be damned for doing it wrong. He must be content with these mere hints of its existence; but he cannot define it, because it is like a person; and no book of logic will undertake to define Aunt Jane or Uncle William. We can only say, with more or less mournful conviction, that if Aunt Jane is not a person, there is no such thing as a person, and I say with equal conviction that if Ireland is not a nation, there is no such thing as a nation. France is not a nation, England is not a nation; there is no such thing as
patriotism on this planet. Any Englishman, of any party, with any proposal, may well clear his mind of cant about that preliminary question. If we free Ireland, we must free it to be a nation; if we go on repressing Ireland, we are repressing a nation; if we are right to repress Ireland, we are right to repress a nation. After that we may consider what can be done, according to our opinions about the respect due to patriotism, the reality of cosmopolitan and imperial alternatives, and so on. I will debate with the man who does not want mankind divided into nations at all; I can imagine a case for the man who wants specially to restrain one particular nation, as I would restrain anti-national Prussia. But I will not argue with a man about whether Ireland is a nation, or about the yet more awful question of whether it is an island. I know there is a sceptical philosophy which suggests that all ultimate ideas are only penultimate ideas; and therefore perhaps that all islands are really peninsulars. But I will claim to know what I mean by an island and what I mean by an individual; and when I think suddenly of my experience in the island in question, the impression is a single one; the voices mingle in a human voice which I should know if I heard it again, calling in the distance; the crowds dwindle into a single figure whom I have seen long ago upon a strange hill-side, and she walking like a queen.
BELFAST AND THE RELIGIOUS PROBLEM

OF that cloud of dream which seems to drift over so many Irish poems and impressions, I felt very little in Ireland. There is a real meaning in this suggestion of a mystic sleep; but it does not mean what most of us imagine, and is not to be found where we expect it. On the contrary, I think the most vivid impression the nation left on me, was that it was almost unnaturally wide awake. I might almost say that Ireland suffers from insomnia. This is not only literally true, of those tremendous talks, the prolonged activities of rich and restless intellects, that can burn up the nights from darkness to daybreak. It is true on the doubtful as well as the delightful side; and the temperament has something of the morbid vigilance and even of the irritability of insomnia. Its lucidity is not only superhuman, but it is sometimes in the true sense inhuman. Its intellectual clarity cannot resist the temptation to intellectual cruelty. If I had to sum up in a sentence the one fault really to be found with the Irish, I could do it simply enough. I should say it saddened me that I liked them all so much better than they liked each other. But it is our supreme stupidity that this is always taken as meaning that Ireland is a sort of Donnybrook Fair. It is really quite the reverse of a merely rowdy and irresponsible quarrel. So far from fighting with shillelaghs, they fight far too much with rapiers; their temptation is in the very nicety and even delicacy of the thrust. Of course there are multitudes who make no such deadly use of the national irony; but it is sufficiently common for even these to suffer from it; and after a time I began to understand a little that burden about bitterness of speech, which recurs so often in the songs of Mr. Yeats and other Irish poets.

“Though hope fall from you and love decay Burning in fires of a slanderous tongue.”

But there is nothing dreamy about the bitterness; the worst part of it is the fact that the criticisms always have a very lucid and logical touch of truth. It is not for us to lecture the Irish about forgiveness, who have given them so much to forgive. But if some one who had not lost the right to preach to them, if St. Patrick were to return to preach, he would find that nothing had failed, through all those ages of agony, of faith and honour and endurance; but I think he might possibly say, what I have no right to say, a word about charity.
There is indeed one decisive sense in which the Irish are very poetical; in that of giving a special and serious social recognition to poetry. I have sometimes expressed the fancy that men in the Golden Age might spontaneously talk in verse; and it is really true that half the Irish talk is in verse. Quotation becomes recitation. But it is much too rhythmic to resemble our own theatrical recitations. This is one of my own strongest and most sympathetic memories, and one of my most definable reasons for having felt extraordinarily happy in Dublin. It was a paradise of poets, in which a man who may feel inclined to mention a book or two of Paradise Lost, or illustrate his meaning with the complete ballad of the Ancient Mariner, feels he will be better understood than elsewhere. But the more this very national quality is noted, the less it will be mistaken for anything merely irresponsible, or even merely emotional. The shortest way of stating the truth is to say that poetry plays the part of music. It is in every sense of the phrase a social function. A poetical evening is as natural as a musical evening; and being as natural it becomes what is called artificial. As in some circles “Do you play?” is rather “Don’t you play?” these Irish circles would be surprised because a man did not recite rather than because he did. A hostile critic, especially an Irish critic, might possibly say that the Irish are poetical because they are not sufficiently musical. I can imagine Mr. Bernard Shaw saying something of the sort. But it might well be retorted that they are not merely musical because they will not consent to be merely emotional. It is far truer to say that they give a reasonable place to poetry, than that they permit any particular poetic interference with reason. “But I, whose virtues are the definitions of the analytical mind,” says Mr. Yeats, and any one who has been in the atmosphere will know what he means. In so far as such things stray from reason, they tend rather to ritual than to riot. Poetry is in Ireland what humour is in America; it is an institution. The Englishman, who is always for good and evil the amateur, takes both in a more occasional and even accidental fashion. It must always be remembered here that the ancient Irish civilisation had a high order of poetry, which was not merely mystical, but rather mathematical. Like Celtic ornament, Celtic verse tended too much to geometrical patterns. If this was irrational, it was not by excess of emotion. It might rather be described as irrational by excess of reason. The antique hierarchy of minstrels, each grade with its own complicated metre, suggests that there was something Chinese about a thing so inhumanly civilised. Yet all this vanished etiquette is somehow in the air in Ireland; and men and women move to it, as to the steps of a lost dance.
Thus, whether we consider the sense in which the Irish are really quarrelsome, or the sense in which they are really poetical, we find that both lead us back to a condition of clarity which seems the very reverse of a mere dream. In both cases Ireland is critical, and even self-critical. The bitterness I have ventured to lament is not Irish bitterness against the English; that I should assume as not only inevitable, but substantially justifiable. It is Irish bitterness against the Irish; the remarks of one honest Nationalist about another honest Nationalist. Similarly, while they are fond of poetry, they are not always fond of poets; and there is plenty of satire in their conversation on the subject. I have said that half the talk may consist of poetry; I might almost say that the other half may consist of parody. All these things amount to an excess of vigilance and realism; the mass of the people watch and pray, but even those who never pray never cease to watch. If they idealise sleep, it is as the sleepless do; it might almost be said that they can only dream of dreaming. If a dream haunts them, it is rather as something that escapes them; and indeed some of their finest poetry is rather about seeking fairyland than about finding it. Granted all this, I may say that there was one place in Ireland where I did seem to find it, and not merely to seek it. There was one spot where I seemed to see the dream itself in possession; as one might see from afar a cloud resting on a single hill. There a dream, at once a desire and a delusion, brooded above a whole city. That place was Belfast.

The description could be justified even literally and in detail. A man told me in northeast Ulster that he had heard a mother warning her children away from some pond, or similar place of danger, by saying, “Don’t you go there; there are wee popes there.” A country where that could be said is like Elfland as compared to England. If not exactly a land of fairies, it is at least a land of goblins. There is something charming in the fancy of a pool full of these peculiar elves, like so many efts, each with his tiny triple crown or crossed keys complete. That is the difference between this manufacturing district and an English manufacturing district, like that of Manchester. There are numbers of sturdy Nonconformists in Manchester; and doubtless they direct some of their educational warnings against the system represented by the Archbishop of Canterbury. But nobody in Manchester, however Nonconformist, tells even a child that a puddle is a sort of breeding place for Archbishops of Canterbury, little goblins in gaiters and aprons. It may be said that it is a very stagnant pool that breeds that sort of efts. But whatever view we take of it, it remains true, to begin with, that the paradox could be proved merely from superficial things like superstitions. Protestant Ulster reeks of superstition; it is the strong smell that
really comes like a blast out of Belfast, as distinct from Birmingham or Brixton. But to me there is always something human and almost humanising about superstition; and I really think that such lingering legends about the Pope, as a being as distant and dehumanised as the King of the Cannibal Islands, have served as a sort of negative folk–lore. And the same may be said, in so far as it is true that the commercial province has retained a theology as well as a mythology. Wherever men are still theological there is still some chance of their being logical. And in this the Calvinist Ulsterman may be more of a Catholic Irishman than is commonly realised, especially by himself.

Attacks and apologies abound about the matter of Belfast bigotry; but bigotry is by no means the worst thing in Belfast. I rather think it is the best. Nor is it the strongest example of what I mean, when I say that Belfast does really live in a dream. The other and more remarkable fault of the society has indeed a religious root; for nearly everything in history has a religious root, and especially nearly everything in Irish history. Of that theoretical origin in theology I may say something in a moment; it will be enough to say here that what has produced the more prominent and practical evil is ultimately the theology itself, but not the habit of being theological. It is the creed; but not the faith. In so far as the Ulster Protestant really has a faith, he is really a fine fellow; though perhaps not quite so fine a fellow as he thinks himself. And that is the chasm; and can be most shortly stated as I have often stated it in such debates, by saying that the Protestant generally says, “I am a good Protestant,” while the Catholic always says, “I am a bad Catholic.”

When I say that Belfast is dominated by a dream, I mean it in the strict psychological sense; that something inside the mind is stronger than everything outside it. Nonsense is not only stronger than sense, but stronger than the senses. The idea in a man’s head can eclipse the eyes in his head. Very worthy and kindly merchants told me there was no poverty in Belfast. They did not say there was less poverty than was commonly alleged, or less poverty than there had been, or less than there was in similar places elsewhere. They said there was none. As a remark about the Earthly Paradise or the New Jerusalem, it would be arresting. As a remark about the streets, through which they and I had both passed a few moments before, it was simply a triumph of the sheer madness of the imagination of man. These eminent citizens of Belfast received me in the kindest and most courteous fashion; and I would not willingly say anything in criticism of them beyond what is necessary for the practical needs of their country and mine. But indeed I think the greatest criticism of them is that they
would not understand what the criticism means. I will therefore clothe it in a parable, which is none the worse for having also been a real incident. When told there was no poverty in Belfast, I had remarked mildly that the people must have a singular taste in dress. I was gravely assured that they had indeed a most singular taste in dress. I was left with the general impression that wearing shirts or trousers decorated with large holes at irregular intervals was a pardonable form of foppery or fashionable extravagance. And it will always be a deep indwelling delight, in the memories of my life, that just as these city fathers and I came out on to the steps of the hotel, there appeared before us one of the raggedest of the ragged little boys I had seen, asking for a penny. I gave him a penny, whereon this group of merchants was suddenly transfigured into a sort of mob, vociferating, “Against the law! Against the law!” and bundled him away. I hope it is not unamiable to be so much entertained by that vision of a mob of magistrates, so earnestly shooing away a solitary child like a cat. Anyhow, they knew not what they did; and, what is worse, knew not that they knew not. And they would not understand, if I told them, what legend might have been made about that child, in the Christian ages of the world.

The point is here that the evil in the delusion does not consist in bigotry, but in vanity. It is not that such a Belfast man thinks he is right; for any honest man has a right to think he is right. It is that he does think he is good, not to say great; and no honest man can reach that comfortable conviction without a course of intellectual dishonesty. What cuts this spirit off from Christian common sense is the fact that the delusion, like most insane delusions, is merely egotistical. It is simply the pleasure of thinking extravagantly well of oneself; and unlimited indulgence in that pleasure is far more weakening than any indulgence in drink or dissipation. But so completely does it construct an unreal cosmos round the ego, that the criticism of the world cannot be felt even for worldly purposes. I could give many examples of this element in Belfast, as compared even with Birmingham or Manchester. The Lord Mayor of Manchester may not happen to know much about pictures; but he knows men who know about them. But the Belfast authorities will exhibit a maniacally bad picture as a masterpiece, merely because it glorifies Belfast. No man dare put up such a picture in Manchester, within a stone’s–throw of Mr. Charles Rowley. I care comparatively little about the case of aesthetics; but the case is even clearer in ethics. So wholly are these people sundered from more Christian traditions that their very boasts lower them; and. they abase themselves when they mean to exalt themselves. It never occurs to them that their strange inside standards do not always impress
outsiders. A great employer introduced me to several of his very intelligent employees; and I can readily bear witness to the sincerity of the great Belfast delusion even among many of the poorer men of Belfast. But the sincere efforts of them and their master, to convince me that a union with the Catholic majority under Home Rule was intolerable to them, all went to one tune, which recurred with a kind of chorus, “We won’t have the likes of them making laws for the likes of us.” It never seemed to cross their minds that this is not a high example of any human morality; that judged by pagan verecundia or Christian humility or modern democratic brotherhood, it is simply the remark of a snob. The man in question is quite innocent of all this; he has no notion of modesty, or even of mock modesty; he is not only superior, but he thinks it a superiority to claim superiority.

It is here that we cannot avoid theology, because, we cannot avoid theory. For the point is that even in theory the one religious atmosphere now differs from the other. That the difference had historically a religious root is really unquestionable; but anyhow it is very deeply rooted. The essence of Calvinism was certainty about salvation; the essence of Catholicism is uncertainty about salvation. The modern and materialised form of that certainty is superiority; the belief of a man in a fixed moral aristocracy of men like himself. But the truth concerned here is that, by this time at any rate, the superiority has become a doctrine as well as an indulgence. I doubt if this extreme school of Protestants believe in Christian humility even as an ideal. I doubt whether the more honest of them would even profess to believe in it. This can be clearly seen by comparing it with other Christian virtues; of which this decayed Calvinism offers at least a version, even to those who think it a perversion. Puritanism is a version of purity; if we think it a parody of purity. Philanthropy is a version of charity; if we think it a parody of charity. But in all this commercial Protestantism there is no version of humility; there is not even a parody of humility. Humility is not an ideal. Humility is not even a hypocrisy. There is no institution, no commandment, no common form of words, no popular pattern or traditional tale, to tell anybody in any fashion that there is any such thing as a peril of spiritual pride. In short, there is here a school of thought and sentiment that does definitely regard self-satisfaction as a strength; as against the strong Christian tradition in the rest of the country that does as definitely regard it as a weakness. That is the real moral issue in the modern struggle in Ireland; nor is it confined to Ireland. England has been deeply infected with this pharisaical weakness; but as I have said, England takes things vaguely where Ireland takes
them vividly. The men of Belfast offer that city as something supreme, unique and unrivalled; and they are very nearly right. There is nothing exactly like it in the industrialism of this country; but for all that, the fight against its religion of arrogance has been fought out elsewhere and on a larger field. There is another centre and citadel from which this theory, of strength in a self–hypnotised superiority, has despised Christendom. There has been a rival city to Belfast; and its name was Berlin.

Historians of all religions and no religion may yet come to regard it as a historical fact, I fancy, that the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century (at least in the form it actually took) was a barbaric breakdown, like that Prussianism which was the ultimate product of the Protestantism. But however this may be, historians will always be interested to note that it produced certain curious and characteristic things; which are worth studying whether we like or dislike them. And one of its features, I fancy, has been this; that it has had the power of producing certain institutions which progressed very rapidly to great wealth and power; which the world regarded at a certain moment as invincible; and which the world, at the next moment, suddenly discovered to be intolerable. It was so with the whole of that Calvinist theology, of which Belfast is now left as the lonely missionary. It was so, even in our own time, with the whole of that industrial capitalism of which Belfast is now the besieged and almost deserted outpost. And it was so with Berlin as it was with Belfast; and a subtle Prussian might almost complain of a kind of treachery, in the abruptness with which the world woke up and found it wanting; in the suddenness of the reaction that struck it impotent, so soon after it had been counted on omnipotent. These things seem to hold all the future; and in one flash they are things of the past.

Belfast is an antiquated novelty. Such a thing is still being excused for seeming parvenu when it is discovered to be passe. For instance, it is only by coming in touch with some of the controversies surrounding the Convention, that an Englishman could realise how much the mentality of the Belfast leader is not so much that of a remote seventeenth century Whig, as that of a recent nineteenth century Radical. His conventionality seemed to be that of a Victorian rather than a Williamite; and to be less limited by the Orange Brotherhood than by the Cobden Club. This is a fact most successfully painted and pasted over by the big brushes of our own Party System, which has the art of hiding so many glaring facts. This Unionist Party in Ireland is very largely concerned to resist the main reform advocated by the Unionist Party in England. A political humorist, who understood the Cobden tradition of Belfast and the Chamberlain
tradition of Birmingham, could have a huge amount of fun appealing from one to
the other; congratulating Belfast on the bold Protectionist doctrines prevalent in
Ireland; adjuring Mr. Bonar Law and the Tariff Reformers never to forget the
fight made by Belfast for the sacred principles of Free Trade. But the fact that
the Belfast school is merely the Manchester school is only one aspect of this
general truth about the abrupt collapse into antiquity; a sudden superannuation.
The whole march of that Manchester industrialism is not only halted but turned;
the whole position is outflanked by new forces coming from new directions; the
wealth of the peasants blocks the road in front of it; the general strike has
risen menacing its rear. That strange cloud of self–protecting vanity may still
permit Belfast to believe in Belfast, but Britain does not really believe in Belfast.
Philosophical forces far wider and deeper than politics have undermined the
conception of progressive Protestantism in Ireland. I should say myself that mere
English ascendency in that island became intellectually impossible on the day
when Shaftesbury introduced the first Factory Act, and on the day when
Newman published the first pages of the Apologia. Both men were certainly
Tories and probably Unionists.

Neither were connected with the subject or with each other; the one hated the
Pope and the other the Liberator. But industrialism was never again self–
evidently superior after the first event, or Protestantism self–evidently superior
after the other. And it needed a towering and self–evident superiority to excuse
the English rule in Ireland. It is only on the ground of unquestionably doing
good that men can do so much evil as that.

Some Orangemen before the war indulged in a fine rhetorical comparison
between William of Prussia and William of Orange; and openly suggested that
the new Protestant Deliverer from the north would come from North Germany. I
was assured by my more moderate hosts in Belfast that such Orangemen could
not be regarded as representative or even responsible. On that I cannot
pronounce. The Orangemen may not have been representative; they may not
have been responsible; but I am quite sure they were right. I am quite sure those
poor fanatics were far nearer the nerve of historical truth than professional
politicians like Sir Edward Carson or industrial capitalists like Sir George Clark.
If ever there was a natural alliance in the world, it would have been the alliance
between Belfast and Berlin. The fanatics may be fools, but they have here the
light by which the foolish things can confound the wise. It is the brightest spot in
Belfast, bigotry, for if the light in its body be darkness, it is still brighter than the
darkness. By the vision that goes everywhere with the virility and greatness of
religion, these men have indeed pierced to the Protestant secret and the meaning of four hundred years. Their Protestantism is Prussianism, not as a term of abuse, but as a term of abstract and impartial ethical science. Belfast and Berlin are on the same side in the deepest of all the spiritual issues involved in the war. And that is the simple issue of whether pride is a sin, and therefore a weakness. Modern mentality, or great masses of it, has seriously advanced the view that it is a weakness to disarm criticism by self-criticism, and a strength to disdain criticism through self-confidence. That is the thesis for which Berlin gave battle to the older civilisation in Europe; and that for which Belfast gave battle to the older civilisation in Ireland. It may be, as I suggested, that such Protestant pride is the old Calvinism, with its fixed election of the few. It may be that the Protestantism is merely Paganism, with its brutish gods and giants lingering in corners of the more savage north. It may be that the Calvinism was itself a recurrence of the Paganism. But in any case, I am sure that this superiority, which can master men like a nightmare, can also vanish like a nightmare. And I strongly suspect that in this matter also, as in the matter of property as viewed by a peasantry, the older civilisation will prove to be the real civilisation; and that a healthier society will return to regarding pride as a pestilence, as the Socialists have already returned to regarding avarice as a pestilence. The old tradition of Christendom was that the highest form of faith was a doubt. It was the doubt of a man about his soul. It was admirably expressed to me by Mr. Yeats, who is now champion of Catholic orthodoxy, in stating his preference for mediaeval Catholicism as compared with modern humanitarianism; “Men were thinking then about their own sins, and now they are always thinking about other people’s.” And even by the Protestant test of progress, pride is seen to be arrested by a premature paralysis. Progress is superiority to oneself; and it is stopped dead by superiority to others. The case is even clearer by the test of poetry, which is much more solid and permanent than progress. The Superman may have been a sort of poem; but he could never be any sort of poet. The more we attempt to analyse that strange element of wonder, which is the soul of all the arts, the more we shall see that it must depend on some subordination of the self to a glory existing beyond it, and even in spite of it. Man always feels as a creature when he acts as a creator. When he carves a cathedral it is to make a monster that can swallow him. But the Nietzschean nightmare of swallowing the world is only a sort of yawning. When the evolutionary anarch has broken all links and laws and is at last free to speak, he finds he has nothing to say. So German songs under the imperial eagle fell silent like songbirds under a hawk;
and it is but rarely, and here and there, that a Belfast merchant liberates his soul in a lyric. He has to get Mr. Kipling to write a Belfast poem, in a style technically attuned to the Belfast pictures. There is the true Tara of the silent harp, and the throne and habitation of the dream; and it is there that the Celtic pessimists should weep in silence for the end of song. Blowing one’s own trumpet has not proved a good musical education.

In logic a wise man will always put the cart before the horse. That is to say, he will always put the end before the means; when he is considering the question as a whole. He does not construct a cart in order to exercise a horse. He employs a horse to draw a cart, and whatever is in the cart. In all modern reasoning there is a tendency to make the mere political beast of burden more important than the chariot of man it is meant to draw. This had led to a dismissal of all such spiritual questions in favour of what are called social questions; and this to a too facile treatment of things like the religious question in Belfast. There is a religious question; and it will not have an irreligious answer. It will not be met by the limitation of Christian faith, but rather by the extension of Christian charity. But if a man says that there is no difference between a Protestant and a Catholic, and that both can act in an identical fashion everywhere but in a church or chapel, he is madly driving the cart–horse when he has forgotten the cart. A religion is not the church a man goes to but the cosmos he lives in; and if any sceptic forgets it, the maddest fanatic beating an Orange drum about the Battle of the Boyne is a better philosopher than he.

Many uneducated and some educated people in Belfast, quite sincerely believe that Roman priests are fiends, only waiting to rekindle the fires of the Inquisition. For two simple reasons, however, I declined to take this fact as evidence of anything except their sincerity. First, because the stories, when reduced to their rudiment of truth, generally resolved themselves into the riddle of poor Roman Catholics giving money to their own religion; and seemed to deplore not so much a dependence on priests as an independence of employers. And second for a reason drawn from my own experience, as well as common knowledge, concerning the Protestant gentry in the south of Ireland. The southern Unionists spoke quite without this special horror of Catholic priests or peasants. They grumbled at them or laughed at them as a man grumbles or laughs at his neighbours; but obviously they no more dreamed that the priest would burn them than that he would eat them. If the priests were as black as the black Protestants painted them, they would be at their worst where they are with the majority; and would be known at their worst by the minority. It was clear
that Belfast held the more bigoted tradition, not because it knew more of priests, but because it knew less of them; not because it was on the spot, but because the spot was barred. An even more general delusion was the idea that all the southern Irish dreamed and did no work. I pointed out that this also was inconsistent with concrete experience; since all over the world a man who makes a small farm pay has to work very hard indeed. In historic fact, the old notion that the Irish peasant did no work, but only dreamed, had a simple explanation. It merely meant that he did no work for a capitalist’s profit; but dreamed of some day doing work for his own profit. But there may also have been this distorted truth in the tradition; that a free peasant, while he extends his own work, creates his own holidays. He is not idle all day, but he may be idle at any time of the day; he does not dream whenever he feels inclined, but he does dream whenever he chooses. A famous Belfast manufacturer, a man of capacity, but one who shook his head over the unaccountable prevalence of priests, assured me that he had seen peasants in the south doing nothing, at all sorts of odd times; and this is doubtless the difference between the farm and the factory. The same gentleman showed me over the colossal shipping of the great harbour, with all machinery and transport leading up to it. No man of any imagination would be insensible to such titanic experiments of his race; or deny the dark poetry of those furnaces fit for Vulcan or those hammers worthy of Thor. But as I stood on the dock I said to my guide: “Have you ever asked what all this is for?” He was an intelligent man, an exile from metaphysical Scotland, and he knew what I meant. “I don’t know,” he said, “perhaps we are only insects building a coral reef. I don’t know what is the good of the coral reef.” “Perhaps,” I said, “that is what the peasant dreams about, and, why he listens to the priest.”

For there seems to be a fashionable fallacy to the effect that religious equality is something to be done and done with, that we may go on to the real matter of political equality. In philosophy it is the flat contrary that is true. Political equality is something to be done and done with, that we may go on to the much more real matter of religion. At the Abbey Theatre I saw a forcible play by Mr. St. John Ervine, called The Mixed Marriage; which I should remember if it were only for the beautiful acting of Miss Maire O’Neill. But the play moved me very much as a play; yet I felt that the presence of this fallacy falsified it in some measure. The dramatist seemed to resent a schism merely because it interfered with a strike. But the only object of striking is liberty; and the only object of liberty is life: a thing wholly spiritual. It is economic liberty that should be dismissed as these people dismiss theology. We only get it, to forget it. It is right
that men should have houses, right that they should have land, right that they should have laws to protect the land; but all these things are only machinery to make leisure for the labouring soul. The house is only a stage set up by stage carpenters for the acting of what Mr. J. B. Yeats has called “the drama of the home.” All the most dramatic things happen at home, from being born to being dead. What a man thinks about these things is his life; and to substitute for them a bustle of electioneering and legislation is to wander about among screens and pulleys on the wrong side of pasteboard scenery; and never to act the play. And that play is always a miracle play; and the name of its hero is Everyman.

When I came back from the desolate splendour of the Donegal sea and shore, and saw again the square garden and the statue outside the Dublin hotel, I did not know I was returning to something that might well be called more desolate. For it was when I entered the hotel that I first found that it was full of the awful tragedy of the Leinster. I had often seen death in a home, but never death decimating a vast hostelry; and there was something strangely shocking about the empty seats of men and women with whom I had talked so idly a few days before. It was almost as if there was more tragedy in the cutting short of such trivial talk than in the sundering of life–long ties. But there was all the dignity as well as the tragedy of man; and I was glad, before I left Ireland, to have seen the nobler side of the Anglo–Irish garrison; and to have known men of my own blood, however mistaken, so enduring the end of things. With the bad news from the sea came better news from the war; Mangin had struck the sensational blow that cut off the Germans as they marched upon Chalons; and with all the emotions of an exile, however temporary, I knew that my own land was secure. Somehow, the bad and good news together turned my mind more and more towards England; and all the inner humour and insular geniality which even the Irish may some day be allowed to understand. As I went homewards on the next boat that started from the Irish port, and the Wicklow hills receded in a rainy and broken sunlight, it was with all the simplest of those ancient appetites with which a man should come back to his own country. Only there clung to me, not to be denied, one sentiment about Ireland, one sentiment that I could not transfer to England; which called me like an elfland of so many happy figures, from Puck to Pickwick. As I looked at those rainy hills, I knew at least that I was looking, perhaps for the last time, on something rooted in the Christian faith. There at least the Christian ideal was something more than an ideal; it was in a special sense real. It was so real that it appeared even in statistics. It was so self–evident as to be seen even by sociologists. It was a land where our religion had
made even its vision visible. It had made even its unpopular virtues popular. It must be, in the times to come, a final testing-place, of whether a people that will take that name seriously, and even solidly, is fated to suffer or to succeed.

As the long line of the mountain coast unfolded before me I had an optical illusion; it may be that many have had it before. As new lengths of coast and lines of heights were unfolded, I had the fancy that the whole land was not receding but advancing, like something spreading out its arms to the world. A chance shred of sunshine rested, like a riven banner, on the hill which I believe is called in Irish the Mountain of the Golden Spears; and I could have imagined that the spears and the banner were coming on. And in that flash I remembered that the men of this island had once gone forth, not the torches of conquerors or destroyers; but as missionaries in the very midnight of the Dark Ages, like a multitude of moving candles, that were the light of the world.
A SHORT HISTORY
OF ENGLAND

G. K. CHESTERTON
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

A SHORT HISTORY OF ENGLAND

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I
INTRODUCTION

II
THE PROVINCE OF ENGLAND

III
THE AGE OF LEGENDS

IV
THE DEFEAT OF THE BARBARIANS

V
ST. EDWARD AND THE NORMAN KINGS

VI
THE AGE OF THE CRUSADES

VII
THE PROBLEM OF THE PLANTAGENETS

VIII
THE MEANING OF MERRY ENGLAND

IX
NATIONALITY AND THE FRENCH WARS

X
THE WAR OF THE USURPERS

XI
THE REBELLION OF THE RICH

XII
SPAIN AND THE SCHISM OF NATIONS

XIII
THE AGE OF THE PURITANS

XIV
THE TRIUMPH OF THE WHIGS
XV
THE WAR WITH THE GREAT REPUBLICS

XVI
ARISTOCRACY AND THE DISCONTENTS

XVII
THE RETURN OF THE BARBARIAN

XVIII
CONCLUSION
INTRODUCTION

It will be very reasonably asked why I should consent, though upon a sort of challenge, to write even a popular essay in English history, who make no pretence to particular scholarship and am merely a member of the public. The answer is that I know just enough to know one thing: that a history from the standpoint of a member of the public has not been written. What we call the popular histories should rather be called the anti–popular histories. They are all, nearly without exception, written against the people; and in them, the populace is either ignored or elaborately proved to have been wrong. It is true that Green called his book “A Short History of the English People”; but he seems to have thought it too short for the people to be properly mentioned. For instance, he calls one very large part of his story “Puritan England.” But England never was Puritan. It would have been almost as unfair to call the rise of Henry of Navarre “Puritan France.” And some of our extreme Whig historians would have been pretty nearly capable of calling the campaign of Wexford and Drogheda “Puritan Ireland.”

But it is especially in the matter of the Middle Ages that the popular histories trample upon the popular traditions. In this respect there is an almost comic contrast between the general information provided about England in the last two or three centuries, in which its present industrial system, was being built up, and the general information given about the preceding centuries, which we call broadly mediaeval. Of the sort of waxwork history which is thought sufficient for the side–show of the age of abbots and crusaders, a small instance will be sufficient. A popular Encyclopaedia appeared some years ago, professing among other things to teach English History to the masses; and in this I came upon a series of pictures of the English kings. No one could expect them to be all authentic; but the interest attached to those that were necessarily imaginary. There is much vivid material in contemporary literature for portraits of men like Henry II or Edward I; but this did not seem to have been found, or even sought. And wandering to the image that stood for Stephen of Blois, my eye was staggered by a gentleman with one of those helmets with steel brims curved like a crescent, which went with the age of ruffs and trunk–hose. I am tempted to suspect that the head was that of a halberdier at some such scene as the
execution of Mary Queen of Scots. But he had a helmet; and helmets were mediaeval; and any old helmet was good enough for Stephen.

Now suppose the readers of that work of reference had looked for the portrait of Charles I and found the head of a policeman. Suppose it had been taken, modern helmet and all, out of some snapshot in the Daily Sketch of the arrest of Mrs. Pankhurst. I think we may go so far as to say that the readers would have refused to accept it as a lifelike portrait of Charles I. They would have formed the opinion that there must be some mistake. Yet the time that elapsed between Stephen and Mary was much longer than the time that has elapsed between Charles and ourselves. The revolution in human society between the first of the Crusades and the last of the Tudors was immeasurably more colossal and complete than any change between Charles and ourselves. And, above all, that revolution should be the first thing and the final thing in anything calling itself a popular history. For it is the story of how our populace gained great things, but to–day has lost everything.

Now I will modestly maintain that I know more about English history than this; and that I have as much right to make a popular summary of it as the gentleman who made the crusader and the halberdier change hats. But the curious and arresting thing about the neglect, one might say the omission, of mediaeval civilization in such histories as this, lies in the fact I have already noted. It is exactly the popular story that is left out of the popular history. For instance, even a working man, a carpenter or cooper or bricklayer, has been taught about the Great Charter, as something like the Great Auk, save that its almost monstrous solitude came from being before its time instead of after. He was not taught that the whole stuff of the Middle Ages was stiff with the parchment of charters; that society was once a system of charters, and of a kind much more interesting to him. The carpenter heard of one charter given to barons, and chiefly in the interest of barons; the carpenter did not hear of any of the charters given to carpenter, to coopers, to all the people like himself. Or, to take another instance, the boy and girl reading the stock simplified histories of the schools practically never heard of such a thing as a burgher, until he appears in a shirt with a noose round his neck. They certainly do not imagine anything of what he meant in the Middle Ages. And Victorian shopkeepers did not conceive themselves as taking part in any such romance as the adventure of Coutrai, where the mediaeval shopkeepers more than won their spurs–for they won the spurs of their enemies.

I have a very simple motive and excuse for telling the little I know of this true
tale. I have met in my wanderings a man brought up in the lower quarters of a great house, fed mainly on its leavings and burdened mostly with its labours. I know that his complaints are stilled, and his status justified, by a story that is told to him. It is about how his grandfather was a chimpanzee and his father a wild man of the woods, caught by hunters and tamed into something like intelligence. In the light of this, he may well be thankful for the almost human life that he enjoys; and may be content of leaving behind him a yet more evolved animal. Strangely enough, the calling of this story by the sacred name of Progress ceased to satisfy me when I began to suspect (and to discover) that it is not true. I know by now enough at least of his origin to know that he was not evolved, but simply disinherited. His family tree is not a monkey tree, save in the sense that no monkey could have climbed it; rather it is like that tree torn up by the roots and names “Dedischado,” on the shield of the unknown knight.
II

THE PROVINCE OF ENGLAND

The land on which we live once had the highly poetic privilege of being the end of the world. Its extremity was ultima Thule, the other end of nowhere. When these islands, lost in a night of northern seas, were lit up at last by the long searchlights of Rome, it was felt that the remotest remnant of things had been touched; and more for pride than possession.

The sentiment was not unsuitable, even in geography. About these realms upon the edge of everything there was really something that can only be called edgy. Britain is not so much an island as an archipelago; it is at least a labyrinth of peninsulas. In few of the kindred countries can one so easily and so strangely find sea in the fields or fields in the sea. The great rivers seem not only to meet in the ocean, but barely to miss each other in the hills: the whole land, though low as a whole, leans towards the west in shouldering mountains; and a prehistoric tradition has taught it to look towards the sunset for islands yet dreamier than its own. The islanders are of a kind with their islands. Different as are the nations into which they are now divided, the Scots, the English, the Irish, the Welsh of the western uplands, have something altogether different from the humdrum docility of the inland Germans, or from the bon sens français which can be at will trenchant or trite. There is something common to all the Britons, which even Acts of Union have not torn asunder. The nearest name for it is insecurity, something fitting in men walking on cliffs and the verge of things. Adventure, a lonely taste in liberty, a humour without wit, perplex their critics and perplex themselves. Their souls are fretted like their coasts. They have an embarrassment, noted by all foreigners: it is expressed, perhaps, in the Irish by a confusion of speech and in the English by a confusion of thought. For the Irish bull is a licence with the symbol of language. But Bull’s own bull, the English bull, is “a dumb ox of thought”; a standing mystification in the mind. There is something double in the thoughts as of the soul mirrored in many waters. Of all peoples they are least attached to the purely classical; the imperial plainness which the French do finely and the Germans coarsely, but the Britons hardly at all. They are constantly colonists and emigrants; they have the name of being at home in every country. But they are torn between love of home and love of something else; of which the sea may be the explanation or may be only the
symbol. It is also found in a nameless nursery rhyme which is the finest line English literature and the dumb refrain of all English poems—”Over the hills and far away.”

The greatest rationalist hero who first conquered Britain, whether or no he was the detached demi–god of “Caesar and Cleopatra,” was certainly a Latin of the Latins, and described these islands when he found them with all the curt positivism of his pen of steel. But even Julius Caesar’s brief account of the Britons leaves on us something of this mystery, which is more than ignorance of fact. They were apparently ruled by that terrible thing, a pagan priesthood. Stones now shapeless yet arranged in symbolic shapes bear witness to the order and labour of those that lifted them. Their worship was probably Nature–worship; and while such a basis may count for something in the elemental quality that has always soaked the island arts, the collision between it and the tolerant Empire suggests the presence of something which generally grows out of nature–worship—I mean the unnatural. But upon nearly all the matters of modern controversy Caesar is silent. He is silent about whether the language was “Celtic”; and some of the place–names have even given rise to a suggestion that, in parts at least, it was already Teutonic. I am not capable of pronouncing upon the truth of such speculations, but I am of pronouncing upon their importance; at least, to my one very simple purpose. And indeed their importance has been very exaggerated. Caesar professed to give no more than the glimpse of a traveller; but, when, some considerable time after, the Romans returned and turned Britain into a Roman province, they continued to display a singular indifference to questions that have excited so many professors. What they cared about was getting and giving in Britain what they had got and given in Gaul. We do not know whether the Britons then, or for that matter the Britons now, were Iberian or Cymric or Teutonic. We do know that in a short time they were Roman.

Every now and then there is discovered in modern England some fragment such as a Roman pavement. Such Roman antiquities rather diminish than increase the Roman reality. They make something seem distant which is still very near, and something seem dead that is still alive. It is like writing a man’s epitaph on his front door. The epitaph would probably be a compliment, but hardly a personal introduction. The important thing about France and England is not that they have Roman remains. They are Roman remains. In truth they are not so much remains as relics; for they are still working miracles. A row of poplars is a more Roman relic than a row of pillars. Nearly all that we call the works of nature have but grown like fungoids upon this original work of man,
and our woods are mosses on the bones of a giant. Under the seed of our harvest and the roots of our trees is a foundation of which the fragments of tile and brick are but emblems; and under the colours of our wildest flowers are the colours of a Roman pavement.

Britain was directly Roman for fully four hundred years; longer than she has been Protestant, and very much longer than she has been industrial. What was meant by being Roman it is necessary in a few lines to say, or no sense can be made of what happened after, especially of what happened immediately after. Being Roman did not mean being subject, in the sense that one savage tribe will enslave another, or in the sense that the cynical politicians of recent times watched with a horrible hopefulness for the evanescence of the Irish. Both conquerors and conquered were heathen, and both had the institutions which seem to us to give an inhumanity to heathenism: the triumph, the slave–market, the lack of all the sensitive nationalism of modern history. But the Roman Empire did not destroy nations; if anything, it created them. Britons were not originally proud of being Britons; but they were proud of being Romans. The Roman steel was at least as much a magnet as a sword. In truth it was rather a round mirror of steel, in which every people came to see itself. For Rome as Rome the very smallness of the civic origin was a warrant for the largeness of the civic experiment. Rome itself obviously could not rule the world, any more than Rutland. I mean it could not rule the other races as the Spartans ruled the Helots or the Americans ruled the negroes. A machine so huge had to be human; it had to have a handle that fitted any man’s hand. The Roman Empire necessarily became less Roman as it became more of an Empire; until not very long after Rome gave conquerors to Britain, Britain was giving emperors to Rome. Out of Britain, as the Britons boasted, came at length the great Empress Helena, who was the mother of Constantine. And it was Constantine, as all men know, who first nailed up that proclamation which all after generations have in truth been struggling either to protect or to tear down.

About that revolution no man has ever been able to be impartial. The present writer will make no idle pretence of being so. That it was the most revolutionary of all revolutions, since it identified the dead body on a servile gibbet with the fatherhood in the skies, has long been a commonplace without ceasing to be a paradox. But there is another historic element that must also be realized. Without saying anything more of its tremendous essence, it is very necessary to note why even pre–Christian Rome was regarded as something mystical for long afterwards by all European men. The extreme view of it was held, perhaps, by
Dante; but it pervaded mediaevalism, and therefore still haunts modernity. Rome was regarded as Man, mighty, though fallen, because it was the utmost that Man had done. It was divinely necessary that the Roman Empire should succeed—if only that it might fail. Hence the school of Dante implied the paradox that the Roman soldiers killed Christ, not only by right, but even by divine right. That mere law might fail at its highest test it had to be real law, and not mere military lawlessness. Therefore God worked by Pilate as by Peter. Therefore the mediaeval poet is eager to show that Roman government was simply good government, and not a usurpation. For it was the whole point of the Christian revolution to maintain that in this, good government was as bad as bad. Even good government was not good enough to know God among the thieves. This is not only generally important as involving a colossal change in the conscience; the loss of the whole heathen repose in the complete sufficiency of the city or the state. It made a sort of eternal rule enclosing an eternal rebellion. It must be incessantly remembered through the first half of English history; for it is the whole meaning in the quarrel of the priests and kings.

The double rule of the civilization and the religion in one sense remained for centuries; and before its first misfortunes came it must be conceived as substantially the same everywhere. And however it began it largely ended in equality. Slavery certainly existed, as it had in the most democratic states of ancient times. Harsh officialism certainly existed, as it exists in the most democratic states of modern times. But there was nothing of what we mean in modern times by aristocracy, still less of what we mean by racial domination. In so far as any change was passing over that society with its two levels of equal citizens and equal slaves, it was only the slow growth of the power of the Church at the expense of the power of the Empire. Now it is important to grasp that the great exception to equality, the institution of Slavery, was slowly modified by both causes. It was weakened both by the weakening of the Empire and by the strengthening of the Church.

Slavery was for the Church not a difficulty of doctrine, but a strain on the imagination. Aristotle and the pagan sages who had defined the servile or “useful” arts, had regarded the slave as a tool, an axe to cut wood or whatever wanted cutting. The Church did not denounce the cutting; but she felt as if she was cutting glass with a diamond. She was haunted by the memory that the diamond is so much more precious than the glass. So Christianity could not settle down into the pagan simplicity that the man was made for the work, when the work was so much less immortally momentous than the man. At about this
stage of a history of England there is generally told the anecdote of a pun of Gregory the Great; and this is perhaps the true point of it. By the Roman theory the barbarian bondmen were meant to be useful. The saint’s mysticism was moved at finding them ornamental; and “Non Angli sed Angeli” meant more nearly “Not slaves, but souls.” It is to the point, in passing, to note that in the modern country most collectively Christian, Russia, the serfs were always referred to as “souls.” The great Pope’s phrase, hackneyed as it is, is perhaps the first glimpse of the golden halos in the best Christian Art. Thus the Church, with whatever other faults, worked of her own nature towards greater social equality; and it is a historical error to suppose that the Church hierarchy worked with aristocracies, or was of a kind with them. It was an inversion of aristocracy; in the ideal of it, at least, the last were to be first. The Irish bull that “One man is as good as another and a great deal better” contains a truth, like many contradictions; a truth that was the link between Christianity and citizenship. Alone of all superiors, the saint does not depress the human dignity of others. He is not conscious of his superiority to them; but only more conscious of his inferiority than they are.

But while a million little priests and monks like mice were already nibbling at the bonds of the ancient servitude, another process was going on, which has here been called the weakening of the Empire. It is a process which is to this day very difficult to explain. But it affected all the institutions of all the provinces, especially the institution of Slavery. But of all the provinces its effect was heaviest in Britain, which lay on or beyond the borders. The case of Britain, however, cannot possibly be considered alone. The first half of English history has been made quite unmeaning in the schools by the attempt to tell it without reference to the corporate Christendom in which it took part and pride. I fully accept the truth of Mr. Kipling’s question of “What can they know of England who only England know?” and merely differ from the view that they will best broaden their minds by the study of Wagga–Wagga and Timbuctoo. It is therefore necessary, though very difficult, to frame in few words some idea of what happened to the whole European race.

Rome itself, which had made all that strong world, was the weakest thing in it. The centre had been growing fainter and fainter, and now the centre disappeared. Rome had as much freed the world as ruled it, and now she could rule no more. Save for the presence of the Pope and his constantly increasing supernatural prestige, the eternal city became like one of her own provincial towns. A loose localism was the result rather than any conscious intellectual unity. There was
anarchy, but there was no rebellion. For rebellion must have a principle, and therefore (for those who can think) an authority. Gibbon called his great pageant of prose “The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.” The Empire did decline, but it did not fall. It remains to this hour.

By a process very much more indirect even than that of the Church, this decentralization and drift also worked against the slave-state of antiquity. The localism did indeed produce that choice of territorial chieftains which came to be called Feudalism, and of which we shall speak later. But the direct possession of man by man the same localism tended to destroy; though this negative influence upon it bears no kind of proportion to the positive influence of the Catholic Church. The later pagan slavery, like our own industrial labour which increasingly resembles it, was worked on a larger and larger scale; and it was at last too large to control. The bondman found the visible Lord more distant than the new invisible one. The slave became the serf; that is, he could be shut in, but not shut out. When once he belonged to the land, it could not be long before the land belonged to him. Even in the old and rather fictitious language of chattel slavery, there is here a difference. It is the difference between a man being a chair and a man being a house. Canute might call for his throne; but if he wanted his throne–room he must go and get it himself. Similarly, he could tell his slave to run, but he could only tell his serf to stay. Thus the two slow changes of the time both tended to transform the tool into a man. His status began to have roots; and whatever has roots will have rights.

What the decline did involve everywhere was decivilization; the loss of letter, of laws, of roads and means of communication, the exaggeration of local colour into caprice. But on the edges of the Empire this decivilization became a definite barbarism, owing to the nearness of wild neighbours who were ready to destroy as deafly and blindly as things are destroyed by fire. Save for the lurid and apocalyptic locust–flight of the Huns, it is perhaps an exaggeration to talk, even in those darkest ages, of a deluge of the barbarians; at least when we are speaking of the old civilization as a whole. But a deluge of barbarians is not entirely an exaggeration of what happened on some of the borders of the Empire; of such edges of the known world as we began by describing in these pages. And on the extreme edge of the world lay Britain.

It may be true, though there is little proof of it, that the Roman civilization itself was thinner in Britain than in the other provinces; but it was a very civilized civilization. It gathered round the great cities like York and Chester and London; for the cities are older than the counties, and indeed older even than the
countries. These were connected by a skeleton of great roads which were and are the bones of Britain. But with the weakening of Rome the bones began to break under barbarian pressure, coming at first from the north; from the Picts who lay beyond Agricola’s boundary in what is now the Scotch Lowlands. The whole of this bewildering time is full of temporary tribal alliances, generally mercenary; of barbarians paid to come on or barbarians paid to go away. It seems certain that in this welter Roman Britain bought help from ruder races living about the neck of Denmark where is now the duchy of Schleswig. Having been chosen only to fight somebody they naturally fought anybody; and a century of fighting followed, under the trampling of which the Roman pavement was broken into yet smaller pieces. It is perhaps permissible to disagree with the historian Green when he says that no spot should be more sacred to modern Englishmen than the neighbourhood of Ramsgate, where the Schleswig people are supposed to have landed; or when he suggests that their appearance is the real beginning of our island story. It would be rather more true to say that it was nearly, though prematurely, the end of it.
III

THE AGE OF LEGENDS

We should be startled if we were quietly reading a prosaic modern novel, and somewhere in the middle it turned without warning into a fairy tale. We should be surprised if one of the spinsters in Cranford, after tidily sweeping the room with a broom, were to fly away on a broomstick. Our attention would be arrested if one of Jane Austen’s young ladies who had just met a dragoon were to walk a little further and meet a dragon. Yet something very like this extraordinary transition takes place in British history at the end of the purely Roman period. We have to do with rational and almost mechanical accounts of encampment and engineering, of a busy bureaucracy and occasional frontier wars, quite modern in their efficiency and inefficiency; and then all of a sudden we are reading of wandering bells and wizard lances, of wars against men as tall as trees or as short as toadstools. The soldier of civilization is no longer fighting with Goths but with goblins; the land becomes a labyrinth of faërie towns unknown to history; and scholars can suggest but cannot explain how a Roman ruler or a Welsh chieftain towers up in the twilight as the awful and unbegotten Arthur. The scientific age comes first and the mythological age after it. One working example, the echoes of which lingered till very late in English literature, may serve to sum up the contrast. The British state which was found by Caesar was long believed to have been founded by Brutus. The contrast between the one very dry discovery and the other very fantastic foundation has something decidedly comic about it; as if Caesar’s ‘Et tu, Brute,’ might be translated, ‘What, you here?’ But in one respect the fable is quite as important as the fact. They both testify to the reality of the Roman foundation of our insular society, and show that even the stories that seem prehistoric are seldom pre-Roman. When England is Elfland, the elves are not the Angles. All the phrases that can be used as clues through that tangle of traditions are more or less Latin phrases. And in all our speech there was no word more Roman than ‘romance.’

The Roman legions left Britain in the fourth century. This did not mean that the Roman civilization left it; but it did mean that the civilization lay far more open both to admixture and attack. Christianity had almost certainly come to Britain, not indeed otherwise than by the routes established by Rome, but certainly long before the official Roman mission of Gregory the Great. It had
certainly been largely swamped by later heathen invasions of the undefended coasts. It may then rationally be urged that the hold both of the Empire and its new religion were here weaker than elsewhere, and that the description of the general civilization in the last chapter is proportionately irrelevant. This, however, is not the chief truth of the matter.

There is one fundamental fact which must be understood of the whole of this period. Yet a modern man must very nearly turn his mind upside down to understand it. Almost every modern man has in his head an association between freedom and the future. The whole culture of our time has been full of the notion of ‘A Good Time Coming.’ Now the whole culture of the Dark Ages was full of the notion of ‘A Good Time Going.’ They looked backwards to old enlightenment and forwards to new prejudices. In our time there has come a quarrel between faith and hope—which perhaps must be healed by charity. But they were situated otherwise. They hoped—but it may be said that they hoped for yesterday. All the motives that make a man a progressive now made a man a conservative then. The more he could keep of the past the more he had a fair law and a free state; the more he gave way to the future the more he must endure of ignorance and privilege. All we call reason was one with all we call reaction. And this is the clue which we must carry with us through the lives of all the great men of the Dark Ages; of Alfred, of Bede, of Dunstan. If the most extreme modern Republican were put back in that period he would be an equally extreme Papist or even Imperialist. For the Pope was what was left of the Empire; and the Empire what was left of the Republic.

We may compare the man of that time, therefore, to one who has left free cities and even free fields behind him, and is forced to advance towards a forest. And the forest is the fittest metaphor, not only because it was really that wild European growth cloven here and there by the Roman roads, but also because there has always been associated with forests another idea which increased as the Roman order decayed. The idea of the forests was the idea of enchantment. There was a notion of things being double or different from themselves, of beasts behaving like men and not merely, as modern wits would say, of men behaving like beasts. But it is precisely here that it is most necessary to remember that an age of reason had preceded the age of magic. The central pillar which has sustained the storied house of our imagination ever since has been the idea of the civilized knight amid the savage enchantments; the adventures of a man still sane in a world gone mad.

The next thing to note in the matter is this: that in this barbaric time none of
the heroes are barbaric. They are only heroes if they are antibarbaric. Men real or
mythical, or more probably both, became omnipresent like gods among the
people, and forced themselves into the faintest memory and the shortest record,
exactly in proportion as they had mastered the heathen madness of the time and
preserved the Christian rationality that had come from Rome. Arthur has his
name because he killed the heathen; the heathen who killed him have no names
at all. Englishmen who know nothing of English history, but less than nothing of
Irish history, have heard somehow or other of Brian Boru, though they spell it
Boroo and seem to be under the impression that it is a joke. It is a joke the
subtlety of which they would never have been able to enjoy, if King Brian had
not broken the heathen in Ireland at the great Battle of Clontarf. The ordinary
English reader would never have heard of Olaf of Norway if he had not
‘preached the Gospel with his sword’; or the Cid if he had not fought against the
Crescent. And though Alfred the Great seems to have deserved his title even as a
personality, he was not so great as the work he had to do.

But the paradox remains that Arthur is more real than Alfred. For the age is
the age of legends. Towards these legends most men adopt by instinct a sane
attitude; and, of the two, credulity is certainly much more sane than incredulity.
It does not much matter whether most of the stories are true; and (as in such
cases as Bacon and Shakespeare) to realize that the question does not matter is
the first step towards answering it correctly. But before the reader dismisses
anything like an attempt to tell the earlier history of the country by its legends,
he will do well to keep two principles in mind, both of them tending to correct
the crude and very thoughtless scepticism which has made this part of the story
so sterile. The nineteenth–century historians went on the curious principle of
dismissing all people of whom tales are told, and concentrating upon people of
whom nothing is told. Thus, Arthur is made utterly impersonal because all
legends are lies, but somebody of the type of Hengist is made quite an important
personality, merely because nobody thought him important enough to lie about.
Now this is the reverse of all common sense. A great many witty sayings are
attributed to Talleyrand which were really said by somebody else. But they
would not be so attributed if Talleyrand had been a fool, still less if he had been
a fable. That fictitious stories are told about a person is, nine times out of ten,
extremely good evidence that there was somebody to tell them about. Indeed
some allow that marvellous things were done, and that there may have been a
man named Arthur at the time in which they were done; but here, so far as I am
concerned, the distinction becomes rather dim. I do not understand the attitude
which holds that there was an Ark and a man named Noah, but cannot believe in the existence of Noah’s Ark.

The other fact to be remembered is that scientific research for the last few years has worked steadily in the direction of confirming and not dissipating the legends of the populace. To take only the obvious instance, modern excavators with modern spades have found a solid stone labyrinth in Crete, like that associated with the Minatour, which was conceived as being as cloudy a fable as the Chimera. To most people this would have seemed quite as frantic as finding the roots of Jack’s Beanstalk or the skeletons in Bluebeard’s cupboard, yet it is simply the fact. Finally, a truth to be remembered which scarcely ever is remembered in estimating the past. It is the paradox that the past is always present: yet it is not what was, but whatever seems to have been; for all the past is part of faith. What did they believe of their fathers? In this matter new discoveries are useless because they are new. We may find men wrong in what they thought they were, but we cannot find them wrong in what they thought they thought. It is therefore very practical to put in a few words, if possible, something of what a man of these islands in the Dark Ages would have said about his ancestors and his inheritance. I will attempt here to put some of the simpler things in their order of importance as he would have seen them; and if we are to understand our father who first made this country anything like itself, it is most important that we should remember that if this was not their real past, it was their real memory.

After that blessed crime, as the wit of mystics called it, which was for these men hardly second to the creation of the world, St. Joseph of Arimathea, one of the few followers of the new religion who seem to have been wealthy, set sail as a missionary, and after long voyages came to that litter of little islands which seemed to the men of the Mediterranean something like the last clouds of the sunset. He came up upon the western and wilder side of that wild and western land, and made his way to a valley which through all the oldest records is called Avalon. Something of rich rains and warmth in its westland meadows, or something in some lost pagan traditions about it, made it persistently regarded as a kind of Earthly Paradise. Arthur, after being slain at Lyonesse, is carried here, as if to heaven. Here the pilgrim planted his staff in the soil; and it took root as a tree that blossoms on Christmas Day.

A mystical materialism marked Christianity from its birth; the very soul of it was a body. Among the stoical philosophies and oriental negations that were its first foes it fought fiercely and particularly for a supernatural freedom to cure
concrete maladies by concrete substances. Hence the scattering of relics was everywhere like the scattering of seed. All who took their mission from the divine tragedy bore tangible fragments which became the gems of churches and cities. St. Joseph carried the cup which held the wine of the Last Supper and the blood of the Crucifixion to that shrine in Avalon which we now call Glastonbury; and it became the heart of a whole universe of legends and romances, not only for Britain but for Europe. Throughout this tremendous and branching tradition it is called the Holy Grail. The vision of it was especially the reward of that ring of powerful paladins whom King Arthur feasted at a Round Table, a symbol imitated or invented by mediaeval knighthood. Both the cup and the table are of vast importance emblematically in the psychology of the chivalric experiment. The idea of a round table is not merely universality but equality. It has in it, modified of course, by other tendencies to differentiation, the same idea that exists in the very word ‘peers,’ as given to the knights of Charlemagne. In this the Round Table is as Roman as the round arch, which might also serve as a type; for instead of being one barbaric rock merely rolled on the others, the king was rather the keystone of an arch. But to this tradition of a level of dignity was added something unearthly that was from Rome, but not of it; the privilege that inverted all privileges; the glimpse of heaven which seemed almost as capricious as fairyland; the flying chalice which was veiled from the highest of all the heroes, and which appeared to one knight who was hardly more than a child.

Rightly or wrongly, this romance established Britain for after centuries as a country with a chivalrous past. Britain had been a mirror of universal knighthood. This fact, or fancy, is of colossal import in all ensuing affairs, especially the affairs of barbarians. These and numberless other local legends are indeed for us buried by the forests of popular fancies that have grown out of them. It is all the harder for the serious modern mind because our fathers felt at home with these tales, and therefore took liberties with them. Probably the rhyme which runs,

‘When good King Arthur ruled this land He was a noble king, He stole three pecks of barley meal,’

is much nearer the true mediaeval note than the aristocratic stateliness of Tennyson. But about all these grotesques of the popular fancy there is one last thing to be remembered. It must especially be remembered by those who would dwell exclusively on documents, and take no note of tradition at all. Wild as would be the results of credulity concerning all the old wives’ tales, it would not
be so wild as the errors that can arise from trusting to written evidence when there is not enough of it. Now the whole written evidence for the first parts of our history would go into a small book. A very few details are mentioned, and none are explained. A fact thus standing alone, without the key of contemporary thought, may be very much more misleading than any fable. To know what word an archaic scribe wrote without being sure of what thing he meant, may produce a result that is literally mad. Thus, for instance, it would be unwise to accept literally the tale that St. Helena was not only a native of Colchester, but was a daughter of Old King Cole. But it would not be very unwise; not so unwise as some things that are deduced from documents. The natives of Colchester certainly did honour to St. Helena, and might have had a king named Cole. According to the more serious story, the saint’s father was an inn–keeper; and the only recorded action of Cole is well within the resources of that calling. It would not be nearly so unwise as to deduce from the written word, as some critic of the future may do, that the natives of Colchester were oysters.
IV

THE DEFEAT OF THE BARBARIANS

It is a quaint accident that we employ the word ‘short–sighted’ as a condemnation; but not the word ‘long–sighted,’ which we should probably use, if at all, as a compliment. Yet the one is as much a malady of vision as the other. We rightly say, in rebuke of a small–minded modernity, that it is very short–sighted to be indifferent to all this is historic. But it is as disastrously long–sighted to be interested only in what is prehistoric. And this disaster has befallen a large proportion of the learned who grope in the darkness of unrecorded epochs for the roots of their favourite race or races. The wars, the enslavements, the primitive marriage customs, the colossal migrations and massacres upon which their theories repose, are no part of history or even of legend. And rather than trust with entire simplicity to these it would be infinitely wiser to trust to legend of the loosest and most local sort. In any case, it is well to record even so simple a conclusion as that what is prehistoric is unhistorical.

But there is another way in which common sense can be brought to the criticism of some prodigious racial theories. To employ the same figure, suppose the scientific historians explain the historic centuries in terms of a prehistoric division between short–sighted and long–sighted men. They could cite their instances and illustrations. They would certainly explain the curiosity of language I mentioned first, as showing that the short–sighted were the conquered race, and their name therefore a term of contempt. They could give us very graphic pictures of the rude tribal war. They could show how the long–sighted people were always cut to pieces in hand–to–hand struggles with axe and knife; until, with the invention of bows and arrows, the advantage veered to the long–sighted, and their enemies were shot down in droves. I could easily write a ruthless romance about it, and still more easily a ruthless anthropological theory. According to that thesis which refers all moral to material changes, they could explain the tradition that old people grow conservative in politics by the well–known fact that old people grow more long–sighted. But I think there might be one thing about this theory which would stump us, and might even, if it be possible, stump them. Suppose it were pointed out that through all the three thousand years of recorded history, abounding in literature of every conceivable kind, there was not so much as a mention of the oculist question for which all
had been dared and done. Suppose not one of the living or dead languages of mankind had so much as a word for ‘long–sighted’ or ‘short–sighted.’ Suppose, in short, the question that had torn the whole world in two was never even asked at all, until some spectacle–maker suggested it somewhere about 1750. In that case I think we should find it hard to believe that this physical difference had really played so fundamental a part in human history. And that is exactly the case with the physical difference between the Celts, the Teutons and the Latins.

I know of no way in which fair–haired people can be prevented from falling in love with dark–haired people; and I do not believe that whether a man was long–headed or round–headed ever made much difference to any one who felt inclined to break his head. To all mortal appearance, in all mortal records and experience, people seem to have killed or spared, married or refrained from marriage, made kings or made slaves, with reference to almost any other consideration except this one. There was the love of a valley or a village, a site or a family; there were enthusiasms for a prince and his hereditary office; there were passions rooted in locality, special emotions about sea–fold or mountain–fold; there were historic memories of a cause or an alliance; there was, more than all, the tremendous test of religion. But of a cause like that of the Celts or Teutons, covering half the earth, there was little or nothing. Race was not only never at any given moment a motive, but it was never even an excuse. The Teutons never had a creed; they never had a cause; and it was only a few years ago that they began even to have a cant.

The orthodox modern historian, notably Green, remarks on the singularity of Britain in being alone of all Roman provinces wholly cleared and repeopled by a Germanic race. He does not entertain, as an escape from the singularity of this even, the possibility that it never happened. In the same spirit he deals with the little that can be quoted of the Teutonic society. His ideal picture of it is completed in small touches which even an amateur can detect as dubious. Thus he will touch on the Teuton with a phrase like ‘the basis of their society was the free man’; and on the Roman with a phrase like ‘the mines, if worked by forced labour, must have been a source of endless oppression.’ The simple fact being that the Roman and the Teuton both had slaves, he treats the Teuton free man as the only thing to be considered, not only then but now; and then goes out of his way to say that if the Roman treated his slaves badly, the slaves were badly treated. He expresses a ‘strange disappointment’ that Gildas, the only British chronicler, does not describe the great Teutonic system. In the opinion of Gildas, a modification of that of Gregory, it was a case of non Angli sed diaboli. The
modern Teutonist is ‘disappointed’ that the contemporary authority saw nothing in his Teutons except wolves, dogs, and whelps from the kennel of barbarism. But it is at least faintly tenable that there was nothing else to be seen.

In any case when St. Augustine came to the largely barbarized land, with what may be called the second of the three great southern visitations which civilized these islands, he did not see any ethnological problems, whatever there may have been to be seen. With him or his converts the chain of literary testimony is taken up again; and we must look at the world as they saw it. He found a king ruling in Kent, beyond whose borders lay other kingdoms of about the same size, the kings of which were all apparently heathen. The names of these kings were mostly what we call Teutonic names; but those who write the almost entirely hagiological records did not say, and apparently did not ask, whether the populations were in this sense of unmixed blood. It is at least possible that, as on the Continent, the kings and courts were almost the only Teutonic element. The Christians found converts, they found patrons, they found persecutors; but they did not find Ancient Britons because they did not look for them; and if they moved among pure Anglo–Saxons they had not the gratification of knowing it. There was, indeed, what all history attests, a marked change of feeling towards the marches of Wales. But all history also attests that this is always found, apart from any difference in race, in the transition from the lowlands to the mountain country. But of all the things they found the thing that counts most in English history is this: that some of the kingdoms at least did correspond to genuine human divisions, which not only existed then but which exist now. Northumbria is still a truer thing than Northumberland. Sussex is still Sussex; Essex is still Essex. And that third Saxon kingdom whose name is not even to be found upon the map, the kingdom of Wessex, is called the West Country and is to–day the most real of them all.

The last of the heathen kingdoms to accept the cross was Mercia, which corresponds very roughly to what we call the Midlands. The unbaptized king, Penda, has even achieved a certain picturesqueness through this fact, and through the forays and furious ambitions which constituted the rest of his reputation; so much so that the other day one of those mystics who will believe anything but Christianity proposed to “continue the work of Penda” in Ealing: fortunately not on any large scale. What that prince believed or disbelieved it is now impossible and perhaps unnecessary to discover; but the last stand of his central kingdom is not insignificant. The isolation of the Mercian was perhaps due to the fact that Christianity grew from the eastern and western coasts. The
eastern growth was, of course, the Augustinian mission, which had already made Canterbury the spiritual capital of the island. The western grew from whatever was left of the British Christianity. The two clashed, not in creed but in customs; and the Augustinians ultimately prevailed. But the work from the west had already been enormous. It is possible that some prestige went with the possession of Glastonbury, which was like a piece of the Holy Land; but behind Glastonbury there was an even grander and more impressive power. There irradiated to all Europe at that time the glory of the golden age of Ireland. There the Celts were the classics of Christian art, opened in the Book of Kells four hundred years before its time. There the baptism of the whole people had been a spontaneous popular festival which reads almost like a picnic; and thence came crowds of enthusiasts for the Gospel almost literally like men running with good news. This must be remembered through the development of that dark dual destiny that has bound us to Ireland: for doubts have been thrown on a national unity which was not from the first a political unity. But if Ireland was not one kingdom it was in reality one bishopric. Ireland was not converted but created by Christianity, as a stone church is created; and all its elements were gathered as under a garment, under the genius of St. Patrick. It was the more individual because the religion was mere religion, without the secular conveniences. Ireland was never Roman, and it was always Romanist.

But indeed this is, in a lesser degree, true of our more immediate subject. It is the paradox of this time that only the unworldly things had any worldly success. The politics are a nightmare; the kings are unstable and the kingdoms shifting; and we are really never on solid ground except on consecrated ground. The material ambitions are not always unfruitful but nearly always unfulfilled. The castles are all castles in the air; it is only the churches that are built on the ground. The visionaries are the only practical men, as in that extraordinary thing, the monastery, which was, in many ways, to be the key of our history. The time was to come when it was to be rooted out of our country with a curious and careful violence; and the modern English reader has therefore a very feeble idea of it and hence of the ages in which it worked. Even in these pages a word or two about its primary nature is therefore quite indispensable.

In the tremendous testament of our religion there are present certain ideals that seem wilder than impieties, which have in later times produced wild sects professing an almost inhuman perfection on certain points; as in the Quakers who renounce the right of self–defence, or the Communists who refuse any personal possessions. Rightly or wrongly, the Christian Church had from the
first dealt with these visions as being special spiritual adventures which were to
the adventurous. She reconciled them with natural human life by calling them
specially good, without admitting that the neglect of them was necessarily bad. She
took the view that it takes all sorts to make a world, even the religious
world, and used the man who chose to go without arms, family, or property as a
sort of exception that proved the rule. Now the interesting fact is that he really
did prove it. This madman who would not mind his own business becomes the
business man of the age. The very word “monk” is a revolution, for it means
solitude and came to mean community—one might call it sociability. What
happened was that this communal life became a sort of reserve and refuge
behind the individual life; a hospital for every kind of hospitality. We shall see
later how this same function of the common life was given to the common land.
It is hard to find an image for it in individualist times; but in private life we most
of us know the friend of the family who helps it by being outside, like a fairy
godmother. It is not merely flippant to say that monks and nuns stood to
mankind as a sort of sanctified league of aunts and uncles. It is a commonplace
that they did everything that nobody else would do; that the abbeys kept the
world’s diary, faced the plagues of all flesh, taught the first technical arts,
preserved the pagan literature, and, above all, kept the poor from the most distant
sight of their modern despair. We still find it necessary to have a reserve of
philanthropists, but we trust it to men who have made themselves rich, not to
men who have made themselves poor. Finally, the abbots and abbesses were
elective. They introduced representative government, unknown to ancient
democracy, and in itself a semi–sacramental idea. If we could look from the
outside at our own institutions, we should see that the very notion of turning a
thousand men into one large man walking to Westminster is not only an act of
faith, but a fairy tale. The fruitful and effective history of Anglo–Saxon England
would be almost entirely a history of its monasteries. Mile by mile, and almost
man by man, they taught and enriched the land. And then, about the beginning
of the ninth century, there came a turn, as of the twinkling of an eye, and it seemed
that all their work was in vain.

The outer world of universal anarchy that lay beyond Christendom heaved
another of its colossal and almost cosmic waves and swept everything away.
Through all the eastern gates, left open, as it were, by the first barbarian
auxiliaries, burst a plague of seafaring savages from Denmark and Scandinavia;
and the recently baptized barbarians were again flooded by the unbaptized. All
this time, it must be remembered, the actual central mechanism of Roman
government had been running down like a click. It was really a race between the driving energy of the missionaries on the edges of the Empire and the galloping paralysis of the city at the centre. In the ninth century the heart had stopped before the hands could bring help to it. All the monastic civilization which had grown up in Britain under a vague Roman protection perished unprotected. The toy kingdoms of the quarrelling Saxons were smashed like sticks; Guthrum, the pirate chief, slew St. Edmund, assumed the crown of East England, took tribute from the panic of Mercia, and towered in menace over Wessex, the last of the Christian lands. The story that follows, page after page, is only the story of its despair and its destruction. The story is a string of Christian defeats alternated with victories so vain as to be more desolate than defeats. It is only in one of these, the fine but fruitless victory at Ashdown, that we first see in the dim struggle, in a desperate and secondary part, the figure who has given his title to the ultimate turning of the tide. For the victor was not then the king, but only the king’s younger brother. There is, from the first, something humble and even accidental about Alfred. He was a great understudy. The interest of his daily life lies in this: that he combined an almost commonplace coolness, and readiness for the ceaseless small bargains and shifting combinations of all that period, with the flaming patience of saints in times of persecution. While he would dare anything for the faith, he would bargain in anything except the faith. He was a conqueror, with no ambition; an author only too glad to be a translator; a simple, concentrated, wary man, watching the fortunes of one thing, which he piloted both boldly and cautiously, and which he saved at last.

He had disappeared after what appeared to be the final heathen triumph and settlement, and is supposed to have lurked like an outlaw in a lonely islet in the impenetrable marshlands of the Parret; towards those wild western lands to which aboriginal races are held to have been driven by fate itself. But Alfred, as he himself wrote in words that are his challenge to the period, held that a Christian man was unconcerned with fate. He began once more to draw to him the bows and spears of the broken levies of the western shires, especially the men of Somerset; and in the spring of 878 he flung them at the lines before the fenced camp of the victorious Danes at Ethandune. His sudden assault was as successful as that at Ashdown, and it was followed by a siege which was successful in a different and very definite sense. Guthrum, the conqueror of England, and all his important supports, were here penned behind their palisades, and when at last they surrendered the Danish conquest had come to an end. Guthrum was baptized, and the Treaty of Wedmore secured the clearance of
Wessex. The modern reader will smile at the baptism, and turn with great interest to the terms of the treaty. In this acute attitude the modern reader will be vitally and hopelessly wrong. He must support the tedium of frequent references to the religious element in this part of English history, for without it there would never have been any English history at all. And nothing could clinch this truth more than the case of the Danes. In all the facts that followed, the baptism of Guthrum is really much more important than the Treaty of Wedmore. The treaty itself was a compromise, and even as such did not endure; a century afterwards a Danish king like Canute was really ruling in England. But though the Dane got the crown, he did not get rid of the cross. It was precisely Alfred’s religious exaction that remained unalterable. And Canute himself is actually now only remembered by men as a witness to the futility of merely pagan power; as the king who put his crown upon the image of Christ, and solemnly surrendered to heaven the Scandinavian empire of the sea.
ST. EDWARD AND THE NORMAN KINGS

The reader may be surprised at the disproportionate importance given to the name which stands first in the title of this chapter. I put it there as the best way of emphasizing, at the beginning of what we may call the practical part of our history, an elusive and rather strange thing. It can only be described as the strength of the weak kings.

It is sometimes valuable to have enough imagination to unlearn as well as to learn. I would ask the reader to forget his reading and everything that he learnt at school, and consider the English monarchy as it would then appear to him. Let him suppose that his acquaintance with the ancient kings has only come to him as it came to most men in simpler times, from nursery tales, from the names of places, from the dedications of churches and charities, from the tales in the tavern, and the tombs in the churchyard. Let us suppose such a person going upon some open and ordinary English way, such as the Thames valley to Windsor, or visiting some old seats of culture, such as Oxford or Cambridge. One of the first things, for instance, he would find would be Eton, a place transformed, indeed, by modern aristocracy, but still enjoying its mediaeval wealth and remembering its mediaeval origin. If he asked about that origin, it is probable that even a public schoolboy would know enough history to tell him that it was founded by Henry VI. If he went to Cambridge and looked with his own eyes for the college chapel which artistically towers above all others like a cathedral, he would probably ask about it, and be told it was King’s College. If he asked which king, he would again be told Henry VI. If he then went into the library and looked up Henry VI in an encyclopaedia, he would find that the legendary giant, who had left these gigantic works behind him, was in history an almost invisible pigmy. Amid the varying and contending numbers of a great national quarrel, he is the only cipher. The contending factions carry him about like a bale of goods. His desires do not seem to be even ascertained, far less satisfied. And yet his real desires are satisfied in stone and marble, in oak and gold, and remain through all the maddest revolutions of modern England, while all the ambitions of those who dictated to him have gone away like dust upon the wind.

Edward the Confessor, like Henry VI, was not only an invalid but almost an
idiot. It is said that he was wan like an albino, and that the awe men had of him was partly that which is felt for a monster of mental deficiency. His Christian charity was of the kind that borders on anarchism, and the stories about him recall the Christian fools in the great anarchic novels of Russia. Thus he is reported to have covered the retreat of a common thief upon the naked plea that the thief needed things more than he did. Such a story is in strange contrast to the claims made for other kings, that theft was impossible in their dominions. Yet the two types of king are afterwards praised by the same people; and the really arresting fact is that the incompetent king is praised the more highly of the two. And exactly as in the case of the last Lancastrian, we find that the praise has really a very practical meaning in the long run. When we turn from the destructive to the constructive side of the Middle Ages we find that the village idiot is the inspiration of cities and civic systems. We find his seal upon the sacred foundations of Westminster Abbey. We find the Norman victors in the hour of victory bowing before his very ghost. In the Tapestry of Bayeux, woven by Norman hands to justify the Norman cause and glorify the Norman triumph, nothing is claimed for the Conqueror beyond his conquest and the plain personal tale that excuses it, and the story abruptly ends with the breaking of the Saxon line at Battle. But over the bier of the decrepit zany, who died without striking a blow, over this and this alone, is shown a hand coming out of heaven, and declaring the true approval of the power that rules the world.

The Confessor, therefore, is a paradox in many ways, and in none more than in the false reputation for the “English” of that day. As I have indicated, there is some unreality in talking about the Anglo–Saxon at all. The Anglo–Saxon is a mythical and straddling giant, who has presumably left one footprint in England and the other in Saxony. But there was a community, or rather group of communities, living in Britain before the Conquest under what we call Saxon names, and of a blood probably more Germanic and certainly less French than the same communities after the Conquest. And they have a modern reputation which is exactly the reverse of their real one. The value of the Anglo–Saxon is exaggerated, and yet his virtues are ignored. Our Anglo–Saxon blood is supposed to be the practical part of us; but as a fact the Anglo–Saxons were more hopelessly unpractical than any Celt. Their racial influence is supposed to be healthy, or, what many think the same thing, heathen. But as a fact these “Teutons” were the mystics. The Anglo–Saxons did one thing, and one thing only, thoroughly well, as they were fitted to do it thoroughly well. They christened England. Indeed, they christened it before it was born. The one thing
the Angles obviously and certainly could not manage to do was to become English. But they did become Christians, and indeed showed a particular disposition to becomes monks. Moderns who talk vaguely of them as our hardy ancestors never do justice to the real good they did us, by thus opening our history, as it were, with the fable of an age of innocence, and beginning all our chronicles, as so many chronicles began, with the golden initial of a saint. By becoming monks they served us in many very valuable and special capacities, but not notably, perhaps, in the capacity of ancestors.

Along the northern coast of France, where the Confessor had passed his early life, lay the lands of one of the most powerful of the French king’s vassals, the Duke of Normandy. He and his people, who constitute one of the most picturesque and curious elements in European history, are confused for most of us by irrelevant controversies which would have been entirely unintelligible to them. The worst of these is the inane fiction which gives the name of Norman to the English aristocracy during its great period of the last three hundred years. Tennyson informed a lady of the name of Vere de Vere that simple faith was more valuable than Norman blood. But the historical student who can believe in Lady Clara as the possessor of the Norman blood must be himself a large possessor of the simple faith. As a matter of fact, as we shall see also when we come to the political scheme of the Normans, the notion is the negation of their real importance in history. The fashionable fancy misses what was best in the Normans, exactly as we have found it missing what was best in the Saxons. One does not know whether to thank the Normans more for appearing or for disappearing. Few philanthropists ever became so rapidly anonymous. It is the great glory of the Norman adventurer that he threw himself heartily into his chance position; and had faith not only in his comrades, but in his subjects, and even in his enemies. He was loyal to the kingdom he had not yet made. Thus the Norman Bruce becomes a Scott thus the descendant of the Norman Strongbow becomes an Irishman. No men less than Normans can be conceived as remaining as a superior caste until the present time. But this alien and adventurous loyalty in the Norman, which appears in these other national histories, appears most strongly of all in the history we have here to follow. The Duke of Normandy does become a real King of England; his claim through the Confessor, his election by the Council, even his symbolic handfuls of the soil of Sussex, these are not altogether empty forms. And though both phrases would be inaccurate, it is very much nearer the truth to call William the first of the English than to call Harold the last of them.
An indeterminate debate touching the dim races that mixed without record in that dim epoch, has made much of the fact that the Norman edges of France, like the East Anglian edges of England, were deeply penetrated by the Norse invasions of the ninth century; and that the ducal house of Normandy, with what other families we know not, can be traced back to a Scandinavian seed. The unquestionable power of captaincy and creative legislation which belonged to the Normans, whoever they were, may be connected reasonably enough with some infusion of fresh blood. But if the racial theorists press the point to a comparison of races, it can obviously only be answered by a study of the two types in separation. And it must surely be manifest that more civilizing power has since been shown by the French when untouched by Scandinavian blood than by the Scandinavians when untouched by French blood. As much fighting (and more ruling) was done by the Crusaders who were never Vikings as by the Vikings who were never Crusaders. But in truth there is no need of such invidious analysis; we may willingly allow a real value to the Scandinavian contribution to the French as to the English nationality, so long as we firmly understand the ultimate historic fact that the duchy of Normandy was as Scandinavian as the town of Norwich. But the debate has another danger, in that it tends to exaggerate even the personal importance of the Norman. Many as were his talents as a master, he is in history the servant of other and wider things. The landing of Lanfranc is perhaps more of a date than the landing of William. And Lanfranc was an Italian—like Julius Caesar. The Norman is not in history a mere wall, the rather brutal boundary of a mere empire. The Norman is a gate. He is like one of those gates which still remain as he made them, with round arch and rude pattern and stout supporting columns; and what entered by that gate was civilization. William of Falaise has in history a title much higher than that of Duke of Normandy or King of England. He was what Julius Caesar was, and what St. Augustine was: he was the ambassador of Europe to Britain.

William asserted that the Confessor, in the course of that connection which followed naturally from his Norman education, had promised the English crown to the holder of the Norman dukedom. Whether he did or not we shall probably never know: it is not intrinsically impossible or even improbable. To blame the promise as unpatriotic, even if it was given, is to read duties defined at a much later date into the first feudal chaos; to make such blame positive and personal is like expecting the Ancient Britons to sing “Rule Britannia.” William further clinched his case by declaring that Harold, the principal Saxon noble and the most probable claimant, had, while enjoying the Duke’s hospitality after a
shipwreck, sworn upon sacred relics not to dispute the Duke’s claim. About this episode also we must agree that we do not know; yet we shall be quite out of touch with the time if we say that we do not care. The element of sacrilege in the alleged perjury of Harold probably affected the Pope when he blessed a banner for William’s army; but it did not affect the Pope much more than it would have affected the people; and Harold’s people quite as much as William’s. Harold’s people presumably denied the fact; and their denial is probably the motive of the very marked and almost eager emphasis with which the Bayeux Tapestry asserts and reasserts the reality of the personal betrayal. There is here a rather arresting fact to be noted. A great part of this celebrated pictorial record is not concerned at all with the well-known historical events which we have only to note rapidly here. It does, indeed, dwell a little on the death of Edward; it depicts the difficulties of William’s enterprise in the felling of forests for shipbuilding, in the crossing of the Channel, and especially in the charge up the hill at Hastings, in which full justice is done to the destructive resistance of Harold’s army. But it was really after Duke William had disembarked and defeated Harold on the Sussex coast, that he did what is historically worthy to be called the Conquest. It is not until these later operations that we have the note of the new and scientific militarism from the Continent. Instead of marching upon London he marched round it; and crossing the Thames at Wallingford cut off the city from the rest of the country and compelled its surrender. He had himself elected king with all the forms that would have accompanied a peaceful succession to the Confessor, and after a brief return to Normandy took up the work of war again to bring all England under his crown. Marching through the snow, he laid waste the northern counties, seized Chester, and made rather than won a kingdom. These things are the foundations of historical England; but of these things the pictures woven in honour of his house tell us nothing. The Bayeux Tapestry may almost be said to stop before the Norman Conquest. But it tells in great detail the tale of some trivial raid into Brittany solely that Harold and William may appear as brothers in arms; and especially that William may be depicted in the very act of giving arms to Harold. And here again there is much more significance than a modern reader may fancy, in its bearing upon the new birth of that time and the ancient symbolism of arms. I have said that Duke William was a vassal of the King of France; and that phrase in its use and abuse is the key to the secular side of this epoch. William was indeed a most mutinous vassal, and a vein of such mutiny runs through his family fortunes: his sons Rufus and Henry I. disturbed him with internal ambitions antagonistic to his own. But it would be a blunder to allow
such personal broils to obscure the system, which had indeed existed here before the Conquest, which clarified and confirmed it. That system we call Feudalism.

That Feudalism was the main mark of the Middle Ages is a commonplace of fashionable information; but it is of the sort that seeks the past rather in Wardour Street than Watling Street. For that matter, the very term “mediaeval” is used for almost anything from Early English to Early Victorian. An eminent Socialist applied it to our armaments, which is like applying it to our aeroplanes. Similarly the just description of Feudalism, and of how far it was a part and how far rather an impediment in the main mediaeval movement, is confused by current debates about quite modern things—especially that modern thing, the English squirearchy. Feudalism was very nearly the opposite of squirearchy. For it is the whole point of the squire that his ownership is absolute and is pacific. And it is the very definition of Feudalism that it was a tenure, and a tenure by military service. Men paid their rent in steel instead of gold, in spears and arrows against the enemies of their landlord. But even these landlords were not landlords in the modern sense; every one was practically as well as theoretically a tenant of the King; and even he often fell into a feudal inferiority to a Pope or an Emperor. To call it mere tenure by soldiering may seem a simplification; but indeed it is precisely here that it was not so simple as it seems. It is precisely a certain knot or enigma in the nature of Feudalism which makes half the struggle of European history, but especially English history.

There was a certain unique type of state and culture which we call mediaeval, for want of a better word, which we see in the Gothic or the great Schoolmen. This thing in itself was above all things logical. Its very cult of authority was a thing of reason, as all men who can reason themselves instantly recognize, even if, like Huxley, they deny its premises or dislike its fruits. Being logical, it was very exact about who had the authority. Now Feudalism was not quite logical, and was never quite exact about who had the authority. Feudalism already flourished before the mediaeval renascence began. It was, if not the forest the mediaevals had to clear, at least the rude timber with which they had to build. Feudalism was a fighting growth of the Dark Ages before the Middle Ages; the age of barbarians resisted by semi–barbarians. I do not say this in disparagement of it. Feudalism was mostly a very human thing; the nearest contemporary name for it was homage, a word which almost means humanity. On the other hand, mediaeval logic, never quite reconciled to it, could become in its extremes inhuman. It was often mere prejudice that protected men, and pure reason that burned them. The feudal units grew through the lively localism of the Dark
Ages, when hills without roads shut in a valley like a garrison. Patriotism had to be parochial; for men had no country, but only a countryside. In such cases the lord grew larger than the king; but it bred not only a local lordship but a kind of local liberty. And it would be very inadvisable to ignore the freer element in Feudalism in English history. For it is the one kind of freedom that the English have had and held.

The knot in the system was something like this. In theory the King owned everything, like an earthly providence; and that made for despotism and “divine right,” which meant in substance a natural authority. In one aspect the King was simply the one lord anointed by the Church, that is recognized by the ethics of the age. But while there was more royalty in theory, there could be more rebellion in practice. Fighting was much more equal than in our age of munitions, and the various groups could arm almost instantly with bows from the forest or spears from the smith. Where men are military there is no militarism. But it is more vital that while the kingdom was in this sense one territorial army, the regiments of it were also kingdoms. The sub–units were also sub–loyalties. Hence the loyalist to his lord might be a rebel to his king; or the king be a demagogue delivering him from the lord. This tangle is responsible for the tragic passions about betrayal, as in the case of William and Harold; the alleged traitor who is always found to be recurrent, yet always felt to be exceptional. To break the tie was at once easy and terrible. Treason in the sense of rebellion was then really felt as treason in the sense of treachery, since it was desertion on a perpetual battlefield. Now, there was even more of this civil war in English than in other history, and the more local and less logical energy on the whole prevailed. Whether there was something in those island idiosyncrasies, shapeless as sea–mists, with which this story began, or whether the Roman imprint had really been lighter than in Gaul, the feudal undergrowth prevented even a full attempt to build the Civitas Dei, or ideal mediaeval state. What emerged was a compromise, which men long afterwards amused themselves by calling a constitution.

There are paradoxes permissible for the redressing of a bad balance in criticism, and which may safely even be emphasized so long as they are not isolated. One of these I have called at the beginning of this chapter the strength of the weak kings. And there is a complement of it, even in this crisis of the Norman mastery, which might well be called the weakness of the strong kings. William of Normandy succeeded immediately, he did not quite succeed ultimately; there was in his huge success a secret of failure that only bore fruit
long after his death. It was certainly his single aim to simplify England into a popular autocracy, like that growing up in France; with that aim he scattered the feudal holdings in scraps, demanded a direct vow from the sub–vassals to himself, and used any tool against the barony, from the highest culture of the foreign ecclesiastics to the rudest relics of Saxon custom. But the very parallel of France makes the paradox startlingly apparent. It is a proverb that the first French kings were puppets; that the mayor of the palace was quite insolently the king of the king. Yet it is certain that the puppet became an idol; a popular idol of unparalleled power, before which all mayors and nobles bent or were broken. In France arose absolute government, the more because it was not precisely personal government. The King was already a thing–like the Republic. Indeed the mediaeval Republics were rigid with divine right. In Norman England, perhaps, the government was too personal to be absolute. Anyhow, there is a real though recondite sense in which William the Conqueror was William the Conquered. When his two sons were dead, the whole country fell into a feudal chaos almost like that before the Conquest. In France the princes who had been slaves became something exceptional like priests; and one of them became a saint. But somehow our greatest kings were still barons; and by that very energy our barons became our kings.
VI

THE AGE OF THE CRUSADES

The last chapter began, in an apparent irrelevance, with the name of St. Edward; and this one might very well begin with the name of St. George. His first appearance, it is said, as a patron of our people, occurred at the instance of Richard Coeur de Lion during his campaign in Palestine; and this, as we shall see, really stands for a new England which might well have a new saint. But the Confessor is a character in English history; whereas St. George, apart from his place in martyrology as a Roman soldier, can hardly be said to be a character in any history. And if we wish to understand the noblest and most neglected of human revolutions, we can hardly get closer to it than by considering this paradox, of how much progress and enlightenment was represented by thus passing from a chronicle to a romance.

In any intellectual corner of modernity can be found such a phrase as I have just read in a newspaper controversy: “Salvation, like other good things, must not come from outside.” To call a spiritual thing external and not internal is the chief mode of modernist excommunication. But if our subject of study is mediaeval and not modern, we must pit against this apparent platitude the very opposite idea. We must put ourselves in the posture of men who thought that almost every good thing came from outside—like good news. I confess that I am not impartial in my sympathies here; and that the newspaper phrase I quoted strikes me as a blunder about the very nature of life. I do not, in my private capacity, believe that a baby gets his best physical food by sucking his thumb; nor that a man gets his best moral food by sucking his soul, and denying its dependence on God or other good things. I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought; and that gratitude is happiness double by wonder. But this faith in receptiveness, and in respect for things outside oneself, need here do no more than help me in explaining what any version of this epoch ought in any case to explain. In nothing is the modern German more modern, or more mad, than in his dream of finding a German name for everything; eating his language, or in other words biting his tongue. And in nothing were the mediaevals more free and sane than in their acceptance of names and emblems from outside their most beloved limits. The monastery would often not only take in the stranger but almost canonize him. A mere adventurer like Bruce was enthroned and thanked.
as if he had really come as a knight errant. And a passionately patriotic community more often than not had a foreigner for a patron saint. Thus crowds of saints were Irishmen, but St. Patrick was not an Irishman. Thus as the English gradually became a nation, they left the numberless Saxon saints in a sense behind them, passed over by comparison not only the sanctity of Edward but the solid fame of Alfred, and invoked a half mythical hero, striving in an eastern desert against an impossible monster.

That transition and that symbol stand for the Crusades. In their romance and reality they were the first English experience of learning, not only from the external, but the remote. England, like every Christian thing, had thriven on outer things without shame. From the roads of Caesar to the churches of Lanfranc, it had sought its meat from God. But now the eagles were on the wing, scenting a more distant slaughter; they were seeking the strange things instead of receiving them. The English had stepped from acceptance to adventure, and the epic of their ships had begun. The scope of the great religious movement which swept England along with all the West would distend a book like this into huge disproportion, yet it would be much better to do so than to dismiss it in the distant and frigid fashion common in such short summaries. The inadequacy of our insular method in popular history is perfectly shown in the treatment of Richard Coeur de Lion. His tale is told with the implication that his departure for the Crusade was something like the escapade of a schoolboy running away to sea. It was, in this view, a pardonable or lovable prank; whereas in truth it was more like a responsible Englishman now going to the Front. Christendom was nearly one nation, and the Front was the Holy Land. That Richard himself was of an adventurous and even romantic temper is true, though it is not unreasonably romantic for a born soldier to do the work he does best. But the point of the argument against insular history is particularly illustrated here by the absence of a continental comparison. In this case we have only to step across the Straits of Dover to find the fallacy. Philip Augustus, Richard’s contemporary in France, had the name of a particularly cautious and coldly public–spirited statesman; yet Philip Augustus went on the same Crusade. The reason was, of course, that the Crusades were, for all thoughtful Europeans, things for the highest statesmanship and the purest public spirit.

Some six hundred years after Christianity sprang up in the East and swept westwards, another great faith arose in almost the same eastern lands and followed it like its gigantic shadow. Like a shadow, it was at once a copy and a contrary. We call it Islam, or the creed of the Moslems; and perhaps its most
explanatory description is that it was the final flaming up of the accumulated Orientalisms, perhaps of the accumulated Hebraisms, gradually rejected as the Church grew more European, or as Christianity turned into Christendom. It highest motive was a hatred of idols, and in its view Incarnation was itself an idolatry. The two things it persecuted were the idea of God being made flesh and of His being afterwards made wood or stone. A study of the questions smouldering in the track of the prairie fire of the Christian conversion favours the suggestion that this fanaticism against art or mythology was at once a development and a reaction from that conversion, a sort of minority report of the Hebraists. In this sense Islam was something like a Christian heresy. The early heresies had been full of mad reversals and evasions of the Incarnation, rescuing their Jesus from the reality of his body even at the expense of the sincerity of his soul. And the Greek Iconoclasts had poured into Italy, breaking the popular statues and denouncing the idolatry of the Pope, until routed, in a style sufficiently symbolic, by the sword of the father of Charlemagne. It was all these disappointed negations that took fire from the genius of Mahomet, and launched out of the burning lands a cavalry charge that nearly conquered the world. And if it be suggested that a note on such Oriental origins is rather remote from a history of England, the answer is that this book may, alas! contain many digressions, but that this is not a digression. It is quite peculiarly necessary to keep in mind that this Semite god haunted Christianity like a ghost; to remember it in every European corner, but especially in our corner. If any one doubts the necessity, let him take a walk to all the parish churches in England within a radius of thirty miles, and ask why this stone virgin is headless or that coloured glass is gone. He will soon learn that it was lately, and in his own lanes and homesteads, that the ecstasy of the deserts returned, and his bleak northern island was filled with the fury of the Iconoclasts.

It was an element in this sublime and yet sinister simplicity of Islam that it knew no boundaries. Its very home was homeless. For it was born in a sandy waste among nomads, and it went everywhere because it came from nowhere. But in the Saracens of the early Middle Ages this nomadic quality in Islam was masked by a high civilization, more scientific if less creatively artistic than that of contemporary Christendom. The Moslem monotheism was, or appeared to be, the more rationalist religion of the two. This rootless refinement was characteristically advanced in abstract things, of which a memory remains in the very name of algebra. In comparison the Christian civilization was still largely instinctive, but its instincts were very strong and very much the other way. It was
full of local affections, which found form in that system of fences which runs like a pattern through everything mediaeval, from heraldry to the holding of land. There was a shape and colour in all their customs and statutes which can be seen in all their tabards and escutcheons; something at once strict and gay. This is not a departure from the interest in external things, but rather a part of it. The very welcome they would often give to a stranger from beyond the wall was a recognition of the wall. Those who think their own life all-sufficient do not see its limit as a wall, but as the end of the world. The Chinese called the white man a “sky-breaker.” The mediaeval spirit loves its part in life as a part, not a whole; its charter for it came from something else. There is a joke about a Benedictine monk who used the common grace of Benedictus benedicat, whereupon the unlettered Franciscan triumphantly retorted Franciscus Franciscat. It is something of a parable of mediaeval history; for if there were a verb Franciscare it would be an approximate description of what St. Francis afterwards did. But that more individual mysticism was only approaching its birth, and Benedictus benedicat is very precisely the motto of the earliest mediaevalism. I mean that everything is blessed from beyond, by something which has in its turn been blessed from beyond again; only the blessed bless. But the point which is the clue to the Crusades is this: that for them the beyond was not the infinite, as in a modern religion. Every beyond was a place. The mystery of locality, with all its hold on the human heart, was as much present in the most ethereal things of Christendom as it was absent from the most practical things of Islam. England would derive a thing from France, France from Italy, Italy from Greece, Greece from Palestine, Palestine from Paradise. It was not merely that a yeoman of Kent would have his house hallowed by the priest of the parish church, which was confirmed by Canterbury, which was confirmed by Rome. Rome herself did not worship herself, as in the pagan age. Rome herself looked eastward to the mysterious cradle of her creed, to a land of which the very earth was called holy. And when she looked eastward for it she saw the face of Mahound. She saw standing in the place that was her earthly heaven a devouring giant out of the deserts, to whom all places were the same.

It has been necessary thus to pause upon the inner emotions of the Crusade, because the modern English reader is widely cut off from these particular feelings of his fathers; and the real quarrel of Christendom and Islam, the fire-baptism of the young nations, could not otherwise be seized in its unique character. It was nothing so simple as a quarrel between two men who both wanted Jerusalem. It was the much deadlier quarrel between one man who
wanted it and another man who could not see why it was wanted. The Moslem, of course, had his own holy places; but he has never felt about them as Westerns can feel about a field or a roof–tree; he thought of the holiness as holy, not of places as places. The austerity which forbade him imagery, the wandering war that forbade him rest, shut him off from all that was breaking out and blossoming in our local patriotisms; just as it has given the Turks an empire without ever giving them a nation.

Now, the effect of this adventure against a mighty and mysterious enemy was simply enormous in the transformation of England, as of all the nations that were developing side by side with England. Firstly, we learnt enormously from what the Saracen did. Secondly, we learnt yet more enormously from what the Saracen did not do. Touching some of the good things which we lacked, we were fortunately able to follow him. But in all the good things which he lacked, we were confirmed like adamant to defy him. It may be said that Christians never knew how right they were till they went to war with Moslems. At once the most obvious and the most representative reaction was the reaction which produced the best of what we call Christian Art; and especially those grotesques of Gothic architecture, which are not only alive but kicking. The East as an environment, as an impersonal glamour, certainly stimulated the Western mind, but stimulated it rather to break the Moslem commandment than to keep it. It was as if the Christian were impelled, like a caricaturist, to cover all that faceless ornament with faces; to give heads to all those headless serpents and birds to all those lifeless trees. Statuary quickened and came to life under the veto of the enemy as under a benediction. The image, merely because it was called an idol, became not only an ensign but a weapon. A hundredfold host of stone sprang up all over the shrines and streets of Europe. The Iconoclasts made more statues than they destroyed.

The place of Coeur de Lion in popular fable and gossip is far more like his place in true history than the place of the mere denationalized ne’er–do–weel given him in our utilitarian school books. Indeed the vulgar rumour is nearly always much nearer the historical truth than the “educated” opinion of to–day; for tradition is truer than fashion. King Richard, as the typical Crusader, did make a momentous difference to England by gaining glory in the East, instead of devoting himself conscientiously to domestic politics in the exemplary manner of King John. The accident of his military genius and prestige gave England something which it kept for four hundred years, and without which it is incomprehensible throughout that period–the reputation of being in the very
vanguard of chivalry. The great romances of the Round Table, the attachment of knighthood to the name of a British king, belong to this period. Richard was not only a knight but a troubadour; and culture and courtesy were linked up with the idea of English valour. The mediaeval Englishman was even proud of being polite; which is at least no worse than being proud of money and bad manners, which is what many Englishmen in our later centuries have meant by their common sense.

Chivalry might be called the baptism of Feudalism. It was an attempt to bring the justice and even the logic of the Catholic creed into a military system which already existed; to turn its discipline into an initiation and its inequalities into a hierarchy. To the comparative grace of the new period belongs, of course, that considerable cultus of the dignity of woman, to which the word “chivalry” is often narrowed, or perhaps exalted. This also was a revolt against one of the worst gaps in the more polished civilization of the Saracens. The Moslems naturally suffered from the older Oriental sentiment about women; and were, of course, without the special inspiration given by the cult of the Virgin. It is false to say that the chivalric view of women was merely an affectation, except in the sense in which there must always be an affectation where there is an ideal. It is the worst sort of superficiality not to see the pressure of a general sentiment merely because it is always broken up by events; the Crusade itself, for example is more present and potent as a frame even than as a reality. From the first Plantagenet to the last Lancastrian it haunts the minds of English kings, giving as a background to their battles a mirage of Palestine. So a devotion like that of Edward I to his queen was quite a real motive in the lives of multitudes of his contemporaries. When crowds of enlightened tourists, setting forth to sneer at the superstitions of the continent, are taking tickets and labelling luggage at the large railway station at the west end of the Strand, I do not know whether they all speak to their wives with a more flowing courtesy than their fathers in Edward’s time, or whether they pause to meditate on the legend of a husband’s sorrow, to be found in the very name of Charing Cross.

But it is a huge historical error to suppose that the Crusades concerned only that crust of society for which heraldry was an art and chivalry an etiquette. The direct contrary is the fact. The First Crusade especially was much more an unanimous popular rising than most that are called riots and revolutions. The Guilds, the great democratic systems of the time, often owed their increasing power to corporate fighting for the Cross; but I shall deal with such things later. Often it was not so much a levy of men as a trek of whole families, like new
gipsies moving eastwards. And it has passed into a proverb that children by themselves often organized a crusade as they now organize a charade. But we shall best realize the fact by fancying every Crusade as a Children’s Crusade. They were full of all that the modern world worships in children, because it has crushed it out of men. Their lives were full, as the rudest remains of their vulgarest arts are full, of something that we all saw out of the nursery window. It can best be seen later, for instance, but it is ubiquitous in the older and more unconscious contemporary art; something that domesticated distant lands and made the horizon at home. They fitted into the corners of small houses the ends of the earth and the edges of the sky. Their perspective is rude and crazy, but it is perspective; it is not the decorative flatness of orientalism. In a word, their world, like a child’s, is full of foreshortening, as of a short cut to fairyland. Their maps are more provocative than picture. Their half–fabulous animals are monsters, and yet are pets. It is impossible to state verbally this very vivid atmosphere; but it was an atmosphere as well as an adventure. It was precisely these outlandish visions that truly came home to everybody; it was the royal councils and feudal quarrels that were comparatively remote. The Holy Land was much nearer to a plain man’s house than Westminster, and immeasurably nearer than Runnymede. To give a list of English kings and parliaments, without pausing a moment upon this prodigious presence of a religious transfiguration in common life, is something the folly of which can but faintly be conveyed by a modern parallel, with secularity and religion reversed. It is as if some Clericalist or Royalist writer should give a list of the Archbishops of Paris from 1750 to 1850, noting how one dies of small–pox, another of old age, another by a curious accident of decapitation and throughout all his record should never once mention the nature, or even the name, of the French Revolution.
VII

THE PROBLEM OF THE PLANTAGENETS

It is a point of prestige with what is called the Higher Criticism in all branches to proclaim that certain popular texts and authorities are “late,” and therefore apparently worthless. Two similar events are always the same event, and the later alone is even credible. This fanaticism is often in mere fact mistaken; it ignores the most common coincidences of human life: and some future critic will probably say that the tale of the Tower of Babel cannot be older than the Eiffel Tower, because there was certainly a confusion of tongues at the Paris Exhibition. Most of the mediaeval remains familiar to the modern reader are necessarily “late,” such as Chaucer or the Robin Hood ballads; but they are none the less, to a wiser criticism, worthy of attention and even trust. That which lingers after an epoch is generally that which lived most luxuriantly in it. It is an excellent habit to read history backwards. It is far wiser for a modern man to read the Middle Ages backwards from Shakespeare, whom he can judge for himself, and who yet is crammed with the Middle Ages, than to attempt to read them forwards from Caedmon, of whom he can know nothing, and of whom even the authorities he must trust know very little. If this be true of Shakespeare, it is even truer, of course, of Chaucer. If we really want to know what was strongest in the twelfth century, it is no bad way to ask what remained of it in the fourteenth. When the average reader turns to the “Canterbury Tales,” which are still as amusing as Dickens yet as mediaeval as Durham Cathedral, what is the very first question to be asked? Why, for instance, are they called Canterbury Tales; and what were the pilgrims doing in the road to Canterbury? They were, of course, taking part in a popular festival like a modern public holiday, though perhaps more genial and leisurely. Nor are we, perhaps, prepared to accept it as a self–evident step in progress that their holidays were derived from saints, while ours are dictated by bankers.

It is almost necessary to say nowadays that a saint means a very good man. The notion of an eminence merely moral, consistent with complete stupidity or unsuccess, is a revolutionary image grown unfamiliar by it very familiarity, and needing, as do many things of this older society, some almost preposterous modern parallel to give its original freshness and point. If we entered a foreign town and found a pillar like the Nelson Column, we should be surprised to learn
the hero on the top of it had been famous for his politeness and hilarity during a chronic toothache. If a procession came down the street with a brass band and a hero on a white horse, we should think it odd to be told that he had been very patient with a half-witted maiden aunt. Yet some such pantomime impossibility is the only measure of the innovation of the Christian idea of a popular and recognized saint. It must especially be realized that while this kind of glory was the highest, it was also in a sense the lowest. The materials of it were almost the same as those of labour and domesticity: it did not need the sword or sceptre, but rather the staff or spade. It was the ambition of poverty. All this must be approximately visualized before we catch a glimpse of the great effects of the story which lay behind the Canterbury Pilgrimage.

The first few lines of Chaucer’s poem, to say nothing of thousands in the course of it, make it instantly plain that it was no case of secular revels still linked by a slight ritual to the name of some forgotten god, as may have happened in the pagan decline. Chaucer and his friends did think about St. Thomas, at least more frequently than a clerk at Margate things about St. Lubbock. They did definitely believe in the bodily cures wrought for them through St. Thomas, at least as firmly as the most enlightened and progressive modern can believe in those of Mrs. Eddy. Who was St. Thomas, to whose shrine the whole of that society is thus seen in the act of moving: and why was he so important? If there be a streak of sincerity in the claim to teach social and democratic society, instead of a string of kings and battles, this is the obvious and open gate by which to approach the figure which disputed England with the first Plantagenet. A real popular history should think more of his popularity even than his policy. And unquestionably thousands of ploughmen, carpenters, cooks, and yeomen, as in the motley crowd of Chaucer, knew a great deal about St. Thomas why they had never even heard of Becket.

It would be easy to detail what followed the Conquest as the feudal tangle that it was, till a prince from Anjou repeated the unifying effort of the Conqueror. It is found equally easy to write of the Red King’s hunting instead of his building, which has lasted longer, and which he probably loved much more. It is easy to catalogue the questions he disputed with Anselm—leaving out the question Anselm cared most about, and which he asked with explosive simplicity, as “Why was God a man?” All this is as simple as saying that a king died of eating lampreys, from which, however, there is little to learn nowadays, unless it be that when a modern monarch perishes of gluttony the newspapers seldom say so. But if we want to know what really happened to England in this dim epoch, I
think it can be dimly but truly traced in the story of St. Thomas of Canterbury.

Henry of Anjou, who brought fresh French blood into the monarchy, brought also a refreshment of the idea for which the French have always stood: the idea in the Roman Law of something impersonal and omnipresent. It is the thing we smile at even in a small French detective story; when Justice opens a hand bag or Justice runs after a cab. Henry II really produced this impression of being a police force in person; a contemporary priest compared his restless vigilance to the bird and the fish of scripture whose way no man knoweth. Kinghood, however, meant law and not caprice; its ideal at least was a justice cheap and obvious as daylight, an atmosphere which lingers only in popular phrases about the King’s English or the King’s highway. But though it tended to be egalitarian it did not, of itself, tend to be humanitarian. In modern France, as in ancient Rome, the other name of Justice has sometimes been Terror. The Frenchman especially is always a Revolutionist—and never an Anarchist. Now this effort of kings like Henry II to rebuild on a plan like that of the Roman Law was not only, of course, crossed and entangled by countless feudal fancies and feelings in themselves as well as others, it was also conditioned by what was the cornerstone of the whole civilization. It had to happen not only with but within the Church. For a Church was to these men rather a world they lived in than a building to which they went. Without the Church the Middle Ages would have had no law, as without the Church the Reformation would have had no Bible. Many priests expounded and embellished the Roman Law, and many priests supported Henry II. And yet there was another element in the Church, stored in its first foundations like dynamite, and destined in every age to destroy and renew the world. An idealism akin to impossibilism ran down the ages parallel to all its political compromises. Monasticism itself was the throwing off of innumerable Utopias, without posterity yet with perpetuity. It had, as was proved recurrently after corrupt epochs, a strange secret of getting poor quickly; a mushroom magnificence of destitution. This wind of revolution in the crusading time caught Francis in Assisi and stripped him of his rich garments in the street. The same wind of revolution suddenly smote Thomas Becket, King Henry’s brilliant and luxurious Chancellor, and drove him on to an unearthly glory and bloody end.

Becket was a type of those historic times in which it is really very practical to be impracticable. The quarrel which tore him from his friend’s side cannot be appreciated in the light of those legal and constitutional debates which the misfortunes of the seventeenth century have made so much of in more recent
history. To convict St. Thomas of illegality and clerical intrigue, when he set the
law of the Church against that of the State, is about as adequate as to convict St.
Francis of bad heraldry when he said he was the brother of the sun and the
moon. There may have been heralds stupid enough to say so even in that much
more logical age, but it is no sufficient way of dealing with visions or with
revolutions. St. Thomas of Canterbury was a great visionary and a great
revolutionist, but so far as England was concerned his revolution failed and his
vision was not fulfilled. We are therefore told in the text–books little more than
that he wrangled with the King about certain regulations; the most crucial being
whether “criminous clerks” should be punished by the State or the Church. And
this was indeed the chief text of the dispute; but to realise it we must reiterate
what is hardest for modern England to understand–the nature of the Catholic
Church when it was itself a government, and the permanent sense in which it
was itself a revolution.

It is always the first fact that escapes notice; and the first fact about the
Church was that it created a machinery of pardon, where the State could only
work with a machinery of punishment. It claimed to be a divine detective who
helped the criminal to escape by a plea of guilty. It was, therefore, in the very
nature of the institution, that when it did punish materially it punished more
lightly. If any modern man were put back in the Becket quarrel, his sympathies
would certainly be torn in two; for the King’s scheme was the more rational, the
Archbishop’s was the more humane. And despite the horrors that darkened
religious disputes long afterwards, this character was certainly in the bulk the
historic character of Church government. It is admitted, for instance, that things
like eviction, or the harsh treatment of tenants, were practically unknown
wherever the Church was landlord. The principle lingered into more evil days in
the form by which the Church authorities handed over culprits to the secular arm
to be killed, even for religious offences. In modern romances this is treated as a
mere hypocrisy; but the man who treats every human inconsistency as a
hypocrisy is himself a hypocrite about his own inconsistencies.

Our world, then, cannot understand St. Thomas, any more than St. Francis,
without accepting very simply a flaming and even fantastic charity, by which the
great Archbishop undoubtedly stands for the victims of this world, where the
wheel of fortune grinds the faces of the poor. He may well have been too
idealistic; he wished to protect the Church as a sort of earthly paradise, of which
the rules might seem to him as paternal as those of heaven, but might well seem
to the King as capricious as those of fairyland. But if the priest was too
idealistic, the King was really too practical; it is intrinsically true to say he was too practical to succeed in practice. There re-enters here, and runs, I think, through all English history, the rather indescribable truth I have suggested about the Conqueror; that perhaps he was hardly impersonal enough for a pure despot. The real moral of our mediaeval story is, I think, subtly contrary to Carlyle’s vision of a stormy strong man to hammer and weld the state like a smith. Our strong men were too strong for us, and too strong for themselves. They were too strong for their own aim of a just and equal monarchy. The smith broke upon the anvil the sword of state that he was hammering for himself. Whether or no this will serve as a key to the very complicated story of our kings and barons, it is the exact posture of Henry II to his rival. He became lawless out of sheer love of law. He also stood, though in a colder and more remote manner, for the whole people against feudal oppression; and if his policy had succeeded in its purity, it would at least have made impossible the privilege and capitalism of later times. But that bodily restlessness which stamped and spurned the furniture was a symbol of him; it was some such things that prevented him and his heirs from sitting as quietly on their throne as the heirs of St. Louis. He thrust again at the tough intangibility of the priests’ Utopianism like a man fighting a ghost; he answered transcendental defiances with baser material persecutions; and at last, on a dark and, I think, decisive day in English history, his word sent four feudal murderers into the cloisters of Canterbury, who went there to destroy a traitor and who created a saint.

At the grave of the dead man broke forth what can only be called an epidemic of healing. For miracles so narrated there is the same evidence as for half of the facts of history; and any one denying them must deny them upon a dogma. But something followed which would seem to modern civilization even more monstrous than a miracle. If the reader can imagine Mr. Cecil Rhodes submitting to be horsewhipped by a Boer in St. Paul’s Cathedral, as an apology for some indefensible death incidental to the Jameson Raid, he will form but a faint idea of what was meant when Henry II was beaten by monks at the tomb of his vassal and enemy. The modern parallel called up is comic, but the truth is that mediaeval actualities have a violence that does seem comic to our conventions. The Catholics of that age were driven by two dominant thoughts: the all-importance of penitence as an answer to sin, and the all-importance of vivid and evident external acts as a proof of penitence. Extravagant humiliation after extravagant pride for them restored the balance of sanity. The point is worth stressing, because without it moderns make neither head nor tail of the period.
Green gravely suggests, for instance, of Henry’s ancestor Fulk of Anjou, that his tyrannies and frauds were further blackened by “low superstition,” which led him to be dragged in a halter round a shrine, scourged and screaming for the mercy of God. Mediaevals would simply have said that such a man might well scream for it, but his scream was the only logical comment he could make. But they would have quite refused to see why the scream should be added to the sins and not subtracted from them. They would have thought it simply muddle-headed to have the same horror at a man being horribly sinful and for being horribly sorry.

But it may be suggested, I think, though with the doubt proper to ignorance, that the Angevin ideal of the King’s Justice lost more by the death of St. Thomas than was instantly apparent in the horror of Christendom, the canonization of the victim and the public penance of the tyrant. These things indeed were in a sense temporary; the King recovered the power to judge clerics, and many later kings and justiciars continued the monarchical plan. But I would suggest, as a possible clue to puzzling after events, that here and by this murderous stroke the crown lost what should have been the silent and massive support of its whole policy. I mean that it lost the people.

It need not be repeated that the case for despotism is democratic. As a rule its cruelty to the strong is kindness to the weak. An autocrat cannot be judged as a historical character by his relations with other historical characters. His true applause comes not from the few actors on the lighted stage of aristocracy, but from that enormous audience which must always sit in darkness throughout the drama. The king who helps numberless helps nameless men, and when he flings his widest largesse he is a Christian doing good by stealth. This sort of monarchy was certainly a mediaeval ideal, nor need it necessarily fail as a reality. French kings were never so merciful to the people as when they were merciless to the peers; and it is probably true that a Czar who was a great lord to his intimates was often a little father in innumerable homes. It is overwhelmingly probable that such a central power, though it might at last have deserved destruction in England as in France have prevented the few from seizing and holding all the wealth and power to this day. But in England it broke off short, through something of which the slaying of St. Thomas may well have been the supreme example. It was something overstrained and startling and against the instincts of the people. And of what was meant in the Middle Ages by the very powerful and rather peculiar thing, the people, I shall speak in the next chapter.

In any case this conjecture finds support in the ensuing events. It is not merely
that, just as the great but personal plan of the Conqueror collapsed after all into the chaos of the Stephen transition, so the great but personal plan of the first Plantagenet collapsed into the chaos of the Barons’ Wars. When all allowance is made for constitutional fictions and afterthoughts, it does seem likely that here for the first time some moral strength deserted the monarchy. The character of Henry’s second son John (for Richard belongs rather to the last chapter) stamped it with something accidental yet symbolic. It was not that John was a mere black blot on the pure gold of the Plantagenets, the texture was much more mixed and continuous; but he really was a discredited Plantagenet, and as it were a damaged Plantagenet. It was not that he was much more of a bad man than many opposed to him, but he was the kind of bad man whom bad men and good do combine to oppose. In a sense subtler than that of the legal and parliamentary logic—chopping invented long afterwards, he certainly managed to put the Crown in the wrong. Nobody suggested that the barons of Stephen’s time starved men in dungeons to promote political liberty, or hung them up by the heels as a symbolic request for a free parliament. In the reign of John and his son it was still the barons, and not in the least the people, who seized the power; but there did begin to appear a case for their seizing it, for contemporaries as well as constitutional historians afterwards. John, in one of his diplomatic doublings, had put England into the papal care, as an estate is put in Chancery. And unluckily the Pope, whose counsels had generally been mild and liberal, was then in his death—grapple with the Germanic Emperor and wanted every penny he could get to win. His winning was a blessing to Europe, but a curse to England, for he used the island as a mere treasury for this foreign war. In this and other matters the baronial party began to have something like a principle, which is the backbone of a policy. Much conventional history that connects their councils with a thing like our House of Commons is as far—fetched as it would be to say that the Speaker wields a Mace like those which the barons brandished in battle. Simon de Montfort was not an enthusiast for the Whig theory of the British Constitution, but he was an enthusiast for something. He founded a parliament in a fit of considerable absence of mind, in the responsible and even religious sense which had made his father so savage a Crusader against heretics, that he laid about him with his great sword before he fell at Evesham.

Magna Carta was not a step towards democracy, but it was a step away from despotism. If we hold that double truth firmly, we have something like a key to the rest of English history. A rather loose aristocracy not only gained but often deserved the name of liberty. And the history of the English can be most briefly
summarized by taking the French motto of “Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity,” and noting that the English have sincerely loved the first and lost the other two.

In the contemporary complication much could be urged both for the Crown and the new and more national rally of the nobility. But it was a complication, whereas a miracle is a plain matter that any man can understand. The possibilities or impossibilities of St. Thomas Becket were left a riddle for history; the white flame of his audacious theory was frustrated, and his work cut short like a fairy tale left untold. But his memory passed into the care of the common people, and with them he was more active dead than alive—yes, even more busy. In the next chapter we shall consider what was meant in the Middle Ages by the common people, and how uncommon we should think it to-day. And in the last chapter we have already seen how in the Crusading age the strangest things grew homily, and men fed on traveller’s tales when there were no national newspapers. A many-coloured pageant of martyrology on numberless walls and windows had familiarized the most ignorant with alien cruelties in many climes; with a bishop flayed by Danes or a virgin burned by Saracens, with one saint stoned by Jews and another hewn in pieces by negroes. I cannot think it was a small matter that among these images one of the most magnificent had met his death but lately at the hands of an English monarch. There was at least something akin to the primitive and epical romances of that period in the tale of those two mighty friends, one of whom struck too hard and slew the other. It may even have been so early as this that something was judged in silence; and for the multitude rested on the Crown a mysterious seal of insecurity like that of Cain, and of exile on the English kings.
THE MEANING OF MERRY ENGLAND

THE mental trick by which the first half of English history has been wholly dwarfed and dehumanised is a very simple one. It consists in telling only the story of the professional destroyers and then complaining that the whole story is one of destruction. A king is at the best a sort of crowned executioner; all government is an ugly necessity; and if it was then uglier it was for the most part merely because it was more difficult. What we call the Judges’ circuits were first rather the King’s raids. For a time the criminal class was so strong that ordinary civil government was conducted by a sort of civil war. When the social enemy was caught at all he was killed or savagely maimed. The King could not take Pentonville Prison about with him on wheels. I am far from denying that there was a real element of cruelty in the Middle Ages; but the point here is that it was concerned with one side of life, which is cruel at the best; and that this involved more cruelty for the same reason that it involved more courage. When we think of our ancestors as the men who inflicted tortures, we ought sometimes to think of them as the men who defied them. But the modern critic of mediaevalism commonly looks only at these crooked shadows and not at the common daylight of the Middle Ages. When he has got over his indignant astonishment at the fact that fighters fought and that hangmen hanged; he assumes that any other ideas there may have been were ineffectual and fruitless. He despises the monk for avoiding the very same activities which he despises the warrior for cultivating. And he insists that the arts of war were sterile, without men admitting the possibility that the arts of peace were productive. But the truth is that it is precisely in the arts of peace, and in the type of production, that the Middle Ages stand singular and unique. This is not eulogy but history; an informed man must recognise this productive peculiarity even if he happens to hate it. The melodramatic things currently called mediaeval are much older and more universal; such as the sport of tournament or the use of torture. The tournament was indeed a Christian and liberal advance on the gladiatorial show, since the lords risked themselves and not merely their slaves. Torture, so far from being peculiarly mediaeval, was copied from pagan Rome and its most rationalist political science; and its application to others besides slaves was really part of the slow mediaeval extinction of slavery. Torture, indeed, is a logical thing
common in states innocent of fanaticism, as in the great agnostic empire of China. What was really arresting and remarkable about the Middle Ages, as the Spartan discipline was peculiar to Sparta, or the Russian communes typical of Russia, was precisely its positive social scheme of production, of the making, building and growing of all the good things of life.

For the tale told in a book like this cannot really touch on mediaeval England at all. The dynasties and the parliaments passed like a changing cloud and across a stable and fruitful landscape. The institutions which affected the masses can be compared to corn or fruit trees in one practical sense at least, that they grew upwards from below. There may have been better societies, and assuredly we have not to look far for worse; but it is doubtful if there was ever so spontaneous a society. We cannot do justice, for instance, to the local government of that epoch, even where it was very faulty and fragmentary, by any comparisons with the plans of local government laid down to–day. Modern local government always comes from above; it is at best granted; it is more often merely imposed. The modern English oligarchy, the modern German Empire, are necessarily more efficient in making municipalities upon a plan, or rather a pattern. The mediaevals not only had self–government, but their self–government was self–made. They did indeed, as the central powers of the national monarchies grew stronger, seek and procure the stamp of state approval; but it was approval of a popular fact already in existence. Men banded together in guilds and parishes long before Local Government Acts were dreamed of. Like charity, which was worked in the same way, their Home Rule began at home. The reactions of recent centuries have left most educated men bankrupt of the corporate imagination required even to imagine this. They only think of a mob as a thing that breaks things–even if they admit it is right to break them. But the mob made these things. An artist mocked as many–headed, an artist with many eyes and hands, created these masterpieces. And if the modern sceptic in his detestation of the democratic ideal, complains of my calling them masterpieces, a simple answer will for the moment serve. It is enough to reply that the very word “masterpiece” is borrowed from the terminology of the mediaeval craftsmen. But such points in the Guild System can be considered a little later; here we are only concerned with the quite spontaneous springing upwards of all these social institutions, such as they were. They rose in the streets like a silent rebellion; like a still and statuesque riot. In modern constitutional countries there are practically no political institutions thus given by the people; all are received by the people. There is only one thing that stands in our midst, attenuated and threatened, but
enthroned in some power like a ghost of the Middle Ages: the Trades Unions.

In agriculture, what had happened to the land was like a universal landslide. But by a prodigy beyond the catastrophes of geology it may be said that the land had slid uphill. Rural civilisation was on a wholly new and much higher level; yet there was no great social convulsions or apparently even great social campaigns to explain it. It is possibly a solitary instance in history of men thus falling upwards; at least of outcasts falling on their feet or vagrants straying into the promised land. Such a thing could not be and was not a mere accident; yet, if we go by conscious political plans, it was something like a miracle. There had appeared, like a subterranean race cast up to the sun, something unknown to the august civilisation of the Roman Empire—a peasantry. At the beginning of the Dark Ages the great pagan cosmopolitan society now grown Christian was as much a slave state as old South Carolina. By the fourteenth century it was almost as much a state of peasant proprietors as modern France. No laws had been passed against slavery; no dogmas even had condemned it by definition; no war had been waged against it, no new race or ruling caste had repudiated it; but it was gone. This startling and silent transformation is perhaps the best measure of the pressure of popular life in the Middle Ages, of how fast it was making new things in its spiritual factory. Like everything else in the mediaeval revolution, from its cathedrals to its ballads, it was as anonymous as it was enormous. It is admitted that the conscious and active emancipators everywhere were the parish priests and the religious brotherhoods; but no name among them has survived and no man of them has reaped his reward in this world. Countless Clarksons and innumerable Wilberforces, without political machinery or public fame, worked at death-beds and confessionals in all the villages of Europe; and the vast system of slavery vanished. It was probably the widest work ever done which was voluntary on both sides; and the Middle Ages was in this and other things the age of volunteers. It is possible enough to state roughly the stages through which the thing passed; but such a statement does not explain the loosening of the grip of the great slave-owners; and it cannot be explained except psychologically. The Catholic type of Christianity was not merely an element, it was a climate; and in that climate the slave would not grow. I have already suggested, touching that transformation of the Roman Empire which was the background of all these centuries, how a mystical view of man’s dignity must have this effect. A table that walked and talked, or a stool that flew with wings out of window, would be about as workable a thing as an immortal chattel. But though here as everywhere the spirit explains the processes, and the processes
cannot even plausibly explain the spirit, these processes involve two very practical points, without which we cannot understand how this great popular civilisation was created—or how it was destroyed.

What we call the manors were originally the villae of the pagan lords, each with its population of slaves. Under this process, however it be explained, what had occurred was the diminishment of the lords’ claim to the whole profit of a slave estate, by which it became a claim to the profit of part of it, and dwindled at last to certain dues or customary payments to the lord, having paid which the slave could enjoy not only the use of the land but the profit of it. It must be remembered that over a great part, and especially very important parts, of the whole territory, the lords were abbots, magistrates elected by a mystical communism and themselves often of peasant birth. Men not only obtained a fair amount of justice under their care, but a fair amount of freedom even from their carelessness. But two details of the development are very vital. First, as has been hinted elsewhere, the slave was long in the intermediate status of a serf. This meant that while the land was entitled to the services of the man, he was equally entitled to the support of the land. He could not be evicted; he could not even, in the modern fashion, have his rent raised. At the beginning it was merely that the slave was owned, but at least he could not be disowned. At the end he had really become a small landlord, merely because it was not the lord that owned him, but the land. It is hardly unsafe to suggest that in this (by one of the paradoxes of this extraordinary period) the very fixity of serfdom was a service to freedom. The new peasant inherited something of the stability of the slave. He did not come to life in a competitive scramble where everybody was trying to snatch his freedom from him. He found himself among neighbours who already regarded his presence as normal and his frontiers as natural frontiers, and among whom all—powerful customs crushed all experiments in competition. By a trick or overturn no romancer has dared to put in a tale, this prisoner had become the governor of his own prison. For a little time it was almost true that an Englishman’s house was his castle, because it had been built strong enough to be his dungeon.

The other notable element was this: that when the produce of the land began by custom to be cut up and only partially transmitted to the lord, the remainder was generally subdivided into two types of property. One the serfs enjoyed severally, in private patches, while the other they enjoyed in common, and generally in common with the lord. Thus arose the momentously important mediaeval institutions of the Common Land, owned side by side with private
land. It was an alternative and a refuge. The mediaevals, except when they were monks, were none of them Communists; but they were all, as it were, potential Communists. It is typical of the dark and dehumanised picture now drawn of the period that our romances constantly describe a broken man as falling back on the forests and the outlaws den, but never describe him as falling back on the common land, which was a much more common incident. Mediaevalism believed in mending its broken men; and as the idea existed in the communal life for monks, it existed in the communal land for peasants. It was their great green hospital, their free and airy workhouse. A Common was not a naked and negative thing like the scrub or heath we call a Common on the edges of the suburbs. It was a reserve of wealth like a reserve of grain in a barn; it was deliberately kept back as a balance, as we talk of a balance at the bank. Now these provisions for a healthier distribution of property would by themselves show any man of imagination that a real moral effort had been made towards social justice; that it could not have been mere evolutionary accident that slowly turned the slave into a serf, and the serf into a peasant proprietor. But if anybody still thinks that mere blind luck, without any groping for the light, had somehow brought about the peasant condition in place of the agrarian slave estate, he has only to turn to what was happening in all the other callings and affairs of humanity. Then he will cease to doubt. For he will find the same mediaeval men busy upon a social scheme which points as plainly in effect to pity and a craving for equality. And it is a system which could no more be produced by accident than one of their cathedrals could be built by an earthquake.

Most work beyond the primary work of agriculture was guarded by the egalitarian vigilance of the Guilds. It is hard to find any term to measure the distance between this system and modern society; one can only approach it first by the faint traces it has left. Our daily life is littered with a debris of the Middle Ages, especially of dead words which no longer carry their meaning. I have already suggested one example. We hardly call up the picture of a return to Christian Communism whenever we mention Wimbledon Common. This truth descends to such trifles as the titles which we write on letters and postcards. The puzzling and truncated monosyllable “Esq.” is a pathetic relic of a remote evolution from chivalry to snobbery. No two historic things could well be more different than an esquire and a squire. The first was above all things an incomplete and probationary position—the tadpole of knighthood; the second is above all things a complete and assured position—the status of the owners and rulers of rural England throughout recent centuries. Our esquires did not win
their estates till they had given up any particular fancy for winning their spurs. Esquire does not mean squire, and esq. does not mean anything. But it remains on our letters a little wriggle in pen and ink and an indecipherable hieroglyph twisted by the strange turns of our history which have turned a military discipline into a pacific oligarchy, and that into a mere plutocracy at last. And there are similar historic riddles to be unpicked in the similar forms of social address. There is something singularly forlorn about the modern word “Mister.” Even in sound it has a simpering feebleness which marks the shrivelling of the strong word from which it came. Nor, indeed, is the symbol of the mere sound inaccurate. I remember seeing a German story of Samson in which he bore the unassuming name of Simson, which surely shows Samson very much shorn. There is something of the same dismal diminuendo in the evolution of a Master into a Mister.

The very vital importance of the word “Master” is this. A Guild was, very broadly speaking, a Trade Union in which every man was his own employer. That is, a man could not work at any trade unless he would join the league and accept the laws of that trade; but he worked in his own shop with his own tools, and the whole profit went to himself. But the word “employer” marks a modern deficiency which makes the modern use of the word “Master” quite inexact. A master meant something quite other and greater than a “boss.” It meant a master of the work, where it now means only a master of the workmen. It is an elementary character of Capitalism that a shipowner need not know the right end of a ship, or a landowner have even seen the landscape, that the owner of a gold mine may be interested in nothing but old pewter, or the owner of a railway travel exclusively in balloons. He may be a more successful capitalist if he has a hobby of his own business; he is often a more successful capitalist if he has the sense to leave it to a manager; but economically he can control the business because he is a capitalist, not because he has any kind of hobby or any kind of sense. The highest grade in the Guild system was a Master, and it meant a mastery of the business. To take the term created by the colleges in the same epoch, all the mediaeval bosses were Masters of Arts. The other grades were the journeyman and the apprentice; but like the corresponding degrees at the universities, they were grades through which every common man could pass. They were not social classes; they were degrees and not castes. This is the whole point of the recurrent romance about the apprentice marrying his master’s daughter. The master would not be surprised at such a thing, any more than an M.A. would swell with aristocratic indignation when his daughter married a
B.A.

When we pass from the strictly educational hierarchy to the strictly egalitarian ideal, we find again that the remains of the thing to–day are so distorted and disconnected as to be comic. There are City Companies which inherit the coats of arms and the immense relative wealth of the old Guilds, and inherit nothing else. Even what is good about them is not what was good about the Guilds. On one case we shall find something like a Worshipful Company of Bricklayers, in which, it is unnecessary to say, there is not a single bricklayer or anybody who has ever known a bricklayer, but in which the senior partners of a few big businesses in the City, with a few faded military men with a taste in cookery, tell each other in after–dinner speeches that it has been the glory of their lives to make allegorical bricks without straw. In another case we shall find a Worshipful Company of Whitewashers who do deserve their name, in the sense that many of them employ a large number of other people to whitewash. These Companies support large charities and often doubtless very valuable charities; but their object is quite different from that of the old charities of the Guilds. The aim of the Guild charities was the same as the aim of the Common Land. It was to resist inequality–or, as some earnest old gentlemen of the last generation would probably put it, to resist evolution. It was to ensure, not only that bricklaying should survive and succeed, but that every bricklayer should survive and succeed. It sought to rebuild the ruins of any bricklayer, and to give any faded whitewasher a new white coat. It was the whole aim of the Guilds to cobbler their cobblers like their shoes and clout their clothiers with their clothes; to strengthen the weakest link, or go after the hundredth sheep; in short, to keep the row of little shops unbroken like a line of battle. It resisted the growth of a big shop like the growth of a dragon. Now even the whitewashers of the Whitewashers Company will not pretend that it exists to prevent a small shop being swallowed by a big shop, or that it has done anything whatever to prevent it. At the best the kindness it would show to a bankrupt whitewasher would be a kind of compensation; it would not be reinstatement; it would not be the restoration of status in an industrial system. So careful of the type it seems, so careless of the single life; and by that very modern evolutionary philosophy the type itself has been destroyed. The old Guilds, with the same object of equality, of course, insisted peremptorily upon the same level system of payment and treatment which is a point of complaint against the modern Trades Unions. But they insisted also, as the Trades Unions cannot do, upon a high standard of craftsmanship, which still astonishes the world in the corners of perishing
buildings or the colours of broken glass. There is no artist or art critic who will not concede, however distant his own style from the Gothic school, that there was in this time a nameless but universal artistic touch in the moulding of the very tools of life. Accident has preserved the rudest sticks and stools and pots and pans which have suggestive shapes as if they were possessed not by devils but by elves. For they were, indeed, as compared with subsequent systems, produced in the incredible fairyland of a free country.

That the most mediaeval of modern institutions, the Trades Unions, do not fight for the same ideal of aesthetic finish is true and certainly tragic; but to make it a matter of blame is wholly to misunderstand the tragedy. The Trades Unions are confederations of men without property, seeking to balance its absence by numbers and the necessary character of their labour. The Guilds were confederations of men with property, seeking to ensure each man in the possession of that property. This is, of course, the only condition of affairs in which property can properly be said to exist at all. We should not speak of a negro community in which most men were white, but the rare negroes were giants. We should not conceive a married community in which most men were bachelors, and three men had harems. A married community means a community where most people are married; not a community where one or two people are very much married. A propertied community means a community where most people have property; not a community where there are a few capitalists. But in fact the Guildsmen (as also, for that matter, the serfs, semi-—serfs and peasants) were much richer than can be realized even from the fact that the Guilds protected the possession of houses, tools, and just payment. The surplus is self—evident upon any just study of the prices of the period, when all deductions have been made, of course, for the different value of the actual coinage. When a man could get a goose or a gallon of ale for one or two of the smallest and commonest coins, the matter is in no way affected by the name of those coins. Even where the individual wealth was severely limited, the collective wealth was very large—the wealth of the Guilds, of the parishes, and especially of the monastic estates. It is important to remember this fact in the subsequent history of England.

The next fact to note is that the local government grew out of things like the Guild system, and not the system from the government. In sketching the sound principles of this lost society, I shall not, of course, be supposed by any sane person to be describing a moral paradise, or to be implying that it was free from the faults and fights and sorrows that harass human life in all times, and certainly
not least in our own time. There was a fair amount of rioting and fighting in connection with the Guilds; and there was especially for some time a combative rivalry between the guilds of merchants who sold things and those of craftsmen who made them, a conflict in which the craftsmen on the whole prevailed. But whichever party may have been predominant, it was the heads of the Guild who became the heads of the town, and not vice versa. The stiff survivals of this once very spontaneous uprising can again be seen in the now anomalous constitution of the Lord Mayor and the Livery of the City of London. We are told so monotonously that the government of our fathers reposed upon arms, that it is valid to insist that this, their most intimate and everyday sort of government, was wholly based upon tools; a government in which the workman’s tool became the sceptre. Blake, in one of his symbolic fantasies, suggests that in the Golden Age the gold and gems should be taken from the hilt of the sword and put upon the handle of the plough. But something very like this did happen in the interlude of this mediaeval democracy, fermenting under the crust of mediaeval monarchy and aristocracy; where productive implements often took on the pomp of heraldry. The Guilds often exhibited emblems and pageantry so compact of their most prosaic uses, that we can only parallel them by imagining armorial tabards, or even religious vestments, woven out of a navvy’s corduroys or a coster’s pearl buttons.

Two more points must be briefly added; and the rough sketch of this now foreign and even fantastic state will be as complete as it can be made here. Both refer to the links between this popular life and the politics which are conventionally the whole of history. The first, and for that age the most evident, is the Charter. To recur once more to the parallel of Trades Unions, as convenient for the casual reader of to–day, the Charter of a Guild roughly corresponded to that “recognition” for which the railwaymen and other trades unionists asked some years ago, without success. By this they had the authority of the King, the central or national government; and this was of great moral weight with mediaevals, who always conceived of freedom as a positive status, not as a negative escape: they had none of the modern romanticism which makes liberty akin to loneliness. Their view remains in the phrase about giving a man the freedom of a city: they had no desire to give him the freedom of a wilderness. To say that they had also the authority of the Church is something of an understatement; for religion ran like a rich thread through the rude tapestry of these popular things while they were still merely popular; and many a trade society must have had a patron saint long before it had a royal seal. The other
point is that it was from these municipal groups already in existence that the first men were chosen for the largest and perhaps the last of the great mediaeval experiments: the Parliament.

We have all read at school that Simon de Montfort and Edward I, when they first summoned Commons to council, chiefly as advisers on local taxation, called “two burgesses” from every town. If we had read a little more closely, those simple words would have given away the whole secret of the lost medieval civilisation. We had only to ask what burgesses were, and whether they grew on trees. We should immediately have discovered that England was full of little parliaments, out of which the great parliament was made. And if it be a matter of wonder that the great council (still called in quaint archaism by its old title of the House of Commons) is the only one of these popular or elective corporations of which we hear much in our books of history, the explanation, I fear, is simple and a little sad. It is that the Parliament was the one among these mediaeval creations which ultimately consented to betray and to destroy the rest.
IX

NATIONALITY AND THE FRENCH WARS

If any one wishes to know what we mean when we say that Christendom was and is one culture, or one civilization, there is a rough but plain way of putting it. It is by asking what is the most common, or rather the most commonplace, of all the uses of the word “Christian.” There is, of course, the highest use of all; but it has nowadays many other uses. Sometimes a Christian means an Evangelical. Sometimes, and more recently, a Christian means a Quaker. Sometimes a Christian means a modest person who believes that he bears a resemblance to Christ. But it has long had one meaning in casual speech among common people, and it means a culture or a civilization. Ben Gunn on Treasure Island did not actually say to Jim Hawkins, “I feel myself out of touch with a certain type of civilization”; but he did say, “I haven’t tasted Christian food.” The old wives in a village looking at a lady with short hair and trousers do not indeed say, “We perceive divergence between her culture and our own”; but they do say, “Why can’t she dress like a Christian?” That the sentiment has thus soaked down to the simplest and even stupidest daily talk is but one evidence that Christendom was a very real thing. But it was also, as we have seen, a very localized thing, especially in the Middle Ages. And that very lively localism the Christian faith and affections encouraged led at last to an excessive and exclusive parochialism. There were rival shrines of the same saint, and a sort of duel between two statues of the same divinity. By a process it is now our difficult duty to follow, a real estrangement between European peoples began. Men began to feel that foreigners did not eat or drink like Christians, and even, when the philosophic schism came, to doubt if they were Christians.

There was, indeed, much more than this involved. While the internal structure of mediaevalism was thus parochial and largely popular, in the greater affairs, and especially the external affairs, such as peace and war, most (though by no means all) of what was mediaeval was monarchical. To see what the kings came to mean we must glance back at the great background, as of darkness and daybreak, against which the first figures of our history have already appeared. That background was the war with the barbarians. While it lasted Christendom was not only one nation but more like one city—and a besieged city. Wessex was but one wall or Paris one tower of it; and in one tongue and spirit Bede might
have chronicled the siege of Paris or Abbo sung the song of Alfred. What followed was a conquest and a conversion; all the end of the Dark Ages and the dawn of mediaevalism is full of the evangelizing of barbarism. And it is the paradox of the Crusades that though the Saracen was superficially more civilized than the Christian, it was a sound instinct which saw him also to be in spirit a destroyer. In the simpler case of northern heathenry the civilization spread with a simpler progress. But it was not till the end of the Middle Ages, and close on the Reformation, that the people of Prussia, the wild land lying beyond Germany, were baptized at all. A flippant person, if he permitted himself a profane confusion with vaccination, might almost be inclined to suggest that for some reason it didn’t “take” even then.

The barbarian peril was thus brought under bit by bit, and even in the case of Islam the alien power which could not be crushed was evidently curbed. The Crusades became hopeless, but they also became needless. As these fears faded the princes of Europe, who had come together to face them, were left facing each other. They had more leisure to find that their own captaincies clashed; but this would easily have been overruled, or would have produced a petty riot, had not the true creative spontaneity, of which we have spoken in the local life, tended to real variety. Royalties found they were representatives almost without knowing it; and many a king insisting on a genealogical tree or a title–deed found he spoke for the forests and the songs of a whole country–side. In England especially the transition is typified in the accident which raised to the throne one of the noblest men of the Middle Ages.

Edward I came clad in all the splendours of his epoch. He had taken the Cross and fought the Saracens; he had been the only worthy foe of Simon de Montfort in these baronial wars which, as we have seen, were the first sign (however faint) of a serious theory that England should be ruled by its barons rather than its kings. He proceeded, like Simon de Montfort, and more solidly, to develop the great mediaeval institution of a parliament. As has been said, it was superimposed on the existing parish democracies, and was first merely the summoning of local representatives to advise on local taxation. Indeed its rise was one with the rise of what we now call taxation; and there is thus a thread of theory leading to its latter claims to have the sole right of taxing. But in the beginning it was an instrument of the most equitable kings, and notably an instrument of Edward I. He often quarrelled with his parliaments and may sometimes have displeased his people (which has never been at all the same thing), but on the whole he was supremely the representative sovereign. In this
connection one curious and difficult question may be considered here, though it marks the end of a story that began with the Norman Conquest. It is pretty certain that he was never more truly a representative king, one might say a republican king, than in the fact that he expelled the Jews. The problem is so much misunderstood and mixed with notions of a stupid spite against a gifted and historic race as such, that we must pause for a paragraph upon it.

The Jews in the Middle Ages were as powerful as they were unpopular. They were the capitalists of the age, the men with wealth banked ready for use. It is very tenable that in this way they were useful; it is certain that in this way they were used. It is also quite fair to say that in this way they were ill-used. The ill-usage was not indeed that suggested at random in romances, which mostly revolve on the one idea that their teeth were pulled out. Those who know this as a story about King John generally do not know the rather important fact that it was a story against King John. It is probably doubtful; it was only insisted on as exceptional; and it was, by that very insistence, obviously regarded as disreputable. But the real unfairness of the Jews’ position was deeper and more distressing to a sensitive and highly civilized people. They might reasonably say that Christian kings and nobles, and even Christian popes and bishops, used for Christian purposes (such as the Crusades and the cathedrals) the money that could only be accumulated in such mountains by a usury they inconsistently denounced as unchristian; and then, when worse times came, gave up the Jew to the fury of the poor, whom that useful usury had ruined. That was the real case for the Jew; and no doubt he really felt himself oppressed. Unfortunately it was the case for the Christians that they, with at least equal reason, felt him as the oppressor; and that mutual charge of tyranny is the Semitic trouble in all times. It is certain that in popular sentiment, this Anti-Semitism was not excused as uncharitableness, but simply regarded as charity. Chaucer puts his curse on Hebrew cruelty into the mouth of the soft-hearted prioress, who wept when she saw a mouse in a trap; and it was when Edward, breaking the rule by which the rulers had hitherto fostered their bankers’ wealth, flung the alien financiers out of the land, that his people probably saw him most plainly at once as a knight errant and a tender father of his people.

Whatever the merits of this question, such a portrait of Edward was far from false. He was the most just and conscientious type of mediaeval monarch; and it is exactly this fact that brings into relief the new force which was to cross his path and in strife with which he died. While he was just, he was also eminently legal. And it must be remembered, if we would not merely read back ourselves
into the past, that much of the dispute of the time was legal; the adjustment of
dynastic and feudal differences not yet felt to be anything else. In this spirit
Edward was asked to arbitrate by the rival claimants to the Scottish crown; and
in this sense he seems to have arbitrated quite honestly. But his legal, or, as some
would say, pedantic mind made the proviso that the Scottish king as such was
already under his suzerainty and he probably never understood the spirit he
called up against him; for that spirit had as yet no name. We call it to–day
Nationalism. Scotland resisted; and the adventures of an outlawed knight named
Wallace soon furnished it with one of those legends which are more important
than history. In a way that was then at least equally practical, the Catholic priests
of Scotland became especially the patriotic and Anti–English party; as indeed
they remained even throughout the Reformation. Wallace was defeated and
executed; but the heather was already on fire; and the espousal of the new
national cause by one of Edward’s own knights named Bruce, seemed to the old
king a mere betrayal of feudal equity. He died in a final fury at the head of a new
invasion upon the very border of Scotland. With his last words the great king
commanded that his bones should be borne in front of the battle; and the bones,
which were of gigantic size, were eventually buried with the epitaph, “Here lies
Edward the Tall, who was the hammer of the Scots.” It was a true epitaph, but in
a sense exactly opposite to its intention. He was their hammer, but he did not
break but make them; for he smote them on an anvil and he forged them into a
sword.

That coincidence or course of events, which must often be remarked in this
story, by which (for whatever reason) our most powerful kings did not somehow
leave their power secure, showed itself in the next reign, when the baronial
quarrels were resumed and the northern kingdom, under Bruce, cut itself finally
free by the stroke of Bannockburn. Otherwise the reign is a mere interlude, and it
is with the succeeding one that we find the new national tendency yet further
developed. The great French wars, in which England won so much glory, were
opened by Edward III, and grew more and more nationalist. But even to feel the
transition of the time we must first realize that the third Edward made as strictly
legal and dynastic a claim to France as the first Edward had made to Scotland;
the claim was far weaker in substance, but it was equally conventional in form.
He thought, or said, he had a claim on a kingdom as a squire might say he had a
claim on an estate; superficially it was an affair for the English and French
lawyers. To read into this that the people were sheep bought and sold is to
misunderstand all mediaeval history; sheep have no trade union. The English
arms owed much of their force to the class of the free yeomen; and the success of the infantry, especially of the archery, largely stood for that popular element which had already unhorsed the high French chivalry at Courtrai. But the point is this; that while the lawyers were talking about the Salic Law, the soldiers, who would once have been talking about guild law or glebe law, were already talking about English law and French law. The French were first in this tendency to see something outside the township, the trade brotherhood, the feudal dues, or the village common. The whole history of the change can be seen in the fact that the French had early begun to call the nation the Greater Land. France was the first of nations and has remained the norm of nations, the only one which is a nation and nothing else. But in the collision the English grew equally corporate; and a true patriotic applause probably hailed the victories of Crecy and Poitiers, as it certainly hailed the later victory of Agincourt. The latter did not indeed occur until after an interval of internal revolutions in England, which will be considered on a later page; but as regards the growth of nationalism, the French wars were continuous. And the English tradition that followed after Agincourt was continuous also. It is embodied in rude and spirited ballads before the great Elizabethans. The Henry V of Shakespeare is not indeed the Henry V of history; yet he is more historic. He is not only a saner and more genial but a more important person. For the tradition of the whole adventure was not that of Henry, but of the populace who turned Henry into Harry. There were a thousand Harries in the army at Agincourt, and not one. For the figure that Shakespeare framed out of the legends of the great victory is largely the figure that all men saw as the Englishman of the Middle Ages. He did not really talk in poetry, like Shakespeare’s hero, but he would have liked to. Not being able to do so, he sang; and the English people principally appear in contemporary impressions as the singing people. They were evidently not only expansive but exaggerative; and perhaps it was not only in battle that they drew the long bow. That fine farcical imagery, which has descended to tell comic songs and common speech of the English poor even to-day, had its happy infancy when England thus became a nation; though the modern poor, under the pressure of economic progress, have partly lost the gaiety and kept only the humour. But in that early April of patriotism the new unity of the State still sat lightly upon them; and a cobbler in Henry’s army, who would at home have thought first that it was the day of St. Crispin of the Cobblers, might truly as well as sincerely have hailed the splintering of the French lances in a storm of arrows, and cried, “St. George for Merry England.”
Human things are uncomfortably complex, and while it was the April of patriotism it was the Autumn of mediaeval society. In the next chapter I shall try to trace the forces that were disintegrating the civilization; and even here, after the first victories, it is necessary to insist on the bitterness and barren ambition that showed itself more and more in the later stages, as the long French wars dragged on. France was at the time far less happy than England—wasted by the treason of its nobles and the weakness of its kings almost as much as by the invasion of the islanders. And yet it was this very despair and humiliation that seemed at last to rend the sky, and let in the light of what it is hard for the coldest historian to call anything but a miracle.

It may be this apparent miracle that has apparently made Nationalism eternal. It may be conjectured, though the question is too difficult to be developed here, that there was something in the great moral change which turned the Roman Empire into Christendom, by which each great thing, to which it afterwards gave birth, was baptized into a promise, or at least into a hope of permanence. It may be that each of its ideas was, as it were, mixed with immortality. Certainly something of this kind can be seen in the conception which turned marriage from a contract into a sacrament. But whatever the cause, it is certain that even for the most secular types of our own time their relation to their native land has become not contractual but sacramental. We may say that flags are rags, that frontiers are fictions, but the very men who have said it for half their lives are dying for a rag, and being rent in pieces for a fiction even as I write. When the battle-trumpet blew in 1914 modern humanity had grouped itself into nations almost before it knew what it had done. If the same sound is heard a thousand years hence, there is no sign in the world to suggest to any rational man that humanity will not do exactly the same thing. But even if this great and strange development be not enduring, the point is that it is felt as enduring, it is hard to give a definition of loyalty, but perhaps we come near it if we call it the thing which operates where an obligation is felt to be unlimited. And the minimum of duty or even decency asked of a patriot is the maximum that is asked by the most miraculous view of marriage. The recognized reality of patriotism is not mere citizenship. The recognized reality of patriotism is for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, in national growth and glory and in national disgrace and decline; it is not to travel in the ship of state as a passenger, but if need be to go down with the ship.

It is needless to tell here again the tale of that earthquake episode in which a clearance in the earth and sky, above the confusion and abasement of the
crows, showed the commanding figure of a woman of the people. She was, in her own living loneliness, a French Revolution. She was the proof that a certain power was not in the French kings or in the French knights, but in the French. But the fact that she saw something above her that was other than the sky, the fact that she lived the life of a saint and died the death of a martyr, probably stamped the new national sentiment with a sacred seal. And the fact that she fought for a defeated country, and, even though it was victorious, was herself ultimately defeated, defines that darker element of devotion of which I spoke above, which makes even pessimism consistent with patriotism. It is more appropriate in this place to consider the ultimate reaction of this sacrifice upon the romance and the realities of England.

I have never counted it a patriotic part to plaster my own country with conventional and unconvincing compliments; but no one can understand England who does not understand that such an episode as this, in which she was so clearly in the wrong, has yet been ultimately linked up with a curious quality in which she is rather unusually in the right. No one candidly comparing us with other countries can say we have specially failed to build the sepulchres of the prophets we stoned, or even the prophets who stoned us. The English historical tradition has at least a loose large-mindedness which always finally falls into the praise not only of great foreigners but great foes. Often along with much injustice it has an illogical generosity; and while it will dismiss a great people with mere ignorance, it treats a great personality with hearty hero-worship. There are more examples than one even in this chapter, for our books may well make out Wallace a better man than he was, as they afterwards assigned to Washington an even better cause than he had. Thackeray smiled at Miss Jane Porter’s picture of Wallace, going into war weeping with a cambric pocket-handkerchief; but her attitude was more English and not less accurate. For her idealization was, if anything, nearer the truth than Thackeray’s own notion of a mediaevalism of hypocritical hogs-in-armour. Edward, who figures as a tyrant, could weep with compassion; and it is probable enough that Wallace wept, with or without a pocket-handkerchief. Moreover, her romance was a reality, the reality of nationalism; and she knew much more about the Scottish patriots ages before her time than Thackeray did about the Irish patriots immediately under his nose. Thackeray was a great man; but in that matter he was a very small man, and indeed an invisible one. The cases of Wallace and Washington and many others are here only mentioned, however, to suggest an eccentric magnanimity which surely balances some of our prejudices. We have done many foolish
things, but we have at least done one fine thing; we have whitewashed our worst enemies. If we have done this for a bold Scottish raider and a vigorous Virginian slave–holder, it may at least show that we are not likely to fail in our final appreciation of the one white figure in the motley processions of war. I believe there to be in modern England something like a universal enthusiasm on this subject. We have seen a great English critic write a book about this heroine, in opposition to a great French critic, solely in order to blame him for not having praised her enough. And I do not believe there lives an Englishman now, who if he had the offer of being an Englishman then, would not discard his chance of riding as the crowned conqueror at the head of all the spears of Agincourt, if he could be that English common soldier of whom tradition tells that he broke his spear asunder to bind it into a cross for Joan of Arc.
THE WAR OF THE USURPERS

THE poet Pope, though a friend of the greatest of Tory Democrats, Bolingbroke, necessarily lived in a world in which even Toryism was Whiggish. And the Whig as a wit never expressed his political point more clearly than in Pope’s line which ran: “The right divine of kings to govern wrong.” It will be apparent, when I deal with that period, that I do not palliate the real unreason in divine right as Filmer and some of the pedantic cavaliers construed it. They professed the impossible ideal of “non–resistance” to any national and legitimate power; though I cannot see that even that was so servile and superstitious as the mere modern ideal of “non–resistance” even to a foreign and lawless power. But the seventeenth century was an age of sects, that is of fads; and the Filmerites made a fad of divine right. Its roots were older, equally religious but much more realistic; and though tangled with many other and even opposite things of the Middle Ages, ramify through all the changes we have now to consider. The connection can hardly be stated better than by taking Pope’s easy epigram and pointing out that it is, after all, very weak in philosophy. “The right divine of kings to govern wrong,” considered as a sneer, really evades all that we mean by “a right.” To have a right to do a thing is not at all the same as to be right in doing it. What Pope says satirically about a divine right is what we all say quite seriously about a human right. If a man has a right to vote, has he not a right to vote wrong? If a man has a right to choose his wife, has he not a right to choose wrong? I have a right to express the opinion which I am now setting down; but I should hesitate to make the controversial claim that this proves the opinion to be right.

Now mediaeval monarchy, though only one aspect of mediaeval rule, was roughly represented in the idea that the ruler had a right to rule as a voter has a right to vote. He might govern wrong, but unless he governed horribly and extravagantly wrong, he retained his position of right; as a private man retains his right to marriage and locomotion unless he goes horribly and extravagantly off his head. It was not really even so simple as this; for the Middle Ages were not, as it is often the fashion to fancy, under a single and steely discipline. They were very controversial and therefore very complex; and it is easy, by isolating items whether about jus divinum or primus inter pares, to maintain that the
mediaevals were almost anything; it has been seriously maintained that they were all Germans. But it is true that the influence of the Church, though by no means of all the great churchmen, encouraged the sense of a sort of sacrament of government, which was meant to make the monarch terrible and therefore often made the man tyrannical. The disadvantage of such despotism is obvious enough. The precise nature of its advantage must be better understood than it is, not for its own sake so much as for the story we have now to tell.

The advantage of “divine right,” or irremovable legitimacy, is this; that there is a limit to the ambitions of the rich. “Roi ne puis,” the royal power, whether it was or was not the power of heaven, was in one respect like the power of heaven. It was not for sale. Constitutional moralists have often implied that a tyrant and a rabble have the same vices. It has perhaps been less noticed that a tyrant and a rabble most emphatically have the same virtues. And one virtue which they very markedly share is that neither tyrants nor rabbles are snobs; they do not care a button what they do to wealthy people. It is true that tyranny was sometimes treated as coming from the heavens almost in the lesser and more literal sense of coming from the sky; a man no more expected to be the king than to be the west wind or the morning star. But at least no wicked miller can chain the wind to turn only his own mill; no pedantic scholar can trim the morning star to be his own reading–lamp. Yet something very like this is what really happened to England in the later Middle Ages; and the first sign of it, I fancy was the fall of Richard II.

Shakespeare’s historical plays are something truer than historical; they are traditional; the living memory of many things lingered, though the memory of others was lost. He is right in making Richard II incarnate the claim to divine right; and Bolingbroke the baronial ambition which ultimately broke up the old mediaeval order. But divine right had become at once drier and more fantastic by the time of the Tudors. Shakespeare could not recover the fresh and popular part of the thing; for he came at a later stage in a process of stiffening which is the main thing to be studied in later mediaevalism. Richard himself was possibly a wayward and exasperating prince; it might well be the weak link that snapped in the strong chain of the Plantagenets. There may have been a real case against the coup d’état which he effected in 1397 and his kinsman Henry of Bolingbroke may have had strong sections of disappointed opinion on his side when he effected in 1399 the first true usurpation in English history. But if we wish to understand that larger tradition which even Shakespeare had lost, we must glance back at something which befell Richard even in the first years of his
reign. It was certainly the greatest event of his reign; and it was possibly the
greatest event of all the reigns which are rapidly considered in this book. The
real English people, the men who work with their hands, lifted their hands to
strike their masters, probably for the first and certainly for the last time in
history.

Pagan slavery had slowly perished, not so much by decaying as by developing
into something better. In one sense it did not die, but rather came to life. The
slave-owner was like a man who should set up a row of sticks for a fence, and
then find they had struck root and were budding into small trees. They would be
at once more valuable and less manageable, especially less portable; and such a
difference between a stick and a tree was precisely the difference between P.
slave and a serf—or even the free peasant which the serf seemed rapidly tending
to become. It was, in the best sense of a battered phrase, a social evolution, and it
had the great evil of one. The evil was that while it was essentially orderly, it
was still literally lawless. That is, the emancipation of the commons had already
advanced very far, but it had not yet advanced far enough to be embodied in a
law. The custom was “unwritten,” like the British Constitution, and (like that
evolutionary, not to say evasive entity) could always be overridden by the rich,
who now drive their great coaches through Acts of Parliament. The new peasant
was still legally a slave, and was to learn it by one of those turns of fortune
which confound a foolish faith in the common sense of unwritten constitutions.
The French Wars gradually grew to be almost as much of a scourge to England
as they were to France. England was despoiled by her own victories; luxury and
poverty increased at the extremes of society; and, by a process more proper to an
ensuing chapter, the balance of the better mediaevalism was lost. Finally, a
furious plague, called the Black Death, burst like a blast on the land, thinning the
population and throwing the work of the world into ruin. There was a shortage of
labour; a difficulty of getting luxuries; and the great lords did what one would
expect them to do. They became lawyers, and upholders of the letter of the law.
They appealed to a rule already nearly obsolete, to drive the serf back to the
more direct servitude of the Dark Ages. They announced their decision to the
people, and the people rose in arms.

The two dramatic stories which connect Wat Tyler, doubtfully with the
beginning, and definitely with the end of the revolt, are far from unimportant,
despite the desire of our present prosaic historians to pretend that all dramatic
stories are unimportant. The tale of Tyler’s first blow is significant in the sense
that it is not only dramatic but domestic. It avenged an insult to the family, and
made the legend of the whole riot, whatever its incidental indecencies, a sort of demonstration on behalf of decency. This is important; for the dignity of the poor is almost unmeaning in modern debates; and an inspector need only bring a printed form and a few long words to do the same thing without having his head broken. The occasion of the protest, and the form which the feudal reaction had first taken, was a Poll Tax; but this was but a part of a general process of pressing the population to servile labour, which fully explains the ferocious language held by the government after the rising had failed; the language in which it threatened to make the state of the serf more servile than before. The facts attending the failure in question are less in dispute. The mediaeval populace showed considerable military energy and co-operation, stormed its way to London, and was met outside the city by a company containing the King and the Lord Mayor, who were forced to consent to a parley. The treacherous stabbing of Tyler by the Mayor gave the signal for battle and massacre on the spot. The peasants closed in roaring, “They have killed our leader,” when a strange thing happened; something which gives us a fleeting and a final glimpse of the crowned sacramental man of the Middle Ages. For one wild moment divine right was divine.

The King was no more than a boy; his very voice must have rung out to that multitude almost like the voice of a child. But the power of his fathers and the great Christendom from which he came fell in some strange fashion upon him; and riding out alone before the people, he cried out, “I am your leader”; and himself promised to grant them all they asked. That promise was afterwards broken; but those who see in the breach of it the mere fickleness of the young and frivolous king, are not only shallow but utterly ignorant interpreters of the whole trend of that time. The point that must be seized, if subsequent things are to be seen as they are, is that Parliament certainly encouraged, and Parliament almost certainly obliged, the King to repudiate the people. For when, after the rejoicing revolutionists had disarmed and were betrayed, the King urged a humane compromise on the Parliament, the Parliament furiously refused it. Already Parliament is not merely a governing body but a governing class. Parliament was as contemptuous of the peasants in the fourteenth as of the Chartists in the nineteenth century. This council, first summoned by the king like juries and many other things, to get from plain men rather reluctant evidence about taxation, has already become an object of ambition, and is, therefore, an aristocracy. There is already war, in this case literally to the knife, between the Commons with a large C and the commons with a small one. Talking about the
knife, it is notable that the murderer of Tyler was not a mere noble but an elective magistrate of the mercantile oligarchy of London; though there is probably no truth in the tale that his blood–stained dagger figures on the arms of the City of London. The mediaeval Londoners were quite capable of assassinating a man, but not of sticking so dirty a knife into the neighbourhood of the cross of their Redeemer, in the place which is really occupied by the sword of St. Paul.

It is remarked above that Parliament was now an aristocracy, being an object of ambition. The truth is, perhaps, more subtle than this; but if ever men yearn to serve on juries we may probably guess that juries are no longer popular. Anyhow, this must be kept in mind, as against the opposite idea of the jus divinum or fixed authority, if we would appreciate the fall of Richard. If the thing which dethroned him was a rebellion, it was a rebellion of the parliament, of the thing that had just proved much more pitiless than he towards a rebellion of the people. But this is not the main point. The point is that by the removal of Richard, a step above the parliament became possible for the first time. The transition was tremendous; the crown became an object of ambition. That which one could snatch another could snatch from him; that which the House of Lancaster held merely by force the House of York could take from it by force. The spell of an undethronable thing seated out of reach was broken, and for three unhappy generations adventurers strove and stumbled on a stairway slippery with blood, above which was something new in the mediaeval imagination; an empty throne.

It is obvious that the insecurity of the Lancastrian usurper, largely because he was a usurper, is the clue to many things, some of which we should now call good, some bad, all of which we should probably call good or bad with the excessive facility with which we dismiss distant things. It led the Lancastrian House to lean on Parliament, which was the mixed matter we have already seen. It may have been in some ways good for the monarchy, to be checked and challenged by an institution which at least kept something of the old freshness and freedom of speech. It was almost certainly bad for the parliament, making it yet more the ally of the mere ambitious noble, of which we shall see much later. It also led the Lancastrian House to lean on patriotism, which was perhaps more popular; to make English the tongue of the court for the first time, and to reopen the French wars with the fine flag–waving of Agincourt. It led it again to lean on the Church, or rather, perhaps, on the higher clergy, and that in the least worthy aspect of clericalism. A certain morbidity which more and more darkened the
end of mediaevalism showed itself in new and more careful cruelties against the
last crop of heresies. A slight knowledge of the philosophy of these heresies will
lend little support to the notion that they were in themselves prophetic of the
Reformation. It is hard to see how anybody can call Wycliffe a Protestant unless
he calls Palagius or Arius a Protestant; and if John Ball was a Reformer, Latimer
was not a Reformer. But though the new heresies did not even hint at the
beginning of English Protestantism, they did, perhaps, hint at the end of English
Catholicism. Cobham did not light a candle to be handed on to Nonconformist
chapels; but Arundel did light a torch and put it to his own church. Such real
unpopularity as did in time attach to the old religious system, and which
afterwards became a true national tradition against Mary was doubtless started
by the diseased energy of these fifteenth–century bishops. Persecution can be a
philosophy, and a defensible philosophy, but with some of these men
persecution was rather a perversion. Across the channel, one of them was
presiding at the trial of Joan of Arc.

But this perversion, this diseased energy, is the power in all the epoch that
follows the fall of Richard II, and especially in those feuds that found so ironic
an imagery in English roses–and thorns. The foreshortening of such a backward
glance as this book can alone claim to be, forbids any entrance into the military
mazes of the wars of York and Lancaster, or any attempt to follow the thrilling
recoveries and revenges which filled the lives of Warwick the Kingmaker and
the warlike widow of Henry V. The rivals were not, indeed, as is sometimes
exaggeratively implied, fighting for nothing, or even (like the lion and the
unicorn) merely fighting for the crown. The shadow of a moral difference can
still be traced even in that stormy twilight of a heroic time. But when we have
said that Lancaster stood, on the whole, for the new notion of a king propped by
parliaments and powerful bishops, and York, on the whole, for the remains of
the older idea of a king who permits nothing to come between him and his
people, we have said everything of permanent political interest that could be
traced by counting all the bows of Barnet or all the lances of Tewkesbury. But
this truth, that there was something which can only vaguely be called Tory about
the Yorkists, has at least one interest, that it lends a justifiable romance to the
last and most remarkable figure of the fighting House of York, with whose fall
the Wars of the Roses ended.

If we desire at all to catch the strange colours of the sunset of the Middle
Ages, to see what had changed yet not wholly killed chivalry there is no better
study than the riddle of Richard III. Of course, scarcely a line of him was like the
caricature with which his much meanker successor placarded the world when he was dead. He was not even a hunchback; he had one shoulder slightly higher than the other, probably the effect of his furious swordsmanship on a naturally slender and sensitive frame. Yet his soul, if not his body, haunts us somehow as the crooked shadow of a straight knight of better days. He was not an ogre shedding rivers of blood; some of the men he executed deserved it as much as any men of that wicked time; and even the tale of his murdered nephews is not certain, as it is told by those who also tell us he was born with tusks and was originally covered with hair. Yet a crimson cloud cannot be dispelled from his memory, and, so tainted is the very air of that time with carnage, that we cannot say he was incapable even of the things of which he may have been innocent. Whether or no he was a good man, he was apparently a good king and even a popular one; yet we think of him vaguely, and not, I fancy, untruly, as on sufferance. He anticipated the Renascence in an abnormal enthusiasm for art and music, and he seems to have held to the old path of religion and charity. He did not pluck perpetually at his sword and dagger because his only pleasure was in cutting throats; he probably did it because he was nervous. It was the age of our first portrait–painting, and a fine contemporary portrait of him throws a more plausible light on this particular detail. For it shows him touching, and probably twisting, a ring on his finger, the very act of a high–strung personality who would also fidget with a dagger. And in his face, as there painted, we can study all that has made it worth while to pause so long upon his name; an atmosphere very different from everything before and after. The face was a remarkable intellectual beauty; but there is something else on the face that is hardly in itself either good or evil, and that thing is death; the death of an epoch, the death of a great civilization, the death of something which once sang to the sun in the canticle of St. Francis and sailed to the ends of the earth in the ships of the First Crusade, but which in peace wearied and turned its weapons inwards, wounded its own brethren, broke its own loyalties, gambled for the crown, and grew feverish even about the creed, and has this one grace among its dying virtues, that its valour is the last to die.

But whatever else may have been bad or good about Richard of Gloucester, there was a touch about him which makes him truly the last of the mediaeval kings. It is expressed in the one word which he cried aloud as he struck down foe after foe in the last charge at Bosworth–treason. For him, as for the first Norman kings, treason was the same as treachery; and in this case at least it was the same as treachery. When his nobles deserted him before the battle, he did not regard it
as a new political combination, but as the sin of false friends and faithless servants. Using his own voice like the trumpet of a herald, he challenged his rival to a fight as personal as that of two paladins of Charlemagne. His rival did not reply, and was not likely to reply. The modern world had begun. The call echoed unanswered down the ages; for since that day no English king has fought after that fashion. Having slain many, he was himself slain and his diminished force destroyed. So ended the war of the usurpers; and the last and most doubtful of all the usurpers, a wanderer from the Welsh marches, a knight from nowhere, found the crown of England under a bush of thorn.
XI

THE REBELLION OF THE RICH

SIR THOMAS MORE, apart from any arguments about the more mystical meshes in which he was ultimately caught and killed, will be hailed by all as a hero of the New Learning; that great dawn of a more rational daylight which for so many made mediaevalism seem a mere darkness. Whatever we think of his appreciation of the Reformation, there will be no dispute about his appreciation of the Renascence. He was above all things a Humanist and a very human one. He was even in many ways very modern, which some rather erroneously suppose to be the same as being human; he was also humane, in the sense of humanitarian. He sketched an ideal, or rather perhaps a fanciful social system, with something of the ingenuity of Mr. H. G. Wells, but essentially with much more than the flippancy attributed to Mr. Bernard Shaw. It is not fair to charge the Utopian notions upon his morality; but their subjects and suggestions mark what (for want of a better word) we can only call his modernism. Thus the immortality of animals is the sort of transcendentalism which savours of evolution, and the grosser jest about the preliminaries of marriage might be taken quite seriously by the students of Eugenics. He suggested a sort of pacifism—though the Utopians had a quaint way of achieving it. In short, while he was, with his friend Erasmus, a satirist of mediaeval abuses, few would now deny that Protestantism would be too narrow rather than too broad for him. If he was obviously not a Protestant, there are few Protestants who would deny him the name of a Reformer. But he was an innovator in things more alluring to modern minds than theology; he was partly what we should call a Neo–Pagan. His friend Colet summed up that escape from mediaevalism which might be called the passage from bad Latin to good Greek. In our loose modern debates they are lumped together; but Greek learning was the growth of this time; there had always been a popular Latin, if a dog Latin. It would be nearer the truth to call the mediaevals bi–lingual than to call their Latin a dead language. Greek never, of course, became so general a possession; but for the man who got it, it is not too much to say that he felt as if he were in the open air for the first time. Much of this Greek spirit was reflected in More; its universality, its urbanity, its balance of buoyant reason and cool curiosity. It is even probable that he shared some of the excesses and errors of taste which inevitably infected the splendid
intellectualism of the reaction against the Middle Ages; we can imagine him thinking gargoyles Gothic, in the sense of barbaric or even failing to be stirred, as Sydney was, by the trumpet of “Chevy Chase.” The wealth of the ancient heathen world, in wit, loveliness, and civic heroism, had so recently been revealed to that generation in its dazzling profusion and perfection, that it might seem a trifle if they did here and there an injustice to the relics of the Dark Ages. When, therefore, we look at the world with the eyes of More we are looking from the widest windows of that time; looking over an English landscape seen for the first time very equally, in the level light of the sun at morning. For what he saw was England of the Renascence; England passing from the mediaeval to the modern. Thus he looked forth, and saw many things and said many things, they were all worthy and many witty; but he noted one thing which is at once a horrible fancy and a homely and practical fact. He who looked over that landscape said: “Sheep are eating men.”

This singular summary of the great epoch of our emancipation and enlightenment is not the fact usually put first in such very curt historical accounts of it. It has nothing to do with the translation of the Bible, or the character of Henry VIII, or the characters of Henry VIII’s wives, or the triangular debates between Henry and Luther and the Pope. It was not Popish sheep who were eating Protestant men, or vice versa; nor did Henry, at any period of his own brief and rather bewildering papacy, have martyrs eaten by lambs as the heathen had them eaten by lions. What was meant, of course, by this picturesque expression, was that an intensive type of agriculture was giving way to a very extensive type of pasture. Great spaces of England which had hitherto been cut up into the commonwealth of a number of farmers were being laid under the sovereignty of a solitary shepherd. The point has been put, by a touch of epigram rather in the manner of More himself, by Mr. J. Stephen, in a striking essay now, I think, only to be found in the back files of The New Witness. He enunciated the paradox that the very much admired individual, who made two blades of grass grow instead of one was a murderer. In the same article, Mr. Stephen traced the true moral origins of this movement, which led to the growing of so much grass and the murder, or at any rate the destruction, of so much humanity. He traced it, and every true record of that transformation traces it, to the growth of a new refinement, in a sense a more rational refinement, in the governing class. The mediaeval lord had been, by comparison, a coarse fellow; he had merely lived in the largest kind of farm–house after the fashion of the largest kind of farmer. He drank wine when he could, but he was quite ready
to drink ale; and science had not yet smoothed his paths with petrol. At a time later than this, one of the greatest ladies of England writes to her husband that she cannot come to him because her carriage horses are pulling the plough. In the true Middle Ages the greatest men were even more rudely hampered, but in the time of Henry VIII the transformation was beginning. In the next generation a phrase was common which is one of the keys of the time, and is very much the key to these more ambitious territorial schemes. This or that great lord was said to be “Italianate.” It meant subtler shapes of beauty, delicate and ductile glass, gold and silver not treated as barbaric stones but rather as stems and wreaths of molten metal, mirrors, cards and such trinkets bearing a load of beauty; it meant the perfection of trifles. It was not, as in popular Gothic craftsmanship, the almost unconscious touch of art upon all necessary things: rather it was the pouring of the whole soul of passionately conscious art especially into unnecessary things. Luxury was made alive with a soul. We must remember this real thirst for beauty; for it is an explanation—and an excuse.

The old barony had indeed been thinned by the civil wars that closed at Bosworth, and curtailed by the economical and crafty policy of that unkingly king, Henry VII. He was himself a “new man,” and we shall see the barons largely give place to a whole nobility of new men. But even the older families already had their faces set in the newer direction. Some of them, the Howards, for instance, may be said to have figured both as old and new families. In any case the spirit of the whole upper class can be described as increasingly new. The English aristocracy which is the chief creation of the Reformation, is undeniably entitled to a certain praise, which is now almost universally regarded as very high praise. It was always progressive. Aristocrats are accused of being proud of their ancestors; it can truly be said that English aristocrats have rather been proud of their descendants. For their descendants they planned huge foundations and piled mountains of wealth; for their descendants they fought for a higher and higher place in the government of the state; for their descendants, above all, they nourished every new science or scheme of social philosophy. They seized the vast economic chances of pasturage; but they also drained the fens. They swept away the priests, but they condescended to the philosophers. As the new Tudor house passes through its generations a new and more rationalist civilization is being made; scholars are criticizing authentic texts; sceptics are discrediting not only popish saints but pagan philosophers; specialists are analyzing and rationalizing traditions, and sheep are eating men.

We have seen that in the fourteenth century in England there was a real
revolution of the poor. It very nearly succeeded; and I need not conceal the conviction that it would have been the best possible thing for all of us if it had entirely succeeded. If Richard II had really sprung into the saddle of Wat Tyler, or rather if his parliament had not unhorsed him when he had got there, if he had confirmed the fact of the new peasant freedom by some form of royal authority, as it was already common to confirm the fact of the Trade Unions by the form of a royal charter, our country would probably have had as happy a history as is possible to human nature. The Renascence, when it came, would have come as popular education and not the culture of a club of aesthetics. The New Learning might have been as democratic as the old learning in the old days of mediaeval Paris and Oxford. The exquisite artistry of the school of Cellini might have been but the highest grade of the craft of a guild. The Shakespearean drama might have been acted by workmen on wooden stages set up in the street like Punch and Judy, the finer fulfilment of the miracle play as it was acted by a guild. The players need not have been “the king’s servants,” but their own masters. The great Renascence might have been liberal with its liberal education. If this be a fancy, it is at least one that cannot be disproved; the mediaeval revolution was too unsuccessful at the beginning for any one to show that it need have been unsuccessful in the end. The feudal parliament prevailed, and pushed back the peasants at least into their dubious and half–developed status. More than this it would be exaggerative to say, and a mere anticipation of the really decisive events afterwards. When Henry VIII came to the throne the guilds were perhaps checked but apparently unchanged, and even the peasants had probably regained ground; many were still theoretically serfs, but largely under the easy landlordism of the abbots; the mediaeval system still stood. It might, for all we know, have begun to grow again; but all such speculations are swamped in new and very strange things. The failure of the revolution of the poor was ultimately followed by a counter–revolution; a successful revolution of the rich.

The apparent pivot of it was in certain events, political and even personal. They roughly resolve themselves into two: the marriages of Henry VIII and the affair of the monasteries. The marriages of Henry VIII have long been a popular and even a stale joke; and there is a truth of tradition in the joke, as there is in almost any joke if it is sufficiently popular, and indeed if it is sufficiently stale. A jocular thing never lives to be stale unless it is also serious. Henry was popular in his first days, and even foreign contemporaries give us quite a glorious picture of a young prince of the Renascence, radiant with all the new accomplishments. In his last days he was something very like a maniac; he no longer inspired love,
and even when he inspired fear, it was rather the fear of a mad dog than of a watch–dog. In this change doubtless the inconsistency and even ignominy of his Bluebeard weddings played a great part. And it is but just to him to say that, perhaps with the exception of the first and the last, he was almost as unlucky in his wives as they were in their husband. But it was undoubtedly the affair of the first divorce that broke the back of his honour, and incidentally broke a very large number of other more valuable and universal things. To feel the meaning of his fury we must realize that he did not regard himself as the enemy but rather as the friend of the Pope; there is a shadow of the old story of Becket. He had defended the Pope in diplomacy and the Church in controversy; and when he wearied of his queen and took a passionate fancy to one of her ladies, Anne Boleyn, he vaguely felt that a rather cynical concession, in that age of cynical concessions, might very well be made to him by a friend. But it is part of that high inconsistency which is the fate of the Christian faith in human hands, that no man knows when the higher side of it will really be uppermost, if only for an instant; and that the worst ages of the Church will not do or say something, as if by accident, that is worthy of the best. Anyhow, for whatever reason, Henry sought to lean upon the cushions of Leo and found he had struck his arm upon the rock of Peter. The Pope denied the new marriage; and Henry, in a storm and darkness of anger, dissolved all the old relations with the Papacy. It is probable that he did not clearly know how much he was doing then; and it is very tenable that we do not know it now. He certainly did not think he was Anti–Catholic; and, in one rather ridiculous sense, we can hardly say that he thought he was anti–papal, since he apparently thought he was a pope. From this day really dates something that played a certain part in history, the more modern doctrine of the divine right of kings, widely different from the mediaeval one. It is a matter which further embarrasses the open question about the continuity of Catholic things in Anglicanism, for it was a new note and yet one struck by the older party. The supremacy of the King over the English national church was not, unfortunately, merely a fad of the King, but became partly, and for one period, a fad of the church. But apart from all controverted questions, there is at least a human and historic sense in which the continuity of our past is broken perilously at this point. Henry not only cut off England from Europe, but what was even more important, he cuts off England from England.

The great divorce brought down Wolsey, the mighty minister who had held the scales between the Empire and the French Monarchy, and made the modern balance of power in Europe. He is often described under the dictum of Ego et
Rex Meus; but he marks a stage in the English story rather because he suffered for it than because he said it. Ego et Rex Meus might be the motto of any modern Prime Minister; for we have forgotten the very fact that the word minister merely means servant. Wolsey was the last great servant who could be, and was, simply dismissed; the mark of a monarchy still absolute; the English were amazed at it in modern Germany, when Bismarck was turned away like a butler. A more awful act proved the new force was already inhuman; it struck down the noblest of the Humanists. Thomas More, who seemed sometimes like an Epicurean under Augustus, died the death of a saint under Diocletian. He died gloriously jesting; and the death has naturally drawn out for us rather the sacred savours of his soul; his tenderness and his trust in the truth of God. But for Humanism it must have seemed a monstrous sacrifice; it was somehow as if Montaigne were a martyr. And that is indeed the note; something truly to be called unnatural had already entered the naturalism of the Renascence; and the soul of the great Christian rose against it. He pointed to the sun, saying “I shall be above that fellow” with Franciscan familiarity, which can love nature because it will not worship her. So he left to his king the sun, which for so many weary days and years was to go down only on his wrath.

But the more impersonal process which More himself had observed (as noted at the beginning of this chapter) is more clearly defined, and less clouded with controversies, in the second of the two parts of Henry’s policy. There is indeed a controversy about the monasteries; but it is one that is clarifying and settling every day. Now it is true that the Church, by the Renascence period, had reached a considerable corruption; but the real proofs of it are utterly different both from the contemporary despotic pretence and from the common Protestant story. It is wildly unfair, for instance, to quote the letters of bishops and such authorities denouncing the sins of monastic life, violent as they often are. They cannot possibly be more violent than the letters of St. Paul to the purest and most primitive churches; the apostle was there writing to those Early Christians whom all churches idealize; and he talks to them as to cut-throats and thieves. The explanation, for those concerned for such subtleties, may possibly be found in the fact that Christianity is not a creed for good men, but for men. Such letters had been written in all centuries; and even in the sixteenth century they do not prove so much that there were bad abbots as that there were good bishops. However, even those who profess that the monks were profligates dare not profess that they were oppressors; there is truth in Cobbett’s point that where monks were landlords, they did not become rack-renting landlords, and could
not become absentee landlords. Nevertheless, there was a weakness in the good institutions as well as a mere strength in the bad ones; and that weakness partakes of the worst element of the time. In the fall of good things there is almost always a touch of betrayal from within; and the abbots were destroyed more easily because they did not stand together. They did not stand together because the spirit of the age (which is very often the worst enemy of the age) was the increasing division between rich and poor; and it had partly divided even the rich and poor clergy. And the betrayal came, as it nearly always comes, from that servant of Christ who holds the bag.

To take a modern attack on liberty, on a much lower plane, we are familiar with the picture of a politician going to the great brewers, or even the great hotel proprietors, and pointing out the uselessness of a litter of little public houses. That is what the Tudor politicians did first with the monasteries. They went to the heads of the great houses and proposed the extinction of the small ones. The great monastic lords did not resist, or, at any rate, did not resist enough; and the sack of the religious houses began. But if the lord abbots acted for a moment as lords, that could not excuse them, in the eyes of much greater lords, for having frequently acted as abbots. A momentary rally to the cause of the rich did not wipe out the disgrace of a thousand petty interferences which had told only to the advantage of the poor; and they were soon to learn that it was no epoch for their easy rule and their careless hospitality. The great houses, now isolated, were themselves brought down one by one; and the beggar, whom the monastery had served as a sort of sacred tavern, came to it at evening and found it a ruin. For a new and wide philosophy was in the world, which still rules our society. By this creed most of the mystical virtues of the old monks have simply been turned into great sins; and the greatest of these is charity.

But the populace which had risen under Richard II was not yet disarmed. It was trained in the rude discipline of bow and bill, and organized into local groups of town and guild and manor. Over half the counties of England the people rose, and fought one final battle for the vision of the Middle Ages. The chief tool of the new tyranny, a dirty fellow named Thomas Cromwell, was specially singled out as the tyrant, and he was indeed rapidly turning all government into a nightmare. The popular movement was put down partly by force; and there is the new note of modern militarism in the fact that it was put down by cynical professional troops, actually brought in from foreign countries, who destroyed English religion for hire. But, like the old popular rising, it was even more put down by fraud. Like the old rising, it was sufficiently triumphant
to force the government to a parley; and the government had to resort to the simple expedient of calming the people with promises, and then proceeding to break first the promises and then the people, after the fashion made familiar to us by the modern politicians in their attitude towards the great strikes. The revolt bore the name of the Pilgrimage of Grace, and its programme was practically the restoration of the old religion. In connection with the fancy about the fate of England if Tyler had triumphed, it proves, I think, one thing; that his triumph, while it might or might not have led to something that could be called a reform, would have rendered quite impossible everything that we now know as the Reformation.

The reign of terror established by Thomas Cromwell became an Inquisition of the blackest and most unbearable sort. Historians, who have no shadow of sympathy with the old religion, are agreed that it was uprooted by means more horrible than have ever, perhaps, been employed in England before or since. It was a government by torturers rendered ubiquitous by spies. The spoliation of the monasteries especially was carried out, not only with a violence which recalled barbarism, but with a minuteness for which there is no other word but meanness. It was as if the Dane had returned in the character of a detective. The inconsistency of the King’s personal attitude to Catholicism did indeed complicate the conspiracy with new brutalities towards Protestants; but such reaction as there was in this was wholly theological. Cromwell lost that fitful favour and was executed, but the terrorism went on the more terribly for being simplified to the single vision of the wrath of the King. It culminated in a strange act which rounds off symbolically the story told on an earlier page. For the despot revenged himself on a rebel whose defiance seemed to him to ring down three centuries. He laid waste the most popular shrine of the English, the shrine to which Chaucer had once ridden singing, because it was also the shrine where King Henry had knelt to repent. For three centuries the Church and the people had called Becket a saint, when Henry Tudor arose and called him a traitor. This might well be thought the topmost point of autocracy; and yet it was not really so.

For then rose to its supreme height of self–revelation that still stranger something of which we have, perhaps fancifully, found hints before in this history. The strong king was weak. He was immeasurably weaker than the strong kings of the Middle Ages; and whether or no his failure had been foreshadowed, he failed. The breach he had made in the dyke of the ancient doctrines let in a flood that may almost be said to have washed him away. In a sense he
disappeared before he died; for the drama that filled his last days is no longer the drama of his own character. We may put the matter most practically by saying that it is unpractical to discuss whether Froude finds any justification for Henry’s crimes in the desire to create a strong national monarchy. For whether or no it was desired, it was not created. Least of all our princes did the Tudors leave behind them a secure central government, and the time when monarchy was at its worst comes only one or two generations before the time when it was weakest. But a few years afterwards, as history goes, the relations of the Crown and its new servants were to be reversed on a high stage so as to horrify the world; and the axe which had been sanctified with the blood of More and soiled with the blood of Cromwell was, at the signal of one of that slave’s own descendants, to fall and to kill an English king.

The tide which thus burst through the breach and overwhelmed the King as well as the Church was the revolt of the rich, and especially of the new rich. They used the King’s name, and could not have prevailed without his power, but the ultimate effect was rather as if they had plundered the King after he had plundered the monasteries. Amazingly little of the wealth, considering the name and theory of the thing, actually remained in royal hands. The chaos was increased, no doubt, by the fact that Edward VI succeeded to the throne as a mere boy, but the deeper truth can be seen in the difficulty of drawing any real line between the two reigns. By marrying into the Seymour family, and thus providing himself with a son, Henry had also provided the country with the very type of powerful family which was to rule merely by pillage. An enormous and unnatural tragedy, the execution of one of the Seymours by his own brother, was enacted during the impotence of the childish king, and the successful Seymour figured as Lord Protector, though even he would have found it hard to say what he was protecting, since it was not even his own family. Anyhow, it is hardly too much to say that every human thing was left unprotected from the greed of such cannibal protectors. We talk of the dissolution of the monasteries, but what occurred was the dissolution of the whole of the old civilization. Lawyers and lackeys and money lenders, the meanest of lucky men, looted the art and economics of the Middle Ages like thieves robbing a church. Their names (when they did not change them) became the names of the great dukes and marquises of our own day. But if we look back and forth in our history, perhaps the most fundamental act of destruction occurred when the armed men of the Seymours and their sort passed from the sacking of the Monasteries to the sacking of the Guilds. The mediaeval Trade Unions were struck down, their buildings broken
into by the soldiery, and their funds seized by the new nobility. And this simple incident takes all its common meaning out of the assertion (in itself plausible enough) that the Guilds, like everything else at that time, were probably not at their best. Proportion is the only practical thing; and it may be true that Caesar was not feeling well on the morning of the Ides of March. But simply to say that the Guilds declined, is about as true as saying that Caesar quietly decayed from purely natural causes at the foot of the statue of Pompey.
SPAIN AND THE SCHISM OF NATIONS

THE revolution that arose out of what is called the Renascence, and ended in some countries in what is called the Reformation, did in the internal politics of England one drastic and definite thing. That thing was destroying the institutions of the poor. It was not the only thing it did, but it was much the most practical. It was the basis of all the problems now connected with Capital and Labour. How much the theological theories of the time had to do with it is a perfectly fair matter for difference of opinion. But neither party, if educated about the facts, will deny that the same time and temper which produced the religious schism also produced this new lawlessness in the rich. The most extreme Protestant will probably be content to say that Protestantism was not the motive, but the mask. The most extreme Catholic will probably be content to admit that Protestantism was not the sin, but rather the punishment. The most sweeping and shameless part of the process was not complete, indeed, until the end of the eighteenth century, when Protestantism was already passing into scepticism. Indeed a very decent case could be made out for the paradox that Puritanism was first and last a veneer on Paganism; that the thing began in the inordinate thirst for new things in the noblesse of the Renascence and ended in the Hell–Fire Club. Anyhow, what was first founded at the Reformation was a new and abnormally powerful aristocracy, and what was destroyed, in an ever increasing degree, was everything that could be held, directly or indirectly, by the people in spite of such an aristocracy. This fact has filled all the subsequent history of our country; but the next particular point in that history concerns the position of the Crown. The King, in reality, had already been elbowed aside by the courtiers who had crowded behind him just before the bursting of the door. The King is left behind in the rush for wealth, and already can do nothing alone. And of this fact the next reign, after the chaos of Edward VI’s, affords a very arresting proof.

Mary Tudor, daughter of the divorced Queen Katherine, has a bad name even in popular history; and popular prejudice is generally more worthy of study than scholarly sophistry. Her enemies were indeed largely wrong about her character, but they were not wrong about her effect. She was, in the limited sense, a good woman, convinced, conscientious, rather morbid. But it is true that she was a bad queen; bad for many things, but especially bad for her own most beloved cause.
It is true, when all is said, that she set herself to burn out “No Popery” and managed to burn it in. The concentration of her fanaticism into cruelty, especially its concentration in particular places and in a short time, did remain like something red–hot in the public memory. It was the first of the series of great historical accidents that separated a real, if not universal public opinion from the old régime. It has been summarized in the death by fire of the three famous martyrs at Oxford; for one of them at least, Latimer, was a reformer of the more robust and human type, though another of them, Cranmer, had been so smooth a snob and coward in the councils of Henry VIII as to make Thomas Cromwell seem by comparison a man. But of what may be called the Latimer tradition, the saner and more genuine Protestantism, I shall speak later. At the time even the Oxford Martyrs probably produced less pity and revulsion than the massacre in the flames of many more obscure enthusiasts, whose very ignorance and poverty made their cause seem more popular than it really was. But this last ugly feature was brought into sharper relief, and produced more conscious or unconscious bitterness, because of that other great fact of which I spoke above, which is the determining test of this time of transition.

What made all the difference was this: that even in this Catholic reign the property of the Catholic Church could not be restored. The very fact that Mary was a fanatic, and yet this act of justice was beyond the wildest dreams of fanaticism—that is the point. The very fact that she was angry enough to commit wrongs for the Church, and yet not bold enough to ask for the rights of the Church—that is the test of the time. She was allowed to deprive small men of their lives, she was not allowed to deprive great men of their property—or rather of other people’s property. She could punish heresy, she could not punish sacrilege. She was forced into the false position of killing men who had not gone to church, and sparing men who had gone there to steal the church ornaments. What forced her into it? Not certainly her own religious attitude, which was almost maniacally sincere; not public opinion, which had naturally much more sympathy for the religious humanities which she did not restore than for the religious inhumanities which she did. The force came, of course, from the new nobility and the new wealth they refused to surrender; and the success of this early pressure proves that the nobility was already stronger than the Crown. The sceptre had only been used as a crowbar to break open the door of a treasure–house, and was itself broken, or at least bent, with the blow.

There is a truth also in the popular insistence on the story of Mary having “Calais” written on her heart, when the last relic of the mediaeval conquests
reverted to France. Mary had the solitary and heroic half–virtue of the Tudors: she was a patriot. But patriots are often pathetically behind the times; for the very fact that they dwell on old enemies often blinds them to new ones. In a later generation Cromwell exhibited the same error reversed, and continued to keep a hostile eye on Spain when he should have kept it on France. In our own time the Jingoes of Fashoda kept it on France when they ought already to have had it on Germany. With no particular anti–national intention, Mary nevertheless got herself into an anti–national position towards the most tremendous international problem of her people. It is the second of the coincidences that confirmed the sixteenth–century change, and the name of it was Spain. The daughter of a Spanish queen, she married a Spanish prince, and probably saw no more in such an alliance than her father had done. But by the time she was succeeded by her sister Elizabeth, who was more cut off from the old religion (though very tenuously attached to the new one), and by the time the project of a similar Spanish marriage for Elizabeth herself had fallen through, something had matured which was wider and mightier than the plots of princes. The Englishman, standing on his little island as on a lonely boat, had already felt falling across him the shadow of a tall ship.

Wooden clichés about the birth of the British Empire and the spacious days of Queen Elizabeth have not merely obscured but contradicted the crucial truth. From such phrases one would fancy that England, in some imperial fashion, now first realized that she was great. It would be far truer to say that she now first realized that she was small. The great poet of the spacious days does not praise her as spacious, but only as small, like a jewel. The vision of universal expansion was wholly veiled until the eighteenth century; and even when it came it was far less vivid and vital than what came in the sixteenth. What came then was not Imperialism; it was Anti–Imperialism. England achieved, at the beginning of her modern history, that one thing human imagination will always find heroic–the story of a small nationality. The business of the Armada was to her what Bannockburn was to the Scots or Majuba to the Boers—a victory that astonished even the victors. What was opposed to them was Imperialism in its complete and colossal sense, a thing unthinkable since Rome. It was, in no overstrained sense, civilization itself. It was the greatness of Spain that was the glory of England. It is only when we realize that the English were, by comparison, as dingy, as undeveloped, as petty and provincial as Boers, that we can appreciate the height of their defiance or the splendour of their escape. We can only grasp it by grasping that for a great part of Europe the cause of the
Armada had almost the cosmopolitan common sense of a crusade. The Pope had declared Elizabeth illegitimate—logically, it is hard to see what else he could say, having declared her mother’s marriage invalid; but the fact was another and perhaps a final stroke sundering England from the elder world. Meanwhile those picturesque English privateers who had plagued the Spanish Empire of the New World were spoken of in the South simply as pirates, and technically the description was true; only technical assaults by the weaker party are in retrospect rightly judged with some generous weakness. Then, as if to stamp the contrast in an imperishable image, Spain, or rather the empire with Spain for its centre, put forth all its strength, and seemed to cover the sea with a navy like the legendary navy of Xerxes. It bore down on the doomed island with the weight and solemnity of a day of judgement; sailors or pirates struck at it with small ships staggering under large cannon, fought it with mere masses of flaming rubbish, and in that last hour of grapple a great storm arose out of the sea and swept round the island, and the gigantic fleet was seen no more. The uncanny completeness and abrupt silence that swallowed this prodigy touched a nerve that has never ceased to vibrate. The hope of England dates from that hopeless hour, for there is no real hope that has not once been a forlorn hope. The breaking of that vast naval net remained like a sign that the small thing which escaped would survive the greatness. And yet there is truly a sense in which we may never be so small or so great again.

For the splendour of the Elizabethan age, which is always spoken of as a sunrise, was in many ways a sunset. Whether we regard it as the end of the Renascence or the end of the old mediaeval civilization, no candid critic can deny that its chief glories ended with it. Let the reader ask himself what strikes him specially in the Elizabethan magnificence, and he will generally find it is something of which there were at least traces in mediaeval times, and far fewer traces in modern times. The Elizabethan drama is like one of its own tragedies—its tempestuous torch was soon to be trodden out by the Puritans. It is needless to say that the chief tragedy was the cutting short of the comedy; for the comedy that came to England after the Restoration was by comparison both foreign and frigid. At the best it is comedy in the sense of being humorous, but not in the sense of being happy. It may be noted that the givers of good news and good luck in the Shakespearean love-stories nearly all belong to a world which was passing, whether they are friars or fairies. It is the same with the chief Elizabethan ideals, often embodied in the Elizabethan drama. The national devotion to the Virgin Queen must not be wholly discredited by its incongruity
with the coarse and crafty character of the historical Elizabeth. Her critics might indeed reasonably say that in replacing the Virgin Mary by the Virgin Queen, the English reformers merely exchanged a true Virgin for a false one. But this truth does not dispose of a true, though limited, contemporary cult. Whatever we think of that particular Virgin Queen, the tragic heroines of the time offer us a whole procession of virgin queens. And it is certain that the mediaevals would have understood much better than the moderns the martyrdom of Measure for Measure. And as with the title of Virgin, so with the title of Queen. The mystical monarchy glorified in Richard II was soon to be dethroned much more ruinously than in Richard II. The same Puritans who tore off the pasteboard crowns of the stage players were also to tear off the real crowns of the kings whose parts they played. All mummery was to be forbidden and all monarchy to be called mummery.

Shakespeare died upon St. George’s day, and much of what St. George had meant died with him. I do not mean that the patriotism of Shakespeare or of England died; that remained and even rose steadily, to be the noblest pride of the coming times. But much more than patriotism had been involved in that image of St. George to whom the Lion Heart had dedicated England long ago in the deserts of Palestine. The conception of a patron saint had carried from the Middle Ages one very unique and as yet unreplaced idea. It was the idea of variation without antagonism. The Seven Champions of Christendom were multiplied by seventy times seven in the patrons of towns, trades and social types; but the very idea that they were all saints excluded the possibility of ultimate rivalry in the fact that they were all patrons. The Guild of the Shoemakers and the Guild of the Skinners, carrying the badges of St. Crispin and St. Bartholomew, might fight each other in the streets; but they did not believe that St. Crispin and St. Bartholomew were fighting each other in the skies. Similarly the English would cry in battle on St. George and the French on St. Denis; but they did not seriously believe that St. George hated St. Denis or even those who cried upon St. Denis. Joan of Arc, who was on the point of patriotism what many modern people would call very fanatical, was yet upon this point what most modern people would call very enlightened. Now, with the religious schism, it cannot be denied, a deeper and more inhuman division appeared. It was no longer a scrap between the followers of saints who were themselves at peace, but a war between the followers of gods who were themselves at war. That the great Spanish ships were named after St. Francis or St. Philip was already beginning to mean little to the new England; soon it was
to mean something almost comically conflicting, as if they were named after Baal or Thor. These are indeed mere symbols, but the process of which they are symbols was very practical and must be seriously followed. There entered with the religious wars the idea which modern science applies to racial wars; the idea of natural wars, not arising from a special quarrel but from the nature of the people quarrelling. The shadow of racial fatalism first fell across our path, and far away in distance and darkness something moved that men had almost forgotten.

Beyond the frontiers of the fading Empire lay that outer land, as loose and drifting as a sea, which had boiled over in the barbarian wars. Most of it was not formally Christian, but barely civilized; a faint awe of the culture of the south and west lay on its wild forces like a light frost. This semi–civilized world had long been asleep; but it had begun to dream. In the generation before Elizabeth a great man who, with all his violence, was vitally a dreamer, Martin Luther, had cried out in his sleep in a voice like thunder, partly against the place of bad customs, but largely also against the place of good works in the Christian scheme. In the generation after Elizabeth the spread of the new wild doctrines in the old wild lands had sucked Central Europe into a cyclic war of creeds. In this the house which stood for the legend of the Holy Roman Empire, Austria, the Germanic partner of Spain, fought for the old religion against a league of other Germans fighting for the new. The continental conditions were indeed complicated, and grew more and more complicated as the dream of restoring religious unity receded. They were complicated by the firm determination of France to be a nation in the full modern sense; to stand free and foursquare from all combinations; a purpose which led her, while hating her own Protestants at home, to give diplomatic support to many Protestants abroad, simply because it preserved the balance of power against the gigantic confederation of Spaniards and Austrians. It is complicated by the rise of a Calvinistic and commercial power in the Netherlands, logical, defiant, defending its own independence valiantly against Spain. But on the whole we shall be right if we see the first throes of the modern international problems in what is called the Thirty Years’ War; whether we call it the revolt of half-heathens against the Holy Roman Empire, or whether we call it the coming of new sciences, new philosophies, and new ethics from the north. Sweden took a hand in the struggle, and sent a military hero to the help of the newer Germany. But the sort of military heroism everywhere exhibited offered a strange combination of more and more complex strategic science with the most naked and cannibal cruelty. Other forces besides
Sweden found a career in the carnage. Far away to the north–east, in a sterile land of fens, a small ambitious family of money–lenders who had become squires, vigilant, thrifty, thoroughly selfish, rather thinly adopted the theories of Luther, and began to lend their almost savage hinds as soldiers on the Protestant side. They were well paid for it by step after step of promotion; but at this time their principality was only the old Mark of Brandenburg. Their own name was Hohenzollern.
XIII

THE AGE OF THE PURITANS

We should be very much bored if we had to read an account of the most exciting argument or string of adventures in which unmeaning words such as “snark” or “boojum” were systematically substituted for the names of the chief characters or objects in dispute; if we were told that a king was given the alternative of becoming a snark or finally surrendering the boojum, or that a mob was roused to fury by the public exhibition of a boojum, which was inevitably regarded as a gross reflection on the snark. Yet something very like this situation is created by most modern attempts to tell the tale of the theological troubles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, while deferring to the fashionable distaste for theology in this generation—or rather in the last generation. Thus the Puritans, as their name implies, were primarily enthusiastic for what they thought was pure religion; frequently they wanted to impose it on others; sometimes they only wanted to be free to practise it themselves; but in no case can justice be done to what was finest in their characters, as well as first in their thoughts, if we never by any chance ask what “it” was that they wanted to impose or to practise. Now, there was a great deal that was very fine about many of the Puritans, which is almost entirely missed by the modern admirers of the Puritans. They are praised for things which they either regarded with indifference or more often detested with frenzy—such as religious liberty. And yet they are quite insufficiently understood, and are even undervalued, in their logical case for the things they really did care about—such as Calvinism. We make the Puritans picturesque in a way they would violently repudiate, in novels and plays they would have publicly burnt. We are interested in everything about them, except the only thing in which they were interested at all.

We have seen that in the first instance the new doctrines in England were simply an excuse for a plutocratic pillage, and that is the only truth to be told about the matter. But it was far otherwise with the individuals a generation or two after, to which the wreck of the Armada was already a legend of national deliverance from Popery, as miraculous and almost as remote as the divilerances of which they read so realistically in the Hebrew Books now laid open to them. The august accident of that Spanish defeat may perhaps have coincided only too well with their concentration on the non–Christian parts of Scripture. It may
have satisfied a certain Old Testament sentiment of the election of the English
being announced in the stormy oracles of air and sea, which was easily turned
into that heresy of a tribal pride that took even heavier hold upon the Germans. It
is by such things that a civilized state may fall from being a Christian nation to
being a Chosen People. But even if their nationalism was of a kind that has
ultimately proved perilous to the comity of nations, it still was nationalism. From
first to last the Puritans were patriots, a point in which they had a marked
superiority over the French Huguenots. Politically, they were indeed at first but
one wing of the new wealthy class which had despoiled the Church and were
proceeding to despoil the Crown. But while they were all merely the creatures of
the great spoliation, many of them were the unconscious creatures of it. They
were strongly represented in the aristocracy, but a great number were of the
middle classes, though almost wholly the middle classes of the towns. By the
poor agricultural population, which was still by far the largest part of the
population, they were simply derided and detested. It may be noted, for instance,
that, while they led the nation in many of its higher departments, they could
produce nothing having the atmosphere of what is rather priggishly called
folklore. All the popular tradition there is, as in songs, toasts, rhymes, or
proverbs, is all Royalist. About the Puritans we can find no great legend. We
must put up as best we can with great literature.

All these things, however, are simply things that other people might have
noticed about them; they are not the most important things, and certainly not the
things they thought about themselves. The soul of the movement was in two
conceptions, or rather in two steps, the first being the moral process by which
they arrived at their chief conclusion, and the second the chief conclusion they
arrived at. We will begin with the first, especially as it was this which
determined all that external social attitude which struck the eye of
contemporaries. The honest Puritan, growing up in youth in a world swept bare
by the great pillage, possessed himself of a first principle which is one of the
three or four alternative first principles which are possible to the mind of man. It
was the principle that the mind of man can alone directly deal with the mind of
God. It may shortly be called the anti–sacramental principle; but it really applies,
and he really applied it, to many things besides the sacraments of the Church. It
equally applies, and he equally applied it, to art, to letters, to the love of locality,
to music, and even to good manners. The phrase about no priest coming between
a man and his Creator is but an impoverished fragment of the full philosophic
doctrine; the true Puritan was equally clear that no singer or story–teller or
fiddler must translate the voice of God to him into the tongues of terrestrial beauty. It is notable that the one Puritan man of genius in modern times, Tolstoy, did accept this full conclusion; denounced all music as a mere drug, and forbade his own admirers to read his own admirable novels. Now, the English Puritans were not only Puritans but Englishmen, and therefore did not always shine in clearness of head; as we shall see, true Puritanism was rather a Scotch than an English thing. But this was the driving power and the direction; and the doctrine is quite tenable if a trifle insane. Intellectual truth was the only tribute fit for the highest truth of the universe; and the next step in such a study is to observe what the Puritan thought was the truth about that truth. His individual reason, cut loose from instinct as well as tradition, taught him a concept of the omnipotence of God which meant simply the impotence of man. In Luther, the earlier and milder form of the Protestant process only went so far as to say that nothing a man did could help him except his confession of Christ; with Calvin it took the last logical step and said that even this could not help him, since Omnipotence must have disposed of all his destiny before hand; that men must be created to be lost and saved. In the purer types of whom I speak this logic was white–hot, and we must read the formula into all their parliamentary and legal formulae. When we read, “The Puritan party demanded reforms in the church,” we must understand, “The Puritan party demanded fuller and clearer affirmation that men are created to be lost and saved.” When we read, “The Army selected persons for their godliness” we must understand, “The Army selected those persons who seemed most convinced that men were created to be lost and saved.” It should be added that this terrible trend was not confined even to Protestant countries; some great Romanists doubtfully followed it until stopped by Rome. It was the spirit of the age, and should be a permanent warning against mistaking the spirit of the age for the immortal spirit of man. For there are now few Christians or non–Christians who can look back at the Calvinism which nearly captured Canterbury and even Rome by the genius and heroism of Pascal or Milton, without crying out, like the lady in Mr. Bernard Shaw’s play, “How splendid! How glorious! . . . and oh what an escape!”

The next thing to note is that their conception of church–government was in a true sense self–government; and yet, for a particular reason, turned out to be a rather selfish self–government. It was equal and yet it was exclusive. Internally the synod or conventicle tended to be a small republic, but unfortunately to be a very small republic. In relation to the street outside the conventicle was not a republic but an aristocracy. It was the most awful of all aristocracies, that of the
elect; for it was not a right of birth but a right before birth, and alone of all nobilities it was not laid level in the dust. Hence we have, on the one hand, in the simpler Puritans a ring of real republican virtue; a defiance of tyrants, an assertion of human dignity, but above all an appeal to that first of all republican virtues—publicity. One of the Regicides, on trial for his life, struck the note which all the unnaturalness of his school cannot deprive of nobility: “This thing was not done in a corner.” But their most drastic idealism did nothing to recover a ray of the light that at once lightened every man that came into the world, the assumption of a brotherhood in all baptized people. They were, indeed, very like that dreadful scaffold at which the Regicide was not afraid to point. They were certainly public, they may have been public—spirited, they were never popular; and it seems never to have crossed their minds that there was any need to be popular. England was never so little of a democracy as during the short time when she was a republic.

The struggle with the Stuarts, which is the next passage in our history, arose from an alliance, which some may think an accidental alliance, between two things. The first was this intellectual fashion of Calvinism which affected the cultured world as did our recent intellectual fashion of Collectivism. The second was the older thing which had made that creed and perhaps that cultured world possible—the aristocratic revolt under the last Tudors. It was, we might say, the story of a father and a son dragging down the same golden image, but the younger really from hatred of idolatry, and the older solely from love of gold. It is at once the tragedy and the paradox of England that it was the eternal passion that passed, and the transient or terrestrial passion that remained. This was true of England; it was far less true of Scotland; and that is the meaning of the Scotch and English war that ended at Worcester. The first change had indeed been much the same materialist matter in both countries—a mere brigandage of barons; and even John Knox, though he has become a national hero, was an extremely anti-national politician. The patriot party in Scotland was that of Cardinal Beaton and Mary Stuart. Nevertheless the new creed did become popular in the Lowlands in a positive sense, not even yet known in our own land. Hence in Scotland Puritanism was the main thing, and was mixed with Parliamentary and other oligarchies. In England Parliamentary oligarchy was the main thing, and was mixed with Puritanism. When the storm began to rise against Charles I, after the more or less transitional time of his father, the Scotch successor of Elizabeth, the instances commonly cited mark all the difference between democratic religion and aristocratic politics. The Scotch legend is that of Jenny Geddes, the poor
woman who threw a stool at the priest. The English legend is that of John Hampden, the great squire who raised a county against the King. The Parliamentary movement in England was, indeed, almost wholly a thing of squires, with their new allies the merchants. They were squires who may well have regarded themselves as the real and natural leaders of the English; but they were leaders who allowed no mutiny among their followers. There was certainly no Village Hampden in Hampden Village.

The Stuarts, it may be suspected, brought from Scotland a more mediaeval and therefore more logical view of their own function; for the note of their nation was logic. It is a proverb that James I was a Scot and a pedant; it is hardly sufficiently noted that Charles I also was not a little of a pedant, being very much of a Scot. He had also the virtues of a Scot, courage, and a quite natural dignity and an appetite for the things of the mind. Being somewhat Scottish, he was very un–English, and could not manage a compromise: he tried instead to split hairs, and seemed merely to break promises. Yet he might safely have been far more inconsistent if he had been a little hearty and hazy; but he was of the sort that sees everything in black and white; and it is therefore remembered—especially the black. From the first he fenced with his Parliament as with a mere foe; perhaps he almost felt it as a foreigner. The issue is familiar, and we need not be so careful as the gentleman who wished to finish the chapter in order to find not what happened to Charles I. His minister, the great Strafford, was foiled in an attempt to make him strong in the fashion of a French king, and perished on the scaffold, a frustrated Richelieu. The Parliament claiming the power of the purse, Charles appealed to the power of the sword, and at first carried all before him; but success passed to the wealth of the Parliamentary class, the discipline of the new army, and the patience and genius of Cromwell, and Charles died the same death as his great servant.

Historically, the quarrel resolved itself; through ramifications generally followed perhaps in more detail than they deserve, into the great modern query of whether a king can raise taxes without the consent of his Parliament. The test case was that of Hampden, the great Buckingham shire magnate, who challenged the legality of a tax which Charles imposed, professedly for a national navy. As even innovators always of necessity seek for sanctity in the past, the Puritan squires made a legend of the mediaeval Magna Carta; and they were so far in a true tradition that the concession of John had really been, as we have already noted, anti–despotic without being democratic. These two truths cover two parts of the problem of the Stuart fall, which are of very different certainty, and should
be considered separately.

For the first point about democracy, no candid person, in face of the facts, can really consider it at all. It is quite possible to hold that the seventeenth-century Parliament was fighting for the truth; it is not possible to hold that it was fighting for the populace. After the autumn of the Middle Ages Parliament was always actively aristocratic and actively anti–popular. The institution which forbade Charles I to raise Ship Money was the same institution which previously forbade Richard II to free the serfs. The group which claimed coal and minerals from Charles I was the same which afterward claimed the common lands from the village communities. It was the same institution which only two generations before had eagerly helped to destroy, not merely things of popular sentiment like the monasteries, but all the things of popular utility like the guilds and parishes, the local governments of towns and trades. The work of the great lords may have had, indeed it certainly had, another more patriotic and creative side; but it was exclusively the work of the great lords that was done by Parliament. The House of Commons has itself been a House of Lords.

But when we turn to the other or anti–despotic aspect of the campaign against the Stuarts, we come to something much more difficult to dismiss and much more easy to justify. While the stupidest things are said against the Stuarts, the real contemporary case for their enemies is little realized; for it is connected with what our insular history most neglects, the condition of the Continent. It should be remembered that though the Stuarts failed in England they fought for things that succeeded in Europe. These were roughly, first, the effects of the Counter–Reformation, which made the sincere Protestant see Stuart Catholicism not at all as the last flicker of an old flame, but as the spread of a conflagration. Charles II, for instance, was a man of strong, sceptical, and almost irritably humorous intellect, and he was quite certainly, and even reluctantly, convinced of Catholicism as a philosophy. The other and more important matter here was the almost awful plutocracy that was being built up in France like a Bastille. It was more logical, and in many ways more equal and even equitable than the English oligarchy, but it really became a tyranny in case of rebellion or even resistance. There were none of the rough English safeguards of juries and good customs of the old common law; there was lettre de cachet as unanswerable as magic. The English who defied the law were better off than the French; a French satirist would probably have retorted that it was the English who obeyed the law who were worse off than the French. The ordering of men’s normal lives was with the squire; but he was, if anything, more limited where he was the magistrate. He
was stronger as master of the village, but actually weaker as agent of the King. In defending this state of things, in short, the Whigs were certainly not defending democracy, but they were in a real sense defending liberty. They were even defending some remains of mediaeval liberty, though not the best; the jury though not the guild. Even feudalism had involved a localism not without liberal elements, which lingered in the aristocratic system. Those who loved such things might well be alarmed at the Leviathan of the State, which for Hobbes was a single monster and for France a single man.

As to the mere facts, it must be said again that in so far as Puritanism was pure, it was unfortunately passing. And the very type of the transition by which it passed can be found in that extraordinary man who is popularly credited with making it predominate. Oliver Cromwell is in history much less the leader of Puritanism than the tamer of Puritanism. He was undoubtedly possessed, certainly in his youth, possibly all his life, by the rather sombre religious passions of his period; but as he emerges into importance, he stands more and more for the Positivism of the English as compared with the Puritanism of the Scotch. He is one of the Puritan squires; but he is steadily more of the squire and less of the Puritan; and he points to the process by which the squirearchy became at last merely pagan. This is the key to most of what is praised and most of what is blamed in him; the key to the comparative sanity, toleration and modern efficiency of many of his departures; the key to the comparative coarseness, earthiness, cynicism, and lack of sympathy in many others. He was the reverse of an idealist; and he cannot without absurdity be held up as an ideal; but he was, like most of the squires, a type genuinely English; not without public spirit, certainly not without patriotism. His seizure of personal power, which destroyed an impersonal and ideal government, had something English in its very unreason. The act of killing the King, I fancy, was not primarily his, and certainly not characteristically his. It was a concession to the high inhuman ideals of the tiny group of true Puritans, with whom he had to compromise but with whom he afterwards collided. It was logic rather than cruelty in the act that was not Cromwellian; for he treated with bestial cruelty the native Irish, whom the new spiritual exclusiveness regarded as beasts—or as the modern euphemism would put it, as aborigines. But his practical temper was more akin to such human slaughter on what seemed to him the edges of civilization, than to a sort of human sacrifice in the very centre and forum of it; he is not a representative regicide. In a sense that piece of headsmanship was rather above his head. The real regicides did it in a sort of trance or vision; and he was not troubled with
visions. But the true collision between the religious and rational sides of the seventeenth-century movement came symbolically on that day of driving storm at Dunbar, when the raving Scotch preachers overruled Leslie and forced him down into the valley to be the victim of the Cromwellian common sense. Cromwell said that God had delivered them into his hand; but it was their own God who delivered them, the dark unnatural God of the Calvinist dreams, as overpowering as a nightmare—and as passing.

It was the Whig rather than the Puritan that triumphed on that day, it was the Englishman with his aristocratic compromise; and even what followed Cromwell’s death, the Restoration, was an aristocratic compromise, and even a Whig compromise. The mob might cheer as for a mediaeval king; but the Protectorate and the Restoration were more of a piece than the mob understood. Even in the superficial things where there seemed to be a rescue it was ultimately a respite. Thus the Puritan régime had risen chiefly by one thing unknown to mediaevalism—militarism. Picked professional troops, harshly drilled but highly paid, were the new and alien instrument by which the Puritans became masters. These were disbanded and their return resisted by Tories and Whigs; but their return seemed always imminent, because it was in the spirit of the new stern world of the Thirty Years’ War. A discovery is an incurable disease; and it had been discovered that a crowd could he turned into an iron centipede, crushing larger and looser crowds. Similarly the remains of Christmas were rescued from the Puritans; but they had eventually to be rescued again by Dickens from the Utilitarians, and may yet have to be rescued by somebody from the vegetarians and teetotallers. The strange army passed and vanished almost like a Moslem invasion; but it had made the difference that armed valour and victory always make, if it was but a negative difference. It was the final break in our history; it was a breaker of many things, and perhaps of popular rebellion in our land. It is something of a verbal symbol that these men founded New England in America, for indeed they tried to found it there. By a paradox, there was something prehistoric in the very nakedness of their novelty. Even the old and savage things they invoked became more savage in becoming more new. In observing what is called their Jewish Sabbath, they would have had to stone the strictest Jew. And they (and indeed their age generally) turned witch–burning from an episode to an epidemic. The destroyers and the things destroyed disappeared together; but they remain as something nobler than the nibbling legalism of some of the Whig cynics who continued their work. They were above all things anti–historic, like the Futurists in Italy; and there was this
unconscious greatness about them, that their very sacrilege was public and solemn like a sacrament; and they were ritualists even as iconoclasts. It was, properly considered, but a very secondary example of their strange and violent simplicity that one of them, before a mighty mob at Whitehall, cut off the anointed head of the sacramental man of the Middle Ages. For another, far away in the western shires, cut down the thorn of Glastonbury, from which had grown the whole story of Britain.
WHETHER or no we believe that the Reformation really reformed, there can be little doubt that the Restoration did not really restore. Charles II was never in the old sense a King; he was a Leader of the Opposition to his own Ministers. Because he was a clever politician he kept his official post, and because his brother and successor was an incredibly stupid politician, he lost it; but the throne was already only one of the official posts. In some ways, indeed, Charles II was fitted for the more modern world then beginning; he was rather an eighteenth century than a seventeenth–century man. He was as witty as a character in a comedy; and it was already the comedy of Sheridan and not of Shakespeare. He was more modern yet when he enjoyed the pure experimentalism of the Royal Society, and bent eagerly over the toys that were to grow into the terrible engines of science. He and his brother, however, had two links with what was in England the losing side; and by the strain on these their dynastic cause was lost. The first, which lessened in its practical pressure as time passed, was, of course, the hatred felt for their religion. The second, which grew as it neared the next century, was their tie with the French Monarchy. We will deal with the religious quarrel before passing on to a much more irreligious age; but the truth about it is tangled and far from easy to trace.

The Tudors had begun to persecute the old religion before they had ceased to belong to it. That is one of the transitional complexities that can only be conveyed by such contradictions. A person of the type and time of Elizabeth would feel fundamentally, and even fiercely, that priests should be celibate, while racking and rending anybody caught talking to the only celibate priests. This mystery, which may be very variously explained, covered the Church of England, and in a great degree the people of England. Whether it be called the Catholic continuity of Anglicanism or merely the slow extirpation of Catholicism, there can be no doubt that a parson like Herrick, for instance, as late as the Civil War, was stuffed with “superstitions” which were Catholic in the extreme sense we should now call Continental. Yet many similar parsons had already a parallel and opposite passion, and thought of Continental Catholicism not even as the errant Church of Christ, but as the consistent Church of Antichrist. It is, therefore, very hard now to guess the proportion of
Protestantism; but there is no doubt about its presence, especially its presence in centres of importance like London. By the time of Charles II, after the purge of the Puritan Terror, it had become something at least more inherent and human than the mere exclusiveness of Calvinist creeds or the craft of Tudor nobles. The Monmouth rebellion showed that it had a popular, though an insufficiently popular, backing. The “No Popery” force became the crowd if it never became the people. It was, perhaps, increasingly an urban crowd, and was subject to those epidemics of detailed delusion with which sensational journalism plays on the urban crowds of to–day. One of these scares and scoops (not to add the less technical name of lies) was the Popish Plot, a storm weathered warily by Charles II. Another was the Tale of the Warming Pan, or the bogus heir to the throne, a storm that finally swept away James II.

The last blow, however, could hardly have fallen but for one of those illogical but almost lovable localisms to which the English temperament is prone. The debate about the Church of England, then and now, differs from most debates in one vital point. It is not a debate about what an institution ought to do, or whether that institution ought to alter, but about what that institution actually is. One party, then as now, only cared for it because it was Catholic, and the other only cared for it because it was Protestant. Now, something had certainly happened to the English quite inconceivable to the Scotch or the Irish. Masses of common people loved the Church of England without having even decided what it was. It had a hold different indeed from that of the mediaeval Church, but also very different from the barren prestige of gentility which clung to it in the succeeding century. Macaulay, with a widely different purpose in mind, devotes some pages to proving that an Anglican clergyman was socially a mere upper servant in the seventeenth century. He is probably right; but he does not guess that this was but the degenerate continuity of the more democratic priesthood of the Middle Ages. A priest was not treated as a gentleman; but a peasant was treated as a priest. And in England then, as in Europe now, many entertained the fancy that priesthood was a higher thing than gentility. In short, the national church was then at least really national, in a fashion that was emotionally vivid though intellectually vague. When, therefore, James II seemed to menace this practising communion, he aroused something at least more popular than the mere priggishness of the Whig lords. To this must be added a fact generally forgotten. I mean the fact that the influence then called Popish was then in a real sense regarded as revolutionary. The Jesuit seemed to the English not merely a conspirator but a sort of anarchist. There is something appalling about abstract
speculations to many Englishmen; and the abstract speculations of Jesuits like Suarez dealt with extreme democracy and things undreamed of here. The last Stuart proposals for toleration seemed thus to many as vast and empty as atheism. The only seventeenth–century Englishmen who had something of this transcendental abstraction were the Quakers, and the cosy English compromise shuddered when the two things shook hands. For it was something much more than a Stuart intrigue which made these philosophical extremes meet, merely because they were philosophical; and which brought the weary but humorous mind of Charles II into alliance with the subtle and detached spirit of William Penn.

Much of England, then, was really alarmed at the Stuart scheme of toleration, sincere or insincere, because it seemed theoretical and therefore fanciful. It was in advance of its age or (to use a more intelligent language) too thin and ethereal for its atmosphere. And to this affection for the actual in the English moderates must be added (in what proportion we know not) a persecuting hatred of Popery almost maniacal but quite sincere. The State had long, as we have seen, been turned to an engine of torture against priests and the friends of priests. Men talk of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes; but the English persecutors never had so tolerant an edict to revoke. But at least by this time the English, like the French, persecutors were oppressing a minority. Unfortunately there was another province of government in which they were still more madly persecuting the majority. For it was here that came to its climax and took on its terrific character that lingering crime that was called the government of Ireland. It would take too long to detail the close network of unnatural laws by which that country was covered till towards the end of the eighteenth century; it is enough to say here that the whole attitude to the Irish was tragically typified, and tied up with our expulsion of the Stuarts, in one of those acts that are remembered for ever. James II, fleeing from the opinion of London, perhaps of England, eventually found refuge in Ireland, which took arms in his favour. The Prince of Orange, whom the aristocracy had summoned to the throne, landed in that country with an English and Dutch army, won the Battle of the Boyne, but saw his army successfully arrested before Limerick by the military genius of Patrick Sarsfield. The check was so complete that peace could only be restored by promising complete religious liberty to the Irish, in return for the surrender of Limerick. The new English Government occupied the town and immediately broke the promise. It is not a matter on which there is much more to be said. It was a tragic necessity that the Irish should remember it; but it was far more tragic that the
English forgot it. For he who has forgotten his sin is repeating it incessantly for ever.

But here again the Stuart position was much more vulnerable on the side of secular policy, and especially of foreign policy. The aristocrats to whom power passed finally at the Revolution were already ceasing to have any supernatural faith in Protestantism as against Catholicism; but they had a very natural faith in England as against France; and even, in a certain sense, in English institutions as against French institutions. And just as these men, the most unmediaeval of mankind, could yet boast about some mediaeval liberties, Magna Carta, the Parliament and the Jury, so they could appeal to a true mediaeval legend in the matter of a war with France. A typical eighteenth–century oligarch like Horace Walpole could complain that the cicerone in an old church troubled him with traces of an irrelevant person named St. Somebody, when he was looking for the remains of John of Gaunt. He could say it with all the naïveté of scepticism, and never dream how far away from John of Gaunt he was really wandering in saying so. But though their notion of mediaeval history was a mere masquerade ball, it was one in which men fighting the French could still, in an ornamental way, put on the armour of the Black Prince or the crown of Henry of Monmouth. In this matter, in short, it is probable enough that the aristocrats were popular as patriots will always be popular. It is true that the last Stuarts were themselves far from unpatriotic; and James II in particular may well be called the founder of the British Navy. But their sympathies were with France, among other foreign countries; they took refuge in France, the elder before and the younger after his period of rule; and France aided the later Jacobite efforts to restore their line. And for the new England, especially the new English nobility, France was the enemy.

The transformation through which the external relations of England passed at the end of the seventeenth century is symbolized by two very separate and definite steps; the first the accession of a Dutch king and the second the accession of a German king. In the first were present all the features that can partially make an unnatural thing natural. In the second we have the condition in which even those effecting it can hardly call it natural, but only call it necessary. William of Orange was like a gun dragged into the breach of a wall; a foreign gun indeed, and one fired in a quarrel more foreign than English, but still a quarrel in which the English, and especially the English aristocrats, could play a great part. George of Hanover was simply something stuffed into a hole in the wall by English aristocrats, who practically admitted that they were simply
stopping it with rubbish. In many ways William, cynical as he was, carried on
the legend of the greater and grimmer Puritanism. He was in private conviction a
Calvinist; and nobody knew or cared what George was except that he was not a
Catholic. He was at home the partly republican magistrate of what had once been
a purely republican experiment, and among the cleaner if colder ideals of the
seventeenth century. George was when he was at home pretty much what the
King of the Cannibal Islands was when he was at home—a savage personal ruler
scarcely logical enough to be called a despot. William was a man of acute if
narrow intelligence; George was a man of no intelligence. Above all, touching
the immediate effect produced, William was married to a Stuart, and ascended
the throne hand-in-hand with a Stuart; he was a familiar figure, and already a
part of our royal family. With George there entered England something that had
scarcely been seen there before; something hardly mentioned in mediaeval or
Renascence writing, except as one mentions a Hottentot—the barbarian from
beyond the Rhine.

The reign of Queen Anne, which covers the period between these two foreign
kings, is therefore the true time of transition. It is the bridge between the time
when the aristocrats were at least weak enough to call in a strong man to help
them, and the time when they were strong enough deliberately to call in a weak
man who would allow them to help themselves. To symbolize is always to
simplify, and to simplify too much; but the whole may be well symbolized as the
struggle of two great figures, both gentlemen and men of genius, both
courageous and clear about their own aims, and in everything else a violent
contrast at every point. One of them was Henry St. John, Lord Bolingbroke; the
other was John Churchill, the famous and infamous Duke of Marlborough. The
story of Churchill is primarily the story of the Revolution and how it succeeded;
the story of Bolingbroke is the story of the Counter-Revolution and how it
failed.

Churchill is a type of the extraordinary time in this, that he combines the
presence of glory with the absence of honour. When the new aristocracy had
become normal to the nation, in the next few generations, it produced personal
types not only of aristocracy but of chivalry. The Revolution reduced us to a
country wholly governed by gentlemen; the popular universities and schools of
the Middle Ages, like their guilds and abbeys, had been seized and turned into
what they are—factories of gentlemen, when they are not merely factories of
snobs. It is hard now to realize that what we call the Public Schools were once
undoubtedly public. By the Revolution they were already becoming as private as
they are now. But at least in the eighteenth century there were great gentlemen in
the generous, perhaps too generous, sense now given to the title. Types not
merely honest, but rash and romantic in their honesty, remain in the record with
the names of Nelson or of Fox. We have already seen that the later reformers
defaced from fanaticism the churches which the first reformers had defaced
simply from avarice. Rather in the same way the eighteenth–century Whigs often
praised, in a spirit of pure magnanimity, what the seventeenth–century Whigs
had done in a spirit of pure meanness. How mean was that meanness can only be
estimated by realizing that a great military hero had not even the ordinary
military virtues of loyalty to his flag or obedience to his superior officers, that he
picked his way through campaigns that have made him immortal with the
watchful spirit of a thieving camp follower. When William landed at Torbay on
the invitation of the other Whig nobles, Churchill, as if to add something ideal to
his imitation of Iscariot, went to James with wanton professions of love and
loyalty, went forth in arms as if to defend the country from invasion, and then
calmly handed the army over to the invader. To the finish of this work of art but
few could aspire, but in their degree all the politicians of the Revolution were
upon this ethical pattern. While they surrounded the throne of James, there was
scarcely one of them who was not in correspondence with William. When they
afterwards surrounded the throne of William, there was not one of them who was
not still in correspondence with James. It was such men who defeated Irish
Jacobitism by the treason of Limerick; it was such men who defeated Scotch
Jacobitism by the treason of Glencoe.

Thus the strange yet splendid story of eighteenth–century England is one of
greatness founded on smallness, a pyramid standing on a point. Or, to vary the
metaphor, the new mercantile oligarchy might be symbolized even in the
externals of its great sister, the mercantile oligarchy of Venice. The solidity was
all in the superstructure; the fluctuation had been all in the foundations. The
great temple of Chatham and Warren Hastings was reared in its origins on things
as unstable as water and as fugitive as foam. It is only a fancy, of course, to
connect the unstable element with something restless and even shifty in the lords
of the sea. But there was certainly in the genesis, if not in the later generations of
our mercantile aristocracy, a thing only too mercantile; something which had
also been urged against a yet older example of that polity, something called
Punica fides. The great Royalist Strafford, going disillusioned to death, had said,
“Put not your trust in princes.” The great Royalist Bolingbroke may well be said
to have retorted, “And least of all in merchant princes.”
Bolingbroke stands for a whole body of conviction which bulked very big in English history, but which with the recent winding of the course of history has gone out of sight. Yet without grasping it we cannot understand our past, nor, I will add, our future. Curiously enough, the best English books of the eighteenth century are crammed with it, yet modern culture cannot see it when it is there. Dr. Johnson is full of it; it is what he meant when he denounced minority rule in Ireland, as well as when he said that the devil was the first Whig. Goldsmith is full of it; it is the whole point of that fine poem “The Deserted Village,” and is set out theoretically with great lucidity and spirit in “The Vicar of Wakefield.” Swift is full of it; and found in it an intellectual brotherhood—in—arms with Bolingbroke himself. In the time of Queen Anne it was probably the opinion of the majority of people in England. But it was not only in Ireland that the minority had begun to rule.

This conviction, as brilliantly expounded by Bolingbroke, had many aspects; perhaps the most practical was the point that one of the virtues of a despot is distance. It is “the little tyrant of the fields” that poisons human life. The thesis involved the truism that a good king is not only a good thing, but perhaps the best thing. But it also involved the paradox that even a bad king is a good king, for his oppression weakens the nobility and relieves the pressure on the populace. If he is a tyrant he chiefly tortures the torturers; and though Nero’s murder of his own mother was hardly perhaps a gain to his soul, it was no great loss to his empire. Bolingbroke had thus a wholly rationalistic theory of Jacobitism. He was, in other respects, a fine and typical eighteenth—century intellect, a free—thinking Deist, a clear and classic writer of English. But he was also a man of adventurous spirit and splendid political courage, and he made one last throw for the Stuarts. He was defeated by the great Whig nobles who formed the committee of the new regime of the gentry. And considering who it was who defeated it, it is almost unnecessary to say that it was defeated by a trick.

The small German prince ascended the throne, or rather was hoisted into it like a dummy, and the great English Royalist went into exile. Twenty years afterwards he reappears and reasserts his living and logical faith in a popular monarchy. But it is typical of the whole detachment and distinction of his mind that for this abstract ideal he was willing to strengthen the heir of the king whom he had tried to exclude. He was always a Royalist, but never a Jacobite. What he cared for was not a royal family but a royal office. He celebrated it in his great book “The Patriot King,” written in exile; and when he thought that George’s great—grandson was enough of a patriot, he only wished that he might be more of
a king. He made in his old age yet another attempt, with such unpromising instruments as George III and Lord Bute; and when these broke in his hand he died with all the dignity of the sed victa Catoni. The great commercial aristocracy grew on to its full stature. But if we wish to realize the good and ill of its growth, there is no better summary than this section from the first to the last of the foiled coup d’état of Bolingbroke. In the first his policy made peace with France, and broke the connection with Austria. In the second his policy again made peace with France, and broke the connection with Prussia. For in that interval the seed of the money-lending squires of Brandenburg had waxed mighty, and had already become that prodigy which has become so enormous a problem in Europe. By the end of this epoch Chatham, who incarnated and even created, at least in a representative sense, all that we call the British Empire, was at the height of his own and his country’s glory. He summarized the new England of the Revolution in everything, especially in everything in which that movement seems to many to be intrinsically contradictory and yet was most corporately consistent. Thus he was a Whig, and even in some ways what we should call a Liberal, like his son after him; but he was also an Imperialist and what we should call a Jingo; and the Whig party was consistently the Jingo party. He was an aristocrat, in the sense that all our public men were then aristocrats; but he was very emphatically what may be called a commercialist—one might almost say Carthaginian. In this connection he has the characteristic which perhaps humanized but was not allowed to hamper the aristocratic plan; I mean that he could use the middle classes. It was a young soldier of middle rank, James Wolfe, who fell gloriously driving the French out of Quebec; it was a young clerk of the East India Company, Robert Clive, who threw open to the English the golden gates of India. But it was precisely one of the strong points of this eighteenth-century aristocracy that it wielded without friction the wealthier bourgeoisie; it was not there that the social cleavage was to come. He was an eloquent parliamentary orator, and though Parliament was as narrow as a senate, it was one of great senators. The very word recalls the roll of those noble Roman phrases they often used, which we are right in calling classic, but wrong in calling cold. In some ways nothing could be further from all this fine if florid scholarship, all this princely and patrician geniality, all this air of freedom and adventure on the sea, than the little inland state of the stingy drill-sergeants of Potsdam, hammering mere savages into mere soldiers. And yet the great chief of these was in some ways like a shadow of Chatham flung across the world—the sort of shadow that is at once an enlargement and a caricature. The English lords,
whose paganism was ennobled by patriotism, saw here something drawn out long and thin out of their own theories. What was paganism in Chatham was atheism in Frederick the Great. And what was in the first patriotism was in the second something with no name but Prussianism. The cannibal theory of a commonwealth, that it can of its nature eat other commonwealths, had entered Christendom. Its autocracy and our own aristocracy drew indirectly nearer together, and seemed for a time to be wedded; but not before the great Bolingbroke had made a dying gesture, as if to forbid the banns.
THE WAR WITH THE GREAT REPUBLLCSS

We cannot understand the eighteenth century so long as we suppose that rhetoric is artificial because it is artistic. We do not fall into this folly about any of the other arts. We talk of a man picking out notes arranged in ivory on a wooden piano “with much feeling,” or of his pouring out his soul by scraping on cat–gut after a training as careful as an acrobat’s. But we are still haunted with a prejudice that verbal form and verbal effect must somehow be hypocritical when they are the link between things so living as a man and a mob. We doubt the feeling of the old–fashioned orator, because his periods are so rounded and pointed as to convey his feeling. Now before any criticism of the eighteenth–century worthies must be put the proviso of their perfect artistic sincerity. Their oratory was unrhymed poetry, and it had the humanity of poetry. It was not even unmetrical poetry; that century is full of great phrases, often spoken on the spur of great moments, which have in them the throb and recurrence of song, as of a man thinking to a tune. Nelson’s “In honour I gained them, in honour I will die with them,” has more rhythm than much that is called vers libres. Patrick Henry’s “Give me liberty or give me death” might be a great line in Walt Whitman.

It is one of the many quaint perversities of the English to pretend to be bad speakers; but in fact the most English eighteenth–century epoch blazed with brilliant speakers. There may have been finer writing in France; there was no such fine speaking as in England. The Parliament had faults enough, but it was sincere enough to be rhetorical. The Parliament was corrupt, as it is now; though the examples of corruption were then often really made examples, in the sense of warnings, where they are now examples only in the sense of patterns. The Parliament was indifferent to the constituencies, as it is now; though perhaps the constituencies were less indifferent to the Parliament. The Parliament was snobbish, as it is now, though perhaps more respectful to mere rank and less to mere wealth. But the Parliament was a Parliament; it did fulfil its name and duty by talking, and trying to talk well. It did not merely do things because they do not bear talking about–as it does now. It was then, to the eternal glory of our country, a great “talking–shop,” not a mere buying and selling shop for financial tips and official places. And as with any other artist, the care the eighteenth
century man expended on oratory is a proof of his sincerity not a disproof of it. An enthusiastic eulogium by Burke is as rich and elaborate as a lover’s sonnet; but it is because Burke is really enthusiastic, like the lover. An angry sentence by Junius is as carefully compounded as a Renascence poison; but it is because Junius is really angry—like the poisoner. Now, nobody who has realized this psychological truth can doubt for a moment that many of the English aristocrats of the eighteenth century had a real enthusiasm for liberty; their voices lift like trumpets upon the very word. Whatever their immediate forbears may have meant, these men meant what they said when they talked of the high memory of Hampden or the majesty of Magna Carta. Those Patriots whom Walpole called the Boys included many who really were patriots—or better still, who really were boys. If we prefer to put it so, among the Whig aristocrats were many who really were Whigs; Whigs by all the ideal definitions which identified the party with a defence of law against tyrants and courtiers. But if anybody deduces, from the fact that the Whig aristocrats were Whigs, any doubt about whether the Whig aristocrats were aristocrats, there is one practical test and reply. It might be tested in many ways: by the game laws and enclosure laws they passed, or by the strict code of the duel and the definition of honour on which they all insisted. But if it be really questioned whether I am right in calling their whole world an aristocracy, and the very reverse of it a democracy, the true historical test is this: that when republicanism really entered the world, they instantly waged two great wars with it—or (if the view be preferred) it instantly waged two great wars with them. America and France revealed the real nature of the English Parliament. Ice may sparkle, but a real spark will show it is only ice. So when the red fire of the Revolution touched the frosty splendours of the Whigs, there was instantly a hissing and a strife; a strife of the flame to melt the ice, of the water to quench the flame.

It has been noted that one of the virtues of the aristocrats was liberty, especially liberty among themselves. It might even be said that one of the virtues of the aristocrats was cynicism. They were not stuffed with our fashionable fiction, with its stiff and wooden figures of a good man named Washington and a bad man named Boney. They at least were aware that Washington’s cause was not so obviously white nor Napoleon’s so obviously black as most books in general circulation would indicate. They had a natural admiration for the military genius of Washington and Napoleon; they had the most unmixed contempt for the German Royal Family. But they were, as a class, not only against both Washington and Napoleon, but against them both for the same reason. And it
was that they both stood for democracy.

Great injustice is done to the English aristocratic government of the time through a failure to realize this fundamental difference, especially in the case of America. There is a wrong-headed humour about the English which appears especially in this, that while they often (as in the case of Ireland) make themselves out right where they were entirely wrong, they are easily persuaded (as in the case of America) to make themselves out entirely wrong where there is at least a case for their having been more or less right. George III’s government laid certain taxes on the colonial community on the eastern seaboard of America. It was certainly not self-evident, in the sense of law and precedent, that the imperial government could not lay taxes on such colonists. Nor were the taxes themselves of that practically oppressive sort which rightly raise everywhere the common casuistry of revolution. The Whig oligarchs had their faults, but utter lack of sympathy with liberty, especially local liberty, and with their adventurous kindred beyond the seas, was by no means one of their faults. Chatham, the great chief of the new and very national noblesse, was typical of them in being free from the faintest illiberality and irritation against the colonies as such. He would have made them free and even favoured colonies, if only he could have kept them as colonies. Burke, who was then the eloquent voice of Whiggism, and was destined later to show how wholly it was a voice of aristocracy, went of course even further. Even North compromised; and though George III, being a fool, might himself have refused to compromise, he had already failed to effect the Bolingbroke scheme of the restitution of the royal power. The case for the Americans, the real reason for calling them right in the quarrel, was something much deeper than the quarrel. They were at issue, not with a dead monarchy, but with a living aristocracy; they declared war on something much finer and more formidable than poor old George. Nevertheless, the popular tradition, especially in America, has pictured it primarily as a duel of George III and George Washington; and, as we have noticed more than once, such pictures though figurative are seldom false. King George’s head was not much more useful on the throne than it was on the sign-board of a tavern; nevertheless, the sign-board was really a sign, and a sign of the times. It stood for a tavern that sold not English but German beer. It stood for that side of the Whig policy which Chatham showed when he was tolerant to America alone, but intolerant of America when allied with France. That very wooden sign stood, in short, for the same thing as the juncture with Frederick the Great; it stood for that Anglo–German alliance which, at a very much later time in history, was to
turn into the world—old Teutonic Race.

Roughly and frankly speaking, we may say that America forced the quarrel. She wished to be separate, which was to her but another phrase for wishing to be free. She was not thinking of her wrongs as a colony, but already of her rights as a republic. The negative effect of so small a difference could never have changed the world. Without the positive effect of a great ideal, one may say of a great new religion. The real case for the colonists is that they felt they could be something, which they also felt, and justly, that England would not help them to be. England would probably have allowed the colonists all sorts of concessions and constitutional privileges, but England could not allow the colonists equality: I do not mean equality with her, but even with each other. Chatham might have compromised with Washington, because Washington was a gentleman; but Chatham could hardly have conceived a country not governed by gentlemen. Burke was apparently ready to grant everything to America; but he would not have been ready to grant what America eventually gained. If he had seen American democracy, he would have been as much appalled by it as he was by French democracy, and would always have been by any democracy. In a word the Whigs were liberal and even generous aristocrats, but they were aristocrats; that is why their concessions were as vain as their conquests. We talk, with a humiliation too rare with us, about our dubious part in the secession of America. Whether it increase or decrease the humiliation I do not know; but I strongly suspect that we had very little to do with it. I believe we counted for uncommonly little in the case. We did not really drive away the American colonists, nor were they driven. They were led on by a light that went before.

That light came from France, like the armies of Lafayette that came to the help of Washington. France was already in travail with the tremendous spiritual revolution which was soon to reshape the world. Her doctrine, disruptive and creative, was widely misunderstood at the time, and is much misunderstood still, despite the splendid clarity of style in which it was stated by Rousseau in the “Contrat Social,” and by Jefferson in The Declaration of Independence. Say the very word “equality” in many modern countries, and four hundred fools will leap to their feet at once to explain that some men can be found, on careful examination, to be taller or handsomer than others. As if Danton had not noticed that he was taller than Robespierre, or as if Washington was not well aware that he was handsomer than Franklin. This is no place to expound a philosophy; it will be enough to say in passing, by way of a parable, that when we say that all pennies are equal, we do not mean that they all look exactly the same. We mean
that they are absolutely equal in their one absolute character, in the most important thing about them. It may be put practically by saying that they are coins of a certain value, twelve of which go to a shilling. It may be put symbolically, and even mystically, by saying that they all bear the image of the King. And, though the most mystical, it is also the most practical summary of equality that all men bear the image of the King of Kings. Indeed, it is of course true that this idea had long underlain all Christianity, even in institutions less popular in form than were, for instance, the mob of mediaeval republics in Italy. A dogma of equal duties implies that of equal rights. I know of no Christian authority that would not admit that it is as wicked to murder a poor man as a rich man, or as bad to burgle an inelegantly furnished house as a tastefully furnished one. But the world had wandered further and further from these truisms, and nobody in the world was further from them than the group of the great English aristocrats. The idea of the equality of men is in substance simply the idea of the importance of man. But it was precisely the notion of the importance of a mere man which seemed startling and indecent to a society whose whole romance and religion now consisted of the importance of a gentleman. It was as if a man had walked naked into Parliament. There is not space here to develop the moral issue in full, but this will suffice to show that the critics concerned about the difference in human types or talents are considerably wasting their time. If they can understand how two coins can count the same though one is bright and the other brown, they might perhaps understand how two men can vote the same though one is bright and the other dull. If, however, they are still satisfied with their solid objection that some men are dull, I can only gravely agree with them, that some men are very dull.

But a few years after Lafayette had returned from helping to found a republic in America he was flung over his own frontiers for resisting the foundation of a republic in France. So furious was the onward stride of this new spirit that the republican of the new world lived to be the reactionary of the old. For when France passed from theory to practice, the question was put to the world in a way not thinkable in connection with the prefatory experiment of a thin population on a colonial coast. The mightiest of human monarchies, like some monstrous immeasurable idol of iron, was melted down in a furnace barely bigger than itself, and recast in a side equally colossal, but in a shape men could not understand. Many, at least, could not understand it, and least of all the liberal aristocracy of England. There were, of course, practical reasons for a continuous foreign policy against France, whether royal or republican. There was primarily
the desire to keep any foreigner from menacing us from the Flemish coast; there was, to a much lesser extent, the colonial rivalry in which so much English glory had been gained by the statesmanship of Chatham and the arms of Wolfe and of Clive. The former reason has returned on us with a singular irony; for in order to keep the French out of Flanders we flung ourselves with increasing enthusiasm into a fraternity with the Germans. We purposely fed and pampered the power which was destined in the future to devour Belgium as France could never have devoured it, and threaten us across the sea with terrors of which no Frenchman would ever dream. But indeed much deeper things unified our attitude towards France before and after the Revolution. It is but one stride from despotism to democracy, in logic as well as in history; and oligarchy is equally remote from both. The Bastille fell, and it seemed to an Englishman merely that a despot had turned into a demos. The young Bonaparte rose, and it seemed to an Englishman merely that a demos had once more turned into a despot. He was not wrong in thinking these allotropic forms of the same alien thing; and that thing was equality. For when millions are equally subject to one law, it makes little difference if they are also subject to one lawgiver; the general social life is a level. The one thing that the English have never understood about Napoleon, in all their myriad studies of his mysterious personality, is how impersonal he was. I had almost said how unimportant he was. He said himself, “I shall go down to history with my code in my hand;” but in practical effects, as distinct from mere name and renown, it would be even truer to say that his code will go down to history with his hand set to it in signature—somewhat illegibly. Thus his testamentary law has broken up big estates and encouraged contented peasants in places where his name is cursed, in places where his name is almost unknown. In his lifetime, of course, it was natural that the annihilating splendour of his military strokes should rivet the eye like flashes of lightning; but his rain fell more silently, and its refreshment remained. It is needless to repeat here that after bursting one world—coalition after another by battles that are the masterpieces of the military art, he was finally worn down by two comparatively popular causes, the resistance of Russia and the resistance of Spain. The former was largely, like so much that is Russian, religious; but in the latter appeared most conspicuously that which concerns us here, the valour, vigilance and high national spirit of England in the eighteenth century. The long Spanish campaign tried and made triumphant the great Irish soldier, afterwards known as Wellington; who has become all the more symbolic since he was finally confronted with Napoleon in the last defeat of the latter at Waterloo. Wellington,
though too logical to be at all English, was in many ways typical of the aristocracy; he had irony and independence of mind. But if we wish to realize how rigidly such men remained limited by their class, how little they really knew what was happening in their time, it is enough to note that Wellington seems to have thought he had dismissed Napoleon by saying he was not really a gentleman. If an acute and experienced Chinaman were to say of Chinese Gordon, “He is not actually a Mandarin,” we should think that the Chinese system deserved its reputation for being both rigid and remote.

But the very name of Wellington is enough to suggest another, and with it the reminder that this, though true, is inadequate. There was some truth in the idea that the Englishman was never so English as when he was outside England, and never smacked so much of the soil as when he was on the sea. There has run through the national psychology something that has never had a name except the eccentric and indeed extraordinary name of Robinson Crusoe; which is all the more English for being quite undiscoverable in England. It may be doubted if a French or German boy especially wishes that his cornland or wineland were a desert; but many an English boy has wished that his island were a desert island. But we might even say that the Englishman was too insular for an island. He awoke most to life when his island was sundered from the foundations of the world, when it hung like a planet and flew like a bird. And, by a contradiction, the real British army was in the navy; the boldest of the islanders were scattered over the moving archipelago of a great fleet. There still lay on it, like an increasing light, the legend of the Armada; it was a great fleet full of the glory of having once been a small one. Long before Wellington ever saw Waterloo the ships had done their work, and shattered the French navy in the Spanish seas, leaving like a light upon the sea the life and death of Nelson, who died with his stars on his bosom and his heart upon his sleeve. There is no word for the memory of Nelson except to call him mythical. The very hour of his death, the very name of his ship, are touched with that epic completeness which critics call the long arm of coincidence and prophets the hand of God. His very faults and failures were heroic, not in a loose but in a classic sense; in that he fell only like the legendary heroes, weakened by a woman, not foiled by any foe among men. And he remains the incarnation of a spirit in the English that is purely poetic; so poetic that it fancies itself a thousand things, and sometimes even fancies itself prosaic. At a recent date, in an age of reason, in a country already calling itself dull and business–like, with top–hats and factory chimneys already beginning to rise like towers of funereal efficiency, this country clergyman’s son moved to
the last in a luminous cloud, and acted a fairy tale. He shall remain as a lesson to those who do not understand England, and a mystery to those who think they do. In outward action he led his ships to victory and died upon a foreign sea; but symbolically he established something indescribable and intimate, something that sounds like a native proverb; he was the man who burnt his ships, and who for ever set the Thames on fire.
ARISTOCRACY AND THE DISCONTENTS

It is the pathos of many hackneyed things that they are intrinsically delicate and are only mechanically made dull. Any one who has seen the first white light, when it comes in by a window, knows that daylight is not only as beautiful but as mysterious as moonlight. It is the subtlety of the colour of sunshine that seems to be colourless. So patriotism, and especially English patriotism, which is vulgarized with volumes of verbal fog and gas, is still in itself something as tenuous and tender as a climate. The name of Nelson, with which the last chapter ended, might very well summarize the matter; for his name is banged and beaten about like an old tin can, while his soul had something in it of a fine and fragile eighteenth–century vase. And it will be found that the most threadbare things contemporary and connected with him have a real truth to the tone and meaning of his life and time, though for us they have too often degenerated into dead jokes. The expression “hearts of oak,” for instance, is no unhappy phrase for the finer side of that England of which he was the best expression. Even as a material metaphor it covers much of what I mean; oak was by no means only made into bludgeons, nor even only into battle–ships; and the English gentry did not think it business–like to pretend to be mere brutes. The mere name of oak calls back like a dream those dark but genial interiors of colleges and country houses, in which great gentlemen, not degenerate, almost made Latin an English language and port an English wine. Some part of that world at least will not perish; for its autumnal glow passed into the brush of the great English portrait–painters, who, more than any other men, were given the power to commemorate the large humanity of their own land; immortalizing a mood as broad and soft as their own brush–work. Come naturally, at the right emotional angle, upon a canvass of Gainsborough, who painted ladies like landscapes, as great and as unconscious with repose, and you will note how subtly the artist gives to a dress flowing in the foreground something of the divine quality of distance. Then you will understand another faded phrase and words spoken far away upon the sea; there will rise up quite fresh before you and be borne upon a bar of music, like words you have never heard before: “For England, home, and beauty.”

When I think of these things, I have no temptation to mere grumbling at the great gentry that waged the great war of our fathers. But indeed the difficulty
about it was something much deeper than could be dealt with by any grumbling. It was an exclusive class, but not an exclusive life; it was interested in all things, though not for all men. Or rather those things it failed to include, through the limitations of this rationalist interval between mediaeval and modern mysticism, were at least not of the sort to shock us with superficial inhumanity. The greatest gap in their souls, for those who think it a gap, was their complete and complacent paganism. All their very decencies assumed that the old faith was dead; those who held it still, like the great Johnson, were considered eccentrics. The French Revolution was a riot that broke up the very formal funeral of Christianity; and was followed by various other complications, including the corpse coming to life. But the scepticism was no mere oligarchic orgy; it was not confined to the Hell–Fire Club; which might in virtue of its vivid name be regarded as relatively orthodox. It is present in the mildest middle–class atmosphere; as in the middle–class masterpiece about “Northanger Abbey,” where we actually remember it is an antiquity, without ever remembering it is an abbey. Indeed there is no clearer case of it than what can only be called the atheism of Jane Austen.

Unfortunately it could truly be said of the English gentleman, as of another gallant and gracious individual, that his honour stood rooted in dishonour. He was, indeed, somewhat in the position of such an aristocrat in a romance, whose splendour has the dark spot of a secret and a sort of blackmail. There was, to begin with, an uncomfortable paradox in the tale of his pedigree. Many heroes have claimed to be descended from the gods, from beings greater than themselves; but he himself was far more heroic than his ancestors. His glory did not come from the Crusades but from the Great Pillage. His fathers had not come over with William the Conqueror, but only assisted in a somewhat shuffling manner, at the coming over of William of Orange. His own exploits were often really romantic, in the cities of the Indian sultans or the war of the wooden ships; it was the exploits of the far–off founders of his family that were painfully realistic. In this the great gentry were more in the position of Napoleonic marshals than of Norman knights, but their position was worse; for the marshals might be descended from peasants and shopkeepers; but the oligarchs were descended from usurers and thieves. That, for good or evil, was the paradox of England; the typical aristocrat was the typical upstart.

But the secret was worse; not only was such a family founded on stealing, but the family was stealing still. It is a grim truth that all through the eighteenth century, all through the great Whig speeches about liberty, all through the great
Tory speeches about patriotism, through the period of Wandewash and Plassy, through the period of Trafalgar and Waterloo, one process was steadily going on in the central senate of the nation. Parliament was passing bill after bill for the enclosure, by the great landlords, of such of the common lands as had survived out of the great communal system of the Middle Ages. It is much more than a pun, it is the prime political irony of our history, that the Commons were destroying the commons. The very word “common,” as we have before noted, lost its great moral meaning, and became a mere topographical term for some remaining scrap of scrub or heath that was not worth stealing. In the eighteenth century these last and lingering commons were connected only with stories about highwaymen, which still linger in our literature. The romance of them was a romance of robbers; but not of the real robbers.

This was the mysterious sin of the English squires, that they remained human, and yet ruined humanity all around them. Their own ideal, nay their own reality of life, was really more generous and genial than the stiff savagery of Puritan captains and Prussian nobles; but the land withered under their smile as under an alien frown. Being still at least English, they were still in their way good-natured; but their position was false, and a false position forces the good-natured into brutality. The French Revolution was the challenge that really revealed to the Whigs that they must make up their minds to be really democrats or admit that they were really aristocrats. They decided, as in the case of their philosophic exponent Burke, to be really aristocrats; and the result was the White Terror, the period of Anti-Jacobin repression which revealed the real side of their sympathies more than any stricken fields in foreign lands. Cobbett, the last and greatest of the yeomen, of the small farming class which the great estates were devouring daily, was thrown into prison merely for protesting against the flogging of English soldiers by German mercenaries. In that savage dispersal of a peaceful meeting which was called the Massacre of Peterloo, English soldiers were indeed employed, though much more in the spirit of German ones. And it is one of the bitter satires that cling to the very continuity of our history, that such suppression of the old yeoman spirit was the work of soldiers who still bore the title of the Yeomanry.

The name of Cobbett is very important here; indeed it is generally ignored because it is important. Cobbett was the one man who saw the tendency of the time as a whole, and challenged it as a whole; consequently he went without support. It is a mark of our whole modern history that the masses are kept quiet with a fight. They are kept quiet by the fight because it is a sham–fight; thus
most of us know by this time that the Party System has been popular only in the same sense that a football match is popular. The division in Cobbett’s time was slightly more sincere, but almost as superficial; it was a difference of sentiment about externals which divided the old agricultural gentry of the eighteenth century from the new mercantile gentry of the nineteenth. Through the first half of the nineteenth century there were some real disputes between the squire and the merchant. The merchant became converted to the important economic thesis of Free Trade, and accused the squire of starving the poor by dear bread to keep up his agrarian privilege. Later the squire retorted not ineffectively by accusing the merchant of brutalizing the poor by overworking them in his factories to keep up his commercial success. The passing of the Factory Acts was a confession of the cruelty that underlay the new industrial experiments, just as the Repeal of the Corn Laws was a confession of the comparative weakness and unpopularity of the squires, who had destroyed the last remnants of any peasantry that might have defended the field against the factory. These relatively real disputes would bring us to the middle of the Victorian era. But long before the beginning of the Victorian era, Cobbett had seen and said that the disputes were only relatively real. Or rather he would have said, in his more robust fashion, that they were not real at all. He would have said that the agricultural pot and the industrial kettle were calling each other black, when they had both been blackened in the same kitchen. And he would have been substantially right; for the great industrial disciple of the kettle, James Watt (who learnt from it the lesson of the steam engine), was typical of the age in this, that he found the old Trade Guilds too fallen, unfashionable and out of touch with the times to help his discovery, so that he had recourse to the rich minority which had warred on and weakened those Guilds since the Reformation. There was no prosperous peasant’s pot, such as Henry of Navarre invoked, to enter into alliance with the kettle. In other words, there was in the strict sense of the word no commonwealth, because wealth, though more and more wealthy, was less and less common. Whether it be a credit or discredit, industrial science and enterprise were in bulk a new experiment of the old oligarchy; and the old oligarchy had always been ready for new experiments—beginning with the Reformation. And it is characteristic of the clear mind which was hidden from many by the hot temper of Cobbett, that he did see the Reformation as the root of both squirearchy and industrialism, and called on the people to break away from both. The people made more effort to do so than is commonly realized. There are many silences in our somewhat snobbish history; and when the
educated class can easily suppress a revolt, they can still more easily suppress the record of it. It was so with some of the chief features of that great mediaeval revolution the failure of which, or rather the betrayal of which, was the real turning point of our history. It was so with the revolts against the religious policy of Henry VIII; and it was so with the rick-burning and frame-breaking riots of Cobbett’s epoch. The real mob reappeared for a moment in our history, for just long enough to show one of the immortal marks of the real mob-ritualism. There is nothing that strikes the undemocratic doctrinaire so sharply about direct democratic action as the vanity or mummery of the things done seriously in the daylight; they astonish him by being as unpractical as a poem or a prayer. The French Revolutionists stormed an empty prison merely because it was large and solid and difficult to storm, and therefore symbolic of the mighty monarchical machinery of which it had been but the shed. The English rioters laboriously broke in pieces a parish grindstone, merely because it was large and solid and difficult to break, and therefore symbolic of the mighty oligarchical machinery which perpetually ground the faces of the poor. They also put the oppressive agent of some landlord in a cart and escorted him round the county, merely to exhibit his horrible personality to heaven and earth. Afterwards they let him go, which marks perhaps, for good or evil, a certain national modification of the movement. There is something very typical of an English revolution in having the tumbril without the guillotine.

      Anyhow, these embers of the revolutionary epoch were trodden out very brutally; the grindstone continued (and continues) to grind in the scriptural fashion above referred to, and, in most political crises since, it is the crowd that has found itself in the cart. But, of course, both the riot and repression in England were but shadows of the awful revolt and vengeance which crowned the parallel process in Ireland. Here the terrorism, which was but a temporary and desperate tool of the aristocrats in England (not being, to do them justice, at all consonant to their temperament, which had neither the cruelty and morbidity nor the logic and fixity of terrorism), became in a more spiritual atmosphere a flaming sword of religious and racial insanity. Pitt, the son of Chatham, was quite unfit to fill his father’s place, unfit indeed (I cannot but think) to fill the place commonly given him in history. But if he was wholly worthy of his immortality, his Irish expedients, even if considered as immediately defensible, have not been worthy of their immortality. He was sincerely convinced of the national need to raise coalition after coalition against Napoleon, by pouring the commercial wealth then rather peculiar to England upon her poorer Allies, and
he did this with indubitable talent and pertinacity. He was at the same time faced with a hostile Irish rebellion and a partly or potentially hostile Irish Parliament. He broke the latter by the most indecent bribery and the former by the most indecent brutality, but he may well have thought himself entitled to the tyrant’s plea. But not only were his expedients those of panic, or at any rate of peril, but (what is less clearly realized) it is the only real defence of them that they were those of panic and peril. He was ready to emancipate Catholics as such, for religious bigotry was not the vice of the oligarchy; but he was not ready to emancipate Irishmen as such. He did not really want to enlist Ireland like a recruit, but simply to disarm Ireland like an enemy. Hence his settlement was from the first in a false position for settling anything. The Union may have been a necessity, but the Union was not a Union. It was not intended to be one, and nobody has ever treated it as one. We have not only never succeeded in making Ireland English, as Burgundy has been made French, but we have never tried. Burgundy could boast of Corneille, though Corneille was a Norman, but we should smile if Ireland boasted of Shakespeare. Our vanity has involved us in a mere contradiction; we have tried to combine identification with superiority. It is simply weak–minded to sneer at an Irishman if he figures as an Englishman, and rail at him if he figures as an Irishman. So the Union has never even applied English laws to Ireland, but only coercions and concessions both specially designed for Ireland. From Pitt’s time to our own this tottering alternation has continued; from the time when the great O’Connell, with his monster meetings, forced our government to listen to Catholic Emancipation to the time when the great Parnell, with his obstruction, forced it to listen to Home Rule, our staggering equilibrium has been maintained by blows from without. In the later nineteenth century the better sort of special treatment began on the whole to increase. Gladstone, an idealistic though inconsistent Liberal, rather belatedly realized that the freedom he loved in Greece and Italy had its rights nearer home, and may be said to have found a second youth in the gateway of the grave, in the eloquence and emphasis of his conversion. And a statesman wearing the opposite label (for what that is worth) had the spiritual insight to see that Ireland, if resolved to be a nation, was even more resolved to be a peasantry. George Wyndham, generous, imaginative, a man among politicians, insisted that the agrarian agony of evictions, shootings, and rack-rentings should end with the individual Irish getting, as Parnell had put it, a grip on their farms. In more ways than one his work rounds off almost romantically the tragedy of the rebellion against Pitt, for Wyndham himself was of the blood of the leader of the rebels,
and he wrought the only reparation yet made for all the blood, shamefully shed, that flowed around the fall of FitzGerald.

The effect on England was less tragic; indeed, in a sense it was comic. Wellington, himself an Irishman though of the narrower party, was pre-eminently a realist, and, like many Irishmen, was especially a realist about Englishmen. He said the army he commanded was the scum of the earth; and the remark is none the less valuable because that army proved itself useful enough to be called the salt of the earth. But in truth it was in this something of a national symbol and the guardian, as it were, of a national secret. There is a paradox about the English, even as distinct from the Irish or the Scotch, which makes any formal version of their plans and principles inevitably unjust to them. England not only makes her ramparts out of rubbish, but she finds ramparts in what she has herself cast away as rubbish. If it be a tribute to a thing to say that even its failures have been successes, there is truth in that tribute. Some of the best colonies were convict settlements, and might be called abandoned convict settlements. The army was largely an army of gaol-birds, raised by gaol-delivery; but it was a good army of bad men; nay, it was a gay army of unfortunate men. This is the colour and the character that has run through the realities of English history, and it can hardly be put in a book, least of all a historical book. It has its flashes in our fantastic fiction and in the songs of the street, but its true medium is conversation. It has no name but incongruity. An illogical laughter survives everything in the English soul. It survived, perhaps, with only too much patience, the time of terrorism in which the more serious Irish rose in revolt. That time was full of a quite topsy-turvey tyranny, and the English humorist stood on his head to suit it. Indeed, he often receives a quite irrational sentence in a police court by saying he will do it on his head. So, under Pitt’s coercionist regime, a man was sent to prison for saying that George IV was fat; but we feel he must have been partly sustained in prison by the artistic contemplation of how fat he was. That sort of liberty, that sort of humanity and it is no mean sort, did indeed survive all the drift and downward eddy of an evil economic system, as well as the dragooning of a reactionary epoch and the drearier menace of materialistic social science, as embodied in the new Puritans, who have purified themselves even of religion. Under this long process, the worst that can be said is that the English humorist has been slowly driven downwards in the social scale. Falstaff was a knight, Sam Weller was a gentleman’s servant, and some of our recent restrictions seem designed to drive Sam Weller to the status of the Artful Dodger. But well it was for us that some
such trampled tradition and dark memory of Merry England survived; well for us, as we shall see, that all our social science failed and all our statesmanship broke down before it. For there was to come the noise of a trumpet and a dreadful day of visitation, in which all the daily workers of a dull civilization were to be called out of their houses and their holes like a resurrection of the dead, and left naked under a strange sun with no religion but a sense of humour. And men might know of what nation Shakespeare was, who broke into puns and practical jokes in the darkest passion of his tragedies, if they had only heard those boys in France and Flanders who called out “Early Doors!” themselves in a theatrical memory, as they went so early in their youth to break down the doors of death.
THE RETURN OF THE BARBARIAN

THE only way to write a popular history as we have already remarked, would be to write it backwards. It would be to take common objects of our own street and tell the tale of how each of them came to be in the street at all. And for my immediate purpose it is really convenient to take two objects we have known all our lives as features of fashion or respectability. One, which has grown rarer recently, is what we call a top hat; the other, which is still a customary formality is a pair of trousers. The history of these humorous objects really does give a clue to what has happened in England for the last hundred years. It is not necessary to be an aesthete in order to regard both objects as the reverse of beautiful, as tested by what may be called the rational side of beauty. The lines of human limbs can be beautiful, and so can the lines of loose drapery, but not cylinders too loose to be the first and too tight to be the second. Nor is a subtle sense of harmony needed to see that while there are hundreds of differently proportioned hats, a hat that actually grows larger towards the top is somewhat top–heavy. But what is largely forgotten is this, that these two fantastic objects which now strike the eye as unconscious freaks, were originally conscious freaks. Our ancestors, to do them justice, did not think them casual or commonplace; they thought them, if not ridiculous, at least rococo. The top–hat was the topmost point of a riot of Regency dandyism, and bucks wore trousers while business men were still wearing knee–breeches. It will not be fanciful to see a certain oriental touch in trousers, which the later Romans also regarded as effeminately oriental; it was an oriental touch found in many florid things of the time–in Byron’s poems or Brighton Pavilion. Now, the interesting point is that for a whole serious century these instantaneous fantasies have remained like fossils. In the carnival of the Regency a few fools got into fancy dress, and we have all remained in fancy dress. At least, we have remained in the dress, though we have lost the fancy.

I say this is typical of the most important thing that happened in the Victorian time. For the most important thing was that nothing happened. The very fuss that was made about minor modifications brings into relief the rigidity with which the main lines of social life were left as they were at the French Revolution. We talk of the French Revolution as something that changed the world; but its most
important relation to England is that it did not change England. A student of our history is concerned rather with the effect it did not have than the effect it did. If it be a splendid fate to have survived the Flood, the English oligarchy had that added splendour. But even for the countries in which the Revolution was a convulsion, it was the last convulsion—until that which shakes the world to–day. It gave their character to all the commonwealths, which all talked about progress, and were occupied in marking time. Frenchmen, under all superficial reactions, remained republican in spirit, as they had been when they first wore top–hats. Englishmen, under all superficial reforms, remained oligarchical in spirit, as they had been when they first wore trousers. Only one power might be said to be growing, and that in a plodding and prosaic fashion—the power in the North East whose name was Prussia. And the English were more and more learning that this growth need cause them no alarm, since the North Germans were their cousins in blood and their brothers in spirit.

The first thing to note, then, about the nineteenth century is that Europe remained herself as compared with the Europe of the great war, and that England especially remained herself as compared even with the rest of Europe. Granted this, we may give their proper importance to the cautious internal changes in this country, the small conscious and the large unconscious changes. Most of the conscious ones were much upon the model of an early one, the great Reform Bill of 1832, and can be considered in the light of it. First, from the standpoint of most real reformers, the chief thing about the Reform Bill was that it did not reform. It had a huge tide of popular enthusiasm behind it, which wholly disappeared when the people found themselves in front of it. It enfranchised large masses of the middle classes; it disfranchised very definite bodies of the working classes; and it so struck the balance between the conservative and the dangerous elements in the commonwealth that the governing class was rather stronger than before. The date, however, is important, not at all because it was the beginning of democracy, but because it was the beginning of the best way ever discovered of evading and postponing democracy. Here enters the homeopathic treatment of revolution, since so often successful. Well into the next generation Disraeli, the brilliant Jewish adventurer who was the symbol of the English aristocracy being no longer genuine, extended the franchise to the artisans, partly, indeed, as a party move against his great rival, Gladstone, but more as the method by which the old popular pressure was first tired out and then toned down. The politicians said the working–class was now strong enough to be allowed votes. It would be truer to say it was now weak enough to be
allowed votes. So in more recent times Payment of Members, which would once have been regarded (and resisted) as an inrush of popular forces, was passed quietly and without resistance, and regarded merely as an extension of parliamentary privileges. The truth is that the old parliamentary oligarchy abandoned their first line of trenches because they had by that time constructed a second line of defence. It consisted in the concentration of colossal political funds in the private and irresponsible power of the politicians, collected by the sale of peerages and more important things, and expended on the jerrymandering of the enormously expensive elections. In the presence of this inner obstacle a vote became about as valuable as a railway ticket when there is a permanent block on the line. The facade and outward form of this new secret government is the merely mechanical application of what is called the Party System. The Party System does not consist, as some suppose, of two parties, but of one. If there were two real parties, there could be no system.

But if this was the evolution of parliamentary reform, as represented by the first Reform Bill, we can see the other side of it in the social reform attacked immediately after the first Reform Bill. It is a truth that should be a tower and a landmark, that one of the first things done by the Reform Parliament was to establish those harsh and dehumanised workhouses which both honest Radicals and honest Tories branded with the black title of the New Bastille. This bitter name lingers in our literature, and can be found by the curious in the works of Carlyle and Hood, but it is doubtless interesting rather as a note of contemporary indignation than as a correct comparison. It is easy to imagine the logicians and legal orators of the parliamentary school of progress finding many points of differentiation and even of contrast. The Bastille was one central institution; the workhouses have been many, and have everywhere transformed local life with what ever they have to give of social sympathy and inspiration. Men of high rank and great wealth were frequently sent to the Bastille; but no such mistake has ever been made by the more business administration of the workhouse. Over the most capricious operations of the lettres de cachet there still hovered some hazy traditional idea that a man is put in prison to punish him for something. It was the discovery of a later social science that men who cannot be punished can still be imprisoned. But the deepest and most decisive difference lies in the better fortune of the New Bastille; for no mob has ever dared to storm it, and it never fell.

The New Poor Law was indeed not wholly new in the sense that it was the culmination and clear enunciation of a principle foreshadowed in the earlier Poor
Law of Elizabeth, which was one of the many anti–popular effects of the Great Pillage. When the monasteries were swept away and the mediaeval system of hospitality destroyed, tramps and beggars became a problem, the solution of which has always tended towards slavery, even when the question of slavery been cleared of the irrelevant question of cruelty. It is obvious that a desperate man might find Mr. Bumble and the Board of Guardians less cruel than cold weather and the bare ground–even if he were allowed to sleep on the ground, which (by a veritable nightmare of nonsense and injustice) he is not. He is actually punished for sleeping under a bush on the specific and stated ground that he cannot afford a bed. It is obvious, however, that he may find his best physical good by going into the workhouse, as he often found it in pagan times by selling himself into slavery. The point is that the solution remains servile, even when Mr. Bumble and the Board of Guardians ceased to be in a common sense cruel. The pagan might have the luck to sell himself to a kind master. The principle of the New Poor Law, which has so far proved permanent in our society, is that the man lost all his civic rights and lost them solely through poverty. There is a touch of irony, though hardly of mere hypocrisy, in the fact that the Parliament which effected this reform had just been abolishing black slavery by buying out the slave–owners in the British colonies. The slave–owners were bought out at a price big enough to be called blackmail; but it would be misunderstanding the national mentality to deny the sincerity of the sentiment. Wilberforce represented in this the real wave of Wesleyan religion which had made a humane reaction against Calvinism, and was in no mean sense philanthropic. But there is something romantic in the English mind which can always see what is remote. It is the strongest example of what men lose by being long–sighted. It is fair to say that they gain many things also, the poems that are like adventures and the adventures that are like poems. It is a national savour, and therefore in itself neither good nor evil; and it depends on the application whether we find a scriptural text for it in the wish to take the wings of the morning and abide in the uttermost parts of the sea, or merely in the saying that the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth.

Anyhow, the unconscious nineteenth–century movement, so slow that it seems stationary, was altogether in this direction, of which workhouse philanthropy is the type. Nevertheless, it had one national institution to combat and overcome; one institution all the more intensely national because it was not official, and in a sense not even political. The modern Trade Union was the inspiration and creation of the English; it is still largely known throughout Europe by its English
name. It was the English expression of the European effort to resist the tendency of Capitalism to reach its natural culmination in slavery. In this it has an almost weird psychological interest, for it is a return to the past by men ignorant of the past, like the subconscious action of some man who has lost his memory. We say that history repeats itself, and it is even more interesting when it unconsciously repeats itself. No man on earth is kept so ignorant of the Middle Ages as the British workman, except perhaps the British business man who employs him. Yet all who know even a little of the Middle Ages can see that the modern Trade Union is a groping for the ancient Guild. It is true that those who look to the Trade Union, and even those clear–sighted enough to call it the Guild, are often without the faintest tinge of mediaeval mysticism, or even of mediaeval morality. But this fact is itself the most striking and even staggering tribute to mediaeval morality. It has all the clinching logic of coincidence. If large numbers of the most hard–headed atheists had evolved, out of their own inner consciousness, the notion that a number of bachelors or spinsters ought to live together in celibate groups for the good of the poor, or the observation of certain hours and offices, it would be a very strong point in favour of the monasteries. It would be all the stronger if the atheists had never heard of monasteries; it would be strongest of all if they hated the very name of monasteries. And it is all the stronger because the man who puts his trust in Trades Unions does not call himself a Catholic or even a Christian, if he does call himself a Guild Socialist.

The Trade Union movement passed through many perils, including a ludicrous attempt of certain lawyers to condemn as a criminal conspiracy that Trade Union solidarity, of which their own profession is the strongest and most startling example in the world. The struggle culminated in gigantic strikes which split the country in every direction in the earlier part of the twentieth century. But another process, with much more power at its back, was also in operation. The principle represented by the New Poor Law proceeded on its course, and in one important respect altered its course, though it can hardly be said to have altered its object. It can most correctly be stated by saying that the employers themselves, who already organized business, began to organize social reform. It was more picturesquely expressed by a cynical aristocrat in Parliament who said, “We are all Socialists now.” The Socialists, a body of completely sincere men led by several conspicuously brilliant men, had long hammered into men’s heads the hopeless sterility of mere non–interference in exchange. The Socialists proposed that the State should not merely interfere in business but should take over the business, and pay all men as equal wage–earners, or at any rate as wage–earners.
The employers were not willing to surrender their own position to the State, and this project has largely faded from politics. But the wiser of them were willing to pay better wages, and they were specially willing to bestow various other benefits so long as they were bestowed after the manner of wages. Thus we had a series of social reforms which, for good or evil, all tended in the same direction; the permission to employees to claim certain advantages as employees, and as something permanently different from employers. Of these the obvious examples were Employers’ Liability, Old Age Pensions, and, as marking another and more decisive stride in the process, the Insurance Act.

The latter in particular, and the whole plan of the social reform in general, were modelled upon Germany. Indeed the whole English life of this period was overshadowed by Germany. We had now reached, for good or evil, the final fulfilment of that gathering influence which began to grow on us in the seventeenth century, which was solidified by the military alliances of the eighteenth century, and which in the nineteenth century had been turned into a philosophy—not to say a mythology. German metaphysics had thinned our theology, so that many a man’s most solemn conviction about Good Friday was that Friday was named after Freya. German history had simply annexed English history, so that it was almost counted the duty of any patriotic Englishman to be proud of being a German. The genius of Carlyle, the culture preached by Matthew Arnold, would not, persuasive as they were, have alone produced this effect but for an external phenomenon of great force. Our internal policy was transformed by our foreign policy; and foreign policy was dominated by the more and more drastic steps which the Prussian, now clearly the prince of all the German tribes, was taking to extend the German influence in the world. Denmark was robbed of two provinces; France was robbed of two provinces; and though the fall of Paris was felt almost everywhere as the fall of the capital of civilization, a thing like the sacking of Rome by the Goths, many of the most influential people in England still saw nothing in it but the solid success of our kinsmen and old allies of Waterloo. The moral methods which achieved it, the juggling with the Augustenburg claim, the forgery of the Ems telegram, were either successfully concealed or were but cloudily appreciated. The Higher Criticism had entered into our ethics as well as our theology. Our view of Europe was also distorted and made disproportionate by the accident of a natural concern for Constantinople and our route to India, which led Palmerston and later Premiers to support the Turk and see Russia as the only enemy. This somewhat cynical reaction was summed up in the strange figure of Disraeli, who
made a pro–Turkish settlement full of his native indifference to the Christian subjects of Turkey, and sealed it at Berlin in the presence of Bismarck. Disraeli was not without insight into the inconsistencies and illusions of the English; he said many sagacious things about them, and one especially when he told the Manchester School that their motto was “Peace and Plenty, amid a starving people, and with the world in arms.” But what he said about Peace and Plenty might well be parodied as a comment on what he himself said about Peace with Honour. Returning from that Berlin Conference he should have said, “I bring you Peace with Honour, peace with the seeds of the most horrible war of history; and honour as the dupes and victims of the old bully in Berlin.”

But it was, as we have seen, especially in social reform that Germany was believed to be leading the way, and to have found the secret of dealing with the economic evil. In the case of Insurance, which was the test case she was applauded for obliging all her workmen to set apart a portion of their wages for any time of sickness; and numerous other provisions, both in Germany and England, pursued the same ideal, which was that of protecting the poor against themselves. It everywhere involved an external power having a finger in the family pie; but little attention was paid to any friction thus caused, for all prejudices against the process were supposed to be the growth of ignorance. And that ignorance was already being attacked by what was called education—an enterprise also inspired largely by the example, and partly by the commercial competition of Germany. It was pointed out that in Germany governments and great employers thought it well worth their while to apply the grandest scale of organization and the minutest inquisition of detail to the instruction of the whole German race. The government was the stronger for training its scholars as it trained its soldiers; the big businesses were the stronger for manufacturing mind as they manufactured material. English education was made compulsory; it was made free; many good, earnest, and enthusiastic men laboured to create a ladder of standards and examinations, which would connect the cleverest of the poor with the culture of the English universities and the current teaching in history or philosophy. But it cannot be said that the connection was very complete, or the achievement so thorough as the German achievement. For whatever reason, the poor Englishman remained in many things much as his fathers had been, and seemed to think the Higher Criticism too high for him even to criticize.

And then a day came, and if we were wise, we thanked God that we had failed. Education, if it had ever really been in question, would doubtless have been a noble gift; education in the sense of the central tradition of history, with
its freedom, its family honour, its chivalry which is the flower of Christendom. But what would our populace, in our epoch, have actually learned if they had learned all that our schools and universities had to teach? That England was but a little branch on a large Teutonic tree; that an unfathomable spiritual sympathy, all-encircling like the sea had always made us the natural allies of the great folk by the flowing Rhine; that all light came from Luther and Lutheran Germany, whose science was still purging Christianity of its Greek and Roman accretions; that Germany was a forest fated to grow; that France was a dung-heap fated to decay—a dung-heap with a crowing cock on it. What would the ladder of education have led to, except a platform on which a posturing professor proved that a cousin german was the same as a German cousin? What would the guttersnipe have learnt as a graduate, except to embrace a Saxon because he was the other half of an Anglo-Saxon? The day came, and the ignorant fellow found he had other things to learn. And he was quicker than his educated countrymen, for he had nothing to unlearn.

He in whose honour all had been said and sung stirred, and stepped across the border of Belgium. Then were spread out before men’s eyes all the beauties of his culture and all the benefits of his organization; then we beheld under a lifting daybreak what light we had followed and after what image we had laboured to refashion ourselves. Nor in any story of mankind has the irony of God chosen the foolish things so catastrophically to confound the wise. For the common crowd of poor and ignorant Englishmen, because they only knew that they were Englishmen, burst through the filthy cob webs of four hundred years and stood where their fathers stood when they knew that they were Christian men. The English poor, broken in every revolt, bullied by every fashion, long despoiled of property, and now being despoiled of liberty, entered history with a noise of trumpets, and turned themselves in two years into one of the iron armies of the world. And when the critic of politics and literature, feeling that this war is after all heroic, looks around him to find the hero, he can point to nothing but a mob.
CONCLUSION

In so small a book on so large a matter, finished hastily enough amid the necessities of an enormous national crisis, it would be absurd to pretend to have achieved proportion; but I will confess to some attempt to correct a disproportion. We talk of historical perspective, but I rather fancy there is too much perspective in history; for perspective makes a giant a pigmy and a pigmy a giant. The past is a giant foreshortened with his feet towards us; and sometimes the feet are of clay. We see too much merely the sunset of the Middle Ages, even when we admire its colours; and the study of a man like Napoleon is too often that of “The Last Phase.” So there is a spirit that thinks it reasonable to deal in detail with Old Sarum, and would think it ridiculous to deal in detail with the Use of Sarum; or which erects in Kensington Gardens a golden monument to Albert larger than anybody has ever erected to Alfred. English history is misread especially, I think, because the crisis is missed. It is usually put about the period of the Stuarts; and many of the memorials of our past seem to suffer from the same visitation as the memorial of Mr. Dick. But though the story of the Stuarts was a tragedy, I think it was also an epilogue.

I make the guess, for it can be no more, that the change really came with the fall of Richard II, following on his failure to use mediaeval despotism in the interests of mediaeval democracy. England, like the other nations of Christendom, had been created not so much by the death of the ancient civilization as by its escape from death, or by its refusal to die. Mediaeval civilization had arisen out of the resistance to the barbarians, to the naked barbarism from the North and the more subtle barbarism from the East. It increased in liberties and local government under kings who controlled the wider things of war and taxation; and in the peasant war of the fourteenth century in England, the king and the populace came for a moment into conscious alliance. They both found that a third thing was already too strong for them. That third thing was the aristocracy; and it captured and called itself the Parliament. The House of Commons, as its name implies, had primarily consisted of plain men summoned by the King like jury men; but it soon became a very special jury. It became, for good or evil, a great organ of government, surviving the Church, the monarchy and the mob; it did many great and not a few good things. It created
what we call the British Empire; it created something which was really far more valuable, a new and natural sort of aristocracy, more humane and even humanitarian than most of the aristocracies of the world. It had sufficient sense of the instincts of the people, at least until lately, to respect the liberty and especially the laughter that had become almost the religion of the race. But in doing all this, it deliberately did two other things, which it thought a natural part of its policy; it took the side of the Protestants, and then (partly as a consequence) it took the side of the Germans. Until very lately most intelligent Englishmen were quite honestly convinced that in both it was taking the side of progress against decay. The question which many of them are now inevitably asking themselves, and would ask whether I asked it or no, is whether it did not rather take the side of barbarism against civilization.

At least, if there be anything valid in my own vision of these things, we have returned to an origin and we are back in the war with the barbarians. It falls as naturally for me that the Englishman and the Frenchman should be on the same side as that Alfred and Abbo should be on the same side, in that black century when the barbarians wasted Wessex and besieged Paris. But there are now, perhaps, less certain tests of the spiritual as distinct from the material victory of civilization. Ideas are more mixed, are complicated by fine shades or covered by fine names. And whether the retreating savage leaves behind him the soul of savagery, like a sickness in the air, I myself should judge primarily by one political and moral test. The soul of savagery is slavery. Under all its mask of machinery and instruction, the German regimentation of the poor was the relapse of barbarians into slavery. I can see no escape from it for ourselves in the ruts of our present reforms, but only by doing what the mediaevals did after the other barbarian defeat: beginning, by guilds and small independent groups, gradually to restore the personal property of the poor and the personal freedom of the family. If the English really attempt that, the English have at least shown in the war, to any one who doubted it, that they have not lost the courage and capacity of their fathers, and can carry it through if they will. If they do not do so, if they continue to move only with the dead momentum of the social discipline which we learnt from Germany, there is nothing before us but what Mr. Belloc, the discoverer of this great sociological drift, has called the Servile Sate. And there are moods in which a man, considering that conclusion of our story, is half inclined to wish that the wave of Teutonic barbarism had washed out us and our armies together; and that the world should never know anything more of the last of the English, except that they died for liberty.
EUGENICS AND OTHER EVILS

G. K. CHESTERTON
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INDEX

## EUGENICS AND OTHER EVILS

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**TO THE READER**

### PART I
**THE FALSE THEORY**

**CHAPTER I**
WHAT IS EUGENICS?

**CHAPTER II**
THE FIRST OBSTACLES

**CHAPTER III**
THE ANARCHY FROM ABOVE

**CHAPTER IV**
THE LUNATIC AND THE LAW

**CHAPTER V**
THE FLYING AUTHORITY

**CHAPTER VI**
THE UNANSWERED CHALLENGE

**CHAPTER VII**
THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH OF DOUBT

**CHAPTER VIII**
A SUMMARY OF A FALSE THEORY

### PART II
**THE REAL AIM**

**CHAPTER I**
THE IMPOTENCE OF IMPENITENCE

**CHAPTER II**
TRUE HISTORY OF A TRAMP

**CHAPTER III**
TRUE HISTORY OF A EUGENIST

**CHAPTER IV**
THE VENGEANCE OF THE FLESH

CHAPTER V
THE MEANNESS OF THE MOTIVE

CHAPTER VI
THE ECLIPSE OF LIBERTY

CHAPTER VII
THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIALISM

CHAPTER VIII
THE END OF THE HOUSEHOLD GODS

CHAPTER IX
A SHORT CHAPTER
TO THE READER

I publish these essays at the present time for a particular reason connected with the present situation; a reason which I should like briefly to emphasise and make clear.

Though most of the conclusions, especially towards the end, are conceived with reference to recent events, the actual bulk of preliminary notes about the science of Eugenics were written before the war. It was a time when this theme was the topic of the hour; when eugenic babies (not visibly very distinguishable from other babies) sprawled all over the illustrated papers; when the evolutionary fancy of Nietzsche was the new cry among the intellectuals; and when Mr. Bernard Shaw and others were considering the idea that to breed a man like a cart–horse was the true way to attain that higher civilisation, of intellectual magnanimity and sympathetic insight, which may be found in cart–horses. It may therefore appear that I took the opinion too controversially, and it seems to me that I sometimes took it too seriously. But the criticism of Eugenics soon expanded of itself into a more general criticism of a modern craze for scientific officialism and strict social organisation.

And then the hour came when I felt, not without relief, that I might well fling all my notes into the fire. The fire was a very big one, and was burning up bigger things than such pedantic quackeries. And, anyhow, the issue itself was being settled in a very different style. Scientific officialism and organisation in the State which had specialised in them, had gone to war with the older culture of Christendom. Either Prussianism would win and the protest would be hopeless, or Prussianism would lose and the protest would be needless. As the war advanced from poison gas to piracy against neutrals, it grew more and more plain that the scientifically organised State was not increasing in popularity. Whatever happened, no Englishmen would ever again go nosing round the stinks of that low laboratory. So I thought all I had written irrelevant, and put it out of my mind.

I am greatly grieved to say that it is not irrelevant. It has gradually grown apparent, to my astounded gaze, that the ruling classes in England are still proceeding on the assumption that Prussia is a pattern for the whole world. If parts of my book are nearly nine years old, most of their principles and proceedings are a great deal older. They can offer us nothing but the same stuffy science, the same bullying bureaucracy and the same terrorism by tenth–rate
professors that have led the German Empire to its recent conspicuous triumph. For that reason, three years after the war with Prussia, I collect and publish these papers.

G.K.C.
PART I

THE FALSE THEORY
CHAPTER I

WHAT IS EUGENICS?

The wisest thing in the world is to cry out before you are hurt. It is no good to cry out after you are hurt; especially after you are mortally hurt. People talk about the impatience of the populace; but sound historians know that most tyrannies have been possible because men moved too late. It is often essential to resist a tyranny before it exists. It is no answer to say, with a distant optimism, that the scheme is only in the air. A blow from a hatchet can only be parried while it is in the air.

There exists today a scheme of action, a school of thought, as collective and unmistakable as any of those by whose grouping alone we can make any outline of history. It is as firm a fact as the Oxford Movement, or the Puritans of the Long Parliament; or the Jansenists; or the Jesuits. It is a thing that can be pointed out; it is a thing that can be discussed; and it is a thing that can still be destroyed. It is called for convenience “Eugenics”; and that it ought to be destroyed I propose to prove in the pages that follow. I know that it means very different things to different people; but that is only because evil always takes advantage of ambiguity. I know it is praised with high professions of idealism and benevolence; with silver-tongued rhetoric about purer motherhood and a happier posterity. But that is only because evil is always flattered, as the Furies were called “The Gracious Ones.” I know that it numbers many disciples whose intentions are entirely innocent and humane; and who would be sincerely astonished at my describing it as I do. But that is only because evil always wins through the strength of its splendid dupes; and there has in all ages been a disastrous alliance between abnormal innocence and abnormal sin. Of these who are deceived I shall speak of course as we all do of such instruments; judging them by the good they think they are doing, and not by the evil which they really do. But Eugenics itself does exist for those who have sense enough to see that ideas exist; and Eugenics itself, in large quantities or small, coming quickly or coming slowly, urged from good motives or bad, applied to a thousand people or applied to three, Eugenics itself is a thing no more to be bargained about than poisoning.

It is not really difficult to sum up the essence of Eugenics: though some of the Eugenists seem to be rather vague about it. The movement consists of two parts:
a moral basis, which is common to all, and a scheme of social application which varies a good deal. For the moral basis, it is obvious that man’s ethical responsibility varies with his knowledge of consequences. If I were in charge of a baby (like Dr. Johnson in that tower of vision), and if the baby was ill through having eaten the soap, I might possibly send for a doctor. I might be calling him away from much more serious cases, from the bedsides of babies whose diet had been far more deadly; but I should be justified. I could not be expected to know enough about his other patients to be obliged (or even entitled) to sacrifice to them the baby for whom I was primarily and directly responsible. Now the Eugenic moral basis is this; that the baby for whom we are primarily and directly responsible is the babe unborn. That is, that we know (or may come to know) enough of certain inevitable tendencies in biology to consider the fruit of some contemplated union in that direct and clear light of conscience which we can now only fix on the other partner in that union. The one duty can conceivably be as definite as or more definite than the other. The baby that does not exist can be considered even before the wife who does. Now it is essential to grasp that this is a comparatively new note in morality. Of course sane people always thought the aim of marriage was the procreation of children to the glory of God or according to the plan of Nature; but whether they counted such children as God’s reward for service or Nature’s premium on sanity, they always left the reward to God or the premium to Nature, as a less definable thing. The only person (and this is the point) towards whom one could have precise duties was the partner in the process. Directly considering the partner’s claims was the nearest one could get to indirectly considering the claims of posterity. If the women of the harem sang praises of the hero as the Moslem mounted his horse, it was because this was the due of a man; if the Christian knight helped his wife off her horse, it was because this was the due of a woman. Definite and detailed dues of this kind they did not predicate of the babe unborn; regarding him in that agnostic and opportunist light in which Mr. Browdie regarded the hypothetical child of Miss Squeers. Thinking these sex relations healthy, they naturally hoped they would produce healthy children; but that was all. The Moslem woman doubtless expected Allah to send beautiful sons to an obedient wife; but she would not have allowed any direct vision of such sons to alter the obedience itself. She would not have said, “I will now be a disobedient wife; as the learned leech informs me that great prophets are often the children of disobedient wives.” The knight doubtless hoped that the saints would help him to strong children, if he did all the duties of his station, one of which might be helping his wife off her
horse; but he would not have refrained from doing this because he had read in a
book that a course of falling off horses often resulted in the birth of a genius. Both Moslem and Christian would have thought such speculations not only
impious but utterly unpractical. I quite agree with them; but that is not the point
here.

The point here is that a new school believes Eugenics against Ethics. And it is
proved by one familiar fact: that the heroisms of history are actually the crimes
of Eugenics. The Eugenists’ books and articles are full of suggestions that non–
eugenic unions should and may come to be regarded as we regard sins; that we
should really feel that marrying an invalid is a kind of cruelty to children. But
history is full of the praises of people who have held sacred such ties to invalids;
of cases like those of Colonel Hutchinson and Sir William Temple, who
remained faithful to betrothals when beauty and health had been apparently
blasted. And though the illnesses of Dorothy Osborne and Mrs. Hutchinson may
not fall under the Eugenic speculations (I do not know), it is obvious that they
might have done so; and certainly it would not have made any difference to
men’s moral opinion of the act. I do not discuss here which morality I favour;
but I insist that they are opposite. The Eugenist really sets up as saints the very
men whom hundreds of families have called sneaks. To be consistent, they ought
to put up statues to the men who deserted their loves because of bodily
misfortune; with inscriptions celebrating the good Eugenist who, on his fiancée
falling off a bicycle, nobly refused to marry her; or to the young hero who, on
hearing of an uncle with erysipelas, magnanimously broke his word. What is
perfectly plain is this: that mankind have hitherto held the bond between man
and woman so sacred, and the effect of it on the children so incalculable, that
they have always admired the maintenance of honour more than the maintenance
of safety. Doubtless they thought that even the children might be none the worse
for not being the children of cowards and shirkers; but this was not the first
thought, the first commandment. Briefly, we may say that while many moral
systems have set restraints on sex almost as severe as any Eugenist could set,
they have almost always had the character of securing the fidelity of the two
sexes to each other, and leaving the rest to God. To introduce an ethic which
makes that fidelity or infidelity vary with some calculation about heredity is that
rarest of all things, a revolution that has not happened before.

It is only right to say here, though the matter should only be touched on, that
many Eugenists would contradict this, in so far as to claim that there was a
consciously Eugenic reason for the horror of those unions which begin with the
celebrated denial to man of the privilege of marrying his grandmother. Dr. S.R. Steinmetz, with that creepy simplicity of mind with which the Eugenists chill the blood, remarks that “we do not yet know quite certainly” what were “the motives for the horror of” that horrible thing which is the agony of Œdipus. With entirely amiable intention, I ask Dr. S.R. Steinmetz to speak for himself. I know the motives for regarding a mother or sister as separate from other women; nor have I reached them by any curious researches. I found them where I found an analogous aversion to eating a baby for breakfast. I found them in a rooted detestation in the human soul to liking a thing in one way, when you already like it in another quite incompatible way. Now it is perfectly true that this aversion may have acted eugenically; and so had a certain ultimate confirmation and basis in the laws of procreation. But there really cannot be any Eugenist quite so dull as not to see that this is not a defence of Eugenics but a direct denial of Eugenics. If something which has been discovered at last by the lamp of learning is something which has been acted on from the first by the light of nature, this (so far as it goes) is plainly not an argument for pestering people, but an argument for letting them alone. If men did not marry their grandmothers when it was, for all they knew, a most hygienic habit; if we know now that they instinctly avoided scientific peril; that, so far as it goes, is a point in favour of letting people marry anyone they like. It is simply the statement that sexual selection, or what Christians call falling in love, is a part of man which in the rough and in the long run can be trusted. And that is the destruction of the whole of this science at a blow.

The second part of the definition, the persuasive or coercive methods to be employed, I shall deal with more fully in the second part of this book. But some such summary as the following may here be useful. Far into the unfathomable past of our race we find the assumption that the founding of a family is the personal adventure of a free man. Before slavery sank slowly out of sight under the new climate of Christianity, it may or may not be true that slaves were in some sense bred like cattle, valued as a promising stock for labour. If it was so it was so in a much looser and vaguer sense than the breeding of the Eugenists; and such modern philosophers read into the old paganism a fantastic pride and cruelty which are wholly modern. It may be, however, that pagan slaves had some shadow of the blessings of the Eugenist’s care. It is quite certain that the pagan freemen would have killed the first man that suggested it. I mean suggested it seriously; for Plato was only a Bernard Shaw who unfortunately made his jokes in Greek. Among free men, the law, more often the creed, most
commonly of all the custom, have laid all sorts of restrictions on sex for this reason or that. But law and creed and custom have never concentrated heavily except upon fixing and keeping the family when once it had been made. The act of founding the family, I repeat, was an individual adventure outside the frontiers of the State. Our first forgotten ancestors left this tradition behind them; and our own latest fathers and mothers a few years ago would have thought us lunatics to be discussing it. The shortest general definition of Eugenics on its practical side is that it does, in a more or less degree, propose to control some families at least as if they were families of pagan slaves. I shall discuss later the question of the people to whom this pressure may be applied; and the much more puzzling question of what people will apply it. But it is to be applied at the very least by somebody to somebody, and that on certain calculations about breeding which are affirmed to be demonstrable. So much for the subject itself. I say that this thing exists. I define it as closely as matters involving moral evidence can be defined; I call it Eugenics. If after that anyone chooses to say that Eugenics is not the Greek for this—I am content to answer that “chivalrous” is not the French for “horsy”; and that such controversial games are more horsy than chivalrous.
CHAPTER II

THE FIRST OBSTACLES

Now before I set about arguing these things, there is a cloud of skirmishers, of harmless and confused modern sceptics, who ought to be cleared off or calmed down before we come to debate with the real doctors of the heresy. If I sum up my statement thus: “Eugenics, as discussed, evidently means the control of some men over the marriage and unmarriage of others; and probably means the control of the few over the marriage and unmarriage of the many,” I shall first of all receive the sort of answers that float like skim on the surface of teacups and talk. I may very roughly and rapidly divide these preliminary objectors into five sects; whom I will call the Euphemists, the Casuists, the Autocrats, the Precedenters, and the Endeavourers. When we have answered the immediate protestation of all these good, shouting, short-sighted people, we can begin to do justice to those intelligences that are really behind the idea.

Most Eugenists are Euphemists. I mean merely that short words startle them, while long words soothe them. And they are utterly incapable of translating the one into the other, however obviously they mean the same thing. Say to them “The persuasive and even coercive powers of the citizen should enable him to make sure that the burden of longevity in the previous generation does not become disproportionate and intolerable, especially to the females”; say this to them and they will sway slightly to and fro like babies sent to sleep in cradles. Say to them “Murder your mother,” and they sit up quite suddenly. Yet the two sentences, in cold logic, are exactly the same. Say to them “It is not improbable that a period may arrive when the narrow if once useful distinction between the anthropoid homo and the other animals, which has been modified on so many moral points, may be modified also even in regard to the important question of the extension of human diet”; say this to them, and beauty born of murmuring sound will pass into their face. But say to them, in a simple, manly, hearty way “Let’s eat a man!” and their surprise is quite surprising. Yet the sentences say just the same thing. Now, if anyone thinks these two instances extravagant, I will refer to two actual cases from the Eugenic discussions. When Sir Oliver Lodge spoke of the methods “of the stud-farm” many Eugenists exclaimed against the crudity of the suggestion. Yet long before that one of the ablest champions in the other interest had written “What nonsense this education is! Who could educate
a racehorse or a greyhound?” Which most certainly either means nothing, or the human stud–farm. Or again, when I spoke of people “being married forcibly by the police,” another distinguished Eugenist almost achieved high spirits in his hearty assurance that no such thing had ever come into their heads. Yet a few days after I saw a Eugenist pronouncement, to the effect that the State ought to extend its powers in this area. The State can only be that corporation which men permit to employ compulsion; and this area can only be the area of sexual selection. I mean somewhat more than an idle jest when I say that the policeman will generally be found in that area. But I willingly admit that the policeman who looks after weddings will be like the policeman who looks after wedding–presents. He will be in plain clothes. I do not mean that a man in blue with a helmet will drag the bride and bridegroom to the altar. I do mean that nobody that man in blue is told to arrest will even dare to come near the church. Sir Oliver did not mean that men would be tied up in stables and scrubbed down by grooms. He meant that they would undergo a less of liberty which to men is even more infamous. He meant that the only formula important to Eugenists would be “by Smith out of Jones.” Such a formula is one of the shortest in the world; and is certainly the shortest way with the Euphemists.

The next sect of superficial objectors is even more irritating. I have called them, for immediate purposes, the Casuists. Suppose I say “I dislike this spread of Cannibalism in the West End restaurants.” Somebody is sure to say “Well, after all, Queen Eleanor when she sucked blood from her husband’s arm was a cannibal.” What is one to say to such people? One can only say “Confine yourself to sucking poisoned blood from people’s arms, and I permit you to call yourself by the glorious title of Cannibal.” In this sense people say of Eugenics, “After all, whenever we discourage a schoolboy from marrying a mad negress with a hump back, we are really Eugenists.” Again one can only answer, “Confine yourselves strictly to such schoolboys as are naturally attracted to hump–backed negroes; and you may exult in the title of Eugenist, all the more proudly because that distinction will be rare.” But surely anyone’s common–sense must tell him that if Eugenics dealt only with such extravagant cases, it would be called common–sense—and not Eugenics. The human race has excluded such absurdities for unknown ages; and has never yet called it Eugenics. You may call it flogging when you hit a choking gentleman on the back; you may call it torture when a man unfreezes his fingers at the fire; but if you talk like that a little longer you will cease to live among living men. If nothing but this mad minimum of accident were involved, there would be no
such thing as a Eugenic Congress, and certainly no such thing as this book.

I had thought of calling the next sort of superficial people the Idealists; but I think this implies a humility towards impersonal good they hardly show; so I call them the Autocrats. They are those who give us generally to understand that every modern reform will “work” all right, because they will be there to see. Where they will be, and for how long, they do not explain very clearly. I do not mind their looking forward to numberless lives in succession; for that is the shadow of a human or divine hope. But even a theosophist does not expect to be a vast number of people at once. And these people most certainly propose to be responsible for a whole movement after it has left their hands. Each man promises to be about a thousand policemen. If you ask them how this or that will work, they will answer, “Oh, I would certainly insist on this”; or “I would never go so far as that”; as if they could return to this earth and do what no ghost has ever done quite successfully—force men to forsake their sins. Of these it is enough to say that they do not understand the nature of a law any more than the nature of a dog. If you let loose a law, it will do as a dog does. It will obey its own nature, not yours. Such sense as you have put into the law (or the dog) will be fulfilled. But you will not be able to fulfil a fragment of anything you have forgotten to put into it.

Along with such idealists should go the strange people who seem to think that you can consecrate and purify any campaign for ever by repeating the names of the abstract virtues that its better advocates had in mind. These people will say “So far from aiming at slavery, the Eugenists are seeking true liberty; liberty from disease and degeneracy, etc.” Or they will say “We can assure Mr. Chesterton that the Eugenists have no intention of segregating the harmless; justice and mercy are the very motto of—” etc. To this kind of thing perhaps the shortest answer is this. Many of those who speak thus are agnostic or generally unsympathetic to official religion. Suppose one of them said “The Church of England is full of hypocrisy.” What would he think of me if I answered, “I assure you that hypocrisy is condemned by every form of Christianity; and is particularly repudiated in the Prayer Book”? Suppose he said that the Church of Rome had been guilty of great cruelties. What would he think of me if I answered, “The Church is expressly bound to meekness and charity; and therefore cannot be cruel”? This kind of people need not detain us long. Then there are others whom I may call the Precedenters; who flourish particularly in Parliament. They are best represented by the solemn official who said the other day that he could not understand the clamour against the Feeble–Minded Bill, as


it only extended the principles of the old Lunacy Laws. To which again one can only answer “Quite so. It only extends the principles of the Lunacy Laws to persons without a trace of lunacy.” This lucid politician finds an old law, let us say, about keeping lepers in quarantine. He simply alters the word “lepers” to “long–nosed people,” and says blandly that the principle is the same.

Perhaps the weakest of all are those helpless persons whom I have called the Endeavourers. The prize specimen of them was another M.P. who defended the same Bill as “an honest attempt” to deal with a great evil: as if one had a right to dragoon and enslave one’s fellow citizens as a kind of chemical experiment; in a state of reverent agnosticism about what would come of it. But with this fatuous notion that one can deliberately establish the Inquisition or the Terror, and then faintly trust the larger hope, I shall have to deal more seriously in a subsequent chapter. It is enough to say here that the best thing the honest Endeavourer could do would be to make an honest attempt to know what he is doing. And not to do anything else until he has found out. Lastly, there is a class of controversialists so hopeless and futile that I have really failed to find a name for them. But whenever anyone attempts to argue rationally for or against any existent and recognisable thing, such as the Eugenic class of legislation, there are always people who begin to chop hay about Socialism and Individualism; and say “You object to all State interference; I am in favour of State interference. You are an Individualist; I, on the other hand,” etc. To which I can only answer, with heart–broken patience, that I am not an Individualist, but a poor fallen but baptised journalist who is trying to write a book about Eugenists, several of whom he has met; whereas he never met an Individualist, and is by no means certain he would recognise him if he did. In short, I do not deny, but strongly affirm, the right of the State to interfere to cure a great evil. I say that in this case it would interfere to create a great evil; and I am not going to be turned from the discussion of that direct issue to bottomless botherations about Socialism and Individualism, or the relative advantages of always turning to the right and always turning to the left.

And for the rest, there is undoubtedly an enormous mass of sensible, rather thoughtless people, whose rooted sentiment it is that any deep change in our society must be in some way infinitely distant. They cannot believe that men in hats and coats like themselves can be preparing a revolution; all their Victorian philosophy has taught them that such transformations are always slow. Therefore, when I speak of Eugenic legislation, or the coming of the Eugenic State, they think of it as something like The Time Machine or Looking Backward: a thing that, good or bad, will have to fit itself to their great–great–
great–grandchild, who may be very different and may like it; and who in any case is rather a distant relative. To all this I have, to begin with, a very short and simple answer. The Eugenic State has begun. The first of the Eugenic Laws has already been adopted by the Government of this country; and passed with the applause of both parties through the dominant House of Parliament. This first Eugenic Law clears the ground and may be said to proclaim negative Eugenics; but it cannot be defended, and nobody has attempted to defend it, except on the Eugenic theory. I will call it the Feeble–Minded Bill both for brevity and because the description is strictly accurate. It is, quite simply and literally, a Bill for incarcerating as madmen those whom no doctor will consent to call mad. It is enough if some doctor or other may happen to call them weak–minded. Since there is scarcely any human being to whom this term has not been conversationally applied by his own friends and relatives on some occasion or other (unless his friends and relatives have been lamentably lacking in spirit), it can be clearly seen that this law, like the early Christian Church (to which, however, it presents points of dissimilarity), is a net drawing in of all kinds. It must not be supposed that we have a stricter definition incorporated in the Bill. Indeed, the first definition of “feeble–minded” in the Bill was much looser and vaguer than the phrase “feeble–minded” itself. It is a piece of yawning idiocy about “persons who though capable of earning their living under favourable circumstances” (as if anyone could earn his living if circumstances were directly unfavourable to his doing so), are nevertheless “incapable of managing their affairs with proper prudence”; which is exactly what all the world and his wife are saying about their neighbours all over this planet. But as an incapacity for any kind of thought is now regarded as statesmanship, there is nothing so very novel about such slovenly drafting. What is novel and what is vital is this: that the defence of this crazy Coercion Act is a Eugenic defence. It is not only openly said, it is eagerly urged, that the aim of the measure is to prevent any person whom these propagandists do not happen to think intelligent from having any wife or children. Every tramp who is sulky, every labourer who is shy, every rustic who is eccentric, can quite easily be brought under such conditions as were designed for homicidal maniacs. That is the situation; and that is the point. England has forgotten the Feudal State; it is in the last anarchy of the Industrial State; there is much in Mr. Belloc’s theory that it is approaching the Servile State; it cannot at present get at the Distributive State; it has almost certainly missed the Socialist State. But we are already under the Eugenist State; and nothing remains to us but rebellion.
CHAPTER III

THE ANARCHY FROM ABOVE

A silent anarchy is eating out our society. I must pause upon the expression; because the true nature of anarchy is mostly misapprehended. It is not in the least necessary that anarchy should be violent; nor is it necessary that it should come from below. A government may grow anarchic as much as a people. The more sentimental sort of Tory uses the word anarchy as a mere term of abuse for rebellion; but he misses a most important intellectual distinction. Rebellion may be wrong and disastrous; but even when rebellion is wrong, it is never anarchy. When it is not self–defence, it is usurpation. It aims at setting up a new rule in place of the old rule. And while it cannot be anarchic in essence (because it has an aim), it certainly cannot be anarchic in method; for men must be organised when they fight; and the discipline in a rebel army has to be as good as the discipline in the royal army. This deep principle of distinction must be clearly kept in mind. Take for the sake of symbolism those two great spiritual stories which, whether we count them myths or mysteries, have so long been the two hinges of all European morals. The Christian who is inclined to sympathise generally with constituted authority will think of rebellion under the image of Satan, the rebel against God. But Satan, though a traitor, was not an anarchist. He claimed the crown of the cosmos; and had he prevailed, would have expected his rebel angels to give up rebelling. On the other hand, the Christian whose sympathies are more generally with just self–defence among the oppressed will think rather of Christ Himself defying the High Priests and scourging the rich traders. But whether or no Christ was (as some say) a Socialist, He most certainly was not an Anarchist. Christ, like Satan, claimed the throne. He set up a new authority against an old authority; but He set it up with positive commandments and a comprehensible scheme. In this light all mediæval people—indeed, all people until a little while ago—would have judged questions involving revolt. John Ball would have offered to pull down the government because it was a bad government, not because it was a government. Richard II. would have blamed Bolingbroke not as a disturber of the peace, but as a usurper. Anarchy, then, in the useful sense of the word, is a thing utterly distinct from any rebellion, right or wrong. It is not necessarily angry; it is not, in its first stages, at least, even necessarily painful. And, as I said before, it is often entirely silent.
Anarchy is that condition of mind or methods in which you cannot stop yourself. It is the loss of that self-control which can return to the normal. It is not anarchy because men are permitted to begin uproar, extravagance, experiment, peril. It is anarchy when people cannot end these things. It is not anarchy in the home if the whole family sits up all night on New Year’s Eve. It is anarchy in the home if members of the family sit up later and later for months afterwards. It was not anarchy in the Roman villa when, during the Saturnalia, the slaves turned masters or the masters slaves. It was (from the slave-owners’ point of view) anarchy if, after the Saturnalia, the slaves continued to behave in a Saturnalian manner; but it is historically evident that they did not. It is not anarchy to have a picnic; but it is anarchy to lose all memory of mealtimes. It would, I think, be anarchy if (as is the disgusting suggestion of some) we all took what we liked off the sideboard. That is the way swine would eat if swine had sideboards; they have no immovable feasts; they are uncommonly progressive, are swine. It is this inability to return within rational limits after a legitimate extravagance that is the really dangerous disorder. The modern world is like Niagara. It is magnificent, but it is not strong. It is as weak as water—like Niagara. The objection to a cataract is not that it is deafening or dangerous or even destructive; it is that it cannot stop. Now it is plain that this sort of chaos can possess the powers that rule a society as easily as the society so ruled. And in modern England it is the powers that rule who are chiefly possessed by it—who are truly possessed by devils. The phrase, in its sound old psychological sense, is not too strong. The State has suddenly and quietly gone mad. It is talking nonsense; and it can’t stop.

Now it is perfectly plain that government ought to have, and must have, the same sort of right to use exceptional methods occasionally that the private householder has to have a picnic or to sit up all night on New Year’s Eve. The State, like the householder, is sane if it can treat such exceptions as exceptions. Such desperate remedies may not even be right; but such remedies are endurable as long as they are admittedly desperate. Such cases, of course, are the communism of food in a besieged city; the official disavowal of an arrested spy; the subjection of a patch of civil life to martial law; the cutting of communication in a plague; or that deepest degradation of the commonwealth, the use of national soldiers not against foreign soldiers, but against their own brethren in revolt. Of these exceptions some are right and some wrong; but all are right in so far as they are taken as exceptions. The modern world is insane, not so much because it admits the abnormal as because it cannot recover the
normal.

We see this in the vague extension of punishments like imprisonment; often the very reformers who admit that prison is bad for people propose to reform them by a little more of it. We see it in panic legislation like that after the White Slave scare, when the torture of flogging was revived for all sorts of ill defined and vague and variegated types of men. Our fathers were never so mad, even when they were torturers. They stretched the man out on the rack. They did not stretch the rack out, as we are doing. When men went witch-burning they may have seen witches everywhere—because their minds were fixed on witchcraft. But they did not see things to burn everywhere, because their minds were unfixed. While tying some very unpopular witch to the stake, with the firm conviction that she was a spiritual tyranny and pestilence, they did not say to each other, “A little burning is what my Aunt Susan wants, to cure her of back-biting,” or “Some of these faggots would do your Cousin James good, and teach him to play with poor girls’ affections.”

Now the name of all this is Anarchy. It not only does not know what it wants, but it does not even know what it hates. It multiplies excessively in the more American sort of English newspapers. When this new sort of New Englander burns a witch the whole prairie catches fire. These people have not the decision and detachment of the doctrinal ages. They cannot do a monstrous action and still see it is monstrous. Wherever they make a stride they make a rut. They cannot stop their own thoughts, though their thoughts are pouring into the pit.

A final instance, which can be sketched much more briefly, can be found in this general fact: that the definition of almost every crime has become more and more indefinite, and spreads like a flattening and thinning cloud over larger and larger landscapes. Cruelty to children, one would have thought, was a thing about as unmistakable, unusual and appalling as parricide. In its application it has come to cover almost every negligence that can occur in a needy household. The only distinction is, of course, that these negligences are punished in the poor, who generally can’t help them, and not in the rich, who generally can. But that is not the point I am arguing just now. The point here is that a crime we all instinctively connect with Herod on the bloody night of Innocents has come precious near being attributable to Mary and Joseph when they lost their child in the Temple. In the light of a fairly recent case (the confessedly kind mother who was lately jailed because her confessedly healthy children had no water to wash in) no one, I think, will call this an illegitimate literary exaggeration. Now this is exactly as if all the horror and heavy punishment, attached in the simplest tribes
to parricide, could now be used against any son who had done any act that could colourably be supposed to have worried his father, and so affected his health. Few of us would be safe.

Another case out of hundreds is the loose extension of the idea of libel. Libel cases bear no more trace of the old and just anger against the man who bore false witness against his neighbour than “cruelty” cases do of the old and just horror of the parents that hated their own flesh. A libel case has become one of the sports of the less athletic rich—a variation on baccarat, a game of chance. A music-hall actress got damages for a song that was called “vulgar,” which is as if I could fine or imprison my neighbour for calling my handwriting “rococo.” A politician got huge damages because he was said to have spoken to children about Tariff Reform; as if that seductive topic would corrupt their virtue, like an indecent story. Sometimes libel is defined as anything calculated to hurt a man in his business; in which case any new tradesman calling himself a grocer slanders the grocer opposite. All this, I say, is Anarchy; for it is clear that its exponents possess no power of distinction, or sense of proportion, by which they can draw the line between calling a woman a popular singer and calling her a bad lot; or between charging a man with leading infants to Protection and leading them to sin and shame. But the vital point to which to return is this. That it is not necessarily, nor even specially, an anarchy in the populace. It is an anarchy in the organ of government. It is the magistrates—voices of the governing class—who cannot distinguish between cruelty and carelessness. It is the judges (and their very submissive special juries) who cannot see the difference between opinion and slander. And it is the highly placed and highly paid experts who have brought in the first Eugenic Law, the Feeble-Minded Bill—thus showing that they can see no difference between a mad and a sane man.

That, to begin with, is the historic atmosphere in which this thing was born. It is a peculiar atmosphere, and luckily not likely to last. Real progress bears the same relation to it that a happy girl laughing bears to an hysterical girl who cannot stop laughing. But I have described this atmosphere first because it is the only atmosphere in which such a thing as the Eugenist legislation could be proposed among men. All other ages would have called it to some kind of logical account, however academic or narrow. The lowest sophist in the Greek schools would remember enough of Socrates to force the Eugenist to tell him (at least) whether Midias was segregated because he was curable or because he was incurable. The meanest Thomist of the mediæval monasteries would have the sense to see that you cannot discuss a madman when you have not discussed a
man. The most owlish Calvinist commentator in the seventeenth century would ask the Eugenist to reconcile such Bible texts as derided fools with the other Bible texts that praised them. The dullest shopkeeper in Paris in 1790 would have asked what were the Rights of Man, if they did not include the rights of the lover, the husband, and the father. It is only in our own London Particular (as Mr. Guppy said of the fog) that small figures can loom so large in the vapour, and even mingle with quite different figures, and have the appearance of a mob. But, above all, I have dwelt on the telescopic quality in these twilight avenues, because unless the reader realises how elastic and unlimited they are, he simply will not believe in the abominations we have to combat.

One of those wise old fairy tales, that come from nowhere and flourish everywhere, tells how a man came to own a small magic machine like a coffee-mill, which would grind anything he wanted when he said one word and stop when he said another. After performing marvels (which I wish my conscience would let me put into this book for padding) the mill was merely asked to grind a few grains of salt at an officers’ mess on board ship; for salt is the type everywhere of small luxury and exaggeration, and sailors’ tales should be taken with a grain of it. The man remembered the word that started the salt mill, and then, touching the word that stopped it, suddenly remembered that he forgot. The tall ship sank, laden and sparkling to the topmasts with salt like Arctic snows; but the mad mill was still grinding at the ocean bottom, where all the men lay drowned. And that (so says this fairy tale) is why the great waters about our world have a bitter taste. For the fairy tales knew what the modern mystics don’t—that one should not let loose either the supernatural or the natural.
CHAPTER IV

THE LUNATIC AND THE LAW

The modern evil, we have said, greatly turns on this: that people do not see that the exception proves the rule. Thus it may or may not be right to kill a murderer; but it can only conceivably be right to kill a murderer because it is wrong to kill a man. If the hangman, having got his hand in, proceeded to hang friends and relatives to his taste and fancy, he would (intellectually) unhang the first man, though the first man might not think so. Or thus again, if you say an insane man is irresponsible, you imply that a sane man is responsible. He is responsible for the insane man. And the attempt of the Eugenists and other fatalists to treat all men as irresponsible is the largest and flattest folly in philosophy. The Eugenist has to treat everybody, including himself, as an exception to a rule that isn’t there.

The Eugenists, as a first move, have extended the frontiers of the lunatic asylum: let us take this as our definite starting point, and ask ourselves what lunacy is, and what is its fundamental relation to human society. Now that raw juvenile scepticism that clogs all thought with catchwords may often be heard to remark that the mad are only the minority, the sane only the majority. There is a neat exactitude about such people’s nonsense; they seem to miss the point by magic. The mad are not a minority because they are not a corporate body; and that is what their madness means. The sane are not a majority; they are mankind. And mankind (as its name would seem to imply) is a kind, not a degree. In so far as the lunatic differs, he differs from all minorities and majorities in kind. The madman who thinks he is a knife cannot go into partnership with the other who thinks he is a fork. There is no trysting place outside reason; there is no inn on those wild roads that are beyond the world.

The madman is not he that defies the world. The saint, the criminal, the martyr, the cynic, the nihilist may all defy the world quite sanely. And even if such fanatics would destroy the world, the world owes them a strictly fair trial according to proof and public law. But the madman is not the man who defies the world; he is the man who denies it. Suppose we are all standing round a field and looking at a tree in the middle of it. It is perfectly true that we all see it (as the decadents say) in infinitely different aspects: that is not the point; the point is that we all say it is a tree. Suppose, if you will, that we are all poets, which
seems improbable; so that each of us could turn his aspect into a vivid image distinct from a tree. Suppose one says it looks like a green cloud and another like a green fountain, and a third like a green dragon and the fourth like a green cheese. The fact remains: that they all say it looks like these things. It is a tree. Nor are any of the poets in the least mad because of any opinions they may form, however frenzied, about the functions or future of the tree. A conservative poet may wish to clip the tree; a revolutionary poet may wish to burn it. An optimist poet may want to make it a Christmas tree and hang candles on it. A pessimist poet may want to hang himself on it. None of these are mad, because they are all talking about the same thing. But there is another man who is talking horribly about something else. There is a monstrous exception to mankind. Why he is so we know not; a new theory says it is heredity; an older theory says it is devils. But in any case, the spirit of it is the spirit that denies, the spirit that really denies realities. This is the man who looks at the tree and does not say it looks like a lion, but says that it is a lamp–post.

I do not mean that all mad delusions are as concrete as this, though some are more concrete. Believing your own body is glass is a more daring denial of reality than believing a tree is a glass lamp at the top of a pole. But all true delusions have in them this unalterable assertion—that what is not is. The difference between us and the maniac is not about how things look or how things ought to look, but about what they self–evidently are. The lunatic does not say that he ought to be King; Perkin Warbeck might say that. He says he is King. The lunatic does not say he is as wise as Shakespeare; Bernard Shaw might say that. The lunatic says he is Shakespeare. The lunatic does not say he is divine in the same sense as Christ; Mr. R.J. Campbell would say that. The lunatic says he is Christ. In all cases the difference is a difference about what is there; not a difference touching what should be done about it.

For this reason, and for this alone, the lunatic is outside public law. This is the abysmal difference between him and the criminal. The criminal admits the facts, and therefore permits us to appeal to the facts. We can so arrange the facts around him that he may really understand that agreement is in his own interests. We can say to him, “Do not steal apples from this tree, or we will hang you on that tree.” But if the man really thinks one tree is a lamp–post and the other tree a Trafalgar Square fountain, we simply cannot treat with him at all. It is obviously useless to say, “Do not steal apples from this lamp–post, or I will hang you on that fountain.” If a man denies the facts, there is no answer but to lock him up. He cannot speak our language: not that varying verbal language which
often misses fire even with us, but that enormous alphabet of sun and moon and green grass and blue sky in which alone we meet, and by which alone we can signal to each other. That unique man of genius, George Macdonald, described in one of his weird stories two systems of space co-incident; so that where I knew there was a piano standing in a drawing-room you knew there was a rose-bush growing in a garden. Something of this sort is in small or great affairs the matter with the madman. He cannot have a vote, because he is the citizen of another country. He is a foreigner. Nay, he is an invader and an enemy; for the city he lives in has been super-imposed on ours.

Now these two things are primarily to be noted in his case. First, that we can only condemn him to a general doom, because we only know his general nature. All criminals, who do particular things for particular reasons (things and reasons which, however criminal, are always comprehensible), have been more and more tried for such separate actions under separate and suitable laws ever since Europe began to become a civilisation—and until the rare and recent re-incursions of barbarism in such things as the Indeterminate Sentence. Of that I shall speak later; it is enough for this argument to point out the plain facts. It is the plain fact that every savage, every sultan, every outlawed baron, every brigand-chief has always used this instrument of the Indeterminate Sentence, which has been recently offered us as something highly scientific and humane. All these people, in short, being barbarians, have always kept their captives captive until they (the barbarians) chose to think the captives were in a fit frame of mind to come out. It is also the plain fact that all that has been called civilisation or progress, justice or liberty, for nearly three thousand years, has had the general direction of treating even the captive as a free man, in so far as some clear case of some defined crime had to be shown against him. All law has meant allowing the criminal, within some limits or other, to argue with the law: as Job was allowed, or rather challenged, to argue with God. But the criminal is, among civilised men, tried by one law for one crime for a perfectly simple reason: that the motive of the crime, like the meaning of the law, is conceivable to the common intelligence. A man is punished specially as a burglar, and not generally as a bad man, because a man may be a burglar and in many other respects not be a bad man. The act of burglary is punishable because it is intelligible. But when acts are unintelligible, we can only refer them to a general untrustworthiness, and guard against them by a general restraint. If a man breaks into a house to get a piece of bread, we can appeal to his reason in various ways. We can hang him for housebreaking; or again (as has occurred to some daring
thinkers) we can give him a piece of bread. But if he breaks in, let us say, to steal the parings of other people’s finger nails, then we are in a difficulty: we cannot imagine what he is going to do with them, and therefore cannot easily imagine what we are going to do with him. If a villain comes in, in cloak and mask, and puts a little arsenic in the soup, we can collar him and say to him distinctly, “You are guilty of Murder; and I will now consult the code of tribal law, under which we live, to see if this practice is not forbidden.” But if a man in the same cloak and mask is found at midnight putting a little soda–water in the soup, what can we say? Our charge necessarily becomes a more general one. We can only observe, with a moderation almost amounting to weakness, “You seem to be the sort of person who will do this sort of thing.” And then we can lock him up. The principle of the indeterminate sentence is the creation of the indeterminate mind. It does apply to the incomprehensible creature, the lunatic. And it applies to nobody else.

The second thing to be noted is this: that it is only by the unanimity of sane men that we can condemn this man as utterly separate. If he says a tree is a lamp–post he is mad; but only because all other men say it is a tree. If some men thought it was a tree with a lamp on it, and others thought it was a lamp–post wreathed with branches and vegetation, then it would be a matter of opinion and degree; and he would not be mad, but merely extreme. Certainly he would not be mad if nobody but a botanist could see it was a tree. Certainly his enemies might be madder than he, if nobody but a lamplighter could see it was not a lamp–post. And similarly a man is not imbecile if only a Eugenist thinks so. The question then raised would not be his sanity, but the sanity of one botanist or one lamplighter or one Eugenist. That which can condemn the abnormally foolish is not the abnormally clever, which is obviously a matter in dispute. That which can condemn the abnormally foolish is the normally foolish. It is when he begins to say and do things that even stupid people do not say or do, that we have a right to treat him as the exception and not the rule. It is only because we none of us profess to be anything more than man that we have authority to treat him as something less.

Now the first principle behind Eugenics becomes plain enough. It is the proposal that somebody or something should criticise men with the same superiority with which men criticise madmen. It might exercise this right with great moderation; but I am not here talking about the exercise, but about the right. Its claim certainly is to bring all human life under the Lunacy Laws.

Now this is the first weakness in the case of the Eugenists: that they cannot
define who is to control whom; they cannot say by what authority they do these things. They cannot see the exception is different from the rule—even when it is misrule, even when it is an unruly rule. The sound sense in the old Lunacy Law was this: that you cannot deny that a man is a citizen until you are practically prepared to deny that he is a man. Men, and only men, can be the judges of whether he is a man. But any private club of prigs can be judges of whether he ought to be a citizen. When once we step down from that tall and splintered peak of pure insanity we step on to a tableland where one man is not so widely different from another. Outside the exception, what we find is the average. And the practical, legal shape of the quarrel is this: that unless the normal men have the right to expel the abnormal, what particular sort of abnormal men have the right to expel the normal men? If sanity is not good enough, what is there that is saner than sanity?

Without any grip of the notion of a rule and an exception, the general idea of judging people’s heredity breaks down and is useless. For this reason: that if everything is the result of a doubtful heredity, the judgment itself is the result of a doubtful heredity also. Let it judge not that it be not judged. Eugenists, strange to say, have fathers and mothers like other people; and our opinion about their fathers and mothers is worth exactly as much as their opinions about ours. None of the parents were lunatics, and the rest is mere likes and dislikes. Suppose Dr. Saleeby had gone up to Byron and said, “My lord, I perceive you have a club-foot and inordinate passions: such are the hereditary results of a profligate soldier marrying a hot-tempered woman.” The poet might logically reply (with characteristic lucidity and impropriety), “Sir, I perceive you have a confused mind and an unphilosophic theory about other people’s love affairs. Such are the hereditary delusions bred by a Syrian doctor marrying a Quaker lady from York.” Suppose Dr. Karl Pearson had said to Shelley, “From what I see of your temperament, you are running great risks in forming a connection with the daughter of a fanatic and eccentric like Godwin.” Shelley would be employing the strict rationalism of the older and stronger free thinkers, if he answered, “From what I observe of your mind, you are rushing on destruction in marrying the great-niece of an old corpse of a courtier and dilettante like Samuel Rogers.” It is only opinion for opinion. Nobody can pretend that either Mary Godwin or Samuel Rogers was mad; and the general view a man may hold about the healthiness of inheriting their blood or type is simply the same sort of general view by which men do marry for love or liking. There is no reason to suppose that Dr. Karl Pearson is any better judge of a bridegroom than the bridegroom is
of a bride.

An objection may be anticipated here, but it is very easily answered. It may be said that we do, in fact, call in medical specialists to settle whether a man is mad; and that these specialists go by technical and even secret tests that cannot be known to the mass of men. It is obvious that this is true; it is equally obvious that it does not affect our argument. When we ask the doctor whether our grandfather is going mad, we still mean mad by our own common human definition. We mean, is he going to be a certain sort of person whom all men recognise when once he exists. That certain specialists can detect the approach of him, before he exists, does not alter the fact that it is of the practical and popular madman that we are talking, and of him alone. The doctor merely sees a certain fact potentially in the future, while we, with less information, can only see it in the present; but his fact is our fact and everybody’s fact, or we should not bother about it at all. Here is no question of the doctor bringing an entirely new sort of person under coercion, as in the Feeble–Minded Bill. The doctor can say, “Tobacco is death to you,” because the dislike of death can be taken for granted, being a highly democratic institution; and it is the same with the dislike of the indubitable exception called madness. The doctor can say, “Jones has that twitch in the nerves, and he may burn down the house.” But it is not the medical detail we fear, but the moral upshot. We should say, “Let him twitch, as long as he doesn’t burn down the house.” The doctor may say, “He has that look in the eyes, and he may take the hatchet and brain you all.” But we do not object to the look in the eyes as such; we object to consequences which, once come, we should all call insane if there were no doctors in the world. We should say, “Let him look how he likes; as long as he does not look for the hatchet.”

Now, that specialists are valuable for this particular and practical purpose, of predicting the approach of enormous and admitted human calamities, nobody but a fool would deny. But that does not bring us one inch nearer to allowing them the right to define what is a calamity; or to call things calamities which common sense does not call calamities. We call in the doctor to save us from death; and, death being admittedly an evil, he has the right to administer the queerest and most recondite pill which he may think is a cure for all such menaces of death. He has not the right to administer death, as the cure for all human ills. And as he has no moral authority to enforce a new conception of happiness, so he has no moral authority to enforce a new conception of sanity. He may know I am going mad; for madness is an isolated thing like leprosy; and I know nothing about leprosy. But if he merely thinks my mind is weak, I may happen to think the
same of his. I often do.

In short, unless pilots are to be permitted to ram ships on to the rocks and then say that heaven is the only true harbour; unless judges are to be allowed to let murderers loose, and explain afterwards that the murder had done good on the whole; unless soldiers are to be allowed to lose battles and then point out that true glory is to be found in the valley of humiliation; unless cashiers are to rob a bank in order to give it an advertisement; or dentists to torture people to give them a contrast to their comforts; unless we are prepared to let loose all these private fancies against the public and accepted meaning of life or safety or prosperity or pleasure—then it is as plain as Punch’s nose that no scientific man must be allowed to meddle with the public definition of madness. We call him in to tell us where it is or when it is. We could not do so, if we had not ourselves settled what it is.

As I wish to confine myself in this chapter to the primary point of the plain existence of sanity and insanity, I will not be led along any of the attractive paths that open here. I shall endeavour to deal with them in the next chapter. Here I confine myself to a sort of summary. Suppose a man’s throat has been cut, quite swiftly and suddenly, with a table knife, at a small table where we sit. The whole of civil law rests on the supposition that we are witnesses; that we saw it; and if we do not know about it, who does? Now suppose all the witnesses fall into a quarrel about degrees of eyesight. Suppose one says he had brought his reading—glasses instead of his usual glasses; and therefore did not see the man fall across the table and cover it with blood. Suppose another says he could not be certain it was blood, because a slight colour-blindness was hereditary in his family. Suppose a third says he cannot swear to the uplifted knife, because his oculist tells him he is astigmatic, and vertical lines do not affect him as do horizontal lines. Suppose another says that dots have often danced before his eyes in very fantastic combinations, many of which were very like one gentleman cutting another gentleman’s throat at dinner. All these things refer to real experiences. There is such a thing as myopia; there is such a thing as colour-blindness; there is such a thing as astigmatism; there is such a thing as shifting shapes swimming before the eyes. But what should we think of a whole dinner party that could give nothing except these highly scientific explanations when found in company with a corpse? I imagine there are only two things we could think: either that they were all drunk, or they were all murderers.

And yet there is an exception. If there were one man at table who was admittedly blind, should we not give him the benefit of the doubt? Should we
not honestly feel that he was the exception that proved the rule? The very fact that he could not have seen would remind us that the other men must have seen. The very fact that he had no eyes must remind us of eyes. A man can be blind; a man can be dead; a man can be mad. But the comparison is necessarily weak, after all. For it is the essence of madness to be unlike anything else in the world: which is perhaps why so many men wiser than we have traced it to another.

Lastly, the literal maniac is different from all other persons in dispute in this vital respect: that he is the only person whom we can, with a final lucidity, declare that we do not want. He is almost always miserable himself, and he always makes others miserable. But this is not so with the mere invalid. The Eugenists would probably answer all my examples by taking the case of marrying into a family with consumption (or some such disease which they are fairly sure is hereditary) and asking whether such cases at least are not clear cases for a Eugenic intervention. Permit me to point out to them that they once more make a confusion of thought. The sickness or soundness of a consumptive may be a clear and calculable matter. The happiness or unhappiness of a consumptive is quite another matter, and is not calculable at all. What is the good of telling people that if they marry for love, they may be punished by being the parents of Keats or the parents of Stevenson? Keats died young; but he had more pleasure in a minute than a Eugenist gets in a month. Stevenson had lung-trouble; and it may, for all I know, have been perceptible to the Eugenic eye even a generation before. But who would perform that illegal operation: the stopping of Stevenson? Intercepting a letter bursting with good news, confiscating a hamper full of presents and prizes, pouring torrents of intoxicating wine into the sea, all this is a faint approximation for the Eugenic inaction of the ancestors of Stevenson. This, however, is not the essential point; with Stevenson it is not merely a case of the pleasure we get, but of the pleasure he got. If he had died without writing a line, he would have had more red-hot joy than is given to most men. Shall I say of him, to whom I owe so much, let the day perish wherein he was born? Shall I pray that the stars of the twilight thereof be dark and it be not numbered among the days of the year, because it shut not up the doors of his mother’s womb? I respectfully decline; like Job, I will put my hand upon my mouth.
CHAPTER V

THE FLYING AUTHORITY

It happened one day that an atheist and a man were standing together on a doorstep; and the atheist said, “It is raining.” To which the man replied, “What is raining?”: which question was the beginning of a violent quarrel and a lasting friendship. I will not touch upon any heads of the dispute, which doubtless included Jupiter Pluvius, the Neuter Gender, Pantheism, Noah’s Ark, Mackintoshes, and the Passive Mood; but I will record the one point upon which the two persons emerged in some agreement. It was that there is such a thing as an atheistic literary style; that materialism may appear in the mere diction of a man, though he be speaking of clocks or cats or anything quite remote from theology. The mark of the atheistic style is that it instinctively chooses the word which suggests that things are dead things; that things have no souls. Thus they will not speak of waging war, which means willing it; they speak of the “outbreak of war,” as if all the guns blew up without the men touching them. Thus those Socialists that are atheist will not call their international sympathy, sympathy; they will call it “solidarity,” as if the poor men of France and Germany were physically stuck together like dates in a grocer’s shop. The same Marxian Socialists are accused of cursing the Capitalists inordinately; but the truth is that they let the Capitalists off much too easily. For instead of saying that employers pay less wages, which might pin the employers to some moral responsibility, they insist on talking about the “rise and fall” of wages; as if a vast silver sea of sixpences and shillings was always going up and down automatically like the real sea at Margate. Thus they will not speak of reform, but of development; and they spoil their one honest and virile phrase, “the class war,” by talking of it as no one in his wits can talk of a war, predicting its finish and final result as one calculates the coming of Christmas Day or the taxes. Thus, lastly (as we shall see touching our special subject–matter here) the atheist style in letters always avoids talking of love or lust, which are things alive, and calls marriage or concubinage “the relations of the sexes”; as if a man and a woman were two wooden objects standing in a certain angle and attitude to each other, like a table and a chair.

Now the same anarchic mystery that clings round the phrase, “il pleut,” clings round the phrase, “il faut.” In English it is generally represented by the passive
mood in grammar, and the Eugenists and their like deal especially in it; they are as passive in their statements as they are active in their experiments. Their sentences always enter tail first, and have no subject, like animals without heads. It is never “the doctor should cut off this leg” or “the policeman should collar that man.” It is always “Such limbs should be amputated,” or “Such men should be under restraint.” Hamlet said, “I should have fatted all the region kites with this slave’s offal.” The Eugenist would say, “The region kites should, if possible, be fattened; and the offal of this slave is available for the dietetic experiment.” Lady Macbeth said, “Give me the daggers; I’ll let his bowels out.” The Eugenist would say, “In such cases the bowels should, etc.” Do not blame me for the repulsiveness of the comparisons. I have searched English literature for the most decent parallels to Eugenist language.

The formless god that broods over the East is called “Om.” The formless god who has begun to brood over the West is called “On.” But here we must make a distinction. The impersonal word on is French, and the French have a right to use it, because they are a democracy. And when a Frenchman says “one” he does not mean himself, but the normal citizen. He does not mean merely “one,” but one and all. “On n’a que sa parole” does not mean “Noblesse oblige,” or “I am the Duke of Billingsgate and must keep my word.” It means: “One has a sense of honour as one has a backbone: every man, rich or poor, should feel honourable”; and this, whether possible or no, is the purest ambition of the republic. But when the Eugenists say, “Conditions must be altered” or “Ancestry should be investigated,” or what not, it seems clear that they do not mean that the democracy must do it, whatever else they may mean. They do not mean that any man not evidently mad may be trusted with these tests and re–arrangements, as the French democratic system trusts such a man with a vote or a farm or the control of a family. That would mean that Jones and Brown, being both ordinary men, would set about arranging each other’s marriages. And this state of affairs would seem a little elaborate, and it might occur even to the Eugenic mind that if Jones and Brown are quite capable of arranging each other’s marriages, it is just possible that they might be capable of arranging their own.

This dilemma, which applies in so simple a case, applies equally to any wide and sweeping system of Eugenist voting; for though it is true that the community can judge more dispassionately than a man can judge in his own case, this particular question of the choice of a wife is so full of disputable shades in every conceivable case, that it is surely obvious that almost any democracy would simply vote the thing out of the sphere of voting, as they would any proposal of
police interference in the choice of walking weather or of children’s names. I should not like to be the politician who should propose a particular instance of Eugenics to be voted on by the French people. Democracy dismissed, it is here hardly needful to consider the other old models. Modern scientists will not say that George III., in his lucid intervals, should settle who is mad; or that the aristocracy that introduced gout shall supervise diet.

I hold it clear, therefore, if anything is clear about the business, that the Eugenists do not merely mean that the mass of common men should settle each other’s marriages between them; the question remains, therefore, whom they do instinctively trust when they say that this or that ought to be done. What is this flying and evanescent authority that vanishes wherever we seek to fix it? Who is the man who is the lost subject that governs the Eugenist’s verb? In a large number of cases I think we can simply say that the individual Eugenist means himself, and nobody else. Indeed one Eugenist, Mr. A.H. Huth, actually had a sense of humour, and admitted this. He thinks a great deal of good could be done with a surgical knife, if we would only turn him loose with one. And this may be true. A great deal of good could be done with a loaded revolver, in the hands of a judicious student of human nature. But it is imperative that the Eugenist should perceive that on that principle we can never get beyond a perfect balance of different sympathies and antipathies. I mean that I should differ from Dr. Saleeby or Dr. Karl Pearson not only in a vast majority of individual cases, but in a vast majority of cases in which they would be bound to admit that such a difference was natural and reasonable. The chief victim of these famous doctors would be a yet more famous doctor: that eminent though unpopular practitioner, Dr. Fell.

To show that such rational and serious differences do exist, I will take one instance from that Bill which proposed to protect families and the public generally from the burden of feeble-minded persons. Now, even if I could share the Eugenic contempt for human rights, even if I could start gaily on the Eugenic campaign, I should not begin by removing feeble-minded persons. I have known as many families in as many classes as most men; and I cannot remember meeting any very monstrous human suffering arising out of the presence of such insufficient and negative types. There seem to be comparatively few of them; and those few by no means the worst burdens upon domestic happiness. I do not hear of them often; I do not hear of them doing much more harm than good; and in the few cases I know well they are not only regarded with human affection, but can be put to certain limited forms of human use. Even if I were a Eugenist,
then I should not personally elect to waste my time locking up the feeble-minded. The people I should lock up would be the strong-minded. I have known hardly any cases of mere mental weakness making a family a failure; I have known eight or nine cases of violent and exaggerated force of character making a family a hell. If the strong-minded could be segregated it would quite certainly be better for their friends and families. And if there is really anything in heredity, it would be better for posterity too. For the kind of egoist I mean is a madman in a much more plausible sense than the mere harmless “deficient”; and to hand on the horrors of his anarchic and insatiable temperament is a much graver responsibility than to leave a mere inheritance of childishness. I would not arrest such tyrants, because I think that even moral tyranny in a few homes is better than a medical tyranny turning the state into a madhouse. I would not segregate them, because I respect a man’s free-will and his front-door and his right to be tried by his peers. But since free-will is believed by Eugenists no more than by Calvinists, since front-doors are respected by Eugenists no more than by house-breakers, and since the Habeas Corpus is about as sacred to Eugenists as it would be to King John, why do not they bring light and peace into so many human homes by removing a demoniac from each of them? Why do not the promoters of the Feeble-Minded Bill call at the many grand houses in town or country where such nightmares notoriously are? Why do they not knock at the door and take the bad squire away? Why do they not ring the bell and remove the dipsomaniac prize-fighter? I do not know; and there is only one reason I can think of, which must remain a matter of speculation. When I was at school, the kind of boy who liked teasing half-wits was not the sort that stood up to bullies.

That, however it may be, does not concern my argument. I mention the case of the strong-minded variety of the monstrous merely to give one out of the hundred cases of the instant divergence of individual opinions the moment we begin to discuss who is fit or unfit to propagate. If Dr. Saleeby and I were setting out on a segregating trip together, we should separate at the very door; and if he had a thousand doctors with him, they would all go different ways. Everyone who has known as many kind and capable doctors as I have, knows that the ablest and sanest of them have a tendency to possess some little hobby or half-discovery of their own, as that oranges are bad for children, or that trees are dangerous in gardens, or that many more people ought to wear spectacles. It is asking too much of human nature to expect them not to cherish such scraps of originality in a hard, dull, and often heroic trade. But the inevitable result of it, as exercised by the individual Saleebys, would be that each man would have his
favourite kind of idiot. Each doctor would be mad on his own madman. One would have his eye on devotional curates; another would wander about collecting obstreperous majors; a third would be the terror of animal–loving spinsters, who would flee with all their cats and dogs before him. Short of sheer literal anarchy, therefore, it seems plain that the Eugenist must find some authority other than his own implied personality. He must, once and for all, learn the lesson which is hardest for him and me and for all our fallen race—the fact that he is only himself.

We now pass from mere individual men who obviously cannot be trusted, even if they are individual medical men, with such despotism over their neighbours; and we come to consider whether the Eugenists have at all clearly traced any more imaginable public authority, any apparatus of great experts or great examinations to which such risks of tyranny could be trusted. They are not very precise about this either; indeed, the great difficulty I have throughout in considering what are the Eugenist’s proposals is that they do not seem to know themselves. Some philosophic attitude which I cannot myself connect with human reason seems to make them actually proud of the dimness of their definitions and the uncompleteness of their plans. The Eugenic optimism seems to partake generally of the nature of that dazzled and confused confidence, so common in private theatricals, that it will be all right on the night. They have all the ancient despotism, but none of the ancient dogmatism. If they are ready to reproduce the secceries and cruelties of the Inquisition, at least we cannot accuse them of offending us with any of that close and complicated thought, that arid and exact logic which narrowed the minds of the Middle Ages; they have discovered how to combine the hardening of the heart with a sympathetic softening of the head. Nevertheless, there is one large, though vague, idea of the Eugenists, which is an idea, and which we reach when we reach this problem of a more general supervision.

It was best presented perhaps by the distinguished doctor who wrote the article on these matters in that composite book which Mr. Wells edited, and called “The Great State.” He said the doctor should no longer be a mere plasterer of paltry maladies, but should be, in his own words, “the health adviser of the community.” The same can be expressed with even more point and simplicity in the proverb that prevention is better than cure. Commenting on this, I said that it amounted to treating all people who are well as if they were ill. This the writer admitted to be true, only adding that everyone is ill. To which I rejoin that if everyone is ill the health adviser is ill too, and therefore cannot know how to
cure that minimum of illness. This is the fundamental fallacy in the whole business of preventive medicine. Prevention is not better than cure. Cutting off a man’s head is not better than curing his headache; it is not even better than failing to cure it. And it is the same if a man is in revolt, even a morbid revolt. Taking the heart out of him by slavery is not better than leaving the heart in him, even if you leave it a broken heart. Prevention is not only not better than cure; prevention is even worse than disease. Prevention means being an invalid for life, with the extra exasperation of being quite well. I will ask God, but certainly not man, to prevent me in all my doings. But the decisive and discussable form of this is well summed up in that phrase about the health adviser of society. I am sure that those who speak thus have something in their minds larger and more illuminating than the other two propositions we have considered. They do not mean that all citizens should decide, which would mean merely the present vague and dubious balance. They do not mean that all medical men should decide, which would mean a much more unbalanced balance. They mean that a few men might be found who had a consistent scheme and vision of a healthy nation, as Napoleon had a consistent scheme and vision of an army. It is cold anarchy to say that all men are to meddle in all men’s marriages. It is cold anarchy to say that any doctor may seize and segregate anyone he likes. But it is not anarchy to say that a few great hygienists might enclose or limit the life of all citizens, as nurses do with a family of children. It is not anarchy, it is tyranny; but tyranny is a workable thing. When we ask by what process such men could be certainly chosen, we are back again on the old dilemma of despotism, which means a man, or democracy which means men, or aristocracy which means favouritism. But as a vision the thing is plausible and even rational. It is rational, and it is wrong.

It is wrong, quite apart from the suggestion that an expert on health cannot be chosen. It is wrong because an expert on health cannot exist. An expert on disease can exist, for the very reason we have already considered in the case of madness, because experts can only arise out of exceptional things. A parallel with any of the other learned professions will make the point plain. If I am prosecuted for trespass, I will ask my solicitor which of the local lanes I am forbidden to walk in. But if my solicitor, having gained my case, were so elated that he insisted on settling what lanes I should walk in; if he asked me to let him map out all my country walks, because he was the perambulatory adviser of the community—then that solicitor would solicit in vain. If he will insist on walking behind me through woodland ways, pointing out with his walking–stick likely
avenues and attractive short-cuts, I shall turn on him with passion, saying: “Sir, I pay you to know one particular puzzle in Latin and Norman-French, which they call the law of England; and you do know the law of England. I have never had any earthly reason to suppose that you know England. If you did, you would leave a man alone when he was looking at it.” As are the limits of the lawyer’s special knowledge about walking, so are the limits of the doctor’s. If I fall over the stump of a tree and break my leg, as is likely enough, I shall say to the lawyer, “Please go and fetch the doctor.” I shall do it because the doctor really has a larger knowledge of a narrower area. There are only a certain number of ways in which a leg can be broken; I know none of them, and he knows all of them. There is such a thing as being a specialist in broken legs. There is no such thing as being a specialist in legs. When unbroken, legs are a matter of taste. If the doctor has really mended my leg, he may merit a colossal equestrian statue on the top of an eternal tower of brass. But if the doctor has really mended my leg he has no more rights over it. He must not come and teach me how to walk; because he and I learnt that in the same school, the nursery. And there is no more abstract likelihood of the doctor walking more elegantly than I do than there is of the barber or the bishop or the burglar walking more elegantly than I do. There cannot be a general specialist; the specialist can have no kind of authority, unless he has avowedly limited his range. There cannot be such a thing as the health adviser of the community, because there cannot be such a thing as one who specialises in the universe.

Thus when Dr. Saleeby says that a young man about to be married should be obliged to produce his health-book as he does his bank-book, the expression is neat; but it does not convey the real respects in which the two things agree, and in which they differ. To begin with, of course, there is a great deal too much of the bank-book for the sanity of our commonwealth; and it is highly probable that the health-book, as conducted in modern conditions, would rapidly become as timid, as snobbish, and as sterile as the money side of marriage has become. In the moral atmosphere of modernity the poor and the honest would probably get as much the worst of it if we fought with health-books as they do when we fight with bank-books. But that is a more general matter; the real point is in the difference between the two. The difference is in this vital fact: that a monied man generally thinks about money, whereas a healthy man does not think about health. If the strong young man cannot produce his health-book, it is for the perfectly simple reason that he has not got one. He can mention some extraordinary malady he has; but every man of honour is expected to do that
now, whatever may be the decision that follows on the knowledge.

Health is simply Nature, and no naturalist ought to have the impudence to understand it. Health, one may say, is God; and no agnostic has any right to claim His acquaintance. For God must mean, among other things, that mystical and multitudinous balance of all things, by which they are at least able to stand up straight and endure; and any scientist who pretends to have exhausted this subject of ultimate sanity, I will call the lowest of religious fanatics. I will allow him to understand the madman, for the madman is an exception. But if he says he understands the sane man, then he says he has the secret of the Creator. For whenever you and I feel fully sane, we are quite incapable of naming the elements that make up that mysterious simplicity. We can no more analyse such peace in the soul than we can conceive in our heads the whole enormous and dizzy equilibrium by which, out of suns roaring like infernos and heavens toppling like precipices, He has hanged the world upon nothing.

We conclude, therefore, that unless Eugenic activity be restricted to monstrous things like mania, there is no constituted or constitutable authority that can really over–rule men in a matter in which they are so largely on a level. In the matter of fundamental human rights, nothing can be above Man, except God. An institution claiming to come from God might have such authority; but this is the last claim the Eugenists are likely to make. One caste or one profession seeking to rule men in such matters is like a man’s right eye claiming to rule him, or his left leg to run away with him. It is madness. We now pass on to consider whether there is really anything in the way of Eugenics to be done, with such cheerfulness as we may possess after discovering that there is nobody to do it.
CHAPTER VI

THE UNANSWERED CHALLENGE

Dr. Saleeby did me the honour of referring to me in one of his addresses on this subject, and said that even I cannot produce any but a feeble–minded child from a feeble–minded ancestry. To which I reply, first of all, that he cannot produce a feeble–minded child. The whole point of our contention is that this phrase conveys nothing fixed and outside opinion. There is such a thing as mania, which has always been segregated; there is such a thing as idiotcy, which has always been segregated; but feeble–mindedness is a new phrase under which you might segregate anybody. It is essential that this fundamental fallacy in the use of statistics should be got somehow into the modern mind. Such people must be made to see the point, which is surely plain enough, that it is useless to have exact figures if they are exact figures about an inexact phrase. If I say, “There are five fools in Acton,” it is surely quite clear that, though no mathematician can make five the same as four or six, that will not stop you or anyone else from finding a few more fools in Acton. Now weak–mindedness, like folly, is a term divided from madness in this vital manner—that in one sense it applies to all men, in another to most men, in another to very many men, and so on. It is as if Dr. Saleeby were to say, “Vanity, I find, is undoubtedly hereditary. Here is Mrs. Jones, who was very sensitive about her sonnets being criticised, and I found her little daughter in a new frock looking in the glass. The experiment is conclusive, the demonstration is complete; there in the first generation is the artistic temperament—that is vanity; and there in the second generation is dress—and that is vanity.” We should answer, “My friend, all is vanity, vanity and vexation of spirit—especially when one has to listen to logic of your favourite kind. Obviously all human beings must value themselves; and obviously there is in all such valuation an element of weakness, since it is not the valuation of eternal justice. What is the use of your finding by experiment in some people a thing we know by reason must be in all of them?”

Here it will be as well to pause a moment and avert one possible misunderstanding. I do not mean that you and I cannot and do not practically see and personally remark on this or that eccentric or intermediate type, for which the word “feeble–minded” might be a very convenient word, and might correspond to a genuine though indefinable fact of experience. In the same way
we might speak, and do speak, of such and such a person being “mad with vanity” without wanting two keepers to walk in and take the person off. But I ask the reader to remember always that I am talking of words, not as they are used in talk or novels, but as they will be used, and have been used, in warrants and certificates, and Acts of Parliament. The distinction between the two is perfectly clear and practical. The difference is that a novelist or a talker can be trusted to try and hit the mark; it is all to his glory that the cap should fit, that the type should be recognised; that he should, in a literary sense, hang the right man. But it is by no means always to the interests of governments or officials to hang the right man. The fact that they often do stretch words in order to cover cases is the whole foundation of having any fixed laws or free institutions at all. My point is not that I have never met anyone whom I should call feeble-minded, rather than mad or imbecile. My point is that if I want to dispossess a nephew, oust a rival, silence a blackmailer, or get rid of an importunate widow, there is nothing in logic to prevent my calling them feeble-minded too. And the vaguer the charge is the less they will be able to disprove it.

One does not, as I have said, need to deny heredity in order to resist such legislation, any more than one needs to deny the spiritual world in order to resist an epidemic of witch-burning. I admit there may be such a thing as hereditary feeble-mindedness; I believe there is such a thing as witchcraft. Believing that there are spirits, I am bound in mere reason to suppose that there are probably evil spirits; believing that there are evil spirits, I am bound in mere reason to suppose that some men grow evil by dealing with them. All that is mere rationalism; the superstition (that is the unreasoning repugnance and terror) is in the person who admits there can be angels but denies there can be devils. The superstition is in the person who admits there can be devils but denies there can be diabolists. Yet I should certainly resist any effort to search for witches, for a perfectly simple reason, which is the key of the whole of this controversy. The reason is that it is one thing to believe in witches, and quite another to believe in witch-smellers. I have more respect for the old witch-finders than for the Eugenists, who go about persecuting the fool of the family; because the witch-finders, according to their own conviction, ran a risk. Witches were not the feeble-minded, but the strong-minded—the evil mesmerists, the rulers of the elements. Many a raid on a witch, right or wrong, seemed to the villagers who did it a righteous popular rising against a vast spiritual tyranny, a papacy of sin. Yet we know that the thing degenerated into a rabid and despicable persecution of the feeble or the old. It ended by being a war upon the weak. It ended by
being what Eugenics begins by being.

When I said above that I believed in witches, but not in witch–smellers, I stated my full position about that conception of heredity, that half–formed philosophy of fears and omens; of curses and weird recurrence and darkness and the doom of blood, which, as preached to humanity to–day, is often more inhuman than witchcraft itself. I do not deny that this dark element exists; I only affirm that it is dark; or, in other words, that its most strenuous students are evidently in the dark about it. I would no more trust Dr. Karl Pearson on a heredity–hunt than on a heresy–hunt. I am perfectly ready to give my reasons for thinking this; and I believe any well–balanced person, if he reflects on them, will think as I do. There are two senses in which a man may be said to know or not know a subject. I know the subject of arithmetic, for instance; that is, I am not good at it, but I know what it is. I am sufficiently familiar with its use to see the absurdity of anyone who says, “So vulgar a fraction cannot be mentioned before ladies,” or “This unit is Unionist, I hope.” Considering myself for one moment as an arithmetician, I may say that I know next to nothing about my subject: but I know my subject. I know it in the street. There is the other kind of man, like Dr. Karl Pearson, who undoubtedly knows a vast amount about his subject; who undoubtedly lives in great forests of facts concerning kinship and inheritance. But it is not, by any means, the same thing to have searched the forests and to have recognised the frontiers. Indeed, the two things generally belong to two very different types of mind. I gravely doubt whether the Astronomer–Royal would write the best essay on the relations between astronomy and astrology. I doubt whether the President of the Geographical Society could give the best definition and history of the words “geography” and “geology.”

Now the students of heredity, especially, understand all of their subject except their subject. They were, I suppose, bred and born in that brier–patch, and have really explored it without coming to the end of it. That is, they have studied everything but the question of what they are studying. Now I do not propose to rely merely on myself to tell them what they are studying. I propose, as will be seen in a moment, to call the testimony of a great man who has himself studied it. But to begin with, the domain of heredity (for those who see its frontiers) is a sort of triangle, enclosed on its three sides by three facts. The first is that heredity undoubtedly exists, or there would be no such thing as a family likeness, and every marriage might suddenly produce a small negro. The second is that even simple heredity can never be simple; its complexity must be literally unfathomable, for in that field fight unthinkable millions. But yet again it never
is simple heredity: for the instant anyone is, he experiences. The third is that these innumerable ancient influences, these instant inundations of experiences, come together according to a combination that is unlike anything else on this earth. It is a combination that does combine. It cannot be sorted out again, even on the Day of Judgment. Two totally different people have become in the sense most sacred, frightful, and unanswerable, one flesh. If a golden–haired Scandinavian girl has married a very swarthy Jew, the Scandinavian side of the family may say till they are blue in the face that the baby has his mother’s nose or his mother’s eyes. They can never be certain the black–haired Bedouin is not present in every feature, in every inch. In the person of the baby he may have gently pulled his wife’s nose. In the person of the baby he may have partly blacked his wife’s eyes.

Those are the three first facts of heredity. That it exists; that it is subtle and made of a million elements; that it is simple, and cannot be unmade into those elements. To summarise: you know there is wine in the soup. You do not know how many wines there are in the soup, because you do not know how many wines there are in the world. And you never will know, because all chemists, all cooks, and all common–sense people tell you that the soup is of such a sort that it can never be chemically analysed. That is a perfectly fair parallel to the hereditary element in the human soul. There are many ways in which one can feel that there is wine in the soup, as in suddenly tasting a wine specially favoured; that corresponds to seeing suddenly flash on a young face the image of some ancestor you have known. But even then the taster cannot be certain he is not tasting one familiar wine among many unfamiliar ones—or seeing one known ancestor among a million unknown ancestors. Another way is to get drunk on the soup, which corresponds to the case of those who say they are driven to sin and death by hereditary doom. But even then the drunkard cannot be certain it was the soup, any more than the traditional drunkard who is certain it was the salmon.

Those are the facts about heredity which anyone can see. The upshot of them is not only that a miss is as good as a mile, but a miss is as good as a win. If the child has his parents’ nose (or noses) that may be heredity. But if he has not, that may be heredity too. And as we need not take heredity lightly because two generations differ—so we need not take heredity a scrap more seriously because two generations are similar. The thing is there, in what cases we know not, in what proportion we know not, and we cannot know.

Now it is just here that the decent difference of function between Dr.
Saleeby’s trade and mine comes in. It is his business to study human health and sickness as a whole, in a spirit of more or less enlightened guesswork; and it is perfectly natural that he should allow for heredity here, there, and everywhere, as a man climbing a mountain or sailing a boat will allow for weather without even explaining it to himself. An utterly different attitude is incumbent on any conscientious man writing about what laws should be enforced or about how commonwealths should be governed. And when we consider how plain a fact is murder, and yet how hesitant and even hazy we all grow about the guilt of a murderer, when we consider how simple an act is stealing, and yet how hard it is to convict and punish those rich commercial pirates who steal the most, when we consider how cruel and clumsy the law can be even about things as old and plain as the Ten Commandments—I simply cannot conceive any responsible person proposing to legislate on our broken knowledge and bottomless ignorance of heredity.

But though I have to consider this dull matter in its due logical order, it appears to me that this part of the matter has been settled, and settled in a most masterly way, by somebody who has infinitely more right to speak on it than I have. Our press seems to have a perfect genius for fitting people with caps that don’t fit; and affixing the wrong terms of eulogy and even the wrong terms of abuse. And just as people will talk of Bernard Shaw as a naughty winking Pierrot, when he is the last great Puritan and really believes in respectability; just as (si parva licet etc.) they will talk of my own paradoxes, when I pass my life in preaching that the truisms are true; so an enormous number of newspaper readers seem to have it fixed firmly in their heads that Mr. H.G. Wells is a harsh and horrible Eugenist in great goblin spectacles, who wants to put us all into metallic microscopes and dissect us with metallic tools. As a matter of fact, of course, Mr. Wells, so far from being too definite, is generally not definite enough. He is an absolute wizard in the appreciation of atmospheres and the opening of vistas; but his answers are more agnostic than his questions. His books will do everything except shut. And so far from being the sort of man who would stop a man from propagating, he cannot even stop a full stop. He is not Eugenic enough to prevent the black dot at the end of a sentence from breeding a line of little dots.

But this is not the clear-cut blunder of which I spoke. The real blunder is this. Mr. Wells deserves a tiara of crowns and a garland of medals for all kinds of reasons. But if I were restricted, on grounds of public economy, to giving Mr. Wells only one medal ob cives servatos, I would give him a medal as the
Eugenist who destroyed Eugenics. For everyone spoke of him, rightly or wrongly, as a Eugenist; and he certainly had, as I have not, the training and type of culture required to consider the matter merely in a biological and not in a generally moral sense. The result was that in that fine book, “Mankind in the Making,” where he inevitably came to grips with the problem, he threw down to the Eugenists an intellectual challenge which seems to me unanswerable, but which, at any rate, is unanswered. I do not mean that no remote Eugenist wrote upon the subject; for it is impossible to read all writings, especially Eugenist writings. I do mean that the leading Eugenists write as if this challenge had never been offered. The gauntlet lies unlifted on the ground.

Having given honour for the idea where it is due, I may be permitted to summarise it myself for the sake of brevity. Mr. Wells’ point was this. That we cannot be certain about the inheritance of health, because health is not a quality. It is not a thing like darkness in the hair or length in the limbs. It is a relation, a balance. You have a tall, strong man; but his very strength depends on his not being too tall for his strength. You catch a healthy, full-blooded fellow; but his very health depends on his being not too full of blood. A heart that is strong for a dwarf will be weak for a giant; a nervous system that would kill a man with a trace of a certain illness will sustain him to ninety if he has no trace of that illness. Nay, the same nervous system might kill him if he had an excess of some other comparatively healthy thing. Seeing, therefore, that there are apparently healthy people of all types, it is obvious that if you mate two of them, you may even then produce a discord out of two inconsistent harmonies. It is obvious that you can no more be certain of a good offspring than you can be certain of a good tune if you play two fine airs at once on the same piano. You can be even less certain of it in the more delicate case of beauty, of which the Eugenists talk a great deal. Marry two handsome people whose noses tend to the aquiline, and their baby (for all you know) may be a goblin with a nose like an enormous parrot’s. Indeed, I actually know a case of this kind. The Eugenist has to settle, not the result of fixing one steady thing to a second steady thing; but what will happen when one toppling and dizzy equilibrium crashes into another.

This is the interesting conclusion. It is on this degree of knowledge that we are asked to abandon the universal morality of mankind. When we have stopped the lover from marrying the unfortunate woman he loves, when we have found him another uproariously healthy female whom he does not love in the least, even then we have no logical evidence that the result may not be as horrid and dangerous as if he had behaved like a man of honour.
CHAPTER VII

THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH OF DOUBT

Let us now finally consider what the honest Eugenists do mean, since it has become increasingly evident that they cannot mean what they say. Unfortunately, the obstacles to any explanation of this are such as to insist on a circuitous approach. The tendency of all that is printed and much that is spoken to—day is to be, in the only true sense, behind the times. It is because it is always in a hurry that it is always too late. Give an ordinary man a day to write an article, and he will remember the things he has really heard latest; and may even, in the last glory of the sunset, begin to think of what he thinks himself. Give him an hour to write it, and he will think of the nearest text—book on the topic, and make the best mosaic he may out of classical quotations and old authorities. Give him ten minutes to write it and he will run screaming for refuge to the old nursery where he learnt his stalest proverbs, or the old school where he learnt his stalest politics. The quicker goes the journalist the slower go his thoughts. The result is the newspaper of our time, which every day can be delivered earlier and earlier, and which, every day, is less worth delivering at all. The poor panting critic falls farther and farther behind the motor—car of modern fact. Fifty years ago he was barely fifteen years behind the times. Fifteen years ago he was not more than fifty years behind the times. Just now he is rather more than a hundred years behind the times: and the proof of it is that the things he says, though manifest nonsense about our society to—day, really were true about our society some hundred and thirty years ago. The best instance of his belated state is his perpetual assertion that the supernatural is less and less believed. It is a perfectly true and realistic account—of the eighteenth century. It is the worst possible account of this age of psychics and spirit—healers and fakirs and fashionable fortune—tellers. In fact, I generally reply in eighteenth century language to this eighteenth century illusion. If somebody says to me, “The creeds are crumbling,” I reply, “And the King of Prussia, who is himself a Freethinker, is certainly capturing Silesia from the Catholic Empress.” If somebody says, “Miracles must be reconsidered in the light of rational experience,” I answer affably, “But I hope that our enlightened leader, Hébert, will not insist on guillotining that poor French queen.” If somebody says, “We must watch for the rise of some new religion which can commend itself to reason,” I reply, “But how much more
necessary is it to watch for the rise of some military adventurer who may destroy
the Republic: and, to my mind, that young Major Bonaparte has rather a restless
air.” It is only in such language from the Age of Reason that we can answer such
things. The age we live in is something more than an age of superstition—it is an
age of innumerable superstitions. But it is only with one example of this that I
am concerned here.

I mean the error that still sends men marching about disestablishing churches
and talking of the tyranny of compulsory church teaching or compulsory church
tithes. I do not wish for an irrelevant misunderstanding here; I would myself
certainly disestablish any church that had a numerical minority, like the Irish or
the Welsh; and I think it would do a great deal of good to genuine churches that
have a partly conventional majority, like the English, or even the Russian. But I
should only do this if I had nothing else to do; and just now there is very much
else to do. For religion, orthodox or unorthodox, is not just now relying on the
weapon of State establishment at all. The Pope practically made no attempt to
preserve the Concordat; but seemed rather relieved at the independence his
Church gained by the destruction of it: and it is common talk among the French
clericalists that the Church has gained by the change. In Russia the one real
charge brought by religious people (especially Roman Catholics) against the
Orthodox Church is not its orthodoxy or heterodoxy, but its abject dependence
on the State. In England we can almost measure an Anglican’s fervour for his
Church by his comparative coolness about its establishment—that is, its control
by a Parliament of Scotch Presbyterians like Balfour, or Welsh Congregationalists like Lloyd George. In Scotland the powerful combination of
the two great sects outside the establishment have left it in a position in which it
feels no disposition to boast of being called by mere lawyers the Church of
Scotland. I am not here arguing that Churches should not depend on the State;
nor that they do not depend upon much worse things. It may be reasonably
maintained that the strength of Romanism, though it be not in any national
police, is in a moral police more rigid and vigilant. It may be reasonably
maintained that the strength of Anglicanism, though it be not in establishment, is
in aristocracy, and its shadow, which is called snobbishness. All I assert here is
that the Churches are not now leaning heavily on their political establishment;
they are not using heavily the secular arm. Almost everywhere their legal tithes
have been modified, their legal boards of control have been mixed. They may
still employ tyranny, and worse tyranny: I am not considering that. They are not
specially using that special tyranny which consists in using the government.
The thing that really is trying to tyrannise through government is Science. The thing that really does use the secular arm is Science. And the creed that really is levying tithes and capturing schools, the creed that really is enforced by fine and imprisonment, the creed that really is proclaimed not in sermons but in statutes, and spread not by pilgrims but by policemen—that creed is the great but disputed system of thought which began with Evolution and has ended in Eugenics. Materialism is really our established Church; for the Government will really help it to persecute its heretics. Vaccination, in its hundred years of experiment, has been disputed almost as much as baptism in its approximate two thousand. But it seems quite natural to our politicians to enforce vaccination; and it would seem to them madness to enforce baptism.

I am not frightened of the word “persecution” when it is attributed to the churches; nor is it in the least as a term of reproach that I attribute it to the men of science. It is as a term of legal fact. If it means the imposition by the police of a widely disputed theory, incapable of final proof—then our priests are not now persecuting, but our doctors are. The imposition of such dogmas constitutes a State Church—in an older and stronger sense than any that can be applied to any supernatural Church to–day. There are still places where the religious minority is forbidden to assemble or to teach in this way or that; and yet more where it is excluded from this or that public post. But I cannot now recall any place where it is compelled by the criminal law to go through the rite of the official religion. Even the Young Turks did not insist on all Macedonians being circumcised.

Now here we find ourselves confronted with an amazing fact. When, in the past, opinions so arguable have been enforced by State violence, it has been at the instigation of fanatics who held them for fixed and flaming certainties. If truths could not be evaded by their enemies, neither could they be altered even by their friends. But what are the certain truths that the secular arm must now lift the sword to enforce? Why, they are that very mass of bottomless questions and bewildered answers that we have been studying in the last chapters—questions whose only interest is that they are trackless and mysterious; answers whose only glory is that they are tentative and new. The devotee boasted that he would never abandon the faith; and therefore he persecuted for the faith. But the doctor of science actually boasts that he will always abandon a hypothesis; and yet he persecutes for the hypothesis. The Inquisitor violently enforced his creed, because it was unchangeable. The savant enforces it violently because he may change it the next day.

Now this is a new sort of persecution; and one may be permitted to ask if it is
an improvement on the old. The difference, so far as one can see at first, seems rather favourable to the old. If we are to be at the merciless mercy of man, most of us would rather be racked for a creed that existed intensely in somebody’s head, rather than vivisected for a discovery that had not yet come into anyone’s head, and possibly never would. A man would rather be tortured with a thumbscrew until he chose to see reason than tortured with a vivisecting knife until the vivisector chose to see reason. Yet that is the real difference between the two types of legal enforcement. If I gave in to the Inquisitors, I should at least know what creed to profess. But even if I yelled out a credo when the Eugenists had me on the rack, I should not know what creed to yell. I might get an extra turn of the rack for confessing to the creed they confessed quite a week ago.

Now let no light-minded person say that I am here taking extravagant parallels; for the parallel is not only perfect, but plain. For this reason: that the difference between torture and vivisection is not in any way affected by the fierceness or mildness of either. Whether they gave the rack half a turn or half a hundred, they were, by hypothesis, dealing with a truth which they knew to be there. Whether they vivisect painfully or painlessly, they are trying to find out whether the truth is there or not. The old Inquisitors tortured to put their own opinions into somebody. But the new Inquisitors torture to get their own opinions out of him. They do not know what their own opinions are, until the victim of vivisection tells them. The division of thought is a complete chasm for anyone who cares about thinking. The old persecutor was trying to teach the citizen, with fire and sword. The new persecutor is trying to learn from the citizen, with scalpel and germ–injector. The master was meeker than the pupil will be.

I could prove by many practical instances that even my illustrations are not exaggerated, by many placid proposals I have heard for the vivisection of criminals, or by the filthy incident of Dr. Neisser. But I prefer here to stick to a strictly logical line of distinction, and insist that whereas in all previous persecutions the violence was used to end our indecision, the whole point here is that the violence is used to end the indecision of the persecutors. This is what the honest Eugenists really mean, so far as they mean anything. They mean that the public is to be given up, not as a heathen land for conversion, but simply as a pabulum for experiment. That is the real, rude, barbaric sense behind this Eugenic legislation. The Eugenist doctors are not such fools as they look in the light of any logical inquiry about what they want. They do not know what they
want, except that they want your soul and body and mine in order to find out. They are quite seriously, as they themselves might say, the first religion to be experimental instead of doctrinal. All other established Churches have been based on somebody having found the truth. This is the first Church that was ever based on not having found it.

There is in them a perfectly sincere hope and enthusiasm; but it is not for us, but for what they might learn from us, if they could rule us as they can rabbits. They cannot tell us anything about heredity, because they do not know anything about it. But they do quite honestly believe that they would know something about it, when they had married and mismarried us for a few hundred years. They cannot tell us who is fit to wield such authority, for they know that nobody is; but they do quite honestly believe that when that authority has been abused for a very long time, somebody somehow will be evolved who is fit for the job. I am no Puritan, and no one who knows my opinions will consider it a mere criminal charge if I say that they are simply gambling. The reckless gambler has no money in his pockets; he has only the ideas in his head. These gamblers have no ideas in their heads; they have only the money in their pockets. But they think that if they could use the money to buy a big society to experiment on, something like an idea might come to them at last. That is Eugenics.

I confine myself here to remarking that I do not like it. I may be very stingy, but I am willing to pay the scientist for what he does know; I draw the line at paying him for everything he doesn’t know. I may be very cowardly, but I am willing to be hurt for what I think or what he thinks—I am not willing to be hurt, or even inconvenienced, for whatever he might happen to think after he had hurt me. The ordinary citizen may easily be more magnanimous than I, and take the whole thing on trust; in which case his career may be happier in the next world, but (I think) sadder in this. At least, I wish to point out to him that he will not be giving his glorious body as soldiers give it, to the glory of a fixed flag, or martyrs to the glory of a deathless God. He will be, in the strict sense of the Latin phrase, giving his vile body for an experiment—an experiment of which even the experimentalist knows neither the significance nor the end.
CHAPTER VIII

A SUMMARY OF A FALSE THEORY

I have up to this point treated the Eugenists, I hope, as seriously as they treat themselves. I have attempted an analysis of their theory as if it were an utterly abstract and disinterested theory; and so considered, there seems to be very little left of it. But before I go on, in the second part of this book, to talk of the ugly things that really are left, I wish to recapitulate the essential points in their essential order, lest any personal irrelevance or over–emphasis (to which I know myself to be prone) should have confused the course of what I believe to be a perfectly fair and consistent argument. To make it yet clearer, I will summarise the thing under chapters, and in quite short paragraphs.

In the first chapter I attempted to define the essential point in which Eugenics can claim, and does claim, to be a new morality. That point is that it is possible to consider the baby in considering the bride. I do not adopt the ideal irresponsibility of the man who said, “What has posterity done for us?” But I do say, to start with, “What can we do for posterity, except deal fairly with our contemporaries?” Unless a man love his wife whom he has seen, how shall he love his child whom he has not seen?

In the second chapter I point out that this division in the conscience cannot be met by mere mental confusions, which would make any woman refusing any man a Eugenist. There will always be something in the world which tends to keep outrageous unions exceptional; that influence is not Eugenics, but laughter.

In the third chapter I seek to describe the quite extraordinary atmosphere in which such things have become possible. I call that atmosphere anarchy; but insist that it is an anarchy in the centres where there should be authority. Government has become ungovernable; that is, it cannot leave off governing. Law has become lawless; that is, it cannot see where laws should stop. The chief feature of our time is the meekness of the mob and the madness of the government. In this atmosphere it is natural enough that medical experts, being authorities, should go mad, and attempt so crude and random and immature a dream as this of petting and patting (and rather spoiling) the babe unborn.

In chapter four I point out how this impatience has burst through the narrow channel of the Lunacy Laws, and has obliterated them by extending them. The whole point of the madman is that he is the exception that proves the rule. But
Eugenics seeks to treat the whole rule as a series of exceptions—to make all men mad. And on that ground there is hope for nobody; for all opinions have an author, and all authors have a heredity. The mentality of the Eugenist makes him believe in Eugenics as much as the mentality of the reckless lover makes him violate Eugenics; and both mentalities are, on the materialist hypothesis, equally the irresponsible product of more or less unknown physical causes. The real security of man against any logical Eugenics is like the false security of Macbeth. The only Eugenist that could rationally attack him must be a man of no woman born.

In the chapter following this, which is called “The Flying Authority,” I try in vain to locate and fix any authority that could rationally rule men in so rooted and universal a matter; little would be gained by ordinary men doing it to each other; and if ordinary practitioners did it they would very soon show, by a thousand whims and quarrels, that they were ordinary men. I then discussed the enlightened despotism of a few general professors of hygiene, and found it unworkable, for an essential reason: that while we can always get men intelligent enough to know more than the rest of us about this or that accident or pain or pest, we cannot count on the appearance of great cosmic philosophers; and only such men can be even supposed to know more than we do about normal conduct and common sanity. Every sort of man, in short, would shirk such a responsibility, except the worst sort of man, who would accept it.

I pass on, in the next chapter, to consider whether we know enough about heredity to act decisively, even if we were certain who ought to act. Here I refer the Eugenists to the reply of Mr. Wells, which they have never dealt with to my knowledge or satisfaction—the important and primary objection that health is not a quality but a proportion of qualities; so that even health married to health might produce the exaggeration called disease. It should be noted here, of course, that an individual biologist may quite honestly believe that he has found a fixed principle with the help of Weissmann or Mendel. But we are not discussing whether he knows enough to be justified in thinking (as is somewhat the habit of the anthropoid Homo) that he is right. We are discussing whether we know enough, as responsible citizens, to put such powers into the hands of men who may be deceived or who may be deceivers. I conclude that we do not.

In the last chapter of the first half of the book I give what is, I believe, the real secret of this confusion, the secret of what the Eugenists really want. They want to be allowed to find out what they want. Not content with the endowment of research, they desire the establishment of research; that is the making of it a
thing official and compulsory, like education or state insurance; but still it is only research and not discovery. In short, they want a new kind of State Church, which shall be an Established Church of Doubt—instead of Faith. They have no Science of Eugenics at all, but they do really mean that if we will give ourselves up to be vivisected they may very probably have one some day. I point out, in more dignified diction, that this is a bit thick.

And now, in the second half of this book, we will proceed to the consideration of things that really exist. It is, I deeply regret to say, necessary to return to realities, as they are in your daily life and mine. Our happy holiday in the land of nonsense is over; we shall see no more its beautiful city, with the almost Biblical name of Bosh, nor the forests full of mares’ nests, nor the fields of tares that are ripened only by moonshine. We shall meet no longer those delicious monsters that might have talked in the same wild club with the Snark and the Jabberwock or the Pobble or the Dong with the Luminous Nose; the father who can’t make head or tail of the mother, but thoroughly understands the child she will some day bear; the lawyer who has to run after his own laws almost as fast as the criminals run away from them; the two mad doctors who might discuss for a million years which of them has the right to lock up the other; the grammarian who clings convulsively to the Passive Mood, and says it is the duty of something to get itself done without any human assistance; the man who would marry giants to giants until the back breaks, as children pile brick upon brick for the pleasure of seeing the staggering tower tumble down; and, above all, the superb man of science who wants you to pay him and crown him because he has so far found out nothing. These fairy–tale comrades must leave us. They exist, but they have no influence in what is really going on. They are honest dupes and tools, as you and I were very nearly being honest dupes and tools. If we come to think coolly of the world we live in, if we consider how very practical is the practical politician, at least where cash is concerned, how very dull and earthy are most of the men who own the millions and manage the newspaper trusts, how very cautious and averse from idealist upheaval are those that control this capitalist society—when we consider all this, it is frankly incredible that Eugenics should be a front bench fashionable topic and almost an Act of Parliament, if it were in practice only the unfinished fantasy which it is, as I have shown, in pure reason. Even if it were a just revolution, it would be much too revolutionary a revolution for modern statesmen, if there were not something else behind. Even if it were a true ideal, it would be much too idealistic an ideal for our “practical men,” if there were not something real as well. Well, there is
something real as well. There is no reason in Eugenics, but there is plenty of motive. Its supporters are highly vague about its theory, but they will be painfully practical about its practice. And while I reiterate that many of its more eloquent agents are probably quite innocent instruments, there are some, even among Eugenists, who by this time know what they are doing. To them we shall not say, “What is Eugenics?” or “Where on earth are you going?” but only “Woe unto you, hypocrites, that devour widows’ houses and for a pretence use long words.”
PART II

THE REAL AIM
CHAPTER I

THE IMPOTENCE OF IMPENITENCE

The root formula of an epoch is always an unwritten law, just as the law that is the first of all laws, that which protects life from the murderer, is written nowhere in the Statute Book. Nevertheless there is all the difference between having and not having a notion of this basic assumption in an epoch. For instance, the Middle Ages will simply puzzle us with their charities and cruelties, their asceticism and bright colours, unless we catch their general eagerness for building and planning, dividing this from that by walls and fences —the spirit that made architecture their most successful art. Thus even a slave seemed sacred; the divinity that did hedge a king, did also, in one sense, hedge a serf, for he could not be driven out from behind his hedges. Thus even liberty became a positive thing like a privilege; and even, when most men had it, it was not opened like the freedom of a wilderness, but bestowed, like the freedom of a city. Or again, the seventeenth century may seem a chaos of contradictions, with its almost priggish praise of parliaments and its quite barbaric massacre of prisoners, until we realise that, if the Middle Ages was a house half built, the seventeenth century was a house on fire. Panic was the note of it, and that fierce fastidiousness and exclusiveness that comes from fear. Calvinism was its characteristic religion, even in the Catholic Church, the insistence on the narrowness of the way and the fewness of the chosen. Suspicion was the note of its politics—“put not your trust in princes.” It tried to thrash everything out by learned, virulent, and ceaseless controversy; and it weeded its population by witch–burning. Or yet again: the eighteenth century will present pictures that seem utterly opposite, and yet seem singularly typical of the time: the sack of Versailles and the “Vicar of Wakefield”; the pastorals of Watteau and the dynamite speeches of Danton. But we shall understand them all better if we once catch sight of the idea of tidying up which ran through the whole period, the quietest people being prouder of their tidiness, civilisation, and sound taste than of any of their virtues; and the wildest people having (and this is the most important point) no love of wildness for its own sake, like Nietzsche or the anarchic poets, but only a readiness to employ it to get rid of unreason or disorder. With these epochs it is not altogether impossible to say that some such form of words is a key. The epoch for which it is almost impossible to find a
form of words is our own.

Nevertheless, I think that with us the keyword is “inevitability,” or, as I should be inclined to call it, “impenitence.” We are subconsciously dominated in all departments by the notion that there is no turning back, and it is rooted in materialism and the denial of free–will. Take any handful of modern facts and compare them with the corresponding facts a few hundred years ago. Compare the modern Party System with the political factions of the seventeenth century. The difference is that in the older time the party leaders not only really cut off each other’s heads, but (what is much more alarming) really repealed each other’s laws. With us it has become traditional for one party to inherit and leave untouched the acts of the other when made, however bitterly they were attacked in the making. James II. and his nephew William were neither of them very gay specimens; but they would both have laughed at the idea of “a continuous foreign policy.” The Tories were not Conservatives; they were, in the literal sense, reactionaries. They did not merely want to keep the Stuarts; they wanted to bring them back.

Or again, consider how obstinately the English mediæval monarchy returned again and again to its vision of French possessions, trying to reverse the decision of fate; how Edward III. returned to the charge after the defeats of John and Henry III., and Henry V. after the failure of Edward III.; and how even Mary had that written on her heart which was neither her husband nor her religion. And then consider this: that we have comparatively lately known a universal orgy of the thing called Imperialism, the unity of the Empire the only topic, colonies counted like crown jewels, and the Union Jack waved across the world. And yet no one so much as dreamed, I will not say of recovering, the American colonies for the Imperial unity (which would have been too dangerous a task for modern empire–builders), but even of re–telling the story from an Imperial standpoint. Henry V. justified the claims of Edward III. Joseph Chamberlain would not have dreamed of justifying the claims of George III. Nay, Shakespeare justifies the French War, and sticks to Talbot and defies the legend of Joan of Arc. Mr. Kipling would not dare to justify the American War, stick to Burgoyne, and defy the legend of Washington. Yet there really was much more to be said for George III. than there ever was for Henry V. It was not said, much less acted upon, by the modern Imperialists; because of this basic modern sense, that as the future is inevitable, so is the past irrevocable. Any fact so complete as the American exodus from the Empire must be considered as final for æons, though it hardly happened more than a hundred years ago. Merely because it has managed to
occur it must be called first, a necessary evil, and then an indispensable good. I need not add that I do not want to reconquer America; but then I am not an Imperialist.

Then there is another way of testing it: ask yourself how many people you have met who grumbled at a thing as incurable, and how many who attacked it as curable? How many people we have heard abuse the British elementary schools, as they would abuse the British climate? How few have we met who realised that British education can be altered, but British weather cannot? How few there were that knew that the clouds were more immortal and more solid than the schools? For a thousand that regret compulsory education, where is the hundred, or the ten, or the one, who would repeal compulsory education? Indeed, the very word proves my case by its unpromising and unfamiliar sound. At the beginning of our epoch men talked with equal ease about Reform and Repeal. Now everybody talks about reform; but nobody talks about repeal. Our fathers did not talk of Free Trade, but of the Repeal of the Corn Laws. They did not talk of Home Rule, but of the Repeal of the Union. In those days people talked of a “Repealer” as the most practical of all politicians, the kind of politician that carries a club. Now the Repealer is flung far into the province of an impossible idealism: and the leader of one of our great parties, having said, in a heat of temporary sincerity, that he would repeal an Act, actually had to write to all the papers to assure them that he would only amend it. I need not multiply instances, though they might be multiplied almost to a million. The note of the age is to suggest that the past may just as well be praised, since it cannot be mended. Men actually in that past have toiled like ants and died like locusts to undo some previous settlement that seemed secure; but we cannot do so much as repeal an Act of Parliament. We entertain the weak–minded notion that what is done can’t be undone. Our view was well summarised in a typical Victorian song with the refrain: “The mill will never grind again the water that is past.” There are many answers to this. One (which would involve a disquisition on the phenomena of Evaporation and Dew) we will here avoid. Another is, that to the minds of simple country folk, the object of a mill is not to grind water, but to grind corn, and that (strange as it may seem) there really have been societies sufficiently vigilant and valiant to prevent their corn perpetually flowing away from them, to the tune of a sentimental song.

Now this modern refusal to undo what has been done is not only an intellectual fault; it is a moral fault also. It is not merely our mental inability to understand the mistake we have made. It is also our spiritual refusal to admit that
we have made a mistake. It was mere vanity in Mr. Brummell when he sent away trays full of imperfectly knotted neck-cloths, lightly remarking, “These are our failures.” It is a good instance of the nearness of vanity to humility, for at least he had to admit that they were failures. But it would have been spiritual pride in Mr. Brummell if he had tied on all the cravats, one on top of the other, lest his valet should discover that he had ever tied one badly. For in spiritual pride there is always an element of secrecy and solitude. Mr. Brummell would be satanic; also (which I fear would affect him more) he would be badly dressed. But he would be a perfect presentation of the modern publicist, who cannot do anything right, because he must not admit that he ever did anything wrong.

This strange, weak obstinacy, this persistence in the wrong path of progress, grows weaker and worse, as do all such weak things. And by the time in which I write its moral attitude has taken on something of the sinister and even the horrible. Our mistakes have become our secrets. Editors and journalists tear up with a guilty air all that reminds them of the party promises unfulfilled, or the party ideals reproaching them. It is true of our statesmen (much more than of our bishops, of whom Mr. Wells said it), that socially in evidence they are intellectually in hiding. The society is heavy with unconfessed sins; its mind is sore and silent with painful subjects; it has a constipation of conscience. There are many things it has done and allowed to be done which it does not really dare to think about; it calls them by other names and tries to talk itself into faith in a false past, as men make up the things they would have said in a quarrel. Of these sins one lies buried deepest but most noisome, and though it is stifled, stinks: the true story of the relations of the rich man and the poor in England. The half-starved English proletarian is not only nearly a skeleton but he is a skeleton in a cupboard.

It may be said, in some surprise, that surely we hear to-day on every side the same story of the destitute proletariat and the social problem, of the sweating in the unskilled trades or the overcrowding in the slums. It is granted; but I said the true story. Untrue stories there are in plenty, on all sides of the discussion. There is the interesting story of the Class Conscious Proletarian of All Lands, the chap who has “solidarity,” and is always just going to abolish war. The Marxian Socialists will tell you all about him; only he isn’t there. A common English workman is just as incapable of thinking of a German as anything but a German as he is of thinking of himself as anything but an Englishman. Then there is the opposite story; the story of the horrid man who is an atheist and wants to destroy the home, but who, for some private reason, prefers to call this Socialism. He
isn’t there either. The prosperous Socialists have homes exactly like yours and mine; and the poor Socialists are not allowed by the Individualists to have any at all. There is the story of the Two Workmen, which is a very nice and exciting story, about how one passed all the public houses in Cheapside and was made Lord Mayor on arriving at the Guildhall, while the other went into all the public houses and emerged quite ineligible for such a dignity. Alas! for this also is vanity. A thief might become Lord Mayor, but an honest workman certainly couldn’t. Then there is the story of “The Relentless Doom,” by which rich men were, by economic laws, forced to go on taking away money from poor men, although they simply longed to leave off: this is an unendurable thought to a free and Christian man, and the reader will be relieved to hear that it never happened. The rich could have left off stealing whenever they wanted to leave off, only this never happened either. Then there is the story of the cunning Fabian who sat on six committees at once and so coaxed the rich man to become quite poor. By simply repeating, in a whisper, that there are “wheels within wheels,” this talented man managed to take away the millionaire’s motor car, one wheel at a time, till the millionaire had quite forgotten that he ever had one. It was very clever of him to do this, only he has not done it. There is not a screw loose in the millionaire’s motor, which is capable of running over the Fabian and leaving him a flat corpse in the road at a moment’s notice. All these stories are very fascinating stories to be told by the Individualist and Socialist in turn to the great Sultan of Capitalism, because if they left off amusing him for an instant he would cut off their heads. But if they once began to tell the true story of the Sultan to the Sultan, he would boil them in oil; and this they wish to avoid.

The true story of the sin of the Sultan he is always trying, by listening to these stories, to forget. As we have said before in this chapter, he would prefer not to remember, because he has made up his mind not to repent. It is a curious story, and I shall try to tell it truly in the two chapters that follow. In all ages the tyrant is hard because he is soft. If his car crashes over bleeding and accusing crowds, it is because he has chosen the path of least resistance. It is because it is much easier to ride down a human race than ride up a moderately steep hill. The fight of the oppressor is always a pillow–fight; commonly a war with cushions—always a war for cushions. Saladin, the great Sultan, if I remember rightly, accounted it the greatest feat of swordsmanship to cut a cushion. And so indeed it is, as all of us can attest who have been for years past trying to cut into the swollen and windy corpulence of the modern compromise, that is at once cosy and cruel. For there is really in our world to–day the colour and silence of the
cushioned divan; and that sense of palace within palace and garden within
garden which makes the rich irresponsibility of the East. Have we not already
the wordless dance, the wineless banquet, and all that strange unchristian
conception of luxury without laughter? Are we not already in an evil Arabian
Nights, and walking the nightmare cities of an invisible despot? Does not our
hangman strangle secretly, the bearer of the bow string? Are we not already
eugenists—that is, eunuch–makers? Do we not see the bright eyes, the
motionless faces, and all that presence of something that is dead and yet
sleepless? It is the presence of the sin that is sealed with pride and impenitence;
the story of how the Sultan got his throne. But it is not the story he is listening to
just now, but another story which has been invented to cover it—the story called
“Eugenius: or the Adventures of One Not Born,” a most varied and entrancing
tale, which never fails to send him to sleep.
CHAPTER II

TRUE HISTORY OF A TRAMP

He awoke in the Dark Ages and smelt dawn in the dark, and knew he was not wholly a slave. It was as if, in some tale of Hans Andersen, a stick or a stool had been left in the garden all night and had grown alive and struck root like a tree. For this is the truth behind the old legal fiction of the servile countries, that the slave is a “chattel,” that is a piece of furniture like a stick or a stool. In the spiritual sense, I am certain it was never so unwholesome a fancy as the spawn of Nietzsche suppose to-day. No human being, pagan or Christian, I am certain, ever thought of another human being as a chair or a table. The mind cannot base itself on the idea that a comet is a cabbage; nor can it on the idea that a man is a stool. No man was ever unconscious of another’s presence—or even indifferent to another’s opinion. The lady who is said to have boasted her indifference to being naked before male slaves was showing off—or she meant something different. The lord who fed fishes by killing a slave was indulging in what most cannibals indulge in—a satanist affectation. The lady was consciously shameless and the lord was consciously cruel. But it simply is not in the human reason to carve men like wood or examine women like ivory, just as it is not in the human reason to think that two and two make five.

But there was this truth in the legal simile of furniture: that the slave, though certainly a man, was in one sense a dead man; in the sense that he was moveable. His locomotion was not his own: his master moved his arms and legs for him as if he were a marionette. Now it is important in the first degree to realise here what would be involved in such a fable as I have imagined, of a stool rooting itself like a shrub. For the general modern notion certainly is that life and liberty are in some way to be associated with novelty and not standing still. But it is just because the stool is lifeless that it moves about. It is just because the tree is alive that it does stand still. That was the main difference between the pagan slave and the Christian serf. The serf still belonged to the lord, as the stick that struck root in the garden would have still belonged to the owner of the garden; but it would have become a live possession. Therefore the owner is forced, by the laws of nature, to treat it with some respect; something becomes due from him. He cannot pull it up without killing it; it has gained a place in the garden—or the society. But the moderns are quite wrong in supposing that mere change and
holiday and variety have necessarily any element of this life that is the only seed of liberty. You may say if you like that an employer, taking all his workpeople to a new factory in a Garden City, is giving them the greater freedom of forest landscapes and smokeless skies. If it comes to that, you can say that the slave-traders took negroes from their narrow and brutish African hamlets, and gave them the polish of foreign travel and medicinal breezes of a sea-voyage. But the tiny seed of citizenship and independence there already was in the serfdom of the Dark Ages, had nothing to do with what nice things the lord might do to the serf. It lay in the fact that there were some nasty things he could not do to the serf—there were not many, but there were some, and one of them was eviction. He could not make the serf utterly landless and desperate, utterly without access to the means of production, though doubtless it was rather the field that owned the serf, than the serf that owned the field. But even if you call the serf a beast of the field, he was not what we have tried to make the town workman—a beast with no field. Foulon said of the French peasants, “Let them eat grass.” If he had said it of the modern London proletariat, they might well reply, “You have not left us even grass to eat.”

There was, therefore, both in theory and practice, some security for the serf, because he had come to life and rooted. The seigneur could not wait in the field in all weathers with a battle-axe to prevent the serf scratching any living out of the ground, any more than the man in my fairy-tale could sit out in the garden all night with an umbrella to prevent the shrub getting any rain. The relation of lord and serf, therefore, involves a combination of two things: inequality and security. I know there are people who will at once point wildly to all sorts of examples, true and false, of insecurity of life in the Middle Ages; but these are people who do not grasp what we mean by the characteristic institutions of a society. For the matter of that, there are plenty of examples of equality in the Middle Ages, as the craftsmen in their guild or the monks electing their abbot. But just as modern England is not a feudal country, though there is a quaint survival called Heralds’ College—or Ireland is not a commercial country, though there is a quaint survival called Belfast—it is true of the bulk and shape of that society that came out of the Dark Ages and ended at the Reformation, that it did not care about giving everybody an equal position, but did care about giving everybody a position. So that by the very beginning of that time even the slave had become a slave one could not get rid of, like the Scotch servant who stubbornly asserted that if his master didn’t know a good servant he knew a good master. The free peasant, in ancient or modern times, is free to go or stay. The
slave, in ancient times, was free neither to go nor stay. The serf was not free to
go; but he was free to stay.

Now what have we done with this man? It is quite simple. There is no historical complexity about it in that respect. We have taken away his freedom to stay. We have turned him out of his field, and whether it was injustice, like turning a free farmer out of his field, or only cruelty to animals, like turning a cow out of its field, the fact remains that he is out in the road. First and last, we have simply destroyed the security. We have not in the least destroyed the inequality. All classes, all creatures, kind or cruel, still see this lowest stratum of society as separate from the upper strata and even the middle strata; he is as separate as the serf. A monster fallen from Mars, ignorant of our simplest word, would know the tramp was at the bottom of the ladder, as well as he would have known it of the serf. The walls of mud are no longer round his boundaries, but only round his boots. The coarse, bristling hedge is at the end of his chin, and not of his garden. But mud and bristles still stand out round him like a horrific halo, and separate him from his kind. The Martian would have no difficulty in seeing he was the poorest person in the nation. It is just as impossible that he should marry an heiress, or fight a duel with a duke, or contest a seat at Westminster, or enter a club in Pall Mall, or take a scholarship at Balliol, or take a seat at an opera, or propose a good law, or protest against a bad one, as it was impossible to the serf. Where he differs is in something very different. He has lost what was possible to the serf. He can no longer scratch the bare earth by day or sleep on the bare earth by night, without being collared by a policeman.

Now when I say that this man has been oppressed as hardly any other man on this earth has been oppressed, I am not using rhetoric: I have a clear meaning which I am confident of explaining to any honest reader. I do not say he has been treated worse: I say he has been treated differently from the unfortunate in all ages. And the difference is this: that all the others were told to do something, and killed or tortured if they did anything else. This man is not told to do something: he is merely forbidden to do anything. When he was a slave, they said to him, “Sleep in this shed; I will beat you if you sleep anywhere else.” When he was a serf, they said to him, “Let me find you in this field: I will hang you if I find you in anyone else’s field.” But now he is a tramp they say to him, “You shall be jailed if I find you in anyone else’s field: but I will not give you a field.” They say, “You shall be punished if you are caught sleeping outside your shed: but there is no shed.” If you say that modern magistrates could never say such mad contradictions, I answer with entire certainty that they do say them. A
little while ago two tramps were summoned before a magistrate, charged with sleeping in the open air when they had nowhere else to sleep. But this is not the full fun of the incident. The real fun is that each of them eagerly produced about twopence, to prove that they could have got a bed, but deliberately didn’t. To which the policeman replied that twopence would not have got them a bed: that they could not possibly have got a bed: and therefore (argued that thoughtful officer) they ought to be punished for not getting one. The intelligent magistrate was much struck with the argument: and proceeded to imprison these two men for not doing a thing they could not do. But he was careful to explain that if they had sinned needlessly and in wanton lawlessness, they would have left the court without a stain on their characters; but as they could not avoid it, they were very much to blame. These things are being done in every part of England every day. They have their parallels even in every daily paper; but they have no parallel in any other earthly people or period; except in that insane command to make bricks without straw which brought down all the plagues of Egypt. For the common historical joke about Henry VIII. hanging a man for being Catholic and burning him for being Protestant is a symbolic joke only. The sceptic in the Tudor time could do something: he could always agree with Henry VIII. The desperate man to–day can do nothing. For you cannot agree with a maniac who sits on the bench with the straws sticking out of his hair and says, “Procure threepence from nowhere and I will give you leave to do without it.”

If it be answered that he can go to the workhouse, I reply that such an answer is founded on confused thinking. It is true that he is free to go to the workhouse, but only in the same sense in which he is free to go to jail, only in the same sense in which the serf under the gibbet was free to find peace in the grave. Many of the poor greatly prefer the grave to the workhouse, but that is not at all my argument here. The point is this: that it could not have been the general policy of a lord towards serfs to kill them all like wasps. It could not have been his standing “Advice to Serfs” to say, “Get hanged.” It cannot be the standing advice of magistrates to citizens to go to prison. And, precisely as plainly, it cannot be the standing advice of rich men to very poor men to go to the workhouses. For that would mean the rich raising their own poor rates enormously to keep a vast and expensive establishment of slaves. Now it may come to this, as Mr. Belloc maintains, but it is not the theory on which what we call the workhouse does in fact rest. The very shape (and even the very size) of a workhouse express the fact that it was founded for certain quite exceptional human failures—like the lunatic asylum. Say to a man, “Go to the madhouse,”
and he will say, “Wherein am I mad?” Say to a tramp under a hedge, “Go to the house of exceptional failures,” and he will say with equal reason, “I travel because I have no house; I walk because I have no horse; I sleep out because I have no bed. Wherein have I failed?” And he may have the intelligence to add, “Indeed, your worship, if somebody has failed, I think it is not I.” I concede, with all due haste, that he might perhaps say “me.”

The speciality then of this man’s wrong is that it is the only historic wrong that has in it the quality of nonsense. It could only happen in a nightmare; not in a clear and rational hell. It is the top point of that anarchy in the governing mind which, as I said at the beginning, is the main trait of modernity, especially in England. But if the first note in our policy is madness, the next note is certainly meanness. There are two peculiarly mean and unmanly legal mantraps in which this wretched man is tripped up. The first is that which prevents him from doing what any ordinary savage or nomad would do—take his chance of an uneven subsistence on the rude bounty of nature.

There is something very abject about forbidding this; because it is precisely this adventurous and vagabond spirit which the educated classes praise most in their books, poems and speeches. To feel the drag of the roads, to hunt in nameless hills and fish in secret streams, to have no address save “Over the Hills and Far Away,” to be ready to breakfast on berries and the daybreak and sup on the sunset and a sodden crust, to feed on wild things and be a boy again, all this is the heartiest and sincerest impulse in recent culture, in the songs and tales of Stevenson, in the cult of George Borrow and in the delightful little books published by Mr. E.V. Lucas. It is the one true excuse in the core of Imperialism; and it faintly softens the squalid prose and wooden–headed wickedness of the Self–Made Man who “came up to London with twopence in his pocket.” But when a poorer but braver man with less than twopence in his pocket does the very thing we are always praising, makes the blue heavens his house, we send him to a house built for infamy and flogging. We take poverty itself and only permit it with a property qualification; we only allow a man to be poor if he is rich. And we do this most savagely if he has sought to snatch his life by that particular thing of which our boyish adventure stories are fullest—hunting and fishing. The extremely severe English game laws hit most heavily what the highly reckless English romances praise most irresponsibly. All our literature is full of praise of the chase—especially of the wild goose chase. But if a poor man followed, as Tennyson says, “far as the wild swan wings to where the world dips down to sea and sands,” Tennyson would scarcely allow him to catch it. If he
found the wildest goose in the wildest fenland in the wildest regions of the sunset, he would very probably discover that the rich never sleep; and that there are no wild things in England.

In short, the English ruler is always appealing to a nation of sportsmen and concentrating all his efforts on preventing them from having any sport. The Imperialist is always pointing out with exultation that the common Englishman can live by adventure anywhere on the globe, but if the common Englishman tries to live by adventure in England, he is treated as harshly as a thief, and almost as harshly as an honest journalist. This is hypocrisy: the magistrate who gives his son “Treasure Island” and then imprisons a tramp is a hypocrite; the squire who is proud of English colonists and indulgent to English schoolboys, but cruel to English poachers, is drawing near that deep place wherein all liars have their part. But our point here is that the baseness is in the idea of bewildering the tramp; of leaving him no place for repentance. It is quite true, of course, that in the days of slavery or of serfdom the needy were fenced by yet fiercer penalties from spoiling the hunting of the rich. But in the older case there were two very important differences, the second of which is our main subject in this chapter. The first is that in a comparatively wild society, however fond of hunting, it seems impossible that enclosing and game-keeping can have been so omnipresent and efficient as in a society full of maps and policemen. The second difference is the one already noted: that if the slave or semi-slave was forbidden to get his food in the greenwood, he was told to get it somewhere else. The note of unreason was absent.

This is the first meanness; and the second is like unto it. If there is one thing of which cultivated modern letters is full besides adventure it is altruism. We are always being told to help others, to regard our wealth as theirs, to do what good we can, for we shall not pass this way again. We are everywhere urged by humanitarians to help lame dogs over stiles—though some humanitarians, it is true, seem to feel a colder interest in the case of lame men and women. Still, the chief fact of our literature, among all historic literatures, is human charity. But what is the chief fact of our legislation? The great outstanding fact of modern legislation, among all historic legislations, is the forbidding of human charity. It is this astonishing paradox, a thing in the teeth of all logic and conscience, that a man that takes another man’s money with his leave can be punished as if he had taken it without his leave. All through those dark or dim ages behind us, through times of servile stagnation, of feudal insolence, of pestilence and civil strife and all else that can war down the weak, for the weak to ask for charity was counted
lawful, and to give that charity, admirable. In all other centuries, in short, the casual bad deeds of bad men could be partly patched and mended by the casual good deeds of good men. But this is now forbidden; for it would leave the tramp a last chance if he could beg.

Now it will be evident by this time that the interesting scientific experiment on the tramp entirely depends on leaving him no chance, and not (like the slave) one chance. Of the economic excuses offered for the persecution of beggars it will be more natural to speak in the next chapter. It will suffice here to say that they are mere excuses, for a policy that has been persistent while probably largely unconscious, with a selfish and atheistic unconsciousness. That policy was directed towards something—or it could never have cut so cleanly and cruelly across the sentimental but sincere modern trends to adventure and altruism. Its object is soon stated. It was directed towards making the very poor man work for the capitalist, for any wages or none. But all this, which I shall also deal with in the next chapter, is here only important as introducing the last truth touching the man of despair. The game laws have taken from him his human command of Nature. The mendicancy laws have taken from him his human demand on Man. There is one human thing left it is much harder to take from him. Debased by him and his betters, it is still something brought out of Eden, where God made him a demigod: it does not depend on money and but little on time. He can create in his own image. The terrible truth is in the heart of a hundred legends and mysteries. As Jupiter could be hidden from all-devouring Time, as the Christ Child could be hidden from Herod—so the child unborn is still hidden from the omniscient oppressor. He who lives not yet, he and he alone is left; and they seek his life to take it away.
CHAPTER III

TRUE HISTORY OF A EUGENIST

He does not live in a dark lonely tower by the sea, from which are heard the screams of vivisected men and women. On the contrary, he lives in Mayfair. He does not wear great goblin spectacles that magnify his eyes to moons or diminish his neighbours to beetles. When he is more dignified he wears a single eyeglass; when more intelligent, a wink. He is not indeed wholly without interest in heredity and Eugenical biology; but his studies and experiments in this science have specialised almost exclusively in equus celer, the rapid or running horse. He is not a doctor; though he employs doctors to work up a case for Eugenics, just as he employs doctors to correct the errors of his dinner. He is not a lawyer, though unfortunately often a magistrate. He is not an author or a journalist; though he not infrequently owns a newspaper. He is not a soldier, though he may have a commission in the yeomanry; nor is he generally a gentleman, though often a nobleman. His wealth now commonly comes from a large staff of employed persons who scurry about in big buildings while he is playing golf. But he very often laid the foundations of his fortune in a very curious and poetical way, the nature of which I have never fully understood. It consisted in his walking about the street without a hat and going up to another man and saying, “Suppose I have two hundred whales out of the North Sea.” To which the other man replied, “And let us imagine that I am in possession of two thousand elephants’ tusks.” They then exchange, and the first man goes up to a third man and says, “Supposing me to have lately come into the possession of two thousand elephants’ tusks, would you, etc.?” If you play this game well, you become very rich; if you play it badly you have to kill yourself or try your luck at the Bar. The man I am speaking about must have played it well, or at any rate successfully.

He was born about 1860; and has been a member of Parliament since about 1890. For the first half of his life he was a Liberal; for the second half he has been a Conservative; but his actual policy in Parliament has remained largely unchanged and consistent. His policy in Parliament is as follows: he takes a seat in a room downstairs at Westminster, and takes from his breast pocket an excellent cigar-case, from which in turn he takes an excellent cigar. This he lights, and converses with other owners of such cigars on equus celer or such
matters as may afford him entertainment. Two or three times in the afternoon a bell rings; whereupon he deposits the cigar in an ashtray with great particularity, taking care not to break the ash, and proceeds to an upstairs room, flanked with two passages. He then walks into whichever of the two passages shall be indicated to him by a young man of the upper classes, holding a slip of paper. Having gone into this passage he comes out of it again, is counted by the young man and proceeds downstairs again; where he takes up the cigar once more, being careful not to break the ash. This process, which is known as Representative Government, has never called for any great variety in the manner of his life. Nevertheless, while his Parliamentary policy is unchanged, his change from one side of the House to the other did correspond with a certain change in his general policy in commerce and social life. The change of the party label is by this time quite a trifling matter; but there was in his case a change of philosophy or at least a change of project; though it was not so much becoming a Tory, as becoming rather the wrong kind of Socialist. He is a man with a history. It is a sad history, for he is certainly a less good man than he was when he started. That is why he is the man who is really behind Eugenics. It is because he has degenerated that he has come to talking of Degeneration.

In his Radical days (to quote from one who corresponded in some ways to this type) he was a much better man, because he was a much less enlightened one. The hard impudence of his first Manchester Individualism was softened by two relatively humane qualities; the first was a much greater manliness in his pride; the second was a much greater sincerity in his optimism. For the first point, the modern capitalist is merely industrial; but this man was also industrious. He was proud of hard work; nay, he was even proud of low work—if he could speak of it in the past and not the present. In fact, he invented a new kind of Victorian snobbishness, an inverted snobbishness. While the snobs of Thackeray turned Muggins into De Mogyns, while the snobs of Dickens wrote letters describing themselves as officers’ daughters “accustomed to every luxury—except spelling,” the Individualist spent his life in hiding his prosperous parents. He was more like an American plutocrat when he began; but he has since lost the American simplicity. The Frenchman works until he can play. The American works until he can’t play; and then thanks the devil, his master, that he is donkey enough to die in harness. But the Englishman, as he has since become, works until he can pretend that he never worked at all. He becomes as far as possible another person—a country gentleman who has never heard of his shop; one whose left hand holding a gun knows not what his right hand doeth in a ledger.
He uses a peerage as an alias, and a large estate as a sort of alibi. A stern Scotch minister remarked concerning the game of golf, with a terrible solemnity of manner, “the man who plays golf—he neglects his business, he forsakes his wife, he forgets his God.” He did not seem to realise that it is the chief aim of many a modern capitalist’s life to forget all three.

This abandonment of a boyish vanity in work, this substitution of a senile vanity in indolence, this is the first respect in which the rich Englishman has fallen. He was more of a man when he was at least a master–workman and not merely a master. And the second important respect in which he was better at the beginning is this: that he did then, in some hazy way, half believe that he was enriching other people as well as himself. The optimism of the early Victorian Individualists was not wholly hypocritical. Some of the clearest–headed and blackest–hearted of them, such as Malthus, saw where things were going, and boldly based their Manchester city on pessimism instead of optimism. But this was not the general case; most of the decent rich of the Bright and Cobden sort did have a kind of confused faith that the economic conflict would work well in the long run for everybody. They thought the troubles of the poor were incurable by State action (they thought that of all troubles), but they did not cold–bloodedly contemplate the prospect of those troubles growing worse and worse. By one of those tricks or illusions of the brain to which the luxurious are subject in all ages, they sometimes seemed to feel as if the populace had triumphed symbolically in their own persons. They blasphemously thought about their thrones of gold what can only be said about a cross—that they, being lifted up, would draw all men after them. They were so full of the romance that anybody could be Lord Mayor, that they seemed to have slipped into thinking that everybody could. It seemed as if a hundred Dick Whittingtons, accompanied by a hundred cats, could all be accommodated at the Mansion House. It was all nonsense; but it was not (until later) all humbug.

Step by step, however, with a horrid and increasing clearness, this man discovered what he was doing. It is generally one of the worst discoveries a man can make. At the beginning, the British plutocrat was probably quite as honest in suggesting that every tramp carried a magic cat like Dick Whittington, as the Bonapartist patriot was in saying that every French soldier carried a marshal’s baton in his knapsack. But it is exactly here that the difference and the danger appears. There is no comparison between a well–managed thing like Napoleon’s army and an unmanageable thing like modern competition. Logically, doubtless, it was impossible that every soldier should carry a marshal’s baton; they could
not all be marshals any more than they could all be mayors. But if the French soldier did not always have a baton in his knapsack, he always had a knapsack. But when that Self–Helper who bore the adorable name of Smiles told the English tramp that he carried a coronet in his bundle, the English tramp had an unanswerable answer. He pointed out that he had no bundle. The powers that ruled him had not fitted him with a knapsack, any more than they had fitted him with a future—or even a present. The destitute Englishman, so far from hoping to become anything, had never been allowed even to be anything. The French soldier’s ambition may have been in practice not only a short, but even a deliberately shortened ladder, in which the top rungs were knocked out. But for the English it was the bottom rungs that were knocked out, so that they could not even begin to climb. And sooner or later, in exact proportion to his intelligence, the English plutocrat began to understand not only that the poor were impotent, but that their impotence had been his only power. The truth was not merely that his riches had left them poor; it was that nothing but their poverty could have been strong enough to make him rich. It is this paradox, as we shall see, that creates the curious difference between him and every other kind of robber.

I think it is no more than justice to him to say that the knowledge, where it has come to him, has come to him slowly; and I think it came (as most things of common sense come) rather vaguely and as in a vision—that is, by the mere look of things. The old Cobdenite employer was quite within his rights in arguing that earth is not heaven, that the best obtainable arrangement might contain many necessary evils; and that Liverpool and Belfast might be growing more prosperous as a whole in spite of pathetic things that might be seen there. But I simply do not believe he has been able to look at Liverpool and Belfast and continue to think this: that is why he has turned himself into a sham country gentleman. Earth is not heaven, but the nearest we can get to heaven ought not to look like hell; and Liverpool and Belfast look like hell, whether they are or not. Such cities might be growing prosperous as a whole, though a few citizens were more miserable. But it was more and more broadly apparent that it was exactly and precisely as a whole that they were not growing more prosperous, but only the few citizens who were growing more prosperous by their increasing misery. You could not say a country was becoming a white man’s country when there were more and more black men in it every day. You could not say a community was more and more masculine when it was producing more and more women. Nor can you say that a city is growing richer and richer when more and more of its inhabitants are very poor men. There might be a false agitation founded on
the pathos of individual cases in a community pretty normal in bulk. But the fact is that no one can take a cab across Liverpool without having a quite complete and unified impression that the pathos is not a pathos of individual cases, but a pathos in bulk. People talk of the Celtic sadness; but there are very few things in Ireland that look so sad as the Irishman in Liverpool. The desolation of Tara is cheery compared with the desolation of Belfast. I recommend Mr. Yeats and his mournful friends to turn their attention to the pathos of Belfast. I think if they hung up the harp that once in Lord Furness’s factory, there would be a chance of another string breaking.

Broadly, and as things bulk to the eye, towns like Leeds, if placed beside towns like Rouen or Florence, or Chartres, or Cologne, do actually look like beggars walking among burghers. After that overpowering and unpleasant impression it is really useless to argue that they are richer because a few of their parasites get rich enough to live somewhere else. The point may be put another way, thus: that it is not so much that these more modern cities have this or that monopoly of good or evil; it is that they have every good in its fourth-rate form and every evil in its worst form. For instance, that interesting weekly paper The Nation amiably rebuked Mr. Belloc and myself for suggesting that revelry and the praise of fermented liquor were more characteristic of Continental and Catholic communities than of communities with the religion and civilisation of Belfast. It said that if we would “cross the border” into Scotland, we should find out our mistake. Now, not only have I crossed the border, but I have had considerable difficulty in crossing the road in a Scotch town on a festive evening. Men were literally lying like piled-up corpses in the gutters, and from broken bottles whisky was pouring down the drains. I am not likely, therefore, to attribute a total and arid abstinence to the whole of industrial Scotland. But I never said that drinking was a mark rather of the Catholic countries. I said that moderate drinking was a mark rather of the Catholic countries. In other words, I say of the common type of Continental citizen, not that he is the only person who is drinking, but that he is the only person who knows how to drink. Doubtless gin is as much a feature of Hoxton as beer is a feature of Munich. But who is the connoisseur who prefers the gin of Hoxton to the beer of Munich? Doubtless the Protestant Scotch ask for “Scotch,” as the men of Burgundy ask for Burgundy. But do we find them lying in heaps on each side of the road when we walk through a Burgundian village? Do we find the French peasant ready to let Burgundy escape down a drain-pipe? Now this one point, on which I accept The Nation’s challenge, can be exactly paralleled on almost every point by
which we test a civilisation. It does not matter whether we are for alcohol or against it. On either argument Glasgow is more objectionable than Rouen. The French abstainer makes less fuss; the French drinker gives less offence. It is so with property, with war, with everything. I can understand a teetotaler being horrified, on his principles, at Italian wine–drinking. I simply cannot believe he could be more horrified at it than at Hoxton gin–drinking. I can understand a Pacifist, with his special scruples, disliking the militarism of Belfort. I flatly deny that he can dislike it more than the militarism of Berlin. I can understand a good Socialist hating the petty cares of the distributed peasant property. I deny that any good Socialist can hate them more than he hates the large cares of Rockefeller. That is the unique tragedy of the plutocratic state to–day; it has no successes to hold up against the failures it alleges to exist in Latin or other methods. You can (if you are well out of his reach) call the Irish rustic debased and superstitious. I defy you to contrast his debasement and superstition with the citizenship and enlightenment of the English rustic.

To–day the rich man knows in his heart that he is a cancer and not an organ of the State. He differs from all other thieves or parasites for this reason: that the brigand who takes by force wishes his victims to be rich. But he who wins by a one–sided contract actually wishes them to be poor. Rob Roy in a cavern, hearing a company approaching, will hope (or if in a pious mood, pray) that they may come laden with gold or goods. But Mr. Rockefeller, in his factory, knows that if those who pass are laden with goods they will pass on. He will therefore (if in a pious mood) pray that they may be destitute, and so be forced to work his factory for him for a starvation wage. It is said (and also, I believe, disputed) that Blücher riding through the richer parts of London exclaimed, “What a city to sack!” But Blücher was a soldier if he was a bandit. The true sweater feels quite otherwise. It is when he drives through the poorest parts of London that he finds the streets paved with gold, being paved with prostrate servants; it is when he sees the grey lean leagues of Bow and Poplar that his soul is uplifted and he knows he is secure. This is not rhetoric, but economics.

I repeat that up to a point the profiteer was innocent because he was ignorant; he had been lured on by easy and accommodating events. He was innocent as the new Thane of Glamis was innocent, as the new Thane of Cawdor was innocent; but the King—The modern manufacturer, like Macbeth, decided to march on, under the mute menace of the heavens. He knew that the spoil of the poor was in his houses; but he could not, after careful calculation, think of any way in which they could get it out of his houses without being arrested for housebreaking. He
faced the future with a face flinty with pride and impenitence. This period can be dated practically by the period when the old and genuine Protestant religion of England began to fail; and the average business man began to be agnostic, not so much because he did not know where he was, as because he wanted to forget. Many of the rich took to scepticism exactly as the poor took to drink; because it was a way out. But in any case, the man who had made a mistake not only refused to unmake it, but decided to go on making it. But in this he made yet another most amusing mistake, which was the beginning of all Eugenics.
CHAPTER IV

THE VENGEANCE OF THE FLESH

By a quaint paradox, we generally miss the meaning of simple stories because we are not subtle enough to understand their simplicity. As long as men were in sympathy with some particular religion or other romance of things in general, they saw the thing solid and swallowed it whole, knowing that it could not disagree with them. But the moment men have lost the instinct of being simple in order to understand it, they have to be very subtle in order to understand it. We can find, for instance, a very good working case in those old puritanical nursery tales about the terrible punishment of trivial sins; about how Tommy was drowned for fishing on the Sabbath, or Sammy struck by lightning for going out after dark. Now these moral stories are immoral, because Calvinism is immoral. They are wrong, because Puritanism is wrong. But they are not quite so wrong, they are not a quarter so wrong, as many superficial sages have supposed.

The truth is that everything that ever came out of a human mouth had a human meaning; and not one of the fixed fools of history was such a fool as he looks. And when our great–uncles or great–grandmothers told a child he might be drowned by breaking the Sabbath, their souls (though undoubtedly, as Touchstone said, in a parlous state) were not in quite so simple a state as is suggested by supposing that their god was a devil who dropped babies into the Thames for a trifle. This form of religious literature is a morbid form if taken by itself; but it did correspond to a certain reality in psychology which most people of any religion, or even of none, have felt a touch of at some time or other. Leaving out theological terms as far as possible, it is the subconscious feeling that one can be wrong with Nature as well as right with Nature; that the point of wrongness may be a detail (in the superstitions of heathens this is often quite a triviality); but that if one is really wrong with Nature, there is no particular reason why all her rivers should not drown or all her storm–bolts strike one who is, by this vague yet vivid hypothesis, her enemy. This may be a mental sickness, but it is too human or too mortal a sickness to be called solely a superstition. It is not solely a superstition; it is not simply superimposed upon human nature by something that has got on top of it. It flourishes without check among non–Christian systems, and it flourishes especially in Calvinism, because Calvinism
is the most non–Christian of Christian systems. But like everything else that inheres in the natural senses and spirit of man, it has something in it; it is not stark unreason. If it is an ill (and it generally is), it is one of the ills that flesh is heir to, but he is the lawful heir. And like many other dubious or dangerous human instincts or appetites, it is sometimes useful as a warning against worse things.

Now the trouble of the nineteenth century very largely came from the loss of this; the loss of what we may call the natural and heathen mysticism. When modern critics say that Julius Caesar did not believe in Jupiter, or that Pope Leo did not believe in Catholicism, they overlook an essential difference between those ages and ours. Perhaps Julius did not believe in Jupiter; but he did not disbelieve in Jupiter. There was nothing in his philosophy, or the philosophy of that age, that could forbid him to think that there was a spirit personal and predominant in the world. But the modern materialists are not permitted to doubt; they are forbidden to believe. Hence, while the heathen might avail himself of accidental omens, queer coincidences or casual dreams, without knowing for certain whether they were really hints from heaven or premonitory movements in his own brain, the modern Christian turned heathen must not entertain such notions at all, but must reject the oracle as the altar. The modern sceptic was drugged against all that was natural in the supernatural. And this was why the modern tyrant marched upon his doom, as a tyrant literally pagan might possibly not have done.

There is one idea of this kind that runs through most popular tales (those, for instance, on which Shakespeare is so often based)—an idea that is profoundly moral even if the tales are immoral. It is what may be called the flaw in the deed: the idea that, if I take my advantage to the full, I shall hear of something to my disadvantage. Thus Midas fell into a fallacy about the currency; and soon had reason to become something more than a Bimetallist. Thus Macbeth had a fallacy about forestry; he could not see the trees for the wood. He forgot that, though a place cannot be moved, the trees that grow on it can. Thus Shylock had a fallacy of physiology; he forgot that, if you break into the house of life, you find it a bloody house in the most emphatic sense. But the modern capitalist did not read fairy–tales, and never looked for the little omens at the turnings of the road. He (or the most intelligent section of him) had by now realised his position, and knew in his heart it was a false position. He thought a margin of men out of work was good for his business; he could no longer really think it was good for his country. He could no longer be the old “hard–headed” man
who simply did not understand things; he could only be the hard-hearted man who faced them. But he still marched on; he was sure he had made no mistake.

However, he had made a mistake—as definite as a mistake in multiplication. It may be summarised thus: that the same inequality and insecurity that makes cheap labour may make bad labour, and at last no labour at all. It was as if a man who wanted something from an enemy, should at last reduce the enemy to come knocking at his door in the despair of winter, should keep him waiting in the snow to sharpen the bargain; and then come out to find the man dead upon the doorstep.

He had discovered the divine boomerang; his sin had found him out. The experiment of Individualism—the keeping of the worker half in and half out of work—was far too ingenious not to contain a flaw. It was too delicate a balance to work entirely with the strength of the starved and the vigilance of the benighted. It was too desperate a course to rely wholly on desperation. And as time went on the terrible truth slowly declared itself; the degraded class was really degenerating. It was right and proper enough to use a man as a tool; but the tool, ceaselessly used, was being used up. It was quite reasonable and respectable, of course, to fling a man away like a tool; but when it was flung away in the rain the tool rusted. But the comparison to a tool was insufficient for an awful reason that had already begun to dawn upon the master’s mind. If you pick up a hammer, you do not find a whole family of nails clinging to it. If you fling away a chisel by the roadside, it does not litter and leave a lot of little chisels. But the meanest of the tools, Man, had still this strange privilege which God had given him, doubtless by mistake. Despite all improvements in machinery, the most important part of the machinery (the fittings technically described in the trade as “hands”) were apparently growing worse. The firm was not only encumbered with one useless servant, but he immediately turned himself into five useless servants. “The poor should not be emancipated,” the old reactionaries used to say, “until they are fit for freedom.” But if this downrush went on, it looked as if the poor would not stand high enough to be fit for slavery.

So at least it seemed, doubtless in a great degree subconsciously, to the man who had wagered all his wealth on the usefulness of the poor to the rich and the dependence of the rich on the poor. The time came at last when the rather reckless breeding in the abyss below ceased to be a supply, and began to be something like a wastage; ceased to be something like keeping foxhounds, and began alarmingly to resemble a necessity of shooting foxes. The situation was
aggravated by the fact that these sexual pleasures were often the only ones the very poor could obtain, and were, therefore, disproportionately pursued, and by the fact that their conditions were often such that prenatal nourishment and such things were utterly abnormal. The consequences began to appear. To a much less extent than the Eugenists assert, but still to a notable extent, in a much looser sense than the Eugenists assume, but still in some sort of sense, the types that were inadequate or incalculable or uncontrollable began to increase. Under the hedges of the country, on the seats of the parks, loafing under the bridges or leaning over the Embankment, began to appear a new race of men—men who are certainly not mad, whom we shall gain no scientific light by calling feeble-minded, but who are, in varying individual degrees, dazed or drink–sodden, or lazy or tricky or tired in body and spirit. In a far less degree than the teetotallers tell us, but still in a large degree, the traffic in gin and bad beer (itself a capitalist enterprise) fostered the evil, though it had not begun it. Men who had no human bond with the instructed man, men who seemed to him monsters and creatures without mind, became an eyesore in the market–place and a terror on the empty roads. The rich were afraid.

Moreover, as I have hinted before, the act of keeping the destitute out of public life, and crushing them under confused laws, had an effect on their intelligences which paralyses them even as a proletariat. Modern people talk of “Reason versus Authority”; but authority itself involves reason, or its orders would not even be understood. If you say to your valet, “Look after the buttons on my waistcoat,” he may do it, even if you throw a boot at his head. But if you say to him, “Look after the buttons on my top–hat,” he will not do it, though you empty a boot–shop over him. If you say to a schoolboy, “Write out that Ode of Horace from memory in the original Latin,” he may do it without a flogging. If you say, “Write out that Ode of Horace in the original German,” he will not do it with a thousand floggings. If you will not learn logic, he certainly will not learn Latin. And the ludicrous laws to which the needy are subject (such as that which punishes the homeless for not going home) have really, I think, a great deal to do with a certain increase in their sheepishness and short–wittedness, and, therefore, in their industrial inefficiency. By one of the monstrosities of the feeble–minded theory, a man actually acquitted by judge and jury could then be examined by doctors as to the state of his mind—presumably in order to discover by what diseased eccentricity he had refrained from the crime. In other words, when the police cannot jail a man who is innocent of doing something, they jail him for being too innocent to do anything. I do not suppose the man is an idiot at all, but
I can believe he feels more like one after the legal process than before. Thus all the factors—the bodily exhaustion, the harassing fear of hunger, the reckless refuge in sexuality, and the black botheration of bad laws—combined to make the employee more unemployable.

Now, it is very important to understand here that there were two courses of action still open to the disappointed capitalist confronted by the new peril of this real or alleged decay. First, he might have reversed his machine, so to speak, and started unwinding the long rope of dependence by which he had originally dragged the proletarian to his feet. In other words, he might have seen that the workmen had more money, more leisure, more luxuries, more status in the community, and then trusted to the normal instincts of reasonably happy human beings to produce a generation better born, bred and cared for than these tortured types that were less and less use to him. It might still not be too late to rebuild the human house upon such an architectural plan that poverty might fly out of the window, with the reasonable prospect of love coming in at the door. In short, he might have let the English poor, the mass of whom were not weak-minded, though more of them were growing weaker, a reasonable chance, in the form of more money, of achieving their eugenical resurrection themselves. It has never been shown, and it cannot be shown, that the method would have failed. But it can be shown, and it must be closely and clearly noted, that the method had very strict limitations from the employers’ own point of view. If they made the worker too comfortable, he would not work to increase another’s comforts; if they made him too independent, he would not work like a dependent. If, for instance, his wages were so good that he could save out of them, he might cease to be a wage-earner. If his house or garden were his own, he might stand an economic siege in it. The whole capitalist experiment had been built on his dependence; but now it was getting out of hand, not in the direction of freedom, but of frank helplessness. One might say that his dependence had got independent of control.

But there was another way. And towards this the employer’s ideas began, first darkly and unconsciously, but now more and more clearly, to drift. Giving property, giving leisure, giving status costs money. But there is one human force that costs nothing. As it does not cost the beggar a penny to indulge, so it would not cost the employer a penny to employ. He could not alter or improve the tables or the chairs on the cheap. But there were two pieces of furniture (labelled respectively “the husband” and “the wife”) whose relations were much cheaper. He could alter the marriage in the house in such a way as to promise himself the
largest possible number of the kind of children he did want, with the smallest possible number of the kind he did not. He could divert the force of sex from producing vagabonds. And he could harness to his high engines unbought the red unbroken river of the blood of a man in his youth, as he has already harnessed to them all the wild waste rivers of the world.
CHAPTER V

THE MEANNESS OF THE MOTIVE

Now, if any ask whether it be imaginable that an ordinary man of the wealthier type should analyse the problem or conceive the plan, the inhumanly far-seeing plan, as I have set it forth, the answer is: “Certainly not.” Many rich employers are too generous to do such a thing; many are too stupid to know what they are doing. The eugenical opportunity I have described is but an ultimate analysis of a whole drift of thoughts in the type of man who does not analyse his thoughts. He sees a slouching tramp, with a sick wife and a string of rickety children, and honestly wonders what he can do with them. But prosperity does not favour self-examination; and he does not even ask himself whether he means “How can I help them?” or “How can I use them?”—what he can still do for them, or what they could still do for him. Probably he sincerely means both, but the latter much more than the former; he laments the breaking of the tools of Mammon much more than the breaking of the images of God. It would be almost impossible to grope in the limbo of what he does think; but we can assert that there is one thing he doesn’t think. He doesn’t think, “This man might be as jolly as I am, if he need not come to me for work or wages.”

That this is so, that at root the Eugenist is the Employer, there are multitudinous proofs on every side, but they are of necessity miscellaneous, and in many cases negative. The most enormous is in a sense the most negative: that no one seems able to imagine capitalist industrialism being sacrificed to any other object. By a curious recurrent slip in the mind, as irritating as a catch in a clock, people miss the main thing and concentrate on the mean thing. “Modern conditions” are treated as fixed, though the very word “modern” implies that they are fugitive. “Old ideas” are treated as impossible, though their very antiquity often proves their permanence. Some years ago some ladies petitioned that the platforms of our big railway stations should be raised, as it was more convenient for the hobble skirt. It never occurred to them to change to a sensible skirt. Still less did it occur to them that, compared with all the female fashions that have fluttered about on it, by this time St. Pancras is as historic as St. Peter’s.

I could fill this book with examples of the universal, unconscious assumption that life and sex must live by the laws of “business” or industrialism, and not
vice versa; examples from all the magazines, novels, and newspapers. In order to make it brief and typical, I take one case of a more or less Eugenist sort from a paper that lies open in front of me—a paper that still bears on its forehead the boast of being peculiarly an organ of democracy in revolt. To this a man writes to say that the spread of destitution will never be stopped until we have educated the lower classes in the methods by which the upper classes prevent procreation. The man had the horrible playfulness to sign his letter “Hopeful.” Well, there are certainly many methods by which people in the upper classes prevent procreation; one of them is what used to be called “platonic friendship,” till they found another name for it at the Old Bailey. I do not suppose the hopeful gentleman hopes for this; but some of us find the abortion he does hope for almost as abominable. That, however, is not the curious point. The curious point is that the hopeful one concludes by saying, “When people have large families and small wages, not only is there a high infantile death-rate, but often those who do live to grow up are stunted and weakened by having had to share the family income for a time with those who died early. There would be less unhappiness if there were no unwanted children.” You will observe that he tacitly takes it for granted that the small wages and the income, desperately shared, are the fixed points, like day and night, the conditions of human life. Compared with them marriage and maternity are luxuries, things to be modified to suit the wage-market. There are unwanted children; but unwanted by whom? This man does not really mean that the parents do not want to have them. He means that the employers do not want to pay them properly. Doubtless, if you said to him directly, “Are you in favour of low wages?” he would say, “No.” But I am not, in this chapter, talking about the effect on such modern minds of a cross-examination to which they do not subject themselves. I am talking about the way their minds work, the instinctive trick and turn of their thoughts, the things they assume before argument, and the way they faintly feel that the world is going. And, frankly, the turn of their mind is to tell the child he is not wanted, as the turn of my mind is to tell the profiteer he is not wanted. Motherhood, they feel, and a full childhood, and the beauty of brothers and sisters, are good things in their way, but not so good as a bad wage. About the mutilation of womanhood, and the massacre of men unborn, he signs himself “Hopeful.” He is hopeful of female indignity, hopeful of human annihilation. But about improving the small bad wage he signs himself “Hopeless.”

This is the first evidence of motive: the ubiquitous assumption that life and love must fit into a fixed framework of employment, even (as in this case) of bad
employment. The second evidence is the tacit and total neglect of the scientific question in all the departments in which it is not an employment question; as, for instance, the marriages of the princely, patrician, or merely plutocratic houses. I do not mean, of course, that no scientific men have rigidly tackled these, though I do not recall any cases. But I am not talking of the merits of individual men of science, but of the push and power behind this movement, the thing that is able to make it fashionable and politically important. I say, if this power were an interest in truth, or even in humanity, the first field in which to study would be in the weddings of the wealthy. Not only would the records be more lucid, and the examples more in evidence, but the cases would be more interesting and more decisive. For the grand marriages have presented both extremes of the problem of pedigree—first the “breeding in and in,” and later the most incongruous cosmopolitan blends. It would really be interesting to note which worked the best, or what point of compromise was safest. For the poor (about whom the newspaper Eugenists are always talking) cannot offer any test cases so complete. Waiters never had to marry waitresses, as princes had to marry princesses. And (for the other extreme) housemaids seldom marry Red Indians. It may be because there are none to marry. But to the millionaires the continents are flying railway stations, and the most remote races can be rapidly linked together. A marriage in London or Paris may chain Ravenna to Chicago, or Ben Cruachan to Bagdad. Many European aristocrats marry Americans, notoriously the most mixed stock in the world; so that the disinterested Eugenist, with a little trouble, might reveal rich stores of negro or Asiatic blood to his delighted employer. Instead of which he dulls our ears and distresses our refinement by tedious denunciations of the monochrome marriages of the poor.

For there is something really pathetic about the Eugenist’s neglect of the aristocrat and his family affairs. People still talk about the pride of pedigree; but it strikes me as the one point on which the aristocrats are almost morbidly modest. We should be learned Eugenists if we were allowed to know half as much of their heredity as we are of their hairdressing. We see the modern aristocrat in the most human poses in the illustrated papers, playing with his dog or parrot—nay, we see him playing with his child, or with his grandchild. But there is something heartrending in his refusal to play with his grandfather. There is often something vague and even fantastic about the antecedents of our most established families, which would afford the Eugenist admirable scope not only for investigation but for experiment. Certainly, if he could obtain the necessary powers, the Eugenist might bring off some startling effects with the mixed
materials of the governing class. Suppose, to take wild and hypothetical examples, he were to marry a Scotch earl, say, to the daughter of a Jewish banker, or an English duke to an American parvenu of semi-Jewish extraction? What would happen? We have here an unexplored field.

It remains unexplored not merely through snobbery and cowardice, but because the Eugenist (at least the influential Eugenist) half-consciously knows it is no part of his job; what he is really wanted for is to get the grip of the governing classes on to the unmanageable output of poor people. It would not matter in the least if all Lord Cowdray’s descendants grew up too weak to hold a tool or turn a wheel. It would matter very much, especially to Lord Cowdray, if all his employees grew up like that. The oligarch can be unemployable, because he will not be employed. Thus the practical and popular exponent of Eugenics has his face always turned towards the slums, and instinctively thinks in terms of them. If he talks of segregating some incurably vicious type of the sexual sort, he is thinking of a ruffian who assaults girls in lanes. He is not thinking of a millionaire like White, the victim of Thaw. If he speaks of the hopelessness of feeble-mindedness, he is thinking of some stunted creature gaping at hopeless lessons in a poor school. He is not thinking of a millionaire like Thaw, the slayer of White. And this not because he is such a brute as to like people like White or Thaw any more than we do, but because he knows that his problem is the degeneration of the useful classes; because he knows that White would never have been a millionaire if all this workers had spent themselves on women as White did, that Thaw would never have been a millionaire if all his servants had been Thaws. The ornaments may be allowed to decay, but the machinery must be mended. That is the second proof of the plutocratic impulse behind all Eugenics: that no one thinks of applying it to the prominent classes. No one thinks of applying it where it could most easily be applied.

A third proof is the strange new disposition to regard the poor as a race; as if they were a colony of Japs or Chinese coolies. It can be most clearly seen by comparing it with the old, more individual, charitable, and (as the Eugenists might say) sentimental view of poverty. In Goldsmith or Dickens or Hood there is a basic idea that the particular poor person ought not to be so poor: it is some accident or some wrong. Oliver Twist or Tiny Tim are fairy princes waiting for their fairy godmother. They are held as slaves, but rather as the hero and heroine of a Spanish or Italian romance were held as slaves by the Moors. The modern poor are getting to be regarded as slaves in the separate and sweeping sense of the negroes in the plantations. The bondage of the white hero to the black master
was regarded as abnormal; the bondage of the black to the white master as normal. The Eugenist, for all I know, would regard the mere existence of Tiny Tim as a sufficient reason for massacring the whole family of Cratchit; but, as a matter of fact, we have here a very good instance of how much more practically true to life is sentiment than cynicism. The poor are not a race or even a type. It is senseless to talk about breeding them; for they are not a breed. They are, in cold fact, what Dickens describes: “a dustbin of individual accidents,” of damaged dignity, and often of damaged gentility. The class very largely consists of perfectly promising children, lost like Oliver Twist, or crippled like Tiny Tim. It contains very valuable things, like most dustbins. But the Eugenist delusion of the barbaric breed in the abyss affects even those more gracious philanthropists who almost certainly do want to assist the destitute and not merely to exploit them. It seems to affect not only their minds, but their very eyesight. Thus, for instance, Mrs. Alec Tweedie almost scornfully asks, “When we go through the slums, do we see beautiful children?” The answer is, “Yes, very often indeed.” I have seen children in the slums quite pretty enough to be Little Nell or the outcast whom Hood called “young and so fair.” Nor has the beauty anything necessarily to do with health; there are beautiful healthy children, beautiful dying children, ugly dying children, ugly uproarious children in Petticoat Lane or Park Lane. There are people of every physical and mental type, of every sort of health and breeding, in a single back street. They have nothing in common but the wrong we do them.

The important point is, however, that there is more fact and realism in the wildest and most elegant old fictions about disinherited dukes and long–lost daughters than there is in this Eugenist attempt to make the poor all of a piece—a sort of black fungoid growth that is ceaselessly increasing in a chasm. There is a cheap sneer at poor landladies: that they always say they have seen better days. Nine times out of ten they say it because it is true. What can be said of the great mass of Englishmen, by anyone who knows any history, except that they have seen better days? And the landlady’s claim is not snobbish, but rather spirited; it is her testimony to the truth in the old tales of which I spoke: that she ought not to be so poor or so servile in status; that a normal person ought to have more property and more power in the State than that. Such dreams of lost dignity are perhaps the only things that stand between us and the cattle–breeding paradise now promised. Nor are such dreams by any means impotent. I remember Mr. T.P. O’Connor wrote an interesting article about Madame Humbert, in the course of which he said that Irish peasants, and probably most peasants, tended
to have a half–fictitious family legend about an estate to which they were entitled. This was written in the time when Irish peasants were landless in their land; and the delusion doubtless seemed all the more entertaining to the landlords who ruled them and the money–lenders who ruled the landlords. But the dream has conquered the realities. The phantom farms have materialised. Merely by tenaciously affirming the kind of pride that comes after a fall, by remembering the old civilisation and refusing the new, by recurring to an old claim that seemed to most Englishmen like the lie of a broken–down lodging–house keeper at Margate—by all this the Irish have got what they want, in solid mud and turf. That imaginary estate has conquered the Three Estates of the Realm.

But the homeless Englishman must not even remember a home. So far from his house being his castle, he must not have even a castle in the air. He must have no memories; that is why he is taught no history. Why is he told none of the truth about the mediæval civilisation except a few cruelties and mistakes in chemistry? Why does a mediæval burgher never appear till he can appear in a shirt and a halter? Why does a mediæval monastery never appear till it is “corrupt” enough to shock the innocence of Henry VIII.? Why do we hear of one charter—that of the barons—and not a word of the charters of the carpenters, smiths, shipwrights and all the rest? The reason is that the English peasant is not only not allowed to have an estate, he is not even allowed to have lost one. The past has to be painted pitch black, that it may be worse than the present.

There is one strong, startling, outstanding thing about Eugenics, and that is its meanness. Wealth, and the social science supported by wealth, had tried an inhuman experiment. The experiment had entirely failed. They sought to make wealth accumulate—and they made men decay. Then, instead of confessing the error, and trying to restore the wealth, or attempting to repair the decay, they are trying to cover their first cruel experiment with a more cruel experiment. They put a poisonous plaster on a poisoned wound. Vilest of all, they actually quote the bewilderment produced among the poor by their first blunder as a reason for allowing them to blunder again. They are apparently ready to arrest all the opponents of their system as mad, merely because the system was maddening. Suppose a captain had collected volunteers in a hot, waste country by the assurance that he could lead them to water, and knew where to meet the rest of his regiment. Suppose he led them wrong, to a place where the regiment could not be for days, and there was no water. And suppose sunstroke struck them down on the sand man after man, and they kicked and danced and raved. And,
when at last the regiment came, suppose the captain successfully concealed his
mistake, because all his men had suffered too much from it to testify to its ever
having occurred. What would you think of the gallant captain? It is pretty much
what I think of this particular captain of industry.

Of course, nobody supposes that all Capitalists, or most Capitalists, are
conscious of any such intellectual trick. Most of them are as much bewildered as
the battered proletariat; but there are some who are less well–meaning and more
mean. And these are leading their more generous colleagues towards the
fulfilment of this ungenerous evasion, if not towards the comprehension of it.
Now a ruler of the Capitalist civilisation, who has come to consider the idea of
ultimately herding and breeding the workers like cattle, has certain
contemporary problems to review. He has to consider what forces still exist in
the modern world for the frustration of his design. The first question is how
much remains of the old ideal of individual liberty. The second question is how
far the modern mind is committed to such egalitarian ideas as may be implied in
Socialism. The third is whether there is any power of resistance in the tradition
of the populace itself. These three questions for the future I shall consider in
their order in the final chapters that follow. It is enough to say here that I think
the progress of these ideals has broken down at the precise point where they will
fail to prevent the experiment. Briefly, the progress will have deprived the
Capitalist of his old Individualist scruples, without committing him to his new
Collectivist obligations. He is in a very perilous position; for he has ceased to be
a Liberal without becoming a Socialist, and the bridge by which he was crossing
has broken above an abyss of Anarchy.
CHAPTER VI

THE ECLIPSE OF LIBERTY

If such a thing as the Eugenic sociology had been suggested in the period from Fox to Gladstone, it would have been far more fiercely repudiated by the reformers than by the Conservatives. If Tories had regarded it as an insult to marriage, Radicals would have far more resolutely regarded it as an insult to citizenship. But in the interval we have suffered from a process resembling a sort of mystical parricide, such as is told of so many gods, and is true of so many great ideas. Liberty has produced scepticism, and scepticism has destroyed liberty. The lovers of liberty thought they were leaving it unlimited, when they were only leaving it undefined. They thought they were only leaving it undefined, when they were really leaving it undefended. Men merely finding themselves free found themselves free to dispute the value of freedom. But the important point to seize about this reactionary scepticism is that as it is bound to be unlimited in theory, so it is bound to be unlimited in practice. In other words, the modern mind is set in an attitude which would enable it to advance, not only towards Eugenic legislation, but towards any conceivable or inconceivable extravagances of Eugenics.

Those who reply to any plea for freedom invariably fall into a certain trap. I have debated with numberless different people on these matters, and I confess I find it amusing to see them tumbling into it one after another. I remember discussing it before a club of very active and intelligent Suffragists, and I cast it here for convenience in the form which it there assumed. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that I say that to take away a poor man’s pot of beer is to take away a poor man’s personal liberty, it is very vital to note what is the usual or almost universal reply. People hardly ever do reply, for some reason or other, by saying that a man’s liberty consists of such and such things, but that beer is an exception that cannot be classed among them, for such and such reasons. What they almost invariably do say is something like this: “After all, what is liberty? Man must live as a member of a society, and must obey those laws which, etc., etc.” In other words, they collapse into a complete confession that they are attacking all liberty and any liberty; that they do deny the very existence or the very possibility of liberty. In the very form of the answer they admit the full scope of the accusation against them. In trying to rebut the smaller accusation,
they plead guilty to the larger one.

This distinction is very important, as can be seen from any practical parallel. Suppose we wake up in the middle of the night and find that a neighbour has entered the house not by the front–door but by the skylight; we may suspect that he has come after the fine old family jewellery. We may be reassured if he can refer it to a really exceptional event; as that he fell on to the roof out of an aeroplane, or climbed on to the roof to escape from a mad dog. Short of the incredible, the stranger the story the better the excuse; for an extraordinary event requires an extraordinary excuse. But we shall hardly be reassured if he merely gazes at us in a dreamy and wistful fashion and says, “After all, what is property? Why should material objects be thus artificially attached, etc., etc.?”

We shall merely realise that his attitude allows of his taking the jewellery and everything else. Or if the neighbour approaches us carrying a large knife dripping with blood, we may be convinced by his story that he killed another neighbour in self–defence, that the quiet gentleman next door was really a homicidal maniac. We shall know that homicidal mania is exceptional and that we ourselves are so happy as not to suffer from it; and being free from the disease may be free from the danger. But it will not soothe us for the man with the gory knife to say softly and pensively “After all, what is human life? Why should we cling to it? Brief at the best, sad at the brightest, it is itself but a disease from which, etc., etc.” We shall perceive that the sceptic is in a mood not only to murder us but to massacre everybody in the street. Exactly the same effect which would be produced by the questions of “What is property?” and “What is life?” is produced by the question of “What is liberty?” It leaves the questioner free to disregard any liberty, or in other words to take any liberties. The very thing he says is an anticipatory excuse for anything he may choose to do. If he gags a man to prevent him from indulging in profane swearing, or locks him in the coal cellar to guard against his going on the spree, he can still be satisfied with saying, “After all, what is liberty? Man is a member of, etc., etc.”

That is the problem, and that is why there is now no protection against Eugenic or any other experiments. If the men who took away beer as an unlawful pleasure had paused for a moment to define the lawful pleasures, there might be a different situation. If the men who had denied one liberty had taken the opportunity to affirm other liberties, there might be some defence for them. But it never occurs to them to admit any liberties at all. It never so much as crosses their minds. Hence the excuse for the last oppression will always serve as well for the next oppression; and to that tyranny there can be no end.
Hence the tyranny has taken but a single stride to reach the secret and sacred places of personal freedom, where no sane man ever dreamed of seeing it; and especially the sanctuary of sex. It is as easy to take away a man’s wife or baby as to take away his beer when you can say “What is liberty?”; just as it is as easy to cut off his head as to cut off his hair if you are free to say “What is life?” There is no rational philosophy of human rights generally disseminated among the populace, to which we can appeal in defence even of the most intimate or individual things that anybody can imagine. For so far as there was a vague principle in these things, that principle has been wholly changed. It used to be said that a man could have liberty, so long as it did not interfere with the liberty of others. This did afford some rough justification for the ordinary legal view of the man with the pot of beer. For instance, it was logical to allow some degree of distinction between beer and tea, on the ground that a man may be moved by excess of beer to throw the pot at somebody’s head. And it may be said that the spinster is seldom moved by excess of tea to throw the tea–pot at anybody’s head. But the whole ground of argument is now changed. For people do not consider what the drunkard does to others by throwing the pot, but what he does to himself by drinking the beer. The argument is based on health; and it is said that the Government must safeguard the health of the community. And the moment that is said, there ceases to be the shadow of a difference between beer and tea. People can certainly spoil their health with tea or with tobacco or with twenty other things. And there is no escape for the hygienic logician except to restrain and regulate them all. If he is to control the health of the community, he must necessarily control all the habits of all the citizens, and among the rest their habits in the matter of sex.

But there is more than this. It is not only true that it is the last liberties of man that are being taken away; and not merely his first or most superficial liberties. It is also inevitable that the last liberties should be taken first. It is inevitable that the most private matters should be most under public coercion. This inverse variation is very important, though very little realised. If a man’s personal health is a public concern, his most private acts are more public than his most public acts. The official must deal more directly with his cleaning his teeth in the morning than with his using his tongue in the market–place. The inspector must interfere more with how he sleeps in the middle of the night than with how he works in the course of the day. The private citizen must have much less to say about his bath or his bedroom window than about his vote or his banking account. The policeman must be in a new sense a private detective; and shadow
him in private affairs rather than in public affairs. A policeman must shut doors behind him for fear he should sneeze, or shove pillows under him for fear he should snore. All this and things far more fantastic follow from the simple formula that the State must make itself responsible for the health of the citizen. But the point is that the policeman must deal primarily and promptly with the citizen in his relation to his home, and only indirectly and more doubtfully with the citizen in his relation to his city. By the whole logic of this test, the king must hear what is said in the inner chamber and hardly notice what is proclaimed from the house-tops. We have heard of a revolution that turns everything upside down. But this is almost literally a revolution that turns everything inside out.

If a wary reactionary of the tradition of Metternich had wished in the nineteenth century to reverse the democratic tendency, he would naturally have begun by depriving the democracy of its margin of more dubious powers over more distant things. He might well begin, for instance, by removing the control of foreign affairs from popular assemblies; and there is a case for saying that a people may understand its own affairs, without knowing anything whatever about foreign affairs. Then he might centralise great national questions, leaving a great deal of local government in local questions. This would proceed so for a long time before it occurred to the blackest terrorist of the despotic ages to interfere with a man’s own habits in his own house. But the new sociologists and legislators are, by the nature of their theory, bound to begin where the despots leave off, even if they leave off where the despots begin. For them, as they would put it, the first things must be the very fountains of life, love and birth and babyhood; and these are always covered fountains, flowing in the quiet courts of the home. For them, as Mr. H.G. Wells put it, life itself may be regarded merely as a tissue of births. Thus they are coerced by their own rational principle to begin all coercion at the other end; at the inside end. What happens to the outside end, the external and remote powers of the citizen, they do not very much care; and it is probable that the democratic institutions of recent centuries will be allowed to decay in undisturbed dignity for a century or two more. Thus our civilisation will find itself in an interesting situation, not without humour; in which the citizen is still supposed to wield imperial powers over the ends of the earth, but has admittedly no power over his own body and soul at all. He will still be consulted by politicians about whether opium is good for China-men, but not about whether ale is good for him. He will be cross-examined for his opinions about the danger of allowing Kamskatka to have a war-fleet, but not about allowing his own child to have a wooden sword. About all, he will be
consulted about the delicate diplomatic crisis created by the proposed marriage of the Emperor of China, and not allowed to marry as he pleases.

Part of this prophecy or probability has already been accomplished; the rest of it, in the absence of any protest, is in process of accomplishment. It would be easy to give an almost endless catalogue of examples, to show how, in dealing with the poorer classes at least, coercion has already come near to a direct control of the relations of the sexes. But I am much more concerned in this chapter to point out that all these things have been adopted in principle, even where they have not been adopted in practice. It is much more vital to realise that the reformers have possessed themselves of a principle, which will cover all such things if it be granted, and which is not sufficiently comprehended to be contradicted. It is a principle whereby the deepest things of flesh and spirit must have the most direct relation with the dictatorship of the State. They must have it, by the whole reason and rationale upon which the thing depends. It is a system that might be symbolised by the telephone from headquarters standing by a man’s bed. He must have a relation to Government like his relation to God. That is, the more he goes into the inner chambers, and the more he closes the doors, the more he is alone with the law. The social machinery which makes such a State uniform and submissive will be worked outwards from the household as from a handle, or a single mechanical knob or button. In a horrible sense, loaded with fear and shame and every detail of dishonour, it will be true to say that charity begins at home.

Charity will begin at home in the sense that all home children will be like charity children. Philanthropy will begin at home, for all householders will be like paupers. Police administration will begin at home, for all citizens will be like convicts. And when health and the humours of daily life have passed into the domain of this social discipline, when it is admitted that the community must primarily control the primary habits, when all law begins, so to speak, next to the skin or nearest the vitals—then indeed it will appear absurd that marriage and maternity should not be similarly ordered. Then indeed it will seem to be illogical, and it will be illogical, that love should be free when life has lost its freedom.

So passed, to all appearance, from the minds of men the strange dream and fantasy called freedom. Whatever be the future of these evolutionary experiments and their effect on civilisation, there is one land at least that has something to mourn. For us in England something will have perished which our fathers valued all the more because they hardly troubled to name it; and
whatever be the stars of a more universal destiny, the great star of our night has set. The English had missed many other things that men of the same origins had achieved or retained. Not to them was given, like the French, to establish eternal communes and clear codes of equality; not to them, like the South Germans, to keep the popular culture of their songs; not to them, like the Irish, was it given to die daily for a great religion. But a spirit had been with them from the first which fenced, with a hundred quaint customs and legal fictions, the way of a man who wished to walk nameless and alone. It was not for nothing that they forgot all their laws to remember the name of an outlaw, and filled the green heart of England with the figure of Robin Hood. It was not for nothing that even their princes of art and letters had about them something of kings incognito, undiscovered by formal or academic fame; so that no eye can follow the young Shakespeare as he came up the green lanes from Stratford, or the young Dickens when he first lost himself among the lights of London. It is not for nothing that the very roads are crooked and capricious, so that a man looking down on a map like a snaky labyrinth, could tell that he was looking on the home of a wandering people. A spirit at once wild and familiar rested upon its wood–lands like a wind at rest. If that spirit be indeed departed, it matters little that it has been driven out by perversions it had itself permitted, by monsters it had idly let loose. Industrialism and Capitalism and the rage for physical science were English experiments in the sense that the English lent themselves to their encouragement; but there was something else behind them and within them that was not they—its name was liberty, and it was our life. It may be that this delicate and tenacious spirit has at last evaporated. If so, it matters little what becomes of the external experiments of our nation in later time. That at which we look will be a dead thing alive with its own parasites. The English will have destroyed England.
CHAPTER VII

THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIALISM

Socialism is one of the simplest ideas in the world. It has always puzzled me how there came to be so much bewilderment and misunderstanding and miserable mutual slander about it. At one time I agreed with Socialism, because it was simple. Now I disagree with Socialism, because it is too simple. Yet most of its opponents still seem to treat it, not merely as an iniquity but as a mystery of iniquity, which seems to mystify them even more than it maddens them. It may not seem strange that its antagonists should be puzzled about what it is. It may appear more curious and interesting that its admirers are equally puzzled. Its foes used to denounce Socialism as Anarchy, which is its opposite. Its friends seemed to suppose that it is a sort of optimism, which is almost as much of an opposite. Friends and foes alike talked as if it involved a sort of faith in ideal human nature; why I could never imagine. The Socialist system, in a more special sense than any other, is founded not on optimism but on original sin. It proposes that the State, as the conscience of the community, should possess all primary forms of property; and that obviously on the ground that men cannot be trusted to own or barter or combine or compete without injury to themselves. Just as a State might own all the guns lest people should shoot each other, so this State would own all the gold and land lest they should cheat or rackrent or exploit each other. It seems extraordinarily simple and even obvious; and so it is. It is too obvious to be true. But while it is obvious, it seems almost incredible that anybody ever thought it optimistic.

I am myself primarily opposed to Socialism, or Collectivism or Bolshevism or whatever we call it, for a primary reason not immediately involved here: the ideal of property. I say the ideal and not merely the idea; and this alone disposes of the moral mistake in the matter. It disposes of all the dreary doubts of the Anti–Socialists about men not yet being angels, and all the yet drearier hopes of the Socialists about men soon being supermen. I do not admit that private property is a concession to baseness and selfishness; I think it is a point of honour. I think it is the most truly popular of all points of honour. But this, though it has everything to do with my plea for a domestic dignity, has nothing to do with this passing summary of the situation of Socialism. I only remark in passing that it is vain for the more vulgar sort of Capitalist, sneering at ideals, to
say to me that in order to have Socialism “You must alter human nature.” I answer “Yes. You must alter it for the worse.”

The clouds were considerably cleared away from the meaning of Socialism by the Fabians of the ‘nineties; by Mr. Bernard Shaw, a sort of anti-romantic Quixote, who charged chivalry as chivalry charged windmills, with Sidney Webb for his Sancho Panza. In so far as these paladins had a castle to defend, we may say that their castle was the Post Office. The red pillar-box was the immovable post against which the irresistible force of Capitalist individualism was arrested. Business men who said that nothing could be managed by the State were forced to admit that they trusted all their business letters and business telegrams to the State.

After all, it was not found necessary to have an office competing with another office, trying to send out pinker postage–stamps or more picturesque postmen. It was not necessary to efficiency that the postmistress should buy a penny stamp for a halfpenny and sell it for twopence; or that she should haggle and beat customers down about the price of a postal order; or that she should always take tenders for telegrams. There was obviously nothing actually impossible about the State management of national needs; and the Post Office was at least tolerably managed. Though it was not always a model employer, by any means, it might be made so by similar methods. It was not impossible that equitable pay, and even equal pay, could be given to the Postmaster–General and the postman. We had only to extend this rule of public responsibility, and we should escape from all the terror of insecurity and torture of compassion, which hag–rides humanity in the insane extremes of economic inequality and injustice. As Mr. Shaw put it, “A man must save Society’s honour before he can save his own.”

That was one side of the argument: that the change would remove inequality; and there was an answer on the other side. It can be stated most truly by putting another model institution and edifice side by side with the Post Office. It is even more of an ideal republic, or commonwealth without competition or private profit. It supplies its citizens not only with the stamps but with clothes and food and lodging, and all they require. It observes considerable level of equality in these things; notably in the clothes. It not only supervises the letters but all the other human communications; notably the sort of evil communications that corrupt good manners. This twin model to the Post Office is called the Prison. And much of the scheme for a model State was regarded by its opponents as a scheme for a model prison; good because it fed men equally, but less acceptable since it imprisoned them equally.
It is better to be in a bad prison than in a good one. From the standpoint of the prisoner this is not at all a paradox; if only because in a bad prison he is more likely to escape. But apart from that, a man was in many ways better off in the old dirty and corrupt prison, where he could bribe turnkeys to bring him drink and meet fellow-prisoners to drink with. Now that is exactly the difference between the present system and the proposed system. Nobody worth talking about respects the present system. Capitalism is a corrupt prison. That is the best that can be said for Capitalism. But it is something to be said for it; for a man is a little freer in that corrupt prison than he would be in a complete prison. As a man can find one jailer more lax than another, so he could find one employer more kind than another; he has at least a choice of tyrants. In the other case he finds the same tyrant at every turn. Mr. Shaw and other rational Socialists have agreed that the State would be in practice government by a small group. Any independent man who disliked that group would find his foe waiting for him at the end of every road.

It may be said of Socialism, therefore, very briefly, that its friends recommended it as increasing equality, while its foes resisted it as decreasing liberty. On the one hand it was said that the State could provide homes and meals for all; on the other it was answered that this could only be done by State officials who would inspect houses and regulate meals. The compromise eventually made was one of the most interesting and even curious cases in history. It was decided to do everything that had ever been denounced in Socialism, and nothing that had ever been desired in it. Since it was supposed to gain equality at the sacrifice of liberty, we proceeded to prove that it was possible to sacrifice liberty without gaining equality. Indeed, there was not the faintest attempt to gain equality, least of all economic equality. But there was a very spirited and vigorous effort to eliminate liberty, by means of an entirely new crop of crude regulations and interferences. But it was not the Socialist State regulating those whom it fed, like children or even like convicts. It was the Capitalist State raiding those whom it had trampled and deserted in every sort of den, like outlaws or broken men. It occurred to the wiser sociologists that, after all, it would be easy to proceed more promptly to the main business of bullying men, without having gone through the laborious preliminary business of supporting them. After all, it was easy to inspect the house without having helped to build it; it was even possible, with luck, to inspect the house in time to prevent it being built. All that is described in the documents of the Housing Problem; for the people of this age loved problems and hated solutions. It was
easy to restrict the diet without providing the dinner. All that can be found in the documents of what is called Temperance Reform.

In short, people decided that it was impossible to achieve any of the good of Socialism, but they comforted themselves by achieving all the bad. All that official discipline, about which the Socialists themselves were in doubt or at least on the defensive, was taken over bodily by the Capitalists. They have now added all the bureaucratic tyrannies of a Socialist state to the old plutocratic tyrannies of a Capitalist State. For the vital point is that it did not in the smallest degree diminish the inequalities of a Capitalist State. It simply destroyed such individual liberties as remained among its victims. It did not enable any man to build a better house; it only limited the houses he might live in—or how he might manage to live there; forbidding him to keep pigs or poultry or to sell beer or cider. It did not even add anything to a man’s wages; it only took away something from a man’s wages and locked it up, whether he liked it or not, in a sort of money-box which was regarded as a medicine-chest. It does not send food into the house to feed the children; it only sends an inspector into the house to punish the parents for having no food to feed them. It does not see that they have got a fire; it only punishes them for not having a fireguard. It does not even occur to it to provide the fireguard.

Now this anomalous situation will probably ultimately evolve into the Servile State of Mr. Belloc’s thesis. The poor will sink into slavery; it might as correctly be said that the poor will rise into slavery. That is to say, sooner or later, it is very probable that the rich will take over the philanthropic as well as the tyrannic side of the bargain; and will feed men like slaves as well as hunting them like outlaws. But for the purpose of my own argument it is not necessary to carry the process so far as this, or indeed any farther than it has already gone. The purely negative stage of interference, at which we have stuck for the present, is in itself quite favourable to all these eugenical experiments. The capitalist whose half-conscious thought and course of action I have simplified into a story in the preceding chapters, finds this insufficient solution quite sufficient for his purposes. What he has felt for a long time is that he must check or improve the reckless and random breeding of the submerged race, which is at once outstripping his requirements and failing to fulfil his needs. Now the anomalous situation has already accustomed him to stopping things. The first interferences with sex need only be negative; and there are already negative interferences without number. So that the study of this stage of Socialism brings us to the same conclusion as that of the ideal of liberty as formally professed by
Liberalism. The ideal of liberty is lost, and the ideal of Socialism is changed, till it is a mere excuse for the oppression of the poor.

The first movements for intervention in the deepest domestic concerns of the poor all had this note of negative interference. Official papers were sent round to the mothers in poor streets; papers in which a total stranger asked these respectable women questions which a man would be killed for asking, in the class of what were called gentlemen or in the countries of what were called free men. They were questions supposed to refer to the conditions of maternity; but the point is here that the reformers did not begin by building up those economic or material conditions. They did not attempt to pay money or establish property to create those conditions. They never give anything—except orders. Another form of the intervention, and one already mentioned, is the kidnapping of children upon the most fantastic excuses of sham psychology. Some people established an apparatus of tests and trick questions; which might make an amusing game of riddles for the family fireside, but seems an insufficient reason for mutilating and dismembering the family. Others became interested in the hopeless moral condition of children born in the economic condition which they did not attempt to improve. They were great on the fact that crime was a disease; and carried on their criminological studies so successfully as to open the reformatory for little boys who played truant; there was no reformatory for reformers. I need not pause to explain that crime is not a disease. It is criminology that is a disease.

Finally one thing may be added which is at least clear. Whether or no the organisation of industry will issue positively in a eugenical reconstruction of the family, it has already issued negatively, as in the negations already noted, in a partial destruction of it. It took the form of a propaganda of popular divorce, calculated at least to accustom the masses to a new notion of the shifting and re–grouping of families. I do not discuss the question of divorce here, as I have done elsewhere, in its intrinsic character; I merely note it as one of these negative reforms which have been substituted for positive economic equality. It was preached with a weird hilarity, as if the suicide of love were something not only humane but happy. But it need not be explained, and certainly it need not be denied, that the harassed poor of a diseased industrialism were indeed maintaining marriage under every disadvantage, and often found individual relief in divorce. Industrialism does produce many unhappy marriages, for the same reason that it produces so many unhappy men. But all the reforms were directed to rescuing the industrialism rather than the happiness. Poor couples
were to be divorced because they were already divided. Through all this modern muddle there runs the curious principle of sacrificing the ancient uses of things because they do not fit in with the modern abuses. When the tares are found in the wheat, the greatest promptitude and practicality is always shown in burning the wheat and gathering the tares into the barn. And since the serpent coiled about the chalice had dropped his poison in the wine of Cana, analysts were instantly active in the effort to preserve the poison and to pour away the wine.
CHAPTER VIII

THE END OF THE HOUSEHOLD GODS

The only place where it is possible to find an echo of the mind of the English masses is either in conversation or in comic songs. The latter are obviously the more dubious; but they are the only things recorded and quotable that come anywhere near it. We talk about the popular Press; but in truth there is no popular Press. It may be a good thing; but, anyhow, most readers would be mildly surprised if a newspaper leading article were written in the language of a navvy. Sometimes the Press is interested in things in which the democracy is also genuinely interested; such as horse–racing. Sometimes the Press is about as popular as the Press Gang. We talk of Labour leaders in Parliament; but they would be highly unparliamentary if they talked like labourers. The Bolshevists, I believe, profess to promote something that they call “proletarian art,” which only shows that the word Bolshevism can sometimes be abbreviated into bosh. That sort of Bolshevist is not a proletarian, but rather the very thing he accuses everybody else of being. The Bolshevist is above all a bourgeois; a Jewish intellectual of the town. And the real case against industrial intellectualism could hardly be put better than in this very comparison. There has never been such a thing as proletarian art; but there has emphatically been such a thing as peasant art. And the only literature which even reminds us of the real tone and talk of the English working classes is to be found in the comic song of the English music–hall.

I first heard one of them on my voyage to America, in the midst of the sea within sight of the New World, with the Statue of Liberty beginning to loom up on the horizon. From the lips of a young Scotch engineer, of all people in the world, I heard for the first time these immortal words from a London music–hall song:—

“Father’s got the sack from the water–works
For smoking of his old cherry–briar;
Father’s got the sack from the water–works
‘Cos he might set the water–works on fire.”

As I told my friends in America, I think it no part of a patriot to boast; and boasting itself is certainly not a thing to boast of. I doubt the persuasive power of English as exemplified in Kipling, and one can easily force it on foreigners too
much, even as exemplified in Dickens. I am no Imperialist, and only on rare and
proper occasions a Jingo. But when I hear those words about Father and the
water–works, when I hear under far–off foreign skies anything so gloriously
English as that, then indeed (I said to them), then indeed:—

“I thank the goodness and the grace
That on my birth have smiled,
And made me, as you see me here,
A little English child.”

But that noble stanza about the water–works has other elements of nobility
besides nationality. It provides a compact and almost perfect summary of the
whole social problem in industrial countries like England and America. If I
wished to set forth systematically the elements of the ethical and economic
problem in Pittsburg or Sheffield, I could not do better than take these few words
as a text, and divide them up like the heads of a sermon. Let me note the points
in some rough fashion here.

1.—Father. This word is still in use among the more ignorant and ill–paid of
the industrial community; and is the badge of an old convention or unit called
the family. A man and woman having vowed to be faithful to each other, the
man makes himself responsible for all the children of the woman, and is thus
generically called “Father.” It must not be supposed that the poet or singer is
necessarily one of the children. It may be the wife, called by the same ritual
“Mother.” Poor English wives say “Father” as poor Irish wives say “Himself,”
meaning the titular head of the house. The point to seize is that among the
ignorant this convention or custom still exists. Father and the family are the
foundations of thought; the natural authority still comes natural to the poet; but it
is overlaid and thwarted with more artificial authorities; the official, the
schoolmaster, the policeman, the employer, and so on. What these forces
fighting the family are we shall see, my dear brethren, when we pass to our
second heading; which is:—

2.—Got the Sack. This idiom marks a later stage of the history of the language
than the comparatively primitive word “Father.” It is needless to discuss whether
the term comes from Turkey or some other servile society. In America they say
that Father has been fired. But it involves the whole of the unique economic
system under which Father has now to live. Though assumed by family tradition
to be a master, he can now, by industrial tradition, only be a particular kind of
servant; a servant who has not the security of a slave. If he owned his own shop
and tools, he could not get the sack. If his master owned him, he could not get
the sack. The slave and the guildsman know where they will sleep every night; it was only the proletarian of individualist industrialism who could get the sack, if not in the style of the Bosphorus, at least in the sense of the Embankment. We pass to the third heading.

3.—From the Water–works. This detail of Father’s life is very important; for this is the reply to most of the Socialists, as the last section is to so many of the Capitalists. The water–works which employed Father is a very large, official and impersonal institution. Whether it is technically a bureaucratic department or a big business makes little or no change in the feelings of Father in connection with it. The water–works might or might not be nationalised; and it would make no necessary difference to Father being fired, and no difference at all to his being accused of playing with fire. In fact, if the Capitalists are more likely to give him the sack, the Socialists are even more likely to forbid him the smoke. There is no freedom for Father except in some sort of private ownership of things like water and fire. If he owned his own well his water could never be cut off, and while he sits by his own fire his pipe can never be put out. That is the real meaning of property, and the real argument against Socialism; probably the only argument against Socialism.

4.—For Smoking. Nothing marks this queer intermediate phase of industrialism more strangely than the fact that, while employers still claim the right to sack him like a stranger, they are already beginning to claim the right to supervise him like a son. Economically he can go and starve on the Embankment; but ethically and hygienically he must be controlled and coddled in the nursery. Government repudiates all responsibility for seeing that he gets bread. But it anxiously accepts all responsibility for seeing that he does not get beer. It passes an Insurance Act to force him to provide himself with medicine; but it is avowedly indifferent to whether he is able to provide himself with meals. Thus while the sack is inconsistent with the family, the supervision is really inconsistent with the sack. The whole thing is a tangled chain of contradictions. It is true that in the special and sacred text of scripture we are here considering, the smoking is forbidden on a general and public and not on a medicinal and private ground. But it is none the less relevant to remember that, as his masters have already proved that alcohol is a poison, they may soon prove that nicotine is a poison. And it is most significant of all that this sort of danger is even greater in what is called the new democracy of America than in what is called the old oligarchy of England. When I was in America, people were already “defending” tobacco. People who defend tobacco are on the road to
proving that daylight is defensible, or that it is not really sinful to sneeze. In other words, they are quietly going mad.

5.—Of his old Cherry-briar. Here we have the intermediate and anomalous position of the institution of Property. The sentiment still exists, even among the poor, or perhaps especially among the poor. But it is attached to toys rather than tools; to the minor products rather than to the means of production. But something of the sanity of ownership is still to be observed; for instance, the element of custom and continuity. It was an old cherry-briar; systematically smoked by Father in spite of all wiles and temptations to Woodbines and gaspers; an old companion possibly connected with various romantic or diverting events in Father’s life. It is perhaps a relic as well as a trinket. But because it is not a true tool, because it gives the man no grip on the creative energies of society, it is, with all the rest of his self-respect, at the mercy of the thing called the sack. When he gets the sack from the water-works, it is only too probable that he will have to pawn his old cherry-briar.

6.—Cos he might set the water-works on fire. And that single line, like the lovely single lines of the great poets, is so full, so final, so perfect a picture of all the laws we pass and all the reasons we give for them, so exact an analysis of the logic of all our precautions at the present time, that the pen falls even from the hands of the commentator; and the masterpiece is left to speak for itself.

Some such analysis as the above gives a better account than most of the anomalous attitude and situation of the English proletarian to-day. It is the more appropriate because it is expressed in the words he actually uses; which certainly do not include the word “proletarian.” It will be noted that everything that goes to make up that complexity is in an unfinished state. Property has not quite vanished; slavery has not quite arrived; marriage exists under difficulties; social regimentation exists under restraints, or rather under subterfuges. The question which remains is which force is gaining on the other, and whether the old forces are capable of resisting the new. I hope they are; but I recognise that they resist under more than one heavy handicap. The chief of these is that the family feeling of the workmen is by this time rather an instinct than an ideal. The obvious thing to protect an ideal is a religion. The obvious thing to protect the ideal of marriage is the Christian religion. And for various reasons, which only a history of England could explain (though it hardly ever does), the working classes of this country have been very much cut off from Christianity. I do not dream of denying, indeed I should take every opportunity of affirming, that monogamy and its domestic responsibilities can be defended on rational apart from religious
grounds. But a religion is the practical protection of any moral idea which has to be popular and which has to be pugnacious. And our ideal, if it is to survive, will have to be both.

Those who make merry over the landlady who has seen better days, of whom something has been said already, commonly speak, in the same jovial journalese, about her household goods as her household gods. They would be much startled if they discovered how right they are. Exactly what is lacking to the modern materialist is something that can be what the household gods were to the ancient heathen. The household gods of the heathen were not only wood and stone; at least there is always more than that in the stone of the hearth–stone and the wood of the roof–tree. So long as Christianity continued the tradition of patron saints and portable relics, this idea of a blessing on the household could continue. If men had not domestic divinities, at least they had divine domesticities. When Christianity was chilled with Puritanism and rationalism, this inner warmth or secret fire in the house faded on the hearth. But some of the embers still glow or at least glimmer; and there is still a memory among the poor that their material possessions are something sacred. I know poor men for whom it is the romance of their lives to refuse big sums of money for an old copper warming–pan. They do not want it, in any sense of base utility. They do not use it as a warming–pan; but it warms them for all that. It is indeed, as Sergeant Buzfuz humorously observed, a cover for hidden fire. And the fire is that which burned before the strange and uncouth wooden gods, like giant dolls, in the huts of ancient Italy. It is a household god. And I can imagine some such neglected and unlucky English man dying with his eyes on the red gleam of that piece of copper, as happier men have died with their eyes on the golden gleam of a chalice or a cross.

It will thus be noted that there has always been some connection between a mystical belief and the materials of domesticity; that they generally go together; and that now, in a more mournful sense, they are gone together. The working classes have no reserves of property with which to defend their relics of religion. They have no religion with which to sanctify and dignify their property. Above all, they are under the enormous disadvantage of being right without knowing it. They hold their sound principles as if they were sullen prejudices. They almost secrete their small property as if it were stolen property. Often a poor woman will tell a magistrate that she sticks to her husband, with the defiant and desperate air of a wanton resolved to run away from her husband. Often she will cry as hopelessly, and as if it were helplessly, when deprived of her child as if she were a child deprived of her doll. Indeed, a child in the street, crying for her lost
doll, would probably receive more sympathy than she does.

Meanwhile the fun goes on; and many such conflicts are recorded, even in the newspapers, between heart–broken parents and house–breaking philanthropists; always with one issue, of course. There are any number of them that never get into the newspapers. And we have to be flippant about these things as the only alternative to being rather fierce; and I have no desire to end on a note of universal ferocity. I know that many who set such machinery in motion do so from motives of sincere but confused compassion, and many more from a dull but not dishonourable medical or legal habit. But if I and those who agree with me tend to some harshness and abruptness of condemnation, these worthy people need not be altogether impatient with our impatience. It is surely beneath them, in the scope of their great schemes, to complain of protests so ineffectual about wrongs so individual. I have considered in this chapter the chances of general democratic defence of domestic honour, and have been compelled to the conclusion that they are not at present hopeful; and it is at least clear that we cannot be founding on them any personal hopes. If this conclusion leaves us defeated, we submit that it leaves us disinterested. Ours is not the sort of protest, at least, that promises anything even to the demagogue, let alone the sycophant. Those we serve will never rule, and those we pity will never rise. Parliament will never be surrounded by a mob of submerged grandmothers brandishing pawn–tickets. There is no trade union of defective children. It is not very probable that modern government will be overturned by a few poor dingy devils who are sent to prison by mistake, or rather by ordinary accident. Surely it is not for those magnificent Socialists, or those great reformers and reconstructors of Capitalism, sweeping onward to their scientific triumphs and caring for none of these things, to murmur at our vain indignation. At least if it is vain it is the less venal; and in so far as it is hopeless it is also thankless. They have their great campaigns and cosmopolitan systems for the regimentation of millions, and the records of science and progress. They need not be angry with us, who plead for those who will never read our words or reward our effort, even with gratitude. They need surely have no worse mood towards us than mystification, seeing that in recalling these small things of broken hearts or homes, we are but recording what cannot be recorded; trivial tragedies that will fade faster and faster in the flux of time, cries that fail in a furious and infinite wind, wild words of despair that are written only upon running water; unless, indeed, as some so stubbornly and strangely say, they are somewhere cut deep into a rock, in the red granite of the wrath of God.
CHAPTER IX

A SHORT CHAPTER

Round about the year 1913 Eugenics was turned from a fad to a fashion. Then, if I may so summarise the situation, the joke began in earnest. The organising mind which we have seen considering the problem of slum population, the popular material and the possibility of protests, felt that the time had come to open the campaign. Eugenics began to appear in big headlines in the daily Press, and big pictures in the illustrated papers. A foreign gentleman named Bolce, living at Hampstead, was advertised on a huge scale as having every intention of being the father of the Superman. It turned out to be a Superwoman, and was called Eugenette. The parents were described as devoting themselves to the production of perfect pre-natal conditions. They “eliminated everything from their lives which did not tend towards complete happiness.” Many might indeed be ready to do this; but in the voluminous contemporary journalism on the subject I can find no detailed notes about how it is done. Communications were opened with Mr. H.G. Wells, with Dr. Saleeby, and apparently with Dr. Karl Pearson. Every quality desired in the ideal baby was carefully cultivated in the parents. The problem of a sense of humour was felt to be a matter of great gravity. The Eugenist couple, naturally fearing they might be deficient on this side, were so truly scientific as to have resort to specialists. To cultivate a sense of fun, they visited Harry Lauder, and then Wilkie Bard, and afterwards George Robey; but all, it would appear, in vain. To the newspaper reader, however, it looked as if the names of Metchnikoff and Steinmetz and Karl Pearson would soon be quite as familiar as those of Robey and Lauder and Bard. Arguments about these Eugenic authorities, reports of the controversies at the Eugenic Congress, filled countless columns. The fact that Mr. Bolce, the creator of perfect pre-natal conditions, was afterwards sued in a law-court for keeping his own flat in conditions of filth and neglect, cast but a slight and momentary shadow upon the splendid dawn of the science. It would be vain to record any of the thousand testimonies to its triumph. In the nature of things, this should be the longest chapter in the book, or rather the beginning of another book. It should record, in numberless examples, the triumphant popularisation of Eugenics in England. But as a matter of fact this is not the first chapter but the last. And this must be a very short chapter, because the whole of this story was cut short. A very curious thing
happened. England went to war.

This would in itself have been a sufficiently irritating interruption in the early life of Eugenette, and in the early establishment of Eugenics. But a far more dreadful and disconcerting fact must be noted. With whom, alas, did England go to war? England went to war with the Superman in his native home. She went to war with that very land of scientific culture from which the very ideal of a Superman had come. She went to war with the whole of Dr. Steinmetz, and presumably with at least half of Dr. Karl Pearson. She gave battle to the birthplace of nine-tenths of the professors who were the prophets of the new hope of humanity. In a few weeks the very name of a professor was a matter for hissing and low plebeian mirth. The very name of Nietzsche, who had held up this hope of something superhuman to humanity, was laughed at for all the world as if he had been touched with lunacy. A new mood came upon the whole people; a mood of marching, of spontaneous soldierly vigilance and democratic discipline, moving to the faint tune of bugles far away. Men began to talk strangely of old and common things, of the counties of England, of its quiet landscapes, of motherhood and the half-buried religion of the race. Death shone on the land like a new daylight, making all things vivid and visibly dear. And in the presence of this awful actuality it seemed, somehow or other, as if even Mr. Bolce and the Eugenic baby were things unaccountably far-away and almost, if one may say so, funny.

Such a revulsion requires explanation, and it may be briefly given. There was a province of Europe which had carried nearer to perfection than any other the type of order and foresight that are the subject of this book. It had long been the model State of all those more rational moralists who saw in science the ordered salvation of society. It was admittedly ahead of all other States in social reform. All the systematic social reforms were professedly and proudly borrowed from it. Therefore when this province of Prussia found it convenient to extend its imperial system to the neighbouring and neutral State of Belgium, all these scientific enthusiasts had a privilege not always granted to mere theorists. They had the gratification of seeing their great Utopia at work, on a grand scale and very close at hand. They had not to wait, like other evolutionary idealists, for the slow approach of something nearer to their dreams; or to leave it merely as a promise to posterity. They had not to wait for it as for a distant thing like the vision of a future state; but in the flesh they had seen their Paradise. And they were very silent for five years.

The thing died at last, and the stench of it stank to the sky. It might be thought
that so terrible a savour would never altogether leave the memories of men; but men’s memories are unstable things. It may be that gradually these dazed dupes will gather again together, and attempt again to believe their dreams and disbelieve their eyes. There may be some whose love of slavery is so ideal and disinterested that they are loyal to it even in its defeat. Wherever a fragment of that broken chain is found, they will be found hugging it. But there are limits set in the everlasting mercy to him who has been once deceived and a second time deceives himself. They have seen their paragons of science and organisation playing their part on land and sea; showing their love of learning at Louvain and their love of humanity at Lille. For a time at least they have believed the testimony of their senses. And if they do not believe now, neither would they believe though one rose from the dead; though all the millions who died to destroy Prussianism stood up and testified against it.
THE SUPERSTITION OF DIVORCE

G. K. CHESTERTON
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

THE SUPERSTITION OF DIVORCE

TABLE OF CONTENTS
INTRODUCTORY NOTE

I
THE SUPERSTITION OF DIVORCE 1

II
THE SUPERSTITION OF DIVORCE 2

III
THE SUPERSTITION OF DIVORCE 3

IV
THE SUPERSTITION OF DIVORCE 4

V
THE STORY OF THE FAMILY

VI
THE STORY OF THE VOW

VII
THE TRAGEDIES OF MARRIAGE

VIII
THE VISTA OF DIVORCE

IX
CONCLUSION
INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The earlier part of this book appeared in the form of five articles which came out in the “New Witness” at the crisis of the recent controversy in the Press on the subject of divorce. Crude and sketchy as they confessedly were, they had a certain rude plan of their own, which I find it very difficult to recast even in order to expand. I have therefore decided to reprint the original articles as they stood, save for a few introductory words; and then, at the risk of repetition, to add a few further chapters, explaining more fully any conceptions that may seem to have been too crudely assumed or dismissed. I have set forth the original matter as it appeared, under a general heading, without dividing it into chapters.

G.K.C.
I

THE SUPERSTITION OF DIVORCE

It is futile to talk of reform without reference to form. To take a case from my own taste and fancy, there is nothing I feel to be so beautiful and wonderful as a window. All casements are magic casements, whether they open on the foam or the front-garden; they lie close to the ultimate mystery and paradox of limitation and liberty. But if I followed my instinct towards an infinite number of windows, it would end in having no walls. It would also (it may be added incidentally) end in having no windows either; for a window makes a picture by making a picture-frame. But there is a simpler way of stating my more simple and fatal error. It is that I have wanted a window, without considering whether I wanted a house. Now many appeals are being made to us to-day on behalf of that light and liberty that might well be symbolised by windows; especially as so many of them concern the enlightenment and liberation of the house, in the sense of the home. Many quite disinterested people urge many quite reasonable considerations in the case of divorce, as a type of domestic liberation; but in the journalistic and general discussion of the matter there is far too much of the mind that works backwards and at random, in the manner of all windows and no walls. Such people say they want divorce, without asking themselves whether they want marriage. Even in order to be divorced it has generally been found necessary to go through the preliminary formality of being married; and unless the nature of this initial act be considered, we might as well be discussing haircutting for the bald or spectacles for the blind. To be divorced is to be in the literal sense unmarried; and there is no sense in a thing being undone when we do not know if it is done.

There is perhaps no worse advice, nine times out of ten, than the advice to do the work that’s nearest. It is especially bad when it means, as it generally does, removing the obstacle that’s nearest. It means that men are not to behave like men but like mice; who nibble at the thing that’s nearest. The man, like the mouse, undermines what he cannot understand. Because he himself bumps into a thing, he calls it the nearest obstacle; though the obstacle may happen to be the pillar that holds up the whole roof over his head. He industriously removes the obstacle; and in return, the obstacle removes him, and much more valuable things than he. This opportunism is perhaps the most impractical thing in this
highly unpractical world. People talk vaguely against destructive criticism; but what is the matter with this criticism is not that it destroys, but that it does not criticise. It is destruction without design. It is taking a complex machine to pieces bit by bit, in any order, without even knowing what the machine is for. And if a man deals with a deadly dynamic machine on the principle of touching the knob that’s nearest, he will find out the defects of that cheery philosophy. Now leaving many sincere and serious critics of modern marriage on one side for the moment, great masses of modern men and women, who write and talk about marriage, are thus nibbling blindly at it like an army of mice. When the reformers propose, for instance, that divorce should be obtainable after an absence of three years (the absence actually taken for granted in the first military arrangements of the late European War) their readers and supporters could seldom give any sort of logical reason for the period being three years, and not three months or three minutes. They are like people who should say “Give me three feet of dog”; and not care where the cut came. Such persons fail to see a dog as an organic entity; in other words, they cannot make head or tail of it. And the chief thing to say about such reformers of marriage is that they cannot make head or tail of it. They do not know what it is, or what it is meant to be, or what its supporters suppose it to be; they never look at it, even when they are inside it. They do the work that’s nearest; which is poking holes in the bottom of a boat under the impression that they are digging in a garden. This question of what a thing is, and whether it is a garden or a boat, appears to them abstract and academic. They have no notion of how large is the idea they attack; or how relatively small appear the holes that they pick in it.

Thus, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, an intelligent man in other matters, says that there is only a “theological” opposition to divorce, and that it is entirely founded on “certain texts” in the Bible about marriages. This is exactly as if he said that a belief in the brotherhood of men was only founded on certain texts in the Bible, about all men being the children of Adam and Eve. Millions of peasants and plain people all over the world assume marriage to be static, without having ever clapped eyes on any text. Numbers of more modern people, especially after the recent experiments in America, think divorce is a social disease, without having ever bothered about any text. It may be maintained that even in these, or in any one, the idea of marriage is ultimately mystical; and the same may be maintained about the idea of brotherhood. It is obvious that a husband and wife are not visibly one flesh, in the sense of being one quadruped. It is equally obvious that Paderewski and Jack Johnson are not twins, and probably have not played
together at their mother’s knee. There is indeed a very important admission, or addition, to be realised here. What is true is this: that if the nonsense of Nietzsche or some such sophist submerged current culture, so that it was the fashion to deny the duties of fraternity; then indeed it might be found that the group which still affirmed fraternity was the original group in whose sacred books was the text about Adam and Eve. Suppose some Prussian professor has opportunistically discovered that Germans and lesser men are respectively descended from two such very different monkeys that they are in no sense brothers, but barely cousins (German) any number of times removed. And suppose he proceeds to remove them even further with a hatchet, suppose he bases on this a repetition of the conduct of Cain, saying not so much “Am I my brother’s keeper?” as “Is he really my brother?” And suppose this higher philosophy of the hatchet becomes prevalent in colleges and cultivated circles, as even more foolish philosophies have done. Then I agree it probably will be the Christian, the man who preserves the text about Cain, who will continue to assert that he is still the professor’s brother; that he is still the professor’s keeper. He may possibly add that, in his opinion, the professor seems to require a keeper.

And that is doubtless the situation in the controversies about divorce and marriage to-day. It is the Christian church which continues to hold strongly, when the world for some reason has weakened on it, what many others hold at other times. But even then it is barely picking up the shreds and scraps of the subject to talk about a reliance on texts. The vital point in the comparison is this: that human brotherhood means a whole view of life, held in the light of life, and defended, rightly or wrongly, by constant appeals to every aspect of life. The religion that holds it most strongly will hold it when nobody else holds it; that is quite true, and that some of us may be so perverse as to think a point in favour of the religion. But anybody who holds it at all will hold it as a philosophy, not hung on one text but on a hundred truths. Fraternity may be a sentimental metaphor; I may be suffering a delusion when I hail a Montenegrin peasant as my long lost brother. As a fact, I have my own suspicions about which of us it is that has got lost. But my delusion is not a deduction from one text, or from twenty; it is the expression of a relation that to me at least seems a reality. And what I should say about the idea of a brother, I should say about the idea of a wife.

It is supposed to be very unbusinesslike to begin at the beginning. It is called “abstract and academic principles with which we English, etc., etc.” It is still in some strange way considered unpractical to open up inquiries about anything by
asking what it is. I happen to have, however, a fairly complete contempt for that sort of practicality; for I know that it is not even practical. My ideal business man would not be one who planked down fifty pounds and said “Here is hard cash; I am a plain man; it is quite indifferent to me whether I am paying a debt, or giving alms to a beggar, or buying a wild bull or a bathing machine.” Despite the infectious heartiness of his tone, I should still, in considering the hard cash, say (like a cabman) “What’s this?” I should continue to insist, priggishly, that it was a highly practical point what the money was; what it was supposed to stand for, to aim at or to declare; what was the nature of the transaction; or, in short, what the devil the man supposed he was doing. I shall therefore begin by asking, in an equally mystical manner, what in the name of God and the angels a man getting married supposes he is doing. I shall begin by asking what marriage is; and the mere question will probably reveal that the act itself, good or bad, wise or foolish, is of a certain kind; that it is not an inquiry or an experiment or an accident; it may probably dawn on us that it is a promise. It can be more fully defined by saying it is a vow.

Many will immediately answer that it is a rash vow. I am content for the moment to reply that all vows are rash vows. I am not now defending but defining vows; I am pointing out that this is a discussion about vows; first, of whether there ought to be vows; and second, of what vows ought to be. Ought a man to break a promise? Ought a man to make a promise? These are philosophic questions; but the philosophic peculiarity of divorce and re-marriage, as compared with free love and no marriage, is that a man breaks and makes a promise at the same moment. It is a highly German philosophy; and recalls the way in which the enemy wishes to celebrate his successful destruction of all treaties by signing some more. If I were breaking a promise, I would do it without promises. But I am very far from minimising the momentous and disputable nature of the vow itself. I shall try to show, in a further article, that this rash and romantic operation is the only furnace from which can come the plain hardware of humanity, the cast–iron resistance of citizenship or the cold steel of common sense; but I am not denying that the furnace is a fire. The vow is a violent and unique thing; though there have been many besides the marriage vow; vows of chivalry, vows of poverty, vows of celibacy, pagan as well as Christian. But modern fashion has rather fallen out of the habit; and men miss the type for the lack of the parallels. The shortest way of putting the problem is to ask whether being free includes being free to bind oneself. For the vow is a tryst with oneself.
I may be misunderstood if I say, for brevity, that marriage is an affair of honour. The sceptic will be delighted to assent, by saying it is a fight. And so it is, if only with oneself; but the point here is that it necessarily has the touch of the heroic, in which virtue can be translated by virtus. Now about fighting, in its nature, there is an implied infinity or at least a potential infinity. I mean that loyalty in war is loyalty in defeat or even disgrace; it is due to the flag precisely at the moment when the flag nearly falls. We do already apply this to the flag of the nation; and the question is whether it is wise or unwise to apply it to the flag of the family. Of course, it is tenable that we should apply it to neither; that misgovernment in the nation or misery in the citizen would make the desertion of the flag an act of reason and not treason. I will only say here that, if this were really the limit of national loyalty, some of us would have deserted our nation long ago.
II

THE SUPERSTITION OF DIVORCE

To the two or three articles appearing here on this subject I have given the title of the Superstition of Divorce; and the title is not taken at random. While free love seems to me a heresy, divorce does really seem to me a superstition. It is not only more of a superstition than free love, but much more of a superstition than strict sacramental marriage; and this point can hardly be made too plain. It is the partisans of divorce, not the defenders of marriage, who attach a stiff and senseless sanctity to a mere ceremony, apart from the meaning of the ceremony. It is our opponents, and not we, who hope to be saved by the letter of ritual, instead of the spirit of reality. It is they who hold that vow or violation, loyalty or disloyalty, can all be disposed of by a mysterious and magic rite, performed first in a law–court and then in a church or a registry office. There is little difference between the two parts of the ritual; except that the law court is much more ritualistic. But the plainest parallels will show anybody that all this is sheer barbarous credulity. It may or may not be superstition for a man to believe he must kiss the Bible to show he is telling the truth. It is certainly the most grovelling superstition for him to believe that, if he kisses the Bible, anything he says will come true. It would surely be the blackest and most benighted Bible–worship to suggest that the mere kiss on the mere book alters the moral quality of perjury. Yet this is precisely what is implied in saying that formal re–marriage alters the moral quality of conjugal infidelity. It may have been a mark of the Dark Ages that Harold should swear on a relic, though he were afterwards forsworn. But surely those ages would have been at their darkest, if he had been content to be sworn on a relic and forsworn on another relic. Yet this is the new altar these reformers would erect for us, out of the mouldy and meaningless relics of their dead law and their dying religion.

Now we, at any rate, are talking about an idea, a thing of the intellect and the soul; which we feel to be unalterable by legal antics. We are talking about the idea of loyalty; perhaps a fantastic, perhaps only an unfashionable idea, but one we can explain and defend as an idea. Now I have already pointed out that most sane men do admit our ideal in such a case as patriotism or public spirit; the necessity of saving the state to which we belong. The patriot may revile but must not renounce his country; he must curse it to cure it, but not to wither it up. The
old pagan citizens felt thus about the city; and modern nationalists feel thus about the nation. But even mere modern internationalists feel it about something; if it is only the nation of mankind. Even the humanitarian does not become a misanthrope and live in a monkey–house. Even a disappointed Collectivist or Communist does not retire into the exclusive society of beavers, because beavers are all communists of the most class–conscious solidarity. He admits the necessity of clinging to his fellow creatures, and begging them to abandon the use of the possessive pronoun; heart–breaking as his efforts must seem to him after a time. Even a Pacifist does not prefer rats to men, on the ground that the rat community is so pure from the taint of Jingoism as always to leave the sinking ship. In short, everybody recognises that there is some ship, large and small, which he ought not to leave, even when he thinks it is sinking.

We may take it then that there are institutions to which we are attached finally; just as there are others to which we are attached temporarily. We go from shop to shop trying to get what we want; but we do not go from nation to nation doing this; unless we belong to a certain group now heading very straight for Pogroms. In the first case it is the threat that we shall withdraw our custom; in the second it is the threat that we shall never withdraw ourselves; that we shall be part of the institution to the last. The time when the shop loses its customers is the time when the city needs its citizens; but it needs them as critics who will always remain to criticise. I need not now emphasise the deadly need of this double energy of internal reform and external defence; the whole towering tragedy which has eclipsed our earth in our time is but one terrific illustration of it. The hammer–strokes are coming thick and fast now; and filling the world with infernal thunders; and there is still the iron sound of something unbreakable deeper and louder than all the things that break. We may curse the kings, we may distrust the captains, we may murmur at the very existence of the armies; but we know that in the darkest days that may come to us, no man will desert the flag.

Now when we pass from loyalty to the nation to loyalty to the family, there can be no doubt about the first and plainest difference. The difference is that the family is a thing far more free. The vow is a voluntary loyalty; and the marriage vow is marked among ordinary oaths of allegiance by the fact that the allegiance is also a choice. The man is not only a citizen of the city, but also the founder and builder of the city. He is not only a soldier serving the colours, but he has himself artistically selected and combined the colours, like the colours of an individual dress. If it be admissible to ask him to be true to the commonwealth
that has made him, it is at least not more illiberal to ask him to be true to the
commonwealth he has himself made. If civic fidelity be, as it is, a necessity, it is
also in a special sense a constraint. The old joke against patriotism, the
Gilbertian irony, congratulated the Englishman on his fine and fastidious taste in
being born in England. It made a plausible point in saying “For he might have
been a Russian”; though indeed we have lived to see some persons who seemed
to think they could be Russians when the fancy took them. If commonsense
considers even such involuntary loyalty natural, we can hardly wonder if it
thinks voluntary loyalty still more natural. And the small state founded on the
sexes is at once the most voluntary and the most natural of all self–governing
states. It is not true of Mr. Brown that he might have been a Russian; but it may
be true of Mrs. Brown that she might have been a Robinson.

Now it is not at all hard to see why this small community, so specially free
touching its cause, should yet be specially bound touching its effects. It is not
hard to see why the vow made most freely is the vow kept most firmly. There
are attached to it, by the nature of things, consequences so tremendous that no
contract can offer any comparison. There is no contract, unless it be that said to
be signed in blood, that can call spirits from the vastly deep, or bring cherubs (or
goblins) to inhabit a small modern villa. There is no stroke of the pen which
creates real bodies and souls, or makes the characters in a novel come to life.
The institution that puzzles intellectuals so much can be explained by the mere
material fact (perceptible even to intellectuals) that children are, generally
speaking, younger than their parents. “Till death do us part” is not an irrational
formula, for those will almost certainly die before they see more than half of the
amazing (or alarming) thing they have done.

Such is, in a curt and crude outline, this obvious thing for those to whom it is
not obvious. Now I know there are thinking men among those who would
tamper with it; and I shall expect some of these to reply to my questions. But for
the moment I only ask this question: whether the parliamentary and journalistic
divorce movement shows even a shadowy trace of these fundamental truths,
regarded as tests. Does it even discuss the nature of a vow, the limits and objects
of loyalty, the survival of the family as a small and free state? The writers are
content to say that Mr. Brown is uncomfortable with Mrs. Brown, and the last
emancipation, for separated couples, seems only to mean that he is still
uncomfortable without Mrs. Brown. These are not days in which being
uncomfortable is felt as the final test of public action. For the rest, the reformers
show statistically that families are in fact so scattered in our industrial anarchy,
that they may as well abandon hope of finding their way home again. I am acquainted with that argument for making bad worse and I see it everywhere leading to slavery. Because London Bridge is broken down, we must assume that bridges are not meant to bridge. Because London commercialism and capitalism have copied hell, we are to continue to copy them. Anyhow, some will retain the conviction that the ancient bridge built between the two towers of sex is the worthiest of the great works of the earth.

It is exceedingly characteristic of the dreary decades before the War that the forms of freedom in which they seemed to specialise were suicide and divorce. I am not at the moment pronouncing on the moral problem of either; I am merely noting, as signs of those times, those two true or false counsels of despair; the end of life and the end of love. Other forms of freedom were being increasingly curtailed. Freedom indeed was the one thing that progressives and conservatives alike contemned. Socialists were largely concerned to prevent strikes, by State arbitration; that is, by adding another rich man to give the casting vote between rich and poor. Even in claiming what they called the right to work they tacitly surrendered the right to leave off working. Tories were preaching conscription, not so much to defend the independence of England as to destroy the independence of Englishmen. Liberals, of course, were chiefly interested in eliminating liberty, especially touching beer and betting. It was wicked to fight, and unsafe even to argue; for citing any certain and contemporary fact might land one in a libel action. As all these doors were successfully shut in our faces along the chilly and cheerless corridor of progress (with its glazed tiles) the doors of death and divorce alone stood open, or rather opened wider and wider. I do not expect the exponents of divorce to admit any similarity in the two things; yet the passing parallel is not irrelevant. It may enable them to realise the limits within which our moral instincts can, even for the sake of argument, treat this desperate remedy as a normal object of desire. Divorce is for us at best a failure, of which we are more concerned to find and cure the cause than to complete the effects; and we regard a system that produces many divorces as we do a system that drives men to drown and shoot themselves. For instance, it is perhaps the commonest complaint against the existing law that the poor cannot afford to avail themselves of it. It is an argument to which normally I should listen with special sympathy. But while I should condemn the law being a luxury, my first thought will naturally be that divorce and death are only luxuries in a rather rare sense. I should not primarily condole with the poor man on the high price of prussic acid; or on the fact that all precipices of suitable suicidal height were the
private property of the landlords. There are other high prices and high precipices I should attack first. I should admit in the abstract that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander; that what is good for the rich is good for the poor; but my first and strongest impression would be that prussic acid sauce is not good for anybody. I fear I should, on the impulse of the moment, pull a poor clerk or artisan back by the coat–tails, if he were jumping over Shakespeare’s Cliff, even if Dover sands were strewn with the remains of the dukes and bankers who had already taken the plunge.

But in one respect, I will heartily concede, the cult of divorce has differed from the mere cult of death. The cult of death is dead. Those I knew in my youth as young pessimists are now aged optimists. And, what is more to the point at present, even when it was living it was limited; it was a thing of one clique in one class. We know the rule in the old comedy, that when the heroine went mad in white satin, the confidante went mad in white muslin. But when, in some tragedy of the artistic temperament, the painter committed suicide in velvet, it was never implied that the plumber must commit suicide in corduroy. It was never held that Hedda Gabler’s housemaid must die in torments on the carpet (trying as her term of service may have been); or that Mrs. Tanqueray’s butler must play the Roman fool and die on his own carving knife. That particular form of playing the fool, Roman or otherwise, was an oligarchic privilege in the decadent epoch; and even as such has largely passed with that epoch. Pessimism, which was never popular, is no longer even fashionable. A far different fate has awaited the other fashion; the other somewhat dismal form of freedom. If divorce is a disease, it is no longer to be a fashionable disease like appendicitis; it is to be made an epidemic like small–pox. As we have already seen papers and public men to–day make a vast parade of the necessity of setting the poor man free to get a divorce. Now why are they so mortally anxious that he should be free to get a divorce, and not in the least anxious that he should be free to get anything else? Why are the same people happy, nay almost hilarious, when he gets a divorce, who are horrified when he gets a drink? What becomes of his money, what becomes of his children, where he works, when he ceases to work, are less and less under his personal control. Labour Exchanges, Insurance Cards, Welfare Work, and a hundred forms of police inspection and supervision have combined for good or evil to fix him more and more strictly to a certain place in society. He is less and less allowed to go to look for a new job; why is he allowed to go to look for a new wife? He is more and more compelled to recognise a Moslem code about liquor; why is it made so easy for him to escape
from his old Christian code about sex? What is the meaning of this mysterious immunity, this special permit for adultery; and why is running away with his neighbour’s wife to be the only exhilaration still left open to him? Why must he love as he pleases; when he may not even live as he pleases?

The answer is, I regret to say, that this social campaign, in most though by no means all of its most prominent campaigners, relies in this matter on a very smug and pestilent piece of cant. There are some advocates of democratic divorce who are really advocates of general democratic freedom; but they are the exceptions; I might say, with all respect, that they are the dupes. The omnipresence of the thing in the press and in political society is due to a motive precisely opposite to the motive professed. The modern rulers, who are simply the rich men, are really quite consistent in their attitude to the poor man. It is the same spirit which takes away his children under the pretence of order, which takes away his wife under the pretence of liberty. That which wishes, in the words of the comic song, to break up the happy home, is primarily anxious not to break up the much more unhappy factory. Capitalism, of course, is at war with the family, for the same reason which has led to its being at war with the Trade Union. This indeed is the only sense in which it is true that capitalism is connected with individualism. Capitalism believes in collectivism for itself and individualism for its enemies. It desires its victims to be individuals, or (in other words) to be atoms. For the word atom, in its clearest meaning (which is none too clear) might be translated as “individual.” If there be any bond, if there be any brotherhood, if there be any class loyalty or domestic discipline, by which the poor can help the poor, these emancipators will certainly strive to loosen that bond or lift that discipline in the most liberal fashion. If there be such a brotherhood, these individualists will redistribute it in the form of individuals; or in other words smash it to atoms.

The masters of modern plutocracy know what they are about. They are making no mistake; they can be cleared of the slander of inconsistency. A very profound and precise instinct has let them to single out the human household as the chief obstacle to their inhuman progress. Without the family we are helpless before the State, which in our modern case is the Servile State. To use a military metaphor, the family is the only formation in which the charge of the rich can be repulsed. It is a force that forms twos as soldiers form fours; and, in every peasant country, has stood in the square house or the square plot of land as infantry have stood in squares against cavalry. How this force operates this, and why, I will try to explain in the last of these articles. But it is when it is most
nearly ridden down by the horsemen of pride and privilege, as in Poland or Ireland, when the battle grows most desperate and the hope most dark, that men begin to understand why that wild oath in its beginnings was flung beyond the bonds of the world; and what would seem as passing as a vision is made permanent as a vow.
III

THE SUPERSTITION OF DIVORCE 3

There has long been a curiously consistent attempt to conceal the fact that France is a Christian country. There have been Frenchmen in the plot, no doubt, and no doubt there have been Frenchmen—though I have myself only found Englishmen—in the derivative attempt to conceal the fact that Balzac was a Christian writer. I began to read Balzac long after I had read the admirers of Balzac; and they had never given me a hint of this truth. I had read that his books were bound in yellow and “quite impudently French”; though I may have been cloudy about why being French should be impudent in a Frenchman. I had read the truer description of “the grimy wizard of the Comedie Humaine,” and have lived to learn the truth of it; Balzac certainly is a genius of the type of that artist he himself describes, who could draw a broomstick so that one knew it had swept the room after a murder. The furniture of Balzac is more alive than the figures of many dramas. For this I was prepared; but not for a certain spiritual assumption which I recognised at once as a historical phenomenon. The morality of a great writer is not the morality he teaches, but the morality he takes for granted. The Catholic type of Christian ethics runs through Balzac’s books, exactly as the Puritan type of Christian ethics runs through Bunyan’s books. What his professed opinions were I do not know, any more than I know Shakespeare’s; but I know that both those great creators of a multitudinous world made it, as compared with other and later writers, on the same fundamental moral plan as the universe of Dante. There can be no doubt about it for any one who can apply as a test the truth I have mentioned; that the fundamental things in a man are not the things he explains, but rather the things he forgets to explain. But here and there Balzac does explain; and with that intellectual concentration Mr. George Moore has acutely observed in that novelist when he is a theorist. And the other day I found in one of Balzac’s novels this passage; which, whether or no it would precisely hit Mr. George Moore’s mood at this moment, strikes me as a perfect prophecy of this epoch, and might also be a motto for this book: “With the solidarity of the family society has lost that elemental force which Montesquieu defined and called ‘honour.’ Society has isolated its members the better to govern them, and has divided in order to weaken.”
Throughout our youth and the years before the War, the current criticism followed Ibsen in describing the domestic system as a doll’s house and the domestic woman as a doll. Mr. Bernard Shaw varied the metaphor by saying that mere custom kept the woman in the home as it keeps the parrot in the cage; and the plays and tales of the period made vivid sketches of a woman who also resembled a parrot in other particulars, rich in raiment, shrill in accent and addicted to saying over and over again what she had been taught to say. Mr. Granville Barker, the spiritual child of Mr. Bernard Shaw, commented in his clever play of “The Voysey Inheritance” on tyranny, hypocrisy and boredom, as the constituent elements of a “happy English home.” Leaving the truth of this aside for the moment, it will be well to insist that the conventionality thus criticised would be even more characteristic of a happy French home. It is not the Englishman’s house, but the Frenchman’s house that is his castle. It might be further added, touching the essential ethical view of the sexes at least, that the Irishman’s house is his castle; though it has been for some centuries a besieged castle. Anyhow, those conventions which were remarked as making domesticity dull, narrow and unnaturally meek and submissive, are particularly powerful among the Irish and the French. From this it will surely be easy, for any lucid and logical thinker, to deduce the fact that the French are dull and narrow, and that the Irish are unnaturally meek and submissive. Mr. Bernard Shaw, being an Irishman who lives among English men, may be conveniently taken as the type of the difference; and it will no doubt be found that the political friends of Mr. Shaw, among Englishmen, will be of a wilder revolutionary type than those whom he would have found among Irishmen. We are in a position to compare the meekness of the Fenians with the fury of the Fabians. This deadening monogamic ideal may even, in a larger sense define and distinguish all the flat subserviency of Clare from all the flaming revolt of Clapham. Nor need we now look far to understand why revolutions have been unknown in the history of France; or why they happen so persistently in the vaguer politics of England. This rigidity and respectability must surely be the explanation of all that incapacity for any civil experiment or explosion, which has always marked that sleepy hamlet of very private houses which we call the city of Paris. But the same things are true not only of Parisians but of peasants; they are even true of other peasants in the great Alliance. Students of Serbian traditions tell us that the peasant literature lays a special and singular curse on the violation of marriage; and this may well explain the prim and sheepish pacifism complained of in that people.
In plain words, there is clearly something wrong in the calculation by which it was proved that a housewife must be as much a servant as a housemaid; or which exhibited the domesticated man as being as gentle as the primrose or as conservative as the Primrose League. It is precisely those who have been conservative about the family who have been revolutionary about the state. Those who are blamed for the bigotry or bourgeois smugness of their marriage conventions are actually those blamed for the restlessness and violence of their political reforms. Nor is there seriously any difficulty in discovering the cause of this. It is simply that in such a society the government, in dealing with the family, deals with something almost as permanent and self–renewing as itself. There can be a continuous family policy, like a continuous foreign policy. In peasant countries the family fights, it may almost be said that the farm fights. I do not mean merely that it riots in evil and exceptional times; though this is not unimportant. It was a savage but a sane feature when, in the Irish evictions, the women poured hot water from the windows; it was part of a final falling back on private tools as public weapons. That sort of thing is not only war to the knife, but almost war to the fork and spoon. It was in this grim sense perhaps that Parnell, in that mysterious pun, said that Kettle was a household word in Ireland (it certainly ought to be after its subsequent glories), and in a more general sense it is certain that meddling with the housewife will ultimately mean getting into hot water. But it is not of such crises of bodily struggle that I speak, but of a steady and peaceful pressure from below of a thousand families upon the framework of government. For this a certain spirit of defence and enclosure is essential; and even feudalism was right in feeling that any such affair of honour must be a family affair. It was a true artistic instinct that pictured the pedigree on a coat that protects the body. The free peasant has arms if he has not armorial bearings. He has not an escutcheon; but he has a shield. Nor do I see why, in a freer and happier society than the present, or even the past, it should not be a blazoned shield. For that is true of pedigree which is true of property; the wrong is not in its being imposed on men, but rather in its being denied to them. Too much capitalism does not mean too many capitalists, but too few capitalists; and so aristocracy sins not in planting a family tree, but in not planting a family forest.

Anyhow, it is found in practice that the domestic citizen can stand a siege, even by the State; because he has those who will stand by him through thick and thin—especially thin. Now those who hold that the State can be made fit to own all and administer all, can consistently disregard this argument; but it may be
said with all respect that the world is more and more disregarding them. If we could find a perfect machine, and a perfect man to work it, it might be a good argument for State Socialism, though an equally good argument for personal despotism. But most of us, I fancy, are now agreed that something of that social pressure from below which we call freedom is vital to the health of the State; and this it is which cannot be fully exercised by individuals, but only by groups and traditions. Such groups have been many; there have been monasteries; there may be guilds; but there is only one type among them which all human beings have a spontaneous and omnipresent inspiration to build for themselves; and this type is the family.

I had intended this article to be the last of those outlining the elements of this debate; but I shall have to add a short concluding section on the way in which all this is missed in the practical (or rather unpractical) proposals about divorce. Here I will only say that they suffer from the modern and morbid weaknesses of always sacrificing the normal to the abnormal. As a fact the “tyranny, hypocrisy and boredom” complained of are not domesticity, but the decay of domesticity. The case of that particular complaint, in Mr. Granville Barker’s play, is itself a proof. The whole point of “The Voysey Inheritance” was that there was no Voysey inheritance. The only heritage of that family was a highly dishonourable debt. Naturally their family affections had decayed when their whole ideal of property and probity had decayed; and there was little love as well as little honour among thieves. It has yet to be proved that they would have been as much bored if they had had a positive and not a negative heritage; and had worked a farm instead of a fraud. And the experience of mankind points the other way.
IV

THE SUPERSTITION OF DIVORCE

I have touched before now on a famous or infamous Royalist who suggested that the people should eat grass; an unfortunate remark perhaps for a Royalist to make; since the regimen is only recorded of a Royal Personage. But there was certainly a simplicity in the solution worthy of a sultan or even a savage chief; and it is this touch of autocratic innocence on which I have mainly insisted touching the social reforms of our day, and especially the social reform known as divorce. I am primarily more concerned with the arbitrary method than with the anarchic result. Very much as the old tyrant would turn any number of men out to grass, so the new tyrant would turn any number of women into grass—widows. Anyhow, to vary the legendary symbolism, it never seems to occur to the king in this fairy tale that the gold crown on his head is a less, and not a more, sacred and settled ornament than the gold ring on the woman’s finger. This change is being achieved by the summary and even secret government which we now suffer; and this would be the first point against it, even if it were really an emancipation; and it is only in form an emancipation. I will not anticipate the details of its defence, which can be offered by others, but I will here conclude for the present by roughly suggesting the practical defences of divorce, as generally given just at present, under four heads. And I will only ask the reader to note that they all have one thing in common; the fact that each argument is also used for all that social reform which plain men are already calling slavery.

First, it is very typical of the latest practical proposals that they are concerned with the case of those who are already separated, and the steps they must take to be divorced. There is a spirit penetrating all our society to—day by which the exception is allowed to alter the rule; the exile to deflect patriotism, the orphan to depose parenthood, and even the widow or, in this case as we have seen the grass widow, to destroy the position of the wife. There is a sort of symbol of this tendency in that mysterious and unfortunate nomadic nation which has been allowed to alter so many things, from a crusade in Russia to a cottage in South Bucks. We have been told to treat the wandering Jew as a pilgrim, while we still treat the wandering Christian as a vagabond. And yet the latter is at least trying to get home, like Ulysses; whereas the former is, if anything, rather fleeing from
home, like Cain. He who is detached, disgruntled, non descript, intermediate is everywhere made the excuse for altering what is common, corporate, traditional and popular. And the alteration is always for the worse. The mermaid never becomes more womanly, but only more fishy. The centaur never becomes more manly, but only more horsy. The Jew cannot really internationalise Christendom; he can only denationalise Christendom. The proletarian does not find it easy to become a small proprietor; he is finding it far easier to become a slave. So the unfortunate man, who cannot tolerate the woman he has chosen from all the women in the world, is not encouraged to return to her and tolerate her, but encouraged to choose another woman whom he may in due course refuse to tolerate. And in all these cases the argument is the same; that the man in the intermediate state is unhappy. Probably he is unhappy, since he is abnormal; but the point is that he is permitted to loosen the universal bond which has kept millions of others normal. Because he has himself got into a hole, he is allowed to burrow in it like a rabbit and undermine a whole countryside.

Next we have, as we always have touching such crude experiments, an argument from the example of other countries, and especially of new countries. Thus the Eugenists tell me solemnly that there have been very successful Eugenic experiments in America. And they rigidly retain their solemnity (while refusing with many rebukes to believe in mine) when I tell them that one of the Eugenic experiments in America is a chemical experiment; which consists of changing a black man into the allotropic form of white ashes. It is really an exceedingly Eugenic experiment; since its chief object is to discourage an inter-racial mixture of blood which is not desired. But I do not like this American experiment, however American; and I trust and believe that it is not typically American at all. It represents, I conceive, only one element in the complexity of the great democracy; and goes along with other evil elements; so that I am not at all surprised that the same strange social sections, which permit a human being to be burned alive, also permit the exalted science of Eugenics. It is the same in the milder matter of liquor laws; and we are told that certain rather crude colonials have established prohibition Laws, which they try to evade; just as we are told they have established divorce laws, which they are now trying to repeal. For in this case of divorce, at least, the argument from distant precedents has recoiled crushing upon itself. There is already an agitation for less divorce in America, even while there is an agitation for more divorce in England.

Again, when an argument is based on a need of population, it will be well if those supporting it realise where it may carry them. It is exceedingly doubtful
whether population is one of the advantages of divorce; but there is no doubt that it is one of the advantages of polygamy. It is already used in Germany as an argument for polygamy. But the very word will teach us to look even beyond Germany for something yet more remote and repulsive. Mere population, along with a sort of polygamous anarchy, will not appear even as a practical ideal to any one who considers, for instance, how consistently Europe has held the headship of the human race, in face of the chaotic myriads of Asia. If population were the chief test of progress and efficiency, China would long ago have proved itself the most progressive and efficient state. De Quincey summed up the whole of that enormous situation in a sentence which is perhaps more impressive and even appalling than all the perspectives of orient architecture and vistas of opium vision in the midst of which it comes. “Man is a weed in those regions.” Many Europeans, fearing for the garden of the world, have fancied that in some future fatality those weeds may spring up and choke it. But no Europeans have really wished that the flowers should become like the weeds. Even if it were true, therefore, that the loosening of the tie necessarily increased the population; even if this were not contradicted, as it is, by the facts of many countries, we should have strong historical grounds for not accepting the deduction. We should still be suspicious of the paradox that we may encourage large families by abolishing the family.

Lastly, I believe it is part of the defence of the new proposal that even its defenders have found its principle a little too crude. I hear they have added provisions which modify the principle; and which seem to be in substance, first, that a man shall be made responsible for a money payment to the wife he deserts, and second, that the matter shall once again be submitted in some fashion to some magistrate. For my purpose here, it is enough to note that there is something of the unmistakable savour of the sociology we resist, in these two touching acts of faith, in a cheque-book and in a lawyer. Most of the fashionable reformers of marriage would be faintly shocked at any suggestion that a poor old charwoman might possibly refuse such money, or that a good kind magistrate might not have the right to give such advice. For the reformers of marriage are very respectable people, with some honourable exceptions; and nothing could fit more smoothly into the rather greasy groove of their respectability than the suggestion that treason is best treated with the damages, gentlemen, heavy damages, of Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz; or that tragedy is best treated by the spiritual arbitrament of Mr. Nupkins.

One word should be added to this hasty sketch of the elements of the case. I
have deliberately left out the loftiest aspect and argument, that which sees marriage as a divine institution; and that for the logical reason that those who believe in this would not believe in divorce; and I am arguing with those who do believe in divorce. I do not ask them to assume the worth of my creed or any creed; and I could wish they did not so often ask me to assume the worth of their worthless, poisonous plutocratic modern society. But if it could be shown, as I think it can, that a long historical view and a patient political experience can at last accumulate solid scientific evidence of the vital need of such a vow, then I can conceive no more tremendous tribute than this, to any faith, which made a flaming affirmation from the darkest beginnings, of what the latest enlightenment can only slowly discover in the end.
V

THE STORY OF THE FAMILY

The most ancient of human institutions has an authority that may seem as wild as anarchy. Alone among all such institutions it begins with a spontaneous attraction; and may be said strictly and not sentimentally to be founded on love instead of fear. The attempt to compare it with coercive institutions complicating later history has led to infinite illogicality in later times. It is as unique as it is universal. There is nothing in any other social relations in any way parallel to the mutual attraction of the sexes. By missing this simple point, the modern world has fallen into a hundred follies. The idea of a general revolt of women against men has been proclaimed with flags and processions, like a revolt of vassals against their lords, of niggers against nigger-drivers, of Poles against Prussians or Irishmen against Englishmen; for all the world as if we really believed in the fabulous nation of the Amazons. The equally philosophical idea of a general revolt of men against women has been put into a romance by Sir Walter Besant, and into a sociological book by Mr. Belfort Bax. But at the first touch of this truth of an aboriginal attraction, all such comparisons collapse and are seen to be comic. A Prussian does not feel from the first that he can only be happy if he spends his days and nights with a Pole. An Englishman does not think his house empty and cheerless unless it happens to contain an Irishman. A white man does not in his romantic youth dream of the perfect beauty of a black man. A railway magnate seldom writes poems about the personal fascination of a railway porter. All the other revolts against all the other relations are reasonable and even inevitable, because those relations are originally only founded upon force or self interest. Force can abolish what force can establish; self-interest can terminate a contract when self-interest has dictated the contract. But the love of man and woman is not an institution that can be abolished, or a contract that can be terminated. It is something older than all institutions or contracts, and something that is certain to outlast them all. All the other revolts are real, because there remains a possibility that the things may be destroyed, or at least divided. You can abolish capitalists; but you cannot abolish males. Prussians can go out of Poland or negroes can be repatriated to Africa; but a man and a woman must remain together in one way or another; and must learn to put up with each other somehow.
These are very simple truths; that is why nobody nowadays seems to take any particular notice of them; and the truth that follows next is equally obvious. There is no dispute about the purpose of Nature in creating such an attraction. It would be more intelligent to call it the purpose of God; for Nature can have no purpose unless God is behind it. To talk of the purpose of Nature is to make a vain attempt to avoid being anthropomorphic, merely by being feminist. It is believing in a goddess because you are too sceptical to believe in a god. But this is a controversy which can be kept apart from the question, if we content ourselves with saying that the vital value ultimately found in this attraction is, of course, the renewal of the race itself. The child is an explanation of the father and mother and the fact that it is a human child is the explanation of the ancient human ties connecting the father and mother. The more human, that is the less bestial, is the child, the more lawful and lasting are the ties. So far from any progress in culture or the sciences tending to loosen the bond, any such progress must logically tend to tighten it. The more things there are for the child to learn, the longer he must remain at the natural school for learning them; and the longer his teachers must at least postpone the dissolution of their partnership. This elementary truth is hidden to–day in vast masses of vicarious, indirect and artificial work, with the fundamental fallacy of which I shall deal in a moment. Here I speak of the primary position of the human group, as it has stood through unthinkable ages of waxing and waning civilisations; often unable to delegate any of its work, always unable to delegate all of it. In this, I repeat, it will always be necessary for the two teachers to remain together, in proportion as they have anything to teach. One of the shapeless sea–beasts, that merely detaches itself from its offspring and floats away, could float away to a submarine divorce court, or an advanced club founded on free–love for fishes. The sea–beast might do this, precisely because the sea beast’s offspring need do nothing; because it has not got to learn the polka or the multiplication table. All these are truisms but they are also truths, and truths that will return; for the present tangle of semi–official substitutes is not only a stop–gap, but one that is not big enough to stop the gap. If people cannot mind their own business, it cannot possibly be made economical to pay them to mind each other’s business; and still less to mind each other’s babies. It is simply throwing away a natural force and then paying for an artificial force; as if a man were to water a plant with a hose while holding up an umbrella to protect it from the rain. The whole really rests on a plutocratic illusion of an infinite supply of servants. When we offer any other system as a “career for women,” we are really proposing that an infinite number of them
should become servants, of a plutocratic or bureaucratic sort. Ultimately, we are arguing that a woman should not be a mother to her own baby, but a nursemaid to somebody else’s baby. But it will not work, even on paper. We cannot all live by taking in each other’s washing, especially in the form of pinafores. In the last resort, the only people who either can or will give individual care, to each of the individual children, are their individual parents. The expression as applied to those dealing with changing crowds of children is a graceful and legitimate flourish of speech.

This triangle of truisms, of father, mother and child, cannot be destroyed; it can only destroy those civilisations which disregard it. Most modern reformers are merely bottomless sceptics, and have no basis on which to rebuild; and it is well that such reformers should realise that there is something they cannot reform. You can put down the mighty from their seat; you can turn the world upside down, and there is much to be said for the view that it may then be the right way up. But you cannot create a world in which the baby carries the mother. You cannot create a world in which the mother has not authority over the baby. You can waste your time in trying, by giving votes to babies or proclaiming a republic of infants in arms. You can say, as an educationist said the other day, that small children should “criticise, question authority and suspend their judgment.” I do not know why he did not go on to say that they should earn their own living, pay income tax to the state, and die in battle for the fatherland; for the proposal evidently is that children shall have no childhood. But you can, if you find entertainment in such games, organise “representative government” among little boys and girls, and tell them to take their legal and constitutional responsibilities as seriously as possible. In short, you can be crazy; but you cannot be consistent. You cannot really carry your own principle back to the aboriginal group, and really apply it to the mother and the baby. You will not act on your own theory in the simplest and most practical of all possible cases. You are not quite so mad as that.

This nucleus of natural authority has always existed in the midst of more artificial authorities. It has always been regarded as something in the literal sense individual; that is, as an absolute that could not really be divided. A baby was not even a baby apart from its mother; it was something else, most probably a corpse. It was always recognised as standing in a peculiar relation to government; simply because it was one of the few things that had not been made by government; and could to some extent come into existence without the support of government. Indeed the case for it is too strong to be stated. For the
case for it is that there is nothing like it; and we can only find faint parallels to it in those more elaborate and painful powers and institutions that are its inferiors. Thus the only way of conveying it is to compare it to a nation; although, compared to it, national divisions are as modern and formal as national anthems. Thus I may often use the metaphor of a city; though in its presence a citizen is as recent as a city clerk. It is enough to note here that everybody does know by intuition and admit by implication that a family is a solid fact, having a character and colour like a nation. The truth can be tested by the most modern and most daily experiences. A man does say “That is the sort of thing the Browns will like”; however tangled and interminable a psychological novel he might compose on the shades of difference between Mr. and Mrs. Brown. A woman does say “I don’t like Jemima seeing so much of the Robinsons”; and she does not always, in the scurry of her social or domestic duties, pause to distinguish the optimistic materialism of Mrs. Robinson from the more acid cynicism which tinges the hedonism of Mr. Robinson. There is a colour of the household inside, as conspicuous as the colour of the house outside. That colour is a blend, and if any tint in it predominate it is generally that preferred by Mrs. Robinson. But, like all composite colours, it is a separate colour; as separate as green is from blue and yellow. Every marriage is a sort of wild balance; and in every case the compromise is as unique as an eccentricity. Philanthropists walking in the slums often see the compromise in the street, and mistake it for a fight. When they interfere, they are thoroughly thumped by both parties; and serve them right, for not respecting the very institution that brought them into the world.

The first thing to see is that this enormous normality is like a mountain; and one that is capable of being a volcano. Every abnormality that is now opposed to it is like a mole–hill; and the earnest sociological organisers of it are exceedingly like moles. But the mountain is a volcano in another sense also; as suggested in that tradition of the southern fields fertilised by lava. It has a creative as well as a destructive side; and it only remains, in this part of the analysis, to note the political effect of this extra–political institution, and the political ideals of which it has been the champion; and perhaps the only permanent champion.

The ideal for which it stands in the state is liberty. It stands for liberty for the very simple reason with which this rough analysis started. It is the only one of these institutions that is at once necessary and voluntary. It is the only check on the state that is bound to renew itself as eternally as the state, and more naturally than the state. Every sane man recognises that unlimited liberty is, anarchy, or rather is nonentity. The civic idea of liberty is to give the citizen a province of
liberty; a limitation within which a citizen is a king. This is the only way in which truth can ever find refuge from public persecution, and the good man survive the bad government. But the good man by himself is no match for the city. There must be balanced against it another ideal institution, and in that sense an immortal institution. So long as the state is the only ideal institution the state will call on the citizen to sacrifice himself, and therefore will not have the smallest scruple in sacrificing the citizen. The state consists of coercion; and must always be justified from its own point of view in extending the bounds of coercion; as, for instance, in the case of conscription. The only thing that can be set up to check or challenge this authority is a voluntary law and a voluntary loyalty. That loyalty is the protection of liberty, in the only sphere where liberty can fully dwell. It is a principle of the constitution that the King never dies. It is the whole principle of the family that the citizen never dies. There must be a heraldry and heredity of freedom; a tradition of resistance to tyranny. A man must be not only free, but free–born.

Indeed, there is something in the family that might loosely be called anarchist; and more correctly called amateur. As there seems something almost vague about its voluntary origin, so there seems something vague about its voluntary organisation. The most vital function it performs, perhaps the most vital function that anything can perform, is that of education; but its type of early education is far too essential to be mistaken for instruction. In a thousand things it works rather by rule of thumb than rule of theory. To take a commonplace and even comic example, I doubt if any text–book or code of rules has ever contained any directions about standing a child in a corner. Doubtless when the modern process is complete, and the coercive principle of the state has entirely extinguished the voluntary element of the family, there will be some exact regulation or restriction about the matter. Possibly it will say that the corner must be an angle of at least ninety–five degrees. Possibly it will say that the converging line of any ordinary corner tends to make a child squint. In fact I am certain that if I said casually, at a sufficient number of tea–tables, that corners made children squint, it would rapidly become a universally received dogma of popular science. For the modern world will accept no dogmas upon any authority; but it will accept any dogmas on no authority. Say that a thing is so, according to the Pope or the Bible, and it will be dismissed as a superstition without examination. But preface your remark merely with “they say” or “don’t you know that?” or try (and fail) to remember the name of some professor mentioned in some newspaper; and the keen rationalism of the modern mind will accept every word you say. This
parenthesis is not so irrelevant as it may appear, for it will be well to remember
that when a rigid officialism breaks in upon the voluntary compromises of the
home, that officialism itself will be only rigid in its action and will be
exceedingly limp in its thought. Intellectually it will be at least as vague as the
amateur arrangements of the home, and the only difference is that the domestic
arrangements are in the only real sense practical, that is, they are founded on
experiences that have been suffered. The others are what is now generally called
scientific; that is, they are founded on experiments that have not yet been made.
As a matter of fact, instead of invading the family with the blundering
bureaucracy that mismanages the public services, it would be far more
philosophical to work the reform the other way round. It would be really quite as
reasonable to alter the laws of the nation so as to resemble the laws of the
nursery. The punishments would be far less horrible, far more humorous, and far
more really calculated to make men feel they had made fools of themselves. It
would be a pleasant change if a judge, instead of putting on the black cap, had to
put on the dunce’s cap; or if we could stand a financier in his own corner.

Of course this opinion is rare, and reactionary—whatever that may mean.
Modern education is founded on the principle that a parent is more likely to be
cruel than anybody else. It passes over the obvious fact that he is less likely to be
cruel than anybody else. Anybody may happen to be cruel; but the first chances
of cruelty come with the whole colourless and indifferent crowd of total
strangers and mechanical mercenaries, whom it is now the custom to call in as
infallible agents of improvement; policemen, doctors, detectives, inspectors,
instructors, and so on. They are automatically given arbitrary power because
there are here and there such things as criminal parents; as if there were no such
things as criminal doctors or criminal school—masters. A mother is not always
judicious about her child’s diet, so it is given into the control of Dr. Crippen. A
father is thought not to teach his sons the purest morality; so they are put under
the tutorship of Eugene Aram. These celebrated criminals are no more rare in
their respective professions than the cruel parents are in the profession of
parenthood. But indeed the case is far stronger than this; and there is no need to
rely on the case of such criminals at all. The ordinary weaknesses of human
nature will explain all the weaknesses of bureaucracy and business government
all over the world. The official need only be an ordinary man to be more
indifferent to other people’s children than to his own; and even to sacrifice other
people’s family prosperity to his own. He may be bored; he may be bribed; he
may be brutal, for any one of the thousand reasons that ever made a man a brute.
All this elementary common sense is entirely left out of account in our educational and social systems of today. It is assumed that the hireling will not flee, and that solely because he is a hireling. It is denied that the shepherd will lay down his life for the sheep; or for that matter, even that the she–wolf will fight for the cubs. We are to believe that mothers are inhuman; but not that officials are human. There are unnatural parents, but there are no natural passions; at least, there are none where the fury of King Lear dared to find them—in the beadle. Such is the latest light on the education of the young; and the same principle that is applied to the child is applied to the husband and wife. Just as it assumes that a child will certainly be loved by anybody except his mother, so it assumes that a man can be happy with anybody except the one woman he has himself chosen for his wife.

Thus the coercive spirit of the state prevails over the free promise of the family, in the shape of formal officialism. But this is not the most coercive of the coercive elements in the modern commonwealth. An even more rigid and ruthless external power is that of industrial employment and unemployment. An even more ferocious enemy of the family is the factory. Between these modern mechanical things the ancient natural institution is not being reformed or modified or even cut down; it is being torn in pieces. It is not only being torn in pieces in the sense of a true metaphor, like a living thing caught in a hideous clockwork of manufacture. It is being literally torn in pieces, in that the husband may go to one factory, the wife to another, and the child to a third. Each will become the servant of a separate financial group, which is more and more gaining the political power of a feudal group. But whereas feudalism received the loyalty of families, the lords of the new servile state will receive only the loyalty of individuals; that is, of lonely men and even of lost children.

It is sometimes said that Socialism attacks the family; which is founded on little beyond the accident that some Socialists believe in free–love. I have been a Socialist, and I am no longer a Socialist, and at no time did I believe in free–love. It is true, I think in a large and unconscious sense, that State Socialism encourages the general coercive claim I have been considering. But if it be true that Socialism attacks the family in theory, it is far more certain that Capitalism attacks it in practice. It is a paradox, but a plain fact, that men never notice a thing as long as it exists in practice. Men who will note a heresy will ignore an abuse. Let any one who doubts the paradox imagine the newspapers formally printing along with the Honours’ List a price list, for peerages and knighthoods; though everybody knows they are bought and sold. So the factory is destroying
the family in fact; and need depend on no poor mad theorist who dreams of destroying it in fancy. And what is destroying it is nothing so plausible as free love; but something rather to be described as an enforced fear. It is economic punishment more terrible than legal punishment, which may yet land us in slavery as the only safety.

From its first days in the forest this human group had to fight against wild monsters; and so it is now fighting against these wild machines. It only managed to survive then, and it will only manage to survive now, by a strong internal sanctity; a tacit oath or dedication deeper than that of the city or the tribe. But though this silent promise was always present, it took at a certain turning point of our history a special form which I shall try to sketch in the next chapter. That turning point was the creation of Christendom by the religion which created it. Nothing will destroy the sacred triangle; and even the Christian faith, the most amazing revolution that ever took place in the mind, served only in a sense to turn that triangle upside down. It held up a mystical mirror in which the order of the three things was reversed; and added a holy family of child, mother and father to the human family of father, mother and child.
VI

THE STORY OF THE VOW

Charles Lamb, with his fine fantastic instinct for combinations that are also contrasts, has noted somewhere a contrast between St. Valentine and valentines. There seems a comic incongruity in such lively and frivolous flirtations still depending on the date and title of an ascetic and celibate bishop of the Dark Ages. The paradox lends itself to his treatment, and there is a truth in his view of it. Perhaps it may seem even more of a paradox to say there is no paradox. In such cases unification appears more provocative than division; and it may seem idly contradictory to deny the contradiction. And yet in truth there is no contradiction. In the deepest sense there is a very real similarity, which puts St. Valentine and his valentines on one side, and most of the modern world on the other. I should hesitate to ask even a German professor to collect, collate and study carefully all the valentines in the world, with the object of tracing a philosophical principle running through them. But if he did, I have no doubt about the philosophic principle he would find. However trivial, however imbecile, however vulgar or vapid or stereotyped the imagery of such things might be, it would always involve one idea, the same idea that makes lovers laboriously chip their initials on a tree or a rock, in a sort of monogram of monogamy. It may be a cockney trick to tie one’s love on a tree; though Orlando did it, and would now doubtless be arrested by the police for breaking the byelaws of the Forest of Arden. I am not here concerned especially to commend the habit of cutting one’s own name and private address in large letters on the front of the Parthenon, across the face of the Sphinx, or in any other nook or corner where it may chance to arrest the sentimental interest of posterity. But like many other popular things, of the sort that can generally be found in Shakespeare, there is a meaning in it that would probably be missed by a less popular poet, like Shelley. There is a very permanent truth in the fact that two free persons deliberately tie themselves to a log of wood. And it is the idea of tying oneself to something that runs through all this old amorous allegory like a pattern of fetters. There is always the notion of hearts chained together, or skewered together, or in some manner secured; there is a security that can only be called captivity. That it frequently fails to secure itself has nothing to do with the present point. The point is that every philosophy of sex must fail, which does
not account for its ambition of fixity, as well as for its experience of failure. There is nothing to make Orlando commit himself on the sworn evidence of the nearest tree. He is not bound to be bound; he is under constraint, but nobody constrains him to be under constraint. In short, Orlando took a vow to marry precisely as Valentine took a vow not to marry. Nor could any ascetic, without being a heretic, have asserted in the wildest reactions of asceticism, that the vow of Orlando was not lawful as well as the vow of Valentine. But it is a notable fact that even when it was not lawful, it was still a vow. Through all that mediaeval culture, which has left us the legend of romance, there ran this pattern of a chain, which was felt as binding even where it ought not to bind. The lawless loves of mediaeval legends all have their own law, and especially their own loyalty, as in the tales of Tristram or Lancelot. In this sense we might say that mediaeval profligacy was more fixed than modern marriage. I am not here discussing either modern or mediaeval ethics, in the matter of what they did say or ought to say of such things. I am only noting as a historical fact the insistence of the mediaeval imagination, even at its wildest, upon one particular idea. That idea is the idea of the vow. It might be the vow which St. Valentine took; it might be a lesser vow which he regarded as lawful; it might be a wild vow which he regarded as quite lawless. But the whole society which made such festivals and bequeathed to us such traditions was full of the idea of vows; and we must recognise this notion, even if we think it nonsensical, as the note of the whole civilisation. And Valentine and the valentine both express it for us; even more if we feel them both as exaggerated, or even as exaggerating opposites. Those extremes meet; and they meet in the same place. Their trysting place is by the tree on which the lover hung his love–letters. And even if the lover hung himself on the tree, instead of his literary compositions, even that act had about it also an indefinable flavour of finality.

It is often said by the critics of Christian origins that certain ritual feasts, processions or dances are really of pagan origin. They might as well say that our legs are of pagan origin. Nobody ever disputed that humanity was human before it was Christian; and no Church manufactured the legs with which men walked or danced, either in a pilgrimage or a ballet. What can really be maintained, so as to carry not a little conviction, is this: that where such a Church has existed it has preserved not only the processions but the dances; not only the cathedral but the carnival. One of the chief claims of Christian civilisation is to have preserved things of pagan origin. In short, in the old religious countries men continue to dance; while in the new scientific cities they are often content to drudge.
But when this saner view of history is realised, there does remain something more mystical and difficult to define. Even heathen things are Christian when they have been preserved by Christianity. Chivalry is something recognisably different even from the virtue of Virgil. Charity is something exceedingly different from the plain pity of Homer. Even our patriotism is something more subtle than the undivided love of the city; and the change is felt in the most permanent things, such as the love of landscape or the love of woman. To define the differentiation in all these things will always be hopelessly difficult. But I would here suggest one element in the change which is perhaps too much neglected; which at any rate ought not to be neglected; the nature of a vow. I might express it by saying that pagan antiquity was the age of status; that Christian mediaevalism was the age of vows; and that sceptical modernity has been the age of contracts; or rather has tried to be, and has failed.

The outstanding example of status was slavery. Needless to say slavery does not mean tyranny; indeed it need only be regarded relatively to other things to be regarded as charity. The idea of slavery is that large numbers of men are meant and made to do the heavy work of the world, and that others, while taking the margin of profits, must nevertheless support them while they do it. The point is not whether the work is excessive or moderate, or whether the condition is comfortable or uncomfortable. The point is that this work is chosen for the man, his status fixed for the man; and this status is forced on him by law. As Mr. Balfour said about Socialism, that is slavery and nothing else is slavery. The slave might well be, and often was, far more comfortable than the average free labourer, and certainly far more lazy than the average peasant. He was a slave because he had not reached his position by choice, or promise, or bargain, but merely by status.

It is admitted that when Christianity had been for some time at work in the world, this ancient servile status began in some mysterious manner to disappear. I suggest here that one of the forms which the new spirit took was the importance of the vow. Feudalism, for instance, differed from slavery chiefly because feudalism was a vow. The vassal put his hands in those of his lord, and vowed to be his man; but there was an accent on the noun substantive as well as on the possessive pronoun. By swearing to be his man, he proved he was not his chattel. Nobody exacts a promise from a pickaxe, or expects a poker to swear everlasting friendship with the tongs. Nobody takes the word of a spade; and nobody ever took the word of a slave. It marks at least a special stage of transition that the form of freedom was essential to the fact of service, or even of
servitude. In this way it is not a coincidence that the word homage actually means manhood. And if there was vow instead of status even in the static parts of Feudalism, it is needless to say that there was a wilder luxuriance of vows in the more adventurous part of it. The whole of what we call chivalry was one great vow. Vows of chivalry varied infinitely from the most solid to the most fantastic; from a vow to give all the spoils of conquest to the poor to a vow to refrain from shaving until the first glimpse of Jerusalem. As I have remarked, this rule of loyalty, even in the unruly exceptions which proved the rule, ran through all the romances and songs of the troubadours; and there were always vows even when they were very far from being marriage vows. The idea is as much present in what they called the Gay Science, of love, as in what they called the Divine Science, of theology. The modern reader will smile at the mention of these things as sciences; and will turn to the study of sociology, ethnology and psycho–analysis; for if these are sciences (about which I would not divulge a doubt) at least nobody would insult them by calling them either gay or divine.

I mean here to emphasise the presence, and not even to settle the proportion, of this new notion in the middle ages. But the critic will be quite wrong if he thinks it enough to answer that all these things affected only a cultured class, not corresponding to the servile class of antiquity. When we come to workmen and small tradesmen, we find the same vague yet vivid presence of the spirit that can only be called the vow. In this sense there was a chivalry of trades as well as a chivalry of orders of knighthood; just as there was a heraldry of shop–signs as well as a heraldry of shields. Only it happens that in the enlightenment and liberation of the sixteenth century, the heraldry of the rich was preserved, and the heraldry of the poor destroyed. And there is a sinister symbolism in the fact that almost the only emblem still hung above a shop is that of the three balls of Lombardy. Of all those democratic glories nothing can now glitter in the sun; except the sign of the golden usury that has devoured them all. The point here, however, is that the trade or craft had not only something like the crest, but something like the vow of knighthood. There was in the position of the guildsman the same basic notion that belonged to knights and even to monks. It was the notion of the free choice of a fixed estate. We can realise the moral atmosphere if we compare the system of the Christian guilds, not only with the status of the Greek and Roman slaves, but with such a scheme as that of the Indian castes. The oriental caste has some of the qualities of the occidental guild; especially the valuable quality of tradition and the accumulation of culture. Men might be proud of their castes, as they were proud of their guilds. But they had
never chosen their castes, as they have chosen their guilds. They had never, within historic memory, even collectively created their castes, as they collectively created their guilds. Like the slave system, the caste system was older than history. The heathens of modern Asia, as much as the heathens of ancient Europe, lived by the very spirit of status. Status in a trade has been accepted like status in a tribe; and that in a tribe of beasts and birds rather than men. The fisherman continued to be a fisherman as the fish continued to be a fish; and the hunter would no more turn into a cook than his dog would try its luck as a cat. Certainly his dog would not be found prostrated before the mysterious altar of Pasht, barking or whining a wild, lonely, and individual vow that he at all costs would become a cat. Yet that was the vital revolt and innovation of vows, as compared with castes or slavery; as when a man vowed to be a monk, or the son of a cobbler saluted the shrine of St. Joseph, the patron saint of carpenters. When he had entered the guild of the carpenters he did indeed find himself responsible for a very real loyalty and discipline; but the whole social atmosphere surrounding his entrance was full of the sense of a separate and personal decision. There is one place where we can still find this sentiment; the sentiment of something at once free and final. We can feel it, if the service is properly understood, before and after the marriage vows at any ordinary wedding in any ordinary church.

Such, in very vague outline, has been the historical nature of vows; and the unique part they played in that mediaeval civilisation out of which modern civilisation rose—or fell. We can now consider, a little less cloudily than it is generally considered nowadays, whether we really think vows are good things; whether they ought to be broken; and (as would naturally follow) whether they ought to be made. But we can never judge it fairly till we face, as I have tried to suggest, this main fact of history; that the personal pledge, feudal or civic or monastic, was the way in which the world did escape from the system of slavery in the past. For the modern breakdown of mere contract leaves it still doubtful if there be any other way of escaping it in the future.

The idea, or at any rate the ideal, of the thing called a vow is fairly obvious. It is to combine the fixity that goes with finality with the self-respect that only goes with freedom. The man is a slave who is his own master, and a king who is his own ancestor. For all kinds of social purposes he has the calculable orbit of the man in the caste or the servile state; but in the story of his own soul he is still pursuing, at great peril, his own adventure. As seen by his neighbours, he is as safe as if immured in a fortress; but as seen by himself he may be forever
careering through the sky or crashing towards the earth in a flying–ship. What is socially humdrum is produced by what is individually heroic; and a city is made not merely of citizens but knight–errants. It is needless to point out the part played by the monastery in civilising Europe in its most barbaric interregnum; and even those who still denounce the monasteries will be found denouncing them for these two extreme and apparently opposite eccentricities. They are blamed for the rigid character of their collective routine; and also for the fantastic character of their individual fanaticism. For the purposes of this part of the argument, it would not matter if the marriage vow produced the most austere discomforts of the monastic vow. The point for the present is that it was sustained by a sense of free will; and the feeling that its evils were not accepted but chosen. The same spirit ran through all the guilds and popular arts and spontaneous social systems of the whole civilisation. It had all the discipline of an army; but it was an army of volunteers.

The civilisation of vows was broken up when Henry the Eighth broke his own vow of marriage. Or rather, it was broken up by a new cynicism in the ruling powers of Europe, of which that was the almost accidental expression in England. The monasteries, that had been built by vows, were destroyed. The guilds, that had been regiments of volunteers were dispersed. The sacramental nature of marriage was denied; and many of the greatest intellects of the new movement, like Milton, already indulged in a very modern idealisation of divorce. The progress of this sort of emancipation advanced step by step with the progress of that aristocratic ascendancy which has made the history of modern England; with all its sympathy with personal liberty, and all its utter lack of sympathy with popular life. Marriage not only became less of a sacrament but less of a sanctity. It threatened to become not only a contract, but a contract that could not be kept. For this one question has retained a strange symbolic supremacy amid all the similar questions, which seems to perpetuate the coincidence of the origin. It began with divorce for a king; and it is now ending in divorces for a whole kingdom.

The modern era that followed can be called the era of contract; but it can still more truly be called the era of leonine contract. The nobles of the new time first robbed the people, and then offered to bargain with them. It would not be an exaggeration to say that they first robbed the people, and then offered to cheat them. For their rents were competitive rents, their economics competitive economics, their ethics competitive ethics; they applied not only legality but pettifogging. No more was heard of the customary rents of the mediaeval estates;
just as no more was heard of the standard wages of the mediaeval guilds. The object of the whole process was to isolate the individual poor man in his dealings with the individual rich man; and then offer to buy and sell with him, though it must necessarily be himself that was bought and sold. In the matter of labour, that is, though a man was supposed to be in the position of a seller, he was more and more really in the possession of a slave. Unless the tendency be reversed, he will probably become admittedly a slave. That is to say, the word slave will never be used; for it is always easy to find an inoffensive word; but he will be admittedly a man legally bound to certain social service, in return for economic security. In other words, the modern experiment of mere contract has broken down. Trusts as well as Trades’ Unions express the fact that it has broken down. Social reform, Socialism, Guild Socialism, Syndicalism, even organised philanthropy, are so many ways of saying that it has broken down. The substitute for it may be the old one of status; but it must be something having some of the stability of status. So far history has found only one way of combining that sort of stability with any sort of liberty. In this sense there is a meaning in the much misused phrase about the army of industry. But the army must be stiffened either by the discipline of conscripts or by the vows of volunteers.

If we may extend the doubtful metaphor of an army of industry to cover the yet weaker phrase about captains of industry, there is no doubt about what those captains at present command. They work for a centralised discipline in every department. They erect a vast apparatus of supervision and inspection; they support all the modern restrictions touching drink and hygiene. They may be called the friends of temperance or even of happiness; but even their friends would not call them the friends of freedom. There is only one form of freedom which they tolerate; and that is the sort of sexual freedom which is covered by the legal fiction of divorce. If we ask why this liberty is alone left, when so many liberties are lost, we shall find the answer in the summary of this chapter. They are trying to break the vow of the knight as they broke the vow of the monk. They recognise the vow as the vital antithesis to servile status, the alternative and therefore the antagonist. Marriage makes a small state within the state, which resists all such regimentation. That bond breaks all other bonds; that law is found stronger than all later and lesser laws. They desire the democracy to be sexually fluid, because the making of small nuclei is like the making of small nations. Like small nations, they are a nuisance to the mind of imperial scope. In short, what they fear, in the most literal sense, is home rule.

Men can always be blind to a thing so long as it is big enough. It is so difficult
to see the world in which we live, that I know that many will see all I have said here of slavery as a nonsensical nightmare. But if my association of divorce with slavery seems only a far–fetched and theoretical paradox, I should have no difficulty in replacing it by a concrete and familiar picture. Let them merely remember the time when they read “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” and ask themselves whether the oldest and simplest of the charges against slavery has not always been the breaking up of families.
VII

THE TRAGEDIES OF MARRIAGE

There is one view very common among the liberal–minded which is exceedingly fatiguing to the clear–headed. It is symbolised in the sort of man who says, “These ruthless bigots will refuse to bury me in consecrated ground, because I have always refused to be baptised.” A clear–headed person can easily conceive his point of view, in so far as he happens to think that baptism does not matter. But the clear–headed will be completely puzzled when they ask themselves why, if he thinks that baptism does not matter, he should think that burial does matter. If it is in no way imprudent for a man to keep himself from a consecrated font, how can it be inhuman for other people to keep him from a consecrated field? It is surely much nearer to mere superstition to attach importance to what is done to a dead body than to a live baby. I can understand a man thinking both superstitious, or both sacred; but I cannot see why he should grumble that other people do not give him as sanctities what he regards as superstitions. He is merely complaining of being treated as what he declares himself to be. It is as if a man were to say, “My persecutors still refuse to make me king, out of mere malice because I am a strict republican.” Or it is as if he said, “These heartless brutes are so prejudiced against a teetotaler, that they won’t even give him a glass of brandy.”

The fashion of divorce would not be a modern fashion if it were not full of this touching fallacy. A great deal of it might be summed up as a most illogical and fanatical appetite for getting married in churches. It is as if a man should practice polygamy out of sheer greed for wedding cake. Or it is as if he provided his household with new shoes, entirely by having them thrown after the wedding carriage when he went off with a new wife. There are other ways of procuring cake or purchasing shoes; and there are other ways of setting up a human establishment. What is unreasonable is the request which the modern man really makes of the religious institutions of his fathers The modern man wants to buy one shoe without the other; to obtain one half of a supernatural revelation without the other. The modern man wants to eat his wedding cake and have it, too.

I am not basing this book on the religious argument, and therefore I will not pause to inquire why the old Catholic institutions of Christianity seem to be
especially made the objects of these unreasonable complaints. As a matter of fact nobody does propose that some ferocious Anti–Semite like M. Drumont should be buried as a Jew with all the rites of the Synagogue. But the broad–minded were furious because Tolstoi, who had denounced Russian orthodoxy quite as ferociously, was not buried as orthodox, with all the rites of the Russian Church. Nobody does insist that a man who wishes to have fifty wives when Mahomet allowed him five must have his fifty with the full approval of Mahomet’s religion. But the broad–minded are extremely bitter because a Christian who wishes to have several wives when his own promise bound him to one, is not allowed to violate his vow at the same altar at which he made it. Nobody does insist on Baptists totally immersing people who totally deny the advantages of being totally immersed. Nobody ever did expect Mormons to receive the open mockers of the Book of Mormon, nor Christian Scientists to let their churches be used for exposing Mrs. Eddy as an old fraud. It is only of the forms of Christianity making the Catholic claim that such inconsistent claims are made. And even the inconsistency is, I fancy, a tribute to the acceptance of the Catholic idea in a catholic fashion. It may be that men have an obscure sense that nobody need belong to the Mormon religion and every one does ultimately belong to the Church; and though he may have made a few dozen Mormon marriages in a wandering and entertaining life, he will really have nowhere to go to if he does not somehow find his way back to the churchyard. But all this concerns the general theological question and not the matter involved here, which is merely historical and social. The point here is that it is at least superficially inconsistent to ask institutions for a formal approval, which they can only give by inconsistency.

I have put first the question of what is marriage. And we are now in a position to ask more clearly what is divorce. It is not merely the negation or neglect of marriage; for any one can always neglect marriage. It is not the dissolution of the legal obligation of marriage, or even the legal obligation of monogamy; for the simple reason that no such obligation exists. Any man in modern London may have a hundred wives if he does not call them wives; or rather, if he does not go through certain more or less mystical ceremonies in order to assert that they are wives. He might create a certain social coolness round his household, a certain fading of his general popularity. But that is not created by law, and could not be prevented by law. As the late Lord Salisbury very sensibly observed about boycotting in Ireland, “How can you make a law to prevent people going out of the room when somebody they don’t like comes into it?” We cannot be forcibly
introduced to a polygamist by a policeman. It would not be an assertion of social liberty, but a denial of social liberty, if we found ourselves practically obliged to associate with all the profligates in society. But divorce is not in this sense mere anarchy. On the contrary divorce is in this sense respectability; and even a rigid excess of respectability. Divorce in this sense might indeed be not unfairly called snobbery. The definition of divorce, which concerns us here, is that it is the attempt to give respectability, and not liberty. It is the attempt to give a certain social status, and not a legal status. It is indeed supposed that this can be done by the alteration of certain legal forms; and this will be more or less true according to the extent to which law as such overawed public opinion, or was valued as a true expression of public opinion. If a man divorced in the large–minded fashion of Henry the Eighth pleaded his legal title among the peasantry of Ireland, for instance, I think he would find a difference still existing between respectability and religion. But the peculiar point here is that many are claiming the sanction of religion as well as of respectability. They would attach to their very natural and sometimes very pardonable experiments a certain atmosphere, and even glamour, which has undoubtedly belonged to the status of marriage in historic Christendom. But before they make this attempt, it would be well to ask why such a dignity ever appeared or in what it consisted. And I fancy we shall find ourselves confronted with the very simple truth, that the dignity arose wholly and entirely out of the fidelity; and that the glamour merely came from the vow.

People were regarded as having a certain dignity because they were dedicated in a certain way; as bound to certain duties and, if it be preferred, to certain discomforts. It may be irrational to endure these discomforts; it may even be irrational to respect them. But it is certainly much more irrational to respect them, and then artificially transfer the same respect to the absence of them. It is as if we were to expect uniforms to be saluted when armies were disbanded; and ask people to cheer a soldier’s coat when it did not contain a soldier. If you think you can abolish war, abolish it; but do not suppose that when there are no wars to be waged, there will still be warriors to be worshipped. If it was a good thing that the monasteries were dissolved, let us say so and dismiss them. But the nobles who dissolved the monasteries did not shave their heads, and ask to be regarded as saints solely on account of that ceremony. The nobles did not dress up as abbots and ask to be credited with a potential talent for working miracles, because of the austerity of their vows of poverty and chastity. They got inside the houses, but not the hoods, and still less the haloes. They at least knew that it is not the habit that makes the monk. They were not so superstitious as those
moderns, who think it is the veil that makes the bride.

What is respected, in short, is the fidelity to the ancient flag of the family, and a readiness to fight for what I have noted as its unique type of freedom. I say readiness to fight, for fortunately the fight itself is the exception rather than the rule. The soldier is not respected because he is doomed to death, but because he is ready for death; and even ready for defeat. The married man or woman is not doomed to evil, sickness or poverty; but is respected for taking a certain step for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness or in health. But there is one result of this line of argument which should correct a danger in some arguments on the same side.

It is very essential that a stricture on divorce, which is in fact simply a defence of marriage, should be independent of sentimentalism, especially in the form called optimism. A man justifying a fight for national independence or civic freedom is neither sentimental nor optimistic. He explains the sacrifice, but he does not explain it away. He does not say that bayonet wounds are pin–pricks, or mere scratches of the thorns on a rose of pleasure. He does not say that the whole display of firearms is a festive display of fireworks. On the contrary, when he praises it most, he praises it as pain rather than pleasure. He increases the praise with the pain; it is his whole boast that militarism, and even modern science, can produce no instrument of torture to tame the soul of man. It is idle, in speaking of war, to pit the realistic against the romantic, in the sense of the heroic; for all possible realism can only increase the heroism; and therefore, in the highest sense, increase the romance. Now I do not compare marriage with war, but I do compare marriage with law or liberty or patriotism or popular government, or any of the human ideals which have often to be defended by war. Even the wildest of those ideals, which seem to escape from all the discipline of peace, do not escape from the discipline of war. The Bolsheviks may have aimed at pure peace and liberty; but they have been compelled, for their own purpose, first to raise armies and then to rule armies. In a word, how ever beautiful you may think your own visions of beatitude, men must suffer to be beautiful, and even suffer a considerable interval of being ugly. And I have no notion of denying that mankind suffers much from the maintenance of the standard of marriage; as it suffers much from the necessity of criminal law or the recurrence of crusades and revolutions. The only question here is whether marriage is indeed, as I maintain, an ideal and an institution making for popular freedom; I do not need to be told that anything making for popular freedom has to be paid for in vigilance and pain, and a whole army of martyrs.
Hence I am far indeed from denying the hard cases which exist here, as in all matters involving the idea of honour. For indeed I could not deny them without denying the whole parallel of militant morality on which my argument rests. But this being first understood, it will be well to discuss in a little more detail what are described as the tragedies of marriage. And the first thing to note about the most tragic of them is that they are not tragedies of marriage at all. They are tragedies of sex; and might easily occur in a highly modern romance in which marriage was not mentioned at all. It is generally summarised by saying that the tragic element is the absence of love. But it is often forgotten that another tragic element is the presence of love. The doctors of divorce, with an air of the frank and friendly realism of men of the world, are always recommending and rejoicing in a sensible separation by mutual consent. But if we are really to dismiss our dreams of dignity and honour, if we are really to fall back on the frank realism of our experience as men of the world, then the very first thing that our experience will tell us is that it very seldom is a separation by mutual consent; that is, that the consent very seldom is sincerely and spontaneously mutual. By far the commonest problem in such cases is that in which one party wishes to end the partnership and the other does not. And of that emotional situation you can make nothing but a tragedy, whichever way you turn it. With or without marriage, with or without divorce, with or without any arrangements that anybody can suggest or imagine, it remains a tragedy. The only difference is that by the doctrine of marriage it remains both a noble and a fruitful tragedy; like that of a man who falls fighting for his country, or dies testifying to the truth. But the truth is that the innovators have as much sham optimism about divorce as any romanticist can have had about marriage. They regard their story, when it ends in the divorce court, through as rosy a mist of sentimentalism as anybody ever regarded a story ending with wedding bells. Such a reformer is quite sure that when once the prince and princess are divorced by the fairy godmother, they will live happily ever after. I enjoy romance, but I like it to be rooted in reality; and any one with a touch of reality knows that nine couples out of ten, when they are divorced, are left in an exceedingly different state. It will be safe to say in most cases that one partner will fail to find happiness in an infatuation, and the other will from the first accept a tragedy. In the realm of reality and not romance, it is commonly a case of breaking hearts as well as breaking promises; and even dishonour is not always a remedy for remorse.

The next limitation to be laid down in the matter affects certain practical forms of discomforts on a level rather lower than love or hatred. The cases most
commonly quoted concern what is called “drink” and what is called “cruelty.” They are always talked about as matters of fact; though in practice they are very decidedly matters of opinion. It is not a flippancy, but a fact, that the misfortune of the woman who has married a drunkard may have to be balanced against the misfortune of the man who has married a teetotaler. For the very definition of drunkenness may depend on the dogma of teetotalism. Drunkenness, it has been very truly observed, “may mean anything from delirium tremens to having a stronger head than the official appointed to conduct the examination.” Mr Bernard Shaw once professed, apparently seriously, that any man drinking wine or beer at all was incapacitated from managing a motorcar; and still more, therefore, one would suppose, from managing a wife. The scales are weighted here, of course, with all those false weights of snobbishness which are the curse of justice in this country. The working class is forced to conduct almost in public a normal and varying festive habit, which the upper class can afford to conduct in private; and a certain section of the middle class, that which happens to concern itself most with local politics and social reforms, really has or affects a standard quite abnormal and even alien. They might go any lengths of injustice in dealing with the working man or working woman accused of too hearty a taste in beer. To mention but one matter out of a thousand, the middle class reformers are obviously quite ignorant of the hours at which working people begin to work. Because they themselves, at eleven o’clock in the morning, have only recently finished breakfast and the full moral digestion of the Daily Mail, they think a char–woman drinking beer at that hour is one of those arising early in the morning to follow after strong drink. Most of them really do not know that she has already done more than half a heavy day’s work, and is partaking of a very reasonable luncheon. The whole problem of proletarian drink is entangled in a network of these misunderstandings; and there is no doubt whatever that, when judged by these generalisations, the poor will be taken in a net of injustices. And this truth is as certain in the case of what is called cruelty as of what is called drink. Nine times out of ten the judgment on a navvy for hitting a woman is about as just as a judgment on him for not taking off his hat to a lady. It is a class test; it may be a class superiority; but it is not an act of equal justice between the classes. It leaves out a thousand things; the provocation, the atmosphere, the harassing restrictions of space, the nagging which Dickens described as the terrors of “temper in a cart,” the absence of certain taboos of social training, the tradition of greater roughness even in the gestures of affection. To make all marriage or divorce, in the case of such a man, turn upon a blow is like blasting
the whole life of a gentleman because he has slammed the door. Often a poor man cannot slam the door; partly because the model villa might fall down; but more because he has nowhere to go to; the smoking–room, the billiard room and the peacock music–room not being yet attached to his premises.

I say this in passing, to point out that while I do not dream of suggesting that there are only happy marriages, there will quite certainly, as things work nowadays, be a very large number of unhappy and unjust divorces. They will be cases in which the innocent partner will receive the real punishment of the guilty partner, through being in fact and feeling the faithful partner. For instance, it is insisted that a married person must at least find release from the society of a lunatic; but it is also true that the scientific reformers, with their fuss about “the feeble–minded,” are continually giving larger and looser definitions of lunacy. The process might begin by releasing somebody from a homicidal maniac, and end by dealing in the same way with a rather dull conversationalist. But in fact nobody does deny that a person should be allowed some sort of release from a homicidal maniac. The most extreme school of orthodoxy only maintains that anybody who has had that experience should be content with that release. In other words, it says he should be content with that experience of matrimony, and not seek another. It was put very wittily, I think, by a Roman Catholic friend of mine, who said he approved of release so long as it was not spelt with a hyphen.

To put it roughly, we are prepared in some cases to listen to the man who complains of having a wife. But we are not prepared to listen, at such length, to the same man when he comes back and complains that he has not got a wife. Now in practice at this moment the great mass of the complaints are precisely of this kind. The reformers insist particularly on the pathos of a man’s position when he has obtained a separation without a divorce. Their most tragic figure is that of the man who is already free of all those ills he had, and is only asking to be allowed to fly to others that he knows not of. I should be the last to deny that, in certain emotional circumstances, his tragedy may be very tragic indeed. But his tragedy is of the emotional kind which can never be entirely eliminated; and which he has himself, in all probability, inflicted on the partner he has left. We may call it the price of maintaining an ideal or the price of making a mistake; but anyhow it is the point of our whole distinction in the matter; it is here that we draw the line, and I have nowhere denied that it is a line of battle. The battle joins on the debatable ground, not of the man’s doubtful past but of his still more doubtful future. In a word, the divorce controversy is not really a controversy about divorce. It is a controversy about re–marriage; or rather about whether it is
marriage at all.

And with that we can only return to the point of honour which I have compared here to a point of patriotism; since it is both the smallest and the greatest kind of patriotism. Men have died in torments during the last five years for points of patriotism far more dubious and fugitive. Men like the Poles or the Serbians, through long periods of their history, may be said rather to have lived in torments. I will never admit that the vital need of the freedom of the family, as I have tried to sketch it here, is not a cause as valuable as the freedom of any frontier. But I do willingly admit that the cause would be a dark and terrible one, if it really asked these men to suffer torments. As I have stated it, on its most extreme terms, it only asks them to suffer abnegations. And those negative sufferings I do think they may honourably be called upon to bear, for the glory of their own oath and the great things by which the nations live. In relation to their own nation most normal men will feel that this distinction between release and “re-lease” is neither fanciful nor harsh, but very rational and human. A patriot may be an exile in another country; but he will not be a patriot of another country. He will be as cheerful as he can in an abnormal position; he may or may not sing his country’s songs in a strange land; but he will not sing the strange songs as his own. And such may fairly be also the attitude of the citizen who has gone into exile from the oldest of earthly cities.
VIII

THE VISTA OF DIVORCE

The case for divorce combines all the advantages of having it both ways; and of
drawing the same deduction from right or left, and from black or white. Whichever way the programme works in practice, it can still be justified in
tory. If there are few examples of divorce, it shows how little divorce need be
dreaded; if there are many, it shows how much it is required. The rarity of
divorce is an argument in favour of divorce; and the multiplicity of divorce is an
argument against marriage. Now, in truth, if we were confined to considering
this alternative in a speculative manner, if there were no concrete facts but only
abstract probabilities, we should have no difficulty in arguing our case. The
abstract liberty allowed by the reformers is as near as possible to anarchy, and
gives no logical or legal guarantee worth discussing. The advantages of their
reform do not accrue to the innocent party, but to the guilty party; especially if
he be sufficiently guilty. A man has only to commit the crime of desertion to
obtain the reward of divorce. And if they are entitled to take as typical the most
horrible hypothetical cases of the abuse of the marriage laws, surely we are
entitled to take equally extreme possibilities in the abuse of their own divorce
laws. If they, when looking about for a husband, so often hit upon a homicidal
maniac, surely we may politely introduce them to the far more human figure of
the gentleman who marries as many women as he likes and gets rid of them as
often as he pleases. But in fact there is no necessity for us to argue thus in the
abstract; for the amiable gentleman in question undoubtedly exists in the
concrete. Of course, he is no new figure; he is a very recurrent type of rascal; his
name has been Lothario or Don Juan; and he has often been represented as a
rather romantic rascal. The point of divorce reform, it cannot be too often
repeated, is that the rascal should not only be regarded as romantic, but regarded
as respectable. He is not to sow his wild oats and settle down; he is merely to
settle down to sowing his wild oats. They are to be regarded as tame and
inoffensive oats; almost, if one may say so, as Quaker oats. But there is no need,
as I say, to speculate about whether the looser view of divorce might prevail; for
it is already prevailing. The newspapers are full of an astonishing hilarity about
the rapidity with which hundreds or thousands of human families are being
broken up by the lawyers; and about the undisguised haste of the “hustling
judges” who carry on the work. It is a form of hilarity which would seem to recall the gaiety of a grave–digger in a city swept by a pestilence. But a few details occasionally flash by in the happy dance; from time to time the court is moved by a momentary curiosity about the causes of the general violation of oaths and promises; as if there might, here and there, be a hint of some sort of reason for ruining the fundamental institution of society. And nobody who notes those details, or considers those faint hints of reason, can doubt for a moment that masses of these men and women are now simply using divorce in the spirit of free–love. They are very seldom the sort of people who have once fallen tragically into the wrong place, and have now found their way triumphantly to the right place. They are almost always people who are obviously wandering from one place to another, and will probably leave their last shelter exactly as they have left their first. But it seems to amuse them to make again, if possible in a church, a promise they have already broken in practice and almost avowedly disbelieve in principle.

In face of this headlong fashion, it is really reasonable to ask the divorce reformers what is their attitude towards the old monogamous ethic of our civilisation; and whether they wish to retain it in general, or to retain it at all. Unfortunately even the sincerest and most lucid of them use language which leaves the matter a little doubtful. Mr. E. S. P. Haynes is one of the most brilliant and most fair–minded controversialists on that side; and he has said, for instance, that he agrees with me in supporting the ideal of indissoluble or, at least, of undissolved marriage. Mr. Haynes is one of the few friends of divorce who are also real friends of democracy; and I am sure that in practice this stands for a real sympathy with the home, especially the poor home. Unfortunately, on the theoretic side, the word “ideal” is far from being an exact term, and is open to two almost opposite interpretations. For many would say that marriage is an ideal as some would say that monasticism is an ideal, in the sense of a counsel of perfection. Now certainly we might preserve a conjugal ideal in this way. A man might be reverently pointed out in the street as a sort of saint, merely because he was married. A man might wear a medal for monogamy; or have letters after his name similar to V.C. or D.D.; let us say L.W. for “Lives With His Wife,” or N.D.Y. for “Not Divorced Yet.” We might, on entering some strange city, be struck by a stately column erected to the memory of a wife who never ran away with a soldier, or the shrine and image of a historical character, who had resisted the example of the man in the “New Witness” ballade in bolting with the children’s nurse. Such high artistic hagiology would be quite consistent with Mr.
Haynes’ divorce reform; with re-marriage after three years, or three hours. It would also be quite consistent with Mr. Haynes’ phrase about preserving an ideal of marriage. What it would not be consistent with is the perfectly plain, solid, secular and social usefulness which I have here attributed to marriage. It does not create or preserve a natural institution, normal to the whole community, to balance the more artificial and even more arbitrary institution of the state; which is less natural even if it is equally necessary. It does not defend a voluntary association, but leaves the only claim on life, death and loyalty with a more coercive institution. It does not stand, in the sense I have tried to explain, for the principle of liberty. In short, it does not do any of the things which Mr. Haynes himself would especially desire to see done. For humanity to be thus spontaneously organised from below, it is necessary that the organisation should be almost as universal as the official organisation from above. The tyrant must find not one family but many families defying his power; he must find mankind not a dust of atoms, but fixed in solid blocks of fidelity. And those human groups must support not only themselves but each other. In this sense what some call individualism is as corporate as communism. It is a thing of volunteers; but volunteers must be soldiers. It is a defence of private persons; but we might say that the private persons must be private soldiers. The family must be recognised as well as real; above all, the family must be recognised by the families. To expect individuals to suffer successfully for a home apart from the home, that is for something which is an incident but not an institution, is really a confusion between two ideas; it is a verbal sophistry almost in the nature of a pun. Similarly, for instance, we cannot prove the moral force of a peasantry by pointing to one peasant; we might almost as well reveal the military force of infantry by pointing to one infant.

I take it, however, that the advocates of divorce do not mean that marriage is to remain ideal only in the sense of being almost impossible. They do not mean that a faithful husband is only to be admired as a fanatic. The reasonable men among them do really mean that a divorced person shall be tolerated as something unusually unfortunate, not merely that a married person shall be admired as some thing unusually blessed and inspired. But whatever they desire, it is as well that they should realise exactly what they do; and in this case I should like to hear their criticisms in the matter of what they see. They must surely see that in England at present, as in many parts of America in the past, the new liberty is being taken in the spirit of licence as if the exception were to be the rule, or, rather, perhaps the absence of rule. This will especially be made
manifest if we consider that the effect of the process is accumulative like a snowball, and returns on itself like a snowball. The obvious effect of frivolous divorce will be frivolous marriage. If people can be separated for no reason they will feel it all the easier to be united for no reason. A man might quite clearly foresee that a sensual infatuation would be fleeting, and console himself with the knowledge that the connection could be equally fleeting. There seems no particular reason why he should not elaborately calculate that he could stand a particular lady’s temper for ten months; or reckon that he would have enjoyed and exhausted her repertoire of drawing-room songs in two years. The old joke about choosing the wife to fit the furniture or the fashions might quite logically return, not as an old joke but as a new solemnity; indeed, it will be found that a new religion is generally the return of an old joke. A man might quite consistently see a woman as suited to the period of the hobble skirt, and as less suited to the threatened recurrence of the crinoline. These fancies are fantastic enough, but they are not a shade more fantastic than the facts of many a divorce controversy as urged in the divorce courts. And this is to leave out altogether the most fantastic fact of all: the winking at widespread and conspicuous collusion. Collusion has become not so much an illegal evasion as a legal fiction, and even a legal institution, as it is admirably satirised in Mr. Somerset Maugham’s brilliant play of “Home and Beauty.” The fact was very frankly brought before the public, by a man who was eminently calculated to disarm satire by sincerity. Colonel Wedgewood is a man who can never be too much honoured, by all who have any hope of popular liberties still finding champions in the midst of parliamentary corruption. He is one of the very few men alive who have shown both military and political courage; the courage of the camp and the courage of the forum. And doubtless he showed a third type of social courage, in avowing the absurd expedient which so many others are content merely to accept and employ. It is admittedly a frantic and farcical thing that a good man should find or think it necessary to pretend to commit a sin. Some of the divorce moralists seem to deduce from this that he ought really to commit the sin. They may possibly be aware, however, that there are some who do not agree with them.

For this latter fact is the next step in the speculative progress of the new morality. The divorce advocates must be well aware that modern civilisation still contains strong elements, not the least intelligent and certainly not the least vigorous, which will not accept the new respectability as a substitute for the old religious vow. The Roman Catholic Church, the Anglo-Catholic school, the conservative peasantry, and a large section of the popular life everywhere, will
regard the riot of divorce and re–marriage as they would any other riot of irresponsibility. The consequence would appear to be that two different standards will appear in ordinary morality, and even in ordinary society. Instead of the old social distinction between those who are married and those who are unmarried, there will be a distinction between those who are married and those who are really married. Society might even become divided into two societies, which is perilously approximate to Disraeli’s famous exaggeration about England divided into two nations. But whether England be actually so divided or not, this note of the two nations is the real note of warning in the matter. It is in this connection perhaps, that we have to consider most gravely and doubtfully the future of our own country.

Anarchy cannot last, but anarchic communities cannot last either. Mere lawlessness cannot live, but it can destroy life. The nations of the earth always return to sanity and solidarity; but the nations which return to it first are the nations which survive. We in England cannot afford to allow our social institutions to go to pieces, as if this ancient and noble country were an ephemeral colony. We cannot afford it comparatively, even if we could afford it positively. We are surrounded by vigorous nations mainly rooted in the peasant or permanent ideals; notably in the case of France and Ireland. I know that the detested and detestably undemocratic parliamentary clique, which corrupts France as it does England, was persuaded or bribed by a Jew named Naquet to pass a crude and recent divorce law, which was full of the hatred of Christianity. But only a very superficial critic of France can be unaware that French parliamentarism is superficial. The French nation as a whole, the most rigidly respectable nation in the world, will certainly go on living by the old standards of domesticity. When Frenchmen are not Christians they are heathens; the heathens who worshipped the household gods. It might seem strange to say, for instance, that an atheist like M. Clemenceau has for his chief ideal a thing called piety. But to understand this it is only necessary to know a little Latin–and a little French.

A short time ago, as I am well aware, it would have sounded very strange to represent the old religious and peasant communities either as a model or a menace. It was counted a queer thing to say, in the days when my friends and I first said it; in the days of my youth when the republic of France and the religion of Ireland were regarded as alike ridiculous and decadent. But many things have happened since then; and it will not now be so easy to persuade even newspaper readers that Foch is a fool, either because he is a Frenchman or because he is a
Catholic. The older tradition, even in the most unfashionable forms, has found champions in the most unexpected quarters. Only the other day Dr. Saleeby, a distinguished scientific critic who had made himself the special advocate of all the instruction and organisation that is called social science, startled his friends and foes alike by saying that the peasant families in the West of Ireland were far more satisfactory and successful than those brooded over by all the benevolent sociology of Bradford. He gave his testimony from an entirely rationalistic and even materialistic point of view; indeed, he carried rationalism so far as to give the preference to Roscommon because the women are still mammals. To a mind of the more traditional type it might seem sufficient to say they are still mothers. To a memory that lingers over the legends and lyrical movements of mankind, it might seem no great improvement to imagine a song that ran “My mammal bids me bind my hair,” or “I’m to be Queen of the May, mammal, I’m to be Queen of the May.” But indeed the truth to which he testified is all the more arresting, because for him it was materialistic and not mystical. The brute biological advantage, as well as other advantages, was with those for whom that truth was a truth; and it was all the more instinctive and automatic where that truth was a tradition. The sort of place where mothers are still something more than mammals is the only sort of place where they still are mammals. There the people are still healthy animals; healthy enough to hit you if you call them animals. I also have, on this merely controversial occasion, used throughout the rationalistic and not the religious appeal. But it is not unreasonable to note that the materialistic advantages are really found among those who most repudiate materialism. This one stray testimony is but a type of a thousand things of the same kind, which will convince any one with the sense of social atmospheres that the day of the peasantry is not passing but rather arriving. It is the more complex types of society that are now entangled in their own complexities. Those who tell us, with a monotonous metaphor, that we cannot put the clock back, seem to be curiously unconscious of the fact that their own clock has stopped. And there is nothing so hopeless as clockwork when it stops. A machine cannot mend itself; it requires a man to mend it; and the future lies with those who can make living laws for men and not merely dead laws for machinery. Those living laws are not to be found in the scatter-brained scepticism which is busy in the great cities, dissolving what it cannot analyse. The primary laws of man are to be found in the permanent life of man; in those things that have been common to it in every time and land, though in the highest civilisation they have reached an enrichment like that of the divine romance of
Cana in Galilee. We know that many critics of such a story say that its elements are not permanent; but indeed it is the critics who are not permanent. A hundred mad dogs of heresy have worried man from the beginning; but it was always the dog that died. We know there is a school of prigs who disapprove of the wine; and there may now be a school of prigs who disapprove of the wedding. For in such a case as the story of Cana, it may be remarked that the pedants are prejudiced against the earthly elements as much as, or more than, the heavenly elements. It is not the supernatural that disgusts them, so much as the natural. And those of us who have seen all the normal rules and relations of humanity uprooted by random speculators, as if they were abnormal abuses and almost accidents, will understand why men have sought for something divine if they wished to preserve anything human. They will know why common sense, cast out from some academy of fads and fashions conducted on the lines of a luxurious madhouse, has age after age sought refuge in the high sanity of a sacrament.
CONCLUSION

This is a pamphlet and not a book; and the writer of a pamphlet not only deals with passing things, but generally with things which he hopes will pass. In that sense it is the object of a pamphlet to be out of date as soon as possible. It can only survive when it does not succeed. The successful pamphlets are necessarily dull; and though I have no great hopes of this being successful, I dare say it is dull enough for all that. It is designed merely to note certain fugitive proposals of the moment, and compare them with certain recurrent necessities of the race; but especially the necessity for some spontaneous social formation freer than that of the state. If it were more in the nature of a work of literature, with anything like an ambition of endurance, I might go deeper into the matter, and give some suggestions about the philosophy or religion of marriage, and the philosophy or religion of all these rather random departures from it. Some day perhaps I may try to write something about the spiritual or psychological quarrel between faith and fads. Here I will only say, in conclusion, that I believe the universal fallacy here is a fallacy of being universal. There is a sense in which it is really a human if heroic possibility to love everybody; and the young student will not find it a bad preliminary exercise to love somebody. But the fallacy I mean is that of a man who is not even content to love everybody, but really wishes to be everybody. He wishes to walk down a hundred roads at once; to sleep in a hundred houses at once; to live a hundred lives at once. To do something like this in the imagination is one of the occasional visions of art and poetry, to attempt it in the art of life is not only anarchy but inaction. Even in the arts it can only be the first hint and not the final fulfillment; a man cannot work at once in bronze and marble, or play the organ and the violin at the same time. The universal vision of being such a Briareus is a nightmare of nonsense even in the merely imaginative world; and ends in mere nihilism in the social world. If a man had a hundred houses, there would still be more houses than he had days in which to dream of them; if a man had a hundred wives, there would still be more women than he could ever know. He would be an insane sultan jealous of the whole human race, and even of the dead and the unborn. I believe that behind the art and philosophy of our time there is a considerable element of this bottomless ambition and this unnatural hunger; and since in these last words I
am touching only lightly on things that would need much larger treatment, I will admit that the rending of the ancient roof of man is probably only a part of such an endless and empty expansion. I asked in the last chapter what those most wildly engaged in the mere dance of divorce, as fantastic as the dance of death, really expected for themselves or for their children. And in the deepest sense I think this is the answer; that they expect the impossible, that is the universal. They are not crying for the moon, which is a definite and therefore a defensible desire. They are crying for the world; and when they had it, they would want another one. In the last resort they would like to try every situation, not in fancy but in fact, but they cannot refuse any and therefore cannot resolve on any. In so far as this is the modern mood, it is a thing so deadly as to be already dead. What is vitally needed everywhere, in art as much as in ethics, in poetry as much as in politics, is choice; a creative power in the will as well as in the mind. Without that self–limitation of somebody, nothing living will ever see the light.
THE APPETITE OF TYRANNY

G. K. CHESTERTON
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### INDEX

**THE APPETITE OF TYRANNY**

- TABLE OF CONTENTS
- THE FACTS OF THE CASE

I
- THE WAR ON THE WORD

II
- THE REFUSAL OF RECIPROCITY

III
- THE APPETITE OF TYRANNY

IV
- THE ESCAPE OF FOLLY

LETTERS TO AN OLD GARIBALDIAN
THE FACTS OF THE CASE

Unless we are all mad, there is at the back of the most bewildering business a story: and if we are all mad, there is no such thing as madness. If I set a house on fire, it is quite true that I may illuminate many other people’s weaknesses as well as my own. It may be that the master of the house was burned because he was drunk; it may be that the mistress of the house was burned because she was stingy, and perished arguing about the expense of the fire-escape. It is, nevertheless, broadly true that they both were burned because I set fire to their house. That is the story of the thing. The mere facts of the story about the present European conflagration are quite as easy to tell.

Before we go on to the deeper things which make this war the most sincere war of human history, it is easy to answer the question of why England came to be in it at all, as one asks how a man fell down a coal-hole, or failed to keep an appointment. Facts are not the whole truth. But facts are facts, and in this case the facts are few and simple. Prussia, France, and England had all promised not to invade Belgium. Prussia proposed to invade Belgium, because it was the safest way of invading France. But Prussia promised that if she might break in, through her own broken promise and ours, she would break in and not steal. In other words, we were offered at the same instant a promise of faith in the future and a proposal of perjury in the present. Those interested in human origin may refer to an old Victorian writer of English, who, in the last and most restrained of his historical essays, wrote of Frederick the Great, the founder of this unchanging Prussian policy. After describing how Frederick broke the guarantee he had signed on behalf of Maria Theresa, he then describes how Frederick sought to put things straight by a promise that was an insult. “If she would but let him have Silesia, he would, he said, stand by her against any power which should try to deprive her of her other dominions, as if he was not already bound to stand by her, or as if his new promise could be of more value than the old one.” That passage was written by Macaulay, but so far as the mere contemporary facts are concerned, it might have been written by me.

Upon the immediate logical and legal origin of the English interest there can be no rational debate. There are some things so simple that one can almost prove them with plans and diagrams, as in Euclid. One could make a kind of comic calendar of what would have happened to the English diplomatist if he had been silenced every time by Prussian diplomacy. Suppose we arrange it in the form of
a kind of diary.

July 24. Germany invades Belgium.
July 26. Germany promises not to annex Belgium.
July 27. England withdraws from the war.
July 29. Germany promises not to annex France. England withdraws from the war.

How long is anybody expected to go with that sort of game, or keep peace at that illimitable price? How long must we pursue a road in which promises are all fetishes in front of us and all fragments behind us? No: upon the cold facts of the final negotiations, as told by any of the diplomatists in any of the documents, there is no doubt about the story. And no doubt about the villain of the story.

These are the last facts—the facts which involved England. It is equally easy to state the first facts—the facts which involved Europe. The Prince who practically ruled Austria was shot by certain persons whom the Austrian Government believed to be conspirators from Servia. The Austrian Government piled up arms and armies, but said not a word either to Servia their suspect or Italy their ally. From the documents it would seem that Austria kept everybody in the dark, except Prussia. It is probably nearer the truth to say that Prussia kept everybody in the dark, including Austria. But all that is what is called opinion, belief, conviction or common-sense, and we are not dealing with it here. The objective fact is that Austria told Servia to permit Servian officers to be suspended by the authority of Austrian officers, and told Servia to submit to this within forty-eight hours. In other words, the sovereign of Servia was practically told to take off not only the laurels of two great campaigns but his own lawful and national crown, and to do it in a time in which no respectable citizen is expected to discharge an hotel bill. Servia asked for time, for arbitration—in short, for peace. But Prussia had already begun to mobilise; and Prussia, presuming that Servia might thus be rescued, declared war.

Between these two ends of fact, the ultimatum to Servia, the ultimatum to Belgium, any one so inclined can of course talk as if everything were relative. If any one ask why the Czar should rush to the support of Servia, it is as easy to ask why the Kaiser should rush to the support of Austria. If any one say that the
French would attack the Germans, it is sufficient to answer that the Germans did attack the French. There remain, however, two attitudes to consider, even perhaps two arguments to counter, which can best be considered and countered under this general head of facts. First of all, there is a curious, cloudy sort of argument, much affected by the professional rhetoricians of Prussia, who are sent out to instruct and correct the minds of Americans or Scandinavians. It consists of going into convulsions of incredulity and scorn at the mention of Russia’s responsibility for Servia or England’s responsibility for Belgium; and suggesting that, treaty or no treaty, frontier or no frontier, Russia would be out to slay Teutons or England to steal colonies. Here, as elsewhere, I think the professors dotted all over the Baltic plain fail in lucidity, and in the power of distinguishing ideas. Of course it is quite true that England has material interests to defend, and will probably use the opportunity to defend them: or, in other words, of course England, like everybody else, would be more comfortable if Prussia were less predominant. The fact remains that we did not do what the Germans did. We did not invade Holland to seize a naval and commercial advantage: and whether they say that we wished to do it in our greed, or feared to do it in our cowardice, the fact remains that we did not do it. Unless this common-sense principle be kept in view, I cannot conceive how any quarrel can possibly be judged. A contract may be made between two persons solely for material advantage on each side: but the moral advantage is still generally supposed to lie with the person who keeps the contract. Surely it cannot be dishonest to be honest—even if honesty is the best policy. Imagine the most complex maze of indirect motives; and still the man who keeps faith for money cannot possibly be worse than the man who breaks faith for money. It will be noted that this ultimate test applies in the same way to Servia as to Belgium and Britain. The Servians may not be a very peaceful people; but, on the occasion under discussion, it was certainly they who wanted peace. You may choose to think the Serb a sort of born robber: but on this occasion it was certainly the Austrian who was trying to rob. Similarly, you may call England perfidious as a sort of historical summary; and declare your private belief that Mr. Asquith was vowed from infancy to the ruin of the German Empire, a Hannibal and hater of the eagles. But, when all is said, it is nonsense to call a man perfidious because he keeps his promise. It is absurd to complain of the sudden treachery of a business man in turning up punctually to his appointment: or the unfair shock given to a creditor by the debtor paying his debts.

Lastly, there is an attitude not unknown in the crisis against which I should
particularly like to protest. I should address my protest especially to those lovers and pursuers of Peace who, very short-sightedly, have occasionally adopted it. I mean the attitude which is impatient of these preliminary details about who did this or that, and whether it was right or wrong. They are satisfied with saying that an enormous calamity, called War, has been begun by some or all of us; and should be ended by some or all of us. To these people this preliminary chapter about the precise happenings must appear not only dry (and it must of necessity be the driest part of the task) but essentially needless and barren. I wish to tell these people that they are wrong; that they are wrong upon all principles of human justice and historic continuity: but that they are specially and supremely wrong upon their own principles of arbitration and international peace.

These sincere and high-minded peace-lovers are always telling us that citizens no longer settle their quarrels by private violence; and that nations should no longer settle theirs by public violence. They are always telling us that we no longer fight duels; and need no longer wage wars. In short, they perpetually base their peace proposals on the fact that an ordinary citizen no longer avenges himself with an axe. But how is he prevented from revenging himself with an axe? If he hits his neighbour on the head with the kitchen chopper, what do we do? Do we all join hands, like children playing Mulberry Bush, and say “We are all responsible for this; but let us hope it will not spread. Let us hope for the happy day when he shall leave off chopping at the man’s head; and when nobody shall ever chop anything for ever and ever.” Do we say “Let byegones be byegones; why go back to all the dull details with which the business began; who can tell with what sinister motives the man was standing there within reach of the hatchet?” We do not. We keep the peace in private life by asking for the facts of provocation, and the proper object of punishment. We do go into the dull details; we do enquire into the origins; we do emphatically enquire who it was that hit first. In short we do what I have done very briefly in this place.

Given this, it is indeed true that behind these facts there are truths; truths of a terrible, of a spiritual sort. In mere fact, the Germanic power has been wrong about Servia, wrong about Russia, wrong about Belgium, wrong about England, wrong about Italy. But there was a reason for its being wrong everywhere; and of that root reason, which has moved half the world against it, I shall speak later. For that is something too omnipresent to be proved, too indisputable to be helped by detail. It is nothing less than the locating, after more than a hundred years of recriminations and wrong explanations, of the modern European evil: the finding of the fountain from which poison has flowed upon all the nations of the earth.
I

THE WAR ON THE WORD

It will hardly be denied that there is one lingering doubt in many, who recognise unavoidable self-defence in the instant parry of the English sword, and who have no great love for the sweeping sabre of Sadowa and Sedan. That doubt is the doubt whether Russia, as compared with Prussia, is sufficiently decent and democratic to be the ally of liberal and civilised powers. I take first, therefore, this matter of civilisation.

It is vital in a discussion like this, that we should make sure we are going by meanings and not by mere words. It is not necessary in any argument to settle what a word means or ought to mean. But it is necessary in every argument to settle what we propose to mean by the word. So long as our opponent understands what is the thing of which we are talking, it does not matter to the argument whether the word is or is not the one he would have chosen. A soldier does not say “We were ordered to go to Mechlin; but I would rather go to Malines.” He may discuss the etymology and archæology of the difference on the march; but the point is that he knows where to go. So long as we know what a given word is to mean in a given discussion, it does not even matter if it means something else in some other and quite distinct discussion. We have a perfect right to say that the width of a window comes to four feet; even if we instantly and cheerfully change the subject to the larger mammals; and say that an elephant has four feet. The identity of the words does not matter, because there is no doubt at all about the meanings; because nobody is likely to think of an elephant as four foot long, or of a window as having tusks and a curly trunk.

It is essential to emphasise this consciousness of the thing under discussion in connection with two or three words that are, as it were, the key-words of this war. One of them is the word “barbarian.” The Prussians apply it to the Russians: the Russians apply it to the Prussians. Both, I think, really mean something that really exists, name or no name. Both mean different things. And if we ask what these different things are, we shall understand why England and France prefer Russia; and consider Prussia the really dangerous barbarian of the two. To begin with, it goes so much deeper even than atrocities; of which, in the past at least, all the three Empires of Central Europe have partaken pretty equally, as they partook of Poland. An English writer, seeking to avert the war
by warnings against Russian influence, said that the flogged backs of Polish women stood between us and the Alliance. But not long before, the flogging of women by an Austrian general led to that officer being thrashed in the streets of London by Barclay and Perkins’ draymen. And as for the third power, the Prussians, it seems clear that they have treated Belgian women in a style compared with which flogging might be called an official formality. But, as I say, something much deeper than any such recrimination lies behind the use of the word on either side. When the German Emperor complains of our allying ourselves with a barbaric and half-oriental power he is not (I assure you) shedding tears over the grave of Kosciusko. And when I say (as I do most heartily) that the German Emperor is a barbarian, I am not merely expressing any prejudices I may have against the profanation of churches or of children. My countrymen and I mean a certain and intelligible thing when we call the Prussians barbarians. It is quite different from the thing attributed to Russians; and it could not possibly be attributed to Russians. It is very important that the neutral world should understand what this thing is.

If the German calls the Russian barbarous he presumably means imperfectly civilised. There is a certain path along which Western nations have proceeded in recent times; and it is tenable that Russia has not proceeded so far as the others: that she has less of the special modern system in science, commerce, machinery, travel or political constitution. The Russ ploughs with an old plough; he wears a wild beard; he adores relics; his life is as rude and hard as that of a subject of Alfred the Great. Therefore he is, in the German sense, a barbarian. Poor fellows like Gorky and Dostoieffsky have to form their own reflections on the scenery, without the assistance of large quotations from Schiller on garden seats; or inscriptions directing them to pause and thank the All-Father for the finest view in Hesse-Pumpernickel. The Russians, having nothing but their faith, their fields, their great courage, and their self-governing communes, are quite cut off from what is called (in the fashionable street in Frankfort) The True, The Beautiful and The Good. There is a real sense in which one can call such backwardness barbaric; by comparison with the Kaiserstrasse; and in that sense it is true of Russia.

Now we, the French and English, do not mean this when we call the Prussians barbarians. If their cities soared higher than their flying ships, if their trains travelled faster than their bullets, we should still call them barbarians. We should know exactly what we meant by it; and we should know that it is true. For we do not mean anything that is an imperfect civilisation by accident. We mean
something that is the enemy of civilisation by design. We mean something that is
wilfully at war with the principles by which human society has been made
possible hitherto. Of course it must be partly civilised even to destroy
civilisation. Such ruin could not be wrought by the savages that are merely
undeveloped or inert. You could not have even Huns without horses; or horses
without horsemanship. You could not have even Danish pirates without ships, or
ships without seamanship. This person, whom I may call the Positive Barbarian,
must be rather more superficially up-to-date than what I may call the Negative
Barbarian. Alaric was an officer in the Roman legions: but for all that he
destroyed Rome. Nobody supposes that Eskimos could have done it at all neatly.
But (in our meaning) barbarism is not a matter of methods but of aims. We say
that these veneered vandals have the perfectly serious aim of destroying certain
ideas which, as they think, the world has outgrown; without which, as we think,
the world will die.

It is essential that this perilous peculiarity in the Pruss, or Positive Barbarian,
should be seized. He has what he fancies is a new idea; and he is going to apply
it to everybody. As a fact it is simply a false generalisation; but he is really
trying to make it general. This does not apply to the Negative Barbarian: it does
not apply to the Russian or the Servian, even if they are barbarians. If a Russian
peasant does beat his wife, he does it because his fathers did it before him: he is
likely to beat less rather than more as the past fades away. He does not think, as
the Prussian would, that he has made a new discovery in physiology in finding
that a woman is weaker than a man. If a Servian does knife his rival without a
word, he does it because other Servians have done it. He may regard it even as
piety, but certainly not as progress. He does not think, as the Prussian does, that
he founds a new school of horology by starting before the word “Go.” He does
not think he is in advance of the world in militarism, merely because he is
behind it in morals. No; the danger of the Pruss is that he is prepared to fight for
old errors as if they were new truths. He has somehow heard of certain shallow
simplifications; and imagines that we have never heard of them. And, as I have
said, his limited but very sincere lunacy concentrates chiefly in a desire to
destroy two ideas, the twin root ideas of rational society. The first is the idea of
record and promise: the second is the idea of reciprocity.

It is plain that the promise, or extension of responsibility through time, is what
chiefly distinguishes us, I will not say from savages, but from brutes and reptiles.
This was noted by the shrewdness of the Old Testament, when it summed up the
dark irresponsible enormity of Leviathan in the words “Will he make a pact with
thee?” The promise, like the wheel, is unknown in Nature: and is the first mark of man. Referring only to human civilisation it may be said with seriousness, that in the beginning was the Word. The vow is to the man what the song is to the bird, or the bark to the dog; his voice, whereby he is known. Just as a man who cannot keep an appointment is not fit even to fight a duel, so the man who cannot keep an appointment with himself is not sane enough even for suicide. It is not easy to mention anything on which the enormous apparatus of human life can be said to depend. But if it depends on anything, it is on this frail cord, flung from the forgotten hills of yesterday to the invisible mountains of to-morrow. On that solitary string hangs everything from Armageddon to an almanac, from a successful revolution to a return ticket. On that solitary string the Barbarian is hacking heavily, with a sabre which is fortunately blunt.

Any one can see this well enough, merely by reading the last negotiations between London and Berlin. The Prussians had made a new discovery in international politics: that it may often be convenient to make a promise; and yet curiously inconvenient to keep it. They were charmed, in their simple way, with this scientific discovery, and desired to communicate it to the world. They therefore promised England a promise, on condition that she broke a promise, and on the implied condition that the new promise might be broken as easily as the old one. To the profound astonishment of Prussia, this reasonable offer was refused! I believe that the astonishment of Prussia was quite sincere. That is what I mean when I say that the Barbarian is trying to cut away that cord of honesty and clear record, on which hangs all that men have made.

The friends of the German cause have complained that Asiatics and Africans upon the very verge of savagery have been brought against them from India and Algiers. And, in ordinary circumstances, I should sympathise with such a complaint made by a European people. But the circumstances are not ordinary. Here, again, the quite unique barbarism of Prussia goes deeper than what we call barbarities. About mere barbarities, it is true, the Turco and the Sikh would have a very good reply to the superior Teuton. The general and just reason for not using non-European tribes against Europeans is that given by Chatham against the use of the Red Indian: that such allies might do very diabolical things. But the poor Turco might not unreasonably ask, after a weekend in Belgium, what more diabolical things he could do than the highly cultured Germans were doing themselves. Nevertheless, as I say, the justification of any extra-European aid goes deeper than any such details. It rests upon the fact that even other civilisations, even much lower civilisations, even remote and repulsive
civilisations, depend as much as our own on this primary principle on which the super-morality of Potsdam declares open War. Even savages promise things; and respect those who keep their promises. Even Orientals write things down: and though they write them from right to left, they know the importance of a scrap of paper. Many merchants will tell you that the word of the sinister and almost unhuman Chinaman is often as good as his bond: and it was amid palm trees and Syrian pavilions that the great utterance opened the tabernacle, to him that sweareth to his hurt and changeth not. There is doubtless a dense labyrinth of duplicity in the East, and perhaps more guile in the individual Asiatic than in the individual German. But we are not talking of the violations of human morality in various parts of the world. We are talking about a new and inhuman morality, which denies altogether the day of obligation. The Prussians have been told by their literary men that everything depends upon Mood: and by their politicians that all arrangements dissolve before “necessity.” That is the importance of the German Chancellor’s phrase. He did not allege some special excuse in the case of Belgium, which might make it seem an exception that proved the rule. He distinctly argued, as on a principle applicable to other cases, that victory was a necessity and honour was a scrap of paper. And it is evident that the half-educated Prussian imagination really cannot get any further than this. It cannot see that if everybody’s action were entirely incalculable from hour to hour, it would not only be the end of all promises, but the end of all projects. In not being able to see that, the Berlin philosopher is really on a lower mental level than the Arab who respects the salt, or the Brahmin who preserves the caste. And in this quarrel we have a right to come with scimitars as well as sabres, with bows as well as rifles, with assegai and tomahawk and boomerang, because there is in all these at least a seed of civilisation that these intellectual anarchists would kill. And if they should find us in our last stand girt with such strange swords and following unfamiliar ensigns, and ask us for what we fight in so singular a company, we shall know what to reply: “We fight for the trust and for the tryst; for fixed memories and the possible meeting of men; for all that makes life anything but an uncontrollable nightmare. We fight for the long arm of honour and remembrance; for all that can lift a man above the quicksands of his moods, and give him the mastery of time.”
II

THE REFUSAL OF RECIPROCITY

In the last summary I suggested that Barbarism, as we mean it, is not mere ignorance or even mere cruelty. It has a more precise sense, and means militant hostility to certain necessary human ideas. I took the case of the vow or the contract, which Prussian intellectualism would destroy. I urged that the Prussian is a spiritual Barbarian, because he is not bound by his own past, any more than a man in a dream. He avows that when he promised to respect a frontier on Monday, he did not foresee what he calls “the necessity” of not respecting it on Tuesday. In short, he is like a child, who at the end of all reasonable explanations and reminders of admitted arrangements, has no answer except “But I want to.”

There is another idea in human arrangements so fundamental as to be forgotten; but now for the first time denied. It may be called the idea of reciprocity; or, in better English, of give and take. The Prussian appears to be quite intellectually incapable of this thought. He cannot, I think, conceive the idea that is the foundation of all comedy; that, in the eyes of the other man, he is only the other man. And if we carry this clue through the institutions of Prussianised Germany, we shall find how curiously his mind has been limited in the matter. The German differs from other patriots in the inability to understand patriotism. Other European peoples pity the Poles or the Welsh for their violated borders; but Germans pity only themselves. They might take forcible possession of the Severn or the Danube, of the Thames or the Tiber, of the Garry or the Garonne—and they would still be singing sadly about how fast and true stands the watch on Rhine; and what a shame it would be if any one took their own little river away from them. That is what I mean by not being reciprocal: and you will find it in all that they do: as in all that is done by savages.

Here, again, it is very necessary to avoid confusing this soul of the savage with mere savagery in the sense of brutality or butchery; in which the Greeks, the French and all the most civilised nations have indulged in hours of abnormal panic or revenge. Accusations of cruelty are generally mutual. But it is the point about the Prussian that with him nothing is mutual. The definition of the true savage does not concern itself even with how much more he hurts strangers or captives than do the other tribes of men. The definition of the true savage is that
he laughs when he hurts you; and howls when you hurt him. This extraordinary
inequality in the mind is in every act and word that comes from Berlin. For
instance, no man of the world believes all he sees in the newspapers; and no
journalist believes a quarter of it. We should, therefore, be quite ready in the
ordinary way to take a great deal off the tales of German atrocities; to doubt this
story or deny that. But there is one thing that we cannot doubt or deny: the seal
and authority of the Emperor. In the Imperial proclamation the fact that certain
“frightful” things have been done is admitted; and justified on the ground of
their frightfulness. It was a military necessity to terrify the peaceful populations
with something that was not civilised, something that was hardly human. Very
well. That is an intelligible policy: and in that sense an intelligible argument. An
army endangered by foreigners may do the most frightful things. But then we
turn the next page of the Kaiser’s public diary, and we find him writing to the
President of the United States, to complain that the English are using Dum-dum
bullets and violating various regulations of the Hague Conference. I pass for the
present the question of whether there is a word of truth in these charges. I am
content to gaze rapturously at the blinking eyes of the True, or Positive,
Barbarian. I suppose he would be quite puzzled if we said that violating the
Hague Conference was “a military necessity” to us; or that the rules of the
Conference were only a scrap of paper. He would be quite pained if we said that
Dum-dum bullets, “by their very frightfulness,” would be very useful to keep
conquered Germans in order. Do what he will, he cannot get outside the idea that
he, because he is he and not you, is free to break the law; and also to appeal to
the law. It is said that the Prussian officers play at a game called Kriegsspiel, or
the War Game. But in truth they could not play at any game; for the essence of
every game is that the rules are the same on both sides.

But taking every German institution in turn, the case is the same; and it is not
a case of mere bloodshed or military bravado. The duel, for example, can
legitimately be called a barbaric thing; but the word is here used in another
sense. There are duels in Germany; but so there are in France, Italy, Belgium,
and Spain; indeed, there are duels wherever there are dentists, newspapers,
Turkish baths, time-tables, and all the curses of civilisation; except in England
and a corner of America. You may happen to regard the duel as a historic relic of
the more barbaric States on which these modern States were built. It might
equally well be maintained that the duel is everywhere the sign of high
civilisation; being the sign of its more delicate sense of honour, its more
vulnerable vanity, or its greater dread of social disrepute. But whichever of the
two views you take, you must concede that the essence of the duel is an armed equality. I should not, therefore, apply the word barbaric, as I am using it, to the duels of German officers, or even to the broadsword combats that are conventional among the German students. I do not see why a young Prussian should not have scars all over his face if he likes them; nay, they are often the redeeming points of interest on an otherwise somewhat unenlightening countenance. The duel may be defended; the sham duel may be defended.

What cannot be defended is something really peculiar to Prussia, of which we hear numberless stories, some of them certainly true. It might be called the one-sided duel. I mean the idea that there is some sort of dignity in drawing the sword upon a man who has not got a sword; a waiter, or a shop assistant, or even a schoolboy. One of the officers of the Kaiser in the affair at Saberne was found industriously hacking at a cripple. In all these matters I would avoid sentiment. We must not lose our tempers at the mere cruelty of the thing; but pursue the strict psychological distinction. Others besides German soldiers have slain the defenceless, for loot or lust or private malice, like any other murderer. The point is that nowhere else but in Prussian Germany is any theory of honour mixed up with such things; any more than with poisoning or picking pockets. No French, English, Italian or American gentleman would think he had in some way cleared his own character by sticking his sabre through some ridiculous greengrocer who had nothing in his hand but a cucumber. It would seem as if the word which is translated from the German as “honour” must really mean something quite different in German. It seems to mean something more like what we should call “prestige.”

The fundamental fact, however, is the absence of the reciprocal idea. The Prussian is not sufficiently civilised for the duel. Even when he crosses swords with us his thoughts are not as our thoughts; when we both glorify war, we are glorifying different things. Our medals are wrought like his, but they do not mean the same thing; our regiments are cheered as his are, but the thought in the heart is not the same; the Iron Cross is on the bosom of his king, but it is not the sign of our God. For we, alas, follow our God with many relapses and self-contradictions, but he follows his very consistently. Through all the things that we have examined, the view of national boundaries, the view of military methods, the view of personal honour and self-defence, there runs in their case something of an atrocious simplicity; something too simple for us to understand: the idea that glory consists in holding the steel, and not in facing it.

If further examples were necessary, it would be easy to give hundreds of them.
Let us leave, for the moment, the relation between man and man in the thing called the duel. Let us take the relation between man and woman, in that immortal duel which we call a marriage. Here again we shall find that other Christian civilisations aim at some kind of equality; even if the balance be irrational or dangerous. Thus, the two extremes of the treatment of women might be represented by what are called the respectable classes in America and in France. In America they choose the risk of comradeship; in France the compensation of courtesy. In America it is practically possible for any young gentleman to take any young lady for what he calls (I deeply regret to say) a joy-ride; but at least the man goes with the woman as much as the woman with the man. In France the young woman is protected like a nun while she is unmarried; but when she is a mother she is really a holy woman; and when she is a grandmother she is a holy terror. By both extremes the woman gets something back out of life. There is only one place where she gets little or nothing back; and that is the north of Germany. France and America aim alike at equality; America by similarity; France by dissimilarity. But North Germany does definitely aim at inequality. The woman stands up, with no more irritation than a butler; the man sits down, with no more embarrassment than a guest. This is the cool affirmation of inferiority, as in the case of the sabre and the tradesman. “Thou goest with women; forget not thy whip,” said Nietzsche. It will be observed that he does not say “poker”; which might come more naturally to the mind of a more common or Christian wife-beater. But then a poker is a part of domesticity; and might be used by the wife as well as the husband. In fact, it often is. The sword and the whip are the weapons of a privileged caste.

Pass from the closest of all differences, that between husband and wife, to the most distant of all differences, that of the remote and unrelated races who have seldom seen each other’s faces, and never been tinged with each other’s blood. Here we still find the same unvarying Prussian principle. Any European might feel a genuine fear of the Yellow Peril; and many Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Russians have felt and expressed it. Many might say, and have said, that the Heathen Chinee is very heathen indeed; that if he ever advances against us he will trample and torture and utterly destroy, in a way that Eastern people do, but Western people do not. Nor do I doubt the German Emperor’s sincerity when he sought to point out to us how abnormal and abominable such a nightmare campaign would be, supposing that it could ever come. But now comes the comic irony; which never fails to follow on the attempt of the Prussian to be philosophic. For the Kaiser, after explaining to his troops how important it was
to avoid Eastern Barbarism, instantly commanded them to become Eastern Barbarians. He told them, in so many words, to be Huns: and leave nothing living or standing behind them. In fact, he frankly offered a new army corps of aboriginal Tartars to the Far East, within such time as it may take a bewildered Hanoverian to turn into a Tartar. Any one who has the painful habit of personal thought, will perceive here at once the non-reciprocal principle again. Boiled down to its bones of logic, it means simply this: “I am a German and you are a Chinaman. Therefore I, being a German, have a right to be a Chinaman. But you have no right to be a Chinaman; because you are only a Chinaman.” This is probably the highest point to which the German culture has risen.

The principle here neglected, which may be called Mutuality by those who misunderstand and dislike the word Equality, does not offer so clear a distinction between the Prussian and the other peoples as did the first Prussian principle of an infinite and destructive opportunism; or, in other words, the principle of being unprincipled. Nor upon this second can one take up so obvious a position touching the other civilisations or semi-civilisations of the world. Some idea of oath and bond there is in the rudest tribes, in the darkest continents. But it might be maintained, of the more delicate and imaginative element of reciprocity, that a cannibal in Borneo understands it almost as little as a professor in Berlin. A narrow and one-sided seriousness is the fault of barbarians all over the world. This may have been the meaning, for aught I know, of the one eye of the Cyclops: that the Barbarian cannot see round things or look at them from two points of view; and thus becomes a blind beast and an eater of men. Certainly there can be no better summary of the savage than this, which as we have seen, unfits him for the duel. He is the man who cannot love—no, nor even hate—his neighbour as himself.

But this quality in Prussia does have one effect which has reference to the same question of the lower civilisations. It disposes once and for all at least of the civilising mission of Germany. Evidently the Germans are the last people in the world to be trusted with the task. They are as shortsighted morally as physically. What is their sophism of “necessity” but an inability to imagine tomorrow morning? What is their non-reciprocity but an inability to imagine, not a god or devil, but merely another man? Are these to judge mankind? Men of two tribes in Africa not only know that they are all men, but can understand that they are all black men. In this they are quite seriously in advance of the intellectual Prussian; who cannot be got to see that we are all white men. The ordinary eye is unable to perceive in the North-East Teuton anything that marks him out
especially from the more colourless classes of the rest of Aryan mankind. He is simply a white man, with a tendency to the grey or the drab. Yet he will explain, in serious official documents, that the difference between him and us is a difference between “the master-race and the inferior-race.” The collapse of German philosophy always occurs at the beginning rather than the end of an argument; and the difficulty here is that there is no way of testing which is a master-race except by asking which is your own race. If you cannot find out (as is usually the case) you fall back on the absurd occupation of writing history about pre-historic times. But I suggest quite seriously that if the Germans can give their philosophy to the Hottentots, there is no reason why they should not give their sense of superiority to the Hottentots. If they can see such fine shades between the Goth and the Gaul, there is no reason why similar shades should not lift the savage above other savages; why any Ojibway should not discover that he is one tint redder than the Dacotahs; or any nigger in the Cameroons say he is not so black as he is painted. For this principle of a quite unproved racial supremacy is the last and worst of the refusals of reciprocity. The Prussian calls all men to admire the beauty of his large blue eyes. If they do, it is because they have inferior eyes: if they don’t, it is because they have no eyes.

Wherever the most miserable remnant of our race, astray and dried up in deserts, or buried forever under the fall of bad civilisations, has some feeble memory that men are men, that bargains are bargains, that there are two sides to a question, or even that it takes two to make a quarrel—that remnant has the right to resist the New Culture, to the knife and club and the splintered stone. For the Prussian begins all his culture by that act which is the destruction of all creative thought and constructive action. He breaks that mirror in the mind, in which a man can see the face of his friend or foe.
III

THE APPETITE OF TYRANNY

The German Emperor has reproached this country with allying itself with “barbaric and semi-oridental power.” We have already considered in what sense we use the word barbaric: it is in the sense of one who is hostile to civilisation, not one who is insufficient in it. But when we pass from the idea of the barbaric to the idea of the oriental, the case is even more curious. There is nothing particularly Tartar in Russian affairs, except the fact that Russia expelled the Tartars. The Eastern invader occupied and crushed the country for many years; but that is equally true of Greece, of Spain and even of Austria. If Russia has suffered from the East she has suffered in order to resist it: and it is rather hard that the very miracle of her escape should make a mystery about her origin. Jonah may or may not have been three days inside a fish, but that does not make him a merman. And in all the other cases of European nations who escaped the monstrous captivity, we do admit the purity and continuity of the European type. We consider the old Eastern rule as a wound, but not as a stain. Copper-coloured men out of Africa overruled for centuries the religion and patriotism of Spaniards. Yet I have never heard that Don Quixote was an African fable on the lines of Uncle Remus. I have never heard that the heavy black in the pictures of Velasquez was due to a negro ancestry. In the case of Spain, which is close to us, we can recognise the resurrection of a Christian and cultured nation after its age of bondage. But Russia is rather remote; and those to whom nations are but names in newspapers can really fancy, like Mr. Baring’s friend, that all Russian churches are “mosques.” Yet the land of Turgenev is not a wilderness of fakirs; and even the fanatical Russian is as proud of being different from the Mongol, as the fanatical Spaniard was proud of being different from the Moor.

The town of Reading, as it exists, offers few opportunities for piracy on the high seas: yet it was the camp of the pirates in Alfred’s day. I should think it hard to call the people of Berkshire half-Danish, merely because they drove out the Danes. In short, some temporary submergence under the savage flood was the fate of many of the most civilised states of Christendom; and it is quite ridiculous to argue that Russia, which wrestled hardest, must have recovered least. Everywhere, doubtless, the East spread a sort of enamel over the conquered countries, but everywhere the enamel cracked. Actual history, in fact,
is exactly opposite to the cheap proverb invented against the Muscovite. It is not true to say “Scratch a Russian and you find a Tartar.” In the darkest hour of the barbaric dominion it was truer to say, “Scratch a Tartar and you find a Russian.” It was the civilisation that survived under all the barbarism. This vital romance of Russia, this revolution against Asia, can be proved in pure fact: not only from the almost superhuman activity of Russia during the struggle, but also (which is much rarer as human history goes) by her quite consistent conduct since. She is the only great nation which has really expelled the Mongol from her country, and continued to protest against the presence of the Mongol in her continent. Knowing what he had been in Russia, she knew what he would be in Europe. In this she pursued a logical line of thought which was, if anything, too unsympathetic with the energies and religions of the East. Every other country, one may say, has been an ally of the Turk; that is, of the Mongol and the Moslem. The French played them as pieces against Austria; the English warmly supported them under the Palmerston régime; even the young Italians sent troops to the Crimea; and of Prussia and her Austrian vassal it is nowadays needless to speak. For good or evil, it is the fact of history that Russia is the only Power in Europe that has never supported the Crescent against the Cross.

That, doubtless, will appear an unimportant matter; but it may become important under certain peculiar conditions. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that there were a powerful prince in Europe who had gone ostentatiously out of his way to pay reverence to the remains of the Tartar, Mongol and Moslem, left as an outpost in Europe. Suppose there were a Christian Emperor who could not even go to the tomb of the Crucified, without pausing to congratulate the last and living crucifier. If there were an Emperor who gave guns and guides and maps and drill instructors to defend the remains of the Mongol in Christendom, what should we say to him? I think at least we might ask him what he meant by his impudence, when he talked about supporting a semi-oriental power. That we support a semi-oriental power, we deny. That he has supported an entirely oriental power cannot be denied—no, not even by the man who did it.

But here is to be noted the essential difference between Russia and Prussia; especially by those who use the ordinary Liberal arguments against the latter. Russia has a policy which she pursues, if you will, through evil and good; but at least so as to produce good as well as evil. Let it be granted that the policy has made her oppressive to the Finns and the Poles—though the Russian Poles feel far less oppressed than do the Prussian Poles. But it is a mere historic fact, that if Russia has been a despot to some small nations, she has been a deliverer to
others. She did, so far as in her lay, emancipate the Servians or the Montenegrins. But whom did Prussia ever emancipate—even by accident? It is indeed somewhat extraordinary that in the perpetual permutations of international politics the Hohenzollerns have never gone astray into the path of enlightenment. They have been in alliance with almost everybody off and on; with France, with England, with Austria, with Russia. Can any one candidly say that they have left on any one of these people the faintest impress of progress or liberation? Prussia was the enemy of the French Monarchy; but a worse enemy of the French Revolution. Prussia had been an enemy of the Czar; but she was a worse enemy of the Duma. Prussia totally disregarded Austrian rights; but she is to-day quite ready to inflict Austrian wrongs. This is the strong particular difference between the one empire and the other. Russia is pursuing certain intelligible and sincere ends, which to her at least are ideals, and for which, therefore, she will make sacrifices and will protect the weak. But the North German soldier is a sort of abstract tyrant, everywhere and always on the side of materialistic tyranny. This Teuton in uniform has been found in strange places; shooting farmers before Saratoga and flogging soldiers in Surrey, hanging niggers in Africa and raping girls in Wicklow; but never, by some mysterious fatality, lending a hand to the freeing of a single city or the independence of one solitary flag. Wherever scorn and prosperous oppression are, there is the Prussian; unconsciously consistent, instinctively restrictive, innocently evil; “following darkness like a dream.”

Suppose we heard of a person (gifted with some longevity) who had helped Alva to persecute Dutch Protestants, then helped Cromwell to persecute Irish Catholics, and then helped Claverhouse to persecute Scotch Puritans, we should find it rather easier to call him a persecutor than to call him a Protestant or a Catholic. Curiously enough this is actually the position in which the Prussian stands in Europe. No argument can alter the fact that in three converging and conclusive cases he has been on the side of three distinct rulers of different religions, who had nothing whatever in common except that they were ruling oppressively. In these three Governments, taken separately, one can see something excusable or at least human. When the Kaiser encouraged the Russian rulers to crush the Revolution, the Russian rulers undoubtedly believed they were wrestling with an inferno of atheism and anarchy. A Socialist of the ordinary English kind cried out upon me when I spoke of Stolypin, and said he was chiefly known by the halter called “Stolypin’s Necktie.” As a fact, there were many other things interesting about Stolypin besides his necktie: his policy
of peasant proprietorship, his extraordinary personal courage, and certainly none
more interesting than that movement in his death agony, when he made the sign
of the cross towards the Czar, as the crown and captain of his Christianity. But
the Kaiser does not regard the Czar as the captain of Christianity. Far from it.
What he supported in Stolypin was the necktie and nothing but the necktie: the
gallows and not the cross. The Russian ruler did believe that the Orthodox
Church was orthodox. The Austrian Archduke did really desire to make the
Catholic Church catholic. He did really believe that he was being Pro-Catholic in
being Pro-Austrian. But the Kaiser cannot be Pro-Catholic, and therefore cannot
have been really Pro-Austrian, he was simply and solely Anti-Servian. Nay, even
in the cruel and sterile strength of Turkey, any one with imagination can see
something of the tragedy and therefore of the tenderness of true belief. The worst
that can be said of the Moslems is, as the poet put it, they offered to man the
choice of the Koran or the sword. The best that can be said for the German is
that he does not care about the Koran, but is satisfied if he can have the sword.
And for me, I confess, even the sins of these three other striving empires take on,
in comparison, something that is sorrowful and dignified: and I feel they do not
deserve that this little Lutheran lounger should patronise all that is evil in them,
while ignoring all that is good. He is not Catholic, he is not Orthodox, he is not
Mahomedan. He is merely an old gentleman who wishes to share the crime
though he cannot share the creed. He desires to be a persecutor by the pang
without the palm. So strongly do all the instincts of the Prussian drive against
liberty, that he would rather oppress other people’s subjects than think of
anybody going without the benefits of oppression. He is a sort of disinterested
despot. He is as disinterested as the devil who is ready to do any one’s dirty
work.

This would seem obviously fantastic were it not supported by solid facts
which cannot be explained otherwise. Indeed it would be inconceivable if we
were thinking of a whole people, consisting of free and varied individuals. But in
Prussia the governing class is really a governing class: and a very few people are
needed to think along these lines to make all the other people act along them.
And the paradox of Prussia is this: that while its princes and nobles have no
other aim on this earth but to destroy democracy wherever it shows itself, they
have contrived to get themselves trusted, not as wardens of the past but as
forerunners of the future. Even they cannot believe that their theory is popular,
but they do believe that it is progressive. Here again we find the spiritual chasm
between the two monarchies in question. The Russian institutions are, in many
cases, really left in the rear of the Russian people, and many of the Russian people know it. But the Prussian institutions are supposed to be in advance of the Prussian people, and most of the Prussian people believe it. It is thus much easier for the warlords to go everywhere and impose a hopeless slavery upon every one, for they have already imposed a sort of hopeful slavery on their own simple race.

And when men shall speak to us of the hoary iniquities of Russia and of how antiquated is the Russian system, we shall answer “Yes; that is the superiority of Russia.” Their institutions are part of their history, whether as relics or fossils. Their abuses have really been uses: that is to say, they have been used up. If they have old engines of terror or torment, they may fall to pieces from mere rust, like an old coat of armour. But in the case of the Prussian tyranny, if it be tyranny at all, it is the whole point of its claim that it is not antiquated, but just going to begin, like the showman. Prussia has a whole thriving factory of thumbscrews, a whole humming workshop of wheels and racks, of the newest and nearest pattern, with which to win back Europe to the Reaction . . . infandum renovare dolorem. And if we wish to test the truth of this, it can be done by the same method which showed us that Russia, if her race or religion could sometimes make her an invader and an oppressor, could also be made an emancipator and a knight errant. In the same way, if the Russian institutions are old-fashioned, they honestly exhibit the good as well as the bad that can be found in old-fashioned things. In their police system they have an inequality which is against our ideas of law. But in their commune system they have an equality that is older than law itself. Even when they flogged each other like barbarians, they called upon each other by their Christian names like children. At their worst they retained all the best of a rude society. At their best, they are simply good, like good children or good nuns. But in Prussia all that is best in the civilised machinery is put at the service of all that is worst in the barbaric mind. Here again the Prussian has no accidental merits, none of those lucky survivals, none of those late repentances, which make the patchwork glory of Russia. Here all is sharpened to a point and pointed to a purpose and that purpose, if words and acts have any meaning at all, is the destruction of liberty throughout the world.
THE ESCAPE OF FOLLY

In considering the Prussian point of view we have been considering what seems to be mainly a mental limitation: a kind of knot in the brain. Towards the problem of Slav population, of English colonisation, of French armies and reinforcements, it shows the same strange philosophic sulks. So far as I can follow it, it seems to amount to saying “It is very wrong that you should be superior to me, because I am superior to you.” The spokesmen of this system seem to have a curious capacity for concentrating this entanglement or contradiction, sometimes into a single paragraph, or even a single sentence. I have already referred to the German Emperor’s celebrated suggestion that in order to avert the peril of Hunnishness we should all become Huns. A much stronger instance is his more recent order to his troops touching the war in Northern France. As most people know, his words ran “It is my Royal and Imperial command that you concentrate your energies, for the immediate present, upon one single purpose, and that is that you address all your skill and all the valour of my soldiers to exterminate first the treacherous English and to walk over General French’s contemptible little Army.” The rudeness of the remark an Englishman can afford to pass over; what I am interested in is the mentality; the train of thought that can manage to entangle itself even in so brief a space. If French’s little Army is contemptible, it would seem clear that all the skill and valour of the German Army had better not be concentrated on it, but on the larger and less contemptible allies. If all the skill and valour of the German Army are concentrated on it, it is not being treated as contemptible. But the Prussian rhetorician had two incompatible sentiments in his mind; and he insisted on saying them both at once. He wanted to think of an English Army as a small thing; but he also wanted to think of an English defeat as a big thing. He wanted to exult, at the same moment, in the utter weakness of the British in their attack; and the supreme skill and valour of the Germans in repelling such an attack. Somehow it must be made a common and obvious collapse for England; and yet a daring and unexpected triumph for Germany. In trying to express these contradictory conceptions simultaneously, he got rather mixed. Therefore he bade Germania fill all her vales and mountains with the dying agonies of this almost invisible earwig; and let the impure blood of this cockroach redden the
Rhine down to the sea.

But it would be unfair to base the criticism on the utterance of any accidental and hereditary prince: and it is quite equally clear in the case of the philosophers who have been held up to us, even in England, as the very prophets of progress. And in nothing is it shown more sharply than in the curious confused talk about Race and especially about the Teutonic Race. Professor Harnack and similar people are reproaching us, I understand, for having broken “the bond of Teutonism”: a bond which the Prussians have strictly observed both in breach and observance. We note it in their open annexation of lands wholly inhabited by negroes, such as Denmark. We note it equally in their instant and joyful recognition of the flaxen hair and light blue eyes of the Turks. But it is still the abstract principle of Professor Harnack which interests me most; and in following it I have the same complexity of enquiry, but the same simplicity of result. Comparing the Professor’s concern about “Teutonism” with his unconcern about Belgium, I can only reach the following result: “A man need not keep a promise he has made. But a man must keep a promise he has not made.” There certainly was a treaty binding Britain to Belgium; if it was only a scrap of paper. If there was any treaty binding Britain to Teutonism it is, to say the least of it, a lost scrap of paper: almost what one might call a scrap of waste-paper. Here again the pendants under consideration exhibit the illogical perversity that makes the brain reel. There is obligation and there is no obligation: sometimes it appears that Germany and England must keep faith with each other; sometimes that Germany need not keep faith with anybody and anything; sometimes that we alone among European peoples are almost entitled to be Germans; sometimes that beside us Russians and Frenchmen almost rise to a Germanic loveliness of character. But through all there is, hazy but not hypocritical, this sense of some common Teutonism.

Professor Haeckel, another of the witnesses raised up against us, attained to some celebrity at one time through proving the remarkable resemblance between two different things by printing duplicate pictures of the same thing. Professor Haeckel’s contribution to biology, in this case, was exactly like Professor Harnack’s contribution to ethnology. Professor Harnack knows what a German is like. When he wants to imagine what an Englishman is like, he simply photographs the same German over again. In both cases there is probably sincerity as well as simplicity. Haeckel was so certain that the species illustrated in embryo really are closely related and linked up, that it seemed to him a small thing to simplify it by mere repetition. Harnack is so certain that the German and
Englishman are almost alike, that he really risks the generalisation that they are exactly alike. He photographs, so to speak, the same fair and foolish face twice over; and calls it a remarkable resemblance between cousins. Thus he can prove the existence of Teutonism just about as conclusively as Haeckel has proved the more tenable proposition of the non-existence of God. Now the German and the Englishman are not in the least alike—except in the sense that neither of them are negroes. They are, in everything good and evil, more unlike than any other two men we can take at random from the great European family. They are opposite from the roots of their history, nay, of their geography. It is an understatement to call Britain insular. Britain is not only an island, but an island slashed by the sea till it nearly splits into three islands; and even the Midlands can almost smell the salt. Germany is a powerful, beautiful and fertile inland country, which can only find the sea by one or two twisted and narrow paths, as people find a subterranean lake. Thus the British Navy is really national because it is natural; it has co-hered out of hundreds of accidental adventures of ships and shipmen before Chaucer’s time and after it. But the German Navy is an artificial thing; as artificial as a constructed Alp would be in England. William II has simply copied the British Navy as Frederick II copied the French Army: and this Japanese or anti-like assiduity in imitation is one of the hundred qualities which the Germans have and the English markedly have not. There are other German superiorities which are very much superior. The one or two really jolly things that the Germans have got are precisely the things which the English haven’t got: notably a real habit of popular music and of the ancient songs of the people, not merely spreading from the towns or caught from the professionals. In this the Germans rather resemble the Welsh: though heaven knows what becomes of Teutonism if they do. But the difference between the Germans and the English goes deeper than all these signs of it; they differ more than any other two Europeans in the normal posture of the mind. Above all, they differ in what is the most English of all English traits; that shame which the French may be right in calling “the bad shame”; for it is certainly mixed up with pride and suspicion, the upshot of which we call shyness. Even an Englishman’s rudeness is often rooted in his being embarrassed. But a German’s rudeness is rooted in his never being embarrassed. He eats and makes love noisily. He never feels a speech or a song or a sermon or a large meal to be what the English call “out of place” in particular circumstances. When Germans are patriotic and religious they have no reactions against patriotism and religion as have the English and the French. Nay, the mistake of Germany in the modern disaster largely arose from the facts
that she thought England was simple when England is very subtle. She thought
that because our politics have become largely financial that they had become
wholly financial; that because our aristocrats had become pretty cynical that they
had become entirely corrupt. They could not seize the subtlety by which a rather
used-up English gentleman might sell a coronet when he would not sell a
fortress; might lower the public standards and yet refuse to lower the flag. In
short, the Germans are quite sure that they understand us entirely, because they
do not understand us at all. Possibly if they began to understand us they might
hate us even more: but I would rather be hated for some small but real reason
than pursued with love on account of all kinds of qualities which I do not
possess and which I do not desire. And when the Germans get their first genuine
glimpse of what modern England is like they will discover that England has a
very broken, belated and inadequate sense of having an obligation to Europe, but
no sort of sense whatever of having any obligation to Teutonism.

This is the last and strongest of the Prussian qualities we have here considered.
There is in stupidity of this sort a strange slippery strength: because it can be not
only outside rules but outside reason. The man who really cannot see that he is
contradicting himself has a great advantage in controversy; though the advantage
breaks down when he tries to reduce it to simple addition, to chess, or to the
game called war. It is the same about the stupidity of the one-sided kinship. The
drunkard who is quite certain that a total stranger is his long-lost brother, has a
greater advantage until it comes to matters of detail. “We must have chaos
within” said Nietzsche, “that we may give birth to a dancing star.”

In these slight notes I have suggested the principal strong points of the
Prussian character. A failure in honour which almost amounts to a failure in
memory: an egomania that is honestly blind to the fact that the other party is an
ego; and, above all, an actual itch for tyranny and interference, the devil which
everywhere torments the idle and the proud. To these must be added a certain
mental shapelessness which can expand or contract without reference to reason
or record; a potential infinity of excuses. If the English had been on the German
side, the German professors would have noted what irresistible energies had
evolved the Teutons. As the English are on the other side, the German professors
will say that these Teutons were not sufficiently evolved. Or they will say that
they were just sufficiently evolved to show that they were not Teutons. Probably
they will say both. But the truth is that all that they call evolution should rather
be called evasion. They tell us they are opening windows of enlightenment and
doors of progress. The truth is that they are breaking up the whole house of the
human intellect, that they may abscond in any direction. There is an ominous and almost monstrous parallel between the position of their over-rated philosophers and of their comparatively under-rated soldiers. For what their professors call roads of progress are really routes of escape.
LETTERS TO AN OLD GARIBALDIAN

Italy, twice hast thou spoken; and time is a thirst for the third.

—SWINBURNE.

My Dear—It is a long time since we met; and I fear these letters may never reach you. But in these violent times I remember with a curious vividness how you brandished a paintbrush about your easel when I was a boy; and how it thrilled me to think that you had so brandished a bayonet against the Teutons—I hope with the same precision and happy results. Round about that period, the very pigments seemed to have some sort of picturesque connection with your national story. There seemed to be something gorgeous and terrible about Venetian Red; and something quite catastrophic about Burnt Sienna. But somehow or other, when I saw in the street yesterday the colours on your flag, it reminded me of the colours on your palette.

You need not fear that I shall try to entangle you or your countrymen in the matters which it is for Italians alone to decide. You know the perils of either course much better than I do. Italy, most assuredly, has no need to prove her courage. She has risked everything in standing out that she could risk by coming in. The proclamations and press of Germany make it plain that the Germans have risen to a height of sensibility hardly to be distinguished from madness. Supposing the nightmare of a Prussian victory, they will revenge themselves on things more remote than the Triple Alliance. There was a promise of peace between them and Belgium; there was none between them and England. The promise to Belgium they broke. The promise of England they invented. It is called the Treaty of Teutonism. No one ever heard of it in this country; but it seems well known in academic circles in Germany. It seems to be something, connected with the colour of one’s hair. But I repeat that I am not concerned to interfere with your decision, save in so far as I may provide some materials for it by describing our own.

For I think the first, perhaps the only, fruitful work an Englishman can do now for the formation of foreign opinion is to talk about what he really understands, the condition of British opinion. It is as simple as it is solid. For the first time, perhaps, what we call the United Kingdom entirely deserves its name. There has been nothing like such unanimity within an Englishman’s recollection. The Irish and even the Welsh were largely pro-Boers, so were some of the most English of the English. No one could have been more English than Fox, yet he denounced
the war with Napoleon. No one could be more English than Cobden, but he denounced the war in the Crimea. It is really extraordinary to find a united England. Indeed, until lately, it was extraordinary to find a united Englishman. Those of us who, like the present writer, repudiated the South African war from its beginnings, had yet a divided heart in the matter, and felt certain aspects of it as glorious as well as infamous. The first fact I can offer you is the unquestionable fact that all these doubts and divisions have ceased. Nor have they ceased by any compromise; but by a universal flash of faith—or, if you will, of suspicion. Nor were our internal conflicts lightly abandoned; nor our reconciliations an easy matter. I am, as you are, a democrat and a citizen of Europe; and my friends and I had grown to loathe the plutocracy and privilege which sat in the high places of our country with a loathing which we thought no love could cast out. Of these rich men I will not speak here; with your permission, I will not think of them. War is a terrible business in any case; and to some intellectual temperaments this is the most terrible part of it. That war takes the young; that war sunder the lovers; that all over Europe brides and bridegrooms are parting at the church door: all that is only a commonplace to commonplace people. To give up one’s love for one’s country is very great. But to give up one’s hate for one’s country, this may also have in it something of pride and something of purification.

What is it that has made the British peoples thus defer not only their artificial parade of party politics but their real social and moral complaints and demands? What is it that has united all of us against the Prussian, as against a mad dog? It is the presence of a certain spirit, as unmistakable as a pungent smell, which we feel is capable of withering all the good things in this world. The burglary of Belgium, the bribe to betray France, these are not excuses; they are facts. But they are only the facts by which we came to know of the presence of the spirit. They do not suffice to define the whole spirit itself. A good rough summary is to say that it is the spirit of barbarism; but indeed it is something worse. It is the spirit of second-rate civilisation; and the distinction involves the most important differences. Granted that it could exist, pure barbarism could not last long; as pure babyhood cannot last long. Of his own nature the baby is interested in the ticking of a watch; and the time will come when you will have to tell him, if you only tell him the wrong time. And that is exactly what the second-rate civilisation does.

But the vital point is here. The abstract barbarian would copy. The cockney and incomplete civilisation always sets itself up to be copied. And in the case
here considered, the German thinks that it is not only his business to spread education, but to spread compulsory education. “Science combined with organisation,” says Professor Ostwald of Berlin University, “makes us terrible to our opponents and ensures a German future for Europe.” That is, as shortly as it can be put, what we are fighting about. We are fighting to prevent a German future for Europe. We think it would be narrower, nastier, less sane, less capable of liberty and of laughter, than any of the worst parts of the European past. And when I cast about for a form in which to explain shortly why we think so, I thought of you. For this is a matter so large that I know not how to express it except in terms of artists like you, in the service of beauty and the faith in freedom. Prussia, at least cannot help me; Lord Palmerston, I believe, called it a country of damned professors. Lord Palmerston, I fear, used the word “damned” more or less flippantly. I use it reverently.

Rome, at her very weakest, has always been a river that wanders and widens and that waters many fields. Berlin, at its strongest, will never be anything but a whirlpool, which seeks its own centre, and is sucked down. It would only narrow all the rest of Europe, as it has already narrowed all the rest of Germany. There is a spirit of diseased egoism, which at last makes all things spin upon one pinpoint in the brain. It is a spirit expressed more often in the slangs than in the tongues of men. The English call it a fad. I do not know what the Italians call it; the Prussians call it philosophy.

Here is the sort of instance that made me think of you. What would you feel first, let us say, if I mentioned Michael Angelo? For the first moment, perhaps, boredom: such as I feel when Americans ask me about Stratford-on-Avon. But, supposing that just fear quieted, you would feel what I and every one else can feel. It might be the sense of the majestic hands of Man upon the locks of the last doors of life; large and terrible hands, like those of that youth who poises the stone above Florence, and looks out upon the circle of the hills. It might be that huge heave of flank and chest and throat in “The Slave,” which is like an earthquake lifting a whole landscape; it might be that tremendous Madonna, whose charity is more strong than death. Anyhow, your thoughts would be something worthy of the man’s terrible paganism and his more terrible Christianity. Who but God could have graven Michael Angelo; who came so near to graving the Mother of God?

German culture deals with the matter as follows:—”Michelangelo Buonarotti (1475–1564).—(=Bernhard) ancestor of the family, lived in Florence about 1210. He had two sons, Berlinghieri and Buonarroti. By this name recurring frequently
in later generations, the family came to be called. It is a German name, compounded of Bona (=Bohn) and Hrodo, Roto (=Rohde, Rothe) Bona and Rotto are cited as Lombard names. Buonarotti is perhaps the old Lombard Beonrad, corresponding to the word Bonroth. Corresponding names are Mackrodt, Osterroth, Leonard.” And so on, and so on, and so on. “In his face he has always been well-coloured . . . the eyes might be called small rather than large, of the colour of horn, but variable with ‘flecks’ of yellow and blue. Hair and beard are black. These particulars are confirmed by the portraits. First and foremost take the portrait of Bugiardini in Museo Buonarotti. Here comes to view the ‘flecked’ appearance of the iris, especially in the right eye. The left may be described as almost wholly blue.” And so on, and so on, and so on. “In the Museo Civico at Pavia, is a fresco likeness by an unknown hand, in which this fresh red is distinctly recognisable on the face. Taking all these bodily characteristics into consideration, it must be said from an anthropological point of view that though originally of German family he was a hybrid between the North and West brunette race.”

Would you take the trouble to prove that Michael Angelo was an Italian that this man takes to prove that he was a German? Of course not. The only impression this man (who is a recognised Prussian historian) produces on your mind or mine is that he does not care about Michael Angelo. For you, being an Italian, are therefore something more than an Italian; and I being an Englishman, something more than an Englishman. But this poor fellow really cannot be anything more than a Prussian. He digs and digs to find dead Prussians, in the catacombs of Rome or under the ruins of Troy. If he can find one blue eye lying about somewhere, he is satisfied. He has no philosophy. He has a hobby, which is collecting Germans. It would probably be vain for you and me to point out that we could prove anything by the sort of ingenuity which finds the German “rothe” in Buonarotti. We could have great fun depriving Germany of all her geniuses in that style. We could say that Moltke must have been an Italian, from the old Latin root mol—indicating the sweetness of that general’s disposition. We might say Bismarck was a Frenchman, since his name begins with the popular theatrical cry of “Bis!” We might say Goethe was an Englishman, because his name begins with the popular sporting cry “Go!” But the ultimate difference between us and the Prussian professor is simply that we are not mad.

The father of Frederick the Great, the founder of the more modern Hohenzollerns, was mad. His madness consisted of stealing giants; like an unscrupulous travelling showman. Any man much over six foot high, whether he
were called the Russian Giant or the Irish Giant or the Chinese Giant or the Hottentot Giant, was in danger of being kidnapped and imprisoned in a Prussian uniform. It is the same mean sort of madness that is working in Prussian professors such as the one I have quoted. They can get no further than the notion of stealing giants. I will not bore you now with all the other giants they have tried to steal; it is enough to say that St. Paul, Leonardo da Vinci, and Shakespeare himself are among the monstrosities exhibited at Frederick-William fair—on grounds as good as those quoted above. But I have put this particular case before you, as an artist rather than an Italian, to show what I mean when I object to a “German future for Europe.” I object to something which believes very much in itself, and in which I do not in the least believe. I object to something which is conceited and small-minded; but which also has that kind of pertinacity which always belongs to lunatics. It wants to be able to congratulate itself on Michael Angelo; never to congratulate the world. It is the spirit that can be seen in those who go bald trying to trace a genealogy; or go bankrupt trying to make out a claim to some remote estate. The Prussian has the inconsistency of the parvenu; he will labour to prove that he is related to some gentleman of the Renaissance, even while he boasts of being able to “buy him up.” If the Italians were really great, why—they were really Germans; and if they weren’t really Germans, well then, they weren’t really great. It is an occupation for an old maid.

Three or four hundred years ago, in the sad silence that had followed the comparative failure of the noble effort of the Middle Ages, there came upon all Europe a storm out of the south. Its tumult is of many tongues; one can hear in it the laughter of Rabelais, or, for that matter, the lyrics of Shakespeare; but the dark heart of the storm was indeed more austral and volcanic; a noise of thunderous wings and the name of Michael the Archangel. And when it had shocked and purified the world and passed, a Prussian professor found a feather fallen to earth; and proved (in several volumes) that it could only have come from a Prussian Eagle. He had seen one—in a cage.

Yours—,

G.K. CHESTERTON.

My Dear—The facts before all Europeans to-day are so fundamental that I still find it easier to talk about them to you as to an old friend, rather than put it in the shape of a pamphlet. In my last letter I pointed out two facts which are pivots. The first is that, to any really cultured person, Prussia is second-rate. The second is that to almost any Prussian, Prussia is really first-rate; and is prepared, quite
literally, to police the rest of the world.

For the first matter, the comparative inferiority of German culture cannot be doubted by people like you. One of the German papers pathetically said that, though the mangling of Malines and Rheims was very sad, it was a comfort to think that yet nobler works of art would spring up wherever the German culture had passed in triumph. From the point of view of humour, it is really rather sad that they never will. The German Emperor’s idea of a Gothic cathedral is as provocative to the fancy as Mrs. Todgers’ idea of a wooden leg. But I think it perfectly probable that they really intended to set up such beautiful buildings as they could. Having been blasphemous enough to ruin such things, they might well be blasphemous enough to replace them. Even if the Prussian attempt on Paris had not wholly collapsed as it has, I doubt whether the Prussians would have destroyed everything. I doubt whether they would even have destroyed the Venus de Milo. More probably they would have put a pair of arms on it, designed by some rising German artist— the Emperor or somebody. And the two arms thus added would look at once like the arms of a woman at a wash-tub. The destroyers of the tower of Rheims are quite capable of destroying the Tower of Giotto. But they are equally capable of the greater crime of completing it. And if they put on a spire, what a spire it would be! What an extinguisher for that clear and almost transparent Christian candle! Have you read some of the German explanations of Hamlet? Did I tell you that Leonardo’s hair must have been German hair, because so many of his contemporaries said it was beautiful? This is what I call being second-rate. All the German excitement about the colonies of England is only a half understanding of what was once heroic and is now largely caddish. The German Emperor’s naval vision is a bad copy of Nelson, as certainly as Frederick the Great’s verses were a bad copy of Voltaire.

But the second point was even more important; that weak as the thing is mentally it is strong materially; and will impose itself materially if we permit it. The Prussians have failed in everything else; but they have not failed in getting their subject thousands to do as they are told. They cannot put up black and white towers in Florence; but they can really put up black and white posts in Alsace. They have failed in diplomacy. I suppose it might be called a failure in diplomacy to come into the fight with two enemies extra and one ally the less. If the Germans, instead of sending spies to study the Belgian soil, had sent spies to consider the Belgian soul, they would have been saved hard work for a week or two. They have failed in controversy. I suppose it might be called a failure in controversy to say that England may be keeping her word for some wicked
purpose; while Germany may be breaking her word for some noble purpose. And that is practically all that the Germans can manage to say. They say that we are an insatiable, unscrupulous, piratical power; and this wild spirit whirled us into the mad course of respecting a treaty we had signed. They can find in us no treason except that we keep our treaties: failing to do this I call failing in controversy. They have failed in popular persuasion. They have had a very good opportunity. The British Empire does contain many people who have been badly treated in various ways: the Irish, the Boers; nay, the Americans themselves, whose national existence began with being badly treated. With these the Prussians have done comparatively little; and with Europeans of your sort nothing. They have never once really sympathised with the feeling of a Switzer for Switzerland; the feeling of a Norwegian for Norway; the feeling of a Tuscan for Tuscany. Even when nations are neutral, Prussia can hardly bear them to be patriotic. Even when they are courting every one else they can praise no one but themselves. They fail in diplomacy, they fail in debate, they fail even in demagogy. They have stupid plots, stupid explanations, and even stupid apologies. But there is one thing they really do not fail in. They do not fail in finding people stupid enough to carry them out.

Now, it is this question I would ask you to consider; you, as a good middle type of the Latins, a Liberal but a Catholic, an artist but a soldier. The danger to the whole civilisation of which Rome was the fountain lies in this. That the more this strange Pruss people fail in all the other things, the more they will fall back on this mere fact of a brutal obedience. They will give orders; they have nothing else to give. I say that this is the question for you; I do not say, I do not dream of saying, that the answer is for me. It is for you to weigh the chance that their very failures in the arts of peace will drive them back upon the arts of war. They could not, and they did not, dupe your people in diplomacy. They did the most undiplomatic thing that can be done; they concealed a breach of partnership without even concealing the concealment. They instigated the intrigue in Austria in such a way that Italy could honestly claim all the freedom of past ignorance, combined with all the disillusionment of present knowledge. They so ran the Triple Alliance that they had to admit your grievance, at the very moment when they claimed your aid. The English are stupider and less sensitive than you are; but even the English found the German Chancellor’s diplomacy not insinuating but simply insulting; I swear I would be a better diplomatist myself. In the same way, there is no danger of people like you being corrupted in controversy. There is no fear that the professors who pullulate all over the Baltic Plain will
overcome the Latins in logic. Some of them even claim to be super-logical; and say they are too big for syllogisms; generally having found even one syllogism too big for them. If they complain either of your abstention from their cause or your adhesion to any other, you have an unanswerable answer. You will say, as you did say, that you did not break the Triple Alliance, even for the sake of peace. It was they who broke it for the sake of war. You, obviously, had as much right to be consulted about Servia as Austria had; and on the mere chess-board of argument it is mate in one move. Nor are they in the least fitted to make an appeal to the popular sentiment of your people. The English, I dare say, and the French, have talked an amazing amount of nonsense about you; but they understand a little better. They do not write exactly like this, which is from the most public and accepted Prussian political philosopher (Chamberlain). “Who can live in Italy to-day and mix with its amiable and highly gifted inhabitants without feeling with pain that here a great nation is lost, irredeemably lost, because it lacks the inner driving power,” etc., which has brought Von Kluck so triumphantly through Paris. Even a half-educated Englishman, who has heard of no Italian poet except Dante, knows that he was something more than amiable. Even a positively illiterate Frenchman, who has heard of no Italian warrior except Napoleon, knows that it was not in “inner driving force” that the artilleryman in question was deficient. “Who can live in Italy to-day?” Evidently the Prussian philosopher can’t. His impressions are taken from Italian operas; not from Italian streets; certainly not from Italian fields. As a matter of fact such images of Italy as burn in the memories of most open-minded Northerners who have been there, are of exactly the other kind. I for one should be inclined to say, “Who can live in Italy to-day without feeling that a woman feeding children, or a man chopping wood, may almost touch him with fear with the fulness of their humanity: so that he can almost smell blood, as one smells burning?” Italians often look lazy; that is, they look as if they would not move; but not as if they could not move, as many Germans do. But even though this formula fitted the Italians, it seems scarcely calculated to please them. For the Prussians, then, with the failure of their diplomacy, the failure of their philosophy, we may also place the failure of their appeals to a foreign people. The Prussian writer may continue his attempts to soothe and charm you by telling you that you are irredeemably lost, and that all great Italians must have been something else. But the method seems to me ill adapted to popular propaganda; and I cannot but say that on this third point of persuasion, the German attempt is not striking.

Now all this is important for this reason. If you consider it carefully you will
see why Europe must, at whatever cost, break Germany in battle: and put an end to her military and material power to do things. If we all have to fight for it, if we all have to die for it, it must be done. If we find allies in the dwarfs of Greenland or the giants of Patagonia, it must be done. And the reason is that unless it is literally and materially done, other things will be literally and materially done; and horrify the heavens. They will be silly things; they will be benighted and limited and laughable things; but they will be accomplished things. Nothing could be more ridiculous, if that is all, than the moral position of the Prussian in Poland; where a magnificent officer, making a vast parade of "ruling," tries to cheat poor peasants out of their fields (and gets cheated) and then takes refuge in beating little boys for saying their prayers in their native tongue. All who remember anything of dignity, of irony, in short of Rome and reason, can see why an officer need not, should not, had better not, and generally does not, beat little boys. But an officer can beat little boys; and a Prussian officer will go on doing it until you take away the stick. Nothing could be more comic, if that is all, than the position of Prussians in Alsace: which they declare to be purely German and admit to be furiously French; so that they have to terrorise it by sabring anybody, including cripples. Again, any of us can see why an officer need not, should not, had better not, and generally does not, sabre a cripple. But an officer can sabre a cripple; and a Prussian officer will go on doing it until you take away the sabre. It is this insane and rigid realism that makes their case peculiar: like that of a Chinaman copying something, or a half-witted servant taking a message. If they had the power to put black and white posts round the grave of Virgil, or dig up Dante to see if he had yellow hair, the mere doing of it which for some of us would be the most unlikely, would for them be the least unlikely thing. They do not hear the laughter of the ages. If they had the power to treat the English or Italian Premier quite literally as a traitor, and shoot him against a wall, they are quite capable of turning such hysterical rhetoric into reality: and scattering his brains before they had collected their own. They do not feel atmospheres. They are all a little deaf; as they are all a little short-sighted. They are annoyed when their enemies, after such experiences as those of Belgium, accuse them of breaking their promises. And in one sense they are right; for there are some sorts of promises they probably would keep. If they have promised to respect a free country, or an old friend, to observe a sworn partnership, or to spare a harmless population, they will find such restrictions chilling and irksome. They will ask some professor on what principle they are discarding it. But if they have promised to shoot the cross off a
church spire, or empty the inkpot into somebody’s beer, or bring home somebody’s ears in their pocket for the pleasure of their families, I think in these cases they would feel a sort of a shadow of what civilised men feel in the fulfilment of a promise, as distinct from the making of it. And, in consideration of such cases, I cannot go the whole length of those severe critics who say that a Prussian will never keep his promise.

Unfortunately, it is precisely this sort of actuality and fulfilment that makes it urgent that Europe should put forth her whole energy to drag down these antique demoniacs; these idiots filled with force as by fiends. They will do things, as a maniac will, until he cannot do them. To me it seemed that some things could not be said and done. I thought a man would have been ashamed to bribe a new enemy like England to betray an old enemy like France. I thought a man would have been ashamed to punish the pure self-defence of folk so offenceless as the Belgians. These hopes must go from us, my friend. There is only one thing of which the Prussian would be ashamed; and of that, we have sworn to God, he shall taste before the end.

My Dear—The Prussianised German, of whatever blend of races he may be, has one quality which may perhaps be racially simple; but which is, at any rate, very plain. Chamberlain, the German philosopher or historian (I know not which to call him or how to call him either) remarks somewhere that purebred races possess fidelity; he instances the negro and the dog—and, I suppose, the German. Anyhow, it is true that there is a recognisable and real thing which might be called fidelity (or perhaps monotony) which exists in Germans in about the same style as in dogs and niggers. The North Teuton really has in this respect the simplicities of the savage and the lower animals; that he has no reactions. He does not laugh at himself. He does not want to kick himself. He does not, like most of us, repent—or occasionally even repent of repenting. He does not read his own works and find them much worse or much better than he had expected. He does not feel a faint irrational sense of debauch, after even divine pleasures of this life. Watch him at a German restaurant, and you will satisfy yourself that he does not. In short, both in the most scientific and in the most casual sense of the word, he does not know what it is to have a temper. He does not bend and fly back like steel; he sticks out, like wood. In this he differs from any nation I have known, from your nation and mine, from the French, the Spanish, the Scotch, the Welsh and the Irish. Bad luck never braces him as it does us. Good luck never frightens him as it does us. It can be seen in what the French call Chauvinism and we call Jingoism. For us it is fireworks; for him it is daylight. On Mafeking
Night, celebrating a small but picturesque success against the Boers, nearly everybody in London came out waving little flags. Nearly everybody in London is now heartily ashamed of it. But it would never occur to the Prussians not to ride their high horses with the freshest insolence for the far-off victory of Sedan; though on that very anniversary the star of their fate had turned scornful in the sky, and Von Kluck was in retreat from Paris. Above all, the Prussian does not feel annoyed, as I do, when foreigners praise his country for all the wrong reasons. The Prussian will allow you to praise him for any reasons, for any length of time, for any eternity of folly; he is there to be praised. Probably he is proud of this; probably he thinks he has a good digestion, because the poison of praise does not make him sick. He thinks the absence of such doubt, or self-knowledge, makes for composure, grandeur, a colossal calm, a superior race—in short, the whole claim of the Teutons to be the highest spiritual product of Nature and Evolution. But as I have noticed a calm unity even more complete, not only in dogs and negroes, but in slugs, slow-worms, mangoldwurzels, moss, mud and bits of stone, I am a sceptic about this test for the marshalling in rank of all the children of God. Now I point this out to you here for a very practical reason. The Prussian will never understand revolutions—which are generally reactions. He regards them, not only with dislike, but with a mysterious kind of pity. Throughout his confused popular histories, there runs a strange suggestion that civic populations have failed hitherto, and failed because they were always fighting. The population of Berlin does not fight, or can’t; and therefore Berlin will succeed where Greece and Rome have failed. Hitherto it is plain enough that Berlin has succeeded in nothing except in bad copies of Greece and Rome; and Prussians would be wiser to discuss the details of the Greek and Roman past, which we can follow, rather than the details of their own future, about which we are naturally not so well informed. Well, every dome they build, every pillar they put upright, every pedestal for epitaph or panel for decoration, every type of church, Catholic or Protestant, every kind of street, large or small, they have copied from the old Pagan or Catholic cities; and those cities, when they made those things, were boiling with revolutions. I remember a German professor saying to me, “I should have no scruple about extinguishing such republics as Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua; they are perpetually rioting for one thing or another.” I said I supposed he would have had no scruple in extinguishing Athens, Rome, Florence and Paris; for they were always rioting for one thing or another. His reply indicated, I thought, that he felt about Cæsar or Rienzi very much as the Scotch Presbyterian Minister felt about Christ, when he was
reminded of the corn-plucking on the Sabbath, and said, “Weel, I dinna think the better of him.” In other words he was quite positive, like all his countrymen, that he could impose a sort of Pax Germanica, which would satisfy all the needs of order and of freedom forever; leaving no need for revolutions or reactions. I am myself of a different opinion. When I was a child, when the toy-trade of Germany had begun to flood this country, there was a priggish British couplet, engraven on the minds of governesses, which ran—What the German children delight to make

The English children delight to break.

I can answer for the delight of the English children; a just and godlike delight. I am not so sure about the delight of the German children, when they were caught in the infernal wheels of the modern civilisation of factories. But, for the present, I am only concerned to say that I do not accept this line of historical division. I do not think history supports the view that those who could break things could not make them.

This is the least intrusive approach by which I can touch on a topic that must of necessity be a delicate one; yet which may well be a difficulty among Latins like yourself. Against this preposterous Prussian upstart we have not only to protect our unity; we have even to protect our quarrels. And the deepest of the reactions or revolts of which I have spoken is the quarrel which (very tragically as I think) has for some hundred years cloven the Christian from the Liberal ideal. It would ill become me, in whose country there is neither such clear doctrine nor such combative democracy, to suppose it can be easy for any of you to close up such sacred wounds. There must still be Catholics who feel they can never forgive a Jacobin. There must still be old Republicans who feel that they could never endure a priest. And yet there is something, the mere sight of which should lock them both in an instant alliance. They have only to look northward and hold the third thing, which thinks itself superior to either: the enormous turnip-face of ce type là, as the French say, who conceives that he can make them both like himself and yet remain superior to both.

I implore you to keep out of the hands of this Fool the quarrel of the great saints and of the great blasphemers. He will do to religion what he will do to art; mix up all the colours on your palette into the colour of mud: and then say that only the purified eyes of Teutons can see that it is pure white. The other day the Director of Museums in Berlin was said to be setting about the creation of a new kind of Art: German Art. Philosophers and men of science were at the same time directed to meet round the table and found a new Religion: German Religion.
How can such people appreciate art; how can they appreciate religion—nay, how can they appreciate irreligion? How does one invent a message? How does one create a Creator? Is it not the plain meaning of the Gospel that it is good news? And is it not the plain meaning of good news that it must come from outside oneself? Otherwise I could make myself happy this moment, by inventing an enormous victory in Flanders. And I suppose (now I come to think of it) that the Germans do.

By the fulness of your faith and even the fulness of your despair, you that remember Rome, have earned a right to prevent all our quarrels being quenched in such cold water from the north. But it is not too much to say that neither religion at its worst nor republicanism at its worst ever offered the coarse insult to all mankind that is offered by this new and nakedly universal monarchy.

There has always been something common to civilised men, whether they called it being merely a citizen; or being merely a sinner. There has always been something which your ancestors called Verecundia; which is at once humility and dignity. Whatever our faults, we do not do exactly as the Prussians do. We do not bellow day and night to draw attention to our own stern silence. We do not praise ourselves solely because nobody else will praise us. I, for one, say at the end of these letters, as I said at the beginning; that in these international matters I have often differed from my countrymen; I have often differed from myself. I shall not claim the completeness of this silly creature we discuss. I shall not answer his boasts with boasts; but with blows.

My front-door is beaten in and broken down suddenly. I see nothing outside, except a sort of smiling, straw-haired commercial traveller with a notebook open, who says, “Excuse me, I am a faultless being, I have persuaded Poland; I can count on my respectful Allies in Alsace. I am simply loved in Lorraine. Quae reggio in terris... What place is there on earth where the name of Prussia is not the signal for hopeful prayers and joyful dances? I am that German who has civilised Belgium; and delicately trimmed the frontiers of Denmark. And I may tell you, with the fulness of conviction, that I have never failed, and shall never fail in anything. Permit me, therefore, to bless your house by the passage of my beautiful boots; that I may burgle the house next door.”

And then something European that is prouder than pride will rise up in me; and I shall answer:—“I am that Englishman who has tortured Ireland, who has been tortured by South Africa; who knows all his mistakes, who is heavy with all his sins. And he tells you, Faultless Being, with a truth as deep as his own guilt,
and as deathless as his own remembrance, that you shall not pass this way.”
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

THE CRIMES OF ENGLAND

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I
SOME WORDS TO PROFESSOR WHIRLWIND

CHAPTER II
THE PROTESTANT HERO

CHAPTER III
THE ENIGMA OF WATERLOO

CHAPTER IV
THE COMING OF THE JANISSARIES

CHAPTER V
THE LOST ENGLAND

CHAPTER VI
HAMLET AND THE DANES

CHAPTER VII
THE MIDNIGHT OF EUROPE

CHAPTER VIII
THE WRONG HORSE

CHAPTER IX
THE AWAKENING OF ENGLAND

CHAPTER X
THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

NOTE ON THE WORD “ENGLISH”
CHAPTER I

SOME WORDS TO PROFESSOR WHIRLWIND


DEAR PROFESSOR WHIRLWIND,

Your name in the original German is too much for me; and this is the nearest I propose to get to it: but under the majestic image of pure wind marching in a movement wholly circular I seem to see, as in a vision, something of your mind. But the grand isolation of your thoughts leads you to express them in such words as are gratifying to yourself, and have an inconspicuous or even an unfortunate effect upon others. If anything were really to be made of your moral campaign against the English nation, it was clearly necessary that somebody, if it were only an Englishman, should show you how to leave off professing philosophy and begin to practise it. I have therefore sold myself into the Prussian service, and in return for a cast-off suit of the Emperor’s clothes (the uniform of an English midshipman), a German hausfrau’s recipe for poison gas, two penny cigars, and twenty-five Iron Crosses, I have consented to instruct you in the rudiments of international controversy. Of this part of my task I have here little to say that is not covered by a general adjuration to you to observe certain elementary rules. They are, roughly speaking, as follows:—First, stick to one excuse. Thus if a tradesman, with whom your social relations are slight, should chance to find you toying with the coppers in his till, you may possibly explain that you are interested in Numismatics and are a Collector of Coins; and he may possibly believe you. But if you tell him afterwards that you pitied him for being overloaded with unwieldy copper discs, and were in the act of replacing them by a silver sixpence of your own, this further explanation, so far from increasing his confidence in your motives, will (strangely enough) actually decrease it. And if you are so unwise as to be struck by yet another brilliant idea, and tell him that the pennies were all bad pennies, which you were concealing to save him from a
police prosecution for coining, the tradesman may even be so wayward as to institute a police prosecution himself. Now this is not in any way an exaggeration of the way in which you have knocked the bottom out of any case you may ever conceivably have had in such matters as the sinking of the Lusitania. With my own eyes I have seen the following explanations, apparently proceeding from your pen, (i) that the ship was a troop-ship carrying soldiers from Canada; (ii) that if it wasn’t, it was a merchant-ship unlawfully carrying munitions for the soldiers in France; (iii) that, as the passengers on the ship had been warned in an advertisement, Germany was justified in blowing them to the moon; (iv) that there were guns, and the ship had to be torpedoed because the English captain was just going to fire them off; (v) that the English or American authorities, by throwing the Lusitania at the heads of the German commanders, subjected them to an insupportable temptation; which was apparently somehow demonstrated or intensified by the fact that the ship came up to schedule time, there being some mysterious principle by which having tea at tea-time justifies poisoning the tea; (vi) that the ship was not sunk by the Germans at all but by the English, the English captain having deliberately tried to drown himself and some thousand of his own countrymen in order to cause an exchange of stiff notes between Mr. Wilson and the Kaiser. If this interesting story be true, I can only say that such frantic and suicidal devotion to the most remote interests of his country almost earns the captain pardon for the crime. But do you not see, my dear Professor, that the very richness and variety of your inventive genius throws a doubt upon each explanation when considered in itself? We who read you in England reach a condition of mind in which it no longer very much matters what explanation you offer, or whether you offer any at all. We are prepared to hear that you sank the Lusitania because the sea-born sons of England would live more happily as deep-sea fishes, or that every person on board was coming home to be hanged. You have explained yourself so completely, in this clear way, to the Italians that they have declared war on you, and if you go on explaining yourself so clearly to the Americans they may quite possibly do the same.

Second, when telling such lies as may seem necessary to your international standing, do not tell the lies to the people who know the truth. Do not tell the Eskimos that snow is bright green; nor tell the negroes in Africa that the sun never shines in that Dark Continent. Rather tell the Eskimos that the sun never shines in Africa; and then, turning to the tropical Africans, see if they will believe that snow is green. Similarly, the course indicated for you is to slander the Russians to the English and the English to the Russians; and there are
hundreds of good old reliable slanders which can still be used against both of them. There are probably still Russians who believe that every English gentleman puts a rope round his wife’s neck and sells her in Smithfield. There are certainly still Englishmen who believe that every Russian gentleman takes a rope to his wife’s back and whips her every day. But these stories, picturesque and useful as they are, have a limit to their use like everything else; and the limit consists in the fact that they are not true, and that there necessarily exists a group of persons who know they are not true. It is so with matters of fact about which you asseverate so positively to us, as if they were matters of opinion. Scarborough might be a fortress; but it is not. I happen to know it is not. Mr. Morel may deserve to be universally admired in England; but he is not universally admired in England. Tell the Russians that he is by all means; but do not tell us. We have seen him; we have also seen Scarborough. You should think of this before you speak.

Third, don’t perpetually boast that you are cultured in language which proves that you are not. You claim to thrust yourself upon everybody on the ground that you are stuffed with wit and wisdom, and have enough for the whole world. But people who have wit enough for the whole world, have wit enough for a whole newspaper paragraph. And you can seldom get through even a whole paragraph without being monotonous, or irrelevant, or unintelligible, or self-contradictory, or broken-minded generally. If you have something to teach us, teach it to us now. If you propose to convert us after you have conquered us, why not convert us before you have conquered us? As it is, we cannot believe what you say about your superior education because of the way in which you say it. If an Englishman says, “I don’t make no mistakes in English, not me,” we can understand his remark; but we cannot endorse it. To say, “Je parler le Frenche language, non demi,” is comprehensible, but not convincing. And when you say, as you did in a recent appeal to the Americans, that the Germanic Powers have sacrificed a great deal of “red fluid” in defence of their culture, we point out to you that cultured people do not employ such a literary style. Or when you say that the Belgians were so ignorant as to think they were being butchered when they weren’t, we only wonder whether you are so ignorant as to think you are being believed when you aren’t. Thus, for instance, when you brag about burning Venice to express your contempt for “tourists,” we cannot think much of the culture, as culture, which supposes St. Mark’s to be a thing for tourists instead of historians. This, however, would be the least part of our unfavourable judgment. That judgment is complete when we have read such a paragraph as
this, prominently displayed in a paper in which you specially spread yourself: “That the Italians have a perfect knowledge of the fact that this city of antiquities and tourists is subject, and rightly subject, to attack and bombardment, is proved by the measures they took at the beginning of the war to remove some of their greatest art treasures.” Now culture may or may not include the power to admire antiquities, and to restrain oneself from the pleasure of breaking them like toys. But culture does, presumably, include the power to think. For less laborious intellects than your own it is generally sufficient to think once. But if you will think twice or twenty times, it cannot but dawn on you that there is something wrong in the reasoning by which the placing of diamonds in a safe proves that they are “rightly subject” to a burglar. The incessant assertion of such things can do little to spread your superior culture; and if you say them too often people may even begin to doubt whether you have any superior culture after all. The earnest friend now advising you cannot but grieve at such incautious garrulity. If you confined yourself to single words, uttered at intervals of about a month or so, no one could possibly raise any rational objection, or subject them to any rational criticism. In time you might come to use whole sentences without revealing the real state of things.

Through neglect of these maxims, my dear Professor, every one of your attacks upon England has gone wide. In pure fact they have not touched the spot, which the real critics of England know to be a very vulnerable spot. We have a real critic of England in Mr. Bernard Shaw, whose name you parade but apparently cannot spell; for in the paper to which I have referred he is called Mr. Bernhard Shaw. Perhaps you think he and Bernhardi are the same man. But if you quoted Mr. Bernard Shaw’s statement instead of misquoting his name, you would find that his criticism of England is exactly the opposite of your own; and naturally, for it is a rational criticism. He does not blame England for being against Germany. He does most definitely blame England for not being sufficiently firmly and emphatically on the side of Russia. He is not such a fool as to accuse Sir Edward Grey of being a fiendish Machiavelli plotting against Germany; he accuses him of being an amiable aristocratic stick who failed to frighten the Junkers from their plan of war. Now, it is not in the least a question of whether we happen to like this quality or that: Mr. Shaw, I rather fancy, would dislike such verbose compromise more than downright plotting. It is simply the fact that Englishmen like Grey are open to Mr. Shaw’s attack and are not open to yours. It is not true that the English were sufficiently clearheaded or self-controlled to conspire for the destruction of Germany. Any man who knows
England, any man who hates England as one hates a living thing, will tell you it is not true. The English may be snobs, they may be plutocrats, they may be hypocrites, but they are not, as a fact, plotters; and I gravely doubt whether they could be if they wanted to. The mass of the people are perfectly incapable of plotting at all, and if the small ring of rich people who finance our politics were plotting for anything, it was for peace at almost any price. Any Londoner who knows the London streets and newspapers as he knows the Nelson column or the Inner Circle, knows that there were men in the governing class and in the Cabinet who were literally thirsting to defend Germany until Germany, by her own act, became indefensible. If they said nothing in support of the tearing up of the promise of peace to Belgium, it is simply because there was nothing to be said.

You were the first people to talk about World-Politics; and the first people to disregard them altogether. Even your foreign policy is domestic policy. It does not even apply to any people who are not Germans; and of your wild guesses about some twenty other peoples, not one has gone right even by accident. Your two or three shots at my own not immaculate land have been such that you would have been much nearer the truth if you had tried to invade England by crossing the Caucasus, or to discover England among the South Sea Islands. With your first delusion, that our courage was calculated and malignant when in truth our very corruption was timid and confused, I have already dealt. The case is the same with your second favourite phrase; that the British army is mercenary. You learnt it in books and not in battlefields; and I should like to be present at a scene in which you tried to bribe the most miserable little loafer in Hammersmith as if he were a cynical condottiere selling his spear to some foreign city. It is not the fact, my dear sir. You have been misinformed. The British Army is not at this moment a hireling army any more than it is a conscript army. It is a volunteer army in the strict sense of the word; nor do I object to your calling it an amateur army. There is no compulsion, and there is next to no pay. It is at this moment drawn from every class of the community, and there are very few classes which would not earn a little more money in their ordinary trades. It numbers very nearly as many men as it would if it were a conscript army; that is with the necessary margin of men unable to serve or needed to serve otherwise. Ours is a country in which that democratic spirit which is common to Christendom is rather unusually sluggish and far below the surface. And the most genuine and purely popular movement that we have had since the Chartists has been the enlistment for this war. By all means say that
such vague and sentimental volunteering is valueless in war if you think so; or even if you don’t think so. By all means say that Germany is unconquerable and that we cannot really kill you. But if you say that we do not really want to kill you, you do us an injustice. You do indeed.

I need not consider the yet crazier things that some of you have said; as that the English intend to keep Calais and fight France as well as Germany for the privilege of purchasing a frontier and the need to keep a conscript army. That, also, is out of books, and pretty mouldy old books at that. It was said, I suppose, to gain sympathy among the French, and is therefore not my immediate business, as they are eminently capable of looking after themselves. I merely drop one word in passing, lest you waste your powerful intellect on such projects. The English may some day forgive you; the French never will. You Teutons are too light and fickle to understand the Latin seriousness. My only concern is to point out that about England, at least, you are invariably and miraculously wrong.

Now speaking seriously, my dear Professor, it will not do. It could be easy to fence with you for ever and parry every point you attempt to make, until English people began to think there was nothing wrong with England at all. But I refuse to play for safety in this way. There is a very great deal that is really wrong with England, and it ought not to be forgotten even in the full blaze of your marvellous mistakes. I cannot have my countrymen tempted to those pleasures of intellectual pride which are the result of comparing themselves with you. The deep collapse and yawning chasm of your ineptitude leaves me upon a perilous spiritual elevation. Your mistakes are matters of fact; but to enumerate them does not exhaust the truth. For instance, the learned man who rendered the phrase in an English advertisement “cut you dead” as “hack you to death,” was in error; but to say that many such advertisements are vulgar is not an error. Again, it is true that the English poor are harried and insecure, with insufficient instinct for armed revolt, though you will be wrong if you say that they are occupied literally in shooting the moon. It is true that the average Englishman is too much attracted by aristocratic society; though you will be in error if you quote dining with Duke Humphrey as an example of it. In more ways than one you forget what is meant by idiom.

I have therefore thought it advisable to provide you with a catalogue of the real crimes of England; and I have selected them on a principle which cannot fail to interest and please you. On many occasions we have been very wrong indeed. We were very wrong indeed when we took part in preventing Europe from putting a term to the impious piracies of Frederick the Great.
wrong indeed when we allowed the triumph over Napoleon to be soiled with the
mire and blood of Blucher’s sullen savages. We were very wrong indeed when
we allowed the peaceful King of Denmark to be robbed in broad daylight by a
brigand named Bismarck; and when we allowed the Prussian swashbucklers to
enslave and silence the French provinces which they could neither govern nor
persuade. We were very wrong indeed when we flung to such hungry
adventurers a position so important as Heligoland. We were very wrong indeed
when we praised the soulless Prussian education and copied the soulless
Prussian laws. Knowing that you will mingle your tears with mine over this
record of English wrong-doing, I dedicate it to you, and I remain,
  Yours reverently,
  G. K. CHESTERTON
CHAPTER II

THE PROTESTANT HERO

SUITABLE FINALE FOR THE GERMAN EMPEROR—FREDERICK II.
AND THE POWER OF FEAR—GERMAN INFLUENCE IN ENGLAND SINCE LATHER—OUR GERMAN KINGS AND ALLIES—TRIUMPH OF FREDERICK THE GREAT.

A question is current in our looser English journalism touching what should be done with the German Emperor after a victory of the Allies. Our more feminine advisers incline to the view that he should be shot. This is to make a mistake about the very nature of hereditary monarchy. Assuredly the Emperor William at his worst would be entitled to say to his amiable Crown Prince what Charles II. said when his brother warned him of the plots of assassins: “They will never kill me to make you king.” Others, of greater monstrosity of mind, have suggested that he should be sent to St. Helena. So far as an estimate of his historical importance goes, he might as well be sent to Mount Calvary. What we have to deal with is an elderly, nervous, not unintelligent person who happens to be a Hohenzollern; and who, to do him justice, does think more of the Hohenzollerns as a sacred caste than of his own particular place in it. In such families the old boast and motto of hereditary kingship has a horrible and degenerate truth. The king never dies; he only decays for ever.

If it were a matter of the smallest importance what happened to the Emperor William when once his house had been disarmed, I should satisfy my fancy with another picture of his declining years; a conclusion that would be peaceful, humane, harmonious, and forgiving.

In various parts of the lanes and villages of South England the pedestrian will come upon an old and quiet public-house, decorated with a dark and faded portrait in a cocked hat and the singular inscription, “The King of Prussia.” These inn signs probably commemorate the visit of the Allies after 1815, though a great part of the English middle classes may well have connected them with the time when Frederick II. was earning his title of the Great, along with a number of other territorial titles to which he had considerably less claim. Sincere and simple-hearted Dissenting ministers would dismount before that sign (for in those days Dissenters drank beer like Christians, and indeed manufactured most
of it) and would pledge the old valour and the old victory of him whom they
called the Protestant Hero. We should be using every word with literal
exactitude if we said that he was really something devilish like a hero. Whether
he was a Protestant hero or not can be decided best by those who have read the
correspondence of a writer calling himself Voltaire, who was quite shocked at
Frederick’s utter lack of religion of any kind. But the little Dissenter drank his
beer in all innocence and rode on. And the great blasphemer of Potsdam would
have laughed had he known; it was a jest after his own heart. Such was the jest
he made when he called upon the emperors to come to communion, and partake
of the eucharistic body of Poland. Had he been such a Bible reader as the
Dissenter doubtless thought him, he might haply have foreseen the vengeance of
humanity upon his house. He might have known what Poland was and was yet to
be; he might have known that he ate and drank to his damnation, discerning not
the body of God.

Whether the placing of the present German Emperor in charge of one of these
wayside public-houses would be a jest after his own heart possibly remains to be
seen. But it would be much more melodious and fitting an end than any of the
sublime euthanasias which his enemies provide for him. That old sign creaking
above him as he sat on the bench outside his home of exile would be a much
more genuine memory of the real greatness of his race than the modern and
almost gimcrack stars and garters that were pulled in Windsor Chapel. From
modern knighthood has departed all shadow of chivalry; how far we have
travelled from it can easily be tested by the mere suggestion that Sir Thomas
Lipton, let us say, should wear his lady’s sleeve round his hat or should watch
his armour in the Chapel of St. Thomas of Canterbury. The giving and receiving
of the Garter among despots and diplomatists is now only part of that sort of
pottering mutual politeness which keeps the peace in an insecure and insincere
state of society. But that old blackened wooden sign is at least and after all the
sign of something; the sign of the time when one solitary Hohenzollern did not
only set fire to fields and cities, but did truly set on fire the minds of men, even
though it were fire from hell.

Everything was young once, even Frederick the Great. It was an appropriate
preface to the terrible epic of Prussia that it began with an unnatural tragedy of
the loss of youth. That blind and narrow savage who was the boy’s father had
just sufficient difficulty in stamping out every trace of decency in him, to show
that some such traces must have been there. If the younger and greater Frederick
ever had a heart, it was a broken heart; broken by the same blow that broke his
flute. When his only friend was executed before his eyes, there were two corpses to be borne away; and one to be borne on a high war-horse through victory after victory: but with a small bottle of poison in the pocket. It is not irrelevant thus to pause upon the high and dark house of his childhood. For the peculiar quality which marks out Prussian arms and ambitions from all others of the kind consists in this wrinkled and premature antiquity. There is something comparatively boyish about the triumphs of all the other tyrants. There was something better than ambition in the beauty and ardour of the young Napoleon. He was at least a lover; and his first campaign was like a love-story. All that was pagan in him worshipped the Republic as men worship a woman, and all that was Catholic in him understood the paradox of Our Lady of Victories. Henry VIII., a far less reputable person, was in his early days a good knight of the later and more florid school of chivalry; we might almost say that he was a fine old English gentleman so long as he was young. Even Nero was loved in his first days: and there must have been some cause to make that Christian maiden cast flowers on his dishonourable grave. But the spirit of the great Hohenzollern smelt from the first of the charnel. He came out to his first victory like one broken by defeats; his strength was stripped to the bone and fearful as a fleshless resurrection; for the worst of what could come had already befallen him. The very construction of his kingship was built upon the destruction of his manhood. He had known the final shame; his soul had surrendered to force. He could not redress that wrong; he could only repeat it and repay it. He could make the souls of his soldiers surrender to his gibbet and his whipping-post; he could ‘make the souls of the nations surrender to his soldiers. He could only break men in as he had been broken; while he could break in, he could never break out. He could not slay in anger, nor even sin with simplicity. Thus he stands alone among the conquerors of their kind; his madness was not due to a mere misdirection of courage. Before the whisper of war had come to him the foundations of his audacity had been laid in fear.

Of the work he did in this world there need be no considerable debate. It was romantic, if it be romantic that the dragon should swallow St. George. He turned a small country into a great one: he made a new diplomacy by the fulness and far-flung daring of his lies: he took away from criminality all reproach of carelessness and incompleteness. He achieved an amiable combination of thrift and theft. He undoubtedly gave to stark plunder something of the solidity of property. He protected whatever he stole as simpler men protect whatever they have earned or inherited. He turned his hollow eyes with a sort of loathsome
affection upon the territories which had most reluctantly become his: at the end of the Seven Years’ War men knew as little how he was to be turned out of Silesia as they knew why he had ever been allowed in it. In Poland, like a devil in possession, he tore asunder the body he inhabited; but it was long before any man dreamed that such disjected limbs could live again. Nor were the effects of his break from Christian tradition confined to Christendom; Macaulay’s world-wide generalisation is very true though very Macaulayese. But though, in a long view, he scattered the seeds of war all over the world, his own last days were passed in a long and comparatively prosperous peace; a peace which received and perhaps deserved a certain praise: a peace with which many European peoples were content. For though he did not understand justice, he could understand moderation. He was the most genuine and the most wicked of pacifists. He did not want any more wars. He had tortured and beggared all his neighbours; but he bore them no malice for it.

The immediate cause of that spirited disaster, the intervention of England on behalf of the new Hohenzollern throne, was due, of course, to the national policy of the first William Pitt. He was the kind of man whose vanity and simplicity are too easily overwhelmed by the obvious. He saw nothing in a European crisis except a war with France; and nothing in a war with France except a repetition of the rather fruitless glories of Agincourt and Malplaquet. He was of the Erastian Whigs, sceptical but still healthy-minded, and neither good enough nor bad enough to understand that even the war of that irreligious age was ultimately a religious war. He had not a shade of irony in his whole being; and beside Frederick, already as old as sin, he was like a rather brilliant schoolboy.

But the direct causes were not the only causes, nor the true ones. The true causes were connected with the triumph of one of the two traditions which had long been struggling in England. And it is pathetic to record that the foreign tradition was then represented by two of the ablest men of that age, Frederick of Prussia and Pitt; while what was really the old English tradition was represented by two of the stupidest men that mankind ever tolerated in any age, George III. and Lord Bute. Bute was the figurehead of a group of Tories who set about fulfilling the fine if fanciful scheme for a democratic monarchy sketched by Bolingbroke in “The Patriot King.” It was bent in all sincerity on bringing men’s minds back to what are called domestic affairs, affairs as domestic as George III. It might have arrested the advancing corruption of Parliaments and enclosure of country-sides, by turning men’s minds from the foreign glories of the great Whigs like Churchill and Chatham; and one of its first acts was to terminate the
alliance with Prussia. Unfortunately, whatever was picturesque in the piracy of Potsdam was beyond the imagination of Windsor. But whatever was prosaic in Potsdam was already established at Windsor; the economy of cold mutton, the heavy-handed taste in the arts, and the strange northern blend of boorishness with etiquette. If Bolingbroke’s ideas had been applied by a spirited person, by a Stuart, for example, or even by Queen Elizabeth (who had real spirit along with her extraordinary vulgarity), the national soul might have broken free from its new northern chains. But it was the irony of the situation that the King to whom Tories appealed as a refuge from Germanism was himself a German.

We have thus to refer the origins of the German influence in England back to the beginning of the Hanoverian Succession; and thence back to the quarrel between the King and the lawyers which had issue at Naseby; and thence again to the angry exit of Henry VIII. from the mediaeval council of Europe. It is easy to exaggerate the part played in the matter by that great and human, though very pagan person, Martin Luther. Henry VIII. was sincere in his hatred for the heresies of the German monk, for in speculative opinions Henry was wholly Catholic; and the two wrote against each other innumerable pages, largely consisting of terms of abuse, which were pretty well deserved on both sides. But Luther was not a Lutheran. He was a sign of the break-up of Catholicism; but he was not a builder of Protestantism. The countries which became corporately and democratically Protestant, Scotland, for instance, and Holland, followed Calvin and not Luther. And Calvin was a Frenchman; an unpleasant Frenchman, it is true, but one full of that French capacity for creating official entities which can really act, and have a kind of impersonal personality, such as the French Monarchy or the Terror. Luther was an anarchist, and therefore a dreamer. He made that which is, perhaps, in the long run, the fullest and most shining manifestation of failure; he made a name. Calvin made an active, governing, persecuting thing, called the Kirk. There is something expressive of him in the fact that he called even his work of abstract theology “The Institutes.”

In England, however, there were elements of chaos more akin to Luther than to Calvin. And we may thus explain many things which appear rather puzzling in our history, notably the victory of Cromwell not only over the English Royalists but over the Scotch Covenanters. It was the victory of that more happy-go-lucky sort of Protestantism, which had in it much of aristocracy but much also of liberty, over that logical ambition of the Kirk which would have made Protestantism, if possible, as constructive as Catholicism had been. It might be called the victory of Individualist Puritanism over Socialist Puritanism. It was
what Milton meant when he said that the new presbyter was an exaggeration of the old priest; it was his office that acted, and acted very harshly. The enemies of the Presbyterians were not without a meaning when they called themselves Independents. To this day no one can understand Scotland who does not realise that it retains much of its mediæval sympathy with France, the French equality, the French pronunciation of Latin, and, strange as it may sound, is in nothing so French as in its Presbyterianism.

In this loose and negative sense only it may be said that the great modern mistakes of England can be traced to Luther. It is true only in this, that both in Germany and England a Protestantism softer and less abstract than Calvinism was found useful to the compromises of courtiers and aristocrats; for every abstract creed does something for human equality. Lutheranism in Germany rapidly became what it is to-day—a religion of court chaplains. The reformed church in England became something better; it became a profession for the younger sons of squires. But these parallel tendencies, in all their strength and weakness, reached, as it were, symbolic culmination when the mediæval monarchy was extinguished, and the English squires gave to what was little more than a German squire the damaged and diminished crown.

It must be remembered that the Germanics were at that time used as a sort of breeding-ground for princes. There is a strange process in history by which things that decay turn into the very opposite of themselves. Thus in England Puritanism began as the hardest of creeds, but has ended as the softest; soft-hearted and not unfrequently soft-headed. Of old the Puritan in war was certainly the Puritan at his best; it was the Puritan in peace whom no Christian could be expected to stand. Yet those Englishmen to-day who claim descent from the great militarists of 1649 express the utmost horror of militarism. An inversion of an opposite kind has taken place in Germany. Out of the country that was once valued as providing a perpetual supply of kings small enough to be stop-gaps, has come the modern menace of the one great king who would swallow the kingdoms of the earth. But the old German kingdoms preserved, and were encouraged to preserve, the good things that go with small interests and strict boundaries, music, etiquette, a dreamy philosophy, and so on. They were small enough to be universal. Their outlook could afford to be in some degree broad and many-sided. They had the impartiality of impotence. All this has been utterly reversed, and we find ourselves at war with a Germany whose powers are the widest and whose outlook is the narrowest in the world.

It is true, of course, that the English squires put themselves over the new
German prince rather than under him. They put the crown on him as an extinguisher. It was part of the plan that the new-comer, though royal, should be almost rustic. Hanover must be one of England’s possessions and not England one of Hanover’s. But the fact that the court became a German court prepared the soil, so to speak; English politics were already subconsciously committed to two centuries of the belittlement of France and the gross exaggeration of Germany. The period can be symbolically marked out by Carteret, proud of talking German at the beginning of the period, and Lord Haldane, proud of talking German at the end of it. Culture is already almost beginning to be spelt with a k. But all such pacific and only slowly growing Teutonism was brought to a crisis and a decision when the voice of Pitt called us, like a trumpet, to the rescue of the Protestant Hero.

Among all the monarchs of that faithless age, the nearest to a man was a woman. Maria Theresa of Austria was a German of the more generous sort, limited in a domestic rather than a national sense, firm in the ancient faith at which all her own courtiers were sneering, and as brave as a young lioness. Frederick hated her as he hated everything German and everything good. He sets forth in his own memoirs, with that clearness which adds something almost superhuman to the mysterious vileness of his character, how he calculated on her youth, her inexperience and her lack of friends as proof that she could be despoiled with safety. He invaded Silesia in advance of his own declaration of war (as if he had run on ahead to say it was coming) and this new anarchic trick, combined with the corruptibility of nearly all the other courts, left him after the two Silesian wars in possession of the stolen goods. But Maria Theresa had refused to submit to the immorality of nine points of the law. By appeals and concessions to France, Russia, and other powers, she contrived to create something which, against the atheist innovator even in that atheist age, stood up for an instant like a spectre of the Crusades. Had that Crusade been universal and whole-hearted, the great new precedent of mere force and fraud would have been broken; and the whole appalling judgment which is fallen upon Christendom would have passed us by. But the other Crusaders were only half in earnest for Europe; Frederick was quite in earnest for Prussia; and he sought for allies, by whose aid this weak revival of good might be stamped out, and his adamantine impudence endure for ever. The allies he found were the English. It is not pleasant for an Englishman to have to write the words.

This was the first act of the tragedy, and with it we may leave Frederick, for we are done with the fellow though not with his work. It is enough to add that if
we call all his after actions satanic, it is not a term of abuse, but of theology. He was a Tempter. He dragged the other kings to “partake of the body of Poland,” and learn the meaning of the Black Mass. Poland lay prostrate before three giants in armour, and her name passed into a synonym for failure. The Prussians, with their fine magnanimity, gave lectures on the hereditary maladies of the man they had murdered. They could not conceive of life in those limbs; and the time was far off when they should be undeceived. In that day five nations were to partake not of the body, but of the spirit of Poland; and the trumpet of the resurrection of the peoples should be blown from Warsaw to the western isles.
CHAPTER III

THE ENIGMA OF WATERLOO


That great Englishman Charles Fox, who was as national as Nelson, went to his death with the firm conviction that England had made Napoleon. He did not mean, of course, that any other Italian gunner would have done just as well; but he did mean that by forcing the French back on their guns, as it were, we had made their chief gunner necessarily their chief citizen. Had the French Republic been left alone, it would probably have followed the example of most other ideal experiments; and praised peace along with progress and equality. It would almost certainly have eyed with the coldest suspicion any adventurer who appeared likely to substitute his personality for the pure impersonality of the Sovereign People; and would have considered it the very flower of republican chastity to provide a Brutus for such a Caesar. But if it was undesirable that equality should be threatened by a citizen, it was intolerable that it should be simply forbidden by a foreigner. If France could not put up with French soldiers she would very soon have to put up with Austrian soldiers; and it would be absurd if, having decided to rely on soldiering, she had hampered the best French soldier even on the ground that he was not French. So that whether we regard Napoleon as a hero rushing to the country’s help, or a tyrant profiting by the country’s extremity, it is equally clear that those who made the war made the war-lord; and those who tried to destroy the Republic were those who created the Empire. So, at least, Fox argued against that much less English prig who would have called him unpatriotic; and he threw the blame upon Pitt’s Government for having joined the anti-French alliance, and so tipped up the scale in favour of a military France. But whether he was right or no, he would
have been the readiest to admit that England was not the first to fly at the throat of the young Republic. Something in Europe much vaster and vaguer had from the first stirred against it. What was it then that first made war—and made Napoleon? There is only one possible answer: the Germans. This is the second act of our drama of the degradation of England to the level of Germany. And it has this very important development; that Germany means by this time all the Germans, just as it does to-day. The savagery of Prussia and the stupidity of Austria are now combined. Mercilessness and muddleheadedness are met together; unrighteousness and unreasonableness have kissed each other; and the tempter and the tempted are agreed. The great and good Maria Theresa was already old. She had a son who was a philosopher of the school of Frederick; also a daughter who was more fortunate, for she was guillotined. It was natural, no doubt, that her brother and relatives should disapprove of the incident; but it occurred long after the whole Germanic power had been hurled against the new Republic. Louis XVI. himself was still alive and nominally ruling when the first pressure came from Prussia and Austria, demanding that the trend of the French emancipation should be reversed. It is impossible to deny, therefore, that what the united Germanics were resolved to destroy was the reform and not even the Revolution. The part which Joseph of Austria played in the matter is symbolic. For he was what is called an enlightened despot, which is the worst kind of despot. He was as irreligious as Frederick the Great, but not so disgusting or amusing. The old and kindly Austrian family, of which Maria Theresa was the affectionate mother, and Marie Antoinette the rather uneducated daughter, was already superseded and summed up by a rather dried-up young man self-schooled to a Prussian efficiency. The needle is already veering northward. Prussia is already beginning to be the captain of the Germanics “in shining armour.” Austria is already becoming a loyal sekundant.

But there still remains one great difference between Austria and Prussia which developed more and more as the energy of the young Napoleon was driven like a wedge between them. The difference can be most shortly stated by saying that Austria did, in some blundering and barbaric way, care for Europe; but Prussia cared for nothing but Prussia. Austria is not a nation; you cannot really find Austria on the map. But Austria is a kind of Empire; a Holy Roman Empire that never came, an expanding and contracting-dream. It does feel itself, in a vague patriarchal way, the leader, not of a nation, but of nations. It is like some dying Emperor of Rome in the decline; who should admit that the legions had been withdrawn from Britain or from Parthia, but would feel it as fundamentally
natural that they should have been there, as in Sicily or Southern Gaul. I would not assert that the aged Francis Joseph imagines that he is Emperor of Scotland or of Denmark; but I should guess that he retains some notion that if he did rule both the Scots and the Danes, it would not be more incongruous than his ruling both the Hungarians and the Poles. This cosmopolitanism of Austria has in it a kind of shadow of responsibility for Christendom. And it was this that made the difference between its proceedings and those of the purely selfish adventurer from the north, the wild dog of Pomerania.

It may be believed, as Fox himself came at last to believe, that Napoleon in his latest years was really an enemy to freedom, in the sense that he was an enemy to that very special and occidental form of freedom which we call Nationalism. The resistance of the Spaniards, for instance, was certainly a popular resistance. It had that peculiar, belated, almost secretive strength with which war is made by the people. It was quite easy for a conqueror to get into Spain; his great difficulty was to get out again. It was one of the paradoxes of history that he who had turned the mob into an army, in defence of its rights against the princes, should at last have his army worn down, not by princes but by mobs. It is equally certain that at the other end of Europe, in burning Moscow and on the bridge of the Beresina, he had found the common soul, even as he had found the common sky, his enemy. But all this does not affect the first great lines of the quarrel, which had begun before horsemen in Germanic uniform had waited vainly upon the road to Varennes or had failed upon the miry slope up to the windmill of Valmy. And that duel, on which depended all that our Europe has since become, had great Russia and gallant Spain and our own glorious island only as subordinates or seconds. That duel, first, last, and for ever, was a duel between the Frenchman and the German; that is, between the citizen and the barbarian.

It is not necessary nowadays to defend the French Revolution, it is not necessary to defend even Napoleon, its child and champion, from criticisms in the style of Southey and Alison, which even at the time had more of the atmosphere of Bath and Cheltenham than of Turcoing and Talavera. The French Revolution was attacked because it was democratic and defended because it was democratic; and Napoleon was not feared as the last of the iron despots, but as the first of the iron democrats. What France set out to prove France has proved; not that common men are all angels, or all diplomatists, or all gentlemen (for these inane aristocratic illusions were no part of the Jacobin theory), but that common men can all be citizens and can all be soldiers; that common men can fight and can rule. There is no need to confuse the question with any of those
escapades of a floundering modernism which have made nonsense of this civic common-sense. Some Free Traders have seemed to leave a man no country to fight for; some Free Lovers seem to leave a man no household to rule. But these things have not established themselves either in France or anywhere else. What has been established is not Free Trade or Free Love, but Freedom; and it is nowhere so patriotic or so domestic as in the country from which it came. The poor men of France have not loved the land less because they have shared it. Even the patricians are patriots; and if some honest Royalists or aristocrats are still saying that democracy cannot organise and cannot obey, they are none the less organised by it and obeying it, nobly living or splendidly dead for it, along the line from Switzerland to the sea.

But for Austria, and even more for Russia, there was this to be said; that the French Republican ideal was incomplete, and that they possessed, in a corrupt but still positive and often popular sense, what was needed to complete it. The Czar was not democratic, but he was humanitarian. He was a Christian Pacifist; there is something of the Tolstoyan in every Russian. It is not wholly fanciful to talk of the White Czar: for Russia even destruction has a deathly softness as of snow. Her ideas are often innocent and even childish; like the idea of Peace. The phrase Holy Alliance was a beautiful truth for the Czar, though only a blasphemous jest for his rascally allies, Metternich and Castlereagh. Austria, though she had lately fallen to a somewhat reasonable toying with heathens and heretics of Turkey and Prussia, still retained something of the old Catholic comfort for the soul. Priests still bore witness to that mighty mediaeval institution which even its enemies concede to be a noble nightmare. All their hoary political iniquities had not deprived them of that dignity. If they darkened the sun in heaven, they clothed it with the strong colours of sunrise in garment or gloriole; if they had given men stones for bread, the stones were carved with kindly faces and fascinating tales. If justice counted on their shameful gibbets hundreds of the innocent dead, they could still say that for them death was more hopeful than life for the heathen. If the new daylight discovered their vile tortures, there had lingered in the darkness some dim memory that they were tortures of Purgatory and not, like those which Parisian and Prussian diabolists showed shameless in the sunshine, of naked hell. They claimed a truth not yet disentangled from human nature; for indeed earth is not even earth without heaven, as a landscape is not a landscape without the sky. And in, a universe without God there is not room enough for a man.

It may be held, therefore, that there must in any case have come a conflict
between the old world and the new; if only because the old are often broad, while the young are always narrow. The Church had learnt, not at the end but at the beginning of her centuries, that the funeral of God is always a premature burial. If the bugles of Bonaparte raised the living populace of the passing hour, she could blow that yet more revolutionary trumpet that shall raise all the democracy of the dead. But if we concede that collision was inevitable between the new Republic on the one hand and Holy Russia and the Holy Roman Empire on the other, there remain two great European forces which, in different attitudes and from very different motives, determined the ultimate combination. Neither of them had any tincture of Catholic mysticism. Neither of them had any tincture of Jacobin idealism. Neither of them, therefore, had any real moral reason for being in the war at all. The first was England, and the second was Prussia.

It is very arguable that England must, in any case, have fought to keep her influence on the ports of the North Sea. It is quite equally arguable that if she had been as heartily on the side of the French Revolution as she was at last against it, she could have claimed the same concessions from the other side. It is certain that England had no necessary communion with the arms and tortures of the Continental tyrannies, and that she stood at the parting of the ways. England was indeed an aristocracy, but a liberal one; and the ideas growing in the middle classes were those which had already made America, and were remaking France. The fiercest Jacobins, such as Danton, were deep in the liberal literature of England. The people had no religion to fight for, as in Russia or La Vendée. The parson was no longer a priest, and had long been a small squire. Already that one great blank in our land had made snobbishness the only religion of South England; and turned rich men into a mythology. The effect can be well summed up in that decorous abbreviation by which our rustics speak of “Lady’s Bedstraw,” where they once spoke of “Our Lady’s Bedstraw.” We have dropped the comparatively democratic adjective, and kept the aristocratic noun. South England is still, as it was called in the Middle Ages, a garden; but it is the kind where grow the plants called “lords and ladies.”

We became more and more insular even about our continental conquests; we stood upon our island as if on an anchored ship. We never thought of Nelson at Naples, but only eternally at Trafalgar; and even that Spanish name we managed to pronounce wrong. But even if we regard the first attack upon Napoleon as a national necessity, the general trend remains true. It only changes the tale from a tragedy of choice to a tragedy of chance. And the tragedy was that, for a second time, we were at one with the Germans.
But if England had nothing to fight for but a compromise, Prussia had nothing to fight for but a negation. She was and is, in the supreme sense, the spirit that denies. It is as certain that she was fighting against liberty in Napoleon as it is that she was fighting against religion in Maria Theresa. What she was fighting for she would have found it quite impossible to tell you. At the best, it was for Prussia; if it was anything else, it was tyranny. She cringed to Napoleon when he beat her, and only joined in the chase when braver people had beaten him. She professed to restore the Bourbons, and tried to rob them while she was restoring them. For her own hand she would have wrecked the Restoration with the Revolution. Alone in all that agony of peoples, she had not the star of one solitary ideal to light the night of her nihilism.

The French Revolution has a quality which all men feel; and which may be called a sudden antiquity. Its classicalism was not altogether a cant. When it had happened it seemed to have happened thousands of years ago. It spoke in parables; in the hammering of spears and the awful cap of Phrygia. To some it seemed to pass like a vision; and yet it seemed eternal as a group of statuary. One almost thought of its most strenuous figures as naked. It is always with a shock of comicality that we remember that its date was so recent that umbrellas were fashionable and top-hats beginning to be tried. And it is a curious fact, giving a kind of completeness to this sense of the thing as something that happened outside the world, that its first great act of arms and also its last were both primarily symbols; and but for this visionary character, were in a manner vain. It began with the taking of the old and almost empty prison called the Bastille; and we always think of it as the beginning of the Revolution, though the real Revolution did not come till some time after. And it ended when Wellington and Blucher met in 1815; and we always think of it as the end of Napoleon; though Napoleon had really fallen before. And the popular imagery is right, as it generally is in such things: for the mob is an artist, though not a man of science. The riot of the 14th of July did not specially deliver prisoners inside the Bastille, but it did deliver the prisoners outside. Napoleon when he returned was indeed a revenant, that is, a ghost. But Waterloo was all the more final in that it was a spectral resurrection and a second death. And in this second case there were other elements that were yet more strangely symbolic. That doubtful and double battle before Waterloo was like the dual personality in a dream. It corresponded curiously to the double mind of the Englishman. We connect Quatre Bras with things romantically English to the verge of sentimentalism, with Byron and “The Black Brunswicker.” We naturally sympathise with Wellington against Ney. We
do not sympathise, and even then we did not really sympathise, with Blucher against Napoleon. Germany has complained that we passed over lightly the presence of Prussians at the decisive action. And well we might. Even at the time our sentiment was not solely jealousy, but very largely shame. Wellington, the grimmest and even the most unamiable of Tories, with no French sympathies and not enough human ones, has recorded his opinion of his Prussian allies in terms of curt disgust. Peel, the primmest and most snobbish Tory that ever praised “our gallant Allies” in a frigid official speech, could not contain himself about the conduct of Blucher’s men. Our middle classes did well to adorn their parlours with the picture of the “Meeting of Wellington and Blucher.” They should have hung up a companion piece of Pilate and Herod shaking hands. Then, after that meeting amid the ashes of Hougomont, where they dreamed they had trodden out the embers of all democracy, the Prussians rode on before, doing after their kind. After them went that ironical aristocrat out of embittered Ireland, with what thoughts we know; and Blucher, with what thoughts we care not; and his soldiers entered Paris, and stole the sword of Joan of Arc.
CHAPTER IV

THE COMING OF THE JANISSARIES


The late Lord Salisbury, a sad and humorous man, made many public and serious remarks that have been proved false and perilous, and many private and frivolous remarks which were valuable and ought to be immortal. He struck dead the stiff and false psychology of “social reform,” with its suggestion that the number of public-houses made people drunk, by saying that there were a number of bedrooms at Hatfield, but they never made him sleepy. Because of this it is possible to forgive him for having talked about “living and dying nations”: though it is of such sayings that living nations die. In the same spirit he included the nation of Ireland in the “Celtic fringe” upon the west of England. It seems sufficient to remark that the fringe is considerably broader than the garment. But the fearful satire of time has very sufficiently avenged the Irish nation upon him, largely by the instrumentality of another fragment of the British robe which he cast away almost contemptuously in the North Sea. The name of it is Heligoland; and he gave it to the Germans.

The subsequent history of the two islands on either side of England has been sufficiently ironical. If Lord Salisbury had foreseen exactly what would happen to Heligoland, as well as to Ireland, he might well have found no sleep at Hatfield in one bedroom or a hundred. In the eastern isle he was strengthening a fortress that would one day be called upon to destroy us. In the western isle he was weakening a fortress that would one day be called upon to save us. In that day his trusted ally, William Hohenzollern, was to batter our ships and boats from the Bight of Heligoland; and in that day his old and once-imprisoned enemy, John Redmond, was to rise in the hour of English jeopardy, and be thanked in thunder for the free offer of the Irish sword. All that Robert Cecil thought valueless has been our loss, and all that he thought feeble our stay. Among those of his political class or creed who accepted and welcomed the Irish leader’s alliance, there were some who knew the real past relations between
England and Ireland, and some who first felt them in that hour. All knew that England could no longer be a mere mistress; many knew that she was now in some sense a suppliant. Some knew that she deserved to be a suppliant. These were they who knew a little of the thing called history; and if they thought at all of such dead catchwords as the “Celtic fringe” for a description of Ireland, it was to doubt whether we were worthy to kiss the hem of her garment. If there be still any Englishman who thinks such language extravagant, this chapter is written to enlighten him.

In the last two chapters I have sketched in outline the way in which England, partly by historical accident, but partly also by false philosophy, was drawn into the orbit of Germany, the centre of whose circle was already at Berlin. I need not recapitulate the causes at all fully here. Luther was hardly a heresiarch for England, though a hobby for Henry VIII. But the negative Germanism of the Reformation, its drag towards the north, its quarantine against Latin culture, was in a sense the beginning of the business. It is well represented in two facts; the barbaric refusal of the new astronomical calendar merely because it was invented by a Pope, and the singular decision to pronounce Latin as if it were something else, making it not a dead language but a new language. Later, the part played by particular royalties is complex and accidental; “the furious German” came and passed; the much less interesting Germans came and stayed. Their influence was negative but not negligible; they kept England out of that current of European life into which the Gallophil Stuarts might have carried her. Only one of the Hanoverians was actively German; so German that he actually gloried in the name of Briton, and spelt it wrong. Incidentally, he lost America. It is notable that all those eminent among the real Britons, who spelt it right, respected and would parley with the American Revolution, however jingo or legitimist they were; the romantic conservative Burke, the earth-devouring Imperialist Chatham, even, in reality, the jog-trot Tory North. The intractability was in the Elector of Hanover more than in the King of England; in the narrow and petty German prince who was bored by Shakespeare and approximately inspired by Handel. What really clinched the unlucky companionship of England and Germany was the first and second alliance with Prussia; the first in which we prevented the hardening tradition of Frederick the Great being broken up by the Seven Years’ War; the second in which we prevented it being broken up by the French Revolution and Napoleon. In the first we helped Prussia to escape like a young brigand; in the second we helped the brigand to adjudicate as a respectable magistrate. Having aided his lawlessness, we defended his
legitimacy. We helped to give the Bourbon prince his crown, though our allies the Prussians (in their cheery way) tried to pick a few jewels out of it before he got it. Through the whole of that period, so important in history, it must be said that we were to be reckoned on for the support of unreformed laws and the rule of unwilling subjects. There is, as it were, an ugly echo even to the name of Nelson in the name of Naples. But whatever is to be said of the cause, the work which we did in it, with steel and gold, was so able and strenuous that an Englishman can still be proud of it. We never performed a greater task than that in which we, in a sense, saved Germany, save that in which a hundred years later, we have now, in a sense, to destroy her. History tends to be a facade of faded picturesqueness for most of those who have not specially studied it: a more or less monochrome background for the drama of their own day. To these it may well seem that it matters little whether we were on one side or the other in a fight in which all the figures are antiquated; Bonaparte and Blucher are both in old cocked hats; French kings and French regicides are both not only dead men but dead foreigners; the whole is a tapestry as decorative and as arbitrary as the Wars of the Roses. It was not so: we fought for something real when we fought for the old world against the new. If we want to know painfully and precisely what it was, we must open an old and sealed and very awful door, on a scene which was called Ireland, but which then might well have been called hell.

Having chosen our part and made war upon the new world, we were soon made to understand what such spiritual infanticide involved; and were committed to a kind of Massacre of the Innocents. In Ireland the young world was represented by young men, who shared the democratic dream of the Continent, and were resolved to foil the plot of Pitt; who was working a huge machine of corruption to its utmost to absorb Ireland into the Anti-Jacobin scheme of England. There was present every coincidence that could make the British rulers feel they were mere abbots of misrule. The stiff and self-conscious figure of Pitt has remained standing incongruously purse in hand; while his manlier rivals were stretching out their hands for the sword, the only possible resort of men who cannot be bought and refuse to be sold. A rebellion broke out and was repressed; and the government that repressed it was ten times more lawless than the rebellion. Fate for once seemed to pick out a situation in plain black and white like an allegory; a tragedy of appalling platitudes. The heroes were really heroes; and the villains were nothing but villains. The common tangle of life, in which good men do evil by mistake and bad men do good by accident, seemed suspended for us as for a judgment. We had to do things that
not only were vile, but felt vile. We had to destroy men who not only were noble, but looked noble. They were men like Wolfe Tone, a statesman in the grand style who was not suffered to found a state; and Robert Emmet, lover of his land and of a woman, in whose very appearance men saw something of the eagle grace of the young Napoleon. But he was luckier than the young Napoleon; for he has remained young. He was hanged; not before he had uttered one of those phrases that are the hinges of history. He made an epitaph of the refusal of an epitaph: and with a gesture has hung his tomb in heaven like Mahomet’s coffin. Against such Irishmen we could only produce Castlereagh; one of the few men in human records who seem to have been made famous solely that they might be infamous. He sold his own country, he oppressed ours; for the rest he mixed his metaphors, and has saddled two separate and sensible nations with the horrible mixed metaphor called the Union. Here there is no possible see-saw of sympathies as there can be between Brutus and Caesar or between Cromwell and Charles I.: there is simply nobody who supposes that Emmet was out for worldly gain, or that Castlereagh was out for anything else. Even the incidental resemblances between the two sides only served to sharpen the contrast and the complete superiority of the nationalists. Thus, Castlereagh and Lord Edward Fitzgerald were both aristocrats. But Castlereagh was the corrupt gentleman at the Court, Fitzgerald the generous gentleman upon the land; some portion of whose blood, along with some portion of his spirit, descended to that great gentleman, who—in the midst of the emetic immorality of our modern politics—gave back that land to the Irish peasantry. Thus again, all such eighteenth-century aristocrats (like aristocrats almost anywhere) stood apart from the popular mysticism and the shrines of the poor; they were theoretically Protestants, but practically pagans. But Tone was the type of pagan who refuses to persecute, like Gallio: Pitt was the type of pagan who consents to persecute; and his place is with Pilate. He was an intolerant indifferentist; ready to enfranchise the Papists, but more ready to massacre them. Thus, once more, the two pagans, Tone and Castlereagh, found a pagan end in suicide. But the circumstances were such that any man, of any party, felt that Tone had died like Cato and Castlereagh had died like Judas.

The march of Pitt’s policy went on; and the chasm between light and darkness deepened. Order was restored; and wherever order spread, there spread an anarchy more awful than the sun has ever looked on. Torture came out of the crypts of the Inquisition and walked in the sunlight of the streets and fields. A village vicar was slain with inconceivable stripes, and his corpse set on fire with
frightful jests about a roasted priest. Rape became a mode of government. The violation of virgins became a standing order of police. Stamped still with the same terrible symbolism, the work of the English Government and the English settlers seemed to resolve itself into animal atrocities against the wives and daughters of a race distinguished for a rare and detached purity, and of a religion which makes of innocence the Mother of God. In its bodily aspects it became like a war of devils upon angels; as if England could produce nothing but torturers, and Ireland nothing but martyrs. Such was a part of the price paid by the Irish body and the English soul, for the privilege of patching up a Prussian after the sabre-stroke of Jena.

But Germany was not merely present in the spirit: Germany was present in the flesh. Without any desire to underrate the exploits of the English or the Orangemen, I can safely say that the finest touches were added by soldiers trained in a tradition inherited from the horrors of the Thirty Years’ War, and of what the old ballad called “the cruel wars of High Germanie.” An Irishman I know, whose brother is a soldier, and who has relatives in many distinguished posts of the British army, told me that in his childhood the legend (or rather the truth) of ’98 was so frightfully alive that his own mother would not have the word “soldier” spoken in her house. Wherever we thus find the tradition alive we find that the hateful soldier means especially the German soldier. When the Irish say, as some of them do say, that the German mercenary was worse than the Orangemen, they say as much as human mouth can utter. Beyond that there is nothing but the curse of God, which shall be uttered in an unknown tongue.

The practice of using German soldiers, and even whole German regiments, in the make-up of the British army, came in with our German princes, and reappeared on many important occasions in our eighteenth-century history. They were probably among those who encamped triumphantly upon Drumossie Moor, and also (which is a more gratifying thought) among those who ran away with great rapidity at Prestonpans. When that very typical German, George III., narrow, serious, of a stunted culture and coarse in his very domesticity, quarrelled with all that was spirited, not only in the democracy of America but in the aristocracy of England, German troops were very fitted to be his ambassadors beyond the Atlantic. With their well-drilled formations they followed Burgoyne in that woodland march that failed at Saratoga; and with their wooden faces beheld our downfall. Their presence had long had its effect in various ways. In one way, curiously enough, their very militarism helped England to be less military; and especially to be more mercantile. It began to be
felt, faintly of course and never consciously, that fighting was a thing that foreigners had to do. It vaguely increased the prestige of the Germans as the military people, to the disadvantage of the French, whom it was the interest of our vanity to underrate. The mere mixture of their uniforms with ours made a background of pageantry in which it seemed more and more natural that English and German potentates should salute each other like cousins, and, in a sense, live in each other’s countries. Thus in 1908 the German Emperor was already regarded as something of a menace by the English politicians, and as nothing but a madman by the English people. Yet it did not seem in any way disgusting or dangerous that Edward VII. should appear upon occasion in a Prussian uniform. Edward VII. was himself a friend to France, and worked for the French Alliance. Yet his appearance in the red trousers of a French soldier would have struck many people as funny; as funny as if he had dressed up as a Chinaman.

But the German hirelings or allies had another character which (by that same strain of evil coincidence which we are tracing in this book) encouraged all that was worst in the English conservatism and inequality, while discouraging all that was best in it. It is true that the ideal Englishman was too much of a squire; but it is just to add that the ideal squire was a good squire. The best squire I know in fiction is Duke Theseus in “The Midsummer Night’s Dream,” who is kind to his people and proud of his dogs; and would be a perfect human being if he were not just a little bit prone to be kind to both of them in the same way. But such natural and even pagan good-nature is consonant with the warm wet woods and comfortable clouds of South England; it never had any place among the harsh and thrifty squires in the plains of East Prussia, the land of the East Wind. They were peevish as well as proud, and everything they created, but especially their army, was made coherent by sheer brutality. Discipline was cruel enough in all the eighteenth-century armies, created long after the decay of any faith or hope that could hold men together. But the state that was first in Germany was first in ferocity. Frederick the Great had to forbid his English admirers to follow his regiments during the campaign, lest they should discover that the most enlightened of kings had only excluded torture from law to impose it without law. This influence, as we have seen, left on Ireland a fearful mark which will never be effaced. English rule in Ireland had been bad before; but in the broadening light of the revolutionary century I doubt whether it could have continued as bad, if we had not taken a side that forced us to flatter barbarian tyranny in Europe. We should hardly have seen such a nightmare as the Anglicising of Ireland if we had not already seen the Germanising of England.
But even in England it was not without its effects; and one of its effects was to rouse a man who is, perhaps, the best English witness to the effect on the England of that time of the Alliance with Germany. With that man I shall deal in the chapter that follows.
CHAPTER V

THE LOST ENGLAND


Telling the truth about Ireland is not very pleasant to a patriotic Englishman; but it is very patriotic. It is the truth and nothing but the truth which I have but touched on in the last chapter. Several times, and especially at the beginning of this war, we narrowly escaped ruin because we neglected that truth, and would insist on treating our crimes of the ’98 and after as very distant; while in Irish feeling, and in fact, they are very near. Repentance of this remote sort is not at all appropriate to the case, and will not do. It may be a good thing to forget and forgive; but it is altogether too easy a trick to forget and be forgiven.

The truth about Ireland is simply this: that the relations between England and Ireland are the relations between two men who have to travel together, one of whom tried to stab the other at the last stopping-place or to poison the other at the last inn. Conversation may be courteous, but it will be occasionally forced. The topic of attempted murder, its examples in history and fiction, may be tactfully avoided in the sallies; but it will be occasionally present in the thoughts. Silences, not devoid of strain, will fall from time to time. The partially murdered person may even think an assault unlikely to recur; but it is asking too much, perhaps, to expect him to find it impossible to imagine. And even if, as God grant, the predominant partner is really sorry for his former manner of predominating, and proves it in some unmistakable manner–as by saving the other from robbers at great personal risk–the victim may still be unable to repress an abstract psychological wonder about when his companion first began to feel like that. Now this is not in the least an exaggerated parable of the position of England towards Ireland, not only in ’98, but far back from the treason that broke the Treaty of Limerick and far onwards through the Great
Famine and after. The conduct of the English towards the Irish after the Rebellion was quite simply the conduct of one man who traps and binds another, and then calmly cuts him about with a knife. The conduct during the Famine was quite simply the conduct of the first man if he entertained the later moments of the second man, by remarking in a chatty manner on the very hopeful chances of his bleeding to death. The British Prime Minister publicly refused to stop the Famine by the use of English ships. The British Prime Minister positively spread the Famine, by making the half-starved populations of Ireland pay for the starved ones. The common verdict of a coroner’s jury upon some emaciated wretch was “Wilful murder by Lord John Russell”: and that verdict was not only the verdict of Irish public opinion, but is the verdict of history. But there were those in influential positions in England who were not content with publicly approving the act, but publicly proclaimed the motive. The Times, which had then a national authority and respectability which gave its words a weight unknown in modern journalism, openly exulted in the prospect of a Golden Age when the kind of Irishman native to Ireland would be “as rare on the banks of the Liffey as a red man on the banks of the Manhattan.” It seems sufficiently frantic that such a thing should have been said by one European of another, or even of a Red Indian, if Red Indians had occupied anything like the place of the Irish then and since; if there were to be a Red Indian Lord Chief Justice and a Red Indian Commander-in-Chief, if the Red Indian Party in Congress, containing first-rate orators and fashionable novelists, could have turned Presidents in and out; if half the best troops of the country were trained with the tomahawk and half the best journalism of the capital written in picture-writing, if later, by general consent, the Chief known as Pine in the Twilight, was the best living poet, or the Chief Thin Red Fox, the ablest living dramatist. If that were realised, the English critic probably would not say anything scornful of red men; or certainly would be sorry he said it. But the extraordinary avowal does mark what was most peculiar in the position. This has not been the common case of misgovernment. It is not merely that the institutions we set up were indefensible; though the curious mark of them is that they were literally indefensible; from Wood’s Halfpence to the Irish Church Establishment. There can be no more excuse for the method used by Pitt than for the method used by Pigott. But it differs further from ordinary misrule in the vital matter of its object. The coercion was not imposed that the people might live quietly, but that the people might die quietly. And then we sit in an owlish innocence of our sin, and debate whether the Irish might conceivably succeed in saving Ireland. We, as a matter of fact, have not even
failed to save Ireland. We have simply failed to destroy her.

It is not possible to reverse this judgment or to take away a single count from it. Is there, then, anything whatever to be said for the English in the matter? There is: though the English never by any chance say it. Nor do the Irish say it; though it is in a sense a weakness as well as a defence. One would think the Irish had reason to say anything that can be said against the English ruling class, but they have not said, indeed they have hardly discovered, one quite simple fact—that it rules England. They are right in asking that the Irish should have a say in the Irish government, but they are quite wrong in supposing that the English have any particular say in English government. And I seriously believe I am not deceived by any national bias, when I say that the common Englishman would be quite incapable of the cruelties that were committed in his name. But, most important of all, it is the historical fact that there was another England, an England consisting of common Englishmen, which not only certainly would have done better, but actually did make some considerable attempt to do better. If anyone asks for the evidence, the answer is that the evidence has been destroyed, or at least deliberately boycotted: but can be found in the unfashionable corners of literature; and, when found, is final. If anyone asks for the great men of such a potential democratic England, the answer is that the great men are labelled small men, or not labelled at all; have been successfully belittled as the emancipation of which they dreamed has dwindled. The greatest of them is now little more than a name; he is criticised to be underrated and not to be understood; but he presented all that alternative and more liberal Englishry; and was enormously popular because he presented it. In taking him as the type of it we may tell most shortly the whole of this forgotten tale. And, even when I begin to tell it, I find myself in the presence of that ubiquitous evil which is the subject of this book. It is a fact, and I think it is not a coincidence, that in standing for a moment where this Englishman stood, I again find myself confronted by the German soldier.

The son of a small Surrey farmer, a respectable Tory and churchman, ventured to plead against certain extraordinary cruelties being inflicted on Englishmen whose hands were tied, by the whips of German superiors; who were then parading in English fields their stiff foreign uniforms and their sanguinary foreign discipline. In the countries from which they came, of course, such torments were the one monotonous means of driving men on to perish in the dead dynastic quarrels of the north; but to poor Will Cobbett, in his provincial island, knowing little but the low hills and hedges around the little church where
he now lies buried, the incident seemed odd–nay, unpleasing. He knew, of course, that there was then flogging in the British army also; but the German standard was notoriously severe in such things, and was something of an acquired taste. Added to which he had all sorts of old grandmotherly prejudices about Englishmen being punished by Englishmen, and notions of that sort. He protested, not only in speech, but actually in print. He was soon made to learn the perils of meddling in the high politics of the High Dutch militarists. The fine feelings of the foreign mercenaries were soothed by Cobbett being flung into Newgate for two years and beggar by a fine of £1000. That small incident is a small transparent picture of the Holy Alliance; of what was really meant by a country, once half liberalised, taking up the cause of the foreign kings. This, and not “The Meeting of Wellington and Blucher,” should be engraved as the great scene of the war. From this intemperate Fenians should learn that the Teutonic mercenaries did not confine themselves solely to torturing Irishmen. They were equally ready to torture Englishmen: for mercenaries are mostly unprejudiced. To Cobbett’s eye we were suffering from allies exactly as we should suffer from invaders. Boney was a bogey; but the German was a nightmare, a thing actually sitting on top of us. In Ireland the Alliance meant the ruin of anything and everything Irish, from the creed of St. Patrick to the mere colour green. But in England also it meant the ruin of anything and everything English, from the Habeas Corpus Act to Cobbett.

After this affair of the scourging, he wielded his pen like a scourge until he died. This terrible pamphleteer was one of those men who exist to prove the distinction between a biography and a life. From his biographies you will learn that he was a Radical who had once been a Tory. From his life, if there were one, you would learn that he was always a Radical because he was always a Tory. Few men changed less; it was round him that the politicians like Pitt chopped and changed, like fakirs dancing round a sacred rock. His secret is buried with him; it is that he really cared about the English people. He was conservative because he cared for their past, and liberal because he cared for their future. But he was much more than this. He had two forms of moral manhood very rare in our time: he was ready to uproot ancient successes, and he was ready to defy oncoming doom. Burke said that few are the partisans of a tyranny that has departed: he might have added that fewer still are the critics of a tyranny that has remained. Burke certainly was not one of them. While lashing himself into a lunacy against the French Revolution, which only very incidentally destroyed the property of the rich, he never criticised (to do him justice, perhaps never
saw) the English Revolution, which began with the sack of convents, and ended with the fencing in of enclosures; a revolution which sweepingly and systematically destroyed the property of the poor. While rhetorically putting the Englishman in a castle, politically he would not allow him on a common. Cobbett, a much more historical thinker, saw the beginning of Capitalism in the Tudor pillage and deplored it; he saw the triumph of Capitalism in the industrial cities and defied it. The paradox he was maintaining really amounted to the assertion that Westminster Abbey is rather more national than Welbeck Abbey. The same paradox would have led him to maintain that a Warwickshire man had more reason to be proud of Stratford-on-Avon than of Birmingham. He would no more have thought of looking for England in Birmingham than of looking for Ireland in Belfast.

The prestige of Cobbett’s excellent literary style has survived the persecution of his equally excellent opinions. But that style also is underrated through the loss of the real English tradition. More cautious schools have missed the fact that the very genius of the English tongue tends not only to vigour, but especially to violence. The Englishman of the leading articles is calm, moderate, and restrained; but then the Englishman of the leading articles is a Prussian. The mere English consonants are full of Cobbett. Dr. Johnson was our great man of letters when he said “stinks,” not when he said “putrefaction.” Take some common phrase like “raining cats and dogs,” and note not only the extravagance of imagery (though that is very Shakespearean), but a jagged energy in the very spelling. Say “chats” and “chiens” and it is not the same. Perhaps the old national genius has survived the urban enslavement most spiritedly in our comic songs, admired by all men of travel and continental culture, by Mr. George Moore as by Mr. Belloc. One (to which I am much attached) had a chorus—“O wind from the South Blow mud in the mouth Of Jane, Jane, Jane.”

Note, again, not only the tremendous vision of clinging soils carried skywards in the tornado, but also the suitability of the mere sounds. Say “bone” and “bouche” for mud and mouth and it is not the same. Cobbett was a wind from the South; and if he occasionally seemed to stop his enemies’ mouths with mud, it was the real soil of South England.

And as his seemingly mad language is very literary, so his seemingly mad meaning is very historical. Modern people do not understand him because they do not understand the difference between exaggerating a truth and exaggerating a lie. He did exaggerate, but what he knew, not what he did not know. He only appears paradoxical because he upheld tradition against fashion. A paradox is a
fantastic thing that is said once: a fashion is a more fantastic thing that is said a sufficient number of times. I could give numberless examples in Cobbett’s case, but I will give only one. Anyone who finds himself full in the central path of Cobbett’s fury sometimes has something like a physical shock. No one who has read “The History of the Reformation” will ever forget the passage (I forget the precise words) in which he says the mere thought of such a person as Cranmer makes the brain reel, and, for an instant, doubt the goodness of God; but that peace and faith flow back into the soul when we remember that he was burned alive. Now this is extravagant. It takes the breath away; and it was meant to. But what I wish to point out is that a much more extravagant view of Cranmer was, in Cobbett’s day, the accepted view of Cranmer; not as a momentary image, but as an immovable historical monument. Thousands of parsons and penmen dutifully set down Cranmer among the saints and martyrs; and there are many respectable people who would do so still. This is not an exaggerated truth, but an established lie. Cranmer was not such a monstrosity of meanness as Cobbett implies; but he was mean. But there is no question of his being less saintly than the parsonages believed; he was not a saint at all; and not very attractive even as a sinner. He was no more a martyr for being burned than Crippen for being hanged.

Cobbett was defeated because the English people was defeated. After the frame-breaking riots, men, as men, were beaten: and machines, as machines, had beaten them. Peterloo was as much the defeat of the English as Waterloo was the defeat of the French. Ireland did not get Home Rule because England did not get it. Cobbett would not forcibly incorporate Ireland, least of all the corpse of Ireland. But before his defeat Cobbett had an enormous following; his “Register” was what the serial novels of Dickens were afterwards to be. Dickens, by the way, inherited the same instinct for abrupt diction, and probably enjoyed writing “gas and gaiters” more than any two other words in his works. But Dickens was narrower than Cobbett, not by any fault of his own, but because in the intervening epoch of the triumph of Scrooge and Gradgrind the link with our Christian past had been lost, save in the single matter of Christmas, which Dickens rescued romantically and by a hair’s-breadth escape. Cobbett was a yeoman; that is, a man free and farming a small estate. By Dickens’s time, yeomen seemed as antiquated as bowmen. Cobbett was mediaeval; that is, he was in almost every way the opposite of what that word means to-day. He was as egalitarian as St. Francis, and as independent as Robin Hood. Like that other yeoman in the ballad, he bore in hand a mighty bow; what some of his enemies
would have called a long bow. But though he sometimes overshot the mark of truth, he never shot away from it, like Froude. His account of that sixteenth century in which the mediaeval civilisation ended, is not more and not less picturesque than Froude’s: the difference is in the dull detail of truth. That crisis was not the foundling of a strong Tudor monarchy, for the monarchy almost immediately perished; it was the founding of a strong class holding all the capital and land, for it holds them to this day. Cobbett would have asked nothing better than to bend his mediaeval bow to the cry of “St. George for Merry England,” for though he pointed to the other and uglier side of the Waterloo medal, he was patriotic; and his premonitions were rather against Blucher than Wellington. But if we take that old war-cry as his final word (and he would have accepted it) we must note how every term in it points away from what the modern plutocrats call either progress or empire. It involves the invocation of saints, the most popular and the most forbidden form of mediaevalism. The modern Imperialist no more thinks of St. George in England than he thinks of St. John in St. John’s Wood. It is nationalist in the narrowest sense; and no one knows the beauty and simplicity of the Middle Ages who has not seen St. George’s Cross separate, as it was at Crécy or Flodden, and noticed how much finer a flag it is than the Union Jack. And the word “merry” bears witness to an England famous for its music and dancing before the coming of the Puritans, the last traces of which have been stamped out by a social discipline utterly un-English. Not for two years, but for ten decades Cobbett has been in prison; and his enemy, the “efficient” foreigner, has walked about in the sunlight, magnificent, and a model for men. I do not think that even the Prussians ever boasted about “Merry Prussia.”
CHAPTER VI

HAMLET AND THE DANES


In the one classic and perfect literary product that ever came out of Germany–I do not mean “Faust,” but Grimm’s Fairy Tales–there is a gorgeous story about a boy who went through a number of experiences without learning how to shudder. In one of them, I remember, he was sitting by the fireside and a pair of live legs fell down the chimney and walked about the room by themselves. Afterwards the rest fell down and joined up; but this was almost an anti-climax. Now that is very charming, and full of the best German domesticity. It suggests truly what wild adventures the traveller can find by stopping at home. But it also illustrates in various ways how that great German influence on England, which is the matter of these essays, began in good things and gradually turned to bad. It began as a literary influence, in the lurid tales of Hoffmann, the tale of “Sintram,” and so on; the revisualising of the dark background of forest behind our European cities. That old German darkness was immeasurably livelier than the new German light. The devils of Germany were much better than the angels. Look at the Teutonic pictures of “The Three Huntsmen” and observe that while the wicked huntsman is effective in his own way, the good huntsman is weak in every way, a sort of sexless woman with a face like a teaspoon. But there is more in these first forest tales, these homely horrors. In the earlier stages they have exactly this salt of salvation, that the boy does not shudder. They are made fearful that he may be fearless, not that he may fear. As long as that limit is kept, the barbaric dreamland is decent; and though individuals like Coleridge and De Quincey mixed it with worse things (such as opium), they kept that romantic rudiment upon the whole. But the one disadvantage of a forest is that one may lose one’s way in it. And the one danger is not that we may meet devils, but that
we may worship them. In other words, the danger is one always associated, by
the instinct of folk-lore, with forests; it is enchantment, or the fixed loss of
oneself in some unnatural captivity or spiritual servitude. And in the evolution of
Germanism, from Hoffmann to Hauptmann, we do see this growing tendency to
take horror seriously, which is diabolism. The German begins to have an eerie
abstract sympathy with the force and fear he describes, as distinct from their
objective. The German is no longer sympathising with the boy against the
goblin, but rather with the goblin against the boy. There goes with it, as always
goes with idolatry, a dehumanised seriousness; the men of the forest are already
building upon a mountain the empty throne of the Superman. Now it is just at
this point that I for one, and most men who love truth as well as tales, begin to
lose interest. I am all for “going out into the world to seek my fortune,” but I do
not want to find it—and find it is only being chained for ever among the frozen
figures of the Sieges Allees. I do not want to be an idolator, still less an idol. I
am all for going to fairyland, but I am also all for coming back. That is, I will
admire, but I will not be magnetised, either by mysticism or militarism. I am all
for German fantasy, but I will resist German earnestness till I die. I am all for
Grimm’s Fairy Tales; but if there is such a thing as Grimm’s Law, I would break
it, if I knew what it was. I like the Prussian’s legs (in their beautiful boots) to fall
down the chimney and walk about my room. But when he procures a head and
begins to talk, I feel a little bored. The Germans cannot really be deep because
they will not consent to be superficial. They are bewitched by art, and stare at it,
and cannot see round it. They will not believe that art is a light and slight thing—a
feather, even if it be from an angelic wing. Only the slime is at the bottom of a
pool; the sky is on the surface. We see this in that very typical process, the
Germanising of Shakespeare. I do not complain of the Germans forgetting that
Shakespeare was an Englishman. I complain of their forgetting that Shakespeare
was a man; that he had moods, that he made mistakes, and, above all, that he
knew his art was an art and not an attribute of deity. That is what is the matter
with the Germans; they cannot “ring fancy’s knell”; their knells have no gaiety.
The phrase of Hamlet about “holding the mirror up to nature” is always quoted
by such earnest critics as meaning that art is nothing if not realistic. But it really
means (or at least its author really thought) that art is nothing if not artificial.
Realists, like other barbarians, really believe the mirror; and therefore break the
mirror. Also they leave out the phrase “as ‘twere,” which must be read into every
remark of Shakespeare, and especially every remark of Hamlet. What I mean by
believing the mirror, and breaking it, can be recorded in one case I remember; in
which a realistic critic quoted German authorities to prove that Hamlet had a
particular psycho-pathological abnormality, which is admittedly nowhere
mentioned in the play. The critic was bewitched; he was thinking of Hamlet as a
real man, with a background behind him three dimensions deep—which does not
exist in a looking-glass. “The best in this kind are but shadows.” No German
commentator has ever made an adequate note on that. Nevertheless, Shakespeare
was an Englishman; he was nowhere more English than in his blunders; but he
was nowhere more successful than in the description of very English types of
character. And if anything is to be said about Hamlet, beyond what Shakespeare
has said about him, I should say that Hamlet was an Englishman too. He was as
much an Englishman as he was a gentleman, and he had the very grave
weaknesses of both characters. The chief English fault, especially in the
nineteenth century, has been lack of decision, not only lack of decision in action,
but lack of the equally essential decision in thought—which some call dogma.
And in the politics of the last century, this English Hamlet, as we shall see,
played a great part, or rather refused to play it.

There were, then, two elements in the German influence; a sort of pretty
playing with terror and a solemn recognition of terrorism. The first pointed to
elfland, and the second to—shall we say, Prussia. And by that unconscious
symbolism with which all this story develops, it was soon to be dramatically
tested, by a definite political query, whether what we really respected was the
Teutonic fantasy or the Teutonic fear.

The Germanisation of England, its transition and turning-point, was well
typified by the genius of Carlyle. The original charm of Germany had been the
charm of the child. The Teutons were never so great as when they were childish;
in their religious art and popular imagery the Christ-Child is really a child,
though the Christ is hardly a man. The self-conscious fuss of their pedagogy is
half-redeemed by the unconscious grace which called a school not a seed-plot of
citizens, but merely a garden of children. All the first and best forest-spirit is
infancy, its wonder, its wilfulness, even its still innocent fear. Carlyle marks
exactly the moment when the German child becomes the spoilt child. The
wonder turns to mere mysticism; and mere mysticism always turns to mere
immoralism. The wilfulness is no longer liked, but is actually obeyed. The fear
becomes a philosophy. Panic hardens into pessimism; or else, what is often
equally depressing, optimism.

Carlyle, the most influential English writer of that time, marks all this by the
mental interval between his “French Revolution” and his “Frederick the Great.”
In both he was Germanic. Carlyle was really as sentimental as Goethe; and Goethe was really as sentimental as Werther. Carlyle understood everything about the French Revolution, except that it was a French revolution. He could not conceive that cold anger that comes from a love of insulted truth. It seemed to him absurd that a man should die, or do murder, for the First Proposition of Euclid; should relish an egalitarian state like an equilateral triangle; or should defend the Pons Asinorum as Codes defended the Tiber bridge. But anyone who does not understand that does not understand the French Revolution—nor, for that matter, the American Revolution. “We hold these truths to be self-evident”: it was the fanaticism of truism. But though Carlyle had no real respect for liberty, he had a real reverence for anarchy. He admired elemental energy. The violence which repelled most men from the Revolution was the one thing that attracted him to it. While a Whig like Macaulay respected the Girondists but deplored the Mountain, a Tory like Carlyle rather liked the Mountain and quite unduly despised the Girondists. This appetite for formless force belongs, of course, to the forests, to Germany. But when Carlyle got there, there fell upon him a sort of spell which is his tragedy and the English tragedy, and, in no small degree, the German tragedy too. The real romance of the Teutons was largely a romance of the Southern Teutons, with their castles, which are almost literally castles in the air, and their river which is walled with vineyards and rhymes so naturally to wine. But as Carlyle’s was rootedly a romance of conquest, he had to prove that the thing which conquered in Germany was really more poetical than anything else in Germany. Now the thing that conquered in Germany was about the most prosaic thing of which the world ever grew weary. There is a great deal more poetry in Brixton than in Berlin. Stella said that Swift could write charmingly about a broom-stick; and poor Carlyle had to write romantically about a ramrod. Compare him with Heine, who had also a detached taste in the mystical grotesques of Germany, but who saw what was their enemy: and offered to nail up the Prussian eagle like an old crow as a target for the archers of the Rhine. Its prosaic essence is not proved by the fact that it did not produce poets: it is proved by the more deadly fact that it did. The actual written poetry of Frederick the Great, for instance, was not even German or barbaric, but simply feeble—and French. Thus Carlyle became continually gloomier as his fit of the blues deepened into Prussian blues; nor can there be any wonder. His philosophy had brought out the result that the Prussian was the first of Germans, and, therefore, the first of men. No wonder he looked at the rest of us with little hope.

But a stronger test was coming both for Carlyle and England. Prussia,
plodding, policing, as materialist as mud, went on solidifying and strengthening after unconquered Russia and unconquered England had rescued her where she lay prostrate under Napoleon. In this interval the two most important events were the Polish national revival, with which Russia was half inclined to be sympathetic, but Prussia was implacably coercionist; and the positive refusal of the crown of a united Germany by the King of Prussia, simply because it was constitutionally offered by a free German Convention. Prussia did not want to lead the Germans: she wanted to conquer the Germans. And she wanted to conquer other people first. She had already found her brutal, if humorous, embodiment in Bismarck; and he began with a scheme full of brutality and not without humour. He took up, or rather pretended to take up, the claim of the Prince of Augustenberg to duchies which were a quite lawful part of the land of Denmark. In support of this small pretender he enlisted two large things, the Germanic body called the Bund and the Austrian Empire. It is possibly needless to say that after he had seized the disputed provinces by pure Prussian violence, he kicked out the Prince of Augustenberg, kicked out the German Bund, and finally kicked out the Austrian Empire too, in the sudden campaign of Sadowa. He was a good husband and a good father; he did not paint in water colours; and of such is the Kingdom of Heaven. But the symbolic intensity of the incident was this. The Danes expected protection from England; and if there had been any sincerity in the ideal side of our Teutonism they ought to have had it. They ought to have had it even by the pedantries of the time, which already talked of Latin inferiority: and were never weary of explaining that the country of Richelieu could not rule and the country of Napoleon could not fight. But if it was necessary for whosoever would be saved to be a Teuton, the Danes were more Teuton than the Prussians. If it be a matter of vital importance to be descended from Vikings, the Danes really were descended from Vikings, while the Prussians were descended from mongrel Slavonic savages. If Protestantism be progress, the Danes were Protestant; while they had attained quite peculiar success and wealth in that small ownership and intensive cultivation which is very commonly a boast of Catholic lands. They had in a quite arresting degree what was claimed for the Germanics as against Latin revolutionism: quiet freedom, quiet prosperity, a simple love of fields and of the sea. But, moreover, by that coincidence which dogs this drama, the English of that Victorian epoch had found their freshest impression of the northern spirit of infancy and wonder in the works of a Danish man of genius, whose stories and sketches were so popular in England as almost to have become English. Good as Grimm’s Fairy
Tales were, they had been collected and not created by the modern German; they were a museum of things older than any nation, of the dateless age of once-upon-a-time. When the English romantics wanted to find the folk-tale spirit still alive, they found it in the small country of one of those small kings, with whom the folk-tales are almost comically crowded. There they found what we call an original writer, who was nevertheless the image of the origins. They found a whole fairyland in one head and under one nineteenth-century top hat. Those of the English who were then children owe to Hans Andersen more than to any of their own writers, that essential educational emotion which feels that domesticity is not dull but rather fantastic; that sense of the fairyland of furniture, and the travel and adventure of the farmyard. His treatment of inanimate things as animate was not a cold and awkward allegory: it was a true sense of a dumb divinity in things that are. Through him a child did feel that the chair he sat on was something like a wooden horse. Through him children and the happier kind of men did feel themselves covered by a roof as by the folded wings of some vast domestic fowl; and feel common doors like great mouths that opened to utter welcome. In the story of “The Fir Tree” he transplanted to England a living bush that can still blossom into candles. And in his tale of “The Tin Soldier” he uttered the true defence of romantic militarism against the prigs who would forbid it even as a toy for the nursery. He suggested, in the true tradition of the folk-tales, that the dignity of the fighter is not in his largeness but rather in his smallness, in his stiff loyalty and heroic helplessness in the hands of larger and lower things. These things, alas, were an allegory. When Prussia, finding her crimes unpunished, afterwards carried them into France as well as Denmark, Carlyle and his school made some effort to justify their Germanism, by pitting what they called the piety and simplicity of Germany against what they called the cynicism and ribaldry of France. But nobody could possibly pretend that Bismarck was more pious and simple than Hans Andersen; yet the Carlyleans looked on with silence or approval while the innocent toy kingdom was broken like a toy. Here again, it is enormously probable that England would have struck upon the right side, if the English people had been the English Government. Among other coincidences, the Danish princess who had married the English heir was something very like a fairy princess to the English crowd. The national poet had hailed her as a daughter of the sea-kings; and she was, and indeed still is, the most popular royal figure in England. But whatever our people may have been like, our politicians were on the very tamest level of timidity and the fear of force to which they have ever sunk. The Tin Soldier of the Danish army and the
paper boat of the Danish navy, as in the story, were swept away down the great
gutter, down that colossal cloaca that leads to the vast cesspool of Berlin.

Why, as a fact, did not England interpose? There were a great many reasons
given, but I think they were all various inferences from one reason; indirect
results and sometimes quite illogical results, of what we have called the
Germanisation of England. First, the very insularity on which we insisted was
barbaric, in its refusal of a seat in the central senate of the nations. What we
called our splendid isolation became a rather ignominious sleeping-partnership
with Prussia. Next, we were largely trained in irresponsibility by our
contemporary historians, Freeman and Green, teaching us to be proud of a
possible descent from King Arthur’s nameless enemies and not from King
Arthur. King Arthur might not be historical, but at least he was legendary.
Hengist and Horsa were not even legendary, for they left no legend. Anybody
could see what was obligatory on the representative of Arthur; he was bound to
be chivalrous, that is, to be European. But nobody could imagine what was
obligatory on the representative of Horsa, unless it were to be horsy. That was
perhaps the only part of the Anglo-Saxon programme that the contemporary
English really carried out. Then, in the very real decline from Cobbett to Cobden
(that is, from a broad to a narrow manliness and good sense) there had grown up
the cult of a very curious kind of peace, to be spread all over the world not by
pilgrims, but by pedlars. Mystics from the beginning had made vows of peace—
but they added to them vows of poverty. Vows of poverty were not in the
Cobdenite’s line. Then, again, there was the positive praise of Prussia, to which
steadily worsening case the Carlyleans were already committed. But beyond
these, there was something else, a spirit which had more infected us as a whole.
That spirit was the spirit of Hamlet. We gave the grand name of “evolution” to a
notion that things do themselves. Our wealth, our insularity, our gradual loss of
faith, had so dazed us that the old Christian England haunted us like a ghost in
whom we could not quite believe. An aristocrat like Palmerston, loving freedom
and hating the upstart despotism, must have looked on at its cold brutality not
without that ugly question which Hamlet asked himself—am I a coward?

It cannot be.
But I am pigeon-liveried and lack gall
To make oppression bitter; or ‘ere this
I should have fatted all the region kites
With this slave’s offal.

We made dumb our anger and our honour; but it has not brought us peace.
CHAPTER VII

THE MIDNIGHT OF EUROPE


Among the minor crimes of England may be classed the shallow criticism and easy abandonment of Napoleon III. The Victorian English had a very bad habit of being influenced by words and at the same time pretending to despise them. They would build their whole historical philosophy upon two or three titles, and then refuse to get even the titles right. The solid Victorian Englishman, with his whiskers and his Parliamentary vote, was quite content to say that Louis Napoleon and William of Prussia both became Emperors—by which he meant autocrats. His whiskers would have bristled with rage and he would have stormed at you for hair-splitting and “lingo,” if you had answered that William was German Emperor, while Napoleon was not French Emperor, but only Emperor of the French. What could such mere order of the words matter? Yet the same Victorian would have been even more indignant if he had been asked to be satisfied with an Art Master, when he had advertised for a Master of Arts. His irritation would have increased if the Art Master had promised him a sea-piece and had brought him a piece of the sea; or if, during the decoration of his house, the same aesthetic humourist had undertaken to procure some Indian Red and had produced a Red Indian.

The Englishman would not see that if there was only a verbal difference between the French Emperor and the Emperor of the French, so, if it came to that, it was a verbal difference between the Emperor and the Republic, or even between a Parliament and no Parliament. For him an Emperor meant merely despotism; he had not yet learned that a Parliament may mean merely oligarchy. He did not know that the English people would soon be made impotent, not by the disfranchising of their constituents, but simply by the silencing of their members; and that the governing class of England did not now depend upon rotten boroughs, but upon rotten representatives. Therefore he did not understand Bonapartism. He did not understand that French democracy became more
democratic, not less, when it turned all France into one constituency which elected one member. He did not understand that many dragged down the Republic because it was not republican, but purely senatorial. He was yet to learn how quite corruptly senatorial a great representative assembly can become. Yet in England to-day we hear “the decline of Parliament” talked about and taken for granted by the best Parliamentarians—Mr. Balfour, for instance—and we hear the one partly French and wholly Jacobin historian of the French Revolution recommending for the English evil a revival of the power of the Crown. It seems that so far from having left Louis Napoleon far behind in the grey dust of the dead despotisms, it is not at all improbable that our most extreme revolutionary developments may end where Louis Napoleon began.

In other words, the Victorian Englishman did not understand the words “Emperor of the French.” The type of title was deliberately chosen to express the idea of an elective and popular origin; as against such a phrase as “the German Emperor,” which expresses an almost transcendental tribal patriarchate, or such a phrase as “King of Prussia,” which suggests personal ownership of a whole territory. To treat the Coup d’état as unpardonable is to justify riot against despotism, but forbid any riot against aristocracy. Yet the idea expressed in “The Emperor of the French” is not dead, but rather risen from the dead. It is the idea that while a government may pretend to be a popular government, only a person can be really popular. Indeed, the idea is still the crown of American democracy, as it was for a time the crown of French democracy. The very powerful official who makes the choice of that great people for peace or war, might very well be called, not the President of the United States, but the President of the Americans. In Italy we have seen the King and the mob prevail over the conservatism of the Parliament, and in Russia the new popular policy sacramentally symbolised by the Czar riding at the head of the new armies. But in one place, at least, the actual form of words exists; and the actual form of words has been splendidly justified. One man among the sons of men has been permitted to fulfil a courtly formula with awful and disastrous fidelity. Political and geographical ruin have written one last royal title across the sky; the loss of palace and capital and territory have but isolated and made evident the people that has not been lost; not laws but the love of exiles, not soil but the souls of men, still make certain that five true words shall yet be written in the corrupt and fanciful chronicles of mankind: “The King of the Belgians.”

It is a common phrase, recurring constantly in the real if rabid eloquence of Victor Hugo, that Napoleon III. was a mere ape of Napoleon I. That is, that he
had, as the politician says, in “L’Aiglon,” “le petit chapeau, mais pas la tête”; that he was merely a bad imitation. This is extravagantly exaggerative; and those who say it, moreover, often miss the two or three points of resemblance which really exist in the exaggeration. One resemblance there certainly was. In both Napoleons it has been suggested that the glory was not so great as it seemed; but in both it can be emphatically added that the eclipse was not so great as it seemed either. Both succeeded at first and failed at last. But both succeeded at last, even after the failure. If at this moment we owe thanks to Napoleon Bonaparte for the armies of united France, we also owe some thanks to Louis Bonaparte for the armies of united Italy. That great movement to a freer and more chivalrous Europe which we call to-day the Cause of the Allies, had its forerunners and first victories before our time; and it not only won at Arcola, but also at Solferino. Men who remembered Louis Napoleon when he mooned about the Blessington salon, and was supposed to be almost mentally deficient, used to say he deceived Europe twice; once when he made men think him an imbecile, and once when he made them think him a statesman. But he deceived them a third time; when he made them think he was dead; and had done nothing.

In spite of the unbridled verse of Hugo and the even more unbridled prose of Kinglake, Napoleon III. is really and solely discredited in history because of the catastrophe of 1870. Hugo hurled any amount of lightning on Louis Napoleon; but he threw very little light on him. Some passages in the “Châtiments” are really caricatures carved in eternal marble. They will always be valuable in reminding generations too vague and soft, as were the Victorians, of the great truth that hatred is beautiful, when it is hatred of the ugliness of the soul. But most of them could have been written about Haman, or Heliogabalus, or King John, or Queen Elizabeth, as much as about poor Louis Napoleon; they bear no trace of any comprehension of his quite interesting aims, and his quite comprehensible contempt for the fat-souled senatorial politicians. And if a real revolutionist like Hugo did not do justice to the revolutionary element in Cæsarism, it need hardly be said that a rather Primrose League Tory like Tennyson did not. Kinglake’s curiously acrid insistence upon the Coup d’état is, I fear, only an indulgence in one of the least pleasing pleasures of our national pen and press, and one which afterwards altogether ran away with us over the Dreyfus case. It is an unfortunate habit of publicly repenting for other people’s sins. If this came easy to an Englishman like Kinglake, it came, of course, still easier to a German like Queen Victoria’s husband and even to Queen Victoria herself, who was naturally influenced by him. But in so far as the sensible
masses of the English nation took any interest in the matter, it is probable that they sympathised with Palmerston, who was as popular as the Prince Consort was unpopular. The black mark against Louis Napoleon’s name until now, has simply been Sedan; and it is our whole purpose to-day to turn Sedan into an interlude. If it is not an interlude, it will be the end of the world. But we have sworn to make an end of that ending: warring on until, if only by a purgatory of the nations and the mountainous annihilation of men, the story of the world ends well.

There are, as it were, valleys of history quite close to us, but hidden by the closer hills. One, as we have seen, is that fold in the soft Surrey hills where Cobbett sleeps with his still-born English Revolution. Another is under that height called The Spy of Italy, where a new Napoleon brought back the golden eagles against the black eagles of Austria. Yet that French adventure in support of the Italian insurrection was very important; we are only beginning to understand its importance. It was a defiance to the German Reaction and 1870 was a sort of revenge for it, just as the Balkan victory was a defiance to the German Reaction and 1914 was the attempted revenge for it. It is true that the French liberation of Italy was incomplete, the problem of the Papal States, for instance, being untouched by the Peace of Villafranca. The volcanic but fruitful spirit of Italy had already produced that wonderful, wandering, and almost omnipresent personality whose red shirt was to be a walking flag: Garibaldi. And many English Liberals sympathised with him and his extremists as against the peace. Palmerston called it “the peace that passeth all understanding”: but the profanity of that hilarious old heathen was nearer the mark than he knew: there were really present some of those deep things which he did not understand. To quarrel with the Pope, but to compromise with him, was an instinct with the Bonapartes; an instinct no Anglo-Saxon could be expected to understand. They knew the truth; that Anti-Clericalism is not a Protestant movement, but a Catholic mood. And after all the English Liberals could not get their own Government to risk what the French Government had risked; and Napoleon III. might well have retorted on Palmerston, his rival in international Liberalism, that half a war was better than no fighting. Swinburne called Villafranca “The Halt before Rome,” and expressed a rhythmical impatience for the time when the world

“Shall ring to the roar of the lion Proclaiming Republican Rome.”

But he might have remembered, after all, that it was not the British lion, that a British poet should have the right to say so imperiously, “Let him roar again. Let him roar again.”
It is true that there was no clear call to England from Italy, as there certainly was from Denmark. The great powers were not bound to help Italy to become a nation, as they were bound to support the unquestioned fact that Denmark was one. Indeed the great Italian patriot was to experience both extremes of the English paradox, and, curiously enough, in connection with both the two national and anti-German causes. For Italy he gained the support of the English, but not the support of England. Not a few of our countrymen followed the red shirt; but not in the red coat. And when he came to England, not to plead the cause of Italy but the cause of Denmark, the Italian found he was more popular with the English than any Englishman. He made his way through a forest of salutations, which would willingly have turned itself into a forest of swords. But those who kept the sword kept it sheathed. For the ruling class the valour of the Italian hero, like the beauty of the Danish Princess, was a thing to be admired, that is enjoyed, like a novel—or a newspaper. Palmerston was the very type of Pacifism, because he was the very type of Jingoism. In spirit as restless as Garibaldi, he was in practice as cautious as Cobden. England had the most prudent aristocracy, but the most reckless democracy in the world. It was, and is, the English contradiction, which has so much misrepresented us, especially to the Irish. Our national captains were carpet knights; our knights errant were among the dismounted rabble. When an Austrian general who had flogged women in the conquered provinces appeared in the London streets, some common draymen off a cart behaved with the direct quixotry of Sir Lancelot or Sir Galahad. He had beaten women and they beat him. They regarded themselves simply as avengers of ladies in distress, breaking the bloody whip of a German bully; just as Cobbett had sought to break it when it was wielded over the men of England. The boorishness was in the Germanic or half-Germanic rulers who wore crosses and spurs: the gallantry was in the gutter. English draymen had more chivalry than Teuton aristocrats—or English ones.

I have dwelt a little on this Italian experiment because it lights up Louis Napoleon as what he really was before the eclipse, a politician—perhaps an unscrupulous politician—but certainly a democratic politician. A power seldom falls being wholly faultless; and it is true that the Second Empire became contaminated with cosmopolitan spies and swindlers, justly reviled by such democrats as Rochefort as well as Hugo. But there was no French inefficiency that weighed a hair in the balance compared with the huge and hostile efficiency of Prussia; the tall machine that had struck down Denmark and Austria, and now stood ready to strike again, extinguishing the lamp of the world. There was a
hitch before the hammer stroke, and Bismarck adjusted it, as with his finger, by a forgery—for he had many minor accomplishments. France fell: and what fell with her was freedom, and what reigned in her stead only tyrants and the ancient terror. The crowning of the first modern Kaiser in the very palace of the old French kings was an allegory; like an allegory on those Versailles walls. For it was at once the lifting of the old despotic diadem and its descent on the low brow of a barbarian. Louis XI. had returned, and not Louis IX.; and Europe was to know that sceptre on which there is no dove.

The instant evidence that Europe was in the grip of the savage was as simple as it was sinister. The invaders behaved with an innocent impiety and bestiality that had never been known in those lands since Clovis was signed with the cross. To the naked pride of the new men nations simply were not. The struggling populations of two vast provinces were simply carried away like slaves into captivity, as after the sacking of some prehistoric town. France was fined for having pretended to be a nation; and the fine was planned to ruin her forever. Under the pressure of such impossible injustice France cried out to the Christian nations, one after another, and by name. Her last cry ended in a stillness like that which had encircled Denmark.

One man answered; one who had quarrelled with the French and their Emperor; but who knew it was not an emperor that had fallen. Garibaldi, not always wise but to his end a hero, took his station, sword in hand, under the darkening sky of Christendom, and shared the last fate of France. A curious record remains, in which a German commander testifies to the energy and effect of the last strokes of the wounded lion of Aspromonte. But England went away sorrowful, for she had great possessions.
CHAPTER VIII

THE WRONG HORSE


In another chapter I mentioned some of the late Lord Salisbury’s remarks with regret, but I trust with respect; for in certain matters he deserved all the respect that can be given to him. His critics said that he “thought aloud”; which is perhaps the noblest thing that can be said of a man. He was jeered at for it by journalists and politicians who had not the capacity to think or the courage to tell their thoughts. And he had one yet finer quality which redeems a hundred lapses of anarchic cynicism. He could change his mind upon the platform: he could repent in public. He could not only think aloud; he could “think better” aloud. And one of the turning-points of Europe had come in the hour when he avowed his conversion from the un-Christian and un-European policy into which his dexterous Oriental master, Disraeli, had dragged him; and declared that England had “put her money on the wrong horse.” When he said it, he referred to the backing we gave to the Turk under a fallacious fear of Russia. But I cannot but think that if he had lived much longer, he would have come to feel the same disgust for his long diplomatic support of the Turk’s great ally in the North. He did not live, as we have lived, to feel that horse run away with us, and rush on through wilder and wilder places, until we knew that we were riding on the nightmare.

What was this thing to which we trusted? And how may we most quickly explain its development from a dream to a nightmare, and the hair’s-breadth escape by which it did not hurl us to destruction, as it seems to be hurling the Turk? It is a certain spirit; and we must not ask for too logical a definition of it, for the people whom it possesses disown logic; and the whole thing is not so much a theory as a confusion of thought. Its widest and most elementary character is adumbrated in the word Teutonism or Pan-Germanism; and with this (which was what appeared to win in 1870) we had better begin. The nature of Pan-Germanism may be allegorised and abbreviated somewhat thus:
The horse asserts that all other creatures are morally bound to sacrifice their interests to his, on the specific ground that he possesses all noble and necessary qualities, and is an end in himself. It is pointed out in answer that when climbing a tree the horse is less graceful than the cat; that lovers and poets seldom urge the horse to make a noise all night like the nightingale; that when submerged for some long time under water, he is less happy than the haddock; and that when he is cut open pearls are less often found in him than in an oyster. He is not content to answer (though, being a muddle-headed horse, he does use this answer also) that having an undivided hoof is more than pearls or oceans or all ascension or song. He reflects for a few years on the subject of cats; and at last discovers in the cat “the characteristic equine quality of caudality, or a tail”; so that cats are horses, and wave on every tree-top the tail which is the equine banner. Nightingales are found to have legs, which explains their power of song. Haddocks are vertebrates; and therefore are sea-horses. And though the oyster outwardly presents dissimilarities which seem to divide him from the horse, he is by the all-filling nature-might of the same horse-moving energy sustained.

Now this horse is intellectually the wrong horse. It is not perhaps going too far to say that this horse is a donkey. For it is obviously within even the intellectual resources of a haddock to answer, “But if a haddock is a horse, why should I yield to you any more than you to me? Why should that singing horse commonly called the nightingale, or that climbing horse hitherto known as the cat, fall down and worship you because of your horsehood? If all our native faculties are the accomplishments of a horse—why then you are only another horse without any accomplishments.” When thus gently reasoned with, the horse flings up his heels, kicks the cat, crushes the oyster, eats the haddock and pursues the nightingale, and that is how the war began.

This apologue is not in the least more fantastic than the facts of the Teutonic claim. The Germans do really say that Englishmen are only Sea-Germans, as our haddocks were only sea-horses. They do really say that the nightingales of Tuscany or the pearls of Hellas must somehow be German birds or German jewels. They do maintain that the Italian Renaissance was really the German Renaissance, pure Germans having Italian names when they were painters, as cockneys sometimes have when they are hair-dressers. They suggest that Jesus and the great Jews were Teutonic. One Teutonist I read actually explained the fresh energy of the French Revolution and the stale privileges of its German enemies by saying that the Germanic soul awoke in France and attacked the Latin influence in Germany. On the advantages of this method I need not dwell:
if you are annoyed at Jack Johnson knocking out an English prize-fighter, you have only to say that it was the whiteness of the black man that won and the blackness of the white man that was beaten. But about the Italian Renaissance they are less general and will go into detail. They will discover (in their researches into ‘istry, as Mr. Gandish said) that Michael Angelo’s surname was Buonarotti; and they will point out that the word “roth” is very like the word “rot.” Which, in one sense, is true enough. Most Englishmen will be content to say it is all rot and pass on. It is all of a piece with the preposterous Prussian history, which talks, for instance, about the “perfect religious tolerance of the Goths”; which is like talking about the legal impartiality of chicken-pox. He will decline to believe that the Jews were Germans; though he may perhaps have met some Germans who were Jews. But deeper than any such practical reply, lies the deep inconsistency of the parable. It is simply this; that if Teutonism be used for comprehension it cannot be used for conquest. If all intelligent peoples are Germans, then Prussians are only the least intelligent Germans. If the men of Flanders are as German as the men of Frankfort, we can only say that in saving Belgium we are helping the Germans who are in the right against the Germans who are in the wrong. Thus in Alsace the conquerors are forced into the comic posture of annexing the people for being German and then persecuting them for being French. The French Teutons who built Rheims must surrender it to the South German Teutons who have partly built Cologne; and these in turn surrender Cologne to the North German Teutons, who never built anything, except the wooden Aunt Sally of old Hindenburg. Every Teuton must fall on his face before an inferior Teuton; until they all find, in the foul marshes towards the Baltic, the very lowest of all possible Teutons, and worship him—and find he is a Slav. So much for Pan-Germanism.

But though Teutonism is indefinable, or at least is by the Teutons undefined, it is not unreal. A vague but genuine soul does possess all peoples who boast of Teutonism; and has possessed ourselves, in so far as we have been touched by that folly. Not a race, but rather a religion, the thing exists; and in 1870 its sun was at noon. We can most briefly describe it under three heads.

The victory of the German arms meant before Leipzig, and means now, the overthrow of a certain idea. That idea is the idea of the Citizen. This is true in a quite abstract and courteous sense; and is not meant as a loose charge of oppression. Its truth is quite compatible with a view that the Germans are better governed than the French. In many ways the Germans are very well governed. But they might be governed ten thousand times better than they are, or than
anybody ever can be, and still be as far as ever from governing. The idea of the Citizen is that his individual human nature shall be constantly and creatively active in altering the State. The Germans are right in regarding the idea as dangerously revolutionary. Every Citizen is a revolution. That is, he destroys, devours and adapts his environment to the extent of his own thought and conscience. This is what separates the human social effort from the non-human; the bee creates the honey-comb, but he does not criticise it. The German ruler really does feed and train the German as carefully as a gardener waters a flower. But if the flower suddenly began to water the gardener, he would be much surprised. So in Germany the people really are educated; but in France the people educates. The French not only make up the State, but make the State; not only make it, but remake it. In Germany the ruler is the artist, always painting the happy German like a portrait; in France the Frenchman is the artist, always painting and repainting France like a house. No state of social good that does not mean the Citizen choosing good, as well as getting it, has the idea of the Citizen at all. To say the Germanies are naturally at war with this idea is merely to respect them and take them seriously: otherwise their war on the French Revolution would be only an ignorant feud. It is this, to them, risky and fanciful notion of the critical and creative Citizen, which in 1870 lay prostrate under United Germany—under the undivided hoof.

Nevertheless, when the German says he has or loves freedom, what he says is not false. He means something; and what he means is the second principle, which I may summarise as the Irresponsibility of Thought. Within the iron framework of the fixed State, the German has not only liberty but anarchy. Anything can be said although, or rather because, nothing can be done. Philosophy is really free. But this practically means only that the prisoner’s cell has become the madman’s cell: that it is scrawled all over inside with stars and systems, so that it looks like eternity. This is the contradiction remarked by Dr. Sarolea, in his brilliant book, between the wildness of German theory and the tameness of German practice. The Germans sterilise thought, making it active with a wild virginity; which can bear no fruit.

But though there are so many mad theories, most of them have one root; and depend upon one assumption. It matters little whether we call it, with the German Socialists, “the Materialist Theory of History”; or, with Bismarck, “blood and iron.” It can be put most fairly thus: that all important events of history are biological, like a change of pasture or the communism of a pack of wolves. Professors are still tearing their hair in the effort to prove somehow that
the Crusaders were migrating for food like swallows; or that the French Revolutionists were somehow only swarming like bees. This works in two ways often accounted opposite; and explains both the German Socialist and the Junker. For, first, it fits in with Teutonic Imperialism; making the “blonde beasts” of Germania into lions whose nature it is to eat such lambs as the French. The highest success of this notion in Europe is marked by praise given to a race famous for its physical firmness and fighting breed, but which has frankly pillaged and scarcely pretended to rule; the Turk, whom some Tories called “the gentleman of Europe.” The Kaiser paused to adore the Crescent on his way to patronise the Cross. It was corporately embodied when Greece attempted a solitary adventure against Turkey and was quickly crushed. That English guns helped to impose the mainly Germanic policy of the Concert upon Crete, cannot be left out of mind while we are making appeals to Greece—or considering the crimes of England.

But the same principle serves to keep the internal politics of the Germans quiet, and prevent Socialism being the practical hope or peril it has been in so many other countries. It operates in two ways; first, by a curious fallacy about “the time not being ripe”–as if time could ever be ripe. The same savage superstition from the forests had infected Matthew Arnold pretty badly when he made a personality out of the Zeitgeist–perhaps the only ghost that was ever entirely fabulous. It is tricked by a biological parallel, by which the chicken always comes out of the egg “at the right time.” He does not; he comes out when he comes out. The Marxian Socialist will not strike till the clock strikes; and the clock is made in Germany, and never strikes. Moreover, the theory of all history as a search for food makes the masses content with having food and physic, but not freedom. The best working model in the matter is the system of Compulsory Insurance; which was a total failure and dead letter in France but has been, in the German sense, a great success in Germany. It treats employed persons as a fixed, separate, and lower caste, who must not themselves dispose of the margin of their small wages. In 1911 it was introduced into England by Mr. Lloyd George, who had studied its operations in Germany, and, by the Prussian prestige in “social reform,” was passed.

These three tendencies cohere, or are cohering, in an institution which is not without a great historical basis and not without great modern conveniences. And as France was the standard-bearer of citizenship in 1798, Germany is the standard-bearer of this alternative solution in 1915. The institution which our fathers called Slavery fits in with, or rather logically flows from, all the three
spirits of which I have spoken, and promises great advantages to each of them. It
can give the individual worker everything except the power to alter the State–
that is, his own status. Finality (or what certain eleutheromaniacs would call
hopelessness) of status is the soul of Slavery–and of Compulsory Insurance.
Then again, Germany gives the individual exactly the liberty that has always
been given to a slave–the liberty to think, the liberty to dream, the liberty to
rage; the liberty to indulge in any intellectual hypotheses about the unalterable
world and state–such as have always been free to slaves, from the stoical
maxims of Epictetus to the skylarking fairy tales of Uncle Remus. And it has
been truly urged by all defenders of slavery that, if history has merely a material
test, the material condition of the subordinate under slavery tends to be good
rather than bad. When I once pointed out how precisely the “model village” of a
great employer reproduces the safety and seclusion of an old slave estate, the
employer thought it quite enough to answer indignantly that he had provided
baths, playing-grounds, a theatre, etc., for his workers. He would probably have
thought it odd to hear a planter in South Carolina boast that he had provided
banjos, hymn-books, and places suitable for the cake-walk. Yet the planter must
have provided the banjos, for a slave cannot own property. And if this Germanic
sociology is indeed to prevail among us, I think some of the broad-minded
thinkers who concur in its prevalence owe something like an apology to many
gallant gentlemen whose graves lie where the last battle was fought in the
Wilderness; men who had the courage to fight for it, the courage to die for it and,
above all, the courage to call it by its name.

With the acceptance by England of the German Insurance Act, I bring this
sketch of the past relations of the two countries to an end. I have written this
book because I wish, once and for all, to be done with my friend Professor
Whirlwind of Prussia, who has long despairsed of really defending his own
country, and has fallen back upon abusing mine. He has dropped, amid general
derision, his attempt to call a thing right when even the Chancellor who did it
called it wrong. But he has an idea that if he can show that somebody from
England somewhere did another wrong, the two wrongs may make a right.
Against the cry of the Roman Catholic Poles the Prussian has never done, or
even pretended to do, anything but harden his heart; but he has (such are the
lovable inconsistencies of human nature) a warm corner in his heart for the
Roman Catholic Irish. He has not a word to say for himself about the campaign
in Belgium, but he still has many wise, reproachful words to utter about the
campaign in South Africa. I propose to take those words out of his mouth. I will
have nothing to do with the fatuous front-bench pretensions that our governors always govern well, that our statesmen are never whitewashed and never in need of whitewash. The only moral superiority I claim is that of not defending the indefensible. I most earnestly urge my countrymen not to hide behind thin official excuses, which the sister kingdoms and the subject races can easily see through. We can confess that our crimes have been as mountains, and still not be afraid of the present comparison. There may be, in the eyes of some, a risk in dwelling in this dark hour on our failures in the past: I believe profoundly that the risk is all the other way. I believe that the most deadly danger to our arms today lies in any whiff of that self-praise, any flavour of that moral cowardice, any glimpse of that impudent andultimate impenitence, that may make one Boer or Scot or Welshman or Irishman or Indian feel that he is only smoothing the path for a second Prussia. I have passed the great part of my life in criticising and condemning the existing rulers and institutions of my country: I think it is infinitely the most patriotic thing that a man can do. I have no illusions either about our past or our present. I think our whole history in Ireland has been a vulgar and ignorant hatred of the crucifix, expressed by a crucifixion. I think the South African War was a dirty work which we did under the whips of moneylenders. I think Mitchelstown was a disgrace; I think Denshawi was a devilry.

Yet there is one part of life and history in which I would assert the absolute spotlessness of England. In one department we wear a robe of white and a halo of innocence. Long and weary as may be the records of our wickedness, in one direction we have done nothing but good. Whoever we may have wronged, we have never wronged Germany. Again and again we have dragged her from under the just vengeance of her enemies, from the holy anger of Maria Teresa, from the impatient and contemptuous common sense of Napoleon. We have kept a ring fence around the Germans while they sacked Denmark and dismembered France. And if we had served our God as we have served their kings, there would not be to-day one remnant of them in our path, either to slander or to slay us.
CHAPTER IX

THE AWAKENING OF ENGLAND


In October 1912 silent and seemingly uninhabited crags and chasms in the high western region of the Balkans echoed and re-echoed with a single shot. It was fired by the hand of a king–real king, who sat listening to his people in front of his own house (for it was hardly a palace), and who, in consequence of his listening to the people, not unfrequently imprisoned the politicians. It is said of him that his great respect for Gladstone as the western advocate of Balkan freedom was slightly shadowed by the fact that Gladstone did not succeed in effecting the bodily capture of Jack the Ripper. This simple monarch knew that if a malefactor were the terror of the mountain hamlets, his subjects would expect him personally to take arms and pursue the ruffian; and if he refused to do so, would very probably experiment with another king. And the same primitive conception of a king being kept for some kind of purpose, led them also to expect him to lead in a foreign campaign, and it was with his own hand that he fired the first shot of the war which brought down into the dust the ancient empire of the Grand Turk.

His kingdom was little more than the black mountain after which it was named: we commonly refer to it under its Italian translation of Montenegro. It is worth while to pause for a moment upon his picturesque and peculiar community, because it is perhaps the simplest working model of all that stood in the path of the great Germanic social machine I have described in the last chapter–stood in its path and was soon to be very nearly destroyed by its onset. It was a branch of the Serbian stock which had climbed into this almost inaccessible eyrie, and thence, for many hundred years, had mocked at the predatory empire of the Turks. The Serbians in their turn were but one branch of the peasant Slavs, millions of whom are spread over Russia and subject on many sides to empires with which they have less sympathy; and the Slavs again, in the broad features which are important here, are not merely Slavonic but simply European. But a particular picture is generally more pointed and intelligible than
tendencies which elsewhere are mingled with subtler tendencies; and of this unmixed European simplicity Montenegro is an excellent model.

Moreover, the instance of one small Christian State will serve to emphasise that this is not a quarrel between England and Germany, but between Europe and Germany. It is my whole purpose in these pages not to spare my own country where it is open to criticism; and I freely admit that Montenegro, morally and politically speaking, is almost as much in advance of England as it is of Germany. In Montenegro there are no millionaires—and therefore next to no Socialists. As to why there are no millionaires, it is a mystery, and best studied among the mysteries of the Middle Ages. By some of the dark ingenuities of that age of priestcraft a curious thing was discovered—that if you kill every usurer, every forestaller, every adulterater, every user of false weights, every fixer of false boundaries, every land-thief, every water-thief, you afterwards discover by a strange indirect miracle, or disconnected truth from heaven, that you have no millionaires. Without dwelling further on this dark matter, we may say that this great gap in the Montenegrin experience explains the other great gap—the lack of Socialists. The Class-conscious Proletarian of All Lands is curiously absent from this land. The reason (I have sometimes fancied) is that the Proletarian is class-conscious, not because he is a Proletarian of All Lands, but because he is a Proletarian with no lands. The poor people in Montenegro have lands—not landlords. They have roots; for the peasant is the root of the priest, the poet, and the warrior. And this, and not a mere recrimination about acts of violence, is the ground of the age-long Balkan bitterness against the Turkish conqueror. Montenegrins are patriotic for Montenegro; but Turks are not patriotic for Turkey. They never heard of it, in fact. They are Bedouins, as homeless as the desert. The “wrong horse” of Lord Salisbury was an Arab steed, only stabled in Byzantium. It is hard enough to rule vagabond people, like the gypsies. To be ruled by them is impossible.

Nevertheless what was called the nineteenth century, and named with a sort of transcendental faith (as in a Pythagorean worship of number), was wearing to its close with reaction everywhere, and the Turk, the great type of reaction, stronger than ever in the saddle. The most civilised of the Christian nations overshadowed by the Crescent dared to attack it and was overwhelmed in a catastrophe that seemed as unanswerable as Hittin. In England Gladstone and Gladstonism were dead; and Mr. Kipling, a less mystical Carlyle, was expending a type of praise upon the British Army which would have been even more appropriate to the Prussian Army. The Prussian Army ruled Prussia; Prussia
ruled Germany; Germany ruled the Concert of Europe. She was planting everywhere the appliances of that new servile machinery which was her secret; the absolute identification of national subordination with business employment; so that Krupp could count on Kaiser and Kaiser on Krupp. Every other commercial traveller was pathetically proud of being both a slave and a spy. The old and the new tyrants had taken hands. The “sack” of the boss was as silent and fatal as the sack of the Bosphorus. And the dream of the citizen was at an end.

It was under a sky so leaden and on a road so strewn with bones that the little mountain democracy with its patriarchal prince went out, first and before all its friends, on the last and seemingly the most hopeless of the rebellions against the Ottoman Empire. Only one of the omens seemed other than disastrous; and even that was doubtful. For the successful Mediterranean attack on Tripoli while proving the gallantry of the Italians (if that ever needed proving) could be taken in two ways, and was seen by many, and probably most, sincere liberals as a mere extension of the Imperialist reaction of Bosnia and Paardeberg, and not as the promise of newer things. Italy, it must be remembered, was still supposed to be the partner of Prussia and the Hapsburgs. For days that seemed like months the microscopic state seemed to be attempting alone what the Crusades had failed to accomplish. And for days Europe and the great powers were thunderstruck, again and yet again, by the news of Turkish forts falling, Turkish cohorts collapsing, the unconquerable Crescent going down in blood. The Serbians, the Bulgarians, the Greeks had gathered and risen from their lairs; and men knew that these peasants had done what all the politicians had long despaired of doing, and that the spirit of the first Christian Emperor was already standing over the city that is named after his name.

For Germany this quite unexpected rush was a reversal of the whole tide of the world. It was as if the Rhine itself had returned from the ocean and retired into the Alps. For a long time past every important political process in Europe had been produced or permitted by Prussia. She had pulled down ministers in France and arrested reforms in Russia. Her ruler was acclaimed by Englishmen like Rhodes, and Americans like Roosevelt, as the great prince of the age. One of the most famous and brilliant of our journalists called him “the Lord Chief Justice of Europe.” He was the strongest man in Christendom; and he had confirmed and consecrated the Crescent. And when he had consecrated it a few hill tribes had risen and trampled it like mire. One or two other things about the same time, less important in themselves, struck in the Prussian’s ear the same new note of
warning and doubt. He sought to obtain a small advantage on the north-west coast of Africa; and England seemed to show a certain strange stiffness in insisting on its abandonment. In the councils over Morocco, England agreed with France with what did not seem altogether an accidental agreement. But we shall not be wrong if we put the crucial point of the German surprise and anger at the attack from the Balkans and the fall of Adrianople. Not only did it menace the key of Asia and the whole Eastern dream of German commerce; not only did it offer the picture of one army trained by France and victorious, and another army trained by Germany and beaten. There was more than the material victory of the Creusot over the Krupp gun. It was also the victory of the peasant’s field over the Krupp factory. By this time there was in the North German brain an awful inversion of all the legends and heroic lives that the human race has loved. Prussia hated romance. Chivalry was not a thing she neglected; it was a thing that tormented her as any bully is tormented by an unanswered challenge. That weird process was completed of which I have spoken on an earlier page, whereby the soul of this strange people was everywhere on the side of the dragon against the knight, of the giant against the hero. Anything unexpected—the forlorn hopes, the eleventh-hour inspirations, by which the weak can elude the strong, and which take the hearts of happier men like trumpets—filled the Prussian with a cold fury, as of a frustrated fate. The Prussian felt as a Chicago pork butcher would feel if the pigs not only refused to pass through his machine, but turned into romantic wild boars, raging and rending, calling for the old hunting of princes and fit to be the crests of kings.

The Prussian saw these things and his mind was made up. He was silent; but he laboured: laboured for three long years without intermission at the making of a military machine that should cut out of the world for ever such romantic accident or random adventure; a machine that should cure the human pigs for ever of any illusion that they had wings. That he did so plot and prepare for an attack that should come from him, anticipating and overwhelming any resistance, is now, even in the documents he has himself published, a fact of common sense. Suppose a man sells all his lands except a small yard containing a well; suppose in the division of the effects of an old friend he particularly asks for his razors; suppose when a corded trunk is sent him he sends back the trunk, but keeps the cord. And then suppose we hear that a rival of his has been lassoed with a rope, his throat then cut, apparently with a razor, and his body hidden in a well, we do not call in Sherlock Holmes to project a preliminary suspicion about the guilty party. In the discussions held by the Prussian Government with Lord
Haldane and Sir Edward Grey we can now see quite as plainly the meaning of the things that were granted and the things that were withheld, the things that would have satisfied the Prussian plotter and the things that did not satisfy him. The German Chancellor refused an English promise not to be aggressive and asked instead for an English promise to be neutral. There is no meaning in the distinction, except in the mind of an aggressor. Germany proposed a pacific arrangement which forbade England to form a fighting alliance with France, but permitted Germany to retain her old fighting alliance with Austria. When the hour of war came she used Austria, used the old fighting alliance and tried to use the new idea of English neutrality. That is to say, she used the rope, the razor, and the well.

But it was either by accident or by individual diplomatic skill that England at the end of the three years even had her own hands free to help in frustrating the German plot. The mass of the English people had no notion of such a plot; and indeed regarded the occasional suggestion of it as absurd. Nor did even the people who knew best know very much better. Thanks and even apologies are doubtless due to those who in the deepest lull of our sleeping partnership with Prussia saw her not as a partner but a potential enemy; such men as Mr. Blatchford, Mr. Bart Kennedy, or the late Emil Reich. But there is a distinction to be made. Few even of these, with the admirable and indeed almost magical exception of Dr. Sarolea, saw Germany as she was; occupied mainly with Europe and only incidentally with England; indeed, in the first stages, not occupied with England at all. Even the Anti-Germans were too insular. Even those who saw most of Germany’s plan saw too much of England’s part in it. They saw it almost wholly as a commercial and colonial quarrel; and saw its issue under the image of an invasion of England, which is even now not very probable. This fear of Germany was indeed a very German fear of Germany. This also conceived the English as Sea-Germans. It conceived Germany as at war with something like itself—practical, prosaic, capitalist, competitive Germany, prepared to cut us up in battle as she cut us out in business. The time of our larger vision was not yet, when we should realise that Germany was more deeply at war with things quite unlike herself, things from which we also had sadly strayed. Then we should remember what we were and see whence we also had come; and far and high upon that mountain from which the Crescent was cast down, behold what was everywhere the real enemy of the Iron Cross—the peasant’s cross, which is of wood.

Even our very slight ripples of panic, therefore, were provincial, and even
shallow; and for the most part we were possessed and convinced of peace. That peace was not a noble one. We had indeed reached one of the lowest and flattest levels of all our undulating history; and it must be admitted that the contemptuous calculation with which Germany counted on our submission and abstention was not altogether unfounded, though it was, thank God, unfulfilled. The full fruition of our alliances against freedom had come. The meek acceptance of Kultur in our books and schools had stiffened what was once a free country with a German formalism and a German fear. By a queer irony, even the same popular writer who had already warned us against the Prussians, had sought to preach among the populace a very Prussian fatalism, pivoted upon the importance of the charlatan Haeckel. The wrestle of the two great parties had long slackened into an embrace. The fact was faintly denied, and a pretence was still made that no pact: existed beyond a common patriotism. But the pretence failed altogether; for it was evident that the leaders on either side, so far from leading in divergent directions, were much closer to each other than to their own followers. The power of these leaders had enormously increased; but the distance between them had diminished, or, rather, disappeared. It was said about 1800, in derision of the Foxite rump, that the Whig Party came down to Parliament in a four-wheeler. It might literally be said in 1900 that the Whig Party and the Tory Party came to Parliament in a hansom cab. It was not a case of two towers rising into different roofs or spires, but founded in the same soil. It was rather the case of an arch, of which the foundation-stones on either side might fancy they were two buildings; but the stones nearest the keystone would know there was only one. This “two-handed engine” still stood ready to strike, not, indeed, the other part of itself, but anyone who ventured to deny that it was doing so. We were ruled, as it were, by a Wonderland king and queen, who cut off our heads, not for saying they quarrelled but for saying they didn’t. The libel law was now used, not to crush lies about private life, but to crush truths about public life. Representation had become mere misrepresentation; a maze of loopholes. This was mainly due to the monstrous presence of certain secret moneys, on which alone many men could win the ruinous elections of the age, and which were contributed and distributed with less check or record than is tolerated in the lowest trade or club. Only one or two people attacked these funds; nobody defended them. Through them the great capitalists had the handle of politics, as of everything else. The poor were struggling hopelessly against rising prices; and their attempts at collective bargaining, by the collective refusal of badly-paid work, were discussed in the press, Liberal and Tory, as attacks
upon the State. And so they were; upon the Servile State.

Such was the condition of England in 1914, when Prussia, now at last armed to the teeth and secure of triumph, stood up before the world, and solemnly, like one taking a sacrament, consecrated her campaign with a crime. She entered by a forbidden door, one which she had herself forbidden—marching upon France through neutralised Belgium, where every step was on her broken word. Her neutralised neighbours resisted, as indeed they, like ourselves, were pledged to do. Instantly the whole invasion was lit up with a flame of moral lunacy, that turned the watching nations white who had never known the Prussian. The statistics of non-combatants killed and tortured by this time only stun the imagination. But two friends of my own have been in villages sacked by the Prussian march. One saw a tabernacle containing the Sacrament patiently picked out in pattern by shot after shot. The other saw a rocking-horse and the wooden toys in a nursery laboriously hacked to pieces. Those two facts together will be enough to satisfy some of us of the name of the Spirit that had passed.

And then a strange thing happened. England, that had not in the modern sense any army at all, was justified of all her children. Respected institutions and reputations did indeed waver and collapse on many sides: though the chief of the states replied worthily to a bribe from the foreign bully, many other politicians were sufficiently wild and weak, though doubtless patriotic in intention. One was set to restrain the journalists, and had to be restrained himself, for being more sensational than any of them. Another scolded the working-classes in the style of an intoxicated temperance lecturer. But England was saved by a forgotten thing—the English. Simple men with simple motives, the chief one a hate of injustice which grows simpler the longer we stare at it, came out of their dreary tenements and their tidy shops, their fields and their suburbs and their factories and their rookeries, and asked for the arms of men. In a throng that was at last three million men, the islanders went forth from their island, as simply as the mountaineers had gone forth from their mountain, with their faces to the dawn.
CHAPTER X

THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

THE HOUR OF PERIL–THE HUMAN DELUGE–THE ENGLISH AT THE MARNE.

The impression produced by the first week of war was that the British contingent had come just in time for the end of the world. Or rather, for any sensitive and civilised man, touched by the modern doubt but by the equally modern mysticism, that old theocratic vision fell far short of the sickening terror of the time. For it was a day of judgment in which upon the throne in heaven and above the cherubim, sat not God, but another.

The British had been posted at the extreme western end of the allied line in the north. The other end rested on the secure city and fortress of Namur; their end rested upon nothing. It is not wholly a sentimental fancy to say that there was something forlorn in the position of that loose end in a strange land, with only the sad fields of Northern France between them and the sea. For it was really round that loose end that the foe would probably fling the lasso of his charge; it was here that death might soon be present upon every side. It must be remembered that many critics, including many Englishmen, doubted whether a rust had not eaten into this as into other parts of the national life, feared that England had too long neglected both the ethic and the technique of war, and would prove a weak link in the chain. The enemy was absolutely certain that it was so. To these men, standing disconsolately amid the hedgeless plains and poplars, came the news that Namur was gone, which was to their captains one of the four corners of the earth. The two armies had touched; and instantly the weaker took an electric shock which told of electric energy, deep into deep Germany, battery behind battery of abysmal force. In the instant it was discovered that the enemy was more numerous than they had dreamed. He was actually more numerous even than they discovered. Every oncoming horseman doubled as in a drunkard’s vision; and they were soon striving without speech in a nightmare of numbers. Then all the allied forces at the front were overthrown in the tragic battle of Mons; and began that black retreat, in which so many of our young men knew war first and at its worst in this terrible world; and so many never returned.
In that blackness began to grow strange emotions, long unfamiliar to our blood. Those six dark days are as full of legends as the six centuries of the Dark Ages. Many of these may be exaggerated fancies, one was certainly an avowed fiction, others are quite different from it and more difficult to dissipate into the daylight. But one curious fact remains about them if they were all lies, or even if they were all deliberate works of art. Not one of them referred to those close, crowded, and stirring three centuries which are nearest to us, and which alone are covered in this sketch, the centuries during which the Teutonic influence had expanded itself over our islands. Ghosts were there perhaps, but they were the ghosts of forgotten ancestors. Nobody saw Cromwell or even Wellington; nobody so much as thought about Cecil Rhodes. Things were either seen or said among the British which linked them up, in matters deeper than any alliance, with the French, who spoke of Joan of Arc in heaven above the fated city; or the Russians who dreamed of the Mother of God with her hand pointing to the west. They were the visions or the inventions of a mediæval army; and a prose poet was in line with many popular rumours when he told of ghostly archers crying “Array, Array,” as in that long-disbanded yeomanry in which I have fancied Cobbett as carrying a bow. Other tales, true or only symptomatic, told of one on a great white horse who was not the victor of Blenheim or even the Black Prince, but a faint figure out of far-off martyrologies—St. George. One soldier is asserted to have claimed to identify the saint because he was “on every quid.” On the coins, St. George is a Roman soldier.

But these fancies, if they were fancies, might well seem the last sickly flickerings of an old-world order now finally wounded to the death. That which was coming on, with the whole weight of a new world, was something that had never been numbered among the Seven Champions of Christendom. Now, in more doubtful and more hopeful days, it is almost impossible to repicture what was, for those who understood, the gigantic finality of the first German strides. It seemed as if the forces of the ancient valour fell away to right and left; and there opened a grand, smooth granite road right to the gate of Paris, down which the great Germania moved like a tall, unanswerable sphinx, whose pride could destroy all things and survive them. In her train moved, like moving mountains, Cyclopean guns that had never been seen among men, before which walled cities melted like wax, their mouths set insolently upwards as if threatening to besiege the sun. Nor is it fantastic to speak so of the new and abnormal armaments; for the soul of Germany was really expressed in colossal wheels and cylinders; and her guns were more symbolic than her flags. Then and now, and in every place
and time, it is to be noted that the German superiority has been in a certain thing and of a certain kind. It is not unity; it is not, in the moral sense, discipline. Nothing can be more united in a moral sense than a French, British, or Russian regiment. Nothing, for that matter, could be more united than a Highland clan at Killiecrankie or a rush of religious fanatics in the Soudan. What such engines, in such size and multiplicity, really meant was this: they meant a type of life naturally intolerable to happier and more healthy-minded men, conducted on a larger scale and consuming larger populations than had ever been known before. They meant cities growing larger than provinces, factories growing larger than cities; they meant the empire of the slum. They meant a degree of detailed repetition and dehumanised division of labour, to which no man born would surrender his brief span in the sunshine, if he could hope to beat his ploughshare into a sword. The nations of the earth were not to surrender to the Kaiser; they were to surrender to Krupp, his master and theirs; the French, the British, the Russians were to surrender to Krupp as the Germans themselves, after a few swiftly broken strikes, had already surrendered to Krupp. Through every cogwheel in that incomparable machinery, through every link in that iron and unending chain, ran the mastery and the skill of a certain kind of artist; an artist whose hands are never idle through dreaming or drawn back in disgust or lifted in wonder or in wrath; but sure and tireless in their touch upon the thousand little things that make the invisible machinery of life. That artist was there in triumph; but he had no name. The ancient world called him the Slave.

From this advancing machine of millions, the slighter array of the Allies, and especially the British at their ultimate outpost, saved themselves by a succession of hair’s-breadth escapes and what must have seemed to the soldiers the heartrending luck of a mouse before a cat. Again and again Von Kluck’s cavalry, supported by artillery and infantry, clawed round the end of the British force, which eluded it as by leaping back again and again. Sometimes the pursuer was, so to speak, so much on top of his prey that it could not even give way to him; but had to hit such blows as it could in the hope of checking him for the instant needed for escape. Sometimes the oncoming wave was so close that a small individual accident, the capture of one man, would mean the washing out of a whole battalion. For day after day this living death endured. And day after day a certain dark truth began to be revealed, bit by bit, certainly to the incredulous wonder of the Prussians, quite possibly to the surprise of the French, and quite as possibly to the surprise of themselves; that there was something singular about the British soldiers. That singular thing may be expressed in a variety of ways;
but it would be almost certainly expressed insufficiently by anyone who had not had the moral courage to face the facts about his country in the last decades before the war. It may perhaps be best expressed by saying that some thousands of Englishmen were dead: and that England was not.

The fortress of Maubeuge had gaped, so to speak, offering a refuge for the unresting and tormented retreat; the British Generals had refused it and continued to fight a losing fight in the open for the sake of the common plan. At night an enormous multitude of Germans had come unexpectedly through the forest and caught a smaller body of the British in Landrecies; failed to dislodge them and lost a whole battalion in that battle of the darkness. At the extreme end of the line Smith-Dorrien’s division, who seemed to be nearly caught or cut off, had fought with one gun against four, and so hammered the Germans that they were forced to let go their hold; and the British were again free. When the blowing up of a bridge announced that they had crossed the last river, something other than that battered remnant was saved; it was the honour of the thing by which we live.

The driven and defeated line stood at last almost under the walls of Paris; and the world waited for the doom of the city. The gates seemed to stand open; and the Prussian was to ride into it for the third and the last time: for the end of its long epic of liberty and equality was come. And still the very able and very French individual on whom rested the last hope of the seemingly hopeless Alliance stood unruffled as a rock, in every angle of his sky-blue jacket and his bulldog figure. He had called his bewildered soldiers back when they had broken the invasion at Guise; he had silently digested the responsibility of dragging on the retreat, as in despair, to the last desperate leagues before the capital; and he stood and watched. And even as he watched the whole huge invasion swerved.

Out through Paris and out and around beyond Paris, other men in dim blue coats swung out in long lines upon the plain, slowly folding upon Von Kluck like blue wings. Von Kluck stood an instant; and then, flinging a few secondary forces to delay the wing that was swinging round on him, dashed across the Allies’ line at a desperate angle, to smash it in the centre as with a hammer. It was less desperate than it seemed; for he counted, and might well count, on the moral and physical bankruptcy of the British line and the end of the French line immediately in front of him, which for six days and nights he had chased before him like autumn leaves before a whirlwind. Not unlike autumn leaves, red-stained, dust-hued, and tattered, they lay there as if swept into a corner. But even as their conquerors wheeled eastwards, their bugles blew the charge; and the
English went forward through the wood that is called Creçy, and stamped it with their seal for the second time, in the highest moment of all the secular history of man.

But it was not now the Creçy in which English and French knights had met in a more coloured age, in a battle that was rather a tournament. It was a league of all knights for the remains of all knighthood, of all brotherhood in arms or in arts, against that which is and has been radically unknightly and radically unbrotherly from the beginning. Much was to happen after—murder and flaming folly and madness in earth and sea and sky; but all men knew in their hearts that the third Prussian thrust had failed, and Christendom was delivered once more. The empire of blood and iron rolled slowly back towards the darkness of the northern forests; and the great nations of the West went forward; where side by side as after a long lover’s quarrel, went the ensigns of St. Denys and St. George.
NOTE ON THE WORD “ENGLISH”

The words “England” and “English” as used here require a word of explanation, if only to anticipate the ire of the inevitable Scot. To begin with, the word “British” involves a similar awkwardness. I have tried to use it in the one or two cases that referred to such things as military glory and unity: though I am sure I have failed of full consistency in so complex a matter. The difficulty is that this sense of glory and unity, which should certainly cover the Scotch, should also cover the Irish. And while it is fairly safe to call a Scotsman a North Briton (despite the just protest of Stevenson), it is very unsafe indeed to call an Irishman a West Briton. But there is a deeper difficulty. I can assure the Scot that I say “England,” not because I deny Scottish nationality, but because I affirm it. And I can say, further, that I could not here include Scots in the thesis, simply because I could not include them in the condemnation. This book is a study, not of a disease but rather of a weakness, which has only been predominant in the predominant partner. It would not be true, for instance, to say either of Ireland or Scotland that the populace lacked a religion; but I do think that British policy as a whole has suffered from the English lack of one, with its inevitable result of plutocracy and class contempt.
THE BLATCHFORD CONTROVERSIES

G. K. CHESTERTON
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INDEX

### THE BLATCHFORD CONTROVERSIES

- **TABLE OF CONTENTS**
- **INTRODUCTION BY MASIE WARD**

1. **CHRISTIANITY AND RATIONALISM**

2. **WHY I BELIEVE IN CHRISTIANITY**

3. **MIRACLES AND MODERN CIVILISATION**

4. **THE ETERNAL HEROISM OF THE SLUMS**
INTRODUCTION BY MASIE WARD

Against R. J. Campbell [Chesterton] showed in a lecture on “Christianity and Social Reform” how belief in sin as well as in goodness was more favourable to social reform than was the rather woolly optimism that refused to recognize evil. “The nigger–driver will be delighted to hear that God is immanent in him . . . The sweater that . . . he has not in any way become divided from the supreme perfection of the universe.” If the New Theology would not lead to social reform, the social Utopia to which the philosophy of [H. G.] Wells and of [George Bernard] Shaw was pointing seemed to Chesterton not a heaven on earth to be desired, but a kind of final hell to be avoided, since it banished all freedom and human responsibility. Arguing with them was again highly fruitful, and two subjects he chose for speeches are suggestive—”The Terror of Tendencies” and “Shall We Abolish the Inevitable?”

In the New Age Shaw wrote about Belloc and Chesterton and so did Wells, while Chesterton wrote about Wells and Shaw, till the Philistines grew angry, called it self–advertisement and log–rolling and urged that a Bill for the abolition of Shaw and Chesterton should be introduced into Parliament. But G.K. had no need for advertisement of himself or his ideas just then: he had a platform, he had an eager audience. Every week he wrote in the Illustrated London News, beginning in 1905 to do “Our Notebook” (this continued till his death in 1936). He was still writing every Saturday in the Daily News. Publishers were disputing for each of his books. Yet he rushed into every religious controversy that was going on, because thereby he could clarify and develop his ideas.

The most important of all these was the controversy with Blatchford, Editor of the Clarion, who had written a rationalist Credo, entitled God and My Neighbour. In 1903–4, he had the generosity and the wisdom to throw open the Clarion to the freest possible discussion of his views. The Christian attack was made by a group of which Chesterton was the outstanding figure, and was afterwards gathered into a paper volume called The Doubts of Democracy.

One essay in this volume, written in 1903, is of primary importance in any study of the sources of Orthodoxy, for it gives a brilliant outline of one of the main contentions of the book and shows even better than Orthodoxy itself what he meant by saying that he had first learnt Christianity from its opponents. It is clear that by now he believed in the Divinity of Christ. The pamphlet itself has fallen into oblivion and Chesterton’s share of it was only three short essays. . . .
in [them] he has put in concentrated form and with different illustrations what he developed five years later. There is nothing more packed with thought in the whole of his writings than these essays.
CHRISTIANITY AND RATIONALISM

The first of all the difficulties that I have in controverting Mr. Blatchford is simply this, that I shall be very largely going over his own ground. My favourite text-book of theology is [Blatchford’s] God and My Neighbour, but I cannot repeat it in detail. If I gave each of my reasons for being a Christian, a vast number of them would be Mr. Blatchford’s reasons for not being one.

For instance, Mr. Blatchford and his school point out that there are many myths parallel to the Christian story; that there were Pagan Christs, and Red Indian Incarnations, and Patagonian Crucifixions, for all I know or care. But does not Mr. Blatchford see the other side of the fact? If the Christian God really made the human race, would not the human race tend to rumours and perversions of the Christian God? If the centre of our life is a certain fact, would not people far from the centre have a muddled version of that fact? If we are so made that a Son of God must deliver us, is it odd that Patagonians should dream of a Son of God?

The Blatchfordian position really amounts to this—that because a certain thing has impressed millions of different people as likely or necessary, therefore it cannot be true. And then this bashful being, veiling his own talents, convicts the wretched G.K.C. of paradox. I like paradox, but I am not prepared to dance and dazzle to the extent of Nunquam, who points to humanity crying out for a thing, and pointing to it from immemorial ages, as proof that it cannot be there.

The story of a Christ is very common in legend and literature. So is the story of two lovers parted by Fate. So is the story of two friends killing each other for a woman. But will it seriously be maintained that, because these two stories are common as legends, therefore no two friends were ever separated by love or no two lovers by circumstances? It is tolerably plain, surely, that these two stories are common because the situation is an intensely probable and human one, because our nature is so built as to make them almost inevitable.

Why should it not be that our nature is so built as to make certain spiritual events inevitable? In any case, it is clearly ridiculous to attempt to disprove Christianity by the number and variety of Pagan Christs. You might as well take the number and variety of ideal schemes of society, from Plato’s Republic to Morris’ News from Nowhere, from More’s Utopia to Blatchford’s Merrie
England, and then try to prove from them that mankind cannot ever reach a better social condition. If anything, of course, they prove the opposite; they suggest a human tendency toward a better condition.

Thus, in this first instance, when learned sceptics come to me and say, “Are you aware that the Kaffirs have a sort of Incarnation?” I should reply: “Speaking as an unlearned person, I don’t know. But speaking as a Christian, I should be very much astonished if they hadn’t.”

Take a second instance. The Secularist says that Christianity has been a gloomy and ascetic thing, and points to the procession of austere or ferocious saints who have given up home and happiness and macerated health and sex. But it never seems to occur to him that the very oddity and completeness of these men’s surrender make it look very much as if there were really something actual and solid in the thing for which they sold themselves. They gave up all pleasures for one pleasure of spiritual ecstasy. They may have been mad; but it looks as if there really were such a pleasure. They gave up all human experiences for the sake of one superhuman experience. They may have been wicked, but it looks as if there were such an experience.

It is perfectly tenable that this experience is as dangerous and selfish a thing as drink. A man who goes ragged and homeless in order to see visions may be as repellant and immoral as a man who goes ragged and homeless in order to drink brandy. That is a quite reasonable position. But what is manifestly not a reasonable position, what would be, in fact, not far from being an insane position, would be to say that the raggedness of the man, and the stupefied degradation of the man, proved that there was no such thing as brandy. That is precisely what the Secularist tries to say. He tries to prove that there is no such thing as supernatural experience by pointing at the people who have given up everything for it. He tries to prove that there is no such thing by proving that there are people who live on nothing else.

Again I may submissively ask: “Whose is the Paradox?” The fanatic severity of these men may, of course, show that they were eccentric people who loved unhappiness for its own sake. But it seems more in accordance with common sense to suppose that they had really found the secret of some actual power or experience which was, like wine, a terrible consolation and a lonely joy.

Thus, then in the second instance, when the learned sceptic says to me: “Christian saints gave up love and liberty for this one rapture of Christianity,” I should reply: “It was very wrong of them. But, having some notion of the rapture of Christianity, I should have been surprised if they hadn’t.”
Take a third instance. The Secularist says that Christianity produced tumult and cruelty. He seems to suppose that this proves it to be bad. But it might prove it to be very good. For men commit crimes not only for bad things, far more often for good things. For no bad things can be desired quite so passionately and persistently as good things can be desired, and only very exceptional men desire very bad and unnatural things.

Most crime is committed because, owing to some peculiar complication, very beautiful or necessary things are in some danger . . .

And if anywhere in history masses of common and kindly men become cruel, it almost certainly does not mean that they are serving something in itself tyrannical (for why should they?). It almost certainly does mean that something that they rightly value is in peril, such as the food of their children, the chastity of their women, or the independence of their country. And when something is set before mankind that is not only enormously valuable, but also quite new, the sudden vision, the chance of winning it, the chance of losing it, drive them mad. It has the same effect in the moral world that the finding of gold has in the economic world. It upsets values, and creates a kind of cruel rush.

We need not go far for instances quite apart from the instances of religion. When the modern doctrines of brotherhood and liberality were preached in France in the eighteenth century the time was ripe for them, the educated classes everywhere had been growing towards them, the world to a very considerable extent welcomed them. And yet all that preparation and openness were unable to prevent the burst of anger and agony which greets anything good. And if the slow and polite preaching of rational fraternity in a rational age ended in the massacres of September, what an a fortiori is here! What would be likely to be the effect of the sudden dropping into a dreadfully evil century of a dreadfully perfect truth? What would happen if a world baser than the world of Sade were confronted with a gospel purer than the gospel of Rousseau?

The mere flinging of the polished pebble of Republican idealism into the artificial lake of eighteenth century Europe produced a splash that seemed to splash the heavens, and a storm that drowned ten thousand men. What would happen if a star from heaven really fell into the slimy and bloody pool of a hopeless and decaying humanity? Men swept a city with the guillotine, a continent with a sabre, because Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity were too precious to be lost. How if Christianity was yet more maddening because it was yet more precious?

But why should we labour the point when One who knew human nature as it
can really be learnt, from fishermen and women and natural people, saw from
his quiet village the track of this truth across history, and, in saying that He came
to bring not peace but a sword, set up eternally His colossal realism against the
eternal sentimentality of the Secularist?

Thus, then, in the third instance, when the learned sceptic says: “Christianity
produced wars and persecutions,” we shall reply: “Naturally.”

And, lastly, let me take an example which leads me on directly to the general
matter I wish to discuss for the remaining space of the articles at my command.
The Secularist constantly points out that the Hebrew and Christian religions
began as local things; that their god was a tribal god; that they gave him material
form, and attached him to particular places.

This is an excellent example of one of the things that if I were conducting a
detailed campaign I should use as an argument for the validity of Biblical
experience. For if there really are some other and higher beings than ourselves,
and if they in some strange way, at some emotional crisis, really revealed
themselves to rude poets or dreamers in very simple times, that these rude people
should regard the revelation as local, and connect it with the particular hill or
river where it happened, seems to me exactly what any reasonable human being
would expect. It has a far more credible look than if they had talked cosmic
philosophy from the beginning. If they had, I should have suspected “priestcraft”
and forgeries and third–century gnosticism.

If there be such a being as God, and He can speak to a child, and if God spoke
to a child in the garden, the child would, of course, say that God lived in the
garden. I should not think it any less likely to be true for that. If the child said:
“God is everywhere; an impalpable essence pervading and supporting all
constituents of the Cosmos alike”—if, I say, the infant addressed me in the above
terms, I should think he was much more likely to have been with the governess
than with God.

So if Moses had said God was an Infinite Energy, I should be certain he had
seen nothing extraordinary. As he said He was a Burning Bush, I think it very
likely that he did see something extraordinary. For whatever be the Divine
Secret, and whether or no it has (as all people have believed) sometimes broken
bounds and surged into our world, at least it lies on the side furthest away from
pedants and their definitions, and nearest to the silver souls of quiet people, to
the beauty of bushes, and the love of one’s native place.

Thus, then, in our last instance (out of hundreds that might be taken), we
conclude in the same way. When the learned sceptic says: “The visions of the
Old Testament were local, and rustic, and grotesque,” we shall answer: “Of course. They were genuine.”

Thus, as I said at the beginning, I find myself, to start with, face to face with the difficulty that to mention the reasons that I have for believing in Christianity is, in very many cases, simply to repeat those arguments which Mr. Blatchford, in some strange way, seems to regard as arguments against it. His book is really rich and powerful. He has undoubtedly set up these four great guns of which I have spoken. I have nothing to say against the size and ammunition of the guns. I only say that by some strange accident of arrangement he has set up those four pieces of artillery pointing at himself. If I were not so humane, I should say: “Gentlemen of the Secularist Guard, fire first.”
WHY I BELIEVE IN CHRISTIANITY

I mean no disrespect to Mr. Blatchford in saying that our difficulty very largely lies in the fact that he, like masses of clever people nowadays, does not understand what theology is. To make mistakes in a science is one thing, to mistake its nature another. And as I read God and My Neighbour, the conviction gradually dawns on me that he thinks theology is the study of whether a lot of tales about God told in the Bible are historically demonstrable. This is as if he were trying to prove to a man that Socialism was sound Political Economy, and began to realise half-way through that the man thought that Political Economy meant the study of whether politicians were economical.

It is very hard to explain briefly the nature of a whole living study; it would be just as hard to explain politics or ethics. For the more a thing is huge and obvious and stares one in the face, the harder it is to define. Anybody can define conchology. Nobody can define morals.

Nevertheless it falls to us to make some attempt to explain this religious philosophy which was, and will be again, the study of the highest intellects and the foundation of the strongest nations, but which our little civilisation has for a while forgotten, just as it has forgotten how to dance and how to dress itself decently. I will try and explain why I think a religious philosophy necessary and why I think Christianity the best religious philosophy. But before I do so I want you to bear in mind two historical facts. I do not ask you to draw my deduction from them or any deduction from them. I ask you to remember them as mere facts throughout the discussion.

1. Christianity arose and spread in a very cultured and very cynical world—in a very modern world. Lucretius was as much a materialist as Haeckel, and a much more persuasive writer. The Roman world had read God and My Neighbour, and in a weary sort of way thought it quite true. It is worth noting that religions almost always do arise out of these sceptical civilisations. A recent book on the Pre–Mohammedan literature of Arabia describes a life entirely polished and luxurious. It was so with Buddha, born in the purple of an ancient civilisation. It was so with Puritanism in England and the Catholic Revival in France and Italy, both of which were born out of the rationalism of the Renaissance. It is so today; it is always so. Go to the two most modern and free–thinking centres, Paris
and America, and you will find them full of devils and angels, of old mysteries and new prophets. Rationalism is fighting for its life against the young and vigorous superstitions.

2. Christianity, which is a very mystical religion, has nevertheless been the religion of the most practical section of mankind. It has far more paradoxes than the Eastern philosophies, but it also builds far better roads.

The Moslem has a pure and logical conception of God, the one Monistic Allah. But he remains a barbarian in Europe, and the grass will not grow where he sets his foot. The Christian has a Triune God, “a tangled trinity,” which seems a mere capricious contradiction in terms. But in action he bestrides the earth, and even the cleverest Eastern can only fight him by imitating him first. The East has logic and lives on rice. Christendom has mysteries—and motor cars. Never mind, as I say, about the inference, let us register the fact.

Now with these two things in mind let me try and explain what Christian theology is.

Complete Agnosticism is the obvious attitude for man. We are all Agnostics until we discover that Agnosticism will not work. Then we adopt some philosophy, Mr. Blatchford’s or mine or some others, for of course Mr. Blatchford is no more an Agnostic than I am. The Agnostic would say that he did not know whether man was responsible for his sins. Mr. Blatchford says that he knows that man is not.

Here we have the seed of the whole huge tree of dogma. Why does Mr. Blatchford go beyond Agnosticism and assert that there is certainly no free will? Because he cannot run his scheme of morals without asserting that there is no free will. He wishes no man to be blamed for sin. Therefore he has to make his disciples quite certain that God did not make them free and therefore blamable. No wild Christian doubt must flit through the mind of the Determinist. No demon must whisper to him in some hour of anger that perhaps the company promoter was responsible for swindling him into the workhouse. No sudden scepticism must suggest to him that perhaps the schoolmaster was blamable for flogging a little boy to death. The Determinist faith must be held firmly, or else certainly the weakness of human nature will lead men to be angered when they are slandered and kick back when they are kicked. In short, free will seems at first sight to belong to the Unknowable. Yet Mr. Blatchford cannot preach what seems to him common charity without asserting one dogma about it. And I cannot preach what seems to me common honesty without asserting another.

Here is the failure of Agnosticism. That our every–day view of the things we
do (in the common sense) know, actually depends upon our view of the things we do not (in the common sense) know. It is all very well to tell a man, as the Agnostics do, to “cultivate his garden.” But suppose a man ignores everything outside his garden, and among them ignores the sun and the rain?

This is the real fact. You cannot live without dogmas about these things. You cannot act for twenty-four hours without deciding either to hold people responsible or not to hold them responsible. Theology is a product far more practical than chemistry.

Some Determinists fancy that Christianity invented a dogma like free will for fun—a mere contradiction. This is absurd. You have the contradiction whatever you are. Determinists tell me, with a degree of truth, that Determinism makes no difference to daily life. That means that although the Determinist knows men have no free will, yet he goes on treating them as if they had.

The difference then is very simple. The Christian puts the contradiction into his philosophy. The Determinist puts it into his daily habits. The Christian states as an avowed mystery what the Determinist calls nonsense. The Determinist has the same nonsense for breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper every day of his life.

The Christian, I repeat, puts the mystery into his philosophy. That mystery by its darkness enlightens all things. Once grant him that, and life is life, and bread is bread, and cheese is cheese: he can laugh and fight. The Determinist makes the matter of the will logical and lucid: and in the light of that lucidity all things are darkened, words have no meaning, actions no aim. He has made his philosophy a syllogism and himself a gibbering lunatic.

It is not a question between mysticism and rationality. It is a question between mysticism and madness. For mysticism, and mysticism alone, has kept men sane from the beginning of the world. All the straight roads of logic lead to some Bedlam, to Anarchism or to passive obedience, to treating the universe as a clockwork of matter or else as a delusion of mind. It is only the Mystic, the man who accepts the contradictions, who can laugh and walk easily through the world.

Are you surprised that the same civilisation which believed in the Trinity discovered steam?

All the great Christian doctrines are of this kind. Look at them carefully and fairly for yourselves. I have only space for two examples. The first is the Christian idea of God. Just as we have all been Agnostics so we have all been Pantheists. In the godhood of youth it seems so easy to say, “Why cannot a man see God in a bird flying and be content?” But then comes a time when we go on
and say, “If God is in the birds, let us be not only as beautiful as the birds; let us be as cruel as the birds; let us live the mad, red life of nature.” And something that is wholesome in us resists and says, “My friend, you are going mad.”

Then comes the other side and we say: “The birds are hateful, the flowers are shameful. I will give no praise to so base an universe.” And the wholesome thing in us says: “My friend, you are going mad.”

Then comes a fantastic thing and says to us: “You are right to enjoy the birds, but wicked to copy them. There is a good thing behind all these things, yet all these things are lower than you. The Universe is right: but the World is wicked. The thing behind all is not cruel, like a bird: but good, like a man.” And the wholesome thing in us says. “I have found the high road.”

Now when Christianity came, the ancient world had just reached this dilemma. It heard the Voice of Nature–Worship crying, “All natural things are good. War is as healthy as he flowers. Lust is as clean as the stars.” And it heard also the cry of the hopeless Stoics and Idealists: “The flowers are at war: the stars are unclean: nothing but man’s conscience is right and that is utterly defeated.”

Both views were consistent, philosophical and exalted: their only disadvantage was that the first leads logically to murder and the second to suicide. After an agony of thought the world saw the sane path between the two. It was the Christian God. He made Nature but He was Man.

Lastly, there is a word to be said about the Fall [Original Sin]. It can only be a word, and it is this. Without the doctrine of the Fall all idea of progress is unmeaning. Mr. Blatchford says that there was not a Fall but a gradual rise. But the very word “rise” implies that you know toward what you are rising. Unless there is a standard you cannot tell whether you are rising or falling. But the main point is that the Fall like every other large path of Christianity is embodied in the common language talked on the top of an omnibus. Anybody might say, “Very few men are really Manly.” Nobody would say, “Very few whales are really whaley.”

If you wanted to dissuade a man from drinking his tenth whisky you would slap him on the back and say, “Be a man.” No one who wished to dissuade a crocodile from eating his tenth explorer would slap it on the back and say, “Be a crocodile.” For we have no notion of a perfect crocodile; no allegory of a whale expelled from his whaley Eden. If a whale came up to us and said: “I am a new kind of whale; I have abandoned whalebone,” we should not trouble. But if a man came up to us (as many will soon come up to us) to say, “I am a new kind
of man. I am the super–man. I have abandoned mercy and justice”; we should answer, “Doubtless you are new, but you are not nearer to the perfect man, for he has been already in the mind of God. We have fallen with Adam and we shall rise with Christ; but we would rather fall with Satan than rise with you.”
MIRACLES AND MODERN CIVILISATION

Mr. Blatchford has summed up all that is important in his whole position in three sentences. They are perfectly honest and clear. Nor are they any the less honest and clear because the first two of them are falsehoods and the third is a fallacy. He says “The Christian denies the miracles of the Mahommedan. The Mahommedan denies the miracles of the Christian. The Rationalist denies all miracles alike.”

The historical error in the first two remarks I will deal with shortly. I confine myself for the moment to the courageous admission of Mr. Blatchford that the Rationalist denies all miracles alike. He does not question them. He does not pretend to be agnostic about them. He does not suspend his judgment until they shall be proved. He denies them. Faced with this astounding dogma I asked Mr. Blatchford why he thought miracles would not occur. He replied that the Universe was governed by laws. Obviously this answer is of no use whatever. For we cannot call a thing impossible because the world is governed by laws, unless we know what laws. Does Mr. Blatchford know all about all the laws in the Universe? And if he does not know about the laws how can he possibly know anything about the exceptions?

For, obviously, the mere fact that a thing happens seldom, under odd circumstances and with no explanation within our knowledge, is no proof that it is against natural law. That would apply to the Siamese twins, or to a new comet, or to radium three years ago.

The philosophical case against miracles is somewhat easily dealt with. There is no philosophical case against miracles. There are such things as the laws of Nature rationally speaking. What everybody knows is this only. That there is repetition in nature. What everybody knows is that pumpkins produce pumpkins. What nobody knows is why they should not produce elephants and giraffes.

There is one philosophical question about miracles and only one. Many able modern Rationalists cannot apparently even get it into their heads. The poorest lad at Oxford in the Middle Ages would have understood it. (Note. As the last sentence will seem strange in our “enlightened” age I may explain that under “the cruel reign of mediaeval superstition,” poor lads were educated at Oxford to a most reckless extent. Thank God, we live in better days.)
The question of miracles is merely this. Do you know why a pumpkin goes on being a pumpkin? If you do not, you cannot possibly tell whether a pumpkin could turn into a coach or couldn’t. That is all.

All the other scientific expressions you are in the habit of using at breakfast are words and winds. You say “It is a law of nature that pumpkins should remain pumpkins.” That only means that pumpkins generally do remain pumpkins, which is obvious; it does not say why. You say “Experience is against it.” That only means, “I have known many pumpkins intimately and none of them turned into coaches.”

There was a great Irish Rationalist of this school (possibly related to Mr. Lecky), who when he was told that a witness had seen him commit murder said that he could bring a hundred witnesses who had not seen him commit it.

You say “The modern world is against it.” That means that a mob of men in London and Birmingham, and Chicago, in a thoroughly pumpkiny state of mind, cannot work miracles by faith.

You say “Science is against it.” That means that so long as pumpkins are pumpkins their conduct is pumpkiny, and bears no resemblance to the conduct of a coach. That is fairly obvious.

What Christianity says is merely this. That this repetition in Nature has its origin not in a thing resembling a law but a thing resembling a will. Of course its phrase of a Heavenly Father is drawn from an earthly father. Quite equally Mr. Blatchford’s phrase of a universal law is a metaphor from an Act of Parliament. But Christianity holds that the world and its repetition came by will or Love as children are begotten by a father, and therefore that other and different things might come by it. Briefly, it believes that a God who could do anything so extraordinary as making pumpkins go on being pumpkins, is like the prophet, Habbakuk, Capable de tout. If you do not think it extraordinary that a pumpkin is always a pumpkin, think again. You have not yet even begun philosophy. You have not even seen a pumpkin.

The historic case against miracles is also rather simple. It consists of calling miracles impossible, then saying that no one but a fool believes impossibilities: then declaring that there is no wise evidence on behalf of the miraculous. The whole trick is done by means of leaning alternately on the philosophical and historical objection. If we say miracles are theoretically possible, they say, “Yes, but there is no evidence for them.” When we take all the records of the human race and say, “Here is your evidence,” they say, “But these people were superstitious, they believed in impossible things.”
The real question is whether our little Oxford Street civilisation is certain to be right and the rest of the world certain to be wrong. Mr. Blatchford thinks that the materialism of nineteenth century Westerns is one of their noble discoveries. I think it is as dull as their coats, as dirty as their streets, as ugly as their trousers, and as stupid as their industrial system.

Mr. Blatchford himself, however, has summed up perfectly his pathetic faith in modern civilisation. He has written a very amusing description of how difficult it would be to persuade an English judge in a modern law court of the truth of the Resurrection. Of course he is quite right; it would be impossible. But it does not seem to occur to him that we Christians may not have such an extravagant reverence for English judges as is felt by Mr. Blatchford himself.

The experiences of the Founder of Christianity have perhaps left us in a vague doubt of the infallibility of courts of law. I know quite well that nothing would induce a British judge to believe that a man had risen from the dead. But then I know quite as well that a very little while ago nothing would have induced a British judge to believe that a Socialist could be a good man. A judge would refuse to believe in new spiritual wonders. But this would not be because he was a judge, but because he was, besides being a judge, an English gentleman, a modern Rationalist, and something of an old fool.

And Mr. Blatchford is quite wrong in supposing that the Christian and the Moslem deny each other’s miracles. No religion that thinks itself true bothers about the miracles of another religion. It denies the doctrines of the religion; it denies its morals; but it never thinks it worth while to deny its signs and wonders.

And why not? Because these things some men have always thought possible. Because any wandering gipsy may have Psychical powers. Because the general existence of a world of spirits and of strange mental powers is a part of the common sense of all mankind. The Pharisees did not dispute the miracles of Christ; they said they were worked by devilry. The Christians did not dispute the miracles of Mahomed. They said they were worked by devilry. The Roman world did not deny the possibility that Christ was a God. It was far too enlightened for that.

In so far as the Church did (chiefly during the corrupt and sceptical eighteenth century) urge miracles as a reason for belief, her fault is evident: but it is not what Mr. Blatchford supposes. It is not that she asked men to believe anything so incredible; it is that she asked men to be converted by anything so commonplace.

What matters about a religion is not whether it can work marvels like any
ragged Indian conjurer, but whether it has a true philosophy of the Universe. The Romans were quite willing to admit that Christ was a God. What they denied was the He was the God—the highest truth of the cosmos. And this is the only point worth discussing about Christianity.
THE ETERNAL HEROISM OF THE SLUMS

I have said it before, but it cannot be too often repeated, that what is the matter with Mr. Blatchford and his school is that they are not sceptical enough. For the really bold questions we have to go back to the Christian Fathers.

For example, Mr. Blatchford, in God and My Neighbor, does me the honour to quote from me as follows: “Mr. G. K. Chesterton, in defending Christianity, said, ‘Christianity has committed crimes at which the sun might sicken in heaven, and no one can refute the statement.’ “ I did say this, and I say it again, but I said something else. I said that every great and useful institution had committed such crimes. And no one can refute that statement.

And why has every great institution been criminal? It is not enough to say “Christians persecuted; down with Christianity.” Any more than it is enough to say, “A Confucian stole my hair–brush; down with Confucianism.” We want to know whether the reason for which the Confucian stole the hair–brush was a reason peculiar to the Confucian or a reason common to many other men.

It is obvious that the Christian’s reason for torturing was a reason common to hosts of other men; it was simply the fact that he held his views strongly and tried unscrupulously to make them prevail. Any other man might hold any other views strongly and try unscrupulously to make them prevail. And when we look at the facts we find, I say, that millions of other men do, and have done so from the beginning of the world.

Mr. Blatchford quoted the one exception of Buddhism which never problem politically. This is, if ever there was one, an exception that proves the rule. For Buddhism has never persecuted, simply because it has never been political at all, because it has always despised material happiness and material civilization. That is to say, Buddhism has never had an inquisition for exactly the same reason that it has never had a printing–press, or a Reform Bill, or a Clarion newspaper.

But if Mr. Blatchford really thinks that the gory past of an institution damns it, and if he really wants an institution to damn, an institution which is much older, and much larger, and much gorier than Christianity, I can easily oblige him.

The institution called Government or the State has a past more shameful than a pirate ship. Every legal code on earth has been full of ferocity and heartrending error. The rack and the stake were not invented by Christians; Christians only
picked up the horrible cast toys of Paganism. The rack and the stake were invented by a bitter Rationalism older than all religions. The rack and the stake were invented by the State, by Society, by the Social Ideal—or, to put it shortly, by Socialism. And this State or Government, the mother of all whips and thumbscrews, this is, if you please, the very thing which Mr. Blatchford and his socialistic following would make stronger than it has ever been under the sun. Strange and admirable delicacy. Delicacy which can have no further dealings with Christianity, because of the Massacre of Saint Bartholomew, but must rather invoke to purify the world a thing which has shown its soul in the torturing of Roman slaves for evidence, and in the artistic punishments of China.

I do disagree with Mr. Blatchford for invoking the State. But then I do not think that the goriness of a thing’s past disqualifies it from saving mankind. I, therefore, am consistent in thinking that Christianity is not disqualified. But Mr. Blatchford is not consistent, for he positively appeals to the greater sinner to save him from the lesser.

If only Mr. Blatchford would ask the real question. It is not, “Why is Christianity so bad when it claims to be so good?” The real question is “Why are all human things so bad when they claim to be so good?” Why is not the most noble scheme a guarantee against corruption? If Nunquam will boldly pursue this question, will really leave delusions behind and walk across the godless waste, alone, he will come at last to a strange place. His sceptical pilgrimage will end at a place where Christianity begins.

Christianity begins with the wickedness of the Inquisition. Only it adds the wickedness of English Liberals, Tories, Socialists, and county magistrates. It begins with a strange thing running across human history. This it calls Sin, or the Fall of Man.

If ever I wish to expound it further, Mr. Blatchford’s list of Christian crimes will be a more valuable compilation. In brief however, Mr. Blatchford sees the sins of historic Christianity rise before him like a great tower. It is a star–defying Tower of Babel, lifting itself alone into the sky, affronting God in Heaven. Let him climb up it for a few years. When he is near to its tremendous top, he will find that it is one of the nine hundred and ninety–nine columns which support the pedestal of the historic Christianity philosophy.

Right or wrong, Christianity has her theory and her remedy for the world’s evils. But what is Mr. Blatchford’s remedy? Before him also lies the wilderness of human frenzy and frivolity. What is his remedy? I am not uttering (as anyone ignorant of the facts might fancy) a wild joke. I am stating the sober truth of the
situation, when I say that Mr. Blatchford’s remedy for all this is that nobody should be responsible for anything.

Never perhaps in the history of mankind has a serious malady been met by a more astounding cure. For Mr. Blatchford, remember, propounds it as a cure. Men have admitted Fatalism as a melancholy metaphysical truth. No one before him, as far as I know, ever took it round with a big drum as a cheery means of moral improvement. The problem is that men will not live up to ideals. The problem is that while Marcus Aurelius is breaking his heart for righteousness, his own son Commodus cares only for bloodthirsty pantomimes. The remedy is to tell Commodus that he cannot help it. The problem is that the purity of St. Francis cannot prevent the corruption of Brother Elias. The remedy is to tell Brother Elias that he is not to be blamed and Francis not to be admired. The problem is that a man will often choose a base pleasure rather than a hard generosity. The remedy is to tell him that the base pleasure has been chosen for him.

I know quite well, of course, that Mr. Blatchford tried to make this monstrous anarchy more tolerable to the intellect. He did it by saying that although people ought not to be blamed for their actions, yet they ought to be trained to do better. They ought, he said, to be given better conditions of heredity and environment, and then they would be good, and the problem would be solved. The primary answer is obvious. How can one say that a man ought not to be held responsible, but ought to be well trained? For if he “ought” to be well trained, there must be somebody who “ought” to train him. And that man must be held responsible for training him. The proposition has killed itself in three sentences. Mr. Blatchford has not removed the necessity for responsibility merely by saying that humanity, instead of being dealt with by the hangmen, ought to be dealt with by the doctors. For, upon the whole, and supposing I required the services of either, I think I would sooner be dealt with by an irresponsible hangman than by an irresponsible doctor.

The second thing to say, of course, is that Mr. Blatchford offers nothing even remotely resembling an argument to show that he knows what conditions would produce good men, or that anybody knows. He cannot surely mean that mere conditions of physical comfort and mental culture produce good men; because manifestly they do not. Mr. Blatchford may have some secret recipe for virtue, making people live in trees, or shave their heads, or dine on some peculiar kind of losenge, but he has not told anybody what it is.

The fact is very simple. It may be true that perfect conditions would produce
perfect men. But it is much more obviously that only perfect men could invent perfect conditions. If we make such a mess of our own lives, how can we be certain that we know the best soil for living things? If heredity and environment make it so necessary for us to commit theft and adultery, why should they not make it necessary for us to create conditions that will lead to theft and adultery? In the British Isles at this moment there exist, I imagine, people in every conceivable degree of riches and poverty, from insane opulence to insane hunger. Is anyone of those classes morally exquisite or glaringly any better than the rest? And where so many modes of education fail, by what right does Mr. Blatchford assume his, whatever it is, to be infallible?

As for the great part of the talk of Mr. Blatchford about sin arising from vile and filthy environments, I do not wish to introduce into this discussion anything of personal emotion, but I am bound to say that I have great difficulty in enduring that talk with patience. Who in the world is it who thus speaks as if wickedness and folly raged only among the unfortunate? Is it Mr. Blatchford who falls back upon the old contemptible impertinence which represents virtue to be something upper–class, like a visiting card, or a silk hat? Is it Nunquam who denies the eternal heroism of the slums? The thing is almost incredible, but so it is. Nunquam has put a coping stone upon his Tempe, this association of vice with poverty, the vilest and the oldest and the dirtiest of all the stones that insolence has ever flung at the poor.

Man that is born of woman has short days and full of trouble; but he is a nobler and a happier being than this would make him out. I will not deign to answer even Mr. Blatchford when he asks “how” a man born in filth and sin can live a noble life. I know so many who are doing it, within a stone’s throw of my own house, in Battersea, that I care little how it is done. Man has something in him always which is not conquered by conditions. Yes, there is a liberty that has never been chained. There is a liberty that has made men happy in dungeons, as it may make then happy in slums. It is the liberty of the mind, that is to say, it is the one liberty on which Mr. Blatchford makes war. That which all the tyrants have left, he would extinguish. That which no gaoler could ever deny to a prisoner, Nunquam would deny. More numerous than can be counted, in all the wars and persecutions of the world, men have looked out of their little grated windows and said, “at least my thoughts are free.” “No, No,” says the face of Mr. Blatchford, suddenly appearing at the window, “your thoughts are the inevitable result of heredity and environment. Your thoughts are as material as your dungeons. Your thoughts are as mechanical as the guillotine.” So pants this
strange comforter, from cell to cell.

I suppose Mr. Blatchford would say that in his Utopia nobody would be in prison. What do I care whether I am in prison or no, if I have to drag chains everywhere. A man in his Utopia may have, for all I know, free food, free meadows, his own estate, his own palace. What does it matter? he may not have his own soul. Every thought that comes into his head he must regard as the click of a machine. He sees a lost child and with a spasm of pity decides to adopt it. Click! he has to remember that he has not really done it at all. He has a temptation to do some huge irresistible sin; he reminds himself that he is a man, that he can, if he likes, be a hero; he resists it. Click! he remember that he is not a man and not a hero, but a machine, so made as to produce that result. He walks in wide fields under a splendid sunrise; he resolves on some vast magnanimity—Click! what is the good of sunrises and palaces? Was ever slavery like unto this slavery? Was ever man before so much a slave?

I know that this will never be, That is, I know that Mr. Blatchford’s philosophy will never be endured among sane men. But if ever it is I will very easily predict what will happen. Man, the machine, will stand up in these flowery meadows and cry aloud, “Was there not once a thing, a church, that taught us we were free in our souls? Did it not surround itself with tortures and dungeons in order to force men to believe that their souls were free? If there was, let it return, tortures, dungeons and all. Put me in those dungeons, rack me with those tortures, if by that means I may possibly believe it again.”
THE VICTORIAN AGE IN LITERATURE

G. K. CHESTERTON
INDEX

THE VICTORIAN AGE IN LITERATURE

  TABLE OF CONTENTS

  INTRODUCTION

  CHAPTER I
  THE VICTORIAN COMPROMISE AND ITS ENEMIES

  CHAPTER II
  THE GREAT VICTORIAN NOVELISTS

  CHAPTER III
  THE GREAT VICTORIAN POETS

  CHAPTER IV
  THE BREAK-UP OF THE COMPROMISE

  BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE
INTRODUCTION

A section of a long and splendid literature can be most conveniently treated in one of two ways. It can be divided as one cuts a currant cake or a Gruyère cheese, taking the currants (or the holes) as they come. Or it can be divided as one cuts wood—along the grain: if one thinks that there is a grain. But the two are never the same: the names never come in the same order in actual time as they come in any serious study of a spirit or a tendency. The critic who wishes to move onward with the life of an epoch, must be always running backwards and forwards among its mere dates; just as a branch bends back and forth continually; yet the grain in the branch runs true like an unbroken river.

Mere chronological order, indeed, is almost as arbitrary as alphabetical order. To deal with Darwin, Dickens, Browning, in the sequence of the birthday book would be to forge about as real a chain as the “Tacitus, Tolstoy, Tupper” of a biographical dictionary. It might lend itself more, perhaps, to accuracy: and it might satisfy that school of critics who hold that every artist should be treated as a solitary craftsman, indifferent to the commonwealth and unconcerned about moral things. To write on that principle in the present case, however, would involve all those delicate difficulties, known to politicians, which beset the public defence of a doctrine which one heartily disbelieves. It is quite needless here to go into the old “art for art’s sake”—business, or explain at length why individual artists cannot be reviewed without reference to their traditions and creeds. It is enough to say that with other creeds they would have been, for literary purposes, other individuals. Their views do not, of course, make the brains in their heads any more than the ink in their pens. But it is equally evident that mere brain-power, without attributes or aims, a wheel revolving in the void, would be a subject about as entertaining as ink. The moment we differentiate the minds, we must differentiate by doctrines and moral sentiments. A mere sympathy for democratic merry-making and mourning will not make a man a writer like Dickens. But without that sympathy Dickens would not be a writer like Dickens; and probably not a writer at all. A mere conviction that Catholic thought is the clearest as well as the best disciplined, will not make a man a writer like Newman. But without that conviction Newman would not be a writer like Newman; and probably not a writer at all. It is useless for the æsthete (or any other anarchist) to urge the isolated individuality of the artist, apart from his attitude to his age. His attitude to his age is his individuality: men are never
individual when alone.

It only remains for me, therefore, to take the more delicate and entangled task; and deal with the great Victorians, not only by dates and names, but rather by schools and streams of thought. It is a task for which I feel myself wholly incompetent; but as that applies to every other literary enterprise I ever went in for, the sensation is not wholly novel: indeed, it is rather reassuring than otherwise to realise that I am now doing something that nobody could do properly. The chief peril of the process, however, will be an inevitable tendency to make the spiritual landscape too large for the figures. I must ask for indulgence if such criticism traces too far back into politics or ethics the roots of which great books were the blossoms; makes Utilitarianism more important than Liberty or talks more of the Oxford Movement than of The Christian Year. I can only answer in the very temper of the age of which I write: for I also was born a Victorian; and sympathise not a little with the serious Victorian spirit. I can only answer, I shall not make religion more important than it was to Keble, or politics more sacred than they were to Mill.
CHAPTER I

THE VICTORIAN COMPROMISE AND ITS ENEMIES

The previous literary life of this country had left vigorous many old forces in the Victorian time, as in our time. Roman Britain and Mediæval England are still not only alive but lively; for real development is not leaving things behind, as on a road, but drawing life from them, as from a root. Even when we improve we never progress. For progress, the metaphor from the road, implies a man leaving his home behind him: but improvement means a man exalting the towers or extending the gardens of his home. The ancient English literature was like all the several literatures of Christendom, alike in its likeness, alike in its very unlikeness. Like all European cultures, it was European; like all European cultures, it was something more than European. A most marked and unmanageable national temperament is plain in Chaucer and the ballads of Robin Hood; in spite of deep and sometimes disastrous changes of national policy, that note is still unmistakable in Shakespeare, in Johnson and his friends, in Cobbett, in Dickens. It is vain to dream of defining such vivid things; a national soul is as indefinable as a smell, and as unmistakable. I remember a friend who tried impatiently to explain the word “mistletoe” to a German, and cried at last, despairing, “Well, you know holly–mistletoe’s the opposite!” I do not commend this logical method in the comparison of plants or nations. But if he had said to the Teuton, “Well, you know Germany–England’s the opposite”–the definition, though fallacious, would not have been wholly false. England, like all Christian countries, absorbed valuable elements from the forests and the rude romanticism of the North; but, like all Christian countries, it drank its longest literary draughts from the classic fountains of the ancients: nor was this (as is so often loosely thought) a matter of the mere “Renaissance.” The English tongue and talent of speech did not merely flower suddenly into the gargantuan polysyllables of the great Elizabethans; it had always been full of the popular Latin of the Middle Ages. But whatever balance of blood and racial idiom one allows, it is really true that the only suggestion that gets near the Englishman is to hint how far he is from the German. The Germans, like the Welsh, can sing perfectly serious songs perfectly seriously in chorus: can with clear eyes and clear voices join together in words of innocent and beautiful personal passion, for a false maiden or a dead child. The nearest one can get to defining the poetic...
temper of Englishmen is to say that they couldn’t do this even for beer. They can sing in chorus, and louder than other Christians: but they must have in their songs something, I know not what, that is at once shamefaced and rowdy. If the matter be emotional, it must somehow be also broad, common and comic, as “Wapping Old Stairs” and “Sally in Our Alley.” If it be patriotic, it must somehow be openly bombastic and, as it were, indefensible, like “Rule Britannia” or like that superb song (I never knew its name, if it has one) that records the number of leagues from Ushant to the Scilly Isles. Also there is a tender love-lyric called “O Tarry Trousers” which is even more English than the heart of The Midsummer Night’s Dream. But our greatest bards and sages have often shown a tendency to rant it and roar it like true British sailors; to employ an extravagance that is half conscious and therefore half humorous. Compare, for example, the rants of Shakespeare with the rants of Victor Hugo. A piece of Hugo’s eloquence is either a serious triumph or a serious collapse: one feels the poet is offended at a smile. But Shakespeare seems rather proud of talking nonsense: I never can read that rousing and mounting description of the storm, where it comes to—

“Who take the ruffian billows by the top,  
Curling their monstrous heads, and hanging them  
With deafening clamour in the slippery clouds.”

Without seeing an immense balloon rising from the ground, with Shakespeare grinning over the edge of the car, and saying, “You can’t stop me: I am above reason now.” That is the nearest we can get to the general national spirit, which we have now to follow through one brief and curious but very national episode.

Three years before the young queen was crowned, William Cobbett was buried at Farnham. It may seem strange to begin with this great neglected name, rather than the old age of Wordsworth or the young death of Shelley. But to any one who feels literature as human, the empty chair of Cobbett is more solemn and significant than the throne. With him died the sort of democracy that was a return to Nature, and which only poets and mobs can understand. After him Radicalism is urban—and Toryism suburban. Going through green Warwickshire, Cobbett might have thought of the crops and Shelley of the clouds. But Shelley would have called Birmingham what Cobbett called it—a hell-hole. Cobbett was one with after Liberals in the ideal of Man under an equal law, a citizen of no mean city. He differed from after Liberals in strongly affirming that Liverpool and Leeds are mean cities.

It is no idle Hibernianism to say that towards the end of the eighteenth century
the most important event in English history happened in France. It would seem still more perverse, yet it would be still more precise, to say that the most important event in English history was the event that never happened at all—the English Revolution on the lines of the French Revolution. Its failure was not due to any lack of fervour or even ferocity in those who would have brought it about: from the time when the first shout went up for Wilkes to the time when the last Luddite fires were quenched in a cold rain of rationalism, the spirit of Cobbett, of rural republicanism, of English and patriotic democracy, burned like a beacon. The revolution failed because it was foiled by another revolution; an aristocratic revolution, a victory of the rich over the poor. It was about this time that the common lands were finally enclosed; that the more cruel game laws were first established; that England became finally a land of landlords instead of common land-owners. I will not call it a Tory reaction; for much of the worst of it (especially of the land-grabbing) was done by Whigs; but we may certainly call it Anti-Jacobin. Now this fact, though political, is not only relevant but essential to everything that concerned literature. The upshot was that though England was full of the revolutionary ideas, nevertheless there was no revolution. And the effect of this in turn was that from the middle of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth the spirit of revolt in England took a wholly literary form. In France it was what people did that was wild and elemental; in England it was what people wrote. It is a quaint comment on the notion that the English are practical and the French merely visionary, that we were rebels in arts while they were rebels in arms.

It has been well and wittily said (as illustrating the mildness of English and the violence of French developments) that the same Gospel of Rousseau which in France produced the Terror, in England produced Sandford and Merton. But people forget that in literature the English were by no means restrained by Mr. Barlow; and that if we turn from politics to art, we shall find the two parts peculiarly reversed. It would be equally true to say that the same eighteenth-century emancipation which in France produced the pictures of David, in England produced the pictures of Blake. There never were, I think, men who gave to the imagination so much of the sense of having broken out into the very borderlands of being, as did the great English poets of the romantic or revolutionary period; than Coleridge in the secret sunlight of the Antarctic, where the waters were like witches’ oils; than Keats looking out of those extreme mysterious casements upon that ultimate sea. The heroes and criminals of the great French crisis would have been quite as incapable of such
imaginative independence as Keats and Coleridge would have been incapable of winning the battle of Wattignies. In Paris the tree of liberty was a garden tree, clipped very correctly; and Robespierre used the razor more regularly than the guillotine. Danton, who knew and admired English literature, would have cursed freely over Kubla Khan; and if the Committee of Public Safety had not already executed Shelley as an aristocrat, they would certainly have locked him up for a madman. Even Hébert (the one really vile Revolutionist), had he been reproached by English poets with worshipping the Goddess of Reason, might legitimately have retorted that it was rather the Goddess of Unreason that they set up to be worshipped. Verbally considered, Carlyle’s French Revolution was more revolutionary than the real French Revolution: and if Carrier, in an exaggerative phrase, empurpled the Loire with carnage, Turner almost literally set the Thames on fire.

This trend of the English Romantics to carry out the revolutionary idea not savagely in works, but very wildly indeed in words, had several results; the most important of which was this. It started English literature after the Revolution with a sort of bent towards independence and eccentricity, which in the brighter wits became individuality, and in the duller ones, Individualism. English Romantics, English Liberals, were not public men making a republic, but poets, each seeing a vision. The lonelier version of liberty was a sort of aristocratic anarchism in Byron and Shelley; but though in Victorian times it faded into much milder prejudices and much more bourgeois crotchets, England retained from that twist a certain odd separation and privacy. England became much more of an island than she had ever been before. There fell from her about this time, not only the understanding of France or Germany, but to her own long and yet lingering disaster, the understanding of Ireland. She had not joined in the attempt to create European democracy; nor did she, save in the first glow of Waterloo, join in the counter-attempt to destroy it. The life in her literature was still, to a large extent, the romantic liberalism of Rousseau, the free and humane truisms that had refreshed the other nations, the return to Nature and to natural rights. But that which in Rousseau was a creed, became in Hazlitt a taste and in Lamb little more than a whim. These latter and their like form a group at the beginning of the nineteenth century of those we may call the Eccentrics: they gather round Coleridge and his decaying dreams or linger in the tracks of Keats and Shelley and Godwin; Lamb with his bibliomania and creed of pure caprice, the most unique of all geniuses; Leigh Hunt with his Bohemian impecuniosity; Landor with his tempestuous temper, throwing plates on the floor; Hazlitt with
his bitterness and his low love affair; even that healthier and happier Bohemian, Peacock. With these, in one sense at least, goes De Quincey. He was, unlike most of these embers of the revolutionary age in letters, a Tory; and was attached to the political army which is best represented in letters by the virile laughter and leisure of Wilson’s Noctes Ambrosianæ. But he had nothing in common with that environment. It remained for some time as a Tory tradition, which balanced the cold and brilliant aristocracy of the Whigs. It lived on the legend of Trafalgar; the sense that insularity was independence; the sense that anomalies are as jolly as family jokes; the general sense that old salts are the salt of the earth. It still lives in some old songs about Nelson or Waterloo, which are vastly more pompous and vastly more sincere than the cockney cocksureness of later Jingo lyrics. But it is hard to connect De Quincey with it; or, indeed, with anything else. De Quincey would certainly have been a happier man, and almost certainly a better man, if he had got drunk on toddy with Wilson, instead of getting calm and clear (as he himself describes) on opium, and with no company but a book of German metaphysics. But he would hardly have revealed those wonderful vistas and perspectives of prose, which permit one to call him the first and most powerful of the decadents: those sentences that lengthen out like nightmare corridors, or rise higher and higher like impossible eastern pagodas. He was a morbid fellow, and far less moral than Burns; for when Burns confessed excess he did not defend it. But he has cast a gigantic shadow on our literature, and was as certainly a genius as Poe. Also he had humour, which Poe had not. And if any one still smarting from the pinpricks of Wilde or Whistler, wants to convict them of plagiarism in their “art for art” epigrams—he will find most of what they said said better in Murder as One of the Fine Arts.

One great man remains of this elder group, who did their last work only under Victoria; he knew most of the members of it, yet he did not belong to it in any corporate sense. He was a poor man and an invalid, with Scotch blood and a strong, though perhaps only inherited, quarrel with the old Calvinism; by name Thomas Hood. Poverty and illness forced him to the toils of an incessant jester; and the revolt against gloomy religion made him turn his wit, whenever he could, in the direction of a defence of happier and humaner views. In the long great roll that includes Homer and Shakespeare, he was the last great man who really employed the pun. His puns were not all good (nor were Shakespeare’s), but the best of them were a strong and fresh form of art. The pun is said to be a thing of two meanings; but with Hood there were three meanings, for there was also the abstract truth that would have been there with no pun at all. The pun of
Hood is underrated, like the “wit” of Voltaire, by those who forget that the words of Voltaire were not pins, but swords. In Hood at his best the verbal neatness only gives to the satire or the scorn a ring of finality such as is given by rhyme. For rhyme does go with reason, since the aim of both is to bring things to an end. The tragic necessity of puns tautened and hardened Hood’s genius; so that there is always a sort of shadow of that sharpness across all his serious poems, falling like the shadow of a sword. “Sewing at once with a double thread a shroud as well as a shirt”–”We thought her dying when she slept, and sleeping when she died”–”Oh God, that bread should be so dear and flesh and blood so cheap”–none can fail to note in these a certain fighting discipline of phrase, a compactness and point which was well trained in lines like “A cannon-ball took off his legs, so he laid down his arms.” In France he would have been a great epigrammatist, like Hugo. In England he is a punster.

There was nothing at least in this group I have loosely called the Eccentrics that disturbs the general sense that all their generation was part of the sunset of the great revolutionary poets. This fading glamour affected England in a sentimental and, to some extent, a snobbish direction; making men feel that great lords with long curls and whiskers were naturally the wits that led the world. But it affected England also negatively and by reaction; for it associated such men as Byron with superiority, but not with success. The English middle classes were led to distrust poetry almost as much as they admired it. They could not believe that either vision at the one end or violence at the other could ever be practical. They were deaf to that great warning of Hugo: “You say the poet is in the clouds; but so is the thunderbolt.” Ideals exhausted themselves in the void; Victorian England, very unwisely, would have no more to do with idealists in politics. And this, chiefly, because there had been about these great poets a young and splendid sterility; since the pantheist Shelley was in fact washed under by the wave of the world, or Byron sank in death as he drew the sword for Hellas.

The chief turn of nineteenth-century England was taken about the time when a footman at Holland House opened a door and announced “Mr. Macaulay.” Macaulay’s literary popularity was representative and it was deserved; but his presence among the great Whig families marks an epoch. He was the son of one of the first “friends of the negro,” whose honest industry and philanthropy were darkened by a religion of sombre smugness, which almost makes one fancy they loved the negro for his colour, and would have turned away from red or yellow men as needlessly gaudy. But his wit and his politics (combined with that
dropping of the Puritan tenets but retention of the Puritan tone which marked his
class and generation), lifted him into a sphere which was utterly opposite to that
from which he came. This Whig world was exclusive; but it was not narrow. It
was very difficult for an outsider to get into it; but if he did get into it he was in a
much freer atmosphere than any other in England. Of those aristocrats, the Old
Guard of the eighteenth century, many denied God, many defended Bonaparte,
and nearly all sneered at the Royal Family. Nor did wealth or birth make any
barriers for those once within this singular Whig world. The platform was high,
but it was level. Moreover the upstart nowadays pushes himself by wealth: but
the Whigs could choose their upstarts. In that world Macaulay found Rogers,
with his phosphorescent and corpse-like brilliancy; there he found Sydney
Smith, bursting with crackers of common sense, an admirable old heathen; there
he found Tom Moore, the romantic of the Regency, a shortened shadow of Lord
Byron. That he reached this platform and remained on it is, I say, typical of a
turning-point in the century. For the fundamental fact of early Victorian history
was this: the decision of the middle classes to employ their new wealth in
backing up a sort of aristocratical compromise, and not (like the middle class in
the French Revolution) insisting on a clean sweep and a clear democratic
programme. It went along with the decision of the aristocracy to recruit itself
more freely from the middle class. It was then also that Victorian “prudery”
began: the great lords yielded on this as on Free Trade. These two decisions have
made the doubtful England of to-day; and Macaulay is typical of them; he is the
bourgeois in Belgravia. The alliance is marked by his great speeches for Lord
Grey’s Reform Bill: it is marked even more significantly in his speech against
the Chartists. Cobbett was dead.

Macaulay makes the foundation of the Victorian age in all its very English and
unique elements: its praise of Puritan politics and abandonment of Puritan
theology; its belief in a cautious but perpetual patching up of the Constitution; its
admiration for industrial wealth. But above all he typifies the two things that
really make the Victorian Age itself, the cheapness and narrowness of its
conscious formulæ; the richness and humanity of its unconscious tradition.
There were two Macaulays, a rational Macaulay who was generally wrong, and a
romantic Macaulay who was almost invariably right. All that was small in him
derives from the dull parliamentarism of men like Sir James Mackintosh; but all
that was great in him has much more kinship with the festive antiquarianism of
Sir Walter Scott.

As a philosopher he had only two thoughts; and neither of them is true. The
first was that politics, as an experimental science, must go on improving, along with clocks, pistols or penknives, by the mere accumulation of experiment and variety. He was, indeed, far too strong-minded a man to accept the hazy modern notion that the soul in its highest sense can change: he seems to have held that religion can never get any better and that poetry rather tends to get worse. But he did not see the flaw in his political theory; which is that unless the soul improves with time there is no guarantee that the accumulations of experience will be adequately used. Figures do not add themselves up; birds do not label or stuff themselves; comets do not calculate their own courses; these things are done by the soul of man. And if the soul of man is subject to other laws, is liable to sin, to sleep, to anarchism or to suicide, then all sciences including politics may fall as sterile and lie as fallow as before man’s reason was made. Macaulay seemed sometimes to talk as if clocks produced clocks, or guns had families of little pistols, or a penknife littered like a pig. The other view he held was the more or less utilitarian theory of toleration; that we should get the best butcher whether he was a Baptist or a Muggletonian, and the best soldier whether he was a Wesleyan or an Irvingite. The compromise worked well enough in an England Protestant in bulk; but Macaulay ought to have seen that it has its limitations. A good butcher might be a Baptist; he is not very likely to be a Buddhist. A good soldier might be a Wesleyan; he would hardly be a Quaker. For the rest, Macaulay was concerned to interpret the seventeenth century in terms of the triumph of the Whigs as champions of public rights; and he upheld this one-sidedly but not malignantly in a style of rounded and ringing sentences, which at its best is like steel and at its worst like tin.

This was the small conscious Macaulay; the great unconscious Macaulay was very different. His noble enduring quality in our literature is this: that he truly had an abstract passion for history; a warm, poetic and sincere enthusiasm for great things as such; an ardour and appetite for great books, great battles, great cities, great men. He felt and used names like trumpets. The reader’s greatest joy is in the writer’s own joy, when he can let his last phrase fall like a hammer on some resounding name like Hildebrand or Charlemagne, on the eagles of Rome or the pillars of Hercules. As with Walter Scott, some of the best things in his prose and poetry are the surnames that he did not make. And it is remarkable to notice that this romance of history, so far from making him more partial or untrustworthy, was the only thing that made him moderately just. His reason was entirely one-sided and fanatical. It was his imagination that was well-balanced and broad. He was monotonously certain that only Whigs were right; but it was
necessary that Tories should at least be great, that his heroes might have foemen worthy of their steel. If there was one thing in the world he hated it was a High Church Royalist parson; yet when Jeremy Collier the Jacobite priest raises a real banner, all Macaulay’s blood warms with the mere prospect of a fight. “It is inspiriting to see how gallantly the solitary outlaw advances to attack enemies formidable separately, and, it might have been thought, irresistible when combined; distributes his swashing blows right and left among Wycherley, Congreve and Vanbrugh, treads the wretched D’Urfey down in the dirt beneath his feet; and strikes with all his strength full at the towering crest of Dryden.” That is exactly where Macaulay is great; because he is almost Homeric. The whole triumph turns upon mere names; but men are commanded by names. So his poem on the Armada is really a good geography book gone mad; one sees the map of England come alive and march and mix under the eye.

The chief tragedy in the trend of later literature may be expressed by saying that the smaller Macaulay conquered the larger. Later men had less and less of that hot love of history he had inherited from Scott. They had more and more of that cold science of self-interests which he had learnt from Bentham.

The name of this great man, though it belongs to a period before the Victorian, is, like the name of Cobbett, very important to it. In substance Macaulay accepted the conclusions of Bentham; though he offered brilliant objections to all his arguments. In any case the soul of Bentham (if he had one) went marching on, like John Brown; and in the central Victorian movement it was certainly he who won. John Stuart Mill was the final flower of that growth. He was himself fresh and delicate and pure; but that is the business of a flower. Though he had to preach a hard rationalism in religion, a hard competition in economics, a hard egoism in ethics, his own soul had all that silvery sensitiveness that can be seen in his fine portrait by Watts. He boasted none of that brutal optimism with which his friends and followers of the Manchester School expounded their cheery negations. There was about Mill even a sort of embarrassment; he exhibited all the wheels of his iron universe rather reluctantly, like a gentleman in trade showing ladies over his factory. There shone in him a beautiful reverence for women, which is all the more touching because, in his department, as it were, he could only offer them so dry a gift as the Victorian Parliamentary Franchise.

Now in trying to describe how the Victorian writers stood to each other, we must recur to the very real difficulty noted at the beginning: the difficulty of keeping the moral order parallel with the chronological order. For the mind moves by instincts, associations, premonitions and not by fixed dates or
completed processes. Action and reaction will occur simultaneously: or the cause actually be found after the effect. Errors will be resisted before they have been properly promulgated: notions will be first defined long after they are dead. It is no good getting the almanac to look up moonshine; and most literature in this sense is moonshine. Thus Wordsworth shrank back into Toryism, as it were, from a Shelleyan extreme of pantheism as yet disembodied. Thus Newman took down the iron sword of dogma to parry a blow not yet delivered, that was coming from the club of Darwin. For this reason no one can understand tradition, or even history, who has not some tenderness for anachronism.

Now for the great part of the Victorian era the utilitarian tradition which reached its highest in Mill held the centre of the field; it was the philosophy in office, so to speak. It sustained its march of codification and inquiry until it had made possible the great victories of Darwin and Huxley and Wallace. If we take Macaulay at the beginning of the epoch and Huxley at the end of it, we shall find that they had much in common. They were both square-jawed, simple men, greedy of controversy but scornful of sophistry, dead to mysticism but very much alive to morality; and they were both very much more under the influence of their own admirable rhetoric than they knew. Huxley, especially, was much more a literary than a scientific man. It is amusing to note that when Huxley was charged with being rhetorical, he expressed his horror of “plastering the fair face of truth with that pestilent cosmetic, rhetoric,” which is itself about as well-plastered a piece of rhetoric as Ruskin himself could have managed. The difference that the period had developed can best be seen if we consider this: that while neither was of a spiritual sort, Macaulay took it for granted that common sense required some kind of theology, while Huxley took it for granted that common sense meant having none. Macaulay, it is said, never talked about his religion: but Huxley was always talking about the religion he hadn’t got.

But though this simple Victorian rationalism held the centre, and in a certain sense was the Victorian era, it was assailed on many sides, and had been assailed even before the beginning of that era. The rest of the intellectual history of the time is a series of reactions against it, which come wave after wave. They have succeeded in shaking it, but not in dislodging it from the modern mind. The first of these was the Oxford Movement; a bow that broke when it had let loose the flashing arrow that was Newman. The second reaction was one man; without teachers or pupils—Dickens. The third reaction was a group that tried to create a sort of new romantic Protestantism, to pit against both Reason and Rome—Carlyle, Ruskin, Kingsley, Maurice—perhaps Tennyson. Browning also was at
once romantic and Puritan; but he belonged to no group, and worked against materialism in a manner entirely his own. Though as a boy he bought eagerly Shelley’s revolutionary poems, he did not think of becoming a revolutionary poet. He concentrated on the special souls of men; seeking God in a series of private interviews. Hence Browning, great as he is, is rather one of the Victorian novelists than wholly of the Victorian poets. From Ruskin, again, descend those who may be called the Pre-Raphaelites of prose and poetry.

It is really with this rationalism triumphant, and with the romance of these various attacks on it, that the study of Victorian literature begins and proceeds. Bentham was already the prophet of a powerful sect; Macaulay was already the historian of an historic party, before the true Victorian epoch began. The middle classes were emerging in a state of damaged Puritanism. The upper classes were utterly pagan. Their clear and courageous testimony remains in those immortal words of Lord Melbourne, who had led the young queen to the throne and long stood there as her protector. “No one has more respect for the Christian religion than I have; but really, when it comes to intruding it into private life—” What was pure paganism in the politics of Melbourne became a sort of mystical cynicism in the politics of Disraeli; and is well mirrored in his novels—for he was a man who felt at home in mirrors. With every allowance for aliens and eccentrics and all the accidents that must always eat the edges of any systematic circumference, it may still be said that the Utilitarians held the fort.

Of the Oxford Movement what remains most strongly in the Victorian Epoch centres round the challenge of Newman, its one great literary man. But the movement as a whole had been of great significance in the very genesis and make up of the society: yet that significance is not quite easy immediately to define. It was certainly not aesthetic ritualism; scarcely one of the Oxford High Churchmen was what we should call a Ritualist. It was certainly not a conscious reaching out towards Rome: except on a Roman Catholic theory which might explain all our unrests by that dim desire. It knew little of Europe, it knew nothing of Ireland, to which any merely Roman Catholic revulsion would obviously have turned. In the first instance, I think, the more it is studied, the more it would appear that it was a movement of mere religion as such. It was not so much a taste for Catholic dogma, but simply a hunger for dogma. For dogma means the serious satisfaction of the mind. Dogma does not mean the absence of thought, but the end of thought. It was a revolt against the Victorian spirit in one particular aspect of it; which may roughly be called (in a cosy and domestic Victorian metaphor) having your cake and eating it too. It saw that the solid and
serious Victorians were fundamentally frivolous—because they were fundamentally inconsistent.

A man making the confession of any creed worth ten minutes’ intelligent talk, is always a man who gains something and gives up something. So long as he does both he can create: for he is making an outline and a shape. Mahomet created, when he forbade wine but allowed five wives: he created a very big thing, which we have still to deal with. The first French Republic created, when it affirmed property and abolished peerages; France still stands like a square, four-sided building which Europe has besieged in vain. The men of the Oxford Movement would have been horrified at being compared either with Moslems or Jacobins. But their sub-conscious thirst was for something that Moslems and Jacobins had and ordinary Anglicans had not: the exalted excitement of consistency. If you were a Moslem you were not a Bacchanal. If you were a Republican you were not a peer. And so the Oxford men, even in their first and dimmest stages, felt that if you were a Churchman you were not a Dissenter. The Oxford Movement was, out of the very roots of its being, a rational movement; almost a rationalist movement. In that it differed sharply from the other reactions that shook the Utilitarian compromise; the blinding mysticism of Carlyle, the mere manly emotionalism of Dickens. It was an appeal to reason: reason said that if a Christian had a feast day he must have a fast day too. Otherwise, all days ought to be alike; and this was that very Utilitarianism against which their Oxford Movement was the first and most rational assault.

This idea, even by reason of its reason, narrowed into a sort of sharp spear, of which the spear blade was Newman. It did forget many of the other forces that were fighting on its side. But the movement could boast, first and last, many men who had this eager dogmatic quality: Keble, who spoilt a poem in order to recognise a doctrine; Faber, who told the rich, almost with taunts, that God sent the poor as eagles to strip them; Froude, who with Newman announced his return in the arrogant motto of Achilles. But the greater part of all this happened before what is properly our period; and in that period Newman, and perhaps Newman alone, is the expression and summary of the whole school. It was certainly in the Victorian Age, and after his passage to Rome, that Newman claimed his complete right to be in any book on modern English literature. This is no place for estimating his theology: but one point about it does clearly emerge. Whatever else is right, the theory that Newman went over to Rome to find peace and an end of argument, is quite unquestionably wrong. He had far more quarrels after he had gone over to Rome. But, though he had far more
quarrels, he had far fewer compromises: and he was of that temper which is
tortured more by compromise than by quarrel. He was a man at once of
abnormal energy and abnormal sensibility: nobody without that combination
could have written the Apologia. If he sometimes seemed to skin his enemies
alive, it was because he himself lacked a skin. In this sense his Apologia is a
triumph far beyond the ephemeral charge on which it was founded; in this sense
he does indeed (to use his own expression) vanquish not his accuser but his
judges. Many men would shrink from recording all their cold fits and hesitations
and prolonged inconsistencies: I am sure it was the breath of life to Newman to
confess them, now that he had done with them for ever. His Lectures on the
Present Position of English Catholics, practically preached against a raging mob,
rise not only higher but happier, as his instant unpopularity increases. There is
something grander than humour, there is fun, in the very first lecture about the
British Constitution as explained to a meeting of Russians. But always his
triumphs are the triumphs of a highly sensitive man: a man must feel insults
before he can so insultingly and splendidly avenge them. He is a naked man,
who carries a naked sword. The quality of his literary style is so successful that it
succeeds in escaping definition. The quality of his logic is that of a long but
passionate patience, which waits until he has fixed all corners of an iron trap.
But the quality of his moral comment on the age remains what I have said: a
protest of the rationality of religion as against the increasing irrationality of mere
Victorian comfort and compromise. So far as the present purpose is concerned,
his protest died with him: he left few imitators and (it may easily be conceived)
no successful imitators. The suggestion of him lingers on in the exquisite
Elizabethan perversity of Coventry Patmore; and has later flamed out from the
shy volcano of Francis Thompson. Otherwise (as we shall see in the parallel case
of Ruskin’s Socialism) he has no followers in his own age: but very many in
ours.

The next group of reactionaries or romantics or whatever we elect to call
them, gathers roughly around one great name. Scotland, from which had come
so many of those harsh economists who made the first Radical philosophies of
the Victorian Age, was destined also to fling forth (I had almost said to spit
forth) their fiercest and most extraordinary enemy. The two primary things in
Thomas Carlyle were his early Scotch education and his later German culture.
The first was in almost all respects his strength; the latter in some respects his
weakness. As an ordinary lowland peasant, he inherited the really valuable
historic property of the Scots, their independence, their fighting spirit, and their
instinctive philosophic consideration of men merely as men. But he was not an ordinary peasant. If he had laboured obscurely in his village till death, he would have been yet locally a marked man; a man with a wild eye, a man with an air of silent anger; perhaps a man at whom stones were sometimes thrown. A strain of disease and suffering ran athwart both his body and his soul. In spite of his praise of silence, it was only through his gift of utterance that he escaped madness. But while his fellow-peasants would have seen this in him and perhaps mocked it, they would also have seen something which they always expect in such men, and they would have got it: vision, a power in the mind akin to second sight. Like many ungainly or otherwise unattractive Scotchmen, he was a seer. By which I do not mean to refer so much to his transcendental rhapsodies about the World-soul or the Nature-garment or the Mysteries and Eternities generally, these seem to me to belong more to his German side and to be less sincere and vital. I mean a real power of seeing things suddenly, not apparently reached by any process; a grand power of guessing. He saw the crowd of the new States General, Danton with his “rude flattened face,” Robespierre peering mistily through his spectacles. He saw the English charge at Dunbar. He guessed that Mirabeau, however dissipated and diseased, had something sturdy inside him. He guessed that Lafayette, however brave and victorious, had nothing inside him. He supported the lawlessness of Cromwell, because across two centuries he almost physically felt the feebleness and hopelessness of the moderate Parliamentarians. He said a word of sympathy for the universally vituperated Jacobins of the Mountain, because through thick veils of national prejudice and misrepresentation, he felt the impossibility of the Gironde. He was wrong in denying to Scott the power of being inside his characters: but he really had a good deal of that power himself. It was one of his innumerable and rather provincial crotchets to encourage prose as against poetry. But, as a matter of fact, he himself was much greater considered as a kind of poet than considered as anything else; and the central idea of poetry is the idea of guessing right, like a child.

He first emerged, as it were, as a student and disciple of Goethe. The connection was not wholly fortunate. With much of what Goethe really stood for he was not really in sympathy; but in his own obstinate way, he tried to knock his idol into shape instead of choosing another. He pushed further and further the extravagances of a vivid but very unbalanced and barbaric style, in the praise of a poet who really represented the calmest classicism and the attempt to restore a Hellenic equilibrium in the mind. It is like watching a shaggy Scandinavian
decorating a Greek statue washed up by chance on his shores. And while the strength of Goethe was a strength of completion and serenity, which Carlyle not only never found but never even sought, the weaknesses of Goethe were of a sort that did not draw the best out of Carlyle. The one civilised element that the German classicists forgot to put into their beautiful balance was a sense of humour. And great poet as Goethe was, there is to the last something faintly fatuous about his half sceptical, half sentimental self-importance; a Lord Chamberlain of teacup politics; an earnest and elderly flirt; a German of the Germans. Now Carlyle had humour; he had it in his very style, but it never got into his philosophy. His philosophy largely remained a heavy Teutonic idealism, absurdly unaware of the complexity of things; as when he perpetually repeated (as with a kind of flat-footed stamping) that people ought to tell the truth; apparently supposing, to quote Stevenson’s phrase, that telling the truth is as easy as blind hookey. Yet, though his general honesty is unquestionable, he was by no means one of those who will give up a fancy under the shock of a fact. If by sheer genius he frequently guessed right, he was not the kind of man to admit easily that he had guessed wrong. His version of Cromwell’s filthy cruelties in Ireland, or his impatient slurring over of the most sinister riddle in the morality of Frederick the Great—these passages are, one must frankly say, disingenuous. But it is, so to speak, a generous disingenuousness; the heat and momentum of sincere admirations, not the shuffling fear and flattery of the constitutional or patriotic historian. It bears most resemblance to the incurable prejudices of a woman.

For the rest there hovered behind all this transcendental haze a certain presence of old northern paganism; he really had some sympathy with the vast vague gods of that moody but not unmanly Nature-worship which seems to have filled the darkness of the North before the coming of the Roman Eagle or the Christian Cross. This he combined, allowing for certain sceptical omissions, with the grisly Old Testament God he had heard about in the black Sabbaths of his childhood; and so promulgated (against both Rationalists and Catholics) a sort of heathen Puritanism: Protestantism purged of its evidences of Christianity.

His great and real work was the attack on Utilitarianism: which did real good, though there was much that was muddled and dangerous in the historical philosophy which he preached as an alternative. It is his real glory that he was the first to see clearly and say plainly the great truth of our time; that the wealth of the state is not the prosperity of the people. Macaulay and the Mills and all the regular run of the Early Victorians, took it for granted that if Manchester was
getting richer, we had got hold of the key to comfort and progress. Carlyle pointed out (with stronger sagacity and humour than he showed on any other question) that it was just as true to say that Manchester was getting poorer as that it was getting richer: or, in other words, that Manchester was not getting richer at all, but only some of the less pleasing people in Manchester. In this matter he is to be noted in connection with national developments much later; for he thus became the first prophet of the Socialists. Sartor Resartus is an admirable fantasia; The French Revolution is, with all its faults, a really fine piece of history; the lectures on Heroes contain some masterly sketches of personalities. But I think it is in Past and Present, and the essay on Chartism, that Carlyle achieves the work he was chosen by gods and men to achieve; which possibly might not have been achieved by a happier or more healthy-minded man. He never rose to more deadly irony than in such macabre descriptions as that of the poor woman proving her sisterhood with the rich by giving them all typhoid fever; or that perfect piece of badinage about “Overproduction of Shirts”; in which he imagines the aristocrats claiming to be quite clear of this offence. “Will you bandy accusations, will you accuse us of overproduction? We take the Heavens and the Earth to witness that we have produced nothing at all. . . .” And he never wrote so sternly and justly as when he compared the “divine sorrow” of Dante with the “undivine sorrow” of Utilitarianism, which had already come down to talking about the breeding of the poor and to hinting at infanticide. This is a representative quarrel; for if the Utilitarian spirit reached its highest point in Mill, it certainly reached its lowest point in Malthus.

One last element in the influence of Carlyle ought to be mentioned; because it very strongly dominated his disciples—especially Kingsley, and to some extent Tennyson and Ruskin. Because he frowned at the cockney cheerfulness of the cheaper economists, they and others represented him as a pessimist, and reduced all his azure infinities to a fit of the blues. But Carlyle’s philosophy, more carefully considered, will be found to be dangerously optimist rather than pessimist. As a thinker Carlyle is not sad, but recklessly and rather unscrupulously satisfied. For he seems to have held the theory that good could not be definitely defeated in this world; and that everything in the long run finds its right level. It began with what we may call the “Bible of History” idea: that all affairs and politics were a clouded but unbroken revelation of the divine. Thus any enormous and unaltered human settlement—as the Norman Conquest or the secession of America—we must suppose to be the will of God. It lent itself to
picturesque treatment; and Carlyle and the Carlyleans were above all things picturesque. It gave them at first a rhetorical advantage over the Catholic and other older schools. They could boast that their Creator was still creating; that he was in Man and Nature, and was not hedged round in a Paradise or imprisoned in a pyx. They could say their God had not grown too old for war: that He was present at Gettysburg and Gravelotte as much as at Gibeon and Gilboa. I do not mean that they literally said these particular things: they are what I should have said had I been bribed to defend their position. But they said things to the same effect: that what manages finally to happen, happens for a higher purpose. Carlyle said the French Revolution was a thing settled in the eternal councils to be; and therefore (and not because it was right) attacking it was “fighting against God.” And Kingsley even carried the principle so far as to tell a lady she should remain in the Church of England mainly because God had put her there. But in spite of its superficial spirituality and encouragement, it is not hard to see how such a doctrine could be abused. It practically comes to saying that God is on the side of the big battalions—or at least, of the victorious ones. Thus a creed which set out to create conquerors would only corrupt soldiers; corrupt them with a craven and unsoldierly worship of success: and that which began as the philosophy of courage ends as the philosophy of cowardice. If, indeed, Carlyle were right in saying that right is only “rightly articulated” might, men would never articulate or move in any way. For no act can have might before it is done: if there is no right, it cannot rationally be done at all. This element, like the Anti-Utilitarian element, is to be kept in mind in connection with after developments: for in this Carlyle is the first cry of Imperialism, as (in the other case) of Socialism: and the two babes unborn who stir at the trumpet are Mr. Bernard Shaw and Mr. Rudyard Kipling. Kipling also carries on from Carlyle the concentration on the purely Hebraic parts of the Bible. The fallacy of this whole philosophy is that if God is indeed present at a modern battle, He may be present not as on Gilboa but Golgotha.

Carlyle’s direct historical worship of strength and the rest of it was fortunately not very fruitful; and perhaps lingered only in Froude the historian. Even he is more an interruption than a continuity. Froude develops rather the harsher and more impatient moral counsels of his master than like Ruskin the more romantic and sympathetic. He carries on the tradition of Hero Worship: but carries far beyond Carlyle the practice of worshipping people who cannot rationally be called heroes. In this matter that eccentric eye of the seer certainly helped Carlyle: in Cromwell and Frederick the Great there was at least something self-
begotten, original or mystical; if they were not heroes they were at least demigods or perhaps demons. But Froude set himself to the praise of the Tudors, a much lower class of people; ill-conditioned prosperous people who merely waxed fat and kicked. Such strength as Henry VIII had was the strength of a badly trained horse that bolts, not of any clear or courageous rider who controls him. There is a sort of strong man mentioned in Scripture who, because he masters himself, is more than he that takes a city. There is another kind of strong man (known to the medical profession) who cannot master himself; and whom it may take half a city to take alive. But for all that he is a low lunatic, and not a hero; and of that sort were too many of the heroes whom Froude attempted to praise. A kind of instinct kept Carlyle from over-praising Henry VIII; or that highly cultivated and complicated liar, Queen Elizabeth. Here, the only importance of this is that one of Carlyle’s followers carried further that “strength” which was the real weakness of Carlyle. I have heard that Froude’s life of Carlyle was unsympathetic; but if it was so it was a sort of parricide. For the rest, like Macaulay, he was a picturesque and partisan historian: but, like Macaulay (and unlike the craven scientific historians of to-day) he was not ashamed of being partisan or of being picturesque. Such studies as he wrote on the Elizabethan seamen and adventurers, represent very triumphantly the sort of romance of England that all this school was attempting to establish; and link him up with Kingsley and the rest.

Ruskin may be very roughly regarded as the young lieutenant of Carlyle in his war on Utilitarian Radicalism: but as an individual he presents many and curious divergences. In the matter of style, he enriched English without disordering it. And in the matter of religion (which was the key of this age as of every other) he did not, like Carlyle, set up the romance of the great Puritans as a rival to the romance of the Catholic Church. Rather he set up and worshipped all the arts and trophies of the Catholic Church as a rival to the Church itself. None need dispute that he held a perfectly tenable position if he chose to associate early Florentine art with a Christianity still comparatively pure, and such sensualities as the Renaissance bred with the corruption of a Papacy. But this does not alter, as a merely artistic fact, the strange air of ill-ease and irritation with which Ruskin seems to tear down the gargoyles of Amiens or the marbles of Venice, as things of which Europe is not worthy; and take them away with him to a really careful museum, situated dangerously near Clapham. Many of the great men of that generation, indeed, had a sort of divided mind; an ethical headache which was literally a “splitting headache”; for there was a schism in the sympathies.
When these men looked at some historic object, like the Catholic Church or the French Revolution, they did not know whether they loved or hated it most. Carlyle’s two eyes were out of focus, as one may say, when he looked at democracy: he had one eye on Valmy and the other on Sedan. In the same way, Ruskin had a strong right hand that wrote of the great mediæval minsters in tall harmonies and traceries as splendid as their own; and also, so to speak, a weak and feverish left hand that was always fidgeting and trying to take the pen away—and write an evangelical tract about the immorality of foreigners. Many of their contemporaries were the same. The sea of Tennyson’s mind was troubled under its serene surface. The incessant excitement of Kingsley, though romantic and attractive in many ways, was a great deal more like Nervous Christianity than Muscular Christianity. It would be quite unfair to say of Ruskin that there was any major inconsistency between his mediæval tastes and his very unmediæval temper: and minor inconsistencies do not matter in anybody. But it is not quite unfair to say of him that he seemed to want all parts of the Cathedral except the altar.

As an artist in prose he is one of the most miraculous products of the extremely poetical genius of England. The length of a Ruskin sentence is like that length in the long arrow that was boasted of by the drawers of the long bow. He draws, not a cloth-yard shaft but a long lance to his ear: he shoots a spear. But the whole goes light as a bird and straight as a bullet. There is no Victorian writer before him to whom he even suggests a comparison, technically considered, except perhaps De Quincey; who also employed the long rich rolling sentence that, like a rocket, bursts into stars at the end. But De Quincey’s sentences, as I have said, have always a dreamy and insecure sense about them, like the turret on toppling turret of some mad sultan’s pagoda. Ruskin’s sentence branches into brackets and relative clauses as a straight strong tree branches into boughs and bifurcations, rather shaking off its burden than merely adding to it. It is interesting to remember that Ruskin wrote some of the best of these sentences in the attempt to show that he did understand the growth of trees, and that nobody else did—except Turner, of course. It is also (to those acquainted with his perverse and wild rhetorical prejudices) even more amusing to remember that if a Ruskin sentence (occupying one or two pages of small print) does not remind us of the growth of a tree, the only other thing it does remind of is the triumphant passage of a railway train.

Ruskin left behind him in his turn two quite separate streams of inspiration. The first and more practical was concerned, like Carlyle’s Chartism, with a
challenge to the social conclusions of the orthodox economists. He was not so
great a man as Carlyle, but he was a much more clear-headed man; and the point
and stab of his challenge still really stands and sticks, like a dagger in a dead
man. He answered the theory that we must always get the cheapest labour we
can, by pointing out that we never do get the cheapest labour we can, in any
matter about which we really care twopence. We do not get the cheapest doctor.
We either get a doctor who charges nothing or a doctor who charges a
recognised and respectable fee. We do not trust the cheapest bishop. We do not
allow admirals to compete. We do not tell generals to undercut each other on the
eve of a war. We either employ none of them or we employ all of them at an
official rate of pay. All this was set out in the strongest and least sentimental of
his books, Unto this Last; but many suggestions of it are scattered through
Sesame and Lilies, The Political Economy of Art, and even Modern Painters. On
this side of his soul Ruskin became the second founder of Socialism. The
argument was not by any means a complete or unconquerable weapon, but I
think it knocked out what little remained of the brains of the early Victorian
rationalists. It is entirely nonsensical to speak of Ruskin as a lounging æsthete,
who strolled into economics, and talked sentimentalism. In plain fact, Ruskin
was seldom so sensible and logical (right or wrong) as when he was talking
about economics. He constantly talked the most glorious nonsense about
landscape and natural history, which it was his business to understand. Within
his own limits, he talked the most cold common sense about political economy,
which was no business of his at all.

On the other side of his literary soul, his mere unwrapping of the wealth and
wonder of European art, he set going another influence, earlier and vaguer than
his influence on Socialism. He represented what was at first the Pre-Raphaelite
School in painting, but afterwards a much larger and looser Pre-Raphaelite
School in poetry and prose. The word “looser” will not be found unfair if we
remember how Swinburne and all the wildest friends of the Rossettis carried this
movement forward. They used the mediæval imagery to blaspheme the
mediæval religion. Ruskin’s dark and doubtful decision to accept Catholic art
but not Catholic ethics had borne rapid or even flagrant fruit by the time that
Swinburne, writing about a harlot, composed a learned and sympathetic and
indecent parody on the Litany of the Blessed Virgin.

With the poets I deal in another part of this book; but the influence of
Ruskin’s great prose touching art criticism can best be expressed in the name of
the next great prose writer on such subjects. That name is Walter Pater: and the
name is the full measure of the extent to which Ruskin’s vague but vast influence had escaped from his hands. Pater eventually joined the Church of Rome (which would not have pleased Ruskin at all), but it is surely fair to say of the mass of his work that its moral tone is neither Puritan nor Catholic, but strictly and splendidly Pagan. In Pater we have Ruskin without the prejudices, that is, without the funny parts. I may be wrong, but I cannot recall at this moment a single passage in which Pater’s style takes a holiday or in which his wisdom plays the fool. Newman and Ruskin were as careful and graceful stylists as he. Newman and Ruskin were as serious, elaborate, and even academic thinkers as he. But Ruskin let himself go about railways. Newman let himself go about Kingsley. Pater cannot let himself go for the excellent reason that he wants to stay: to stay at the point where all the keenest emotions meet, as he explains in the splendid peroration of The Renaissance. The only objection to being where all the keenest emotions meet is that you feel none of them.

In this sense Pater may well stand for a substantial summary of the æsthetes, apart from the purely poetical merits of men like Rossetti and Swinburne. Like Swinburne and others he first attempted to use mediaeval tradition without trusting it. These people wanted to see Paganism through Christianity: because it involved the incidental amusement of seeing through Christianity itself. They not only tried to be in all ages at once (which is a very reasonable ambition, though not often realised), but they wanted to be on all sides at once: which is nonsense. Swinburne tries to question the philosophy of Christianity in the metres of a Christmas carol: and Dante Rossetti tries to write as if he were Christina Rossetti. Certainly the almost successful summit of all this attempt is Pater’s superb passage on the Mona Lisa; in which he seeks to make her at once a mystery of good and a mystery of evil. The philosophy is false; even evidently false, for it bears no fruit to-day. There never was a woman, not Eve herself in the instant of temptation, who could smile the same smile as the mother of Helen and the mother of Mary. But it is the high-water mark of that vast attempt at an impartiality reached through art: and no other mere artist ever rose so high again.

Apart from this Ruskinian offshoot through Pre-Raphaelitism into what was called Æstheticism, the remains of the inspiration of Carlyle fill a very large part in the Victorian life, but not strictly so large a part in the Victorian literature. Charles Kingsley was a great publicist; a popular preacher; a popular novelist; and (in two cases at least) a very good novelist. His Water Babies is really a breezy and roaring freak; like a holiday at the seaside—a holiday where one talks natural history without taking it seriously. Some of the songs in this and other of
his works are very real songs: notably, “When all the World is Young, Lad,” which comes very near to being the only true defence of marriage in the controversies of the nineteenth century. But when all this is allowed, no one will seriously rank Kingsley, in the really literary sense, on the level of Carlyle or Ruskin, Tennyson or Browning, Dickens or Thackeray: and if such a place cannot be given to him, it can be given even less to his lusty and pleasant friend, Tom Hughes, whose personality floats towards the frankness of the Boy’s Own Paper; or to his deep, suggestive metaphysical friend Maurice, who floats rather towards The Hibbert Journal. The moral and social influence of these things is not to be forgotten: but they leave the domain of letters. The voice of Carlyle is not heard again in letters till the coming of Kipling and Henley.

One other name of great importance should appear here, because it cannot appear very appropriately anywhere else: the man hardly belonged to the same school as Ruskin and Carlyle, but fought many of their battles, and was even more concentrated on their main task—the task of convicting liberal bourgeois England of priggishness and provinciality. I mean, of course, Matthew Arnold. Against Mill’s “liberty” and Carlyle’s “strength” and Ruskin’s “nature,” he set up a new presence and entity which he called “culture,” the disinterested play of the mind through the sifting of the best books and authorities. Though a little dandified in phrase, he was undoubtedly serious and public-spirited in intention. He sometimes talked of culture almost as if it were a man, or at least a church (for a church has a sort of personality): some may suspect that culture was a man, whose name was Matthew Arnold. But Arnold was not only right but highly valuable. If we have said that Carlyle was a man that saw things, we may add that Arnold was chiefly valuable as a man who knew things. Well as he was endowed intellectually, his power came more from information than intellect. He simply happened to know certain things, that Carlyle didn’t know, that Kingsley didn’t know, that Huxley and Herbert Spencer didn’t know: that England didn’t know. He knew that England was a part of Europe: and not so important a part as it had been the morning after Waterloo. He knew that England was then (as it is now) an oligarchical State, and that many great nations are not. He knew that a real democracy need not live and does not live in that perpetual panic about using the powers of the State, which possessed men like Spencer and Cobden. He knew a rational minimum of culture and common courtesy could exist and did exist throughout large democracies. He knew the Catholic Church had been in history “the Church of the multitude”: he knew it was not a sect. He knew that great landlords are no more a part of the economic law than nigger-drivers: he
knew that small owners could and did prosper. He was not so much the philosopher as the man of the world: he reminded us that Europe was a society while Ruskin was treating it as a picture gallery. He was a sort of Heavensent courier. His frontal attack on the vulgar and sullen optimism of Victorian utility may be summoned up in the admirable sentence, in which he asked the English what was the use of a train taking them quickly from Islington to Camberwell, if it only took them “from a dismal and illiberal life in Islington to a dismal and illiberal life in Camberwell?”

His attitude to that great religious enigma round which all these great men were grouped as in a ring, was individual and decidedly curious. He seems to have believed that a “Historic Church,” that is, some established organisation with ceremonies and sacred books, etc., could be perpetually preserved as a sort of vessel to contain the spiritual ideas of the age, whatever those ideas might happen to be. He clearly seems to have contemplated a melting away of the doctrines of the Church and even of the meaning of the words: but he thought a certain need in man would always be best satisfied by public worship and especially by the great religious literatures of the past. He would embalm the body that it might often be revisited by the soul—or souls. Something of the sort has been suggested by Dr. Coit and others of the ethical societies in our own time. But while Arnold would loosen the theological bonds of the Church, he would not loosen the official bonds of the State. You must not disestablish the Church: you must not even leave the Church: you must stop inside it and think what you choose. Enemies might say that he was simply trying to establish and endow Agnosticism. It is fairer and truer to say that unconsciously he was trying to restore Paganism: for this State Ritualism without theology, and without much belief, actually was the practice of the ancient world. Arnold may have thought that he was building an altar to the Unknown God; but he was really building it to Divus Cæsar.

As a critic he was chiefly concerned to preserve criticism itself; to set a measure to praise and blame and support the classics against the fashions. It is here that it is specially true of him, if of no writer else, that the style was the man. The most vital thing he invented was a new style: founded on the patient unravelling of the tangled Victorian ideas, as if they were matted hair under a comb. He did not mind how elaborately long he made a sentence, so long as he made it clear. He would constantly repeat whole phrases word for word in the same sentence, rather than risk ambiguity by abbreviation. His genius showed itself in turning this method of a laborious lucidity into a peculiarly exasperating
form of satire and controversy. Newman’s strength was in a sort of stifled passion, a dangerous patience of polite logic and then: “Cowards! if I advanced a step you would run away: it is not you I fear. Di me terrent, et Jupiter hostis.” If Newman seemed suddenly to fly into a temper, Carlyle seemed never to fly out of one. But Arnold kept a smile of heartbroken forbearance, as of the teacher in an idiot school, that was enormously insulting. One trick he often tried with success. If his opponent had said something foolish, like “the destiny of England is in the great heart of England,” Arnold would repeat the phrase again and again until it looked more foolish than it really was. Thus he recurs again and again to “the British College of Health in the New Road” till the reader wants to rush out and burn the place down. Arnold’s great error was that he sometimes thus wearied us of his own phrases, as well as of his enemies.’

These names are roughly representative of the long series of protests against the cold commercial rationalism which held Parliament and the schools through the earlier Victorian time, in so far as those protests were made in the name of neglected intellect, insulted art, forgotten heroism and desecrated religion. But already the Utilitarian citadel had been more heavily bombarded on the other side by one lonely and unlettered man of genius.

The rise of Dickens is like the rising of a vast mob. This is not only because his tales are indeed as crowded and populous as towns: for truly it was not so much that Dickens appeared as that a hundred Dickens characters appeared. It is also because he was the sort of man who has the impersonal impetus of a mob: what Poe meant when he truly said that popular rumour, if really spontaneous, was like the intuition of the individual man of genius. Those who speak scornfully of the ignorance of the mob do not err as to the fact itself; their error is in not seeing that just as a crowd is comparatively ignorant, so a crowd is comparatively innocent. It will have the old and human faults; but it is not likely to specialise in the special faults of that particular society: because the effort of the strong and successful in all ages is to keep the poor out of society. If the higher castes have developed some special moral beauty or grace, as they occasionally do (for instance, mediæval chivalry), it is likely enough, of course, that the mass of men will miss it. But if they have developed some perversion or over-emphasis, as they much more often do (for instance, the Renaissance poisoning), then it will be the tendency of the mass of men to miss that too. The point might be put in many ways; you may say if you will that the poor are always at the tail of the procession, and that whether they are morally worse or better depends on whether humanity as a whole is proceeding towards heaven or
hell. When humanity is going to hell, the poor are always nearest to heaven.

Dickens was a mob—and a mob in revolt; he fought by the light of nature; he had not a theory, but a thirst. If any one chooses to offer the cheap sarcasm that his thirst was largely a thirst for milk-punch, I am content to reply with complete gravity and entire contempt that in a sense this is perfectly true. His thirst was for things as humble, as human, as laughable as that daily bread for which we cry to God. He had no particular plan of reform; or, when he had, it was startlingly petty and parochial compared with the deep, confused clamour of comradeship and insurrection that fills all his narrative. It would not be gravely unjust to him to compare him to his own heroine, Arabella Allen, who “didn’t know what she did like,” but who (when confronted with Mr. Bob Sawyer) “did know what she didn’t like.” Dickens did know what he didn’t like. He didn’t like the Unrivalled Happiness which Mr. Roebuck praised; the economic laws that were working so faultlessly in Fever Alley; the wealth that was accumulating so rapidly in Bleeding Heart Yard. But, above all, he didn’t like the mean side of the Manchester philosophy: the preaching of an impossible thrift and an intolerable temperance. He hated the implication that because a man was a miser in Latin he must also be a miser in English. And this meanness of the Utilitarians had gone very far—infecting many finer minds who had fought the Utilitarians. In the Edinburgh Review, a thing like Malthus could be championed by a man like Macaulay.

The twin root facts of the revolution called Dickens are these: first, that he attacked the cold Victorian compromise; second, that he attacked it without knowing he was doing it—certainly without knowing that other people were doing it. He was attacking something which we will call Mr. Gradgrind. He was utterly unaware (in any essential sense) that any one else had attacked Mr. Gradgrind. All the other attacks had come from positions of learning or cultured eccentricity of which he was entirely ignorant, and to which, therefore (like a spirited fellow), he felt a furious hostility. Thus, for instance, he hated that Little Bethel to which Kit’s mother went: he hated it simply as Kit hated it. Newman could have told him it was hateful, because it had no root in religious history; it was not even a sapling sprung of the seed of some great human and heathen tree: it was a monstrous mushroom that grows in the moonshine and dies in the dawn. Dickens knew no more of religious history than Kit; he simply smelt the fungus, and it stank. Thus, again, he hated that insolent luxury of a class counting itself a comfortable exception to all mankind; he hated it as Kate Nickleby hated Sir Mulberry Hawke—by instinct. Carlyle could have told him that all the world was
full of that anger against the impudent fatness of the few. But when Dickens wrote about Kate Nickleby, he knew about as much of the world—as Kate Nickleby. He did write The Tale of Two Cities long afterwards; but that was when he had been instructed by Carlyle. His first revolutionism was as private and internal as feeling sea-sick. Thus, once more, he wrote against Mr. Gradgrind long before he created him. In The Chimes, conceived in quite his casual and charitable season, with the Christmas Carol and the Cricket on the Hearth, he hit hard at the economists. Ruskin, in the same fashion, would have told him that the worst thing about the economists was that they were not economists: that they missed many essential things even in economics. But Dickens did not know whether they were economists or not: he only knew that they wanted hitting. Thus, to take a last case out of many, Dickens travelled in a French railway train, and noticed that this eccentric nation provided him with wine that he could drink and sandwiches he could eat, and manners he could tolerate. And remembering the ghastly sawdust-eating waiting-rooms of the North English railways, he wrote that rich chapter in Mugby Junction. Matthew Arnold could have told him that this was but a part of the general thinning down of European civilisation in these islands at the edge of it; that for two or three thousand years the Latin society has learnt how to drink wine, and how not to drink too much of it. Dickens did not in the least understand the Latin society: but he did understand the wine. If (to prolong an idle but not entirely false metaphor) we have called Carlyle a man who saw and Arnold a man who knew, we might truly call Dickens a man who tasted, that is, a man who really felt. In spite of all the silly talk about his vulgarity, he really had, in the strict and serious sense, good taste. All real good taste is gusto—the power of appreciating the presence—or the absence—of a particular and positive pleasure. He had no learning; he was not misled by the label on the bottle—for that is what learning largely meant in his time. He opened his mouth and shut his eyes and saw what the Age of Reason would give him. And, having tasted it, he spat it out.

I am constrained to consider Dickens here among the fighters; though I ought (on the pure principles of Art) to be considering him in the chapter which I have allotted to the story-tellers. But we should get the whole Victorian perspective wrong, in my opinion at least, if we did not see that Dickens was primarily the most successful of all the onslaughts on the solid scientific school; because he did not attack from the standpoint of extraordinary faith, like Newman; or the standpoint of extraordinary inspiration, like Carlyle; or the standpoint of extraordinary detachment or serenity, like Arnold; but from the standpoint of
quite ordinary and quite hearty dislike. To give but one instance more, Matthew Arnold, trying to carry into England constructive educational schemes which he could see spread like a clear railway map all over the Continent, was much badgered about what he really thought was wrong with English middle-class education. Despairing of explaining to the English middle class the idea of high and central public instruction, as distinct from coarse and hole-and-corner private instruction, he invoked the aid of Dickens. He said the English middle-class school was the sort of school where Mr. Creakle sat, with his buttered toast and his cane. Now Dickens had probably never seen any other kind of school—certainly he had never understood the systematic State Schools in which Arnold had learnt his lesson. But he saw the cane and the buttered toast, and he knew that it was all wrong. In this sense, Dickens, the great romanticist, is truly the great realist also. For he had no abstractions: he had nothing except realities out of which to make a romance.

With Dickens, then, re-arises that reality with which I began and which (curtly, but I think not falsely) I have called Cobbett. In dealing with fiction as such, I shall have occasion to say wherein Dickens is weaker and stronger than that England of the eighteenth century: here it is sufficient to say that he represents the return of Cobbett in this vital sense; that he is proud of being the ordinary man. No one can understand the thousand caricatures by Dickens who does not understand that he is comparing them all with his own common sense. Dickens, in the bulk, liked the things that Cobbett had liked; what is perhaps more to the point, he hated the things that Cobbett had hated; the Tudors, the lawyers, the leisurely oppression of the poor. Cobbett’s fine fighting journalism had been what is nowadays called “personal,” that is, it supposed human beings to be human. But Cobbett was also personal in the less satisfactory sense; he could only multiply monsters who were exaggerations of his enemies or exaggerations of himself. Dickens was personal in a more godlike sense; he could multiply persons. He could create all the farce and tragedy of his age over again, with creatures unborn to sin and creatures unborn to suffer. That which had not been achieved by the fierce facts of Cobbett, the burning dreams of Carlyle, the white-hot proofs of Newman, was really or very nearly achieved by a crowd of impossible people. In the centre stood that citadel of atheist industrialism: and if indeed it has ever been taken, it was taken by the rush of that unreal army.
CHAPTER II

THE GREAT VICTORIAN NOVELISTS

The Victorian novel was a thing entirely Victorian; quite unique and suited to a sort of cosiness in that country and that age. But the novel itself, though not merely Victorian, is mainly modern. No clear-headed person wastes his time over definitions, except where he thinks his own definition would probably be in dispute. I merely say, therefore, that when I say “novel,” I mean a fictitious narrative (almost invariably, but not necessarily, in prose) of which the essential is that the story is not told for the sake of its naked pointedness as an anecdote, or for the sake of the irrelevant landscapes and visions that can be caught up in it, but for the sake of some study of the difference between human beings. There are several things that make this mode of art unique. One of the most conspicuous is that it is the art in which the conquests of woman are quite beyond controversy. The proposition that Victorian women have done well in politics and philosophy is not necessarily an untrue proposition; but it is a partisan proposition. I never heard that many women, let alone men, shared the views of Mary Wollstonecraft; I never heard that millions of believers flocked to the religion tentatively founded by Miss Frances Power Cobbe. They did, undoubtedly, flock to Mrs. Eddy; but it will not be unfair to that lady to call her following a sect, and not altogether unreasonable to say that such insane exceptions prove the rule. Nor can I at this moment think of a single modern woman writing on politics or abstract things, whose work is of undisputed importance; except perhaps Mrs. Sidney Webb, who settles things by the simple process of ordering about the citizens of a state, as she might the servants in a kitchen. There has been, at any rate, no writer on moral or political theory that can be mentioned, without seeming comic, in the same breath with the great female novelists. But when we come to the novelists, the women have, on the whole, equality; and certainly, in some points, superiority. Jane Austen is as strong in her own way as Scott is in his. But she is, for all practical purposes, never weak in her own way—and Scott very often is. Charlotte Brontë dedicated Jane Eyre to the author of Vanity Fair. I should hesitate to say that Charlotte Brontë’s is a better book than Thackeray’s, but I think it might well be maintained that it is a better story. All sorts of inquiring asses (equally ignorant of the old nature of woman and the new nature of the novel) whispered wisely
that George Eliot’s novels were really written by George Lewes. I will
cheerfully answer for the fact that, if they had been written by George Lewes, no
one would ever have read them. Those who have read his book on Robespierre
will have no doubt about my meaning. I am no idolater of George Eliot; but a
man who could concoct such a crushing opiate about the most exciting occasion
in history certainly did not write The Mill on the Floss. This is the first fact
about the novel, that it is the introduction of a new and rather curious kind of art;
and it has been found to be peculiarly feminine, from the first good novel by
Fanny Burney to the last good novel by Miss May Sinclair. The truth is, I think,
that the modern novel is a new thing; not new in its essence (for that is a
philosophy for fools), but new in the sense that it lets loose many of the things
that are old. It is a hearty and exhaustive overhauling of that part of human
existence which has always been the woman’s province, or rather kingdom; the
play of personalities in private, the real difference between Tommy and Joe. It is
right that womanhood should specialise in individuals, and be praised for doing
so; just as in the Middle Ages she specialised in dignity and was praised for
doing so. People put the matter wrong when they say that the novel is a study of
human nature. Human nature is a thing that even men can understand. Human
nature is born of the pain of a woman; human nature plays at peep-bo when it is
two and at cricket when it is twelve; human nature earns its living and desires
the other sex and dies. What the novel deals with is what women have to deal
with; the differentiations, the twists and turns of this eternal river. The key of
this new form of art, which we call fiction, is sympathy. And sympathy does not
mean so much feeling with all who feel, but rather suffering with all who suffer.
And it was inevitable, under such an inspiration, that more attention should be
given to the awkward corners of life than to its even flow. The very promising
domestic channel dug by the Victorian women, in books like Cranford, by Mrs.
Gaskell, would have got to the sea, if they had been left alone to dig it. They
might have made domesticity a fairyland. Unfortunately another idea, the idea of
imitating men’s cuffs and collars and documents, cut across this purely female
discovery and destroyed it.

It may seem mere praise of the novel to say it is the art of sympathy and the
study of human variations. But indeed, though this is a good thing, it is not
universally good. We have gained in sympathy; but we have lost in brotherhood.
Old quarrels had more equality than modern exonerations. Two peasants in the
Middle Ages quarrelled about their two fields. But they went to the same church,
erved in the same semi-feudal militia, and had the same morality, which ever
might happen to be breaking it at the moment. The very cause of their quarrel was the cause of their fraternity; they both liked land. But suppose one of them a teetotaler who desired the abolition of hops on both farms; suppose the other a vegetarian who desired the abolition of chickens on both farms: and it is at once apparent that a quarrel of quite a different kind would begin; and that in that quarrel it would not be a question of farmer against farmer, but of individual against individual. This fundamental sense of human fraternity can only exist in the presence of positive religion. Man is merely man only when he is seen against the sky. If he is seen against any landscape, he is only a man of that land. If he is seen against any house, he is only a householder. Only where death and eternity are intensely present can human beings fully feel their fellowship. Once the divine darkness against which we stand is really dismissed from the mind (as it was very nearly dismissed in the Victorian time) the differences between human beings become overpoweringly plain; whether they are expressed in the high caricatures of Dickens or the low lunacies of Zola.

This can be seen in a sort of picture in the Prologue of the Canterbury Tales; which is already pregnant with the promise of the English novel. The characters there are at once graphically and delicately differentiated; the Doctor with his rich cloak, his careful meals, his coldness to religion; the Franklin, whose white beard was so fresh that it recalled the daisies, and in whose house it snowed meat and drink; the Summoner, from whose fearful face, like a red cherub’s, the children fled, and who wore a garland like a hoop; the Miller with his short red hair and bagpipes and brutal head, with which he could break down a door; the Lover who was as sleepless as a nightingale; the Knight, the Cook, the Clerk of Oxford. Pendennis or the Cook, M. Mirabolant, is nowhere so vividly varied by a few merely verbal strokes. But the great difference is deeper and more striking. It is simply that Pendennis would never have gone riding with a cook at all. Chaucer’s knight rode with a cook quite naturally; because the thing they were all seeking together was as much above knighthood as it was above cookery. Soldiers and swindlers and bullies and outcasts, they were all going to the shrine of a distant saint. To what sort of distant saint would Pendennis and Colonel Newcome and Mr. Moss and Captain Costigan and Ridley the butler and Bayham and Sir Barnes Newcome and Laura and the Duchess d’Ivry and Warrington and Captain Blackball and Lady Kew travel, laughing and telling tales together?

The growth of the novel, therefore, must not be too easily called an increase in the interest in humanity. It is an increase in the interest in the things in which
men differ; much fuller and finer work had been done before about the things in which they agree. And this intense interest in variety had its bad side as well as its good; it has rather increased social distinctions in a serious and spiritual sense. Most of the oblivion of democracy is due to the oblivion of death. But in its own manner and measure, it was a real advance and experiment of the European mind, like the public art of the Renaissance or the fairyland of physical science explored in the nineteenth century. It was a more unquestionable benefit than these: and in that development women played a peculiar part, English women especially, and Victorian women most of all.

It is perhaps partly, though certainly not entirely, this influence of the great women writers that explains another very arresting and important fact about the emergence of genuinely Victorian fiction. It had been by this time decided, by the powers that had influence (and by public opinion also, at least in the middle-class sense), that certain verbal limits must be set to such literature. The novel must be what some would call pure and others would call prudish; but what is not, properly considered, either one or the other: it is rather a more or less business proposal (right or wrong) that every writer shall draw the line at literal physical description of things socially concealed. It was originally merely verbal; it had not, primarily, any dream of purifying the topic or the moral tone. Dickens and Thackeray claimed very properly the right to deal with shameful passions and suggest their shameful culminations; Scott sometimes dealt with ideas positively horrible—as in that grand Glenallan tragedy which is as appalling as the Oedipus or The Cenci. None of these great men would have tolerated for a moment being talked to (as the muddle-headed amateur censors talk to artists today) about “wholesome” topics and suggestions “that cannot elevate.” They had to describe the great battle of good and evil and they described both; but they accepted a working Victorian compromise about what should happen behind the scenes and what on the stage. Dickens did not claim the license of diction Fielding might have claimed in repeating the senile ecstasies of Grinde (let us say) over his purchased bride: but Dickens does not leave the reader in the faintest doubt about what sort of feelings they were; nor is there any reason why he should. Thackeray would not have described the toilet details of the secret balls of Lord Steyne: he left that to Lady Cardigan. But no one who had read Thackeray’s version would be surprised at Lady Cardigan’s. But though the great Victorian novelists would not have permitted the impudence of the suggestion that every part of their problem must be wholesome and innocent in itself, it is still tenable (I do not say it is certain) that by yielding to the
Philistines on this verbal compromise, they have in the long run worked for impurity rather than purity. In one point I do certainly think that Victorian Bowdlerism did pure harm. This is the simple point that, nine times out of ten, the coarse word is the word that condemns an evil and the refined word the word that excuses it. A common evasion, for instance, substitutes for the word that brands self-sale as the essential sin, a word which weakly suggests that it is no more wicked than walking down the street. The great peril of such soft mystifications is that extreme evils (they that are abnormal even by the standard of evil) have a very long start. Where ordinary wrong is made unintelligible, extraordinary wrong can count on remaining more unintelligible still; especially among those who live in such an atmosphere of long words. It is a cruel comment on the purity of the Victorian Age, that the age ended (save for the bursting of a single scandal) in a thing being everywhere called “Art,” “The Greek Spirit,” “The Platonic Ideal” and so on—which any navvy mending the road outside would have stamped with a word as vile and as vulgar as it deserved.

This reticence, right or wrong, may have been connected with the participation of women with men in the matter of fiction. It is an important point: the sexes can only be coarse separately. It was certainly also due, as I have already suggested, to the treaty between the rich bourgeoisie and the old aristocracy, which both had to make, for the common and congenial purpose of keeping the English people down. But it was due much more than this to a general moral atmosphere in the Victorian Age. It is impossible to express that spirit except by the electric bell of a name. It was latitudinarian, and yet it was limited. It could be content with nothing less than the whole cosmos: yet the cosmos with which it was content was small. It is false to say it was without humour: yet there was something by instinct unsmilng in it. It was always saying solidly that things were “enough”; and proving by that sharpness (as of the shutting of a door) that they were not enough. It took, I will not say its pleasures, but even its emancipations, sadly. Definitions seem to escape this way and that in the attempt to locate it as an idea. But every one will understand me if I call it George Eliot.

I begin with this great woman of letters for both the two reasons already mentioned. She represents the rationalism of the old Victorian Age at its highest. She and Mill are like two great mountains at the end of that long, hard chain which is the watershed of the Early Victorian time. They alone rise high enough to be confused among the clouds—or perhaps confused among the stars. They certainly were seeking truth, as Newman and Carlyle were; the slow slope of the
later Victorian vulgarity does not lower their precipice and pinnacle. But I begin
with this name also because it emphasises the idea of modern fiction as a fresh
and largely a female thing. The novel of the nineteenth century was female; as
fully as the novel of the eighteenth century was male. It is quite certain that no
woman could have written Roderick Random. It is not quite so certain that no
woman could have written Esmond. The strength and subtlety of woman had
certainly sunk deep into English letters when George Eliot began to write.

Her originals and even her contemporaries had shown the feminine power in
fiction as well or better than she. Charlotte Brontë, understood along her own
instincts, was as great; Jane Austen was greater. The latter comes into our
present consideration only as that most exasperating thing, an ideal unachieved.
It is like leaving an unconquered fortress in the rear. No woman later has
captured the complete common sense of Jane Austen. She could keep her head,
while all the after women went about looking for their brains. She could describe
a man coolly; which neither George Eliot nor Charlotte Brontë could do. She
knew what she knew, like a sound dogmatist: she did not know what she did not
know—like a sound agnostic. But she belongs to a vanished world before the
great progressive age of which I write.

One of the characteristics of the central Victorian spirit was a tendency to
substitute a certain more or less satisfied seriousness for the extremes of tragedy
and comedy. This is marked by a certain change in George Eliot; as it is marked
by a certain limitation or moderation in Dickens. Dickens was the People, as it
was in the eighteenth century and still largely is, in spite of all the talk for and
against Board School Education: comic, tragic, realistic, free-spoken, far looser
in words than in deeds. It marks the silent strength and pressure of the spirit of
the Victorian middle class that even to Dickens it never occurred to revive the
verbal coarseness of Smollett or Swift. The other proof of the same pressure is
the change in George Eliot. She was not a genius in the elemental sense of
Dickens; she could never have been either so strong or so soft. But she did
originally represent some of the same popular realities: and her first books (at
least as compared with her latest) were full of sound fun and bitter pathos. Mr.
Max Beerbohm has remarked (in his glorious essay called Ichabod, I think), that
Silas Marner would not have forgotten his miserliness if George Eliot had
written of him in her maturity. I have a great regard for Mr. Beerbohm’s literary
judgments; and it may be so. But if literature means anything more than a cold
calculation of the chances, if there is in it, as I believe, any deeper idea of
detaching the spirit of life from the dull obstacles of life, of permitting human
nature really to reveal itself as human, if (to put it shortly) literature has anything on earth to do with being interesting–then I think we would rather have a few more Marners than that rich maturity that gave us the analysed dust-heaps of Daniel Deronda.

In her best novels there is real humour, of a cool sparkling sort; there is a strong sense of substantial character that has not yet degenerated into psychology; there is a great deal of wisdom, chiefly about women; indeed there is almost every element of literature except a certain indescribable thing called glamour; which was the whole stock-in-trade of the Brontës, which we feel in Dickens when Quilp clambers amid rotten wood by the desolate river; and even in Thackeray when Esmond with his melancholy eyes wanders like some swarthy crow about the dismal avenues of Castlewood. Of this quality (which some have called, but hastily, the essential of literature) George Eliot had not little but nothing. Her air is bright and intellectually even exciting; but it is like the air of a cloudless day on the parade at Brighton. She sees people clearly, but not through an atmosphere. And she can conjure up storms in the conscious, but not in the subconscious mind.

It is true (though the idea should not be exaggerated) that this deficiency was largely due to her being cut off from all those conceptions that had made the fiction of a Muse; the deep idea that there are really demons and angels behind men. Certainly the increasing atheism of her school spoilt her own particular imaginative talent: she was far less free when she thought like Ladislaw than when she thought like Casaubon. It also betrayed her on a matter specially requiring common sense; I mean sex. There is nothing that is so profoundly false as rationalist flirtation. Each sex is trying to be both sexes at once; and the result is a confusion more untruthful than any conventions. This can easily be seen by comparing her with a greater woman who died before the beginning of our present problem. Jane Austen was born before those bonds which (we are told) protected woman from truth, were burst by the Brontës or elaborately untied by George Eliot. Yet the fact remains that Jane Austen knew much more about men than either of them. Jane Austen may have been protected from truth: but it was precious little of truth that was protected from her. When Darcy, in finally confessing his faults, says, “I have been a selfish being all my life, in practice though not in theory,” he gets nearer to a complete confession of the intelligent male than ever was even hinted by the Byronic lapses of the Brontës’ heroes or the elaborate exculpations of George Eliot’s. Jane Austen, of course, covered an infinitely smaller field than any of her later rivals; but I have always believed in
the victory of small nationalities.

The Brontës suggest themselves here; because their superficial qualities, the qualities that can be seized upon in satire, were in this an exaggeration of what was, in George Eliot, hardly more than an omission. There was perhaps a time when Mr. Rawjester was more widely known than Mr. Rochester. And certainly Mr. Rochester (to adopt the diction of that other eminent country gentleman, Mr. Darcy) was simply individualistic not only in practice, but in theory. Now any one may be so in practice: but a man who is simply individualistic in theory must merely be an ass. Undoubtedly the Brontës exposed themselves to some misunderstanding by thus perpetually making the masculine creature much more masculine than he wants to be. Thackeray (a man of strong though sleepy virility) asked in his exquisite plaintive way: “Why do our lady novelists make the men bully the women?” It is, I think, unquestionably true that the Brontës treated the male as an almost anarchic thing coming in from outside nature; much as people on this planet regard a comet. Even the really delicate and sustained comedy of Paul Emanuel is not quite free from this air of studying something alien. The reply may be made that the women in men’s novels are equally fallacious. The reply is probably just.

What the Brontës really brought into fiction was exactly what Carlyle brought into history; the blast of the mysticism of the North. They were of Irish blood settled on the windy heights of Yorkshire; in that country where Catholicism lingered latest, but in a superstitious form; where modern industrialism came earliest and was more superstitious still. The strong winds and sterile places, the old tyranny of barons and the new and blacker tyranny of manufacturers, has made and left that country a land of barbarians. All Charlotte Brontë’s earlier work is full of that sullen and unmanageable world; moss-troopers turned hurriedly into miners; the last of the old world forced into supporting the very first crudities of the new. In this way Charlotte Brontë represents the Victorian settlement in a special way. The Early Victorian Industrialism is to George Eliot and to Charlotte Brontë, rather as the Late Victorian Imperialism would have been to Mrs. Humphry Ward in the centre of the empire and to Miss Olive Schreiner at the edge of it. The real strength there is in characters like Robert Moore, when he is dealing with anything except women, is the romance of industry in its first advance: a romance that has not remained. On such fighting frontiers people always exaggerate the strong qualities the masculine sex does possess, and always add a great many strong qualities that it does not possess. That is, briefly, all the reason in the Brontës on this special subject: the rest is
stark unreason. It can be most clearly seen in that sister of Charlotte Brontë’s who has achieved the real feat of remaining as a great woman rather than a great writer. There is really, in a narrow but intense way, a tradition of Emily Brontë: as there is a tradition of St. Peter or Dr. Johnson. People talk as if they had known her, apart from her works. She must have been something more than an original person; perhaps an origin. But so far as her written works go she enters English letters only as an original person—and rather a narrow one. Her imagination was sometimes superhuman—always inhuman. Wuthering Heights might have been written by an eagle. She is the strongest instance of these strong imaginations that made the other sex a monster: for Heathcliff fails as a man as catastrophically as he succeeds as a demon. I think Emily Brontë was further narrowed by the broadness of her religious views; but never, of course, so much as George Eliot.

In any case, it is Charlotte Brontë who enters Victorian literature. The shortest way of stating her strong contribution is, I think, this: that she reached the highest romance through the lowest realism. She did not set out with Amadis of Gaul in a forest or with Mr. Pickwick in a comic club. She set out with herself, with her own dingy clothes, and accidental ugliness, and flat, coarse, provincial household; and forcibly fused all such muddy materials into a spirited fairy-tale. If the first chapters on the home and school had not proved how heavy and hateful sanity can be, there would really be less point in the insanity of Mr. Rochester’s wife—or the not much milder insanity of Mrs. Rochester’s husband. She discovered the secret of hiding the sensational in the commonplace: and Jane Eyre remains the best of her books (better even than Villette) because while it is a human document written in blood, it is also one of the best blood-and-thunder detective stories in the world.

But while Emily Brontë was as unsociable as a storm at midnight, and while Charlotte Brontë was at best like that warmer and more domestic thing, a house on fire—they do connect themselves with the calm of George Eliot, as the forerunners of many later developments of the feminine advance. Many forerunners (if it comes to that) would have felt rather ill if they had seen the things they foreran. This notion of a hazy anticipation of after history has been absurdly overdone: as when men connect Chaucer with the Reformation; which is like connecting Homer with the Syracusean Expedition. But it is to some extent true that all these great Victorian women had a sort of unrest in their souls. And the proof of it is that (after what I will claim to call the healthier time of Dickens and Thackeray) it began to be admitted by the great Victorian men. If there had
not been something in that irritation, we should hardly have had to speak in these pages of Diana of the Crossways or of Tess of the D’Urbervilles. To what this strange and very local sex war has been due I shall not ask, because I have no answer. That it was due to votes or even little legal inequalities about marriage, I feel myself here too close to realities even to discuss. My own guess is that it has been due to the great neglect of the military spirit by the male Victorians. The woman felt obscurely that she was still running her mortal risk, while the man was not still running his. But I know nothing about it; nor does anybody else.

In so short a book on so vast, complex and living a subject, it is impossible to drop even into the second rank of good authors, whose name is legion; but it is impossible to leave that considerable female force in fiction which has so largely made the very nature of the modern novel, without mentioning two names which almost brought that second rank up to the first rank. They were at utterly opposite poles. The one succeeded by being a much mellower and more Christian George Eliot; the other succeeded by being a much more mad and unchristian Emily Brontë. But Mrs. Oliphant and the author calling herself “Ouida” both forced themselves well within the frontier of fine literature. The Beleaguered City is literature in its highest sense; the other works of its author tend to fall into fiction in its best working sense. Mrs. Oliphant was infinitely saner in that city of ghosts than the cosmopolitan Ouida ever was in any of the cities of men. Mrs. Oliphant would never have dared to discover, either in heaven or hell, such a thing as a hairbrush with its back encrusted with diamonds. But though Ouida was violent and weak where Mrs. Oliphant might have been mild and strong, her own triumphs were her own. She had a real power of expressing the senses through her style; of conveying the very heat of blue skies or the bursting of palpable pomegranates. And just as Mrs. Oliphant transfused her more timid Victorian tales with a true and intense faith in the Christian mystery—so Ouida, with infinite fury and infinite confusion of thought, did fill her books with Byron and the remains of the French Revolution. In the track of such genius there has been quite an accumulation of true talent as in the children’s tales of Mrs. Ewing, the historical tales of Miss Yonge, the tales of Mrs. Molesworth, and so on. On a general review I do not think I have been wrong in taking the female novelists first. I think they gave its special shape, its temporary twist, to the Victorian novel.

Nevertheless it is a shock (I almost dare to call it a relief) to come back to the males. It is the more abrupt because the first name that must be mentioned derives directly from the mere maleness of the Sterne and Smollett novel. I have
already spoken of Dickens as the most homely and instinctive, and therefore
probably the heaviest, of all the onslaughts made on the central Victorian
satisfaction. There is therefore the less to say of him here, where we consider
him only as a novelist; but there is still much more to say than can even
conceivably be said. Dickens, as we have stated, inherited the old comic,
rambling novel from Smollett and the rest. Dickens, as we have also stated,
consented to expurgate that novel. But when all origins and all restraints have
been defined and allowed for, the creature that came out was such as we shall
not see again. Smollett was coarse; but Smollett was also cruel. Dickens was
frequently horrible; he was never cruel. The art of Dickens was the most
exquisite of arts: it was the art of enjoying everybody. Dickens, being a very
human writer, had to be a very human being; he had his faults and sensibilities in
a strong degree; and I do not for a moment maintain that he enjoyed everybody
in his daily life. But he enjoyed everybody in his books: and everybody has
enjoyed everybody in those books even till to-day. His books are full of baffled
villains stalking out or cowardly bullies kicked downstairs. But the villains and
the cowards are such delightful people that the reader always hopes the villain
will put his head through a side window and make a last remark; or that the bully
will say one thing more, even from the bottom of the stairs. The reader really
hopes this; and he cannot get rid of the fancy that the author hopes so too. I
cannot at the moment recall that Dickens ever killed a comic villain, except
Quilp, who was deliberately made even more villainous than comic. There can
be no serious fears for the life of Mr. Wegg in the muckcart; though Mr.
Pecksniff fell to be a borrower of money, and Mr. Mantalini to turning a mangle,
the human race has the comfort of thinking they are still alive: and one might
have the rapture of receiving a begging letter from Mr. Pecksniff, or even of
catching Mr. Mantalini collecting the washing, if one always lurked about on
Monday mornings. This sentiment (the true artist will be relieved to hear) is
entirely unmoral. Mrs. Wilfer deserved death much more than Mr. Quilp, for she
had succeeded in poisoning family life persistently, while he was (to say the
least of it) intermittent in his domesticity. But who can honestly say he does not
hope Mrs. Wilfer is still talking like Mrs. Wilfer—especially if it is only in a
book? This is the artistic greatness of Dickens, before and after which there is
really nothing to be said. He had the power of creating people, both possible and
impossible, who were simply precious and priceless people; and anything subtler
added to that truth really only weakens it.

The mention of Mrs. Wilfer (whom the heart is loth to leave) reminds one of
the only elementary ethical truth that is essential in the study of Dickens. That is that he had broad or universal sympathies in a sense totally unknown to the social reformers who wallow in such phrases. Dickens (unlike the social reformers) really did sympathise with every sort of victim of every sort of tyrant. He did truly pray for all who are desolate and oppressed. If you try to tie him to any cause narrower than that Prayer Book definition, you will find you have shut out half his best work. If, in your sympathy for Mrs. Quilp, you call Dickens the champion of downtrodden woman, you will suddenly remember Mr. Wilfer, and find yourself unable to deny the existence of downtrodden man. If in your sympathy for Mr. Rouncewell you call Dickens the champion of a manly middle-class Liberalism against Chesney Wold, you will suddenly remember Stephen Blackpool—and find yourself unable to deny that Mr. Rouncewell might be a pretty insupportable cock on his own dung-hill. If in your sympathy for Stephen Blackpool you call Dickens a Socialist (as does Mr. Pugh), and think of him as merely heralding the great Collectivist revolt against Victorian Individualism and Capitalism, which seemed so clearly to be the crisis at the end of this epoch—you will suddenly remember the agreeable young Barnacle at the Circumlocution Office: and you will be unable, for very shame, to assert that Dickens would have trusted the poor to a State Department. Dickens did not merely believe in the brotherhood of men in the weak modern way; he was the brotherhood of men, and knew it was a brotherhood in sin as well as in aspiration. And he was not only larger than the old factions he satirised; he was larger than any of our great social schools that have gone forward since he died.

The seemingly quaint custom of comparing Dickens and Thackeray existed in their own time, and no one will dismiss it with entire disdain who remembers that the Victorian tradition was domestic and genuine, even when it was hoodwinked and unworldly. There must have been some reason for making this imaginary duel between two quite separate and quite amiable acquaintances. And there is, after all, some reason for it. It is not, as was once cheaply said, that Thackeray went in for truth, and Dickens for mere caricature. There is a huge accumulation of truth, down to the smallest detail, in Dickens: he seems sometimes a mere mountain of facts. Thackeray, in comparison, often seems quite careless and elusive; almost as if he did not quite know where all his characters were. There is a truth behind the popular distinction; but it lies much deeper. Perhaps the best way of stating it is this: that Dickens used reality, while aiming at an effect of romance; while Thackeray used the loose language and ordinary approaches of romance, while aiming at an effect of reality. It was the
special and splendid business of Dickens to introduce us to people who would have been quite incredible if he had not told us so much truth about them. It was the special and not less splendid task of Thackeray to introduce us to people whom we knew already. Paradoxically, but very practically, it followed that his introductions were the longer of the two. When we hear of Aunt Betsy Trotwood, we vividly envisage everything about her, from her gardening gloves to her seaside residence, from her hard, handsome face to her tame lunatic laughing at the bedroom window. It is all so minutely true that she must be true also. We only feel inclined to walk round the English coast until we find that particular garden and that particular aunt. But when we turn from the aunt of Copperfield to the uncle of Pendennis, we are more likely to run round the coast trying to find a watering-place where he isn’t than one where he is. The moment one sees Major Pendennis, one sees a hundred Major Pendennisises. It is not a matter of mere realism. Miss Trotwood’s bonnet and gardening tools and cupboard full of old-fashioned bottles are quite as true in the materialistic way as the Major’s cuffs and corner table and toast and newspaper. Both writers are realistic: but Dickens writes realism in order to make the incredible credible. Thackeray writes it in order to make us recognise an old friend. Whether we shall be pleased to meet the old friend is quite another matter: I think we should be better pleased to meet Miss Trotwood, and find, as David Copperfield did, a new friend, a new world. But we recognise Major Pendennis even when we avoid him. Henceforth Thackeray can count on our seeing him from his wig to his well-blacked boots whenever he chooses to say “Major Pendennis paid a call.” Dickens, on the other hand, had to keep up an incessant excitement about his characters; and no man on earth but he could have kept it up.

It may be said, in approximate summary, that Thackeray is the novelist of memory—of our memories as well as his own. Dickens seems to expect all his characters, like amusing strangers arriving at lunch: as if they gave him not only pleasure, but surprise. But Thackeray is everybody’s past—is everybody’s youth. Forgotten friends flit about the passages of dreamy colleges and unremembered clubs; we hear fragments of unfinished conversations, we see faces without names for an instant, fixed for ever in some trivial grimace: we smell the strong smell of social cliques now quite incongruous to us; and there stir in all the little rooms at once the hundred ghosts of oneself.

For this purpose Thackeray was equipped with a singularly easy and sympathetic style, carved in slow soft curves where Dickens hacked out his images with a hatchet. There was a sort of avuncular indulgence about his
attitude; what he called his “preaching” was at worst a sort of grumbling, ending
with the sentiment that boys will be boys and that there’s nothing new under the
sun. He was not really either a cynic or a censor morum; but (in another sense
than Chaucer’s) a gentle pardoner: having seen the weaknesses he is sometimes
almost weak about them. He really comes nearer to exculpating Pendennis or
Ethel Newcome than any other author, who saw what he saw, would have been.
The rare wrath of such men is all the more effective; and there are passages in
Vanity Fair and still more in The Book of Snobs, where he does make the dance
of wealth and fashion look stiff and monstrous, like a Babylonian masquerade.
But he never quite did it in such a way as to turn the course of the Victorian Age.

It may seem strange to say that Thackeray did not know enough of the world;
yet this was the truth about him in large matters of the philosophy of life, and
especially of his own time. He did not know the way things were going: he was
too Victorian to understand the Victorian epoch. He did not know enough
ignorant people to have heard the news. In one of his delightful asides he
imagines two little clerks commenting erroneously on the appearance of Lady
Kew or Sir Brian Newcome in the Park, and says: “How should Jones and
Brown, who are not, vous comprenez, du monde, understand these mysteries?”
But I think Thackeray knew quite as little about Jones and Brown as they knew
about Newcome and Kew; his world was le monde. Hence he seemed to take it
for granted that the Victorian compromise would last; while Dickens (who knew
his Jones and Brown) had already guessed that it would not. Thackeray did not
realise that the Victorian platform was a moving platform. To take but one
instance, he was a Radical like Dickens; all really representative Victorians,
except perhaps Tennyson, were Radicals. But he seems to have thought of all
reform as simple and straightforward and all of a piece; as if Catholic
Emancipation, the New Poor Law, Free Trade and the Factory Acts and Popular
Education were all parts of one almost self-evident evolution of enlightenment.
Dickens, being in touch with the democracy, had already discovered that the
country had come to a dark place of divided ways and divided counsels. In Hard
Times he realised Democracy at war with Radicalism; and became, with so
incompatible an ally as Ruskin, not indeed a Socialist, but certainly an anti-
Individualist. In Our Mutual Friend he felt the strength of the new rich, and
knew they had begun to transform the aristocracy, instead of the aristocracy
transforming them. He knew that Veneering had carried off Twemlow in
triumph. He very nearly knew what we all know to-day: that, so far from it being
possible to plod along the progressive road with more votes and more Free
Trade, England must either sharply become very much more democratic or as rapidly become very much less so.

There gathers round these two great novelists a considerable group of good novelists, who more or less mirror their mid-Victorian mood. Wilkie Collins may be said to be in this way a lesser Dickens and Anthony Trollope a lesser Thackeray. Wilkie Collins is chiefly typical of his time in this respect: that while his moral and religious conceptions were as mechanical as his carefully constructed fictitious conspiracies, he nevertheless informed the latter with a sort of involuntary mysticism which dealt wholly with the darker side of the soul. For this was one of the most peculiar of the problems of the Victorian mind. The idea of the supernatural was perhaps at as low an ebb as it had ever been—certainly much lower than it is now. But in spite of this, and in spite of a certain ethical cheeriness that was almost de rigueur—the strange fact remains that the only sort of supernaturalism the Victorians allowed to their imaginations was a sad supernaturalism. They might have ghost stories, but not saints’ stories. They could trifle with the curse or unpardoning prophecy of a witch, but not with the pardon of a priest. They seem to have held (I believe erroneously) that the supernatural was safest when it came from below. When we think (for example) of the uncountable riches of religious art, imagery, ritual and popular legend that has clustered round Christmas through all the Christian ages, it is a truly extraordinary thing to reflect that Dickens (wishing to have in The Christmas Carol a little happy supernaturalism by way of a change) actually had to make up a mythology for himself. Here was one of the rare cases where Dickens, in a real and human sense, did suffer from the lack of culture. For the rest, Wilkie Collins is these two elements: the mechanical and the mystical; both very good of their kind. He is one of the few novelists in whose case it is proper and literal to speak of his “plots.” He was a plotter; he went about to slay Godfrey Ablewhite as coldly and craftily as the Indians did. But he also had a sound though sinister note of true magic; as in the repetition of the two white dresses in The Woman in White; or of the dreams with their double explanations in Armadale. His ghosts do walk. They are alive; and walk as softly as Count Fosco, but as solidly. Finally, The Moonstone is probably the best detective tale in the world.

Anthony Trollope, a clear and very capable realist, represents rather another side of the Victorian spirit of comfort; its leisureliness, its love of detail, especially of domestic detail; its love of following characters and kindred from book to book and from generation to generation. Dickens very seldom tried this latter experiment, and then (as in Master Humphrey’s Clock) unsuccessfully;
those magnesium blazes of his were too brilliant and glaring to be indefinitely prolonged. But Thackeray was full of it; and we often feel that the characters in The Newcomes or Philip might legitimately complain that their talk and tale are being perpetually interrupted and pestered by people out of other books. Within his narrower limits, Trollope was a more strict and masterly realist than Thackeray, and even those who would call his personages “types” would admit that they are as vivid as characters. It was a bustling but a quiet world that he described: politics before the coming of the Irish and the Socialists; the Church in the lull between the Oxford Movement and the modern High Anglican energy. And it is notable in the Victorian spirit once more that though his clergymen are all of them real men and many of them good men, it never really occurs to us to think of them as the priests of a religion.

Charles Reade may be said to go along with these; and Disraeli and even Kingsley; not because these three very different persons had anything particular in common, but because they all fell short of the first rank in about the same degree. Charles Reade had a kind of cold coarseness about him, not morally but artistically, which keeps him out of the best literature as such: but he is of importance to the Victorian development in another way; because he has the harsher and more tragic note that has come later in the study of our social problems. He is the first of the angry realists. Kingsley’s best books may be called boys’ books. There is a real though a juvenile poetry in Westward Ho! and though that narrative, historically considered, is very much of a lie, it is a good, thundering honest lie. There are also genuinely eloquent things in Hypatia, and a certain electric atmosphere of sectarian excitement that Kingsley kept himself in, and did know how to convey. He said he wrote the book in his heart’s blood. This is an exaggeration, but there is a truth in it; and one does feel that he may have relieved his feelings by writing it in red ink. As for Disraeli, his novels are able and interesting considered as everything except novels, and are an important contribution precisely because they are written by an alien who did not take our politics so seriously as Trollope did. They are important again as showing those later Victorian changes which men like Thackeray missed. Disraeli did do something towards revealing the dishonesty of our politics—even if he had done a good deal towards bringing it about.

Between this group and the next there hovers a figure very hard to place; not higher in letters than these, yet not easy to class with them; I mean Bulwer Lytton. He was no greater than they were; yet somehow he seems to take up more space. He did not, in the ultimate reckoning, do anything in particular: but
he was a figure; rather as Oscar Wilde was later a figure. You could not have the Victorian Age without him. And this was not due to wholly superficial things like his dandyism, his dark, sinister good looks and a great deal of the mere polished melodrama that he wrote. There was something in his all-round interests; in the variety of things he tried; in his half-aristocratic swagger as poet and politician, that made him in some ways a real touchstone of the time. It is noticeable about him that he is always turning up everywhere and that he brings other people out, generally in a hostile spirit. His Byronic and almost Oriental ostentation was used by the young Thackeray as something on which to sharpen his new razor of Victorian common sense. His pose as a dilettante satirist inflamed the execrable temper of Tennyson, and led to those lively comparisons to a bandbox and a lion in curlpapers. He interposed the glove of warning and the tear of sensibility between us and the proper ending of Great Expectations. Of his own books, by far the best are the really charming comedies about The Caxtons and Kenelm Chillingly; none of his other works have a high literary importance now, with the possible exception of A Strange Story; but his Coming Race is historically interesting as foreshadowing those novels of the future which were afterwards such a weapon of the Socialists. Lastly, there was an element indefinable about Lytton, which often is in adventurers; which amounts to a suspicion that there was something in him after all. It rang out of him when he said to the hesitating Crimean Parliament: “Destroy your Government and save your army.”

With the next phase of Victorian fiction we enter a new world; the later, more revolutionary, more continental, freer but in some ways weaker world in which we live to-day. The subtle and sad change that was passing like twilight across the English brain at this time is very well expressed in the fact that men have come to mention the great name of Meredith in the same breath as Mr. Thomas Hardy. Both writers, doubtless, disagreed with the orthodox religion of the ordinary English village. Most of us have disagreed with that religion until we made the simple discovery that it does not exist. But in any age where ideas could be even feebly disentangled from each other, it would have been evident at once that Meredith and Hardy were, intellectually speaking, mortal enemies. They were much more opposed to each other than Newman was to Kingsley; or than Abelard was to St. Bernard. But then they collided in a sceptical age, which is like colliding in a London fog. There can never be any clear controversy in a sceptical age.

Nevertheless both Hardy and Meredith did mean something; and they did
mean diametrically opposite things. Meredith was perhaps the only man in the modern world who has almost had the high honour of rising out of the low estate of a Pantheist into the high estate of a Pagan. A Pagan is a person who can do what hardly any person for the last two thousand years could do: a person who can take Nature naturally. It is due to Meredith to say that no one outside a few of the great Greeks has ever taken Nature so naturally as he did. And it is also due to him to say that no one outside Colney Hatch ever took Nature so unnaturally as it was taken in what Mr. Hardy has had the blasphemy to call Wessex Tales. This division between the two points of view is vital; because the turn of the nineteenth century was a very sharp one; by it we have reached the rapids in which we find ourselves to-day.

Meredith really is a Pantheist. You can express it by saying that God is the great All: you can express it much more intelligently by saying that Pan is the great god. But there is some sense in it, and the sense is this: that some people believe that this world is sufficiently good at bottom for us to trust ourselves to it without very much knowing why. It is the whole point in most of Meredith’s tales that there is something behind us that often saves us when we understand neither it nor ourselves. He sometimes talked mere intellectualism about women: but that is because the most brilliant brains can get tired. Meredith’s brain was quite tired when it wrote some of its most quoted and least interesting epigrams: like that about passing Seraglio Point, but not doubling Cape Turk. Those who can see Meredith’s mind in that are with those who can see Dickens’ mind in Little Nell. Both were chivalrous pronouncements on behalf of oppressed females: neither has any earthly meaning as ideas.

But what Meredith did do for women was not to emancipate them (which means nothing) but to express them, which means a great deal. And he often expressed them right, even when he expressed himself wrong. Take, for instance, that phrase so often quoted: “Woman will be the last thing civilised by man.” Intellectually it is something worse than false; it is the opposite of what he was always attempting to say. So far from admitting any equality in the sexes, it logically admits that a man may use against a woman any chains or whips he has been in the habit of using against a tiger or a bear. He stood as the special champion of female dignity: but I cannot remember any author, Eastern or Western, who has so calmly assumed that man is the master and woman merely the material, as Meredith really does in this phrase. Any one who knows a free woman (she is generally a married woman) will immediately be inclined to ask two simple and catastrophic questions, first: “Why should woman be civilised?”
and, second: “Why, if she is to be civilised, should she be civilised by man?” In the mere intellectualism of the matter, Meredith seems to be talking the most brutal sex mastery: he, at any rate, has not doubled Cape Turk, nor even passed Seraglio Point. Now why is it that we all really feel that this Meredithian passage is not so insolently masculine as in mere logic it would seem? I think it is for this simple reason: that there is something about Meredith making us feel that it is not woman he disbelieves in, but civilisation. It is a dark undemonstrated feeling that Meredith would really be rather sorry if woman were civilised by man—or by anything else. When we have got that, we have got the real Pagan—the man that does believe in Pan.

It is proper to put this philosophic matter first, before the æsthetic appreciation of Meredith, because with Meredith a sort of passing bell has rung and the Victorian orthodoxy is certainly no longer safe. Dickens and Carlyle, as we have said, rebelled against the orthodox compromise: but Meredith has escaped from it. Cosmopolitanism, Socialism, Feminism are already in the air; and Queen Victoria has begun to look like Mrs. Grundy. But to escape from a city is one thing: to choose a road is another. The free-thinker who found himself outside the Victorian city, found himself also in the fork of two very different naturalistic paths. One of them went upwards through a tangled but living forest to lonely but healthy hills: the other went down to a swamp. Hardy went down to botanise in the swamp, while Meredith climbed towards the sun. Meredith became, at his best, a sort of daintily dressed Walt Whitman: Hardy became a sort of village atheist brooding and blaspheming over the village idiot. It is largely because the free-thinkers, as a school, have hardly made up their minds whether they want to be more optimist or more pessimist than Christianity that their small but sincere movement has failed.

For the duel is deadly; and any agnostic who wishes to be anything more than a Nihilist must sympathise with one version of nature or the other. The God of Meredith is impersonal; but he is often more healthy and kindly than any of the persons. That of Thomas Hardy is almost made personal by the intense feeling that he is poisonous. Nature is always coming in to save Meredith’s women; Nature is always coming in to betray and ruin Hardy’s. It has been said that if God had not existed it would have been necessary to invent Him. But it is not often, as in Mr. Hardy’s case, that it is necessary to invent Him in order to prove how unnecessary (and undesirable) He is. But Mr. Hardy is anthropomorphic out of sheer atheism. He personifies the universe in order to give it a piece of his mind. But the fight is unequal for the old philosophical reason: that the universe
had already given Mr. Hardy a piece of its mind to fight with. One curious result of this divergence in the two types of sceptic is this: that when these two brilliant novelists break down or blow up or otherwise lose for a moment their artistic self-command, they are both equally wild, but wild in opposite directions. Meredith shows an extravagance in comedy which, if it were not so complicated, every one would call broad farce. But Mr. Hardy has the honour of inventing a new sort of game, which may be called the extravagance of depression. The placing of the weak lover and his new love in such a place that they actually see the black flag announcing that Tess has been hanged is utterly inexcusable in art and probability; it is a cruel practical joke. But it is a practical joke at which even its author cannot brighten up enough to laugh.

But it is when we consider the great artistic power of these two writers, with all their eccentricities, that we see even more clearly that free-thought was, as it were, a fight between finger-posts. For it is the remarkable fact that it was the man who had the healthy and manly outlook who had the crabbed and perverse style; it was the man who had the crabbed and perverse outlook who had the healthy and manly style. The reader may well have complained of paradox when I observed above that Meredith, unlike most neo-Pagans, did in his way take Nature naturally. It may be suggested, in tones of some remonstrance, that things like “though pierced by the cruel acerb,” or “thy fleetingness is bigger in the ghost,” or “her gabbling grey she eyes askant,” or “sheer film of the surface awag” are not taking Nature naturally. And this is true of Meredith’s style, but it is not true of his spirit; nor even, apparently, of his serious opinions. In one of the poems I have quoted he actually says of those who live nearest to that Nature he was always praising—

“Have they but held her laws and nature dear,
They mouth no sentence of inverted wit”;

Which certainly was what Meredith himself was doing most of the time. But a similar paradox of the combination of plain tastes with twisted phrases can also be seen in Browning. Something of the same can be seen in many of the cavalier poets. I do not understand it: it may be that the fertility of a cheerful mind crowds everything, so that the tree is entangled in its own branches; or it may be that the cheerful mind cares less whether it is understood or not; as a man is less articulate when he is humming than when he is calling for help.

Certainly Meredith suffers from applying a complex method to men and things he does not mean to be complex; nay, honestly admires for being simple.
The conversations between Diana and Redworth fail of their full contrast because Meredith can afford the twopence for Diana coloured, but cannot afford the penny for Redworth plain. Meredith’s ideals were neither sceptical nor finicky: but they can be called insufficient. He had, perhaps, over and above his honest Pantheism two convictions profound enough to be called prejudices. He was probably of Welsh blood, certainly of Celtic sympathies, and he set himself more swiftly though more subtly than Ruskin or Swinburne to undermining the enormous complacency of John Bull. He also had a sincere hope in the strength of womanhood, and may be said, almost without hyperbole, to have begotten gigantic daughters. He may yet suffer for his chivalric interference as many champions do. I have little doubt that when St. George had killed the dragon he was heartily afraid of the princess. But certainly neither of these two vital enthusiasms touched the Victorian trouble. The disaster of the modern English is not that they are not Celtic, but that they are not English. The tragedy of the modern woman is not that she is not allowed to follow man, but that she follows him far too slavishly. This conscious and theorising Meredith did not get very near his problem and is certainly miles away from ours. But the other Meredith was a creator; which means a god. That is true of him which is true of so different a man as Dickens, that all one can say of him is that he is full of good things. A reader opening one of his books feels like a schoolboy opening a hamper which he knows to have somehow cost a hundred pounds. He may be more bewildered by it than by an ordinary hamper; but he gets the impression of a real richness of thought; and that is what one really gets from such riots of felicity as Evan Harrington or Harry Richmond. His philosophy may be barren, but he was not. And the chief feeling among those that enjoy him is a mere wish that more people could enjoy him too.

I end here upon Hardy and Meredith; because this parting of the ways to open optimism and open pessimism really was the end of the Victorian peace. There are many other men, very nearly as great, on whom I might delight to linger: on Shorthouse, for instance, who in one way goes with Mrs. Browning or Coventry Patmore. I mean that he has a wide culture, which is called by some a narrow religion. When we think what even the best novels about cavaliers have been (written by men like Scott or Stevenson) it is a wonderful thing that the author of John Inglesant could write a cavalier romance in which he forgot Cromwell but remembered Hobbes. But Shorthouse is outside the period in fiction in the same sort of way in which Francis Thompson is outside it in poetry. He did not accept the Victorian basis. He knew too much.
There is one more matter that may best be considered here, though briefly: it illustrates the extreme difficulty of dealing with the Victorian English in a book like this, because of their eccentricity; not of opinions, but of character and artistic form. There are several great Victorians who will not fit into any of the obvious categories I employ; because they will not fit into anything, hardly into the world itself. Where Germany or Italy would relieve the monotony of mankind by paying serious respect to an artist, or a scholar, or a patriotic warrior, or a priest—it was always the instinct of the English to do it by pointing out a Character. Dr. Johnson has faded as a poet or a critic, but he survives as a Character. Cobbett is neglected (unfortunately) as a publicist and pamphleteer, but he is remembered as a Character. Now these people continued to crop up through the Victorian time; and each stands so much by himself that I shall end these pages with a profound suspicion that I have forgotten to mention a Character of gigantic dimensions. Perhaps the best example of such eccentrics is George Borrow; who sympathised with unsuccessful nomads like the gipsies while every one else sympathised with successful nomads like the Jews; who had a genius like the west wind for the awakening of wild and casual friendships and the drag and attraction of the roads. But whether George Borrow ought to go into the section devoted to philosophers, or the section devoted to novelists, or the section devoted to liars, nobody else has ever known, even if he did.

But the strongest case of this Victorian power of being abruptly original in a corner can be found in two things: the literature meant merely for children and the literature meant merely for fun. It is true that these two very Victorian things often melted into each other (as was the way of Victorian things), but not sufficiently to make it safe to mass them together without distinction. Thus there was George Macdonald, a Scot of genius as genuine as Carlyle’s; he could write fairy-tales that made all experience a fairy-tale. He could give the real sense that every one had the end of an elfin thread that must at last lead them into Paradise. It was a sort of optimist Calvinism. But such really significant fairy-tales were accidents of genius. Of the Victorian Age as a whole it is true to say that it did discover a new thing; a thing called Nonsense. It may be doubted whether this thing was really invented to please children. Rather it was invented by old people trying to prove their first childhood, and sometimes succeeding only in proving their second. But whatever else the thing was, it was English and it was individual. Lewis Carroll gave mathematics a holiday: he carried logic into the wild lands of illogicality. Edward Lear, a richer, more romantic and therefore more truly Victorian buffoon, improved the experiment. But the more we study
it, the more we shall, I think, conclude that it reposed on something more real and profound in the Victorians than even their just and exquisite appreciation of children. It came from the deep Victorian sense of humour.

It may appear, because I have used from time to time the only possible phrases for the case, that I mean the Victorian Englishman to appear as a blockhead, which means an unconscious buffoon. To all this there is a final answer: that he was also a conscious buffoon—and a successful one. He was a humorist; and one of the best humorists in Europe. That which Goethe had never taught the Germans, Byron did manage to teach the English—the duty of not taking him seriously. The strong and shrewd Victorian humour appears in every slash of the pencil of Charles Keene; in every undergraduate inspiration of Calverley or “Q.” or J.K.S. They had largely forgotten both art and arms: but the gods had left them laughter.

But the final proof that the Victorians were alive by this laughter, can be found in the fact they could manage and master for a moment even the cosmopolitan modern theatre. They could contrive to put “The Bab Ballads” on the stage. To turn a private name into a public epithet is a thing given to few: but the word “Gilbertian” will probably last longer than the name Gilbert.

It meant a real Victorian talent; that of exploding unexpectedly and almost, as it seemed, unintentionally. Gilbert made good jokes by the thousand; but he never (in his best days) made the joke that could possibly have been expected of him. This is the last essential of the Victorian. Laugh at him as a limited man, a moralist, conventionalist, an opportunist, a formalist. But remember also that he was really a humorist; and may still be laughing at you.
CHAPTER III

THE GREAT VICTORIAN POETS

What was really unsatisfactory in Victorian literature is something much easier to feel than to state. It was not so much a superiority in the men of other ages to the Victorian men. It was a superiority of Victorian men to themselves. The individual was unequal. Perhaps that is why the society became unequal: I cannot say. They were lame giants; the strongest of them walked on one leg a little shorter than the other. A great man in any age must be a common man, and also an uncommon man. Those that are only uncommon men are perverts and sowers of pestilence. But somehow the great Victorian man was more and less than this. He was at once a giant and a dwarf. When he has been sweeping the sky in circles infinitely great, he suddenly shrivels into something indescribably small. There is a moment when Carlyle turns suddenly from a high creative mystic to a common Calvinist. There are moments when George Eliot turns from a prophetess into a governess. There are also moments when Ruskin turns into a governess, without even the excuse of sex. But in all these cases the alteration comes as a thing quite abrupt and unreasonable. We do not feel this acute angle anywhere in Homer or in Virgil or in Chaucer or in Shakespeare or in Dryden; such things as they knew they knew. It is no disgrace to Homer that he had not discovered Britain; or to Virgil that he had not discovered America; or to Chaucer that he had not discovered the solar system; or to Dryden that he had not discovered the steam-engine. But we do most frequently feel, with the Victorians, that the very vastness of the number of things they know illustrates the abrupt abyss of the things they do not know. We feel, in a sort of way, that it is a disgrace to a man like Carlyle when he asks the Irish why they do not bestir themselves and re-forest their country: saying not a word about the soaking up of every sort of profit by the landlords which made that and every other Irish improvement impossible. We feel that it is a disgrace to a man like Ruskin when he says, with a solemn visage, that building in iron is ugly and unreal, but that the weightiest objection is that there is no mention of it in the Bible; we feel as if he had just said he could find no hair-brushes in Habakkuk. We feel that it is a disgrace to a man like Thackeray when he proposes that people should be forcibly prevented from being nuns, merely because he has no fixed intention of becoming a nun himself. We feel that it is a disgrace to a man like Tennyson,
when he talks of the French revolutions, the huge crusades that had recreated the whole of his civilisation, as being “no graver than a schoolboy’s barring out.” We feel that it is a disgrace to a man like Browning to make spluttering and spiteful puns about the names Newman, Wiseman, and Manning. We feel that it is a disgrace to a man like Newman when he confesses that for some time he felt as if he couldn’t come in to the Catholic Church, because of that dreadful Mr. Daniel O’Connell, who had the vulgarity to fight for his own country. We feel that it is a disgrace to a man like Dickens, when he makes a blind brute and savage out of a man like St. Dunstan; it sounds as if it were not Dickens talking but Dombey. We feel it is a disgrace to a man like Swinburne, when he has a Jingo fit and calls the Boer children in the concentration camps “Whelps of treacherous dams whom none save we have spared to starve and slay”: we feel that Swinburne, for the first time, really has become an immoral and indecent writer. All this is a certain odd provincialism peculiar to the English in that great century: they were in a kind of pocket; they appealed to too narrow a public opinion; I am certain that no French or German men of the same genius made such remarks. Renan was the enemy of the Catholic Church; but who can imagine Renan writing of it as Kingsley or Dickens did? Taine was the enemy of the French Revolution; but who can imagine Taine talking about it as Tennyson or Newman talked? Even Matthew Arnold, though he saw this peril and prided himself on escaping it, did not altogether escape it. There must be (to use an Irishism) something shallow in the depths of any man who talks about the Zeitgeist as if it were a living thing.

But this defect is very specially the key to the case of the two great Victorian poets, Tennyson and Browning; the two spirited or beautiful tunes, so to speak, to which the other events marched or danced. It was especially so of Tennyson, for a reason which raises some of the most real problems about his poetry. Tennyson, of course, owed a great deal to Virgil. There is no question of plagiarism here; a debt to Virgil is like a debt to Nature. But Tennyson was a provincial Virgil. In such passages as that about the schoolboy’s barring out he might be called a suburban Virgil. I mean that he tried to have the universal balance of all the ideas at which the great Roman had aimed: but he hadn’t got hold of all the ideas to balance. Hence his work was not a balance of truths, like the universe. It was a balance of whims; like the British Constitution. It is intensely typical of Tennyson’s philosophical temper that he was almost the only Poet Laureate who was not ludicrous. It is not absurd to think of Tennyson as tuning his harp in praise of Queen Victoria: that is, it is not absurd in the same
sense as Chaucer’s harp hallowed by dedication to Richard II or Wordsworth’s harp hallowed by dedication to George IV is absurd. Richard’s court could not properly appreciate either Chaucer’s daisies or his “devotion.” George IV would not have gone pottering about Helvellyn in search of purity and the simple annals of the poor. But Tennyson did sincerely believe in the Victorian compromise; and sincerity is never undignified. He really did hold a great many of the same views as Queen Victoria, though he was gifted with a more fortunate literary style. If Dickens is Cobbett’s democracy stirring in its grave, Tennyson is the exquisitely ornamental extinguisher on the flame of the first revolutionary poets. England has settled down; England has become Victorian. The compromise was interesting, it was national and for a long time it was successful: there is still a great deal to be said for it. But it was as freakish and unphilosophic, as arbitrary and untranslatable, as a beggar’s patched coat or a child’s secret language. Now it is here that Browning had a certain odd advantage over Tennyson; which has, perhaps, somewhat exaggerated his intellectual superiority to him. Browning’s eccentric style was more suitable to the poetry of a nation of eccentrics; of people for the time being removed far from the centre of intellectual interests. The hearty and pleasant task of expressing one’s intense dislike of something one doesn’t understand is much more poetically achieved by saying, in a general way “Grrr–you swine!” than it is by laboured lines such as “the red fool-fury of the Seine.” We all feel that there is more of the man in Browning here; more of Dr. Johnson or Cobbett. Browning is the Englishman taking himself wilfully, following his nose like a bull-dog, going by his own likes and dislikes. We cannot help feeling that Tennyson is the Englishman taking himself seriously–an awful sight. One’s memory flutters unhappily over a certain letter about the Papal Guards written by Sir Willoughby Patterne. It is here chiefly that Tennyson suffers by that very Virgilian loveliness and dignity of diction which he put to the service of such a small and anomalous national scheme. Virgil had the best news to tell as well as the best words to tell it in. His world might be sad; but it was the largest world one could live in before the coming of Christianity. If he told the Romans to spare the vanquished and to war down the mighty, at least he was more or less well informed about who were mighty and who were vanquished. But when Tennyson wrote verses like—

“Of freedom in her regal seat,  
Of England; not the schoolboy heat,  
The blind hysterics of the Celt”
He quite literally did not know one word of what he was talking about; he did not know what Celts are, or what hysterics are, or what freedom was, or what regal was or even of what England was—in the living Europe of that time.

His religious range was very much wider and wiser than his political; but here also he suffered from treating as true universality a thing that was only a sort of lukewarm local patriotism. Here also he suffered by the very splendour and perfection of his poetical powers. He was quite the opposite of the man who cannot express himself; the inarticulate singer who dies with all his music in him. He had a great deal to say; but he had much more power of expression than was wanted for anything he had to express. He could not think up to the height of his own towering style.

For whatever else Tennyson was, he was a great poet; no mind that feels itself free, that is, above the ebb and flow of fashion, can feel anything but contempt for the later effort to discredit him in that respect. It is true that, like Browning and almost every other Victorian poet, he was really two poets. But it is just to him to insist that in his case (unlike Browning’s) both the poets were good. The first is more or less like Stevenson in metre; it is a magical luck or skill in the mere choice of words. “Wet sands marbled with moon and cloud”—”Flits by the sea-blue bird of March”—”Leafless ribs and iron horns”—”When the long dun wolds are ribbed with snow”—in all these cases one word is the keystone of an arch which would fall into ruin without it. But there are other strong phrases that recall not Stevenson but rather their common master, Virgil—”Tears from the depths of some divine despair”—”There is fallen a splendid tear from the passion-flower at the gate”—”Was a great water; and the moon was full”—”God made Himself an awful rose of dawn.” These do not depend on a word but on an idea: they might even be translated. It is also true, I think, that he was first and last a lyric poet. He was always best when he expressed himself shortly. In long poems he had an unfortunate habit of eventually saying very nearly the opposite of what he meant to say. I will take only two instances of what I mean. In the Idylls of the King, and in In Memoriam (his two sustained and ambitious efforts), particular phrases are always flashing out the whole fire of the truth; the truth that Tennyson meant. But owing to his English indolence, his English aristocratic irresponsibility, his English vagueness in thought, he always managed to make the main poem mean exactly what he did not mean. Thus, these two lines which simply say that:

“Lancelot was the first in tournament,
But Arthur mightiest in the battle-field”
Do really express what he meant to express about Arthur being after all “the highest, yet most human too; not Lancelot, nor another.” But as his hero is actually developed, we have exactly the opposite impression; that poor old Lancelot, with all his faults, was much more of a man than Arthur. He was a Victorian in the bad as well as the good sense; he could not keep priggishness out of long poems. Or again, take the case of In Memoriam. I will quote one verse (probably incorrectly) which has always seemed to me splendid, and which does express what the whole poem should express— but hardly does.

“That we may lift from out the dust,
A voice as unto him that hears
A cry above the conquered years
Of one that ever works, and trust.”

The poem should have been a cry above the conquered years. It might well have been that if the poet could have said sharply at the end of it, as a pure piece of dogma, “I’ve forgotten every feature of the man’s face: I know God holds him alive.” But under the influence of the mere leisurely length of the thing, the reader does rather receive the impression that the wound has been healed only by time; and that the victor hours can boast that this is the man that loved and lost, but all he was is overworn. This is not the truth; and Tennyson did not intend it for the truth. It is simply the result of the lack of something militant, dogmatic and structural in him: whereby he could not be trusted with the trail of a very long literary process without entangling himself like a kitten playing cat’s-cradle.

Browning, as above suggested, got on much better with eccentric and secluded England because he treated it as eccentric and secluded; a place where one could do what one liked. To a considerable extent he did do what he liked; arousing not a few complaints; and many doubts and conjectures as to why on earth he liked it. Many comparatively sympathetic persons pondered upon what pleasure it could give any man to write Sordello or rhyme “end-knot” to “offend not.” Nevertheless he was no anarchist and no mystagogue; and even where he was defective, his defect has commonly been stated wrongly. The two chief charges against him were a contempt for form unworthy of an artist, and a poor pride in obscurity. The obscurity is true, though not, I think, the pride in it; but the truth about this charge rather rises out of the truth about the other. The other charge is not true. Browning cared very much for form; he cared very much for style. You may not happen to like his style; but he did. To say that he had not enough mastery over form to express himself perfectly like Tennyson or Swinburne is
like criticising the griffin of a mediæval gargoyle without even knowing that it is a griffin; treating it as an infantile and unsuccessful attempt at a classical angel. A poet indifferent to form ought to mean a poet who did not care what form he used as long as he expressed his thoughts. He might be a rather entertaining sort of poet; telling a smoking-room story in blank verse or writing a hunting-song in the Spenserian stanza; giving a realistic analysis of infanticide in a series of triolets; or proving the truth of Immortality in a long string of limericks. Browning certainly had no such indifference. Almost every poem of Browning, especially the shortest and most successful ones, was moulded or graven in some special style, generally grotesque, but invariably deliberate. In most cases whenever he wrote a new song he wrote a new kind of song. The new lyric is not only of a different metre, but of a different shape. No one, not even Browning, ever wrote a poem in the same style as that horrible one beginning “John, Master of the Temple of God,” with its weird choruses and creepy prose directions. No one, not even Browning, ever wrote a poem in the same style as Pisgah-sights. No one, not even Browning, ever wrote a poem in the same style as Time’s Revenges. No one, not even Browning, ever wrote a poem in the same style as Meeting at Night and Parting at Morning. No one, not even Browning, ever wrote a poem in the same style as The Flight of the Duchess, or in the same style as The Grammarian’s Funeral, or in the same style as A Star, or in the same style as that astounding lyric which begins abruptly “Some people hang pictures up.” These metres and manners were not accidental; they really do suit the sort of spiritual experiment Browning was making in each case. Browning, then, was not chaotic; he was deliberately grotesque. But there certainly was, over and above this grotesqueness, a perversity and irrationality about the man which led him to play the fool in the middle of his own poems; to leave off carving gargoyles and simply begin throwing stones. His curious complicated puns are an example of this: Hood had used the pun to make a sentence or a sentiment especially pointed and clear. In Browning the word with two meanings seems to mean rather less, if anything, than the word with one. It also applies to his trick of setting himself to cope with impossible rhymes. It may be fun, though it is not poetry, to try rhyming to ranunculus; but even the fun presupposes that you do rhyme to it; and I will affirm, and hold under persecution, that “Tommy-make-room-for-your-uncle-us” does not rhyme to it.

The obscurity, to which he must in a large degree plead guilty, was, curiously enough, the result rather of the gay artist in him than the deep thinker. It is patience in the Browning students; in Browning it was only impatience. He
wanted to say something comic and energetic and he wanted to say it quick. And, between his artistic skill in the fantastic and his temperament turn for the abrupt, the idea sometimes flashed past unseen. But it is quite an error to suppose that these are the dark mines containing his treasure. The two or three great and true things he really had to say he generally managed to say quite simply. Thus he really did want to say that God had indeed made man and woman one flesh; that the sex relation was religious in this real sense that even in our sin and despair we take it for granted and expect a sort of virtue in it. The feelings of the bad husband about the good wife, for instance, are about as subtle and entangled as any matter on this earth; and Browning really had something to say about them. But he said it in some of the plainest and most unmistakable words in all literature; as lucid as a flash of lightning. “Pompilia, will you let them murder me?” Or again, he did really want to say that death and such moral terrors were best taken in a military spirit; he could not have said it more simply than: “I was ever a fighter; one fight more, the best and the last.” He did really wish to say that human life was unworkable unless immortality were implied in it every other moment; he could not have said it more simply: “leave now to dogs and apes; Man has for ever.” The obscurities were not merely superficial, but often covered quite superficial ideas. He was as likely as not to be most unintelligible of all in writing a compliment in a lady’s album. I remember in my boyhood (when Browning kept us awake like coffee) a friend reading out the poem about the portrait to which I have already referred, reading it in that rapid dramatic way in which this poet must be read. And I was profoundly puzzled at the passage where it seemed to say that the cousin disparaged the picture, “while John scorns ale.” I could not think what this sudden teetotalism on the part of John had to do with the affair, but I forgot to ask at the time and it was only years afterwards that, looking at the book, I found it was “John’s corns ail,” a very Browningesque way of saying he winced. Most of Browning’s obscurity is of that sort— the mistakes are almost as quaint as misprints—and the Browning student, in that sense, is more a proof reader than a disciple. For the rest his real religion was of the most manly, even the most boyish sort. He is called an optimist; but the word suggests a calculated contentment which was not in the least one of his vices. What he really was was a romantic. He offered the cosmos as an adventure rather than a scheme. He did not explain evil, far less explain it away; he enjoyed defying it. He was a troubadour even in theology and metaphysics: like the Jongleurs de Dieu of St. Francis. He may be said to have serenaded heaven with a guitar, and even, so to speak, tried to climb there with a
rope ladder. Thus his most vivid things are the red-hot little love lyrics, or rather, little love dramas. He did one really original and admirable thing: he managed the real details of modern love affairs in verse, and love is the most realistic thing in the world. He substituted the street with the green blind for the faded garden of Watteau, and the “blue spirt of a lighted match” for the monotony of the evening star.

Before leaving him it should be added that he was fitted to deepen the Victorian mind, but not to broaden it. With all his Italian sympathies and Italian residence, he was not the man to get Victorian England out of its provincial rut: on many things Kingsley himself was not so narrow. His celebrated wife was wider and wiser than he in this sense; for she was, however one-sidedly, involved in the emotions of central European politics. She defended Louis Napoleon and Victor Emmanuel; and intelligently, as one conscious of the case against them both. As to why it now seems simple to defend the first Italian King, but absurd to defend the last French Emperor—well, the reason is sad and simple. It is concerned with certain curious things called success and failure, and I ought to have considered it under the heading of The Book of Snobs. But Elizabeth Barrett, at least, was no snob: her political poems have rather an impatient air, as if they were written, and even published, rather prematurely—just before the fall of her idol. These old political poems of hers are too little read to-day; they are amongst the most sincere documents on the history of the times, and many modern blunders could be corrected by the reading of them. And Elizabeth Barrett had a strength really rare among women poets; the strength of the phrase. She excelled in her sex, in epigram, almost as much as Voltaire in his. Pointed phrases like: “Martyrs by the pang without the palm”—or “Incense to sweeten a crime and myrrh to embitter a curse,” these expressions, which are witty after the old fashioned of the conceit, came quite freshly and spontaneously to her quite modern mind. But the first fact is this, that these epigrams of hers were never so true as when they turned on one of the two or three pivots on which contemporary Europe was really turning. She is by far the most European of all the English poets of that age; all of them, even her own much greater husband, look local beside her. Tennyson and the rest are nowhere. Take any positive political fact, such as the final fall of Napoleon. Tennyson wrote these profoundly foolish lines—

“He thought to quell the stubborn hearts of oak
Madman!”
As if the defeat of an English regiment were a violation of the laws of Nature. Mrs. Browning knew no more facts about Napoleon, perhaps, than Tennyson did; but she knew the truth. Her epigram on Napoleon’s fall is in one line

“And kings crept out again to feel the sun.”

Talleyrand would have clapped his horrible old hands at that. Her instinct about the statesman and the soldier was very like Jane Austen’s instinct for the gentleman and the man. It is not unnoticeable that as Miss Austen spent most of her life in a village, Miss Barrett spent most of her life on a sofa. The godlike power of guessing seems (for some reason I do not understand) to grow under such conditions. Unfortunately Mrs. Browning was like all the other Victorians in going a little lame, as I have roughly called it, having one leg shorter than the other. But her case was, in one sense, extreme. She exaggerated both ways. She was too strong and too weak, or (as a false sex philosophy would express it) too masculine and too feminine. I mean that she hit the centre of weakness with almost the same emphatic precision with which she hit the centre of strength. She could write finally of the factory wheels “grinding life down from its mark,” a strong and strictly true observation. Unfortunately she could also write of Euripides “with his droppings of warm tears.” She could write in A Drama of Exile, a really fine exposition, touching the later relation of Adam and the animals: unfortunately the tears were again turned on at the wrong moment at the main; and the stage direction commands a silence, only broken by the dropping of angel’s tears. How much noise is made by angel’s tears? Is it a sound of emptied buckets, or of garden hose, or of mountain cataracts? That is the sort of question which Elizabeth Barrett’s extreme love of the extreme was always tempting people to ask. Yet the question, as asked, does her a heavy historical injustice; we remember all the lines in her work which were weak enough to be called “womanly,” we forget the multitude of strong lines that are strong enough to be called “manly”; lines that Kingsley or Henley would have jumped for joy to print in proof of their manliness. She had one of the peculiar talents of true rhetoric, that of a powerful concentration. As to the critic who thinks her poetry owed anything to the great poet who was her husband, he can go and live in the same hotel with the man who can believe that George Eliot owed anything to the extravagant imagination of Mr. George Henry Lewes. So far from Browning inspiring or interfering, he did not in one sense interfere enough. Her real inferiority to him in literature is that he was consciously while she was unconsciously absurd.
It is natural, in the matter of Victorian moral change, to take Swinburne as the next name here. He is the only poet who was also, in the European sense, on the spot; even if, in the sense of the Gilbertian song, the spot was barred. He also knew that something rather crucial was happening to Christendom; he thought it was getting unchristened. It is even a little amusing, indeed, that these two Pro-Italian poets almost conducted a political correspondence in rhyme. Mrs. Browning sternly reproached those who had ever doubted the good faith of the King of Sardinia, whom she acclaimed as being truly a king. Swinburne, lyrically alluding to her as “Sea-eagle of English feather,” broadly hinted that the chief blunder of that wild fowl had been her support of an autocratic adventurer: “calling a crowned man royal, that was no more than a king.” But it is not fair, even in this important connection, to judge Swinburne by Songs Before Sunrise. They were songs before a sunrise that has never turned up. Their dogmatic assertions have for a long time past stared starkly at us as nonsense. As, for instance, the phrase “Glory to Man in the Highest, for man is the master of things”; after which there is evidently nothing to be said, except that it is not true. But even where Swinburne had his greater grip, as in that grave and partly just poem Before a Crucifix, Swinburne, the most Latin, the most learned, the most largely travelled of the Victorians, still knows far less of the facts than even Mrs. Browning. The whole of the poem, Before a Crucifix, breaks down by one mere mistake. It imagines that the French or Italian peasants who fell on their knees before the Crucifix did so because they were slaves. They fell on their knees because they were free men, probably owning their own farms. Swinburne could have found round about Putney plenty of slaves who had no crucifixes: but only crucifixions.

When we come to ethics and philosophy, doubtless we find Swinburne in full revolt, not only against the temperate idealism of Tennyson, but against the genuine piety and moral enthusiasm of people like Mrs. Browning. But here again Swinburne is very English, nay, he is very Victorian, for his revolt is illogical. For the purposes of intelligent insurrection against priests and kings, Swinburne ought to have described the natural life of man, free and beautiful, and proved from this both the noxiousness and the needlessness of such chains. Unfortunately Swinburne rebelled against Nature first and then tried to rebel against religion for doing exactly the same thing that he had done. His songs of joy are not really immoral; but his songs of sorrow are. But when he merely hurls at the priest the assertion that flesh is grass and life is sorrow, he really lays himself open to the restrained answer, “So I have ventured, on various
occasions, to remark.” When he went forth, as it were, as the champion of pagan change and pleasure, he heard uplifted the grand choruses of his own Atalanta, in his rear, refusing hope.

The splendid diction that blazes through the whole of that drama, that still dances exquisitely in the more lyrical Poems and Ballads, makes some marvellous appearances in Songs Before Sunrise, and then mainly falters and fades away, is, of course, the chief thing about Swinburne. The style is the man; and some will add that it does not, thus unsupported, amount to much of a man. But the style itself suffers some injustice from those who would speak thus. The views expressed are often quite foolish and often quite insincere; but the style itself is a manlier and more natural thing than is commonly made out. It is not in the least languorous or luxurious or merely musical and sensuous, as one would gather from both the eulogies and the satires, from the conscious and the unconscious imitations. On the contrary, it is a sort of fighting and profane parody of the Old Testament; and its lines are made of short English words like the short Roman words. The first line of one of his finest poems, for instance, runs, “I have lived long enough to have seen one thing, that love hath an end.” In that sentence only one small “e” gets outside the monosyllable. Through all his interminable tragedies, he was fondest of lines like—

“If ever I leave off to honour you
God give me shame; I were the worst churl born.”

The dramas were far from being short and dramatic; but the words really were. Nor was his verse merely smooth; except his very bad verse, like “the lilies and languors of virtue, to the raptures and roses of vice,” which both, in cheapness of form and foolishness of sentiment, may be called the worst couplet in the world’s literature. In his real poetry (even in the same poem) his rhythm and rhyme are as original and ambitious as Browning; and the only difference between him and Browning is, not that he is smooth and without ridges, but that he always crests the ridge triumphantly and Browning often does not—

“Oh thy bosom though many a kiss be,
There are none such as knew it of old.
Was it Alciphron once or Arisbe,
Male ringlets or feminine gold,
That thy lips met with under the statue
Whence a look shot out sharp after thieves
From the eyes of the garden-god at you
Across the fig-leaves.”
Look at the rhymes in that verse, and you will see they are as stiff a task as Browning’s: only they are successful. That is the real strength of Swinburne—a style. It was a style that nobody could really imitate; and least of all Swinburne himself, though he made the attempt all through his later years. He was, if ever there was one, an inspired poet. I do not think it the highest sort of poet. And you never discover who is an inspired poet until the inspiration goes.

With Swinburne we step into the circle of that later Victorian influence which was very vaguely called Æsthetic. Like all human things, but especially Victorian things, it was not only complex but confused. Things in it that were at one on the emotional side were flatly at war on the intellectual. In the section of the painters, it was the allies or pupils of Ruskin, pious, almost painfully exact, and copying mediaeval details rather for their truth than their beauty. In the section of the poets it was pretty loose, Swinburne being the leader of the revels. But there was one great man who was in both sections, a painter and a poet, who may be said to bestride the chasm like a giant. It is in an odd and literal sense true that the name of Rossetti is important here, for the name implies the nationality. I have loosely called Carlyle and the Brontës the romance from the North; the nearest to a general definition of the Æsthetic movement is to call it the romance from the South. It is that warm wind that had never blown so strong since Chaucer, standing in his cold English April, had smelt the spring in Provence. The Englishman has always found it easier to get inspiration from the Italians than from the French; they call to each other across that unconquered castle of reason. Browning’s Englishman in Italy, Browning’s Italian in England, were both happier than either would have been in France. Rossetti was the Italian in England, as Browning was the Englishman in Italy; and the first broad fact about the artistic revolution Rossetti wrought is written when we have written his name. But if the South lets in warmth or heat, it also lets in hardness. The more the orange tree is luxuriant in growth, the less it is loose in outline. And it is exactly where the sea is slightly warmer than marble that it looks slightly harder. This, I think, is the one universal power behind the Æsthetic and Pre-Raphaelite movements, which all agreed in two things at least: strictness in the line and strength, nay violence, in the colour.

Rossetti was a remarkable man in more ways than one; he did not succeed in any art; if he had he would probably never have been heard of. It was his happy knack of half failing in both the arts that has made him a success. If he had been as good a poet as Tennyson, he would have been a poet who painted pictures. If he had been as good a painter as Burne-Jones, he would have been a painter who
wrote poems. It is odd to note on the very threshold of the extreme art movement that this great artist largely succeeded by not defining his art. His poems were too pictorial. His pictures were too poetical. That is why they really conquered the cold satisfaction of the Victorians, because they did mean something, even if it was a small artistic thing.

Rossetti was one with Ruskin, on the one hand, and Swinburne on the other, in reviving the decorative instinct of the Middle Ages. While Ruskin, in letters only, praised that decoration Rossetti and his friends repeated it. They almost made patterns of their poems. That frequent return of the refrain which was foolishly discussed by Professor Nordau was, in Rossetti’s case, of such sadness as sometimes to amount to sameness. The criticism on him, from a mediæval point of view, is not that he insisted on a chorus, but that he could not insist on a jolly chorus. Many of his poems were truly mediæval, but they would have been even more mediæval if he could ever have written such a refrain as “Tally Ho!” or even “Tooral-ooral” instead of “Tall Troy’s on fire.” With Rossetti goes, of course, his sister, a real poet, though she also illustrated that Pre-Raphaelite’s conflict of views that covered their coincidence of taste. Both used the angular outlines, the burning transparencies, the fixed but still unfathomable symbols of the great mediæval civilisation; but Rossetti used the religious imagery (on the whole) irreligiously, Christina Rossetti used it religiously but (on the whole) so to make it seem a narrower religion.

One poet, or, to speak more strictly, one poem, belongs to the same general atmosphere and impulse as Swinburne; the free but languid atmosphere of later Victorian art. But this time the wind blew from hotter and heavier gardens than the gardens of Italy. Edward Fitzgerald, a cultured eccentric, a friend of Tennyson, produced what professed to be a translation of the Persian poet Omar, who wrote quatrains about wine and roses and things in general. Whether the Persian original, in its own Persian way, was greater or less than this version I must not discuss here, and could not discuss anywhere. But it is quite clear that Fitzgerald’s work is much too good to be a good translation. It is as personal and creative a thing as ever was written; and the best expression of a bad mood, a mood that may, for all I know, be permanent in Persia, but was certainly at this time particularly fashionable in England. In the technical sense of literature it is one of the most remarkable achievements of that age; as poetical as Swinburne and far more perfect. In this verbal sense its most arresting quality is a combination of something haunting and harmonious that flows by like a river or a song, with something else that is compact and pregnant like a pithy saying
picked out in rock by the chisel of some pagan philosopher. It is at once a tune that escapes and an inscription that remains. Thus, alone among the reckless and romantic verses that first rose in Coleridge or Keats, it preserves something also of the wit and civilisation of the eighteenth century. Lines like “a Muezzin from the tower of darkness cries,” or “Their mouths are stopped with dust” are successful in the same sense as “Pinnacled dim in the intense inane” or “Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.” But—

“Indeed, indeed, repentance oft before
I swore; but was I sober when I swore?”

Is equally successful in the same sense as—“Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer
And without sneering teach the rest to sneer.”

It thus earned a right to be considered the complete expression of that scepticism and sensual sadness into which later Victorian literature was more and more falling away: a sort of bible of unbelief. For a cold fit had followed the hot fit of Swinburne, which was of a feverish sort: he had set out to break down without having, or even thinking he had, the rudiments of rebuilding in him; and he effected nothing national even in the way of destruction. The Tennysonians still walked past him as primly as a young ladies’ school—the Browningites still inked their eyebrows and minds in looking for the lost syntax of Browning; while Browning himself was away looking for God, rather in the spirit of a truant boy from their school looking for birds’ nests. The nineteenth-century sceptics did not really shake the respectable world and alter it, as the eighteenth-century sceptics had done; but that was because the eighteenth-century sceptics were something more than sceptics, and believed in Greek tragedies, in Roman laws, in the Republic. The Swinburnian sceptics had nothing to fight for but a frame of mind; and when ordinary English people listened to it, they came to the conclusion that it was a frame of mind they would rather hear about than experience. But these later poets did, so to speak, spread their soul in all the empty spaces; weaker brethren, disappointed artists, unattached individuals, very young people, were sapped or swept away by these songs; which, so far as any particular sense in them goes, were almost songs without words. It is because there is something which is after all indescribably manly, intellectual, firm about Fitzgerald’s way of phrasing the pessimism that he towers above the slope that was tumbling down to the decadents. But it is still pessimism, a thing unfit for a white man; a thing like opium, that may often be a poison and sometimes a medicine, but never a food for us, who are driven by an inner command not only
to think but to live, not only to live but to grow, and not only to grow but to build.

And, indeed, we see the insufficiency of such sad extremes even in the next name among the major poets; we see the Swinburnian parody of mediaevalism, the inverted Catholicism of the decadents, struggling to get back somehow on its feet. The aesthetic school had, not quite unjustly, the name of mere dilettanti. But it is fair to say that in the next of them, a workman and a tradesman, we already feel something of that return to real issues leading up to the real revolts that broke up Victorianism at last. In the mere art of words, indeed, William Morris carried much further than Swinburne or Rossetti the mere imitation of stiff mediaeval ornament. The other mediaevalists had their modern moments; which were (if they had only known it) much more mediaeval than their mediaeval moments. Swinburne could write—

“We shall see Buonaparte the bastard
Kick heels with his throat in a rope.”

One has an uneasy feeling that William Morris would have written something like—“And the kin of the ill king Bonaparte
Hath a high gallows for all this part.”

Rossetti could, for once in a way, write poetry about a real woman and call her “Jenny.” One has a disturbed suspicion that Morris would have called her “Jehanne.”

But all that seems at first more archaic and decorative about Morris really arose from the fact that he was more virile and real than either Swinburne or Rossetti. It arose from the fact that he really was, what he so often called himself, a craftsman. He had enough masculine strength to be tidy: that is, after the masculine manner, tidy about his own trade. If his poems were too like wallpapers, it was because he really could make wallpapers. He knew that lines of poetry ought to be in a row, as palings ought to be in a row; and he knew that neither palings nor poetry looks any the worse for being simple or even severe. In a sense Morris was all the more creative because he felt the hard limits of creation as he would have felt them if he were not working in words but in wood; and if he was unduly dominated by the mere conventions of the mediaevals, it was largely because they were (whatever else they were) the very finest fraternity of free workmen the world is ever likely to see.

The very things that were urged against Morris are in this sense part of his ethical importance; part of the more promising and wholesome turn he was half
unconsciously giving to the movement of modern art. His hazier fellow-Socialists blamed him because he made money; but this was at least in some degree because he made other things to make money: it was part of the real and refreshing fact that at last an æsthete had appeared who could make something. If he was a capitalist, at least he was what later capitalists cannot or will not be—something higher than a capitalist, a tradesman. As compared with aristocrats like Swinburne or aliens like Rossetti, he was vitally English and vitally Victorian. He inherits some of that paradoxical glory which Napoleon gave reluctantly to a nation of shopkeepers. He was the last of that nation; he did not go out golfing: like that founder of the artistic shopman, Samuel Richardson, “he kept his shop, and his shop kept him.” The importance of his Socialism can easily be exaggerated. Among other lesser points, he was not a Socialist; he was a sort of Dickensian anarchist. His instinct for titles was always exquisite. It is part of his instinct of decoration: for on a page the title always looks important and the printed mass of matter a mere dado under it. And no one had ever nobler titles than The Roots of the Mountains or The Wood at the End of the World. The reader feels he hardly need read the fairy-tale because the title is so suggestive. But, when all is said, he never chose a better title than that of his social Utopia, News from Nowhere. He wrote it while the last Victorians were already embarked on their bold task of fixing the future—of narrating to-day what has happened to-morrow. They named their books by cold titles suggesting straight corridors of marble—titles like Looking Backward. But Morris was an artist as well as an anarchist. News from Nowhere is an irresponsible title; and it is an irresponsible book. It does not describe the problem solved; it does not describe wealth either wielded by the State or divided equally among the citizens. It simply describes an undiscovered country where every one feels good-natured all day. That he could even dream so is his true dignity as a poet. He was the first of the Æsthetes to smell mediævalism as a smell of the morning; and not as a mere scent of decay.

With him the poetry that had been peculiarly Victorian practically ends; and, on the whole, it is a happy ending. There are many other minor names of major importance; but for one reason or other they do not derive from the schools that had dominated this epoch as such. Thus Thompson, the author of The City of Dreadful Night, was a fine poet; but his pessimism combined with a close pugnacity does not follow any of the large but loose lines of the Swinburnian age. But he was a great person—he knew how to be democratic in the dark. Thus Coventry Patmore was a much greater person. He was bursting with ideas, like
Browning—and truer ideas as a rule. He was as eccentric and florid and
Elizabethan as Browning; and often in moods and metres that even Browning
was never wild enough to think of. No one will ever forget the first time he read
Patmore’s hint that the cosmos is a thing that God made huge only “to make dirt
cheap”; just as nobody will ever forget the sudden shout he uttered when he first
heard Mrs. Todgers asked for the rough outline of a wooden leg. These things
are not jokes, but discoveries. But the very fact that Patmore was, as it were, the
Catholic Browning, keeps him out of the Victorian atmosphere as such. The
Victorian English simply thought him an indecent sentimentalist, as they did all
the hot and humble religious diarists of Italy or Spain. Something of the same
fate followed the most powerful of that last Victorian group who were called
“Minor Poets.” They numbered many other fine artists: notably Mr. William
Watson, who is truly Victorian in that he made a manly attempt to tread down
the decadents and return to the right reason of Wordsworth—

“I have not paid the world
The evil and the insolent courtesy
Of offering it my baseness as a gift.”

But none of them were able even to understand Francis Thompson; his sky-
scraping humility, his mountains of mystical detail, his occasional and
unashamed weakness, his sudden and sacred blasphemies. Perhaps the shortest
definition of the Victorian Age is that he stood outside it.
CHAPTER IV

THE BREAK-UP OF THE COMPROMISE

If it be curiously and carefully considered it will, I think, appear more and more true that the struggle between the old spiritual theory and the new material theory in England ended simply in a deadlock; and a deadlock that has endured. It is still impossible to say absolutely that England is a Christian country or a heathen country; almost exactly as it was impossible when Herbert Spencer began to write. Separate elements of both sorts are alive, and even increasingly alive. But neither the believer nor the unbeliever has the impudence to call himself the Englishman. Certainly the great Victorian rationalism has succeeded in doing a damage to religion. It has done what is perhaps the worst of all damages to religion. It has driven it entirely into the power of the religious people. Men like Newman, men like Coventry Patmore, men who would have been mystics in any case, were driven back upon being much more extravagantly religious than they would have been in a religious country. Men like Huxley, men like Kingsley, men like most Victorian men, were equally driven back on being irreligious; that is, on doubting things which men’s normal imagination does not necessarily doubt. But certainly the most final and forcible fact is that this war ended like the battle of Sheriffmuir, as the poet says; they both did fight, and both did beat, and both did run away. They have left to their descendants a treaty that has become a dull torture. Men may believe in immortality, and none of the men know why. Men may not believe in miracles, and none of the men know why. The Christian Church had been just strong enough to check the conquest of her chief citadels. The rationalist movement had been just strong enough to conquer some of her outposts, as it seemed, for ever. Neither was strong enough to expel the other; and Victorian England was in a state which some call liberty and some call lockjaw.

But the situation can be stated another way. There came a time, roughly somewhere about 1880, when the two great positive enthusiasms of Western Europe had for the time exhausted each other–Christianity and the French Revolution. About that time there used to be a sad and not unsympathetic jest going about to the effect that Queen Victoria might very well live longer than the Prince of Wales. Somewhat in the same way, though the republican impulse was hardly a hundred years old and the religious impulse nearly two thousand, yet as
far as England was concerned, the old wave and the new seemed to be spent at the same time. On the one hand Darwin, especially through the strong journalistic genius of Huxley, had won a very wide spread though an exceedingly vague victory. I do not mean that Darwin’s own doctrine was vague; his was merely one particular hypothesis about how animal variety might have arisen; and that particular hypothesis, though it will always be interesting, is now very much the reverse of secure. But it is only in the strictly scientific world and among strictly scientific men that Darwin’s detailed suggestion has largely broken down. The general public impression that he had entirely proved his case (whatever it was) was early arrived at, and still remains. It was and is hazily associated with the negation of religion. But (and this is the important point) it was also associated with the negation of democracy. The same Mid-Victorian muddle-headedness that made people think that “evolution” meant that we need not admit the supremacy of God, also made them think that “survival” meant that we must admit the supremacy of men. Huxley had no hand in spreading these fallacies; he was a fair fighter; and he told his own followers, who spoke thus, most emphatically not to play the fool. He said most strongly that his or any theory of evolution left the old philosophical arguments for a creator, right or wrong, exactly where they were before. He also said most emphatically that any one who used the argument of Nature against the ideal of justice or an equal law, was as senseless as a gardener who should fight on the side of the ill weeds merely because they grew apace. I wish, indeed, that in such a rude summary as this, I had space to do justice to Huxley as a literary man and a moralist. He had a live taste and talent for the English tongue, which he devoted to the task of keeping Victorian rationalism rational. He did not succeed. As so often happens when a rather unhealthy doubt is in the atmosphere, the strongest words of their great captain could not keep the growing crowds of agnostics back from the most hopeless and inhuman extremes of destructive thought. Nonsense not yet quite dead about the folly of allowing the unfit to survive began to be more and more wildly whispered. Such helpless specimens of “advanced thought” are, of course, quite as inconsistent with Darwinism as they are with democracy or with any other intelligent proposition ever offered. But these unintelligent propositions were offered; and the ultimate result was this rather important one: that the harshness of Utilitarianism began to turn into downright tyranny. That beautiful faith in human nature and in freedom which had made delicate the dry air of John Stuart Mill; that robust, romantic sense of justice which had redeemed even the injustices of Macaulay—all that seemed
slowly and sadly to be drying up. Under the shock of Darwinism all that was
good in the Victorian rationalism shook and dissolved like dust. All that was bad
in it abode and clung like clay. The magnificent emancipation evaporated; the
mean calculation remained. One could still calculate in clear statistical tables,
how many men lived, how many men died. One must not ask how they lived; for
that is politics. One must not ask how they died; for that is religion. And religion
and politics were ruled out of all the Later Victorian debating clubs; even
including the debating club at Westminster. What third thing they were
discussing, which was neither religion nor politics, I do not know. I have tried
the experiment of reading solidly through a vast number of their records and
reviews and discussions; and still I do not know. The only third thing I can think
of to balance religion and politics is art; and no one well acquainted with the
debates at St. Stephen’s will imagine that the art of extreme eloquence was the
cause of the confusion. None will maintain that our political masters are
removed from us by an infinite artistic superiority in the choice of words. The
politicians know nothing of politics, which is their own affair: they know
nothing of religion, which is certainly not their affair: it may legitimately be said
that they have to do with nothing; they have reached that low and last level
where a man knows as little about his own claim, as he does about his enemies.’
In any case there can be no doubt about the effect of this particular situation on
the problem of ethics and science. The duty of dragging truth out by the tail or
the hind leg or any other corner one can possibly get hold of, a perfectly sound
duty in itself, had somehow come into collision with the older and larger duty of
knowing something about the organism and ends of a creature; or, in the
everyday phrase, being able to make head or tail of it. This paradox pursued and
tormented the Victorians. They could not or would not see that humanity repels
or welcomes the railway-train, simply according to what people come by it.
They could not see that one welcomes or smashes the telephone, according to
what words one hears in it. They really seem to have felt that the train could be a
substitute for its own passengers; or the telephone a substitute for its own voice.

In any case it is clear that a change had begun to pass over scientific inquiry,
of which we have seen the culmination in our own day. There had begun that
easy automatic habit, of science as an oiled and smooth-running machine, that
habit of treating things as obviously unquestionable, when, indeed, they are
obviously questionable. This began with vaccination in the Early Victorian Age;
it extended to the early licence of vivisection in its later age; it has found a sort
of fitting foolscape, or crown of crime and folly, in the thing called Eugenics. In
all three cases the point was not so much that the pioneers had not proved their case; it was rather that, by an unexpressed rule of respectability, they were not required to prove it. This rather abrupt twist of the rationalistic mind in the direction of arbitrary power, certainly weakened the Liberal movement from within. And meanwhile it was being weakened by heavy blows from without.

There is a week that is the turn of the year; there was a year that was the turn of the century. About 1870 the force of the French Revolution faltered and fell: the year that was everywhere the death of Liberal ideas: the year when Paris fell: the year when Dickens died. While the new foes of freedom, the sceptics and scientists, were damaging democracy in ideas, the old foes of freedom, the emperors and the kings, were damaging her more heavily in arms. For a moment it almost seemed that the old Tory ring of iron, the Holy Alliance, had recombined against France. But there was just this difference: that the Holy Alliance was now not arguably, but almost avowedly, an Unholy Alliance. It was an alliance between those who still thought they could deny the dignity of man and those who had recently begun to have a bright hope of denying even the dignity of God. Eighteenth-century Prussia was Protestant and probably religious. Nineteenth-century Prussia was almost utterly atheist. Thus the old spirit of liberty felt itself shut up at both ends, that which was called progressive and that which was called reactionary: barricaded by Bismarck with blood and iron and by Darwin by blood and bones. The enormous depression which infects many excellent people born about this time, probably has this cause.

It was a great calamity that the freedom of Wilkes and the faith of Dr. Johnson fought each other. But it was an even worse calamity that they practically killed each other. They killed each other almost simultaneously, like Herminius and Mamilius. Liberalism (in Newman’s sense) really did strike Christianity through headpiece and through head; that is, it did daze and stun the ignorant and ill-prepared intellect of the English Christian. And Christianity did smite Liberalism through breastplate and through breast; that is, it did succeed, through arms and all sorts of awful accidents, in piercing more or less to the heart of the Utilitarian—and finding that he had none. Victorian Protestantism had not head enough for the business; Victorian Radicalism had not heart enough for the business. Down fell they dead together, exactly as Macaulay’s Lay says, and still stood all who saw them fall almost until the hour at which I write.

This coincident collapse of both religious and political idealism produced a curious cold air of emptiness and real subconscious agnosticism such as is extremely unusual in the history of mankind. It is what Mr. Wells, with his usual
verbal delicacy and accuracy, spoke of as that ironical silence that follows a
great controversy. It is what people less intelligent than Mr. Wells meant by
calling themselves fin de siècle; though, of course, rationally speaking, there is
no more reason for being sad towards the end of a hundred years than towards
the end of five hundred fortnights. There was no arithmetical autumn, but there
was a spiritual one. And it came from the fact suggested in the paragraphs
above; the sense that man’s two great inspirations had failed him together. The
Christian religion was much more dead in the eighteenth century than it was in
the nineteenth century. But the republican enthusiasm was also much more alive.
If their scepticism was cold, and their faith even colder, their practical politics
were wildly idealistic; and if they doubted the kingdom of heaven, they were
gloriously credulous about the chances of it coming on earth. In the same way
the old pagan republican feeling was much more dead in the feudal darkness of
the eleventh or twelfth centuries, than it was even a century later; but if creative
politics were at their lowest, creative theology was almost at its highest point of
energy.

The modern world, in fact, had fallen between two stools. It had fallen
between that austere old three-legged stool which was the tripod of the cold
priestess of Apollo; and that other mystical and mediæval stool that may well be
called the Stool of Repentance. It kept neither of the two values as intensely
valuable. It could not believe in the bonds that bound men; but, then, neither
could it believe in the men they bound. It was always restrained in its hatred of
slavery by a half remembrance of its yet greater hatred of liberty. They were
almost alone, I think, in thus carrying to its extreme the negative attitude already
noted in Miss Arabella Allen. Anselm would have despised a civic crown, but he
would not have despised a relic. Voltaire would have despised a relic; but he
would not have despised a vote. We hardly find them both despised till we come
to the age of Oscar Wilde.

These years that followed on that double disillusionment were like one long
afternoon in a rich house on a rainy day. It was not merely that everybody
believed that nothing would happen; it was also that everybody believed that
anything happening was even duller than nothing happening. It was in this stale
atmosphere that a few flickers of the old Swinburnian flame survived; and were
called Art. The great men of the older artistic movement did not live in this time;
rather they lived through it. But this time did produce an interregnum of art that
had a truth of its own; though that truth was near to being only a consistent lie.

The movement of those called Æsthetes (as satirised in Patience) and the
movement of those afterwards called Decadents (satirised in Mr. Street’s delightful Autobiography of a Boy) had the same captain; or at any rate the same bandmaster. Oscar Wilde walked in front of the first procession wearing a sunflower, and in front of the second procession wearing a green carnation. With the aesthetic movement and its more serious elements, I deal elsewhere; but the second appearance of Wilde is also connected with real intellectual influences, largely negative, indeed, but subtle and influential. The mark in most of the arts of this time was a certain quality which those who like it would call “uniqueness of aspect,” and those who do not like it “not quite coming off.” I mean the thing meant something from one standpoint; but its mark was that the smallest change of standpoint made it unmeaning and unthinkable—a foolish joke. A beggar painted by Rembrandt is as solid as a statue, however roughly he is sketched in; the soul can walk all round him like a public monument. We see he would have other aspects; and that they would all be the aspects of a beggar. Even if one did not admit the extraordinary qualities in the painting, one would have to admit the ordinary qualities in the sitter. If it is not a masterpiece it is a man. But a nocturne by Whistler of mist on the Thames is either a masterpiece or it is nothing; it is either a nocturne or a nightmare of childish nonsense. Made in a certain mood, viewed through a certain temperament, conceived under certain conventions, it may be, it often is, an unreplaceable poem, a vision that may never be seen again. But the moment it ceases to be a splendid picture it ceases to be a picture at all. Or, again, if Hamlet is not a great tragedy it is an uncommonly good tale. The people and the posture of affairs would still be there even if one thought that Shakespeare’s moral attitude was wrong. Just as one could imagine all the other sides of Rembrandt’s beggar, so, with the mind’s eye (Horatio), one can see all four sides of the castle of Elsinore. One might tell the tale from the point of view of Lærtes or Claudius or Polonius or the gravedigger; and it would still be a good tale and the same tale. But if we take a play like Pelléas and Mélisande, we shall find that unless we grasp the particular fairy thread of thought the poet rather hazily flings to us, we cannot grasp anything whatever. Except from one extreme poetic point of view, the thing is not a play; it is not a bad play, it is a mass of clotted nonsense. One whole act describes the lovers going to look for a ring in a distant cave when they both know they have dropped it down a well. Seen from some secret window on some special side of the soul’s turret, this might convey a sense of faerie futility in our human life. But it is quite obvious that unless it called forth that one kind of sympathy, it would call forth nothing but laughter and rotten eggs. In the same
play the husband chases his wife with a drawn sword, the wife remarking at intervals “I am not gay.” Now there may really be an idea in this; the idea of human misfortune coming most cruelly upon the optimism of innocence; that the lonely human heart says, like a child at a party, “I am not enjoying myself as I thought I should.” But it is plain that unless one thinks of this idea (and of this idea only) the expression is not in the least unsuccessful pathos; it is very broad and highly successful farce. Maeterlinck and the decadents, in short, may fairly boast of being subtle; but they must not mind if they are called narrow.

This is the spirit of Wilde’s work and of most of the literary work done in that time and fashion. It is, as Mr. Arthur Symons said, an attitude; but it is an attitude in the flat, not in the round; not a statue, but the cardboard king in a toy-theatre, which can only be looked at from the front. In Wilde’s own poetry we have particularly a perpetually toppling possibility of the absurd; a sense of just falling too short or just going too far. “Plant lilies at my head” has something wrong about it; something silly that is not there in—

“And put a grey stone at my head”

In the old ballad. But even where Wilde was right, he had a way of being right with this excessive strain on the reader’s sympathy (and gravity) which was the mark of all these men with a “point of view.” There is a very sound sonnet of his in which he begins by lamenting mere anarchy, as hostile to the art and civilisation that were his only gods; but ends by saying—

“And yet
These Christs that die upon the barricades
God knows that I am with them—in some ways.”

Now that is really very true; that is the way a man of wide reading and worldly experience, but not ungenerous impulses, does feel about the mere fanatic, who is at once a nuisance to humanity and an honour to human nature. Yet who can read that last line without feeling that Wilde is poised on the edge of a precipice of bathos; that the phrase comes very near to being quite startlingly silly. It is as in the case of Maeterlinck, let the reader move his standpoint one inch nearer the popular standpoint, and there is nothing for the thing but harsh, hostile, unconquerable mirth. Somehow the image of Wilde lolling like an elegant leviathan on a sofa, and saying between the whiffs of a scented cigarette that martyrdom is martyrdom in some respects, has seized on and mastered all more delicate considerations in the mind. It is unwise in a poet to goad the sleeping lion of laughter.
In less dexterous hands the decadent idea, what there was of it, went entirely to pieces, which nobody has troubled to pick up. Oddly enough (unless this be always the Nemesis of excess) it began to be insupportable in the very ways in which it claimed specially to be subtle and tactful; in the feeling for different art-forms, in the welding of subject and style, in the appropriateness of the epithet and the unity of the mood. Wilde himself wrote some things that were not immorality, but merely bad taste; not the bad taste of the conservative suburbs, which merely means anything violent or shocking, but real bad taste; as in a stern subject treated in a florid style; an over-dressed woman at a supper of old friends; or a bad joke that nobody had time to laugh at. This mixture of sensibility and coarseness in the man was very curious; and I for one cannot endure (for example) his sensual way of speaking of dead substances, satin or marble or velvet, as if he were stroking a lot of dogs and cats. But there was a sort of power—or at least weight—in his coarseness. His lapses were those proper to the one good thing he really was, an Irish swashbuckler—a fighter. Some of the Roman Emperors might have had the same luxuriousness and yet the same courage. But the later decadents were far worse, especially the decadent critics, the decadent illustrators—there were even decadent publishers. And they utterly lost the light and reason of their existence: they were masters of the clumsy and the incongruous. I will take only one example. Aubrey Beardsley may be admired as an artist or no; he does not enter into the scope of this book. But it is true that there is a certain brief mood, a certain narrow aspect of life, which he renders to the imagination rightly. It is mostly felt under white, deathly lights in Piccadilly, with the black hollow of heaven behind shiny hats or painted faces: a horrible impression that all mankind are masks. This being the thing Beardsley could express (and the only thing he could express), it is the solemn and awful fact that he was set down to illustrate Malory’s Morte d’Arthur. There is no need to say more; taste, in the artist’s sense, must have been utterly dead. They might as well have employed Burne-Jones to illustrate Martin Chuzzlewit. It would not have been more ludicrous than putting this portrayer of evil puppets, with their thin lines like wire and their small faces like perverted children’s, to trace against the grand barbaric forests the sin and the sorrow of Lancelot.

To return to the chief of the decadents, I will not speak of the end of the individual story: there was horror and there was expiation. And, as my conscience goes at least, no man should say one word that could weaken the horror—or the pardon. But there is one literary consequence of the thing which must be mentioned, because it bears us on to that much breezier movement
which first began to break in upon all this ghastly idleness—I mean the Socialist Movement. I do not mean “De Profundis”; I do not think he had got to the real depths when he wrote that book. I mean the one real thing he ever wrote: The Ballad of Reading Gaol; in which we hear a cry for common justice and brotherhood very much deeper, more democratic and more true to the real trend of the populace to-day, than anything the Socialists ever uttered even in the boldest pages of Bernard Shaw.

Before we pass on to the two expansive movements in which the Victorian Age really ended, the accident of a distinguished artist is available for estimating this somewhat cool and sad afternoon of the epoch at its purest; not in lounging pessimism or luxurious aberrations, but in earnest skill and a high devotion to letters. This change that had come, like the change from a golden sunset to a grey twilight, can be very adequately measured if we compare the insight and intricacy of Meredith with the insight and intricacy of Mr. Henry James. The characters of both are delicate and indisputable; but we must all have had a feeling that the characters in Meredith are gods, but that the characters in Henry James are ghosts. I do not mean that they are unreal: I believe in ghosts. So does Mr. Henry James; he has written some of his very finest literature about the little habits of these creatures. He is in the deep sense of a dishonoured word, a Spiritualist if ever there was one. But Meredith was a materialist as well. The difference is that a ghost is a disembodied spirit; while a god (to be worth worrying about) must be an embodied spirit. The presence of soul and substance together involves one of the two or three things which most of the Victorians did not understand—the thing called a sacrament. It is because he had a natural affinity for this mystical materialism that Meredith, in spite of his affectations, is a poet: and, in spite of his Victorian Agnosticism (or ignorance) is a pious Pagan and not a mere Pantheist. Mr. Henry James is at the other extreme. His thrill is not so much in symbol or mysterious emblem as in the absence of interventions and protections between mind and mind. It is not mystery: it is rather a sort of terror at knowing too much. He lives in glass houses; he is akin to Maeterlinck in a feeling of the nakedness of souls. None of the Meredithian things, wind or wine or sex or stark nonsense, ever gets between Mr. James and his prey. But the thing is a deficiency as well as a talent: we cannot but admire the figures that walk about in his afternoon drawing-rooms; but we have a certain sense that they are figures that have no faces.

For the rest, he is most widely known, or perhaps only most widely chaffed, because of a literary style that lends itself to parody and is a glorious feast for
Mr. Max Beerbohm. It may be called The Hampered, or Obstacle Race Style, in which one continually trips over commas and relative clauses; and where the sense has to be perpetually qualified lest it should mean too much. But such satire, however friendly, is in some sense unfair to him; because it leaves out his sense of general artistic design, which is not only high, but bold. This appears, I think, most strongly in his short stories; in his long novels the reader (or at least one reader) does get rather tired of everybody treating everybody else in a manner which in real life would be an impossible intellectual strain. But in his short studies there is the unanswerable thing called real originality; especially in the very shape and point of the tale. It may sound odd to compare him to Mr. Rudyard Kipling: but he is like Kipling and also like Wells in this practical sense: that no one ever wrote a story at all like the Mark of the Beast; no one ever wrote a story at all like A Kink in Space: and in the same sense no one ever wrote a story like The Great Good Place. It is alone in order and species; and it is masterly. He struck his deepest note in that terrible story, The Turn of the Screw; and though there is in the heart of that horror a truth of repentance and religion, it is again notable of the Victorian writers that the only supernatural note they can strike assuredly is the tragic and almost the diabolic. Only Mr. Max Beerbohm has been able to imagine Mr. Henry James writing about Christmas.

Now upon this interregnum, this cold and brilliant waiting-room which was Henry James at its highest and Wilde at its worst, there broke in two positive movements, largely honest though essentially unhistoric and profane, which were destined to crack up the old Victorian solidity past repair. The first was Bernard Shaw and the Socialists: the second was Rudyard Kipling and the Imperialists. I take the Socialists first not because they necessarily came so in order of time, but because they were less the note upon which the epoch actually ended.

William Morris, of whom we have already spoken, may be said to introduce the Socialists, but rather in a social sense than a philosophical. He was their friend, and in a sort of political way, their father; but he was not their founder, for he would not have believed a word of what they ultimately came to say. Nor is this the conventional notion of the old man not keeping pace with the audacity of the young. Morris would have been disgusted not with the wildness, but the tameness of our tidy Fabians. He was not a Socialist, but he was a Revolutionist; he didn’t know much more about what he was; but he knew that. In this way, being a full-blooded fellow, he rather repeats the genial sulkiness of Dickens. And if we take this fact about him first, we shall find it a key to the whole
movement of this time. For the one dominating truth which overshadows everything else at this point is a political and economic one. The Industrial System, run by a small class of Capitalists on a theory of competitive contract, had been quite honestly established by the early Victorians and was one of the primary beliefs of Victorianism. The Industrial System, so run, had become another name for hell. By Morris’s time and ever since, England has been divided into three classes: Knaves, Fools, and Revolutionists.

History is full of forgotten controversies; and those who speak of Socialism now have nearly all forgotten that for some time it was an almost equal fight between Socialism and Anarchism for the leadership of the exodus from Capitalism. It is here that Herbert Spencer comes in logically, though not chronologically; also that much more interesting man, Auberon Herbert. Spencer has no special place as a man of letters; and a vastly exaggerated place as a philosopher. His real importance was that he was very nearly an Anarchist. The indefinable greatness there is about him after all, in spite of the silliest and smuggest limitations, is in a certain consistency and completeness from his own point of view. There is something mediæval, and therefore manful, about writing a book about everything in the world. Now this simplicity expressed itself in politics in carrying the Victorian worship of liberty to the most ridiculous lengths; almost to the length of voluntary taxes and voluntary insurance against murder. He tried, in short, to solve the problem of the State by eliminating the State from it. He was resisted in this by the powerful good sense of Huxley; but his books became sacred books for a rising generation of rather bewildered rebels, who thought we might perhaps get out of the mess if everybody did as he liked.

Thus the Anarchists and Socialists fought a battle over the death-bed of Victorian Industrialism; in which the Socialists (that is, those who stood for increasing instead of diminishing the power of Government) won a complete victory and have almost exterminated their enemy. The Anarchist one meets here and there nowadays is a sad sight; he is disappointed with the future, as well as with the past.

This victory of the Socialists was largely a literary victory; because it was effected and popularised not only by a wit, but by a sincere wit; and one who had the same sort of militant lucidity that Huxley had shown in the last generation and Voltaire in the last century. A young Irish journalist, impatient of the impoverished Protestantism and Liberalism to which he had been bred, came out as the champion of Socialism not as a matter of sentiment, but as a matter of
common sense. The primary position of Bernard Shaw towards the Victorian Age may be roughly summarised thus: the typical Victorian said coolly: “Our system may not be a perfect system, but it works.” Bernard Shaw replied, even more coolly: “It may be a perfect system, for all I know or care. But it does not work.” He and a society called the Fabians, which once exercised considerable influence, followed this shrewd and sound strategic hint to avoid mere emotional attack on the cruelty of Capitalism; and to concentrate on its clumsiness, its ludicrous incapacity to do its own work. This campaign succeeded, in the sense that while (in the educated world) it was the Socialist who looked the fool at the beginning of that campaign, it is the Anti-Socialist who looks the fool at the end of it. But while it won the educated classes it lost the populace for ever. It dried up those springs of blood and tears out of which all revolt must come if it is to be anything but bureaucratic readjustment. We began this book with the fires of the French Revolution still burning, but burning low. Bernard Shaw was honestly in revolt in his own way: but it was Bernard Shaw who trod out the last ember of the Great Revolution. Bernard Shaw proceeded to apply to many other things the same sort of hilarious realism which he thus successfully applied to the industrial problem. He also enjoyed giving people a piece of his mind; but a piece of his mind was a more appetising and less raw-looking object than a piece of Hardy’s. There were many modes of revolt growing all around him; Shaw supported them—and supplanted them. Many were pitting the realism of war against the romance of war: they succeeded in making the fight dreary and repulsive, but the book dreary and repulsive too. Shaw, in Arms and the Man, did manage to make war funny as well as frightful. Many were questioning the right of revenge or punishment; but they wrote their books in such a way that the reader was ready to release all mankind if he might revenge himself on the author. Shaw, in Captain Brassbound’s Conversion, really showed at its best the merry mercy of the pagan; that beautiful human nature that can neither rise to penance nor sink to revenge. Many had proved that even the most independent incomes drank blood out of the veins of the oppressed: but they wrote it in such a style that their readers knew more about depression than oppression. In Widowers’ Houses Shaw very nearly (but not quite) succeeded in making a farce out of statistics. And the ultimate utility of his brilliant interruption can best be expressed in the very title of that play. When ages of essential European ethics have said “widows’ houses,” it suddenly occurs to him to say “but what about widowers’ houses?” There is a sort of insane equity about it which was what Bernard Shaw had the power to give, and gave.
Out of the same social ferment arose a man of equally unquestionable genius, Mr. H.G. Wells. His first importance was that he wrote great adventure stories in the new world the men of science had discovered. He walked on a round slippery world as boldly as Ulysses or Tom Jones had worked on a flat one. Cyrano de Bergerac or Baron Munchausen, or other typical men of science, had treated the moon as a mere flat silver mirror in which Man saw his own image—the Man in the Moon. Wells treated the moon as a globe, like our own; bringing forth monsters as moonish as we are earthy. The exquisitely penetrating political and social satire he afterwards wrote belongs to an age later than the Victorian. But because, even from the beginning, his whole trend was Socialist, it is right to place him here.

While the old Victorian ideas were being disturbed by an increasing torture at home, they were also intoxicated by a new romance from abroad. It did not come from Italy with Rossetti and Browning, or from Persia with Fitzgerald: but it came from countries as remote, countries which were (as the simple phrase of that period ran) “painted red” on the map. It was an attempt to reform England through the newer nations; by the criticism of the forgotten colonies, rather than of the forgotten classes. Both Socialism and Imperialism were utterly alien to the Victorian idea. From the point of view of a Victorian aristocrat like Palmerston, Socialism would be the cheek of gutter snipes; Imperialism would be the intrusion of cads. But cads are not alone concerned.

Broadly, the phase in which the Victorian epoch closed was what can only be called the Imperialist phase. Between that and us stands a very individual artist who must nevertheless be connected with that phase. As I said at the beginning, Macaulay (or, rather, the mind Macaulay shared with most of his powerful middle class) remains as a sort of pavement or flat foundation under all the Victorians. They discussed the dogmas rather than denied them. Now one of the dogmas of Macaulay was the dogma of progress. A fair statement of the truth in it is not really so hard. Investigation of anything naturally takes some little time. It takes some time to sort letters so as to find a letter: it takes some time to test a gas-bracket so as to find the leak; it takes some time to sift evidence so as to find the truth. Now the curse that fell on the later Victorians was this: that they began to value the time more than the truth. One felt so secretarial when sorting letters that one never found the letter; one felt so scientific in explaining gas that one never found the leak; and one felt so judicial, so impartial, in weighing evidence that one had to be bribed to come to any conclusion at all. This was the last note of the Victorians: procrastination was called progress.
Now if we look for the worst fruits of this fallacy we shall find them in historical criticism. There is a curious habit of treating any one who comes before a strong movement as the “forerunner” of that movement. That is, he is treated as a sort of slave running in advance of a great army. Obviously, the analogy really arises from St. John the Baptist, for whom the phrase “forerunner” was rather peculiarly invented. Equally obviously, such a phrase only applies to an alleged or real divine event: otherwise the forerunner would be a founder. Unless Jesus had been the Baptist’s God, He would simply have been his disciple.

Nevertheless the fallacy of the “forerunner” has been largely used in literature. Thus men will call a universal satirist like Langland a “morning star of the Reformation,” or some such rubbish; whereas the Reformation was not larger, but much smaller than Langland. It was simply the victory of one class of his foes, the greedy merchants, over another class of his foes, the lazy abbots. In real history this constantly occurs; that some small movement happens to favour one of the million things suggested by some great man; whereupon the great man is turned into the running slave of the small movement. Thus certain sectarian movements borrowed the sensationalism without the sacramentalism of Wesley. Thus certain groups of decadents found it easier to imitate De Quincey’s opium than his eloquence. Unless we grasp this plain common sense (that you or I are not responsible for what some ridiculous sect a hundred years hence may choose to do with what we say) the peculiar position of Stevenson in later Victorian letters cannot begin to be understood. For he was a very universal man; and talked some sense not only on every subject, but, so far as it is logically possible, in every sense. But the glaring deficiencies of the Victorian compromise had by that time begun to gape so wide that he was forced, by mere freedom of philosophy and fancy, to urge the neglected things. And yet this very urgency certainly brought on an opposite fever, which he would not have liked if he had lived to understand it. He liked Kipling, though with many healthy hesitations; but he would not have liked the triumph of Kipling; which was the success of the politician and the failure of the poet. Yet when we look back up the false perspective of time, Stevenson does seem in a sense to have prepared that imperial and downward path.

I shall not talk here, any more than anywhere else in this book, about the “sedulous ape” business. No man ever wrote as well as Stevenson who cared only about writing. Yet there is a sense, though a misleading one, in which his original inspirations were artistic rather than purely philosophical. To put the
point in that curt covenanting way which he himself could sometimes command, he thought it immoral to neglect romance. The whole of his real position was expressed in that phrase of one of his letters “our civilisation is a dingy ungentlemanly business: it drops so much out of a man.” On the whole he concluded that what had been dropped out of the man was the boy. He pursued pirates as Defoe would have fled from them; and summed up his simplest emotions in that touching cri de cœur “shall we never shed blood?” He did for the penny dreadful what Coleridge had done for the penny ballad. He proved that, because it was really human, it could really rise as near to heaven as human nature could take it. If Thackeray is our youth, Stevenson is our boyhood: and though this is not the most artistic thing in him, it is the most important thing in the history of Victorian art. All the other fine things he did were, for curious reasons, remote from the current of his age. For instance, he had the good as well as the bad of coming from a Scotch Calvinist’s house. No man in that age had so healthy an instinct for the actuality of positive evil. In The Master of Ballantrae he did prove with a pen of steel, that the Devil is a gentleman—but is none the less the Devil. It is also characteristic of him (and of the revolt from Victorian respectability in general) that his most blood-and-thunder sensational tale is also that which contains his most intimate and bitter truth. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is a double triumph; it has the outside excitement that belongs to Conan Doyle with the inside excitement that belongs to Henry James. Alas, it is equally characteristic of the Victorian time that while nearly every Englishman has enjoyed the anecdote, hardly one Englishman has seen the joke—I mean the point. You will find twenty allusions to Jekyll and Hyde in a day’s newspaper reading. You will also find that all such allusions suppose the two personalities to be equal, neither caring for the other. Or more roughly, they think the book means that man can be cloven into two creatures, good and evil. The whole stab of the story is that man can’t: because while evil does not care for good, good must care for evil. Or, in other words, man cannot escape from God, because good is the God in man; and insists on omniscience. This point, which is good psychology and also good theology and also good art, has missed its main intention merely because it was also good story-telling.

If the rather vague Victorian public did not appreciate the deep and even tragic ethics with which Stevenson was concerned, still less were they of a sort to appreciate the French finish and fastidiousness of his style; in which he seemed to pick the right word up on the point of his pen, like a man playing spillikins. But that style also had a quality that could be felt; it had a military edge to it, an
acies; and there was a kind of swordsmanship about it. Thus all the circumstances led, not so much to the narrowing of Stevenson to the romance of the fighting spirit; but the narrowing of his influence to that romance. He had a great many other things to say; but this was what we were willing to hear: a reaction against the gross contempt for soldiering which had really given a certain Chinese deadness to the Victorians. Yet another circumstance thrust him down the same path; and in a manner not wholly fortunate. The fact that he was a sick man immeasurably increases the credit to his manhood in preaching a sane levity and pugnacious optimism. But it also forbade him full familiarity with the actualities of sport, war, or comradeship: and here and there his note is false in these matters, and reminds one (though very remotely) of the mere provincial bully that Henley sometimes sank to be.

For Stevenson had at his elbow a friend, an invalid like himself, a man of courage and stoicism like himself; but a man in whom everything that Stevenson made delicate and rational became unbalanced and blind. The difference is, moreover, that Stevenson was quite right in claiming that he could treat his limitation as an accident; that his medicines “did not colour his life.” His life was really coloured out of a shilling paint-box, like his toy-theatre: such high spirits as he had are the key to him: his sufferings are not the key to him. But Henley’s sufferings are the key to Henley; much must be excused him, and there is much to be excused. The result was that while there was always a certain dainty equity about Stevenson’s judgments, even when he was wrong, Henley seemed to think that on the right side the wronger you were the better. There was much that was feminine in him; and he is most understandable when surprised in those little solitary poems which speak of emotions mellowed, of sunset and a quiet end. Henley hurled himself into the new fashion of praising Colonial adventure at the expense both of the Christian and the republican traditions; but the sentiment did not spread widely until the note was struck outside England in one of the conquered countries; and a writer of Anglo-Indian short stories showed the stamp of the thing called genius; that indefinable, dangerous and often temporary thing.

For it is really impossible to criticise Rudyard Kipling as part of Victorian literature, because he is the end of such literature. He has many other powerful elements; an Indian element, which makes him exquisitely sympathetic with the Indian; a vague Jingo influence which makes him sympathetic with the man that crushes the Indian; a vague journalistic sympathy with the men that misrepresent everything that has happened to the Indian; but of the Victorian virtues, nothing.
All that was right or wrong in Kipling was expressed in the final convulsion that he almost in person managed to achieve. The nearest that any honest man can come to the thing called “impartiality” is to confess that he is partial. I therefore confess that I think this last turn of the Victorian Age was an unfortunate turn; much on the other side can be said, and I hope will be said. But about the facts there can be no question. The Imperialism of Kipling was equally remote from the Victorian caution and the Victorian idealism: and our subject does quite seriously end here. The world was full of the trampling of totally new forces, gold was sighted from far in a sort of cynical romanticism: the guns opened across Africa; and the great queen died.

Of what will now be the future of so separate and almost secretive an adventure of the English, the present writer will not permit himself, even for an instant, to prophesy. The Victorian Age made one or two mistakes, but they were mistakes that were really useful; that is, mistakes that were really mistaken. They thought that commerce outside a country must extend peace: it has certainly often extended war. They thought that commerce inside a country must certainly promote prosperity; it has largely promoted poverty. But for them these were experiments; for us they ought to be lessons. If we continue the capitalist use of the populace— if we continue the capitalist use of external arms, it will lie heavy on the living. The dishonour will not be on the dead.
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

After having surveyed the immense field presented in such a volume as Mr. George Mair’s Modern English Literature in this series, or, more fully, in the Cambridge History of Modern Literature, the later volume of Chambers’ English Literature, Mr. Gosse’s History of Modern English Literature, or Henry Morley’s English Literature in the Reign of Victoria, the wise reader will choose some portion for closer study, and will go straight to the originals before he has any further traffic with critics or commentators, however able.

He will then need the aid of fuller biographies. Some Victorian Lives are already classic, or nearly so, among them Sir G. Trevelyan’s Macaulay, Forster’s Dickens, Mrs. Gaskell’s Charlotte Brontë, Froude’s Carlyle, and Sir E.T. Cook’s Ruskin. With these may be ranged the great Dictionary of National Biography. The “English Men of Letters” Series includes H.D. Traill’s Coleridge, Ainger’s Lamb, Trollope’s Thackeray, Leslie Stephen’s George Eliot, Herbert Paul’s Matthew Arnold, Sir A. Lyall’s Tennyson, G.K. Chesterton’s Robert Browning, and A.C. Benson’s Fitzgerald. At least two autobiographies must be named, those of Herbert Spencer and John Stuart Mill, and, as antidote to Newman’s Apologia, the gay self-revelations of Borrow, and Jefferies’ Story of My Heart. Other considerable volumes are W.J. Cross’s George Eliot, Lionel Johnson’s Art of Thomas Hardy, Mr. W.M. Rossetti’s Dante G. Rossetti, Colvin’s R.L. Stevenson, J.W. Mackail’s William Morris, Holman Hunt’s Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Sir Leslie Stephen’s The Utilitarians, Buxton Forman’s Our Living Poets, Edward Thomas’s Swinburne, Monypenny’s Disraeli, Dawson’s Victorian Novelists, and Stedman’s Victorian Poets. The “Everyman” Short Biographical Dictionary of English Literature is useful for dates.

The latter half of the second volume of Mr. F.A. Mumby’s Letters of Literary Men is devoted to the Victorian Age. There are fuller collections of the Letters of Leigh Hunt, Thackeray, Dickens, the Brownings, Fitzgerald, Charles Kingsley, Matthew Arnold, and more recently the Letters of George Meredith, edited by his son.

Among the important critical writers of the period, Matthew Arnold (Essays in Criticism, Study of Celtic Literature, etc.) stands easily first. Others are John, now Lord, Morley (Studies in Literature, etc.), Augustine Birrell (Obiter Dicta, Essays), W.E. Henley (Views and Reviews), J. Addington Symonds (Essays), J. Churton Collins, Richard Garnett, Stopford A. Brooke, George E.B. Saintsbury
(History of Criticism), R.H. Hutton (Contemporary Thought), J.M. Robertson (Modern Humanists, Buckle, etc.), Frederic Harrison (The Choice of Books, etc.), Andrew Lang, Walter Bagehot, Edmund Gosse, Prof. Dowden, Sir Walter Raleigh, and Sir A.T. Quiller Couch.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

A MISCELLANY OF MEN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE SUFFRAGIST

THE POET AND THE CHEESE

THE THING

THE MAN WHO THINKS BACKWARDS

THE NAMELESS MAN

THE GARDENER AND THE GUINEA

THE VOTER AND THE TWO VOICES

THE MAD OFFICIAL

THE ENCHANTED MAN

THE SUN WORSHIPPER

THE WRONG INCENDIARY

THE FREE MAN

THE HYPOTHETICAL HOUSEHOLDER

THE PRIEST OF SPRING

THE REAL JOURNALIST

THE SENTIMENTAL SCOT

THE SECTARIAN OF SOCIETY

THE FOOL

THE CONSCRIPT AND THE CRISIS

THE MISER AND HIS FRIENDS

THE MYSTAGOGUE

THE RED REACTIONARY
THE SEPARATIST AND SACRED THINGS

THE MUMMER

THE ARISTOCRATIC ‘ARRY

THE NEW THEOLOGIAN

THE ROMANTIC IN THE RAIN

THE FALSE PHOTOGRAPHER

THE SULTAN

THE ARCHITECT OF SPEARS

THE MAN ON TOP

THE OTHER KIND OF MAN

THE MEDIAEVAL VILLAIN

THE DIVINE DETECTIVE

THE ELF OF JAPAN

THE CHARTERED LIBERTINE

THE CONTENTED MAN

THE ANGRY AUTHOR: HIS FAREWELL
THE SUFFRAGIST

Rightly or wrongly, it is certain that a man both liberal and chivalric, can and very often does feel a dis-ease and distrust touching those political women we call Suffragettes. Like most other popular sentiments, it is generally wrongly stated even when it is rightly felt. One part of it can be put most shortly thus: that when a woman puts up her fists to a man she is putting herself in the only posture in which he is not afraid of her. He can be afraid of her speech and still more of her silence; but force reminds him of a rusted but very real weapon of which he has grown ashamed. But these crude summaries are never quite accurate in any matter of the instincts. For the things which are the simplest so long as they are undisputed invariably become the subtlest when once they are disputed: which was what Joubert meant, I suppose, when he said, “It is not hard to believe in God if one does not define Him.” When the evil instincts of old Foulon made him say of the poor, “Let them eat grass,” the good and Christian instincts of the poor made them hang him on a lamppost with his mouth stuffed full of that vegetation. But if a modern vegetarian aristocrat were to say to the poor, “But why don’t you like grass?” their intelligences would be much more taxed to find such an appropriate repartee. And this matter of the functions of the sexes is primarily a matter of the instincts; sex and breathing are about the only two things that generally work best when they are least worried about. That, I suppose, is why the same sophisticated age that has poisoned the world with Feminism is also polluting it with Breathing Exercises. We plunge at once into a forest of false analogies and bad blundering history; while almost any man or woman left to themselves would know at least that sex is quite different from anything else in the world.

There is no kind of comparison possible between a quarrel of man and woman (however right the woman may be) and the other quarrels of slave and master, of rich and poor, or of patriot and invader, with which the Suffragists deluge us every day. The difference is as plain as noon; these other alien groups never came into contact until they came into collision. Races and ranks began with battle, even if they afterwards melted into amity. But the very first fact about the sexes is that they like each other. They seek each other: and awful as are the sins and sorrows that often come of their mating, it was not such things that made them meet. It is utterly astounding to note the way in which modern writers and talkers miss this plain, wide, and overwhelming fact: one would suppose woman
a victim and nothing else. By this account ideal, emancipated woman has, age after age, been knocked silly with a stone axe. But really there is no fact to show that ideal, emancipated woman was ever knocked silly; except the fact that she is silly. And that might have arisen in so many other ways. Real responsible woman has never been silly; and any one wishing to knock her would be wise (like the streetboys) to knock and run away. It is ultimately idiotic to compare this prehistoric participation with any royalties or rebellions. Genuine royalties wish to crush rebellions. Genuine rebels wish to destroy kings. The sexes cannot wish to abolish each other; and if we allow them any sort of permanent opposition it will sink into something as base as a party system.

As marriage, therefore, is rooted in an aboriginal unity of instincts, you cannot compare it, even in its quarrels, with any of the mere collisions of separate institutions. You could compare it with the emancipation of negroes from planters—if it were true that a white man in early youth always dreamed of the abstract beauty of a black man. You could compare it with the revolt of tenants against a landlord—if it were true that young landlords wrote sonnets to invisible tenants. You could compare it to the fighting policy of the Fenians—if it were true that every normal Irishman wanted an Englishman to come and live with him. But as we know there are no instincts in any of these directions, these analogies are not only false but false on the cardinal fact. I do not speak of the comparative comfort or merit of these different things: I say they are different. It may be that love turned to hate is terribly common in sexual matters: it may be that hate turned to love is not uncommon in the rivalries of race or class. But any philosophy about the sexes that begins with anything but the mutual attraction of the sexes, begins with a fallacy; and all its historical comparisons are as irrelevant and impertinent as puns.

But to expose such cold negation of the instincts is easy: to express or even half express the instincts is very hard. The instincts are very much concerned with what literary people call “style” in letters or more vulgar people call “style” in dress. They are much concerned with how a thing is done, as well as whether one may do it: and the deepest elements in their attraction or aversion can often only be conveyed by stray examples or sudden images. When Danton was defending himself before the Jacobin tribunal he spoke so loud that his voice was heard across the Seine, in quite remote streets on the other side of the river. He must have bellowed like a bull of Bashan. Yet none of us would think of that prodigy except as something poetical and appropriate. None of us would instinctively feel that Danton was less of a man or even less of a gentleman, for
speaking so in such an hour. But suppose we heard that Marie Antoinette, when tried before the same tribunal, had howled so that she could be heard in the Faubourg St. Germain—well, I leave it to the instincts, if there are any left. It is not wrong to howl. Neither is it right. It is simply a question of the instant impression on the artistic and even animal parts of humanity, if the noise were heard suddenly like a gun.

Perhaps the nearest verbal analysis of the instinct may be found in the gestures of the orator addressing a crowd. For the true orator must always be a demagogue: even if the mob be a small mob, like the French committee or the English House of Lords. And “demagogue,” in the good Greek meaning, does not mean one who pleases the populace, but one who leads it: and if you will notice, you will see that all the instinctive gestures of oratory are gestures of military leadership; pointing the people to a path or waving them on to an advance. Notice that long sweep of the arm across the body and outward, which great orators use naturally and cheap orators artificially. It is almost the exact gesture of the drawing of a sword.

The point is not that women are unworthy of votes; it is not even that votes are unworthy of women. It is that votes are unworthy of men, so long as they are merely votes; and have nothing in them of this ancient militarism of democracy. The only crowd worth talking to is the crowd that is ready to go somewhere and do something; the only demagogue worth hearing is he who can point at something to be done: and, if he points with a sword, will only feel it familiar and useful like an elongated finger. Now, except in some mystical exceptions which prove the rule, these are not the gestures, and therefore not the instincts, of women. No honest man dislikes the public woman. He can only dislike the political woman; an entirely different thing. The instinct has nothing to do with any desire to keep women curtained or captive: if such a desire exists. A husband would be pleased if his wife wore a gold crown and proclaimed laws from a throne of marble; or if she uttered oracles from the tripod of a priestess; or if she could walk in mystical motherhood before the procession of some great religious order. But that she should stand on a platform in the exact altitude in which he stands; leaning forward a little more than is graceful and holding her mouth open a little longer and wider than is dignified—well, I only write here of the facts of natural history; and the fact is that it is this, and not publicity or importance, that hurts. It is for the modern world to judge whether such instincts are indeed danger signals; and whether the hurting of moral as of material nerves is a tocsin and a warning of nature.
THE POET AND THE CHEESE

There is something creepy in the flat Eastern Counties; a brush of the white feather. There is a stillness, which is rather of the mind than of the bodily senses. Rapid changes and sudden revelations of scenery, even when they are soundless, have something in them analogous to a movement of music, to a crash or a cry. Mountain hamlets spring out on us with a shout like mountain brigands. Comfortable valleys accept us with open arms and warm words, like comfortable innkeepers. But travelling in the great level lands has a curiously still and lonely quality; lonely even when there are plenty of people on the road and in the marketplace. One’s voice seems to break an almost elvish silence, and something unreasonably weird in the phrase of the nursery tales, “And he went a little farther and came to another place,” comes back into the mind.

In some such mood I came along a lean, pale road south of the fens, and found myself in a large, quiet, and seemingly forgotten village. It was one of those places that instantly produce a frame of mind which, it may be, one afterwards decks out with unreal details. I dare say that grass did not really grow in the streets, but I came away with a curious impression that it did. I dare say the marketplace was not literally lonely and without sign of life, but it left the vague impression of being so. The place was large and even loose in design, yet it had the air of something hidden away and always overlooked. It seemed shy, like a big yokel; the low roofs seemed to be ducking behind the hedges and railings; and the chimneys holding their breath. I came into it in that dead hour of the afternoon which is neither after lunch nor before tea, nor anything else even on a half-holiday; and I had a fantastic feeling that I had strayed into a lost and extra hour that is not numbered in the twenty-four.

I entered an inn which stood openly in the marketplace yet was almost as private as a private house. Those who talk of “public-houses” as if they were all one problem would have been both puzzled and pleased with such a place. In the front window a stout old lady in black with an elaborate cap sat doing a large piece of needlework. She had a kind of comfortable Puritanism about her; and might have been (perhaps she was) the original Mrs. Grundy. A little more withdrawn into the parlour sat a tall, strong, and serious girl, with a face of beautiful honesty and a pair of scissors stuck in her belt, doing a small piece of needlework. Two feet behind them sat a hulking labourer with a humorous face like wood painted scarlet, with a huge mug of mild beer which he had not
touched, and probably would not touch for hours. On the hearthrug there was an equally motionless cat; and on the table a copy of ‘Household Words.’

I was conscious of some atmosphere, still and yet bracing, that I had met somewhere in literature. There was poetry in it as well as piety; and yet it was not poetry after my particular taste. It was somehow at once solid and airy. Then I remembered that it was the atmosphere in some of Wordsworth’s rural poems; which are full of genuine freshness and wonder, and yet are in some incurable way commonplace. This was curious; for Wordsworth’s men were of the rocks and fells, and not of the fenlands or flats. But perhaps it is the clearness of still water and the mirrored skies of meres and pools that produces this crystalline virtue. Perhaps that is why Wordsworth is called a Lake Poet instead of a mountain poet. Perhaps it is the water that does it. Certainly the whole of that town was like a cup of water given at morning.

After a few sentences exchanged at long intervals in the manner of rustic courtesy, I inquired casually what was the name of the town. The old lady answered that its name was Stilton, and composedly continued her needlework. But I had paused with my mug in air, and was gazing at her with a suddenly arrested concern. “I suppose,” I said, “that it has nothing to do with the cheese of that name.” “Oh, yes,” she answered, with a staggering indifference, “they used to make it here.”

I put down my mug with a gravity far greater than her own. “But this place is a Shrine!” I said. “Pilgrims should be pouring into it from wherever the English legend has endured alive. There ought to be a colossal statue in the marketplace of the man who invented Stilton cheese. There ought to be another colossal statue of the first cow who provided the foundations of it. There should be a burnished tablet let into the ground on the spot where some courageous man first ate Stilton cheese, and survived. On the top of a neighbouring hill (if there are any neighbouring hills) there should be a huge model of a Stilton cheese, made of some rich green marble and engraven with some haughty motto: I suggest something like ‘Ver non semper viret; sed Stiltonia semper virescit.’” The old lady said, “Yes, sir,” and continued her domestic occupations.

After a strained and emotional silence, I said, “If I take a meal here tonight can you give me any Stilton?”

“No, sir; I’m afraid we haven’t got any Stilton,” said the immovable one, speaking as if it were something thousands of miles away.

“This is awful,” I said: for it seemed to me a strange allegory of England as she is now; this little town that had lost its glory; and forgotten, so to speak, the
meaning of its own name. And I thought it yet more symbolic because from all 
that old and full and virile life, the great cheese was gone; and only the beer 
remained. And even that will be stolen by the Liberals or adulterated by the 
Conservatives. Politely disengaging myself, I made my way as quickly as 
possible to the nearest large, noisy, and nasty town in that neighbourhood, where 
I sought out the nearest vulgar, tawdry, and avaricious restaurant.

There (after trifling with beef, mutton, puddings, pies, and so on) I got a 
Stilton cheese. I was so much moved by my memories that I wrote a sonnet to 
the cheese. Some critical friends have hinted to me that my sonnet is not strictly 
new; that it contains “echoes” (as they express it) of some other poem that they 
have read somewhere. Here, at least, are the lines I wrote:

SONNET TO A STILTON CHEESE Stilton, thou shouldst be living at this 
hour And so thou art. Nor losest grace thereby; England has need of thee, and so 
have I—She is a Fen. Far as the eye can scour, League after grassy league from 
Lincoln tower To Stilton in the fields, she is a Fen. Yet this high cheese, by 
choice of fenland men, Like a tall green volcano rose in power. Plain living and 
long drinking are no more, And pure religion reading ‘Household Words,’ And 
sturdy manhood sitting still all day Shrink, like this cheese that crumbles to its 
core; While my digestion, like the House of Lords, The heaviest burdens on 
herself doth lay.

I confess I feel myself as if some literary influence, something that has 
haunted me, were present in this otherwise original poem; but it is hopeless to 
disentangle it now.
THE THING

The wind awoke last night with so noble a violence that it was like the war in heaven; and I thought for a moment that the Thing had broken free. For wind never seems like empty air. Wind always sounds full and physical, like the big body of something; and I fancied that the Thing itself was walking gigantic along the great roads between the forests of beech.

Let me explain. The vitality and recurrent victory of Christendom have been due to the power of the Thing to break out from time to time from its enveloping words and symbols. Without this power all civilisations tend to perish under a load of language and ritual. One instance of this we hear much in modern discussion: the separation of the form from the spirit of religion. But we hear too little of numberless other cases of the same stiffening and falsification; we are far too seldom reminded that just as church-going is not religion, so reading and writing are not knowledge, and voting is not self-government. It would be easy to find people in the big cities who can read and write quickly enough to be clerks, but who are actually ignorant of the daily movements of the sun and moon.

The case of self-government is even more curious, especially as one watches it for the first time in a country district. Self-government arose among men (probably among the primitive men, certainly among the ancients) out of an idea which seems now too simple to be understood. The notion of self-government was not (as many modern friends and foes of it seem to think) the notion that the ordinary citizen is to be consulted as one consults an Encyclopaedia. He is not there to be asked a lot of fancy questions, to see how he answers them. He and his fellows are to be, within reasonable human limits, masters of their own lives. They shall decide whether they shall be men of the oar or the wheel, of the spade or the spear. The men of the valley shall settle whether the valley shall be devastated for coal or covered with corn and vines; the men of the town shall decide whether it shall be hoary with thatches or splendid with spires. Of their own nature and instinct they shall gather under a patriarchal chief or debate in a political market-place. And in case the word “man” be misunderstood, I may remark that in this moral atmosphere, this original soul of self-government, the women always have quite as much influence as the men. But in modern England neither the men nor the women have any influence at all. In this primary matter, the moulding of the landscape, the creation of a mode of life, the people are
utterly impotent. They stand and stare at imperial and economic processes going on, as they might stare at the Lord Mayor’s Show.

Round about where I live, for instance, two changes are taking place which really affect the land and all things that live on it, whether for good or evil. The first is that the urban civilisation (or whatever it is) is advancing; that the clerks come out in black swarms and the villas advance in red battalions. The other is that the vast estates into which England has long been divided are passing out of the hands of the English gentry into the hands of men who are always upstarts and often actually foreigners.

Now, these are just the sort of things with which self-government was really supposed to grapple. People were supposed to be able to indicate whether they wished to live in town or country, to be represented by a gentleman or a cad. I do not presume to prejudge their decision; perhaps they would prefer the cad; perhaps he is really preferable. I say that the filling of a man’s native sky with smoke or the selling of his roof over his head illustrate the sort of things he ought to have some say in, if he is supposed to be governing himself. But owing to the strange trend of recent society, these enormous earthquakes he has to pass over and treat as private trivialities. In theory the building of a villa is as incidental as the buying of a hat. In reality it is as if all Lancashire were laid waste for deer forests; or as if all Belgium were flooded by the sea. In theory the sale of a squire’s land to a moneylender is a minor and exceptional necessity. In reality it is a thing like a German invasion. Sometimes it is a German invasion.

Upon this helpless populace, gazing at these prodigies and fates, comes round about every five years a thing called a General Election. It is believed by antiquarians to be the remains of some system of self-government; but it consists solely in asking the citizen questions about everything except what he understands. The examination paper of the Election generally consists of some such queries as these: “I. Are the green biscuits eaten by the peasants of Eastern Lithuania in your opinion fit for human food? II. Are the religious professions of the President of the Orange Free State hypocritical or sincere? III. Do you think that the savages in Prusso-Portuguese East Bunyipland are as happy and hygienic as the fortunate savages in Franco-British West Bunyipland? IV. Did the lost Latin Charter said to have been exacted from Henry III reserve the right of the Crown to create peers? V. What do you think of what America thinks of what Mr. Roosevelt thinks of what Sir Eldon Gorst thinks of the state of the Nile? VI. Detect some difference between the two persons in frock-coats placed before you at this election.”
Now, it never was supposed in any natural theory of self-government that the ordinary man in my neighbourhood need answer fantastic questions like these. He is a citizen of South Bucks, not an editor of ‘Notes and Queries.’ He would be, I seriously believe, the best judge of whether farmsteads or factory chimneys should adorn his own sky-line, of whether stupid squires or clever usurers should govern his own village. But these are precisely the things which the oligarchs will not allow him to touch with his finger. Instead, they allow him an Imperial destiny and divine mission to alter, under their guidance, all the things that he knows nothing about. The name of self-government is noisy everywhere: the Thing is throttled.

The wind sang and split the sky like thunder all the night through; in scraps of sleep it filled my dreams with the divine discordances of martyrdom and revolt; I heard the horn of Roland and the drums of Napoleon and all the tongues of terror with which the Thing has gone forth: the spirit of our race alive. But when I came down in the morning only a branch or two was broken off the tree in my garden; and none of the great country houses in the neighbourhood were blown down, as would have happened if the Thing had really been abroad.
THE MAN WHO THINKS BACKWARDS

The man who thinks backwards is a very powerful person to-day: indeed, if he is not omnipotent, he is at least omnipresent. It is he who writes nearly all the learned books and articles, especially of the scientific or skeptical sort; all the articles on Eugenics and Social Evolution and Prison Reform and the Higher Criticism and all the rest of it. But especially it is this strange and tortuous being who does most of the writing about female emancipation and the reconsidering of marriage. For the man who thinks backwards is very frequently a woman.

Thinking backwards is not quite easy to define abstractedly; and, perhaps, the simplest method is to take some object, as plain as possible, and from it illustrate the two modes of thought: the right mode in which all real results have been rooted; the wrong mode, which is confusing all our current discussions, especially our discussions about the relations of the sexes. Casting my eye round the room, I notice an object which is often mentioned in the higher and subtler of these debates about the sexes: I mean a poker. I will take a poker and think about it; first forwards and then backwards; and so, perhaps, show what I mean.

The sage desiring to think well and wisely about a poker will begin somewhat as follows: Among the live creatures that crawl about this star the queerest is the thing called Man. This plucked and plumeless bird, comic and forlorn, is the butt of all the philosophies. He is the only naked animal; and this quality, once, it is said, his glory, is now his shame. He has to go outside himself for everything that he wants. He might almost be considered as an absent-minded person who had gone bathing and left his clothes everywhere, so that he has hung his hat upon the beaver and his coat upon the sheep. The rabbit has white warmth for a waistcoat, and the glow-worm has a lantern for a head. But man has no heat in his hide, and the light in his body is darkness; and he must look for light and warmth in the wild, cold universe in which he is cast. This is equally true of his soul and of his body; he is the one creature that has lost his heart as much as he has lost his hide. In a spiritual sense he has taken leave of his senses; and even in a literal sense he has been unable to keep his hair on. And just as this external need of his has lit in his dark brain the dreadful star called religion, so it has lit in his hand the only adequate symbol of it: I mean the red flower called Fire. Fire, the most magic and startling of all material things, is a thing known only to man and the expression of his sublime externalism. It embodies all that is human in his hearths and all that is divine on his altars. It is the most human thing in the
world; seen across wastes of marsh or medleys of forest, it is veritably the purple
and golden flag of the sons of Eve. But there is about this generous and rejoicing
thing an alien and awful quality: the quality of torture. Its presence is life; its
touch is death. Therefore, it is always necessary to have an intermediary between
ourselves and this dreadful deity; to have a priest to intercede for us with the god
of life and death; to send an ambassador to the fire. That priest is the poker.
Made of a material more merciless and warlike than the other instruments of
domicity, hammered on the anvil and born itself in the flame, the poker is
strong enough to enter the burning fiery furnace, and, like the holy children, not
be consumed. In this heroic service it is often battered and twisted, but is the
more honourable for it, like any other soldier who has been under fire.

Now all this may sound very fanciful and mystical, but it is the right view of
pokers, and no one who takes it will ever go in for any wrong view of pokers,
such as using them to beat one’s wife or torture one’s children, or even (though
that is more excusable) to make a policeman jump, as the clown does in the
pantomime. He who has thus gone back to the beginning, and seen everything as
quaint and new, will always see things in their right order, the one depending on
the other in degree of purpose and importance: the poker for the fire and the fire
for the man and the man for the glory of God.

This is thinking forwards. Now our modern discussions about everything,
Imperialism, Socialism, or Votes for Women, are all entangled in an opposite
train of thought, which runs as follows:—A modern intellectual comes in and
sees a poker. He is a positivist; he will not begin with any dogmas about the
nature of man, or any day-dreams about the mystery of fire. He will begin with
what he can see, the poker; and the first thing he sees about the poker is that it is
crooked. He says, “Poor poker; it’s crooked.” Then he asks how it came to be
crooked; and is told that there is a thing in the world (with which his
temperament has hitherto left him unacquainted)—a thing called fire. He points
out, very kindly and clearly, how silly it is of people, if they want a straight
poker, to put it into a chemical combustion which will very probably heat and
warp it. “Let us abolish fire,” he says, “and then we shall have perfectly straight
pokers. Why should you want a fire at all?” They explain to him that a creature
called Man wants a fire, because he has no fur or feathers. He gazes dreamily at
the embers for a few seconds, and then shakes his head. “I doubt if such an
animal is worth preserving,” he says. “He must eventually go under in the
cosmic struggle when pitted against well-armoured and warmly protected
species, who have wings and trunks and spires and scales and horns and shaggy
hair. If Man cannot live without these luxuries, you had better abolish Man.” At this point, as a rule, the crowd is convinced; it heaves up all its clubs and axes, and abolishes him. At least, one of him.

Before we begin discussing our various new plans for the people’s welfare, let us make a kind of agreement that we will argue in a straightforward way, and not in a tail-foremost way. The typical modern movements may be right; but let them be defended because they are right, not because they are typical modern movements. Let us begin with the actual woman or man in the street, who is cold; like mankind before the finding of fire. Do not let us begin with the end of the last red-hot discussion—like the end of a red hot poker. Imperialism may be right. But if it is right, it is right because England has some divine authority like Israel, or some human authority like Rome; not because we have saddled ourselves with South Africa, and don’t know how to get rid of it. Socialism may be true. But if it is true, it is true because the tribe or the city can really declare all land to be common land, not because Harrod’s Stores exist and the commonwealth must copy them. Female suffrage may be just. But if it is just, it is just because women are women, not because women are sweated workers and white slaves and all sorts of things that they ought never to have been. Let not the Imperialist accept a colony because it is there, nor the Suffragist seize a vote because it is lying about, nor the Socialist buy up an industry merely because it is for sale.

Let us ask ourselves first what we really do want, not what recent legal decisions have told us to want, or recent logical philosophies proved that we must want, or recent social prophecies predicted that we shall some day want. If there must be a British Empire, let it be British, and not, in mere panic, American or Prussian. If there ought to be female suffrage, let it be female, and not a mere imitation as coarse as the male blackguard or as dull as the male clerk. If there is to be Socialism, let it be social; that is, as different as possible from all the big commercial departments of to-day. The really good journeyman tailor does not cut his coat according to his cloth; he asks for more cloth. The really practical statesman does not fit himself to existing conditions, he denounces the conditions as unfit. History is like some deeply planted tree which, though gigantic in girth, tapers away at last into tiny twigs; and we are in the topmost branches. Each of us is trying to bend the tree by a twig: to alter England through a distant colony, or to capture the State through a small State department, or to destroy all voting through a vote. In all such bewilderment he is wise who resists this temptation of trivial triumph or surrender, and happy (in
an echo of the Roman poet) who remembers the roots of things.
THE NAMELESS MAN

There are only two forms of government the monarchy or personal government, and the republic or impersonal government. England is not a government; England is an anarchy, because there are so many kings. But there is one real advantage (among many real disadvantages) in the method of abstract democracy, and that is this: that under impersonal government politics are so much more personal. In France and America, where the State is an abstraction, political argument is quite full of human details—some might even say of inhuman details. But in England, precisely because we are ruled by personages, these personages do not permit personalities. In England names are honoured, and therefore names are suppressed. But in the republics, in France especially, a man can put his enemies’ names into his article and his own name at the end of it.

This is the essential condition of such candour. If we merely made our anonymous articles more violent, we should be baser than we are now. We should only be arming masked men with daggers instead of cudgels. And I, for one, have always believed in the more general signing of articles, and have signed my own articles on many occasions when, heaven knows, I had little reason to be vain of them. I have heard many arguments for anonymity; but they all seem to amount to the statement that anonymity is safe, which is just what I complain of. In matters of truth the fact that you don’t want to publish something is, nine times out of ten, a proof that you ought to publish it.

But there is one answer to my perpetual plea for a man putting his name to his writing. There is one answer, and there is only one answer, and it is never given. It is that in the modern complexity very often a man’s name is almost as false as his pseudonym. The prominent person today is eternally trying to lose a name, and to get a title. For instance, we all read with earnestness and patience the pages of the ‘Daily Mail,’ and there are times when we feel moved to cry, “Bring to us the man who thought these strange thoughts! Pursue him, capture him, take great care of him. Bring him back to us tenderly, like some precious bale of silk, that we may look upon the face of the man who desires such things to be printed. Let us know his name; his social and medical pedigree.” But in the modern muddle (it might be said) how little should we gain if those frankly fatuous sheets were indeed subscribed by the man who had inspired them. Suppose that after every article stating that the Premier is a piratical Socialist...
there were printed the simple word “Northcliffe.” What does that simple word suggest to the simple soul? To my simple soul (uninstructed otherwise) it suggests a lofty and lonely crag somewhere in the wintry seas towards the Orkheys or Norway; and barely clinging to the top of this crag the fortress of some forgotten chieftain. As it happens, of course, I know that the word does not mean this; it means another Fleet Street journalist like myself or only different from myself in so far as he has sought to secure money while I have sought to secure a jolly time.

A title does not now even serve as a distinction: it does not distinguish. A coronet is not merely an extinguisher: it is a hiding-place.

But the really odd thing is this. This false quality in titles does not merely apply to the new and vulgar titles, but to the old and historic titles also. For hundreds of years titles in England have been essentially unmeaning; void of that very weak and very human instinct in which titles originated. In essential nonsense of application there is nothing to choose between Northcliffe and Norfolk. The Duke of Norfolk means (as my exquisite and laborious knowledge of Latin informs me) the Leader of Norfolk. It is idle to talk against representative government or for it. All government is representative government until it begins to decay. Unfortunately (as is also evident) all government begins to decay the instant it begins to govern. All aristocrats were first meant as envoys of democracy; and most envoys of democracy lose no time in becoming aristocrats. By the old essential human notion, the Duke of Norfolk ought simply to be the first or most manifest of Norfolk men.

I see growing and filling out before me the image of an actual Duke of Norfolk. For instance, Norfolk men all make their voices run up very high at the end of a sentence. The Duke of Norfolk’s voice, therefore, ought to end in a perfect shriek. They often (I am told) end sentences with the word “together”; entirely irrespective of its meaning. Thus I shall expect the Duke of Norfolk to say: “I beg to second the motion together”; or “This is a great constitutional question together.” I shall expect him to know much about the Broads and the sluggish rivers above them; to know about the shooting of water-fowl, and not to know too much about anything else. Of mountains he must be wildly and ludicrously ignorant. He must have the freshness of Norfolk; nay, even the flatness of Norfolk. He must remind me of the watery expanses, the great square church towers and the long level sunsets of East England. If he does not do this, I decline to know him.

I need not multiply such cases; the principle applies everywhere. Thus I lose
all interest in the Duke of Devonshire unless he can assure me that his soul is filled with that strange warm Puritanism, Puritanism shot with romance, which colours the West Country. He must eat nothing but clotted cream, drink nothing but cider, reading nothing but ‘Lorna Doone,’ and be unacquainted with any town larger than Plymouth, which he must regard with some awe, as the Central Babylon of the world. Again, I should expect the Prince of Wales always to be full of the mysticism and dreamy arbour of the Celtic fringe.

Perhaps it may be thought that these demands are a little extreme; and that our fancy is running away with us. Nevertheless, it is not my Duke of Devonshire who is funny; but the real Duke of Devonshire. The point is that the scheme of titles is a misfit throughout: hardly anywhere do we find a modern man whose name and rank represent in any way his type, his locality, or his mode of life. As a mere matter of social comedy, the thing is worth noticing. You will meet a man whose name suggests a gouty admiral, and you will find him exactly like a timid organist: you will hear announced the name of a haughty and almost heathen grande dame, and behold the entrance of a nice, smiling Christian cook. These are light complications of the central fact of the falsification of all names and ranks. Our peers are like a party of mediaeval knights who should have exchanged shields, crests, and pennons. For the present rule seems to be that the Duke of Sussex may lawfully own the whole of Essex; and that the Marquis of Cornwall may own all the hills and valleys so long as they are not Cornish.

The clue to all this tangle is as simple as it is terrible. If England is an aristocracy, England is dying. If this system IS the country, as some say, the country is stiffening into more than the pomp and paralysis of China. It is the final sign of imbecility in a people that it calls cats dogs and describes the sun as the moon—and is very particular about the preciseness of these pseudonyms. To be wrong, and to be carefully wrong, that is the definition of decadence. The disease called aphasia, in which people begin by saying tea when they mean coffee, commonly ends in their silence. Silence of this stiff sort is the chief mark of the powerful parts of modern society. They all seem straining to keep things in rather than to let things out. For the kings of finance speechlessness is counted a way of being strong, though it should rather be counted a way of being sly. By this time the Parliament does not parley any more than the Speaker speaks. Even the newspaper editors and proprietors are more despotic and dangerous by what they do not utter than by what they do. We have all heard the expression “golden silence.” The expression “brazen silence” is the only adequate phrase for our editors. If we wake out of this throttled, gaping, and wordless nightmare, we
must awake with a yell. The Revolution that releases England from the fixed falsity of its present position will be not less noisy than other revolutions. It will contain, I fear, a great deal of that rude accomplishment described among little boys as “calling names”; but that will not matter much so long as they are the right names.
THE GARDENER AND THE GUINEA

Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as an English Peasant. Indeed, the type can only exist in community, so much does it depend on cooperation and common laws. One must not think primarily of a French Peasant; any more than of a German Measle. The plural of the word is its proper form; you cannot have a Peasant till you have a peasantry. The essence of the Peasant ideal is equality; and you cannot be equal all by yourself.

Nevertheless, because human nature always craves and half creates the things necessary to its happiness, there are approximations and suggestions of the possibility of such a race even here. The nearest approach I know to the temper of a Peasant in England is that of the country gardener; not, of course, the great scientific gardener attached to the great houses; he is a rich man’s servant like any other. I mean the small jobbing gardener who works for two or three moderate-sized gardens; who works on his own; who sometimes even owns his house; and who frequently owns his tools. This kind of man has really some of the characteristics of the true Peasant—especially the characteristics that people don’t like. He has none of that irresponsible mirth which is the consolation of most poor men in England. The gardener is even disliked sometimes by the owners of the shrubs and flowers; because (like Micaiah) he prophesies not good concerning them, but evil. The English gardener is grim, critical, self-respecting; sometimes even economical. Nor is this (as the reader’s lightning wit will flash back at me) merely because the English gardener is always a Scotch gardener. The type does exist in pure South England blood and speech; I have spoken to the type. I was speaking to the type only the other evening, when a rather odd little incident occurred.

It was one of those wonderful evenings in which the sky was warm and radiant while the earth was still comparatively cold and wet. But it is of the essence of Spring to be unexpected; as in that heroic and hackneyed line about coming “before the swallow dares.” Spring never is Spring unless it comes too soon. And on a day like that one might pray, without any profanity, that Spring might come on earth as it was in heaven. The gardener was gardening. I was not gardening. It is needless to explain the causes of this difference; it would be to tell the tremendous history of two souls. It is needless because there is a more immediate explanation of the case: the gardener and I, if not equal in agreement, were at least equal in difference. It is quite certain that he would not have
allowed me to touch the garden if I had gone down on my knees to him. And it is by no means certain that I should have consented to touch the garden if he had gone down on his knees to me. His activity and my idleness, therefore, went on steadily side by side through the long sunset hours.

And all the time I was thinking what a shame it was that he was not sticking his spade into his own garden, instead of mine: he knew about the earth and the underworld of seeds, the resurrection of Spring and the flowers that appear in order like a procession marshalled by a herald. He possessed the garden intellectually and spiritually, while I only possessed it politically. I know more about flowers than coal-owners know about coal; for at least I pay them honour when they are brought above the surface of the earth. I know more about gardens than railway shareholders seem to know about railways: for at least I know that it needs a man to make a garden; a man whose name is Adam. But as I walked on that grass my ignorance overwhelmed me—and yet that phrase is false, because it suggests something like a storm from the sky above. It is truer to say that my ignorance exploded underneath me, like a mine dug long before; and indeed it was dug before the beginning of the ages. Green bombs of bulbs and seeds were bursting underneath me everywhere; and, so far as my knowledge went, they had been laid by a conspirator. I trod quite uneasily on this uprush of the earth; the Spring is always only a fruitful earthquake. With the land all alive under me I began to wonder more and more why this man, who had made the garden, did not own the garden. If I stuck a spade into the ground, I should be astonished at what I found there . . . and just as I thought this I saw that the gardener was astonished too.

Just as I was wondering why the man who used the spade did not profit by the spade, he brought me something he had found actually in my soil. It was a thin worn gold piece of the Georges, of the sort which are called, I believe, Spade Guineas. Anyhow, a piece of gold.

If you do not see the parable as I saw it just then, I doubt if I can explain it just now. He could make a hundred other round yellow fruits: and this flat yellow one is the only sort that I can make. How it came there I have not a notion—unless Edmund Burke dropped it in his hurry to get back to Butler’s Court. But there it was: this is a cold recital of facts. There may be a whole pirate’s treasure lying under the earth there, for all I know or care; for there is no interest in a treasure without a Treasure Island to sail to. If there is a treasure it will never be found, for I am not interested in wealth beyond the dreams of avarice since I know that avarice has no dreams, but only insomnia. And, for the other party,
my gardener would never consent to dig up the garden.

Nevertheless, I was overwhelmed with intellectual emotions when I saw that answer to my question; the question of why the garden did not belong to the gardener. No better epigram could be put in reply than simply putting the Spade Guinea beside the Spade. This was the only underground seed that I could understand. Only by having a little more of that dull, battered yellow substance could I manage to be idle while he was active. I am not altogether idle myself; but the fact remains that the power is in the thin slip of metal we call the Spade Guinea, not in the strong square and curve of metal which we call the Spade. And then I suddenly remembered that as I had found gold on my ground by accident, so richer men in the north and west counties had found coal in their ground, also by accident.

I told the gardener that as he had found the thing he ought to keep it, but that if he cared to sell it to me it could be valued properly, and then sold. He said at first, with characteristic independence, that he would like to keep it. He said it would make a brooch for his wife. But a little later he brought it back to me without explanation. I could not get a ray of light on the reason of his refusal; but he looked lowering and unhappy. Had he some mystical instinct that it is just such accidental and irrational wealth that is the doom of all peasantry? Perhaps he dimly felt that the boy’s pirate tales are true; and that buried treasure is a thing for robbers and not for producers. Perhaps he thought there was a curse on such capital: on the coal of the coal-owners, on the gold of the gold-seekers. Perhaps there is.
THE VOTER AND THE TWO VOICES

The real evil of our Party System is commonly stated wrong. It was stated wrong by Lord Rosebery, when he said that it prevented the best men from devoting themselves to politics, and that it encouraged a fanatical conflict. I doubt whether the best men ever would devote themselves to politics. The best men devote themselves to pigs and babies and things like that. And as for the fanatical conflict in party politics, I wish there was more of it. The real danger of the two parties with their two policies is that they unduly limit the outlook of the ordinary citizen. They make him barren instead of creative, because he is never allowed to do anything except prefer one existing policy to another. We have not got real Democracy when the decision depends upon the people. We shall have real Democracy when the problem depends upon the people. The ordinary man will decide not only how he will vote, but what he is going to vote about.

It is this which involves some weakness in many current aspirations towards the extension of the suffrage; I mean that, apart from all questions of abstract justice, it is not the smallness or largeness of the suffrage that is at present the difficulty of Democracy. It is not the quantity of voters, but the quality of the thing they are voting about. A certain alternative is put before them by the powerful houses and the highest political class. Two roads are opened to them; but they must go down one or the other. They cannot have what they choose, but only which they choose. To follow the process in practice we may put it thus. The Suffragettes—if one may judge by their frequent ringing of his bell—want to do something to Mr. Asquith. I have no notion what it is. Let us say (for the sake of argument) that they want to paint him green. We will suppose that it is entirely for that simple purpose that they are always seeking to have private interviews with him; it seems as profitable as any other end that I can imagine to such an interview. Now, it is possible that the Government of the day might go in for a positive policy of painting Mr. Asquith green; might give that reform a prominent place in their programme. Then the party in opposition would adopt another policy, not a policy of leaving Mr. Asquith alone (which would be considered dangerously revolutionary), but some alternative course of action, as, for instance, painting him red. Then both sides would fling themselves on the people, they would both cry that the appeal was now to the Caesar of Democracy. A dark and dramatic air of conflict and real crisis would arise on both sides; arrows of satire would fly and swords of eloquence flame. The
Greens would say that Socialists and free lovers might well want to paint Mr. Asquith red; they wanted to paint the whole town red. Socialists would indignantly reply that Socialism was the reverse of disorder, and that they only wanted to paint Mr. Asquith red so that he might resemble the red pillar-boxes which typified State control. The Greens would passionately deny the charge so often brought against them by the Reds; they would deny that they wished Mr. Asquith green in order that he might be invisible on the green benches of the Commons, as certain terrified animals take the colour of their environment.

There would be fights in the street perhaps, and abundance of ribbons, flags, and badges, of the two colours. One crowd would sing, “Keep the Red Flag Flying,” and the other, “The Wearing of the Green.” But when the last effort had been made and the last moment come, when two crowds were waiting in the dark outside the public building to hear the declaration of the poll, then both sides alike would say that it was now for democracy to do exactly what it chose. England herself, lifting her head in awful loneliness and liberty, must speak and pronounce judgment. Yet this might not be exactly true. England herself, lifting her head in awful loneliness and liberty, might really wish Mr. Asquith to be pale blue. The democracy of England in the abstract, if it had been allowed to make up a policy for itself, might have desired him to be black with pink spots. It might even have liked him as he is now. But a huge apparatus of wealth, power, and printed matter has made it practically impossible for them to bring home these other proposals, even if they would really prefer them. No candidates will stand in the spotted interest; for candidates commonly have to produce money either from their own pockets or the party’s; and in such circles spots are not worn. No man in the social position of a Cabinet Minister, perhaps, will commit himself to the pale-blue theory of Mr. Asquith; therefore it cannot be a Government measure, therefore it cannot pass.

Nearly all the great newspapers, both pompous and frivolous, will declare dogmatically day after day, until every one half believes it, that red and green are the only two colours in the paint-box. THE OBSERVER will say: “No one who knows the solid framework of politics or the emphatic first principles of an Imperial people can suppose for a moment that there is any possible compromise to be made in such a matter; we must either fulfil our manifest racial destiny and crown the edifice of ages with the august figure of a Green Premier, or we must abandon our heritage, break our promise to the Empire, fling ourselves into final anarchy, and allow the flaming and demoniac image of a Red Premier to hover over our dissolution and our doom.” The DAILY MAIL would say: “There is no
halfway house in this matter; it must be green or red. We wish to see every honest Englishman one colour or the other.” And then some funny man in the popular Press would star the sentence with a pun, and say that the DAILY MAIL liked its readers to be green and its paper to be read. But no one would even dare to whisper that there is such a thing as yellow.

For the purposes of pure logic it is clearer to argue with silly examples than with sensible ones: because silly examples are simple. But I could give many grave and concrete cases of the kind of thing to which I refer. In the later part of the Boer War both parties perpetually insisted in every speech and pamphlet that annexation was inevitable and that it was only a question whether Liberals or Tories should do it. It was not inevitable in the least; it would have been perfectly easy to make peace with the Boers as Christian nations commonly make peace with their conquered enemies. Personally I think that it would have been better for us in the most selfish sense, better for our pocket and prestige, if we had never effected the annexation at all; but that is a matter of opinion. What is plain is that it was not inevitable; it was not, as was said, the only possible course; there were plenty of other courses; there were plenty of other colours in the box. Again, in the discussion about Socialism, it is repeatedly rubbed into the public mind that we must choose between Socialism and some horrible thing that they call Individualism. I don’t know what it means, but it seems to mean that anybody who happens to pull out a plum is to adopt the moral philosophy of the young Horner—and say what a good boy he is for helping himself.

It is calmly assumed that the only two possible types of society are a Collectivist type of society and the present society that exists at this moment and is rather like an animated muck-heap. It is quite unnecessary to say that I should prefer Socialism to the present state of things. I should prefer anarchism to the present state of things. But it is simply not the fact that Collectivism is the only other scheme for a more equal order. A Collectivist has a perfect right to think it the only sound scheme; but it is not the only plausible or possible scheme. We might have peasant proprietorship; we might have the compromise of Henry George; we might have a number of tiny communes; we might have co-operation; we might have Anarchist Communism; we might have a hundred things. I am not saying that any of these are right, though I cannot imagine that any of them could be worse than the present social madhouse, with its top-heavy rich and its tortured poor; but I say that it is an evidence of the stiff and narrow alternative offered to the civic mind, that the civic mind is not, generally speaking, conscious of these other possibilities. The civic mind is not free or
alert enough to feel how much it has the world before it. There are at least ten solutions of the Education question, and no one knows which Englishmen really want. For Englishmen are only allowed to vote about the two which are at that moment offered by the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition. There are ten solutions of the drink question; and no one knows which the democracy wants; for the democracy is only allowed to fight about one Licensing Bill at a time.

So that the situation comes to this: The democracy has a right to answer questions, but it has no right to ask them. It is still the political aristocracy that asks the questions. And we shall not be unreasonably cynical if we suppose that the political aristocracy will always be rather careful what questions it asks. And if the dangerous comfort and self-flattery of modern England continues much longer there will be less democratic value in an English election than in a Roman saturnalia of slaves. For the powerful class will choose two courses of action, both of them safe for itself, and then give the democracy the gratification of taking one course or the other. The lord will take two things so much alike that he would not mind choosing from them blindfold—and then for a great jest he will allow the slaves to choose.
THE MAD OFFICIAL

Going mad is the slowest and dullest business in the world. I have very nearly done it more than once in my boyhood, and so have nearly all my friends, born under the general doom of mortals, but especially of moderns; I mean the doom that makes a man come almost to the end of thinking before he comes to the first chance of living.

But the process of going mad is dull, for the simple reason that a man does not know that it is going on. Routine and literalism and a certain dry-throated earnestness and mental thirst, these are the very atmosphere of morbidity. If once the man could become conscious of his madness, he would cease to be man. He studies certain texts in Daniel or cryptograms in Shakespeare through monstrously magnifying spectacles, which are on his nose night and day. If once he could take off the spectacles he would smash them. He deduces all his fantasies about the Sixth Seal or the Anglo-Saxon Race from one unexamined and invisible first principle. If he could once see the first principle, he would see that it is not there.

This slow and awful self-hypnotism of error is a process that can occur not only with individuals, but also with whole societies. It is hard to pick out and prove; that is why it is hard to cure. But this mental degeneration may be brought to one test, which I truly believe to be a real test. A nation is not going mad when it does extravagant things, so long as it does them in an extravagant spirit. Crusaders not cutting their beards till they found Jerusalem, Jacobins calling each other Harmodius and Epaminondas when their names were Jacques and Jules, these are wild things, but they were done in wild spirits at a wild moment.

But whenever we see things done wildly, but taken tamely, then the State is growing insane. For instance, I have a gun license. For all I know, this would logically allow me to fire off fifty-nine enormous field-guns day and night in my back garden. I should not be surprised at a man doing it; for it would be great fun. But I should be surprised at the neighbours putting up with it, and regarding it as an ordinary thing merely because it might happen to fulfill the letter of my license.

Or, again, I have a dog license; and I may have the right (for all I know) to turn ten thousand wild dogs loose in Buckinghamshire. I should not be surprised if the law were like that; because in modern England there is practically no law to be surprised at. I should not be surprised even at the man who did it; for a
certain kind of man, if he lived long under the English landlord system, might do anything. But I should be surprised at the people who consented to stand it. I should, in other words, think the world a little mad if the incident, were received in silence.

Now things every bit as wild as this are being received in silence every day. All strokes slip on the smoothness of a polished wall. All blows fall soundless on the softness of a padded cell. For madness is a passive as well as an active state: it is a paralysis, a refusal of the nerves to respond to the normal stimuli, as well as an unnatural stimulation. There are commonwealths, plainly to be distinguished here and there in history, which pass from prosperity to squalor, or from glory to insignificance, or from freedom to slavery, not only in silence, but with serenity. The face still smiles while the limbs, literally and loathsomely, are dropping from the body. These are peoples that have lost the power of astonishment at their own actions. When they give birth to a fantastic fashion or a foolish law, they do not start or stare at the monster they have brought forth. They have grown used to their own unreason; chaos is their cosmos; and the whirlwind is the breath of their nostrils. These nations are really in danger of going off their heads en masse; of becoming one vast vision of imbecility, with toppling cities and crazy country-sides, all dotted with industrious lunatics. One of these countries is modern England.

Now here is an actual instance, a small case of how our social conscience really works: tame in spirit, wild in result, blank in realisation; a thing without the light of mind in it. I take this paragraph from a daily paper:—“At Epping, yesterday, Thomas Woolbourne, a Lambourne labourer, and his wife were summoned for neglecting their five children. Dr. Alpin said he was invited by the inspector of the N.S.P.C.C. to visit defendants’ cottage. Both the cottage and the children were dirty. The children looked exceedingly well in health, but the conditions would be serious in case of illness. Defendants were stated to be sober. The man was discharged. The woman, who said she was hampered by the cottage having no water supply and that she was ill, was sentenced to six weeks’ imprisonment. The sentence caused surprise, and the woman was removed crying, ‘Lord save me!’”

I know no name for this but Chinese. It calls up the mental picture of some archaic and changeless Eastern Court, in which men with dried faces and stiff ceremonial costumes perform some atrocious cruelty to the accompaniment of formal proverbs and sentences of which the very meaning has been forgotten. In both cases the only thing in the whole farrago that can be called real is the
wrong. If we apply the lightest touch of reason to the whole Epping prosecution it dissolves into nothing.

I here challenge any person in his five wits to tell me what that woman was sent to prison for. Either it was for being poor, or it was for being ill. Nobody could suggest, nobody will suggest, nobody, as a matter of fact, did suggest, that she had committed any other crime. The doctor was called in by a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Was this woman guilty of cruelty to children? Not in the least. Did the doctor say she was guilty of cruelty to children? Not in the least. Was there any evidence even remotely bearing on the sin of cruelty? Not a rap. The worse that the doctor could work himself up to saying was that though the children were “exceedingly” well, the conditions would be serious in case of illness. If the doctor will tell me any conditions that would be comic in case of illness, I shall attach more weight to his argument.

Now this is the worst effect of modern worry. The mad doctor has gone mad. He is literally and practically mad; and still he is quite literally and practically a doctor. The only question is the old one, Quis docebit ipsum doctorem? Now cruelty to children is an utterly unnatural thing; instinctively accursed of earth and heaven. But neglect of children is a natural thing; like neglect of any other duty, it is a mere difference of degree that divides extending arms and legs in calisthenics and extending them on the rack. It is a mere difference of degree that separates any operation from any torture. The thumb-screw can easily be called Manicure. Being pulled about by wild horses can easily be called Massage. The modern problem is not so much what people will endure as what they will not endure. But I fear I interrupt. . . . The boiling oil is boiling; and the Tenth Mandarin is already reciting the “Seventeen Serious Principles and the Fifty-three Virtues of the Sacred Emperor.”
THE ENCHANTED MAN

When I arrived to see the performance of the Buckinghamshire Players, who acted Miss Gertrude Robins’s POT LUCK at Naphill a short time ago, it is the distressing, if scarcely surprising, truth that I entered very late. This would have mattered little, I hope, to any one, but that late comers had to be forced into front seats. For a real popular English audience always insists on crowding in the back part of the hall; and (as I have found in many an election) will endure the most unendurable taunts rather than come forward. The English are a modest people; that is why they are entirely ruled and run by the few of them that happen to be immodest. In theatrical affairs the fact is strangely notable; and in most playhouses we find the bored people in front and the eager people behind.

As far as the performance went I was quite the reverse of a bored person; but I may have been a boring person, especially as I was thus required to sit in the seats of the scornful. It will be a happy day in the dramatic world when all ladies have to take off their hats and all critics have to take off their heads. The people behind will have a chance then. And as it happens, in this case, I had not so much taken off my head as lost it. I had lost it on the road; on that strange journey that was the cause of my coming in late. I have a troubled recollection of having seen a very good play and made a very bad speech; I have a cloudy recollection of talking to all sorts of nice people afterwards, but talking to them jerkily and with half a head, as a man talks when he has one eye on a clock.

And the truth is that I had one eye on an ancient and timeless clock, hung uselessly in heaven; whose very name has passed into a figure for such bemused folly. In the true sense of an ancient phrase, I was moonstruck. A lunar landscape a scene of winter moonlight had inexplicably got in between me and all other scenes. If any one had asked me I could not have said what it was; I cannot say now. Nothing had occurred to me; except the breakdown of a hired motor on the ridge of a hill. It was not an adventure; it was a vision.

I had started in wintry twilight from my own door; and hired a small car that found its way across the hills towards Naphill. But as night blackened and frost brightened and hardened it I found the way increasingly difficult; especially as the way was an incessant ascent. Whenever we topped a road like a staircase it was only to turn into a yet steeper road like a ladder.

At last, when I began to fancy that I was spirally climbing the Tower of Babel in a dream, I was brought to fact by alarming noises, stoppage, and the driver
saying that “it couldn’t be done.” I got out of the car and suddenly forgot that I had ever been in it.

From the edge of that abrupt steep I saw something indescribable, which I am now going to describe. When Mr. Joseph Chamberlain delivered his great patriotic speech on the inferiority of England to the Dutch parts of South Africa, he made use of the expression “the illimitable veldt.” The word “veldt” is Dutch, and the word “illimitable” is Double Dutch. But the meditative statesman probably meant that the new plains gave him a sense of largeness and dreariness which he had never found in England. Well, if he never found it in England it was because he never looked for it in England. In England there is an illimitable number of illimitable veldts. I saw six or seven separate eternities in cresting as many different hills. One cannot find anything more infinite than a finite horizon, free and lonely and innocent. The Dutch veldt may be a little more desolate than Birmingham. But I am sure it is not so desolate as that English hill was, almost within a cannon-shot of High Wycombe.

I looked across a vast and voiceless valley straight at the moon, as if at a round mirror. It may have been the blue moon of the proverb; for on that freezing night the very moon seemed blue with cold. A deathly frost fastened every branch and blade to its place. The sinking and softening forests, powdered with a gray frost, fell away underneath me into an abyss which seemed unfathomable. One fancied the world was soundless only because it was bottomless: it seemed as if all songs and cries had been swallowed in some unresisting stillness under the roots of the hills. I could fancy that if I shouted there would be no echo; that if I hurled huge stones there would be no noise of reply. A dumb devil had bewitched the landscape: but that again does not express the best or worst of it. All those hoary and frosted forests expressed something so inhuman that it has no human name. A horror of unconsciousness lay on them; that is the nearest phrase I know. It was as if one were looking at the back of the world; and the world did not know it. I had taken the universe in the rear. I was behind the scenes. I was eavesdropping upon an unconscious creation.

I shall not express what the place expressed. I am not even sure that it is a thing that ought to be expressed. There was something heathen about its union of beauty and death; sorrow seemed to glitter, as it does in some of the great pagan poems. I understood one of the thousand poetical phrases of the populace, “a God-forsaken place.” Yet something was present there; and I could not yet find the key to my fixed impression. Then suddenly I remembered the right word. It
was an enchanted place. It had been put to sleep. In a flash I remembered all the fairy-tales about princes turned to marble and princesses changed to snow. We were in a land where none could strive or cry out; a white nightmare. The moon looked at me across the valley like the enormous eye of a hypnotist; the one white eye of the world.

There was never a better play than POT LUCK; for it tells a tale with a point and a tale that might happen any day among English peasants. There were never better actors than the local Buckinghamshire Players: for they were acting their own life with just that rise into exaggeration which is the transition from life to art. But all the time I was mesmerised by the moon; I saw all these men and women as enchanted things. The poacher shot pheasants; the policeman tracked pheasants; the wife hid pheasants; they were all (especially the policeman) as true as death. But there was something more true to death than true to life about it all: the figures were frozen with a magic frost of sleep or fear or custom such as does not cramp the movements of the poor men of other lands. I looked at the poacher and the policeman and the gun; then at the gun and the policeman and the poacher; and I could find no name for the fancy that haunted and escaped me. The poacher believed in the Game Laws as much as the policeman. The poacher's wife not only believed in the Game Laws, but protected them as well as him. She got a promise from her husband that he would never shoot another pheasant. Whether he kept it I doubt; I fancy he sometimes shot a pheasant even after that. But I am sure he never shot a policeman. For we live in an enchanted land.
THE SUN WORSHIPPER

There is a shrewd warning to be given to all people who are in revolt. And in the present state of things, I think all men are revolting in that sense; except a few who are revolting in the other sense. But the warning to Socialists and other revolutionaries is this: that as sure as fate, if they use any argument which is atheist or materialistic, that argument will always be turned against them at last by the tyrant and the slave. To-day I saw one too common Socialist argument turned Tory, so to speak, in a manner quite startling and insane. I mean that modern doctrine, taught, I believe, by most followers of Karl Marx, which is called the materialist theory of history. The theory is, roughly, this: that all the important things in history are rooted in an economic motive. In short, history is a science; a science of the search for food.

Now I desire, in passing only, to point out that this is not merely untrue, but actually the reverse of the truth. It is putting it too feebly to say that the history of man is not only economic. Man would not have any history if he were only economic. The need for food is certainly universal, so universal that it is not even human. Cows have an economic motive, and apparently (I dare not say what ethereal delicacies may be in a cow) only an economic motive. The cow eats grass anywhere and never eats anything else. In short, the cow does fulfill the materialist theory of history: that is why the cow has no history. “A History of Cows” would be one of the simplest and briefest of standard works. But if some cows thought it wicked to eat long grass and persecuted all who did so; if the cow with the crumpled horn were worshipped by some cows and gored to death by others; if cows began to have obvious moral preferences over and above a desire for grass, then cows would begin to have a history. They would also begin to have a highly unpleasant time, which is perhaps the same thing.

The economic motive is not merely not inside all history; it is actually outside all history. It belongs to Biology or the Science of Life; that is, it concerns things like cows, that are not so very much alive. Men are far too much alive to get into the science of anything; for them we have made the art of history. To say that human actions have depended on economic support is like saying that they have depended on having two legs. It accounts for action, but not for such varied action; it is a condition, but not a motive; it is too universal to be useful. Certainly a soldier wins the Victoria Cross on two legs; he also runs away on two legs. But if our object is to discover whether he will become a V.C. or a
coward the most careful inspection of his legs will yield us little or no information. In the same way a man will want food if he is a dreamy romantic tramp, and will want food if he is a toiling and sweating millionaire. A man must be supported on food as he must be supported on legs. But cows (who have no history) are not only furnished more generously in the matter of legs, but can see their food on a much grander and more imaginative scale. A cow can lift up her eyes to the hills and see uplands and peaks of pure food. Yet we never see the horizon broken by crags of cake or happy hills of cheese.

So far the cow (who has no history) seems to have every other advantage. But history—the whole point of history—precisely is that some two legged soldiers ran away while others, of similar anatomical structure, did not. The whole point of history precisely is: some people (like poets and tramps) chance getting money by disregarding it, while others (such as millionaires) will absolutely lose money for the fun of bothering about it. There would be no history if there were only economic history. All the historical events have been due to the twists and turns given to the economic instinct by forces that were not economic. For instance, this theory traces the French war of Edward III to a quarrel about the French wines. Any one who has even smelt the Middle Ages must feel fifty answers spring to his lips; but in this case one will suffice. There would have been no such war, then, if we all drank water like cows. But when one is a man one enters the world of historic choice. The act of drinking wine is one that requires explanation. So is the act of not drinking wine.

But the capitalist can get much more fun out of the doctrine.

When strikes were splitting England right and left a little while ago, an ingenious writer, humorously describing himself as a Liberal, said that they were entirely due to the hot weather. The suggestion was eagerly taken up by other creatures of the same kind, and I really do not see why it was not carried farther and applied to other lamentable uprisings in history. Thus, it is a remarkable fact that the weather is generally rather warm in Egypt; and this cannot but throw a light on the sudden and mysterious impulse of the Israelites to escape from captivity. The English strikers used some barren republican formula (arid as the definitions of the medieval schoolmen), some academic shibboleth about being free men and not being forced to work except for a wage accepted by them. Just in the same way the Israelites in Egypt employed some dry scholastic quibble about the extreme difficulty of making bricks with nothing to make them of. But whatever fantastic intellectual excuses they may have put forward for their strange and unnatural conduct in walking out when the prison door was open,
there can be no doubt that the real cause was the warm weather. Such a climate notoriously also produces delusions and horrible fancies, such as Mr. Kipling describes. And it was while their brains were disordered by the heat that the Jews fancied that they were founding a nation, that they were led by a prophet, and, in short, that they were going to be of some importance in the affairs of the world.

Nor can the historical student fail to note that the French monarchy was pulled down in August; and that August is a month in summer.

In spite of all this, however, I have some little difficulty myself in accepting so simple a form of the Materialist Theory of History (at these words all Marxian Socialists will please bow their heads three times), and I rather think that exceptions might be found to the principle. Yet it is not chiefly such exceptions that embarrass my belief in it.

No; my difficulty is rather in accounting for the strange coincidence by which the shafts of Apollo split us exclusively along certain lines of class and of economics. I cannot understand why all solicitors did not leave off soliciting, all doctors leave off doctoring, all judges leave off judging, all benevolent bankers leave off lending money at high interest, and all rising politicians leave off having nothing to add to what their right honourable friend told the House about eight years ago. The quaint theoretic plea of the workers, that they were striking because they were ill paid, seems to receive a sort of wild and hazy confirmation from the fact that, throughout the hottest weather, judges and other persons who are particularly well paid showed no disposition to strike. I have to fall back therefore on metaphysical fancies of my own; and I continue to believe that the anger of the English poor (to steal a phrase from Sir Thomas Browne) came from something in man that is other than the elements and that owes no homage unto the sun.

When comfortable people come to talking stuff of that sort, it is really time that the comfortable classes made a short summary and confession of what they have really done with the very poor Englishman. The dawn of the mediaeval civilisation found him a serf; which is a different thing from a slave. He had security; although the man belonged to the land rather than the land to the man. He could not be evicted; his rent could not be raised. In practice, it came to something like this: that if the lord rode down his cabbages he had not much chance of redress; but he had the chance of growing more cabbages. He had direct access to the means of production.

Since then the centuries in England have achieved something different; and
something which, fortunately, is perfectly easy to state. There is no doubt about what we have done. We have kept the inequality, but we have destroyed the security. The man is not tied to the land, as in serfdom; nor is the land tied to the man, as in a peasantry. The rich man has entered into an absolute ownership of farms and fields; and (in the modern industrial phrase) he has locked out the English people. They can only find an acre to dig or a house to sleep in by accepting such competitive and cruel terms as he chooses to impose.

Well, what would happen then, over the larger parts of the planet, parts inhabited by savages? Savages, of course, would hunt and fish. That retreat for the English poor was perceived; and that retreat was cut off. Game laws were made to extend over districts like the Arctic snows or the Sahara. The rich man had property over animals he had no more dreamed of than a governor of Roman Africa had dreamed of a giraffe. He owned all the birds that passed over his land: he might as well have owned all the clouds that passed over it. If a rabbit ran from Smith’s land to Brown’s land, it belonged to Brown, as if it were his pet dog. The logical answer to this would be simple: Any one stung on Brown’s land ought to be able to prosecute Brown for keeping a dangerous wasp without a muzzle.

Thus the poor man was forced to be a tramp along the roads and to sleep in the open. That retreat was perceived; and that retreat was cut off. A landless man in England can be punished for behaving in the only way that a landless man can behave: for sleeping under a hedge in Surrey or on a seat on the Embankment. His sin is described (with a hideous sense of fun) as that of having no visible means of subsistence.

The last possibility, of course, is that upon which all human beings would fall back if they were sinking in a swamp or impaled on a spike or deserted on an island. It is that of calling out for pity to the passerby. That retreat was perceived; and that retreat was cut off. A man in England can be sent to prison for asking another man for help in the name of God.

You have done all these things, and by so doing you have forced the poor to serve the rich, and to serve them on the terms of the rich. They have still one weapon left against the extremes of insult and unfairness: that weapon is their numbers and the necessity of those numbers to the working of that vast and slavish machine. And because they still had this last retreat (which we call the Strike), because this retreat was also perceived, there was talk of this retreat being also cut off. Whereupon the workmen became suddenly and violently angry; and struck at your Boards and Committees here, there, and wherever they
could. And you opened on them the eyes of owls, and said, “It must be the sunshine.” You could only go on saying, “The sun, the sun.” That was what the man in Ibsen said, when he had lost his wits.
THE WRONG INCENDIARY

I stood looking at the Coronation Procession—I mean the one in Beaconsfield; not the rather elephantine imitation of it which, I believe, had some success in London—and I was seriously impressed. Most of my life is passed in discovering with a deathly surprise that I was quite right. Never before have I realised how right I was in maintaining that the small area expresses the real patriotism: the smaller the field the taller the tower. There were things in our local procession that did not (one might even reverently say, could not) occur in the London procession. One of the most prominent citizens in our procession (for instance) had his face blacked. Another rode on a pony which wore pink and blue trousers. I was not present at the Metropolitan affair, and therefore my assertion is subject to such correction as the eyewitness may always offer to the absentee. But I believe with some firmness that no such features occurred in the London pageant.

But it is not of the local celebration that I would speak, but of something that occurred before it. In the field beyond the end of my garden the materials for a bonfire had been heaped; a hill of every kind of rubbish and refuse and things that nobody wants; broken chairs, dead trees, rags, shavings, newspapers, new religions, in pamphlet form, reports of the Eugenic Congress, and so on. All this refuse, material and mental, it was our purpose to purify and change to holy flame on the day when the King was crowned. The following is an account of the rather strange thing that really happened. I do not know whether it was any sort of symbol; but I narrate it just as it befell.

In the middle of the night I woke up slowly and listened to what I supposed to be the heavy crunching of a cart-wheel along a road of loose stones. Then it grew louder, and I thought somebody was shooting out cartloads of stones; then it seemed as if the shock was breaking big stones into pieces. Then I realised that under this sound there was also a strange, sleepy, almost inaudible roar; and that on top of it every now and then came pigmy pops like a battle of penny pistols. Then I knew what it was. I went to the window; and a great firelight flung across two meadows smote me where I stood. “Oh, my holy aunt,” I thought, “they’ve mistaken the Coronation Day.”

And yet when I eyed the transfigured scene it did not seem exactly like a bonfire or any ritual illumination. It was too chaotic, and too close to the houses of the town. All one side of a cottage was painted pink with the giant brush of
flame; the next side, by contrast, was painted as black as tar. Along the front of
this ran a blackening rim or rampart edged with a restless red ribbon that danced
and doubled and devoured like a scarlet snake; and beyond it was nothing but a
deathly fulness of light.

I put on some clothes and went down the road; all the dull or startling noises
in that din of burning growing louder and louder as I walked. The heaviest sound
was that of an incessant cracking and crunching, as if some giant with teeth of
stone was breaking up the bones of the world. I had not yet come within sight of
the real heart and habitat of the fire; but the strong red light, like an unnatural
midnight sunset, powdered the grayest grass with gold and flushed the few tall
trees up to the last fingers of their foliage. Behind them the night was black and
cavernous; and one could only trace faintly the ashen horizon beyond the dark
and magic Wilton Woods. As I went, a workman on a bicycle shot a rood past
me; then staggered from his machine and shouted to me to tell him where the
fire was. I answered that I was going to see, but thought it was the cottages by
the wood-yard. He said, “My God!” and vanished.

A little farther on I found grass and pavement soaking and flooded, and the
red and yellow flames repainted in pools and puddles. Beyond were dim huddles
of people and a small distant voice shouting out orders. The fire-engines were at
work. I went on among the red reflections, which seemed like subterranean fires;
I had a singular sensation of being in a very important dream. Oddly enough, this
was increased when I found that most of my friends and neighbours were
entangled in the crowd. Only in dreams do we see familiar faces so vividly
against a black background of midnight. I was glad to find (for the workman
cyclist’s sake) that the fire was not in the houses by the wood-yard, but in the
wood-yard itself. There was no fear for human life, and the thing was seemingly
accidental; though there were the usual ugly whispers about rivalry and revenge.
But for all that I could not shake off my dream-drugged soul a swollen, tragic,
portentous sort of sensation, that it all had something to do with the crowning of
the English King, and the glory or the end of England. It was not till I saw the
puddles and the ashes in broad daylight next morning that I was fundamentally
certain that my midnight adventure had not happened outside this world.

But I was more arrogant than the ancient Emperors Pharaoh or
Nebuchadnezzar; for I attempted to interpret my own dream. The fire was
feeding upon solid stacks of unused beech or pine, gray and white piles of virgin
wood. It was an orgy of mere waste; thousands of good things were being killed
before they had ever existed. Doors, tables, walking-sticks, wheelbarrows,
wooden swords for boys, Dutch dolls for girls I could hear the cry of each uncreated thing as it expired in the flames. And then I thought of that other noble tower of needless things that stood in the field beyond my garden; the bonfire, the mountain of vanities, that is meant for burning; and how it stood dark and lonely in the meadow, and the birds hopped on its corners and the dew touched and spangled its twigs. And I remembered that there are two kinds of fires, the Bad Fire and the Good Fire the last must surely be the meaning of Bonfire. And the paradox is that the Good Fire is made of bad things, of things that we do not want; but the Bad Fire is made of good things, of things that we do want; like all that wealth of wood that might have made dolls and chairs and tables, but was only making a hueless ash.

And then I saw, in my vision, that just as there are two fires, so there are two revolutions. And I saw that the whole mad modern world is a race between them. Which will happen first—the revolution in which bad things shall perish, or that other revolution, in which good things shall perish also? One is the riot that all good men, even the most conservative, really dream of, when the sneer shall be struck from the face of the well-fed; when the wine of honour shall be poured down the throat of despair; when we shall, so far as to the sons of flesh is possible, take tyranny and usury and public treason and bind them into bundles and burn them. And the other is the disruption that may come prematurely, negatively, and suddenly in the night; like the fire in my little town.

It may come because the mere strain of modern life is unbearable; and in it even the things that men do desire may break down; marriage and fair ownership and worship and the mysterious worth of man. The two revolutions, white and black, are racing each other like two railway trains; I cannot guess the issue . . . but even as I thought of it, the tallest turret of the timber stooped and faltered and came down in a cataract of noises. And the fire, finding passage, went up with a spout like a fountain. It stood far up among the stars for an instant, a blazing pillar of brass fit for a pagan conqueror, so high that one could fancy it visible away among the goblin trees of Burnham or along the terraces of the Chiltern Hills.
THE FREE MAN

The idea of liberty has ultimately a religious root; that is why men find it so easy to die for and so difficult to define. It refers finally to the fact that, while the oyster and the palm tree have to save their lives by law, man has to save his soul by choice. Ruskin rebuked Coleridge for praising freedom, and said that no man would wish the sun to be free. It seems enough to answer that no man would wish to be the sun. Speaking as a Liberal, I have much more sympathy with the idea of Joshua stopping the sun in heaven than with the idea of Ruskin trotting his daily round in imitation of its regularity. Joshua was a Radical, and his astronomical act was distinctly revolutionary. For all revolution is the mastering of matter by the spirit of man, the emergence of that human authority within us which, in the noble words of Sir Thomas Browne, “owes no homage unto the sun.”

Generally, the moral substance of liberty is this: that man is not meant merely to receive good laws, good food or good conditions, like a tree in a garden, but is meant to take a certain princely pleasure in selecting and shaping like the gardener. Perhaps that is the meaning of the trade of Adam. And the best popular words for rendering the real idea of liberty are those which speak of man as a creator. We use the word “make” about most of the things in which freedom is essential, as a country walk or a friendship or a love affair. When a man “makes his way” through a wood he has really created, he has built a road, like the Romans. When a man “makes a friend,” he makes a man. And in the third case we talk of a man “making love,” as if he were (as, indeed, he is) creating new masses and colours of that flaming material an awful form of manufacture. In its primary spiritual sense, liberty is the god in man, or, if you like the word, the artist.

In its secondary political sense liberty is the living influence of the citizen on the State in the direction of moulding or deflecting it. Men are the only creatures that evidently possess it. On the one hand, the eagle has no liberty; he only has loneliness. On the other hand, ants, bees, and beavers exhibit the highest miracle of the State influencing the citizen; but no perceptible trace of the citizen influencing the State. You may, if you like, call the ants a democracy as you may call the bees a despotism. But I fancy that the architectural ant who attempted to introduce an art nouveau style of ant-hill would have a career as curt and fruitless as the celebrated bee who wanted to swarm alone. The isolation of this
idea in humanity is akin to its religious character; but it is not even in humanity by any means equally distributed. The idea that the State should not only be supported by its children, like the ant-hill, but should be constantly criticised and reconstructed by them, is an idea stronger in Christendom than any other part of the planet; stronger in Western than Eastern Europe. And touching the pure idea of the individual being free to speak and act within limits, the assertion of this idea, we may fairly say, has been the peculiar honour of our own country. For my part I greatly prefer the Jingoism of Rule Britannia to the Imperialism of The Recessional. I have no objection to Britannia ruling the waves. I draw the line when she begins to rule the dry land—and such damnably dry land too—as in Africa. And there was a real old English sincerity in the vulgar chorus that “Britons never shall be slaves.” We had no equality and hardly any justice; but freedom we were really fond of. And I think just now it is worth while to draw attention to the old optimistic prophecy that “Britons never shall be slaves.”

The mere love of liberty has never been at a lower ebb in England than it has been for the last twenty years. Never before has it been so easy to slip small Bills through Parliament for the purpose of locking people up. Never was it so easy to silence awkward questions, or to protect high-placed officials. Two hundred years ago we turned out the Stuarts rather than endanger the Habeas Corpus Act. Two years ago we abolished the Habeas Corpus Act rather than turn out the Home Secretary. We passed a law (which is now in force) that an Englishman’s punishment shall not depend upon judge and jury, but upon the governors and jailers who have got hold of him. But this is not the only case. The scorn of liberty is in the air. A newspaper is seized by the police in Trafalgar Square without a word of accusation or explanation. The Home Secretary says that in his opinion the police are very nice people, and there is an end of the matter. A Member of Parliament attempts to criticise a peerage. The Speaker says he must not criticise a peerage, and there the matter drops.

Political liberty, let us repeat, consists in the power of criticising those flexible parts of the State which constantly require reconsideration, not the basis, but the machinery. In plainer words, it means the power of saying the sort of things that a decent but discontented citizen wants to say. He does not want to spit on the Bible, or to run about without clothes, or to read the worst page in Zola from the pulpit of St. Paul’s. Therefore the forbidding of these things (whether just or not) is only tyranny in a secondary and special sense. It restrains the abnormal, not the normal man. But the normal man, the decent discontented citizen, does want to protest against unfair law courts. He does want to expose brutalities of the
police. He does want to make game of a vulgar pawnbroker who is made a Peer. He does want publicly to warn people against unscrupulous capitalists and suspicious finance. If he is run in for doing this (as he will be) he does want to proclaim the character or known prejudices of the magistrate who tries him. If he is sent to prison (as he will be) he does want to have a clear and civilised sentence, telling him when he will come out. And these are literally and exactly the things that he now cannot get. That is the almost cloying humour of the present situation. I can say abnormal things in modern magazines. It is the normal things that I am not allowed to say. I can write in some solemn quarterly an elaborate article explaining that God is the devil; I can write in some cultured weekly an aesthetic fancy describing how I should like to eat boiled baby. The thing I must not write is rational criticism of the men and institutions of my country.

The present condition of England is briefly this: That no Englishman can say in public a twentieth part of what he says in private. One cannot say, for instance, that—But I am afraid I must leave out that instance, because one cannot say it. I cannot prove my case—because it is so true.
THE HYPOTHETICAL HOUSEHOLDER

We have read of some celebrated philosopher who was so absent-minded that he paid a call at his own house. My own absent-mindedness is extreme, and my philosophy, of course, is the marvel of men and angels. But I never quite managed to be so absent-minded as that. Some yards at least from my own door, something vaguely familiar has always caught my eye; and thus the joke has been spoiled. Of course I have quite constantly walked into another man’s house, thinking it was my own house; my visits became almost monotonous. But walking into my own house and thinking it was another man’s house is a flight of poetic detachment still beyond me. Something of the sensations that such an absent-minded man must feel I really felt the other day; and very pleasant sensations they were. The best parts of every proper romance are the first chapter and the last chapter; and to knock at a strange door and find a nice wife would be to concentrate the beginning and end of all romance.

Mine was a milder and slighter experience, but its thrill was of the same kind. For I strolled through a place I had imagined quite virgin and unvisited (as far as I was concerned), and I suddenly found I was treading in my own footprints, and the footprints were nearly twenty years old.

It was one of those stretches of country which always suggests an almost unnatural decay; thickets and heaths that have grown out of what were once great gardens. Garden flowers still grow there as wild flowers, as it says in some good poetic couplet which I forget; and there is something singularly romantic and disastrous about seeing things that were so long a human property and care fighting for their own hand in the thicket. One almost expects to find a decayed dog-kennel; with the dog evolved into a wolf.

This desolate garden-land had been even in my youth scrappily planned out for building. The half-built or empty houses had appeared quite threateningly on the edge of this heath even when I walked over it years ago and almost as a boy. I was astonished that the building had gone no farther; I suppose somebody went bankrupt and somebody else disliked building. But I remember, especially along one side of this tangle or coppice, that there had once been a row of half-built houses. The brick of which they were built was a sort of plain pink; everything else was a blinding white; the houses smoked with white dust and white sawdust; and on many of the windows were rubbed those round rough disks of white which always delighted me as a child. They looked like the white eyes of
some blind giant.

I could see the crude, parched pink-and-white villas still; though I had not thought at all of them for a quarter of my life; and had not thought much of them even when I saw them. Then I was an idle, but eager youth walking out from London; now I was a most reluctantly busy middle-aged person, coming in from the country. Youth, I think, seems farther off than childhood, for it made itself more of a secret. Like a prenatal picture, distant, tiny, and quite distinct, I saw this heath on which I stood; and I looked around for the string of bright, half-baked villas. They still stood there; but they were quite russet and weather-stained, as if they had stood for centuries.

I remembered exactly what I had done on that day long ago. I had half slid on a miry descent; it was still there; a little lower I had knocked off the top of a thistle; the thistles had not been discouraged, but were still growing. I recalled it because I had wondered why one knocks off the tops of thistles; and then I had thought of Tarquin; and then I had recited most of Macaulay’s VIRGINIA to myself, for I was young. And then I came to a tattered edge where the very tuft had whitened with the sawdust and brick-dust from the new row of houses; and two or three green stars of dock and thistle grew spasmodically about the blinding road.

I remembered how I had walked up this new one-sided street all those years ago; and I remembered what I had thought. I thought that this red and white glaring terrace at noon was really more creepy and more lonesome than a glimmering churchyard at midnight. The churchyard could only be full of the ghosts of the dead; but these houses were full of the ghosts of the unborn. And a man can never find a home in the future as he can find it in the past. I was always fascinated by that mediaeval notion of erecting a rudely carpentered stage in the street, and acting on it a miracle play of the Holy Family or the Last Judgment. And I thought to myself that each of these glaring, gaping, new jerry-built boxes was indeed a rickety stage erected for the acting of a real miracle play; that human family that is almost the holy one, and that human death that is near to the last judgment.

For some foolish reason the last house but one in that imperfect row especially haunted me with its hollow grin and empty window-eyes. Something in the shape of this brick-and-mortar skeleton was attractive; and there being no workmen about, I strolled into it for curiosity and solitude. I gave, with all the sky-deep gravity of youth, a benediction upon the man who was going to live there. I even remember that for the convenience of meditation I called him James
Harrogate.

As I reflected it crawled back into my memory that I had mildly played the fool in that house on that distant day. I had some red chalk in my pocket, I think, and I wrote things on the unpapered plaster walls; things addressed to Mr. Harrogate. A dim memory told me that I had written up in what I supposed to be the dining-room:

James Harrogate, thank God for meat, Then eat and eat and eat and eat, or something of that kind. I faintly feel that some longer lyric was scrawled on the walls of what looked like a bedroom, something beginning:

When laying what you call your head, O Harrogate, upon your bed, and there all my memory dislimns and decays. But I could still see quite vividly the plain plastered walls and the rude, irregular writing, and the places where the red chalk broke. I could see them, I mean, in memory; for when I came down that road again after a sixth of a century the house was very different.

I had seen it before at noon, and now I found it in the dusk. But its windows glowed with lights of many artificial sorts; one of its low square windows stood open; from this there escaped up the road a stream of lamplight and a stream of singing. Some sort of girl, at least, was standing at some sort of piano, and singing a song of healthy sentimentalism in that house where long ago my blessing had died on the wind and my poems been covered up by the wallpaper. I stood outside that lamplit house at dusk full of those thoughts that I shall never express if I live to be a million any better than I expressed them in red chalk upon the wall. But after I had hovered a little, and was about to withdraw, a mad impulse seized me. I rang the bell. I said in distinct accents to a very smart suburban maid, “Does Mr. James Harrogate live here?”

She said he didn’t; but that she would inquire, in case I was looking for him in the neighbourhood; but I excused her from such exertion. I had one moment’s impulse to look for him all over the world; and then decided not to look for him at all.
THE PRIEST OF SPRING

The sun has strengthened and the air softened just before Easter Day. But it is a troubled brightness which has a breath not only of novelty but of revolution, There are two great armies of the human intellect who will fight till the end on this vital point, whether Easter is to be congratulated on fitting in with the Spring —or the Spring on fitting in with Easter.

The only two things that can satisfy the soul are a person and a story; and even a story must be about a person. There are indeed very voluptuous appetites and enjoyments in mere abstractions like mathematics, logic, or chess. But these mere pleasures of the mind are like mere pleasures of the body. That is, they are mere pleasures, though they may be gigantic pleasures; they can never by a mere increase of themselves amount to happiness. A man just about to be hanged may enjoy his breakfast; especially if it be his favourite breakfast; and in the same way he may enjoy an argument with the chaplain about heresy, especially if it is his favourite heresy. But whether he can enjoy either of them does not depend on either of them; it depends upon his spiritual attitude towards a subsequent event. And that event is really interesting to the soul; because it is the end of a story and (as some hold) the end of a person.

Now it is this simple truth which, like many others, is too simple for our scientists to see. This is where they go wrong, not only about true religion, but about false religions too; so that their account of mythology is more mythical than the myth itself. I do not confine myself to saying that they are quite incorrect when they state (for instance) that Christ was a legend of dying and reviving vegetation, like Adonis or Persephone. I say that even if Adonis was a god of vegetation, they have got the whole notion of him wrong. Nobody, to begin with, is sufficiently interested in decaying vegetables, as such, to make any particular mystery or disguise about them; and certainly not enough to disguise them under the image of a very handsome young man, which is a vastly more interesting thing. If Adonis was connected with the fall of leaves in autumn and the return of flowers in spring, the process of thought was quite different. It is a process of thought which springs up spontaneously in all children and young artists; it springs up spontaneously in all healthy societies. It is very difficult to explain in a diseased society.

The brain of man is subject to short and strange snatches of sleep. A cloud seals the city of reason or rests upon the sea of imagination; a dream that darkens
as much, whether it is a nightmare of atheism or a daydream of idolatry. And just as we have all sprung from sleep with a start and found ourselves saying some sentence that has no meaning, save in the mad tongues of the midnight; so the human mind starts from its trances of stupidity with some complete phrase upon its lips; a complete phrase which is a complete folly. Unfortunately it is not like the dream sentence, generally forgotten in the putting on of boots or the putting in of breakfast. This senseless aphorism, invented when man’s mind was asleep, still hangs on his tongue and entangles all his relations to rational and daylight things. All our controversies are confused by certain kinds of phrases which are not merely untrue, but were always unmeaning; which are not merely inapplicable, but were always intrinsically useless. We recognise them wherever a man talks of “the survival of the fittest,” meaning only the survival of the survivors; or wherever a man says that the rich “have a stake in the country,” as if the poor could not suffer from misgovernment or military defeat; or where a man talks about “going on towards Progress,” which only means going on towards going on; or when a man talks about “government by the wise few,” as if they could be picked out by their pantaloons. “The wise few” must mean either the few whom the foolish think wise or the very foolish who think themselves wise.

There is one piece of nonsense that modern people still find themselves saying, even after they are more or less awake, by which I am particularly irritated. It arose in the popularised science of the nineteenth century, especially in connection with the study of myths and religions. The fragment of gibberish to which I refer generally takes the form of saying “This god or hero really represents the sun.” Or “Apollo killing the Python MEANS that the summer drives out the winter.” Or “The King dying in a western battle is a SYMBOL of the sun setting in the west.” Now I should really have thought that even the skeptical professors, whose skulls are as shallow as frying-pans, might have reflected that human beings never think or feel like this. Consider what is involved in this supposition. It presumes that primitive man went out for a walk and saw with great interest a big burning spot on the sky. He then said to primitive woman, “My dear, we had better keep this quiet. We mustn’t let it get about. The children and the slaves are so very sharp. They might discover the sun any day, unless we are very careful. So we won’t call it ‘the sun,’ but I will draw a picture of a man killing a snake; and whenever I do that you will know what I mean. The sun doesn’t look at all like a man killing a snake; so nobody can possibly know. It will be a little secret between us; and while the slaves and
the children fancy I am quite excited with a grand tale of a writhing dragon and a wrestling demigod, I shall really MEAN this delicious little discovery, that there is a round yellow disc up in the air.” One does not need to know much mythology to know that this is a myth. It is commonly called the Solar Myth.

Quite plainly, of course, the case was just the other way. The god was never a symbol or hieroglyph representing the sun. The sun was a hieroglyph representing the god. Primitive man (with whom my friend Dombey is no doubt well acquainted) went out with his head full of gods and heroes, because that is the chief use of having a head. Then he saw the sun in some glorious crisis of the dominance of noon on the distress of nightfall, and he said, “That is how the face of the god would shine when he had slain the dragon,” or “That is how the whole world would bleed to westward, if the god were slain at last.”

No human being was ever really so unnatural as to worship Nature. No man, however indulgent (as I am) to corpulency, ever worshipped a man as round as the sun or a woman as round as the moon. No man, however attracted to an artistic attenuation, ever really believed that the Dryad was as lean and stiff as the tree. We human beings have never worshipped Nature; and indeed, the reason is very simple. It is that all human beings are superhuman beings. We have printed our own image upon Nature, as God has printed His image upon us. We have told the enormous sun to stand still; we have fixed him on our shields, caring no more for a star than for a starfish. And when there were powers of Nature we could not for the time control, we have conceived great beings in human shape controlling them. Jupiter does not mean thunder. Thunder means the march and victory of Jupiter. Neptune does not mean the sea; the sea is his, and he made it. In other words, what the savage really said about the sea was, “Only my fetish Mumbo could raise such mountains out of mere water.” What the savage really said about the sun was, “Only my great great-grandfather Jumbo could deserve such a blazing crown.”

About all these myths my own position is utterly and even sadly simple. I say you cannot really understand any myths till you have found that one of them is not a myth. Turnip ghosts mean nothing if there are no real ghosts. Forged bank-notes mean nothing if there are no real bank-notes. Heathen gods mean nothing, and must always mean nothing, to those of us that deny the Christian God. When once a god is admitted, even a false god, the Cosmos begins to know its place: which is the second place. When once it is the real God the Cosmos falls down before Him, offering flowers in spring as flames in winter. “My love is like a red, red rose” does not mean that the poet is praising roses under the allegory of
a young lady. “My love is an arbutus” does not mean that the author was a botanist so pleased with a particular arbutus tree that he said he loved it. “Who art the moon and regent of my sky” does not mean that Juliet invented Romeo to account for the roundness of the moon. “Christ is the Sun of Easter” does not mean that the worshipper is praising the sun under the emblem of Christ. Goddess or god can clothe themselves with the spring or summer; but the body is more than raiment. Religion takes almost disdainfully the dress of Nature; and indeed Christianity has done as well with the snows of Christmas as with the snow-drops of spring. And when I look across the sun-struck fields, I know in my inmost bones that my joy is not solely in the spring, for spring alone, being always returning, would be always sad. There is somebody or something walking there, to be crowned with flowers: and my pleasure is in some promise yet possible and in the resurrection of the dead.
THE REAL JOURNALIST

Our age which has boasted of realism will fail chiefly through lack of reality. Never, I fancy, has there been so grave and startling a divorce between the real way a thing is done and the look of it when it is done. I take the nearest and most topical instance to hand a newspaper. Nothing looks more neat and regular than a newspaper, with its parallel columns, its mechanical printing, its detailed facts and figures, its responsible, polysyllabic leading articles. Nothing, as a matter of fact, goes every night through more agonies of adventure, more hairbreadth escapes, desperate expedients, crucial councils, random compromises, or barely averted catastrophes. Seen from the outside, it seems to come round as automatically as the clock and as silently as the dawn. Seen from the inside, it gives all its organisers a gasp of relief every morning to see that it has come out at all; that it has come out without the leading article upside down or the Pope congratulated on discovering the North Pole.

I will give an instance (merely to illustrate my thesis of unreality) from the paper that I know best. Here is a simple story, a little episode in the life of a journalist, which may be amusing and instructive: the tale of how I made a great mistake in quotation. There are really two stories: the story as seen from the outside, by a man reading the paper; and the story seen from the inside, by the journalists shouting and telephoning and taking notes in shorthand through the night.

This is the outside story; and it reads like a dreadful quarrel. The notorious G. K. Chesterton, a reactionary Torquemada whose one gloomy pleasure was in the defence of orthodoxy and the pursuit of heretics, long calculated and at last launched a denunciation of a brilliant leader of the New Theology which he hated with all the furnace of his fanatic soul. In this document Chesterton darkly, deliberately, and not having the fear of God before his eyes, asserted that Shakespeare wrote the line “that wreathes its old fantastic roots so high.” This he said because he had been kept in ignorance by Priests; or, perhaps, because he thought craftily that none of his dupes could discover a curious and forgotten rhyme called ‘Elegy in a Country Churchyard.’ Anyhow, that orthodox gentleman made a howling error; and received some twenty-five letters and postcards from kind correspondents who pointed out the mistake.

But the odd thing is that scarcely any of them could conceive that it was a mistake. The first wrote in the tone of one wearied of epigrams, and cried,
“What is the joke NOW?” Another professed (and practised, for all I know, God help him) that he had read through all Shakespeare and failed to find the line. A third wrote in a sort of moral distress, asking, as in confidence, if Gray was really a plagiarist. They were a noble collection; but they all subtly assumed an element of leisure and exactitude in the recipient’s profession and character which is far from the truth. Let us pass on to the next act of the external tragedy.

In Monday’s issue of the same paper appeared a letter from the same culprit. He ingenuously confessed that the line did not belong to Shakespeare, but to a poet whom he called Grey. Which was another cropper—or whopper. This strange and illiterate outbreak was printed by the editor with the justly scornful title, “Mr. Chesterton ‘Explains’?” Any man reading the paper at breakfast saw at once the meaning of the sarcastic quotation marks. They meant, of course, “Here is a man who doesn’t know Gray from Shakespeare; he tries to patch it up and he can’t even spell Gray. And that is what he calls an Explanation.” That is the perfectly natural inference of the reader from the letter, the mistake, and the headline—as seen from the outside. The falsehood was serious; the editorial rebuke was serious. The stern editor and the sombre, baffled contributor confront each other as the curtain falls.

And now I will tell you exactly what really happened. It is honestly rather amusing; it is a story of what journals and journalists really are. A monstrously lazy man lives in South Bucks partly by writing a column in the Saturday Daily News. At the time he usually writes it (which is always at the last moment) his house is unexpectedly invaded by infants of all shapes and sizes. His Secretary is called away; and he has to cope with the invading pigmies. Playing with children is a glorious thing; but the journalist in question has never understood why it was considered a soothing or idyllic one. It reminds him, not of watering little budding flowers, but of wrestling for hours with gigantic angels and devils. Moral problems of the most monstrous complexity besiege him incessantly. He has to decide before the awful eyes of innocence, whether, when a sister has knocked down a brother’s bricks, in revenge for the brother having taken two sweets out of his turn, it is endurable that the brother should retaliate by scribbling on the sister’s picture book, and whether such conduct does not justify the sister in blowing out the brother’s unlawfully lighted match.

Just as he is solving this problem upon principles of the highest morality, it occurs to him suddenly that he has not written his Saturday article; and that there is only about an hour to do it in. He wildly calls to somebody (probably the gardener) to telephone to somewhere for a messenger; he barricades himself in
another room and tears his hair, wondering what on earth he shall write about. A drumming of fists on the door outside and a cheerful bellowing encourage and clarify his thoughts; and he is able to observe some newspapers and circulars in wrappers lying on the table. One is a dingy book catalogue; the second is a shiny pamphlet about petrol; the third is a paper called The Christian Commonwealth. He opens it anyhow, and sees in the middle of a page a sentence with which he honestly disagrees. It says that the sense of beauty in Nature is a new thing, hardly felt before Wordsworth. A stream of images and pictures pour through his head, like skies chasing each other or forests running by. “Not felt before Wordsworth!” he thinks. “Oh, but this won’t do . . . bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang . . . night’s candles are burnt out . . . glowed with living sapphires . . . leaving their moon-loved maze . . . antique roots fantastic . . . antique roots wreathed high . . . what is it in As You Like It?”

He sits down desperately; the messenger rings at the bell; the children drum on the door; the servants run up from time to time to say the messenger is getting bored; and the pencil staggers along, making the world a present of fifteen hundred unimportant words, and making Shakespeare a present of a portion of Gray’s Elegy; putting “fantastic roots wreathed high” instead of “antique roots peep out.” Then the journalist sends off his copy and turns his attention to the enigma of whether a brother should commandeer a sister’s necklace because the sister pinched him at Littlehampton. That is the first scene; that is how an article is really written.

The scene now changes to the newspaper office. The writer of the article has discovered his mistake and wants to correct it by the next day: but the next day is Sunday. He cannot post a letter, so he rings up the paper and dictates a letter by telephone. He leaves the title to his friends at the other end; he knows that they can spell “Gray,” as no doubt they can: but the letter is put down by journalistic custom in a pencil scribble and the vowel may well be doubtful. The friend writes at the top of the letter “‘G. K. C.’ Explains,” putting the initials in quotation marks. The next man passing it for press is bored with these initials (I am with him there) and crosses them out, substituting with austere civility, “Mr. Chesterton Explains.” But and now he hears the iron laughter of the Fates, for the blind bolt is about to fall—but he neglects to cross out the second “quote” (as we call it) and it goes up to press with a “quote” between the last words. Another quotation mark at the end of “explains” was the work of one merry moment for the printers upstairs. So the inverted commas were lifted entirely off one word on to the other and a totally innocent title suddenly turned into a blasting sneer.
But that would have mattered nothing so far, for there was nothing to sneer at. In the same dark hour, however, there was a printer who was (I suppose) so devoted to this Government that he could think of no Gray but Sir Edward Grey. He spelt it “Grey” by a mere misprint, and the whole tale was complete: first blunder, second blunder, and final condemnation.

That is a little tale of journalism as it is; if you call it egotistic and ask what is the use of it I think I could tell you. You might remember it when next some ordinary young workman is going to be hanged by the neck on circumstantial evidence.
THE SENTIMENTAL SCOT

Of all the great nations of Christendom, the Scotch are by far the most romantic. I have just enough Scotch experience and just enough Scotch blood to know this in the only way in which a thing can really be known; that is, when the outer world and the inner world are at one. I know it is always said that the Scotch are practical, prosaic, and puritan; that they have an eye to business. I like that phrase “an eye” to business.

Polyphemus had an eye for business; it was in the middle of his forehead. It served him admirably for the only two duties which are demanded in a modern financier and captain of industry: the two duties of counting sheep and of eating men. But when that one eye was put out he was done for. But the Scotch are not one-eyed practical men, though their best friends must admit that they are occasionally business-like. They are, quite fundamentally, romantic and sentimental, and this is proved by the very economic argument that is used to prove their harshness and hunger for the material. The mass of Scots have accepted the industrial civilisation, with its factory chimneys and its famine prices, with its steam and smoke and steel—and strikes. The mass of the Irish have not accepted it. The mass of the Irish have clung to agriculture with claws of iron; and have succeeded in keeping it. That is because the Irish, though far inferior to the Scotch in art and literature, are hugely superior to them in practical politics. You do need to be very romantic to accept the industrial civilisation. It does really require all the old Gaelic glamour to make men think that Glasgow is a grand place. Yet the miracle is achieved; and while I was in Glasgow I shared the illusion. I have never had the faintest illusion about Leeds or Birmingham. The industrial dream suited the Scots. Here was a really romantic vista, suited to a romantic people; a vision of higher and higher chimneys taking hold upon the heavens, of fiercer and fiercer fires in which adamant could evaporate like dew. Here were taller and taller engines that began already to shriek and gesticulate like giants. Here were thunderbolts of communication which already flashed to and fro like thoughts. It was unreasonable to expect the rapt, dreamy, romantic Scot to stand still in such a whirl of wizardry to ask whether he, the ordinary Scot, would be any the richer.

He, the ordinary Scot, is very much the poorer. Glasgow is not a rich city. It is a particularly poor city ruled by a few particularly rich men. It is not, perhaps, quite so poor a city as Liverpool, London, Manchester, Birmingham, or Bolton.
It is vastly poorer than Rome, Rouen, Munich, or Cologne. A certain civic vitality notable in Glasgow may, perhaps, be due to the fact that the high poetic patriotism of the Scots has there been reinforced by the cutting common sense and independence of the Irish. In any case, I think there can be no doubt of the main historical fact. The Scotch were tempted by the enormous but unequal opportunities of industrialism, because the Scotch are romantic. The Irish refused those enormous and unequal opportunities, because the Irish are clear-sighted. They would not need very clear sight by this time to see that in England and Scotland the temptation has been a betrayal. The industrial system has failed.

I was coming the other day along a great valley road that strikes out of the westland counties about Glasgow, more or less towards the east and the widening of the Forth. It may, for all I know (I amused myself with the fancy), be the way along which Wallace came with his crude army, when he gave battle before Stirling Brig; and, in the midst of mediaeval diplomacies, made a new nation possible. Anyhow, the romantic quality of Scotland rolled all about me, as much in the last reek of Glasgow as in the first rain upon the hills. The tall factory chimneys seemed trying to be taller than the mountain peaks; as if this landscape were full (as its history has been full) of the very madness of ambition. The wageslavery we live in is a wicked thing. But there is nothing in which the Scotch are more piercing and poetical, I might say more perfect, than in their Scotch wickedness. It is what makes the Master of Ballantrae the most thrilling of all fictitious villains. It is what makes the Master of Lovat the most thrilling of all historical villains. It is poetry. It is an intensity which is on the edge of madness or (what is worse) magic. Well, the Scotch have managed to apply something of this fierce romanticism even to the lowest of all lordships and serfdoms; the proletarian inequality of today. You do meet now and then, in Scotland, the man you never meet anywhere else but in novels; I mean the self-made man; the hard, insatiable man, merciless to himself as well as to others. It is not “enterprise”; it is kleptomania. He is quite mad, and a much more obvious public pest than any other kind of kleptomaniac; but though he is a cheat, he is not an illusion. He does exist; I have met quite two of him. Him alone among modern merchants we do not weakly flatter when we call him a bandit. Something of the irresponsibility of the true dark ages really clings about him. Our scientific civilisation is not a civilisation; it is a smoke nuisance. Like smoke it is choking us; like smoke it will pass away. Only of one or two Scotsmen, in my experience, was it true that where there is smoke there is fire.
But there are other kinds of fire; and better. The one great advantage of this strange national temper is that, from the beginning of all chronicles, it has provided resistance as well as cruelty. In Scotland nearly everything has always been in revolt—especially loyalty. If these people are capable of making Glasgow, they are also capable of wrecking it; and the thought of my many good friends in that city makes me really doubtful about which would figure in human memories as the more huge calamity of the two. In Scotland there are many rich men so weak as to call themselves strong. But there are not so many poor men weak enough to believe them.

As I came out of Glasgow I saw men standing about the road. They had little lanterns tied to the fronts of their caps, like the fairies who used to dance in the old fairy pantomimes. They were not, however, strictly speaking, fairies. They might have been called gnomes, since they worked in the chasms of those purple and chaotic hills. They worked in the mines from whence comes the fuel of our fires. Just at the moment when I saw them, moreover, they were not dancing; nor were they working. They were doing nothing. Which, in my opinion (and I trust yours), was the finest thing they could do.
THE SECTARIAN OF SOCIETY

A fixed creed is absolutely indispensable to freedom. For while men are and should be various, there must be some communication between them if they are to get any pleasure out of their variety. And an intellectual formula is the only thing that can create a communication that does not depend on mere blood, class, or capricious sympathy. If we all start with the agreement that the sun and moon exist, we can talk about our different visions of them. The strong-eyed man can boast that he sees the sun as a perfect circle. The shortsighted man may say (or if he is an impressionist, boast) that he sees the moon as a silver blur. The colour-blind man may rejoice in the fairy-trick which enables him to live under a green sun and a blue moon. But if once it be held that there is nothing but a silver blur in one man’s eye or a bright circle (like a monocle) in the other man’s, then neither is free, for each is shut up in the cell of a separate universe.

But, indeed, an even worse fate, practically considered, follows from the denim of the original intellectual formula. Not only does the individual become narrow, but he spreads narrowness across the world like a cloud; he causes narrowness to increase and multiply like a weed. For what happens is this: that all the shortsighted people come together and build a city called Myopia, where they take shortsightedness for granted and paint shortsighted pictures and pursue very shortsighted policies. Meanwhile all the men who can stare at the sun get together on Salisbury Plain and do nothing but stare at the sun; and all the men who see a blue moon band themselves together and assert the blue moon, not once in a blue moon, but incessantly. So that instead of a small and varied group, you have enormous monotonous groups. Instead of the liberty of dogma, you have the tyranny of taste.

Allegory apart, instances of what I mean will occur to every one; perhaps the most obvious is Socialism. Socialism means the ownership by the organ of government (whatever it is) of all things necessary to production. If a man claims to be a Socialist in that sense he can be any kind of man he likes in any other sense—a bookie, a Mahatma, a man about town, an archbishop, a Margate nigger. Without recalling at the moment clear-headed Socialists in all of these capacities, it is obvious that a clear-headed Socialist (that is, a Socialist with a creed) can be a soldier, like Mr. Blatchford, or a Don, like Mr. Ball, or a Bathchairman like Mr. Meeke, or a clergyman like Mr. Conrad Noel, or an artistic tradesman like the late Mr. William Morris.
But some people call themselves Socialists, and will not be bound by what they call a narrow dogma; they say that Socialism means far, far more than this; all that is high, all that is free, all that is, etc., etc. Now mark their dreadful fate; for they become totally unfit to be tradesmen, or soldiers, or clergymen, or any other stricken human thing, but become a particular sort of person who is always the same. When once it has been discovered that Socialism does not mean a narrow economic formula, it is also discovered that Socialism does mean wearing one particular kind of clothes, reading one particular kind of books, hanging up one particular kind of pictures, and in the majority of cases even eating one particular kind of food. For men must recognise each other somehow. These men will not know each other by a principle, like fellow citizens. They cannot know each other by a smell, like dogs. So they have to fall back on general colouring; on the fact that a man of their sort will have a wife in pale green and Walter Crane’s “Triumph of Labour” hanging in the hall.

There are, of course, many other instances; for modern society is almost made up of these large monochrome patches. Thus I, for one, regret the supersession of the old Puritan unity, founded on theology, but embracing all types from Milton to the grocer, by that newer Puritan unity which is founded rather on certain social habits, certain common notions, both permissive and prohibitive, in connection with Particular social pleasures.

Thus I, for one, regret that (if you are going to have an aristocracy) it did not remain a logical one founded on the science of heraldry; a thing asserting and defending the quite defensible theory that physical genealogy is the test; instead of being, as it is now, a mere machine of Eton and Oxford for varnishing anybody rich enough with one monotonous varnish.

And it is supremely so in the case of religion. As long as you have a creed, which every one in a certain group believes or is supposed to believe, then that group will consist of the old recurring figures of religious history, who can be appealed to by the creed and judged by it; the saint, the hypocrite, the brawler, the weak brother. These people do each other good; or they all join together to do the hypocrite good, with heavy and repeated blows. But once break the bond of doctrine which alone holds these people together and each will gravitate to his own kind outside the group. The hypocrites will all get together and call each other saints; the saints will get lost in a desert and call themselves weak brethren; the weak brethren will get weaker and weaker in a general atmosphere of imbecility; and the brawler will go off looking for somebody else with whom to brawl.
This has very largely happened to modern English religion; I have been in many churches, chapels, and halls where a confident pride in having got beyond creeds was coupled with quite a paralysed incapacity to get beyond catchwords. But wherever the falsity appears it comes from neglect of the same truth: that men should agree on a principle, that they may differ on everything else; that God gave men a law that they might turn it into liberties.

There was hugely more sense in the old people who said that a wife and husband ought to have the same religion than there is in all the contemporary gushing about sister souls and kindred spirits and auras of identical colour. As a matter of fact, the more the sexes are in violent contrast the less likely they are to be in violent collision. The more incompatible their tempers are the better. Obviously a wife’s soul cannot possibly be a sister soul. It is very seldom so much as a first cousin. There are very few marriages of identical taste and temperament; they are generally unhappy. But to have the same fundamental theory, to think the same thing a virtue, whether you practise or neglect it, to think the same thing a sin, whether you punish or pardon or laugh at it, in the last extremity to call the same thing duty and the same thing disgrace—this really is necessary to a tolerably happy marriage; and it is much better represented by a common religion than it is by affinities and auras. And what applies to the family applies to the nation. A nation with a root religion will be tolerant. A nation with no religion will be bigoted. Lastly, the worst effect of all is this: that when men come together to profess a creed, they come courageously, though it is to hide in catacombs and caves. But when they come together in a clique they come sneakishly, eschewing all change or disagreement, though it is to dine to a brass band in a big London hotel. For birds of a feather flock together, but birds of the white feather most of all.
THE FOOL

For many years I had sought him, and at last I found him in a club. I had been
told that he was everywhere; but I had almost begun to think that he was
nowhere. I had been assured that there were millions of him; but before my late
discovery I inclined to think that there were none of him. After my late
discovery I am sure that there is one; and I incline to think that there are several,
say, a few hundreds; but unfortunately most of them occupying important
positions. When I say “him,” I mean the entire idiot.

I have never been able to discover that “stupid public” of which so many
literary men complain. The people one actually meets in trains or at tea parties
seem to me quite bright and interesting; certainly quite enough so to call for the
full exertion of one’s own wits. And even when I have heard brilliant
“conversationalists” conversing with other people, the conversation had much
more equality and give and take than this age of intellectual snobs will admit. I
have sometimes felt tired, like other people; but rather tired with men’s talk and
variety than with their stolidity or sameness; therefore it was that I sometimes
longed to find the refreshment of a single fool.

But it was denied me. Turn where I would I found this monotonous brilliancy
of the general intelligence, this ruthless, ceaseless sparkle of humour and good
sense. The “mostly fools” theory has been used in an anti-democratic sense; but
when I found at last my priceless ass, I did not find him in what is commonly
called the democracy; nor in the aristocracy either. The man of the democracy
generally talks quite rationally, sometimes on the anti-democratic side, but
always with an idea of giving reasons for what he says and referring to the
realities of his experience. Nor is it the aristocracy that is stupid; at least, not that
section of the aristocracy which represents it in politics. They are often cynical,
especially about money, but even their boredom tends to make them a little eager
for any real information or originality. If a man like Mr. Winston Churchill or
Mr. Wyndham made up his mind for any reason to attack Syndicalism he would
find out what it was first. Not so the man I found in the club.

He was very well dressed; he had a heavy but handsome face; his black
clothes suggested the City and his gray moustaches the Army; but the whole
suggested that he did not really belong to either, but was one of those who
dabble in shares and who play at soldiers. There was some third element about
him that was neither mercantile nor military. His manners were a shade too
gentlemanly to be quite those of a gentleman. They involved an unction and over-emphasis of the club-man: then I suddenly remembered feeling the same thing in some old actors or old playgoers who had modelled themselves on actors. As I came in he said, “If I was the Government,” and then put a cigar in his mouth which he lit carefully with long intakes of breath. Then he took the cigar out of his mouth again and said, “I’d give it ’em,” as if it were quite a separate sentence. But even while his mouth was stopped with the cigar his companion or interlocutor leaped to his feet and said with great heartiness, snatching up a hat, “Well, I must be off. Tuesday!” I dislike these dark suspicions, but I certainly fancied I recognised the sudden geniality with which one takes leave of a bore.

When, therefore, he removed the narcotic stopper from his mouth it was to me that he addressed the belated epigram. “I’d give it ’em.”

“What would you give them,” I asked, “the minimum wage?”

“I’d give them beans,” he said. “I’d shoot ’em down shoot ’em down, every man Jack of them. I lost my best train yesterday, and here’s the whole country paralysed, and here’s a handful of obstinate fellows standing between the country and coal. I’d shoot ’em down!”

“That would surely be a little harsh,” I pleaded. “After all, they are not under martial law, though I suppose two or three of them have commissions in the Yeomanry.”

“Commissions in the Yeomanry!” he repeated, and his eyes and face, which became startling and separate, like those of a boiled lobster, made me feel sure that he had something of the kind himself.

“Besides,” I continued, “wouldn’t it be quite enough to confiscate their money?”

“Well, I’d send them all to penal servitude, anyhow,” he said, “and I’d confiscate their funds as well.”

“The policy is daring and full of difficulty,” I replied, “but I do not say that it is wholly outside the extreme rights of the republic. But you must remember that though the facts of property have become quite fantastic, yet the sentiment of property still exists. These coal-owners, though they have not earned the mines, though they could not work the mines, do quite honestly feel that they own the mines. Hence your suggestion of shooting them down, or even of confiscating their property, raises very—”

“What do you mean?” asked the man with the cigar, with a bullying eye. “Who yer talking about?”
“I’m talking about what you were talking about,” I replied; “as you put it so perfectly, about the handful of obstinate fellows who are standing between the country and the coal. I mean the men who are selling their own coal for fancy prices, and who, as long as they can get those prices, care as little for national starvation as most merchant princes and pirates have cared for the provinces that were wasted or the peoples that were enslaved just before their ships came home. But though I am a bit of a revolutionist myself, I cannot quite go with you in the extreme violence you suggest. You say—”

“I say,” he cried, bursting through my speech with a really splendid energy like that of some noble beast, “I say I’d take all these blasted miners and—”

I had risen slowly to my feet, for I was profoundly moved; and I stood staring at that mental monster.

“Oh,” I said, “so it is the miners who are all to be sent to penal servitude, so that we may get more coal. It is the miners who are to be shot dead, every man Jack of them; for if once they are all shot dead they will start mining again . . . You must forgive me, sir; I know I seem somewhat moved. The fact is, I have just found something. Something I have been looking for years.”

“Well,” he asked, with no unfriendly stare, “and what have you found?”

“No,” I answered, shaking my head sadly, “I do not think it would be quite kind to tell you what I have found.”

He had a hundred virtues, including the capital virtue of good humour, and we had no difficulty in changing the subject and forgetting the disagreement. He talked about society, his town friends and his country sports, and I discovered in the course of it that he was a county magistrate, a Member of Parliament, and a director of several important companies. He was also that other thing, which I did not tell him.

The moral is that a certain sort of person does exist, to whose glory this article is dedicated. He is not the ordinary man. He is not the miner, who is sharp enough to ask for the necessities of existence. He is not the mine-owner, who is sharp enough to get a great deal more, by selling his coal at the best possible moment. He is not the aristocratic politician, who has a cynical but a fair sympathy with both economic opportunities. But he is the man who appears in scores of public places open to the upper middle class or (that less known but more powerful section) the lower upper class. Men like this all over the country are really saying whatever comes into their heads in their capacities of justice of the peace, candidate for Parliament, Colonel of the Yeomanry, old family doctor, Poor Law guardian, coroner, or above all, arbiter in trade disputes. He suffers, in
the literal sense, from softening of the brain; he has softened it by always taking
the view of everything most comfortable for his country, his class, and his
private personality. He is a deadly public danger. But as I have given him his
name at the beginning of this article there is no need for me to repeat it at the
end.
THE CONSCRIPT AND THE CRISIS

Very few of us ever see the history of our own time happening. And I think the best service a modern journalist can do to society is to record as plainly as ever he can exactly what impression was produced on his mind by anything he has actually seen and heard on the outskirts of any modern problem or campaign. Though all he saw of a railway strike was a flat meadow in Essex in which a train was becalmed for an hour or two, he will probably throw more light on the strike by describing this which he has seen than by describing the steely kings of commerce and the bloody leaders of the mob whom he has never seen—nor any one else either. If he comes a day too late for the battle of Waterloo (as happened to a friend of my grandfather) he should still remember that a true account of the day after Waterloo would be a most valuable thing to have. Though he was on the wrong side of the door when Rizzio was being murdered, we should still like to have the wrong side described in the right way. Upon this principle I, who know nothing of diplomacy or military arrangements, and have only held my breath like the rest of the world while France and Germany were bargaining, will tell quite truthfully of a small scene I saw, one of the thousand scenes that were, so to speak, the anterooms of that inmost chamber of debate.

In the course of a certain morning I came into one of the quiet squares of a small French town and found its cathedral. It was one of those gray and rainy days which rather suit the Gothic. The clouds were leaden, like the solid blue-gray lead of the spires and the jewelled windows; the sloping roofs and high-shouldered arches looked like cloaks drooping with damp; and the stiff gargoyles that stood out round the walls were scoured with old rains and new. I went into the round, deep porch with many doors and found two grubby children playing there out of the rain. I also found a notice of services, etc., and among these I found the announcement that at 11.30 (that is about half an hour later) there would be a special service for the Conscripts, that is to say, the draft of young men who were being taken from their homes in that little town and sent to serve in the French Army; sent (as it happened) at an awful moment, when the French Army was encamped at a parting of the ways. There were already a great many people there when I entered, not only of all kinds, but in all attitudes, kneeling, sitting, or standing about. And there was that general sense that strikes every man from a Protestant country, whether he dislikes the Catholic atmosphere or likes it; I mean, the general sense that the thing was “going on all
the time”; that it was not an occasion, but a perpetual process, as if it were a sort of mystical inn.

Several tricolours were hung quite near to the altar, and the young men, when they came in, filed up the church and sat right at the front. They were, of course, of every imaginable social grade; for the French conscription is really strict and universal. Some looked like young criminals, some like young priests, some like both. Some were so obviously prosperous and polished that a barrack-room must seem to them like hell; others (by the look of them) had hardly ever been in so decent a place. But it was not so much the mere class variety that most sharply caught an Englishman’s eye. It was the presence of just those one or two kinds of men who would never have become soldiers in any other way.

There are many reasons for becoming a soldier. It may be a matter of hereditary luck or abject hunger or heroic virtue or fugitive vice; it may be an interest in the work or a lack of interest in any other work. But there would always be two or three kinds of people who would never tend to soldiering; all those kinds of people were there. A lad with red hair, large ears, and very careful clothing, somehow conveyed across the church that he had always taken care of his health, not even from thinking about it, but simply because he was told, and that he was one of those who pass from childhood to manhood without any shock of being a man. In the row in front of him there was a very slight and vivid little Jew, of the sort that is a tailor and a Socialist. By one of those accidents that make real life so unlike anything else, he was the one of the company who seemed especially devout. Behind these stiff or sensitive boys were ranged the ranks of their mothers and fathers, with knots and bunches of their little brothers and sisters.

The children kicked their little legs, wriggled about the seats, and gaped at the arched roof while their mothers were on their knees praying their own prayers, and here and there crying. The gray clouds of rain outside gathered, I suppose, more and more; for the deep church continuously darkened. The lads in front began to sing a military hymn in odd, rather strained voices; I could not disentangle the words, but only one perpetual refrain; so that it sounded like

Sacraterumbrarrar pour la patrie, Valdarkararump pour la patrie.

Then this ceased; and silence continued, the coloured windows growing gloomier and gloomier with the clouds. In the dead stillness a child started crying suddenly and incoherently. In a city far to the north a French diplomatist and a German aristocrat were talking.

I will not make any commentary on the thing that could blur the outline of its
almost cruel actuality. I will not talk nor allow any one else to talk about “clericalism” and “militarism.” Those who talk like that are made of the same mud as those who call all the angers of the unfortunate “Socialism.” The women who were calling in the gloom around me on God and the Mother of God were not “clericalists”; or, if they were, they had forgotten it. And I will bet my boots the young men were not “militarists”—quite the other way just then. The priest made a short speech; he did not utter any priestly dogmas (whatever they are), he uttered platitudes. In such circumstances platitudes are the only possible things to say; because they are true. He began by saying that he supposed a large number of them would be uncommonly glad not to go. They seemed to assent to this particular priestly dogma with even more than their alleged superstitious credulity. He said that war was hateful, and that we all hated it; but that “in all things reasonable” the law of one’s own commonwealth was the voice of God. He spoke about Joan of Arc; and how she had managed to be a bold and successful soldier while still preserving her virtue and practising her religion; then he gave them each a little paper book. To which they replied (after a brief interval for reflection):

Pongprongperesklang pour la patrie, Tambraugtararronc pour la patrie.

which I feel sure was the best and most pointed reply.

While all this was happening feelings quite indescribable crowded about my own darkening brain, as the clouds crowded above the darkening church. They were so entirely of the elements and the passions that I cannot utter them in an idea, but only in an image. It seemed to me that we were barricaded in this church, but we could not tell what was happening outside the church. The monstrous and terrible jewels of the windows darkened or glistened under moving shadow or light, but the nature of that light and the shapes of those shadows we did not know and hardly dared to guess. The dream began, I think, with a dim fancy that enemies were already in the town, and that the enormous oaken doors were groaning under their hammers. Then I seemed to suppose that the town itself had been destroyed by fire, and effaced, as it may be thousands of years hence, and that if I opened the door I should come out on a wilderness as flat and sterile as the sea. Then the vision behind the veil of stone and slate grew wilder with earthquakes. I seemed to see chasms cloven to the foundations of all things, and letting up an infernal dawn. Huge things happily hidden from us had climbed out of the abyss, and were striding about taller than the clouds. And when the darkness crept from the sapphires of Mary to the sanguine garments of St. John I fancied that some hideous giant was walking round the church and
looking in at each window in turn.

Sometimes, again, I thought of that church with coloured windows as a ship carrying many lanterns struggling in a high sea at night. Sometimes I thought of it as a great coloured lantern itself, hung on an iron chain out of heaven and tossed and swung to and fro by strong wings, the wings of the princes of the air. But I never thought of it or the young men inside it save as something precious and in peril, or of the things outside but as something barbaric and enormous.

I know there are some who cannot sympathise with such sentiments of limitation; I know there are some who would feel no touch of the heroic tenderness if some day a young man, with red hair, large ears, and his mother’s lozenges in his pocket, were found dead in uniform in the passes of the Vosges. But on this subject I have heard many philosophies and thought a good deal for myself; and the conclusion I have come to is Sacrarterumbrar pour la Pattie, and it is not likely that I shall alter it now.

But when I came out of the church there were none of these things, but only a lot of Shops, including a paper-shop, on which the posters announced that the negotiations were proceeding satisfactorily.
THE MISER AND HIS FRIENDS

It is a sign of sharp sickness in a society when it is actually led by some special sort of lunatic. A mild touch of madness may even keep a man sane; for it may keep him modest. So some exaggerations in the State may remind it of its own normal. But it is bad when the head is cracked; when the roof of the commonwealth has a tile loose.

The two or three cases of this that occur in history have always been gibbeted gigantically. Thus Nero has become a black proverb, not merely because he was an oppressor, but because he was also an aesthete—that is, an erotomaniac. He not only tortured other people’s bodies; he tortured his own soul into the same red revolting shapes. Though he came quite early in Roman Imperial history and was followed by many austere and noble emperors, yet for us the Roman Empire was never quite cleansed of that memory of the sexual madman. The populace or barbarians from whom we come could not forget the hour when they came to the highest place of the earth, saw the huge pedestal of the earthly omnipotence, read on it Divus Caesar, and looked up and saw a statue without a head.

It is the same with that ugly entanglement before the Renaissance, from which, alas, most memories of the Middle Ages are derived. Louis XI was a very patient and practical man of the world; but (like many good business men) he was mad. The morbidity of the intriguer and the torturer clung about everything he did, even when it was right. And just as the great Empire of Antoninus and Aurelius never wiped out Nero, so even the silver splendour of the latter saints, such as Vincent de Paul, has never painted out for the British public the crooked shadow of Louis XI. Whenever the unhealthy man has been on top, he has left a horrible savour that humanity finds still in its nostrils. Now in our time the unhealthy man is on top; but he is not the man mad on sex, like Nero; or mad on statecraft, like Louis XI; he is simply the man mad on money. Our tyrant is not the satyr or the torturer; but the miser.

The modern miser has changed much from the miser of legend and anecdote; but only because he has grown yet more insane. The old miser had some touch of the human artist about him in so far that he collected gold—a substance that can really be admired for itself, like ivory or old oak. An old man who picked up yellow pieces had something of the simple ardour, something of the mystical materialism, of a child who picks out yellow flowers. Gold is but one kind of coloured clay, but coloured clay can be very beautiful. The modern idolater of
riches is content with far less genuine things. The glitter of guineas is like the glitter of buttercups, the chink of pelf is like the chime of bells, compared with the dreary papers and dead calculations which make the hobby of the modern miser.

The modern millionaire loves nothing so lovable as a coin. He is content sometimes with the dead crinkle of notes; but far more often with the mere repetition of noughts in a ledger, all as like each other as eggs to eggs. And as for comfort, the old miser could be comfortable, as many tramps and savages are, when he was once used to being unclean. A man could find some comfort in an unswept attic or an unwashed shirt. But the Yankee millionaire can find no comfort with five telephones at his bed-head and ten minutes for his lunch. The round coins in the miser’s stocking were safe in some sense. The round noughts in the millionaire’s ledger are safe in no sense; the same fluctuation which excites him with their increase depresses him with their diminution. The miser at least collects coins; his hobby is numismatics. The man who collects noughts collects nothings.

It may be admitted that the man amassing millions is a bit of an idiot; but it may be asked in what sense does he rule the modern world. The answer to this is very important and rather curious. The evil enigma for us here is not the rich, but the Very Rich. The distinction is important; because this special problem is separate from the old general quarrel about rich and poor that runs through the Bible and all strong books, old and new. The special problem to-day is that certain powers and privileges have grown so world-wide and unwieldy that they are out of the power of the moderately rich as well as of the moderately poor. They are out of the power of everybody except a few millionaires—that is, misers. In the old normal friction of normal wealth and poverty I am myself on the Radical side. I think that a Berkshire squire has too much power over his tenants; that a Brompton builder has too much power over his workmen; that a West London doctor has too much power over the poor patients in the West London Hospital.

But a Berkshire squire has no power over cosmopolitan finance, for instance. A Brompton builder has not money enough to run a Newspaper Trust. A West End doctor could not make a corner in quinine and freeze everybody out. The merely rich are not rich enough to rule the modern market. The things that change modern history, the big national and international loans, the big educational and philanthropic foundations, the purchase of numberless newspapers, the big prices paid for peerages, the big expenses often incurred in
elections—these are getting too big for everybody except the misers; the men with the largest of earthly fortunes and the smallest of earthly aims.

There are two other odd and rather important things to be said about them. The first is this: that with this aristocracy we do not have the chance of a lucky variety in types which belongs to larger and looser aristocracies. The moderately rich include all kinds of people even good people. Even priests are sometimes saints; and even soldiers are sometimes heroes. Some doctors have really grown wealthy by curing their patients and not by flattering them; some brewers have been known to sell beer. But among the Very Rich you will never find a really generous man, even by accident. They may give their money away, but they will never give themselves away; they are egoistic, secretive, dry as old bones. To be smart enough to get all that money you must be dull enough to want it.

Lastly, the most serious point about them is this: that the new miser is flattered for his meanness and the old one never was. It was never called self-denial in the old miser that he lived on bones. It is called self-denial in the new millionaire if he lives on beans. A man like Dancer was never praised as a Christian saint for going in rags. A man like Rockefeller is praised as a sort of pagan stoic for his early rising or his unassuming dress. His “simple” meals, his “simple” clothes, his “simple” funeral, are all extolled as if they were creditable to him. They are disgraceful to him: exactly as disgraceful as the tatters and vermin of the old miser were disgraceful to him. To be in rags for charity would be the condition of a saint; to be in rags for money was that of a filthy old fool. Precisely in the same way, to be “simple” for charity is the state of a saint; to be “simple” for money is that of a filthy old fool. Of the two I have more respect for the old miser, gnawing bones in an attic: if he was not nearer to God, he was at least a little nearer to men. His simple life was a little more like the life of the real poor.
THE MYSTAGOGUE

Whenever you hear much of things being unutterable and indefinable and impalpable and unnamable and subtly indescribable, then elevate your aristocratic nose towards heaven and snuff up the smell of decay. It is perfectly true that there is something in all good things that is beyond all speech or figure of speech. But it is also true that there is in all good things a perpetual desire for expression and concrete embodiment; and though the attempt to embody it is always inadequate, the attempt is always made. If the idea does not seek to be the word, the chances are that it is an evil idea. If the word is not made flesh it is a bad word.

Thus Giotto or Fra Angelico would have at once admitted theologically that God was too good to be painted; but they would always try to paint Him. And they felt (very rightly) that representing Him as a rather quaint old man with a gold crown and a white beard, like a king of the elves, was less profane than resisting the sacred impulse to express Him in some way. That is why the Christian world is full of gaudy pictures and twisted statues which seem, to many refined persons, more blasphemous than the secret volumes of an atheist. The trend of good is always towards Incarnation. But, on the other hand, those refined thinkers who worship the Devil, whether in the swamps of Jamaica or the salons of Paris, always insist upon the shapelessness, the wordlessness, the unutterable character of the abomination. They call him “horror of emptiness,” as did the black witch in Stevenson’s Dynamiter; they worship him as the unspeakable name; as the unbearable silence. They think of him as the void in the heart of the whirlwind; the cloud on the brain of the maniac; the toppling turrets of vertigo or the endless corridors of nightmare. It was the Christians who gave the Devil a grotesque and energetic outline, with sharp horns and spiked tail. It was the saints who drew Satan as comic and even lively. The Satanists never drew him at all.

And as it is with moral good and evil, so it is also with mental clarity and mental confusion. There is one very valid test by which we may separate genuine, if perverse and unbalanced, originality and revolt from mere impudent innovation and bluff. The man who really thinks he has an idea will always try to explain that idea. The charlatan who has no idea will always confine himself to explaining that it is much too subtle to be explained. The first idea may really be very outree or specialist; it may really be very difficult to express to ordinary
people. But because the man is trying to express it, it is most probable that there is something in it, after all. The honest man is he who is always trying to utter the unutterable, to describe the indescribable; but the quack lives not by plunging into mystery, but by refusing to come out of it.

Perhaps this distinction is most comically plain in the case of the thing called Art, and the people called Art Critics. It is obvious that an attractive landscape or a living face can only half express the holy cunning that has made them what they are. It is equally obvious that a landscape painter expresses only half of the landscape; a portrait painter only half of the person; they are lucky if they express so much. And again it is yet more obvious that any literary description of the pictures can only express half of them, and that the less important half. Still, it does express something; the thread is not broken that connects God With Nature, or Nature with men, or men with critics. The “Mona Lisa” was in some respects (not all, I fancy) what God meant her to be. Leonardo’s picture was, in some respects, like the lady. And Walter Pater’s rich description was, in some respects, like the picture. Thus we come to the consoling reflection that even literature, in the last resort, can express something other than its own unhappy self.

Now the modern critic is a humbug, because he professes to be entirely inarticulate. Speech is his whole business; and he boasts of being speechless. Before Botticelli he is mute. But if there is any good in Botticelli (there is much good, and much evil too) it is emphatically the critic’s business to explain it: to translate it from terms of painting into terms of diction. Of course, the rendering will be inadequate—but so is Botticelli. It is a fact he would be the first to admit. But anything which has been intelligently received can at least be intelligently suggested. Pater does suggest an intelligent cause for the cadaverous colour of Botticelli’s “Venus Rising from the Sea.” Ruskin does suggest an intelligent motive for Turner destroying forests and falsifying landscapes. These two great critics were far too fastidious for my taste; they urged to excess the idea that a sense of art was a sort of secret; to be patiently taught and slowly learnt. Still, they thought it could be taught: they thought it could be learnt. They constrained themselves, with considerable creative fatigue, to find the exact adjectives which might parallel in English prose what has been clone in Italian painting. The same is true of Whistler and R. A. M. Stevenson and many others in the exposition of Velasquez. They had something to say about the pictures; they knew it was unworthy of the pictures, but they said it.

Now the eulogists of the latest artistic insanities (Cubism and Post
Impressionism and Mr. Picasso) are eulogists and nothing else. They are not critics; least of all creative critics. They do not attempt to translate beauty into language; they merely tell you that it is untranslatable—that is, unutterable, indefinable, indescribable, impalpable, ineffable, and all the rest of it. The cloud is their banner; they cry to chaos and old night. They circulate a piece of paper on which Mr. Picasso has had the misfortune to upset the ink and tried to dry it with his boots, and they seek to terrify democracy by the good old anti-democratic muddlements: that “the public” does not understand these things; that “the likes of us” cannot dare to question the dark decisions of our lords.

I venture to suggest that we resist all this rubbish by the very simple test mentioned above. If there were anything intelligent in such art, something of it at least could be made intelligible in literature. Man is made with one head, not with two or three. No criticism of Rembrandt is as good as Rembrandt; but it can be so written as to make a man go back and look at his pictures. If there is a curious and fantastic art, it is the business of the art critics to create a curious and fantastic literary expression for it; inferior to it, doubtless, but still akin to it. If they cannot do this, as they cannot; if there is nothing in their eulogies, as there is nothing except eulogy—then they are quacks or the high-priests of the unutterable. If the art critics can say nothing about the artists except that they are good it is because the artists are bad. They can explain nothing because they have found nothing; and they have found nothing because there is nothing to be found.
THE RED REACTIONARY

The one case for Revolution is that it is the only quite clean and complete road to anything—even to restoration. Revolution alone can be not merely a revolt of the living, but also a resurrection of the dead.

A friend of mine (one, in fact, who writes prominently on this paper) was once walking down the street in a town of Western France, situated in that area that used to be called La Vendee; which in that great creative crisis about 1790 formed a separate and mystical soul of its own, and made a revolution against a revolution. As my friend went down this street he whistled an old French air which he had found, like Mr. Gandish, “in his researches into ‘istory,” and which had somehow taken his fancy; the song to which those last sincere loyalists went into battle. I think the words ran:

Monsieur de Charette. Dit au gens d’ici. Le roi va remettre. Le fleur de lys.

My friend was (and is) a Radical, but he was (and is) an Englishman, and it never occurred to him that there could be any harm in singing archaic lyrics out of remote centuries; that one had to be a Catholic to enjoy the “Dies Irae,” or a Protestant to remember “Lillibullero.” Yet he was stopped and gravely warned that things so politically provocative might get him at least into temporary trouble.

A little time after I was helping King George V to get crowned, by walking round a local bonfire and listening to a local band. Just as a bonfire cannot be too big, so (by my theory of music) a band cannot be too loud, and this band was so loud, emphatic, and obvious, that I actually recognised one or two of the tunes. And I noticed that quite a formidable proportion of them were Jacobite tunes; that is, tunes that had been primarily meant to keep George V out of his throne for ever. Some of the real airs of the old Scottish rebellion were played, such as “Charlie is My Darling,” or “What’s a’ the steer, kimmer?” songs that men had sung while marching to destroy and drive out the monarchy under which we live. They were songs in which the very kinsmen of the present King were swept aside as usurpers. They were songs in which the actual words “King George” occurred as a curse and a derision. Yet they were played to celebrate his very Coronation; played as promptly and innocently as if they had been “Grandfather’s Clock” or “Rule Britannia” or “The Honeysuckle and the Bee.”

That contrast is the measure, not only between two nations, but between two modes of historical construction and development. For there is not really very
much difference, as European history goes, in the time that has elapsed between us and the Jacobite and between us and the Jacobin. When George III was crowned the gauntlet of the King’s Champion was picked up by a partisan of the Stuarts. When George III was still on the throne the Bourbons were driven out of France as the Stuarts had been driven out of England. Yet the French are just sufficiently aware that the Bourbons might possibly return that they will take a little trouble to discourage it; whereas we are so certain that the Stuarts will never return that we actually play their most passionate tunes as a compliment to their rivals. And we do not even do it tauntingly. I examined the faces of all the bandsmen; and I am sure they were devoid of irony: indeed, it is difficult to blow a wind instrument ironically. We do it quite unconsciously; because we have a huge fundamental dogma, which the French have not. We really believe that the past is past. It is a very doubtful point.

Now the great gift of a revolution (as in France) is that it makes men free in the past as well as free in the future. Those who have cleared away everything could, if they liked, put back everything. But we who have preserved everything—we cannot restore anything. Take, for the sake of argument, the complex and many coloured ritual of the Coronation recently completed. That rite is stratified with the separate centuries; from the first rude need of discipline to the last fine shade of culture or corruption, there is nothing that cannot be detected or even dated. The fierce and childish vow of the lords to serve their lord “against all manner of folk” obviously comes from the real Dark Ages; no longer confused, even by the ignorant, with the Middle Ages. It comes from some chaos of Europe, when there was one old Roman road across four of our counties; and when hostile “folk” might live in the next village. The sacramental separation of one man to be the friend of the fatherless and the nameless belongs to the true Middle Ages; with their great attempt to make a moral and invisible Roman Empire; or (as the Coronation Service says) to set the cross for ever above the ball. Elaborate local tomfooleries, such as that by which the Lord of the Manor of Work-sop is alone allowed to do something or other, these probably belong to the decay of the Middle Ages, when that great civilisation died out in grotesque literalism and entangled heraldry. Things like the presentation of the Bible bear witness to the intellectual outburst at the Reformation; things like the Declaration against the Mass bear witness to the great wars of the Puritans; and things like the allegiance of the Bishops bear witness to the wordy and parenthetical political compromises which (to my deep regret) ended the wars of religion.
But my purpose here is only to point out one particular thing. In all that long list of variations there must be, and there are, things which energetic modern minds would really wish, with the reasonable modification, to restore. Dr. Clifford would probably be glad to see again the great Puritan idealism that forced the Bible into an antique and almost frozen formality. Dr. Horton probably really regrets the old passion that excommunicated Rome. In the same way Mr. Belloc would really prefer the Middle Ages; as Lord Rosebery would prefer the Erastian oligarchy of the eighteenth century. The Dark Ages would probably be disputed (from widely different motives) by Mr. Rudyard Kipling and Mr. Cunninghame Graham. But Mr. Cunninghame Graham would win.

But the black case against Conservative (or Evolutionary) politics is that none of these sincere men can win. Dr. Clifford cannot get back to the Puritans; Mr. Belloc cannot get back to the mediaevals; because (alas) there has been no Revolution to leave them a clear space for building or rebuilding. Frenchmen have all the ages behind them, and can wander back and pick and choose. But Englishmen have all the ages on top of them, and can only lie groaning under that imposing tower, without being able to take so much as a brick out of it. If the French decide that their Republic is bad they can get rid of it; but if we decide that a Republic was good, we should have much more difficulty. If the French democracy actually desired every detail of the mediaeval monarchy, they could have it. I do not think they will or should, but they could. If another Dauphin were actually crowned at Rheims; if another Joan of Arc actually bore a miraculous banner before him; if mediaeval swords shook and blazed in every gauntlet; if the golden lilies glowed from every tapestry; if this were really proved to be the will of France and the purpose of Providence—such a scene would still be the lasting and final justification of the French Revolution.

For no such scene could conceivably have happened under Louis XVI.
THE SEPARATIST AND SACRED THINGS

In the very laudable and fascinating extensions of our interest in Asiatic arts or faiths, there are two incidental injustices which we tend nowadays to do to our own records and our own religion. The first is a tendency to talk as if certain things were not only present in the higher Orientals, but were peculiar to them. Thus our magazines will fall into a habit of wondering praise of Bushido, the Japanese chivalry, as if no Western knights had ever vowed noble vows, or as if no Eastern knights had ever broken them. Or again, our drawing-rooms will be full of the praises of Indian renunciation and Indian unworldliness, as if no Christians had been saints, or as if all Buddhists had been. But if the first injustice is to think of human virtues as peculiarly Eastern, the other injustice is a failure to appreciate what really is peculiarly Eastern. It is too much taken for granted that the Eastern sort of idealism is certainly superior and convincing; whereas in truth it is only separate and peculiar. All that is richest, deepest, and subtlest in the East is rooted in Pantheism; but all that is richest, deepest, and subtlest in us is concerned with denying passionately that Pantheism is either the highest or the purest religion.

Thus, in turning over some excellent books recently written on the spirit of Indian or Chinese art and decoration, I found it quietly and curiously assumed that the artist must be at his best if he flows with the full stream of Nature; and identifies himself with all things; so that the stars are his sleepless eyes and the forests his far-flung arms. Now in this way of talking both the two injustices will be found. In so far as what is claimed is a strong sense of the divine in all things, the Eastern artists have no more monopoly of it than they have of hunger and thirst.

I have no doubt that the painters and poets of the Far East do exhibit this; but I rebel at being asked to admit that we must go to the Far East to find it. Traces of such sentiments can be found, I fancy, even in other painters and poets. I do not question that the poet Wo Wo (that ornament of the eighth dynasty) may have written the words: “Even the most undignified vegetable is for this person capable of producing meditations not to be exhibited by much weeping.” But, I do not therefore admit that a Western gentleman named Wordsworth (who made a somewhat similar remark) had plagiarised from Wo Wo, or was a mere Occidental fable and travesty of that celebrated figure. I do not deny that Tinishona wrote that exquisite example of the short Japanese poem entitled
“Honourable Chrysanthemum in Honourable Hole in Wall.” But I do not therefore admit that Tennyson’s little verse about the flower in the cranny was not original and even sincere.

It is recorded (for all I know) of the philanthropic Emperor Bo, that when engaged in cutting his garden lawn with a mower made of alabaster and chrysoberyl, he chanced to cut down a small flower; whereupon, being much affected, he commanded his wise men immediately to take down upon tablets of ivory the lines beginning: “Small and unobtrusive blossom with ruby extremities.” But this incident, touching as it is, does not shake my belief in the incident of Robert Burns and the daisy; and I am left with an impression that poets are pretty much the same everywhere in their poetry—and in their prose.

I have tried to convey my sympathy and admiration for Eastern art and its admirers, and if I have not conveyed them I must give it up and go on to more general considerations. I therefore proceed to say—with the utmost respect, that it is Cheek, a rarefied and etherealised form of Cheek, for this school to speak in this way about the mother that bore them, the great civilisation of the West. The West also has its magic landscapes, only through our incurable materialism they look like landscapes as well as like magic. The West also has its symbolic figures, only they look like men as well as symbols. It will be answered (and most justly) that Oriental art ought to be free to follow its own instinct and tradition; that its artists are concerned to suggest one thing and our artists another; that both should be admired in their difference. Profoundly true; but what is the difference? It is certainly not as the Orientalisers assert, that we must go to the Far East for a sympathetic and transcendental interpretation of Nature. We have paid a long enough toll of mystics and even of madmen to be quit of that disability.

Yet there is a difference, and it is just what I suggested. The Eastern mysticism is an ecstasy of unity; the Christian mysticism is an ecstasy of creation, that is of separation and mutual surprise. The latter says, like St. Francis, “My brother fire and my sister water”; the former says, “Myself fire and myself water.” Whether you call the Eastern attitude an extension of oneself into everything or a contraction of oneself into nothing is a matter of metaphysical definition. The effect is the same, an effect which lives and throbs throughout all the exquisite arts of the East. This effect is the Sing called rhythm, a pulsation of pattern, or of ritual, or of colours, or of cosmic theory, but always suggesting the unification of the individual with the world. But there is quite another kind of sympathy the sympathy with a thing because it is different. No one will say that
Rembrandt did not sympathise with an old woman; but no one will say that Rembrandt painted like an old woman. No one will say that Reynolds did not appreciate children; but no one will say he did it childishly. The supreme instance of this divine division is sex, and that explains (what I could never understand in my youth) why Christendom called the soul the bride of God. For real love is an intense realisation of the “separateness” of all our souls. The most heroic and human love-poetry of the world is never mere passion; precisely because mere passion really is a melting back into Nature, a meeting of the waters. And water is plunging and powerful; but it is only powerful downhill. The high and human love-poetry is all about division rather than identity; and in the great love-poems even the man as he embraces the woman sees her, in the same instant, afar off; a virgin and a stranger.

For the first injustice, of which we have spoken, still recurs; and if we grant that the East has a right to its difference, it is not realised in what we differ. That nursery tale from nowhere about St. George and the Dragon really expresses best the relation between the West and the East. There were many other differences, calculated to arrest even the superficial eye, between a saint and a dragon. But the essential difference was simply this: that the Dragon did want to eat St. George; whereas St. George would have felt a strong distaste for eating the Dragon. In most of the stories he killed the Dragon. In many of the stories he not only spared, but baptised it. But in neither case did the Christian have any appetite for cold dragon. The Dragon, however, really has an appetite for cold Christian—and especially for cold Christianity. This blind intention to absorb, to change the shape of everything and digest it in the darkness of a dragon’s stomach; this is what is really meant by the Pantheism and Cosmic Unity of the East. The Cosmos as such is cannibal; as old Time ate his children. The Eastern saints were saints because they wanted to be swallowed up. The Western saint, like St. George, was sainted by the Western Church precisely because he refused to be swallowed. The same process of thought that has prevented nationalities disappearing in Christendom has prevented the complete appearance of Pantheism. All Christian men instinctively resist the idea of being absorbed into an Empire; an Austrian, a Spanish, a British, or a Turkish Empire. But there is one empire, much larger and much more tyrannical, which free men will resist with even stronger passion. The free man violently resists being absorbed into the empire which is called the Universe. He demands Home Rule for his nationality, but still more Home Rule for his home. Most of all he demands Home Rule for himself. He claims the right to be saved, in spite of Moslem
fatalism. He claims the right to be damned in spite of theosophical optimism. He refuses to be the Cosmos; because he refuses to forget it.
THE MUMMER

The night before Christmas Eve I heard a burst of musical voices so close that they might as well have been inside the house instead of just outside; so I asked them inside, hoping that they might then seem farther away. Then I realised that they were the Christmas Mummers, who come every year in country parts to enact the rather rigid fragments of the old Christmas play of St. George, the Turkish Knight, and the Very Venal Doctor. I will not describe it; it is indescribable; but I will describe my parallel sentiments as it passed.

One could see something of that half-failure that haunts our artistic revivals of mediaeval dances, carols, or Bethlehem Plays. There are elements in all that has come to us from the more morally simple society of the Middle Ages: elements which moderns, even when they are mediaevalists, find it hard to understand and harder to imitate. The first is the primary idea of Mummery itself. If you will observe a child just able to walk, you will see that his first idea is not to dress up as anybody—but to dress up. Afterwards, of course, the idea of being the King or Uncle William will leap to his lips. But it is generally suggested by the hat he has already let fall over his nose, from far deeper motives. Tommy does not assume the hat primarily because it is Uncle William’s hat, but because it is not Tommy’s hat. It is a ritual investiture; and is akin to those Gorgon masks that stiffened the dances of Greece or those towering mitres that came from the mysteries of Persia. For the essence of such ritual is a profound paradox: the concealment of the personality combined with the exaggeration of the person. The man performing a rite seeks to be at once invisible and conspicuous. It is part of that divine madness which all other creatures wonder at in Man, that he alone parades this pomp of obliteration and anonymity. Man is not, perhaps, the only creature who dresses himself, but he is the only creature who disguises himself. Beasts and birds do indeed take the colours of their environment; but that is not in order to be watched, but in order not to be watched; it is not the formalism of rejoicing, but the formlessness of fear. It is not so with men, whose nature is the unnatural. Ancient Britons did not stain themselves blue because they lived in blue forests; nor did Georgian beaux and belles powder their hair to match an Arctic landscape; the Britons were not dressing up as kingfishers nor the beaux pretending to be polar bears. Nay, even when modern ladies paint their faces a bright mauve, it is doubted by some naturalists whether they do it with the idea of escaping notice. So merry-makers (or Mummers) adopt their costume
to heighten and exaggerate their own bodily presence and identity; not to sink it, primarily speaking, in another identity. It is not Acting—that comparatively low profession-comparatively I mean. It is Mummery; and, as Mr. Kensit would truly say, all elaborate religious ritual is Mummery. That is, it is the noble conception of making Man something other and more than himself when he stands at the limit of human things. It is only careful faddists and feeble German philosophers who want to wear no clothes; and be “natural” in their Dionysian revels. Natural men, really vigorous and exultant men, want to wear more and more clothes when they are revelling. They want worlds of waistcoats and forests of trousers and pagodas of tall hats toppling up to the stars.

Thus it is with the lingering Mummers at Christmas in the country. If our more refined revivers of Miracle Plays or Morrice Dances tried to reconstruct the old Mummers’ Play of St. George and the Turkish Knight (I do not know why they do not) they would think at once of picturesque and appropriate dresses. St. George’s panoply would be pictured from the best books of armour and blazonry: the Turkish Knight’s arms and ornaments would be traced from the finest Saracenic arabesques. When my garden door opened on Christmas Eve and St. George of England entered, the appearance of that champion was slightly different. His face was energetically blacked all over with soot, above which he wore an aged and very tall top hat; he wore his shirt outside his coat like a surplice, and he flourished a thick umbrella. Now do not, I beg you, talk about “ignorance”; or suppose that the Mummer in question (he is a very pleasant Ratcatcher, with a tenor voice) did this because he knew no better. Try to realise that even a Ratcatcher knows St. George of England was not black, and did not kill the Dragon with an umbrella. The Ratcatcher is not under this delusion; any more than Paul Veronese thought that very good men have luminous rings round their heads; any more than the Pope thinks that Christ washed the feet of the twelve in a Cathedral; any more than the Duke of Norfolk thinks the lions on a tabard are like the lions at the Zoo. These things are denaturalised because they are symbols; because the extraordinary occasion must hide or even disfigure the ordinary people. Black faces were to mediaeval mummeries what carved masks were to Greek plays: it was called being “vizarded.” My Ratcatcher is not sufficiently arrogant to suppose for a moment that he looks like St. George. But he is sufficiently humble to be convinced that if he looks as little like himself as he can, he will be on the right road.

This is the soul of Mumming; the ostentatious secrecy of men in disguise. There are, of course, other mediaeval elements in it which are also difficult to
explain to the fastidious mediaevalists of to-day. There is, for instance, a certain output of violence into the void. It can best be defined as a raging thirst to knock men down without the faintest desire to hurt them. All the rhymes with the old ring have the trick of turning on everything in which the rhymsters most sincerely believed, merely for the pleasure of blowing off steam in startling yet careless phrases. When Tennyson says that King Arthur “drew all the petty princedoms under him,” and “made a realm and ruled,” his grave Royalism is quite modern. Many mediaevals, outside the mediaeval republics, believed in monarchy as solemnly as Tennyson. But that older verse

When good King Arthur ruled this land He was a goodly King—He stole three pecks of barley-meal To make a bag-pudding.

is far more Arthurian than anything in The Idylls of the King. There are other elements; especially that sacred thing that can perhaps be called Anachronism. All that to us is Anachronism was to mediaevals merely Eternity. But the main excellence of the Mumming Play lies still, I think, in its uproarious secrecy. If we cannot hide our hearts in healthy darkness, at least we can hide our faces in healthy blacking. If you cannot escape like a philosopher into a forest, at least you can carry the forest with you, like a Jack-in-the-Green. It is well to walk under universal ensigns; and there is an old tale of a tyrant to whom a walking forest was the witness of doom. That, indeed, is the very intensity of the notion: a masked man is ominous; but who shall face a mob of masks?
THE ARISTOCRATIC ‘ARRY

The Cheap Tripper, pursued by the curses of the aesthetes and the antiquaries, really is, I suppose, a symptom of the strange and almost unearthly ugliness of our diseased society. The costumes and customs of a hundred peasantry are there to prove that such ugliness does not necessarily follow from mere poverty, or mere democracy, or mere unlettered simplicity of mind.

But though the tripper, artistically considered, is a sign of our decadence, he is not one of its worst signs, but relatively one of its best; one of its most innocent and most sincere. Compared with many of the philosophers and artists who denounce him; he looks like a God fearing fisher or a noble mountaineer. His antics with donkeys and concertinas, crowded charabancs, and exchanged hats, though clumsy, are not so vicious or even so fundamentally vulgar as many of the amusements of the overeducated. People are not more crowded on a char-a-banc than they are at a political “At Home,” or even an artistic soiree; and if the female trippers are overdressed, at least they are not overdressed and underdressed at the same time. It is better to ride a donkey than to be a donkey. It is better to deal with the Cockney festival which asks men and women to change hats, rather than with the modern Utopia that wants them to change heads.

But the truth is that such small, but real, element of vulgarity as there is indeed in the tripper, is part of a certain folly and falsity which is characteristic of much modernity, and especially of the very people who persecute the poor tripper most. There is something in the whole society, and even especially in the cultured part of it, that does things in a clumsy and unbeautiful way.

A case occurs to me in the matter of Stonehenge, which I happened to visit yesterday. Now to a person really capable of feeling the poetry of Stonehenge it is almost a secondary matter whether he sees Stonehenge at all. The vast void roll of the empty land towards Salisbury, the gray tablelands like primeval altars, the trailing rain-clouds, the vapour of primeval sacrifices, would all tell him of a very ancient and very lonely Britain. It would not spoil his Druidic mood if he missed Stonehenge. But it does spoil his mood to find Stonehenge—surrounded by a brand-new fence of barbed wire, with a policeman and a little shop selling picture post-cards.

Now if you protest against this, educated people will instantly answer you, “Oh, it was done to prevent the vulgar trippers who chip stones and carve names
and spoil the look of Stonehenge.” It does not seem to occur to them that barbed wire and a policeman rather spoil the look of Stonehenge. The scratching of a name, particularly when performed with blunt penknife or pencil by a person of imperfect School Board education, can be trusted in a little while to be indistinguishable from the grayest hieroglyphic by the grandest Druid of old. But nobody could get a modern policeman into the same picture with a Druid. This really vital piece of vandalism was done by the educated, not the uneducated; it was done by the influence of the artists or antiquaries who wanted to preserve the antique beauty of Stonehenge. It seems to me curious to preserve your lady’s beauty from freckles by blacking her face all over; or to protect the pure whiteness of your wedding garment by dyeing it green.

And if you ask, “But what else could any one have done, what could the most artistic age have done to save the monument?” I reply, “There are hundreds of things that Greeks or Mediaevals might have done; and I have no notion what they would have chosen; but I say that by an instinct in their whole society they would have done something that was decent and serious and suitable to the place. Perhaps some family of knights or warriors would have the hereditary duty of guarding such a place. If so their armour would be appropriate; their tents would be appropriate; not deliberately—they would grow like that. Perhaps some religious order such as normally employ nocturnal watches and the relieving of guard would protect such a place. Perhaps it would be protected by all sorts of rituals, consecrations, or curses, which would seem to you mere raving superstition and silliness. But they do not seem to me one twentieth part so silly, from a purely rationalist point of view, as calmly making a spot hideous in order to keep it beautiful.”

The thing that is really vulgar, the thing that is really vile, is to live in a good place Without living by its life. Any one who settles down in a place without becoming part of it is (barring peculiar personal cases, of course) a tripper or wandering cad. For instance, the Jew is a genuine peculiar case. The Wandering Jew is not a wandering cad. He is a highly civilised man in a highly difficult position; the world being divided, and his own nation being divided, about whether he can do anything else except wander.

The best example of the cultured, but common, tripper is the educated Englishman on the Continent. We can no longer explain the quarrel by calling Englishmen rude and foreigners polite. Hundreds of Englishmen are extremely polite, and thousands of foreigners are extremely rude. The truth of the matter is that foreigners do not resent the rude Englishman. What they do resent, what
they do most justly resent, is the polite Englishman. He visits Italy for Botticellis or Flanders for Rembrandts, and he treats the great nations that made these things courteously—as he would treat the custodians of any museum. It does not seem to strike him that the Italian is not the custodian of the pictures, but the creator of them. He can afford to look down on such nations—when he can paint such pictures.

That is, in matters of art and travel, the psychology of the cad. If, living in Italy, you admire Italian art while distrusting Italian character, you are a tourist, or cad. If, living in Italy, you admire Italian art while despising Italian religion, you are a tourist, or cad. It does not matter how many years you have lived there. Tourists will often live a long time in hotels without discovering the nationality of the waiters. Englishmen will often live a long time in Italy without discovering the nationality of the Italians. But the test is simple. If you admire what Italians did without admiring Italians—you are a cheap tripper.

The same, of course, applies much nearer home. I have remarked elsewhere that country shopkeepers are justly offended by London people, who, coming among them, continue to order all their goods from London. It is caddish to wink and squint at the colour of a man’s wine, like a wine taster; and then refuse to drink it. It is equally caddish to wink and squint at the colour of a man’s orchard, like a landscape painter; and then refuse to buy the apples. It is always an insult to admire a thing and not use it. But the main point is that one has no right to see Stonehenge without Salisbury Plain and Salisbury: One has no right to respect the dead Italians without respecting the live ones. One has no right to visit a Christian society like a diver visiting the deep-sea fishes—fed along a lengthy tube by another atmosphere, and seeing the sights without breathing the air. It is very real bad manners.
THE NEW THEOLOGIAN

It is an old story that names do not fit things; it is an old story that the oldest forest is called the New Forest, and that Irish stew is almost peculiar to England. But these are traditional titles that tend, of their nature, to stiffen; it is the tragedy of to-day that even phrases invented for to-day do not fit it. The forest has remained new while it is nearly a thousand years old; but our fashions have grown old while they were still new.

The extreme example of this is that when modern wrongs are attacked, they are almost always attacked wrongly. People seem to have a positive inspiration for finding the inappropriate phrase to apply to an offender; they are always accusing a man of theft when he has been convicted of murder. They must accuse Sir Edward Carson of outrageous rebellion, when his offence has really been a sleek submission to the powers that be. They must describe Mr. Lloyd George as using his eloquence to rouse the mob, whereas he has really shown considerable cleverness in damping it down. It was probably under the same impulse towards a mysterious misfit of names that people denounced Dr. Inge as “the Gloomy Dean.”

Now there is nothing whatever wrong about being a Dean; nor is there anything wrong about being gloomy. The only question is what dark but sincere motives have made you gloomy. What dark but sincere motives have made you a Dean. Now the address of Dr. Inge which gained him this erroneous title was mostly concerned with a defence of the modern capitalists against the modern strikers, from whose protest he appeared to anticipate appalling results. Now if we look at the facts about that gentleman’s depression and also about his Deanery, we shall find a very curious state of things.

When Dr. Inge was called “the Gloomy Dean” a great injustice was done him. He had appeared as the champion of our capitalist community against the forces of revolt; and any one who does that exceeds in optimism rather than pessimism. A man who really thinks that strikers have suffered no wrong, or that employers have done no wrong—such a man is not a Gloomy Dean, but a quite wildly and dangerously happy Dean. A man who can feel satisfied with modern industrialism must be a man with a mysterious fountain of high spirits. And the actual occasion is not less curious; because, as far as I can make out, his title to gloom reposes on his having said that our worker’s demand high wages, while the placid people of the Far East will quite cheerfully work for less.
This is true enough, of course, and there does not seem to be much difficulty about the matter. Men of the Far East will submit to very low wages for the same reason that they will submit to “the punishment known as Li, or Slicing”; for the same reason that they will praise polygamy and suicide; for the same reason that they subject the wife utterly to the husband or his parents; for the same reason that they serve their temples with prostitutes for priests; for the same reason that they sometimes seem to make no distinction between sexual passion and sexual perversion. They do it, that is, because they are Heathens; men with traditions different from ours about the limits of endurance and the gestures of self-respect. They may be very much better than we are in hundreds of other ways; and I can quite understand a man (though hardly a Dean) really preferring their historic virtues to those of Christendom. A man may perhaps feel more comfortable among his Asiatic coolies than among his European comrades: and as we are to allow the Broadest Thought in the Church, Dr. Inge has as much right to his heresy as anybody else. It is true that, as Dr. Inge says, there are numberless Orientals who will do a great deal of work for very little money; and it is most undoubtedly true that there are several high-placed and prosperous Europeans who like to get work done and pay as little as possible for it.

But I cannot make out why, with his enthusiasm for heathen habits and traditions, the Dean should wish to spread in the East the ideas which he has found so dreadfully unsettling in the West. If some thousands of years of paganism have produced the patience and industry that Dean Inge admires, and if some thousand years of Christianity have produced the sentimentality and sensationalism which he regrets, the obvious deduction is that Dean Inge would be much happier if he were a heathen Chinese. Instead of supporting Christian missions to Korea or Japan, he ought to be at the head of a great mission in London for converting the English to Taoism or Buddhism. There his passion for the moral beauties of paganism would have free and natural play; his style would improve; his mind would begin slowly to clear; and he would be free from all sorts of little irritating scrupulosities which must hamper even the most Conservative Christian in his full praise of sweating and the sack.

In Christendom he will never find rest. The perpetual public criticism and public change which is the note of all our history springs from a certain spirit far too deep to be defined. It is deeper than democracy; nay, it may often appear to be non-democratic; for it may often be the special defence of a minority or an individual. It will often leave the ninety-and-nine in the wilderness and go after that which is lost. It will often risk the State itself to right a single wrong; and do
justice though the heavens fall. Its highest expression is not even in the formula of the great gentlemen of the French Revolution who said that all men were free and equal. Its highest expression is rather in the formula of the peasant who said that a man’s a man for a’ that. If there were but one slave in England, and he did all the work while the rest of us made merry, this spirit that is in us would still cry aloud to God night and day. Whether or no this spirit was produced by, it clearly works with, a creed which postulates a humanised God and a vividly personal immortality. Men must not be busy merely like a swarm, or even happy merely like a herd; for it is not a question of men, but of a man. A man’s meals may be poor, but they must not be bestial; there must always be that about the meal which permits of its comparison to the sacrament. A man’s bed may be hard, but it must not be abject or unclean: there must always be about the bed something of the decency of the death-bed.

This is the spirit which makes the Christian poor begin their terrible murmur whenever there is a turn of prices or a deadlock of toil that threatens them with vagabondage or pauperisation; and we cannot encourage the Dean with any hope that this spirit can be cast out. Christendom will continue to suffer all the disadvantages of being Christian: it is the Dean who must be gently but firmly altered. He had absent-mindedly strayed into the wrong continent and the wrong creed. I advise him to chuck it.

But the case is more curious still. To connect the Dean with Confucian temples or traditions may have appeared fantastic; but it is not. Dr. Inge is not a stupid old Tory Rector, strict both on Church and State. Such a man might talk nonsense about the Christian Socialists being “court chaplains of King Demos” or about his own superb valour in defying the democracy that rages in the front pews of Anglican churches. We should not expect a mere old-fashioned country clergyman to know that Demos has never been king in England and precious seldom anywhere else; we should not expect him to realise that if King Demos had any chaplains they would be uncommonly poorly paid. But Dr. Inge is not old-fashioned; he considers himself highly progressive and advanced. He is a New Theologian; that is, he is liberal in theology—and nothing else. He is apparently in sober fact, and not as in any fantasy, in sympathy with those who would soften the superior claim of our creed by urging the rival creeds of the East; with those who would absorb the virtues of Buddhism or of Islam. He holds a high seat in that modern Parliament of Religions where all believers respect each other’s unbelief.

Now this has a very sharp moral for modern religious reformers. When next
you hear the “liberal” Christian say that we should take what is best in Oriental faiths, make quite sure what are the things that people like Dr. Inge call best; what are the things that people like Dr. Inge propose to take. You will not find them imitating the military valour of the Moslem. You will not find them imitating the miraculous ecstasy of the Hindoo. The more you study the “broad” movement of today, the more you will find that these people want something much less like Chinese metaphysics, and something much more like Chinese Labour. You will find the levelling of creeds quite unexpectedly close to the lowering of wages. Dr. Inge is the typical latitudinarian of to-day; and was never more so than when he appeared not as the apostle of the blacks, but as the apostle of the blacklegs. Preached, as it is, almost entirely among the prosperous and polite, our brotherhood with Buddhism or Mohammedanism practically means this—that the poor must be as meek as Buddhists, while the rich may be as ruthless as Mohammedans. That is what they call the reunion of all religions.
THE ROMANTIC IN THE RAIN

The middle classes of modern England are quite fanatically fond of washing; and are often enthusiastic for teetotalism. I cannot therefore comprehend why it is that they exhibit a mysterious dislike of rain. Rain, that inspiring and delightful thing, surely combines the qualities of these two ideals with quite a curious perfection. Our philanthropists are eager to establish public baths everywhere. Rain surely is a public bath; it might almost be called mixed bathing. The appearance of persons coming fresh from this great natural lustration is not perhaps polished or dignified; but for the matter of that, few people are dignified when coming out of a bath. But the scheme of rain in itself is one of an enormous purification. It realises the dream of some insane hygienist: it scrubs the sky. Its giant brooms and mops seem to reach the starry rafters and Starless corners of the cosmos; it is a cosmic spring cleaning.

If the Englishman is really fond of cold baths, he ought not to grumble at the English climate for being a cold bath. In these days we are constantly told that we should leave our little special possessions and join in the enjoyment of common social institutions and a common social machinery. I offer the rain as a thoroughly Socialistic institution. It disregards that degraded delicacy which has hitherto led each gentleman to take his shower-bath in private. It is a better shower-bath, because it is public and communal; and, best of all, because somebody else pulls the string.

As for the fascination of rain for the water drinker, it is a fact the neglect of which I simply cannot comprehend. The enthusiastic water drinker must regard a rainstorm as a sort of universal banquet and debauch of his own favourite beverage. Think of the imaginative intoxication of the wine drinker if the crimson clouds sent down claret or the golden clouds hock. Paint upon primitive darkness some such scenes of apocalypse, towering and gorgeous skyscapes in which champagne falls like fire from heaven or the dark skies grow purple and tawny with the terrible colours of port. All this must the wild abstainer feel, as he rolls in the long soaking grass, kicks his ecstatic heels to heaven, and listens to the roaring rain. It is he, the water drinker, who ought to be the true bacchanal of the forests; for all the forests are drinking water. Moreover, the forests are apparently enjoying it: the trees rave and reel to and fro like drunken giants; they clash boughs as revellers clash cups; they roar undying thirst and howl the health of the world.
All around me as I write is a noise of Nature drinking: and Nature makes a noise when she is drinking, being by no means refined. If I count it Christian mercy to give a cup of cold water to a sufferer, shall I complain of these multitudinous cups of cold water handed round to all living things; a cup of water for every shrub; a cup of water for every weed? I would be ashamed to grumble at it. As Sir Philip Sidney said, their need is greater than mine—especially for water.

There is a wild garment that still carries nobly the name of a wild Highland clan: a elan come from those hills where rain is not so much an incident as an atmosphere. Surely every man of imagination must feel a tempestuous flame of Celtic romance spring up within him whenever he puts on a mackintosh. I could never reconcile myself to carrying all umbrella; it is a pompous Eastern business, carried over the heads of despots in the dry, hot lands. Shut up, an umbrella is an unmanageable walking stick; open, it is an inadequate tent. For my part, I have no taste for pretending to be a walking pavilion; I think nothing of my hat, and precious little of my head. If I am to be protected against wet, it must be by some closer and more careless protection, something that I can forget altogether. It might be a Highland plaid. It might be that yet more Highland thing, a mackintosh.

And there is really something in the mackintosh of the military qualities of the Highlander. The proper cheap mackintosh has a blue and white sheen as of steel or iron; it gleams like armour. I like to think of it as the uniform of that ancient clan in some of its old and misty raids. I like to think of all the Macintoshes, in their mackintoshes, descending on some doomed Lowland village, their wet waterproofs flashing in the sun or moon. For indeed this is one of the real beauties of rainy weather, that while the amount of original and direct light is commonly lessened, the number of things that reflect light is unquestionably increased. There is less sunshine; but there are more shiny things; such beautifully shiny things as pools and puddles and mackintoshes. It is like moving in a world of mirrors.

And indeed this is the last and not the least gracious of the casual works of magic wrought by rain: that while it decreases light, yet it doubles it. If it dims the sky, it brightens the earth. It gives the roads (to the sympathetic eye) something of the beauty of Venice. Shallow lakes of water reiterate every detail of earth and sky; we dwell in a double universe. Sometimes walking upon bare and lustrous pavements, wet under numerous lamps, a man seems a black blot on all that golden looking-glass, and could fancy he was flying in a yellow sky. But
wherever trees and towns hang head downwards in a pigmy puddle, the sense of Celestial topsy-turvydom is the same. This bright, wet, dazzling confusion of shape and shadow, of reality and reflection, will appeal strongly to any one with the transcendental instinct about this dreamy and dual life of ours. It will always give a man the strange sense of looking down at the skies.
THE FALSE PHOTOGRAPHER

When, as lately, events have happened that seem (to the fancy, at least) to test if not stagger the force of official government, it is amusing to ask oneself what is the real weakness of civilisation, ours especially, when it contends with the one lawless man. I was reminded of one weakness this morning in turning over an old drawerful of pictures.

This weakness in civilisation is best expressed by saying that it cares more for science than for truth. It prides itself on its “methods” more than its results; it is satisfied with precision, discipline, good communications, rather than with the sense of reality. But there are precise falsehoods as well as precise facts. Discipline may only mean a hundred men making the same mistake at the same minute. And good communications may in practice be very like those evil communications which are said to corrupt good manners. Broadly, we have reached a “scientific age,” which wants to know whether the train is in the timetable, but not whether the train is in the station. I take one instance in our police inquiries that I happen to have come across: the case of photography.

Some years ago a poet of considerable genius tragically disappeared, and the authorities or the newspapers circulated a photograph of him, so that he might be identified. The photograph, as I remember it, depicted or suggested a handsome, haughty, and somewhat pallid man with his head thrown back, with long distinguished features, colourless thin hair and slight moustache, and though conveyed merely by the head and shoulders, a definite impression of height. If I had gone by that photograph I should have gone about looking for a long soldierly but listless man, with a profile rather like the Duke of Connaught’s.

Only, as it happened, I knew the poet personally; I had seen him a great many times, and he had an appearance that nobody could possibly forget, if seen only once. He had the mark of those dark and passionate Westland Scotch, who before Burns and after have given many such dark eyes and dark emotions to the world. But in him the unmistakable strain, Gaelic or whatever it is, was accentuated almost to oddity; and he looked like some swarthy elf. He was small, with a big head and a crescent of coal-black hair round the back of a vast dome of baldness. Immediately under his eyes his cheekbones had so high a colour that they might have been painted scarlet; three black tufts, two on the upper lip and one under the lower, seemed to touch up the face with the fierce moustaches of Mephistopheles. His eyes had that “dancing madness” in them
which Stevenson saw in the Gaelic eyes of Alan Breck; but he sometimes distorted the expression by screwing a monstrous monocle into one of them. A man more unmistakable would have been hard to find. You could have picked him out in any crowd—so long as you had not seen his photograph.

But in this scientific picture of him twenty causes, accidental and conventional, had combined to obliterate him altogether. The limits of photography forbade the strong and almost melodramatic colouring of cheek and eyebrow. The accident of the lighting took nearly all the darkness out of the hair and made him look almost like a fair man. The framing and limitation of the shoulders made him look like a big man; and the devastating bore of being photographed when you want to write poetry made him look like a lazy man. Holding his head back, as people do when they are being photographed (or shot), but as he certainly never held it normally, accidentally concealed the bald dome that dominated his slight figure. Here we have a clockwork picture, begun and finished by a button and a box of chemicals, from which every projecting feature has been more delicately and dexterously omitted than they could have been by the most namby-pamby flatterer, painting in the weakest water-colours, on the smoothest ivory.

I happen to possess a book of Mr. Max Beerbohm’s caricatures, one of which depicts the unfortunate poet in question. To say it represents an utterly incredible hobgoblin is to express in faint and inadequate language the license of its sprawling lines. The authorities thought it strictly safe and scientific to circulate the poet’s photograph. They would have clapped me in an asylum if I had asked them to circulate Max’s caricature. But the caricature would have been far more likely to find the man.

This is a small but exact symbol of the failure of scientific civilisation. It is so satisfied in knowing it has a photograph of a man that it never asks whether it has a likeness of him. Thus declarations, seemingly most detailed, have flashed along the wires of the world ever since I was a boy. We were told that in some row Boer policemen had shot an Englishman, a British subject, an English citizen. A long time afterwards we were quite casually informed that the English citizen was quite black. Well, it makes no difference to the moral question; black men should be shot on the same ethical principles as white men. But it makes one distrust scientific communications which permitted so startling an alteration of the photograph. I am sorry we got hold of a photographic negative in which a black man came out white. Later we were told that an Englishman had fought for the Boers against his own flag, which would have been a disgusting thing to do.
Later, it was admitted that he was an Irishman; which is exactly as different as if he had been a Pole. Common sense, with all the facts before it, does see that black is not white, and that a nation that has never submitted has a right to moral independence. But why does it so seldom have all the facts before it? Why are the big aggressive features, such as blackness or the Celtic wrath, always left out in such official communications, as they were left out in the photograph? My friend the poet had hair as black as an African and eyes as fierce as an Irishman; why does our civilisation drop all four of the facts? Its error is to omit the arresting thing—which might really arrest the criminal. It strikes first the chilling note of science, demanding a man “above the middle height, chin shaven, with gray moustache,” etc., which might mean Mr. Balfour or Sir Redvers Buller. It does not seize the first fact of impression, as that a man is obviously a sailor or a Jew or a drunkard or a gentleman or a nigger or an albino or a prize-fighter or an imbecile or an American. These are the realities by which the people really recognise each other. They are almost always left out of the inquiry.
THE SULTAN

There is one deep defect in our extension of cosmopolitan and Imperial cultures. That is, that in most human things if you spread your butter far you spread it thin. But there is an odder fact yet: rooted in something dark and irrational in human nature. That is, that when you find your butter thin, you begin to spread it. And it is just when you find your ideas wearing thin in your own mind that you begin to spread them among your fellow-creatures. It is a paradox; but not my paradox. There are numerous cases in history; but I think the strongest case is this. That we have Imperialism in all our clubs at the very time when we have Orientalism in all our drawing-rooms.

I mean that the colonial ideal of such men as Cecil Rhodes did not arise out of any fresh creative idea of the Western genius, it was a fad, and like most fads an imitation. For what was wrong with Rhodes was not that, like Cromwell or Hildebrand, he made huge mistakes, nor even that he committed great crimes. It was that he committed these crimes and errors in order to spread certain ideas. And when one asked for the ideas they could not be found. Cromwell stood for Calvinism, Hildebrand for Catholicism; but Rhodes had no principles whatever to give to the world. He had only a hasty but elaborate machinery for spreading the principles that he hadn’t got. What he called his ideals were the dregs of a Darwinism which had already grown not only stagnant, but poisonous. That the fittest must survive, and that any one like himself must be the fittest; that the weakest must go to the wall, and that any one he could not understand must be the weakest; that was the philosophy which he lumberingly believed through life, like many another agnostic old bachelor of the Victorian era. All his views on religion (reverently quoted in the Review of Reviews) were simply the stalest ideas of his time. It was not his fault, poor fellow, that he called a high hill somewhere in South Africa “his church.” It was not his fault, I mean, that he could not see that a church all to oneself is not a church at all. It is a madman’s cell. It was not his fault that he “figured out that God meant as much of the planet to be Anglo-Saxon as possible.” Many evolutionists much wiser had “figured out” things even more babyish. He was an honest and humble recipient of the plodding popular science of his time; he spread no ideas that any cockney clerk in Streatham could not have spread for him. But it was exactly because he had no ideas to spread that he invoked slaughter, violated justice, and ruined republics to spread them.
But the case is even stronger and stranger. Fashionable Imperialism not only has no ideas of its own to extend; but such ideas as it has are actually borrowed from the brown and black peoples to whom it seeks to extend them. The Crusading kings and knights might be represented as seeking to spread Western ideas in the East. But all that our Imperialist aristocrats could do would be to spread Eastern ideas in the East. For that very governing class which urges Occidental Imperialism has been deeply discoloured with Oriental mysticism and Cosmology.

The same society lady who expects the Hindoos to accept her view of politics has herself accepted their view of religion. She wants first to steal their earth, and then to share their heaven. The same Imperial cynic who wishes the Turks to submit to English science has himself submitted to Turkish philosophy, to a wholly Turkish view of despotism and destiny.

There is an obvious and amusing proof of this in a recent life of Rhodes. The writer admits with proper Imperial gloom the fact that Africa is still chiefly inhabited by Africans. He suggests Rhodes in the South confronting savages and Kitchener in the North facing Turks, Arabs, and Soudanese, and then he quotes this remark of Cecil Rhodes: “It is inevitable fate that all this should be changed; and I should like to be the agent of fate.” That was Cecil Rhodes’s one small genuine idea; and it is an Oriental idea.

Here we have evident all the ultimate idiocy of the present Imperial position. Rhodes and Kitchener are to conquer Moslem bedouins and barbarians, in order to teach them to believe only in inevitable fate. We are to wreck provinces and pour blood like Niagara, all in order to teach a Turk to say “Kismet”; which he has said since his cradle. We are to deny Christian justice and destroy international equality, all in order to teach an Arab to believe he is “an agent of fate,” when he has never believed anything else. If Cecil Rhodes’s vision could come true (which fortunately is increasingly improbable), such countries as Persia or Arabia would simply be filled with ugly and vulgar fatalists in billycocks, instead of with graceful and dignified fatalists in turbans. The best Western idea, the idea of spiritual liberty and danger, of a doubtful and romantic future in which all things may happen—this essential Western idea Cecil Rhodes could not spread, because (as he says himself) he did not believe in it.

It was an Oriental who gave to Queen Victoria the crown of an Empress in addition to that of a Queen. He did not understand that the title of King is higher than that of Emperor. For in the East titles are meant to be vast and wild; to be extravagant poems: the Brother of the Sun and Moon, the Caliph who lives for
ever. But a King of England (at least in the days of real kings) did not bear a merely poetical title; but rather a religious one. He belonged to his people and not merely they to him. He was not merely a conqueror, but a father—yes, even when he was a bad father. But this sort of solid sanctity always goes with local affections and limits: and the Cecil Rhodes Imperialism set up not the King, but the Sultan; with all the typically Eastern ideas of the magic of money, of luxury without uproar; of prostrate provinces and a chosen race. Indeed Cecil Rhodes illustrated almost every quality essential to the Sultan, from the love of diamonds to the scorn of woman.
THE ARCHITECT OF SPEARS

The other day, in the town of Lincoln, I suffered an optical illusion which accidentally revealed to me the strange greatness of the Gothic architecture. Its secret is not, I think, satisfactorily explained in most of the discussions on the subject. It is said that the Gothic eclipses the classical by a certain richness and complexity, at once lively and mysterious. This is true; but Oriental decoration is equally rich and complex, yet it awakens a widely different sentiment. No man ever got out of a Turkey carpet the emotions that he got from a cathedral tower. Over all the exquisite ornament of Arabia and India there is the presence of something stiff and heartless, of something tortured and silent. Dwarfed trees and crooked serpents, heavy flowers and hunchbacked birds accentuate by the very splendour and contrast of their colour the servility and monotony of their shapes. It is like the vision of a sneering sage, who sees the whole universe as a pattern. Certainly no one ever felt like this about Gothic, even if he happens to dislike it. Or, again, some will say that it is the liberty of the Middle Ages in the use of the comic or even the coarse that makes the Gothic more interesting than the Greek. There is more truth in this; indeed, there is real truth in it. Few of the old Christian cathedrals would have passed the Censor of Plays. We talk of the inimitable grandeur of the old cathedrals; but indeed it is rather their gaiety that we do not dare to imitate. We should be rather surprised if a chorister suddenly began singing “Bill Bailey” in church. Yet that would be only doing in music what the mediaevals did in sculpture. They put into a Miserere seat the very scenes that we put into a music hall song: comic domestic scenes similar to the spilling of the beer and the hanging out of the washing. But though the gaiety of Gothic is one of its features, it also is not the secret of its unique effect. We see a domestic topsy-turvydom in many Japanese sketches. But delightful as these are, with their fairy tree-tops, paper houses, and toddling, infantile inhabitants, the pleasure they give is of a kind quite different from the joy and energy of the gargoyles. Some have even been so shallow and illiterate as to maintain that our pleasure in medieval building is a mere pleasure in what is barbaric, in what is rough, shapeless, or crumbling like the rocks. This can be dismissed after the same fashion; South Sea idols, with painted eyes and radiating bristles, are a delight to the eye; but they do not affect it in at all the same way as Westminster Abbey. Some again (going to another and almost equally foolish extreme) ignore the coarse and comic in mediaevalism; and praise the pointed arch only for its
utter purity and simplicity, as of a saint with his hands joined in prayer. Here, again, the uniqueness is missed. There are Renaissance things (such as the ethereal silvery drawings of Raphael), there are even pagan things (such as the Praying Boy) which express as fresh and austere a piety. None of these explanations explain. And I never saw what was the real point about Gothic till I came into the town of Lincoln, and saw it behind a row of furniture-vans.

I did not know they were furniture-vans; at the first glance and in the smoky distance I thought they were a row of cottages. A low stone wall cut off the wheels, and the vans were somewhat of the same colour as the yellowish clay or stone of the buildings around them. I had come across that interminable Eastern plain which is like the open sea, and all the more so because the one small hill and tower of Lincoln stands up in it like a light-house. I had climbed the sharp, crooked streets up to this ecclesiastical citadel; just in front of me was a flourishing and richly coloured kitchen garden; beyond that was the low stone wall; beyond that the row of vans that looked like houses; and beyond and above that, straight and swift and dark, light as a flight of birds, and terrible as the Tower of Babel, Lincoln Cathedral seemed to rise out of human sight.

As I looked at it I asked myself the questions that I have asked here; what was the soul in all those stones? They were varied, but it was not variety; they were solemn, but it was not solemnity; they were farcical, but it was not farce. What is it in them that thrills and soothes a man of our blood and history, that is not there in an Egyptian pyramid or an Indian temple or a Chinese pagoda? All of a sudden the vans I had mistaken for cottages began to move away to the left. In the start this gave to my eye and mind I really fancied that the Cathedral was moving towards the right. The two huge towers seemed to start striding across the plain like the two legs of some giant whose body was covered with the clouds. Then I saw what it was.

The truth about Gothic is, first, that it is alive, and second, that it is on the march. It is the Church Militant; it is the only fighting architecture. All its spires are spears at rest; and all its stones are stones asleep in a catapult. In that instant of illusion, I could hear the arches clash like swords as they crossed each other. The mighty and numberless columns seemed to go swinging by like the huge feet of imperial elephants. The graven foliage wraithed and blew like banners going into battle; the silence was deafening with all the mingled noises of a military march; the great bell shook down, as the organ shook up its thunder. The thirsty-throated gargoyles shouted like trumpets from all the roofs and pinnacles as they passed; and from the lectern in the core of the cathedral the
eagle of the awful evangelist clashed his wings of brass.

And amid all the noises I seemed to hear the voice of a man shouting in the midst like one ordering regiments hither and thither in the fight; the voice of the great half-military master-builder; the architect of spears. I could almost fancy he wore armour while he made that church; and I knew indeed that, under a scriptural figure, he had borne in either hand the trowel and the sword.

I could imagine for the moment that the whole of that house of life had marched out of the sacred East, alive and interlocked, like an army. Some Eastern nomad had found it solid and silent in the red circle of the desert. He had slept by it as by a world-forgotten pyramid; and been woke at midnight by the wings of stone and brass, the tramping of the tall pillars, the trumpets of the waterspouts. On such a night every snake or sea-beast must have turned and twisted in every crypt or corner of the architecture. And the fiercely coloured saints marching eternally in the flamboyant windows would have carried their glorioles like torches across dark lands and distant seas; till the whole mountain of music and darkness and lights descended roaring on the lonely Lincoln hill. So for some hundred and sixty seconds I saw the battle-beauty of the Gothic; then the last furniture-van shifted itself away; and I saw only a church tower in a quiet English town, round which the English birds were floating.
THE MAN ON TOP

There is a fact at the root of all realities to-day which cannot be stated too simply. It is that the powers of this world are now not trusted simply because they are not trustworthy. This can be quite clearly seen and said without any reference to our several passions or partisanship. It does not follow that we think such a distrust a wise sentiment to express; it does not even follow that we think it a good sentiment to entertain. But such is the sentiment, simply because such is the fact. The distinction can be quite easily defined in an example. I do not think that private workers owe an indefinite loyalty to their employer. But I do think that patriotic soldiers owe a more or less indefinite loyalty to their leader in battle. But even if they ought to trust their captain, the fact remains that they often do not trust him; and the fact remains that he often is not fit to be trusted.

Most of the employers and many of the Socialists seem to have got a very muddled ethic about the basis of such loyalty; and perpetually try to put employers and officers upon the same disciplinary plane. I should have thought myself that the difference was alphabetical enough. It has nothing to do with the idealising of war or the materialising of trade; it is a distinction in the primary purpose. There might be much more elegance and poetry in a shop under William Morris than in a regiment under Lord Kitchener. But the difference is not in the persons or the atmosphere, but in the aim. The British Army does not exist in order to pay Lord Kitchener. William Morris’s shop, however artistic and philanthropic, did exist to pay William Morris. If it did not pay the shopkeeper it failed as a shop; but Lord Kitchener does not fail if he is underpaid, but only if he is defeated. The object of the Army is the safety of the nation from one particular class of perils; therefore, since all citizens owe loyalty to the nation, all citizens who are soldiers owe loyalty to the Army. But nobody has any obligation to make some particular rich man richer. A man is bound, of course, to consider the indirect results of his action in a strike; but he is bound to consider that in a swing, or a giddy-go-round, or a smoking concert; in his wildest holiday or his most private conversation. But direct responsibility like that of a soldier he has none. He need not aim solely and directly at the good of the shop; for the simple reason that the shop is not aiming solely and directly at the good of the nation. The shopman is, under decent restraints, let us hope, trying to get what he can out of the nation; the shop assistant may, under the
same decent restraints, get what he can out of the shopkeeper. All this distinction is very obvious. At least I should have thought so.

But the primary point which I mean is this. That even if we do take the military view of mercantile service, even if we do call the rebellious shop assistant “disloyal”—that leaves exactly where it was the question of whether he is, in point of fact, in a good or bad shop. Granted that all Mr. Poole’s employees are bound to follow for ever the cloven pennon of the Perfect Pair of Trousers, it is all the more true that the pennon may, in point of fact, become imperfect. Granted that all Barney Barnato’s workers ought to have followed him to death or glory, it is still a Perfectly legitimate question to ask which he was likely to lead them to. Granted that Dr. Sawyer’s boy ought to die for his master’s medicines, we may still hold an inquest to find out if he died of them. While we forbid the soldier to shoot the general, we may still wish the general were shot.

The fundamental fact of our time is the failure of the successful man. Somehow we have so arranged the rules of the game that the winners are worthless for other purposes; they can secure nothing except the prize. The very rich are neither aristocrats nor self-made men; they are accidents—or rather calamities. All revolutionary language is a generation behind the times in talking of their futility. A revolutionist would say (with perfect truth) that coal-owners know next to nothing about coal-mining. But we are past that point. Coal-owners know next to nothing about coal-owning. They do not develop and defend the nature of their own monopoly with any consistent and courageous policy, however wicked, as did the old aristocrats with the monopoly of land. They have not the virtues nor even the vices of tyrants; they have only their powers. It is the same with all the powerful of to-day; it is the same, for instance, with the high-placed and high-paid official. Not only is the judge not judicial, but the arbiter is not even arbitrary. The arbiter decides, not by some gust of justice or injustice in his soul like the old despot dooming men under a tree, but by the permanent climate of the class to which he happens to belong. The ancient wig of the judge is often indistinguishable from the old wig of the flunkey.

To judge about success or failure one must see things very simply; one must see them in masses, as the artist, half closing his eyes against details, sees light and shade. That is the only way in which a just judgment can be formed as to whether any departure or development, such as Islam or the American Republic, has been a benefit upon the whole. Seen close, such great erections always abound in ingenious detail and impressive solidity; it is only by seeing them afar off that one can tell if the Tower leans.
Now if we thus take in the whole tilt or posture of our modern state, we shall simply see this fact: that those classes who have on the whole governed, have on the whole failed. If you go to a factory you will see some very wonderful wheels going round; you will be told that the employer often comes there early in the morning; that he has great organising power; that if he works over the colossal accumulation of wealth he also works over its wise distribution. All this may be true of many employers, and it is practically said of all.

But if we shade our eyes from all this dazzle of detail; if we simply ask what has been the main feature, the upshot, the final fruit of the capitalist system, there is no doubt about the answer. The special and solid result of the reign of the employers has been—unemployment. Unemployment not only increasing, but becoming at last the very pivot upon which the whole process turns.

Or, again, if you visit the villages that depend on one of the great squires, you will hear praises, often just, of the landlord’s good sense or good nature; you will hear of whole systems of pensions or of care for the sick, like those of a small and separate nation; you will see much cleanliness, order, and business habits in the offices and accounts of the estate. But if you ask again what has been the upshot, what has been the actual result of the reign of landlords, again the answer is plain. At the end of the reign of landlords men will not live on the land. The practical effect of having landlords is not having tenants. The practical effect of having employers is that men are not employed. The unrest of the populace is therefore more than a murmur against tyranny; it is against a sort of treason. It is the suspicion that even at the top of the tree, even in the seats of the mighty, our very success is unsuccessful.
THE OTHER KIND OF MAN

There are some who are conciliated by Conciliation Boards. There are some who, when they hear of Royal Commissions, breathe again—or snore again. There are those who look forward to Compulsory Arbitration Courts as to the islands of the blest. These men do not understand the day that they look upon or the sights that their eyes have seen.

The almost sacramental idea of representation, by which the few may incarnate the many, arose in the Middle Ages, and has done great things for justice and liberty. It has had its real hours of triumph, as when the States General met to renew France’s youth like the eagle’s; or when all the virtues of the Republic fought and ruled in the figure of Washington. It is not having one of its hours of triumph now. The real democratic unrest at this moment is not an extension of the representative process, but rather a revolt against it. It is no good giving those now in revolt more boards and committees and compulsory regulations. It is against these very things that they are revolting. Men are not only rising against their oppressors, but against their representatives or, as they would say, their misrepresentatives. The inner and actual spirit of workaday England is coming out not in applause, but in anger, as a god who should come out of his tabernacle to rebuke and confound his priests.

There is a certain kind of man whom we see many times in a day, but whom we do not, in general, bother very much about. He is the kind of man of whom his wife says that a better husband when he’s sober you couldn’t have. She sometimes adds that he never is sober; but this is in anger and exaggeration. Really he drinks much less and works much more than the modern legend supposes. But it is quite true that he has not the horror of bodily outbreak, natural to the classes that contain ladies; and it is quite true that he never has that alert and inventive sort of industry natural to the classes from which men can climb into great wealth. He has grown, partly by necessity, but partly also by temper, accustomed to have dirty clothes and dirty hands normally and without discomfort. He regards cleanliness as a kind of separate and special costume; to be put on for great festivals. He has several really curious characteristics, which would attract the eyes of sociologists, if they had any eyes. For instance, his vocabulary is coarse and abusive, in marked contrast to his actual spirit, which is generally patient and civil. He has an odd way of using certain words of really horrible meaning, but using them quite innocently and without the most distant
taint of the evils to which they allude. He is rather sentimental; and, like most sentimental people, not devoid of snobbishness. At the same time, he believes the ordinary manly commonplaces of freedom and fraternity as he believes most of the decent traditions of Christian men: he finds it very difficult to act according to them, but this difficulty is not confined to him. He has a strong and individual sense of humour, and not much power of corporate or militant action. He is not a Socialist. Finally, he bears no more resemblance to a Labour Member than he does to a City Alderman or a Die-Hard Duke. This is the Common Labourer of England; and it is he who is on the march at last.

See this man in your mind as you see him in the street, realise that it is his open mind we wish to influence or his empty stomach we wish to cure, and then consider seriously (if you can) the five men, including two of his own alleged oppressors, who were summoned as a Royal Commission to consider his claims when he or his sort went out on strike upon the railways. I knew nothing against, indeed I knew nothing about, any of the gentlemen then summoned, beyond a bare introduction to Mr. Henderson, whom I liked, but whose identity I was in no danger of confusing with that of a railway-porter. I do not think that any old gentleman, however absent-minded, would be likely on arriving at Euston, let us say, to hand his Gladstone-bag to Mr. Henderson or to attempt to reward that politician with twopence. Of the others I can only judge by the facts about their status as set forth in the public Press. The Chairman, Sir David Harrell, appeared to be an ex-official distinguished in (of all things in the world) the Irish Constabulary. I have no earthly reason to doubt that the Chairman meant to be fair; but I am not talking about what men mean to be, but about what they are. The police in Ireland are practically an army of occupation; a man serving in them or directing them is practically a soldier; and, of course, he must do his duty as such. But it seems truly extraordinary to select as one likely to sympathise with the democracy of England a man whose whole business in life it has been to govern against its will the democracy of Ireland. What should we say if Russian strikers were offered the sympathetic arbitration of the head of the Russian Police in Finland or Poland? And if we do not know that the whole civilised world sees Ireland with Poland as a typical oppressed nation, it is time we did. The Chairman, whatever his personal virtues, must be by instinct and habit akin to the capitalists in the dispute. Two more of the Commissioners actually were the capitalists in the dispute. Then came Mr. Henderson (pushing his trolley and cheerily crying, “By your leave.”), and then another less known gentleman who had “corresponded” with the Board of Trade, and had thus
gained some strange claim to represent the very poor.

Now people like this might quite possibly produce a rational enough report, and in this or that respect even improve things. Men of that kind are tolerably kind, tolerably patriotic, and tolerably business-like. But if any one supposes that men of that kind can conceivably quiet any real ‘quarrel with the Man of the Other Kind, the man whom I first described, it is frantic. The common worker is angry exactly because he has found out that all these boards consist of the same well-dressed Kind of Man, whether they are called Governmental or Capitalist. If any one hopes that he will reconcile the poor, I say, as I said at the beginning, that such a one has not looked on the light of day or dwelt in the land of the living.

But I do not criticise such a Commission except for one most practical and urgent purpose. It will be answered to me that the first Kind of Man of whom I spoke could not really be on boards and committees, as modern England is managed. His dirt, though necessary and honourable, would be offensive: his speech, though rich and figurative, would be almost incomprehensible. Let us grant, for the moment, that this is so. This Kind of Man, with his sooty hair or sanguinary adjectives, cannot be represented at our committees of arbitration. Therefore, the other Kind of Man, fairly prosperous, fairly plausible, at home at least with the middle class, capable at least of reaching and touching the upper class, he must remain the only Kind of Man for such councils.

Very well. If then, you give at any future time any kind of compulsory powers to such councils to prevent strikes, you will be driving the first Kind of Man to work for a particular master as much as if you drove him with a whip.
THE MEDIAEVAL VILLAIN

I see that there have been more attempts at the whitewashing of King John. But the gentleman who wrote has a further interest in the matter; for he believes that King John was innocent, not only on this point, but as a whole. He thinks King John has been very badly treated; though I am not sure whether he would attribute to that Plantagenet a saintly merit or merely a humdrum respectability.

I sympathise with the whitewashing of King John, merely because it is a protest against our waxwork style of history. Everybody is in a particular attitude, with particular moral attributes; Rufus is always hunting and Coeur-de-Lion always crusading; Henry VIII always marrying, and Charles I always having his head cut off; Alfred rapidly and in rotation making his people’s clocks and spoiling their cakes; and King John pulling out Jews’ teeth with the celerity and industry of an American dentist. Anything is good that shakes all this stiff simplification, and makes us remember that these men were once alive; that is, mixed, free, flippant, and inconsistent. It gives the mind a healthy kick to know that Alfred had fits, that Charles I prevented enclosures, that Rufus was really interested in architecture, that Henry VIII was really interested in theology.

And as these scraps of reality can startle us into more solid imagination of events, so can even errors and exaggerations if they are on the right side. It does some good to call Alfred a prig, Charles I a Puritan, and John a jolly good fellow; if this makes us feel that they were people whom we might have liked or disliked. I do not myself think that John was a nice gentleman; but for all that the popular picture of him is all wrong. Whether he had any generous qualities or not, he had what commonly makes them possible, dare-devil courage, for instance, and hotheaded decision. But, above all, he had a morality which he broke, but which we misunderstand.

The mediaeval mind turned centrally upon the pivot of Free Will. In their social system the mediaevals were too much PARTI-PER-PALE, as their heralds would say, too rigidly cut up by fences and quarterings of guild or degree. But in their moral philosophy they always thought of man as standing free and doubtful at the cross-roads in a forest. While they clad and bound the body and (to some extent) the mind too stiffly and quaintly for our taste, they had a much stronger sense than we have of the freedom of the soul. For them the soul always hung
poised like an eagle in the heavens of liberty. Many of the things that strike a modern as most fantastic came from their keen sense of the power of choice.

For instance, the greatest of the Schoolmen devotes folios to the minute description of what the world would have been like if Adam had refused the apple; what kings, laws, babies, animals, planets would have been in an unfallen world. So intensely does he feel that Adam might have decided the other way that he sees a complete and complex vision of another world, a world that now can never be.

This sense of the stream of life in a man that may turn either way can be felt through all their popular ethics in legend, chronicle, and ballad. It is a feeling which has been weakened among us by two heavy intellectual forces. The Calvinism of the seventeenth century and the physical science of the nineteenth, whatever other truths they may have taught, have darkened this liberty with a sense of doom. We think of bad men as something like black men, a separate and incurable kind of people. The Byronic spirit was really a sort of operatic Calvinism. It brought the villain upon the stage; the lost soul; the modern version of King John. But the contemporaries of King John did not feel like that about him, even when they detested him. They instinctively felt him to be a man of mixed passions like themselves, who was allowing his evil passions to have much too good a time of it. They might have spoken of him as a man in considerable danger of going to hell; but they would have not talked of him as if he had come from there. In the ballads of Percy or Robin Hood it frequently happens that the King comes upon the scene, and his ultimate decision makes the climax of the tale. But we do not feel, as we do in the Byronic or modern romance, that there is a definite stage direction “Enter Tyrant.” Nor do we behold a deus ex machina who is certain to do all that is mild and just. The King in the ballad is in a state of virile indecision. Sometimes he will pass from a towering passion to the most sweeping magnanimity and friendliness; sometimes he will begin an act of vengeance and be turned from it by a jest. Yet this august levity is not moral indifference; it is moral freedom. It is the strong sense in the writer that the King, being the type of man with power, will probably sometimes use it badly and sometimes well. In this sense John is certainly misrepresented, for he is pictured as something that none of his own friends or enemies saw. In that sense he was certainly not so black as he is painted, for he lived in a world where every one was piebald.

King John would be represented in a modern play or novel as a kind of degenerate; a shifty-eyed moral maniac with a twist in his soul’s backbone and
green blood in his veins. The mediaevals were quite capable of boiling him in melted lead, but they would have been quite incapable of despairing of his soul in the modern fashion. A striking a fortiori case is that of the strange mediaeval legend of Robert the Devil. Robert was represented as a monstrous birth sent to an embittered woman actually in answer to prayers to Satan, and his earlier actions are simply those of the infernal fire let loose upon earth. Yet though he can be called almost literally a child of hell, yet the climax of the story is his repentance at Rome and his great reparation. That is the paradox of mediaeval morals: as it must appear to the moderns. We must try to conceive a race of men who hated John, and sought his blood, and believed every abomination about him, who would have been quite capable of assassinating or torturing him in the extremity of their anger. And yet we must admit that they would not really have been fundamentally surprised if he had shaved his head in humiliation, given all his goods to the poor, embraced the lepers in a lazar-house, and been canonised as a saint in heaven. So strongly did they hold that the pivot of Will should turn freely, which now is rusted, and sticks.

For we, whatever our political opinions, certainly never think of our public men like that. If we hold the opinion that Mr. Lloyd George is a noble tribune of the populace and protector of the poor, we do not admit that he can ever have paltered with the truth or bargained with the powerful. If we hold the equally idiotic opinion that he is a red and rabid Socialist, maddening mobs into mutiny and theft, then we expect him to go on maddening them—and us. We do not expect him, let us say, suddenly to go into a monastery. We have lost the idea of repentance; especially in public things; that is why we cannot really get rid of our great national abuses of economic tyranny and aristocratic avarice. Progress in the modern sense is a very dismal drudge; and mostly consists of being moved on by the police. We move on because we are not allowed to move back. But the really ragged prophets, the real revolutionists who held high language in the palaces of kings, they did not confine themselves to saying, “Onward, Christian soldiers,” still less, “Onward, Futurist soldiers”; what they said to high emperors and to whole empires was, “Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?”
THE DIVINE DETECTIVE

Every person of sound education enjoys detective stories, and there are even several points on which they have a hearty superiority to most modern books. A detective story generally describes six living men discussing how it is that a man is dead. A modern philosophic story generally describes six dead men discussing how any man can possibly be alive. But those who have enjoyed the roman policier must have noted one thing, that when the murderer is caught he is hardly ever hanged. “That,” says Sherlock Holmes, “is the advantage of being a private detective”; after he has caught he can set free. The Christian Church can best be defined as an enormous private detective, correcting that official detective—the State. This, indeed, is one of the injustices done to historic Christianity; injustices which arise from looking at complex exceptions and not at the large and simple fact. We are constantly being told that theologians used racks and thumbscrews, and so they did. Theologians used racks and thumbscrews just as they used thimbles and three-legged stools, because everybody else used them. Christianity no more created the mediaeval tortures than it did the Chinese tortures; it inherited them from any empire as heathen as the Chinese.

The Church did, in an evil hour, consent to imitate the commonwealth and employ cruelty. But if we open our eyes and take in the whole picture, if we look at the general shape and colour of the thing, the real difference between the Church and the State is huge and plain. The State, in all lands and ages, has created a machinery of punishment, more bloody and brutal in some places than others, but bloody and brutal everywhere. The Church is the only institution that ever attempted to create a machinery of pardon. The Church is the only thing that ever attempted by system to pursue and discover crimes, not in order to avenge, but in order to forgive them. The stake and rack were merely the weaknesses of the religion; its snobberies, its surrenders to the world. Its speciality—or, if you like, its oddity—was this merciless mercy; the unrelenting sleuthhound who seeks to save and not slay.

I can best illustrate what I mean by referring to two popular plays on somewhat parallel topics, which have been successful here and in America. The Passing of the Third Floor Back is a humane and reverent experiment, dealing with the influence of one unknown but divine figure as he passes through a group of Squalid characters. I have no desire to make cheap fun of the extremely abrupt conversions of all these people; that is a point of art, not of morals; and,
after all, many conversions have been abrupt. This saviour’s method of making people good is to tell them how good they are already; and in the case of suicidal outcasts, whose moral backs are broken, and who are soaked with sincere self-contempt, I can imagine that this might be quite the right way. I should not deliver this message to authors or members of Parliament, because they would so heartily agree with it.

Still, it is not altogether here that I differ from the moral of Mr. Jerome’s play. I differ vitally from his story because it is not a detective story. There is in it none of this great Christian idea of tearing their evil out of men; it lacks the realism of the saints. Redemption should bring truth as well as peace; and truth is a fine thing, though the materialists did go mad about it. Things must be faced, even in order to be forgiven; the great objection to “letting sleeping dogs lie” is that they lie in more senses than one. But in Mr. Jerome’s Passing of the Third Floor Back the redeemer is not a divine detective, pitiless in his resolve to know and pardon. Rather he is a sort of divine dupe, who does not pardon at all, because he does not see anything that is going on. It may, or may not, be true to say, “Tout comprendre est tout pardonner.” But it is much more evidently true to say, “Rien comprendre est rien Pardonner,” and the “Third Floor Back” does not seem to comprehend anything. He might, after all, be a quite selfish sentimentalist, who found it comforting to think well of his neighbours. There is nothing very heroic in loving after you have been deceived. The heroic business is to love after you have been undeceived.

When I saw this play it was natural to compare it with another play which I had not seen, but which I have read in its printed version. I mean Mr. Rann Kennedy’s Servant in the House, the success of which sprawls over so many of the American newspapers. This also is concerned with a dim, yet evidently divine, figure changing the destinies of a whole group of persons. It is a better play structurally than the other; in fact, it is a very fine play indeed; but there is nothing aesthetic or fastidious about it. It is as much or more than the other sensational, democratic, and (I use the word in a sound and good sense) Salvationist.

But the difference lies precisely in this—that the Christ of Mr. Kennedy’s play insists on really knowing all the souls that he loves; he declines to conquer by a kind of supernatural stupidity. He pardons evil, but he will not ignore it. In other words, he is a Christian, and not a Christian Scientist. The distinction doubtless is partly explained by the problems severally selected. Mr. Jerome practically supposes Christ to be trying to save disreputable people; and that, of course, is
naturally a simple business. Mr. Kennedy supposes Him to be trying to save the reputable people, which is a much larger affair. The chief characters in The Servant in the House are a popular and strenuous vicar, universally respected, and his fashionable and forcible wife. It would have been no good to tell these people they had some good in them—for that was what they were telling themselves all day long. They had to be reminded that they had some bad in them—instinctive idolatries and silent treasons which they always tried to forget. It is in connection with these crimes of wealth and culture that we face the real problem of positive evil. The whole of Mr. Blatchford’s controversy about sin was vitiated throughout by one’s consciousness that whenever he wrote the word “sinner” he thought of a man in rags. But here, again, we can find truth merely by referring to vulgar literature—its unfailing fountain. Whoever read a detective story about poor people? The poor have crimes; but the poor have no secrets. And it is because the proud have secrets that they need to be detected before they are forgiven.
THE ELF OF JAPAN

There are things in this world of which I can say seriously that I love them but I do not like them. The point is not merely verbal, but psychologically quite valid. Cats are the first things that occur to me as examples of the principle. Cats are so beautiful that a creature from another star might fall in love with them, and so incalculable that he might kill them. Some of my friends take quite a high moral line about cats. Some, like Mr. Titterton, I think, admire a cat for its moral independence and readiness to scratch anybody “if he does not behave himself.” Others, like Mr. Belloe, regard the cat as cruel and secret, a fit friend for witches; one who will devour everything, except, indeed, poisoned food, “so utterly lacking is it in Christian simplicity and humility.” For my part, I have neither of these feelings. I admire cats as I admire catkins; those little fluffy things that hang on trees. They are both pretty and both furry, and both declare the glory of God. And this abstract exultation in all living things is truly to be called Love; for it is a higher feeling than mere affectional convenience; it is a vision. It is heroic, and even saintly, in this: that it asks for nothing in return. I love all the eats in the street as St. Francis of Assisi loved all the birds in the wood or all the fishes in the sea; not so much, of course, but then I am not a saint. But he did not wish to bridle a bird and ride on its back, as one bridles and rides on a horse. He did not wish to put a collar round a fish’s neck, marked with the name “Francis,” and the address “Assisi”—as one does with a dog. He did not wish them to belong to him or himself to belong to them; in fact, it would be a very awkward experience to belong to a lot of fishes. But a man does belong to his dog, in another but an equally real sense with that in which the dog belongs to him. The two bonds of obedience and responsibility vary very much with the dogs and the men; but they are both bonds. In other words, a man does not merely love a dog; as he might (in a mystical moment) love any sparrow that perched on his windowsill or any rabbit that ran across his path. A man likes a dog; and that is a serious matter.

To me, unfortunately perhaps (for I speak merely of individual taste), a cat is a wild animal. A cat is Nature personified. Like Nature, it is so mysterious that one cannot quite repose even in its beauty. But like Nature again, it is so beautiful that one cannot believe that it is really cruel. Perhaps it isn’t; and there again it is like Nature. Men of old time worshipped cats as they worshipped crocodiles; and those magnificent old mystics knew what they were about. The
moment in which one really loves cats is the same as that in which one (moderately and within reason) loves crocodiles. It is that divine instant when a man feels himself—no, not absorbed into the unity of all things (a loathsome fancy)—but delighting in the difference of all things. At the moment when a man really knows he is a man he will feel, however faintly, a kind of fairy-tale pleasure in the fact that a crocodile is a crocodile. All the more will he exult in the things that are more evidently beautiful than crocodiles, such as flowers and birds and eats—which are more beautiful than either. But it does not follow that he will wish to pick all the flowers or to cage all the birds or to own all the cats.

No one who still believes in democracy and the rights of man will admit that any division between men and men can be anything but a fanciful analogy to the division between men and animals. But in the sphere of such fanciful analogy there are even human beings whom I feel to be like eats in this respect: that I can love them without liking them. I feel it about certain quaint and alien societies, especially about the Japanese. The exquisite old Japanese draughtsmanship (of which we shall see no more, now Japan has gone in for Progress and Imperialism) had a quality that was infinitely attractive and intangible. Japanese pictures were really rather like pictures made by cats. They were full of feathery softness and of sudden and spirited scratches. If any one will wander in some gallery fortunate enough to have a fine collection of those slight water-colour sketches on rice paper which come from the remote East, he will observe many elements in them which a fanciful person might consider feline. There is, for instance, that odd enjoyment of the tops of trees; those airy traceries of forks and fading twigs, up to which certainly no artist, but only a cat could climb. There is that elfish love of the full moon, as large and lucid as a Chinese lantern, hung in these tenuous branches. That moon is so large and luminous that one can imagine a hundred cats howling under it. Then there is the exhaustive treatment of the anatomy of birds and fish; subjects in which cats are said to be interested. Then there is the slanting cat-like eye of all these Eastern gods and men—but this is getting altogether too coincident. We shall have another racial theory in no time (beginning “Are the Japs Cats?”), and though I shall not believe in my theory, somebody else might. There are people among my esteemed correspondents who might believe anything. It is enough for me to say here that in this small respect Japs affect me like cats. I mean that I love them. I love their quaint and native poetry, their instinct of easy civilisation, their unique unreplaceable art, the testimony they bear to the bustling, irrepressible activities of nature and man. If I were a real mystic looking down on them from a real
mountain, I am sure I should love them more even than the strong winged and unwearied birds or the fruitful, ever multiplying fish. But, as for liking them, as one likes a dog—that is quite another matter. That would mean trusting them.

In the old English and Scotch ballads the fairies are regarded very much in the way that I feel inclined to regard Japs and cats. They are not specially spoken of as evil; they are enjoyed as witching and wonderful; but they are not trusted as good. You do not say the wrong words or give the wrong gifts to them; and there is a curious silence about what would happen to you if you did. Now to me, Japan, the Japan of Art, was always a fairyland. What trees as gay as flowers and peaks as white as wedding cakes; what lanterns as large as houses and houses as frail as lanterns! . . . but . . . but . . . the missionary explained (I read in the paper) that the assertion and denial about the Japanese use of torture was a mere matter of verbal translation. “The Japanese would not call twisting the thumbs back ‘torture.’”
THE CHARTERED LIBERTINE

I find myself in agreement with Mr. Robert Lynd for his most just remark in connection with the Malatesta case, that the police are becoming a peril to society. I have no attraction to that sort of atheist asceticism to which the purer types of Anarchism tend; but both an atheist and an ascetic are better men than a spy; and it is ignominious to see one’s country thus losing her special point of honour about asylum and liberty. It will be quite a new departure if we begin to protect and whitewash foreign policemen. I always understood it was only English policemen who were absolutely spotless. A good many of us, however, have begun to feel with Mr. Lynd, and on all sides authorities and officials are being questioned. But there is one most graphic and extraordinary fact, which it did not lie in Mr. Lynd’s way to touch upon, but which somebody really must seize and emphasise. It is this: that at the very time when we are all beginning to doubt these authorities, we are letting laws pass to increase their most capricious powers. All our commissions, petitions, and letters to the papers are asking whether these authorities can give an account of their stewardship. And at the same moment all our laws are decreeing that they shall not give any account of their stewardship, but shall become yet more irresponsible stewards. Bills like the FeebleMinded Bill and the Inebriate Bill (very appropriate names for them) actually arm with scorpions the hand that has chastised the Malatestas and Maleckas with whips. The inspector, the doctor, the police sergeant, the well-paid person who writes certificates and “passes” this, that, or the other; this sort of man is being trusted with more authority, apparently because he is being doubted with more reason. In one room we are asking why the Government and the great experts between them cannot sail a ship. In another room we are deciding that the Government and experts shall be allowed, without trial or discussion, to immure any one’s body, damn any one’s soul, and dispose of unborn generations with the levity of a pagan god. We are putting the official on the throne while he is still in the dock.

The mere meaning of words is now strangely forgotten and falsified; as when people talk of an author’s “message,” without thinking whom it is from; and I have noted in these connections the strange misuse of another word. It is the excellent mediaeval word “charter.” I remember the Act that sought to save gutter-boys from cigarettes was called “The Children’s Charter.” Similarly the Act which seeks to lock up as lunatics people who are not lunatics was actually
called a “charter” of the feebleminded. Now this terminology is insanely wrong, even if the Bills are right. Even were they right in theory they would be applied only to the poor, like many better rules about education and cruelty. A woman was lately punished for cruelty because her children were not washed when it was proved that she had no water. From that it will be an easy step in Advanced Thought to punishing a man for wine-bibbing when it is proved that he had no wine. Riots in right reason widen down the ages. And when we have begun by shutting up a confessedly kind person for cruelty, we may yet come to shutting up Mr. Tom Mann for feeblemindedness.

But even if such laws do good to children or idiots, it is wrong to use the word “charter.” A charter does not mean a thing that does good to people. It means a thing that grants people more rights and liberties. It may be a good thing for gutter-boys to be deprived of their cigarettes: it might be a good thing for aldermen to be deprived of their cigars. But I think the Goldsmiths’ Company would be very much surprised if the King granted them a new charter (in place of their mediaeval charter), and it only meant that policemen might pull the cigars out of their mouths. It may be a good thing that all drunkards should be locked up: and many acute statesmen (King John, for instance) would certainly have thought it a good thing if all aristocrats could be locked up. But even that somewhat cynical prince would scarcely have granted to the barons a thing called “the Great Charter” and then locked them all up on the strength of it. If he had, this interpretation of the word “charter” would have struck the barons with considerable surprise. I doubt if their narrow mediaeval minds could have taken it in.

The roots of the real England are in the early Middle Ages, and no Englishman will ever understand his own language (or even his own conscience) till he understands them. And he will never understand them till he understands this word “charter.” I will attempt in a moment to state in older, more suitable terms, what a charter was. In modern, practical, and political terms, it is quite easy to state what a charter was. A charter was the thing that the railway workers wanted last Christmas and did not get; and apparently will never get. It is called in the current jargon “recognition”; the acknowledgment in so many words by society of the immunities or freedoms of a certain set of men. If there had been railways in the Middle Ages there would probably have been a railwaymen’s guild; and it would have had a charter from the King, defining their rights. A charter is the expression of an idea still true and then almost universal: that authority is necessary for nothing so much as for the granting of liberties. Like
everything mediaeval, it ramified back to a root in religion; and was a sort of small copy of the Christian idea of man’s creation. Man was free, not because there was no God, but because it needed a God to set him free. By authority he was free. By authority the craftsmen of the guilds were free. Many other great philosophers took and take the other view: the Lucretian pagans, the Moslem fatalists, the modern monists and determinists, all roughly confine themselves to saying that God gave man a law. The mediaeval Christian insisted that God gave man a charter. Modern feeling may not sympathise with its list of liberties, which included the liberty to be damned; but that has nothing to do with the fact that it was a gift of liberties and not of laws. This was mirrored, however dimly, in the whole system. There was a great deal of gross inequality; and in other aspects absolute equality was taken for granted. But the point is that equality and inequality were ranks—or rights. There were not only things one was forbidden to do; but things one was forbidden to forbid. A man was not only definitely responsible, but definitely irresponsible. The holidays of his soul were immovable feasts. All a charter really meant lingered alive in that poetic phrase that calls the wind a “chartered” libertine.

Lie awake at night and hear the wind blowing; hear it knock at every man’s door and shout down every man’s chimney. Feel how it takes liberties with everything, having taken primary liberty for itself; feel that the wind is always a vagabond and sometimes almost a housebreaker. But remember that in the days when free men had charters, they held that the wind itself was wild by authority; and was only free because it had a father.
THE CONTENTED MAN

The word content is not inspiring nowadays; rather it is irritating because it is dull. It prepares the mind for a little sermon in the style of the Vicar of Wakefield about how you and I should be satisfied with our countrified innocence and our simple village sports. The word, however, has two meanings, somewhat singularly connected; the “sweet content” of the poet and the “cubic content” of the mathematician. Some distinguish these by stressing the different syllables. Thus, it might happen to any of us, at some social juncture, to remark gaily, “Of the content of the King of the Cannibal Islands’ Stewpot I am content to be ignorant”; or “Not content with measuring the cubic content of my safe, you are stealing the spoons.” And there really is an analogy between the mathematical and the moral use of the term, for lack of the observation of which the latter has been much weakened and misused.

The preaching of contentment is in disrepute, well deserved in so far that the moral is really quite inapplicable to the anarchy and insane peril of our tall and toppling cities. Content suggests some kind of security; and it is not strange that our workers should often think about rising above their position, since they have so continually to think about sinking below it. The philanthropist who urges the poor to saving and simple pleasures deserves all the derision that he gets. To advise people to be content with what they have got may or may not be sound moral philosophy.

But to urge people to be content with what they haven’t got is a piece of impudence hard for even the English poor to pardon. But though the creed of content is unsuited to certain special riddles and wrongs, it remains true for the normal of mortal life. We speak of divine discontent; discontent may sometimes be a divine thing, but content must always be the human thing. It may be true that a particular man, in his relation to his master or his neighbour, to his country or his enemies, will do well to be fiercely unsatisfied or thirsting for an angry justice. But it is not true, no sane person can call it true, that man as a whole in his general attitude towards the world, in his posture towards death or green fields, towards the weather or the baby, will be wise to cultivate dissatisfaction. In a broad estimate of our earthly experience, the great truism on the tablet remains: he must not covet his neighbour’s ox nor his ass nor anything that is his. In highly complex and scientific civilisations he may sometimes find himself forced into an exceptional vigilance. But, then, in highly complex and scientific
But I wish to urge the case for cubic content; in which (even more than in moral content) I take a personal interest. Now, moral content has been undervalued and neglected because of its separation from the other meaning. It has become a negative rather than a positive thing. In some accounts of contentment it seems to be little more than a meek despair.

But this is not the true meaning of the term; it should stand for the idea of a positive and thorough appreciation of the content of anything; for feeling the substance and not merely the surface of experience. “Content” ought to mean in English, as it does in French, being pleased; placidly, perhaps, but still positively pleased. Being contented with bread and cheese ought not to mean not caring what you eat. It ought to mean caring for bread and cheese; handling and enjoying the cubic content of the bread and cheese and adding it to your own. Being content with an attic ought not to mean being unable to move from it and resigned to living in it. It ought to mean appreciating what there is to appreciate in such a position; such as the quaint and elvish slope of the ceiling or the sublime aerial view of the opposite chimney-pots. And in this sense contentment is a real and even an active virtue; it is not only affirmative, but creative. The poet in the attic does not forget the attic in poetic musings; he remembers whatever the attic has of poetry; he realises how high, how starry, how cool, how unadorned and simple—in short, how Attic is the attic.

True contentment is a thing as active as agriculture. It is the power of getting out of any situation all that there is in it. It is arduous and it is rare. The absence of this digestive talent is what makes so cold and incredible the tales of so many people who say they have been “through” things; when it is evident that they have come out on the other side quite unchanged. A man might have gone “through” a plum pudding as a bullet might go through a plum pudding; it depends on the size of the pudding—and the man. But the awful and sacred question is “Has the pudding been through him?” Has he tasted, appreciated, and absorbed the solid pudding, with its three dimensions and its three thousand tastes and smells? Can he offer himself to the eyes of men as one who has cubically conquered and contained a pudding?

In the same way we may ask of those who profess to have passed through trivial or tragic experiences whether they have absorbed the content of them; whether they licked up such living water as there was. It is a pertinent question in connection with many modern problems.

Thus the young genius says, “I have lived in my dreary and squalid village
before I found success in Paris or Vienna.” The sound philosopher will answer, “You have never lived in your village, or you would not call it dreary and squalid.”

Thus the Imperialist, the Colonial idealist (who commonly speaks and always thinks with a Yankee accent) will say, “I’ve been right away from these little muddy islands, and seen God’s great seas and prairies.” The sound philosopher will reply, “You have never been in these islands; you have never seen the weald of Sussex or the plain of Salisbury; otherwise you could never have called them either muddy or little.”

Thus the Suffragette will say, “I have passed through the paltry duties of pots and pans, the drudgery of the vulgar kitchen; but I have come out to intellectual liberty.” The sound philosopher will answer, “You have never passed through the kitchen, or you never would call it vulgar. Wiser and stronger women than you have really seen a poetry in pots and pans; naturally, because there is a poetry in them.” It is right for the village violinist to climb into fame in Paris or Vienna; it is right for the stray Englishman to climb across the high shoulder of the world; it is right for the woman to climb into whatever cathedrae or high places she can allow to her sexual dignity. But it is wrong that any of these climbers should kick the ladder by which they have climbed. But indeed these bitter people who record their experiences really record their lack of experiences. It is the countryman who has not succeeded in being a countryman who comes up to London. It is the clerk who has not succeeded in being a clerk who tries (on vegetarian principles) to be a countryman. And the woman with a past is generally a woman angry about the past she never had.

When you have really exhausted an experience you always reverence and love it. The two things that nearly all of us have thoroughly and really been through are childhood and youth. And though we would not have them back again on any account, we feel that they are both beautiful, because we have drunk them dry.
THE ANGRY AUTHOR: HIS FAREWELL

I have republished all these old articles of mine because they cover a very controversial period, in which I was in nearly all the controversies, whether I was visible there or no. And I wish to gather up into this last article a valedictory violence about all such things; and then pass to where, beyond these voices, there is peace—or in other words, to the writing of Penny Dreadfuls; a noble and much-needed work. But before I finally desert the illusions of rationalism for the actualities of romance, I should very much like to write one last roaring, raging book telling all the rationalists not to be so utterly irrational. The book would be simply a string of violent vetoes, like the Ten Commandments. I would call it “Don’ts for Dogmatists; or Things I am Tired Of.”

This book of intellectual etiquette, like most books of etiquette, would begin with superficial things; but there would be, I fancy, a wailing imprecation in the words that could not be called artificial; it might begin thus:—

(1) Don’t use a noun and then an adjective that crosses out the noun. An adjective qualifies, it cannot contradict. Don’t say, “Give me a patriotism that is free from all boundaries.” It is like saying, “Give me a pork pie with no pork in it.” Don’t say, “I look forward to that larger religion that shall have no special dogmas.” It is like saying, “I look forward to that larger quadruped who shall have no feet.” A quadruped means something with four feet; and a religion means something that commits a man to some doctrine about the universe. Don’t let the meek substantive be absolutely murdered by the joyful, exuberant adjective.

(2) Don’t say you are not going to say a thing, and then say it. This practice is very flourishing and successful with public speakers. The trick consists of first repudiating a certain view in unfavourable terms, and then repeating the same view in favourable terms. Perhaps the simplest form of it may be found in a landlord of my neighbourhood, who said to his tenants in an election speech, “Of course I’m not going to threaten you, but if this Budget passes the rents will go up.” The thing can be done in many forms besides this. “I am the last man to mention party politics; but when I see the Empire rent in pieces by irresponsible Radicals,” etc. “In this hall we welcome all creeds. We have no hostility against any honest belief; but only against that black priestcraft and superstition which can accept such a doctrine as,” etc. “I would not say one word that could ruffle our relations with Germany. But this I will say; that when I see ceaseless and
unscrupulous armament,” etc. Please don’t do it. Decide to make a remark or not to make a remark. But don’t fancy that you have somehow softened the saying of a thing by having just promised not to say it.

(3) Don’t use secondary words as primary words. “Happiness” (let us say) is a primary word. You know when you have the thing, and you jolly well know when you haven’t. “Progress” is a secondary word; it means the degree of one’s approach to happiness, or to some such solid ideal. But modern controversies constantly turn on asking, “Does Happiness help Progress?” Thus, I see in the New Age this week a letter from Mr. Egerton Swann, in which he warns the world against me and my friend Mr. Belloc, on the ground that our democracy is “spasmodic” (whatever that means); while our “reactionism is settled and permanent.” It never strikes Mr. Swann that democracy means something in itself; while “reactionism” means nothing—except in connection with democracy. You cannot react except from something. If Mr. Swann thinks I have ever reacted from the doctrine that the people should rule, I wish he would give me the reference.

(4) Don’t say, “There is no true creed; for each creed believes itself right and the others wrong.” Probably one of the creeds is right and the others are wrong. Diversity does show that most of the views must be wrong. It does not by the faintest logic show that they all must be wrong. I suppose there is no subject on which opinions differ with more desperate sincerity than about which horse will win the Derby. These are certainly solemn convictions; men risk ruin for them. The man who puts his shirt on Potosi must believe in that animal, and each of the other men putting their last garments upon other quadrupeds must believe in them quite as sincerely. They are all serious, and most of them are wrong. But one of them is right. One of the faiths is justified; one of the horses does win; not always even the dark horse which might stand for Agnosticism, but often the obvious and popular horse of Orthodoxy. Democracy has its occasional victories; and even the Favourite has been known to come in first. But the point here is that something comes in first. That there were many beliefs does not destroy the fact that there was one well-founded belief. I believe (merely upon authority) that the world is round. That there may be tribes who believe it to be triangular or oblong does not alter the fact that it is certainly some shape, and therefore not any other shape. Therefore I repeat, with the wail of imprecation, don’t say that the variety of creeds prevents you from accepting any creed. It is an unintelligent remark.

(5) Don’t (if any one calls your doctrine mad, which is likely enough), don’t
answer that madmen are only the minority and the sane only the majority. The sane are sane because they are the corporate substance of mankind; the insane are not a minority because they are not a mob. The man who thinks himself a man thinks the next man a man; he reckons his neighbour as himself. But the man who thinks he is a chicken does not try to look through the man who thinks he is glass. The man who thinks himself Jesus Christ does not quarrel with the man who thinks himself Rockefeller; as would certainly happen if the two had ever met. But madmen never meet. It is the only thing they cannot do. They can talk, they can inspire, they can fight, they can found religions; but they cannot meet. Maniacs can never be the majority; for the simple reason that they can never be even a minority. If two madmen had ever agreed they might have conquered the world.

(6) Don’t say that the idea of human equality is absurd, because some men are tall and some short, some clever and some stupid. At the height of the French Revolution it was noticed that Danton was tall and Murat short. In the wildest popular excitement of America it is known that Rockefeller is stupid and that Bryan is clever. The doctrine of human equality reposes upon this: That there is no man really clever who has not found that he is stupid. That there is no big man who has not felt small. Some men never feel small; but these are the few men who are.

(7) Don’t say (O don’t say) that Primitive Man knocked down a woman with a club and carried her away. Why on earth should he? Does the male sparrow knock down the female sparrow with a twig? Does the male giraffe knock down the female giraffe with a palm tree? Why should the male have had to use any violence at any time in order to make the female a female? Why should the woman roll herself in the mire lower than the sow or the she-bear; and profess to have been a slave where all these creatures were creators; where all these beasts were gods? Do not talk such bosh. I implore you, I supplicate you not to talk such bosh. Utterly and absolutely abolish all such bosh—and we may yet begin to discuss these public questions properly. But I fear my list of protests grows too long; and I know it could grow longer for ever. The reader must forgive my elongations and elaborations. I fancied for the moment that I was writing a book.
ALARMS AND DISCURSIONS

G. K. CHESTERTON
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

ALARMS AND DISCURSIONS

TABLE OF CONTENTS
INTRODUCTORY
ON GARGOYLES

I
II
III
THE SURRENDER OF A COCKNEY
THE NIGHTMARE
THE TELEGRAPH POLES
A DRAMA OF DOLLS
THE MAN AND HIS NEWSPAPER
THE APPETITE OF EARTH
SIMMONS AND THE SOCIAL TIE
CHEESE
THE RED TOWN
THE FURROWS
THE PHILOSOPHY OF SIGHT-SEEING
A CRIMINAL HEAD
THE WRATH OF THE ROSES
THE GOLD OF GLASTONBURY
THE FUTURISTS
DUKES
THE GLORY OF GREY
THE ANARCHIST
HOW I FOUND THE SUPERMAN
THE NEW HOUSE
THE WINGS OF STONE
THE THREE KINDS OF MEN
THE STEWARD OF THE CHILTERN HUNDREDS
THE FIELD OF BLOOD
THE STRANGENESS OF LUXURY
THE TRIUMPH OF THE DONKEY
THE WHEEL
FIVE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-FIVE
ETHANDUNE
THE FLAT FREAK
THE GARDEN OF THE SEA
THE SENTIMENTALIST
THE WHITE HORSES
THE LONG BOW
THE MODERN SCROOGE
THE HIGH PLAINS
THE CHORUS
A ROMANCE OF THE MARSHES
INTRODUCTORY

ON GARGOYLES

Alone at some distance from the wasting walls of a disused abbey I found half sunken in the grass the grey and goggle-eyed visage of one of those graven monsters that made the ornamental water-spouts in the cathedrals of the Middle Ages. It lay there, scoured by ancient rains or striped by recent fungus, but still looking like the head of some huge dragon slain by a primeval hero. And as I looked at it, I thought of the meaning of the grotesque, and passed into some symbolic reverie of the three great stages of art.

I

Once upon a time there lived upon an island a merry and innocent people, mostly shepherds and tillers of the earth. They were republicans, like all primitive and simple souls; they talked over their affairs under a tree, and the nearest approach they had to a personal ruler was a sort of priest or white witch who said their prayers for them. They worshipped the sun, not idolatrously, but as the golden crown of the god whom all such infants see almost as plainly as the sun.

Now this priest was told by his people to build a great tower, pointing to the sky in salutation of the Sun-god; and he pondered long and heavily before he picked his materials. For he was resolved to use nothing that was not almost as clear and exquisite as sunshine itself; he would use nothing that was not washed as white as the rain can wash the heavens, nothing that did not sparkle as spotlessly as that crown of God. He would have nothing grotesque or obscure; he would not have even anything emphatic or even anything mysterious. He would have all the arches as light as laughter and as candid as logic. He built the temple in three concentric courts, which were cooler and more exquisite in substance each than the other. For the outer wall was a hedge of white lilies, ranked so thick that a green stalk was hardly to be seen; and the wall within that was of crystal, which smashed the sun into a million stars. And the wall within that, which was the tower itself, was a tower of pure water, forced up in an everlasting fountain; and upon the very tip and crest of that foaming spire was one big and blazing diamond, which the water tossed up eternally and caught
again as a child catches a ball.

“Now,” said the priest, “I have made a tower which is a little worthy of the sun.”

II

But about this time the island was caught in a swarm of pirates; and the shepherds had to turn themselves into rude warriors and seamen; and at first they were utterly broken down in blood and shame; and the pirates might have taken the jewel flung up for ever from their sacred fount. And then, after years of horror and humiliation, they gained a little and began to conquer because they did not mind defeat. And the pride of the pirates went sick within them after a few unexpected foils; and at last the invasion rolled back into the empty seas and the island was delivered. And for some reason after this men began to talk quite differently about the temple and the sun. Some, indeed, said, “You must not touch the temple; it is classical; it is perfect, since it admits no imperfections.” But the others answered, “In that it differs from the sun, that shines on the evil and the good and on mud and monsters everywhere. The temple is of the noon; it is made of white marble clouds and sapphire sky. But the sun is not always of the noon. The sun dies daily, every night he is crucified in blood and fire.” Now the priest had taught and fought through all the war, and his hair had grown white, but his eyes had grown young. And he said, “I was wrong and they are right. The sun, the symbol of our father, gives life to all those earthly things that are full of ugliness and energy. All the exaggerations are right, if they exaggerate the right thing. Let us point to heaven with tusks and horns and fins and trunks and tails so long as they all point to heaven. The ugly animals praise God as much as the beautiful. The frog’s eyes stand out of his head because he is staring at heaven. The giraffe’s neck is long because he is stretching towards heaven. The donkey has ears to hear—let him hear.”

And under the new inspiration they planned a gorgeous cathedral in the Gothic manner, with all the animals of the earth crawling over it, and all the possible ugly things making up one common beauty, because they all appealed to the god. The columns of the temple were carved like the necks of giraffes; the dome was like an ugly tortoise; and the highest pinnacle was a monkey standing on his head with his tail pointing at the sun. And yet the whole was beautiful, because it was lifted up in one living and religious gesture as a man lifts his hands in prayer.
But this great plan was never properly completed. The people had brought up on great wagons the heavy tortoise roof and the huge necks of stone, and all the thousand and one oddities that made up that unity, the owls and the efts and the crocodiles and the kangaroos, which hideous by themselves might have been magnificent if reared in one definite proportion and dedicated to the sun. For this was Gothic, this was romantic, this was Christian art; this was the whole advance of Shakespeare upon Sophocles. And that symbol which was to crown it all, the ape upside down, was really Christian; for man is the ape upside down.

But the rich, who had grown riotous in the long peace, obstructed the thing, and in some squabble a stone struck the priest on the head and he lost his memory. He saw piled in front of him frogs and elephants, monkeys and giraffes, toadstools and sharks, all the ugly things of the universe which he had collected to do honour to God. But he forgot why he had collected them. He could not remember the design or the object. He piled them all wildly into one heap fifty feet high; and when he had done it all the rich and influential went into a passion of applause and cried, “This is real art! This is Realism! This is things as they really are!”

That, I fancy, is the only true origin of Realism. Realism is simply Romanticism that has lost its reason. This is so not merely in the sense of insanity but of suicide. It has lost its reason; that is its reason for existing. The old Greeks summoned godlike things to worship their god. The medieval Christians summoned all things to worship theirs, dwarfs and pelicans, monkeys and madmen. The modern realists summon all these million creatures to worship their god; and then have no god for them to worship. Paganism was in art a pure beauty; that was the dawn. Christianity was a beauty created by controlling a million monsters of ugliness; and that in my belief was the zenith and the noon. Modern art and science practically mean having the million monsters and being unable to control them; and I will venture to call that the disruption and the decay. The finest lengths of the Elgin marbles consist splendid houses going to the temple of a virgin. Christianity, with its gargoyles and grotesques, really amounted to saying this: that a donkey could go before all the horses of the world when it was really going to the temple. Romance means a holy donkey going to the temple. Realism means a lost donkey going nowhere.

The fragments of futile journalism or fleeting impression which are here collected are very like the wrecks and riven blocks that were piled in a heap
round my imaginary priest of the sun. They are very like that grey and gaping head of stone that I found overgrown with the grass. Yet I will venture to make even of these trivial fragments the high boast that I am a medievalist and not a modern. That is, I really have a notion of why I have collected all the nonsensical things there are. I have not the patience nor perhaps the constructive intelligence to state the connecting link between all these chaotic papers. But it could be stated. This row of shapeless and ungainly monsters which I now set before the reader does not consist of separate idols cut out capriciously in lonely valleys or various islands. These monsters are meant for the gargoyles of a definite cathedral. I have to carve the gargoyles, because I can carve nothing else; I leave to others the angels and the arches and the spires. But I am very sure of the style of the architecture, and of the consecration of the church.
THE SURRENDER OF A COCKNEY

Evert man, though he were born in the very belfry of Bow and spent his infancy climbing among chimneys, has waiting for him somewhere a country house which he has never seen; but which was built for him in the very shape of his soul. It stands patiently waiting to be found, knee-deep in orchards of Kent or mirrored in pools of Lincoln; and when the man sees it he remembers it, though he has never seen it before. Even I have been forced to confess this at last, who am a Cockney, if ever there was one, a Cockney not only on principle, but with savage pride. I have always maintained, quite seriously, that the Lord is not in the wind or thunder of the waste, but if anywhere in the still small voice of Fleet Street. I sincerely maintain that Nature-worship is more morally dangerous than the most vulgar man-worship of the cities; since it can easily be perverted into the worship of an impersonal mystery, carelessness, or cruelty. Thoreau would have been a jollier fellow if he had devoted himself to a greengrocer instead of to greens. Swinburne would have been a better moralist if he had worshipped a fishmonger instead of worshipping the sea. I prefer the philosophy of bricks and mortar to the philosophy of turnips. To call a man a turnip may be playful, but is seldom respectful. But when we wish to pay emphatic honour to a man, to praise the firmness of his nature, the squareness of his conduct, the strong humility with which he is interlocked with his equals in silent mutual support, then we invoke the nobler Cockney metaphor, and call him a brick.

But, despite all these theories, I have surrendered; I have struck my colours at sight; at a mere glimpse through the opening of a hedge. I shall come down to living in the country, like any common Socialist or Simple Lifer. I shall end my days in a village, in the character of the Village Idiot, and be a spectacle and a judgment to mankind. I have already learnt the rustic manner of leaning upon a gate; and I was thus gymnastically occupied at the moment when my eye caught the house that was made for me. It stood well back from the road, and was built of a good yellow brick; it was narrow for its height, like the tower of some Border robber; and over the front door was carved in large letters, “1908.” That last burst of sincerity, that superb scorn of antiquarian sentiment, overwhelmed me finally. I closed my eyes in a kind of ecstasy. My friend (who was helping me to lean on the gate) asked me with some curiosity what I was doing.

“My dear fellow,” I said, with emotion, “I am bidding farewell to forty-three hansom cabmen.”
“Well,” he said, “I suppose they would think this county rather outside the radius.”

“Oh, my friend,” I cried brokenly, “how beautiful London is! Why do they only write poetry about the country? I could turn every lyric cry into Cockney.

“My heart leaps up when I behold A sky-sign in the sky,’

‘as I observed in a volume which is too little read, founded on the older English poets. You never saw my ‘Golden Treasury Regilded; or, The Classics Made Cockney’—it contained some fine lines.

‘O Wild West End, thou breath of London’s being,’

‘or the reminiscence of Keats, beginning

‘City of smuts and mellow fogfulness.’;

“I have written many such lines on the beauty of London; yet I never realized that London was really beautiful till now. Do you ask me why? It is because I have left it for ever.”

“If you will take my advice,” said my friend, “you will humbly endeavour not to be a fool. What is the sense of this mad modern notion that every literary man must live in the country, with the pigs and the donkeys and the squires? Chaucer and Spenser and Milton and Dryden lived in London; Shakespeare and Dr. Johnson came to London because they had had quite enough of the country. And as for trumpery topical journalists like you, why, they would cut their throats in the country. You have confessed it yourself in your own last words. You hunger and thirst after the streets; you think London the finest place on the planet. And if by some miracle a Bayswater omnibus could come down this green country lane you would utter a yell of joy.”

Then a light burst upon my brain, and I turned upon him with terrible sternness.

“Why, miserable aesthete,” I said in a voice of thunder, “that is the true country spirit! That is how the real rustic feels. The real rustic does utter a yell of joy at the sight of a Bayswater omnibus. The real rustic does think London the finest place on the planet. In the few moments that I have stood by this stile, I have grown rooted here like an ancient tree; I have been here for ages. Petulant Suburban, I am the real rustic. I believe that the streets of London are paved with gold; and I mean to see it before I die.”

The evening breeze freshened among the little tossing trees of that lane, and the purple evening clouds piled up and darkened behind my Country Seat, the house that belonged to me, making, by contrast, its yellow bricks gleam like gold. At last my friend said: “To cut it short, then, you mean that you will live in
the country because you won’t like it. What on earth will you do here; dig up the
garden?”

“Dig!” I answered, in honourable scorn. “Dig! Do work at my Country Seat; no, thank you. When I find a Country Seat, I sit in it. And for your other objection, you are quite wrong. I do not dislike the country, but I like the town more. Therefore the art of happiness certainly suggests that I should live in the country and think about the town. Modern nature-worship is all upside down. Trees and fields ought to be the ordinary things; terraces and temples ought to be extraordinary. I am on the side of the man who lives in the country and wants to go to London. I abominate and abjure the man who lives in London and wants to go to the country; I do it with all the more heartiness because I am that sort of man myself. We must learn to love London again, as rustics love it. Therefore (I quote again from the great Cockney version of The Golden Treasury)—“‘Therefore, ye gas-pipes, ye asbestos? stoves, Forbode not any severing of our loves. I have relinquished but your earthly sight, To hold you dear in a more distant way. I’ll love the ‘buses lumbering through the wet, Even more than when I lightly tripped as they. The grimy colour of the London clay Is lovely yet, ’

“because I have found the house where I was really born; the tall and quiet house from which I can see London afar off, as the miracle of man that it is.”
THE NIGHTMARE

A sunset of copper and gold had just broken down and gone to pieces in the west, and grey colours were crawling over everything in earth and heaven; also a wind was growing, a wind that laid a cold finger upon flesh and spirit. The bushes at the back of my garden began to whisper like conspirators; and then to wave like wild hands in signal. I was trying to read by the last light that died on the lawn a long poem of the decadent period, a poem about the old gods of Babylon and Egypt, about their blazing and obscene temples, their cruel and colossal faces.

“Or didst thou love the God of Flies who plagued the Hebrews and was splashed With wine unto the waist, or Pasht who had green beryls for her eyes?”

I read this poem because I had to review it for the Daily News; still it was genuine poetry of its kind. It really gave out an atmosphere, a fragrant and suffocating smoke that seemed really to come from the Bondage of Egypt or the Burden of Tyre There is not much in common (thank God) between my garden with the grey-green English sky-line beyond it, and these mad visions of painted palaces huge, headless idols and monstrous solitudes of red or golden sand. Nevertheless (as I confessed to myself) I can fancy in such a stormy twilight some such smell of death and fear. The ruined sunset really looks like one of their ruined temples: a shattered heap of gold and green marble. A black flapping thing detaches itself from one of the sombre trees and flutters to another. I know not if it is owl or flittermouse; I could fancy it was a black cherub, an infernal cherub of darkness, not with the wings of a bird and the head of a baby, but with the head of a goblin and the wings of a bat. I think, if there were light enough, I could sit here and write some very creditable creepy tale, about how I went up the crooked road beyond the church and met Something—say a dog, a dog with one eye. Then I should meet a horse, perhaps, a horse without a rider, the horse also would have one eye. Then the inhuman silence would be broken; I should meet a man (need I say, a one-eyed man?) who would ask me the way to my own house. Or perhaps tell me that it was burnt to the ground. I could tell a very cosy little tale along some such lines. Or I might dream of climbing for ever the tall dark trees above me. They are so tall that I feel as if I should find at their tops the nests of the angels; but in this mood they would be dark and dreadful angels; angels of death.

Only, you see, this mood is all bosh. I do not believe in it in the least. That
one-eyed universe, with its one-eyed men and beasts, was only created with one universal wink. At the top of the tragic trees I should not find the Angel’s Nest. I should only find the Mare’s Nest; the dreamy and divine nest is not there. In the Mare’s Nest I shall discover that dim, enormous opalescent egg from which is hatched the Nightmare. For there is nothing so delightful as a nightmare—when you know it is a nightmare.

That is the essential. That is the stern condition laid upon all artists touching this luxury of fear. The terror must be fundamentally frivolous. Sanity may play with insanity; but insanity must not be allowed to play with sanity. Let such poets as the one I was reading in the garden, by all means, be free to imagine what outrageous deities and violent landscapes they like. By all means let them wander freely amid their opium pinnacles and perspectives. But these huge gods, these high cities, are toys; they must never for an instant be allowed to be anything else. Man, a gigantic child, must play with Babylon and Nineveh, with Isis and with Ashtaroth. By all means let him dream of the Bondage of Egypt, so long as he is free from it. By all means let him take up the Burden of Tyre, so long as he can take it lightly. But the old gods must be his dolls, not his idols. His central sanctities, his true possessions, should be Christian and simple. And just as a child would cherish most a wooden horse or a sword that is a mere cross of wood, so man, the great child, must cherish most the old plain things of poetry and piety; that horse of wood that was the epic end of Ilium, or that cross of wood that redeemed and conquered the world.

In one of Stevenson’s letters there is a characteristically humorous remark about the appalling impression produced on him in childhood by the beasts with many eyes in the Book of Revelations: “If that was heaven, what in the name of Davy Jones was hell like?” Now in sober truth there is a magnificent idea in these monsters of the Apocalypse. It is, I suppose, the idea that beings really more beautiful or more universal than we are might appear to us frightful and even confused. Especially they might seem to have senses at once more multiplex and more staring; an idea very imaginatively seized in the multitude of eyes. I like those monsters beneath the throne very much. But I like them beneath the throne. It is when one of them goes wandering in deserts and finds a throne for himself that evil faiths begin, and there is (literally) the devil to pay—to pay in dancing girls or human sacrifice. As long as those misshapen elemental powers are around the throne, remember that the thing that they worship is the likeness of the appearance of a man.

That is, I fancy, the true doctrine on the subject of Tales of Terror and such
things, which unless a man of letters do well and truly believe, without doubt he will end by blowing his brains out or by writing badly. Man, the central pillar of the world must be upright and straight; around him all the trees and beasts and elements and devils may crook and curl like smoke if they choose. All really imaginative literature is only the contrast between the weird curves of Nature and the straightness of the soul. Man may behold what ugliness he likes if he is sure that he will not worship it; but there are some so weak that they will worship a thing only because it is ugly. These must be chained to the beautiful. It is not always wrong even to go, like Dante, to the brink of the lowest promontory and look down at hell. It is when you look up at hell that a serious miscalculation has probably been made.

Therefore I see no wrong in riding with the Nightmare to-night; she whinnies to me from the rocking tree-tops and the roaring wind; I will catch her and ride her through the awful air. Woods and weeds are alike tugging at the roots in the rising tempest, as if all wished to fly with us over the moon, like that wild amorous cow whose child was the Moon-Calf. We will rise to that mad infinite where there is neither up nor down, the high topsy-turveydom of the heavens. I will answer the call of chaos and old night. I will ride on the Nightmare; but she shall not ride on me.
THE TELEGRAPH POLES

My friend and I were walking in one of those wastes of pine-wood which make inland seas of solitude in every part of Western Europe; which have the true terror of a desert, since they are uniform, and so one may lose one’s way in them. Stiff, straight, and similar, stood up all around us the pines of the wood, like the pikes of a silent mutiny. There is a truth in talking of the variety of Nature; but I think that Nature often shows her chief strangeness in her sameness. There is a weird rhythm in this very repetition; it is as if the earth were resolved to repeat a single shape until the shape shall turn terrible.

Have you ever tried the experiment of saying some plain word, such as “dog,” thirty times? By the thirtieth time it has become a word like “snark” or “pobble.” It does not become tame, it becomes wild, by repetition. In the end a dog walks about as startling and undecipherable as Leviathan or Croquemitaine.

It may be that this explains the repetitions in Nature, it may be for this reason that there are so many million leaves and pebbles. Perhaps they are not repeated so that they may grow familiar. Perhaps they are repeated only in the hope that they may at last grow unfamiliar. Perhaps a man is not startled at the first cat he sees, but jumps into the air with surprise at the seventy-ninth cat. Perhaps he has to pass through thousands of pine trees before he finds the one that is really a pine tree. However this may be, there is something singularly thrilling, even something urgent and intolerant, about the endless forest repetitions; there is the hint of something like madness in that musical monotony of the pines.

I said something like this to my friend; and he answered with sardonic truth, “Ah, you wait till we come to a telegraph post.”

My friend was right, as he occasionally is in our discussions, especially upon points of fact. We had crossed the pine forest by one of its paths which happened to follow the wires of the provincial telegraphy; and though the poles occurred at long intervals they made a difference when they came. The instant we came to the straight pole we could see that the pines were not really straight. It was like a hundred straight lines drawn with schoolboy pencils all brought to judgment suddenly by one straight line drawn with a ruler. All the amateur lines seemed to reel to right and left. A moment before I could have sworn they stood as straight as lances; now I could see them curve and waver everywhere, like scimitars and yataghans. Compared with the telegraph post the pines were crooked—and alive. That lonely vertical rod at once deformed and enfranchised the forest. It tangled
it all together and yet made it free, like any grotesque undergrowth of oak or holly.

“Yes,” said my gloomy friend, answering my thoughts. “You don’t know what a wicked shameful thing straightness is if you think these trees are straight. You never will know till your precious intellectual civilization builds a forty-mile forest of telegraph poles.”

We had started walking from our temporary home later in the day than we intended; and the long afternoon was already lengthening itself out into a yellow evening when we came out of the forest on to the hills above a strange town or village, of which the lights had already begun to glitter in the darkening valley. The change had already happened which is the test and definition of evening. I mean that while the sky seemed still as bright, the earth was growing blacker against it, especially at the edges, the hills and the pine-tops. This brought out yet more clearly the owlish secrecy of pine-woods; and my friend cast a regretful glance at them as he came out under the sky. Then he turned to the view in front; and, as it happened, one of the telegraph posts stood up in front of him in the last sunlight. It was no longer crossed and softened by the more delicate lines of pine wood; it stood up ugly, arbitrary, and angular as any crude figure in geometry.

My friend stopped, pointing his stick at it, and all his anarchic philosophy rushed to his lips.

“Demon,” he said to me briefly, “behold your work. That palace of proud trees behind us is what the world was before you civilized men, Christians or democrats or the rest, came to make it dull with your dreary rules of morals and equality. In the silent fight of that forest, tree fights speechless against tree, branch against branch. And the upshot of that dumb battle is inequality—and beauty. Now lift up your eyes and look at equality and ugliness. See how regularly the white buttons are arranged on that black stick, and defend your dogmas if you dare.”

“Is that telegraph post so much a symbol of democracy?” I asked. “I fancy that while three men have made the telegraph to get dividends, about a thousand men have preserved the forest to cut wood. But if the telegraph pole is hideous (as I admit) it is not due to doctrine but rather to commercial anarchy. If any one had a doctrine about a telegraph pole it might be carved in ivory and decked with gold. Modern things are ugly, because modern men are careless, not because they are careful.”

“No,” answered my friend with his eye on the end of a splendid and sprawling sunset, “there is something intrinsically deadening about the very idea of a
doctrine. A straight line is always ugly. Beauty is always crooked. These rigid posts at regular intervals are ugly because they are carrying across the world the real message of democracy.”

“At this moment,” I answered, “they are probably carrying across the world the message, ‘Buy Bulgarian Rails.’ They are probably the prompt communication between some two of the wealthiest and wickedest of His children with whom God has ever had patience. No; these telegraph poles are ugly and detestable, they are inhuman and indecent. But their baseness lies in their privacy, not in their publicity. That black stick with white buttons is not the creation of the soul of a multitude. It is the mad creation of the souls of two millionaires.”

“At least you have to explain,” answered my friend gravely, “how it is that the hard democratic doctrine and the hard telegraphic outline have appeared together; you have . . . But bless my soul, we must be getting home. I had no idea it was so late. Let me see, I think this is our way through the wood. Come, let us both curse the telegraph post for entirely different reasons and get home before it is dark.”

We did not get home before it was dark. For one reason or another we had underestimated the swiftness of twilight and the suddenness of night, especially in the threading of thick woods. When my friend, after the first five minutes’ march, had fallen over a log, and I, ten minutes after, had stuck nearly to the knees in mire, we began to have some suspicion of our direction. At last my friend said, in a low, husky voice:

“I’m afraid we’re on the wrong path. It’s pitch dark.”

“I thought we went the right way,” I said, tentatively.

“Well,” he said; and then, after a long pause, “I can’t see any telegraph poles. I’ve been looking for them.”

“So have I,” I said. “They’re so straight.”

We groped away for about two hours of darkness in the thick of the fringe of trees which seemed to dance round us in derision. Here and there, however, it was possible to trace the outline of something just too erect and rigid to be a pine tree. By these we finally felt our way home, arriving in a cold green twilight before dawn.
A DRAMA OF DOLLS

In a small grey town of stone in one of the great Yorkshire dales, which is full of history, I entered a hall and saw an old puppet-play exactly as our fathers saw it five hundred years ago. It was admirably translated from the old German, and was the original tale of Faust. The dolls were at once comic and convincing; but if you cannot at once laugh at a thing and believe in it, you have no business in the Middle Ages. Or in the world, for that matter.

The puppet-play in question belongs, I believe, to the fifteenth century; and indeed the whole legend of Dr. Faustus has the colour of that grotesque but somewhat gloomy time. It is very unfortunate that we so often know a thing that is past only by its tail end. We remember yesterday only by its sunsets. There are many instances. One is Napoleon. We always think of him as a fat old despot, ruling Europe with a ruthless military machine. But that, as Lord Rosebery would say, was only “The Last Phase”; or at least the last but one. During the strongest and most startling part of his career, the time that made him immortal, Napoleon was a sort of boy, and not a bad sort of boy either, bullet-headed and ambitious, but honestly in love with a woman, and honestly enthusiastic for a cause, the cause of French justice and equality.

Another instance is the Middle Ages, which we also remember only by the odour of their ultimate decay. We think of the life of the Middle Ages as a dance of death, full of devils and deadly sins, lepers and burning heretics. But this was not the life of the Middle Ages, but the death of the Middle Ages. It is the spirit of Louis XI and Richard III, not of Louis IX and Edward I.

This grim but not unwholesome fable of Dr. Faustus, with its rebuke to the mere arrogance of learning, is sound and stringent enough; but it is not a fair sample of the mediaeval soul at its happiest and sanest. The heart of the true Middle Ages might be found far better, for instance, in the noble tale of Tannhauser, in which the dead staff broke into leaf and flower to rebuke the pontiff who had declared even one human being beyond the strength of sorrow and pardon.

But there were in the play two great human ideas which the mediaeval mind never lost its grip on, through the heaviest nightmares of its dissolution. They were the two great jokes of mediaevalism, as they are the two eternal jokes of mankind. Wherever those two jokes exist there is a little health and hope; wherever they are absent, pride and insanity are present. The first is the idea that
the poor man ought to get the better of the rich man. The other is the idea that
the husband is afraid of the wife.

I have heard that there is a place under the knee which, when struck, should
produce a sort of jump; and that if you do not jump, you are mad. I am sure that
there are some such places in the soul. When the human spirit does not jump
with joy at either of those two old jokes, the human spirit must be struck with
incurable paralysis. There is hope for people who have gone down into the hells
of greed and economic oppression (at least, I hope there is, for we are such a
people ourselves), but there is no hope for a people that does not exult in the
abstract idea of the peasant scoring off the prince. There is hope for the idle and
the adulterous, for the men that desert their wives and the men that beat their
wives. But there is no hope for men who do not boast that their wives bully
them.

The first idea, the idea about the man at the bottom coming out on top, is
expressed in this puppet-play in the person of Dr. Faustus’ servant, Caspar.
Sentimental old Tones, regretting the feudal times, sometimes complain that in
these days Jack is as good as his master. But most of the actual tales of the
feudal times turn on the idea that Jack is much better than his master, and
certainly it is so in the case of Caspar and Faust. The play ends with the
damnation of the learned and illustrious doctor, followed by a cheerful and
animated dance by Caspar, who has been made watchman of the city.

But there was a much keener stroke of mediaeval irony earlier in the play. The
learned doctor has been ransacking all the libraries of the earth to find a certain
rare formula, now almost unknown, by which he can control the infernal deities.
At last he procures the one precious volume, opens it at the proper page, and
leaves it on the table while he seeks some other part of his magic equipment. The
servant comes in, reads off the formula, and immediately becomes an emperor of
the elemental spirits. He gives them a horrible time. He summons and dismisses
them alternately with the rapidity of a piston-rod working at high speed; he
keeps them flying between the doctor’s house and their own more
unmentionable residences till they faint with rage and fatigue. There is all the
best of the Middle Ages in that; the idea of the great levellers, luck and laughter;
the idea of a sense of humour defying and dominating hell.

One of the best points in the play as performed in this Yorkshire town was that
the servant Caspar was made to talk Yorkshire, instead of the German rustic
dialect which he talked in the original. That also smacks of the good air of that
epoch. In those old pictures and poems they always made things living by
making them local. Thus, queerly enough, the one touch that was not in the old mediaeval version was the most mediaeval touch of all.

That other ancient and Christian jest, that a wife is a holy terror, occurs in the last scene, where the doctor (who wears a fur coat throughout, to make him seem more offensively rich and refined) is attempting to escape from the avenging demons, and meets his old servant in the street. The servant obligingly points out a house with a blue door, and strongly recommends Dr. Faustus to take refuge in it. “My old woman lives there,” he says, “and the devils are more afraid of her than you are of them.” Faustus does not take this advice, but goes on meditating and reflecting (which had been his mistake all along) until the clock strikes twelve, and dreadful voices talk Latin in heaven. So Faustus, in his fur coat, is carried away by little black imps; and serve him right for being an Intellectual.
THE MAN AND HIS NEWSPAPER

At a little station, which I decline to specify, somewhere between Oxford and Guildford, I missed a connection or miscalculated a route in such manner that I was left stranded for rather more than an hour. I adore waiting at railway stations, but this was not a very sumptuous specimen. There was nothing on the platform except a chocolate automatic machine, which eagerly absorbed pennies but produced no corresponding chocolate, and a small paper-stall with a few remaining copies of a cheap imperial organ which we will call the Daily Wire. It does not matter which imperial organ it was, as they all say the same thing.

Though I knew it quite well already, I read it with gravity as I strolled out of the station and up the country road. It opened with the striking phrase that the Radicals were setting class against class. It went on to remark that nothing had contributed more to make our Empire happy and enviable, to create that obvious list of glories which you can supply for yourself, the prosperity of all classes in our great cities, our populous and growing villages, the success of our rule in Ireland, etc., etc., than the sound Anglo-Saxon readiness of all classes in the State “to work heartily hand-in-hand.” It was this alone, the paper assured me, that had saved us from the horrors of the French Revolution. “It is easy for the Radicals,” it went on very solemnly, “to make jokes about the dukes. Very few of these revolutionary gentlemen have given to the poor one half of the earnest thought, tireless unselfishness, and truly Christian patience that are given to them by the great landlords of this country. We are very sure that the English people, with their sturdy common sense, will prefer to be in the hands of English gentlemen rather than in the miry claws of Socialistic buccaneers.”

Just when I had reached this point I nearly ran into a man. Despite the populousness and growth of our villages, he appeared to be the only man for miles, but the road up which I had wandered turned and narrowed with equal abruptness, and I nearly knocked him off the gate on which he was leaning. I pulled up to apologize, and since he seemed ready for society, and even pathetically pleased with it, I tossed the Daily Wire over a hedge and fell into speech with him. He wore a wreck of respectable clothes, and his face had that plebeian refinement which one sees in small tailors and watchmakers, in poor men of sedentary trades. Behind him a twisted group of winter trees stood up as gaunt and tattered as himself, but I do not think that the tragedy that he symbolized was a mere fancy from the spectral wood. There was a fixed look in
his face which told that he was one of those who in keeping body and soul together have difficulties not only with the body, but also with the soul.

He was a Cockney by birth, and retained the touching accent of those streets from which I am an exile; but he had lived nearly all his life in this countryside; and he began to tell me the affairs of it in that formless, tail-foremost way in which the poor gossip about their great neighbours. Names kept coming and going in the narrative like charms or spells, unaccompanied by any biographical explanation. In particular the name of somebody called Sir Joseph multiplied itself with the omnipresence of a deity. I took Sir Joseph to be the principal landowner of the district; and as the confused picture unfolded itself, I began to form a definite and by no means pleasing picture of Sir Joseph. He was spoken of in a strange way, frigid and yet familiar, as a child might speak of a stepmother or an unavoidable nurse; something intimate, but by no means tender; something that was waiting for you by your own bed and board; that told you to do this and forbade you to do that, with a caprice that was cold and yet somehow personal. It did not appear that Sir Joseph was popular, but he was “a household word.” He was not so much a public man as a sort of private god or omnipotence. The particular man to whom I spoke said he had “been in trouble,” and that Sir Joseph had been “pretty hard on him.”

And under that grey and silver cloudland, with a background of those frost-bitten and wind-tortured trees, the little Londoner told me a tale which, true or false, was as heartrending as Romeo and Juliet.

He had slowly built up in the village a small business as a photographer, and he was engaged to a girl at one of the lodges, whom he loved with passion. “I’m the sort that ‘ad better marry,” he said; and for all his frail figure I knew what he meant. But Sir Joseph, and especially Sir Joseph’s wife, did not want a photographer in the village; it made the girls vain, or perhaps they disliked this particular photographer. He worked and worked until he had just enough to marry on honestly; and almost on the eve of his wedding the lease expired, and Sir Joseph appeared in all his glory. He refused to renew the lease; and the man went wildly elsewhere. But Sir Joseph was ubiquitous; and the whole of that place was barred against him. In all that country he could not find a shed to which to bring home his bride. The man appealed and explained; but he was disliked as a demagogue, as well as a photographer. Then it was as if a black cloud came across the winter sky; for I knew what was coming. I forget even in what words he told of Nature maddened and set free. But I still see, as in a photograph, the grey muscles of the winter trees standing out like tight ropes, as
if all Nature were on the rack.

“She ‘ad to go away,” he said.

“Wouldn’t her parents,” I began, and hesitated on the word “forgive.”

“Oh, her people forgave her,” he said. “But Her Ladyship . . .”

“Her Ladyship made the sun and moon and stars,” I said, impatiently. “So of course she can come between a mother and the child of her body.”

“Well, it does seem a bit ‘ard . . .” he began with a break in his voice.

“But, good Lord, man,” I cried, “it isn’t a matter of hardness! It’s a matter of impious and indecent wickedness. If your Sir Joseph knew the passions he was playing with, he did you a wrong for which in many Christian countries he would have a knife in him.”

The man continued to look across the frozen fields with a frown. He certainly told his tale with real resentment, whether it was true or false, or only exaggerated. He was certainly sullen and injured; but he did not seem to think of any avenue of escape. At last he said:

“Well, it’s a bad world; let’s ‘ope there’s a better one.”

“Amen,” I said. “But when I think of Sir Joseph, I understand how men have hoped there was a worse one.”

Then we were silent for a long time and felt the cold of the day crawling up, and at last I said, abruptly:

“The other day at a Budget meeting, I heard.”

He took his elbows off the stile and seemed to change from head to foot like a man coming out of sleep with a yawn. He said in a totally new voice, louder but much more careless, “Ah yes, sir, . . . this ‘ere Budget . . . the Radicals are doing a lot of ‘arm.”

I listened intently, and he went on. He said with a sort of careful precision, “Settin’ class against class; that’s what I call it. Why, what’s made our Empire except the readiness of all classes to work ‘eartily ‘and-in-’and.”

He walked a little up and down the lane and stamped with the cold. Then he said, “What I say is, what else kept us from the ‘errors of the French Revolution?”

My memory is good, and I waited in tense eagerness for the phrase that came next. “They may laugh at Dukes; I’d like to see them ‘alf as kind and Christian and patient as lots of the landlords are. Let me tell you, sir,” he said, facing round at me with the final air of one launching a paradox. “The English people ‘ave some common sense, and they’d rather be in the ‘ands of gentlemen than in the claws of a lot of Socialist thieves.”
I had an indescribable sense that I ought to applaud, as if I were a public meeting. The insane separation in the man’s soul between his experience and his ready-made theory was but a type of what covers a quarter of England. As he turned away, I saw the Daily Wire sticking out of his shabby pocket. He bade me farewell in quite a blaze of catchwords, and went stumping up the road. I saw his figure grow smaller and smaller in the great green landscape; even as the Free Man has grown smaller and smaller in the English countryside.
I was walking the other day in a kitchen garden, which I find has somehow got attached to my premises, and I was wondering why I liked it. After a prolonged spiritual self-analysis I came to the conclusion that I like a kitchen garden because it contains things to eat. I do not mean that a kitchen garden is ugly; a kitchen garden is often very beautiful. The mixture of green and purple on some monstrous cabbage is much subtler and grander than the mere freakish and theatrical splashing of yellow and violet on a pansy. Few of the flowers merely meant for ornament are so ethereal as a potato. A kitchen garden is as beautiful as an orchard; but why is it that the word “orchard” sounds as beautiful as the word “flower-garden,” and yet also sounds more satisfactory? I suggest again my extraordinarily dark and delicate discovery: that it contains things to eat.

The cabbage is a solid; it can be approached from all sides at once; it can be realized by all senses at once. Compared with that the sunflower, which can only be seen, is a mere pattern, a thing painted on a flat wall. Now, it is this sense of the solidity of things that can only be uttered by the metaphor of eating. To express the cubic content of a turnip, you must be all round it at once. The only way to get all round a turnip at once is to eat the turnip. I think any poetic mind that has loved solidity, the thickness of trees, the squareness of stones, the firmness of clay, must have sometimes wished that they were things to eat. If only brown peat tasted as good as it looks; if only white firwood were digestible! We talk rightly of giving stones for bread: but there are in the Geological Museum certain rich crimson marbles, certain split stones of blue and green, that make me wish my teeth were stronger.

Somebody staring into the sky with the same ethereal appetite declared that the moon was made of green cheese. I never could conscientiously accept the full doctrine. I am Modernist in this matter. That the moon is made of cheese I have believed from childhood; and in the course of every month a giant (of my acquaintance) bites a big round piece out of it. This seems to me a doctrine that is above reason, but not contrary to it. But that the cheese is green seems to be in some degree actually contradicted by the senses and the reason; first because if the moon were made of green cheese it would be inhabited; and second because if it were made of green cheese it would be green. A blue moon is said to be an unusual sight; but I cannot think that a green one is much more common. In fact, I think I have seen the moon looking like every other sort of cheese except a
green cheese. I have seen it look exactly like a cream cheese: a circle of warm white upon a warm faint violet sky above a cornfield in Kent. I have seen it look very like a Dutch cheese, rising a dull red copper disk amid masts and dark waters at Honfleur. I have seen it look like an ordinary sensible Cheddar cheese in an ordinary sensible Prussian blue sky; and I have once seen it so naked and ruinous-looking, so strangely lit up, that it looked like a Gruyere cheese, that awful volcanic cheese that has horrible holes in it, as if it had come in boiling unnatural milk from mysterious and unearthly cattle. But I have never yet seen the lunar cheese green; and I incline to the opinion that the moon is not old enough. The moon, like everything else, will ripen by the end of the world; and in the last days we shall see it taking on those volcanic sunset colours, and leaping with that enormous and fantastic life.

But this is a parenthesis; and one perhaps slightly lacking in prosaic actuality. Whatever may be the value of the above speculations, the phrase about the moon and green cheese remains a good example of this imagery of eating and drinking on a large scale. The same huge fancy is in the phrase “if all the trees were bread and cheese,” which I have cited elsewhere in this connection; and in that noble nightmare of a Scandinavian legend, in which Thor drinks the deep sea nearly dry out of a horn. In an essay like the present (first intended as a paper to be read before the Royal Society) one cannot be too exact; and I will concede that my theory of the gradual vire-scence of our satellite is to be regarded rather as an alternative theory than as a law finally demonstrated and universally accepted by the scientific world. It is a hypothesis that holds the field, as the scientists say of a theory when there is no evidence for it so far.

But the reader need be under no apprehension that I have suddenly gone mad, and shall start biting large pieces out of the trunks of trees; or seriously altering (by large semicircular mouthfuls) the exquisite outline of the mountains. This feeling for expressing a fresh solidity by the image of eating is really a very old one. So far from being a paradox of perversity, it is one of the oldest commonplaces of religion. If any one wandering about wants to have a good trick or test for separating the wrong idealism from the right, I will give him one on the spot. It is a mark of false religion that it is always trying to express concrete facts as abstract; it calls sex affinity; it calls wine alcohol; it calls brute starvation the economic problem. The test of true religion is that its energy drives exactly the other way; it is always trying to make men feel truths as facts; always trying to make abstract things as plain and solid as concrete things; always trying to make men, not merely admit the truth, but see, smell, handle,
hear, and devour the truth. All great spiritual scriptures are full of the invitation not to test, but to taste; not to examine, but to eat. Their phrases are full of living water and heavenly bread, mysterious manna and dreadful wine. Worldliness, and the polite society of the world, has despised this instinct of eating; but religion has never despised it. When we look at a firm, fat, white cliff of chalk at Dover, I do not suggest that we should desire to eat it; that would be highly abnormal. But I really mean that we should think it good to eat; good for some one else to eat. For, indeed, some one else is eating it; the grass that grows upon its top is devouring it silently, but, doubtless, with an uproarious appetite.
SIMMONS AND THE SOCIAL TIE

It is a platitude, and none the less true for that, that we need to have an ideal in our minds with which to test all realities. But it is equally true, and less noted, that we need a reality with which to test ideals. Thus I have selected Mrs. Buttons, a charwoman in Battersea, as the touchstone of all modern theories about the mass of women. Her name is not Buttons; she is not in the least a contemptible nor entirely a comic figure. She has a powerful stoop and an ugly, attractive face, a little like that of Huxley—without the whiskers, of course. The courage with which she supports the most brutal bad luck has something quite creepy about it. Her irony is incessant and inventive; her practical charity very large; and she is wholly unaware of the philosophical use to which I put her.

But when I hear the modern generalization about her sex on all sides I simply substitute her name, and see how the thing sounds then. When on the one side the mere sentimentalist says, “Let woman be content to be dainty and exquisite, a protected piece of social art and domestic ornament,” then I merely repeat it to myself in the “other form,” “Let Mrs. Buttons be content to be dainty and exquisite, a protected piece of social art, etc.” It is extraordinary what a difference the substitution seems to make. And on the other hand, when some of the Suffragettes say in their pamphlets and speeches, “Woman, leaping to life at the trumpet call of Ibsen and Shaw, drops her tawdry luxuries and demands to grasp the sceptre of empire and the firebrand of speculative thought”—in order to understand such a sentence I say it over again in the amended form: “Mrs. Buttons, leaping to life at the trumpet call of Ibsen and Shaw, drops her tawdry luxuries and demands to grasp the sceptre of empire and the firebrand of speculative thought.” Somehow it sounds quite different. And yet when you say Woman I suppose you mean the average woman; and if most women are as capable and critical and morally sound as Mrs. Buttons, it is as much as we can expect, and a great deal more than we deserve.

But this study is not about Mrs. Buttons; she would require many studies. I will take a less impressive case of my principle, the principle of keeping in the mind an actual personality when we are talking about types or tendencies or generalized ideals. Take, for example, the question of the education of boys. Almost every post brings me pamphlets expounding some advanced and suggestive scheme of education; the pupils are to be taught separate; the sexes are to be taught together; there should be no prizes; there should be no
punishments; the master should lift the boys to his level; the master should
descend to their level; we should encourage the heartiest comradeship among
boys, and also the tenderest spiritual intimacy with masters; toil must be pleasant
and holidays must be instructive; with all these things I am daily impressed and
somewhat bewildered. But on the great Buttons’ principle I keep in my mind and
apply to all these ideals one still vivid fact; the face and character of a particular
schoolboy whom I once knew. I am not taking a mere individual oddity, as you
will hear. He was exceptional, and yet the reverse of eccentric; he was (in a quite
sober and strict sense of the words) exceptionally average. He was the
incarnation and the exaggeration of a certain spirit which is the common spirit of
boys, but which nowhere else became so obvious and outrageous. And because
he was an incarnation he was, in his way, a tragedy.

I will call him Simmons. He was a tall, healthy figure, strong, but a little
slouching, and there was in his walk something between a slight swagger and a
seaman’s roll; he commonly had his hands in his pockets. His hair was dark,
straight, and undistinguished; and his face, if one saw it after his figure, was
something of a surprise. For while the form might be called big and braggart, the
face might have been called weak, and was certainly worried. It was a hesitating
face, which seemed to blink doubtfully in the daylight. He had even the look of
one who has received a buffet that he cannot return. In all occupations he was
the average boy; just sufficiently good at sports, just sufficiently bad at work to
be universally satisfactory. But he was prominent in nothing, for prominence
was to him a thing like bodily pain. He could not endure, without discomfort
amounting to desperation, that any boy should be noticed or sensational
separated from the long line of boys; for him, to be distinguished was to be
disgraced.

Those who interpret schoolboys as merely wooden and barbarous, unmoved
by anything but a savage seriousness about tuck or cricket, make the mistake of
forgetting how much of the schoolboy life is public and ceremonial, having
reference to an ideal; or, if you like, to an affectation. Boys, like dogs, have a
sort of romantic ritual which is not always their real selves. And this romantic
ritual is generally the ritual of not being romantic; the pretence of being much
more masculine and materialistic than they are. Boys in themselves are very
sentimental. The most sentimental thing in the world is to hide your feelings; it
is making too much of them. Stoicism is the direct product of sentimentalism;
and schoolboys are sentimental individually, but stoical collectively.

For example, there were numbers of boys at my school besides myself who
took a private pleasure in poetry; but red-hot iron would not have induced most of us to admit this to the masters, or to repeat poetry with the faintest inflection of rhythm or intelligence. That would have been anti-social egoism; we called it “showing off.” I myself remember running to school (an extraordinary thing to do) with mere internal ecstasy in repeating lines of Walter Scott about the taunts of Marmion or the boasts of Roderick Dhu, and then repeating the same lines in class with the colourless decorum of a hurdy-gurdy. We all wished to be invisible in our uniformity; a mere pattern of Eton collars and coats.

But Simmons went even further. He felt it as an insult to brotherly equality if any task or knowledge out of the ordinary track was discovered even by accident. If a boy had learnt German in infancy; or if a boy knew some terms in music; or if a boy was forced to confess feebly that he had read “The Mill on the Floss”–then Simmons was in a perspiration of discomfort. He felt no personal anger, still less any petty jealousy, what he felt was an honourable and generous shame. He hated it as a lady hates coarseness in a pantomime; it made him want to hide himself. Just that feeling of impersonal ignominy which most of us have when some one betrays indecent ignorance, Simmons had when some one betrayed special knowledge. He writhed and went red in the face; he used to put up the lid of his desk to hide his blushes for human dignity, and from behind this barrier would whisper protests which had the hoarse emphasis of pain. “O, shut up, I say . . . O, I say, shut up. . . . O, shut it, can’t you?” Once when a little boy admitted that he had heard of the Highland claymore, Simmons literally hid his head inside his desk and dropped the lid upon it in desperation; and when I was for a moment transferred from the bottom of the form for knowing the name of Cardinal Newman, I thought he would have rushed from the room.

His psychological eccentricity increased; if one can call that an eccentricity which was a wild worship of the ordinary. At last he grew so sensitive that he could not even bear any question answered correctly without grief. He felt there was a touch of disloyalty, of unfraternal individualism, even about knowing the right answer to a sum. If asked the date of the battle of Hastings, he considered it due to social tact and general good feeling to answer 1067. This chivalrous exaggeration led to bad feeling between him and the school authority, which ended in a rupture unexpectedly violent in the case of so good-humoured a creature. He fled from the school, and it was discovered upon inquiry that he had fled from his home also.

I never expected to see him again; yet it is one of the two or three odd coincidences of my life that I did see him. At some public sports or recreation
ground I saw a group of rather objectless youths, one of whom was wearing the dashing uniform of a private in the Lancers. Inside that uniform was the tall figure, shy face, and dark, stiff hair of Simmons. He had gone to the one place where every one is dressed alike—a regiment. I know nothing more; perhaps he was killed in Africa. But when England was full of flags and false triumphs, when everybody was talking manly trash about the whelps of the lion and the brave boys in red, I often heard a voice echoing in the under-caverns of my memory, “Shut up . . . O, shut up . . . O, I say, shut it.”
CHEESE

My forthcoming work in five volumes, “The Neglect of Cheese in European Literature” is a work of such unprecedented and laborious detail that it is doubtful if I shall live to finish it. Some overflowings from such a fountain of information may therefore be permitted to springle these pages. I cannot yet wholly explain the neglect to which I refer. Poets have been mysteriously silent on the subject of cheese. Virgil, if I remember right, refers to it several times, but with too much Roman restraint. He does not let himself go on cheese. The only other poet I can think of just now who seems to have had some sensibility on the point was the nameless author of the nursery rhyme which says: “If all the trees were bread and cheese”—which is, indeed a rich and gigantic vision of the higher gluttony. If all the trees were bread and cheese there would be considerable deforestation in any part of England where I was living. Wild and wide woodlands would reel and fade before me as rapidly as they ran after Orpheus. Except Virgil and this anonymous rhymer, I can recall no verse about cheese. Yet it has every quality which we require in exalted poetry. It is a short, strong word; it rhymes to “breeze” and “seas” (an essential point); that it is emphatic in sound is admitted even by the civilization of the modern cities. For their citizens, with no apparent intention except emphasis, will often say, “Cheese it!” or even “Quite the cheese.” The substance itself is imaginative. It is ancient—sometimes in the individual case, always in the type and custom. It is simple, being directly derived from milk, which is one of the ancestral drinks, not lightly to be corrupted with soda-water. You know, I hope (though I myself have only just thought of it), that the four rivers of Eden were milk, water, wine, and ale. Aerated waters only appeared after the Fall.

But cheese has another quality, which is also the very soul of song. Once in endeavouring to lecture in several places at once, I made an eccentric journey across England, a journey of so irregular and even illogical shape that it necessitated my having lunch on four successive days in four roadside inns in four different counties. In each inn they had nothing but bread and cheese; nor can I imagine why a man should want more than bread and cheese, if he can get enough of it. In each inn the cheese was good; and in each inn it was different. There was a noble Wensleydale cheese in Yorkshire, a Cheshire cheese in Cheshire, and so on. Now, it is just here that true poetic civilization differs from that paltry and mechanical civilization which holds us all in bondage. Bad
customs are universal and rigid, like modern militarism. Good customs are
universal and varied, like native chivalry and self-defence. Both the good and
bad civilization cover us as with a canopy, and protect us from all that is outside.
But a good civilization spreads over us freely like a tree, varying and yielding
because it is alive. A bad civilization stands up and sticks out above us like an
umbrella—artificial, mathematical in shape; not merely universal, but uniform. So
it is with the contrast between the substances that vary and the substances that
are the same wherever they penetrate. By a wise doom of heaven men were
commanded to eat cheese, but not the same cheese. Being really universal it
varies from valley to valley. But if, let us say, we compare cheese with soap (that
vastly inferior substance), we shall see that soap tends more and more to be
merely Smith’s Soap or Brown’s Soap, sent automatically all over the world. If
the Red Indians have soap it is Smith’s Soap. If the Grand Lama has soap it is
Brown’s soap. There is nothing subtly and strangely Buddhist, nothing tenderly
Tibetan, about his soap. I fancy the Grand Lama does not eat cheese (he is not
worthy), but if he does it is probably a local cheese, having some real relation to
his life and outlook. Safety matches, tinned foods, patent medicines are sent all
over the world; but they are not produced all over the world. Therefore there is
in them a mere dead identity, never that soft play of slight variation which exists
in things produced everywhere out of the soil, in the milk of the kine, or the
fruits of the orchard. You can get a whisky and soda at every outpost of the
Empire: that is why so many Empire-builders go mad. But you are not tasting or
touching any environment, as in the cider of Devonshire or the grapes of the
Rhine. You are not approaching Nature in one of her myriad tints of mood, as in
the holy act of eating cheese.

When I had done my pilgrimage in the four wayside public-houses I reached
one of the great northern cities, and there I proceeded, with great rapidity and
complete inconsistency, to a large and elaborate restaurant, where I knew I could
get many other things besides bread and cheese. I could get that also, however;
or at least I expected to get it; but I was sharply reminded that I had entered
Babylon, and left England behind. The waiter brought me cheese, indeed, but
cheese cut up into contemptibly small pieces; and it is the awful fact that, instead
of Christian bread, he brought me biscuits. Biscuits—to one who had eaten the
cheese of four great countrysides! Biscuits—to one who had proved anew for
himself the sanctity of the ancient wedding between cheese and bread! I
addressed the waiter in warm and moving terms. I asked him who he was that he
should put asunder those whom Humanity had joined. I asked him if he did not
feel, as an artist, that a solid but yielding substance like cheese went naturally with a solid, yielding substance like bread; to eat it off biscuits is like eating it off slates. I asked him if, when he said his prayers, he was so supercilious as to pray for his daily biscuits. He gave me generally to understand that he was only obeying a custom of Modern Society. I have therefore resolved to raise my voice, not against the waiter, but against Modern Society, for this huge and unparalleled modern wrong.
THE RED TOWN

When a man says that democracy is false because most people are stupid, there are several courses which the philosopher may pursue. The most obvious is to hit him smartly and with precision on the exact tip of the nose. But if you have scruples (moral or physical) about this course, you may proceed to employ Reason, which in this case has all the savage solidity of a blow with the fist. It is stupid to say that “most people” are stupid. It is like saying “most people are tall,” when it is obvious that “tall” can only mean taller than most people. It is absurd to denounce the majority of mankind as below the average of mankind.

Should the man have been hammered on the nose and brained with logic, and should he still remain cold, a third course opens: lead him by the hand (himself half-willing) towards some sunlit and yet secret meadow and ask him who made the names of the common wild flowers. They were ordinary people, so far as any one knows, who gave to one flower the name of the Star of Bethlehem and to another and much commoner flower the tremendous title of the Eye of Day. If you cling to the snobbish notion that common people are prosaic, ask any common person for the local names of the flowers, names which vary not only from county to county, but even from dale to dale.

But, curiously enough, the case is much stronger than this. It will be said that this poetry is peculiar to the country populace, and that the dim democracies of our modern towns at least have lost it. For some extraordinary reason they have not lost it. Ordinary London slang is full of witty things said by nobody in particular. True, the creed of our cruel cities is not so sane and just as the creed of the old countryside; but the people are just as clever in giving names to their sins in the city as in giving names to their joys in the wilderness. One could not better sum up Christianity than by calling a small white insignificant flower “The Star of Bethlehem.” But then, again, one could not better sum up the philosophy deduced from Darwinism than in the one verbal picture of “having your monkey up.”

Who first invented these violent felicities of language? Who first spoke of a man “being off his head”? The obvious comment on a lunatic is that his head is off him; yet the other phrase is far more fantastically exact. There is about every madman a singular sensation that his body has walked off and left the important part of him behind.

But the cases of this popular perfection in phrase are even stronger when they
are more vulgar. What concentrated irony and imagination there is for instance, in the metaphor which describes a man doing a midnight flitting as “shooting the moon”? It expresses everything about the run away: his eccentric occupation, his improbable explanations, his furtive air as of a hunter, his constant glances at the blank clock in the sky.

No; the English democracy is weak enough about a number of things; for instance, it is weak in politics. But there is no doubt that democracy is wonderfully strong in literature. Very few books that the cultured class has produced of late have been such good literature as the expression “painting the town red.”

Oddly enough, this last Cockney epigram clings to my memory. For as I was walking a little while ago round a corner near Victoria I realized for the first time that a familiar lamp-post was painted all over with a bright vermilion just as if it were trying (in spite of the obvious bodily disqualification) to pretend that it was a pillar-box. I have since heard official explanations of these startling and scarlet objects. But my first fancy was that some dissipated gentleman on his way home at four o’clock in the morning had attempted to paint the town red and got only as far as one lamp-post.

I began to make a fairy tale about the man; and, indeed, this phrase contains both a fairy tale and a philosophy; it really states almost the whole truth about those pure outbreaks of pagan enjoyment to which all healthy men have often been tempted. It expresses the desire to have levity on a large scale which is the essence of such a mood. The rowdy young man is not content to paint his tutor’s door green: he would like to paint the whole city scarlet. The word which to us best recalls such gigantesque idiocy is the word “mafficking.” The slaves of that saturnalia were not only painting the town red; they thought that they were painting the map red—that they were painting the world red. But, indeed, this Imperial debauch has in it something worse than the mere larkiness which is my present topic; it has an element of real self-flattery and of sin. The Jingo who wants to admire himself is worse than the blackguard who only wants to enjoy himself. In a very old ninth-century illumination which I have seen, depicting the war of the rebel angels in heaven, Satan is represented as distributing to his followers peacock feathers—the symbols of an evil pride. Satan also distributed peacock feathers to his followers on Mafeking Night . . .

But taking the case of ordinary pagan recklessness and pleasure seeking, it is, as we have said, well expressed in this image. First, because it conveys this notion of filling the world with one private folly; and secondly, because of the
profound idea involved in the choice of colour. Red is the most joyful and dreadful thing in the physical universe; it is the fiercest note, it is the highest light, it is the place where the walls of this world of ours wear thinnest and something beyond burns through. It glows in the blood which sustains and in the fire which destroys us, in the roses of our romance and in the awful cup of our religion. It stands for all passionate happiness, as in faith or in first love.

Now, the profligate is he who wishes to spread this crimson of conscious joy over everything; to have excitement at every moment; to paint everything red. He bursts a thousand barrels of wine to incarnadine the streets; and sometimes (in his last madness) he will butcher beasts and men to dip his gigantic brushes in their blood. For it marks the sacredness of red in nature, that it is secret even when it is ubiquitous, like blood in the human body, which is omnipresent, yet invisible. As long as blood lives it is hidden; it is only dead blood that we see. But the earlier parts of the rake’s progress are very natural and amusing. Painting the town red is a delightful thing until it is done. It would be splendid to see the cross of St. Paul’s as red as the cross of St. George, and the gallons of red paint running down the dome or dripping from the Nelson Column. But when it is done, when you have painted the town red, an extraordinary thing happens. You cannot see any red at all.

I can see, as in a sort of vision, the successful artist standing in the midst of that frightful city, hung on all sides with the scarlet of his shame. And then, when everything is red, he will long for a red rose in a green hedge and long in vain; he will dream of a red leaf and be unable even to imagine it. He has desecrated the divine colour, and he can no longer see it, though it is all around. I see him, a single black figure against the red-hot hell that he has kindled, where spires and turrets stand up like immobile flames: he is stiffened in a sort of agony of prayer. Then the mercy of Heaven is loosened, and I see one or two flakes of snow very slowly begin to fall.
As I see the corn grow green all about my neighbourhood, there rushes on me for no reason in particular a memory of the winter. I say “rushes,” for that is the very word for the old sweeping lines of the ploughed fields. From some accidental turn of a train-journey or a walking tour, I saw suddenly the fierce rush of the furrows. The furrows are like arrows; they fly along an arc of sky. They are like leaping animals; they vault an inviolable hill and roll down the other side. They are like battering battalions; they rush over a hill with flying squadrons and carry it with a cavalry charge. They have all the air of Arabs sweeping a desert, of rockets sweeping the sky, of torrents sweeping a watercourse. Nothing ever seemed so living as those brown lines as they shot sheer from the height of a ridge down to their still whirl of the valley. They were swifter than arrows, fiercer than Arabs, more riotous and rejoicing than rockets. And yet they were only thin straight lines drawn with difficulty, like a diagram, by painful and patient men. The men that ploughed tried to plough straight; they had no notion of giving great sweeps and swirls to the eye. Those cataracts of cloven earth; they were done by the grace of God. I had always rejoiced in them; but I had never found any reason for my joy. There are some very clever people who cannot enjoy the joy unless they understand it. There are other and even cleverer people who say that they lose the joy the moment they do understand it. Thank God I was never clever, and I could always enjoy things when I understood them and when I didn’t. I can enjoy the orthodox Tory, though I could never understand him. I can also enjoy the orthodox Liberal, though I understand him only too well.

But the splendour of furrowed fields is this: that like all brave things they are made straight, and therefore they bend. In everything that bows gracefully there must be an effort at stiffness. Bows are beautiful when they bend only because they try to remain rigid; and sword-blades can curl like silver ribbons only because they are certain to spring straight again. But the same is true of every tough curve of the tree-trunk, of every strong-backed bend of the bough; there is hardly any such thing in Nature as a mere droop of weakness. Rigidity yielding a little, like justice swayed by mercy, is the whole beauty of the earth. The cosmos is a diagram just bent beautifully out of shape. Everything tries to be straight; and everything just fortunately fails.

The foil may curve in the lunge, but there is nothing beautiful about beginning
the battle with a crooked foil. So the strict aim, the strong doctrine, may give a little in the actual fight with facts: but that is no reason for beginning with a weak doctrine or a twisted aim. Do not be an opportunist; try to be theoretic at all the opportunities; fate can be trusted to do all the opportunist part of it. Do not try to bend, any more than the trees try to bend. Try to grow straight, and life will bend you.

Alas! I am giving the moral before the fable; and yet I hardly think that otherwise you could see all that I mean in that enormous vision of the ploughed hills. These great furrowed slopes are the oldest architecture of man: the oldest astronomy was his guide, the oldest botany his object. And for geometry, the mere word proves my case.

But when I looked at those torrents of ploughed parallels, that great rush of rigid lines, I seemed to see the whole huge achievement of democracy, Here was mere equality: but equality seen in bulk is more superb than any supremacy. Equality free and flying, equality rushing over hill and dale, equality charging the world— that was the meaning of those military furrows, military in their identity, military in their energy. They sculptured hill and dale with strong curves merely because they did not mean to curve at all. They made the strong lines of landscape with their stiffly driven swords of the soil. It is not only nonsense, but blasphemy, to say that man has spoilt the country. Man has created the country; it was his business, as the image of God. No hill, covered with common scrub or patches of purple heath, could have been so sublimely hilly as that ridge up to which the ranked furrows rose like aspiring angels. No valley, confused with needless cottages and towns, can have been so utterly valleyish as that abyss into which the down-rushing furrows raged like demons into the swirling pit.

It is the hard lines of discipline and equality that mark out a landscape and give it all its mould and meaning. It is just because the lines of the furrow arc ugly and even that the landscape is living and superb. As I think I have remarked elsewhere, the Republic is founded on the plough.
THE PHILOSOPHY OF SIGHT-SEEING

It would be really interesting to know exactly why an intelligent person—by which I mean a person with any sort of intelligence—can and does dislike sight-seeing. Why does the idea of a char-a-banc full of tourists going to see the birthplace of Nelson or the death-scene of Simon de Montfort strike a strange chill to the soul? I can tell quite easily what this dim aversion to tourists and their antiquities does not arise from—at least, in my case. Whatever my other vices (and they are, of course, of a lurid cast), I can lay my hand on my heart and say that it does not arise from a paltry contempt for the antiquities, nor yet from the still more paltry contempt for the tourists. If there is one thing more dwarfish and pitiful than irreverence for the past, it is irreverence for the present, for the passionate and many-coloured procession of life, which includes the char-a-banc among its many chariots and triumphal cars. I know nothing so vulgar as that contempt for vulgarity which sneers at the clerks on a Bank Holiday or the Cockneys on Margate sands. The man who notices nothing about the clerk except his Cockney accent would have noticed nothing about Simon de Montfort except his French accent. The man who jeers at Jones for having dropped an “h” might have jeered at Nelson for having dropped an arm. Scorn springs easily to the essentially vulgar-minded, and it is as easy to gibe at Montfort as a foreigner or at Nelson as a cripple, as to gibe at the struggling speech and the maimed bodies of the mass of our comic and tragic race. If I shrink faintly from this affair of tourists and tombs, it is certainly not because I am so profane as to think lightly either of the tombs or the tourists. I reverence those great men who had the courage to die; I reverence also these little men who have the courage to live.

Even if this be conceded, another suggestion may be made. It may be said that antiquities and commonplace crowds are indeed good things, like violets and geraniums; but they do not go together. A billycock is a beautiful object (it may be eagerly urged), but it is not in the same style of architecture as Ely Cathedral; it is a dome, a small rococo dome in the Renaissance manner, and does not go with the pointed arches that assault heaven like spears. A char-a-banc is lovely (it may be said) if placed upon a pedestal and worshipped for its own sweet sake; but it does not harmonize with the curve and outline of the old three-decker on which Nelson died; its beauty is quite of another sort. Therefore (we will suppose our sage to argue) antiquity and democracy should be kept separate, as inconsistent things. Things may be inconsistent in time and space which are by
no means inconsistent in essential value and idea. Thus the Catholic Church has water for the new-born and oil for the dying: but she never mixes oil and water.

This explanation is plausible; but I do not find it adequate. The first objection is that the same smell of bathos haunts the soul in the case of all deliberate and elaborate visits to “beauty spots,” even by persons of the most elegant position or the most protected privacy. Specially visiting the Coliseum by moonlight always struck me as being as vulgar as visiting it by limelight. One millionaire standing on the top of Mont Blanc, one millionaire standing in the desert by the Sphinx, one millionaire standing in the middle of Stonehenge, is just as comic as one millionaire is anywhere else; and that is saying a good deal. On the other hand, if the billycock had come privately and naturally into Ely Cathedral, no enthusiast for Gothic harmony would think of objecting to the billycock—so long, of course, as it was not worn on the head. But there is indeed a much deeper objection to this theory of the two incompatible excellences of antiquity and popularity. For the truth is that it has been almost entirely the antiquities that have normally interested the populace; and it has been almost entirely the populace who have systematically preserved the antiquities. The Oldest Inhabitant has always been a clodhopper; I have never heard of his being a gentleman. It is the peasants who preserve all traditions of the sites of battles or the building of churches. It is they who remember, so far as any one remembers, the glimpses of fairies or the graver wonders of saints. In the classes above them the supernatural has been slain by the supercilious. That is a true and tremendous text in Scripture which says that “where there is no vision the people perish.” But it is equally true in practice that where there is no people the visions perish.

The idea must be abandoned, then, that this feeling of faint dislike towards popular sight-seeing is due to any inherent incompatibility between the idea of special shrines and trophies and the idea of large masses of ordinary men. On the contrary, these two elements of sanctity and democracy have been specially connected and allied throughout history. The shrines and trophies were often put up by ordinary men. They were always put up for ordinary men. To whatever things the fastidious modern artist may choose to apply his theory of specialist judgment, and an aristocracy of taste, he must necessarily find it difficult really to apply it to such historic and monumental art. Obviously, a public building is meant to impress the public. The most aristocratic tomb is a democratic tomb, because it exists to be seen; the only aristocratic thing is the decaying corpse, not the undecaying marble; and if the man wanted to be thoroughly aristocratic, he should be buried in his own back-garden. The chapel of the most narrow and
exclusive sect is universal outside, even if it is limited inside, its walls and windows confront all points of the compass and all quarters of the cosmos. It may be small as a dwelling-place, but it is universal as a monument; if its sectarians had really wished to be private they should have met in a private house. Whenever and wherever we erect a national or municipal hall, pillar, or statue, we are speaking to the crowd like a demagogue.

The statue of every statesman offers itself for election as much as the statesman himself. Every epitaph on a church slab is put up for the mob as much as a placard in a General Election. And if we follow this track of reflection we shall, I think, really find why it is that modern sight-seeing jars on something in us, something that is not a caddish contempt for graves nor an equally caddish contempt for cads. For, after all, there is many a churchyard which consists mostly of dead cads; but that does not make it less sacred or less sad.

The real explanation, I fancy, is this: that these cathedrals and columns of triumph were meant, not for people more cultured and self-conscious than modern tourists, but for people much rougher and more casual. Those leaps of live stone like frozen fountains, were so placed and poised as to catch the eye of ordinary inconsiderate men going about their daily business; and when they are so seen they are never forgotten. The true way of reviving the magic of our great minsters and historic sepulchres is not the one which Ruskin was always recommending. It is not to be more careful of historic buildings. Nay, it is rather to be more careless of them. Buy a bicycle in Maidstone to visit an aunt in Dover, and you will see Canterbury Cathedral as it was built to be seen. Go through London only as the shortest way between Croydon and Hampstead, and the Nelson Column will (for the first time in your life) remind you of Nelson. You will appreciate Hereford Cathedral if you have come for cider, not if you have come for architecture. You will really see the Place Vendome if you have come on business, not if you have come for art. For it was for the simple and laborious generations of men, practical, troubled about many things, that our fathers reared those portents. There is, indeed, another element, not unimportant: the fact that people have gone to cathedrals to pray. But in discussing modern artistic cathedral-lovers, we need not consider this.
A CRIMINAL HEAD

When men of science (or, more often, men who talk about science) speak of studying history or human society scientifically they always forget that there are two quite distinct questions involved. It may be that certain facts of the body go with certain facts of the soul, but it by no means follows that a grasp of such facts of the body goes with a grasp of the things of the soul. A man may show very learnedly that certain mixtures of race make a happy community, but he may be quite wrong (he generally is) about what communities are happy. A man may explain scientifically how a certain physical type involves a really bad man, but he may be quite wrong (he generally is) about which sort of man is really bad. Thus his whole argument is useless, for he understands only one half of the equation.

The drearier kind of don may come to me and say, “Ceils are unsuccessful; look at Irishmen, for instance.” To which I should reply, “You may know all about Celts; but it is obvious that you know nothing about Irishmen. The Irish are not in the least unsuccessful, unless it is unsuccessful to wander from their own country over a great part of the earth, in which case the English are unsuccessful too.” A man with a bumpy head may say to me (as a kind of New Year greeting), “Fools have microcephalous skulls,” or what not. To which I shall reply, “In order to be certain of that, you must be a good judge both of the physical and of the mental fact. It is not enough that you should know a microcephalous skull when you see it. It is also necessary that you should know a fool when you see him; and I have a suspicion that you do not know a fool when you see him, even after the most lifelong and intimate of all forms of acquaintanceship.”

The trouble with most sociologists, criminologists, etc., is that while their knowledge of their own details is exhaustive and subtle, their knowledge of man and society, to which these are to be applied, is quite exceptionally superficial and silly. They know everything about biology, but almost nothing about life. Their ideas of history, for instance, are simply cheap and uneducated. Thus some famous and foolish professor measured the skull of Charlotte Corday to ascertain the criminal type; he had not historical knowledge enough to know that if there is any “criminal type,” certainly Charlotte Corday had not got it. The skull, I believe, afterwards turned out not to be Charlotte Corday’s at all; but that is another story. The point is that the poor old man was trying to match Charlotte
Corday’s mind with her skull without knowing anything whatever about her mind.

But I came yesterday upon a yet more crude and startling example.

In a popular magazine there is one of the usual articles about criminology; about whether wicked men could be made good if their heads were taken to pieces. As by far the wickedest men I know of are much too rich and powerful ever to submit to the process, the speculation leaves me cold. I always notice with pain, however, a curious absence of the portraits of living millionaires from such galleries of awful examples; most of the portraits in which we are called upon to remark the line of the nose or the curve of the forehead appear to be the portraits of ordinary sad men, who stole because they were hungry or killed because they were in a rage. The physical peculiarity seems to vary infinitely; sometimes it is the remarkable square head, sometimes it is the unmistakable round head; sometimes the learned draw attention to the abnormal development, sometimes to the striking deficiency of the back of the head. I have tried to discover what is the invariable factor, the one permanent mark of the scientific criminal type; after exhaustive classification I have to come to the conclusion that it consists in being poor.

But it was among the pictures in this article that I received the final shock; the enlightenment which has left me in lasting possession of the fact that criminologists are generally more ignorant than criminals. Among the starved and bitter, but quite human, faces was one head, neat but old-fashioned, with the powder of the 18th century and a certain almost pert primness in the dress which marked the conventions of the upper middle-class about 1790. The face was lean and lifted stiffly up, the eyes stared forward with a frightful sincerity, the lip was firm with a heroic firmness; all the more pathetic because of a certain delicacy and deficiency of male force, Without knowing who it was, one could have guessed that it was a man in the manner of Shakespeare’s Brutus, a man of piercingly pure intentions, prone to use government as a mere machine for morality, very sensitive to the charge of inconsistency and a little too proud of his own clean and honourable life. I say I should have known this almost from the face alone, even if I had not known who it was.

But I did know who it was. It was Robespierre. And underneath the portrait of this pale and too eager moralist were written these remarkable words: “Deficiency of ethical instincts,” followed by something to the effect that he knew no mercy (which is certainly untrue), and by some nonsense about a retreating forehead, a peculiarity which he shared with Louis XVI and with half
the people of his time and ours.

Then it was that I measured the staggering distance between the knowledge and the ignorance of science. Then I knew that all criminology might be worse than worthless, because of its utter ignorance of that human material of which it is supposed to be speaking. The man who could say that Robespierre was deficient in ethical instincts is a man utterly to be disregarded in all calculations of ethics. He might as well say that John Bunyan was deficient in ethical instincts. You may say that Robespierre was morbid and unbalanced, and you may say the same of Bunyan. But if these two men were morbid and unbalanced they were morbid and unbalanced by feeling too much about morality, not by feeling too little. You may say if you like that Robespierre was (in a negative sort of way) mad. But if he was mad he was mad on ethics. He and a company of keen and pugnacious men, intellectually impatient of unreason and wrong, resolved that Europe should not be choked up in every channel by oligarchies and state secrets that already stank. The work was the greatest that was ever given to men to do except that which Christianity did in dragging Europe out of the abyss of barbarism after the Dark Ages. But they did it, and no one else could have done it.

Certainly we could not do it. We are not ready to fight all Europe on a point of justice. We are not ready to fling our most powerful class as mere refuse to the foreigner; we are not ready to shatter the great estates at a stroke; we are not ready to trust ourselves in an awful moment of utter dissolution in order to make all things seem intelligible and all men feel honourable henceforth. We are not strong enough to be as strong as Danton. We are not strong enough to be as weak as Robespierre. There is only one thing, it seems, that we can do. Like a mob of children, we can play games upon this ancient battlefield; we can pull up the bones and skulls of the tyrants and martyrs of that unimaginable war; and we can chatter to each other childishy and innocently about skulls that are imbecile and heads that are criminal. I do not know whose heads are criminal, but I think I know whose are imbecile.
THE WRATH OF THE ROSES

The position of the rose among flowers is like that of the dog among animals. It is so much that both are domesticated as that have some dim feeling that they were always domesticated. There are wild roses and there are wild dogs. I do not know the wild dogs; wild roses are very nice. But nobody ever thinks of either of them if the name is abruptly mentioned in a gossip or a poem. On the other hand, there are tame tigers and tame cobras, but if one says, “I have a cobra in my pocket,” or “There is a tiger in the music-room,” the adjective “tame” has to be somewhat hastily added. If one speaks of beasts one thinks first of wild beasts; if of flowers one thinks first of wild flowers.

But there are two great exceptions; caught so completely into the wheel of man’s civilization, entangled so unalterably with his ancient emotions and images, that the artificial product seems more natural than the natural. The dog is not a part of natural history, but of human history; and the real rose grows in a garden. All must regard the elephant as something tremendous, but tamed; and many, especially in our great cultured centres, regard every bull as presumably a mad bull. In the same way we think of most garden trees and plants as fierce creatures of the forest or morass taught at last to endure the curb.

But with the dog and the rose this instinctive principle is reversed. With them we think of the artificial as the archetype; the earth-born as the erratic exception. We think vaguely of the wild dog as if he had run away, like the stray cat. And we cannot help fancying that the wonderful wild rose of our hedges has escaped by jumping over the hedge. Perhaps they fled together, the dog and the rose: a singular and (on the whole) an imprudent elopement. Perhaps the treacherous dog crept from the kennel, and the rebellious rose from the flower-bed, and they fought their way out in company, one with teeth and the other with thorns. Possibly this is why my dog becomes a wild dog when he sees roses, and kicks them anywhere. Possibly this is why the wild rose is called a dog-rose. Possibly not.

But there is this degree of dim barbaric truth in the quaint old-world legend that I have just invented. That in these two cases the civilized product is felt to be the fiercer, nay, even the wilder. Nobody seems to be afraid of a wild dog: he is classed among the jackals and the servile beasts. The terrible cave canem is written over man’s creation. When we read “Beware of the Dog,” it means beware of the tame dog: for it is the tame dog that is terrible. He is terrible in
proportion as he is tame: it is his loyalty and his virtues that are awful to the stranger, even the stranger within your gates; still more to the stranger halfway over your gates. He is alarmed at such deafening and furious docility; he flees from that great monster of mildness.

Well, I have much the same feeling when I look at the roses ranked red and thick and resolute round a garden; they seem to me bold and even blustering. I hasten to say that I know even less about my own garden than about anybody else’s garden. I know nothing about roses, not even their names. I know only the name Rose; and Rose is (in every sense of the word) a Christian name. It is Christian in the one absolute and primordial sense of Christian—that it comes down from the age of pagans. The rose can be seen, and even smelt, in Greek, Latin, Provencal, Gothic, Renascence, and Puritan poems. Beyond this mere word Rose, which (like wine and other noble words) is the same in all the tongues of white men, I know literally nothing. I have heard the more evident and advertised names. I know there is a flower which calls itself the Glory of Dijon—which I had supposed to be its cathedral. In any case, to have produced a rose and a cathedral is to have produced not only two very glorious and humane things, but also (as I maintain) two very soldierly and defiant things. I also know there is a rose called Marechal Niel—note once more the military ring.

And when I was walking round my garden the other day I spoke to my gardener (an enterprise of no little valour) and asked him the name of a strange dark rose that had somehow oddly taken my fancy. It was almost as if it reminded me of some turbid element in history and the soul. Its red was not only swarthy, but smoky; there was something congested and wrathful about its colour. It was at once theatrical and sulky. The gardener told me it was called Victor Hugo.

Therefore it is that I feel all roses to have some secret power about them; even their names may mean something in connexion with themselves, in which they differ from nearly all the sons of men. But the rose itself is royal and dangerous; long as it has remained in the rich house of civilization, it has never laid off its armour. A rose always looks like a mediaeval gentleman of Italy, with a cloak of crimson and a sword: for the thorn is the sword of the rose.

And there is this real moral in the matter; that we have to remember that civilization as it goes on ought not perhaps to grow more fighting—but ought to grow more ready to fight. The more valuable and reposeful is the order we have to guard, the more vivid should be our ultimate sense of vigilance and potential violence. And when I walk round a summer garden, I can understand how those
high mad lords at the end of the Middle Ages, just before their swords clashed, caught at roses for their instinctive emblems of empire and rivalry. For to me any such garden is full of the wars of the roses.
THE GOLD OF GLASTONBURY

One silver morning I walked into a small grey town of stone, like twenty other grey western towns, which happened to be called Glastonbury; and saw the magic thorn of near two thousand years growing in the open air as casually as any bush in my garden.

In Glastonbury, as in all noble and humane things, the myth is more important than the history. One cannot say anything stronger of the strange old tale of St. Joseph and the Thorn than that it dwarfs St. Dunstan. Standing among the actual stones and shrubs one thinks of the first century and not of the tenth; one’s mind goes back beyond the Saxons and beyond the greatest statesman of the Dark Ages. The tale that Joseph of Arimathea came to Britain is presumably a mere legend. But it is not by any means so incredible or preposterous a legend as many modern people suppose. The popular notion is that the thing is quite comic and inconceivable; as if one said that Wat Tyler went to Chicago, or that John Bunyan discovered the North Pole. We think of Palestine as little, localized and very private, of Christ’s followers as poor folk, astricte globis, rooted to their towns or trades; and we think of vast routes of travel and constant world-communications as things of recent and scientific origin. But this is wrong; at least, the last part of it is. It is part of that large and placid lie that the rationalists tell when they say that Christianity arose in ignorance and barbarism. Christianity arose in the thick of a brilliant and bustling cosmopolitan civilization. Long sea-voyages were not so quick, but were quite as incessant as to-day; and though in the nature of things Christ had not many rich followers, it is not unnatural to suppose that He had some. And a Joseph of Arimathea may easily have been a Roman citizen with a yacht that could visit Britain. The same fallacy is employed with the same partisan motive in the case of the Gospel of St. John; which critics say could not have been written by one of the first few Christians because of its Greek transcendentalism and its Platonic tone. I am no judge of the philology, but every human being is a divinely appointed judge of the philosophy: and the Platonic tone seems to me to prove nothing at all. Palestine was not a secluded valley of barbarians; it was an open province of a polyglot empire, overrun with all sorts of people of all kinds of education. To take a rough parallel: suppose some great prophet arose among the Boers in South Africa. The prophet himself might be a simple or unlettered man. But no one who knows the modern world would be surprised if one of his closest
followers were a Professor from Heidelberg or an M.A. from Oxford.

All this is not urged here with any notion of proving that the tale of the thorn is not a myth; as I have said, it probably is a myth. It is urged with the much more important object of pointing out the proper attitude towards such myths. The proper attitude is one of doubt and hope and of a kind of light mystery. The tale is certainly not impossible; as it is certainly not certain. And through all the ages since the Roman Empire men have fed their healthy fancies and their historical imagination upon the very twilight condition of such tales. But to-day real agnosticm has declined along with real theology. People cannot leave a creed alone; though it is the essence of a creed to be clear. But neither can they leave a legend alone; though it is the essence of a legend to be vague. That sane half scepticism which was found in all rustics, in all ghost tales and fairy tales, seems to be a lost secret. Modern people must make scientifically certain that St. Joseph did or did not go to Glastonbury, despite the fact that it is now quite impossible to find out; and that it does not, in a religious sense, very much matter. But it is essential to feel that he may have gone to Glastonbury: all songs, arts, and dedications branching and blossoming like the thorn, are rooted in some such sacred doubt. Taken thus, not heavily like a problem but lightly like an old tale, the thing does lead one along the road of very strange realities, and the thorn is found growing in the heart of a very secret maze of the soul. Something is really present in the place; some closer contact with the thing which covers Europe but is still a secret. Somehow the grey town and the green bush touch across the world the strange small country of the garden and the grave; there is verily some communion between the thorn tree and the crown of thorns.

A man never knows what tiny thing will startle him to such ancestral and impersonal tears. Piles of superb masonry will often pass like a common panorama; and on this grey and silver morning the ruined towers of the cathedral stood about me somewhat vaguely like grey clouds. But down in a hollow where the local antiquaries are making a fruitful excavation, a magnificent old ruffian with a pickaxe (whom I believe to have been St. Joseph of Arimathea) showed me a fragment of the old vaulted roof which he had found in the earth; and on the whitish grey stone there was just a faint brush of gold. There seemed a piercing and swordlike pathos, an unexpected fragrance of all forgotten or desecrated things, in the bare survival of that poor little pigment upon the imperishable rock. To the strong shapes of the Roman and the Gothic I had grown accustomed; but that weak touch of colour was at once tawdry and tender, like some popular keepsake. Then I knew that all my fathers were men like me;
for the columns and arches were grave, and told of the gravity of the builders; but here was one touch of their gaiety. I almost expected it to fade from the stone as I stared. It was as if men had been able to preserve a fragment of a sunset.

And then I remembered how the artistic critics have always praised the grave tints and the grim shadows of the crumbling cloisters and abbey towers, and how they themselves often dress up like Gothic ruins in the sombre tones of dim grey walls or dark green ivy. I remembered how they hated almost all primary things, but especially primary colours. I knew they were appreciating much more delicately and truly than I the sublime skeleton and the mighty fungoids of the dead Glastonbury. But I stood for an instant alive in the living Glastonbury, gay with gold and coloured like the toy-book of a child.
THE FUTURISTS

It was a warm golden evening, fit for October, and I was watching (with regret) a lot of little black pigs being turned out of my garden, when the postman handed to me, with a perfunctory haste which doubtless masked his emotion, the Declaration of Futurism. If you ask me what Futurism is, I cannot tell you; even the Futurists themselves seem a little doubtful; perhaps they are waiting for the future to find out. But if you ask me what its Declaration is, I answer eagerly; for I can tell you quite a lot about that. It is written by an Italian named Marinetti, in a magazine which is called Poesia. It is headed “Declaration of Futurism” in enormous letters; it is divided off with little numbers; and it starts straight away like this: “1. We intend to glorify the love of danger, the custom of energy, the strengt of daring. 2. The essential elements of our poetry will be courage, audacity, and revolt. 3. Literature having up to now glorified thoughtful immobility, ecstasy, and slumber, we wish to exalt the aggressive movement, the feverish insomnia, running, the perilous leap, the cuff and the blow.” While I am quite willing to exalt the cuff within reason, it scarcely seems such an entirely new subject for literature as the Futurists imagine. It seems to me that even through the slumber which fills the Siege of Troy, the Song of Roland, and the Orlando Furioso, and in spite of the thoughtful immobility which marks “Pantagruel,” “Henry V,” and the Ballad of Chevy Chase, there are occasional gleams of an admiration for courage, a readiness to glorify the love of danger, and even the “strengt of daring,” I seem to remember, slightly differently spelt, somewhere in literature.

The distinction, however, seems to be that the warriors of the past went in for tournaments, which were at least dangerous for themselves, while the Futurists go in for motor-cars, which are mainly alarming for other people. It is the Futurist in his motor who does the “aggressive movement,” but it is the pedestrians who go in for the “running” and the “perilous leap.” Section No. 4 says, “We declare that the splendour of the world has been enriched with a new form of beauty, the beauty of speed. A race-automobile adorned with great pipes like serpents with explosive breath. . . . A race-automobile which seems to rush over exploding powder is more beautiful than the Victory of Samothrace.” It is also much easier, if you have the money. It is quite clear, however, that you cannot be a Futurist at all unless you are frightfully rich. Then follows this lucid and soul-stirring sentence: “5. We will sing the praises of man holding the
flywheel of which the ideal steering-post traverses the earth impelled itself around the circuit of its own orbit.” What a jolly song it would be—so hearty, and with such a simple swing in it! I can imagine the Futurists round the fire in a tavern touting out in chorus some ballad with that incomparable refrain; shouting over their swaying flagons some such words as these:

A notion came into my head as new as it was bright That poems might be written on the subject of a fight; No praise was given to Lancelot, Achilles, Nap or Corbett, But we will sing the praises of man holding the flywheel of which the ideal steering-post traverses the earth impelled itself around the circuit of its own orbit.

Then lest it should be supposed that Futurism would be so weak as to permit any democratic restraints upon the violence and levity of the luxurious classes, there would be a special verse in honour of the motors also:

My fathers scaled the mountains in their pilgrimages far, But I feel full of energy while sitting in a car; And petrol is the perfect wine, I lick it and absorb it, So we will sing the praises of man holding the flywheel of which the ideal steering-post traverses the earth impelled itself around the circuit of its own orbit.

Yes, it would be a rollicking catch. I wish there were space to finish the song, or to detail all the other sections in the Declaration. Suffice it to say that Futurism has a gratifying dislike both of Liberal politics and Christian morals; I say gratifying because, however unfortunately the cross and the cap of liberty have quarrelled, they are always united in the feeble hatred of such silly megalomaniacs as these. They will “glorify war—the only true hygiene of the world—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of Anarchism, the beautiful ideas which kill, and the scorn of woman.” They will “destroy museums, libraries, and fight against moralism, feminism, and all utilitarian cowardice.” The proclamation ends with an extraordinary passage which I cannot understand at all, all about something that is going to happen to Mr. Marinetti when he is forty. As far as I can make out he will then be killed by other poets, who will be overwhelmed with love and admiration for him. “They will come against us from far away, from everywhere, leaping on the cadence of their first poems, clawing the air with crooked fingers and scenting at the Academy gates the good smell of our decaying minds.” Well, it is satisfactory to be told, however obscurely, that this sort of thing is coming to an end some day, to be replaced by some other tomfoolery. And though I commonly refrain from clawing the air with crooked fingers, I can assure Mr. Marinetti that this omission does not
disqualify me, and that I scent the good smell of his decaying mind all right.

I think the only other point of Futurism is contained in this sentence: “It is in Italy that we hurl this overthrowing and inflammatory Declaration, with which to-day we found Futurism, for we will free Italy from her numberless museums which cover her with countless cemeteries.” I think that rather sums it up. The best way, one would think, of freeing oneself from a museum would be not to go there. Mr. Marinetti’s fathers and grandfathers freed Italy from prisons and torture chambers, places where people were held by force. They, being in the bondage of “moralism,” attacked Governments as unjust, real Governments, with real guns. Such was their utilitarian cowardice that they would die in hundreds upon the bayonets of Austria. I can well imagine why Mr. Marinetti in his motor-car does not wish to look back at the past. If there was one thing that could make him look smaller even than before it is that roll of dead men’s drums and that dream of Garibaldi going by. The old Radical ghosts go by, more real than the living men, to assault I know not what ramparted city in hell. And meanwhile the Futurist stands outside a museum in a warlike attitude, and defiantly tells the official at the turnstile that he will never, never come in.

There is a certain solid use in fools. It is not so much that they rush in where angels fear to tread, but rather that they let out what devils intend to do. Some perversion of folly will float about nameless and pervade a whole society; then some lunatic gives it a name, and henceforth it is harmless. With all really evil things, when the danger has appeared the danger is over. Now it may be hoped that the self-indulgent sprawlers of Poesia have put a name once and for all to their philosophy. In the case of their philosophy, to put a name to it is to put an end to it. Yet their philosophy has been very widespread in our time; it could hardly have been pointed and finished except by this perfect folly. The creed of which (please God) this is the flower and finish consists ultimately in this statement: that it is bold and spirited to appeal to the future. Now, it is entirely weak and half-witted to appeal to the future. A brave man ought to ask for what he wants, not for what he expects to get. A brave man who wants Atheism in the future calls himself an Atheist; a brave man who wants Socialism, a Socialist; a brave man who wants Catholicism, a Catholic. But a weak-minded man who does not know what he wants in the future calls himself a Futurist.

They have driven all the pigs away. Oh that they had driven away the prigs, and left the pigs! The sky begins to droop with darkness and all birds and blossoms to descend unaltering into the healthy underworld where things slumber and grow. There was just one true phrase of Mr. Marinetti’s about
himself: “the feverish insomnia.” The whole universe is pouring headlong to the happiness of the night. It is only the madman who has not the courage to sleep.
DUKES

The Duc de Chambertin-Pommard was a small but lively relic of a really aristocratic family, the members of which were nearly all Atheists up to the time of the French Revolution, but since that event (beneficial in such various ways) had been very devout. He was a Royalist, a Nationalist, and a perfectly sincere patriot in that particular style which consists of ceaselessly asserting that one’s country is not so much in danger as already destroyed. He wrote cheery little articles for the Royalist Press entitled “The End of France” or “The Last Cry,” or what not, and he gave the final touches to a picture of the Kaiser riding across a pavement of prostrate Parisians with a glow of patriotic exultation. He was quite poor, and even his relations had no money. He walked briskly to all his meals at a little open cafe, and he looked just like everybody else.

Living in a country where aristocracy does not exist, he had a high opinion of it. He would yearn for the swords and the stately manners of the Pommards before the Revolution—most of whom had been (in theory) Republicans. But he turned with a more practical eagerness to the one country in Europe where the tricolour has never flown and men have never been roughly equalized before the State. The beacon and comfort of his life was England, which all Europe sees clearly as the one pure aristocracy that remains. He had, moreover, a mild taste for sport and kept an English bulldog, and he believed the English to be a race of bulldogs, of heroic squires, and hearty yeomen vassals, because he read all this in English Conservative papers, written by exhausted little Levantine clerks. But his reading was naturally for the most part in the French Conservative papers (though he knew English well), and it was in these that he first heard of the horrible Budget. There he read of the confiscatory revolution planned by the Lord Chancellor of the Exchequer, the sinister Georges Lloyd. He also read how chivalrously Prince Arthur Balfour of Burleigh had defied that demagogue, assisted by Austen the Lord Chamberlain and the gay and witty Walter Lang. And being a brisk partisan and a capable journalist, he decided to pay England a special visit and report to his paper upon the struggle.

He drove for an eternity in an open fly through beautiful woods, with a letter of introduction in his pocket to one duke, who was to introduce him to another duke. The endless and numberless avenues of bewildering pine woods gave him a queer feeling that he was driving through the countless corridors of a dream. Yet the vast silence and freshness healed his irritation at modern ugliness and
unrest. It seemed a background fit for the return of chivalry. In such a forest a
king and all his court might lose themselves hunting or a knight errant might
perish with no companion but God. The castle itself when he reached it was
somewhat smaller than he had expected, but he was delighted with its romantic
and castellated outline. He was just about to alight when somebody opened two
enormous gates at the side and the vehicle drove briskly through.

“That is not the house?” he inquired politely of the driver.

“No, sir,” said the driver, controlling the corners of his mouth. “The lodge,
sir.”

“Indeed,” said the Duc de Chambertin-Pommard, “that is where the Duke’s
land begins?”

“Oh no, sir,” said the man, quite in distress. “We’ve been in his Grace’s land
all day.”

The Frenchman thanked him and leant back in the carriage, feeling as if
everything were incredibly huge and vast, like Gulliver in the country of the
Brobdignags.

He got out in front of a long facade of a somewhat severe building, and a little
careless man in a shooting jacket and knickerbockers ran down the steps. He had
a weak, fair moustache and dull, blue, babyish eyes; his features were
insignificant, but his manner extremely pleasant and hospitable, This was the
Duke of Aylesbury, perhaps the largest landowner in Europe, and known only as
a horsebreeder until he began to write abrupt little letters about the Budget. He
led the French Duke upstairs, talking trivialties in a hearty way, and there
presented him to another and more important English oligarch, who got up from
a writing-desk with a slightly senile jerk. He had a gleaming bald head and
glasses; the lower part of his face was masked with a short, dark beard, which
did not conceal a beaming smile, not unmixed with sharpness. He stooped a little
as he ran, like some sedentary head clerk or cashier; and even without the
cheque-book and papers on his desk would have given the impression of a
merchant or man of business. He was dressed in a light grey check jacket. He
was the Duke of Windsor, the great Unionist statesman. Between these two
loose, amiable men, the little Gaul stood erect in his black frock coat, with the
monstrous gravity of French ceremonial good manners. This stiffness led the
Duke of Windsor to put him at his ease (like a tenant), and he said, rubbing his
hands:

“I was delighted with your letter . . . delighted. I shall be very pleased if I can
give you–er–any details.”
“My visit,” said the Frenchman, “scarcely suffices for the scientific exhaustion of detail. I seek only the idea. The idea, that is always the immediate thing.”

“Quite so,” said the other rapidly; “quite so . . . the idea.”

Feeling somehow that it was his turn (the English Duke having done all that could be required of him) Pommard had to say: “I mean the idea of aristocracy. I regard this as the last great battle for the idea. Aristocracy, like any other thing, must justify itself to mankind. Aristocracy is good because it preserves a picture of human dignity in a world where that dignity is often obscured by servile necessities. Aristocracy alone can keep a certain high reticence of soul and body, a certain noble distance between the sexes.”

The Duke of Aylesbury, who had a clouded recollection of having squirited soda-water down the neck of a Countess on the previous evening, looked somewhat gloomy, as if lamenting the theoretic spirit of the Latin race. The elder Duke laughed heartily, and said: “Well, well, you know; we English are horribly practical. With us the great question is the land. Out here in the country . . . do you know this part?”

“Yes, yes,” cried the Frenchmen eagerly. “I See what you mean. The country! the old rustic life of humanity! A holy war upon the bloated and filthy towns. What right have these anarchists to attack your busy and prosperous countrysides? Have they not thriven under your management? Are not the English villages always growing larger and gayer under the enthusiastic leadership of their encouraging squires? Have you not the Maypole? Have you not Merry England?”

The Duke of Aylesbury made a noise in his throat, and then said very indistinctly: “They all go to London.”

“All go to London?” repeated Pommard, with a blank stare. “Why?”

This time nobody answered, and Pommard had to attack again.

“The spirit of aristocracy is essentially opposed to the greed of the industrial cities. Yet in France there are actually one or two nobles so vile as to drive coal and gas trades, and drive them hard.” The Duke of Windsor looked at the carpet. The Duke of Aylesbury went and looked out of the window. At length the latter said: “That’s rather stiff, you know. One has to look after one’s own business in town as well.”

“Do not say it,” cried the little Frenchman, starting up. “I tell you all Europe is one fight between business and honour. If we do not fight for honour, who will? What other right have we poor two-legged sinners to titles and quartered shields except that we staggeringly support some idea of giving things which cannot be
demanded and avoiding things which cannot be punished? Our only claim is to be a wall across Christendom against the Jew pedlars and pawnbrokers, against the Goldsteins and the—”

The Duke of Aylesbury swung round with his hands in his pockets.

“Oh, I say,” he said, “you’ve been readin’ Lloyd George. Nobody but dirty Radicals can say a word against Goldstein.”

“I certainly cannot permit,” said the elder Duke, rising rather shakily, “the respected name of Lord Goldstein—”

He intended to be impressive, but there was something in the Frenchman’s eye that is not so easily impressed; there shone there that steel which is the mind of France.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “I think I have all the details now. You have ruled England for four hundred years. By your own account you have not made the countryside endurable to men. By your own account you have helped the victory of vulgarity and smoke. And by your own account you are hand and glove with those very money-grubbers and adventurers whom gentlemen have no other business but to keep at bay. I do not know what your people will do; but my people would kill you.”

Some seconds afterwards he had left the Duke’s house, and some hours afterwards the Duke’s estate.
THE GLORY OF GREY

I suppose that, taking this summer as a whole, people will not call it an appropriate time for praising the English climate. But for my part I will praise the English climate till I die—even if I die of the English climate. There is no weather so good as English weather. Nay, in a real sense there is no weather at all anywhere but in England. In France you have much sun and some rain; in Italy you have hot winds and cold winds; in Scotland and Ireland you have rain, either thick or thin; in America you have hells of heat and cold, and in the Tropics you have sunstrokes varied by thunderbolts. But all these you have on a broad and brutal scale, and you settle down into contentment or despair. Only in our own romantic country do you have the strictly romantic thing called Weather; beautiful and changing as a woman. The great English landscape painters (neglected now like everything that is English) have this salient distinction: that the Weather is not the atmosphere of their pictures; it is the subject of their pictures. They paint portraits of the Weather. The Weather sat to Constable. The Weather posed for Turner, and a deuce of a pose it was. This cannot truly be said of the greatest of their continental models or rivals. Poussin and Claude painted objects, ancient cities or perfect Arcadian shepherds through a clear medium of the climate. But in the English painters Weather is the hero; with Turner an Adelphi hero, taunting, flashing and fighting, melodramatic but really magnificent. The English climate, a tall and terrible protagonist, robed in rain and thunder and snow and sunlight, fills the whole canvas and the whole foreground. I admit the superiority of many other French things besides French art. But I will not yield an inch on the superiority of English weather and weather-painting. Why, the French have not even got a word for Weather: and you must ask for the weather in French as if you were asking for the time in English.

Then, again, variety of climate should always go with stability of abode. The weather in the desert is monotonous; and as a natural consequence the Arabs wander about, hoping it may be different somewhere. But an Englishman’s house is not only his castle; it is his fairy castle. Clouds and colours of every varied dawn and eve are perpetually touching and turning it from clay to gold, or from gold to ivory. There is a line of woodland beyond a corner of my garden which is literally different on every one of the three hundred and sixty-five days. Sometimes it seems as near as a hedge, and sometimes as far as a faint and fiery
evening cloud. The same principle (by the way) applies to the difficult problem of wives. Variability is one of the virtues of a woman. It avoids the crude requirement of polygamy. So long as you have one good wife you are sure to have a spiritual harem.

Now, among the heresies that are spoken in this matter is the habit of calling a grey day a “colourless” day. Grey is a colour, and can be a very powerful and pleasing colour. There is also an insulting style of speech about “one grey day just like another” You might as well talk about one green tree just like another. A grey clouded sky is indeed a canopy between us and the sun; so is a green tree, if it comes to that. But the grey umbrellas differ as much as the green in their style and shape, in their tint and tilt. One day may be grey like steel, and another grey like dove’s plumage. One may seem grey like the deathly frost, and another grey like the smoke of substantial kitchens. No things could seem further apart than the doubt of grey and the decision of scarlet. Yet grey and red can mingle, as they do in the morning clouds: and also in a sort of warm smoky stone of which they build the little towns in the west country. In those towns even the houses that are wholly grey have a glow in them; as if their secret firesides were such furnaces of hospitality as faintly to transfuse the walls like walls of cloud. And wandering in those westland parts I did once really find a sign-post pointing up a steep crooked path to a town that was called Clouds. I did not climb up to it; I feared that either the town would not be good enough for the name, or I should not be good enough for the town. Anyhow, the little hamlets of the warm grey stone have a geniality which is not achieved by all the artistic scarlet of the suburbs; as if it were better to warm one’s hands at the ashes of Glastonbury than at the painted flames of Croydon.

Again, the enemies of grey (those astute, daring and evil-minded men) are fond of bringing forward the argument that colours suffer in grey weather, and that strong sunlight is necessary to all the hues of heaven and earth. Here again there are two words to be said; and it is essential to distinguish. It is true that sun is needed to burnish and bring into bloom the tertiary and dubious colours; the colour of peat, pea-soup, Impressionist sketches, brown velvet coats, olives, grey and blue slates, the complexions of vegetarians, the tints of volcanic rock, chocolate, cocoa, mud, soot, slime, old boots; the delicate shades of these do need the sunlight to bring out the faint beauty that often clings to them. But if you have a healthy negro taste in colour, if you choke your garden with poppies and geraniums, if you paint your house sky-blue and scarlet, if you wear, let us say, a golden top-hat and a crimson frock-coat, you will not only be visible on
the greyest day, but you will notice that your costume and environment produce a certain singular effect. You will find, I mean, that rich colours actually look more luminous on a grey day, because they are seen against a sombre background and seem to be burning with a lustre of their own. Against a dark sky all flowers look like fireworks. There is something strange about them, at once vivid and secret, like flowers traced in fire in the phantasmal garden of a witch. A bright blue sky is necessarily the high light of the picture; and its brightness kills all the bright blue flowers. But on a grey day the larkspur looks like fallen heaven; the red daisies are really the red lost eyes of day; and the sunflower is the vice-regent of the sun.

Lastly, there is this value about the colour that men call colourless; that it suggests in some way the mixed and troubled average of existence, especially in its quality of strife and expectation and promise. Grey is a colour that always seems on the eve of changing to some other colour; of brightening into blue or blanching into white or bursting into green and gold. So we may be perpetually reminded of the indefinite hope that is in doubt itself; and when there is grey weather in our hills or grey hairs in our heads, perhaps they may still remind us of the morning.
THE ANARCHIST

I have now lived for about two months in the country, and have gathered the last rich autumnal fruit of a rural life, which is a strong desire to see London. Artists living in my neighbourhood talk rapturously of the rolling liberty of the landscape, the living peace of woods. But I say to them (with a slight Buckinghamshire accent), “Ah, that is how Cockneys feel. For us real old country people the country is reality; it is the town that is romance. Nature is as plain as one of her pigs, as commonplace, as comic, and as healthy. But civilization is full of poetry, even if it be sometimes an evil poetry. The streets of London are paved with gold; that is, with the very poetry of avarice.” With these typically bucolic words I touch my hat and go ambling away on a stick, with a stiffness of gait proper to the Oldest Inhabitant; while in my more animated moments I am taken for the Village Idiot. Exchanging heavy but courteous salutations with other gaffers, I reach the station, where I ask for a ticket for London where the king lives. Such a journey, mingled of provincial fascination and fear, did I successfully perform only a few days ago; and alone and helpless in the capital, found myself in the tangle of roads around the Marble Arch.

A faint prejudice may possess the mind that I have slightly exaggerated my rusticity and remoteness. And yet it is true as I came to that corner of the Park that, for some unreasonable reason of mood, I saw all London as a strange city and the civilization itself as one enormous whim. The Marble Arch itself, in its new insular position, with traffic turning dizzily all about it, struck me as a placid monstrosity. What could be wilder than to have a huge arched gateway, with people going everywhere except under it? If I took down my front door and stood it up all by itself in the middle of my back garden, my village neighbours (in their simplicity) would probably stare. Yet the Marble Arch is now precisely that; an elaborate entrance and the only place by which no one can enter. By the new arrangement its last weak pretence to be a gate has been taken away. The cabman still cannot drive through it, but he can have the delights of riding round it, and even (on foggy nights) the rapture of running into it. It has been raised from the rank of a fiction to the dignity of an obstacle.

As I began to walk across a corner of the Park, this sense of what is strange in cities began to mingle with some sense of what is stern as well as strange. It was one of those queer-coloured winter days when a watery sky changes to pink and grey and green, like an enormous opal. The trees stood up grey and angular, as if
in attitudes of agony; and here and there on benches under the trees sat men as grey and angular as they. It was cold even for me, who had eaten a large breakfast and purposed to eat a perfectly Gargantuan lunch; it was colder for the men under the trees. And to eastward through the opalescent haze, the warmer whites and yellows of the houses in Park-lane shone as unsubstantially as if the clouds themselves had taken on the shape of mansions to mock the men who sat there in the cold. But the mansions were real—like the mockery.

No one worth calling a man allows his moods to change his convictions; but it is by moods that we understand other men’s convictions. The bigot is not he who knows he is right; every sane man knows he is right. The bigot is he whose emotions and imagination are too cold and weak to feel how it is that other men go wrong. At that moment I felt vividly how men might go wrong, even unto dynamite. If one of those huddled men under the trees had stood up and asked for rivers of blood, it would have been erroneous—but not irrelevant. It would have been appropriate and in the picture; that lurid grey picture of insolence on one side and impotence on the other. It may be true (on the whole it is) that this social machine we have made is better than anarchy. Still, it is a machine; and we have made it. It does hold those poor men helpless: and it does lift those rich men high . . . and such men—good Lord! By the time I flung myself on a bench beside another man I was half inclined to try anarchy for a change.

The other was of more prosperous appearance than most of the men on such seats; still, he was not what one calls a gentleman, and had probably worked at some time like a human being. He was a small, sharp-faced man, with grave, staring eyes, and a beard somewhat foreign. His clothes were black; respectable and yet casual; those of a man who dressed conventionally because it was a bore to dress unconventionally—as it is. Attracted by this and other things, and wanting an outburst for my bitter social feelings, I tempted him into speech, first about the cold, and then about the General Election. To this the respectable man replied:

“Well, I don’t belong to any party myself. I’m an Anarchist.”

I looked up and almost expected fire from heaven. This coincidence was like the end of the world. I had sat down feeling that somehow or other Park-lane must be pulled down; and I had sat down beside the man who wanted to pull it down. I bowed in silence for an instant under the approaching apocalypse; and in that instant the man turned sharply and started talking like a torrent.

“Understand me,” he said. “Ordinary people think an Anarchist means a man with a bomb in his pocket. Herbert Spencer was an Anarchist. But for that fatal
admission of his on page 793, he would be a complete Anarchist. Otherwise, he agrees wholly with Pidge.”

This was uttered with such blinding rapidity of syllabification as to be a better test of teetotalism than the Scotch one of saying “Biblical criticism” six times. I attempted to speak, but he began again with the same rippling rapidity.

“You will say that Pidge also admits government in that tenth chapter so easily misunderstood. Bolger has attacked Pidge on those lines. But Bolger has no scientific training. Bolger is a psychometrist, but no sociologist. To any one who has combined a study of Pidge with the earlier and better discoveries of Kruxy, the fallacy is quite clear. Bolger confounds social coercion with coercional social action.”

His rapid rattling mouth shut quite tight suddenly, and he looked steadily and triumphantly at me, with his head on one side. I opened my mouth, and the mere motion seemed to sting him to fresh verbal leaps.

“Yes,” he said, “that’s all very well. The Finland Group has accepted Bolger. But,” he said, suddenly lifting a long finger as if to stop me, “but–Pidge has replied. His pamphlet is published. He has proved that Potential Social Rebuff is not a weapon of the true Anarchist. He has shown that just as religious authority and political authority have gone, so must emotional authority and psychological authority. He has shown–”

I stood up in a sort of daze. “I think you remarked,” I said feebly, “that the mere common populace do not quite understand Anarchism”–“Quite so,” he said with burning swiftness; “as I said, they think any Anarchist is a man with a bomb, whereas–”

“But great heavens, man!” I said; “it’s the man with the bomb that I understand! I wish you had half his sense. What do I care how many German dons tie themselves in knots about how this society began? My only interest is about how soon it will end. Do you see those fat white houses over in Park-lane, where your masters live?”

He assented and muttered something about concentrations of capital.

“Well,” I said, “if the time ever comes when we all storm those houses, will you tell me one thing? Tell me how we shall do it without authority? Tell me how you will have an army of revolt without discipline?”

For the first instant he was doubtful; and I had bidden him farewell, and crossed the street again, when I saw him open his mouth and begin to run after me. He had remembered something out of Pidge.

I escaped, however, and as I leapt on an omnibus I saw again the enormous
emblem of the Marble Arch. I saw that massive symbol of the modern mind: a door with no house to it; the gigantic gate of Nowhere.
HOW I FOUND THE SUPERMAN

Readers of Mr. Bernard Shaw and other modern writers may be interested to know that the Superman has been found. I found him; he lives in South Croydon. My success will be a great blow to Mr. Shaw, who has been following quite a false scent, and is now looking for the creature in Blackpool; and as for Mr. Wells’s notion of generating him out of gases in a private laboratory, I always thought it doomed to failure. I assure Mr. Wells that the Superman at Croydon was born in the ordinary way, though he himself, of course, is anything but ordinary.

Nor are his parents unworthy of the wonderful being whom they have given to the world. The name of Lady Hypatia Smythe-Browne (now Lady Hypatia Hagg) will never be forgotten in the East End, where she did such splendid social work. Her constant cry of “Save the children!” referred to the cruel neglect of children’s eyesight involved in allowing them to play with crudely painted toys. She quoted unanswerable statistics to prove that children allowed to look at violet and vermilion often suffered from failing eyesight in their extreme old age; and it was owing to her ceaseless crusade that the pestilence of the Monkey-on-the-Stick was almost swept from Hoxton. The devoted worker would tramp the streets untiringly, taking away the toys from all the poor children, who were often moved to tears by her kindness. Her good work was interrupted, partly by a new interest in the creed of Zoroaster, and partly by a savage blow from an umbrella. It was inflicted by a dissolute Irish apple-woman, who, on returning from some orgy to her ill-kept apartment, found Lady Hypatia in the bedroom taking down an oleograph, which, to say the least of it, could not really elevate the mind. At this the ignorant and partly intoxicated Celt dealt the social reformer a severe blow, adding to it an absurd accusation of theft. The lady’s exquisitely balanced mind received a shock, and it was during a short mental illness that she married Dr. Hagg.

Of Dr. Hagg himself I hope there is no need to speak. Any one even slightly acquainted with those daring experiments in Neo-Individualist Eugenics, which are now the one absorbing interest of the English democracy, must know his name and often commend it to the personal protection of an impersonal power. Early in life he brought to bear that ruthless insight into the history of religions which he had gained in boyhood as an electrical engineer. Later he became one of our greatest geologists; and achieved that bold and bright outlook upon the
future of Socialism which only geology can give. At first there seemed something like a rift, a faint, but perceptible, fissure, between his views and those of his aristocratic wife. For she was in favour (to use her own powerful epigram) of protecting the poor against themselves; while he declared pitilessly, in a new and striking metaphor, that the weakest must go to the wall. Eventually, however, the married pair perceived an essential union in the unmistakably modern character of both their views, and in this enlightening and intelligible formula their souls found peace. The result is that this union of the two highest types of our civilization, the fashionable lady and the all but vulgar medical man, has been blessed by the birth of the Superman, that being whom all the labourers in Battersea are so eagerly expecting night and day.

I found the house of Dr. and Lady Hypatia Hagg without much difficulty; it is situated in one of the last straggling streets of Croydon, and overlooked by a line of poplars. I reached the door towards the twilight, and it was natural that I should fancifully see something dark and monstrous in the dim bulk of that house which contained the creature who was more marvellous than the children of men. When I entered the house I was received with exquisite courtesy by Lady Hypatia and her husband; but I found much greater difficulty in actually seeing the Superman, who is now about fifteen years old, and is kept by himself in a quiet room. Even my conversation with the father and mother did not quite clear up the character of this mysterious being. Lady Hypatia, who has a pale and poignant face, and is clad in those impalpable and pathetic greys and greens with which she has brightened so many homes in Hoxton, did not appear to talk of her offspring with any of the vulgar vanity of an ordinary human mother. I took a bold step and asked if the Superman was nice looking.

“He creates his own standard, you see,” she replied, with a slight sigh. “Upon that plane he is more than Apollo. Seen from our lower plane, of course—” And she sighed again.

I had a horrible impulse, and said suddenly, “Has he got any hair?”

There was a long and painful silence, and then Dr. Hagg said smoothly: “Everything upon that plane is different; what he has got is not . . . well, not, of course, what we call hair . . . but—”

“Don’t you think,” said his wife, very softly, “don’t you think that really, for the sake of argument, when talking to the mere public, one might call it hair?”

“Perhaps you are right,” said the doctor after a few moments’ reflection. “In connexion with hair like that one must speak in parables.”

“Well, what on earth is it,” I asked in some irritation, “if it isn’t hair? Is it
feathers?”

“Not feathers, as we understand feathers,” answered Hagg in an awful voice.

I got up in some irritation. “Can I see him, at any rate?” I asked. “I am a journalist, and have no earthly motives except curiosity and personal vanity. I should like to say that I had shaken hands with the Superman.”

The husband and wife had both got heavily to their feet, and stood, embarrassed. “Well, of course, you know,” said Lady Hypatia, with the really charming smile of the aristocratic hostess. “You know he can’t exactly shake hands . . . not hands, you know. . . . The structure, of course—”

I broke out of all social bounds, and rushed at the door of the room which I thought to contain the incredible creature. I burst it open; the room was pitch dark. But from in front of me came a small sad yelp, and from behind me a double shriek.

“You have done it, now!” cried Dr. Hagg, burying his bald brow in his hands. “You have let in a draught on him; and he is dead.”

As I walked away from Croydon that night I saw men in black carrying out a coffin that was not of any human shape. The wind wailed above me, whirling the poplars, so that they drooped and nodded like the plumes of some cosmic funeral. “It is, indeed,” said Dr. Hagg, “the whole universe weeping over the frustration of its most magnificent birth.” But I thought that there was a hoot of laughter in the high wail of the wind.
THE NEW HOUSE

Within a stone’s throw of my house they are building another house. I am glad they are building it, and I am glad it is within a stone’s throw; quite well within it, with a good catapult. Nevertheless, I have not yet cast the first stone at the new house—not being, strictly speaking, guiltless myself in the matter of new houses. And, indeed, in such cases there is a strong protest to be made. The whole curse of the last century has been what is called the Swing of the Pendulum; that is the idea that Man must go alternately from one extreme to the other. It is a shameful and even shocking fancy; it is the denial of the whole dignity of mankind. When Man is alive he stands still. It is only when he is dead that he swings. But whenever one meets modern thinkers (as one often does) progressing towards a madhouse, one always finds, on inquiry, that they have just had a splendid escape from another madhouse. Thus, hundreds of people become Socialists, not because they have tried Socialism and found it nice, but because they have tried Individualism and found it particularly nasty. Thus, many embrace Christian Science solely because they are quite sick of heathen science; they are so tired of believing that everything is matter that they will even take refuge in the revolting fable that everything is mind. Man ought to march somewhere. But modern man (in his sick reaction) is ready to march nowhere—so long as it is the Other End of Nowhere.

The case of building houses is a strong instance of this. Early in the nineteenth century our civilization chose to abandon the Greek and medieval idea of a town, with walls, limited and defined, with a temple for faith and a market-place for politics; and it chose to let the city grow like a jungle with blind cruelty and bestial unconsciousness; so that London and Liverpool are the great cities we now see. Well, people have reacted against that; they have grown tired of living in a city which is as dark and barbaric as a forest only not as beautiful, and there has been an exodus into the country of those who could afford it, and some I could name who can’t. Now, as soon as this quite rational recoil occurred, it flew at once to the opposite extreme. People went about with beaming faces, boasting that they were twenty-three miles from a station. Rubbing their hands, they exclaimed in rollicking asides that their butcher only called once a month, and that their baker started out with fresh hot loaves which were quite stale before they reached the table. A man would praise his little house in a quiet valley, but gloomily admit (with a slight shake of the head) that a human habitation on the
distant horizon was faintly discernible on a clear day. Rival ruralists would quarrel about which had the most completely inconvenient postal service; and there were many jealous heartburnings if one friend found out any uncomfortable situation which the other friend had thoughtlessly overlooked.

In the feverish summer of this fanaticism there arose the phrase that this or that part of England is being “built over.” Now, there is not the slightest objection, in itself, to England being built over by men, any more than there is to its being (as it is already) built over by birds, or by squirrels, or by spiders. But if birds’ nests were so thick on a tree that one could see nothing but nests and no leaves at all, I should say that bird civilization was becoming a bit decadent. If whenever I tried to walk down the road I found the whole thoroughfare one crawling carpet of spiders, closely interlocked, I should feel a distress verging on distaste. If one were at every turn crowded, elbowed, overlooked, overcharged, sweated, rack-rented, swindled, and sold up by avaricious and arrogant squirrels, one might at last remonstrate. But the great towns have grown intolerable solely because of such suffocating vulgarities and tyrannies. It is not humanity that disgusts us in the huge cities; it is inhumanity. It is not that there are human beings; but that they are not treated as such. We do not, I hope, dislike men and women; we only dislike their being made into a sort of jam: crushed together so that they are not merely powerless but shapeless. It is not the presence of people that makes London appalling. It is merely the absence of The People.

Therefore, I dance with joy to think that my part of England is being built over, so long as it is being built over in a human way at human intervals and in a human proportion. So long, in short, as I am not myself built over, like a pagan slave buried in the foundations of a temple, or an American clerk in a star-striking pagoda of flats, I am delighted to see the faces and the homes of a race of bipeds, to which I am not only attracted by a strange affection, but to which also (by a touching coincidence) I actually happen to belong. I am not one desiring deserts. I am not Timon of Athens; if my town were Athens I would stay in it. I am not Simeon Stylites; except in the mournful sense that every Saturday I find myself on the top of a newspaper column. I am not in the desert repenting of some monstrous sins; at least, I am repenting of them all right, but not in the desert. I do not want the nearest human house to be too distant to see; that is my objection to the wilderness. But neither do I want the nearest human house to be too close to see; that is my objection to the modern city. I love my fellow-man; I do not want him so far off that I can only observe anything of him through a telescope, nor do I want him so close that I can examine parts of him
with a microscope. I want him within a stone’s throw of me; so that whenever it is really necessary, I may throw the stone.

Perhaps, after all, it may not be a stone. Perhaps, after all, it may be a bouquet, or a snowball, or a firework, or a Free Trade Loaf; perhaps they will ask for a stone and I shall give them bread. But it is essential that they should be within reach: how can I love my neighbour as myself if he gets out of range for snowballs? There should be no institution out of the reach of an indignant or admiring humanity. I could hit the nearest house quite well with the catapult; but the truth is that the catapult belongs to a little boy I know, and, with characteristic youthful ‘selfishness, he has taken it away.
THE WINGS OF STONE

The preceding essay is about a half-built house upon my private horizon; I wrote it sitting in a garden-chair; and as, though it was a week ago, I have scarcely moved since then (to speak of), I do not see why I should not go on writing about it. Strictly speaking, I have moved; I have even walked across a field—a field of turf all fiery in our early summer sunlight—and studied the early angular red skeleton which has turned golden in the sun. It is odd that the skeleton of a house is cheerful when the skeleton of a man is mournful, since we only see it after the man is destroyed. At least, we think the skeleton is mournful; the skeleton himself does not seem to think so. Anyhow, there is something strangely primary and poetic about this sight of the scaffolding and main lines of a human building; it is a pity there is no scaffolding round a human baby. One seems to see domestic life as the daring and ambitious thing that it is, when one looks at those open staircases and empty chambers, those spirals of wind and open halls of sky. Ibsen said that the art of domestic drama was merely to knock one wall out of the four walls of a drawing-room. I find the drawing-room even more impressive when all four walls are knocked out.

I have never understood what people mean by domesticity being tame; it seems to me one of the wildest of adventures. But if you wish to see how high and harsh and fantastic an adventure it is, consider only the actual structure of a house itself. A man may march up in a rather bored way to bed; but at least he is mounting to a height from which he could kill himself. Every rich, silent, padded staircase, with banisters of oak, stair-rods of brass, and busts and settees on every landing, every such staircase is truly only an awful and naked ladder running up into the Infinite to a deadly height. The millionaire who stumps up inside the house is really doing the same thing as the tiler or roof-mender who climbs up outside the house; they are both mounting up into the void. They are both making an escalade of the intense inane. Each is a sort of domestic mountaineer; he is reaching a point from which mere idle falling will kill a man; and life is always worth living while men feel that they may die.

I cannot understand people at present making such a fuss about flying ships and aviation, when men ever since Stonehenge and the Pyramids have done something so much more wild than flying. A grasshopper can go astonishingly high up in the air, his biological limitation and weakness is that he cannot stop there. Hosts of unclean birds and crapulous insects can pass through the sky, but
they cannot pass any communication between it and the earth. But the army of
man has advanced vertically into infinity, and not been cut off. It can establish
outposts in the ether, and yet keep open behind it its erect and insolent road. It
would be grand (as in Jules Verne) to fire a cannon-ball at the moon; but would
it not be grander to build a railway to the moon? Yet every building of brick or
wood is a hint of that high railroad; every chimney points to some star, and every
tower is a Tower of Babel. Man rising on these awful and unbroken wings of
stone seems to me more majestic and more mystic than man fluttering for an
instant on wings of canvas and sticks of steel. How sublime and, indeed, almost
dizzy is the thought of these veiled ladders on which we all live, like climbing
monkeys! Many a black-coated clerk in a flat may comfort himself for his
sombre garb by reflecting that he is like some lonely rook in an immemorial elm.
Many a wealthy bachelor on the top floor of a pile of mansions should look forth
at morning and try (if possible) to feel like an eagle whose nest just clings to the
edge of some awful cliff. How sad that the word “giddy” is used to imply
wantonness or levity! It should be a high compliment to a man’s exalted
spirituality and the imagination to say he is a little giddy.

I strolled slowly back across the stretch of turf by the sunset, a field of the
cloth of gold. As I drew near my own house, its huge size began to horrify me;
and when I came to the porch of it I discovered with an incredulity as strong as
despair that my house was actually bigger than myself. A minute or two before
there might well have seemed to be a monstrous and mythical competition about
which of the two should swallow the other. But I was Jonah; my house was the
huge and hungry fish; and even as its jaws darkened and closed about me I had
again this dreadful fancy touching the dizzy altitude of all the works of man. I
climbed the stairs stubbornly, planting each foot with savage care, as if
ascending a glacier. When I got to a landing I was wildly relieved, and waved
my hat. The very word “landing” has about it the wild sound of some one
washed up by the sea. I climbed each flight like a ladder in naked sky. The walls
all round me failed and faded into infinity; I went up the ladder to my bedroom
as Montrose went up the ladder to the gallows; sic itur ad astro. Do you think
this is a little fantastic—even a little fearful and nervous? Believe me, it is only
one of the wild and wonderful things that one can learn by stopping at home.
THE THREE KINDS OF MEN

Roughly speaking, there are three kinds of people in this world. The first kind of people are People; they are the largest and probably the most valuable class. We owe to this class the chairs we sit down on, the clothes we wear, the houses we live in; and, indeed (when we come to think of it), we probably belong to this class ourselves. The second class may be called for convenience the Poets; they are often a nuisance to their families, but, generally speaking, a blessing to mankind. The third class is that of the Professors or Intellectuals; sometimes described as the thoughtful people; and these are a blight and a desolation both to their families and also to mankind. Of course, the classification sometimes overlaps, like all classification. Some good people are almost poets and some bad poets are almost professors. But the division follows lines of real psychological cleavage. I do not offer it lightly. It has been the fruit of more than eighteen minutes of earnest reflection and research.

The class called People (to which you and I, with no little pride, attach ourselves) has certain casual, yet profound, assumptions, which are called “commonplaces,” as that children are charming, or that twilight is sad and sentimental, or that one man fighting three is a fine sight. Now, these feelings are not crude; they are not even simple. The charm of children is very subtle; it is even complex, to the extent of being almost contradictory. It is, at its very plainest, mingled of a regard for hilarity and a regard for helplessness. The sentiment of twilight, in the vulgarist drawing-room song or the coarsest pair of sweethearts, is, so far as it goes, a subtle sentiment. It is strangely balanced between pain and pleasure; it might also be called pleasure tempting pain. The plunge of impatient chivalry by which we all admire a man fighting odds is not at all easy to define separately, it means many things, pity, dramatic surprise, a desire for justice, a delight in experiment and the indeterminate. The ideas of the mob are really very subtle ideas; but the mob does not express them subtly. In fact, it does not express them at all, except on those occasions (now only too rare) when it indulges in insurrection and massacre.

Now, this accounts for the otherwise unreasonable fact of the existence of Poets. Poets are those who share these popular sentiments, but can so express them that they prove themselves the strange and delicate things that they really are. Poets draw out the shy refinement of the rabble. Where the common man covers the queerest emotions by saying, “Rum little kid,” Victor Hugo will write
“L’art d’etre grand-pere”; where the stockbroker will only say abruptly, “Evenings closing in now,” Mr. Yeats will write “Into the twilight”; where the navvy can only mutter something about pluck and being “precious game,” Homer will show you the hero in rags in his own hall defying the princes at their banquet. The Poets carry the popular sentiments to a keener and more splendid pitch; but let it always be remembered that it is the popular sentiments that they are carrying. No man ever wrote any good poetry to show that childhood was shocking, or that twilight was gay and farcical, or that a man was contemptible because he had crossed his single sword with three. The people who maintain this are the Professors, or Prigs.

The Poets are those who rise above the people by understanding them. Of course, most of the Poets wrote in prose–Rabelais, for instance, and Dickens. The Prigs rise above the people by refusing to understand them: by saying that all their dim, strange preferences are prejudices and superstitions. The Prigs make the people feel stupid; the Poets make the people feel wiser than they could have imagined that they were. There are many weird elements in this situation. The oddest of all perhaps is the fate of the two factors in practical politics. The Poets who embrace and admire the people are often pelted with stones and crucified. The Prigs who despise the people are often loaded with lands and crowned. In the House of Commons, for instance, there are quite a number of prigs, but comparatively few poets. There are no People there at all.

By poets, as I have said, I do not mean people who write poetry, or indeed people who write anything. I mean such people as, having culture and imagination, use them to understand and share the feelings of their fellows; as against those who use them to rise to what they call a higher plane. Crudely, the poet differs from the mob by his sensibility; the professor differs from the mob by his insensibility. He has not sufficient finesse and sensitiveness to sympathize with the mob. His only notion is coarsely to contradict it, to cut across it, in accordance with some egotistical plan of his own; to tell himself that, whatever the ignorant say, they are probably wrong. He forgets that ignorance often has the exquisite intuitions of innocence.

Let me take one example which may mark out the outline of the contention. Open the nearest comic paper and let your eye rest lovingly upon a joke about a mother-in-law. Now, the joke, as presented for the populace, will probably be a simple joke; the old lady will be tall and stout, the hen-pecked husband will be small and cowering. But for all that, a mother-in-law is not a simple idea. She is a very subtle idea. The problem is not that she is big and arrogant; she is
frequently little and quite extraordinarily nice. The problem of the mother-in-law is that she is like the twilight: half one thing and half another. Now, this twilight truth, this fine and even tender embarrassment, might be rendered, as it really is, by a poet, only here the poet would have to be some very penetrating and sincere novelist, like George Meredith, or Mr. H. G. Wells, whose “Ann Veronica” I have just been reading with delight. I would trust the fine poets and novelists because they follow the fairy clue given them in Comic Cuts. But suppose the Professor appears, and suppose he says (as he almost certainly will), “A mother-in-law is merely a fellow-citizen. Considerations of sex should not interfere with comradeship. Regard for age should not influence the intellect. A mother-in-law is merely Another Mind. We should free ourselves from these tribal hierarchies and degrees.” Now, when the Professor says this (as he always does), I say to him, “Sir, you are coarser than Comic Cuts. You are more vulgar and blundering than the most elephantine music-hall artiste. You are blinder and grosser than the mob. These vulgar knockabouts have, at least, got hold of a social shade and real mental distinction, though they can only express it clumsily. You are so clumsy that you cannot get hold of it at all. If you really cannot see that the bridegroom’s mother and the bride have any reason for constraint or diffidence, then you are neither polite nor humane: you have no sympathy in you for the deep and doubtful hearts of human folk.” It is better even to put the difficulty as the vulgar put it than to be pertly unconscious of the difficulty altogether.

The same question might be considered well enough in the old proverb that two is company and three is none. This proverb is the truth put popularly: that is, it is the truth put wrong. Certainly it is untrue that three is no company. Three is splendid company: three is the ideal number for pure comradeship: as in the Three Musketeers. But if you reject the proverb altogether; if you say that two and three are the same sort of company; if you cannot see that there is a wider abyss between two and three than between three and three million—then I regret to inform you that you belong to the Third Class of human beings; that you shall have no company either of two or three, but shall be alone in a howling desert till you die.
The other day on a stray spur of the Chiltern Hills I climbed up upon one of those high, abrupt, windy churchyards from which the dead seem to look down upon all the living. It was a mountain of ghosts as Olympus was a mountain of gods. In that church lay the bones of great Puritan lords, of a time when most of the power of England was Puritan, even of the Established Church. And below these uplifted bones lay the huge and hollow valleys of the English countryside, where the motors went by every now and then like meteors, where stood out in white squares and oblongs in the chequered forest many of the country seats even of those same families now dulled with wealth or decayed with Toryism. And looking over that deep green prospect on that luminous yellow evening, a lovely and austere thought came into my mind, a thought as beautiful as the green wood and as grave as the tombs. The thought was this: that I should like to go into Parliament, quarrel with my party, accept the Stewardship of the Chiltern Hundreds, and then refuse to give it up.

We are so proud in England of our crazy constitutional anomalies that I fancy that very few readers indeed will need to be told about the Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds. But in case there should be here or there one happy man who has never heard of such twisted tomfooleries, I will rapidly remind you what this legal fiction is. As it is quite a voluntary, sometimes even an eager, affair to get into Parliament, you would naturally suppose that it would be also a voluntary matter to get out again. You would think your fellow-members would be indifferent, or even relieved to see you go; especially as (by another exercise of the shrewd, illogical old English common sense) they have carefully built the room too small for the people who have to sit in it. But not so, my pippins, as it says in the “Iliad.” If you are merely a member of Parliament (Lord knows why) you can’t resign. But if you are a Minister of the Crown (Lord knows why) you can. It is necessary to get into the Ministry in order to get out of the House; and they have to give you some office that doesn’t exist or that nobody else wants and thus unlock the door. So you go to the Prime Minister, concealing your air of fatigue, and say, “It has been the ambition of my life to be Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds.” The Prime Minister then replies, “I can imagine no man more fitted both morally and mentally for that high office.” He then gives it you, and you hurriedly leave, reflecting how the republics of the Continent reel anarchically to and fro for lack of a little solid English directness and simplicity.
Now, the thought that struck me like a thunderbolt as I sat on the Chiltern slope was that I would like to get the Prime Minister to give me the Chiltern Hundreds, and then startle and disturb him by showing the utmost interest in my work. I should profess a general knowledge of my duties, but wish to be instructed in the details. I should ask to see the Under-Steward and the Under-Under-Steward, and all the fine staff of experienced permanent officials who are the glory of this department. And, indeed, my enthusiasm would not be wholly unreal. For as far as I can recollect the original duties of a Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds were to put down the outlaws and brigands in that part of the world. Well, there are a great many outlaws and brigands in that part of the world still, and though their methods have so largely altered as to require a corresponding alteration in the tactics of the Steward, I do not see why an energetic and public-spirited Steward should not nab them yet.

For the robbers have not vanished from the old high forests to the west of the great city. The thieves have not vanished; they have grown so large that they are invisible. You do not see the word “Asia” written across a map of that neighbourhood; nor do you see the word “Thief” written across the countrysides of England; though it is really written in equally large letters. I know men governing despotically great stretches of that country, whose every step in life has been such that a slip would have sent them to Dartmoor; but they trod along the high hard wall between right and wrong, the wall as sharp as a swordedge, as softly and craftily and lightly as a cat. The vastness of their silent violence itself obscured what they were at; if they seem to stand for the rights of property it is really because they have so often invaded them. And if they do not break the laws, it is only because they make them.

But after all we only need a Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds who really understands cats and thieves. Men hunt one animal differently from another; and the rich could catch swindlers as dexterously as they catch otters or antlered deer if they were really at all keen upon doing it. But then they never have an uncle with antlers; nor a personal friend who is an otter. When some of the great lords that lie in the churchyard behind me went out against their foes in those deep woods beneath I wager that they had bows against the bows of the outlaws, and spears against the spears of the robber knights. They knew what they were about; they fought the evildoers of their age with the weapons of their age. If the same common sense were applied to commercial law, in forty-eight hours it would be all over with the American Trusts and the African forward finance. But it will not be done: for the governing class either does not care, or cares very much, for
the criminals, and as for me, I had a delusive opportunity of being Constable of Beaconsfield (with grossly inadequate powers), but I fear I shall never really be Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds.
THE FIELD OF BLOOD

In my daily paper this morning I read the following interesting paragraphs, which take my mind back to an England which I do not remember and which, therefore (perhaps), I admire.

“Nearly sixty years ago—on 4 September, 1850—the Austrian General Haynau, who had gained an unenviable fame throughout the world by his ferocious methods in suppressing the Hungarian revolution in 1849, while on a visit to this country, was belaboured in the streets of London by the draymen of Messrs. Barclay, Perkins and Co., whose brewery he had just inspected in company of an adjutant. Popular delight was so great that the Government of the time did not dare to prosecute the assailants, and the General—the ‘women-flogger,’ as he was called by the people—had to leave these shores without remedy.

“He returned to his own country and settled upon his estate at Szekeres, which is close to the commune above-mentioned. By his will the estate passed to his daughter, after whose death it was to be presented to the commune. This daughter has just died, but the Communal Council, after much deliberation, has declined to accept the gift, and ordered that the estate should be left to fall out of cultivation, and be called the ‘Bloody Meadow.’”

Now that is an example of how things happen under an honest democratic impulse. I do not dwell specially on the earlier part of the story, though the earlier part of the story is astonishingly interesting. It recalls the days when Englishmen were potential lighters; that is, potential rebels. It is not for lack of agonies of intellectual anger: the Sultan and the late King Leopold have been denounced as heartily as General Haynau. But I doubt if they would have been physically thrashed in the London streets.

It is not the tyrants that are lacking, but the draymen. Nevertheless, it is not upon the historic heroes of Barclay, Perkins and Co. that I build all my hope. Fine as it was, it was not a full and perfect revolution. A brewer’s drayman beating an eminent European General with a stick, though a singularly bright and pleasing vision, is not a complete one. Only when the brewer’s drayman beats the brewer with a stick shall we see the clear and radiant sunrise of British self-government. The fun will really start when we begin to thump the oppressors of England as well as the oppressors of Hungary. It is, however, a definite decline in the spiritual character of draymen that now they can thump neither one nor the other.
But, as I have already suggested, my real quarrel is not about the first part of the extract, but about the second. Whether or no the draymen of Barclay and Perkins have degenerated, the Commune which includes Szekeres has not degenerated. By the way, the Commune which includes Szekeres is called Kissekeres; I trust that this frank avowal will excuse me from the necessity of mentioning either of these places again by name. The Commune is still capable of performing direct democratic actions, if necessary, with a stick.

I say with a stick, not with sticks, for that is the whole argument about democracy. A people is a soul; and if you want to know what a soul is, I can only answer that it is something that can sin and that can sacrifice itself. A people can commit theft; a people can confess theft; a people can repent of theft. That is the idea of the republic. Now, most modern people have got into their heads the idea that democracies are dull, drifting things, a mere black swarm or slide of clerks to their accustomed doom. In most modern novels and essays it is insisted (by way of contrast) that a walking gentleman may have adventures as he walks. It is insisted that an aristocrat can commit crimes, because an aristocrat always cultivates liberty. But, in truth, a people can have adventures, as Israel did crawling through the desert to the promised land. A people can do heroic deeds; a people can commit crimes; the French people did both in the Revolution; the Irish people have done both in their much purer and more honourable progress.

But the real answer to this aristocratic argument which seeks to identify democracy with a drab utilitarianism may be found in action such as that of the Hungarian Commune—whose name I decline to repeat. This Commune did just one of those acts that prove that a separate people has a separate personality; it threw something away. A man can throw a bank note into the fire. A man can fling a sack of corn into the river. The bank-note may be burnt as a satisfaction of some scruple; the corn may be destroyed as a sacrifice to some god. But whenever there is sacrifice we know there is a single will. Men may be disputatious and doubtful, may divide by very narrow majorities in their debate about how to gain wealth. But men have to be uncommonly unanimous in order to refuse wealth. It wants a very complete committee to burn a bank note in the office grate. It needs a highly religious tribe really to throw corn into the river. This self-denial is the test and definition of self-government.

I wish I could feel certain that any English County Council or Parish Council would be single enough to make that strong gesture of a romantic refusal; could say, “No rents shall be raised from this spot; no grain shall grow in this spot; no
good shall come of this spot; it shall remain sterile for a sign.” But I am afraid they might answer, like the eminent sociologist in the story, that it was “wiste of spice.”
THE STRANGENESS OF LUXURY

It is an English misfortune that what is called “public spirit” is so often a very private spirit; the legitimate but strictly individual ideals of this or that person who happens to have the power to carry them out. When these private principles are held by very rich people, the result is often the blackest and most repulsive kind of despotism, which is benevolent despotism. Obviously it is the public which ought to have public spirit. But in this country and at this epoch this is exactly what it has not got. We shall have a public washhouse and a public kitchen long before we have a public spirit; in fact, if we had a public spirit we might very probably do without the other things. But if England were properly and naturally governed by the English, one of the first results would probably be this: that our standard of excess or defect in property would be changed from that of the plutocrat to that of the moderately needy man. That is, that while property might be strictly respected, everything that is necessary to a clerk would be felt and considered on quite a different plane from anything which is a very great luxury to a clerk. This sane distinction of sentiment is not instinctive at present, because our standard of life is that of the governing class, which is eternally turning luxuries into necessities as fast as pork is turned into sausages; and which cannot remember the beginning of its needs and cannot get to the end of its novelties.

Take, for the sake of argument, the case of the motor. Doubtless the duke now feels it as necessary to have a motor as to have a roof, and in a little while he may feel it equally necessary to have a flying ship. But this does not prove (as the reactionary sceptics always argue) that a motor really is just as necessary as a roof. It only proves that a man can get used to an artificial life: it does not prove that there is no natural life for him to get used to. In the broad bird’s-eye view of common sense there abides a huge disproportion between the need for a roof and the need for an aeroplane; and no rush of inventions can ever alter it. The only difference is that things are now judged by the abnormal needs, when they might be judged merely by the normal needs. The best aristocrat sees the situation from an aeroplane. The good citizen, in his loftiest moments, goes no further than seeing it from the roof.

It is not true that luxury is merely relative. It is not true that it is only an expensive novelty which we may afterwards come to think a necessity. Luxury has a firm philosophical meaning; and where there is a real public spirit luxury is
generally allowed for, sometimes rebuked, but always recognized instantly. To the healthy soul there is something in the very nature of certain pleasures which warns us that they are exceptions, and that if they become rules they will become very tyrannical rules.

Take a harassed seamstress out of the Harrow Road and give her one lightning hour in a motorcar, and she will probably feel it as splendid, but strange, rare, and even terrible. But this is not (as the relativists say) merely because she has never been in a car before. She has never been in the middle of a Somerset cowslip meadow before; but if you put her there she does not think it terrifying or extraordinary, but merely pleasant and free and a little lonely. She does not think the motor monstrous because it is new. She thinks it monstrous because she has eyes in her head; she thinks it monstrous because it is monstrous. That is, her mothers and grandmothers, and the whole race by whose life she lives, have had, as a matter of fact, a roughly recognizable mode of living; sitting in a green field was a part of it; travelling as quick as a cannon ball was not. And we should not look down on the seamstress because she mechanically emits a short sharp scream whenever the motor begins to move. On the contrary, we ought to look up to the seamstress, and regard her cry as a kind of mystic omen or revelation of nature, as the old Goths used to consider the howls emitted by chance females when annoyed. For that ritual yell is really a mark of moral health—of swift response to the stimulations and changes of life. The seamstress is wiser than all the learned ladies, precisely because she can still feel that a motor is a different sort of thing from a meadow. By the accident of her economic imprisonment it is even possible that she may have seen more of the former than the latter. But this has not shaken her cyclopean sagacity as to which is the natural thing and which the artificial. If not for her, at least for humanity as a whole, there is little doubt about which is the more normally attainable. It is considerably cheaper to sit in a meadow and see motors go by than to sit in a motor and see meadows go by.

To me personally, at least, it would never seem needful to own a motor, any more than to own an avalanche. An avalanche, if you have luck, I am told, is a very swift, successful, and thrilling way of coming down a hill. It is distinctly more stirring, say, than a glacier, which moves an inch in a hundred years. But I do not divide these pleasures either by excitement or convenience, but by the nature of the thing itself. It seems human to have a horse or bicycle, because it seems human to potter about; and men cannot work horses, nor can bicycles work men, enormously far afield of their ordinary haunts and affairs.

But about motoring there is something magical, like going to the moon; and I
say the thing should be kept exceptional and felt as something breathless and bizarre. My ideal hero would own his horse, but would have the moral courage to hire his motor. Fairy tales are the only sound guidebooks to life; I like the Fairy Prince to ride on a white pony out of his father’s stables, which are of ivory and gold. But if in the course of his adventures he finds it necessary to travel on a flaming dragon, I think he ought to give the dragon back to the witch at the end of the story. It is a mistake to have dragons about the place.

For there is truly an air of something weird about luxury; and it is by this that healthy human nature has always smelt and suspected it. All romances that deal in extreme luxury, from the “Arabian Nights” to the novels of Ouida and Disraeli, have, it may be noted, a singular air of dream and occasionally of nightmare. In such imaginative debauches there is something as occasional as intoxication; if that is still counted occasional. Life in those preposterous palaces would be an agony of dullness; it is clear we are meant to visit them only as in a flying vision. And what is true of the old freaks of wealth, flavour and fierce colour and smell, I would say also of the new freak of wealth, which is speed. I should say to the duke, when I entered his house at the head of an armed mob, “I do not object to your having exceptional pleasures, if you have them exceptionally. I do not mind your enjoying the strange and alien energies of science, if you feel them strange and alien, and not your own. But in condemning you (under the Seventeenth Section of the Eighth Decree of the Republic) to hire a motorcar twice a year at Margate, I am not the enemy of your luxuries, but, rather, the protector of them.”

That is what I should say to the duke. As to what the duke would say to me, that is another matter, and may well be deferred.
THE TRIUMPH OF THE DONKEY

Doubtless the unsympathetic might state my doctrine that one should not own a motor like a horse, but rather use it like a flying dragon in the simpler form that I will always go motoring in somebody else’s car. My favourite modern philosopher (Mr. W. W. Jacobs) describes a similar case of spiritual delicacy misunderstood. I have not the book at hand, but I think that Job Brown was reproaching Bill Chambers for wasteful drunkenness, and Henery Walker spoke up for Bill, and said he scarcely ever had a glass but what somebody else paid for it, and there was “unpleasantness all round then.”

Being less sensitive than Bill Chambers (or whoever it was) I will risk this rude perversion of my meaning, and concede that I was in a motor-car yesterday, and the motor-car most certainly was not my own, and the journey, though it contained nothing that is specially unusual on such journeys, had running through it a strain of the grotesque which was at once wholesome and humiliating. The symbol of that influence was that ancient symbol of the humble and humorous—a donkey.

When first I saw the donkey I saw him in the sunlight as the unearthly gargoyle that he is. My friend had met me in his car (I repeat firmly, in his car) at the little painted station in the middle of the warm wet woods and hop-fields of that western country. He proposed to drive me first to his house beyond the village before starting for a longer spin of adventure, and we rattled through those rich green lanes which have in them something singularly analogous to fairy tales: whether the lanes produced the fairies or (as I believe) the fairies produced the lanes. All around in the glimmering hop-yards stood those little hop-kilns like stunted and slanting spires. They look like dwarfish churches—in fact, rather like many modern churches I could mention, churches all of them small and each of them a little crooked. In this elfin atmosphere we swung round a sharp corner and half-way up a steep, white hill, and saw what looked at first like a tall, black monster against the sun. It appeared to be a dark and dreadful woman walking on wheels and waving long ears like a bat’s. A second glance told me that she was not the local witch in a state of transition; she was only one of the million tricks of perspective. She stood up in a small wheeled cart drawn by a donkey; the donkey’s ears were just set behind her head, and the whole was black against the light.

Perspective is really the comic element in everything. It has a pompous Latin
name, but it is incurably Gothic and grotesque. One simple proof of this is that it is always left out of all dignified and decorative art. There is no perspective in the Elgin Marbles, and even the essentially angular angels in mediaeval stained glass almost always (as it says in “Patience”) contrive to look both angular and flat. There is something intrinsically disproportionate and outrageous in the idea of the distant objects dwindling and growing dwarfish, the closer objects swelling enormous and intolerable. There is something frantic in the notion that one’s own father by walking a little way can be changed by a blast of magic to a pigmy. There is something farcical in the fancy that Nature keeps one’s uncle in an infinite number of sizes, according to where he is to stand. All soldiers in retreat turn into tin soldiers; all bears in rout into toy bears; as if on the ultimate horizon of the world everything was sardonically doomed to stand up laughable and little against heaven.

It was for this reason that the old woman and her donkey struck us first when seen from behind as one black grotesque. I afterwards had the chance of seeing the old woman, the cart, and the donkey fairly, in flank and in all their length. I saw the old woman and the donkey PASSANT, as they might have appeared heraldically on the shield of some heroic family. I saw the old woman and the donkey dignified, decorative, and flat, as they might have marched across the Elgin Marbles. Seen thus under an equal light, there was nothing specially ugly about them; the cart was long and sufficiently comfortable; the donkey was stolid and sufficiently respectable; the old woman was lean but sufficiently strong, and even smiling in a sour, rustic manner. But seen from behind they looked like one black monstrous animal; the dark donkey ears seemed like dreadful wings, and the tall dark back of the woman, erect like a tree, seemed to grow taller and taller until one could almost scream.

Then we went by her with a blasting roar like a railway train, and fled far from her over the brow of the hill to my friend’s home.

There we paused only for my friend to stock the car with some kind of picnic paraphernalia, and so started again, as it happened, by the way we had come. Thus it fell that we went shattering down that short, sharp hill again before the poor old woman and her donkey had managed to crawl to the top of it; and seeing them under a different light, I saw them very differently. Black against the sun, they had seemed comic; but bright against greenwood and grey cloud, they were not comic but tragic; for there are not a few things that seem fantastic in the twilight, and in the sunlight are sad. I saw that she had a grand, gaunt mask of ancient honour and endurance, and wide eyes sharpened to two shining
points, as if looking for that small hope on the horizon of human life. I also saw that her cart contained carrots.

“Don’t you feel, broadly speaking, a beast,” I asked my friend, “when you go so easily and so fast?” For we had crashed by so that the crazy cart must have thrilled in every stick of it.

My friend was a good man, and said, “Yes. But I don’t think it would do her any good if I went slower.”

“No,” I assented after reflection. “Perhaps the only pleasure we can give to her or any one else is to get out of their sight very soon.”

My friend availed himself of this advice in no niggard spirit; I felt as if we were fleeing for our lives in throttling fear after some frightful atrocity. In truth, there is only one difference left between the secrecy of the two social classes: the poor hide themselves in darkness and the rich hide themselves in distance. They both hide.

As we shot like a lost boat over a cataract down into a whirlpool of white roads far below, I saw afar a black dot crawling like an insect. I looked again: I could hardly believe it. There was the slow old woman, with her slow old donkey, still toiling along the main road. I asked my friend to slacken, but when he said of the car, “She’s wanting to go,” I knew it was all up with him. For when you have called a thing female you have yielded to it utterly. We passed the old woman with a shock that must have shaken the earth: if her head did not reel and her heart quail, I know not what they were made of. And when we had fled perilously on in the gathering dark, spurning hamlets behind us, I suddenly called out, “Why, what asses we are! Why, it’s She that is brave—she and the donkey. We are safe enough; we are artillery and plate-armour: and she stands up to us with matchwood and a snail! If you had grown old in a quiet valley, and people began firing cannon-balls as big as cabs at you in your seventieth year, wouldn’t you jump—and she never moved an eyelid. Oh! we go very fast and very far, no doubt—”

As I spoke came a curious noise, and my friend, instead of going fast, began to go very slow; then he stopped; then he got out. Then he said, “And I left the Stepney behind.”

The grey moths came out of the wood and the yellow stars came out to crown it, as my friend, with the lucidity of despair, explained to me (on the soundest scientific principles, of course) that nothing would be any good at all. We must sleep the night in the lane, except in the very unlikely event of some one coming by to carry a message to some town. Twice I thought I heard some tiny sound of
such approach, and it died away like wind in the trees, and the motorist was already asleep when I heard it renewed and realized. Something certainly was approaching. I ran up the road—and there it was. Yes, It—and She. Thrice had she come, once comic and once tragic and once heroic. And when she came again it was as if in pardon on a pure errand of prosaic pity and relief. I am quite serious. I do not want you to laugh. It is not the first time a donkey has been received seriously, nor one riding a donkey with respect.
THE WHEEL

In a quiet and rustic though fairly famous church in my neighbourhood there is a window supposed to represent an Angel on a Bicycle. It does definitely and indisputably represent a nude youth sitting on a wheel; but there is enough complication in the wheel and sanctity (I suppose) in the youth to warrant this working description. It is a thing of florid Renascence outline, and belongs to the highly pagan period which introduced all sorts of objects into ornament: personally I can believe in the bicycle more than in the angel. Men, they say, are now imitating angels; in their flying-machines, that is: not in any other respect that I have heard of. So perhaps the angel on the bicycle (if he is an angel and if it is a bicycle) was avenging himself by imitating man. If so, he showed that high order of intellect which is attributed to angels in the mediaeval books, though not always (perhaps) in the mediaeval pictures.

For wheels are the mark of a man quite as much as wings are the mark of an angel. Wheels are the things that are as old as mankind and yet are strictly peculiar to man, that are prehistoric but not pre-human.

A distinguished psychologist, who is well acquainted with physiology, has told me that parts of himself are certainly levers, while other parts are probably pulleys, but that after feeling himself carefully all over, he cannot find a wheel anywhere. The wheel, as a mode of movement, is a purely human thing. On the ancient escutcheon of Adam (which, like much of the rest of his costume, has not yet been discovered) the heraldic emblem was a wheel–passant. As a mode of progress, I say, it is unique. Many modern philosophers, like my friend before mentioned, are ready to find links between man and beast, and to show that man has been in all things the blind slave of his mother earth. Some, of a very different kind, are even eager to show it; especially if it can be twisted to the discredit of religion. But even the most eager scientists have often admitted in my hearing that they would be surprised if some kind of cow approached them moving solemnly on four wheels. Wings, fins, flappers, claws, hoofs, webs, trotters, with all these the fantastic families of the earth come against us and close around us, fluttering and flapping and rustling and galloping and lumbering and thundering; but there is no sound of wheels.

I remember dimly, if, indeed, I remember aright, that in some of those dark prophetic pages of Scripture, that seem of cloudy purple and dusky gold, there is a passage in which the seer beholds a violent dream of wheels. Perhaps this was
indeed the symbolic declaration of the spiritual supremacy of man. Whatever the
birds may do above or the fishes beneath his ship, man is the only thing to steer;
the only thing to be conceived as steering. He may make the birds his friends, if
he can. He may make the fishes his gods, if he chooses. But most certainly he
will not believe a bird at the masthead; and it is hardly likely that he will even
permit a fish at the helm. He is, as Swinburne says, helmsman and chief: he is
literally the Man at the Wheel.

The wheel is an animal that is always standing on its head; only “it does it so
rapidly that no philosopher has ever found out which is its head.” Or if the
phrase be felt as more exact, it is an animal that is always turning head over
heels and progressing by this principle. Some fish, I think, turn head over heels
(supposing them, for the sake of argument, to have heels); I have a dog who
nearly did it; and I did it once myself when I was very small. It was an accident,
and, as delightful novelist, Mr. De Morgan, would say, it never can happen
again. Since then no one has accused me of being upside down except mentally:
and I rather think that there is something to be said for that; especially as typified
by the rotary symbol. A wheel is the sublime paradox; one part of it is always
going forward and the other part always going back. Now this, as it happens, is
highly similar to the proper condition of any human soul or any political state.
Every sane soul or state looks at once backwards and forwards; and even goes
backwards to come on.

For those interested in revolt (as I am) I only say meekly that one cannot have
a Revolution without revolving. The wheel, being a logical thing, has reference
to what is behind as well as what is before. It has (as every society should have)
a part that perpetually leaps helplessly at the sky and a part that perpetually bows
down its head into the dust. Why should people be so scornful of us who stand
on our heads? Bowing down one’s head in the dust is a very good thing, the
humble beginning of all happiness. When we have bowed our heads in the dust
for a little time the happiness comes; and then (leaving our heads’ in the humble
and reverent position) we kick up our heels behind in the air. That is the true
origin of standing on one’s head; and the ultimate defence of paradox. The wheel
humbles itself to be exalted; only it does it a little quicker than I do.
FIVE HUNDRED AND FIFTY-FIVE

Life is full of a ceaseless shower of small coincidences: too small to be worth mentioning except for a special purpose, often too trifling even to be noticed, any more than we notice one snowflake falling on another. It is this that lends a frightful plausibility to all false doctrines and evil fads. There are always such crowds of accidental arguments for anything. If I said suddenly that historical truth is generally told by red-haired men, I have no doubt that ten minutes’ reflection (in which I decline to indulge) would provide me with a handsome list of instances in support of it. I remember a riotous argument about Bacon and Shakespeare in which I offered quite at random to show that Lord Rosebery had written the works of Mr. W. B. Yeats. No sooner had I said the words than a torrent of coincidences rushed upon my mind. I pointed out, for instance, that Mr. Yeats’s chief work was “The Secret Rose.” This may easily be paraphrased as “The Quiet or Modest Rose”; and so, of course, as the Primrose. A second after I saw the same suggestion in the combination of “rose” and “bury.” If I had pursued the matter, who knows but I might have been a raving maniac by this time.

We trip over these trivial repetitions and exactitudes at every turn, only they are too trivial even for conversation. A man named Williams did walk into a strange house and murder a man named Williamson; it sounds like a sort of infanticide. A journalist of my acquaintance did move quite unconsciously from a place called Overstrand to a place called Overroads. When he had made this escape he was very properly pursued by a voting card from Battersea, on which a political agent named Burn asked him to vote for a political candidate named Burns. And when he did so another coincidence happened to him: rather a spiritual than a material coincidence; a mystical thing, a matter of a magic number.

For a sufficient number of reasons, the man I know went up to vote in Battersea in a drifting and even dubious frame of mind. As the train slid through swampy woods and sullen skies there came into his empty mind those idle and yet awful questions which come when the mind is empty. Fools make cosmic systems out of them; knaves make profane poems out of them; men try to crush them like an ugly lust. Religion is only the responsible reinforcement of common courage and common sense. Religion only sets up the normal mood of health against the hundred moods of disease.
But there is this about such ghastly empty enigmas, that they always have an answer to the obvious answer, the reply offered by daily reason. Suppose a man’s children have gone swimming; suppose he is suddenly throttled by the senseless—fear that they are drowned. The obvious answer is, “Only one man in a thousand has his children drowned.” But a deeper voice (deeper, being as deep as hell) answers, “And why should not you—be the thousandth man?” What is true of tragic doubt is true also of trivial doubt. The voter’s guardian devil said to him, “If you don’t vote to-day you can do fifteen things which will quite certainly do some good somewhere, please a friend, please a child, please a maddened publisher. And what good do you expect to do by voting? You don’t think your man will get in by one vote, do you?” To this he knew the answer of common sense, “But if everybody said that, nobody would get in at all.” And then there came that deeper voice from Hades, “But you are not settling what everybody shall do, but what one person on one occasion shall do. If this afternoon you went your way about more solid things, how would it matter and who would ever know?” Yet somehow the voter drove on blindly through the blackening London roads, and found somewhere a tedious polling station and recorded his tiny vote.

The politician for whom the voter had voted got in by five hundred and fifty-five votes. The voter read this next morning at breakfast, being in a more cheery and expansive mood, and found something very fascinating not merely in the fact of the majority, but even in the form of it. There was something symbolic about the three exact figures; one felt it might be a sort of motto or cipher. In the great book of seals and cloudy symbols there is just such a thundering repetition. Six hundred and sixty-six was the Mark of the Beast. Five hundred and fifty-five is the Mark of the Man; the triumphant tribune and citizen. A number so symmetrical as that really rises out of the region of science into the region of art. It is a pattern, like the egg-and-dart ornament or the Greek key. One might edge a wall-paper or fringe a robe with a recurring decimal. And while the voter luxuriated in this light exactitude of the numbers, a thought crossed his mind and he almost leapt to his feet. “Why, good heavens!” he cried. “I won that election; and it was won by one vote! But for me it would have been the despicable, broken-backed, disjointed, inharmonious figure five hundred and fifty-four. The whole artistic point would have vanished. The Mark of the Man would have disappeared from history. It was I who with a masterful hand seized the chisel and carved the hieroglyph—complete and perfect. I clutched the trembling hand of Destiny when it was about to make a dull square four and forced it to make a
nice curly five. Why, but for me the Cosmos would have lost a coincidence!” After this outburst the voter sat down and finished his breakfast.
ETHANDUNE

Perhaps you do not know where Ethandune is. Nor do I; nor does anybody. That is where the somewhat sombre fun begins. I cannot even tell you for certain whether it is the name of a forest or a town or a hill. I can only say that in any case it is of the kind that floats and is unfixed. If it is a forest, it is one of those forests that march with a million legs, like the walking trees that were the doom of Macbeth. If it is a town, it is one of those towns that vanish, like a city of tents. If it is a hill, it is a flying hill, like the mountain to which faith lends wings. Over a vast dim region of England this dark name of Ethandune floats like an eagle doubtful where to swoop and strike, and, indeed, there were birds of prey enough over Ethandune, wherever it was. But now Ethandune itself has grown as dark and drifting as the black drifts of the birds.

And yet without this word that you cannot fit with a meaning and hardly with a memory, you would be sitting in a very different chair at this moment and looking at a very different tablecloth. As a practical modern phrase I do not commend it; if my private critics and correspondents in whom I delight should happen to address me “G. K. Chesterton, Poste Restante, Ethandune,” I fear their letters would not come to hand. If two hurried commercial travellers should agree to discuss a business matter at Ethandune from 5 to 5.15, I am afraid they would grow old in the district as white-haired wanderers. To put it plainly, Ethandune is anywhere and nowhere in the western hills; it is an English mirage.

And yet but for this doubtful thing you would have probably no Daily News on Saturday and certainly no church on Sunday. I do not say that either of these two things is a benefit; but I do say that they are customs, and that you would not possess them except through this mystery. You would not have Christmas puddings, nor (probably) any puddings; you would not have Easter eggs, probably not poached eggs, I strongly suspect not scrambled eggs, and the best historians are decidedly doubtful about curried eggs. To cut a long story short (the longest of all stories), you would not have any civilization, far less any Christian civilization. And if in some moment of gentle curiosity you wish to know why you are the polished sparkling, rounded, and wholly satisfactory citizen which you obviously are, then I can give you no more definite answer geographical or historical; but only toll in your ears the tone of the uncaptured name—Ethandune.

I will try to state quite sensibly why it is as important as it is. And yet even
that is not easy. If I were to state the mere fact from the history books, numbers of people would think it equally trivial and remote, like some war of the Picts and Scots. The points perhaps might be put in this way. There is a certain spirit in the world which breaks everything off short. There may be magnificence in the smashing; but the thing is smashed. There may be a certain splendour; but the splendour is sterile: it abolishes all future splendours. I mean (to take a working example), York Minster covered with flames might happen to be quite as beautiful as York Minster covered with carvings. But the carvings produce more carvings. The flames produce nothing but a little black heap. When any act has this cul-de-sac quality it matters little whether it is done by a book or a sword, by a clumsy battle-axe or a chemical bomb. The case is the same with ideas. The pessimist may be a proud figure when he curses all the stars; the optimist may be an even prouder figure when he blesses them all. But the real test is not in the energy, but in the effect. When the optimist has said, “All things are interesting,” we are left free; we can be interested as much or as little as we please. But when the pessimist says, “No things are interesting,” it may be a very witty remark: but it is the last witty remark that can be made on the subject. He has burnt his cathedral; he has had his blaze and the rest is ashes. The sceptics, like bees, give their one sting and die. The pessimist must be wrong, because he says the last word.

Now, this spirit that denies and that destroys had at one period of history a dreadful epoch of military superiority. They did burn York Minster, or at least, places of the same kind. Roughly speaking, from the seventh century to the tenth, a dense tide of darkness, of chaos and brainless cruelty, poured on these islands and on the western coasts of the Continent, which well-nigh cut them off from all the white man’s culture for ever. And this is the final human test; that the varied chiefs of that vague age were remembered or forgotten according to how they had resisted this almost cosmic raid. Nobody thought of the modern nonsense about races; everybody thought of the human race and its highest achievements. Arthur was a Celt, and may have been a fabulous Celt; but he was a fable on the right side. Charlemagne may have been a Gaul or a Goth, but he was not a barbarian; he fought for the tradition against the barbarians, the nihilists. And for this reason also, for this reason, in the last resort, only, we call the saddest and in some ways the least successful of the Wessex kings by the title of Alfred the Great. Alfred was defeated by the barbarians again and again, he defeated the barbarians again and again; but his victories were almost as vain as his defeats. Fortunately he did not believe in the Time Spirit or the Trend of
Things or any such modern rubbish, and therefore kept pegging away. But while his failures and his fruitless successes have names still in use (such as Wilton, Basing, and Ashdown), that last epic battle which really broke the barbarian has remained without a modern place or name. Except that it was near Chippenham, where the Danes gave up their swords and were baptized, no one can pick out certainly the place where you and I were saved from being savages for ever.

But the other day under a wild sunset and moonrise I passed the place which is best reputed as Ethandune, a high, grim upland, partly bare and partly shaggy; like that savage and sacred spot in those great imaginative lines about the demon lover and the waning moon. The darkness, the red wreck of sunset, the yellow and lurid moon, the long fantastic shadows, actually created that sense of monstrous incident which is the dramatic side of landscape. The bare grey slopes seemed to rush downhill like routed hosts; the dark clouds drove across like riven banners; and the moon was like a golden dragon, like the Golden Dragon of Wessex.

As we crossed a tilt of the torn heath I saw suddenly between myself and the moon a black shapeless pile higher than a house. The atmosphere was so intense that I really thought of a pile of dead Danes, with some phantom conqueror on the top of it. Fortunately I was crossing these wastes with a friend who knew more history than I; and he told me that this was a barrow older than Alfred, older than the Romans, older perhaps than the Britons; and no man knew whether it was a wall or a trophy or a tomb. Ethandune is still a drifting name; but it gave me a queer emotion to think that, sword in hand, as the Danes poured with the torrents of their blood down to Chippenham, the great king may have lifted up his head and looked at that oppressive shape, suggestive of something and yet suggestive of nothing; may have looked at it as we did, and understood it as little as we.
THE FLAT FREAK

Some time ago a Sub-Tropical Dinner was given by some South African millionaire. I forget his name; and so, very likely, does he. The humour of this was so subtle and haunting that it has been imitated by another millionaire, who has given a North Pole Dinner in a grand hotel, on which he managed to spend gigantic sums of money. I do not know how he did it; perhaps they had silver for snow and great sapphires for lumps of ice. Anyhow, it seems to have cost rather more to bring the Pole to London than to take Peary to the Pole. All this, one would say, does not concern us. We do not want to go to the Pole—or to the hotel. I, for one, cannot imagine which would be the more dreary and disgusting—the real North Pole or the sham one. But as a mere matter of psychology (that merry pastime) there is a question that is not unentertaining.

Why is it that all this scheme of ice and snow leaves us cold? Why is it that you and I feel that we would (on the whole) rather spend the evening with two or three stable boys in a pot-house than take part in that pallid and Arctic joke? Why does the modern millionaire’s jest—bore a man to death with the mere thought of it? That it does bore a man to death I take for granted, and shall do so until somebody writes to me in cold ink and tells me that he really thinks it funny.

Now, it is not a sufficient explanation to say that the joke is silly. All jokes are silly; that is what they are for. If you ask some sincere and elemental person, a woman, for instance, what she thinks of a good sentence from Dickens, she will say that it is “too silly.” When Mr. Weller, senior, assured Mr. Weller, junior, that “circumvented” was “a more tenderer word” than “circumscribed,” the remark was at least as silly as it was sublime. It is vain, then, to object to “senseless jokes.” The very definition of a joke is that it need have no sense; except that one wild and supernatural sense which we call the sense of humour. Humour is meant, in a literal sense, to make game of man; that is, to dethrone him from his official dignity and hunt him like game. It is meant to remind us human beings that we have things about us as ungainly and ludicrous as the nose of the elephant or the neck of the giraffe. If laughter does not touch a sort of fundamental folly, it does not do its duty in bringing us back to an enormous and original simplicity. Nothing has been worse than the modern notion that a clever man can make a joke without taking part in it; without sharing in the general absurdity that such a situation creates. It is unpardonable conceit not to laugh at
your own jokes. Joking is undignified; that is why it is so good for one’s soul. Do not fancy you can be a detached wit and avoid being a buffoon; you cannot. If you are the Court Jester you must be the Court Fool.

Whatever it is, therefore, that wearies us in these wealthy jokes (like the North Pole Dinner) it is not merely that men make fools of themselves. When Dickens described Mr. Chuckster, Dickens was, strictly speaking, making a fool of himself; for he was making a fool out of himself. And every kind of real lark, from acting a charade to making a pun, does consist in restraining one’s nine hundred and ninety-nine serious selves and letting the fool loose. The dullness of the millionaire joke is much deeper. It is not silly at all; it is solely stupid. It does not consist of ingenuity limited, but merely of inanity expanded. There is considerable difference between a wit making a fool of himself and a fool making a wit of himself.

The true explanation, I fancy, may be stated thus. We can all remember it in the case of the really inspiring parties and fooleries of our youth. The only real fun is to have limited materials and a good idea. This explains the perennial popularity of impromptu private theatricals. These fascinate because they give such a scope for invention and variety with the most domestic restriction of machinery. A tea-cosy may have to do for an Admiral’s cocked hat; it all depends on whether the amateur actor can swear like an Admiral. A hearth-rug may have to do for a bear’s fur; it all depends on whether the wearer is a polished and versatile man of the world and can grunt like a bear. A clergyman’s hat (to my own private and certain knowledge) can be punched and thumped into the exact shape of a policeman’s helmet; it all depends on the clergyman. I mean it depends on his permission; his imprimatur; his nihil obstat. Clergymen can be policemen; rugs can rage like wild animals; tea-cosies can smell of the sea; if only there is at the back of them all one bright and amusing idea. What is really funny about Christmas charades in any average home is that there is a contrast between commonplace resources and one comic idea. What is deadly dull about the millionaire-banquets is that there is a contrast between colossal resources and no idea.

That is the abyss of inanity in such feasts—it may be literally called a yawning abyss. The abyss is the vast chasm between the money power employed and the thing it is employed on. To make a big joke out of a broomstick, a barrow and an old hat—that is great. But to make a small joke out of mountains of emeralds and tons of gold—surely that is humiliating! The North Pole is not a very good joke to start with. An icicle hanging on one’s nose is a simple sort of humour in any
case. If a set of spontaneous mummers got the effect cleverly with cut crystals from the early Victorian chandelier there might really be something suddenly funny in it. But what should we say of hanging diamonds on a hundred human noses merely to make that precious joke about icicles?

What can be more abject than the union of elaborate and recherche arrangements with an old and obvious point? The clown with the red-hot poker and the string of sausages is all very well in his way. But think of a string of pate de foie gras sausages at a guinea a piece! Think of a red-hot poker cut out of a single ruby! Imagine such fantasticalities of expense with such a tameness and staleness of design.

We may even admit the practical joke if it is domestic and simple. We may concede that apple-pie beds and butter-slides are sometimes useful things for the education of pompous persons living the Higher Life. But imagine a man making a butter-slide and telling everybody it was made with the most expensive butter. Picture an apple-pie bed of purple and cloth of gold. It is not hard to see that such schemes would lead simultaneously to a double boredom; weariness of the costly and complex method and of the meagre and trivial thought. This is the true analysis, I think of that chill of tedium that strikes to the soul of any intelligent man when he hears of such elephantine pranks. That is why we feel that Freak Dinners would not even be freakish. That is why we feel that expensive Arctic feasts would probably be a frost.

If it be said that such things do no harm, I hasten, in one sense, at least, to agree. Far from it; they do good. They do good in the most vital matter of modern times; for they prove and print in huge letters the truth which our society must learn or perish. They prove that wealth in society as now constituted does not tend to get into the hands of the thrifty or the capable, but actually tends to get into the hands of wastrels and imbeciles. And it proves that the wealthy class of to-day is quite as ignorant about how to enjoy itself as about how to rule other people. That it cannot make its government govern or its education educate we may take as a trifling weakness of oligarchy; but pleasure we do look to see in such a class; and it has surely come to its decrepitude when it cannot make its pleasures please.
THE GARDEN OF THE SEA

One sometimes hears from persons of the chillier type of culture the remark that plain country people do not appreciate the beauty of the country. This is an error rooted in the intellectual pride of mediocrity; and is one of the many examples of a truth in the idea that extremes meet. Thus, to appreciate the virtues of the mob one must either be on a level with it (as I am) or be really high up, like the saints. It is roughly the same with aesthetics; slang and rude dialect can be relished by a really literary taste, but not by a merely bookish taste. And when these cultivated cranks say that rustics do not talk of Nature in an appreciative way, they really mean that they do not talk in a bookish way. They do not talk bookishly about clouds or stones, or pigs or slugs, or horses or anything you please. They talk piggishly about pigs; and sluggishly, I suppose, about slugs; and are refreshingly horsy about horses. They speak in a stony way of stones; they speak in a cloudy way of clouds; and this is surely the right way. And if by any chance a simple intelligent person from the country comes in contact with any aspect of Nature unfamiliar and arresting, such a person’s comment is always worth remark. It is sometimes an epigram, and at worst it is never a quotation.

Consider, for instance, what wastes of wordy imitation and ambiguity the ordinary educated person in the big towns could pour out on the subject of the sea. A country girl I know in the county of Buckingham had never seen the sea in her life until the other day. When she was asked what she thought of it she said it was like cauliflowers. Now that is a piece of pure literature—vivid, entirely independent and original, and perfectly true. I had always been haunted with an analogous kinship which I could never locate; cabbages always remind me of the sea and the sea always reminds me of cabbages. It is partly, perhaps, the veined mingling of violet and green, as in the sea a purple that is almost dark red may mix with a green that is almost yellow, and still be the blue sea as a whole. But it is more the grand curves of the cabbage that curl over cavernously like waves, and it is partly again that dreamy repetition, as of a pattern, that made two great poets, Eschylus and Shakespeare, use a word like “multitudinous” of the ocean. But just where my fancy halted the Buckinghamshire young woman rushed (so to speak) to my imaginative rescue. Cauliflowers are twenty times better than cabbages, for they show the wave breaking as well as curling, and the efflorescence of the branching foam, blind bubbling, and opaque. Moreover, the strong lines of life are suggested; the arches of the rushing waves have all the
rigid energy of green stalks, as if the whole sea were one great green plant with one immense white flower rooted in the abyss.

Now, a large number of delicate and superior persons would refuse to see the force in that kitchen garden comparison, because it is not connected with any of the ordinary maritime sentiments as stated in books and songs. The aesthetic amateur would say that he knew what large and philosophical thoughts he ought to have by the boundless deep. He would say that he was not a greengrocer who would think first of greens. To which I should reply, like Hamlet, apropos of a parallel profession, “I would you were so honest a man.” The mention of “Hamlet” reminds me, by the way, that besides the girl who had never seen the sea, I knew a girl who had never seen a stage-play. She was taken to “Hamlet,” and she said it was very sad. There is another case of going to the primordial point which is overlaid by learning and secondary impressions. We are so used to thinking of “Hamlet” as a problem that we sometimes quite forget that it is a tragedy, just as we are so used to thinking of the sea as vast and vague, that we scarcely notice when it is white and green.

But there is another quarrel involved in which the young gentleman of culture comes into violent collision with the young lady of the cauliflowers. The first essential of the merely bookish view of the sea is that it is boundless, and gives a sentiment of infinity. Now it is quite certain, I think, that the cauliflower simile was partly created by exactly the opposite impression, the impression of boundary and of barrier. The girl thought of it as a field of vegetables, even as a yard of vegetables. The girl was right. The ocean only suggests infinity when you cannot see it; a sea mist may seem endless, but not a sea. So far from being vague and vanishing, the sea is the one hard straight line in Nature. It is the one plain limit; the only thing that God has made that really looks like a wall. Compared to the sea, not only sun and cloud are chaotic and doubtful, but solid mountains and standing forests may be said to melt and fade and flee in the presence of that lonely iron line. The old naval phrase, that the seas are England’s bulwarks, is not a frigid and artificial metaphor; it came into the head of some genuine sea-dog, when he was genuinely looking at the sea. For the edge of the sea is like the edge of a sword; it is sharp, military, and decisive; it really looks like a bolt or bar, and not like a mere expansion. It hangs in heaven, grey, or green, or blue, changing in colour, but changeless in form, behind all the slippery contours of the land and all the savage softness of the forests, like the scales of God held even. It hangs, a perpetual reminder of that divine reason and justice which abides behind all compromises and all legitimate variety; the one
straight line; the limit of the intellect; the dark and ultimate dogma of the world.
THE SENTIMENTALIST

“Sentimentalism is the most broken reed on which righteousness can lean”; these were, I think, the exact words of a distinguished American visitor at the Guildhall, and may Heaven forgive me if I do him a wrong. It was spoken in illustration of the folly of supporting Egyptian and other Oriental nationalism, and it has tempted me to some reflections on the first word of the sentence.

The Sentimentalist, roughly speaking, is the man who wants to eat his cake and have it. He has no sense of honour about ideas; he will not see that one must pay for an idea as for anything else. He will not see that any worthy idea, like any honest woman, can only be won on its own terms, and with its logical chain of loyalty. One idea attracts him; another idea really inspires him; a third idea flatters him; a fourth idea pays him. He will have them all at once in one wild intellectual harem, no matter how much they quarrel and contradict each other. The Sentimentalist is a philosophic profligate, who tries to capture every mental beauty without reference to its rival beauties; who will not even be off with the old love before he is on with the new. Thus if a man were to say, “I love this woman, but I may some day find my affinity in some other woman,” he would be a Sentimentalist. He would be saying, “I will eat my wedding-cake and keep it.” Or if a man should say, “I am a Republican, believing in the equality of citizens; but when the Government has given me my peerage I can do infinite good as a kind landlord and a wise legislator”; then that man would be a Sentimentalist. He would be trying to keep at the same time the classic austerity of equality and also the vulgar excitement of an aristocrat. Or if a man should say, “I am in favour of religious equality; but I must preserve the Protestant Succession,” he would be a Sentimentalist of a grosser and more improbable kind.

This is the essence of the Sentimentalist: that he seeks to enjoy every idea without its sequence, and every pleasure without its consequence.

Now it would really be hard to find a worse case of this inconsequent sentimentalism than the theory of the British Empire advanced by Mr. Roosevelt himself in his attack on Sentimentalists. For the Imperial theory, the Roosevelt and Kipling theory, of our relation to Eastern races is simply one of eating the Oriental cake (I suppose a Sultana Cake) and at the same time leaving it alone.

Now there are two sane attitudes of a European statesman towards Eastern peoples, and there are only two.
First, he may simply say that the less we have to do with them the better; that whether they are lower than us or higher they are so catastrophically different that the more we go our way and they go theirs the better for all parties concerned. I will confess to some tenderness for this view. There is much to be said for letting that calm immemorial life of slave and sultan, temple and palm tree flow on as it has always flowed. The best reason of all, the reason that affects me most finally, is that if we left the rest of the world alone we might have some time for attending to our own affairs, which are urgent to the point of excruciation. All history points to this; that intensive cultivation in the long run triumphs over the widest extensive cultivation; or, in other words, that making one’s own field superior is far more effective than reducing other people’s fields to inferiority. If you cultivate your own garden and grow a specially large cabbage, people will probably come to see it. Whereas the life of one selling small cabbages round the whole district is often forlorn.

Now, the Imperial Pioneer is essentially a commercial traveller; and a commercial traveller is essentially a person who goes to see people because they don’t want to see him. As long as empires go about urging their ideas on others, I always have a notion that the ideas are no good. If they were really so splendid, they would make the country preaching them a wonder of the world. That is the true ideal; a great nation ought not to be a hammer, but a magnet. Men went to the mediaeval Sorbonne because it was worth going to. Men went to old Japan because only there could they find the unique and exquisite old Japanese art. Nobody will ever go to modern Japan (nobody worth bothering about, I mean), because modern Japan has made the huge mistake of going to the other people: becoming a common empire. The mountain has condescended to Mahomet; and henceforth Mahomet will whistle for it when he wants it.

That is my political theory: that we should make England worth copying instead of telling everybody to copy her.

But it is not the only possible theory. There is another view of our relations to such places as Egypt and India which is entirely tenable. It may be said, “We Europeans are the heirs of the Roman Empire; when all is said we have the largest freedom, the most exact science, the most solid romance. We have a deep though undefined obligation to give as we have received from God; because the tribes of men are truly thirsting for these things as for water. All men really want clear laws: we can give clear laws. All men really want hygiene: we can give hygiene. We are not merely imposing Western ideas. We are simply fulfilling human ideas—for the first time.”
On this line, I think, it is possible to justify the forts of Africa and the railroads of Asia; but on this line we must go much further. If it is our duty to give our best, there can be no doubt about what is our best. The greatest thing our Europe has made is the Citizen: the idea of the average man, free and full of honour, voluntarily invoking on his own sin the just vengeance of his city. All else we have done is mere machinery for that: railways exist only to carry the Citizen; forts only to defend him; electricity only to light him, medicine only to heal him. Popularism, the idea of the people alive and patiently feeding history, that we cannot give; for it exists everywhere, East and West. But democracy, the idea of the people fighting and governing— that is the only thing we have to give.

Those are the two roads. But between them weakly wavers the Sentimentalist— that is, the Imperialist of the Roosevelt school. He wants to have it both ways, to have the splendours of success without the perils. Europe may enslave Asia, because it is flattering: but Europe must not free Asia, because that is responsible. It tickles his Imperial taste that Hindoos should have European hats: it is too dangerous if they have European heads. He cannot leave Asia Asiatic: yet he dare not contemplate Asia as European. Therefore he proposes to have in Egypt railway signals, but not flags; despatch boxes, but not ballot boxes.

In short, the Sentimentalist decides to spread the body of Europe without the soul.
THE WHITE HORSES

It is within my experience, which is very brief and occasional in this matter, that it is not really at all easy to talk in a motor-car. This is fortunate; first, because, as a whole, it prevents me from motoring; and second because, at any given moment, it prevents me from talking. The difficulty is not wholly due to the physical conditions, though these are distinctly unconversational. FitzGerald’s Omar, being a pessimist, was probably rich, and being a lazy fellow, was almost certainly a motorist. If any doubt could exist on the point, it is enough to say that, in speaking of the foolish profits, Omar has defined the difficulties of colloquial motoring with a precision which cannot be accidental. “Their words to wind are scattered; and their mouths are stopped with dust.” From this follows not (as many of the cut-and-dried philosophers would say) a savage silence and mutual hostility, but rather one of those rich silences that make the mass and bulk of all friendship; the silence of men rowing the same boat or fighting in the same battle-line.

It happened that the other day I hired a motor-car, because I wanted to visit in very rapid succession the battle-places and hiding-places of Alfred the Great; and for a thing of this sort a motor is really appropriate. It is not by any means the best way of seeing the beauty of the country; you see beauty better by walking, and best of all by sitting still. But it is a good method in any enterprise that involves a parody of the military or governmental quality—anything which needs to know quickly the whole contour of a county or the rough, relative position of men and towns. On such a journey, like jagged lightning, I sat from morning till night by the side of the chauffeur; and we scarcely exchanged a word to the hour. But by the time the yellow stars came out in the villages and the white stars in the skies, I think I understood this character; and I fear he understood mine.

He was a Cheshire man with a sour, patient, and humorous face; he was modest, though a north countryman, and genial, though an expert. He spoke (when he spoke at all) with a strong northland accent; and he evidently was new to the beautiful south country, as was clear both from his approval and his complaints. But though he came from the north he was agricultural and not commercial in origin; he looked at the land rather than the towns, even if he looked at it with a somewhat more sharp and utilitarian eye. His first remark for some hours was uttered when we were crossing the more coarse and desolate
heights of Salisbury Plain. He remarked that he had always thought that Salisbury Plain was a plain. This alone showed that he was new to the vicinity. But he also said, with a critical frown, “A lot of this land ought to be good land enough. Why don’t they use it?” He was then silent for some more hours.

At an abrupt angle of the slopes that lead down from what is called (with no little humour) Salisbury Plain, I saw suddenly, as by accident, something I was looking for—that is, something I did not expect to see. We are all supposed to be trying to walk into heaven; but we should be uncommonly astonished if we suddenly walked into it. As I was leaving Salisbury Plain (to put it roughly) I lifted up my eyes and saw the White Horse of Britain.

One or two truly fine poets of the Tory and Protestant type, such as Swinburne and Mr. Rudyard Kipling, have eulogized England under the image of white horses, meaning the white-maned breakers of the Channel. This is right and natural enough. The true philosophical Tory goes back to ancient things because he thinks they will be anarchic things. It would startle him very much to be told that there are white horses of artifice in England that may be older than those wild white horses of the elements. Yet it is truly so. Nobody knows how old are those strange green and white hieroglyphics, those straggling quadrupeds of chalk, that stand out on the sides of so many of the Southern Downs. They are possibly older than Saxon and older than Roman times. They may well be older than British, older than any recorded times. They may go back, for all we know, to the first faint seeds of human life on this planet. Men may have picked a horse out of the grass long before they scratched a horse on a vase or pot, or messed and massed any horse out of clay. This may be the oldest human art—before building or graving. And if so, it may have first happened in another geological age, before the sea burst through the narrow Straits of Dover. The White Horse may have begun in Berkshire when there were no white horses at Folkestone or Newhaven. That rude but evident white outline that I saw across the valley may have been begun when Britain was not an island. We forget that there are many places where art is older than nature.

We took a long detour through somewhat easier roads, till we came to a breach or chasm in the valley, from which we saw our friend the White Horse once more. At least, we thought it was our friend the White Horse; but after a little inquiry we discovered to our astonishment that it was another friend and another horse. Along the leaning flanks of the same fair valley there was (it seemed) another white horse; as rude and as clean, as ancient and as modern, as the first. This, at least, I thought must be the aboriginal White Horse of Alfred,
which I had always heard associated with his name. And yet before we had driven into Wantage and seen King Alfred’s quaint grey statue in the sun, we had seen yet a third white horse. And the third white horse was so hopelessly unlike a horse that we were sure that it was genuine. The final and original white horse, the white horse of the White Horse Vale, has that big, babyish quality that truly belongs to our remotest ancestors. It really has the prehistoric, preposterous quality of Zulu or New Zealand native drawings. This at least was surely made by our fathers when they were barely men; long before they were civilized men.

But why was it made? Why did barbarians take so much trouble to make a horse nearly as big as a hamlet; a horse who could bear no hunter, who could drag no load? What was this titanic, sub-conscious instinct for spoiling a beautiful green slope with a very ugly white quadruped? What (for the matter of that) is this whole hazardous fancy of humanity ruling the earth, which may have begun with white horses, which may by no means end with twenty horse-power cars? As I rolled away out of that country, I was still cloudily considering how ordinary men ever came to want to make such strange chalk horses, when my chauffeur startled me by speaking for the first time for nearly two hours. He suddenly let go one of the handles and pointed at a gross green bulk of down that happened to swell above us. “That would be a good place,” he said.

Naturally I referred to his last speech of some hours before; and supposed he meant that it would be promising for agriculture. As a fact, it was quite unpromising; and this made me suddenly understand the quiet ardour in his eye. All of a sudden I saw what he really meant. He really meant that this would be a splendid place to pick out another white horse. He knew no more than I did why it was done; but he was in some unthinkable prehistoric tradition, because he wanted to do it. He became so acute in sensibility that he could not bear to pass any broad breezy hill of grass on which there was not a white horse. He could hardly keep his hands off the hills. He could hardly leave any of the living grass alone.

Then I left off wondering why the primitive man made so many white horses. I left off troubling in what sense the ordinary eternal man had sought to scar or deface the hills. I was content to know that he did want it; for I had seen him wanting it.
THE LONG BOW

I find myself still sitting in front of the last book by Mr. H. G. Wells, I say stunned with admiration, my family says sleepy with fatigue. I still feel vaguely all the things in Mr. Wells’s book which I agree with; and I still feel vividly the one thing that I deny. I deny that biology can destroy the sense of truth, which alone can even desire biology. No truth which I find can deny that I am seeking the truth. My mind cannot find anything which denies my mind . . . But what is all this? This is no sort of talk for a genial essay. Let us change the subject; let us have a romance or a fable or a fairy tale.

Come, let us tell each other stories. There was once a king who was very fond of listening to stories, like the king in the Arabian Nights. The only difference was that, unlike that cynical Oriental, this king believed all the stories that he heard. It is hardly necessary to add that he lived in England. His face had not the swarthy secrecy of the tyrant of the thousand tales; on the contrary, his eyes were as big and innocent as two blue moons; and when his yellow beard turned totally white he seemed to be growing younger. Above him hung still his heavy sword and horn, to remind men that he had been a tall hunter and warrior in his time: indeed, with that rusted sword he had wrecked armies. But he was one of those who will never know the world, even when they conquer it. Besides his love of this old Chaucerian pastime of the telling of tales, he was, like many old English kings, specially interested in the art of the bow. He gathered round him great archers of the stature of Ulysses and Robin Hood, and to four of these he gave the whole government of his kingdom. They did not mind governing his kingdom; but they were sometimes a little bored with the necessity of telling him stories. None of their stories were true; but the king believed all of them, and this became very depressing. They created the most preposterous romances; and could not get the credit of creating them. Their true ambition was sent empty away. They were praised as archers; but they desired to be praised as poets. They were trusted as men, but they would rather have been admired as literary men.

At last, in an hour of desperation, they formed themselves into a club or conspiracy with the object of inventing some story which even the king could not swallow. They called it The League of the Long Bow; thus attaching themselves by a double bond to their motherland of England, which has been steadily celebrated since the Norman Conquest for its heroic archery and for the extraordinary credulity of its people.
At last it seemed to the four archers that their hour had come. The king commonly sat in a green curtained chamber, which opened by four doors, and was surmounted by four turrets. Summoning his champions to him on an April evening, he sent out each of them by a separate door, telling him to return at morning with the tale of his journey. Every champion bowed low, and, girding on great armour as for awful adventures, retired to some part of the garden to think of a lie. They did not want to think of a lie which would deceive the king; any lie would do that. They wanted to think of a lie so outrageous that it would not deceive him, and that was a serious matter.

The first archer who returned was a dark, quiet, clever fellow, very dextrous in small matters of mechanics. He was more interested in the science of the bow than in the sport of it. Also he would only shoot at a mark, for he thought it cruel to kill beasts and birds, and atrocious to kill men. When he left the king he had gone out into the wood and tried all sorts of tiresome experiments about the bending of branches and the impact of arrows; when even he found it tiresome he returned to the house of the four turrets and narrated his adventure. “Well,” said the king, “what have you been shooting?” “Arrows,” answered the archer. “So I suppose,” said the king smiling; “but I mean, I mean what wild things have you shot?” “I have shot nothing but arrows,” answered the Bowman obstinately. “When I went out on to the plain I saw in a crescent the black army of the Tartars, the terrible archers whose bows are of bended steel, and their bolts as big as javelins. They spied me afar off, and the shower of their arrows shut out the sun and made a rattling roof above me. You know, I think it wrong to kill a bird, or worm, or even a Tartar. But such is the precision and rapidity of perfect science that, with my own arrows, I split every arrow as it came against me. I struck every flying shaft as if it were a flying bird. Therefore, Sire, I may say truly, that I shot nothing but arrows.” The king said, “I know how clever you engineers are with your fingers.” The archer said, “Oh,” and went out.

The second archer, who had curly hair and was pale, poetical, and rather effeminate, had merely gone out into the garden and stared at the moon. When the moon had become too wide, blank, and watery, even for his own wide, blank, and watery eyes, he came in again. And when the king said “What have you been shooting?” he answered with great volubility, “I have shot a man; not a man from Tartary, not a man from Europe, Asia, Africa, or America; not a man on this earth at all. I have shot the Man in the Moon.” “Shot the Man in the Moon?” repeated the king with something like a mild surprise. “It is easy to prove it,” said the archer with hysterical haste. “Examine the moon through this
particularly powerful telescope, and you will no longer find any traces of a man there.” The king glued his big blue idiotic eye to the telescope for about ten minutes, and then said, “You are right: as you have often pointed out, scientific truth can only be tested by the senses. I believe you.” And the second archer went out, and being of a more emotional temperament burst into tears.

The third archer was a savage, brooding sort of man with tangled hair and dreamy eyes, and he came in without any preface, saying, “I have lost all my arrows. They have turned into birds.” Then as he saw that they all stared at him, he said “Well, you know everything changes on the earth; mud turns into marigolds, eggs turn into chickens; one can even breed dogs into quite different shapes. Well, I shot my arrows at the awful eagles that clash their wings round the Himalayas; great golden eagles as big as elephants, which snap the tall trees by perching on them. My arrows fled so far over mountain and valley that they turned slowly into fowls in their flight. See here,” and he threw down a dead bird and laid an arrow beside it. “Can’t you see they are the same structure. The straight shaft is the backbone; the sharp point is the beak; the feather is the rudimentary plumage. It is merely modification and evolution.” After a silence the king nodded gravely and said, “Yes; of course everything is evolution.” At this the third archer suddenly and violently left the room, and was heard in some distant part of the building making extraordinary noises either of sorrow or of mirth.

The fourth archer was a stunted man with a face as dead as wood, but with wicked little eyes close together, and very much alive. His comrades dissuaded him from going in because they said that they had soared up into the seventh heaven of living lies, and that there was literally nothing which the old man would not believe. The face of the little archer became a little more wooden as he forced his way in, and when he was inside he looked round with blinking bewilderment. “Ha, the last,” said the king heartily, “welcome back again!” There was a long pause, and then the stunted archer said, “What do you mean by ‘again’? I have never been here before.” The king stared for a few seconds, and said, “I sent you out from this room with the four doors last night.” After another pause the little man slowly shook his head. “I never saw you before,” he said simply; “you never sent me out from anywhere. I only saw your four turrets in the distance, and strayed in here by accident. I was born in an island in the Greek Archipelago; I am by profession an auctioneer, and my name is Punk.” The king sat on his throne for seven long instants like a statue; and then there awoke in his mild and ancient eyes an awful thing; the complete conviction of untruth. Every
one has felt it who has found a child obstinately false. He rose to his height and took down the heavy sword above him, plucked it out naked, and then spoke. “I will believe your mad tales about the exact machinery of arrows; for that is science. I will believe your mad tales about traces of life in the moon; for that is science. I will believe your mad tales about jellyfish turning into gentlemen, and everything turning into anything; for that is science. But I will not believe you when you tell me what I know to be untrue. I will not believe you when you say that you did not all set forth under my authority and out of my house. The other three may conceivably have told the truth; but this last man has certainly lied. Therefore I will kill him.” And with that the old and gentle king ran at the man with uplifted sword; but he was arrested by the roar of happy laughter, which told the world that there is, after all, something which an Englishman will not swallow.
Mr. Vernon-Smith, of Trinity, and the Social Settlement, Tooting, author of “A Higher London” and “The Boyg System at Work,” came to the conclusion, after looking through his select and even severe library, that Dickens’s “Christmas Carol” was a very suitable thing to be read to charwomen. Had they been men they would have been forcibly subjected to Browning’s “Christmas Eve” with exposition, but chivalry spared the charwomen, and Dickens was funny, and could do no harm. His fellow worker Wimpole would read things like “Three Men in a Boat” to the poor; but Vernon-Smith regarded this as a sacrifice of principle, or (what was the same thing to him) of dignity. He would not encourage them in their vulgarity; they should have nothing from him that was not literature. Still Dickens was literature after all; not literature of a high order, of course, not thoughtful or purposeful literature, but literature quite fitted for charwomen on Christmas Eve.

He did not, however, let them absorb Dickens without due antidotes of warning and criticism. He explained that Dickens was not a writer of the first rank, since he lacked the high seriousness of Matthew Arnold. He also feared that they would find the characters of Dickens terribly exaggerated. But they did not, possibly because they were meeting them every day. For among the poor there are still exaggerated characters; they do not go to the Universities to be universified. He told the charwomen, with progressive brightness, that a mad wicked old miser like Scrooge would be really quite impossible now; but as each of the charwomen had an uncle or a grandfather or a father-in-law who was exactly like Scrooge, his cheerfulness was not shared. Indeed, the lecture as a whole lacked something of his firm and elastic touch, and towards the end he found himself rambling, and in a sort of abstraction, talking to them as if they were his fellows. He caught himself saying quite mystically that a spiritual plane (by which he meant his plane) always looked to those on the sensual or Dickens plane, not merely austere, but desolate. He said, quoting Bernard Shaw, that we could all go to heaven just as we can all go to a classical concert, but if we did it would bore us. Realizing that he was taking his flock far out of their depth, he ended somewhat hurriedly, and was soon receiving that generous applause which is a part of the profound ceremonialism of the working classes. As he made his way to the door three people stopped him, and he answered them heartily enough, but with an air of hurry which he would not have dreamed of
showing to people of his own class. One was a little schoolmistress who told him with a sort of feverish meekness that she was troubled because an Ethical Lecturer had said that Dickens was not really Progressive; but she thought he was Progressive; and surely he was Progressive. Of what being Progressive was she had no more notion than a whale. The second person implored him for a subscription to some soup kitchen or cheap meal; and his refined features sharpened; for this, like literature, was a matter of principle with him. “Quite the wrong method,” he said, shaking his head and pushing past. “Nothing any good but the Boyg system.” The third stranger, who was male, caught him on the step as he came out into the snow and starlight; and asked him point blank for money. It was a part of Vernon-Smith’s principles that all such persons are prosperous impostors; and like a true mystic he held to his principles in defiance of his five senses, which told him that the night was freezing and the man very thin and weak. “If you come to the Settlement between four and five on Friday week,” he said, “inquiries will be made.” The man stepped back into the snow with a not ungraceful gesture as of apology; he had frosty silver hair, and his lean face, though in shadow, seemed to wear something like a smile. As Vernon-Smith stepped briskly into the street, the man stooped down as if to do up his bootlace. He was, however, guiltless of any such dandyism; and as the young philanthropist stood pulling on his gloves with some particularity, a heavy snowball was suddenly smashed into his face. He was blind for a black instant; then as some of the snow fell, saw faintly, as in a dim mirror of ice or dreamy crystal, the lean man bowing with the elegance of a dancing master, and saying amiably, “A Christmas box.” When he had quite cleared his face of snow the man had vanished.

For three burning minutes Cyril Vernon-Smith was nearer to the people and more their brother than he had been in his whole high-stepping pedantic existence; for if he did not love a poor man, he hated one. And you never really regard a labourer as your equal until you can quarrel with him. “Dirty cad!” he muttered. “Filthy fool! Mucking with snow like a beastly baby! When will they be civilized? Why, the very state of the street is a disgrace and a temptation to such tomfools. Why isn’t all this snow cleared away and the street made decent?”

To the eye of efficiency, there was, indeed, something to complain of in the condition of the road. Snow was banked up on both sides in white walls and towards the other and darker end of the street even rose into a chaos of low colourless hills. By the time he reached them he was nearly knee deep, and was
in a far from philanthropic frame of mind. The solitude of the little streets was as strange as their white obstruction, and before he had ploughed his way much further he was convinced that he had taken a wrong turning, and fallen upon some formless suburb unvisited before. There was no light in any of the low, dark houses; no light in anything but the blank emphatic snow. He was modern and morbid; hellish isolation hit and held him suddenly; anything human would have relieved the strain, if it had been only the leap of a garotter. Then the tender human touch came indeed; for another snowball struck him, and made a star on his back. He turned with fierce joy, and ran after a boy escaping; ran with dizzy and violent speed, he knew not for how long. He wanted the boy; he did not know whether he loved or hated him. He wanted humanity; he did not know whether he loved or hated it.

As he ran he realized that the landscape around him was changing in shape though not in colour. The houses seemed to dwindle and disappear in hills of snow as if buried; the snow seemed to rise in tattered outlines of crag and cliff and crest, but he thought nothing of all these impossibilities until the boy turned to bay. When he did he saw the child was queerly beautiful, with gold red hair, and a face as serious as complete happiness. And when he spoke to the boy his own question surprised him, for he said for the first time in his life, “What am I doing here?” And the little boy, with very grave eyes, answered, “I suppose you are dead.”

He had (also for the first time) a doubt of his spiritual destiny. He looked round on a towering landscape of frozen peaks and plains, and said, “Is this hell?” And as the child stared, but did not answer, he knew it was heaven.

All over that colossal country, white as the world round the Pole, little boys were playing, rolling each other down dreadful slopes, crushing each other under falling cliffs; for heaven is a place where one can fight for ever without hurting. Smith suddenly remembered how happy he had been as a child, rolling about on the safe sandhills around Conway.

Right above Smith’s head, higher than the cross of St. Paul’s, but curving over him like the hanging blossom of a harebell, was a cavernous crag of snow. A hundred feet below him, like a landscape seen from a balloon, lay snowy flats as white and as far away. He saw a little boy stagger, with many catastrophic slides, to that toppling peak; and seizing another little boy by the leg, send him flying away down to the distant silver plains. There he sank and vanished in the snow as if in the sea; but coming up again like a diver rushed madly up the steep once more, rolling before him a great gathering snowball, gigantic at last, which he
hurled back at the mountain crest, and brought both the boy and the mountain
down in one avalanche to the level of the vale. The other boy also sank like a
stone, and also rose again like a bird, but Smith had no leisure to concern
himself with this. For the collapse of that celestial crest had left him standing
solitary in the sky on a peak like a church spire.

He could see the tiny figures of the boys in the valley below, and he knew by
their attitudes that they were eagerly telling him to jump. Then for the first time
he knew the nature of faith, as he had just known the fierce nature of charity. Or
rather for the second time, for he remembered one moment when he had known
faith before. It was n when his father had taught him to swim, and he had
believed he could float on water not only against reason, but (what is so much
harder) against instinct. Then he had trusted water; now he must trust air.

He jumped. He went through air and then through snow with the same
blinding swiftness. But as he buried himself in solid snow like a bullet he
seemed to learn a million things and to learn them all too fast. He knew that the
whole world is a snowball, and that all the stars are snowballs. He knew that no
man will be fit for heaven till he loves solid whiteness as a little boy loves a ball
of snow.

He sank and sank and sank . . . and then, as usually happens in such cases,
woke up, with a start—in the street. True, he was taken up for a common drunk,
but (if you properly appreciate his conversion) you will realize that he did not
mind; since the crime of drunkenness is infinitely less than that of spiritual pride,
of which he had really been guilty.
THE HIGH PLAINS

By high plains I do not mean table-lands; table-lands do not interest one very much. They seem to involve the bore of a climb without the pleasure of a peak. Also they are vaguely associated with Asia and those enormous armies that eat up everything like locusts, as did the army of Xerxes; with emperors from nowhere spreading their battalions everywhere; with the white elephants and the painted horses, the dark engines and the dreadful mounted bowmen of the moving empires of the East, with all that evil insolence in short that rolled into Europe in the youth of Nero, and after having been battered about and abandoned by one Christian nation after another, turned up in England with Disraeli and was christened (or rather paganed) Imperialism.

Also (it may be necessary to explain) I do not mean “high planes” such as the Theosophists and the Higher Thought Centres talk about. They spell theirs differently; but I will not have theirs in any spelling. They, I know, are always expounding how this or that person is on a lower plane, while they (the speakers) are on a higher plane: sometimes they will almost tell you what plane, as “5994” or “Plane F, sub-plane 304.” I do not mean this sort of height either. My religion says nothing about such planes except that all men are on one plane and that by no means a high one. There are saints indeed in my religion: but a saint only means a man who really knows he is a sinner.

Why then should I talk of the plains as high? I do it for a rather singular reason, which I will illustrate by a parallel. When I was at school learning all the Greek I have ever forgotten, I was puzzled by the phrase OINON MELAN that is “black wine,” which continually occurred. I asked what it meant, and many most interesting and convincing answers were given. It was pointed out that we know little of the actual liquid drunk by the Greeks; that the analogy of modern Greek wines may suggest that it was dark and sticky, perhaps a sort of syrup always taken with water; that archaic language about colour is always a little dubious, as where Homer speaks of the “wine-dark sea” and so on. I was very properly satisfied, and never thought of the matter again; until one day, having a decanter of claret in front of me, I happened to look at it. I then perceived that they called wine black because it is black. Very thin, diluted, or held-up abruptly against a flame, red wine is red; but seen in body in most normal shades and semi-lights red wine is black, and therefore was called so.

On the same principles I call the plains high because the plains always are
high; they are always as high as we are. We talk of climbing a mountain crest and looking down at the plain; but the phrase is an illusion of our arrogance. It is impossible even to look down at the plain. For the plain itself rises as we rise. It is not merely true that the higher we climb the wider and wider is spread out below us the wealth of the world; it is not merely that the devil or some other respectable guide for tourists takes us to the top of an exceeding high mountain and shows us all the kingdoms of the earth. It is more than that, in our real feeling of it. It is that in a sense the whole world rises with us roaring, and accompanies us to the crest like some clanging chorus of eagles. The plains rise higher and higher like swift grey walls piled up against invisible invaders. And however high a peak you climb, the plain is still as high as the peak.

The mountain tops are only noble because from them we are privileged to behold the plains. So the only value in any man being superior is that he may have a superior admiration for the level and the common. If there is any profit in a place craggy and precipitous it is only because from the vale it is not easy to see all the beauty of the vale; because when actually in the flats one cannot see their sublime and satisfying flatness. If there is any value in being educated or eminent (which is doubtful enough) it is only because the best instructed man may feel most swiftly and certainly the splendour of the ignorant and the simple: the full magnificence of that mighty human army in the plains. The general goes up to the hill to look at his soldiers, not to look down at his soldiers. He withdraws himself not because his regiment is too small to be touched, but because it is too mighty to be seen. The chief climbs with submission and goes higher with great humility; since in order to take a bird’s eye view of everything, he must become small and distant like a bird.

The most marvellous of those mystical cavaliers who wrote intricate and exquisite verse in England in the seventeenth century, I mean Henry Vaughan, put the matter in one line, intrinsically immortal and practically forgotten—“Oh holy hope and high humility.”

That adjective “high” is not only one of the sudden and stunning inspirations of literature; it is also one of the greatest and gravest definitions of moral science. However far aloft a man may go, he is still looking up, not only at God (which is obvious), but in a manner at men also: seeing more and more all that is towering and mysterious in the dignity and destiny of the lonely house of Adam. I wrote some part of these rambling remarks on a high ridge of rock and turf overlooking a stretch of the central counties; the rise was slight enough in reality, but the immediate ascent had been so steep and sudden that one could
not avoid the fancy that on reaching the summit one would look down at the stars. But one did not look down at the stars, but rather up at the cities; seeing as high in heaven the palace town of Alfred like a lit sunset cloud, and away in the void spaces, like a planet in eclipse, Salisbury. So, it may be hoped, until we die you and I will always look up rather than down at the labours and the habitations of our race; we will lift up our eyes to the valleys from whence cometh our help. For from every special eminence and beyond every sublime landmark, it is good for our souls to see only vaster and vaster visions of that dizzy and divine level; and to behold from our crumbling turrets the tall plains of equality.
THE CHORUS

One of the most marked instances of the decline of true popular sympathy is the gradual disappearance in our time of the habit of singing in chorus. Even when it is done nowadays it is done tentatively and sometimes inaudibly; apparently upon some preposterous principle (which I have never clearly grasped) that singing is an art. In the new aristocracy of the drawing-room a lady is actually asked whether she sings. In the old democracy of the dinner table a man was simply told to sing, and he had to do it. I like the atmosphere of those old banquets. I like to think of my ancestors, middle-aged or venerable gentlemen, all sitting round a table and explaining that they would never forget old days or friends with a rumpty-iddity-iddity, or letting it be known that they would die for England’s glory with their tooral oral, etc. Even the vices of that society (which sometimes, I fear, rendered the narrative portions of the song almost as cryptic and inarticulate as the chorus) were displayed with a more human softening than the same vices in the saloon bars of our own time. I greatly prefer Mr. Richard Swiveller to Mr. Stanley Ortheris. I prefer the man who exceeded in rosy wine in order that the wing of friendship might never moult a feather to the man who exceeds quite as much in whiskies and sodas, but declares all the time that he’s for number one, and that you don’t catch him paying for other men’s drinks. The old men of pleasure (with their tooral oral) got at least some social and communal virtue out of pleasure. The new men of pleasure (without the slightest vestige of a tooral oral) are simply hermits of irreligion instead of religion, anchorites of atheism, and they might as well be drugging themselves with hashish or opium in a wilderness.

But the chorus of the old songs had another use besides this obvious one of asserting the popular element in the arts. The chorus of a song, even of a comic song, has the same purpose as the chorus in a Greek tragedy. It reconciles men to the gods. It connects this one particular tale with the cosmos and the philosophy of common things. Thus we constantly find in the old ballads, especially the pathetic ballads, some refrain about the grass growing green, or the birds singing, or the woods being merry in spring. These are windows opened in the house of tragedy; momentary glimpses of larger and quieter scenes, of more ancient and enduring landscapes. Many of the country songs describing crime and death have refrains of a startling joviality like cock crow, just as if the whole company were coming in with a shout of protest against so sombre a view of
existence. There is a long and gruesome ballad called “The Berkshire Tragedy,” about a murder committed by a jealous sister, for the consummation of which a wicked miller is hanged, and the chorus (which should come in a kind of burst) runs:

“And I’ll be true to my love If my love’ll be true to me.”

The very reasonable arrangement here suggested is introduced, I think, as a kind of throw back to the normal, a reminder that even “The Berkshire Tragedy” does not fill the whole of Berkshire. The poor young lady is drowned, and the wicked miller (to whom we may have been affectionately attached) is hanged; but still a ruby kindles in the vine, and many a garden by the water blows. Not that Omar’s type of hedonistic resignation is at all the same as the breezy impatience of the Berkshire refrain; but they are alike in so far as they gaze out beyond the particular complication to more open plains of peace. The chorus of the ballad looks past the drowning maiden and the miller’s gibbet, and sees the lanes full of lovers.

This use of the chorus to humanize and dilute a dark story is strongly opposed to the modern view of art. Modern art has to be what is called “intense.” It is not easy to define being intense; but, roughly speaking, it means saying only one thing at a time, and saying it wrong. Modern tragic writers have to write short stories; if they wrote long stories (as the man said of philosophy) cheerfulness would creep in. Such stories are like stings; brief, but purely painful. And doubtless they bore some resemblance to some lives lived under our successful scientific civilization; lives which tend in any case to be painful, and in many cases to be brief. But when the artistic people passed beyond the poignant anecdote and began to write long books full of poignancy, then the reading public began to rebel and to demand the recall of romance. The long books about the black poverty of cities became quite insupportable. The Berkshire tragedy had a chorus; but the London tragedy has no chorus. Therefore people welcomed the return of adventurous novels about alien places and times, the trenchant and swordlike stories of Stevenson. But I am not narrowly on the side of the romantics. I think that glimpses of the gloom of our civilization ought to be recorded. I think that the bewilderments of the solitary and sceptical soul ought to be preserved, if it be only for the pity (yes, and the admiration) of a happier time. But I wish that there were some way in which the chorus could enter. I wish that at the end of each chapter of stiff agony or insane terror the choir of humanity could come in with a crash of music and tell both the reader and the author that this is not the whole of human experience. Let them go on recording
hard scenes or hideous questions, but let there be a jolly refrain.

Thus we might read: “As Honoria laid down the volume of Ibsen and went wearily to her window, she realized that life must be to her not only harsher, but colder than it was to the comfortable and the weak. With her tooral ooral, etc.;” or, again: “The young curate smiled grimly as he listened to his great-grandmother’s last words. He knew only too well that since Phogg’s discovery of the hereditary hairiness of goats religion stood on a very different basis from that which it had occupied in his childhood. With his rumpty-iddity, rumpty-iddity;” and so on. Or we might read: “Uriel Maybloom stared gloomily down at his sandals, as he realized for the first time how senseless and anti-social are all ties between man and woman; how each must go his or her way without any attempt to arrest the head-long separation of their souls.” And then would come in one deafening chorus of everlasting humanity “But I’ll be true to my love, if my love’ll be true to me.”

In the records of the first majestic and yet fantastic developments of the foundation of St. Francis of Assisi is an account of a certain Blessed Brother Giles. I have forgotten most of it, but I remember one fact: that certain students of theology came to ask him whether he believed in free will, and, if so, how he could reconcile it with necessity. On hearing the question St. Francis’s follower reflected a little while and then seized a fiddle and began capering and dancing about the garden, playing a wild tune and generally expressing a violent and invigorating indifference. The tune is not recorded, but it is the eternal chorus of mankind, that modifies all the arts and mocks all the individualisms, like the laughter and thunder of some distant sea.
A ROMANCE OF THE MARSHES

In books as a whole marshes are described as desolate and colourless, great fields of clay or sedge, vast horizons of drab or grey. But this, like many other literary associations, is a piece of poetical injustice. Monotony has nothing to do with a place; monotony, either in its sensation or its infliction, is simply the quality of a person. There are no dreary sights; there are only dreary sightseers. It is a matter of taste, that is of personality, whether marshes are monotonous; but it is a matter of fact and science that they are not monochrome. The tops of high mountains (I am told) are all white; the depths of primeval caverns (I am also told) are all dark. The sea will be grey or blue for weeks together; and the desert, I have been led to believe, is the colour of sand. The North Pole (if we found it) would be white with cracks of blue; and Endless Space (if we went there) would, I suppose, be black with white spots. If any of these were counted of a monotonous colour I could well understand it; but on the contrary, they are always spoken of as if they had the gorgeous and chaotic colours of a cosmic kaleidoscope. Now exactly where you can find colours like those of a tulip garden or a stained-glass window, is in those sunken and sodden lands which are always called dreary. Of course the great tulip gardens did arise in Holland; which is simply one immense marsh. There is nothing in Europe so truly tropical as marshes. Also, now I come to think of it, there are few places so agreeably marshy as tropics. At any rate swamp and fenlands in England are always especially rich in gay grasses or gorgeous fungoids; and seem sometimes as glorious as a transformation scene; but also as unsubstantial. In these splendid scenes it is always very easy to put your foot through the scenery. You may sink up to your armpits; but you will sink up to your armpits in flowers. I do not deny that I myself am of a sort that sinks—except in the matter of spirits. I saw in the west counties recently a swampy field of great richness and promise. If I had stepped on it I have no doubt at all that I should have vanished; that aeons hence the complete fossil of a fat Fleet Street journalist would be found in that compressed clay. I only claim that it would be found in some attitude of energy, or even of joy. But the last point is the most important of all, for as I imagined myself sinking up to the neck in what looked like a solid green field, I suddenly remembered that this very thing must have happened to certain interesting pirates quite a thousand years ago.

For, as it happened, the flat fenland in which I so nearly sunk was the fenland
round the Island of Athelney, which is now an island in the fields and no longer in the waters. But on the abrupt hillock a stone still stands to say that this was that embattled islet in the Parrett where King Alfred held his last fort against the foreign invaders, in that war that nearly washed us as far from civilization as the Solomon Islands. Here he defended the island called Athelney as he afterwards did his best to defend the island called England. For the hero always defends an island, a thing beleaguered and surrounded, like the Troy of Hector. And the highest and largest humanitarian can only rise to defending the tiny island called the earth.

One approaches the island of Athelney along a low long road like an interminable white string stretched across the flats, and lined with those dwarfish trees that are elvish in their very dullness. At one point of the journey (I cannot conceive why) one is arrested by a toll gate at which one has to pay threepence. Perhaps it is a distorted tradition of those dark ages. Perhaps Alfred, with the superior science of comparative civilization, had calculated the economics of Denmark down to a halfpenny. Perhaps a Dane sometimes came with twopence, sometimes even with twopence-halfpenny, after the sack of many cities even with twopence three farthings; but never with threepence. Whether or no it was a permanent barrier to the barbarians it was only a temporary barrier to me. I discovered three large and complete coppers in various parts of my person, and I passed on along that strangely monotonous and strangely fascinating path. It is not merely fanciful to feel that the place expresses itself appropriately as the place where the great Christian King hid himself from the heathen. Though a marshland is always open it is still curiously secret. Fens, like deserts, are large things very apt to be mislaid. These flats feared to be overlooked in a double sense; the small trees crouched and the whole plain seemed lying on its face, as men do when shells burst. The little path ran fearlessly forward; but it seemed to run on all fours. Everything in that strange countryside seemed to be lying low, as if to avoid the incessant and rattling rain of the Danish arrows. There were indeed hills of no inconsiderable height quite within call; but those pools and flats of the old Parrett seemed to separate themselves like a central and secret sea; and in the midst of them stood up the rock of Athelney as isolate as it was to Alfred. And all across this recumbent and almost crawling country there ran the glory of the low wet lands; grass lustrous and living like the plumage of some universal bird; the flowers as gorgeous as bonfires and the weeds more beautiful than the flowers. One stooped to stroke the grass, as if the earth were all one kind beast that could feel.
Why does no decent person write an historical novel about Alfred and his fort in Athelney, in the marshes of the Parrett? Not a very historical novel. Not about his Truth-telling (please) or his founding the British Empire, or the British Navy, or the Navy League, or whichever it was he founded. Not about the Treaty of Wedmore and whether it ought (as an eminent historian says) to be called the Pact of Chippenham. But an aboriginal romance for boys about the bare, bald, beatific fact that a great hero held his fort in an island in a river. An island is fine enough, in all conscience or piratic unconscientiousness, but an island in a river sounds like the beginning of the greatest adventure story on earth. “Robinson Crusoe” is really a great tale, but think of Robinson Crusoe’s feelings if he could have actually seen England and Spain from his inaccessible isle! “Treasure Island” is a spirit of genius: but what treasure could an island contain to compare with Alfred? And then consider the further elements of juvenile romance in an island that was more of an island than it looked. Athelney was masked with marshes; many a heavy harnessed Viking may have started bounding across a meadow only to find himself submerged in a sea. I feel the full fictitious splendour spreading round me; I see glimpses of a great romance that will never be written. I see a sudden shaft quivering in one of the short trees. I see a red-haired man wading madly among the tall gold flowers of the marsh, leaping onward and lurching lower. I see another shaft stand quivering in his throat. I cannot see any more, because, as I have delicately suggested, I am a heavy man. This mysterious marshland does not sustain me, and I sink into its depths with a bubbling groan.
ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

G. K. CHESTERTON
THE METHUSELAHITE
SPIRITUALISM
THE ERROR OF IMPARTIALITY
PHONETIC SPELLING
HUMANITARIANISM AND STRENGTH
WINE WHEN IT IS RED
DEMAGOGUES AND MYSTAGOGUES
THE “EATANSWILL GAZETTE.”
FAIRY TALES
TOM JONES AND MORALITY
THE MAID OF ORLEANS
A DEAD POET
CHRISTMAS
THE CASE FOR THE EPHEMERAL

I cannot understand the people who take literature seriously; but I can love them, and I do. Out of my love I warn them to keep clear of this book. It is a collection of crude and shapeless papers upon current or rather flying subjects; and they must be published pretty much as they stand. They were written, as a rule, at the last moment; they were handed in the moment before it was too late, and I do not think that our commonwealth would have been shaken to its foundations if they had been handed in the moment after. They must go out now, with all their imperfections on their head, or rather on mine; for their vices are too vital to be improved with a blue pencil, or with anything I can think of, except dynamite.

Their chief vice is that so many of them are very serious; because I had no time to make them flippant. It is so easy to be solemn; it is so hard to be frivolous. Let any honest reader shut his eyes for a few moments, and approaching the secret tribunal of his soul, ask himself whether he would really rather be asked in the next two hours to write the front page of the Times, which is full of long leading articles, or the front page of Tit–Bits, which is full of short jokes. If the reader is the fine conscientious fellow I take him for, he will at once reply that he would rather on the spur of the moment write ten Times articles than one Tit–Bits joke. Responsibility, a heavy and cautious responsibility of speech, is the easiest thing in the world; anybody can do it. That is why so many tired, elderly, and wealthy men go in for politics. They are responsible, because they have not the strength of mind left to be irresponsible. It is more dignified to sit still than to dance the Barn Dance. It is also easier. So in these easy pages I keep myself on the whole on the level of the Times: it is only occasionally that I leap upwards almost to the level of Tit–Bits.

I resume the defence of this indefensible book. These articles have another disadvantage arising from the scurry in which they were written; they are too long–winded and elaborate. One of the great disadvantages of hurry is that it takes such a long time. If I have to start for High–gate this day week, I may perhaps go the shortest way. If I have to start this minute, I shall almost certainly go the longest. In these essays (as I read them over) I feel frightfully annoyed with myself for not getting to the point more quickly; but I had not enough leisure to be quick. There are several maddening cases in which I took two or three pages in attempting to describe an attitude of which the essence could be expressed in an epigram; only there was no time for epigrams. I do not repent of
one shade of opinion here expressed; but I feel that they might have been expressed so much more briefly and precisely. For instance, these pages contain a sort of recurring protest against the boast of certain writers that they are merely recent. They brag that their philosophy of the universe is the last philosophy or the new philosophy, or the advanced and progressive philosophy. I have said much against a mere modernism. When I use the word “modernism,” I am not alluding specially to the current quarrel in the Roman Catholic Church, though I am certainly astonished at any intellectual group accepting so weak and unphilosophical a name. It is incomprehensible to me that any thinker can calmly call himself a modernist; he might as well call himself a Thursdayite. But apart altogether from that particular disturbance, I am conscious of a general irritation expressed against the people who boast of their advancement and modernity in the discussion of religion. But I never succeeded in saying the quite clear and obvious thing that is really the matter with modernism. The real objection to modernism is simply that it is a form of snobbishness. It is an attempt to crush a rational opponent not by reason, but by some mystery of superiority, by hinting that one is specially up to date or particularly “in the know.” To flaunt the fact that we have had all the last books from Germany is simply vulgar; like flaunting the fact that we have had all the last bonnets from Paris. To introduce into philosophical discussions a sneer at a creed’s antiquity is like introducing a sneer at a lady’s age. It is caddish because it is irrelevant. The pure modernist is merely a snob; he cannot bear to be a month behind the fashion. Similarly I find that I have tried in these pages to express the real objection to philanthropists and have not succeeded. I have not seen the quite simple objection to the causes advocated by certain wealthy idealists; causes of which the cause called teetotalism is the strongest case. I have used many abusive terms about the thing, calling it Puritanism, or superciliousness, or aristocracy; but I have not seen and stated the quite simple objection to philanthropy; which is that it is religious persecution. Religious persecution does not consist in thumbscrews or fires of Smithfield; the essence of religious persecution is this: that the man who happens to have material power in the State, either by wealth or by official position, should govern his fellow–citizens not according to their religion or philosophy, but according to his own. If, for instance, there is such a thing as a vegetarian nation; if there is a great united mass of men who wish to live by the vegetarian morality, then I say in the emphatic words of the arrogant French marquis before the French Revolution, “Let them eat grass.” Perhaps that French oligarch was a humanitarian; most
oligarchs are. Perhaps when he told the peasants to eat grass he was recommending to them the hygienic simplicity of a vegetarian restaurant. But that is an irrelevant, though most fascinating, speculation. The point here is that if a nation is really vegetarian let its government force upon it the whole horrible weight of vegetarianism. Let its government give the national guests a State vegetarian banquet. Let its government, in the most literal and awful sense of the words, give them beans. That sort of tyranny is all very well; for it is the people tyrannising over all the persons. But “temperance reformers” are like a small group of vegetarians who should silently and systematically act on an ethical assumption entirely unfamiliar to the mass of the people. They would always be giving peerages to greengrocers. They would always be appointing Parliamentary Commissions to enquire into the private life of butchers. Whenever they found a man quite at their mercy, as a pauper or a convict or a lunatic, they would force him to add the final touch to his inhuman isolation by becoming a vegetarian. All the meals for school children will be vegetarian meals. All the State public houses will be vegetarian public houses. There is a very strong case for vegetarianism as compared with teetotalism. Drinking one glass of beer cannot by any philosophy be drunkenness; but killing one animal can, by this philosophy, be murder. The objection to both processes is not that the two creeds, teetotal and vegetarian, are not admissible; it is simply that they are not admitted. The thing is religious persecution because it is not based on the existing religion of the democracy. These people ask the poor to accept in practice what they know perfectly well that the poor would not accept in theory. That is the very definition of religious persecution. I was against the Tory attempt to force upon ordinary Englishmen a Catholic theology in which they do not believe. I am even more against the attempt to force upon them a Mohamedan morality which they actively deny.

Again, in the case of anonymous journalism I seem to have said a great deal without getting out the point very clearly. Anonymous journalism is dangerous, and is poisonous in our existing life simply because it is so rapidly becoming an anonymous life. That is the horrible thing about our contemporary atmosphere. Society is becoming a secret society. The modern tyrant is evil because of his elusiveness. He is more nameless than his slave. He is not more of a bully than the tyrants of the past; but he is more of a coward. The rich publisher may treat the poor poet better or worse than the old master workman treated the old apprentice. But the apprentice ran away and the master ran after him. Nowadays it is the poet who pursues and tries in vain to fix the fact of responsibility. It is
the publisher who runs away. The clerk of Mr. Solomon gets the sack: the beautiful Greek slave of the Sultan Suliman also gets the sack; or the sack gets her. But though she is concealed under the black waves of the Bosphorus, at least her destroyer is not concealed. He goes behind golden trumpets riding on a white elephant. But in the case of the clerk it is almost as difficult to know where the dismissal comes from as to know where the clerk goes to. It may be Mr. Solomon or Mr. Solomon’s manager, or Mr. Solomon’s rich aunt in Cheltenham, or Mr. Soloman’s rich creditor in Berlin. The elaborate machinery which was once used to make men responsible is now used solely in order to shift the responsibility. People talk about the pride of tyrants; but we in this age are not suffering from the pride of tyrants. We are suffering from the shyness of tyrants; from the shrinking modesty of tyrants. Therefore we must not encourage leader–writers to be shy; we must not inflame their already exaggerated modesty. Rather we must attempt to lure them to be vain and ostentatious; so that through ostentation they may at last find their way to honesty.

The last indictment against this book is the worst of all. It is simply this: that if all goes well this book will be unintelligible gibberish. For it is mostly concerned with attacking attitudes which are in their nature accidental and incapable of enduring. Brief as is the career of such a book as this, it may last just twenty minutes longer than most of the philosophies that it attacks. In the end it will not matter to us whether we wrote well or ill; whether we fought with flails or reeds. It will matter to us greatly on what side we fought.
COCKNEYS AND THEIR JOKES

A writer in the Yorkshire Evening Post is very angry indeed with my performances in this column. His precise terms of reproach are, “Mr. G. K. Chesterton is not a humourist: not even a Cockney humourist.” I do not mind his saying that I am not a humourist—in which (to tell the truth) I think he is quite right. But I do resent his saying that I am not a Cockney. That envenomed arrow, I admit, went home. If a French writer said of me, “He is no metaphysician: not even an English metaphysician,” I could swallow the insult to my metaphysics, but I should feel angry about the insult to my country. So I do not urge that I am a humourist; but I do insist that I am a Cockney. If I were a humourist, I should certainly be a Cockney humourist; if I were a saint, I should certainly be a Cockney saint. I need not recite the splendid catalogue of Cockney saints who have written their names on our noble old City churches. I need not trouble you with the long list of the Cockney humourists who have discharged their bills (or failed to discharge them) in our noble old City taverns. We can weep together over the pathos of the poor Yorkshireman, whose county has never produced some humour not intelligible to the rest of the world. And we can smile together when he says that somebody or other is “not even” a Cockney humourist like Samuel Johnson or Charles Lamb. It is surely sufficiently obvious that all the best humour that exists in our language is Cockney humour. Chaucer was a Cockney; he had his house close to the Abbey. Dickens was a Cockney; he said he could not think without the London streets. The London taverns heard always the quaintest conversation, whether it was Ben Johnson’s at the Mermaid or Sam Johnson’s at the Cock. Even in our own time it may be noted that the most vital and genuine humour is still written about London. Of this type is the mild and humane irony which marks Mr. Pett Ridge’s studies of the small grey streets. Of this type is the simple but smashing laughter of the best tales of Mr. W. W. Jacobs, telling of the smoke and sparkle of the Thames. No; I concede that I am not a Cockney humourist. No; I am not worthy to be. Some time, after sad and strenuous after-lives; some time, after fierce and apocalyptic incarnations; in some strange world beyond the stars, I may become at last a Cockney humourist. In that potential paradise I may walk among the Cockney humourists, if not an equal, at least a companion. I may feel for a moment on my shoulder the hearty hand of Dryden and thread the labyrinths of the sweet insanity of Lamb. But that could only be if I were not only much cleverer, but much better than I am.
Before I reach that sphere I shall have left behind, perhaps, the sphere that is inhabited by angels, and even passed that which is appropriated exclusively to the use of Yorkshiremen.

No; London is in this matter attacked upon its strongest ground. London is the largest of the bloated modern cities; London is the smokiest; London is the dirtiest; London is, if you will, the most sombre; London is, if you will, the most miserable. But London is certainly the most amusing and the most amused. You may prove that we have the most tragedy; the fact remains that we have the most comedy, that we have the most farce. We have at the very worst a splendid hypocrisy of humour. We conceal our sorrow behind a screaming derision. You speak of people who laugh through their tears; it is our boast that we only weep through our laughter. There remains always this great boast, perhaps the greatest boast that is possible to human nature. I mean the great boast that the most unhappy part of our population is also the most hilarious part. The poor can forget that social problem which we (the moderately rich) ought never to forget. Blessed are the poor; for they alone have not the poor always with them. The honest poor can sometimes forget poverty. The honest rich can never forget it.

I believe firmly in the value of all vulgar notions, especially of vulgar jokes. When once you have got hold of a vulgar joke, you may be certain that you have got hold of a subtle and spiritual idea. The men who made the joke saw something deep which they could not express except by something silly and emphatic. They saw something delicate which they could only express by something indelicate. I remember that Mr. Max Beerbohm (who has every merit except democracy) attempted to analyse the jokes at which the mob laughs. He divided them into three sections: jokes about bodily humiliation, jokes about things alien, such as foreigners, and jokes about bad cheese. Mr. Max Beerbohm thought he understood the first two forms; but I am not sure that he did. In order to understand vulgar humour it is not enough to be humorous. One must also be vulgar, as I am. And in the first case it is surely obvious that it is not merely at the fact of something being hurt that we laugh (as I trust we do) when a Prime Minister sits down on his hat. If that were so we should laugh whenever we saw a funeral. We do not laugh at the mere fact of something falling down; there is nothing humorous about leaves falling or the sun going down. When our house falls down we do not laugh. All the birds of the air might drop around us in a perpetual shower like a hailstorm without arousing a smile. If you really ask yourself why we laugh at a man sitting down suddenly in the street you will discover that the reason is not only recondite, but ultimately religious. All the
jokes about men sitting down on their hats are really theological jokes; they are concerned with the Dual Nature of Man. They refer to the primary paradox that man is superior to all the things around him and yet is at their mercy.

Quite equally subtle and spiritual is the idea at the back of laughing at foreigners. It concerns the almost torturing truth of a thing being like oneself and yet not like oneself. Nobody laughs at what is entirely foreign; nobody laughs at a palm tree. But it is funny to see the familiar image of God disguised behind the black beard of a Frenchman or the black face of a Negro. There is nothing funny in the sounds that are wholly inhuman, the howling of wild beasts or of the wind. But if a man begins to talk like oneself, but all the syllables come out different, then if one is a man one feels inclined to laugh, though if one is a gentleman one resists the inclination.

Mr. Max Beerbohm, I remember, professed to understand the first two forms of popular wit, but said that the third quite stumped him. He could not see why there should be anything funny about bad cheese. I can tell him at once. He has missed the idea because it is subtle and philosophical, and he was looking for something ignorant and foolish. Bad cheese is funny because it is (like the foreigner or the man fallen on the pavement) the type of the transition or transgression across a great mystical boundary. Bad cheese symbolises the change from the inorganic to the organic. Bad cheese symbolises the startling prodigy of matter taking on vitality. It symbolises the origin of life itself. And it is only about such solemn matters as the origin of life that the democracy condescends to joke. Thus, for instance, the democracy jokes about marriage, because marriage is a part of mankind. But the democracy would never deign to joke about Free Love, because Free Love is a piece of priggishness.

As a matter of fact, it will be generally found that the popular joke is not true to the letter, but is true to the spirit. The vulgar joke is generally in the oddest way the truth and yet not the fact. For instance, it is not in the least true that mothers–in–law are as a class oppressive and intolerable; most of them are both devoted and useful. All the mothers–in–law I have ever had were admirable. Yet the legend of the comic papers is profoundly true. It draws attention to the fact that it is much harder to be a nice mother–in–law than to be nice in any other conceivable relation of life. The caricatures have drawn the worst mother–in–law a monster, by way of expressing the fact that the best mother–in–law is a problem. The same is true of the perpetual jokes in comic papers about shrewish wives and henpecked husbands. It is all a frantic exaggeration, but it is an exaggeration of a truth; whereas all the modern mouthings about oppressed
women are the exaggerations of a falsehood. If you read even the best of the intellectuals of to-day you will find them saying that in the mass of the democracy the woman is the chattel of her lord, like his bath or his bed. But if you read the comic literature of the democracy you will find that the lord hides under the bed to escape from the wrath of his chattel. This is not the fact, but it is much nearer the truth. Every man who is married knows quite well, not only that he does not regard his wife as a chattel, but that no man can conceivably ever have done so. The joke stands for an ultimate truth, and that is a subtle truth. It is one not very easy to state correctly. It can, perhaps, be most correctly stated by saying that, even if the man is the head of the house, he knows he is the figurehead.

But the vulgar comic papers are so subtle and true that they are even prophetic. If you really want to know what is going to happen to the future of our democracy, do not read the modern sociological prophecies, do not read even Mr. Wells’s Utopias for this purpose, though you should certainly read them if you are fond of good honesty and good English. If you want to know what will happen, study the pages of Snaps or Patchy Bits as if they were the dark tablets graven with the oracles of the gods. For, mean and gross as they are, in all seriousness, they contain what is entirely absent from all Utopias and all the sociological conjectures of our time: they contain some hint of the actual habits and manifest desires of the English people. If we are really to find out what the democracy will ultimately do with itself, we shall surely find it, not in the literature which studies the people, but in the literature which the people studies.

I can give two chance cases in which the common or Cockney joke was a much better prophecy than the careful observations of the most cultured observer. When England was agitated, previous to the last General Election, about the existence of Chinese labour, there was a distinct difference between the tone of the politicians and the tone of the populace. The politicians who disapproved of Chinese labour were most careful to explain that they did not in any sense disapprove of Chinese. According to them, it was a pure question of legal propriety, of whether certain clauses in the contract of indenture were not inconsistent with our constitutional traditions: according to them, the case would have been the same if the people had been Kaffirs or Englishmen. It all sounded wonderfully enlightened and lucid; and in comparison the popular joke looked, of course, very poor. For the popular joke against the Chinese labourers was simply that they were Chinese; it was an objection to an alien type; the popular
papers were full of gibes about pigtails and yellow faces. It seemed that the Liberal politicians were raising an intellectual objection to a doubtful document of State; while it seemed that the Radical populace were merely roaring with idiotic laughter at the sight of a Chinaman’s clothes. But the popular instinct was justified, for the vices revealed were Chinese vices.

But there is another case more pleasant and more up to date. The popular papers always persisted in representing the New Woman or the Suffragette as an ugly woman, fat, in spectacles, with bulging clothes, and generally falling off a bicycle. As a matter of plain external fact, there was not a word of truth in this. The leaders of the movement of female emancipation are not at all ugly; most of them are extraordinarily good–looking. Nor are they at all indifferent to art or decorative costume; many of them are alarmingly attached to these things. Yet the popular instinct was right. For the popular instinct was that in this movement, rightly or wrongly, there was an element of indifference to female dignity, of a quite new willingness of women to be grotesque. These women did truly despise the pontifical quality of woman. And in our streets and around our Parliament we have seen the stately woman of art and culture turn into the comic woman of Comic Bits. And whether we think the exhibition justifiable or not, the prophecy of the comic papers is justified: the healthy and vulgar masses were conscious of a hidden enemy to their traditions who has now come out into the daylight, that the scriptures might be fulfilled. For the two things that a healthy person hates most between heaven and hell are a woman who is not dignified and a man who is.
THE FALLACY OF SUCCESS

There has appeared in our time a particular class of books and articles which I sincerely and solemnly think may be called the silliest ever known among men. They are much more wild than the wildest romances of chivalry and much more dull than the dullest religious tract. Moreover, the romances of chivalry were at least about chivalry; the religious tracts are about religion. But these things are about nothing; they are about what is called Success. On every bookstall, in every magazine, you may find works telling people how to succeed. They are books showing men how to succeed in everything; they are written by men who cannot even succeed in writing books. To begin with, of course, there is no such thing as Success. Or, if you like to put it so, there is nothing that is not successful. That a thing is successful merely means that it is; a millionaire is successful in being a millionaire and a donkey in being a donkey. Any live man has succeeded in living; any dead man may have succeeded in committing suicide. But, passing over the bad logic and bad philosophy in the phrase, we may take it, as these writers do, in the ordinary sense of success in obtaining money or worldly position. These writers profess to tell the ordinary man how he may succeed in his trade or speculation—how, if he is a builder, he may succeed as a builder; how, if he is a stockbroker, he may succeed as a stockbroker. They profess to show him how, if he is a grocer, he may become a sporting yachtsman; how, if he is a tenth-rate journalist, he may become a peer; and how, if he is a German Jew, he may become an Anglo-Saxon. This is a definite and business-like proposal, and I really think that the people who buy these books (if any people do buy them) have a moral, if not a legal, right to ask for their money back. Nobody would dare to publish a book about electricity which literally told one nothing about electricity; no one would dare to publish an article on botany which showed that the writer did not know which end of a plant grew in the earth. Yet our modern world is full of books about Success and successful people which literally contain no kind of idea, and scarcely any kind of verbal sense.

It is perfectly obvious that in any decent occupation (such as bricklaying or writing books) there are only two ways (in any special sense) of succeeding. One is by doing very good work, the other is by cheating. Both are much too simple to require any literary explanation. If you are in for the high jump, either jump higher than any one else, or manage somehow to pretend that you have done so.
If you want to succeed at whist, either be a good whist–player, or play with marked cards. You may want a book about jumping; you may want a book about whist; you may want a book about cheating at whist. But you cannot want a book about Success. Especially you cannot want a book about Success such as those which you can now find scattered by the hundred about the book–market. You may want to jump or to play cards; but you do not want to read wandering statements to the effect that jumping is jumping, or that games are won by winners. If these writers, for instance, said anything about success in jumping it would be something like this: “The jumper must have a clear aim before him. He must desire definitely to jump higher than the other men who are in for the same competition. He must let no feeble feelings of mercy (sneaked from the sickening Little Englanders and Pro–Boers) prevent him from trying to do his best. He must remember that a competition in jumping is distinctly competitive, and that, as Darwin has gloriously demonstrated, THE WEAKEST GO TO THE WALL.” That is the kind of thing the book would say, and very useful it would be, if read out in a low and tense voice to a young man just about to take the high jump. Or suppose that in the course of his intellectual rambles the philosopher of Success dropped upon our other case, that of playing cards, his bracing advice would run—“In playing cards it is very necessary to avoid the mistake (commonly made by maudlin humanitarians and Free Traders) of permitting your opponent to win the game. You must have grit and snap and go in to win. The days of idealism and superstition are over. We live in a time of science and hard common sense, and it has now been definitely proved that in any game where two are playing IF ONE DOES NOT WIN THE OTHER WILL.” It is all very stirring, of course; but I confess that if I were playing cards I would rather have some decent little book which told me the rules of the game. Beyond the rules of the game it is all a question either of talent or dishonesty; and I will undertake to provide either one or the other–which, it is not for me to say.

Turning over a popular magazine, I find a queer and amusing example. There is an article called “The Instinct that Makes People Rich.” It is decorated in front with a formidable portrait of Lord Rothschild. There are many definite methods, honest and dishonest, which make people rich; the only “instinct” I know of which does it is that instinct which theological Christianity crudely describes as “the sin of avarice.” That, however, is beside the present point. I wish to quote the following exquisite paragraphs as a piece of typical advice as to how to succeed. It is so practical; it leaves so little doubt about what should be our next
The name of Vanderbilt is synonymous with wealth gained by modern enterprise. ‘Cornelius,’ the founder of the family, was the first of the great American magnates of commerce. He started as the son of a poor farmer; he ended as a millionaire twenty times over.

“He had the money-making instinct. He seized his opportunities, the opportunities that were given by the application of the steam-engine to ocean traffic, and by the birth of railway locomotion in the wealthy but undeveloped United States of America, and consequently he amassed an immense fortune.

“Now it is, of course, obvious that we cannot all follow exactly in the footsteps of this great railway monarch. The precise opportunities that fell to him do not occur to us. Circumstances have changed. But, although this is so, still, in our own sphere and in our own circumstances, we can follow his general methods; we can seize those opportunities that are given us, and give ourselves a very fair chance of attaining riches.”

In such strange utterances we see quite clearly what is really at the bottom of all these articles and books. It is not mere business; it is not even mere cynicism. It is mysticism; the horrible mysticism of money. The writer of that passage did not really have the remotest notion of how Vanderbilt made his money, or of how anybody else is to make his. He does, indeed, conclude his remarks by advocating some scheme; but it has nothing in the world to do with Vanderbilt. He merely wished to prostrate himself before the mystery of a millionaire. For when we really worship anything, we love not only its clearness but its obscurity. We exult in its very invisibility. Thus, for instance, when a man is in love with a woman he takes special pleasure in the fact that a woman is unreasonable. Thus, again, the very pious poet, celebrating his Creator, takes pleasure in saying that God moves in a mysterious way. Now, the writer of the paragraph which I have quoted does not seem to have had anything to do with a god, and I should not think (judging by his extreme unpracticality) that he had ever been really in love with a woman. But the thing he does worship—Vanderbilt—he treats in exactly this mystical manner. He really revels in the fact his deity Vanderbilt is keeping a secret from him. And it fills his soul with a sort of transport of cunning, an ecstasy of priestcraft, that he should pretend to be telling to the multitude that terrible secret which he does not know.

Speaking about the instinct that makes people rich, the same writer remarks —“In olden days its existence was fully understood. The Greeks enshrined it in the story of Midas, of the ‘Golden Touch.’ Here was a man who turned everything he laid his hands upon into gold. His life was a progress amidst
riches. Out of everything that came in his way he created the precious metal. ‘A foolish legend,’ said the wiseacres of the Victorian age. ‘A truth,’ say we of today. We all know of such men. We are ever meeting or reading about such persons who turn everything they touch into gold. Success dogs their very footsteps. Their life’s pathway leads unerringly upwards. They cannot fail.”

Unfortunately, however, Midas could fail; he did. His path did not lead unerringly upward. He starved because whenever he touched a biscuit or a ham sandwich it turned to gold. That was the whole point of the story, though the writer has to suppress it delicately, writing so near to a portrait of Lord Rothschild. The old fables of mankind are, indeed, unfathomably wise; but we must not have them expurgated in the interests of Mr. Vanderbilt. We must not have King Midas represented as an example of success; he was a failure of an unusually painful kind. Also, he had the ears of an ass. Also (like most other prominent and wealthy persons) he endeavoured to conceal the fact. It was his barber (if I remember right) who had to be treated on a confidential footing with regard to this peculiarity; and his barber, instead of behaving like a go-ahead person of the Succeed–at–all–costs school and trying to blackmail King Midas, went away and whispered this splendid piece of society scandal to the reeds, who enjoyed it enormously. It is said that they also whispered it as the winds swayed them to and fro. I look reverently at the portrait of Lord Rothschild; I read reverently about the exploits of Mr. Vanderbilt. I know that I cannot turn everything I touch to gold; but then I also know that I have never tried, having a preference for other substances, such as grass, and good wine. I know that these people have certainly succeeded in something; that they have certainly overcome somebody; I know that they are kings in a sense that no men were ever kings before; that they create markets and bestride continents. Yet it always seems to me that there is some small domestic fact that they are hiding, and I have sometimes thought I heard upon the wind the laughter and whisper of the reeds.

At least, let us hope that we shall all live to see these absurd books about Success covered with a proper derision and neglect. They do not teach people to be successful, but they do teach people to be snobbish; they do spread a sort of evil poetry of worldliness. The Puritans are always denouncing books that inflame lust; what shall we say of books that inflame the viler passions of avarice and pride? A hundred years ago we had the ideal of the Industrious Apprentice; boys were told that by thrift and work they would all become Lord Mayors. This was fallacious, but it was manly, and had a minimum of moral truth. In our society, temperance will not help a poor man to enrich himself, but
it may help him to respect himself. Good work will not make him a rich man, but
good work may make him a good workman. The Industrious Apprentice rose by
virtues few and narrow indeed, but still virtues. But what shall we say of the
gospel preached to the new Industrious Apprentice; the Apprentice who rises not
by his virtues, but avowedly by his vices?
ON RUNNING AFTER ONE’S HAT

I feel an almost savage envy on hearing that London has been flooded in my absence, while I am in the mere country. My own Battersea has been, I understand, particularly favoured as a meeting of the waters. Battersea was already, as I need hardly say, the most beautiful of human localities. Now that it has the additional splendour of great sheets of water, there must be something quite incomparable in the landscape (or waterscape) of my own romantic town. Battersea must be a vision of Venice. The boat that brought the meat from the butcher’s must have shot along those lanes of rippling silver with the strange smoothness of the gondola. The greengrocer who brought cabbages to the corner of the Latchmere Road must have leant upon the oar with the unearthly grace of the gondolier. There is nothing so perfectly poetical as an island; and when a district is flooded it becomes an archipelago.

Some consider such romantic views of flood or fire slightly lacking in reality. But really this romantic view of such inconveniences is quite as practical as the other. The true optimist who sees in such things an opportunity for enjoyment is quite as logical and much more sensible than the ordinary “Indignant Ratepayer” who sees in them an opportunity for grumbling. Real pain, as in the case of being burnt at Smithfield or having a toothache, is a positive thing; it can be supported, but scarcely enjoyed. But, after all, our toothaches are the exception, and as for being burnt at Smithfield, it only happens to us at the very longest intervals. And most of the inconveniences that make men swear or women cry are really sentimental or imaginative inconveniences—things altogether of the mind. For instance, we often hear grown-up people complaining of having to hang about a railway station and wait for a train. Did you ever hear a small boy complain of having to hang about a railway station and wait for a train? No; for to him to be inside a railway station is to be inside a cavern of wonder and a palace of poetical pleasures. Because to him the red light and the green light on the signal are like a new sun and a new moon. Because to him when the wooden arm of the signal falls down suddenly, it is as if a great king had thrown down his staff as a signal and started a shrieking tournament of trains. I myself am of little boys’ habit in this matter. They also serve who only stand and wait for the two fifteen. Their meditations may be full of rich and fruitful things. Many of the most purple hours of my life have been passed at Clapham Junction, which is now, I suppose, under water. I have been there in many moods so fixed and
mystical that the water might well have come up to my waist before I noticed it particularly. But in the case of all such annoyances, as I have said, everything depends upon the emotional point of view. You can safely apply the test to almost every one of the things that are currently talked of as the typical nuisance of daily life.

For instance, there is a current impression that it is unpleasant to have to run after one’s hat. Why should it be unpleasant to the well-ordered and pious mind? Not merely because it is running, and running exhausts one. The same people run much faster in games and sports. The same people run much more eagerly after an uninteresting; little leather ball than they will after a nice silk hat. There is an idea that it is humiliating to run after one’s hat; and when people say it is humiliating they mean that it is comic. It certainly is comic; but man is a very comic creature, and most of the things he does are comic—eating, for instance. And the most comic things of all are exactly the things that are most worth doing—such as making love. A man running after a hat is not half so ridiculous as a man running after a wife.

Now a man could, if he felt rightly in the matter, run after his hat with the manliest ardour and the most sacred joy. He might regard himself as a jolly huntsman pursuing a wild animal, for certainly no animal could be wilder. In fact, I am inclined to believe that hat-hunting on windy days will be the sport of the upper classes in the future. There will be a meet of ladies and gentlemen on some high ground on a gusty morning. They will be told that the professional attendants have started a hat in such—and—such a thicket, or whatever be the technical term. Notice that this employment will in the fullest degree combine sport with humanitarianism. The hunters would feel that they were not inflicting pain. Nay, they would feel that they were inflicting pleasure, rich, almost riotous pleasure, upon the people who were looking on. When last I saw an old gentleman running after his hat in Hyde Park, I told him that a heart so benevolent as his ought to be filled with peace and thanks at the thought of how much unaffected pleasure his every gesture and bodily attitude were at that moment giving to the crowd.

The same principle can be applied to every other typical domestic worry. A gentleman trying to get a fly out of the milk or a piece of cork out of his glass of wine often imagines himself to be irritated. Let him think for a moment of the patience of anglers sitting by dark pools, and let his soul be immediately irradiated with gratification and repose. Again, I have known some people of very modern views driven by their distress to the use of theological terms to
which they attached no doctrinal significance, merely because a drawer was jammed tight and they could not pull it out. A friend of mine was particularly afflicted in this way. Every day his drawer was jammed, and every day in consequence it was something else that rhymes to it. But I pointed out to him that this sense of wrong was really subjective and relative; it rested entirely upon the assumption that the drawer could, should, and would come out easily. “But if,” I said, “you picture to yourself that you are pulling against some powerful and oppressive enemy, the struggle will become merely exciting and not exasperating. Imagine that you are tugging up a lifeboat out of the sea. Imagine that you are roping up a fellow-creature out of an Alpine crevasse. Imagine even that you are a boy again and engaged in a tug-of-war between French and English.” Shortly after saying this I left him; but I have no doubt at all that my words bore the best possible fruit. I have no doubt that every day of his life he hangs on to the handle of that drawer with a flushed face and eyes bright with battle, uttering encouraging shouts to himself, and seeming to hear all round him the roar of an applauding ring.

So I do not think that it is altogether fanciful or incredible to suppose that even the floods in London may be accepted and enjoyed poetically. Nothing beyond inconvenience seems really to have been caused by them; and inconvenience, as I have said, is only one aspect, and that the most unimaginative and accidental aspect of a really romantic situation. An adventure is only an inconvenience rightly considered. An inconvenience is only an adventure wrongly considered. The water that girdled the houses and shops of London must, if anything, have only increased their previous witchery and wonder. For as the Roman Catholic priest in the story said: “Wine is good with everything except water,” and on a similar principle, water is good with everything except wine.
THE VOTE AND THE HOUSE

Most of us will be canvassed soon, I suppose; some of us may even canvass. Upon which side, of course, nothing will induce me to state, beyond saying that by a remarkable coincidence it will in every case be the only side in which a high-minded, public-spirited, and patriotic citizen can take even a momentary interest. But the general question of canvassing itself, being a non-party question, is one which we may be permitted to approach. The rules for canvassers are fairly familiar to any one who has ever canvassed. They are printed on the little card which you carry about with you and lose. There is a statement, I think, that you must not offer a voter food or drink. However hospitable you may feel towards him in his own house, you must not carry his lunch about with you. You must not produce a veal cutlet from your tail-coat pocket. You must not conceal poached eggs about your person. You must not, like a kind of conjurer, produce baked potatoes from your hat. In short, the canvasser must not feed the voter in any way. Whether the voter is allowed to feed the canvasser, whether the voter may give the canvasser veal cutlets and baked potatoes, is a point of law on which I have never been able to inform myself. When I found myself canvassing a gentleman, I have sometimes felt tempted to ask him if there was any rule against his giving me food and drink; but the matter seemed a delicate one to approach. His attitude to me also sometimes suggested a doubt as to whether he would, even if he could. But there are voters who might find it worth while to discover if there is any law against bribing a canvasser. They might bribe him to go away.

The second veto for canvassers which was printed on the little card said that you must not persuade any one to personate a voter. I have no idea what it means. To dress up as an average voter seems a little vague. There is no well-recognised uniform, as far as I know, with civic waistcoat and patriotic whiskers. The enterprise resolves itself into one somewhat similar to the enterprise of a rich friend of mine who went to a fancy-dress ball dressed up as a gentleman. Perhaps it means that there is a practice of personating some individual voter. The canvasser creeps to the house of his fellow-conspirator carrying a make-up in a bag. He produces from it a pair of white moustaches and a single eyeglass, which are sufficient to give the most common-place person a startling resemblance to the Colonel at No. 80. Or he hurriedly affixes to his friend that large nose and that bald head which are all that is essential to an illusion of the
presence of Professor Budger. I do not undertake to unravel these knots. I can only say that when I was a canvasser I was told by the little card, with every circumstance of seriousness and authority, that I was not to persuade anybody to personate a voter: and I can lay my hand upon my heart and affirm that I never did.

The third injunction on the card was one which seemed to me, if interpreted exactly and according to its words, to undermine the very foundations of our politics. It told me that I must not “threaten a voter with any consequence whatever.” No doubt this was intended to apply to threats of a personal and illegitimate character; as, for instance, if a wealthy candidate were to threaten to raise all the rents, or to put up a statue of himself. But as verbally and grammatically expressed, it certainly would cover those general threats of disaster to the whole community which are the main matter of political discussion. When a canvasser says that if the opposition candidate gets in the country will be ruined, he is threatening the voters with certain consequences. When the Free Trader says that if Tariffs are adopted the people in Brompton or Bayswater will crawl about eating grass, he is threatening them with consequences. When the Tariff Reformer says that if Free Trade exists for another year St. Paul’s Cathedral will be a ruin and Ludgate Hill as deserted as Stonehenge, he is also threatening. And what is the good of being a Tariff Reformer if you can’t say that? What is the use of being a politician or a Parliamentary candidate at all if one cannot tell the people that if the other man gets in, England will be instantly invaded and enslaved, blood be pouring down the Strand, and all the English ladies carried off into harems. But these things are, after all, consequences, so to speak.

The majority of refined persons in our day may generally be heard abusing the practice of canvassing. In the same way the majority of refined persons (commonly the same refined persons) may be heard abusing the practice of interviewing celebrities. It seems a very singular thing to me that this refined world reserves all its indignation for the comparatively open and innocent element in both walks of life. There is really a vast amount of corruption and hypocrisy in our election politics; about the most honest thing in the whole mess is the canvassing. A man has not got a right to “nurse” a constituency with aggressive charities, to buy it with great presents of parks and libraries, to open vague vistas of future benevolence; all this, which goes on unrebuked, is bribery and nothing else. But a man has got the right to go to another free man and ask him with civility whether he will vote for him. The information can be asked,
granted, or refused without any loss of dignity on either side, which is more than can be said of a park. It is the same with the place of interviewing in journalism. In a trade where there are labyrinths of insincerity, interviewing is about the most simple and the most sincere thing there is. The canvasser, when he wants to know a man’s opinions, goes and asks him. It may be a bore; but it is about as plain and straight a thing as he could do. So the interviewer, when he wants to know a man’s opinions, goes and asks him. Again, it may be a bore; but, again, it is about as plain and straight as anything could be. But all the other real and systematic cynicisms of our journalism pass without being vituperated and even without being known—financial motives of policy, the misleading posters, the suppression of just letters of complaint. A statement about a man may be infamously untrue, but it is read calmly. But a statement by a man to an interviewer is felt as indefensibly vulgar. That the paper should misrepresent him is nothing; that he should represent himself is bad taste. The whole error in both cases lies in the fact that the refined persons are attacking politics and journalism on the ground of vulgarity. Of course, politics and journalism are, as it happens, very vulgar. But their vulgarity is not the worst thing about them. Things are so bad with both that by this time their vulgarity is the best thing about them. Their vulgarity is at least a noisy thing; and their great danger is that silence that always comes before decay. The conversational persuasion at elections is perfectly human and rational; it is the silent persuasions that are utterly damnable.

If it is true that the Commons’ House will not hold all the Commons, it is a very good example of what we call the anomalies of the English Constitution. It is also, I think, a very good example of how highly undesirable those anomalies really are. Most Englishmen say that these anomalies do not matter; they are not ashamed of being illogical; they are proud of being illogical. Lord Macaulay (a very typical Englishman, romantic, prejudiced, poetical), Lord Macaulay said that he would not lift his hand to get rid of an anomaly that was not also a grievance. Many other sturdy romantic Englishmen say the same. They boast of our anomalies; they boast of our illogicality; they say it shows what a practical people we are. They are utterly wrong. Lord Macaulay was in this matter, as in a few others, utterly wrong. Anomalies do matter very much, and do a great deal of harm; abstract illogicalities do matter a great deal, and do a great deal of harm. And this for a reason that any one at all acquainted with human nature can see for himself. All injustice begins in the mind. And anomalies accustom the mind to the idea of unreason and untruth. Suppose I had by some prehistoric law
the power of forcing every man in Battersea to nod his head three times before he got out of bed. The practical politicians might say that this power was a harmless anomaly; that it was not a grievance. It could do my subjects no harm; it could do me no good. The people of Battersea, they would say, might safely submit to it. But the people of Battersea could not safely submit to it, for all that. If I had nodded their heads for them for fifty years I could cut off their heads for them at the end of it with immeasurably greater ease. For there would have permanently sunk into every man’s mind the notion that it was a natural thing for me to have a fantastic and irrational power. They would have grown accustomed to insanity.

For, in order that men should resist injustice, something more is necessary than that they should think injustice unpleasant. They must think injustice absurd; above all, they must think it startling. They must retain the violence of a virgin astonishment. That is the explanation of the singular fact which must have struck many people in the relations of philosophy and reform. It is the fact (I mean) that optimists are more practical reformers than pessimists. Superficially, one would imagine that the railer would be the reformer; that the man who thought that everything was wrong would be the man to put everything right. In historical practice the thing is quite the other way; curiously enough, it is the man who likes things as they are who really makes them better. The optimist Dickens has achieved more reforms than the pessimist Gissing. A man like Rousseau has far too rosy a theory of human nature; but he produces a revolution. A man like David Hume thinks that almost all things are depressing; but he is a Conservative, and wishes to keep them as they are. A man like Godwin believes existence to be kindly; but he is a rebel. A man like Carlyle believes existence to be cruel; but he is a Tory. Everywhere the man who alters things begins by liking things. And the real explanation of this success of the optimistic reformer, of this failure of the pessimistic reformer, is, after all, an explanation of sufficient simplicity. It is because the optimist can look at wrong not only with indignation, but with a startled indignation. When the pessimist looks at any infamy, it is to him, after all, only a repetition of the infamy of existence. The Court of Chancery is indefensible—like mankind. The Inquisition is abominable—like the universe. But the optimist sees injustice as something discordant and unexpected, and it stings him into action. The pessimist can be enraged at wrong; but only the optimist can be surprised at it.

And it is the same with the relations of an anomaly to the logical mind. The pessimist resents evil (like Lord Macaulay) solely because it is a grievance. The
optimist resents it also, because it is an anomaly; a contradiction to his conception of the course of things. And it is not at all unimportant, but on the contrary most important, that this course of things in politics and elsewhere should be lucid, explicable and defensible. When people have got used to unreason they can no longer be startled at injustice. When people have grown familiar with an anomaly, they are prepared to that extent for a grievance; they may think the grievance grievous, but they can no longer think it strange. Take, if only as an excellent example, the very matter alluded to before; I mean the seats, or rather the lack of seats, in the House of Commons. Perhaps it is true that under the best conditions it would never happen that every member turned up. Perhaps a complete attendance would never actually be. But who can tell how much influence in keeping members away may have been exerted by this calm assumption that they would stop away? How can any man be expected to help to make a full attendance when he knows that a full attendance is actually forbidden? How can the men who make up the Chamber do their duty reasonably when the very men who built the House have not done theirs reasonably? If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself for the battle? And what if the remarks of the trumpet take this form, “I charge you as you love your King and country to come to this Council. And I know you won’t.”
CONCEIT AND CARICATURE

If a man must needs be conceited, it is certainly better that he should be conceited about some merits or talents that he does not really possess. For then his vanity remains more or less superficial; it remains a mere mistake of fact, like that of a man who thinks he inherits the royal blood or thinks he has an infallible system for Monte Carlo. Because the merit is an unreal merit, it does not corrupt or sophisticate his real merits. He is vain about the virtue he has not got; but he may be humble about the virtues that he has got. His truly honourable qualities remain in their primordial innocence; he cannot see them and he cannot spoil them. If a man’s mind is erroneously possessed with the idea that he is a great violinist, that need not prevent his being a gentleman and an honest man. But if once his mind is possessed in any strong degree with the knowledge that he is a gentleman, he will soon cease to be one.

But there is a third kind of satisfaction of which I have noticed one or two examples lately—another kind of satisfaction which is neither a pleasure in the virtues that we do possess nor a pleasure in the virtues we do not possess. It is the pleasure which a man takes in the presence or absence of certain things in himself without ever adequately asking himself whether in his case they constitute virtues at all. A man will plume himself because he is not bad in some particular way, when the truth is that he is not good enough to be bad in that particular way. Some priggish little clerk will say, “I have reason to congratulate myself that I am a civilised person, and not so bloodthirsty as the Mad Mullah.” Somebody ought to say to him, “A really good man would be less bloodthirsty than the Mullah. But you are less bloodthirsty, not because you are more of a good man, but because you are a great deal less of a man. You are not bloodthirsty, not because you would spare your enemy, but because you would run away from him.” Or again, some Puritan with a sullen type of piety would say, “I have reason to congratulate myself that I do not worship graven images like the old heathen Greeks.” And again somebody ought to say to him, “The best religion may not worship graven images, because it may see beyond them. But if you do not worship graven images, it is only because you are mentally and morally quite incapable of graving them. True religion, perhaps, is above idolatry. But you are below idolatry. You are not holy enough yet to worship a lump of stone.”

Mr. F. C. Gould, the brilliant and felicitous caricaturist, recently delivered a
most interesting speech upon the nature and atmosphere of our modern English caricature. I think there is really very little to congratulate oneself about in the condition of English caricature. There are few causes for pride; probably the greatest cause for pride is Mr. F. C. Gould. But Mr. F. C. Gould, forbidden by modesty to adduce this excellent ground for optimism, fell back upon saying a thing which is said by numbers of other people, but has not perhaps been said lately with the full authority of an eminent cartoonist. He said that he thought “that they might congratulate themselves that the style of caricature which found acceptance nowadays was very different from the lampoon of the old days.” Continuing, he said, according to the newspaper report, “On looking back to the political lampoons of Rowlandson’s and Gilray’s time they would find them coarse and brutal. In some countries abroad still, ‘even in America,’ the method of political caricature was of the bludgeon kind. The fact was we had passed the bludgeon stage. If they were brutal in attacking a man, even for political reasons, they roused sympathy for the man who was attacked. What they had to do was to rub in the point they wanted to emphasise as gently as they could.” (Laughter and applause.)

Anybody reading these words, and anybody who heard them, will certainly feel that there is in them a great deal of truth, as well as a great deal of geniality. But along with that truth and with that geniality there is a streak of that erroneous type of optimism which is founded on the fallacy of which I have spoken above. Before we congratulate ourselves upon the absence of certain faults from our nation or society, we ought to ask ourselves why it is that these faults are absent. Are we without the fault because we have the opposite virtue? Or are we without the fault because we have the opposite fault? It is a good thing assuredly, to be innocent of any excess; but let us be sure that we are not innocent of excess merely by being guilty of defect. Is it really true that our English political satire is so moderate because it is so magnanimous, so forgiving, so saintly? Is it penetrated through and through with a mystical charity, with a psychological tenderness? Do we spare the feelings of the Cabinet Minister because we pierce through all his apparent crimes and follies down to the dark virtues of which his own soul is unaware? Do we temper the wind to the Leader of the Opposition because in our all–embracing heart we pity and cherish the struggling spirit of the Leader of the Opposition? Briefly, have we left off being brutal because we are too grand and generous to be brutal? Is it really true that we are better than brutality? Is it really true that we have passed the bludgeon stage?
I fear that there is, to say the least of it, another side to the matter. Is it not only too probable that the mildness of our political satire, when compared with the political satire of our fathers, arises simply from the profound unreality of our current politics? Rowlandson and Gilray did not fight merely because they were naturally pothouse pugilists; they fought because they had something to fight about. It is easy enough to be refined about things that do not matter; but men kicked and plunged a little in that portentous wrestle in which swung to and fro, alike dizzy with danger, the independence of England, the independence of Ireland, the independence of France. If we wish for a proof of this fact that the lack of refinement did not come from mere brutality, the proof is easy. The proof is that in that struggle no personalities were more brutal than the really refined personalities. None were more violent and intolerant than those who were by nature polished and sensitive. Nelson, for instance, had the nerves and good manners of a woman: nobody in his senses, I suppose, would call Nelson “brutal.” But when he was touched upon the national matter, there sprang out of him a spout of oaths, and he could only tell men to “Kill! kill! kill the d–d Frenchmen.” It would be as easy to take examples on the other side. Camille Desmoulins was a man of much the same type, not only elegant and sweet in temper, but almost tremulously tender and humanitarian. But he was ready, he said, “to embrace Liberty upon a pile of corpses.” In Ireland there were even more instances. Robert Emmet was only one famous example of a whole family of men at once sensitive and savage. I think that Mr. F.C. Gould is altogether wrong in talking of this political ferocity as if it were some sort of survival from ruder conditions, like a flint axe or a hairy man. Cruelty is, perhaps, the worst kind of sin. Intellectual cruelty is certainly the worst kind of cruelty. But there is nothing in the least barbaric or ignorant about intellectual cruelty. The great Renaissance artists who mixed colours exquisitely mixed poisons equally exquisitely; the great Renaissance princes who designed instruments of music also designed instruments of torture. Barbarity, malignity, the desire to hurt men, are the evil things generated in atmospheres of intense reality when great nations or great causes are at war. We may, perhaps, be glad that we have not got them: but it is somewhat dangerous to be proud that we have not got them. Perhaps we are hardly great enough to have them. Perhaps some great virtues have to be generated, as in men like Nelson or Emmet, before we can have these vices at all, even as temptations. I, for one, believe that if our caricaturists do not hate their enemies, it is not because they are too big to hate them, but because their enemies are not big enough to hate. I do not think we have passed the bludgeon
stage. I believe we have not come to the bludgeon stage. We must be better, braver, and purer men than we are before we come to the bludgeon stage.

Let us then, by all means, be proud of the virtues that we have not got; but let us not be too arrogant about the virtues that we cannot help having. It may be that a man living on a desert island has a right to congratulate himself upon the fact that he can meditate at his ease. But he must not congratulate himself on the fact that he is on a desert island, and at the same time congratulate himself on the self-restraint he shows in not going to a ball every night. Similarly our England may have a right to congratulate itself upon the fact that her politics are very quiet, amicable, and humdrum. But she must not congratulate herself upon that fact and also congratulate herself upon the self-restraint she shows in not tearing herself and her citizens into rags. Between two English Privy Councillors polite language is a mark of civilisation, but really not a mark of magnanimity.

Allied to this question is the kindred question on which we so often hear an innocent British boast—the fact that our statesmen are privately on very friendly relations, although in Parliament they sit on opposite sides of the House. Here, again, it is as well to have no illusions. Our statesmen are not monsters of mystical generosity or insane logic, who are really able to hate a man from three to twelve and to love him from twelve to three. If our social relations are more peaceful than those of France or America or the England of a hundred years ago, it is simply because our politics are more peaceful; not improbably because our politics are more fictitious. If our statesmen agree more in private, it is for the very simple reason that they agree more in public. And the reason they agree so much in both cases is really that they belong to one social class; and therefore the dining life is the real life. Tory and Liberal statesmen like each other, but it is not because they are both expansive; it is because they are both exclusive.
PATRIOTISM AND SPORT

I notice that some papers, especially papers that call themselves patriotic, have fallen into quite a panic over the fact that we have been twice beaten in the world of sport, that a Frenchman has beaten us at golf, and that Belgians have beaten us at rowing. I suppose that the incidents are important to any people who ever believed in the self-satisfied English legend on this subject. I suppose that there are men who vaguely believe that we could never be beaten by a Frenchman, despite the fact that we have often been beaten by Frenchmen, and once by a Frenchwoman. In the old pictures in Punch you will find a recurring piece of satire. The English caricaturists always assumed that a Frenchman could not ride to hounds or enjoy English hunting. It did not seem to occur to them that all the people who founded English hunting were Frenchmen. All the Kings and nobles who originally rode to hounds spoke French. Large numbers of those Englishmen who still ride to hounds have French names. I suppose that the thing is important to any one who is ignorant of such evident matters as these. I suppose that if a man has ever believed that we English have some sacred and separate right to be athletic, such reverses do appear quite enormous and shocking. They feel as if, while the proper sun was rising in the east, some other and unexpected sun had begun to rise in the north–north–west by north. For the benefit, the moral and intellectual benefit of such people, it may be worth while to point out that the Anglo–Saxon has in these cases been defeated precisely by those competitors whom he has always regarded as being out of the running; by Latins, and by Latins of the most easy and unstrenuous type; not only by Frenchman, but by Belgians. All this, I say, is worth telling to any intelligent person who believes in the haughty theory of Anglo–Saxon superiority. But, then, no intelligent person does believe in the haughty theory of Anglo–Saxon superiority. No quite genuine Englishman ever did believe in it. And the genuine Englishman these defeats will in no respect dismay.

The genuine English patriot will know that the strength of England has never depended upon any of these things; that the glory of England has never had anything to do with them, except in the opinion of a large section of the rich and a loose section of the poor which copies the idleness of the rich. These people will, of course, think too much of our failure, just as they thought too much of our success. The typical Jingoes who have admired their countrymen too much for being conquerors will, doubtless, despise their countrymen too much for
being conquered. But the Englishman with any feeling for England will know that athletic failures do not prove that England is weak, any more than athletic successes proved that England was strong. The truth is that athletics, like all other things, especially modern, are insanely individualistic. The Englishmen who win sporting prizes are exceptional among Englishmen, for the simple reason that they are exceptional even among men. English athletes represent England just about as much as Mr. Barnum’s freaks represent America. There are so few of such people in the whole world that it is almost a toss-up whether they are found in this or that country.

If any one wants a simple proof of this, it is easy to find. When the great English athletes are not exceptional Englishmen they are generally not Englishmen at all. Nay, they are often representatives of races of which the average tone is specially incompatible with athletics. For instance, the English are supposed to rule the natives of India in virtue of their superior hardiness, superior activity, superior health of body and mind. The Hindus are supposed to be our subjects because they are less fond of action, less fond of openness and the open air. In a word, less fond of cricket. And, substantially, this is probably true, that the Indians are less fond of cricket. All the same, if you ask among Englishmen for the very best cricket-player, you will find that he is an Indian. Or, to take another case: it is, broadly speaking, true that the Jews are, as a race, pacific, intellectual, indifferent to war, like the Indians, or, perhaps, contemptuous of war, like the Chinese: nevertheless, of the very good prize-fighters, one or two have been Jews.

This is one of the strongest instances of the particular kind of evil that arises from our English form of the worship of athletics. It concentrates too much upon the success of individuals. It began, quite naturally and rightly, with wanting England to win. The second stage was that it wanted some Englishmen to win. The third stage was (in the ecstasy and agony of some special competition) that it wanted one particular Englishman to win. And the fourth stage was that when he had won, it discovered that he was not even an Englishman.

This is one of the points, I think, on which something might really be said for Lord Roberts and his rather vague ideas which vary between rifle clubs and conscription. Whatever may be the advantages or disadvantages otherwise of the idea, it is at least an idea of procuring equality and a sort of average in the athletic capacity of the people; it might conceivably act as a corrective to our mere tendency to see ourselves in certain exceptional athletes. As it is, there are millions of Englishmen who really think that they are a muscular race because
C.B. Fry is an Englishman. And there are many of them who think vaguely that athletics must belong to England because Ranjitsinhji is an Indian.

But the real historic strength of England, physical and moral, has never had anything to do with this athletic specialism; it has been rather hindered by it. Somebody said that the Battle of Waterloo was won on Eton playing–fields. It was a particularly unfortunate remark, for the English contribution to the victory of Waterloo depended very much more than is common in victories upon the steadiness of the rank and file in an almost desperate situation. The Battle of Waterloo was won by the stubbornness of the common soldier—that is to say, it was won by the man who had never been to Eton. It was absurd to say that Waterloo was won on Eton cricket–fields. But it might have been fairly said that Waterloo was won on the village green, where clumsy boys played a very clumsy cricket. In a word, it was the average of the nation that was strong, and athletic glories do not indicate much about the average of a nation. Waterloo was not won by good cricket–players. But Waterloo was won by bad cricket–players, by a mass of men who had some minimum of athletic instincts and habits.

It is a good sign in a nation when such things are done badly. It shows that all the people are doing them. And it is a bad sign in a nation when such things are done very well, for it shows that only a few experts and eccentrics are doing them, and that the nation is merely looking on. Suppose that whenever we heard of walking in England it always meant walking forty–five miles a day without fatigue. We should be perfectly certain that only a few men were walking at all, and that all the other British subjects were being wheeled about in Bath–chairs. But if when we hear of walking it means slow walking, painful walking, and frequent fatigue, then we know that the mass of the nation still is walking. We know that England is still literally on its feet.

The difficulty is therefore that the actual raising of the standard of athletics has probably been bad for national athleticism. Instead of the tournament being a healthy mêlée into which any ordinary man would rush and take his chance, it has become a fenced and guarded tilting–yard for the collision of particular champions against whom no ordinary man would pit himself or even be permitted to pit himself. If Waterloo was won on Eton cricket–fields it was because Eton cricket was probably much more careless then than it is now. As long as the game was a game, everybody wanted to join in it. When it becomes an art, every one wants to look at it. When it was frivolous it may have won Waterloo: when it was serious and efficient it lost Magersfontein.

In the Waterloo period there was a general rough–and–tumble athleticism
among average Englishmen. It cannot be re–created by cricket, or by conscription, or by any artificial means. It was a thing of the soul. It came out of laughter, religion, and the spirit of the place. But it was like the modern French duel in this—that it might happen to anybody. If I were a French journalist it might really happen that Monsieur Clemenceau might challenge me to meet him with pistols. But I do not think that it is at all likely that Mr. C. B. Fry will ever challenge me to meet him with cricket–bats.
AN ESSAY ON TWO CITIES

A little while ago I fell out of England into the town of Paris. If a man fell out of the moon into the town of Paris he would know that it was the capital of a great nation. If, however, he fell (perhaps off some other side of the moon) so as to hit the city of London, he would not know so well that it was the capital of a great nation; at any rate, he would not know that the nation was so great as it is. This would be so even on the assumption that the man from the moon could not read our alphabet, as presumably he could not, unless elementary education in that planet has gone to rather unsuspected lengths. But it is true that a great part of the distinctive quality which separates Paris from London may be even seen in the names. Real democrats always insist that England is an aristocratic country. Real aristocrats always insist (for some mysterious reason) that it is a democratic country. But if any one has any real doubt about the matter let him consider simply the names of the streets. Nearly all the streets out of the Strand, for instance, are named after the first name, second name, third name, fourth, fifth, and sixth names of some particular noble family; after their relations, connections, or places of residence—Arundel Street, Norfolk Street, Villiers Street, Bedford Street, Southampton Street, and any number of others. The names are varied, so as to introduce the same family under all sorts of different surnames. Thus we have Arundel Street and also Norfolk Street; thus we have Buckingham Street and also Villiers Street. To say that this is not aristocracy is simply intellectual impudence. I am an ordinary citizen, and my name is Gilbert Keith Chesterton; and I confess that if I found three streets in a row in the Strand, the first called Gilbert Street, the second Keith Street, and the third Chesterton Street, I should consider that I had become a somewhat more important person in the commonwealth than was altogether good for its health. If Frenchmen ran London (which God forbid!), they would think it quite as ludicrous that those streets should be named after the Duke of Buckingham as that they should be named after me. They are streets out of one of the main thoroughfares of London. If French methods were adopted, one of them would be called Shakspere Street, another Cromwell Street, another Wordsworth Street; there would be statues of each of these persons at the end of each of these streets, and any streets left over would be named after the date on which the Reform Bill was passed or the Penny Postage established.

Suppose a man tried to find people in London by the names of the places. It
would make a fine farce, illustrating our illogicality. Our hero having once realised that Buckingham Street was named after the Buckingham family, would naturally walk into Buckingham Palace in search of the Duke of Buckingham. To his astonishment he would meet somebody quite different. His simple lunar logic would lead him to suppose that if he wanted the Duke of Marlborough (which seems unlikely) he would find him at Marlborough House. He would find the Prince of Wales. When at last he understood that the Marlboroughs live at Blenheim, named after the great Marlborough’s victory, he would, no doubt, go there. But he would again find himself in error if, acting upon this principle, he tried to find the Duke of Wellington, and told the cabman to drive to Waterloo. I wonder that no one has written a wild romance about the adventures of such an alien, seeking the great English aristocrats, and only guided by the names; looking for the Duke of Bedford in the town of that name, seeking for some trace of the Duke of Norfolk in Norfolk. He might sail for Wellington in New Zealand to find the ancient seat of the Wellingtons. The last scene might show him trying to learn Welsh in order to converse with the Prince of Wales.

But even if the imaginary traveller knew no alphabet of this earth at all, I think it would still be possible to suppose him seeing a difference between London and Paris, and, upon the whole, the real difference. He would not be able to read the words “Quai Voltaire;” but he would see the sneering statue and the hard, straight roads; without having heard of Voltaire he would understand that the city was Voltairean. He would not know that Fleet Street was named after the Fleet Prison. But the same national spirit which kept the Fleet Prison closed and narrow still keeps Fleet Street closed and narrow. Or, if you will, you may call Fleet Street cosy, and the Fleet Prison cosy. I think I could be more comfortable in the Fleet Prison, in an English way of comfort, than just under the statue of Voltaire. I think that the man from the moon would know France without knowing French; I think that he would know England without having heard the word. For in the last resort all men talk by signs. To talk by statues is to talk by signs; to talk by cities is to talk by signs. Pillars, palaces, cathedrals, temples, pyramids, are an enormous dumb alphabet: as if some giant held up his fingers of stone. The most important things at the last are always said by signs, even if, like the Cross on St. Paul’s, they are signs in heaven. If men do not understand signs, they will never understand words.

For my part, I should be inclined to suggest that the chief object of education should be to restore simplicity. If you like to put it so, the chief object of education is not to learn things; nay, the chief object of education is to unlearn
things. The chief object of education is to unlearn all the weariness and wickedness of the world and to get back into that state of exhilaration we all instinctively celebrate when we write by preference of children and of boys. If I were an examiner appointed to examine all examiners (which does not at present appear probable), I would not only ask the teachers how much knowledge they had imparted; I would ask them how much splendid and scornful ignorance they had erected, like some royal tower in arms. But, in any case, I would insist that people should have so much simplicity as would enable them to see things suddenly and to see things as they are. I do not care so much whether they can read the names over the shops. I do not care very much whether they can read the shops. I do not feel deeply troubled as to whether they can tell where London is on the map so long as they can tell where Brixton is on the way home. I do not even mind whether they can put two and two together in the mathematical sense; I am content if they can put two and two together in the metaphorical sense. But all this longer statement of an obvious view comes back to the metaphor I have employed. I do not care a dump whether they know the alphabet, so long as they know the dumb alphabet.

Unfortunately, I have noticed in many aspects of our popular education that this is not done at all. One teaches our London children to see London with abrupt and simple eyes. And London is far more difficult to see properly than any other place. London is a riddle. Paris is an explanation. The education of the Parisian child is something corresponding to the clear avenues and the exact squares of Paris. When the Parisian boy has done learning about the French reason and the Roman order he can go out and see the thing repeated in the shapes of many shining public places, in the angles of many streets. But when the English boy goes out, after learning about a vague progress and idealism, he cannot see it anywhere. He cannot see anything anywhere, except Sapolio and the Daily Mail. We must either alter London to suit the ideals of our education, or else alter our education to suit the great beauty of London.
It is obvious that there is a great deal of difference between being international and being cosmopolitan. All good men are international. Nearly all bad men are cosmopolitan. If we are to be international we must be national. And it is largely because those who call themselves the friends of peace have not dwelt sufficiently on this distinction that they do not impress the bulk of any of the nations to which they belong. International peace means a peace between nations, not a peace after the destruction of nations, like the Buddhist peace after the destruction of personality. The golden age of the good European is like the heaven of the Christian: it is a place where people will love each other; not like the heaven of the Hindu, a place where they will be each other. And in the case of national character this can be seen in a curious way. It will generally be found, I think, that the more a man really appreciates and admires the soul of another people the less he will attempt to imitate it; he will be conscious that there is something in it too deep and too unmanageable to imitate. The Englishman who has a fancy for France will try to be French; the Englishman who admires France will remain obstinately English. This is to be particularly noticed in the case of our relations with the French, because it is one of the outstanding peculiarities of the French that their vices are all on the surface, and their extraordinary virtues concealed. One might almost say that their vices are the flower of their virtues.

Thus their obscenity is the expression of their passionate love of dragging all things into the light. The avarice of their peasants means the independence of their peasants. What the English call their rudeness in the streets is a phase of their social equality. The worried look of their women is connected with the responsibility of their women; and a certain unconscious brutality of hurry and gesture in the men is related to their inexhaustible and extraordinary military courage. Of all countries, therefore, France is the worst country for a superficial fool to admire. Let a fool hate France: if the fool loves it he will soon be a knave. He will certainly admire it, not only for the things that are not creditable, but actually for the things that are not there. He will admire the grace and indolence of the most industrious people in the world. He will admire the romance and fantasy of the most determinedly respectable and commonplace people in the world. This mistake the Englishman will make if he admires France too hastily; but the mistake that he makes about France will be slight compared with the
mistake that he makes about himself. An Englishman who professes really to like French realistic novels, really to be at home in a French modern theatre, really to experience no shock on first seeing the savage French caricatures, is making a mistake very dangerous for his own sincerity. He is admiring something he does not understand. He is reaping where he has not sown, and taking up where he has not laid down; he is trying to taste the fruit when he has never toiled over the tree. He is trying to pluck the exquisite fruit of French cynicism, when he has never tilled the rude but rich soil of French virtue.

The thing can only be made clear to Englishmen by turning it round. Suppose a Frenchman came out of democratic France to live in England, where the shadow of the great houses still falls everywhere, and where even freedom was, in its origin, aristocratic. If the Frenchman saw our aristocracy and liked it, if he saw our snobbishness and liked it, if he set himself to imitate it, we all know what we should feel. We all know that we should feel that that particular Frenchman was a repulsive little gnat. He would be imitating English aristocracy; he would be imitating the English vice. But he would not even understand the vice he plagiarised: especially he would not understand that the vice is partly a virtue. He would not understand those elements in the English which balance snobbishness and make it human: the great kindness of the English, their hospitality, their unconscious poetry, their sentimental conservatism, which really admires the gentry. The French Royalist sees that the English like their King. But he does not grasp that while it is base to worship a King, it is almost noble to worship a powerless King. The impotence of the Hanoverian Sovereigns has raised the English loyal subject almost to the chivalry and dignity of a Jacobite. The Frenchman sees that the English servant is respectful: he does not realise that he is also disrespectful; that there is an English legend of the humorous and faithful servant, who is as much a personality as his master; the Caleb Balderstone, the Sam Weller. He sees that the English do admire a nobleman; he does not allow for the fact that they admire a nobleman most when he does not behave like one. They like a noble to be unconscious and amiable: the slave may be humble, but the master must not be proud. The master is Life, as they would like to enjoy it; and among the joys they desire in him there is none which they desire more sincerely than that of generosity, of throwing money about among mankind, or, to use the noble mediæval word, largesse—the joy of largeness. That is why a cabman tells you are no gentleman if you give him his correct fare. Not only his pocket, but his soul is hurt. You have wounded his ideal. You have defaced his vision of the
perfect aristocrat. All this is really very subtle and elusive; it is very difficult to separate what is mere slavishness from what is a sort of vicarious nobility in the English love of a lord. And no Frenchman could easily grasp it at all. He would think it was mere slavishness; and if he liked it, he would be a slave. So every Englishman must (at first) feel French candour to be mere brutality. And if he likes it, he is a brute. These national merits must not be understood so easily. It requires long years of plenitude and quiet, the slow growth of great parks, the seasoning of oaken beams, the dark enrichment of red wine in cellars and in inns, all the leisure and the life of England through many centuries, to produce at last the generous and genial fruit of English snobbishness. And it requires battery and barricade, songs in the streets, and ragged men dead for an idea, to produce and justify the terrible flower of French indecency.

When I was in Paris a short time ago, I went with an English friend of mine to an extremely brilliant and rapid succession of French plays, each occupying about twenty minutes. They were all astonishingly effective; but there was one of them which was so effective that my friend and I fought about it outside, and had almost to be separated by the police. It was intended to indicate how men really behaved in a wreck or naval disaster, how they break down, how they scream, how they fight each other without object and in a mere hatred of everything. And then there was added, with all that horrible irony which Voltaire began, a scene in which a great statesman made a speech over their bodies, saying that they were all heroes and had died in a fraternal embrace. My friend and I came out of this theatre, and as he had lived long in Paris, he said, like a Frenchman: “What admirable artistic arrangement! Is it not exquisite?” “No,” I replied, assuming as far as possible the traditional attitude of John Bull in the pictures in Punch—”No, it is not exquisite. Perhaps it is unmeaning; if it is unmeaning I do not mind. But if it has a meaning I know what the meaning is; it is that under all their pageant of chivalry men are not only beasts, but even hunted beasts. I do not know much of humanity, especially when humanity talks in French. But I know when a thing is meant to uplift the human soul, and when it is meant to depress it. I know that ‘Cyrano de Bergerac’ (where the actors talked even quicker) was meant to encourage man. And I know that this was meant to discourage him.” “These sentimental and moral views of art,” began my friend, but I broke into his words as a light broke into my mind. “Let me say to you,” I said, “what Jaurès said to Liebknecht at the Socialist Conference: ‘You have not died on the barricades.’ You are an Englishman, as I am, and you ought to be as amiable as I am. These people have some right to be terrible in
art, for they have been terrible in politics. They may endure mock tortures on the stage; they have seen real tortures in the streets. They have been hurt for the idea of Democracy. They have been hurt for the idea of Catholicism. It is not so utterly unnatural to them that they should be hurt for the idea of literature. But, by blazes, it is altogether unnatural to me! And the worst thing of all is that I, who am an Englishman, loving comfort, should find comfort in such things as this. The French do not seek comfort here, but rather unrest. This restless people seeks to keep itself in a perpetual agony of the revolutionary mood. Frenchmen, seeking revolution, may find the humiliation of humanity inspiring. But God forbid that two pleasure–seeking Englishmen should ever find it pleasant!”
THE ZOLA CONTROVERSY

The difference between two great nations can be illustrated by the coincidence that at this moment both France and England are engaged in discussing the memorial of a literary man. France is considering the celebration of the late Zola, England is considering that of the recently deceased Shakspere. There is some national significance, it may be, in the time that has elapsed. Some will find impatience and indelicacy in this early attack on Zola or deification of him; but the nation which has sat still for three hundred years after Shakspere’s funeral may be considered, perhaps, to have carried delicacy too far. But much deeper things are involved than the mere matter of time. The point of the contrast is that the French are discussing whether there shall be any monument, while the English are discussing only what the monument shall be. In other words, the French are discussing a living question, while we are discussing a dead one. Or rather, not a dead one, but a settled one, which is quite a different thing.

When a thing of the intellect is settled it is not dead: rather it is immortal. The multiplication table is immortal, and so is the fame of Shakspere. But the fame of Zola is not dead or not immortal; it is at its crisis, it is in the balance; and may be found wanting. The French, therefore, are quite right in considering it a living question. It is still living as a question, because it is not yet solved. But Shakspere is not a living question: he is a living answer.

For my part, therefore, I think the French Zola controversy much more practical and exciting than the English Shakspere one. The admission of Zola to the Pantheon may be regarded as defining Zola’s position. But nobody could say that a statue of Shakspere, even fifty feet high, on the top of St. Paul’s Cathedral, could define Shakspere’s position. It only defines our position towards Shakspere. It is he who is fixed; it is we who are unstable. The nearest approach to an English parallel to the Zola case would be furnished if it were proposed to put some savagely controversial and largely repulsive author among the ashes of the greatest English poets. Suppose, for instance, it were proposed to bury Mr. Rudyard Kipling in Westminster Abbey. I should be against burying him in Westminster Abbey; first, because he is still alive (and here I think even he himself might admit the justice of my protest); and second, because I should like to reserve that rapidly narrowing space for the great permanent examples, not for the interesting foreign interruptions, of English literature. I would not have either
Mr. Kipling or Mr. George Moore in Westminster Abbey, though Mr. Kipling has certainly caught even more cleverly than Mr. Moore the lucid and cool cruelty of the French short story. I am very sure that Geoffrey Chaucer and Joseph Addison get on very well together in the Poets’ Corner, despite the centuries that sunder them. But I feel that Mr. George Moore would be much happier in Pere–la–Chaise, with a riotous statue by Rodin on the top of him; and Mr. Kipling much happier under some huge Asiatic monument, carved with all the cruelties of the gods.

As to the affair of the English monument to Shakspere, every people has its own mode of commemoration, and I think there is a great deal to be said for ours. There is the French monumental style, which consists in erecting very pompous statues, very well done. There is the German monumental style, which consists in erecting very pompous statues, badly done. And there is the English monumental method, the great English way with statues, which consists in not erecting them at all. A statue may be dignified; but the absence of a statue is always dignified. For my part, I feel there is something national, something wholesomely symbolic, in the fact that there is no statue of Shakspere. There is, of course, one in Leicester Square; but the very place where it stands shows that it was put up by a foreigner for foreigners. There is surely something modest and manly about not attempting to express our greatest poet in the plastic arts in which we do not excel. We honour Shakspere as the Jews honour God—by not daring to make of him a graven image. Our sculpture, our statues, are good enough for bankers and philanthropists, who are our curse: not good enough for him, who is our benediction. Why should we celebrate the very art in which we triumph by the very art in which we fail?

England is most easily understood as the country of amateurs. It is especially the country of amateur soldiers (that is, of Volunteers), of amateur statesmen (that is, of aristocrats), and it is not unreasonable or out of keeping that it should be rather specially the country of a careless and lounging view of literature. Shakspere has no academic monument for the same reason that he had no academic education. He had small Latin and less Greek, and (in the same spirit) he has never been commemorated in Latin epitaphs or Greek marble. If there is nothing clear and fixed about the emblems of his fame, it is because there was nothing clear and fixed about the origins of it. Those great schools and Universities which watch a man in his youth may record him in his death; but Shakspere had no such unifying traditions. We can only say of him what we can say of Dickens. We can only say that he came from nowhere and that he went
everywhere. For him a monument in any place is out of place. A cold statue in a
certain square is unsuitable to him as it would be unsuitable to Dickens. If we
put up a statue of Dickens in Portland Place to–morrow we should feel the
stiffness as unnatural. We should fear that the statue might stroll about the street
at night.

But in France the question of whether Zola shall go to the Panthéon when he
is dead is quite as practicable as the question whether he should go to prison
when he was alive. It is the problem of whether the nation shall take one turn of
thought or another. In raising a monument to Zola they do not raise merely a
trophy, but a finger–post. The question is one which will have to be settled in
most European countries; but like all such questions, it has come first to a head
in France; because France is the battlefield of Christendom. That question is, of
course, roughly this: whether in that ill–defined area of verbal licence on certain
dangerous topics it is an extenuation of indelicacy or an aggravation of it that the
indelicacy was deliberate and solemn. Is indecency more indecent if it is grave,
or more indecent if it is gay? For my part, I belong to an old school in this
matter. When a book or a play strikes me as a crime, I am not disarmed by being
told that it is a serious crime. If a man has written something vile, I am not
comforted by the explanation that he quite meant to do it. I know all the evils of
flippancy; I do not like the man who laughs at the sight of virtue. But I prefer
him to the man who weeps at the sight of virtue and complains bitterly of there
being any such thing. I am not reassured, when ethics are as wild as cannibalism,
by the fact that they are also as grave and sincere as suicide. And I think there is
an obvious fallacy in the bitter contrasts drawn by some moderns between the
aversion to Ibsen’s “Ghosts” and the popularity of some such joke as “Dear Old
Charlie.” Surely there is nothing mysterious or unphilosophic in the popular
preference. The joke of “Dear Old Charlie” is passed–because it is a joke.
“Ghosts” are exorcised–because they are ghosts.

This is, of course, the whole question of Zola. I am grown up, and I do not
worry myself much about Zola’s immorality. The thing I cannot stand is his
morality. If ever a man on this earth lived to embody the tremendous text, “But
if the light in your body be darkness, how great is the darkness,” it was certainly
he. Great men like Ariosto, Rabelais, and Shakspere fall in foul places, flounder
in violent but venial sin, sprawl for pages, exposing their gigantic weakness, are
dirty, are indefensible; and then they struggle up again and can still speak with a
convincing kindness and an unbroken honour of the best things in the world:
Rabelais, of the instruction of ardent and austere youth; Ariosto, of holy
chivalry; Shakspere, of the splendid stillness of mercy. But in Zola even the ideals are undesirable; Zola’s mercy is colder than justice—nay, Zola’s mercy is more bitter in the mouth than injustice. When Zola shows us an ideal training he does not take us, like Rabelais, into the happy fields of humanist learning. He takes us into the schools of inhumanist learning, where there are neither books nor flowers, nor wine nor wisdom, but only deformities in glass bottles, and where the rule is taught from the exceptions. Zola’s truth answers the exact description of the skeleton in the cupboard; that is, it is something of which a domestic custom forbids the discovery, but which is quite dead, even when it is discovered. Macaulay said that the Puritans hated bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators. Of such substance also was this Puritan who had lost his God. A Puritan of this type is worse than the Puritan who hates pleasure because there is evil in it. This man actually hates evil because there is pleasure in it. Zola was worse than a pornographer, he was a pessimist. He did worse than encourage sin: he encouraged discouragement. He made lust loathsome because to him lust meant life.
Some time ago I ventured to defend that race of hunted and persecuted outlaws, the Bishops; but until this week I had no idea of how much persecuted they were. For instance, the Bishop of Birmingham made some extremely sensible remarks in the House of Lords, to the effect that Oxford and Cambridge were (as everybody knows they are) far too much merely plutocratic playgrounds. One would have thought that an Anglican Bishop might be allowed to know something about the English University system, and even to have, if anything, some bias in its favour. But (as I pointed out) the rollicking Radicalism of Bishops has to be restrained. The man who writes the notes in the weekly paper called the Outlook feels that it is his business to restrain it. The passage has such simple sublimity that I must quote it—“Dr. Gore talked unworthily of his reputation when he spoke of the older Universities as playgrounds for the rich and idle. In the first place, the rich men there are not idle. Some of the rich men are, and so are some of the poor men. On the whole, the sons of noble and wealthy families keep up the best traditions of academic life.”

So far this seems all very nice. It is a part of the universal principle on which Englishmen have acted in recent years. As you will not try to make the best people the most powerful people, persuade yourselves that the most powerful people are the best people. Mad Frenchmen and Irishmen try to realise the ideal. To you belongs the nobler (and much easier) task of idealising the real. First give your Universities entirely into the power of the rich; then let the rich start traditions; and then congratulate yourselves on the fact that the sons of the rich keep up these traditions. All that is quite simple and jolly. But then this critic, who crushes Dr. Gore from the high throne of the Outlook, goes on in a way that is really perplexing. “It is distinctly advantageous,” he says, “that rich and poor—i. e., young men with a smooth path in life before them, and those who have to hew out a road for themselves—should be brought into association. Each class learns a great deal from the other. On the one side, social conceit and exclusiveness give way to the free spirit of competition amongst all classes; on the other side, angularities and prejudices are rubbed away.” Even this I might have swallowed. But the paragraph concludes with this extraordinary sentence: “We get the net result in such careers as those of Lord Milner, Lord Curzon, and Mr. Asquith.”

Those three names lay my intellect prostrate. The rest of the argument I
understand quite well. The social exclusiveness of aristocrats at Oxford and Cambridge gives way before the free spirit of competition amongst all classes. That is to say, there is at Oxford so hot and keen a struggle, consisting of coal-heavers, London clerks, gypsies, navvies, drapers’ assistants, grocers’ assistants—in short, all the classes that make up the bulk of England—there is such a fierce competition at Oxford among all these people that in its presence aristocratic exclusiveness gives way. That is all quite clear. I am not quite sure about the facts, but I quite understand the argument. But then, having been called upon to contemplate this bracing picture of a boisterous turmoil of all the classes of England, I am suddenly asked to accept as example of it, Lord Milner, Lord Curzon, and the present Chancellor of the Exchequer. What part do these gentlemen play in the mental process? Is Lord Curzon one of the rugged and ragged poor men whose angularities have been rubbed away? Or is he one of those whom Oxford immediately deprived of all kind of social exclusiveness? His Oxford reputation does not seem to bear out either account of him. To regard Lord Milner as a typical product of Oxford would surely be unfair. It would be to deprive the educational tradition of Germany of one of its most typical products. English aristocrats have their faults, but they are not at all like Lord Milner. What Mr. Asquith was meant to prove, whether he was a rich man who lost his exclusiveness, or a poor man who lost his angles, I am utterly unable to conceive.

There is, however, one mild but very evident truth that might perhaps be mentioned. And it is this: that none of those three excellent persons is, or ever has been, a poor man in the sense that that word is understood by the overwhelming majority of the English nation. There are no poor men at Oxford in the sense that the majority of men in the street are poor. The very fact that the writer in the Outlook can talk about such people as poor shows that he does not understand what the modern problem is. His kind of poor man rather reminds me of the Earl in the ballad by that great English satirist, Sir W.S. Gilbert, whose angles (very acute angles) had, I fear, never been rubbed down by an old English University. The reader will remember that when the Periwinkle–girl was adored by two Dukes, the poet added—“A third adorer had the girl,
A man of lowly station;
A miserable grovelling Earl
Besought her approbation.”

Perhaps, indeed, some allusion to our University system, and to the universal clash in it of all the classes of the community, may be found in the verse a little
farther on, which says—“He’d had, it happily befell,  
A decent education;  
His views would have befitted well  
A far superior station.”

Possibly there was as simple a chasm between Lord Curzon and Lord Milner. But I am afraid that the chasm will become almost imperceptible, a microscopic crack, if we compare it with the chasm that separates either or both of them from the people of this country.

Of course the truth is exactly as the Bishop of Birmingham put it. I am sure that he did not put it in any unkindly or contemptuous spirit towards those old English seats of learning, which whether they are or are not seats of learning, are, at any rate, old and English, and those are two very good things to be. The Old English University is a playground for the governing class. That does not prove that it is a bad thing; it might prove that it was a very good thing. Certainly if there is a governing class, let there be a playground for the governing class. I would much rather be ruled by men who know how to play than by men who do not know how to play. Granted that we are to be governed by a rich section of the community, it is certainly very important that that section should be kept tolerably genial and jolly. If the sensitive man on the Outlook does not like the phrase, “Playground of the rich,” I can suggest a phrase that describes such a place as Oxford perhaps with more precision. It is a place for humanising those who might otherwise be tyrants, or even experts.

To pretend that the aristocrat meets all classes at Oxford is too ludicrous to be worth discussion. But it may be true that he meets more different kinds of men than he would meet under a strictly aristocratic regime of private tutors and small schools. It all comes back to the fact that the English, if they were resolved to have an aristocracy, were at least resolved to have a good–natured aristocracy. And it is due to them to say that almost alone among the peoples of the world, they have succeeded in getting one. One could almost tolerate the thing, if it were not for the praise of it. One might endure Oxford, but not the Outlook.

When the poor man at Oxford loses his angles (which means, I suppose, his independence), he may perhaps, even if his poverty is of that highly relative type possible at Oxford, gain a certain amount of worldly advantage from the surrender of those angles. I must confess, however, that I can imagine nothing nastier than to lose one’s angles. It seems to me that a desire to retain some angles about one’s person is a desire common to all those human beings who do not set their ultimate hopes upon looking like Humpty–Dumpty. Our angles are
simply our shapes. I cannot imagine any phrase more full of the subtle and exquisite vileness which is poisoning and weakening our country than such a phrase as this, about the desirability of rubbing down the angularities of poor men. Reduced to permanent and practical human speech, it means nothing whatever except the corrupting of that first human sense of justice which is the critic of all human institutions.

It is not in any such spirit of facile and reckless reassurance that we should approach the really difficult problem of the delicate virtues and the deep dangers of our two historic seats of learning. A good son does not easily admit that his sick mother is dying; but neither does a good son cheerily assert that she is “all right.” There are many good arguments for leaving the two historic Universities exactly as they are. There are many good arguments for smashing them or altering them entirely. But in either case the plain truth told by the Bishop of Birmingham remains. If these Universities were destroyed, they would not be destroyed as Universities. If they are preserved, they will not be preserved as Universities. They will be preserved strictly and literally as playgrounds; places valued for their hours of leisure more than for their hours of work. I do not say that this is unreasonable; as a matter of private temperament I find it attractive. It is not only possible to say a great deal in praise of play; it is really possible to say the highest things in praise of it. It might reasonably be maintained that the true object of all human life is play. Earth is a task garden; heaven is a playground. To be at last in such secure innocence that one can juggle with the universe and the stars, to be so good that one can treat everything as a joke—that may be, perhaps, the real end and final holiday of human souls. When we are really holy we may regard the Universe as a lark; so perhaps it is not essentially wrong to regard the University as a lark. But the plain and present fact is that our upper classes do regard the University as a lark, and do not regard it as a University. It also happens very often that through some oversight they neglect to provide themselves with that extreme degree of holiness which I have postulated as a necessary preliminary to such indulgence in the higher frivolity.

Humanity, always dreaming of a happy race, free, fantastic, and at ease, has sometimes pictured them in some mystical island, sometimes in some celestial city, sometimes as fairies, gods, or citizens of Atlantis. But one method in which it has often indulged is to picture them as aristocrats, as a special human class that could actually be seen hunting in the woods or driving about the streets. And this never was (as some silly Germans say) a worship of pride and scorn; mankind never really admired pride; mankind never had any thing but a scorn
for scorn. It was a worship of the spectacle of happiness; especially of the spectacle of youth. This is what the old Universities in their noblest aspect really are; and this is why there is always something to be said for keeping them as they are. Aristocracy is not a tyranny; it is not even merely a spell. It is a vision. It is a deliberate indulgence in a certain picture of pleasure painted for the purpose; every Duchess is (in an innocent sense) painted, like Gainsborough’s “Duchess of Devonshire.” She is only beautiful because, at the back of all, the English people wanted her to be beautiful. In the same way, the lads at Oxford and Cambridge are only larking because England, in the depths of its solemn soul, really wishes them to lark. All this is very human and pardonable, and would be even harmless if there were no such things in the world as danger and honour and intellectual responsibility. But if aristocracy is a vision, it is perhaps the most unpractical of all visions. It is not a working way of doing things to put all your happiest people on a lighted platform and stare only at them. It is not a working way of managing education to be entirely content with the mere fact that you have (to a degree unexampled in the world) given the luckiest boys the jolliest time. It would be easy enough, like the writer in the Outlook, to enjoy the pleasures and deny the perils. Oh what a happy place England would be to live in if only one did not love it!
A correspondent has written me an able and interesting letter in the matter of some allusions of mine to the subject of communal kitchens. He defends communal kitchens very lucidly from the standpoint of the calculating collectivist; but, like many of his school, he cannot apparently grasp that there is another test of the whole matter, with which such calculation has nothing at all to do. He knows it would be cheaper if a number of us ate at the same time, so as to use the same table. So it would. It would also be cheaper if a number of us slept at different times, so as to use the same pair of trousers. But the question is not how cheap are we buying a thing, but what are we buying? It is cheap to own a slave. And it is cheaper still to be a slave.

My correspondent also says that the habit of dining out in restaurants, etc., is growing. So, I believe, is the habit of committing suicide. I do not desire to connect the two facts together. It seems fairly clear that a man could not dine at a restaurant because he had just committed suicide; and it would be extreme, perhaps, to suggest that he commits suicide because he has just dined at a restaurant. But the two cases, when put side by side, are enough to indicate the falsity and poltroonery of this eternal modern argument from what is in fashion. The question for brave men is not whether a certain thing is increasing; the question is whether we are increasing it. I dine very often in restaurants because the nature of my trade makes it convenient: but if I thought that by dining in restaurants I was working for the creation of communal meals, I would never enter a restaurant again; I would carry bread and cheese in my pocket or eat chocolate out of automatic machines. For the personal element in some things is sacred. I heard Mr. Will Crooks put it perfectly the other day: “The most sacred thing is to be able to shut your own door.”

My correspondent says, “Would not our women be spared the drudgery of cooking and all its attendant worries, leaving them free for higher culture?” The first thing that occurs to me to say about this is very simple, and is, I imagine, a part of all our experience. If my correspondent can find any way of preventing women from worrying, he will indeed be a remarkable man. I think the matter is a much deeper one. First of all, my correspondent overlooks a distinction which is elementary in our human nature. Theoretically, I suppose, every one would like to be freed from worries. But nobody in the world would always like to be freed from worrying occupations. I should very much like (as far as my feelings
at the moment go) to be free from the consuming nuisance of writing this article. But it does not follow that I should like to be free from the consuming nuisance of being a journalist. Because we are worried about a thing, it does not follow that we are not interested in it. The truth is the other way. If we are not interested, why on earth should we be worried? Women are worried about housekeeping, but those that are most interested are the most worried. Women are still more worried about their husbands and their children. And I suppose if we strangled the children and poleaxed the husbands it would leave women free for higher culture. That is, it would leave them free to begin to worry about that. For women would worry about higher culture as much as they worry about everything else.

I believe this way of talking about women and their higher culture is almost entirely a growth of the classes which (unlike the journalistic class to which I belong) have always a reasonable amount of money. One odd thing I specially notice. Those who write like this seem entirely to forget the existence of the working and wage-earning classes. They say eternally, like my correspondent, that the ordinary woman is always a drudge. And what, in the name of the Nine Gods, is the ordinary man? These people seem to think that the ordinary man is a Cabinet Minister. They are always talking about man going forth to wield power, to carve his own way, to stamp his individuality on the world, to command and to be obeyed. This may be true of a certain class. Dukes, perhaps, are not drudges; but, then, neither are Duchesses. The Ladies and Gentlemen of the Smart Set are quite free for the higher culture, which consists chiefly of motoring and Bridge. But the ordinary man who typifies and constitutes the millions that make up our civilisation is no more free for the higher culture than his wife is.

Indeed, he is not so free. Of the two sexes the woman is in the more powerful position. For the average woman is at the head of something with which she can do as she likes; the average man has to obey orders and do nothing else. He has to put one dull brick on another dull brick, and do nothing else; he has to add one dull figure to another dull figure, and do nothing else. The woman’s world is a small one, perhaps, but she can alter it. The woman can tell the tradesman with whom she deals some realistic things about himself. The clerk who does this to the manager generally gets the sack, or shall we say (to avoid the vulgarism), finds himself free for higher culture. Above all, as I said in my previous article, the woman does work which is in some small degree creative and individual. She can put the flowers or the furniture in fancy arrangements of her own. I fear
the bricklayer cannot put the bricks in fancy arrangements of his own, without disaster to himself and others. If the woman is only putting a patch into a carpet, she can choose the thing with regard to colour. I fear it would not do for the office boy dispatching a parcel to choose his stamps with a view to colour; to prefer the tender mauve of the sixpenny to the crude scarlet of the penny stamp. A woman cooking may not always cook artistically; still she can cook artistically. She can introduce a personal and imperceptible alteration into the composition of a soup. The clerk is not encouraged to introduce a personal and imperceptible alteration into the figures in a ledger.

The trouble is that the real question I raised is not discussed. It is argued as a problem in pennies, not as a problem in people. It is not the proposals of these reformers that I feel to be false so much as their temper and their arguments. I am not nearly so certain that communal kitchens are wrong as I am that the defenders of communal kitchens are wrong. Of course, for one thing, there is a vast difference between the communal kitchens of which I spoke and the communal meal (monstrum horrendum, informe) which the darker and wilder mind of my correspondent diabolically calls up. But in both the trouble is that their defenders will not defend them humanly as human institutions. They will not interest themselves in the staring psychological fact that there are some things that a man or a woman, as the case may be, wishes to do for himself or herself. He or she must do it inventively, creatively, artistically, individually—in a word, badly. Choosing your wife (say) is one of these things. Is choosing your husband’s dinner one of these things? That is the whole question: it is never asked.

And then the higher culture. I know that culture. I would not set any man free for it if I could help it. The effect of it on the rich men who are free for it is so horrible that it is worse than any of the other amusements of the millionaire—worse than gambling, worse even than philanthropy. It means thinking the smallest poet in Belgium greater than the greatest poet of England. It means losing every democratic sympathy. It means being unable to talk to a navvy about sport, or about beer, or about the Bible, or about the Derby, or about patriotism, or about anything whatever that he, the navvy, wants to talk about. It means taking literature seriously, a very amateurish thing to do. It means pardoning indecency only when it is gloomy indecency. Its disciples will call a spade a spade; but only when it is a grave–digger’s spade. The higher culture is sad, cheap, impudent, unkind, without honesty and without ease. In short, it is “high.” That abominable word (also applied to game) admirably describes it.
No; if you were setting women free for something else, I might be more melted. If you can assure me, privately and gravely, that you are setting women free to dance on the mountains like mænads, or to worship some monstrous goddess, I will make a note of your request. If you are quite sure that the ladies in Brixton, the moment they give up cooking, will beat great gongs and blow horns to Mumbo–Jumbo, then I will agree that the occupation is at least human and is more or less entertaining. Women have been set free to be Bacchantes; they have been set free to be Virgin Martyrs; they have been set free to be Witches. Do not ask them now to sink so low as the higher culture.

I have my own little notions of the possible emancipation of women; but I suppose I should not be taken very seriously if I propounded them. I should favour anything that would increase the present enormous authority of women and their creative action in their own homes. The average woman, as I have said, is a despot; the average man is a serf. I am for any scheme that any one can suggest that will make the average woman more of a despot. So far from wishing her to get her cooked meals from outside, I should like her to cook more wildly and at her own will than she does. So far from getting always the same meals from the same place, let her invent, if she likes, a new dish every day of her life. Let woman be more of a maker, not less. We are right to talk about “Woman;” only blackguards talk about women. Yet all men talk about men, and that is the whole difference. Men represent the deliberative and democratic element in life. Woman represents the despotic.
THE MODERN MARTYR

The incident of the Suffragettes who chained themselves with iron chains to the railings of Downing Street is a good ironical allegory of most modern martyrdom. It generally consists of a man chaining himself up and then complaining that he is not free. Some say that such larks retard the cause of female suffrage, others say that such larks alone can advance it; as a matter of fact, I do not believe that they have the smallest effect one way or the other.

The modern notion of impressing the public by a mere demonstration of unpopularity, by being thrown out of meetings or thrown into jail is largely a mistake. It rests on a fallacy touching the true popular value of martyrdom. People look at human history and see that it has often happened that persecutions have not only advertised but even advanced a persecuted creed, and given to its validity the public and dreadful witness of dying men. The paradox was pictorially expressed in Christian art, in which saints were shown brandishing as weapons the very tools that had slain them. And because his martyrdom is thus a power to the martyr, modern people think that any one who makes himself slightly uncomfortable in public will immediately be uproariously popular. This element of inadequate martyrdom is not true only of the Suffragettes; it is true of many movements I respect and some that I agree with. It was true, for instance, of the Passive Resisters, who had pieces of their furniture sold up. The assumption is that if you show your ordinary sincerity (or even your political ambition) by being a nuisance to yourself as well as to other people, you will have the strength of the great saints who passed through the fire. Any one who can be hustled in a hall for five minutes, or put in a cell for five days, has achieved what was meant by martyrdom, and has a halo in the Christian art of the future. Miss Pankhurst will be represented holding a policeman in each hand—the instruments of her martyrdom. The Passive Resister will be shown symbolically carrying the teapot that was torn from him by tyrannical auctioneers.

But there is a fallacy in this analogy of martyrdom. The truth is that the special impressiveness which does come from being persecuted only happens in the case of extreme persecution. For the fact that the modern enthusiast will undergo some inconvenience for the creed he holds only proves that he does hold it, which no one ever doubted. No one doubts that the Nonconformist minister cares more for Nonconformity than he does for his teapot. No one doubts that
Miss Pankhurst wants a vote more than she wants a quiet afternoon and an armchair. All our ordinary intellectual opinions are worth a bit of a row: I remember during the Boer War fighting an Imperialist clerk outside the Queen’s Hall, and giving and receiving a bloody nose; but I did not think it one of the incidents that produce the psychological effect of the Roman amphitheatre or the stake at Smithfield. For in that impression there is something more than the mere fact that a man is sincere enough to give his time or his comfort. Pagans were not impressed by the torture of Christians merely because it showed that they honestly held their opinion; they knew that millions of people honestly held all sorts of opinions. The point of such extreme martyrdom is much more subtle. It is that it gives an appearance of a man having something quite specially strong to back him up, of his drawing upon some power. And this can only be proved when all his physical contentment is destroyed; when all the current of his bodily being is reversed and turned to pain. If a man is seen to be roaring with laughter all the time that he is skinned alive, it would not be unreasonable to deduce that somewhere in the recesses of his mind he had thought of a rather good joke. Similarly, if men smiled and sang (as they did) while they were being boiled or torn in pieces, the spectators felt the presence of something more than mere mental honesty: they felt the presence of some new and unintelligible kind of pleasure, which, presumably, came from somewhere. It might be a strength of madness, or a lying spirit from Hell; but it was something quite positive and extraordinary; as positive as brandy and as extraordinary as conjuring. The Pagan said to himself: “If Christianity makes a man happy while his legs are being eaten by a lion, might it not make me happy while my legs are still attached to me and walking down the street?” The Secularists laboriously explain that martyrdoms do not prove a faith to be true, as if anybody was ever such a fool as to suppose that they did. What they did prove, or, rather, strongly suggest, was that something had entered human psychology which was stronger than strong pain. If a young girl, scourged and bleeding to death, saw nothing but a crown descending on her from God, the first mental step was not that her philosophy was correct, but that she was certainly feeding on something. But this particular point of psychology does not arise at all in the modern cases of mere public discomfort or inconvenience. The causes of Miss Pankhurst’s cheerfulness require no mystical explanations. If she were being burned alive as a witch, if she then looked up in unmixed rapture and saw a ballot-box descending out of heaven, then I should say that the incident, though not conclusive, was frightfully impressive. It would not prove logically that she
ought to have the vote, or that anybody ought to have the vote. But it would prove this: that there was, for some reason, a sacramental reality in the vote, that the soul could take the vote and feed on it; that it was in itself a positive and overpowering pleasure, capable of being pitted against positive and overpowering pain.

I should advise modern agitators, therefore, to give up this particular method: the method of making very big efforts to get a very small punishment. It does not really go down at all; the punishment is too small, and the efforts are too obvious. It has not any of the effectiveness of the old savage martyrdom, because it does not leave the victim absolutely alone with his cause, so that his cause alone can support him. At the same time it has about it that element of the pantomimic and the absurd, which was the cruelest part of the slaying and the mocking of the real prophets. St. Peter was crucified upside down as a huge inhuman joke; but his human seriousness survived the inhuman joke, because, in whatever posture, he had died for his faith. The modern martyr of the Pankhurst type courts the absurdity without making the suffering strong enough to eclipse the absurdity. She is like a St. Peter who should deliberately stand on his head for ten seconds and then expect to be canonised for it.

Or again, the matter might be put in this way. Modern martyrdoms fail even as demonstrations, because they do not prove even that the martyrs are completely serious. I think, as a fact, that the modern martyrs generally are serious, perhaps a trifle too serious. But their martyrdom does not prove it; and the public does not always believe it. Undoubtedly, as a fact, Dr. Clifford is quite honourably indignant with what he considers to be clericalism, but he does not prove it by having his teapot sold; for a man might easily have his teapot sold as an actress has her diamonds stolen—as a personal advertisement. As a matter of fact, Miss Pankhurst is quite in earnest about votes for women. But she does not prove it by being chucked out of meetings. A person might be chucked out of meetings just as young men are chucked out of music–halls—for fun. But no man has himself eaten by a lion as a personal advertisement. No woman is broiled on a gridiron for fun. That is where the testimony of St. Perpetua and St. Faith comes in. Doubtless it is no fault of these enthusiasts that they are not subjected to the old and searching penalties; very likely they would pass through them as triumphantly as St. Agatha. I am simply advising them upon a point of policy, things being as they are. And I say that the average man is not impressed with their sacrifices simply because they are not and cannot be more decisive than the sacrifices which the average man himself would make for mere fun if he were
drunk. Drunkards would interrupt meetings and take the consequences. And as for selling a teapot, it is an act, I imagine, in which any properly constituted drunkard would take a positive pleasure. The advertisement is not good enough; it does not tell. If I were really martyred for an opinion (which is more improbable than words can say), it would certainly only be for one or two of my most central and sacred opinions. I might, perhaps, be shot for England, but certainly not for the British Empire. I might conceivably die for political freedom, but I certainly wouldn’t die for Free Trade. But as for kicking up the particular kind of shindy that the Suffragettes are kicking up, I would as soon do it for my shallowest opinion as for my deepest one. It never could be anything worse than an inconvenience; it never could be anything better than a spree. Hence the British public, and especially the working classes, regard the whole demonstration with fundamental indifference; for, while it is a demonstration that probably is adopted from the most fanatical motives, it is a demonstration which might be adopted from the most frivolous.
ON POLITICAL SECRECY

Generally, instinctively, in the absence of any special reason, humanity hates the idea of anything being hidden—that is, it hates the idea of anything being successfully hidden. Hide–and–seek is a popular pastime; but it assumes the truth of the text, “Seek and ye shall find.” Ordinary mankind (gigantic and unconquerable in its power of joy) can get a great deal of pleasure out of a game called “hide the thimble,” but that is only because it is really a game of “see the thimble.” Suppose that at the end of such a game the thimble had not been found at all; suppose its place was unknown for ever: the result on the players would not be playful, it would be tragic. That thimble would hag–ride all their dreams. They would all die in asylums. The pleasure is all in the poignant moment of passing from not knowing to knowing. Mystery stories are very popular, especially when sold at sixpence; but that is because the author of a mystery story reveals. He is enjoyed not because he creates mystery, but because he destroys mystery. Nobody would have the courage to publish a detective–story which left the problem exactly where it found it. That would rouse even the London public to revolution. No one dare publish a detective–story that did not detect.

There are three broad classes of the special things in which human wisdom does permit privacy. The first is the case I have mentioned—that of hide–and–seek, or the police novel, in which it permits privacy only in order to explode and smash privacy. The author makes first a fastidious secret of how the Bishop was murdered, only in order that he may at last declare, as from a high tower, to the whole democracy the great glad news that he was murdered by the governess. In that case, ignorance is only valued because being ignorant is the best and purest preparation for receiving the horrible revelations of high life. Somewhat in the same way being an agnostic is the best and purest preparation for receiving the happy revelations of St. John.

This first sort of secrecy we may dismiss, for its whole ultimate object is not to keep the secret, but to tell it. Then there is a second and far more important class of things which humanity does agree to hide. They are so important that they cannot possibly be discussed here. But every one will know the kind of things I mean. In connection with these, I wish to remark that though they are, in one sense, a secret, they are also always a “sécret de Polichinelle.” Upon sex and such matters we are in a human freemasonry; the freemasonry is disciplined, but
the freemasonry is free. We are asked to be silent about these things, but we are not asked to be ignorant about them. On the contrary, the fundamental human argument is entirely the other way. It is the thing most common to humanity that is most veiled by humanity. It is exactly because we all know that it is there that we need not say that it is there.

Then there is a third class of things on which the best civilisation does permit privacy, does resent all inquiry or explanation. This is in the case of things which need not be explained, because they cannot be explained, things too airy, instinctive, or intangible—caprices, sudden impulses, and the more innocent kind of prejudice. A man must not be asked why he is talkative or silent, for the simple reason that he does not know. A man is not asked (even in Germany) why he walks slow or quick, simply because he could not answer. A man must take his own road through a wood, and make his own use of a holiday. And the reason is this: not because he has a strong reason, but actually because he has a weak reason; because he has a slight and fleeting feeling about the matter which he could not explain to a policeman, which perhaps the very appearance of a policeman out of the bushes might destroy. He must act on the impulse, because the impulse is unimportant, and he may never have the same impulse again. If you like to put it so he must act on the impulse because the impulse is not worth a moment’s thought. All these fancies men feel should be private; and even Fabians have never proposed to interfere with them.

Now, for the last fortnight the newspapers have been full of very varied comments upon the problem of the secrecy of certain parts of our political finance, and especially of the problem of the party funds. Some papers have failed entirely to understand what the quarrel is about. They have urged that Irish members and Labour members are also under the shadow, or, as some have said, even more under it. The ground of this frantic statement seems, when patiently considered, to be simply this: that Irish and Labour members receive money for what they do. All persons, as far as I know, on this earth receive money for what they do; the only difference is that some people, like the Irish members, do it.

I cannot imagine that any human being could think any other human being capable of maintaining the proposition that men ought not to receive money. The simple point is that, as we know that some money is given rightly and some wrongly, an elementary common–sense leads us to look with indifference at the money that is given in the middle of Ludgate Circus, and to look with particular suspicion at the money which a man will not give unless he is shut up in a box or a bathing–machine. In short, it is too silly to suppose that anybody could ever
have discussed the desirability of funds. The only thing that even idiots could ever have discussed is the concealment of funds. Therefore, the whole question that we have to consider is whether the concealment of political money–transactions, the purchase of peerages, the payment of election expenses, is a kind of concealment that falls under any of the three classes I have mentioned as those in which human custom and instinct does permit us to conceal. I have suggested three kinds of secrecy which are human and defensible. Can this institution be defended by means of any of them?

Now the question is whether this political secrecy is of any of the kinds that can be called legitimate. We have roughly divided legitimate secrets into three classes. First comes the secret that is only kept in order to be revealed, as in the detective stories; secondly, the secret which is kept because everybody knows it, as in sex; and third, the secret which is kept because it is too delicate and vague to be explained at all, as in the choice of a country walk. Do any of these broad human divisions cover such a case as that of secrecy of the political and party finances? It would be absurd, and even delightfully absurd, to pretend that any of them did. It would be a wild and charming fancy to suggest that our politicians keep political secrets only that they may make political revelations. A modern peer only pretends that he has earned his peerage in order that he may more dramatically declare, with a scream of scorn and joy, that he really bought it. The Baronet pretends that he deserved his title only in order to make more exquisite and startling the grand historical fact that he did not deserve it. Surely this sounds improbable. Surely all our statesmen cannot be saving themselves up for the excitement of a death–bed repentance. The writer of detective tales makes a man a duke solely in order to blast him with a charge of burglary. But surely the Prime Minister does not make a man a duke solely in order to blast him with a charge of bribery. No; the detective–tale theory of the secrecy of political funds must (with a sigh) be given up.

Neither can we say that the thing is explained by that second case of human secrecy which is so secret that it is hard to discuss it in public. A decency is preserved about certain primary human matters precisely because every one knows all about them. But the decency touching contributions, purchases, and peerages is not kept up because most ordinary men know what is happening; it is kept up precisely because most ordinary men do not know what is happening. The ordinary curtain of decorum covers normal proceedings. But no one will say that being bribed is a normal proceeding.

And if we apply the third test to this problem of political secrecy, the case is
even clearer and even more funny. Surely no one will say that the purchase of peerages and such things are kept secret because they are so light and impulsive and unimportant that they must be matters of individual fancy. A child sees a flower and for the first time feels inclined to pick it. But surely no one will say that a brewer sees a coronet and for the first time suddenly thinks that he would like to be a peer. The child’s impulse need not be explained to the police, for the simple reason that it could not be explained to anybody. But does anyone believe that the laborious political ambitions of modern commercial men ever have this airy and incommunicable character? A man lying on the beach may throw stones into the sea without any particular reason. But does anyone believe that the brewer throws bags of gold into the party funds without any particular reason? This theory of the secrecy of political money must also be regretfully abandoned; and with it the two other possible excuses as well. This secrecy is one which cannot be justified as a sensational joke nor as a common human freemasonry, nor as an indescribable personal whim. Strangely enough, indeed, it violates all three conditions and classes at once. It is not hidden in order to be revealed: it is hidden in order to be hidden. It is not kept secret because it is a common secret of mankind, but because mankind must not get hold of it. And it is not kept secret because it is too unimportant to be told, but because it is much too important to bear telling. In short, the thing we have is the real and perhaps rare political phenomenon of an occult government. We have an exoteric and an esoteric doctrine. England is really ruled by priestcraft, but not by priests. We have in this country all that has ever been alleged against the evil side of religion; the peculiar class with privileges, the sacred words that are unpronounceable; the important things known only to the few. In fact we lack nothing except the religion.
EDWARD VII. AND SCOTLAND

I have received a serious, and to me, at any rate, an impressive remonstrance from the Scottish Patriotic Association. It appears that I recently referred to Edward VII. of Great Britain and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, under the horrible description of the King of England. The Scottish Patriotic Association draws my attention to the fact that by the provisions of the Act of Union, and the tradition of nationality, the monarch should be referred to as the King of Britain. The blow thus struck at me is particularly wounding because it is particularly unjust. I believe in the reality of the independent nationalities under the British Crown much more passionately and positively than any other educated Englishman of my acquaintance believes in it. I am quite certain that Scotland is a nation; I am quite certain that nationality is the key of Scotland; I am quite certain that all our success with Scotland has been due to the fact that we have in spirit treated it as a nation. I am quite certain that Ireland is a nation; I am quite certain that nationality is the key to Ireland; I am quite certain that all our failure in Ireland arose from the fact that we would not in spirit treat it as a nation. It would be difficult to find, even among the innumerable examples that exist, a stronger example of the immensely superior importance of sentiment to what is called practicality than this case of the two sister nations. It is not that we have encouraged a Scotchman to be rich; it is not that we have encouraged a Scotchman to be active; it is not that we have encouraged a Scotchman to be free. It is that we have quite definitely encouraged a Scotchman to be Scotch.

A vague, but vivid impression was received from all our writers of history, philosophy, and rhetoric that the Scottish element was something really valuable in itself, was something which even Englishmen were forced to recognise and respect. If we ever admitted the beauty of Ireland, it was as something which might be loved by an Englishman but which could hardly be respected even by an Irishman. A Scotchman might be proud of Scotland; it was enough for an Irishman that he could be fond of Ireland. Our success with the two nations has been exactly proportioned to our encouragement of their independent national emotion; the one that we would not treat nationally has alone produced Nationalists. The one nation that we would not recognise as a nation in theory is the one that we have been forced to recognise as a nation in arms. The Scottish Patriotic Association has no need to draw my attention to the importance of the separate national sentiment or the need of keeping the Border as a sacred line.
The case is quite sufficiently proved by the positive history of Scotland. The place of Scottish loyalty to England has been taken by English admiration of Scotland. They do not need to envy us our titular leadership, when we seem to envy them their separation.

I wish to make very clear my entire sympathy with the national sentiment of the Scottish Patriotic Association. But I wish also to make clear this very enlightening comparison between the fate of Scotch and of Irish patriotism. In life it is always the little facts that express the large emotions, and if the English once respected Ireland as they respect Scotland, it would come out in a hundred small ways. For instance, there are crack regiments in the British Army which wear the kilt—the kilt which, as Macaulay says with perfect truth, was regarded by nine Scotchmen out of ten as the dress of a thief. The Highland officers carry a silver–hilted version of the old barbarous Gaelic broadsword with a basket–hilt, which split the skulls of so many English soldiers at Killiecrankie and Prestonpans. When you have a regiment of men in the British Army carrying ornamental silver shillelaghs you will have done the same thing for Ireland, and not before—or when you mention Brian Boru with the same intonation as Bruce.

Let me be considered therefore to have made quite clear that I believe with a quite special intensity in the independent consideration of Scotland and Ireland as apart from England. I believe that, in the proper sense of the words, Scotland is an independent nation, even if Edward VII. is the King of Scotland. I believe that, in the proper sense of words, Ireland is an independent nation, even if Edward VII. is King of Ireland. But the fact is that I have an even bolder and wilder belief than either of these. I believe that England is an independent nation. I believe that England also has its independent colour and history, and meaning. I believe that England could produce costumes quite as queer as the kilt; I believe that England has heroes fully as untranslatable as Brian Boru, and consequently I believe that Edward VII. is, among his innumerable other functions, really King of England. If my Scotch friends insist, let us call it one of his quite obscure, unpopular, and minor titles; one of his relaxations. A little while ago he was Duke of Cornwall; but for a family accident he might still have been King of Hanover. Nor do I think that we should blame the simple Cornishmen if they spoke of him in a rhetorical moment by his Cornish title, nor the well–meaning Hanoverians if they classed him with Hanoverian Princes.

Now it so happens that in the passage complained of I said the King of England merely because I meant the King of England. I was speaking strictly and especially of English Kings, of Kings in the tradition of the old Kings of
England. I wrote as an English nationalist keenly conscious of the sacred boundary of the Tweed that keeps (or used to keep) our ancient enemies at bay. I wrote as an English nationalist resolved for one wild moment to throw off the tyranny of the Scotch and Irish who govern and oppress my country. I felt that England was at least spiritually guarded against these surrounding nationalities. I dreamed that the Tweed was guarded by the ghosts of Scropes and Percys; I dreamed that St. George’s Channel was guarded by St. George. And in this insular security I spoke deliberately and specifically of the King of England, of the representative of the Tudors and Plantagenets. It is true that the two Kings of England, of whom I especially spoke, Charles II. and George III., had both an alien origin, not very recent and not very remote. Charles II. came of a family originally Scotch. George III. came of a family originally German. But the same, so far as that goes, could be said of the English royal houses when England stood quite alone. The Plantagenets were originally a French family. The Tudors were originally a Welsh family. But I was not talking of the amount of English sentiment in the English Kings. I was talking of the amount of English sentiment in the English treatment and popularity of the English Kings. With that Ireland and Scotland have nothing whatever to do.

Charles II. may, for all I know, have not only been King of Scotland; he may, by virtue of his temper and ancestry, have been a Scotch King of Scotland. There was something Scotch about his combination of clear-headedness with sensuality. There was something Scotch about his combination of doing what he liked with knowing what he was doing. But I was not talking of the personality of Charles, which may have been Scotch. I was talking of the popularity of Charles, which was certainly English. One thing is quite certain: whether or no he ever ceased to be a Scotch man, he ceased as soon as he conveniently could to be a Scotch King. He had actually tried the experiment of being a national ruler north of the Tweed, and his people liked him as little as he liked them. Of Presbyterianism, of the Scottish religion, he left on record the exquisitely English judgment that it was “no religion for a gentleman.” His popularity then was purely English; his royalty was purely English; and I was using the words with the utmost narrowness and deliberation when I spoke of this particular popularity and royalty as the popularity and royalty of a King of England. I said of the English people specially that they like to pick up the King’s crown when he has dropped it. I do not feel at all sure that this does apply to the Scotch or the Irish. I think that the Irish would knock his crown off for him. I think that the Scotch would keep it for him after they had picked it up.
For my part, I should be inclined to adopt quite the opposite method of asserting nationality. Why should good Scotch nationalists call Edward VII. the King of Britain? They ought to call him King Edward I. of Scotland. What is Britain? Where is Britain? There is no such place. There never was a nation of Britain; there never was a King of Britain; unless perhaps Vortigern or Uther Pendragon had a taste for the title. If we are to develop our Monarchy, I should be altogether in favour of developing it along the line of local patriotism and of local proprietorship in the King. I think that the Londoners ought to call him the King of London, and the Liverpudlians ought to call him the King of Liverpool. I do not go so far as to say that the people of Birmingham ought to call Edward VII. the King of Birmingham; for that would be high treason to a holier and more established power. But I think we might read in the papers: “The King of Brighton left Brighton at half–past two this afternoon,” and then immediately afterwards, “The King of Worthing entered Worthing at ten minutes past three.” Or, “The people of Margate bade a reluctant farewell to the popular King of Margate this morning,” and then, “His Majesty the King of Ramsgate returned to his country and capital this afternoon after his long sojourn in strange lands.” It might be pointed out that by a curious coincidence the departure of the King of Oxford occurred a very short time before the triumphal arrival of the King of Reading. I cannot imagine any method which would more increase the kindly and normal relations between the Sovereign and his people. Nor do I think that such a method would be in any sense a depreciation of the royal dignity; for, as a matter of fact, it would put the King upon the same platform with the gods. The saints, the most exalted of human figures, were also the most local. It was exactly the men whom we most easily connected with heaven whom we also most easily connected with earth.
THOUGHTS AROUND KOEPENICK

A famous and epigrammatic author said that life copied literature; it seems clear that life really caricatures it. I suggested recently that the Germans submitted to, and even admired, a solemn and theatrical assertion of authority. A few hours after I had sent up my “copy,” I saw the first announcement of the affair of the comic Captain at Koepenick. The most absurd part of this absurd fraud (at least, to English eyes) is one which, oddly enough, has received comparatively little comment. I mean the point at which the Mayor asked for a warrant, and the Captain pointed to the bayonets of his soldiery and said. “These are my authority.” One would have thought any one would have known that no soldier would talk like that. The dupes were blamed for not knowing that the man wore the wrong cap or the wrong sash, or had his sword buckled on the wrong way; but these are technicalities which they might surely be excused for not knowing. I certainly should not know if a soldier’s sash were on inside out or this cap on behind before. But I should know uncommonly well that genuine professional soldiers do not talk like Adelphi villains and utter theatrical epigrams in praise of abstract violence.

We can see this more clearly, perhaps, if we suppose it to be the case of any other dignified and clearly distinguishable profession. Suppose a Bishop called upon me. My great modesty and my rather distant reverence for the higher clergy might lead me certainly to a strong suspicion that any Bishop who called on me was a bogus Bishop. But if I wished to test his genuineness I should not dream of attempting to do so by examining the shape of his apron or the way his gaiters were done up. I have not the remotest idea of the way his gaiters ought to be done up. A very vague approximation to an apron would probably take me in; and if he behaved like an approximately Christian gentleman he would be safe enough from my detection. But suppose the Bishop, the moment he entered the room, fell on his knees on the mat, clasped his hands, and poured out a flood of passionate and somewhat hysterical extempore prayer, I should say at once and without the smallest hesitation, “Whatever else this man is, he is not an elderly and wealthy cleric of the Church of England. They don’t do such things.” Or suppose a man came to me pretending to be a qualified doctor, and flourished a stethoscope, or what he said was a stethoscope. I am glad to say that I have not even the remotest notion of what a stethoscope looks like; so that if he flourished a musical–box or a coffee–mill it would be all one to me. But I do think that I
am not exaggerating my own sagacity if I say that I should begin to suspect the doctor if on entering my room he flung his legs and arms about, crying wildly, “Health! Health! priceless gift of Nature! I possess it! I overflow with it! I yearn to impart it! Oh, the sacred rapture of imparting health!” In that case I should suspect him of being rather in a position to receive than to offer medical superintendence.

Now, it is no exaggeration at all to say that any one who has ever known any soldiers (I can only answer for English and Irish and Scotch soldiers) would find it just as easy to believe that a real Bishop would grovel on the carpet in a religious ecstasy, or that a real doctor would dance about the drawing-room to show the invigorating effects of his own medicine, as to believe that a soldier, when asked for his authority, would point to a lot of shining weapons and declare symbolically that might was right. Of course, a real soldier would go rather red in the face and huskily repeat the proper formula, whatever it was, as that he came in the King’s name.

Soldiers have many faults, but they have one redeeming merit; they are never worshippers of force. Soldiers more than any other men are taught severely and systematically that might is not right. The fact is obvious. The might is in the hundred men who obey. The right (or what is held to be right) is in the one man who commands them. They learn to obey symbols, arbitrary things, stripes on an arm, buttons on a coat, a title, a flag. These may be artificial things; they may be unreasonable things; they may, if you will, be wicked things; but they are weak things. They are not Force, and they do not look like Force. They are parts of an idea: of the idea of discipline; if you will, of the idea of tyranny; but still an idea. No soldier could possibly say that his own bayonets were his authority. No soldier could possibly say that he came in the name of his own bayonets. It would be as absurd as if a postman said that he came inside his bag. I do not, as I have said, underrate the evils that really do arise from militarism and the military ethic. It tends to give people wooden faces and sometimes wooden heads. It tends moreover (both through its specialisation and through its constant obedience) to a certain loss of real independence and strength of character. This has almost always been found when people made the mistake of turning the soldier into a statesman, under the mistaken impression that he was a strong man. The Duke of Wellington, for instance, was a strong soldier and therefore a weak statesman. But the soldier is always, by the nature of things, loyal to something. And as long as one is loyal to something one can never be a worshipper of mere force. For mere force, violence in the abstract, is the enemy
of anything we love. To love anything is to see it at once under lowering skies of danger. Loyalty implies loyalty in misfortune; and when a soldier has accepted any nation’s uniform he has already accepted its defeat.

Nevertheless, it does appear to be possible in Germany for a man to point to fixed bayonets and say, “These are my authority,” and yet to convince ordinarily sane men that he is a soldier. If this is so, it does really seem to point to some habit of high-faultin’ in the German nation, such as that of which I spoke previously. It almost looks as if the advisers, and even the officials, of the German Army had become infected in some degree with the false and feeble doctrine that might is right. As this doctrine is invariably preached by physical weaklings like Nietzsche it is a very serious thing even to entertain the supposition that it is affecting men who have really to do military work. It would be the end of German soldiers to be affected by German philosophy. Energetic people use energy as a means, but only very tired people ever use energy as a reason. Athletes go in for games, because athletes desire glory. Invalids go in for calisthenics; for invalids (alone of all human beings) desire strength. So long as the German Army points to its heraldic eagle and says, “I come in the name of this fierce but fabulous animal,” the German Army will be all right. If ever it says, “I come in the name of bayonets,” the bayonets will break like glass, for only the weak exhibit strength without an aim.

At the same time, as I said before, do not let us forged our own faults. Do not let us forget them any the more easily because they are the opposite to the German faults. Modern England is too prone to present the spectacle of a person who is enormously delighted because he has not got the contrary disadvantages to his own. The Englishman is always saying “My house is not damp” at the moment when his house is on fire. The Englishman is always saying, “I have thrown off all traces of anæmia” in the middle of a fit of apoplexy. Let us always remember that if an Englishman wants to swindle English people, he does not dress up in the uniform of a soldier. If an Englishman wants to swindle English people he would as soon think of dressing up in the uniform of a messenger boy. Everything in England is done unofficially, casually, by conversations and cliques. The one Parliament that really does rule England is a secret Parliament; the debates of which must not be published—the Cabinet. The debates of the Commons are sometimes important; but only the debates in the Lobby, never the debates in the House. Journalists do control public opinion; but it is not controlled by the arguments they publish—it is controlled by the arguments between the editor and sub-editor, which they do not publish. This casualness is
our English vice. It is at once casual and secret. Our public life is conducted privately. Hence it follows that if an English swindler wished to impress us, the last thing he would think of doing would be to put on a uniform. He would put on a polite slouching air and a careless, expensive suit of clothes; he would stroll up to the Mayor, be so awfully sorry to disturb him, find he had forgotten his card-case, mention, as if he were ashamed of it, that he was the Duke of Mercia, and carry the whole thing through with the air of a man who could get two hundred witnesses and two thousand retainers, but who was too tired to call any of them. And if he did it very well I strongly suspect that he would be as successful as the indefensible Captain at Koepenick.

Our tendency for many centuries past has been, not so much towards creating an aristocracy (which may or may not be a good thing in itself), as towards substituting an aristocracy for everything else. In England we have an aristocracy instead of a religion. The nobility are to the English poor what the saints and the fairies are to the Irish poor, what the large devil with a black face was to the Scotch poor—the poetry of life. In the same way in England we have an aristocracy instead of a Government. We rely on a certain good humour and education in the upper class to interpret to us our contradictory Constitution. No educated man born of woman will be quite so absurd as the system that he has to administer. In short, we do not get good laws to restrain bad people. We get good people to restrain bad laws. And last of all we in England have an aristocracy instead of an Army. We have an Army of which the officers are proud of their families and ashamed of their uniforms. If I were a king of any country whatever, and one of my officers were ashamed of my uniform, I should be ashamed of my officer. Beware, then, of the really well-bred and apologetic gentleman whose clothes are at once quiet and fashionable, whose manner is at once diffident and frank. Beware how you admit him into your domestic secrets, for he may be a bogus Earl. Or, worse still, a real one.
THE BOY

I have no sympathy with international aggression when it is taken seriously, but I have a certain dark and wild sympathy with it when it is quite absurd. Raids are all wrong as practical politics, but they are human and imaginable as practical jokes. In fact, almost any act of ragging or violence can be forgiven on this strict condition—that it is of no use at all to anybody. If the aggressor gets anything out of it, then it is quite unpardonable. It is damned by the least hint of utility or profit. A man of spirit and breeding may brawl, but he does not steal. A gentleman knocks off his friend’s hat; but he does not annex his friend’s hat. For this reason (as Mr. Belloc has pointed out somewhere), the very militant French people have always returned after their immense raids—the raids of Godfrey the Crusader, the raids of Napoleon; “they are sucked back, having accomplished nothing but an epic.”

Sometimes I see small fragments of information in the newspapers which make my heart leap with an irrational patriotic sympathy. I have had the misfortune to be left comparatively cold by many of the enterprises and proclamations of my country in recent times. But the other day I found in the Tribune the following paragraph, which I may be permitted to set down as an example of the kind of international outrage with which I have by far the most instinctive sympathy. There is something attractive, too, in the austere simplicity with which the affair is set forth—“Geneva, Oct. 31.

“The English schoolboy Allen, who was arrested at Lausanne railway station on Saturday, for having painted red the statue of General Jomini of Payerne, was liberated yesterday, after paying a fine of £24. Allen has proceeded to Germany, where he will continue his studies. The people of Payerne are indignant, and clamoured for his detention in prison.”

Now I have no doubt that ethics and social necessity require a contrary attitude, but I will freely confess that my first emotions on reading of this exploit were those of profound and elemental pleasure. There is something so large and simple about the operation of painting a whole stone General a bright red. Of course I can understand that the people of Payerne were indignant. They had passed to their homes at twilight through the streets of that beautiful city (or is it a province?), and they had seen against the silver ending of the sunset the grand grey figure of the hero of that land remaining to guard the town under the stars. It certainly must have been a shock to come out in the broad white morning and
find a large vermilion General staring under the staring sun. I do not blame them at all for clamouring for the schoolboy’s detention in prison; I dare say a little detention in prison would do him no harm. Still, I think the immense act has something about it human and excusable; and when I endeavour to analyse the reason of this feeling I find it to lie, not in the fact that the thing was big or bold or successful, but in the fact that the thing was perfectly useless to everybody, including the person who did it. The raid ends in itself; and so Master Allen is sucked back again, having accomplished nothing but an epic.

There is one thing which, in the presence of average modern journalism, is perhaps worth saying in connection with such an idle matter as this. The morals of a matter like this are exactly like the morals of anything else; they are concerned with mutual contract, or with the rights of independent human lives. But the whole modern world, or at any rate the whole modern Press, has a perpetual and consuming terror of plain morals. Men always attempt to avoid condemning a thing upon merely moral grounds. If I beat my grandmother to death to–morrow in the middle of Battersea Park, you may be perfectly certain that people will say everything about it except the simple and fairly obvious fact that it is wrong. Some will call it insane; that is, will accuse it of a deficiency of intelligence. This is not necessarily true at all. You could not tell whether the act was unintelligent or not unless you knew my grandmother. Some will call it vulgar, disgusting, and the rest of it; that is, they will accuse it of a lack of manners. Perhaps it does show a lack of manners; but this is scarcely its most serious disadvantage. Others will talk about the loathsome spectacle and the revolting scene; that is, they will accuse it of a deficiency of art, or æsthetic beauty. This again depends on the circumstances: in order to be quite certain that the appearance of the old lady has definitely deteriorated under the process of being beaten to death, it is necessary for the philosophical critic to be quite certain how ugly she was before. Another school of thinkers will say that the action is lacking in efficiency: that it is an uneconomic waste of a good grandmother. But that could only depend on the value, which is again an individual matter. The only real point that is worth mentioning is that the action is wicked, because your grandmother has a right not to be beaten to death. But of this simple moral explanation modern journalism has, as I say, a standing fear. It will call the action anything else—mad, bestial, vulgar, idiotic, rather than call it sinful.

One example can be found in such cases as that of the prank of the boy and the statue. When some trick of this sort is played, the newspapers opposed to it
always describe it as “a senseless joke.” What is the good of saying that? Every joke is a senseless joke. A joke is by its nature a protest against sense. It is no good attacking nonsense for being successfully nonsensical. Of course it is nonsensical to paint a celebrated Italian General a bright red; it is as nonsensical as “Alice in Wonderland.” It is also, in my opinion, very nearly as funny. But the real answer to the affair is not to say that it is nonsensical or even to say that it is not funny, but to point out that it is wrong to spoil statues which belong to other people. If the modern world will not insist on having some sharp and definite moral law, capable of resisting the counter-attractions of art and humour, the modern world will simply be given over as a spoil to anybody who can manage to do a nasty thing in a nice way. Every murderer who can murder entertainingly will be allowed to murder. Every burglar who burgles in really humorous attitudes will burgle as much as he likes.

There is another case of the thing that I mean. Why on earth do the newspapers, in describing a dynamite outrage or any other political assassination, call it a “dastardly outrage” or a cowardly outrage? It is perfectly evident that it is not dastardly in the least. It is perfectly evident that it is about as cowardly as the Christians going to the lions. The man who does it exposes himself to the chance of being torn in pieces by two thousand people. What the thing is, is not cowardly, but profoundly and detestably wicked. The man who does it is very infamous and very brave. But, again, the explanation is that our modern Press would rather appeal to physical arrogance, or to anything, rather than appeal to right and wrong.

In most of the matters of modern England, the real difficulty is that there is a negative revolution without a positive revolution. Positive aristocracy is breaking up without any particular appearance of positive democracy taking its place. The polished class is becoming less polished without becoming less of a class; the nobleman who becomes a guinea-pig keeps all his privileges but loses some of his tradition; he becomes less of a gentleman without becoming less of a nobleman. In the same way (until some recent and happy revivals) it seemed highly probable that the Church of England would cease to be a religion long before it had ceased to be a Church. And in the same way, the vulgarisation of the old, simple middle class does not even have the advantage of doing away with class distinctions; the vulgar man is always the most distinguished, for the very desire to be distinguished is vulgar.

At the same time, it must be remembered that when a class has a morality it does not follow that it is an adequate morality. The middle-class ethic was
inadequate for some purposes; so is the public–school ethic, the ethic of the upper classes. On this last matter of the public schools Dr. Spenser, the Head Master of University College School, has lately made some valuable observations. But even he, I think, overstates the claim of the public schools. “The strong point of the English public schools,” he says, “has always lain in their efficiency as agencies for the formation of character and for the inculcation of the great notion of obligation which distinguishes a gentleman. On the physical and moral sides the public–school men of England are, I believe, unequalled.” And he goes on to say that it is on the mental side that they are defective. But, as a matter of fact, the public–school training is in the strict sense defective upon the moral side also; it leaves out about half of morality. Its just claim is that, like the old middle class (and the Zulus), it trains some virtues and therefore suits some people for some situations. Put an old English merchant to serve in an army and he would have been irritated and clumsy. Put the men from English public schools to rule Ireland, and they make the greatest hash in human history.

Touching the morality of the public schools, I will take one point only, which is enough to prove the case. People have got into their heads an extraordinary idea that English public–school boys and English youth generally are taught to tell the truth. They are taught absolutely nothing of the kind. At no English public school is it even suggested, except by accident, that it is a man’s duty to tell the truth. What is suggested is something entirely different: that it is a man’s duty not to tell lies. So completely does this mistake soak through all civilisation that we hardly ever think even of the difference between the two things. When we say to a child, “You must tell the truth,” we do merely mean that he must refrain from verbal inaccuracies. But the thing we never teach at all is the general duty of telling the truth, of giving a complete and fair picture of anything we are talking about, of not misrepresenting, not evading, not suppressing, not using plausible arguments that we know to be unfair, not selecting unscrupulously to prove an ex parte case, not telling all the nice stories about the Scotch, and all the nasty stories about the Irish, not pretending to be disinterested when you are really angry, not pretending to be angry when you are really only avaricious. The one thing that is never taught by any chance in the atmosphere of public schools is exactly that–that there is a whole truth of things, and that in knowing it and speaking it we are happy.

If any one has the smallest doubt of this neglect of truth in public schools he can kill his doubt with one plain question. Can any one on earth believe that if
the seeing and telling of the whole truth were really one of the ideals of the English governing class, there could conceivably exist such a thing as the English party system? Why, the English party system is founded upon the principle that telling the whole truth does not matter. It is founded upon the principle that half a truth is better than no politics. Our system deliberately turns a crowd of men who might be impartial into irrational partisans. It teaches some of them to tell lies and all of them to believe lies. It gives every man an arbitrary brief that he has to work up as best he may and defend as best he can. It turns a room full of citizens into a room full of barristers. I know that it has many charms and virtues, fighting and good–fellowship; it has all the charms and virtues of a game. I only say that it would be a stark impossibility in a nation which believed in telling the truth.
LIMERICKS AND COUNSELS OF PERFECTION

It is customary to remark that modern problems cannot easily be attacked because they are so complex. In many cases I believe it is really because they are so simple. Nobody would believe in such simplicity of scoundrelism even if it were pointed out. People would say that the truth was a charge of mere melodramatic villainy; forgetting that nearly all villains really are melodramatic. Thus, for instance, we say that some good measures are frustrated or some bad officials kept in power by the press and confusion of public business; whereas very often the reason is simple healthy human bribery. And thus especially we say that the Yellow Press is exaggerative, over-emotional, illiterate, and anarchical, and a hundred other long words; whereas the only objection to it is that it tells lies. We waste our fine intellects in finding exquisite phraseology to fit a man, when in a well-ordered society we ought to be finding handcuffs to fit him.

This criticism of the modern type of righteous indignation must have come into many people’s minds, I think, in reading Dr. Horton’s eloquent expressions of disgust at the “corrupt Press,” especially in connection with the Limerick craze. Upon the Limerick craze itself, I fear Dr. Horton will not have much effect; such fads perish before one has had time to kill them. But Dr. Horton’s protest may really do good if it enables us to come to some clear understanding about what is really wrong with the popular Press, and which means it might be useful and which permissible to use for its reform. We do not want a censorship of the Press; but we are long past talking about that. At present it is not we that silence the Press; it is the Press that silences us. It is not a case of the Commonwealth settling how much the editors shall say; it is a case of the editors settling how much the Commonwealth shall know. If we attack the Press we shall be rebelling, not repressing. But shall we attack it?

Now it is just here that the chief difficulty occurs. It arises from the very rarity and rectitude of those minds which commonly inaugurate such crusades. I have the warmest respect for Dr. Horton’s thirst after righteousness; but it has always seemed to me that his righteousness would be more effective without his refinement. The curse of the Nonconformists is their universal refinement. They dimly connect being good with being delicate, and even dapper; with not being grotesque or loud or violent; with not sitting down on one’s hat. Now it is always a pleasure to be loud and violent, and sometimes it is a duty. Certainly it has
nothing to do with sin; a man can be loudly and violently virtuous—nay, he can be loudly and violently saintly, though that is not the type of saintliness that we recognise in Dr. Horton. And as for sitting on one’s hat, if it is done for any sublime object (as, for instance, to amuse the children), it is obviously an act of very beautiful self–sacrifice, the destruction and surrender of the symbol of personal dignity upon the shrine of public festivity. Now it will not do to attack the modern editor merely for being unrefined, like the great mass of mankind. We must be able to say that he is immoral, not that he is undignified or ridiculous. I do not mind the Yellow Press editor sitting on his hat. My only objection to him begins to dawn when he attempts to sit on my hat; or, indeed (as is at present the case), when he proceeds to sit on my head.

But in reading between the lines of Dr. Horton’s invective one continually feels that he is not only angry with the popular Press for being unscrupulous: he is partly angry with the popular Press for being popular. He is not only irritated with Limericks for causing a mean money–scramble; he is also partly irritated with Limericks for being Limericks. The enormous size of the levity gets on his nerves, like the glare and blare of Bank Holiday. Now this is a motive which, however human and natural, must be strictly kept out of the way. It takes all sorts to make a world; and it is not in the least necessary that everybody should have that love of subtle and unobtrusive perfections in the matter of manners or literature which does often go with the type of the ethical idealist. It is not in the least desirable that everybody should be earnest. It is highly desirable that everybody should be honest, but that is a thing that can go quite easily with a coarse and cheerful character. But the ineffectualness of most protests against the abuse of the Press has been very largely due to the instinct of democracy (and the instinct of democracy is like the instinct of one woman, wild but quite right) that the people who were trying to purify the Press were also trying to refine it; and to this the democracy very naturally and very justly objected. We are justified in enforcing good morals, for they belong to all mankind; but we are not justified in enforcing good manners, for good manners always mean our own manners. We have no right to purge the popular Press of all that we think vulgar or trivial. Dr. Horton may possibly loathe and detest Limericks just as I loathe and detest riddles; but I have no right to call them flippant and unprofitable; there are wild people in the world who like riddles. I am so afraid of this movement passing off into mere formless rhetoric and platform passion that I will even come close to the earth and lay down specifically some of the things that, in my opinion, could be, and ought to be, done to reform the Press.
First, I would make a law, if there is none such at present, by which an editor, proved to have published false news without reasonable verification, should simply go to prison. This is not a question of influences or atmospheres; the thing could be carried out as easily and as practically as the punishment of thieves and murderers. Of course there would be the usual statement that the guilt was that of a subordinate. Let the accused editor have the right of proving this if he can; if he does, let the subordinate be tried and go to prison. Two or three good rich editors and proprietors properly locked up would take the sting out of the Yellow Press better than centuries of Dr. Horton.

Second, it’s impossible to pass over altogether the most unpleasant, but the most important part of this problem. I will deal with it as distantly as possible. I do not believe there is any harm whatever in reading about murders; rather, if anything, good; for the thought of death operates very powerfully with the poor in the creation of brotherhood and a sense of human dignity. I do not believe there is a pennyworth of harm in the police news, as such. Even divorce news, though contemptible enough, can really in most cases be left to the discretion of grown people; and how far children get hold of such things is a problem for the home and not for the nation. But there is a certain class of evils which a healthy man or woman can actually go through life without knowing anything about at all. These, I say, should be stamped and blackened out of every newspaper with the thickest black of the Russian censor. Such cases should either be always tried in camera or reporting them should be a punishable offence. The common weakness of Nature and the sins that flesh is heir to we can leave people to find in newspapers. Men can safely see in the papers what they have already seen in the streets. They may safely find in their journals what they have already found in themselves. But we do not want the imaginations of rational and decent people clouded with the horrors of some obscene insanity which has no more to do with human life than the man in Bedlam who thinks he is a chicken. And, if this vile matter is admitted, let it be simply with a mention of the Latin or legal name of the crime, and with no details whatever. As it is, exactly the reverse is true. Papers are permitted to terrify and darken the fancy of the young with innumerable details, but not permitted to state in clean legal language what the thing is about. They are allowed to give any fact about the thing except the fact that it is a sin.

Third, I would do my best to introduce everywhere the practice of signed articles. Those who urge the advantages of anonymity are either people who do not realise the special peril of our time or they are people who are profiting by it.
It is true, but futile, for instance, to say that there is something noble in being nameless when a whole corporate body is bent on a consistent aim: as in an army or men building a cathedral. The point of modern newspapers is that there is no such corporate body and common aim; but each man can use the authority of the paper to further his own private fads and his own private finances.
ANONYMITY AND FURTHER COUNSELS

The end of the article which I write is always cut off, and, unfortunately, I belong to that lower class of animals in whom the tail is important. It is not anybody’s fault but my own; it arises from the fact that I take such a long time to get to the point. Somebody, the other day, very reasonably complained of my being employed to write prefaces. He was perfectly right, for I always write a preface to the preface, and then I am stopped; also quite justifiably.

In my last article I said that I favoured three things—first, the legal punishment of deliberately false information; secondly, a distinction, in the matter of reported immorality, between those sins which any healthy man can see in himself and those which he had better not see anywhere; and thirdly, an absolute insistence in the great majority of cases upon the signing of articles. It was at this point that I was cut short, I will not say by the law of space, but rather by my own lawlessness in the matter of space. In any case, there is something more that ought to be said.

It would be an exaggeration to say that I hope some day to see an anonymous article counted as dishonourable as an anonymous letter. For some time to come, the idea of the leading article, expressing the policy of the whole paper, must necessarily remain legitimate; at any rate, we have all written such leading articles, and should never think the worse of any one for writing one. But I should certainly say that writing anonymously ought to have some definite excuse, such as that of the leading article. Writing anonymously ought to be the exception; writing a signed article ought to be the rule. And anonymity ought to be not only an exception, but an accidental exception; a man ought always to be ready to say what anonymous article he had written. The journalistic habit of counting it something sacred to keep secret the origin of an article is simply part of the conspiracy which seeks to put us who are journalists in the position of a much worse sort of Jesuits or Freemasons.

As has often been said, anonymity would be all very well if one could for a moment imagine that it was established from good motives. Suppose, for instance, that we were all quite certain that the men on the Thunderer newspaper were a band of brave young idealists who were so eager to overthrow Socialism, Municipal and National, that they did not care to which of them especially was given the glory of striking it down. Unfortunately, however, we do not believe this. What we believe, or, rather, what we know, is that the attack on Socialism
in the Thunderer arises from a chaos of inconsistent and mostly evil motives, any
one of which would lose simply by being named. A jerry–builder whose houses
have been condemned writes anonymously and becomes the Thunderer. A
Socialist who has quarrelled with the other Socialists writes anonymously, and
he becomes the Thunderer. A monopolist who has lost his monopoly, and a
demagogue who has lost his mob, can both write anonymously and become the
same newspaper. It is quite true that there is a young and beautiful fanaticism in
which men do not care to reveal their names. But there is a more elderly and a
much more common excitement in which men do not dare to reveal them.

Then there is another rule for making journalism honest on which I should like
to insist absolutely. I should like it to be a fixed thing that the name of the
proprietor as well as the editor should be printed upon every paper. If the paper
is owned by shareholders, let there be a list of shareholders. If (as is far more
common in this singularly undemocratic age) it is owned by one man, let that
one man’s name be printed on the paper, if possible in large red letters. Then, if
there are any obvious interests being served, we shall know that they are being
served. My friends in Manchester are in a terrible state of excitement about the
power of brewers and the dangers of admitting them to public office. But at
least, if a man has controlled politics through beer, people generally know it: the
subject of beer is too fascinating for any one to miss such personal peculiarities.
But a man may control politics through journalism, and no ordinary English
citizen know that he is controlling them at all. Again and again in the lists of
Birthday Honours you and I have seen some Mr. Robinson suddenly elevated to
the Peerage without any apparent reason. Even the Society papers (which we
read with avidity) could tell us nothing about him except that he was a sportsman
or a kind landlord, or interested in the breeding of badgers. Now I should like the
name of that Mr. Robinson to be already familiar to the British public. I should
like them to know already the public services for which they have to thank him. I
should like them to have seen the name already on the outside of that organ of
public opinion called Tootsie’s Tips, or The Boy Blackmailer, or Nosey Knows,
that bright little financial paper which did so much for the Empire and which so
narrowly escaped a criminal prosecution. If they had seen it thus, they would
estimate more truly and tenderly the full value of the statement in the Society
paper that he is a true gentleman and a sound Churchman.

Finally, it should be practically imposed by custom (it so happens that it could
not possibly be imposed by law) that letters of definite and practical complaint
should be necessarily inserted by any editor in any paper. Editors have grown
very much too lax in this respect. The old editor used dimly to regard himself as
an unofficial public servant for the transmitting of public news. If he suppressed
anything, he was supposed to have some special reason for doing so; as that the
material was actually libellous or literally indecent. But the modern editor
regards himself far too much as a kind of original artist, who can select and
suppress facts with the arbitrary ease of a poet or a caricaturist. He “makes up”
the paper as man “makes up” a fairy tale, he considers his newspaper solely as a
work of art, meant to give pleasure, not to give news. He puts in this one letter
because he thinks it clever. He puts in these three or four letters because he
thinks them silly. He suppresses this article because he thinks it wrong. He
suppresses this other and more dangerous article because he thinks it right. The
old idea that he is simply a mode of the expression of the public, an “organ” of
opinion, seems to have entirely vanished from his mind. To–day the editor is not
only the organ, but the man who plays on the organ. For in all our modern
movements we move away from Democracy.

This is the whole danger of our time. There is a difference between the
oppression which has been too common in the past and the oppression which
seems only too probable in the future. Oppression in the past, has commonly
been an individual matter. The oppressors were as simple as the oppressed, and
as lonely. The aristocrat sometimes hated his inferiors; he always hated his
equals. The plutocrat was an individualist. But in our time even the plutocrat has
become a Socialist. They have science and combination, and may easily
inaugurate a much greater tyranny than the world has ever seen.
ON THE CRYPTIC AND THE ELLIPTIC

Surely the art of reporting speeches is in a strange state of degeneration. We should not object, perhaps, to the reporter’s making the speeches much shorter than they are; but we do object to his making all the speeches much worse than they are. And the method which he employs is one which is dangerously unjust. When a statesman or philosopher makes an important speech, there are several courses which the reporter might take without being unreasonable. Perhaps the most reasonable course of all would be not to report the speech at all. Let the world live and love, marry and give in marriage, without that particular speech, as they did (in some desperate way) in the days when there were no newspapers. A second course would be to report a small part of it; but to get that right. A third course, far better if you can do it, is to understand the main purpose and argument of the speech, and report that in clear and logical language of your own. In short, the three possible methods are, first, to leave the man’s speech alone; second, to report what he says or some complete part of what he says; and third, to report what he means. But the present way of reporting speeches (mainly created, I think, by the scrappy methods of the Daily Mail) is something utterly different from both these ways, and quite senseless and misleading.

The present method is this: the reporter sits listening to a tide of words which he does not try to understand, and does not, generally speaking, even try to take down; he waits until something occurs in the speech which for some reason sounds funny, or memorable, or very exaggerated, or, perhaps, merely concrete; then he writes it down and waits for the next one. If the orator says that the Premier is like a porpoise in the sea under some special circumstances, the reporter gets in the porpoise even if he leaves out the Premier. If the orator begins by saying that Mr. Chamberlain is rather like a violoncello, the reporter does not even wait to hear why he is like a violoncello. He has got hold of something material, and so he is quite happy. The strong words all are put in; the chain of thought is left out. If the orator uses the word “donkey,” down goes the word “donkey.” If the orator uses the word “damnable,” down goes the word “damnable.” They follow each other so abruptly in the report that it is often hard to discover the fascinating fact as to what was damnable or who was being compared with a donkey. And the whole line of argument in which these things occurred is entirely lost. I have before me a newspaper report of a speech by Mr. Bernard Shaw, of which one complete and separate paragraph runs like this
“Capital meant spare money over and above one’s needs. Their country was not really their country at all except in patriotic songs.”

I am well enough acquainted with the whole map of Mr. Bernard Shaw’s philosophy to know that those two statements might have been related to each other in a hundred ways. But I think that if they were read by an ordinary intelligent man, who happened not to know Mr. Shaw’s views, he would form no impression at all except that Mr. Shaw was a lunatic of more than usually abrupt conversation and disconnected mind. The other two methods would certainly have done Mr. Shaw more justice: the reporter should either have taken down verbatim what the speaker really said about Capital, or have given an outline of the way in which this idea was connected with the idea about patriotic songs.

But we have not the advantage of knowing what Mr. Shaw really did say, so we had better illustrate the different methods from something that we do know. Most of us, I suppose, know Mark Antony’s Funeral Speech in “Julius Cæsar.” Now Mark Antony would have no reason to complain if he were not reported at all; if the Daily Pilum or the Morning Fasces, or whatever it was, confined itself to saying, “Mr. Mark Antony also spoke,” or “Mr. Mark Antony, having addressed the audience, the meeting broke up in some confusion.” The next honest method, worthy of a noble Roman reporter, would be that since he could not report the whole of the speech, he should report some of the speech. He might say—”Mr. Mark Antony, in the course of his speech, said—’ When that the poor have cried Cæsar hath wept: Ambition should be made of sterner stuff.’”

In that case one good, solid argument of Mark Antony would be correctly reported. The third and far higher course for the Roman reporter would be to give a philosophical statement of the purport of the speech. As thus—”Mr. Mark Antony, in the course of a powerful speech, conceded the high motives of the Republican leaders, and disclaimed any intention of raising the people against them; he thought, however, that many instances could be quoted against the theory of Cæsar’s ambition, and he concluded by reading, at the request of the audience, the will of Cæsar, which proved that he had the most benevolent designs towards the Roman people.” That is (I admit) not quite so fine as Shakspere, but it is a statement of the man’s political position. But if a Daily Mail reporter were sent to take down Antony’s oration, he would simply wait for any expressions that struck him as odd and put them down one after another without any logical connection at all. It would turn out something like this: “Mr. Mark Antony wished for his audience’s ears. He had thrice offered Cæsar a
crown. Cæsar was like a deer. If he were Brutus he would put a wound in every
tongue. The stones of Rome would mutiny. See what a rent the envious Casca
paid. Brutus was Cæsar’s angel. The right honourable gentleman concluded by
saying that he and the audience had all fallen down.” That is the report of a
political speech in a modern, progressive, or American manner, and I wonder
whether the Romans would have put up with it.

The reports of the debates in the Houses of Parliament are constantly growing
smaller and smaller in our newspapers. Perhaps this is partly because the
speeches are growing duller and duller. I think in some degree the two things act
and re–act on each other. For fear of the newspapers politicians are dull, and at
last they are too dull even for the newspapers. The speeches in our time are more
careful and elaborate, because they are meant to be read, and not to be heard.
And exactly because they are more careful and elaborate, they are not so likely
to be worthy of a careful and elaborate report. They are not interesting enough.
So the moral cowardice of modern politicians has, after all, some punishment
attached to it by the silent anger of heaven. Precisely because our political
speeches are meant to be reported, they are not worth reporting. Precisely
because they are carefully designed to be read, nobody reads them.

Thus we may concede that politicians have done something towards degrading
journalism. It was not entirely done by us, the journalists. But most of it was. It
was mostly the fruit of our first and most natural sin–the habit of regarding
ourselves as conjurers rather than priests, for the definition is that a conjurer is
apart from his audience, while a priest is a part of his. The conjurer despises his
congregation; if the priest despises any one, it must be himself. The curse of all
journalism, but especially of that yellow journalism which is the shame of our
profession, is that we think ourselves cleverer than the people for whom we
write, whereas, in fact, we are generally even stupider. But this insolence has its
Nemesis; and that Nemesis is well illustrated in this matter of reporting.

For the journalist, having grown accustomed to talking down to the public,
commonly talks too low at last, and becomes merely barbaric and unintelligible.
By his very efforts to be obvious he becomes obscure. This just punishment may
specially be noticed in the case of those staggering and staring headlines which
American journalism introduced and which some English journalism imitates. I
once saw a headline in a London paper which ran simply thus: “Dobbin’s Little
Mary.” This was intended to be familiar and popular, and therefore, presumably,
lucid. But it was some time before I realised, after reading about half the printed
matter underneath, that it had something to do with the proper feeding of horses.
At first sight, I took it, as the historical leader of the future will certainly take it, as containing some allusion to the little daughter who so monopolised the affections of the Major at the end of “Vanity Fair.” The Americans carry to an even wilder extreme this darkness by excess of light. You may find a column in an American paper headed “Poet Brown Off Orange–flowers,” or “Senator Robinson Shoehorns Hats Now,” and it may be quite a long time before the full meaning breaks upon you: it has not broken upon me yet.

And something of this intellectual vengeance pursues also those who adopt the modern method of reporting speeches. They also become mystical, simply by trying to be vulgar. They also are condemned to be always trying to write like George R. Sims, and succeeding, in spite of themselves, in writing like Maeterlinck. That combination of words which I have quoted from an alleged speech of Mr. Bernard Shaw’s was written down by the reporter with the idea that he was being particularly plain and democratic. But, as a matter of fact, if there is any connection between the two sentences, it must be something as dark as the deepest roots of Browning, or something as invisible as the most airy filaments of Meredith. To be simple and to be democratic are two very honourable and austere achievements; and it is not given to all the snobs and self–seekers to achieve them. High above even Maeterlinck or Meredith stand those, like Homer and Milton, whom no one can misunderstand. And Homer and Milton are not only better poets than Browning (great as he was), but they would also have been very much better journalists than the young men on the Daily Mail.

As it is, however, this misrepresentation of speeches is only a part of a vast journalistic misrepresentation of all life as it is. Journalism is popular, but it is popular mainly as fiction. Life is one world, and life seen in the newspapers another; the public enjoys both, but it is more or less conscious of the difference. People do not believe, for instance, that the debates in the House of Commons are as dramatic as they appear in the daily papers. If they did they would go, not to the daily paper, but to the House of Commons. The galleries would be crowded every night as they were in the French Revolution; for instead of seeing a printed story for a penny they would be seeing an acted drama for nothing. But the, people know in their hearts that journalism is a conventional art like any other, that it selects, heightens, and falsifies. Only its Nemesis is the same as that of other arts: if it loses all care for truth it loses all form likewise. The modern who paints too cleverly produces a picture of a cow which might be the earthquake at San Francisco. And the journalist who reports a speech too
cleverly makes it mean nothing at all.
THE WORSHIP OF THE WEALTHY

There has crept, I notice, into our literature and journalism a new way of flattering the wealthy and the great. In more straightforward times flattery itself was more straight–forward; falsehood itself was more true. A poor man wishing to please a rich man simply said that he was the wisest, bravest, tallest, strongest, most benevolent and most beautiful of mankind; and as even the rich man probably knew that he wasn’t that, the thing did the less harm. When courtiers sang the praises of a King they attributed to him things that were entirely improbable, as that he resembled the sun at noonday, that they had to shade their eyes when he entered the room, that his people could not breathe without him, or that he had with his single sword conquered Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. The safety of this method was its artificiality; between the King and his public image there was really no relation. But the moderns have invented a much subtler and more poisonous kind of eulogy. The modern method is to take the prince or rich man, to give a credible picture of his type of personality, as that he is business–like, or a sportsman, or fond of art, or convivial, or reserved; and then enormously exaggerate the value and importance of these natural qualities. Those who praise Mr. Carnegie do not say that he is as wise as Solomon and as brave as Mars; I wish they did. It would be the next most honest thing to giving their real reason for praising him, which is simply that he has money. The journalists who write about Mr. Pierpont Morgan do not say that he is as beautiful as Apollo; I wish they did. What they do is to take the rich man’s superficial life and manner, clothes, hobbies, love of cats, dislike of doctors, or what not; and then with the assistance of this realism make the man out to be a prophet and a saviour of his kind, whereas he is merely a private and stupid man who happens to like cats or to dislike doctors. The old flatterer took for granted that the King was an ordinary man, and set to work to make him out extraordinary. The newer and cleverer flatterer takes for granted that he is extraordinary, and that therefore even ordinary things about him will be of interest.

I have noticed one very amusing way in which this is done. I notice the method applied to about six of the wealthiest men in England in a book of interviews published by an able and well–known journalist. The flatterer contrives to combine strict truth of fact with a vast atmosphere of awe and mystery by the simple operation of dealing almost entirely in negatives. Suppose
you are writing a sympathetic study of Mr. Pierpont Morgan. Perhaps there is not much to say about what he does think, or like, or admire; but you can suggest whole vistas of his taste and philosophy by talking a great deal about what he does not think, or like, or admire. You say of him—"But little attracted to the most recent schools of German philosophy, he stands almost as resolutely aloof from the tendencies of transcendental Pantheism as from the narrower ecstasies of Neo-Catholicism." Or suppose I am called upon to praise the charwoman who has just come into my house, and who certainly deserves it much more. I say—"It would be a mistake to class Mrs. Higgs among the followers of Loisy; her position is in many ways different; nor is she wholly to be identified with the concrete Hebraism of Harnack." It is a splendid method, as it gives the flatterer an opportunity of talking about something else besides the subject of the flattery, and it gives the subject of the flattery a rich, if somewhat bewildered, mental glow, as of one who has somehow gone through agonies of philosophical choice of which he was previously unaware. It is a splendid method; but I wish it were applied sometimes to charwomen rather than only to millionaires.

There is another way of flattering important people which has become very common, I notice, among writers in the newspapers and elsewhere. It consists in applying to them the phrases “simple,” or “quiet,” or “modest,” without any sort of meaning or relation to the person to whom they are applied. To be simple is the best thing in the world; to be modest is the next best thing. I am not so sure about being quiet. I am rather inclined to think that really modest people make a great deal of noise. It is quite self–evident that really simple people make a great deal of noise. But simplicity and modesty, at least, are very rare and royal human virtues, not to be lightly talked about. Few human beings, and at rare intervals, have really risen into being modest; not one man in ten or in twenty has by long wars become simple, as an actual old soldier does by long wars become simple. These virtues are not things to fling about as mere flattery; many prophets and righteous men have desired to see these things and have not seen them. But in the description of the births, lives, and deaths of very luxurious men they are used incessantly and quite without thought. If a journalist has to describe a great politician or financier (the things are substantially the same) entering a room or walking down a thoroughfare, he always says, “Mr. Midas was quietly dressed in a black frock coat, a white waistcoat, and light grey trousers, with a plain green tie and simple flower in his button–hole.” As if any one would expect him to have a crimson frock coat or spangled trousers. As if any one would expect him to have a burning Catherine wheel in his button–hole.
But this process, which is absurd enough when applied to the ordinary and external lives of worldly people, becomes perfectly intolerable when it is applied, as it always is applied, to the one episode which is serious even in the lives of politicians. I mean their death. When we have been sufficiently bored with the account of the simple costume of the millionaire, which is generally about as complicated as any that he could assume without being simply thought mad; when we have been told about the modest home of the millionaire, a home which is generally much too immodest to be called a home at all; when we have followed him through all these unmeaning eulogies, we are always asked last of all to admire his quiet funeral. I do not know what else people think a funeral should be except quiet. Yet again and again, over the grave of every one of those sad rich men, for whom one should surely feel, first and last, a speechless pity—over the grave of Beit, over the grave of Whiteley—this sickening nonsense about modesty and simplicity has been poured out. I well remember that when Beit was buried, the papers said that the mourning-coaches contained everybody of importance, that the floral tributes were sumptuous, splendid, intoxicating; but, for all that, it was a simple and quiet funeral. What, in the name of Acheron, did they expect it to be? Did they think there would be human sacrifice—the immolation of Oriental slaves upon the tomb? Did they think that long rows of Oriental dancing-girls would sway hither and thither in an ecstasy of lament? Did they look for the funeral games of Patroclus? I fear they had no such splendid and pagan meaning. I fear they were only using the words “quiet” and “modest” as words to fill up a page—a mere piece of the automatic hypocrisy which does become too common among those who have to write rapidly and often. The word “modest” will soon become like the word “honourable,” which is said to be employed by the Japanese before any word that occurs in a polite sentence, as “Put honourable umbrella in honourable umbrella—stand;” or “condescend to clean honourable boots.” We shall read in the future that the modest King went out in his modest crown, clad from head to foot in modest gold and attended with his ten thousand modest earls, their swords modestly drawn. No! if we have to pay for splendour let us praise it as splendour, not as simplicity. When next I meet a rich man I intend to walk up to him in the street and address him with Oriental hyperbole. He will probably run away.
In these days we are accused of attacking science because we want it to be scientific. Surely there is not any undue disrespect to our doctor in saying that he is our doctor, not our priest, or our wife, or ourself. It is not the business of the doctor to say that we must go to a watering-place; it is his affair to say that certain results of health will follow if we do go to a watering-place. After that, obviously, it is for us to judge. Physical science is like simple addition: it is either infallible or it is false. To mix science up with philosophy is only to produce a philosophy that has lost all its ideal value and a science that has lost all its practical value. I want my private physician to tell me whether this or that food will kill me. It is for my private philosopher to tell me whether I ought to be killed. I apologise for stating all these truisms. But the truth is, that I have just been reading a thick pamphlet written by a mass of highly intelligent men who seem never to have heard of any of these truisms in their lives.

Those who detest the harmless writer of this column are generally reduced (in their final ecstasy of anger) to calling him “brilliant;” which has long ago in our journalism become a mere expression of contempt. But I am afraid that even this disdainful phrase does me too much honour. I am more and more convinced that I suffer, not from a shiny or showy impertinence, but from a simplicity that verges upon imbecility. I think more and more that I must be very dull, and that everybody else in the modern world must be very clever. I have just been reading this important compilation, sent to me in the name of a number of men for whom I have a high respect, and called “New Theology and Applied Religion.” And it is literally true that I have read through whole columns of the things without knowing what the people were talking about. Either they must be talking about some black and bestial religion in which they were brought up, and of which I never even heard, or else they must be talking about some blazing and blinding vision of God which they have found, which I have never found, and which by its very splendour confuses their logic and confounds their speech. But the best instance I can quote of the thing is in connection with this matter of the business of physical science on the earth, of which I have just spoken. The following words are written over the signature of a man whose intelligence I respect, and I cannot make head or tail of them—“When modern science declared that the cosmic process knew nothing of a historical event corresponding to a Fall, but told, on the contrary, the story of an incessant rise in
the scale of being, it was quite plain that the Pauline scheme—I mean the argumentative processes of Paul’s scheme of salvation—had lost its very foundation; for was not that foundation the total depravity of the human race inherited from their first parents? . . . But now there was no Fall; there was no total depravity, or imminent danger of endless doom; and, the basis gone, the superstructure followed.”

It is written with earnestness and in excellent English; it must mean something. But what can it mean? How could physical science prove that man is not depraved? You do not cut a man open to find his sins. You do not boil him until he gives forth the unmistakable green fumes of depravity. How could physical science find any traces of a moral fall? What traces did the writer expect to find? Did he expect to find a fossil Eve with a fossil apple inside her? Did he suppose that the ages would have spared for him a complete skeleton of Adam attached to a slightly faded fig-leaf? The whole paragraph which I have quoted is simply a series of inconsequent sentences, all quite untrue in themselves and all quite irrelevant to each other. Science never said that there could have been no Fall. There might have been ten Falls, one on top of the other, and the thing would have been quite consistent with everything that we know from physical science. Humanity might have grown morally worse for millions of centuries, and the thing would in no way have contradicted the principle of Evolution. Men of science (not being raving lunatics) never said that there had been “an incessant rise in the scale of being;” for an incessant rise would mean a rise without any relapse or failure; and physical evolution is full of relapse and failure. There were certainly some physical Falls; there may have been any number of moral Falls. So that, as I have said, I am honestly bewildered as to the meaning of such passages as this, in which the advanced person writes that because geologists know nothing about the Fall, therefore any doctrine of depravity is untrue. Because science has not found something which obviously it could not find, therefore something entirely different—the psychological sense of evil—is untrue. You might sum up this writer’s argument abruptly, but accurately, in some way like this—”We have not dug up the bones of the Archangel Gabriel, who presumably had none, therefore little boys, left to themselves, will not be selfish.” To me it is all wild and whirling; as if a man said—”The plumber can find nothing wrong with our piano; so I suppose that my wife does love me.”

I am not going to enter here into the real doctrine of original sin, or into that probably false version of it which the New Theology writer calls the doctrine of
depravity. But whatever else the worst doctrine of depravity may have been, it was a product of spiritual conviction; it had nothing to do with remote physical origins. Men thought mankind wicked because they felt wicked themselves. If a man feels wicked, I cannot see why he should suddenly feel good because somebody tells him that his ancestors once had tails. Man’s primary purity and innocence may have dropped off with his tail, for all anybody knows. The only thing we all know about that primary purity and innocence is that we have not got it. Nothing can be, in the strictest sense of the word, more comic than to set so shadowy a thing as the conjectures made by the vaguer anthropologists about primitive man against so solid a thing as the human sense of sin. By its nature the evidence of Eden is something that one cannot find. By its nature the evidence of sin is something that one cannot help finding.

Some statements I disagree with; others I do not understand. If a man says, “I think the human race would be better if it abstained totally from fermented liquor,” I quite understand what he means, and how his view could be defended. If a man says, “I wish to abolish beer because I am a temperance man,” his remark conveys no meaning to my mind. It is like saying, “I wish to abolish roads because I am a moderate walker.” If a man says, “I am not a Trinitarian,” I understand. But if he says (as a lady once said to me), “I believe in the Holy Ghost in a spiritual sense,” I go away dazed. In what other sense could one believe in the Holy Ghost? And I am sorry to say that this pamphlet of progressive religious views is full of baffling observations of that kind. What can people mean when they say that science has disturbed their view of sin? What sort of view of sin can they have had before science disturbed it? Did they think that it was something to eat? When people say that science has shaken their faith in immortality, what do they mean? Did they think that immortality was a gas?

Of course the real truth is that science has introduced no new principle into the matter at all. A man can be a Christian to the end of the world, for the simple reason that a man could have been an Atheist from the beginning of it. The materialism of things is on the face of things; it does not require any science to find it out. A man who has lived and loved falls down dead and the worms eat him. That is Materialism if you like. That is Atheism if you like. If mankind has believed in spite of that, it can believe in spite of anything. But why our human lot is made any more hopeless because we know the names of all the worms who eat him, or the names of all the parts of him that they eat, is to a thoughtful mind somewhat difficult to discover. My chief objection to these semi–scientific revolutionists is that they are not at all revolutionary. They are the party of
platitude. They do not shake religion: rather religion seems to shake them. They can only answer the great paradox by repeating the truism.
THE METHUSELAHITE

I saw in a newspaper paragraph the other day the following entertaining and deeply philosophical incident. A man was enlisting as a soldier at Portsmouth, and some form was put before him to be filled up, common, I suppose, to all such cases, in which was, among other things, an inquiry about what was his religion. With an equal and ceremonial gravity the man wrote down the word “Methuselahite.” Whoever looks over such papers must, I should imagine, have seen some rum religions in his time; unless the Army is going to the dogs. But with all his specialist knowledge he could not “place” Methuselahism among what Bossuet called the variations of Protestantism. He felt a fervid curiosity about the tenets and tendencies of the sect; and he asked the soldier what it meant. The soldier replied that it was his religion “to live as long as he could.”

Now, considered as an incident in the religious history of Europe, that answer of that soldier was worth more than a hundred cartloads of quarterly and monthly and weekly and daily papers discussing religious problems and religious books. Every day the daily paper reviews some new philosopher who has some new religion; and there is not in the whole two thousand words of the whole two columns one word as witty as or wise as that word “Methuselahite.” The whole meaning of literature is simply to cut a long story short; that is why our modern books of philosophy are never literature. That soldier had in him the very soul of literature; he was one of the great phrase–makers of modern thought, like Victor Hugo or Disraeli. He found one word that defines the paganism of to–day.

Henceforward, when the modern philosophers come to me with their new religions (and there is always a kind of queue of them waiting all the way down the street) I shall anticipate their circumlocutions and be able to cut them short with a single inspired word. One of them will begin, “The New Religion, which is based upon that Primordial Energy in Nature. . . .” “Methuselahite,” I shall say sharply; “good morning.” “Human Life,” another will say, “Human Life, the only ultimate sanctity, freed from creed and dogma. . . .” “Methuselahite!” I shall yell. “Out you go!” “My religion is the Religion of Joy,” a third will explain (a bald old man with a cough and tinted glasses), “the Religion of Physical Pride and Rapture, and my. . . .” “Methuselahite!” I shall cry again, and I shall slap him boisterously on the back, and he will fall down. Then a pale young poet with serpentine hair will come and say to me (as one did only the
other day): “Moods and impressions are the only realities, and these are constantly and wholly changing. I could hardly therefore define my religion...” “I can,” I should say, somewhat sternly. “Your religion is to live a long time; and if you stop here a moment longer you won’t fulfil it.”

A new philosophy generally means in practice the praise of some old vice. We have had the sophist who defends cruelty, and calls it masculinity. We have had the sophist who defends profligacy, and calls it the liberty of the emotions. We have had the sophist who defends idleness, and calls it art. It will almost certainly happen—it can almost certainly be prophesied—that in this saturnalia of sophistry there will at some time or other arise a sophist who desires to idealise cowardice. And when we are once in this unhealthy world of mere wild words, what a vast deal there would be to say for cowardice! “Is not life a lovely thing and worth saving?” the soldier would say as he ran away. “Should I not prolong the exquisite miracle of consciousness?” the householder would say as he hid under the table. “As long as there are roses and lilies on the earth shall I not remain here?” would come the voice of the citizen from under the bed. It would be quite as easy to defend the coward as a kind of poet and mystic as it has been, in many recent books, to defend the emotionalist as a kind of poet and mystic, or the tyrant as a kind of poet and mystic. When that last grand sophistry and morbidity is preached in a book or on a platform, you may depend upon it there will be a great stir in its favour, that is, a great stir among the little people who live among books and platforms. There will be a new great Religion, the Religion of Methuselahism: with pomps and priests and altars. Its devout crusaders will vow themselves in thousands with a great vow to live long. But there is one comfort: they won’t.

For, indeed, the weakness of this worship of mere natural life (which is a common enough creed to-day) is that it ignores the paradox of courage and fails in its own aim. As a matter of fact, no men would be killed quicker than the Methuselahites. The paradox of courage is that a man must be a little careless of his life even in order to keep it. And in the very case I have quoted we may see an example of how little the theory of Methuselahism really inspires our best life. For there is one riddle in that case which cannot easily be cleared up. If it was the man’s religion to live as long as he could, why on earth was he enlisting as a soldier?
SPIRITUALISM

I have received a letter from a gentleman who is very indignant at what he considers my flippancy in disregarding or degrading Spiritualism. I thought I was defending Spiritualism; but I am rather used to being accused of mocking the thing that I set out to justify. My fate in most controversies is rather pathetic. It is an almost invariable rule that the man with whom I don’t agree thinks I am making a fool of myself, and the man with whom I do agree thinks I am making a fool of him. There seems to be some sort of idea that you are not treating a subject properly if you eulogise it with fantastic terms or defend it by grotesque examples. Yet a truth is equally solemn whatever figure or example its exponent adopts. It is an equally awful truth that four and four make eight, whether you reckon the thing out in eight onions or eight angels, or eight bricks or eight bishops, or eight minor poets or eight pigs. Similarly, if it be true that God made all things, that grave fact can be asserted by pointing at a star or by waving an umbrella. But the case is stronger than this. There is a distinct philosophical advantage in using grotesque terms in a serious discussion.

I think seriously, on the whole, that the more serious is the discussion the more grotesque should be the terms. For this, as I say, there is an evident reason. For a subject is really solemn and important in so far as it applies to the whole cosmos, or to some great spheres and cycles of experience at least. So far as a thing is universal it is serious. And so far as a thing is universal it is full of comic things. If you take a small thing, it may be entirely serious: Napoleon, for instance, was a small thing, and he was serious: the same applies to microbes. If you isolate a thing, you may get the pure essence of gravity. But if you take a large thing (such as the Solar System) it must be comic, at least in parts. The germs are serious, because they kill you. But the stars are funny, because they give birth to life, and life gives birth to fun. If you have, let us say, a theory about man, and if you can only prove it by talking about Plato and George Washington, your theory may be a quite frivolous thing. But if you can prove it by talking about the butler or the postman, then it is serious, because it is universal. So far from it being irreverent to use silly metaphors on serious questions, it is one’s duty to use silly metaphors on serious questions. It is the test of one’s seriousness. It is the test of a responsible religion or theory whether it can take examples from pots and pans and boots and butter-tubs. It is the test of a good philosophy whether you can defend it grotesquely. It is the test of a
good religion whether you can joke about it.

When I was a very young journalist I used to be irritated at a peculiar habit of printers, a habit which most persons of a tendency similar to mine have probably noticed also. It goes along with the fixed belief of printers that to be a Rationalist is the same thing as to be a Nationalist. I mean the printer’s tendency to turn the word “cosmic” into the word “comic.” It annoyed me at the time. But since then I have come to the conclusion that the printers were right. The democracy is always right. Whatever is cosmic is comic.

Moreover, there is another reason that makes it almost inevitable that we should defend grotesquely what we believe seriously. It is that all grotesqueness is itself intimately related to seriousness. Unless a thing is dignified, it cannot be undignified. Why is it funny that a man should sit down suddenly in the street? There is only one possible or intelligent reason: that man is the image of God. It is not funny that anything else should fall down; only that a man should fall down. No one sees anything funny in a tree falling down. No one sees a delicate absurdity in a stone falling down. No man stops in the road and roars with laughter at the sight of the snow coming down. The fall of thunderbolts is treated with some gravity. The fall of roofs and high buildings is taken seriously. It is only when a man tumbles down that we laugh. Why do we laugh? Because it is a grave religious matter: it is the Fall of Man. Only man can be absurd: for only man can be dignified.

The above, which occupies the great part of my article, is a parentheticals. It is time that I returned to my choleric correspondent who rebuked me for being too frivolous about the problem of Spiritualism. My correspondent, who is evidently an intelligent man, is very angry with me indeed. He uses the strongest language. He says I remind him of a brother of his: which seems to open an abyss or vista of infamy. The main substance of his attack resolves itself into two propositions. First, he asks me what right I have to talk about Spiritualism at all, as I admit I have never been to a séance. This is all very well, but there are a good many things to which I have never been, but I have not the smallest intention of leaving off talking about them. I refuse (for instance) to leave off talking about the Siege of Troy. I decline to be mute in the matter of the French Revolution. I will not be silenced on the late indefensible assassination of Julius Cæsar. If nobody has any right to judge of Spiritualism except a man who has been to a séance, the results, logically speaking, are rather serious: it would almost seem as if nobody had any right to judge of Christianity who had not been to the first meeting at Pentecost. Which would be dreadful. I conceive myself capable of
forming my opinion of Spiritualism without seeing spirits, just as I form my opinion of the Japanese War without seeing the Japanese, or my opinion of American millionaires without (thank God) seeing an American millionaire. Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed: a passage which some have considered as a prophecy of modern journalism.

But my correspondent’s second objection is more important. He charges me with actually ignoring the value of communication (if it exists) between this world and the next. I do not ignore it. But I do say this—That a different principle attaches to investigation in this spiritual field from investigation in any other. If a man baits a line for fish, the fish will come, even if he declares there are no such things as fishes. If a man limes a twig for birds, the birds will be caught, even if he thinks it superstitious to believe in birds at all. But a man cannot bait a line for souls. A man cannot lime a twig to catch gods. All wise schools have agreed that this latter capture depends to some extent on the faith of the capturer. So it comes to this: If you have no faith in the spirits your appeal is in vain; and if you have—is it needed? If you do not believe, you cannot. If you do—you will not.

That is the real distinction between investigation in this department and investigation in any other. The priest calls to the goddess, for the same reason that a man calls to his wife, because he knows she is there. If a man kept on shouting out very loud the single word “Maria,” merely with the object of discovering whether if he did it long enough some woman of that name would come and marry him, he would be more or less in the position of the modern spiritualist. The old religionist cried out for his God. The new religionist cries out for some god to be his. The whole point of religion as it has hitherto existed in the world was that you knew all about your gods, even before you saw them, if indeed you ever did. Spiritualism seems to me absolutely right on all its mystical side. The supernatural part of it seems to me quite natural. The incredible part of it seems to me obviously true. But I think it so far dangerous or unsatisfactory that it is in some degree scientific. It inquires whether its gods are worth inquiring into. A man (of a certain age) may look into the eyes of his lady—love to see that they are beautiful. But no normal lady will allow that young man to look into her eyes to see whether they are beautiful. The same vanity and idiosyncrasy has been generally observed in gods. Praise them; or leave them alone; but do not look for them unless you know they are there. Do not look for them unless you want them. It annoys them very much.
THE ERROR OF IMPARTIALITY

The refusal of the jurors in the Thaw trial to come to an agreement is certainly a somewhat amusing sequel to the frenzied and even fantastic caution with which they were selected. Jurymen were set aside for reasons which seem to have only the very wildest relation to the case—reasons which we cannot conceive as giving any human being a real bias. It may be questioned whether the exaggerated theory of impartiality in an arbiter or juryman may not be carried so far as to be more unjust than partiality itself. What people call impartiality may simply mean indifference, and what people call partiality may simply mean mental activity. It is sometimes made an objection, for instance, to a juror that he has formed some primâ–facie opinion upon a case: if he can be forced under sharp questioning to admit that he has formed such an opinion, he is regarded as manifestly unfit to conduct the inquiry. Surely this is unsound. If his bias is one of interest, of class, or creed, or notorious propaganda, then that fact certainly proves that he is not an impartial arbiter. But the mere fact that he did form some temporary impression from the first facts as far as he knew them—this does not prove that he is not an impartial arbiter—it only proves that he is not a cold–blooded fool.

If we walk down the street, taking all the jurymen who have not formed opinions and leaving all the jurymen who have formed opinions, it seems highly probable that we shall only succeed in taking all the stupid jurymen and leaving all the thoughtful ones. Provided that the opinion formed is really of this airy and abstract kind, provided that it has no suggestion of settled motive or prejudice, we might well regard it not merely as a promise of capacity, but literally as a promise of justice. The man who took the trouble to deduce from the police reports would probably be the man who would take the trouble to deduce further and different things from the evidence. The man who had the sense to form an opinion would be the man who would have the sense to alter it.

It is worth while to dwell for a moment on this minor aspect of the matter because the error about impartiality and justice is by no means confined to a criminal question. In much more serious matters it is assumed that the agnostic is impartial; whereas the agnostic is merely ignorant. The logical outcome of the fastidiousness about the Thaw jurors would be that the case ought to be tried by Esquimaux, or Hottentots, or savages from the Cannibal Islands—by some class of people who could have no conceivable interest in the parties, and moreover, no conceivable interest in the case. The pure and starry perfection of impartiality
would be reached by people who not only had no opinion before they had heard the case, but who also had no opinion after they had heard it. In the same way, there is in modern discussions of religion and philosophy an absurd assumption that a man is in some way just and well-poised because he has come to no conclusion; and that a man is in some way knocked off the list of fair judges because he has come to a conclusion. It is assumed that the sceptic has no bias; whereas he has a very obvious bias in favour of scepticism. I remember once arguing with an honest young atheist, who was very much shocked at my disputing some of the assumptions which were absolute sanctities to him (such as the quite unproved proposition of the independence of matter and the quite improbable proposition of its power to originate mind), and he at length fell back upon this question, which he delivered with an honourable heat of defiance and indignation: “Well, can you tell me any man of intellect, great in science or philosophy, who accepted the miraculous?” I said, “With pleasure. Descartes, Dr. Johnson, Newton, Faraday, Newman, Gladstone, Pasteur, Browning, Brunetiere—as many more as you please.” To which that quite admirable and idealistic young man made this astonishing reply—”Oh, but of course they had to say that; they were Christians.” First he challenged me to find a black swan, and then he ruled out all my swans because they were black. The fact that all these great intellects had come to the Christian view was somehow or other a proof either that they were not great intellects or that they had not really come to that view. The argument thus stood in a charmingly convenient form: “All men that count have come to my conclusion; for if they come to your conclusion they do not count.”

It did not seem to occur to such controversialists that if Cardinal Newman was really a man of intellect, the fact that he adhered to dogmatic religion proved exactly as much as the fact that Professor Huxley, another man of intellect, found that he could not adhere to dogmatic religion; that is to say (as I cheerfully admit), it proved precious little either way. If there is one class of men whom history has proved especially and supremely capable of going quite wrong in all directions, it is the class of highly intellectual men. I would always prefer to go by the bulk of humanity; that is why I am a democrat. But whatever be the truth about exceptional intelligence and the masses, it is manifestly most unreasonable that intelligent men should be divided upon the absurd modern principle of regarding every clever man who cannot make up his mind as an impartial judge, and regarding every clever man who can make up his mind as a servile fanatic. As it is, we seem to regard it as a positive objection to a reasoner that he has
taken one side or the other. We regard it (in other words) as a positive objection to a reasoner that he has contrived to reach the object of his reasoning. We call a man a bigot or a slave of dogma because he is a thinker who has thought thoroughly and to a definite end. We say that the juryman is not a juryman because he has brought in a verdict. We say that the judge is not a judge because he gives judgment. We say that the sincere believer has no right to vote, simply because he has voted.
PHONETIC SPELLING

A correspondent asks me to make more lucid my remarks about phonetic spelling. I have no detailed objection to items of spelling–reform; my objection is to a general principle; and it is this. It seems to me that what is really wrong with all modern and highly civilised language is that it does so largely consist of dead words. Half our speech consists of similes that remind us of no similarity; of pictorial phrases that call up no picture; of historical allusions the origin of which we have forgotten. Take any instance on which the eye happens to alight. I saw in the paper some days ago that the well–known leader of a certain religious party wrote to a supporter of his the following curious words: “I have not forgotten the talented way in which you held up the banner at Birkenhead.” Taking the ordinary vague meaning of the word “talented,” there is no coherency in the picture. The trumpets blow, the spears shake and glitter, and in the thick of the purple battle there stands a gentleman holding up a banner in a talented way. And when we come to the original force of the word “talent” the matter is worse: a talent is a Greek coin used in the New Testament as a symbol of the mental capital committed to an individual at birth. If the religious leader in question had really meant anything by his phrases, he would have been puzzled to know how a man could use a Greek coin to hold up a banner. But really he meant nothing by his phrases. “Holding up the banner” was to him a colourless term for doing the proper thing, and “talented” was a colourless term for doing it successfully.

Now my own fear touching anything in the way of phonetic spelling is that it would simply increase this tendency to use words as counters and not as coins. The original life in a word (as in the word “talent”) burns low as it is: sensible spelling might extinguish it altogether. Suppose any sentence you like: suppose a man says, “Republics generally encourage holidays.” It looks like the top line of a copy–book. Now, it is perfectly true that if you wrote that sentence exactly as it is pronounced, even by highly educated people, the sentence would run: “Ripubliks jenrally inkurrij hollidies.” It looks ugly: but I have not the smallest objection to ugliness. My objection is that these four words have each a history and hidden treasures in them: that this history and hidden treasure (which we tend to forget too much as it is) phonetic spelling tends to make us forget altogether. Republic does not mean merely a mode of political choice. Republic (as we see when we look at the structure of the word) means the Public Thing: the abstraction which is us all.
A Republican is not a man who wants a Constitution with a President. A Republican is a man who prefers to think of Government as impersonal; he is opposed to the Royalist, who prefers to think of Government as personal. Take the second word, “generally.” This is always used as meaning “in the majority of cases.” But, again, if we look at the shape and spelling of the word, we shall see that “generally” means something more like “generically,” and is akin to such words as “generation” or “regenerate.” “Pigs are generally dirty” does not mean that pigs are, in the majority of cases, dirty, but that pigs as a race or genus are dirty, that pigs as pigs are dirty—an important philosophical distinction. Take the third word, “encourage.” The word “encourage” is used in such modern sentences in the merely automatic sense of promote; to encourage poetry means merely to advance or assist poetry. But to encourage poetry means properly to put courage into poetry—a fine idea. Take the fourth word, “holidays.” As long as that word remains, it will always answer the ignorant slander which asserts that religion was opposed to human cheerfulness; that word will always assert that when a day is holy it should also be happy. Properly spelt, these words all tell a sublime story, like Westminster Abbey. Phonetically spelt, they might lose the last traces of any such story. “Generally” is an exalted metaphysical term; “jenrally” is not. If you “encourage” a man, you pour into him the chivalry of a hundred princes; this does not happen if you merely “inkurrij” him. “Republics,” if spelt phonetically, might actually forget to be public. “Holidays,” if spelt phonetically, might actually forget to be holy.

Here is a case that has just occurred. A certain magistrate told somebody whom he was examining in court that he or she “should always be polite to the police.” I do not know whether the magistrate noticed the circumstance, but the word “polite” and the word “police” have the same origin and meaning. Politeness means the atmosphere and ritual of the city, the symbol of human civilisation. The policeman means the representative and guardian of the city, the symbol of human civilisation. Yet it may be doubted whether the two ideas are commonly connected in the mind. It is probable that we often hear of politeness without thinking of a policeman; it is even possible that our eyes often alight upon a policeman without our thoughts instantly flying to the subject of politeness. Yet the idea of the sacred city is not only the link of them both, it is the only serious justification and the only serious corrective of them both. If politeness means too often a mere frippery, it is because it has not enough to do with serious patriotism and public dignity; if policemen are coarse or casual, it is because they are not sufficiently convinced that they are the servants of the
beautiful city and the agents of sweetness and light. Politeness is not really a frippery. Politeness is not really even a thing merely suave and deprecating. Politeness is an armed guard, stern and splendid and vigilant, watching over all the ways of men; in other words, politeness is a policeman. A policeman is not merely a heavy man with a truncheon: a policeman is a machine for the smoothing and sweetening of the accidents of everyday existence. In other words, a policeman is politeness; a veiled image of politeness—sometimes impenetrably veiled. But my point is here that by losing the original idea of the city, which is the force and youth of both the words, both the things actually degenerate. Our politeness loses all manliness because we forget that politeness is only the Greek for patriotism. Our policemen lose all delicacy because we forget that a policeman is only the Greek for something civilised. A policeman should often have the functions of a knight–errant. A policeman should always have the elegance of a knight–errant. But I am not sure that he would succeed any the better n remembering this obligation of romantic grace if his name were spelt phonetically, supposing that it could be spelt phonetically. Some spelling–reformers, I am told, in the poorer parts of London do spell his name phonetically, very phonetically. They call him a “pleeceman.” Thus the whole romance of the ancient city disappears from the word, and the policeman’s reverent courtesy of demeanour deserts him quite suddenly. This does seem to me the case against any extreme revolution in spelling. If you spell a word wrong you have some temptation to think it wrong.
HUMANITARIANISM AND STRENGTH

Somebody writes complaining of something I said about progress. I have forgotten what I said, but I am quite certain that it was (like a certain Mr. Douglas in a poem which I have also forgotten) tender and true. In any case, what I say now is this. Human history is so rich and complicated that you can make out a case for any course of improvement or retrogression. I could make out that the world has been growing more democratic, for the English franchise has certainly grown more democratic. I could also make out that the world has been growing more aristocratic, for the English Public Schools have certainly grown more aristocratic. I could prove the decline of militarism by the decline of flogging; I could prove the increase of militarism by the increase of standing armies and conscription. But I can prove anything in this way. I can prove that the world has always been growing greener. Only lately men have invented absinthe and the Westminster Gazette. I could prove the world has grown less green. There are no more Robin Hood foresters, and fields are being covered with houses. I could show that the world was less red with khaki or more red with the new penny stamps. But in all cases progress means progress only in some particular thing. Have you ever noticed that strange line of Tennyson, in which he confesses, half consciously, how very conventional progress is?—“Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change.”

Even in praising change, he takes for a simile the most unchanging thing. He calls our modern change a groove. And it is a groove; perhaps there was never anything so groovy.

Nothing would induce me in so idle a monologue as this to discuss adequately a great political matter like the question of the military punishments in Egypt. But I may suggest one broad reality to be observed by both sides, and which is, generally speaking, observed by neither. Whatever else is right, it is utterly wrong to employ the argument that we Europeans must do to savages and Asiatics whatever savages and Asiatics do to us. I have even seen some controversialists use the metaphor, “We must fight them with their own weapons.” Very well; let those controversialists take their metaphor, and take it literally. Let us fight the Soudanese with their own weapons. Their own weapons are large, very clumsy knives, with an occasional old-fashioned gun. Their own weapons are also torture and slavery. If we fight them with torture and slavery,
we shall be fighting badly, precisely as if we fought them with clumsy knives and old guns. That is the whole strength of our Christian civilisation, that it does fight with its own weapons and not with other people’s. It is not true that superiority suggests a tit for tat. It is not true that if a small hooligan puts his tongue out at the Lord Chief Justice, the Lord Chief Justice immediately realises that his only chance of maintaining his position is to put his tongue out at the little hooligan. The hooligan may or may not have any respect at all for the Lord Chief Justice: that is a matter which we may contentedly leave as a solemn psychological mystery. But if the hooligan has any respect at all for the Lord Chief Justice, that respect is certainly extended to the Lord Chief Justice entirely because he does not put his tongue out.

Exactly in the same way the ruder or more sluggish races regard the civilisation of Christendom. If they have any respect for it, it is precisely because it does not use their own coarse and cruel expedients. According to some modern moralists whenever Zulus cut off the heads of dead Englishmen, Englishmen must cut off the heads of dead Zulus. Whenever Arabs or Egyptians constantly use the whip to their slaves, Englishmen must use the whip to their subjects. And on a similar principle (I suppose), whenever an English Admiral has to fight cannibals the English Admiral ought to eat them. However unattractive a menu consisting entirely of barbaric kings may appear to an English gentleman, he must try to sit down to it with an appetite. He must fight the Sandwich Islanders with their own weapons; and their own weapons are knives and forks. But the truth of the matter is, of course, that to do this kind of thing is to break the whole spell of our supremacy. All the mystery of the white man, all the fearful poetry of the white man, so far as it exists in the eyes of these savages, consists in the fact that we do not do such things. The Zulus point at us and say, “Observe the advent of these inexplicable demi–gods, these magicians, who do not cut off the noses of their enemies.” The Soudanese say to each other, “This hardy people never flogs its servants; it is superior to the simplest and most obvious human pleasures.” And the cannibals say, “The austere and terrible race, the race that denies itself even boiled missionary, is upon us: let us flee.”

Whether or no these details are a little conjectural, the general proposition I suggest is the plainest common sense. The elements that make Europe upon the whole the most humanitarian civilisation are precisely the elements that make it upon the whole the strongest. For the power which makes a man able to entertain a good impulse is the same as that which enables him to make a good gun; it is imagination. It is imagination that makes a man outwit his enemy, and it is
imagination that makes him spare his enemy. It is precisely because this picturing of the other man’s point of view is in the main a thing in which Christians and Europeans specialise that Christians and Europeans, with all their faults, have carried to such perfection both the arts of peace and war.

They alone have invented machine–guns, and they alone have invented ambulances; they have invented ambulances (strange as it may sound) for the same reason for which they have invented machine–guns. Both involve a vivid calculation of remote events. It is precisely because the East, with all its wisdom, is cruel, that the East, with all its wisdom, is weak. And it is precisely because savages are pitiless that they are still–merely savages. If they could imagine their enemy’s sufferings they could also imagine his tactics. If Zulus did not cut off the Englishman’s head they might really borrow it. For if you do not understand a man you cannot crush him. And if you do understand him, very probably you will not.

When I was about seven years old I used to think that the chief modern danger was a danger of over–civilisation. I am inclined to think now that the chief modern danger is that of a slow return towards barbarism, just such a return towards barbarism as is indicated in the suggestions of barbaric retaliation of which I have just spoken. Civilisation in the best sense merely means the full authority of the human spirit over all externals. Barbarism means the worship of those externals in their crude and unconquered state. Barbarism means the worship of Nature; and in recent poetry, science, and philosophy there has been too much of the worship of Nature. Wherever men begin to talk much and with great solemnity about the forces outside man, the note of it is barbaric. When men talk much about heredity and environment they are almost barbarians. The modern men of science are many of them almost barbarians. Mr. Blatchford is in great danger of becoming a barbarian. For barbarians (especially the truly squalid and unhappy barbarians) are always talking about these scientific subjects from morning till night. That is why they remain squalid and unhappy; that is why they remain barbarians. Hottentots are always talking about heredity, like Mr. Blatchford. Sandwich Islanders are always talking about environment, like Mr. Suthers. Savages–those that are truly stunted or depraved–dedicate nearly all their tales and sayings to the subject of physical kinship, of a curse on this or that tribe, of a taint in this or that family, of the invincible law of blood, of the unavoidable evil of places. The true savage is a slave, and is always talking about what he must do; the true civilised man is a free man and is always talking about what he may do. Hence all the Zola heredity and Ibsen heredity
that has been written in our time affects me as not merely evil, but as essentially ignorant and retrogressive. This sort of science is almost the only thing that can with strict propriety be called reactionary. Scientific determinism is simply the primal twilight of all mankind; and some men seem to be returning to it.

Another savage trait of our time is the disposition to talk about material substances instead of about ideas. The old civilisation talked about the sin of gluttony or excess. We talk about the Problem of Drink—as if drink could be a problem. When people have come to call the problem of human intemperance the Problem of Drink, and to talk about curing it by attacking the drink traffic, they have reached quite a dim stage of barbarism. The thing is an inverted form of fetish worship; it is no sillier to say that a bottle is a god than to say that a bottle is a devil. The people who talk about the curse of drink will probably progress down that dark hill. In a little while we shall have them calling the practice of wife-beating the Problem of Pokers; the habit of housebreaking will be called the Problem of the Skeleton-Key Trade; and for all I know they may try to prevent forgery by shutting up all the stationers’ shops by Act of Parliament.

I cannot help thinking that there is some shadow of this uncivilised materialism lying at present upon a much more dignified and valuable cause. Every one is talking just now about the desirability of ingeminating peace and averting war. But even war and peace are physical states rather than moral states, and in talking about them only we have by no means got to the bottom of the matter. How, for instance, do we as a matter of fact create peace in one single community? We do not do it by vaguely telling every one to avoid fighting and to submit to anything that is done to him. We do it by definitely defining his rights and then undertaking to avenge his wrongs. We shall never have a common peace in Europe till we have a common principle in Europe. People talk of “The United States of Europe;” but they forget that it needed the very doctrinal “Declaration of Independence” to make the United States of America. You cannot agree about nothing any more than you can quarrel about nothing.
WINE WHEN IT IS RED

I suppose that there will be some wigs on the green in connection with the recent manifesto signed by a string of very eminent doctors on the subject of what is called “alcohol.” “Alcohol” is, to judge by the sound of it, an Arabic word, like “algebra” and “Alhambra,” those two other unpleasant things. The Alhambra in Spain I have never seen; I am told that it is a low and rambling building; I allude to the far more dignified erection in Leicester Square. If it is true, as I surmise, that “alcohol” is a word of the Arabs, it is interesting to realise that our general word for the essence of wine and beer and such things comes from a people which has made particular war upon them. I suppose that some aged Moslem chieftain sat one day at the opening of his tent and, brooding with black brows and cursing in his black beard over wine as the symbol of Christianity, racked his brains for some word ugly enough to express his racial and religious antipathy, and suddenly spat out the horrible word “alcohol.” The fact that the doctors had to use this word for the sake of scientific clearness was really a great disadvantage to them in fairly discussing the matter. For the word really involves one of those beggings of the question which make these moral matters so difficult. It is quite a mistake to suppose that, when a man desires an alcoholic drink, he necessarily desires alcohol.

Let a man walk ten miles steadily on a hot summer’s day along a dusty English road, and he will soon discover why beer was invented. The fact that beer has a very slight stimulating quality will be quite among the smallest reasons that induce him to ask for it. In short, he will not be in the least desiring alcohol; he will be desiring beer. But, of course, the question cannot be settled in such a simple way. The real difficulty which conforms everybody, and which especially conforms doctors, is that the extraordinary position of man in the physical universe makes it practically impossible to treat him in either one direction or the other in a purely physical way. Man is an exception, whatever else he is. If he is not the image of God, then he is a disease of the dust. If it is not true that a divine being fell, then we can only say that one of the animals went entirely off its head. In neither case can we really argue very much from the body of man simply considered as the body of an innocent and healthy animal. His body has got too much mixed up with his soul, as we see in the supreme instance of sex. It may be worth while uttering the warning to wealthy philanthropists and idealists that this argument from the animal should not be
thoughtlessly used, even against the atrocious evils of excess; it is an argument that proves too little or too much.

Doubtless, it is unnatural to be drunk. But then in a real sense it is unnatural to be human. Doubtless, the intemperate workman wastes his tissues in drinking; but no one knows how much the sober workman wastes his tissues by working. No one knows how much the wealthy philanthropist wastes his tissues by talking; or, in much rarer conditions, by thinking. All the human things are more dangerous than anything that affects the beasts—sex, poetry, property, religion. The real case against drunkenness is not that it calls up the beast, but that it calls up the Devil. It does not call up the beast, and if it did it would not matter much, as a rule; the beast is a harmless and rather amiable creature, as anybody can see by watching cattle. There is nothing bestial about intoxication; and certainly there is nothing intoxicating or even particularly lively about beasts. Man is always something worse or something better than an animal; and a mere argument from animal perfection never touches him at all. Thus, in sex no animal is either chivalrous or obscene. And thus no animal ever invented anything so bad as drunkenness—or so good as drink.

The pronouncement of these particular doctors is very clear and uncompromising; in the modern atmosphere, indeed, it even deserves some credit for moral courage. The majority of modern people, of course, will probably agree with it in so far as it declares that alcoholic drinks are often of supreme value in emergencies of illness; but many people, I fear, will open their eyes at the emphatic terms in which they describe such drink as considered as a beverage; but they are not content with declaring that the drink is in moderation harmless: they distinctly declare that it is in moderation beneficial. But I fancy that, in saying this, the doctors had in mind a truth that runs somewhat counter to the common opinion. I fancy that it is the experience of most doctors that giving any alcohol for illness (though often necessary) is about the most morally dangerous way of giving it. Instead of giving it to a healthy person who has many other forms of life, you are giving it to a desperate person, to whom it is the only form of life. The invalid can hardly be blamed if by some accident of his erratic and overwrought condition he comes to remember the thing as the very water of vitality and to use it as such. For in so far as drinking is really a sin it is not because drinking is wild, but because drinking is tame; not in so far as it is anarchy, but in so far as it is slavery. Probably the worst way to drink is to drink medicinally. Certainly the safest way to drink is to drink carelessly; that is, without caring much for anything, and especially not caring for the drink.
The doctor, of course, ought to be able to do a great deal in the way of restraining those individual cases where there is plainly an evil thirst; and beyond that the only hope would seem to be in some increase, or, rather, some concentration of ordinary public opinion on the subject. I have always held consistently my own modest theory on the subject. I believe that if by some method the local public-house could be as definite and isolated a place as the local post-office or the local railway station, if all types of people passed through it for all types of refreshment, you would have the same safeguard against a man behaving in a disgusting way in a tavern that you have at present against his behaving in a disgusting way in a post-office: simply the presence of his ordinary sensible neighbours. In such a place the kind of lunatic who wants to drink an unlimited number of whiskies would be treated with the same severity with which the post office authorities would treat an amiable lunatic who had an appetite for licking an unlimited number of stamps. It is a small matter whether in either case a technical refusal would be officially employed. It is an essential matter that in both cases the authorities could rapidly communicate with the friends and family of the mentally afflicted person. At least, the postmistress would not dangle a strip of tempting sixpenny stamps before the enthusiast’s eyes as he was being dragged away with his tongue out. If we made drinking open and official we might be taking one step towards making it careless. In such things to be careless is to be sane: for neither drunkards nor Moslems can be careless about drink.
DEMAGOGUES AND MYSTAGOGUES

I once heard a man call this age the age of demagogues. Of this I can only say, in the admirably sensible words of the angry coachman in “Pickwick,” that “that remark’s political, or what is much the same, it ain’t true.” So far from being the age of demagogues, this is really and specially the age of mystagogues. So far from this being a time in which things are praised because they are popular, the truth is that this is the first time, perhaps, in the whole history of the world in which things can be praised because they are unpopular. The demagogue succeeds because he makes himself understood, even if he is not worth understanding. But the mystagogue succeeds because he gets himself misunderstood; although, as a rule, he is not even worth misunderstanding. Gladstone was a demagogue: Disraeli a mystagogue. But ours is specially the time when a man can advertise his wares not as a universality, but as what the tradesmen call “a speciality.” We all know this, for instance, about modern art. Michelangelo and Whistler were both fine artists; but one is obviously public, the other obviously private, or, rather, not obvious at all. Michelangelo’s frescoes are doubtless finer than the popular judgment, but they are plainly meant to strike the popular judgment. Whistler’s pictures seem often meant to escape the popular judgment; they even seem meant to escape the popular admiration. They are elusive, fugitive; they fly even from praise. Doubtless many artists in Michelangelo’s day declared themselves to be great artists, although they were unsuccessful. But they did not declare themselves great artists because they were unsuccessful: that is the peculiarity of our own time, which has a positive bias against the populace.

Another case of the same kind of thing can be found in the latest conceptions of humour. By the wholesome tradition of mankind, a joke was a thing meant to amuse men; a joke which did not amuse them was a failure, just as a fire which did not warm them was a failure. But we have seen the process of secrecy and aristocracy introduced even into jokes. If a joke falls flat, a small school of aesthetes only ask us to notice the wild grace of its falling and its perfect flatness after its fall. The old idea that the joke was not good enough for the company has been superseded by the new aristocratic idea that the company was not worthy of the joke. They have introduced an almost insane individualism into that one form of intercourse which is specially and uproariously communal. They have made even levities into secrets. They have made laughter lonelier than tears.
There is a third thing to which the mystagogues have recently been applying the methods of a secret society: I mean manners. Men who sought to rebuke rudeness used to represent manners as reasonable and ordinary; now they seek to represent them as private and peculiar. Instead of saying to a man who blocks up a street or the fireplace, “You ought to know better than that,” the moderns say, “You, of course, don’t know better than that.”

I have just been reading an amusing book by Lady Grove called “The Social Fetich,” which is a positive riot of this new specialism and mystification. It is due to Lady Grove to say that she has some of the freer and more honourable qualities of the old Whig aristocracy, as well as their wonderful worldliness and their strange faith in the passing fashion of our politics. For instance, she speaks of Jingo Imperialism with a healthy English contempt; and she perceives stray and striking truths, and records them justly—as, for instance, the greater democracy of the Southern and Catholic countries of Europe. But in her dealings with social formulæ here in England she is, it must frankly be said, a common mystagogue. She does not, like a decent demagogue, wish to make people understand; she wishes to make them painfully conscious of not understanding. Her favourite method is to terrify people from doing things that are quite harmless by telling them that if they do they are the kind of people who would do other things, equally harmless. If you ask after somebody’s mother (or whatever it is), you are the kind of person who would have a pillow-case, or would not have a pillow-case. I forget which it is; and so, I dare say, does she. If you assume the ordinary dignity of a decent citizen and say that you don’t see the harm of having a mother or a pillow-case, she would say that of course you wouldn’t. This is what I call being a mystagogue. It is more vulgar than being a demagogue; because it is much easier.

The primary point I meant to emphasise is that this sort of aristocracy is essentially a new sort. All the old despots were demagogues; at least, they were demagogues whenever they were really trying to please or impress the demos. If they poured out beer for their vassals it was because both they and their vassals had a taste for beer. If (in some slightly different mood) they poured melted lead on their vassals, it was because both they and their vassals had a strong distaste for melted lead. But they did not make any mystery about either of the two substances. They did not say, “You don’t like melted lead? . . . . Ah! no, of course, you wouldn’t; you are probably the kind of person who would prefer beer. . . . It is no good asking you even to imagine the curious undercurrent of psychological pleasure felt by a refined person under the seeming shock of
melted lead.” Even tyrants when they tried to be popular, tried to give the people pleasure; they did not try to overawe the people by giving them something which they ought to regard as pleasure. It was the same with the popular presentment of aristocracy. Aristocrats tried to impress humanity by the exhibition of qualities which humanity admires, such as courage, gaiety, or even mere splendour. The aristocracy might have more possession in these things, but the democracy had quite equal delight in them. It was much more sensible to offer yourself for admiration because you had drunk three bottles of port at a sitting, than to offer yourself for admiration (as Lady Grove does) because you think it right to say “port wine” while other people think it right to say “port.” Whether Lady Grove’s preference for port wine (I mean for the phrase port wine) is a piece of mere nonsense I do not know; but at least it is a very good example of the futility of such tests in the matter even of mere breeding. “Port wine” may happen to be the phrase used in certain good families; but numberless aristocrats say “port,” and all barmaids say “port wine.” The whole thing is rather more trivial than collecting tram–tickets; and I will not pursue Lady Grove’s further distinctions. I pass over the interesting theory that I ought to say to Jones (even apparently if he is my dearest friend), “How is Mrs. Jones?” instead of “How is your wife?” and I pass over an impassioned declamation about bedspreads (I think) which has failed to fire my blood.

The truth of the matter is really quite simple. An aristocracy is a secret society; and this is especially so when, as in the modern world, it is practically a plutocracy. The one idea of a secret society is to change the password. Lady Grove falls naturally into a pure perversity because she feels subconsciously that the people of England can be more effectively kept at a distance by a perpetual torrent of new tests than by the persistence of a few old ones. She knows that in the educated “middle class” there is an idea that it is vulgar to say port wine; therefore she reverses the idea–she says that the man who would say “port” is a man who would say, “How is your wife?” She says it because she knows both these remarks to be quite obvious and reasonable.

The only thing to be done or said in reply, I suppose, would be to apply the same principle of bold mystification on our own part. I do not see why I should not write a book called “Etiquette in Fleet Street,” and terrify every one else out of that thoroughfare by mysterious allusions to the mistakes that they generally make. I might say: “This is the kind of man who would wear a green tie when he went into a tobacconist’s,” or “You don’t see anything wrong in drinking a Benedictine on Thursday? . . . No, of course you wouldn’t.” I might asseverate
with passionate disgust and disdain: “The man who is capable of writing sonnets as well as triolets is capable of climbing an omnibus while holding an umbrella.” It seems a simple method; if ever I should master it perhaps I may govern England.
THE “EATANSWILL GAZETTE.”

The other day some one presented me with a paper called the Eatanswill Gazette. I need hardly say that I could not have been more startled if I had seen a coach coming down the road with old Mr. Tony Weller on the box. But, indeed, the case is much more extraordinary than that would be. Old Mr. Weller was a good man, a specially and seriously good man, a proud father, a very patient husband, a sane moralist, and a reliable ally. One could not be so very much surprised if somebody pretended to be Tony Weller. But the Eatanswill Gazette is definitely depicted in “Pickwick” as a dirty and unscrupulous rag, soaked with slander and nonsense. It was really interesting to find a modern paper proud to take its name. The case cannot be compared to anything so simple as a resurrection of one of the “Pickwick” characters; yet a very good parallel could easily be found. It is almost exactly as if a firm of solicitors were to open their offices to–morrow under the name of Dodson and Fogg.

It was at once apparent, of course, that the thing was a joke. But what was not apparent, what only grew upon the mind with gradual wonder and terror, was the fact that it had its serious side. The paper is published in the well–known town of Sudbury, in Suffolk. And it seems that there is a standing quarrel between Sudbury and the county town of Ipswich as to which was the town described by Dickens in his celebrated sketch of an election. Each town proclaims with passion that it was Eatanswill. If each town proclaimed with passion that it was not Eatanswill, I might be able to understand it. Eatanswill, according to Dickens, was a town alive with loathsome corruption, hypocritical in all its public utterances, and venal in all its votes. Yet, two highly respectable towns compete for the honour of having been this particular cesspool, just as ten cities fought to be the birthplace of Homer. They claim to be its original as keenly as if they were claiming to be the original of More’s “Utopia” or Morris’s “Earthly Paradise.” They grow seriously heated over the matter. The men of Ipswich say warmly, “It must have been our town; for Dickens says it was corrupt, and a more corrupt town than our town you couldn’t have met in a month.” The men of Sudbury reply with rising passion, “Permit us to tell you, gentlemen, that our town was quite as corrupt as your town any day of the week. Our town was a common nuisance; and we defy our enemies to question it.” “Perhaps you will tell us,” sneer the citizens of Ipswich, “that your politics were ever as thoroughly filthy as–” “As filthy as anything,” answer the Sudbury men, undauntedly.
“Nothing in politics could be filthier. Dickens must have noticed how disgusting we were.” “And could he have failed to notice,” the others reason indignantly, “how disgusting we were? You could smell us a mile off. You Sudbury fellows may think yourselves very fine, but let me tell you that, compared to our city, Sudbury was an honest place.” And so the controversy goes on. It seems to me to be a new and odd kind of controversy.

Naturally, an outsider feels inclined to ask why Eatanswill should be either one or the other. As a matter of fact, I fear Eatanswill was every town in the country. It is surely clear that when Dickens described the Eatanswill election he did not mean it as a satire on Sudbury or a satire on Ipswich; he meant it as a satire on England. The Eatanswill election is not a joke against Eatanswill; it is a joke against elections. If the satire is merely local, it practically loses its point; just as the “Circumlocution Office” would lose its point if it were not supposed to be a true sketch of all Government offices; just as the Lord Chancellor in “Bleak House” would lose his point if he were not supposed to be symbolic and representative of all Lord Chancellors. The whole moral meaning would vanish if we supposed that Oliver Twist had got by accident into an exceptionally bad workhouse, or that Mr. Dorrit was in the only debtors’ prison that was not well managed. Dickens was making game, not of places, but of methods. He poured all his powerful genius into trying to make the people ashamed of the methods. But he seems only to have succeeded in making people proud of the places. In any case, the controversy is conducted in a truly extraordinary way. No one seems to allow for the fact that, after all, Dickens was writing a novel, and a highly fantastic novel at that. Facts in support of Sudbury or Ipswich are quoted not only from the story itself, which is wild and wandering enough, but even from the yet wilder narratives which incidentally occur in the story, such as Sam Weller’s description of how his father, on the way to Eatanswill, tipped all the voters into the canal. This may quite easily be (to begin with) an entertaining tarradiddle of Sam’s own invention, told, like many other even more improbable stories, solely to amuse Mr. Pickwick. Yet the champions of these two towns positively ask each other to produce a canal, or to fail for ever in their attempt to prove themselves the most corrupt town in England. As far as I remember, Sam’s story of the canal ends with Mr. Pickwick eagerly asking whether everybody was rescued, and Sam solemnly replying that one old gentleman’s hat was found, but that he was not sure whether his head was in it. If the canal is to be taken as realistic, why not the hat and the head? If these critics ever find the canal I recommend them to drag it for the body of the old gentleman.
Both sides refuse to allow for the fact that the characters in the story are comic characters. For instance, Mr. Percy Fitzgerald, the eminent student of Dickens, writes to the Eatanswill Gazette to say that Sudbury, a small town, could not have been Eatanswill, because one of the candidates speaks of its great manufactures. But obviously one of the candidates would have spoken of its great manufactures if it had had nothing but a row of apple-stalls. One of the candidates might have said that the commerce of Eatanswill eclipsed Carthage, and covered every sea; it would have been quite in the style of Dickens. But when the champion of Sudbury answers him, he does not point out this plain mistake. He answers by making another mistake exactly of the same kind. He says that Eatanswill was not a busy, important place. And his odd reason is that Mrs. Pott said she was dull there. But obviously Mrs. Pott would have said she was dull anywhere. She was setting her cap at Mr. Winkle. Moreover, it was the whole point of her character in any case. Mrs. Pott was that kind of woman. If she had been in Ipswich she would have said that she ought to be in London. If she was in London she would have said that she ought to be in Paris. The first disputant proves Eatanswill grand because a servile candidate calls it grand. The second proves it dull because a discontented woman calls it dull.

The great part of the controversy seems to be conducted in the spirit of highly irrelevant realism. Sudbury cannot be Eatanswill, because there was a fancy-dress shop at Eatanswill, and there is no record of a fancy-dress shop at Sudbury. Sudbury must be Eatanswill because there were heavy roads outside Eatanswill, and there are heavy roads outside Sudbury. Ipswich cannot be Eatanswill, because Mrs. Leo Hunter’s country seat would not be near a big town. Ipswich must be Eatanswill because Mrs. Leo Hunter’s country seat would be near a large town. Really, Dickens might have been allowed to take liberties with such things as these, even if he had been mentioning the place by name. If I were writing a story about the town of Limerick, I should take the liberty of introducing a bun-shop without taking a journey to Limerick to see whether there was a bun-shop there. If I wrote a romance about Torquay, I should hold myself free to introduce a house with a green door without having studied a list of all the coloured doors in the town. But if, in order to make it particularly obvious that I had not meant the town for a photograph either of Torquay or Limerick, I had gone out of my way to give the place a wild, fictitious name of my own, I think that in that case I should be justified in tearing my hair with rage if the people of Limerick or Torquay began to argue about bun-shops and green doors. No reasonable man would expect Dickens to be so literal as all that even
about Bath or Bury St. Edmunds, which do exist; far less need he be literal about Eatanswill, which didn’t exist.

I must confess, however, that I incline to the Sudbury side of the argument. This does not only arise from the sympathy which all healthy people have for small places as against big ones; it arises from some really good qualities in this particular Sudbury publication. First of all, the champions of Sudbury seem to be more open to the sensible and humorous view of the book than the champions of Ipswich—at least, those that appear in this discussion. Even the Sudbury champion, bent on finding realistic clothes, rebels (to his eternal honour) when Mr. Percy Fitzgerald tries to show that Bob Sawyer’s famous statement that he was neither Buff nor Blue, “but a sort of plaid,” must have been copied from some silly man at Ipswich who said that his politics were “half and half.” Anybody might have made either of the two jokes. But it was the whole glory and meaning of Dickens that he confined himself to making jokes that anybody might have made a little better than anybody would have made them.
FAIRY TALES

Some solemn and superficial people (for nearly all very superficial people are solemn) have declared that the fairy–tales are immoral; they base this upon some accidental circumstances or regrettable incidents in the war between giants and boys, some cases in which the latter indulged in unsympathetic deceptions or even in practical jokes. The objection, however, is not only false, but very much the reverse of the facts. The fairy–tales are at root not only moral in the sense of being innocent, but moral in the sense of being didactic, moral in the sense of being moralising. It is all very well to talk of the freedom of fairyland, but there was precious little freedom in fairyland by the best official accounts. Mr. W.B. Yeats and other sensitive modern souls, feeling that modern life is about as black a slavery as ever oppressed mankind (they are right enough there), have especially described elfland as a place of utter ease and abandonment—a place where the soul can turn every way at will like the wind. Science denounces the idea of a capricious God; but Mr. Yeats’s school suggests that in that world every one is a capricious god. Mr. Yeats himself has said a hundred times in that sad and splendid literary style which makes him the first of all poets now writing in English (I will not say of all English poets, for Irishmen are familiar with the practice of physical assault), he has, I say, called up a hundred times the picture of the terrible freedom of the fairies, who typify the ultimate anarchy of art—“Where nobody grows old or weary or wise, Where nobody grows old or godly or grave.”

But, after all (it is a shocking thing to say), I doubt whether Mr. Yeats really knows the real philosophy of the fairies. He is not simple enough; he is not stupid enough. Though I say it who should not, in good sound human stupidity I would knock Mr. Yeats out any day. The fairies like me better than Mr. Yeats; they can take me in more. And I have my doubts whether this feeling of the free, wild spirits on the crest of hill or wave is really the central and simple spirit of folk–lore. I think the poets have made a mistake: because the world of the fairy–tales is a brighter and more varied world than ours, they have fancied it less moral; really it is brighter and more varied because it is more moral. Suppose a man could be born in a modern prison. It is impossible, of course, because nothing human can happen in a modern prison, though it could sometimes in an ancient dungeon. A modern prison is always inhuman, even when it is not inhumane. But suppose a man were born in a modern prison, and grew
accustomed to the deadly silence and the disgusting indifference; and suppose he were then suddenly turned loose upon the life and laughter of Fleet Street. He would, of course, think that the literary men in Fleet Street were a free and happy race; yet how sadly, how ironically, is this the reverse of the case! And so again these toiling serfs in Fleet Street, when they catch a glimpse of the fairies, think the fairies are utterly free. But fairies are like journalists in this and many other respects. Fairies and journalists have an apparent gaiety and a delusive beauty. Fairies and journalists seem to be lovely and lawless; they seem to be both of them too exquisite to descend to the ugliness of everyday duty. But it is an illusion created by the sudden sweetness of their presence. Journalists live under law; and so in fact does fairyland.

If you really read the fairy–tales, you will observe that one idea runs from one end of them to the other—the idea that peace and happiness can only exist on some condition. This idea, which is the core of ethics, is the core of the nursery–tales. The whole happiness of fairyland hangs upon a thread, upon one thread. Cinderella may have a dress woven on supernatural looms and blazing with unearthly brilliance; but she must be back when the clock strikes twelve. The king may invite fairies to the christening, but he must invite all the fairies or frightful results will follow. Bluebeard’s wife may open all doors but one. A promise is broken to a cat, and the whole world goes wrong. A promise is broken to a yellow dwarf, and the whole world goes wrong. A girl may be the bride of the God of Love himself if she never tries to see him; she sees him, and he vanishes away. A girl is given a box on condition she does not open it; she opens it, and all the evils of this world rush out at her. A man and woman are put in a garden on condition that they do not eat one fruit: they eat it, and lose their joy in all the fruits of the earth.

This great idea, then, is the backbone of all folk–lore—the idea that all happiness hangs on one thin veto; all positive joy depends on one negative. Now, it is obvious that there are many philosophical and religious ideas akin to or symbolised by this; but it is not with them I wish to deal here. It is surely obvious that all ethics ought to be taught to this fairy–tale tune; that, if one does the thing forbidden, one imperils all the things provided. A man who breaks his promise to his wife ought to be reminded that, even if she is a cat, the case of the fairy–cat shows that such conduct may be incautious. A burglar just about to open some one else’s safe should be playfully reminded that he is in the perilous posture of the beautiful Pandora: he is about to lift the forbidden lid and loosen evils unknown. The boy eating some one’s apples in some one’s apple tree
should be a reminder that he has come to a mystical moment of his life, when one apple may rob him of all others. This is the profound morality of fairy-tales; which, so far from being lawless, go to the root of all law. Instead of finding (like common books of ethics) a rationalistic basis for each Commandment, they find the great mystical basis for all Commandments. We are in this fairyland on sufferance; it is not for us to quarrel with the conditions under which we enjoy this wild vision of the world. The vetoes are indeed extraordinary, but then so are the concessions. The idea of property, the idea of some one else’s apples, is a rum idea; but then the idea of there being any apples is a rum idea. It is strange and weird that I cannot with safety drink ten bottles of champagne; but then the champagne itself is strange and weird, if you come to that. If I have drunk of the fairies’ drink it is but just I should drink by the fairies’ rules. We may not see the direct logical connection between three beautiful silver spoons and a large ugly policeman; but then who in fairy tales ever could see the direct logical connection between three bears and a giant, or between a rose and a roaring beast? Not only can these fairy-tales be enjoyed because they are moral, but morality can be enjoyed because it puts us in fairyland, in a world at once of wonder and of war.
TOM JONES AND MORALITY

The two hundredth anniversary of Henry Fielding is very justly celebrated, even if, as far as can be discovered, it is only celebrated by the newspapers. It would be too much to expect that any such merely chronological incident should induce the people who write about Fielding to read him; this kind of neglect is only another name for glory. A great classic means a man whom one can praise without having read. This is not in itself wholly unjust; it merely implies a certain respect for the realisation and fixed conclusions of the mass of mankind.

I have never read Pindar (I mean I have never read the Greek Pindar; Peter Pindar I have read all right), but the mere fact that I have not read Pindar, I think, ought not to prevent me and certainly would not prevent me from talking of “the masterpieces of Pindar,” or of “great poets like Pindar or Æschylus.” The very learned men are angularly unenlightened on this as on many other subjects; and the position they take up is really quite unreasonable. If any ordinary journalist or man of general reading alludes to Villon or to Homer, they consider it a quite triumphant sneer to say to the man, “You cannot read mediæval French,” or “You cannot read Homeric Greek.” But it is not a triumphant sneer—or, indeed, a sneer at all. A man has got as much right to employ in his speech the established and traditional facts of human history as he has to employ any other piece of common human information. And it is as reasonable for a man who knows no French to assume that Villon was a good poet as it would be for a man who has no ear for music to assume that Beethoven was a good musician. Because he himself has no ear for music, that is no reason why he should assume that the human race has no ear for music. Because I am ignorant (as I am), it does not follow that I ought to assume that I am deceived. The man who would not praise Pindar unless he had read him would be a low, distrustful fellow, the worst kind of sceptic, who doubts not only God, but man. He would be like a man who could not call Mount Everest high unless he had climbed it. He would be like a man who would not admit that the North Pole was cold until he had been there.

But I think there is a limit, and a highly legitimate limit, to this process. I think a man may praise Pindar without knowing the top of a Greek letter from the bottom. But I think that if a man is going to abuse Pindar, if he is going to denounce, refute, and utterly expose Pindar, if he is going to show Pindar up as the utter ignoramus and outrageous impostor that he is, then I think it will be just as well perhaps—I think, at any rate, it would do no harm—if he did know a little
Greek, and even had read a little Pindar. And I think the same situation would be involved if the critic were concerned to point out that Pindar was scandalously immoral, pestilently cynical, or low and beastly in his views of life. When people brought such attacks against the morality of Pindar, I should regret that they could not read Greek; and when they bring such attacks against the morality of Fielding, I regret very much that they cannot read English.

There seems to be an extraordinary idea abroad that Fielding was in some way an immoral or offensive writer. I have been astounded by the number of the leading articles, literary articles, and other articles written about him just now in which there is a curious tone of apologising for the man. One critic says that after all he couldn’t help it, because he lived in the eighteenth century; another says that we must allow for the change of manners and ideas; another says that he was not altogether without generous and humane feelings; another suggests that he clung feebly, after all, to a few of the less important virtues. What on earth does all this mean? Fielding described Tom Jones as going on in a certain way, in which, most unfortunately, a very large number of young men do go on. It is unnecessary to say that Henry Fielding knew that it was an unfortunate way of going on. Even Tom Jones knew that. He said in so many words that it was a very unfortunate way of going on; he said, one may almost say, that it had ruined his life; the passage is there for the benefit of any one who may take the trouble to read the book. There is ample evidence (though even this is of a mystical and indirect kind), there is ample evidence that Fielding probably thought that it was better to be Tom Jones than to be an utter coward and sneak. There is simply not one rag or thread or speck of evidence to show that Fielding thought that it was better to be Tom Jones than to be a good man. All that he is concerned with is the description of a definite and very real type of young man; the young man whose passions and whose selfish necessities sometimes seemed to be stronger than anything else in him.

The practical morality of Tom Jones is bad, though not so bad, spiritually speaking, as the practical morality of Arthur Pendennis or the practical morality of Pip, and certainly nothing like so bad as the profound practical immorality of Daniel Deronda. The practical morality of Tom Jones is bad; but I cannot see any proof that his theoretical morality was particularly bad. There is no need to tell the majority of modern young men even to live up to the theoretical ethics of Henry Fielding. They would suddenly spring into the stature of archangels if they lived up to the theoretic ethics of poor Tom Jones. Tom Jones is still alive, with all his good and all his evil; he is walking about the streets; we meet him
every day. We meet with him, we drink with him, we smoke with him, we talk with him, we talk about him. The only difference is that we have no longer the intellectual courage to write about him. We split up the supreme and central human being, Tom Jones, into a number of separate aspects. We let Mr. J.M. Barrie write about him in his good moments, and make him out better than he is. We let Zola write about him in his bad moments, and make him out much worse than he is. We let Maeterlinck celebrate those moments of spiritual panic which he knows to be cowardly; we let Mr. Rudyard Kipling celebrate those moments of brutality which he knows to be far more cowardly. We let obscene writers write about the obscenities of this ordinary man. We let puritan writers write about the purities of this ordinary man. We look through one peephole that makes men out as devils, and we call it the new art. We look through another peephole that makes men out as angels, and we call it the New Theology. But if we pull down some dusty old books from the bookshelf, if we turn over some old mildewed leaves, and if in that obscurity and decay we find some faint traces of a tale about a complete man, such a man as is walking on the pavement outside, we suddenly pull a long face, and we call it the coarse morals of a bygone age.

The truth is that all these things mark a certain change in the general view of morals; not, I think, a change for the better. We have grown to associate morality in a book with a kind of optimism and prettiness; according to us, a moral book is a book about moral people. But the old idea was almost exactly the opposite; a moral book was a book about immoral people. A moral book was full of pictures like Hogarth’s “Gin Lane” or “Stages of Cruelty,” or it recorded, like the popular broadsheet, “God’s dreadful judgment” against some blasphemer or murderer. There is a philosophical reason for this change. The homeless scepticism of our time has reached a sub-conscious feeling that morality is somehow merely a matter of human taste—an accident of psychology. And if goodness only exists in certain human minds, a man wishing to praise goodness will naturally exaggerate the amount of it that there is in human minds or the number of human minds in which it is supreme. Every confession that man is vicious is a confession that virtue is visionary. Every book which admits that evil is real is felt in some vague way to be admitting that good is unreal. The modern instinct is that if the heart of man is evil, there is nothing that remains good. But the older feeling was that if the heart of man was ever so evil, there was something that remained good—goodness remained good. An actual avenging virtue existed outside the human race; to that men rose, or from that men fell away. Therefore,
of course, this law itself was as much demonstrated in the breach as in the observance. If Tom Jones violated morality, so much the worse for Tom Jones. Fielding did not feel, as a melancholy modern would have done, that every sin of Tom Jones was in some way breaking the spell, or we may even say destroying the fiction of morality. Men spoke of the sinner breaking the law; but it was rather the law that broke him. And what modern people call the foulness and freedom of Fielding is generally the severity and moral stringency of Fielding. He would not have thought that he was serving morality at all if he had written a book all about nice people. Fielding would have considered Mr. Ian Maclaren extremely immoral; and there is something to be said for that view. Telling the truth about the terrible struggle of the human soul is surely a very elementary part of the ethics of honesty. If the characters are not wicked, the book is. This older and firmer conception of right as existing outside human weakness and without reference to human error can be felt in the very lightest and loosest of the works of old English literature. It is commonly unmeaning enough to call Shakspere a great moralist; but in this particular way Shakspere is a very typical moralist. Whenever he alludes to right and wrong it is always with this old implication. Right is right, even if nobody does it. Wrong is wrong, even if everybody is wrong about it.
A considerable time ago (at far too early an age, in fact) I read Voltaire’s “La Pucelle,” a savage sarcasm on the traditional purity of Joan of Arc, very dirty, and very funny. I had not thought of it again for years, but it came back into my mind this morning because I began to turn over the leaves of the new “Jeanne d’Arc,” by that great and graceful writer, Anatole France. It is written in a tone of tender sympathy, and a sort of sad reverence; it never loses touch with a noble tact and courtesy, like that of a gentleman escorting a peasant girl through the modern crowd. It is invariably respectful to Joan, and even respectful to her religion. And being myself a furious admirer of Joan the Maid, I have reflectively compared the two methods, and I come to the conclusion that I prefer Voltaire’s.

When a man of Voltaire’s school has to explode a saint or a great religious hero, he says that such a person is a common human fool, or a common human fraud. But when a man like Anatole France has to explode a saint, he explains a saint as somebody belonging to his particular fussy little literary set. Voltaire read human nature into Joan of Arc, though it was only the brutal part of human nature. At least it was not specially Voltaire’s nature. But M. France read M. France’s nature into Joan of Arc—all the cold kindness, all the homeless sentimental sin of the modern literary man. There is one book that it recalled to me with startling vividness, though I have not seen the matter mentioned anywhere; Renan’s “Vie de Jésus.” It has just the same general intention: that if you do not attack Christianity, you can at least patronise it. My own instinct, apart from my opinions, would be quite the other way. If I disbelieved in Christianity, I should be the loudest blasphemer in Hyde Park. Nothing ought to be too big for a brave man to attack; but there are some things too big for a man to patronise.

And I must say that the historical method seems to me excessively unreasonable. I have no knowledge of history, but I have as much knowledge of reason as Anatole France. And, if anything is irrational, it seems to me that the Renan–France way of dealing with miraculous stories is irrational. The Renan–France method is simply this: you explain supernatural stories that have some foundation simply by inventing natural stories that have no foundation. Suppose that you are confronted with the statement that Jack climbed up the beanstalk into the sky. It is perfectly philosophical to reply that you do not think that he
It is (in my opinion) even more philosophical to reply that he may very probably have done so. But the Renan–France method is to write like this: “When we consider Jack’s curious and even perilous heredity, which no doubt was derived from a female greengrocer and a profligate priest, we can easily understand how the ideas of heaven and a beanstalk came to be combined in his mind. Moreover, there is little doubt that he must have met some wandering conjurer from India, who told him about the tricks of the mango plant, and how it is sent up to the sky. We can imagine these two friends, the old man and the young, wandering in the woods together at evening, looking at the red and level clouds, as on that night when the old man pointed to a small beanstalk, and told his too imaginative companion that this also might be made to scale the heavens. And then, when we remember the quite exceptional psychology of Jack, when we remember how there was in him a union of the prosaic, the love of plain vegetables, with an almost irrelevant eagerness for the unattainable, for invisibility and the void, we shall no longer wonder that it was to him especially that was sent this sweet, though merely symbolic, dream of the tree uniting earth and heaven.” That is the way that Renan and France write, only they do it better. But, really, a rationalist like myself becomes a little impatient and feels inclined to say, “But, hang it all, what do you know about the heredity of Jack or the psychology of Jack? You know nothing about Jack at all, except that some people say that he climbed up a beanstalk. Nobody would ever have thought of mentioning him if he hadn’t. You must interpret him in terms of the beanstalk religion; you cannot merely interpret religion in terms of him. We have the materials of this story, and we can believe them or not. But we have not got the materials to make another story.”

It is no exaggeration to say that this is the manner of M. Anatole France in dealing with Joan of Arc. Because her miracle is incredible to his somewhat old-fashioned materialism, he does not therefore dismiss it and her to fairyland with Jack and the Beanstalk. He tries to invent a real story, for which he can find no real evidence. He produces a scientific explanation which is quite destitute of any scientific proof. It is as if I (being entirely ignorant of botany and chemistry) said that the beanstalk grew to the sky because nitrogen and argon got into the subsidiary ducts of the corolla. To take the most obvious example, the principal character in M. France’s story is a person who never existed at all. All Joan’s wisdom and energy, it seems, came from a certain priest, of whom there is not the tiniest trace in all the multitudinous records of her life. The only foundation I can find for this fancy is the highly undemocratic idea that a peasant girl could
not possibly have any ideas of her own. It is very hard for a freethinker to remain
democratic. The writer seems altogether to forget what is meant by the moral
atmosphere of a community. To say that Joan must have learnt her vision of a
virgin overthrowing evil from a priest, is like saying that some modern girl in
London, pitying the poor, must have learnt it from a Labour Member. She would
learn it where the Labour Member learnt it—in the whole state of our society.

But that is the modern method: the method of the reverent sceptic. When you
find a life entirely incredible and incomprehensible from the outside, you
pretend that you understand the inside. As Renan, the rationalist, could not make
any sense out of Christ’s most public acts, he proceeded to make an ingenious
system out of His private thoughts. As Anatole France, on his own intellectual
principle, cannot believe in what Joan of Arc did, he professes to be her dearest
friend, and to know exactly what she meant. I cannot feel it to be a very rational
manner of writing history; and sooner or later we shall have to find some more
solid way of dealing with those spiritual phenomena with which all history is as
closely spotted and spangled as the sky is with stars.

Joan of Arc is a wild and wonderful thing enough, but she is much saner than
most of her critics and biographers. We shall not recover the common sense of
Joan until we have recovered her mysticism. Our wars fail, because they begin
with something sensible and obvious—such as getting to Pretoria by Christmas.
But her war succeeded—because it began with something wild and perfect—the
saints delivering France. She put her idealism in the right place, and her realism
also in the right place: we moderns get both displaced. She put her dreams and
her sentiment into her aims, where they ought to be; she put her practicality into
her practice. In modern Imperial wars, the case is reversed. Our dreams, our
aims are always, we insist, quite practical. It is our practice that is dreamy.

It is not for us to explain this flaming figure in terms of our tired and
querulous culture. Rather we must try to explain ourselves by the blaze of such
fixed stars. Those who called her a witch hot from hell were much more sensible
than those who depict her as a silly sentimental maiden prompted by her parish
priest. If I have to choose between the two schools of her scattered enemies, I
could take my place with those subtle clerks who thought her divine mission
devilish, rather than with those rustic aunts and uncles who thought it
impossible.
A DEAD POET

With Francis Thompson we lose the greatest poetic energy since Browning. His energy was of somewhat the same kind. Browning was intellectually intricate because he was morally simple. He was too simple to explain himself; he was too humble to suppose that other people needed any explanation. But his real energy, and the real energy of Francis Thompson, was best expressed in the fact that both poets were at once fond of immensity and also fond of detail. Any common Imperialist can have large ideas so long as he is not called upon to have small ideas also. Any common scientific philosopher can have small ideas so long as he is not called upon to have large ideas as well. But great poets use the telescope and also the microscope. Great poets are obscure for two opposite reasons; now, because they are talking about something too large for any one to understand, and now again because they are talking about something too small for any one to see. Francis Thompson possessed both these infinities. He escaped by being too small, as the microbe escapes; or he escaped by being too large, as the universe escapes. Any one who knows Francis Thompson’s poetry knows quite well the truth to which I refer. For the benefit of any person who does not know it, I may mention two cases taken from memory. I have not the book by me, so I can only render the poetical passages in a clumsy paraphrase. But there was one poem of which the image was so vast that it was literally difficult for a time to take it in; he was describing the evening earth with its mist and fume and fragrance, and represented the whole as rolling upwards like a smoke; then suddenly he called the whole ball of the earth a thurible, and said that some gigantic spirit swung it slowly before God. That is the case of the image too large for comprehension. Another instance sticks in my mind of the image which is too small. In one of his poems, he says that abyss between the known and the unknown is bridged by “Pontifical death.” There are about ten historical and theological puns in that one word. That a priest means a pontiff, that a pontiff means a bridge–maker, that death is certainly a bridge, that death may turn out after all to be a reconciling priest, that at least priests and bridges both attest to the fact that one thing can get separated from another thing–these ideas, and twenty more, are all actually concentrated in the word “pontifical.” In Francis Thompson’s poetry, as in the poetry of the universe, you can work infinitely out and out, but yet infinitely in and in. These two infinities are the mark of greatness; and he was a great poet.
Beneath the tide of praise which was obviously due to the dead poet, there is an evident undercurrent of discussion about him; some charges of moral weakness were at least important enough to be authoritatively contradicted in the Nation; and, in connection with this and other things, there has been a continuous stir of comment upon his attraction to and gradual absorption in Catholic theological ideas. This question is so important that I think it ought to be considered and understood even at the present time. It is, of course, true that Francis Thompson devoted himself more and more to poems not only purely Catholic, but, one may say, purely ecclesiastical. And it is, moreover, true that (if things go on as they are going on at present) more and more good poets will do the same. Poets will tend towards Christian orthodoxy for a perfectly plain reason; because it is about the simplest and freest thing now left in the world. On this point it is very necessary to be clear. When people impute special vices to the Christian Church, they seem entirely to forget that the world (which is the only other thing there is) has these vices much more. The Church has been cruel; but the world has been much more cruel. The Church has plotted; but the world has plotted much more. The Church has been superstitious; but it has never been so superstitious as the world is when left to itself.

Now, poets in our epoch will tend towards ecclesiastical religion strictly because it is just a little more free than anything else. Take, for instance, the case of symbol and ritualism. All reasonable men believe in symbol; but some reasonable men do not believe in ritualism; by which they mean, I imagine, a symbolism too complex, elaborate, and mechanical. But whenever they talk of ritualism they always seem to mean the ritualism of the Church. Why should they not mean the ritual of the world? It is much more ritualistic. The ritual of the Army, the ritual of the Navy, the ritual of the Law Courts, the ritual of Parliament are much more ritualistic. The ritual of a dinner-party is much more ritualistic. Priests may put gold and great jewels on the chalice; but at least there is only one chalice to put them on. When you go to a dinner-party they put in front of you five different chalices, of five weird and heraldic shapes, to symbolise five different kinds of wine; an insane extension of ritual from which Mr. Percy Dearmer would fly shrieking. A bishop wears a mitre; but he is not thought more or less of a bishop according to whether you can see the very latest curves in his mitre. But a swell is thought more or less of a swell according to whether you can see the very latest curves in his hat. There is more fuss about symbols in the world than in the Church.

And yet (strangely enough) though men fuss more about the worldly symbols,
they mean less by them. It is the mark of religious forms that they declare something unknown. But it is the mark of worldly forms that they declare something which is known, and which is known to be untrue. When the Pope in an Encyclical calls himself your father, it is a matter of faith or of doubt. But when the Duke of Devonshire in a letter calls himself yours obediently, you know that he means the opposite of what he says. Religious forms are, at the worst, fables; they might be true. Secular forms are falsehoods; they are not true. Take a more topical case. The German Emperor has more uniforms than the Pope. But, moreover, the Pope’s vestments all imply a claim to be something purely mystical and doubtful. Many of the German Emperor’s uniforms imply a claim to be something which he certainly is not and which it would be highly disgusting if he were. The Pope may or may not be the Vicar of Christ. But the Kaiser certainly is not an English Colonel. If the thing were reality it would be treason. If it is mere ritual, it is by far the most unreal ritual on earth.

Now, poetical people like Francis Thompson will, as things stand, tend away from secular society and towards religion for the reason above described: that there are crowds of symbols in both, but that those of religion are simpler and mean more. To take an evident type, the Cross is more poetical than the Union Jack, because it is simpler. The more simple an idea is, the more it is fertile in variations. Francis Thompson could have written any number of good poems on the Cross, because it is a primary symbol. The number of poems which Mr. Rudyard Kipling could write on the Union Jack is, fortunately, limited, because the Union Jack is too complex to produce luxuriance. The same principle applies to any possible number of cases. A poet like Francis Thompson could deduce perpetually rich and branching meanings out of two plain facts like bread and wine; with bread and wine he can expand everything to everywhere. But with a French menu he cannot expand anything; except perhaps himself. Complicated ideas do not produce any more ideas. Mongrels do not breed. Religious ritual attracts because there is some sense in it. Religious imagery, so far from being subtle, is the only simple thing left for poets. So far from being merely superhuman, it is the only human thing left for human beings.
CHRISTMAS

There is no more dangerous or disgusting habit than that of celebrating Christmas before it comes, as I am doing in this article. It is the very essence of a festival that it breaks upon one brilliantly and abruptly, that at one moment the great day is not and the next moment the great day is. Up to a certain specific instant you are feeling ordinary and sad; for it is only Wednesday. At the next moment your heart leaps up and your soul and body dance together like lovers; for in one burst and blaze it has become Thursday. I am assuming (of course) that you are a worshipper of Thor, and that you celebrate his day once a week, possibly with human sacrifice. If, on the other hand, you are a modern Christian Englishman, you hail (of course) with the same explosion of gaiety the appearance of the English Sunday. But I say that whatever the day is that is to you festive or symbolic, it is essential that there should be a quite clear black line between it and the time going before. And all the old wholesome customs in connection with Christmas were to the effect that one should not touch or see or know or speak of something before the actual coming of Christmas Day. Thus, for instance, children were never given their presents until the actual coming of the appointed hour. The presents were kept tied up in brown–paper parcels, out of which an arm of a doll or the leg of a donkey sometimes accidentally stuck. I wish this principle were adopted in respect of modern Christmas ceremonies and publications. Especially it ought to be observed in connection with what are called the Christmas numbers of magazines. The editors of the magazines bring out their Christmas numbers so long before the time that the reader is more likely to be still lamenting for the turkey of last year than to have seriously settled down to a solid anticipation of the turkey which is to come. Christmas numbers of magazines ought to be tied up in brown paper and kept for Christmas Day. On consideration, I should favour the editors being tied up in brown paper. Whether the leg or arm of an editor should ever be allowed to protrude I leave to individual choice.

Of course, all this secrecy about Christmas is merely sentimental and ceremonial; if you do not like what is sentimental and ceremonial, do not celebrate Christmas at all. You will not be punished if you don’t; also, since we are no longer ruled by those sturdy Puritans who won for us civil and religious liberty, you will not even be punished if you do. But I cannot understand why any one should bother about a ceremonial except ceremonially. If a thing only
exists in order to be graceful, do it gracefully or do not do it. If a thing only exists as something professing to be solemn, do it solemnly or do not do it. There is no sense in doing it slouchingly; nor is there even any liberty. I can understand the man who takes off his hat to a lady because it is the customary symbol. I can understand him, I say; in fact, I know him quite intimately. I can also understand the man who refuses to take off his hat to a lady, like the old Quakers, because he thinks that a symbol is superstition. But what point would there be in so performing an arbitrary form of respect that it was not a form of respect? We respect the gentleman who takes off his hat to the lady; we respect the fanatic who will not take off his hat to the lady. But what should we think of the man who kept his hands in his pockets and asked the lady to take his hat off for him because he felt tired?

This is combining insolence and superstition; and the modern world is full of the strange combination. There is no mark of the immense weak–mindedness of modernity that is more striking than this general disposition to keep up old forms, but to keep them up informally and feebly. Why take something which was only meant to be respectful and preserve it disrespectfully? Why take something which you could easily abolish as a superstition and carefully perpetuate it as a bore? There have been many instances of this half–witted compromise. Was it not true, for instance, that the other day some mad American was trying to buy Glastonbury Abbey and transfer it stone by stone to America? Such things are not only illogical, but idiotic. There is no particular reason why a pushing American financier should pay respect to Glastonbury Abbey at all. But if he is to pay respect to Glastonbury Abbey, he must pay respect to Glastonbury. If it is a matter of sentiment, why should he spoil the scene? If it is not a matter of sentiment, why should he ever have visited the scene? To call this kind of thing Vandalism is a very inadequate and unfair description. The Vandals were very sensible people. They did not believe in a religion, and so they insulted it; they did not see any use for certain buildings, and so they knocked them down. But they were not such fools as to encumber their march with the fragments of the edifice they had themselves spoilt. They were at least superior to the modern American mode of reasoning. They did not desecrate the stones because they held them sacred.

Another instance of the same illogicality I observed the other day at some kind of “At Home.” I saw what appeared to be a human being dressed in a black evening–coat, black dress–waistcoat, and black dress–trousers, but with a shirt–front made of Jaeger wool. What can be the sense of this sort of thing? If a man
thinks hygiene more important than convention (a selfish and heathen view, for
the beasts that perish are more hygienic than man, and man is only above them
because he is more conventional), if, I say, a man thinks that hygiene is more
important than convention, what on earth is there to oblige him to wear a shirt–
front at all? But to take a costume of which the only conceivable cause or
advantage is that it is a sort of uniform, and then not wear it in the uniform way–
this is to be neither a Bohemian nor a gentleman. It is a foolish affectation, I
think, in an English officer of the Life Guards never to wear his uniform if he
can help it. But it would be more foolish still if he showed himself about town in
a scarlet coat and a Jaeger breast–plate. It is the custom nowadays to have Ritual
Commissions and Ritual Reports to make rather unmeaning compromises in the
ceremonial of the Church of England. So perhaps we shall have an ecclesiastical
compromise by which all the Bishops shall wear Jaeger copes and Jaeger mitres.
Similarly the King might insist on having a Jaeger crown. But I do not think he
will, for he understands the logic of the matter better than that. The modern
monarch, like a reasonable fellow, wears his crown as seldom as he can; but if
he does it at all, then the only point of a crown is that it is a crown. So let me
assure the unknown gentleman in the woollen vesture that the only point of a
white shirt–front is that it is a white shirt–front. Stiffness may be its impossible
defect; but it is certainly its only possible merit.

Let us be consistent, therefore, about Christmas, and either keep customs or
not keep them. If you do not like sentiment and symbolism, you do not like
Christmas; go away and celebrate something else; I should suggest the birthday
of Mr. M’Cabe. No doubt you could have a sort of scientific Christmas with a
hygienic pudding and highly instructive presents stuffed into a Jaeger stocking;
go and have it then. If you like those things, doubtless you are a good sort of
fellow, and your intentions are excellent. I have no doubt that you are really
interested in humanity; but I cannot think that humanity will ever be much
interested in you. Humanity is unhygienic from its very nature and beginning. It
is so much an exception in Nature that the laws of Nature really mean nothing to
it. Now Christmas is attacked also on the humanitarian ground. Ouida called it a
feast of slaughter and gluttony. Mr. Shaw suggested that it was invented by
poulterers. That should be considered before it becomes more considerable.

I do not know whether an animal killed at Christmas has had a better or a
worse time than it would have had if there had been no Christmas or no
Christmas dinners. But I do know that the fighting and suffering brotherhood to
which I belong and owe everything, Mankind, would have a much worse time if
there were no such thing as Christmas or Christmas dinners. Whether the turkey which Scrooge gave to Bob Cratchit had experienced a lovelier or more melancholy career than that of less attractive turkeys is a subject upon which I cannot even conjecture. But that Scrooge was better for giving the turkey and Cratchit happier for getting it I know as two facts, as I know that I have two feet. What life and death may be to a turkey is not my business; but the soul of Scrooge and the body of Cratchit are my business. Nothing shall induce me to darken human homes, to destroy human festivities, to insult human gifts and human benefactions for the sake of some hypothetical knowledge which Nature curtained from our eyes. We men and women are all in the same boat, upon a stormy sea. We owe to each other a terrible and tragic loyalty. If we catch sharks for food, let them be killed most mercifully; let any one who likes love the sharks, and pet the sharks, and tie ribbons round their necks and give them sugar and teach them to dance. But if once a man suggests that a shark is to be valued against a sailor, or that the poor shark might be permitted to bite off a nigger’s leg occasionally; then I would court–martial the man—he is a traitor to the ship.

And while I take this view of humanitarianism of the anti–Christmas kind, it is cogent to say that I am a strong anti–vivisectionist. That is, if there is any vivisection, I am against it. I am against the cutting–up of conscious dogs for the same reason that I am in favour of the eating of dead turkeys. The connection may not be obvious; but that is because of the strangely unhealthy condition of modern thought. I am against cruel vivisection as I am against a cruel anti–Christmas asceticism, because they both involve the upsetting of existing fellowships and the shocking of normal good feelings for the sake of something that is intellectual, fanciful, and remote. It is not a human thing, it is not a humane thing, when you see a poor woman staring hungrily at a bloater, to think, not of the obvious feelings of the woman, but of the unimaginable feelings of the deceased bloater. Similarly, it is not human, it is not humane, when you look at a dog to think about what theoretic discoveries you might possibly make if you were allowed to bore a hole in his head. Both the humanitarians’ fancy about the feelings concealed inside the bloater, and the vivisectionists’ fancy about the knowledge concealed inside the dog, are unhealthy fancies, because they upset a human sanity that is certain for the sake of something that is of necessity uncertain. The vivisectionist, for the sake of doing something that may or may not be useful, does something that certainly is horrible. The anti–Christmas humanitarian, in seeking to have a sympathy with a turkey which no man can have with a turkey, loses the sympathy he has already with the
happiness of millions of the poor.

It is not uncommon nowadays for the insane extremes in reality to meet. Thus I have always felt that brutal Imperialism and Tolstoian non–resistance were not only not opposite, but were the same thing. They are the same contemptible thought that conquest cannot be resisted, looked at from the two standpoints of the conqueror and the conquered. Thus again teetotalism and the really degraded gin–selling and dram–drinking have exactly the same moral philosophy. They are both based on the idea that fermented liquor is not a drink, but a drug. But I am specially certain that the extreme of vegetarian humanity is, as I have said, akin to the extreme of scientific cruelty–they both permit a dubious speculation to interfere with their ordinary charity. The sound moral rule in such matters as vivisection always presents itself to me in this way. There is no ethical necessity more essential and vital than this: that casuistical exceptions, though admitted, should be admitted as exceptions. And it follows from this, I think, that, though we may do a horrid thing in a horrid situation, we must be quite certain that we actually and already are in that situation. Thus, all sane moralists admit that one may sometimes tell a lie; but no sane moralist would approve of telling a little boy to practise telling lies, in case he might one day have to tell a justifiable one. Thus, morality has often justified shooting a robber or a burglar. But it would not justify going into the village Sunday school and shooting all the little boys who looked as if they might grow up into burglars. The need may arise; but the need must have arisen. It seems to me quite clear that if you step across this limit you step off a precipice.

Now, whether torturing an animal is or is not an immoral thing, it is, at least, a dreadful thing. It belongs to the order of exceptional and even desperate acts. Except for some extraordinary reason I would not grievously hurt an animal; with an extraordinary reason I would grievously hurt him. If (for example) a mad elephant were pursuing me and my family, and I could only shoot him so that he would die in agony, he would have to die in agony. But the elephant would be there. I would not do it to a hypothetical elephant. Now, it always seems to me that this is the weak point in the ordinary vivisectionist argument, “Suppose your wife were dying.” Vivisection is not done by a man whose wife is dying. If it were it might be lifted to the level of the moment, as would be lying or stealing bread, or any other ugly action. But this ugly action is done in cold blood, at leisure, by men who are not sure that it will be of any use to anybody–men of whom the most that can be said is that they may conceivably make the beginnings of some discovery which may perhaps save the life of some one
else’s wife in some remote future. That is too cold and distant to rob an act of its immediate horror. That is like training the child to tell lies for the sake of some great dilemma that may never come to him. You are doing a cruel thing, but not with enough passion to make it a kindly one.

So much for why I am an anti–vivisectionist; and I should like to say, in conclusion, that all other anti–vivisectionists of my acquaintance weaken their case infinitely by forming this attack on a scientific speciality in which the human heart is commonly on their side, with attacks upon universal human customs in which the human heart is not at all on their side. I have heard humanitarians, for instance, speak of vivisection and field sports as if they were the same kind of thing. The difference seems to me simple and enormous. In sport a man goes into a wood and mixes with the existing life of that wood; becomes a destroyer only in the simple and healthy sense in which all the creatures are destroyers; becomes for one moment to them what they are to him—another animal. In vivisection a man takes a simpler creature and subjects it to subtleties which no one but man could inflict on him, and for which man is therefore gravely and terribly responsible.

Meanwhile, it remains true that I shall eat a great deal of turkey this Christmas; and it is not in the least true (as the vegetarians say) that I shall do it because I do not realise what I am doing, or because I do what I know is wrong, or that I do it with shame or doubt or a fundamental unrest of conscience. In one sense I know quite well what I am doing; in another sense I know quite well that I know not what I do. Scrooge and the Cratchits and I are, as I have said, all in one boat; the turkey and I are, to say the most of it, ships that pass in the night, and greet each other in passing. I wish him well; but it is really practically impossible to discover whether I treat him well. I can avoid, and I do avoid with horror, all special and artificial tormenting of him, sticking pins in him for fun or sticking knives in him for scientific investigation. But whether by feeding him slowly and killing him quickly for the needs of my brethren, I have improved in his own solemn eyes his own strange and separate destiny, whether I have made him in the sight of God a slave or a martyr, or one whom the gods love and who die young—that is far more removed from my possibilities of knowledge than the most abstruse intricacies of mysticism or theology. A turkey is more occult and awful than all the angels and archangels. In so far as God has partly revealed to us an angelic world, he has partly told us what an angel means. But God has never told us what a turkey means. And if you go and stare at a live turkey for an hour or two, you will find by the end of it that the enigma has rather increased
than diminished.
THE DEFENDANT

G. K. CHESTERTON
INDEX

THE DEFENDANT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

IN DEFENCE OF A NEW EDITION

INTRODUCTION

A DEFENCE OF PENNY DREADFULS

A DEFENCE OF RASH VOWS

A DEFENCE OF SKELETONS

A DEFENCE OF PUBLICITY

A DEFENCE OF NONSENSE

A DEFENCE OF PLANETS

A DEFENCE OF CHINA SHEPHERDESSES

A DEFENCE OF USEFUL INFORMATION

A DEFENCE OF HERALDRY

A DEFENCE OF UGLY THINGS

A DEFENCE OF FARCE

A DEFENCE OF HUMILITY

A DEFENCE OF SLANG

A DEFENCE OF BABY-WORSHIP

A DEFENCE OF DETECTIVE STORIES

A DEFENCE OF PATRIOTISM
IN DEFENCE OF A NEW EDITION

The reissue of a series of essays so ephemeral and even superfluous may seem at the first glance to require some excuse; probably the best excuse is that they will have been completely forgotten, and therefore may be read again with entirely new sensations. I am not sure, however, that this claim is so modest as it sounds, for I fancy that Shakespeare and Balzac, if moved to prayers, might not ask to be remembered, but to be forgotten, and forgotten thus; for if they were forgotten they would be everlastingly re-discovered and re-read. It is a monotonous memory which keeps us in the main from seeing things as splendid as they are. The ancients were not wrong when they made Lethe the boundary of a better land; perhaps the only flaw in their system is that a man who had bathed in the river of forgetfulness would be as likely as not to climb back upon the bank of the earth and fancy himself in Elysium.

If, therefore, I am certain that most sensible people have forgotten the existence of this book—I do not speak in modesty or in pride—I wish only to state a simple and somewhat beautiful fact. In one respect the passing of the period during which a book can be considered current has afflicted me with some melancholy, for I had intended to write anonymously in some daily paper a thorough and crushing exposure of the work inspired mostly by a certain artistic impatience of the too indulgent tone of the critiques and the manner in which a vast number of my most monstrous fallacies have passed unchallenged. I will not repeat that powerful article here, for it cannot be necessary to do anything more than warn the reader against the perfectly indefensible line of argument adopted at the end of p. 28. I am also conscious that the title of the book is, strictly speaking, inaccurate. It is a legal metaphor, and, speaking legally, a defendant is not an enthusiast for the character of King John or the domestic virtues of the prairie-dog. He is one who defends himself, a thing which the present writer, however poisoned his mind may be with paradox, certainly never dreamed of attempting.

Criticism upon the book considered as literature, if it can be so considered, I should, of course, never dream of discussing—firstly, because it is ridiculous to do so; and, secondly, because there was, in my opinion, much justice in such criticism.

But there is one matter on which an author is generally considered as having a right to explain himself, since it has nothing to do with capacity or intelligence,
and that is the question of his morals.

I am proud to say that a furious, uncompromising, and very effective attack was made upon what was alleged to be the utter immorality of this book by my excellent friend Mr. C.F.G. Masterman, in the ‘Speaker.’ The tendency of that criticism was to the effect that I was discouraging improvement and disguising scandals by my offensive optimism. Quoting the passage in which I said that ‘diamonds were to be found in the dust-bin,’ he said: ‘There is no difficulty in finding good in what humanity rejects. The difficulty is to find it in what humanity accepts. The diamond is easy enough to find in the dust-bin. The difficulty is to find it in the drawing-room.’ I must admit, for my part, without the slightest shame, that I have found a great many very excellent things in drawing-rooms. For example, I found Mr. Masterman in a drawing-room. But I merely mention this purely ethical attack in order to state, in as few sentences as possible, my difference from the theory of optimism and progress therein enunciated. At first sight it would seem that the pessimist encourages improvement. But in reality it is a singular truth that the era in which pessimism has been cried from the house-tops is also that in which almost all reform has stagnated and fallen into decay. The reason of this is not difficult to discover. No man ever did, and no man ever can, create or desire to make a bad thing good or an ugly thing beautiful. There must be some germ of good to be loved, some fragment of beauty to be admired. The mother washes and decks out the dirty or careless child, but no one can ask her to wash and deck out a goblin with a heart like hell. No one can kill the fatted calf for Mephistopheles. The cause which is blocking all progress today is the subtle scepticism which whispers in a million ears that things are not good enough to be worth improving. If the world is good we are revolutionaries, if the world is evil we must be conservatives. These essays, futile as they are considered as serious literature, are yet ethically sincere, since they seek to remind men that things must be loved first and improved afterwards.

G. K. C.
INTRODUCTION

In certain endless uplands, uplands like great flats gone dizzy, slopes that seem to contradict the idea that there is even such a thing as a level, and make us all realize that we live on a planet with a sloping roof, you will come from time to time upon whole valleys filled with loose rocks and boulders, so big as to be like mountains broken loose. The whole might be an experimental creation shattered and cast away. It is often difficult to believe that such cosmic refuse can have come together except by human means. The mildest and most cockney imagination conceives the place to be the scene of some war of giants. To me it is always associated with one idea, recurrent and at last instinctive. The scene was the scene of the stoning of some prehistoric prophet, a prophet as much more gigantic than after-prophets as the boulders are more gigantic than the pebbles. He spoke some words—words that seemed shameful and tremendous—and the world, in terror, buried him under a wilderness of stones. The place is the monument of an ancient fear.

If we followed the same mood of fancy, it would he more difficult to imagine what awful hint or wild picture of the universe called forth that primal persecution, what secret of sensational thought lies buried under the brutal stones. For in our time the blasphemies are threadbare. Pessimism is now patently, as it always was essentially, more commonplace than piety. Profanity is now more than an affectation—it is a convention. The curse against God is Exercise I. in the primer of minor poetry. It was not, assuredly, for such babyish solemnities that our imaginary prophet was stoned in the morning of the world. If we weigh the matter in the faultless scales of imagination, if we see what is the real trend of humanity, we shall feel it most probable that he was stoned for saying that the grass was green and that the birds sang in spring; for the mission of all the prophets from the beginning has not been so much the pointing out of heavens or hells as primarily the pointing out of the earth.

Religion has had to provide that longest and strangest telescope—the telescope through which we could see the star upon which we dwelt. For the mind and eyes of the average man this world is as lost as Eden and as sunken as Atlantis. There runs a strange law through the length of human history—that men are continually tending to undervalue their environment, to undervalue their happiness, to undervalue themselves. The great sin of mankind, the sin typified by the fall of Adam, is the tendency, not towards pride, but towards this weird
and horrible humility.

This is the great fall, the fall by which the fish forgets the sea, the ox forgets the meadow, the clerk forgets the city, every man forgets his environment and, in the fullest and most literal sense, forgets himself. This is the real fall of Adam, and it is a spiritual fall. It is a strange thing that many truly spiritual men, such as General Gordon, have actually spent some hours in speculating upon the precise location of the Garden of Eden. Most probably we are in Eden still. It is only our eyes that have changed.

The pessimist is commonly spoken of as the man in revolt. He is not. Firstly, because it requires some cheerfulness to continue in revolt, and secondly, because pessimism appeals to the weaker side of everybody, and the pessimist, therefore, drives as roaring a trade as the publican. The person who is really in revolt is the optimist, who generally lives and dies in a desperate and suicidal effort to persuade all the other people how good they are. It has been proved a hundred times over that if you really wish to enrage people and make them angry, even unto death, the right way to do it is to tell them that they are all the sons of God. Jesus Christ was crucified, it may be remembered, not because of anything he said about God, but on a charge of saying that a man could in three days pull down and rebuild the Temple. Every one of the great revolutionists, from Isaiah to Shelley, have been optimists. They have been indignant, not about the badness of existence, but about the slowness of men in realizing its goodness. The prophet who is stoned is not a brawler or a marplot. He is simply a rejected lover. He suffers from an unrequited attachment to things in general.

It becomes increasingly apparent, therefore, that the world is in a permanent danger of being misjudged. That this is no fanciful or mystical idea may be tested by simple examples. The two absolutely basic words ‘good’ and ‘bad,’ descriptive of two primal and inexplicable sensations, are not, and never have been, used properly. Things that are bad are not called good by any people who experience them; but things that are good are called bad by the universal verdict of humanity.

Let me explain a little: Certain things are bad so far as they go, such as pain, and no one, not even a lunatic, calls a tooth-ache good in itself; but a knife which cuts clumsily and with difficulty is called a bad knife, which it certainly is not. It is only not so good as other knives to which men have grown accustomed. A knife is never bad except on such rare occasions as that in which it is neatly and scientifically planted in the middle of one’s back. The coarsest and bluntest knife which ever broke a pencil into pieces instead of sharpening it is a good thing in
so far as it is a knife. It would have appeared a miracle in the Stone Age. What we call a bad knife is a good knife not good enough for us; what we call a bad hat is a good hat not good enough for us; what we call bad cookery is good cookery not good enough for us; what we call a bad civilization is a good civilization not good enough for us. We choose to call the great mass of the history of mankind bad, not because it is bad, but because we are better. This is palpably an unfair principle. Ivory may not be so white as snow, but the whole Arctic continent does not make ivory black.

Now it has appeared to me unfair that humanity should be engaged perpetually in calling all those things bad which have been good enough to make other things better, in everlastingly kicking down the ladder by which it has climbed. It has appeared to me that progress should be something else besides a continual parricide; therefore I have investigated the dust-heaps of humanity, and found a treasure in all of them. I have found that humanity is not incidentally engaged, but eternally and systematically engaged, in throwing gold into the gutter and diamonds into the sea. I have found that every man is disposed to call the green leaf of the tree a little less green than it is, and the snow of Christmas a little less white than it is; therefore I have imagined that the main business of a man, however humble, is defence. I have conceived that a defendant is chiefly required when worldlings despise the world—that a counsel for the defence would not have been out of place in that terrible day when the sun was darkened over Calvary and Man was rejected of men.
A DEFENCE OF PENNY DREADFULS

One of the strangest examples of the degree to which ordinary life is undervalued is the example of popular literature, the vast mass of which we contentedly describe as vulgar. The boy’s novelette may be ignorant in a literary sense, which is only like saying that a modern novel is ignorant in the chemical sense, or the economic sense, or the astronomical sense; but it is not vulgar intrinsically—it is the actual centre of a million flaming imaginations.

In former centuries the educated class ignored the ruck of vulgar literature. They ignored, and therefore did not, properly speaking, despise it. Simple ignorance and indifference does not inflate the character with pride. A man does not walk down the street giving a haughty twirl to his moustaches at the thought of his superiority to some variety of deep-sea fishes. The old scholars left the whole under-world of popular compositions in a similar darkness.

To-day, however, we have reversed this principle. We do despise vulgar compositions, and we do not ignore them. We are in some danger of becoming petty in our study of pettiness; there is a terrible Circean law in the background that if the soul stoops too ostentatiously to examine anything it never gets up again. There is no class of vulgar publications about which there is, to my mind, more utterly ridiculous exaggeration and misconception than the current boys’ literature of the lowest stratum. This class of composition has presumably always existed, and must exist. It has no more claim to be good literature than the daily conversation of its readers to be fine oratory, or the lodging-houses and tenements they inhabit to be sublime architecture. But people must have conversation, they must have houses, and they must have stories. The simple need for some kind of ideal world in which fictitious persons play an unhampered part is infinitely deeper and older than the rules of good art, and much more important. Every one of us in childhood has constructed such an invisible dramatis personæ, but it never occurred to our nurses to correct the composition by careful comparison with Balzac. In the East the professional story-teller goes from village to village with a small carpet; and I wish sincerely that anyone had the moral courage to spread that carpet and sit on it in Ludgate Circus. But it is not probable that all the tales of the carpet-bearer are little gems of original artistic workmanship. Literature and fiction are two entirely different things. Literature is a luxury; fiction is a necessity. A work of art can hardly be too short, for its climax is its merit. A story can never be too long, for its
conclusion is merely to be deplored, like the last halfpenny or the last pipelight. And so, while the increase of the artistic conscience tends in more ambitious works to brevity and impressionism, voluminous industry still marks the producer of the true romantic trash. There was no end to the ballads of Robin Hood; there is no end to the volumes about Dick Deadshot and the Avenging Nine. These two heroes are deliberately conceived as immortal.

But instead of basing all discussion of the problem upon the common-sense recognition of this fact—that the youth of the lower orders always has had and always must have formless and endless romantic reading of some kind, and then going on to make provision for its wholesomeness—we begin, generally speaking, by fantastic abuse of this reading as a whole and indignant surprise that the errand-boys under discussion do not read ‘The Egoist’ and ‘The Master Builder.’ It is the custom, particularly among magistrates, to attribute half the crimes of the Metropolis to cheap novelettes. If some grimy urchin runs away with an apple, the magistrate shrewdly points out that the child’s knowledge that apples appease hunger is traceable to some curious literary researches. The boys themselves, when penitent, frequently accuse the novelettes with great bitterness, which is only to be expected from young people possessed of no little native humour. If I had forged a will, and could obtain sympathy by tracing the incident to the influence of Mr. George Moore’s novels, I should find the greatest entertainment in the diversion. At any rate, it is firmly fixed in the minds of most people that gutter-boys, unlike everybody else in the community, find their principal motives for conduct in printed books.

Now it is quite clear that this objection, the objection brought by magistrates, has nothing to do with literary merit. Bad story writing is not a crime. Mr. Hall Caine walks the streets openly, and cannot be put in prison for an anticlimax. The objection rests upon the theory that the tone of the mass of boys’ novelettes is criminal and degraded, appealing to low cupidity and low cruelty. This is the magisterial theory, and this is rubbish.

So far as I have seen them, in connection with the dirtiest bookstalls in the poorest districts, the facts are simply these: The whole bewildering mass of vulgar juvenile literature is concerned with adventures, rambling, disconnected and endless. It does not express any passion of any sort, for there is no human character of any sort. It runs eternally in certain grooves of local and historical type: the medieval knight, the eighteenth-century duellist, and the modern cowboy, recur with the same stiff simplicity as the conventional human figures in an Oriental pattern. I can quite as easily imagine a human being kindling wild
appetites by the contemplation of his Turkey carpet as by such dehumanized and naked narrative as this.

Among these stories there are a certain number which deal sympathetically with the adventures of robbers, outlaws and pirates, which present in a dignified and romantic light thieves and murderers like Dick Turpin and Claude Duval. That is to say, they do precisely the same thing as Scott’s ‘Ivanhoe,’ Scott’s ‘Rob Roy,’ Scott’s ‘Lady of the Lake,’ Byron’s ‘Corsair,’ Wordsworth’s ‘Rob Roy’s Grave,’ Stevenson’s ‘Macaire,’ Mr. Max Pemberton’s ‘Iron Pirate,’ and a thousand more works distributed systematically as prizes and Christmas presents. Nobody imagines that an admiration of Locksley in ‘Ivanhoe’ will lead a boy to shoot Japanese arrows at the deer in Richmond Park; no one thinks that the incautious opening of Wordsworth at the poem on Rob Roy will set him up for life as a blackmailer. In the case of our own class, we recognise that this wild life is contemplated with pleasure by the young, not because it is like their own life, but because it is different from it. It might at least cross our minds that, for whatever other reason the errand-boy reads ‘The Red Revenge,’ it really is not because he is dripping with the gore of his own friends and relatives.

In this matter, as in all such matters, we lose our bearings entirely by speaking of the ‘lower classes’ when we mean humanity minus ourselves. This trivial romantic literature is not especially plebeian: it is simply human. The philanthropist can never forget classes and callings. He says, with a modest swagger, ‘I have invited twenty-five factory hands to tea.’ If he said ‘I have invited twenty-five chartered accountants to tea,’ everyone would see the humour of so simple a classification. But this is what we have done with this lumberland of foolish writing: we have probed, as if it were some monstrous new disease, what is, in fact, nothing but the foolish and valiant heart of man. Ordinary men will always be sentimentalists: for a sentimentalist is simply a man who has feelings and does not trouble to invent a new way of expressing them. These common and current publications have nothing essentially evil about them. They express the sanguine and heroic truisms on which civilization is built; for it is clear that unless civilization is built on truisms, it is not built at all. Clearly, there could be no safety for a society in which the remark by the Chief Justice that murder was wrong was regarded as an original and dazzling epigram.

If the authors and publishers of ‘Dick Deadshot,’ and such remarkable works, were suddenly to make a raid upon the educated class, were to take down the names of every man, however distinguished, who was caught at a University
Extension Lecture, were to confiscate all our novels and warn us all to correct our lives, we should be seriously annoyed. Yet they have far more right to do so than we; for they, with all their idiotcy, are normal and we are abnormal. It is the modern literature of the educated, not of the uneducated, which is avowedly and aggressively criminal. Books recommending profligacy and pessimism, at which the high-souled errand-boy would shudder, lie upon all our drawing-room tables. If the dirtiest old owner of the dirtiest old bookstall in Whitechapel dared to display works really recommending polygamy or suicide, his stock would be seized by the police. These things are our luxuries. And with a hypocrisy so ludicrous as to be almost unparalleled in history, we rate the gutter-boys for their immorality at the very time that we are discussing (with equivocal German Professors) whether morality is valid at all. At the very instant that we curse the Penny Dreadful for encouraging thefts upon property, we canvass the proposition that all property is theft. At the very instant we accuse it (quite unjustly) of lubricity and indecency, we are cheerfully reading philosophies which glory in lubricity and indecency. At the very instant that we charge it with encouraging the young to destroy life, we are placidly discussing whether life is worth preserving.

But it is we who are the morbid exceptions; it is we who are the criminal class. This should be our great comfort. The vast mass of humanity, with their vast mass of idle books and idle words, have never doubted and never will doubt that courage is splendid, that fidelity is noble, that distressed ladies should be rescued, and vanquished enemies spared. There are a large number of cultivated persons who doubt these maxims of daily life, just as there are a large number of persons who believe they are the Prince of Wales; and I am told that both classes of people are entertaining conversationalists. But the average man or boy writes daily in these great gaudy diaries of his soul, which we call Penny Dreadfuls, a plainer and better gospel than any of those iridescent ethical paradoxes that the fashionable change as often as their bonnets. It may be a very limited aim in morality to shoot a ‘many-faced and fickle traitor,’ but at least it is a better aim than to be a many-faced and fickle traitor, which is a simple summary of a good many modern systems from Mr. d’Annunzio’s downwards. So long as the coarse and thin texture of mere current popular romance is not touched by a paltry culture it will never be vitally immoral. It is always on the side of life. The poor—the slaves who really stoop under the burden of life—have often been mad, scatter-brained and cruel, but never hopeless. That is a class privilege, like cigars. Their drivelling literature will always be a ‘blood and thunder’ literature,
as simple as the thunder of heaven and the blood of men.
A DEFENCE OF RASH VOWS

If a prosperous modern man, with a high hat and a frock-coat, were to solemnly pledge himself before all his clerks and friends to count the leaves on every third tree in Holland Walk, to hop up to the City on one leg every Thursday, to repeat the whole of Mill’s ‘Liberty’ seventy-six times, to collect 300 dandelions in fields belonging to anyone of the name of Brown, to remain for thirty-one hours holding his left ear in his right hand, to sing the names of all his aunts in order of age on the top of an omnibus, or make any such unusual undertaking, we should immediately conclude that the man was mad, or, as it is sometimes expressed, was ‘an artist in life.’ Yet these vows are not more extraordinary than the vows which in the Middle Ages and in similar periods were made, not by fanatics merely, but by the greatest figures in civic and national civilization—by kings, judges, poets, and priests. One man swore to chain two mountains together, and the great chain hung there, it was said, for ages as a monument of that mystical folly. Another swore that he would find his way to Jerusalem with a patch over his eyes, and died looking for it. It is not easy to see that these two exploits, judged from a strictly rational standpoint, are any saner than the acts above suggested. A mountain is commonly a stationary and reliable object which it is not necessary to chain up at night like a dog. And it is not easy at first sight to see that a man pays a very high compliment to the Holy City by setting out for it under conditions which render it to the last degree improbable that he will ever get there.

But about this there is one striking thing to be noticed. If men behaved in that way in our time, we should, as we have said, regard them as symbols of the ‘decadence.’ But the men who did these things were not decadent; they belonged generally to the most robust classes of what is generally regarded as a robust age. Again, it will be urged that if men essentially sane performed such insanities, it was under the capricious direction of a superstitious religious system. This, again, will not hold water; for in the purely terrestrial and even sensual departments of life, such as love and lust, the medieval princes show the same mad promises and performances, the same misshapen imagination and the same monstrous self-sacrifice. Here we have a contradiction, to explain which it is necessary to think of the whole nature of vows from the beginning. And if we consider seriously and correctly the nature of vows, we shall, unless I am much mistaken, come to the conclusion that it is perfectly sane, and even sensible, to
swear to chain mountains together, and that, if insanity is involved at all, it is a little insane not to do so.

The man who makes a vow makes an appointment with himself at some distant time or place. The danger of it is that himself should not keep the appointment. And in modern times this terror of one’s self, of the weakness and mutability of one’s self, has perilously increased, and is the real basis of the objection to vows of any kind. A modern man refrains from swearing to count the leaves on every third tree in Holland Walk, not because it is silly to do so (he does many sillier things), but because he has a profound conviction that before he had got to the three hundred and seventy-ninth leaf on the first tree he would be excessively tired of the subject and want to go home to tea. In other words, we fear that by that time he will be, in the common but hideously significant phrase, another man. Now, it is this horrible fairy tale of a man constantly changing into other men that is the soul of the Decadence. That John Paterson should, with apparent calm, look forward to being a certain General Barker on Monday, Dr. Macgregor on Tuesday, Sir Walter Carstairs on Wednesday, and Sam Slugg on Thursday, may seem a nightmare; but to that nightmare we give the name of modern culture. One great decadent, who is now dead, published a poem some time ago, in which he powerfully summed up the whole spirit of the movement by declaring that he could stand in the prison yard and entirely comprehend the feelings of a man about to be hanged:

‘For he that lives more lives than one
More deaths than one must die.’

And the end of all this is that maddening horror of unreality which descends upon the decadents, and compared with which physical pain itself would have the freshness of a youthful thing. The one hell which imagination must conceive as most hellish is to be eternally acting a play without even the narrowest and dirtiest greenroom in which to be human. And this is the condition of the decadent, of the aesthete, of the free-lover. To be everlastingly passing through dangers which we know cannot scathe us, to be taking oaths which we know cannot bind us, to be defying enemies who we know cannot conquer us—this is the grinning tyranny of decadence which is called freedom.

Let us turn, on the other hand, to the maker of vows. The man who made a vow, however wild, gave a healthy and natural expression to the greatness of a great moment. He vowed, for example, to chain two mountains together, perhaps a symbol of some great relief, or love, or aspiration. Short as the moment of his
resolve might be, it was, like all great moments, a moment of immortality, and the desire to say of it exegi monumentum oere perennius was the only sentiment that would satisfy his mind. The modern aesthetic man would, of course, easily see the emotional opportunity; he would vow to chain two mountains together. But, then, he would quite as cheerfully vow to chain the earth to the moon. And the withering consciousness that he did not mean what he said, that he was, in truth, saying nothing of any great import, would take from him exactly that sense of daring actuality which is the excitement of a vow. For what could be more maddening than an existence in which our mother or aunt received the information that we were going to assassinate the King or build a temple on Ben Nevis with the genial composure of custom?

The revolt against vows has been carried in our day even to the extent of a revolt against the typical vow of marriage. It is most amusing to listen to the opponents of marriage on this subject. They appear to imagine that the ideal of constancy was a yoke mysteriously imposed on mankind by the devil, instead of being, as it is, a yoke consistently imposed by all lovers on themselves. They have invented a phrase, a phrase that is a black and white contradiction in two words—’free-love’—as if a lover ever had been, or ever could be, free. It is the nature of love to bind itself, and the institution of marriage merely paid the average man the compliment of taking him at his word. Modern sages offer to the lover, with an ill-flavoured grin, the largest liberties and the fullest irresponsibility; but they do not respect him as the old Church respected him; they do not write his oath upon the heavens, as the record of his highest moment. They give him every liberty except the liberty to sell his liberty, which is the only one that he wants.

In Mr. Bernard Shaw’s brilliant play ‘The Philanderer,’ we have a vivid picture of this state of things. Charteris is a man perpetually endeavouring to be a free-lover, which is like endeavouring to be a married bachelor or a white negro. He is wandering in a hungry search for a certain exhilaration which he can only have when he has the courage to cease from wandering. Men knew better than this in old times—in the time, for example, of Shakespeare’s heroes. When Shakespeare’s men are really celibate they praise the undoubted advantages of celibacy, liberty, irresponsibility, a chance of continual change. But they were not such fools as to continue to talk of liberty when they were in such a condition that they could be made happy or miserable by the moving of someone else’s eyebrow. Suckling classes love with debt in his praise of freedom.
‘And he that’s fairly out of both
Of all the world is blest.
He lives as in the golden age,
When all things made were common;
He takes his pipe, he takes his glass,
He fears no man or woman.’

This is a perfectly possible, rational and manly position. But what have lovers to do with ridiculous affectations of fearing no man or woman? They know that in the turning of a hand the whole cosmic engine to the remotest star may become an instrument of music or an instrument of torture. They hear a song older than Suckling’s, that has survived a hundred philosophies. ‘Who is this that looketh out of the window, fair as the sun, clear as the moon, terrible as an army with banners?’

As we have said, it is exactly this backdoor, this sense of having a retreat behind us, that is, to our minds, the sterilizing spirit in modern pleasure. Everywhere there is the persistent and insane attempt to obtain pleasure without paying for it. Thus, in politics the modern Jingoes practically say, ‘Let us have the pleasures of conquerors without the pains of soldiers: let us sit on sofas and be a hardy race.’ Thus, in religion and morals, the decadent mystics say: ‘Let us have the fragrance of sacred purity without the sorrows of self-restraint; let us sing hymns alternately to the Virgin and Priapus.’ Thus in love the free-lovers say: ‘Let us have the splendour of offering ourselves without the peril of committing ourselves; let us see whether one cannot commit suicide an unlimited number of times.’

Emphatically it will not work. There are thrilling moments, doubtless, for the spectator, the amateur, and the aesthete; but there is one thrill that is known only to the soldier who fights for his own flag, to the ascetic who starves himself for his own illumination, to the lover who makes finally his own choice. And it is this transfiguring self-discipline that makes the vow a truly sane thing. It must have satisfied even the giant hunger of the soul of a lover or a poet to know that in consequence of some one instant of decision that strange chain would hang for centuries in the Alps among the silences of stars and snows. All around us is the city of small sins, abounding in backways and retreats, but surely, sooner or later, the towering flame will rise from the harbour announcing that the reign of the cowards is over and a man is burning his ships.
A DEFENCE OF SKELETONS

Some little time ago I stood among immemorial English trees that seemed to take hold upon the stars like a brood of Ygdrasils. As I walked among these living pillars I became gradually aware that the rustics who lived and died in their shadow adopted a very curious conversational tone. They seemed to be constantly apologizing for the trees, as if they were a very poor show. After elaborate investigation, I discovered that their gloomy and penitent tone was traceable to the fact that it was winter and all the trees were bare. I assured them that I did not resent the fact that it was winter, that I knew the thing had happened before, and that no forethought on their part could have averted this blow of destiny. But I could not in any way reconcile them to the fact that it was winter. There was evidently a general feeling that I had caught the trees in a kind of disgraceful deshabille, and that they ought not to be seen until, like the first human sinners, they had covered themselves with leaves. So it is quite clear that, while very few people appear to know anything of how trees look in winter, the actual foresters know less than anyone. So far from the line of the tree when it is bare appearing harsh and severe, it is luxuriantly indefinable to an unusual degree; the fringe of the forest melts away like a vignette. The tops of two or three high trees when they are leafless are so soft that they seem like the gigantic brooms of that fabulous lady who was sweeping the cobwebs off the sky. The outline of a leafy forest is in comparison hard, gross and blotchy; the clouds of night do not more certainly obscure the moon than those green and monstrous clouds obscure the tree; the actual sight of the little wood, with its gray and silver sea of life, is entirely a winter vision. So dim and delicate is the heart of the winter woods, a kind of glittering gloaming, that a figure stepping towards us in the chequered twilight seems as if he were breaking through unfathomable depths of spiders’ webs.

But surely the idea that its leaves are the chief grace of a tree is a vulgar one, on a par with the idea that his hair is the chief grace of a pianist. When winter, that healthy ascetic, carries his gigantic razor over hill and valley, and shaves all the trees like monks, we feel surely that they are all the more like trees if they are shorn, just as so many painters and musicians would be all the more like men if they were less like mops. But it does appear to be a deep and essential difficulty that men have an abiding terror of their own structure, or of the structure of things they love. This is felt dimly in the skeleton of the tree: it is
felt profoundly in the skeleton of the man.

The importance of the human skeleton is very great, and the horror with which it is commonly regarded is somewhat mysterious. Without claiming for the human skeleton a wholly conventional beauty, we may assert that he is certainly not uglier than a bull-dog, whose popularity never wanes, and that he has a vastly more cheerful and ingratiating expression. But just as man is mysteriously ashamed of the skeletons of the trees in winter, so he is mysteriously ashamed of the skeleton of himself in death. It is a singular thing altogether, this horror of the architecture of things. One would think it would be most unwise in a man to be afraid of a skeleton, since Nature has set curious and quite insuperable obstacles to his running away from it.

One ground exists for this terror: a strange idea has infected humanity that the skeleton is typical of death. A man might as well say that a factory chimney was typical of bankruptcy. The factory may be left naked after ruin, the skeleton may be left naked after bodily dissolution; but both of them have had a lively and workmanlike life of their own, all the pulleys creaking, all the wheels turning, in the House of Livelihood as in the House of Life. There is no reason why this creature (new, as I fancy, to art), the living skeleton, should not become the essential symbol of life.

The truth is that man’s horror of the skeleton is not horror of death at all. It is man’s eccentric glory that he has not, generally speaking, any objection to being dead, but has a very serious objection to being undignified. And the fundamental matter which troubles him in the skeleton is the reminder that the ground-plan of his appearance is shamelessly grotesque. I do not know why he should object to this. He contentedly takes his place in a world that does not pretend to be genteel—a laughing, working, jeering world. He sees millions of animals carrying, with quite a dandified levity, the most monstrous shapes and appendages, the most preposterous horns, wings, and legs, when they are necessary to utility. He sees the good temper of the frog, the unaccountable happiness of the hippopotamus. He sees a whole universe which is ridiculous, from the animalcule, with a head too big for its body, up to the comet, with a tail too big for its head. But when it comes to the delightful oddity of his own inside, his sense of humour rather abruptly deserts him.

In the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance (which was, in certain times and respects, a much gloomier period) this idea of the skeleton had a vast influence in freezing the pride out of all earthly pomps and the fragrance out of all fleeting pleasures. But it was not, surely, the mere dread of death that did this, for these
were ages in which men went to meet death singing; it was the idea of the
degradation of man in the grinning ugliness of his structure that withered the
juvenile insolence of beauty and pride. And in this it almost assuredly did more
good than harm. There is nothing so cold or so pitiless as youth, and youth in
aristocratic stations and ages tended to an impeccable dignity, an endless
summer of success which needed to be very sharply reminded of the scorn of the
stars. It was well that such flamboyant prigs should be convinced that one
practical joke, at least, would bowl them over, that they would fall into one
grinning man-trap, and not rise again. That the whole structure of their existence
was as wholesomely ridiculous as that of a pig or a parrot they could not be
expected to realize; that birth was humorous, coming of age humorous, drinking
and fighting humorous, they were far too young and solemn to know. But at least
they were taught that death was humorous.

There is a peculiar idea abroad that the value and fascination of what we call
Nature lie in her beauty. But the fact that Nature is beautiful in the sense that a
dado or a Liberty curtain is beautiful, is only one of her charms, and almost an
accidental one. The highest and most valuable quality in Nature is not her
beauty, but her generous and defiant ugliness. A hundred instances might be
taken. The croaking noise of the rooks is, in itself, as hideous as the whole hell
of sounds in a London railway tunnel. Yet it uplifts us like a trumpet with its
course kindliness and honesty, and the lover in ‘Maud’ could actually persuade
himself that this abominable noise resembled his lady-love’s name. Has the poet,
for whom Nature means only roses and lilies, ever heard a pig grunting? It is a
noise that does a man good—a strong, snorting, imprisoned noise, breaking its
way out of unfathomable dungeons through every possible outlet and organ. It
might be the voice of the earth itself, snoring in its mighty sleep. This is the
deepest, the oldest, the most wholesome and religious sense of the value of
Nature—the value which comes from her immense babyishness. She is as top-
heavy, as grotesque, as solemn and as happy as a child. The mood does come
when we see all her shapes like shapes that a baby scrawls upon a slate—simple,
rudimentary, a million years older and stronger than the whole disease that is
called Art. The objects of earth and heaven seem to combine into a nursery tale,
and our relation to things seems for a moment so simple that a dancing lunatic
would be needed to do justice to its lucidity and levity. The tree above my head
is flapping like some gigantic bird standing on one leg; the moon is like the eye
of a Cyclops. And, however much my face clouds with sombre vanity, or vulgar
vengeance, or contemptible contempt, the bones of my skull beneath it are
laughing for ever.
A DEFENCE OF PUBLICITY

It is a very significant fact that the form of art in which the modern world has certainly not improved upon the ancient is what may roughly be called the art of the open air. Public monuments have certainly not improved, nor has the criticism of them improved, as is evident from the fashion of condemning such a large number of them as pompous. An interesting essay might be written on the enormous number of words that are used as insults when they are really compliments. It is in itself a singular study in that tendency which, as I have said, is always making things out worse than they are, and necessitating a systematic attitude of defence. Thus, for example, some dramatic critics cast contempt upon a dramatic performance by calling it theatrical, which simply means that it is suitable to a theatre, and is as much a compliment as calling a poem poetical. Similarly we speak disdainfully of a certain kind of work as sentimental, which simply means possessing the admirable and essential quality of sentiment. Such phrases are all parts of one peddling and cowardly philosophy, and remind us of the days when ‘enthusiast’ was a term of reproach. But of all this vocabulary of unconscious eulogies nothing is more striking than the word ‘pompous.’

Properly speaking, of course, a public monument ought to be pompous. Pomp is its very object; it would be absurd to have columns and pyramids blushing in some coy nook like violets in the woods of spring. And public monuments have in this matter a great and much-needed lesson to teach. Valour and mercy and the great enthusiasms ought to be a great deal more public than they are at present. We are too fond nowadays of committing the sin of fear and calling it the virtue of reverence. We have forgotten the old and wholesome morality of the Book of Proverbs, ‘Wisdom crieth without; her voice is heard in the streets.’ In Athens and Florence her voice was heard in the streets. They had an outdoor life of war and argument, and they had what modern commercial civilization has never had—an outdoor art. Religious services, the most sacred of all things, have always been held publicly; it is entirely a new and debased notion that sanctity is the same as secrecy. A great many modern poets, with the most abstruse and delicate sensibilities, love darkness, when all is said and done, much for the same reason that thieves love it. The mission of a great spire or statue should be to strike the spirit with a sudden sense of pride as with a thunderbolt. It should lift us with it into the empty and ennobling air. Along the base of every noble
monument, whatever else may be written there, runs in invisible letters the lines of Swinburne:

‘This thing is God:
To be man with thy might,
To go straight in the strength of thy spirit, and live
out thy life in the light.’

If a public monument does not meet this first supreme and obvious need, that it should be public and monumental, it fails from the outset.

There has arisen lately a school of realistic sculpture, which may perhaps be better described as a school of sketchy sculpture. Such a movement was right and inevitable as a reaction from the mean and dingy pomposity of English Victorian statuary. Perhaps the most hideous and depressing object in the universe—far more hideous and depressing than one of Mr. H.G. Wells’s shapeless monsters of the slime (and not at all unlike them)—is the statue of an English philanthropist. Almost as bad, though, of course, not quite as bad, are the statues of English politicians in Parliament Fields. Each of them is cased in a cylindrical frock-coat, and each carries either a scroll or a dubious-looking garment over the arm that might be either a bathing-towel or a light great-coat. Each of them is in an oratorical attitude, which has all the disadvantage of being affected without even any of the advantages of being theatrical. Let no one suppose that such abortions arise merely from technical demerit. In every line of those leaden dolls is expressed the fact that they were not set up with any heat of natural enthusiasm for beauty or dignity. They were set up mechanically, because it would seem indecorous or stingy if they were not set up. They were even set up sulkily, in a utilitarian age which was haunted by the thought that there were a great many more sensible ways of spending money. So long as this is the dominant national sentiment, the land is barren, statues and churches will not grow—for they have to grow, as much as trees and flowers. But this moral disadvantage which lay so heavily upon the early Victorian sculpture lies in a modified degree upon that rough, picturesque, commonplace sculpture which has begun to arise, and of which the statue of Darwin in the South Kensington Museum and the statue of Gordon in Trafalgar Square are admirable examples. It is not enough for a popular monument to be artistic, like a black charcoal sketch; it must be striking; it must be in the highest sense of the word sensational; it must stand for humanity; it must speak for us to the stars; it must declare in the face of all the heavens that when the longest and blackest catalogue has been made of all our crimes and follies there are some things of
which we men are not ashamed.

The two modes of commemorating a public man are a statue and a biography. They are alike in certain respects, as, for example, in the fact that neither of them resembles the original, and that both of them commonly tone down not only all a man’s vices, but all the more amusing of his virtues. But they are treated in one respect differently. We never hear anything about biography without hearing something about the sanctity of private life and the necessity for suppressing the whole of the most important part of a man’s existence. The sculptor does not work at this disadvantage. The sculptor does not leave out the nose of an eminent philanthropist because it is too beautiful to be given to the public; he does not depict a statesman with a sack over his head because his smile was too sweet to be endurable in the light of day. But in biography the thesis is popularly and solidly maintained, so that it requires some courage even to hint a doubt of it, that the better a man was, the more truly human life he led, the less should be said about it.

For this idea, this modern idea that sanctity is identical with secrecy, there is one thing at least to be said. It is for all practical purposes an entirely new idea; it was unknown to all the ages in which the idea of sanctity really flourished. The record of the great spiritual movements of mankind is dead against the idea that spirituality is a private matter. The most awful secret of every man’s soul, its most lonely and individual need, its most primal and psychological relationship, the thing called worship, the communication between the soul and the last reality—this most private matter is the most public spectacle in the world. Anyone who chooses to walk into a large church on Sunday morning may see a hundred men each alone with his Maker. He stands, in truth, in the presence of one of the strangest spectacles in the world—a mob of hermits. And in thus definitely espousing publicity by making public the most internal mystery, Christianity acts in accordance with its earliest origins and its terrible beginning. It was surely by no accident that the spectacle which darkened the sun at noonday was set upon a hill. The martyrdoms of the early Christians were public not only by the caprice of the oppressor, but by the whole desire and conception of the victims.

The mere grammatical meaning of the word ‘martyr’ breaks into pieces at a blow the whole notion of the privacy of goodness. The Christian martyrdoms were more than demonstrations: they were advertisements. In our day the new theory of spiritual delicacy would desire to alter all this. It would permit Christ to be crucified if it was necessary to His Divine nature, but it would ask in the
name of good taste why He could not be crucified in a private room. It would declare that the act of a martyr in being torn in pieces by lions was vulgar and sensational, though, of course, it would have no objection to being torn in pieces by a lion in one’s own parlour before a circle of really intimate friends.

It is, I am inclined to think, a decadent and diseased purity which has inaugurated this notion that the sacred object must be hidden. The stars have never lost their sanctity, and they are more shameless and naked and numerous than advertisements of Pears’ soap. It would be a strange world indeed if Nature was suddenly stricken with this ethereal shame, if the trees grew with their roots in the air and their load of leaves and blossoms underground, if the flowers closed at dawn and opened at sunset, if the sunflower turned towards the darkness, and the birds flew, like bats, by night.
A DEFENCE OF NONSENSE

There are two equal and eternal ways of looking at this twilight world of ours: we may see it as the twilight of evening or the twilight of morning; we may think of anything, down to a fallen acorn, as a descendant or as an ancestor. There are times when we are almost crushed, not so much with the load of the evil as with the load of the goodness of humanity, when we feel that we are nothing but the inheritors of a humiliating splendour. But there are other times when everything seems primitive, when the ancient stars are only sparks blown from a boy’s bonfire, when the whole earth seems so young and experimental that even the white hair of the aged, in the fine biblical phrase, is like almond-trees that blossom, like the white hawthorn grown in May. That it is good for a man to realize that he is ‘the heir of all the ages’ is pretty commonly admitted; it is a less popular but equally important point that it is good for him sometimes to realize that he is not only an ancestor, but an ancestor of primal antiquity; it is good for him to wonder whether he is not a hero, and to experience ennobling doubts as to whether he is not a solar myth.

The matters which most thoroughly evoke this sense of the abiding childhood of the world are those which are really fresh, abrupt and inventive in any age; and if we were asked what was the best proof of this adventurous youth in the nineteenth century we should say, with all respect to its portentous sciences and philosophies, that it was to be found in the rhymes of Mr. Edward Lear and in the literature of nonsense. ‘The Dong with the Luminous Nose,’ at least, is original, as the first ship and the first plough were original.

It is true in a certain sense that some of the greatest writers the world has seen—Aristophanes, Rabelais and Sterne—have written nonsense; but unless we are mistaken, it is in a widely different sense. The nonsense of these men was satiric—that is to say, symbolic; it was a kind of exuberant capering round a discovered truth. There is all the difference in the world between the instinct of satire, which, seeing in the Kaiser’s moustaches something typical of him, draws them continually larger and larger; and the instinct of nonsense which, for no reason whatever, imagines what those moustaches would look like on the present Archbishop of Canterbury if he grew them in a fit of absence of mind. We incline to think that no age except our own could have understood that the Quangle-Wangle meant absolutely nothing, and the Lands of the Jumblies were absolutely nowhere. We fancy that if the account of the knave’s trial in ‘Alice in
Wonderland’ had been published in the seventeenth century it would have been bracketed with Bunyan’s ‘Trial of Faithful’ as a parody on the State prosecutions of the time. We fancy that if ‘The Dong with the Luminous Nose’ had appeared in the same period everyone would have called it a dull satire on Oliver Cromwell.

It is altogether advisedly that we quote chiefly from Mr. Lear’s ‘Nonsense Rhymes.’ To our mind he is both chronologically and essentially the father of nonsense; we think him superior to Lewis Carroll. In one sense, indeed, Lewis Carroll has a great advantage. We know what Lewis Carroll was in daily life: he was a singularly serious and conventional don, universally respected, but very much of a pedant and something of a Philistine. Thus his strange double life in earth and in dreamland emphasizes the idea that lies at the back of nonsense—the idea of escape, of escape into a world where things are not fixed horribly in an eternal appropriateness, where apples grow on pear-trees, and any odd man you meet may have three legs. Lewis Carroll, living one life in which he would have thundered morally against any one who walked on the wrong plot of grass, and another life in which he would cheerfully call the sun green and the moon blue, was, by his very divided nature, his one foot on both worlds, a perfect type of the position of modern nonsense. His Wonderland is a country populated by insane mathematicians. We feel the whole is an escape into a world of masquerade; we feel that if we could pierce their disguises, we might discover that Humpty Dumpty and the March Hare were Professors and Doctors of Divinity enjoying a mental holiday. This sense of escape is certainly less emphatic in Edward Lear, because of the completeness of his citizenship in the world of unreason. We do not know his prosaic biography as we know Lewis Carroll’s. We accept him as a purely fabulous figure, on his own description of himself:

‘His body is perfectly spherical,
He weareth a runcible hat.’

While Lewis Carroll’s Wonderland is purely intellectual, Lear introduces quite another element—the element of the poetical and even emotional. Carroll works by the pure reason, but this is not so strong a contrast; for, after all, mankind in the main has always regarded reason as a bit of a joke. Lear introduces his unmeaning words and his amorphous creatures not with the pomp of reason, but with the romantic prelude of rich hues and haunting rhythms.

‘Far and few, far and few,
Are the lands where the Jumblies live,’
is an entirely different type of poetry to that exhibited in ‘Jabberwocky.’ Carroll, with a sense of mathematical neatness, makes his whole poem a mosaic of new and mysterious words. But Edward Lear, with more subtle and placid effrontery, is always introducing scraps of his own elvish dialect into the middle of simple and rational statements, until we are almost stunned into admitting that we know what they mean. There is a genial ring of commonsense about such lines as,

‘For his aunt Jobiska said “Every one knows
That a Pobble is better without his toes,”’

which is beyond the reach of Carroll. The poet seems so easy on the matter that we are almost driven to pretend that we see his meaning, that we know the peculiar difficulties of a Pobble, that we are as old travellers in the ‘Gromboolian Plain’ as he is.

Our claim that nonsense is a new literature (we might almost say a new sense) would be quite indefensible if nonsense were nothing more than a mere aesthetic fancy. Nothing sublimely artistic has ever arisen out of mere art, any more than anything essentially reasonable has ever arisen out of the pure reason. There must always be a rich moral soil for any great aesthetic growth. The principle of art for art’s sake is a very good principle if it means that there is a vital distinction between the earth and the tree that has its roots in the earth; but it is a very bad principle if it means that the tree could grow just as well with its roots in the air. Every great literature has always been allegorical—allegorical of some view of the whole universe. The ‘Iliad’ is only great because all life is a battle, the ‘Odyssey’ because all life is a journey, the Book of Job because all life is a riddle. There is one attitude in which we think that all existence is summed up in the word ‘ghosts’; another, and somewhat better one, in which we think it is summed up in the words ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream.’ Even the vulgarest melodrama or detective story can be good if it expresses something of the delight in sinister possibilities—the healthy lust for darkness and terror which may come on us any night in walking down a dark lane. If, therefore, nonsense is really to be the literature of the future, it must have its own version of the Cosmos to offer; the world must not only be the tragic, romantic, and religious, it must be nonsensical also. And here we fancy that nonsense will, in a very unexpected way, come to the aid of the spiritual view of things. Religion has for centuries been trying to make men exult in the ‘wonders’ of creation, but it has forgotten that a thing cannot be completely wonderful so long as it remains sensible. So long as we regard a tree as an obvious thing, naturally and
reasonably created for a giraffe to eat, we cannot properly wonder at it. It is when we consider it as a prodigious wave of the living soil sprawling up to the skies for no reason in particular that we take off our hats, to the astonishment of the park-keeper. Everything has in fact another side to it, like the moon, the patroness of nonsense. Viewed from that other side, a bird is a blossom broken loose from its chain of stalk, a man a quadruped begging on its hind legs, a house a gigantesque hat to cover a man from the sun, a chair an apparatus of four wooden legs for a cripple with only two.

This is the side of things which tends most truly to spiritual wonder. It is significant that in the greatest religious poem existent, the Book of Job, the argument which convinces the infidel is not (as has been represented by the merely rational religionism of the eighteenth century) a picture of the ordered beneficence of the Creation; but, on the contrary, a picture of the huge and undecipherable unreason of it. ‘Hast Thou sent the rain upon the desert where no man is?’ This simple sense of wonder at the shapes of things, and at their exuberant independence of our intellectual standards and our trivial definitions, is the basis of spirituality as it is the basis of nonsense. Nonsense and faith (strange as the conjunction may seem) are the two supreme symbolic assertions of the truth that to draw out the soul of things with a syllogism is as impossible as to draw out Leviathan with a hook. The well-meaning person who, by merely studying the logical side of things, has decided that ‘faith is nonsense,’ does not know how truly he speaks; later it may come back to him in the form that nonsense is faith.
A DEFENCE OF PLANETS

A book has at one time come under my notice called ‘Terra Firma: the Earth not a Planet.’ The author was a Mr. D. Wardlaw Scott, and he quoted very seriously the opinions of a large number of other persons, of whom we have never heard, but who are evidently very important. Mr. Beach of Southsea, for example, thinks that the world is flat; and in Southsea perhaps it is. It is no part of my present intention, however, to follow Mr. Scott’s arguments in detail. On the lines of such arguments it may be shown that the earth is flat, and, for the matter of that, that it is triangular. A few examples will suffice:

One of Mr. Scott’s objections was that if a projectile is fired from a moving body there is a difference in the distance to which it carries according to the direction in which it is sent. But as in practice there is not the slightest difference whichever way the thing is done, in the case of the earth ‘we have a forcible overthrow of all fancies relative to the motion of the earth, and a striking proof that the earth is not a globe.’

This is altogether one of the quaintest arguments we have ever seen. It never seems to occur to the author, among other things, that when the firing and falling of the shot all take place upon the moving body, there is nothing whatever to compare them with. As a matter of fact, of course, a shot fired at an elephant does actually often travel towards the marksman, but much slower than the marksman travels. Mr. Scott probably would not like to contemplate the fact that the elephant, properly speaking, swings round and hits the bullet. To us it appears full of a rich cosmic humour.

I will only give one other example of the astronomical proofs:

‘If the earth were a globe, the distance round the surface, say, at 45 degrees south latitude, could not possibly be any greater than the same latitude north; but since it is found by navigators to be twice the distance—to say the least of it—or double the distance it ought to be according to the globular theory, it is a proof that the earth is not a globe.’

This sort of thing reduces my mind to a pulp. I can faintly resist when a man says that if the earth were a globe cats would not have four legs; but when he says that if the earth were a globe cats would not have five legs I am crushed.

But, as I have indicated, it is not in the scientific aspect of this remarkable theory that I am for the moment interested. It is rather with the difference between the flat and the round worlds as conceptions in art and imagination that
I am concerned. It is a very remarkable thing that none of us are really Copernicans in our actual outlook upon things. We are convinced intellectually that we inhabit a small provincial planet, but we do not feel in the least suburban. Men of science have quarrelled with the Bible because it is not based upon the true astronomical system, but it is certainly open to the orthodox to say that if it had been it would never have convinced anybody.

If a single poem or a single story were really transfused with the Copernican idea, the thing would be a nightmare. Can we think of a solemn scene of mountain stillness in which some prophet is standing in a trance, and then realize that the whole scene is whizzing round like a zoetrope at the rate of nineteen miles a second? Could we tolerate the notion of a mighty King delivering a sublime fiat and then remember that for all practical purposes he is hanging head downwards in space? A strange fable might be written of a man who was blessed or cursed with the Copernican eye, and saw all men on the earth like tintacks clustering round a magnet. It would be singular to imagine how very different the speech of an aggressive egoist, announcing the independence and divinity of man, would sound if he were seen hanging on to the planet by his boot soles.

For, despite Mr. Wardlaw Scott’s horror at the Newtonian astronomy and its contradiction of the Bible, the whole distinction is a good instance of the difference between letter and spirit; the letter of the Old Testament is opposed to the conception of the solar system, but the spirit has much kinship with it. The writers of the Book of Genesis had no theory of gravitation, which to the normal person will appear a fact of as much importance as that they had no umbrellas. But the theory of gravitation has a curiously Hebrew sentiment in it—a sentiment of combined dependence and certainty, a sense of grappling unity, by which all things hang upon one thread. ‘Thou hast hanged the world upon nothing,’ said the author of the Book of Job, and in that sentence wrote the whole appalling poetry of modern astronomy. The sense of the preciousness and fragility of the universe, the sense of being in the hollow of a hand, is one which the round and rolling earth gives in its most thrilling form. Mr. Wardlaw Scott’s flat earth would be the true territory for a comfortable atheist. Nor would the old Jews have any objection to being as much upside down as right way up. They had no foolish ideas about the dignity of man.

It would be an interesting speculation to imagine whether the world will ever develop a Copernican poetry and a Copernican habit of fancy; whether we shall ever speak of ‘early earth-turn’ instead of ‘early sunrise,’ and speak indifferently of looking up at the daisies, or looking down on the stars. But if we ever do,
there are really a large number of big and fantastic facts awaiting us, worthy to make a new mythology. Mr. Wardlaw Scott, for example, with genuine, if unconscious, imagination, says that according to astronomers, ‘the sea is a vast mountain of water miles high.’ To have discovered that mountain of moving crystal, in which the fishes build like birds, is like discovering Atlantis: it is enough to make the old world young again. In the new poetry which we contemplate, athletic young men will set out sturdily to climb up the face of the sea. If we once realize all this earth as it is, we should find ourselves in a land of miracles: we shall discover a new planet at the moment that we discover our own. Among all the strange things that men have forgotten, the most universal and catastrophic lapse of memory is that by which they have forgotten that they are living on a star.

In the early days of the world, the discovery of a fact of natural history was immediately followed by the realization of it as a fact of poetry. When man awoke from the long fit of absent-mindedness which is called the automatic animal state, and began to notice the queer facts that the sky was blue and the grass green, he immediately began to use those facts symbolically. Blue, the colour of the sky, became a symbol of celestial holiness; green passed into the language as indicating a freshness verging upon unintelligence. If we had the good fortune to live in a world in which the sky was green and the grass blue, the symbolism would have been different. But for some mysterious reason this habit of realizing poetically the facts of science has ceased abruptly with scientific progress, and all the confounding portents preached by Galileo and Newton have fallen on deaf ears. They painted a picture of the universe compared with which the Apocalypse with its falling stars was a mere idyll. They declared that we are all careering through space, clinging to a cannon-ball, and the poets ignore the matter as if it were a remark about the weather. They say that an invisible force holds us in our own armchairs while the earth hurtles like a boomerang; and men still go back to dusty records to prove the mercy of God. They tell us that Mr. Scott’s monstrous vision of a mountain of sea-water rising in a solid dome, like the glass mountain in the fairy-tale, is actually a fact, and men still go back to the fairy-tale. To what towering heights of poetic imagery might we not have risen if only the poetizing of natural history had continued and man’s fancy had played with the planets as naturally as it once played with the flowers! We might have had a planetary patriotism, in which the green leaf should be like a cockade, and the sea an everlasting dance of drums. We might have been proud of what our star has wrought, and worn its heraldry haughtily in the blind tournament of the
spheres. All this, indeed, we may surely do yet; for with all the multiplicity of knowledge there is one thing happily that no man knows: whether the world is old or young.
A DEFENCE OF CHINA SHEPHERDESSES

There are some things of which the world does not like to be reminded, for they are the dead loves of the world. One of these is that great enthusiasm for the Arcadian life which, however much it may now lie open to the sneers of realism, did, beyond all question, hold sway for an enormous period of the world’s history, from the times that we describe as ancient down to times that may fairly be called recent. The conception of the innocent and hilarious life of shepherds and shepherdesses certainly covered and absorbed the time of Theocritus, of Virgil, of Catullus, of Dante, of Cervantes, of Ariosto, of Shakespeare, and of Pope. We are told that the gods of the heathen were stone and brass, but stone and brass have never endured with the long endurance of the China Shepherdess. The Catholic Church and the Ideal Shepherd are indeed almost the only things that have bridged the abyss between the ancient world and the modern. Yet, as we say, the world does not like to be reminded of this boyish enthusiasm.

But imagination, the function of the historian, cannot let so great an element alone. By the cheap revolutionary it is commonly supposed that imagination is a merely rebellious thing, that it has its chief function in devising new and fantastic republics. But imagination has its highest use in a retrospective realization. The trumpet of imagination, like the trumpet of the Resurrection, calls the dead out of their graves. Imagination sees Delphi with the eyes of a Greek, Jerusalem with the eyes of a Crusader, Paris with the eyes of a Jacobin, and Arcadia with the eyes of a Euphuist. The prime function of imagination is to see our whole orderly system of life as a pile of stratified revolutions. In spite of all revolutionaries it must be said that the function of imagination is not to make strange things settled, so much as to make settled things strange; not so much to make wonders facts as to make facts wonders. To the imaginative the truisms are all paradoxes, since they were paradoxes in the Stone Age; to them the ordinary copy-book blazes with blasphemy.

Let us, then, consider in this light the old pastoral or Arcadian ideal. But first certainly one thing must be definitely recognised. This Arcadian art and literature is a lost enthusiasm. To study it is like fumbling in the love-letters of a dead man. To us its flowers seem as tawdry as cockades; the lambs that dance to the shepherd’s pipe seem to dance with all the artificiality of a ballet. Even our own prosaic toil seems to us more joyous than that holiday. Where its ancient exuberance passed the bounds of wisdom and even of virtue, its caperings seem
frozen into the stillness of an antique frieze. In those gray old pictures a bacchanal seems as dull as an archdeacon. Their very sins seem colder than our restraints.

All this may be frankly recognised: all the barren sentimentality of the Arcadian ideal and all its insolent optimism. But when all is said and done, something else remains.

Through ages in which the most arrogant and elaborate ideals of power and civilization held otherwise undisputed sway, the ideal of the perfect and healthy peasant did undoubtedly represent in some shape or form the conception that there was a dignity in simplicity and a dignity in labour. It was good for the ancient aristocrat, even if he could not attain to innocence and the wisdom of the earth, to believe that these things were the secrets of the priesthood of the poor. It was good for him to believe that even if heaven was not above him, heaven was below him. It was well that he should have amid all his flamboyant triumphs the never-extinguished sentiment that there was something better than his triumphs, the conception that ‘there remaineth a rest.’

The conception of the Ideal Shepherd seems absurd to our modern ideas. But, after all, it was perhaps the only trade of the democracy which was equalized with the trades of the aristocracy even by the aristocracy itself. The shepherd of pastoral poetry was, without doubt, very different from the shepherd of actual fact. Where one innocently piped to his lambs, the other innocently swore at them; and their divergence in intellect and personal cleanliness was immense. But the difference between the ideal shepherd who danced with Amaryllis and the real shepherd who thrashed her is not a scrap greater than the difference between the ideal soldier who dies to capture the colours and the real soldier who lives to clean his accoutrements, between the ideal priest who is everlastingly by someone’s bed and the real priest who is as glad as anyone else to get to his own. There are ideal conceptions and real men in every calling; yet there are few who object to the ideal conceptions, and not many, after all, who object to the real men.

The fact, then, is this: So far from resenting the existence in art and literature of an ideal shepherd, I genuinely regret that the shepherd is the only democratic calling that has ever been raised to the level of the heroic callings conceived by an aristocratic age. So far from objecting to the Ideal Shepherd, I wish there were an Ideal Postman, an Ideal Grocer, and an Ideal Plumber. It is undoubtedly true that we should laugh at the idea of an Ideal Postman; it is true, and it proves that we are not genuine democrats.
Undoubtedly the modern grocer, if called upon to act in an Arcadian manner, if desired to oblige with a symbolic dance expressive of the delights of grocery, or to perform on some simple instrument while his assistants skipped around him, would be embarrassed, and perhaps even reluctant. But it may be questioned whether this temporary reluctance of the grocer is a good thing, or evidence of a good condition of poetic feeling in the grocery business as a whole. There certainly should be an ideal image of health and happiness in any trade, and its remoteness from the reality is not the only important question. No one supposes that the mass of traditional conceptions of duty and glory are always operative, for example, in the mind of a soldier or a doctor; that the Battle of Waterloo actually makes a private enjoy pipeclaying his trousers, or that the ‘health of humanity’ softens the momentary phraseology of a physician called out of bed at two o’clock in the morning. But although no ideal obliterates the ugly drudgery and detail of any calling, that ideal does, in the case of the soldier or the doctor, exist definitely in the background and makes that drudgery worth while as a whole. It is a serious calamity that no such ideal exists in the case of the vast number of honourable trades and crafts on which the existence of a modern city depends. It is a pity that current thought and sentiment offer nothing corresponding to the old conception of patron saints. If they did there would be a Patron Saint of Plumbers, and this would alone be a revolution, for it would force the individual craftsman to believe that there was once a perfect being who did actually plumb.

When all is said and done, then, we think it much open to question whether the world has not lost something in the complete disappearance of the ideal of the happy peasant. It is foolish enough to suppose that the rustic went about all over ribbons, but it is better than knowing that he goes about all over rags and being indifferent to the fact. The modern realistic study of the poor does in reality lead the student further astray than the old idyllic notion. For we cannot get the chiaroscuro of humble life so long as its virtues seem to us as gross as its vices and its joys as sullen as its sorrows. Probably at the very moment that we can see nothing but a dull-faced man smoking and drinking heavily with his friend in a pot-house, the man himself is on his soul’s holiday, crowned with the flowers of a passionate idleness, and far more like the Happy Peasant than the world will ever know.
A DEFENCE OF USEFUL INFORMATION

It is natural and proper enough that the masses of explosive ammunition stored up in detective stories and the replete and solid sweet-stuff shops which are called sentimental novelettes should be popular with the ordinary customer. It is not difficult to realize that all of us, ignorant or cultivated, are primarily interested in murder and love-making. The really extraordinary thing is that the most appalling fictions are not actually so popular as that literature which deals with the most undisputed and depressing facts. Men are not apparently so interested in murder and love-making as they are in the number of different forms of latchkey which exist in London or the time that it would take a grasshopper to jump from Cairo to the Cape. The enormous mass of fatuous and useless truth which fills the most widely-circulated papers, such as Tit-Bits, Science Siftings, and many of the illustrated magazines, is certainly one of the most extraordinary kinds of emotional and mental pabulum on which man ever fed. It is almost incredible that these preposterous statistics should actually be more popular than the most blood-curdling mysteries and the most luxurious debauches of sentiment. To imagine it is like imagining the humorous passages in Bradshaw’s Railway Guide read aloud on winter evenings. It is like conceiving a man unable to put down an advertisement of Mother Seigel’s Syrup because he wished to know what eventually happened to the young man who was extremely ill at Edinburgh. In the case of cheap detective stories and cheap novelettes, we can most of us feel, whatever our degree of education, that it might be possible to read them if we gave full indulgence to a lower and more facile part of our natures; at the worst we feel that we might enjoy them as we might enjoy bull-baiting or getting drunk. But the literature of information is absolutely mysterious to us. We can no more think of amusing ourselves with it than of reading whole pages of a Surbiton local directory. To read such things would not be a piece of vulgar indulgence; it would be a highly arduous and meritorious enterprise. It is this fact which constitutes a profound and almost unfathomable interest in this particular branch of popular literature.

Primarily, at least, there is one rather peculiar thing which must in justice be said about it. The readers of this strange science must be allowed to be, upon the whole, as disinterested as a prophet seeing visions or a child reading fairy-tales. Here, again, we find, as we so often do, that whatever view of this matter of popular literature we can trust, we can trust least of all the comment and censure
current among the vulgar educated. The ordinary version of the ground of this popularity for information, which would be given by a person of greater cultivation, would be that common men are chiefly interested in those sordid facts that surround them on every side. A very small degree of examination will show us that whatever ground there is for the popularity of these insane encyclopaedias, it cannot be the ground of utility. The version of life given by a penny novelette may be very moonstruck and unreliable, but it is at least more likely to contain facts relevant to daily life than compilations on the subject of the number of cows’ tails that would reach the North Pole. There are many more people who are in love than there are people who have any intention of counting or collecting cows’ tails. It is evident to me that the grounds of this widespread madness of information for information’s sake must be sought in other and deeper parts of human nature than those daily needs which lie so near the surface that even social philosophers have discovered them somewhere in that profound and eternal instinct for enthusiasm and minding other people’s business which made great popular movements like the Crusades or the Gordon Riots.

I once had the pleasure of knowing a man who actually talked in private life after the manner of these papers. His conversation consisted of fragmentary statements about height and weight and depth and time and population, and his conversation was a nightmare of dulness. During the shortest pause he would ask whether his interlocutors were aware how many tons of rust were scraped every year off the Menai Bridge, and how many rival shops Mr. Whiteley had bought up since he opened his business. The attitude of his acquaintances towards this inexhaustible entertainer varied according to his presence or absence between indifference and terror. It was frightful to think of a man’s brain being stocked with such inexpressibly profitless treasures. It was like visiting some imposing British Museum and finding its galleries and glass cases filled with specimens of London mud, of common mortar, of broken walking-sticks and cheap tobacco. Years afterwards I discovered that this intolerable prosaic bore had been, in fact, a poet. I learnt that every item of this multitudinous information was totally and unblushingly untrue, that for all I knew he had made it up as he went along; that no tons of rust are scraped off the Menai Bridge, and that the rival tradesmen and Mr. Whiteley were creatures of the poet’s brain. Instantly I conceived consuming respect for the man who was so circumstantial, so monotonous, so entirely purposeless a liar. With him it must have been a case of art for art’s sake. The joke sustained so gravely through a respected lifetime was of that order of joke which is shared with omniscience. But what struck me more
cogently upon reflection was the fact that these immeasurable trivialities, which had struck me as utterly vulgar and arid when I thought they were true, immediately became picturesque and almost brilliant when I thought they were inventions of the human fancy. And here, as it seems to me, I laid my finger upon a fundamental quality of the cultivated class which prevents it, and will, perhaps, always prevent it from seeing with the eyes of popular imagination. The merely educated can scarcely ever be brought to believe that this world is itself an interesting place. When they look at a work of art, good or bad, they expect to be interested, but when they look at a newspaper advertisement or a group in the street, they do not, properly and literally speaking, expect to be interested. But to common and simple people this world is a work of art, though it is, like many great works of art, anonymous. They look to life for interest with the same kind of cheerful and uneradicable assurance with which we look for interest at a comedy for which we have paid money at the door. To the eyes of the ultimate school of contemporary fastidiousness, the universe is indeed an ill-drawn and over-coloured picture, the scrawlings in circles of a baby upon the slate of night; its starry skies are a vulgar pattern which they would not have for a wallpaper, its flowers and fruits have a cockney brilliancy, like the holiday hat of a flower-girl. Hence, degraded by art to its own level, they have lost altogether that primitive and typical taste of man—the taste for news. By this essential taste for news, I mean the pleasure in hearing the mere fact that a man has died at the age of 110 in South Wales, or that the horses ran away at a funeral in San Francisco. Large masses of the early faiths and politics of the world, numbers of the miracles and heroic anecdotes, are based primarily upon this love of something that has just happened, this divine institution of gossip. When Christianity was named the good news, it spread rapidly, not only because it was good, but also because it was news. So it is that if any of us have ever spoken to a navvy in a train about the daily paper, we have generally found the navvy interested, not in those struggles of Parliaments and trades unions which sometimes are, and are always supposed to be, for his benefit; but in the fact that an unusually large whale has been washed up on the coast of Orkney, or that some leading millionaire like Mr. Harmsworth is reported to break a hundred pipes a year. The educated classes, cloyed and demoralized with the mere indulgence of art and mood, can no longer understand the idle and splendid disinterestedness of the reader of Pearson’s Weekly. He still keeps something of that feeling which should be the birthright of men—the feeling that this planet is like a new house into which we have just moved our baggage. Any detail of it has a value, and,
with a truly sportsmanlike instinct, the average man takes most pleasure in the
details which are most complicated, irrelevant, and at once difficult and useless
to discover. Those parts of the newspaper which announce the giant gooseberry
and the raining frogs are really the modern representatives of the popular
tendency which produced the hydra and the werewolf and the dog-headed men.
Folk in the Middle Ages were not interested in a dragon or a glimpse of the devil
because they thought that it was a beautiful prose idyll, but because they thought
that it had really just been seen. It was not like so much artistic literature, a
refuge indicating the dulness of the world: it was an incident pointedly
illustrating the fecund poetry of the world.

That much can be said, and is said, against the literature of information, I do
not for a moment deny. It is shapeless, it is trivial, it may give an unreal air of
knowledge, it unquestionably lies along with the rest of popular literature under
the general indictment that it may spoil the chance of better work, certainly by
wasting time, possibly by ruining taste. But these obvious objections are the
objections which we hear so persistently from everyone that one cannot help
wondering where the papers in question procure their myriads of readers. The
natural necessity and natural good underlying such crude institutions is far less
often a subject of speculation; yet the healthy hungers which lie at the back of
the habits of modern democracy are surely worthy of the same sympathetic study
that we give to the dogmas of the fanatics long dethroned and the intrigues of
commonwealths long obliterated from the earth. And this is the base and
consideration which I have to offer: that perhaps the taste for shreds and patches
of journalistic science and history is not, as is continually asserted, the vulgar
and senile curiosity of a people that has grown old, but simply the babyish and
indiscriminate curiosity of a people still young and entering history for the first
time. In other words, I suggest that they only tell each other in magazines the
same kind of stories of commonplace portents and conventional eccentricities
which, in any case, they would tell each other in taverns. Science itself is only
the exaggeration and specialization of this thirst for useless fact, which is the
mark of the youth of man. But science has become strangely separated from the
mere news and scandal of flowers and birds; men have ceased to see that a
pterodactyl was as fresh and natural as a flower, that a flower is as monstrous as
a pterodactyl. The rebuilding of this bridge between science and human nature is
one of the greatest needs of mankind. We have all to show that before we go on
to any visions or creations we can be contented with a planet of miracles.
A DEFENCE OF HERALDRY

The modern view of heraldry is pretty accurately represented by the words of the famous barrister who, after cross-examining for some time a venerable dignitary of Heralds’ College, summed up his results in the remark that ‘the silly old man didn’t even understand his own silly old trade.’

Heraldry properly so called was, of course, a wholly limited and aristocratic thing, but the remark needs a kind of qualification not commonly realized. In a sense there was a plebeian heraldry, since every shop was, like every castle, distinguished not by a name, but a sign. The whole system dates from a time when picture-writing still really ruled the world. In those days few could read or write; they signed their names with a pictorial symbol, a cross—and a cross is a great improvement on most men’s names.

Now, there is something to be said for the peculiar influence of pictorial symbols on men’s minds. All letters, we learn, were originally pictorial and heraldic: thus the letter A is the portrait of an ox, but the portrait is now reproduced in so impressionist a manner that but little of the rural atmosphere can be absorbed by contemplating it. But as long as some pictorial and poetic quality remains in the symbol, the constant use of it must do something for the aesthetic education of those employing it. Public-houses are now almost the only shops that use the ancient signs, and the mysterious attraction which they exercise may be (by the optimistic) explained in this manner. There are taverns with names so dreamlike and exquisite that even Sir Wilfrid Lawson might waver on the threshold for a moment, suffering the poet to struggle with the moralist. So it was with the heraldic images. It is impossible to believe that the red lion of Scotland acted upon those employing it merely as a naked convenience like a number or a letter; it is impossible to believe that the Kings of Scotland would have cheerfully accepted the substitute of a pig or a frog. There are, as we say, certain real advantages in pictorial symbols, and one of them is that everything that is pictorial suggests, without naming or defining. There is a road from the eye to the heart that does not go through the intellect. Men do not quarrel about the meaning of sunsets; they never dispute that the hawthorn says the best and Wittiest thing about the spring.

Thus in the old aristocratic days there existed this vast pictorial symbolism of all the colours and degrees of aristocracy. When the great trumpet of equality was blown, almost immediately afterwards was made one of the greatest
blunders in the history of mankind. For all this pride and vivacity, all these towering symbols and flamboyant colours, should have been extended to mankind. The tobacconist should have had a crest, and the cheesemonger a war-cry. The grocer who sold margarine as butter should have felt that there was a stain on the escutcheon of the Higgineses. Instead of doing this, the democrats made the appalling mistake—a mistake at the root of the whole modern malady—of decreasing the human magnificence of the past instead of increasing it. They did not say, as they should have done, to the common citizen, ‘You are as good as the Duke of Norfolk,’ but used that meaner democratic formula, ‘The Duke of Norfolk is no better than you are.’

For it cannot be denied that the world lost something finally and most unfortunately about the beginning of the nineteenth century. In former times the mass of the people was conceived as mean and commonplace, but only as comparatively mean and commonplace; they were dwarfed and eclipsed by certain high stations and splendid callings. But with the Victorian era came a principle which conceived men not as comparatively, but as positively, mean and commonplace. A man of any station was represented as being by nature a dingy and trivial person—a person born, as it were, in a black hat. It began to be thought that it was ridiculous for a man to wear beautiful garments, instead of it being—as, of course, it is—ridiculous for him to deliberately wear ugly ones. It was considered affected for a man to speak bold and heroic words, whereas, of course, it is emotional speech which is natural, and ordinary civil speech which is affected. The whole relations of beauty and ugliness, of dignity and ignominy were turned upside down. Beauty became an extravagance, as if top-hats and umbrellas were not the real extravagance—a landscape from the land of the goblins. Dignity became a form of foolery and shamelessness, as if the very essence of a fool were not a lack of dignity. And the consequence is that it is practically most difficult to propose any decoration or public dignity for modern men without making them laugh. They laugh at the idea of carrying crests and coats-of-arms instead of laughing at their own boots and neckties. We are forbidden to say that tradesmen should have a poetry of their own, although there is nothing so poetical as trade. A grocer should have a coat-of-arms worthy of his strange merchandise gathered from distant and fantastic lands; a postman should have a coat-of-arms capable of expressing the strange honour and responsibility of the man who carries men’s souls in a bag; the chemist should have a coat-of-arms symbolizing something of the mysteries of the house of healing, the cavern of a merciful witchcraft.
There were in the French Revolution a class of people at whom everybody laughed, and at whom it was probably difficult, as a practical matter, to refrain from laughing. They attempted to erect, by means of huge wooden statues and brand-new festivals, the most extraordinary new religions. They adored the Goddess of Reason, who would appear, even when the fullest allowance has been made for their many virtues, to be the deity who had least smiled upon them. But these capering maniacs, disowned alike by the old world and the new, were men who had seen a great truth unknown alike to the new world and the old. They had seen the thing that was hidden from the wise and understanding, from the whole modern democratic civilization down to the present time. They realized that democracy must have a heraldry, that it must have a proud and high-coloured pageantry, if it is to keep always before its own mind its own sublime mission. Unfortunately for this ideal, the world has in this matter followed English democracy rather than French; and those who look back to the nineteenth century will assuredly look back to it as we look back to the reign of the Puritans, as the time of black coats and black tempers. From the strange life the men of that time led, they might be assisting at the funeral of liberty instead of at its christening. The moment we really believe in democracy, it will begin to blossom, as aristocracy blossomed, into symbolic colours and shapes. We shall never make anything of democracy until we make fools of ourselves. For if a man really cannot make a fool of himself, we may be quite certain that the effort is superfluous.
A DEFENCE OF UGLY THINGS

There are some people who state that the exterior, sex, or physique of another person is indifferent to them, that they care only for the communion of mind with mind; but these people need not detain us. There are some statements that no one ever thinks of believing, however often they are made.

But while nothing in this world would persuade us that a great friend of Mr. Forbes Robertson, let us say, would experience no surprise or discomfort at seeing him enter the room in the bodily form of Mr. Chaplin, there is a confusion constantly made between being attracted by exterior, which is natural and universal, and being attracted by what is called physical beauty, which is not entirely natural and not in the least universal. Or rather, to speak more strictly, the conception of physical beauty has been narrowed to mean a certain kind of physical beauty which no more exhausts the possibilities of external attractiveness than the respectability of a Clapham builder exhausts the possibilities of moral attractiveness.

The tyrants and deceivers of mankind in this matter have been the Greeks. All their splendid work for civilization ought not to have wholly blinded us to the fact of their great and terrible sin against the variety of life. It is a remarkable fact that while the Jews have long ago been rebelled against and accused of blighting the world with a stringent and one-sided ethical standard, nobody has noticed that the Greeks have committed us to an infinitely more horrible asceticism—an asceticism of the fancy, a worship of one aesthetic type alone. Jewish severity had at least common-sense as its basis; it recognised that men lived in a world of fact, and that if a man married within the degrees of blood certain consequences might follow. But they did not starve their instinct for contrasts and combinations; their prophets gave two wings to the ox and any number of eyes to the cherubim with all the riotous ingenuity of Lewis Carroll. But the Greeks carried their police regulation into elfland; they vetoed not the actual adulteries of the earth but the wild weddings of ideas, and forbade the banns of thought.

It is extraordinary to watch the gradual emasculation of the monsters of Greek myth under the pestilent influence of the Apollo Belvedere. The chimaera was a creature of whom any healthy-minded people would have been proud; but when we see it in Greek pictures we feel inclined to tie a ribbon round its neck and give it a saucer of milk. Who ever feels that the giants in Greek art and poetry
were really big–big as some folk-lore giants have been? In some Scandinavian story a hero walks for miles along a mountain ridge, which eventually turns out to be the bridge of the giant’s nose. That is what we should call, with a calm conscience, a large giant. But this earthquake fancy terrified the Greeks, and their terror has terrified all mankind out of their natural love of size, vitality, variety, energy, ugliness. Nature intended every human face, so long as it was forcible, individual, and expressive, to be regarded as distinct from all others, as a poplar is distinct from an oak, and an apple-tree from a willow. But what the Dutch gardeners did for trees the Greeks did for the human form; they lopped away its living and sprawling features to give it a certain academic shape; they hacked off noses and pared down chins with a ghastly horticultural calm. And they have really succeeded so far as to make us call some of the most powerful and endearing faces ugly, and some of the most silly and repulsive faces beautiful. This disgraceful via media, this pitiful sense of dignity, has bitten far deeper into the soul of modern civilization than the external and practical Puritanism of Israel. The Jew at the worst told a man to dance in fetters; the Greek put an exquisite vase upon his head and told him not to move.

Scripture says that one star differeth from another in glory, and the same conception applies to noses. To insist that one type of face is ugly because it differs from that of the Venus of Milo is to look at it entirely in a misleading light. It is strange that we should resent people differing from ourselves; we should resent much more violently their resembling ourselves. This principle has made a sufficient hash of literary criticism, in which it is always the custom to complain of the lack of sound logic in a fairy tale, and the entire absence of true oratorical power in a three-act farce. But to call another man’s face ugly because it powerfully expresses another man’s soul is like complaining that a cabbage has not two legs. If we did so, the only course for the cabbage would be to point out with severity, but with some show of truth, that we were not a beautiful green all over.

But this frigid theory of the beautiful has not succeeded in conquering the art of the world, except in name. In some quarters, indeed, it has never held sway. A glance at Chinese dragons or Japanese gods will show how independent are Orientals of the conventional idea of facial and bodily regularity, and how keen and fiery is their enjoyment of real beauty, of goggle eyes, of sprawling claws, of gaping mouths and writhing coils. In the Middle Ages men broke away from the Greek standard of beauty, and lifted up in adoration to heaven great towers, which seemed alive with dancing apes and devils. In the full summer of
technical artistic perfection the revolt was carried to its real consummation in the study of the faces of men. Rembrandt declared the sane and manly gospel that a man was dignified, not when he was like a Greek god, but when he had a strong, square nose like a cudgel, a boldly-blocked head like a helmet, and a jaw like a steel trap.

This branch of art is commonly dismissed as the grotesque. We have never been able to understand why it should be humiliating to be laughable, since it is giving an elevated artistic pleasure to others. If a gentleman who saw us in the street were suddenly to burst into tears at the mere thought of our existence, it might be considered disquieting and uncomplimentary; but laughter is not uncomplimentary. In truth, however, the phrase ‘grotesque’ is a misleading description of ugliness in art. It does not follow that either the Chinese dragons or the Gothic gargoyles or the goblinish old women of Rembrandt were in the least intended to be comic. Their extravagance was not the extravagance of satire, but simply the extravagance of vitality; and here lies the whole key of the place of ugliness in aesthetics. We like to see a crag jut out in shameless decision from the cliff, we like to see the red pines stand up hardly upon a high cliff, we like to see a chasm cloven from end to end of a mountain. With equally noble enthusiasm we like to see a nose jut out decisively, we like to see the red hair of a friend stand up hardly in bristles upon his head, we like to see his mouth broad and clean cut like the mountain crevasse. At least some of us like all this; it is not a question of humour. We do not burst with amusement at the first sight of the pines or the chasm; but we like them because they are expressive of the dramatic stillness of Nature, her bold experiments, her definite departures, her fearlessness and savage pride in her children. The moment we have snapped the spell of conventional beauty, there are a million beautiful faces waiting for us everywhere, just as there are a million beautiful spirits.
A DEFENCE OF FARCE

I have never been able to understand why certain forms of art should be marked off as something debased and trivial. A comedy is spoken of as ‘degenerating into farce’; it would be fair criticism to speak of it ‘changing into farce’; but as for degenerating into farce, we might equally reasonably speak of it as degenerating into tragedy. Again, a story is spoken of as ‘melodramatic,’ and the phrase, queerly enough, is not meant as a compliment. To speak of something as ‘pantomimic’ or ‘sensational’ is innocently supposed to be biting, Heaven knows why, for all works of art are sensations, and a good pantomime (now extinct) is one of the pleasantest sensations of all. ‘This stuff is fit for a detective story,’ is often said, as who should say, ‘This stuff is fit for an epic.’

Whatever may be the rights and wrongs of this mode of classification, there can be no doubt about one most practical and disastrous effect of it. These lighter or wilder forms of art, having no standard set up for them, no gust of generous artistic pride to lift them up, do actually tend to become as bad as they are supposed to be. Neglected children of the great mother, they grow up in darkness, dirty and unlettered, and when they are right they are right almost by accident, because of the blood in their veins. The common detective story of mystery and murder seems to the intelligent reader to be little except a strange glimpse of a planet peopled by congenital idiots, who cannot find the end of their own noses or the character of their own wives. The common pantomime seems like some horrible satiric picture of a world without cause or effect, a mass of ‘jarring atoms,’ a prolonged mental torture of irrelevancy. The ordinary farce seems a world of almost piteous vulgarity, where a half-witted and stunted creature is afraid when his wife comes home, and amused when she sits down on the doorstep. All this is, in a sense, true, but it is the fault of nothing in heaven or earth except the attitude and the phrases quoted at the beginning of this article. We have no doubt in the world that, if the other forms of art had been equally despised, they would have been equally despicable. If people had spoken of ‘sonnets’ with the same accent with which they speak of ‘music-hall songs,’ a sonnet would have been a thing so fearful and wonderful that we almost regret we cannot have a specimen; a rowdy sonnet is a thing to dream about. If people had said that epics were only fit for children and nursemaids, ‘Paradise Lost’ might have been an average pantomime: it might have been called ‘Harlequin Satan, or How Adam ‘Ad ’em.’ For who would trouble to bring to perfection a
work in which even perfection is grotesque? Why should Shakespeare write ‘Othello’ if even his triumph consisted in the eulogy, ‘Mr. Shakespeare is fit for something better than writing tragedies’?

The case of farce, and its wilder embodiment in harlequinade, is especially important. That these high and legitimate forms of art, glorified by Aristophanes and Molière, have sunk into such contempt may be due to many causes: I myself have little doubt that it is due to the astonishing and ludicrous lack of belief in hope and hilarity which marks modern aesthetics, to such an extent that it has spread even to the revolutionists (once the hopeful section of men), so that even those who ask us to fling the stars into the sea are not quite sure that they will be any better there than they were before. Every form of literary art must be a symbol of some phase of the human spirit; but whereas the phase is, in human life, sufficiently convincing in itself, in art it must have a certain pungency and neatness of form, to compensate for its lack of reality. Thus any set of young people round a tea-table may have all the comedy emotions of ‘Much Ado about Nothing’ or ‘Northanger Abbey,’ but if their actual conversation were reported, it would possibly not be a worthy addition to literature. An old man sitting by his fire may have all the desolate grandeur of Lear or Père Goriot, but if he comes into literature he must do something besides sit by the fire. The artistic justification, then, of farce and pantomime must consist in the emotions of life which correspond to them. And these emotions are to an incredible extent crushed out by the modern insistence on the painful side of life only. Pain, it is said, is the dominant element of life; but this is true only in a very special sense. If pain were for one single instant literally the dominant element in life, every man would be found hanging dead from his own bed-post by the morning. Pain, as the black and catastrophic thing, attracts the youthful artist, just as the schoolboy draws devils and skeletons and men hanging. But joy is a far more elusive and elvish matter, since it is our reason for existing, and a very feminine reason; it mingles with every breath we draw and every cup of tea we drink. The literature of joy is infinitely more difficult, more rare and more triumphant than the black and white literature of pain. And of all the varied forms of the literature of joy, the form most truly worthy of moral reverence and artistic ambition is the form called ‘farce’—or its wilder shape in pantomime. To the quietest human being, seated in the quietest house, there will sometimes come a sudden and unmeaning hunger for the possibilities or impossibilities of things; he will abruptly wonder whether the teapot may not suddenly begin to pour out honey or sea-water, the clock to point to all hours of the day at once, the candle to burn.
green or crimson, the door to open upon a lake or a potato-field instead of a London street. Upon anyone who feels this nameless anarchism there rests for the time being the abiding spirit of pantomime. Of the clown who cuts the policeman in two it may be said (with no darker meaning) that he realizes one of our visions. And it may be noted here that this internal quality in pantomime is perfectly symbolized and preserved by that commonplace or cockney landscape and architecture which characterizes pantomime and farce. If the whole affair happened in some alien atmosphere, if a pear-tree began to grow apples or a river to run with wine in some strange fairyland, the effect would be quite different. The streets and shops and door-knockers of the harlequinade, which to the vulgar aesthete make it seem commonplace, are in truth the very essence of the aesthetic departure. It must be an actual modern door which opens and shuts, constantly disclosing different interiors; it must be a real baker whose loaves fly up into the air without his touching them, or else the whole internal excitement of this elvish invasion of civilization, this abrupt entrance of Puck into Pimlico, is lost. Some day, perhaps, when the present narrow phase of aesthetics has ceased to monopolize the name, the glory of a farcical art may become fashionable. Long after men have ceased to drape their houses in green and gray and to adorn them with Japanese vases, an aesthete may build a house on pantomime principles, in which all the doors shall have their bells and knockers on the inside, all the staircases be constructed to vanish on the pressing of a button, and all the dinners (humorous dinners in themselves) come up cooked through a trapdoor. We are very sure, at least, that it is as reasonable to regulate one’s life and lodgings by this kind of art as by any other.

The whole of this view of farce and pantomime may seem insane to us; but we fear that it is we who are insane. Nothing in this strange age of transition is so depressing as its merriment. All the most brilliant men of the day when they set about the writing of comic literature do it under one destructive fallacy and disadvantage: the notion that comic literature is in some sort of way superficial. They give us little knick-knacks of the brittleness of which they positively boast, although two thousand years have beaten as vainly upon the follies of the ‘Frogs’ as on the wisdom of the ‘Republic.’ It is all a mean shame of joy. When we come out from a performance of the ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream’ we feel as near to the stars as when we come out from ‘King Lear.’ For the joy of these works is older than sorrow, their extravagance is saner than wisdom, their love is stronger than death.

The old masters of a healthy madness, Aristophanes or Rabelais or
Shakespeare, doubtless had many brushes with the precisians or ascetics of their day, but we cannot but feel that for honest severity and consistent self-maceration they would always have had respect. But what abysses of scorn, inconceivable to any modern, would they have reserved for an aesthetic type and movement which violated morality and did not even find pleasure, which outraged sanity and could not attain to exuberance, which contented itself with the fool’s cap without the bells!
A DEFENCE OF HUMILITY

The act of defending any of the cardinal virtues has to-day all the exhilaration of a vice. Moral truisms have been so much disputed that they have begun to sparkle like so many brilliant paradoxes. And especially (in this age of egoistic idealism) there is about one who defends humility something inexpressibly rakish.

It is no part of my intention to defend humility on practical grounds. Practical grounds are uninteresting, and, moreover, on practical grounds the case for humility is overwhelming. We all know that the ‘divine glory of the ego’ is socially a great nuisance; we all do actually value our friends for modesty, freshness, and simplicity of heart. Whatever may be the reason, we all do warmly respect humility—in other people.

But the matter must go deeper than this. If the grounds of humility are found only in social convenience, they may be quite trivial and temporary. The egoists may be the martyrs of a nobler dispensation, agonizing for a more arduous ideal. To judge from the comparative lack of ease in their social manner, this seems a reasonable suggestion.

There is one thing that must be seen at the outset of the study of humility from an intrinsic and eternal point of view. The new philosophy of self-esteem and self-assertion declares that humility is a vice. If it be so, it is quite clear that it is one of those vices which are an integral part of original sin. It follows with the precision of clockwork every one of the great joys of life. No one, for example, was ever in love without indulging in a positive debauch of humility. All full-blooded and natural people, such as schoolboys, enjoy humility the moment they attain hero-worship. Humility, again, is said both by its upholders and opponents to be the peculiar growth of Christianity. The real and obvious reason of this is often missed. The pagans insisted upon self-assertion because it was the essence of their creed that the gods, though strong and just, were mystic, capricious, and even indifferent. But the essence of Christianity was in a literal sense the New Testament—a covenant with God which opened to men a clear deliverance. They thought themselves secure; they claimed palaces of pearl and silver under the oath and seal of the Omnipotent; they believed themselves rich with an irrevocable benediction which set them above the stars; and immediately they discovered humility. It was only another example of the same immutable paradox. It is always the secure who are humble.
This particular instance survives in the evangelical revivalists of the street. They are irritating enough, but no one who has really studied them can deny that the irritation is occasioned by these two things, an irritating hilarity and an irritating humility. This combination of joy and self-prostration is a great deal too universal to be ignored. If humility has been discredited as a virtue at the present day, it is not wholly irrelevant to remark that this discredit has arisen at the same time as a great collapse of joy in current literature and philosophy. Men have revived the splendour of Greek self-assertion at the same time that they have revived the bitterness of Greek pessimism. A literature has arisen which commands us all to arrogate to ourselves the liberty of self-sufficing deities at the same time that it exhibits us to ourselves as dingy maniacs who ought to be chained up like dogs. It is certainly a curious state of things altogether. When we are genuinely happy, we think we are unworthy of happiness. But when we are demanding a divine emancipation we seem to be perfectly certain that we are unworthy of anything.

The only explanation of the matter must be found in the conviction that humility has infinitely deeper roots than any modern men suppose; that it is a metaphysical and, one might almost say, a mathematical virtue. Probably this can best be tested by a study of those who frankly disregard humility and assert the supreme duty of perfecting and expressing one’s self. These people tend, by a perfectly natural process, to bring their own great human gifts of culture, intellect, or moral power to a great perfection, successively shutting out everything that they feel to be lower than themselves. Now shutting out things is all very well, but it has one simple corollary—that from everything that we shut out we are ourselves shut out. When we shut our door on the wind, it would be equally true to say that the wind shuts its door on us. Whatever virtues a triumphant egoism really leads to, no one can reasonably pretend that it leads to knowledge. Turning a beggar from the door may be right enough, but pretending to know all the stories the beggar might have narrated is pure nonsense; and this is practically the claim of the egoism which thinks that self-assertion can obtain knowledge. A beetle may or may not be inferior to a man—the matter awaits demonstration; but if he were inferior by ten thousand fathoms, the fact remains that there is probably a beetle view of things of which a man is entirely ignorant. If he wishes to conceive that point of view, he will scarcely reach it by persistently revelling in the fact that he is not a beetle. The most brilliant exponent of the egoistic school, Nietszche, with deadly and honourable logic, admitted that the philosophy of self-satisfaction led to looking down upon the
weak, the cowardly, and the ignorant. Looking down on things may be a delightful experience, only there is nothing, from a mountain to a cabbage, that is really seen when it is seen from a balloon. The philosopher of the ego sees everything, no doubt, from a high and rarified heaven; only he sees everything foreshortened or deformed.

Now if we imagine that a man wished truly, as far as possible, to see everything as it was, he would certainly proceed on a different principle. He would seek to divest himself for a time of those personal peculiarities which tend to divide him from the thing he studies. It is as difficult, for example, for a man to examine a fish without developing a certain vanity in possessing a pair of legs, as if they were the latest article of personal adornment. But if a fish is to be approximately understood, this physiological dandyism must be overcome. The earnest student of fish morality will, spiritually speaking, chop off his legs. And similarly the student of birds will eliminate his arms; the frog-lover will with one stroke of the imagination remove all his teeth, and the spirit wishing to enter into all the hopes and fears of jelly-fish will simplify his personal appearance to a really alarming extent. It would appear, therefore, that this great body of ours and all its natural instincts, of which we are proud, and justly proud, is rather an encumbrance at the moment when we attempt to appreciate things as they should be appreciated. We do actually go through a process of mental asceticism, a castration of the entire being, when we wish to feel the abounding good in all things. It is good for us at certain times that ourselves should be like a mere window—as clear, as luminous, and as invisible.

In a very entertaining work, over which we have roared in childhood, it is stated that a point has no parts and no magnitude. Humility is the luxurious art of reducing ourselves to a point, not to a small thing or a large one, but to a thing with no size at all, so that to it all the cosmic things are what they really are—of immeasurable stature. That the trees are high and the grasses short is a mere accident of our own foot-rules and our own stature. But to the spirit which has stripped off for a moment its own idle temporal standards the grass is an everlasting forest, with dragons for denizens; the stones of the road are as incredible mountains piled one upon the other; the dandelions are like gigantic bonfires illuminating the lands around; and the heath-bells on their stalks are like planets hung in heaven each higher than the other. Between one stake of a paling and another there are new and terrible landscapes; here a desert, with nothing but one misshapen rock; here a miraculous forest, of which all the trees flower above the head with the hues of sunset; here, again, a sea full of monsters that Dante
would not have dared to dream. These are the visions of him who, like the child in the fairy tales, is not afraid to become small. Meanwhile, the sage whose faith is in magnitude and ambition is, like a giant, becoming larger and larger, which only means that the stars are becoming smaller and smaller. World after world falls from him into insignificance; the whole passionate and intricate life of common things becomes as lost to him as is the life of the infusoria to a man without a microscope. He rises always through desolate eternities. He may find new systems, and forget them; he may discover fresh universes, and learn to despise them. But the towering and tropical vision of things as they really are—the gigantic daisies, the heaven-consuming dandelions, the great Odyssey of strange-coloured oceans and strange-shaped trees, of dust like the wreck of temples, and thistledown like the ruin of stars—all this colossal vision shall perish with the last of the humble.
A DEFENCE OF SLANG

The aristocrats of the nineteenth century have destroyed entirely their one solitary utility. It is their business to be flaunting and arrogant; but they flaunt unobtrusively, and their attempts at arrogance are depressing. Their chief duty hitherto has been the development of variety, vivacity, and fulness of life; oligarchy was the world’s first experiment in liberty. But now they have adopted the opposite ideal of ‘good form,’ which may be defined as Puritanism without religion. Good form has sent them all into black like the stroke of a funeral bell. They engage, like Mr. Gilbert’s curates, in a war of mildness, a positive competition of obscurity. In old times the lords of the earth sought above all things to be distinguished from each other; with that object they erected outrageous images on their helmets and painted preposterous colours on their shields. They wished to make it entirely clear that a Norfolk was as different, say, from an Argyll as a white lion from a black pig. But to-day their ideal is precisely the opposite one, and if a Norfolk and an Argyll were dressed so much alike that they were mistaken for each other they would both go home dancing with joy.

The consequences of this are inevitable. The aristocracy must lose their function of standing to the world for the idea of variety, experiment, and colour, and we must find these things in some other class. To ask whether we shall find them in the middle class would be to jest upon sacred matters. The only conclusion, therefore, is that it is to certain sections of the lower class, chiefly, for example, to omnibus-conductors, with their rich and rococo mode of thought, that we must look for guidance towards liberty and light.

The one stream of poetry which is continually flowing is slang. Every day a nameless poet weaves some fairy tracery of popular language. It may be said that the fashionable world talks slang as much as the democratic; this is true, and it strongly supports the view under consideration. Nothing is more startling than the contrast between the heavy, formal, lifeless slang of the man-about-town and the light, living, and flexible slang of the coster. The talk of the upper strata of the educated classes is about the most shapeless, aimless, and hopeless literary product that the world has ever seen. Clearly in this, again, the upper classes have degenerated. We have ample evidence that the old leaders of feudal war could speak on occasion with a certain natural symbolism and eloquence that they had not gained from books. When Cyrano de Bergerac, in Rostand’s play,
throws doubts on the reality of Christian’s dulness and lack of culture, the latter replies:

‘Bah! on trouve des mots quand on Monte à l’assaut;
Oui, j’ai un certain esprit facile et militaire;’

and these two lines sum up a truth about the old oligarchs. They could not write three legible letters, but they could sometimes speak literature. Douglas, when he hurled the heart of Bruce in front of him in his last battle, cried out, ‘Pass first, great heart, as thou wert ever wont.’ A Spanish nobleman, when commanded by the King to receive a high-placed and notorious traitor, said: ‘I will receive him in all obedience, and burn down my house afterwards.’ This is literature without culture; it is the speech of men convinced that they have to assert proudly the poetry of life.

Anyone, however, who should seek for such pearls in the conversation of a young man of modern Belgravia would have much sorrow in his life. It is not only impossible for aristocrats to assert proudly the poetry of life; it is more impossible for them than for anyone else. It is positively considered vulgar for a nobleman to boast of his ancient name, which is, when one comes to think of it, the only rational object of his existence. If a man in the street proclaimed, with rude feudal rhetoric, that he was the Earl of Doncaster, he would be arrested as a lunatic; but if it were discovered that he really was the Earl of Doncaster, he would simply be cut as a cad. No poetical prose must be expected from Earls as a class. The fashionable slang is hardly even a language; it is like the formless cries of animals, dimly indicating certain broad, well-understood states of mind. ‘Bored,’ ‘cut up,’ ‘jolly,’ ‘rotten,’ and so on, are like the words of some tribe of savages whose vocabulary has only twenty of them. If a man of fashion wished to protest against some solecism in another man of fashion, his utterance would be a mere string of set phrases, as lifeless as a string of dead fish. But an omnibus conductor (being filled with the Muse) would burst out into a solid literary effort: ‘You’re a gen’leman, aren’t yer . . . yer boots is a lot brighter than yer ‘ed . . . there’s precious little of yer, and that’s clothes . . . that’s right, put yer cigar in yer mouth ‘cos I can’t see yer be’ind it . . . take it out again, do yer! you’re young for smokin,’ but I’ve sent for yer mother . . . . Goin’? oh, don’t run away: I won’t ‘arm yer. I’ve got a good ‘art, I ‘ave. . . .”Down with croolty to animals,” I say,’ and so on. It is evident that this mode of speech is not only literary, but literary in a very ornate and almost artificial sense. Keats never put into a sonnet so many remote metaphors as a coster puts into a curse; his speech
is one long allegory, like Spenser’s ‘Faerie Queen.’

I do not imagine that it is necessary to demonstrate that this poetic allusiveness is the characteristic of true slang. Such an expression as ‘Keep your hair on’ is positively Meredithian in its perverse and mysterious manner of expressing an idea. The Americans have a well-known expression about ‘swelled-head’ as a description of self-approval, and the other day I heard a remarkable fantasia upon this air. An American said that after the Chinese War the Japanese wanted ‘to put on their hats with a shoe-horn.’ This is a monument of the true nature of slang, which consists in getting further and further away from the original conception, in treating it more and more as an assumption. It is rather like the literary doctrine of the Symbolists.

The real reason of this great development of eloquence among the lower orders again brings us back to the case of the aristocracy in earlier times. The lower classes live in a state of war, a war of words. Their readiness is the product of the same fiery individualism as the readiness of the old fighting oligarchs. Any cabman has to be ready with his tongue, as any gentleman of the last century had to be ready with his sword. It is unfortunate that the poetry which is developed by this process should be purely a grotesque poetry. But as the higher orders of society have entirely abdicated their right to speak with a heroic eloquence, it is no wonder that the language should develop by itself in the direction of a rowdy eloquence. The essential point is that somebody must be at work adding new symbols and new circumlocutions to a language.

All slang is metaphor, and all metaphor is poetry. If we paused for a moment to examine the cheapest cant phrases that pass our lips every day, we should find that they were as rich and suggestive as so many sonnets. To take a single instance: we speak of a man in English social relations ‘breaking the ice.’ If this were expanded into a sonnet, we should have before us a dark and sublime picture of an ocean of everlasting ice, the sombre and baffling mirror of the Northern nature, over which men walked and danced and skated easily, but under which the living waters roared and toiled fathoms below. The world of slang is a kind of topsy-turvydom of poetry, full of blue moons and white elephants, of men losing their heads, and men whose tongues run away with them—a whole chaos of fairy tales.
A DEFENCE OF BABY-WORSHIP

The two facts which attract almost every normal person to children are, first, that they are very serious, and, secondly, that they are in consequence very happy. They are jolly with the completeness which is possible only in the absence of humour. The most unfathomable schools and sages have never attained to the gravity which dwells in the eyes of a baby of three months old. It is the gravity of astonishment at the universe, and astonishment at the universe is not mysticism, but a transcendent common-sense. The fascination of children lies in this: that with each of them all things are remade, and the universe is put again upon its trial. As we walk the streets and see below us those delightful bulbous heads, three times too big for the body, which mark these human mushrooms, we ought always primarily to remember that within every one of these heads there is a new universe, as new as it was on the seventh day of creation. In each of those orbs there is a new system of stars, new grass, new cities, a new sea.

There is always in the healthy mind an obscure prompting that religion teaches us rather to dig than to climb; that if we could once understand the common clay of earth we should understand everything. Similarly, we have the sentiment that if we could destroy custom at a blow and see the stars as a child sees them, we should need no other apocalypse. This is the great truth which has always lain at the back of baby-worship, and which will support it to the end. Maturity, with its endless energies and aspirations, may easily be convinced that it will find new things to appreciate; but it will never be convinced, at bottom, that it has properly appreciated what it has got. We may scale the heavens and find new stars innumerable, but there is still the new star we have not found–that on which we were born.

But the influence of children goes further than its first trifling effort of remaking heaven and earth. It forces us actually to remodel our conduct in accordance with this revolutionary theory of the marvellousness of all things. We do (even when we are perfectly simple or ignorant)–we do actually treat talking in children as marvellous, walking in children as marvellous, common intelligence in children as marvellous. The cynical philosopher fancies he has a victory in this matter—that he can laugh when he shows that the words or antics of the child, so much admired by its worshippers, are common enough. The fact is that this is precisely where baby-worship is so profoundly right. Any words and any antics in a lump of clay are wonderful, the child’s words and antics are
wonderful, and it is only fair to say that the philosopher’s words and antics are equally wonderful.

The truth is that it is our attitude towards children that is right, and our attitude towards grown-up people that is wrong. Our attitude towards our equals in age consists in a servile solemnity, overlying a considerable degree of indifference or disdain. Our attitude towards children consists in a condescending indulgence, overlying an unfathomable respect. We bow to grown people, take off our hats to them, refrain from contradicting them flatly, but we do not appreciate them properly. We make puppets of children, lecture them, pull their hair, and reverence, love, and fear them. When we reverence anything in the mature, it is their virtues or their wisdom, and this is an easy matter. But we reverence the faults and follies of children.

We should probably come considerably nearer to the true conception of things if we treated all grown-up persons, of all titles and types, with precisely that dark affection and dazed respect with which we treat the infantile limitations. A child has a difficulty in achieving the miracle of speech, consequently we find his blunders almost as marvellous as his accuracy. If we only adopted the same attitude towards Premiers and Chancellors of the Exchequer, if we genially encouraged their stammering and delightful attempts at human speech, we should be in a far more wise and tolerant temper. A child has a knack of making experiments in life, generally healthy in motive, but often intolerable in a domestic commonwealth. If we only treated all commercial buccaneers and bumptious tyrants on the same terms, if we gently chided their brutalities as rather quaint mistakes in the conduct of life, if we simply told them that they would ‘understand when they were older,’ we should probably be adopting the best and most crushing attitude towards the weaknesses of humanity. In our relations to children we prove that the paradox is entirely true, that it is possible to combine an amnesty that verges on contempt with a worship that verges upon terror. We forgive children with the same kind of blasphemous gentleness with which Omar Khayyam forgave the Omnipotent.

The essential rectitude of our view of children lies in the fact that we feel them and their ways to be supernatural while, for some mysterious reason, we do not feel ourselves or our own ways to be supernatural. The very smallness of children makes it possible to regard them as marvels; we seem to be dealing with a new race, only to be seen through a microscope. I doubt if anyone of any tenderness or imagination can see the hand of a child and not be a little frightened of it. It is awful to think of the essential human energy moving so tiny
a thing; it is like imagining that human nature could live in the wing of a butterfly or the leaf of a tree. When we look upon lives so human and yet so small, we feel as if we ourselves were enlarged to an embarrassing bigness of stature. We feel the same kind of obligation to these creatures that a deity might feel if he had created something that he could not understand.

But the humorous look of children is perhaps the most endearing of all the bonds that hold the Cosmos together. Their top-heavy dignity is more touching than any humility; their solemnity gives us more hope for all things than a thousand carnivals of optimism; their large and lustrous eyes seem to hold all the stars in their astonishment; their fascinating absence of nose seems to give to us the most perfect hint of the humour that awaits us in the kingdom of heaven.
A DEFENCE OF DETECTIVE STORIES

In attempting to reach the genuine psychological reason for the popularity of detective stories, it is necessary to rid ourselves of many mere phrases. It is not true, for example, that the populace prefer bad literature to good, and accept detective stories because they are bad literature. The mere absence of artistic subtlety does not make a book popular. Bradshaw’s Railway Guide contains few gleams of psychological comedy, yet it is not read aloud uproariously on winter evenings. If detective stories are read with more exuberance than railway guides, it is certainly because they are more artistic. Many good books have fortunately been popular; many bad books, still more fortunately, have been unpopular. A good detective story would probably be even more popular than a bad one. The trouble in this matter is that many people do not realize that there is such a thing as a good detective story; it is to them like speaking of a good devil. To write a story about a burglary is, in their eyes, a sort of spiritual manner of committing it. To persons of somewhat weak sensibility this is natural enough; it must be confessed that many detective stories are as full of sensational crime as one of Shakespeare’s plays.

There is, however, between a good detective story and a bad detective story as much, or, rather more, difference than there is between a good epic and a bad one. Not only is a detective story a perfectly legitimate form of art, but it has certain definite and real advantages as an agent of the public weal.

The first essential value of the detective story lies in this, that it is the earliest and only form of popular literature in which is expressed some sense of the poetry of modern life. Men lived among mighty mountains and eternal forests for ages before they realized that they were poetical; it may reasonably be inferred that some of our descendants may see the chimney-pots as rich a purple as the mountain-peaks, and find the lamp-posts as old and natural as the trees. Of this realization of a great city itself as something wild and obvious the detective story is certainly the ‘Iliad.’ No one can have failed to notice that in these stories the hero or the investigator crosses London with something of the loneliness and liberty of a prince in a tale of elfland, that in the course of that incalculable journey the casual omnibus assumes the primal colours of a fairy ship. The lights of the city begin to glow like innumerable goblin eyes, since they are the guardians of some secret, however crude, which the writer knows and the reader does not. Every twist of the road is like a finger pointing to it; every fantastic
skyline of chimney-pots seems wildly and derisively signalling the meaning of the mystery.

This realization of the poetry of London is not a small thing. A city is, properly speaking, more poetic even than a countryside, for while Nature is a chaos of unconscious forces, a city is a chaos of conscious ones. The crest of the flower or the pattern of the lichen may or may not be significant symbols. But there is no stone in the street and no brick in the wall that is not actually a deliberate symbol—a message from some man, as much as if it were a telegram or a post-card. The narrowest street possesses, in every crook and twist of its intention, the soul of the man who built it, perhaps long in his grave. Every brick has as human a hieroglyph as if it were a graven brick of Babylon; every slate on the roof is as educational a document as if it were a slate covered with addition and subtraction sums. Anything which tends, even under the fantastic form of the minutiae of Sherlock Holmes, to assert this romance of detail in civilization, to emphasize this unfathomably human character in flints and tiles, is a good thing. It is good that the average man should fall into the habit of looking imaginatively at ten men in the street even if it is only on the chance that the eleventh might be a notorious thief. We may dream, perhaps, that it might be possible to have another and higher romance of London, that men’s souls have stranger adventures than their bodies, and that it would be harder and more exciting to hunt their virtues than to hunt their crimes. But since our great authors (with the admirable exception of Stevenson) decline to write of that thrilling mood and moment when the eyes of the great city, like the eyes of a cat, begin to flame in the dark, we must give fair credit to the popular literature which, amid a babble of pedantry and preciosity, declines to regard the present as prosaic or the common as commonplace. Popular art in all ages has been interested in contemporary manners and costume; it dressed the groups around the Crucifixion in the garb of Florentine gentlefolk or Flemish burghers. In the last century it was the custom for distinguished actors to present Macbeth in a powdered wig and ruffles. How far we are ourselves in this age from such conviction of the poetry of our own life and manners may easily be conceived by anyone who chooses to imagine a picture of Alfred the Great toasting the cakes dressed in tourist’s knickerbockers, or a performance of ‘Hamlet’ in which the Prince appeared in a frock-coat, with a crape band round his hat. But this instinct of the age to look back, like Lot’s wife, could not go on for ever. A rude, popular literature of the romantic possibilities of the modern city was bound to arise. It has arisen in the popular detective stories, as rough and refreshing as the ballads
of Robin Hood.

There is, however, another good work that is done by detective stories. While it is the constant tendency of the Old Adam to rebel against so universal and automatic a thing as civilization, to preach departure and rebellion, the romance of police activity keeps in some sense before the mind the fact that civilization itself is the most sensational of departures and the most romantic of rebellions. By dealing with the unsleeping sentinels who guard the outposts of society, it tends to remind us that we live in an armed camp, making war with a chaotic world, and that the criminals, the children of chaos, are nothing but the traitors within our gates. When the detective in a police romance stands alone, and somewhat fatuously fearless amid the knives and fists of a thieves’ kitchen, it does certainly serve to make us remember that it is the agent of social justice who is the original and poetic figure, while the burglars and footpads are merely placid old cosmic conservatives, happy in the immemorial respectability of apes and wolves. The romance of the police force is thus the whole romance of man. It is based on the fact that morality is the most dark and daring of conspiracies. It reminds us that the whole noiseless and unnoticeable police management by which we are ruled and protected is only a successful knight-errantry.
A DEFENCE OF PATRIOTISM

The decay of patriotism in England during the last year or two is a serious and distressing matter. Only in consequence of such a decay could the current lust of territory be confounded with the ancient love of country. We may imagine that if there were no such thing as a pair of lovers left in the world, all the vocabulary of love might without rebuke be transferred to the lowest and most automatic desire. If no type of chivalrous and purifying passion remained, there would be no one left to say that lust bore none of the marks of love, that lust was rapacious and love pitiful; that lust was blind and love vigilant, that lust sated itself and love was insatiable. So it is with the ‘love of the city,’ that high and ancient intellectual passion which has been written in red blood on the same table with the primal passions of our being. On all sides we hear to-day of the love of our country, and yet anyone who has literally such a love must be bewildered at the talk, like a man hearing all men say that the moon shines by day and the sun by night. The conviction must come to him at last that these men do not realize what the word ‘love’ means, that they mean by the love of country, not what a mystic might mean by the love of God, but something of what a child might mean by the love of jam. To one who loves his fatherland, for instance, our boasted indifference to the ethics of a national war is mere mysterious gibberism. It is like telling a man that a boy has committed murder, but that he need not mind because it is only his son. Here clearly the word ‘love’ is used unmeaningly. It is the essence of love to be sensitive, it is a part of its doom; and anyone who objects to the one must certainly get rid of the other. This sensitiveness, rising sometimes to an almost morbid sensitiveness, was the mark of all great lovers like Dante and all great patriots like Chatham. ‘My country, right or wrong,’ is a thing that no patriot would think of saying except in a desperate case. It is like saying, ‘My mother, drunk or sober.’ No doubt if a decent man’s mother took to drink he would share her troubles to the last; but to talk as if he would be in a state of gay indifference as to whether his mother took to drink or not is certainly not the language of men who know the great mystery.

What we really need for the frustration and overthrow of a deaf and raucous Jingoism is a renascence of the love of the native land. When that comes, all shrill cries will cease suddenly. For the first of all the marks of love is seriousness: love will not accept sham bulletins or the empty victory of words. It will always esteem the most candid counsellor the best. Love is drawn to truth
by the unerring magnetism of agony; it gives no pleasure to the lover to see ten doctors dancing with vociferous optimism round a death-bed.

We have to ask, then, Why is it that this recent movement in England, which has honestly appeared to many a renascence of patriotism, seems to us to have none of the marks of patriotism—at least, of patriotism in its highest form? Why has the adoration of our patriots been given wholly to qualities and circumstances good in themselves, but comparatively material and trivial:—trade, physical force, a skirmish at a remote frontier, a squabble in a remote continent? Colonies are things to be proud of, but for a country to be only proud of its extremities is like a man being only proud of his legs. Why is there not a high central intellectual patriotism, a patriotism of the head and heart of the Empire, and not merely of its fists and its boots? A rude Athenian sailor may very likely have thought that the glory of Athens lay in rowing with the right kind of oars, or having a good supply of garlic; but Pericles did not think that this was the glory of Athens. With us, on the other hand, there is no difference at all between the patriotism preached by Mr. Chamberlain and that preached by Mr. Pat Rafferty, who sings ‘What do you think of the Irish now?’ They are both honest, simple-minded, vulgar eulogies upon trivialities and truisms.

I have, rightly or wrongly, a notion of the chief cause of this pettiness in English patriotism of to-day, and I will attempt to expound it. It may be taken generally that a man loves his own stock and environment, and that he will find something to praise in it; but whether it is the most praiseworthy thing or no will depend upon the man’s enlightenment as to the facts. If the son of Thackeray, let us say, were brought up in ignorance of his father’s fame and genius, it is not improbable that he would be proud of the fact that his father was over six feet high. It seems to me that we, as a nation, are precisely in the position of this hypothetical child of Thackeray’s. We fall back upon gross and frivolous things for our patriotism, for a simple reason. We are the only people in the world who are not taught in childhood our own literature and our own history.

We are, as a nation, in the truly extraordinary condition of not knowing our own merits. We have played a great and splendid part in the history of universal thought and sentiment; we have been among the foremost in that eternal and bloodless battle in which the blows do not slay, but create. In painting and music we are inferior to many other nations; but in literature, science, philosophy, and political eloquence, if history be taken as a whole, we can hold our own with any. But all this vast heritage of intellectual glory is kept from our schoolboys like a heresy; and they are left to live and die in the dull and infantile type of
patriotism which they learnt from a box of tin soldiers. There is no harm in the box of tin soldiers; we do not expect children to be equally delighted with a beautiful box of tin philanthropists. But there is great harm in the fact that the subtler and more civilized honour of England is not presented so as to keep pace with the expanding mind. A French boy is taught the glory of Molière as well as that of Turenne; a German boy is taught his own great national philosophy before he learns the philosophy of antiquity. The result is that, though French patriotism is often crazy and boastful, though German patriotism is often isolated and pedantic, they are neither of them merely dull, common, and brutal, as is so often the strange fate of the nation of Bacon and Locke. It is natural enough, and even righteous enough, under the circumstances. An Englishman must love England for something; consequently, he tends to exalt commerce or prize-fighting, just as a German might tend to exalt music, or a Flamand to exalt painting, because he really believes it is the chief merit of his fatherland. It would not be in the least extraordinary if a claim of eating up provinces and pulling down princes were the chief boast of a Zulu. The extraordinary thing is, that it is the chief boast of a people who have Shakespeare, Newton, Burke, and Darwin to boast of.

The peculiar lack of any generosity or delicacy in the current English nationalism appears to have no other possible origin but in this fact of our unique neglect in education of the study of the national literature. An Englishman could not be silly enough to despise other nations if he once knew how much England had done for them. Great men of letters cannot avoid being humane and universal. The absence of the teaching of English literature in our schools is, when we come to think of it, an almost amazing phenomenon. It is even more amazing when we listen to the arguments urged by headmasters and other educational conservatives against the direct teaching of English. It is said, for example, that a vast amount of English grammar and literature is picked up in the course of learning Latin and Greek. This is perfectly true, but the topsyturviness of the idea never seems to strike them. It is like saying that a baby picks up the art of walking in the course of learning to hop, or that a Frenchman may successfully be taught German by helping a Prussian to learn Ashanti. Surely the obvious foundation of all education is the language in which that education is conveyed; if a boy has only time to learn one thing, he had better learn that.

We have deliberately neglected this great heritage of high national sentiment. We have made our public schools the strongest walls against a whisper of the
honour of England. And we have had our punishment in this strange and perverted fact that, while a unifying vision of patriotism can enoble bands of brutal savages or dingy burghers, and be the best thing in their lives, we, who are—the world being judge—humane, honest, and serious individually, have a patriotism that is the worst thing in ours. What have we done, and where have we wandered, we that have produced sages who could have spoken with Socrates and poets who could walk with Dante, that we should talk as if we have never done anything more intelligent than found colonies and kick niggers? We are the children of light, and it is we that sit in darkness. If we are judged, it will not be for the merely intellectual transgression of failing to appreciate other nations, but for the supreme spiritual transgression of failing to appreciate ourselves.
TREMENDOUS TRIFLES

G. K. CHESTERTON
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

TREMENDOUS TRIFLES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

I
TREMENDOUS TRIFLES

II
A PIECE OF CHALK

III
THE SECRET OF A TRAIN

IV
THE PERFECT GAME

V
THE EXTRAORDINARY CABMAN

VI
AN ACCIDENT

VII
THE ADVANTAGES OF HAVING ONE LEG

VIII
THE END OF THE WORLD

IX
IN THE PLACE DE LA BASTILLE

X
ON LYING IN BED

XI
THE TWELVE MEN

XII
THE WIND AND THE TREES

XIII
THE DICKENSIAN

XIV
IN TOPSY-TURVY LAND

XV
WHAT I FOUND IN MY POCKET

XVI
THE DRAGON'S GRANDMOTHER

XVII
THE RED ANGEL

XVIII
THE TOWER

XIX
HOW I MET THE PRESIDENT

XX
THE GIANT

XXI
A GREAT MAN

XXII
THE ORTHODOX BARBER

XXIII
THE TOY THEATRE

XXIV
A TRAGEDY OF TWOPENCE

XXV
A CAB RIDE ACROSS COUNTRY

XXVI
THE TWO NOISES

XXVII
SOME POLICEMEN AND A MORAL

XXVIII
THE LION

XXIX
HUMANITY: AN INTERLUDE

XXX
THE LITTLE BIRDS WHO WON'T SING

XXXI
THE RIDDLE OF THE IVY
XXXII. THE TRAVELLERS IN STATE

XXXIII
THE PREHISTORIC RAILWAY STATION

XXXIV
THE DIABOLIST

XXXV
A GLIMPSE OF MY COUNTRY

XXXVI
A SOMEWHAT IMPROBABLE STORY

XXXVII
THE SHOP OF GHOSTS

XXXVIII
THE BALLADE OF A STRANGE TOWN

XXXIX
THE MYSTERY OF A PAGEANT
PREFACE

These fleeting sketches are all republished by kind permission of the Editor of the DAILY NEWS, in which paper they appeared. They amount to no more than a sort of sporadic diary—a diary recording one day in twenty which happened to stick in the fancy—the only kind of diary the author has ever been able to keep. Even that diary he could only keep by keeping it in public, for bread and cheese. But trivial as are the topics they are not utterly without a connecting thread of motive. As the reader’s eye strays, with hearty relief, from these pages, it probably alights on something, a bed-post or a lamp-post, a window blind or a wall. It is a thousand to one that the reader is looking at something that he has never seen: that is, never realised. He could not write an essay on such a post or wall: he does not know what the post or wall mean. He could not even write the synopsis of an essay; as “The Bed-Post; Its Significance—Security Essential to Idea of Sleep—Night Felt as Infinite—Need of Monumental Architecture,” and so on. He could not sketch in outline his theoretic attitude towards window-blinds, even in the form of a summary. “The Window-Blind—Its Analogy to the Curtain and Veil—Is Modesty Natural?—Worship of and Avoidance of the Sun, etc., etc.” None of us think enough of these things on which the eye rests. But don’t let us let the eye rest. Why should the eye be so lazy? Let us exercise the eye until it learns to see startling facts that run across the landscape as plain as a painted fence. Let us be ocular athletes. Let us learn to write essays on a stray cat or a coloured cloud. I have attempted some such thing in what follows; but anyone else may do it better, if anyone else will only try.
I

TREMENDOUS TRIFLES

Once upon a time there were two little boys who lived chiefly in the front garden, because their villa was a model one. The front garden was about the same size as the dinner table; it consisted of four strips of gravel, a square of turf with some mysterious pieces of cork standing up in the middle and one flower bed with a row of red daisies. One morning while they were at play in these romantic grounds, a passing individual, probably the milkman, leaned over the railing and engaged them in philosophical conversation. The boys, whom we will call Paul and Peter, were at least sharply interested in his remarks. For the milkman (who was, I need say, a fairy) did his duty in that state of life by offering them in the regulation manner anything that they chose to ask for. And Paul closed with the offer with a business-like abruptness, explaining that he had long wished to be a giant that he might stride across continents and oceans and visit Niagara or the Himalayas in an afternoon dinner stroll. The milkman producing a wand from his breast pocket, waved it in a hurried and perfunctory manner; and in an instant the model villa with its front garden was like a tiny doll’s house at Paul’s colossal feet. He went striding away with his head above the clouds to visit Niagara and the Himalayas. But when he came to the Himalayas, he found they were quite small and silly-looking, like the little cork rockery in the garden; and when he found Niagara it was no bigger than the tap turned on in the bathroom. He wandered round the world for several minutes trying to find something really large and finding everything small, till in sheer boredom he lay down on four or five prairies and fell asleep. Unfortunately his head was just outside the hut of an intellectual backwoodsman who came out of it at that moment with an axe in one hand and a book of Neo-Catholic Philosophy in the other. The man looked at the book and then at the giant, and then at the book again. And in the book it said, “It can be maintained that the evil of pride consists in being out of proportion to the universe.” So the backwoodsman put down his book, took his axe and, working eight hours a day for about a week, cut the giant’s head off; and there was an end of him.

Such is the severe yet salutary history of Paul. But Peter, oddly enough, made exactly the opposite request; he said he had long wished to be a pigmy about half an inch high; and of course he immediately became one. When the
transformation was over he found himself in the midst of an immense plain, covered with a tall green jungle and above which, at intervals, rose strange trees each with a head like the sun in symbolic pictures, with gigantic rays of silver and a huge heart of gold. Toward the middle of this prairie stood up a mountain of such romantic and impossible shape, yet of such stony height and dominance, that it looked like some incident of the end of the world. And far away on the faint horizon he could see the line of another forest, taller and yet more mystical, of a terrible crimson colour, like a forest on fire for ever. He set out on his adventures across that coloured plain; and he has not come to the end of it yet.

Such is the story of Peter and Paul, which contains all the highest qualities of a modern fairy tale, including that of being wholly unfit for children; and indeed the motive with which I have introduced it is not childish, but rather full of subtlety and reaction. It is in fact the almost desperate motive of excusing or palliating the pages that follow. Peter and Paul are the two primary influences upon European literature to-day; and I may be permitted to put my own preference in its most favourable shape, even if I can only do it by what little girls call telling a story.

I need scarcely say that I am the pigmy. The only excuse for the scraps that follow is that they show what can be achieved with a commonplace existence and the sacred spectacles of exaggeration. The other great literary theory, that which is roughly represented in England by Mr. Rudyard Kipling, is that we moderns are to regain the primal zest by sprawling all over the world growing used to travel and geographical variety, being at home everywhere, that is being at home nowhere. Let it be granted that a man in a frock coat is a heartrending sight; and the two alternative methods still remain. Mr. Kipling’s school advises us to go to Central Africa in order to find a man without a frock coat. The school to which I belong suggests that we should stare steadily at the man until we see the man inside the frock coat. If we stare at him long enough he may even be moved to take off his coat to us; and that is a far greater compliment than his taking off his hat. In other words, we may, by fixing our attention almost fiercely on the facts actually before us, force them to turn into adventures; force them to give up their meaning and fulfil their mysterious purpose. The purpose of the Kipling literature is to show how many extraordinary things a man may see if he is active and strides from continent to continent like the giant in my tale. But the object of my school is to show how many extraordinary things even a lazy and ordinary man may see if he can spur himself to the single activity of seeing. For this purpose I have taken the laziest person of my acquaintance, that is myself;
and made an idle diary of such odd things as I have fallen over by accident, in walking in a very limited area at a very indolent pace. If anyone says that these are very small affairs talked about in very big language, I can only gracefully compliment him upon seeing the joke. If anyone says that I am making mountains out of molehills, I confess with pride that it is so. I can imagine no more successful and productive form of manufacture than that of making mountains out of molehills. But I would add this not unimportant fact, that molehills are mountains; one has only to become a pigmy like Peter to discover that.

I have my doubts about all this real value in mountaineering, in getting to the top of everything and overlooking everything. Satan was the most celebrated of Alpine guides, when he took Jesus to the top of an exceeding high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the earth. But the joy of Satan in standing on a peak is not a joy in largeness, but a joy in beholding smallness, in the fact that all men look like insects at his feet. It is from the valley that things look large; it is from the level that things look high; I am a child of the level and have no need of that celebrated Alpine guide. I will lift up my eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my help; but I will not lift up my carcass to the hills, unless it is absolutely necessary. Everything is in an attitude of mind; and at this moment I am in a comfortable attitude. I will sit still and let the marvels and the adventures settle on me like flies. There are plenty of them, I assure you. The world will never starve for want of wonders; but only for want of wonder.
II

A PIECE OF CHALK

I remember one splendid morning, all blue and silver, in the summer holidays when I reluctantly tore myself away from the task of doing nothing in particular, and put on a hat of some sort and picked up a walking-stick, and put six very bright-coloured chalks in my pocket. I then went into the kitchen (which, along with the rest of the house, belonged to a very square and sensible old woman in a Sussex village), and asked the owner and occupant of the kitchen if she had any brown paper. She had a great deal; in fact, she had too much; and she mistook the purpose and the rationale of the existence of brown paper. She seemed to have an idea that if a person wanted brown paper he must be wanting to tie up parcels; which was the last thing I wanted to do; indeed, it is a thing which I have found to be beyond my mental capacity. Hence she dwelt very much on the varying qualities of toughness and endurance in the material. I explained to her that I only wanted to draw pictures on it, and that I did not want them to endure in the least; and that from my point of view, therefore, it was a question, not of tough consistency, but of responsive surface, a thing comparatively irrelevant in a parcel. When she understood that I wanted to draw she offered to overwhelm me with note-paper, apparently supposing that I did my notes and correspondence on old brown paper wrappers from motives of economy.

I then tried to explain the rather delicate logical shade, that I not only liked brown paper, but liked the quality of brownness in paper, just as I liked the quality of brownness in October woods, or in beer, or in the peat-streams of the North. Brown paper represents the primal twilight of the first toil of creation, and with a bright-coloured chalk or two you can pick out points of fire in it, sparks of gold, and blood-red, and sea-green, like the first fierce stars that sprang out of divine darkness. All this I said (in an off-hand way) to the old woman; and I put the brown paper in my pocket along with the chalks, and possibly other things. I suppose every one must have reflected how primeval and how poetical are the things that one carries in one’s pocket; the pocket-knife, for instance, the type of all human tools, the infant of the sword. Once I planned to write a book of poems entirely about the things in my pockets. But I found it would be too long; and the age of the great epics is past.

With my stick and my knife, my chalks and my brown paper, I went out on to
the great downs. I crawled across those colossal contours that express the best quality of England, because they are at the same time soft and strong. The smoothness of them has the same meaning as the smoothness of great cart-horses, or the smoothness of the beech-tree; it declares in the teeth of our timid and cruel theories that the mighty are merciful. As my eye swept the landscape, the landscape was as kindly as any of its cottages, but for power it was like an earthquake. The villages in the immense valley were safe, one could see, for centuries; yet the lifting of the whole land was like the lifting of one enormous wave to wash them all away.

I crossed one swell of living turf after another, looking for a place to sit down and draw. Do not, for heaven’s sake, imagine I was going to sketch from Nature. I was going to draw devils and seraphim, and blind old gods that men worshipped before the dawn of right, and saints in robes of angry crimson, and seas of strange green, and all the sacred or monstrous symbols that look so well in bright colours on brown paper. They are much better worth drawing than Nature; also they are much easier to draw. When a cow came slouching by in the field next to me, a mere artist might have drawn it; but I always get wrong in the hind legs of quadrupeds. So I drew the soul of the cow; which I saw there plainly walking before me in the sunlight; and the soul was all purple and silver, and had seven horns and the mystery that belongs to all the beasts. But though I could not with a crayon get the best out of the landscape, it does not follow that the landscape was not getting the best out of me. And this, I think, is the mistake that people make about the old poets who lived before Wordsworth, and were supposed not to care very much about Nature because they did not describe it much.

They preferred writing about great men to writing about great hills; but they sat on the great hills to write it. They gave out much less about Nature, but they drank in, perhaps, much more. They painted the white robes of their holy virgins with the blinding snow, at which they had stared all day. They blazoned the shields of their paladins with the purple and gold of many heraldic sunsets. The greenness of a thousand green leaves clustered into the live green figure of Robin Hood. The blueness of a score of forgotten skies became the blue robes of the Virgin. The inspiration went in like sunbeams and came out like Apollo.

But as I sat scrawling these silly figures on the brown paper, it began to dawn on me, to my great disgust, that I had left one chalk, and that a most exquisite and essential chalk, behind. I searched all my pockets, but I could not find any white chalk. Now, those who are acquainted with all the philosophy (nay,
religion) which is typified in the art of drawing on brown paper, know that white is positive and essential. I cannot avoid remarking here upon a moral significance. One of the wise and awful truths which this brown-paper art reveals, is this, that white is a colour. It is not a mere absence of colour; it is a shining and affirmative thing, as fierce as red, as definite as black. When, so to speak, your pencil grows red-hot, it draws roses; when it grows white-hot, it draws stars. And one of the two or three defiant verities of the best religious morality, of real Christianity, for example, is exactly this same thing; the chief assertion of religious morality is that white is a colour. Virtue is not the absence of vices or the avoidance of moral dangers; virtue is a vivid and separate thing, like pain or a particular smell. Mercy does not mean not being cruel or sparing people revenge or punishment; it means a plain and positive thing like the sun, which one has either seen or not seen.

Chastity does not mean abstention from sexual wrong; it means something flaming, like Joan of Arc. In a word, God paints in many colours; but He never paints so gorgeously, I had almost said so gaudily, as when He paints in white. In a sense our age has realised this fact, and expressed it in our sullen costume. For if it were really true that white was a blank and colourless thing, negative and non-committal, then white would be used instead of black and grey for the funeral dress of this pessimistic period. We should see city gentlemen in frock coats of spotless silver linen, with top hats as white as wonderful arum lilies. Which is not the case.

Meanwhile, I could not find my chalk. I sat on the hill in a sort of despair. There was no town nearer than Chichester at which it was even remotely probable that there would be such a thing as an artist’s colourman. And yet, without white, my absurd little pictures would be as pointless as the world would be if there were no good people in it. I stared stupidly round, racking my brain for expedients. Then I suddenly stood up and roared with laughter, again and again, so that the cows stared at me and called a committee. Imagine a man in the Sahara regretting that he had no sand for his hour-glass. Imagine a gentleman in mid-ocean wishing that he had brought some salt water with him for his chemical experiments. I was sitting on an immense warehouse of white chalk. The landscape was made entirely out of white chalk. White chalk was piled more miles until it met the sky. I stooped and broke a piece off the rock I sat on; it did not mark so well as the shop chalks do; but it gave the effect. And I stood there in a trance of pleasure, realising that this Southern England is not only a grand peninsula, and a tradition and a
civilisation; it is something even more admirable. It is a piece of chalk.
III

THE SECRET OF A TRAIN

All this talk of a railway mystery has sent my mind back to a loose memory. I will not merely say that this story is true: because, as you will soon see, it is all truth and no story. It has no explanation and no conclusion; it is, like most of the other things we encounter in life, a fragment of something else which would be intensely exciting if it were not too large to be seen. For the perplexity of life arises from there being too many interesting things in it for us to be interested properly in any of them; what we call its triviality is really the tag-ends of numberless tales; ordinary and unmeaning existence is like ten thousand thrilling detective stories mixed up with a spoon. My experience was a fragment of this nature, and it is, at any rate, not fictitious. Not only am I not making up the incidents (what there were of them), but I am not making up the atmosphere of the landscape, which were the whole horror of the thing. I remember them vividly, and they were as I shall now describe.

About noon of an ashena autumn day some years ago I was standing outside the station at Oxford intending to take the train to London. And for some reason, out of idleness or the emptiness of my mind or the emptiness of the pale grey sky, or the cold, a kind of caprice fell upon me that I would not go by that train at all, but would step out on the road and walk at least some part of the way to London. I do not know if other people are made like me in this matter; but to me it is always dreary weather, what may be called useless weather, that slings into life a sense of action and romance. On bright blue days I do not want anything to happen; the world is complete and beautiful, a thing for contemplation. I no more ask for adventures under that turquoise dome than I ask for adventures in church. But when the background of man’s life is a grey background, then, in the name of man’s sacred supremacy, I desire to paint on it in fire and gore. When the heavens fail man refuses to fail; when the sky seems to have written on it, in letters of lead and pale silver, the decree that nothing shall happen, then the immortal soul, the prince of the creatures, rises up and decrees that something shall happen, if it be only the slaughter of a policeman. But this is a digressive way of stating what I have said already—that the bleak sky awoke in me a hunger for some change of plans, that the monotonous weather seemed to render unbearable the use of the monotonous train, and that I set out into the country
lanes, out of the town of Oxford. It was, perhaps, at that moment that a strange curse came upon me out of the city and the sky, whereby it was decreed that years afterwards I should, in an article in the DAILY NEWS, talk about Sir George Trevelyan in connection with Oxford, when I knew perfectly well that he went to Cambridge.

As I crossed the country everything was ghostly and colourless. The fields that should have been green were as grey as the skies; the tree-tops that should have been green were as grey as the clouds and as cloudy. And when I had walked for some hours the evening was closing in. A sickly sunset clung weakly to the horizon, as if pale with reluctance to leave the world in the dark. And as it faded more and more the skies seemed to come closer and to threaten. The clouds which had been merely sullen became swollen; and then they loosened and let down the dark curtains of the rain. The rain was blinding and seemed to beat like blows from an enemy at close quarters; the skies seemed bending over and bawling in my ears. I walked on many more miles before I met a man, and in that distance my mind had been made up; and when I met him I asked him if anywhere in the neighbourhood I could pick up the train for Paddington. He directed me to a small silent station (I cannot even remember the name of it) which stood well away from the road and looked as lonely as a hut on the Andes. I do not think I have ever seen such a type of time and sadness and scepticism and everything devilish as that station was: it looked as if it had always been raining there ever since the creation of the world. The water streamed from the soaking wood of it as if it were not water at all, but some loathsome liquid corruption of the wood itself; as if the solid station were eternally falling to pieces and pouring away in filth. It took me nearly ten minutes to find a man in the station. When I did he was a dull one, and when I asked him if there was a train to Paddington his answer was sleepy and vague. As far as I understood him, he said there would be a train in half an hour. I sat down and lit a cigar and waited, watching the last tail of the tattered sunset and listening to the everlasting rain. It may have been in half an hour or less, but a train came rather slowly into the station. It was an unnaturally dark train; I could not see a light anywhere in the long black body of it; and I could not see any guard running beside it. I was reduced to walking up to the engine and calling out to the stoker to ask if the train was going to London. “Well–yes, sir,” he said, with an unaccountable kind of reluctance. “It is going to London; but–” It was just starting, and I jumped into the first carriage; it was pitch dark. I sat there smoking and wondering, as we steamed through the continually darkening
landscape, lined with desolate poplars, until we slowed down and stopped, irrationally, in the middle of a field. I heard a heavy noise as of some one clambering off the train, and a dark, ragged head suddenly put itself into my window. “Excuse me, sir,” said the stoker, “but I think, perhaps—well, perhaps you ought to know—there’s a dead man in this train.”

Had I been a true artist, a person of exquisite susceptibilities and nothing else, I should have been bound, no doubt, to be finally overwhelmed with this sensational touch, and to have insisted on getting out and walking. As it was, I regret to say, I expressed myself politely, but firmly, to the effect that I didn’t care particularly if the train took me to Paddington. But when the train had started with its unknown burden I did do one thing, and do it quite instinctively, without stopping to think, or to think more than a flash. I threw away my cigar. Something that is as old as man and has to do with all mourning and ceremonial told me to do it. There was something unnecessarily horrible, it seemed to me, in the idea of there being only two men in that train, and one of them dead and the other smoking a cigar. And as the red and gold of the butt end of it faded like a funeral torch trampled out at some symbolic moment of a procession, I realised how immortal ritual is. I realised (what is the origin and essence of all ritual) that in the presence of those sacred riddles about which we can say nothing it is more decent merely to do something. And I realised that ritual will always mean throwing away something; DESTROYING our corn or wine upon the altar of our gods.

When the train panted at last into Paddington Station I sprang out of it with a suddenly released curiosity. There was a barrier and officials guarding the rear part of the train; no one was allowed to press towards it. They were guarding and hiding something; perhaps death in some too shocking form, perhaps something like the Merstham matter, so mixed up with human mystery and wickedness that the land has to give it a sort of sanctity; perhaps something worse than either. I went out gladly enough into the streets and saw the lamps shining on the laughing faces. Nor have I ever known from that day to this into what strange story I wandered or what frightful thing was my companion in the dark.
IV

THE PERFECT GAME

We have all met the man who says that some odd things have happened to him, but that he does not really believe that they were supernatural. My own position is the opposite of this. I believe in the supernatural as a matter of intellect and reason, not as a matter of personal experience. I do not see ghosts; I only see their inherent probability. But it is entirely a matter of the mere intelligence, not even of the motions; my nerves and body are altogether of this earth, very earthy. But upon people of this temperament one weird incident will often leave a peculiar impression. And the weirdest circumstance that ever occurred to me occurred a little while ago. It consisted in nothing less than my playing a game, and playing it quite well for some seventeen consecutive minutes. The ghost of my grandfather would have astonished me less.

On one of these blue and burning afternoons I found myself, to my inexpressible astonishment, playing a game called croquet. I had imagined that it belonged to the epoch of Leach and Anthony Trollope, and I had neglected to provide myself with those very long and luxuriant side whiskers which are really essential to such a scene. I played it with a man whom we will call Parkinson, and with whom I had a semi-philosophical argument which lasted through the entire contest. It is deeply implanted in my mind that I had the best of the argument; but it is certain and beyond dispute that I had the worst of the game.

“Oh, Parkinson, Parkinson!” I cried, patting him affectionately on the head with a mallet, “how far you really are from the pure love of the sport—you who can play. It is only we who play badly who love the Game itself. You love glory; you love applause; you love the earthquake voice of victory; you do not love croquet. You do not love croquet until you love being beaten at croquet. It is we the bunglers who adore the occupation in the abstract. It is we to whom it is art for art’s sake. If we may see the face of Croquet herself (if I may so express myself) we are content to see her face turned upon us in anger. Our play is called amateurish; and we wear proudly the name of amateur, for amateurs is but the French for Lovers. We accept all adventures from our Lady, the most disastrous or the most dreary. We wait outside her iron gates (I allude to the hoops), vainly essaying to enter. Our devoted balls, impetuous and full of chivalry, will not be confined within the pedantic boundaries of the mere croquet ground. Our balls
seek honour in the ends of the earth; they turn up in the flower-beds and the
conservatory; they are to be found in the front garden and the next street. No,
Parkinson! The good painter has skill. It is the bad painter who loves his art. The
good musician loves being a musician, the bad musician loves music. With such
a pure and hopeless passion do I worship croquet. I love the game itself. I love
the parallelogram of grass marked out with chalk or tape, as if its limits were the
frontiers of my sacred Fatherland, the four seas of Britain. I love the mere swing
of the mallets, and the click of the balls is music. The four colours are to me
sacramental and symbolic, like the red of martyrdom, or the white of Easter Day.
You lose all this, my poor Parkinson. You have to solace yourself for the
absence of this vision by the paltry consolation of being able to go through
hoops and to hit the stick.”

And I waved my mallet in the air with a graceful gaiety.

“Don’t be too sorry for me,” said Parkinson, with his simple sarcasm. “I shall
get over it in time. But it seems to me that the more a man likes a game the better
he would want to play it. Granted that the pleasure in the thing itself comes first,
does not the pleasure of success come naturally and inevitably afterwards? Or,
take your own simile of the Knight and his Lady-love. I admit the gentleman
does first and foremost want to be in the lady’s presence. But I never yet heard
of a gentleman who wanted to look an utter ass when he was there.”

“Perhaps not; though he generally looks it,” I replied. “But the truth is that
there is a fallacy in the simile, although it was my own. The happiness at which
the lover is aiming is an infinite happiness, which can be extended without limit.
The more he is loved, normally speaking, the jollier he will be. It is definitely
true that the stronger the love of both lovers, the stronger will be the happiness.
But it is not true that the stronger the play of both croquet players the stronger
will be the game. It is logically possible—(follow me closely here, Parkinson!)—it
is logically possible, to play croquet too well to enjoy it at all. If you could put
this blue ball through that distant hoop as easily as you could pick it up with
your hand, then you would not put it through that hoop any more than you pick it
up with your hand; it would not be worth doing. If you could play unerringly you
would not play at all. The moment the game is perfect the game disappears.”

“I do not think, however,” said Parkinson, “that you are in any immediate
danger of effecting that sort of destruction. I do not think your croquet will
vanish through its own faultless excellence. You are safe for the present.”

I again caressed him with the mallet, knocked a ball about, wired myself, and
resumed the thread of my discourse.
The long, warm evening had been gradually closing in, and by this time it was almost twilight. By the time I had delivered four more fundamental principles, and my companion had gone through five more hoops, the dusk was verging upon dark.

“We shall have to give this up,” said Parkinson, as he missed a ball almost for the first time, “I can’t see a thing.”

“Nor can I,” I answered, “and it is a comfort to reflect that I could not hit anything if I saw it.”

With that I struck a ball smartly, and sent it away into the darkness towards where the shadowy figure of Parkinson moved in the hot haze. Parkinson immediately uttered a loud and dramatic cry. The situation, indeed, called for it. I had hit the right ball.

Stunned with astonishment, I crossed the gloomy ground, and hit my ball again. It went through a hoop. I could not see the hoop; but it was the right hoop. I shuddered from head to foot.

Words were wholly inadequate, so I slouched heavily after that impossible ball. Again I hit it away into the night, in what I supposed was the vague direction of the quite invisible stick. And in the dead silence I heard the stick rattle as the ball struck it heavily.

I threw down my mallet. “I can’t stand this,” I said. “My ball has gone right three times. These things are not of this world.”

“Pick your mallet up,” said Parkinson, “have another go.”

“I tell you I daren’t. If I made another hoop like that I should see all the devils dancing there on the blessed grass.”

“Why devils?” asked Parkinson; “they may be only fairies making fun of you. They are sending you the ‘Perfect Game,’ which is no game.”

I looked about me. The garden was full of a burning darkness, in which the faint glimmers had the look of fire. I stepped across the grass as if it burnt me, picked up the mallet, and hit the ball somewhere–somewhere where another ball might be. I heard the dull click of the balls touching, and ran into the house like one pursued.
V

THE EXTRAORDINARY CABMAN

From time to time I have introduced into this newspaper column the narration of incidents that have really occurred. I do not mean to insinuate that in this respect it stands alone among newspaper columns. I mean only that I have found that my meaning was better expressed by some practical parable out of daily life than by any other method; therefore I propose to narrate the incident of the extraordinary cabman, which occurred to me only three days ago, and which, slight as it apparently is, aroused in me a moment of genuine emotion bordering upon despair.

On the day that I met the strange cabman I had been lunching in a little restaurant in Soho in company with three or four of my best friends. My best friends are all either bottomless sceptics or quite uncontrollable believers, so our discussion at luncheon turned upon the most ultimate and terrible ideas. And the whole argument worked out ultimately to this: that the question is whether a man can be certain of anything at all. I think he can be certain, for if (as I said to my friend, furiously brandishing an empty bottle) it is impossible intellectually to entertain certainty, what is this certainty which it is impossible to entertain? If I have never experienced such a thing as certainty I cannot even say that a thing is not certain. Similarly, if I have never experienced such a thing as green I cannot even say that my nose is not green. It may be as green as possible for all I know, if I have really no experience of greenness. So we shouted at each other and shook the room; because metaphysics is the only thoroughly emotional thing. And the difference between us was very deep, because it was a difference as to the object of the whole thing called broad-mindedness or the opening of the intellect. For my friend said that he opened his intellect as the sun opens the fans of a palm tree, opening for opening’s sake, opening infinitely for ever. But I said that I opened my intellect as I opened my mouth, in order to shut it again on something solid. I was doing it at the moment. And as I truly pointed out, it would look uncommonly silly if I went on opening my mouth infinitely, for ever and ever.

Now when this argument was over, or at least when it was cut short (for it will never be over), I went away with one of my companions, who in the confusion and comparative insanity of a General Election had somehow become a member
of Parliament, and I drove with him in a cab from the corner of Leicester-square to the members’ entrance of the House of Commons, where the police received me with a quite unusual tolerance. Whether they thought that he was my keeper or that I was his keeper is a discussion between us which still continues.

It is necessary in this narrative to preserve the utmost exactitude of detail. After leaving my friend at the House I took the cab on a few hundred yards to an office in Victoria-street which I had to visit. I then got out and offered him more than his fare. He looked at it, but not with the surly doubt and general disposition to try it on which is not unknown among normal cabmen. But this was no normal, perhaps, no human, cabman. He looked at it with a dull and infantile astonishment, clearly quite genuine. “Do you know, sir,” he said, “you’ve only given me 1s.8d?” I remarked, with some surprise, that I did know it. “Now you know, sir,” said he in a kindly, appealing, reasonable way, “you know that ain’t the fare from Euston.” “Euston,” I repeated vaguely, for the phrase at that moment sounded to me like China or Arabia. “What on earth has Euston got to do with it?” “You hailed me just outside Euston Station,” began the man with astonishing precision, “and then you said—” “What in the name of Tartarus are you talking about?” I said with Christian forbearance; “I took you at the south-west corner of Leicester-square.” “Leicester-square,” he exclaimed, loosening a kind of cataract of scorn, “why we ain’t been near Leicester-square to-day. You hailed me outside Euston Station, and you said—” “Are you mad, or am I?” I asked with scientific calm.

I looked at the man. No ordinary dishonest cabman would think of creating so solid and colossal and creative a lie. And this man was not a dishonest cabman. If ever a human face was heavy and simple and humble, and with great big blue eyes protruding like a frog’s, if ever (in short) a human face was all that a human face should be, it was the face of that resentful and respectful cabman. I looked up and down the street; an unusually dark twilight seemed to be coming on. And for one second the old nightmare of the sceptic put its finger on my nerve. What was certainty? Was anybody certain of anything? Heavens! to think of the dull rut of the sceptics who go on asking whether we possess a future life. The exciting question for real scepticism is whether we possess a past life. What is a minute ago, rationalistically considered, except a tradition and a picture? The darkness grew deeper from the road. The cabman calmly gave me the most elaborate details of the gesture, the words, the complex but consistent course of action which I had adopted since that remarkable occasion when I had hailed him outside Euston Station. How did I know (my sceptical friends would say)
that I had not hailed him outside Euston. I was firm about my assertion; he was quite equally firm about his. He was obviously quite as honest a man as I, and a member of a much more respectable profession. In that moment the universe and the stars swung just a hair’s breadth from their balance, and the foundations of the earth were moved. But for the same reason that I believe in Democracy, for the same reason that I believe in free will, for the same reason that I believe in fixed character of virtue, the reason that could only be expressed by saying that I do not choose to be a lunatic, I continued to believe that this honest cabman was wrong, and I repeated to him that I had really taken him at the corner of Leicester-square. He began with the same evident and ponderous sincerity, “You hailed me outside Euston Station, and you said—”

And at this moment there came over his features a kind of frightful transfiguration of living astonishment, as if he had been lit up like a lamp from the inside. “Why, I beg your pardon, sir,” he said. “I beg your pardon. I beg your pardon. You took me from Leicester-square. I remember now. I beg your pardon.” And with that this astonishing man let out his whip with a sharp crack at his horse and went trundling away. The whole of which interview, before the banner of St. George I swear, is strictly true.

I looked at the strange cabman as he lessened in the distance and the mists. I do not know whether I was right in fancying that although his face had seemed so honest there was something unearthly and demoniac about him when seen from behind. Perhaps he had been sent to tempt me from my adherence to those sanities and certainties which I had defended earlier in the day. In any case it gave me pleasure to remember that my sense of reality, though it had rocked for an instant, had remained erect.
AN ACCIDENT

Some time ago I wrote in these columns an article called “The Extraordinary Cabman.” I am now in a position to contribute my experience of a still more extraordinary cab. The extraordinary thing about the cab was that it did not like me; it threw me out violently in the middle of the Strand. If my friends who read the DAILY NEWS are as romantic (and as rich) as I take them to be, I presume that this experience is not uncommon. I suppose that they are all being thrown out of cabs, all over London. Still, as there are some people, virginal and remote from the world, who have not yet had this luxurious experience, I will give a short account of the psychology of myself when my hansom cab ran into the side of a motor omnibus, and I hope hurt it.

I do not need to dwell on the essential romance of the hansom cab—that one really noble modern thing which our age, when it is judged, will gravely put beside the Parthenon. It is really modern in that it is both secret and swift. My particular hansom cab was modern in these two respects; it was also very modern in the fact that it came to grief. But it is also English; it is not to be found abroad; it belongs to a beautiful, romantic country where nearly everybody is pretending to be richer than they are, and acting as if they were. It is comfortable, and yet it is reckless; and that combination is the very soul of England. But although I had always realised all these good qualities in a hansom cab, I had not experienced all the possibilities, or, as the moderns put it, all the aspects of that vehicle. My enunciation of the merits of a hansom cab had been always made when it was the right way up. Let me, therefore, explain how I felt when I fell out of a hansom cab for the first and, I am happy to believe, the last time. Polycrates threw one ring into the sea to propitiate the Fates. I have thrown one hansom cab into the sea (if you will excuse a rather violent metaphor) and the Fates are, I am quite sure, propitiated. Though I am told they do not like to be told so.

I was driving yesterday afternoon in a hansom cab down one of the sloping streets into the Strand, reading one of my own admirable articles with continual pleasure, and still more continual surprise, when the horse fell forward, scrambled a moment on the scraping stones, staggered to his feet again, and went forward. The horses in my cabs often do this, and I have learnt to enjoy my
own articles at any angle of the vehicle. So I did not see anything at all odd about the way the horse went on again. But I saw it suddenly in the faces of all the people on the pavement. They were all turned towards me, and they were all struck with fear suddenly, as with a white flame out of the sky. And one man half ran out into the road with a movement of the elbow as if warding off a blow, and tried to stop the horse. Then I knew that the reins were lost, and the next moment the horse was like a living thunder-bolt. I try to describe things exactly as they seemed to me; many details I may have missed or mis-stated; many details may have, so to speak, gone mad in the race down the road. I remember that I once called one of my experiences narrated in this paper “A Fragment of Fact.” This is, at any rate, a fragment of fact. No fact could possibly be more fragmentary than the sort of fact that I expected to be at the bottom of that street.

I believe in preaching to the converted; for I have generally found that the converted do not understand their own religion. Thus I have always urged in this paper that democracy has a deeper meaning than democrats understand; that is, that common and popular things, proverbs, and ordinary sayings always have something in them unrealised by most who repeat them. Here is one. We have all heard about the man who is in momentary danger, and who sees the whole of his life pass before him in a moment. In the cold, literal, and common sense of words, this is obviously a thundering lie. Nobody can pretend that in an accident or a mortal crisis he elaborately remembered all the tickets he had ever taken to Wimbledon, or all the times that he had ever passed the brown bread and butter.

But in those few moments, while my cab was tearing towards the traffic of the Strand, I discovered that there is a truth behind this phrase, as there is behind all popular phrases. I did really have, in that short and shrieking period, a rapid succession of a number of fundamental points of view. I had, so to speak, about five religions in almost as many seconds. My first religion was pure Paganism, which among sincere men is more shortly described as extreme fear. Then there succeeded a state of mind which is quite real, but for which no proper name has ever been found. The ancients called it Stoicism, and I think it must be what some German lunatics mean (if they mean anything) when they talk about Pessimism. It was an empty and open acceptance of the thing that happens—as if one had got beyond the value of it. And then, curiously enough, came a very strong contrary feeling—that things mattered very much indeed, and yet that they were something more than tragic. It was a feeling, not that life was unimportant, but that life was much too important ever to be anything but life. I hope that this was Christianity. At any rate, it occurred at the moment when we went crash into
the omnibus.

It seemed to me that the hansom cab simply turned over on top of me, like an enormous hood or hat. I then found myself crawling out from underneath it in attitudes so undignified that they must have added enormously to that great cause to which the Anti-Puritan League and I have recently dedicated ourselves. I mean the cause of the pleasures of the people. As to my demeanour when I emerged, I have two confessions to make, and they are both made merely in the interests of mental science. The first is that whereas I had been in a quite pious frame of mind the moment before the collision, when I got to my feet and found I had got off with a cut or two I began (like St. Peter) to curse and to swear. A man offered me a newspaper or something that I had dropped. I can distinctly remember consigning the paper to a state of irremediable spiritual ruin. I am very sorry for this now, and I apologise both to the man and to the paper. I have not the least idea what was the meaning of this unnatural anger; I mention it as a psychological confession. It was immediately followed by extreme hilarity, and I made so many silly jokes to the policeman that he disgraced himself by continual laughter before all the little boys in the street, who had hitherto taken him seriously.

There is one other odd thing about the matter which I also mention as a curiosity of the human brain or deficiency of brain. At intervals of about every three minutes I kept on reminding the policeman that I had not paid the cabman, and that I hoped he would not lose his money. He said it would be all right, and the man would appear. But it was not until about half an hour afterwards that it suddenly struck me with a shock intolerable that the man might conceivably have lost more than half a crown; that he had been in danger as well as I. I had instinctively regarded the cabman as something uplifted above accidents, a god. I immediately made inquiries, and I am happy to say that they seemed to have been unnecessary.

But henceforward I shall always understand with a darker and more delicate charity those who take tythe of mint, and anise, and cumin, and neglect the weightier matters of the law; I shall remember how I was once really tortured with owing half a crown to a man who might have been dead. Some admirable men in white coats at the Charing Cross Hospital tied up my small injury, and I went out again into the Strand. I felt upon me even a kind of unnatural youth; I hungered for something untried. So to open a new chapter in my life I got into a hansom cab.
VII

THE ADVANTAGES OF HAVING ONE LEG

A friend of mine who was visiting a poor woman in bereavement and casting about for some phrase of consolation that should not be either insolent or weak, said at last, “I think one can live through these great sorrows and even be the better. What wears one is the little worries.” “That’s quite right, mum,” answered the old woman with emphasis, “and I ought to know, seeing I’ve had ten of ’em.” It is, perhaps, in this sense that it is most true that little worries are most wearing. In its vaguer significance the phrase, though it contains a truth, contains also some possibilities of self-deception and error. People who have both small troubles and big ones have the right to say that they find the small ones the most bitter; and it is undoubtedly true that the back which is bowed under loads incredible can feel a faint addition to those loads; a giant holding up the earth and all its animal creation might still find the grasshopper a burden. But I am afraid that the maxim that the smallest worries are the worst is sometimes used or abused by people, because they have nothing but the very smallest worries. The lady may excuse herself for reviling the crumpled rose leaf by reflecting with what extraordinary dignity she would wear the crown of thorns—if she had to. The gentleman may permit himself to curse the dinner and tell himself that he would behave much better if it were a mere matter of starvation. We need not deny that the grasshopper on man’s shoulder is a burden; but we need not pay much respect to the gentleman who is always calling out that he would rather have an elephant when he knows there are no elephants in the country. We may concede that a straw may break the camel’s back, but we like to know that it really is the last straw and not the first.

I grant that those who have serious wrongs have a real right to grumble, so long as they grumble about something else. It is a singular fact that if they are sane they almost always do grumble about something else. To talk quite reasonably about your own quite real wrongs is the quickest way to go off your head. But people with great troubles talk about little ones, and the man who complains of the crumpled rose leaf very often has his flesh full of the thorns. But if a man has commonly a very clear and happy daily life then I think we are justified in asking that he shall not make mountains out of molehills. I do no deny that molehills can sometimes be important. Small annoyances have this evil
about them, that they can be more abrupt because they are more invisible; they cast no shadow before, they have no atmosphere. No one ever had a mystical premonition that he was going to tumble over a hassock. William III. died by falling over a molehill; I do not suppose that with all his varied abilities he could have managed to fall over a mountain. But when all this is allowed for, I repeat that we may ask a happy man (not William III.) to put up with pure inconveniences, and even make them part of his happiness. Of positive pain or positive poverty I do not here speak. I speak of those innumerable accidental limitations that are always falling across our path—bad weather, confinement to this or that house or room, failure of appointments or arrangements, waiting at railway stations, missing posts, finding unpunctuality when we want punctuality, or, what is worse, finding punctuality when we don’t. It is of the poetic pleasures to be drawn from all these that I sing—I sing with confidence because I have recently been experimenting in the poetic pleasures which arise from having to sit in one chair with a sprained foot, with the only alternative course of standing on one leg like a stork—a stork is a poetic simile; therefore I eagerly adopted it.

To appreciate anything we must always isolate it, even if the thing itself symbolise something other than isolation. If we wish to see what a house is it must be a house in some uninhabited landscape. If we wish to depict what a man really is we must depict a man alone in a desert or on a dark sea sand. So long as he is a single figure he means all that humanity means; so long as he is solitary he means human society; so long as he is solitary he means sociability and comradeship. Add another figure and the picture is less human—not more so. One is company, two is none. If you wish to symbolise human building draw one dark tower on the horizon; if you wish to symbolise light let there be no star in the sky. Indeed, all through that strangely lit season which we call our day there is but one star in the sky—a large, fierce star which we call the sun. One sun is splendid; six suns would be only vulgar. One Tower Of Giotto is sublime; a row of Towers of Giotto would be only like a row of white posts. The poetry of art is in beholding the single tower; the poetry of nature in seeing the single tree; the poetry of love in following the single woman; the poetry of religion in worshipping the single star. And so, in the same pensive lucidity, I find the poetry of all human anatomy in standing on a single leg. To express complete and perfect leggishness the leg must stand in sublime isolation, like the tower in the wilderness. As Ibsen so finely says, the strongest leg is that which stands most alone.

This lonely leg on which I rest has all the simplicity of some Doric column.
The students of architecture tell us that the only legitimate use of a column is to support weight. This column of mine fulfils its legitimate function. It supports weight. Being of an animal and organic consistency, it may even improve by the process, and during these few days that I am thus unequally balanced, the helplessness or dislocation of the one leg may find compensation in the astonishing strength and classic beauty of the other leg. Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson in Mr. George Meredith’s novel might pass by at any moment, and seeing me in the stork-like attitude would exclaim, with equal admiration and a more literal exactitude, “He has a leg.” Notice how this famous literary phrase supports my contention touching this isolation of any admirable thing. Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson, wishing to make a clear and perfect picture of human grace, said that Sir Willoughby Patterne had a leg. She delicately glossed over and concealed the clumsy and offensive fact that he had really two legs. Two legs were superfluous and irrelevant, a reflection, and a confusion. Two legs would have confused Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson like two Monuments in London. That having had one good leg he should have another—this would be to use vain repetitions as the Gentiles do. She would have been as much bewildered by him as if he had been a centipede.

All pessimism has a secret optimism for its object. All surrender of life, all denial of pleasure, all darkness, all austerity, all desolation has for its real aim this separation of something so that it may be poignantly and perfectly enjoyed. I feel grateful for the slight sprain which has introduced this mysterious and fascinating division between one of my feet and the other. The way to love anything is to realise that it might be lost. In one of my feet I can feel how strong and splendid a foot is; in the other I can realise how very much otherwise it might have been. The moral of the thing is wholly exhilarating. This world and all our powers in it are far more awful and beautiful than even we know until some accident reminds us. If you wish to perceive that limitless felicity, limit yourself if only for a moment. If you wish to realise how fearfully and wonderfully God’s image is made, stand on one leg. If you want to realise the splendid vision of all visible things—wink the other eye.
VIII

THE END OF THE WORLD

For some time I had been wandering in quiet streets in the curious town of Besançon, which stands like a sort of peninsula in a horse-shoe of river. You may learn from the guide books that it was the birthplace of Victor Hugo, and that it is a military station with many forts, near the French frontier. But you will not learn from guide books that the very tiles on the roofs seem to be of some quainter and more delicate colour than the tiles of all the other towns of the world; that the tiles look like the little clouds of some strange sunset, or like the lustrous scales of some strange fish. They will not tell you that in this town the eye cannot rest on anything without finding it in some way attractive and even elvish, a carved face at a street corner, a gleam of green fields through a stunted arch, or some unexpected colour for the enamel of a spire or dome.

Evening was coming on and in the light of it all these colours so simple and yet so subtle seemed more and more to fit together and make a fairy tale. I sat down for a little outside a café with a row of little toy trees in front of it, and presently the driver of a fly (as we should call it) came to the same place. He was one of those very large and dark Frenchmen, a type not common but yet typical of France; the Rabelaisian Frenchman, huge, swarthy, purple-faced, a walking wine-barrel; he was a sort of Southern Falstaff, if one can imagine Falstaff anything but English. And, indeed, there was a vital difference, typical of two nations. For while Falstaff would have been shaking with hilarity like a huge jelly, full of the broad farce of the London streets, this Frenchman was rather solemn and dignified than otherwise—as if pleasure were a kind of pagan religion. After some talk which was full of the admirable civility and equality of French civilisation, he suggested without either eagerness or embarrassment that he should take me in his fly for an hour’s ride in the hills beyond the town. And though it was growing late I consented; for there was one long white road under an archway and round a hill that dragged me like a long white cord. We drove through the strong, squat gateway that was made by Romans, and I remember the coincidence like a sort of omen that as we passed out of the city I heard simultaneously the three sounds which are the trinity of France. They make what some poet calls “a tangled trinity,” and I am not going to disentangle it. Whatever those three things mean, how or why they co-exist; whether they can
be reconciled or perhaps are reconciled already; the three sounds I heard then by an accident all at once make up the French mystery. For the brass band in the Casino gardens behind me was playing with a sort of passionate levity some ramping tune from a Parisian comic opera, and while this was going on I heard also the bugles on the hills above, that told of terrible loyalties and men always arming in the gate of France; and I heard also, fainter than these sounds and through them all, the Angelus.

After this coincidence of symbols I had a curious sense of having left France behind me, or, perhaps, even the civilised world. And, indeed, there was something in the landscape wild enough to encourage such a fancy. I have seen perhaps higher mountains, but I have never seen higher rocks; I have never seen height so near, so abrupt and sensational, splinters of rock that stood up like the spires of churches, cliffs that fell sudden and straight as Satan fell from heaven. There was also a quality in the ride which was not only astonishing, but rather bewildering; a quality which many must have noticed if they have driven or ridden rapidly up mountain roads. I mean a sense of gigantic gyration, as of the whole earth turning about one’s head. It is quite inadequate to say that the hills rose and fell like enormous waves. Rather the hills seemed to turn about me like the enormous sails of a windmill, a vast wheel of monstrous archangelic wings. As we drove on and up into the gathering purple of the sunset this dizziness increased, confounding things above with things below. Wide walls of wooded rock stood out above my head like a roof. I stared at them until I fancied that I was staring down at a wooded plain. Below me steeps of green swept down to the river. I stared at them until I fancied that they swept up to the sky. The purple darkened, night drew nearer; it seemed only to cut clearer the chasms and draw higher the spires of that nightmare landscape. Above me in the twilight was the huge black hulk of the driver, and his broad, blank back was as mysterious as the back of Death in Watts’ picture. I felt that I was growing too fantastic, and I sought to speak of ordinary things. I called out to the driver in French, “Where are you taking me?” and it is a literal and solemn fact that he answered me in the same language without turning around, “To the end of the world.”

I did not answer. I let him drag the vehicle up dark, steep ways, until I saw lights under a low roof of little trees and two children, one oddly beautiful, playing at ball. Then we found ourselves filling up the strict main street of a tiny hamlet, and across the wall of its inn was written in large letters, LE BOUT DU MONDE—the end of the world.

The driver and I sat down outside that inn without a word, as if all ceremonies
were natural and understood in that ultimate place. I ordered bread for both of us, and red wine, that was good but had no name. On the other side of the road was a little plain church with a cross on top of it and a cock on top of the cross. This seemed to me a very good end of the world; if the story of the world ended here it ended well. Then I wondered whether I myself should really be content to end here, where most certainly there were the best things of Christendom—a church and children’s games and decent soil and a tavern for men to talk with men. But as I thought a singular doubt and desire grew slowly in me, and at last I started up.

“Are you not satisfied?” asked my companion. “No,” I said, “I am not satisfied even at the end of the world.”

Then, after a silence, I said, “Because you see there are two ends of the world. And this is the wrong end of the world; at least the wrong one for me. This is the French end of the world. I want the other end of the world. Drive me to the other end of the world.”

“The other end of the world?” he asked. “Where is that?”

“It is in Walham Green,” I whispered hoarsely. “You see it on the London omnibuses. ‘World’s End and Walham Green.’ Oh, I know how good this is; I love your vineyards and your free peasantry, but I want the English end of the world. I love you like a brother, but I want an English cabman, who will be funny and ask me what his fare ‘is.’ Your bugles stir my blood, but I want to see a London policeman. Take, oh, take me to see a London policeman.”

He stood quite dark and still against the end of the sunset, and I could not tell whether he understood or not. I got back into his carriage.

“You will understand,” I said, “if ever you are an exile even for pleasure. The child to his mother, the man to his country, as a countryman of yours once said. But since, perhaps, it is rather too long a drive to the English end of the world, we may as well drive back to Besançon.”

Only as the stars came out among those immortal hills I wept for Walham Green.
IN THE PLACE DE LA BASTILLE

On the first of May I was sitting outside a café in the Place de la Bastille in Paris staring at the exultant column, crowned with a capering figure, which stands in the place where the people destroyed a prison and ended an age. The thing is a curious example of how symbolic is the great part of human history. As a matter of mere material fact, the Bastille when it was taken was not a horrible prison; it was hardly a prison at all. But it was a symbol, and the people always go by a sure instinct for symbols; for the Chinaman, for instance, at the last General Election, or for President Kruger’s hat in the election before; their poetic sense is perfect. The Chinaman with his pigtail is not an idle flippancy. He does typify with a compact precision exactly the thing the people resent in African policy, the alien and grotesque nature of the power of wealth, the fact that money has no roots, that it is not a natural and familiar power, but a sort of airy and evil magic calling monsters from the ends of the earth. The people hate the mine owner who can bring a Chinaman flying across the sea, exactly as the people hated the wizard who could fetch a flying dragon through the air. It was the same with Mr. Kruger’s hat. His hat (that admirable hat) was not merely a joke. It did symbolise, and symbolise extremely well, the exact thing which our people at that moment regarded with impatience and venom; the old-fashioned, dingy, Republican simplicity, the unbeautiful dignity of the bourgeois, and the heavier truisms of political morality. No; the people are sometimes wrong on the practical side of politics; they are never wrong on the artistic side.

So it was, certainly, with the Bastille. The destruction of the Bastille was not a reform; it was something more important than a reform. It was an iconoclasm; it was the breaking of a stone image. The people saw the building like a giant looking at them with a score of eyes, and they struck at it as at a carved fact. For of all the shapes in which that immense illusion called materialism can terrify the soul, perhaps the most oppressive are big buildings. Man feels like a fly, an accident, in the thing he has himself made. It requires a violent effort of the spirit to remember that man made this confounding thing and man could unmake it. Therefore the mere act of the ragged people in the street taking and destroying a huge public building has a spiritual, a ritual meaning far beyond its immediate political results. It is a religious service. If, for instance, the Socialists were
numerous or courageous enough to capture and smash up the Bank of England, you might argue for ever about the inutility of the act, and how it really did not touch the root of the economic problem in the correct manner. But mankind would never forget it. It would change the world.

Architecture is a very good test of the true strength of a society, for the most valuable things in a human state are the irrevocable things—marriage, for instance. And architecture approaches nearer than any other art to being irrevocable, because it is so difficult to get rid of. You can turn a picture with its face to the wall; it would be a nuisance to turn that Roman cathedral with its face to the wall. You can tear a poem to pieces; it is only in moments of very sincere emotion that you tear a town-hall to pieces. A building is akin to dogma; it is insolent, like a dogma. Whether or no it is permanent, it claims permanence like a dogma. People ask why we have no typical architecture of the modern world, like impressionism in painting. Surely it is obviously because we have not enough dogmas; we cannot bear to see anything in the sky that is solid and enduring, anything in the sky that does not change like the clouds of the sky. But along with this decision which is involved in creating a building, there goes a quite similar decision in the more delightful task of smashing one. The two of necessity go together. In few places have so many fine public buildings been set up as here in Paris, and in few places have so many been destroyed. When people have finally got into the horrible habit of preserving buildings, they have got out of the habit of building them. And in London one mingles, as it were, one’s tears because so few are pulled down.

As I sat staring at the column of the Bastille, inscribed to Liberty and Glory, there came out of one corner of the square (which, like so many such squares, was at once crowded and quiet) a sudden and silent line of horsemen. Their dress was of a dull blue, plain and prosaic enough, but the sun set on fire the brass and steel of their helmets; and their helmets were carved like the helmets of the Romans. I had seen them by twos and threes often enough before. I had seen plenty of them in pictures toiling through the snows of Friedland or roaring round the squares at Waterloo. But now they came file after file, like an invasion, and something in their numbers, or in the evening light that lit up their faces and their crests, or something in the reverie into which they broke, made me inclined to spring to my feet and cry out, “The French soldiers!” There were the little men with the brown faces that had so often ridden through the capitals of Europe as coolly as they now rode through their own. And when I looked across the square I saw that the two other corners were choked with blue and
red; held by little groups of infantry. The city was garrisoned as against a revolution.

Of course, I had heard all about the strike, chiefly from a baker. He said he was not going to “Chomer.” I said, “Qu’est-ce que c’est que le chome?” He said, “Ils ne veulent pas travailler.” I said, “Ni moi non plus,” and he thought I was a class-conscious collectivist proletarian. The whole thing was curious, and the true moral of it one not easy for us, as a nation, to grasp, because our own faults are so deeply and dangerously in the other direction. To me, as an Englishman (personally steeped in the English optimism and the English dislike of severity), the whole thing seemed a fuss about nothing. It looked like turning out one of the best armies in Europe against ordinary people walking about the street. The cavalry charged us once or twice, more or less harmlessly. But, of course, it is hard to say how far in such criticisms one is assuming the French populace to be (what it is not) as docile as the English. But the deeper truth of the matter tingled, so to speak, through the whole noisy night. This people has a natural faculty for feeling itself on the eve of something—of the Bartholomew or the Revolution or the Commune or the Day of Judgment. It is this sense of crisis that makes France eternally young. It is perpetually pulling down and building up, as it pulled down the prison and put up the column in the Place de La Bastille. France has always been at the point of dissolution. She has found the only method of immortality. She dies daily.
ON LYING IN BED

Lying in bed would be an altogether perfect and supreme experience if only one had a coloured pencil long enough to draw on the ceiling. This, however, is not generally a part of the domestic apparatus on the premises. I think myself that the thing might be managed with several pails of Aspinall and a broom. Only if one worked in a really sweeping and masterly way, and laid on the colour in great washes, it might drip down again on one’s face in floods of rich and mingled colour like some strange fairy rain; and that would have its disadvantages. I am afraid it would be necessary to stick to black and white in this form of artistic composition. To that purpose, indeed, the white ceiling would be of the greatest possible use; in fact, it is the only use I think of a white ceiling being put to.

But for the beautiful experiment of lying in bed I might never have discovered it. For years I have been looking for some blank spaces in a modern house to draw on. Paper is much too small for any really allegorical design; as Cyrano de Bergerac says, “Il me faut des géants.” But when I tried to find these fine clear spaces in the modern rooms such as we all live in I was continually disappointed. I found an endless pattern and complication of small objects hung like a curtain of fine links between me and my desire. I examined the walls; I found them to my surprise to be already covered with wallpaper, and I found the wallpaper to be already covered with uninteresting images, all bearing a ridiculous resemblance to each other. I could not understand why one arbitrary symbol (a symbol apparently entirely devoid of any religious or philosophical significance) should thus be sprinkled all over my nice walls like a sort of small-pox. The Bible must be referring to wallpapers, I think, when it says, “Use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do.” I found the Turkey carpet a mass of unmeaning colours, rather like the Turkish Empire, or like the sweetmeat called Turkish Delight. I do not exactly know what Turkish Delight really is; but I suppose it is Macedonian Massacres. Everywhere that I went forlornly, with my pencil or my paint brush, I found that others had unaccountably been before me, spoiling the walls, the curtains, and the furniture with their childish and barbaric designs.

Nowhere did I find a really clear space for sketching until this occasion when I
prolonged beyond the proper limit the process of lying on my back in bed. Then the light of that white heaven broke upon my vision, that breadth of mere white which is indeed almost the definition of Paradise, since it means purity and also means freedom. But alas! like all heavens, now that it is seen it is found to be unattainable; it looks more austere and more distant than the blue sky outside the window. For my proposal to paint on it with the bristly end of a broom has been discouraged—never mind by whom; by a person debarred from all political rights—and even my minor proposal to put the other end of the broom into the kitchen fire and turn it to charcoal has not been conceded. Yet I am certain that it was from persons in my position that all the original inspiration came for covering the ceilings of palaces and cathedrals with a riot of fallen angels or victorious gods. I am sure that it was only because Michael Angelo was engaged in the ancient and honourable occupation of lying in bed that he ever realized how the roof of the Sistine Chapel might be made into an awful imitation of a divine drama that could only be acted in the heavens.

The tone now commonly taken toward the practice of lying in bed is hypocritical and unhealthy. Of all the marks of modernity that seem to mean a kind of decadence, there is none more menacing and dangerous than the exultation of very small and secondary matters of conduct at the expense of very great and primary ones, at the expense of eternal ties and tragic human morality. If there is one thing worse than the modern weakening of major morals, it is the modern strengthening of minor morals. Thus it is considered more withering to accuse a man of bad taste than of bad ethics. Cleanliness is not next to godliness nowadays, for cleanliness is made essential and godliness is regarded as an offence. A playwright can attack the institution of marriage so long as he does not misrepresent the manners of society, and I have met Ibsenite pessimists who thought it wrong to take beer but right to take prussic acid. Especially this is so in matters of hygiene; notably such matters as lying in bed. Instead of being regarded, as it ought to be, as a matter of personal convenience and adjustment, it has come to be regarded by many as if it were a part of essential morals to get up early in the morning. It is upon the whole part of practical wisdom; but there is nothing good about it or bad about its opposite.

Misers get up early in the morning; and burglars, I am informed, get up the night before. It is the great peril of our society that all its mechanisms may grow more fixed while its spirit grows more fickle. A man’s minor actions and arrangements ought to be free, flexible, creative; the things that should be unchangeable are his principles, his ideals. But with us the reverse is true; our
views change constantly; but our lunch does not change. Now, I should like men
to have strong and rooted conceptions, but as for their lunch, let them have it
sometimes in the garden, sometimes in bed, sometimes on the roof, sometimes in
the top of a tree. Let them argue from the same first principles, but let them do it
in a bed, or a boat, or a balloon. This alarming growth of good habits really
means a too great emphasis on those virtues which mere custom can ensure, it
means too little emphasis on those virtues which custom can never quite ensure,
sudden and splendid virtues of inspired pity or of inspired candour. If ever that
abrupt appeal is made to us we may fail. A man can get use to getting up at five
o’clock in the morning. A man cannot very well get used to being burnt for his
opinions; the first experiment is commonly fatal. Let us pay a little more
attention to these possibilities of the heroic and unexpected. I dare say that when
I get out of this bed I shall do some deed of an almost terrible virtue.

For those who study the great art of lying in bed there is one emphatic caution
to be added. Even for those who can do their work in bed (like journalists), still
more for those whose work cannot be done in bed (as, for example, the
professional harpooners of whales), it is obvious that the indulgence must be
very occasional. But that is not the caution I mean. The caution is this: if you do
lie in bed, be sure you do it without any reason or justification at all. I do not
speak, of course, of the seriously sick. But if a healthy man lies in bed, let him
do it without a rag of excuse; then he will get up a healthy man. If he does it for
some secondary hygienic reason, if he has some scientific explanation, he may
get up a hypochondriac.
XI

THE TWELVE MEN

The other day, while I was meditating on morality and Mr. H. Pitt, I was, so to speak, snatched up and put into a jury box to try people. The snatching took some weeks, but to me it seemed something sudden and arbitrary. I was put into this box because I lived in Battersea, and my name began with a C. Looking round me, I saw that there were also summoned and in attendance in the court whole crowds and processions of men, all of whom lived in Battersea, and all of whose names began with a C.

It seems that they always summon jurymen in this sweeping alphabetical way. At one official blow, so to speak, Battersea is denuded of all its C’s, and left to get on as best it can with the rest of the alphabet. A Cumberpatch is missing from one street—a Chizzolpop from another—three Chucksterfields from Chucksterfield House; the children are crying out for an absent Cadgerboy; the woman at the street corner is weeping for her Coffintop, and will not be comforted. We settle down with a rollicking ease into our seats (for we are a bold, devil-may-care race, the C’s of Battersea), and an oath is administered to us in a totally inaudible manner by an individual resembling an Army surgeon in his second childhood. We understand, however, that we are to well and truly try the case between our sovereign lord the King and the prisoner at the bar, neither of whom has put in an appearance as yet.

Just when I was wondering whether the King and the prisoner were, perhaps, coming to an amicable understanding in some adjoining public house, the prisoner’s head appears above the barrier of the dock; he is accused of stealing bicycles, and he is the living image of a great friend of mine. We go into the matter of the stealing of the bicycles. We do well and truly try the case between the King and the prisoner in the affair of the bicycles. And we come to the conclusion, after a brief but reasonable discussion, that the King is not in any way implicated. Then we pass on to a woman who neglected her children, and who looks as if somebody or something had neglected her. And I am one of those who fancy that something had.

All the time that the eye took in these light appearances and the brain passed these light criticisms, there was in the heart a barbaric pity and fear which men have never been able to utter from the beginning, but which is the power behind
half the poems of the world. The mood cannot even adequately be suggested, except faintly by this statement that tragedy is the highest expression of the infinite value of human life. Never had I stood so close to pain; and never so far away from pessimism. Ordinarily, I should not have spoken of these dark emotions at all, for speech about them is too difficult; but I mention them now for a specific and particular reason to the statement of which I will proceed at once. I speak these feelings because out of the furnace of them there came a curious realisation of a political or social truth. I saw with a queer and indescribable kind of clearness what a jury really is, and why we must never let it go.

The trend of our epoch up to this time has been consistently towards specialism and professionalism. We tend to have trained soldiers because they fight better, trained singers because they sing better, trained dancers because they dance better, specially instructed laughers because they laugh better, and so on and so on. The principle has been applied to law and politics by innumerable modern writers. Many Fabians have insisted that a greater part of our political work should be performed by experts. Many legalists have declared that the untrained jury should be altogether supplanted by the trained Judge.

Now, if this world of ours were really what is called reasonable, I do not know that there would be any fault to find with this. But the true result of all experience and the true foundation of all religion is this. That the four or five things that it is most practically essential that a man should know, are all of them what people call paradoxes. That is to say, that though we all find them in life to be mere plain truths, yet we cannot easily state them in words without being guilty of seeming verbal contradictions. One of them, for instance, is the unimpeachable platitude that the man who finds most pleasure for himself is often the man who least hunts for it. Another is the paradox of courage; the fact that the way to avoid death is not to have too much aversion to it. Whoever is careless enough of his bones to climb some hopeful cliff above the tide may save his bones by that carelessness. Whoever will lose his life, the same shall save it; an entirely practical and prosaic statement.

Now, one of these four or five paradoxes which should be taught to every infant prattling at his mother’s knee is the following: That the more a man looks at a thing, the less he can see it, and the more a man learns a thing the less he knows it. The Fabian argument of the expert, that the man who is trained should be the man who is trusted would be absolutely unanswerable if it were really true that a man who studied a thing and practiced it every day went on seeing more
and more of its significance. But he does not. He goes on seeing less and less of its significance. In the same way, alas! we all go on every day, unless we are continually goading ourselves into gratitude and humility, seeing less and less of the significance of the sky or the stones.

Now it is a terrible business to mark a man out for the vengeance of men. But it is a thing to which a man can grow accustomed, as he can to other terrible things; he can even grow accustomed to the sun. And the horrible thing about all legal officials, even the best, about all judges, magistrates, barristers, detectives, and policemen, is not that they are wicked (some of them are good), not that they are stupid (several of them are quite intelligent), it is simply that they have got used to it.

Strictly they do not see the prisoner in the dock; all they see is the usual man in the usual place. They do not see the awful court of judgment; they only see their own workshop. Therefore, the instinct of Christian civilisation has most wisely declared that into their judgments there shall upon every occasion be infused fresh blood and fresh thoughts from the streets. Men shall come in who can see the court and the crowd, and coarse faces of the policeman and the professional criminals, the wasted faces of the wastrels, the unreal faces of the gesticulating counsel, and see it all as one sees a new picture or a play hitherto unvisited.

Our civilisation has decided, and very justly decided, that determining the guilt or innocence of men is a thing too important to be trusted to trained men. It wishes for light upon that awful matter, it asks men who know no more law than I know, but who can feel the things that I felt in the jury box. When it wants a library catalogued, or the solar system discovered, or any trifle of that kind, it uses up specialists. But when it wishes anything done which is really serious, it collects twelve of the ordinary men standing round. The same thing was done, if I remember right, by the Founder of Christianity.
THE WIND AND THE TREES

I am sitting under tall trees, with a great wind boiling like surf about the tops of them, so that their living load of leaves rocks and roars in something that is at once exultation and agony. I feel, in fact, as if I were actually sitting at the bottom of the sea among mere anchors and ropes, while over my head and over the green twilight of water sounded the everlasting rush of waves and the toil and crash and shipwreck of tremendous ships. The wind tugs at the trees as if it might pluck them root and all out of the earth like tufts of grass. Or, to try yet another desperate figure of speech for this unspeakable energy, the trees are straining and tearing and lashing as if they were a tribe of dragons each tied by the tail.

As I look at these top-heavy giants tortured by an invisible and violent witchcraft, a phrase comes back into my mind. I remember a little boy of my acquaintance who was once walking in Battersea Park under just such torn skies and tossing trees. He did not like the wind at all; it blew in his face too much; it made him shut his eyes; and it blew off his hat, of which he was very proud. He was, as far as I remember, about four. After complaining repeatedly of the atmospheric unrest, he said at last to his mother, “Well, why don’t you take away the trees, and then it wouldn’t wind.”

Nothing could be more intelligent or natural than this mistake. Any one looking for the first time at the trees might fancy that they were indeed vast and titanic fans, which by their mere waving agitated the air around them for miles. Nothing, I say, could be more human and excusable than the belief that it is the trees which make the wind. Indeed, the belief is so human and excusable that it is, as a matter of fact, the belief of about ninety-nine out of a hundred of the philosophers, reformers, sociologists, and politicians of the great age in which we live. My small friend was, in fact, very like the principal modern thinkers; only much nicer.

In the little apologue or parable which he has thus the honour of inventing, the trees stand for all visible things and the wind for the invisible. The wind is the spirit which bloweth where it listeth; the trees are the material things of the world which are blown where the spirit lists. The wind is philosophy, religion, revolution; the trees are cities and civilisations. We only know that there is a
wind because the trees on some distant hill suddenly go mad. We only know that there is a real revolution because all the chimney-pots go mad on the whole skyline of the city.

Just as the ragged outline of a tree grows suddenly more ragged and rises into fantastic crests or tattered tails, so the human city rises under the wind of the spirit into toppling temples or sudden spires. No man has ever seen a revolution. Mobs pouring through the palaces, blood pouring down the gutters, the guillotine lifted higher than the throne, a prison in ruins, a people in arms—these things are not revolution, but the results of revolution.

You cannot see a wind; you can only see that there is a wind. So, also, you cannot see a revolution; you can only see that there is a revolution. And there never has been in the history of the world a real revolution, brutally active and decisive, which was not preceded by unrest and new dogma in the reign of invisible things. All revolutions began by being abstract. Most revolutions began by being quite pedantically abstract.

The wind is up above the world before a twig on the tree has moved. So there must always be a battle in the sky before there is a battle on the earth. Since it is lawful to pray for the coming of the kingdom, it is lawful also to pray for the coming of the revolution that shall restore the kingdom. It is lawful to hope to hear the wind of Heaven in the trees. It is lawful to pray “Thine anger come on earth as it is in Heaven.”

The great human dogma, then, is that the wind moves the trees. The great human heresy is that the trees move the wind. When people begin to say that the material circumstances have alone created the moral circumstances, then they have prevented all possibility of serious change. For if my circumstances have made me wholly stupid, how can I be certain even that I am right in altering those circumstances?

The man who represents all thought as an accident of environment is simply smashing and discrediting all his own thoughts—including that one. To treat the human mind as having an ultimate authority is necessary to any kind of thinking, even free thinking. And nothing will ever be reformed in this age or country unless we realise that the moral fact comes first.

For example, most of us, I suppose, have seen in print and heard in debating clubs an endless discussion that goes on between Socialists and total abstainers. The latter say that drink leads to poverty; the former say that poverty leads to drink. I can only wonder at their either of them being content with such simple physical explanations. Surely it is obvious that the thing which among the
English proletariat leads to poverty is the same as the thing which leads to drink; the absence of strong civic dignity, the absence of an instinct that resists degradation.

When you have discovered why enormous English estates were not long ago cut up into small holdings like the land of France, you will have discovered why the Englishman is more drunken than the Frenchman. The Englishman, among his million delightful virtues, really has this quality, which may strictly be called “hand to mouth,” because under its influence a man’s hand automatically seeks his own mouth, instead of seeking (as it sometimes should do) his oppressor’s nose. And a man who says that the English inequality in land is due only to economic causes, or that the drunkenness of England is due only to economic causes, is saying something so absurd that he cannot really have thought what he was saying.

Yet things quite as preposterous as this are said and written under the influence of that great spectacle of babyish helplessness, the economic theory of history. We have people who represent that all great historic motives were economic, and then have to howl at the top of their voices in order to induce the modern democracy to act on economic motives. The extreme Marxian politicians in England exhibit themselves as a small, heroic minority, trying vainly to induce the world to do what, according to their theory, the world always does. The truth is, of course, that there will be a social revolution the moment the thing has ceased to be purely economic. You can never have a revolution in order to establish a democracy. You must have a democracy in order to have a revolution.

I get up from under the trees, for the wind and the slight rain have ceased. The trees stand up like golden pillars in a clear sunlight. The tossing of the trees and the blowing of the wind have ceased simultaneously. So I suppose there are still modern philosophers who will maintain that the trees make the wind.
He was a quiet man, dressed in dark clothes, with a large limp straw hat; with something almost military in his moustache and whiskers, but with a quite unmilitary stoop and very dreamy eyes. He was gazing with a rather gloomy interest at the cluster, one might almost say the tangle, of small shipping which grew thicker as our little pleasure boat crawled up into Yarmouth Harbour. A boat entering this harbour, as every one knows, does not enter in front of the town like a foreigner, but creeps round at the back like a traitor taking the town in the rear. The passage of the river seems almost too narrow for traffic, and in consequence the bigger ships look colossal. As we passed under a timber ship from Norway, which seemed to block up the heavens like a cathedral, the man in a straw hat pointed to an odd wooden figurehead carved like a woman, and said, like one continuing a conversation, “Now, why have they left off having them. They didn’t do any one any harm?”

I replied with some flippancy about the captain’s wife being jealous; but I knew in my heart that the man had struck a deep note. There has been something in our most recent civilisation which is mysteriously hostile to such healthy and humane symbols.

“They hate anything like that, which is human and pretty,” he continued, exactly echoing my thoughts. “I believe they broke up all the jolly old figureheads with hatchets and enjoyed doing it.”

“Like Mr. Quilp,” I answered, “when he battered the wooden Admiral with the poker.”

His whole face suddenly became alive, and for the first time he stood erect and stared at me.

“Do you come to Yarmouth for that?” he asked.

“For what?”

“For Dickens,” he answered, and drummed with his foot on the deck.

“No,” I answered; “I come for fun, though that is much the same thing.”

“I always come,” he answered quietly, “to find Peggotty’s boat. It isn’t here.”

And when he said that I understood him perfectly.

There are two Yarmouths; I daresay there are two hundred to the people who live there. I myself have never come to the end of the list of Batterseas. But there
are two to the stranger and tourist; the poor part, which is dignified, and the prosperous part, which is savagely vulgar. My new friend haunted the first of these like a ghost; to the latter he would only distantly allude.

“The place is very much spoilt now . . . trippers, you know,” he would say, not at all scornfully, but simply sadly. That was the nearest he would go to an admission of the monstrous watering place that lay along the front, outblazing the sun, and more deafening than the sea. But behind—out of earshot of this uproar—there are lanes so narrow that they seem like secret entrances to some hidden place of repose. There are squares so brimful of silence that to plunge into one of them is like plunging into a pool. In these places the man and I paced up and down talking about Dickens, or, rather, doing what all true Dickensians do, telling each other verbatim long passages which both of us knew quite well already. We were really in the atmosphere of the older England. Fishermen passed us who might well have been characters like Peggotty; we went into a musty curiosity shop and bought pipe-stoppers carved into figures from Pickwick. The evening was settling down between all the buildings with that slow gold that seems to soak everything when we went into the church.

In the growing darkness of the church, my eye caught the coloured windows which on that clear golden evening were flaming with all the passionate heraldry of the most fierce and ecstatic of Christian arts. At length I said to my companion:

“Do you see that angel over there? I think it must be meant for the angel at the sepulchre.”

He saw that I was somewhat singularly moved, and he raised his eyebrows.

“I daresay,” he said. “What is there odd about that?”

After a pause I said, “Do you remember what the angel at the sepulchre said?”

“Not particularly,” he answered; “but where are you off to in such a hurry?”

I walked him rapidly out of the still square, past the fishermen’s almshouses, towards the coast, he still inquiring indignantly where I was going.

“I am going,” I said, “to put pennies in automatic machines on the beach. I am going to listen to the niggers. I am going to have my photograph taken. I am going to drink ginger-beer out of its original bottle. I will buy some picture postcards. I do want a boat. I am ready to listen to a concertina, and but for the defects of my education should be ready to play it. I am willing to ride on a donkey; that is, if the donkey is willing. I am willing to be a donkey; for all this was commanded me by the angel in the stained-glass window.”

“I really think,” said the Dickensian, “that I had better put you in charge of
your relations."

“Sir,” I answered, “there are certain writers to whom humanity owes much, whose talent is yet of so shy or delicate or retrospective a type that we do well to link it with certain quaint places or certain perishing associations. It would not be unnatural to look for the spirit of Horace Walpole at Strawberry Hill, or even for the shade of Thackeray in Old Kensington. But let us have no antiquarianism about Dickens, for Dickens is not an antiquity. Dickens looks not backward, but forward; he might look at our modern mobs with satire, or with fury, but he would love to look at them. He might lash our democracy, but it would be because, like a democrat, he asked much from it. We will not have all his books bound up under the title of ‘The Old Curiosity Shop.’ Rather we will have them all bound up under the title of ‘Great Expectations.’ Wherever humanity is he would have us face it and make something of it, swallow it with a holy cannibalism, and assimilate it with the digestion of a giant. We must take these trippers as he would have taken them, and tear out of them their tragedy and their farce. Do you remember now what the angel said at the sepulchre? ‘Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here; he is risen.’"

With that we came out suddenly on the wide stretch of the sands, which were black with the knobs and masses of our laughing and quite desperate democracy. And the sunset, which was now in its final glory, flung far over all of them a red flush and glitter like the gigantic firelight of Dickens. In that strange evening light every figure looked at once grotesque and attractive, as if he had a story to tell. I heard a little girl (who was being throttled by another little girl) say by way of self-vindication, “My sister-in-law ‘as got four rings aside her weddin’ ring!”

I stood and listened for more, but my friend went away.
IN TOPSY-TURVY LAND

Last week, in an idle metaphor, I took the tumbling of trees and the secret energy of the wind as typical of the visible world moving under the violence of the invisible. I took this metaphor merely because I happened to be writing the article in a wood. Nevertheless, now that I return to Fleet Street (which seems to me, I confess, much better and more poetical than all the wild woods in the world), I am strangely haunted by this accidental comparison. The people’s figures seem a forest and their soul a wind. All the human personalities which speak or signal to me seem to have this fantastic character of the fringe of the forest against the sky. That man that talks to me, what is he but an articulate tree? That driver of a van who waves his hands wildly at me to tell me to get out of the way, what is he but a bunch of branches stirred and swayed by a spiritual wind, a sylvan object that I can continue to contemplate with calm? That policeman who lifts his hand to warn three omnibuses of the peril that they run in encountering my person, what is he but a shrub shaken for a moment with that blast of human law which is a thing stronger than anarchy? Gradually this impression of the woods wears off. But this black-and-white contrast between the visible and invisible, this deep sense that the one essential belief is belief in the invisible as against the visible, is suddenly and sensationally brought back to my mind. Exactly at the moment when Fleet Street has grown most familiar (that is, most bewildering and bright), my eye catches a poster of vivid violet, on which I see written in large black letters these remarkable words: “Should Shop Assistants Marry?”

When I saw those words everything might just as well have turned upside down. The men in Fleet Street might have been walking about on their hands. The cross of St. Paul’s might have been hanging in the air upside down. For I realise that I have really come into a topsy-turvy country; I have come into the country where men do definitely believe that the waving of the trees makes the wind. That is to say, they believe that the material circumstances, however black and twisted, are more important than the spiritual realities, however powerful and pure. “Should Shop Assistants Marry?” I am puzzled to think what some periods and schools of human history would have made of such a question. The ascetics of the East or of some periods of the early Church would have thought
that the question meant, “Are not shop assistants too saintly, too much of another world, even to feel the emotions of the sexes?” But I suppose that is not what the purple poster means. In some pagan cities it might have meant, “Shall slaves so vile as shop assistants even be allowed to propagate their abject race?” But I suppose that is not what the purple poster means. We must face, I fear, the full insanity of what it does mean. It does really mean that a section of the human race is asking whether the primary relations of the two human sexes are particularly good for modern shops. The human race is asking whether Adam and Eve are entirely suitable for Marshall and Snelgrove. If this is not topsy-turvy I cannot imagine what would be. We ask whether the universal institution will improve our (please God) temporary institution. Yet I have known many such questions. For instance, I have known a man ask seriously, “Does Democracy help the Empire?” Which is like saying, “Is art favourable to frescoes?”

I say that there are many such questions asked. But if the world ever runs short of them, I can suggest a large number of questions of precisely the same kind, based on precisely the same principle.

“Do Feet Improve Boots?”—”Is Bread Better when Eaten?”—”Should Hats have Heads in them?”—”Do People Spoil a Town?”—”Do Walls Ruin Wall-papers?”—”Should Neckties enclose Necks?”—”Do Hands Hurt Walking-sticks?”—”Does Burning Destroy Firewood?”—”Is Cleanliness Good for Soap?”—”Can Cricket Really Improve Cricket-bats?”—”Shall We Take Brides with our Wedding Rings?” and a hundred others.

Not one of these questions differs at all in intellectual purport or in intellectual value from the question which I have quoted from the purple poster, or from any of the typical questions asked by half of the earnest economists of our times. All the questions they ask are of this character; they are all tinged with this same initial absurdity. They do not ask if the means is suited to the end; they all ask (with profound and penetrating scepticism) if the end is suited to the means. They do not ask whether the tail suits the dog. They all ask whether a dog is (by the highest artistic canons) the most ornamental appendage that can be put at the end of a tail. In short, instead of asking whether our modern arrangements, our streets, trades, bargains, laws, and concrete institutions are suited to the primal and permanent idea of a healthy human life, they never admit that healthy human life into the discussion at all, except suddenly and accidentally at odd moments; and then they only ask whether that healthy human life is suited to our streets and trades. Perfection may be attainable or unattainable as an end. It may or may
not be possible to talk of imperfection as a means to perfection. But surely it passes toleration to talk of perfection as a means to imperfection. The New Jerusalem may be a reality. It may be a dream. But surely it is too outrageous to say that the New Jerusalem is a reality on the road to Birmingham.

This is the most enormous and at the same time the most secret of the modern tyrannies of materialism. In theory the thing ought to be simple enough. A really human being would always put the spiritual things first. A walking and speaking statue of God finds himself at one particular moment employed as a shop assistant. He has in himself a power of terrible love, a promise of paternity, a thirst for some loyalty that shall unify life, and in the ordinary course of things he asks himself, “How far do the existing conditions of those assisting in shops fit in with my evident and epic destiny in the matter of love and marriage?” But here, as I have said, comes in the quiet and crushing power of modern materialism. It prevents him rising in rebellion, as he would otherwise do. By perpetually talking about environment and visible things, by perpetually talking about economics and physical necessity, painting and keeping repainted a perpetual picture of iron machinery and merciless engines, of rails of steel, and of towers of stone, modern materialism at last produces this tremendous impression in which the truth is stated upside down. At last the result is achieved. The man does not say as he ought to have said, “Should married men endure being modern shop assistants?” The man says, “Should shop assistants marry?” Triumph has completed the immense illusion of materialism. The slave does not say, “Are these chains worthy of me?” The slave says scientifically and contentedly, “Am I even worthy of these chains?”
WHAT I FOUND IN MY POCKET

Once when I was very young I met one of those men who have made the Empire what it is—a man in an astracan coat, with an astracan moustache—a tight, black, curly moustache. Whether he put on the moustache with the coat or whether his Napoleonic will enabled him not only to grow a moustache in the usual place, but also to grow little moustaches all over his clothes, I do not know. I only remember that he said to me the following words: “A man can’t get on nowadays by hanging about with his hands in his pockets.” I made reply with the quite obvious flippancy that perhaps a man got on by having his hands in other people’s pockets; whereupon he began to argue about Moral Evolution, so I suppose what I said had some truth in it. But the incident now comes back to me, and connects itself with another incident—if you can call it an incident—which happened to me only the other day.

I have only once in my life picked a pocket, and then (perhaps through some absent-mindedness) I picked my own. My act can really with some reason be so described. For in taking things out of my own pocket I had at least one of the more tense and quivering emotions of the thief; I had a complete ignorance and a profound curiosity as to what I should find there. Perhaps it would be the exaggeration of eulogy to call me a tidy person. But I can always pretty satisfactorily account for all my possessions. I can always tell where they are, and what I have done with them, so long as I can keep them out of my pockets. If once anything slips into those unknown abysses, I wave it a sad Virgilian farewell. I suppose that the things that I have dropped into my pockets are still there; the same presumption applies to the things that I have dropped into the sea. But I regard the riches stored in both these bottomless chasms with the same reverent ignorance. They tell us that on the last day the sea will give up its dead; and I suppose that on the same occasion long strings of extraordinary things will come running out of my pockets. But I have quite forgotten what any of them are; and there is really nothing (excepting the money) that I shall be at all surprised at finding among them.

Such at least has hitherto been my state of innocence. I here only wish briefly to recall the special, extraordinary, and hitherto unprecedented circumstances which led me in cold blood, and being of sound mind, to turn out my pockets. I
was locked up in a third-class carriage for a rather long journey. The time was
towards evening, but it might have been anything, for everything resembling
earth or sky or light or shade was painted out as if with a great wet brush by an
unshifting sheet of quite colourless rain. I had no books or newspapers. I had not
even a pencil and a scrap of paper with which to write a religious epic. There
were no advertisements on the walls of the carriage, otherwise I could have
plunged into the study, for any collection of printed words is quite enough to
suggest infinite complexities of mental ingenuity. When I find myself opposite
the words “Sunlight Soap” I can exhaust all the aspects of Sun Worship, Apollo,
and Summer poetry before I go on to the less congenial subject of soap. But
there was no printed word or picture anywhere; there was nothing but blank
wood inside the carriage and blank wet without. Now I deny most energetically
that anything is, or can be, uninteresting. So I stared at the joints of the walls and
seats, and began thinking hard on the fascinating subject of wood. Just as I had
begun to realise why, perhaps, it was that Christ was a carpenter, rather than a
bricklayer, or a baker, or anything else, I suddenly started upright, and
remembered my pockets. I was carrying about with me an unknown treasury. I
had a British Museum and a South Kensington collection of unknown curios
hung all over me in different places. I began to take the things out.

The first thing I came upon consisted of piles and heaps of Battersea tram
tickets. There were enough to equip a paper chase. They shook down in showers
like confetti. Primarily, of course, they touched my patriotic emotions, and
brought tears to my eyes; also they provided me with the printed matter I
required, for I found on the back of them some short but striking little scientific
essays about some kind of pill. Comparatively speaking, in my then destitution,
those tickets might be regarded as a small but well-chosen scientific library.
Should my railway journey continue (which seemed likely at the time) for a few
months longer, I could imagine myself throwing myself into the controversial
aspects of the pill, composing replies and rejoinders pro and con upon the data
furnished to me. But after all it was the symbolic quality of the tickets that
moved me most. For as certainly as the cross of St. George means English
patriotism, those scraps of paper meant all that municipal patriotism which is
now, perhaps, the greatest hope of England.

The next thing that I took out was a pocket-knife. A pocket-knife, I need
hardly say, would require a thick book full of moral meditations all to itself. A
knife typifies one of the most primary of those practical origins upon which as
upon low, thick pillows all our human civilisation reposes. Metals, the mystery
of the thing called iron and of the thing called steel, led me off half-dazed into a kind of dream. I saw into the intrails of dim, damp wood, where the first man among all the common stones found the strange stone. I saw a vague and violent battle, in which stone axes broke and stone knives were splintered against something shining and new in the hand of one desperate man. I heard all the hammers on all the anvils of the earth. I saw all the swords of Feudal and all the weals of Industrial war. For the knife is only a short sword; and the pocket-knife is a secret sword. I opened it and looked at that brilliant and terrible tongue which we call a blade; and I thought that perhaps it was the symbol of the oldest of the needs of man. The next moment I knew that I was wrong; for the thing that came next out of my pocket was a box of matches. Then I saw fire, which is stronger even than steel, the old, fierce female thing, the thing we all love, but dare not touch.

The next thing I found was a piece of chalk; and I saw in it all the art and all the frescoes of the world. The next was a coin of a very modest value; and I saw in it not only the image and superscription of our own Caesar, but all government and order since the world began. But I have not space to say what were the items in the long and splendid procession of poetical symbols that came pouring out. I cannot tell you all the things that were in my pocket. I can tell you one thing, however, that I could not find in my pocket. I allude to my railway ticket.
I met a man the other day who did not believe in fairy tales. I do not mean that he did not believe in the incidents narrated in them—that he did not believe that a pumpkin could turn into a coach. He did, indeed, entertain this curious disbelief. And, like all the other people I have ever met who entertained it, he was wholly unable to give me an intelligent reason for it. He tried the laws of nature, but he soon dropped that. Then he said that pumpkins were unalterable in ordinary experience, and that we all reckoned on their infinitely protracted pumpkinity. But I pointed out to him that this was not an attitude we adopt specially towards impossible marvels, but simply the attitude we adopt towards all unusual occurrences. If we were certain of miracles we should not count on them. Things that happen very seldom we all leave out of our calculations, whether they are miraculous or not. I do not expect a glass of water to be turned into wine; but neither do I expect a glass of water to be poisoned with prussic acid. I do not in ordinary business relations act on the assumption that the editor is a fairy; but neither do I act on the assumption that he is a Russian spy, or the lost heir of the Holy Roman Empire. What we assume in action is not that the natural order is unalterable, but simply that it is much safer to bet on uncommon incidents than on common ones. This does not touch the credibility of any attested tale about a Russian spy or a pumpkin turned into a coach. If I had seen a pumpkin turned into a Panhard motor-car with my own eyes that would not make me any more inclined to assume that the same thing would happen again. I should not invest largely in pumpkins with an eye to the motor trade. Cinderella got a ball dress from the fairy; but I do not suppose that she looked after her own clothes any the less after it.

But the view that fairy tales cannot really have happened, though crazy, is common. The man I speak of disbelieved in fairy tales in an even more amazing and perverted sense. He actually thought that fairy tales ought not to be told to children. That is (like a belief in slavery or annexation) one of those intellectual errors which lie very near to ordinary mortal sins. There are some refusals which, though they may be done what is called conscientiously, yet carry so much of their whole horror in the very act of them, that a man must in doing them not only harden but slightly corrupt his heart. One of them was the refusal
of milk to young mothers when their husbands were in the field against us. Another is the refusal of fairy tales to children.

The man had come to see me in connection with some silly society of which I am an enthusiastic member; he was a fresh-coloured, short-sighted young man, like a stray curate who was too helpless even to find his way to the Church of England. He had a curious green necktie and a very long neck; I am always meeting idealists with very long necks. Perhaps it is that their eternal aspiration slowly lifts their heads nearer and nearer to the stars. Or perhaps it has something to do with the fact that so many of them are vegetarians: perhaps they are slowly evolving the neck of the giraffe so that they can eat all the tops of the trees in Kensington Gardens. These things are in every sense above me. Such, anyhow, was the young man who did not believe in fairy tales; and by a curious coincidence he entered the room when I had just finished looking through a pile of contemporary fiction, and had begun to read “Grimm’s Fairy Tales” as a natural consequence.

The modern novels stood before me, however, in a stack; and you can imagine their titles for yourself. There was “Suburban Sue: A Tale of Psychology,” and also “Psychological Sue: A Tale of Suburbia”; there was “Trixy: A Temperament,” and “Man-Hate: A Monochrome,” and all those nice things. I read them with real interest, but, curiously enough, I grew tired of them at last, and when I saw “Grimm’s Fairy Tales” lying accidentally on the table, I gave a cry of indecent joy. Here at least, here at last, one could find a little common sense. I opened the book, and my eyes fell on these splendid and satisfying words, “The Dragon’s Grandmother.” That at least was reasonable; that at least was true. “The Dragon’s Grandmother!” While I was rolling this first touch of ordinary human reality upon my tongue, I looked up suddenly and saw this monster with a green tie standing in the doorway.

I listened to what he said about the society politely enough, I hope; but when he incidentally mentioned that he did not believe in fairy tales, I broke out beyond control. “Man,” I said, “who are you that you should not believe in fairy tales? It is much easier to believe in Blue Beard than to believe in you. A blue beard is a misfortune; but there are green ties which are sins. It is far easier to believe in a million fairy tales than to believe in one man who does not like fairy tales. I would rather kiss Grimm instead of a Bible and swear to all his stories as if they were thirty-nine articles than say seriously and out of my heart that there can be such a man as you; that you are not some temptation of the devil or some delusion from the void. Look at these plain, homely, practical words. ‘The
Dragon’s Grandmother,’ that is all right; that is rational almost to the verge of rationalism. If there was a dragon, he had a grandmother. But you—you had no grandmother! If you had known one, she would have taught you to love fairy tales. You had no father, you had no mother; no natural causes can explain you. You cannot be. I believe many things which I have not seen; but of such things as you it may be said, ‘Blessed is he that has seen and yet has disbelieved.’”

It seemed to me that he did not follow me with sufficient delicacy, so I moderated my tone. “Can you not see,” I said, “that fairy tales in their essence are quite solid and straightforward; but that this everlasting fiction about modern life is in its nature essentially incredible? Folk-lore means that the soul is sane, but that the universe is wild and full of marvels. Realism means that the world is dull and full of routine, but that the soul is sick and screaming. The problem of the fairy tale is—what will a healthy man do with a fantastic world? The problem of the modern novel is—what will a madman do with a dull world? In the fairy tales the cosmos goes mad; but the hero does not go mad. In the modern novels the hero is mad before the book begins, and suffers from the harsh steadiness and cruel sanity of the cosmos. In the excellent tale of ‘The Dragon’s Grandmother,’ in all the other tales of Grimm, it is assumed that the young man setting out on his travels will have all substantial truths in him; that he will be brave, full of faith, reasonable, that he will respect his parents, keep his word, rescue one kind of people, defy another kind, ‘parcere subjectis et debellare,’ etc. Then, having assumed this centre of sanity, the writer entertains himself by fancying what would happen if the whole world went mad all round it, if the sun turned green and the moon blue, if horses had six legs and giants had two heads. But your modern literature takes insanity as its centre. Therefore, it loses the interest even of insanity. A lunatic is not startling to himself, because he is quite serious; that is what makes him a lunatic. A man who thinks he is a piece of glass is to himself as dull as a piece of glass. A man who thinks he is a chicken is to himself as common as a chicken. It is only sanity that can see even a wild poetry in insanity. Therefore, these wise old tales made the hero ordinary and the tale extraordinary. But you have made the hero extraordinary and the tale ordinary—so ordinary—oh, so very ordinary.”

I saw him still gazing at me fixedly. Some nerve snapped in me under the hypnotic stare. I leapt to my feet and cried, “In the name of God and Democracy and the Dragon’s grandmother—in the name of all good things—I charge you to avaunt and haunt this house no more.” Whether or no it was the result of the exorcism, there is no doubt that he definitely went away.
THE RED ANGEL

I find that there really are human beings who think fairy tales bad for children. I do not speak of the man in the green tie, for him I can never count truly human. But a lady has written me an earnest letter saying that fairy tales ought not to be taught to children even if they are true. She says that it is cruel to tell children fairy tales, because it frightens them. You might just as well say that it is cruel to give girls sentimental novels because it makes them cry. All this kind of talk is based on that complete forgetting of what a child is like which has been the firm foundation of so many educational schemes. If you keep bogies and goblins away from children they would make them up for themselves. One small child in the dark can invent more hells than Swedenborg. One small child can imagine monsters too big and black to get into any picture, and give them names too unearthly and cacophonous to have occurred in the cries of any lunatic. The child, to begin with, commonly likes horrors, and he continues to indulge in them even when he does not like them. There is just as much difficulty in saying exactly where pure pain begins in his case, as there is in ours when we walk of our own free will into the torture-chamber of a great tragedy. The fear does not come from fairy tales; the fear comes from the universe of the soul.

The timidity of the child or the savage is entirely reasonable; they are alarmed at this world, because this world is a very alarming place. They dislike being alone because it is verily and indeed an awful idea to be alone. Barbarians fear the unknown for the same reason that Agnostics worship it—because it is a fact. Fairy tales, then, are not responsible for producing in children fear, or any of the shapes of fear; fairy tales do not give the child the idea of the evil or the ugly; that is in the child already, because it is in the world already. Fairy tales do not give the child his first idea of bogey. What fairy tales give the child is his first clear idea of the possible defeat of bogey. The baby has known the dragon intimately ever since he had an imagination. What the fairy tale provides for him is a St. George to kill the dragon.

Exactly what the fairy tale does is this: it accustoms him for a series of clear pictures to the idea that these limitless terrors had a limit, that these shapeless enemies have enemies in the knights of God, that there is something in the universe more mystical than darkness, and stronger than strong fear. When I was
a child I have stared at the darkness until the whole black bulk of it turned into one negro giant taller than heaven. If there was one star in the sky it only made him a Cyclops. But fairy tales restored my mental health, for next day I read an authentic account of how a negro giant with one eye, of quite equal dimensions, had been baffled by a little boy like myself (of similar inexperience and even lower social status) by means of a sword, some bad riddles, and a brave heart. Sometimes the sea at night seemed as dreadful as any dragon. But then I was acquainted with many youngest sons and little sailors to whom a dragon or two was as simple as the sea.

Take the most horrible of Grimm’s tales in incident and imagery, the excellent tale of the “Boy who Could not Shudder,” and you will see what I mean. There are some living shocks in that tale. I remember specially a man’s legs which fell down the chimney by themselves and walked about the room, until they were rejoined by the severed head and body which fell down the chimney after them. That is very good. But the point of the story and the point of the reader’s feelings is not that these things are frightening, but the far more striking fact that the hero was not frightened at them. The most fearful of all these fearful wonders was his own absence of fear. He slapped the bogies on the back and asked the devils to drink wine with him; many a time in my youth, when stifled with some modern morbidity, I have prayed for a double portion of his spirit. If you have not read the end of his story, go and read it; it is the wisest thing in the world. The hero was at last taught to shudder by taking a wife, who threw a pail of cold water over him. In that one sentence there is more of the real meaning of marriage than in all the books about sex that cover Europe and America.

At the four corners of a child’s bed stand Perseus and Roland, Sigurd and St. George. If you withdraw the guard of heroes you are not making him rational; you are only leaving him to fight the devils alone. For the devils, alas, we have always believed in. The hopeful element in the universe has in modern times continually been denied and reasserted; but the hopeless element has never for a moment been denied. As I told “H. N. B.” (whom I pause to wish a Happy Christmas in its most superstitious sense), the one thing modern people really do believe in is damnation. The greatest of purely modern poets summed up the really modern attitude in that fine Agnostic line—“There may be Heaven; there must be Hell.”

The gloomy view of the universe has been a continuous tradition; and the new types of spiritual investigation or conjecture all begin by being gloomy. A little while ago men believed in no spirits. Now they are beginning rather slowly to
believe in rather slow spirits.

Some people objected to spiritualism, table rappings, and such things, because they were undignified, because the ghosts cracked jokes or waltzed with dinner-tables. I do not share this objection in the least. I wish the spirits were more farcical than they are. That they should make more jokes and better ones, would be my suggestion. For almost all the spiritualism of our time, in so far as it is new, is solemn and sad. Some Pagan gods were lawless, and some Christian saints were a little too serious; but the spirits of modern spiritualism are both lawless and serious—a disgusting combination. The specially contemporary spirits are not only devils, they are blue devils. This is, first and last, the real value of Christmas; in so far as the mythology remains at all it is a kind of happy mythology. Personally, of course, I believe in Santa Claus; but it is the season of forgiveness, and I will forgive others for not doing so. But if there is anyone who does not comprehend the defect in our world which I am civilising, I should recommend him, for instance, to read a story by Mr. Henry James, called “The Turn of the Screw.” It is one of the most powerful things ever written, and it is one of the things about which I doubt most whether it ought ever to have been written at all. It describes two innocent children gradually growing at once omniscient and half-witted under the influence of the foul ghosts of a groom and a governess. As I say, I doubt whether Mr. Henry James ought to have published it (no, it is not indecent, do not buy it; it is a spiritual matter), but I think the question so doubtful that I will give that truly great man a chance. I will approve the thing as well as admire it if he will write another tale just as powerful about two children and Santa Claus. If he will not, or cannot, then the conclusion is clear; we can deal strongly with gloomy mystery, but not with happy mystery; we are not rationalists, but diabolists.

I have thought vaguely of all this staring at a great red fire that stands up in the room like a great red angel. But, perhaps, you have never heard of a red angel. But you have heard of a blue devil. That is exactly what I mean.
XVIII

THE TOWER

I have been standing where everybody has stood, opposite the great Belfry Tower of Bruges, and thinking, as every one has thought (though not, perhaps, said), that it is built in defiance of all decencies of architecture. It is made in deliberate disproportion to achieve the one startling effect of height. It is a church on stilts. But this sort of sublime deformity is characteristic of the whole fancy and energy of these Flemish cities. Flanders has the flattest and most prosaic landscapes, but the most violent and extravagant of buildings. Here Nature is tame; it is civilisation that is untamable. Here the fields are as flat as a paved square; but, on the other hand, the streets and roofs are as uproarious as a forest in a great wind. The waters of wood and meadow slide as smoothly and meekly as if they were in the London water-pipes. But the parish pump is carved with all the creatures out of the wilderness. Part of this is true, of course, of all art. We talk of wild animals, but the wildest animal is man. There are sounds in music that are more ancient and awful than the cry of the strangest beast at night. And so also there are buildings that are shapeless in their strength, seeming to lift themselves slowly like monsters from the primal mire, and there are spires that seem to fly up suddenly like a startled bird.

This savagery even in stone is the expression of the special spirit in humanity. All the beasts of the field are respectable; it is only man who has broken loose. All animals are domestic animals; only man is ever undomestic. All animals are tame animals; it is only we who are wild. And doubtless, also, while this queer energy is common to all human art, it is also generally characteristic of Christian art among the arts of the world. This is what people really mean when they say that Christianity is barbaric, and arose in ignorance. As a matter of historic fact, it didn’t; it arose in the most equably civilised period the world has ever seen.

But it is true that there is something in it that breaks the outline of perfect and conventional beauty, something that dots with anger the blind eyes of the Apollo and lashes to a cavalry charge the horses of the Elgin Marbles. Christianity is savage, in the sense that it is primeval; there is in it a touch of the nigger hymn. I remember a debate in which I had praised militant music in ritual, and some one asked me if I could imagine Christ walking down the street before a brass band. I said I could imagine it with the greatest ease; for Christ definitely approved a
natural noisiness at a great moment. When the street children shouted too loud, certain priggish disciples did begin to rebuke them in the name of good taste. He said: “If these were silent the very stones would cry out.” With these words He called up all the wealth of artistic creation that has been founded on this creed. With those words He founded Gothic architecture. For in a town like this, which seems to have grown Gothic as a wood grows leaves, anywhere and anyhow, any odd brick or moulding may be carved off into a shouting face. The front of vast buildings is thronged with open mouths, angels praising God, or devils defying Him. Rock itself is racked and twisted, until it seems to scream. The miracle is accomplished; the very stones cry out.

But though this furious fancy is certainly a specialty of men among creatures, and of Christian art among arts, it is still most notable in the art of Flanders. All Gothic buildings are full of extravagant things in detail; but this is an extravagant thing in design. All Christian temples worth talking about have gargoyles; but Bruges Belfry is a gargoyle. It is an unnaturally long-necked animal, like a giraffe. The same impression of exaggeration is forced on the mind at every corner of a Flemish town. And if any one asks, “Why did the people of these flat countries instinctively raise these riotous and towering monuments?” the only answer one can give is, “Because they were the people of these flat countries.” If any one asks, “Why the men of Bruges sacrificed architecture and everything to the sense of dizzy and divine heights?” we can only answer, “Because Nature gave them no encouragement to do so.”

As I stare at the Belfry, I think with a sort of smile of some of my friends in London who are quite sure of how children will turn out if you give them what they call “the right environment.” It is a troublesome thing, environment, for it sometimes works positively and sometimes negatively, and more often between the two. A beautiful environment may make a child love beauty; it may make him bored with beauty; most likely the two effects will mix and neutralise each other. Most likely, that is, the environment will make hardly any difference at all. In the scientific style of history (which was recently fashionable, and is still conventional) we always had a list of countries that had owed their characteristics to their physical conditions.

The Spaniards (it was said) are passionate because their country is hot; Scandinavians adventurous because their country is cold; Englishmen naval because they are islanders; Switzers free because they are mountaineers. It is all very nice in its way. Only unfortunately I am quite certain that I could make up quite as long a list exactly contrary in its argument point-blank against the
influence of their geographical environment. Thus Spaniards have discovered more continents than Scandinavians because their hot climate discouraged them from exertion. Thus Dutchmen have fought for their freedom quite as bravely as Switzers because the Dutch have no mountains. Thus Pagan Greece and Rome and many Mediterranean peoples have specially hated the sea because they had the nicest sea to deal with, the easiest sea to manage. I could extend the list for ever. But however long it was, two examples would certainly stand up in it as pre-eminent and unquestionable. The first is that the Swiss, who live under staggering precipices and spires of eternal snow, have produced no art or literature at all, and are by far the most mundane, sensible, and business-like people in Europe. The other is that the people of Belgium, who live in a country like a carpet, have, by an inner energy, desired to exalt their towers till they struck the stars.

As it is therefore quite doubtful whether a person will go specially with his environment or specially against his environment, I cannot comfort myself with the thought that the modern discussions about environment are of much practical value. But I think I will not write any more about these modern theories, but go on looking at the Belfry of Bruges. I would give them the greater attention if I were not pretty well convinced that the theories will have disappeared a long time before the Belfry.
XIX

HOW I MET THE PRESIDENT

Several years ago, when there was a small war going on in South Africa and a great fuss going on in England, when it was by no means so popular and convenient to be a Pro-Boer as it is now, I remember making a bright suggestion to my Pro-Boer friends and allies, which was not, I regret to say, received with the seriousness it deserved. I suggested that a band of devoted and noble youths, including ourselves, should express our sense of the pathos of the President’s and the Republic’s fate by growing Kruger beards under our chins. I imagined how abruptly this decoration would alter the appearance of Mr. John Morley; how startling it would be as it emerged from under the chin of Mr. Lloyd-George. But the younger men, my own friends, on whom I more particularly urged it, men whose names are in many cases familiar to the readers of this paper—Mr. Masterman’s for instance, and Mr. Conrad Noel—they, I felt, being young and beautiful, would do even more justice to the Kruger beard, and when walking down the street with it could not fail to attract attention. The beard would have been a kind of counterblast to the Rhodes hat. An appropriate counterblast; for the Rhodesian power in Africa is only an external thing, placed upon the top like a hat; the Dutch power and tradition is a thing rooted and growing like a beard; we have shaved it, and it is growing again. The Kruger beard would represent time and the natural processes. You cannot grow a beard in a moment of passion.

After making this proposal to my friends I hurriedly left town. I went down to a West Country place where there was shortly afterwards an election, at which I enjoyed myself very much canvassing for the Liberal candidate. The extraordinary thing was that he got in. I sometimes lie awake at night and meditate upon that mystery; but it must not detain us now. The rather singular incident which happened to me then, and which some recent events have recalled to me, happened while the canvassing was still going on. It was a burning blue day, and the warm sunshine, settling everywhere on the high hedges and the low hills, brought out into a kind of heavy bloom that HUMANE quality of the landscape which, as far as I know, only exists in England; that sense as if the bushes and the roads were human, and had kindness like men; as if the tree were a good giant with one wooden leg; as if the very line of palings
were a row of good-tempered gnomes. On one side of the white, sprawling road a low hill or down showed but a little higher than the hedge, on the other the land tumbled down into a valley that opened towards the Mendip hills. The road was very erratic, for every true English road exists in order to lead one a dance; and what could be more beautiful and beneficent than a dance? At an abrupt turn of it I came upon a low white building, with dark doors and dark shuttered windows, evidently not inhabited and scarcely in the ordinary sense inhabitable—a thing more like a toolhouse than a house of any other kind. Made idle by the heat, I paused, and, taking a piece of red chalk out of my pocket, began drawing aimlessly on the back door—drawing goblins and Mr. Chamberlain, and finally the ideal Nationalist with the Kruger beard. The materials did not permit of any delicate rendering of his noble and national expansion of countenance (stoical and yet hopeful, full of tears for man, and yet of an element of humour); but the hat was finely handled. Just as I was adding the finishing touches to the Kruger fantasy, I was frozen to the spot with terror. The black door, which I thought no more of than the lid of an empty box, began slowly to open, impelled from within by a human hand. And President Kruger himself came out into the sunlight!

He was a shade milder of eye than he was in his portraits, and he did not wear that ceremonial scarf which was usually, in such pictures, slung across his ponderous form. But there was the hat which filled the Empire with so much alarm; there were the clumsy dark clothes, there was the heavy, powerful face; there, above all, was the Kruger beard which I had sought to evoke (if I may use the verb) from under the features of Mr. Masterman. Whether he had the umbrella or not I was too much emotionally shaken to observe; he had not the stone lions with him, or Mrs. Kruger; and what he was doing in that dark shed I cannot imagine, but I suppose he was oppressing an Outlander.

I was surprised, I must confess, to meet President Kruger in Somersetshire during the war. I had no idea that he was in the neighbourhood. But a yet more arresting surprise awaited me. Mr. Kruger regarded me for some moments with a dubious grey eye, and then addressed me with a strong Somersetshire accent. A curious cold shock went through me to hear that inappropriate voice coming out of that familiar form. It was as if you met a Chinaman, with pigtail and yellow jacket, and he began to talk broad Scotch. But the next moment, of course, I understood the situation. We had much underrated the Boers in supposing that the Boer education was incomplete. In pursuit of his ruthless plot against our island home, the terrible President had learnt not only English, but all the
dialects at a moment’s notice to win over a Lancashire merchant or seduce a Northumberland Fusilier. No doubt, if I asked him, this stout old gentleman could grind out Sussex, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk, and so on, like the tunes in a barrel organ. I could not wonder if our plain, true-hearted German millionaires fell before a cunning so penetrated with culture as this.

And now I come to the third and greatest surprise of all that this strange old man gave me. When he asked me, dryly enough, but not without a certain steady civility that belongs to old-fashioned country people, what I wanted and what I was doing, I told him the facts of the case, explaining my political mission and the almost angelic qualities of the Liberal candidate. Whereupon, this old man became suddenly transfigured in the sunlight into a devil of wrath. It was some time before I could understand a word he said, but the one word that kept on recurring was the word “Kruger,” and it was invariably accompanied with a volley of violent terms. Was I for old Kruger, was I? Did I come to him and want him to help old Kruger? I ought to be ashamed, I was . . . and here he became once more obscure. The one thing that he made quite clear was that he wouldn’t do anything for Kruger.

“But you ARE Kruger,” burst from my lips, in a natural explosion of reasonableness. “You ARE Kruger, aren’t you?”

After this innocent CRI DE COEUR of mine, I thought at first there would be a fight, and I remembered with regret that the President in early life had had a hobby of killing lions. But really I began to think that I had been mistaken, and that it was not the President after all. There was a confounding sincerity in the anger with which he declared that he was Farmer Bowles, and everybody knew it. I appeased him eventually and parted from him at the door of his farmhouse, where he left me with a few tags of religion, which again raised my suspicions of his identity. In the coffee-room to which I returned there was an illustrated paper with a picture of President Kruger, and he and Farmer Bowles were as like as two peas. There was a picture also of a group of Outlander leaders, and the faces of them, leering and triumphant, were perhaps unduly darkened by the photograph, but they seemed to me like the faces of a distant and hostile people.

I saw the old man once again on the fierce night of the poll, when he drove down our Liberal lines in a little cart ablaze with the blue Tory ribbons, for he was a man who would carry his colours everywhere. It was evening, and the warm western light was on the grey hair and heavy massive features of that good old man. I knew as one knows a fact of sense that if Spanish and German
stockbrokers had flooded his farm or country he would have fought them for ever, not fiercely like an Irishman, but with the ponderous courage and ponderous cunning of the Boer. I knew that without seeing it, as certainly as I knew without seeing it that when he went into the polling room he put his cross against the Conservative name. Then he came out again, having given his vote and looking more like Kruger than ever. And at the same hour on the same night thousands upon thousands of English Krugers gave the same vote. And thus Kruger was pulled down and the dark-faced men in the photograph reigned in his stead.
XX

THE GIANT

I sometimes fancy that every great city must have been built by night. At least, it is only at night that every part of a great city is great. All architecture is great architecture after sunset; perhaps architecture is really a nocturnal art, like the art of fireworks. At least, I think many people of those nobler trades that work by night (journalists, policemen, burglars, coffee-stall keepers, and such mistaken enthusiasts as refuse to go home till morning) must often have stood admiring some black bulk of building with a crown of battlements or a crest of spires and then burst into tears at daybreak to discover that it was only a haberdasher’s shop with huge gold letters across the face of it.

I had a sensation of this sort the other day as I happened to be wandering in the Temple Gardens towards the end of twilight. I sat down on a bench with my back to the river, happening to choose such a place that a huge angle and façade of building jutting out from the Strand sat above me like an incubus. I dare say that if I took the same seat to-morrow by daylight I should find the impression entirely false. In sunlight the thing might seem almost distant; but in that half-darkness it seemed as if the walls were almost falling upon me. Never before have I had so strongly the sense which makes people pessimists in politics, the sense of the hopeless height of the high places of the earth. That pile of wealth and power, whatever was its name, went up above and beyond me like a cliff that no living thing could climb. I had an irrational sense that this thing had to be fought, that I had to fight it; and that I could offer nothing to the occasion but an indolent journalist with a walking-stick.

Almost as I had the thought, two windows were lit in that black, blind face. It was as if two eyes had opened in the huge face of a sleeping giant; the eyes were too close together, and gave it the suggestion of a bestial sneer. And either by accident of this light or of some other, I could now read the big letters which spaced themselves across the front; it was the Babylon Hotel. It was the perfect symbol of everything that I should like to pull down with my hands if I could. Reared by a detected robber, it is framed to be the fashionable and luxurious home of undetected robbers. In the house of man are many mansions; but there is a class of men who feel normal nowhere except in the Babylon Hotel or in Dartmoor Gaol. That big black face, which was staring at me with its flaming
eyes too close together, that was indeed the giant of all epic and fairy tales. But, alas! I was not the giant-killer; the hour had come, but not the man. I sat down on the seat again (I had had one wild impulse to climb up the front of the hotel and fall in at one of the windows), and I tried to think, as all decent people are thinking, what one can really do. And all the time that oppressive wall went up in front of me, and took hold upon the heavens like a house of the gods.

It is remarkable that in so many great wars it has been the defeated who have won. The people who were left worst at the end of the war were generally the people who were left best at the end of the whole business. For instance, the Crusades ended in the defeat of the Christians. But they did not end in the decline of the Christians; they ended in the decline of the Saracens. That huge prophetic wave of Moslem power which had hung in the very heavens above the towns of Christendom, that wave was broken, and never came on again. The Crusaders had saved Paris in the act of losing Jerusalem. The same applies to that epic of Republican war in the eighteenth century to which we Liberals owe our political creed. The French Revolution ended in defeat: the kings came back across a carpet of dead at Waterloo. The Revolution had lost its last battle; but it had gained its first object. It had cut a chasm. The world has never been the same since. No one after that has ever been able to treat the poor merely as a pavement.

These jewels of God, the poor, are still treated as mere stones of the street; but as stones that may sometimes fly. If it please God, you and I may see some of the stones flying again before we see death. But here I only remark the interesting fact that the conquered almost always conquer. Sparta killed Athens with a final blow, and she was born again. Sparta went away victorious, and died slowly of her own wounds. The Boers lost the South African War and gained South Africa.

And this is really all that we can do when we fight something really stronger than ourselves; we can deal it its death-wound one moment; it deals us death in the end. It is something if we can shock and jar the unthinking impetus and enormous innocence of evil; just as a pebble on a railway can stagger the Scotch express. It is enough for the great martyrs and criminals of the French revolution, that they have surprised for all time the secret weakness of the strong. They have awakened and set leaping and quivering in his crypt for ever the coward in the hearts of kings.

When Jack the Giant-Killer really first saw the giant his experience was not such as has been generally supposed. If you care to hear it I will tell you the real
story of Jack the Giant-Killer. To begin with, the most awful thing which Jack first felt about the giant was that he was not a giant. He came striding across an interminable wooded plain, and against its remote horizon the giant was quite a small figure, like a figure in a picture—he seemed merely a man walking across the grass. Then Jack was shocked by remembering that the grass which the man was treading down was one of the tallest forests upon that plain. The man came nearer and nearer, growing bigger and bigger, and at the instant when he passed the possible stature of humanity Jack almost screamed. The rest was an intolerable apocalypse.

The giant had the one frightful quality of a miracle; the more he became incredible the more he became solid. The less one could believe in him the more plainly one could see him. It was unbearable that so much of the sky should be occupied by one human face. His eyes, which had stood out like bow windows, became bigger yet, and there was no metaphor that could contain their bigness; yet still they were human eyes. Jack’s intellect was utterly gone under that huge hypnotism of the face that filled the sky; his last hope was submerged, his five wits all still with terror.

But there stood up in him still a kind of cold chivalry, a dignity of dead honour that would not forget the small and futile sword in his hand. He rushed at one of the colossal feet of this human tower, and when he came quite close to it the ankle-bone arched over him like a cave. Then he planted the point of his sword against the foot and leant on it with all his weight, till it went up to the hilt and broke the hilt, and then snapped just under it. And it was plain that the giant felt a sort of prick, for he snatched up his great foot into his great hand for an instant; and then, putting it down again, he bent over and stared at the ground until he had seen his enemy.

Then he picked up Jack between a big finger and thumb and threw him away; and as Jack went through the air he felt as if he were flying from system to system through the universe of stars. But, as the giant had thrown him away carelessly, he did not strike a stone, but struck soft mire by the side of a distant river. There he lay insensible for several hours; but when he awoke again his horrible conqueror was still in sight. He was striding away across the void and wooded plain towards where it ended in the sea; and by this time he was only much higher than any of the hills. He grew less and less indeed; but only as a really high mountain grows at last less and less when we leave it in a railway train. Half an hour afterwards he was a bright blue colour, as are the distant hills; but his outline was still human and still gigantic. Then the big blue figure
seemed to come to the brink of the big blue sea, and even as it did so it altered its attitude. Jack, stunned and bleeding, lifted himself laboriously upon one elbow to stare. The giant once more caught hold of his ankle, wavered twice as in a wind, and then went over into the great sea which washes the whole world, and which, alone of all things God has made, was big enough to drown him.
XXI

A GREAT MAN

People accuse journalism of being too personal; but to me it has always seemed far too impersonal. It is charged with tearing away the veils from private life; but it seems to me to be always dropping diaphanous but blinding veils between men and men. The Yellow Press is abused for exposing facts which are private; I wish the Yellow Press did anything so valuable. It is exactly the decisive individual touches that it never gives; and a proof of this is that after one has met a man a million times in the newspapers it is always a complete shock and reversal to meet him in real life. The Yellow Pressman seems to have no power of catching the first fresh fact about a man that dominates all after impressions. For instance, before I met Bernard Shaw I heard that he spoke with a reckless desire for paradox or a sneering hatred of sentiment; but I never knew till he opened his mouth that he spoke with an Irish accent, which is more important than all the other criticisms put together.

Journalism is not personal enough. So far from digging out private personalities, it cannot even report the obvious personalities on the surface. Now there is one vivid and even bodily impression of this kind which we have all felt when we met great poets or politicians, but which never finds its way into the newspapers. I mean the impression that they are much older than we thought they were. We connect great men with their great triumphs, which generally happened some years ago, and many recruits enthusiastic for the thin Napoleon of Marengo must have found themselves in the presence of the fat Napoleon of Leipzic.

I remember reading a newspaper account of how a certain rising politician confronted the House of Lords with the enthusiasm almost of boyhood. It described how his “brave young voice” rang in the rafters. I also remember that I met him some days after, and he was considerably older than my own father. I mention this truth for only one purpose: all this generalisation leads up to only one fact—the fact that I once met a great man who was younger than I expected.

I had come over the wooded wall from the villages about Epsom, and down a stumbling path between trees towards the valley in which Dorking lies. A warm sunlight was working its way through the leafage; a sunlight which though of saintless gold had taken on the quality of evening. It was such sunlight as
reminds a man that the sun begins to set an instant after noon. It seemed to lessen as the wood strengthened and the road sank.

I had a sensation peculiar to such entangled descents; I felt that the treetops that closed above me were the fixed and real things, certain as the level of the sea; but that the solid earth was every instant failing under my feet. In a little while that splendid sunlight showed only in splashes, like flaming stars and suns in the dome of green sky. Around me in that emerald twilight were trunks of trees of every plain or twisted type; it was like a chapel supported on columns of every earthly and unearthly style of architecture.

Without intention my mind grew full of fancies on the nature of the forest; on the whole philosophy of mystery and force. For the meaning of woods is the combination of energy with complexity. A forest is not in the least rude or barbarous; it is only dense with delicacy. Unique shapes that an artist would copy or a philosopher watch for years if he found them in an open plain are here mingled and confounded; but it is not a darkness of deformity. It is a darkness of life; a darkness of perfection. And I began to think how much of the highest human obscurity is like this, and how much men have misunderstood it. People will tell you, for instance, that theology became elaborate because it was dead. Believe me, if it had been dead it would never have become elaborate; it is only the live tree that grows too many branches.

These trees thinned and fell away from each other, and I came out into deep grass and a road. I remember being surprised that the evening was so far advanced; I had a fancy that this valley had a sunset all to itself. I went along that road according to directions that had been given me, and passed the gateway in a slight paling beyond which the wood changed only faintly to a garden. It was as if the curious courtesy and fineness of that character I was to meet went out from him upon the valley; for I felt on all these things the finger of that quality which the old English called “faërie”; it is the quality which those can never understand who think of the past as merely brutal; it is an ancient elegance such as there is in trees. I went through the garden and saw an old man sitting by a table, looking smallish in his big chair. He was already an invalid, and his hair and beard were both white; not like snow, for snow is cold and heavy, but like something feathery, or even fierce; rather they were white like the white thistledown. I came up quite close to him; he looked at me as he put out his frail hand, and I saw of a sudden that his eyes were startlingly young. He was the one great man of the old world whom I have met who was not a mere statue over his own grave.
He was deaf and he talked like a torrent. He did not talk about the books he had written; he was far too much alive for that. He talked about the books he had not written. He unrolled a purple bundle of romances which he had never had time to sell. He asked me to write one of the stories for him, as he would have asked the milkman, if he had been talking to the milkman. It was a splendid and frantic story, a sort of astronomical farce. It was all about a man who was rushing up to the Royal Society with the only possible way of avoiding an earth-destroying comet; and it showed how, even on this huge errand, the man was tripped up at every other minute by his own weakness and vanities; how he lost a train by trifling or was put in gaol for brawling. That is only one of them; there were ten or twenty more. Another, I dimly remember, was a version of the fall of Parnell; the idea that a quite honest man might be secret from a pure love of secrecy, of solitary self-control. I went out of that garden with a blurred sensation of the million possibilities of creative literature. The feeling increased as my way fell back into the wood; for a wood is a palace with a million corridors that cross each other everywhere. I really had the feeling that I had seen the creative quality; which is supernatural. I had seen what Virgil calls the Old Man of the Forest: I had seen an elf. The trees thronged behind my path; I have never seen him again; and now I shall not see him, because he died last Tuesday.
XXII

THE ORTHODOX BARBER

Those thinkers who cannot believe in any gods often assert that the love of humanity would be in itself sufficient for them; and so, perhaps, it would, if they had it. There is a very real thing which may be called the love of humanity; in our time it exists almost entirely among what are called uneducated people; and it does not exist at all among the people who talk about it.

A positive pleasure in being in the presence of any other human being is chiefly remarkable, for instance, in the masses on Bank Holiday; that is why they are so much nearer Heaven (despite appearances) than any other part of our population.

I remember seeing a crowd of factory girls getting into an empty train at a wayside country station. There were about twenty of them; they all got into one carriage; and they left all the rest of the train entirely empty. That is the real love of humanity. That is the definite pleasure in the immediate proximity of one’s own kind. Only this coarse, rank, real love of men seems to be entirely lacking in those who propose the love of humanity as a substitute for all other love; honourable, rationalistic idealists.

I can well remember the explosion of human joy which marked the sudden starting of that train; all the factory girls who could not find seats (and they must have been the majority) relieving their feelings by jumping up and down. Now I have never seen any rationalistic idealists do this. I have never seen twenty modern philosophers crowd into one third-class carriage for the mere pleasure of being together. I have never seen twenty Mr. McCabes all in one carriage and all jumping up and down.

Some people express a fear that vulgar trippers will overrun all beautiful places, such as Hampstead or Burnham Beeches. But their fear is unreasonable; because trippers always prefer to trip together; they pack as close as they can; they have a suffocating passion of philanthropy.

But among the minor and milder aspects of the same principle, I have no hesitation in placing the problem of the colloquial barber. Before any modern man talks with authority about loving men, I insist (I insist with violence) that he shall always be very much pleased when his barber tries to talk to him. His barber is humanity: let him love that. If he is not pleased at this, I will not accept
any substitute in the way of interest in the Congo or the future of Japan. If a man
cannot love his barber whom he has seen, how shall he love the Japanese whom
he has not seen?

It is urged against the barber that he begins by talking about the weather; so do
all dukes and diplomatists, only that they talk about it with ostentatious fatigue
and indifference, whereas the barber talks about it with an astonishing, nay
incredible, freshness of interest. It is objected to him that he tells people that they
are going bald. That is to say, his very virtues are cast up against him; he is
blamed because, being a specialist, he is a sincere specialist, and because, being
a tradesman, he is not entirely a slave. But the only proof of such things is by
example; therefore I will prove the excellence of the conversation of barbers by
a specific case. Lest any one should accuse me of attempting to prove it by
fictitious means, I beg to say quite seriously that though I forget the exact
language employed, the following conversation between me and a human (I
trust), living barber really took place a few days ago.

I had been invited to some At Home to meet the Colonial Premiers, and lest I
should be mistaken for some partly reformed bush-ranger out of the interior of
Australia I went into a shop in the Strand to get shaved. While I was undergoing
the torture the man said to me:

“There seems to be a lot in the papers about this new shaving, sir. It seems you
can shave yourself with anything— with a stick or a stone or a pole or a poker”
(here I began for the first time to detect a sarcastic intonation) “or a shovel or
a—”

Here he hesitated for a word, and I, although I knew nothing about the matter,
helped him out with suggestions in the same rhetorical vein.

“Or a button-hook,” I said, “or a blunderbuss or a battering-ram or a piston-
rod—”

He resumed, refreshed with this assistance, “Or a curtain rod or a candle-stick,
or a—”

“Cow-catcher,” I suggested eagerly, and we continued in this ecstatic duet for
some time. Then I asked him what it was all about, and he told me. He explained
the thing eloquently and at length.

“The funny part of it is,” he said, “that the thing isn’t new at all. It’s been
talked about ever since I was a boy, and long before. There is always a notion
that the razor might be done without somehow. But none of those schemes ever
came to anything; and I don’t believe myself that this will.”

“Why, as to that,” I said, rising slowly from the chair and trying to put on my
coat inside out, “I don’t know how it may be in the case of you and your new shaving. Shaving, with all respect to you, is a trivial and materialistic thing, and in such things startling inventions are sometimes made. But what you say reminds me in some dark and dreamy fashion of something else. I recall it especially when you tell me, with such evident experience and sincerity, that the new shaving is not really new. My friend, the human race is always trying this dodge of making everything entirely easy; but the difficulty which it shifts off one thing it shifts on to another. If one man has not the toil of preparing a man’s chin, I suppose that some other man has the toil of preparing something very curious to put on a man’s chin. It would be nice if we could be shaved without troubling anybody. It would be nicer still if we could go unshaved without annoying anybody—‘But, O wise friend, chief Barber of the Strand, Brother, nor you nor I have made the world.’

“Whoever made it, who is wiser, and we hope better than we, made it under strange limitations, and with painful conditions of pleasure.

“In the first and darkest of its books it is fiercely written that a man shall not eat his cake and have it; and though all men talked until the stars were old it would still be true that a man who has lost his razor could not shave with it. But every now and then men jump up with the new something or other and say that everything can be had without sacrifice, that bad is good if you are only enlightened, and that there is no real difference between being shaved and not being shaved. The difference, they say, is only a difference of degree; everything is evolutionary and relative. Shavedness is immanent in man. Every ten-penny nail is a Potential Razor. The superstitious people of the past (they say) believed that a lot of black bristles standing out at right angles to one’s face was a positive affair. But the higher criticism teaches us better. Bristles are merely negative. They are a Shadow where Shaving should be.

“Well, it all goes on, and I suppose it all means something. But a baby is the Kingdom of God, and if you try to kiss a baby he will know whether you are shaved or not. Perhaps I am mixing up being shaved and being saved; my democratic sympathies have always led me to drop my ‘h’s.’ In another moment I may suggest that goats represent the lost because goats have long beards. This is growing altogether too allegorical.

“Nevertheless,” I added, as I paid the bill, “I have really been profoundly interested in what you told me about the New Shaving. Have you ever heard of a thing called the New theology?”

He smiled and said that he had not.
XXIII

THE TOY THEATRE

There is only one reason why all grown-up people do not play with toys; and it is a fair reason. The reason is that playing with toys takes so very much more time and trouble than anything else. Playing as children mean playing is the most serious thing in the world; and as soon as we have small duties or small sorrows we have to abandon to some extent so enormous and ambitious a plan of life. We have enough strength for politics and commerce and art and philosophy; we have not enough strength for play. This is a truth which every one will recognize who, as a child, has ever played with anything at all; any one who has played with bricks, any one who has played with dolls, any one who has played with tin soldiers. My journalistic work, which earns money, is not pursued with such awful persistency as that work which earned nothing.

Take the case of bricks. If you publish a book to-morrow in twelve volumes (it would be just like you) on “The Theory and Practice of European Architecture,” your work may be laborious, but it is fundamentally frivolous. It is not serious as the work of a child piling one brick on the other is serious; for the simple reason that if your book is a bad book no one will ever be able ultimately and entirely to prove to you that it is a bad book. Whereas if his balance of bricks is a bad balance of bricks, it will simply tumble down. And if I know anything of children, he will set to work solemnly and sadly to build it up again. Whereas, if I know anything of authors, nothing would induce you to write your book again, or even to think of it again if you could help it.

Take the case of dolls. It is much easier to care for an educational cause than to care for a doll. It is as easy to write an article on education as to write an article on toffee or tramcars or anything else. But it is almost as difficult to look after a doll as to look after a child. The little girls that I meet in the little streets of Battersea worship their dolls in a way that reminds one not so much of play as idolatry. In some cases the love and care of the artistic symbol has actually become more important than the human reality which it was, I suppose, originally meant to symbolize.

I remember a Battersea little girl who wheeled her large baby sister stuffed into a doll’s perambulator. When questioned on this course of conduct, she replied: “I haven’t got a dolly, and Baby is pretending to be my dolly.”
was indeed imitating art. First a doll had been a substitute for a child; afterwards a child was a mere substitute for a doll. But that opens other matters; the point is here that such devotion takes up most of the brain and most of the life; much as if it were really the thing which it is supposed to symbolize. The point is that the man writing on motherhood is merely an educationalist; the child playing with a doll is a mother.

Take the case of soldiers. A man writing an article on military strategy is simply a man writing an article; a horrid sight. But a boy making a campaign with tin soldiers is like a General making a campaign with live soldiers. He must to the limit of his juvenile powers think about the thing; whereas the war correspondent need not think at all. I remember a war correspondent who remarked after the capture of Methuen: “This renewed activity on the part of Delarey is probably due to his being short of stores.” The same military critic had mentioned a few paragraphs before that Delarey was being hard pressed by a column which was pursuing him under the command of Methuen. Methuen chased Delarey; and Delarey’s activity was due to his being short of stores. Otherwise he would have stood quite still while he was chased. I run after Jones with a hatchet, and if he turns round and tries to get rid of me the only possible explanation is that he has a very small balance at his bankers. I cannot believe that any boy playing at soldiers would be as idiotic as this. But then any one playing at anything has to be serious. Whereas, as I have only too good reason to know, if you are writing an article you can say anything that comes into your head.

Broadly, then, what keeps adults from joining in children’s games is, generally speaking, not that they have no pleasure in them; it is simply that they have no leisure for them. It is that they cannot afford the expenditure of toil and time and consideration for so grand and grave a scheme. I have been myself attempting for some time past to complete a play in a small toy theatre, the sort of toy theatre that used to be called Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured; only that I drew and coloured the figures and scenes myself. Hence I was free from the degrading obligation of having to pay either a penny or twopence; I only had to pay a shilling a sheet for good cardboard and a shilling a box for bad water colours. The kind of miniature stage I mean is probably familiar to every one; it is never more than a development of the stage which Skelt made and Stevenson celebrated.

But though I have worked much harder at the toy theatre than I ever worked at any tale or article, I cannot finish it; the work seems too heavy for me. I have to
break off and betake myself to lighter employments; such as the biographies of
great men. The play of “St. George and the Dragon,” over which I have burnt the
midnight oil (you must colour the thing by lamplight because that is how it will
be seen), still lacks most conspicuously, alas! two wings of the Sultan’s Palace,
and also some comprehensible and workable way of getting up the curtain.

All this gives me a feeling touching the real meaning of immortality. In this
world we cannot have pure pleasure. This is partly because pure pleasure would
be dangerous to us and to our neighbours. But it is partly because pure pleasure
is a great deal too much trouble. If I am ever in any other and better world, I
hope that I shall have enough time to play with nothing but toy theatres; and I
hope that I shall have enough divine and superhuman energy to act at least one
play in them without a hitch.

Meanwhile the philosophy of toy theatres is worth any one’s consideration.
All the essential morals which modern men need to learn could be deduced from
this toy. Artistically considered, it reminds us of the main principle of art, the
principle which is in most danger of being forgotten in our time. I mean the fact
that art consists of limitation; the fact that art is limitation. Art does not consist
in expanding things. Art consists of cutting things down, as I cut down with a
pair of scissors my very ugly figures of St. George and the Dragon. Plato, who
liked definite ideas, would like my cardboard dragon; for though the creature has
few other artistic merits he is at least dragonish. The modern philosopher, who
likes infinity, is quite welcome to a sheet of the plain cardboard. The most
artistic thing about the theatrical art is the fact that the spectator looks at the
whole thing through a window. This is true even of theatres inferior to my own;
even at the Court Theatre or His Majesty’s you are looking through a window;
an unusually large window. But the advantage of the small theatre exactly is that
you are looking through a small window. Has not every one noticed how sweet
and startling any landscape looks when seen through an arch? This strong,
square shape, this shutting off of everything else is not only an assistance to
beauty; it is the essential of beauty. The most beautiful part of every picture is
the frame.

This especially is true of the toy theatre; that, by reducing the scale of events it
can introduce much larger events. Because it is small it could easily represent the
earthquake in Jamaica. Because it is small it could easily represent the Day of
Judgment. Exactly in so far as it is limited, so far it could play easily with falling
cities or with falling stars. Meanwhile the big theatres are obliged to be
economical because they are big. When we have understood this fact we shall
have understood something of the reason why the world has always been first inspired by small nationalities. The vast Greek philosophy could fit easier into the small city of Athens than into the immense Empire of Persia. In the narrow streets of Florence Dante felt that there was room for Purgatory and Heaven and Hell. He would have been stifled by the British Empire. Great empires are necessarily prosaic; for it is beyond human power to act a great poem upon so great a scale. You can only represent very big ideas in very small spaces. My toy theatre is as philosophical as the drama of Athens.
XXIV

A TRAGEDY OF TWOPENCE

My relations with the readers of this page have been long and pleasant, but—perhaps for that very reason—I feel that the time has come when I ought to confess the one great crime of my life. It happened a long time ago; but it is not uncommon for a belated burst of remorse to reveal such dark episodes long after they have occurred. It has nothing to do with the orgies of the Anti-Puritan League. That body is so offensively respectable that a newspaper, in describing it the other day, referred to my friend Mr. Edgar Jepson as Canon Edgar Jepson; and it is believed that similar titles are intended for all of us. No; it is not by the conduct of Archbishop Crane, of Dean Chesterton, of the Rev. James Douglas, of Monsignor Bland, and even of that fine and virile old ecclesiastic, Cardinal Nesbit, that I wish (or rather, am driven by my conscience) to make this declaration. The crime was committed in solitude and without accomplices. Alone I did it. Let me, with the characteristic thirst of penitents to get the worst of the confession over, state it first of all in its most dreadful and indefensible form. There is at the present moment in a town in Germany (unless he has died of rage on discovering his wrong), a restaurant-keeper to whom I still owe twopence. I last left his open-air restaurant knowing that I owed him twopence. I carried it away under his nose, despite the fact that the nose was a decidedly Jewish one. I have never paid him, and it is highly improbable that I ever shall. How did this villainy come to occur in a life which has been, generally speaking, deficient in the dexterity necessary for fraud? The story is as follows—and it has a moral, though there may not be room for that.

It is a fair general rule for those travelling on the Continent that the easiest way of talking in a foreign language is to talk philosophy. The most difficult kind of talking is to talk about common necessities. The reason is obvious. The names of common necessities vary completely with each nation and are generally somewhat odd and quaint. How, for instance, could a Frenchman suppose that a coalbox would be called a “scuttle”? If he has ever seen the word scuttle it has been in the Jingo Press, where the “policy of scuttle” is used whenever we give up something to a small Power like Liberals, instead of giving up everything to a great Power, like Imperialists. What Englishman in Germany would be poet enough to guess that the Germans call a glove a “hand-shoe.”
Nations name their necessities by nicknames, so to speak. They call their tubs and stools by quaint, elvish, and almost affectionate names, as if they were their own children! But any one can argue about abstract things in a foreign language who has ever got as far as Exercise IV. in a primer. For as soon as he can put a sentence together at all he finds that the words used in abstract or philosophical discussions are almost the same in all nations. They are the same, for the simple reason that they all come from the things that were the roots of our common civilisation. From Christianity, from the Roman Empire, from the mediaeval Church, or the French Revolution. “Nation,” “citizen,” “religion,” “philosophy,” “authority,” “the Republic,” words like these are nearly the same in all the countries in which we travel. Restrain, therefore, your exuberant admiration for the young man who can argue with six French atheists when he first lands at Dieppe. Even I can do that. But very likely the same young man does not know the French for a shoe-horn. But to this generalisation there are three great exceptions. (1) In the case of countries that are not European at all, and have never had our civic conceptions, or the old Latin scholarship. I do not pretend that the Patagonian phrase for “citizenship” at once leaps to the mind, or that a Dyak’s word for “the Republic” has been familiar to me from the nursery. (2) In the case of Germany, where, although the principle does apply to many words such as “nation” and “philosophy,” it does not apply so generally, because Germany has had a special and deliberate policy of encouraging the purely German part of its language. (3) In the case where one does not know any of the language at all, as is generally the case with me.

Such at least was my situation on the dark day on which I committed my crime. Two of the exceptional conditions which I have mentioned were combined. I was walking about a German town, and I knew no German. I knew, however, two or three of those great and solemn words which hold our European civilisation together—one of which is “cigar.” As it was a hot and dreamy day, I sat down at a table in a sort of beer-garden, and ordered a cigar and a pot of lager. I drank the lager, and paid for it. I smoked the cigar, forgot to pay for it, and walked away, gazing rapturously at the royal outline of the Taunus mountains. After about ten minutes, I suddenly remembered that I had not paid for the cigar. I went back to the place of refreshment, and put down the money. But the proprietor also had forgotten the cigar, and he merely said guttural things in a tone of query, asking me, I suppose, what I wanted. I said “cigar,” and he gave me a cigar. I endeavoured while putting down the money to wave away the cigar with gestures of refusal. He thought that my rejection was of the nature of a
condemnation of that particular cigar, and brought me another. I whirled my arms like a windmill, seeking to convey by the sweeping universality of my gesture that my rejection was a rejection of cigars in general, not of that particular article. He mistook this for the ordinary impatience of common men, and rushed forward, his hands filled with miscellaneous cigars, pressing them upon me. In desperation I tried other kinds of pantomime, but the more cigars I refused the more and more rare and precious cigars were brought out of the deeps and recesses of the establishment. I tried in vain to think of a way of conveying to him the fact that I had already had the cigar. I imitated the action of a citizen smoking, knocking off and throwing away a cigar. The watchful proprietor only thought I was rehearsing (as in an ecstasy of anticipation) the joys of the cigar he was going to give me. At last I retired baffled: he would not take the money and leave the cigars alone. So that this restaurant-keeper (in whose face a love of money shone like the sun at noonday) flatly and firmly refused to receive the twopence that I certainly owed him; and I took that twopence of his away with me and rioted on it for months. I hope that on the last day the angels will break the truth very gently to that unhappy man.

This is the true and exact account of the Great Cigar Fraud, and the moral of it is this—that civilisation is founded upon abstractions. The idea of debt is one which cannot be conveyed by physical motions at all, because it is an abstract idea. And civilisation obviously would be nothing without debt. So when hard-headed fellows who study scientific sociology (which does not exist) come and tell you that civilisation is material or indifferent to the abstract, just ask yourselves how many of the things that make up our Society, the Law, or the Stocks and Shares, or the National Debt, you would be able to convey with your face and your ten fingers by grinning and gesticulating to a German innkeeper.
XXV

A CAB RIDE ACROSS COUNTRY

Sown somewhere far off in the shallow dales of Hertfordshire there lies a village of great beauty, and I doubt not of admirable virtue, but of eccentric and unbalanced literary taste, which asked the present writer to come down to it on Sunday afternoon and give an address.

Now it was very difficult to get down to it at all on Sunday afternoon, owing to the indescribable state into which our national laws and customs have fallen in connection with the seventh day. It is not Puritanism; it is simply anarchy. I should have some sympathy with the Jewish Sabbath, if it were a Jewish Sabbath, and that for three reasons; first, that religion is an intrinsically sympathetic thing; second, that I cannot conceive any religion worth calling a religion without a fixed and material observance; and third, that the particular observance of sitting still and doing no work is one that suits my temperament down to the ground.

But the absurdity of the modern English convention is that it does not let a man sit still; it only perpetually trips him up when it has forced him to walk about. Our Sabbatarianism does not forbid us to ask a man in Battersea to come and talk in Hertfordshire; it only prevents his getting there. I can understand that a deity might be worshipped with joys, with flowers, and fireworks in the old European style. I can understand that a deity might be worshipped with sorrows. But I cannot imagine any deity being worshipped with inconveniences. Let the good Moslem go to Mecca, or let him abide in his tent, according to his feelings for religious symbols. But surely Allah cannot see anything particularly dignified in his servant being misled by the time-table, finding that the old Mecca express is not running, missing his connection at Bagdad, or having to wait three hours in a small side station outside Damascus.

So it was with me on this occasion. I found there was no telegraph service at all to this place; I found there was only one weak thread of train-service. Now if this had been the authority of real English religion, I should have submitted to it at once. If I believed that the telegraph clerk could not send the telegram because he was at that moment rigid in an ecstasy of prayer, I should think all telegrams unimportant in comparison. If I could believe that railway porters when relieved from their duties rushed with passion to the nearest place of worship, I should
say that all lectures and everything else ought to give way to such a consideration. I should not complain if the national faith forbade me to make any appointments of labour or self-expression on the Sabbath. But, as it is, it only tells me that I may very probably keep the Sabbath by not keeping the appointment.

But I must resume the real details of my tale. I found that there was only one train in the whole of that Sunday by which I could even get within several hours or several miles of the time or place. I therefore went to the telephone, which is one of my favourite toys, and down which I have shouted many valuable, but prematurely arrested, monologues upon art and morals. I remember a mild shock of surprise when I discovered that one could use the telephone on Sunday; I did not expect it to be cut off, but I expected it to buzz more than on ordinary days, to the advancement of our national religion. Through this instrument, in fewer words than usual, and with a comparative economy of epigram, I ordered a taxi-cab to take me to the railway station. I have not a word to say in general either against telephones or taxi-cabs; they seem to me two of the purest and most poetic of the creations of modern scientific civilisation. Unfortunately, when the taxi-cab started, it did exactly what modern scientific civilisation has done—it broke down. The result of this was that when I arrived at King’s Cross my only train was gone; there was a Sabbath calm in the station, a calm in the eyes of the porters, and in my breast, if calm at all, if any calm, a calm despair.

There was not, however, very much calm of any sort in my breast on first making the discovery; and it was turned to blinding horror when I learnt that I could not even send a telegram to the organisers of the meeting. To leave my entertainers in the lurch was sufficiently exasperating; to leave them without any intimation was simply low. I reasoned with the official. I said: “Do you really mean to say that if my brother were dying and my mother in this place, I could not communicate with her?” He was a man of literal and laborious mind; he asked me if my brother was dying. I answered that he was in excellent and even offensive health, but that I was inquiring upon a question of principle. What would happen if England were invaded, or if I alone knew how to turn aside a comet or an earthquake. He waved away these hypotheses in the most irresponsible spirit, but he was quite certain that telegrams could not reach this particular village. Then something exploded in me; that element of the outrageous which is the mother of all adventures sprang up ungovernable, and I decided that I would not be a cad merely because some of my remote ancestors had been Calvinists. I would keep my appointment if I lost all my money and all
my wits. I went out into the quiet London street, where my quiet London cab was still waiting for its fare in the cold misty morning. I placed myself comfortably in the London cab and told the London driver to drive me to the other end of Hertfordshire. And he did.

I shall not forget that drive. It was doubtful weather, even in a motor-cab, the thing was possible with any consideration for the driver, not to speak of some slight consideration for the people in the road. I urged the driver to eat and drink something before he started, but he said (with I know not what pride of profession or delicate sense of adventure) that he would rather do it when we arrived—if we ever did. I was by no means so delicate; I bought a varied selection of pork-pies at a little shop that was open (why was that shop open?—it is all a mystery), and ate them as we went along. The beginning was sombre and irritating. I was annoyed, not with people, but with things, like a baby; with the motor for breaking down and with Sunday for being Sunday. And the sight of the northern slums expanded and ennobled, but did not decrease, my gloom: Whitechapel has an Oriental gaudiness in its squalor; Battersea and Camberwell have an indescribable bustle of democracy; but the poor parts of North London.

It was one of those days which more than once this year broke the retreat of winter; a winter day that began too late to be spring. We were already clear of the obstructing crowds and quickening our pace through a borderland of market gardens and isolated public-houses, when the grey showed golden patches and a good light began to glitter on everything. The cab went quicker and quicker. The open land whirled wider and wider; but I did not lose my sense of being battled with and thwarted that I had felt in the thronged slums. Rather the feeling increased, because of the great difficulty of space and time. The faster went the car, the fiercer and thicker I felt the fight.

The whole landscape seemed charging at me—and just missing me. The tall, shining grass went by like showers of arrows; the very trees seemed like lances hurled at my heart, and shaving it by a hair’s breadth. Across some vast, smooth valley I saw a beech-tree by the white road stand up little and defiant. It grew bigger and bigger with blinding rapidity. It charged me like a tilting knight, seemed to hack at my head, and pass by. Sometimes when we went round a curve of road, the effect was yet more awful. It seemed as if some tree or windmill swung round to smite like a boomerang. The sun by this time was a blazing fact; and I saw that all Nature is chivalrous and militant. We do wrong to
seek peace in Nature; we should rather seek the nobler sort of war; and see all the trees as green banners.

I gave my address, arriving just when everybody was deciding to leave. When my cab came reeling into the market-place they decided, with evident disappointment, to remain. Over the lecture I draw a veil. When I came back home I was called to the telephone, and a meek voice expressed regret for the failure of the motor-cab, and even said something about any reasonable payment. “Whom can I pay for my own superb experience? What is the usual charge for seeing the clouds shattered by the sun? What is the market price of a tree blue on the sky-line and then blinding white in the sun? Mention your price for that windmill that stood behind the hollyhocks in the garden. Let me pay you for . . .” Here it was, I think, that we were cut off.
XXVI

THE TWO NOISES

For three days and three nights the sea had charged England as Napoleon charged her at Waterloo. The phrase is instinctive, because away to the last grey line of the sea there was only the look of galloping squadrons, impetuous, but with a common purpose. The sea came on like cavalry, and when it touched the shore it opened the blazing eyes and deafening tongues of the artillery. I saw the worst assault at night on a seaside parade where the sea smote on the doors of England with the hammers of earthquake, and a white smoke went up into the black heavens. There one could thoroughly realise what an awful thing a wave really is. I talk like other people about the rushing swiftness of a wave. But the horrible thing about a wave is its hideous slowness. It lifts its load of water laboriously: in that style at once slow and slippery in which a Titan might lift a load of rock and then let it slip at last to be shattered into shock of dust. In front of me that night the waves were not like water: they were like falling city walls. The breaker rose first as if it did not wish to attack the earth; it wished only to attack the stars. For a time it stood up in the air as naturally as a tower; then it went a little wrong in its outline, like a tower that might some day fall. When it fell it was as if a powder magazine blew up.

I have never seen such a sea. All the time there blew across the land one of those stiff and throttling winds that one can lean up against like a wall. One expected anything to be blown out of shape at any instant; the lamp-post to be snapped like a green stalk, the tree to be whirled away like a straw. I myself should certainly have been blown out of shape if I had possessed any shape to be blown out of; for I walked along the edge of the stone embankment above the black and battering sea and could not rid myself of the idea that it was an invasion of England. But as I walked along this edge I was somewhat surprised to find that as I neared a certain spot another noise mingled with the ceaseless cannonade of the sea.

Somewhere at the back, in some pleasure ground or casino or place of entertainment, an undaunted brass band was playing against the cosmic uproar. I do not know what band it was. Judging from the boisterous British Imperialism of most of the airs it played, I should think it was a German band. But there was no doubt about its energy, and when I came quite close under it it really drowned
the storm. It was playing such things as “Tommy Atkins” and “You Can Depend on Young Australia,” and many others of which I do not know the words, but I should think they would be “John, Pat, and Mac, With the Union Jack,” or that fine though unwritten poem, “Wait till the Bull Dog gets a bite of you.” Now, I for one detest Imperialism, but I have a great deal of sympathy with Jingoism. And there seemed something so touching about this unbroken and innocent bragging under the brutal menace of Nature that it made, if I may so put it, two tunes in my mind. It is so obvious and so jolly to be optimistic about England, especially when you are an optimist—and an Englishman. But through all that glorious brass came the voice of the invasion, the undertone of that awful sea. I did a foolish thing. As I could not express my meaning in an article, I tried to express it in a poem—a bad one. You can call it what you like. It might be called “Doubt,” or “Brighton.” It might be called “The Patriot,” or yet again “The German Band.” I would call it “The Two Voices,” but that title has been taken for a grossly inferior poem. This is how it began—“They say the sun is on your knees A lamp to light your lands from harm, They say you turn the seven seas To little brooks about your farm. I hear the sea and the new song that calls you empress all day long. “(O fallen and fouled! O you that lie Dying in swamps—you shall not die, Your rich have secrets, and stronge lust, Your poor are chased about like dust, Emptied of anger and surprise—And God has gone out of their eyes, Your cohorts break—your captains lie, I say to you, you shall not die.)”

Then I revived a little, remembering that after all there is an English country that the Imperialists have never found. The British Empire may annex what it likes, it will never annex England. It has not even discovered the island, let alone conquered it. I took up the two tunes again with a greater sympathy for the first—“I know the bright baptismal rains, I love your tender troubled skies, I know your little climbing lanes, Are peering into Paradise, From open hearth to orchard cool, How bountiful and beautiful. “(O throttled and without a cry, O strangled and stabbed, you shall not die, The frightful word is on your walls, The east sea to the west sea calls, The stars are dying in the sky, You shall not die; you shall not die.)”

Then the two great noises grew deafening together, the noise of the peril of England and the louder noise of the placidity of England. It is their fault if the last verse was written a little rudely and at random—“I see you how you smile in state Straight from the Peak to Plymouth Bar, You need not tell me you are great, I know how more than great you are. I know what William Shakespeare was, I have seen Gainsborough and the grass. “(O given to believe a lie, O my
mad mother, do do not die, Whose eyes turn all ways but within, Whose sin is innocence of sin, Whose eyes, blinded with beams at noon, Can see the motes upon the moon, You shall your lover still pursue. To what last madhouse shelters you I will uphold you, even I. You that are dead. You shall not die.)”

But the sea would not stop for me any more than for Canute; and as for the German band, that would not stop for anybody.
XXVII

SOME POLICEMEN AND A MORAL

The other day I was nearly arrested by two excited policemen in a wood in Yorkshire. I was on a holiday, and was engaged in that rich and intricate mass of pleasures, duties, and discoveries which for the keeping off of the profane, we disguise by the exoteric name of Nothing. At the moment in question I was throwing a big Swedish knife at a tree, practising (alas, without success) that useful trick of knife-throwing by which men murder each other in Stevenson’s romances.

Suddenly the forest was full of two policemen; there was something about their appearance in and relation to the greenwood that reminded me, I know not how, of some happy Elizabethan comedy. They asked what the knife was, who I was, why I was throwing it, what my address was, trade, religion, opinions on the Japanese war, name of favourite cat, and so on. They also said I was damaging the tree; which was, I am sorry to say, not true, because I could not hit it. The peculiar philosophical importance, however, of the incident was this. After some half-hour’s animated conversation, the exhibition of an envelope, an unfinished poem, which was read with great care, and, I trust, with some profit, and one or two other subtle detective strokes, the elder of the two knights became convinced that I really was what I professed to be, that I was a journalist, that I was on the DAILY NEWS (this was the real stroke; they were shaken with a terror common to all tyrants), that I lived in a particular place as stated, and that I was stopping with particular people in Yorkshire, who happened to be wealthy and well-known in the neighbourhood.

In fact the leading constable became so genial and complimentary at last that he ended up by representing himself as a reader of my work. And when that was said, everything was settled. They acquitted me and let me pass.

“But,” I said, “what of this mangled tree? It was to the rescue of that Dryad, tethered to the earth, that you rushed like knight-errants. You, the higher humanitarians, are not deceived by the seeming stillness of the green things, a stillness like the stillness of the cataract, a headlong and crashing silence. You know that a tree is but a creature tied to the ground by one leg. You will not let assassins with their Swedish daggers shed the green blood of such a being. But if so, why am I not in custody; where are my gyves? Produce, from some portion
of your persons, my mouldy straw and my grated window. The facts of which I have just convinced you, that my name is Chesterton, that I am a journalist, that I am living with the well-known and philanthropic Mr. Blank of Ilkley, cannot have anything to do with the question of whether I have been guilty of cruelty to vegetables. The tree is none the less damaged even though it may reflect with a dark pride that it was wounded by a gentleman connected with the Liberal press. Wounds in the bark do not more rapidly close up because they are inflicted by people who are stopping with Mr. Blank of Ilkley. That tree, the ruin of its former self, the wreck of what was once a giant of the forest, now splintered and laid low by the brute superiority of a Swedish knife, that tragedy, constable, cannot be wiped out even by stopping for several months more with some wealthy person. It is incredible that you have no legal claim to arrest even the most august and fashionable persons on this charge. For if so, why did you interfere with me at all?”

I made the later and larger part of this speech to the silent wood, for the two policemen had vanished almost as quickly as they came. It is very possible, of course, that they were fairies. In that case the somewhat illogical character of their view of crime, law, and personal responsibility would find a bright and elfish explanation; perhaps if I had lingered in the glade till moonrise I might have seen rings of tiny policemen dancing on the sward; or running about with glow-worm belts, arresting grasshoppers for damaging blades of grass. But taking the bolder hypothesis, that they really were policemen, I find myself in a certain difficulty. I was certainly accused of something which was either an offence or was not. I was let off because I proved I was a guest at a big house. The inference seems painfully clear; either it is not a proof of infamy to throw a knife about in a lonely wood, or else it is a proof of innocence to know a rich man. Suppose a very poor person, poorer even than a journalist, a navvy or unskilled labourer, tramping in search of work, often changing his lodgings, often, perhaps, failing in his rent. Suppose he had been intoxicated with the green gaiety of the ancient wood. Suppose he had thrown knives at trees and could give no description of a dwelling-place except that he had been fired out of the last. As I walked home through a cloudy and purple twilight I wondered how he would have got on.

Moral. We English are always boasting that we are very illogical; there is no great harm in that. There is no subtle spiritual evil in the fact that people always brag about their vices; it is when they begin to brag about their virtues that they become insufferable. But there is this to be said, that illogicality in your
constitution or your legal methods may become very dangerous if there happens to be some great national vice or national temptation which many take advantage of the chaos. Similarly, a drunkard ought to have strict rules and hours; a temperate man may obey his instincts.

Take some absurd anomaly in the British law—the fact, for instance, that a man ceasing to be an M. P. has to become Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds, an office which I believe was intended originally to keep down some wild robbers near Chiltern, wherever that is. Obviously this kind of illogicality does not matter very much, for the simple reason that there is no great temptation to take advantage of it. Men retiring from Parliament do not have any furious impulse to hunt robbers in the hills. But if there were a real danger that wise, white-haired, venerable politicians taking leave of public life would desire to do this (if, for instance, there were any money in it), then clearly, if we went on saying that the illogicality did not matter, when (as a matter of fact) Sir Michael Hicks-Beach was hanging Chiltern shop-keepers every day and taking their property, we should be very silly. The illogicality would matter, for it would have become an excuse for indulgence. It is only the very good who can live riotous lives.

Now this is exactly what is present in cases of police investigation such as the one narrated above. There enters into such things a great national sin, a far greater sin than drink—the habit of respecting a gentleman. Snobbishness has, like drink, a kind of grand poetry. And snobbishness has this peculiar and devilish quality of evil, that it is rampant among very kindly people, with open hearts and houses. But it is our great English vice; to be watched more fiercely than small-pox. If a man wished to hear the worst and wickedest thing in England summed up in casual English words, he would not find it in any foul oaths or ribald quarrelling. He would find it in the fact that the best kind of working man, when he wishes to praise any one, calls him “a gentleman.” It never occurs to him that he might as well call him “a marquis,” or “a privy councillor”—that he is simply naming a rank or class, not a phrase for a good man. And this perennial temptation to a shameful admiration, must, and, I think, does, constantly come in and distort and poison our police methods.

In this case we must be logical and exact; for we have to keep watch upon ourselves. The power of wealth, and that power at its vilest, is increasing in the modern world. A very good and just people, without this temptation, might not need, perhaps, to make clear rules and systems to guard themselves against the power of our great financiers. But that is because a very just people would have shot them long ago, from mere native good feeling.
XXVIII

THE LION

In the town of Belfort I take a chair and I sit down in the street. We talk in a cant phrase of the Man in the Street, but the Frenchman is the man in the street. Things quite central for him are connected with these lamp-posts and pavements; everything from his meals to his martyrdoms. When first an Englishman looks at a French town or village his first feeling is simply that it is uglier than an English town or village; when he looks again he sees that this comparative absence of the picturesque is chiefly expressed in the plain, precipitous frontage of the houses standing up hard and flat out of the street like the cardboard houses in a pantomime—a hard angularity allied perhaps to the harshness of French logic. When he looks a third time he sees quite simply that it is all because the houses have no front gardens. The vague English spirit loves to have the entrance to its house softened by bushes and broken by steps. It likes to have a little anteroom of hedges half in the house and half out of it; a green room in a double sense. The Frenchman desires no such little pathetic ramparts or halting places, for the street itself is a thing natural and familiar to him.

The French have no front gardens; but the street is every man’s front garden. There are trees in the street, and sometimes fountains. The street is the Frenchman’s tavern, for he drinks in the street. It is his dining-room, for he dines in the street. It is his British Museum, for the statues and monuments in French streets are not, as with us, of the worst, but of the best, art of the country, and they are often actually as historical as the Pyramids. The street again is the Frenchman’s Parliament, for France has never taken its Chamber of Deputies so seriously as we take our House of Commons, and the quibbles of mere elected nonentities in an official room seem feeble to a people whose fathers have heard the voice of Desmoulins like a trumpet under open heaven, or Victor Hugo shouting from his carriage amid the wreck of the second Republic. And as the Frenchman drinks in the street and dines in the street so also he fights in the street and dies in the street, so that the street can never be commonplace to him.

Take, for instance, such a simple object as a lamp-post. In London a lamp-post is a comic thing. We think of the intoxicated gentleman embracing it, and recalling ancient friendship. But in Paris a lamp-post is a tragic thing. For we think of tyrants hanged on it, and of an end of the world. There is, or was, a
bitter Republican paper in Paris called LA LANTERNE. How funny it would be if there were a Progressive paper in England called THE LAMP POST! We have said, then, that the Frenchman is the man in the street; that he can dine in the street, and die in the street. And if I ever pass through Paris and find him going to bed in the street, I shall say that he is still true to the genius of his civilisation.

All that is good and all that is evil in France is alike connected with this open-air element. French democracy and French indecency are alike part of the desire to have everything out of doors. Compared to a café, a public-house is a private house.

There were two reasons why all these fancies should float through the mind in the streets of this especial town of Belfort. First of all, it lies close upon the boundary of France and Germany, and boundaries are the most beautiful things in the world. To love anything is to love its boundaries; thus children will always play on the edge of anything. They build castles on the edge of the sea, and can only be restrained by public proclamation and private violence from walking on the edge of the grass. For when we have come to the end of a thing we have come to the beginning of it.

Hence this town seemed all the more French for being on the very margin of Germany, and although there were many German touches in the place—German names, larger pots of beer, and enormous theatrical barmaid dressed up in outrageous imitation of Alsatian peasants—yet the fixed French colour seemed all the stronger for these specks of something else. All day long and all night long troops of dusty, swarthy, scornful little soldiers went plodding through the streets with an air of stubborn disgust, for German soldiers look as if they despised you, but French soldiers as if they despised you and themselves even more than you. It is a part, I suppose, of the realism of the nation which has made it good at war and science and other things in which what is necessary is combined with what is nasty. And the soldiers and the civilians alike had most of them cropped hair, and that curious kind of head which to an Englishman looks almost brutal, the kind that we call a bullet-head. Indeed, we are speaking very appropriately when we call it a bullet-head, for in intellectual history the heads of Frenchmen have been bullets—yes, and explosive bullets.

But there was a second reason why in this place one should think particularly of the open-air politics and the open-air art of the French. For this town of Belfort is famous for one of the most typical and powerful of the public monuments of France. From the café table at which I sit I can see the hill beyond the town on which hangs the high and flat-faced citadel, pierced with many
windows, and warmed in the evening light. On the steep hill below it is a huge stone lion, itself as large as a hill. It is hacked out of the rock with a sort of gigantic impression. No trivial attempt has been made to make it like a common statue; no attempt to carve the mane into curls, or to distinguish the monster minutely from the earth out of which he rises, shaking the world. The face of the lion has something of the bold conventionality of Assyrian art. The mane of the lion is left like a shapeless cloud of tempest, as if it might literally be said of him that God had clothed his neck with thunder. Even at this distance the thing looks vast, and in some sense prehistoric. Yet it was carved only a little while ago. It commemorates the fact that this town was never taken by the Germans through all the terrible year, but only laid down its arms at last at the command of its own Government. But the spirit of it has been in this land from the beginning—the spirit of something defiant and almost defeated.

As I leave this place and take the railway into Germany the news comes thicker and thicker up the streets that Southern France is in a flame, and that there perhaps will be fought out finally the awful modern battle of the rich and poor. And as I pass into quieter places for the last sign of France on the sky-line, I see the Lion of Belfort stand at bay, the last sight of that great people which has never been at peace.
XXIX

HUMANITY: AN INTERLUDE

Except for some fine works of art, which seem to be there by accident, the City of Brussels is like a bad Paris, a Paris with everything noble cut out, and everything nasty left in. No one can understand Paris and its history who does not understand that its fierce ness is the balance and justification of its frivolity. It is called a city of pleasure; but it may also very specially be called a city of pain. The crown of roses is also a crown of thorns. Its people are too prone to hurt others, but quite ready also to hurt themselves. They are martyrs for religion, they are martyrs for irreligion; they are even martyrs for immorality. For the indecency of many of their books and papers is not of the sort which charms and seduces, but of the sort that horrifies and hurts; they are torturing themselves. They lash their own patriotism into life with the same whips which most men use to lash foreigners to silence. The enemies of France can never give an account of her infamy or decay which does not seem insipid and even polite compared with the things which the Nationalists of France say about their own nation. They taunt and torment themselves; sometimes they even deliberately oppress themselves. Thus, when the mob of Paris could make a Government to please itself, it made a sort of sublime tyranny to order itself about. The spirit is the same from the Crusades or St. Bartholomew to the apotheosis of Zola. The old religionists tortured men physically for a moral truth. The new realists torture men morally for a physical truth.

Now Brussels is Paris without this constant purification of pain. Its indecencies are not regrettable incidents in an everlasting revolution. It has none of the things which make good Frenchmen love Paris; it has only the things which make unspeakable Englishmen love it. It has the part which is cosmopolitan—and narrows; not the part which is Parisian—and universal. You can find there (as commonly happens in modern centres) the worst things of all nations—the DAILY MAIL from England, the cheap philosophies from Germany, the loose novels of France, and the drinks of America. But there is no English broad fun, no German kindly ceremony, no American exhilaration, and, above all, no French tradition of fighting for an idea. Though all the boulevards look like Parisian boulevards, though all the shops look like Parisian shops, you cannot look at them steadily for two minutes without feeling the full distance
between, let us say, King Leopold and fighters like Clemenceau and Deroulède.

For all these reasons, and many more, when I had got into Brussels I began to make all necessary arrangements for getting out of it again; and I had impulsively got into a tram which seemed to be going out of the city. In this tram there were two men talking; one was a little man with a black French beard; the other was a baldish man with bushy whiskers, like the financial foreign count in a three-act farce. And about the time that we reached the suburb of the city, and the traffic grew thinner, and the noises more few, I began to hear what they were saying. Though they spoke French quickly, their words were fairly easy to follow, because they were all long words. Anybody can understand long words because they have in them all the lucidity of Latin.

The man with the black beard said: “It must that we have the Progress.”

The man with the whiskers parried this smartly by saying: “It must also that we have the Consolidation International.”

This is a sort of discussion which I like myself, so I listened with some care, and I think I picked up the thread of it. One of the Belgians was a Little Belgian, as we speak of a Little Englander. The other was a Belgian Imperialist, for though Belgium is not quite strong enough to be altogether a nation, she is quite strong enough to be an empire. Being a nation means standing up to your equals, whereas being an empire only means kicking your inferiors. The man with whiskers was the Imperialist, and he was saying: “The science, behold there the new guide of humanity.”

And the man with the beard answered him: “It does not suffice to have progress in the science; one must have it also in the sentiment of the human justice.”

This remark I applauded, as if at a public meeting, but they were much too keen on their argument to hear me. The views I have often heard in England, but never uttered so lucidly, and certainly never so fast. Though Belgian by nation they must both have been essentially French. Whiskers was great on education, which, it seems, is on the march. All the world goes to make itself instructed. It must that the more instructed enlighten the less instructed. Eh, well then, the European must impose upon the savage the science and the light. Also (apparently) he must impose himself on the savage while he is about it. To-day one travelled quickly. The science had changed all. For our fathers, they were religious, and (what was worse) dead. To-day humanity had electricity to the hand; the machines came from triumphing; all the lines and limits of the globe effaced themselves. Soon there would not be but the great Empires and
confederations, guided by the science, always the science.

Here Whiskers stopped an instant for breath; and the man with the sentiment for human justice had “la parole” off him in a flash. Without doubt Humanity was on the march, but towards the sentiments, the ideal, the methods moral and pacific. Humanity directed itself towards Humanity. For your wars and empires on behalf of civilisation, what were they in effect? The war, was it not itself an affair of the barbarism? The Empires were they not things savage? The Humanity had passed all that; she was now intellectual. Tolstoy had refined all human souls with the sentiments the most delicate and just. Man was become a spirit; the wings pushed...

At this important point of evolution the tram came to a jerky stoppage; and staring around I found, to my stunned consternation, that it was almost dark, that I was far away from Brussels, that I could not dream of getting back to dinner; in short, that through the clinging fascination of this great controversy on Humanity and its recent complete alteration by science or Tolstoy, I had landed myself Heaven knows where. I dropped hastily from the suburban tram and let it go on without me.

I was alone in the flat fields out of sight of the city. On one side of the road was one of those small, thin woods which are common in all countries, but of which, by a coincidence, the mystical painters of Flanders were very fond. The night was closing in with cloudy purple and grey; there was one ribbon of silver, the last rag of the sunset. Through the wood went one little path, and somehow it suggested that it might lead to some sign of life–there was no other sign of life on the horizon. I went along it, and soon sank into a sort of dancing twilight of all those tiny trees. There is something subtle and bewildering about that sort of frail and fantastic wood. A forest of big trees seems like a bodily barrier; but somehow that mist of thin lines seems like a spiritual barrier. It is as if one were caught in a fairy cloud or could not pass a phantom. When I had well lost the last gleam of the high road a curious and definite feeling came upon me. Now I suddenly felt something much more practical and extraordinary—the absence of humanity: inhuman loneliness. Of course, there was nothing really lost in my state; but the mood may hit one anywhere. I wanted men–any men; and I felt our awful alliance over all the globe. And at last, when I had walked for what seemed a long time, I saw a light too near the earth to mean anything except the image of God.

I came out on a clear space and a low, long cottage, the door of which was open, but was blocked by a big grey horse, who seemed to prefer to eat with his
head inside the sitting-room. I got past him, and found he was being fed by a young man who was sitting down and drinking beer inside, and who saluted me with heavy rustic courtesy, but in a strange tongue. The room was full of staring faces like owls, and these I traced at length as belonging to about six small children. Their father was still working in the fields, but their mother rose when I entered. She smiled, but she and all the rest spoke some rude language, Flamand, I suppose; so that we had to be kind to each other by signs. She fetched me beer, and pointed out my way with her finger; and I drew a picture to please the children; and as it was a picture of two men hitting each other with swords, it pleased them very much. Then I gave a Belgian penny to each child, for as I said on chance in French, “It must be that we have the economic equality.” But they had never heard of economic equality, while all Battersea workmen have heard of economic equality, though it is true that they haven’t got it.

I found my way back to the city, and some time afterwards I actually saw in the street my two men talking, no doubt still saying, one that Science had changed all in Humanity, and the other that Humanity was now pushing the wings of the purely intellectual. But for me Humanity was hooked on to an accidental picture. I thought of a low and lonely house in the flats, behind a veil or film of slight trees, a man breaking the ground as men have broken from the first morning, and a huge grey horse champing his food within a foot of a child’s head, as in the stable where Christ was born.
THE LITTLE BIRDS WHO WON’T SING

On my last morning on the Flemish coast, when I knew that in a few hours I should be in England, my eye fell upon one of the details of Gothic carving of which Flanders is full. I do not know whether the thing is old, though it was certainly knocked about and indecipherable, but at least it was certainly in the style and tradition of the early Middle Ages. It seemed to represent men bending themselves (not to say twisting themselves) to certain primary employments. Some seemed to be sailors tugging at ropes; others, I think, were reaping; others were energetically pouring something into something else. This is entirely characteristic of the pictures and carvings of the early thirteenth century, perhaps the most purely vigorous time in all history. The great Greeks preferred to carve their gods and heroes doing nothing. Splendid and philosophic as their composure is there is always about it something that marks the master of many slaves. But if there was one thing the early mediaevals liked it was representing people doing something—hunting or hawking, or rowing boats, or treading grapes, or making shoes, or cooking something in a pot. “Quicquid agunt homines, votum, timor, ira voluptas.” (I quote from memory.) The Middle Ages is full of that spirit in all its monuments and manuscripts. Chaucer retains it in his jolly insistence on everybody’s type of trade and toil. It was the earliest and youngest resurrection of Europe, the time when social order was strengthening, but had not yet become oppressive; the time when religious faiths were strong, but had not yet been exasperated. For this reason the whole effect of Greek and Gothic carving is different. The figures in the Elgin marbles, though often reining their steeds for an instant in the air, seem frozen for ever at that perfect instant. But a mass of mediaeval carving seems actually a sort of bustle or hubbub in stone. Sometimes one cannot help feeling that the groups actually move and mix, and the whole front of a great cathedral has the hum of a huge hive.

But about these particular figures there was a peculiarity of which I could not be sure. Those of them that had any heads had very curious heads, and it seemed to me that they had their mouths open. Whether or no this really meant anything or was an accident of nascent art I do not know; but in the course of wondering I recalled to my mind the fact that singing was connected with many of the tasks
there suggested, that there were songs for reapers and songs for sailors hauling ropes. I was still thinking about this small problem when I walked along the pier at Ostend; and I heard some sailors uttering a measured shout as they laboured, and I remembered that sailors still sing in chorus while they work, and even sing different songs according to what part of their work they are doing. And a little while afterwards, when my sea journey was over, the sight of men working in the English fields reminded me again that there are still songs for harvest and for many agricultural routines. And I suddenly wondered why if this were so it should be quite unknown, for any modern trade to have a ritual poetry. How did people come to chant rude poems while pulling certain ropes or gathering certain fruit, and why did nobody do anything of the kind while producing any of the modern things? Why is a modern newspaper never printed by people singing in chorus? Why do shopmen seldom, if ever, sing?

If reapers sing while reaping, why should not auditors sing while auditing and bankers while banking? If there are songs for all the separate things that have to be done in a boat, why are there not songs for all the separate things that have to be done in a bank? As the train from Dover flew through the Kentish gardens, I tried to write a few songs suitable for commercial gentlemen. Thus, the work of bank clerks when casting up columns might begin with a thundering chorus in praise of Simple Addition.

“Up my lads and lift the ledgers, sleep and ease are o’er. Hear the Stars of Morning shouting: ‘Two and Two are four.’ Though the creeds and realms are reeling, though the sophists roar, Though we weep and pawn our watches, Two and Two are Four.”

“There’s a run upon the Bank–Stand away! For the Manager’s a crank and the Secretary drank, and the

Upper Tooting Bank Turns to bay! Stand close: there is a run On the Bank. Of our ship, our royal one, let the ringing legend run, That she fired with every gun Ere she sank.”

And as I came into the cloud of London I met a friend of mine who actually is in a bank, and submitted these suggestions in rhyme to him for use among his colleagues. But he was not very hopeful about the matter. It was not (he assured me) that he underrated the verses, or in any sense lamented their lack of polish. No; it was rather, he felt, an indefinable something in the very atmosphere of the society in which we live that makes it spiritually difficult to sing in banks. And I think he must be right; though the matter is very mysterious. I may observe here that I think there must be some mistake in the calculations of the Socialists. They
put down all our distress, not to a moral tone, but to the chaos of private enterprise. Now, banks are private; but post-offices are Socialistic: therefore I naturally expected that the post-office would fall into the collectivist idea of a chorus. Judge of my surprise when the lady in my local post-office (whom I urged to sing) dismissed the idea with far more coldness than the bank clerk had done. She seemed indeed, to be in a considerably greater state of depression than he. Should any one suppose that this was the effect of the verses themselves, it is only fair to say that the specimen verse of the Post-Office Hymn ran thus:

“O’er London our letters are shaken like snow, Our wires o’er the world like the thunderbolts go. The news that may marry a maiden in Sark, Or kill an old lady in Finsbury Park.”

Chorus (with a swing of joy and energy):
“Or kill an old lady in Finsbury Park.”

And the more I thought about the matter the more painfully certain it seemed that the most important and typical modern things could not be done with a chorus. One could not, for instance, be a great financier and sing; because the essence of being a great financier is that you keep quiet. You could not even in many modern circles be a public man and sing; because in those circles the essence of being a public man is that you do nearly everything in private. Nobody would imagine a chorus of money-lenders. Every one knows the story of the solicitors’ corps of volunteers who, when the Colonel on the battlefield cried “Charge!” all said simultaneously, “Six-and-eightpence.” Men can sing while charging in a military, but hardly in a legal sense. And at the end of my reflections I had really got no further than the sub-conscious feeling of my friend the bank-clerk—that there is something spiritually suffocating about our life; not about our laws merely, but about our life. Bank-clerks are without songs, not because they are poor, but because they are sad. Sailors are much poorer. As I passed homewards I passed a little tin building of some religious sort, which was shaken with shouting as a trumpet is torn with its own tongue. THEY were singing anyhow; and I had for an instant a fancy I had often had before: that with us the super-human is the only place where you can find the human. Human nature is hunted and has fled into sanctuary.
THE RIDDLE OF THE IVY

More than a month ago, when I was leaving London for a holiday, a friend walked into my flat in Battersea and found me surrounded with half-packed luggage.

“You seem to be off on your travels,” he said. “Where are you going?”

With a strap between my teeth I replied, “To Battersea.”

“The wit of your remark,” he said, “wholly escapes me.”

“I am going to Battersea,” I repeated, “to Battersea viâ Paris, Belfort, Heidelberg, and Frankfort. My remark contained no wit. It contained simply the truth. I am going to wander over the whole world until once more I find Battersea. Somewhere in the seas of sunset or of sunrise, somewhere in the ultimate archipelago of the earth, there is one little island which I wish to find: an island with low green hills and great white cliffs. Travellers tell me that it is called England (Scotch travellers tell me that it is called Britain), and there is a rumour that somewhere in the heart of it there is a beautiful place called Battersea.”

“I suppose it is unnecessary to tell you,” said my friend, with an air of intellectual comparison, “that this is Battersea?”

“It is quite unnecessary,” I said, “and it is spiritually untrue. I cannot see any Battersea here; I cannot see any London or any England. I cannot see that door. I cannot see that chair: because a cloud of sleep and custom has come across my eyes. The only way to get back to them is to go somewhere else; and that is the real object of travel and the real pleasure of holidays. Do you suppose that I go to France in order to see France? Do you suppose that I go to Germany in order to see Germany? I shall enjoy them both; but it is not them that I am seeking. I am seeking Battersea. The whole object of travel is not to set foot on foreign land; it is at last to set foot on one’s own country as a foreign land. Now I warn you that this Gladstone bag is compact and heavy, and that if you utter that word ‘paradox’ I shall hurl it at your head. I did not make the world, and I did not make it paradoxical. It is not my fault, it is the truth, that the only way to go to England is to go away from it.”

But when, after only a month’s travelling, I did come back to England, I was startled to find that I had told the exact truth. England did break on me at once
beautifully new and beautifully old. To land at Dover is the right way to approach England (most things that are hackneyed are right), for then you see first the full, soft gardens of Kent, which are, perhaps, an exaggeration, but still a typical exaggeration, of the rich rusticity of England. As it happened, also, a fellow-traveller with whom I had fallen into conversation felt the same freshness, though for another cause. She was an American lady who had seen Europe, and had never yet seen England, and she expressed her enthusiasm in that simple and splendid way which is natural to Americans, who are the most idealistic people in the whole world. Their only danger is that the idealist can easily become the idolator. And the American has become so idealistic that he even idealises money. But (to quote a very able writer of American short stories) that is another story.

“I have never been in England before,” said the American lady, “yet it is so pretty that I feel as if I have been away from it for a long time.”

“So you have,” I said; “you have been away for three hundred years.”

“What a lot of ivy you have,” she said. “It covers the churches and it buries the houses. We have ivy; but I have never seen it grow like that.”

“I am interested to hear it,” I replied, “for I am making a little list of all the things that are really better in England. Even a month on the Continent, combined with intelligence, will teach you that there are many things that are better abroad. All the things that the DAILY MAIL calls English are better abroad. But there are things entirely English and entirely good. Kippers, for instance, and Free Trade, and front gardens, and individual liberty, and the Elizabethan drama, and hansom cabs, and cricket, and Mr. Will Crooks. Above all, there is the happy and holy custom of eating a heavy breakfast. I cannot imagine that Shakespeare began the day with rolls and coffee, like a Frenchman or a German. Surely he began with bacon or bloaters. In fact, a light bursts upon me; for the first time I see the real meaning of Mrs. Gallup and the Great Cipher. It is merely a mistake in the matter of a capital letter. I withdraw my objections; I accept everything; bacon did write Shakespeare.”

“I cannot look at anything but the ivy,” she said, “it looks so comfortable.”

While she looked at the ivy I opened for the first time for many weeks an English newspaper, and I read a speech of Mr. Balfour in which he said that the House of Lords ought to be preserved because it represented something in the nature of permanent public opinion of England, above the ebb and flow of the parties. Now Mr. Balfour is a perfectly sincere patriot, a man who, from his own point of view, thinks long and seriously about the public needs, and he is,
moreover, a man of entirely exceptionable intellectual power. But alas, in spite of all this, when I had read that speech I thought with a heavy heart that there was one more thing that I had to add to the list of the specially English things, such as kippers and cricket; I had to add the specially English kind of humbug. In France things are attacked and defended for what they are. The Catholic Church is attacked because it is Catholic, and defended because it is Catholic. The Republic is defended because it is Republican, and attacked because it is Republican. But here is the ablest of English politicians consoling everybody by telling them that the House of Lords is not really the House of Lords, but something quite different, that the foolish accidental peers whom he meets every night are in some mysterious way experts upon the psychology of the democracy; that if you want to know what the very poor want you must ask the very rich, and that if you want the truth about Hoxton, you must ask for it at Hatfield. If the Conservative defender of the House of Lords were a logical French politician he would simply be a liar. But being an English politician he is simply a poet. The English love of believing that all is as it should be, the English optimism combined with the strong English imagination, is too much even for the obvious facts. In a cold, scientific sense, of course, Mr. Balfour knows that nearly all the Lords who are not Lords by accident are Lords by bribery. He knows, and (as Mr. Belloc excellently said) everybody in Parliament knows the very names of the peers who have purchased their peerages. But the glamour of comfort, the pleasure of reassuring himself and reassuring others, is too strong for this original knowledge; at last it fades from him, and he sincerely and earnestly calls on Englishmen to join with him in admiring an august and public-spirited Senate, having wholly forgotten that the Senate really consists of idiots whom he has himself despised; and adventurers whom he has himself ennobled.

“Your ivy is so beautifully soft and thick,” said the American lady, “it seems to cover almost everything. It must be the most poetical thing in England.”

“It is very beautiful,” I said, “and, as you say, it is very English. Charles Dickens, who was almost more English than England, wrote one of his rare poems about the beauty of ivy. Yes, by all means let us admire the ivy, so deep, so warm, so full of a genial gloom and a grotesque tenderness. Let us admire the ivy; and let us pray to God in His mercy that it may not kill the tree.”
XXXII. THE TRAVELLERS IN STATE

The other day, to my great astonishment, I caught a train; it was a train going into the Eastern Counties, and I only just caught it. And while I was running along the train (amid general admiration) I noticed that there were a quite peculiar and unusual number of carriages marked “Engaged.” On five, six, seven, eight, nine carriages was pasted the little notice: at five, six, seven, eight, nine windows were big bland men staring out in the conscious pride of possession. Their bodies seemed more than usually impenetrable, their faces more than usual placid. It could not be the Derby, if only for the minor reasons that it was the opposite direction and the wrong day. It could hardly be the King. It could hardly be the French President. For, though these distinguished persons naturally like to be private for three hours, they are at least public for three minutes. A crowd can gather to see them step into the train; and there was no crowd here, or any police ceremonial.

Who were those awful persons, who occupied more of the train than a bricklayer’s beanfeast, and yet were more fastidious and delicate than the King’s own suite? Who were these that were larger than a mob, yet more mysterious than a monarch? Was it possible that instead of our Royal House visiting the Tsar, he was really visiting us? Or does the House of Lords have a breakfast? I waited and wondered until the train slowed down at some station in the direction of Cambridge. Then the large, impenetrable men got out, and after them got out the distinguished holders of the engaged seats. They were all dressed decorously in one colour; they had neatly cropped hair; and they were chained together.

I looked across the carriage at its only other occupant, and our eyes met. He was a small, tired-looking man, and, as I afterwards learnt, a native of Cambridge; by the look of him, some working tradesman there, such as a journeyman tailor or a small clock-mender. In order to make conversation I said I wondered where the convicts were going. His mouth twitched with the instinctive irony of our poor, and he said: “I don’t s’pose they’re goin’ on an ‘oliday at the seaside with little spades and pails.” I was naturally delighted, and, pursuing the same vein of literary invention, I suggested that perhaps dons were taken down to Cambridge chained together like this. And as he lived in Cambridge, and had seen several dons, he was pleased with such a scheme. Then when we had ceased to laugh, we suddenly became quite silent; and the bleak, grey eyes of the little man grew sadder and emptier than an open sea. I knew
what he was thinking, because I was thinking the same, because all modern sophists are only sophists, and there is such a thing as mankind. Then at last (and it fell in as exactly as the right last note of a tune one is trying to remember) he said: “Well, I s’pose we ‘ave to do it.” And in those three things, his first speech and his silence and his second speech, there were all the three great fundamental facts of the English democracy, its profound sense of humour, its profound sense of pathos, and its profound sense of helplessness.

It cannot be too often repeated that all real democracy is an attempt (like that of a jolly hostess) to bring the shy people out. For every practical purpose of a political state, for every practical purpose of a tea-party, he that abaseth himself must be exalted. At a tea-party it is equally obvious that he that exalteth himself must be abased, if possible without bodily violence. Now people talk of democracy as being coarse and turbulent: it is a self-evident error in mere history. Aristocracy is the thing that is always coarse and turbulent: for it means appealing to the self-confident people. Democracy means appealing to the different people. Democracy means getting those people to vote who would never have the cheek to govern: and (according to Christian ethics) the precise people who ought to govern are the people who have not the cheek to do it. There is a strong example of this truth in my friend in the train. The only two types we hear of in this argument about crime and punishment are two very rare and abnormal types.

We hear of the stark sentimentalist, who talks as if there were no problem at all: as if physical kindness would cure everything: as if one need only pat Nero and stroke Ivan the Terrible. This mere belief in bodily humanitarianism is not sentimental; it is simply snobbish. For if comfort gives men virtue, the comfortable classes ought to be virtuous—which is absurd. Then, again, we do hear of the yet weaker and more watery type of sentimentalists: I mean the sentimentalist who says, with a sort of splutter, “Flog the brutes!” or who tells you with innocent obscenity “what he would do” with a certain man—always supposing the man’s hands were tied.

This is the more effeminate type of the two; but both are weak and unbalanced. And it is only these two types, the sentimental humanitarian and the sentimental brutalitarian, whom one hears in the modern babel. Yet you very rarely meet either of them in a train. You never meet anyone else in a controversy. The man you meet in a train is like this man that I met: he is emotionally decent, only he is intellectually doubtful. So far from luxuriating in the loathsome things that could be “done” to criminals, he feels bitterly how
much better it would be if nothing need be done. But something must be done. “I s’pose we ‘ave to do it.” In short, he is simply a sane man, and of a sane man there is only one safe definition. He is a man who can have tragedy in his heart and comedy in his head.

Now the real difficulty of discussing decently this problem of the proper treatment of criminals is that both parties discuss the matter without any direct human feeling. The denouncers of wrong are as cold as the organisers of wrong. Humanitarianism is as hard as inhumanity.

Let me take one practical instance. I think the flogging arranged in our modern prisons is a filthy torture; all its scientific paraphernalia, the photographing, the medical attendance, prove that it goes to the last foul limit of the boot and rack. The cat is simply the rack without any of its intellectual reasons. Holding this view strongly, I open the ordinary humanitarian books or papers and I find a phrase like this, “The lash is a relic of barbarism.” So is the plough. So is the fishing net. So is the horn or the staff or the fire lit in winter. What an inexpressibly feeble phrase for anything one wants to attack—a relic of barbarism! It is as if a man walked naked down the street to-morrow, and we said that his clothes were not quite in the latest fashion. There is nothing particularly nasty about being a relic of barbarism. Man is a relic of barbarism. Civilisation is a relic of barbarism.

But torture is not a relic of barbarism at all. In actuality it is simply a relic of sin; but in comparative history it may well be called a relic of civilisation. It has always been most artistic and elaborate when everything else was most artistic and elaborate. Thus it was detailed exquisite in the late Roman Empire, in the complex and gorgeous sixteenth century, in the centralised French monarchy a hundred years before the Revolution, and in the great Chinese civilisation to this day. This is, first and last, the frightful thing we must remember. In so far as we grow instructed and refined we are not (in any sense whatever) naturally moving away from torture. We may be moving towards torture. We must know what we are doing, if we are to avoid the enormous secret cruelty which has crowned every historic civilisation.

The train moves more swiftly through the sunny English fields. They have taken the prisoners away, and I do not know what they have done with them.
A railway station is an admirable place, although Ruskin did not think so; he did not think so because he himself was even more modern than the railway station. He did not think so because he was himself feverish, irritable, and snorting like an engine. He could not value the ancient silence of the railway station.

“In a railway station,” he said, “you are in a hurry, and therefore, miserable”; but you need not be either unless you are as modern as Ruskin. The true philosopher does not think of coming just in time for his train except as a bet or a joke.

The only way of catching a train I have ever discovered is to be late for the one before. Do this, and you will find in a railway station much of the quietude and consolation of a cathedral. It has many of the characteristics of a great ecclesiastical building; it has vast arches, void spaces, coloured lights, and, above all, it has recurrence or ritual. It is dedicated to the celebration of water and fire the two prime elements of all human ceremonial. Lastly, a station resembles the old religions rather than the new religions in this point, that people go there. In connection with this it should also be remembered that all popular places, all sites, actually used by the people, tend to retain the best routine of antiquity very much more than any localities or machines used by any privileged class. Things are not altered so quickly or completely by common people as they are by fashionable people. Ruskin could have found more memories of the Middle Ages in the Underground Railway than in the grand hotels outside the stations. The great palaces of pleasure which the rich build in London all have brazen and vulgar names. Their names are either snobbish, like the Hotel Cecil, or (worse still) cosmopolitan like the Hotel Metropole. But when I go in a third-class carriage from the nearest circle station to Battersea to the nearest circle station to the DAILY NEWS, the names of the stations are one long litany of solemn and saintly memories. Leaving Victoria I come to a park belonging especially to St. James the Apostle; thence I go to Westminster Bridge, whose very name alludes to the awful Abbey; Charing Cross holds up the symbol of Christendom; the next station is called a Temple; and Blackfriars remembers the mediaeval dream of a Brotherhood.

If you wish to find the past preserved, follow the million feet of the crowd. At
the worst the uneducated only wear down old things by sheer walking. But the educated kick them down out of sheer culture.

I feel all this profoundly as I wander about the empty railway station, where I have no business of any kind. I have extracted a vast number of chocolates from automatic machines; I have obtained cigarettes, toffee, scent, and other things that I dislike by the same machinery; I have weighed myself, with sublime results; and this sense, not only of the healthiness of popular things, but of their essential antiquity and permanence, is still in possession of my mind. I wander up to the bookstall, and my faith survives even the wild spectacle of modern literature and journalism. Even in the crudest and most clamorous aspects of the newspaper world I still prefer the popular to the proud and fastidious. If I had to choose between taking in the DAILY MAIL and taking in the TIMES (the dilemma reminds one of a nightmare), I should certainly cry out with the whole of my being for the DAILY MAIL. Even mere bigness preached in a frivolous way is not so irritating as mere meanness preached in a big and solemn way. People buy the DAILY MAIL, but they do not believe in it. They do believe in the TIMES, and (apparently) they do not buy it. But the more the output of paper upon the modern world is actually studied, the more it will be found to be in all its essentials ancient and human, like the name of Charing Cross. Linger for two or three hours at a station bookstall (as I am doing), and you will find that it gradually takes on the grandeur and historic allusiveness of the Vatican or Bodleian Library. The novelty is all superficial; the tradition is all interior and profound. The DAILY MAIL has new editions, but never a new idea. Everything in a newspaper that is not the old human love of altar or fatherland is the old human love of gossip. Modern writers have often made game of the old chronicles because they chiefly record accidents and prodigies; a church struck by lightning, or a calf with six legs. They do not seem to realise that this old barbaric history is the same as new democratic journalism. It is not that the savage chronicle has disappeared. It is merely that the savage chronicle now appears every morning.

As I moved thus mildly and vaguely in front of the bookstall, my eye caught a sudden and scarlet title that for the moment staggered me. On the outside of a book I saw written in large letters, “Get On or Get Out.” The title of the book recalled to me with a sudden revolt and reaction all that does seem unquestionably new and nasty; it reminded me that there was in the world of today that utterly idiotic thing, a worship of success; a thing that only means surpassing anybody in anything; a thing that may mean being the most
successful person in running away from a battle; a thing that may mean being the most successfully sleepy of the whole row of sleeping men. When I saw those words the silence and sanctity of the railway station were for the moment shadowed. Here, I thought, there is at any rate something anarchic and violent and vile. This title, at any rate, means the most disgusting individualism of this individualistic world. In the fury of my bitterness and passion I actually bought the book, thereby ensuring that my enemy would get some of my money. I opened it prepared to find some brutality, some blasphemy, which would really be an exception to the general silence and sanctity of the railway station. I was prepared to find something in the book that was as infamous as its title.

I was disappointed. There was nothing at all corresponding to the furious decisiveness of the remarks on the cover. After reading it carefully I could not discover whether I was really to get on or to get out; but I had a vague feeling that I should prefer to get out. A considerable part of the book, particularly towards the end, was concerned with a detailed description of the life of Napoleon Bonaparte. Undoubtedly Napoleon got on. He also got out. But I could not discover in any way how the details of his life given here were supposed to help a person aiming at success. One anecdote described how Napoleon always wiped his pen on his knee-breeches. I suppose the moral is: always wipe your pen on your knee-breeches, and you will win the battle of Wagram. Another story told that he let loose a gazelle among the ladies of his Court. Clearly the brutal practical inference is–loose a gazelle among the ladies of your acquaintance, and you will be Emperor of the French. Get on with a gazelle or get out. The book entirely reconciled me to the soft twilight of the station. Then I suddenly saw that there was a symbolic division which might be paralleled from biology. Brave men are vertebrates; they have their softness on the surface and their toughness in the middle. But these modern cowards are all crustaceans; their hardness is all on the cover and their softness is inside. But the softness is there; everything in this twilight temple is soft.
XXXIV

THE DIABOLIST

Every now and then I have introduced into my essays an element of truth. Things that really happened have been mentioned, such as meeting President Kruger or being thrown out of a cab. What I have now to relate really happened; yet there was no element in it of practical politics or of personal danger. It was simply a quiet conversation which I had with another man. But that quiet conversation was by far the most terrible thing that has ever happened to me in my life. It happened so long ago that I cannot be certain of the exact words of the dialogue, only of its main questions and answers; but there is one sentence in it for which I can answer absolutely and word for word. It was a sentence so awful that I could not forget it if I would. It was the last sentence spoken; and it was not spoken to me.

The thing befell me in the days when I was at an art school. An art school is different from almost all other schools or colleges in this respect: that, being of new and crude creation and of lax discipline, it presents a specially strong contrast between the industrious and the idle. People at an art school either do an atrocious amount of work or do no work at all. I belonged, along with other charming people, to the latter class; and this threw me often into the society of men who were very different from myself, and who were idle for reasons very different from mine. I was idle because I was very much occupied; I was engaged about that time in discovering, to my own extreme and lasting astonishment, that I was not an atheist. But there were others also at loose ends who were engaged in discovering what Carlyle called (I think with needless delicacy) the fact that ginger is hot in the mouth.

I value that time, in short, because it made me acquainted with a good representative number of blackguards. In this connection there are two very curious things which the critic of human life may observe. The first is the fact that there is one real difference between men and women; that women prefer to talk in twos, while men prefer to talk in threes. The second is that when you find (as you often do) three young cads and idiots going about together and getting drunk together every day you generally find that one of the three cads and idiots is (for some extraordinary reason) not a cad and not an idiot. In these small groups devoted to a drivelling dissipation there is almost always one man who
seems to have condescended to his company; one man who, while he can talk a foul triviality with his fellows, can also talk politics with a Socialist, or philosophy with a Catholic.

It was just such a man whom I came to know well. It was strange, perhaps, that he liked his dirty, drunken society; it was stranger still, perhaps, that he liked my society. For hours of the day he would talk with me about Milton or Gothic architecture; for hours of the night he would go where I have no wish to follow him, even in speculation. He was a man with a long, ironical face, and close and red hair; he was by class a gentleman, and could walk like one, but preferred, for some reason, to walk like a groom carrying two pails. He looked like a sort of Super-jockey; as if some archangel had gone on the Turf. And I shall never forget the half-hour in which he and I argued about real things for the first and the last time.

Along the front of the big building of which our school was a part ran a huge slope of stone steps, higher, I think, than those that lead up to St. Paul’s Cathedral. On a black wintry evening he and I were wandering on these cold heights, which seemed as dreary as a pyramid under the stars. The one thing visible below us in the blackness was a burning and blowing fire; for some gardener (I suppose) was burning something in the grounds, and from time to time the red sparks went whirling past us like a swarm of scarlet insects in the dark. Above us also it was gloom; but if one stared long enough at that upper darkness, one saw vertical stripes of grey in the black and then became conscious of the colossal façade of the Doric building, phantasmal, yet filling the sky, as if Heaven were still filled with the gigantic ghost of Paganism.

The man asked me abruptly why I was becoming orthodox. Until he said it, I really had not known that I was; but the moment he had said it I knew it to be literally true. And the process had been so long and full that I answered him at once out of existing stores of explanation.

“I am becoming orthodox,” I said, “because I have come, rightly or wrongly, after stretching my brain till it bursts, to the old belief that heresy is worse even than sin. An error is more menacing than a crime, for an error begets crimes. An Imperialist is worse than a pirate. For an Imperialist keeps a school for pirates; he teaches piracy disinterestedly and without an adequate salary. A Free Lover is worse than a profligate. For a profligate is serious and reckless even in his shortest love; while a Free Lover is cautious and irresponsible even in his longest devotion. I hate modern doubt because it is dangerous.”

“You mean dangerous to morality,” he said in a voice of wonderful
gentleness. “I expect you are right. But why do you care about morality?”

I glanced at his face quickly. He had thrust out his neck as he had a trick of doing; and so brought his face abruptly into the light of the bonfire from below, like a face in the footlights. His long chin and high cheek-bones were lit up infernally from underneath; so that he looked like a fiend staring down into the flaming pit. I had an unmeaning sense of being tempted in a wilderness; and even as I paused a burst of red sparks broke past.

“Aren’t those sparks splendid?” I said.

“Yes,” he replied.

“That is all that I ask you to admit,” said I. “Give me those few red specks and I will deduce Christian morality. Once I thought like you, that one’s pleasure in a flying spark was a thing that could come and go with that spark. Once I thought that the delight was as free as the fire. Once I thought that red star we see was alone in space. But now I know that the red star is only on the apex of an invisible pyramid of virtues. That red fire is only the flower on a stalk of living habits, which you cannot see. Only because your mother made you say ‘Thank you’ for a bun are you now able to thank Nature or chaos for those red stars of an instant or for the white stars of all time. Only because you were humble before fireworks on the fifth of November do you now enjoy any fireworks that you chance to see. You only like them being red because you were told about the blood of the martyrs; you only like them being bright because brightness is a glory. That flame flowered out of virtues, and it will fade with virtues. Seduce a woman, and that spark will be less bright. Shed blood, and that spark will be less red. Be really bad, and they will be to you like the spots on a wall-paper.”

He had a horrible fairness of the intellect that made me despair of his soul. A common, harmless atheist would have denied that religion produced humility or humility a simple joy: but he admitted both. He only said, “But shall I not find in evil a life of its own? Granted that for every woman I ruin one of those red sparks will go out: will not the expanding pleasure of ruin . . .”

“Do you see that fire?” I asked. “If we had a real fighting democracy, some one would burn you in it; like the devil-worshipper that you are.”

“Perhaps,” he said, in his tired, fair way. “Only what you call evil I call good.”

He went down the great steps alone, and I felt as if I wanted the steps swept and cleaned. I followed later, and as I went to find my hat in the low, dark passage where it hung, I suddenly heard his voice again, but the words were inaudible. I stopped, startled: then I heard the voice of one of the vilest of his associates saying, “Nobody can possibly know.” And then I heard those two or
three words which I remember in every syllable and cannot forget. I heard the Diabolist say, “I tell you I have done everything else. If I do that I shan’t know the difference between right and wrong.” I rushed out without daring to pause; and as I passed the fire I did not know whether it was hell or the furious love of God.

I have since heard that he died: it may be said, I think, that he committed suicide; though he did it with tools of pleasure, not with tools of pain. God help him, I know the road he went; but I have never known, or even dared to think, what was that place at which he stopped and refrained.
XXXV

A GLIMPSE OF MY COUNTRY

Whatever is it that we are all looking for? I fancy that it is really quite close. When I was a boy I had a fancy that Heaven or Fairyland or whatever I called it, was immediately behind my own back, and that this was why I could never manage to see it, however often I twisted and turned to take it by surprise. I had a notion of a man perpetually spinning round on one foot like a teetotum in the effort to find that world behind his back which continually fled from him. Perhaps this is why the world goes round. Perhaps the world is always trying to look over its shoulder and catch up the world which always escapes it, yet without which it cannot be itself.

In any case, as I have said, I think that we must always conceive of that which is the goal of all our endeavours as something which is in some strange way near. Science boasts of the distance of its stars; of the terrific remoteness of the things of which it has to speak. But poetry and religion always insist upon the proximity, the almost menacing closeness of the things with which they are concerned. Always the Kingdom of Heaven is “At Hand”; and Looking-glass Land is only through the looking-glass. So I for one should never be astonished if the next twist of a street led me to the heart of that maze in which all the mystics are lost. I should not be at all surprised if I turned one corner in Fleet Street and saw a yet queerer-looking lamp; I should not be surprised if I turned a third corner and found myself in Elfland.

I should not be surprised at this; but I was surprised the other day at something more surprising. I took a turn out of Fleet Street and found myself in England.

The singular shock experienced perhaps requires explanation. In the darkest or the most inadequate moments of England there is one thing that should always be remembered about the very nature of our country. It may be shortly stated by saying that England is not such a fool as it looks. The types of England, the externals of England, always misrepresent the country. England is an oligarchical country, and it prefers that its oligarchy should be inferior to itself.

The speaking in the House of Commons, for instance, is not only worse than the speaking was, it is worse than the speaking is, in all or almost all other places in small debating clubs or casual dinners. Our countrymen probably prefer this solemn futility in the higher places of the national life. It may be a strange sight
to see the blind leading the blind; but England provides a stranger. England shows us the blind leading the people who can see. And this again is an under-
statement of the case. For the English political aristocrats not only speak worse than many other people; they speak worse than themselves. The ignorance of statesmen is like the ignorance of judges, an artificial and affected thing. If you have the good fortune really to talk with a statesman, you will be constantly startled with his saying quite intelligent things. It makes one nervous at first. And I have never been sufficiently intimate with such a man to ask him why it was a rule of his life in Parliament to appear sillier than he was.

It is the same with the voters. The average man votes below himself; he votes with half a mind or with a hundredth part of one. A man ought to vote with the whole of himself as he worships or gets married. A man ought to vote with his head and heart, his soul and stomach, his eye for faces and his ear for music; also (when sufficiently provoked) with his hands and feet. If he has ever seen a fine sunset, the crimson colour of it should creep into his vote. If he has ever heard splendid songs, they should be in his ears when he makes the mystical cross. But as it is, the difficulty with English democracy at all elections is that it is something less than itself. The question is not so much whether only a minority of the electorate votes. The point is that only a minority of the voter votes.

This is the tragedy of England; you cannot judge it by its foremost men. Its types do not typify. And on the occasion of which I speak I found this to be so especially of that old intelligent middle class which I had imagined had almost vanished from the world. It seemed to me that all the main representatives of the middle class had gone off in one direction or in the other; they had either set out in pursuit of the Smart Set or they had set out in pursuit of the Simple Life. I cannot say which I dislike more myself; the people in question are welcome to have either of them, or, as is more likely, to have both, in hideous alternations of disease and cure. But all the prominent men who plainly represent the middle class have adopted either the single eye-glass of Mr Chamberlain or the single eye of Mr. Bernard Shaw.

The old class that I mean has no representative. Its food was plentiful; but it had no show. Its food was plain; but it had no fads. It was serious about politics; and when it spoke in public it committed the solecism of trying to speak well. I thought that this old earnest political England had practically disappeared. And as I say, I took one turn out of Fleet Street and I found a room full of it.

At the top of the room was a chair in which Johnson had sat. The club was a club in which Wilkes had spoken, in a time when even the ne’er-do-weel was
virile. But all these things by themselves might be merely archaism. The extraordinary thing was that this hall had all the hubbub, the sincerity, the anger, the oratory of the eighteenth century. The members of this club were of all shades of opinion, yet there was not one speech which gave me that jar of unreality which I often have in listening to the ablest men uttering my own opinion. The Toryism of this club was like the Toryism of Johnson, a Toryism that could use humour and appealed to humanity. The democracy of this club was like the democracy of Wilkes, a democracy that can speak epigrams and fight duels; a democracy that can face things out and endure slander; the democracy of Wilkes, or, rather, the democracy of Fox.

One thing especially filled my soul with the soul of my fathers. Each man speaking, whether he spoke well or ill, spoke as well as he could from sheer fury against the other man. This is the greatest of our modern descents, that nowadays a man does not become more rhetorical as he becomes more sincere. An eighteenth-century speaker, when he got really and honestly furious, looked for big words with which to crush his adversary. The new speaker looks for small words to crush him with. He looks for little facts and little sneers. In a modern speech the rhetoric is put into the merely formal part, the opening to which nobody listens. But when Mr. Chamberlain, or a Moderate, or one of the harder kind of Socialists, becomes really sincere, he becomes Cockney. “The destiny of the Empire,” or “The destiny of humanity,” do well enough for mere ornamental preliminaries, but when the man becomes angry and honest, then it is a snarl, “Where do we come in?” or “It’s your money they want.”

The men in this eighteenth-century club were entirely different; they were quite eighteenth century. Each one rose to his feet quivering with passion, and tried to destroy his opponent, not with sniggering, but actually with eloquence. I was arguing with them about Home Rule; at the end I told them why the English aristocracy really disliked an Irish Parliament; because it would be like their club.

I came out again into Fleet Street at night, and by a dim lamp I saw pasted up some tawdry nonsense about Wastrels and how London was rising against something that London had hardly heard of. Then I suddenly saw, as in one obvious picture, that the modern world is an immense and tumultuous ocean, full of monstrous and living things. And I saw that across the top of it is spread a thin, a very thin, sheet of ice, of wicked wealth and of lying journalism.

And as I stood there in the darkness I could almost fancy that I heard it crack.
XXXVI

A SOMEWHAT IMPROBABLE STORY

I cannot remember whether this tale is true or not. If I read it through very carefully I have a suspicion that I should come to the conclusion that it is not. But, unfortunately, I cannot read it through very carefully, because, you see, it is not written yet. The image and the idea of it clung to me through a great part of my boyhood; I may have dreamt it before I could talk; or told it to myself before I could read; or read it before I could remember. On the whole, however, I am certain that I did not read it, for children have very clear memories about things like that; and of the books which I was really fond I can still remember, not only the shape and bulk and binding, but even the position of the printed words on many of the pages. On the whole, I incline to the opinion that it happened to me before I was born.

At any rate, let us tell the story now with all the advantages of the atmosphere that has clung to it. You may suppose me, for the sake of argument, sitting at lunch in one of those quick-lunch restaurants in the City where men take their food so fast that it has none of the quality of food, and take their half-hour’s vacation so fast that it has none of the qualities of leisure; to hurry through one’s leisure is the most unbusiness-like of actions. They all wore tall shiny hats as if they could not lose an instant even to hang them on a peg, and they all had one eye a little off, hypnotised by the huge eye of the clock. In short, they were the slaves of the modern bondage, you could hear their fetters clanking. Each was, in fact, bound by a chain; the heaviest chain ever tied to a man—it is called a watch-chain.

Now, among these there entered and sat down opposite to me a man who almost immediately opened an uninterrupted monologue. He was like all the other men in dress, yet he was startlingly opposite to them in all manner. He wore a high shiny hat and a long frock coat, but he wore them as such solemn things were meant to be worn; he wore the silk hat as if it were a mitre, and the frock coat as if it were the ephod of a high priest. He not only hung his hat up on the peg, but he seemed (such was his stateliness) almost to ask permission of the hat for doing so, and to apologise to the peg for making use of it. When he had sat down on a wooden chair with the air of one considering its feelings and given a sort of slight stoop or bow to the wooden table itself, as if it were an altar, I
could not help some comment springing to my lips. For the man was a big, sanguine-faced, prosperous-looking man, and yet he treated everything with a care that almost amounted to nervousness.

For the sake of saying something to express my interest I said, “This furniture is fairly solid; but, of course, people do treat it much too carelessly.”

As I looked up doubtfully my eye caught his, and was fixed as his was fixed in an apocalyptic stare. I had thought him ordinary as he entered, save for his strange, cautious manner; but if the other people had seen him then they would have screamed and emptied the room. They did not see him, and they went on making a clatter with their forks, and a murmur with their conversation. But the man’s face was the face of a maniac.

“Did you mean anything particular by that remark?” he asked at last, and the blood crawled back slowly into his face.

“Nothing whatever,” I answered. “One does not mean anything here; it spoils people’s digestions.”

He limped back and wiped his broad forehead with a big handkerchief; and yet there seemed to be a sort of regret in his relief.

“I thought perhaps,” he said in a low voice, “that another of them had gone wrong.”

“If you mean another digestion gone wrong,” I said, “I never heard of one here that went right. This is the heart of the Empire, and the other organs are in an equally bad way.”

“No, I mean another street gone wrong,” and he said heavily and quietly, “but as I suppose that doesn’t explain much to you, I think I shall have to tell you the story. I do so with all the less responsibility, because I know you won’t believe it. For forty years of my life I invariably left my office, which is in Leadenhall Street, at half-past five in the afternoon, taking with me an umbrella in the right hand and a bag in the left hand. For forty years two months and four days I passed out of the side office door, walked down the street on the left-hand side, took the first turning to the left and the third to the right, from where I bought an evening paper, followed the road on the right-hand side round two obtuse angles, and came out just outside a Metropolitan station, where I took a train home. For forty years two months and four days I fulfilled this course by accumulated habit: it was not a long street that I traversed, and it took me about four and a half minutes to do it. After forty years two months and four days, on the fifth day I went out in the same manner, with my umbrella in the right hand and my bag in the left, and I began to notice that walking along the familiar street tired me
somewhat more than usual; and when I turned it I was convinced that I had
turned down the wrong one. For now the street shot up quite a steep slant, such
as one only sees in the hilly parts of London, and in this part there were no hills
at all. Yet it was not the wrong street; the name written on it was the same; the
shuttered shops were the same; the lamp-posts and the whole look of the
perspective was the same; only it was tilted upwards like a lid. Forgetting any
trouble about breathlessness or fatigue I ran furiously forward, and reached the
second of my accustomed turnings, which ought to bring me almost within sight
of the station. And as I turned that corner I nearly fell on the pavement. For now
the street went up straight in front of my face like a steep staircase or the side of
a pyramid. There was not for miles round that place so much as a slope like that
of Ludgate Hill. And this was a slope like that of the Matterhorn. The whole
street had lifted itself like a single wave, and yet every speck and detail of it was
the same, and I saw in the high distance, as at the top of an Alpine pass, picked
out in pink letters the name over my paper shop.

“I ran on and on blindly now, passing all the shops and coming to a part of the
road where there was a long grey row of private houses. I had, I know not why,
an irrational feeling that I was a long iron bridge in empty space. An impulse
seized me, and I pulled up the iron trap of a coal-hole. Looking down through it I
saw empty space and the stairs.

“When I looked up again a man was standing in his front garden, having
apparently come out of his house; he was leaning over the railings and gazing at
me. We were all alone on that nightmare road; his face was in shadow; his dress
was dark and ordinary; but when I saw him standing so perfectly still I knew
somehow that he was not of this world. And the stars behind his head were
larger and fiercer than ought to be endured by the eyes of men.

“If you are a kind angel,’ I said, ‘or a wise devil, or have anything in common
with mankind, tell me what is this street possessed of devils.’

“After a long silence he said, ‘What do you say that it is?’

“It is Bumpton Street, of course,’ I snapped. ‘It goes to Oldgate Station.’

“Yes,’ he admitted gravely; ‘it goes there sometimes. Just now, however, it is
going to heaven.’

“To heaven?’ I said. ‘Why?’

“It is going to heaven for justice,’ he replied. ‘You must have treated it badly.
Remember always that there is one thing that cannot be endured by anybody or
anything. That one unendurable thing is to be overworked and also neglected.
For instance, you can overwork women—everybody does. But you can’t neglect
women—I defy you to. At the same time, you can neglect tramps and gypsies and all the apparent refuse of the State so long as you do not overwork it. But no beast of the field, no horse, no dog can endure long to be asked to do more than his work and yet have less than his honour. It is the same with streets. You have worked this street to death, and yet you have never remembered its existence. If you had a healthy democracy, even of pagans, they would have hung this street with garlands and given it the name of a god. Then it would have gone quietly. But at last the street has grown tired of your tireless insolence; and it is bucking and rearing its head to heaven. Have you never sat on a bucking horse?"

"I looked at the long grey street, and for a moment it seemed to me to be exactly like the long grey neck of a horse flung up to heaven. But in a moment my sanity returned, and I said, ‘But this is all nonsense. Streets go to the place they have to go. A street must always go to its end.’"

"Why do you think so of a street?’ he asked, standing very still.

‘Because I have always seen it do the same thing,’ I replied, in reasonable anger. ‘Day after day, year after year, it has always gone to Oldgate Station; day after . . . ‘

“I stopped, for he had flung up his head with the fury of the road in revolt.

‘And you?’ he cried terribly. ‘What do you think the road thinks of you? Does the road think you are alive? Are you alive? Day after day, year after year, you have gone to Oldgate Station. . . . ‘ Since then I have respected the things called inanimate."

And bowing slightly to the mustard-pot, the man in the restaurant withdrew.
XXXVII

THE SHOP OF GHOSTS

Nearly all the best and most precious things in the universe you can get for a halfpenny. I make an exception, of course, of the sun, the moon, the earth, people, stars, thunderstorms, and such trifles. You can get them for nothing. Also I make an exception of another thing, which I am not allowed to mention in this paper, and of which the lowest price is a penny halfpenny. But the general principle will be at once apparent. In the street behind me, for instance, you can now get a ride on an electric tram for a halfpenny. To be on an electric tram is to be on a flying castle in a fairy tale. You can get quite a large number of brightly coloured sweets for a halfpenny. Also you can get the chance of reading this article for a halfpenny; along, of course, with other and irrelevant matter.

But if you want to see what a vast and bewildering array of valuable things you can get at a halfpenny each you should do as I was doing last night. I was gluing my nose against the glass of a very small and dimly lit toy shop in one of the greyest and leanest of the streets of Battersea. But dim as was that square of light, it was filled (as a child once said to me) with all the colours God ever made. Those toys of the poor were like the children who buy them; they were all dirty; but they were all bright. For my part, I think brightness more important than cleanliness; since the first is of the soul, and the second of the body. You must excuse me; I am a democrat; I know I am out of fashion in the modern world.

As I looked at that palace of pigmy wonders, at small green omnibuses, at small blue elephants, at small black dolls, and small red Noah’s arks, I must have fallen into some sort of unnatural trance. That lit shop-window became like the brilliantly lit stage when one is watching some highly coloured comedy. I forgot the grey houses and the grimy people behind me as one forgets the dark galleries and the dim crowds at a theatre. It seemed as if the little objects behind the glass were small, not because they were toys, but because they were objects far away. The green omnibus was really a green omnibus, a green Bayswater omnibus, passing across some huge desert on its ordinary way to Bayswater. The blue elephant was no longer blue with paint; he was blue with distance. The black doll was really a negro relieved against passionate tropic foliage in the land where every weed is flaming and only man is black. The red Noah’s ark
was really the enormous ship of earthly salvation riding on the rain-swollen sea, red in the first morning of hope.

Every one, I suppose, knows such stunning instants of abstraction, such brilliant blanks in the mind. In such moments one can see the face of one’s own best friend as an unmeaning pattern of spectacles or moustaches. They are commonly marked by the two signs of the slowness of their growth and the suddenness of their termination. The return to real thinking is often as abrupt as bumping into a man. Very often indeed (in my case) it is bumping into a man. But in any case the awakening is always emphatic and, generally speaking, it is always complete. Now, in this case, I did come back with a shock of sanity to the consciousness that I was, after all, only staring into a dingy little toy-shop; but in some strange way the mental cure did not seem to be final. There was still in my mind an unmanageable something that told me that I had strayed into some odd atmosphere, or that I had already done some odd thing. I felt as if I had worked a miracle or committed a sin. It was as if I had at any rate, stepped across some border in the soul.

To shake off this dangerous and dreamy sense I went into the shop and tried to buy wooden soldiers. The man in the shop was very old and broken, with confused white hair covering his head and half his face, hair so startlingly white that it looked almost artificial. Yet though he was senile and even sick, there was nothing of suffering in his eyes; he looked rather as if he were gradually falling asleep in a not unkindly decay. He gave me the wooden soldiers, but when I put down the money he did not at first seem to see it; then he blinked at it feebly, and then he pushed it feebly away.

“No, no,” he said vaguely. “I never have. I never have. We are rather old-fashioned here.”

“Not taking money,” I replied, “seems to me more like an uncommonly new fashion than an old one.”

“I never have,” said the old man, blinking and blowing his nose; “I’ve always given presents. I’m too old to stop.”

“Good heavens!” I said. “What can you mean? Why, you might be Father Christmas.”

“I am Father Christmas,” he said apologetically, and blew his nose again.

The lamps could not have been lighted yet in the street outside. At any rate, I could see nothing against the darkness but the shining shop-window. There were no sounds of steps or voices in the street; I might have strayed into some new and sunless world. But something had cut the chords of common sense, and I
could not feel even surprise except sleepily. Something made me say, “You look ill, Father Christmas.”

“I am dying,” he said.

I did not speak, and it was he who spoke again.

“All the new people have left my shop. I cannot understand it. They seem to object to me on such curious and inconsistent sort of grounds, these scientific men, and these innovators. They say that I give people superstitions and make them too visionary; they say I give people sausages and make them too coarse. They say my heavenly parts are too heavenly; they say my earthly parts are too earthly; I don’t know what they want, I’m sure. How can heavenly things be too heavenly, or earthly things too earthly? How can one be too good, or too jolly? I don’t understand. But I understand one thing well enough. These modern people are living and I am dead.”

“You may be dead,” I replied. “You ought to know. But as for what they are doing, do not call it living.”

A silence fell suddenly between us which I somehow expected to be unbroken. But it had not fallen for more than a few seconds when, in the utter stillness, I distinctly heard a very rapid step coming nearer and nearer along the street. The next moment a figure flung itself into the shop and stood framed in the doorway. He wore a large white hat tilted back as if in impatience; he had tight black old-fashioned pantaloons, a gaudy old-fashioned stock and waistcoat, and an old fantastic coat. He had large, wide-open, luminous eyes like those of an arresting actor; he had a pale, nervous face, and a fringe of beard. He took in the shop and the old man in a look that seemed literally a flash and uttered the exclamation of a man utterly staggered.

“Good lord!” he cried out; “it can’t be you! It isn’t you! I came to ask where your grave was.”

“I’m not dead yet, Mr. Dickens,” said the old gentleman, with a feeble smile; “but I’m dying,” he hastened to add reassuringly.

“But, dash it all, you were dying in my time,” said Mr. Charles Dickens with animation; “and you don’t look a day older.”

“I’ve felt like this for a long time,” said Father Christmas.

Mr. Dickens turned his back and put his head out of the door into the darkness.

“Dick,” he roared at the top of his voice; “he’s still alive.”

Another shadow darkened the doorway, and a much larger and more full-blooded gentleman in an enormous periwig came in, fanning his flushed face
with a military hat of the cut of Queen Anne. He carried his head well back like a soldier, and his hot face had even a look of arrogance, which was suddenly contradicted by his eyes, which were literally as humble as a dog’s. His sword made a great clatter, as if the shop were too small for it.

“Indeed,” said Sir Richard Steele, “’tis a most prodigious matter, for the man was dying when I wrote about Sir Roger de Coverley and his Christmas Day.”

My senses were growing dimmer and the room darker. It seemed to be filled with newcomers.

“It hath ever been understood,” said a burly man, who carried his head humorously and obstinately a little on one side—I think he was Ben Jonson—“It hath ever been understood, consule Jacobo, under our King James and her late Majesty, that such good and hearty customs were fallen sick, and like to pass from the world. This grey beard most surely was no lustier when I knew him than now.”

And I also thought I heard a green-clad man, like Robin Hood, say in some mixed Norman French, “But I saw the man dying.”

“I have felt like this a long time,” said Father Christmas, in his feeble way again.

Mr. Charles Dickens suddenly leant across to him.

“Since when?” he asked. “Since you were born?”

“Yes,” said the old man, and sank shaking into a chair. “I have been always dying.”

Mr. Dickens took off his hat with a flourish like a man calling a mob to rise.

“I understand it now,” he cried, “you will never die.”
THE BALLADE OF A STRANGE TOWN

My friend and I, in fooling about Flanders, fell into a fixed affection for the town of Mechlin or Malines. Our rest there was so restful that we almost felt it as a home, and hardly strayed out of it.

We sat day after day in the market-place, under little trees growing in wooden tubs, and looked up at the noble converging lines of the Cathedral tower, from which the three riders from Ghent, in the poem, heard the bell which told them they were not too late. But we took as much pleasure in the people, in the little boys with open, flat Flemish faces and fur collars round their necks, making them look like burgomasters; or the women, whose prim, oval faces, hair strained tightly off the temples, and mouths at once hard, meek, and humorous, exactly reproduced the late mediaeval faces in Memling and Van Eyck.

But one afternoon, as it happened, my friend rose from under his little tree, and pointing to a sort of toy train that was puffing smoke in one corner of the clear square, suggested that we should go by it. We got into the little train, which was meant really to take the peasants and their vegetables to and fro from their fields beyond the town, and the official came round to give us tickets. We asked him what place we should get to if we paid fivepence. The Belgians are not a romantic people, and he asked us (with a lamentable mixture of Flemish coarseness and French rationalism) where we wanted to go.

We explained that we wanted to go to fairyland, and the only question was whether we could get there for fivepence. At last, after a great deal of international misunderstanding (for he spoke French in the Flemish and we in the English manner), he told us that fivepence would take us to a place which I have never seen written down, but which when spoken sounded like the word “Waterloo” pronounced by an intoxicated patriot; I think it was Waerlowe.

We clasped our hands and said it was the place we had been seeking from boyhood, and when we had got there we descended with promptitude.

For a moment I had a horrible fear that it really was the field of Waterloo; but I was comforted by remembering that it was in quite a different part of Belgium. It was a cross-roads, with one cottage at the corner, a perspective of tall trees like Hobbema’s “Avenue,” and beyond only the infinite flat chess-board of the little fields. It was the scene of peace and prosperity; but I must confess that my
friend’s first action was to ask the man when there would be another train back to Mechlin. The man stated that there would be a train back in exactly one hour. We walked up the avenue, and when we were nearly half an hour’s walk away it began to rain.

We arrived back at the cross-roads sodden and dripping, and, finding the train waiting, climbed into it with some relief. The officer on this train could speak nothing but Flemish, but he understood the name Mechlin, and indicated that when we came to Mechlin Station he would put us down, which, after the right interval of time, he did.

We got down, under a steady downpour, evidently on the edge of Mechlin, though the features could not easily be recognised through the grey screen of the rain. I do not generally agree with those who find rain depressing. A shower-bath is not depressing; it is rather startling. And if it is exciting when a man throws a pail of water over you, why should it not also be exciting when the gods throw many pails? But on this soaking afternoon, whether it was the dull sky-line of the Netherlands or the fact that we were returning home without any adventure, I really did think things a trifle dreary. As soon as we could creep under the shelter of a street we turned into a little café, kept by one woman. She was incredibly old, and she spoke no French. There we drank black coffee and what was called “cognac fine.” “Cognac fine” were the only two French words used in the establishment, and they were not true. At least, the fineness (perhaps by its very ethereal delicacy) escaped me. After a little my friend, who was more restless than I, got up and went out, to see if the rain had stopped and if we could at once stroll back to our hotel by the station. I sat finishing my coffee in a colourless mood, and listening to the unremitting rain.

Suddenly the door burst open, and my friend appeared, transfigured and frantic.

“Get up!” he cried, waving his hands wildly. “Get up! We’re in the wrong town! We’re not in Mechlin at all. Mechlin is ten miles, twenty miles off—God knows what! We’re somewhere near Antwerp.”

“What!” I cried, leaping from my seat, and sending the furniture flying. “Then all is well, after all! Poetry only hid her face for an instant behind a cloud. Positively for a moment I was feeling depressed because we were in the right town. But if we are in the wrong town—why, we have our adventure after all! If we are in the wrong town, we are in the right place.”

I rushed out into the rain, and my friend followed me somewhat more grimly. We discovered we were in a town called Lierre, which seemed to consist chiefly
of bankrupt pastry cooks, who sold lemonade.

“This is the peak of our whole poetic progress!” I cried enthusiastically. “We must do something, something sacramental and commemorative! We cannot sacrifice an ox, and it would be a bore to build a temple. Let us write a poem.”

With but slight encouragement, I took out an old envelope and one of those pencils that turn bright violet in water. There was plenty of water about, and the violet ran down the paper, symbolising the rich purple of that romantic hour. I began, choosing the form of an old French ballade; it is the easiest because it is the most restricted—“Can Man to Mount Olympus rise, And fancy Primrose Hill the scene? Can a man walk in Paradise And think he is in Turnham Green? And could I take you for Malines, Not knowing the nobler thing you were? O Pearl of all the plain, and queen, The lovely city of Lierre. “Through memory’s mist in glimmering guise Shall shine your streets of sloppy sheen. And wet shall grow my dreaming eyes, To think how wet my boots have been Now if I die or shoot a Dean—”

Here I broke off to ask my friend whether he thought it expressed a more wild calamity to shoot a Dean or to be a Dean. But he only turned up his coat collar, and I felt that for him the muse had folded her wings. I rewrote—“Now if I die a Rural Dean, Or rob a bank I do not care, Or turn a Tory. I have seen The lovely city of Lierre.”

“The next line,” I resumed, warming to it; but my friend interrupted me.

“The next line,” he said somewhat harshly, “will be a railway line. We can get back to Mechlin from here, I find, though we have to change twice. I dare say I should think this jolly romantic but for the weather. Adventure is the champagne of life, but I prefer my champagne and my adventures dry. Here is the station.”

We did not speak again until we had left Lierre, in its sacred cloud of rain, and were coming to Mechlin, under a clearer sky, that even made one think of stars. Then I leant forward and said to my friend in a low voice—”I have found out everything. We have come to the wrong star.”

He stared his query, and I went on eagerly: “That is what makes life at once so splendid and so strange. We are in the wrong world. When I thought that was the right town, it bored me; when I knew it was wrong, I was happy. So the false optimism, the modern happiness, tires us because it tells us we fit into this world. The true happiness is that we don’t fit. We come from somewhere else. We have lost our way.”

He silently nodded, staring out of the window, but whether I had impressed or only fatigued him I could not tell. “This,” I added, “is suggested in the last verse
of a fine poem you have grossly neglected—“‘Happy is he and more than wise
Who sees with wondering eyes and clean The world through all the grey
disguise Of sleep and custom in between. Yes; we may pass the heavenly screen,
But shall we know when we are there? Who know not what these dead stones
mean, The lovely city of Lierre.’”

Here the train stopped abruptly. And from Mechlin church steeple we heard
the half-chime: and Joris broke silence with “No bally HORS D’OEUVRES for
me: I shall get on to something solid at once.”

L’Envoy Prince, wide your Empire spreads, I ween, Yet happier is that
moistened Mayor, Who drinks her cognac far from fine, The lovely city of
Lierre.
THE MYSTERY OF A PAGEANT

Once upon a time, it seems centuries ago, I was prevailed on to take a small part in one of those historical processions or pageants which happened to be fashionable in or about the year 1909. And since I tend, like all who are growing old, to re-enter the remote past as a paradise or playground, I disinter a memory which may serve to stand among those memories of small but strange incidents with which I have sometimes filled this column. The thing has really some of the dark qualities of a detective-story; though I suppose that Sherlock Holmes himself could hardly unravel it now, when the scent is so old and cold and most of the actors, doubtless, long dead.

This old pageant included a series of figures from the eighteenth century, and I was told that I was just like Dr. Johnson. Seeing that Dr. Johnson was heavily seamed with small-pox, had a waistcoat all over gravy, snorted and rolled as he walked, and was probably the ugliest man in London, I mention this identification as a fact and not as a vaunt. I had nothing to do with the arrangement; and such fleeting suggestions as I made were not taken so seriously as they might have been. I requested that a row of posts be erected across the lawn, so that I might touch all of them but one, and then go back and touch that. Failing this, I felt that the least they could do was to have twenty-five cups of tea stationed at regular intervals along the course, each held by a Mrs. Thrale in full costume. My best constructive suggestion was the most harshly rejected of all. In front of me in the procession walked the great Bishop Berkeley, the man who turned the tables on the early materialists by maintaining that matter itself possibly does not exist. Dr. Johnson, you will remember, did not like such bottomless fancies as Berkeley’s, and kicked a stone with his foot, saying, “I refute him so!” Now (as I pointed out) kicking a stone would not make the metaphysical quarrel quite clear; besides, it would hurt. But how picturesque and perfect it would be if I moved across the ground in the symbolic attitude of kicking Bishop Berkeley! How complete an allegoric group; the great transcendentalist walking with his head among the stars, but behind him the avenging realist pedro claudio, with uplifted foot. But I must not take up space with these forgotten frivolities; we old men grow too garrulous in talking of the distant past.
This story scarcely concerns me either in my real or my assumed character. Suffice it to say that the procession took place at night in a large garden and by torchlight (so remote is the date), that the garden was crowded with Puritans, monks, and men-at-arms, and especially with early Celtic saints smoking pipes, and with elegant Renaissance gentlemen talking Cockney. Suffice it to say, or rather it is needless to say, that I got lost. I wandered away into some dim corner of that dim shrubbery, where there was nothing to do except tumbling over tent ropes, and I began almost to feel like my prototype, and to share his horror of solitude and hatred of a country life.

In this detachment and dilemma I saw another man in a white wig advancing across this forsaken stretch of lawn; a tall, lean man, who stooped in his long black robes like a stooping eagle. When I thought he would pass me, he stopped before my face, and said, “Dr. Johnson, I think. I am Paley.”

“Sir,” I said, “you used to guide men to the beginnings of Christianity. If you can guide me now to wherever this infernal thing begins you will perform a yet higher and harder function.”

His costume and style were so perfect that for the instant I really thought he was a ghost. He took no notice of my flippancy, but, turning his black-robed back on me, led me through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways, until we came out into the glare of gaslight and laughing men in masquerade, and I could easily laugh at myself.

And there, you will say, was an end of the matter. I am (you will say) naturally obtuse, cowardly, and mentally deficient. I was, moreover, unused to pageants; I felt frightened in the dark and took a man for a spectre whom, in the light, I could recognise as a modern gentleman in a masquerade dress. No; far from it. That spectral person was my first introduction to a special incident which has never been explained and which still lays its finger on my nerve.

I mixed with the men of the eighteenth century; and we fooled as one does at a fancy-dress ball. There was Burke as large as life and a great deal better looking. There was Cowper much larger than life; he ought to have been a little man in a night-cap, with a cat under one arm and a spaniel under the other. As it was, he was a magnificent person, and looked more like the Master of Ballantrae than Cowper. I persuaded him at last to the night-cap, but never, alas, to the cat and dog. When I came the next night Burke was still the same beautiful improvement upon himself; Cowper was still weeping for his dog and cat and would not be comforted; Bishop Berkeley was still waiting to be kicked in the interests of philosophy. In short, I met all my old friends but one. Where was Paley? I had
been mystically moved by the man’s presence; I was moved more by his absence. At last I saw advancing towards us across the twilight garden a little man with a large book and a bright attractive face. When he came near enough he said, in a small, clear voice, “I’m Paley.” The thing was quite natural, of course; the man was ill and had sent a substitute. Yet somehow the contrast was a shock.

By the next night I had grown quite friendly with my four or five colleagues; I had discovered what is called a mutual friend with Berkeley and several points of difference with Burke. Cowper, I think it was, who introduced me to a friend of his, a fresh face, square and sturdy, framed in a white wig. “This,” he explained, “is my friend So-and-So. He’s Paley.” I looked round at all the faces by this time fixed and familiar; I studied them; I counted them; then I bowed to the third Paley as one bows to necessity. So far the thing was all within the limits of coincidence. It certainly seemed odd that this one particular cleric should be so varying and elusive. It was singular that Paley, alone among men, should swell and shrink and alter like a phantom, while all else remained solid. But the thing was explicable; two men had been ill and there was an end of it; only I went again the next night, and a clear-coloured elegant youth with powdered hair bounded up to me, and told me with boyish excitement that he was Paley.

For the next twenty-four hours I remained in the mental condition of the modern world. I mean the condition in which all natural explanations have broken down and no supernatural explanation has been established. My bewilderment had reached to boredom when I found myself once more in the colour and clatter of the pageant, and I was all the more pleased because I met an old school-fellow, and we mutually recognised each other under our heavy clothes and hoary wigs. We talked about all those great things for which literature is too small and only life large enough; red-hot memories and those gigantic details which make up the characters of men. I heard all about the friends he had lost sight of and those he had kept in sight; I heard about his profession, and asked at last how he came into the pageant.

“The fact is,” he said, “a friend of mine asked me, just for to-night, to act a chap called Paley; I don’t know who he was. . . .”

“No, by thunder!” I said, “nor does anyone.”

This was the last blow, and the next night passed like a dream. I scarcely noticed the slender, sprightly, and entirely new figure which fell into the ranks in the place of Paley, so many times deceased. What could it mean? Why was the giddy Paley unfaithful among the faithful found? Did these perpetual changes
prove the popularity or the unpopularity of being Paley? Was it that no human being could support being Paley for one night and live till morning? Or was it that the gates were crowded with eager throngs of the British public thirsting to be Paley, who could only be let in one at a time? Or is there some ancient vendetta against Paley? Does some secret society of Deists still assassinate any one who adopts the name?

I cannot conjecture further about this true tale of mystery; and that for two reasons. First, the story is so true that I have had to put a lie into it. Every word of this narrative is veracious, except the one word Paley. And second, because I have got to go into the next room and dress up as Dr. Johnson.
VARIED TYPES

G. K. CHESTERTON
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INDEX

## VARIED TYPES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table of Contents</th>
<th>Charlotte Brontë</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>William Morris and His School</td>
<td>Optimism of Byron</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pope and the Art of Satire</td>
<td>Francis Rostand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles II</td>
<td>Stevenson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Carlyle</td>
<td>Tolstoy and the Cult of Simplicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savonarola</td>
<td>The Position of Sir Walter Scott</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfred the Great</td>
<td>Bret Harte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maeterlinck</td>
<td>Ruskin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen Victoria</td>
<td>The German Emperor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennyson</td>
<td>Elizabeth Barrett Browning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Charlotte Brontë

Objection is often raised against realistic biography because it reveals so much that is important and even sacred about a man’s life. The real objection to it will rather be found in the fact that it reveals about a man the precise points which are unimportant. It reveals and asserts and insists on exactly those things in a man’s life of which the man himself is wholly unconscious; his exact class in society, the circumstances of his ancestry, the place of his present location. These are things which do not, properly speaking, ever arise before the human vision. They do not occur to a man’s mind; it may be said, with almost equal truth, that they do not occur in a man’s life. A man no more thinks about himself as the inhabitant of the third house in a row of Brixton villas than he thinks about himself as a strange animal with two legs. What a man’s name was, what his income was, whom he married, where he lived, these are not sanctities; they are irrelevancies.

A very strong case of this is the case of the Brontës. The Brontë is in the position of the mad lady in a country village; her eccentricities form an endless source of innocent conversation to that exceedingly mild and bucolic circle, the literary world. The truly glorious gossips of literature, like Mr. Augustine Birrell and Mr. Andrew Lang, never tire of collecting all the glimpses and anecdotes and sermons and side-lights and sticks and straws which will go to make a Brontë museum. They are the most personally discussed of all Victorian authors, and the limelight of biography has left few darkened corners in the dark old Yorkshire house. And yet the whole of this biographical investigation, though natural and picturesque, is not wholly suitable to the Brontës. For the Brontë genius was above all things deputed to assert the supreme unimportance of externals. Up to that point truth had always been conceived as existing more or less in the novel of manners. Charlotte Brontë electrified the world by showing that an infinitely older and more elemental truth could be conveyed by a novel in which no person, good or bad, had any manners at all. Her work represents the first great assertion that the humdrum life of modern civilisation is a disguise as tawdry and deceptive as the costume of a ball masqué. She showed that abysses may exist inside a governess and eternities inside a manufacturer; her heroine is the commonplace spinster, with the dress of merino and the soul of flame. It is significant to notice that Charlotte Brontë, following consciously or unconsciously the great trend of her genius, was the first to take away from the
heroine not only the artificial gold and diamonds of wealth and fashion, but even
the natural gold and diamonds of physical beauty and grace. Instinctively she felt
that the whole of the exterior must be made ugly that the whole of the interior
might be made sublime. She chose the ugliest of women in the ugliest of
centuries, and revealed within them all the hells and heavens of Dante.

It may, therefore, I think, be legitimately said that the externals of the Brontës’
life, though singularly picturesque in themselves, matter less than the externals
of almost any other writers. It is interesting to know whether Jane Austen had
any knowledge of the lives of the officers and women of fashion whom she
introduced into her masterpieces. It is interesting to know whether Dickens had
ever seen a shipwreck or been inside a workhouse. For in these authors much of
the conviction is conveyed, not always by adherence to facts, but always by
grasp of them. But the whole aim and purport and meaning of the work of the
Brontës is that the most futile thing in the whole universe is fact. Such a story as
“Jane Eyre” is in itself so monstrous a fable that it ought to be excluded from a
book of fairy tales. The characters do not do what they ought to do, nor what
they would do, nor it might be said, such is the insanity of the atmosphere, not
even what they intend to do. The conduct of Rochester is so primevally and
superhumanly caddish that Bret Harte in his admirable travesty scarcely
exaggerated it. “Then, resuming his usual manner, he threw his boots at my head
and withdrew,” does perhaps reach to something resembling caricature. The
scene in which Rochester dresses up as an old gipsy has something in it which is
really not to be found in any other branch of art, except in the end of the
pantomime, where the Emperor turns into a pantaloon. Yet, despite this vast
nightmare of illusion and morbidity and ignorance of the world, “Jane Eyre” is
perhaps the truest book that was ever written. Its essential truth to life sometimes
makes one catch one’s breath. For it is not true to manners, which are constantly
false, or to facts, which are almost always false; it is true to the only existing
thing which is true, emotion, the irreducible minimum, the indestructible germ.
It would not matter a single straw if a Brontë story were a hundred times more
moonstruck and improbable than “Jane Eyre,” or a hundred times more
moonstruck and improbable than “Wuthering Heights.” It would not matter if
George Read stood on this head, and Mrs. Read rode on a dragon, if Fairfax
Rochester had four eyes and St. John Rivers three legs, the story would still
remain the truest story in the world. The typical Brontë character is, indeed, a
kind of monster. Everything in him except the essential is dislocated. His hands
are on his legs and his feet on his arms, his nose is above his eyes, but his heart
is in the right place.

The great and abiding truth for which the Brontë cycle of fiction stands is a certain most important truth about the enduring spirit of youth, the truth of the near kinship between terror and joy. The Brontë heroine, dingily dressed, badly educated, hampered by a humiliating inexperience, a kind of ugly innocence, is yet, by the very fact of her solitude and her gaucherie, full of the greatest delight that is possible to a human being, the delight of expectation, the delight of an ardent and flamboyant ignorance. She serves to show how futile it is of humanity to suppose that pleasure can be attained chiefly by putting on evening dress every evening, and having a box at the theatre every first night. It is not the man of pleasure who has pleasure; it is not the man of the world who appreciates the world. The man who has learnt to do all conventional things perfectly has at the same time learnt to do them prosaically. It is the awkward man, whose evening dress does not fit him, whose gloves will not go on, whose compliments will not come off, who is really full of the ancient ecstasies of youth. He is frightened enough of society actually to enjoy his triumphs. He has that element of fear which is one of the eternal ingredients of joy. This spirit is the central spirit of the Brontë novel. It is the epic of the exhilaration of the shy man. As such it is of incalculable value in our time, of which the curse is that it does not take joy reverently because it does not take it fearfully. The shabby and inconspicuous governess of Charlotte Brontë, with the small outlook and the small creed, had more commerce with the awful and elemental forces which drive the world than a legion of lawless minor poets. She approached the universe with real simplicity, and, consequently, with real fear and delight. She was, so to speak, shy before the multitude of the stars, and in this she had possessed herself of the only force which can prevent enjoyment being as black and barren as routine. The faculty of being shy is the first and the most delicate of the powers of enjoyment. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of pleasure.

Upon the whole, therefore, I think it may justifiably be said that the dark wild youth of the Brontës in their dark wild Yorkshire home has been somewhat exaggerated as a necessary factor in their work and their conception. The emotions with which they dealt were universal emotions, emotions of the morning of existence, the springtide joy and the springtide terror. Every one of us as a boy or girl has had some midnight dream of nameless obstacle and unutterable menace, in which there was, under whatever imbecile forms, all the deadly stress and panic of “Wuthering Heights.” Every one of us has had a day-dream of our own potential destiny not one atom more reasonable than “Jane
Eyre.” And the truth which the Brontës came to tell us is the truth that many waters cannot quench love, and that suburban respectability cannot touch or damp a secret enthusiasm. Clapham, like every other earthly city, is built upon a volcano. Thousands of people go to and fro in the wilderness of bricks and mortar, earning mean wages, professing a mean religion, wearing a mean attire, thousands of women who have never found any expression for their exaltation or their tragedy but to go on working harder and yet harder at dull and automatic employments, at scolding children or stitching shirts. But out of all these silent ones one suddenly became articulate, and spoke a resonant testimony, and her name was Charlotte Brontë. Spreading around us upon every side to-day like a huge and radiating geometrical figure are the endless branches of the great city. There are times when we are almost stricken crazy, as well we may be, by the multiplicity of those appalling perspectives, the frantic arithmetic of that unthinkable population. But this thought of ours is in truth nothing but a fancy. There are no chains of houses; there are no crowds of men. The colossal diagram of streets and houses is an illusion, the opium dream of a speculative builder. Each of these men is supremely solitary and supremely important to himself. Each of these houses stands in the centre of the world. There is no single house of all those millions which has not seemed to someone at some time the heart of all things and the end of travel.
WILLIAM MORRIS AND HIS SCHOOL

It is proper enough that the unveiling of the bust of William Morris should approximate to a public festival, for while there have been many men of genius in the Victorian era more despotic than he, there have been none so representative. He represents not only that rapacious hunger for beauty which has now for the first time become a serious problem in the healthy life of humanity, but he represents also that honourable instinct for finding beauty in common necessities of workmanship which gives it a stronger and more bony structure. The time has passed when William Morris was conceived to be irrelevant to be described as a designer of wall-papers. If Morris had been a hatter instead of a decorator, we should have become gradually and painfully conscious of an improvement in our hats. If he had been a tailor, we should have suddenly found our frock-coats trailing on the ground with the grandeur of mediaeval raiment. If he had been a shoemaker, we should have found, with no little consternation, our shoes gradually approximating to the antique sandal. As a hairdresser, he would have invented some massing of the hair worthy to be the crown of Venus; as an ironmonger, his nails would have had some noble pattern, fit to be the nails of the Cross.

The limitations of William Morris, whatever they were, were not the limitations of common decoration. It is true that all his work, even his literary work, was in some sense decorative, had in some degree the qualities of a splendid wall-paper. His characters, his stories, his religious and political views, had, in the most emphatic sense, length and breadth without thickness. He seemed really to believe that men could enjoy a perfectly flat felicity. He made no account of the unexplored and explosive possibilities of human nature, of the unnameable terrors, and the yet more unnameable hopes. So long as a man was graceful in every circumstance, so long as he had the inspiring consciousness that the chestnut colour of his hair was relieved against the blue forest a mile behind, he would be serenely happy. So he would be, no doubt, if he were really fitted for a decorative existence; if he were a piece of exquisitely coloured cardboard.

But although Morris took little account of the terrible solidity of human nature—took little account, so to speak, of human figures in the round, it is altogether unfair to represent him as a mere æsthete. He perceived a great public necessity and fulfilled it heroically. The difficulty with which he grappled was
one so immense that we shall have to be separated from it by many centuries before we can really judge of it. It was the problem of the elaborate and deliberate ugliness of the most self-conscious of centuries. Morris at least saw the absurdity of the thing. He felt it was monstrous that the modern man, who was pre-eminently capable of realising the strangest and most contradictory beauties, who could feel at once the fiery aureole of the ascetic and the colossal calm of the Hellenic god, should himself, by a farcical bathos, be buried in a black coat, and hidden under a chimney-pot hat. He could not see why the harmless man who desired to be an artist in raiment should be condemned to be, at best, a black and white artist. It is indeed difficult to account for the clinging curse of ugliness which blights everything brought forth by the most prosperous of centuries. In all created nature there is not, perhaps, anything so completely ugly as a pillar-box. Its shape is the most unmeaning of shapes, its height and thickness just neutralising each other; its colour is the most repulsive of colours—a fat and soulless red, a red without a touch of blood or fire, like the scarlet of dead men’s sins. Yet there is no reason whatever why such hideousness should possess an object full of civic dignity, the treasure-house of a thousand secrets, the fortress of a thousand souls. If the old Greeks had had such an institution, we may be sure that it would have been surmounted by the severe, but graceful, figure of the god of letter-writing. If the mediæval Christians has possessed it, it would have had a niche filled with the golden aureole of St. Rowland of the Postage Stamps. As it is, there it stands at all our street-corners, disguising one of the most beautiful of ideas under one of the most preposterous of forms. It is useless to deny that the miracles of science have not been such an incentive to art and imagination as were the miracles of religion. If men in the twelfth century had been told that the lightning had been driven for leagues underground, and had dragged at its destroying tail loads of laughing human beings, and if they had then been told that the people alluded to this pulverising portent chirpily as “The Twopenny Tube,” they would have called down the fire of Heaven on us as a race of half-witted atheists. Probably they would have been quite right.

This clear and fine perception of what may be called the anæsthetic element in the Victorian era was, undoubtedly, the work of a great reformer: it requires a fine effort of the imagination to see an evil that surrounds us on every side. The manner in which Morris carried out his crusade may, considering the circumstances, be called triumphant. Our carpets began to bloom under our feet like the meadows in spring, and our hitherto prosaic stools and sofas seemed
growing legs and arms at their own wild will. An element of freedom and rugged dignity came in with plain and strong ornaments of copper and iron. So delicate and universal has been the revolution in domestic art that almost every family in England has had its taste cunningly and treacherously improved, and if we look back at the early Victorian drawing-rooms it is only to realise the strange but essential truth that art, or human decoration, has, nine times out of ten in history, made things uglier than they were before, from the “coiffure” of a Papuan savage to the wall-paper of a British merchant in 1830.

But great and beneficent as was the æsthetic revolution of Morris, there was a very definite limit to it. It did not lie only in the fact that his revolution was in truth a reaction, though this was a partial explanation of his partial failure. When he was denouncing the dresses of modern ladies, “upholstered like arm-chairs instead of being draped like women,” as he forcibly expressed it, he would hold up for practical imitation the costumes and handicrafts of the Middle Ages. Further than this retrogressive and imitative movement he never seemed to go. Now, the men of the time of Chaucer had many evil qualities, but there was at least one exhibition of moral weakness they did not give. They would have laughed at the idea of dressing themselves in the manner of the bowmen at the battle of Senlac, or painting themselves an æsthetic blue, after the custom of the ancient Britons. They would not have called that a movement at all. Whatever was beautiful in their dress or manners sprang honestly and naturally out of the life they led and preferred to lead. And it may surely be maintained that any real advance in the beauty of modern dress must spring honestly and naturally out of the life we lead and prefer to lead. We are not altogether without hints and hopes of such a change, in the growing orthodoxy of rough and athletic costumes. But if this cannot be, it will be no substitute or satisfaction to turn life into an interminable historical fancy-dress ball.

But the limitation of Morris’s work lay deeper than this. We may best suggest it by a method after his own heart. Of all the various works he performed, none, perhaps, was so splendidly and solidly valuable as his great protest for the fables and superstitions of mankind. He has the supreme credit of showing that the fairy tales contain the deepest truth of the earth, the real record of men’s feeling for things. Trifling details may be inaccurate, Jack may not have climbed up so tall a beanstalk, or killed so tall a giant; but it is not such things that make a story false; it is a far different class of things that makes every modern book of history as false as the father of lies; ingenuity, self-consciousness, hypocritical impartiality. It appears to us that of all the fairy-tales none contains so vital a
moral truth as the old story, existing in many forms, of Beauty and the Beast. There is written, with all the authority of a human scripture, the eternal and essential truth that until we love a thing in all its ugliness we cannot make it beautiful. This was the weak point in William Morris as a reformer: that he sought to reform modern life, and that he hated modern life instead of loving it. Modern London is indeed a beast, big enough and black enough to be the beast in Apocalypse, blazing with a million eyes, and roaring with a million voices. But unless the poet can love this fabulous monster as he is, can feel with some generous excitement his massive and mysterious joie-de-vivre, the vast scale of his iron anatomy and the beating of his thunderous heart, he cannot and will not change the beast into the fairy prince. Morris’s disadvantage was that he was not honestly a child of the nineteenth century: he could not understand its fascination, and consequently he could not really develop it. An abiding testimony to his tremendous personal influence in the aesthetic world is the vitality and recurrence of the Arts and Crafts Exhibitions, which are steeped in his personality like a chapel in that of a saint. If we look round at the exhibits in one of these aesthetic shows, we shall be struck by the large mass of modern objects that the decorative school leaves untouched. There is a noble instinct for giving the right touch of beauty to common and necessary things, but the things that are so touched are the ancient things, the things that always to some extent commended themselves to the lover of beauty. There are beautiful gates, beautiful fountains, beautiful cups, beautiful chairs, beautiful reading-desks. But there are no modern things made beautiful. There are no beautiful lamp-posts, beautiful letter-boxes, beautiful engines, beautiful bicycles. The spirit of William Morris has not seized hold of the century and made its humblest necessities beautiful. And this was because, with all his healthiness and energy, he had not the supreme courage to face the ugliness of things; Beauty shrank from the Beast and the fairy-tale had a different ending.

But herein, indeed, lay Morris’s deepest claim to the name of a great reformer: that he left his work incomplete. There is, perhaps, no better proof that a man is a mere meteor, merely barren and brilliant, than that his work is done perfectly. A man like Morris draws attention to needs he cannot supply. In after-years we may have perhaps a newer and more daring Arts and Crafts Exhibition. In it we shall not decorate the armour of the twelfth century, but the machinery of the twentieth. A lamp-post shall be wrought nobly in twisted iron, fit to hold the sanctity of fire. A pillar-box shall be carved with figures emblematical of the secrets of comradeship and the silence and honour of the State. Railway signals,
of all earthly things the most poetical, the coloured stars of life and death, shall be lamps of green and crimson worthy of their terrible and faithful service. But if ever this gradual and genuine movement of our time towards beauty—not backwards, but forwards—does truly come about, Morris will be the first prophet of it. Poet of the childhood of nations, craftsman in the new honesties of art, prophet of a merrier and wiser life, his full-blooded enthusiasm will be remembered when human life has once more assumed flamboyant colours and proved that this painful greenish grey of the æsthetic twilight in which we now live is, in spite of all the pessimists, not of the greyness of death, but the greyness of dawn.
OPTIMISM OF BYRON

Everything is against our appreciating the spirit and the age of Byron. The age that has just passed from us is always like a dream when we wake in the morning, a thing incredible and centuries away. And the world of Byron seems a sad and faded world, a weird and inhuman world, where men were romantic in whiskers, ladies lived, apparently, in bowers, and the very word has the sound of a piece of stage scenery. Roses and nightingales recur in their poetry with the monotonous elegance of a wall-paper pattern. The whole is like a revel of dead men, a revel with splendid vesture and half-witted faces.

But the more shrewdly and earnestly we study the histories of men, the less ready shall we be to make use of the word “artificial.” Nothing in the world has ever been artificial. Many customs, many dresses, many works of art are branded with artificiality because they exhibit vanity and self-consciousness: as if vanity were not a deep and elemental thing, like love and hate and the fear of death. Vanity may be found in darkling deserts, in the hermit and in the wild beasts that crawl around him. It may be good or evil, but assuredly it is not artificial: vanity is a voice out of the abyss.

The remarkable fact is, however, and it bears strongly on the present position of Byron, that when a thing is unfamiliar to us, when it is remote and the product of some other age or spirit, we think it not savage or terrible, but merely artificial. There are many instances of this: a fair one is the case of tropical plants and birds. When we see some of the monstrous and flamboyant blossoms that enrich the equatorial woods, we do not feel that they are conflagrations of nature; silent explosions of her frightful energy. We simply find it hard to believe that they are not wax flowers grown under a glass case. When we see some of the tropic birds, with their tiny bodies attached to gigantic beaks, we do not feel that they are freaks of the fierce humour of Creation. We almost believe that they are toys out of a child’s play-box, artificially carved and artificially coloured. So it is with the great convulsion of Nature which was known as Byronism. The volcano is not an extinct volcano now; it is the dead stick of a rocket. It is the remains not of a natural but of an artificial fire.

But Byron and Byronism were something immeasurably greater than anything that is represented by such a view as this: their real value and meaning are indeed little understood. The first of the mistakes about Byron lies in the fact that he is treated as a pessimist. True, he treated himself as such, but a critic can
hardly have even a slight knowledge of Byron without knowing that he had the smallest amount of knowledge of himself that ever fell to the lot of an intelligent man. The real character of what is known as Byron’s pessimism is better worth study than any real pessimism could ever be.

It is the standing peculiarity of this curious world of ours that almost everything in it has been extolled enthusiastically and invariably extolled to the disadvantage of everything else.

One after another almost every one of the phenomena of the universe has been declared to be alone capable of making life worth living. Books, love, business, religion, alcohol, abstract truth, private emotion, money, simplicity, mysticism, hard work, a life close to nature, a life close to Belgrave Square are every one of them passionately maintained by somebody to be so good that they redeem the evil of an otherwise indefensible world. Thus, while the world is almost always condemned in summary, it is always justified, and indeed extolled, in detail after detail.

Existence has been praised and absolved by a chorus of pessimists. The work of giving thanks to Heaven is, as it were, divided ingeniously among them. Schopenhauer is told off as a kind of librarian in the House of God, to sing the praises of the austere pleasures of the mind. Carlyle, as steward, undertakes the working department and eulogises a life of labour in the fields. Omar Khayyam is established in the cellar, and swears that it is the only room in the house. Even the blackest of pessimistic artists enjoys his art. At the precise moment that he has written some shameless and terrible indictment of Creation, his one pang of joy in the achievement joins the universal chorus of gratitude, with the scent of the wild flower and the song of the bird.

Now Byron had a sensational popularity, and that popularity was, as far as words and explanations go, founded upon his pessimism. He was adored by an overwhelming majority, almost every individual of which despised the majority of mankind. But when we come to regard the matter a little more deeply we tend in some degree to cease to believe in this popularity of the pessimist. The popularity of pure and unadulterated pessimism is an oddity; it is almost a contradiction in terms. Men would no more receive the news of the failure of existence or of the harmonious hostility of the stars with ardour or popular rejoicing than they would light bonfires for the arrival of cholera or dance a breakdown when they were condemned to be hanged. When the pessimist is popular it must always be not because he shows all things to be bad, but because he shows some things to be good.
Men can only join in a chorus of praise, even if it is the praise of denunciation. The man who is popular must be optimistic about something, even if he is only optimistic about pessimism. And this was emphatically the case with Byron and the Byronists. Their real popularity was founded not upon the fact that they blamed everything, but upon the fact that they praised something. They heaped curses upon man, but they used man merely as a foil. The things they wished to praise by comparison were the energies of Nature. Man was to them what talk and fashion were to Carlyle, what philosophical and religious quarrels were to Omar, what the whole race after practical happiness was to Schopenhauer, the thing which must be censured in order that somebody else may be exalted. It was merely a recognition of the fact that one cannot write in white chalk except on a black-board.

Surely it is ridiculous to maintain seriously that Byron’s love of the desolate and inhuman in nature was the mark of vital scepticism and depression. When a young man can elect deliberately to walk alone in winter by the side of the shattering sea, when he takes pleasure in storms and stricken peaks, and the lawless melancholy of the older earth, we may deduce with the certainty of logic that he is very young and very happy. There is a certain darkness which we see in wine when seen in shadow; we see it again in the night that has just buried a gorgeous sunset. The wine seems black, and yet at the same time powerfully and almost impossibly red; the sky seems black, and yet at the same time to be only too dense a blend of purple and green. Such was the darkness which lay around the Byronic school. Darkness with them was only too dense a purple. They would prefer the sullen hostility of the earth because amid all the cold and darkness their own hearts were flaming like their own firesides.

Matters are very different with the more modern school of doubt and lamentation. The last movement of pessimism is perhaps expressed in Mr. Aubrey Beardsley’s allegorical designs. Here we have to deal with a pessimism which tends naturally not towards the oldest elements of the cosmos, but towards the last and most fantastic fripperies of artificial life. Byronism tended towards the desert; the new pessimism towards the restaurant. Byronism was a revolt against artificiality; the new pessimism is a revolt in its favour.

The Byronic young man had an affectation of sincerity; the decadent, going a step deeper into the avenues of the unreal, has positively an affectation of affectation. And it is by their fopperies and their frivolities that we know that their sinister philosophy is sincere; in their lights and garlands and ribbons we read their indwelling despair. It was so, indeed, with Byron himself; his really
bitter moments were his frivolous moments. He went on year after year calling
down fire upon mankind, summoning the deluge and the destructive sea and all
the ultimate energies of nature to sweep away the cities of the spawn of man. But
through all this his subconscious mind was not that of a despaier; on the
contrary, there is something of a kind of lawless faith in thus parleying with such
immense and immemorial brutalities. It was not until the time in which he wrote
“Don Juan” that he really lost this inward warmth and geniality, and a sudden
shout of hilarious laughter announced to the world that Lord Byron had really
become a pessimist.

One of the best tests in the world of what a poet really means is his metre. He
may be a hypocrite in his metaphysics, but he cannot be a hypocrite in his
prosody. And all the time that Byron’s language is of horror and emptiness, his
metre is a bounding pas de quatre. He may arraign existence on the most deadly
charges, he may condemn it with the most desolating verdict, but he cannot alter
the fact that on some walk in a spring morning when all the limbs are swinging
and all the blood alive in the body, the lips may be caught repeating:

“Oh, there’s not a joy the world can give like that it takes away,
When the glow of early youth declines in beauty’s dull decay;
’Tis not upon the cheek of youth the blush that fades so fast,
But the tender bloom of heart is gone ere youth itself be past.”

That automatic recitation is the answer to the whole pessimism of Byron.

The truth is that Byron was one of a class who may be called the unconscious
optimists, who are very often, indeed, the most uncompromising conscious
pessimists, because the exuberance of their nature demands for an adversary a
dragon as big as the world. But the whole of his essential and unconscious being
was spirited and confident, and that unconscious being, long disguised and
buried under emotional artifices, suddenly sprang into prominence in the face of
a cold, hard, political necessity. In Greece he heard the cry of reality, and at the
time that he was dying, he began to live. He heard suddenly the call of that
buried and subconscious happiness which is in all of us, and which may emerge
suddenly at the sight of the grass of a meadow or the spears of the enemy.
POPE AND THE ART OF SATIRE

The general critical theory common in this and the last century is that it was very easy for the imitators of Pope to write English poetry. The classical couplet was a thing that anyone could do. So far as that goes, one may justifiably answer by asking anyone to try. It may be easier really to have wit, than really, in the boldest and most enduring sense, to have imagination. But it is immeasurably easier to pretend to have imagination than to pretend to have wit. A man may indulge in a sham rhapsody, because it may be the triumph of a rhapsody to be unintelligible. But a man cannot indulge in a sham joke, because it is the ruin of a joke to be unintelligible. A man may pretend to be a poet: he can no more pretend to be a wit than he can pretend to bring rabbits out of a hat without having learnt to be a conjuror. Therefore, it may be submitted, there was a certain discipline in the old antithetical couplet of Pope and his followers. If it did not permit of the great liberty of wisdom used by the minority of great geniuses, neither did it permit of the great liberty of folly which is used by the majority of small writers. A prophet could not be a poet in those days, perhaps, but at least a fool could not be a poet. If we take, for the sake of example, such a line as Pope’s: “Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,” the test is comparatively simple. A great poet would not have written such a line, perhaps. But a minor poet could not.

Supposing that a lyric poet of the new school really had to deal with such an idea as that expressed in Pope’s line about Man: “A being darkly wise and rudely great,” Is it really so certain that he would go deeper into the matter than that old antithetical jingle goes? I venture to doubt whether he would really be any wiser or weirder or more imaginative or more profound. The one thing that he would really be, would be longer. Instead of writing, “A being darkly wise and rudely great,” the contemporary poet, in his elaborately ornamented book of verses, would produce something like the following: “A creature

Of feature
More dark, more dark, more dark than skies,
Yea, darkly wise, yea, darkly wise:
Darkly wise as a formless fate.
And if he be great,
If he be great, then rudely great,
Rudely great as a plough that plies,
And darkly wise, and darkly wise.”

Have we really learnt to think more broadly? Or have we only learnt to spread our thoughts thinner? I have a dark suspicion that a modern poet might manufacture an admirable lyric out of almost every line of Pope.

There is, of course, an idea in our time that the very antithesis of the typical line of Pope is a mark of artificiality. I shall have occasion more than once to point out that nothing in the world has ever been artificial. But certainly antithesis is not artificial. An element of paradox runs through the whole of existence itself. It begins in the realm of ultimate physics and metaphysics, in the two facts that we cannot imagine a space that is infinite, and that we cannot imagine a space that is finite. It runs through the inmost complications of divinity, in that we cannot conceive that Christ in the wilderness was truly pure, unless we also conceive that he desired to sin. It runs, in the same manner, through all the minor matters of morals, so that we cannot imagine courage existing except in conjunction with fear, or magnanimity existing except in conjunction with some temptation to meanness. If Pope and his followers caught this echo of natural irrationality, they were not any the more artificial. Their antitheses were fully in harmony with existence, which is itself a contradiction in terms.

Pope was really a great poet; he was the last great poet of civilisation. Immediately after the fall of him and his school come Burns and Byron, and the reaction towards the savage and the elemental. But to Pope civilisation was still an exciting experiment. Its perruques and ruffles were to him what feathers and bangles are to a South Sea Islander—the real romance of civilisation. And in all the forms of art which peculiarly belong to civilisation, he was supreme. In one especially he was supreme—the great and civilised art of satire. And in this we have fallen away utterly.

We have had a great revival in our time of the cult of violence and hostility. Mr. Henley and his young men have an infinite number of furious epithets with which to overwhelm anyone who differs from them. It is not a placid or untroubled position to be Mr. Henley’s enemy, though we know that it is certainly safer than to be his friend. And yet, despite all this, these people produce no satire. Political and social satire is a lost art, like pottery and stained glass. It may be worth while to make some attempt to point out a reason for this.

It may seem a singular observation to say that we are not generous enough to
write great satire. This, however, is approximately a very accurate way of describing the case. To write great satire, to attack a man so that he feels the attack and half acknowledges its justice, it is necessary to have a certain intellectual magnanimity which realises the merits of the opponent as well as his defects. This is, indeed, only another way of putting the simple truth that in order to attack an army we must know not only its weak points, but also its strong points. England in the present season and spirit fails in satire for the same simple reason that it fails in war: it despises the enemy. In matters of battle and conquest we have got firmly rooted in our minds the idea (an idea fit for the philosophers of Bedlam) that we can best trample on a people by ignoring all the particular merits which give them a chance of trampling upon us. It has become a breach of etiquette to praise the enemy; whereas, when the enemy is strong, every honest scout ought to praise the enemy. It is impossible to vanquish an army without having a full account of its strength. It is impossible to satirise a man without having a full account of his virtues. It is too much the custom in politics to describe a political opponent as utterly inhuman, as utterly careless of his country, as utterly cynical, which no man ever was since the beginning of the world. This kind of invective may often have a great superficial success: it may hit the mood of the moment; it may raise excitement and applause; it may impress millions. But there is one man among all those millions whom it does not impress, whom it hardly ever touches; that is the man against whom it is directed. The one person for whom the whole satire has been written in vain is the man whom it is the whole object of the institution of satire to reach. He knows that such a description of him is not true. He knows that he is not utterly unpatriotic, or utterly self-seeking, or utterly barbarous and revengeful. He knows that he is an ordinary man, and that he can count as many kindly memories, as many humane instincts, as many hours of decent work and responsibility as any other ordinary man. But behind all this he has his real weaknesses, the real ironies of his soul: behind all these ordinary merits lie the mean compromises, the craven silences, the sullen vanities, the secret brutalities, the unmanly visions of revenge. It is to these that satire should reach if it is to touch the man at whom it is aimed. And to reach these it must pass and salute a whole army of virtues.

If we turn to the great English satirists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for example, we find that they had this rough, but firm, grasp of the size and strength, the value and the best points of their adversary. Dryden, before hewing Ahitophel in pieces, gives a splendid and spirited account of the insane
valour and inspired cunning of the “daring pilot in extremity,”
who was more untrustworthy in calm than in storm, and “Steered too near the
rocks to boast his wit.”
The whole is, so far as it goes, a sound and picturesque version of the great
Shaftesbury. It would, in many ways, serve as a very sound and picturesque
account of Lord Randolph Churchill. But here comes in very pointedly the
difference between our modern attempts at satire and the ancient achievement of
it. The opponents of Lord Randolph Churchill, both Liberal and Conservative,
did not satirise him nobly and honestly, as one of those great wits to madness
near allied. They represented him as a mere puppy, a silly and irreverent upstart
whose impudence supplied the lack of policy and character. Churchill had grave
and even gross faults, a certain coarseness, a certain hard boyish assertiveness, a
certain lack of magnanimity, a certain peculiar patrician vulgarity. But he was a
much larger man than satire depicted him, and therefore the satire could not and
did not overwhelm him. And here we have the cause of the failure of
contemporary satire, that it has no magnanimity, that is to say, no patience. It
cannot endure to be told that its opponent has his strong points, just as Mr.
Chamberlain could not endure to be told that the Boers had a regular army. It can
be content with nothing except persuading itself that its opponent is utterly bad
or utterly stupid—that is, that he is what he is not and what nobody else is. If we
take any prominent politician of the day—such, for example, as Sir William
Harcourt—we shall find that this is the point in which all party invective fails.
The Tory satire at the expense of Sir William Harcourt is always desperately
endeavouring to represent that he is inept, that he makes a fool of himself, that
he is disagreeable and disgraceful and untrustworthy. The defect of all that is
that we all know that it is untrue. Everyone knows that Sir William Harcourt is
not inept, but is almost the ablest Parliamentarian now alive. Everyone knows
that he is not disagreeable or disgraceful, but a gentleman of the old school who
is on excellent social terms with his antagonists. Everyone knows that he is not
untrustworthy, but a man of unimpeachable honour who is much trusted. Above
all, he knows it himself, and is therefore affected by the satire exactly as any one
of us would be if we were accused of being black or of keeping a shop for the
receiving of stolen goods. We might be angry at the libel, but not at the satire:
for a man is angry at a libel because it is false, but at a satire because it is true.

Mr. Henley and his young men are very fond of invective and satire; if they
wish to know the reason of their failure in these things, they need only turn to
the opening of Pope’s superb attack upon Addison. The Henleyite’s idea of
satirising a man is to express a violent contempt for him, and by the heat of this
to persuade others and himself that the man is contemptible. I remember reading
a satiric attack on Mr. Gladstone by one of the young anarchic Tories, which
began by asserting that Mr. Gladstone was a bad public speaker. If these people
would, as I have said, go quietly and read Pope’s “Atticus,” they would see how
a great satirist approaches a great enemy: “Peace to all such! But were there one
whose fires
True genius kindles, and fair fame inspires,
Blest with each talent, and each art to please,
And born to write, converse, and live with ease.
Should such a man—”
And then follows the torrent of that terrible criticism. Pope was not such a fool
as to try to make out that Addison was a fool. He knew that Addison was not a
fool, and he knew that Addison knew it. But hatred, in Pope’s case, had become
so great and, I was almost going to say, so pure, that it illuminated all things, as
love illuminates all things. He said what was really wrong with Addison; and in
calm and clear and everlasting colours he painted the picture of the evil of the
literary temperament: “Bear, like the Turk, no brother near the throne,
View him with scornful, yet with jealous eyes,
And hate for arts that caused himself to rise.
Like Cato give his little Senate laws,
And sit attentive to his own applause.
While wits and templars every sentence raise,
And wonder with a foolish face of praise.”
This is the kind of thing which really goes to the mark at which it aims. It is
penetrated with sorrow and a kind of reverence, and it is addressed directly to a
man. This is no mock-tournament to gain the applause of the crowd. It is a
deadly duel by the lonely seashore.

In current political materialism there is everywhere the assumption that,
without understanding anything of his case or his merits, we can benefit a man
practically. Without understanding his case and his merits, we cannot even hurt
him.
Asceticism is a thing which, in its very nature, we tend in these days to misunderstand. Asceticism, in the religious sense, is the repudiation of the great mass of human joys because of the supreme joyfulness of the one joy, the religious joy. But asceticism is not in the least confined to religious asceticism: there is scientific asceticism which asserts that truth is alone satisfying; there is aesthetic asceticism which asserts that art is alone satisfying; there is amatory asceticism which asserts that love is alone satisfying. There is even epicurean asceticism, which asserts that beer and skittles are alone satisfying. Wherever the manner of praising anything involves the statement that the speaker could live with that thing alone, there lies the germ and essence of asceticism. When William Morris, for example, says that “love is enough,” it is obvious that he asserts in those words that art, science, politics, ambition, money, houses, carriages, concerts, gloves, walking-sticks, door-knockers, railway-stations, cathedrals, and any other things one may choose to tabulate are unnecessary. When Omar Khayyam says:

“A book of verses underneath the bough,
A loaf of bread, a jug of wine, and thou
Beside me singing in the wilderness—
O wilderness were Paradise enow.”

It is clear that he speaks fully as much ascetically as he does aesthetically. He makes a list of things and says that he wants no more. The same thing was done by a medæval monk. Examples might, of course, be multiplied a hundred-fold. One of the most genuinely poetical of our younger poets says, as the one thing certain, that

“From quiet home and first beginning
Out to the undiscovered ends—
There’s nothing worth the wear of winning
But laughter and the love of friends.”

Here we have a perfect example of the main important fact, that all true joy expresses itself in terms of asceticism.

But if, in any case, it should happen that a class or a generation lose the sense of the peculiar kind of joy which is being celebrated, they immediately begin to call the enjoyers of that joy gloomy and self-destroying. The most formidable liberal philosophers have called the monks melancholy because they denied
themselves the pleasures of liberty and marriage. They might as well call the trippers on a Bank Holiday melancholy because they deny themselves, as a rule, the pleasures of silence and meditation. A simpler and stronger example is, however, to hand. If ever it should happen that the system of English athletics should vanish from the public schools and the universities, if science should supply some new and non-competitive manner of perfecting the physique, if public ethics swung round to an attitude of absolute contempt and indifference towards the feeling called sport, then it is easy to see what would happen. Future historians would simply state that in the dark days of Queen Victoria young men at Oxford and Cambridge were subjected to a horrible sort of religious torture. They were forbidden, by fantastic monastic rules, to indulge in wine or tobacco during certain arbitrarily fixed periods of time, before certain brutal fights and festivals. Bigots insisted on their rising at unearthly hours and running violently around fields for no object. Many men ruined their health in these dens of superstition, many died there. All this is perfectly true and irrefutable. Athleticism in England is an asceticism, as much as the monastic rules. Men have overstrained themselves and killed themselves through English athleticism. There is one difference and one only: we do feel the love of sport; we do not feel the love of religious offices. We see only the price in the one case and only the purchase in the other.

The only question that remains is what was the joy of the old Christian ascetics of which their asceticism was merely the purchasing price? The mere possibility of the query is an extraordinary example of the way in which we miss the main points of human history. We are looking at humanity too close, and see only the details and not the vast and dominant features. We look at the rise of Christianity, and conceive it as a rise of self-abnegation and almost of pessimism. It does not occur to us that the mere assertion that this raging and confounding universe is governed by justice and mercy is a piece of staggering optimism fit to set all men capering. The detail over which these monks went mad with joy was the universe itself; the only thing really worthy of enjoyment. The white daylight shone over all the world, the endless forests stood up in their order. The lightning awoke and the tree fell and the sea gathered into mountains and the ship went down, and all these disconnected and meaningless and terrible objects were all part of one dark and fearful conspiracy of goodness, one merciless scheme of mercy. That this scheme of Nature was not accurate or well founded is perfectly tenable, but surely it is not tenable that it was not optimistic. We insist, however, upon treating this matter tail foremost. We insist that the
ascetics were pessimists because they gave up threescore years and ten for an eternity of happiness. We forget that the bare proposition of an eternity of happiness is by its very nature ten thousand times more optimistic than ten thousand pagan saturnalias.

Mr. Adderley’s life of Francis of Assisi does not, of course, bring this out; nor does it fully bring out the character of Francis. It has rather the tone of a devotional book. A devotional book is an excellent thing, but we do not look in it for the portrait of a man, for the same reason that we do not look in a love-sonnet for the portrait of a woman, because men in such conditions of mind not only apply all virtues to their idol, but all virtues in equal quantities. There is no outline, because the artist cannot bear to put in a black line. This blaze of benediction, this conflict between lights, has its place in poetry, not in biography. The successful examples of it may be found, for instance, in the more idealistic odes of Spenser. The design is sometimes almost indecipherable, for the poet draws in silver upon white.

It is natural, of course, that Mr. Adderley should see Francis primarily as the founder of the Franciscan Order. We suspect this was only one, perhaps a minor one, of the things that he was; we suspect that one of the minor things that Christ did was to found Christianity. But the vast practical work of Francis is assuredly not to be ignored, for this amazingly unworldly and almost maddeningly simple-minded infant was one of the most consistently successful men that ever fought with this bitter world. It is the custom to say that the secret of such men is their profound belief in themselves, and this is true, but not all the truth. Workhouses and lunatic asylums are thronged with men who believe in themselves. Of Francis it is far truer to say that the secret of his success was his profound belief in other people, and it is the lack of this that has commonly been the curse of these obscure Napoleons. Francis always assumed that everyone must be just as anxious about their common relative, the water-rat, as he was. He planned a visit to the Emperor to draw his attention to the needs of “his little sisters the larks.” He used to talk to any thieves and robbers he met about their misfortune in being unable to give rein to their desire for holiness. It was an innocent habit, and doubtless the robbers often “got round him,” as the phrase goes. Quite as often, however, they discovered that he had “got round” them, and discovered the other side, the side of secret nobility.

Conceiving of St. Francis as primarily the founder of the Franciscan Order, Mr. Adderley opens his narrative with an admirable sketch of the history of Monasticism in Europe, which is certainly the best thing in the book. He
distinguishes clearly and fairly between the Manichaean ideal that underlies so much of Eastern Monasticism and the ideal of self-discipline which never wholly vanished from the Christian form. But he does not throw any light on what must be for the outsider the absorbing problem of this Catholic asceticism, for the excellent reason that, not being an outsider, he does not find it a problem at all.

To most people, however, there is a fascinating inconsistency in the position of St. Francis. He expressed in loftier and bolder language than any earthly thinker the conception that laughter is as divine as tears. He called his monks the mountebanks of God. He never forgot to take pleasure in a bird as it flashed past him, or a drop of water, as it fell from his finger: he was, perhaps, the happiest of the sons of men. Yet this man undoubtedly founded his whole polity on the negation of what we think the most imperious necessities; in his three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, he denied to himself and those he loved most, property, love, and liberty. Why was it that the most large-hearted and poetic spirits in that age found their most congenial atmosphere in these awful renunciations? Why did he who loved where all men were blind, seek to blind himself where all men loved? Why was he a monk, and not a troubadour? These questions are far too large to be answered fully here, but in any life of Francis they ought at least to have been asked; we have a suspicion that if they were answered, we should suddenly find that much of the enigma of this sullen time of ours was answered also. So it was with the monks. The two great parties in human affairs are only the party which sees life black against white, and the party which sees it white against black, the party which macerates and blackens itself with sacrifice because the background is full of the blaze of an universal mercy, and the party which crowns itself with flowers and lights itself with bridal torches because it stands against a black curtain of incalculable night. The revellers are old, and the monks are young. It was the monks who were the spendthrifts of happiness, and we who are its misers.

Doubtless, as is apparent from Mr. Adderley’s book, the clear and tranquil life of the Three Vows had a fine and delicate effect on the genius of Francis. He was primarily a poet. The perfection of his literary instinct is shown in his naming the fire “brother,” and the water “sister,” in the quaint demagogic dexterity of the appeal in the sermon to the fishes “that they alone were saved in the Flood.” In the amazingly minute and graphic dramatisation of the life, disappointments, and excuses of any shrub or beast that he happened to be addressing, his genius has a curious resemblance to that of Burns. But if he
avoided the weakness of Burns’ verses to animals, the occasional morbidity, bombast, and moralisation on himself, the credit is surely due to a cleaner and more transparent life.

The general attitude of St. Francis, like that of his Master, embodied a kind of terrible common sense. The famous remark of the Caterpillar in “Alice in Wonderland”–”Why not?” impresses us as his general motto. He could not see why he should not be on good terms with all things. The pomp of war and ambition, the great empire of the Middle Ages, and all its fellows begin to look tawdry and top-heavy, under the rationality of that innocent stare. His questions were blasting and devastating, like the questions of a child. He would not have been afraid even of the nightmares of cosmogony, for he had no fear in him. To him the world was small, not because he had any views as to its size, but for the reason that gossiping ladies find it small, because so many relatives were to be found in it. If you had taken him to the loneliest star that the madness of an astronomer can conceive, he would have only beheld in it the features of a new friend.
When “Cyrano de Bergerac” was published, it bore the subordinate title of a heroic comedy. We have no tradition in English literature which would justify us in calling a comedy heroic, though there was once a poet who called a comedy divine. By the current modern conception, the hero has his place in a tragedy, and the one kind of strength which is systematically denied to him is the strength to succeed. That the power of a man’s spirit might possibly go to the length of turning a tragedy into a comedy is not admitted; nevertheless, almost all the primitive legends of the world are comedies, not only in the sense that they have a happy ending, but in the sense that they are based upon a certain optimistic assumption that the hero is destined to be the destroyer of the monster. Singularly enough, this modern idea of the essential disastrous character of life, when seriously considered, connects itself with a hyper-aesthetic view of tragedy and comedy which is largely due to the influence of modern France, from which the great heroic comedies of Monsieur Rostand have come. The French genius has an instinct for remedying its own evil work, and France gives always the best cure for “Frenchiness.” The idea of comedy which is held in England by the school which pays most attention to the technical niceties of art is a view which renders such an idea as that of heroic comedy quite impossible. The fundamental conception in the minds of the majority of our younger writers is that comedy is, par excellence, a fragile thing. It is conceived to be a conventional world of the most absolutely delicate and gimcrack description. Such stories as Mr. Max Beerbohm’s “Happy Hypocrite” are conceptions which would vanish or fall into utter nonsense if viewed by one single degree too seriously. But great comedy, the comedy of Shakespeare or Sterne, not only can be, but must be, taken seriously. There is nothing to which a man must give himself up with more faith and self-abandonment than to genuine laughter. In such comedies one laughs with the heroes, and not at them. The humour which steeps the stories of Falstaff and Uncle Toby is a cosmic and philosophic humour, a geniality which goes down to the depths. It is not superficial reading, it is not even, strictly speaking, light reading. Our sympathies are as much committed to the characters as if they were the predestined victims in a Greek tragedy. The modern writer of comedies may be said to boast of the brittleness of his characters. He seems always on the eve of knocking his puppets to pieces. When John Oliver Hobbes wrote for the first time a comedy of serious emotions, she named it, with a thinly-disguised
contempt for her own work, “A Sentimental Comedy.” The ground of this conception of the artificiality of comedy is a profound pessimism. Life in the eyes of these mournful buffoons is itself an utterly tragic thing; comedy must be as hollow as a grinning mask. It is a refuge from the world, and not even, properly speaking, a part of it. Their wit is a thin sheet of shining ice over the eternal waters of bitterness.

“Cyrano de Bergerac” came to us as the new decoration of an old truth, that merriment was one of the world’s natural flowers, and not one of its exotics. The gigantesque levity, the flamboyant eloquence, the Rabelaisian puns and digressions were seen to be once more what they had been in Rabelais, the mere outbursts of a human sympathy and bravado as old and solid as the stars. The human spirit demanded wit as headlong and haughty as its will. All was expressed in the words of Cyrano at his highest moment of happiness, Il me faut des géants. An essential aspect of this question of heroic comedy is the question of drama in rhyme. There is nothing that affords so easy a point of attack for the dramatic realist as the conduct of a play in verse. According to his canons, it is indeed absurd to represent a number of characters facing some terrible crisis in their lives by capping rhymes like a party playing bouts rimés. In his eyes it must appear somewhat ridiculous that two enemies taunting each other with insupportable insults should obligingly provide each other with metrical spacing and neat and convenient rhymes. But the whole of this view rests finally upon the fact that few persons, if any, to-day understand what is meant by a poetical play. It is a singular thing that those poetical plays which are now written in England by the most advanced students of the drama follow exclusively the lines of Maeterlinck, and use verse and rhyme for the adornment of a profoundly tragic theme. But rhyme has a supreme appropriateness for the treatment of the higher comedy. The land of heroic comedy is, as it were, a paradise of lovers, in which it is not difficult to imagine that men could talk poetry all day long. It is far more conceivable that men’s speech should flower naturally into these harmonious forms, when they are filled with the essential spirit of youth, than when they are sitting gloomily in the presence of immemorial destiny. The great error consists in supposing that poetry is an unnatural form of language. We should all like to speak poetry at the moment when we truly live, and if we do not speak, it is because we have an impediment in our speech. It is not song that is the narrow or artificial thing, it is conversation that is a broken and stammering attempt at song. When we see men in a spiritual extravaganza, like “Cyrano de Bergerac,” speaking in rhyme, it is not our language disguised or
distorted, but our language rounded and made whole. Rhymes answer each other as the sexes in flowers and in humanity answer each other. Men do not speak so, it is true. Even when they are inspired or in love they talk inanities. But the poetic comedy does not misrepresent the speech one half so much as the speech misrepresents the soul. Monsieur Rostand showed even more than his usual insight when he called “Cyrano de Bergerac” a comedy, despite the fact that, strictly speaking, it ends with disappointment and death. The essence of tragedy is a spiritual breakdown or decline, and in the great French play the spiritual sentiment mounts unceasingly until the last line. It is not the facts themselves, but our feeling about them, that makes tragedy and comedy, and death is more joyful in Rostand than life in Maeterlinck. The same apparent contradiction holds good in the case of the drama of “L’Aiglon,” now being performed with so much success. Although the hero is a weakling, the subject a fiasco, the end a premature death and a personal disillusionment, yet, in spite of this theme, which might have been chosen for its depressing qualities, the unconquerable pæan of the praise of things, the ungovernable gaiety of the poet’s song swells so high that at the end it seems to drown all the weak voices of the characters in one crashing chorus of great things and great men. A multitude of mottoes might be taken from the play to indicate and illustrate, not only its own spirit, but much of the spirit of modern life. When in the vision of the field of Wagram the horrible voices of the wounded cry out, Les corbeaux, les corbeaux, the Duke, overwhelmed with a nightmare of hideous trivialities, cries out, Où, où, sont les aigles? That antithesis might stand alone as an invocation at the beginning of the twentieth century to the spirit of heroic comedy. When an ex-General of Napoleon is asked his reason for having betrayed the Emperor, he replies, La fatigue, and at that a veteran private of the Great Army rushes forward, and crying passionately, Et nous? pours out a terrible description of the life lived by the commoner soldier. To-day, when pessimism is almost as much a symbol of wealth and fashion as jewels or cigars, when the pampered heirs of the ages can sum up life in few other words but la fatigue, there might surely come a cry from the vast mass of common humanity from the beginning—et nous? It is this potentiality for enthusiasm among the mass of men that makes the function of comedy at once common and sublime. Shakespeare’s “Much Ado About Nothing” is a great comedy, because behind it is the whole pressure of that love of love which is the youth of the world, which is common to all the young, especially to those who swear they will die bachelors and old maids. “Love’s Labour’s Lost” is filled with the same energy, and there it falls even more
definitely into the scope of our subject, since it is a comedy in rhyme in which all men speak lyrically as naturally as the birds sing in pairing time. What the love of love is to the Shakespearean comedies, that other and more mysterious human passion, the love of death, is to “L’Aiglon.” Whether we shall ever have in England a new tradition of poetic comedy it is difficult at present to say, but we shall assuredly never have it until we realise that comedy is built upon everlasting foundations in the nature of things, that it is not a thing too light to capture, but too deep to plumb. Monsieur Rostand, in his description of the Battle of Wagram, does not shrink from bringing about the Duke’s ears the frightful voices of actual battle, of men torn by crows, and suffocated with blood, but when the Duke, terrified at these dreadful appeals, asks them for their final word, they all cry together Vive l’Empereur! Monsieur Rostand, perhaps, did not know that he was writing an allegory. To me that field of Wagram is the field of the modern war of literature. We hear nothing but the voices of pain; the whole is one phonograph of horror. It is right that we should hear these things, it is right that not one of them should be silenced; but these cries of distress are not in life, as they are in modern art, the only voices; they are the voices of men, but not the voice of man. When questioned finally and seriously as to their conception of their destiny, men have from the beginning of time answered in a thousand philosophies and religions with a single voice and in a sense most sacred and tremendous, Vive l’Empereur.
CHARLES II

There are a great many bonds which still connect us with Charles II, one of the idlest men of one of the idlest epochs. Among other things Charles II represented one thing which is very rare and very satisfying; he was a real and consistent sceptic. Scepticism, both in its advantages and disadvantages, is greatly misunderstood in our time. There is a curious idea abroad that scepticism has some connection with such theories as materialism and atheism and secularism. This is of course a mistake; the true sceptic has nothing to do with these theories simply because they are theories. The true sceptic is as much a spiritualist as he is a materialist. He thinks that the savage dancing round an African idol stands quite as good a chance of being right as Darwin. He thinks that mysticism is every bit as rational as rationalism. He has indeed the most profound doubts as to whether St. Matthew wrote his own gospel. But he has quite equally profound doubts as to whether the tree he is looking at is a tree and not a rhinoceros.

This is the real meaning of that mystery which appears so prominently in the lives of great sceptics, which appears with especial prominence in the life of Charles II. I mean their constant oscillation between atheism and Roman Catholicism. Roman Catholicism is indeed a great and fixed and formidable system, but so is atheism. Atheism is indeed the most daring of all dogmas, more daring than the vision of a palpable day of judgment. For it is the assertion of a universal negative; for a man to say that there is no God in the universe is like saying that there are no insects in any of the stars.

Thus it was with that wholesome and systematic sceptic, Charles II. When he took the Sacrament according to the forms of the Roman Church in his last hour he was acting consistently as a philosopher. The wafer might not be God; similarly it might not be a wafer. To the genuine and poetical sceptic the whole world is incredible, with its bulbous mountains and its fantastic trees. The whole order of things is as outrageous as any miracle which could presume to violate it. Transubstantiation might be a dream, but if it was, it was assuredly a dream within a dream. Charles II. sought to guard himself against hell fire because he could not think hell itself more fantastic than the world as it was revealed by science. The priest crept up the staircase, the doors were closed, the few of the faithful who were present hushed themselves respectfully, and so, with every circumstance of secrecy and sanctity, with the cross uplifted and the prayers
poured out, was consummated the last great act of logical unbelief.

The problem of Charles II. consists in this, that he has scarcely a moral virtue to his name, and yet he attracts us morally. We feel that some of the virtues have been dropped out in the lists made by all the saints and sages, and that Charles II. was pre-eminently successful in these wild and unmentionable virtues. The real truth of this matter and the real relation of Charles II. to the moral ideal is worth somewhat more exhaustive study.

It is a commonplace that the Restoration movement can only be understood when considered as a reaction against Puritanism. But it is insufficiently realised that the tyranny which half frustrated all the good work of Puritanism was of a very peculiar kind. It was not the fire of Puritanism, the exultation in sobriety, the frenzy of a restraint, which passed away; that still burns in the heart of England, only to be quenched by the final overwhelming sea. But it is seldom remembered that the Puritans were in their day emphatically intellectual bullies, that they relied swaggeringly on the logical necessity of Calvinism, that they bound omnipotence itself in the chains of syllogism. The Puritans fell, through the damning fact that they had a complete theory of life, through the eternal paradox that a satisfactory explanation can never satisfy. Like Brutus and the logical Romans, like the logical French Jacobins, like the logical English utilitarians, they taught the lesson that men’s wants have always been right and their arguments always wrong. Reason is always a kind of brute force; those who appeal to the head rather than the heart, however pallid and polite, are necessarily men of violence. We speak of “touching” a man’s heart, but we can do nothing to his head but hit it. The tyranny of the Puritans over the bodies of men was comparatively a trifle; pikes, bullets, and conflagrations are comparatively a trifle. Their real tyranny was the tyranny of aggressive reason over the cowed and demoralised human spirit. Their brooding and raving can be forgiven, can in truth be loved and reverenced, for it is humanity on fire; hatred can be genial, madness can be homely. The Puritans fell, not because they were fanatics, but because they were rationalists.

When we consider these things, when we remember that Puritanism, which means in our day a moral and almost temperamental attitude, meant in that day a singularly arrogant logical attitude, we shall comprehend a little more the grain of good that lay in the vulgarity and triviality of the Restoration. The Restoration, of which Charles II. was a pre-eminent type, was in part a revolt of all the chaotic and unclassed parts of human nature, the parts that are left over, and will always be left over, by every rationalistic system of life. This does not
merely account for the revolt of the vices and of that empty recklessness and horseplay which is sometimes more irritating than any vice. It accounts also for the return of the virtue of politeness, for that also is a nameless thing ignored by logical codes. Politeness has indeed about it something mystical; like religion, it is everywhere understood and nowhere defined. Charles is not entirely to be despised because, as the type of this movement, he let himself float upon this new tide of politeness. There was some moral and social value in his perfection in little things. He could not keep the Ten Commandments, but he kept the ten thousand commandments. His name is unconnected with any great acts of duty or sacrifice, but it is connected with a great many of those acts of magnanimous politeness, of a kind of dramatic delicacy, which lie on the dim borderland between morality and art. “Charles II.,” said Thackeray, with unerring brevity, “was a rascal, but not a snob.” Unlike George IV. he was a gentleman, and a gentleman is a man who obeys strange statutes, not to be found in any moral text-book, and practises strange virtues nameless from the beginning of the world.

So much may be said and should be said for the Restoration, that it was the revolt of something human, if only the debris of human nature. But more cannot be said. It was emphatically a fall and not an ascent, a recoil and not an advance, a sudden weakness and not a sudden strength. That the bow of human nature was by Puritanism bent immeasurably too far, that it overstrained the soul by stretching it to the height of an almost horrible idealism, makes the collapse of the Restoration infinitely more excusable, but it does not make it any the less a collapse. Nothing can efface the essential distinction that Puritanism was one of the world’s great efforts after the discovery of the true order, whereas it was the essence of the Restoration that it involved no effort at all. It is true that the Restoration was not, as has been widely assumed, the most immoral epoch of our history. Its vices cannot compare for a moment in this respect with the monstrous tragedies and almost suffocating secracies and villainies of the Court of James I. But the dram-drinking and nose-slitting of the saturnalia of Charles II. seem at once more human and more detestable than the passions and poisons of the Renaissance, much in the same way that a monkey appears inevitably more human and more detestable than a tiger. Compared with the Renaissance, there is something Cockney about the Restoration. Not only was it too indolent for great morality, it was too indolent even for great art. It lacked that seriousness which is needed even for the pursuit of pleasure, that discipline which is essential even to a game of lawn tennis. It would have appeared to
Charles II.’s poets quite as arduous to write “Paradise Lost” as to regain Paradise.

All old and vigorous languages abound in images and metaphors, which, though lightly and casually used, are in truth poems in themselves, and poems of a high and striking order. Perhaps no phrase is so terribly significant as the phrase “killing time.” It is a tremendous and poetical image, the image of a kind of cosmic parricide. There are on the earth a race of revellers who do, under all their exuberance, fundamentally regard time as an enemy. Of these were Charles II. and the men of the Restoration. Whatever may have been their merits, and as we have said we think that they had merits, they can never have a place among the great representatives of the joy of life, for they belonged to those lower epicureans who kill time, as opposed to those higher epicureans who make time live.

Of a people in this temper Charles II. was the natural and rightful head. He may have been a pantomime King, but he was a King, and with all his geniality he let nobody forget it. He was not, indeed, the aimless flaneur that he has been represented. He was a patient and cunning politician, who disguised his wisdom under so perfect a mask of folly that he not only deceived his allies and opponents, but has deceived almost all the historians that have come after him. But if Charles was, as he emphatically was, the only Stuart who really achieved despotism, it was greatly due to the temper of the nation and the age. Despotism is the easiest of all governments, at any rate for the governed.

It is indeed a form of slavery, and it is the despot who is the slave. Men in a state of decadence employ professionals to fight for them, professionals to dance for them, and a professional to rule them.

Almost all the faces in the portraits of that time look, as it were, like masks put on artificially with the perruque. A strange unreality broods over the period. Distracted as we are with civic mysteries and problems we can afford to rejoice. Our tears are less desolate than their laughter, our restraints are larger than their liberty.
A recent incident has finally convinced us that Stevenson was, as we suspected, a great man. We knew from recent books that we have noticed, from the scorn of “Ephemera Critica” and Mr. George Moore, that Stevenson had the first essential qualification of a great man: that of being misunderstood by his opponents. But from the book which Messrs. Chatto & Windus have issued, in the same binding as Stevenson’s works, “Robert Louis Stevenson,” by Mr. H. Bellyse Baildon, we learn that he has the other essential qualification, that of being misunderstood by his admirers. Mr. Baildon has many interesting things to tell us about Stevenson himself, whom he knew at college. Nor are his criticisms by any means valueless. That upon the plays, especially “Beau Austin,” is remarkably thoughtful and true. But it is a very singular fact, and goes far, as we say, to prove that Stevenson had that unfathomable quality which belongs to the great, that this admiring student of Stevenson can number and marshal all the master’s work and distribute praise and blame with decision and even severity, without ever thinking for a moment of the principles of art and ethics which would have struck us as the very things that Stevenson nearly killed himself to express.

Mr. Baildon, for example, is perpetually lecturing Stevenson for his “pessimism”; surely a strange charge against a man who has done more than any modern artist to make men ashamed of their shame of life. But he complains that, in “The Master of Ballantrae” and “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,” Stevenson gives evil a final victory over good. Now if there was one point that Stevenson more constantly and passionately emphasised than any other it was that we must worship good for its own value and beauty, without any reference whatever to victory or failure in space and time. “Whatever we are intended to do,” he said, “we are not intended to succeed.” That the stars in their courses fight against virtue, that humanity is in its nature a forlorn hope, this was the very spirit that through the whole of Stevenson’s work sounded a trumpet to all the brave. The story of Henry Durie is dark enough, but could anyone stand beside the grave of that sodden monomaniac and not respect him? It is strange that men should see sublime inspiration in the ruins of an old church and see none in the ruins of a man.

The author has most extraordinary ideas about Stevenson’s tales of blood and spoil; he appears to think that they prove Stevenson to have had (we use Mr.
Baildon’s own phrase) a kind of “homicidal mania.” “He [Stevenson] arrives pretty much at the paradox that one can hardly be better employed than in taking life.” Mr. Baildon might as well say that Dr. Conan Doyle delights in committing inexplicable crimes, that Mr. Clark Russell is a notorious pirate, and that Mr. Wilkie Collins thought that one could hardly be better employed than in stealing moonstones and falsifying marriage registers. But Mr. Baildon is scarcely alone in this error: few people have understood properly the goriness of Stevenson. Stevenson was essentially the robust schoolboy who draws skeletons and gibbets in his Latin grammar. It was not that he took pleasure in death, but that he took pleasure in life, in every muscular and emphatic action of life, even if it were an action that took the life of another.

Let us suppose that one gentleman throws a knife at another gentleman and pins him to the wall. It is scarcely necessary to remark that there are in this transaction two somewhat varying personal points of view. The point of view of the man pinned is the tragic and moral point of view, and this Stevenson showed clearly that he understood in such stories as “The Master of Ballantrae” and “Weir of Hermiston.” But there is another view of the matter—that in which the whole act is an abrupt and brilliant explosion of bodily vitality, like breaking a rock with a blow of a hammer, or just clearing a five-barred gate. This is the standpoint of romance, and it is the soul of “Treasure Island” and “The Wrecker.” It was not, indeed, that Stevenson loved men less, but that he loved clubs and pistols more. He had, in truth, in the devouring universalism of his soul, a positive love for inanimate objects such as has not been known since St. Francis called the sun brother and the well sister. We feel that he was actually in love with the wooden crutch that Silver sent hurtling in the sunlight, with the box that Billy Bones left at the “Admiral Benbow,” with the knife that Wicks drove through his own hand and the table. There is always in his work a certain clean-cut angularity which makes us remember that he was fond of cutting wood with an axe.

Stevenson’s new biographer, however, cannot make any allowance for this deep-rooted poetry of mere sight and touch. He is always imputing something to Stevenson as a crime which Stevenson really professed as an object. He says of that glorious riot of horror, “The Destroying Angel,” in “The Dynamiter,” that it is “highly fantastic and putting a strain on our credulity.” This is rather like describing the travels of Baron Munchausen as “unconvincing.” The whole story of “The Dynamiter” is a kind of humorous nightmare, and even in that story “The Destroying Angel” is supposed to be an extravagant lie made up on the
spur of the moment. It is a dream within a dream, and to accuse it of improbability is like accusing the sky of being blue. But Mr. Baildon, whether from hasty reading or natural difference of taste, cannot in the least comprehend that rich and romantic irony of Stevenson’s London stories. He actually says of that portentous monument of humour, Prince Florizel of Bohemia, that, “though evidently admired by his creator, he is to me on the whole rather an irritating presence.” From this we are almost driven to believe (though desperately and against our will) that Mr. Baildon thinks that Prince Florizel is to be taken seriously, as if he were a man in real life. For ourselves. Prince Florizel is almost our favourite character in fiction; but we willingly add the proviso that if we met him in real life we should kill him.

The fact is, that the whole mass of Stevenson’s spiritual and intellectual virtues have been partly frustrated by one additional virtue—that of artistic dexterity. If he had chalked up his great message on a wall, like Walt Whitman, in large and straggling letters, it would have startled men like a blasphemy. But he wrote his light-headed paradoxes in so flowing a copy-book hand that everyone supposed they must be copy-book sentiments. He suffered from his versatility, not, as is loosely said, by not doing every department well enough, but by doing every department too well. As child, cockney, pirate, or Puritan, his disguises were so good that most people could not see the same man under all. It is an unjust fact that if a man can play the fiddle, give legal opinions, and black boots just tolerably, he is called an Admirable Crichton, but if he does all three thoroughly well, he is apt to be regarded, in the several departments, as a common fiddler, a common lawyer, and a common boot-black. This is what has happened in the case of Stevenson. If “Dr. Jekyll,” “The Master of Ballantrae,” “The Child’s Garden of Verses,” and “Across the Plains” had been each of them one shade less perfectly done than they were, everyone would have seen that they were all parts of the same message; but by succeeding in the proverbial miracle of being in five places at once, he has naturally convinced others that he was five different people. But the real message of Stevenson was as simple as that of Mohamet, as moral as that of Dante, as confident as that of Whitman, and as practical as that of James Watt. The conception which unites the whole varied work of Stevenson was that romance, or the vision of the possibilities of things, was far more important than mere occurrences: that one was the soul of our life, the other the body, and that the soul was the precious thing. The germ of all his stories lies in the idea that every landscape or scrap of scenery has a soul: and that soul is a story. Standing before a stunted orchard with a broken stone wall,
we may know as a mere fact that no one has been through it but an elderly female cook. But everything exists in the human soul: that orchard grows in our own brain, and there it is the shrine and theatre of some strange chance between a girl and a ragged poet and a mad farmer. Stevenson stands for the conception that ideas are the real incidents: that our fancies are our adventures. To think of a cow with wings is essentially to have met one. And this is the reason for his wide diversities of narrative: he had to make one story as rich as a ruby sunset, another as grey as a hoary monolith: for the story was the soul, or rather the meaning, of the bodily vision. It is quite inappropriate to judge “The Teller of Tales” (as the Samoans called him) by the particular novels he wrote, as one would judge Mr. George Moore by “Esther Waters.” These novels were only the two or three of his soul’s adventures that he happened to tell. But he died with a thousand stories in his heart.

THOMAS CARLYLE

There are two main moral necessities for the work of a great man: the first is that he should believe in the truth of his message; the second is that he should believe in the acceptability of his message. It was the whole tragedy of Carlyle that he had the first and not the second.

The ordinary capital, however, which is made out of Carlyle’s alleged gloom is a very paltry matter. Carlyle had his faults, both as a man and as a writer, but the attempt to explain his gospel in terms of his “liver” is merely pitiful. If indigestion invariably resulted in a “Sartor Resartus,” it would be a vastly more tolerable thing than it is. Diseases do not turn into poems; even the decadent really writes with the healthy part of his organism. If Carlyle’s private faults and literary virtues ran somewhat in the same line, he is only in the situation of every man; for every one of us it is surely very difficult to say precisely where our honest opinions end and our personal predilections begin. But to attempt to denounce Carlyle as a mere savage egotist cannot arise from anything but a pure inability to grasp Carlyle’s gospel. “Ruskin,” says a critic, “did, all the same, verily believe in God; Carlyle believed only in himself.” This is certainly a distinction between the author he has understood and the author he has not understood. Carlyle believed in himself, but he could not have believed in himself more than Ruskin did; they both believed in God, because they felt that if everything else fell into wrack and ruin, themselves were permanent witnesses to God. Where they both failed was not in belief in God or in belief in themselves; they failed in belief in other people. It is not enough for a prophet to believe in his message; he must believe in its acceptability. Christ, St. Francis, Bunyan, Wesley, Mr. Gladstone, Walt Whitman, men of indescribable variety, were all alike in a certain faculty of treating the average man as their equal, of trusting to his reason and good feeling without fear and without condescension. It was this simplicity of confidence, not only in God, but in the image of God, that was lacking in Carlyle.

But the attempts to discredit Carlyle’s religious sentiment must absolutely fall to the ground. The profound security of Carlyle’s sense of the unity of the Cosmos is like that of a Hebrew prophet; and it has the same expression that it had in the Hebrew prophets—humour. A man must be very full of faith to jest about his divinity. No Neo-Pagan delicately suggesting a revival of Dionysus, no vague, half-converted Theosophist groping towards a recognition of Buddha,
would ever think of cracking jokes on the matter. But to the Hebrew prophets their religion was so solid a thing, like a mountain or a mammoth, that the irony of its contact with trivial and fleeting matters struck them like a blow. So it was with Carlyle. His supreme contribution, both to philosophy and literature, was his sense of the sarcasm of eternity. Other writers had seen the hope or the terror of the heavens, he alone saw the humour of them. Other writers had seen that there could be something elemental and eternal in a song or statute, he alone saw that there could be something elemental and eternal in a joke. No one who ever read it will forget the passage, full of dark and agnostic gratification, in which he narrates that some Court chronicler described Louis XV. as “falling asleep in the Lord.” “Enough for us that he did fall asleep; that, curtained in thick night, under what keeping we ask not, he at least will never, through unending ages, insult the face of the sun any more . . . and we go on, if not to better forms of beastliness, at least to fresher ones.”

The supreme value of Carlyle to English literature was that he was the founder of modern irrationalism; a movement fully as important as modern rationalism. A great deal is said in these days about the value or valuelessness of logic. In the main, indeed, logic is not a productive tool so much as a weapon of defence. A man building up an intellectual system has to build like Nehemiah, with the sword in one hand and the trowel in the other. The imagination, the constructive quality, is the trowel, and argument is the sword. A wide experience of actual intellectual affairs will lead most people to the conclusion that logic is mainly valuable as a weapon wherewith to exterminate logicians.

But though this may be true enough in practice, it scarcely clears up the position of logic in human affairs. Logic is a machine of the mind, and if it is used honestly it ought to bring out an honest conclusion. When people say that you can prove anything by logic, they are not using words in a fair sense. What they mean is that you can prove anything by bad logic. Deep in the mystic ingratitude of the soul of man there is an extraordinary tendency to use the name for an organ, when what is meant is the abuse or decay of that organ. Thus we speak of a man suffering from “nerves,” which is about as sensible as talking about a man suffering from ten fingers. We speak of “liver” and “digestion” when we mean the failure of liver and the absence of digestion. And in the same manner we speak of the dangers of logic, when what we really mean is the danger of fallacy.

But the real point about the limitation of logic and the partial overthrow of logic by writers like Carlyle is deeper and somewhat different. The fault of the
great mass of logicians is not that they bring out a false result, or, in other words, are not logicians at all. Their fault is that by an inevitable psychological habit they tend to forget that there are two parts of a logical process, the first the choosing of an assumption, and the second the arguing upon it, and humanity, if it devotes itself too persistently to the study of sound reasoning, has a certain tendency to lose the faculty of sound assumption. It is astonishing how constantly one may hear from rational and even rationalistic persons such a phrase as “He did not prove the very thing with which he started,” or, “The whole of his case rested upon a pure assumption,” two peculiarities which may be found by the curious in the works of Euclid. It is astonishing, again, how constantly one hears rationalists arguing upon some deep topic, apparently without troubling about the deep assumptions involved, having lost their sense, as it were, of the real colour and character of a man’s assumption. For instance, two men will argue about whether patriotism is a good thing and never discover until the end, if at all, that the cosmopolitan is basing his whole case upon the idea that man should, if he can, become as God, with equal sympathies and no prejudices, while the nationalist denies any such duty at the very start, and regards man as an animal who has preferences, as a bird has feathers.

Thus it was with Carlyle: he startled men by attacking not arguments, but assumptions. He simply brushed aside all the matters which the men of the nineteenth century held to be incontrovertible, and appealed directly to the very different class of matters which they knew to be true. He induced men to study less the truth of their reasoning, and more the truth of the assumptions upon which they reasoned. Even where his view was not the highest truth, it was always a refreshing and beneficent heresy. He denied every one of the postulates upon which the age of reason based itself. He denied the theory of progress which assumed that we must be better off than the people of the twelfth century. Whether we were better than the people of the twelfth century, according to him, depended entirely upon whether we chose or deserved to be.

He denied every type and species of prop or association or support which threw the responsibility upon civilisation or society, or anything but the individual conscience. He has often been called a prophet. The real ground of the truth of this phrase is often neglected. Since the last era of purely religious literature, the era of English Puritanism, there has been no writer in whose eyes the soul stood so much alone.

Carlyle was, as we have suggested, a mystic, and mysticism was with him, as with all its genuine professors, only a transcendent form of common sense.
Mysticism and common sense alike consist in a sense of the dominance of certain truths and tendencies which cannot be formally demonstrated or even formally named. Mystic and common sense are alike appeals to realities that we all know to be real, but which have no place in argument except as postulates. Carlyle’s work did consist in breaking through formulæ, old and new, to these old and silent and ironical sanities. Philosophers might abolish kings a hundred times over, he maintained, they could not alter the fact that every man and woman does choose a king and repudiate all the pride of citizenship for the exultation of humility. If inequality of this kind was a weakness, it was a weakness bound up with the very strength of the universe. About hero worship, indeed, few critics have done the smallest justice to Carlyle. Misled by those hasty and choleric passages in which he sometimes expressed a preference for mere violence, passages which were a great deal more connected with his temperament than with his philosophy, they have finally imbibed the notion that Carlyle’s theory of hero worship was a theory of terrified submission to stern and arrogant men. As a matter of fact, Carlyle is really inhumane about some questions, but he is never inhumane about hero worship. His view is not that human nature is so vulgar and silly a thing that it must be guided and driven; it is, on the contrary, that human nature is so chivalrous and fundamentally magnanimous a thing that even the meanest have it in them to love a leader more than themselves, and to prefer loyalty to rebellion. When he speaks of this trait in human nature Carlyle’s tone invariably softens. We feel that for the moment he is kindled with admiration of mankind, and almost reaches the verge of Christianity. Whatever else was acid and captious about Carlyle’s utterances, his hero worship was not only humane, it was almost optimistic. He admired great men primarily, and perhaps correctly, because he thought that they were more human than other men. The evil side of the influence of Carlyle and his religion of hero worship did not consist in the emotional worship of valour and success; that was a part of him, as, indeed, it is a part of all healthy children. Where Carlyle really did harm was in the fact that he, more than any modern man, is responsible for the increase of that modern habit of what is vulgarly called “Going the whole hog.” Often in matters of passion and conquest it is a singularly hoggish hog. This remarkable modern craze for making one’s philosophy, religion, politics, and temper all of a piece, of seeking in all incidents for opportunities to assert and reassert some favourite mental attitude, is a thing which existed comparatively little in other centuries. Solomon and Horace, Petrarch and Shakespeare were pessimists when they were melancholy,
and optimists when they were happy. But the optimist of to-day seems obliged to prove that gout and unrequited love make him dance with joy, and the pessimist of to-day to prove that sunshine and a good supper convulse him with inconsolable anguish. Carlyle was strongly possessed with this mania for spiritual consistency. He wished to take the same view of the wars of the angels and of the paltriest riot at Donnybrook Fair. It was this species of insane logic which led him into his chief errors, never his natural enthusiasms. Let us take an example. Carlyle’s defence of slavery is a thoroughly ridiculous thing, weak alike in argument and in moral instinct. The truth is, that he only took it up from the passion for applying everywhere his paradoxical defence of aristocracy. He blundered, of course, because he did not see that slavery has nothing in the world to do with aristocracy, that it is, indeed, almost its opposite. The defence which Carlyle and all its thoughtful defenders have made for aristocracy was that a few persons could more rapidly and firmly decide public affairs in the interests of the people. But slavery is not even supposed to be a government for the good of the governed. It is a possession of the governed avowedly for the good of the governors. Aristocracy uses the strong for the service of the weak; slavery uses the weak for the service of the strong. It is no derogation to man as a spiritual being, as Carlyle firmly believed he was, that he should be ruled and guided for his own good like a child—for a child who is always ruled and guided we regard as the very type of spiritual existence. But it is a derogation and an absolute contradiction to that human spirituality in which Carlyle believed that a man should be owned like a tool for someone else’s good, as if he had no personal destiny in the Cosmos. We draw attention to this particular error of Carlyle’s because we think that it is a curious example of the waste and unclean places into which that remarkable animal, “the whole hog,” more than once led him.

In this respect Carlyle has had unquestionably long and an unquestionably bad influence. The whole of that recent political ethic which conceives that if we only go far enough we may finish a thing for once and all, that being strong consists chiefly in being deliberately deaf and blind, owes a great deal of its complete sway to his example. Out of him flows most of the philosophy of Nietzsche, who is in modern times the supreme maniac of this moonstruck consistency. Though Nietzsche and Carlyle were in reality profoundly different, Carlyle being a stiff-necked peasant and Nietzsche a very fragile aristocrat, they were alike in this one quality of which we speak, the strange and pitiful audacity with which they applied their single ethical test to everything in heaven and earth. The disciple of Nietzsche, indeed, embraces immorality like an austere
and difficult faith. He urges himself to lust and cruelty with the same tremulous enthusiasm with which a Christian urges himself to purity and patience; he struggles as a monk struggles with bestial visions and temptations with the ancient necessities of honour and justice and compassion. To this madhouse, it can hardly be denied, has Carlyle’s intellectual courage brought many at last.
TOLSTOY AND THE CULT OF SIMPLICITY

The whole world is certainly heading for a great simplicity, not deliberately, but rather inevitably. It is not a mere fashion of false innocence, like that of the French aristocrats before the Revolution, who built an altar to Pan, and who taxed the peasantry for the enormous expenditure which is needed in order to live the simple life of peasants. The simplicity towards which the world is driving is the necessary outcome of all our systems and speculations and of our deep and continuous contemplation of things. For the universe is like everything in it; we have to look at it repeatedly and habitually before we see it. It is only when we have seen it for the hundredth time that we see it for the first time. The more consistently things are contemplated, the more they tend to unify themselves and therefore to simplify themselves. The simplification of anything is always sensational. Thus monotheism is the most sensational of things: it is as if we gazed long at a design full of disconnected objects, and, suddenly, with a stunning thrill, they came together into a huge and staring face.

Few people will dispute that all the typical movements of our time are upon this road towards simplification. Each system seeks to be more fundamental than the other; each seeks, in the literal sense, to undermine the other. In art, for example, the old conception of man, classic as the Apollo Belvedere, has first been attacked by the realist, who asserts that man, as a fact of natural history, is a creature with colourless hair and a freckled face. Then comes the Impressionist, going yet deeper, who asserts that to his physical eye, which alone is certain, man is a creature with purple hair and a grey face. Then comes the Symbolist, and says that to his soul, which alone is certain, man is a creature with green hair and a blue face. And all the great writers of our time represent in one form or another this attempt to reestablish communication with the elemental, or, as it is sometimes more roughly and fallaciously expressed, to return to nature. Some think that the return to nature consists in drinking no wine; some think that it consists in drinking a great deal more than is good for them. Some think that the return to nature is achieved by beating swords into ploughshares; some think it is achieved by turning ploughshares into very ineffectual British War Office bayonets. It is natural, according to the Jingo, for a man to kill other people with gunpowder and himself with gin. It is natural, according to the humanitarian revolutionist, to kill other people with dynamite and himself with vegetarianism. It would be too obviously Philistine a sentiment,
perhaps, to suggest that the claim of either of these persons to be obeying the voice of nature is interesting when we consider that they require huge volumes of paradoxical argument to persuade themselves or anyone else of the truth of their conclusions. But the giants of our time are undoubtedly alike in that they approach by very different roads this conception of the return to simplicity. Ibsen returns to nature by the angular exterior of fact, Maeterlinck by the eternal tendencies of fable. Whitman returns to nature by seeing how much he can accept, Tolstoy by seeing how much he can reject.

Now, this heroic desire to return to nature, is, of course, in some respects, rather like the heroic desire of a kitten to return to its own tail. A tail is a simple and beautiful object, rhythmic in curve and soothing in texture; but it is certainly one of the minor but characteristic qualities of a tail that it should hang behind. It is impossible to deny that it would in some degree lose its character if attached to any other part of the anatomy. Now, nature is like a tail in the sense that it vitally important, if it is to discharge its real duty, that it should be always behind. To imagine that we can see nature, especially our own nature, face to face, is a folly; it is even a blasphemy. It is like the conduct of a cat in some mad fairy-tale, who should set out on his travels with the firm conviction that he would find his tail growing like a tree in the meadows at the end of the world. And the actual effect of the travels of the philosopher in search of nature, when seen from the outside, looks very like the gyrations of the tail-pursuing kitten, exhibiting much enthusiasm but little dignity, much cry and very little tail. The grandeur of nature is that she is omnipotent and unseen, that she is perhaps ruling us most when we think that she is heeding us least. “Thou art a God that hidest Thyself,” said the Hebrew poet. It may be said with all reverence that it is behind a man’s back that the spirit of nature hides.

It is this consideration that lends a certain air of futility even to all the inspired simplicities and thunderous veracities of Tolstoy. We feel that a man cannot make himself simple merely by warring on complexity; we feel, indeed, in our saner moments, that a man cannot make himself simple at all. A self-conscious simplicity may well be far more intrinsically ornate than luxury itself. Indeed, a great deal of the pomp and sumptuousness of the world’s history was simple in the truest sense. It was born of an almost babyish receptiveness; it was the work of men who had eyes to wonder and men who had ears to hear.

“King Solomon brought merchant men
Because of his desire
With peacocks, apes, and ivory,
But this proceeding was not a part of the wisdom of Solomon; it was a part of his folly—I had almost said of his innocence. Tolstoy, we feel, would not be content with hurling satire and denunciation at “Solomon in all his glory.” With fierce and unimpeachable logic he would go a step further. He would spend days and nights in the meadows stripping the shameless crimson coronals off the lilies of the field.

The new collection of “Tales from Tolstoy,” translated and edited by Mr. R. Nisbet Bain, is calculated to draw particular attention to this ethical and ascetic side of Tolstoy’s work. In one sense, and that the deepest sense, the work of Tolstoy is, of course, a genuine and noble appeal to simplicity. The narrow notion that an artist may not teach is pretty well exploded by now. But the truth of the matter is, that an artist teaches far more by his mere background and properties, his landscape, his costume, his idiom and technique—all the part of his work, in short, of which he is probably entirely unconscious, than by the elaborate and pompous moral dicta which he fondly imagines to be his opinions. The real distinction between the ethics of high art and the ethics of manufactured and didactic art lies in the simple fact that the bad fable has a moral, while the good fable is a moral. And the real moral of Tolstoy comes out constantly in these stories, the great moral which lies at the heart of all his work, of which he is probably unconscious, and of which it is quite likely that he would vehemently disapprove. The curious cold white light of morning that shines over all the tales, the folklore simplicity with which “a man or a woman” are spoken of without further identification, the love—one might almost say the lust—for the qualities of brute materials, the hardness of wood, and the softness of mud, the ingrained belief in a certain ancient kindliness sitting beside the very cradle of the race of man—these influences are truly moral. When we put beside them the trumpeting and tearing nonsense of the didactic Tolstoy, screaming for an obscene purity, shouting for an inhuman peace, hacking up human life into small sins with a chopper, sneering at men, women, and children out of respect to humanity, combining in one chaos of contradictions an unmanly Puritan and an uncivilised prig, then, indeed, we scarcely know whither Tolstoy has vanished. We know not what to do with this small and noisy moralist who is inhabiting one corner of a great and good man.

It is difficult in every case to reconcile Tolstoy the great artist with Tolstoy the almost venomous reformer. It is difficult to believe that a man who draws in such noble outlines the dignity of the daily life of humanity regards as evil that
divine act of procreation by which that dignity is renewed from age to age. It is
difficult to believe that a man who has painted with so frightful an honesty the
heartrending emptiness of the life of the poor can really grudge them every one
of their pitiful pleasures, from courtship to tobacco. It is difficult to believe that a
poet in prose who has so powerfully exhibited the earth-born air of man, the
essential kinship of a human being, with the landscape in which he lives, can
deny so elemental a virtue as that which attaches a man to his own ancestors and
his own land. It is difficult to believe that the man who feels so poignantly the
detestable insolence of oppression would not actually, if he had the chance, lay
the oppressor flat with his fist. All, however, arises from the search after a false
simplicity, the aim of being, if I may so express it, more natural than it is natural
to be. It would not only be more human, it would be more humble of us to be
content to be complex. The truest kinship with humanity would lie in doing as
humanity has always done, accepting with a sportsmanlike relish the estate to
which we are called, the star of our happiness, and the fortunes of the land of our
birth.

The work of Tolstoy has another and more special significance. It represents
the re-assertion of a certain awful common sense which characterised the most
extreme utterances of Christ. It is true that we cannot turn the cheek to the
smiter; it is true that we cannot give our cloak to the robber; civilisation is too
complicated, too vain-glorious, too emotional. The robber would brag, and we
should blush; in other words, the robber and we are alike sentimentalists. The
command of Christ is impossible, but it is not insane; it is rather sanity preached
to a planet of lunatics. If the whole world was suddenly stricken with a sense of
humour it would find itself mechanically fulfilling the Sermon on the Mount. It
is not the plain facts of the world which stand in the way of that consummation,
but its passions of vanity and self-advertisement and morbid sensibility. It is true
that we cannot turn the cheek to the smiter, and the sole and sufficient reason is
that we have not the pluck. Tolstoy and his followers have shown that they have
the pluck, and even if we think they are mistaken, by this sign they conquer.
Their theory has the strength of an utterly consistent thing. It represents that
doctrine of mildness and non-resistance which is the last and most audacious of
all the forms of resistance to every existing authority. It is the great strike of the
Quakers which is more formidable than many sanguinary revolutions. If human
beings could only succeed in achieving a real passive resistance they would be
strong with the appalling strength of inanimate things, they would be calm with
the maddening calm of oak or iron, which conquer without vengeance and are
conquered without humiliation. The theory of Christian duty enunciated by them is that we should never conquer by force, but always, if we can, conquer by persuasion. In their mythology St. George did not conquer the dragon: he tied a pink ribbon round its neck and gave it a saucer of milk. According to them, a course of consistent kindness to Nero would have turned him into something only faintly represented by Alfred the Great. In fact, the policy recommended by this school for dealing with the bovine stupidity and bovine fury of this world is accurately summed up in the celebrated verse of Mr. Edward Lear:

“There was an old man who said, ‘How
Shall I flee from this terrible cow?
I will sit on a stile and continue to smile
Till I soften the heart of this cow.’”

Their confidence in human nature is really honourable and magnificent; it takes the form of refusing to believe the overwhelming majority of mankind, even when they set out to explain their own motives. But although most of us would in all probability tend at first sight to consider this new sect of Christians as little less outrageous than some brawling and absurd sect in the Reformation, yet we should fall into a singular error in doing so. The Christianity of Tolstoy is, when we come to consider it, one of the most thrilling and dramatic incidents in our modern civilisation. It represents a tribute to the Christian religion more sensational than the breaking of seals or the falling of stars.

From the point of view of a rationalist, the whole world is rendered almost irrational by the single phenomenon of Christian Socialism. It turns the scientific universe topsy-turvy, and makes it essentially possible that the key of all social evolution may be found in the dusty casket of some discredited creed. It cannot be amiss to consider this phenomenon as it really is.

The religion of Christ has, like many true things, been disproven an extraordinary number of times. It was disproven by the Neo-Platonist philosophers at the very moment when it was first starting forth upon its startling and universal career. It was disproven again by many of the sceptics of the Renaissance only a few years before its second and supremely striking embodiment, the religion of Puritanism, was about to triumph over many kings and civilise many continents. We all agree that these schools of negation were only interludes in its history; but we all believe naturally and inevitably that the negation of our own day is really a breaking up of the theological cosmos, an Armageddon, a Ragnarok, a twilight of the gods. The man of the nineteenth century, like a schoolboy of sixteen, believes that his doubt and depression are
symbols of the end of the world. In our day the great irreligionists who did nothing but dethrone God and drive angels before them have been outstripped, distanced, and made to look orthodox and humdrum. A newer race of sceptics has found something infinitely more exciting to do than nailing down the lids upon a million coffins, and the body upon a single cross. They have disputed not only the elementary creeds, but the elementary laws of mankind, property, patriotism, civil obedience. They have arraigned civilisation as openly as the materialists have arraigned theology; they have damned all the philosophers even lower than they have damned the saints. Thousands of modern men move quietly and conventionally among their fellows while holding views of national limitation or landed property that would have made Voltaire shudder like a nun listening to blasphemies. And the last and wildest phase of this saturnalia of scepticism, the school that goes furthest among thousands who go so far, the school that denies the moral validity of those ideals of courage or obedience which are recognised even among pirates, this school bases itself upon the literal words of Christ, like Dr. Watts or Messrs. Moody and Sankey. Never in the whole history of the world was such a tremendous tribute paid to the vitality of an ancient creed. Compared with this, it would be a small thing if the Red Sea were cloven asunder, or the sun did stand still at midday. We are faced with the phenomenon that a set of revolutionists whose contempt for all the ideals of family and nation would evoke horror in a thieves’ kitchen, who can rid themselves of those elementary instincts of the man and the gentleman which cling to the very bones of our civilisation, cannot rid themselves of the influence of two or three remote Oriental anecdotes written in corrupt Greek. The fact, when realised, has about it something stunning and hypnotic. The most convinced rationalist is in its presence suddenly stricken with a strange and ancient vision, sees the immense sceptical cosmogonies of this age as dreams going the way of a thousand forgotten heresies, and believes for a moment that the dark sayings handed down through eighteen centuries may, indeed, contain in themselves the revolutions of which we have only begun to dream.

This value which we have above suggested unquestionably belongs to the Tolstoians, who may roughly be described as the new Quakers. With their strange optimism, and their almost appalling logical courage, they offer a tribute to Christianity which no orthodoxies could offer. It cannot but be remarkable to watch a revolution in which both the rulers and the rebels march under the same symbol. But the actual theory of non-resistance itself, with all its kindred theories, is not, I think, characterised by that intellectual obviousness and
necessity which its supporters claim for it. A pamphlet before us shows us an extraordinary number of statements about the new Testament, of which the accuracy is by no means so striking as the confidence. To begin with, we must protest against a habit of quoting and paraphrasing at the same time. When a man is discussing what Jesus meant, let him state first of all what He said, not what the man thinks He would have said if he had expressed Himself more clearly. Here is an instance of question and answer:

Q. “How did our Master Himself sum up the law in a few words?”

A. “Be ye merciful, be ye perfect even as your Father; your Father in the spirit world is merciful, is perfect.”

There is nothing in this, perhaps, which Christ might not have said except the abominable metaphysical modernism of “the spirit world”; but to say that it is recorded that He did say it, is like saying it is recorded that He preferred palm trees to sycamores. It is a simple and unadulterated untruth. The author should know that these words have meant a thousand things to a thousand people, and that if more ancient sects had paraphrased them as cheerfully as he, he would never have had the text upon which he founds his theory. In a pamphlet in which plain printed words cannot be left alone, it is not surprising if there are mis-statements upon larger matters. Here is a statement clearly and philosophically laid down which we can only content ourselves with flatly denying: “The fifth rule of our Lord is that we should take special pains to cultivate the same kind of regard for people of foreign countries, and for those generally who do not belong to us, or even have an antipathy to us, which we already entertain towards our own people, and those who are in sympathy with us.” I should very much like to know where in the whole of the New Testament the author finds this violent, unnatural, and immoral proposition. Christ did not have the same kind of regard for one person as for another. We are specifically told that there were certain persons whom He specially loved. It is most improbable that He thought of other nations as He thought of His own. The sight of His national city moved Him to tears, and the highest compliment He paid was, “Behold an Israelite indeed.”

The author has simply confused two entirely distinct things. Christ commanded us to have love for all men, but even if we had equal love for all men, to speak of having the same love for all men is merely bewildering nonsense. If we love a man at all, the impression he produces on us must be vitally different to the impression produced by another man whom we love. To speak of having the same kind of regard for both is about as sensible as asking a man whether he prefers chrysanthemums or billiards. Christ did not love humanity; He never said
He loved humanity; He loved men. Neither He nor anyone else can love humanity; it is like loving a gigantic centipede. And the reason that the Tolstoians can even endure to think of an equally distributed affection is that their love of humanity is a logical love, a love into which they are coerced by their own theories, a love which would be an insult to a tom-cat.

But the greatest error of all lies in the mere act of cutting up the teaching of the New Testament into five rules. It precisely and ingeniously misses the most dominant characteristic of the teaching–its absolute spontaneity. The abyss between Christ and all His modern interpreters is that we have no record that He ever wrote a word, except with His finger in the sand. The whole is the history of one continuous and sublime conversation. Thousands of rules have been deduced from it before these Tolstoian rules were made, and thousands will be deduced afterwards. It was not for any pompous proclamation, it was not for any elaborate output of printed volumes; it was for a few splendid and idle words that the cross was set up on Calvary, and the earth gaped, and the sun was darkened at noonday.
SAVONAROLA

Savonarola is a man whom we shall probably never understand until we know what horror may lie at the heart of civilisation. This we shall not know until we are civilised. It may be hoped, in one sense, that we may never understand Savonarola.

The great deliverers of men have, for the most part, saved them from calamities which we all recognise as evil, from calamities which are the ancient enemies of humanity. The great law-givers saved us from anarchy: the great physicians saved us from pestilence: the great reformers saved us from starvation. But there is a huge and bottomless evil compared with which all these are fleabites, the most desolating curse that can fall upon men or nations, and it has no name except we call it satisfaction. Savonarola did not save men from anarchy, but from order; not from pestilence, but from paralysis; not from starvation, but from luxury. Men like Savonarola are the witnesses to the tremendous psychological fact at the back of all our brains, but for which no name has ever been found, that ease is the worst enemy of happiness, and civilisation potentially the end of man.

For I fancy that Savonarola’s thrilling challenge to the luxury of his day went far deeper than the mere question of sin. The modern rationalistic admirers of Savonarola, from George Eliot downwards, dwell, truly enough, upon the sound ethical justification of Savonarola’s anger, upon the hideous and extravagant character of the crimes which polluted the palaces of the Renaissance. But they need not be so anxious to show that Savonarola was no ascetic, that he merely picked out the black specks of wickedness with the priggish enlightenment of a member of an Ethical Society. Probably he did hate the civilisation of his time, and not merely its sins; and that is precisely where he was infinitely more profound than a modern moralist. He saw, that the actual crimes were not the only evils: that stolen jewels and poisoned wine and obscene pictures were merely the symptoms; that the disease was the complete dependence upon jewels and wine and pictures. This is a thing constantly forgotten in judging of ascetics and Puritans in old times. A denunciation of harmless sports did not always mean an ignorant hatred of what no one but a narrow moralist would call harmful. Sometimes it meant an exceedingly enlightened hatred of what no one but a narrow moralist would call harmless. Ascetics are sometimes more advanced than the average man, as well as less.
Such, at least, was the hatred in the heart of Savonarola. He was making war against no trivial human sins, but against godless and thankless quiescence, against getting used to happiness, the mystic sin by which all creation fell. He was preaching that severity which is the sign-manual of youth and hope. He was preaching that alertness, that clean agility and vigilance, which is as necessary to gain pleasure as to gain holiness, as indispensable in a lover as in a monk. A critic has truly pointed out that Savonarola could not have been fundamentally anti-aesthetic, since he had such friends as Michael Angelo, Botticelli, and Luca della Robbia. The fact is that this purification and austerity are even more necessary for the appreciation of life and laughter than for anything else. To let no bird fly past unnoticed, to spell patiently the stones and weeds, to have the mind a storehouse of sunset, requires a discipline in pleasure, and an education in gratitude.

The civilisation which surrounded Savonarola on every side was a civilisation which had already taken the wrong turn, the turn that leads to endless inventions and no discoveries, in which new things grow old with confounding rapidity, but in which no old things ever grow new. The monstrosity of the crimes of the Renaissance was not a mark of imagination; it was a mark, as all monstrosity is, of the loss of imagination. It is only when a man has really ceased to see a horse as it is, that he invents a centaur, only when he can no longer be surprised at an ox, that he worships the devil. Diablerie is the stimulant of the jaded fancy; it is the dram-drinking of the artist. Savonarola addressed himself to the hardest of all earthly tasks, that of making men turn back and wonder at the simplicities they had learnt to ignore. It is strange that the most unpopular of all doctrines is the doctrine which declares the common life divine. Democracy, of which Savonarola was so fiery an exponent, is the hardest of gospels; there is nothing that so terrifies men as the decree that they are all kings. Christianity, in Savonarola’s mind, identical with democracy, is the hardest of gospels; there is nothing that so strikes men with fear as the saying that they are all the sons of God.

Savonarola and his republic fell. The drug of despotism was administered to the people, and they forgot what they had been. There are some at the present day who have so strange a respect for art and letters, and for mere men of genius, that they conceive the reign of the Medici to be an improvement on that of the great Florentine republican. It is such men as these and their civilisation that we have at the present day to fear. We are surrounded on many sides by the same symptoms as those which awoke the unquenchable wrath of Savonarola—a
hedonism that is more sick of happiness than an invalid is sick of pain, an art
sense that seeks the assistance of crime since it has exhausted nature. In many
modern works we find veiled and horrible hints of a truly Renaissance sense of
the beauty of blood, the poetry of murder. The bankrupt and depraved
imagination does not see that a living man is far more dramatic than a dead one.
Along with this, as in the time of the Medici, goes the falling back into the arms
of despotism, the hunger for the strong man which is unknown among strong
men. The masterful hero is worshipped as he is worshipped by the readers of the
“Bow Bells Novelettes,” and for the same reason—a profound sense of personal
weakness. That tendency to devolve our duties descends on us, which is the soul
of slavery, alike whether for its menial tasks it employs serfs or emperors.
Against all this the great clerical republican stands in everlasting protest,
preferring his failure to his rival’s success. The issue is still between him and
Lorenzo, between the responsibilities of liberty and the license of slavery,
between the perils of truth and the security of silence, between the pleasure of
toil and the toil of pleasure. The supporters of Lorenzo the Magnificent are
assuredly among us, men for whom even nations and empires only exist to
satisfy the moment, men to whom the last hot hour of summer is better than a
sharp and wintry spring. They have an art, a literature, a political philosophy,
which are all alike valued for their immediate effect upon the taste, not for what
they promise of the destiny of the spirit. Their statuettes and sonnets are rounded
and perfect, while “Macbeth” is in comparison a fragment, and the Moses of
Michael Angelo a hint. Their campaigns and battles are always called
triumphant, while Cæsar and Cromwell wept for many humiliations. And the
end of it all is the hell of no resistance, the hell of an unfathomable softness,
until the whole nature recoils into madness and the chamber of civilisation is no
longer merely a cushioned apartment, but a padded cell.

This last and worst of human miseries Savonarola saw afar off, and bent his
whole gigantic energies to turning the chariot into another course. Few men
understood his object; some called him a madman, some a charlatan, some an
enemy of human joy. They would not even have understood if he had told them,
if he had said that he was saving them from a calamity of contentment which
should be the end of joys and sorrows alike. But there are those to-day who feel
the same silent danger, and who bend themselves to the same silent resistance.
They also are supposed to be contending for some trivial political scruple.

Mr. M’Hardy says, in defending Savonarola, that the number of fine works of
art destroyed in the Burning of the Vanities has been much exaggerated. I
confess that I hope the pile contained stacks of incomparable masterpieces if the sacrifice made that one real moment more real. Of one thing I am sure, that Savonarola’s friend Michael Angelo would have piled all his own statues one on top of the other, and burnt them to ashes, if only he had been certain that the glow transfiguring the sky was the dawn of a younger and wiser world.
THE POSITION OF SIR WALTER SCOTT

Walter Scott is a writer who should just now be re-emerging into his own high place in letters, for unquestionably the recent, though now dwindling, schools of severely technical and aesthetic criticism have been unfavourable to him. He was a chaotic and unequal writer, and if there is one thing in which artists have improved since his time, it is in consistency and equality. It would perhaps be unkind to inquire whether the level of the modern man of letters, as compared with Scott, is due to the absence of valleys or the absence of mountains. But in any case, we have learnt in our day to arrange our literary effects carefully, and the only point in which we fall short of Scott is in the incidental misfortune that we have nothing particular to arrange.

It is said that Scott is neglected by modern readers; if so, the matter could be more appropriately described by saying that modern readers are neglected by Providence. The ground of this neglect, in so far as it exists, must be found, I suppose, in the general sentiment that, like the beard of Polonius, he is too long. Yet it is surely a peculiar thing that in literature alone a house should be despised because it is too large, or a host impugned because he is too generous. If romance be really a pleasure, it is difficult to understand the modern reader’s consuming desire to get it over, and if it be not a pleasure, it is difficult to understand his desire to have it at all. Mere size, it seems to me, cannot be a fault. The fault must lie in some disproportion. If some of Scott’s stories are dull and dilatory, it is not because they are giants, but because they are hunchbacks or cripples. Scott was very far indeed from being a perfect writer, but I do not think that it can be shown that the large and elaborate plan on which his stories are built was by any means an imperfection. He arranged his endless prefaces and his colossal introductions just as an architect plans great gates and long approaches to a really large house. He did not share the latter-day desire to get quickly through a story. He enjoyed narrative as a sensation; he did not wish to swallow a story like a pill, that it should do him good afterwards. He desired to taste it like a glass of port, that it might do him good at the time. The reader sits late at his banquets. His characters have that air of immortality which belongs to those of Dumas and Dickens. We should not be surprised to meet them in any number of sequels. Scott, in his heart of hearts, probably would have liked to write an endless story without either beginning or close.

Walter Scott is a great, and, therefore, mysterious man. He will never be
understood until Romance is understood, and that will be only when Time, Man, and Eternity are understood. To say that Scott had more than any other man that ever lived a sense of the romantic seems, in these days, a slight and superficial tribute. The whole modern theory arises from one fundamental mistake—the idea that romance is in some way a plaything with life, a figment, a conventionality, a thing upon the outside. No genuine criticism of romance will ever arise until we have grasped the fact that romance lies not upon the outside of life, but absolutely in the centre of it. The centre of every man’s existence is a dream. Death, disease, insanity, are merely material accidents, like toothache or a twisted ankle. That these brutal forces always besiege and often capture the citadel does not prove that they are the citadel. The boast of the realist (applying what the reviewers call his scalpel) is that he cuts into the heart of life; but he makes a very shallow incision, if he only reaches as deep as habits and calamities and sins. Deeper than all these lies a man’s vision of himself, as swaggering and sentimental as a penny novelette. The literature of can-dour unearths innumerable weaknesses and elements of lawlessness which is called romance. It perceives superficial habits like murder and dipsomania, but it does not perceive the deepest of sins—the sin of vanity—vanity which is the mother of all day-dreams and adventures, the one sin that is not shared with any boon companion, or whispered to any priest.

In estimating, therefore, the ground of Scott’s pre-eminence in romance we must absolutely rid ourselves of the notion that romance or adventure are merely materialistic things involved in the tangle of a plot or the multiplicity of drawn swords. We must remember that it is, like tragedy or farce, a state of the soul, and that, for some dark and elemental reason which we can never understand, this state of the soul is evoked in us by the sight of certain places or the contemplation of certain human crises, by a stream rushing under a heavy and covered wooden bridge, or by a man plunging a knife or sword into tough timber. In the selection of these situations which catch the spirit of romance as in a net, Scott has never been equalled or even approached. His finest scenes affect us like fragments of a hilarious dream. They have the same quality which is often possessed by those nocturnal comedies—that of seeming more human than our waking life—even while they are less possible. Sir Arthur Wardour, with his daughter and the old beggar crouching in a cranny of the cliff as night falls and the tide closes around them, are actually in the coldest and bitterest of practical situations. Yet the whole incident has a quality that can only be called boyish. It is warmed with all the colours of an incredible sunset. Rob Roy trapped in the
Tolbooth, and confronted with Bailie Nicol Jarvie, draws no sword, leaps from no window, affects none of the dazzling external acts upon which contemporary romance depends, yet that plain and humourous dialogue is full of the essential philosophy of romance which is an almost equal betting upon man and destiny. Perhaps the most profoundly thrilling of all Scott’s situations is that in which the family of Colonel Mannering are waiting for the carriage which may or may not arrive by night to bring an unknown man into a princely possession. Yet almost the whole of that thrilling scene consists of a ridiculous conversation about food, and flirtation between a frivolous old lawyer and a fashionable girl. We can say nothing about what makes these scenes, except that the wind bloweth where it listeth, and that here the wind blows strong.

It is in this quality of what may be called spiritual adventurousness that Scott stands at so different an elevation to the whole of the contemporary crop of romancers who have followed the leadership of Dumas. There has, indeed, been a great and inspiring revival of romance in our time, but it is partly frustrated in almost every case by this rooted conception that romance consists in the vast multiplication of incidents and the violent acceleration of narrative. The heroes of Mr. Stanley Weyman scarcely ever have their swords out of their hands; the deeper presence of romance is far better felt when the sword is at the hip ready for innumerable adventures too terrible to be pictured. The Stanley Weyman hero has scarcely time to eat his supper except in the act of leaping from a window or whilst his other hand is employed in lunging with a rapier. In Scott’s heroes, on the other hand, there is no characteristic so typical or so worthy of humour as their disposition to linger over their meals. The conviviality of the Clerk of Copmanhurst or of Mr. Pleydell, and the thoroughly solid things they are described as eating, is one of the most perfect of Scott’s poetic touches. In short, Mr. Stanley Weyman is filled with the conviction that the sole essence of romance is to move with insatiable rapidity from incident to incident. In the truer romance of Scott there is more of the sentiment of “Oh! still delay, thou art so fair”! more of a certain patriarchal enjoyment of things as they are—of the sword by the side and the wine-cup in the hand. Romance, indeed, does not consist by any means so much in experiencing adventures as in being ready for them. How little the actual boy cares for incidents in comparison to tools and weapons may be tested by the fact that the most popular story of adventure is concerned with a man who lived for years on a desert island with two guns and a sword, which he never had to use on an enemy.

Closely connected with this is one of the charges most commonly brought
against Scott, particularly in his own day—the charge of a fanciful and monotonous insistence upon the details of armour and costume. The critic in the Edinburgh Review said indignantly that he could tolerate a somewhat detailed description of the apparel of Marmion, but when it came to an equally detailed account of the apparel of his pages and yeomen the mind could bear it no longer. The only thing to be said about that critic is that he had never been a little boy. He foolishly imagined that Scott valued the plume and dagger of Marmion for Marmion’s sake. Not being himself romantic, he could not understand that Scott valued the plume because it was a plume, and the dagger because it was a dagger. Like a child, he loved weapons with a manual materialistic love, as one loves the softness of fur or the coolness of marble. One of the profound philosophical truths which are almost confined to infants is this love of things, not for their use or origin, but for their own inherent characteristics, the child’s love of the toughness of wood, the wetness of water, the magnificent soapiness of soap. So it was with Scott, who had so much of the child in him. Human beings were perhaps the principal characters in his stories, but they were certainly not the only characters. A battle-axe was a person of importance, a castle had a character and ways of its own. A church bell had a word to say in the matter. Like a true child, he almost ignored the distinction between the animate and inanimate. A two-handed sword might be carried only by a menial in a procession, but it was something important and immeasurably fascinating—it was a two-handed sword.

There is one quality which is supreme and continuous in Scott which is little appreciated at present. One of the values we have really lost in recent fiction is the value of eloquence. The modern literary artist is compounded of almost every man except the orator. Yet Shakespeare and Scott are certainly alike in this, that they could both, if literature had failed, have earned a living as professional demagogues. The feudal heroes in the “Waverley Novels” retort upon each other with a passionate dignity, haughty and yet singularly human, which can hardly be paralleled in political eloquence except in “Julius Cæsar.” With a certain fiery impartiality which stirs the blood, Scott distributes his noble orations equally among saints and villains. He may deny a villain every virtue or triumph, but he cannot endure to deny him a telling word; he will ruin a man, but he will not silence him. In truth, one of Scott’s most splendid traits is his difficulty, or rather incapacity, for despising any of his characters. He did not scorn the most revolting miscreant as the realist of to-day commonly scorns his own hero. Though his soul may be in rags, every man of Scott can speak like a
king.

This quality, as I have said, is sadly to seek in the fiction of the passing hour. The realist would, of course, repudiate the bare idea of putting a bold and brilliant tongue in every man’s head, but even where the moment of the story naturally demands eloquence the eloquence seems frozen in the tap. Take any contemporary work of fiction and turn to the scene where the young Socialist denounces the millionaire, and then compare the stilted sociological lecture given by that self-sacrificing bore with the surging joy of words in Rob Roy’s declaration of himself, or Athelstane’s defiance of De Bracy. That ancient sea of human passion upon which high words and great phrases are the resplendent foam is just now at a low ebb. We have even gone the length of congratulating ourselves because we can see the mud and the monsters at the bottom.

In politics there is not a single man whose position is due to eloquence in the first degree; its place is taken by repartees and rejoinders purely intellectual, like those of an omnibus conductor. In discussing questions like the farm-burning in South Africa no critic of the war uses his material as Burke or Grattan (perhaps exaggeratively) would have used it—the speaker is content with facts and expositions of facts. In another age he might have risen and hurled that great song in prose, perfect as prose and yet rising into a chant, which Meg Merrilies hurled at Ellangowan, at the rulers of Britain: “Ride your ways. Laird of Ellangowan; ride your ways, Godfrey Bertram—this day have ye quenched seven smoking hearths. See if the fire in your ain parlour burns the blyther for that. Ye have riven the thack of seven cottar houses. Look if your ain roof-tree stands the faster for that. Ye may stable your stirks in the sheilings of Dern-cleugh. See that the hare does not couch on the hearsthstane of Ellangowan. Ride your ways, Godfrey Bertram.”

The reason is, of course, that these men are afraid of bombast and Scott was not. A man will not reach eloquence if he is afraid of bombast, just as a man will not jump a hedge if he is afraid of a ditch. As the object of all eloquence is to find the least common denominator of men’s souls, to fall just within the natural comprehension, it cannot obviously have any chance with a literary ambition which aims at falling just outside it. It is quite right to invent subtle analyses and detached criticisms, but it is unreasonable to expect them to be punctuated with roars of popular applause. It is possible to conceive of a mob shouting any central and simple sentiment, good or bad, but it is impossible to think of a mob shouting a distinction in terms. In the matter of eloquence, the whole question is one of the immediate effect of greatness, such as is produced even by fine
bombast. It is absurd to call it merely superficial; here there is no question of superficiality; we might as well call a stone that strikes us between the eyes merely superficial. The very word “superficial” is founded on a fundamental mistake about life, the idea that second thoughts are best. The superficial impression of the world is by far the deepest. What we really feel, naturally and casually, about the look of skies and trees and the face of friends, that and that alone will almost certainly remain our vital philosophy to our dying day.

Scott’s bombast, therefore, will always be stirring to anyone who approaches it, as he should approach all literature, as a little child. We could easily excuse the contemporary critic for not admiring melodramas and adventure stories, and Punch and Judy, if he would admit that it was a slight deficiency in his artistic sensibilities. Beyond all question, it marks a lack of literary instinct to be unable to simplify one’s mind at the first signal of the advance of romance. “You do me wrong,” said Brian de Bois-Guilbert to Rebecca. “Many a law, many a commandment have I broken, but my word, never.” “Die,” cries Balfour of Burley to the villain in “Old Mortality.” “Die, hoping nothing, believing nothing—” “And fearing nothing,” replies the other. This is the old and honourable fine art of bragging, as it was practised by the great worthies of antiquity. The man who cannot appreciate it goes along with the man who cannot appreciate beef or claret or a game with children or a brass band. They are afraid of making fools of themselves, and are unaware that that transformation has already been triumphantly effected.

Scott is separated, then, from much of the later conception of fiction by this quality of eloquence. The whole of the best and finest work of the modern novelist (such as the work of Mr. Henry James) is primarily concerned with that delicate and fascinating speech which burrows deeper and deeper like a mole; but we have wholly forgotten that speech which mounts higher and higher like a wave and falls in a crashing peroration. Perhaps the most thoroughly brilliant and typical man of this decade is Mr. Bernard Shaw. In his admirable play of “Candida” it is clearly a part of the character of the Socialist clergyman that he should be eloquent, but he is not eloquent because the whole “G.B.S.” condition of mind renders impossible that poetic simplicity which eloquence requires. Scott takes his heroes and villains seriously, which is, after all, the way that heroes and villains take themselves—especially villains. It is the custom to call these old romantic poses artificial; but the word artificial is the last and silliest evasion of criticism. There was never anything in the world that was really artificial. It had some motive or ideal behind it, and generally a much better one
than we think.

Of the faults of Scott as an artist it is not very necessary to speak, for faults are generally and easily pointed out, while there is yet no adequate valuation of the varieties and contrasts of virtue. We have compiled a complete botanical classification of the weeds in the poetical garden, but the flowers still flourish, neglected and nameless. It is true, for example, that Scott had an incomparably stiff and pedantic way of dealing with his heroines: he made a lively girl of eighteen refuse an offer in the language of Dr. Johnson. To him, as to most men of his time, woman was not an individual, but an institution—a toast that was drunk some time after that of Church and King. But it is far better to consider the difference rather as a special merit, in that he stood for all those clean and bracing shocks of incident which are untouched by passion or weakness, for a certain breezy bachelorhood, which is almost essential to the literature of adventure. With all his faults, and all his triumphs, he stands for the great mass of natural manliness which must be absorbed into art unless art is to be a mere luxury and freak. An appreciation of Scott might be made almost a test of decadence. If ever we lose touch with this one most reckless and defective writer, it will be a proof to us that we have erected round ourselves a false cosmos, a world of lying and horrible perfection, leaving outside of it Walter Scott and that strange old world which is as confused and as indefensible and as inspiring and as healthy as he.
BRET HARTE

There are more than nine hundred and ninety-nine excellent reasons which we could all have for admiring the work of Bret Harte. But one supreme reason stands not in a certain general superiority to them all—a reason which may be stated in three propositions united in a common conclusion: first, that he was a genuine American; second, that he was a genuine humourist; and, third, that he was not an American humourist. Bret Harte had his own peculiar humour, but it had nothing in particular to do with American humour. American humour has its own peculiar excellence, but it has nothing in particular to do with Bret Harte. American humour is purely exaggerative; Bret Harte’s humour was sympathetic and analytical.

In order fully to understand this, it is necessary to realise, genuinely and thoroughly, that there is such a thing as an international difference in humour. If we take the crudest joke in the world—the joke, let us say, of a man sitting down on his hat—we shall yet find that all the nations would differ in their way of treating it humourously, and that if American humour treated it at all, it would be in a purely American manner. For example, there was a case of an orator in the House of Commons, who, after denouncing all the public abuses he could think of, did sit down on his hat. An Irishman immediately rose, full of the whole wealth of Irish humour, and said, “Should I be in order, Sir, in congratulating the honourable gentleman on the fact that when he sat down on his hat his head was not in it?” Here is a glorious example of Irish humour—the bull not unconscious, not entirely conscious, but rather an idea so absurd that even the utterer of it can hardly realise how abysmally absurd it is. But every other nation would have treated the idea in a manner slightly different. The Frenchman’s humour would have been logical: he would have said, “The orator denounces modern abuses and destroys to himself the top-hat: behold a good example!” What the Scotchman’s humour would have said I am not so certain, but it would probably have dealt with the serious advisability of making such speeches on top of someone else’s hat. But American humour on such a general theme would be the humour of exaggeration. The American humourist would say that the English politicians so often sat down on their hats that the noise of the House of Commons was one crackle of silk. He would say that when an important orator rose to speak in the House of Commons, long rows of hatters waited outside the House with note-books to take down orders from the participants in the debate.
He would say that the whole hat trade of London was disorganised by the news that a clever remark had been made by a young M. P. on the subject of the imports of Jamaica. In short, American humour, neither unfathomably absurd like the Irish, nor transfiguringly lucid and appropriate like the French, nor sharp and sensible and full of realities of life like the Scotch, is simply the humour of imagination. It consists in piling towers on towers and mountains on mountains; of heaping a joke up to the stars and extending it to the end of the world.

With this distinctively American humour Bret Harte had little or nothing in common. The wild, sky-breaking humour of America has its fine qualities, but it must in the nature of things be deficient in two qualities, not only of supreme importance to life and letters, but of supreme importance to humour—reverence and sympathy. And these two qualities were knit into the closest texture of Bret Harte’s humour. Everyone who has read and enjoyed Mark Twain as he ought to be read and enjoyed will remember a very funny and irreverent story about an organist who was asked to play appropriate music to an address upon the parable of the Prodigal Son, and who proceeded to play with great spirit, “We’ll all get blind drunk, when Johnny comes marching home.” The best way of distinguishing Bret Harte from the rest of American humour is to say that if Bret Harte had described that scene, it would in some subtle way have combined a sense of the absurdity of the incident with some sense of the sublimity and pathos of the theme. You would have felt that the organist’s tune was funny, but not that the Prodigal Son was funny. But America is under a kind of despotism of humour. Everyone is afraid of humour: the meanest of human nightmares. Bret Harte had, to express the matter briefly but more or less essentially, the power of laughing not only at things, but also with them. America has laughed at things magnificently, with Gargantuan reverberations of laughter. But she has not even begun to learn the richer lesson of laughing with them.

The supreme proof of the fact that Bret Harte had the instinct of reverence may be found in the fact that he was a really great parodist. This may have the appearance of being a paradox, but, as in the case of many other paradoxes, it is not so important whether it is a paradox as whether it is not obviously true. Mere derision, mere contempt, never produced or could produce parody. A man who simply despises Paderewski for having long hair is not necessarily fitted to give an admirable imitation of his particular touch on the piano. If a man wishes to parody Paderewski’s style of execution, he must emphatically go through one process first: he must admire it, and even reverence it. Bret Harte had a real power of imitating great authors, as in his parodies on Dumas, on Victor Hugo,
on Charlotte Brontë. This means, and can only mean, that he had perceived the real beauty, the real ambition of Dumas and Victor Hugo and Charlotte Brontë. To take an example, Bret Harte has in his imitation of Hugo a passage like this:

“M. Madeline was, if possible, better than M. Myriel. M. Myriel was an angel. M. Madeline was a good man.” I do not know whether Victor Hugo ever used this antithesis; but I am certain that he would have used it and thanked his stars if he had thought of it. This is real parody, inseparable from admiration. It is the same in the parody of Dumas, which is arranged on the system of “Aramis killed three of them. Porthos three. Athos three.” You cannot write that kind of thing unless you have first exulted in the arithmetical ingenuity of the plots of Dumas. It is the same in the parody of Charlotte Brontë, which opens with a dream of a storm-beaten cliff, containing jewels and pelicans. Bret Harte could not have written it unless he had really understood the triumph of the Brontës, the triumph of asserting that great mysteries lie under the surface of the most sullen life, and that the most real part of a man is in his dreams.

This kind of parody is forever removed from the purview of ordinary American humour. Can anyone imagine Mark Twain, that admirable author, writing even a tolerable imitation of authors so intellectually individual as Hugo or Charlotte Brontë? Mark Twain would yield to the spirit of contempt which destroys parody. All those who hate authors fail to satirise them, for they always accuse them of the wrong faults. The enemies of Thackeray call him a worldling, instead of what he was, a man too ready to believe in the goodness of the unworldly. The enemies of Meredith call his gospel too subtle, instead of what it is, a gospel, if anything, too robust. And it is this vulgar misunderstanding which we find in most parody—which we find in all American parody—but which we never find in the parodies of Bret Harte.

“The skies they were ashen and sober,
The streets they were dirty and drear,
It was the dark month of October,
In that most immemorial year.
Like the skies, I was perfectly sober,
But my thoughts they were palsied and sear,
Yes, my thoughts were decidedly queer.”

This could only be written by a genuine admirer of Edgar Allan Poe, who permitted himself for a moment to see the fun of the thing. Parody might indeed be defined as the worshipper’s half-holiday.

The same general characteristic of sympathy amounting to reverence marks Bret Harte’s humour in his better-known class of works, the short stories. He
does not make his characters absurd in order to make them contemptible: it might almost be said that he makes them absurd in order to make them dignified. For example, the greatest creation of Bret Harte, greater even than Colonel Starbottle (and how terrible it is to speak of anyone greater than Colonel Starbottle!) is that unutterable being who goes by the name of Yuba Bill. He is, of course, the coach-driver in the Bret Harte district. Some ingenious person, whose remarks I read the other day, had compared him on this ground with old Mr. Weller. It would be difficult to find a comparison indicating a more completely futile instinct for literature. Tony Weller and Yuba Bill were both coach-drivers, and this fact establishes a resemblance just about as much as the fact that Jobson in “Rob Roy” and George Warrington in “Pendennis” were both lawyers; or that Antonio and Mr. Pickwick were both merchants; or that Sir Galahad and Sir Willoughby Patten were both knights. Tony Weller is a magnificent grotesque. He is a gargoyle, and his mouth, like the mouths of so many gargoyles, is always open. He is garrulous, exuberant, flowery, preposterously sociable. He holds that great creed of the convivial, the creed which is at the back of so much that is greatest in Dickens, the creed that eternity begins at ten o’clock at night, and that nights last forever. But Yuba Bill is a figure of a widely different character. He is not convivial; it might almost be said that he is too great ever to be sociable. A circle of quiescence and solitude such as that which might ring a saint or a hermit rings this majestic and profound humourist. His jokes do not flow upon him like those of Mr. Weller, sparkling, continual, and deliberate, like the play of a fountain in a pleasure garden; they fall suddenly and capriciously, like a crash of avalanches from a great mountain. Tony Weller has the noisy humour of London, Yuba Bill has the silent humour of the earth.

One of the worst of the disadvantages of the rich and random fertility of Bret Harte is the fact that it is very difficult to trace or recover all the stories that he has written. I have not within reach at the moment the story in which the character of Yuba Bill is exhibited in its most solemn grandeur, but I remember that it concerned a ride on the San Francisco stage coach, a difficulty arising from storm and darkness, and an intelligent young man who suggested to Yuba Bill that a certain manner of driving the coach in a certain direction might minimise the dangers of the journey. A profound silence followed the intelligent young man’s suggestion, and then (I quote from memory) Yuba Bill observed at last:

“Air you settin’ any value on that remark?”
The young man professed not fully to comprehend him, and Yuba Bill continued reflectively:

“’Cos there’s a comic paper in ‘Frisco pays for them things, and I’ve seen worse in it.”

To be rebuked thus is like being rebuked by the Pyramids or by the starry heavens. There is about Yuba Bill this air of a pugnacious calm, a stepping back to get his distance for a shattering blow, which is like that of Dr. Johnson at his best. And the effect is inexpressively increased by the background and the whole picture which Bret Harte paints so powerfully; the stormy skies, the sombre gorge, the rocking and spinning coach, and high above the feverish passengers the huge dark form of Yuba Bill, a silent mountain of humour.

Another unrecovered and possibly irrecoverable fragment about Yuba Bill, I recall in a story about his visiting a lad who had once been his protégé in the Wild West, and who had since become a distinguished literary man in Boston. Yuba Bill visits him, and on finding him in evening dress lifts up his voice in a superb lamentation over the tragedy of finding his old friend at last “a ‘otel waiter.” Then, vindictively pursuing the satire, he calls fiercely to his young friend, “Hi, Alphonse! bring me a patty de foy gras, damme.” These are the things that make us love the eminent Bill. He is one of those who achieve the noblest and most difficult of all the triumphs of a fictitious character—the triumph of giving us the impression of having a great deal more in him than appears between the two boards of the story. Smaller characters give us the impression that the author has told the whole truth about them, greater characters give the impression that the author has given of them, not the truth, but merely a few hints and samples. In some mysterious way we seem to feel that even if Shakespeare was wrong about Falstaff, Falstaff existed and was real; that even if Dickens was wrong about Micawber, Micawber existed and was real. So we feel that there is in the great salt-sea of Yuba Bill’s humour as good fish as ever came out of it. The fleeting jests which Yuba Bill throws to the coach passengers only give us the opportunity of fancying and deducing the vast mass of jests which Yuba Bill shares with his creator.

Bret Harte had to deal with countries and communities of an almost unexampled laxity, a laxity passing the laxity of savages, the laxity of civilised men grown savage. He dealt with a life which we in a venerable and historic society may find it somewhat difficult to realise. It was the life of an entirely new people, a people who, having no certain past, could have no certain future. The strangest of all the sardonic jests that history has ever played may be found
in this fact: that there is a city which is of all cities the most typical of innovation and dissipation, and a certain almost splendid vulgarity, and that this city bears the name in a quaint old European language of the most perfect exponent of the simplicity and holiness of the Christian tradition; the city is called San Francisco. San Francisco, the capital of the Bret Harte country, is a city typifying novelty in a manner in which it is typified by few modern localities. San Francisco has in all probability its cathedrals, but it may well be that its cathedrals are less old and less traditional than many of our hotels. If its inhabitants built a temple to the most primal and forgotten god of whose worship we can find a trace, that temple would still be a modern thing compared with many taverns in Suffolk round which there lingers a faint tradition of Mr. Pickwick. And everything in that new gold country was new, even to the individual inhabitants. Good, bad, and indifferent, heroes and dastards, they were all men from nowhere.

Most of us have come across the practical problem of London landladies, the problem of the doubtful foreign gentleman in a street of respectable English people. Those who have done so can form some idea of what it would be to live in a street full of doubtful foreign gentlemen, in a parish, in a city, in a nation composed entirely of doubtful foreign gentlemen. Old California, at the time of the first rush after gold, was actually this paradox of the nation of foreigners. It was a republic of incognitos: no one knew who anyone else was, and only the more ill-mannered and uneasy even desired to know. In such a country as this, gentlemen took more trouble to conceal their gentility than thieves living in South Kensington would take to conceal their blackguardism. In such a country everyone is an equal, because everyone is a stranger. In such a country it is not strange if men in moral matters feel something of the irresponsibility of a dream. To plan plans which are continually miscarrying against men who are continually disappearing by the assistance of you know not whom, to crush you know not whom, this must be a demoralising life for any man; it must be beyond description demoralising for those who have been trained in no lofty or orderly scheme of right. Small blame to them indeed if they become callous and supercilious and cynical. And the great glory and achievement of Bret Harte consists in this, that he realised that they do not become callous, supercilious, and cynical, but that they do become sentimental and romantic, and profoundly affectionate. He discovered the intense sensibility of the primitive man. To him we owe the realisation of the fact that while modern barbarians of genius like Mr. Henley, and in his weaker moments Mr. Rudyard Kipling, delight in
describing the coarseness and crude cynicism and fierce humour of the unlettered classes, the unlettered classes are in reality highly sentimental and religious, and not in the least like the creations of Mr. Henley and Mr. Kipling. Bret Harte tells the truth about the wildest, the grossest, the most rapacious of all the districts of the earth—the truth that, while it is very rare indeed in the world to find a thoroughly good man, it is rarer still, rare to the point of monstrosity, to find a man who does not either desire to be one, or imagine that he is one already.
ALFRED THE GREAT

The celebrations in connection with the millenary of King Alfred struck a note of sympathy in the midst of much that was unsympathetic, because, altogether apart from any peculiar historical opinions, all men feel the sanctifying character of that which is at once strong and remote; the ancient thing is always the most homely, and the distant thing the most near. The only possible peacemaker is a dead man, ever since by the sublime religious story a dead man only could reconcile heaven and earth. In a certain sense we always feel the past ages as human, and our own age as strangely and even weirdly dehumanised. In our own time the details overpower us; men’s badges and buttons seem to grow larger and larger as in a horrible dream. To study humanity in the present is like studying a mountain with a magnifying glass; to study it in the past is like studying it through a telescope.

For this reason England, like every other great and historic nation, has sought its typical hero in remote and ill-recorded times. The personal and moral greatness of Alfred is, indeed, beyond question. It does not depend any more than the greatness of any other human hero upon the accuracy of any or all of the stories that are told about him. Alfred may not have done one of the things which are reported of him, but it is immeasurably easier to do every one of those things than to be the man of whom such things are reported falsely. Fable is, generally speaking, far more accurate than fact, for fable describes a man as he was to his own age, fact describes him as he is to a handful of inconsiderable antiquarians many centuries after. Whether Alfred watched the cakes for the neat-herd’s wife, whether he sang songs in the Danish camp, is of no interest to anyone except those who set out to prove under considerable disadvantages that they are genealogically descended from him. But the man is better pictured in these stories than in any number of modern realistic trivialities about his favourite breakfast and his favourite musical composer. Fable is more historical than fact, because fact tells us about one man and fable tells us about a million men. If we read of a man who could make green grass red and turn the sun into the moon, we may not believe these particular details about him, but we learn something infinitely more important than such trivialities, the fact that men could look into his face and believe it possible. The glory and greatness of Alfred, therefore, is like that of all the heroes of the morning of the world, set far beyond the chance of that strange and sudden dethronement which may arise from the unsealing of
a manuscript or the turning over of a stone. Men may have told lies when they
said that he first entrapped the Danes with his song and then overcame them with
his armies, but we know very well that it is not of us that such lies are told. There
may be myths clustering about each of our personalities; local saga-men
and chroniclers have very likely circulated the story that we are addicted to
drink, or that we ferociously ill-use our wives. But they do not commonly lie to
the effect that we have shed our blood to save all the inhabitants of the street. A
story grows easily, but a heroic story is not a very easy thing to evoke. Wherever
that exists we may be pretty certain that we are in the presence of a dark but
powerful historic personality. We are in the presence of a thousand lies all
pointing with their fantastic fingers to one undiscovered truth.

Upon this ground alone every encouragement is due to the cult of Alfred.
Every nation requires to have behind it some historic personality, the validity of
which is proved, as the validity of a gun is proved, by its long range. It is
wonderful and splendid that we treasure, not the truth, but the very gossip about
a man who died a thousand years ago. We may say to him, as M. Rostand says to
the Austrian Prince:

“Dors, ce n’est pas toujours la Légende qui ment:
Une rêve est parfois moins trompeur qu’un document.”

To have a man so simple and so honourable to represent us in the darkness of
primeval history, binds all the intervening centuries together, and mollifies all
their monstrosities. It makes all history more comforting and intelligible; it
makes the desolate temple of the ages as human as an inn parlour.

But whether it come through reliable facts or through more reliable falsehoods
the personality of Alfred has its own unmistakable colour and stature. Lord
Rosebery uttered a profound truth when he said that that personality was
peculiarly English. The great magnificence of the English character is expressed
in the word “service.” There is, perhaps, no nation so vitally theocratical as the
English; no nation in which the strong men have so consistently preferred the
instrumental to the despotic attitude, the pleasures of the loyal to the pleasures of
the royal position. We have had tyrants like Edward I. and Queen Elizabeth, but
even our tyrants have had the worried and responsible air of stewards of a great
estate. Our typical hero is such a man as the Duke of Wellington, who had every
kind of traditional and external arrogance, but at the back of all that the strange
humility which made it physically possible for him without a gleam of humour
or discomfort to go on his knees to a preposterous bounder like George IV.
Across the infinite wastes of time and through all the mists of legend we still feel the presence in Alfred of this strange and unconscious self-effacement. After the fullest estimate of our misdeeds we can still say that our very despots have been less self-assertive than many popular patriots. As we consider these things we grow more and more impatient of any modern tendencies towards the enthronement of a more self-conscious and theatrical ideal. Lord Rosebery called up before our imaginations the picture of what Alfred would have thought of the vast modern developments of his nation, its immense fleet, its widespread Empire, its enormous contribution to the mechanical civilisation of the world. It cannot be anything but profitable to conceive Alfred as full of astonishment and admiration at these things; it cannot be anything but good for us that we should realise that to the childlike eyes of a great man of old time our inventions and appliances have not the vulgarity and ugliness that we see in them. To Alfred a steamboat would be a new and sensational sea-dragon, and the penny postage a miracle achieved by the despotism of a demi-god.

But when we have realised all this there is something more to be said in connection with Lord Rosebery’s vision. What would King Alfred have said if he had been asked to expend the money which he devoted to the health and education of his people upon a struggle with some race of Visigoths or Parthians inhabiting a small section of a distant continent? What would he have said if he had known that that science of letters which he taught to England would eventually be used not to spread truth, but to drug the people with political assurances as imbecile in themselves as the assurance that fire does not burn and water does not drown? What would he have said if the same people who, in obedience to that ideal of service and sanity of which he was the example, had borne every privation in order to defeat Napoleon, should come at last to find no better compliment to one of their heroes than to call him the Napoleon of South Africa? What would he have said if that nation for which he had inaugurated a long line of incomparable men of principle should forget all its traditions and coquette with the immoral mysticism of the man of destiny?

Let us follow these things by all means if we find them good, and can see nothing better. But to pretend that Alfred would have admired them is like pretending that St. Dominic would have seen eye to eye with Mr. Bradlaugh, or that Fra Angelico would have revelled in the posters of Mr. Aubrey Beardsley. Let us follow them if we will, but let us take honestly all the disadvantages of our change; in the wildest moment of triumph let us feel the shadow upon our glories of the shame of the great king.
MAETERLINCK

The selection of “Thoughts from Maeterlinck” is a very creditable and also a very useful compilation. Many modern critics object to the hacking and hewing of a consistent writer which is necessary for this kind of work, but upon more serious consideration, the view is not altogether adequate. Maeterlinck is a very great man; and in the long run this process of mutilation has happened to all great men. It was the mark of a great patriot to be drawn and quartered and his head set on one spike in one city and his left leg on another spike in another city. It was the mark of a saint that even these fragments began to work miracles. So it has been with all the very great men of the world. However careless, however botchy, may be the version of Maeterlinck or of anyone else given in such a selection as this, it is assuredly far less careless and far less botchy than the version, the parody, the wild misrepresentation of Maeterlinck which future ages will hear and distant critics be called upon to consider.

No one can feel any reasonable doubt that we have heard about Christ and Socrates and Buddha and St. Francis a mere chaos of excerpts, a mere book of quotations. But from those fragmentary epigrams we can deduce greatness as clearly as we can deduce Venus from the torso of Venus or Hercules ex pede Herculem. If we knew nothing else about the Founder of Christianity, for example, beyond the fact that a religious teacher lived in a remote country, and in the course of his peregrinations and proclamations consistently called Himself “the Son of Man,” we should know by that alone that he was a man of almost immeasurable greatness. If future ages happened to record nothing else about Socrates except that he owned his title to be the wisest of men because he knew that he knew nothing, they would be able to deduce from that the height and energy of his civilisation, the glory that was Greece. The credit of such random compilations as that which “E.S.S.” and Mr. George Allen have just effected is quite secure. It is the pure, pedantic, literal editions, the complete works of this author or that author which are forgotten. It is such books as this that have revolutionised the destiny of the world. Great things like Christianity or Platonism have never been founded upon consistent editions; all of them have been founded upon scrap-books.

The position of Maeterlinck in modern life is a thing too obvious to be easily determined in words. It is, perhaps, best expressed by saying that it is the great glorification of the inside of things at the expense of the outside. There is one
great evil in modern life for which nobody has found even approximately a tolerable description: I can only invent a word and call it “remotism.” It is the tendency to think first of things which, as a matter of fact, lie far away from the actual centre of human experience. Thus people say, “All our knowledge of life begins with the amoeba.” It is false; our knowledge of life begins with ourselves. Thus they say that the British Empire is glorious, and at the very word Empire they think at once of Australia and New Zealand, and Canada, and Polar bears, and parrots and kangaroos, and it never occurs to any one of them to think of the Surrey Hills. The one real struggle in modern life is the struggle between the man like Maeterlinck, who sees the inside as the truth, and the man like Zola, who sees the outside as the truth. A hundred cases might be given. We may take, for the sake of argument, the case of what is called falling in love. The sincere realist, the man who believes in a certain finality in physical science, says, “You may, if you like, describe this thing as a divine and sacred and incredible vision; that is your sentimental theory about it. But what it is, is an animal and sexual instinct designed for certain natural purposes.” The man on the other side, the idealist, replies, with quite equal confidence, that this is the very reverse of the truth. I put it as it has always struck me; he replies, “Not at all. You may, if you like, describe this thing as an animal and sexual instinct designed for certain natural purposes; that is your philosophical or zoological theory about it. What it is, beyond all doubt of any kind, is a divine and sacred and incredible vision.” The fact that it is an animal necessity only comes to the naturalistic philosopher after looking abroad, studying its origins and results, constructing an explanation of its existence, more or less natural and conclusive. The fact that it is a spiritual triumph comes to the first errand boy who happens to feel it. If a lad of seventeen falls in love and is struck dead by a hansom cab an hour afterwards, he has known the thing as it is, a spiritual ecstasy; he has never come to trouble about the thing as it may be, a physical destiny. If anyone says that falling in love is an animal thing, the answer is very simple. The only way of testing the matter is to ask those who are experiencing it, and none of those would admit for a moment that it was an animal thing.

Maeterlinck’s appearance in Europe means primarily this subjective intensity; by this the materialism is not overthrown: materialism is undermined. He brings, not something which is more poetic than realism, not something which is more spiritual than realism, not something which is more right than realism, but something which is more real than realism. He discovers the one indestructible thing. This material world on which such vast systems have been superimposed–
this may mean anything. It may be a dream, it may be a joke, it may be a trap or temptation, it may be a charade, it may be the beatific vision: the only thing of which we are certain is this human soul. This human soul finds itself alone in a terrible world, afraid of the grass. It has brought forth poetry and religion in order to explain matters; it will bring them forth again. It matters not one atom how often the lulls of materialism and scepticism occur; they are always broken by the reappearance of a fanatic. They have come in our time: they have been broken by Maeterlinck.
I do not think anyone could find any fault with the way in which Mr. Collingwood has discharged his task, except, of course, Mr. Ruskin himself, who would certainly have scored through all the eulogies in passionate red ink and declared that his dear friend had selected for admiration the very parts of his work which were vile, brainless, and revolting. That, however, was merely Ruskin’s humour, and one of the deepest disappointments with Mr. Collingwood is that he, like everyone else, fails to appreciate Ruskin as a humourist. Yet he was a great humourist: half the explosions which are solemnly scolded as “one-sided” were simply meant to be one-sided, were mere laughing experiments in language. Like a woman, he saw the humour of his own prejudices, did not sophisticate them by logic, but deliberately exaggerated them by rhetoric. One tenth of his paradoxes would have made the fortune of a modern young man with gloves of an art yellow. He was as fond of nonsense as Mr. Max Beerbohm. Only... he was fond of other things too. He did not ask humanity to dine on pickles.

But while his kaleidoscope of fancy and epigram gives him some kinship with the present day, he was essentially of an earlier type: he was the last of the prophets. With him vanishes the secret of that early Victorian simplicity which gave a man the courage to mount a pulpit above the head of his fellows. Many elements, good and bad, have destroyed it; humility as well as fear, camaraderie as well as scepticism, have bred in us a desire to give our advice lightly and persuasively, to mask our morality, to whisper a word and glide away. The contrast was in some degree typified in the House of Commons under the last leadership of Mr. Gladstone: the old order with its fist on the box, and the new order with its feet on the table. Doubtless the wine of that prophecy was too strong even for the strong heads that carried it. It made Ruskin capricious and despotic, Tennyson lonely and whimsical, Carlyle harsh to the point of hatred, and Kingsley often rabid to the ruin of logic and charity. One alone of that race of giants, the greatest and most neglected, was sober after the cup. No mission, no frustration could touch with hysteria the humanity of Robert Browning.

But though Ruskin seems to close the roll of the militant prophets, we feel how needful are such figures when we consider with what pathetic eagerness men pay prophetic honours even to those who disclaim the prophetic character. Ibsen declares that he only depicts life, that as far as he is concerned there is
nothing to be done, and still armies of “Ibsenites” rally to the flag and enthusiastically do nothing. I have found traces of a school which avowedly follows Mr. Henry James: an idea full of humour. I like to think of a crowd with pikes and torches shouting passages from “The Awkward Age.” It is right and proper for a multitude to declare its readiness to follow a prophet to the end of the world, but if he himself explains, with pathetic gesticulations, that he is only going for a walk in the park, there is not much for the multitude to do. But the disciple of Ruskin had plenty to do. He made roads; in his spare moments he studied the whole of geology and botany. He lifted up paving stones and got down into early Florentine cellars, where, by hanging upside down, he could catch a glimpse of a Cimabue unpraisable but by divine silence. He rushed from one end of a city to the other comparing ceilings. His limbs were weary, his clothes were torn, and in his eyes was that unfathomable joy of life which man will never know again until once more he takes himself seriously.

Mr. Collingwood’s excellent chapters on the art criticism of Ruskin would be better, in my opinion, if they showed more consciousness of the after revolutions that have reversed, at least in detail, much of Ruskin’s teaching. We no longer think that art became valueless when it was first corrupted with anatomical accuracy. But if we return to that Raphaelism to which he was so unjust, let us not fall into the old error of intelligent reactionaries, that of ignoring our own debt to revolutions. Ruskin could not destroy the market of Raphaelism, but he could and did destroy its monopoly. We may go back to the Renaissance, but let us remember that we go back free. We can picnic now in the ruins of our dungeon and deride our deliverer.

But neither in Mr. Collingwood’s book nor in Ruskin’s own delightful “Præterita” shall we ever get to the heart of the matter. The work of Ruskin and his peers remains incomprehensible by the very completeness of their victory. Fallen forever is that vast brick temple of Utilitarianism, of which we may find the fragments but never renew the spell. Liberal Unionists howl in its high places, and in its ruins Mr. Lecky builds his nest. Its records read with something of the mysterious arrogance of Chinese: hardly a generation away from us, we read of a race who believed in the present with the same sort of servile optimism with which the Oriental believes in the past. It may be that banging his head against that roof for twenty years did not improve the temper of the prophet. But he made what he praised in the old Italian pictures—“an opening into eternity.”

QUEEN VICTORIA

Anyone who possesses spiritual or political courage has made up his mind to a prospect of immutable mutability; but even in a “transformation” there is something catastrophic in the removal of the back scene. It is a truism to say of the wise and noble lady who is gone from us that we shall always remember her; but there is a subtler and higher compliment still in confessing that we often forgot her. We forgot her as we forget the sunshine, as we forget the postulates of an argument, as we commonly forget our own existence. Mr. Gladstone is the only figure whose loss prepared us for such earthquakes altering the landscape. But Mr. Gladstone seemed a fixed and stationary object in our age for the same reason that one railway train looks stationary from another; because he and the age of progress were both travelling at the same impetuous rate of speed. In the end, indeed, it was probably the age that dropped behind. For a symbol of the Queen’s position we must rather recur to the image of a stretch of scenery, in which she was as a mountain so huge and familiar that its disappearance would make the landscape round our own door seem like a land of strangers. She had an inspired genius for the familiarising virtues; her sympathy and sanity made us feel at home even in an age of revolutions. That indestructible sense of security which for good and evil is so typical of our nation, that almost scornful optimism which, in the matter of ourselves, cannot take peril or even decadence seriously, reached by far its highest and healthiest form in the sense that we were watched over by one so thoroughly English in her silence and self-control, in her shrewd trustfulness and her brilliant inaction. Over and above those sublime laws of labour and pity by which she ordered her life, there are a very large number of minor intellectual matters in which we might learn a lesson from the Queen. There is one especially which is increasingly needed in an age when moral claims become complicated and hysterical. That Queen Victoria was a model of political unselfishness is well known; it is less often remarked that few modern people have an unselfishness so completely free from morbidity, so fully capable of deciding a moral question without exaggerating its importance. No eminent person of our time has been so utterly devoid of that disease of self-assertion which is often rampant among the unselfish. She had one most rare and valuable faculty, the faculty of letting things pass—Acts of Parliament and other things. Her predecessors, whether honest men or knaves, were attacked every now and then with a nightmare of despotic responsibility; they suddenly conceived that it
rested with them to save the world and the Protestant Constitution. Queen Victoria had far too much faith in the world to try to save it. She knew that Acts of Parliament, even bad Acts of Parliament, do not destroy nations. But she knew that ignorance, ill-temper, tyranny, and officiousness do destroy nations, and not upon any provocation would she set an example in these things. We fancy that this sense of proportion, this largeness and coolness of intellectual magnanimity is the one of the thousand virtues of Queen Victoria of which the near future will stand most in need. We are gaining many new mental powers, and with them new mental responsibilities. In psychology, in sociology, above all in education, we are learning to do a great many clever things. Unless we are much mistaken the next great task will be to learn not to do them. If that time comes, assuredly we cannot do better than turn once more to the memory of the great Queen who for seventy years followed through every possible tangle and distraction the fairy thread of common sense.

We are suffering just now from an outbreak of the imagination which exhibits itself in politics and the most unlikely places. The German Emperor, for example, is neither a tyrant nor a lunatic, as used to be absurdly represented; he is simply a minor poet; and he feels just as any minor poet would feel if he found himself on the throne of Barbarossa. The revival of militarism and ecclesiasticism is an invasion of politics by the artistic sense; it is heraldry rather than chivalry that is lusted after. Amid all this waving of wands and flaunting of uniforms, all this hedonistic desire to make the most of everything, there is something altogether quiet and splendid about the sober disdain with which this simple and courteous lady in a black dress left idle beside her the sceptre of a hundred tyrants. The heart of the whole nation warmed as it had never warmed for centuries at the thought of having in their midst a woman who cared nothing for her rights, and nothing for those fantastic duties which are more egotistical than rights themselves.

The work of the Queen for progressive politics has surely been greatly underrated. She invented democratic monarchy as much as James Watt invented the steam engine. William IV., from whom we think of her as inheriting her Constitutional position, held in fact a position entirely different to that which she now hands on to Edward VII. William IV. was a limited monarch; that is to say, he had a definite, open, and admitted power in politics, but it was a limited power. Queen Victoria was not a limited monarch; in the only way in which she cared to be a monarch at all she was as unlimited as Haroun Alraschid. She had unlimited willing obedience, and unlimited social supremacy. To her belongs the
credit of inventing a new kind of monarchy; in which the Crown, by relinquishing the whole of that political and legal department of life which is concerned with coercion, regimentation, and punishment, was enabled to rise above it and become the symbol of the sweeter and purer relations of humanity, the social intercourse which leads and does not drive. Too much cannot be said for the wise audacity and confident completeness with which the Queen cut away all those cords of political supremacy to which her predecessors had clung madly as the only stays of the monarchy. She had her reward. For while William IV.’s supremacy may be called a survival, it is not too much to say that the Queen’s supremacy might be called a prophecy. By lifting a figure purely human over the heads of judges and warriors, we uttered in some symbolic fashion the abiding, if unreasoning, hope which dwells in all human hearts, that some day we may find a simpler solution of the woes of nations than the summons and the treadmill, that we may find in some such influence as the social influence of a woman, what was called in the noble old language of mediæval monarchy, “a fountain of mercy and a fountain of honour.”

In the universal reverence paid to the Queen there was hardly anywhere a touch of snobbishness. Snobbishness, in so far as it went out towards former sovereigns, went out to them as aristocrats rather than as kings, as heads of that higher order of men, who were almost angels or demons in their admitted superiority to common lines of conduct. This kind of reverence was always a curse: nothing can be conceived as worse for the mass of the people than that they should think the morality for which they have to struggle an inferior morality, a thing unfitted for a haughtier class. But of this patrician element there was hardly a trace in the dignity of the Queen. Indeed, the degree to which the middle and lower classes took her troubles and problems to their hearts was almost grotesque in its familiarity. No one thought of the Queen as an aristocrat like the Duke of Devonshire, or even as a member of the governing classes like Mr. Chamberlain. Men thought of her as something nearer to them even in being further off; as one who was a good queen, and who would have been, had her fate demanded, with equal cheerfulness, a good washerwoman. Herein lay her unexampled triumph, the greatest and perhaps the last triumph of monarchy. Monarchy in its healthiest days had the same basis as democracy: the belief in human nature when entrusted with power. A king was only the first citizen who received the franchise.

Both royalty and religion have been accused of despising humanity, and in practice it has been too often true; but after all both the conception of the prophet
and that of the king were formed by paying humanity the supreme compliment of selecting from it almost at random. This daring idea that a healthy human being, when thrilled by all the trumpets of a great trust, would rise to the situation, has often been tested, but never with such complete success as in the case of our dead Queen. On her was piled the crushing load of a vast and mystical tradition, and she stood up straight under it. Heralds proclaimed her as the anointed of God, and it did not seem presumptuous. Brave men died in thousands shouting her name, and it did not seem unnatural. No mere intellect, no mere worldly success could, in this age of bold inquiry, have sustained that tremendous claim; long ago we should have stricken Cæsar and dethroned Napoleon. But these glories and these sacrifices did not seem too much to celebrate a hardworking human nature; they were possible because at the heart of our Empire was nothing but a defiant humility. If the Queen had stood for any novel or fantastic imperial claims, the whole would have seemed a nightmare; the whole was successful because she stood, and no one could deny that she stood, for the humblest, the shortest and the most indestructible of human gospels, that when all troubles and troublemongers have had their say, our work can be done till sunset, our life can be lived till death.
THE GERMAN EMPEROR

The list of the really serious, the really convinced, the really important and comprehensible people now alive includes, as most Englishmen would now be prepared to admit, the German Emperor. He is a practical man and a poet. I do not know whether there are still people in existence who think there is some kind of faint antithesis between these two characters; but I incline to think there must be, because of the surprise which the career of the German Emperor has generally evoked. When he came to the throne it became at once apparent that he was poetical; people assumed in consequence that he was unpractical; that he would plunge Europe into war, that he would try to annex France, that he would say he was the Emperor of Russia, that he would stand on his head in the Reichstag, that he would become a pirate on the Spanish Main. Years upon years have passed; he has gone on making speeches, he has gone on talking about God and his sword, he has poured out an ever increased rhetoric and aestheticism. And yet all the time people have slowly and surely realised that he knows what he is about, that he is one of the best friends of peace, that his influence on Europe is not only successful, but in many ways good, that he knows what world he is living in better than a score of materialists.

The explanation never comes to them—he is a poet; therefore, a practical man. The affinity of the two words, merely as words, is much nearer than many people suppose, for the matter of that. There is one Greek word for “I do” from which we get the word practical, and another Greek word for “I do” from which we get the word poet. I was doubtless once informed of a profound difference between the two, but I have forgotten it. The two words practical and poetical may mean two subtly different things in that old and subtle language, but they mean the same in English and the same in the long run. It is ridiculous to suppose that the man who can understand the inmost intricacies of a human being who has never existed at all cannot make a guess at the conduct of man who lives next door. It is idle to say that a man who has himself felt the mad longing under the mad moon for a vagabond life cannot know why his son runs away to sea. It is idle to say that a man who has himself felt the hunger for any kind of exhilaration, from angel or devil, cannot know why his butler takes to drink. It is idle to say that a man who has been fascinated with the wild fastidiousness of destiny does not know why stockbrokers gamble, to say that a man who has been knocked into the middle of eternal life by a face in a crowd
does not know why the poor marry young; that a man who found his path to all things kindly and pleasant blackened and barred suddenly by the body of a man does not know what it is to desire murder. It is idle, in short, for a man who has created men to say that he does not understand them. A man who is a poet may, of course, easily make mistakes in these personal and practical relations; such mistakes and similar ones have been made by poets; such mistakes and greater ones have been made by soldiers and statesmen and men of business. But in so far as a poet is in these things less of a practical man he is also less of a poet.

If Shakespeare really married a bad wife when he had conceived the character of Beatrice he ought to have been ashamed of himself: he had failed not only in his life, he had failed in his art. If Balzac got into rows with his publishers he ought to be rebuked and not commiserated, having evolved so many consistent business men from his own inside. The German Emperor is a poet, and therefore he succeeds, because poetry is so much nearer to reality than all the other human occupations. He is a poet, and succeeds because the majority of men are poets. It is true, if that matter is at all important, that the German Emperor is not a good poet. The majority of men are poets, only they happen to be bad poets. The German Emperor fails ridiculously, if that is all that is in question, in almost every one of the artistic occupations to which he addresses himself: he is neither a first-rate critic, nor a first-rate musician, nor a first-rate painter, nor a first-rate poet. He is a twelfth-rate poet, but because he is a poet at all he knocks to pieces all the first-rate politicians in the war of politics.

Having made clear my position so far, I discover with a certain amount of interest that I have not yet got to the subject of these remarks. The German Emperor is a poet, and although, as far as I know, every line he ever wrote may be nonsense, he is a poet in this real sense, that he has realised the meaning of every function he has performed. Why should we jeer at him because he has a great many uniforms, for instance? The very essence of the really imaginative man is that he realises the various types or capacities in which he can appear. Every one of us, or almost every one of us, does in reality fulfil almost as many offices as Pooh-Bah. Almost every one of us is a ratepayer, an immortal soul, an Englishman, a baptised person, a mammal, a minor poet, a juryman, a married man, a bicyclist, a Christian, a purchaser of newspapers, and a critic of Mr. Alfred Austin. We ought to have uniforms for all these things. How beautiful it would be if we appeared to-morrow in the uniform of a ratepayer, in brown and green, with buttons made in the shape of coins, and a blue income-tax paper tastefully arranged as a favour; or, again, if we appeared dressed as immortal
souls, in a blue uniform with stars. It would be very exciting to dress up as Englishmen, or to go to a fancy dress ball as Christians.

Some of the costumes I have suggested might appear a little more difficult to carry out. The dress of a person who purchases newspapers (though it mostly consists of coloured evening editions arranged in a stiff skirt, like that of a saltatrice, round the waist of the wearer) has many mysterious points. The attire of a person prepared to criticise the Poet Laureate is something so awful and striking that I dare not even begin to describe it; the one fact which I am willing to reveal, and to state seriously and responsibly, is that it buttons up behind.

But most assuredly we ought not to abuse the Kaiser because he is fond of putting on all his uniforms; he does so because he has a large number of established and involuntary incarnations. He tries to do his duty in that state of life to which it shall please God to call him; and it so happens that he has been called to as many different estates as there are regiments in the German Army. He is a huntsman and proud of being a huntsman, an engineer and proud of being an engineer, an infantry soldier and proud of being so, a light horseman and proud of being so. There is nothing wrong in all this; the only wrong thing is that it should be confined to the merely destructive arts of war. The sight of the German Kaiser in the most magnificent of the uniforms in which he had led armies to victory is not in itself so splendid or delightful as that of many other sights which might come before us without a whisper of the alarms of war. It is not so splendid or delightful as the sight of an ordinary householder showing himself in that magnificent uniform of purple and silver which should signalise the father of three children. It is not so splendid or delightful as the appearance of a young clerk in an insurance office decorated with those three long crimson plumes which are the well-known insignia of a gentleman who is just engaged to be married. Nor can it compare with the look of a man wearing the magnificent green and silver armour by which we know one who has induced an acquaintance to give up getting drunk, or the blue and gold which is only accorded to persons who have prevented fights in the street. We belong to quite as many regiments as the German Kaiser. Our regiments are regiments that are embattled everywhere; they fight an unending fight against all that is hopeless and rapacious and of evil report. The only difference is that we have the regiments, but not the uniforms.

Only one obvious point occurs to me to add. If the Kaiser has more than any other man the sense of the poetry of the ancient things, the sword, the crown, the ship, the nation, he has the sense of the poetry of modern things also. He has one
sense, and it is even a joke against him. He feels the poetry of one thing that is more poetic than sword or crown or ship or nation, the poetry of the telegram. No one ever sent a telegram who did not feel like a god. He is a god, for he is a minor poet; a minor poet, but a poet still.
Mr. Morton Luce has written a short study of Tennyson which has considerable cultivation and suggestiveness, which will be sufficient to serve as a notebook for Tennyson’s admirers, but scarcely sufficient, perhaps, to serve as a pamphlet against his opponents. If a critic has, as he ought to have, any of the functions anciently attributed to a prophet, it ought not to be difficult for him to prophesy that Tennyson will pass through a period of facile condemnation and neglect before we arrive at the true appreciation of his work. The same thing has happened to the most vigorous of essayists, Macaulay, and the most vigorous of romancers, Dickens, because we live in a time when mere vigour is considered a vulgar thing. The same idle and frigid reaction will almost certainly discredit the stateliness and care of Tennyson, as it has discredited the recklessness and inventiveness of Dickens. It is only necessary to remember that no action can be discredited by a reaction.

The attempts which have been made to discredit the poetical position of Tennyson are in the main dictated by an entire misunderstanding of the nature of poetry. When critics like Matthew Arnold, for example, suggest that his poetry is deficient in elaborate thought, they only prove, as Matthew Arnold proved, that they themselves could never be great poets. It is no valid accusation against a poet that the sentiment he expresses is commonplace. Poetry is always commonplace; it is vulgar in the noblest sense of that noble word. Unless a man can make the same kind of ringing appeal to absolute and admitted sentiments that is made by a popular orator, he has lost touch with emotional literature. Unless he is to some extent a demagogue, he cannot be a poet. A man who expresses in poetry new and strange and undiscovered emotions is not a poet; he is a brain specialist. Tennyson can never be discredited before any serious tribunal of criticism because the sentiments and thoughts to which he dedicates himself are those sentiments and thoughts which occur to anyone. These are the peculiar province of poetry; poetry, like religion, is always a democratic thing, even if it pretends the contrary. The faults of Tennyson, so far as they existed, were not half so much in the common character of his sentiments as in the arrogant perfection of his workmanship. He was not by any means so wrong in his faults as he was in his perfections.

Men are very much too ready to speak of men’s work being ordinary, when we consider that, properly considered, every man is extraordinary.
man is a tribal fable, like the Man-Wolf or the Wise Man of the Stoics. In every man’s heart there is a revolution; how much more in every poet’s? The supreme business of criticism is to discover that part of a man’s work which is his and to ignore that part which belongs to others. Why should any critic of poetry spend time and attention on that part of a man’s work which is unpoetical? Why should any man be interested in aspects which are uninteresting? The business of a critic is to discover the importance of men and not their crimes. It is true that the Greek word critic carries with it the meaning of a judge, and up to this point of history judges have had to do with the valuation of men’s sins, and not with the valuation of their virtues.

Tennyson’s work, disencumbered of all that uninteresting accretion which he had inherited or copied, resolves itself, like that of any other man of genius, into those things which he really inaugurated. Underneath all his exterior of polished and polite rectitude there was in him a genuine fire of novelty; only that, like all the able men of his period, he disguised revolution under the name of evolution. He is only a very shallow critic who cannot see an eternal rebel in the heart of the Conservative.

Tennyson had certain absolutely personal ideas, as much his own as the ideas of Browning or Meredith, though they were fewer in number. One of these, for example, was the fact that he was the first of all poets (and perhaps the last) to attempt to treat poetically that vast and monstrous vision of fact which science had recently revealed to mankind. Scientific discoveries seem commonly fables as fantastic in the ears of poets as poems in the ears of men of science. The poet is always a Ptolemaist; for him the sun still rises and the earth stands still. Tennyson really worked the essence of modern science into his poetical constitution, so that its appalling birds and frightful flowers were really part of his literary imagery. To him blind and brutal monsters, the products of the wild babyhood of the Universe, were as the daisies and the nightingales were to Keats; he absolutely realised the great literary paradox mentioned in the Book of Job: “He saw Behemoth, and he played with him as with a bird.”

Instances of this would not be difficult to find. But the tests of poetry are those instances in which this outrageous scientific phraseology becomes natural and unconscious. Tennyson wrote one of his own exquisite lyrics describing the exultation of a lover on the evening before his bridal day. This would be an occasion, if ever there was one, for falling back on those ancient and assured falsehoods of the domed heaven and the flat earth in which generations of poets have made us feel at home. We can imagine the poet in such a lyric saluting the
setting sun and prophesying the sun’s resurrection. There is something extraordinarily typical of Tennyson’s scientific faith in the fact that this, one of the most sentimental and elemental of his poems, opens with the two lines:

“Move eastward, happy earth, and leave
Yon orange sunset waning slow.”

Rivers had often been commanded to flow by poets, and flowers to blossom in their season, and both were doubtless grateful for the permission. But the terrestrial globe of science has only twice, so far as we know, been encouraged in poetry to continue its course, one instance being that of this poem, and the other the incomparable “Address to the Terrestrial Globe” in the “Bab Ballads.”

There was, again, another poetic element entirely peculiar to Tennyson, which his critics have, in many cases, ridiculously confused with a fault. This was the fact that Tennyson stood alone among modern poets in the attempt to give a poetic character to the conception of Liberal Conservatism, of splendid compromise. The carping critics who have abused Tennyson for this do not see that it was far more daring and original for a poet to defend conventionality than to defend a cart-load of revolutions. His really sound and essential conception of Liberty,

“Turning to scorn with lips divine
The falsehood of extremes,”

is as good a definition of Liberalism as has been uttered in poetry in the Liberal century. Moderation is not a compromise; moderation is a passion; the passion of great judges. That Tennyson felt that lyrical enthusiasm could be devoted to established customs, to indefensible and ineradicable national constitutions, to the dignity of time and the empire of unutterable common sense, all this did not make him a tamer poet, but an infinitely more original one. Any poetaster can describe a thunderstorm; it requires a poet to describe the ancient and quiet sky.

I cannot, indeed, fall in with Mr. Morton Luce in his somewhat frigid and patrician theory of poetry. “Dialect,” he says, “mostly falls below the dignity of art.” I cannot feel myself that art has any dignity higher than the indwelling and divine dignity of human nature. Great poets like Burns were far more undignified when they clothed their thoughts in what Mr. Morton Luce calls “the seemly raiment of cultured speech” than when they clothed them in the headlong and flexible patois in which they thought and prayed and quarrelled and made love. If Tennyson failed (which I do not admit) in such poems as “The Northern Farmer,” it was not because he used too much of the spirit of the dialect, but
because he used too little.

Tennyson belonged undoubtedly to a period from which we are divided; the period in which men had queer ideas of the antagonism of science and religion; the period in which the Missing Link was really missing. But his hold upon the old realities of existence never wavered; he was the apostle of the sanctity of laws, of the sanctity of customs; above all, like every poet, he was the apostle of the sanctity of words.
ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING

The delightful new edition of Mrs. Browning’s “Casa Guidi Windows” which Mr. John Lane has just issued ought certainly to serve as an opportunity for the serious criticism and inevitable admiration to which a great poet is entitled. For Mrs. Browning was a great poet, and not, as is idly and vulgarly supposed, only a great poetess. The word poetess is bad English, and it conveys a particularly bad compliment. Nothing is more remarkable about Mrs. Browning’s work than the absence of that trite and namby-pamby elegance which the last two centuries demanded from lady writers. Wherever her verse is bad it is bad from some extravagance of imagery, some violence of comparison, some kind of debauch of cleverness. Her nonsense never arises from weakness, but from a confusion of powers. If the phrase explain itself, she is far more a great poet than she is a good one.

Mrs. Browning often appears more luscious and sentimental than many other literary women, but this was because she was stronger. It requires a certain amount of internal force to break down. A complete self-humiliation requires enormous strength, more strength than most of us possess. When she was writing the poetry of self-abandonment she really abandoned herself with the valour and decision of an anchorite abandoning the world. Such a couplet as: “Our Euripides, the human,
With his dropping of warm tears,”
gives to most of us a sickly and nauseous sensation. Nothing can be well conceived more ridiculous than Euripides going about dropping tears with a loud splash, and Mrs. Browning coming after him with a thermometer. But the one emphatic point about this idiotic couplet is that Mrs. Hemans would never have written it. She would have written something perfectly dignified, perfectly harmless, perfectly inconsiderable. Mrs. Browning was in a great and serious difficulty. She really meant something. She aimed at a vivid and curious image, and she missed it. She had that catastrophic and public failure which is, as much as a medal or a testimonial, the badge of the brave.

In spite of the tiresome half-truth that art is unmoral, the arts require a certain considerable number of moral qualities, and more especially all the arts require courage. The art of drawing, for example, requires even a kind of physical courage. Anyone who has tried to draw a straight line and failed knows that he fails chiefly in nerve, as he might fail to jump off a cliff. And similarly all great
literary art involves the element of risk, and the greatest literary artists have commonly been those who have run the greatest risk of talking nonsense. Almost all great poets rant, from Shakespeare downwards. Mrs. Browning was Elizabethan in her luxuriance and her audacity, and the gigantic scale of her wit. We often feel with her as we feel with Shakespeare, that she would have done better with half as much talent. The great curse of the Elizabethans is upon her, that she cannot leave anything alone, she cannot write a single line without a conceit: “And the eyes of the peacock fans
Winked at the alien glory,”
she said of the Papal fans in the presence of the Italian tricolour: “And a royal
blood sends glances up her princely eye to trouble,
And the shadow of a monarch’s crown is softened in her hair,”
is her description of a beautiful and aristocratic lady. The notion of peacock feathers winking like so many London urchins is perhaps one of her rather aggressive and outrageous figures of speech. The image of a woman’s hair as the softened shadow of a crown is a singularly vivid and perfect one. But both have the same quality of intellectual fancy and intellectual concentration. They are both instances of a sort of ethereal epigram. This is the great and dominant characteristic of Mrs. Browning, that she was significant alike in failure and success. Just as every marriage in the world, good or bad, is a marriage, dramatic, irrevocable, and big with coming events, so every one of her wild weddings between alien ideas is an accomplished fact which produces a certain effect on the imagination, which has for good or evil become part and parcel of our mental vision forever. She gives the reader the impression that she never declined a fancy, just as some gentlemen of the eighteenth century never declined a duel. When she fell it was always because she missed the foothold, never because she funk the leap.

“Casa Guidi Windows” is, in one aspect, a poem very typical of its author. Mrs. Browning may fairly be called the peculiar poet of Liberalism, of that great movement of the first half of the nineteenth century towards the emancipation of men from ancient institutions which had gradually changed their nature, from the houses of refuge which had turned into dungeons, and the mystic jewels which remained only as fetters. It was not what we ordinarily understand by revolt. It had no hatred in its heart for ancient and essentially human institutions. It had that deeply conservative belief in the most ancient of institutions, the average man, which goes by the name of democracy. It had none of the spirit of modern Imperialism which is kicking a man because he is down. But, on the other hand,
it had none of the spirit of modern Anarchism and scepticism which is kicking a
man merely because he is up. It was based fundamentally on a belief in the
destiny of humanity, whether that belief took an irreligious form, as in
Swinburne, or a religious form, as in Mrs. Browning. It had that rooted and
natural conviction that the Millennium was coming to-morrow which has been
the conviction of all iconoclasts and reformers, and for which some rationalists
have been absurd enough to blame the early Christians. But they had none of
that disposition to pin their whole faith to some black-and-white scientific
system which afterwards became the curse of philosophical Radicalism. They
were not like the sociologists who lay down a final rectification of things,
amounting to nothing except an end of the world, a great deal more depressing
than would be the case if it were knocked to pieces by a comet. Their ideal, like
the ideal of all sensible people, was a chaotic and confused notion of goodness
made up of English primroses and Greek statues, birds singing in April, and
regiments being cut to pieces for a flag. They were neither Radicals nor
Socialists, but Liberals, and a Liberal is a noble and indispensable lunatic who
tries to make a cosmos of his own head.

Mrs. Browning and her husband were more liberal than most Liberals. Theirs
was the hospitality of the intellect and the hospitality of the heart, which is the
best definition of the term. They never fell into the habit of the idle
revolutionists of supposing that the past was bad because the future was good,
which amounted to asserting that because humanity had never made anything
but mistakes it was now quite certain to be right. Browning possessed in a
greater degree than any other man the power of realising that all conventions
were only victorious revolutions. He could follow the mediæval logicians in all
their sowing of the wind and reaping of the whirlwind with all that generous
ardour which is due to abstract ideas. He could study the ancients with the young
eyes of the Renaissance and read a Greek grammar like a book of love lyrics.
This immense and almost confounding Liberalism of Browning doubtless had
some effect upon his wife. In her vision of New Italy she went back to the image
of Ancient Italy like an honest and true revolutionist; for does not the very word
“revolution” mean a rolling backward. All true revolutions are reversions to the
natural and the normal. A revolutionist who breaks with the past is a notion fit
for an idiot. For how could a man even wish for something which he had never
heard of? Mrs. Browning’s inexhaustible sympathy with all the ancient and
essential passions of humanity was nowhere more in evidence than in her
conception of patriotism. For some dark reason, which it is difficult indeed to
fathom, belief in patriotism in our day is held to mean principally a belief in every other nation abandoning its patriotic feelings. In the case of no other passion does this weird contradiction exist. Men whose lives are mainly based upon friendship sympathise with the friendships of others. The interest of engaged couples in each other is a proverb, and like many other proverbs sometimes a nuisance. In patriotism alone it is considered correct just now to assume that the sentiment does not exist in other people. It was not so with the great Liberals of Mrs. Browning’s time. The Brownings had, so to speak, a disembodied talent for patriotism. They loved England and they loved Italy; yet they were the very reverse of cosmopolitans. They loved the two countries as countries, not as arbitrary divisions of the globe. They had hold of the root and essence of patriotism. They knew how certain flowers and birds and rivers pass into the mills of the brain and come out as wars and discoveries, and how some triumphant adventure or some staggering crime wrought in a remote continent may bear about it the colour of an Italian city or the soul of a silent village of Surrey.
UTOPIA OF USURERS
AND OTHER ESSAYS

G. K. CHESTERTON
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INDEX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UTOPIA OF USURERS AND OTHER ESSAYS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A SONG OF SWORDS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## UTOPIA OF USURERS

1. ART AND ADVERTISEMENT
2. LETTERS AND THE NEW LAUREATES
3. UNBUSINESSLIKE BUSINESS
4. THE WAR ON HOLIDAYS
5. THE CHURCH OF THE SERVILE STATE
6. SCIENCE AND THE EUGENISTS
7. THE EVOLUTION OF THE PRISON
8. THE LASH FOR LABOUR
9. THE MASK OF SOCIALISM

## THE ESCAPE

## THE NEW RAID

## THE NEW NAME

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A WORKMAN'S HISTORY OF ENGLAND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND THE IRISH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIBERALISM; A SAMPLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE FATIGUE OF FLEET STREET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE AMNESTY FOR AGGRESSION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REVIVE THE COURT JESTER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE ART OF MISSING THE POINT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE SERVILE STATE AGAIN</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE EMPIRE OF THE IGNORANT

THE SYMBOLISM OF KRUPP

THE TOWER OF BEBEL

A REAL DANGER

THE DREGS OF PURITANISM

THE TYRANNY OF BAD JOURNALISM

THE POETRY OF THE REVOLUTION
A SONG OF SWORDS

“A drove of cattle came into a village called Swords; and was stopped by the rioters.”—Daily Paper.
In the place called Swords on the Irish road It is told for a new renown
How we held the horns of the cattle, and how We will hold the horns of the devils now
Ere the lord of hell with the horn on his brow Is crowned in Dublin town.
Light in the East and light in the West,
And light on the cruel lords,
On the souls that suddenly all men knew,
And the green flag flew and the red flag flew, And many a wheel of the world stopped, too, When the cattle were stopped at Swords.
Be they sinners or less than saints
That smite in the street for rage,
We know where the shame shines bright; we know You that they smite at, you their foe,
Lords of the lawless wage and low,
This is your lawful wage.
You pinched a child to a torture price
That you dared not name in words;
So black a jest was the silver bit
That your own speech shook for the shame of it, And the coward was plain as a cow they hit When the cattle have strayed at Swords.
The wheel of the torrent of wives went round To break men’s brotherhood;
You gave the good Irish blood to grease
The clubs of your country’s enemies;
you saw the brave man beat to the knees:
And you saw that it was good.
The rope of the rich is long and long—
The longest of hangmen’s cords;
But the kings and crowds are holding their breath, In a giant shadow o’er all beneath
Where God stands holding the scales of Death Between the cattle and Swords.
Haply the lords that hire and lend
The lowest of all men’s lords,
Who sell their kind like kine at a fair,
Will find no head of their cattle there;
But faces of men where cattle were:
    Faces of men—and Swords.
UTOPIA OF USURERS

I. ART AND ADVERTISEMENT

I propose, subject to the patience of the reader, to devote two or three articles to prophecy. Like all healthy-minded prophets, sacred and profane, I can only prophesy when I am in a rage and think things look ugly for everybody. And like all healthy-minded prophets, I prophesy in the hope that my prophecy may not come true. For the prediction made by the true soothsayer is like the warning given by a good doctor. And the doctor has really triumphed when the patient he condemned to death has revived to life. The threat is justified at the very moment when it is falsified. Now I have said again and again (and I shall continue to say again and again on all the most inappropriate occasions) that we must hit Capitalism, and hit it hard, for the plain and definite reason that it is growing stronger. Most of the excuses which serve the capitalists as masks are, of course, the excuses of hypocrites. They lie when they claim philanthropy; they no more feel any particular love of men than Albu felt an affection for Chinamen. They lie when they say they have reached their position through their own organising ability. They generally have to pay men to organise the mine, exactly as they pay men to go down it. They often lie about the present wealth, as they generally lie about their past poverty. But when they say that they are going in for a “constructive social policy,” they do not lie. They really are going in for a constructive social policy. And we must go in for an equally destructive social policy; and destroy, while it is still half-constructed, the accursed thing which they construct.

THE EXAMPLE OF THE ARTS

Now I propose to take, one after another, certain aspects and departments of modern life, and describe what I think they will be like in this paradise of plutocrats, this Utopia of gold and brass in which the great story of England seems so likely to end. I propose to say what I think our new masters, the mere millionaires, will do with certain human interests and institutions, such as art, science, jurisprudence, or religion—unless we strike soon enough to prevent them. And for the sake of argument I will take in this article the example of the arts.
Most people have seen a picture called “Bubbles,” which is used for the advertisement of a celebrated soap, a small cake of which is introduced into the pictorial design. And anybody with an instinct for design (the caricaturist of the Daily Herald, for instance), will guess that it was not originally a part of the design. He will see that the cake of soap destroys the picture as a picture; as much as if the cake of soap had been used to Scrub off the paint. Small as it is, it breaks and confuses the whole balance of objects in the composition. I offer no judgment here upon Millais’s action in the matter; in fact, I do not know what it was. The important point for me at the moment is that the picture was not painted for the soap, but the soap added to the picture. And the spirit of the corrupting change which has separated us from that Victorian epoch can be best seen in this: that the Victorian atmosphere, with all its faults, did not permit such a style of patronage to pass as a matter of course. Michael Angelo may have been proud to have helped an emperor or a pope; though, indeed, I think he was prouder than they were on his own account. I do not believe Sir John Millais was proud of having helped a soap-boiler. I do not say he thought it wrong; but he was not proud of it. And that marks precisely the change from his time to our own. Our merchants have really adopted the style of merchant princes. They have begun openly to dominate the civilisation of the State, as the emperors and popes openly dominated in Italy. In Millais’s time, broadly speaking, art was supposed to mean good art; advertisement was supposed to mean inferior art. The head of a black man, painted to advertise somebody’s blacking, could be a rough symbol, like an inn sign. The black man had only to be black enough. An artist exhibiting the picture of a negro was expected to know that a black man is not so black as he is painted. He was expected to render a thousand tints of grey and brown and violet: for there is no such thing as a black man just as there is no such thing as a white man. A fairly clear line separated advertisement from art.

THE FIRST EFFECT

I should say the first effect of the triumph of the capitalist (if we allow him to triumph) will be that that line of demarcation will entirely disappear. There will be no art that might not just as well be advertisement. I do not necessarily mean that there will be no good art; much of it might be, much of it already is, very good art. You may put it, if you please, in the form that there has been a vast improvement in advertisements. Certainly there would be nothing surprising if the head of a negro advertising Somebody’s Blacking now adays were finished
with as careful and subtle colours as one of the old and superstitious painters would have wasted on the negro king who brought gifts to Christ. But the improvement of advertisements is the degradation of artists. It is their degradation for this clear and vital reason: that the artist will work, not only to please the rich, but only to increase their riches; which is a considerable step lower. After all, it was as a human being that a pope took pleasure in a cartoon of Raphael or a prince took pleasure in a statuette of Cellini. The prince paid for the statuette; but he did not expect the statuette to pay him. It is my impression that no cake of soap can be found anywhere in the cartoons which the Pope ordered of Raphael. And no one who knows the small-minded cynicism of our plutocracy, its secrecy, its gambling spirit, its contempt of conscience, can doubt that the artist-advertiser will often be assisting enterprises over which he will have no moral control, and of which he could feel no moral approval. He will be working to spread quack medicines, queer investments; and will work for Marconi instead of Medici. And to this base ingenuity he will have to bend the proudest and purest of the virtues of the intellect, the power to attract his brethren, and the noble duty of praise. For that picture by Millais is a very allegorical picture. It is almost a prophecy of what uses are awaiting the beauty of the child unborn. The praise will be of a kind that may correctly be called soap; and the enterprises of a kind that may truly be described as Bubbles.

II. LETTERS AND THE NEW LAUREATES

In these articles I only take two or three examples of the first and fundamental fact of our time. I mean the fact that the capitalists of our community are becoming quite openly the kings of it. In my last (and first) article, I took the case of Art and advertisement. I pointed out that Art must be growing worse—merely because advertisement is growing better. In those days Millais condescended to Pears’ soap. In these days I really think it would be Pears who condescended to Millais. But here I turn to an art I know more about, that of journalism. Only in my ease the art verges on artlessness.

The great difficulty with the English lies in the absence of something one may call democratic imagination. We find it easy to realise an individual, but very hard to realise that the great masses consist of individuals. Our system has been aristocratic: in the special sense of there being only a few actors on the stage. And the back scene is kept quite dark, though it is really a throng of faces. Home Rule tended to be not so much the Irish as the Grand Old Man. The Boer War
tended not to be so much South Africa as simply “Joe.” And it is the amusing but distressing fact that every class of political leadership, as it comes to the front in its turn, catches the rays of this isolating lime-light; and becomes a small aristocracy. Certainly no one has the aristocratic complaint so badly as the Labour Party. At the recent Congress, the real difference between Larkin and the English Labour leaders was not so much in anything right or wrong in what he said, as in something elemental and even mystical in the way he suggested a mob. But it must be plain, even to those who agree with the more official policy, that for Mr. Havelock Wilson the principal question was Mr. Havelock Wilson; and that Mr. Sexton was mainly considering the dignity and fine feelings of Mr. Sexton. You may say they were as sensitive as aristocrats, or as sulky as babies; the point is that the feeling was personal. But Larkin, like Danton, not only talks like ten thousand men talking, but he also has some of the carelessness of the colossus of Arcis; “Que mon nom soit fletri, que la France soit libre.”

A DANCE OF DEGRADATION

It is needless to say that this respecting of persons has led all the other parties a dance of degradation. We ruin South Africa because it would be a slight on Lord Gladstone to save South Africa. We have a bad army, because it would be a snub to Lord Haldane to have a good army. And no Tory is allowed to say “Marconi” for fear Mr. George should say “Kynoch.” But this curious personal element, with its appalling lack of patriotism, has appeared in a new and curious form in another department of life; the department of literature, especially periodical literature. And the form it takes is the next example I shall give of the way in which the capitalists are now appearing, more and more openly, as the masters and princes of the community.

I will take a Victorian instance to mark the change; as I did in the case of the advertisement of “Bubbles.” It was said in my childhood, by the more apoplectic and elderly sort of Tory, that W. E. Gladstone was only a Free Trader because he had a partnership in Gilbey’s foreign wines. This was, no doubt, nonsense; but it had a dim symbolic, or mainly prophetic, truth in it. It was true, to some extent even then, and it has been increasingly true since, that the statesman was often an ally of the salesman; and represented not only a nation of shopkeepers, but one particular shop. But in Gladstone’s time, even if this was true, it was never the whole truth; and no one would have endured it being the admitted truth. The politician was not solely an eloquent and persuasive bagman travelling for
certain business men; he was bound to mix even his corruption with some intelligible ideals and rules of policy. And the proof of it is this: that at least it was the statesman who bulked large in the public eye; and his financial backer was entirely in the background. Old gentlemen might choke over their port, with the moral certainty that the Prime Minister had shares in a wine merchant’s. But the old gentleman would have died on the spot if the wine merchant had really been made as important as the Prime Minister. If it had been Sir Walter Gilbey whom Disraeli denounced, or Punch caricatured; if Sir Walter Gilbey’s favourite collars (with the design of which I am unacquainted) had grown as large as the wings of an archangel; if Sir Walter Gilbey had been credited with successfully eliminating the British Oak with his little hatchet; if, near the Temple and the Courts of Justice, our sight was struck by a majestic statue of a wine merchant; or if the earnest Conservative lady who threw a gingerbread-nut at the Premier had directed it towards the wine merchant instead, the shock to Victorian England would have been very great indeed.

HALOES FOR EMPLOYERS

Now something very like that is happening; the mere wealthy employer is beginning to have not only the power but some of the glory. I have seen in several magazines lately, and magazines of a high class, the appearance of a new kind of article. Literary men are being employed to praise a big business man personally, as men used to praise a king. They not only find political reasons for the commercial schemes—that they have done for some time past—they also find moral defences for the commercial schemers. They describe the capitalist’s brain of steel and heart of gold in a way that Englishmen hitherto have been at least in the habit of reserving for romantic figures like Garibaldi or Gordon. In one excellent magazine Mr. T. P. O’Connor, who, when he likes, can write on letters like a man of letters, has some purple pages of praise of Sir Joseph Lyons—the man who runs those teashop places. He incidentally brought in a delightful passage about the beautiful souls possessed by some people called Salmon and Gluckstein. I think I like best the passage where he said that Lyons’s charming social accomplishments included a talent for “imitating a Jew.” The article is accompanied with a large and somewhat leering portrait of that shopkeeper, which makes the parlour-trick in question particularly astonishing. Another literary man, who certainly ought to know better, wrote in another paper a piece of hero-worship about Mr. Selfridge. No doubt the fashion will spread, and the
art of words, as polished and pointed by Ruskin or Meredith, will be perfected yet further to explore the labyrinthine heart of Harrod; or compare the simple stoicism of Marshall with the saintly charm of Snelgrove.

Any man can be praised—and rightly praised. If he only stands on two legs he does something a cow cannot do. If a rich man can manage to stand on two legs for a reasonable time, it is called self-control. If he has only one leg, it is called (with some truth) self-sacrifice. I could say something nice (and true) about every man I have ever met. Therefore, I do not doubt I could find something nice about Lyons or Selfridge if I searched for it. But I shall not. The nearest postman or cab-man will provide me with just the same brain of steel and heart of gold as these unlucky lucky men. But I do resent the whole age of patronage being revived under such absurd patrons; and all poets becoming court poets, under kings that have taken no oath, nor led us into any battle.

III. UNBUSINESSLIKE BUSINESS

The fairy tales we were all taught did not, like the history we were all taught, consist entirely of lies. Parts of the tale of “Puss in Boots” or “Jack and the Beanstalk” may strike the realistic eye as a little unlikely and out of the common way, so to speak; but they contain some very solid and very practical truths. For instance, it may be noted that both in “Puss in Boots” and “Jack and the Beanstalk” if I remember aright, the ogre was not only an ogre but also a magician. And it will generally be found that in all such popular narratives, the king, if he is a wicked king, is generally also a wizard. Now there is a very vital human truth enshrined in this. Bad government, like good government, is a spiritual thing. Even the tyrant never rules by force alone; but mostly by fairy tales. And so it is with the modern tyrant, the great employer. The sight of a millionaire is seldom, in the ordinary sense, an enchanting sight: nevertheless, he is in his way an enchanter. As they say in the gushing articles about him in the magazines, he is a fascinating personality. So is a snake. At least he is fascinating to rabbits; and so is the millionaire to the rabbit-witted sort of people that ladies and gentlemen have allowed themselves to become. He does, in a manner, cast a spell, such as that which imprisoned princes and princesses under the shapes of falcons or stags. He has truly turned men into sheep, as Circe turned them into swine.

Now, the chief of the fairy tales, by which he gains this glory and glamour, is a certain hazy association he has managed to create between the idea of bigness
and the idea of practicality. Numbers of the rabbit-witted ladies and gentlemen
do really think, in spite of themselves and their experience, that so long as a shop
has hundreds of different doors and a great many hot and unhealthy underground
departments (they must be hot; this is very important), and more people than
would be needed for a man-of-war, or crowded cathedral, to say: “This way,
madam,” and “The next article, sir,” it follows that the goods are good. In short,
they hold that the big businesses are businesslike. They are not. Any
housekeeper in a truthful mood, that is to say, any housekeeper in a bad temper,
will tell you that they are not. But housekeepers, too, are human, and therefore
inconsistent and complex; and they do not always stick to truth and bad temper.
They are also affected by this queer idolatry of the enormous and elaborate; and
cannot help feeling that anything so complicated must go like clockwork. But
complexity is no guarantee of accuracy—in clockwork or in anything else. A
clock can be as wrong as the human head; and a clock can stop, as suddenly as
the human heart.

But this strange poetry of plutocracy prevails over people against their very
senses. You write to one of the great London stores or emporia, asking, let us
say, for an umbrella. A month or two afterwards you receive a very elaborately
constructed parcel, containing a broken parasol. You are very pleased. You are
gratified to reflect on what a vast number of assistants and employees had
combined to break that parasol. You luxuriate in the memory of all those long
rooms and departments and wonder in which of them the parasol that you never
ordered was broken. Or you want a toy elephant for your child on Christmas
Day; as children, like all nice and healthy people, are very ritualistic. Some week
or so after Twelfth Night, let us say, you have the pleasure of removing three
layers of pasteboards, five layers of brown paper, and fifteen layers of tissue
paper and discovering the fragments of an artificial crocodile. You smile in an
expansive spirit. You feel that your soul has been broadened by the vision of
incompetence conducted on so large a scale. You admire all the more the
colossal and Omnipresent Brain of the Organiser of Industry, who amid all his
multitudinous cares did not disdain to remember his duty of smashing even the
smallest toy of the smallest child. Or, supposing you have asked him to send you
some two rolls of cocoa-nut matting: and supposing (after a due interval for
reflection) he duly delivers to you the five rolls of wire netting. You take
pleasure in the consideration of a mystery: which coarse minds might have
called a mistake. It consoles you to know how big the business is: and what an
enormous number of people were needed to make such a mistake.
That is the romance that has been told about the big shops; in the literature and art which they have bought, and which (as I said in my recent articles) will soon be quite indistinguishable from their ordinary advertisements. The literature is commercial; and it is only fair to say that the commerce is often really literary. It is no romance, but only rubbish.

The big commercial concerns of to-day are quite exceptionally incompetent. They will be even more incompetent when they are omnipotent. Indeed, that is, and always has been, the whole point of a monopoly; the old and sound argument against a monopoly. It is only because it is incompetent that it has to be omnipotent. When one large shop occupies the whole of one side of a street (or sometimes both sides), it does so in order that men may be unable to get what they want; and may be forced to buy what they don’t want. That the rapidly approaching kingdom of the Capitalists will ruin art and letters, I have already said. I say here that in the only sense that can be called human, it will ruin trade, too.

I will not let Christmas go by, even when writing for a revolutionary paper necessarily appealing to many with none of my religious sympathies, without appealing to those sympathies. I knew a man who sent to a great rich shop for a figure for a group of Bethlehem. It arrived broken. I think that is exactly all that business men have now the sense to do.

IV. THE WAR ON HOLIDAYS

The general proposition, not always easy to define exhaustively, that the reign of the capitalist will be the reign of the cad—that is, of the unlocked type that is neither the citizen nor the gentleman—can be excellently studied in its attitude towards holidays. The special emblematic Employer of to-day, especially the Model Employer (who is the worst sort) has in his starved and evil heart a sincere hatred of holidays. I do not mean that he necessarily wants all his workmen to work until they drop; that only occurs when he happens to be stupid as well as wicked. I do not mean to say that he is necessarily unwilling to grant what he would call “decent hours of labour.” He may treat men like dirt; but if you want to make money, even out of dirt, you must let it lie fallow by some rotation of rest. He may treat men as dogs, but unless he is a lunatic he will for certain periods let sleeping dogs lie.

But humane and reasonable hours for labour have nothing whatever to do with the idea of holidays. It is not even a question of ten hours day and eight-hours
day; it is not a question of cutting down leisure to the space necessary for food, sleep and exercise. If the modern employer came to the conclusion, for some reason or other, that he could get most out of his men by working them hard for only two hours a day, his whole mental attitude would still be foreign and hostile to holidays. For his whole mental attitude is that the passive time and the active time are alike useful for him and his business. All is, indeed, grist that comes to his mill, including the millers. His slaves still serve him in unconsciousness, as dogs still hunt in slumber. His grist is ground not only by the sounding wheels of iron, but by the soundless wheel of blood and brain. His sacks are still filling silently when the doors are shut on the streets and the sound of the grinding is low.

THE GREAT HOLIDAY

Now a holiday has no connection with using a man either by beating or feeding him. When you give a man a holiday you give him back his body and soul. It is quite possible you may be doing him an injury (though he seldom thinks so), but that does not affect the question for those to whom a holiday is holy. Immortality is the great holiday; and a holiday, like the immortality in the old theologies, is a double-edged privilege. But wherever it is genuine it is simply the restoration and completion of the man. If people ever looked at the printed word under their eye, the word “recreation” would be like the word “resurrection,” the blast of a trumpet.

A man, being merely useful, is necessarily incomplete, especially if he be a modern man and means by being useful being “utilitarian.” A man going into a modern club gives up his hat; a man going into a modern factory gives up his head. He then goes in and works loyally for the old firm to build up the great fabric of commerce (which can be done without a head), but when he has done work he goes to the cloak-room, like the man at the club, and gets his head back again; that is the germ of the holiday. It may be urged that the club man who leaves his hat often goes away with another hat; and perhaps it may be the same with the factory hand who has left his head. A hand that has lost its head may affect the fastidious as a mixed metaphor; but, God pardon us all, what an unmixed truth! We could almost prove the whole ease from the habit of calling human beings merely “hands” while they are working; as if the hand were horribly cut off, like the hand that has offended; as if, while the sinner entered heaven maimed, his unhappy hand still laboured laying up riches for the lords of
hell. But to return to the man whom we found waiting for his head in the cloakroom. It may be urged, we say, that he might take the wrong head, like the wrong hat; but here the similarity ceases. For it has been observed by benevolent onlookers at life’s drama that the hat taken away by mistake is frequently better than the real hat; whereas the head taken away after the hours of toil is certainly worse: stained with the cobwebs and dust of this dustbin of all the centuries.

THE SUPREME ADVENTURE

All the words dedicated to places of eating and drinking are pure and poetic words. Even the word “hotel” is the word hospital. And St. Julien, whose claret I drank this Christmas, was the patron saint of innkeepers, because (as far as I can make out) he was hospitable to lepers. Now I do not say that the ordinary hotel-keeper in Piccadilly or the Avenue de l’Opera would embrace a leper, slap him on the back, and ask him to order what he liked; but I do say that hospitality is his trade virtue. And I do also say it is well to keep before our eyes the supreme adventure of a virtue. If you are brave, think of the man who was braver than you. If you are kind, think of the man who was kinder than you.

That is what was meant by having a patron saint. That is the link between the poor saint who received bodily lepers and the great hotel proprietor who (as a rule) receives spiritual lepers. But a word yet weaker than “hotel” illustrates the same point—the word “restaurant.” There again you have the admission that there is a definite building or statue to “restore”; that ineffaceable image of man that some call the image of God. And that is the holiday; it is the restaurant or restoring thing that, by a blast of magic, turns a man into himself.

This complete and reconstructed man is the nightmare of the modern capitalist. His whole scheme would crack across like a mirror of Shallot, if once a plain man were ready for his two plain duties—ready to live and ready to die. And that horror of holidays which marks the modern capitalist is very largely a horror of the vision of a whole human being: something that is not a “hand” or a “head for figures.” But an awful creature who has met himself in the wilderness. The employers will give time to eat, time to sleep; they are in terror of a time to think.

To anyone who knows any history it is wholly needless to say that holidays have been destroyed. As Mr. Belloc, who knows much more history than you or I, recently pointed out in the “Pall Mall Magazine,” Shakespeare’s title of “Twelfth Night: or What You Will” simply meant that a winter carnival for
everybody went on wildly till the twelfth night after Christmas. Those of my readers who work for modern offices or factories might ask their employers for twelve days’ holidays after Christmas. And they might let me know the reply.

V. THE CHURCH OF THE SERVILE STATE

I confess I cannot see why mere blasphemy by itself should be an excuse for tyranny and treason; or how the mere isolated fact of a man not believing in God should be a reason for my believing in Him.

But the rather spinsterish flutter among some of the old Freethinkers has put one tiny ripple of truth in it; and that affects the idea which I wish to emphasise even to monotony in these pages. I mean the idea that the new community which the capitalists are now constructing will be a very complete and absolute community; and one which will tolerate nothing really independent of itself. Now, it is true that any positive creed, true or false, would tend to be independent of itself. It might be Roman Catholicism or Mahomedanism or Materialism; but, if strongly held, it would be a thorn in the side of the Servile State. The Moslem thinks all men immortal: the Materialist thinks all men mortal. But the Moslem does not think the rich Sinbad will live forever; but the poor Sinbad will die on his deathbed. The Materialist does not think that Mr. Haeckel will go to heaven, while all the peasants will go to pot, like their chickens. In every serious doctrine of the destiny of men, there is some trace of the doctrine of the equality of men. But the capitalist really depends on some religion of inequality. The capitalist must somehow distinguish himself from human kind; he must be obviously above it—or he would be obviously below it. Take even the least attractive and popular side of the larger religions to-day; take the mere vetoes imposed by Islam on Atheism or Catholicism. The Moslem veto upon intoxicants cuts across all classes. But it is absolutely necessary for the capitalist (who presides at a Licensing Committee, and also at a large dinner), it is absolutely necessary for him, to make a distinction between gin and champagne. The Atheist veto upon all miracles cuts across all classes. But it is absolutely necessary for the capitalist to make a distinction between his wife (who is an aristocrat and consults crystal gazers and star gazers in the West End), and vulgar miracles claimed by gipsies or travelling showmen. The Catholic veto upon usury, as defined in dogmatic councils, cuts across all classes. But it is absolutely necessary to the capitalist to distinguish more delicately between two kinds of usury; the kind he finds useful and the kind he
does not find useful. The religion of the Servile State must have no dogmas or definitions. It cannot afford to have any definitions. For definitions are very dreadful things: they do the two things that most men, especially comfortable men, cannot endure. They fight; and they fight fair.

Every religion, apart from open devil worship, must appeal to a virtue or the pretence of a virtue. But a virtue, generally speaking, does some good to everybody. It is therefore necessary to distinguish among the people it was meant to benefit those whom it does benefit. Modern broad-mindedness benefits the rich; and benefits nobody else. It was meant to benefit the rich; and meant to benefit nobody else. And if you think this unwarranted, I will put before you one plain question. There are some pleasures of the poor that may also mean profits for the rich: there are other pleasures of the poor which cannot mean profits for the rich? Watch this one contrast, and you will watch the whole creation of a careful slavery.

In the last resort the two things called Beer and Soap end only in a froth. They are both below the high notice of a real religion. But there is just this difference: that the soap makes the factory more satisfactory, while the beer only makes the workman more satisfied. Wait and see if the Soap does not increase and the Beer decrease. Wait and see whether the religion of the Servile State is not in every case what I say: the encouragement of small virtues supporting capitalism, the discouragement of the huge virtues that defy it. Many great religions, Pagan and Christian, have insisted on wine. Only one, I think, has insisted on Soap. You will find it in the New Testament attributed to the Pharisees.

VI. SCIENCE AND THE EUGENISTS

The key fact in the new development of plutocracy is that it will use its own blunder as an excuse for further crimes. Everywhere the very completeness of the impoverishment will be made a reason for the enslavement; though the men who impoverished were the same who enslaved. It is as if a highwayman not only took away a gentleman’s horse and all his money, but then handed him over to the police for tramping without visible means of subsistence. And the most monstrous feature in this enormous meanness may be noted in the plutocratic appeal to science, or, rather, to the pseudo-science that they call Eugenics.

The Eugenists get the ear of the humane but rather hazy cliques by saying that the present “conditions” under which people work and breed are bad for the race; but the modern mind will not generally stretch beyond one step of
reasoning, and the consequence which appears to follow on the consideration of these “conditions” is by no means what would originally have been expected. If somebody says: “A rickety cradle may mean a rickety baby,” the natural deduction, one would think, would be to give the people a good cradle, or give them money enough to buy one. But that means higher wages and greater equalisation of wealth; and the plutocratic scientist, with a slightly troubled expression, turns his eyes and pince-nez in another direction. Reduced to brutal terms of truth, his difficulty is this and simply this: More food, leisure, and money for the workman would mean a better workman, better even from the point of view of anyone for whom he worked. But more food, leisure, and money would also mean a more independent workman. A house with a decent fire and a full pantry would be a better house to make a chair or mend a clock in, even from the customer’s point of view, than a hovel with a leaky roof and a cold hearth. But a house with a decent fire and a full pantry would also be a better house in which to refuse to make a chair or mend a clock—a much better house to do nothing in—and doing nothing is sometimes one of the highest of the duties of man. All but the hard-hearted must be torn with pity for this pathetic dilemma of the rich man, who has to keep the poor man just stout enough to do the work and just thin enough to have to do it. As he stood gazing at the leaky roof and the rickety cradle in a pensive manner, there one day came into his mind a new and curious idea—one of the most strange, simple, and horrible ideas that have ever risen from the deep pit of original sin.

The roof could not be mended, or, at least, it could not be mended much, without upsetting the capitalist balance, or, rather, disproportion in society; for a man with a roof is a man with a house, and to that extent his house is his castle. The cradle could not be made to rock easier, or, at least, not much easier, without strengthening the hands of the poor household, for the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world—to that extent. But it occurred to the capitalist that there was one sort of furniture in the house that could be altered. The husband and wife could be altered. Birth costs nothing, except in pain and valour and such old-fashioned things; and the merchant need pay no more for mating a strong miner to a healthy fishwife than he pays when the miner mates himself with a less robust female whom he has the sentimentality to prefer. Thus it might be possible, by keeping on certain broad lines of heredity, to have some physical improvement without any moral, political, or social improvement. It might be possible to keep a supply of strong and healthy slaves without coddling them with decent conditions. As the mill-owners use the wind and the water to drive
their mills, they would use this natural force as something even cheaper; and turn
their wheels by diverting from its channel the blood of a man in his youth. That
is what Eugenics means; and that is all that it means.

Of the moral state of those who think of such things it does not become us to
speak. The practical question is rather the intellectual one: of whether their
calculations are well founded, and whether the men of science can or will
guarantee them any such physical certainties. Fortunately, it becomes clearer
every day that they are, scientifically speaking, building on the shifting sand.
The theory of breeding slaves breaks down through what a democrat calls the
equality of men, but which even an oligarchist will find himself forced to call the
similarity of men. That is, that though it is not true that all men are normal, it is
overwhelmingly certain that most men are normal. All the common Eugenic
arguments are drawn from extreme cases, which, even if human honour and
laughter allowed of their being eliminated, would not by their elimination greatly
affect the mass. For the rest, there remains the enormous weakness in Eugenics,
that if ordinary men’s judgment or liberty is to be discounted in relation to
heredity, the judgment of the judges must be discounted in relation to their
heredity. The Eugenic professor may or may not succeed in choosing a baby’s
parents; it is quite certain that he cannot succeed in choosing his own parents.
All his thoughts, including his Eugenic thoughts, are, by the very principle of
those thoughts, flowing from a doubtful or tainted source. In short, we should
need a perfectly Wise Man to do the thing at all. And if he were a Wise Man he
would not do it.

VII. THE EVOLUTION OF THE PRISON

I have never understood why it is that those who talk most about evolution, and
talk it in the very age of fashionable evolutionism, do not see the one way in
which evolution really does apply to our modern difficulty. There is, of course,
an element of evolutionism in the universe; and I know no religion or philosophy
that ever entirely ignored it. Evolution, popularly speaking, is that which
happens to unconscious things. They grow unconsciously; or fade
unconsciously; or rather, some parts of them grow and some parts of them fade;
and at any given moment there is almost always some presence of the fading
thing, and some incompleteness in the growing one. Thus, if I went to sleep for a
hundred years, like the Sleeping Beauty (I wish I could), I should grow a beard
—unlike the Sleeping Beauty. And just as I should grow hair if I were asleep, I
should grow grass if I were dead. Those whose religion it was that God was asleep were perpetually impressed and affected by the fact that he had a long beard. And those whose philosophy it is that the universe is dead from the beginning (being the grave of nobody in particular) think that is the way that grass can grow. In any case, these developments only occur with dead or dreaming things. What happens when everyone is asleep is called Evolution. What happens when everyone is awake is called Revolution.

There was once an honest man, whose name I never knew, but whose face I can almost see (it is framed in Victorian whiskers and fixed in a Victorian neck-cloth), who was balancing the achievements of France and England in civilisation and social efficiencies. And when he came to the religious aspect he said that there were more stone and brick churches used in France; but, on the other hand, there are more sects in England. Whether such a lively disintegration is a proof of vitality in any valuable sense I have always doubted. The sun may breed maggots in a dead dog; but it is essential for such a liberation of life that the dog should be unconscious or (to say the least of it) absent-minded. Broadly speaking, you may call the thing corruption, if you happen to like dogs. You may call it evolution, if you happen to like maggots. In either case, it is what happens to things if you leave them alone.

THE EVOLUTIONISTS’ ERROR

Now, the modern Evolutionists have made no real use of the idea of evolution, especially in the matter of social prediction. They always fall into what is (from their logical point of view) the error of supposing that evolution knows what it is doing. They predict the State of the future as a fruit rounded and polished. But the whole point of evolution (the only point there is in it) is that no State will ever be rounded and polished, because it will always contain some organs that outlived their use, and some that have not yet fully found theirs. If we wish to prophesy what will happen, we must imagine things now moderate grown enormous; things now local grown universal; things now promising grown triumphant; primroses bigger than sunflowers, and sparrows stalking about like flamingoes.

In other words, we must ask what modern institution has a future before it? What modern institution may have swollen to six times its present size in the social heat and growth of the future? I do not think the Garden City will grow: but of that I may speak in my next and last article of this series. I do not think
even the ordinary Elementary School, with its compulsory education, will grow. Too many unlettered people hate the teacher for teaching; and too many lettered people hate the teacher for not teaching. The Garden City will not bear much blossom; the young idea will not shoot, unless it shoots the teacher. But the one flowering tree on the estate, the one natural expansion which I think will expand, is the institution we call the Prison.

PRISONS FOR ALL

If the capitalists are allowed to erect their constructive capitalist community, I speak quite seriously when I say that I think Prison will become an almost universal experience. It will not necessarily be a cruel or shameful experience: on these points (I concede certainly for the present purpose of debate) it may be a vastly improved experience. The conditions in the prison, very possibly, will be made more humane. But the prison will be made more humane only in order to contain more of humanity. I think little of the judgment and sense of humour of any man who can have watched recent police trials without realising that it is no longer a question of whether the law has been broken by a crime; but, now, solely a question of whether the situation could be mended by an imprisonment. It was so with Tom Mann; it was so with Larkin; it was so with the poor atheist who was kept in gaol for saying something he had been acquitted of saying: it is so in such cases day by day. We no longer lock a man up for doing something; we lock him up in the hope of his doing nothing. Given this principle, it is evidently possible to make the mere conditions of punishment more moderate, or—(more probably) more secret. There may really be more mercy in the Prison, on condition that there is less justice in the Court. I should not be surprised if, before we are done with all this, a man was allowed to smoke in prison, on condition, of course, that he had been put in prison for smoking.

Now that is the process which, in the absence of democratic protest, will certainly proceed, will increase and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it. Prison may even lose its disgrace for a little time: it will be difficult to make it disgraceful when men like Larkin can be imprisoned for no reason at all, just as his celebrated ancestor was hanged for no reason at all. But capitalist society, which naturally does not know the meaning of honour, cannot know the meaning of disgrace: and it will still go on imprisoning for no reason at all. Or rather for that rather simple reason that makes a cat spring or a rat run away.

It matters little whether our masters stoop to state the matter in the form that
every prison should be a school; or in the more candid form that every school should be a prison. They have already fulfilled their servile principle in the case of the schools. Everyone goes to the Elementary Schools except the few people who tell them to go there. I prophesy that (unless our revolt succeeds) nearly everyone will be going to Prison, with a precisely similar patience.

VIII. THE LASH FOR LABOUR

If I were to prophesy that two hundred years hence a grocer would have the right and habit of beating the grocer’s assistant with a stick, or that shop girls might be flogged, as they already can be fined, many would regard it as rather a rash remark. It would be a rash remark. Prophecy is always unreliable; unless we except the kind which is avowedly irrational, mystical and supernatural prophecy. But relatively to nearly all the other prophecies that are being made around me to-day, I should say my prediction stood an exceptionally good chance. In short, I think the grocer with the stick is a figure we are far more likely to see than the Superman or the Samurai, or the True Model Employer, or the Perfect Fabian Official, or the citizen of the Collectivist State. And it is best for us to see the full ugliness of the transformation which is passing over our Society in some such abrupt and even grotesque image at the end of it. The beginnings of a decline, in every age of history, have always had the appearance of being reforms. Nero not only fiddled while Rome was burning, but he probably really paid more attention to the fiddle than to the fire. The Roi Soleil, like many other soleils, was most splendid to all appearance a little before sunset. And if I ask myself what will be the ultimate and final fruit of all our social reforms, garden cities, model employers, insurances, exchanges, arbitration courts, and so on, then, I say, quite seriously, “I think it will be labour under the lash.”

THE SULTAN AND THE SACK

Let us arrange in some order a number of converging considerations that all point in this direction. (1) It is broadly true, no doubt, that the weapon of the employer has hitherto been the threat of dismissal, that is, the threat of enforced starvation. He is a Sultan who need not order the bastinado, so long as he can order the sack. But there are not a few signs that this weapon is not quite so convenient and flexible a one as his increasing rapacities require. The fact of the
introduction of fines, secretly or openly, in many shops and factories, proves that it is convenient for the capitalists to have some temporary and adjustable form of punishment besides the final punishment of pure ruin. Nor is it difficult to see the commonsense of this from their wholly inhuman point of view. The act of sacking a man is attended with the same disadvantages as the act of shooting a man: one of which is that you can get no more out of him. It is, I am told, distinctly annoying to blow a fellow creature’s brains out with a revolver and then suddenly remember that he was the only person who knew where to get the best Russian cigarettes. So our Sultan, who is the orderer of the sack, is also the bearer of the bow-string. A school in which there was no punishment, except expulsion, would be a school in which it would be very difficult to keep proper discipline; and the sort of discipline on which the reformed capitalism will insist will be all of the type which in free nations is imposed only on children. Such a school would probably be in a chronic condition of breaking up for the holidays. And the reasons for the insufficiency of this extreme instrument are also varied and evident. The materialistic Sociologists, who talk about the survival of the fittest and the weakest going to the wall (and whose way of looking at the world is to put on the latest and most powerful scientific spectacles, and then shut their eyes), frequently talk as if a workman were simply efficient or non-efficient, as if a criminal were reclaimable or irreclaimable. The employers have sense enough at least to know better than that. They can see that a servant may be useful in one way and exasperating in another; that he may be bad in one part of his work and good in another; that he may be occasionally drunk and yet generally indispensable. Just as a practical school-master would know that a schoolboy can be at once the plague and the pride of the school. Under these circumstances small and varying penalties are obviously the most convenient things for the person keeping order; an underling can be punished for coming late, and yet do useful work when he comes. It will be possible to give a rap over the knuckles without wholly cutting off the right hand that has offended. Under these circumstances the employers have naturally resorted to fines. But there is a further ground for believing that the process will go beyond fines before it is completed.

(2) The fine is based on the old European idea that everybody possesses private property in some reasonable degree; but not only is this not true to-day, but it is not being made any truer, even by those who honestly believe that they are mending matters. The great employers will often do something towards improving what they call the “conditions” of their workers; but a worker might
have his conditions as carefully arranged as a racehorse has, and still have no more personal property than a racehorse. If you take an average poor seamstress or factory girl, you will find that the power of chastising her through her property has very considerable limits; it is almost as hard for the employer of labour to tax her for punishment as it is for the Chancellor of the Exchequer to tax her for revenue. The next most obvious thing to think of, of course, would be imprisonment, and that might be effective enough under simpler conditions. An old-fashioned shopkeeper might have locked up his apprentice in his coal-cellar; but his coal-cellar would be a real, pitch dark coal-cellar, and the rest of his house would be a real human house. Everybody (especially the apprentice) would see a most perceptible difference between the two. But, as I pointed out in the article before this, the whole tendency of the capitalist legislation and experiment is to make imprisonment much more general and automatic, while making it, or professing to make it, more humane. In other words, the hygienic prison and the servile factory will become so uncommonly like each other that the poor man will hardly know or care whether he is at the moment expiating an offence or merely swelling a dividend. In both places there will be the same sort of shiny tiles. In neither place will there be any cell so unwholesome as a coal-cellar or so wholesome as a home. The weapon of the prison, therefore, like the weapon of the fine, will be found to have considerable limitations to its effectiveness when employed against the wretched reduced citizen of our day. Whether it be property or liberty you cannot take from him what he has not got. You cannot imprison a slave, because you cannot enslave a slave.

THE BARBAROUS REVIVAL

(3) Most people, on hearing the suggestion that it may come to corporal punishment at last (as it did in every slave system I ever heard of, including some that were generally kindly, and even successful), will merely be struck with horror and incredulity, and feel that such a barbarous revival is unthinkable in the modern atmosphere. How far it will be, or need be, a revival of the actual images and methods of ruder times I will discuss in a moment. But first, as another of the converging lines tending to corporal punishment, consider this: that for some reason or other the old full-blooded and masculine humanitarianism in this matter has weakened and fallen silent; it has weakened and fallen silent in a very curious manner, the precise reason for which I do not altogether understand. I knew the average Liberal, the average Nonconformist
minister, the average Labour Member, the average middle-class Socialist, were, with all their good qualities, very deficient in what I consider a respect for the human soul. But I did imagine that they had the ordinary modern respect for the human body. The fact, however, is clear and incontrovertible. In spite of the horror of all humane people, in spite of the hesitation even of our corrupt and panic-stricken Parliament, measures can now be triumphantly passed for spreading or increasing the use of physical torture, and for applying it to the newest and vaguest categories of crime. Thirty or forty years ago, nay, twenty years ago, when Mr. F. Hugh O’Donnell and others forced a Liberal Government to drop the cat-o-nine-tails like a scorpion, we could have counted on a mass of honest hatred of such things. We cannot count on it now.

(4) But lastly, it is not necessary that in the factories of the future the institution of physical punishment should actually remind people of the jambok or the knout. It could easily be developed out of the many forms of physical discipline which are already used by employers on the excuses of education or hygiene. Already in some factories girls are obliged to swim whether they like it or not, or do gymnastics whether they like it or not. By a simple extension of hours or complication of exercises a pair of Swedish clubs could easily be so used as to leave their victim as exhausted as one who had come off the rack. I think it extremely likely that they will be.

IX. THE MASK OF SOCIALISM

The chief aim of all honest Socialists just now is to prevent the coming of Socialism. I do not say it as a sneer, but, on the contrary, as a compliment; a compliment to their political instinct and public spirit. I admit it may be called an exaggeration; but there really is a sort of sham Socialism that the modern politicians may quite possibly agree to set up; if they do succeed in setting it up, the battle for the poor is lost.

We must note, first of all, a general truth about the curious time we live in. It will not be so difficult as some people may suppose to make the Servile State look rather like Socialism, especially to the more pedantic kind of Socialist. The reason is this. The old lucid and trenchant expounder of Socialism, such as Blatchford or Fred Henderson, always describes the economic power of the plutocrats as consisting in private property. Of course, in a sense, this is quite true; though they too often miss the point that private property, as such, is not the same as property confined to the few. But the truth is that the situation has
grown much more subtle; perhaps too subtle, not to say too insane, for straight-thinking theorists like Blatchford. The rich man to-day does not only rule by using private property; he also rules by treating public property as if it were private property. A man like Lord Murray pulled the strings, especially the purse-strings; but the whole point of his position was that all sorts of strings had got entangled. The secret strength of the money he held did not lie merely in the fact that it was his money. It lay precisely in the fact that nobody had any clear idea of whether it was his money, or his successor’s money, or his brother’s money, or the Marconi Company’s money, or the Liberal Party’s money, or the English Nation’s money. It was buried treasure; but it was not private property. It was the acme of plutocracy because it was not private property. Now, by following this precedent, this unprincipled vagueness about official and unofficial moneys by the cheerful habit of always mixing up the money in the pocket with the money in the till, it would be quite possible to keep the rich as rich as ever in practice, though they might have suffered confiscation in theory. Mr. Lloyd George has four hundred a year as an M. P.; but he not only gets much more as a Minister, but he might at any time get immeasurably more by speculating on State secrets that are necessarily known to him. Some say that he has even attempted something of the kind. Now, it would be quite possible to cut Mr. George down, not to four hundred a year, but to fourpence a day; and still leave him all these other and enormous financial superiorities. It must be remembered that a Socialist State, in any way resembling a modern State, must, however egalitarian it may be, have the handling of huge sums, and the enjoyment of large conveniences; it is not improbable that the same men will handle and enjoy in much the same manner, though in theory they are doing it as instruments, and not as individuals. For instance, the Prime Minister has a private house, which is also (I grieve to inform that eminent Puritan) a public house. It is supposed to be a sort of Government office; though people do not generally give children’s parties, or go to bed in a Government office. I do not know where Mr. Herbert Samuel lives; but I have no doubt he does himself well in the matter of decoration and furniture. On the existing official parallel there is no need to move any of these things in order to Socialise them. There is no need to withdraw one diamond-headed nail from the carpet; or one golden teaspoon from the tray. It is only necessary to call it an official residence, like 10 Downing-street. I think it is not at all improbable that this Plutocracy, pretending to be a Bureaucracy, will be attempted or achieved. Our wealthy rulers will be in the position which grumblers in the world of sport sometimes attribute to some
of the “gentlemen” players. They assert that some of these are paid like any professional; only their pay is called their expenses. This system might run side by side with a theory of equal wages, as absolute as that once laid down by Mr. Bernard Shaw. By the theory of the State, Mr. Herbert Samuel and Mr. Lloyd George might be humble citizens, drudging for their fourpence a day; and no better off than porters and coal-heavers. If there were presented to our mere senses what appeared to be the form of Mr. Herbert Samuel in an astrakhan coat and a motor-car, we should find the record of the expenditure (if we could find it at all) under the heading of “Speed Limit Extension Enquiry Commission.” If it fell to our lot to behold (with the eye of flesh) what seemed to be Mr. Lloyd George lying in a hammock and smoking a costly cigar, we should know that the expenditure would be divided between the “Condition of Rope and Netting Investigation Department,” and the “State of Cuban Tobacco Trade: Imperial Inspector’s Report.”

Such is the society I think they will build unless we can knock it down as fast as they build it. Everything in it, tolerable or intolerable, will have but one use; and that use what our ancestors used to call usance or usury. Its art may be good or bad, but it will be an advertisement for usurers; its literature may be good or bad, but it will appeal to the patronage of usurers; its scientific selection will select according to the needs of usurers; its religion will be just charitable enough to pardon usurers; its penal system will be just cruel enough to crush all the critics of usurers: the truth of it will be Slavery: and the title of it may quite possibly be Socialism.
THE ESCAPE

We watched you building, stone by stone, The well-washed cells and well-washed graves We shall inhabit but not own When Britons ever shall be slaves; The water’s waiting in the trough, The tame oats sown are portioned free, There is Enough, and just Enough, And all is ready now but we.

But you have not caught us yet, my lords, You have us still to get. A sorry army you’d have got, Its flags are rags that float and rot, Its drums are empty pan and pot, Its baggage is—an empty cot; But you have not caught us yet.

A little; and we might have slipped When came your rumours and your sales And the foiled rich men, feeble-lipped, Said and unsaid their sorry tales; Great God! It needs a bolder brow To keep ten sheep inside a pen, And we are sheep no longer now; You are but Masters. We are Men.

We give you all good thanks, my lords, We buy at easy price; Thanks for the thousands that you stole, The bribes by wire, the bets on coal, The knowledge of that naked whole That hath delivered our flesh and soul Out of your Paradise.

We had held safe your parks; but when Men taunted you with bribe and fee, We only saw the Lord of Men Grin like an Ape and climb a tree; And humbly had we stood without Your princely barns; did we not see In pointed faces peering out What Rats now own the granary.

It is too late, too late, my lords, We give you back your grace: You cannot with all cajoling Make the wet ditch, or winds that sting, Lost pride, or the pawned wedding rings, Or drink or Death a blacker thing Than a smile upon your face.
THE NEW RAID

The two kinds of social reform, one of which might conceivably free us at last while the other would certainly enslave us forever, are exhibited in an easy working model in the two efforts that have been made for the soldiers’ wives—I mean the effort to increase their allowance and the effort to curtail their alleged drinking. In the preliminary consideration, at any rate, we must see the second question as quite detached from our own sympathies on the special subject of fermented liquor. It could be applied to any other pleasure or ornament of life; it will be applied to every other pleasure and ornament of life if the Capitalist campaign can succeed. The argument we know; but it cannot be too often made clear. An employer, let us say, pays a seamstress twopence a day, and she does not seem to thrive on it. So little, perhaps, does she thrive on it that the employer has even some difficulty in thriving upon her. There are only two things that he can do, and the distinction between them cuts the whole social and political world in two. It is a touchstone by which we can—not sometimes, but always—distinguish economic equality from servile social reform. He can give the girl some magnificent sum, such as sixpence a day, to do as she likes with, and trust that her improved health and temper will work for the benefit of his business. Or he may keep her to the original sum of a shilling a week, but earmark each of the pennies to be used or not to be used for a particular purpose. If she must not spend this penny on a bunch of violets, or that penny on a novelette, or the other penny on a toy for some baby, it is possible that she will concentrate her expenditure more upon physical necessities, and so become, from the employer’s point of view, a more efficient person. Without the trouble of adding twopence to her wages, he has added twopenny-worth to her food. In short, she has the holy satisfaction of being worth more without being paid more.

This Capitalist is an ingenious person, and has many polished characteristics; but I think the most singular thing about him is his staggering lack of shame. Neither the hour of death nor the day of reckoning, neither the tent of exile nor the house of mourning, neither chivalry nor patriotism, neither womanhood nor widowhood, is safe at this supreme moment from his dirty little expedient of dieting the slave. As similar bullies, when they collect the slum rents, put a foot in the open door, these are always ready to push in a muddy wedge wherever there is a slit in a sundered household or a crack in a broken heart. To a man of any manhood nothing can be conceived more loathsome and sacrilegious than
even so much as asking whether a woman who has given up all she loved to
death and the fatherland has or has not shown some weakness in her seeking for
self-comfort. I know not in which of the two cases I should count myself the
baser for inquiring—a case where the charge was false or a case where it was
true. But the philanthropic employer of the sort I describe is not a man of any
manhood; in a sense he is not a man at all. He shows some consciousness of the
fact when he calls his workers “men” as distinct from masters. He cannot
comprehend the gallantry of costermongers or the delicacy that is quite common
among cabmen. He finds this social reform by half-rations on the whole to his
mercantile profit, and it will be hard to get him to think of anything else.

But there are people assisting him, people like the Duchess of Marlborough,
who know not their right hand from their left, and to these we may legitimately
address our remonstrance and a resume of some of the facts they do not know.
The Duchess of Marlborough is, I believe, an American, and this separates her
from the problem in a special way, because the drink question in America is
entirely different from the drink question in England. But I wish the Duchess of
Marlborough would pin up in her private study, side by side with the Declaration
of Independence, a document recording the following simple truths: (1) Beer,
which is largely drunk in public-houses, is not a spirit or a grog or a cocktail or a
drug. It is the common English liquid for quenching the thirst; it is so still among
innumerable gentlemen, and, until very lately, was so among innumerable ladies.
Most of us remember dames of the last generation whose manners were fit for
Versailles, and who drank ale or Stout as a matter of course. Schoolboys drank
ale as a matter of course, and their schoolmasters gave it to them as a matter of
course. To tell a poor woman that she must not have any until half the day is
over is simply cracked, like telling a dog or a child that he must not have water.
(2) The public-house is not a secret rendezvous of bad characters. It is the open
and obvious place for a certain purpose, which all men used for that purpose
until the rich began to be snobs and the poor to become slaves. One might as
well warn people against Willesden Junction. (3) Many poor people live in
houses where they cannot, without great preparation, offer hospitality. (4) The
climate of these picturesque islands does not favour conducting long
conversations with one’s oldest friends on an iron seat in the park. (5) Halfpast
eleven a.m. is not early in the day for a woman who gets up before six. (6) The
bodies and minds of these women belong to God and to themselves.
THE NEW NAME

Something has come into our community, which is strong enough to save our community; but which has not yet got a name. Let no one fancy I confess any unreality when I confess the namelessness. The morality called Puritanism, the tendency called Liberalism, the reaction called Tory Democracy, had not only long been powerful, but had practically done most of their work, before these actual names were attached to them. Nevertheless, I think it would be a good thing to have some portable and practicable way of referring to those who think as we do in our main concern. Which is, that men in England are ruled, at this minute by the clock, by brutes who refuse them bread, by liars who refuse them news, and by fools who cannot govern, and therefore wish to enslave.

Let me explain first why I am not satisfied with the word commonly used, which I have often used myself; and which, in some contexts, is quite the right word to use. I mean the word “rebel.” Passing over the fact that many who understand the justice of our cause (as a great many at the Universities) would still use the word “rebel” in its old and strict sense as meaning only a disturber of just rule. I pass to a much more practical point. The word “rebel” understates our cause. It is much too mild; it lets our enemies off much too easily. There is a tradition in all western life and letters of Prometheus defying the stars, of man at war with the Universe, and dreaming what nature had never dared to dream. All this is valuable in its place and proportion. But it has nothing whatever to do with our ease; or rather it very much weakens it. The plutocrats will be only too pleased if we profess to preach a new morality; for they know jolly well that they have broken the old one. They will be only too pleased to be able to say that we, by our own confession, are merely restless and negative; that we are only what we call rebels and they call cranks. But it is not true; and we must not concede it to them for a moment. The model millionaire is more of a crank than the Socialists; just as Nero was more of a crank than the Christians. And avarice has gone mad in the governing class to-day, just as lust went mad in the circle of Nero. By all the working and orthodox standards of sanity, capitalism is insane. I should not say to Mr. Rockefeller “I am a rebel.” I should say “I am a respectable man: and you are not.”

OUR LAWLESS ENEMIES
But the vital point is that the confession of mere rebellion softens the startling lawlessness of our enemies. Suppose a publisher’s clerk politely asked his employer for a rise in his salary; and, on being refused, said he must leave the employment? Suppose the employer knocked him down with a ruler, tied him up as a brown paper parcel, addressed him (in a fine business hand) to the Governor of Rio Janeiro and then asked the policeman to promise never to arrest him for what he had done? That is a precise copy, in every legal and moral principle, of the “deportation of the strikers.” They were assaulted and kidnapped for not accepting a contract, and for nothing else; and the act was so avowedly criminal that the law had to be altered afterwards to cover the crime. Now suppose some postal official, between here and Rio Janeiro, had noticed a faint kicking inside the brown paper parcel, and had attempted to ascertain the cause. And suppose the clerk could only explain, in a muffled voice through the brown paper, that he was by constitution and temperament a Rebel. Don’t you see that he would be rather understating his case? Don’t you see he would be bearing his injuries much too meekly? They might take him out of the parcel; but they would very possibly put him into a mad-house instead. Symbolically speaking, that is what they would like to do with us. Symbolically speaking, the dirty misers who rule us will put us in a mad-house—unless we can put them there.

Or suppose a bank cashier were admittedly allowed to take the money out of the till, and put it loose in his pocket, more or less mixed up with his own money; afterwards laying some of both (at different odds) on “Blue Murder” for the Derby. Suppose when some depositor asked mildly what day the accountants came, he smote that astonished inquirer on the nose, crying: “Slanderer! Mud-slinger!” and suppose he then resigned his position. Suppose no books were shown. Suppose when the new cashier came to be initiated into his duties, the old cashier did not tell him about the money, but confided it to the honour and delicacy of his own maiden aunt at Cricklewood. Suppose he then went off in a yacht to visit the whale fisheries of the North Sea. Well, in every moral and legal principle, that is a precise account of the dealings with the Party Funds. But what would the banker say? What would the clients say? One thing, I think, I can venture to promise; the banker would not march up and down the office exclaiming in rapture, “I’m a rebel! That’s what I am, a rebel!” And if he said to the first indignant depositor “You are a rebel,” I fear the depositor might answer, “You are a robber.” We have no need to elaborate arguments for breaking the law. The capitalists have broken the law. We have no need of further moralities. They have broken their own morality. It is as if you were to run down the street
shouting, “Communism! Communism! Share! Share!” after a man who had run away with your watch.

We want a term that will tell everybody that there is, by the common standard, frank fraud and cruelty pushed to their fierce extreme; and that we are fighting THEM. We are not in a state of “divine discontent”; we are in an entirely human and entirely reasonable rage. We say we have been swindled and oppressed, and we are quite ready and able to prove it before any tribunal that allows us to call a swindler a swindler. It is the protection of the present system that most of its tribunals do not. I cannot at the moment think of any party name that would particularly distinguish us from our more powerful and prosperous opponents, unless it were the name the old Jacobites gave themselves; the Honest Party.

CAPTURED OUR STANDARDS

I think it is plain that for the purpose of facing these new and infamous modern facts, we cannot, with any safety, depend on any of the old nineteenth century names; Socialist, or Communist, or Radical, or Liberal, or Labour. They are all honourable names; they all stand, or stood, for things in which we may still believe; we can still apply them to other problems; but not to this one. We have no longer a monopoly of these names. Let it be understood that I am not speaking here of the philosophical problem of their meaning, but of the practical problem of their use. When I called myself a Radical I knew Mr. Balfour would not call himself a Radical; therefore there was some use in the word. When I called myself a Socialist I knew Lord Penrhyn would not call himself a Socialist; therefore there was some use in the word. But the capitalists, in that aggressive march which is the main fact of our time, have captured our standards, both in the military and philosophic sense of the word. And it is useless for us to march under colours which they can carry as well as we.

Do you believe in Democracy? The devils also believe and tremble. Do you believe in Trades Unionism? The Labour Members also believe; and tremble like a falling teetotum. Do you believe in the State? The Samuels also believe, and grin. Do you believe in the centralisation of Empire? So did Beit. Do you believe in the decentralisation of Empire? So does Albu. Do you believe in the brotherhood of men: and do you, dear brethren, believe that Brother Arthur Henderson does not? Do you cry, “The world for the workers!” and do you imagine Philip Snowden would not? What we need is a name that shall declare, not that the modern treason and tyranny are bad, but that they are quite literally,
intolerable: and that we mean to act accordingly. I really think “the Limits” would be as good a name as any. But, anyhow, something is born among us that is as strong as an infant Hercules: and it is part of my prejudices to want it christened. I advertise for godfathers and godmothers.
A WORKMAN’S HISTORY OF ENGLAND

A thing which does not exist and which is very much wanted is “A Working-Man’s History of England.” I do not mean a history written for working men (there are whole dustbins of them), I mean a history, written by working men or from the working men’s standpoint. I wish five generations of a fisher’s or a miner’s family could incarnate themselves in one man and tell the story.

It is impossible to ignore altogether any comment coming from so eminent a literary artist as Mr. Laurence Housman, but I do not deal here so specially with his well known conviction about Votes for Women, as with another idea which is, I think, rather at the back of it, if not with him at least with others; and which concerns this matter of the true story of England. For the true story is so entirely different from the false official story that the official classes tell that by this time the working class itself has largely forgotten its own experience. Either story can be quite logically linked up with Female Suffrage, which, therefore, I leave where it is for the moment; merely confessing that, so long as we get hold of the right story and not the wrong story, it seems to me a matter of secondary importance whether we link it up with Female Suffrage or not.

Now the ordinary version of recent English history that most moderately educated people have absorbed from childhood is something like this. That we emerged slowly from a semi-barbarism in which all the power and wealth were in the hands of Kings and a few nobles; that the King’s power was broken first and then in due time that of the nobles, that this piece-meal improvement was brought about by one class after another waking up to a sense of citizenship and demanding a place in the national councils, frequently by riot or violence; and that in consequence of such menacing popular action, the franchise was granted to one class after another and used more and more to improve the social conditions of those classes, until we practically became a democracy, save for such exceptions as that of the women. I do not think anyone will deny that something like that is the general idea of the educated man who reads a newspaper and of the newspaper that he reads. That is the view current at public schools and colleges; it is part of the culture of all the classes that count for much in government; and there is not one word of truth in it from beginning to end.

THAT GREAT REFORM BILL
Wealth and political power were very much more popularly distributed in the Middle Ages than they are now; but we will pass all that and consider recent history. The franchise has never been largely and liberally granted in England; half the males have no vote and are not likely to get one. It was never granted in reply to pressure from awakened sections of the democracy; in every case there was a perfectly clear motive for granting it solely for the convenience of the aristocrats. The Great Reform Bill was not passed in response to such riots as that which destroyed a Castle; nor did the men who destroyed the Castle get any advantage whatever out of the Great Reform Bill. The Great Reform Bill was passed in order to seal an alliance between the landed aristocrats and the rich manufacturers of the north (an alliance that rules us still); and the chief object of that alliance was to prevent the English populace getting any political power in the general excitement after the French Revolution. No one can read Macaulay’s speech on the Chartists, for instance, and not see that this is so. Disraeli’s further extension of the suffrage was not effected by the intellectual vivacity and pure republican theory of the mid-Victorian agricultural labourer; it was effected by a politician who saw an opportunity to dish the Whigs, and guessed that certain orthodoxies in the more prosperous artisan might yet give him a balance against the commercial Radicals. And while this very thin game of wire-pulling with the mere abstraction of the vote was being worked entirely by the oligarchs and entirely in their interests, the solid and real thing that was going on was the steady despoiling of the poor of all power or wealth, until they find themselves to-day upon the threshold of slavery. That is The Working Man’s History of England.

Now, as I have said, I care comparatively little what is done with the mere voting part of the matter, so long as it is not claimed in such a way as to allow the plutocrat to escape his responsibility for his crimes, by pretending to be much more progressive, or much more susceptible to popular protest, than he ever has been. And there is this danger in many of those who have answered me. One of them, for instance, says that women have been forced into their present industrial situations by the same iron economic laws that have compelled men. I say that men have not been compelled by iron economic laws, but in the main by the coarse and Christless cynicism of other men. But, of course, this way of talking is exactly in accordance with the fashionable and official version of English history. Thus, you will read that the monasteries, places where men of the poorest origin could be powerful, grew corrupt and gradually decayed. Or you will read that the mediaeval guilds of free workmen yielded at last to an
inevitable economic law. You will read this; and you will be reading lies. They might as well say that Julius Caesar gradually decayed at the foot of Pompey's statue. You might as well say that Abraham Lincoln yielded at last to an inevitable economic law. The free mediaeval guilds did not decay; they were murdered. Solid men with solid guns and halberds, armed with lawful warrants from living statesmen broke up their corporations and took away their hard cash from them. In the same way the people in Cradley Heath are no more victims of a necessary economic law than the people in Putumayo. They are victims of a very terrible creature, of whose sins much has been said since the beginning of the world; and of whom it was said of old, “Let us fall into the hands of God, for His mercies are great; but let us not fall into the hands of Man.”

THE CAPITALIST IS IN THE DOCK

Now it is this offering of a false economic excuse for the sweater that is the danger in perpetually saying that the poor woman will use the vote and that the poor man has not used it. The poor man is prevented from using it; prevented by the rich man, and the poor woman would be prevented in exactly the same gross and stringent style. I do not deny, of course, that there is something in the English temperament, and in the heritage of the last few centuries that makes the English workman more tolerant of wrong than most foreign workmen would be. But this only slightly modifies the main fact of the moral responsibility. To take an imperfect parallel, if we said that negro slaves would have rebelled if negroes had been more intelligent, we should be saying what is reasonable. But if we were to say that it could by any possibility be represented as being the negro’s fault that he was at that moment in America and not in Africa, we should be saying what is frankly unreasonable. It is every bit as unreasonable to say the mere supineness of the English workmen has put them in the capitalist slaveyard. The capitalist has put them in the capitalist slaveyard; and very cunning smiths have hammered the chains. It is just this creative criminality in the authors of the system that we must not allow to be slurred over. The capitalist is in the dock to-day; and so far as I at least can prevent him, he shall not get out of it.
THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AND THE IRISH

It will be long before the poison of the Party System is worked out of the body politic. Some of its most indirect effects are the most dangerous. One that is very dangerous just now is this: that for most Englishmen the Party System falsifies history, and especially the history of revolutions. It falsifies history because it simplifies history. It paints everything either Blue or Buff in the style of its own silly circus politics: while a real revolution has as many colours as the sunrise—or the end of the world. And if we do not get rid of this error we shall make very bad blunders about the real revolution which seems to grow more and more probable, especially among the Irish. And any human familiarity with history will teach a man this first of all: that Party practically does not exist in a real revolution. It is a game for quiet times.

If you take a boy who has been to one of those big private schools which are falsely called the Public Schools, and another boy who has been to one of those large public schools which are falsely called the Board Schools, you will find some differences between the two, chiefly a difference in the management of the voice. But you will find they are both English in a special way, and that their education has been essentially the same. They are ignorant on the same subjects. They have never heard of the same plain facts. They have been taught the wrong answer to the same confusing question. There is one fundamental element in the attitude of the Eton master talking about “playing the game,” and the elementary teacher training gutter-snipes to sing, “What is the Meaning of Empire Day?” And the name of that element is “unhistoric.” It knows nothing really about England, still less about Ireland or France, and, least of all, of course, about anything like the French Revolution.

REVOLUTION BY SNAP DIVISION

Now what general notion does the ordinary English boy, thus taught to utter one ignorance in one of two accents, get and keep through life about the French Revolution? It is the notion of the English House of Commons with an enormous Radical majority on one side of the table and a small Tory minority on the other; the majority voting solid for a Republic, the minority voting solid for a Monarchy; two teams tramping through two lobbies with no difference between their methods and ours, except that (owing to some habit peculiar to Gaul) the
brief intervals were brightened by a riot or a massacre, instead of by a whisky and soda and a Marconi tip. Novels are much more reliable than histories in such matters. For though an English novel about France does not tell the truth about France, it does tell the truth about England; and more than half the histories never tell the truth about anything. And popular fiction, I think, bears witness to the general English impression. The French Revolution is a snap division with an unusual turnover of votes. On the one side stand a king and queen who are good but weak, surrounded by nobles with rapiers drawn; some of whom are good, many of whom are wicked, all of whom are good-looking. Against these there is a formless mob of human beings, wearing red caps and seemingly insane, who all blindly follow ruffians who are also rhetoricians; some of whom die repentant and others unrepentant towards the end of the fourth act. The leaders of this boiling mass of all men melted into one are called Mirabeau, Robespierre, Danton, Marat, and so on. And it is conceded that their united frenzy may have been forced on them by the evils of the old regime.

That, I think, is the commonest English view of the French Revolution; and it will not survive the reading of two pages of any real speech or letter of the period. These human beings were human; varied, complex and inconsistent. But the rich Englishman, ignorant of revolutions, would hardly believe you if you told him some of the common human subtleties of the case. Tell him that Robespierre threw the red cap in the dirt in disgust, while the king had worn it with a broad grin, so to speak; tell him that Danton, the fierce founder of the Republic of the Terror, said quite sincerely to a noble, “I am more monarchist than you;” tell him that the Terror really seems to have been brought to an end chiefly by the efforts of people who particularly wanted to go on with it—and he will not believe these things. He will not believe them because he has no humility, and therefore no realism. He has never been inside himself; and so could never be inside another man. The truth is that in the French affair everybody occupied an individual position. Every man talked sincerely, if not because he was sincere, then because he was angry. Robespierre talked even more about God than about the Republic because he cared even more about God than about the Republic. Danton talked even more about France than about the Republic because he cared even more about France than about the Republic. Marat talked more about Humanity than either, because that physician (though himself somewhat needing a physician) really cared about it. The nobles were divided, each man from the next. The attitude of the king was quite different from the attitude of the queen; certainly much more different than any
differences between our Liberals and Tories for the last twenty years. And it will sadden some of my friends to remember that it was the king who was the Liberal and the queen who was the Tory. There were not two people, I think, in that most practical crisis who stood in precisely the same attitude towards the situation. And that is why, between them, they saved Europe. It is when you really perceive the unity of mankind that you really perceive its variety. It is not a flippancy, it is a very sacred truth, to say that when men really understand that they are brothers they instantly begin to fight.

THE REVIVAL OF REALITY

Now these things are repeating themselves with an enormous reality in the Irish Revolution. You will not be able to make a Party System out of the matter. Everybody is in revolt; therefore everybody is telling the truth. The Nationalists will go on caring most for the nation, as Danton and the defenders of the frontier went on caring most for the nation. The priests will go on caring most for religion, as Robespierre went on caring most for religion. The Socialists will go on caring most for the cure of physical suffering, as Marat went on caring most for it. It is out of these real differences that real things can be made, such as the modern French democracy. For by such tenacity everyone sees at last that there is something in the other person’s position. And those drilled in party discipline see nothing either past or present. And where there is nothing there is Satan.

For a long time past in our politics there has not only been no real battle, but no real bargain. No two men have bargained as Gladstone and Parnell bargained—each knowing the other to be a power. But in real revolutions men discover that no one man can really agree with another man until he has disagreed with him.
LIBERALISM: A SAMPLE

There is a certain daily paper in England towards which I feel very much as Tom Pinch felt towards Mr. Pecksniff immediately after he had found him out. The war upon Dickens was part of the general war on all democrats, about the eighties and nineties, which ushered in the brazen plutocracy of to-day. And one of the things that it was fashionable to say of Dickens in drawing-rooms was that he had no subtlety, and could not describe a complex frame of mind. Like most other things that are said in drawing-rooms, it was a lie. Dickens was a very unequal writer, and his successes alternate with his failures; but his successes are subtle quite as often as they are simple. Thus, to take “Martin Chuzzlewit” alone, I should call the joke about the Lord No-zoo a simple joke: but I should call the joke about Mrs. Todgers’s vision of a wooden leg a subtle joke. And no frame of mind was ever so self-contradictory and yet so realistic as that which Dickens describes when he says, in effect, that, though Pinch knew now that there had never been such a person as Pecksniff, in his ideal sense, he could not bring himself to insult the very face and form that had contained the legend. The parallel with Liberal journalism is not perfect; because it was once honest; and Pecksniff presumably never was. And even when I come to feel a final incompatibility of temper, Pecksniff was not so Pecksniffian as he has since become. But the comparison is complete in so far as I share all the reluctance of Mr. Pinch. Some old heathen king was advised by one of the Celtic saints, I think, to burn what he had adored and adore what he had burnt. I am quite ready, if anyone will prove I was wrong, to adore what I have burnt; but I do really feel an unwillingness verging upon weakness to burning what I have adored. I think it is a weakness to be overcome in times as bad as these, when (as Mr. Orage wrote with something like splendid common sense the other day) there is such a lot to do and so few people who will do it. So I will devote this article to considering one case of the astounding baseness to which Liberal journalism has sunk.

MENTAL BREAKDOWN IN FLEET STREET

One of the two or three streaks of light on our horizon can be perceived in this: that the moral breakdown of these papers has been accompanied by a mental breakdown also. The contemporary official paper, like the “Daily News” or the
“Daily Chronicle” (I mean in so far as it deals with politics), simply cannot argue; and simply does not pretend to argue. It considers the solution which it imagines that wealthy people want, and it signifies the same in the usual manner; which is not by holding up its hand, but by falling on its face. But there is no more curious quality in its degradation than a sort of carelessness, at once of hurry and fatigue, with which it flings down its argument—or rather its refusal to argue. It does not even write sophistry: it writes anything. It does not so much poison the reader’s mind as simply assume that the reader hasn’t got one. For instance, one of these papers printed an article on Sir Stuart Samuel, who, having broken the great Liberal statute against corruption, will actually, perhaps, be asked to pay his own fine—in spite of the fact that he can well afford to do so. The article says, if I remember aright, that the decision will cause general surprise and some indignation. That any modern Government making a very rich capitalist obey the law will cause general surprise, may be true. Whether it will cause general indignation rather depends on whether our social intercourse is entirely confined to Park Lane, or any such pigsties built of gold. But the journalist proceeds to say, his neck rising higher and higher out of his collar, and his hair rising higher and higher on his head, in short, his resemblance to the Dickens’ original increasing every instant, that he does not mean that the law against corruption should be less stringent, but that the burden should be borne by the whole community. This may mean that whenever a rich man breaks the law, all the poor men ought to be made to pay his fine. But I will suppose a slightly less insane meaning. I will suppose it means that the whole power of the commonwealth should be used to prosecute an offender of this kind. That, of course, can only mean that the matter will be decided by that instrument which still pretends to represent the whole power of the commonwealth. In other words, the Government will judge the Government.

Now this is a perfectly plain piece of brute logic. We need not go into the other delicious things in the article, as when it says that “in old times Parliament had to be protected against Royal invasion by the man in the street.” Parliament has to be protected now against the man in the street. Parliament is simply the most detested and the most detestable of all our national institutions: all that is evident enough. What is interesting is the blank and staring fallacy of the attempted reply.

WHEN THE JOURNALIST IS RUINED
A long while ago, before all the Liberals died, a Liberal introduced a Bill to prevent Parliament being merely packed with the slaves of financial interests. For that purpose he established the excellent democratic principle that the private citizen, as such, might protest against public corruption. He was called the Common Informer. I believe the miserable party papers are really reduced to playing on the degradation of the two words in modern language. Now the word “common” in “Common Informer” means exactly what it means in “common sense” or “Book of Common Prayer,” or (above all) in “House of Commons.” It does not mean anything low or vulgar; any more than they do. The only difference is that the House of Commons really is low and vulgar; and the Common Informer isn’t. It is just the same with the word “Informers.” It does not mean spy or sneak. It means one who gives information. It means what “journalist” ought to mean. The only difference is that the Common Informer may be paid if he tells the truth. The common journalist will be ruined if he does.

Now the quite plain point before the party journalist is this: If he really means that a corrupt bargain between a Government and a contractor ought to be judged by public opinion, he must (nowadays) mean Parliament; that is, the caucus that controls Parliament. And he must decide between one of two views. Either he means that there can be no such thing as a corrupt Government. Or he means that it is one of the characteristic qualities of a corrupt Government to denounce its own corruption. I laugh; and I leave him his choice.
THE FATIGUE OF FLEET STREET

Why is the modern party political journalism so bad? It is worse even than it intends to be. It praises its preposterous party leaders through thick and thin; but it somehow succeeds in making them look greater fools than they are. This clumsiness clings even to the photographs of public men, as they are snapshotted at public meetings. A sensitive politician (if there is such a thing) would, I should think, want to murder the man who snapshots him at those moments. For our general impression of a man’s gesture or play of feature is made up of a series of vanishing instants, at any one of which he may look worse than our general impression records. Mr. Augustine Birrell may have made quite a sensible and amusing speech, in the course of which his audience would hardly have noticed that he resettled his necktie. Snapshot him, and he appears as convulsively clutching his throat in the agonies of strangulation, and with his head twisted on one side as if he had been hanged. Sir Edward Carson might make a perfectly good speech, which no one thought wearisome, but might himself be just tired enough to shift from one leg to the other. Snapshot him, and he appears as holding one leg stiffly in the air and yawning enough to swallow the audience. But it is in the prose narratives of the Press that we find most manifestations of this strange ineptitude; this knack of exhibiting your own favourites in an unlucky light. It is not so much that the party journalists do not tell the truth as that they tell just enough of it to make it clear that they are telling lies. One of their favourite blunders is an amazing sort of bathos. They begin by telling you that some statesman said something brilliant in style or biting in wit, at which his hearers thrilled with terror or thundered with applause. And then they tell you what it was that he said. Silly asses!

INSANE EXAGGERATION

Here is an example from a leading Liberal paper touching the debates on Home Rule. I am a Home Ruler; so my sympathies would be, if anything, on the side of the Liberal paper upon that point. I merely quote it as an example of this ridiculous way of writing, which, by insane exaggeration, actually makes its hero look smaller than he is.

This was strange language to use about the “hypocritical sham,” and Mr. Asquith, knowing that the biggest battle of his career was upon him, hit back
without mercy. “I should like first to know,” said he, with a glance at his supporters, “whether my proposals are accepted?”

That’s all. And I really do not see why poor Mr. Asquith should be represented as having violated the Christian virtue of mercy by saying that. I myself could compose a great many paragraphs upon the same model, each containing its stinging and perhaps unscrupulous epigram. As, for example: —“The Archbishop of Canterbury, realising that his choice now lay between denying God and earning the crown of martyrdom by dying in torments, spoke with a frenzy of religious passion that might have seemed fanatical under circumstances less intense. ‘The Children’s Service,’ he said firmly, with his face to the congregation, ‘will be held at half-past four this afternoon as usual.’”

Or, we might have:—“Lord Roberts, recognising that he had now to face Armageddon, and that if he lost this last battle against overwhelming odds the independence of England would be extinguished forever, addressed to his soldiers (looking at them and not falling off his horse) a speech which brought their national passions to boiling point, and might well have seemed blood-thirsty in quieter times. It ended with the celebrated declaration that it was a fine day.”

Or we might have the much greater excitement of reading something like this: —“The Astronomer Royal, having realised that the earth would certainly be smashed to pieces by a comet unless his requests in connection with wireless telegraphy were seriously considered, gave an address at the Royal Society which, under other circumstances, would have seemed unduly dogmatic and emotional and deficient in scientific agnosticism. This address (which he delivered without any attempt to stand on his head) included a fierce and even ferocious declaration that it is generally easier to see the stars by night than by day.”

Now, I cannot see, on my conscience and reason, that any one of my imaginary paragraphs is more ridiculous than the real one. Nobody can believe that Mr. Asquith regards these belated and careful compromises about Home Rule as “the biggest battle of his career.” It is only justice to him to say that he has had bigger battles than that. Nobody can believe that any body of men, bodily present, either thundered or thrilled at a man merely saying that he would like to know whether his proposals were accepted. No; it would be far better for Parliament if its doors were shut again, and reporters were excluded. In that case, the outer public did hear genuine rumours of almost gigantic eloquence; such as that which has perpetuated Pitt’s reply against the charge of youth, or Fox’s
bludgeoning of the idea of war as a compromise. It would be much better to follow the old fashion and let in no reporters at all than to follow the new fashion and select the stupidest reporters you can find.

THEIR LOAD OF LIES

Now, why do people in Fleet-street talk such tosh? People in Fleet-street are not fools. Most of them have realised reality through work; some through starvation; some through damnation, or something damnably like it. I think it is simply and seriously true that they are tired of their job. As the general said in M. Rostand’s play, “la fatigue!”

I do really believe that this is one of the ways in which God (don’t get flurried, Nature if you like) is unexpectedly avenged on things infamous and unreasonable. And this method is that men’s moral and even physical tenacity actually give out under such a load of lies. They go on writing their leading articles and their Parliamentary reports. They go on doing it as a convict goes on picking oakum. But the point is not that we are bored with their articles; the point is that they are. The work is done worse because it is done weakly and without human enthusiasm. And it is done weakly because of the truth we have told so many times in this book: that it is not done for monarchy, for which men will die; or for democracy, for which men will die; or even for aristocracy, for which many men have died. It is done for a thing called Capitalism: which stands out quite clearly in history in many curious ways. But the most curious thing about it is that no man has loved it; and no man died for it.
THE AMNESTY FOR AGGRESSION

If there is to rise out of all this red ruin something like a republic of justice, it is essential that our views should be real views; that is, glimpses of lives and landscapes outside ourselves. It is essential that they should not be mere opium visions that begin and end in smoke—and so often in cannon smoke. I make no apology, therefore, for returning to the purely practical and realistic point I urged last week: the fact that we shall lose everything we might have gained if we lose the idea that the responsible person is responsible.

For instance, it is almost specially so with the one or two things in which the British Government, or the British public, really are behaving badly. The first, and worst of them, is the non-extension of the Moratorium, or truce of debtor and creditor, to the very world where there are the poorest debtors and the cruellest creditors. This is infamous: and should be, if possible, more infamous to those who think the war right than to those who think it wrong. Everyone knows that the people who can least pay their debts are the people who are always trying to. Among the poor a payment may be as rash as a speculation. Among the rich a bankruptcy may be as safe as a bank. Considering the class from which private soldiers are taken, there is an atrocious meanness in the idea of buying their blood abroad, while we sell their sticks at home. The English language, by the way, is full of delicate paradoxes. We talk of the private soldiers because they are really public soldiers; and we talk of the public schools because they are really private schools. Anyhow, the wrong is of the sort that ought to be resisted, as much in war as in peace.

ought to be hammered

But as long as we speak of it as a cloudy conclusion, come to by an anonymous club called Parliament, or a masked tribunal called the Cabinet, we shall never get such a wrong righted. Somebody is officially responsible for the unfairness; and that somebody ought to be hammered. The other example, less important but more ludicrous, is the silly boycott of Germans in England, extending even to German music. I do not believe for a moment that the English people feel any such insane fastidiousness. Are the English artists who practise the particularly English art of water-colour to be forbidden to use Prussian blue? Are all old ladies to shoot their Pomeranian dogs? But though England would laugh at this,
she will get the credit of it, and will continue: until we ask who the actual persons are who feel sure that we should shudder at a ballad of the Rhine. It is certain that we should find they are capitalists. It is very probable that we should find they are foreigners.

Some days ago the Official Council of the Independent Labour Party, or the Independent Council of the Official Labour Party, or the Independent and Official Council of the Labour Party (I have got quite nervous about these names and distinctions; but they all seem to say the same thing) began their manifesto by saying it would be difficult to assign the degrees of responsibility which each nation had for the outbreak of the war. Afterwards, a writer in the “Christian Commonwealth,” lamenting war in the name of Labour, but in the language of my own romantic middle-class, said that all the nations must share the responsibility for this great calamity of war. Now exactly as long as we go on talking like that we shall have war after war, and calamity after calamity, until the crack of doom. It simply amounts to a promise of pardon to any person who will start a quarrel. It is an amnesty for assassins. The moment any man assaults any other man he makes all the other men as bad as himself. He has only to stab, and to vanish in a fog of forgetfulness. The real eagles of iron, the predatory Empires, will be delighted with this doctrine. They will applaud the Labour Concert or Committee, or whatever it is called. They will willingly take all the crime, with only a quarter of the conscience: they will be as ready to share the memory as they are to share the spoil. The Powers will divide responsibility as calmly as they divided Poland.

THE WHOLE LOATHSOME LOAD

But I still stubbornly and meekly submit my point: that you cannot end war without asking who began it. If you think somebody else, not Germany, began it, then blame that somebody else: do not blame everybody and nobody. Perhaps you think that a small sovereign people, fresh from two triumphant wars, ought to discrown itself before sunrise; because the nephew of a neighbouring Emperor has been shot by his own subjects. Very well. Then blame Servia; and, to the extent of your influence, you may be preventing small kingdoms being obstinate or even princes being shot. Perhaps you think the whole thing was a huge conspiracy of Russia, with France as a dupe and Servia as a pretext. Very well. Then blame Russia; and, to the extent of your influence, you may be preventing great Empires from making racial excuses for a raid. Perhaps you think France
wrong for feeling what you call “revenge,” and I should call recovery of stolen goods. Perhaps you blame Belgium for being sentimental about her frontier; or England for being sentimental about her word. If so, blame them; or whichever of them you think is to blame. Or again, it is barely possible that you may think, as I do, that the whole loathsome load has been laid upon us by the monarchy which I have not named; still less wasted time in abusing. But if there be in Europe a military State which has not the religion of Russia, yet has helped Russia to tyrannise over the Poles, that State cares not for religion, but for tyranny. If there be a State in Europe which has not the religion of the Austrians, but has helped Austria to bully the Servians, that State cares not for belief, but for bullying. If there be in Europe any people or principality which respects neither republics nor religions, to which the political ideal of Paris is as much a myth as the mystical ideal of Moscow, then blame that: and do more than blame. In the healthy and highly theological words of Robert Blatchford, drive it back to the Hell from which it came.

CRYING OVER SPILT BLOOD

But whatever you do, do not blame everybody for what was certainly done by somebody. It may be it is no good crying over spilt blood, any more than over spilt milk. But we do not find the culprit any more by spilling the milk over everybody; or by daubing everybody with blood. Still less do we improve matters by watering the milk with our tears, nor the blood either. To say that everybody is responsible means that nobody is responsible. If in the future we see Russia annexing Rutland (as part of the old Kingdom of Muscovy), if we see Bavaria taking a sudden fancy to the Bank of England, or the King of the Cannibal Islands suddenly demanding a tribute of edible boys and girls from England and America, we may be quite certain also that the Leader of the Labour Party will rise, with a slight cough, and say: “It would be a difficult task to apportion the blame between the various claims which . . .”
REVIVE THE COURT JESTER

I hope the Government will not think just now about appointing a Poet Laureate. I hardly think they can be altogether in the right mood. The business just now before the country makes a very good detective story; but as a national epic it is a little depressing. Jingo literature always weakens a nation; but even healthy patriotic literature has its proper time and occasion. For instance, Mr. Newbolt (who has been suggested for the post) is a very fine poet; but I think his patriotic lyrics would just now rather jar upon a patriot. We are rather too much concerned about our practical seamanship to feel quite confident that Drake will return and “drum them up the Channel as he drummed them long ago.” On the contrary, we have an uncomfortable feeling that Drake’s ship might suddenly go to the bottom, because the capitalists have made Lloyd George abolish the Plimsoll Line. One could not, without being understood ironically, adjure the two party teams to-day to “play up, play up and play the game,” or to “love the game more than the prize.” And there is no national hero at this moment in the soldiering line—unless, perhaps, it is Major Archer-Shee—of whom anyone would be likely to say: “Sed miles; sed pro patria.” There is, indeed, one beautiful poem of Mr. Newbolt’s which may mingle faintly with one’s thoughts in such times, but that, alas, is to a very different tune. I mean that one in which he echoes Turner’s conception of the old wooden ship vanishing with all the valiant memories of the English:

There’s a far bell ringing At the setting of the sun, And a phantom voice is singing Of the great days done. There’s a far bell ringing, And a phantom voice is singing Of a fame forever clinging To the great days done. For the sunset breezes shiver, Temeraire, Temeraire, And she’s fading down the river. . . .

Well, well, neither you nor I know whether she is fading down the river or not. It is quite enough for us to know, as King Alfred did, that a great many pirates have landed on both banks of the Thames.

PRAISE AND PROPHECY IMPOSSIBLE

At this moment that is the only kind of patriotic poem that could satisfy the emotions of a patriotic person. But it certainly is not the sort of poem that is expected from a Poet Laureate, either on the highest or the lowest theory of his office. He is either a great minstrel singing the victories of a great king, or he is a
common Court official like the Groom of the Powder Closet. In the first case his praises should be true; in the second case they will nearly always be false; but in either case he must praise. And what there is for him to praise just now it would be precious hard to say. And if there is no great hope of a real poet, there is still less hope of a real prophet. What Newman called, I think, “The Prophetic Office,” that is, the institution of an inspired protest even against an inspired religion, certainly would not do in modern England. The Court is not likely to keep a tame prophet in order to encourage him to be wild. It is not likely to pay a man to say that wolves shall howl in Downing-street and vultures build their nests in Buckingham Palace. So vast has been the progress of humanity that these two things are quite impossible. We cannot have a great poet praising kings. We cannot have a great prophet denouncing kings. So I have to fall back on a third suggestion.

THE FIELD FOR A FOOL

Instead of reviving the Court Poet, why not revive the Court Fool? He is the only person who could do any good at this moment either to the Royal or the judicial Courts. The present political situation is utterly unsuitable for the purposes of a great poet. But it is particularly suitable for the purposes of a great buffoon. The old jester was under certain privileges: you could not resent the jokes of a fool, just as you cannot resent the sermons of a curate. Now, what the present Government of England wants is neither serious praise nor serious denunciation; what it wants is satire. What it wants, in other words, is realism given with gusto. When King Louis the Eleventh unexpectedly visited his enemy, the Duke of Burgundy, with a small escort, the Duke’s jester said he would give the King his fool’s cap, for he was the fool now. And when the Duke replied with dignity, “And suppose I treat him with all proper respect?” the fool answered, “Then I will give it to you.” That is the kind of thing that somebody ought to be free to say now. But if you say it now you will be fined a hundred pounds at the least.

CARSON’S DILEMMA

For the things that have been happening lately are not merely things that one could joke about. They are themselves, truly and intrinsically, jokes. I mean that there is a sort of epigram of unreason in the situation itself, as there was in the situation where there was jam yesterday and jam to-morrow but never jam to-
day. Take, for instance, the extraordinary case of Sir Edward Carson. The point is not whether we regard his attitude in Belfast as the defiance of a sincere and dogmatic rebel, or as the bluff of a party hack and mountebank. The point is not whether we regard his defence of the Government at the Old Bailey as a chivalrous and reluctant duty done as an advocate or a friend, or as a mere case of a lawyer selling his soul for a fat brief. The point is that whichever of the two actions we approve, and whichever of the four explanations we adopt, Sir Edward’s position is still raving nonsense. On any argument, he cannot escape from his dilemma. It may be argued that laws and customs should be obeyed whatever our private feelings; and that it is an established custom to accept a brief in such a case. But then it is a somewhat more established custom to obey an Act of Parliament and to keep the peace. It may be argued that extreme misgovernment justifies men in Ulster or elsewhere in refusing to obey the law. But then it would justify them even more in refusing to appear professionally in a law court. Etiquette cannot be at once so unimportant that Carson may shoot at the King’s uniform, and yet so important that he must always be ready to put on his own. The Government cannot be so disreputable that Carson need not lay down his gun, and yet so respectable that he is bound to put on his wig. Carson cannot at once be so fierce that he can kill in what he considers a good cause, and yet so meek that he must argue in what he considers a bad cause. Obedience or disobedience, conventional or unconventional, a solicitor’s letter cannot be more sacred than the King’s writ; a blue bag cannot be more rational than the British flag. The thing is rubbish read anyway, and the only difficulty is to get a joke good enough to express it. It is a case for the Court Jester. The phantasy of it could only be expressed by some huge ceremonial hoax. Carson ought to be crowned with the shamrocks and emeralds and followed by green-clad minstrels of the Clan-na-Gael, playing “The Wearing of the Green.”

BELATED CHATTINESS BY WIRELESS

But all the recent events are like that. They are practical jokes. The jokes do not need to be made: they only need to be pointed out. You and I do not talk and act as the Isaacs brothers talked and acted, by their own most favourable account of themselves; and even their account of themselves was by no means favourable. You and I do not talk of meeting our own born brother “at a family function” as if he were some infinitely distant cousin whom we only met at Christmas. You and I, when we suddenly feel inclined for a chat with the same brother about his
dinner and the Coal Strike, do not generally select either wireless telegraphy or the Atlantic Cable as the most obvious and economical channel for that outburst of belated chattiness. You and I do not talk, if it is proposed to start a railway between Catsville and Dogtown, as if the putting up of a station at Dogtown could have no kind of economic effect on the putting up of a station at Catsville. You and I do not think it candid to say that when we are at one end of a telephone we have no sort of connection with the other end. These things have got into the region of farce; and should be dealt with farcically, not even ferociously.

A FOOL WHO SHALL BE FREE

In the Roman Republic there was a Tribune of the People, whose person was inviolable like an ambassador’s. There was much the same idea in Becket’s attempt to remove the Priest, who was then the popular champion, from the ordinary courts. We shall have no Tribune; for we have no republic. We shall have no Priest; for we have no religion. The best we deserve or can expect is a Fool who shall be free; and who shall deliver us with laughter.
Missing the point is a very fine art; and has been carried to something like perfection by politicians and Pressmen to-day. For the point is generally a very sharp point; and is, moreover, sharp at both ends. That is to say that both parties would probably impale themselves in an uncomfortable manner if they did not manage to avoid it altogether. I have just been looking at the election address of the official Liberal candidate for the part of the country in which I live; and though it is, if anything, rather more logical and free from cant than most other documents of the sort it is an excellent example of missing the point. The candidate has to go boring on about Free Trade and Land Reform and Education; and nobody reading it could possibly imagine that in the town of Wycombe, where the poll will be declared, the capital of the Wycombe division of Bucks which the candidate is contesting, centre of the important and vital trade on which it has thriven, a savage struggle about justice has been raging for months past between the poor and rich, as real as the French Revolution. The man offering himself at Wycombe as representative of the Wycombe division simply says nothing about it at all. It is as if a man at the crisis of the French Terror had offered himself as a deputy for the town of Paris, and had said nothing about the Monarchy, nothing about the Republic, nothing about the massacres, nothing about the war; but had explained with great clearness his views on the suppression of the Jansenists, the literary style of Racine, the suitability of Turenne for the post of commander-in-chief, and the religious reflections of Madame de Maintenon. For, at their best, the candidate’s topics are not topical. Home Rule is a very good thing, and modern education is a very bad thing; but neither of them are things that anybody is talking about in High Wycombe. This is the first and simplest way of missing the point: deliberately to avoid and ignore it.

It would be an amusing experiment, by the way, to go to the point instead of avoiding it. What fun it would be to stand as a strict Party candidate, but issue a perfectly frank and cynical Election Address. Mr. Mosley’s address begins, “Gentlemen,—Sir Alfred Cripps having been chosen for a high judicial position and a seat in the House of Lords, a by-election now becomes necessary, and the
electors of South Bucks are charged with the responsible duty of electing, etc., etc.” But suppose there were another candidate whose election address opened in a plain, manly style, like this: “Gentlemen,—In the sincere hope of being myself chosen for a high judicial position or a seat in the House of Lords, or considerably increasing my private fortune by some Government appointment, or, at least, inside information about the financial prospects, I have decided that it is worth my while to disburse large sums of money to you on various pretexts, and, with even more reluctance to endure the bad speaking and bad ventilation of the Commons’ House of Parliament, so help me God. I have very pronounced convictions on various political questions; but I will not trouble my fellow-citizens with them, since I have quite made up my mind to abandon any or all of them if requested to do so by the upper classes. The electors are therefore charged with the entirely irresponsible duty of electing a Member; or, in other words, I ask my neighbours round about this part, who know I am not a bad chap in many ways, to do me a good turn in my business, just as I might ask them to change a sovereign. My election will have no conceivable kind of effect on anything or anybody except myself; so I ask, as man to man, the Electors of the Southern or Wycombe Division of the County of Buckingham to accept a ride in one of my motor-cars; and poll early to please a pal—God Save the King.” I do not know whether you or I would be elected if we presented ourselves with an election address of that kind; but we should have had our fun and (comparatively speaking) saved our souls; and I have a strong suspicion that we should be elected or rejected on a mechanical majority like anybody else; nobody having dreamed of reading an election address any more than an advertisement of a hair restorer.

TYRANNY AND HEAD-DRESS

But there is another and more subtle way in which we may miss the point; and that is, not by keeping a dead silence about it, but by being just witty enough to state it wrong. Thus, some of the Liberal official papers have almost screwed up their courage to the sticking-point about the bestial coup d’état in South Africa. They have screwed up their courage to the sticking-point; and it has stuck. It cannot get any further; because it has missed the main point. The modern Liberals make their feeble attempts to attack the introduction of slavery into South Africa by the Dutch and the Jews, by a very typical evasion of the vital fact. The vital fact is simply slavery. Most of these Dutchmen have always felt
like slave-owners. Most of these Jews have always felt like slaves. Now that they are on top, they have a particular and curious kind of impudence, which is only known among slaves. But the Liberal journalists will do their best to suggest that the South African wrong consisted in what they call Martial Law. That is, that there is something specially wicked about men doing an act of cruelty in khaki or in vermilion, but not if it is done in dark blue with pewter buttons. The tyrant who wears a busby or a forage cap is abominable; the tyrant who wears a horsehair wig is excusable. To be judged by soldiers is hell; but to be judged by lawyers is paradise.

Now the point must not be missed in this way. What is wrong with the tyranny in Africa is not that it is run by soldiers. It would be quite as bad, or worse, if it were run by policemen. What is wrong is that, for the first time since Pagan times, private men are being forced to work for a private man. Men are being punished by imprisonment or exile for refusing to accept a job. The fact that Botha can ride on a horse, or fire off a gun, makes him better rather than worse than any man like Sidney Webb or Philip Snowden, who attempt the same slavery by much less manly methods. The Liberal Party will try to divert the whole discussion to one about what they call militarism. But the very terms of modern politics contradict it. For when we talk of real rebels against the present system we call them Militants. And there will be none in the Servile State.
THE SERVILE STATE AGAIN

I read the other day, in a quotation from a German newspaper, the highly characteristic remark that Germany having annexed Belgium would soon re-establish its commerce and prosperity, and that, in particular, arrangements were already being made for introducing into the new province the German laws for the protection of workmen.

I am quite content with that paragraph for the purpose of any controversy about what is called German atrocity. If men I know had not told me they had themselves seen the bayoneting of a baby; if the most respectable refugees did not bring with them stories of burning cottages—yes, and of burning cottagers as well; if doctors did not report what they do report of the condition of girls in the hospitals; if there were no facts; if there were no photographs, that one phrase I have quoted would be quite sufficient to satisfy me that the Prussians are tyrants; tyrants in a peculiar and almost insane sense which makes them pre-eminent among the evil princes of the earth. The first and most striking feature is a stupidity that rises into a sort of ghastly innocence. The protection of workmen! Some workmen, perhaps, might have a fancy for being protected from shrapnel; some might be glad to put up an umbrella that would ward off things dropping from the gentle Zeppelin in heaven upon the place beneath. Some of these discontented proletarians have taken the same view as Vandervelde their leader, and are now energetically engaged in protecting themselves along the line of the Yser; I am glad to say not altogether without success. It is probable that nearly all of the Belgian workers would, on the whole, prefer to be protected against bombs, sabres, burning cities, starvation, torture, and the treason of wicked kings. In short, it is probable—it is at least possible, impious as is the idea—that they would prefer to be protected against Germans and all they represent. But if a Belgian workman is told that he is not to be protected against Germans, but actually to be protected by Germans, I think he may be excused for staring. His first impulse, I imagine, will be to ask, “Against whom? Are there any worse people to come along?”

But apart from the hellish irony of this humanitarian idea, the question it raises is really one of solid importance for people whose politics are more or less like ours. There is a very urgent point in that question, “Against whom would the Belgian workmen be protected by the German laws?” And if we pursue it, we shall be enabled to analyse something of that poison—very largely a Prussian
poison—which has long been working in our own commonwealth, to the enslavement of the weak and the secret strengthening of the strong. For the Prussian armies are, pre-eminently, the advance guard of the Servile State. I say this scientifically, and quite apart from passion or even from preference. I have no illusions about either Belgium or England. Both have been stained with the soot of Capitalism and blinded with the smoke of mere Colonial ambition; both have been caught at a disadvantage in such modern dirt and disorder; both have come out much better than I should have expected countries so modern and so industrial to do. But in England and Belgium there is Capitalism mixed up with a great many other things, strong things and things that pursue other aims; Clericalism, for instance, and militant Socialism in Belgium; Trades Unionism and sport and the remains of real aristocracy in England. But Prussia is Capitalism; that is, a gradually solidifying slavery; and that majestic unity with which she moves, dragging all the dumb Germanies after her, is due to the fact that her Servile State is complete, while ours is incomplete. There are not mutinies; there are not even mockeries; the voice of national self-criticism has been extinguished forever. For this people is already permanently cloven into a higher and a lower class: in its industry as much as its army. Its employers are, in the strictest and most sinister sense, captains of industry. Its proletariat is, in the truest and most pitiable sense, an army of labour. In that atmosphere masters bear upon them the signs that they are more than men; and to insult an officer is death.

If anyone ask how this extreme and unmistakable subordination of the employed to the employers is brought about, we all know the answer. It is brought about by hunger and hardness of heart, accelerated by a certain kind of legislation, of which we have had a good deal lately in England, but which was almost invariably borrowed from Prussia. Mr. Herbert Samuel’s suggestion that the poor should be able to put their money in little boxes and not be able to get it out again is a sort of standing symbol of all the rest. I have forgotten how the poor were going to benefit eventually by what is for them indistinguishable from dropping sixpence down a drain. Perhaps they were going to get it back some day; perhaps when they could produce a hundred coupons out of the Daily Citizen; perhaps when they got their hair cut; perhaps when they consented to be inoculated, or trepanned, or circumcised, or something. Germany is full of this sort of legislation; and if you asked an innocent German, who honestly believed in it, what it was, he would answer that it was for the protection of workmen.

And if you asked again “Their protection from what?” you would have the
whole plan and problem of the Servile State plain in front of you. Whatever
notion there is, there is no notion whatever of protecting the employed person
from his employer. Much less is there any idea of his ever being anywhere
except under an employer. Whatever the Capitalist wants he gets. He may have
the sense to want washed and well-fed labourers rather than dirty and feeble
ones, and the restrictions may happen to exist in the form of laws from the
Kaiser or by-laws from the Krupps. But the Kaiser will not offend the Krupps,
and the Krupps will not offend the Kaiser. Laws of this kind, then, do not
attempt to protect workmen against the injustice of the Capitalist as the English
Trade Unions did. They do not attempt to protect workmen against the injustice
of the State as the mediaeval guilds did. Obviously they cannot protect workmen
against the foreign invader—especially when (as in the comic case of Belgium)
they are imposed by the foreign invader. What then are such laws designed to
protect workmen against? Tigers, rattlesnakes, hyenas?

Oh, my young friends; oh, my Christian brethren, they are designed to protect
this poor person from something which to those of established rank is more
horrid than many hyenas. They are designed, my friends, to protect a man from
himself—from something that the masters of the earth fear more than famine or
war, and which Prussia especially fears as everything fears that which would
certainly be its end. They are meant to protect a man against himself—that is,
they are meant to protect a man against his manhood.

And if anyone reminds me that there is a Socialist Party in Germany, I reply
that there isn’t.
THE EMPIRE OF THE IGNORANT

That anarchic future which the more timid Tories professed to fear has already fallen upon us. We are ruled by ignorant people. But the most ignorant people in modern Britain are to be found in the upper class, the middle class, and especially the upper middle class. I do not say it with the smallest petulance or even distaste; these classes are often really beneficent in their breeding or their hospitality, or their humanity to animals.

There is still no better company than the young at the two Universities, or the best of the old in the Army or some of the other services. Also, of course, there are exceptions in the matter of learning; real scholars like Professor Gilbert Murray or Professor Phillimore are not ignorant, though they are gentlemen. But when one looks up at any mass of the wealthier and more powerful classes, at the Grand Stand at Epsom, at the windows of Park-lane, at the people at a full-dress debate or a fashionable wedding, we shall be safe in saying that they are, for the most part, the most ill-taught, or untaught, creatures in these islands.

LITERALLY ILLITERATE

It is indeed their feeble boast that they are not literally illiterate. They are always saying the ancient barons could not sign their own names—for they know less of history perhaps than of anything else. The modern barons, however, can sign their own names—or someone else’s for a change. They can sign their own names; and that is about all they can do. They cannot face a fact, or follow an argument, or feel a tradition; but, least of all, can they, upon any persuasion, read through a plain impartial book, English or foreign, that is not specially written to soothe their panic or to please their pride. Looking up at these seats of the mighty I can only say, with something of despair, what Robert Lowe said of the enfranchised workmen: “We must educate our masters.”

I do not mean this as paradoxical, or even as symbolical; it is simply tame and true. The modern English rich know nothing about things, not even about the things to which they appeal. Compared with them, the poor are pretty sure to get some enlightenment, even if they cannot get liberty; they must at least be technical. An old apprentice learnt a trade, even if his master came like any Turk and banged him most severely. The old housewife knew which side her bread was buttered, even if it were so thin as to be almost imperceptible. The old sailor
knew the ropes; even if he knew the rope’s end. Consequently, when any of these revolted, they were concerned with things they knew, pains, practical impossibilities, or the personal record.

BUT THEY KNOW

The apprentice cried “Clubs?” and cracked his neighbours’ heads with the precision and fineness of touch which only manual craftsmanship can give. The housewives who flatly refused to cook the hot dinner knew how much or how little, cold meat there was in the house. The sailor who defied discipline by mutinying at the Nore did not defy discipline in the sense of falling off the rigging or letting the water into the hold. Similarly the modern proletariat, however little it may know, knows what it is talking about.

But the curious thing about the educated class is that exactly what it does not know is what it is talking about. I mean that it is startlingly ignorant of those special things which it is supposed to invoke and keep inviolate. The things that workmen invoke may be uglier, more acrid, more sordid; but they know all about them. They know enough arithmetic to know that prices have risen; the kind Levantine gentleman is always there to make them fully understand the meaning of an interest sum; and the landlord will define Rent as rigidly as Ricardo. The doctors can always tell them the Latin for an empty stomach; and when the poor man is treated for the time with some human respect (by the Coronet) it almost seems a pity he is not alive to hear how legally he died.

Against this bitter shrewdness and bleak realism in the suffering classes it is commonly supposed that the more leisured classes stand for certain legitimate ideas which also have their place in life; such as history, reverence, the love of the land. Well, it might be no bad thing to have something, even if it were something narrow, that testified to the truths of religion or patriotism. But such narrow things in the past have always at least known their own history; the bigot knew his catechism; the patriot knew his way home. The astonishing thing about the modern rich is their real and sincere ignorance—especially of the things they like.

NO!

Take the most topical case you can find in any drawing-room: Belfast. Ulster is most assuredly a matter of history; and there is a sense in which Orange
resistance is a matter of religion. But go and ask any of the five hundred fluttering ladies at a garden party (who find Carson so splendid and Belfast so thrilling) what it is all about, when it began, where it came from, what it really maintains? What was the history of Ulster? What is the religion of Belfast? Do any of them know where Ulstermen were in Grattan’s time; do any of them know what was the “Protestantism” that came from Scotland to that isle; could any of them tell what part of the old Catholic system it really denied?

It was generally something that the fluttering ladies find in their own Anglican churches every Sunday. It were vain to ask them to state the doctrines of the Calvinist creed; they could not state the doctrines of their own creed. It were vain to tell them to read the history of Ireland; they have never read the history of England. It would matter as little that they do not know these things, as that I do not know German; but then German is not the only thing I am supposed to know. History and ritual are the only things aristocrats are supposed to know; and they don’t know them.

SMILE AND SMILE

I am not fed on turtle soup and Tokay because of my exquisite intimacy with the style and idiom of Heine and Richter. The English governing class is fed on turtle soup and Tokay to represent the past, of which it is literally ignorant, as I am of German irregular verbs; and to represent the religious traditions of the State, when it does not know three words of theology, as I do not know three words of German.

This is the last insult offered by the proud to the humble. They rule them by the smiling terror of an ancient secret. They smile and smile; but they have forgotten the secret.
THE SYMBOLISM OF KRUPP

The curious position of the Krupp firm in the awful story developing around us is not quite sufficiently grasped. There is a kind of academic clarity of definition which does not see the proportions of things for which everything falls within a definition, and nothing ever breaks beyond it. To this type of mind (which is valuable when set to its special and narrow work) there is no such thing as an exception that proves the rule. If I vote for confiscating some usurer’s millions I am doing, they say, precisely what I should be doing if I took pennies out of a blind man’s hat. They are both denials of the principle of private property, and are equally right and equally wrong, according to our view of that principle. I should find a great many distinctions to draw in such a matter. First, I should say that taking a usurer’s money by proper authority is not robbery, but recovery of stolen goods. Second, I should say that even if there were no such thing as personal property, there would still be such a thing as personal dignity, and different modes of robbery would diminish it in very different ways. Similarly, there is a truth, but only a half-truth, in the saying that all modern Powers alike rely on the Capitalist and make war on the lines of Capitalism. It is true, and it is disgraceful. But it is not equally true and equally disgraceful. It is not true that Montenegro is as much ruled by financiers as Prussia, just as it is not true that as many men in the Kaiserstrasse, in Berlin, wear long knives in their belts as wear them in the neighbourhood of the Black Mountain. It is not true that every peasant from one of the old Russian communes is the immediate servant of a rich man, as is every employee of Mr. Rockefeller. It is as false as the statement that no poor people in America can read or write. There is an element of Capitalism in all modern countries, as there is an element of illiteracy in all modern countries. There are some who think that the number of our fellow-citizens who can sign their names ought to comfort us for the extreme fewness of those who have anything in the bank to sign it for, but I am not one of these.

In any case, the position of Krupp has certain interesting aspects. When we talk of Army contractors as among the base but active actualities of war, we commonly mean that while the contractor benefits by the war, the war, on the whole, rather suffers by the contractor. We regard this unsoldierly middleman with disgust, or great anger, or contemptuous acquiescence, or commercial dread and silence, according to our personal position and character. But we nowhere think of him as having anything to do with fighting in the final sense. Those
worthy and wealthy persons who employ women’s labour at a few shillings a week do not do it to obtain the best clothes for the soldiers, but to make a sufficient profit on the worst. The only argument is whether such clothes are just good enough for the soldiers, or are too bad for anybody or anything. We tolerate the contractor, or we do not tolerate him; but no one admires him especially, and certainly no one gives him any credit for any success in the war. Confessedly or unconfessedly we knock his profits, not only off what goes to the taxpayer, but what goes to the soldier. We know the Army will not fight any better, at least, because the clothes they wear were stitched by wretched women who could hardly see; or because their boots were made by harassed helots, who never had time to think. In war-time it is very widely confessed that Capitalism is not a good way of ruling a patriotic or self-respecting people, and all sorts of other things, from strict State organisation to quite casual personal charity, are hastily substituted for it. It is recognised that the “great employer,” nine times out of ten, is no more than the schoolboy or the page who pilfers tarts and sweets from the dishes as they go up and down. How angry one is with him depends on temperament, on the stage of the dinner—also on the number of tarts.

Now here comes in the real and sinister significance of Krupps. There are many capitalists in Europe as rich, as vulgar, as selfish, as rootedly opposed to any fellowship of the fortunate and unfortunate. But there is no other capitalist who claims, or can pretend to claim, that he has very appreciably helped the activities of his people in war. I will suppose that Lipton did not deserve the very severe criticisms made on his firm by Mr. Justice Darling; but, however blameless he was, nobody can suppose that British soldiers would charge better with the bayonet because they had some particular kind of groceries inside them. But Krupp can make a plausible claim that the huge infernal machines to which his country owes nearly all of its successes could only have been produced under the equally infernal conditions of the modern factory and the urban and proletarian civilisation. That is why the victory of Germany would be simply the victory of Krupp, and the victory of Krupp would be simply the victory of Capitalism. There, and there alone, Capitalism would be able to point to something done successfully for a whole nation—done (as it would certainly maintain) better than small free States or natural democracies could have done it. I confess I think the modern Germans morally second-rate, and I think that even war, when it is conducted most successfully by machinery, is second-rate war. But this second-rate war will become not only the first but the only brand, if the cannon of Krupp should conquer; and, what is very much worse, it will be the
only intelligent answer that any capitalist has yet given against our case that Capitalism is as wasteful and as weak as it is certainly wicked. I do not fear any such finality, for I happen to believe in the kind of men who fight best with bayonets and whose fathers hammered their own pikes for the French Revolution.
THE TOWER OF BEBEL

Among the cloudy and symbolic stories in the beginning of the Bible there is one about a tower built with such vertical energy as to take a hold on heaven, but ruined and resulting only in a confusion of tongues. The story might be interpreted in many ways—religiously, as meaning that spiritual insolence starts all human separations; irreligiously, as meaning that the inhuman heavens grudge man his magnificent dream; or merely satirically as suggesting that all attempts to reach a higher agreement always end in more disagreement than there was before. It might be taken by the partially intelligent Kensitite as a judgment on Latin Christians for talking Latin. It might be taken by the somewhat less intelligent Professor Harnack as a final proof that all prehistoric humanity talked German. But when all was said, the symbol would remain that a plain tower, as straight as a sword, as simple as a lily, did nevertheless produce the deepest divisions that have been known among men. In any case we of the world in revolt—Syndicalists, Socialists, Guild Socialists, or whatever we call ourselves—have no need to worry about the scripture or the allegory. We have the reality. For whatever reason, what is said to have happened to the people of Shinak has precisely and practically happened to us.

None of us who have known Socialists (or rather, to speak more truthfully, none of us who have been Socialists) can entertain the faintest doubt that a fine intellectual sincerity lay behind what was called “L’Internationale.” It was really felt that Socialism was universal like arithmetic. It was too true for idiom or turn of phrase. In the formula of Karl Marx men could find that frigid fellowship which they find when they agree that two and two make four. It was almost as broadminded as a religious dogma.

Yet this universal language has not succeeded, at a moment of crisis, in imposing itself on the whole world. Nay, it has not, at the moment of crisis, succeeded in imposing itself on its own principal champions. Herve is not talking Economic Esperanto; he is talking French. Bebel is not talking Economic Esperanto; he is talking German. Blatchford is not talking Economic Esperanto; he is talking English, and jolly good English, too. I do not know whether French or Flemish was Vandervelde’s nursery speech, but I am quite certain he will know more of it after this struggle than he knew before. In short, whether or no there be a new union of hearts, there has really and truly been a new division of tongues.
How are we to explain this singular truth, even if we deplore it? I dismiss with fitting disdain the notion that it is a mere result of military terrorism or snobbish social pressure. The Socialist leaders of modern Europe are among the most sincere men in history; and their Nationalist note in this affair has had the ring of their sincerity. I will not waste time on the speculation that Vandervelde is bullied by Belgian priests; or that Blatchford is frightened of the horse-guards outside Whitehall. These great men support the enthusiasm of their conventional countrymen because they share it; and they share it because there is (though perhaps only at certain great moments) such a thing as pure democracy.

Timour the Tartar, I think, celebrated some victory with a tower built entirely out of human skulls; perhaps he thought that would reach to heaven. But there is no cement in such building; the veins and ligaments that hold humanity together have long fallen away; the skulls will roll impotently at a touch; and ten thousand more such trophies could only make the tower taller and crazier. I think the modern official apparatus of “votes” is very like that tottering monument. I think the Tartar “counted heads,” like an electioneering agent. Sometimes when I have seen from the platform of some paltry party meeting the rows and rows of grinning upturned faces, I have felt inclined to say, as the poet does in the “The Vision of Sin”—“Welcome fellow-citizens, Hollow hearts and empty heads.”

Not that the people were personally hollow or empty, but they had come on a hollow and empty business: to help the good Mr. Binks to strengthen the Insurance Act against the wicked Mr. Jinks who would only promise to fortify the Insurance Act. That night it did not blow the democratic gale. Yet it can blow on these as on others; and when it does blow men learn many things. I, for one, am not above learning them.

The Marxian dogma which simplifies all conflicts to the Class War is so much nobler a thing than the nose-counting of the parliaments that one must apologise for the comparison. And yet there is a comparison. When we used to say that there were so many thousands of Socialists in Germany, we were counting by skulls. When we said that the majority consisting of Proletarians would be everywhere opposed to the minority, consisting of Capitalists, we were counting by skulls. Why, yes; if all men’s heads had been cut off from the rest of them, as they were by the good sense and foresight of Timour the Tartar; if they had no hearts or bellies to be moved; no hand that flies up to ward off a weapon, no foot that can feel a familiar soil—if things were so the Marxian calculation would be not only complete but correct. As we know to-day, the Marxian calculation is complete, but it is not correct.
Now, this is the answer to the questions of some kind critics, whose actual words I have not within reach at the moment, about whether my democracy meant the rule of the majority over the minority. It means the rule of the rule—the rule of the rule over the exception. When a nation finds a soul it clothes it with a body, and does verily act like one living thing. There is nothing to be said about those who are out of it, except that they are out of it. After talking about it in the abstract for decades, this is Democracy, and it is marvellous in our eyes. It is not the difference between ninety-nine persons and a hundred persons; it is one person—the people. I do not know or care how many or how few of the Belgians like or dislike the pictures of Wiertz. They could not be either justified or condemned by a mere majority of Belgians. But I am very certain that the defiance to Prussia did not come from a majority of Belgians. It came from Belgium one and indivisible—atheists, priests, princes of the blood, Frenchified shopkeepers, Flemish boors, men, women, and children, and the sooner we understand that this sort of thing can happen the better for us. For it is this spontaneous spiritual fellowship of communities under certain conditions to which the four or five most independent minds of Europe willingly bear witness to-day.

But is there no exception: is there no one faithful among the unfaithful found? Is no great Socialist politician still untouched by the patriotism of the vulgar? Why, yes; the rugged Ramsay MacDonald, scarred with a hundred savage fights against the capitalist parties, still lifts up his horny hand for peace. What further need have we of witnesses? I, for my part, am quite satisfied, and do not doubt that Mr. MacDonald will be as industrious in damping down democracy in this form as in every other.
A REAL DANGER

Heaven forbid that I should once more wade in those swamps of logomachy and tautology in which the old guard of the Determinists still seem to be floundering. The question of Fate and Free Will can never attain to a conclusion, though it may attain to a conviction. The shortest philosophic summary is that both cause and choice are ultimate ideas within us, and that if one man denies choice because it seems contrary to cause, the other man has quite as much right to deny cause because it seems contrary to choice. The shortest ethical summary is that Determinism either affects conduct or it does not. If it does not, it is morally not worth preaching; if it does, it must affect conduct in the direction of impotence and submission. A writer in the “Clarion” says that the reformer cannot help trying to reform, nor the Conservative help his Conservatism. But suppose the reformer tries to reform the Conservative and turn him into another reformer? Either he can, in which case Determinism has made no difference at all, or he can’t, in which case it can only have made reformers more hopeless and Conservatives more obstinate. And the shortest practical and political summary is that working men, most probably, will soon be much too busy using their Free Will to stop to prove that they have got it. Nevertheless, I like to watch the Determinist in the “Clarion” Cockpit every week, as busy as a squirrel—in a cage. But being myself a squirrel (leaping lightly from bough to bough) and preferring the form of activity which occasionally ends in nuts, I should not intervene in the matter even indirectly, except upon a practical point. And the point I have in mind is practical to the extent of deadly peril. It is another of the numerous new ways in which the restless rich, now walking the world with an awful insomnia, may manage to catch us napping.

MUST BE A MYSTERY

There are two letters in the “Clarion” this week which in various ways interest me very much. One is concerned to defend Darwin against the scientific revolt against him that was led by Samuel Butler, and among other things it calls Bernard Shaw a back number. Well, most certainly “The Origin of Species” is a back number, in so far as any honest and interesting book ever can be; but in pure philosophy nothing can be out of date, since the universe must be a mystery even to the believer. There is, however, one condition of things in which I do
call it relevant to describe somebody as behind the times. That is when the man
in question, thinking of some state of affairs that has passed away, is really
helping the very things he would like to hinder. The principles cannot alter, but
the problems can. Thus, I should call a man behind the times who, in the year
1872, pleaded for the peaceful German peasants against the triumphant
militarism of Napoleon. Or I should call a man out of date who, in the year 1892,
wished for a stronger Navy to compete with the Navy of Holland, because it had
once swept the sea and sailed up the Thames. And I certainly call a man or a
movement out of date that, in the year 1914, when we few are fighting a giant
machine, strengthened with all material wealth and worked with all the material
sciences, thinks that our chief danger is from an excess of moral and religious
responsibility. He reminds me of Mr. Snodgrass, who had the presence of mind
to call out “Fire!” when Mr. Pickwick fell through the ice.

The other letter consists of the usual wiredrawn argument for fatalism. Man
cannot imagine the universe being created, and therefore is “compelled by his
reason” to think the universe without beginning or end, which (I may remark) he
cannot imagine either. But the letter ends with something much more ominous
than bad metaphysics. Here, in the middle of the “Clarion,” in the centre of a
clean and combative democratic sheet, I meet again my deplorable old
acquaintance, the scientific criminologist. “The so-called evil-doer should not be
punished for his acts, but restrained.” In forty-eight hours I could probably get a
petition to that effect signed by millionaires. A short time ago a Bill was
introduced to hold irresponsible and “restrain” a whole new class of people, who
were “incapable of managing their affairs with prudence.” Read the supporters’
names on the back of that Bill, and see what sort of democrats they were.

Now, clearing our heads of what is called popular science (which means going
to sleep to a lullaby of long words), let us use our own brains a little, and ask
ourselves what is the real difference between punishing a man and restraining
him. The material difference may be any or none; for punishment may be very
mild, and restraint may be very ruthless. The man, of course, must dislike one as
much as the other, or it would not be necessary to restrain him at all. And I
assure you he will get no great glow of comfort out of your calling him
irresponsible after you have made him impotent. A man does not necessarily feel
more free and easy in a straight waistcoat than in a stone cell. The moral
difference is that a man can be punished for a crime because he is born a citizen;
while he can be constrained because he is born a slave. But one arresting and
tremendous difference towers over all these doubtful or arguable differences.
There is one respect, vital to all our liberties and all our lives, in which the new restraint would be different from the old punishment. It is of this that the plutocrats will take advantage.

THE PLAIN DIFFERENCE

The perfectly plain difference is this. All punishment, even the most horrible, proceeds upon the assumption that the extent of the evil is known, and that a certain amount of expiation goes with it. Even if you hang the man, you cannot hang him twice. Even if you burn him, you cannot burn him for a month. And in the case of all ordinary imprisonments, the whole aim of free institutions from the beginning of the world has been to insist that a man shall be convicted of a definite crime and confined for a definite period. But the moment you admit this notion of medical restraint, you must in fairness admit that it may go on as long as the authorities choose to think (or say) that it ought to go on. The man’s punishment refers to the past, which is supposed to have been investigated, and which, in some degree at least, has been investigated. But his restraint refers to the future, which his doctors, keepers, and wardens have yet to investigate. The simple result will be that, in the scientific Utopia of the “Clarion,” men like Mann or Syme or Larkin will not be put in prison because of what they have done. They will be kept in prison because of what they might do. Indeed, the builders of the new tyranny have already come very near to avowing this scientific and futurist method. When the lawyers tried to stop the “Suffragette” from appearing at all, they practically said: “We do not know your next week’s crime, because it isn’t committed yet; but we are scientifically certain you have the criminal type. And by the sublime and unalterable laws of heredity, all your poor little papers will inherit it.”

This is a purely practical question; and that is why I insist on it, even in such strenuous times. The writers on the “Clarion” have a perfect right to think Christianity is the foe of freedom, or even that the stupidity and tyranny of the present Government is due to the monkish mysticism of Lord Morley and Mr. John M. Robertson. They have a right to think the theory of Determinism as true as Calvin thought it. But I do not like seeing them walk straight into the enormous iron trap set open by the Capitalists, who find it convenient to make our law even more lawless than it is. The rich men want a scientist to write them a lettre de cachet as a doctor writes a prescription. And so they wish to seal up in a public gaol the scandals of a private asylum. Yes; the writers on the “Clarion”
are indeed claiming irresponsibility for human beings. But it is the governments that will be irresponsible, not the governed.

But I will tell them one small secret in conclusion. There is nothing whatever wrong in the ancient and universal idea of Punishment—except that we are not punishing the right people.
THE DREGS OF PURITANISM

One peculiarity of the genuine kind of enemy of the people is that his slightest phrase is clamorous with all his sins. Pride, vain-glory, and hypocrisy seem present in his very grammar; in his very verbs or adverbs or prepositions, as well as in what he says, which is generally bad enough. Thus I see that a Nonconformist pastor in Bromley has been talking about the pathetic little presents of tobacco sent to the common soldiers. This is how he talks about it. He is reported as having said, “By the help of God, they wanted this cigarette business stopped.” How one could write a volume on that sentence, a great thick volume called “The Decline of the English Middle Class.” In taste, in style, in philosophy, in feeling, in political project, the horrors of it are as unfathomable as hell.

First, to begin with the trifle, note something slipshod and vague in the mere verbiage, typical of those who prefer a catchword to a creed. “This cigarette business” might mean anything. It might mean Messrs. Salmon and Gluckstein’s business. But the pastor at Bromley will not interfere with that, for the indignation of his school of thought, even when it is sincere, always instinctively and unconsciously swerves aside from anything that is rich and powerful like the partners in a big business, and strikes instead something that is poor and nameless like the soldiers in a trench. Nor does the expression make clear who “they” are—whether the inhabitants of Britain or the inhabitants of Bromley, or the inhabitants of this one crazy tabernacle in Bromley; nor is it evident how it is going to be stopped or who is being asked to stop it. All these things are trifles compared to the more terrible offences of the phrase; but they are not without their social and historical interest. About the beginning of the nineteenth century the wealthy Puritan class, generally the class of the employers of labour, took a line of argument which was narrow, but not nonsensical. They saw the relation of rich and poor quite coldly as a contract, but they saw that a contract holds both ways. The Puritans of the middle class, in short, did in some sense start talking and thinking for themselves. They are still talking. They have long ago left off thinking. They talk about the loyalty of workmen to their employers, and God knows what rubbish; and the first small certainty about the reverend gentleman whose sentence I have quoted is that his brain stopped working as a clock stops, years and years ago.

Second, consider the quality of the religious literature! These people are
always telling us that the English translated Bible is sufficient training for anyone in noble and appropriate diction; and so it is. Why, then, are they not trained? They are always telling us that Bunyan, the rude Midland tinker, is as much worth reading as Chaucer or Spenser; and so he is. Why, then, have they not read him? I cannot believe that anyone who had seen, even in a nightmare of the nursery, Apollyon straddling over the whole breadth of the way could really write like that about a cigarette. By the help of God, they wanted this cigarette business stopped. Therefore, with angels and archangels and the whole company of Heaven, with St. Michael, smiter of Satan and Captain of the Chivalry of God, with all the ardour of the seraphs and the flaming patience of the saints, we will have this cigarette business stopped. Where has all the tradition of the great religious literatures gone to that a man should come on such a bathos with such a bump?

Thirdly, of course, there is the lack of imaginative proportion, which rises into a sort of towering blasphemy. An enormous number of live young men are being hurt by shells, hurt by bullets, hurt by fever and hunger and horror of hope deferred; hurt by lance blades and sword blades and bayonet blades breaking into the bloody house of life. But Mr. Price (I think that’s his name) is still anxious that they should not be hurt by cigarettes. That is the sort of maniacal isolation that can be found in the deserts of Bromley. That cigarettes are bad for the health is a very tenable opinion to which the minister is quite entitled. If he happens to think that the youth of Bromley smoke too many cigarettes, and that he has any influence in urging on them the unhealthiness of the habit, I should not blame him if he gave sermons or lectures about it (with magic-lantern slides), so long as it was in Bromley and about Bromley. Cigarettes may be bad for the health: bombs and bayonets and even barbed wire are not good for the health. I never met a doctor who recommended any of them. But the trouble with this sort of man is that he cannot adjust himself to the scale of things. He would do very good service if he would go among the rich aristocratic ladies and tell them not to take drugs in a chronic sense, as people take opium in China. But he would be doing very bad service if he were to go among the doctors and nurses on the field and tell them not to give drugs, as they give morphia in a hospital. But it is the whole hypothesis of war, it is its very nature and first principle, that the man in the trench is almost as much a suffering and abnormal person as the man in the hospital. Hit or unhit, conqueror or conquered, he is, by nature of the case, having less pleasure than is proper and natural to a man.

Fourth (for I need not dwell here on the mere diabolical idiocy that can regard
beer or tobacco as in some way evil and unseemly in themselves), there is the most important element in this strange outbreak; at least, the most dangerous and the most important for us. There is that main feature in the degradation of the old middle class: the utter disappearance of its old appetite for liberty. Here there is no question of whether the men are to smoke cigarettes, or the women choose to send cigarettes, or even that the officers or doctors choose to allow cigarettes. The thing is to cease, and we may note one of the most recurrent ideas of the servile State: it is mentioned in the passive mood. It must be stopped, and we must not even ask who has stopped it!
THE TYRANNY OF BAD JOURNALISM

The amazing decision of the Government to employ methods quite alien to England, and rather belonging to the police of the Continent, probably arises from the appearance of papers which are lucid and fighting, like the papers of the Continent. The business may be put in many ways. But one way of putting it is simply to say that a monopoly of bad journalism is resisting the possibility of good journalism. Journalism is not the same thing as literature; but there is good and bad journalism, as there is good and bad literature, as there is good and bad football. For the last twenty years or so the plutocrats who govern England have allowed the English nothing but bad journalism. Very bad journalism, simply considered as journalism.

It always takes a considerable time to see the simple and central fact about anything. All sorts of things have been said about the modern Press, especially the Yellow Press; that it is Jingo or Philistine or sensational or wrongly inquisitive or vulgar or indecent or trivial; but none of these have anything really to do with the point.

The point about the Press is that it is not what it is called. It is not the “popular Press.” It is not the public Press. It is not an organ of public opinion. It is a conspiracy of a very few millionaires, all sufficiently similar in type to agree on the limits of what this great nation (to which we belong) may know about itself and its friends and enemies. The ring is not quite complete; there are old-fashioned and honest papers: but it is sufficiently near to completion to produce on the ordinary purchaser of news the practical effects of a corner and a monopoly. He receives all his political information and all his political marching orders from what is by this time a sort of half-conscious secret society, with very few members, but a great deal of money.

This enormous and essential fact is concealed for us by a number of legends that have passed into common speech. There is the notion that the Press is flashy or trivial because it is popular. In other words, an attempt is made to discredit democracy by representing journalism as the natural literature of democracy. All this is cold rubbish. The democracy has no more to do with the papers than it has with the peerages. The millionaire newspapers are vulgar and silly because the millionaires are vulgar and silly. It is the proprietor, not the editor, not the sub-editor, least of all the reader, who is pleased with this monotonous prairie of printed words. The same slander on democracy can be noticed in the case of
advertisements. There is many a tender old Tory imagination that vaguely feels that our streets would be hung with escutcheons and tapestries, if only the profane vulgar had not hung them with advertisements of Sapolio and Sunlight Soap. But advertisement does not come from the unlettered many. It comes from the refined few. Did you ever hear of a mob rising to placard the Town Hall with proclamations in favour of Sapolio? Did you ever see a poor, ragged man laboriously drawing and painting a picture on the wall in favour of Sunlight Soap—simply as a labour of love? It is nonsense; those who hang our public walls with ugly pictures are the same select few who hang their private walls with exquisite and expensive pictures. The vulgarisation of modern life has come from the governing class; from the highly educated class. Most of the people who have posters in Camberwell have peerages at Westminster. But the strongest instance of all is that which has been unbroken until lately, and still largely prevails; the ghastly monotony of the Press.

Then comes that other legend; the notion that men like the masters of the Newspaper Trusts “give the people what they want.” Why, it is the whole aim and definition of a Trust that it gives the people what it chooses. In the old days, when Parliaments were free in England, it was discovered that one courtier was allowed to sell all the silk, and another to sell all the sweet wine. A member of the House of Commons humorously asked who was allowed to sell all the bread. I really tremble to think what that sarcastic legislator would have said if he had been put off with the modern nonsense about “gauging the public taste.” Suppose the first courtier had said that, by his shrewd, self-made sense, he had detected that people had a vague desire for silk; and even a deep, dim human desire to pay so much a yard for it! Suppose the second courtier said that he had, by his own rugged intellect, discovered a general desire for wine: and that people bought his wine at his price—when they could buy no other! Suppose a third courtier had jumped up and said that people always bought his bread when they could get none anywhere else.

Well, that is a perfect parallel. “After bread, the need of the people is knowledge,” said Danton. Knowledge is now a monopoly, and comes through to the citizens in thin and selected streams, exactly as bread might come through to a besieged city. Men must wish to know what is happening, whoever has the privilege of telling them. They must listen to the messenger, even if he is a liar. They must listen to the liar, even if he is a bore. The official journalist for some time past has been both a bore and a liar; but it was impossible until lately to neglect his sheets of news altogether. Lately the capitalist Press really has begun
to be neglected; because its bad journalism was overpowering and appalling. Lately we have really begun to find out that capitalism cannot write, just as it cannot fight, or pray, or marry, or make a joke, or do any other stricken human thing. But this discovery has been quite recent. The capitalist newspaper was never actually unread until it was actually unreadable.

If you retain the servile superstition that the Press, as run by the capitalists, is popular (in any sense except that in which dirty water in a desert is popular), consider the case of the solemn articles in praise of the men who own newspapers—men of the type of Cadbury or Harmsworth, men of the type of the small club of millionaires. Did you ever hear a plain man in a tramcar or train talking about Carnegie’s bright genial smile or Rothschild’s simple, easy hospitality? Did you ever hear an ordinary citizen ask what was the opinion of Sir Joseph Lyons about the hopes and fears of this, our native land? These few small-minded men publish, papers to praise themselves. You could no more get an intelligent poor man to praise a millionaire’s soul, except for hire, than you could get him to sell a millionaire’s soap, except for hire. And I repeat that, though there are other aspects of the matter of the new plutocratic raid, one of the most important is mere journalistic jealousy. The Yellow Press is bad journalism: and wishes to stop the appearance of good journalism.

There is no average member of the public who would not prefer to have Lloyd George discussed as what he is, a Welshman of genius and ideals, strangely fascinated by bad fashion and bad finance, rather than discussed as what neither he nor anyone else ever was, a perfect democrat or an utterly detestable demagogue. There is no reader of a daily paper who would not feel more concern—and more respect—for Sir Rufus Isaacs as a man who has been a stockbroker, than as a man who happens to be Attorney-General. There is no man in the street who is not more interested in Lloyd George’s investments than in his Land Campaign. There is no man in the street who could not understand (and like) Rufus Isaacs as a Jew better than he can possibly like him as a British statesman. There is no sane journalist alive who would say that the official account of Marconis would be better “copy” than the true account that such papers as this have dragged out. We have committed one crime against the newspaper proprietor which he will never forgive. We point out that his papers are dull. And we propose to print some papers that are interesting.
THE POETRY OF THE REVOLUTION

Everyone but a consistent and contented capitalist, who must be something pretty near to a Satanist, must rejoice at the spirit and success of the Battle of the Buses. But one thing about it which happens to please me particularly was that it was fought, in one aspect at least, on a point such as the plutocratic fool calls unpractical. It was fought about a symbol, a badge, a thing attended with no kind of practical results, like the flags for which men allow themselves to fall down dead, or the shrines for which men will walk some hundreds of miles from their homes. When a man has an eye for business, all that goes on on this earth in that style is simply invisible to him. But let us be charitable to the eye for business; the eye has been pretty well blacked this time.

But I wish to insist here that it is exactly what is called the unpractical part of the thing that is really the practical. The chief difference between men and the animals is that all men are artists; though the overwhelming majority of us are bad artists. As the old fable truly says, lions do not make statues; even the cunning of the fox can go no further than the accomplishment of leaving an exact model of the vulpine paw: and even that is an accomplishment which he wishes he hadn’t got. There are Chryselephantine statues, but no purely elephantine ones. And, though we speak in a general way of an elephant trumpeting, it is only by human blandishments that he can be induced to play the drum. But man, savage or civilised, simple or complex always desires to see his own soul outside himself; in some material embodiment. He always wishes to point to a table in a temple, or a cloth on a stick, or a word on a scroll, or a badge on a coat, and say: “This is the best part of me. If need be, it shall be the rest of me that shall perish.” This is the method which seems so unbusinesslike to the men with an eye to business. This is also the method by which battles are won.

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE BADGE

The badge on a Trade Unionist’s coat is a piece of poetry in the genuine, lucid, and logical sense in which Milton defined poetry (and he ought to know) when he said that it was simple, sensuous, and passionate. It is simple, because many understand the word “badge,” who might not even understand the word “recognition.” It is sensuous, because it is visible and tangible; it is incarnate, as all the good Gods have been; and it is passionate in this perfectly practical sense,
which the man with an eye to business may some day learn more thoroughly than he likes, that there are men who will allow you to cross a word out in a theoretical document, but who will not allow you to pull a big button off their bodily clothing, merely because you have more money than they have. Now I think it is this sensuousness, this passion, and, above all, this simplicity that are most wanted in this promising revolt of our time. For this simplicity is perhaps the only thing in which the best type of recent revolutionists have failed. It has been our sorrow lately to salute the sunset of one of the very few clean and incorruptible careers in the most corruptible phase of Christendom. The death of Quelch naturally turns one’s thoughts to those extreme Marxian theorists, who, whatever we may hold about their philosophy, have certainly held their honour like iron. And yet, even in this instant of instinctive reverence, I cannot feel that they were poetical enough, that is childish enough, to make a revolution. They had all the audacity needed for speaking to the despot; but not the simplicity needed for speaking to the democracy. They were always accused of being too bitter against the capitalist. But it always seemed to me that they were (quite unconsciously, of course) much too kind to him. They had a fatal habit of using long words, even on occasions when he might with propriety have been described in very short words. They called him a Capitalist when almost anybody in Christendom would have called him a cad. And “cad” is a word from the poetic vocabulary indicating rather a general and powerful reaction of the emotions than a status that could be defined in a work of economics. The capitalist, asleep in the sun, let such long words crawl all over him, like so many long, soft, furry caterpillars. Caterpillars cannot sting like wasps. And, in repeating that the old Marxians have been, perhaps, the best and bravest men of our time, I say also that they would have been better and braver still if they had never used a scientific word, and never read anything but fairy tales.

THE BEASTLY INDIVIDUALIST

Suppose I go on to a ship, and the ship sinks almost immediately; but I (like the people in the Bab Ballads), by reason of my clinging to a mast, upon a desert island am eventually cast. Or rather, suppose I am not cast on it, but am kept bobbing about in the water, because the only man on the island is what some call an Individualist, and will not throw me a rope; though coils of rope of the most annoying elaboration and neatness are conspicuous beside him as he stands upon the shore. Now, it seems to me, that if, in my efforts to shout at this fellow-
creature across the crashing breakers, I call his position the “insularistic position,” and my position “the semi-amphibian position,” much valuable time may be lost. I am not an amphibian. I am a drowning man. He is not an insularist, or an individualist. He is a beast. Or rather, he is worse than any beast can be. And if, instead of letting me drown, he makes me promise, while I am drowning, that if I come on shore it shall be as his bodily slave, having no human claims henceforward forever, then, by the whole theory and practice of capitalism, he becomes a capitalist, he also becomes a cad.

Now, the language of poetry is simpler than that of prose; as anyone can see who has read what the old-fashioned protestant used to call confidently “his” Bible. And, being simpler, it is also truer; and, being truer, it is also fiercer. And, for most of the infamies of our time, there is really nothing plain enough, except the plain language of poetry. Take, let us say, the ease of the recent railway disaster, and the acquittal of the capitalists’ interest. It is not a scientific problem for us to investigate. It is a crime committed before our eyes; committed, perhaps, by blind men or maniacs, or men hypnotised, or men in some other ways unconscious; but committed in broad daylight, so that the corpse is bleeding on our door-step. Good lives were lost, because good lives do not pay; and bad coals do pay. It seems simply impossible to get any other meaning out of the matter except that. And, if in human history there be anything simple and anything horrible, it seems to have been present in this matter. If, even after some study and understanding of the old religious passions which were the resurrection of Europe, we cannot endure the extreme infamy of witches and heretics literally burned alive—well, the people in this affair were quite as literally burned alive. If, when we have really tried to extend our charity beyond the borders of personal sympathy, to all the complexities of class and creed, we still feel something insolent about the triumphant and acquitted man who is in the wrong, here the men who are in the wrong are triumphant and acquitted. It is no subject for science. It is a subject for poetry. But for poetry of a terrible sort.
A CHESTERTON CALENDAR

G. K. CHESTERTON
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

A CHESTERTON CALENDAR

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFATORY NOTE

JANUARY

NEW YEAR’S DAY

JANUARY 2nd

JANUARY 3rd

JANUARY 4th

JANUARY 5th

JANUARY 6th

THE FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY’ THE WISE MEN

JANUARY 7th

JANUARY 8th

JANUARY 9th

JANUARY 10th

JANUARY 11th

JANUARY 12th

JANUARY 13th

JANUARY 14th

JANUARY 15th

JANUARY 16th

JANUARY 17th

JANUARY 18th

JANUARY 19th

JANUARY 20th
JANUARY 21st

JANUARY 22nd

JANUARY 23rd

JANUARY 24th

JANUARY 25th

JANUARY 26th

JANUARY 27th

JANUARY 28th

JANUARY 29th

JANUARY 30th

EXECUTION OF CHARLES I

JANUARY 31st

FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY 1st

FEBRUARY 2nd

CANDLEMAS. THE FEAST OF THE PURIFICATION

FEBRUARY 3rd

FEBRUARY 4th

FEBRUARY 5th

FEBRUARY 6th

FEBRUARY 7th

DICKENS BORN

FEBRUARY 8th

FEBRUARY 9th

FEBRUARY 10th

FEBRUARY 11th

FEBRUARY 12th

FEBRUARY 13th
FEBRUARY 14th
ST. VALENTINE’S DAY

FEBRUARY 15th

FEBRUARY 16th

FEBRUARY 17th

FEBRUARY 18th

FEBRUARY 19th

FEBRUARY 20th

FEBRUARY 21st

FEBRUARY 22nd

FEBRUARY 23rd

FEBRUARY 24th

FEBRUARY 25th

FEBRUARY 26th

FEBRUARY 27th

FEBRUARY 28th

MARCH

March 1st
ST. DAVID’S DAY

MARCH 2nd

MARCH 3rd

MARCH 4th

MARCH 5th

MARCH 6th

MARCH 7th

MARCH 8th

MARCH 9th

MARCH 10th
MARCH 11th
MARCH 12th
MARCH 13th
MARCH 14th
MARCH 15th
MARCH 16th
MARCH 17th
ST. PATRICK’S DAY
MARCH 18th
MARCH 19th
MARCH 20th
MARCH 21st
MARCH 22nd
MARCH 23rd
MARCH 24th
MARCH 25th
LADY DAY
MARCH 26th
MARCH 27th
MARCH 28th
MARCH 29th
MARCH 30th
MARCH 31st

APRIL

APRIL 1st
ALL FOOLS’ DAY
APRIL 2nd
APRIL 3rd
APRIL 4th
APRIL 5th
APRIL 6th
APRIL 7th
APRIL 8th
APRIL 9th
APRIL 10th
APRIL 11th
APRIL 12th
APRIL 13th
APRIL 14th
APRIL 15th
APRIL 16th
APRIL 17th
APRIL 18th
APRIL 19th
PRIMROSE DAY
APRIL 20th
APRIL 21st
APRIL 22nd
APRIL 23rd
ST. GEORGE’S DAY
APRIL 24th
APRIL 25th
ST MARK’S DAY
APRIL 26th
APRIL 27th
APRIL 28th
APRIL 29th
APRIL 30th
ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA’S DAY

MAY

MAY 1st
LABOUR DAY

MAY 2nd

MAY 3rd

MAY 4th

MAY 5th

MAY 6th

MAY 7th

MAY 8th

MAY 9th

MAY 10th

MAY 11th

MAY 12th

MAY 13th

MAY 14th

MAY 15th

MAY 16th

MAY 17th

MAY 18th
GEORGE MEREDITH DIED

MAY 19th
GLADSTONE DIED

MAY 20th

MAY 21st

MAY 22nd

MAY 23rd
MAY 24th
EMPIRE DAY

MAY 25th

MAY 26th
ST. AUGUSTINE OF ENGLAND’S DAY

MAY 27th

MAY 28th

MAY 29th
THE RESTORATION

MAY 30th
BLESSED JOAN OF ARC

MAY 31st

JUNE

JUNE 1st

JUNE 2nd

JUNE 3rd

JUNE 4th

JUNE 5th

JUNE 6th

JUNE 7th

JUNE 8th

JUNE 9th
DICKENS DIED

JUNE 10th

JUNE 11th

JUNE 12th

JUNE 13th

JUNE 14th

JUNE 15th
JUNE 16th
JUNE 17th
JUNE 18th
WATERLOO DAY
JUNE 19th
JUNE 20th
JUNE 21st
JUNE 22nd
JUNE 23rd
JUNE 24th
MIDSUMMER DAY
JUNE 25th
JUNE 26th
JUNE 27th
JUNE 28th
JUNE 29th
ST. PETER’S DAY
JUNE 30th

JULY
JULY 1st
JULY 2nd
JULY 3rd
JULY 4th
INDEPENDENCE DAY
JULY 5th
JULY 6th
JULY 7th
JULY 8th
JULY 9th
JULY 10th
JULY 11th
JULY 12th
JULY 13th
JULY 14th
THE FALL OF THE BASTILLE
JULY 15th
ST. SWITHIN’S DAY
JULY 16th
JULY 17th
JULY 18th
THACKERAY BORN
JULY 19th
JULY 20th
JULY 21st
JULY 22nd
JULY 23rd
JULY 24th
JULY 25th
JULY 26th
JULY 27th
JULY 28th
JULY 29th
JULY 30th
JULY 31st
AUGUST
AUGUST 1st
AUGUST 2nd
AUGUST 3rd
AUGUST 4th
AUGUST 5th
AUGUST 6th
TRANSFIGURATION
AUGUST 7th
AUGUST 8th
AUGUST 9th
AUGUST 10th
THE FALL OF THE FRENCH MONARCHY
AUGUST 11th
AUGUST 12th
AUGUST 13th
AUGUST 14th
AUGUST 15th
THE ASSUMPTION
AUGUST 16th
AUGUST 17th
AUGUST 18th
AUGUST 19th
AUGUST 20th
AUGUST 21st
AUGUST 22nd
AUGUST 23rd
AUGUST 24th
ST. BARTHOLOMEW’S DAY
AUGUST 25th
AUGUST 26th
AUGUST 27th
AUGUST 28th
AUGUST 29th
AUGUST 30th
AUGUST 31st

SEPTEMBER

SEPTEMBER 1st
SEPTEMBER 2nd
BATTLE OF SEDAN
SEPTEMBER 3rd
SEPTEMBER 4th
SEPTEMBER 5th
SEPTEMBER 6th
SEPTEMBER 7th
SEPTEMBER 8th
SEPTEMBER 9th
SEPTEMBER 10th
SEPTEMBER 11th
SEPTEMBER 12th
SEPTEMBER 13th
SEPTEMBER 14th
SEPTEMBER 15th
SEPTEMBER 16th
SEPTEMBER 17th
SEPTEMBER 18th
DR. JOHNSON BORN
SEPTEMBER 19th
SEPTEMBER 20th
SEPTEMBER 21st
ST. MATTHEW’S DAY
SEPTEMBER 22nd
SEPTEMBER 23rd
SEPTEMBER 24th
SEPTEMBER 25th
SEPTEMBER 26th
SEPTEMBER 27th
SEPTEMBER 28th
SEPTEMBER 29th
ST. MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS
SEPTEMBER 30th

OCTOBER

OCTOBER 1st
OCTOBER 2nd
OCTOBER 3rd
OCTOBER 4th
ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI
OCTOBER 5th
OCTOBER 6th
OCTOBER 7th
OCTOBER 8th
OCTOBER 9th
OCTOBER 10th
OCTOBER 11th
OCTOBER 12th
OCTOBER 13th
OCTOBER 14th
BATTLE OF HASTINGS
OCTOBER 15th
OCTOBER 16th
OCTOBER 17th
OCTOBER 18th
ST. LUKE’S DAY

OCTOBER 19th

OCTOBER 20th

OCTOBER 21st
TRAFALGAR DAY

OCTOBER 22nd

OCTOBER 23rd

OCTOBER 24th

OCTOBER 25th

OCTOBER 26th

OCTOBER 27th

OCTOBER 28th

OCTOBER 29th

OCTOBER 30th

OCTOBER 31st
HALLOW E’EN

NOVEMBER

NOVEMBER 1st
ALL SAINTS’ DAY

NOVEMBER 2nd
ALL SOULS’ DAY

NOVEMBER 3rd

NOVEMBER 4th

NOVEMBER 5th
GUY FAWKES’ DAY

NOVEMBER 6th

NOVEMBER 7th

NOVEMBER 8th

NOVEMBER 9th
LORD MAYOR’S DAY

NOVEMBER 10th
NOVEMBER 11th
NOVEMBER 12th
NOVEMBER 13th
NOVEMBER 14th
NOVEMBER 15th
NOVEMBER 16th
NOVEMBER 17th
NOVEMBER 18th
NOVEMBER 19th
NOVEMBER 20th
NOVEMBER 21st
NOVEMBER 22nd
NOVEMBER 23rd
NOVEMBER 24th
NOVEMBER 25th
NOVEMBER 26th
NOVEMBER 27th
NOVEMBER 28th
NOVEMBER 29th
NOVEMBER 30th

ST. ANDREW’S DAY

DECEMBER

DECEMBER 1st
DECEMBER 2nd
DECEMBER 3rd
DECEMBER 4th
DECEMBER 5th

DECEMBER 6th
ST. NICHOLAS’S DAY

DECEMBER 7th

DECEMBER 8th

DECEMBER 9th

DECEMBER 10th

DECEMBER 11th

DECEMBER 12th
BROWNING DIED

DECEMBER 13th

DECEMBER 14th

DECEMBER 15th

DECEMBER 16th

DECEMBER 17th

DECEMBER 18th

DECEMBER 19th

DECEMBER 20th

DECEMBER 21st
ST. THOMAS’S DAY

DECEMBER 22nd

DECEMBER 23rd

DECEMBER 24th
CHRISTMAS EVE, THE TRUCE OF CHRISTMAS

DECEMBER 25th
CHRISTMAS DAY

DECEMBER 26th
BOXING DAY

DECEMBER 27th
ST. JOHN’S DAY
DECEMBER 28th
HOLY INNOCENTS’ DAY

DECEMBER 29th
ST. THOMAS À BECKET

DECEMBER 30th

DECEMBER 31st

THE MOVEABLE FEASTS

ADVENT SUNDAY

SHROVE TUESDAY

ASH WEDNESDAY

PALM SUNDAY

MAUNDAY THURSDAY

GOOD FRIDAY

HOLY SATURDAY

EASTER DAY

ASCENSION DAY

WHITSUNDAY

TRINITY SUNDAY

CORPUS CHRISTI
PREFATORY NOTE

It will be found that almost all Mr. G. K. Chesterton’s books have been utilized in the making of this Calendar. A word of acknowledgment is due to the various publishers for their courtesy in permitting this: to Messrs. Grant Richards, Arthur L. Humphreys, J. W. Arrowsmith, John Lane, J. M. Dent & Co., Macmillan & Co., Duckworth & Co., Harper & Co., Cassell & Co., and Methuen & Co. Recourse has been had also to the files of the ‘Daily News,’ the ‘Illustrated London News,’ and other journals to which Mr. Chesterton has been a contributor. The present publishers feel they are peculiarly indebted to Mr. Chesterton himself for his kindness in allowing them to include certain verses from poems which have not yet been printed in extenso elsewhere.
JANUARY

Mere light sophistry is the thing that I happen to despise most of all things, and it is perhaps a wholesome fact that this is the thing of which I am generally accused.

‘Orthodoxy.’

NEW YEAR’S DAY

The object of a New Year is not that we should have a new year. It is that we should have a new soul and a new nose; new feet, a new backbone, new ears, and new eyes. Unless a particular man made New Year resolutions, he would make no resolutions. Unless a man starts afresh about things, he will certainly do nothing effective. Unless a man starts on the strange assumption that he has never existed before, it is quite certain that he will never exist afterwards. Unless a man be born again, he shall by no means enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

‘Daily News.’

JANUARY 2ND

There is no such thing as fighting on the winning side: one fights to find out which is the winning side.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

JANUARY 3RD

Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die. ‘He that will lose his life, the same shall save it,’ is not a piece of mysticism for saints and heroes. It is a piece of everyday advice for sailors or mountaineers. It might be printed in an Alpine guide-or a drill-book. This paradox is the whole principle of courage; even of quite earthly or quite brutal courage. A man cut off by the sea may save his life if he will risk it on the precipice. He can only get away from death by continually stepping within an inch of it. A soldier, surrounded by enemies, if he is to cut his way out, needs to combine a strong desire for living with a strange carelessness about dying. He must not merely cling to life, for then he will be a coward, and will
not escape. He must not merely wait for death, for then he will be a suicide, and will not escape. He must seek his life in a spirit of furious indifference to it; he must desire life like water and yet drink death like wine. No philosopher, I fancy, has ever expressed this romantic riddle with adequate lucidity, and I certainly have not done so. But Christianity has done more: it has marked the limits of it in the awful graves of the suicide and the hero, showing the distance between him who dies for the sake of living and him who dies for the sake of dying. And it has held up ever since above the European lances the banner of the mystery of chivalry: the Christian courage which is a disdain of death; not the Chinese courage which is a disdain of life.

‘Orthodoxy.’

JANUARY 4TH

The fact is that purification and austerity are even more necessary for the appreciation of life and laughter than for anything else. To let no bird fly past unnoticed, to spell patiently the stones and weeds, to have the mind a storehouse of sunsets, requires a discipline in pleasure and an education in gratitude.

‘Twelve Types.’

JANUARY 5TH

We have people who represent that all great historic motives were economic, and then have to howl at the top of their voices in order to induce the modern democracy to act on economic motives. The extreme Marxian politicians in England exhibit themselves as a small, heroic minority, trying vainly to induce the world to do what, according to their theory, the world always does.

‘Tremendous Trifles.’

JANUARY 6TH

THE FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY’ THE WISE MEN

Step softly, under snow or rain,
To find the place where men can pray;
The way is all so very plain,
That we may lose the way.
Oh, we have learnt to peer and pore
On tortured puzzles from our youth.
We know all labyrinthine lore,
We are the three Wise Men of yore,
And we know all things but the truth.
Go humbly . . . it has hailed and snowed . . .
With voices low and lanterns lit,
So very simple is the road,
That we may stray from it.
The world grows terrible and white,
And blinding white the breaking day,
We walk bewildered in the light,
For something is too large for sight,
And something much too plain to say.
The Child that was ere worlds begun
(. . . We need but walk a little way . . .
We need but see a latch undone . . .),
The Child that played with moon and sun
Is playing with a little hay.
The house from which the heavens are fed,
The old strange house that is our own,
Where tricks of words are never said,
And Mercy is as plain as bread,
And Honour is as hard as stone.
Go humbly; humble are the skies,
And low and large and fierce the Star,
So very near the Manger lies,
That we may travel far.
Hark! Laughter like a lion wakes
To roar to the resounding plain,
And the whole heaven shouts and shakes,
For God Himself is born again;
And we are little children walking
Through the snow and rain.

‘Daily News.’

JANUARY 7TH

The idea of private property universal but private, the idea of families free but still families, of domesticity democratic but still domestic, of one man one house—this remains the real vision and magnet of mankind. The world may accept something more official and general, less human and intimate. But the world will be like a broken-hearted woman who makes a humdrum marriage because she may not make a happy one; Socialism may be the world’s deliverance, but it is not the world’s desire.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’
JANUARY 8TH

The dipsomaniac and the abstainer are not only both mistaken, but they both make the same mistake. They both regard wine as a drug and not as a drink.

‘George Bernard Shaw.’

JANUARY 9TH

The thing from which England suffers just now more than from any other evil is not the assertion of falsehoods, but the endless and irrepressible repetition of half-truths.

‘G. F Watts.’

JANUARY 10TH

It is amusing to notice that many of the moderns, whether sceptics or mystics, have taken as their sign a certain eastern symbol, which is the very symbol of this ultimate nullity. When they wish to represent eternity, they represent it by a serpent with its tail in its mouth. There is a startling sarcasm in the image of that very unsatisfactory meal. The eternity of the material fatalists, the eternity of the eastern pessimists, the eternity of the supercilious theosophists and higher scientists of to-day is, indeed, very well presented by a serpent eating its tail—a degraded animal who destroys even himself.

‘Orthodoxy.’

JANUARY 11TH

Variability is one of the virtues of a woman. It obviates the crude requirements of polygamy. If you have one good wife you are sure to have a spiritual harem.

‘Daily News.’

JANUARY 12TH

We must not have King Midas represented as an example of success; he was a failure of an unusually painful kind. Also, he had the ears of an ass. Also (like most other prominent and wealthy persons), he endeavoured to conceal the fact. It was his barber (if I remember right) who had to be treated on a confidential
footing with regard to this peculiarity; and his barber, instead of behaving like a
go-ahead person of the succeed-at-all-costs school and trying to blackmail King
Midas, went away and whispered this splendid piece of society scandal to the
reeds, who enjoyed it enormously. It is said that they also whispered it as the
winds swayed them to and fro. I look reverently at the portrait of Lord
Rothschild; I read reverently about the exploits of Mr. Vanderbilt. I know that I
cannot turn everything I touch to gold; but then I also know that I have never
tried, having a preference for other substances—such as grass and good wine. I
know that these people have certainly succeeded in something; that they have
certainly overcome somebody; I know that they are kings in a sense that no men
were ever kings before; that they create markets and bestride continents. Yet it
always seems to me that there is some small domestic fact that they are hiding,
and I have sometimes thought I heard upon the wind the laughter and whisper of
the reeds.

‘All Things Considered.’

JANUARY 13TH

The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found
difficult; and left untried.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

JANUARY 14TH

The old masters of a healthy madness—Aristophanes or Rabelais or Shakespeare
—doubtless had many brushes with the precisians or ascetics of their day, but we
cannot but feel that for honest severity and consistent self-maceration they
would always have had respect. But what abysses of scorn, inconceivable to any
modern, would they have reserved for an aesthetic type and movement which
violated morality and did not even find pleasure, which outraged sanity and
could not attain to exuberance, which contented itself with the fool’s cap without
the bells!

‘The Defendant.’

JANUARY 15TH

The truth is that all feeble spirits naturally live in the future, because it is
featureless; it is a soft job; you can make it what you like. The next age is blank, and I can paint it freshly with my favourite colour. It requires real courage to face the past, because the past is full of facts which cannot be got over; of men certainly wiser than we, and of things done which we could not do. I know I cannot write a poem as good as ‘Lycidas.’ But it is always easy to say that the particular sort of poetry I can write will be the poetry of the future.

‘George Bernard Shaw.’

JANUARY 16TH

‘I have only that which the poor have equally with the rich; which the lonely have equally with the man of many friends. To me this whole strange world is homely, because in the heart of it there is a home; to me this cruel world is kindly, because higher than the heavens there is something more human than humanity. If a man must not fight for this, may he fight for anything? I would fight for my friend, but if I lost my friend, I should still be there. I would fight for my country, but if I lost my country, I should still exist. But if what that devil dreams were true, I should not be—I should burst like a bubble and be gone; I could not live in that imbecile universe. Shall I not fight for my own existence?’

‘The Ball and the Cross.’

JANUARY 17TH

There are vast prospects and splendid songs in the point of view of the typically unsuccessful man; if all the used-up actors and spoilt journalists and broken clerks could give a chorus it would be a wonderful chorus in praise of the world.

Introduction to ‘Nicholas Nickleby.’

JANUARY 18TH

‘Tommy was a good boy’ is a purely philosophical statement, worthy of Plato or Aquinas. ‘Tommy lived the higher life’ is a gross metaphor from a ten-foot rule.

‘Orthodoxy.’

JANUARY 19TH

Happiness is a mystery like religion, and should never be rationalized. Suppose a
man experiences a really splendid moment of pleasure. I do not mean something connected with a piece of enamel, I mean something with a violent happiness in it—an almost painful happiness. A man may have, for instance, a moment of ecstasy in first love, or a moment of victory in battle. The lover enjoys the moment, but precisely not for the moment’s sake. He enjoys it for the woman’s sake, or his own sake. The warrior enjoys the moment, but not for the sake of the moment; he enjoys it for the sake of the flag. The cause which the flag stands for may be foolish and fleeting; the love may be calf-love, and last for a week. But the patriot thinks of the flag as eternal; the lover thinks of his love as something that cannot end. These moments are filled with eternity; these moments are joyful because they do not seem momentary. Once look at them as moments after Pater’s manner, and they become as cold as Pater and his style. Man cannot love mortal things. He can only love immortal things for an instant.

‘Heretics.’

JANUARY 20TH

It is remarkable that in so many great wars it is the defeated who have won. The people who were left worst at the end of the war were generally the people who were left best at the end of the whole business. For instance, the Crusades ended in the defeat of the Christians. But they did not end in the decline of the Christians; they ended in the decline of the Saracens. That huge prophetic wave of Moslem power which had hung in the very heavens above the towns of Christendom: that wave was broken, and never came on again. The Crusades had saved Paris in the act of losing Jerusalem. The same applies to that epic of Republican war in the eighteenth century to which we Liberals owe our political creed. The French Revolution ended in defeat; the kings came back across a carpet of dead at Waterloo. The Revolution had lost its last battle, but it had gained its first object. It had cut a chasm. The world has never been the same since.

‘Tremendous Trifles.’

JANUARY 21ST

From such books . . . we can discover what a clever man can do with the idea of aristocracy. But from the ‘Family Herald Supplement’ literature we can learn what the idea of aristocracy can do with a man who is not clever. And when we
know that we know English history.

‘Heretics.’

JANUARY 22ND

Darwinism can be used to back up two mad moralities, but it cannot be used to back up a single sane one. The kinship and competition of all living creatures can be used as a reason for being insanely cruel or insanely sentimental; but not for a healthy love of animals. On the evolutionary basis you may be inhumane, or you may be absurdly humane; but you cannot be human. That you and a tiger are one may be a reason for being tender to a tiger. Or it may be a reason for being as cruel as the tiger. It is one way to train the tiger to imitate you; it is a shorter way to imitate the tiger. But in neither case does evolution tell you how to treat a tiger reasonably—that is, to admire his stripes while avoiding his claws. If you want to treat a tiger reasonably, you must go back to the garden of Eden.

‘Orthodoxy.’

JANUARY 23RD

Some priggish little clerk will say, ‘I have reason to congratulate myself that I am a civilized person, and not so bloodthirsty as the Mad Mullah.’ Somebody ought to say to him, ‘A really good man would be less bloodthirsty than the Mullah. But you are less bloodthirsty, not because you are more of a good man, but because you are a great deal less of a man. You are not bloodthirsty, not because you would spare your enemy, but because you would run away from him.’

‘All Things Considered.’

JANUARY 24TH

To the quietest human being, seated in the quietest house, there will sometimes come a sudden and unmeaning hunger for the possibilities or impossibilities of things; he will abruptly wonder whether the teapot may not suddenly begin to pour out honey or sea-water, the clock to point to all hours of the day at once, the candle to burn green or crimson, the door to open upon a lake or a potato-field instead of a London street. Upon anyone who feels this nameless anarchism
there rests for the time being the spirit of pantomime. Of the clown who cuts the policeman in two it may be said (with no darker meaning) that he realizes one of our visions.

‘The Defendant.’

JANUARY 25TH

Silence is the unbearable repartee.

‘Charles Dickens.’

JANUARY 26TH

‘I am staring,’ said MacIan at last, ‘at that which shall judge us both.’

‘Oh yes,’ said Turnbull in a tired way; ‘I suppose you mean God.’

‘No, I don’t,’ said MacIan, shaking his head, ‘I mean him.’ And he pointed to the half-tipsy yokel who was ploughing, down the road.

‘I mean him. He goes out in the early dawn; he digs or he ploughs a field. Then he comes back and drinks ale, and then he sings a song. All your philosophies and political systems are young compared to him. All your hoary cathedrals—yes, even the Eternal Church on earth is new compared to him. The most mouldering gods in the British Museum are new facts beside him. It is he who in the end shall judge us all. I am going to ask him which of us is right.’

‘Ask that intoxicated turnip-eater——’

‘Yes—which of us is right. Oh, you have long words and I have long words; and I talk of every man being the image of God; and you talk of every man being a citizen and enlightened enough to govern. But, if every man typifies God, there is God. If every man is an enlightened citizen, there is your enlightened citizen. The first man one meets is always man. Let us catch him up.’

‘The Ball and the Cross.’

JANUARY 27TH

I gravely doubt whether women ever were married by capture. I think they pretended to be; as they do still.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

JANUARY 28TH
On bright blue days I do not want anything to happen; the world is complete and beautiful—a thing for contemplation. I no more ask for adventures under that turquoise dome than I ask for adventures in church. But when the background of man’s life is a grey background, then, in the name of man’s sacred supremacy, I desire to paint on it in fire and gore. When the heavens fail man refuses to fail; when the sky seems to have written on it, in letters of lead and pale silver, the decree that nothing shall happen, then the immortal soul, the prince of all creatures, rises up and decrees that something shall happen, if it be only the slaughter of a policeman.

‘Tremendous Trifles.’

JANUARY 29TH

It is the very difference between the artistic mind and the mathematical that the former sees things as they are in a picture, some nearer and larger, some smaller and farther away: while to the mathematical mind everything, every inch in a million, every fact in a cosmos, must be of equal value. That is why mathematicians go mad, and poets scarcely ever do. A man may have as wide a view of life as he likes, the wider the better: a distant view, a bird’s-eye view, but still a view and not a map. The one thing he cannot attempt in his version of the universe is to draw things to scale.

‘G. F. Watts.’

JANUARY 30TH

EXECUTION OF CHARLES I

The face of the King’s servants grew greater than the King.
He tricked them and they trapped him and drew round him in a ring;
The new grave lords closed round him that had eaten the abbey’s fruits,
And the men of the new religion with their Bibles in their boots,
We saw their shoulders moving to menace and discuss.
And some were pure and some were vile, but none took heed of us;
We saw the King when they killed him, and his face was proud and pale,
And a few men talked of freedom while England talked of ale.

‘The Silent People.’

JANUARY 31ST
The ‘Iliad’ is only great because all life is a battle, the ‘Odyssey’ because all life is a journey, the Book of Job because all life is a riddle.
   The Defendant.’
FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY 1ST

Many modern Englishmen talk of themselves as the sturdy descendants of their sturdy Puritan fathers. As a fact, they would run away from a cow. If you asked one of their Puritan fathers, if you asked Bunyan, for instance, whether he was sturdy, he would have answered with tears, that he was as weak as water. And because of this he would have borne tortures.

‘Heretics.’

FEBRUARY 2ND

CANDLEMAS. THE FEAST OF THE PURIFICATION

But as I sat scrawling these silly figures on brown paper, it began to dawn on me, to my great disgust, that I had left one chalk, and that a most exquisite and essential one, behind. I searched all my pockets, but I could not find any white chalk. Now, those who are acquainted with all the philosophy (nay, religion) which is typified in the art of drawing on brown paper, know that white is positive and essential. I cannot avoid remarking here upon a moral significance. One of the wise and awful truths which this brown-paper art reveals is this: that white is a colour. It is not a mere absence of colour, it is a shining and affirmative thing: as fierce as red, as definite as black. When (so to speak) your pencil grows red hot, it draws roses; when it grows white hot, it draws stars. And one of the two or three defiant verities of the best religious morality—of real Christianity, for example—is exactly this same thing. The chief assertion of religious morality is that white is a colour. Virtue is not the absence of vices or the avoidance of moral dangers; virtue is a vivid and separate thing, like pain or a particular smell. Mercy does not mean not being cruel or sparing people revenge or punishment: it means a plain and positive thing like the sun, which one has either seen or not seen. Chastity does not mean abstention from sexual wrong; it means something flaming like Joan of Arc. In a word, God paints in many colours, but He never paints so gorgeously—I had almost said so gaudily—as when He paints in white.

‘Tremendous Trifles.’
FEBRUARY 3RD

It is always easy to let the age have its head; the difficult thing is to keep one’s own. It is always easy to be a modernist, as it is easy to be a snob. To have fallen into any of those open traps of error and exaggeration which fashion after fashion and sect after sect set along the historic path of Christendom—that would indeed have been simple. It is always simple to fall; there are an infinity of angles at which one falls: only one at which one stands. To have fallen into any one of the fads from Gnosticism to Christian Science would indeed have been obvious and tame. But to have avoided them all has been one whirling adventure; and in my vision the heavenly chariot flies thundering through the ages, the dull heresies sprawling and prostrate, the wild truth reeling but erect.

‘Orthodoxy.’

FEBRUARY 4TH

The curse against God is ‘Exercise I’ in the primer of minor poetry.

‘The Defendant.’

FEBRUARY 5TH

Whatever else the worst doctrine of depravity may have been, it was a product of spiritual conviction; it had nothing to do with remote physical origins. Men thought mankind wicked because they felt wicked themselves. If a man feels wicked, I cannot see why he should suddenly feel good because somebody tells him that his ancestors once had tails. Man’s primary purity and innocence may have dropped off with his tail, for all anybody knows. The only thing we all know about that primary purity and innocence is that we have not got it.

‘All Things Considered.’

FEBRUARY 6TH

If you have composed a bad opera you may persuade yourself that it is a good one; if you have carved a bad statue you can think yourself better than Michelangelo. But if you have lost a battle you cannot believe you have won it; if your client is hanged you cannot pretend that you have got him off.

‘George Bernard Shaw.’
FEBRUARY 7TH

DICKENS BORN

We are able to answer the question, ‘Why have we no great men?’ We have no great men chiefly because we are always looking for them. We are connoisseurs of greatness, and connoisseurs can never be great; we are fastidious—that is, we are small. When Diogenes went about with a lantern looking for an honest man, I am afraid he had very little time to be honest himself. And when anybody goes about on his hands and knees looking for a great man to worship, he is making sure that one man at any rate shall not be great. Now the error of Diogenes is evident. The error of Diogenes lay in the fact that he omitted to notice that every man is both an honest man and a dishonest man. Diogenes looked for his honest man inside every crypt and cavern, but he never thought of looking inside the thief. And that is where the Founder of Christianity found the honest man; He found him on a gibbet and promised him Paradise. Just as Christianity looked for the honest man inside the thief, democracy looked for the wise man inside the fool. It encouraged the fool to be wise. We can call this thing sometimes optimism, sometimes equality; the nearest name for it is encouragement. It had its exaggerations—failure to understand original sin, notions that education would make all men good, the childlike yet pedantic philosophies of human perfectibility. But the whole was full of faith in the infinity of human souls, which is in itself not only Christian but orthodox; and this we have lost amid the limitations of pessimistic science. Christianity said that any man could be a saint if he chose; democracy, that every man could be a citizen if he chose. The note of the last few decades in art and ethics has been that a man is stamped with an irrevocable psychology and is cramped for perpetuity in the prison of his skull. It was a world that expects everything and everybody. It was a world that encouraged anybody to be anything. And in England and literature its living expression was Dickens.

‘Charles Dickens.’

FEBRUARY 8TH

That which is large enough for the rich to covet is large enough for the poor to defend.

‘The Napoleon of Notting Hill.’
FEBRUARY 9TH

The modern writers who have suggested, in a more or less open manner, that the family is a bad institution, have generally confined themselves to suggesting, with much sharpness, bitterness, or pathos, that perhaps the family is not always very congenial. Of course the family is a good institution because it is uncongenial. It is wholesome precisely because it contains so many divergencies and varieties. It is, as the sentimentalists say, like a little kingdom, and, like most other little kingdoms, is generally in a state of something resembling anarchy. It is exactly because our brother George is not interested in our religious difficulties, but is interested in the Trocadero restaurant, that the family has some of the bracing qualities of the commonwealth. It is precisely because our uncle Henry does not approve of the theatrical ambitions of our sister Sarah that the family is like humanity. The men and women who, for good reasons and bad, revolt against the family are, for good reasons and bad, simply revolting against mankind. Aunt Elizabeth is unreasonable, like mankind. Papa is excitable, like mankind. Our younger brother is mischievous, like mankind. Grandpapa is stupid, like the world; he is old, like the world.

‘Heretics.’

FEBRUARY 10TH

He said: ‘If these were silent the very stones would cry out.’ With these words He called up all the wealth of artistic creation that has been founded on this creed. With those words He founded Gothic architecture. For in a town like this, which seems to have grown Gothic as a wood grows leaves—anywhere and anyhow—any odd brick or moulding may be carved off into a shouting face. The front of vast buildings is thronged with open mouths, angels praising God, or devils defying Him. Rock itself is racked and twisted, until it seems to scream. The miracle is accomplished; the very stones cry out.

‘Tremendous Trifles.’

FEBRUARY 11TH

The chaos of habits that always goes with males when left entirely to themselves has only one honourable cure; and that is the strict discipline of a monastery. Anyone who has seen our unhappy young idealists in East End settlements
losing their collars in the wash and living on tinned salmon, will fully understand why it was decided by the wisdom of St. Bernard or St. Benedict that if men were to live without women, they must not live without rules.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

FEBRUARY 12TH

The British Empire may annex what it likes, it will never annex England. It has not even discovered the island, let alone conquered it.

‘Tremendous Trifles.’

FEBRUARY 13TH

Let it never be forgotten that a hypocrite is a very unhappy man; he is a man who has devoted himself to a most delicate and arduous intellectual art in which he may achieve masterpieces which he must keep secret, fight thrilling battles and win hair-breadth victories for which he cannot have a whisper of praise. A really accomplished impostor is the most wretched of geniuses: he is a Napoleon on a desert island.

‘Browning.’

FEBRUARY 14TH

ST. VALENTINE’S DAY

The revolt against vows has been carried in our day even to the extent of a revolt against the typical vow of marriage. It is most amusing to listen to the opponents of marriage on this subject. They appear to imagine that the ideal of constancy was a joke mysteriously imposed on mankind by the devil, instead of being as it is a yoke consistently imposed on all lovers by themselves. They have invented a phrase, a phrase that is a black v. white contradiction in two words—‘free love’—as if a lover ever had been or ever could be free. It is the nature of love to bind itself, and the institution of marriage merely paid the average man the compliment of taking him at his word. Modern sages offer to the lover with an ill-favoured grin the largest liberties and the fullest irresponsibility; but they do not respect him as the old Church respected him; they do not write his oath upon the heavens as the record of his highest moment. They give him every liberty
except the liberty to sell his liberty, which is the only one that he wants.

‘The Defendant.’

FEBRUARY 15TH

London is the largest of the bloated modern cities; London is the smokiest; London is the dirtiest; London is, if you will, the most sombre; London is, if you will, the most miserable. But London is certainly the most amusing and the most amused. You may prove that we have the most tragedy; the fact remains that we have the most comedy, that we have the most farce.

‘All Things Considered.’

FEBRUARY 16TH

Our fathers had a plain sort of pity: if you will, a gross and coarse pity. They had their own sort of sentimentalism. They were quite willing to weep over Smike. But it certainly never occurred to them to weep over Squeers. No doubt they were often narrow and often visionary. No doubt they often looked at a political formula when they should have looked at an elemental fact. No doubt they were pedantic in some of their principles and clumsy in some of their solutions. No doubt, in short, they were all very wrong, and no doubt we are the people and wisdom shall die with us. But when they saw something that in their eyes, such as they were, really violated their morality, such as it was, then they did not cry ‘Investigate!’ They did not cry ‘Educate!’ They did not cry ‘Improve!’ They did not cry ‘Evolve!’ Like Nicholas Nickleby, they cried ‘Stop!’ And it did stop.

Introduction to ‘Nicholas Nickleby.’

FEBRUARY 17TH

Some people do not like the word ‘dogma.’ Fortunately they are free, and there is an alternative for them. There are two things, and two things only, for the human mind—a dogma and a prejudice. The Middle Ages were a rational epoch, an age of doctrine. Our age is, at its best, a poetical epoch, an age of prejudice. A doctrine is a definite point; a prejudice is a direction. That an ox may be eaten, while a man should not be eaten, is a doctrine. That as little as possible of anything should be eaten is a prejudice; which is also sometimes called an ideal.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’
FEBRUARY 18TH

There are some people who state that the exterior, sex, or physique of another person is indifferent to them, that they care only for the communion of mind with mind; but these people need not detain us. There are some statements that no one ever thinks of believing, however often they are made.

‘The Defendant.’

FEBRUARY 19TH

There are two rooted spiritual realities out of which grow all kinds of democratic conception or sentiment of human equality. There are two things in which all men are manifestly and unmistakably equal. They are not equally clever or equally muscular or equally fat, as the sages of the modern reaction (with piercing insight) perceive. But this is a spiritual certainty, that all men are tragic. And this, again, is an equally sublime spiritual certainty, that all men are comic. No special and private sorrow can be so dreadful as the fact of having to die. And no freak or deformity can be so funny as the mere fact of having two legs. Every man is important if he loses his life; and every man is funny if he loses his hat, and has to run after it. And the universal test everywhere of whether a thing is popular, of the people, is whether it employs vigorously these extremes of the tragic and the comic.

‘Charles Dickens.’

FEBRUARY 20TH

Now the reason why our fathers did not make marriage, in the middle-aged and static sense, the subject of their plays was a very simple one; it was that a play is a very bad place for discussing that topic. You cannot easily make a good drama out of the success or failure of a marriage, just as you could not make a good drama out of the growth of an oak-tree or the decay of an empire. As Polonius very reasonably observed, it is too long. A happy love-affair will make a drama simply because it is dramatic; it depends on an ultimate yes or no. But a happy marriage is not dramatic; perhaps it would be less happy if it were. The essence of a romantic heroine is that she asks herself an intense question; but the essence of a sensible wife is that she is much too sensible to ask herself any questions at all. All the things that make monogamy a success are in their nature undramatic
things, the silent growth of an instinctive confidence, the common wounds and
victories, the accumulation of customs, the rich maturing of old jokes. Sane
marriage is an untheatrical thing; it is therefore not surprising that most modern
dramatists have devoted themselves to insane marriage.

‘George Bernard Shaw.’

FEBRUARY 21ST

If Americans can be divorced for ‘incompatibility of temper,’ I cannot conceive
why they are not all divorced. I have known many happy marriages, but never a
compatible one. The whole aim of marriage is to fight through and survive the
instant when incompatibility becomes unquestionable. For a man and a woman,
as such, are incompatible.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

FEBRUARY 22ND

Of a sane man there is only one safe definition: he is a man who can have
tragedy in his heart and comedy in his head.

‘Tremendous Trifles.’

FEBRUARY 23RD

The artistic temperament is a disease that afflicts amateurs.

‘Heretics.’

FEBRUARY 24TH

It is constantly assumed, especially in our Tolstoian tendencies, that when the
lion lies down with the lamb the lion becomes lamb-like. But that is brutal
annexation and imperialism on the part of the lamb. That is simply the lamb
absorbing the lion instead of the lion eating the lamb. The real problem is—Can
the lion lie down with the lamb and still retain his royal ferocity? That is the
problem the Church attempted; that is the miracle she achieved.

‘Orthodoxy.’

FEBRUARY 25TH
Nothing is important except the fate of the soul; and literature is only redeemed from an utter triviality, surpassing that of naughts and crosses, by the fact that it describes not the world around us, or the things on the retina of the eye, or the enormous irrelevancy of encyclopædias, but some condition to which the human spirit can come.

Introduction to ‘The Old Curiosity Shop.’

FEBRUARY 26TH

It is neither blood nor rain that has made England, but hope—the thing all those dead men have desired. France was not France because she was made to be by the skulls of the Celts or by the sun of Gaul. France was France because she chose.

‘George Bernard Shaw.’

FEBRUARY 27TH

A man must be partly a one-idead man because he is a one-weaponed man—and he is flung naked into the fight. In short, he must (as the books on Success say) give ‘his best’; and what a small part of a man ‘his best’ is! His second and third best are often much better. If he is the first violin he must fiddle for life; he must not remember that he is a fine fourth bagpipe, a fair fifteenth billiard-cue, a foil, a fountain-pen, a hand at whist, a gun, and an image of God.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

FEBRUARY 28TH

The wise man will follow a star, low and large and fierce in the heavens, but the nearer he comes to it the smaller and smaller it will grow, till he finds it the humble lantern over some little inn or stable. Not till we know the high things shall we know how lovely they are.

‘William Blake.’
ST. DAVID’S DAY

My eyes are void with vision; I sing but I cannot speak;
I hide in the vaporous caverns like a creature wild and weak;
But for ever my harps are tuned and for ever my songs are sung,
And I answer my tyrants ever in an unknown tongue.
When the blue men broke in the battle with the Roman or the Dane,
In the cracks of my ghastly uplands they gathered like ghosts again.
Some say I am still a Druid, some say my spirit shows
Catholic, Puritan, Pagan; but no man knows.
Mother of God’s good witches, of all white mystery,
Whatever else I am seeking, I seek for thee.
For the old harp better fitted and swung on a stronger thong,
We, that shall sing for ever; O hear our song!

‘The Seven Swords.’

MARCH 2ND

It may be a very limited aim in morality to shoot a ‘many-faced and fickle traitor,’ but at least it is a better aim than to be a many-faced and fickle traitor, which is a simple summary of a good many modern systems from Mr. d’Annunzio’s downwards.

‘The Defendant.’

MARCH 3RD

A man may easily be forgiven for not doing this or that incidental act of charity, especially when the question is as genuinely difficult and dubious as is the case of mendicity. But there is something quite pestilently Pecksniffian about shrinking from a hard task on the plea that it is not hard enough. If a man will really try talking to the ten beggars who come to his door he will soon find out whether it is really so much easier than the labour of writing a cheque for a hospital.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’
MARCH 4TH

But the man we see every day—the worker in Mr. Gradgrind’s factory, the little clerk in Mr. Gradgrind’s office—he is too mentally worried to believe in freedom. He is kept quiet with revolutionary literature. He is calmed and kept in his place by a constant succession of wild philosophies. He is a Marxian one day, a Nietzscheite the next day, a Superman (probably) the next day, and a slave every day. The only thing that remains after all the philosophies is the factory. The only man who gains by all the philosophies is Gradgrind. It would be worth his while to keep his commercial helotry supplied with sceptical literature. And now I come to think of it, of course, Gradgrind is famous for giving libraries. He shows his sense: all modern books are on his side. As long as the vision of heaven is always changing, the vision of earth will be exactly the same. No ideal will remain long enough to be realized, or even partly realized. The modern young man will never change his environment, for he will always change his mind.

‘Orthodoxy.’

MARCH 5TH

Progress should mean that we are always walking towards the New Jerusalem. It does mean that the New Jerusalem is always walking away from us. We are not altering the real to suit the ideal. We are altering the ideal: it is easier.

‘Orthodoxy.’

MARCH 6TH

In a very entertaining work, over which we have roared in childhood, it is stated that a point has no parts and no magnitude. Humility is the luxurious art of reducing ourselves to a point, not to a small thing or a large one, but to a thing with no size at all, so that to it all the cosmic things are what they really are—of immeasurable stature.

‘The Defendant.’

MARCH 7TH

Thus because we are not in a civilization which believes strongly in oracles or
sacred places, we see the full frenzy of those who killed themselves to find the sepulchre of Christ. But being in a civilization which does believe in this dogma of fact for fact’s sake, we do not see the full frenzy of those who kill themselves to find the North Pole. I am not speaking of a tenable ultimate utility, which is true both of the Crusades and the polar explorations. I mean merely that we do see the superficial and aesthetic singularity, the startling quality, about the idea of men crossing a continent with armies to conquer the place where a man died. But we do not see the aesthetic singularity and the startling quality of men dying in agonies to find a place where no man can live—a place only interesting because it is supposed to be the meeting-place of some lines that do not exist.

‘Heretics.’

MARCH 8TH

In one of his least convincing phrases, Nietzsche had said that just as the ape ultimately produced the man, so should we ultimately produce something higher than the man. The immediate answer, of course, is sufficiently obvious: the ape did not worry about the man, so why should we worry about the superman? If the superman will come by natural selection, may we not leave it to natural selection? If the superman will come by human selection, what sort of superman are we to select? If he is simply to be more just, more brave, or more merciful, then Zarathustra sinks into a Sunday-school teacher; the only way we can work for it is to be more just, more brave, and more merciful—sensible advice, but hardly startling. If he is to be anything else than this, why should we desire him, or what else are we to desire? These questions have been many times asked of the Nietzscheites, and none of the Nietzscheites have even attempted to answer them.

‘George Bernard Shaw.’

MARCH 9TH

A man can be a Christian to the end of the world, for the simple reason that a man could have been an Atheist from the beginning of it. The materialism of things is on the face of things: it does not require any science to find it out. A man who has lived and loved falls down dead and the worms eat him. That is Materialism, if you like. That is Atheism, if you like. If mankind has believed in spite of that, it can believe in spite of anything. But why our human lot is made
any more hopeless because we know the names of the worms who eat him, or the names of all the parts of him that they eat, is to a thoughtful mind somewhat difficult to discover.

‘All Things Considered.’

MARCH 10TH

We should probably come considerably nearer to the true conception of things if we treated all grown-up persons, of all titles and types, with precisely that dark affection and dazed respect with which we treat the infantile limitations. A child has no difficulty in achieving the miracle of speech, consequently we find his blunders almost as marvellous as his accuracy. If we only adopted the same attitude towards Premiers and Chancellors of the Exchequer, if we genially encouraged their stammering and delightful attempts at human speech, we should be in a far more wise and tolerant temper.

‘The Defendant.’

MARCH 11TH

When the working women in the poor districts come to the doors of the public-houses and try to get their husbands home, simple-minded ‘social workers’ always imagine that every husband is a tragic drunkard and every wife a broken-hearted saint. It never occurs to them that the poor woman is only doing under coarser conventions exactly what every fashionable hostess does when she tries to get the men from arguing over the cigars to come and gossip over the teacups.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

MARCH 12TH

What have we done, and where have we wandered, we that have produced sages who could have spoken with Socrates and poets who could walk with Dante, that we should talk as if we had never done anything more intelligent than found colonies and kick niggers? We are the children of light, and it is we that sit in darkness. If we are judged, it will not be for the merely intellectual transgression of failing to appreciate other nations, but for the supreme spiritual transgression of failing to appreciate ourselves.

‘The Defendant.’
MARCH 13TH

And for those who talk to us with interfering eloquence about Jaeger and the pores of the skin, and about Plasmon and the coats of the stomach, at them shall only be hurled the words that are hurled at fops and gluttons, ‘Take no thought what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, or wherewithal ye shall be clothed. For after all these things do the Gentiles seek. But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.’

‘Heretics.’

MARCH 14TH

The Christian admits that the universe is manifold and even miscellaneous, just as a sane man knows that he is complex. Nay, the really sane man knows that he has a touch of the madman. But the Materialist’s world is quite simple and solid, just as the madman is quite sure he is sane. The Materialist is sure that history has been simply and solely a chain of causation, just as the interesting person before mentioned is quite sure that he is simply and solely a chicken. Materialists and madmen never have doubts.

‘Orthodoxy.’

MARCH 15TH

The modern world (intent on anarchy in everything, even in Government) refuses to perceive the permanent element of tragic constancy which inheres in all passion, and which is the origin of marriage. Marriage rests upon the fact that you cannot have your cake and eat it; that you cannot lose your heart and have it.

Introduction to ‘David Copperfield.’

MARCH 16TH

Morality did not begin by one man saying to another, ‘I will not hit you if you do not hit me’; there is no trace of such a transaction. There is a trace of both men having said, ‘We must not hit each other in the holy place.’ They gained their morality by guarding their religion. They did not cultivate courage. They fought for the shrine, and found they had become courageous. They did not cultivate cleanliness. They purified themselves for the altar, and found that they
were clean. The history of the Jews is the only early document known to most Englishmen, and the facts can be judged sufficiently from that. The Ten Commandments which have been found substantially common to mankind were merely military commands; a code of regimental orders, issued to protect a certain ark across a certain desert. Anarchy was evil because it endangered the sanctity. And only when they made a holy day for God did they find they had made a holiday for men.

‘Orthodoxy.’

MARCH 17TH

ST. PATRICK’S DAY

The average autochthonous Irishman is close to patriotism because he is close to the earth; he is close to domesticity because he is close to the earth; he is close to doctrinal theology and elaborate ritual because he is close to the earth. In short, he is close to the heavens because he is close to the earth.

‘George Bernard Shaw.’

MARCH 18TH

We men and women are all in the same boat, upon a stormy sea. We owe to each other a terrible and tragic loyalty. If we catch sharks for food, let them be killed most mercifully; let anyone who likes love the sharks, and pet the sharks, and tie ribbons round their necks and give them sugar and teach them to dance. But if once a man suggests that a shark is to be valued against a sailor, or that the poor shark might be permitted to bite off a nigger’s leg occasionally, then I would court-martial the man—he is a traitor to the ship.

‘All Things Considered.’

MARCH 19TH

Every statute is a declaration of war, to be backed by arms. Every tribunal is a revolutionary tribunal. In a republic all punishment is as sacred and solemn as lynching.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’
MARCH 20TH

I have no sympathy with international aggression when it is taken seriously, but I have a certain dark and wild sympathy with it when it is quite absurd. Raids are all wrong as practical politics, but they are human and imaginable as practical jokes. In fact, almost any act of ragging or violence can be forgiven on this strict condition—that it is of no use at all to anybody. If the aggression gets anything out of it, then it is quite unpardonable. It is damned by the least hint of utility or profit. A man of spirit and breeding may brawl, but he does not steal. A gentleman knocks off his friend’s hat, but he does not annex his friend’s hat.

‘All Things Considered.’

MARCH 21ST

Modern and cultured persons, I believe, object to their children seeing kitchen company or being taught by a woman like Peggotty. But surely it is more important to be educated in a sense of human dignity and equality than in anything else in the world. And a child who has once had to respect a kind and capable woman of the lower classes will respect the lower classes for ever. The true way to overcome the evil in class distinctions is not to denounce them as revolutionists denounce them, but to ignore them as children ignore them.

‘Charles Dickens.’

MARCH 22ND

There is no clearer sign of the absence of originality among modern poets than their disposition to find new topics. Really original poets write poems about the spring. They are always fresh, just as the spring is always fresh. Men wholly without originality write poems about torture, or new religions, or some perversion of obscenity, hoping that the mere sting of the subject may speak for them. But we do not sufficiently realize that what is true of the classic ode is also true of the classic joke. A true poet writes about the spring being beautiful because (after a thousand springs) the spring really is beautiful. In the same way the true humorist writes about a man sitting down on his hat because the act of sitting down on one’s own hat (however often and admirably performed) really is extremely funny. We must not dismiss a new poet because his poem is called ‘To a Skylark’; nor must we dismiss a humorist because his new farce is called
‘My Mother-in-Law.’ He may really have splendid and inspiring things to say upon an eternal problem. The whole question is whether he has.

Introduction to ‘Sketches by Boz.’

MARCH 23RD

Man is an exception, whatever else he is. If he is not the image of God, then he is a disease of the dust. If it is not true that a divine being fell, then we can only say that one of the animals went entirely off its head.

‘All Things Considered.’

MARCH 24TH

Social reformers have fired a hundred shots against the public-house, but never one against its really shameful character. The sign of decay is not in the public-house, but in the private bar; or rather the row of five or six private bars, into each of which a respectable dipsomaniac can go in solitude, and by indulging his own half-witted sin violates his own half-witted morality. Nearly all these places are equipped with an atrocious apparatus of ground-glass windows which can be so closed that they practically conceal the face of the buyer from the seller. Words cannot express the abysses of human infamy and hateful shame expressed by that elaborate piece of furniture. Whenever I go into a public-house, which happens fairly often, I always carefully open all these apertures and then leave the place in every way refreshed.

‘George Bernard Shaw.’

MARCH 25TH

LADY DAY

Fearfully plain the flowers grew,
Like a child’s book to read,
Or like a friend’s face seen in a glass.
He looked, and there Our Lady was;
She stood and stroked the tall live grass
As a man strokes his steed.
Her face was like a spoken word
When brave men speak and choose,
The very colours of her coat
Were better than good news. . . .
'The gates of heaven are tightly locked,  
We do not guard our gain,  
The heaviest hind may easily  
Come silently and suddenly  
Upon me in a lane.  
‘And any little maid that walks  
In good thoughts apart,  
May break the guard of the Three Kings,  
And see the dear and dreadful things  
I hid within my heart.’

‘Ballad of Alfred.’

MARCH 26TH

It is one of the mean and morbid modern lies that physical courage is connected with cruelty. The Tolstoian and Kiplingite are nowhere more at one than in maintaining this. They have, I believe, some small sectarian quarrel with each other: the one saying that courage must be abandoned because it is connected with cruelty, and the other maintaining that cruelty is charming because it is a part of courage. But it is all, thank God, a lie. An energy and boldness of body may make a man stupid or reckless or dull or drunk or hungry, but it does not make him spiteful.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

MARCH 27TH

For human beings, being children, have the childish wilfulness and the childish secrecy. And they never have from the beginning of the world done what the wise men have seen to be inevitable.

‘The Napoleon of Notting Hill.’

MARCH 28TH

Cruelty to animals is cruelty and a vile thing; but cruelty to a man is not cruelty; it is treason. Tyranny over a man is not tyranny: it is rebellion, for man is royal. Now, the practical weakness of the vast mass of modern pity for the poor and the oppressed is precisely that it is merely pity; the pity is pitiful, but not respectful. Men feel that the cruelty to the poor is a kind of cruelty to animals. They never feel that it is injustice to equals; nay, it is treachery to comrades. This dark,
scientific pity, this brutal pity, has an elemental sincerity of its own, but it is entirely useless for all ends of social reform. Democracy swept Europe with the sabre when it was founded upon the Rights of Man. It has done literally nothing at all since it has been founded only upon the wrongs of man. Or, more strictly speaking, its recent failure has been due to its not admitting the existence of any rights or wrongs, or indeed of any humanity. Evolution (the sinister enemy of revolution) does not especially deny the existence of God: what it does deny is the existence of man. And all the despair about the poor, and the cold and repugnant pity for them, has been largely due to the vague sense that they have literally relapsed into the state of the lower animals.

‘Charles Dickens.’

MARCH 29TH

The modern humanitarian can love all opinions, but he cannot love all men; he seems sometimes, in the ecstasy of his humanitarianism, even to hate them all. He can love all opinions, including the opinion that men are unlovable.

Introduction to ‘Hard Times.’

MARCH 30TH

Every man is dangerous who only cares for one thing.

‘The Napoleon of Notting Hill.’

MARCH 31ST

As Mr. Blatchford says, ‘The world does not want piety, but soap—and Socialism.’ Piety is one of the popular virtues, whereas soap and Socialism are two hobbies of the upper middle class.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’
April

April 1st

All Fools’ Day

We shall never make anything of democracy until we make fools of ourselves. For if a man really cannot make a fool of himself, we may be quite certain that the effort is superfluous.

‘The Defendant.’

April 2nd

Modesty has moved from the organ of ambition. Modesty has settled upon the organ of conviction—where it was never meant to be. A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; this has been exactly reversed. Nowadays the part of a man that a man does assert is exactly the part he ought not to assert—himself. The part he doubts is exactly the part he ought not to doubt—the Divine Reason. Huxley preached a humility content to learn from Nature. But the new sceptic is so humble that he doubts if he can even learn. Thus we should be wrong if we had said hastily that there is no humility typical of our time. The truth is that there is a real humility typical of our time; but it so happens that it is practically a more poisonous humility than the wildest prostrations of the ascetic. The old humility was a spur that prevented a man from stopping: not a nail in his boot that prevented him from going on. For the old humility made a man doubtful about his efforts, which might make him work harder. But the new humility makes a man doubtful about his aims, which will make him stop working altogether.

‘Orthodoxy.’

April 3rd

It is very currently suggested that the modern man is the heir of all the ages, that he has got the good out of these successive human experiments. I know not what to say in answer to this, except to ask the reader to look at the modern man, as I have just looked at the modern man—in the looking-glass. Is it really true that
you and I are two starry towers built up of all the most towering visions of the past? Have we really fulfilled all the great historic ideals one after the other, from our naked ancestor who was brave enough to kill a mammoth with a stone knife, through the Greek citizen and the Christian saint to our own grandfather or great-grandfather, who may have been sabred by the Manchester Yeomany or shot in the ’48? Are we still strong enough to spear mammoths, but now tender enough to spare them? Does the cosmos contain any mammoth that we have either speared or spared? When we decline (in a marked manner) to fly the red flag and fire across a barricade like our grandfathers, are we really declining in deference to sociologists—or to soldiers? Have we indeed outstripped the warrior and passed the ascetical saint? I fear we only outstrip the warrior in the sense that we should probably run away from him. And if we have passed the saint, I fear we have passed him without bowing.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

APRIL 4TH

The prophet who is stoned is not a brawler or a marplot. He is simply a rejected lover. He suffers from an unrequited attachment to things in general.

‘The Defendant.’

APRIL 5TH

Laughter and love are everywhere. The cathedrals, built in the ages that loved God, are full of blasphemous grotesques. The mother laughs continually at the child, the lover laughs continually at the lover, the wife at the husband, the friend at the friend.

‘The Napoleon of Notting Hill.’

APRIL 6TH

Fairy-tales do not give a child his first idea of bogy. What fairy-tales give the child is his first clear idea of the possible defeat of bogy. The baby has known the dragon intimately ever since he had an imagination. What the fairy-tale provides for him is a St. George to kill the dragon.

Exactly what the fairy-tale does is this: it accustoms him by a series of clear pictures to the idea that these limitless terrors have a limit, that these shapeless
enemies have enemies, that these infinite enemies of man have enemies in the
knights of God, that there is something in the universe more mystical than
darkness, and stronger than strong fear. When I was a child I have stared at the
darkness until the whole black bulk of it turned into one negro giant taller than
heaven. If there was one star in the sky it only made him a Cyclops. But fairy-
tales restored my mental health. For next day I read an authentic account of how
a negro giant with one eye, of quite equal dimensions, had been baffled by a
little boy like myself (of similar inexperience and even lower social status) by
means of a sword, some bad riddles, and a brave heart.
‘Tremendous Trifles.’

APRIL 7TH

The full value of this life can only be got by fighting; the violent take it by
storm. And if we have accepted everything we have missed something—war.
This life of ours is a very enjoyable fight, but a very miserable truce.
‘Charles Dickens.’

APRIL 8TH

The old religionists tortured men physically for a moral truth. The new realists
torture men morally for a physical truth.
‘Tremendous Trifles.’

APRIL 9TH

‘I sincerely maintain that Nature-worship is more morally dangerous than the
most vulgar Man-worship of the cities; since it can easily be perverted into the
worship of an impersonal mystery, carelessness, or cruelty. Thoreau would have
been a jollier fellow if he had devoted himself to a green-grocer instead of to
greens.’
‘Alarms and Discursions.’

APRIL 10TH

Suppose that a great commotion arises in the street about something—let us say
a lamp-post, which many influential persons desire to pull down. A grey-clad
monk, who is the spirit of the Middle Ages, is approached on the matter, and begins to say, in the arid manner of the Schoolmen, ‘Let us first of all consider, my brethren, the value of Light. If Light be in itself good——’ At this point he is somewhat excusably knocked down. All the people make a rush for the lamp-post, the lamp-post is down in ten minutes, and they go about congratulating each other on their unmedieval practicality. But as things go on they do not work out so easily. Some people have pulled the lamp-post down because they wanted the electric light; some because they wanted old iron; some because they wanted darkness, because their deeds were evil. Some thought it not enough of a lamp-post, some too much; some acted because they wanted to smash municipal machinery; some because they wanted to smash something. And there is war in the night, no man knowing whom he strikes. So, gradually and inevitably, today, to-morrow, or the next day, there comes back the conviction that the monk was right after all, and that all depends on what is the philosophy of Light. Only what we might have discussed under the gas-lamp we must now discuss in the dark.

‘Heretics.’

APRIL 11TH

His soul will never starve for exploits or excitements who is wise enough to be made a fool of. He will make himself happy in the traps that have been laid for him; he will roll in their nets and sleep. All doors will fly open to him who has a mildness more defiant than mere courage. The whole is unerringly expressed in one fortunate phrase—he will be always ‘taken in.’ To be taken in everywhere is to see the inside of everything. It is the hospitality of circumstance. With torches and trumpets, like a guest, the greenhorn is taken in by Life. And the sceptic is cast out by it.

‘Charles Dickens.’

APRIL 12TH

You cannot admire will in general, because the essence of will is that it is particular. A brilliant anarchist like Mr. John Davidson felt an irritation against ordinary morality, and therefore he invokes will—will to anything. He only wants humanity to want something. But humanity does want something. It wants ordinary morality. He rebels against the law and tells us to will something or
anything. But we have willed something. We have willed the law against which he rebels.

‘Orthodoxy.’

APRIL 13TH

I have often been haunted with a fancy that the creeds of men might be paralleled and represented in their beverages. Wine might stand for genuine Catholicism, and ale for genuine Protestantism; for these at least are real religions with comfort and strength in them. Clean cold Agnosticism would be clean cold water—an excellent thing if you can get it. Most modern ethical and idealistic movements might be well represented by soda-water—which is a fuss about nothing. Mr. Bernard Shaw’s philosophy is exactly like black coffee—it awakens, but it does not really inspire. Modern hygienic materialism is very like cocoa; it would be impossible to express one’s contempt for it in stronger terms than that. Sometimes one may come across something that may honestly be compared to milk, an ancient and heathen mildness, an earthly yet sustaining mercy—the milk of human kindness. You can find it in a few pagan poets and a few old fables; but it is everywhere dying out.

‘William Blake.’

APRIL 14TH

As it is in politics with the specially potent man, so it is in history with the specially learned. We do not need the learned man to teach us the important things. We all know the important things, though we all violate and neglect them. Gigantic industry, abysmal knowledge are needed for the discovery of the tiny things—the things that seem hardly worth the trouble. Generally speaking, the ordinary man should be content with the terrible secret that men are men—which is another way of saying that they are brothers.

‘Illustrated London News.’

APRIL 15TH

The women were of the kind vaguely called emancipated, and professed some protest against male supremacy. Yet these new women would always pay to a man the extraordinary compliment which no ordinary woman ever pays to him
—that of listening while he is talking.

‘The Man who was Thursday.’

APRIL 16TH

Whatever the merits or demerits of the Pantheistic sentiment of melting into nature of ‘Oneness’ (I think they call it) with seas and skies, it is not and it never has been a popular sentiment. It has been the feeling of a few learned aesthetes or secluded naturalists. Popular poetry is all against Pantheism and quite removed from Immanence. It is all about the beautiful earth as an edge or fringe of something much better and quite distinct. Ballads and carols do not go to the tune of ‘One with the Essence of the Boundless World.’ Ballads and carols go to the tune of ‘Over the hills and far away;’ the sense that life leads by a strange and special path to something sacred and separate.

‘Daily News.’

APRIL 17TH

How high the sea of human happiness rose in the Middle Ages, we now only know by the colossal walls that they built to keep it in bounds. How low human happiness sank in the twentieth century, our children will only know by these extraordinary modern books, which tell people to be cheerful and that life is not so bad after all. Humanity never produces optimists till it has ceased to produce happy men. It is strange to be obliged to impose a holiday like a fast, and to drive men to a banquet with spears.

‘George Bernard Shaw.’

APRIL 18TH

If a god does come upon the earth, he will descend at the sight of the brave. Our prostrations and litanies are of no avail; our new moons and sabbaths are an abomination. The great man will come when all of us are feeling great, not when all of us are feeling small. He will ride in at some splendid moment when we all feel that we could do without him.

‘Charles Dickens.’

APRIL 19TH
PRIMROSE DAY

If the great Jew who led the English Tories understood patriotism (as I do not doubt that he did) it must have been a decidedly special and peculiar kind of patriotism, and it necessarily laid him open to the mistake about the relative positions of the terms Emperor and King. To him no doubt Emperor seemed obviously a higher title; just as Brother of the Sun and Moon would have seemed to him a higher title than Second Cousin of the Evening Star. Among Orientals all such titles are towering and hyperbolical. But of kingship as it has been felt among Christian men he had no notion, and small blame to him. He did not understand the domestic, popular, and priestly quality in the thing; the idea expressed in the odd old phrase of being the breath of his people’s nostrils; the mystical life pumped through the lungs and framework of a state.

‘Illustrated London News.’

APRIL 20TH

‘I know of a magic wand, but it is a wand that only one or two may rightly use, and only seldom. It is a fairy wand of great fear, stronger than those who use it—often frightful, often wicked to use. But whatever is touched with it is never again wholly common; whatever is touched with it takes a magic from outside the world. It has made mean landscapes magnificent and hovels outlast cathedrals. The touch of it is the finger of a strange perfection.

‘There it is!’—he pointed to the floor where his sword lay flat and shining.

‘The Napoleon of Notting Hill.’

APRIL 21ST

There are many definite methods, honest and dishonest, which make men rich; the only ‘instinct’ I know of which does it is that instinct which theological Christianity crudely describes as ‘the sin of avarice.’

‘All Things Considered.’

APRIL 22ND

It is a common saying that anything may happen behind our backs:
transcendently considered, the thing has an eerie truth about it. Eden may be behind our backs, or Fairyland. But this mystery of the human back has, again, its other side in the strange impression produced on those behind: to walk behind anyone along a lane is a thing that, properly speaking, touches the oldest nerve of awe. Watts has realized this as no one in art or letters has realized it in the whole history of the world; it has made him great. There is one possible exception to his monopoly of this magnificent craze. Two thousand years before, in the dark scriptures of a nomad people, it had been said that their prophet saw the immense Creator of all things, but only saw Him from behind.

‘G. F. Watts.’

APRIL 23RD

ST. GEORGE’S DAY

I see how you smile in state
Straight from the Peak to Plymouth Bar;
You need not tell me you are great,
I know how more than great you are.
I know what spirit Chaucer was;
I have seen Gainsborough and the grass.

‘Tremendous Trifles.’

APRIL 24TH

There is no fear that a modern king will attempt to override the constitution: it is more likely that he will ignore the constitution and work behind its back. He will take no advantage of his kingly power: it is more likely that he will take advantage of his kingly powerlessness—of the fact that he is free from criticism and publicity. For the King is the most private person of our time. It will not be necessary for anyone to fight against the proposal of a censorship of the Press. We do not need a censorship of the Press. We have a censorship by the Press.

‘Orthodoxy.’

APRIL 25TH

ST MARK’S DAY
The only thing still old-fashioned enough to reject miracles is the New Theology.

‘Orthodoxy.’

APRIL 26TH

The modern man thought Becket’s robes too rich and his meals too poor. But then the modern man was really exceptional in history; no man before ever ate such elaborate dinners in such ugly clothes. The modern man found the Church too simple exactly where life is too complex; he found the Church too gorgeous exactly where modern life is too dingy. The man who disliked the plain fasts and feasts was mad on entrées. The man who disliked vestments wore a pair of preposterous trousers. And surely if there was any insanity involved in the matter at all it was in the trousers, not in the simply falling robe. If there was any insanity at all, it was in the extravagant entrées, not in the bread and wine.

‘Orthodoxy.’

APRIL 27TH

The two things that a healthy person hates most between heaven and hell are a woman who is not dignified and a man who is.

‘All Things Considered.’

APRIL 28TH

For those who study the great art of lying in bed there is one emphatic caution to be added. Even for those who cannot do their work in bed (as, for example, the professional harpooners of whales), it is obvious that the indulgence must be very occasional. But that is not the caution I mean. The caution is this: if you do lie in bed, be sure you do it without any reason or justification at all. I do not speak, of course, of the seriously sick. But if a healthy man lies in bed, let him do it without a rag of excuse; then he will get up a healthy man. If he does it for some secondary hygienic reason, if he has some scientific explanation, he may get up a hypochondriac.

‘Tremendous Trifles.’

APRIL 29TH
The creed of our cruel cities is not so sane and just as the creed of the old country-side; but the people are just as clever in giving names to their sins in the city as in giving names to their joys in the wilderness. One could not better sum up Christianity than by calling a small white insignificant flower ‘The Star of Bethlehem.’ But then again one could not better sum up the philosophy deduced from Darwinism than in the one verbal picture of ‘having your monkey up.’

‘Daily News.’

APRIL 30TH

ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA’S DAY

Historic Christianity rose into a high and strange coup de théâtre of morality—things that are to virtue what the crimes of Nero are to vice. The spirits of indignation and of charity took terrible and attractive forms, ranging from that monkish fierceness that scourged like a dog the first and greatest of the Plantagenets, to the sublime pity of St. Catherine, who, in the official shambles, kissed the bloody head of the criminal. Our ethical teachers write reasonably for prison reform; but we are not likely to see Mr. Cadbury, or any eminent philanthropist, go into Reading Jail to embrace the strangled corpse before it is cast into the quicklime. Our ethical teachers write wildly against the power of millionaires, but we are not likely to see Mr. Rockefeller, or any modern tyrant, publicly whipped in Westminster Abbey.

‘Orthodoxy.’
MAY

MAY 1ST

LABOUR DAY

It may be we shall rise the last as Frenchmen rose the first;
Our wrath come after Russia’s, and our wrath be the worst.
It may be we are set to mark by our riot and our rest
God’s scorn of all man’s governance: it may be beer is best.
But we are the people of England, and we never have spoken yet.
Mock at us, pay us, pass us; but do not quite forget.

‘The Silent People.’

MAY 2ND

If drudgery only means dreadfully hard work, I admit the woman drudges in the home, as a man might drudge at the Cathedral of Amiens or drudge behind a gun at Trafalgar. But if it means that the hard work is more heavy because it is trifling, colourless, and of small import to the soul, then, as I say, I give it up: I do not know what the word means. To be Queen Elizabeth within a definite area—deciding sales, banquets, labours, and holidays; to be Whiteley within a certain area—providing toys, boots, sheets, cakes, and books; to be Aristotle within a certain area—teaching morals, manners, theology, and hygiene: I can understand how this might exhaust the mind, but I cannot imagine how it could narrow it.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

MAY 3RD

Since it is lawful to pray for the coming of the Kingdom, it is lawful also to pray for the coming of the revolution that shall restore the Kingdom. It is lawful to hope to hear the wind of Heaven in the trees. It is lawful to pray, ‘Thine anger come on earth as it is in Heaven.’

‘Tremendous Trifles.’

MAY 4TH
Happy is he and more than wise
Who sees with wondering eyes and clean
This world through all the grey disguise
Of sleep and custom in between.
Yes; we may pass the heavenly screen,
But shall we know when we are there?
Who know not what these dead stones mean,
The lovely city of Lierre.

‘Tremendous Trifles.’

MAY 5TH

Anomalies do matter very much, and do a great deal of harm; abstract illogicalities do matter a great deal, and do a great deal of harm: and this for a reason that anyone at all acquainted with human nature can see for himself. All injustice begins in the mind: and anomalies accustom the mind to the idea of unreason and untruth. Suppose I had by some prehistoric law the power of forcing every man in Battersea to nod his head three times before he got out of bed: the practical politicians might say that this power was a harmless anomaly, that it was not a grievance. It could do my subjects no harm; it could do me no good. The people of Battersea, they would say, might safely submit to it; but the people of Battersea could not safely submit to it, for all that. If I had nodded their heads for them for fifty years, I could cut off their heads for them at the end of it with immeasurably greater ease; for there would have permanently sunk into every man’s mind the notion that it was a natural thing for me to have a fantastic and irrational power. They would have grown accustomed to insanity.

‘All Things Considered.’

MAY 6TH

Ireland is a country in which the political conflicts are at least genuine: they are about something. They are about patriotism, about religion, or about money: the three great realities. In other words, they are concerned with what commonwealth a man lives in, or with what universe a man lives in, or how he is to manage to live in either. But they are not concerned with which of two wealthy cousins in the same governing class shall be allowed to bring in the same Parish Councils Bill.

‘George Bernard Shaw.’
MAY 7TH

Maeterlinck is as efficient in filling a man with strange spiritual tremors as Messrs. Crosse & Blackwell are in filling a man with jam. But it all depends on what you want to be filled with. Lord Rosebery, being a modern sceptic, probably prefers the spiritual tremors. I, being an orthodox Christian, prefer the jam.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

MAY 8TH

The world is not a lodging-house at Brighton, which we are to leave because it is miserable. It is the fortress of our family, with the flag flying on the turret, and the more miserable it is the less we should leave it. The point is not that this world is too sad to love or too glad not to love; the point is that when you do love a thing, its gladness is a reason for loving it, and its sadness a reason for loving it more. All optimistic thoughts about England and all pessimistic thoughts about her are alike reasons for the English patriot. Similarly, optimism and pessimism are alike arguments for the cosmic patriot.

‘Orthodoxy.’

MAY 9TH

It is not by any means self-evident upon the face of it that an institution like the liberty of speech is right or just. It is not natural or obvious to let a man utter follies and abominations which you believe to be bad for mankind any more than it is natural or obvious to let a man dig up a part of the public road, or infect half a town with typhoid fever. The theory of free speech, that truth is so much larger and stranger and more many-sided than we know of, that it is very much better at all costs to hear every one’s account of it, is a theory which has been justified upon the whole by experiment, but which remains a very daring and even a very surprising theory. It is really one of the great discoveries of the modern time; but once admitted, it is a principle that does not merely affect politics, but philosophy, ethics, and finally, poetry.

‘Browning.’

MAY 10TH
Whatever makes men feel old is mean—an empire or a skin-flint shop. Whatever makes men feel young is great—a great war or a love-story. And in the darkest of the books of God there is written a truth that is also a riddle. It is of the new things that men tire—of fashions and proposals and improvements and change. It is the old things that startle and intoxicate. It is the old things that are young. There is no sceptic who does not feel that men have doubted before. There is no rich and fickle man who does not feel that all his novelties are ancient. There is no worshipper of change who does not feel upon his neck the vast weight of the weariness of the universe. But we who do the old things are fed by Nature with a perpetual infancy. No man who is in love thinks that anyone has been in love before. No woman who has a child thinks there have been such things as children. No people that fight for their own city are haunted with the burden of the broken empires.

‘The Napoleon of Notting Hill.’

MAY 11TH

Most of us have suffered from a certain sort of lady who, by her perverse unselfishness, gives more trouble than the selfish; who almost clamours for the unpopular dish and scrambles for the worst seat. Most of us have known parties or expeditions full of this seething fuss of self-effacement.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

MAY 12TH

It is the custom, particularly among magistrates, to attribute half the crimes of the Metropolis to cheap novelettes. If some grimy urchin runs away with an apple, the magistrate shrewdly points out that the child’s knowledge that apples appease hunger is traceable to some curious literary researches. The boys themselves, when penitent, frequently accuse the novelettes with great bitterness, which is only to be expected from young people possessed of no little native humour. If I had forged a will, and could obtain sympathy by tracing the incident to the influence of Mr. George Moore’s novels, I should find the greatest entertainment in the diversion. At any rate, it is firmly fixed in the minds of most people that gutter-boys, unlike everybody else in the community, find their principal motives for conduct in printed books.

‘The Defendant.’
MAY 13TH

Soldiers have many faults, but they have one redeeming merit: they are never worshippers of Force. Soldiers more than any other men are taught severely and systematically that might is not right. The fact is obvious: the might is in the hundred men who obey. The right (or what is held to be right) is in the one man who commands them. They learn to obey symbols, arbitrary things, stripes on an arm, buttons on a coat, a title, a flag. These may be artificial things; they may be unreasonable things; they may, if you will, be wicked things; but they are not weak things. They are not Force, and they do not look like Force. They are parts of an idea, of the idea of discipline; if you will, of the idea of tyranny; but still an idea. No soldier could possibly say that his own bayonets were his authority. No soldier could possibly say that he came in the name of his own bayonets. It would be as absurd as if a postman said that he came inside his bag. I do not, as I have said, underrate the evils that really do arise from militarism and the military ethic. It tends to give people wooden faces and sometimes wooden heads. It tends, moreover (both through its specialization and through its constant obedience), to a certain loss of real independence and strength of character. This has almost always been found when people made the mistake of turning the soldier into a statesman, under the mistaken impression that he was a strong man. The Duke of Wellington, for instance, was a strong soldier and therefore a weak statesman. But the soldier is always, by the nature of things, loyal to something. And as long as one is loyal to something one can never be a worshipper of mere force. For mere force, violence in the abstract, is the enemy of anything we love. To love anything is to see it at once under lowering skies of danger. Loyalty implies loyalty in misfortune; and when a soldier has accepted any nation’s uniform he has already accepted its defeat.

‘All Things Considered.’

MAY 14TH

Now, I have not lost my ideals in the least; my faith in fundamentals is exactly what it always was. What I have lost is my old childlike faith in practical politics. I am still as much concerned as ever about the Battle of Armageddon; but I am not so much concerned about the General Election. As a babe I leapt up on my mother’s knee at the mere mention of it. No; the vision is always solid and reliable. The vision is always a fact. It is the reality that is often a fraud. As
much as I ever did, I believe in Liberalism. But there was a rosy time of innocence when I believed in Liberals.

‘Orthodoxy.’

MAY 15TH

Distribute the dignified people and the capable people and the highly business-like people among all the situations which their ambition or their innate corruption may demand, but keep close to your heart, keep deep in your inner councils the absurd people; let the clever people pretend to govern you, let the unimpeachable people pretend to advise you, but let the fools alone influence you; let the laughable people whose faults you see and understand be the only people who are really inside your life, who really come near you or accompany you on your lonely march towards the last impossibility.

Introduction to ‘David Copperfield.’

MAY 16TH

Philosophy is not the concern of those who pass through Divinity and Greats, but of those who pass through birth and death. Nearly all the more awful and abstruse statements can be put in words of one syllable, from ‘A child is born’ to ‘A soul is damned.’ If the ordinary man may not discuss existence, why should he be asked to conduct it?

‘George Bernard Shaw.’

MAY 17TH

Keeping to one woman is a small price for so much as seeing one woman.

‘Orthodoxy.’

MAY 18TH

GEORGE MEREDITH DIED

The trees thinned and fell away from each other, and I came out into deep grass and a road. I remember being surprised that the evening was so far advanced; I had a fancy that this valley had a sunset all to itself. I went along that road
according to directions that had been given me, and passed the gateway in a slight paling, beyond which the wood changed only faintly to a garden. It was as if the curious courtesy and fineness of that character I was to meet went out from him upon the valley; for I felt on all these things the finger of that quality which the old English called ‘faerie’; it is the quality which those can never understand who think of the past as merely brutal; it is an ancient elegance such as there is in trees. I went through the garden and saw an old man sitting by a table, looking smallish in his big chair. He was already an invalid, and his hair and beard were both white; not like snow, for snow is cold and heavy, but like something feathery, or even fierce; rather they were white like white thistledown. I came up quite close to him; he looked at me as he put out his frail hand, and I saw of a sudden that his eyes were startlingly young. He was the one great man of the old world whom I have met who was not a mere statue over his own grave.

He was deaf and he talked like a torrent. He did not talk about the books he had written; he was far too much alive for that. He talked about the books he had not written. He unrolled a purple bundle of romances which he had never had time to sell. He asked me to write one of the stories for him, as he would have asked the milkman, if he had been talking to the milkman. It was a splendid and frantic story, a sort of astronomical farce. It was all about a man who was rushing up to the Royal Society with the only possible way of avoiding an earth-destroying comet; and it showed how, even on this huge errand, the man was tripped up at every other minute by his own weaknesses and vanities; how he lost a train by trifling or was put in gaol for brawling. That is only one of them; there were ten or twenty more. Another, I dimly remember, was a version of the fall of Parnell; the idea that a quite honest man might be secret from a pure love of secrecy, of solitary self-control. I went out of that garden with a blurred sensation of the million possibilities of creative literature. The feeling increased as my way fell back into the wood; for a wood is a palace with a million corridors that cross each other everywhere. I really had the feeling that I had seen the creative quality; which is supernatural. I had seen what Virgil calls the Old Man of the Forest: I had seen an elf. The trees thronged behind my path; I have never seen him again; and now I shall not see him, because he died last Tuesday.

‘Tremendous Trifles.’

MAY 19TH
GLADSTONE DIED

Lift up your heads: in life, in death,
God knoweth his head was high;
Quit we the coward’s broken breath
Who watched a strong man die.
Oh, young ones of a darker day,
In Art’s wan colours clad,
Whose very love and hate are grey—
Whose very sin is sad,
Pass on; one agony long drawn
Was merrier than your mirth,
When hand-in-hand came death and dawn
And spring was on the earth.
‘To Them that Mourn.’

MAY 20TH

If the authors and publishers of ‘Dick Deadshot,’ and such remarkable works, were suddenly to make a raid upon the educated class, were to take down the names of every man, however distinguished, who was caught at a University Extension Lecture, were to confiscate all our novels and warn us all to correct our lives, we should be seriously annoyed. Yet they have far more right to do so than we; for they, with all their idiotcy, are normal and we are abnormal. It is the modern literature of the educated, not of the uneducated, which is avowedly and aggressively criminal. Books recommending profligacy and pessimism, at which the high-souled errand-boy would shudder, lie upon all our drawing-room tables. If the dirtiest old owner of the dirtiest old bookstall in Whitechapel dared to display works really recommending polygamy or suicide, his stock would be seized by the police. These things are our luxuries. And with a hypocrisy so ludicrous as to be almost unparalleled in history, we rate the gutter boys for their immorality at the very time that we are discussing (with equivocal German professors) whether morality is valid at all. At the very instant that we curse the Penny Dreadful for encouraging thefts upon property, we canvass the proposition that all property is theft. . . . At the very instant that we charge it with encouraging the young to destroy life, we are placidly discussing whether life is worth preserving.

‘The Defendant.’

MAY 21ST
The English nation will still be going the way of all European nations when the Anglo-Saxon race has gone the way of all fads. 
‘Heretics.’

MAY 22ND

The public does not like bad literature. The public likes a certain kind of literature, and likes that kind even when it is bad better than another kind of literature even when it is good. Nor is this unreasonable; for the line between different types of literature is as real as the line between tears and laughter; and to tell people who can only get bad comedy that you have some first-class tragedy is as irrational as to offer a man who is shivering over weak, warm coffee a really superior sort of ice.
‘Charles Dickens.’

MAY 23RD

To-morrow is the Gorgon; a man must only see it mirrored in the shining shield of yesterday. If he sees it directly he is turned to stone. This has been the fate of all those who have really seen fate and futurity as clear and inevitable. The Calvinists, with their perfect creed of predestination, were turned to stone; the modern sociological scientists (with their excruciating Eugenics) are turned to stone. The only difference is that the Puritans make dignified, and the Eugenists somewhat amusing, statues.
‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

MAY 24TH

EMPIRE DAY

I for one should be sincerely glad if we could have a national celebration, remembering our real achievements and reminding ourselves of our real work in the world. Only for any such national celebration I should suggest two conditions: first, that our national celebration should be invented by our nation and not by another nation. And secondly, that it should be forced by the people on the newspaper proprietors, and not by the newspaper proprietors on the people.
Illustrated London News.

MAY 25TH

There is no hope for men who do not boast that their wives bully them.

‘Alarms and Discursions.’

MAY 26TH

ST. AUGUSTINE OF ENGLAND’S DAY

If our faith had been a mere fad of the fading empire, fad would have followed fad in the twilight, and if the civilization ever re-emerged (and many such have never re-emerged) it would have been under some new barbaric flag. But the Christian Church was the last life of the old society and was also the first life of the new. She took the people who were forgetting how to make an arch, and she taught them to invent the Gothic arch. In a word, the most absurd thing that could be said of the Church is the thing we have all heard said of it. How can we say that the Church wishes to bring us back into the Dark Ages? The Church was the only thing that ever brought us out of them.

‘Orthodoxy.’

MAY 27TH

One Sun is splendid: six Suns would be only vulgar. One Tower of Giotto is sublime: a row of Towers of Giotto would be only like a row of white posts. The poetry of art is in beholding the single tower; the poetry of nature, in seeing the single tree; the poetry of love, in following the single woman; the poetry of religion, in worshipping the single star.

‘Tremendous Trifles.’

MAY 28TH

Boys like romantic tales; but babies like realistic tales—because they find them romantic. In fact, a baby is about the only person, I should think, to whom a modern realistic novel could be read without boring him.

‘Orthodoxy.’
MAY 29TH

THE RESTORATION

It is a commonplace that the Restoration Movement can only be understood when considered as a reaction against Puritanism. But it is insufficiently realized that the tyranny which half frustrated all the good work of Puritanism was of a very peculiar kind. It was not the fire of Puritanism, the exultation in sobriety, the frenzy of restraint, which passed away: that still burns in the heart of England, only to be quenched by the final overwhelming sea. But it is seldom remembered that the Puritans were in their day emphatically intellectual bullies, that they relied swaggeringly on the logical necessity of Calvinism, that they bound omnipotence itself in the chains of syllogism. The Puritans fell, through the damning fact that they had a complete theory of life, through the eternal paradox that a satisfactory explanation can never satisfy.

‘Twelve Types.’

MAY 30TH

BLESSED JOAN OF ARC

Joan of Arc was not stuck at the Cross Roads either by rejecting all the paths like Tolstoy or by accepting them all like Nietzsche. She chose a path and went down it like a thunderbolt. Yet Joan, when I come to think of her, had in her all that was true either in Tolstoy or Nietzsche—all that was even tolerable in either of them. I thought of all that is noble in Tolstoy: the pleasure in plain things, especially in plain pity, the actualities of the earth, the reverence for the poor, the dignity of the bowed back. Joan of Arc had all that, and with this great addition: that she endured poverty while she admired it, whereas Tolstoy is only a typical aristocrat trying to find out its secret. And then I thought of all that was brave and proud and pathetic in poor Nietzsche and his mutiny against the emptiness and timidity of our time. I thought of his cry for the ecstatic equilibrium of danger, his hunger for the rush of great horses, his cry to arms. Well, Joan of Arc had all that; and, again, with this difference, that she did not praise fighting, but fought. We know that she was not afraid of an army, while Nietzsche for all we know was afraid of a cow. Tolstoy only praised the peasant; she was the peasant. Nietzsche only praised the warrior; she was the warrior. She beat them both at
their own antagonistic ideals; she was more gentle than the one, more violent than the other. Yet she was a perfectly practical person who did something, while they are wild speculators who do nothing.

‘Orthodoxy.’

MAY 31ST

Our civilization has decided, and very justly decided, that determining the guilt or innocence of men is a thing too important to be trusted to trained men. If it wishes for light upon that awful matter, it asks men who know no more law than I know, but who can feel the things that I felt in the jury-box. When it wants a library catalogued, or the solar system discovered, or any trifle of that kind, it uses up its specialists. But when it wishes anything done which is really serious, it collects twelve of the ordinary men standing round. The same thing was done, if I remember right, by the Founder of Christianity.

‘Tremendous Trifles.’
JUNE

JUNE 1ST

The great lords will refuse the English peasant his three acres and a cow on advanced grounds, if they cannot refuse it longer on reactionary grounds. They will deny him the three acres on grounds of State Ownership. They will forbid him the cow on grounds of humanitarianism.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

JUNE 2ND

Life is a thing too glorious to be enjoyed.

‘George Bernard Shaw.’

JUNE 3RD

I remember an artistic and eager lady asking me, in her grand green drawing-room, whether I believed in comradeship between the sexes, and why not. I was driven back on offering the obvious and sincere answer: ‘Because if I were to treat you for two minutes like a comrade, you would turn me out of the house.’

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

JUNE 4TH

Every man of us to-day is three men. There is in every modern European three powers so distinct as to be almost personal—the trinity of our earthly destiny. The three may be rudely summarized thus: First and nearest to us is the Christian, the man of the historic Church, of the creed that must have coloured our minds incurably whether we regard it as the crown and combination of the other two, or whether we regard it as an accidental superstition which has remained for two thousand years. First, then, comes the Christian; behind him comes the Roman—the citizen of that great cosmopolitan realm of reason and order, in the level and equality of which Christianity arose. He is the Stoic who is so much sterner than the Ancorites. He is the Republican who is so much prouder than kings. It is he that makes straight roads and clear laws, and for
whom good sense is good enough. And the third man: he has no name, and all true tales of him are blotted out; yet he walks behind us in every forest path and wakes within us when the wind wakes at night. He is the origins—he is the man in the forest.

‘William Blake.’

JUNE 5TH

The right and proper thing, of course, is that every good patriot should stop at home and curse his own country. So long as that is being done everywhere, we may be sure that things are fairly happy, and being kept up to a reasonably high standard. So long as we are discontented separately we may be well content as a whole.

‘Illustrated London News.’

JUNE 6TH

I have never been able to understand where people got the idea that democracy was in some way opposed to tradition. It is obvious that tradition is only democracy extended through time. It is trusting to a consensus of common human voices rather than to some isolated or arbitrary record. The man who quotes some German historian against the tradition of the Catholic Church, for instance, is strictly appealing to aristocracy. He is appealing to the superiority of one expert against the awful authority of a mob. It is quite easy to see why a legend is treated, and ought to be treated, more respectfully than a book of history. The legend is generally made by the majority of people in the village, who are sane. The book is generally written by the one man in the village, who is mad. Those who urge against tradition—that men in the past were ignorant—may go and urge it at the Carlton Club, along with the statement that voters in the slums are ignorant. It will not do for us. If we attach great importance to the opinion of ordinary men in great unanimity when we are dealing with daily matters, there is no reason why we should disregard it when we are dealing with history or fable. Tradition may be defined as an extension of the franchise. Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes—our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about. All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth: tradition
objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death. Democracy tells us not to neglect a good man’s opinion, even if he is our groom: tradition asks us not to neglect a good man’s opinion, even if he is our father.

‘Orthodoxy.’

JUNE 7TH

You hold that your heretics and sceptics have helped the world forward and handed on a lamp of progress. I deny it. Nothing is plainer from real history than that each of your heretics invented a complete cosmos of his own which the next heretic smashed entirely to pieces. Who knows now exactly what Nestorius taught? Who cares? There are only two things that we know for certain about it. The first is that Nestorius, as a heretic, taught something quite opposite to the teaching of Arius, the heretic who came before him, and something quite useless to James Turnbull, the heretic who comes after. I defy you to go back to the Freethinkers of the past and find any habitation for yourself at all. I defy you to read Godwin or Shelley, or the deists of the eighteenth century, or the nature-worshipping humanists of the Renaissance, without discovering that you differ from them twice as much as you differ from the Pope. You are a nineteenth-century sceptic, and you are always telling me that I ignore the cruelty of Nature. If you had been an eighteenth-century sceptic you would have told me that I ignore the kindness and benevolence of Nature. You are an Atheist, and you praise the deists of the eighteenth century. Read them instead of praising them, and you will find that their whole universe stands or falls with the deity. You are a Materialist, and you think Bruno a scientific hero. See what he said, and you will think him an insane mystic. No; the great Freethinker, with his genuine ability and honesty, does not in practice destroy Christianity. What he does destroy is the Freethinker who went before.

‘The Ball and the Cross.’

JUNE 8TH

When the old Liberals removed the gags from all the heresies, their idea was that religious and philosophical discoveries might thus be made. Their view was that cosmic truth was so important that everyone ought to bear independent testimony. The modern idea is that cosmic truth is so unimportant that it cannot matter what anyone says. The former freed inquiry as men loose a noble hound;
the latter frees inquiry as men fling back into the sea a fish unfit for eating. Never has there been so little discussion about the nature of men as now, when, for the first time, anyone can discuss it.

‘Heretics.’

JUNE 9TH

DICKENS DIED

The hour of absinthe is over. We shall not be much further troubled with the little artists who found Dickens too sane for their sorrows and too clean for their delights. But we have a long way to travel before we get back to what Dickens meant; and the passage is along an English rambling road—a twisting road such as Mr. Pickwick travelled. But this at least is part of what he meant: that comradeship and serious joy are not interludes in our travel, but that rather our travels are interludes in comradeship and joy, which, through God, shall endure for ever. The inn does not point to the road: the road points to the inn. And all roads point at last to an ultimate inn, where we shall meet Dickens and all his characters. And when we drink again it shall be from the great flagons in the tavern at the end of the world.

‘Charles Dickens.’

JUNE 10TH

I have always been inclined to believe the ruck of hard-working people rather than to believe that special and troublesome literary class to which I belong. I prefer even the fancies and prejudices of the people who see life from the inside to the clearest demonstrations of the people who see life from the outside. I would always trust the old wives’ fables against the old maids’ facts. As long as wit is mother-wit it can be as wild as it pleases.

‘Orthodoxy.’

JUNE 11TH

However far aloft a man may go he is still looking up, not only at God (which is obvious), but in a manner at men also: seeing more and more all that is towering and mysterious in the dignity and destiny of the lonely house of Adam. . . . So it
may be hoped, until we die, you and I will always look up rather than down at the labours and habitations of our race; we will lift up our eyes to the valleys from whence cometh our help. For from every special eminence beyond every sublime landmark, it is good for our souls to see only vaster and vaster visions of that dizzy and divine level, and to behold from our crumbling turrets the tall plains of equality.

‘Alarms and Discursions.’

JUNE 12TH

There is more of the song and music of mankind in a clerk putting on his Sunday clothes than in a fanatic running naked down Cheapside.

‘William Blake.’

JUNE 13TH

If we are to save the oppressed, we must have two apparently antagonistic emotions in us at the same time. We must think the oppressed man intensely miserable, and at the same time intensely attractive and important. We must insist with violence upon his degradation; we must insist with the same violence upon his dignity. For if we relax by one inch the one assertion, men will say he does not need saving. And if we relax by one inch the other assertion men will say he is not worth saving. The optimists will say that reform is needless. The pessimists will say that reform is hopeless. We must apply both simultaneously to the same oppressed man; we must say that he is a worm and a god; and we must thus lay ourselves open to the accusation (or the compliment) of transcendentalism.

‘Charles Dickens.’

JUNE 14TH

You say your civilization will include all talents. Will it? Do you really mean to say that at the moment when the Esquimaux has learnt to vote for a County Council, you will have learnt to spear a walrus?

‘The Napoleon of Notting Hill.’

JUNE 15TH
‘Certainly, it is untrue that three is no company. Three is splendid company. Three is the ideal number for pure comradeship: as in the ‘Three Musketeers.’ But if you reject the proverb altogether; if you say that two and three are the same sort of company; if you cannot see that there is a wider abyss between two and three than between three and three million—then I regret to inform you that you shall have no company either of two or three, but shall be alone in a howling desert till you die.’

‘Alarms and Discursions.’

JUNE 16TH

Blasphemy is an artistic effect, because blasphemy depends on a philosophical conviction. Blasphemy depends upon belief, and is fading with it. If anyone doubts this, let him sit down seriously and try to think blasphemous thoughts about Thor. I think his family will find him at the end of the day in a state of some exhaustion.

‘Heretics.’

JUNE 17TH

Just as the rivalry of armaments is only a sort of sulky plagiarism, so the rivalry of parties is only a sort of sulky inheritance. Men have votes, so women must soon have votes; poor children are taught by force, so they must soon be fed by force; the police shut public-houses by twelve o’clock, so soon they must shut them by eleven o’clock; children stop at school till they are fourteen, so soon they will stop till they are forty. No gleam of reason, no momentary return to first principles, no abstract asking of any obvious question, can interrupt this mad and monotonous gallop of mere progress by precedent.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

JUNE 18TH

WATERLOO DAY

The time of big theories was the time of big results. In the era of sentiment and fine words, at the end of the eighteenth century, men were really robust and effective. The sentimentalists conquered Napoleon. The cynics could not catch
De Wet. A hundred years ago our affairs for good or evil were wielded triumphantly by rhetoricians. Now our affairs are hopelessly muddled by strong, silent men.

‘Heretics.’

JUNE 19TH

Herein lies the peculiar significance, the peculiar sacredness even, of penny dreadfuls and the common printed matter made for our errand-boys. Here in dim and desperate forms, under the ban of our base culture, stormed at by silly magistrates, sneered at by silly schoolmasters—here is the old popular literature still popular; here is the unmistakable voluminousness, the thousand-and-one tales of Dick Deadshot, like the thousand-and-one tales of Robin Hood. Here is the splendid and static boy, the boy who remains a boy through a thousand volumes and a thousand years. Here in mean alleys and dim shops, shadowed and shamed by the police, mankind is still driving its dark trade in heroes. And elsewhere, and in all ages, in braver fashion, under cleaner skies, the same eternal tale-telling still goes on, and the whole mortal world is a factory of immortals.

‘Charles Dickens.’

JUNE 20TH

There are two very curious things which the critic of life may observe. The first is the fact that there is one real difference between men and women: that women prefer to talk in two’s, while men prefer to talk in three’s. The second is that when you find (as you often do) three young cads and idiots going about together and getting drunk together every day, you generally find that one of the three cads and idiots is (for some extraordinary reason) not a cad and not an idiot. In those small groups devoted to a drivelling dissipation there is almost always one man who seems to have condescended to his company: one man who, while he can talk a foul triviality with his fellows, can also talk politics with a Socialist, or philosophy with a Catholic.

‘Tremendous Trifles.’

JUNE 21ST
Mankind has in nearly all places and periods seen that there is a soul and a body as plainly as that there is a sun and moon. But because a narrow Protestant sect called Materialists declared for a short time that there was no soul, another narrow Protestant sect called Christian Scientist is now maintaining that there is no body.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

JUNE 22ND

Those thinkers who cannot believe in any gods often assert that the love of humanity would be in itself sufficient for them; and so, perhaps, it would, if they had it.

‘Tremendous Trifles.’

JUNE 23RD

Only the Christian Church can offer any rational objection to a complete confidence in the rich. For she has maintained from the beginning that the danger was not in man’s environment, but in man. Further, she has maintained that if we come to talk of a dangerous environment, the most dangerous of all is the commodious environment. I know that the most modern manufacture has been really occupied in trying to produce an abnormally large needle. I know that the most recent biologists have been chiefly anxious to discover a very small camel. But if we diminish the camel to his smallest, or open the eye of the needle to its largest: if, in short, we assume the words of Christ to have meant the very least that they could mean, His words must at the very least mean this—that rich men are not very likely to be morally trustworthy.

‘Orthodoxy.’

JUNE 24TH

MIDSUMMER DAY

O well for him that loves the sun,
That sees the heaven-race ridden or run,
The splashing seas of sunset won,
And shouts for victory.
God made the sun to crown his head,
And when death’s dart at last is sped,
At least it will not find him dead,
And pass the carrion by.
O ill for him that loves the sun;
Shall the sun stoop for anyone?
Shall the sun weep for hearts undone
Or heavy souls that pray?
Not less for us and everyone
Was that white web of splendour spun;
O well for him who loves the sun
Although the sun should slay.

‘Ballad of the Sun.’

JUNE 25TH

A man’s good work is effected by doing what he does: a woman’s by being what she is.

‘Robert Browning.’

JUNE 26TH

If the old priests forced a statement on mankind, at least they previously took some trouble to make it lucid. It has been left for the modern mobs of Anglicans and Nonconformists to persecute for a doctrine without even stating it.

‘Heretics.’

JUNE 27TH

From the time of the first fairy tales men had always believed ideally in equality; they had always thought that something ought to be done, if anything could be done, to redress the balance between Cinderella and the ugly sisters. The irritating thing about the French was not that they said this ought to be done: everybody said that. The irritating thing about the French was that they did it.

Introduction to ‘Hard Times.’

JUNE 28TH

My Lady clad herself in grey,
That caught and clung about her throat;
Then all the long grey winter-day
On me a living splendour smote;
And why grey palmers holy are,
And why grey minsters great in story,
And grey skies ring the morning star,
And grey hairs are a crown of glory.
My Lady clad herself in green,
Like meadows where the wind-waves pass;
Then round my spirit spread, I ween,
A splendour of forgotten grass.
Then all that dropped of stem or sod,
Hoarded as emeralds might be,
I bowed to every bush, and trod
Amid the live grass fearfully.
My Lady clad herself in blue,
Then on me, like the seer long gone,
The likeness of a sapphire grew,
The throne of him that sat thereon.
Then knew I why the Fashioner
Splashed reckless blue on sky and sea;
And ere ’twas good enough for her,
He tried it on Eternity.
Beneath the gnarled old Knowledge-tree
Sat, like an owl, the evil sage:
‘The world’s a bubble,’ solemnly
He read, and turned a second page.
‘A bubble, then, old crow,’ I cried,
‘God keep you in your weary wit!
A bubble—have you ever spied
The colours I have seen on it?’

‘A Chord of Colour.’

JUNE 29TH

ST. PETER’S DAY

When Christ at a symbolic moment was establishing His great society, He chose for its corner-stone neither the brilliant Paul nor the mystic John, but a shuffler, a snob, a coward—in a word, a man. And upon this rock He has built His Church, and the gates of Hell have not prevailed against it. All the empires and the kingdoms have failed because of this inherent and continual weakness, that they were founded by strong men and upon strong men. But this one thing—the historic Christian Church—was founded upon a weak man, and for that reason it is indestructible. For no chain is stronger than its weakest link.

‘Heretics.’
JUNE 30TH

There are thrilling moments, doubtless, for the spectator, the amateur, and the æsthete; but there is one thrill that is known only to the soldier who fights for his own flag, to the ascetic who starves himself for his own illumination, to the lover who makes finally his own choice. And it is this transfiguring self-discipline that makes the vow a truly sane thing. It must have satisfied even the giant hunger of the soul of a lover or a poet to know that in consequence of some one instant of decision that strange chain would hang for centuries in the Alps among the silences of stars and snows. All around us is the city of small sins, abounding in backways and retreats; but surely, sooner or later, the towering flame will rise from the harbour announcing that the reign of the cowards is over and a man is burning his ships.

‘The Defendant.’
JULY

JULY 1ST

The average man votes below himself; he votes with half a mind or a hundredth part of one. A man ought to vote with the whole of himself, as he worships or gets married. A man ought to vote with his head and heart, his soul and stomach, his eye for faces and his ear for music; also (when sufficiently provoked) with his hands and feet. If he has ever seen a fine sunset, the crimson colour of it should creep into his vote. If he has ever heard splendid songs, they should be in his ears when he makes the mystical cross. But as it is, the difficulty with English democracy at all elections is that it is something less than itself. The question is not so much whether only a minority of the electorate votes. The point is that only a minority of the voter votes.

‘Tremendous Trifles.’

JULY 2ND

Modern masters of science are much impressed with the need of beginning all inquiry with a fact. The ancient masters of religion were quite equally impressed with that necessity. They began with the fact of sin—a fact as practical as potatoes. Whether or not man could be washed in miraculous waters, there was no doubt at any rate that he wanted washing. But certain religious leaders in London, not mere Materialists, have begun in our day not to deny the highly disputable water, but to deny the indisputable dirt. Certain new theologians dispute original sin, which is the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved. Some followers of the Reverend R. J. Campbell, in their almost too fastidious spirituality, admit divine sinlessness, which they cannot see even in their dreams. But they essentially deny human sin, which they can see in the street. The strongest saints and the strongest sceptics alike took positive evil as the starting-point of their argument. If it be true (as it certainly is) that a man can feel exquisite happiness in skinning a cat, then the religious philosopher can only draw one of two deductions: he must either deny the existence of God, as all Atheists do, or he must deny the present union between God and man, as all Christians do. The new theologians seem to think it a highly rationalistic solution to deny the cat.
‘Orthodoxy.’

JULY 3RD

The love of those whom we do not know is quite as eternal a sentiment as the love of those whom we do know. In our friends the richness of life is proved to us by what we have gained; in the faces in the street the richness of life is proved to us by a hint of what we have lost.

‘Robert Browning.’

JULY 4TH

INDEPENDENCE DAY

The old Anglo-American quarrel was much more fundamentally friendly than most Anglo-American alliances. Each nation understood the other enough to quarrel. In our time, neither nation understands itself even enough to quarrel.

Introduction to ‘American Notes.’

JULY 5TH

It is the one great weakness of journalism as a picture of our modern existence, that it must be a picture made up entirely of exceptions. We announce on flaring posters that a man has fallen off a scaffolding. We do not announce on flaring posters that a man has not fallen off a scaffolding. Yet this latter fact is fundamentally more exciting, as indicating that the moving tower of terror and mystery, a man, is still abroad upon the earth. That the man has not fallen off a scaffolding is really more sensational; and it is also some thousand times more common. But journalism cannot reasonably be expected thus to insist upon the permanent miracles. Busy editors cannot be expected to put on their posters ‘Mr. Wilkinson Still Safe,’ or ‘Mr. Jones of Worthing, Not Dead Yet.’ They cannot announce the happiness of mankind at all. They cannot describe all the forks that are not stolen, or all the marriages that are not dissolved. Hence the complete picture they give of life is of necessity fallacious: they can only represent what is unusual. However democratic they may be, they are only concerned with the minority.

‘The Ball and the Cross.’
JULY 6TH

Happy, who like Ulysses or that lord
That raped the fleece, returning full and sage,
With usage and the world’s wide reason stored,
With his own kin can wait the end of age.
When shall I see, when shall I see, God knows!
My little village smoke; or pass the door,
The old dear door of that unhappy house
That is to me a kingdom and much more?
Mightier to me the house my fathers made
Than your audacious heads, O Halls of Rome!
More than immortal marbles undecayed,
The thin sad slates that cover up my home;
More than your Tiber is my Loire to me,
Than Palatine my little Lyré there;
And more than all the winds of all the sea
The quiet kindness of the Angevin air.

Translation from ‘Du Bellay.’

JULY 7TH

It is a great mistake to suppose that love unites and unifies men. Love diversifies them, because love is directed towards individuality. The thing that really unites men and makes them like to each other is hatred. Thus, for instance, the more we love Germany the more pleased we shall be that Germany should be something different from ourselves, should keep her own ritual and conviviality and we ours. But the more we hate Germany the more we shall copy German guns and German fortifications in order to be armed against Germany. The more modern nations detest each other the more meekly they follow each other; for all competition is in its nature only a furious plagiarism.

‘Charles Dickens.’

JULY 8TH

The temporary decline of theology had involved the neglect of philosophy and all fine thinking, and Bernard Shaw had to find shaky justifications in Schopenhauer for the sons of God shouting for joy. He called it the Will to Live—a phrase invented by Prussian professors who would like to exist but can’t.

‘George Bernard Shaw.’
JULY 9TH

There are only two kinds of social structure conceivable—personal government and impersonal government. If my anarchic friends will not have rules, they will have rulers. Preferring personal government, with its tact and flexibility, is called Royalism. Preferring impersonal government, with its dogmas and definitions, is called Republicanism. Objecting broad-mindedly both to kings and creeds is called Bosh—at least, I know no more philosophic word for it.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

JULY 10TH

Now, I have no particular objection to people who take the gilt off the gingerbread: if only for this excellent reason—that I am much fonder of gingerbread than I am of gilt. But there are some objections to this task when it becomes a crusade or an obsession. One of them is this: that people who have really scraped the gilt off the gingerbread generally waste the rest of their lives in attempting to scrape the gilt off gigantic lumps of gold. Such has too often been the case with Shaw. He can, if he likes, scrape the romance off the armaments of Europe or the party system of Great Britain; but he cannot scrape the romance off love or military valour, because it is all romance, and three thousand miles thick.

‘George Bernard Shaw.’

JULY 11TH

‘The Church is not a thing like the Athenæum Club,’ he cried. ‘If the Athenæum Club lost all its members, the Athenæum Club would dissolve and cease to exist. But when we belong to the Church we belong to something which is outside all of us: which is outside everything you talk about, outside the Cardinals and the Pope. They belong to it, but it does not belong to them. If we all fell dead suddenly, the Church would still somehow exist in God.’

‘The Ball and the Cross.’

JULY 12TH

Of all conceivable forms of enlightenment the worst is what these people call the
Inner Light. Of all horrible religions the most horrible is the worship of the god within. Anyone who knows anybody knows how it would work; anyone who knows anyone from the Higher Thought Centre knows how it does work. That Jones shall worship the god within him turns out ultimately to mean that Jones shall worship Jones. Let Jones worship the sun or moon—anything rather than the Inner Light; let Jones worship cats or crocodiles, if he can find any in his street, but not the god within. Christianity came into the world, firstly, in order to assert with violence that a man had not only to look inwards, but to look outwards, to behold with astonishment and enthusiasm a divine company and a divine captain. The only fun of being a Christian was that a man was not left alone with the Inner Light, but definitely recognized an outer light, fair as the sun, clear as the moon, terrible as an army with banners.

‘Orthodoxy.’

JULY 13TH

The slum novelist gains his effects by describing the same grey mist as draping the dingy factory and the dingy tavern. But to the man he is supposed to be studying there must be exactly the same difference between the factory and the tavern that there is to a middle-class man between a late night at the office and a supper at Pagani’s.

‘Heretics.’

JULY 14TH

THE FALL OF THE BASTILLE

The destruction of the Bastille was not a reform: it was something more important than a reform. It was an iconoclasm; it was the breaking of a stone image. The people saw the building like a giant looking at them with a score of eyes, and they struck at it as at a carved face. For of all the shapes in which that immense illusion called Materialism can terrify the soul, perhaps the most oppressive is that of the big building. Man feels like a fly, an accident in the thing he has himself made. It requires a violent effort of the spirit to remember that man made this confounding thing and man could unmake it. Therefore the mere act of the ragged people in the street taking and destroying a huge public building has a spiritual, and a ritual, meaning far beyond its immediate political
results. It is a religious service. If, for instance, the Socialists were numerous or courageous enough to capture and smash up the Bank of England you might argue for ever about the inutility of the act, and how it really did not touch the root of the economic problem in the correct manner. But mankind would never forget it. It would change the world.

‘Tremendous Trifles.’

JULY 15TH

ST. SWITHIN’S DAY

Only in our romantic country do you have the romantic thing called weather—beautiful and changeable as a woman. The great English landscape painters (neglected now, like everything that is English) have this salient distinction, that the weather is not the atmosphere of their pictures: it is the subject of their pictures. They paint portraits of the weather. The weather sat to Constable; the weather posed for Turner—and the deuce of a pose it was. In the English painters the climate is the hero; in the case of Turner a swaggering and fighting hero, melodramatic but magnificent. The tall and terrible protagonist robed in rain, thunder, and sunlight, fills the whole canvas and the whole foreground. Rich colours actually look more luminous on a grey day, because they are seen against a dark background, and seem to be burning with a lustre of their own. Against a dim sky all flowers look like fireworks. There is something strange about them at once vivid and secret, like flowers traced in fire in the grim garden of a witch. A bright blue sky is necessarily the high light in the picture, and its brightness kills all the bright blue flowers. But on a grey day the larkspur looks like fallen heaven; the red daisies are really the lost-red eyes of day, and the sunflower is the vice-regent of the sun. Lastly, there is this value about the colour that men call colourless: that it suggests in some way the mixed and troubled average of existence, especially in its quality of strife and expectation and promise. Grey is a colour that always seems on the eve of changing to some other colour; of brightening into blue, or blanching into white or breaking into green or gold. So we may be perpetually reminded of the indefinite hope that is in doubt itself; and when there is grey weather on our hills or grey hair on our heads perhaps they may still remind us of the morning.

‘Daily News.’
JULY 16TH

It is true that all sensible women think all studious men mad. It is true, for the matter of that, all women of any kind think all men of any kind mad. But they do not put it in telegrams any more than they wire to you that grass is green or God all-merciful. These things are truisms and often private ones at that.

‘The Club of Queer Trades.’

JULY 17TH

You may come to think a blow bad because it humiliates. You may come to think murder wrong because it is violent, and not because it is unjust.

‘The Ball and the Cross.’

JULY 18TH

THACKERAY BORN

In all things his great spirit had the grandeur and the weakness which belonged to the England of his time—an England splendidly secure and free, and yet (perhaps for that reason) provincial and innocent. He had nothing of the doctrinal quality of the French and Germans. He was not one who made up his mind, but one who let his mind make him up. He lay naturally open to all noble influences flowing around him; but he never bestirred himself to seek those that were not flowing or that flowed in opposite directions. Thus, for instance, he really loved liberty, as only a novelist can love it, a man mainly occupied with the variety and vivacity of men. But he could not see the cause of liberty except where the Victorian English saw it; he could not see it in the cause of Irish liberty (which was exactly like the cause of Polish or Italian liberty, except that it was led by much more religious and responsible men), and he made the Irish characters the object of much innocent and rather lumbering satire. But this was not his mistake, but the mistake of the atmosphere, and he was a sublime emotional Englishman, who lived by atmosphere. He was a great sensitive. The comparison between him and Dickens is commonly as clumsy and unreasonable as a comparison between Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade or Bulwer Lytton and Anthony Trollope. But the comparison really has this element of actuality: that Dickens was above all things creative; Thackeray was above all things
receptive. There is no sense in talking about truth in the matter: both are modes of truth. If you like to put it so: the world imposed on Thackeray, and Dickens imposed on the world. But it could be put more truly by saying that Thackeray represents, in that gigantic parody called genius, the spirit of the Englishman in repose. This spirit is the idle embodiment of all of us; by his weaknesses we shall fail and by his enormous sanities we shall endure.

Introduction to ‘Thackeray.’

JULY 19TH

The Marchioness really has all the characteristics, the entirely heroic characteristics, which make a woman respected by a man. She is female—that is, she is at once incurably candid and incurably loyal, she is full of terrible common sense, she expects little pleasure for herself and yet she can enjoy bursts of it; above all, she is physically timid and yet she can face anything.

Introduction to ‘The Old Curiosity Shop.’

JULY 20TH

Democracy in its human sense is not arbitrament by the majority; it is not even arbitrament by everybody. It can be more nearly defined as arbitrament by anybody: I mean that it rests on that club-habit of taking a total stranger for granted, of assuming certain things to be inevitably common to yourself and him. Only the things that anybody may be presumed to hold have the full authority of democracy. Look out of the window and notice the first man who walks by. The Liberals may have swept England with an overwhelming majority; but you would not stake a button that the man is a Liberal. The Bible may be read in all schools and respected in all law courts; but you would not bet a straw that he believes in the Bible. But you would bet your week’s wages, let us say, that he believes in wearing clothes. You would bet that he believes that physical courage is a fine thing, or that parents have authority over children. Of course, he might be the millioneth man who does not believe these things; if it comes to that, he might be the Bearded Lady dressed up as a man. But these prodigies are quite a different thing from any mere calculation of numbers. People who hold these views are not a minority, but a monstrosity. But of these universal dogmas that have full democratic authority the only test is this test of anybody: what you would observe before any new-comer in a tavern—that is the
real English law. The first man you see from the window, he is the King of England.
‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

JULY 21ST

Many clever men like you have trusted to civilization. Many clever Babylonians, many clever Egyptians, many clever men at the end of Rome. Can you tell me, in a world that is flagrant with the failures of civilization, what there is particularly immortal about yours?
‘The Napoleon of Notting Hill.’

JULY 22ND

It is a sufficient proof that we are not an essentially democratic state that we are always wondering what we shall do with the poor. If we were democrats, we should be wondering what the poor will do with us. With us the governing class is always saying to itself, ‘What laws shall we make?’ In a purely democratic state it would be always saying, ‘What laws can we obey?’
‘Heretics.’

JULY 23RD

No two ideals could be more opposite than a Christian saint in a Gothic cathedral and a Buddhist saint in a Chinese temple. The opposition exists at every point; but perhaps the shortest statement of it is that the Buddhist saint always has his eyes shut, while the Christian saint always has them very wide open. The Buddhist saint always has a very sleek and harmonious body, but his eyes are heavy and sealed with sleep. The medieval saint’s body is wasted to its crazy bones, but his eyes are frightfully alive. There cannot be any real community of spirit between forces that produced symbols so different as that. Granted that both images are extravagances, are perversions of the pure creed, it must be a real divergence which could produce such opposite extravagances. The Buddhist is looking with peculiar intentness inwards. The Christian is staring with a frantic intentness outwards.
‘Orthodoxy.’
JULY 24TH

Novels and newspapers still talk of the English aristocracy that came over with William the Conqueror. Little of our effective oligarchy is as old as the Reformation; and none of it came over with William the Conqueror. Some of the older English landlords came over with William of Orange; the rest have come over by ordinary alien immigration.

‘George Bernard Shaw.’

JULY 25TH

It is the negation of property that the Duke of Sutherland should have all the farms in one estate; just as it would be the negation of marriage if he had all our wives in one harem.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

JULY 26TH

Christianity is always out of fashion because it is always sane; and all fashions are mild insanities. When Italy is mad on art the Church seems too Puritanical; when England is mad on Puritanism the Church seems too artistic. When you quarrel with us now you class us with kingship and despotism; but when you quarrelled with us first it was because we would not accept the divine despotism of Henry VIII. The Church always seems to be behind the times, when it is really beyond the times; it is waiting till the last fad shall have seen its last summer. It keeps the key of a permanent virtue.

‘The Ball and the Cross.’

JULY 27TH

The best men of the Revolution were simply common men at their best. This is why our age can never understand Napoleon. Because he was something great and triumphant, we suppose that he must have been something extraordinary, something inhuman. Some say he was the Devil; some say he was the Superman. Was he a very, very bad man? Was he a good man with some greater moral code? We strive in vain to invent the mysteries behind that immortal mask of brass. The modern world with all its subtleness will never guess his strange
secret; for his strange secret was that he was very like other people.

‘Charles Dickens.’

**JULY 28TH**

The greatest disaster of the nineteenth century was this: that men began to use the word ‘spiritual’ as the same as the word ‘good.’ They thought that to grow in refinement and uncorporeality was to grow in virtue. When scientific evolution was announced, some feared that it would encourage mere animality. It did worse: it encouraged mere spirituality. It taught men to think that so long as they were passing from the ape they were going. But you can pass from the ape and go to the devil.

‘Orthodoxy.’

**JULY 29TH**

One of the deepest and strangest of all human moods is the mood which will suddenly strike us perhaps in a garden at night, or deep in sloping meadows, the feeling that every flower and leaf has just uttered something stupendously direct and important, and that we have by a prodigy of imbecility not heard or understood it. There is a certain poetic value, and that a genuine one, in this sense of having missed the full meaning of things. There is beauty, not only in wisdom, but in this dazed and dramatic ignorance.

‘Robert Browning.’

**JULY 30TH**

The authority of priests to absolve, the authority of popes to define, the authority even of inquisitors to terrify: these were all only dark defences erected round one central authority, more undemonstrable, more supernatural than all the authority of a man to think. We know now that this is so; we have no excuse for not knowing it. For we can hear scepticism crashing through the old ring of authorities, and at the same moment we can see reason swaying upon her throne.

‘Orthodoxy.’

**JULY 31ST**
The party system in England is an enormous and most efficient machine for preventing political conflicts.

‘George Bernard Shaw.’
AUGUST

AUGUST 1ST

A man must be orthodox upon most things, or he will never even have time to preach his own heresy.

‘George Bernard Shaw.’

AUGUST 2ND

Just as one generation could prevent the very existence of the next generation, by all entering a monastery or jumping into the sea, so one set of thinkers can in some degree prevent further thinking by teaching the next generation that there is no validity in any human thought. It is idle to talk always of the alternative of reason and faith. Reason is itself a matter of faith. It is an act of faith to assert that our thoughts have any relation to reality at all. If you are merely a sceptic, you must sooner or later ask yourself the question, ‘Why should anything go right; even observation or deduction? Why should not good logic be as misleading as bad logic? They are both movements in the brain of a bewildered ape?’ The young sceptic says, ‘I have a right to think for myself.’ But the old sceptic, the complete sceptic, says, ‘I have no right to think for myself. I have no right to think at all.’

‘Orthodoxy.’

AUGUST 3RD

Even among liars there are two classes, one immeasurably better than another. The honest liar is the man who tells the truth about his old lies; who says on Wednesday, ‘I told a magnificent lie on Monday.’ He keeps the truth in circulation; no one version of things stagnates in him and becomes an evil secret. He does not have to live with old lies; a horrible domesticity.

Introduction to ‘The Old Curiosity Shop.’

AUGUST 4TH

The only way to remember a place for ever is to live in the place for an hour; and
the only way to live in the place for an hour is to forget the place for an hour. The undying scenes we can all see, if we shut our eyes, are not the scenes we have stared at under the direction of guide-books; the scenes we see are the scenes at which we did not look at all—the scenes in which we walked when we were thinking about something else—about a sin, or a love affair, or some childish sorrow. We can see the background now because we did not see it then.

‘Charles Dickens.’

AUGUST 5TH

The keeper of a restaurant would much prefer that each customer should give his order smartly, though it were for stewed ibis or boiled elephant, rather than that each customer should sit holding his head in his hands, plunged in arithmetical calculations about how much food there can be on the premises.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

AUGUST 6TH

TRANSFIGURATION

Joy, which was the small publicity of the pagan, is the gigantic secret of the Christian. The tremendous figure which fills the Gospels towers in this respect, as in every other, above all the thinkers who ever thought themselves tall. His pathos was natural, almost casual. The Stoics, ancient and modern, were proud of concealing their tears. He never concealed His tears; He showed them plainly on His open face at any daily sight, such as the far sight of His native city. Yet He concealed something. Solemn supermen and imperial diplomats are proud of restraining their anger. He never restrained His anger. He flung furniture down the front steps of the Temple and asked men how they expected to escape the damnation of hell. Yet He restrained something. I say it with reverence; there was in that shattering personality a thread that must be called shyness. There was something that He hid from all men when He went up a mountain to pray. There was something that He covered by abrupt silence or impetuous isolation. There was some one thing that was too great for God to show us when He walked upon our earth, and I have sometimes fancied that it was His mirth.

‘Orthodoxy.’
AUGUST 7TH

Imperialism is foreign, Socialism is foreign, Militarism is foreign, Education is foreign, strictly even Liberalism is foreign. But Radicalism was our own; as English as the hedge-rows.

‘Charles Dickens.’

AUGUST 8TH

A cloud was on the mind of men, and wailing went the weather,
Yea, a sick cloud upon the soul when we were boys together.
Science announced nonentity and art admired decay;
The world was old and ended: but you and I were gay.
Round us in antic order their crippled vices came—
Lust that had lost its laughter, fear that had lost its shame.
Like the white lock of Whistler, that lit our aimless gloom,
Men showed their own white feather as proudly as a plume.
Life was a flower that faded, and death a drone that stung;
The world was very old indeed when you and I were young!
They twisted even decent sins to shapes not to be named:
Men were ashamed of honour; but we were not ashamed.
Weak if we were and foolish, not thus we failed, not thus;
When that black Baal blocked the heavens he had no hymns from us.
Children we were—our forts of sand were even as weak as we,
High as they went we piled them up to break that bitter sea.
Fools as we were in motley, all jangled and absurd,
When all church bells were silent, our cap and bells were heard.

‘The Man who was Thursday.’

AUGUST 9TH

In practice no one is mad enough to legislate or educate upon dogmas of physical inheritance; and even the language of the thing is rarely used except for special modern purposes—such as the endowment of research or the oppression of the poor.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

AUGUST 10TH

THE FALL OF THE FRENCH MONARCHY
We, the modern English, cannot easily understand the French Revolution, because we cannot easily understand the idea of a bloody battle for pure common sense; we cannot understand common sense in arms and conquering. The French feeling—the feeling at the back of the Revolution—was that the more sensible a man was, the more you must look out for slaughter.

‘Charles Dickens.’

AUGUST 11TH

Tom Jones is still alive, with all his good and all his evil; he is walking about the streets; we meet him every day. We meet with him, we drink with him, we smoke with him, we talk with him, we talk about him. The only difference is that we have no longer the intellectual courage to write about him. We split up the supreme and central human being, Tom Jones, into a number of separate aspects. We let Mr. J. M. Barrie write about him in his good moments, and make him out better than he is. We let Zola write about him in his bad moments, and make him out much worse than he is. We let Maeterlinck celebrate those moments of spiritual panic which he knows to be cowardly; we let Mr. Rudyard Kipling celebrate those moments of brutality which he knows to be far more cowardly. We let obscene writers write about the obscenities of this ordinary man. We let puritan writers write about the purities of this ordinary man. We look through one peephole that makes men out as devils, and we call it the New Art. We look through another peephole that makes men out as angels, and we call it the New Theology. But if we pull down some dusty old books from the bookshelf, if we turn over some old mildewed leaves, and if in that obscurity and decay we find some faint traces of a tale about a complete man—such a man as is walking on the pavement outside—we suddenly pull a long face, and we call it the coarse morals of a bygone age.

‘All Things Considered.’

AUGUST 12TH

Self is the Gorgon. Vanity sees it in the mirror of other men and lives. Pride studies it for itself and is turned to stone.

‘Heretics.’

AUGUST 13TH
You complain of Catholicism for setting up an ideal of virginity; it did nothing of the kind. The whole human race set up an ideal of virginity; the Greeks in Athene, the Romans in the Vestal fire, set up an ideal of virginity. What then is your real quarrel with Catholicism? Your quarrel can only be, your quarrel really only is, that Catholicism has achieved an ideal of virginity; that it is no longer a mere piece of floating poetry. But if you, and a few feverish men, in top hats, running about in a street in London, choose to differ as to the ideal itself, not only from the Church, but from the Parthenon whose name means virginity, from the Roman Empire which went outwards from the virgin flame, from the whole legend and tradition of Europe, from the lion who will not touch virgins, from the unicorn who respects them, and who make up together the bearers of your own national shield, from the most living and lawless of your own poets, from Massinger, who wrote the ‘Virgin Martyr,’ from Shakespeare, who wrote ‘Measure for Measure’—if you in Fleet Street differ from all this human experience, does it never strike you that it may be Fleet Street that is wrong?

‘The Ball and the Cross.’

AUGUST 14TH

It cannot be too often repeated that all real democracy is an attempt (like that of a jolly hostess) to bring shy people out. For every practical purpose of a political state, for every practical purpose of a tea-party, he that abaseth himself must be exalted. At a tea-party it is equally obvious that he that exalteth himself must be abased, if possible without bodily violence.

‘Tremendous Trifles.’

AUGUST 15TH

THE ASSUMPTION

One instant in a still light
He saw Our Lady, then
Her dress was soft as western sky,
And she was a queen most womanly,
But she was a queen of men.
And over the iron forest
He saw Our Lady stand,
Her eyes were sad withouten art
And seven swords were in her heart,
But one was in her hand.
‘Ballad of Alfred.’

AUGUST 16TH

I am not prepared to admit that there is, or can be, properly speaking, in the world anything that is too sacred to be known. That spiritual beauty and spiritual truth are in their nature communicable and that they should be communicated, is a principle which lies at the root of every conceivable religion. Christ was crucified upon a hill, and not in a cavern, and the word Gospel itself involves the same idea as the ordinary name of a daily paper. Whenever, therefore, a poet or any similar type of man can, or conceives that he can, make all men partakers in some splendid secret of his own heart, I can imagine nothing saner and nothing manlier than his course in doing so.

‘Robert Browning.’

AUGUST 17TH

Once men sang together round a table in chorus; now one man sings alone, for the absurd reason that he can sing better. If scientific civilization goes on (which is most improbable) only one man will laugh, because he can laugh better than the rest.

‘Heretics.’

AUGUST 18TH

All I have to urge is that I dislike the big Whiteley shop, and that I dislike Socialism because it will (according to Socialists) be so like that shop. It is its fulfilment, not its reversal. I do not object to Socialism, because it will revolutionize our commerce, but because it will leave it so horribly the same.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

AUGUST 19TH

In a hollow of the grey-green hills of rainy Ireland lived an old, old woman, whose uncle was always Cambridge at the Boat Race. But in her grey-green hollows, she knew nothing of this; she didn’t know that there was a Boat Race. Also she did not know that she had an uncle. She had heard of nobody at all,
except of George the First, of whom she had heard (I know not why), and in whose historical memory she put her simple trust. And by and by, in God’s good time, it was discovered that this uncle of hers was really not her uncle, and they came and told her so. She smiled through her tears, and said only, ‘Virtue is its own reward.’
   ‘The Napoleon of Notting Hill.’

AUGUST 20TH

Surely the vilest point of human vanity is exactly that; to ask to be admired for admiring what your admirers do not admire.
   Introduction to ‘Bleak House.’

AUGUST 21ST

There is more simplicity in the man who eats caviar on impulse than in the man who eats grape-nuts on principle.
   ‘Heretics.’

AUGUST 22ND

There was until lately a law forbidding a man to marry his deceased wife’s sister; yet the thing happened constantly. There was no law forbidding a man to marry his deceased wife’s scullery-maid; yet it did not happen nearly so often. It did not happen because the marriage market is managed in the spirit and by the authority of women.
   ‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

AUGUST 23RD

This world and all our powers in it are far more awful and beautiful than we ever know until some accident reminds us. If you wish to perceive that limitless felicity, limit yourself if only for a moment. If you wish to realize how fearfully and wonderfully God’s image is made, stand upon one leg. If you want to realize the splendid vision of all visible things—wink the other eye.
   ‘Tremendous Trifles.’
AUGUST 24TH

ST. BARTHOLOMEW’S DAY

The Secularist says that Christianity produced tumult and cruelty. He seems to suppose that this proves it to be bad. But it might prove it to be very good. For men commit crimes not only for bad things, far more often for good things. For no bad things can be desired quite so passionately and persistently as good things can be desired, and only very exceptional men desire very bad and unnatural things. Most crime is committed because, owing to some peculiar complication, very beautiful and necessary things are in some danger. For instance, if we wanted to abolish thieving and swindling at one blow, the best thing to do would be to abolish babies. Babies, the most beautiful things on earth, have been the excuse and origin of almost all the business brutality and financial infamy on earth. If we could abolish monogamic or romantic love, the country would be dotted with Maiden Assizes.

‘Religious Doubts of Democracy.’

AUGUST 25TH

There are only three things in the world that women do not understand; and they are Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

AUGUST 26TH

Modern Nonconformist newspapers distinguish themselves by suppressing precisely those nouns and adjectives which the founders of Nonconformity distinguished themselves by flinging at kings and queens.

‘Heretics.’

AUGUST 27TH

Many of us live publicly with featureless public puppets, images of the small public abstractions. It is when we pass our own private gate, and open our own secret door, that we step into the land of the giants.

‘Charles Dickens.’
AUGUST 28TH

With any recovery from morbidity there must go a certain healthy humiliation. There comes a certain point in such conditions when only three things are possible: first, a perpetuation of Satanic pride; secondly, tears; and third, laughter.

‘The Man who was Thursday.’

AUGUST 29TH

Did Herbert Spencer ever convince you—did he ever convince anybody—did he ever for one mad moment convince himself—that it must be to the interest of the individual to feel a public spirit? Do you believe that, if you rule your department badly, you stand any more chance, or one half of the chance, of being guillotined that an angler stands of being pulled into the river by a strong pike? Herbert Spencer refrained from theft for the same reason he refrained from wearing feathers in his hair, because he was an English gentleman with different tastes.

‘The Napoleon of Notting Hill.’

AUGUST 30TH

War is a dreadful thing; but it does prove two points sharply and unanswerably—numbers and an unnatural valour. One does discover the two urgent matters; how many rebels there are alive, and how many are ready to be dead.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

AUGUST 31ST

Carlyle said that men were mostly fools. Christianity, with a surer and more reverent realism, says that they are all fools. This doctrine is sometimes called the doctrine of original sin. It may also be described as the doctrine of the equality of men.

‘Heretics.’
SEPTEMBER

SEPTEMBER 1ST

If a modern philanthropist came to Dotheboys Hall I fear he would not employ the simple, sacred and truly Christian solution of beating Mr. Squeers with a stick. I fancy he would petition the Government to appoint a Royal Commission to inquire into Mr. Squeers. I think he would every now and then write letters to the newspapers reminding people that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, there was a Royal Commission to inquire into Mr. Squeers. I agree that he might even go the length of calling a crowded meeting in St. James’s Hall on the subject of the best policy with regard to Mr. Squeers. At this meeting some very heated and daring speakers might even go the length of alluding sternly to Mr. Squeers. Occasionally even hoarse voices from the back of the hall might ask (in vain) what was going to be done with Mr. Squeers. The Royal Commission would report about three years afterwards and would say that many things had happened which were certainly most regrettable, that Mr. Squeers was the victim of a bad system; that Mrs. Squeers was also the victim of a bad system; but that the man who sold Squeers’ cane had really acted with great indiscretion and ought to be spoken to kindly. Something like this would be what, after four years, the Royal Commission would have said; but it would not matter in the least what the Royal Commission had said, for by that time the philanthropists would be off on a new tack and the world would have forgotten all about Dotheboys Hall and everything connected with it. By that time the philanthropists would be petitioning Parliament for another Royal Commission; perhaps a Royal Commission to inquire into whether Mr. Mantalini was extravagant with his wife’s money; perhaps a commission to inquire into whether Mr. Vincent Crummies kept the Infant Phenomenon short by means of gin.

Introduction to ‘Nicholas Nickleby.’

SEPTEMBER 2ND

BATTLE OF SEDAN

The Germans have not conquered very much in history as a whole. About fifty
years ago they beat the French and fifty years before that the French very soundly beat them. If we see history as a whole there is no more doubt that the French people is the more military than there is that the German people is the more musical. Germany is a great and splendid nation; and there are millions of sensible German patriots grappling with the sins and follies which are part of her problem.

‘Illustrated London News.’

SEPTEMBER 3RD

If votes for women do not mean mobs for women they do not mean what they were meant to mean.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

SEPTEMBER 4TH

There is a notion adrift everywhere that imagination, especially mystical imagination, is dangerous to man’s mental balance. Poets are commonly spoken of as psychologically unreliable; and generally there is a vague association between wreathing laurels in your hair and sticking straws in it. Facts and history utterly contradict this view. Most of the very great poets have been not only sane, but extremely business-like; and if Shakespeare ever really held horses, it was because he was much the safest man to hold them. Imagination does not breed insanity. Exactly what does breed insanity is reason. Poets do not go mad, but chess-players do. Mathematicians go mad, and cashiers, but creative artists very seldom.

‘Orthodoxy.’

SEPTEMBER 5TH

Our modern mystics make a mistake when they wear long hair or loose ties to attract the spirits. The elves and the old gods when they revisit the earth really go straight for a dull top-hat. For it means simplicity, which the gods love.

‘Charles Dickens.’

SEPTEMBER 6TH
Women have been set free to be Bacchantes. They have been set free to be virgin martyrs; they have been set free to be witches. Do not ask them now to sink so low as the higher culture.

‘All Things Considered.’

SEPTEMBER 7TH

The sin and sorrow of despotism is not that it does not love men, but that it loves them too much and trusts them too little.

‘Robert Browning.’

SEPTEMBER 8TH

A philosopher cannot talk about any single thing, down to a pumpkin, without showing whether he is wise or foolish; but he can easily talk about everything without anyone having any views about him, beyond gloomy suspicions.

‘G. F. Watts.’

SEPTEMBER 9TH

Chattering finch and water-fly
Are not merrier than I;
Here among the flowers I lie
Laughing everlastingly.
No: I may not tell the best;
Surely, friends, I might have guessed
Death was but the good King’s jest,
It was hid so carefully.

‘The Skeleton.’

SEPTEMBER 10TH

England is still ruled by the great Barnacle family. Parliament is still ruled by the great Barnacle trinity—the solemn old Barnacle, who knew that the Circumlocution Office was a protection; the sprightly young Barnacle, who knew that it was a fraud; and the bewildered young Barnacle who knew nothing about it. From these three types our Cabinets are still exclusively recruited. People talk of the tyrannies and anomalies which Dickens denounced as things
of the past like the Star Chamber. They believe that the days of the old brutal optimism and the old brutal indifference are gone for ever. In truth, this very belief is only the continuance of the old stupid optimism and the old brutal indifference. We believe in a free England and a pure England, because we still believe in the Circumlocution Office account of this matter. Undoubtedly our serenity is widespread. We believe that England is really reformed, we believe that England is really democratic, we believe that English politics are free from corruption. But this general satisfaction of ours does not show that Dickens has beaten the Barnacles. It only shows that the Barnacles have beaten Dickens.

‘Charles Dickens.’

SEPTEMBER 11TH

When a man begins to think that the grass will not grow at night unless he lies awake to watch it, he generally ends either in an asylum or on the throne of an emperor.

‘Robert Browning.’

SEPTEMBER 12TH

Thieves respect property. They merely wish the property to become their property that they may more perfectly respect it. But philosophers dislike property as property; they wish to destroy the very idea of personal possession. Bigamists respect marriage, or they would not go through the highly ceremonial and even ritualistic formality of bigamy. But philosophers despise marriage as marriage. Murderers respect human life; they merely wish to attain a greater fullness of human life in themselves by the sacrifice of what seems to them to be lesser lives. But philosophers hate life itself, their own as much as other people’s.

‘The Man who was Thursday.’

SEPTEMBER 13TH

The lunatic is the man who lives in a small world but thinks it is a large one; he is a man who lives in a tenth of the truth, and thinks it is the whole. The madman cannot conceive any cosmos outside a certain tale or conspiracy or vision. Hence the more clearly we see the world divided into Saxons and non-Saxons, into our
splendid selves and the rest, the more certain we may be that we are slowly and quietly going mad. The more plain and satisfying our state appears, the more we may know that we are living in an unreal world. For the real world is not satisfying. The more clear become the colours and facts of Anglo-Saxon superiority, the more surely we may know we are in a dream. For the real world is not clear or plain. The real world is full of bracing bewilderments and brutal surprises. Comfort is the blessing and the curse of the English, and of Americans of the Pogram type also. With them it is a loud comfort, a wild comfort, a screaming and capering comfort; but comfort at bottom still. For there is but an inch of difference between the cushioned chamber and the padded cell.

‘Charles Dickens.’

SEPTEMBER 14TH

I never said a word against eminent men of science. What I complain of is a vague popular philosophy which supposes itself to be scientific when it is really nothing but a sort of new religion and an uncommonly nasty one. When people talked about the Fall of Man, they knew they were talking about a mystery, a thing they didn’t understand. Now they talk about the survival of the fittest: they think they do understand it, whereas they have not merely no notion, they have an elaborately false notion of what the words mean.

‘The Club of Queer Trades.’

SEPTEMBER 15TH

The only way of catching a train I have ever discovered is to miss the train before.

‘Tremendous Trifles.’

SEPTEMBER 16TH

Many people have wondered why it is that children’s stories are so full of moralizing. The reason is perfectly simple: it is that children like moralizing more than anything else, and eat it up as if it were so much jam. The reason why we, who are grown up, dislike moralizing is equally clear: it is that we have discovered how much perversion and hypocrisy can be mixed with it; we have grown to dislike morality not because morality is moral, but because morality is
so often immoral. But the child has never seen the virtues twisted into vices; the child does not know that men are not only bad from good motives, but also often good from bad motives. The child does not know that whereas the Jesuit may do evil that good may come, the man of the world often does good that evil may come. Therefore, the child has a hearty, healthy, unspoiled, and insatiable appetite for mere morality; for the mere difference between a good little girl and a bad little girl. And it can be proved by innumerable examples that when we are quite young we do like the moralizing story. Grown-up people like the “Comic Sandford and Merton,” but children like the real “Sandford and Merton.”

‘Daily News.’

SEPTEMBER 17TH

One of the few gifts that can really increase with old age is a sense of humour. That is the whole fun of belonging to an ancient civilization like our own great civilization of Europe. In my vision I see Europe still sitting on her mighty bull, the enormous and mystic mother from whom we come, who has given us everything from the ‘Iliad’ to the French Revolution. And from her awful lips I seem to hear the words:—

‘Think of me, old Mother Scrubbs,
A-joining these ‘ere toty clubs:
Fancy me deserting the pubs
At my time of life!’
‘Illustrated London News.’

SEPTEMBER 18TH

DR. JOHNSON BORN

If anyone wishes to see the real rowdy egalitarianism which is necessary (to males at least) he can find it as well as anywhere in the great old tavern disputes which come down to us in such books as Boswell’s ‘Johnson.’ It is worth while to mention that one name especially, because the modern world in its morbidity has done it a grave injustice. The demeanour of Johnson, it is said, was ‘harsh and despotic.’ It was occasionally harsh, but it was never despotic. Johnson was not in the least a despot. Johnson was a demagogue, he shouted against a shouting crowd. The very fact that he wrangled with other people is a proof that other people were allowed to wrangle with him. His very brutality was based on
the idea of an equal scrimmage like that of football. It is strictly true that he bawled and banged the table because he was a modest man. He was honestly afraid of being overwhelmed or even overlooked. Addison had exquisite manners and was the king of his company. He was polite to everybody, but superior to everybody; therefore he has been handed down for ever in the immortal insult of Pope:—

Like Cato give his little Senate laws
And sit attention to his own applause.

Johnson, so far from being king of his company, was a sort of Irish Member in his own Parliament. Addison was a courteous superior and was hated. Johnson was an insolent equal, and therefore was loved by all who knew him and handed down in a marvellous book which is one of the mere miracles of love.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

SEPTEMBER 19TH

Brave men are all vertebrates: they have their softness on the surface and their toughness in the middle.

‘Tremendous Trifles.’

SEPTEMBER 20TH

The teetotaller has chosen a most unfortunate phrase for the drunkard when he says that the drunkard is making a beast of himself. The man who drinks ordinarily makes nothing but an ordinary man of himself. The man who drinks excessively makes a devil of himself. But nothing connected with a human and artistic thing like wine can bring one nearer to the brute life of Nature. The only man who is, in the exact and literal sense of the words, making a beast of himself is the teetotaller.

‘Charles Dickens.’

SEPTEMBER 21ST

ST. MATTHEW’S DAY

The abyss between Christ and all His modern interpreters is that we have no record that He ever wrote a word, except with His finger in the sand. The whole
is the history of one continuous and sublime conversation. It was not for any pompous proclamation, it was not for any elaborate output of printed volumes; it was for a few splendid and idle words that the cross was set up on Calvary and the earth gaped, and the sun was darkened at noonday.

‘Twelve Types.’

SEPTEMBER 22ND

So with the wan waste grasses on my spear,
I ride for ever seeking after God.
My hair grows whiter than my thistle plume
And all my limbs are loose; but in my eyes
The star of an unconquerable praise:
For in my soul one hope for ever sings,
That at the next white corner of a road
My eyes may look on Him.

‘The Wild Knight.’

SEPTEMBER 23RD

An error is more menacing than a crime, for an error begets crimes. . . . A free lover is worse than a profligate. For a profligate is serious and reckless even in his shortest love; while a free lover is cautious and irresponsible even in his longest devotion.

‘Tremendous Trifles.’

SEPTEMBER 24TH

If the barricades went up in our streets and the poor became masters, I think the priests would escape, I fear the gentlemen would; but I believe the gutters would be simply running with the blood of philanthropists.

‘Charles Dickens.’

SEPTEMBER 25TH

Pessimism says that life is so short that it gives nobody a chance; religion says that life is so short that it gives everybody his final chance.

Introduction to ‘Nicholas Nickleby.’
SEPTEMBER 26TH

In short, one Pankhurst is an exception, but a thousand Pankhursts are a nightmare, a Bacchic orgy, a witch’s sabbath. For in all legends men have thought of women as sublime separately, but horrible in a crowd.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

SEPTEMBER 27TH

Individually, men may present a more or less rational appearance, eating, sleeping, and scheming. But humanity as a whole is changeful, mystical, fickle, delightful. Men are men, but Man is a woman.

‘The Napoleon of Notting Hill.’

SEPTEMBER 28TH

I should not be at all surprised if I turned one corner in Fleet Street and saw a queer looking window, turned another corner and saw a yet queerer looking lamp; I should not be surprised if I turned a third corner and found myself in Elfland.

‘Tremendous Trifles.’

SEPTEMBER 29TH

ST. MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS

Historic Christianity has always believed in the valour of St. Michael riding in front of the Church Militant, and in an ultimate and absolute pleasure, not indirect or utilitarian, the intoxication of the Spirit, the wine of the blood of God.

‘George Bernard Shaw.’

SEPTEMBER 30TH

When a man really tells the truth, the first truth he tells is that he himself is a liar.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’
OCTOBER

OCTOBER 1ST

Of all the tests by which the good citizen and strong reformer can be distinguished from the vague faddist or the inhuman sceptic, I know no better test than this—that the unreal reformer sees in front of him one certain future, the future of his fad; while the real reformer sees before him ten or twenty futures among which his country must choose, and may in some dreadful hour choose the wrong one. The true patriot is always doubtful of victory; because he knows that he is dealing with a living thing; a thing with free will. To be certain of free will is to be uncertain of success.

Introduction to ‘American Notes.’

OCTOBER 2ND

Nietzsche scales staggering mountains, but he turns up ultimately in Tibet. He sits down beside Tolstoy in the land of nothing and Nirvana. They are both helpless—one because he must not grasp anything, and the other because he must not let go of anything. The Tolstoian’s will is frozen by a Buddhistic instinct that all special actions are evil. But the Nietzscheite’s will is quite equally frozen by his view that all special actions are good; for if all special actions are good, none of them are special. They stand at the cross roads, and one hates all the roads and the other likes all the roads. The result is—well, some things are not hard to calculate. They stand at the cross roads.

‘Orthodoxy.’

OCTOBER 3RD

Modern women defend their office with all the fierceness of domesticity. They fight for desk and typewriter as for hearth and home, and develop a sort of wolfish wifehood on behalf of the invisible head of the firm. That is why they do office work so well; and that is why they ought not to do it.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

OCTOBER 4TH
ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

For most people there is a fascinating inconsistency in the position of St. Francis. He expressed in loftier and bolder language than any earthly thinker the conception that laughter is as divine as tears. He called his monks the mountebanks of God. He never forgot to take pleasure in a bird as it flashed past him, or a drop of water as it fell from his finger; he was perhaps the happiest of the sons of men. Yet this man undoubtedly founded his whole polity on the negation of what we think of the most imperious necessities; in his three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience he denied to himself, and those he loved most, property, love, and liberty. Why was it that the most large-hearted and poetic spirits in that age found their most congenial atmosphere in these awful renunciations? Why did he who loved where all men were blind, seek to blind himself where all men loved? Why was he a monk and not a troubadour? We have a suspicion that if these questions were answered we should suddenly find that much of the enigma of this sullen time of ours was answered also.

‘Twelve Types.’

OCTOBER 5TH

It is awful to think that this world which so many poets have praised has even for a time been depicted as a mantrap into which we may just have the manhood to jump. Think of all those ages through which men have had the courage to die, and then remember that we have actually fallen to talking about having the courage to live.

‘George Bernard Shaw.’

OCTOBER 6TH

We will eat and drink later. Let us remain together a little, we who have loved each other so sadly, and have fought so long. I seem to remember only centuries of heroic war, in which you were always heroes—epic on epic, iliad on iliad, and you always brothers in arms. Whether it was but recently (for Time is nothing) or at the beginning of the world, I sent you out to war. I sat in the darkness where there is not any created thing, and to you I was only a voice commanding valour and an unnatural virtue. You heard the voice in the dark and you never
heard it again. The sun in heaven denied it, the earth and sky denied it, all human wisdom denied it. And when I met you in the daylight I denied it myself. But you were men. You did not forget your secret honour, though the whole cosmos turned an engine of torture to tear it out of you.

‘The Man who was Thursday.’

OCTOBER 7TH

The truest kinship with humanity would lie in doing as humanity has always done, accepting with a sportsman-like relish the estate to which we are called, the star of our happiness, and the fortunes of the land of our birth.

‘Twelve Types.’

OCTOBER 8TH

When your father told you, walking about the garden, that bees stung or that roses smell sweet, you did not talk of taking the best out of his philosophy. When the bees stung you, you did not call it an entertaining coincidence; when the rose smelt sweet you did not say, ‘My father is a rude, barbaric symbol enshrining (perhaps unconsciously) the deep delicate truth that flowers smell.’ No, you believed your father because you had found him to be a living fountain of facts, a thing that really knew more than you; a thing that would tell you the truth to-morrow, as well as to-day.

‘Orthodoxy.’

OCTOBER 9TH

There is only one thing that it requires real courage to say, and that is a truism.

‘G. F. Watts.’

OCTOBER 10TH

Red is the most joyful and dreadful thing in the physical universe; it is the fiercest note, it is the highest light, it is the place where the walls of this world of ours wear thinnest and something beyond burns through. It glows in the blood which sustains and in the fire which destroys us, in the roses of our romance and in the awful cup of our religion. It stands for all passionate happiness, as in faith
or in first love.
    ‘Daily News.’

OCTOBER 11TH

Commonness means the quality common to the saint and the sinner, to the philosopher and the fool; and it was this that Dickens grasped and developed. In everybody there is a certain thing that loves babies, that fears death, that likes sunlight: that thing enjoys Dickens. And everybody does not mean uneducated crowds, everybody means everybody: everybody means Mrs. Meynell.
    ‘Charles Dickens.’

OCTOBER 12TH

Some of the most frantic lies on the face of life are told with modesty and restraint; for the simple reason that only modesty and restraint will save them.
    ‘Charles Dickens.’

OCTOBER 13TH

In a world without humour, the only thing to do is to eat. And how perfect an exception! How can these people strike dignified attitudes, and pretend that things matter, when the total ludicrousness of life is proved by the very method by which it is supported? A man strikes the lyre, and says, ‘Life is real, life is earnest,’ and then goes into a room and stuffs alien substances into a hole in his head.
    ‘The Napoleon of Notting Hill.’

OCTOBER 14TH

BATTLE OF HASTINGS

Gored on the Norman gonfalon
The Golden Dragon died,
We shall not wake with ballad strings
The good time of the smaller things,
We shall not see the holy kings
Ride down the Severn side.
‘Ballad of Alfred.’

OCTOBER 15TH

I am grown up, and I do not worry myself much about Zola’s immorality. The thing I cannot stand is his morality. If ever a man on this earth lived to embody the tremendous text, ‘But if the light in your body be darkness, how great is the darkness!’ it was certainly he. Great men like Ariosto, Rabelais, and Shakespeare fall in foul places, flounder in violent but venial sin, sprawl for pages, exposing their gigantic weakness, are dirty, are indefensible; and then they struggle up again and can still speak with a convincing kindness and an unbroken honour of the best things in the world: Rabelais, of the instruction of ardent and austere youth; Ariosto, of holy chivalry; Shakespeare, of the splendid stillness of mercy. But in Zola even the ideals are undesirable; Zola’s mercy is colder than justice—nay, Zola’s mercy is more bitter in the mouth than injustice. When Zola shows us an ideal training he does not take us, like Rabelais, into the happy fields of humanist learning. He takes us into the schools of inhumanist learning, where there are neither books nor flowers, nor wine nor wisdom, but only deformities in glass bottles, and where the rule is taught from the exceptions. Zola’s truth answers the exact description of the skeleton in the cupboard; that is, it is something of which a domestic custom forbids the discovery, but which is quite dead, even when it is discovered.

‘All Things Considered.’

OCTOBER 16TH

We talk in a cant phrase of the Man in the Street, but the Frenchman is the Man in the Street. As the Frenchman drinks in the street and dines in the street, so he fights in the street and dies in the street; so that the street can never be commonplace to him.

‘Tremendous Trifles.’

OCTOBER 17TH

If we wish to preserve the family we must revolutionize the nation.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’
OCTOBER 18TH

ST. LUKE’S DAY

In these days we are accused of attacking science because we want it to be scientific. Surely there is not any undue disrespect to our doctor in saying that he is our doctor, not our priest or our wife or ourself. It is not the business of the doctor to say that we must go to a watering-place; it is his affair to say that certain results of health will follow if we do go to a watering-place. After that, obviously, it is for us to judge. Physical science is like simple addition; it is either infallible or it is false. To mix science up with philosophy is only to produce a philosophy that has lost all its ideal value and a science that has lost all its practical value. I want my private physician to tell me whether this or that food will kill me. It is for my private philosopher to tell me whether I ought to be killed.

‘All Things Considered.’

OCTOBER 19TH

It was absurd to say that Waterloo was won on Eton cricket-fields. But it might have been fairly said that Waterloo was won on the village green, where clumsy boys played a very clumsy cricket. In a word, it was the average of the nation that was strong, and athletic glories do not indicate much about the average of a nation. Waterloo was not won by good cricket-players. But Waterloo was won by bad cricket-players, by a mass of men who had some minimum of athletic instincts and habits. It is a good sign in a nation, when such things are done badly. It shows that all the people are doing them. And it is a bad sign in a nation when such things are done very well, for it shows that only a few experts and eccentrics are doing them, and that the nation is merely looking on.

‘All Things Considered.’

OCTOBER 20TH

I sometimes think it is a pity that people travel in foreign countries; it narrows their minds so much.

‘Daily News.’
OCTOBER 21ST

TRAFALGAR DAY

The heroic is a fact, even when it is a fact of coincidence or of miracle; and a fact is a thing which can be admitted without being explained. But I would merely hint that there is a very natural explanation of this frightful felicity, either of phrase or action, which so many men have exhibited on so many scaffolds or battlefields. It is merely that when a man has found something which he prefers to life, he then for the first time begins to live. A promptitude of poetry opens in his soul of which our paltry experiences do not possess the key. When once he has despised this world as a mere instrument, it becomes a musical instrument, it falls into certain artistic harmonies around him. If Nelson had not worn his stars he would not have been hit. But if he had not worn his stars he would not have been Nelson; and if he had not been Nelson he might have lost the battle.

‘Daily News.’

OCTOBER 22ND

Watts proved no doubt that he was not wholly without humour by this admirable picture (“The First Oyster”). Gladstone proved that he was not wholly without humour by his reply to Mr. Chaplin, by his singing of “Doo-dah,” and by his support of a grant to the Duke of Coburg. But both men were singularly little possessed by the mood or the idea of humour. To them had been in peculiar fullness revealed the one great truth which our modern thought does not know, and which it may possibly perish through not knowing. They knew that to enjoy life means to take it seriously. There is an eternal kinship between solemnity and high spirits, and almost the very name of it is Gladstone. Its other name is Watts. They knew that not only life, but every detail of life, is most a pleasure when it is studied with the gloomiest intensity. . . . The startling cheerfulness of the old age of Gladstone, the startling cheerfulness of the old age of Watts, are both redolent of this exuberant seriousness, this uproarious gravity. They were as happy as the birds because, like the birds, they were untainted by the disease of laughter. They are as awful and philosophical as children at play: indeed, they remind us of a truth true for all of us, though capable of misunderstanding, that the great aim of a man’s life is to get into his second childhood.

‘Watts.’
OCTOBER 23RD

The foil may curve in the lunge; but there is nothing beautiful about beginning the battle with a crooked foil. So the strict aim, the strong doctrine, may give a little in the actual fight with facts; but that is no reason for beginning with a weak doctrine or a twisted aim. Do not be an opportunist; try to be theoretic at all the opportunities; fate can be trusted to do all the opportunist part of it. Do not try to bend; any more than the trees try to bend. Try to grow straight; and life will bend you.

‘Daily News.’

OCTOBER 24TH

Truth must necessarily be stranger than fiction; for fiction is the creation of the human mind and therefore congenial to it.

‘The Club of Queer Trades.’

OCTOBER 25TH

If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing badly.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

OCTOBER 26TH

It is currently said that hope goes with youth and lends to youth its wings of a butterfly; but I fancy that hope is the last gift given to man, and the only gift not given to youth. Youth is pre-eminently the period in which a man can be lyric, fanatical, poetic; but youth is the period in which a man can be hopeless. The end of every episode is the end of the world. But the power of hoping through everything, the knowledge that the soul survives its adventures, that great inspiration comes to the middle-aged. God has kept that good wine until now.

‘Charles Dickens.’

OCTOBER 27TH

We have made an empire out of our refuse; but we cannot make a nation even out of our best material. Such is the vague and half-conscious contradiction that
undoubtedly possesses the minds of great masses of the not unkindly rich. Touching the remote empire they feel a vague but vast humanitarian hope; touching the chances of small holdings or rural reconstruction in the heart of the empire they feel a doubt and a disinclination that is not untouched with despair. Their creed contains two great articles: first, that the common Englishman can get on anywhere; and second, that the common Englishman cannot get on in England.

Introduction to ‘Cottage Homes of England.’

OCTOBER 28TH

There is only one very timid sort of man that is not afraid of women.
‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

OCTOBER 29TH

I do not see ghosts; I only see their inherent probability.
‘Tremendous Trifles.’

OCTOBER 30TH

Do you see this lantern? Do you see the cross carved on it and the flame inside? You did not make it. You did not light it. Better men than you, men who could believe and obey, twisted the entrails of iron, and preserved the legend of fire. There is not a street you walk on, there is not a thread you wear, that was not made as this lantern was, by denying your philosophy of dirt and rats. You can make nothing. You can only destroy. You will destroy mankind; you will destroy the world. Let that suffice you. Yet this one old Christian lantern you shall now destroy. It shall go where your empire of apes will never have the wit to find it.
‘The Man who was Thursday.’

OCTOBER 31ST

HALLOW E’EN

If we ever get the English back on to the English land they will become again a
religious people, if all goes well, a superstitious people. The absence from modern life of both the higher and the lower forms of faith is largely due to a divorce from nature and the trees and clouds. If we have no more turnip ghosts it is chiefly from the lack of turnips.

‘Heretics.’
NOVEMBER

ALL SAINTS’ DAY

You cannot deny that it is perfectly possible that to-morrow morning in Ireland or in Italy there might appear a man not only as good but good in exactly the same way as St. Francis of Assisi. Very well; now take the other types of human virtue: many of them splendid. The English gentleman of Elizabeth was chivalrous and idealistic. But can you stand still in this meadow and be an English gentleman of Elizabeth? The austere republican of the eighteenth century, with his stern patriotism and his simple life, was a fine fellow. But have you ever seen him? Have you ever seen an austere republican? Only a hundred years have passed and that volcano of revolutionary truth and valour is as cold as the mountains of the moon. And so it will be with the ethics which are buzzing down Fleet Street at this instant as I speak. What phrase would inspire a London clerk or workman just now? Perhaps that he is a son of the British Empire on which the sun never sets; perhaps that he is a prop of his Trades Union, or a class-conscious proletarian something or other; perhaps merely that he is a gentleman, when he obviously is not. Those names and notions are all honourable, but how long will they last? Empires break; industrial conditions change; the suburbs will not last for ever. What will remain? I will tell you: the Catholic saint will remain.

‘The Ball and the Cross.’

NOVEMBER 2ND

ALL SOULS’ DAY

There are two things in which all men are manifestly and unmistakably equal. They are not equally clever or equally muscular or equally fat, as the sages of the modern reaction (with piercing insight) perceive. But this is a spiritual certainty, that all men are tragic. And this again is an equally sublime spiritual certainty, that all men are comic.

‘Charles Dickens.’
NOVEMBER 3RD

You cannot love a thing without wanting to fight for it.
   Introduction to ‘Nicholas Nickleby.’

NOVEMBER 4TH

The modern philosopher had told me again and again that I was in the right place, and I had still felt depressed even in acquiescence. But I had heard that I was in the wrong place, and my soul sang for joy, like a bird in spring. The knowledge found out and illuminated forgotten chambers in the dark house of infancy. I knew now why grass had always seemed to me as queer as the green beard of a giant, and why I could feel homesick at home.
   ‘Orthodoxy.’

NOVEMBER 5TH

GUY FAWKES’ DAY

Guy Fawkes’ Day is not only in some rude sense a festival, and in some rude sense a religious festival; it is also, what is supremely symbolic and important, a winter religious festival. Here the 5th of November, which celebrates a paltry Christian quarrel, has a touch of the splendour of the 25th of December, which celebrates Christianity itself. Dickens and all the jolly English giants who write of the red firelight are grossly misunderstood in this matter. Prigs call them coarse and materialistic because they write about the punch and plum pudding of winter festivals. The prigs do not see that if these writers were really coarse and materialistic they would not write about winter feasts at all. Mere materialists would write about summer and the sun. The whole point of winter pleasure is that it is a defiant pleasure, a pleasure armed and at bay. The whole point is in the fierce contrast between the fire and wine within and the roaring rains outside. And some part of the sacredness of firelight we may allow to fireworks.
   Article in ‘The Observer.’

NOVEMBER 6TH

What we are looking at is not the boyhood of free thought: it is the old age and
ultimate dissolution of free thought. It is vain for bishops and pious big wigs to discuss what things will happen if wild scepticism runs its course. It has run its course. It is vain for eloquent atheists to talk of the great truths that will be revealed if once we see free thought begin. We have seen it end. It has no more questions to ask; it has questioned itself. You cannot call up any wilder vision than a city in which men ask themselves if they have any selves. You cannot fancy a more sceptical world than that in which men doubt if there is a world.

‘Orthodoxy.’

NOVEMBER 7TH

A man ought to eat because he has a good appetite to satisfy, and emphatically not because he has a large frame to sustain. A man ought to take exercise not because he is too fat, but because he loves foils or horses or high mountains, and loves them for their own sake. And a man ought to marry because he has fallen in love, and emphatically not because the world requires to be populated. The food will really renovate his tissues as long as he is not thinking about his tissues. The exercise will really get him into training so long as he is thinking about something else. And the marriage will really stand some chance of producing a generous-blooded generation if it had its origin in its own natural and generous excitement. It is the first law of health that our necessities should not be accepted as necessities; they should be accepted as luxuries. Let us, then, be careful about the small things, such as a scratch or a slight illness, or anything that can be managed with care. But in the name of all sanity, let us be careless about the important things, such as marriage, or the fountain of our very life will fail.

‘Heretics.’

NOVEMBER 8TH

If there be any value in scaling the mountains, it is only that from them one can behold the plains.

‘Daily News.’

NOVEMBER 9TH

LORD MAYOR’S DAY
I pressed some little way farther through the throng of people, and caught a glimpse of some things that are never seen in Fleet Street. I mean real green which is like the grass in the glaring sun, and real blue that is like the burning sky in another quarter of the world, and real gold that is like fire that cannot be quenched, and real red that is like savage roses and the wine that is the blood of God. Nor was it a contemptible system of ideas that was supposed to be depicted by these colours of flags and shields and shining horsemen. It was at least supposed to be England, which made us all; it was at least supposed to be London, which made me and better men. I at least am not so made that I can make sport of such symbols. There in whatever ungainly procession, there on whatever ugly shields, there was the cross of St. George and the sword of St. Paul. Even if all men should go utterly away from everything that is symbolized, the last symbol will impress them. If no one should be left in the world except a million open malefactors and one hypocrite, that hypocrite will still remind them of holiness.

‘Daily News.’

NOVEMBER 10TH

Old happiness is grey as we
And we may still outstrip her;
If we be slippered pantaloons
O let us hunt the slipper!
The old world glows with colours clear,
And if, as saith the saint,
The world is but a painted show,
O let us lick the paint!
Far, far behind are morbid hours
And lonely hearts that bleed;
Far, far behind us are the days
When we were old indeed.
Behold the simple sum of things
Where, in one splendour spun,
The stars go round the Mulberry Bush,
The Burning Bush, the Sun.

‘Grey Beards at Play.’

NOVEMBER 11TH

A man (of a certain age) may look into the eyes of his lady-love to see that they
are beautiful. But no normal lady will allow that young man to look into her eyes to see whether they are beautiful. The same variety and idiosyncrasy has been generally observed in gods. Praise them; or leave them alone; but do not look for them unless you know they are there. Do not look for them unless you want them.

‘All Things Considered.’

NOVEMBER 12TH

Likelier across these flats afar,
These sulky levels smooth and free,
The drums shall crash a waltz of war
And Death shall dance with Liberty;
Likelier the barricades shall blare
Slaughter below and smoke above,
And death and hate and hell declare
That men have found a thing to love.

‘The Napoleon of Notting Hill.’

NOVEMBER 13TH

Everything is military in the sense that everything depends upon obedience. There is no perfectly epicurean corner; there is no perfectly irresponsible place. Everywhere men have made the way for us with sweat and submission. We may fling ourselves into a hammock in a fit of divine carelessness. But we are glad that the net-maker did not make the net in a fit of divine carelessness. We may jump upon a child’s rocking-horse for a joke. But we are glad that the carpenter did not leave the legs of it unglued for a joke.

‘Heretics.’

NOVEMBER 14TH

I will ride upon the Nightmare; but she shall not ride on me.

‘Daily News.’

NOVEMBER 15TH

A great man of letters or any great artist is symbolic without knowing it. The
things he describes are types because they are truths. Shakespeare may or may
not have ever put it to himself that Richard the Second was a philosophical
symbol; but all good criticism must necessarily see him so. It may be a
reasonable question whether an artist should be allegorical. There can be no
doubt among sane men that a critic should be allegorical.

Introduction to ‘Great Expectations.’

NOVEMBER 16TH

When society is in rather a futile fuss about the subjection of women, will no one
say how much every man owes to the tyranny and privilege of women, to the
fact that they alone rule education until education becomes futile? For a boy is
only sent to be taught at school when it is too late to teach him anything. The
real thing has been done already, and thank God it is nearly always done by
women. Every man is womanized, merely by being born. They talk of the
masculine woman; but every man is a feminized man. And if ever men walk to
Westminster to protest against this female privilege, I shall not join their
procession.

‘Orthodoxy.’

NOVEMBER 17TH

Seriousness is not a virtue. It would be a heresy, but a much more sensible
heresy, to say that seriousness is a vice. It is really a natural trend or lapse into
taking one’s self gravely, because it is the easiest thing to do. It is much easier to
write a good Times leading article than a good joke in Punch. For solemnity
flows out of men naturally, but laughter is a leap. It is easy to be heavy: hard to
be light. Satan fell by the force of gravity.

‘Orthodoxy.’

NOVEMBER 18TH

Yes, you are right. I am afraid of him. Therefore I swear by God that I will seek
out this man whom I fear until I find him and strike him on the mouth. If heaven
were his throne and the earth his footstool I swear that I would pull him down. . .
. Because I am afraid of him; and no man should leave in the universe anything
of which he is afraid.
'The Man who was Thursday.'

NOVEMBER 19TH

Under all this vast illusion of the cosmopolitan planet, with its empires and its Reuter’s Agency, the real life of man goes on concerned with this tree or that temple, with this harvest or that drinking-song, totally uncomprehended, totally untouched. And it watches from its splendid parochialism, possibly with a smile of amusement, motor-car civilization going its triumphant way, outstripping time, consuming space, seeing all and seeing nothing, roaring on at last to the capture of the solar system, only to find the sun cockney and the stars suburban.

‘Heretics.’

NOVEMBER 20TH

Every detail points to something, certainly, but generally to the wrong thing. Facts point in all directions, it seems to me, like the thousands of twigs on a tree. It is only the life of the tree that has unity and goes up—only the green blood that springs, like a fountain, at the stars.

‘The Club of Queer Trades.’

NOVEMBER 21ST

Shallow romanticists go away in trains and stop in places called Hugmy-in-the-Hole, or Bumps-on-the-Puddle. And all the time they could, if they liked, go and live at a place with the dim, divine name of St. John’s Wood. I have never been to St. John’s Wood. I dare not. I should be afraid of the innumerable night of firtrees, afraid to come upon a blood-red cup and the beating of the wings of the eagle. But all these things can be imagined by remaining reverently in the Harrow train.

‘The Napoleon of Notting Hill.’

NOVEMBER 22ND

Giants, as in the wise old fairy-tales, are vermin. Supermen, if not good men, are vermin.

‘Heretics.’
NOVEMBER 23RD

It is part of that large and placid lie that the rationalists tell when they say that Christianity arose in ignorance and barbarism. Christianity arose in the thick of a brilliant and bustling cosmopolitan civilization. Long sea voyages were not so quick, but were quite as incessant as to-day; and though in the nature of things Christ had not many rich followers, it is not unnatural to suppose that He had some. And a Joseph of Arimathea may easily have been a Roman citizen with a yacht that could visit Britain. The same fallacy is employed with the same partisan motive in the case of the Gospel of St. John; which critics say could not have been written by one of the first few Christians because of its Greek transcendentalism and its Platonic tone. I am no judge of the philology, but every human being is a divinely appointed judge of the philosophy: and the Platonic tone seems to me to prove nothing at all.

‘Daily News.’

NOVEMBER 24TH

Sometimes the best business of an age is to resist some alien invasion; sometimes to preach practical self-control in a world too self-indulgent and diffuse; sometimes to prevent the growth in the state of great new private enterprises that would poison or oppress it. Above all, it may happen that the highest task of a thinking citizen may be to do the exact opposite of the work the Radicals had to do. It may be his highest duty to cling on to every scrap of the past that he can find, if he feels that the ground is giving way beneath him and sinking into mere savagery and forgetfulness of all human culture.

Introduction to ‘A Child’s History of England.’

NOVEMBER 25TH

Science in the modern world has many uses; its chief use, however, is to provide long words to cover the errors of the rich.

‘Heretics.’

NOVEMBER 26TH

We talk of art as something artificial in comparison with life. But I sometimes
fancy that the very highest art is more real than life itself. At least this is true: that in proportion as passions become real they become poetical; the lover is always trying to be the poet. All real energy is an attempt at harmony and a high swing of rhythm; and if we were only real enough we should all talk in rhyme. However this may be, it is unquestionable in the case of great public affairs. Whenever you have real practical politics you have poetical politics. Whenever men have succeeded in wars they have sung war-songs; whenever you have the useful triumph you have also the useless trophy.

But the thing is more strongly apparent exactly where the great Fabian falls foul of it—in the open scenes of history and the actual operation of events. The things that actually did happen all over the world are precisely the things which he thinks could not have happened in Galilee, the artistic isolations, the dreadful dialogues in which each speaker was dramatic, the prophecies flung down like gauntlets, the high invocations of history, the marching and mounting excitement of the story, the pulverizing and appropriate repartees. These things do happen; they have happened; they are attested, in all the cases where the soul of man had become poetic in its very peril. At every one of its important moments the most certain and solid history reads like an historical novel.

‘Daily News.’

NOVEMBER 27TH

Anyone could easily excuse the ill-humour of the poor. But great masses of the poor have not even any ill-humour to be excused. Their cheeriness is startling enough to be the foundation of a miracle play; and certainly is startling enough to be the foundation of a romance.

Introduction to ‘Christmas Stories.’

NOVEMBER 28TH

Lo! I am come to autumn,
When all the leaves are gold;
Grey hairs and golden leaves cry out
The year and I are old.
In youth I sought the prince of men
Captain in cosmic wars.
Our Titan even the weeds would show
Defiant, to the stars.
But now a great thing in the street
Seems any human nod,
Where shift in strange democracy
The million masks of God.
In youth I sought the golden flower
Hidden in wood or wold,
But I am come to autumn,
When all the leaves are gold.

‘The Wild Knight.’

NOVEMBER 29TH

There is a noble instinct for giving the right touch of beauty to common and necessary things, but the things that are so touched are the ancient things, the things that always, to some extent, commended themselves to the lover of beauty. The spirit of William Morris has not seized hold of the century and made its humblest necessities beautiful. And this was because, with all his healthiness and energy, he had not the supreme courage to face the ugliness of things; Beauty shrank from the Beast and the fairy tale had a different ending.

‘Twelve Types.’

NOVEMBER 30TH

ST. ANDREW’S DAY

I am quite certain that Scotland is a nation; I am quite certain that nationality is the key of Scotland; I am quite certain that all our success with Scotland has been due to the fact that we have in spirit treated it as a nation. I am quite certain that Ireland is a nation. I am quite certain that nationality is the key of Ireland; I am quite certain that all our failure in Ireland arose from the fact that we would not in spirit treat it as a nation. It would be difficult to find, even among the innumerable examples that exist, a stronger example of the immensely superior importance of sentiment, to what is called practicality, than this case of the two sister nations. It is not that we have encouraged a Scotchman to be rich; it is not that we have encouraged a Scotchman to be active; it is not that we have encouraged a Scotchman to be free. It is that we have quite definitely encouraged a Scotchman to be Scotch.

‘All Things Considered.’
DECEMBER

DECEMBER 1ST

In this world of ours we do not so much go on and discover small things: rather we go on and discover big things. It is the detail that we see first; it is the design that we only see very slowly, and some men die never having seen it at all. We see certain squadrons in certain uniforms gallop past; we take an arbitrary fancy to this or that colour, to this or that plume. But it often takes us a long time to realize what the fight is about or even who is fighting whom.

So in the modern intellectual world we can see flags of many colours, deeds of manifold interest; the one thing we cannot see is the map. We cannot see the simplified statement which tells us what is the origin of all the trouble.

‘William Blake.’

DECEMBER 2ND

Our wisdom, whether expressed in private or public, belongs to the world, but our folly belongs to those we love.

‘Browning.’

DECEMBER 3RD

Our fathers were large and healthy enough to make a thing humane, and not worry about whether it was hygienic. They were big enough to get into small rooms.

‘Charles Dickens.’

DECEMBER 4TH

A cosmic philosophy is not constructed to fit a man; a cosmic philosophy is constructed to fit a cosmos. A man can no more possess a private religion than he can possess a private sun and moon.

Introduction to ‘Book of Job.’

DECEMBER 5TH
That Christianity is identical with democracy, is the hardest of gospels; there is nothing that so strikes men with fear as the saying that they are all the sons of God.

‘Twelve Types.’

DECEMBER 6TH

ST. NICHOLAS’S DAY

All the old wholesome customs in connexion with Christmas were to the effect that one should not touch or see or know or speak of something before the actual coming of Christmas Day. Thus, for instance, children were never given their presents until the actual coming of the appointed hour. The presents were kept tied up in brown-paper parcels, out of which an arm of a doll or the leg of a donkey sometimes accidentally stuck. I wish this principle were adopted in respect of modern Christmas ceremonies and publications. The editors of the magazines bring out their Christmas numbers so long before the time that the reader is more likely to be lamenting for the turkey of last year than to have seriously settled down to a solid anticipation of the turkey which is to come. Christmas numbers of magazines ought to be tied up in brown paper and kept for Christmas Day. On consideration, I should favour the editors being tied up in brown paper. Whether the leg or arm of an editor should ever be allowed to protrude I leave to individual choice.

‘All Things Considered.’

DECEMBER 7TH

We had talked for about half an hour about politics and God; for men always talk about the most important things to total strangers. It is because in the total stranger we perceive man himself; the image of God is not disguised by resemblances to an uncle or doubts of the wisdom of a moustache.

‘The Club of Queer Trades.’

DECEMBER 8TH

He had found the thing which the modern people call Impressionism, which is another name for that final scepticism which can find no floor to the universe.
‘The Man who was Thursday.’

DECEMBER 9TH

There was a time when you and I and all of us were all very close to God; so that even now the colour of a pebble (or a paint), the smell of a flower (or a firework) comes to our hearts with a kind of authority and certainty; as if they were fragments of a muddled message, or features of a forgotten face. To pour that fiery simplicity upon the whole of life is the only real aim of education; and closest to the child comes the woman—she understands.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

DECEMBER 10TH

A man must love a thing very much if he not only practises it without any hope of fame or money, but even practises it without any hope of doing it well. Such a man must love the toils of the work more than any other man can love the rewards of it.

‘Browning.’

DECEMBER 11TH

Among all the strange things that men have forgotten, the most universal and catastrophic lapse of memory is that by which they have forgotten that they are living on a star.

‘Defendant.’

DECEMBER 12TH

BROWNING DIED

The poem, ‘Old Pictures in Florence,’ suggests admirably that a sense of incompleteness may easily be a great advance upon a sense of completeness: that the part may easily and obviously be greater than the whole. And from this Browning draws, as he is fully justified in drawing, a definite hope for immortality and the larger scale of life. For nothing is more certain than that though this world is the only world that we have known, or of which we could
ever dream, the fact does remain that we have named it ‘a strange world.’ In other words, we have certainly felt that this world did not explain itself, that something in its complete and patent picture has been omitted. And Browning was right in saying that in a cosmos where incompleteness implies completeness, life implies immortality. The second of the great Browning doctrines requires some audacity to express. It can only be properly stated as the hope that lies in the imperfection of God—that is to say, that Browning held that sorrow and self-denial, if they were the burdens of man, were also his privileges. He held that these stubborn sorrows and obscure valours might—to use a yet more strange expression—have provoked the envy of the Almighty. If man has self-sacrifice and God has none, then man has in the universe a secret and blasphemous superiority. And this tremendous story of a divine jealousy Browning reads into the story of the Crucifixion. These are emphatically the two main doctrines or opinions of Browning, which I have ventured to characterize roughly as the hope in the imperfection of man, and more boldly as the hope in the imperfection of God. They are great thoughts, thoughts written by a great man, and they raise noble and beautiful doubts on behalf of faith which the human spirit will never answer or exhaust.

‘Robert Browning.’

DECEMBER 13TH

Elder father, though thine eyes
Shine with hoary mysteries,
Canst thou tell what in the heart
Of a cowslip blossom lies?
Smaller than all lives that be,
Secret as the deepest sea,
Stands a little house of seeds
Like an elfin’s granary.
Speller of the stones and weeds,
Skilled in Nature’s crafts and creeds,
Tell me what is in the heart
Of the smallest of the seeds.
God Almighty, and with Him
Cherubim and Seraphim
Filling all Eternity—
Adonai Elohim.

‘The Wild Knight.’
DECEMBER 14TH

The rare strange thing is to hit the mark; the gross obvious thing is to miss it. Chaos is dull; because in chaos a train might go anywhere—to Baker Street or Bagdad. But man is a magician and his whole magic is in this that he does say ‘Victoria,’ and lo! it is Victoria.

‘The Man who was Thursday.’

DECEMBER 15TH

Men talk of philosophy and theology as if they were something specialistic and arid and academic. But philosophy and theology are not only the only democratic things, they are democratic to the point of being vulgar, to the point, I was going to say, of being rowdy. They alone admit all matters: they alone lie open to all attacks. . . . There is no detail from buttons to kangaroos that does not enter into the gay confusion of philosophy. There is no fact of life, from the death of a donkey to the General Post Office, which has not its place to dance and sing in, in the glorious carnival of theology.

‘G. F. Watts.’

DECEMBER 16TH

The Duke of Chester, the vice-president, was a young and rising politician—that is to say, he was a pleasant youth with flat fair hair and a freckled face, with moderate intelligence and enormous estates. In public his appearances were always successful and his principle was simple enough. When he thought of a joke he made it and was called brilliant. When he could not think of a joke he said that this was no time for trifling, and was called able. In private, in a club of his own class, he was simply quite pleasantly frank and silly like a schoolboy.

‘The Innocence of Father Brown.’

DECEMBER 17TH

The personal is not a mere figure for the impersonal: rather the impersonal is a clumsy term for something more personal than common personality. God is not a symbol of goodness. Goodness is a symbol of God.

‘William Blake.’
DECEMBER 18TH

The world is not to be justified as it is justified by the mechanical optimists; it is not to be justified as the best of all possible worlds. . . . Its merit is precisely that none of us could have conceived such a thing; that we should have rejected the bare idea of it as miracle and unreason. It is the best of all impossible worlds.

‘Charles Dickens.’

DECEMBER 19TH

The educated classes have adopted a hideous and heathen custom of considering death as too dreadful to talk about, and letting it remain a secret for each person, like some private malformation. The poor, on the contrary, make a great gossip and display about bereavement; and they are right. They have hold of a truth of psychology which is at the back of all the funeral customs of the children of men. The way to lessen sorrow is to make a lot of it. The way to endure a painful crisis is to insist very much that it is a crisis; to permit people who must feel sad at least to feel important. In this the poor are simply the priests of the universal civilization; and in their stuffy feasts and solemn chattering there is the smell of the baked meats of Hamlet and the dust and echo of the funeral games of Patroclus.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

DECEMBER 20TH

A crime is like any other work of art. Don’t look surprised; crimes are by no means the only works of art that come from an infernal workshop. But every work of art, divine or diabolic, has one indispensable mark—I mean that the centre of it is simple, however the entourage may be complicated.

‘The Innocence of Father Brown.’

DECEMBER 21ST

ST. THOMAS’S DAY

It was Huxley and Herbert Spencer and Bradlaugh who brought me back to orthodox theology. They sowed in my mind my first wild doubts of doubt. Our
grandmothers were quite right when they said that Tom Paine and the Freethinkers unsettled the mind. They do. They unsettled mine horribly. The rationalists made me question whether reason was of any use whatever; and when I had finished Herbert Spencer I had got as far as doubting (for the first time) whether evolution had occurred at all. As I laid down the last of Colonel Ingersoll’s atheistic lectures, the dreadful thought broke into my mind, ‘Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.’

‘Orthodoxy.’

DECEMBER 22ND

Pure and exalted atheists talk themselves into believing that the working classes are turning with indignant scorn from the churches. The working classes are not indignant against the churches in the least. The things the working classes really are indignant against are the hospitals. The people has no definite disbelief in the temples of theology. The people has a very fiery and practical disbelief in the temples of physical science.

‘Charles Dickens.’

DECEMBER 23RD

A turkey is more occult and awful than all the angels and archangels. In so far as God has partly revealed to us an angelic world, He has partly told us what an angel means. But God has never told us what a turkey means. And if you go and stare at a live turkey for an hour or two, you will find by the end of it that the enigma has rather increased than diminished.

‘All Things Considered.’

DECEMBER 24TH

CHRISTMAS EVE. THE TRUCE OF CHRISTMAS

Passionate peace is in the sky—
And in the snow in silver sealed
The beasts are perfect in the field,
And men seem men so suddenly—
(But take ten swords and ten times ten
And blow the bugle in praising men;
For we are for all men under the sun,
And they are against us every one;
And misers haggle and madmen clutch
And there is peril in praising much,
And we have the terrible tongues uncurled
That praise the world to the sons of the world).
The idle humble hill and wood
Are bowed about the sacred birth,
And for one little hour the earth
Is lazy with the love of good—
(But ready are you, and ready am I,
If the battle blow and the guns go by;
For we are for all men under the sun,
And they are against us every one;
And the men that hate herd all together,
To pride and gold, and the great white feather,
And the thing is graven in star and stone
That the men who love are all alone).
Hunger is hard and time is tough,
But bless the beggars and kiss the kings,
For hope has broken the heart of things,
And nothing was ever praised enough.
(But hold the shield for a sudden swing
And point the sword when you praise a thing,
For we are for all men under the sun,
And they are against us every one,
And mime and merchant, thane and thrall
Hate us because we love them all,
Only till Christmastide go by
Passionate peace is in the sky).

‘The Commonwealth.’

DECEMBER 25TH

CHRISTMAS DAY

There fared a mother driven forth
Out of an inn to roam;
In the place where she was homeless
All men are at home.
The crazy stable close at hand,
With shaking timber and shifting sand,
Grew a stronger thing to abide and stand
Than the square stones of Rome.
For men are homesick in their homes,
And strangers under the sun,
And they lay their heads in a foreign land
Whenever the day is done.
Here we have battle and blazing eyes,
And chance and honour and high surprise,
But our homes are under miraculous skies
Where the Yule tale was begun.
A Child in a foul stable,
Where the beasts feed and foam,
Only where He was homeless
Are you and I at home:
We have hands that fashion and heads that know,
But our hearts we lost—how long ago!
In a place no chart nor ship can show
Under the sky’s dome.
This world is wild as an old wives’ tale,
And strange the plain things are,
The earth is enough and the air is enough
For our wonder and our war;
But our rest is as far as the fire-drake swings
And our peace is put in impossible things
Where clashed and thundered unthinkable wings
Round an incredible star.
To an open house in the evening
Home shall all men come,
To an older place than Eden
And a taller town than Rome.
To the end of the way of the wandering star,
To the things that cannot be and that are,
To the place where God was homeless
And all men are at home.


DECEMBER 26TH

BOXING DAY

There are innumerable persons with eyeglasses and green garments who pray for the return of the maypole or the Olympian Games. But there is about these people a haunting and alarming something which suggests that it is just possible that they do not keep Christmas. If so, where is the sense of all their dreams of festive traditions? Here is a solid and ancient festive tradition still plying a roaring trade in the streets, and they think it vulgar. If this is so, let them be very certain of this: that they are the kind of people who in the time of the maypole would have thought the maypole vulgar; who in the time of the Canterbury
pilgrimage would have thought the Canterbury pilgrimage vulgar; who in the time of the Olympian Games would have thought the Olympian Games vulgar. Nor can there be any reasonable doubt that they were vulgar. Let no man deceive himself; if by vulgarity we mean coarseness of speech, rowdiness of behaviour, gossip, horseplay, and some heavy drinking: vulgarity there always was, wherever there was joy, wherever there was faith in the gods.

‘Heretics.’

DECEMBER 27TH

ST. JOHN’S DAY

Christ did not love humanity, He never said He loved humanity; He loved men. Neither He nor anyone else can love humanity; it is like loving a gigantic centipede. And the reason that the Tolstoians can even endure to think of an equally distributed love is that their love of humanity is a logical love, a love into which they are coerced by their own theories, a love which would be an insult to a tom-cat.

‘Twelve Types.’

DECEMBER 28TH

HOLY INNOCENTS’ DAY

That little urchin with the gold-red hair (whom I have just watched toddling past my house), she shall not be lopped and lamed and altered; her hair shall not be cut short like a convict’s. No; all the kingdoms of the earth shall be hacked about and mutilated to suit her. The winds of the world shall be tempered to that lamb unshorn. All crowns that cannot fit her head shall be broken; all raiment and building that does not harmonize with her glory shall waste away. Her mother may bid her bind her hair, for that is natural authority; but the Emperor of the Planet shall not bid her cut it off. She is the human and sacred image; all around her the social fabric shall sway and split and fall; the pillars of society shall be shaken and the roofs of ages come rushing down; and not one hair of her head shall be harmed.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’
DECEMBER 29TH

ST. THOMAS À BECKET

When four knights scattered the blood and brains of St. Thomas of Canterbury it was not only a sign of anger but a sort of black admiration. They wished for his blood, but they wished even more for his brains. Such a blow will remain for ever unintelligible unless we realize what the brains of St. Thomas were thinking about just before they were distributed over the floor. They were thinking about the great medieval conception that the Church is the judge of the world. Becket objected to a priest being tried even by the Lord Chief Justice. And his reason was simple: because the Lord Chief Justice was being tried by the priest. The judiciary was itself sub judice. The kings were themselves in the dock. The idea was to create an invisible kingdom without armies or prisons, but with complete freedom to condemn publicly all the kingdoms of the earth.

‘What’s Wrong with the World.’

DECEMBER 30TH

Progress is not an illegitimate word, but it is logically evident that it is illegitimate for us. It is a sacred word, a word that could only rightly be used by rigid believers and in the ages of faith.

‘Heretics.’

DECEMBER 31ST

With all the multiplicity of knowledge there is one thing happily that no man knows: whether the world is old or young.

‘The Defendant.’
THE MOVEABLE FEASTS

ADVENT SUNDAY

People, if you have any prayers,
Say prayers for me;
And lay me under a Christian stone
In this lost land I thought my own,
To wait till the holy horn be blown
And all poor men are free.

‘Ballad of Alfred.’

SHROVE TUESDAY

Why should I care for the Ages
Because they are old and grey?
To me like sudden laughter
The stars are fresh and gay;
The world is a daring fancy
And finished yesterday.
Why should I bow to the Ages
Because they are drear and dry?
Slow trees and ripening meadows
For me go roaring by,
A living charge, a struggle
To escalate the sky.
The eternal suns and systems,
Solid and silent all,
To me are stars of an instant,
Only the fires that fall
From God’s good rocket rising
On this night of carnival.

‘A Novelty’ (‘The Wild Knight’).

ASH WEDNESDAY

Nor shall all iron doors make dumb
Men wondering ceaselessly,
If it be not better to fast for joy
Than feast for misery?

‘Ballad of Alfred.’
PALM SUNDAY

When fishes flew and forests walked
And figs grew upon thorn,
Some moment when the moon was blood
Then surely I was born.
With monstrous head and sickening cry
And ears like errant wings,
The devil’s walking parody
On all four-footed things.
The tattered outlaw of the earth,
Of ancient crooked will,
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,
I keep my secret still.
Fools, for I also had my hour,
One far fierce hour and sweet,
There was a shout about my ears
And palms before my feet.

‘The Donkey’ (‘The Wild Knight’).

MAUNDAY THURSDAY

Jesus Christ made wine, not a medicine, but a sacrament. But Omar makes it, not a sacrament, but a medicine. He feasts because life is not joyful; he revels because he is not glad. ‘Drink,’ he says, ‘for you know not whence you come nor why. Drink, for you know not when you go nor where. Drink, because the stars are cruel and the world as idle as a humming-top. Drink, because there is nothing worth trusting, nothing worth fighting for. Drink, because all things are lapsed in a base equality and an evil peace.’ So he stands offering us the cup in his hands. And in the high altar of Christianity stands another figure in whose hand also is the cup of the vine. ‘Drink,’ he says, ‘for the whole world is as red as this wine with the crimson of the love and wrath of God. Drink, for the trumpets are blowing for battle, and this is the stirrup cup. Drink, for this is my blood of the New Testament that is shed for you. Drink, for I know whence you come and why. Drink, for I know when you go and where.’

‘Heretics.’

GOOD FRIDAY

And well may God with the serving folk
Cast in His dreadful lot.
Is not He too a servant,
And is not He forgot?
Wherefore was God in Golgotha
Slain as a serf is slain;
And hate He had of prince and peer,
And love He had and made good cheer,
Of them that, like this woman here,
Go powerfully in pain.

‘Ballad of Alfred.’

HOLY SATURDAY

The Cross cannot be defeated for it is defeat.
‘The Ball and the Cross.’

EASTER DAY

I said to my companion the Dickensian, ‘Do you see that angel over there? I think it must be meant for the Angel at the Sepulchre.’ He saw that I was somewhat singularly moved, and he raised his eyebrows.
‘I daresay,’ he said. ‘What is there odd about that?’

After a pause I answered, ‘Do you remember what the Angel at the Sepulchre said?’

‘Not particularly,’ ha replied; ‘but where are you off to in such a hurry?’
‘I am going,’ I said, ‘to put pennies into automatic machines on the beach. I am going to listen to the niggers. I am going to have my photograph taken. I will buy some picture postcards. I do want a boat. I am ready to listen to a concertina, and but for the defects of my education should be ready to play it. I am willing to ride on a donkey; that is, if the donkey is willing. For all this was commanded me by the angel in the stained glass window.’

‘I really think,’ said the Dickensian, ‘that I had better put you in charge of your relations.’

‘Sir,’ I answered, ‘there are certain writers to whom humanity owes much, whose talent is yet of so shy and delicate or retrospective a type that we do well to link it with certain quaint places or certain perishing associations. It would not be unnatural to look for the spirit of Horace Walpole at Strawberry Hill, or even for the shade of Thackeray in old Kensington. But let us have no antiquarianism about Dickens for Dickens is not an antiquity. Dickens looks not backward but
forward; he might look at our modern mobs with satire, or with fury, but he would love to look at them. He might lash our democracy, but it would be because, like a democrat, he asked much from it. We will not have all his books bound up under the title ‘The Old Curiosity Shop.’ Rather we will have them all bound up under the title of ‘Great Expectations.’ Wherever humanity is he would have us face it and make something of it, swallow it with a holy cannibalism and assimilate it with the digestion of a giant. We must take these trippers as he would have taken them and tear out of them their tragedy and their farce. Do you remember now what the Angel said at the Sepulchre? ‘Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here; He is risen.’

‘Tremendous Trifles.’

ASCENSION DAY

What is the difference between Christ and Satan?

It is quite simple. Christ descended into hell; Satan fell into it. One of them wanted to go up and went down; the other wanted to go down and went up.

‘The Ball and the Cross.’

WHITSUNDAY

I have a far more solid and central ground for submitting to Christianity as a faith, instead of merely picking up hints from it as a scheme. And that is this; that the Christian Church in its practical relation to my soul is a living teacher, not a dead one. It not only certainly taught me yesterday, but will almost certainly teach me to-morrow. Once I saw suddenly the meaning of the shape of the cross; some day I may see suddenly the meaning of the shape of the mitre. One fine morning I saw why windows were pointed; some fine morning I may see why priests were shaven. Plato has told you a truth; but Plato is dead. Shakespeare has startled you with an image; but Shakespeare will not startle you with any more. But imagine what it would be to live with such men still living. To know that Plato might break out with an original lecture to-morrow, or that at any moment Shakespeare might shatter everything with a single song. The man who lives in contact with what he believes to be a living Church is a man always expecting to meet Plato and Shakespeare to-morrow at breakfast. He is always expecting to see some truth that he has never seen before.

‘Orthodoxy.’
TRINITY SUNDAY

The meanest man in grey fields gone
Behind the set of sun,
Heareth between star and other star,
Through the door of the darkness fallen ajar,
The Council eldest of things that are,
The talk of the Three in One.

‘Ballad of Alfred.’

CORPUS CHRISTI

All great spiritual Scriptures are full of the invitation not to test but to taste; not to examine but to eat. Their phrases are full of living water and heavenly bread, mysterious manna and dreadful wine. Worldliness and the polite society of the world has despised this instinct of eating, but religion has never despised it.

‘Daily News.’
ESSAYS I BY CHESTERTON

G. K. CHESTERTON
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

ESSAYS I BY CHESTERTON

TABLE OF CONTENTS

HALF HOURS IN HADES
AN ELEMENTARY HANDBOOK OF DEMONOLOGY

PREFACE

I THE FIVE PRIMARY TYPES

II THE EVOLUTION OF DEMONS

III WHAT WE SHOULD ALL LOOK FOR

TO FRANCES

DREAMS

LEO TOLSTOY

LEO TOLSTOY AS WRITER

THE RETURN OF THE ANGELS

CHRISTIANITY AND RATIONALISM

A PIECE OF CHALK

ON MENDING AND ENDING THINGS

Skepticism and Spiritualism

Philosophy for the Schoolroom

The Roots of the World

Two Kinds of Paradox

The Pun

The Great Shipwreck as Analogy

Wonder and the Wooden Post
HALF HOURS IN HADES

AN ELEMENTARY HANDBOOK OF DEMONOLOGY

PREFACE

In the autumn of 1890, I was leaving the Casino at Monte Carlo in company with an eminent Divine, whose name, for obvious reasons, I suppress. We were engaged in an interesting discussion on the subject of Demons, he contending that they were an unnecessary, not to say prejudicial, element in our civilisation, an opinion which, needless to say, I strongly opposed. Having at length been so fortunate as to convince him of his error, I proceeded to furnish him with various instances in which Demons have proved beneficial to mankind, and at length he exclaimed. “My dear fellow, why do you not write a book about . . .” Here he coughed. The idea took so strong a hold upon me, that from that time I have taken more careful note of the habits and appearance of such specimens as come in my way, and my studies have resulted in the production of this little work, which will, I trust, prove not uninteresting to the youthful seeker after knowledge.

In my capacity as Professor of Supernatural Science at Oxford University, it has often been my duty to call upon an individual who probably knows more about all branches of the subject with which I am about to deal than any man on earth, although no one has yet persuaded him to give his knowledge to the world; and with his permission I have dedicated these pictures to him, as some slight recognition of the wisdom and experience which he had brought to my assistance in the compiling of this modest treatise.

Baron’s Court House, London
October 1891
To that mature personage,
the cimmerian nature of whose aspect
is popularly supposed to be greatly overrated,
this volume is affectionately dedicated.

I THE FIVE PRIMARY TYPES

It is not wonderful that so few persons should know anything about the habits
and appearance of those whose names are so often on their lips, and who exert so great an influence over all our lives? For those who love the study of Demonology (and I pity the man or woman who does not) it possess an interest which will remain after health, youth and even life have departed.

It is not my intention in this simple little work to puzzle the young student with any of those dark technicalities of the Science which are only intelligible to such as have studied it for some time. I merely try to put before him, in language as simply as possible, the various species of Demon with which he is most likely to meet, and to explain the organism of any he may have already encountered.

To proceed at once to business, I will first introduce to my young readers the Common, or “Garden” serpent, so called because its first appearance in the world took place in a garden. Since that time its proportions have dwindled considerably, but its influence and power have largely increased; it is found in almost everything.

Plate I. The Common or “Garden” Serpent (Tentator hortensis)
Plate II. The Mediaeval Devil (Diabolus faunalius)

The prejudice entertained by clergymen and others against this insect is most unreasonable and cruel. Were it not for the creature they destroy, their occupation would be gone, like Othello’s. Yet they do all they can to stamp out and crush down this little creature, wherever he may show his hoof.

The next in importance of the specimens of this interesting branch of science is the Mediaeval Demon, whose horns, tail and claws form a remarkable contrast to the serpentine formation of our first type. So wide is the divergence between the two that many modern authorities on the subject put it in an entirely different class to the Common or Garden species, connecting it with an extinct animal of similar formation known as the Faun or Pan, which found its home in many parts of Arcadia. Be this as it may, the Mediaeval Demon is, of all the species, perhaps the one with which we are most familiar; in fact so accustomed are we to the traits and appearance of this remarkable creature that we have more or less taken it under our patronage. It is in a domesticated state the subject rather of playfulness and household merriment than of abhorrence, while the far cleverer and more graceful serpent is the object of a cruel and unreasoning persecution.

But useful as the mediaeval species is found at the present day as a general source of amusement, it has of late somewhat failed to stir public interest, which is turned towards newer and more elegant varieties: some of which we shall pass briefly in review. Mr. J. Milton, in his interesting and valuable work on this subject, has discussed at some length the leading characteristics of a fine species...
of which he was primarily the discoverer, and of which Fig. A. is a sketch. This magnificent animal measures at least four roods, and when floating full length on the warm gulf, of which it is an inhabitant, has been compared by its discoverer to a whale.

According to Mr. Milton’s theory, this animal is practically identical with the creature represented in Plate I, but, however ably supported, his view has been abandoned by most later authorities. This species is an inhabitant of warm latitudes like most of its kind, being originally found in the burning lakes and dark wildernesses of the most remote parts of the world. Its colour is, generally speaking, dark, but, like most of these creatures, this peculiarity has been much overrated, and Mr. Milton has justly pointed out the “faded splendour wan” which imparts a lighter shade to many parts of its exterior.

We now come to the discussion of a very remarkable species which are vulgarly known for the most part by their colour.

The Red Devil (Diabolus Mephistopheles) was discovered by that learned and enterprising German naturalist, Mr. Wolfgang von Goethe, who has published an interesting story of a specimen kept in a domesticated state in the house of his learned fellow-countryman, Dr. Faust. In a domestic state this creature is playful and active, but mischievous and impossible to trust. The learned doctor found it a useful and entertaining companion for many years, but was finally persuaded to part with it, on which it sought the seclusion of its native surroundings. Its colour, as suggested by its name, is, with the exception of its face and hands, a uniform red. Its height is about six feet.

The Blue Devil
(Caeruleus lugubrius)

Very different in appearance, yet possessed of one or two of the same habits, is the Blue Devil (Caeruleus Lugubrius). These creatures are gregarious, being usually seen and spoken of in the plural. Though formed by Super-Nature in their habits and exterior apparently for the filling of waste moors, mountains, churchyards and other obsolete places, these animals, like the Red Devil, have frequently been domesticated in rich and distinguished houses, and many of the wealthiest aristocrats and most successful men of commerce may be seen with a string of these blue creatures led by a leash in the street or seated round him in a ring on his own fireside. The noise made by this creature is singularly melancholy and depressing, and its general appearance is far from lively. But though less agile and intelligent than the Red Devil, the sobriety of its habits and demeanour have made it a suitable pet for the houses of clergymen and other
respectable persons. To such an extent indeed has this domestication of the Blue Devil been carried, that many persons have denied its connection with the great class we are discussing. There can, however, be no doubt about its origin.

II THE EVOLUTION OF DEMONS

On what perhaps is the most intricate and interesting part of Demonology it is impossible to say much in a work of small size and pretensions. It is unnecessary to go through the elaborate proof given by Mr. Darwin and transfer it to the supernatural world, but only to make a few remarks on some of the most interesting examples of diabolical evolution. When the young student grows older he will meet with others in his own experience.

III WHAT WE SHOULD ALL LOOK FOR

“But, mamma, can we all see devils?”

“Certainly, Charlotte, if we will take the trouble. They are constantly in our path and it is only the lazy and careless that pass them by. The human race might well learn a lesson from these little creatures, and in fact it not infrequently does. Harry here will tell you that only this morning he found a most interesting specimen while coming from church, and how pleased I was that he should have been so diligent. We can all see the common varieties in any country walk, or even in the city, where they are occasionally found, but at the same time it is to be remembered that we cannot expect to see all this great field of interest in this life. Dr. Brown, the vicar, who knows more about these things than you or I, children, will, I am sure, take great pleasure in some day showing you over his collection, where you will see some very rare species, not to be found in everyday life, and which are the fruits of a long career of diligent research. He possess, I believe, the only known variety of the Pelagian ever seen in this country and will be pleased to show it you and make it vainly talk. The Boasting Anabaptist (Anabaptiste Falsegloriator) has also its representatives in his collection and he is the author of many clever works on the subject.”

“But, mamma, does Dr. Brown love his little pets?”

“I have reason to believe that he is fondly attached to them. They are never out of his sight and he has often said that he has gleaned many useful lessons from their habits. In fact he says that he would not be the man he is but for them, and one glance at Dr. Brown will make it clear that this is no exaggeration.”
“Mamma, dear, do you remember what Cousin George found when he was staying with us last summer?”

“I recollect it extremely well, Albert, and I am glad indeed to find that your memory is as vivid as mine. It had always been my belief that Cousin George would alight upon some such discovery, for I well know him as a keen observer of Supernature and I hope, my children, that you may ever be as clever Demonologists as he. I remember even as a little boy he would be always found in the haunts of these creatures among which he may almost be said to have been brought up. I predict a great future for Cousin George.”

“And, mamma dear, remember that you promised to show us some experiments this evening.”

“Well, children, you shall have some. Will you turn out the gas, Albert? while you, Jane, will ask cook to lend us the large kettle. Harry will fetch the long wand from its place in the umbrella stand. Thank you, that is right. Now, children, for our first experiment I have here the eye of the common newt or eft, the left toe of the edible frog, the jaw of one or the blue sharks, a portion of the root of the hemlock plant, which I took no little trouble to dig up quite late last night, the liver of a blaspheming Jew, and other interesting specimens: round about the cauldron go, children, in the poisoned entrails throw. That is right. Now we will see what happens . . . Ah, I thought so. Do you see those two round green orbs of light, Jane? Those are the eyes of a very interesting species, and its form will soon become apparent to us. Do not scream, Charlotte, for that would be naughty, and would perhaps frighten the little creatures, as they are very timid. By this time, children, you may perceive the outline of an attenuated figure, resembling in some respects that of a skeleton, though the ears, which you can now see moving, show that this is not the case. Lift little Harry up, James, since he is too small to see over the edge of the cauldron.”
TO FRANCES

Extracts from a letter to Frances Blogg, c. 1895

. . . I am looking over the sea and endeavouring to reckon up the estate I have to offer you. As far as I can make out my equipment for starting on a journey to fairyland consists of the following items.

1st. A Straw Hat. The oldest part of this admirable relic shows traces of pure Norman work. The vandalism of Cromwell’s soldiers has left us little of the original hat-band.

2nd. A Walking Stick, very knobby and heavy: admirably fitted to break the head of any denizen of Suffolk who denies that you are the noblest of ladies, but of no other manifest use.

3rd. A copy of Walt Whitman’s poems, once nearly given to Salter, but quite forgotten. It has his name in it still with an affectionate inscription from his sincere friend Gilbert Chesterton. I wonder if he will ever have it.

4th. A number of letters from a young lady, containing everything good and generous and loyal and holy and wise that isn’t in Walt Whitman’s poems.

5th. An unwieldy sort of a pocket knife, the blades mostly having an edge of a more varied and picturesque outline than is provided by the prosaic cutler. The chief element however is a thing ‘to take stones out of a horse’s hoof.’ What a beautiful sensation of security it gives one to reflect that if one should ever have money enough to buy a horse and should happen to buy one and the horse should happen to have stone in his hoof—that one is ready; one stands prepared, with a defiant smile!

6th. Passing from the last miracle of practical foresight, we come to a box of matches. Every now and then I strike one of these, because fire is beautiful and burns your fingers. Some people think this waste of matches: the same people who object to the building of Cathedrals.

7th. About three pounds in gold and silver, the remains of one of Mr. Unwin’s bursts of affection: those explosions of spontaneous love for myself, which, such is the perfect order and harmony of his mind, occur at startlingly exact intervals of time.

8th. A book of Children’s Rhymes, in manuscript, called the ‘Weather Book’ about 3/4 finished, and destined for Mr. Nutt. I have been working at it fairly steadily, which I think jolly creditable under the circumstances. One can’t put anything interesting in it. They’ll understand those things when they grow up.
9th. A tennis racket—nay, start not. It is a part of the new regime, and the only new and neat-looking thing in the Museum. We’ll soon mellow it—like the straw hat. My brother and I are teaching each other lawn tennis.

10th. A soul, hitherto idle and omnivorous but now happy enough to be ashamed of itself.

11th. A body, equally idle and quite equally omnivorous, absorbing tea, coffee, claret, sea-water, and swimming. I think, the sea being a convenient size.

12th. A Heart—mislaid somewhere. And that is about all the property of which an inventory can be made at present. After all, my tastes are stoically simple. A straw hat, a stick, a box of matches and some of his own poetry. What more does man require?. . .

. . . The City of Felixstowe, as seen by the local prophet from the neighbouring mountain-peak, does not strike the eye as having anything uncanny about it. At least I imagine that it requires rather careful scrutiny before the eerie curl of a chimney pot, or the elfin wink of a lonely lamp-post brins home to the startled soul that it is really the City of a Fearful Folk. That the inhabitants are not human in the ordinary sense is quite clear, yet it has only just begun to dawn on me after staying a week in the Town of Unreason with its monstrous landscape and grave, unmeaning customs. Do I seem to be raving? Let me give my experiences.

I am bound to admit that I do not think I am good at shopping. I generally succeed in getting rid of money, but other observances, such as bringing away the goods that I’ve paid for, and knowing what I’ve bought, often pass over as secondary. But to shop in a town of ordinary tradesmen is one thing: to shop in a town of raving lunatics is another. I set out one morning, happy and hopeful with the intention of buying (a) a tennis racket (b) some tennis balls (c) some tennis shoes (d) a ticket for a tennis ground. I went to the shop pointed out by some villager (probably mad) and went in and said I believed they kept tennis rackets. The young man smiled and assented. I suggested that he might show me some. The young man looked positively alarmed. ‘Oh,’ he said, ‘We haven’t got any—not got any here.’ I asked ‘Where?’ ‘Oh, they’re out you know. All round,’ he explained wildly, with a graphic gesture in the direction of the sea and the sky. ‘All out round. We’ve left them all round at places.’ To this day I don’t know what he meant, but I merely asked when they would quit these weird retreats. He said in an hour: in an hour I called again. Were they in now? ‘Well not in—not in, just yet,’ he said with a sort of feverish confidentialness, as if he wasn’t quite well. ‘Are they still—all out at places?’ I asked with a a restrained humor. ‘Oh,
no!’ he said with a burst of reassuring pride. ‘They are only out there—out behind, you know.’ I hope my face expressed my beaming comprehension of the spot alluded to. Eventually, at a third visit, the rackets were produced. None of them, I was told by my brother, were of any first-class maker, so that was outside the question. The choice was between some good, neat first-hand instruments which suited me, and some seedy-looking second-hand objects with plain deal handles, which would have done at a pinch. I thought that perhaps it would be better to get a good-class racket in London and content myself for the present with economising on one of these second-hand monuments of depression. So I asked the price. ’10/6’ was the price of the second-hand article. I thought this large for the tool, and wondered if the first-hand rackets were much dearer. What price the first-hand? ’7/6’ said the Creature, cheery as a bird. I did not faint. I am strong.

I rejected the article which was dearer because it had been hallowed by human possession, and accepted the cheap, new crude racket. Except the newness there was no difference between them whatever. I then asked the smiling Maniac for balls. He brought me a selection of large red globes nearly as big as Dutch cheeses. I said, ‘Are these tennis-balls?’ He said, ‘Oh, did you want tennis-balls?’ I said Yes—they often came in handy at tennis. The goblin was quite impervious to satire, and I left him endeavouring to draw my attention to his wares in general, particularly to some zinc baths which he seemed to think should form part of the equipment of a tennis player.

Never before or since have I met a being of that order and degree of creepiness. He was a nightmare of unmeaning idiocy. But some mention ought to be made of the old man at the entrance to the tennis ground who opened his mouth in parables on the subject of the fee for playing there. He seemed to have been wound up to make only one remark, ‘It’s sixpence.’ Under these circumstances the attempt to discover whether the sixpence covered a day’s tennis or a week or fifty years was rather baffling. At last I put down the sixpence. This seems to galvanise him into life. He looked at the clock, which was indicating five past eleven and said, ‘It’s sixpence an hour—so you’ll be all right till two.’ I fled screaming.

Since then I have examined the town more carefully and feel the presence of something nameless. There is a claw-curl in the sea-bent trees, an eye-gleam in the dark flints in the wall that is not of this world.

When we set up a house, darling (honeysuckle porch, yew clipt hedge, bees, poetry and eight shillings a week), I think you will have to do the shopping.
Particularly at Felixstowe. There was a great and glorious man who said, ‘Give us the luxuries of life and we will dispense with the necessities.’ That I think would be a splendid motto to write (in letters of brown gold) over the porch of our hypothetical home. There will be a sofa for you, for example, but no chairs, for I prefer the floor. There will be a select store of chocolate-creams (to make you do the Carp with) and the rest will be bread and water. We will each retain a suit of evening dress for great occasions, and at other times clothe ourselves in the skins of wild beasts (how pretty you would look) which would fit your taste in furs and be economical.

I have sometimes thought it would be very fine to take an ordinary house, a very poor, commonplace house in West Kensington, say, and make it symbolic. Not artistic—Heaven—O Heaven forbid. My blood boils when I think of the affronts put by knock-kneed pictorial epicures on the strong, honest, ugly, patient shapes of necessary things: the brave old bones of life. There are aesthetic pattering prigs who can look on a saucepan without one tear of joy or sadness: mongrel decadents that can see no dignity in the honourable scars of a kettle. So they concentrate all their house decoration on coloured windows that nobody looks out of, and vases of lilies that everybody wishes out of the way. No: my idea (which is much cheaper) is to make a house really (allegoric) really explain its own essential meaning. Mystical or ancient sayings should be inscribed on every object, the more prosaic the object the better; and the more coarsely and rudely the inscription was traced the better. ‘Hast thou sent the Rain upon the Earth?’ should be inscribed on the Umbrella-Stand: perhaps on the Umbrella. ‘Even the Hairs of your Head are all numbered’ would give a tremendous significance to one’s hairbrushes: the words about ‘living water’ would reveal the music and sanctity of the sink: while ‘Our God is a consuming Fire’ might be written over the kitchen-grate, to assist the mystic musings of the cook—Shall we ever try that experiment, dearest. Perhaps not, for no words would be golden enough for the tools you had to touch: you would be beauty enough for one house . . .”

. . . By all means let us have bad things in our dwelling and make them good things. I shall offer no objection to your having an occasional dragon to dinner, or a penitent Griffin to sleep in the spare bed. The image of you taking a sunday school of little Devils is pleasing. They will look up, first in savage wonder, then in vague respect; they will see the most glorious and noble lady that ever lived since their prince tempted Eve, with a halo of hair and great heavenly eyes that seem to make the good at the heart of things almost too terribly simple and
naked for the sons of flesh: and as they gaze, their tails will drop off, and their wings will sprout: and they will become Angels in six lessons. . . .

I cannot profess to offer any elaborate explanation of your mother’s disquiet but I admit it does not wholly surprise me. You see I happen to know one factor in the case, and one only, of which you are wholly ignorant. I know you . . . I know one thing which has made me feel strange before your mother—I know the value of what I take away. I feel (in a weird moment) like the Angel of Death.

You say you want to talk to me about death: my views about death are bright, brisk and entertaining. When Azrael takes a soul it may be to other and brighter worlds: like those whither you and I go together. The transformation called Death may be something as beautiful and dazzling as the transformation called Love. It may make the dead man ‘happy,’ just as your mother knows that you are happy. But none the less it is a transformation, and sad sometimes for those left behind. A mother whose child is dying can hardly believe that in the inscrutable Unknown there is anyone who can look to it as well as she. And if a mother cannot trust her child easily to God Almighty, shall I be so mean as to be angry because she cannot trust it easily to me? I tell you I have stood before your mother and felt like a thief. I know you are not going to part: neither physically, mentally, morally nor spiritually. But she sees a new element in your life, wholly from outside—is it not natural, given her temperament, that you should find her perturbed? Oh, dearest, dearest Frances, let us always be very gentle to older people. Indeed, darling, it is not they who are the tyrants, but we. They may interrupt our building in the scaffolding stages: we turn their house upside down when it is their final home and rest. Your mother would certainly have worried if you had been engaged to the Archangel Michael (who, indeed, is bearing his disappointment very well): how much more when you are engaged to an aimless, tactless, reckless, unbrushed, strange-hatted, opinionated scarecrow who has suddenly walked into the vacant place. I could have prophesied her unrest: wait and she will calm down all right, dear. God comfort her: I dare not. . . .

. . . Gilbert Keith Chesterton was born of comfortable but honest parents on the top of Campden Hill, Kensington. He was christened at St. George’s Church which stands just under that more imposing building, the Waterworks Tower. This place was chosen, apparently, in order that the whole available water supply might be used in the intrepid attempt to make him a member of Christ, a child of God and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Of the early years of this remarkable man few traces remain. One of his
earliest recorded observations was the simple exclamation, full of heart-felt delight, ‘Look at Baby. Funny Baby.’ Here we see the first hint of that ineffable conversational modesty, that shy social self-effacement, which has ever hidden his light under a bushel. His mother also recounts with apparent amusement an incident connected with his imperious demand for his father’s top-hat. ‘Give me that hat, please.’ ‘No, dear, you mustn’t have that.’ ‘Give me that hat.’ ‘No, dear—’ ‘If you don’t give it me, I’ll say ‘At.’ An exquisite selection in the matter of hats has indeed always been one of the great man’s hobbies.

When he had drawn pictures on all the blinds and tablecloths and towels and walls and windowpanes it was felt that he required a larger sphere. Consequently he was sent to Mr. Bewsher who gave him desks and copy-books and Latin grammars and atlases to draw pictures on. He was far too innately conscientious not to use these materials to draw on. To other uses, asserted by some to belong to these objects, he paid little heed. The only really curious thing about his school life was that he had a weird and quite involuntary habit of getting French prizes. They were the only ones he ever got and he never tried to get them. But though the thing was quite mysterious to him, and though he made every effort to avoid it, it went on, being evidently a part of some occult natural law.

For the first half of his time at school he was very solitary and futile. He never regretted the time, for it gave him two things, complete mental self-sufficiency and a comprehension of the psychology of outcasts.

But one day, as he was roaming about a great naked building land which he haunted in play hours, rather like an outlaw in the woods, he met a curious agile youth with hair brushed up off his head. Seeing each other, they promptly hit each other simultaneously and had a fight. Next day they met again and fought again. These Homeric conflicts went on for many days, till one morning in the crisis of some insane grapple, the subject of this biography quoted, like a war-chant, something out of Macaulay’s Lays. The other started and relaxed his hold. They gazed at each other. Then the foe quoted the following line. In this land of savages they knew each other. For the next two hours they talked books. They have talked books ever since. The boy was Edmund Clerihew Bentley. The incident just narrated is the true and real account of the first and deepest of our hero’s male connections. But another was to ensue, probably equally profound and far more pregnant with awful and dazzling consequences. Bentley always had a habit of trying to do things well: twelve years of the other’s friendship has not cured him of this. Being seized with a particular desire to learn conjuring, he had made the acquaintance of an eerie and supernatural young man, who
instructed him in the Black Art: a gaunt Mephistophelian sort of individual, who our subject half thought was a changeling. Our subject has not quite got over the idea yet, though for practical social purposes he calls him Lucian Oldershaw. Our subject met Lucian Oldershaw. ‘That night,’ as Shakespeare says, ‘there was a star.’

These three persons soon became known through the length and breadth of St. Paul’s School as the founders of a singular brotherhood. It was called the J.D.C. No one, we believe, could ever have had better friends than did the hero of this narrative. We wish that we could bring before the reader the personality of all the Knights of that eccentric round table. Most of them are known already to the reader. Even the subject himself is possibly known to the reader. Bertram, who seemed somehow to have been painted by Vandyck, a sombre and stately young man, a blend of Cavalier and Puritan, with the physique of a military father and the views of an ethical mother and a soul of his own which for sheer simplicity is something staggering. Vemede with an Oriental and inscrutable placidity varied every now and then with dazzling agility and Meredithian humour. Waldo d’Avigdor who masks with complete fashionable triviality a Hebraic immutability of passion tried in a more ironical and bitter service than his Father Jacob. Lawrence and Maurice Solomon, who show another side of the same people, the love of home, the love of children, the meek and malicious humour, the tranquil service of a law. Salter who shows how beautiful and ridiculous a combination can be made of the most elaborate mental cultivation and artistic sensibility and omniscience with a receptiveness and a humility extraordinary in any man. These were his friends. May he be forgiven for speaking of them at length and with pride? Some day we hope the reader may know them all. He knew these people; he knew their friends. He heard Mildred Wain say ‘Blogg’ and he thought it was a funny name. Had he been told that he would ever pronounce it with the accents of tears and passion he would have said, in his pride, that the name was not suitable for that purpose. But there are [Greek letters]... 

He went for a time to an ArtSchool. There he met a great many curious people. Many of the men were horrible blackguards: he was not exactly that: so they naturally found each other interesting. He went through some rather appalling discoveries about human life and the final discovery was that there is no Devil—no, not even such a thing as a bad man.

One pleasant Saturday afternoon [his friend] Lucian said to him, ‘I am going to take you to see the Bloggs.’ ‘The what?’ said the unhappy man. ‘The Bloggs,’
said the other, darkly. Naturally assuming that it was the name of a public-house
he reluctantly followed his friend. He came to a small front-garden; if it was a
public-house it was not a businesslike one. They raised the latch—they rang the
bell (if the bell was not in the close time just then). No flower in the pots
winked. No brick grinned. No sign in Heaven or earth warned him. The birds
sang on in the trees. He went in.

The first time he spent an evening at the Bloggs there was no one there. That
is to say there was a worn but fiery little lady in a grey dress who didn’t approve
of ‘catastrophic solutions of social problems.’ That, he understood, was Mrs.
Blogg. There was a long, blonde, smiling young person who seemed to think
him quite off his head and who was addressed as Ethel. There were two people
whose meaning and status he couldn’t imagine, one of whom had a big nose and
the other hadn’t. . . . Lastly, there was a Juno-like creature in a tremendous hat
who eyed him all the time half wildly, like a shying horse, because he said he
was quite happy. . . .

But the second time he went there he was plumped down on a sofa beside a
being of whom he had a vague impression that brown hair grew at intervals all
down her like a caterpillar. Once in the course of conversation she looked
straight at him and he said to himself as plainly as if he had read it in a book: ‘If
I had anything to do with this girl I should go on my knees to her: if I spoke with
her she would never deceive me: if I depended on her she would never deny me:
if I loved her she would never play with me: if I trusted her she would never go
back on me: if I remembered her she would never forget me. I may never see her
again. Goodbye.’ It was all said in a flash: but it was all said. . . .

Two years, as they say in the playbills, is supposed to elapse. And here is the
subject of this memoir sitting on a balcony above the sea. The time, evening. He
is thinking of the whole bewildering record of which the foregoing is a brief
outline: he sees how far he has gone wrong and how idle and wasteful and
wicked he has often been: how miserably unfitted he is for what he is called
upon to be. Let him now declare it and hereafter for ever hold his peace.

But there are four lamps of thanksgiving always before him. The first is for his
creation out of the same earth with such a woman as you. The second is that he
has not, with all his faults, ‘gone after strange women.’ You cannot think how a
man’s self restraint is rewarded in this. The third is that he has tried to love
everything alive: a dim preparation for loving you. And the fourth is—but no
words can express that. Here ends my previous existence. Take it: it led me to
you.
DREAMS

There can be comparatively little question that the place ordinarily occupied by dreams in literature is peculiarly unreal and unsatisfying. When the hero tells us that “last night he dreamed a dream,” we are quite certain from the perfect and decorative character of the dream that he made it up at breakfast. The dream is so reasonable that it is quite impossible. An angel came to him and opened before him a scroll inscribed with some tremendous moral truth; a knight in armour rode past him declaring some ideal quest; the phantom of his mother arose to warn him from some imminent sin. Dreams like these are (with occasional exceptions) practically unknown in the lawless kingdoms of the night. A dream is scarcely ever rounded to express faultlessly some faultless ideas. An angel might indeed open a scroll before the dreamer, but it would probably be inscribed with some remark about excursion trains to Brighton; a knight in armour might ride by him, but it would be impossible to deny that the most salient fact about that warrier was the fact that he was wearing three hats; his mother might indeed appear to the dreamer, and give him the tenderest and most elevated counsel, but it would be impossible for the loftiest ethical comfort to entirely obscure the fact that her nose was growing longer and longer every minute. Dreams have a kind of hellish ingenuity and energy in the pursuit of the inappropriate; the most omniscient and cunning artist never took so much trouble or achieved such success in finding exactly the word that was right or exactly the action that was significant, as this midnight lord of misrule can do in finding exactly the word that is wrong and exactly the action that is meaningless. The object of art is to subordinate the detail that is incidental to the tendency which is general. The object of a dream appears to be so to develop itself that some utterly futile and half-witted detail shall gradually devour all the other details of the vision. The flower upon the wall-paper just behind the head of Napoleon Buonaparte becomes brighter and brighter until we see nothing but a flower; the third waistcoat button of our best friend grows larger and larger until it is the great round sun of a revolving cosmos.

Thus at first sight it would seem that the lord of dreams was the eternal opponent of art. He seems to be to the aesthetic system what Satan is to the religious system, an unconquerable enemy, an irreducible minimum. The prigs of art who in this period erect their impeccable edifice, with even more than the gravity of the prigs of religion, have to deal with this mighty underworld of man
in which their new rules are set as much at naught as the old ones, which is as careless of the modern canons of pleasure as of the ancient canons of pain. Asleep the artist is in the hands of an enchantress of ugliness who makes him love the discordant and hate the beautiful. In that realm the landscape painter paints monstrous landscapes, mingling scarlet and purple; in that realm the musician devises torturing melodies, and the architect top-heavy cathedrals.

So far as the forms and modes of art are concerned this is indeed true. The translucently allegorical dreams so often narrated in romance are essentially inconceivable. When the aged priest in a story narrates his dream, in which the imagery is dignified and the message plain, we are free to yield finally to a conviction that must have long been growing on us, and conclude that he is a somewhat distinguished liar. Dreams may have infinite meanings, but those meanings are not conveyed obviously by communicative mothers and candid angels. The Bible is an excellent place to look for a wisdom and morality older than mere words and ideals, and there is certainly far more truth in the old Biblical version of the nature of dreams which made them inscrutable and somewhat grotesque parables requiring particular persons to interpret them. If great spiritual truths are conveyed by dreams, they must certainly be conveyed as they were to Pharaoh or Nebuchadnezzar by farcical mysteries of clay-footed images and lean cows eating fat ones.

But there is another and far deeper manner in which dreams definitely correspond to art. Nothing is more remarkable in some of the great artistic masterpieces of the world than their startling deficiency in much of that sense of grace and proportion which goes nowadays by the name of art. If art were really what some contemporary critics represent it, a matter of the faultless arrangement of harmonies and transitions, Shakespeare would certainly not be anything like so great an artist as the last poetaster in Fleet Street who published a series of seven sonnets on seven varieties of grey sunset. Shakespeare often suffers from too much inventiveness; that which clogs us and trips us up in his masterpieces is not so much inferior work as irrelevant brilliancy; not so much failures as fragments of other masterpieces. Dickens was designless without knowing or caring; Sterne was designless by design. Yet these great works which mix up abstractions fit for an epic with fooleries not fit for a pantomime, which clash the sword with the red-hot poker, which present such a picture of literary chaos as might be produced if the characters in every book from Paradise Lost to Pickwick broke from their covers and mingled in one mad romance “these great works have assuredly a unity of their own or they would not be
works of art. The unity which they have is a unity which when properly understood gives us the key of almost the whole of literary æsthetics: it is the same unity that we find in dreams. There is one unity which we do find in dreams. It binds together a their brutal inconsequence and all their moonstruck anti-climaxes. It makes the unimaginable nocturnal farce which begins with a saint choosing parasols and ends with a policeman shelling peas, as rounded and single a harmony as some poet’s roundel upon a passion flower. This unity is the absolute unity of emotion. If we wish to experience pure and naked feeling we can never experience it so really as in that unreal land. There the passions seem to live an outlawed and abstract existence, unconnected with any facts or persons. In dreams we have revenge without any injury, remorse without any sin, memory without any recollections, hope without any prospect. Love, indeed, almost proves itself a divine thing by the logic of dreams; for in a dream every material circumstance may alter, spectacles may grow on a baby, and moustaches on a maiden aunt, and yet the great sway of one tyrannical tenderness may never cease. Our dream may begin with the end of the world, and end with a picnic at Hampton Court, but the same rich and nameless mood will be expressed by the falling stars and by the crumbling sandwiches. In a dream daisies may glare at us like the eyes of demons. In a dream lightning and conflagration may warm and soothe us like our own fireside. In this subconscious world, in short, existence betrays itself; it shows that it is full of spiritual forces which disguise themselves as lions and lamp-posts, which can as easily disguise themselves as butterflies and Babylonian temples. The essential unity of a dream, which is never broken or impaired, is the unity of its attitude towards God, wistful or vacant, or grateful, or rebellious or assured.

Surely this unity of dreams was the unity which underlay the old wild masterpieces of literature. The plays of Shakespeare, for example, may be full of incidental discords, but not one of them ever fails to convey its aboriginal sentiment, that life is as black as the tempest or as green as the greenwood. It is said that art should represent life. So indeed it should, but it labours under the primary disadvantage that no man has seen life at any time. Long records of Whitechapel crime, long rows of Brixton villas, the words which one clerk says to another clerk, the despatches that one diplomatist writes to another diplomatist, none of these things even approach to being life. For life the man of science, even if he lives in the very heart of Brixton, is still searching with a microscope. Life dwells alone in our very heart of hearts, life is one and virgin and unconquered, and sometimes in the watches of the night speaks in its own
terrible harmony.
If any one wishes to form the fullest estimate of the real character and influence of the great man whose name is prefixed to these remarks, he will not find it in his novels, splendid as they are, or in his ethical views, clearly and finely as they are conceived and expanded. He will find it best expressed in the news that has recently come from Canada, that a sect of Russian Christian anarchists has turned all its animals loose, on the ground that it is immoral to possess them or control them. About such an incident as this there is a quality altogether independent of the rightness or wrongness, the sanity or insanity, of the view. It is first and foremost a reminder that the world is still young. There are still theories of life as insanely reasonable as those which were disputed under the clear blue skies of Athens. There are still examples of a faith as fierce and practical as that of the Mahometans, who swept across Africa and Europe, shouting a single word. To the languid contemporary politician and philosopher it seems doubtless like something out of a dream, that in this iron-bound, homogeneous, and clockwork age, a company of European men in boots and waistcoats should begin to insist on taking the horse out of the shafts of the omnibus, and lift the pig out of his pig-sty, and the dog out of his kennel, because of a moral scruple or theory. It is like a page from some fairy farce to imagine the Doukhabor solemnly escorting a hen to the door of the yard and bidding it a benevolent farewell as it sets out on its travels. All this, as I say, seems mere muddle-headed absurdity to the typical leader of human society in this decade, to a man like Mr. Balfour, or Mr. Wyndham. But there is nevertheless a further thing to be said, and that is that, if Mr. Balfour could be converted to a religion which taught him that he was morally bound to walk into the House of Commons on his hands, and he did walk on his hands, if Mr. Wyndham could accept a creed which taught that he ought to dye his hair blue, and he did dye his hair blue, they would both of them be, almost beyond description, better and happier men than they are. For there is only one happiness possible or conceivable under the sun, and that is enthusiasm—that strange and splendid word that has passed through so many vicissitudes, which meant, in the eighteenth century the condition of a lunatic, and in ancient Greece the presence of a god.

This great act of heroic consistency which has taken place in Canada is the best example of the work of Tolstoy. It is true (as I believe) that the Doukhabors
have an origin quite independent of the great Russian moralist, but there can surely be little doubt that their emergence into importance and the growth and mental distinction of their sect, is due to his admirable summary and justification of their scheme of ethics. Tolstoy, besides being a magnificent novelist, is one of the very few men alive who have a real, solid, and serious view of life. He is a Catholic church, of which he is the only member, the somewhat arrogant Pope and the somewhat submissive layman. He is one of the two or three men in Europe, who have an attitude towards things so entirely their own, that we could supply their inevitable view on anything—a silk hat, a Home Rule Bill, an Indian poem, or a pound of tobacco. There are three men in existence who have such an attitude: Tolstoy, Mr. Bernard Shaw, and my friend Mr. Hilaire Belloc. They are all diametrically opposed to each other, but they all have this essential resemblance, that, given their basis of thought, their soil of conviction, their opinions on every earthly subject grow there naturally, like flowers in a field. There are certain views of certain things that they must take; they do not form opinions, the opinions form themselves. Take, for instance, in the case of Tolstoy, the mere list of miscellaneous objects which I wrote down at random above, a silk hat, a Home Rule Bill, an Indian poem, and a pound of tobacco. Tolstoy would say: “I believe in the utmost possible simplification of life; therefore, this silk hat is a black abortion.” He would say: “I believe in the utmost possible simplification of life; therefore, this Home Rule Bill is a mere peddling compromise; it is no good to break up a centralised empire into nations, you must break the nation up into individuals.” He would say: “I believe in the utmost possible simplification of life; therefore, I am interested in this Indian poem, for Eastern ethics, under all their apparent gorgeousness, are far simpler and more Tolstoyan than Western.” He would say: “I believe in the utmost possible simplification of life; therefore, this pound of tobacco is a thing of evil; take it away.” Everything in the world, from the Bible to a bootjack, can be, and is, reduced by Tolstoy to this great fundamental Tolstoyan principle, the simplification of life. When we deal with a body of opinion like this we are dealing with an incident in the history of Europe infinitely more important than the appearance of Napoleon Buonaparte.

This emergence of Tolstoy, with his awful and simple ethics, is important in more ways than one. Among other things it is a very interesting commentary on an attitude which has been taken up for the matter of half a century by all the avowed opponents of religion. The secularist and the sceptic have denounced Christianity first and foremost, because of its encouragement of fanaticism;
because religious excitement led men to burn their neighbours and to dance naked down the street. How queer it all sounds now. Religion can be swept out of the matter altogether, and still there are philosophical and ethical theories which can produce fanaticism enough to fill the world. Fanaticism has nothing at all to do with religion. There are grave scientific theories which, if carried out logically, would result in the same fires in the market-place and the same nakedness in the street. There are modern esthetes who would expose themselves like the Adamites if they could do it in elegant attitudes. There are modern scientific moralists who would burn their opponents alive, and would be quite contented if they were burnt by some new chemical process. And if any one doubts this proposition—that fanaticism has nothing to do with religion, but has only to do with human nature—let him take this case of Tolstoy and the Doukhobors. A sect of men start with no theology at all, but with the simple doctrine that we ought to love our neighbour and use no force against him, and they end in thinking it wicked to carry a leather handbag, or to ride in a cart. A great modern writer who erases theology altogether, denies the validity of the Scriptures and the Churches alike, forms a purely ethical theory that love should be the instrument of reform, and ends by maintaining that we have no right to strike a man if he is torturing a child before our eyes. He goes on, he develops a theory of the mind and the emotions, which might be held by the most rigid atheist, and he ends by maintaining that the sexual relation out of which all humanity has come, is not only not moral, but is positively not natural. This is fanaticism as it has been and as it will always be. Destroy the last copy of he Bible, and persecution and insane orgies will be founded on Mr. Herbert Spencer’s “Synthetic Philosophy.” Some of the broadest thinkers of the Middle Ages believed in faggots, and some of the broadest thinkers in the nineteenth century believe in dynamite.

The truth is that Tolstoy, with his immense genius, with his colossal faith, with his vast fearlessness and vast knowledge of life, is deficient in one faculty and one faculty alone. He is not a mystic: and therefore he has a tendency to go mad. Men talk of the extravagances and frenzies that have been produced by mysticism: they are a mere drop in the bucket. In the main, and from the beginning of time, mysticism has kept men sane. The thing that has driven them mad was logic. It is significant that, with all that has been said about the excitability of poets, only one English poet ever went mad, and he went mad from a logical system of theology. He was Cowper, and his poetry retarded his insanity for many years. So poetry, in which Tolstoy is deficient, has always
been a tonic and sanative thing. The only thing that has kept the race of men from the mad extremes of the convent and the pirate-galley, the night-club and the lethal chamber, has been mysticism—the belief that logic is misleading, and that things are not what they seem.

G. K. CHESTERTON.

LEO TOLSTOY AS WRITER

HALF the ignorance or misunderstanding of this greatest living figure in literature comes of the attempt to judge him as we judge the specialised Western novelist—an utterly futile method of approach. He is a Russian, in the first place. Had he come to Paris with Turguenieff, he might have been similarly re-nationalised, might possibly have developed into a writer pure and simple; the world might so have gained a few great romances—it would have lost infinitely in other directions. Turguenieff wished it so. “My friend,” he wrote to Tolstoy from his deathbed, “return to literature! Reflect that that gift comes to you whence everything comes to us. Ah! how happy I should be if I could think that my prayers could influence you. . . . My friend, great writer of our Russian land, hear my entreaty!” For once, the second greatest of modern Russians took a narrow view of character and destiny. Genius must work itself out on its own lines. Tolstoy remained a Russian from tip to toe—that is one of his supreme values for us; and he remained an indivisible personality. The artist and the moralist are inseparable in his works. “We are not to take ‘Anna Karenina’ as a work of art,” said Matthew Arnold; “we are to take it as a piece of life.” The distinction is not very satisfactorily stated, but the meaning is clear. So, too, W. D. Howells, in his introduction to an American edition of the “Sebastopol Sketches”: “I do not know how it is with others to whom these books of Tolstoy’s have come, but for my part I cannot think of them as literature in the artistic sense at all. Some people complain to me when I praise them that they are too long, too diffuse, too confused, that the characters’ names are hard to pronounce, and that the life they portray is very sad and not amusing. In the presence of these criticisms I can only say that I find them nothing of the kind, but that each history of Tolstoy’s is as clear, as orderly, as brief, as something I have lived through myself. I cannot think of any service which imaginative literature has done the race so great as that which Tolstoy has done in his conception of Karenina at that crucial moment when the cruelly outraged man sees that he cannot be good with dignity. This leaves all tricks of fancy, all
effects of art, immeasurably behind.” So much being said, however, we may be allowed to emphasise in this qualities and achievements of Tolstoy as artist, rather than the expositions of Christian Anarchism and the social philippics under which those achievements have been somewhat hidden in recent years.

Morbid introspectiveness and the spirit of revolt inevitably colour what is best in nineteenth-century Russia. Born at Yasny Polyana (“Clear Field”), Tula, in 1828, and early orphaned, Tolstoy’s youth synchronised with the period of reaction that brought the Empire to the humiliating disasters of the Crimean War. No hope was left in the thin layer of society lying between the two millstones of the Court and the serfs; none in the little sphere of art where Byronic romanticism was ready to expire. The boy saw from the first the rottenness of the patriarchal aristocracy in which his lot seemed to be cast. Precocious, abnormally sensitive and observant, impatient of discipline and formal learning, awkward and bashful, always brooding, not a little conceited, he was a sceptic at fifteen, and left the University of Kazan in disgust at the stupid conventions of the time and place, without taking his degree. “Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth”—which appeared in three sections between 1852 and 1857—tells the story of this period, though the figure of Irtenieff is probably a projection rather than a portrait of himself, to whom he is always less fair, not to say merciful, than to others. This book is a most uncompromising exercise in self-analysis. It of great length, there is no plot, and few outer events are recorded.

The realism is generally morbid, but is varied by some passages of great descriptive power, such as the account of the storm, and occasionally with tender pathos, as in the story of the soldier’s death, as well as by grimly vivid pages, such as the narrative of the mother’s death. In this earliest work will be found the seeds both of Tolstoy’s artistic genius and of his ethical gospel.

After five years of mildly benevolent efforts among his serfs at Yasny Polyana (the disappointments of which he related a few years later in “A Landlord’s Morning,” intended to have been part of a full novel called “A Russian Proprietor”), his elder brother Nicholas persuaded him to join the army, and in 1851 he was drafted to the Caucasus as an artillery officer. On this favourite stage of Russian romance, where for the first time he saw the towering mountains and the tropical sun, and met the rugged adventurous highlanders, Tolstoy felt his imagination stirred as Byron among the isles of Greece, and his early revulsion against city life confirmed as Wordsworth amid the Lakes, as Thoreau at Walden, by a direct call from Nature to his own heart. The largest result of this experience was “The Cossacks” (1852). Turguenieff described this
fine prose epic of the contact of civilised and savage man as “the best novel written in our language.” “The Raid” (or “The Invaders,” as Mr. Dole’s translation is entitled), same year, “The Wood-Cutting Expedition” (1855), “Meeting an Old Acquaintance” (1856), and “A Prisoner in the Caucasus” (1862) are also drawn from recollections of this sojourn, and show the same descriptive and romantic power. Upon the outbreak of the Crimean War the Count was called to Sebastopol, where he had command of a battery, and took part in the defence of the citadel. The immediate product of these dark months of bloodshed was the thrilling series of impressions reprinted from one of the leading Russian reviews as “Sebastopol Sketches” (1856). From that day onward Tolstoy knew and hateful truth about war and the thoughtless pseudo-patriotism which hurries nations into fratricidal slaughter. From that there was expunged from his mind all the cheap romanticism which depends upon the glorification of the savage nature. These wonderful pictures of the routine of the battlefield established his position in Russia as a writer, and later on created in Western countries an impression like that of the canvases of Verestchagin.

For a brief time Tolstoy became a figure in the old and new capitals of Russia by right of talent as well as birth. His very chequered friendship with Turguenieff, one of the oddest chapters in literary history, can only be mentioned here. In 1857 he travelled in Germany, France, and Italy. It was of these years that he declared in “My Confession” that he could not think of them without horror, disgust, and pain of heart. The catalogue of crime which he charged against himself in his salvationist crisis of twenty years later must not be taken literally; but that there was some ground for it we may guess from the scenic and incidental realism of the “Recollections of a Billiard Marker” (1856), and of many a later page. Several other powerful short novels date from about this time, including “Albert” and “Lucerne,” both of which remind us of the Count’s susceptibility to music; “Polikushka,” a tale of peasant life; and “Family Happiness,” the story of a marriage that failed, a most clear, consistent, forceful, and in parts beautiful piece of work, anticipating in essentials “The Kreutzer Sonata” that was to scandalise the world thirty years afterward.

After all, it was family happiness that saved Leo Tolstoy. For the third time the hand of death had snatched away one of the nearest to him—his brother Nicholas. Two years later, in 1862, he married Miss Behrs, daughter of the army surgeon in Tula—the most fortunate thing that has happened to him in his whole life, I should think. Family responsibilities, those novel and daring experiments in peasant education which are recorded in several volumes of the highest
interest, the supervision of the estate, magisterial work, and last, but not least, the prolonged labours upon “War and Peace” and “Anna Karenina” fill up the next fifteen years. “War and Peace” (1864–9) is a huge panorama of the Napoleonic campaign of 1812, with preceding and succeeding episodes in Russian society. These four volumes display in their superlative degree Tolstoy’s indifference to plot and his absorption in individual character; they are rather a series of scenes threaded upon the fortunes of several families than a set novel; but they contain passages of penetrating psychology and vivid description, as well as a certain amount of anarchist theorising. Of this work, by which its author became known in the West, Flaubert (how the name carries us backward!) wrote: “It is of the first order. What a painter and what a psychologist! The two first volumes are sublime, but the third drags frightfully. There are some quite Shakespearean things in it.” The artist’s hand was now strengthening for his highest attainment. In 1876 appeared “Anna Karenina,” his greatest, and as he intended at the time (but Art is not so easily jilted), his last novel. The fine qualities of this book, which, though long, is dramatically unified and vitally coherent, have been so fully recognised that I need not attempt to describe them. Mr. George Meredith has described Anna as “the most perfectly depicted female character in all fiction,” which, from the author of “Diana,” is praise indeed. Parallel with the main subject of the illicit love of Anna and Vronsky there is a minor subject in the fortunes of Levin and Kitty, wherein the reader will discover many of Tolstoy’s own experiences. Matthew Arnold complained that the book contained too many characters and a burdensome multiplicity of actions, but praised its author’s extraordinarily fine perception and no less extraordinary truthfulness, and frankly revelled in Anna’s “large, fresh, rich, generous, delightful nature.” “When I had ended my work ‘Anna Karenina,’” said Tolstoy in “My Confession” (1879–82), “my despair reached such a height that I could do nothing but think of the horrible condition in which I found myself. . . . I saw only one thing—Death. Everything else was a lie.” Of that spiritual crisis nothing need be said here except that it only intensified, and did not really, as it seemed to do, vitally change, principles and instincts which had possessed Tolstoy from the beginning. His subsequent ethical and religious development may be traced in a long series of books and pamphlets, of which the most important are “The Gospels Translated, Compared, and Harmonised” (1880–2), “What I Believe” [“My Religion”], produced abroad in 1884, “What is to be Done?” (1884–5), “Life” (1887), “Work” (1888), “The Kingdom of God is Within You” (1893), “Non-Action” (1894), “Patriotism and Christianity” (1896)
—crusade, in the foreign and the clandestine presses at least, against all Imperial authority and social maladjustments. Mr. Tchertkoff, Mr. Aylmer Maudej the “Brotherhood Publishing Co.,” and the “Free Age Press” deserve praise for their efforts to popularise these and other works of the Count in thoroughly good translations. In “What is Art?” (1898), not content with the bare utilitarian argument that it is merely a means of social union, he launched a jehad against all modern ideas of Art which rely upon a conception of beauty and all ideas of beauty into which pleasure enters as a leading constituent. A short but luminous essay on “Guy de Maupassant and the Art of Fiction” is a scathing attack upon militarism in general and the Franco-Russian Alliance in particular—“The Christian Teaching” (1898), and “The Slavery of our Times” (1900). Various letters on the successive famines and on the religious persecutions in Russia deserve separate mention; they remind us that since the failure of the revolutionary movement miscalled “Nihilism” Tolstoy has gradually risen to the position of the one man who can continue with impunity a public more satisfactory contribution to the subject.

It is more to our purpose to note that in this volcanic and fecund if fundamentally simple personality the artist has dogged the steps of the evangelist to the last. “Master and Man” (1895) is one of the most exquisite short stories ever written. “The Death of Ivan Ilyitch” (1884) and “Resurrection” (1899) are in some ways the most powerful of all his works. The much condemned “Dominion of Darkness” (1886) and “Kreutzer Sonata” (1889) will be more fairly judged when the average Englishman has learned the supreme merit of that uncompromising truthfulness which gives nobility to every line the grand Russian ever wrote. To submit a work like “Resurrection” to the summary treatment which the ordinary novel receives and merits is absurd. It is a large picture of the fall and rise of man done by the swift and restless hand of a master who stands in a category apart, with an eye that sees externals and essentials with like accuracy and rapidity. Because the dramatic quality of these living pictures lies, not in their organisation into a conventionally limited plot, but first in the challenging idea upon which they are founded, then the inexorable development of individual characters, and ever and anon in the grip of particular episodes, the little critics scoff. The idea, the characters, the episodes are all too real and precious British self-complacency. The grandmotherly Athenoeum permits some person to describe this Promethean figure as “a precious vase that has been broken,” and can now only be pieced together to make “the ornament of a museum,”—which reminds me that I heard a lecturer before a well-known
literary society in London describe him lately as a “scavenger,” and that a city bookseller assured me the other day that there was something almost amounting to a boycott against his fiction in the shops. The publisher who is preparing a complete edition of Tolstoy—enormous work!—knows better, knows that Tolstoy is one of the world-spirits whose advance out of the obscurity of a benighted land into the largest contemporary circulation is but a foretaste of an influence that will soon be co-extensive with the commonwealth of thinking men and women.

His service to literature is precisely the same as his service to morals. Like Bunyan and Burns, Dickens and Whitman, he throws down in a world of decadent conventions the gauge of the democratic ideal. As he calls the politician and the social reformer back to the land and the common people, so he calls the artist back to the elemental forces ever at work beneath the surface-show of nature and humanity. With an extraordinary penetration into the hidden recesses of character, he joins a terrible truthfulness, and that absolute simplicity of manner which we generally associate with genius. He is a realist, not merely of the outer, but more especially of the inner life. There is no staginess, no sentimentality, in his work. He has no heroes in our Western sense, none, even, of those sensational types of personality which glorify the name of his Northern contemporary, Ibsen. His style is always natural, direct, irresistible as a physical process. He has rarely strayed beyond the channel of his own experience, and the reader who prefers breadth to depth of knowledge must seek elsewhere. He has little humour, but a grimly satiric note has sometimes crept into his writing, as Archdeacon Farrar will remember. Of artifice designed for vulgar entertainment he knows nothing; in the world of true art, which is the wine-press of the soul of man, he stands, a princely figure. Theories, prescriptions, and discussions are forgotten, and we think only with love and reverence of this modern patriarch, so lonely amid the daily enlarging congregation of the hearts he has awakened to a sense of the mystery, the terror, the joy, the splendour of human destinies.

G. H. PERRIS.

Tolstoy’s Place in European Literature

The justness of the word great applied to a nation’s writers is perhaps best tested by simply taking each writer in turn from out his Age, and seeing how far our conception of his Age remains unaffected. We may take away hundreds of clever writers, scores of distinguished creators, and the Age remains before our eyes, solidly unaffected by their absence; but touch one or two central figures, and lo! the whole framework of the Age gives in your hands, and you realise that
the World’s insight into, and understanding of that Age’s life has been supplied us by the special interpretation offered by two or three great minds. In fact, every Age seems dwarfed, chaotic, full of confused tendencies and general contradiction till the few great men have arisen, and symbolised in themselves what their nation’s growth or strife signifies. How many dumb ages are there in which no great writer has appeared, ages to whose inner life in consequence we have no key!

Tolstoy’s significance as the great writer of modern Russia can scarcely be augmented in Russian eyes by his exceeding significance to Europe as symbolising the spiritual unrest of the modern world. Yet so inevitably must the main stream of each age’s tendency and the main movement of the world’s thought be discovered for us by the great writers, whenever they appear, that Russia can no more keep Tolstoy’s significance to herself than could Germany keep Goethe’s to herself. True it is that Tolstoy, as great novelist, has been absorbed in mirroring the peculiar world of half-feudal, modern Russia, a world strange to Western Europe, but the spirit of analysis with which the creator of Anna Karenina and War and Peace has confronted the modern world is more truly representative of our Age’s outlook than is the spirit of any other of his great contemporaries. Between the days of Wilhelm Meister and of Resurrection what an extraordinary volume of the rushing tide of modern life has swept by! A century of that “liberation of modern Europe from the old routine” has passed since Goethe stood forth for “the awakening of the modern spirit.” A century of emancipation, of Science, of unbelief, of incessant shock, change, and Progress all over the face of Europe, and even as Goethe a hundred years ago typified the triumph of the new intelligence of Europe over the shackles of its old institutions, routine, and dogma (as Matthew Arnold affirms), so Tolstoy today stands for the triumph of the European soul against civilisation’s routine and dogma. The peculiar modernness of Tolstoy’s attitude, however, as we shall presently show, is that he is inspired largely by the modern scientific spirit in his searching analysis of modern life. Apparently at war with Science and Progress, his extraordinary fascination for the mind of Europe lies in the fact that he of all great contemporary writers has come nearest to demonstrating, to realising what the life of the modern man is. He of all the analysts of the civilised man’s thoughts, emotions, and actions has least idealized, least beautified, and least distorted the complex daily life of the European world. With a marked moral bias, driven onward in his search for truth by his passionate religious temperament, Tolstoy, in his pictures of life, has constructed a truer whole, a
human world less bounded by the artist’s individual limitations, more mysteriously living in its vast flux and flow than is the world of any writer of the century. War and Peace and Anna Karenina, those great worlds where the physical environment, mental outlook, emotional aspiration, and moral code of the whole community of Russia are reproduced by his art, as some mighty cunning phantasmagoria of changing life, are superior in the sense of containing a whole nation’s life, to the world of Goethe, Byron, Scott, Victor Hugo, Balzac, Dickens, Thackeray, Maupassant, or any latter day creator we can name.

And not only so, but Tolstoy’s analysis of life throws more light on the main currents of thought in our Age, raises deeper problems, and explores more untouched territories of the mind than does any corresponding analysis by his European contemporaries.

It is by Tolstoy’s passionate seeking of the life of the soul that the great Russian writer towers above the men of our day, and it is because his hunger for spiritual truth has led him to probe contemporary life, to examine all modern formulas and appearances, to penetrate into the secret thought and emotion of men of all grades in our complex society, that his work is charged with the essence of nearly all that modernity thinks and feels, believes and suffers, hopes and fears as it evolves in more and more complex forms of our terribly complex civilisation. The soul of humanity is, however, always the appeal of men from the life that environs, moulds, and burdens them, to instincts that go beyond and transcend their present life. Tolstoy is the appeal of the modern world, the cry of the modern conscience against the blinded fate of its own progress. To the eye of science everything is possible in human life, the sacrifice of the innocent for the sake of the progress of the guilty, the crushing and deforming of the weak so that the strong may triumph over them, the evolution of new serf classes at the dictates of a ruling class. All this the nineteenth century has seen accomplished, and not seen alone in Russia. It is Tolstoy’s distinction to have combined in his life-work more than any other great artist two main conflicting points of view. He has fused by his art the science that defines the way Humanity is forced forward blindly and irresponsibly from century to century by the mere pressure of events, he has fused with this science of our modern world the soul’s protest against the earthly fate of man which leads the generations into taking the ceaseless roads of evil which every age unwinds.

Let us cite Tolstoy’s treatment of War as an instance of how this great artist symbolises the Age for us and so marks the advance in self-consciousness of the modern mind, and as a nearer approximation to a realisation of what life is. We
have only got to compare Tolstoy’s “Sebastopol” (1856) with any other document on war by other European writers to perceive that Tolstoy alone among artists has realised war, his fellows have idealised it. To quote a passage from a former article let us say that: “Sebastopol” gives us war under all aspects —war as a squalid, honourable, daily affair of mud and glory, of vanity, disease, hard work, stupidity, patriotism, and inhuman agony. Tolstoy gets the complex effects of “Sebastopol” by keenly analysing the effect of the sights and sounds, dangers and pleasures, of war on the brains of a variety of typical men, and by placing a special valuation of his own on these men’s actions, thoughts, and emotions, on their courage, altruism, and show of indifference in the face of death. He lifts up, in fact, the veil of appearances conventionally drawn by society over the actualities of the glorious trade of killing men, and he does this chiefly by analysing keenly the insensitiveness and indifference of the average mind, which says of the worst of war’s realities, “I felt so and so, and did so and so: but as to what those other thousands may have felt in their agony, that I did not enter into at all.” “Sebastopol,” therefore, though an exceedingly short and exceedingly simple narrative, is a psychological document on modern war of extraordinary value, for it simply relegates to the lumber-room, as unlife-like and hopelessly limited, all those theatrical glorifications of war which men of letters, romantic poets, and grave historians alike have been busily piling up on humanity’s shelves from generation to generation. And more: we feel that in “Sebastopol” we have at last the skeptical modern spirit, absorbed in actual life, demonstrating what war is, and expressing at length the confused sensations of countless men, who have heretofore, recognising this man Tolstoy as the most advanced product of our civilisation, and likening him to a great surgeon, who, not deceived by the world’s presentation of its own life, penetrates into the essential joy and suffering, health and disease of multitudes of men; a surgeon who, face to face with the strangest of Nature’s laws in the constitution of human society, puzzled by all the illusions, fatailities, and conventions of the human mind, resolutely sets himself to lay bare the roots of all its passions, appetites, and incentives in the struggle for life, so that at least human reason may advance farther along the path of self-knowledge in advancing towards a general sociological study of man.

Tolstoy’s place in nineteenth-century literature is, therefore, in our view, no less fixed and certain than is Voltaire’s place in the eighteenth century. Both of these writers focus for us in a marvelously complete manner the respective methods of analysing life by which the rationalism of the seventeenth and
eighteenth centuries, and the science and humanitarianism of the nineteenth
century have moulded for us the modern world. All the movements, all the
problems, all the speculation, all the agitations of the world of today in contrast
with the immense materialistic civilisation that science has hastily built up for us
in three or four generations, all the spirit of modern life is condensed in the
pages of Tolstoy’s writings, because, as we have said, he typifies the soul of the
modern man gazing, now undaunted, and now in alarm, at the formidable array
of the newly-tabulated cause and effect of humanity’s progress, at the appalling
cheapness and waste of human life in Nature’s hands. Tolstoy thus stands for the
modern soul’s alarm in contact with science. And just as science’s work after its
first destruction of the past ages’ formalism, superstition, and dogma is directed
more and more to the examination and amelioration of human life, so Tolstoy’s
work has been throughout inspired by a passionate love of humanity, and by his
ceaseless struggle against conventional religion, dogmatic science, and society’s
mechanical influence on the minds of its members. To make man more
conscious of his acts, to show society its real motives and what it is feeling, and
not cry out in admiration at what it pretends to feel—this has been the great
novelist’s aim in his delineation of Russia’s life. Ever seeking the one truth—to
arrive at men’s thoughts and sensations under the daily pressure of life—never
flinching from his exploration of the dark world of man’s animalism and
incessant self-deception, Tolstoy’s realism in art is symbolical of our absorption
in the world of fact, in the modern study of natural law, a study of ultimately
without loss of spirituality, nay, resulting in immense gain to the spiritual life.
The realism of the great Russian’s novels is, therefore, more in line with the
modern tendency and outlook than is the general tendency of other schools of
Continental literature. And Tolstoy must be finally looked on, not merely as the
conscience of the Russian world revolting against the too heavy burden which
the Russian people have now to bear in Holy Russia’s onward march towards the
building-up of her great Asiatic Empire, but also as the soul of the modern world
seeking to replace in its love of humanity the life of those old religions which
science is destroying day by day. In this sense Tolstoy will stand in European
literature as the conscience of the modern world.
THE RETURN OF THE ANGELS

Daily News, March 14th, 1903

I write these remarks with one great hope, that of arousing controversy. It is really a singular matter that amid all the talk of the great work of physical science and its alleged victory over religious dogmatism, no one has noticed what the greatest of all the triumphs of science really was. It was a discovery far greater than that of evolution. It was the discovery, not of a fact, but of a method, the mother of innumerable facts. That method is, of course, what is known in scientific theory as the method of the hypothesis. It can be most clearly and simply conveyed in common language by saying that it is the principle that the best way to see if a coat fits a man is not to measure both of them, but to try it on. It is the replacing of the very slow, logical method of accumulating, point by point, an absolute proof by a rapid, experimental and imaginative method which gives us, long before we can get absolute proof, a very good working belief. I hear, let us say, of a certain theory about the universe. As a trial, I assume it to be true; then, if I discover with a start that, once assumed, it explains the boots on my feet and the nose on my face, that my umbrella has a new and radiant meaning, that my front door suddenly explains itself, that truths about my cat and dog and wife and hat and sideboard crowd upon me all day and everyday, I believe that theory and go on believing it more and more.

On the other hand, if the theory be not true, I may be perfectly certain that ten minutes after I have experimentally assumed it, I shall break my shins over some contradiction. We have buttoned the coat round the world (that rotund and patient old gentleman) and it has split down the back. It is surely quite obvious that this is the method on which we base all our real beliefs and that on this, above all, we base our belief in evolution. Of the thousands of brilliant and elegant persons like ourselves who believe roughly in the Darwinian doctrine, how many are there who know which fossil or skeleton, which parrot’s tail or which cuttle-fish’s stomach, is really believed to be the conclusive example and absolute datum of natural selection? We know scarcely anything of the Darwinian facts that lead to conversion. What we know is much more important: the Darwinian facts that come after conversion. What we know, to use a higher language, are the fruits of the spirit. We know that with this idea once inside our heads a million things become transparent as if a lamp were lit behind them: we see the thing in the dog in the street, in the pear on the wall, in the book of
history we are reading, in the baby in the perambulator and in the last news from Borneo. And the fulfilments pour in upon us in so natural and continual a cataract that at last is reached that paradox of the condition which is called belief. We have seen so many evidences of the theory that we have forgotten them all. The theory is so clear to us that we can scarcely even defend it. If we walked up to the nearest rationalist we know and asked him to prove evolution, he would be dazed, like a man asked to defend justice.

Now it ought to be clearly stated at this stage of philosophical development that it is most emphatically by this method of the successful hypothesis, of the theory that justifies itself, that so large a number of the young in this generation have returned to a certain doctrine of the spiritual. What this doctrine is it may be right to state as baldly and as briefly as possible; it is the view that the world, closely examined, does point with an extreme suggestiveness to the existence of a spiritual world, of a world of agencies not apparently produced by matter, capable to some extent of controlling and inspiring, capable to some extent of being known. It ought, I say, to be plainly stated that numbers of us have returned to this belief; and that we have returned to it, not because of this argument or that argument, but because the theory, when it is adopted, works out everywhere; because the coat, when it is tried on, fits in every crease. It ought to be stated because the old rationalists are rightly indignant with us, in so far as they fancy that we base such a tremendous doctrine on a few desperate quibbles; in so far as they fancy, as they do, that we are hanging on to religion by sticks and straws. . . . The return to the spiritual theory rests on none of these things. It rests, like the movement towards evolution, on the fact that the thing works out. We put on the theory like a magic hat and history becomes translucent like a house of glass.

Let us begin at the beginning. A startling and sensational event occurred recently; I allude to the emergence of the creature called man. It is a recent event, cosmically considered; it is, comparatively speaking, only a little too old to have been headlined in the evening papers. The newness, suddenness and utter uniqueness of the rise of man reminds one of Japan in the East; only it is more so. . . . There may be a hundred explanations of this. No sane man would say that it involved a spiritual deduction. But it fits in with it, and fits in with it very well, to suppose that there is another atmosphere of life besides the animal and that this spiritual world irrupted in some way into that creature at the moment. The phenomenon does not prove Religion, but religion explains the Phenomenon. The Phenomenon is quite as solitary as the Incarnation. It can be explained by
saying that in a sense it was the Incarnation. Then we go on. There is one thing which the whole human race, without any exception at all, attests. From the dimmest ages and lands, wherever the seed of man is found, it declares this that such an irruption did take place in the beginning, that they or their fathers have had dealings with a darker or more wonderful being. If human evidence means anything at all, this is perhaps the only thing on which we have overwhelming evidence.

We have nearly overwhelming human witness to the necessity of morality; we have quite overwhelming human witness to the reality of the spiritual life. We are ready enough to quote the evidence of all mankind in support of police regulations or the data of ethics; but we think mankind must be talking nonsense when, with one universal shout it cries out to this thing which is older than sin. That Marcus Aurelius and the Red Indians, that Hindu sages and Italian brigands and Mr Spurgeon and Sir William Crookes should all by various roads come to this conclusion, this is an important thing. A more important thing still is that this belief in spirit, so far from being a morbid thing, is held by almost all people who are physically strong and live in the open air. Powerful peasants and farmers six feet high all believe in fairies. Rationalism is a disease of the towns, like the housing problem. All this is, of course, only suggestive, but it is very suggestive. The Phenomenon does not prove Religion; but Religion explains the Phenomenon. . . . We have not returned to the spiritual theory because of this or that triviality—because of a justification of the Fourth Gospel or a rap on the table. We have returned to it because, by the rejection of rationalism, the world becomes suddenly rational.
CHRISTIANITY AND RATIONALISM

My friend, Mr. George Haw, has asked me to state, in one or two articles, my general belief on the subject of Christianity, to be inserted in the Clarion. I will not pretend to any particular reluctance to do so; but I ought not to do it without first of all offering to Mr. Blatchford our gratitude, and something which is better than gratitude, our congratulations, upon the very magnanimous action which he has taken in thus putting this paper into the hands of the religious opponents. In doing so he has scored, in a generous unconsciousness, a real point.

Most of the awful revelations of Christian evil and ignorance do not, I am afraid, affect me in quite so serious a manner as they ought to. When I hear that a German professor has found the four-hundreth accurate origin of protoplasm, I try in vain to feel excitement; when I read that savages paint their faces green to please the ghosts (or what not), I have no feeling beyond a vague pleasure and sympathy. Both the German professor and the green-faced savage seem to me to be doing the same thing—that is, falling under the influence of that starry impulse which leads men to take a vast deal of trouble about quite useless things.

But such things do not make much difference to my view of Christianity. In the whole of this controversy I have felt the force of one thing, which has really hit practical Christianity; I think it is a good argument; I think it is a terrible argument. It is not that this controversy is being conducted in a non-Christian paper. It certainly is a fair point scored against a religion that the people who seem to be most interested in it are those who believe it to be a fraud. I think, therefore, that Mr. Blatchford’s magnanimity, like all magnanimity, is profoundly philosophical and wise.

Nor do I blame him, as some have done, for having discussed it at great length; as the subject is the nature of the Universe, it is necessarily as large as the Universe, and as rich as the Universe, and I may add, as amusing as the Universe.

In fact, I fancy there must be such a thing as Immortality, merely that Mr. Blatchford and I may have time to discuss whether it is true.

Before I give an outline of my view, there is one other thing to be said in which I cannot avoid the personal note. I have begun to realise that there are a good many people to whom my way of speaking about these things appears like an indication that I am flippant or imperfectly sincere. Since, as a matter of fact,
I am more certain of myself in this affair than I am of the existence of the moon, this naturally causes me some considerable regret; but I think I see the naturalness of the mistake and how it arose in people for removed from the Christian atmosphere. Christianity is itself so jolly a thing that it fills the possessor of it with a certain silly exuberance, which sad and high-minded Rationalists might reasonably mistake for mere buffoonery and blasphemy; just as their prototypes, the sad and high-minded Stoics of old Rome, did mistake the Christian joyousness for buffoonery and blasphemy.

This difference holds good everywhere, in the cold Pagan architecture and the grinning gargoyles of Christendom, in the preposterous motley of the Middle Ages and the dingy dress of this Rationlistic century. And if Mr. Blatchford wishes to know why we should be surprised if the Duke of Devonshire walked about with one leg red and the other yellow (as a nobleman might have done in the thirteenth century), I can obligingly inform him that it is because of the decay of our faith. Nowhere in history has there ever been any popular brightness and gaiety without religion.

The first of all the difficulties that I have in controverting Mr. Blatchford is simply this, that I shall be very largely going over his own ground. My favourite text-book of theology is God and my Neighbour but I cannot repeat it in detail. If I gave each of my reasons for being a Christian, a vast number of them would be Mr. Blachford’s reasons for not being one.

For instance, Mr. Blatchford and his school point out that there are many myths parallel to the Christian story; that there were Pagan Christs, and Red Indian Incarnations, and Patagonian Crucifixions, for all I know or care. But does not Mr. Blatchford see the other side of this fact? If the Christian God really made the human race, would not the human race tend to rumours and perversions of the Christian God? If the center of our life is a certain fact, would not people far from the center have a muddled version of that fact? If we are so made that a Son of God must deliver us, is it odd that Patagonians should dream of a Son of God?

The Blatchfordian position really amounts to this—that because a certain thing has impressed millions of different people as likely or necessary therefore is cannot be true. And then this bashful being, veiling his own talents, convicts the wretched G.K.C. of paradox! I like paradox, but I am not prepared to dance and dazzle to the extent of Nunquam, who points to humanity crying out to a thing, and pointing to it from immemorial ages, as a proof that it cannot be there.

The story of a Christ is very common in legend and literature. So is the story
of two lovers parted by Fate. So is the story of two friends killing each other for a woman. But will it seriously be maintained that, because these two stories are common as legends, therefore not two friends were ever separated by love or no two lovers by circumstances? It is tolerably plain, surely, that these two stories are common because the situation is an intensely probable and human one, because our nature is so built as to make them almost inevitable.

Why should it not be that our nature is so built as to make certain spiritual events inevitable? In any case, it is clearly ridiculous to attempt to disprove Christianity by the number and variety of Pagan Christs. You might as well take the number and variety of ideal schemes of society, from Plato’s Republic to Morris’ News from Nowhere, from More’s Utopia to Blatchford’s Merrie England, and then try and prove from them that mankind cannot ever reach a better social condition. If anything, of course, they prove the opposite; they suggest a human tendency towards a better condition.

Thus, in this first instance, when learned skeptics come to me and say, “Are you aware that the Kaffirs have a story of Incarnation?” I should reply: “Speaking as an unlearned person, I don’t know. But speaking as a Christian, I should be very much astonished if they hadn’t.”

Take a second instance. The Secularist says that Christianity has been a gloomy and ascetic thing, and points to the procession of austere or ferocious saints who have given up home and happiness and macerated health and sex. But it never seems to occur to him that the very oddity and completeness of the men’s surrender make it look very much as if there were really something actual and solid in the thing for which they sold themselves. They gave up all human experiences for the sake on one superhuman experience. They may have been wicked, but it looks as if there were such an experience.

It is perfectly tenable that this experience is as dangerous and selfish a thing as drink. A man who goes ragged and homeless in order to see visions may be as repellent and immoral as a man who goes ragged and homeless in order to drink brandy. That is a quite reasonable position. But what is manifestly not a reasonable position what would be, in fact not far from being an insane position, would be to say that the raggedness of the man, and the homelessness of the man, and the stupefied degradation of the man proved that there was no such thing as brandy.

That is precisely what the Secularist tries to say. He tries to prove that there is no such think as supernatural experience by pointing at the people who have given up everything for it. He tries to prove that there is no such thing by
proving that there are people who live on nothing else.

Again I may submissively ask: “Whose is the paradox?” The frantic severity of these men may, of course, show that they were eccentric people who loved unhappiness for its own sake. But it seems more in accordance with commonsense to suppose that they had really found the secret of some actual power or experience which was, like wine, a terrible consolation and a lonely joy.

Thus, then, in the second instance, when the learned sceptic says to me: “Christian saints gave up love and liberty for this one rapture of Christianity, I should have been surprised if they hadn’t.”

Take a third instance. The Secularist says that Christianity produced tumult and cruelty. He seems to suppose that this proves it to be bad. But it might prove it to be very good. For men commit crimes not only for bad things, far more often for good things. For no bad things can be desired quite so passionately and persistently as good things can be desired and only very exceptional men desire very bad and unnatural things.

Most crime is committed because, owing to some peculiar complication, very beautiful or necessary things are in some danger. For instance, if we wanted to abolish thieving and swindling at one blow, the best thing to do would be to abolish babies. Babies, the most beautiful things on earth, have been the excuse and origin of almost all the business of brutality and financial infamy on earth.

If we could abolish monogamic or romantic love, again the country would be dotted with Maiden Assizes. And if anywhere in history masses of common and kindly men become cruel it almost certainly does not mean that they are serving something in itself tyrannical (for why should they?). It almost certainly does mean that something that they rightly value is in peril such as the food of their children, the chastity of their women, or the independence of their country. And when something is set before them that is not only enormously valuable, but also quite new, the sudden vision, the chance of winning it, the chance of losing it, drive them mad. It has the same effect in the moral world that the finding of gold has in the economic world. It upsets values, and creates a kind of cruel rush.

We need not go far for instances quite apart from the instances of religion. When the modern doctrines of brotherhood and liberty were preached in France in the eighteenth century the time was ripe for them, the educated classes everywhere had been growing towards them, the world to a very considerable extent welcomed them. And yet all that preparation and openness were unable to prevent the burst of anger and agony which greets anything good. And if the
slow and polite preaching of rational fraternity in a rational age ended in the
massacres of September, what an a fortiori is here! What would be likely to be
the effect of the sudden dropping into a dreadfully evil century of a dreadfully
perfect truth? What would happen if a world baser than the world of Sade were
confronted with a gospel purer than the gospel of Rousseau?

The mere flinging of the polished pebble of Republican Idealism into the
artificial lake of eighteenth century Europe produced a splash that seemed to
splash the heavens, and a storm that drowned ten thousand men. What would
happen if a star from heaven really fell into the slimy and bloody pool of a
hopless and decaying humanity? Men swept a city with the guillotine, a
continent with the sabre, because Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity were too
precious to be lost. How if Christianity was yet more maddening because it was
yet more precious?

But why should we labour the point when One who knew human nature as it
can really be learnt, from fishermen and women and natural people, saw from
his quiet village the track of this truth across history, and, in saying that He came
to bring not peace but a sword, set up eternally His colossal realism against the
eternal sentimentality of the Secularist?

Thus, then, in the third instance, when the learned sceptic says: “Christianiaity
produced wars and persecutions,” we shall reply: “Naturally.”

And, lastly, let me take an example which leads me on directly to the general
matter I wish to discuss for the remaining space of the articles at my command.
The Secularist constantly points out that the Hebrew and Christian religions
began as local things; that their god was a tribal god; that they gave him material
form, and attached him to particular places.

This is an excellent example of one of the things that if I were conducting a
detailed campaign I should use as an argument for the validity of Biblical
experience. For if there really are some other and higher beings than ourselves,
and if they in some strange ways, at some emotional crisis, really revealed
themselves to rude poets or dreamers in very simple times, that the rude people
should regard the revelation as local, and connect it with the particular hill or
river where it happened, seems to me exactly what any reasonable human being
would expect. It has a far more credible look than if they had talked cosmic
philosophy from the beginning. If they had, I should have suspected “priestcraft”
and forgeries and third-century Gnosticism

If there be such a being as God, and He can speak to a child, and if God spoke
to a child in the garden the child would, of course, say that God lived in the
garden. I should not think it any less likely to be true for that. If the child said: “God is everywhere: an impalpable essence pervading and supporting all constituents of the Cosmos alike”—if, I say, the infant addressed me in the above terms, I should think he was mouch more likely to have been with the governess than with God.

So if Moses had said God was an Infinite Energy, I should be certain he had seen nothing extraordinary. As he said He was a Burning Bush, I think it very likely that he did see something extraordinary. For whatever be the Divine Secret, and whether or no it has (as all people have believed) sometimes broken bounds and surged into our work, at least it lies on the side furthest away from pedants and their definitions, and nearest to the silver souls of quiet people, to the beauty of bushes, and the love of one’s native place.

Thus, then in our last instance (out of hundreds that might be taken), we conclude in the same way. When the learned sceptic says: “The visions of the Old Testament were local, and rustic, and grotesque,” we shall answer: “Of course. They were genuine.”
A PIECE OF CHALK

The Daily News, November 4, 1905

I remember one splendid morning, all blue and silver, in the summer holidays when I reluctantly tore myself away from the task of doing nothing in particular, and put on a hat of some sort and picked up a walking-stick, and put six very bright-colored chalks in my pocket. I then went into the kitchen (which along with the rest of the house, belonged to a very square and sensible woman in a Sussex village), and asked the owner and occupant of the kitchen if she had any brown paper. She had a great deal; in fact she had too much; and she mistook the purpose and the rationale of the existence of brown paper. She seemed to have an idea that if a person wanted brown paper he must be wanting to tie up parcels; which was the last thing I wanted to do; indeed it is a thing which I have found to be beyond my mental capacity. Hence she dwelt very much on the varying qualities of toughness and endurance in the material. I explained to her that I only wanted to draw pictures on it, and that I did not want them to endure in the least; and that from my point of view, therefore, it was a question, not of tough consistency, but of responsive surface, a thing comparatively irrelevant in a parcel. When she understood that I wanted to draw she offered to overwhelm me with note-paper, apparently supposing that I did my notes and correspondence on old brown paper wrappers from motives of economy.

I then tried to explain the rather delicate logical shade, that I not only like brown paper, but I liked the quality of brownness in paper, just as I liked the quality of brownness in October woods, or in beer, or in the peat-streams of the North. Brown paper represents the primal twilight of the first toil of creation, and with a bright-colored chalk or two you can pick out points of fire in it, sparks of gold, and blood-red, and sea-green, like the first fierce stars that sprang out of divine darkness. All this I said (in an off-hand way) to the old woman; and I put the brown paper in my pocket along with the chalks, and possibly other things. I suppose every one must have reflected how primeval and how poetical are the things that one carries in one’s pocket; the pocket-knife, for instance, the type of all human tools, the infant of the sword. Once I planned to write a book of poems entirely about the things in my pockets. But I found it was too long and the age of great epics is past.

With my stick, my knife, my chalks, and my brown paper, I went out on to the great downs. I crawled across those colossal contours that express the best
quality of England, because they are at the same time soft and strong. The smoothness of them has the same meaning as the smoothness of great cart-horses, or the smoothness of the beech-tree; it declares in the teeth of our timid and cruel theories that the mighty are merciful. As my eye swept the landscape, the landscape was as kindly as any of its cottages, but for power it was like an earthquake. The villages in the immense valley were safe, one could see, for centuries: yet the lifting of the whole land was like the lifting of one enormous wave to wash them all away.

I crossed one swell of living turf after another, looking for a place to sit down and draw. Do not, for heaven’s sake, imagine I was going to sketch from Nature. I was going to draw devils and seraphim, and blind old gods that men worshipped before the dawn of right, and saints in robes of angry crimson, and seas of strange green, and all the sacred or monstrous symbols that look so well in bright colors on brown drawing paper. They are much better worth drawing than Nature; also they are much easier to draw. When a cow came slouching by in a field next to me, a mere artist might have drawn it; but I always get wrong in the hind legs of quadrupeds. So I drew the soul of the cow; which I saw there plainly walking before me in the sunlight; and the soul was all purple and silver, and had seven horns and the mystery that belongs to all beasts. But though I could not with a crayon get the best out of the landscape, it does not follow that the landscape was not getting the best out of me. And this, I think, is the mistake that people make about the old poets who lived before Wordsworth, and were supposed not to care very much about Nature because they did not describe it much.

They preferred writing about great men to writing about great hills; but they sat on the great hills to write about it. They gave out much less about Nature, but they drank it in, perhaps, much more. They painted the white robes of their holy virgins with the blinding snow, at which they had stared all day. They blazoned the shields of their paladins with the purple and gold of many heraldic sunsets. The greenness of a thousand green leaves clustered into the live green figure of Robin Hood. The blueness of a score of forgotten skies became the blue robes of the Virgin. The inspiration went in like sunbeams and came out like Apollo.

But as I sat scrawling these silly figures on the brown paper, it began to dawn on me, to my great disgust, that I had left one chalk, and that a most exquisite and essential chalk, behind. I searched all of my pockets, but I could not find any white chalk. Now, those who are acquainted with philosophy (nay, religion) which is typified in the art of drawing on brown paper, know that white is
positive and essential. I cannot avoid remarking here on a moral significance. One of the wise and awful truths which this brown-paper art reveals, is this, that white is a color. It is not a mere absence of color; it is a shining and affirmative thing, as fierce as red, as definite as black. When, so to speak, your pencil grows red-hot, it draws roses; when it grows white-hot, it draws stars. And one of the two or three defiant verities of the best religious morality, of real Christianity, for example, is exactly this same thing; the chief assertion of religious morality is that white is a color. Virtue is not the absence of vices or the avoidance of moral dangers; virtue is a vivid and separate thing, like pain or a particular smell. Mercy does not mean not being cruel or sparing people revenge or punishment; it means a plain and positive thing like the sun, which one has either seen or not seen. Chastity does not mean abstention from sexual wrong; it means something flaming, like Joan of Arc. In a word, God paints in many colors; but He never paints so gorgeously, I had almost said so gaudily, as when He paints in white. In a sense our age has realized this fact, and expressed it in our sullen costume. For if it were really true that white was a blank and colorless thing, negative and non-committal, then white would be used instead of black and grey for the funeral of this pessimistic period. We should see city gentlemen in frock coats of spotless silver linen, with top hats as white as wonderful arum lilies. Which is not the case.

Meanwhile, I could not find my chalk.

.........................

I sat on the hill in a sort of despair. There was no town nearer than Chichester at which it was even remotely probable that there would be such a thing as an artist’s colorman. And yet, without white, my absurd little pictures would have been as pointless as the world would be if there were no good people in it. I stared stupidly round, racking my brain for expedients. Then I suddenly stood and roared with laughter, again and again, so that the cows stared at me and called a committee. Imagine a man in the Sahara regretting that he had no sand for his hourglass. Imagine a gentleman in mid-ocean wishing that he had brought some salt water with it with him for some chemical experiment. I was sitting in an immense warehouse of white chalk. The landscape was made entirely out of white chalk. White chalk was piled more miles until it met the sky. I stooped and broke a piece off the rock I sat on; it did not mark so well as the shop chalks do; but it gave the effect. And I stood there in a trance of pleasure, realizing that this Southern England is not only a grand peninsula, and a tradition and a civilization; it is something even more admirable. It is a piece of chalk.
ON MENDING AND ENDING THINGS

Illustrated London News, December 23, 1905

A certain politician (whom I would not discuss here on any account) once said of a certain institution (which wild horses shall not induce me to name) that “It must be mended or ended.” Few people who use this useful phrase about reform notice the important thing about it. The important thing about it is that the two methods described here are not similar but opposite; between mending and ending that is not a difference of degree but of vital antagonism of kind. Mending is based upon the idea that the original nature of a thing is good; ending is based upon the idea that the original nature of a thing is bad or at least, has lost all power of being good.

If I “mend” an armchair it is because I want an armchair. I mend the armchair because I wish to restore it to a state of more complete armchairishness. My objection to the armchair in its unmended state is that its defects prevent it from being in the fullest sense an armchair at all. If (let us say) the back has come off and three of the legs have disappeared, I realize, in looking at it, not merely that it presents a sense of general irregularity to the eye; I realize that in such and such respects it does definitely fall short of the Divine and Archetypal Armchair, which, as Plato would have pointed out, exists in heaven.

But it is possible that I might possess among my drawing room furniture some object, let us say a rack or a thumbscrew, of which the nature and raison d’être was repellent to my moral feelings. If my thumbscrew fell into slight disrepair, I should not mend it at all; because the more I mended my thumbscrew the more thumbscrewy it would be. If my private rack were out of order, I should be in no way disturbed; for my private code of ethics prevents me from racking anyone, and the more it was out of order the less likely it would be that any casual passer-by could get racked on it.

In short, a thing is either bad or good in its original aims and functions. If it is good, we are in favor of mending it; and because we are in favor of mending it, we are necessarily opposed to ending it. If it is bad, we are in favor of ending it; and because we are in favor of ending it, we ought to fly into a passion at the mere thought of mending it. It is the question of this fundamental alternative, the right or wrong of the primary idea, which we have to settle in the case of receiving money for charity from members of dubious or disputed trades, from a publican or a pirate.
This is an extremely good example of the fact I have often enunciated, the fact that there is nothing so really practical and urgent as ideal philosophy. If being a publican is a bad thing in its nature, the quickest way of getting a good settlement is to punish the man for being a publican, to suppress him like a smuggler, to treat the man who administers beer like a man who administers poison. But if being a publican is a good thing in itself, the quickest way of getting a good publican is to admire the man because he is a publican, to follow him in great crowds, and crown him with laurel because he is a publican. It is a practical course to destroy a thing; but the only other practical course is to idealize it. A respected despot may sometimes be good; but a despicable despot must always be despicable. If you are going to end an innkeeper, it can be done quite easily with a hatchet. But if you are going to mend an innkeeper, you must do it tenderly, you must do it reverently. You must nail an extra arm or leg on his person, keeping always before you the Platonic image of the perfect innkeeper, to whose shape you seek to restore him.

So I would deal with the seller of whiskey or of battleships, whose contributions to charity were spurned for conscience’ sake by Mr. Bernard Shaw’s latest dramatic creation. Certainly Major Barbara’s rejection of the alms cannot rationally be imitated unless we suppress the trades. If we think these tradesmen wrong, it is absurd merely to refuse their contributions to charities. To do so amounts merely to this: that we tolerate them all the time they are doing evil, and only begin to insult them when they begin to do good.
SKEPTICISM AND SPIRITUALISM

The Illustrated London News, April 14, 1906)

Glancing over several papers of late, I see such headings as “Another Medium Exposed,” and “Another Spiritualistic Fraud.” The easy and conventional comments made upon the matter by the journalists seem to me to be singularly lacking in a logical sense, and there seems to be an underlying assumption in all such comments that the more often you discover a dishonest medium or a fraudulent seance, the more you have diminished the credit or probability of spiritualism. I have never been at a seance in my life, and I never had, and probably never shall have, anything to do with the specific set of people who call themselves spiritualists. But as a mere matter of intellectual justice or mental lucidity, it is desirable to protest against this confused argument which connects the proved falsity of knaves with the probable falsity of psychic phenomena. The two things have no logical connection whatever. No conceivable number of false mediums affects the probability of the existence of real mediums one way or the other. This is surely obvious enough. No conceivable number of forged bank-notes can disprove the existence of the Bank of England. If anything, the argument might as well be turned the other way; we might say with rather more reason that as all hypocrisies are the evil fruits of public virtue, so in the same way the more real spiritualism there is in the world the more false spiritualism there is likely to be.

In fact, the mere abstract rationality of this problem is very wrongly discussed. For instance, it is always considered ludicrous and a signal for a burst of laughter if the spiritualists say that a seance has been spoiled by the presence of a skeptic, or that an attitude of faith is necessary to encourage the psychic communications. But there is nothing at all unreasonable or unlikely about the idea that doubt might discourage and faith encourage spiritual communications, if there are any. The suggestion does not make spiritualism in abstract logic any more improbable. All that it does make it is more difficult. There is nothing foolish or fantastic about the supposition that a dispassionate person acts as a deterrent to passionate truths. Only it happens to make it much harder for any dispassionate person to find out what is true. There are a thousand practical parallels. An impartial psychologist studying the problem of human nature could, no doubt, learn a great deal from a man and woman making love to each other in his presence. None the less, it is unfortunately the fact that no man and
woman would make love to each other in the presence of an impartial psychologist. Students of physiology and surgery might learn something from a man suddenly stabbing another man on a platform in a lecture-theater. But no man would stab another man on a platform in a lecture-theater. A schoolmaster would learn much if the boys would be boys in his presence; but they never are boys in his presence. An educationalist studying infancy might make important discoveries if he could hear the things said by a baby when absolutely alone and at his ease with his mother. But it is quite obvious that the mere entrance of a great ugly educationalist (they are an ugly lot) would set the child screaming with terror.

The problem, then, of skepticism and spiritual ecstacies is a perfectly human and intelligible problem to state, though it may be a difficult problem to solve. It is exactly as if a man pointed at some lady (you can choose the lady out of your own acquaintance at your own discretion) and said with marked emphasis, “Under no circumstance could I address a sonnet to that lady.” We might reply, “Oh, yes; if you fell in love with her you might feel inclined to do so.” He would be fully justified in replying (with tears in his eyes), “But I cannot fall in love with her by any imaginable process.” But he would not be logically justified in replying “Oh, that is all nonsense. You want me to give up my judgment, and become a silly partisan.” The whole question under discussion is what would happen if he did become a partisan. In the same way, the skeptic who is expelled with bashed hat and tattered coat-tails from a spiritualistic seance has a perfect right to say (with or without tears in his eyes) “But why blame me for unbelief? I cannot manage to believe in such things by any imaginable process.” But he has no logical right to say that it could not have been his skepticism that spoilt the seance, or that there was anything at all unphilosophical in supposing that it was. An impartial person is a good judge of many things, but not of all. He is not (for instance) a good judge of what it feels like to be partial.

For my own part, what little I resent in what little I have seen of spiritualism is altogether the opposite element. I do not mind spiritualism, in so far as it is fierce and credulous. In that it seems to me to be akin to sex, to song, to the great epics and the great religions, to all that has made humanity heroic. I do not object to spiritualism in so far as it is spiritualistic. I do object to it in so far as it is scientific. Conviction and curiosity are both very good things. But they ought to have two different houses. There have been many frantic and blasphemous beliefs in this old barbaric earth of ours; men have served their deities with obscene dances, with cannibalism, and the blood of infants. But no religion was
quite so blasphemous as to pretend that it was scientifically investigating its god to see what he was made of. Bacchanals did not say, “Let us discover whether there is a god of wine.” They enjoyed wine so much that they cried out naturally to the god of it. Christians did not say, “A few experiments will show us whether there is a god of goodness.” They loved good so much that they knew that it was a god. Moreover, all the great religions always loved passionately and poetically the symbols and machinery by which they worked—the temple, the colored robes, the altar, the symbolic flowers, or the sacrificial fire. It made these things beautiful: it laid itself open to the charge of idolatry. And into these great ritual religions there has descended, whatever the meaning of it, the thing of which Sophocles spoke, “The power of the gods, which is mighty and groweth not old.” When I hear that the spiritualists have begun to carve great golden wings upon their flying tables, I shall recognize the atmosphere of a faith. When I hear them accused of worshipping a planchet made of ivory and sardonyx (whatever that is) I shall know that they have become a great religion. Meanwhile, I fear I shall remain one of those who believe in spirits much too easily ever to become a spiritualist. Modern people think the supernatural so improbable that they want to see it. I think it so probable that I leave it alone. Spirits are not worth all this fuss; I know that, for I am one myself . . .
PHILOSOPHY FOR THE SCHOOLROOM

Daily News, June 22, 1907

What modern people want to be made to understand is simply that all argument begins with an assumption; that is, with something that you do not doubt. You can, of course, if you like, doubt the assumption at the beginning of your argument, but in that case you are beginning a different argument with another assumption at the beginning of it. Every argument begins with an infallible dogma, and that infallible dogma can only be disputed by falling back on some other infallible dogma; you can never prove your first statement or it would not be your first. All this is the alphabet of thinking. And it has this special and positive point about it, that it can be taught in a school, like the other alphabet. Not to start an argument without stating your postulates could be taught in philosophy as it is taught in Euclid, in a common schoolroom with a blackboard. And I think it might be taught in some simple and rational degree even to the young, before they go out into the streets and are delivered over entirely to the logic and philosophy of the Daily Mail.

Much of our chaos about religion and doubt arises from this—that our modern sceptics always begin by telling us what they do not believe. But even in a sceptic we want to know first what he does believe. Before arguing, we want to know what we need not argue about. And this confusion is infinitely increased by the fact that all the sceptics of our time are sceptics at different degrees of the dissolution of scepticism.

Now you and I have, I hope, this advantage over all those clever new philosophers, that we happen not to be mad. All of us believe in St. Paul’s Cathedral; most of us believe in St. Paul. But let us clearly realize this fact, that we do believe in a number of things which are part of our existence, but which cannot be demonstrated. Leave religion for the moment wholly out of the question. All sane men, I say, believe firmly and unalterably in a certain number of things which are unproved and unprovable. Let us state them roughly.

Every sane man believes that the world around him and the people in it are real, and not his own delusion or dream. No man starts burning London in the belief that his servant will soon wake him for breakfast. But that I, at any given moment, am not in a dream, is unproved and unprovable. That anything exists except myself is unproved and unprovable.

All sane men believe that this world not only exists, but matters. Every man
believes there is a sort of obligation on us to interest ourselves in this vision or panorama of life. He would think a man wrong who said, “I did not ask for this farce and it bores me. I am aware that an old lady is being murdered down-stairs, but I am going to sleep.” That there is any such duty to improve the things we did not make is a thing unproved and unprovable.

All sane men believe that there is such a thing as a self, or ego, which is continuous. There is no inch of my brain matter the same as it was ten years ago. But if I have saved a man in battle ten years ago, I am proud; if I have run away, I am ashamed. That there is such a paramount “I” is unproved and unprovable. But it is more than unproved and unprovable; it is definitely disputed by many metaphysicians.

Lastly, most sane men believe, and all sane men in practice assume, that they have a power of choice and responsibility for action.

Surely it might be possible to establish some plain, dull statement such as the above, to make people see where they stand. And if the youth of the future must not (at present) be taught any religion, it might at least be taught, clearly and firmly, the three or four sanities and certainties of human free thought.
THE ROOTS OF THE WORLD

The Daily News (August 17, 1907)

Once upon a time a little boy lived in a garden in which he was permitted to pick the flowers but forbidden to pull them up by the roots. There was, however, one particular plant, insignificant, somewhat thorny, with a small, star-like flower, which he very much wanted to pull up by the roots. His tutors and guardians, who lived in the house with him, were worthy, formal people, and they gave him reasons why he should not pull it up. They were silly reasons as a rule. But none of the reasons against doing the thing were quite so silly as the little boy’s reason for wanting to do it; for his reason was that Truth demanded that he should pull the thing up by the roots to see how it was growing. Still it was a sleepy, thoughtless kind of house, and nobody gave him the real answer to his argument, which was that it would kill the plant, and that there is no more Truth about a dead plant than about a live one. So one dark night, when clouds sealed the moon like a secret too good or too bad to be told, the little boy came down the old creaking stairs of his farmhouse and crept into the garden in his nightgown. He told himself repeatedly that there was no more reason against his pulling this plant off the garden than against his knocking off a thistle top idly in a lane. Yet the darkness which he had chosen contradicted him, and also his own throbbing pulse, for he told himself continually that next morning he might be crucified as the blasphemer who had torn up the sacred tree.

Perhaps he might have been so crucified if he had so torn it up. I cannot say. But he did not tear it up; and it was not for want of trying. For when he laid hold of the little plant in the garden he tugged and tugged, and found the thing held as if clamped to the earth with iron. And when he strained himself a third time there came a frightful noise behind him, and either nerves or (which he would have denied) conscience made him leap back and stagger and stare around. The house he lived in was a mere bulk of blackness against a sky almost as black. Yet after staring long he saw that the very outline had grown unfamiliar, for the great chimney of the kitchen had fallen crooked and calamitous. Desperately he gave another pull at the plant, and heard far off the roof of the stables fall in and the horses shriek and plunge. Then he ran into the house and rolled himself in the bedclothes. Next morning found the kitchen ruined, the day’s food destroyed, two horses dead, and three broken loose and lost. But the boy still kept a furious curiosity, and a little while after, when a fog from the sea had hidden home and
garden, he dragged again at the roots of the indestructible plant. He hung on to it like a boy on the rope of a tug of war, but it did not give. Only through the grey sea-fog came choking and panic-stricken cries; they cried that the King’s castle had fallen, that the towers guarding the coast were gone; that half the great sea-city had split away and slid into the sea. Then the boy was frightened for a little while, and said no more about the plant, but when he had come to a strong and careless manhood, and the destruction in the district had been slowly repaired, he said openly before the people, “Let us have done with the riddle of this irrational weed. In the name of Truth let us drag it up.” And he gathered a great company of strong men, like an army to meet invaders, and they all laid hold of the little plant and they tugged night and day. And the Great Wall fell down in China for forty miles. And the Pyramids were split up into jagged stones. And the Eiffel Tower in Paris went over like a ninepin, killing half the Parisians; and the Statue of Liberty in New York harbour fell forward suddenly and smashed the American fleet; and St. Paul’s Cathedral killed all the journalists in Fleetstreet, and Japan had a record series of earthquakes and then sank into the sea. Some have declared that these last two incidents were not calamities properly so called; but into that I will not enter. The point, was that when they had tugged for about twenty-four hours the strong men of that country had pulled down about half of the civilized world, but had not pulled up the plant. I will not weary the reader with the full facts of this realistic story, with how they used first elephants and then steam engines to tear up the flower, and how the only result was that the flower stuck fast, but that the moon began to be agitated and even the sun was a bit dicky. At last the human race interfered, as it always does at last, by means of a revolution. But long before that the boy, or man, who is the hero of this tale had thrown up the business, merely saying to his pastors and masters, “You gave me a number of elaborate and idle reasons why I should not pull up this shrub. Why did you not give me the two good reasons: first, that I can’t; second, that I should damage everything else if I even tried it on?”

All those who have sought in the name of science to uproot religion seem to me very like the little boy in the garden. Skeptics do not succeed in pulling up the roots of Christianity; but they do succeed in pulling up the roots of every man’s ordinary vine and fig tree, of every man’s garden and every man’s kitchen garden. Secularists have not succeeded in wrecking divine things; but Secularists have succeeded in wrecking secular things. A religion cannot be shown to be monstrous at the last; a religion is monstrous from the beginning. It announces itself as extraordinary. It offers itself as extravagant. The sceptics at the most can
only ask us to reject our creed as something wild. And we have accepted it as something wild. So far one would think there would be a mere impasse, a block between us and those who cannot feel as we do. But then follows the curious practical experience which has ratified religion in our reason for ever. For the enemies of religion cannot leave it alone. They laboriously attempt to smash religion. They cannot smash religion; but they do smash everything else. With your queries and dilemmas you have made no havoc in faith,: from the first it was a transcendental conviction; it cannot be made any more transcendental than it was. But you have (if that is any comfort to you) made a certain havoc in common morals and common sense.

The opponents of our religion do not commit us to accepting their axioms; our axioms remain what they were before; but they do commit themselves to every doctrine of insanity and despair. They do not hit us, but they do plunge past us into the marsh and the abyss. Mr. Blatchford cannot commit us to the comment that man is not the image of his maker for that statement is as dogmatic as its denial. But he can and does commit himself to the statement, humanly ludicrous and intolerable, that I must not blame a bully or praise the man who knocks him down. Evolutionists cannot drive us, because of the nameless gradation in Nature, to deny the personality of God, for a personal God might as well work by gradations as in any other way; but they do drive themselves, through those gradations, to deny the existence of a personal Mr. Jones, because he is within the scope of evolution and his edges are rubbed away. The evolutionists uproot the world, but not the flowers. The Titans never scaled heaven, but they laid waste the earth.
TWO KINDS OF PARADOX

Illustrated London News, 11 March 1911

There is nothing that needs more fastidious care than our choice of nonsense. Sense is like daylight or daily air, and may come from any quarter or in any quantity. But nonsense is an art. Like an art, it is rarely successful, and yet entirely simple when it is successful. Like an art, it depends on the smallest word, and a misprint can spoil it. And like an art, when it is not in the service of heaven it is almost always in the service of hell. Numberless imitators of Lewis Carroll or of Edward Lear have tried to write nonsense and failed; falling back (one may hope) upon writing sense. But certainly, as the great Gilbert said, wherever there has been nonsense it has been precious nonsense. Les Précieuses Ridicules might be translated, perhaps, in two ways. No one doubts that serious artists are absurd; but it might also be maintained that absurdity is always a serious art.

I have suffered as much as any man from the public insult of the misprint. I have seen my love of books described as a love of boots. I have seen the word “cosmic” invariably printed as “comic”; and have merely reflected that the two are much the same. As to Nationalists and Rationalists, I have come to the conclusion that no human handwriting or typewriting can clearly distinguish them; and I now placidly permit them to be interchanged, though the first represents everything I love and the second everything I loathe. But there is one kind of misprint I should still find it hard to forgive. I could not pardon a blunder in the printing of “Jabberwock.” I insist on absolute literalism in that really fine poem of Lear,—“The Dong with the Luminous Nose.” To spoil these new nonsense words would be like shooting a great musician improvising on the piano. The sounds could never be recovered again. “And as in uffish thought he stood.” If the printer had printed it “affish” I doubt if the first edition would have sold. “Over the Great Gromboolian Plain.” Suppose I had seen it printed “Gromhoolian.” Perhaps I should never have known, as I know now, that Edward Lear was a yet greater man than Lewis Carroll.

The first principle, then, may be considered clear. Let mistakes be made in ordinary books—that is, in scientific works, established biographies, histories, and so on. Do not let us be hard on misprints when they occur merely in time-tables or atlases or works of science. In works like those of Professor Haeckel, for example, it is sometimes quite difficult to discover which are the misprints
and which are the intentional assertions. But in anything artistic, anything which avowedly strays beyond reason, there we must demand the exactitude of art. If a thing is admittedly not possible, then the next best thing it can do is to be beautiful. If a thing is nonsensical, it ought to be perfectly nonsensical.

This, which applies to the nonsensical borderland of words, as in Lear and Carroll, applies also to the nonsensical borderland of thoughts, as in Oscar Wilde or Bernard Shaw. There also the difficulty is not to find nonsense, but to find any precious nonsense. Many accuse Mr. Shaw and others of merely saying anything opposite to the current view. But if these critics have detected such a scheme of success, why do they not merely profit by it? If they have got the key, let them use it. If they know the trick, let them do it. If a man can achieve prominence and prosperity merely by saying that the sun shines at night and the stars by day, that every man has four legs and every horse two—surely the path to success is open, for there must be many such things to say. But the truth is that, while we can all wallow in commonplaces (a thoroughly healthy thing, like a mud bath), we must all be particular in our selection of paradoxes. Here, for once, taste is really important.

For there are two kinds of paradoxes. They are not so much the good and the bad, nor even the true and the false. Rather they are the fruitful and the barren; the paradoxes which produce life and the paradoxes that merely announce death. Nearly all modern paradoxes merely announce death. I see everywhere among the young men who have imitated Mr. Shaw a strange tendency to utter epigrams which deny the possibility of further life and thought. A paradox may be a thing unusual, menacing, even ugly—like a rhinoceros. But, as a live rhinoceros ought to produce more rhinoceri, so a live paradox ought to produce more paradoxes. Nonsense ought to be suggestive; but nowadays it is abortive. The new epigrams are not even fantastic finger-posts on the wild road: they are tablets, each set into a brick wall at the end of a blind alley. So far as they concern thought at all, they cry to men, “Think no more,” as the voice said “Sleep no more” to Macbeth. These rhetoricians never speak except to move the closure. Even when they are really witty (as in the case of Mr. Shaw), they commonly commit the one crime that cannot be forgiven among free men. They say the last word.

I will give such instances as happen to lie before me. I see on my table a book of aphorisms by a young Socialist writer, Mr. Holbrook Jackson; it is called “Platitudes in the Making,” and curiously illustrates this difference between the paradox that starts thought and the paradox that prevents thought. Of course, the writer has read too much Nietzsche and Shaw, and too little of less groping and
more gripping thinkers. But he says many really good things of his own, and they illustrate perfectly what I mean here about the suggestive and the destructive nonsense.

Thus in one place he says. “Suffer fools gladly: they may be right.” That strikes me as good; but here I mean specially that it strikes me as fruitful and free. You can do something with the idea, it opens an avenue. One can go searching among one’s more solid acquaintances and relatives for the fires of a concealed infallibility. One may fancy one sees the star of immortal youth in the somewhat empty eye of Uncle George; one may faintly follow some deep rhythm of nature in the endless repetitions with which Miss Bootle tells a story; and in the grunts and gasps of the Major next door may hear, as it were, the cry of a strangled god. It can never narrow our minds, it can never arrest our life, to suppose that a particular fool is not such a fool as he looks. It must be all to the increase of charity, and charity is the imagination of the heart.

I turn the next page, and come on what I call the barren paradox. Under the head of “Advices,” Mr. Jackson writes, “Don’t think—do.” This is exactly like saying “Don’t eat—digest.” All doing that is not mechanical or accidental involves thinking; only the modern world seems to have forgotten that there can be such a thing as decisive and dramatic thinking. Everything that comes from the will must pass through the mind, though it may pass quickly. The only sort of thing the strong man can “do” without thinking is something like falling over a doormat. This is not even making the mind jump; it is simply making it stop. I take another couple of cases at random. “The object of life is life.” That affects me as ultimately true; always presuming the author is liberal enough to include eternal life. But even if it is nonsense, it is thoughtful nonsense.

On another page I read, “Truth is one’s own conception of things.” That is thoughtless nonsense. A man would never have had any conception of things at all unless he had thought they were things and there was some truth about them. Here we have the black nonsense, like black magic, that shuts down the brain. “A lie is that which you do not believe.” That is a lie; so perhaps Mr. Jackson does not believe it.
THE PUN

The Daily News, 1911

A PIECE of peculiarly bad advice is constantly given to modern writers, especially to modern theologians: that they should adapt themselves to the spirit of the age. If there is one thing that has made shipwreck of mankind from the beginning it has been the spirit of the age, which always means exaggerating still further something that is grossly exaggerated already. The spirit of the age always means taking the crinolines that are already inconvenient and widening them till they become impossible. But if anyone wants a good minor example he could hardly find a better one than the ancient and often barbaric kind of humour that goes by the name of the pun.

For the pun has two distinct functions; a rare function, which is eternal, and a fashionable function, which is dead. If we take first the last and least of the two we must put ourselves for a moment into an ancestral atmosphere now utterly forgotten. In the Bohemian half of the Early Victorian world wit reigned as a kind of institution. Wit was to these intellectual people something like what sport is to simpler people; it was a permanent open competition, free but yet formal lists in which young men could win their spurs.

Wit, which is in this sense warlike (as compared with humour, which may be accidental or even partly unconscious), must of necessity tend to fixed and perhaps even pedantic forms of flippancy. Capping verses, retorting in rhymed couplets, making anagrams or acrostics on any chance word or phrase, fill all the social chronicles of that time. Two eminent lawyers exchange rhymed epigrams instantaneously at a dinner table; Lamb is proud of having written impromptu a preposterous conceit about pink stockings; Douglas Jerrold goes about like some notorious duellist, always ready to impale somebody on a point. In this atmosphere it is not surprising that one of the most popular entertainments should have been the fantastic yet precise one of punning.

But though the wit was formal the fellowship was frank and uproarious. Many such men, from Lamb to Dickens, or from Sydney Smith to Leigh Hunt, were men whose ingenuity had in it a certain poetry and elemental humour. Hence followed what must always follow when high spirited people are playing a game with rules. The limitations are enjoyed, but the limitations are strained to their utmost, each player is proud of getting a preposterous exception just inside the rule. The laughter was highest when the shot was wildest; and in this atmosphere
arose the cardinal maxim of Charles Lamb, “that the worst pun is the best.” It was the aim of the ideal punster that people should admire his ingenuity but in the same breath somewhat damn his impudence. This first sort of punning in pure high spirits was indeed a fashion, like singing at the dinner table. We may be permitted a partial fear that in ceasing to sing at the dinner table too many people have ceased to sing altogether, and we may be disposed to warn ourselves and each other against losing the good spirits as well as the bad puns of our fathers.

In a primary sense puns are a perfect type of literary art. That is, they briefly embody the chief essence of art; that completeness of form should confirm completeness of idea. But while all art aims at this forcing form and meaning to go on all fours, there are three special and sharp forms of the thing which do it most clearly and defiantly. One is rhyme; another is what is called simile and metaphor, and the third is the pun. Let us take, for the sake of argument, the simile first.

Suppose a man criticising the current journalistic system wrote as follows: “When we speak of the freedom of the Press we should remember that the individual Pressman writes under considerable restrictions in the form of his work, and still more in the bias he is bound to assume.” That expresses a very vivid fact, but it does not, perhaps, express it very vividly. Mr. Zangwill has expressed the same thing thus: “A public question is like a piece of paper. Much may be written on both sides; but a journalist must only write on one side.” Then anyone can feel how the pungency of the intellectual protest is perfected and emphasised by a pungency in the mere verbal form. The same sense of hitting the right nail on the head can be conveyed by the coincidence called rhyme. A man writing prose in a passion of righteous indignation might perhaps say, “One can at least get rid of such a human insect, a creature who is malodorous and poisonous at once.” But it would not have the special sort of ringing energy and emphasis of a couplet to the same effect: Yet let me flap this bug with gilded wings,

This painted child of dirt that stinks and stings.

This is in one way a specially good example, because it shows the proximity of assonance to other verbal tricks. If wings and stings is only a rhyme, stinks and stings is something very like a pun. And when we come to the great puns of Hood or of any other writer, we note first of all this use of the pun in sharpening and clinching a thought. Suppose (to adopt the same method) that Hood, writing a journalistic report of one of the last duels, had written: “Both principals fired in
the air; and we cannot too strongly express our hope that those who think it incumbent on them to use this old form of self-vindication, may imitate such a sensible and humane interpretation of it.” That is sound enough; but it is a little laborious, and does not express either the detachment or the decision of such a critic of duelling. Hood, as a fact, did write: So each one upwards in the air
  His shot he did expend.
  And may all other duels have
  That upshot at the end.

Here the verbal jest, falling so ridiculously right, does express, not merely the humanity of the critic, but also his humorous impartiality and unruffled readiness of intellect. Or again, on the proposal to shut the Zoological Gardens on Sunday, Hood might well have written in some newspaper: “It is difficult to see where our Puritan legislators draw the line in natural pleasures; they forbid the sight of God’s works when they are animal, yet they cannot forbid them when they are vegetable or mineral.” That is rational but it has the note of plea. What is wanted for such fanaticalisms is the note of scorn; and you get it with the double ring of a real argument and a verbal gibe: Once let the sect triumphant to their text
  Shut Nero up from Saturday till Monday;
  And sure as fate they will deny us next
  To see the dandelions on a Sunday.

That is the literary use of the trick, and is poetic as well as pointed: a landscape as well as a trap.
THE GREAT SHIPWRECK AS ANALOGY

The Illustrated London News, May 11, 1912

The tragedy of the great shipwreck is too terrific for any analogies of mere fancy. But the analogy which springs to the mind between the great modern ship and our great modern society that sent it forth—this analogy is not a fancy. It is a fact; a fact perhaps too large and plain for the eyes easily to take in. Our whole civilization is indeed very like the TITANIC; alike in its power and its impotence, its security and its insecurity. Technically considered, the sufficiency of the precautions are a matter for technical inquiry. But psychologically considered, there can be no doubt that such vast elaboration and system induce a frame of mind which is inefficient rather than efficient. Quite apart from the question of whether anyone was to blame, the big outstanding fact remains: that there was no sort of sane proportion between the provision for luxury and levity, and the extent of the provision for need and desperation. The scheme did far too much for prosperity and far too little for distress—just like the modern State. Mr. Veneering, it will be remembered, in his electoral address, “instituted a new and striking comparison between the State and a ship”; the comparison, if not new, is becoming a little too striking. By the time you have made your ship as big as a commonwealth it does become very like a ship—rather like a sinking ship.

For there is a real connection between such catastrophes and a certain frame of mind which refuses to expect them. A rough man going about the sea in a small boat may make every other kind of mistake: he may obey superstitions; he may take too much rum; he may get drunk; he may get drowned. But, cautious or reckless, drunk or sober, he cannot forget that he is in a boat and that a boat is as dangerous a beast as a wild horse. The very lines of the boat have the swift poetry of peril; the very carriage and gestures of the boat are those of a thing assailed. But if you make your boat so large that it does not even look like a boat, but like a sort of watering-place, it must, by the deepest habit of human nature, induce a less vigilant attitude of the mind. An aristocrat on board ship who travels with a garage for his motor almost feels as if he were travelling with the trees of his park. People living in open-air cafes sprinkled with liqueurs and ices get as far from the thought of any revolt of the elements as they are from that of an earthquake under the Hotel Cecil. The mental process is quite illogical, but it is quite inevitable. Of course, both sailors and passengers are intellectually aware that motors at sea are often less useful than life-boats, and that ices are no
antidote to icebergs. But man is not only governed by what he thinks but by what
he chooses to think about; and the sights that sink into us day by day colour our
minds with every tint between insolence and terror. This is one of the worst evils
in that extreme separation of social classes which marks the modern ship—and
State.

But whether or no our unhappy fellow-creatures on the TITANIC suffered
more than they need from this unreality of original outlook, they cannot have
had less instinct of actuality than we have who are left alive on land: and now
that they are dead they are much more real than we. They have known what
papers and politicians never know—of what man is really made, and what
manner of thing is our nature at its best and worst. It is this curious, cold, flimsy
incapacity to conceive what a THING is like that appears in so many places,
even in the comments on this astounding sorrow. It appears in the displeasing
incident of Miss Sylvia Pankhurst, who, immediately after the disaster, seems to
have hastened to assure the public that men must get no credit for giving the
boats up to women, because it was the “rule” at sea. Whether this was a graceful
thing for a gay spinster to say to eight hundred widows in the very hour of doom
is not worth inquiry here, Like cannibalism, it is a matter of taste. But what
chiefly astonishes me in the remark is the utter absence which it reveals of the
rudiments of political thought. What does Miss Pankhurst imagine a “rule” is—a
sort of basilisk? Some hundreds of men are, in the exact and literal sense of the
proverb, between the devil and the deep sea. It is their business, if they can make
up their minds to it, to accept the deep sea and resist the devil. What does Miss
Pankhurst suppose a “rule” could do to them in such extremities? Does she think
the captain would fine every man sixpence who expressed a preference for his
life? Has it occurred to her that a hundredth part of the ship’s population could
have thrown the captain and all the authorities into the sea? But Miss
Pankhurst’s remark although imbecile, is informing. Now I see the abject and
idolatrous way in which she uses the word “rule,” I begin to understand the
abject and idolatrous way in which she uses the word “vote.” She cannot see that
wills and not words control events. If ever she is in a fire or shipwreck with men
below a certain standard of European morals, she will soon find out that the
existence of a rule depends on whether people can be induced to obey it. And if
she ever has a vote in the very low state of European politics, she will very soon
find out that its importance depends on whether you can induce the man you
vote for to obey his mandate or any of his promises. It is vain to rule if your
subjects can and do disobey you. It is vain to vote if your delegates can and do
disobey you.

But, indeed, a real rule can do without such exceptions as the Suffragettes; de minimis non curat lex. And if the word “rule” be used in the wider sense of an attempt to maintain a certain standard of private conduct out of respect for public opinion, we can only say that not only is this a real moral triumph, but it is, in our present condition, rather a surprising and reassuring one. It is exactly this corporate conscience that the modern State has dangerously neglected. There was probably more instinctive fraternity and sense of identical interests, I will say, not on an old skipper’s vessel, but on an old pirate’s, than there was between the emigrants, the aristocrats, the journalists, or the millionaires who set out to die together on the great ship. That they found in so cruel a way their brotherhood and the need of man for the respect of his neighbour, this is a dreadful fact, but certainly the reverse of a degrading one. The case of Mr. Stead, which I feel with rather special emotions, both of sympathy and difference, is very typical of the whole tragedy. Mr. Stead was far too great and brave a man to require any concealment of his exaggerations or his more unbalanced moods; his strength was in a flaming certainty, which one only weakens by calling sincerity, and a hunger and thirst for human sympathy. His excess, we may say, with real respect, was in the direction of megalomania; a childlike belief in big empires, big newspapers, big alliances—big ships. He toiled like a Titan for that Anglo-American combination of which the ship that has gone down may well be called the emblem. And at the last all these big things broke about him, and somewhat bigger things remained: a courage that was entirely individual; a kindness that was entirely universal. His death may well become a legend.
WONDER AND THE WOODEN POST

Black night had shut in my house and garden with shutters first of slate and then of ebony; I was making my way indoors by the fiery square of the lamplit window, when I thought I saw something new sticking out of the ground, and bent over to look at it. In so doing I knocked my head against a post and saw stars; stars of the seventh heaven, stars of the secret and supreme firmament. For it did truly seem, as the slight pain lessened but before the pain had wholly passed, as if I saw written in an astral alphabet on the darkness something that I had never understood so clearly before: a truth about the mysteries and the mystics which I have half known all my life. I shall not be able to put the idea together again with the words upon this page, for these queer moods of clearness are always fugitive: but I will try. The post is still there; but the stars in the brain are fading.

When I was young I wrote a lot of little poems, mostly about the beauty and necessity of Wonder; which was a genuine feeling with me, as it is still. The power of seeing plain things and landscapes in a kind of sunlight of surprise; the power of jumping at the sight of a bird as if at a winged bullet; the power of being brought to a standstill by a tree as by the gesture of a gigantic hand; in short, the power of poetically running one’s head against a post is one which varies in different people and which I can say without conceit is a part of my own human nature. It is not a power that indicates any artistic strength, still less any spiritual exaltation; men who are religious in a sense too sublime for me to conceive are equally without it. Of the pebble in the pathways of the twig on the edge, it may truly be said that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see these things and have not seen them. It is a small and special gift, but an innocent one.

As my little poems were mostly bad poems, they attracted a certain amount of attention among modern artists and critics; I was told that I was a mystic and found myself being introduced to whole rows and rows of mystics; most of them much older and wiser than I. Of course, there were professional quacks and amateur asses among them; but not in much larger proportion than would have appeared among politicians or men of science or any other mixed convention. There was the long-faced, elderly man, who said, in a deep bass voice like distant thunder: “What we want is Love”; which was true enough, if to want means to lack. There was the little, radiant man, who radiated all his fingers
outwards and cried: “Heaven is here! Is is now!” as if he were selling something, as he probably was. There was the chirpy little man who took one confidentially into a corner and said quietly: “There is no true difference between good and bad, false and true; they are alike leading us upwards.” He was easily disposed of; merely by asking, if there was no difference between good and bad, what was the difference between up and down? But it would be gravely and grossly unjust to suggest that any of these represented the modern mystics whose acquaintance I made. I met many men whom history and literature will rightly remember. I met the man who was and is by far the greatest poet who has written in English for decades. For I will not call Mr. Yeats an English poet; I will only say that I should be sorry to see him translated into any other language. I met a man like Mr. Herbert Burrows who, almost alone among men in my knowledge, contrived to combine an Oriental and impersonal religion with that hard fighting and hot magnanimity which we in the west mean when we are speaking of a man. There were great poets and great fighters, then, among these modern mystics whom I met; and their genius and sincerity, as well as their mysticism, led me to conclude that they were quite right. And yet there was something inside me telling me, which what I can only call a stifled scream, that they were quite wrong. It was the same for that matter with my early economic opinions. I was a Socialist in my youth; because the attack on Socialism, as then conducted, left a man no choice except to be a Socialist or a scoundrel. But, even then, long before I ceased to be a Socialist, long before I heard of peasant ownership or any other escape from our present disgrace, I had felt by a sort of tug in my bones that the Fabians and the Marxians were pulling the world one way when I wanted it to go the other. So I felt about great mystics like Mr. Yeats; about sane thosophists like Mr. Burrows. I felt, not merely that their mysticism was in flat contradiction to mine . . . more even than materialism. I went on feeling this; it took me a long time to give it even an obscure expression. I never found a really vivid expression until I knocked my head against the post. The expression that leapt to my lips then, I am (as I say) forgetting slowly.

Now what I found finally about our contemporary mystics was this. When they said that a wooden post was wonderful (a point on which we are all agreed, I hope) they meant that they could make something wonderful out of it by thinking about it. “Dream; there is no truth,” said Mr. Yeats, “but in your own heart.” The modern mystic looked for the post, not outside in the garden, but inside, in the mirror of his mind. But the mind of the modern mystic, like a dandy’s dressing-room, was entirely made of mirrors. Thus glass repeated glass
like doors opening inwards for ever; till one could hardly see that inmost chamber of unreality where the post made its last appearance. And as the mirrors of the modern mystic’s mind are most of them curved and many of them cracked, the post in its ultimate reflection looked like all sorts of things; a waterspout, the tree of knowledge, the sea-serpent standing upright, a twisted column of the new natural architecture, and so on. Hence we have Picasso and a million puerilities. But I was never interested in mirrors; that is, I was never primarily interested in my own reflection . . . or reflections. I am interested in wooden posts, which do startle me like miracles. I am interested in the post that stands waiting outside my door, to hit me over the head, like a giant’s club in a fairy tale. All my mental doors open outwards into a world I have not made. My last door of liberty opens upon a world of sun and solid things, of objective adventures. The post in the garden; the thing I could neither create nor expect: strong plain daylight on stiff upstanding wood: it is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.

When the modern mystics said they liked to see a post, they meant they liked to imagine it. They were better poets than I; and they imagined it as soon as they saw it. Now I might see a post long before I had imagined it . . . and (as I have already described) I might feel it before I saw it. To me the post is wonderful because it is there; there whether I like it or not. I was struck silly by a post, but if I were struck blind by a thunderbolt, the post would still be there; the substance of things not seen. For the amazing thing about the universe is that it exists; not that we can discuss its existence. All real spirituality is a testimony to this world as much as the other: the material universe does exist. The Cosmos still quivers to its topmost star from that great kick that Dr. Johnson gave the stone when he defied Berkeley. The kick was not philosophy . . . but it was religion.

Now the mystics around me had not this lively faith that things are fantasies because they are facts. They wanted, as all magicians did, “to control the elements”; to be the Cosmos. They wished the stars to be their omnipresent eyes and winds their long wild tongues unrolled; and therefore they favoured twilight, and all the dim and borderland mdeiums in which one thing melts into another . . . in which a man can be as large as Nature and (what is worse) as impersonal as Nature. But I never was properly impressed with the mystery of twilight, but rather with the riddle of daylight, as huge and staring as the sphinx. I felt it in big bare buildings against a blue sky, high houses gutted or still empty, great blank walls washed with warm light as with a monstrous brush. One seemed to have
come to the back of everything. And everything had that strange and high indifference that belongs only to things that are . . . You see I have not said what I meant: but if you admit that my head and the post were equally wonderful, I give you leave to say they were equally wooden.
ESSAYS II BY CHESTERTON

G. K. CHESTERTON
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### INDEX

### ESSAYS II BY CHESTERTON

- TABLE OF CONTENTS
- ASPARAGUS
- DIVORCE VERSUS DEMOCRACY
  - PREFACE
  - DIVORCE VERSUS DEMOCRACY
- DICKENS (ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA ARTICLE)
- MILTON: MAN AND POET
- ON DARWINISM AND MYSTERY
- DOUBTS ABOUT DARWINISM
- NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE MORALITY
- MORMONISM
- CHILD PSYCHOLOGY AND NONSENSE
- GOVERNMENT AND THE RIGHTS OF MAN
- FRENCH AND ENGLISH
- ON HOUSEHOLD GODS AND GOBLINS
- PICKWICK AND THE ENGLISH PEOPLES
- THE PERSECUTION OF RELIGION
ASPARAGUS

New Witness, 18th June 1914

At about twenty-one minutes past two today I suddenly saw that asparagus is the secret of aristocracy. I was trying to put long limp stalks into my mouth, when the idea came into my head; and the stalk failed to do so. I do not refer to any merely metaphorical and superficial comparisons which could easily be made between them. We might say that most of the organism was left dead white, merely that a little button at the top might be bright green. We might draw the moral that average aristocrats are made out much stronger than they are; and illustrate it from average asparagi. They say that any stick is good enough to beat a dog with; but did anyone ever try to beat a dog with a stick of asparagus? We might draw the moral that aristocratic traditions are made out much more popular than they really were. ‘Norman’ gets mispronounced as English. In this way three French leopards were somehow turned into British lions. And in this way also the solemn word Asparagus, which means nothing so far as I know, was turned by the populace into ‘sparrowgrass,’ which means two of the most picturesque things in the world. Asparagus, which I presume to have been the name of a Roman pro-consul, Marcus Asparagus Esculens, or what not, never deserved such luck as to lose its origin in two things so true and common as the bold birds of the town and the green democracy of the fields. Or again, we might say of sticks of asparagus that they have often lost their heads, and we might say the same of aristocrats. Both heads have been bitten off by the guillotine before now. But to complete the parallel we must maintain that the head of the aristocrat was the best part of him; and this is often hard to maintain. But, indeed, I do not base the view upon any such fancies from phraseology. Far deeper in earth are the roots of asparagus.

The one essential of an aristocracy is to be in advance of its age. That is, there must be something new known to a few. There must be a password; and it must always be a new password. Moreover, it must be, by its nature, an irrational password, for anything quite rational might rapidly be calculated even by the uninitiated. In the same way it is essential to any social observance that involves a social distinction, that the observance should be, in this sense at least, artificial. That is, you can only know the observance as the soldier knows the password, because he has been told.

The working instance best known to us of the middle classes is the old
arbitrary distinction about how to eat asparagus. Now, excluding cannibalism and the habit of eating sand (about which I can offer no opinion) there is really nothing one can eat which is less fitted to be eaten with the fingers than asparagus. It is long; it is greasy; it is loose and liable to every sort of soft yet sudden catastrophe; it is always eaten with some sort of oily sauce; and its nice conduct would involve the powers of a professional juggler confirmed with some practice in climbing the greasy pole. Most things could quite easily be eaten with one’s fingers. Cold beef could quite easily be eaten with one’s fingers; or simply with one’s teeth. I have seldom seen a noble cheese without an impulse merely to fix my fangs in it. New potatoes could be eaten with the fingers as cleanly as Easter eggs; and whitebait might as well be shovelled into our open mouths by a Whitebait Machine, for all the use we make of a knife and fork to dissect them. We could easily eat fish-cakes as we eat seed cake. Cold Christmas pudding is a substance with all the majesty of coloured marble; far cleaner, stronger and more coherent than any ordinary bread or biscuit. Yet all these we are supposed to approach through the intervention of a little stunted sword or a stumpy trident. Only this one tiresome, toppling vegetable, I eat between my finger and thumb. I should be better off as a giraffe eating the top of a palm tree: it doesn’t want any holding up.

We will not exaggerate. Eating soup with the fingers, the young student should not attempt; and sauces, custards and even curries are no field for the manual labourer. I would not eat stewed rhubarb with my fingers, or, indeed, with any instrument that science could devise. Even with things involving treacle, I have not a good touch. But, while strictly avoiding anything like exaggeration or frivolity, I still note that the point of asparagus is that it is not the food, among other foods, specially fitted to the fingers. In other words, the principle could not have been deduced from abstract reason, or have grown out of the general instincts of men. It could not have been custom: that is why it was etiquette.

The brotherhood of man is a fact which in the long run wears down all other facts. Therefore, a privileged class, if it would avoid sliding naturally back into the body of mankind, must keep up an incessant excitement about new projects, new cultures and new prejudices, new skirts and stockings. It must tell a new tale every day or perish, like the lady of the Arabian Nights. Tennyson, who was too much touched with this aristocratic—or snobbish—Futurism, wrote, ‘Lest one good custom should corrupt the world,’ which really means lest everybody should learn the right way of eating asparagus. And so, out of luxury and waste
and weariness, the fever they call Progress came into the world.

Do you tell me they don’t eat asparagus with their fingers now? Do I not know that in some of the best houses they have little tongs for each person, which are charming? Have I not heard that asparagus is now lowered into the open mouth on a string, or shot into the mouth with a small gun, or eaten with the toes, or not eaten at all? No; I do not know, that is what I wish to point out. They have changed the password.
DIVORCE VERSUS DEMOCRACY

PREFACE

I have been asked to put forward in pamphlet form this rather hasty essay as it appeared in “Nash’s Magazine”; and I do so by the kind permission of the editor. The rather chaotic quality of its journalism it is now impossible to alter. The convictions upon which it is based are unaltered and unalterable. Indeed, in so far as circumstances have since affected them, they are greatly strengthened. In so far as there was something sporadic and seemingly irrelevant in the writing, it was partly because I was contending against an evil that was diffused and indefinable, at once tentative and ubiquitous. Since then that disease has come to a head and burst; primarily in the North of Europe. By that historic habit which generally makes one European people the standard bearer of a social tendency, which made the Empire a Roman Empire and the Revolution a French Revolution, the North Germans have become the peculiar champions of that modern change which would make the State infinitely superior to the Family. It is even asserted that Prussian political authority is now encouraging the abandonment of common morality for the support of population; and even if this horrible thing be untrue, it is highly significant that it can be plausibly said of Prussia and certainly of no other ChristianState. And in the new light of action it is possible to trace more clearly the trend towards divorce, as also that trend towards the other pagan institution of slavery, which would certainly have accompanied it. But the enslaving force in Europe struck too early; and the whole movement has been brought to a standstill.

The same circumstances have given an importance to a formula of my own which I still think rather important. It may be summarised as the patriotism of the household. In the experience of nationality we do not admit that any excess of despair can come into the same logical world as desertion. No amount of tragedy need amount to treason. The Christian view of marriage conceives of the home as self-governing in a manner analogous to an independent state; that is, that it may include internal reform and even internal rebellion; but because of the bond, not against it. In this way it is itself a sort of standing reformer of the State; for the State is judged by whether its arrangements bear helpfully or bear hardly on the human fullness and fertility of the free family. Thus the Wicked Ten in Rome were condemned and cast down because their public powers
permitted a wrong against the purity of a private family. Thus the mediaeval revolt against the Poll Tax began by the authority of an official insulting the authority of a father. Men do not now, any more than then, become sinless by receiving a post in a bureaucracy; and if the domestic affairs of the poor were once put into the hands of mere lawyers and inspectors, the poor would soon find themselves in positions from which there is no exit save by the sword of Virginius and the hammer of Wat Tyler. As for the section of the rich who are still seeking a servile solution, they, of course, are still seeking the extension of divorce. It is only “divide et impera”; and they want the division of sex for the division of labour. The very same economic calculation which makes them encourage tyranny in the shop makes them encourage licence in the family. But now the free families of five great nations have risen against them; and their plot has failed.

++++

DIVORCE VERSUS DEMOCRACY

On this question of divorce I do not profess to be impartial, for I have never perceived any intelligent meaning in the word. I merely (and most modestly) profess to be right. I also profess to be representative: that is, democratic. Now, one may believe in democracy or disbelieve in it. It would be grossly unfair to conceal the fact that there are difficulties on both sides. The difficulty of believing in democracy is that it is so hard to believe—like God and most other good things. The difficulty of disbelieving in democracy is that there is nothing else to believe in. I mean there is nothing else on earth or in earthly politics. Unless an aristocracy is selected by gods, it must be selected by men. It may be negatively and passively permitted, but either heaven or humanity must permit it; otherwise it has no more moral authority than a lucky pickpocket. It is babyltalk to talk about “Supermen” or “Nature’s Aristocracy” or “The Wise Few.” “The Wise Few” must be either those whom others think wise—who are often fools; or those who think themselves wise—who are always fools.

Well, if one happens to believe in democracy as I do, as a large trust in the active and passive judgment of the human conscience, one can have no hesitation, no “impartiality,” about one’s view of divorce; and especially about one’s view of the extension of divorce among the democracy. A democrat in any sense must regard that extension as the last and vilest of the insults offered by
the modern rich to the modern poor. The rich do largely believe in divorce; the poor do mainly believe in fidelity. But the modern rich are powerful and the modern poor are powerless. Therefore for years and decades past the rich have been preaching their own virtues. Now that they have begun to preach their vices too, I think it is time to kick.

There is one enormous and elementary objection to the popularising of divorce, which comes before any consideration of the nature of marriage. It is like an alphabet in letters too large to be seen. It is this: That even if the democracy approved of divorce as strongly and deeply as the democracy does (in fact—disapprove of it—any man of common sense must know that nowadays the thing will be worked probably against the democracy, but quite certainly by the plutocracy. People seem to forget that in a society where power goes with wealth and where wealth is in an extreme state of inequality, extending the powers of the law means something entirely different from extending the powers of the public. They seem to forget that there is a great deal of difference between what laws define and what laws do. A poor woman in a poor public-house was broken with a ruinous fine for giving a child a sip of shandy-gaff. Nobody supposed that the law verbally stigmatised the action for being done by a poor person in a poor public-house. But most certainly nobody will dare to pretend that a rich man giving a boy a sip of champagne would have been punished so heavily—or punished at all. I have seen the thing done frequently in country houses; and my host and hostess would have been very much surprised if I had gone outside and telephoned for the police. The law theoretically condemns any one who tries to frustrate the police or even fails to assist them. Yet the rich motorists are allowed to keep up an organised service of anti-police detectives—wearing a conspicuous uniform—for the avowed purpose of showing motorists how to avoid capture. No one supposes again that the law says in so many words that the right to organise for the evasion of laws is a privilege of the rich but not of the poor. But take the same practical test. What would the police say, what would the world say, if men stood about the streets in green and yellow uniforms, notoriously for the purpose of warning pickpockets of the presence of a plain-clothes officer? What would the world say if recognised officials in peaked caps watched by night to warn a burglar that the police were waiting for him? Yet there is no distinction of principle between the evasion of that police-trap and the other police-trap—the police-trap which prevents a motorist from killing a child like a chicken; which prevents the most frivolous kind of murder, the most piteous kind of sudden death.
Well, the Poor Man’s Divorce Law will be applied exactly as all these others are applied. Everybody must know that it would mean in practice that well-dressed men, doctors, magistrates, and inspectors, would have more power over the family lives of the ill-dressed men, navvies, plumbers, and potmen. Nobody can have the impudence to pretend that it would mean that navvies, plumbers, and potmen would (either individually or collectively) have more power over the family lives of doctors, magistrates, and inspectors. Nobody dare assert that because divorce is a State affair, therefore the poor citizen will have any power, direct or indirect, to divorce a duchess from a duke or a banker from a banker’s wife. But no one will call it inconceivable that the power of rich families over poor families, which is already great, the power of the duke as landlord, the power of the banker as money-lender, might be considerably increased by arming magistrates with more powers of interference in private life. For the dukes and bankers often are magistrates, always the friends and relatives of magistrates. The navvies are not. The navvy will be the subject of the new experiments; certainly never the experimentalist. It is the poor man who will show to the imaginative eye of science all those horrors which, according to newspaper correspondents, cry aloud for divorce—drunkenness, madness, cruelty, incurable disease. If he is slow in working for his master, he will be “defective.” If he is worn out by working for his master, he will be “degenerate.” If he, at some particular opportunity, prefers to work for himself to working for his master, he will be obviously insane. If he never has any opportunity of working for any master he will be “unemployable.” All the bitter embarrassments and entanglements incidental to extreme poverty will be used to break conjugal happiness, as they are already used to break parental authority. Marriage will be called a failure wherever it is a struggle, just as parents in modern England are sent to prison for neglecting the children whom they cannot afford to feed.

I will take but one instance of the enormity and silliness which is really implied in these proposals for the extension of divorce. Take the case quoted by many contributors to the discussion in the papers—the case of what is called “cruelty.” Now what is the real meaning of this as regards the prosperous and as regards the struggling classes of the community? Let us take the prosperous classes first. Every one knows that those who are really to be described as gentlemen all profess a particular tradition, partly chivalrous, partly merely modern and refined—a tradition against “laying hands upon a woman, save in a way of kindness.” I do not mean that a gentleman hates the cowing of a woman
by brute force: any one must hate that. I mean he has a ritual, taboo kind of feeling about the laying on of a finger. If a gentle man (real or imitation) has struck his wife ever so lightly, he feels he has done one of those things that thrill the thoughts with the notion of a border-line, something like saying the Lord’s Prayer backwards, touching a hot kettle, reversing the crucifix, or “breaking the pledge.” The wife may forgive the husband more easily for this than for many things; but the husband will find it hard to forgive himself. It is a purely class sentiment, like the poor folks’ dislike of hospitals. What is the effect of this class sentiment on divorce among the higher classes?

The first effect, of course, is greatly to assist those faked divorces so common among the fashionable. I mean that where there is a collusion, a small pat or push can be remembered, exaggerated, or invented; and yet seem to the solemn judges a very solemn thing in people of their own social class. But outside these cases, the test is not wholly inappropriate as applied to the richer classes. For all Gentlemen feeling or affecting this special horror, it does really look bad if a gentleman has broken through it, it does look like madness or a personal hatred and persecution. It may even look like worse things. If a man with luxurious habits, in artistic surroundings, is cruel to his wife, it may be connected with some perversion of sex cruelty, such as was alleged (I know not how truly) in the case of the millionaire Thaw. We need not deny that such cases are cases for separation, if not for divorce.

But this test of technical cruelty, which is rough and ready as applied to the rich, is absolutely mad and meaningless as applied to the poor. A poor woman does not judge her husband as a bully by whether he has ever hit out. One might as well say that a schoolboy judges whether another schoolboy is a bully by whether he has ever hit out. The poor wife, like the schoolboy, judges him as a bully by whether he is a bully. She knows that while wife-beating may really be a crime, wife-hitting is sometimes very like just self-defence. No one knows better than she does that her husband often has a great deal to put up with; sometimes she means him to; sometimes she is justified. She comes and tells this to magistrates again and again; in police court after police court women with black eyes try to explain the thing to judges with no eyes. In street after street women turn in anger on the hapless knight-errant who has interrupted an instantaneous misunderstanding. In these people’s lives the rooms are crowded, the tempers are torn to rags, the natural exits are forbidden. In such societies it is as abominable to punish or divorce people for a blow as it would be to punish or divorce a gentleman for slamming a door. Yet who can doubt, if ever divorce is
applied to the populace, it would be applied in the spirit which takes the blow quite seriously? If any one doubts it, he does not know what world he is living in. It is common to meet nowadays men who talk of what they call Free Love as if it were something like Free Silver—a new and ingenious political scheme. They seem to forget that it is as easy to judge what it would be like as to judge of what legal marriage would be like. “Free Love” has been going on in every town and village since the beginning of the world; and the first fact that every man of the world knows about it is plain enough. It never does produce any of the wild purity and perfect freedom its friends attribute to it. If any paper had the pluck to head a column “Is Concubinage a Failure?” instead of “Is Marriage a Failure?” the answer “Yes” would be given by the personal memory of all. Modern people perpetually quote some wild expression of monks in the wilderness (when a whole civilisation was maddened by remorse) about the perilous quality of Woman, about how she was a spectre and a serpent and a destroying fire. Probably the establishment of nuns, situated a few miles off, described Man also as a serpent and a spectre; but their works have not come down to us.

Now all this old-world wit against Benedick the married man was sensible enough. But so was the bachelorhood of the old monks, who said it, sensible enough. It is perfectly true that to entangle yourself with another soul in the most tender and tragic degree is to make, in all rational possibility, a martyr or a fool of yourself. Most of the modern denunciations of marriage might have been copied direct from the maddest of the monkish diaries. The attack on marriage is an argument for celibacy. It is not an argument for divorce. For that entanglement which celibacy avowedly avoids, divorce merely reduplicates and repeats. It may have been a sort of solemn comfort to a gentleman of Africa to reflect that he had no wife. It cannot be anything but a discomfort to a gentleman of America to wonder which wife he really has. If progress means, as in the ludicrous definition of Herbert Spencer, “an advance from the simple to the complex,” then certainly divorce is a part of progress. Nothing can be conceived more complex than the condition of a man who has settled down finally four or five times. Nothing can be conceived more complex than the position of a profligate who has not only had ten liaisons, but ten legal liaisons. There is a real sense in which free love might free men. But freer divorce would catch them in the most complicated net ever woven in this wicked world.

The tragedy of love is in love, not in marriage. There is not unhappy marriage that might not be an equally unhappy concubinage, or a far more unhappy seduction. Whether the tie be legal or no, matters something to the faithless
party; it matters nothing to the faithful one. The pathos reposes upon the perfectly simple fact that if any one deliberately provokes either passions or affections, he is responsible for them as long as they go on, as the man is responsible for letting loose a flood or setting fire to a city. His remedy is not to provoke them, like the hermit. His punishment, when he deserves punishment, is to spend the rest of his life in trying to undo any ill he has done. His escape is despair—which is called, in this connection, divorce. For every healthy man feels one fundamental fact in his soul. He feels that he must have a life, and not a series of lives. He would rather the human drama were a tragedy than that it were a series of Music-hall Turns and Potted Plays. A man wishes to save the souls of all the men he has been: of the dirty little schoolboy; of the doubtful and morbid youth; of the lover; of the husband. Re-incarnation has always seemed to me a cold creed; because each incarnation must forget the other. It would be worse still if this short human life were broken up into yet shorter lives, each of which was in its turn forgotten.

If you are a democrat who likes also to be an honest man—if (in other words) you want to know what the people want and not merely what you can somehow induce them to ask for—then there is no doubt at all that this is what they want. You can only realise it by looking for human nature elsewhere than in election reports, but when you have once looked for it you see it and you never forget it. From the fact that every one thinks it natural that young men and women should carve names on trees, to the fact that every one thinks it unnatural that old men and women should be separated in work houses, millions and millions of daily details prove that people do regard the relation as normally permanent; not a vision, but as a vow.

Now for the exceptions, true or false. I would note a strange and even silly oversight in the discussion of such exceptions, which has haunted most arguments for further divorce. The ordinary emancipated prig or poet who urges this side of the question always talks to one tune. “Marriage may be the best for most men,” he says, “but there are exceptional natures that demand a more undulating experience; constancy will do for the common herd, but there are complex natures and complex cases where no one could recommend constancy. I do not ask (at the present Stage of Progress) for the abolition of marriage; I hereby ask that it may be remitted in such individual and extreme examples.”

Now it is perfectly astounding to me that any one who has walked about this world should make such a blunder about the breed we call mankind. Surely it is plain enough that if you ask for dreadful exceptions, you will get them—too
many of them. Let me take once again a rough parable. Suppose I advertised in
the papers that I had a place for any one who was too stupid to be a clerk.
Probably I should receive no replies; possibly one. Possibly also (nay, probably)
it would be from the one man who was not stupid at all. But suppose I had
advertised that I had a place for any one who was too clever to be a clerk. My
office would be instantly besieged by all the most hopeless fools in the four
kingdoms. To advertise for exceptions is simply to advertise for egoists. To
advertise for egoists is to advertise for idiots. It is exactly the bore who does
think that his case is interesting. It is precisely the really common person who
does think that his case is uncommon. It is always the dull man who does think
himself rather wild. To ask solely for strange experiences of the soul is simply to
let loose all the imbecile asylums about one’s ears. Whatever other theory is
right, this theory of the exceptions is obviously wrong—or (what matters more
to our modern atheists) is obviously unbusinesslike. It is, moreover, to any one
with popular political sympathies, a very deep and subtle sort of treason. By thus
putting a premium on the exceptional we grossly deceive the unconsciousness of
the normal. It seems strangely forgotten that the indifference of a nation is sacred
as well as its differences. Even public apathy is a kind of public opinion—and in
many cases a very sensible kind. If I ask every body to vote about Mineral Meals
and do not get a single ballot-paper returned, I may say that the citizens have not
voted. But they have.

The principle held by the populace, against which this plutocratic conspiracy
is being engineered, is simply the principle expressed in the Prayer Book in the
words “for better, for worse.” It is the principle that all noble things have to be
paid for, even if you only pay for them with a promise. One does not take one’s
interest out of England as one takes it out of Consols. A man is not an
Englishman unless he can endure even the decay and death of England. And just
as every citizen is a potential soldier, so every wife or husband is a potential
hospital nurse—or even asylum attendant. For though we should all approve of
certain tragedies being mitigated by a celibate separation—yet the more real love
and honour there has been in the marriage, the less real mitigation there will be
in the parting. But this sound public instinct both about patriotism and marriage
also insists that the first vow or obligation shall be mitigated, not merely erased
and forgotten. Many a good woman has loved and refused a doubtful man, with
the proviso that she would marry no one else; the old institution of marriage has
the same feeling about the tragedy that is post-matrimonial. The thing remains
real; it binds one to something. If I am exiled from England I will go and live on
an island somewhere and be as jolly as I can. I will not become a patriot of any other land.
DICKENS (ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA ARTICLE)

DICKENS, Charles John Huffam (1812–1870), certainly the most popular and perhaps the greatest of the great English novelists, was born in Landport, a division of Portsea; in a house in Mile End terrace, Commercial road. The house can be identified and is in some sense a popular shrine or memorial, enabling the sightseer to link up in one journey two of the most romantic national names, associating Dickens with Portsea and Nelson with Portsmouth. But beyond this symbolic and almost legendary local interest, the actual address indicates little more than the drifting and often decaying fortunes of the class and family from which he came. It would be an exaggeration to compare it to Lant street, in the Borough, of which, it will be remembered, “the inhabitants were migratory, disappearing usually towards the verge of quarter-day.” But there is the note of something nomadic about the social world to which he belonged. We talk of the solid middle class; he belonged, one might almost say, to the liquid middle class; certainly to the insecure middle class. His father, John Dickens, was a clerk in the Navy-Pay Office, and all through life a man of wavering and unstable status, partly by his misfortunes and partly by his fault. It is said that Dickens sketched him in a lighter spirit as Micawber and in a sadder and more realistic aspect as Dorrit. The contrast between the two men, as well as the two moods, should be a warning against the weakness of taking too literally the idea of Dickensian “originals.” The habit has done grave injustice to many people, such as Leigh Hunt; and it may involve a grave injustice to John Dickens; and perhaps an even greater injustice to Mrs. John Dickens, nee Elizabeth Barrow, whom a similar rumour reports as the real Mrs. Nickleby. Some may question, not without grief, whether there really could be a real Mrs. Nickleby. But in any case there certainly could not be a man who was both Dorrit and Micawber. The truth is that we shall misunderstand from the beginning the nature of the Dickensian imagination, if we suppose these things to be mechanical portraits in black and white, taken by “the profeel machine,” as Mr. Weller said. It is the whole point of Dickens that he took hints from human beings; and turned them, one may say, into superhuman beings. But it is true that John Dickens was of the type that is often shifted from place to place; and this is the chief significance of Charles Dickens’s connection with Portsea, or rather of his lack of connection with it. He can only have been two years old when the household moved for a short time to London and then for a longer time to Chatham. It was perhaps lucky that the
formative period of his first childhood was also the most fortunate period of his not very fortunate family. The dockyard of Chatham, the towers of Rochester, the gardens and the great roads of Kent remained to him through life as the only normal memory of a nursery and a native soil; his house in later years looked down on the great road from Gads hill and the cathedral tower rose again in his last vision, in the opium dream called “Edwin Drood.” Here he had leisure to learn a little from books, who was so soon to learn only from life; first in the stricter sense of school-books, from a Mr. Giles, a Baptist minister in Chatham; and second, and probably with greater profit, from a random heap of old novels that included much of the greatest English literature and even more of the type of literature from which he could learn most; Roderick Random and Robinson Crusoe and Tom Jones and The Vicar of Wakefield.

He can hardly have been ten years old when the household was once more upon the march. John Dickens had fallen heavily into debt; he continued the tendency to change his private address; and his next private address was the Debtors’ Prison of the Marshalsea. His wife, the mother of eight children of whom Charles was the second, had to encamp desolately in CamdenTown and open a dingy sort of “educational establishment.” Meanwhile the unfortunate Charles was learning his lessons at a very different sort of educational establishment. After helping his mother in every sort of menial occupation, he was thrown forth to earn his own living by tying and labelling pots of blacking in a blacking warehouse at Old Hungerford Stairs. The blacking was symbolical enough; Dickens never doubted that this piece of his childhood was the darkest period of his life; and he seems indeed to have been in a mood to black himself all over, like the Othello of the Crummles Company. Of his pessimistic period, of the heartrending monotony and ignominy, he has given little more than a bitter abbreviation in David Copperfield. But he was storing up much more than bitterness; it is obvious that he had already developed an almost uncanny vigilance and alertness of attention. By the time his servitude came to an end, by his father falling into a legacy as he had fallen into a jail (there was really a touch of Micawber in the way in which things turned up and turned down for him) the boy was no longer a normal boy, let alone a child. He called his wandering parent “the Prodigal Father”; and there was something of the same fantastic family inversion in the very existence of so watchful and critical a son. We are struck at once with an almost malicious maturity of satire; some of the best passages of the prison life of the Pickwicks and the Dorrits occur in private letters about his own early life. He had shared, of course, the improvement in the
family condition; which was represented in his case by a period of service as a clerk to a Mr. Blackmore, a GraysInn solicitor, and afterwards in the equally successful, and much more congenial, occupation of a newspaper reporter and ultimately a Parliamentary reporter. His father had taken up the trade; but his son was already making a mark in it, as reporter to The True Sun, The Mirror of Parliament and The Morning Chronicle. In all these aspects and attitudes, at this time, he appears as alert, sharp-witted and detached; recalling that sort of metallic brightness which an observer at this period so often saw flash upon his face. It is worthy of note, because certain healthy social emotions which he always championed have somewhat falsified his personality in the eyes of the prigs whom he loved to rap over the head. He was a genuine champion of geniality; but he was not always genial; certainly not only genial. One of his earliest sketches, published not long after this time, was a defence of the Christian festivity of Christmas against the Puritans and the Utilitarians; it was called “Christmas Under Three Heads.” All his life he defended valiantly the pleasures of the poor; and insisted that God had given ale and rum, as well as wine, to make glad the heart of man. But all this has clouded his character with fumes of mere conviviality and irresponsibility which were very far from being really characteristic. Even in youth, which is the period of irresponsibility, Dickens appears in some ways as highly responsible. He was in sharp reaction against the futility of his family; he was both ambitious and industrious; and there were some who even found him hard. In many moods he had as angry a dislike of the Skimpole as of the Gradgrinds.

Indeed he had come in more ways than one to the high turning-point of his fortunes. His marriage and his first real literary work can be dated at about the same time. He had already begun to write sketches, chiefly in The Old Monthly Magazine, which were in the broadest sense caricatures, of the common objects of the street or the market-place. They were illustrated by Cruikshank; and in these early stages of the story the illustrator is often more important than the author. This was notoriously true of his next and perhaps his greatest experiment; but it is typical in any case of his time and his time of life. The prose sketches were signed “Boz” and the signature had become a recognized pseudonym when Messrs. Chapman and Hall, the publishers, approached him with the suggestion of a larger scheme. A well known humorous artist of that epoch, Seymour, was to produce a series of plates illustrating the adventures, or misadventures, of the Nimrod Club, a group of amateur sportsmen, destined to dwindle and yet to grow infinitely greater in the single figure of Mr. Nathaniel
Dickens consented to write the letter-press, which was little more than a running accompaniment like an ornamental border around the drawings; and in that strange fashion, secondary, subordinate and even trivial, first formed itself in the human fancy the epic and pantomime of Pickwick (1837). Dickens persuaded the publishers to let the Pickwick Club represent more varied interests or eccentricities, retained Mr. Winkle to represent or misrepresent the original notion of sport; and by that one stroke of independence cut himself free from a stale fashion and started a new artistic adventure and revolution. He gave as one of his reasons the fact that he had no special knowledge of sports or games, and proceeded to drive his argument home triumphantly by his description of the cricket-match at Dingley Dell. And yet that cricket-match alone might illustrate exactly the game which Dickens so gloriously won; and why that wild and ill-instructed batsman has had so many thousand runs and is not out. What did a few mistakes in the description of cricket, or even in the description of real life, matter in a man who could invent that orator at the cricket-dinner, who complimented the defeated eleven by saying, with the gesture of Alexander, “If I were not Dumkins, I would be Luffey; if I were not Podder, I would be Struggles”? Men do not read that sort of thing to learn about cricket, or even about life, but to find something more living than either. There had broken through the entanglements of that trumpery bargain a force of comic genius which swallowed up its own origin and excuses; a wild animal big enough to eat all its direction labels. People forgot about Seymour; forgot about sport; forgot about the Nimrod Club; soon forgot about the Pickwick Club. They forgot all that he forgot and followed whatever he followed; much bigger and wilder game than any aimed at by the mere gun of Mr. Winkle. The track of the story wandered; the tone of the story changed; a servant whom Pickwick found cleaning boots in an inn-yard took the centre of the stage and towered even over Pickwick; Pickwick from being a pompous buffoon became a generous and venerable old English gentleman; and the world still followed that incredible transformation-scene and wishes there were more of it to this day. This was the emergence of Dickens into literature. It had, of course, many secondary effects in life. One was the first and almost the most bitter of his quarrels; Seymour may be excused for having been annoyed at the relations of artist and author being thus turned upside down in a whirlwind; but Seymour was not therefore necessarily justified in saying, as he did say and his widow long continued to say, that Dickens had gained glory from another man’s ideas. Nobody, we may well imagine, believes that the oration of Sergeant Buzfuz or the poem of Mrs.
Leo Hunter, were Mr. Seymour’s ideas. Dickens had an inexhaustible torrent of such ideas; and no man on earth could pretend to have provided them. But it is true that in this quarrel, as in others, some found a touch of sharpness and acid self-defence in Dickens; and he was never without his enemies. His ideal was certainly the leisure and geniality of Pickwick; but he was fighting rather too hard for his own hand and had too much at stake and too pressing a knowledge of poverty to be anything but practical.

As Pickwick was the foundation of his public life, his marriage was naturally the foundation of his private life; and in this also he has been an object of criticism as he was certainly an object of sympathy. Very little good is done by making guesses about a story of which the spiritual balance and proportion were probably never known to more than three or four people. It is sufficiently significant that those who were nearest to it, and who survive to speak or rather to be silent, agree in laying no very heavy blame upon anyone involved. One of the principals of the Morning Chronicle, George Hogarth, had been so much struck by the “Boz” sketches as to insist on an improvement in the payment of the writer; he introduced Dickens to his family and especially (we may say) to his daughters, with all of whom the young journalist seems to have been on very friendly and even affectionate terms. One of them, Catherine, he married, and certainly married for love; but not perhaps with the sort of love which gives a man a full and serious realization of what he is doing. It is the pathos of the story that in a sense the friendship outlasted the love; for another sister, who understood him better, remained his friend long after his marriage had become a prolonged misunderstanding. All this, however, happened long afterwards; for the moment his marriage may be taken as marking his step into security and success; especially as he was probably stimulated and, as it were, intoxicated, by a romance that brought him into more refined social surroundings than his own. From that moment he was launched as a popular writer and a power in the world; and he never went back, until he died of popularity thirty years afterwards.

It is notable that his next work was Oliver Twist (1838); which might be meant for a contrast to Pickwick. If the first trick had succeeded, nobody could accuse the conjurer of trying the same trick twice. He was probably proud of proving his range; but he was certainly courageous in testing his popularity. It is true that Oliver Twist consists of a queer mixture of melodrama and realism; but both the realism and the melodrama are deliberately dark and grim. Nevertheless it is fortunate that with his second book he thus brought into play what may be
called his second talent. It is too common to compare his humour with his pathos; for indeed there is no comparison. But there really is a comparison between his humour and his horror; and he really had a talent for a certain sort of horror, which is exactly rendered by the popular phrase of supping on horrors. For there is a sort of lurid conviviality that accompanies the panic; as if the nightmare could accompany and not follow the heavy meal. This suppressed vitality is due to his never for an instant losing the love of life; the love of death, which is despair and pessimism, was meaningless to him till he died. The sort of horror which afterwards conceived the death of Krook is already found in Oliver Twist; as in that intolerable repetition throbbing in the murderer’s ears; “will wash out mud-stains, blood-stains” and so on. For the rest, the plot is preposterous and the flashes of fun excellent but few; yet there is another aspect of the book which makes it important in the story of Dickens. It is not only the first of his nightmare novels, but also the first of his social tracts. Something of social protest could be read between the lines of Pickwick in prison; but the prison of Pickwick was very mild compared with the charitable almshouse of Oliver. Dickens is witness, with Hood and Cobbett and many others, that the workhouse was felt by all generous people as something quite unnaturally new and hard and inhuman. It is sometimes said that he killed Bumble; it would be easier to say that, by making Bumble live, he created something by which it will always be possible to kill bureaucracies.

Whether we call the transition from Pickwick to Oliver Twist a change from comedy to tragedy, or merely a change from farce to melodrama, it is notable that the next act of Dickens is to mix the two in about equal proportions. Having shown how much he can vary, he tries to show how well he can combine. It is worth noting because it explains much of the failure as well as the success of his art as a whole. We may even say that, to the last, this sort of exhibition of power remained his principal weakness. When the critics, like those of The Quarterly, called him vulgar, it meant nothing except that the critics themselves were snobbish. There is nothing vulgar about drinking beer or describing the drinking of beer, or enjoying the humours of really humorous people who happen to black boots, like Sam Weller. But there is something just a little vulgar about professing to be a Universal Provider; a man who writes not only something that he wants to write, but anything that anybody wants to read. Anything in his work that can really be called failure is very largely due to this appetite for universal success. There is nothing wrong about the jester laughing at his own jokes; indeed they must be very poor jokes if even he cannot laugh at them. Dickens, in
one of those endless private letters which are almost more entertaining than his published novels, describes himself as “a if he thought he was very funny indeed”; and so he was. But when he set out to prove that he was not only very funny, but very pathetic, very tragic, very powerful, he was not always enjoying the sense of power over his work, he was enjoying the sense of power over his audience. He was an admirable actor in private theatricals; and sometimes, unfortunately, they were public theatricals. And on this side of his character he had the proverbial itch of Toole to act Hamlet. When he was rendering the humours of the crowd, he was that rather rare thing, a real democrat. But when he was trying to command the tears and thrills of the crowd, he was something of a demagogue; that is, not one mingling with the crowd, but one trying to dazzle and to drive it. One of the ways in which he displayed this attribute, if not of vulgarity at least of vanity, was in his habit, from this time onwards, of running side by side in the same book about five different stories in about five different styles. It pleased the actor in him to show his versatility and his ease in turning from one to the other. He did not realize clearly enough that in some of the parts he was a first-rate actor and in some a second-rate and in some a fifth-rate actor. He did not remind himself that though he turned to each topic with equal ease, he did not turn to each with equal effect. But, whatever the disadvantages of the universal ambition, it definitely dates from the period of his next book. Pickwick has a prevailing tint of gaiety and Oliver Twist of gravity, not to say grimness; but with Nicholas Nickleby (1839) we have the new method, which is like a pattern of bright and dark stripes. The melodrama is if possible even more melodramatic than in Oliver Twist; but what there is of it is equally black and scowling. But the comedy or farce has already displayed the rapid ripening of his real genius in letters. There is no better company in all literature than the strolling company of Mr. Vincent Crummles; though it is to be hoped that in any convivial meeting of it, Miss Snevellicci will remember to invite her incomparable papa. Mr. Mantalini also is one of the great gifts of Dickens to the enduring happiness of humanity. For the rest, it is very difficult to take the serious part of the story seriously. There is precious little difference between the rant and claptrap of the Crummles plays, which Dickens makes fun of, and the rant and claptrap of Ralph Nickleby and Mulberry Hawke which Dickens gravely narrates to us. All that, however, was of little consequence either immediate or permanent. Dickens was not proving that he could write smooth and probable narratives, which many people could do. He was proving that he could create Mantalini and Snevellicci, which nobody could do.
Nevertheless, this pretence of providing for all tastes, which produced the serio-comic novel, is also the explanation of the next stage of his career. There runs or recurs throughout his whole life a certain ambition to preside over a more or less complex or many-sided publication; a large framework for many pictures; a system of tales within tales like the Arabian Nights or the tales of the Tabard. It is the ambition that he afterwards gratified by becoming the editor of two magazines, Household Words and All the Year Round. But there is here something of a shadow of the original meaning of the word magazine, in the sense of a shop; and another hint of that excessive desire to keep a shop that sells everything. He had been for a time editor of something of the sort in Bentley’s Miscellany, but the final form taken by this mild and genial megalomania (if we may so describe it) was the plan which Dickens formed immediately after the success of Nicholas Nickleby. The serial scheme was to be called, “Master Humphrey’s Clock,” and was to consist of different stories told by a group of friends. With the idea of making them the more friendly he turned some of them into old friends; reintroducing Mr. Pickwick and the two Wellers, though these characters were hardly at their best, the author’s mind being already on other things. One of these things was a historical novel, perhaps conceived more in the romantic manner of Scott than the prosaic manner of Smollett, which Dickens generally followed. It was called Barnaby Rudge (1840) and the most interesting part of it perhaps is the business of the Gordon Riots; and the mob that has a madman for its mascot and penny-dreadful prentice for its comic relief. But there is also a plot as complicated as, though rather clearer than, that of Oliver Twist; a plot that intensely interested the detective mind of Poe. Barnaby Rudge, however, is not so directly Dickensian as the romance that preceded or the romance that followed it. The second story, somewhat insecurely wedged into the framework of Master Humphrey’s Clock, was The Old Curiosity Shop (1841), as the opening and some of the references in the story still vaguely attest. The public reception of this story very sharply illustrates what has been said about the double character of his success. On the one side was his true success as a craftsman carving figures of a certain type, generally gargoyles and grotesques. On the other side was his inferior success as a jack-of-all-trades tending only too much to be a cheapjack. As a matter of fact, The Old Curiosity Shop contains some of the most attractive and imaginative humour in all his humorous work; there is nothing better anywhere than Mr. Swiveller’s imitation of the brigand or Mr. Brass’s funeral oration over the dwarf. But in general gossip and association, everything else in the story is swallowed up in the lachrymose
subject of Little Nell. There can be no doubt that this unfortunate female had a most unfortunate effect on Dickens’s whole conception of his literary function. He was flattered because silly people wrote him letters imploring him not to let Little Nell die; and forgot how many sensible people there were, only hoping that the Marchioness would live for ever. Little Nell was better dead, but she was an unconscionable long time dying; and we cannot altogether acquit Dickens of keeping her lingering in agony as an exhibition of his power. It tended to fix him in that unfortunate attitude, of something between a showman and a magician, which explains almost all the real mistakes of his life.

About this time a very determining event interrupted his purely literary development, his first visit to America. It was destined to have, apart from any other results, a direct effect upon his next book, which was Martin Chuzzlewit (1844). There were, of course, many purely practical and personal elements in the criticism which he directed against the western democracy. An unjust copyright law, or one which he at any rate thought very unjust, had enabled Americans to pirate his most popular works; and it would seem that the people he met were, in their breezy way, but little inclined to apologize for the anomaly. But it would be very unjust to Dickens to deny that his sense and sensibility were alike irritated by some real divisions in the international relation. There were things in the American culture, or lack of culture, which he could not be expected to understand but which he might reasonably be expected to dislike. His English law-abiding liberalism would in any case have been startled by a certain streak of ferocity and persecution that there really is in the Americans; just as he might have recoiled from the same fierceness in the Irish or the Italians. But in the Americans it was also connected with something crude and incomplete in the society, and was not softened by tradition or romance. He was also both annoyed and amused at the American habit of uttering solemn idealistic soliloquies and of using rhetoric very rhetorically. But all these impressions are important chiefly as they changed the course of his next important narrative; and illustrated a certain condition or defect of his whole narrative method.

All these early books of Dickens, from Pickwick onward, appeared, it must always be remembered, serially and in separate parts. They were anticipated eagerly like bulletins; and they were often written up to time almost as hastily as newspaper reports. One effect of this method was that it encouraged the novelist in a sort of opportunism and something of a hand to mouth habit of work. And a character that always belonged, in varying degrees, to his novels is first and most
sharply illustrated in Martin Chuzzlewit. The earlier numbers, though they contained the two superb caricatures called Pecksniff and Mrs. Gamp, had not for some reason been so popular as the caricatures called Pickwick and Miss Squeers. Dickens was already beginning to show something of that feverish fatigue which was the natural reaction of his fervid industry. He feared that the public was bored with the book; he became perhaps subconsciously a little bored with it himself. He conceived the bold idea of breaking the story in the middle and putting in a purple patch woven from his wild memories of the Yankees. It was completely successful, in the comedy sense; but it is worth noting that Dickens did something curiously Dickensian in thus suddenly sending Martin Chuzzlewit across the sea to America. It is not easy to imagine Thackeray suddenly hurling Pendennis from Mayfair into the middle of Australia; or George Eliot dislodging Felix Holt and flinging him as far as the North Pole. The difference was partly the result of the Dickensian temper and partly of the method of publication. But it will be well to remember it: for there is more than one example of what looks like a positive change of plan in the Dickens stories, made more possible by this early habit of not producing the work of art as a whole. Some have suggested that the degeneration of Boffin was originally meant to be real, and his rather clumsy plot an afterthought: and the same idea has figured in the reconstructions of Edwin Drood.

At this point there is a break in the life of Dickens, in more ways than one. It is represented by his decision to live abroad for a time, chiefly on grounds of economy; the last lingering results of the relative failure of Martin Chuzzlewit. He took a villa in the neighbourhood of Genoa in 1844; and he and his family, already a fairly large one, settled down there with a certain air of finality that deserved for a time the name of exile. But it is curious to note that the literary work done there has something of the character of an interlude, and indeed of a rather incongruous interlude. For it was in that Italian landscape that he concentrated on a study so very domestic, insular and even cockney as The Chimes (1845); and industriously continued the series of short Christmas stories which had recently begun in the very London fog of A Christmas Carol (1843). Whatever be the merits or demerits of the Christmas Carol, it really is a carol; in the sense of being short and direct and having the same chorus throughout. The same is true in another way of The Chimes; and of most things that occupied him in his Italian home. He had not settled down to another long and important book; and it soon became apparent that he had not settled down at all. He returned to London, the landscape which for him was really the most romantic
and even historic; and did something so ominously typical of the place and time as almost to seem like tempting Providence. He became the first editor of the Daily News, a paper started to maintain those Liberal, if not Radical opinions of which he always shared the confident outlook and the humane simplicity. He did not long remain attached to the editorial chair or even to the metropolis, for this was the most restless period in all his restless life. He immediately went back to Lausanne and immediately wanted to go back to London. It seems probable that this break in his social life corresponded to a break in his artistic life: which was in a sense just about to begin all over again and begin at the other end. He did indeed write one more full-size novel of the earlier type, Dombey and Son (1846–48); but it has very much the character of the winding up of an old business, like the winding up of the Dombey firm at the end of it. It is comic as the earlier books were comic, and no praise can be higher; it is conventional as the earlier plots were conventional, and never really pretended to be anything else; it contains a dying child upon the pattern of Little Nell; it contains a very amusing major much improved from the pattern of Mr. Dowler. But underneath all this easy repetition of the old dexterity and the old clumsiness the mind of the conjurer is already elsewhere. Dombey and Son was more successful in a business sense than Martin Chuzzlewit; though really less successful in many others. Dickens settled again in England in a more prosperous style; sent his son to Eton and, what was more sensational, took a rest. It was after a long holiday at Broadstairs, in easier circumstances more favourable to imaginative growth and a general change of view, that there appeared in 1849 an entirely new novel in an entirely new style.

There is all the difference between the life and adventures of David Copperfield and the life and adventures of Nicholas Nickleby, that there is between the life of Charles Dickens and the life of Amadis of Gaul. The latter is a good or bad romance; the former is a romantic biography, only the more realistic for being romantic. For romance is a very real part of life and perhaps the most real part of youth. Dickens had turned the telescope round or was looking through the other end of it; looking perhaps into a mirror, looking in any case out of a new window. It was life as he saw it, which was somewhat fantastically; but it was his own life as he knew it, and even as he had lived it. In other words, it is fanciful but it is not fictitious; because not merely invented in the manner of fiction. In Pickwick or Nickleby he had in a sense breathed fresh imaginative life into stock characters, but they were still stage characters; in the new style he may be extravagant, but he is not stagey. That vague glow of
exaggeration and glamour which lies over all the opening chapters of David Copperfield, which dilates some figures and distorts others, is the genuine sentimentalism and suppressed passion of youth; it is no longer a convention or tradition of caricature. There are men like Steerforth and girls like Dora; they are not as boys see them; but boys do see them so. This passionate autobiography, though it stiffens into greater conventionality at the real period of passion, is really, in the dismally battered phrase, a human document. But something of the new spirit, more subtle and sympathetic but perhaps less purely creative, belongs to all the books written after this date. The next of the novels in point of time was Bleak House (1853), a satire chiefly directed against Chancery and the law’s delay, but containing some brilliant satire on other things, as on the philanthropic fool whose eyes are in the ends of the earth. But the description of the feverish idleness of Rick has the new note of one for whom a well-meaning young man is no longer merely a “first walking gentleman.” After a still more severe phase in Hard Times (1854) (historically important as the revolt of a Radical against the economic individualism which was originally identified with Radicalism) he continued the same tendency in Little Dorrit (1857), the tone of which is perhaps as sad as anything illustrated by Dickensian humours can be; broke off into an equally serious and more sensational experiment in historical romance in The Tale of Two Cities (1859), largely an effect of the influence of Carlyle; and finally reached what was perhaps the height of his new artistic method in a purely artistic sense. He never wrote anything better, considered as literature, than the first chapters of Great Expectations (1861). But there is, after all, something about Dickens that prevents the critic from being ever quite content with criticizing his work as literature. Something larger seems involved, which is not literature, but life; and yet the very opposite of a mere recorded way of living. And he who remembers Pickwick and Pecksniff, creatures like Puck or Pan, may sometimes wonder whether the work had not most life when it was least lifelike.

The stretch of stories following on David Copperfield, from 1850 onwards, fall into the framework of another of Dickens’s editorial schemes; and this time a much more successful one. He began to edit Household Words, in which some, though not all of his later tales appeared; and continued to do so until he exchanged it in 1859 for another and similar periodical called All the Year Round. Just as we find him about this time induced at last to settle down finally in a comparatively comfortable editorial chair, so we find him at last settled more comfortably in a domicile that could really be called a home, when,
returning at last to his beloved Rochester district on the great road of Kent, he set up his house at Gads hill. It is sad to realize that this material domestic settlement had followed on a moral unsettlement; and the separation of Dickens and his wife, by agreement (of which the little that needs saying has already been said) had already taken place in 1856. But indeed, even apart from that tragedy, it is typical of Dickens that his repose could never be taken as final. His life was destined to end in a whirlwind of an entirely new type of activity; which none the less never interrupted that creative work which was the indwelling excitement of all his days. He wrote one more complete novel, Our Mutual Friend (1864–65), and it is more complete than most. Indeed it is one of the best though not one of the most Dickensian of the Dickens novels. He then turned his restless talent to something in the nature of a detective story, more in the manner of his friend Wilkie Collins; the sort of story which begins by asking a question; in this case a question about the secret and the sequel of the fate of the hero, Edwin Drood. The question will never be answered; for it was cut short by the only thing that could be more dramatic than the death of the hero; the death of the author. Charles Dickens was dead.

He died very suddenly, dropping from his chair at the dinner-table, in the year 1870 at the comparatively early age of fifty-eight. A death so abrupt, and essentially so premature, could not but raise doubts about the wisdom of his impetuous industry and debates almost as varied as those round the secret of Edwin Drood. But without exaggerating any one of the elements that contributed to it, we may note that the very last phase of his life was a new phase; and was almost entirely filled with his new activity in giving public readings from his works. He had gone to America once more in the November of 1867, with this particular purpose; and his campaign of public speaking in this style was truly American in its scope and scale. If he had indeed been unjust to America as a writer, it is curious that he should have reached his final popularity and perhaps his final collapse, in a character so supremely American. Differences exist about how far he exaggerated the function or how far his biographer exaggerated the danger; but his own letters, ragged with insomnia and impatience, full of desperate fatigue and more desperate courage, are alone enough to show that he was playing a very dangerous game for a man approaching sixty. But it is certainly true, as is alleged on the other side, that this was nothing new in the general conduct of Dickens; that he had long ago begun burning the candle at both ends; and there have been few men, in the matter of natural endowments, with so great and glorious a candle to burn.
He was buried in the Poet’s Corner of Westminster Abbey; and new and vulgar as many critics had called his work, he was far more of a poet than many who were buried there as poets. He left a will commending his soul to God, and to the mercy of Jesus Christ, and leaving his works to the judgment of posterity; and in both respects the action was symbolic and will remain significant in history. Intellectually limited as he was by the rather cheap and cheery negations of an age of commercial rationalism, he had never been a bitter secularist or anti-clerical; he was at heart traditional and was drawn much more towards Anglican than Puritan Christianity; and his greatest work may yet prove to be the perpetuation of the joyful mystery of Christmas. On the other side, he has suffered and may suffer again the changes in the mere fashions of criticism; but his work was creative, it added something to life; and it is hard to believe that something so added will ever be entirely taken away. The defects of his work are glaring; they hardly need to be detected; they need the less to be emphasized because, unfortunately, he always emphasized them himself. It may be a fault, it is certainly a fact, that he enjoyed writing his worst work as much as his best.

The charge of exaggeration is itself exaggerated. It is also, which is much more important, merely repeated mechanically, without any consideration of its true meaning. Dickens did exaggerate; but his exaggeration was purely Dickensian. In this sense his very vulgarity had the quality of distinction. Mere overstatement, to say that a tall man is ten feet high, to say that a frosty morning froze Niagara; this is something relatively easy to do, though sometimes very cleverly done, especially by Americans. But the distinction of Dickens can be stated even in the common charge against him. He is said to have turned men into monsters of humour or horror, whereas the men were really commonplace and conventional persons in shops and offices. If any critic depreciates the Dickensian method as mere overstatement, the answer is obvious: let him take some of these commonplace people and overstate them. He will soon discover that he has not the vaguest notion of what to overstate. He will soon realize that it is not a simple matter of mere exaggeration, in the sense of mere extension. It is not a matter of making a man a little taller or a morning a little colder; the challenge to imagination is not whether he can exaggerate, but whether he can find anything worth exaggerating. Now the genius of Dickens consisted in seeing in somebody, whom others might call merely prosaic, the germ of a sort of prose poem. There was in this or that man’s attitude, or affectation, or habit of thought, something which only needed a touch of exaggeration to be a charming fantasy or a dramatic contradiction. The books of Dickens are in fact full of
bores; of bores who do not bore us, merely because they did not bore him. We have all of us heard a hundred times the tiresome trick of public speakers, of asking themselves rhetorical questions which they do not want answered. Any of us might have heard a fat Dissenting minister doing it at a tea-party and thankfully forgotten all about him. But Dickens seized on the fallacy and turned it into a fantasy; into Mr. Chadband’s demands to know why he could not fly, or his wild and beautiful apologue about the elephant and the eel. We talk of the power of drawing people out; and that is the nearest parallel to the power of Dickens. He drew reels and reels of highly coloured caricature out of an ordinary person, as dazzlingly as a conjurer draws reels and reels of highly coloured paper out of an ordinary hat. But if anybody thinks the conjuring-trick is easy to perform, let him try it with the next ordinary person he sees. The exaggeration is always the logical extension of something that really exists; but genius appears, first in seeing that it exists, and second in seeing that it will bear to be thus exaggerated. That is something totally different from giving a man a long nose; it is the delicate surgical separation or extension of a living nerve. It is carrying a ludicrous train of thought further than the actual thinker carries it; but it requires a little thinking. It is making fools more gloriously foolish than they can be in this vale of tears; and it is not every fool who can do it.

There were other reasons for the injustice in the particular case of Dickens. Though his characters often were caricatures, they were not such wild caricatures as was supposed by those who had never met such characters. And the critics had never met the characters; because the critics did not live in the common life of the English people; and Dickens did. England was a much more amusing and horrible place than it appeared to the sort of man who wrote reviews in The Quarterly; and, in spite of all scientific progress or social reform, it is still. The poverty and anarchy of Dickens’s early life had stuffed his memory with strange things and people never to be discovered in Tennysonian country houses or even Thackerayan drawing-rooms. Poverty makes strange bedfellows, the same sort of bedfellows whom Mr. Pickwick fought for the recovery of his nightcap. In the vivid phrase, he did indeed live in Queer street and was acquainted with very queer fish. And it is something of an irony that his tragedy was the justification of his farce. He not only learnt in suffering what he taught in song, but what he rendered, so to speak, in a comic song.

It is also true, however, that he caught many of these queer fish because he liked fishing in such troubled waters. A good example of this combination of opportunity and eccentricity is to be found in his affection for travelling
showmen and vagabond entertainments of all sorts, especially those that exhibited giants and dwarfs and such monstrosities. Some might see in this truth a sort of travesty of all his travesties. It would be easy to suggest a psychological theory, by which all his art tended to the antics of the abnormal; it would also be entirely false. It would be much truer to say that Dickens created so many wild and fantastic caricatures because he was himself commonplace. He never identifies himself with anything abnormal, in the more modern manner. In his travelling show, the Giant always falls far short of being a Superman. And though he was tempted only too easily to an obvious pathos, there was never anything particularly pathetic about his dwarfs. His fun is more robust; and even, in that sense, more callous. The truth is that Dickens’s attitude to the abnormal has been misunderstood owing to the modern misunderstanding of the idea of the normal. He was in many ways a wild satirist, but still a satirist; and satire is founded on sanity. He has his real Cockney limitations. But his moderation was not a limitation but a liberty; for it allowed him to hit out in all directions. It was precisely because he had an ordinary and sensible view of life that he could measure the full madness both of Gradgrind’s greed or Micawber’s improvidence. It was because he was what we call commonplace that Dombey appeared to him so stiff or Jellaby so slovenly. In a later generation a real person often assumed such an unreal pose and lost the power of merely laughing at it; as, for example, when Oscar Wilde said seriously all that Skimpole had said absurdly. The Victorian commonsense was not a complete commonsense; and Dickens did suffer from having a narrower culture than Swift or Rabelais. But he did not suffer from being sensible; it was even more from his sense than his sensibility, it was from a sort of inspired irritation and impatience of good sense, that he was able to give us so radiant a fairyland of fools.

His literary work produced of course much more than a literary effect. He was the last great poet, in the true sense of maker, who made something for the people and was in the highest sense popular. He still gives his name, not to a literary clique, but to a league or fellowship numbering thousands all over the world. In this connection it is often noted that he achieved many things even considered as a practical political and social reformer. He let light into dark corners, like the dens of dirt and brutality often called schools, especially in Yorkshire; he probably had much to do with making the professional nurse a duller but more reliable person than Mrs. Gamp; it is likely enough that his vivid descriptions, assisted by the whole trend of the time, hastened the extinction of ordinary imprisonment for debt and clarified much of the original chaos of
Chancery. But precisely because this has often been said, it will be well not to say it too often. It has the effect of making his satire appear much more superficial and utilitarian than it really was; for the great satirist is concerned with things not so easily destroyed. We do more honour to Dickens in noting the evils he did not destroy than those he did. The eager worship of a man merely wealthy, however dull and trivial, which appears in the affair of Merdle, has by no means disappeared from our own more recent affairs. The pompous old Barnacle and the agreeable young Barnacle are still almost as much alive as in Dickens’s day. The sweeping away of a genuine gentry, in the person of Mr. Twemlow, on the tide of a new plutocracy, represented by Mr. Veneering, has gone much further than in Dickens’s day. But this makes Dickens’s satire the more rather than the less valuable to posterity. The other mood, which pictures all such abuses as things of the past, tends not to reform but only too much to repose; and to the perpetuation of a rather snobbish and paltry version of the Dickensian tradition. In that spirit we may hear to this day a Stiltstalkings telling the House of Commons that Stiltstalkings have perished before the march of progress; or in the law courts a Buzfuz quoting Buzfuz and jeering at himself as an extinct monster.

The future of the fame of Dickens is no part of the Dickens record and a very dubious part of the Dickens criticism. Some have suggested that his glory will fade as new fashions succeed those he satirized; others have said, at least equally reasonably, that the difference itself fades when all the fashions have grown old; and that Aristophanes and Cervantes have outlived their descendants as well as their contemporaries. But there can be no question of the importance of Dickens as a human event in history; a sort of conflagration and transfiguration in the very heart of what is called the conventional Victorian era; a naked flame of mere natural genius, breaking out in a man without culture, without tradition, without help from historic religions or philosophies or from the great foreign schools; and revealing a light that never was on sea or land, if only in the long fantastic shadows that it threw from common things.
MILTON: MAN AND POET

1917

All the mass of acute and valuable matter written or compiled about Milton leaves eternally an unanswered question; a difficulty felt by all, if expressed by few, of his readers. That difficulty is a contrast between the man and his poems. There exists in the world a group of persons who perpetually try to prove that Shakespeare was a clown and could not have written about princes, or that he was a drunkard and could not have written about virtue. I think there is a slight fallacy in the argument. But I wonder that they have not tried the much more tempting sport of separating the author of L’ Allegro from the author of the Defensus Populi Anglicani. For the contrast between the man Milton and the poet Milton is very much greater than is commonly realized. I fear that the shortest and clearest way of stating it is that when all is said and done, he is a poet whom we cannot help liking, and a man whom we cannot like. I find it far easier to believe that an intoxicated Shakespeare wrote the marble parts of Shakespeare than that a marble Milton wrote the intoxicated, or, rather, intoxicating, parts of Milton. Milton’s character was cold; he was one of those men who had every virtue except the one virtue needful. While other poets may have been polygamists from passion, he was polygamous on principle. While other artists were merely selfish, he was egoistic.

The public has a quick eye for portraits, a very keen nose for personality; and across two centuries the traditional picture of Milton dictating to his daughters till they were nearly dead has kept the truth about Milton; it has not taken the chill off. But though the mass of men feel the fact Milton after two hundred years, they seldom read the poetry of Milton at all. And so, because Milton the man was cold, they have got over the difficulty by saying that the poet Milton is cold too; cold, classical, marmoreal. But the poetry of Milton is not cold. He did in his later years, and in a fit of bad temper, write a classical drama, which is the only one of his works which is really difficult to read. But taken as a whole he is a particularly poetical poet, as fond of symbols and witchery as Coleridge, as fond of colored pleasures as Keats. He is sometimes sufficiently amorous to be called tender; he is frequently sufficiently amorous to be called sensual. Even his religion is not always heathen in his poetry. If you heard for the first time the line,

By the dear might of Him that walked the waves,
you would only fancy that some heart of true religious heat and humility, like Crashaw or George Herbert, had for a moment achieved a technical triumph and found a faultless line. If you read for the first time,

But come, thou Goddess fair and free,
In heaven yclept Euphrosyne,
you would think that the most irresponsible of the Elizabethans had uttered it as he went dancing down the street, believing himself in A ready. If you read,

Blossoms and fruits at once of golden hue
Appeared, with gay enamelled colors mixed,
or
Silence was pleased. Now glowed the firmament
With living sapphires,
you would think that all the rich dyes of the Orient and the Middle Ages had met, as they do in some quite modern poet, such as Keats or even Swinburne. If you read the account of the ale and the elf and the Christmas sports in L’Allegro, you might think them written by the most rollicking of rustic poets; if you read some lines about Eve in Paradise Lost, you might think them written at once by the most passionate and the most chivalrous of lovers. Paradise Lost is not dull; it is not even frigid. Anyone who can remember reading the first few books as a boy will know what I mean; it is a romance, and even a fantastic romance. There is something in it of Thalabe the Destroyer; something wild and magical about the image of the empire in the abyss scaling the turrets of the magician who is king of the cosmos. There is something Oriental in its design and its strange colors. One cannot imagine Flaxman illustrating Milton as he illustrated Homer. Nor is it even true that the rich glimpse of tropical terrors are conveyed in a clear outline of language. No one took more liberties with English, with metre, and even with common sense than Milton; an instance, of course, is the well-known superlative about Adam and his children.

Milton was not a simple epic poet like Homer, nor was he even a specially clear epic poet like Virgil. If these two gentlemen had studied his verse, they would have certainly acknowledged its power; but they would have shrunk from its inversions, its abrupt ellipses, its sentences that sometimes come tail foremost. I might even say that Homer reading Milton might have much the same feelings as Milton reading Browning. He would have found

Or of the eternal coeternal beam
a trifle obscure, and
nor sometimes forget,
Those other two, equalled with me in fate, etc., etc.,
almost entirely unintelligible. In this sense it is absurd to set up Milton as a
superlatively clear and classic poet. In the art of turning his sentences inside out
he never had an equal; and the only answer is to say that the result is perfect;
though it is inside out, yet somehow it is right side out.

Nevertheless, the tradition which puts Milton with Virgil and the large and
lucid poets, must possess and does possess some poetic significance. It lies, I
think, in this: the startling contrast between Milton and the century in which he
lived. He was not supremely classical; but he was classical in a time when
classicism was almost forgotten. He was not specially lucid; but he was
moderately intelligible in an age when nearly all poets were proud of being
unintelligible; an age of one hundred Brownings gone mad. The seventeenth
century was a most extraordinary time, which still awaits its adequate
explanation. It was something coming after the Renaissance which developed
and yet darkened and confused it, just as a tree might be more tangled for
growing. The puns that had been in Shakespeare few and bad became
numberless and ingenious. The schisms of thought which under Wickliffe and
Luther had at least the virtue of heartiness, and were yet full of a human
hesitation, became harsh, incessant, exclusive; every morning one heard that a
new mad sect had excommunicated humanity. The grammars of Greek and
Latin, which the young princes of the Renaissance had read as if they were
romances, were now being complicated by bald-headed pedants until no one on
earth could read them. Theology, which could always in light moments be given
the zest of an amusement, became a disease with the Puritans. War, which had
been the sport of gentlemen, was now rapidly becoming the ill-smelling science
for engineers it still remains. The air was full of anger; and not a young sort of
anger; exasperation on points of detail perpetually renewed. If the Renaissance
was like a splendid wine, the seventeenth century might be compared to the
second fermentation into vinegar. But whatever metaphor we use the main fact is
certain; the age was horribly complex; it was learned, it was crabbed, and in
nearly all its art and utterance, it was crooked.

Remember the wonderfully witty poets of Charles I.; those wonderfully witty
poets who were incomprehensible at the first reading and dull even when one
could comprehend them. Think of the scurrilous war of pamphlets, in which
Milton himself engaged; pages full of elaborate logic which no one can follow,
and elaborate scandals which everyone has forgotten. Think of the tortured
legalities of Crown and Parliament, quoting against each other other precedents of an
utterly different age; think of the thick darkness of diplomacy that covers the meaning (if it had any) of the Thirty Years’ War. The seventeenth century was a labyrinth; it was full of corners and crotchets. And against this sort of background Milton stands up as simple and splendid as Apollo. His style, which must always have been splendid, appeared more pure and translucent than it really was in contrast with all the mad mystification and darkness.

A riddle itself, that time is full of minor riddles; and one of the most inexplicable of them involves the whole position of Milton. How far was there really a connection between Calvinism and the idea of liberty, or the idea of popular government? There is much to be said on both sides; indeed there is no more perplexing question than whereabouts at the Reformation, or just after the Reformation, lay the real seed of modern self-government and freedom, or, to speak more strictly, of the modern belief in them; for we rather praise these things than possess them.

The first and fundamental fact is certainly against the liberalizing character of Puritanism. It did not profess to be merely a moral movement; its whole point was that it was strictly a theological movement; its chief objection to its enemies was that they tried to exalt (as the Scotch Puritans said) “the cauld banes of morality” above the sustaining and comfortable doctrine of predestination. To a Calvinist the most important thing was Calvinism; to a Puritan the most important thing was the Puritan creed; and this in itself certainly did not favor the vague sentiments either of emancipation or fraternity. Calvinism took away a man’s liberty in the universe; why, then, should it favor its liberty in the State? Puritanism denied free will; why should it be likely to affirm free speech? Why should the Calvinist object to an aristocracy? The Calvinists were an aristocracy; they were the most arrogant and awful of aristocracies by the nature of their own belief: they were the elect. Why should the Puritans dislike a baby being born a nobleman? It was the whole philosophy of the Puritans that a baby is born a celestial nobleman; and he is at birth and before birth a member of the cosmic upper classes. It should have been a small matter to the Puritans to admit that one might be born a king, seeing that they maintained the much more paradoxical position that one might be born a saint. Nor is it easy to see upon their own ideal principles why the Puritans should have disliked despotism or arbitrary power; though it is certainly much more the fact that they did dislike despotism than that they did dislike oligarchy. The first conception of Calvinism is a fierce insistence on the utterly arbitrary nature of power. The King of the Cavaliers was certainly not so purely willful, so sublimely capricious a sultan, as
the God of the Puritans.

But we can add something much more plain and practical. It is not merely that despotism or oligarchy might well have pleased the Puritans in theory: it is also true that they did please the Puritans in practice. Of the democratic element that did honestly exist in Puritanism I will speak in a moment; but the oligarchic and despotic elements were not merely things that logically ought to have appeared, but things that actually did appear. It is no longer denied, I think, by serious historians that the whole business of the Puritan revolt or triumph was anti-popular; that is to say, that at almost any given moment of the struggle, universal suffrage would have been a clear victory for the king. The really brilliant triumph of Cromwell was not his triumph over the monarchy, but his triumph over the democracy; the fact that he somehow kept the enormous crowd called England quiet. In short, his great glory was not in heading the Great Rebellion, but in avoiding the Great Rebellion. For the really Great Rebellion was the one that never happened. But, indeed, it is unnecessary even to urge so generally accepted a conjecture as this. Whatever may be true of the rebellion as a whole, no one will deny that at certain moments Puritanism appeared in politics as arrogant, fastidious and anti-popular; full of the pride of predestination and the scorn of all flesh. Even the most enthusiastic upholder of the Whig or Republican theory of Puritanism will hardly pretend that when Colonel Pride drove out of Parliament at the point of the pike all the members that ventured to disagree with him, his soul was at that moment inflamed with an enthusiasm for free discussion or representative government. It was by no means democratic; but it was highly Calvinistic. It was a sort of public pantomime of the doctrine of election; of election in the theological, but by no means the political sense. It is still called “Pride’s Purge;” and the phrase has quite a fine allegorical flavor, as if it came out of Pilgrim’s Progress. In fact, one of the really happy coincidences of the historical epoch was that one distinguished officer at any rate had somehow got hold of the right surname. And upon larger grounds the alliance between oligarchy and Protestantism has become only too plain. For all we know the Reformation may have tried to make a democracy; all that we do know for certain is that it did make an aristocracy, the most powerful aristocracy of modern times. The great English landlords, who are the peers, arose after the destruction of the small English landlords, who were the abbots. The public schools, which were for the populace in the Middle Ages, became aristocratic after the Reformation. The universities, which were popular in the Middle Ages, became aristocratic after the Reformation. The tramp who went to a monastic
inn in the Middle Ages, went to jail and the whipping-post after the
Reformation. All this is scarcely denied.

Yet against all this must be put in fairness certain important facts; especially
two facts illustrated in the figure and career of Milton. When we have clearly
seen that Calvinism always favors aristocracy in theory and often favors it in
practice, two great facts remain to be explained or to be explained away. First,
that the Puritans did favor a deliberate or nodical method of church
government, a government by debate; and, second, that most of the abstract
republicans of the seventeenth century were either Puritans or upon the Puritan
side. I am not, of course, discussing the synod as a mode of church government,
nor a republic as a mode of national government. I only say that the clamor for
these things must have corresponded to some kind of enthusiasm for liberty and
equality alien to the more obvious lessons of Calvinism. But the republicanism
was of a peculiar and frigid kind; there was very little human fraternity about it.
Fletcher of Saltown was the author of some epigrams about the public good that
read like those of some great pagan; but he was also the author of a proposal to
reduce the poorer inhabitants of Scotland to a condition of personal slavery.
There was a flavor of Fletcher of Saltown about Milton. Shakespeare puts into
the mouth of some character (generally a silly character) some contemptuous
talk about the greasy rabble, talk which is common to all literary work, but
especially common in work which like Shakespeare’s was intended to please the
greasy rabble. Whenever this happens critics point to it and say, “Look at the
Tory prejudices of the Royalist Shakespeare! Observe the Jacobite servility of
the follower of James I.!” But as a matter of fact Milton despised the populace
much more than Shakespeare; and Milton put his contempt for common men not
into the mouth of silly or stupid characters, but into that of the one wise
caracter, the Chorus, who is supposed to express the moral of a play:

Nor do I name of men the common rout . . .

But such as thou hast solemnly elected.

I cannot help thinking that Milton was successful with Satan, because he was
rather like Satan himself. I mean his own Satan: I will not be so intemperate as
to say that he resembled the genuine article. The kind of strength which
supported Milton in blindness and outlawry was very like the kind of strength
that supported Satan on the flaming marl; it is the same quality, and for merely
literary purposes we need not quarrel about whether it should be called spiritual
nobility or spiritual pride. It was almost wholly intellectual; it was unsmiling and
it was empty of affection. And in justice to the genial, if somewhat vague,
people who made up the bulk of the Royalist party and probably the bulk of the English people, we must remember that there was about the high republican type, the type of Vane, or Sydney, or Milton, something of this austerity which chilled and even alarmed. There was something in these republicans which was not brotherly; there was something in these republicans which was not democratic. The compound of the new Puritan and the old pagan citizen produced none of those hearty or homely drinkers, soldiers, or ruffians, men like Danton or Dumouriez, who lent laughter to the terrors of the French Revolution. The deepest dislike which the Cavaliers felt for the Puritans, and no unjust dislike either, had reference to this nameless feeling.

It is possible, I fancy, to frame a fair statement that shall admit this element of the pride of the elect while doing justice to the democratic germ in Puritanism. It was the misfortune of that age that the synodical or debating club idea was applied, not to the whole people as among the pagans, but to small groups or sections among the people. Equality appeared in the form of little separate chapels, not in the form of a great national temple. Thus the Puritan movement encouraged the sense of the equality of members without encouraging the sense of the equality of men. Each little sect was a democracy internally considered, but an oligarchy externally considered. For an aristocracy is none the less aristocratic because its members are all on a level; indeed this is rather a mark of aristocracy; in this sense most aristocracies have been levelers. Even the House of Lords is called the House of Equals: the House of Peers. Thus arose a spirit which had the plainness and much of the harshness of democracy without any of its sympathy or abandon. Thus arose the great race of the aristocratic republicans, half pagan and half Puritan, the greatest of whom was Milton.

The effect of this great type has been immense; but it has been largely a negative effect. If the English peoples have remained somewhat inaccessible to the more ideal aspect of the republican idea, and they certainly have; if, through failing to understand it, they have done gross injustice to the heroisms and even the crimes of the French Revolution, it is in no small degree due to this uncongenial element in the only great school of English republicans. The ultimate victory of Shakespeare over Milton has been very largely due to the primary victory of Il Penseroso over L’Allegro. The return of Charles II. was the return of a certain snobbish compromise which has never been shaken off, and which is certainly far less heroic than the dreadful patriotism of the great regicides; but the balance and excuse of that snobbishness was that it was the return of English humor and good nature. So we see it in Milton, in the one great
Elizabethan who became a Puritan. His earlier poems are the dying cries of Merry England. England, like his own Samson, lost its strength when it lost its long hair. Milton was one of the slayers; but he was also of the slain. The mystery of his strange mind confronts us forever; we do not know of what god or demon or destiny he had really caught sight afar off; we do not know what he really saw with his sightless eyes. We only know that it turned him to stone.
ON DARWINISM AND MYSTERY

The Illustrated London News 1920–1922

Mr. Edward Clodd, the distinguished student of Folklore, has asked me a question touching a passage which appeared in this paper. He was writing with reference to the larger question of Darwinism, to which I may return more fully at some other time. But as the sentence he quoted from these columns stands somewhat separate it may be proper to treat it separately. The words he wishes more fully explained are: “Even the Evolutionist is now shy of explaining Evolution. To-day the scientific temper is . . . scientific doubt of science, not scientific doubt of religion.” He especially wishes to know what I mean by the phrase “scientific doubt of religion.”

Now I take it that my negative statement at least is evident enough; I mean that the most recent revolutionary scientific suggestions do not happen to throw any doubt on any religion. The Book of Genesis does not say that God formed the substance of the world out of atoms, and therefore a scientist cannot be rebuked as a Bible-smasher if he says it is formed not of atoms, but of electrons. The Council of the Church which laid down the dogma of the Co-eternity of Father and Son did not lay down any dogma on the Conservation of Energy. Therefore Mme. Curie could not be burned as a heretic even if, as some said, her discovery disturbed our ideas about the Conservation of Energy. The Athanasian Creed does not say that parallel straight lines never meet, so it would be unaffected by Professor Einstein saying, if he does really say, that they are not parallel or even straight. The prophets did not prophesy that a man would never fly, and are, therefore, not discredited when he does fly. The saints certainly never said there was no such thing as wordless talking, and therefore have nothing to retract if there is such a thing as wireless telegraphy. In many ways it would be far easier to maintain that the modern inventions have verified the ancient miracles. Now in these technical and utilitarian examples it is still true to say that, if they do not disturb religious doctrines, they also do not disturb scientific doctrines. But the former class of more theoretic discoveries do disturb scientific doctrines. It is the doctrines about gravity and energy, about atoms and ether, about the very foundations of the purely scientific universe, that have been affected or threatened by purely scientific research.

Hence I was led to say that the scientific men are pulling to pieces their own scientific universe. It was something relative to this that I said they were not
primarily concerned now with doubt about religion. The phrase (in a positive as distinct from a relative sense) refers, of course, to various spiritual and teleological ideas that were supposed, rightly or wrongly, to be disturbed by an earlier phase of science. Some seem to suppose that I am here arguing for these doctrines; but that is a complete mistake. Of the pre-Darwinian doctrines of the popular Protestantism in England, there are some that I believe and some that I heartily disbelieve; but none that I have made the basis of my remarks on Darwinism. They are based on the inconsistencies and illogicalities of the Darwinians themselves. Many sincere critics seems to find it very difficult to believe this. One of them asked me quite sharply why the wing of the bat had not been divinely designed with feathers like the wings of the owl—almost as if I myself had culpably neglected to provide the animal with proper plumage. All this is to miss my whole purpose in this particular discussion. If I do personally believe in design, it is for somewhat deeper reasons which have nothing to do with the wings of bats; and certainly I never dreamed of demonstrating it from the wings of bats. I never professed to trace the causes of these things at all. I have not written a book called “The Origin of Species.” I have not conducted detailed researches or proclaimed dogmatic conclusions. I do not know the true reason for a bat not having feathers; I only know that Darwin gave a false reason for its having wings. And the more the Darwinians explain, the more certain I become that Darwinism was wrong. All their explanations ignore the fact that Darwinism supposes an animal feature to appear first, not merely in an incomplete stage, but in an almost imperceptible stage. The member of a sort of mouse family, destined to found the bat family, could only have differed from his brother mice by some minute trace of membrane; and why should that enable him to escape out of a natural massacre of mice? Or even if we suppose it did serve some other purpose, it could only be by a coincidence; and this is to imagine a million coincidences accounting for every creature. A special providence watching over a bat would be a far more realistic notion than such a run of luck as that.

But as for the positive conclusions to be drawn, I am perfectly content to accept Mr. Clodd’s basis of “an area of the unknowne where, as he quotes from George Eliot, “men grow blind, though angels know the rest.” But I still think that the Darwinians, being men, were blind leaders of the blind. There must have been a real greatness about Darwin’s science, of the detailed accumulations of which I should not claim to judge. There certainly was a real greatness about Huxley’s literature, of which I can judge rather better. Nobody says that either
was not a great man, but merely that he made a great mistake. And as to what
remains when that mistake is admitted, I repeat that I am content with Mr.
Clodd’s phrase. It is not my theology, or the old Puritan theology any more than
the old Darwinian biology. What remains is mystery—an unfathomed and
perhaps unfathomable mystery. What remains after Darwin is exactly what
existed before Darwin—a darkness which I, for quite other reasons, believe to be
divine. But whether or no it is divine, it is certainly dark. What is the real truth,
what really happened in the variations of creatures, must have been something
which has not yet suggested itself to the imagination of man. I for one should be
very much surprised if that truth, when discovered, did not contain at least a
large element of evolution. But even that surprise is possible where everything is
possible, except what has been proven to be impossible.

For the first time, in short, the agnostics will become agnostic. That is the
point of my reply to Mr. Clodd’s question about the “scientific doubt of
religion.” The doubt to-day is a real doubt; before it was an inference from some
dogma like Darwinism. The Victorian agnostics were not really agnostics. At the
back of their minds was a materialistic, or at least a monistic, universe. But that
monistic universe is in its turn becoming mystical, or at least very mysterious.
The next time of transition will probably be one of real agnosticism, or of more
or less exciting ignorance. And Mr. Clodd and I can than agree about the
borderland in which men are blind and angels know the rest, though he may be
more content to rest in the blindness of men, and I in the knowledge of the
angels. But I never advanced this argument as a way of being on the side of
angels. I am so far merely on the side of men; of the great mass of reverent and
reasonable human beings, who would rather admit that they are blind in the dark
than be burdened in the dark with old-fashioned scientific spectacles, and told by
a quack that they can see.
Doubts about Darwinism

The Illustrated London News, 17th July 1920

Since objections have been raised against remarks of mine, here and elsewhere, on the subject of science and the system of evolution, I feel it may be fair to acknowledge them here by explaining my meaning more fully. To begin with, of course, I am confronted with a very reasonable retort that I know nothing about the subject. I am not a biologist; I am not even the most amateur sort of naturalist. There is a not unnatural disposition to remark on this fact, when I use phrases indicating that the Darwinian idea has suffered defeat. It is true, and it would be equally true if I ventured to throw out the suggestion that the Kaiser has suffered a defeat. If I were to insinuate that the armies of the German Empire were ultimately out-manoeuvred and forced to a surrender, it might be said that I was wholly ignorant of the technical strategy of soldiering, and did not know what half the manoeuvres meant; and this would be perfectly true. I am sorry to say that I was unable to be a soldier; and I am very glad to say that I refused to be a critic of the details of soldiering. Or again, if I dared to hint that there is now a rather difficult financial situation, that prices are rather high and housing rather hard, I might be reminded that I am not an expert in financial matters; that I am not a professor of political economy, or even a close student of political economy. And this also would be quite true. I am sorry to say I am not an economist; and I very glad I am not a financier. But these cases alone will be sufficient to suggest, to anybody of the smallest common sense, that there is a fallacy somewhere in the simple argument that only an expert in detail can perceive that there is a difficulty, or declare that there is a defeat.

Now, I will roughly arrange in order the facts of common knowledge that seem to me to support my conclusions as a matter of commonsense. First of all, there is something that will be very suggestive to anybody with a sense of human nature; I mean the tone of the Darwinians themselves. We may well begin with the first and greatest of the Darwinians. Huxley said, in his later years, that Darwin’s suggestion had never been shown to be inconsistent with any new discovery; and anybody acquainted with the atmosphere will be struck by the singular note of negation in that. When Huxley began to write, he certainly expected that, by the end of his life, Darwin’s suggestion would have been confirmed by a crowd of positive discoveries. Now nobody talks of it at present as a settled scientific law. Even the critic who complained of my own remark
called Darwinism a “hypothesis,” and admitted that it had been “profoundly modified.” And he added the very singular and significant phrase: that the Darwinian hypotheses was still “that most sound at bottom.” If anyone does not hear the negative note in that, I think he does not know the sound of human voice. In short, this Darwinian is already on the defensive, as even Huxley, at an earlier stage and in a lesser degree, was already on the defensive. There is evidently, at least, a subconscious disappointment that the hypothesis is still a hypothesis at all. Putting aside the positive points made against it, it ought long ago to have had a hundred positive points made for it. The one out of that hundred which Huxley did try to make, the genealogy of the horse, will be found on examination to be singularly slender and shaky. My concern for the moment, however, is only with a certain controversial tone; the tone of a gentleman who remarked to me, in a stoic and almost tragic voice: “I am the Last Darwinian.” I do not for a moment suggest that these Darwinians are no longer Darwinians. But if this is how the Darwinians talk while they are still Darwinians, how do you suppose the anti-Darwinians are talking?

Next I will take another suggestion. I will take the instances selected in order to expound the hypothesis, by those who are still content to expound it. There is always a conscious or unconscious effort of selection. And it is by no means a Natural Selection. It is generally, in spite of the phrase that is their motto, a very unnatural selection. The simple and natural thing to do, if you think you can explain biological variations, is to explain the variations where they are most obviously varied. If you were explaining to a child, for instance, you would take things like the horn of the rhinoceros or the hump of the dromedary. In fact, you would give a correct and scientific version of the “Just-So Stories.” And so they would, if they had anything more correct and scientific than the “Just-So Stories.” But these horns and humps, these high outstanding features of variation, are exactly the things that are generally not chosen for examples, and not explained by this universal explanation. And the truth is that it is very often precisely these obvious things that the explanation cannot explain. In almost every case it may be noticed that the exponent, consciously or unconsciously, selects one single and special case of his own, as Huxley selected the horse; the one case in which he thinks, or hopes, that the hypothesis really WILL hold water.

Thus Mr. H. G. Wells, in his wonderfully interesting and valuable “Outline of History,” takes one unnaturally simplified case of the growing of fur, or the change of the color of fur. He then implies that all other cases of natural
selection are of the same kind. But they are not of the same kind, but of an exceedingly different and even opposite kind. If fur protects from cold, the longer fur will be a protection in the stronger cold. But any fur will be a protection in any cold. Any fur will be better than no fur; any fur will serve some of the purposes of fur. But it is not certain that any horn is better than no horn; it is very far from certain that any hump is better than no hump. It is very far from obvious that the first rudimentary suggestion of a horn, the first faint thickening which might lead through countless generations to the growth of a horn, would be of any particular use as a horn. And we must suppose, on the Darwinian hypothesis, that the hornless animal reached his horn through unthinkable gradations of what were, for all practical purposes, hornless animal. Why should one rhinoceros be so benevolent a Futurist as to start an improvement that could only help some much later rhinoceros to survive? And why on earth should its mere foreshadowing help the earlier rhinoceros to survive? This thesis can only explain variations when they discreetly refrain from varying very much. To the real riddles that arrest the eye, it has no answer that can satisfy the intelligence. For any child or man with his eyes open, I imagine, there is no creature that really calls for an answer, like a living riddle, so clearly as the bat. But if you will call up the Darwinian vision, of thousands of intermediary creatures with webbed feet that are not yet wings, their survival will seem incredible. A mouse can run, and survive; and a flitter-mouse can fly, and survive. But a creature that cannot yet fly, and can no longer run, ought obviously to have perished, by the very Darwinian doctrine which has to assume that he survived.

There are many other signs of this confession of failure, for which I have hardly left myself space. There is a chorus of Continental doubts; there is a multitude of destructive criticisms with which alone I could fill this article, even from my own very loose and general reading. But I will add a third reason of the same more general sort. The Darwinians have this mark of fighters for a lost cause, that they are perpetually appealing to sentiment and to authority. Put your bat or your rhinoceros simply and innocently as a child might put them, before the Darwinian, and he will answer by an appeal to authority. He will probably answer with the names of various German professors; he will not answer with any ordinary English words, explaining the point at issue. God condescended to argue with Job, but the last Darwinian will not condescend to argue with you. He will inform you of your ignorance; he will not enlighten your ignorance.

And I will add this point of merely personal experience of humanity: when men have a real explanation they explain it, eagerly and copiously and in
common speech, as Huxley freely gave it when he thought he had it. When they have no explanation to offer, they give short dignified replies, disdainful of the ignorance of the multitude.
NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE MORALITY

Illustrated London News (ILN), January 3, 1920

A vast amount of nonsense is talked against negative and destructive things. The silliest sort of progressive complains of negative morality, and compares it unfavorably with positive morality. The silliest sort of conservative complains of destructive reform and compares it unfavorably with constructive reform. Both the progressive and the conservative entirely neglect to consider the very meaning of the words “yes” and “no.” To give the answer “yes” to one question is to imply the answer “no” to another question. To desire the construction of something is to desire the destruction of whatever prevents its construction. This is particularly plain in the fuss about the “negative” morality of the Ten Commandments. The truth is that the curtness of the Commandments is an evidence, not of the gloom and narrowness of a religion but of its liberality and humanity. It is shorter to state the things forbidden than the things permitted precisely because most things are permitted and only a few things are forbidden. An optimist who insisted on a purely positive morality would have to begin by telling a man that he might pick dandelions on a common and go on for months before he came to the fact that he might throw pebbles into the sea. In comparison with this positive morality the Ten Commandments rather shine in that brevity which is the soul of wit.

But of course the fallacy is even more fundamental than this. Negative morality is positive morality, stated in the plainest and therefore the most positive way. If I am told not to murder Mr. Robinson, if I am stopped in the very act of murdering Mr. Robinson, it is obvious that Mr. Robinson is not only spared, but in a sense renewed, and even created. And those who like Mr. Robinson, among them my reactionary romanticism might suggest the inclusion of Mrs. Robinson, will be well aware that they have recovered a living and complex unity. And similarly, those who like European civilisation, and the common code of what used to be called Christendom, will realize that salvation is not negative, but highly positive, and even highly complex. They will rejoice at its escape, long before they have leisure for its examination. But, without examination, they will know that there is a great deal to be examined, and a great deal that is worth examination. Nothing is negative except nothing. It is not our rescue that was negative, but only the nothingness and annihilation from which we were rescued.
On the other side there is the same fallacy about merely destructive reform. It could be applied just as easily to the merely destructive war. In both cases destruction may be essential to the avoidance of destruction, and also to the very possibility of construction. Men are not merely destroying a ship in order to have a shipwreck; they may be merely destroying a tree in order to have a ship. To complain that we spent four years in the Great War in mere destruction is to complain that we spent them in escaping from being destroyed. And it is, once again, to forget the fact that the failure of the murderer means the life of a positive and not a negative Mr. Robinson. If we take the imaginary Mr. Robinson as a type of the average modern man in Western Europe, and study him from head to foot, we shall find defects as well as merits. And in the whole civilisation we have saved, we shall find defects that amounts to diseases. Its feet, if not of clay, are certainly in clay, stuck in the mud of a materialistic industrial destitution and despair. To say it is a positive good and glory to have saved Mr. Robinson from strangling is to miss the whole meaning of human life. It is to forget every good as soon as we have saved it, that is, to lose it as soon as we have got it. Progress of that kind is a hope that is the enemy of faith, and a faith that is the enemy of charity.

When our hopes for the coming time seem disturbed or doubtful, and peace chaotic, let us remember that it is really our disappointment that is an illusion. It is our rescue that is a reality. Our grounds for gratitude are really far greater than our powers of being grateful. It is in the mood of a noble sort of humility, and even a noble sort of fear, that new things are really made. We adorn things most when we love them most. And we love them most when we have nearly lost them.
MORMONISM

THERE is inevitably something comic (comic in the broad and vulgar style which all men ought to appreciate in its place) about the panic aroused by the presence of the Mormons and their supposed polygamous campaign in this country.

It calls up the absurd image of an enormous omnibus, packed inside with captive English ladies, with an Elder on the box, controlling his horses with the same patriarchal gravity as his wives, and another Elder as conductor calling out “Higher up,” with an exaulted and allegorical intonation. And there is something highly fantastic to the ordinary healthy mind in the idea of any precaution being proposed; in the idea of locking the Duchess in the boudoir and the governess in the nursery, lest they should make a dash for Utah, and become the ninety-third Mrs. Abraham Nye, or the hundredth Mrs. Hiram Boke.

But these frankly vulgar jokes, like most vulgar jokes, cover a popular prejudice which is but the bristly hide of a living principle. Elder Ward, recently speaking at Nottingham, strongly protested against these rumours, and asserted absolutely that polygamy had never been practised with the consent of the Mormon Church since 1890. I think it only just that this disclaimer should be circulated; but though it is most probably sincere, I do not find it very soothing. The year 1890 is not very long ago, and a society that could have practised so recently a custom so alien to Christendom must surely have a moral attitude which might be repellent to use in many other respects. Moreover, the phrase about the consent of the Church (if correctly reported) has a little the air of an official repudiating responsibility for unofficial excesses. It sounds almost as if Mr. Abraham Nye might, on his own account, come into church with a hundred and fourteen wives, but people were supposed not to notice them. It might amount to little more than this, that the Chief Elder may allow the hundred and fourteen wives to walk down the street like a girls’ school, but he is not officially expected to take off his hat to each of them in turn. Seriously speaking, however, I have little doubt that Elder Ward speaks the substantial truth, and that polygamy is dying, or has died, among the Mormons. My reason for thinking this is simple; it is that polygamy always tends to die out. Even in the east I believe that, counting heads, it is by this time the exception rather than the rule. Like slavery, it is always being started, because of its obvious conveniences. It has only one small inconvenience, which is that it is intolerable.
Our real error in such a case is that we do not know or care about the creed itself, from which a people’s customs, good or bad, will necessarily flow. We talk much about “respecting” this or that person’s religion; but the way to respect a religion is to treat it as a religion: to ask what are its tenets and what are their consequences. But modern tolerance is deafer than intolerance. The old religious authorities, at least, defined a heresy before they condemned it, and read a book before they burned it. But we are always saying to a Mormon or a Moslem—“Never mind about your religion, come to my arms.” To which he naturally replies—“But I do mind about my religion, and I advise you to mind your eye.”

About half the history now taught in schools and colleges is made windy and barren by this narrow notion of leaving out the theological theories. The wars and Parliaments of the Puritans made absolutely no sense if we leave out the fact that Calvinism appeared to them to be the absolute metaphysical truth, unanswerable, unreplaceable, and the only thing worth having in the world. The Crusades and dynastic quarrels of the Norman and Angevin Kings make absolutely no sense if we leave out the fact that these men (with all their vices) were enthusiastic for the doctrine, discipline, and endowment of Catholicism. Yet I have read a history of the Puritans by a modern Nonconformist in which the name of Calvin was not even mentioned, which is like writing a history of the Jews without mentioning either Abraham or Moses. And I have never read any popular or educational history of England that gave the slightest hint of the motives in the human mind that covered England with abbeys and Palestine with banners. Historians seem to have completely forgotten the two facts—first, that men act from ideas; and second, that it might, therefore, be as well to discover which ideas. The medievals did not believe primarily in “chivalry,” but in Catholicism, as producing chivalry among other things. The Puritans did not believe primarily in “righteousness,” but in Calvinism, as producing righteousness among other things. It was the creed that held the coarse or cunning men of the world at both epochs. William the Conqueror was in some ways a cynical and brutal soldier, but he did attach importance to the fact that the Church upheld his enterprise; that Harold had sworn falsely on the bones of saints, and that the banner above his own lances had been blessed by the Pope. Cromwell was in some ways a cynical and brutal soldier; but he did attach importance to the fact that he had gained assurance from on high in the Calvinistic scheme; that the Bible seemed to support him—in short, the most important moment in his own life, for him, was not when Charles I lost his head,
but when Oliver Cromwell did not lose his soul. If you leave these things out of
the story, you are leaving out the story itself. If William Rufus was only a red-
haired man who liked hunting, why did he force Anselm’s head under a mitre,
instead of forcing his head under a headsman’s axe? If John Bunyan only cared
for “righteousness,” why was he in terror of being damned, when he knew he
was rationally righteous? We shall never make anything of moral and religious
movements in history until we begin to look at their theory as well as their
practice. For their practice (as in the case of the Mormons) is often so unfamiliar
and frantic that it is quite unintelligible without their theory.

I have not the space, even if I had the knowledge, to describe the fundamental
theories of Mormonism about the universe. But they are extraordinarily
interesting; and a proper understanding of them would certainly enable us to see
daylight through the more perplexing or menacing customs of this community;
and therefore to judge how far polygamy was in their scheme a permanent and
self-renewing principle or (as is quite probably) a personal and unscrupulous
accident. The basic Mormon belief is one that comes out of the morning of the
desert, from the most primitive and even infantile attitude. Their chief dogma is
that God is material, not that He was materialized once, as all Christians believe;
nor that He is materialized specially, as all Catholics believe; but that He was
materially embodied from all time; that He has a local habitation as well as a
name. Under the influence of this barbaric but violently vivid conception, these
people crossed a great desert with their guns and oxen, patiently, persistently,
and courageously, as if they were following a vast and visible giant who was
striding across the plains. In other words this strange sect, by soaking itself
solely in the Hebrew Scriptures, had really managed to reproduce the
atmosphere of those Scriptures as they are felt by Hebrews rather than by
Christians. A number of dull, earnest, ignorant, black-coated men with chimney-
pot hats, chin bears or mutton-chop whiskers, managed to reproduce in their own
souls the richness and the peril of an ancient Oriental experience. If we think
from this end we may possibly guess how it was that they added polygamy.
CHILD PSYCHOLOGY AND NONSENSE

Illustrated London News, October 15, 1921

In this age of child-psychology nobody pays any attention to the actual psychology of the child. All that seems to matter is the psychology of the psychologist and the particular theory or train of thought that he is maintaining against another psychologist. Most of the art and literature now magnificently manufactured for children is not even honestly meant to please children. The artist would hardly condescend to make a baby laugh if nobody else laughed, or even listened. These things are not meant to please the child. At best they are meant to please the child-lover. At the worst they are experiments in scientific educational method. Beautiful, wise, and witty lyrics like those of Stevenson’s “Child’s Garden of Verses” will always remain as a pure lively fountain of pleasure—for grown up people. But the point of many of them is not only such that a child could not see it, it is such that a child ought not to be allowed to see it—The child that is not clean and neat,

With lots of toys and things to eat,
He is a naughty child, I’m sure,
Or else his dear papa is poor.

No child ought to understand the appalling abyss of that after-thought. No child could understand, without being a snob or a social reformer or something hideous, the irony of that illusion to the inequalities and iniquities with which this wicked world has insulted the sacred dignity of fatherhood. The child who could really smile at that line would be capable of sitting down immediately to write a Gissing novel, and then hanging himself on the nursery bed-post. But neither Stevenson or any Stevensonian (and I will claim to be a good Stevensonian) ever really dreamed of expecting a child to smile at the poem. It was the poet who smiled at the child, which is quite a different thing, though possibly quite as beautiful in its way. And that is the character of all this new nursery literature. It has the legitimate and even honourable object of educating the adult in the appreciation of babies. It is an excellent thing to teach men and women to take pleasure in children, but it is a totally different thing from giving children pleasure.

Now the old nursery rhymes were honestly directed to give children pleasure. Many of them have genuine elements of poetry, but they are not primarily meant to be poetry, because they are simply meant to be pleasure. In this sense “Hey
Diddle Diddle” is something much more than an idyll. It is a masterpiece of psychology, a classic and perfect model of education. The lilt and jingle of it is exactly the sort that a baby can feel to be a tune and can turn into a dance. The imagery of it is exactly what is wanted for the first movements of imagination when it experiments in incongruity. For it is full of familiar objects in fantastic conjunction. The child has seen a cow and he has seen the moon. But the notion of the one jumping over the other is probably new to him and is, in the noblest word, nonsensical. Cats and dogs and dishes and spoons are all his daily companions and even his friends, but it gives him a sort of fresh surprise and happiness to think of their going on such a singular holiday. He would simply learn nothing at all from our attempts to find a fine shade of humour in the political economy of the poor papa, even if the poor papa were romantically occupied, not in jumping over the moon, but at least in shooting it.

Of course there is much more than this in “Hey Diddle Diddle.” The cow jumping over the moon is not only a fancy very suitable to children, it is a theme very worthy of poets. The lunar adventure may appear to some a lunatic adventure, but it is one round which the imagination of man has always revolved, especially the imagination of romantic figures like Ariosto, and Cyrano de Bergerac. The notion that cattle might fly has received sublime imaginative treatment. The winged bull not only walks, as if shaking the earth, amid the ruins of Assyrian sculpture, but even wheeled and flamed in heaven as the Apocalyptic symbol of St. Luke. That which combines imaginations so instinctive and ancient, in a single fancy so simple and so clear, is certainly not without the raw material of poetry. And the general idea, which is that of a sort of cosmic Saturnalia or season when anything may happen, is itself an idea that has haunted humanity in a hundred forms, some of them exquisitely artistic forms.

It would be easy to justify a vast number of the other nursery rhymes, in the same vein of a more serious art criticism. If I were asked to quote four lines which sufficed to illustrate what has been called the imaginative reason, when it rises almost to touch an unimaginative unreason (for that point of contact is poetry), I should be content to quote four lines that were in a picture book in my own nursery—The man in the wilderness asked of me,

How many strawberries grow in the sea?
I answered him, as I thought good:
“As many red herrings as grow in the wood.”
Everything in that is poetical; from the dark unearthly figure of the man of the
desert, with his mysterious riddles, to the perfect blend of logic and vision which makes beautiful pictures even in proving them impossible. But this artistic quality, though present, is not primary; the primary purpose is the amusement of children. And we are not amusing children; we are amusing ourselves with children.

Our fathers added a touch of beauty to all practical things, so they introduced fine fantastic figures and capering and dancing rhythms, which might be admired even by grown men, into what they primarily and practically designed to be enjoyed by children. But they did not always do this and they never thought mainly of doing it. What they always did was to make fun fitted for the young; and what they never did was turn it into irony only intelligible to the old. A nursery rhyme was like a nursery table or a nursery cupboard—a thing constructed for a particular human purpose. They saw their aim clearly and they achieved it. They wrote utter nonsense and took care to make it utterly nonsensical.

For there are two ways of dealing with nonsense in this world. One way is to put nonsense in the right place; as when people put nonsense into nursery rhymes. The other is to put nonsense in the wrong place; as when they put it into educational addresses, psychological criticisms, and complaints against nursery rhymes or other normal amusements of mankind.
GOVERNMENT AND THE RIGHTS OF MAN

Illustrated London News, July 30, 1921

I could never see why a man who is not free to open his mouth to drink should be free to open it to talk. Talking does far more direct harm to other people. The village suffers less directly from the village drunkard than it might from the village tale bearer, or the village tub-thumper, or the village villain who seduces the village maiden. These and twenty other types of evil are done simply by talking; it is certain that a vast amount of evil would be prevented if we all wore gags. And the answer is not to deny that slander is a social poison, or seduction a spiritual murder. The answer is that, unless a man is allowed to talk, he might as well be a chimpanzee who is only able to chatter. In other words, if a man loses the responsibility for these rudimentary functions and forms of freedom, he loses not only his citizenship, but his manhood.

But there are other personal liberties still permitted us, more elaborate and civilized than that simple human speech which is still closely akin to the chatter of the chimpanzees. By some official oversight, which I am quite unable to explain, we are still allowed to write private letters if we put them in public pillar-boxes. The Postmaster-General does not write all our letters for us; even the local postman has as yet no such local powers. I cannot conceive how it is that reformers have failed to note the need for uniting, reorganizing, coordinating, codifying, and linking up all this complex, chaotic, and wasteful system, or lack of system. There must be vast amounts of overlapping, with some six young gentlemen writing letters to one young lady. There must be a terribly low educational standard, with all sorts of poor people allowed to put into a private letter any spelling or grammar they like. There must be a number of bad psychological habits being formed, by foolish people writing their sons in the Colonies or their mothers in the workhouse. And all this anarchy and deterioration could be stopped by the simple process of standardisation of all correspondence. I know if I use the word “standardisation,” Mr. H.G. Wells will welcome it and begin to think of it seriously [indeed there opens before me a vista of vast social reform].

On the face of it, the first and most obvious method would be for the Government to send round official forms for our friendly correspondence, to be filled up like the forms about insurance or Income Tax. Here and there, even in the most model communication, there would be words left blank, which the
individual might be allowed to fill out himself. I have a half-formed ideal of an official love letter, printed in the manner of “I you,” so that the citizen might insert “love,” or “like,” or “adore,” with a view to the new civil marriage; or “renounce,” or “repudiate,” or “execrate,” with a view to the newer and more civil divorce. But even these blanks for verbal variation must be admitted with caution; for the aim of the whole reform is to raise the general level of all correspondence to a height unattainable by the majority of the people as yet.

It may be hinted that I plead for this reform with the passion of self interest, for it would enable me to neglect my correspondence in theory as I already neglect it in practice. I very seldom write to anybody; and I never write to the people I like best. About them I do not trouble, for they understand. But there are unanswered letters from total strangers about which I feel a remorse. Some day I shall make a list of the people I should have liked to answer, or advertise for them by such details as I can remember them. If I had any money I should like to leave them millions of it when I die. It may be said that I should get off cheaply, if the government would sent round to all these people an official card in my name [instead].

But I am not really converted to my own project, even by my own failure. I am not really convinced of the necessity of standardised correspondence, either by the existence of criminal letters or my own criminal neglect of letters. If or when, in some strange mood at some distant date, I should actually answer a letter, I should still prefer to answer it myself. even if I had nothing to write except an apology for not writing, I should prefer my self-abasement to have the character of self-determination.

It is a most extraordinary fact that all modern talk about self-determination is applied to everything except the self. It is applied to the State but it is not applied to the very thing to which its verbal formula professes to apply. I, for one, do believe in that mystical doctrine of democracy, which pre-supposes that England has a soul, or that France has a self. But surely it is much more obvious and ordinary fact that Jones has a self and Robinson has a self. And the question I have here discussed under the parable of the Post Office is not the question of whether there are abuses in drink or diet, as there are calumny and blackmail in any pillar-box or postman’s bag. It is the question of whether in these days the claims of government are to leave anything whatever of the rights of man.
FRENCH AND ENGLISH

It is obvious that there is a great deal of difference between being international and being cosmopolitan. All good men are international. Nearly all bad men are cosmopolitan. If we are to be international we must be national. And it is largely because those who call themselves the friends of peace have not dwelt sufficiently on this distinction that they do not impress the bulk of any of the nations to which they belong. International peace means a peace between nations, not a peace after the destruction of nations, like the Buddhist peace after the destruction of personality. The golden age of the good European is like the heaven of the Christian: it is a place where people will love each other; not like the heaven of the Hindu, a place where they will be each other. And in the case of national character this can be seen in a curious way. It will generally be found, I think, that the more a man really appreciates and admires the soul of another people the less he will attempt to imitate it; he will be conscious that there is something in it too deep and too unmanageable to imitate. The Englishman who has a fancy for France will try to be French; the Englishman who admires France will remain obstinately English. This is to be particularly noticed in the case of our relations with the French, because it is one of the outstanding peculiarities of the French that their vices are all on the surface, and their extraordinary virtues concealed. One might almost say that their vices are the flower of their virtues.

Thus their obscenity is the expression of their passionate love of dragging all things into the light. The avarice of their peasants means the independence of their peasants. What the English call their rudeness in the streets is a phase of their social equality. The worried look of their women is connected with the responsibility of their women; and a certain unconscious brutality of hurry and gesture in the men is related to their inexhaustible and extraordinary military courage. Of all countries, therefore, France is the worst country for a superficial fool to admire. Let a fool hate France: if the fool loves it he will soon be a knave. He will certainly admire it, not only for the things that are not creditable, but actually for the things that are not there. He will admire the grace and indolence of the most industrious people in the world. He will admire the romance and fantasy of the most determinedly respectable and common-place people in the world. This mistake the Englishman will make if he admires France too hastily; but the mistake that he makes about France will be slight compared with the
mistake that he makes about himself. An Englishman who professes really to like French realistic novels, really to be at home in a French modern theatre, really to experience no shock on first seeing the savage French caricatures, is making a mistake very dangerous for his own sincerity. He is admiring something he does not understand. He is reaping where he has not sown, and taking up where he has not laid down; he is trying to taste the fruit when he has never toiled over the tree. He is trying to pluck the exquisite fruit of French cynicism, when he has never tilled the rude but rich soil of French virtue.

The thing can only be made clear to Englishmen by turning it round. Suppose a Frenchman came out of democratic France to live in England, where the shadow of the great houses still falls everywhere, and where even freedom was, in its origin, aristocratic. If the Frenchman saw our aristocracy and liked it, if he saw our snobbishness and liked it, if he set himself to imitate it, we all know what we should feel. We all know that we should feel that that particular Frenchman was a repulsive little gnat. He would be imitating English aristocracy; he would be imitating the English vice. But he would not even understand the vice he plagiarised: especially he would not understand that the vice is partly a virtue. He would not understand those elements in the English which balance snobbishness and make it human: the great kindness of the English, their hospitality, their unconscious poetry, their sentimental conservatism, which really admires the gentry. The French Royalist sees that the English like their King. But he does not grasp that while it is base to worship a King, it is almost noble to worship a powerless King. The impotence of the Hanoverian Sovereigns has raised the English loyal subject almost to the chivalry and dignity of a Jacobite. The Frenchman sees that the English servant is respectful: he does not realise that he is also disrespectful; that there is an English legend of the humorous and faithful servant, who is as much a personality as his master; the Caleb Balderstone, the Sam Weller. He sees that the English do admire a nobleman; he does not allow for the fact that they admire a nobleman most when he does not behave like one. They like a noble to be unconscious and amiable: the slave may be humble, but the master must not be proud. The master is Life, as they would like to enjoy it; and among the joys they desire in him there is none which they desire more sincerely than that of generosity, of throwing money about among mankind, or, to use the noble mediaeval word, largesse—the joy of largeness. That is why a cabman tells you you are no gentleman if you give him his correct fare. Not only his pocket, but his soul is hurt. You have wounded his ideal. You have defaced his vision of the
perfect aristocrat. All this is really very subtle and elusive; it is very difficult to separate what is mere slavishness from what is a sort of vicarious nobility in the English love of a lord. And no Frenchman could easily grasp it at all. He would think it was mere slavishness; and if he liked it, he would be a slave. So every Englishman must (at first) feel French candour to be mere brutality. And if he likes it, he is a brute. These national merits must not be understood so easily. It requires long years of plentitude and quiet, the slow growth of great parks, the seasoning of oaken beams, the dark enrichment of red wine in cellars and in inns, all the leisure and the life of England through many centuries, to produce at last the generous and genial fruit of English snobbishness. And it requires battery and barricade, songs in the streets, and ragged men dead for an idea, to produce and justify the terrible flower of French indecency.

When I was in Paris a short time ago, I went with an English friend of mine to an extremely brilliant and rapid succession of French plays, each occupying about twenty minutes. They were all astonishingly effective; but there was one of them which was so effective that my friend and I fought about it outside, and had almost to be separated by the police. It was intended to indicate how men really behaved in a wreck or naval disaster, how they break down, how they scream, how they fight each other without object and in a mere hatred of everything. And then there was added, with all that horrible irony which Voltaire began, a scene in which a great statesman made a speech over their bodies, saying that they were all heroes and had died in a fraternal embrace. My friend and I came out of this theatre, and as he had lived long in Paris, he said, like a Frenchman: “What admirable artistic arrangement! Is it not exquisite?” “No,” I replied, assuming as far as possible the traditional attitude of John Bull in the pictures in Punch—“No, it is not exquisite. Perhaps it is unmeaning; if it is unmeaning I do not mind. But if it has a meaning I know what the meaning is; it is that under all their pageant of chivalry men are not only beasts, but even hunted beasts. I do not know much of humanity, especially when humanity talks in French. But I know when a thing is meant to uplift the human soul, and when it is meant to depress it. I know that Cyrano de Bergerac (where the actors talked even quicker) was meant to encourage man. And I know that this was meant to discourage him.” “These sentimental and moral views of art,” began my friend, but I broke into his words as a light broke into my mind. “Let me say to you,” I said, “what Jaurès said to Liebknecht at the Socialist Conference: ‘You have not died on the barricades.’ You are an Englishman, as I am, and you ought to be as amiable as I am. These people have some right to be terrible in art, for they have
been terrible in politics. They may endure mock tortures on the stage; they have seen real tortures in the streets. They have been hurt for the idea of Democracy. They have been hurt for the idea of Catholicism. It is not so utterly unnatural to them that they should be hurt for the idea of literature. But, by blazes, it is altogether unnatural to me! And the worst thing of all is that I, who am an Englishman, loving comfort, should find comfort in such things as this. The French do not seek comfort here, but rather unrest. This restless people seeks to keep itself in a perpetual agony of the revolutionary mood. Frenchmen, seeking revolution, may find the humiliation of humanity inspiring. But God forbid that two pleasure-seeking Englishmen should ever find it pleasant!”
ON HOUSEHOLD GODS AND GOBLINS

Sometime ago I went with some children to see Maeterlinck’s fine and delicate fairy play about the Blue Bird that brought everybody happiness. For some reason or other it did not being me happiness, and even the children were not quite happy. I will not go so far as to say that the Blue Bird was a Blue Devil, but it left us in something seriously like the blues. The children were party dissatisfied with it because it did not end with a Day of Judgment; because it was never revealed to the hero and heroine that the dog had been faithful and the cat faithless. For children are innocent and love justice; while most of us are wicked and naturally prefer mercy.

But there was something wrong about the Blue Bird, even from my more mature and corrupt point of view. There were several incidental things I did not like. I did not like the sentimental passage about the love-affair of two babes unborn; it seemed to me a piece of what may be called bad Barrie; and logically it spoilt the only meaning of the scene, which was that the babes were looking to all earthly experiences as things inconceivable. I was not convinced when the boy exclaimed, “There are no dead,” for I am by no means sure that he (or the dramatist) knew what he meant by it. “I heard a voice from Heaven cry: Blessed are the dead. . . .” I do not know all that is meant in that; but I think the person who said it knew. But there was something more continuous and clinging in the whole business which left me vaguely restless. And I think the nearest to a definition was that I felt as if the poet was condescending to everything; condescending to pots and pans and birds and beasts and babies.

The one part of the business which I really felt to be original and suggestive was the animation of all the materials of the household, as if with familiar spirits; the spirit of fire, the spirit of water and the rest. And even here I felt a faint difference which moved me to an imaginary comparison. I wonder that none of our medievalists has made a Morality or allegorical play founded on the Canticle of Saint Francis, which speaks somewhat similarly of Brother Fire and Sister Water. It would be a real exercise in Gothic craftsmanship and decoration to make these symbolic figures at once stiff and fantastic. If nobody else does this I shall be driven to spoil the idea myself, as I have spoiled so many other rather good ideas in my time. But the point of the parallel at the moment is merely this: that the medieval poet does strike me as having felt about fire like a child while the modern poet felt about it like a man talking to children.
Few and simple as are the words of the older poem, it does somehow convey to me that when the poet spoke of fire as untameable and strong, he felt it as something that might conceivably be feared as well as loved. I do not think the modern poet feared the nursery fire as a child who loved it might fear it. And this elemental quality in the real primitives brought back to my mind something I have always felt about this conception, which is the really fine conception in the Blue Bird: I mean something like that which the heathens embodied in the images of the household gods. The household gods, I believe, were carved out of wood; which makes them even more like the chairs and tables.

The nomad and the anarchist accuse the domestic ideal of being merely timid and prim. But this is not because they themselves are bolder or more vigorous, but simply because they do not know it well enough to know how bold and vigorous it is. The most nomadic life to-day is not the life of the desert but of the industrial cities. It is by a very accurate accident that we talk about a Street-Arab; and the Semitic description applies to not a few gutter-snipes whose gilded chariots have raised them above the gutter. They live in clubs and hotels and are often simply ignorant, I might say innocent, of the ancient life of the family, and certainly off the ancient life on the farm.

When a townsman first sees these things directly and intimately, he does not despise them as dull but rather dreads then as wild, as he sometimes takes a tame cow for a wild bull. The most obvious example is the hearth which is the heart of the home. A man living in the lukewarm air of centrally-heated hotels may be said to have never seen fire. Compared to him the housewife at the fireside is an Amazon wrestling with a flaming dragon. The same moral might be drawn from the fact that the watchdog fights while the wild dog often runs away. Of the husband, as of the house-dog, it may often said that he has been tamed into ferocity.

This is especially true of the sort of house represented by the country cottage. It is only in theory that the things are petty and prosaic; a man realistically experiencing them will feel them to be things big and baffling and involving a heavy battle with nature. When we read about cabbages or cauliflowers in the papers, and especially the comic papers, we learn to think of them as commonplace. But if a man of any imagination will merely consent to walk round the kitchen-garden for himself, and really looks at cabbages and cauliflowers, he will feel at once that they are vast and elemental things like the mountains in the clouds. He will feel something almost monstrous about the size and solidity of the things swelling out of that small and tidy patch of ground.
There are moods in which that everyday English kitchen plot will affect him as men are affected by the reeking wealth and toppling rapidity of tropic vegetation; the green bubbles and crawling branches of a nightmare.

But whatever his mood, he will see that things so large and work so laborious cannot possibly be merely trivial. His reason no less than his imagination will tell him that the fight here waged between the family and the field is of all things the most primitive and fundamental. If that is not poetical, nothing is poetical, and certainly not the dingy Bohemianism of the artists in the towns. But the point for the moment is that even by the purely artistic test the same truth is apparent. An artist looking at these things with a free and fresh vision will at once appreciate what I mean by calling them wild rather than tame. It is true of fire, of water, of vegetation, of half a hundred other things. If a man reads about a pig, he will think of something comic and commonplace, chiefly because the word “pig” sounds comic and commonplace. If he looks at a real pig in a pigsty, he will have the sense of something too large to be alive, like a hippopotamus at the Zoo.

This is not a coincidence or a sophistry; it rests on the real and living logic of things. The family is itself a wilder thing than the State; if we mean by wildness that it is born of will and choice as elemental and emancipated as the wind. It has its own laws, as the wind has; but properly understood it is infinitely less subservient than things are under the elaborate and mechanical regulations of legalism. Its obligations are love and loyalty, but these are things quite capable of being in revolt against merely human laws; for merely human law has a great tendency to become merely inhuman law. It is concerned with events that are in the moral world what cyclones and earthquakes are in the material world.

People are not born in an infant-school any more than they die in an undertaker’s shop. These prodigies are private things; and take place in the tiny theatre of the home. The public systems, the large organisation, are a mere machinery for the transport and distribution of things; they do not touch the intrinsic nature of the things themselves. If a birthday present is sent from one family to another all the legal system, and even all that we call the social system, is only concerned with the present so long as it is a parcel. Nearly all our modern sociology might be called the philosophy of parcels. For that matter, nearly all our modern descriptions of Utopia or the Great State might be called the paradise of postmen. It is in the inner chamber that the parcel becomes a present; that it explodes, so to speak, into its own radiance and real popularity; and it is equally true, so far as that argument is concerned, whether it is a bon-bon or a bomb.
The essential message is always a personal message; the important business is always private business. And this is, of course, especially with the first of all birthday presents which presents itself at birth; and it is no exaggeration to talk of a bomb as the symbol of a baby. Of course, the same is true of the tragic as the beatific acts of the domestic drama; of the spadework of the struggle for life or the Damoclean sword of death.

The defence of domesticity is not that it is always happy, or even that it is always harmless. It is rather that it does involve, like all heroic things, the possibilities of calamity and even of crime. Old Mother Hubbard may find that the cupboard is bare; she may even find a skeleton in the cupboard. All that is involved here is the insistence on the true case for this intimate type of association; that in itself it is certainly not commonplace and most certainly is not conventional. The conventions belong rather to those wider worldly organisations which are now set up as rivals to it; to the club, to the school and above all to the State. You cannot have a successful club without rules; but a family will really do without any rules exactly in proportion as it is a successful family. What somebody said about the songs of a people could be said much more truly about the jokes of a household. And a joke is in its nature a wild and spontaneous thing; even the modern fanaticism for organisation has never really attempted to organise laughter like a chorus. Therefore, we may truly say that these external emblems or examples of something grotesque and extravagant about our private possessions are not mere artistic exercises in the incongruous; they are not, as the phrase goes, mere paradoxes. They are really related to the aboriginal nature of the institution itself and the idea that is behind it. The real family is something as wild and elemental as a cabbage.
“The Empire Review,” Vol XXXVIII, October 1923

The English character has been wronged more by praise than by blame. It has been wronged most of all by accepting one sort of blame as if it were a sort of praise. The irony of such an incident is in itself rather curious and interesting. It is as if a man were wrongly accused of being a murderer, and was faintly flattered because the charge made: him look like a desperado. An entertaining little comedy might be written about such a respectable householder, who had a delicacy about entirely clearing his character, because he could not help hankering after the chance of looking as picturesque as a pirate. The comedy is common enough in real life, I imagine, in connection with the lighter vices of a man of the world. Many a young man has allowed himself to be thought immoral; and locked in his bosom the dark secret that he was perfectly moral. Now, the misunderstanding about the Englishman is of the same type but in the opposite direction. He has allowed himself to be considered much less gay and picturesque than he really is, because there was something more insidiously flattering in the way in which he was called grave and prosaic.

Continental criticism, broadly speaking, has made a mistake about England. It was a very natural mistake, founded on certain superficial truths, such as those which have so long hidden from England the thrift and the tenacity of France. It largely arose out of the religious quarrel and the rise of the Puritans. And the Puritan was the sort of solitary figure which, when it happens to appear in one particular country, frequently falsifies international impressions. Such a person is associated with such a place, not so much because he is often found there as because he is never found anywhere else. Foreign critics have presented the Englishman as a Puritan with a long face, very much as foreign caricaturists have presented the English soldier as a Scotchman with a short kilt. Most British soldiers are not Highland soldiers, but all Highland soldiers are British soldiers. Highlanders are not seen in any other army; and therefore nobody else except Highlanders are seen in that army. In the same way the Puritan is an exception in England; only he is more of an exception in Europe. Nowhere else has the Puritan been dominant as he was in this island; for his presence there was despotic rather than democratic. His original power was due to militarism. His more modern power is due to plutocracy. But the English populace has never been Puritan, even in the sense in which the Scotch populace has been Puritan;
still less in the sense in which the Irish populace has been Catholic. Nobody who thinks in terms of real popularity, right or wrong, can have the smallest doubt about whether our democracy is normally on the march to Exeter Hall or to the Derby.

Along with this historical accident of the Puritan aristocracy went several other things equally accidental. A certain shyness and moody embarrassment that come from much more complex causes; the fact that like most northern peoples, including the northern French, we have not the rapid gestures of the South, an exaggerated reputation for roughness, curiously compounded of the legend of physical exercise and the legend that business is business, combined with the puzzle of Protestantism to create on the Continent an imaginary Englishman as stiff and stern as a Prussian. So far the mistake need not have troubled us very much. Nations normally do misunderstand each other; and it is not worse than the notion that the Frenchman is immoral or that the Irishman does not know what he wants. Unfortunately, this slander had in it something horribly like a compliment. Still more unfortunately, some Englishmen were so weak as to accept the compliment. They liked to be called stiff because they thought it meant that they were strong. They liked to be called solemn because they thought it meant that they were responsible. Vanity of this sort is not of course peculiar to them; it is common to the whole human race. But it was simply out of the weakness of vanity that they confessed to the sin of pride. In reality, they are not particularly proud and certainly not in the least stern; they are an exceptionally kindly and even soft-hearted people. They do not even take their pleasures sadly; they only take an incidental and I think regrettable pleasure in being called sad.

The meaning of Merry England was in this old original character of the English. In mediaeval times their public and proverbial character was festive and full of fun; and even in modern times their private and personal character is the same. The witness to it is the wonderful English literature; but of late years it has been overlaid by the cross-purposes about the Continental criticism and the false ideal thus imposed. It is not only a false but even a foreign ideal. The Englishman actually dresses up as the French picture of himself. To get clear of this complication, the right course is to appeal to the authority of that great national literature, especially as it was when it was still entirely normal, and had not been crossed and confused by the self-conscious poses of more recent times. The last full and free manifestation of this normal and national spirit is represented by the name of Pickwick. It is the last expression of the complete
freedom and fullness, not only in the literature of England, but even in the literature of Dickens. Though the work of Dickens continued to be great, though in some matters of subtlety and reality it became much greater, there was something that it never quite recovered again; and it was something that can only be called the liberty of our fathers. The author of “Our Mutual Friend” was not quite so free as the author of “Pickwick”; not even so free as the author of “Oliver Twist.” Though his insight into the growth of modern plutocracy was far deeper than that of any of his contemporaries, he has himself suffered a little from passing successfully into more plutocratic circles. He no longer represents quite so realistically the inspired prejudices of the whole people. He is touched a little with the newspaper notion of good taste. There has fallen on him a little of that fatal sort of broad-mindedness which looks at maps rather than places. He has no longer the wisdom of the uneducated man, who says what he thinks. He has begun to have too much of the knowledge of the half-educated man, who says what he thinks he ought to think. Wild and fantastic as the first books of Dickens may appear, they are in one sense more realistic than his realistic books. The young Dickens describes things because they are real, and laughs at them because they are laughable. He may exaggerate them, but it is because they are there to be exaggerated. He describes the Eatonwill election as comic and corrupt because it was comic and corrupt. He is not concerned, or is only very incidentally concerned, with the consequences of his argument as affecting representative government, as affecting an existing oligarchy or a possible democracy. Similarly the young Dickens described Fagin the Jew exactly as any poor man in a poor street would have described him, and would still describe him. The older Dickens of “Our Mutual Friend” had grown faintly afraid of being an anti-Semite. I do not mean that he was insincere or intimidated; on the contrary, he was much bolder and franker than anybody else. But his mind had been modified by a modern refinement and lost the old popular realism of Ben Jonson or Fielding. The Puritan in “Pickwick” is just like the Puritan in “Bartholomew Fair.” But if Mr. Stiggins had intruded on the domestic happiness of Mr. Wilfer instead of Mr. Weller, I doubt if that Free Church Minister’s nose would have been quite so red or his character quite so black as it was painted.

In short, Dickens gained only liberality when he lost liberty. It is a melancholy exchange; and though Dickens, as has been said, kept his superiority to his own rather snobbish generation to the very last, it is in his first books, and especially in “Pickwick,” that we must seek the full and frank expression of that old traditional truth about the English people. That truth certainly bears no
resemblance to the image of the stern inarticulate stoic which foreigners have invented as a criticism and we have accepted as a compliment. On the other hand, it does bear a marked resemblance to the mediaeval tradition about England as we have it in Chaucer or in the ballads about Robin Hood. That spirit is not at all stoical and is certainly the very reverse of Puritan. It is full of precisely that almost illogical indulgence, that charity to the indefensible, that made possible the sympathy for the Wife of Bath, for Falstaff, and for Friar Tuck.

And that is the truth about the English adventure even outside England. Its type of endurance has not been stoicism but rather tolerance. We might say it was much too tolerant, if it had not the rare virtue of tolerating the intolerable. What has really made the English, apart from mere jingo journalistic flatters, a success in colonies and in campaigns in savage countries, was a certain comic acceptance of the incongruous; a certain capacity in the English cockney or yokel of continuing to be absurdly like himself even when, in the ritual formula, he don’t know where he are. This is a national merit which, like other national merits, is gained at the expense of missing other things; of missing, for instance, the full status of the citizen and the full inherited experience that comes of remaining rooted in very old civilisations. But it is perhaps the most humorous and attractive of all national virtues; and men who really know from the inside the various nations of European humanity have found nothing more human than the ordinary English comic song or the talk of the Tommies in the trenches. Of all that great popular tradition “Pickwick” is the supreme artistic sympathetic masterpiece and even the miracle. Its very faults are its merits; since they correspond to this particular national morality. If the story is chaotic, it is because the philosophy of the people has long been chaotic, and indeed even perilously chaotic. If it is even in one sense superficial, as being a skimming of the surface of a vast and varied society, it is because it is true. In that sense the English spirit really has a certain superficiality of which the very deep motive is sociability. It loses something, indeed, it loses a great deal, in not thinking its way back to first principles or facing fundamental truths. But it also gains a great deal in the great virtue of charity; both in the form of patience with comrades and hospitality to strangers. Friendships are not broken up by the feuds of the intellect; and if there is far too little recognition of the idea of truth, there is a very valuable recognition of the idea of trust.

Nothing is more English or more characteristic in the Pickwick epic than the fact that the band of comrades are comic in their incongruity. They differ and do
not quarrel; or they quarrel and do not part. There is an assumption and atmosphere of absurd toleration spread over the whole story, so that we never expect ridicule to be anything except ridiculous. Mr. Pickwick calls Mr. Winkle an imposter; but he does not seem to object to impostors. He denounces his followers for trifling with feminine feelings and then only laughs when the denunciation is turned against himself. There runs through the whole story an implication that the absurd company will go through with its absurd adventure; and that implication has been tacit in many companies of English people. There must have been many groups of Englishmen in camps and colonial holes and corners, consisting of men who got on with each other somehow, though each was regarded lightly enough as an individual. They were comic characters, if not to themselves, at least to each other. And even in isolation, any one of them who had with him (as he often had) a tattered volume of Pickwick, must have felt that he carried his country in his pocket.
Most of us feel something rather arresting, not to say alarming, about the case of the man who was locked up in a lunatic asylum for eight years for being religious, or for taking a reasonable interest in the word “parallelogram,” and the idea of the end of the world. The persecution of science by religion is something of which we hear a good deal, and a good deal more than is historically accurate. But, in any case, it has pretty well come to an end. The persecution of religion by science has relatively, perhaps, only begun; but it is already at work, in we know not how many obscure cases of pedantry and cruelty. The mystics are very likely to be the martyrs when the psychologists become the kings. But there is involved a paradox that is still more peculiar. It is not merely that anything religious may be persecuted on the ground that it is not rational. It is also that anything irrational may be tolerated so long as it is also irreligious. It is only lunacy to assert religion; it is no longer lunacy to deny reason. If it were, all the professors of pragmatism would be locked up. The very incidents in this case afford an illustration. A man may be represented as mad and as making a mystical riddle of the word “parallelogram.” But a man is not regarded as mad because he says that parallel lines always meet. Our fathers would have called him a rank, raving madman; denying the self-evident and uttering a contradiction in terms. We only call him a mathematician of the newer school of relativity or the fourth dimension. The man who said: “Two and two may make five in the fixed stars” was a lunatic; and none the less a lunatic for being a literary man. I willingly admit that men of science have not a monopoly of this mental breakdown. But certainly the man who could talk as if the stars were fixed, and the numbers unfixed, was suffering from a complete mental breakdown. It is not half so crazy to expect the end of the world to come soon as to expect the Superman to come soon. Yet how many earnest evolutionists in our time have written gravely as if the Superman was to be expected next week! Things do come to an end; and a thing designed is generally reviewed by the designer when it has come to an end. A man planting a rhododendron bush sees it bloom and wither and pronounces on the experiment; and there is nothing irrational in a day of judgement, assuming a design. But there is nothing in the world to show that a rhododendron all by itself will sprout into a super-rhododendron all the colors of the rainbow, merely because that would be a superior plant. The Superman was
simply and solely a phantom called out of the void by the imagination of a lunatic; a quite literal lunatic named Nietzsche. Yet how vivid that utterly unreasonable vision became for many of our wavering and weak-minded generation! And the strangest thing of all is that it was some of the best brains that were thus bewitched. They also have their word “parallelogram,” like the blessed word “Mesopotamia”; but, while few soldiers want to go back to Mesopotamia, there are evidently sages who want to go back to Methuselah.

I need hardly say that I am not arguing that Mr. Bernard Shaw has a tile loose; I am only pointing out that there are far more tiles loose on the Hall of Science than on the parish church, or even the revivalist’s chapel. On the contrary, it is my desire here to penetrate past the superficial oddities of Mr. Shaw’s dramatic experiment, and consider whether the idea itself is in fact as sane as it is certainly serious. Mr. Shaw has suffered as a subject of criticism from two classes of critics. The first are those who say they do not know what he means, and think it necessary to infer that he means nothing. The second are those who think they do know what he means, and think it necessary to agree with it. Few people seem to see that it is quite possible to understand it pretty completely and disagree with it altogether. But, as a matter of fact, it is only by taking it seriously that anybody can disagree with it seriously. The man who says that Shaw’s play is all nonsense is really lending valuable support to the man who says it is all sense. By confessing his inability to make anything of it, he is precluding himself from arguing with the man who makes everything of it. He is like a man who should defend Christianity against Renan’s “Vie de Jesu” by saying he thanked God he could not read the lingo. Or he is like a man who should reply to a detailed political denunciation by saying that the fellow gabbled too fast for him to follow. It would be impossible to pay a more complete tribute to the truth of a philosophy than to say that nobody understands it except the few people who have found it to be true. It would be impossible to pay Mr. Shaw a more complete compliment than to suggest that he mystifies the stupid and convinces the wise. Yet that is exactly the impression that is necessarily left by merely sneering at the eccentricity or extravagance or the extraordinary length or any other fantastic but merely external feature of the play like “Back to Methuselah.” I have, therefore, always tried to do in criticisms what Mr. Shaw himself does in prefaces, and discussed the doctrine which is the backbone of the whole business. For Mr. Bernard Shaw, of all men in the world, leaves the critics the least right to say they do not know what he means; for he elaborately explains it beforehand. Alone among the most fantastic fabulists, he
not only adorns the fable with moral, but he actually puts the moral before the fable.

The preface to this particular play deals first with a more particular point; about which Mr. Shaw seems to me completely to prove his case. It is that the Darwinian version of evolution is, in the most emphatic sense of the phrase, not like life. It is impossible to believe that life has been so completely separated from will as it is implied in the notion of natural selection producing all the varieties of nature. It is far too much of a fortuitous concourse of animals like a fortuitous concourse of atoms. In that sense, every chapter of the “Origin of Species” may be precisely described as a chapter of accidents. Natural selection is the most unnatural thing we can conceive. It is an eternal coincidence. But it is not only that the natural selection is not natural at all; it is the whole point of it that it is not selection at all. Nobody selects; and nothing cannot select. It seems to me in the largest and most luminous sense a matter of commonsense to say that, if there was not a clear design from above, then there was some sort of design from below; and it is quite possible, of course, that there was both. All this preliminary part of the preface and the argument is sound and on solid ground; because it is dealing with a definite theory and giving reasons for differing from the theory. In other words, it is trying to do in the case of Darwin what I am trying to do in the case of Shaw.

Mr. Shaw’s notion is not meant to be nonsensical, but it is nonsensical; not as a term of abuse, but in the exact sense in which I have said that most sensible people would have called the modern talk about pragmatism and parallelism nonsensical. Any rational person, and especially any rational person, would have called it irrational. Any sceptic, from Lucretius or Lucian to Hume and Huxley, would have thought it far more rational to say that the world was coming to an end in a hundred years than to say that the life of a man was not coming to an end for three hundred years. The mere scale or scope of the modern prophecies would have seemed utterly unbalanced and bewildering to all the philosophies of civilized history. I think they would be right; but not merely because of anything externally extravagant about the scale or scope. What is unnatural about this philosophy is that it will not accept the only norm it can ever get; that which Aristotle called the measure of all things. A good and happy humanity is, humanly speaking, the idea by which we test political and social ideas; it is a test; it is in that sense the ideal. This futurist religion will not accept it as normal, and goes forth hunting for a new normal that it can never find. It can never find it because it can never fix it. It is obvious, of course, that a permanent ideal is
absolutely necessary to anything like progress or reform. You cannot reform what is eternally formless; and you cannot march towards what is always moving about. What is the good of the progressive making certain that the children of the future shall have better boots, when the prophet is already saying that they will have no feet? It may seem a crazy comparison to say that children will have no feet. But it is not half so crazy as saying that people will have no children. And it actually is one part of this futurist scheme that the new generation will be born mature, without passing through childhood. That is an excellent working model of the whole issue. To us a world without children would not be a better world, but a very much worse world. It would not be an impossible Utopia, but simply an intolerable nightmare. And this is simply because we have kept in view, what the evolutionary lunatics have lost sight of, that there can be nothing more ideal that the ideal; and the only thing that affects humanity as an ideal at all is that which is fully human in being divine. For some of us it is fixed by a divine humanity, and even by a divine child.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INDEX

## ESSAYS III BY CHESTERTON

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

- AMERICAN FUNDAMENTALISTS AND THE ENGLISH JOURNALISTS
- COMPULSORY EDUCATION AND THE MONKEY TRIAL
- THE IDEAL OF A LEISURE STATE
- WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE—AND AT HOME
- A SHY BIRD
  - I
  - II
- THE POLISH IDEAL
- HUMOUR
- ON AMERICAN MORALS
- MYTHS AND METAPHORS
- ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS ARTICLE
- THE EQUALITY OF SEXLESSNESS
- OUR BIRTHDAY
- HOW NOT TO DO IT
- CHRISTMAS AND THE FIRST GAMES
- THE ANGRY STREET
- DOGS
- THE RUNAWAY ABBOT
- INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JOB
- SOCIAL REFORM VERSUS BIRTH CONTROL
  - MALTHUS: AN ANSWER TO GODWIN
A SIMPLE TEST
ONE OF A CLASS
THE CONFLICT
A PIECE OF HUMBUG
THE MISTAKE
AMERICAN FUNDAMENTALISTS AND THE ENGLISH JOURNALISTS

The Illustrated London News, 1st August 1925

By this time, we have all had our laughs over “Monkeyville” and the public execution of the Missing Link, not least the Americans, who are fully alive to the fun of the fair, and most of all, perhaps, those astute Americans who are said to have used the whole scientific and philosophical controversy as a means of advertising the little town of Dayton in Tennessee. I have heard it stated, I know not how truly, that certain of those too restless, not to say rampant, publicity agents who are prepared to run anything and anybody in the United States had solemnly promised the municipal authorities, that the name of their town should be in the front page of every newspaper in the world. I do not know if this is true, but if the promise was given, it was certainly kept. Perhaps the fulfillment is a little too like Mark Twain’s story of how he doubled the circulation of an agricultural paper. It will be remembered that, being a temporary editor of that quiet rural organ, he raised it, by his own account, into the wildest popularity by advising people not to pull turnips, but to send up a boy to shake the tree; and assuring them that clams would lie quiet if music were played. The story of “Monkeyville” may be as mythical as the story of Mark Twain, but if it is true, it is at least highly evolutionary. In one sense the small American towns which are least ready to preach evolution are most ready to practise it. I have myself seen a tiny little hamlet of wooden houses on the empty plains, outside which stood a notice in enormous letters: “Watch Us Grow.” This might be regarded as a highly biological conception of the germ and the organism. But if it was evolution, it was one of the sort founded on will and in that sense on design. It was certainly Lamarckian and not Darwinian evolution. But we may be permitted to doubt whether the sturdy Fundamentalists who probably inhabit its frame-houses drew any fine distinction between Darwin and Lamarck. Anyhow, as I say, we have had our laughs over the affair; and indeed I fear, to tell the truth, that a great many of the English journalists who laughed loudest knew just as much about evolution as the Fundamentalists in the little houses of that wooden village in the wilderness.

All my life, or at least the latter part of it, I have been trying to discover the meaning of the word “paradox.” It seems to have two meanings—a statement that seems to contain a contradiction or to be intrinsically improbable, and a
statement that happens to be different from the catchwords common at a particular moment. Now, as a fact, these catchwords themselves often are paradoxes. These catchwords themselves are often intrinsically contradictory or improbable. So that, by the simple operation of stating the dull and obvious truth, one may gain quite a picturesque reputation for dashing and dazzling paradox. For instance, it is a pure paradox to say, as the modern English have said for so long, that it is more practical not to be logical. Its exactly like saying that book-keeping is more practical if it ignores simple addition, and assumes that two and two make five. It is exactly like saying that carriage-building is more practical when we abandon the attempt to make circular wheels and are content with wheels of any rough and approximate outline, like that of an ellipse or an egg. In other words, it is not only paradoxical, but nonsensical. Yet all the books and papers and patriotic poems and stories I read in my youth repeated again and again this paradox: that our conclusions would be right if our reasoning was wrong. I ventured to say, in my humdrum and prosaic fashion, that I did not think this was so; and instantly all those thousands of paradox-mongers accused me of paradox. Or again, it was pure paradox in the old Utilitarians to say that if everybody was egotistical the result would somehow be social. Yet the men who, like Ruskin, merely pointed out the fantasy of this fantasy, were themselves called fantastic. By a sober and industrious attention to this little rule, I also have managed to get myself called fantastic or paradoxical. But I have always found that, whenever one of these truisms was thus criticised, the truism very soon came true.

So it was in this case of the journalistic joke in England about the Fundamentalist in America. I pointed out long time ago in these columns that what was the matter with America and Americans was not that they were bad or good, or wise or foolish, or corrupt or public-spirited, but simply that they were almost incredibly backward and behind the times. I pointed out that this involved virtues as well as vices. It is sometimes just as well to be behind the times, when they are such bad times as modern progress is apparently in for. But, for good or evil, America is a generation behind. Yet when I said that, any number of people cried out in protest against such a provocative absurdity, asking me if I knew more about electricity than Edison, or whether I had seen the labour-saving appliances in the New York apartments. By this time journalists who have joked about “Monkeyville” may be disposed to admit that, if I know less about electricity than Edison, I know more about evolution than the late William Jennings Bryan. Now Mr. Bryan was not only an orator of genius, he was a
public figure who had been the Secretary of State and might have been President. Suppose we imagine a British statesman of Cabinet rank, let us say Earl Balfour, intervening in a scientific and religious debate. Who can imagine him going back fifty years, dressing up as Disraeli, in order to defy Professor Huxley with the words: “I am on the side of the Angels”? That is practically what Mr. Bryan did, because his whole world was fifty years old. Earl Balfour’s intervention would quite certainly be about something new, like Einstein; certainly not about something as old as Darwin. Earl Balfour is supposed to be a Tory and Mr. Bryan was supposed to be a Radical; the former is an aristocrat, the latter was a Democrat. But do not let us forget that tradition is one of the true virtues of democracy. Do not let us forget that curiosity and innovation, the appetite for anything new, are among the vices of aristocracy. England has suffered a great deal from the progressive spirit of all aristocrats. It has been hurried into fashion after fashion, and folly after folly, in every department from Dress to Religion. There is a great deal too much Einstein in the English governing class. Exactly what England has lacked for the last few centuries has been the strong family traditions that exist in farmers and rooted social types; England has not enough tenacity in religion and morals. In another and far more fundamental sense, what she lacks is Fundamentalism.

And now that the journalists have had their joke, perhaps it would be well to realise that the joke is partly against them. In so far as some of them seem to imagine that Darwinism is a final scientific discovery, like the circulation of the blood, the joke is entirely against them. It is rather old-fashioned to fly into a fuss about the sudden appearance of Mr. Charles Darwin in the scientific world. But it is almost as old-fashioned to be completely overwhelmed by the appearance of that rising young biologist. It is almost antiquated to fancy Darwin has proved his case merely because he has presented his case. From the point of view of a REALLY rising biologist today, the fun of the Darwinian leading articles must be even funnier that the fun of the Fundamentalists. A French or Italian scientist would probably be as much amused at the assumption that nobody can contradict Darwin as the Darwinian is at the assumption that nobody must contradict Moses. But if we are, in some ways, a little behind the main march of European knowledge, at least we are a long way ahead of the New World and its pioneers. O pioneers! This naturally gives us a certain gratification in the case of commercial pretensions; but do not let us forget the other side. In one sense Darwin is still a rising and recent and youthful figure. And that is in the sense that his theory is still a juvenile hypothesis and has never come of age
as a law. The child has not yet been successfully reared; nor is it certain that the suggestion of the survival of the fittest will be the fittest to survive. Now it is likely that the English were much too eager to swallow it. A mere craze tied us to Darwin, as it might now tie us to Einstein. It might have been better for science if we had shown a little more of the spirit of Dayton versus Darwin. For even Fundamentalism is better god than Fashion.
COMPULSORY EDUCATION AND THE MONKEY TRIAL

The Illustrated London News, 8th August 1925

My remarks last week about the Dayton controversy were written just before, though they were published just after, the sensational news of the sad death of Mr. Bryan. I should like to state this fact, in case there should have been any unreasonable touches of flippancy, on a matter about which most people in this country were flippant. And indeed, in any case, I think that many people in this country were rather too flippant. There really was a moral to “Monkeyville,” and it was not the moral that most of us were tempted to draw; still less the joke that most of us were tempted to make. It is something that remains after the comedy of Dayton and after the tragedy of Bryan. Indeed, it is something that was there before this comic and tragic crisis came, and would still have been there if it had never come. When all is said and done, there really was and is a modern problem, which was the real problem troubling the honest jurymen of Tennessee.

For the problem is likely to prove a nuisance. It will be none the less a nuisance in the future because nobody is taking any particular trouble to face it in the present. In practical politics the survival of the fittest frequently means only the survival of the fussiest. And I fancy I can foresee a very considerable fuss, in the near future, about the Dayton difficulty, which some ridiculed as merely a thing of the past. The particular question of whether Americans are on the side of the angels or on the side of the apes, in the single scandal of alleged materialism at “Monkeyville,” may indeed be a thing of the past. Anyhow, journalists may now be excused for treating it as a thing of the past; though, curiously enough, there are two quite contrary reasons for calling it so. One set of scientists will say it is an old business because Natural Selection is established. Another set of scientists will say it is an old business because Natural Selection is exploded. The old biologists may still think Darwinism too new to be disputed. The young biologists will often think it too old to be defended. But those who think Darwin too right to be questioned, and those who think Darwin too questionable to be followed, may well join in thinking him a very old subject to be discussed. They may well, therefore, decline any further discussion; and, even if they are not bored with Darwin, they may well be bored with Dayton.

But the real problem that remains has nothing necessarily to do with either Dayton or Darwin. It is a real problem because it has to do with the real world of
existing education and politics. It is not concerned with professors of fifty years ago, but with the schoolmasters of to-day. It is a problem of the schools; a problem of education; it is not concerned with monkeys, but with men. And if “Monkeyville” did not exactly solve it, most of those who make fun of “Monkeyville” do not seem even to know that it exists to be solved. So far from having discovered the solution, they have not yet discovered the problem. And in that respect, all enlightened Evolutionists who have smiled over the affair are really much less advanced, much less in touch with the time, much less aware of the new world of the twentieth century, than the wild Fundamentalists of Tennessee.

The problem arises out of compulsory education. It is the great paradox of the modern world. It is the fact that at the very time when the world decided that people should not be coerced about their form of religion, it also decided that they should be coerced about their education. Queen Elizabeth made an Act of Conformity by which all populace had to go to church; Queen Victoria saw the making of another Act of Conformity by which all the populace had to go to school. Now in pure reason it is quite clear and quite certain that both were in the same sense persecution. Both assumed certain things to be true, and punished anybody who acted as if they were false. But this rational recognition was covered and confused for some time by two facts—or fictions. The first was what may be called the Theory of the Three R’s. That is, it was a theory that instruction could be confined to things so simple and so self-evident that nobody but a lunatic would be in the least likely to dispute them. The other was what may be called the Theory of Secular Education, which people with more confused minds called Unsectarian Education, or Undenominational Education. That is, it was a theory that religion, in the strict sense of theology, was the only thing about which even the lunatics would be likely to quarrel. In short, the theory was that a Christian and a Mahometan might learn the same lessons in the same class, on ninety-nine subjects out of a hundred, so long as nobody mentioned Mahomet or mentioned Christ. It seems strange that nobody noticed the limitations of such a view. Men do not, indeed, talk incessantly at every dance or dinner-party on the subject of Mahomet. But men do occasionally talk about wine. Men do even in their wilder moments talk about wives. And the Moslem and the Christian must either be taught separately about wine and wives; or they must be taught together at the expense of one religion or the other; or they must never be taught about wine or wives at all. The latter is what ought logically to follow from unsectarian education, though it seems a little
defective as a detailed scheme of instruction about life. In practice, few people
do exclude these topics as theological. Few people say, when offered a glass of
sherry: “Do not be so denominational.” Few consider a remark: “My wife is at
Brighton,” as a provocative and wounding reflection on the Koran. But this was
not because religious disagreements do not matter, but because on these points
most Englishmen did not really disagree in religion. But with the growth of new
philosophies and theories, they do really disagree in religion. The Prohibitionist
does think it not only denominational, but disgraceful, to drink the glass of
sherry. The Free Lover does not think it disgraceful, or perhaps even
denominational, to be connected with five women instead of one. In other words,
we can no longer feel that religious controversy will only arise out of religious
conversation. In that sense, we can no longer be sure that religion can only arise
out of religion.

Now it is nonsense to say that such a philosophy cannot be inculcated except
through theology. It is nonsense to say that you have kept such things out of the
schools merely by keeping the priest out of the school, when you admit the
professor into the school. The professor can preach any sectarian idea, not in the
name of a sect, but in the name of a science. The professor can preach the
devilish destructiveness of the glass of sherry, and call it a lesson in psychology
or pathology. The professor can preach the advantages of polygamy, and call it a
lesson in anthropology or history. The professor can insinuate any ideas about
life because biology is the study of life. The professor can suggest any view of
the nature of man because history is the story of man. And the case is
complicated by the fact that the educationists are teaching more and more
subjects, even while pretending to preach fewer and fewer creeds. It is
impossible to use the old argument of the self-evident character of the Three R’s
when the Three R’s really stand for Reason, Religion, and Rationalism. It is
impossible to argue at once that the schoolmaster ought to teach everything, and
to argue that he will teach nothing that will not please everybody. In practice he
need only teach whatever pleases somebody; that somebody being himself. And
if his own private opinions happen to be of the rather crude sort that are
commonly contemporary with, and connected with, the new sciences or pseudo-
sciences, he can teach any of them under cover of those sciences. That is what
the people of Dayton, Tennessee, were really in revolt against. And that is where
the people of Dayton, Tennessee, were really and completely right.

It is obviously most unjust that the old believer should be forbidden to teach
his old beliefs, while the new believer is free to teach his new beliefs. It is true
that the Bible-worship of the Fundamentalists is not really very old. It is true that
the Natural Selection of the Darwinians is not really very new. But in those
American conditions the things stand in some such relation; and, however they
stand, the general argument is left standing. It is obviously unfair and
unreasonable that secular education should forbid one man to say a religion is
ture and allow another to say it is untrue. It is obviously essential to justice that
unsectarian education should cut both ways; and that if the orthodox must cut
out the statement that he has a Divine origin, the materialist must cut out the
statement that man has a wholly and exclusively bestial origin. The difficulty
arises from the combination of the widening of education with the exclusion of
religious education. But if the Fundamentalists say that some secularists abuse
the right of secular education, they say what is exceedingly probable—and, if
they say it is intolerable, they tell the truth.
THE IDEAL OF A LEISURE STATE

The Illustrated London News, March 21, 1925

Among the strange and rather stiff antics of the rather antiquated art of party journalism is the duty laid upon the good party man of trying to disagree with his opponents when they have the impudence to agree with him. He not only has to insist that they are wrong; he has to deny their right to be right. Even when you have to admit that your antagonist is talking sense, even when you pride yourself on talking exactly the same sense, you have to deny that it is sensible of him to talk sense. Or you deny that it is sense in the same sense; or sense in the true sense of the word. More often you simply imply that it is inconsistent and irrational in him to talk sense, because it is his whole duty and high function in State to talk nonsense. It is his business to be wrong; it is his business to be beaten; he is the invisible playmate, who sides with the Frenchman and never can win. That he should suddenly side with his own country, or win the approval of his own critics, is regarded as a form of cheating. Twice lately I have noticed a party leader saying things that any sensible person would say, but not allowed by the Opposition Press to say them, because he was not supposed to be a sensible person. One of them was when Mr. Baldwin pointed out the appalling peril of directly declaring war on all Trade Unionists at the very moment when we are supposed to be persuading them not to be Bolshevists. The other was when Mr. George Lansbury said to the effect that the dole was a deplorable necessity, because every man in the world ought to grow up expecting to work. But the conventional journalists, instead of agreeing with Mr. Landsbury, sneered at him for agreeing with them.

Well, that way of working against Bolshevism will have its Nemesis; the Nemesis of all nonsense, which is neglect. A new generation will go straight to the problems and forget all about the party quarrels. If we want to know what the future will be like, as far as anybody can know it, we must begin at the springs of thought and theory, the sources of the river, and not merely potter about in the swamps where it straggles away into its last labyrinthine delta of lobbying and intrigue. We must consider what ideas there are in the world at present, and in what way they are likely to mould the future. Now Mr. George Lansbury, whether consciously or not, really touched on one of the most important of these intellectual conflicts, which so often precede political and even military conflicts. And the position which he took up upon that matter was that of a
conservative or a traditionalist; or as some on the otherside would say, of a Tory.

The controversy I mean has nothing to do with Socialism or Capitalism. It is a question about the nature of human life, even of ideal human life, which cuts across all these things and would probably divide Socialism into two camps. It is something which some speculators have already begun to discuss under the name of “The Leisure State.” It is something which was suggested, perhaps, in the title and work of Mr. H.G. Wells called “The World Set Free.” It does not mean the world set free from the sceptre or the sabre; it means the world set free from the spade and the ploughshare. It means that it might be possible so to organize machinery that the whole life of man on the earth should be one of leisure and not of labour. I will not pretend to discuss whether it would be mechanically possible. But it is time we began to discuss whether it is morally desirable. I am entirely at one with the Socialists in wishing to give most men less work and some men more work. But the abstract question propounded here is not that question; it is whether, if we could, we would give nobody any work. It assumes for the sake of argument the dark and dubious principle that labour-saving devices will save labour. It asks whether, even then, we always want to save labour. We talk of paying too much for labour; should we or should we not pay too much for idleness?

Many of the idealists can only conceive of an idle humanity as an ideal humanity. They talk as if no man could ever rest until he reached Utopia; or as if a really long holiday were something like heaven, utterly distant and divine. Their social philosophy is that of the hearty and humorous epitaph of the charwoman, who had gone on to do nothing for ever and ever. But even now it is by no means certain that those who are not charwomen really become any more hearty and humorous by doing nothing for ever and ever. A vast amount of stuffy and sentimental humbug has been uttered in favour of the Gospel of Work. As it was said that Carlyle talked a great deal in praise of silence, it may also be respectfully affirmed that he idled away a great deal of his time meditating on the virtues of labour. Work is not necessarily good for people; overwork is very bad for people; and both often begin with a bad motive and come to a bad end. Many a modern industrialist has prided himself on being as industrious as he was industrial. And it meant little more than that he was ready to sweat himself, as well as his neighbors, when he wanted to swindle his neighbors. Many a modern man has lived by the Gospel of Work, when it meant the spirit that will always work against the Gospel. A great deal of harm has been done by setting up these oily machines as models for mankind. I would not
point to these ideal industrious men; I would turn away men’s eyes from the painful picture of the Industrious Apprentice; I would veil their faces lest they should be disturbed by the repulsive appearance of the man who Attended These Classes and Is Making Big Money Now. I would hastily remove this deplorable person; but would gently remind the Utopians that he is not the only kind of person who is deplorable.

Now, the LeisureState exists already. It can be represented at any sort of function such as is called a State Banquet or State Ball. The World Set Free exists already. It exists in the world that specially claims to call itself the world. It exists in the world which Socialists and Utopians specially claim to call worldly. We are in a position even now to judge pretty well, in a general fashion, what is the effect on human beings having nothing particular to do. The “world” is already set free, if that is freedom; but is it exactly what the Utopians want to demand as freedom? It is undoubtedly an idle society, but is it an ideal society? Is Utopia to be found in Belgravia any more than in Bohemia? Are the rich all good or better than anybody else? Are they all clever or cleverer than anybody else? Are they even all free and happy, or all freer and happier than anybody else? And though there are good and clever and free and happy people among the idle rich, as there are among the idle poor, not to mention the industrious poor, I think it is broadly true that most of us have found that the most sincere and sensible people were people who earned their own living. I agree therefore with Mr. Landbury in differing from those who would perpetuate eternal unemployment combined with universal doles, and who call that ignominious combination The World Set Free.

But there is another strong objection which I, one of the laziest of all the children of Adam, have against the LeisureState. Those who think it could be done argue that a vast machinery using electricity, water-power, petrol, and so on, might reduce the work imposed on each of us to a minimum. It might, but it would also reduce our control to a minimum. We should ourselves become parts of a machine, even if the machine only used those parts once a week. The machine would be our master; for the machine would produce our food, and most of us could have no notion of how it was really being produced. A free man would rather be a peasant rising at dawn to put more work on his own field. In other words, in the social formula to which we are all accustomed, the peasant has control over the means of production. The occasional adjunct to the intermittent machine would have no control whatever over his own leisure, but less over his own life. Machinery organized in that fashion would have to be
organized from an official centre; and no more controlled by its adjuncts than the tiniest of the little wheels can wind a watch. The leisured persons might be many things in their long hours of leisure. It is not impossible, by the parallel of plutocracy, that they might be profligates, perverts, drugtakers, dram-drinkers, pessimists, and suicides. But they might all be poets and artists and philosophers. They would not be citizens.
WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE—AND AT HOME

The Illustrated London News, 18th December, 1926

The recent controversy about the professional position of married women was part of a much larger controversy, which is not limited to professional women or even to women. It involves a distinction that controversialists on both sides commonly forget. As it is conducted, it turns largely on the query about whether family life is what is called a “whole-time job” or a “half-time job.” But there is also another distinction between a whole job and a half job, or a hundredth part of a job. It has nothing to do with the time that is occupied, but only with the ground that is covered. An industrial expert once actually boasted that it took twenty men to make a pin; and I hope he sat down on the pin. But the man making the twentieth part of the pin did not only work for the twentieth part of an hour. He might perfectly well be working for twelve hours—indeed, he might have been working for twenty-four hours for all the happy industrial expert generally cared. He might work for the whole of a lifetime, but he never made the whole of a pin.

Now, there are lingering still in the world a number of lunatics, among whom I have the honour to count myself, who think it a good thing to preserve as many whole jobs as possible. We congratulate ourselves, in our crazy fashion, whenever we find anybody personally and completely doing anything. We rejoice when we find remaining in the world any cases in which the individual can see the beginning and the end of his own work. We are well aware that this is often incompatible with modern scientific civilization, and the fact has sometimes moved us to say what we think about modern scientific civilization. But anyhow, whether we are right or wrong, that is an important distinction not always remembered; and that is the important distinction that ought to be most remembered, and is least remembered, in this modern debate about the occupation of women.

Probably there must be a certain number of people doing work which they do not complete. Perhaps there must be some people doing work which they do not comprehend. But we do not want to multiply those people indefinitely, and then cover it all by shouting about emancipation and equality. It may be emancipation to allow a woman to make part of a pin, if she really wants to make part of a pin. It may be equality if she is really filled with a furious jealousy of her husband, who has the privilege of making part of a pin. But we question whether it is
really a more human achievement to make part of a pin than to make the whole of a pinafore. And we even go further, and question whether it is more human to make the whole of a pinafore than to look after the whole of a child. The point about the “half-time job” of motherhood is that it is at least one of the jobs that can be regarded as a whole, and almost as an end in itself. A human being is in some sense an end in himself. Anything that makes him happy or high-minded is, under God, a thing directed to an ultimate end. It is not, like nearly all the trades and professions, merely a machinery and a means to an end. And it is a thing which can, by the constitution of human nature, be pursued with positive and unpurchased enthusiasm. Whether or no it is a half-time job, it need not be a half-hearted job.

Now, as a matter of fact, there are not so many jobs which normal and ordinary people can pursue with enthusiasm for their own sakes. The position is generally falsified by quoting the exceptional cases of specialists who achieve success. There may be a woman who is so very fond of swimming the Channel that she can go on doing it until she breaks a record. There may be, for that matter, a woman who is so fond of discovering the North Pole that she goes on doing it long after it has been discovered. Such sensational successes naturally bulk big in the newspapers, because they are sensational cases. But they are not the question of whether women are more free in professional or domestic life. To answer that question, we must assume all the sailors on the Channel boats to be women, all the fishermen in the herring fleet to be women, all the whalers in the North Sea to be women, and then consider whether the worst paid and hardest worked of all those workers were really having a happier or a harder life. It will be at once apparent that the vast majority of them must be under orders; and that perhaps a considerable minority of them would be under orders which they did not entirely understand. There could not be a community in which the average woman was in command of a ship. But there can be a community in which the average woman is in command of a house.

To take a hundred women out of a hundred houses and give them a hundred ships would be obviously impossible, unless all the ships were canoes. And that would be carrying to rather fanatical lengths the individualist ideal of people paddling their own canoe. To take the hundred women out of the hundred houses and put them on ten ships, or more probably on two ships, is obviously to increase vastly the number of servants and diminish the number of mistresses. The only ship I remember that was so manned (or perhaps we should say womanned) was the ship in the Bab Ballad commanded by Lieutenant Bellaye:
[Note: The lieutenant is the hero of Gilbert’s “The Bumboat Woman’s Story.” He is so loved that numbers of young women disguised as sailors stow away on his ship.] even there it might be said that the young ladies who sailed with him had ultimately rather a domestic than a professional ideal. But that naval commander was not very professional himself, and it will be remembered, excused his sailors from most of their duties and amused himself by firing off his one big gun.

I fear that the experience of most subordinate women in shops and factories is a little more strenuous. I have taken an extremely elementary and crude example, but I am not the first rhetorician who has found it convenient to discuss the State under the bright and original similitude of a ship. But the principle does apply quite as much to a shop as to a ship. It applies with especial exactitude to the modern shop, which is almost larger than the modern ship. A shop or a factory must consist of a very large majority of servants; and one of the few human institutions in which there need be no such enormous majority of servants is the human household. I still think, therefore, that for the lady interested in ships the most supreme and symbolical moment is the moment when her ships come home. And I think there are some sort of symbolical ships that had much better come home and stay there.

I know all about the necessary modifications and compromises produced by the accidental conditions of to-day. I am not unreasonable about them. But what we are discussing is not the suggestion that the ideal should be modified. It is the suggestion that the ideal should be abolished. It is the suggestion that a new test or method of judgment should be applied to the affair, which is not the test of whether the thing is a whole job, in the sense of a self-sufficing and satisfactory job, but of whether it is what is called a half-time job—that is, a thing to be measured by the mechanical calculation of modern employment.

There have been household gods and household saints and household fairies. I am not sure that there have yet been any factory gods or factory saints or factory fairies. I may be wrong, as I am no commercial expert, but I have not heard of them as yet. And we think that the reason lies in the distinction which I made at the beginning of these remarks. The imagination and the religious instinct and the human sense of humour have free play when people are dealing with something which, however small, is rounded and complete like a cosmos.

The place where babies are born, where men die, where the drama of mortal life is acted, is not an office or a shop or a bureau. It is something much smaller in size and much larger in scope. And while nobody would be such a fool as to
pretend that it is the only place where people should work, or even the only place where women should work, it has a character of unity and universality that is not found in any of the fragmentary experiences of the division of labour.
THE problem of presenting the English culture to that general European culture, of which it must always be a part, is made more problematical by one practical fact; which is partly an accident. It is the coincidence that the very best English things have to be translated. And anybody who has ever tried to translate anything knows there is continual danger of a sort of despair; he is tempted to say that what has to be translated is always what cannot be translated. From the standpoint of anyone who can see it from the inside, but see it sanely, the best things in England are poetry and humour; and it so happens that they are both locked up in a language. The Continent can be more cosmopolitan, partly because Continental countries have produced masterpieces in more cosmopolitan arts. You do not need an Italian dictionary or a Spanish phrase-book in order to appreciate a statue of Donatello or a painting of Velasquez. And the other two great cultures of Western Europe both in some sense escape from language, though they escape, so to speak, at opposite ends or at opposite extremes; one at the extreme of reason and the other at the extreme of emotion. France has affected and altered all nations by a logic almost as abstract as mathematics; and Germany has moved all nations by the wordless might of music. Now scientific argument can be translated; and music does not need to be translated. But some slight acquaintance with the tongue talked in one particular corner of the Continent of Europe is necessary in order to realise that “night’s candles are burnt out” is rather fine poetry, or that Mr. Swiveller’s gazelle who married a market-gardener is distinctly funny.

But this has a sort of secondary result, even in contacts necessarily cosmopolitan or international. We also, of course, must have a diplomatic language; but we have never had the knack of putting much of what is national into what is official. It is a paradox; or it would seem to the more logical nations a paradox, for it means that there is less of what is national in what is said in the name of the nation. It is a paradox to say that what is responsible is not representative. But the English are the most paradoxical of all the peoples of the earth. And whatever be the reason, it is certainly the fact that the organs of the
State are very seldom the really organic organs of the people. Of all peoples we
English are possibly the most purely patriotic, possibly excessively and narrowly
patriotic, but anyhow tacitly taking the nation as a sort of religion or substitute
for religion. And yet we have hardly a decent patriotic song to our name, and
nothing whatever in the way of a National Anthem or official patriotic song that
any of the singing or marching nations would tolerate for ten lines. If any
intelligent foreigner would get a glimpse of the paradox that is the secret of the
English, let him compare the astonishingly low literary level of the patriotic
music-hall song, about waving the flag, with the exceedingly high literary level
of the domestic music-hall song, about hanging out the washing. As has been
said, poetry and humour are the good fairies of England; and the poetry may be
found in the poor man’s front-garden and the humour in the poor man’s
backyard. By another quaint perversity we alone retain a Poet Laureate, when we
have lost touch with those ancient classical or medieval traditions which would
make much more comprehensible to the Continent the idea of an official ode or a
national bard or a minstrel singing before the king. One or two of our best poets
have been Laureates, and one or two of their very worst poems have been
Laureate Odes. But our very best poet came from nowhere, and very much
resembles our very greatest humorist; for in that sense both Shakespeare and
Dickens were poets, and poets coming from nowhere and even going nowhere.
Neither of them can be quite conceived as going into the Government service
and becoming the official voice of the English State. They lacked something of
that classic solidity which can alone give dignity to a completely collective
institution like the French Academy or even the Comedie Francaise. Even when
talents of that classical type exist among us, they exist under conditions that are
so individualistic or patchy or sectarian that it is difficult to use them as they
were used in the great classical century in France by a classic dramatist who
could command a chorus. We have had perhaps two poets, of very different
scale, who had by nature that sort of impersonal grandeur that might have given
dignity, as did the French classic poets, to an accepted loyalty to a great
monarchy. And Landor was a Radical and Milton was a regicide.

Now it cannot be denied that in many merely international relations we have
to remove an impression of pomposity. But pomposity is only the failure of
pomp. So we say that an actor is too theatrical, because he is not sufficiently at
home in the theatre to be dramatic. We fail in official poetry, or official prose, or
official proclamations, because it is not our job and we do not do it well. But we
fail in common intelligence if we do not realise that other nations often do do it
well. We must not underrate the achievement of France in making drama a public institution, or of Germany in making music a public institution, merely because we ourselves are not very bright about institutions. We must not make a superiority out of an incapacity; but we must, and the increasing international pressure forces us to repeat most emphatically that we must, make other nations understand the nature of our capacity and the things of which we are really capable.

We all recognise the curse on those who say that charity begins at home; that they so often mean that charity ends at home. But by various historical accidents it is unfortunately true that English charity has had no obvious duty except to begin and end at home, not because England would not have sympathised with Europe, but because England knew hardly anything about anything but England. This fact has unfortunately hidden the much more important fact that English charity is really quite exceptionally charitable. When seen from the inside the English are of all the peoples the most soft-hearted; I shall not deny that it sometimes bears a resemblance to being soft-headed. On the other hand there is an international impression at least a hundred years old that the Englishman is cold and proud and insensitive. The problem of explaining the English culture is the problem of explaining these two things together and inducing the foreigner to look at the inside rather than the outside. In other words, in some way or other he must come and find us at home, not necessarily by coming to our country, but by reading the books or knowing the circumstances in which we are most at home. It is exactly the humanity of England that has never been explained to humanity.

Now it is exactly here that a sort of rescue comes with a real experience of some of the finest foreign culture. For it is not only the finest but even the most fastidious foreign critic who can sometimes appreciate our coarsest or most comic creations. He can often appreciate what we do not appreciate because it is too popular to be fashionable. I live in dread that some European judge will discover the vigour of our Cockney Comic Songs; and publish them, as we should have done, in a companion volume to the Golden Treasury. Anyhow, it is a very practical clue to the right method in the matter. We might well suppose, for instance, that of all thinkable things Pickwick would be most essentially and exclusively a sort of family joke. But large numbers of Frenchmen know it is a good joke. Any number of Frenchmen would have seen the fun of the jokes of Pickwick who would have seen nothing but the cant of the speeches of Pitt. Daudet almost modelled himself on Dickens; Maurois might be called a Dickensian; and there is a real imprint of Dickens on French literature, precisely
because it is the imprint of entirely genuine English literature. It is interesting to note in international influence the difference between Dickens and Thackeray. Thackeray, with all his merits, was only too much the English gentleman who represents us abroad. But Dickens really works for us abroad, precisely because Dickens was only at home when he was at home. Thackeray, Anglo-Indian by birth and Anglo-European by travel, never quite understood Europe, just as the Anglo-Indian never quite understood India. Dickens never tried to understand either of them; but the result is that Europeans who love sincerity do want to understand Dickens.

Now the Englishman at home is almost the exact opposite of the Englishman abroad, or at least the legend of the Englishman abroad. Daudet, whom I have mentioned as an admirer of Dickens, expressed surprise when he visited England to find the people so different from what he had expected. For he had expected “men with all the vices of conquerors.” Of course the English, being weak and human like other people, love to be told that they have the vices of conquerors. Indeed, I almost feel a sort of traitor to my country in giving them away by saying that they very often have the virtues of saints. Especially the patience of saints. But if anybody wants to understand that patience he will find it much more genuine in Pickwick than in any Pacifist pamphlets. Note how Dickens takes for granted the patience of old Weller with his preposterous wife and her preposterous pastor, whom he nevertheless shows himself capable afterwards of ducking in a horse-trough, and you will be very near the nerve of something that is really English. The question is, how can we explain so secret a virtue to those who have other virtues, and cannot directly perceive that we have this one? Only one thing is certain; that we cannot do it by perpetually calling ourselves virtuous.

It is vital that we should avoid the appearance of offering ourselves as moral models, not because we have not moral advantages, in this or that respect, even as compared with others, but because we have not the intellectual advantages that would enable us to make the comparison or anyhow to make it correctly. In other words, our difficulty in helping them to know us has been, not only that we did not know them, but also that we did not know how much they knew already. There are some features about which some foreigners know much more about us than we do ourselves, but they are not the most genuine or the most general features. For instance, the fact that our populace does not really care much about politics, especially foreign politics, really acquits such a people of many charges that foreigners might bring, even if it might be a charge in itself. Our newspapers
never tell us very much of what really is said about us, or against us, by responsible opinion; but the fact remains that the most genuine truth about England is to be found in England and not in what Europe says about England or England says about Europe. The former may be a muddle or a misunderstanding, but there still remains something much more worthy of being understood; and concerning that we come back to what may seem the same somewhat frivolous moral, that it is much more likely to be found in our novels than in our newspapers.

II

Continental criticism, broadly speaking, has made a mistake about England. It was a very natural mistake, founded on certain superficial truths, such as those which have so long hidden from England the thrift and the tenacity of France. It largely arose out of the religious quarrel and the rise of the Puritans. And the Puritan was the sort of solitary figure which, when it happened to appear in one particular country, frequently falsified international impressions. Such a person is associated with such a place, not so much because he is often found there as because he is never found anywhere else. Nowhere else has the Puritan been dominant as he was in this island; for his presence here was despotic rather than democratic. His original power was due to militarism. His more modern power is due to plutocracy. But the English populace has never been Puritan even in the sense in which the Scottish populace has been Puritan; still less in the sense in which the Irish populace has been Catholic. Nobody who thinks in terms of real popularity, right or wrong, can have the smallest doubt about whether our democracy is normally on the march to Exeter Hall or to the Derby.

Along with this historical accident of the Puritan aristocracy went several other things equally accidental. A certain shyness and moody embarrassment that come from much more complex causes; the fact that, like most Northern peoples, including the Northern French, we have not the rapid gestures of the South; an exaggerated reputation for roughness, curiously compounded of the legend of physical exercise and the legend that business is business, combined, with the puzzle of Protestantism, to create on the Continent an imaginary Englishman as stiff and stern as a Prussian. So far the mistake need not have troubled us very much. Nations normally do misunderstand each other; and it is not worse than the notion that the Frenchman is immoral or that the Irishman does not know what he wants. Unfortunately, this slander had in it something
horribly like a compliment. Still more unfortunately, some Englishmen were so weak as to accept the compliment. They liked to be called stiff because they thought it meant that they were strong. They liked to be called solemn because they thought it meant that they were responsible. Vanity of this sort is not of course peculiar to them; it is common to the whole human race. But it was simply out of the weakness of vanity that they confessed to the sin of pride. In reality, they are not particularly proud and certainly not in the least stern; they are an exceptionally kindly and even soft-hearted people. They do not even take their pleasures sadly; they only take an incidental and I think regrettable pleasure in being called sad.

The meaning of Merry England was in this old original character of the English. In medieval times their public and proverbial character was festive and full of fun; and even in modern times their private and personal character is the same. The witness to it is the great national literature, especially as it was when it was still entirely normal, and had not been crossed and confused by the self-conscious poses of more recent times. The last full and free manifestation of this normal and national spirit is represented by the name of Pickwick. It is the last expression of the complete freedom and fullness, not only in the literature of England, but even in the literature of Dickens.

The truth about the English adventure even outside England, is that the type of endurance has not been stoicism but rather tolerance. We might say it was much too tolerant, if it had not the rare virtue of tolerating the intolerable. What has really made the English, apart from mere jingo journalistic flatteries, a success in colonies and in campaigns in savage countries, was a certain comic acceptance of the incongruous; a certain capacity in the English Cockney or yokel of continuing to be absurdly like himself even when, in the ritual formula, he don’t know where he are. This is a national merit which, like other national merits, is gained at the expense of missing other things; of missing, for instance, the full status of the citizen and the full inherited experience that comes of remaining rooted in very old civilizations. But it is perhaps the most humorous and attractive of all national virtues; and men who really know from the inside the various nations of European humanity have found nothing more human than the ordinary English comic song or the talk of the Tommies in the trenches.

Nothing is more English than the fact that a band of comrades are comic in their incongruity. They differ and do not quarrel; or they quarrel and do not part. There must have been many groups of Englishmen in camps and colonial holes and corners, consisting of men who got on with each other somehow, though
each was regarded lightly enough as an individual. They were comic characters, if not to themselves, at least to each other.

The English spirit is really a shy bird, and differs therein from both the American and the German Eagle. And the shyness is mixed up with that misunderstanding by which a people very poetic have come to be called prosaic; and the bird is indeed as shy as the nightingale in the dark wood of Keats or the albatross flying over the desolate seas of Coleridge. We must above all things be the reverse of vulgar, and therefore the reverse of vainglorious, if we are really to convey what freedom, what humour and what greatness of heart are hidden in the very seclusion of England.
THE POLISH IDEAL

The Illustrated London News, July 2, 1927

There are certain things in this world that are at once intensely loved and intensely hated. They are naturally things of a strong character, and either very good or very bad. They generally give a great deal of trouble to everybody, and a special sort of trouble to those who try to destroy them. But they give most trouble of all to those who try to ignore them. Some hate them so insanely as to deny their very existence; but the void made by that negation continues to exasperate those who have made it till they are like men choked with a vacuum. They declare that it shall be nameless, and then never cease to curse its name. This curious case is perhaps best illustrated by example. One example of it is Ireland. Another example is Poland.

Within ten minutes of my stepping from the train on to Polish territory I had heard two phrases—phrases which struck the precise note which thus inspires one-half of the world and infuriates the other half. We were received by a sort of escort of Polish cavalry, and one of the officers made a speech in French—a very fine speech in very good French. In the course of it he used the first of these two typical expressions: “I will not say the chief friend of Poland. God is the chief friend of Poland.” And he afterwards said, in a more playful and conversational moment: “After all, there are only two trades for a man—a poet and a soldier of cavalry.” He said it humorously, and with the delicate implication, “You are a poet and I am a soldier of cavalry. So there we are!” I said that, allowing for the difficulty of anybody having anything to eat if this were literally true, I entirely accepted the sentiment, and heartily agreed with it. But I know there are some people who would not understand it even enough to disagree with it. I know that some people would furiously refuse even to see the joke of it. There is something in that particular sort of romance, or (if you will) in that particular sort of swagger, which moves them quite genuinely to a violent irritation. It is an irritation common among rationalists, among the drier sort of dons, and among the duller sort of public servants.

Now, if all those Polish officers had been Prussian officers, if their swagger had consisted of silently pushing people off the kerbstone, if their ceremony had consisted not in making good speeches but in standing in a row quite speechless, if their faces had been like painted wood and their heads and bodies puffed up with nothing but an east wind of pride, they would not have irritated this sort of
critic in this sort of way. They would have soothed him, with a vague sense that this is what soldiers must be. I do not say he would approve of everything they did, but he would accept what they were. It would not anger him or even seem to him absurd, as it does to me, who belong to the other half of mankind. But what does anger him, what does seem to him absurd, is the idea of a soldier civilized; the man who is no more ashamed of the military art than of any other art, but who is interested in other arts—and interested in them all like an artist. That the man in uniform should make a speech, and, worst of all, a good speech, seems comic—like a policeman composing a sonnet. That he should connect a horse-soldier with a poet appears meaningless, like connecting a butcher with a Buddhist monk. In one historic word, these people hate and have always hated the Cavalier. They hate the Cavalier especially when he writes Cavalier songs. They hate the knight when he is also a troubadour. They can understand Ironsides solemnly killing people in the fear of the Lord, as they can understand Prussian soldiers solemnly killing people in the fear of the War-Lord. But they cannot tolerate the combination of wit and culture and courtesy with this business of killing. It seems especially preposterous when the Cavalier adds to all his other dazzling inconsistencies by being quite as religious as the Ironside. The last touch is put to their angry bewilderment when the man who has talked gaily as if nobody mattered except lancers and lyric poets says, with the same simplicity and gaiety, “the only friend of our country is God.”

These critics commonly say that they are irritated with this romantic type because it always fails; so they are naturally even more irritated when it very frequently succeeds. People who are ready to shed tears of sympathy when the windmills overthrow Don Quixote are very angry indeed when Don Quixote really overthrows the windmills. People who are prepared to give a vain blessing to a forlorn hope are not unnaturally annoyed to find that the forlorn hope is comparatively hopeful and not entirely forlorn. Even the most genial of these realists, Mr. Bernard Shaw, would be a little vexed if he had to reverse the whole moral of “Arms and the Man” and admit that the Arms counted for a little less and the Man for a little more. He would be slightly put out, perhaps, if the celebrated artillery duel really took place, and the sentimental Sergius blew the realistic Bluntzschli to pieces. But that is almost exactly what has really happened in modern Europe to-day. That is what happened, for instance, when the practical Mr. Broadbent went bankrupt in his Other Island.

When the Poles defeated the Bolshevists in the field of battle, it was precisely that. It was the old chivalric tradition defeating everything that is modern,
everything that is necessitarian, everything that is mechanical in method and materialistic in philosophy. It was the Marxian notion that everything is inevitable defeated by the Christian notion that nothing is inevitable—no, not even what has already happened. Mr. Belloc has put the Polish ideal into lines dedicated to a great Polish shrine—

Hope of the Half-Defeated; house of gold; Shrine of the sword and tower of ivory.

Before I leave these Polish cavaliers I may remark that I had another chance of seeing them at the jumping competitions in the Concours Hippique, and I will only mention one incident and leave it, for it is something of a parable. The course consisted of the usual high obstacle, but there was one which was apparently of a novel pattern and practically insuperable. Anyhow, one after another in that long procession of admirable riders, French, Polish, and Italian, failed at this final test till failure came to be treated as a matter of course; even experts on such occasions differ about the degrees of merits and misfortunes, and I am not an expert at a horse show. One of the Lancers playfully asked me if I was going to compete. I made the obvious answer that, mounted on my favorite elephant, I would undertake to step over many of the fences, though certainly no the last fence of all, which I doubt if a giraffe could bestride. But the general feeling seemed to be that I should be more useful as an obstacle than a surmounter of obstacles, and that, if I lay down on the course, it might be even worse than the worst obstacle.

There was some amusement and some pity for one young Pole—who was, I believe, a novice or relatively untried person—whose mount in some fashion stumble so that the rider was shot over the horse’s head. At least, I thought he was shot over the horse’s head, and then discovered, amid some amazing and jerky gyrations, that he was what can only be called clinging to the horse’s ears. While the horse danced about the course in a dégagé manner, the rider seemed to crawl down his neck in some incredible way and rolled back into the saddle. He found one stirrup and tired in vain to find the other. Then he gave it up—the stirrup, not the race. He cleared a fairly low obstacle before him, and then, seeming to gather a wild impetus from nowhere, with one stirrup flying loose and swaying in the saddle, he charged the last impossible barrier, and, first of all that company, went over it like a bird. And someone said at my elbow with a sharp exclamation, in English: “That’s just like the Poles!”

Hope of the Half-Defeated; house of gold . . .
HUMOUR

From Encyclopaedia Britannica, May 1928

Humour, in the modern use of the term, signifies a perception of the comic or incongruous of a special sort; generally distinguished from Wit, as being on the one side more subtle, or on the other side more vague. It is thus a term which not only refuses to be defined, but in a sense boasts of being indefinable; and it would commonly be regarded as a deficiency in humour to search for a definition of humour. The modern use of the term, however, is by no means the primary or necessary use of it; and it is one of the cases, rarer than is commonly supposed, in which derivation offers at least an approach to definition. Everybody knows that ‘Humor,’ in the Latin sense of ‘moisture’ was applied here as part of the old physiological theory, by which the characters of men varied according to the proportions of certain different secretions in the human body; as, for instance, that the predominance of phlegm produced the phlegmatic humour. By the time of the full consolidation of the English language, it had thus become possible for Ben Jonson and others to use the word ‘humour’ rather in the sense of ‘the ruling passion.’ With this there necessarily went an idea of exaggeration; and by the end of the process the character of a humorist was more or less identical with what we should call an eccentric. The next stages of the development, which are rather slow and subtle correspond to the various degrees in which the eccentric has become conscious of his eccentricity. England has always been especially rich in these eccentrics; and in England, where everything was less logical and more casual than in other countries, the eccentric long remained, as we should say, half unconsciously and half consciously humorous. The blend, and the beginnings of the modern meaning, may perhaps be dated at about the time of Walter Scott’s Waverley Novels; when Guy Mannering complains of Councillor Pleydell as ‘a crack-brained humorist.’ For Pleydell is indeed laughed at for his little vanities or whims; but he himself joins in the laugh and sees the humour of his humour. Since then the word has come to be used more and more exclusively of conscious humour; and generally of a rather deep and delicate appreciation of the absurdities of others.

Nevertheless there clings to the word Humour, especially when balanced against the word Wit, a sort of tradition or atmosphere that belongs to the old eccentrics whose eccentricity was always wilful and not infrequently blind. The distinction is a fine one; but one of the elements remaining in this blend is a
certain sense of being laughed at, as well as of laughing. It involves some confession of human weakness; whereas wit is rather the human intellect exerting its full strength, though perhaps upon a small point. Wit is reason on its judgment seat; and though the offenders may be touched lightly, the point is that the judge is not touched at all. But humour always has in it some idea of the humorist himself being at a disadvantage and caught in the entanglements and contradictions of human life. It is a grave error to underrate Wit as something trivial; for certain purposes of satire it can truly be the sword of the spirit, and the satirist bears not the sword in vain. But it is essential to wit that he should bear the sword with ease; that for the wit the weapon should be light if the blow be heavy; that there should be no question of his being encumbered with his instrument or laying open his guard. But humour can be of the finest and yet lay open the guard or confess its inconsistency. When Voltaire said, commenting on the judicial murder of Byng, “In England they kill one Admiral to encourage the others,” it would immediately be recognized as humour. But we rightly class Voltaire as a wit, because he represents the consistent human reason detesting an inconsistency. We shall be very wrong if we despise him as a wit, for that French clearness has depths of irony; there is, for instance, more than is seen at a glance in the very word ‘encourage.’ But it is true that the wit is here a judge independent of the judges, unaffected by the King or the Admiral or the English Courtmartial or the mob. He is abstract justice recording a contradiction. But when Falstaff (a model of the humorist become or becoming conscious) cries out in desperate bravado, “They hate us youth,” the incongruity between the speech and the corpulent old humbug of a speaker is present to his own mind, as well as to ours. He also discovers a contradiction, but it is in himself; for Falstaff really did bemuse himself with youthful companionship which he knew to be like a drug or a dream; and indeed Shakespeare himself, in one at least of the Sonnets, becomes bitterly conscious of the same illusion. There is therefore in humour, or at least in the origins of humour, something of this idea of the eccentric caught in the act of eccentricity and brazening it out; something of one surprised in disarray and become conscious of the chaos within. Wit corresponds to the divine virtue of justice, in so far as so dangerous a virtue can belong to man. Humour corresponds to the human virtue of humility and is only more divine because it has, for the moment, more sense of the mysteries.

If there be so much of enlightenment to be gathered from the history of the word, there is very little to be gathered from any of the attempts at a scientific history of the thing. The speculations on the nature of any reaction to the risible
belong to the larger and more elementary subject of Laughter and are for the department of psychology; according to some, almost for that of physiology. Whatever be their value touching the primitive function of laughter, they throw very little light on the highly civilized product of humour. It may well be questioned whether some of the explanations are not too crude even for the crudest origins; that they hardly apply even to the savage and certainly do not apply to the child. It has been suggested, for example, that all laughter had its origin in a sort of cruelty, in an exultation over the pain or ignominy of an enemy; but it is very hard even for the most imaginative psychologist to believe that, when a baby bursts out laughing at the image of the cow jumping over the moon, he is really finding pleasure in the probability of the cow breaking her leg when she comes down again. The truth is that all these primitive and prehistoric origins are largely unknown and possibly unknowable; and like all the unknown and unknowable are a field for furious wars of religion. Such primary human causes will always be interpreted differently according to different philosophies of human life. Another philosophy would say, for instance, that laughter is due not to an animal cruelty but to a purely human realization of the contrast between man’s spiritual immensity within and his littleness and restriction without, for it is itself a joke that a house should be larger inside than out. According to such a view, the very incompatibility between the sense of human dignity and the perpetual possibility of incidental indignities, produces the primary or archetypal joke of the old gentleman sitting down suddenly on the ice. We do not laugh thus when a tree or a rock tumbles down; because we do not know the sense of self-esteem or serious importance within. But such speculations in psychology, especially in primitive psychology, have very little to do with the actual history of comedy as an artistic creation.

There is no doubt that comedy existed as an artistic creation many thousands of years ago, in the case of peoples whose life and letters we can sufficiently understand to appreciate the fine shades of meaning; especially, of course, in the case of the Greeks. It is difficult for us to say how far it existed in civilizations more remote of which the records are for us more stiff and symbolic; but the very limitation of symbolism which makes it hard for us to prove its existence should warn us against assuming without evidence that it did not exist. We know more about Greek humour than about Hittite humour, at least partly for the simple reason that we know Greek better than we know any sort of colloquial Hittite; and while what applies to Hittite applies too in a less degree to Hebrew, a case like that of early Hebrew presents something of the same problem of
limitation. But without any attempts to settle such problems of scholarship, it is hard to believe that the highest sense of human satire was not present in the words of Job. “Truly you are wise and wisdom will die with you”; or that no perception of a poetic contrast was felt by so great a poet when he said of Behemoth, commonly identified with the hippopotamus; “Canst thou play with him as with a bird?” It is probable that the Chinese civilization, in which the quality of the quaint and the fantastic has flowered with a beautiful luxuriance for many centuries, could also quote fairly early examples of the same order of fancy.

In any case, humour is in the very foundations of our European literature, which alone is quite sufficiently a part of ourselves for the full appreciation of so subtle and sometimes sub-conscious a quality. Even a schoolboy can see it in such scenes of Aristophanes as that in which the dead man sits up in indignation at having to pay the toll of the Styx, and says he would rather come to life again; or when Dionysus asks to see the wicked in hell and is answered by a gesture pointing at the audience. Before the period of intellectual controversies in Athens, indeed, we generally find in Greek poetry, as in the greater part of all human folk lore, that the joke is a practical joke. To a robust taste, however, it is none the less of a joke for that. For the joke of Odysseus calling himself Noman is not, as some suppose, a sort of trivial pun or verbalism; the joke is in the gigantic image of the raging Cyclops, roaring as if to rend the mountains, after being defeated by something so simple and so small. And this example is worth noting; as representing what is really the fun of all the fairy-tales; the notion of something apparently omnipotent made impotent by some tiny trick. This fairy-tale idea is undoubtedly one of the primitive fountains from which flows the long winding stream of historic humour. When Puss in Boots persuades the boastful magician to turn into a mouse and be eaten, it almost deserves to be called wit.

After these two early expressions, the practical joke of the folk-tale and the more philosophic fun of the Old Comedy, the history of humour is simply the history of literature. It is especially the history of European literature; for this sane sense of the incongruous is one of the highest qualities balancing the European spirit. It would be easy to go through the rich records of every nation and note this element in almost every novel or play, and in not a few poems or philosophical works. There is naturally no space for such a survey; but three great names, one English, one French and a third Spanish, may be mentioned for their historical quality; since they opened new epochs and even their few
superiors were still their followers. The first of these determining names is that of Chaucer, whose urbanity has done something to conceal his real originality. Medieval civilization had a very powerful sense of the grotesque, as is apparent in its sculpture alone; but it was in a sense a fighting sentiment; it dealt with dragons and devils; it was alive, but it was very decidedly kicking. Chaucer brought into this atmosphere a cool air of true comedy; a sort of incongruity most incongruous in that world. In his personal sketches we have a new and very English element, of at once laughing at people and liking them. The whole of humorous fiction, if not the whole of fiction, dates from the Prologue of the Canterbury Tales. Rather later, Rabelais opened a new chapter by showing that intellectual things could be treated with the energy of high spirits and a sort of pressure of physical exuberance, which was itself humorous in its very human abandon. He will always be the inspiration of a certain sort of genial impatience; and the moments when the great human mind boils over like a pot. The Renaissance itself was, of course, such a boiling, but the elements were some of them more poisonous; though a word should be said for the tonics of that time, the humour of Erasmus and of More. Thirdly, there appeared with the great Cervantes an element new in its explicit expression; that grand and very Christian quality of the man who laughs at himself. Cervantes was himself more chivalrous than most men when he began to mock at chivalry. Since his time, humour in this purely humorous sense, the confession of complexity and weakness already remarked upon, has been a sort of secret of the high culture of the West. The influence of Cervantes and Rabelais, and the rest runs through all modern letters, especially our own; taking on a shrewd and acid tang in Swift, a more delicate and perhaps more dubious taste in Sterne, passing on through every sort of experiment of essay or comedy, pausing upon the pastoral gaiety of Goldsmith or going on finally to bring forth, like a great birth of giants, the walking caricatures of Dickens. Nor is it altogether a national accident that the tradition has here been followed in our own nation. For it is true that humour, in the special and even limited sense here given to it, humour as distinct from wit, from satire, from irony or from many things that may legitimately produce amusement, has been a thing strongly and specially present in English life and letters. That we may not in turn depreciate the wit and logic of the rest of the world, it will be well to remember that humour does originate in the half-conscious eccentric, that it is in part a confession of inconsistency, but, when all is said, it has added a new beauty to human life. It may even be noted that there has appeared especially in England a new variety of humour, more properly to
be called Nonsense. Nonsense may be described as humour which has for the moment renounced all connection with wit. It is humour that abandons all attempt at intellectual justification; and does not merely jest at the incongruity of some accident or practical joke, as a by-product of real life, but extracts and enjoys it for its own sake. Jabberwocky is not a parody on anything; the Jumblies are not a satire on anybody; they are folly for folly’s sake on the same lines as art for art’s sake, or more properly beauty for beauty’s sake; and they do not serve any social purpose except perhaps the purpose of a holiday. Here again it will be well to remember that even the work of humour should not consist entirely of holidays. But this art of nonsense is a valuable contribution to culture; and it is very largely, or almost entirely, an English contribution. So cultivated and competent a foreign observer as M. Emile Cammaerts has remarked that it is so native as to be at first quite unmeaning to foreigners. This is perhaps the latest phase in the history of humour; but it will be well even in this case to preserve what is so essential a virtue of humour; the virtue of proportion. Humour, like wit, is related however indirectly, to truth and the eternal virtues; as it is the greatest incongruity of all to be serious about humour, so it is the worst sort of pomposity to be monotonously proud of humour; for it is itself the chief antidote to pride; and has been, ever since the time of the Book of Proverbs, the hammer of fools.
ON AMERICAN MORALS

Generally Speaking, 1929

America is sometimes offered to us, even by Americans (who ought to know better), as a moral example. There are indeed very real American virtues; but this virtuous attitude is hardly one of them. And if anyone wants to know what a welter of weakness and inconsequence the moral mind of America can sometimes be, he may be advised to look, not so much to the Crime Wave or the Charleston, as to the serious idealistic essays by highbrows and cultural critics, such as one by Miss Avis D. Carlson on ‘Wanted: A Substitute for Righteousness.’ By righteousness she means, of course, the narrow New England taboos; but she does not know it. For the inference she draws is that we should recognize frankly that ‘the standard abstract right and wrong is moribund.’ This statement will seem less insane if we consider, somewhat curiously, what the standard abstract right and wrong seems to mean—at least in her section of the States. It is a glimpse of an incredible world.

She takes the case of a young man brought up ‘in a home where there was an attempt to make dogmatic cleavage of right and wrong.’ And what was the dogmatic cleavage? Ah, what indeed! His elders told him that some things were right and some wrong; and for some time he accepted this strange assertion. But when he leaves home he finds that, ‘apparently perfectly nice people do the things he has been taught to think evil.’ Then follows a revelation. ‘The flowerlike girl he envelops in a mist of romantic idealization smokes like an imp from the lower regions and pets like a movie vamp. The chum his heart yearns towards cultivates a hip-flask, etc.’ And this is what the writer calls a dogmatic cleavage between right and wrong!

The standard of abstract right and wrong apparently is this. That a girl by smoking a cigarette makes herself one of the company of the fiends of hell. That such an action is much the same as that of a sexual vampire. That a young man who continues to drink fermented liquor must necessarily be ‘evil’ and must deny the very existence of any difference between right and wrong. That is the ‘standard of abstract right and wrong’ that is apparently taught in the American home. And it is perfectly obvious, on the face of it, that it is not a standard of abstract right or wrong at all. That is exactly what it is not. That is the very last thing any clear-headed person would call it. It is not a standard; it is not abstract; it has not the vaguest notion of what is meant by right and wrong. It is a chaos of
social and sentimental accidents and associations, some of them snobbish, all of them provincial, but, above all, nearly all of them concrete and connected with a materialistic prejudice against particular materials. To have a horror of tobacco is not to have an abstract standard of right; but exactly the opposite. It is to have no standard of right whatever; and to make certain local likes and dislikes as a substitute. We need not be very surprised if the young man repudiates these meaningless vetoes as soon as he can; but if he thinks he is repudiating morality, he must be almost as muddle-headed as his father. And yet the writer in question calmly proposes that we should abolish all ideas of right and wrong, and abandon the whole human conception of a standard of abstract justice, because a boy in Boston cannot be induced to think that a nice girl is a devil when she smokes a cigarette.

If the rising generation were faced with no worse doubts and difficulties than this, it would not be very difficult to reconcile them to the traditions of truth and justice. But I think the episode is worth mentioning, merely because it throws a ray of light on the moral condition of American Culture, in the decay of Puritanism. And when next we are told that the idealism of America is to set a ‘standard’ by which England must transform herself, it will be well to remember what is apparently meant by a standard and an ideal; and that the fire of idealism seems both to begin and end in smoke.

Incidentally, I must say I can bear witness to this queer taboo about tobacco. Of course numberless Americans smoke numberless cigars; a great many others eat cigars, which seems to me a more occult pleasure. But there does exist an extraordinary idea that ethics are involved in some way; and many who smoke really disapprove of smoking. I remember once receiving two American interviewers on the same afternoon; there was a box of cigars in front of me and I offered one to each in turn. Their reaction (as they would probably call it) was very curious to watch. The first journalist stiffened suddenly and silently and declined in a very cold voice. He could not have conveyed more plainly that I had attempted to corrupt an honorable man with a foul and infamous indulgence; as if I were the Old Man of the Mountain offering him hashish that would turn him into an assassin. The second reaction was even more remarkable. The second journalist first looked doubtful; then looked sly; then seemed to glance about him nervously, as if wondering whether we were alone, and then said with a sort of crestfallen and covert smile: ‘Well, Mr. Chesterton, I’m afraid I have the habit.’

As I also have the habit, and have never been able to imagine how it could be
connected with morality or immorality, I confess that I plunged with him deeply into an immoral life. In the course of our conversation, I found he was otherwise perfectly sane. He was quite intelligent about economics or architecture; but his moral sense seemed to have entirely disappeared. He really thought it rather wicked to smoke. He had no ‘standard of abstract right or wrong’; in him it was not merely moribund; it was apparently dead. But anyhow, that is the point and that is the test. Nobody who has an abstract standard of right and wrong can possibly think it wrong to smoke a cigar. But he had a concrete standard of particular cut and dried customs of a particular tribe. Those who say Americans are largely descended from the American Indians might certainly make a case out of the suggestion that this mystical horror of material things is largely a barbaric sentiment. The Red Indian is said to have tried and condemned a tomahawk for committing a murder. In this case he was certainly the prototype of the white man who curses a bottle because too much of it goes into a man. Prohibition is sometimes praised for its simplicity; on these lines it may be equally condemned for its savagery. But I myself do not say anything so absurd as that Americans are savages; nor do I think it would matter much if they were descended from savages. It is culture that counts and not ethnology; and the culture that is concerned here derives indirectly rather from New England than from Old America. Whatever it derives from, however, this is the thing to be noted about it: that it really does not seem to understand what is meant by a standard of right and wrong. It is a vague sentimental notion that certain habits were not suitable to the old log cabin or the old hometown. It has a vague utilitarian notion that certain habits are not directly useful in the new amalgamated stores or the new financial gambling-hell. If his aged mother or his economic master dislikes to see a young man hanging about with a pipe in his mouth, the action becomes a sin; or the nearest that such a moral philosophy can come to the idea of a sin. A man does not chop wood for the log hut by smoking; and a man does not make dividends for the Big Boss by smoking; and therefore smoking has a smell as of something sinful. Of what the great theologians and moral philosophers have meant by a sin, these people have no more idea than a child drinking milk has of a great toxicologist analyzing poisons. It may be a credit of their virtue to be thus vague about vice. The man who is silly enough to say, when offered a cigarette, ‘I have no vices,’ may not always deserve the rapier-thrust of the reply given by the Italian Cardinal, ‘It is not a vice, or doubtless you would have it.’ But at least the Cardinal knows it is not a vice; which assists the clarity of his mind. But the lack of clear standards among those
who vaguely think of it as a vice may yet be the beginning of much peril and oppression. My two American journalists, between them, may yet succeed in adding the sinfulness of cigars to the other curious things now part of the American Constitution.

I would therefore venture to say to Miss Avis Carlson that the quarrel in question does not arise from the Yankee Puritans having too much morality, but from their having too little. It does not arise from their drawing too hard and fast a line of distinction between right and wrong, but from their being much to loose and indistinct. They go by associations and not by abstractions. Therefore they classify smoking with vamping or a flask in the pocket with sin in the soul. I hope at least that some of the Fundamentalists will succeed in being a little more fundamental than this. The men of Tennessee are supposed to be very anxious to draw the line between men and monkeys. They are also supposed by some to be rather too anxious to draw the line between black men and white men. May I be allowed to hope that they will succeed in drawing a rather more logical line between bad men and good men? Something of the the difference and the difficulty may be seen by comparing the old Ku Klux Klan with the new Klu Klux Klan. The old secret society may have been justified or not; but it had a definite object: it was directed against somebody. The new secret society seems to have been directed against anybody; often against anybody who drank; in time, for all I know, against anybody who smoked. It is this sort of formless fanaticism that is the great danger of the American Temperament; and it is well to insist that if men must persecute, they will be more clear-headed if they persecute for a creed.
MYTHS AND METAPHORS

The Illustrated London News, 26th January 1929

What I venture to criticize in certain men, whom some call scientists and I call materialists, is their perpetual use of Mythology. One half of what they say is so true as to be trite; the other half of what they say is so untrue as to be transparent. But they cover both their platitudes and their pretenses by an elaborate parade of legendary and allegorical images. I read this in some remarks on Darwinism by one of the last surviving Darwinians: “Among the individuals of every species there goes on, as Malthus had realised, a competition of struggle for the means of life, and Nature selects the individuals which vary in the most successful direction.” Now when men of the old religions said that God chose a people and raised up a prophet, at least they meant something; and they meant what they said. They meant that a being with a mind and a will used them in an act of selection. But who is Nature, and how does she, or he, or it, manage to select anything or anybody? All that the writer actually has to say is that some individuals do emerge when other individuals are extinguished. It hardly needed either Darwin or Darwinians to tell us that. But Nature selecting those that vary in the most successful direction means nothing whatever, except that the successful succeed. But this tautological truism is wrapped up in clouds of mythology, by the introduction of a mythical being whom even the writer regards as a myth. The reader is to be impressed and deluded by the vision of a vast stone goddess sitting on a mountain throne, and pointing at a particular frog or rabbit saying, in tones of thunder, that this alone is to survive. All we know is that it does survive (for the moment), and then we pride ourselves on being able to repeat the mere fact that it does survive in half a hundred variegated and flowery expressions: as that it has survival value; or that it is naturally selected for survival; or that it survives because it is the fittest for survival; or that Nature’s great law of the survival of the fittest sternly commands it to survive. The critics of religion used to say that its mysteries were mummeries; but these things are in the special and real sense mummeries. They are things offered to a credulous congregation by priests who know them to be mummeries. It is impossible to prove that the priest knows that there is no god in the shrine, or no truth in the oracle. But we know that the materialist knows that there is no such things as a large fastidious lady, called Nature, who points a finger at a frog.

The particular case in which this mythological metaphor was used is of course
another matter. It is, indeed, a matter which has involved at various times a great deal of this element of materialist mythology. To see what truth was really in it we should have to go back to the old Darwinian debate; which I have not the least intention of doing here. But I may observe, in passing, that this notion of Nature selecting things is specially incompatible with all that can really be said for their own case; and that the very name of natural selection is a most unnatural name for it. For it is their whole case that everything happened, in the ordinary human sense, by accident. We should rather call it coincidence; and some of us call it quite incredible coincidence. But, anyhow, the whole case for it is that one quadruped happened to have a long neck, and happened to live at a moment when it was necessary to reach a taller tree or shrub. If these happenings happen to happen about a hundred times in succession, in exactly the same way, you can by that process turn some sort of sheep or goat into a giraffe. Whether this is probable or not is another question. But the whole Darwinian argument is that it is NOT a case of Nature selecting, any more than of God selecting, or anyone else selecting, but a case of things falling out in that fashion. We are quite ready to discuss trees and giraffes in their place, without perpetual references to God. Could the materialists not so far control their rhetorical and romantic sentimentalism as to do it without perpetual reference to Nature? Shall we make a bargain; that we will for the moment leave out our theology, if they will leave out their mythology?

But the mythological habit is not entirely and exclusively confined to men of science, or even to materialists. This sort of mythology is rather generally scattered over the modern world. The popular form of the mythological is the metaphorical. Certain figures of speech are fixed in the modern mind, exactly as the fables of the gods and nymphs were fixed in the mind of pagan antiquity. It is astonishing to note how often, when we address a man with anything resembling an idea, he answers with some recognised metaphor, supposed to be appropriate to the case. If you say to him, “I myself prefer the principle of the Guild to the principle of the Trust,” he will not answer you by talking about principles. He can be counted on to say: “You can’t put the clock back,” with all the regularity of a ticking clock. This is a very extreme example of the mental breakdown that goes with a relapse into metaphor. For the man is actually understanding his own case out of sheer love of metaphor. It may be that you cannot put time back, but you can put the clock back. He would be in a stronger position if he talked about the abstraction called time; but an all-devouring appetite for figurative language forces him to talk about clocks. Of course the real
question raised has nothing to do with either clocks or time. It is the question of whether certain abstract principles, which may or may not have been observed in the past, ought to be observed in future. But the point is here that even the man who means that we cannot reconstruct the past can hardly ever reconstruct his own sentence in any other form except this figurative form. Without his myth, or his metaphor, he is lost.

Another mass of metaphors is drawn from the phenomena of morning, or the fact that the sun rises; or, rather (I grovel in apology to the man of science), appears to rise. It is a perfectly natural metaphor for poets; or indeed, for all men, in that aspect in which all men are mystics. That there is mystery in these natural things, which the imagination understands more subtly than the reason, is true enough. Nor have I any contempt even for mythology considered mythology. But when we want to know what somebody wants to do, when we ask a free-thinker what he thinks, and why he thinks it, it is a little tiresome to be told that he is waiting for the Dawn, or engaged at the moment in singing Songs Before Sunrise. [Footnote 1] One is tempted to retort that Dawn is not always an entirely cheerful thing, even for those who have exercised their free thought upon the conventional tradition of their own society. There is such a thing as being shot at Dawn.

I do not mean for a moment, of course, that we should do without myths and metaphors altogether. I am constantly using them myself, and shall continue to do so. But I think we ought all to be on guard against depending on them as a substitute for reason. Perhaps it would be well to have a Fast Day, on which we undertook to abstain from everything but abstract terms, Let us all agree that every Friday we will do without metaphors as without meat. I am sure it would be good for the intellectual digestion.
As it seems to be generally understood that nine-thousand-nine-hundred-and-fifty-seven novels, twelve-thousand-five-hundred-and-eighty-three plays, and several million reminiscences in prose, verse, and free verse, are shortly to appear on the virgin and untouched topic of the Great War, it will perhaps be well to be prepared with some general principles for the criticism of the problem, as well as for the criticism of the particular solutions of it. Should any books or plays appear during the next few years on any other topic except that of the Great War, such daring departures and exceptional experiments will of themselves be sufficiently conspicuous. But we need something like a general rule of reading to correct the general tendency of writing; and I will venture to offer some suggestions for it here.

When the old popular complaint was made against the Novel with a Purpose, it was almost always based on the idea that the purpose would hurt the novel. It was not sufficiently realised that the novel can also hurt the purpose. When jolly old playgoers protested against the Problem Play, it was always on the ground that the play was spoiled by the problem. It was not enough emphasised that the problem can be spoiled by the play. There is a very good case for those who really are concerned about purposes and problems, and who find that they are very falsely and crookedly presented in dramas and stories. There is always a moral idea of some sort inhering in any great play or romance, because man is a moral being in his inmost and not merely in his external existence. But a play or a story is often an exceedingly bad way of presenting any practical moral problem that requires a practical solution. The writer either exhibits a sham fight of dialogue, taking care that the Whig dogs shall not have the best of it; or else he is almost forced to leave the moral of his story much more obscure and doubtful than a clear call to public duty or social justice ought to be. If we have really come to hold a strong moral conviction, we want to shout it much more loudly than is artistic in any work of art. Since the world has discarded Rhetoric as something false, it has lost the only natural expression of anything that is true. We want more of the orator, and even more of the demagogue; but not the demagogue masked and muffled by the disguise of a dramatist.

I would suggest, therefore, that, when hundreds of suggestions and half-suggestions are thus made to us on the subject of war, peace, and patriotism, we
should keep certain maxims in mind as a corrective to mere suggestion: which, by itself, is as undignified as mesmerism. In these things we want to have reasons that can be stated as reasons, and not as catchwords or phrases or fragments of dialogue. We want to beware of certain fallacies that could not be maintained in argument but can easily be implied in art. Here are a few of these fallacies, which do not cease to be fallacies because they become fashions.

First, if we really desire peace or any other good thing, let us make a pious resolution that we will not talk nonsense. In other words, let us agree that we will not use newspaper mottoes like “War Is Unthinkable.” Slogans of that sort are invented because they are nonsense. A man gets up and says that war is unthinkable at the very moment when everybody is thinking about war, and because everybody is thinking about war. They are, as we have already noted, writing, preaching, scribbling, and screaming about war, and almost about nothing else. Let us say that war is unbearable, or that war is unjustifiable, or that war is invariably indefensible, if we think so. But to say that it is unthinkable is to say that we refuse to think.

Second, do not let us be satisfied with the sort of argument that can be made very vivid, not to say horrid, in fiction: the sort of argument that says, “If only you knew what war is really like!” If we were logically limited to that argument, it would be easy to apply it to all sorts of things. You could make large numbers of refined maiden aunts living in Bath and Cheltenham feel very ill with a realistic novel having the motto, “If you only knew what surgery is like!” You could send shudders all over Upper and Lower Tooting with a detailed and documentary novel headed “If You Only Knew What Scavenging Is Like!” If there are any people silly enough to suppose that all wounds on the battlefield are elegant and picturesque, they may be capable of supposing that all wounds in a hospital are elegant and picturesque. There may have been soldiers who mistakenly entered the army on the former assumption; there have probably been nurses who mistakenly entered the hospital on the latter. But that does not prove by itself that nobody has a noble vocation of nursing; nor does it prove by itself that nobody has a noble vocation of soldiering. Whether war attains its object, whether it is a legitimate object, whether war is a legitimate means—all those are different questions, lying beyond this particular question. But if armed conflict can be as useful or necessary as amputation, it is no answer to say that it is as ugly as amputation.

Third, I would respectfully remind most of those who have written, are writing, and will resolutely and unceasingly continue to write novels and plays about the War and the Armistice and Ten Years After, that they should try to
encourage a real friendship with foreigners. And a friendship with foreigners does not mean a friendship with Germans. It means a friendship with Germans and with everybody else, including those who are extremely likely to quarrel with Germans. I would suggest to them, what they seem to have entirely forgotten, that if they describe the reaction towards Peace as if it were solely and entirely a reaction towards Prussians, they will not be encouraging Peace but very definitely encouraging War. They will be doing, in a much more dangerous form, exactly what they themselves denounced the Government for doing when it tied us up in a one-sided alliance; with the addition (as I should say) of our being tied to the wrong side instead of the right. But the point is that, whatever their romantic suggestions of reconciliation may favour, they do not favour the cause of Peace. The same sort of man who could only fight by writing sentimental lies against all Germans is now writing sentimental fiction in favour of all Germans. But he is not writing it in favour of Peace. The only chance of peace in the world lies in the possibility of our understanding the other side also. And so long as it is the fashion of the moment to talk as if all Italians were bullies, all Frenchmen braggarts, all Poles futile lunatics, and the rest, it is perhaps something of a stretch of language to say that we are making friends with foreigners. In fact, we are not making friends at all. We are doing something much more terrible and ominous. We are making Allies.

Lastly, let us remember as a general principle that opinions should be stated as opinions and convictions as convictions. We must not be impatient because these statements are called abstract. Whereas some charming romance about mud and blood and disembowelled horses is in comparison beautifully concrete. We are not savages, to express ourselves only in picture-writing. We are civilised men, acquainted with mathematics and metaphysics, and presumably capable of thinking in terms of thought. Certainly if we ever lose that power, it will be a worse relapse into barbarism than the worst war in the world.
THE EQUALITY OF SEXLESSNESS

GK’s Weekly, July 26, 1930

In almost all the modern opinions of women it is curious to observe how many lies have to be assumed before a case can be made. A young lady flies from England to Australia; another wins an air race; a Duchess creates a speed record in reaching India; others win motoring trophies; and now the King’s prize for marksmanship has gone to a woman. All of which is very interesting and possibly praiseworthy as means of spending one’s leisure time; and if it were left to that, even if no more were added than the perfectly plain fact that such feats could not have been achieved by their mothers and grandmothers, we would be content to doff our hats to the ladies with all courtesy and respect which courage, endurance and ability have always rightly demanded.

But it is not left to that; and considerably more is added. It is suggested, for example, that the tasks were beyond the mothers and grandmothers, nor for the very obvious reason that they had no motorcars and airplanes in which to amuse their leisure hours, but because women were then enslaved by the convention of natural inferiority to man. Those days, we are told, “in which women were held incapable of positive social achievements are gone forever.” It does not seem to have occurred to this critic that the very fact of being a mother or grandmother indicates a certain positive social achievement; the achievement of which, indeed, probably left little leisure for travelling airily about the hemispheres. The same critic goes on to state, with all the solemn emphasis of profound thought, that “the important thing is not that women are the same as men—that is a fallacy—but that they are just as valuable to society as men. Equality of citizenship means that there are twice as many heads to solve present-day problems as there were to solve the problems of the past. And two heads are better than one.” And the dreadful proof of the modern collapse of all that was meant by man and wife and the family council, is that this sort of imbecility can be taken seriously.

The London Times, in a studied leading article, points out that the first emancipators of women (whoever they were) had no idea what lay in store for future generations. “Could they have foreseen it they might have disarmed much opposition by pointing to the possibilities, not only of freedom, but of equality and fraternity also.”

And we ask, what does it all mean? What in the name of all that is graceful
and dignified does fraternity with women mean? What nonsense, or worse, is indicated by the freedom and equality of the sexes?

We mean something quite definite when we speak of a man being a little free with the ladies. What definite freedom is meant when the freedom of women is proposed? If it merely means the right to free opinions, the right to vote independently of fathers and husbands, what possible connection does it have with the freedom to fly to Australia or score bulls-eyes at Bisley? If it means, as we fear it does, freedom from responsibility of managing a home and a family, an equal right with men in business and social careers, at the expense of home and family, then such progress we can only call progressive deterioration.

And for men too, there is, according to a famous authoress, a hope of freedom. Men are beginning to revolt, we are told, against the old tribal custom of desiring fatherhood. The male is casting off the shackles of being a creator and a man. When all are sexless there will be equality. There will be no women and no men. There will be but a fraternity, free and equal. The only consoling thought is that it will endure but for one generation.
OUR BIRTHDAY

G. K.s Weekly, 21st March, 1935-written for the magazine’s tenth anniversary

As this is a Birthday Number, I propose to write about birthdays in a futile and irresponsible manner, as befits a festive occasion; and to leave for a later issue some of the serious questions that are raised in this one. I remember that long ago, in one of my countless controversies with Mr. Bernard Shaw, I commented on a scornful remark of his that he did not keep his own birthday and would not be bothered with anybody else’s; and I argued that this exactly illustrates the one point upon which he is really wrong; and that if he had only kept his birthday, he might have kept many other things along with it. It will be noted that, with the magnificent magnanimity in which he has never failed, especially in dealing with me and my romantic delusions, he has contributed to this special number an article dealing with very vital matters. I hope to answer that article, in greater detail, in due course; here I will only give a very general reply upon the particular aspect which is excellently and exactly represented by Birthdays.

For one happy hour, in talking about Birthdays, I shall not stoop to talk about Birth-Control. But when Mr. Shaw asks why I doubt that he and I, not to mention Mr. H. G. Wells and Mr. Bertrand Russell, can form a committee to produce a creed, not to say a cosmos—my general answer is that the difference begins with the very birth of the conception. A Birthday embodies certain implicit ideas; with some of which he agrees and is right; with others of which he disagrees and is wrong. In some matters the difference between us seems to amount to this: that I very respectfully recognize that he disagrees with me; but he will not even allow me to disagree with him. But there is one fundamental truth in which I have never for a moment disagreed with him. Whatever else he is, he has never been a pessimist; or in spiritual matters a defeatist. He is at least on the side of Life, and in that sense of Birth. When the Sons of God shout for joy, merely because the creation is in being, Mr. Shaw’s splendid Wagnerian shout or bellow will be mingled with my less musical but equally mystical song of praise. I am aware that in the same poem the patriarch Job, under the stress of incidental irritations, actually curses the day he was born; prays that the stars of its twilight be dark and that it be not numbered among the days of the year; but I am sure that G.B.S. will not carry his contempt for birthday celebrations to that length. The first fact about the celebration of a birthday is that it is a way of affirming defiantly, and even flamboyantly, that it is a good thing to be alive. On
that matter, and it is a basic matter, there really is a basis of agreement; and Mr. Shaw and I, giving our performance as morning stars that sing together, will sing in perfect harmony if hardly with equal technique.

But there is a second fact about Birthdays, and the birth-song of all creation, a fact which really follows on this; but which, as it seems to me, the other school of thought almost refuses to recognize. The point of that fact is simply that it is a fact. In being glad about my Birthday, I am being glad about something which I did not myself bring about. In being grateful for my birth, I am grateful for something which has already happened; which happened, sad as it may seem to some, quite a long time ago. Now it seems to me that Mr. Shaw and his school start almost everything in the spirit of people who are saying, I shall myself select the 17th of October as the date of my birth. I propose to be born at Market Harborough; I have selected for my father a very capable and humane dentist, while my mother will be trained as a high-class headmistress for the tremendous honor and responsibility of her position; before that, I think I shall send her to Girton. The house I have selected to be born in faces a handsome ornamental park, etc., etc.” In other words, it seems to me that modern thinkers of this kind have simply no philosophy or poetry or possible attitude at all, towards the things which they receive from the real, world that exists already; from the past; from the parent; from the patriotic tradition or the moral philosophy of mankind. They only talk about making things; as if they could make themselves as well as everything else. They are always talking about making a religion; and cannot get into their heads the very notion of receiving a revelation. They are always talking about making a creed; without seeing that it involves making a cosmos. But even then, we could not possibly make the cosmos that has made us. Now nobody who knows anything about my little tastes and prejudices will say that I am not in sympathy with the notion of making things. I believe in making thousands of things; making jokes, making pictures, making (as distinct from faking) goods, making books, and even articles (of which, as the reader will sadly perceive, there is no end), making toys, making tools, making farms, making homes, making churches, making sacred images; and, incidentally also, making war on people who would prevent me from doing these things. But the workshop, vast as it is, is only one half of the world. There is a whole problem of the human mind, which is necessarily concerned with the things that it did not make; with the things that it could not make; including itself. And I say it is so with any view of life, which leaves out the whole of that aspect of life; all receptivity, all gratitude, all inheritance, all worship. Unless a philosopher has a
philosophy, which can make tolerable and tenable his attitude towards all the actualities that are around him and before him and behind him—then he has only half a philosophy; blind, though he is the wittiest man in the world, he is in that sense half-witted.

Mr. Bernard Shaw is certainly one of the wittiest men in the world, and about whole huge aspects of life, one of the wisest. But if I am to sit down with him at a committee of evolutionists, to draw up a creed for humanity, I fancy I foresee that this is the line along which I shall eventually come to issue my Minority Report. I shall find myself the representative, and I suspect the only representative of the implications of my Birthday. I do not even mind calling it the pride of birth, which of course has nothing to do with the pride of rank; so long as it involves the humility of birth also.
HOW NOT TO DO IT

G.K.’s Weekly, 16th May, 1935

There are two recognised ways of arguing with a Communist; and they are both wrong. There is also a third way which is right but which is not recognised. Now I have a notion that, for one reason or another, a considerable part of our time will be taken up soon by arguing with Communists. And I should like to sketch very roughly this notion of mine about the right way to do it. Curiously enough, the two commonest ways of contradicting Communism also contradict each other. The first consists of convicting the Bolshevist of all vices. The second, curiously enough, consists of convicting him of all the virtues. It actually consists of pitting all our vices against his virtues; or his supposed virtues.

This is very much the more dangerous and even suicidal trick of the two; but its nature needs a little explanation. The first common or conventional method is at least simple enough. The Capitalist says to the Communist, “You shall not enter my house, for I know you would burt it down; you shall not speak to my family, for I know you would blow them up; you are a common thief and murderer and I am a highly respectable and moral person; and not as this Russian.” Now I do not like talking like that to a Bolshevist; because I should not like talking like that to a burglar. It is Pharisaical; and the Pharisee is a more ancient enemy of the Christian than the Marxian.

But I rather prefer it to the other method, which I find extremely common, among those who profess to defend property or individualism against the Marxian heresy. It really consists of telling the Communist that he is an idealist, or, in other words, that he must be wrong because he has ideals. In this second case, the Capitalist says to the Communist, “You believe in a lot of nonsense about the brotherhood of men; but I tell you, as a practical man, that every man wants to get as much as he can for himself, and will beat his own brother in business if he can. Every man must obey his acquisitive instinct.” (I read these very words recently in an attack on the Bolshevist theory.) “You cannot keep things humming and hustling without private enterprise; and you cannot produce private enterprise unless you bribe or reward it with the glittering prizes of private property.” People use these arguments against Communism, as if they were the only arguments against Communism; and then they are surprised that a number of more generous and spirited young people become Communists.
They do not seem to see that, to such young people, the Capitalist in question only seems to be saying, “I am a greedy old scoundrel, and I forbid you to be anything else.”

Now the true, full and final argument against Communism is that private property is much more important than private enterprise. A pickpocket represents private enterprise, but we should hardly say that he supports private property. Private property is not a bribe that exists for the sake of private enterprise. On the contrary, private enterprise is only a tool or weapon, that may sometimes be useful to preserve private property. And it is necessary to preserve private property; simply because the other name of it is liberty. On the one hand, it is not merely a conventional respectability; on the contrary, it is only the man with some property and privacy who can live his own life freely. On the other hand, it is not a mere licence to trade, still less a mere licence to cheat; on the contrary, the whole point of property is that in that alone can be naturally nourished the sentiment of honour. It would need some space to expound it here and might take some time to expound it to the Communist. But the Communist would listen at least longer than he would to a man merely boasting of self-righteousness or a man merely boasting of avarice.
CHRISTMAS AND THE FIRST GAMES

I have sometimes been haunted with a vague story about a wild and fantastic uncle, the enemy of parents and the cause of revolution in nurseries, who went about preaching a certain theory; I mean the theory that all the objects which children use at Christmas for what we call riotous or illegitimate purposes, were originally created for those purposes; and not for the humdrum household purposes which they now serve. For instance, we will suppose that the story begins with a pillow-fight in a night nursery; and boys buffeting and bashing each other with those white and shapeless clubs. The uncle, who would be a professor of immense learning and even greater imagination and inventiveness, would proceed to make himself unpopular with parents and popular with children, by proving that the pillow in prehistoric art is obviously designed to be a club; that the sham-fight in the night nursery is actually more ancient and authoritative than the whole institution of beds or bedclothes; that in some innocent morning of the world such cherubim warred on each other with such clouds, possibly made of white samite, mystic, wonderful, and stuffed with feathers from the angels’ wings; and that it was only afterwards, when weariness fell upon the world and the young gods had grown tired of their godlike sports, that they slept with their heads upon their weapons; and so, by a gradual dislocation of the whole original purpose of the pillow, it came to be recognized as having its proper place on a bed.

It is obvious that any number of these legends could be launched with ease and grace and general gratification. It would be urged, to eagerly assenting little boys, that catapults are really older and more majestic than windows. Windows were merely targets set up for catapults, clear and fragile that such archaic archers might be rewarded with a crash and sparkle of crystal; that it was only after the oppressive priesthood of the Middle Paleolithic had ruthlessly suppressed the Catapult Culture, that people had gradually come to use the now useless glass targets for purposes of light or ventilation. Similarly, butter was originally used solely to make butter-slides in the path of parents and guardians and it was only by a late accident in the life of some prominent though prostrate citizen, who happened to lick the pavement, that its edible qualities were discovered.

The subversive principle can be applied to almost every childish game; it may be said that primitive hunters hunted the slipper, long before that leaping and
elusive animal was duplicated and worn as furry spoils upon the feet of the hunter. It might be said that no handkerchief was ever used to blow the nose, as in our degenerate day, till it had been used for centuries to blind the eyes, as in the hierarchic mystery of Blind-Man’s-Buff.

True, I cannot set forth here in any great detail any actual proofs of these prehistoric origins; but I never heard of anybody bothering about historic proofs in connection with prehistoric origins. There is quite as much evidence for my favorite uncle’s theory of the primitive pillow as there is for Mr. H.G. Wells’s detailed account of the horrible Old Man, who ruled by terror over twenty or thirty younger men who could have thrown him out of the cave on his apelike ear; there is as much scientific proof as there is for Dr. Freud’s highly modern and morbid romance about a whole race of sexual perverts making a whole religious service out of parricide; there is as much in the way of data for demonstration as in Mr. Gerald Heard’s sentimental film-scenario about arboreal anthropoids kissing the stones which they throw at lions. Nobody expects any historic evidence for things of this sort, because they are prehistoric; and nobody dreams of attempting to found them on any scientific facts; they are simply Science. I do not see why my favorite uncle and I should not be Science too. I do not see why we should not simply make things up out of our own heads; things which cannot possibly be contradicted, just as they cannot possibly be proved. The only difference is that my uncle and I, especially when we set out with a general intention of talking about Christmas, cannot manage to work up that curious loathing of the human race, which is now considered essential to any history written for humanitarians. Dr. Freud (as is perhaps natural after a heavy day of psychopathic interviews) seems to have taken quite a dislike to human beings. So when he makes up the story of how their first forgotten institutions arose in utterly unrecorded times, he makes the family story as nasty as he can; like any other modern novelist. But my uncle and I (especially at Christmas) happen to feel in a more cheerful and charitable frame of mind; and, as there are no iron creeds or dogmas to restrain anybody from anything, we have as much right to imagine cheerful things as he has to imagine gloomy ones. And we beg to announce, with the same authority, that everything began with a celestial pillow fight of cherubs, or that the whole world was made entirely for the games of children.

The two or three truths, of which my uncle’s hypothesis is at least symbolic or suggestive, may be conveniently arranged thus. First, it must always be remembered that there really is a mystery, and something resembling a religious
mystery, in the origin of many things which have since become (very rightly) practical and (very wrongly) prosaic. If my uncle in a festive moment declared that fireworks came before fires, and were used to blazon the blackness of night with ceremonial illuminations, before it was even noticed that they could cook our food or warm our hands, he might not be speaking with pedantic precision; but he would not be far off from a considerable historic truth. There are many strange traces of the ritual side of tilling or tending animals preceding the practical side. Second, it must be remembered that these rituals, including Christmas, have been on the whole preserved by the populace; for a true populace is far more traditional than an aristocracy. They have been preserved by poor people, though generally by poor people who possessed some small property, in short, most markedly by a peasantry. Thus, if my uncle, rising hilariously once more, were to propound to the company the opinion that the Christmas stocking stuffed with gifts and strung onto the bedpost, was a thing far more ancient and authoritative than mere common human stockings as degraded to be the livery of common human legs, I should soothe him by assuring him that I saw his point, though I might not accept this literal illustration of it.

Now it is very interesting to remember that there is another proverb, or traditional truth, about stockings in connection with peasants. It has often been said that the peasant put his small property into his stocking, stuck his little hoard of gold into his stocking, so that it might be safe from thieves and bankers. And the peasant was lectured about this, by no less than nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine lecturers on political economy and professional professors of economics or high finance. It was patiently pointed out to him that metal coins do not breed like maggots when left in a stocking; that guineas do not have little families of guineas as guinea-pigs do; that a stocking is not a nest in which a sovereign can lay half-sovereigns as a bird lays eggs; or, in more learned but less sensible language, that his money was not bringing him any interest. So that the only way to make money do what money cannot do, and the only true scientific scheme for proving there is a guinea-and-a-half when there is only a guinea, is to put it in a bank. A bank, as the nine thousand professors of economics explained to the stupid or stupefied peasant can never fail to pay interest. A stocking may wear out or have holes in it; thieves may break in and steal; but it is manifestly impossible for bankers to steal; and even a violation of nature’s laws for things in banks to be stolen; much more for them to disappear altogether, in so brisk and busy a center of speculation. Since banks cannot conceivably fail, argued the professors, you would obviously be a richer man,
with somebody else’s money from somewhere somehow mysteriously added to your own, if you would take it out of the stocking and put it into the bank. The peasant was still dazed; but he was strangely stubborn. Since then, the situation has been modified in various ways; and a good many of the professors are wishing they had imitated the peasant.
THE ANGRY STREET

I cannot remember whether this tale is true or not. If I read it through very carefully I have a suspicion that I should come to the conclusion that it is not. But, unfortunately, I cannot read it through very carefully because, you see, it is not written yet. The image and idea of it clung to me through a great part of my boyhood; I may have dreamt it before I could talk; or told it to myself before I could read; or read it before I could remember. On the whole, however, I am certain that I did not read it. For children have very clear memories about things like that; and of the books of which I was really fond I can still remember not only the shape and bulk and binding, but even the position of the printed words on many of the pages. On the whole, I incline to the opinion that it happened to me before I was born.

At any rate, let us tell the story now with all the advantages of the atmosphere that has clung to it. You may suppose me, for the sake of argument, sitting at lunch in one of those quick-lunch restaurants in the City where men take their food so fast that it has none of the quality of food, and take their half-hour’s vacation so fast that it has none of the qualities of leisure. To hurry through one’s leisure is the most unbusiness-like of actions. They all wore tall shiny hats as if they could not lose an instant even to hang them on a peg, and they all had one eye a little off, hypnotised by the huge eye of the clock. In short, they were the slaves of the modern bondage, you could hear their fetters clanking. Each was, in fact, bound by a chain; the heaviest chain ever tied to a man—it is called a watch-chain.

Now, among these there entered and sat down opposite to me a man who almost immediately opened an uninterrupted monologue. He was like all the other men in dress, yet he was startlingly opposite to them all in manner. He wore a high shiny hat and a long frock coat, but be wore them as such solemn things were meant to be worn; he wore the silk hat as if it were a mitre, and the frock coat as if it were the ephod of a high priest. He not only hung his hat up on the peg, but he seemed (such was his stateliness) almost to ask permission of the hat for doing so, and to apologise to the peg for making use of it. When he had sat down on a wooden chair with the air of one considering its feelings and given a sort of slight stoop or bow to the wooden table itself, as if it were an altar, I could not help some comment springing to my lips. For the man was a big, sanguine-faced, prosperous-looking man, and yet he treated everything with a
care that almost amounted to nervousness.

For the sake of saying something to express my interest I said, “This furniture is fairly solid; but, of course, people do treat it much too carelessly.”

As I looked up doubtfully my eye caught his, and was fixed as his was fixed, in an apocalyptic stare. I had thought him ordinary as he entered, save for his strange, cautious manner; but if the other people had seen him they would have screamed and emptied the room. They did not see him, and they went on making a clatter with their forks, and a murmur with their conversation.

But the man’s face was the face of a maniac.

“Did you mean anything particular by that remark?” he asked at last, and the blood crawled back slowly into his face.

“Nothing whatever,” I answered. “One does not mean anything here; it spoils people’s digestion.”

He leaned back and wiped his broad forehead with a big handkerchief; and yet there seemed to be a sort of regret in his relief. “I thought perhaps,” he said in a low voice, “that another of them had gone wrong.”

“If you mean another digestion gone wrong,” I said, “I never heard of one here that went right.

This is the heart of the Empire, and the other organs are in an equally bad way.”

“No, I mean another street gone wrong,” and he said heavily and quietly, “but as I suppose that doesn’t explain much to you, I think I shall have to tell you the story. I do so with all the less responsibility, because I know you won’t believe it. For forty years of my life I invariably left my office, which is in Leadenhall Street, at half-past five in the afternoon, taking with me an umbrella in the right hand and a bag in the left hand. For forty years two months and four days I passed out of the side door, walked down the street on the left-hand side, took the first turning to the left and the third to the right, from where I bought an evening paper, followed the road on the right-hand side round two obtuse angles, and came out just outside a Metropolitan Station, where I took a train home. For forty years two months and four days I fulfilled this course by accumulated habit: it was not a long street that I traversed, and it took me about four and a half minutes to do it. After forty years two months and four days, on the fifth day I went out in the same manner, with my umbrella in the right hand and my bag in the left, and I began to notice that walking along the familiar street tired me somewhat more than usual. At first I thought I must be breathless and out of condition; though this, again, seemed unnatural, as my habits had always been
like clockwork. But after a little while I became convinced that the road was distinctly on a more steep incline than I had known previously; I was positively panting uphill.

"Owing to this no doubt the corner of the street seemed farther off than usual; and when I turned it I was convinced that I had turned down the wrong one. For now the street shot up quite a steep slant, such as one only sees in the hilly parts of London, and in this part there were no hills at all.

"Yet it was not the wrong street. The name written on it was the same; the shuttered shops were the same; the lamp-posts and the whole look of the perspective was the same; only it was tilted upwards like a lid. Forgetting any trouble about breathlessness or fatigue I ran furiously forward, and reached the second of my accustomed turnings, which ought to bring me almost within sight of the station. And as I turned that corner I nearly fell on the pavement. For now the street went up straight in front of my face like a steep staircase or the side of a pyramid. There was not for miles around that place so much as a slope like that of Ludgate Hill. And this was a slope like that of the Matterhorn. The whole street had lifted itself like a single wave, and yet every speck and detail of it was the same, and I saw in the high distance, as at the top of an Alpine pass, picked out in pink letters, the name over my paper shop.

"I ran on and on blindly now, passing all the shops, and coming to a part of the road where there was a long grey row of private houses. I had, I know not why, an irrational feeling that I was on a long iron bridge in empty space. An impulse seized me, and I pulled up the iron trap of a coal-hole. Looking down through it I saw empty space and the stars. When I looked up again a man was standing in his front garden, having apparently come out of his house; he was leaning over the railings and gazing at me. We were all alone on that nightmare road; his face was in shadow; his dress was dark and ordinary; but when I saw him standing so perfectly still I knew somehow that he was not of this world. And the stars behind his head were larger and fiercer than ought to be endured by the eyes of men.

"'If you are a kind angel,' I said, 'or a wise devil, or have anything in common with mankind, tell me what is this street possessed of devils.'

"After a long silence he said, 'What do you say it is?'

"'It is Bumpton Street, of course,' I snapped. 'It goes to Oldgate Station.'

"'Yes,' he admitted gravely, 'it goes there sometimes. Just now, however, it is going to heaven.'

"'To heaven?' I said, 'Why?'
“‘It is going to heaven for justice,’ he replied. ‘You must have treated it badly. Remember always there is one thing that cannot be endured by anybody or anything. That one unendurable thing is to be overworked and also neglected. For instance, you can overwork women—everybody does. But you can’t neglect women—I defy you to. At the same time, you can neglect tramps and gipsies and all the apparent refuse of the State, so long as you do not overwork them.

‘But no beast of the field, no horse, no dog can endure long to be asked to do more than his work and yet have less than his honour.

‘It is the same with streets. You have worked this street to death, and yet you have never remembered its existence. If you had owned a healthy democracy, even of pagans, they would have hung this street with garlands and given it the name of a god. Then it would have gone quietly. But at last the street has grown tired of your tireless insolence; and it is bucking and rearing its head to heaven. Have you never sat on a bucking horse?’

“I looked at the long grey street, and for a moment it seemed to me to be exactly like the long grey neck of a horse flung up to heaven. But in a moment my sanity returned, and I said, ‘But this is all nonsense. Streets go to the place they have to go to. A street must always go to its end.’

‘Why do you think so of a street?’ he asked, standing very still.

‘Because I have always seen it do the same thing,’ I replied, in reasonable anger. ‘Day after day, year after year, it has always gone to Oldgate Station; day after . . . ’

“I stopped, for he had flung up his head with the fury of the road in revolt.

‘And you?’ he cried terribly. ‘What do you think the road thinks of you? Does the road think you are alive? Are you alive? Day after day, year after year, you have gone to Oldgate Station . . . ‘ Since then I have respected the things called inanimate!”

And bowing slightly to the mustard-pot, the man in the restaurant withdrew.
Cynics often speak of the disillusioning effects of experience, but I for one have found that nearly all things not evil are better in experience than in theory. Take, for example, the innovation which I have of late introduced into my domestic life; he is a four-legged innovation in the shape of an Aberdeen terrier. I have always imagined myself to be a lover of all animals, because I have never met any animal that I definitely disliked. Most people draw the line somewhere. Lord Roberts disliked cats; the best woman I know objects to spiders; a Theosophist I know protects, but detests, mice; and many leading humanitarians have an objection to human beings.

If the dog is loved he is loved as a dog; not as a fellow-citizen, or an idol, or a pet, or a product of evolution. The moment you are responsible for one respectable animal, that moment an abyss opens as wide as the world between cruelty and the necessary coercion of animals. There are some people who talk of what they call “Corporal Punishment,” and class under that head the hideous torture inflicted on unfortunate citizens in our prisons and workhouses, and also the smack one gives to a silly boy or the whipping of an intolerable terrier. You might as well invent a phrase called “Reciprocal Concussion” and leave it to be understood that you included under this head kissing, kicking, the collision of boats at sea, the embracing of young Germans, and the meeting of comets in mid-air.

That is the second moral value of the thing; the moment you have an animal in your charge you soon discover what is really cruelty to animals, and what is only kindness to them. For instance, some people have called it inconsistent in me to be an anti-vivisectionist and yet to be in favour of ordinary sports. I can only say that I can quite imagine myself shooting my dog, but cannot imagine myself vivisecting him.

But there is something deeper in the matter than all that, only the hour is late, and both the dog and I are too drowsy to interpret it. He lies in front of me curled up before the fire, as so many dogs must have lain before so many fires. I sit on one side of that hearth, as so many men must have sat by so many hearths. Somehow this creature has completed my manhood; somehow, I cannot explain why, a man ought to have a dog. A man ought to have six legs; those other four legs are part of him. Our alliance is older than any of the passing and priggish explanations that are offered of either of us; before evolution was, we were. You
can find it written in a book that I am a mere survival of a squabble of anthropoid apes; and perhaps I am. I am sure I have no objection. But my dog knows I am a man, and you will not find the meaning of that word written in any book as clearly as it is written in his soul.

It may be written in a book that my dog is canine; and from this it may be deduced that he must hunt with a pack, since all canines hunt with a pack. Hence it may be argued (in the book) that if I have one Aberdeen terrier I ought to have twenty-five Aberdeen terriers. But my dog knows that I do not ask him to hunt with a pack; he knows that I do not care a curse whether he is canine or not so long as he is my dog. That is the real secret of the matter which the superficial evolutionists cannot be got to see. If traceable history be the test, civilization is much older than the savagery of evolution. The civilized dog is older than the wild dog of science. The civilized man is older than the primitive man of science. We feel it in our bones that we are the antiquities, and that the visions of biology are the fancies and the fads. The books do not matter; the night is closing in, and it is too dark to read books. Faintly against the fading firelight can be traced the prehistoric outlines of the man and the dog.
THE RUNAWAY ABBOT

Some miles from the monastery of Monte Cassino stood a great crag or cliff, standing up like a pillar of the Apennines. It was crowned with a castle that bore the name of The Dry Rock, and was the eyrie in which the eaglets of the Aquino branch of the Imperial family were nursed to fly. Here lived Count Landulf of Aquino, who was the father of Thomas Aquinas and some seven other sons. In military affairs he doubtless rode with his family, in the feudal manner; and apparently had something to do with the destruction of the monastery. But it was typical of the tangle of the time, that Count Landulf seems afterwards to have thought that it would be a tactful and delicate act to put in his son Thomas as Abbot of the monastery. This would be of the nature of a graceful apology to the Church, and also, it would appear, the solution of a family difficulty.

For it had been long apparent to Count Landulf that nothing could be done with his seventh son Thomas, except to make him an Abbot or something of that kind. Born in 1226, he had from childhood a mysterious objection to becoming a predatory eagle, or even to taking an ordinary interest in falconry or tilting or any other gentlemanly pursuits. He was a large and heavy and quiet boy, and phenomenally silent, scarcely opening his mouth except to say suddenly to his schoolmaster in an explosive manner, “What is God?” The answer is not recorded but it is probable that the asker went on worrying out answers for himself. The only place for a person of this kind was the Church and presumably the cloister; and so far as that went, there was no particular difficulty. It was easy enough for a man in Count Landulf’s position to arrange with some monastery for his son to be received there; and in this particular case he thought it would be a good idea if he were received in some official capacity, that would be worthy of his worldly rank. So everything was smoothly arranged for Thomas Aquinas becoming a monk, which would seem to be what he himself wanted; and sooner or later becoming Abbot of Monte Cassino. And then the curious thing happened.

In so far as we may follow rather dim and disputed events, it would seem that the young Thomas Aquinas walked into his father’s castle one day and calmly announced that he had become one of the Begging Friars, of the new order founded by Dominic the Spaniard; much as the eldest son of the squire might go home and airily inform the family that he had married a gypsy; or the heir of a Tory Duke state that he was walking tomorrow with the Hunger Marchers
organised by alleged Communists. By this, as has been noted already, we may pretty well measure the abyss between the old monasticism and the new, and the earthquake of the Dominican and Franciscan revolution. Thomas had appeared to wish to be a Monk; and the gates were silently opened to him and the long avenues of the abbey, the very carpet, so to speak, laid for him up to the throne of the mitred abbot. He said he wished to be a Friar, and his family flew at him like wild beasts; his brothers pursued him along the public roads, half-rent his friar’s frock from his back and finally locked him up in a tower like a lunatic.

It is not very easy to trace the course of this furious family quarrel, and how it eventually spent itself against the tenacity of the young Friar; according to some stories, his mother’s disapproval was short-lived and she went over to his side; but it was not only his relatives that were embroiled. We might say that the central governing class of Europe, which partly consisted of his family, were in a turmoil over the deplorable youth; even the Pope was asked for tactful intervention, and it was at one time proposed that Thomas should be allowed to wear the Dominican habit while acting as Abbot in the Benedictine Abbey. To many this would seem a tactful compromise; but it did not commend itself to the narrow medieval mind of Thomas Aquinas. He indicated sharply that he wished to be a Dominican in the Dominican Order, and not at a fancy-dress ball; and the diplomatic proposal appears to have been dropped.

Thomas of Aquino wanted to be a Friar. It was a staggering fact to his contemporaries; and it is rather an intriguing fact even to us; for this desire, limited literally and strictly to this statement, was the one practical thing to which his will was clamped with adamantine obstinacy till his death. He would not be an Abbot; he would not be a Monk; he would not even be a Prior or ruler in his own fraternity; he would not be a prominent or important Friar; he would be a Friar. It is as if Napoleon had insisted on remaining a private soldier all his life. Something in this heavy, quiet, cultivated, rather academic gentleman would not be satisfied till he was, by fixed authoritative proclamation and official pronouncement, established and appointed to be a Beggar. It is all the more interesting because, while he did more than his duty a thousand times over, he was not at all like a Beggar; nor at all likely to be a good Beggar. He had nothing of the native vagabond about him, as had his great precursors; he was not born with something of the wondering minstrel, like St. Francis; or something of the tramping missionary, like St. Dominic. But he insisted upon putting himself under military orders, to do these things at the will of another, if required. He may be compared with some of the more magnanimous aristocrats who have
enrolled themselves in revolutionary armies; or some of the best of the poets and scholars who volunteered as private soldiers in the Great War. Something in the courage and consistency of Dominic and Francis had challenged his deep sense of justice; and while remaining a very reasonable person, and even a diplomatic one, he never let anything shake the iron immobility of this one decision of his youth; nor was he to be turned from his tall and towering ambition to take the lowest place.

The first effect of his decision, as we have seen, was much more stimulating and even startling. The General of the Dominicans, under whom Thomas had enrolled himself, was probably well aware of the diplomatic attempts to dislodge him and the worldly difficulties of resisting them. His expedient was to take his young follower out of Italy altogether; bidding him proceed with a few other friars to Paris. There was something prophetic even about this first progress of the travelling teacher of the nations; for Paris was indeed destined to be in some sense the goal of his spiritual journey; since it was there that he was to deliver both his great defence of the Friars and his great defiance to the antagonists of Aristotle. But this his first journey to Paris was destined to be broken off very short indeed. The friars had reached a turn of the road by a wayside fountain, a little way north of Rome, when they were overtaken by a wild cavalcade of captors, who seized on Thomas like brigands, but who were in fact only rather needlessly agitated brothers. He had a large number of brothers: perhaps only two were here involved. Indeed he was the seventh; and friends of Birth Control may lament that this philosopher was needlessly added to the noble line of ruffians who kidnapped him. It was an odd affair altogether. There is something quaint and picturesque in the idea of kidnapping a begging friar, who might in a sense be called a runaway abbot. There is a comic and tragic tangle in the motives and purposes of such a trio of strange kinsmen. There is a sort of Christian cross-purposes in the contrast between the feverish illusion of the importance of things, always marking men who are called practical; and the much more practical pertinacity of the man who is called theoretical.

Thus at least did those three strange brethren stagger or trail along their tragic road, tied together, as it were, like criminal and constable; only that the criminals were making the arrest. So their figures are seen for an instant against the horizon of history; brothers as sinister as any since Cain and Abel. For this queer outrage in the great family of Aquino does really stand out symbolically, as representing something that will forever make the Middle Ages a mystery and a bewilderment; capable of sharply contrasted interpretations like darkness and
light. For in two of those men there raged, we might say screamed, a savage pride of blood and blazonry of arms, though they were princes of the most refined world of their time, which would seem more suitable to a tribe dancing round a totem. For the moment they had forgotten everything except the name of a family, that is narrower than a tribe, and far narrower than a nation. And the third figure of that trio, born of the same mother and perhaps visibly one with the others in face or form, had a conception of brotherhood broader than most modern democracy, for it was not national but international; a faith in mercy and modesty far deeper than any mere mildness of manners in the modern world; and a drastic oath of poverty, which would now be counted quite a mad exaggeration of the revolt against plutocracy and pride. Out of the same Italian castle came two savages and one sage; or one saint more pacific than most modern sages. That is the double aspect confusing a hundred controversies. That is what makes the riddle of the medieval age; that it was not one age but two ages. We look into the moods of some men, and it might be the Stone Age; we look into the minds of other men, and they might be living in the Golden Age; in the most modern sort of Utopia. There were always good men and bad men; but in this time good men who were subtle lived with bad men who were simple. They lived in the same family; they were brought up in the same nursery; and they came out to struggle, as the brothers of Aquino struggled by the wayside, when they dragged the new friar along the road and shut him up in the castle on the hill.

When his relations tried to despoil him of his friar’s frock he seems to have laid about them in the fighting manner of his fathers, and it would seem successfully, since this attempt was abandoned. He accepted the imprisonment itself with his customary composure, and probably did not mind very much whether he was left to philosophise in a dungeon or in a cell. Indeed there is something in the way the whole tale is told, which suggests that through a great part of that strange abduction, he had been carried about like a lumbering stone statue. Only one tale told of his captivity shows him merely in anger; and that shows him angrier than he ever was before or after. It struck the imagination of his own time for more important reasons; but it has an interest that is psychological as well as moral. For once in his life, for the first time and the last, Thomas of Aquino was really hors de lui; riding a storm outside that tower of intellect and contemplation in which he commonly lived. And that was when his brothers introduced into his room some specially gorgeous and painted courtesan, with the idea of surprising him by a sudden temptation, or at least involving him in a scandal. His anger was justified, even by less strict moral
standards than his own; for the meanness was even worse than the foulness of the expedient. Even on the lowest grounds, he knew his brothers knew, and they knew that he knew, that it was an insult to him as a gentleman to suppose that he would break his pledge upon so base a provocation; and he had behind him a far more terrible sensibility; all that huge ambition of humility which was to him the voice of God out of heaven. In this one flash alone we see that huge unwieldy figure in an attitude of activity, or even animation; and he was very animated indeed. He sprang from his seat and snatched a brand out of the fire, and stood brandishing it like a flaming sword. The woman not unnaturally shrieked and fled, which was all that he wanted; but it is quaint to think of what she must have thought of that madman of monstrous stature juggling with flames and apparently threatening to burn down the house. All he did, however, was to stride after her to the door and bang and bar it behind her; and then, with a sort of impulse of violent ritual, he rammed the burning brand into the door, blackening and blistering it with one big black sign of the cross. Then he returned, and dropped it again into the fire; and sat down on that seat of sedentary scholarship, that chair of philosophy, that secret throne of contemplation, from which he never rose again. . . .
INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JOB

THE Book of Job is among the other Old Testament Books both a philosophical riddle and a historical riddle. It is the philosophical riddle that concerns us in such an introduction as this; so we may dismiss first the few words of general explanation or warning which should be said about the historical aspect. Controversy has long raged about which parts of this epic belong to its original scheme and which are interpolations of considerably later date. The doctors disagree, as it is the business of doctors to do; but upon the whole the trend of investigation has always been in the direction of maintaining that the parts interpolated, if any, were the prose prologue and epilogue and possibly the speech of the young man who comes in with an apology at the end. I do not profess to be competent to decide such questions. But whatever decision the reader may come to concerning them, there is a general truth to be remembered in this connection. When you deal with any ancient artistic creation do not suppose that it is anything against it that it grew gradually. The Book of Job may have grown gradually just as Westminster Abbey grew gradually. But the people who made the old folk poetry, like the people who made Westminster Abbey, did not attach that importance to the actual date and the actual author, that importance which is entirely the creation of the almost insane individualism of modern times. We may put aside the case of Job, as one complicated with religious difficulties, and take any other, say the case of the Iliad. Many people have maintained the characteristic formula of modern scepticism, that Homer was not written by Homer, but by another person of the same name. Just in the same way many have maintained that Moses was not Moses but another person called Moses. But the thing really to be remembered in the matter of the Iliad is that if other people did interpolate the passages, the thing did not create the same sense of shock as would be created by such proceedings in these individualistic times. The creation of the tribal epic was to some extent regarded as a tribal work, like the building of the tribal temple. Believe then, if you will, that the prologue of Job and the epilogue and the speech of Elihu are things inserted after the original work was composed. But do not suppose that such insertions have that obvious and spurious character which would belong to any insertions in a modern individualistic book. Do not regard the insertions as you would regard a chapter in George Meredith which you afterwards found had not been written by George Meredith, or half a scene in Ibsen which you found had been cunningly
sneaked in by Mr. William Archer. Remember that this old world which made these old poems like the Iliad and Job, always kept the tradition of what it was making. A man could almost leave a poem to his son to be finished as he would have finished it, just as a man could leave a field to his son, to be reaped as he would have reaped it. What is called Homeric unity may be a fact or not. The Iliad may have been written by one man. It may have been written by a hundred men. But let us remember that there was more unity in those times in a hundred men than there is unity now in one man. Then a city was like one man. Now one man is like a city in civil war.

Without going, therefore, into questions of unity as understood by the scholars, we may say of the scholarly riddle that the book has unity in the sense that all great traditional creations have unity; in the sense that Canterbury Cathedral has unity. And the same is broadly true of what I have called the philosophical riddle. There is a real sense in which the Book of Job stands apart from most of the books included in the canon of the Old Testament. But here again those are wrong who insist on the entire absence of unity.

Those are wrong who maintain that the Old Testament is a mere loose library; that it has no consistency or aim. Whether the result was achieved by some supernal spiritual truth, or by a steady national tradition, or merely by an ingenious selection in after times, the books of the Old Testament have a quite perceptible unity. To attempt to understand the Old Testament without realizing this main idea is as absurd as it would be to study one of Shakespeare’s plays without realizing that the author of them had any philosophical object at all. It is as if a man were to read the history of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, thinking all the time that he was reading what really purported to be the history of an old Danish pirate prince. Such a reader would not realize at all that Hamlet’s procrastination was on the part of the poet intentional. He would merely say, “How long Shakespeare’s hero does take to kill his enemy.” So speak the Bible smashers, who are unfortunately always at bottom Bible worshippers. They do not understand the special tone and intention of the Old Testament; they do not understand its main idea, which is the idea of all men being merely the instruments of a higher power.

Those, for instance, who complain of the atrocities and treacheries of the judges and prophets of Israel have really got a notion in their head that has nothing to do with the subject. They are too Christian. They are reading back into the pre-Christian scriptures a purely Christian idea the idea of saints, the idea that the chief instruments of God are very particularly good men. This is a
deeper, a more daring, and a more interesting idea than the old Jewish one. It is
the idea that innocence has about it something terrible which in the long run
makes and re-makes empires and the world. But the Old Testament idea was
much more what may be called the common-sense idea, that strength is strength,
that cunning is cunning, that worldly success is worldly success, and that
Jehovah uses these things for His own ultimate purpose, just as He uses natural
forces or physical elements. He uses the strength of a hero as He uses that of a
Mammoth without any particular respect for the Mammoth. I cannot
comprehend how it is that so many simple-minded sceptics have read such
stories as the fraud of Jacob and supposed that the man who wrote it (whoever
he was) did not know that Jacob was a sneak just as well as we do. The primeval
human sense of honour does not change so much as that. But these simple-
minded sceptics are, like the majority of modern sceptics, Christians. They fancy
that the patriarchs must be meant for patterns; they fancy that Jacob was being
set up as some kind of saint; and in that case I do not wonder that they are a little
startled. That is not the atmosphere of the Old Testament at all. The heroes of the
Old Testament are not the sons of God, but the slaves of God, gigantic and
terrible slaves, like the genii, who were the slaves of Aladdin.

The central idea of the great part of the Old Testament may be called the idea
of the loneliness of God. God is not the only chief character of the Old
Testament; God is properly the only character in the Old Testament. Compared
with His clearness of purpose all the other wills are heavy and automatic, like
those of animals; compared with His actuality all the sons of flesh are shadows.
Again and again the note is struck, “With whom hath he taken counsel?” “I have
trodden the wine press alone, and of the peoples there was no man with me.” All
the patriarchs and prophets are merely His tools or weapons; for the Lord is a
man of war. He uses Joshua like an axe or Moses like a measuring-rod. For Him
Samson is only a sword and Isaiah a trumpet. The saints of Christianity are
supposed to be like God, to be, as it were, little statuettes of Him. The Old
Testament hero is no more supposed to be of the same nature as God than a saw
or a hammer is supposed to be of the same shape as the carpenter.

This is the main key and characteristic of the Hebrew scriptures as a whole.
There are, indeed, in those scriptures innumerable instances of the sort of rugged
humour, keen emotion, and powerful individuality which is never wanting in
great primitive prose and poetry. Nevertheless the main characteristic remains;
the sense not merely that God is stronger than man, not merely that God is more
secret than man, but that He means more, that He knows better what He is doing,
that compared with Him we have something of the vagueness, the unreason, and the vagrancy of the beasts that perish. “It is he that sitteth above the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers.” We might almost put it thus. The book is so intent upon asserting the personality of God that it almost asserts the impersonality of man. Unless this gigantic cosmic brain has conceived a thing, that thing is insecure and void; man has not enough tenacity to ensure its continuance. “Except the Lord build the house their labour is but lost that build it. Except the Lord keep the city the watchman watcheth but in vain.”

Everywhere else, then, the Old Testament positively rejoices in the obliteraton of man in comparison with the divine purpose. The Book of Job stands definitely alone because the Book of Job definitely asks, “But what is the purpose of God? Is it worth the sacrifice even of our miserable humanity? Of course it is easy enough to wipe out our own paltry wills for the sake of a will that is grander and kinder? But is it grander and kinder? Let God use His tools; let God break His tools. But what is He doing and what are they being broken for?” It is because of this question that we have to attack as a philosophical riddle the riddle of the Book of Job.

The present importance of the Book of Job cannot be expressed adequately even by saying that it is the most interesting of ancient books. We may almost say of the Book of Job that it is the most interesting of modern books. In truth, of course, neither of the two phrases covers the matter, because fundamental human religion and fundamental human irreligion are both at once old and new; philosophy is either eternal or it is not philosophy. The modern habit of saying, “This is my opinion, but I may be wrong,” is entirely irrational. If I say that it may be wrong I say that is not my opinion. The modern habit of saying “Every man has a different philosophy; this is my philosophy and its suits me”; the habit of saying this is mere weak-mindedness. A cosmic philosophy is not constructed to fit a man; a cosmic philosophy is constructed to fit a cosmos. A man can no more possess a private religion than he can possess a private sun and moon. The first of the intellectual beauties of the Book of Job is that it is all concerned with this desire to know the actuality; the desire to know what is, and not merely what seems. If moderns were writing the book we should probably find that Job and his comforters got on quite well together by the simple operation of referring their differences to what is called the temperament, saying that the comforters were by nature “optimists” and Job by nature a “pessimist.” And they would be quite comfortable, as people can often be, for some time at least, by agreeing to say what is obviously untrue. For if the word “pessimist” means anything at all,
then emphatically Job is not a pessimist. His case alone is sufficient to refute the modern absurdity of referring everything to physical temperament. Job does not in any sense look at life in a gloomy way. If wishing to be happy and being quite ready to be happy constitute an optimist, Job is an optimist. He is a perplexed optimist; he is an exasperated optimist; he is an outraged and insulted optimist. He wishes the universe to justify itself, not because he wishes it to be caught out, but because he really wishes it to be justified. He demands an explanation from God, but he does not do it at all in the spirit in which Hampden might demand an explanation from Charles I. He does it in the spirit in which a wife might demand an explanation from her husband whom she really respected. He remonstrates with his Maker because he is proud of his Maker. He even speaks of the Almighty as his enemy, but he never doubts, at the back of his mind, that his enemy has some kind of a case which he does not understand. In a fine and famous blasphemy he says, “Oh, that mine adversary had written a book!” It never really occurs to him that it could possibly be a bad book. He is anxious to be convinced, that is, he thinks that God could convince him. In short, we may say again that if the word optimist means anything (which I doubt) Job is an optimist. He shakes the pillars of the world and strikes insanely at the heavens; he lashes the stars, but it is not to silence them; it is to make them speak. In the same way we may speak of the official optimists, the Comforters of Job. Again, if the word pessimist means anything (which I doubt) the comforters of Job may be called pessimists rather than optimists. All that they really believe is not that God is good but that God is so strong that it is much more judicious to call Him good. It would be the exaggeration of censure to call them evolutionists; but they have something of the vital error of the evolutionary optimist. They will keep on saying that everything in the universe fits into everything else: as if there were anything comforting about a number of nasty things all fitting into each other. We shall see later how God in the great climax of the poem turns this particular argument altogether upside down.

When, at the end of the poem, God enters (somewhat abruptly), is struck the sudden and splendid note which makes the thing as great as it is. All the human beings through the story, and Job especially, have been asking questions of God. A more trivial poet would have made God enter in some sense or other in order to answer the questions. By a touch truly to be called inspired, when God enters, it is to ask a number more questions on His own account. In this drama of scepticism God Himself takes up the role of sceptic. He does what all the great voices defending religion have always done. He does, for instance, what
Socrates did. He turns rationalism against itself. He seems to say that if it comes to asking questions, He can ask some questions which will fling down and flatten out all conceivable human questioners. The poet by an exquisite intuition has made God ironically accept a kind of controversial equality with His accusers. He is willing to regard it as if it were a fair intellectual duel: “Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.” The everlasting adopts an enormous and sardonic humility. He is quite willing to be prosecuted. He only asks for the right which every prosecuted person possesses; He asks to be allowed to cross-examine the witness for the prosecution. And He carries yet further the correctness of the legal parallel. For the first question, essentially speaking, which He asks of Job is the question that any criminal accused by Job would be most entitled to ask. He asks Job who he is. And Job, being a man of candid intellect, takes a little time to consider, and comes to the conclusion that he does not know.

This is the first great fact to notice about the speech of God, which is the culmination of the inquiry. It represents all human sceptics routed by a higher scepticism. It is this method, used sometimes by supreme and sometimes by mediocre minds, that has ever since been the logical weapon of the true mystic. Socrates, as I have said, used it when he showed that if you only allowed him enough sophistry he could destroy all the sophists. Jesus Christ used it when He reminded the Sadducees, who could not imagine the nature of marriage in heaven, that if it came to that they had not really imagined the nature of marriage at all. In the break up of Christian theology in the eighteenth century, Butler used it, when he pointed out that rationalistic arguments could be used as much against vague religion as against doctrinal religion, as much against rationalist ethics as against Christian ethics. It is the root and reason of the fact that men who have religious faith have also philosophic doubt, like Cardinal Newman, Mr. Balfour, or Mr. Mallock. These are the small streams of the delta; the Book of Job is the first great cataract that creates the river. In dealing with the arrogant asserter of doubt, it is not the right method to tell him to stop doubting. It is rather the right method to tell him to go on doubting, to doubt a little more, to doubt every day newer and wilder things in the universe, until at last, by some strange enlightenment, he may begin to doubt himself. This, I say, is the first fact touching the speech; the fine inspiration by which God comes in at the end, not to answer riddles, but to propound them. The other great fact which, taken together with this one, makes the whole work religious instead of merely philosophical, is that other great surprise which makes Job suddenly satisfied
with the mere presentation of something impenetrable. Verbally speaking the enigmas of Jehovah seem darker and more desolate than the enigmas of Job; yet Job was comfortless before the speech of Jehovah and is comforted after it. He has been told nothing, but he feels the terrible and tingling atmosphere of something which is too good to be told. The refusal of God to explain His design is itself a burning hint of His design. The riddles of God are more satisfying than the solutions of man. Thirdly, of course, it is one of the splendid strokes that God rebukes alike the man who accused, and the men who defended Him; that He knocks down pessimists and optimists with the same hammer. And it is in connection with the mechanical and supercilious comforters of Job that there occurs the still deeper and finer inversion of which I have spoken. The mechanical optimist endeavours to justify the universe avowedly upon the ground that it is a rational and consecutive pattern. He points out that the fine thing about the world is that it can all be explained. That is the one point, if I may put it so, on which God in return, is explicit to the point of violence. God says, in effect, that if there is one fine thing about the world, as far as men are concerned, it is that it cannot be explained. He insists on the inexplicableness of everything; “Hath the rain a father? . . . Out of whose womb came the ice?” He goes farther, and insists on the positive and palpable unreason of things; “Hast thou sent the rain upon the desert where no man is, and upon the wilderness wherein there is no man?” God will make man see things, if it is only against the black background of nonentity. God will make Job see a startling universe if He can only do it by making Job see an idiotic universe. To startle man God becomes for an instant a blasphemer; one might almost say that God becomes for an instant an atheist. He unrolls before Job a long panorama of created things, the horse, the eagle, the raven, the wild ass, the peacock, the ostrich, the crocodile. He so describes each of them that it sounds like a monster walking in the sun. The whole is a sort of psalm or rhapsody of the sense of wonder. The maker of all things is astonished at the things He has Himself made. This we may call the third point. Job puts forward a note of interrogation; God answers with a note of exclamation. Instead of proving to Job that it is an explicable world, He insists that it is a much stranger world than Job ever thought it was. Lastly, the poet has achieved in this speech, with that unconscious artistic accuracy found in so many of the simpler epics, another and much more delicate thing. Without once relaxing the rigid impenetrability of Jehovah in His deliberate declaration, he has contrived to let fall here and therein the metaphors, in the parenthetical imagery, sudden and splendid suggestions that the secret of
God is a bright and not a sad one semi-accidental suggestions, like light seen for an instant through the cracks of a closed door. It would be difficult to praise too highly, in a purely poetical sense, the instinctive exactitude and ease with which these more optimistic insinuations are let fall in other connections, as if the Almighty Himself were scarcely aware that He was letting them out. For instance, there is that famous passage where Jehovah with devastating sarcasm, asks Job where he was when the foundations of the world were laid, and then (as if merely fixing a date) mentions the time when the sons of God shouted for joy. One cannot help feeling, even upon this meagre information, that they must have had something to shout about. Or again, when God is speaking of snow and hail in the mere catalogue of the physical cosmos, He speaks of them as a treasury that He has laid up against the day of battle—a hint of some huge Armageddon in which evil shall be at last overthrown.

Nothing could be better, artistically speaking, than this optimism breaking through agnosticism like fiery gold round the edges of a black cloud. Those who look superficially at the barbaric origin of the epic may think it fanciful to read so much artistic significance into its casual similes or accidental phrases. But no one who is well acquainted with great examples of semi-barbaric poetry, as in the Song of Roland or the old ballads, will fall into this mistake. No one who knows what primitive poetry is, can fail to realize that while its conscious form is simple some of its finer effects are subtle. The Iliad contrives to express the idea that Hector and Sarpedon have a certain tone or tint of sad and chivalrous resignation, not bitter enough to be called pessimism and not jovial enough to be called optimism; Homer could never have said this in elaborate words. But somehow he contrives to say it in simple words. The Song of Roland contrives to express the idea that Christianity imposes upon its heroes a paradox: a paradox of great humility in the matter of their sins combined with great ferocity in the matter of their ideas. Of course the Song of Roland could not say this; but it conveys this. In the same way the Book of Job must be credited with many subtle effects which were in the author’s soul without being, perhaps, in the author’s mind. And of these by far the most important remains even yet to be stated. I do not know, and I doubt whether even scholars know, if the Book of Job had a great effect or had any effect upon the after development of Jewish thought. But if it did have any effect it may have saved them from an enormous collapse and decay. Here in this Book the question is really asked whether God invariably punishes vice with terrestrial punishment and rewards virtue with terrestrial prosperity. If the Jews had answered that question wrongly they might
have lost all their after influence in human history. They might have sunk even down to the level of modern well educated society. For when once people have begun to believe that prosperity is the reward of virtue their next calamity is obvious. If prosperity is regarded as the reward of virtue it will be regarded as the symptom of virtue. Men will leave off the heavy task of making good men successful. They will adopt the easier task of making out successful men good. This, which has happened throughout modern commerce and journalism, is the ultimate Nemesis of the wicked optimism of the comforters of Job. If the Jews could be saved from it, the Book of Job saved them. The Book of Job is chiefly remarkable, as I have insisted throughout, for the fact that it does not end in a way that is conventionally satisfactory. Job is not told that his misfortunes were due to his sins or a part of any plan for his improvement.

But in the prologue we see Job tormented not because he was the worst of men, but because he was the best. It is the lesson of the whole work that man is most comforted by paradoxes. Here is the very darkest and strangest of the paradoxes; and it is by all human testimony the most reassuring. I need not suggest what a high and strange history awaited this paradox of the best man in the worst fortune. I need not say that in the freest and most philosophical sense there is one Old Testament figure who is truly a type; or say what is prefigured in the wounds of Job.
SOCIAL REFORM VERSUS BIRTH CONTROL

The real history of the world is full of the queerest cases of notions that have turned clean head-over-heels and completely contradicted themselves. The last example is an extraordinary notion that what is called Birth Control is a social reform that goes along with other social reforms favoured by progressive people.

It is rather like saying that cutting off King Charles’ head was one of the most elegant of the Cavalier fashions in hair-dressing. It is like saying that decapitation is an advance on dentistry. It may or may not be right to cut off the King’s head; it may or may not be right to cut off your own head when you have the toothache. But anybody ought to be able to see that if we once simplify things by head cutting we can do without hair-cutting; that it will be needless to practise dentistry on the dead or philanthropy on the unborn—or the unbegotten. So it is not a provision for our descendants to say that the destruction of our descendants will render it unnecessary to provide them with anything. It may be that it is only destruction in the sense of negation; and it may be that few of our descendants may be allowed to survive. But it is obvious that the negation is a piece of mere pessimism, opposing itself to the more optimistic notion that something can be done for the whole family of man. Nor is it surprising to anybody who can think, to discover that this is exactly what really happened.

The story began with Godwin, the friend of Shelley, and the founder of so many of the social hopes that are called revolutionary. Whatever we think of his theory in detail, he certainly filled the more generous youth of his time with that thirst for social justice and equality which is the inspiration of Socialism and other ideals. What is even more gratifying, he filled the wealthy old men of his time with pressing and enduring terror, and about three-quarters of the talk of Tories and Whigs of that time consists of sophistries and excuses invented to patch up a corrupt compromise of oligarchy against the appeal to fraternity and fundamental humanity made by men like Godwin and Shelley.

MALTHUS: AN ANSWER TO GODWIN

The old oligarchs would use any tool against the new democrats; and one day it was their dismal good luck to get hold of a tool called Malthus. Malthus wrote avowedly and admittedly an answer to Godwin. His whole dreary book was only intended to be an answer to Godwin. Whereas Godwin was trying to show that
humanity might be made happier and more humane, Malthus was trying to show that humanity could never by any possibility be made happier or more humane. The argument he used was this: that if the starving man were made tolerably free or fairly prosperous, he would marry and have a number of children, and there would not be food for all. The inference was, evidently, that he must be left to starve. The point about the increase of children he fortified by a fantastically mathematical formula about geometrical progression, which any living human being can dearly see is inapplicable to any living thing. Nothing depending on the human will can proceed by geometrical progression, and population certainly does not proceed by anything of the sort.

But the point is here, that Malthus meant his argument as an argument against all social reform. He never thought of using it as anything else, except an argument against all social reform. Nobody else ever thought in those more logical days of using it as anything but an argument against social reform. Malthus even used it as an argument against the ancient habit of human charity. He warned people against any generosity in the giving of alms. His theory was always thrown as cold water on any proposal to give the poor man property or a better status. Such is the noble story of the birth of Birth Control.

The only difference is this: that the old capitalists were more sincere and more scientific, while the modern capitalists are more hypocritical and more hazy. The rich man of 1850 used it in theory for the oppression of the poor. The rich man of 1927 will only use it in practice for the oppression of the poor. Being incapable of theory, being indeed incapable of thought, he can only deal in two things: what he calls practicality and what I call sentimentality. Not being so much of a man as Malthus, he cannot bear to be a pessimist, so he becomes a sentimentalist. He mixes up this old plain brutal idea (that the poor must be forbidden to breed) with a lot of slipshod and sickly social ideals and promises which are flatly incompatible with it. But he is after all a practical man, and he will be quite as brutal as his forbears when it comes to practice. And the practical upshot of the whole thing is plain enough. If he can prevent his servants from having families, he need not support those families Why the devil should he?

A SIMPLE TEST

If anybody doubts that this is the very simple motive, let him test it by the very simple statements made by the various Birth-Controllers like the Dean of St.
Paul’s. They never do say that we suffer from a too bountiful supply of bankers or that cosmopolitan financiers must not have such large families. They do not say that the fashionable throng at Ascot wants thinning, or that it is desirable to decimate the people dining at the Ritz or the Savoy. Though, Lord knows, if ever a thing human could look like a sub-human jungle, with tropical flowers and very poisonous weeds, it is the rich crowd that assembles in a modern Americanized hotel.

But the Birth-Controllers have not the smallest desire to control that jungle. It is much too dangerous a jungle to touch. It contains tigers. They never do talk about a danger from the comfortable classes, even from a more respectable section of the comfortable classes. The Gloomy Dean is not gloomy about there being too many Dukes; and naturally not about there being too many Deans. He is not primarily annoyed with a politician for having a whole population of poor relations, though places and public salaries have to be found for all the relations. Political Economy means that everybody except politicians must be economical.

The Birth-Controller does not bother about all these things, for the perfectly simple reason that it is not such people that he wants to control. What he wants to control is the populace, and he practically says so. He always insists that a workman has no right to have so many children, or that a slum is perilous because it is producing so many children. The question he dreads is “Why has not the workman a better wage? Why has not the slum family a better house?” His way of escaping from it is to suggest, not a larger house but a smaller family. The landlord or the employer says in his hearty and handsome fashion: “You really cannot expect me to deprive myself of my money. But I will make a sacrifice, I will deprive myself of your children.”

ONE OF A CLASS

Meanwhile, as the Malthusian attack on democratic hopes slowly stiffened and strengthened all the reactionary resistance to reform in this country, other forces were already in the field. I may remark in passing that Malthus, and his sophistry against all social reform, did not stand alone. It was one of a whole class of scientific excuses invented by the rich as reasons for denying justice to the poor, especially when the old superstitious glamour about kings and nobles had faded in the nineteenth century. One was talking about the Iron Laws of Political Economy, and pretending that somebody had proved somewhere, with figures on a slate, that injustice is incurable. Another was a mass of brutal nonsense about
Darwinism and a struggle for life, in which the devil must catch the hindmost. As a fact it was struggle for wealth, in which the devil generally catches the foremost. They all had the character of an attempt to twist the new tool of science to make it a weapon for the old tyranny of money.

But these forces, though powerful in a diseased industrial plutocracy. were not the only forces even in the nineteenth century. Towards the end of that century, especially on the Continent, there was another movement going on, notably among Christian Socialists and those called Catholic Democrats and others. There is no space to describe it here; its interest lies in being the exact reversal of the order of argument used by the Malthusian and the Birth-Controller. This movement was not content with the test of what is called a Living Wage. It insisted specially on what it preferred to call a Family Wage. In other words, it maintained that no wage is just or adequate unless it does envisage and cover the man, not only considered as an individual, but as the father of a normal and reasonably numerous family. This sort of movement is the true contrary of Birth Control and both will probably grow until they come into some tremendous controversial collision. It amuses me to reflect on that big coming battle, and to remember that the more my opponents practise Birth Control, the fewer there will be of them to fight us on that day.

THE CONFLICT

What I cannot get my opponents in this matter to see, in the strange mental confusion that covers the question, is the perfectly simple fact that these two claims, whatever else they are, are contrary claims. At the very beginning of the whole discussion stands the elementary fact that limiting families is a reason for lowering wages and not a reason for raising them. You may like the limitation for other reasons, as you may dislike it for other reasons. You may drag the discussion off to entirely different questions, such as, whether wives in normal homes are slaves. You may compromise out of consideration for the employer or for some other reason, and meet him half-way by taking half a loaf or having half a family. But the claims are in principle opposite. It is the whole truth in that theory of the class war about which the newspapers talk such nonsense. The full claim of the poor would be to have what they considered a full-sized family. If you cut this down to suit wages you make a concession to fit the capitalist conditions. The practical application I shall mention in a moment; I am talking now about the primary logical contradiction. If the two methods can be carried
out, they can be carried out so as to contradict and exclude each other. One has no need of the other; one can dispense with or destroy the other. If you can make the wage larger, there is no need to make the family smaller. If you can make the family small, there is no need to make the wage larger. Anyone may judge which the ruling capitalist will probably prefer to do. But if he does one, he need not do the other.

There is of course a great deal more to be said. I have dealt with only one feature of Birth Control—its exceedingly unpleasant origin. I said it was purely capitalist and reactionary; I venture to say I have proved it was entirely capitalist and reactionary. But there are many other aspects of this evil thing. It is unclean in the light of the instincts; it is unnatural in relation to the affections; it is part of a general attempt to run the populace on a routine of quack medicine and smelly science; it is mixed up with a muddled idea that women are free when they serve their employers but slaves when they help their husbands; it is ignorant of the very existence of real households where prudence comes by free-will and agreement. It has all those aspects, and many of them would be extraordinarily interesting to discuss. But in order not to occupy too much space, I will take as a text nothing more than the title.

A PIECE OF HUMBUG

The very name of “Birth Control” is a piece of pure humbug. It is one of those blatant euphemisms used in the headlines of the Trust Press. It is like “Tariff Reform.” It is like “Free Labour.” It is meant to mean nothing, that it may mean anything, and especially some thing totally different from what it says. Everybody believes in birth control, and nearly everybody has exercised some control over the conditions of birth. People do not get married as somnambulists or have children in their sleep. But throughout numberless ages and nations, the normal and real birth control is called self control. If anybody says it cannot is possibly work, I say it does. In many classes, in many countries where these quack nostrums are unknown, populations of free men have remained within reasonable limits by sound traditions of thrift and responsibility. In so far as there is a local evil of excess, it comes with all other evils from the squalor and despair of our decaying industrialism. But the thing the capitalist newspapers call birth control is not control at all. It is the idea that people should be, in one respect, completely and utterly uncontrolled, so long as they can evade everything in the function that is positive and creative, and intelligent and
worthy of a free man. It is a name given to a succession of different expedients, (the one that was used last is always described as having been dreadfully dangerous) by which it is possible to filch the pleasure belonging to a natural process while violently and unnaturally thwarting the process itself.

The nearest and most respectable parallel would be that of the Roman epicure, who took emetics at intervals all day so that he might eat five or six luxurious dinners daily. Now any man’s common sense, unclouded by newspaper science and long words, will tell him at once that an operation like that of the epicures is likely in the long run even to be bad for his digestion and pretty certain to be bad for his character. Men left to themselves gave sense enough to know when a habit obviously savours of perversion and peril. And if it were the fashion in fashionable circles to call the Roman expedient by the name of “Diet Control,” and to talk about it in a lofty fashion as merely “the improvement of life and the service of life” (as if it meant no more than the mastery of man over his meals), we should take the liberty of calling it cant and saying that it had no relation to the reality in debate.

THE MISTAKE

The fact is, I think, that I am in revolt against the conditions of industrial capitalism and the advocates of Birth Control are in revolt against the conditions of human life. What their spokesmen can possibly mean by saying that I wage a “class war against mothers” must remain a matter of speculation. If they mean that I do the unpardonable wrong to mothers of thinking they will wish to continue to be mothers, even in a society of greater economic justice and civic equality, then I think they are perfectly right. I doubt whether mothers could escape from motherhood into Socialism. But the advocates of Birth Control seem to want some of them to escape from it into capitalism. They seem to express a sympathy with those who prefer “the right to earn outside the home” or (in other words) the right to be a wage-slave and work under the orders of a total stranger because he happens to be a richer man. By what conceivable contortions of twisted thought this ever came to be considered a freer condition than that of companionship with the man she has herself freely accepted, I never could for the life of me make out. The only sense I can make of it is that the proletarian work, though obviously more senile and subordinate than the parental, is so far safer and more irresponsible because it is not parental. I can easily believe that there are some people who do prefer working in a factory to working in a family;
for there are always some people who prefer slavery to freedom, and who especially prefer being governed to governing someone else. But I think their quarrel with motherhood is not like mine, a quarrel with inhuman conditions, but simply a quarrel with life. Given an attempt to escape from the nature of things, and I can well believe that it might lead at last to something like “the nursery school for our children staffed by other mothers and single women of expert training.”

I will add nothing to that ghastly picture, beyond speculating pleasantly about the world in which women cannot manage their own children but can manage each other’s. But I think it indicates an abyss between natural and unnatural arrangements which would have to be bridged before we approached what is supposed to be the subject of discussion.
THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN

G. K. CHESTERTON
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**INDEX**

**THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN**

- TABLE OF CONTENTS
- THE BLUE CROSS
- THE SECRET GARDEN
- THE QUEER FEET
- THE FLYING STARS
- THE INVISIBLE MAN
- THE HONOUR OF ISRAEL GOW
- THE WRONG SHAPE
- THE SINS OF PRINCE SARADINE
- THE HAMMER OF GOD
- THE EYE OF APOLLO
- THE SIGN OF THE BROKEN SWORD
- THE THREE TOOLS OF DEATH
Between the silver ribbon of morning and the green glittering ribbon of sea, the boat touched Harwich and let loose a swarm of folk like flies, among whom the man we must follow was by no means conspicuous—nor wished to be. There was nothing notable about him, except a slight contrast between the holiday gaiety of his clothes and the official gravity of his face. His clothes included a slight, pale grey jacket, a white waistcoat, and a silver straw hat with a grey-blue ribbon. His lean face was dark by contrast, and ended in a curt black beard that looked Spanish and suggested an Elizabethan ruff. He was smoking a cigarette with the seriousness of an idler. There was nothing about him to indicate the fact that the grey jacket covered a loaded revolver, that the white waistcoat covered a police card, or that the straw hat covered one of the most powerful intellects in Europe. For this was Valentin himself, the head of the Paris police and the most famous investigator of the world; and he was coming from Brussels to London to make the greatest arrest of the century.

Flambeau was in England. The police of three countries had tracked the great criminal at last from Ghent to Brussels, from Brussels to the Hook of Holland; and it was conjectured that he would take some advantage of the unfamiliarity and confusion of the Eucharistic Congress, then taking place in London. Probably he would travel as some minor clerk or secretary connected with it; but, of course, Valentin could not be certain; nobody could be certain about Flambeau.

It is many years now since this colossus of crime suddenly ceased keeping the world in a turmoil; and when he ceased, as they said after the death of Roland, there was a great quiet upon the earth. But in his best days (I mean, of course, his worst) Flambeau was a figure as statuesque and international as the Kaiser. Almost every morning the daily paper announced that he had escaped the consequences of one extraordinary crime by committing another. He was a Gascon of gigantic stature and bodily daring; and the wildest tales were told of his outbursts of athletic humour; how he turned the juge d’instruction upside down and stood him on his head, “to clear his mind”; how he ran down the Rue de Rivoli with a policeman under each arm. It is due to him to say that his fantastic physical strength was generally employed in such bloodless though undignified scenes; his real crimes were chiefly those of ingenious and wholesale robbery. But each of his thefts was almost a new sin, and would make
a story by itself. It was he who ran the great Tyrolean Dairy Company in London, with no dairies, no cows, no carts, no milk, but with some thousand subscribers. These he served by the simple operation of moving the little milk cans outside people’s doors to the doors of his own customers. It was he who had kept up an unaccountable and close correspondence with a young lady whose whole letter-bag was intercepted, by the extraordinary trick of photographing his messages infinitesimally small upon the slides of a microscope. A sweeping simplicity, however, marked many of his experiments. It is said that he once repainted all the numbers in a street in the dead of night merely to divert one traveller into a trap. It is quite certain that he invented a portable pillar-box, which he put up at corners in quiet suburbs on the chance of strangers dropping postal orders into it. Lastly, he was known to be a startling acrobat; despite his huge figure, he could leap like a grasshopper and melt into the tree-tops like a monkey. Hence the great Valentin, when he set out to find Flambeau, was perfectly aware that his adventures would not end when he had found him.

But how was he to find him? On this the great Valentin’s ideas were still in process of settlement.

There was one thing which Flambeau, with all his dexterity of disguise, could not cover, and that was his singular height. If Valentin’s quick eye had caught a tall apple-woman, a tall grenadier, or even a tolerably tall duchess, he might have arrested them on the spot. But all along his train there was nobody that could be a disguised Flambeau, any more than a cat could be a disguised giraffe. About the people on the boat he had already satisfied himself; and the people picked up at Harwich or on the journey limited themselves with certainty to six. There was a short railway official travelling up to the terminus, three fairly short market gardeners picked up two stations afterwards, one very short widow lady going up from a small Essex town, and a very short Roman Catholic priest going up from a small Essex village. When it came to the last case, Valentin gave it up and almost laughed. The little priest was so much the essence of those Eastern flats; he had a face as round and dull as a Norfolk dumpling; he had eyes as empty as the North Sea; he had several brown paper parcels, which he was quite incapable of collecting. The Eucharistic Congress had doubtless sucked out of their local stagnation many such creatures, blind and helpless, like moles disinterred. Valentin was a sceptic in the severe style of France, and could have no love for priests. But he could have pity for them, and this one might have provoked pity in anybody. He had a large, shabby umbrella, which constantly
fell on the floor. He did not seem to know which was the right end of his return ticket. He explained with a moon-calf simplicity to everybody in the carriage that he had to be careful, because he had something made of real silver “with blue stones” in one of his brown-paper parcels. His quaint blending of Essex flatness with saintly simplicity continuously amused the Frenchman till the priest arrived (somehow) at Tottenham with all his parcels, and came back for his umbrella. When he did the last, Valentin even had the good nature to warn him not to take care of the silver by telling everybody about it. But to whomever he talked, Valentin kept his eye open for someone else; he looked out steadily for anyone, rich or poor, male or female, who was well up to six feet; for Flambeau was four inches above it.

He alighted at Liverpool Street, however, quite conscientiously secure that he had not missed the criminal so far. He then went to Scotland Yard to regularise his position and arrange for help in case of need; he then lit another cigarette and went for a long stroll in the streets of London. As he was walking in the streets and squares beyond Victoria, he paused suddenly and stood. It was a quaint, quiet square, very typical of London, full of an accidental stillness. The tall, flat houses round looked at once prosperous and uninhabited; the square of shrubbery in the centre looked as deserted as a green Pacific islet. One of the four sides was much higher than the rest, like a dais; and the line of this side was broken by one of London’s admirable accidents—a restaurant that looked as if it had strayed from Soho. It was an unreasonably attractive object, with dwarf plants in pots and long, striped blinds of lemon yellow and white. It stood specially high above the street, and in the usual patchwork way of London, a flight of steps from the street ran up to meet the front door almost as a fire-escape might run up to a first-floor window. Valentin stood and smoked in front of the yellow-white blinds and considered them long.

The most incredible thing about miracles is that they happen. A few clouds in heaven do come together into the staring shape of one human eye. A tree does stand up in the landscape of a doubtful journey in the exact and elaborate shape of a note of interrogation. I have seen both these things myself within the last few days. Nelson does die in the instant of victory; and a man named Williams does quite accidentally murder a man named Williamson; it sounds like a sort of infanticide. In short, there is in life an element of elfin coincidence which people reckoning on the prosaic may perpetually miss. As it has been well expressed in the paradox of Poe, wisdom should reckon on the unforeseen.

Aristide Valentin was unfathomably French; and the French intelligence is
intelligence specially and solely. He was not “a thinking machine”; for that is a brainless phrase of modern fatalism and materialism. A machine only is a machine because it cannot think. But he was a thinking man, and a plain man at the same time. All his wonderful successes, that looked like conjuring, had been gained by plodding logic, by clear and commonplace French thought. The French electrify the world not by starting any paradox, they electrify it by carrying out a truism. They carry a truism so far—as in the French Revolution. But exactly because Valentin understood reason, he understood the limits of reason. Only a man who knows nothing of motors talks of motoring without petrol; only a man who knows nothing of reason talks of reasoning without strong, undisputed first principles. Here he had no strong first principles.

Flambeau had been missed at Harwich; and if he was in London at all, he might be anything from a tall tramp on Wimbledon Common to a tall toast-master at the Hotel Metropole. In such a naked state of nescience, Valentin had a view and a method of his own.

In such cases he reckoned on the unforeseen. In such cases, when he could not follow the train of the reasonable, he coldly and carefully followed the train of the unreasonable. Instead of going to the right places—banks, police stations, rendezvous—he systematically went to the wrong places; knocked at every empty house, turned down every cul de sac, went up every lane blocked with rubbish, went round every crescent that led him uselessly out of the way. He defended this crazy course quite logically. He said that if one had a clue this was the worst way; but if one had no clue at all it was the best, because there was just the chance that any oddity that caught the eye of the pursuer might be the same that had caught the eye of the pursued. Somewhere a man must begin, and it had better be just where another man might stop. Something about that flight of steps up to the shop, something about the quietude and quaintness of the restaurant, roused all the detective’s rare romantic fancy and made him resolve to strike at random. He went up the steps, and sitting down at a table by the window, asked for a cup of black coffee.

It was half-way through the morning, and he had not breakfasted; the slight litter of other breakfasts stood about on the table to remind him of his hunger; and adding a poached egg to his order, he proceeded musingly to shake some white sugar into his coffee, thinking all the time about Flambeau. He remembered how Flambeau had escaped, once by a pair of nail scissors, and once by a house on fire; once by having to pay for an unstamped letter, and once by getting people to look through a telescope at a comet that might destroy the
world. He thought his detective brain as good as the criminal’s, which was true. But he fully realised the disadvantage. “The criminal is the creative artist; the detective only the critic,” he said with a sour smile, and lifted his coffee cup to his lips slowly, and put it down very quickly. He had put salt in it.

He looked at the vessel from which the silvery powder had come; it was certainly a sugar-basin; as unmistakably meant for sugar as a champagne-bottle for champagne. He wondered why they should keep salt in it. He looked to see if there were any more orthodox vessels. Yes; there were two salt-cellars quite full. Perhaps there was some speciality in the condiment in the salt-cellars. He tasted it; it was sugar. Then he looked round at the restaurant with a refreshed air of interest, to see if there were any other traces of that singular artistic taste which puts the sugar in the salt-cellars and the salt in the sugar-basin. Except for an odd splash of some dark fluid on one of the white-papered walls, the whole place appeared neat, cheerful and ordinary. He rang the bell for the waiter.

When that official hurried up, fuzzy-haired and somewhat bleary-eyed at that early hour, the detective (who was not without an appreciation of the simpler forms of humour) asked him to taste the sugar and see if it was up to the high reputation of the hotel. The result was that the waiter yawned suddenly and woke up.

“Do you play this delicate joke on your customers every morning?” inquired Valentin. “Does changing the salt and sugar never pall on you as a jest?”

The waiter, when this irony grew clearer, stammeringly assured him that the establishment had certainly no such intention; it must be a most curious mistake. He picked up the sugar-basin and looked at it; he picked up the salt-cellar and looked at that, his face growing more and more bewildered. At last he abruptly excused himself, and hurrying away, returned in a few seconds with the proprietor. The proprietor also examined the sugar-basin and then the salt-cellar; the proprietor also looked bewildered.

Suddenly the waiter seemed to grow inarticulate with a rush of words. “I zink,” he stuttered eagerly, “I zink it is those two clergymen.”

“What two clergymen?”

“The two clergymen,” said the waiter, “that threw soup at the wall.”

“Threw soup at the wall?” repeated Valentin, feeling sure this must be some singular Italian metaphor.

“Yes, yes,” said the attendant excitedly, and pointed at the dark splash on the white paper; “threw it over there on the wall.”

Valentin looked his query at the proprietor, who came to his rescue with fuller
“Yes, sir,” he said, “it’s quite true, though I don’t suppose it has anything to do with the sugar and salt. Two clergymen came in and drank soup here very early, as soon as the shutters were taken down. They were both very quiet, respectable people; one of them paid the bill and went out; the other, who seemed a slower coach altogether, was some minutes longer getting his things together. But he went at last. Only, the instant before he stepped into the street he deliberately picked up his cup, which he had only half emptied, and threw the soup slap on the wall. I was in the back room myself, and so was the waiter; so I could only rush out in time to find the wall splashed and the shop empty. It don’t do any particular damage, but it was confounded cheek; and I tried to catch the men in the street. They were too far off though; I only noticed they went round the next corner into Carstairs Street.”

The detective was on his feet, hat settled and stick in hand. He had already decided that in the universal darkness of his mind he could only follow the first odd finger that pointed; and this finger was odd enough. Paying his bill and clashing the glass doors behind him, he was soon swinging round into the other street.

It was fortunate that even in such fevered moments his eye was cool and quick. Something in a shop-front went by him like a mere flash; yet he went back to look at it. The shop was a popular greengrocer and fruiterer’s, an array of goods set out in the open air and plainly ticketed with their names and prices. In the two most prominent compartments were two heaps, of oranges and of nuts respectively. On the heap of nuts lay a scrap of cardboard, on which was written in bold, blue chalk, “Best tangerine oranges, two a penny.” On the oranges was the equally clear and exact description, “Finest Brazil nuts, 4d. a lb.” M. Valentin looked at these two placards and fancied he had met this highly subtle form of humour before, and that somewhat recently. He drew the attention of the red-faced fruiterer, who was looking rather sullenly up and down the street, to this inaccuracy in his advertisements. The fruiterer said nothing, but sharply put each card into its proper place. The detective, leaning elegantly on his walking-cane, continued to scrutinise the shop. At last he said, “Pray excuse my apparent irrelevance, my good sir, but I should like to ask you a question in experimental psychology and the association of ideas.”

The red-faced shopman regarded him with an eye of menace; but he continued gaily, swinging his cane, “Why,” he pursued, “why are two tickets wrongly placed in a greengrocer’s shop like a shovel hat that has come to London for a
holiday? Or, in case I do not make myself clear, what is the mystical association which connects the idea of nuts marked as oranges with the idea of two clergymen, one tall and the other short?"

The eyes of the tradesman stood out of his head like a snail’s; he really seemed for an instant likely to fling himself upon the stranger. At last he stammered angrily: “I don’t know what you ‘ave to do with it, but if you’re one of their friends, you can tell ’em from me that I’ll knock their silly ‘eads off, parsons or no parsons, if they upset my apples again.”

“Indeed?” asked the detective, with great sympathy. “Did they upset your apples?”

“One of ’em did,” said the heated shopman; “rolled ’em all over the street. I’d ‘ave caught the fool but for havin’ to pick ’em up.”

“Which way did these parsons go?” asked Valentin.

“Up that second road on the left-hand side, and then across the square,” said the other promptly.

“Thanks,” replied Valentin, and vanished like a fairy. On the other side of the second square he found a policeman, and said: “This is urgent, constable; have you seen two clergymen in shovel hats?”

The policeman began to chuckle heavily. “I ‘ave, sir; and if you arst me, one of ’em was drunk. He stood in the middle of the road that bewildered that—”

“Which way did they go?” snapped Valentin.

“They took one of them yellow buses over there,” answered the man; “them that go to Hampstead.”

Valentin produced his official card and said very rapidly: “Call up two of your men to come with me in pursuit,” and crossed the road with such contagious energy that the ponderous policeman was moved to almost agile obedience. In a minute and a half the French detective was joined on the opposite pavement by an inspector and a man in plain clothes.

“Well, sir,” began the former, with smiling importance, “and what may—?”

Valentin pointed suddenly with his cane. “I’ll tell you on the top of that omnibus,” he said, and was darting and dodging across the tangle of the traffic. When all three sank panting on the top seats of the yellow vehicle, the inspector said: “We could go four times as quick in a taxi.”

“Quite true,” replied their leader placidly, “if we only had an idea of where we were going.”

“Well, where are you going?” asked the other, staring.

Valentin smoked frowningly for a few seconds; then, removing his cigarette,
he said: “If you know what a man’s doing, get in front of him; but if you want to
guess what he’s doing, keep behind him. Stray when he strays; stop when he
stops; travel as slowly as he. Then you may see what he saw and may act as he
acted. All we can do is to keep our eyes skinned for a queer thing.”

“What sort of queer thing do you mean?” asked the inspector.

“Any sort of queer thing,” answered Valentin, and relapsed into obstinate
silence.

The yellow omnibus crawled up the northern roads for what seemed like hours
on end; the great detective would not explain further, and perhaps his assistants
felt a silent and growing doubt of his errand. Perhaps, also, they felt a silent and
growing desire for lunch, for the hours crept long past the normal luncheon hour,
and the long roads of the North London suburbs seemed to shoot out into length
after length like an infernal telescope. It was one of those journeys on which a
man perpetually feels that now at last he must have come to the end of the
universe, and then finds he has only come to the beginning of Tufnell Park.
London died away in draggled taverns and dreary scrubs, and then was
unaccountably born again in blazing high streets and blatant hotels. It was like
passing through thirteen separate vulgar cities all just touching each other. But
though the winter twilight was already threatening the road ahead of them, the
Parisian detective still sat silent and watchful, eyeing the frontage of the streets
that slid by on either side. By the time they had left Camden Town behind, the
policemen were nearly asleep; at least, they gave something like a jump as
Valentin leapt erect, struck a hand on each man’s shoulder, and shouted to the
driver to stop.

They tumbled down the steps into the road without realising why they had
been dislodged; when they looked round for enlightenment they found Valentin
triumphantly pointing his finger towards a window on the left side of the road. It
was a large window, forming part of the long facade of a gilt and palatial public-
house; it was the part reserved for respectable dining, and labelled “Restaurant.”
This window, like all the rest along the frontage of the hotel, was of frosted and
figured glass; but in the middle of it was a big, black smash, like a star in the ice.

“Our cue at last,” cried Valentin, waving his stick; “the place with the broken
window.”

there that this has anything to do with them?”

Valentin almost broke his bamboo stick with rage.

“Proof!” he cried. “Good God! the man is looking for proof! Why, of course,
the chances are twenty to one that it has nothing to do with them. But what else can we do? Don’t you see we must either follow one wild possibility or else go home to bed?” He banged his way into the restaurant, followed by his companions, and they were soon seated at a late luncheon at a little table, and looked at the star of smashed glass from the inside. Not that it was very informative to them even then.

“Got your window broken, I see,” said Valentin to the waiter as he paid the bill.

“Yes, sir,” answered the attendant, bending busily over the change, to which Valentin silently added an enormous tip. The waiter straightened himself with mild but unmistakable animation.

“Ah, yes, sir,” he said. “Very odd thing, that, sir.”

“Indeed?” Tell us about it,” said the detective with careless curiosity.

“Well, two gents in black came in,” said the waiter; “two of those foreign parsons that are running about. They had a cheap and quiet little lunch, and one of them paid for it and went out. The other was just going out to join him when I looked at my change again and found he’d paid me more than three times too much. ‘Here,’ I says to the chap who was nearly out of the door, ‘you’ve paid too much.’ ‘Oh,’ he says, very cool, ‘have we?’ ‘Yes,’ I says, and picks up the bill to show him. Well, that was a knock-out.”

“What do you mean?” asked his interlocutor.

“Well, I’d have sworn on seven Bibles that I’d put 4s. on that bill. But now I saw I’d put 14s., as plain as paint.”

“Well?” cried Valentin, moving slowly, but with burning eyes, “and then?”

“The parson at the door he says all serene, ‘Sorry to confuse your accounts, but it’ll pay for the window.’ ‘What window?’ I says. ‘The one I’m going to break,’ he says, and smashed that blessed pane with his umbrella.”

All three inquirers made an exclamation; and the inspector said under his breath, “Are we after escaped lunatics?” The waiter went on with some relish for the ridiculous story:

“I was so knocked silly for a second, I couldn’t do anything. The man marched out of the place and joined his friend just round the corner. Then they went so quick up Bullock Street that I couldn’t catch them, though I ran round the bars to do it.”

“Bullock Street,” said the detective, and shot up that thoroughfare as quickly as the strange couple he pursued.

Their journey now took them through bare brick ways like tunnels; streets
with few lights and even with few windows; streets that seemed built out of the blank backs of everything and everywhere. Dusk was deepening, and it was not easy even for the London policemen to guess in what exact direction they were treading. The inspector, however, was pretty certain that they would eventually strike some part of Hampstead Heath. Abruptly one bulging gas-lit window broke the blue twilight like a bull’s-eye lantern; and Valentin stopped an instant before a little garish sweetstuff shop. After an instant’s hesitation he went in; he stood amid the gaudy colours of the confectionery with entire gravity and bought thirteen chocolate cigars with a certain care. He was clearly preparing an opening; but he did not need one.

An angular, elderly young woman in the shop had regarded his elegant appearance with a merely automatic inquiry; but when she saw the door behind him blocked with the blue uniform of the inspector, her eyes seemed to wake up.

“Oh,” she said, “if you’ve come about that parcel, I’ve sent it off already.”

“Parcel?” repeated Valentin; and it was his turn to look inquiring.

“I mean the parcel the gentleman left—the clergyman gentleman.”

“For goodness’ sake,” said Valentin, leaning forward with his first real confession of eagerness, “for Heaven’s sake tell us what happened exactly.”

“Well,” said the woman a little doubtfully, “the clergymen came in about half an hour ago and bought some peppermints and talked a bit, and then went off towards the Heath. But a second after, one of them runs back into the shop and says, ‘Have I left a parcel!’ Well, I looked everywhere and couldn’t see one; so he says, ‘Never mind; but if it should turn up, please post it to this address,’ and he left me the address and a shilling for my trouble. And sure enough, though I thought I’d looked everywhere, I found he’d left a brown paper parcel, so I posted it to the place he said. I can’t remember the address now; it was somewhere in Westminster. But as the thing seemed so important, I thought perhaps the police had come about it.”

“So they have,” said Valentin shortly. “Is Hampstead Heath near here?”

“Straight on for fifteen minutes,” said the woman, “and you’ll come right out on the open.” Valentin sprang out of the shop and began to run. The other detectives followed him at a reluctant trot.

The street they threaded was so narrow and shut in by shadows that when they came out unexpectedly into the void common and vast sky they were startled to find the evening still so light and clear. A perfect dome of peacock-green sank into gold amid the blackening trees and the dark violet distances. The glowing green tint was just deep enough to pick out in points of crystal one or two stars.
All that was left of the daylight lay in a golden glitter across the edge of Hampstead and that popular hollow which is called the Vale of Health. The holiday makers who roam this region had not wholly dispersed; a few couples sat shapelessly on benches; and here and there a distant girl still shrieked in one of the swings. The glory of heaven deepened and darkened around the sublime vulgarity of man; and standing on the slope and looking across the valley, Valentin beheld the thing which he sought.

Among the black and breaking groups in that distance was one especially black which did not break—a group of two figures clerically clad. Though they seemed as small as insects, Valentin could see that one of them was much smaller than the other. Though the other had a student’s stoop and an inconspicuous manner, he could see that the man was well over six feet high. He shut his teeth and went forward, whirling his stick impatiently. By the time he had substantially diminished the distance and magnified the two black figures as in a vast microscope, he had perceived something else; something which startled him, and yet which he had somehow expected. Whoever was the tall priest, there could be no doubt about the identity of the short one. It was his friend of the Harwich train, the stumpy little cure of Essex whom he had warned about his brown paper parcels.

Now, so far as this went, everything fitted in finally and rationally enough. Valentin had learned by his inquiries that morning that a Father Brown from Essex was bringing up a silver cross with sapphires, a relic of considerable value, to show some of the foreign priests at the congress. This undoubtedly was the “silver with blue stones”; and Father Brown undoubtedly was the little greenhorn in the train. Now there was nothing wonderful about the fact that what Valentin had found out Flambeau had also found out; Flambeau found out everything. Also there was nothing wonderful in the fact that when Flambeau heard of a sapphire cross he should try to steal it; that was the most natural thing in all natural history. And most certainly there was nothing wonderful about the fact that Flambeau should have it all his own way with such a silly sheep as the man with the umbrella and the parcels. He was the sort of man whom anybody could lead on a string to the North Pole; it was not surprising that an actor like Flambeau, dressed as another priest, could lead him to Hampstead Heath. So far the crime seemed clear enough; and while the detective pitied the priest for his helplessness, he almost despised Flambeau for condescending to so gullible a victim. But when Valentin thought of all that had happened in between, of all that had led him to his triumph, he racked his brains for the smallest rhyme or
reason in it. What had the stealing of a blue-and-silver cross from a priest from Essex to do with chucking soup at wall paper? What had it to do with calling nuts oranges, or with paying for windows first and breaking them afterwards? He had come to the end of his chase; yet somehow he had missed the middle of it. When he failed (which was seldom), he had usually grasped the clue, but nevertheless missed the criminal. Here he had grasped the criminal, but still he could not grasp the clue.

The two figures that they followed were crawling like black flies across the huge green contour of a hill. They were evidently sunk in conversation, and perhaps did not notice where they were going; but they were certainly going to the wilder and more silent heights of the Heath. As their pursuers gained on them, the latter had to use the undignified attitudes of the deer-stalker, to crouch behind clumps of trees and even to crawl prostrate in deep grass. By these ungainly ingenitures the hunters even came close enough to the quarry to hear the murmur of the discussion, but no word could be distinguished except the word “reason” recurring frequently in a high and almost childish voice. Once over an abrupt dip of land and a dense tangle of thickets, the detectives actually lost the two figures they were following. They did not find the trail again for an agonising ten minutes, and then it led round the brow of a great dome of hill overlooking an amphitheatre of rich and desolate sunset scenery. Under a tree in this commanding yet neglected spot was an old ramshackle wooden seat. On this seat sat the two priests still in serious speech together. The gorgeous green and gold still clung to the darkening horizon; but the dome above was turning slowly from peacock-green to peacock-blue, and the stars detached themselves more and more like solid jewels. Mutely motioning to his followers, Valentin contrived to creep up behind the big branching tree, and, standing there in deathly silence, heard the words of the strange priests for the first time.

After he had listened for a minute and a half, he was gripped by a devilish doubt. Perhaps he had dragged the two English policemen to the wastes of a nocturnal heath on an errand no saner than seeking figs on its thistles. For the two priests were talking exactly like priests, piously, with learning and leisure, about the most aerial enigmas of theology. The little Essex priest spoke the more simply, with his round face turned to the strengthening stars; the other talked with his head bowed, as if he were not even worthy to look at them. But no more innocently clerical conversation could have been heard in any white Italian cloister or black Spanish cathedral.

The first he heard was the tail of one of Father Brown’s sentences, which
ended: “. . . what they really meant in the Middle Ages by the heavens being incorruptible.”

The taller priest nodded his bowed head and said:

“Ah, yes, these modern infidels appeal to their reason; but who can look at those millions of worlds and not feel that there may well be wonderful universes above us where reason is utterly unreasonable?”

“No,” said the other priest; “reason is always reasonable, even in the last limbo, in the lost borderland of things. I know that people charge the Church with lowering reason, but it is just the other way. Alone on earth, the Church makes reason really supreme. Alone on earth, the Church affirms that God himself is bound by reason.”

The other priest raised his austere face to the spangled sky and said:

“Yet who knows if in that infinite universe—?”

“Only infinite physically,” said the little priest, turning sharply in his seat, “not infinite in the sense of escaping from the laws of truth.”

Valentin behind his tree was tearing his fingernails with silent fury. He seemed almost to hear the sniggers of the English detectives whom he had brought so far on a fantastic guess only to listen to the metaphysical gossip of two mild old parsons. In his impatience he lost the equally elaborate answer of the tall cleric, and when he listened again it was again Father Brown who was speaking:

“Reason and justice grip the remotest and the loneliest star. Look at those stars. Don’t they look as if they were single diamonds and sapphires? Well, you can imagine any mad botany or geology you please. Think of forests of adamant with leaves of brilliants. Think the moon is a blue moon, a single elephantine sapphire. But don’t fancy that all that frantic astronomy would make the smallest difference to the reason and justice of conduct. On plains of opal, under cliffs cut out of pearl, you would still find a notice-board, ‘Thou shalt not steal.’”

Valentin was just in the act of rising from his rigid and crouching attitude and creeping away as softly as might be, felled by the one great folly of his life. But something in the very silence of the tall priest made him stop until the latter spoke. When at last he did speak, he said simply, his head bowed and his hands on his knees:

“Well, I think that other worlds may perhaps rise higher than our reason. The mystery of heaven is unfathomable, and I for one can only bow my head.”

Then, with brow yet bent and without changing by the faintest shade his attitude or voice, he added:
“Just hand over that sapphire cross of yours, will you? We’re all alone here, and I could pull you to pieces like a straw doll.”

The utterly unaltered voice and attitude added a strange violence to that shocking change of speech. But the guarder of the relic only seemed to turn his head by the smallest section of the compass. He seemed still to have a somewhat foolish face turned to the stars. Perhaps he had not understood. Or, perhaps, he had understood and sat rigid with terror.

“Yes,” said the tall priest, in the same low voice and in the same still posture, “yes, I am Flambeau.”

Then, after a pause, he said:

“Come, will you give me that cross?”

“No,” said the other, and the monosyllable had an odd sound.

Flambeau suddenly flung off all his pontifical pretensions. The great robber leaned back in his seat and laughed low but long.

“No,” he cried, “you won’t give it me, you proud prelate. You won’t give it me, you little celibate simpleton. Shall I tell you why you won’t give it me? Because I’ve got it already in my own breast-pocket.”

The small man from Essex turned what seemed to be a dazed face in the dusk, and said, with the timid eagerness of “The Private Secretary”:

“Are—are you sure?”

Flambeau yelled with delight.

“Really, you’re as good as a three-act farce,” he cried. “Yes, you turnip, I am quite sure. I had the sense to make a duplicate of the right parcel, and now, my friend, you’ve got the duplicate and I’ve got the jewels. An old dodge, Father Brown—a very old dodge.”

“Yes,” said Father Brown, and passed his hand through his hair with the same strange vagueness of manner. “Yes, I’ve heard of it before.”

The colossus of crime leaned over to the little rustic priest with a sort of sudden interest.

“You have heard of it?” he asked. “Where have you heard of it?”

“Well, I mustn’t tell you his name, of course,” said the little man simply. “He was a penitent, you know. He had lived prosperously for about twenty years entirely on duplicate brown paper parcels. And so, you see, when I began to suspect you, I thought of this poor chap’s way of doing it at once.”

“Began to suspect me?” repeated the outlaw with increased intensity. “Did you really have the gumption to suspect me just because I brought you up to this bare part of the heath?”
“No, no,” said Brown with an air of apology. “You see, I suspected you when we first met. It’s that little bulge up the sleeve where you people have the spiked bracelet.”

“How in Tartarus,” cried Flambeau, “did you ever hear of the spiked bracelet?”

“Oh, one’s little flock, you know!” said Father Brown, arching his eyebrows rather blankly. “When I was a curate in Hartlepool, there were three of them with spiked bracelets. So, as I suspected you from the first, don’t you see, I made sure that the cross should go safe, anyhow. I’m afraid I watched you, you know. So at last I saw you change the parcels. Then, don’t you see, I changed them back again. And then I left the right one behind.”

“Left it behind?” repeated Flambeau, and for the first time there was another note in his voice beside his triumph.

“Well, it was like this,” said the little priest, speaking in the same unaffected way. “I went back to that sweet-shop and asked if I’d left a parcel, and gave them a particular address if it turned up. Well, I knew I hadn’t; but when I went away again I did. So, instead of running after me with that valuable parcel, they have sent it flying to a friend of mine in Westminster.” Then he added rather sadly: “I learnt that, too, from a poor fellow in Hartlepool. He used to do it with handbags he stole at railway stations, but he’s in a monastery now. Oh, one gets to know, you know,” he added, rubbing his head again with the same sort of desperate apology. “We can’t help being priests. People come and tell us these things.”

Flambeau tore a brown-paper parcel out of his inner pocket and rent it in pieces. There was nothing but paper and sticks of lead inside it. He sprang to his feet with a gigantic gesture, and cried:

“I don’t believe you. I don’t believe a bumpkin like you could manage all that. I believe you’ve still got the stuff on you, and if you don’t give it up—why, we’re all alone, and I’ll take it by force!”

“No,” said Father Brown simply, and stood up also, “you won’t take it by force. First, because I really haven’t still got it. And, second, because we are not alone.”

Flambeau stopped in his stride forward.

“Behind that tree,” said Father Brown, pointing, “are two strong policemen and the greatest detective alive. How did they come here, do you ask? Why, I brought them, of course! How did I do it? Why, I’ll tell you if you like! Lord bless you, we have to know twenty such things when we work among the
criminal classes! Well, I wasn’t sure you were a thief, and it would never do to make a scandal against one of our own clergy. So I just tested you to see if anything would make you show yourself. A man generally makes a small scene if he finds salt in his coffee; if he doesn’t, he has some reason for keeping quiet. I changed the salt and sugar, and you kept quiet. A man generally objects if his bill is three times too big. If he pays it, he has some motive for passing unnoticed. I altered your bill, and you paid it.”

The world seemed waiting for Flambeau to leap like a tiger. But he was held back as by a spell; he was stunned with the utmost curiosity.

“Well,” went on Father Brown, with lumbering lucidity, “as you wouldn’t leave any tracks for the police, of course somebody had to. At every place we went to, I took care to do something that would get us talked about for the rest of the day. I didn’t do much harm—a splashed wall, spilt apples, a broken window; but I saved the cross, as the cross will always be saved. It is at Westminster by now. I rather wonder you didn’t stop it with the Donkey’s Whistle.”

“Well, you’ve never heard of it,” said the priest, making a face. “It’s a foul thing. I’m sure you’re too good a man for a Whistler. I couldn’t have countered it even with the Spots myself; I’m not strong enough in the legs.”

“What on earth are you talking about?” asked the other.

“Well, I did think you’d know the Spots,” said Father Brown, agreeably surprised. “Oh, you can’t have gone so very wrong yet!”

“How in blazes do you know all these horrors?” cried Flambeau.

The shadow of a smile crossed the round, simple face of his clerical opponent.

“Oh, by being a celibate simpleton, I suppose,” he said. “Has it never struck you that a man who does next to nothing but hear men’s real sins is not likely to be wholly unaware of human evil? But, as a matter of fact, another part of my trade, too, made me sure you weren’t a priest.”

“What?” asked the thief, almost gaping.


And even as he turned away to collect his property, the three policemen came out from under the twilight trees. Flambeau was an artist and a sportsman. He stepped back and swept Valentin a great bow.

“Do not bow to me, mon ami,” said Valentin with silver clearness. “Let us both bow to our master.”

And they both stood an instant uncovered while the little Essex priest blinked about for his umbrella.
Aristide Valentin, Chief of the Paris Police, was late for his dinner, and some of his guests began to arrive before him. These were, however, reassured by his confidential servant, Ivan, the old man with a scar, and a face almost as grey as his moustaches, who always sat at a table in the entrance hall—a hall hung with weapons. Valentin’s house was perhaps as peculiar and celebrated as its master. It was an old house, with high walls and tall poplars almost overhanging the Seine; but the oddity—and perhaps the police value—of its architecture was this: that there was no ultimate exit at all except through this front door, which was guarded by Ivan and the armoury. The garden was large and elaborate, and there were many exits from the house into the garden. But there was no exit from the garden into the world outside; all round it ran a tall, smooth, unscaleable wall with special spikes at the top; no bad garden, perhaps, for a man to reflect in whom some hundred criminals had sworn to kill.

As Ivan explained to the guests, their host had telephoned that he was detained for ten minutes. He was, in truth, making some last arrangements about executions and such ugly things; and though these duties were rootedly repulsive to him, he always performed them with precision. Ruthless in the pursuit of criminals, he was very mild about their punishment. Since he had been supreme over French—and largely over European—policial methods, his great influence had been honourably used for the mitigation of sentences and the purification of prisons. He was one of the great humanitarian French freethinkers; and the only thing wrong with them is that they make mercy even colder than justice.

When Valentin arrived he was already dressed in black clothes and the red rosette—an elegant figure, his dark beard already streaked with grey. He went straight through his house to his study, which opened on the grounds behind. The garden door of it was open, and after he had carefully locked his box in its official place, he stood for a few seconds at the open door looking out upon the garden. A sharp moon was fighting with the flying rags and tatters of a storm, and Valentin regarded it with a wistfulness unusual in such scientific natures as his. Perhaps such scientific natures have some psychic prevision of the most tremendous problem of their lives. From any such occult mood, at least, he quickly recovered, for he knew he was late, and that his guests had already begun to arrive. A glance at his drawing-room when he entered it was enough to make certain that his principal guest was not there, at any rate. He saw all the
other pillars of the little party; he saw Lord Galloway, the English Ambassador—a choleric old man with a russet face like an apple, wearing the blue ribbon of the Garter. He saw Lady Galloway, slim and threadlike, with silver hair and a face sensitive and superior. He saw her daughter, Lady Margaret Graham, a pale and pretty girl with an elfish face and copper-coloured hair. He saw the Duchess of Mont St. Michel, black-eyed and opulent, and with her her two daughters, black-eyed and opulent also. He saw Dr. Simon, a typical French scientist, with glasses, a pointed brown beard, and a forehead barred with those parallel wrinkles which are the penalty of superciliousness, since they come through constantly elevating the eyebrows. He saw Father Brown, of Cobhole, in Essex, whom he had recently met in England. He saw—perhaps with more interest than any of these—a tall man in uniform, who had bowed to the Galloways without receiving any very hearty acknowledgment, and who now advanced alone to pay his respects to his host. This was Commandant O’Brien, of the French Foreign Legion. He was a slim yet somewhat swaggering figure, clean-shaven, dark-haired, and blue-eyed, and, as seemed natural in an officer of that famous regiment of victorious failures and successful suicides, he had an air at once dashing and melancholy. He was by birth an Irish gentleman, and in boyhood had known the Galloways—especially Margaret Graham. He had left his country after some crash of debts, and now expressed his complete freedom from British etiquette by swinging about in uniform, sabre and spurs. When he bowed to the Ambassador’s family, Lord and Lady Galloway bent stiffly, and Lady Margaret looked away.

But for whatever old causes such people might be interested in each other, their distinguished host was not specially interested in them. No one of them at least was in his eyes the guest of the evening. Valentin was expecting, for special reasons, a man of world-wide fame, whose friendship he had secured during some of his great detective tours and triumphs in the United States. He was expecting Julius K. Brayne, that multi-millionaire whose colossal and even crushing endowments of small religions have occasioned so much easy sport and easier solemnity for the American and English papers. Nobody could quite make out whether Mr. Brayne was an atheist or a Mormon or a Christian Scientist; but he was ready to pour money into any intellectual vessel, so long as it was an untried vessel. One of his hobbies was to wait for the American Shakespeare—a hobby more patient than angling. He admired Walt Whitman, but thought that Luke P. Tanner, of Paris, Pa., was more “progressive” than Whitman any day. He liked anything that he thought “progressive.” He thought Valentin
“progressive,” thereby doing him a grave injustice.

The solid appearance of Julius K. Brayne in the room was as decisive as a dinner bell. He had this great quality, which very few of us can claim, that his presence was as big as his absence. He was a huge fellow, as fat as he was tall, clad in complete evening black, without so much relief as a watch-chain or a ring. His hair was white and well brushed back like a German’s; his face was red, fierce and cherubic, with one dark tuft under the lower lip that threw up that otherwise infantile visage with an effect theatrical and even Mephistophelean. Not long, however, did that salon merely stare at the celebrated American; his lateness had already become a domestic problem, and he was sent with all speed into the dining-room with Lady Galloway on his arm.

Except on one point the Galloways were genial and casual enough. So long as Lady Margaret did not take the arm of that adventurer O’Brien, her father was quite satisfied; and she had not done so, she had decorously gone in with Dr. Simon. Nevertheless, old Lord Galloway was restless and almost rude. He was diplomatic enough during dinner, but when, over the cigars, three of the younger men—Simon the doctor, Brown the priest, and the detrimental O’Brien, the exile in a foreign uniform—all melted away to mix with the ladies or smoke in the conservatory, then the English diplomatist grew very undiplomatic indeed. He was stung every sixty seconds with the thought that the scamp O’Brien might be signalling to Margaret somehow; he did not attempt to imagine how. He was left over the coffee with Brayne, the hoary Yankee who believed in all religions, and Valentin, the grizzled Frenchman who believed in none. They could argue with each other, but neither could appeal to him. After a time this “progressive” logomachy had reached a crisis of tedium; Lord Galloway got up also and sought the drawing-room. He lost his way in long passages for some six or eight minutes: till he heard the high-pitched, didactic voice of the doctor, and then the dull voice of the priest, followed by general laughter. They also, he thought with a curse, were probably arguing about “science and religion.” But the instant he opened the salon door he saw only one thing—he saw what was not there. He saw that Commandant O’Brien was absent, and that Lady Margaret was absent too.

Rising impatiently from the drawing-room, as he had from the dining-room, he stamped along the passage once more. His notion of protecting his daughter from the Irish-Algerian n’er-do-weel had become something central and even mad in his mind. As he went towards the back of the house, where was Valentin’s study, he was surprised to meet his daughter, who swept past with a
white, scornful face, which was a second enigma. If she had been with O’Brien, where was O’Brien! If she had not been with O’Brien, where had she been? With a sort of senile and passionate suspicion he groped his way to the dark back parts of the mansion, and eventually found a servants’ entrance that opened on to the garden. The moon with her scimitar had now ripped up and rolled away all the storm-wrack. The argent light lit up all four corners of the garden. A tall figure in blue was striding across the lawn towards the study door; a glint of moonlit silver on his facings picked him out as Commandant O’Brien.

He vanished through the French windows into the house, leaving Lord Galloway in an indescribable temper, at once virulent and vague. The blue-and-silver garden, like a scene in a theatre, seemed to taunt him with all that tyrannic tenderness against which his worldly authority was at war. The length and grace of the Irishman’s stride enraged him as if he were a rival instead of a father; the moonlight maddened him. He was trapped as if by magic into a garden of troubadours, a Watteau fairyland; and, willing to shake off such amorous imbecilities by speech, he stepped briskly after his enemy. As he did so he tripped over some tree or stone in the grass; looked down at it first with irritation and then a second time with curiosity. The next instant the moon and the tall poplars looked at an unusual sight—an elderly English diplomatist running hard and crying or bellowing as he ran.

His hoarse shouts brought a pale face to the study door, the beaming glasses and worried brow of Dr. Simon, who heard the nobleman’s first clear words. Lord Galloway was crying: “A corpse in the grass—a blood-stained corpse.” O’Brien at last had gone utterly out of his mind.

“We must tell Valentin at once,” said the doctor, when the other had brokenly described all that he had dared to examine. “It is fortunate that he is here;” and even as he spoke the great detective entered the study, attracted by the cry. It was almost amusing to note his typical transformation; he had come with the common concern of a host and a gentleman, fearing that some guest or servant was ill. When he was told the gory fact, he turned with all his gravity instantly bright and businesslike; for this, however abrupt and awful, was his business.

“Strange, gentlemen,” he said as they hurried out into the garden, “that I should have hunted mysteries all over the earth, and now one comes and settles in my own back-yard. But where is the place?” They crossed the lawn less easily, as a slight mist had begun to rise from the river; but under the guidance of the shaken Galloway they found the body sunken in deep grass—the body of a very tall and broad-shouldered man. He lay face downwards, so they could only
see that his big shoulders were clad in black cloth, and that his big head was bald, except for a wisp or two of brown hair that clung to his skull like wet seaweed. A scarlet serpent of blood crawled from under his fallen face.

“At least,” said Simon, with a deep and singular intonation, “he is none of our party.”

“Examine him, doctor,” cried Valentin rather sharply. “He may not be dead.”

The doctor bent down. “He is not quite cold, but I am afraid he is dead enough,” he answered. “Just help me to lift him up.”

They lifted him carefully an inch from the ground, and all doubts as to his being really dead were settled at once and frightfully. The head fell away. It had been entirely sundered from the body; whoever had cut his throat had managed to sever the neck as well. Even Valentin was slightly shocked. “He must have been as strong as a gorilla,” he muttered.

Not without a shiver, though he was used to anatomical abortions, Dr. Simon lifted the head. It was slightly slashed about the neck and jaw, but the face was substantially unjured. It was a ponderous, yellow face, at once sunken and swollen, with a hawk-like nose and heavy lids—a face of a wicked Roman emperor, with, perhaps, a distant touch of a Chinese emperor. All present seemed to look at it with the coldest eye of ignorance. Nothing else could be noted about the man except that, as they had lifted his body, they had seen underneath it the white gleam of a shirt-front defaced with a red gleam of blood. As Dr. Simon said, the man had never been of their party. But he might very well have been trying to join it, for he had come dressed for such an occasion.

Valentin went down on his hands and knees and examined with his closest professional attention the grass and ground for some twenty yards round the body, in which he was assisted less skillfully by the doctor, and quite vaguely by the English lord. Nothing rewarded their grovellings except a few twigs, snapped or chopped into very small lengths, which Valentin lifted for an instant’s examination and then tossed away.

“Twigs,” he said gravely; “twigs, and a total stranger with his head cut off; that is all there is on this lawn.”

There was an almost creepy stillness, and then the unnerved Galloway called out sharply:

“Who’s that! Who’s that over there by the garden wall!”

A small figure with a foolishly large head drew waveringly near them in the moonlit haze; looked for an instant like a goblin, but turned out to be the harmless little priest whom they had left in the drawing-room.
“I say,” he said meekly, “there are no gates to this garden, do you know.”

Valentin’s black brows had come together somewhat crossly, as they did on principle at the sight of the cassock. But he was far too just a man to deny the relevance of the remark. “You are right,” he said. “Before we find out how he came to be killed, we may have to find out how he came to be here. Now listen to me, gentlemen. If it can be done without prejudice to my position and duty, we shall all agree that certain distinguished names might well be kept out of this. There are ladies, gentlemen, and there is a foreign ambassador. If we must mark it down as a crime, then it must be followed up as a crime. But till then I can use my own discretion. I am the head of the police; I am so public that I can afford to be private. Please Heaven, I will clear everyone of my own guests before I call in my men to look for anybody else. Gentlemen, upon your honour, you will none of you leave the house till tomorrow at noon; there are bedrooms for all. Simon, I think you know where to find my man, Ivan, in the front hall; he is a confidential man. Tell him to leave another servant on guard and come to me at once. Lord Galloway, you are certainly the best person to tell the ladies what has happened, and prevent a panic. They also must stay. Father Brown and I will remain with the body.”

When this spirit of the captain spoke in Valentin he was obeyed like a bugle. Dr. Simon went through to the armoury and routed out Ivan, the public detective’s private detective. Galloway went to the drawing-room and told the terrible news tactfully enough, so that by the time the company assembled there the ladies were already startled and already soothed. Meanwhile the good priest and the good atheist stood at the head and foot of the dead man motionless in the moonlight, like symbolic statues of their two philosophies of death.

Ivan, the confidential man with the scar and the moustaches, came out of the house like a cannon ball, and came racing across the lawn to Valentin like a dog to his master. His livid face was quite lively with the glow of this domestic detective story, and it was with almost unpleasant eagerness that he asked his master’s permission to examine the remains.

“Yes; look, if you like, Ivan,” said Valentin, “but don’t be long. We must go in and thrash this out in the house.”

Ivan lifted the head, and then almost let it drop.

“Why,” he gasped, “it’s—no, it isn’t; it can’t be. Do you know this man, sir?”

“No,” said Valentin indifferently; “we had better go inside.”

Between them they carried the corpse to a sofa in the study, and then all made their way to the drawing-room.
The detective sat down at a desk quietly, and even without hesitation; but his
eye was the iron eye of a judge at assize. He made a few rapid notes upon paper
in front of him, and then said shortly: “Is everybody here?”

“Not Mr. Brayne,” said the Duchess of Mont St. Michel, looking round.

“No,” said Lord Galloway in a hoarse, harsh voice. “And not Mr. Neil
O’Brien, I fancy. I saw that gentleman walking in the garden when the corpse
was still warm.”

“Ivan,” said the detective, “go and fetch Commandant O’Brien and Mr.
Brayne. Mr. Brayne, I know, is finishing a cigar in the dining-room;
Commandant O’Brien, I think, is walking up and down the conservatory. I am
not sure.”

The faithful attendant flashed from the room, and before anyone could stir or
speak Valentin went on with the same soldierly swiftness of exposition.

“Everyone here knows that a dead man has been found in the garden, his head
cut clean from his body. Dr. Simon, you have examined it. Do you think that to
cut a man’s throat like that would need great force? Or, perhaps, only a very
sharp knife?”

“I should say that it could not be done with a knife at all,” said the pale doctor.

“Have you any thought,” resumed Valentin, “of a tool with which it could be
done?”

“Speaking within modern probabilities, I really haven’t,” said the doctor,
arching his painful brows. “It’s not easy to hack a neck through even clumsily,
and this was a very clean cut. It could be done with a battle-axe or an old
headsman’s axe, or an old two-handed sword.”

“But, good heavens!” cried the Duchess, almost in hysterics, “there aren’t any
two-handed swords and battle-axes round here.”

Valentin was still busy with the paper in front of him. “Tell me,” he said, still
writing rapidly, “could it have been done with a long French cavalry sabre?”

A low knocking came at the door, which, for some unreasonable reason,
curled everyone’s blood like the knocking in Macbeth. Amid that frozen silence
Dr. Simon managed to say: “A sabre—yes, I suppose it could.”

“Thank you,” said Valentin. “Come in, Ivan.”

The confidential Ivan opened the door and ushered in Commandant Neil
O’Brien, whom he had found at last pacing the garden again.

The Irish officer stood up disordered and defiant on the threshold. “What do
you want with me?” he cried.

“Please sit down,” said Valentin in pleasant, level tones. “Why, you aren’t
wearing your sword. Where is it?”

“I left it on the library table,” said O’Brien, his brogue deepening in his disturbed mood. “It was a nuisance, it was getting—”

“Ivan,” said Valentin, “please go and get the Commandant’s sword from the library.” Then, as the servant vanished, “Lord Galloway says he saw you leaving the garden just before he found the corpse. What were you doing in the garden?”


A heavy silence sank and endured, and at the end of it came again that trivial and terrible knocking. Ivan reappeared, carrying an empty steel scabbard. “This is all I can find,” he said.

“Put it on the table,” said Valentin, without looking up.

There was an inhuman silence in the room, like that sea of inhuman silence round the dock of the condemned murderer. The Duchess’s weak exclamations had long ago died away. Lord Galloway’s swollen hatred was satisfied and even sobered. The voice that came was quite unexpected.

“I think I can tell you,” cried Lady Margaret, in that clear, quivering voice with which a courageous woman speaks publicly. “I can tell you what Mr. O’Brien was doing in the garden, since he is bound to silence. He was asking me to marry him. I refused; I said in my family circumstances I could give him nothing but my respect. He was a little angry at that; he did not seem to think much of my respect. I wonder,” she added, with rather a wan smile, “if he will care at all for it now. For I offer it him now. I will swear anywhere that he never did a thing like this.”

Lord Galloway had edged up to his daughter, and was intimidating her in what he imagined to be an undertone. “Hold your tongue, Maggie,” he said in a thunderous whisper. “Why should you shield the fellow? Where’s his sword? Where’s his confounded cavalry—”

He stopped because of the singular stare with which his daughter was regarding him, a look that was indeed a lurid magnet for the whole group.

“You old fool!” she said in a low voice without pretence of piety, “what do you suppose you are trying to prove? I tell you this man was innocent while with me. But if he wasn’t innocent, he was still with me. If he murdered a man in the garden, who was it who must have seen—who must at least have known? Do you hate Neil so much as to put your own daughter—”

Lady Galloway screamed. Everyone else sat tingling at the touch of those satanic tragedies that have been between lovers before now. They saw the proud,
white face of the Scotch aristocrat and her lover, the Irish adventurer, like old portraits in a dark house. The long silence was full of formless historical memories of murdered husbands and poisonous paramours.

In the centre of this morbid silence an innocent voice said: “Was it a very long cigar?”

The change of thought was so sharp that they had to look round to see who had spoken.

“I mean,” said little Father Brown, from the corner of the room, “I mean that cigar Mr. Brayne is finishing. It seems nearly as long as a walking-stick.”

Despite the irrelevance there was assent as well as irritation in Valentin’s face as he lifted his head.

“Quite right,” he remarked sharply. “Ivan, go and see about Mr. Brayne again, and bring him here at once.”

The instant the factotum had closed the door, Valentin addressed the girl with an entirely new earnestness.

“Lady Margaret,” he said, “we all feel, I am sure, both gratitude and admiration for your act in rising above your lower dignity and explaining the Commandant’s conduct. But there is a hiatus still. Lord Galloway, I understand, met you passing from the study to the drawing-room, and it was only some minutes afterwards that he found the garden and the Commandant still walking there.”

“You have to remember,” replied Margaret, with a faint irony in her voice, “that I had just refused him, so we should scarcely have come back arm in arm. He is a gentleman, anyhow; and he loitered behind—and so got charged with murder.”

“In those few moments,” said Valentin gravely, “he might really—”

The knock came again, and Ivan put in his scarred face.

“Beg pardon, sir,” he said, “but Mr. Brayne has left the house.”

“Left!” cried Valentin, and rose for the first time to his feet.

“Gone. Scooted. Evaporated,” replied Ivan in humorous French. “His hat and coat are gone, too, and I’ll tell you something to cap it all. I ran outside the house to find any traces of him, and I found one, and a big trace, too.”

“What do you mean?” asked Valentin.

“I’ll show you,” said his servant, and reappeared with a flashing naked cavalry sabre, streaked with blood about the point and edge. Everyone in the room eyed it as if it were a thunderbolt; but the experienced Ivan went on quite quietly:

“I found this,” he said, “flung among the bushes fifty yards up the road to
Paris. In other words, I found it just where your respectable Mr. Brayne threw it when he ran away.”

There was again a silence, but of a new sort. Valentin took the sabre, examined it, reflected with unaffected concentration of thought, and then turned a respectful face to O’Brien. “Commandant,” he said, “we trust you will always produce this weapon if it is wanted for police examination. Meanwhile,” he added, slapping the steel back in the ringing scabbard, “let me return you your sword.”

At the military symbolism of the action the audience could hardly refrain from applause.

For Neil O’Brien, indeed, that gesture was the turning-point of existence. By the time he was wandering in the mysterious garden again in the colours of the morning the tragic futility of his ordinary mien had fallen from him; he was a man with many reasons for happiness. Lord Galloway was a gentleman, and had offered him an apology. Lady Margaret was something better than a lady, a woman at least, and had perhaps given him something better than an apology, as they drifted among the old flowerbeds before breakfast. The whole company was more lighthearted and humane, for though the riddle of the death remained, the load of suspicion was lifted off them all, and sent flying off to Paris with the strange millionaire—a man they hardly knew. The devil was cast out of the house—he had cast himself out.

Still, the riddle remained; and when O’Brien threw himself on a garden seat beside Dr. Simon, that keenly scientific person at once resumed it. He did not get much talk out of O’Brien, whose thoughts were on pleasanter things.

“I can’t say it interests me much,” said the Irishman frankly, “especially as it seems pretty plain now. Apparently Brayne hated this stranger for some reason; lured him into the garden, and killed him with my sword. Then he fled to the city, tossing the sword away as he went. By the way, Ivan tells me the dead man had a Yankee dollar in his pocket. So he was a countryman of Brayne’s, and that seems to clinch it. I don’t see any difficulties about the business.”

“There are five colossal difficulties,” said the doctor quietly; “like high walls within walls. Don’t mistake me. I don’t doubt that Brayne did it; his flight, I fancy, proves that. But as to how he did it. First difficulty: Why should a man kill another man with a great hulking sabre, when he can almost kill him with a pocket knife and put it back in his pocket? Second difficulty: Why was there no noise or outcry? Does a man commonly see another come up waving a scimitar and offer no remarks? Third difficulty: A servant watched the front door all the
evening; and a rat cannot get into Valentin’s garden anywhere. How did the dead man get into the garden? Fourth difficulty: Given the same conditions, how did Brayne get out of the garden?”

“And the fifth,” said Neil, with eyes fixed on the English priest who was coming slowly up the path.

“Is a trifle, I suppose,” said the doctor, “but I think an odd one. When I first saw how the head had been slashed, I supposed the assassin had struck more than once. But on examination I found many cuts across the truncated section; in other words, they were struck after the head was off. Did Brayne hate his foe so fiendishly that he stood sabring his body in the moonlight?”

“Horrible!” said O’Brien, and shuddered.

The little priest, Brown, had arrived while they were talking, and had waited, with characteristic shyness, till they had finished. Then he said awkwardly:

“I say, I’m sorry to interrupt. But I was sent to tell you the news!”

“News?” repeated Simon, and stared at him rather painfully through his glasses.

“Yes, I’m sorry,” said Father Brown mildly. “There’s been another murder, you know.”

Both men on the seat sprang up, leaving it rocking.

“And, what’s stranger still,” continued the priest, with his dull eye on the rhododendrons, “it’s the same disgusting sort; it’s another beheading. They found the second head actually bleeding into the river, a few yards along Brayne’s road to Paris; so they suppose that he—”

“Great Heaven!” cried O’Brien. “Is Brayne a monomaniac?”

“There are American vendettas,” said the priest impassively. Then he added: “They want you to come to the library and see it.”

Commandant O’Brien followed the others towards the inquest, feeling decidedly sick. As a soldier, he loathed all this secretive carnage; where were these extravagant amputations going to stop? First one head was hacked off, and then another; in this case (he told himself bitterly) it was not true that two heads were better than one. As he crossed the study he almost staggered at a shocking coincidence. Upon Valentin’s table lay the coloured picture of yet a third bleeding head; and it was the head of Valentin himself. A second glance showed him it was only a Nationalist paper, called The Guillotine, which every week showed one of its political opponents with rolling eyes and writhing features just after execution; for Valentin was an anti-clerical of some note. But O’Brien was an Irishman, with a kind of chastity even in his sins; and his gorge rose against
that great brutality of the intellect which belongs only to France. He felt Paris as a whole, from the grotesques on the Gothic churches to the gross caricatures in the newspapers. He remembered the gigantic jests of the Revolution. He saw the whole city as one ugly energy, from the sanguinary sketch lying on Valentin’s table up to where, above a mountain and forest of gargoyles, the great devil grins on Notre Dame.

The library was long, low, and dark; what light entered it shot from under low blinds and had still some of the ruddy tinge of morning. Valentin and his servant Ivan were waiting for them at the upper end of a long, slightly-sloping desk, on which lay the mortal remains, looking enormous in the twilight. The big black figure and yellow face of the man found in the garden confronted them essentially unchanged. The second head, which had been fished from among the river reeds that morning, lay streaming and dripping beside it; Valentin’s men were still seeking to recover the rest of this second corpse, which was supposed to be afloat. Father Brown, who did not seem to share O’Brien’s sensibilities in the least, went up to the second head and examined it with his blinking care. It was little more than a mop of wet white hair, fringed with silver fire in the red and level morning light; the face, which seemed of an ugly, empurpled and perhaps criminal type, had been much battered against trees or stones as it tossed in the water.

“Good morning, Commandant O’Brien,” said Valentin, with quiet cordiality. “You have heard of Brayne’s last experiment in butchery, I suppose?”

Father Brown was still bending over the head with white hair, and he said, without looking up:

“I suppose it is quite certain that Brayne cut off this head, too.”

“Well, it seems common sense,” said Valentin, with his hands in his pockets. “Killed in the same way as the other. Found within a few yards of the other. And sliced by the same weapon which we know he carried away.”

“Yes, yes; I know,” replied Father Brown submissively. “Yet, you know, I doubt whether Brayne could have cut off this head.”

“Why not?” inquired Dr. Simon, with a rational stare.

“Well, doctor,” said the priest, looking up blinking, “can a man cut off his own head? I don’t know.”

O’Brien felt an insane universe crashing about his ears; but the doctor sprang forward with impetuous practicality and pushed back the wet white hair.

“Oh, there’s no doubt it’s Brayne,” said the priest quietly. “He had exactly that chip in the left ear.”
The detective, who had been regarding the priest with steady and glittering eyes, opened his clenched mouth and said sharply: “You seem to know a lot about him, Father Brown.”

“I do,” said the little man simply. “I’ve been about with him for some weeks. He was thinking of joining our church.”

The star of the fanatic sprang into Valentin’s eyes; he strode towards the priest with clenched hands. “And, perhaps,” he cried, with a blasting sneer, “perhaps he was also thinking of leaving all his money to your church.”

“Perhaps he was,” said Brown stolidly; “it is possible.”

“In that case,” cried Valentin, with a dreadful smile, “you may indeed know a great deal about him. About his life and about his—”

Commandant O’Brien laid a hand on Valentin’s arm. “Drop that slanderous rubbish, Valentin,” he said, “or there may be more swords yet.”

But Valentin (under the steady, humble gaze of the priest) had already recovered himself. “Well,” he said shortly, “people’s private opinions can wait. You gentlemen are still bound by your promise to stay; you must enforce it on yourselves—and on each other. Ivan here will tell you anything more you want to know; I must get to business and write to the authorities. We can’t keep this quiet any longer. I shall be writing in my study if there is any more news.”

“Is there any more news, Ivan?” asked Dr. Simon, as the chief of police strode out of the room.

“Only one more thing, I think, sir,” said Ivan, wrinkling up his grey old face, “but that’s important, too, in its way. There’s that old buffer you found on the lawn,” and he pointed without pretence of reverence at the big black body with the yellow head. “We’ve found out who he is, anyhow.”

“Indeed!” cried the astonished doctor, “and who is he?”

“His name was Arnold Becker,” said the under-detective, “though he went by many aliases. He was a wandering sort of scamp, and is known to have been in America; so that was where Brayne got his knife into him. We didn’t have much to do with him ourselves, for he worked mostly in Germany. We’ve communicated, of course, with the German police. But, oddly enough, there was a twin brother of his, named Louis Becker, whom we had a great deal to do with. In fact, we found it necessary to guillotine him only yesterday. Well, it’s a rum thing, gentlemen, but when I saw that fellow flat on the lawn I had the greatest jump of my life. If I hadn’t seen Louis Becker guillotined with my own eyes, I’d have sworn it was Louis Becker lying there in the grass. Then, of course, I remembered his twin brother in Germany, and following up the clue—”
The explanatory Ivan stopped, for the excellent reason that nobody was listening to him. The Commandant and the doctor were both staring at Father Brown, who had sprung stiffly to his feet, and was holding his temples tight like a man in sudden and violent pain.

“Stop, stop, stop!” he cried; “stop talking a minute, for I see half. Will God give me strength? Will my brain make the one jump and see all? Heaven help me! I used to be fairly good at thinking. I could paraphrase any page in Aquinas once. Will my head split—or will it see? I see half—I only see half.”

He buried his head in his hands, and stood in a sort of rigid torture of thought or prayer, while the other three could only go on staring at this last prodigy of their wild twelve hours.

When Father Brown’s hands fell they showed a face quite fresh and serious, like a child’s. He heaved a huge sigh, and said: “Let us get this said and done with as quickly as possible. Look here, this will be the quickest way to convince you all of the truth.” He turned to the doctor. “Dr. Simon,” he said, “you have a strong head-piece, and I heard you this morning asking the five hardest questions about this business. Well, if you will ask them again, I will answer them.”

Simon’s pince-nez dropped from his nose in his doubt and wonder, but he answered at once. “Well, the first question, you know, is why a man should kill another with a clumsy sabre at all when a man can kill with a bodkin?”

“A man cannot behead with a bodkin,” said Brown calmly, “and for this murder beheading was absolutely necessary.”

“Why?” asked O’Brien, with interest.

“And the next question?” asked Father Brown.

“Well, why didn’t the man cry out or anything?” asked the doctor; “sabres in gardens are certainly unusual.”

“Twigs,” said the priest gloomily, and turned to the window which looked on the scene of death. “No one saw the point of the twigs. Why should they lie on that lawn (look at it) so far from any tree? They were not snapped off; they were chopped off. The murderer occupied his enemy with some tricks with the sabre, showing how he could cut a branch in mid-air, or what-not. Then, while his enemy bent down to see the result, a silent slash, and the head fell.”

“Well,” said the doctor slowly, “that seems plausible enough. But my next two questions will stump anyone.”

The priest still stood looking critically out of the window and waited.

“You know how all the garden was sealed up like an air-tight chamber,” went on the doctor. “Well, how did the strange man get into the garden?”
Without turning round, the little priest answered: “There never was any strange man in the garden.”

There was a silence, and then a sudden cackle of almost childish laughter relieved the strain. The absurdity of Brown’s remark moved Ivan to open taunts.

“Oh!” he cried; “then we didn’t lug a great fat corpse on to a sofa last night? He hadn’t got into the garden, I suppose?”

“Got into the garden?” repeated Brown reflectively. “No, not entirely.”

“Hang it all,” cried Simon, “a man gets into a garden, or he doesn’t.”

“Not necessarily,” said the priest, with a faint smile. “What is the nest question, doctor?”

“I fancy you’re ill,” exclaimed Dr. Simon sharply; “but I’ll ask the next question if you like. How did Brayne get out of the garden?”

“He didn’t get out of the garden,” said the priest, still looking out of the window.

“Didn’t get out of the garden?” exploded Simon.

“Not completely,” said Father Brown.

Simon shook his fists in a frenzy of French logic. “A man gets out of a garden, or he doesn’t,” he cried.

“Not always,” said Father Brown.

Dr. Simon sprang to his feet impatiently. “I have no time to spare on such senseless talk,” he cried angrily. “If you can’t understand a man being on one side of a wall or the other, I won’t trouble you further.”

“Doctor,” said the cleric very gently, “we have always got on very pleasantly together. If only for the sake of old friendship, stop and tell me your fifth question.”

The impatient Simon sank into a chair by the door and said briefly: “The head and shoulders were cut about in a queer way. It seemed to be done after death.”

“Yes,” said the motionless priest, “it was done so as to make you assume exactly the one simple falsehood that you did assume. It was done to make you take for granted that the head belonged to the body.”

The borderland of the brain, where all the monsters are made, moved horribly in the Gaelic O’Brien. He felt the chaotic presence of all the horse-men and fish-women that man’s unnatural fancy has begotten. A voice older than his first fathers seemed saying in his ear: “Keep out of the monstrous garden where grows the tree with double fruit. Avoid the evil garden where died the man with two heads.” Yet, while these shameful symbolic shapes passed across the ancient mirror of his Irish soul, his Frenchified intellect was quite alert, and was
watching the odd priest as closely and incredulously as all the rest.

Father Brown had turned round at last, and stood against the window, with his face in dense shadow; but even in that shadow they could see it was pale as ashes. Nevertheless, he spoke quite sensibly, as if there were no Gaelic souls on earth.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “you did not find the strange body of Becker in the garden. You did not find any strange body in the garden. In face of Dr. Simon’s rationalism, I still affirm that Becker was only partly present. Look here!” (pointing to the black bulk of the mysterious corpse) “you never saw that man in your lives. Did you ever see this man?”

He rapidly rolled away the bald, yellow head of the unknown, and put in its place the white-maned head beside it. And there, complete, unified, unmistakable, lay Julius K. Brayne.

“The murderer,” went on Brown quietly, “hacked off his enemy’s head and flung the sword far over the wall. But he was too clever to fling the sword only. He flung the head over the wall also. Then he had only to clap on another head to the corpse, and (as he insisted on a private inquest) you all imagined a totally new man.”

“Clap on another head!” said O’Brien staring. “What other head? Heads don’t grow on garden bushes, do they?”

“No,” said Father Brown huskily, and looking at his boots; “there is only one place where they grow. They grow in the basket of the guillotine, beside which the chief of police, Aristide Valentin, was standing not an hour before the murder. Oh, my friends, hear me a minute more before you tear me in pieces. Valentin is an honest man, if being mad for an arguable cause is honesty. But did you never see in that cold, grey eye of his that he is mad! He would do anything, anything, to break what he calls the superstition of the Cross. He has fought for it and starved for it, and now he has murdered for it. Brayne’s crazy millions had hitherto been scattered among so many sects that they did little to alter the balance of things. But Valentin heard a whisper that Brayne, like so many scatter-brained sceptics, was drifting to us; and that was quite a different thing. Brayne would pour supplies into the impoverished and pugnacious Church of France; he would support six Nationalist newspapers like The Guillotine. The battle was already balanced on a point, and the fanatic took flame at the risk. He resolved to destroy the millionaire, and he did it as one would expect the greatest of detectives to commit his only crime. He abstracted the severed head of Becker on some criminological excuse, and took it home in his official box. He had that
last argument with Brayne, that Lord Galloway did not hear the end of; that failing, he led him out into the sealed garden, talked about swordsmanship, used twigs and a sabre for illustration, and—”

Ivan of the Scar sprang up. “You lunatic,” he yelled; “you’ll go to my master now, if I take you by—”

“Why, I was going there,” said Brown heavily; “I must ask him to confess, and all that.”

Driving the unhappy Brown before them like a hostage or sacrifice, they rushed together into the sudden stillness of Valentin’s study.

The great detective sat at his desk apparently too occupied to hear their turbulent entrance. They paused a moment, and then something in the look of that upright and elegant back made the doctor run forward suddenly. A touch and a glance showed him that there was a small box of pills at Valentin’s elbow, and that Valentin was dead in his chair; and on the blind face of the suicide was more than the pride of Cato.
THE QUEER FEET

If you meet a member of that select club, “The Twelve True Fishermen,” entering the Vernon Hotel for the annual club dinner, you will observe, as he takes off his overcoat, that his evening coat is green and not black. If (supposing that you have the star-defying audacity to address such a being) you ask him why, he will probably answer that he does it to avoid being mistaken for a waiter. You will then retire crushed. But you will leave behind you a mystery as yet unsolved and a tale worth telling.

If (to pursue the same vein of improbable conjecture) you were to meet a mild, hard-working little priest, named Father Brown, and were to ask him what he thought was the most singular luck of his life, he would probably reply that upon the whole his best stroke was at the Vernon Hotel, where he had averted a crime and, perhaps, saved a soul, merely by listening to a few footsteps in a passage. He is perhaps a little proud of this wild and wonderful guess of his, and it is possible that he might refer to it. But since it is immeasurably unlikely that you will ever rise high enough in the social world to find “The Twelve True Fishermen,” or that you will ever sink low enough among slums and criminals to find Father Brown, I fear you will never hear the story at all unless you hear it from me.

The Vernon Hotel at which The Twelve True Fishermen held their annual dinners was an institution such as can only exist in an oligarchical society which has almost gone mad on good manners. It was that topsy-turvy product—an “exclusive” commercial enterprise. That is, it was a thing which paid not by attracting people, but actually by turning people away. In the heart of a plutocracy tradesmen become cunning enough to be more fastidious than their customers. They positively create difficulties so that their wealthy and weary clients may spend money and diplomacy in overcoming them. If there were a fashionable hotel in London which no man could enter who was under six foot, society would meekly make up parties of six-foot men to dine in it. If there were an expensive restaurant which by a mere caprice of its proprietor was only open on Thursday afternoon, it would be crowded on Thursday afternoon. The Vernon Hotel stood, as if by accident, in the corner of a square in Belgravia. It was a small hotel; and a very inconvenient one. But its very inconveniences were considered as walls protecting a particular class. One inconvenience, in particular, was held to be of vital importance: the fact that practically only
twenty-four people could dine in the place at once. The only big dinner table was the celebrated terrace table, which stood open to the air on a sort of veranda overlooking one of the most exquisite old gardens in London. Thus it happened that even the twenty-four seats at this table could only be enjoyed in warm weather; and this making the enjoyment yet more difficult made it yet more desired. The existing owner of the hotel was a Jew named Lever; and he made nearly a million out of it, by making it difficult to get into. Of course he combined with this limitation in the scope of his enterprise the most careful polish in its performance. The wines and cooking were really as good as any in Europe, and the demeanour of the attendants exactly mirrored the fixed mood of the English upper class. The proprietor knew all his waiters like the fingers on his hand; there were only fifteen of them all told. It was much easier to become a Member of Parliament than to become a waiter in that hotel. Each waiter was trained in terrible silence and smoothness, as if he were a gentleman’s servant. And, indeed, there was generally at least one waiter to every gentleman who dined.

The club of The Twelve True Fishermen would not have consented to dine anywhere but in such a place, for it insisted on a luxurious privacy; and would have been quite upset by the mere thought that any other club was even dining in the same building. On the occasion of their annual dinner the Fishermen were in the habit of exposing all their treasures, as if they were in a private house, especially the celebrated set of fish knives and forks which were, as it were, the insignia of the society, each being exquisitely wrought in silver in the form of a fish, and each loaded at the hilt with one large pearl. These were always laid out for the fish course, and the fish course was always the most magnificent in that magnificent repast. The society had a vast number of ceremonies and observances, but it had no history and no object; that was where it was so very aristocratic. You did not have to be anything in order to be one of the Twelve Fishers; unless you were already a certain sort of person, you never even heard of them. It had been in existence twelve years. Its president was Mr. Audley. Its vice-president was the Duke of Chester.

If I have in any degree conveyed the atmosphere of this appalling hotel, the reader may feel a natural wonder as to how I came to know anything about it, and may even speculate as to how so ordinary a person as my friend Father Brown came to find himself in that golden galley. As far as that is concerned, my story is simple, or even vulgar. There is in the world a very aged rioter and demagogue who breaks into the most refined retreats with the dreadful
information that all men are brothers, and wherever this leveller went on his pale horse it was Father Brown’s trade to follow. One of the waiters, an Italian, had been struck down with a paralytic stroke that afternoon; and his Jewish employer, marvelling mildly at such superstitions, had consented to send for the nearest Popish priest. With what the waiter confessed to Father Brown we are not concerned, for the excellent reason that that cleric kept it to himself; but apparently it involved him in writing out a note or statement for the conveying of some message or the righting of some wrong. Father Brown, therefore, with a meek impudence which he would have shown equally in Buckingham Palace, asked to be provided with a room and writing materials. Mr. Lever was torn in two. He was a kind man, and had also that bad imitation of kindness, the dislike of any difficulty or scene. At the same time the presence of one unusual stranger in his hotel that evening was like a speck of dirt on something just cleaned. There was never any borderland or anteroom in the Vernon Hotel, no people waiting in the hall, no customers coming in on chance. There were fifteen waiters. There were twelve guests. It would be as startling to find a new guest in the hotel that night as to find a new brother taking breakfast or tea in one’s own family. Moreover, the priest’s appearance was second-rate and his clothes muddy; a mere glimpse of him afar off might precipitate a crisis in the club. Mr. Lever at last hit on a plan to cover, since he might not obliterate, the disgrace. When you enter (as you never will) the Vernon Hotel, you pass down a short passage decorated with a few dingy but important pictures, and come to the main vestibule and lounge which opens on your right into passages leading to the public rooms, and on your left to a similar passage pointing to the kitchens and offices of the hotel. Immediately on your left hand is the corner of a glass office, which abuts upon the lounge—a house within a house, so to speak, like the old hotel bar which probably once occupied its place.

In this office sat the representative of the proprietor (nobody in this place ever appeared in person if he could help it), and just beyond the office, on the way to the servants’ quarters, was the gentlemen’s cloak room, the last boundary of the gentlemen’s domain. But between the office and the cloak room was a small private room without other outlet, sometimes used by the proprietor for delicate and important matters, such as lending a duke a thousand pounds or declining to lend him sixpence. It is a mark of the magnificent tolerance of Mr. Lever that he permitted this holy place to be for about half an hour profaned by a mere priest, scribbling away on a piece of paper. The story which Father Brown was writing down was very likely a much better story than this one, only it will never be
known. I can merely state that it was very nearly as long, and that the last two or three paragraphs of it were the least exciting and absorbing.

For it was by the time that he had reached these that the priest began a little to allow his thoughts to wander and his animal senses, which were commonly keen, to awaken. The time of darkness and dinner was drawing on; his own forgotten little room was without a light, and perhaps the gathering gloom, as occasionally happens, sharpened the sense of sound. As Father Brown wrote the last and least essential part of his document, he caught himself writing to the rhythm of a recurrent noise outside, just as one sometimes thinks to the tune of a railway train. When he became conscious of the thing he found what it was: only the ordinary patter of feet passing the door, which in an hotel was no very unlikely matter. Nevertheless, he stared at the darkened ceiling, and listened to the sound. After he had listened for a few seconds dreamily, he got to his feet and listened intently, with his head a little on one side. Then he sat down again and buried his brow in his hands, now not merely listening, but listening and thinking also.

The footsteps outside at any given moment were such as one might hear in any hotel; and yet, taken as a whole, there was something very strange about them. There were no other footsteps. It was always a very silent house, for the few familiar guests went at once to their own apartments, and the well-trained waiters were told to be almost invisible until they were wanted. One could not conceive any place where there was less reason to apprehend anything irregular. But these footsteps were so odd that one could not decide to call them regular or irregular. Father Brown followed them with his finger on the edge of the table, like a man trying to learn a tune on the piano.

First, there came a long rush of rapid little steps, such as a light man might make in winning a walking race. At a certain point they stopped and changed to a sort of slow, swinging stamp, numbering not a quarter of the steps, but occupying about the same time. The moment the last echoing stamp had died away would come again the run or ripple of light, hurrying feet, and then again the thud of the heavier walking. It was certainly the same pair of boots, partly because (as has been said) there were no other boots about, and partly because they had a small but unmistakable creak in them. Father Brown had the kind of head that cannot help asking questions; and on this apparently trivial question his head almost split. He had seen men run in order to jump. He had seen men run in order to slide. But why on earth should a man run in order to walk? Or, again, why should he walk in order to run? Yet no other description would cover the antics of this invisible pair of legs. The man was either walking very fast down
one-half of the corridor in order to walk very slow down the other half; or he was walking very slow at one end to have the rapture of walking fast at the other. Neither suggestion seemed to make much sense. His brain was growing darker and darker, like his room.

Yet, as he began to think steadily, the very blackness of his cell seemed to make his thoughts more vivid; he began to see as in a kind of vision the fantastic feet capering along the corridor in unnatural or symbolic attitudes. Was it a heathen religious dance? Or some entirely new kind of scientific exercise? Father Brown began to ask himself with more exactness what the steps suggested. Taking the slow step first: it certainly was not the step of the proprietor. Men of his type walk with a rapid waddle, or they sit still. It could not be any servant or messenger waiting for directions. It did not sound like it. The poorer orders (in an oligarchy) sometimes lurch about when they are slightly drunk, but generally, and especially in such gorgeous scenes, they stand or sit in constrained attitudes. No; that heavy yet springy step, with a kind of careless emphasis, not specially noisy, yet not caring what noise it made, belonged to only one of the animals of this earth. It was a gentleman of western Europe, and probably one who had never worked for his living.

Just as he came to this solid certainty, the step changed to the quicker one, and ran past the door as feverishly as a rat. The listener remarked that though this step was much swifter it was also much more noiseless, almost as if the man were walking on tiptoe. Yet it was not associated in his mind with secrecy, but with something else—something that he could not remember. He was maddened by one of those half-memories that make a man feel half-witted. Surely he had heard that strange, swift walking somewhere. Suddenly he sprang to his feet with a new idea in his head, and walked to the door. His room had no direct outlet on the passage, but let on one side into the glass office, and on the other into the cloakroom beyond. He tried the door into the office, and found it locked. Then he looked at the window, now a square pane full of purple cloud cleft by livid sunset, and for an instant he smelt evil as a dog smells rats.

The rational part of him (whether the wiser or not) regained its supremacy. He remembered that the proprietor had told him that he should lock the door, and would come later to release him. He told himself that twenty things he had not thought of might explain the eccentric sounds outside; he reminded himself that there was just enough light left to finish his own proper work. Bringing his paper to the window so as to catch the last stormy evening light, he resolutely plunged once more into the almost completed record. He had written for about twenty
minutes, bending closer and closer to his paper in the lessening light; then suddenly he sat upright. He had heard the strange feet once more.

This time they had a third oddity. Previously the unknown man had walked, with levity indeed and lightning quickness, but he had walked. This time he ran. One could hear the swift, soft, bounding steps coming along the corridor, like the pads of a fleeing and leaping panther. Whoever was coming was a very strong, active man, in still yet tearing excitement. Yet, when the sound had swept up to the office like a sort of whispering whirlwind, it suddenly changed again to the old slow, swaggering stamp.

Father Brown flung down his paper, and, knowing the office door to be locked, went at once into the cloak room on the other side. The attendant of this place was temporarily absent, probably because the only guests were at dinner and his office was a sinecure. After groping through a grey forest of overcoats, he found that the dim cloak room opened on the lighted corridor in the form of a sort of counter or half-door, like most of the counters across which we have all handed umbrellas and received tickets. There was a light immediately above the semicircular arch of this opening. It threw little illumination on Father Brown himself, who seemed a mere dark outline against the dim sunset window behind him. But it threw an almost theatrical light on the man who stood outside the cloak room in the corridor.

He was an elegant man in very plain evening dress; tall, but with an air of not taking up much room; one felt that he could have slid along like a shadow where many smaller men would have been obvious and obstructive. His face, now flung back in the lamplight, was swarthy and vivacious, the face of a foreigner. His figure was good, his manners good humoured and confident; a critic could only say that his black coat was a shade below his figure and manners, and even bulged and bagged in an odd way. The moment he caught sight of Brown’s black silhouette against the sunset, he tossed down a scrap of paper with a number and called out with amiable authority: “I want my hat and coat, please; I find I have to go away at once.”

Father Brown took the paper without a word, and obediently went to look for the coat; it was not the first menial work he had done in his life. He brought it and laid it on the counter; meanwhile, the strange gentleman who had been feeling in his waistcoat pocket, said laughing: “I haven’t got any silver; you can keep this.” And he threw down half a sovereign, and caught up his coat.

Father Brown’s figure remained quite dark and still; but in that instant he had lost his head. His head was always most valuable when he had lost it. In such
moments he put two and two together and made four million. Often the Catholic Church (which is wedded to common sense) did not approve of it. Often he did not approve of it himself. But it was real inspiration—important at rare crises—when whosoever shall lose his head the same shall save it.

“I think, sir,” he said civilly, “that you have some silver in your pocket.”

The tall gentleman stared. “Hang it,” he cried, “if I choose to give you gold, why should you complain?”

“Because silver is sometimes more valuable than gold,” said the priest mildly; “that is, in large quantities.”

The stranger looked at him curiously. Then he looked still more curiously up the passage towards the main entrance. Then he looked back at Brown again, and then he looked very carefully at the window beyond Brown’s head, still coloured with the after-glow of the storm. Then he seemed to make up his mind. He put one hand on the counter, vaulted over as easily as an acrobat and towered above the priest, putting one tremendous hand upon his collar.

“Stand still,” he said, in a hacking whisper. “I don’t want to threaten you, but—”

“I do want to threaten you,” said Father Brown, in a voice like a rolling drum, “I want to threaten you with the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched.”

“You’re a rum sort of cloak-room clerk,” said the other.

“I am a priest, Monsieur Flambeau,” said Brown, “and I am ready to hear your confession.”

The other stood gasping for a few moments, and then staggered back into a chair.

The first two courses of the dinner of The Twelve True Fishermen had proceeded with placid success. I do not possess a copy of the menu; and if I did it would not convey anything to anybody. It was written in a sort of super-French employed by cooks, but quite unintelligible to Frenchmen. There was a tradition in the club that the hors d’oeuvres should be various and manifold to the point of madness. They were taken seriously because they were avowedly useless extras, like the whole dinner and the whole club. There was also a tradition that the soup course should be light and unpretending—a sort of simple and austere vigil for the feast of fish that was to come. The talk was that strange, slight talk which governs the British Empire, which governs it in secret, and yet would scarcely enlighten an ordinary Englishman even if he could overhear it.
sort of bored benignity. The Radical Chancellor of the Exchequer, whom the whole Tory party was supposed to be cursing for his extortions, was praised for his minor poetry, or his saddle in the hunting field. The Tory leader, whom all Liberals were supposed to hate as a tyrant, was discussed and, on the whole, praised—as a Liberal. It seemed somehow that politicians were very important. And yet, anything seemed important about them except their politics. Mr. Audley, the chairman, was an amiable, elderly man who still wore Gladstone collars; he was a kind of symbol of all that phantasmal and yet fixed society. He had never done anything—not even anything wrong. He was not fast; he was not even particularly rich. He was simply in the thing; and there was an end of it. No party could ignore him, and if he had wished to be in the Cabinet he certainly would have been put there. The Duke of Chester, the vice-president, was a young and rising politician. That is to say, he was a pleasant youth, with flat, fair hair and a freckled face, with moderate intelligence and enormous estates. In public his appearances were always successful and his principle was simple enough. When he thought of a joke he made it, and was called brilliant. When he could not think of a joke he said that this was no time for trifling, and was called able. In private, in a club of his own class, he was simply quite pleasantly frank and silly, like a schoolboy. Mr. Audley, never having been in politics, treated them a little more seriously. Sometimes he even embarrassed the company by phrases suggesting that there was some difference between a Liberal and a Conservative. He himself was a Conservative, even in private life. He had a roll of grey hair over the back of his collar, like certain old-fashioned statesmen, and seen from behind he looked like the man the empire wants. Seen from the front he looked like a mild, self-indulgent bachelor, with rooms in the Albany—which he was.

As has been remarked, there were twenty-four seats at the terrace table, and only twelve members of the club. Thus they could occupy the terrace in the most luxurious style of all, being ranged along the inner side of the table, with no one opposite, commanding an uninterrupted view of the garden, the colours of which were still vivid, though evening was closing in somewhat luridly for the time of year. The chairman sat in the centre of the line, and the vice-president at the right-hand end of it. When the twelve guests first trooped into their seats it was the custom (for some unknown reason) for all the fifteen waiters to stand lining the wall like troops presenting arms to the king, while the fat proprietor stood and bowed to the club with radiant surprise, as if he had never heard of them before. But before the first chink of knife and fork this army of retainers had
vanished, only the one or two required to collect and distribute the plates darting about in deathly silence. Mr. Lever, the proprietor, of course had disappeared in convulsions of courtesy long before. It would be exaggerative, indeed irreverent, to say that he ever positively appeared again. But when the important course, the fish course, was being brought on, there was—how shall I put it?—a vivid shadow, a projection of his personality, which told that he was hovering near. The sacred fish course consisted (to the eyes of the vulgar) in a sort of monstrous pudding, about the size and shape of a wedding cake, in which some considerable number of interesting fishes had finally lost the shapes which God had given to them. The Twelve True Fishermen took up their celebrated fish knives and fish forks, and approached it as gravely as if every inch of the pudding cost as much as the silver fork it was eaten with. So it did, for all I know. This course was dealt with in eager and devouring silence; and it was only when his plate was nearly empty that the young duke made the ritual remark: “They can’t do this anywhere but here.”

“Nowhere,” said Mr. Audley, in a deep bass voice, turning to the speaker and nodding his venerable head a number of times. “Nowhere, assuredly, except here. It was represented to me that at the Cafe Anglais—”

Here he was interrupted and even agitated for a moment by the removal of his plate, but he recaptured the valuable thread of his thoughts. “It was represented to me that the same could be done at the Cafe Anglais. Nothing like it, sir,” he said, shaking his head ruthlessly, like a hanging judge. “Nothing like it.”

“Overrated place,” said a certain Colonel Pound, speaking (by the look of him) for the first time for some months.

“Oh, I don’t know,” said the Duke of Chester, who was an optimist, “it’s jolly good for some things. You can’t beat it at—”

A waiter came swiftly along the room, and then stopped dead. His stoppage was as silent as his tread; but all those vague and kindly gentlemen were so used to the utter smoothness of the unseen machinery which surrounded and supported their lives, that a waiter doing anything unexpected was a start and a jar. They felt as you and I would feel if the inanimate world disobeyed—if a chair ran away from us.

The waiter stood staring a few seconds, while there deepened on every face at table a strange shame which is wholly the product of our time. It is the combination of modern humanitarianism with the horrible modern abyss between the souls of the rich and poor. A genuine historic aristocrat would have thrown things at the waiter, beginning with empty bottles, and very probably
ending with money. A genuine democrat would have asked him, with comrade-like clearness of speech, what the devil he was doing. But these modern plutocrats could not bear a poor man near to them, either as a slave or as a friend. That something had gone wrong with the servants was merely a dull, hot embarrassment. They did not want to be brutal, and they dreaded the need to be benevolent. They wanted the thing, whatever it was, to be over. It was over. The waiter, after standing for some seconds rigid, like a cataleptic, turned round and ran madly out of the room.

When he reappeared in the room, or rather in the doorway, it was in company with another waiter, with whom he whispered and gesticulated with southern fierceness. Then the first waiter went away, leaving the second waiter, and reappeared with a third waiter. By the time a fourth waiter had joined this hurried synod, Mr. Audley felt it necessary to break the silence in the interests of Tact. He used a very loud cough, instead of a presidential hammer, and said: “Splendid work young Moocher’s doing in Burmah. Now, no other nation in the world could have—”

A fifth waiter had sped towards him like an arrow, and was whispering in his ear: “So sorry. Important! Might the proprietor speak to you?”

The chairman turned in disorder, and with a dazed stare saw Mr. Lever coming towards them with his lumbering quickness. The gait of the good proprietor was indeed his usual gait, but his face was by no means usual. Generally it was a genial copper-brown; now it was a sickly yellow.

“You will pardon me, Mr. Audley,” he said, with asthmatic breathlessness. “I have great apprehensions. Your fish-plates, they are cleared away with the knife and fork on them!”

“Well, I hope so,” said the chairman, with some warmth.

“You see him?” panted the excited hotel keeper; “you see the waiter who took them away? You know him?”

“Know the waiter?” answered Mr. Audley indignantly. “Certainly not!”

Mr. Lever opened his hands with a gesture of agony. “I never send him,” he said. “I know not when or why he come. I send my waiter to take away the plates, and he find them already away.”

Mr. Audley still looked rather too bewildered to be really the man the empire wants; none of the company could say anything except the man of wood—Colonel Pound—who seemed galvanised into an unnatural life. He rose rigidly from his chair, leaving all the rest sitting, screwed his eyeglass into his eye, and spoke in a raucous undertone as if he had half-forgotten how to speak. “Do you
mean,” he said, “that somebody has stolen our silver fish service?”

The proprietor repeated the open-handed gesture with even greater helplessness and in a flash all the men at the table were on their feet.

“Are all your waiters here?” demanded the colonel, in his low, harsh accent.

“Yes; they’re all here. I noticed it myself,” cried the young duke, pushing his boyish face into the inmost ring. “Always count ’em as I come in; they look so queer standing up against the wall.”

“But surely one cannot exactly remember,” began Mr. Audley, with heavy hesitation.

“I remember exactly, I tell you,” cried the duke excitedly. “There never have been more than fifteen waiters at this place, and there were no more than fifteen tonight, I’ll swear; no more and no less.”

The proprietor turned upon him, quaking in a kind of palsy of surprise. “You say—you say,” he stammered, “that you see all my fifteen waiters?”

“As usual,” assented the duke. “What is the matter with that!”

“Nothing,” said Lever, with a deepening accent, “only you did not. For one of zem is dead upstairs.”

There was a shocking stillness for an instant in that room. It may be (so supernatural is the word death) that each of those idle men looked for a second at his soul, and saw it as a small dried pea. One of them—the duke, I think—even said with the idiotic kindness of wealth: “Is there anything we can do?”

“He has had a priest,” said the Jew, not untouched.

Then, as to the clang of doom, they awoke to their own position. For a few weird seconds they had really felt as if the fifteenth waiter might be the ghost of the dead man upstairs. They had been dumb under that oppression, for ghosts were to them an embarrassment, like beggars. But the remembrance of the silver broke the spell of the miraculous; broke it abruptly and with a brutal reaction. The colonel flung over his chair and strode to the door. “If there was a fifteenth man here, friends,” he said, “that fifteenth fellow was a thief. Down at once to the front and back doors and secure everything; then we’ll talk. The twenty-four pearls of the club are worth recovering.”

Mr. Audley seemed at first to hesitate about whether it was gentlemanly to be in such a hurry about anything; but, seeing the duke dash down the stairs with youthful energy, he followed with a more mature motion.

At the same instant a sixth waiter ran into the room, and declared that he had found the pile of fish plates on a sideboard, with no trace of the silver.

The crowd of diners and attendants that tumbled helter-skelter down the
passages divided into two groups. Most of the Fishermen followed the proprietor
to the front room to demand news of any exit. Colonel Pound, with the
chairman, the vice-president, and one or two others darted down the corridor
leading to the servants’ quarters, as the more likely line of escape. As they did so
they passed the dim alcove or cavern of the cloak room, and saw a short, black-
coated figure, presumably an attendant, standing a little way back in the shadow
of it.

“Hallo, there!” called out the duke. “Have you seen anyone pass?”
The short figure did not answer the question directly, but merely said:
“Perhaps I have got what you are looking for, gentlemen.”
They paused, wavering and wondering, while he quietly went to the back of
the cloak room, and came back with both hands full of shining silver, which he
laid out on the counter as calmly as a salesman. It took the form of a dozen
quaintly shaped forks and knives.

“You—you—” began the colonel, quite thrown off his balance at last. Then he
peered into the dim little room and saw two things: first, that the short, black-
clad man was dressed like a clergyman; and, second, that the window of the
room behind him was burst, as if someone had passed violently through.
“Valuable things to deposit in a cloak room, aren’t they?” remarked the
clergyman, with cheerful composure.

“Did—did you steal those things?” stammered Mr. Audley, with staring eyes.
“If I did,” said the cleric pleasantly, “at least I am bringing them back again.”
“But you didn’t,” said Colonel Pound, still staring at the broken window.
“To make a clean breast of it, I didn’t,” said the other, with some humour.
And he seated himself quite gravely on a stool. “But you know who did,” said
the, colonel.
“I don’t know his real name,” said the priest placidly, “but I know something
of his fighting weight, and a great deal about his spiritual difficulties. I formed
the physical estimate when he was trying to throttle me, and the moral estimate
when he repented.”

“Oh, I say—repented!” cried young Chester, with a sort of crow of laughter.
Father Brown got to his feet, putting his hands behind him. “Odd, isn’t it,” he
said, “that a thief and a vagabond should repent, when so many who are rich and
secure remain hard and frivolous, and without fruit for God or man? But there, if
you will excuse me, you trespass a little upon my province. If you doubt the
penitence as a practical fact, there are your knives and forks. You are The
Twelve True Fishers, and there are all your silver fish. But He has made me a
“Did you catch this man?” asked the colonel, frowning.

Father Brown looked him full in his frowning face. “Yes,” he said, “I caught him, with an unseen hook and an invisible line which is long enough to let him wander to the ends of the world, and still to bring him back with a twitch upon the thread."

There was a long silence. All the other men present drifted away to carry the recovered silver to their comrades, or to consult the proprietor about the queer condition of affairs. But the grim-faced colonel still sat sideways on the counter, swinging his long, lank legs and biting his dark moustache.

At last he said quietly to the priest: “He must have been a clever fellow, but I think I know a cleverer.”

“He was a clever fellow,” answered the other, “but I am not quite sure of what other you mean.”

“I mean you,” said the colonel, with a short laugh. “I don’t want to get the fellow jailed; make yourself easy about that. But I’d give a good many silver forks to know exactly how you fell into this affair, and how you got the stuff out of him. I reckon you’re the most up-to-date devil of the present company.”

Father Brown seemed rather to like the saturnine candour of the soldier. “Well,” he said, smiling, “I mustn’t tell you anything of the man’s identity, or his own story, of course; but there’s no particular reason why I shouldn’t tell you of the mere outside facts which I found out for myself.”

He hopped over the barrier with unexpected activity, and sat beside Colonel Pound, kicking his short legs like a little boy on a gate. He began to tell the story as easily as if he were telling it to an old friend by a Christmas fire.

“You see, colonel,” he said, “I was shut up in that small room there doing some writing, when I heard a pair of feet in this passage doing a dance that was as queer as the dance of death. First came quick, funny little steps, like a man walking on tiptoe for a wager; then came slow, careless, creaking steps, as of a big man walking about with a cigar. But they were both made by the same feet, I swear, and they came in rotation; first the run and then the walk, and then the run again. I wondered at first idly and then wildly why a man should act these two parts at once. One walk I knew; it was just like yours, colonel. It was the walk of a well-fed gentleman waiting for something, who strolls about rather because he is physically alert than because he is mentally impatient. I knew that I knew the other walk, too, but I could not remember what it was. What wild creature had I met on my travels that tore along on tiptoe in that extraordinary style? Then I
heard a clink of plates somewhere; and the answer stood up as plain as St. Peter’s. It was the walk of a waiter—that walk with the body slanted forward, the eyes looking down, the ball of the toe spurning away the ground, the coat tails and napkin flying. Then I thought for a minute and a half more. And I believe I saw the manner of the crime, as clearly as if I were going to commit it.”

Colonel Pound looked at him keenly, but the speaker’s mild grey eyes were fixed upon the ceiling with almost empty wistfulness.

“A crime,” he said slowly, “is like any other work of art. Don’t look surprised; crimes are by no means the only works of art that come from an infernal workshop. But every work of art, divine or diabolic, has one indispensable mark—I mean, that the centre of it is simple, however much the fulfilment may be complicated. Thus, in Hamlet, let us say, the grotesqueness of the grave-digger, the flowers of the mad girl, the fantastic finery of Osric, the pallor of the ghost and the grin of the skull are all oddities in a sort of tangled wreath round one plain tragic figure of a man in black. Well, this also,” he said, getting slowly down from his seat with a smile, “this also is the plain tragedy of a man in black. Yes,” he went on, seeing the colonel look up in some wonder, “the whole of this tale turns on a black coat. In this, as in Hamlet, there are the rococo excrescences—you yourselves, let us say. There is the dead waiter, who was there when he could not be there. There is the invisible hand that swept your table clear of silver and melted into air. But every clever crime is founded ultimately on some one quite simple fact—some fact that is not itself mysterious. The mystification comes in covering it up, in leading men’s thoughts away from it. This large and subtle and (in the ordinary course) most profitable crime, was built on the plain fact that a gentleman’s evening dress is the same as a waiter’s. All the rest was acting, and thundering good acting, too.”

“Still,” said the colonel, getting up and frowning at his boots, “I am not sure that I understand.”

“Colonel,” said Father Brown, “I tell you that this archangel of impudence who stole your forks walked up and down this passage twenty times in the blaze of all the lamps, in the glare of all the eyes. He did not go and hide in dim corners where suspicion might have searched for him. He kept constantly on the move in the lighted corridors, and everywhere that he went he seemed to be there by right. Don’t ask me what he was like; you have seen him yourself six or seven times tonight. You were waiting with all the other grand people in the reception room at the end of the passage there, with the terrace just beyond. Whenever he came among you gentlemen, he came in the lightning style of a
waiter, with bent head, flapping napkin and flying feet. He shot out on to the
terrace, did something to the table cloth, and shot back again towards the office
and the waiters’ quarters. By the time he had come under the eye of the office
clerk and the waiters he had become another man in every inch of his body, in
every instinctive gesture. He strolled among the servants with the absent-minded
insolence which they have all seen in their patrons. It was no new thing to them
that a swell from the dinner party should pace all parts of the house like an
animal at the Zoo; they know that nothing marks the Smart Set more than a habit
of walking where one chooses. When he was magnificently weary of walking
down that particular passage he would wheel round and pace back past the
office; in the shadow of the arch just beyond he was altered as by a blast of
magic, and went hurrying forward again among the Twelve Fishermen, an
obsequious attendant. Why should the gentlemen look at a chance waiter? Why
should the waiters suspect a first-rate walking gentleman? Once or twice he
played the coolest tricks. In the proprietor’s private quarters he called out
breezily for a syphon of soda water, saying he was thirsty. He said genially that
he would carry it himself, and he did; he carried it quickly and correctly through
the thick of you, a waiter with an obvious errand. Of course, it could not have
been kept up long, but it only had to be kept up till the end of the fish course.

“His worst moment was when the waiters stood in a row; but even then he
contrived to lean against the wall just round the corner in such a way that for that
important instant the waiters thought him a gentleman, while the gentlemen
thought him a waiter. The rest went like winking. If any waiter caught him away
from the table, that waiter caught a languid aristocrat. He had only to time
himself two minutes before the fish was cleared, become a swift servant, and
clear it himself. He put the plates down on a sideboard, stuffed the silver in his
breast pocket, giving it a bulgy look, and ran like a hare (I heard him coming) till
he came to the cloak room. There he had only to be a plutocrat again—a
plutocrat called away suddenly on business. He had only to give his ticket to the
cloak-room attendant, and go out again elegantly as he had come in. Only—one
happened to be the cloak-room attendant.”

“What did you do to him?” cried the colonel, with unusual intensity. “What
did he tell you?”

“I beg your pardon,” said the priest immovably, “that is where the story ends.”

“And the interesting story begins,” muttered Pound. “I think I understand his
professional trick. But I don’t seem to have got hold of yours.”

“I must be going,” said Father Brown.
They walked together along the passage to the entrance hall, where they saw the fresh, freckled face of the Duke of Chester, who was bounding buoyantly along towards them.

“Come along, Pound,” he cried breathlessly. “I’ve been looking for you everywhere. The dinner’s going again in spanking style, and old Audley has got to make a speech in honour of the forks being saved. We want to start some new ceremony, don’t you know, to commemorate the occasion. I say, you really got the goods back, what do you suggest?”

“Why,” said the colonel, eyeing him with a certain sardonic approval, “I should suggest that henceforward we wear green coats, instead of black. One never knows what mistakes may arise when one looks so like a waiter.”

“Oh, hang it all!” said the young man, “a gentleman never looks like a waiter.”

“Nor a waiter like a gentleman, I suppose,” said Colonel Pound, with the same lowering laughter on his face. “Reverend sir, your friend must have been very smart to act the gentleman.”

Father Brown buttoned up his commonplace overcoat to the neck, for the night was stormy, and took his commonplace umbrella from the stand.

“Yes,” he said; “it must be very hard work to be a gentleman; but, do you know, I have sometimes thought that it may be almost as laborious to be a waiter.”

And saying “Good evening,” he pushed open the heavy doors of that palace of pleasures. The golden gates closed behind him, and he went at a brisk walk through the damp, dark streets in search of a penny omnibus.
THE FLYING STARS

“The most beautiful crime I ever committed,” Flambeau would say in his highly moral old age, “was also, by a singular coincidence, my last. It was committed at Christmas. As an artist I had always attempted to provide crimes suitable to the special season or landscapes in which I found myself, choosing this or that terrace or garden for a catastrophe, as if for a statuary group. Thus squires should be swindled in long rooms panelled with oak; while Jews, on the other hand, should rather find themselves unexpectedly penniless among the lights and screens of the Cafe Riche. Thus, in England, if I wished to relieve a dean of his riches (which is not so easy as you might suppose), I wished to frame him, if I make myself clear, in the green lawns and grey towers of some cathedral town. Similarly, in France, when I had got money out of a rich and wicked peasant (which is almost impossible), it gratified me to get his indignant head relieved against a grey line of clipped poplars, and those solemn plains of Gaul over which broods the mighty spirit of Millet.

“Well, my last crime was a Christmas crime, a cheery, cosy, English middle-class crime; a crime of Charles Dickens. I did it in a good old middle-class house near Putney, a house with a crescent of carriage drive, a house with a stable by the side of it, a house with the name on the two outer gates, a house with a monkey tree. Enough, you know the species. I really think my imitation of Dickens’s style was dexterous and literary. It seems almost a pity I repented the same evening.”

Flambeau would then proceed to tell the story from the inside; and even from the inside it was odd. Seen from the outside it was perfectly incomprehensible, and it is from the outside that the stranger must study it. From this standpoint the drama may be said to have begun when the front doors of the house with the stable opened on the garden with the monkey tree, and a young girl came out with bread to feed the birds on the afternoon of Boxing Day. She had a pretty face, with brave brown eyes; but her figure was beyond conjecture, for she was so wrapped up in brown furs that it was hard to say which was hair and which was fur. But for the attractive face she might have been a small toddling bear.

The winter afternoon was reddening towards evening, and already a ruby light was rolled over the bloomless beds, filling them, as it were, with the ghosts of the dead roses. On one side of the house stood the stable, on the other an alley or cloister of laurels led to the larger garden behind. The young lady, having
scattered bread for the birds (for the fourth or fifth time that day, because the dog ate it), passed unobtrusively down the lane of laurels and into a glimmering plantation of evergreens behind. Here she gave an exclamation of wonder, real or ritual, and looking up at the high garden wall above her, beheld it fantastically bestridden by a somewhat fantastic figure.

“Oh, don’t jump, Mr. Crook,” she called out in some alarm; “it’s much too high.”

The individual riding the party wall like an aerial horse was a tall, angular young man, with dark hair sticking up like a hair brush, intelligent and even distinguished lineaments, but a sallow and almost alien complexion. This showed the more plainly because he wore an aggressive red tie, the only part of his costume of which he seemed to take any care. Perhaps it was a symbol. He took no notice of the girl’s alarmed adjuration, but leapt like a grasshopper to the ground beside her, where he might very well have broken his legs.

“I think I was meant to be a burglar,” he said placidly, “and I have no doubt I should have been if I hadn’t happened to be born in that nice house next door. I can’t see any harm in it, anyhow.”

“How can you say such things!” she remonstrated.

“Well,” said the young man, “if you’re born on the wrong side of the wall, I can’t see that it’s wrong to climb over it.”

“I never know what you will say or do next,” she said.

“I don’t often know myself,” replied Mr. Crook; “but then I am on the right side of the wall now.”

“And which is the right side of the wall?” asked the young lady, smiling.

“Whichever side you are on,” said the young man named Crook.

As they went together through the laurels towards the front garden a motor horn sounded thrice, coming nearer and nearer, and a car of splendid speed, great elegance, and a pale green colour swept up to the front doors like a bird and stood throbbing.

“Hullo, hullo!” said the young man with the red tie, “here’s somebody born on the right side, anyhow. I didn’t know, Miss Adams, that your Santa Claus was so modern as this.”

“Oh, that’s my godfather, Sir Leopold Fischer. He always comes on Boxing Day.”

Then, after an innocent pause, which unconsciously betrayed some lack of enthusiasm, Ruby Adams added:

“He is very kind.”
John Crook, journalist, had heard of that eminent City magnate; and it was not his fault if the City magnate had not heard of him; for in certain articles in The Clarion or The New Age Sir Leopold had been dealt with austerely. But he said nothing and grimly watched the unloading of the motor-car, which was rather a long process. A large, neat chauffeur in green got out from the front, and a small, neat manservant in grey got out from the back, and between them they deposited Sir Leopold on the doorstep and began to unpack him, like some very carefully protected parcel. Rugs enough to stock a bazaar, furs of all the beasts of the forest, and scarves of all the colours of the rainbow were unwrapped one by one, till they revealed something resembling the human form; the form of a friendly, but foreign-looking old gentleman, with a grey goat-like beard and a beaming smile, who rubbed his big fur gloves together.

Long before this revelation was complete the two big doors of the porch had opened in the middle, and Colonel Adams (father of the furry young lady) had come out himself to invite his eminent guest inside. He was a tall, sunburnt, and very silent man, who wore a red smoking-cap like a fez, making him look like one of the English Sirdars or Pashas in Egypt. With him was his brother-in-law, lately come from Canada, a big and rather boisterous young gentleman-farmer, with a yellow beard, by name James Blount. With him also was the more insignificant figure of the priest from the neighbouring Roman Church; for the colonel’s late wife had been a Catholic, and the children, as is common in such cases, had been trained to follow her. Everything seemed undistinguished about the priest, even down to his name, which was Brown; yet the colonel had always found something companionable about him, and frequently asked him to such family gatherings.

In the large entrance hall of the house there was ample room even for Sir Leopold and the removal of his wraps. Porch and vestibule, indeed, were unduly large in proportion to the house, and formed, as it were, a big room with the front door at one end, and the bottom of the staircase at the other. In front of the large hall fire, over which hung the colonel’s sword, the process was completed and the company, including the saturnine Crook, presented to Sir Leopold Fischer. That venerable financier, however, still seemed struggling with portions of his well-lined attire, and at length produced from a very interior tail-coat pocket, a black oval case which he radiantly explained to be his Christmas present for his god-daughter. With an unaffected vain-glory that had something disarming about it he held out the case before them all; it flew open at a touch and half-blinded them. It was just as if a crystal fountain had spurted in their
eyes. In a nest of orange velvet lay like three eggs, three white and vivid diamonds that seemed to set the very air on fire all round them. Fischer stood beaming benevolently and drinking deep of the astonishment and ecstasy of the girl, the grim admiration and gruff thanks of the colonel, the wonder of the whole group.

“I’ll put ’em back now, my dear,” said Fischer, returning the case to the tails of his coat. “I had to be careful of ’em coming down. They’re the three great African diamonds called ‘The Flying Stars,’ because they’ve been stolen so often. All the big criminals are on the track; but even the rough men about in the streets and hotels could hardly have kept their hands off them. I might have lost them on the road here. It was quite possible.”

“Quite natural, I should say,” growled the man in the red tie. “I shouldn’t blame ’em if they had taken ’em. When they ask for bread, and you don’t even give them a stone, I think they might take the stone for themselves.”

“I won’t have you talking like that,” cried the girl, who was in a curious glow. “You’ve only talked like that since you became a horrid what’s-his-name. You know what I mean. What do you call a man who wants to embrace the chimney-sweep?”

“A saint,” said Father Brown.

“I think,” said Sir Leopold, with a supercilious smile, “that Ruby means a Socialist.”

“A radical does not mean a man who lives on radishes,” remarked Crook, with some impatience; “and a Conservative does not mean a man who preserves jam. Neither, I assure you, does a Socialist mean a man who desires a social evening with the chimney-sweep. A Socialist means a man who wants all the chimneys swept and all the chimney-sweeps paid for it.”

“But who won’t allow you,” put in the priest in a low voice, “to own your own soot.”

Crook looked at him with an eye of interest and even respect. “Does one want to own soot?” he asked.

“One might,” answered Brown, with speculation in his eye. “I’ve heard that gardeners use it. And I once made six children happy at Christmas when the conjuror didn’t come, entirely with soot—applied externally.”

“Oh, splendid,” cried Ruby. “Oh, I wish you’d do it to this company.”

The boisterous Canadian, Mr. Blount, was lifting his loud voice in applause, and the astonished financier his (in some considerable deprecation), when a knock sounded at the double front doors. The priest opened them, and they
showed again the front garden of evergreens, monkey-tree and all, now gathering gloom against a gorgeous violet sunset. The scene thus framed was so coloured and quaint, like a back scene in a play, that they forgot a moment the insignificant figure standing in the door. He was dusty-looking and in a frayed coat, evidently a common messenger. “Any of you gentlemen Mr. Blount?” he asked, and held forward a letter doubtfully. Mr. Blount started, and stopped in his shout of assent. Ripping up the envelope with evident astonishment he read it; his face clouded a little, and then cleared, and he turned to his brother-in-law and host.

“I’m sick at being such a nuisance, colonel,” he said, with the cheery colonial conventions; “but would it upset you if an old acquaintance called on me here tonight on business? In point of fact it’s Florian, that famous French acrobat and comic actor; I knew him years ago out West (he was a French-Canadian by birth), and he seems to have business for me, though I hardly guess what.”

“Of course, of course,” replied the colonel carelessly—“My dear chap, any friend of yours. No doubt he will prove an acquisition.”

“He’ll black this face, if that’s what you mean,” cried Blount, laughing. “I don’t doubt he’d black everyone else’s eyes. I don’t care; I’m not refined. I like the jolly old pantomime where a man sits on his top hat.”

“Not on mine, please,” said Sir Leopold Fischer, with dignity.

“Well, well,” observed Crook, airily, “don’t let’s quarrel. There are lower jokes than sitting on a top hat.”

Dislike of the red-tied youth, born of his predatory opinions and evident intimacy with the pretty godchild, led Fischer to say, in his most sarcastic, magisterial manner: “No doubt you have found something much lower than sitting on a top hat. What is it, pray?”

“Letting a top hat sit on you, for instance,” said the Socialist.

“Now, now, now,” cried the Canadian farmer with his barbarian benevolence, “don’t let’s spoil a jolly evening. What I say is, let’s do something for the company tonight. Not blacking faces or sitting on hats, if you don’t like those—but something of the sort. Why couldn’t we have a proper old English pantomime—clown, columbine, and so on. I saw one when I left England at twelve years old, and it’s blazed in my brain like a bonfire ever since. I came back to the old country only last year, and I find the thing’s extinct. Nothing but a lot of snivelling fairy plays. I want a hot poker and a policeman made into sausages, and they give me princesses moralising by moonlight, Blue Birds, or something. Blue Beard’s more in my line, and him I like best when he turned
into the pantaloon.”

“I’m all for making a policeman into sausages,” said John Crook. “It’s a better definition of Socialism than some recently given. But surely the get-up would be too big a business.”

“Not a scrap,” cried Blount, quite carried away. “A harlequinade’s the quickest thing we can do, for two reasons. First, one can gag to any degree; and, second, all the objects are household things—tables and towel-horses and washing baskets, and things like that.”

“That’s true,” admitted Crook, nodding eagerly and walking about. “But I’m afraid I can’t have my policeman’s uniform? Haven’t killed a policeman lately.”

Blount frowned thoughtfully a space, and then smote his thigh. “Yes, we can!” he cried. “I’ve got Florian’s address here, and he knows every costumier in London. I’ll phone him to bring a police dress when he comes.” And he went bounding away to the telephone.

“Oh, it’s glorious, godfather,” cried Ruby, almost dancing. “I’ll be columbine and you shall be pantaloon.”

The millionaire held himself stiff with a sort of heathen solemnity. “I think, my dear,” he said, “you must get someone else for pantaloon.”

“I will be pantaloon, if you like,” said Colonel Adams, taking his cigar out of his mouth, and speaking for the first and last time.

“You ought to have a statue,” cried the Canadian, as he came back, radiant, from the telephone. “There, we are all fitted. Mr. Crook shall be clown; he’s a journalist and knows all the oldest jokes. I can be harlequin, that only wants long legs and jumping about. My friend Florian ‘phones he’s bringing the police costume; he’s changing on the way. We can act it in this very hall, the audience sitting on those broad stairs opposite, one row above another. These front doors can be the back scene, either open or shut. Shut, you see an English interior. Open, a moonlit garden. It all goes by magic.” And snatching a chance piece of billiard chalk from his pocket, he ran it across the hall floor, half-way between the front door and the staircase, to mark the line of the footlights.

How even such a banquet of bosh was got ready in the time remained a riddle. But they went at it with that mixture of recklessness and industry that lives when youth is in a house; and youth was in that house that night, though not all may have isolated the two faces and hearts from which it flamed. As always happens, the invention grew wilder and wilder through the very tameness of the bourgeois conventions from which it had to create. The columbine looked charming in an outstanding skirt that strangely resembled the large lamp-shade in the drawing-
room. The clown and pantaloon made themselves white with flour from the
cook, and red with rouge from some other domestic, who remained (like all true
Christian benefactors) anonymous. The harlequin, already clad in silver paper
out of cigar boxes, was, with difficulty, prevented from smashing the old
Victorian lustre chandeliers, that he might cover himself with resplendent
crystals. In fact he would certainly have done so, had not Ruby unearthed some
old pantomime paste jewels she had worn at a fancy dress party as the Queen of
Diamonds. Indeed, her uncle, James Blount, was getting almost out of hand in
his excitement; he was like a schoolboy. He put a paper donkey’s head
unexpectedly on Father Brown, who bore it patiently, and even found some
private manner of moving his ears. He even essayed to put the paper donkey’s
tail to the coat-tails of Sir Leopold Fischer. This, however, was frowned down.
“Uncle is too absurd,” cried Ruby to Crook, round whose shoulders she had
seriously placed a string of sausages. “Why is he so wild?”
“He is harlequin to your columbine,” said Crook. “I am only the clown who
makes the old jokes.”
“I wish you were the harlequin,” she said, and left the string of sausages
swinging.
Father Brown, though he knew every detail done behind the scenes, and had
even evoked applause by his transformation of a pillow into a pantomime baby,
went round to the front and sat among the audience with all the solemn
expectation of a child at his first matinee. The spectators were few, relations, one
or two local friends, and the servants; Sir Leopold sat in the front seat, his full
and still fur-collared figure largely obscuring the view of the little cleric behind
him; but it has never been settled by artistic authorities whether the cleric lost
much. The pantomime was utterly chaotic, yet not contemptible; there ran
through it a rage of improvisation which came chiefly from Crook the clown.
Commonly he was a clever man, and he was inspired tonight with a wild
omniscience, a folly wiser than the world, that which comes to a young man who
has seen for an instant a particular expression on a particular face. He was
supposed to be the clown, but he was really almost everything else, the author
(so far as there was an author), the prompter, the scene-painter, the scene-shifter,
and, above all, the orchestra. At abrupt intervals in the outrageous performance
he would hurl himself in full costume at the piano and bang out some popular
music equally absurd and appropriate.
The climax of this, as of all else, was the moment when the two front doors at
the back of the scene flew open, showing the lovely moonlit garden, but showing
more prominently the famous professional guest; the great Florian, dressed up as a policeman. The clown at the piano played the constabulary chorus in the “Pirates of Penzance,” but it was drowned in the deafening applause, for every gesture of the great comic actor was an admirable though restrained version of the carriage and manner of the police. The harlequin leapt upon him and hit him over the helmet; the pianist playing “Where did you get that hat?” he faced about in admirably simulated astonishment, and then the leaping harlequin hit him again (the pianist suggesting a few bars of “Then we had another one”). Then the harlequin rushed right into the arms of the policeman and fell on top of him, amid a roar of applause. Then it was that the strange actor gave that celebrated imitation of a dead man, of which the fame still lingers round Putney. It was almost impossible to believe that a living person could appear so limp.

The athletic harlequin swung him about like a sack or twisted or tossed him like an Indian club; all the time to the most maddeningly ludicrous tunes from the piano. When the harlequin heaved the comic constable heavily off the floor the clown played “I arise from dreams of thee.” When he shuffled him across his back, “With my bundle on my shoulder,” and when the harlequin finally let fall the policeman with a most convincing thud, the lunatic at the instrument struck into a jingling measure with some words which are still believed to have been, “I sent a letter to my love and on the way I dropped it.”

At about this limit of mental anarchy Father Brown’s view was obscured altogether; for the City magnate in front of him rose to his full height and thrust his hands savagely into all his pockets. Then he sat down nervously, still fumbling, and then stood up again. For an instant it seemed seriously likely that he would stride across the footlights; then he turned a glare at the clown playing the piano; and then he burst in silence out of the room.

The priest had only watched for a few more minutes the absurd but not inelegant dance of the amateur harlequin over his splendidly unconscious foe. With real though rude art, the harlequin danced slowly backwards out of the door into the garden, which was full of moonlight and stillness. The vamped dress of silver paper and paste, which had been too glaring in the footlights, looked more and more magical and silvery as it danced away under a brilliant moon. The audience was closing in with a cataract of applause, when Brown felt his arm abruptly touched, and he was asked in a whisper to come into the colonel’s study.

He followed his summoner with increasing doubt, which was not dispelled by a solemn comicality in the scene of the study. There sat Colonel Adams, still
unaffectedly dressed as a pantaloon, with the knobbled whalebone nodding above his brow, but with his poor old eyes sad enough to have sobered a Saturnalia. Sir Leopold Fischer was leaning against the mantelpiece and heaving with all the importance of panic.

“This is a very painful matter, Father Brown,” said Adams. “The truth is, those diamonds we all saw this afternoon seem to have vanished from my friend’s tail-coat pocket. And as you—”

“As I,” supplemented Father Brown, with a broad grin, “was sitting just behind him—”

“Nothing of the sort shall be suggested,” said Colonel Adams, with a firm look at Fischer, which rather implied that some such thing had been suggested. “I only ask you to give me the assistance that any gentleman might give.”

“Which is turning out his pockets,” said Father Brown, and proceeded to do so, displaying seven and sixpence, a return ticket, a small silver crucifix, a small breviary, and a stick of chocolate.

The colonel looked at him long, and then said, “Do you know, I should like to see the inside of your head more than the inside of your pockets. My daughter is one of your people, I know; well, she has lately—” and he stopped.

“She has lately,” cried out old Fischer, “opened her father’s house to a cut-throat Socialist, who says openly he would steal anything from a richer man. This is the end of it. Here is the richer man—and none the richer.”

“If you want the inside of my head you can have it,” said Brown rather wearily. “What it’s worth you can say afterwards. But the first thing I find in that disused pocket is this: that men who mean to steal diamonds don’t talk Socialism. They are more likely,” he added demurely, “to denounce it.”

Both the others shifted sharply and the priest went on:

“You see, we know these people, more or less. That Socialist would no more steal a diamond than a Pyramid. We ought to look at once to the one man we don’t know. The fellow acting the policeman—Florian. Where is he exactly at this minute, I wonder.”

The pantaloon sprang erect and strode out of the room. An interlude ensued, during which the millionaire stared at the priest, and the priest at his breviary; then the pantaloon returned and said, with staccato gravity, “The policeman is still lying on the stage. The curtain has gone up and down six times; he is still lying there.”

Father Brown dropped his book and stood staring with a look of blank mental ruin. Very slowly a light began to creep in his grey eyes, and then he made the
scarcely obvious answer.

“Please forgive me, colonel, but when did your wife die?”

“Wife!” replied the staring soldier, “she died this year two months. Her brother James arrived just a week too late to see her.”

The little priest bounded like a rabbit shot. “Come on!” he cried in quite unusual excitement. “Come on! We’ve got to go and look at that policeman!”

They rushed on to the now curtained stage, breaking rudely past the columbine and clown (who seemed whispering quite contentedly), and Father Brown bent over the prostrate comic policeman.

“Chloroform,” he said as he rose; “I only guessed it just now.”

There was a startled stillness, and then the colonel said slowly, “Please say seriously what all this means.”

Father Brown suddenly shouted with laughter, then stopped, and only struggled with it for instants during the rest of his speech. “Gentlemen,” he gasped, “there’s not much time to talk. I must run after the criminal. But this great French actor who played the policeman—this clever corpse the harlequin waltzed with and dandled and threw about—he was—” His voice again failed him, and he turned his back to run.

“He was?” called Fischer inquiringly.

“A real policeman,” said Father Brown, and ran away into the dark.

There were hollows and bowers at the extreme end of that leafy garden, in which the laurels and other immortal shrubs showed against sapphire sky and silver moon, even in that midwinter, warm colours as of the south. The green gaiety of the waving laurels, the rich purple indigo of the night, the moon like a monstrous crystal, make an almost irresponsible romantic picture; and among the top branches of the garden trees a strange figure is climbing, who looks not so much romantic as impossible. He sparkles from head to heel, as if clad in ten million moons; the real moon catches him at every movement and sets a new inch of him on fire. But he swings, flashing and successful, from the short tree in this garden to the tall, rambling tree in the other, and only stops there because a shade has slid under the smaller tree and has unmistakably called up to him.

“Well, Flambeau,” says the voice, “you really look like a Flying Star; but that always means a Falling Star at last.”

The silver, sparkling figure above seems to lean forward in the laurels and, confident of escape, listens to the little figure below.

“You never did anything better, Flambeau. It was clever to come from Canada (with a Paris ticket, I suppose) just a week after Mrs. Adams died, when no one
was in a mood to ask questions. It was cleverer to have marked down the Flying Stars and the very day of Fischer’s coming. But there’s no cleverness, but mere genius, in what followed. Stealing the stones, I suppose, was nothing to you. You could have done it by sleight of hand in a hundred other ways besides that pretence of putting a paper donkey’s tail to Fischer’s coat. But in the rest you eclipsed yourself.”

The silvery figure among the green leaves seems to linger as if hypnotised, though his escape is easy behind him; he is staring at the man below.

“Oh, yes,” says the man below, “I know all about it. I know you not only forced the pantomime, but put it to a double use. You were going to steal the stones quietly; news came by an accomplice that you were already suspected, and a capable police officer was coming to rout you up that very night. A common thief would have been thankful for the warning and fled; but you are a poet. You already had the clever notion of hiding the jewels in a blaze of false stage jewellery. Now, you saw that if the dress were a harlequin’s the appearance of a policeman would be quite in keeping. The worthy officer started from Putney police station to find you, and walked into the queerest trap ever set in this world. When the front door opened he walked straight on to the stage of a Christmas pantomime, where he could be kicked, clubbed, stunned and drugged by the dancing harlequin, amid roars of laughter from all the most respectable people in Putney. Oh, you will never do anything better. And now, by the way, you might give me back those diamonds.”

The green branch on which the glittering figure swung, rustled as if in astonishment; but the voice went on:

“I want you to give them back, Flambeau, and I want you to give up this life. There is still youth and honour and humour in you; don’t fancy they will last in that trade. Men may keep a sort of level of good, but no man has ever been able to keep on one level of evil. That road goes down and down. The kind man drinks and turns cruel; the frank man kills and lies about it. Many a man I’ve known started like you to be an honest outlaw, a merry robber of the rich, and ended stamped into slime. Maurice Blum started out as an anarchist of principle, a father of the poor; he ended a greasy spy and tale-bearer that both sides used and despised. Harry Burke started his free money movement sincerely enough; now he’s sponging on a half-starved sister for endless brandies and sodas. Lord Amber went into wild society in a sort of chivalry; now he’s paying blackmail to the lowest vultures in London. Captain Barillon was the great gentleman-apache before your time; he died in a madhouse, screaming with fear of the “narks” and
receivers that had betrayed him and hunted him down. I know the woods look very free behind you, Flambeau; I know that in a flash you could melt into them like a monkey. But some day you will be an old grey monkey, Flambeau. You will sit up in your free forest cold at heart and close to death, and the tree-tops will be very bare.”

Everything continued still, as if the small man below held the other in the tree in some long invisible leash; and he went on:

“Your downward steps have begun. You used to boast of doing nothing mean, but you are doing something mean tonight. You are leaving suspicion on an honest boy with a good deal against him already; you are separating him from the woman he loves and who loves him. But you will do meaner things than that before you die.”

Three flashing diamonds fell from the tree to the turf. The small man stooped to pick them up, and when he looked up again the green cage of the tree was emptied of its silver bird.

The restoration of the gems (accidentally picked up by Father Brown, of all people) ended the evening in uproarious triumph; and Sir Leopold, in his height of good humour, even told the priest that though he himself had broader views, he could respect those whose creed required them to be cloistered and ignorant of this world.
THE INVISIBLE MAN

In the cool blue twilight of two steep streets in Camden Town, the shop at the corner, a confectioner’s, glowed like the butt of a cigar. One should rather say, perhaps, like the butt of a firework, for the light was of many colours and some complexity, broken up by many mirrors and dancing on many gilt and gaily-coloured cakes and sweetmeats. Against this one fiery glass were glued the noses of many gutter-snipes, for the chocolates were all wrapped in those red and gold and green metallic colours which are almost better than chocolate itself; and the huge white wedding-cake in the window was somehow at once remote and satisfying, just as if the whole North Pole were good to eat. Such rainbow provocations could naturally collect the youth of the neighbourhood up to the ages of ten or twelve. But this corner was also attractive to youth at a later stage; and a young man, not less than twenty-four, was staring into the same shop window. To him, also, the shop was of fiery charm, but this attraction was not wholly to be explained by chocolates; which, however, he was far from despising.

He was a tall, burly, red-haired young man, with a resolute face but a listless manner. He carried under his arm a flat, grey portfolio of black-and-white sketches, which he had sold with more or less success to publishers ever since his uncle (who was an admiral) had disinherited him for Socialism, because of a lecture which he had delivered against that economic theory. His name was John Turnbull Angus.

Entering at last, he walked through the confectioner’s shop to the back room, which was a sort of pastry-cook restaurant, merely raising his hat to the young lady who was serving there. She was a dark, elegant, alert girl in black, with a high colour and very quick, dark eyes; and after the ordinary interval she followed him into the inner room to take his order.

His order was evidently a usual one. “I want, please,” he said with precision, “one halfpenny bun and a small cup of black coffee.” An instant before the girl could turn away he added, “Also, I want you to marry me.”

The young lady of the shop stiffened suddenly and said, “Those are jokes I don’t allow.”

The red-haired young man lifted grey eyes of an unexpected gravity.

“Really and truly,” he said, “it’s as serious—as serious as the halfpenny bun. It is expensive, like the bun; one pays for it. It is indigestible, like the bun. It
hurts.”

The dark young lady had never taken her dark eyes off him, but seemed to be studying him with almost tragic exactitude. At the end of her scrutiny she had something like the shadow of a smile, and she sat down in a chair.

“Don’t you think,” observed Angus, absently, “that it’s rather cruel to eat these halfpenny buns? They might grow up into penny buns. I shall give up these brutal sports when we are married.”

The dark young lady rose from her chair and walked to the window, evidently in a state of strong but not unsympathetic cogitation. When at last she swung round again with an air of resolution she was bewildered to observe that the young man was carefully laying out on the table various objects from the shop-window. They included a pyramid of highly coloured sweets, several plates of sandwiches, and the two decanters containing that mysterious port and sherry which are peculiar to pastry-cooks. In the middle of this neat arrangement he had carefully let down the enormous load of white sugared cake which had been the huge ornament of the window.

“What on earth are you doing?” she asked.

“Duty, my dear Laura,” he began.

“Oh, for the Lord’s sake, stop a minute,” she cried, “and don’t talk to me in that way. I mean, what is all that?”

“A ceremonial meal, Miss Hope.”

“And what is that?” she asked impatiently, pointing to the mountain of sugar.

“The wedding-cake, Mrs. Angus,” he said.

The girl marched to that article, removed it with some clatter, and put it back in the shop window; she then returned, and, putting her elegant elbows on the table, regarded the young man not unfavourably but with considerable exasperation.

“You don’t give me any time to think,” she said.

“I’m not such a fool,” he answered; “that’s my Christian humility.”

She was still looking at him; but she had grown considerably graver behind the smile.

“Mr. Angus,” she said steadily, “before there is a minute more of this nonsense I must tell you something about myself as shortly as I can.”

“Delighted,” replied Angus gravely. “You might tell me something about myself, too, while you are about it.”

“Oh, do hold your tongue and listen,” she said. “It’s nothing that I’m ashamed of, and it isn’t even anything that I’m specially sorry about. But what would you
say if there were something that is no business of mine and yet is my nightmare?"

“In that case,” said the man seriously, “I should suggest that you bring back the cake.”

“Well, you must listen to the story first,” said Laura, persistently. “To begin with, I must tell you that my father owned the inn called the ‘Red Fish’ at Ludbury, and I used to serve people in the bar.”

“I have often wondered,” he said, “why there was a kind of a Christian air about this one confectioner’s shop.”

“Ludbury is a sleepy, grassy little hole in the Eastern Counties, and the only kind of people who ever came to the ‘Red Fish’ were occasional commercial travellers, and for the rest, the most awful people you can see, only you’ve never seen them. I mean little, loungy men, who had just enough to live on and had nothing to do but lean about in bar-rooms and bet on horses, in bad clothes that were just too good for them. Even these wretched young rotters were not very common at our house; but there were two of them that were a lot too common—common in every sort of way. They both lived on money of their own, and were wearisomely idle and over-dressed. But yet I was a bit sorry for them, because I half believe they slunk into our little empty bar because each of them had a slight deformity; the sort of thing that some yokels laugh at. It wasn’t exactly a deformity either; it was more an oddity. One of them was a surprisingly small man, something like a dwarf, or at least like a jockey. He was not at all jockeyish to look at, though; he had a round black head and a well-trimmed black beard, bright eyes like a bird’s; he jingled money in his pockets; he jangled a great gold watch chain; and he never turned up except dressed just too much like a gentleman to be one. He was no fool though, though a futile idler; he was curiously clever at all kinds of things that couldn’t be the slightest use; a sort of impromptu conjuring; making fifteen matches set fire to each other like a regular firework; or cutting a banana or some such thing into a dancing doll. His name was Isidore Smythe; and I can see him still, with his little dark face, just coming up to the counter, making a jumping kangaroo out of five cigars.

“The other fellow was more silent and more ordinary; but somehow he alarmed me much more than poor little Smythe. He was very tall and slight, and light-haired; his nose had a high bridge, and he might almost have been handsome in a spectral sort of way; but he had one of the most appalling squints I have ever seen or heard of. When he looked straight at you, you didn’t know where you were yourself, let alone what he was looking at. I fancy this sort of
disfigurement embittered the poor chap a little; for while Smythe was ready to show off his monkey tricks anywhere, James Welkin (that was the squinting man’s name) never did anything except soak in our bar parlour, and go for great walks by himself in the flat, grey country all round. All the same, I think Smythe, too, was a little sensitive about being so small, though he carried it off more smartly. And so it was that I was really puzzled, as well as startled, and very sorry, when they both offered to marry me in the same week.

“Well, I did what I’ve since thought was perhaps a silly thing. But, after all, these freaks were my friends in a way; and I had a horror of their thinking I refused them for the real reason, which was that they were so impossibly ugly. So I made up some gas of another sort, about never meaning to marry anyone who hadn’t carved his way in the world. I said it was a point of principle with me not to live on money that was just inherited like theirs. Two days after I had talked in this well-meaning sort of way, the whole trouble began. The first thing I heard was that both of them had gone off to seek their fortunes, as if they were in some silly fairy tale.

“Well, I’ve never seen either of them from that day to this. But I’ve had two letters from the little man called Smythe, and really they were rather exciting.”

“Ever heard of the other man?” asked Angus.

“No, he never wrote,” said the girl, after an instant’s hesitation. “Smythe’s first letter was simply to say that he had started out walking with Welkin to London; but Welkin was such a good walker that the little man dropped out of it, and took a rest by the roadside. He happened to be picked up by some travelling show, and, partly because he was nearly a dwarf, and partly because he was really a clever little wretch, he got on quite well in the show business, and was soon sent up to the Aquarium, to do some tricks that I forget. That was his first letter. His second was much more of a startler, and I only got it last week.”

The man called Angus emptied his coffee-cup and regarded her with mild and patient eyes. Her own mouth took a slight twist of laughter as she resumed, “I suppose you’ve seen on the hoardings all about this ‘Smythe’s Silent Service’? Or you must be the only person that hasn’t. Oh, I don’t know much about it, it’s some clockwork invention for doing all the housework by machinery. You know the sort of thing: ‘Press a Button—A Butler who Never Drinks.’ ‘Turn a Handle—Ten Housemaids who Never Flirt.’ You must have seen the advertisements. Well, whatever these machines are, they are making pots of money; and they are making it all for that little imp whom I knew down in Ludbury. I can’t help feeling pleased the poor little chap has fallen on his feet; but the plain fact is, I’m
in terror of his turning up any minute and telling me he’s carved his way in the world—as he certainly has.”

“And the other man?” repeated Angus with a sort of obstinate quietude.

Laura Hope got to her feet suddenly. “My friend,” she said, “I think you are a witch. Yes, you are quite right. I have not seen a line of the other man’s writing; and I have no more notion than the dead of what or where he is. But it is of him that I am frightened. It is he who is all about my path. It is he who has half driven me mad. Indeed, I think he has driven me mad; for I have felt him where he could not have been, and I have heard his voice when he could not have spoken.”

“Well, my dear,” said the young man, cheerfully, “if he were Satan himself, he is done for now you have told somebody. One goes mad all alone, old girl. But when was it you fancied you felt and heard our squinting friend?”

“I heard James Welkin laugh as plainly as I hear you speak,” said the girl, steadily. “There was nobody there, for I stood just outside the shop at the corner, and could see down both streets at once. I had forgotten how he laughed, though his laugh was as odd as his squint. I had not thought of him for nearly a year. But it’s a solemn truth that a few seconds later the first letter came from his rival.”

“Did you ever make the spectre speak or squeak, or anything?” asked Angus, with some interest.

Laura suddenly shuddered, and then said, with an unshaken voice, “Yes. Just when I had finished reading the second letter from Isidore Smythe announcing his success. Just then, I heard Welkin say, ‘He shan’t have you, though.’ It was quite plain, as if he were in the room. It is awful, I think I must be mad.”

“If you really were mad,” said the young man, “you would think you must be sane. But certainly there seems to me to be something a little rum about this unseen gentleman. Two heads are better than one—I spare you allusions to any other organs and really, if you would allow me, as a sturdy, practical man, to bring back the wedding-cake out of the window—”

Even as he spoke, there was a sort of steely shriek in the street outside, and a small motor, driven at devilish speed, shot up to the door of the shop and stuck there. In the same flash of time a small man in a shiny top hat stood stamping in the outer room.

Angus, who had hitherto maintained hilarious ease from motives of mental hygiene, revealed the strain of his soul by striding abruptly out of the inner room and confronting the new-comer. A glance at him was quite sufficient to confirm the savage guesswork of a man in love. This very dapper but dwarfish figure,
with the spike of black beard carried insolently forward, the clever unrestful eyes, the neat but very nervous fingers, could be none other than the man just described to him: Isidore Smythe, who made dolls out of banana skins and match-boxes; Isidore Smythe, who made millions out of undrinking butlers and unflirting housemaids of metal. For a moment the two men, instinctively understanding each other’s air of possession, looked at each other with that curious cold generosity which is the soul of rivalry.

Mr. Smythe, however, made no allusion to the ultimate ground of their antagonism, but said simply and explosively, “Has Miss Hope seen that thing on the window?”

“Oh the window?” repeated the staring Angus.

“There’s no time to explain other things,” said the small millionaire shortly. “There’s some tomfoolery going on here that has to be investigated.”

He pointed his polished walking-stick at the window, recently depleted by the bridal preparations of Mr. Angus; and that gentleman was astonished to see along the front of the glass a long strip of paper pasted, which had certainly not been on the window when he looked through it some time before. Following the energetic Smythe outside into the street, he found that some yard and a half of stamp paper had been carefully gummed along the glass outside, and on this was written in straggly characters, “If you marry Smythe, he will die.”

“Laura,” said Angus, putting his big red head into the shop, “you’re not mad.”

“It’s the writing of that fellow Welkin,” said Smythe gruffly. “I haven’t seen him for years, but he’s always bothering me. Five times in the last fortnight he’s had threatening letters left at my flat, and I can’t even find out who leaves them, let alone if it is Welkin himself. The porter of the flats swears that no suspicious characters have been seen, and here he has pasted up a sort of dado on a public shop window, while the people in the shop—”

“Quite so,” said Angus modestly, “while the people in the shop were having tea. Well, sir, I can assure you I appreciate your common sense in dealing so directly with the matter. We can talk about other things afterwards. The fellow cannot be very far off yet, for I swear there was no paper there when I went last to the window, ten or fifteen minutes ago. On the other hand, he’s too far off to be chased, as we don’t even know the direction. If you’ll take my advice, Mr. Smythe, you’ll put this at once in the hands of some energetic inquiry man, private rather than public. I know an extremely clever fellow, who has set up in business five minutes from here in your car. His name’s Flambeau, and though his youth was a bit stormy, he’s a strictly honest man now, and his brains are
worth money. He lives in Lucknow Mansions, Hampstead.”

“That is odd,” said the little man, arching his black eyebrows. “I live, myself, in Himylaya Mansions, round the corner. Perhaps you might care to come with me; I can go to my rooms and sort out these queer Welkin documents, while you run round and get your friend the detective.”

“You are very good,” said Angus politely. “Well, the sooner we act the better.”

Both men, with a queer kind of impromptu fairness, took the same sort of formal farewell of the lady, and both jumped into the brisk little car. As Smythe took the handles and they turned the great corner of the street, Angus was amused to see a gigantesque poster of “Smythe’s Silent Service,” with a picture of a huge headless iron doll, carrying a saucepan with the legend, “A Cook Who is Never Cross.”

“I use them in my own flat,” said the little black-bearded man, laughing, “partly for advertisements, and partly for real convenience. Honestly, and all above board, those big clockwork dolls of mine do bring your coals or claret or a timetable quicker than any live servants I’ve ever known, if you know which knob to press. But I’ll never deny, between ourselves, that such servants have their disadvantages, too.”

“Indeed?” said Angus; “is there something they can’t do?”

“Yes,” replied Smythe coolly; “they can’t tell me who left those threatening letters at my flat.”

The man’s motor was small and swift like himself; in fact, like his domestic service, it was of his own invention. If he was an advertising quack, he was one who believed in his own wares. The sense of something tiny and flying was accentuated as they swept up long white curves of road in the dead but open daylight of evening. Soon the white curves came sharper and dizzier; they were upon ascending spirals, as they say in the modern religions. For, indeed, they were cresting a corner of London which is almost as precipitous as Edinburgh, if not quite so picturesque. Terrace rose above terrace, and the special tower of flats they sought, rose above them all to almost Egyptian height, gilt by the level sunset. The change, as they turned the corner and entered the crescent known as Himylaya Mansions, was as abrupt as the opening of a window; for they found that pile of flats sitting above London as above a green sea of slate. Opposite to the mansions, on the other side of the gravel crescent, was a bushy enclosure more like a steep hedge or dyke than a garden, and some way below that ran a strip of artificial water, a sort of canal, like the moat of that embowered fortress.
As the car swept round the crescent it passed, at one corner, the stray stall of a man selling chestnuts; and right away at the other end of the curve, Angus could see a dim blue policeman walking slowly. These were the only human shapes in that high suburban solitude; but he had an irrational sense that they expressed the speechless poetry of London. He felt as if they were figures in a story.

The little car shot up to the right house like a bullet, and shot out its owner like a bomb shell. He was immediately inquiring of a tall commissionaire in shining braid, and a short porter in shirt sleeves, whether anybody or anything had been seeking his apartments. He was assured that nobody and nothing had passed these officials since his last inquiries; whereupon he and the slightly bewildered Angus were shot up in the lift like a rocket, till they reached the top floor.

“Just come in for a minute,” said the breathless Smythe. “I want to show you those Welkin letters. Then you might run round the corner and fetch your friend.” He pressed a button concealed in the wall, and the door opened of itself.

It opened on a long, commodious ante-room, of which the only arresting features, ordinarily speaking, were the rows of tall half-human mechanical figures that stood up on both sides like tailors’ dummies. Like tailors’ dummies they were headless; and like tailors’ dummies they had a handsome unnecessary humpiness in the shoulders, and a pigeon-breasted protuberance of chest; but barring this, they were not much more like a human figure than any automatic machine at a station that is about the human height. They had two great hooks like arms, for carrying trays; and they were painted pea-green, or vermilion, or black for convenience of distinction; in every other way they were only automatic machines and nobody would have looked twice at them. On this occasion, at least, nobody did. For between the two rows of these domestic dummies lay something more interesting than most of the mechanics of the world. It was a white, tattered scrap of paper scrawled with red ink; and the agile inventor had snatched it up almost as soon as the door flew open. He handed it to Angus without a word. The red ink on it actually was not dry, and the message ran, “If you have been to see her today, I shall kill you.”

There was a short silence, and then Isidore Smythe said quietly, “Would you like a little whiskey? I rather feel as if I should.”

“Thank you; I should like a little Flambeau,” said Angus, gloomily. “This business seems to me to be getting rather grave. I’m going round at once to fetch him.”

“Right you are,” said the other, with admirable cheerfulness. “Bring him round here as quick as you can.”
But as Angus closed the front door behind him he saw Smythe push back a button, and one of the clockwork images glided from its place and slid along a groove in the floor carrying a tray with syphon and decanter. There did seem something a trifle weird about leaving the little man alone among those dead servants, who were coming to life as the door closed.

Six steps down from Smythe’s landing the man in shirt sleeves was doing something with a pail. Angus stopped to extract a promise, fortified with a prospective bribe, that he would remain in that place until the return with the detective, and would keep count of any kind of stranger coming up those stairs. Dashing down to the front hall he then laid similar charges of vigilance on the commissionaire at the front door, from whom he learned the simplifying circumstances that there was no back door. Not content with this, he captured the floating policeman and induced him to stand opposite the entrance and watch it; and finally paused an instant for a pennyworth of chestnuts, and an inquiry as to the probable length of the merchant’s stay in the neighbourhood.

The chestnut seller, turning up the collar of his coat, told him he should probably be moving shortly, as he thought it was going to snow. Indeed, the evening was growing grey and bitter, but Angus, with all his eloquence, proceeded to nail the chestnut man to his post.

“Keep yourself warm on your own chestnuts,” he said earnestly. “Eat up your whole stock; I’ll make it worth your while. I’ll give you a sovereign if you’ll wait here till I come back, and then tell me whether any man, woman, or child has gone into that house where the commissionaire is standing.”

He then walked away smartly, with a last look at the besieged tower.

“I’ve made a ring round that room, anyhow,” he said. “They can’t all four of them be Mr. Welkin’s accomplices.”

Lucknow Mansions were, so to speak, on a lower platform of that hill of houses, of which Himylaya Mansions might be called the peak. Mr. Flambeau’s semi-official flat was on the ground floor, and presented in every way a marked contrast to the American machinery and cold hotel-like luxury of the flat of the Silent Service. Flambeau, who was a friend of Angus, received him in a rococo artistic den behind his office, of which the ornaments were sabres, harquebuses, Eastern curiosities, flasks of Italian wine, savage cooking-pots, a plumy Persian cat, and a small dusty-looking Roman Catholic priest, who looked particularly out of place.

“This is my friend Father Brown,” said Flambeau. “I’ve often wanted you to meet him. Splendid weather, this; a little cold for Southerners like me.”
“Yes, I think it will keep clear,” said Angus, sitting down on a violet-striped Eastern ottoman.

“No,” said the priest quietly, “it has begun to snow.”

And, indeed, as he spoke, the first few flakes, foreseen by the man of chestnuts, began to drift across the darkening windowpane.

“Well,” said Angus heavily. “I’m afraid I’ve come on business, and rather jumpy business at that. The fact is, Flambeau, within a stone’s throw of your house is a fellow who badly wants your help; he’s perpetually being haunted and threatened by an invisible enemy—a scoundrel whom nobody has even seen.” As Angus proceeded to tell the whole tale of Smythe and Welkin, beginning with Laura’s story, and going on with his own, the supernatural laugh at the corner of two empty streets, the strange distinct words spoken in an empty room, Flambeau grew more and more vividly concerned, and the little priest seemed to be left out of it, like a piece of furniture. When it came to the scribbled stamp-paper pasted on the window, Flambeau rose, seeming to fill the room with his huge shoulders.

“If you don’t mind,” he said, “I think you had better tell me the rest on the nearest road to this man’s house. It strikes me, somehow, that there is no time to be lost.”

“Delighted,” said Angus, rising also, “though he’s safe enough for the present, for I’ve set four men to watch the only hole to his burrow.”

They turned out into the street, the small priest trundling after them with the docility of a small dog. He merely said, in a cheerful way, like one making conversation, “How quick the snow gets thick on the ground.”

As they threaded the steep side streets already powdered with silver, Angus finished his story; and by the time they reached the crescent with the towering flats, he had leisure to turn his attention to the four sentinels. The chestnut seller, both before and after receiving a sovereign, swore stubbornly that he had watched the door and seen no visitor enter. The policeman was even more emphatic. He said he had had experience of crooks of all kinds, in top hats and in rags; he wasn’t so green as to expect suspicious characters to look suspicious; he looked out for anybody, and, so help him, there had been nobody. And when all three men gathered round the gilded commissionaire, who still stood smiling astride of the porch, the verdict was more final still.

“I’ve got a right to ask any man, duke or dustman, what he wants in these flats,” said the genial and gold-laced giant, “and I’ll swear there’s been nobody to ask since this gentleman went away.”
The unimportant Father Brown, who stood back, looking modestly at the pavement, here ventured to say meekly, “Has nobody been up and down stairs, then, since the snow began to fall? It began while we were all round at Flambeau’s.”

“Nobody’s been in here, sir, you can take it from me,” said the official, with beaming authority.

“Then I wonder what that is?” said the priest, and stared at the ground blankly like a fish.

The others all looked down also; and Flambeau used a fierce exclamation and a French gesture. For it was unquestionably true that down the middle of the entrance guarded by the man in gold lace, actually between the arrogant, stretched legs of that colossus, ran a stringy pattern of grey footprints stamped upon the white snow.

“God!” cried Angus involuntarily, “the Invisible Man!”

Without another word he turned and dashed up the stairs, with Flambeau following; but Father Brown still stood looking about him in the snow-clad street as if he had lost interest in his query.

Flambeau was plainly in a mood to break down the door with his big shoulders; but the Scotchman, with more reason, if less intuition, fumbled about on the frame of the door till he found the invisible button; and the door swung slowly open.

It showed substantially the same serried interior; the hall had grown darker, though it was still struck here and there with the last crimson shafts of sunset, and one or two of the headless machines had been moved from their places for this or that purpose, and stood here and there about the twilit place. The green and red of their coats were all darkened in the dusk; and their likeness to human shapes slightly increased by their very shapelessness. But in the middle of them all, exactly where the paper with the red ink had lain, there lay something that looked like red ink spilt out of its bottle. But it was not red ink.

With a French combination of reason and violence Flambeau simply said “Murder!” and, plunging into the flat, had explored, every corner and cupboard of it in five minutes. But if he expected to find a corpse he found none. Isidore Smythe was not in the place, either dead or alive. After the most tearing search the two men met each other in the outer hall, with streaming faces and staring eyes. “My friend,” said Flambeau, talking French in his excitement, “not only is your murderer invisible, but he makes invisible also the murdered man.”

Angus looked round at the dim room full of dummies, and in some Celtic
corner of his Scotch soul a shudder started. One of the life-size dolls stood immediately overshadowing the blood stain, summoned, perhaps, by the slain man an instant before he fell. One of the high-shouldered hooks that served the thing for arms, was a little lifted, and Angus had suddenly the horrid fancy that poor Smythe’s own iron child had struck him down. Matter had rebelled, and these machines had killed their master. But even so, what had they done with him?

“Eaten him?” said the nightmare at his ear; and he sickened for an instant at the idea of rent, human remains absorbed and crushed into all that acephalous clockwork.

He recovered his mental health by an emphatic effort, and said to Flambeau, “Well, there it is. The poor fellow has evaporated like a cloud and left a red streak on the floor. The tale does not belong to this world.”

“There is only one thing to be done,” said Flambeau, “whether it belongs to this world or the other. I must go down and talk to my friend.”

They descended, passing the man with the pail, who again asseverated that he had let no intruder pass, down to the commissionaire and the hovering chestnut man, who rigidly reasserted their own watchfulness. But when Angus looked round for his fourth confirmation he could not see it, and called out with some nervousness, “Where is the policeman?”

“I beg your pardon,” said Father Brown; “that is my fault. I just sent him down the road to investigate something—that I just thought worth investigating.”

“Well, we want him back pretty soon,” said Angus abruptly, “for the wretched man upstairs has not only been murdered, but wiped out.”

“How?” asked the priest.

“Father,” said Flambeau, after a pause, “upon my soul I believe it is more in your department than mine. No friend or foe has entered the house, but Smythe is gone, as if stolen by the fairies. If that is not supernatural, I—”

As he spoke they were all checked by an unusual sight; the big blue policeman came round the corner of the crescent, running. He came straight up to Brown.

“You’re right, sir,” he panted, “they’ve just found poor Mr. Smythe’s body in the canal down below.”

Angus put his hand wildly to his head. “Did he run down and drown himself?” he asked.

“He never came down, I’ll swear,” said the constable, “and he wasn’t drowned either, for he died of a great stab over the heart.”
“And yet you saw no one enter?” said Flambeau in a grave voice.
“Let us walk down the road a little,” said the priest.
As they reached the other end of the crescent he observed abruptly, “Stupid of me! I forgot to ask the policeman something. I wonder if they found a light brown sack.”
“Why a light brown sack?” asked Angus, astonished.
“Because if it was any other coloured sack, the case must begin over again,” said Father Brown; “but if it was a light brown sack, why, the case is finished.”
“I am pleased to hear it,” said Angus with hearty irony. “It hasn’t begun, so far as I am concerned.”
“You must tell us all about it,” said Flambeau with a strange heavy simplicity, like a child.
Unconsciously they were walking with quickening steps down the long sweep of road on the other side of the high crescent, Father Brown leading briskly, though in silence. At last he said with an almost touching vagueness, “Well, I’m afraid you’ll think it so prosy. We always begin at the abstract end of things, and you can’t begin this story anywhere else.
“Have you ever noticed this—that people never answer what you say? They answer what you mean—or what they think you mean. Suppose one lady says to another in a country house, ‘Is anybody staying with you?’ the lady doesn’t answer ‘Yes; the butler, the three footmen, the parlourmaid, and so on,’ though the parlourmaid may be in the room, or the butler behind her chair. She says ‘There is nobody staying with us,’ meaning nobody of the sort you mean. But suppose a doctor inquiring into an epidemic asks, ‘Who is staying in the house?’ then the lady will remember the butler, the parlourmaid, and the rest. All language is used like that; you never get a question answered literally, even when you get it answered truly. When those four quite honest men said that no man had gone into the Mansions, they did not really mean that no man had gone into them. They meant no man whom they could suspect of being your man. A man did go into the house, and did come out of it, but they never noticed him.”
A minute or two after he resumed in the same unassuming voice, like a man thinking his way. “Of course you can’t think of such a man, until you do think of him. That’s where his cleverness comes in. But I came to think of him through two or three little things in the tale Mr. Angus told us. First, there was the fact that this Welkin went for long walks. And then there was the vast lot of stamp
paper on the window. And then, most of all, there were the two things the young lady said—things that couldn’t be true. Don’t get annoyed,” he added hastily, noting a sudden movement of the Scotchman’s head; “she thought they were true. A person can’t be quite alone in a street a second before she receives a letter. She can’t be quite alone in a street when she starts reading a letter just received. There must be somebody pretty near her; he must be mentally invisible.”

“Why must there be somebody near her?” asked Angus.

“Because,” said Father Brown, “barring carrier-pigeons, somebody must have brought her the letter.”

“Do you really mean to say,” asked Flambeau, with energy, “that Welkin carried his rival’s letters to his lady?”

“Yes,” said the priest. “Welkin carried his rival’s letters to his lady. You see, he had to.”

“Oh, I can’t stand much more of this,” exploded Flambeau. “Who is this fellow? What does he look like? What is the usual get-up of a mentally invisible man?”

“He is dressed rather handsomely in red, blue and gold,” replied the priest promptly with precision, “and in this striking, and even showy, costume he entered Himylaya Mansions under eight human eyes; he killed Smythe in cold blood, and came down into the street again carrying the dead body in his arms —”

“Reverend sir,” cried Angus, standing still, “are you raving mad, or am I?”

“You are not mad,” said Brown, “only a little unobservant. You have not noticed such a man as this, for example.”

He took three quick strides forward, and put his hand on the shoulder of an ordinary passing postman who had bustled by them unnoticed under the shade of the trees.

“Nobody ever notices postmen somehow,” he said thoughtfully; “yet they have passions like other men, and even carry large bags where a small corpse can be stowed quite easily.”

The postman, instead of turning naturally, had ducked and tumbled against the garden fence. He was a lean fair-bearded man of very ordinary appearance, but as he turned an alarmed face over his shoulder, all three men were fixed with an almost fiendish squint.

Flambeau went back to his sabres, purple rugs and Persian cat, having many
things to attend to. John Turnbull Angus went back to the lady at the shop, with whom that imprudent young man contrives to be extremely comfortable. But Father Brown walked those snow-covered hills under the stars for many hours with a murderer, and what they said to each other will never be known.
A stormy evening of olive and silver was closing in, as Father Brown, wrapped in a grey Scotch plaid, came to the end of a grey Scotch valley and beheld the strange castle of Glengyle. It stopped one end of the glen or hollow like a blind alley; and it looked like the end of the world. Rising in steep roofs and spires of seagreen slate in the manner of the old French-Scotch chateaux, it reminded an Englishman of the sinister steeple-hats of witches in fairy tales; and the pine woods that rocked round the green turrets looked, by comparison, as black as numberless flocks of ravens. This note of a dreamy, almost a sleepy devilry, was no mere fancy from the landscape. For there did rest on the place one of those clouds of pride and madness and mysterious sorrow which lie more heavily on the noble houses of Scotland than on any other of the children of men. For Scotland has a double dose of the poison called heredity; the sense of blood in the aristocrat, and the sense of doom in the Calvinist.

The priest had snatched a day from his business at Glasgow to meet his friend Flambeau, the amateur detective, who was at Glengyle Castle with another more formal officer investigating the life and death of the late Earl of Glengyle. That mysterious person was the last representative of a race whose valour, insanity, and violent cunning had made them terrible even among the sinister nobility of their nation in the sixteenth century. None were deeper in that labyrinthine ambition, in chamber within chamber of that palace of lies that was built up around Mary Queen of Scots.

The rhyme in the country-side attested the motive and the result of their machinations candidly:

As green sap to the simmer trees

Is red gold to the Ogilvies.

For many centuries there had never been a decent lord in Glengyle Castle; and with the Victorian era one would have thought that all eccentricities were exhausted. The last Glengyle, however, satisfied his tribal tradition by doing the only thing that was left for him to do; he disappeared. I do not mean that he went abroad; by all accounts he was still in the castle, if he was anywhere. But though his name was in the church register and the big red Peerage, nobody ever saw him under the sun.
If anyone saw him it was a solitary man-servant, something between a groom and a gardener. He was so deaf that the more business-like assumed him to be dumb; while the more penetrating declared him to be half-witted. A gaunt, red-haired labourer, with a dogged jaw and chin, but quite blank blue eyes, he went by the name of Israel Gow, and was the one silent servant on that deserted estate. But the energy with which he dug potatoes, and the regularity with which he disappeared into the kitchen gave people an impression that he was providing for the meals of a superior, and that the strange earl was still concealed in the castle. If society needed any further proof that he was there, the servant persistently asserted that he was not at home. One morning the provost and the minister (for the Glengyles were Presbyterian) were summoned to the castle. There they found that the gardener, groom and cook had added to his many professions that of an undertaker, and had nailed up his noble master in a coffin. With how much or how little further inquiry this odd fact was passed, did not as yet very plainly appear; for the thing had never been legally investigated till Flambeau had gone north two or three days before. By then the body of Lord Glengyle (if it was the body) had lain for some time in the little churchyard on the hill.

As Father Brown passed through the dim garden and came under the shadow of the chateau, the clouds were thick and the whole air damp and thundery. Against the last stripe of the green-gold sunset he saw a black human silhouette; a man in a chimney-pot hat, with a big spade over his shoulder. The combination was queerly suggestive of a sexton; but when Brown remembered the deaf servant who dug potatoes, he thought it natural enough. He knew something of the Scotch peasant; he knew the respectability which might well feel it necessary to wear “blacks” for an official inquiry; he knew also the economy that would not lose an hour’s digging for that. Even the man’s start and suspicious stare as the priest went by were consonant enough with the vigilance and jealousy of such a type.

The great door was opened by Flambeau himself, who had with him a lean man with iron-grey hair and papers in his hand: Inspector Craven from Scotland Yard. The entrance hall was mostly stripped and empty; but the pale, sneering faces of one or two of the wicked Ogilvies looked down out of black periwigs and blackening canvas.

Following them into an inner room, Father Brown found that the allies had been seated at a long oak table, of which their end was covered with scribbled papers, flanked with whisky and cigars. Through the whole of its remaining length it was occupied by detached objects arranged at intervals; objects about as
inexplicable as any objects could be. One looked like a small heap of glittering broken glass. Another looked like a high heap of brown dust. A third appeared to be a plain stick of wood.

“You seem to have a sort of geological museum here,” he said, as he sat down, jerking his head briefly in the direction of the brown dust and the crystalline fragments.

“Not a geological museum,” replied Flambeau; “say a psychological museum.”

“Oh, for the Lord’s sake,” cried the police detective laughing, “don’t let’s begin with such long words.”

“Don’t you know what psychology means?” asked Flambeau with friendly surprise. “Psychology means being off your chump.”

“Still I hardly follow,” replied the official.

“Well,” said Flambeau, with decision, “I mean that we’ve only found out one thing about Lord Glengyle. He was a maniac.”

The black silhouette of Gow with his top hat and spade passed the window, dimly outlined against the darkening sky. Father Brown stared passively at it and answered:

“I can understand there must have been something odd about the man, or he wouldn’t have buried himself alive—nor been in such a hurry to bury himself dead. But what makes you think it was lunacy?”

“Well,” said Flambeau, “you just listen to the list of things Mr. Craven has found in the house.”

“We must get a candle,” said Craven, suddenly. “A storm is getting up, and it’s too dark to read.”

“Have you found any candles,” asked Brown smiling, “among your oddities?”

Flambeau raised a grave face, and fixed his dark eyes on his friend.

“That is curious, too,” he said. “Twenty-five candles, and not a trace of a candlestick.”

In the rapidly darkening room and rapidly rising wind, Brown went along the table to where a bundle of wax candles lay among the other scrappy exhibits. As he did so he bent accidentally over the heap of red-brown dust; and a sharp sneeze cracked the silence.

“Hullo!” he said, “snuff!”

He took one of the candles, lit it carefully, came back and stuck it in the neck of the whisky bottle. The unrestful night air, blowing through the crazy window, waved the long flame like a banner. And on every side of the castle they could
hear the miles and miles of black pine wood seething like a black sea around a rock.

“I will read the inventory,” began Craven gravely, picking up one of the papers, “the inventory of what we found loose and unexplained in the castle. You are to understand that the place generally was dismantled and neglected; but one or two rooms had plainly been inhabited in a simple but not squalid style by somebody; somebody who was not the servant Gow. The list is as follows:

“First item. A very considerable hoard of precious stones, nearly all diamonds, and all of them loose, without any setting whatever. Of course, it is natural that the Ogilvies should have family jewels; but those are exactly the jewels that are almost always set in particular articles of ornament. The Ogilvies would seem to have kept theirs loose in their pockets, like coppers.

“Second item. Heaps and heaps of loose snuff, not kept in a horn, or even a pouch, but lying in heaps on the mantelpieces, on the sideboard, on the piano, anywhere. It looks as if the old gentleman would not take the trouble to look in a pocket or lift a lid.

“Third item. Here and there about the house curious little heaps of minute pieces of metal, some like steel springs and some in the form of microscopic wheels. As if they had gutted some mechanical toy.

“Fourth item. The wax candles, which have to be stuck in bottle necks because there is nothing else to stick them in. Now I wish you to note how very much queerer all this is than anything we anticipated. For the central riddle we are prepared; we have all seen at a glance that there was something wrong about the last earl. We have come here to find out whether he really lived here, whether he really died here, whether that red-haired scarecrow who did his burying had anything to do with his dying. But suppose the worst in all this, the most lurid or melodramatic solution you like. Suppose the servant really killed the master, or suppose the master isn’t really dead, or suppose the master is dressed up as the servant, or suppose the servant is buried for the master; invent what Wilkie Collins’ tragedy you like, and you still have not explained a candle without a candlestick, or why an elderly gentleman of good family should habitually spill snuff on the piano. The core of the tale we could imagine; it is the fringes that are mysterious. By no stretch of fancy can the human mind connect together snuff and diamonds and wax and loose clockwork.”

“I think I see the connection,” said the priest. “This Glengyle was mad against the French Revolution. He was an enthusiast for the ancien regime, and was trying to re-enact literally the family life of the last Bourbons. He had snuff
because it was the eighteenth century luxury; wax candles, because they were the eighteenth century lighting; the mechanical bits of iron represent the locksmith hobby of Louis XVI; the diamonds are for the Diamond Necklace of Marie Antoinette.”

Both the other men were staring at him with round eyes. “What a perfectly extraordinary notion!” cried Flambeau. “Do you really think that is the truth?”

“I am perfectly sure it isn’t,” answered Father Brown, “only you said that nobody could connect snuff and diamonds and clockwork and candles. I give you that connection off-hand. The real truth, I am very sure, lies deeper.”

He paused a moment and listened to the wailing of the wind in the turrets. Then he said, “The late Earl of Glengyle was a thief. He lived a second and darker life as a desperate housebreaker. He did not have any candlesticks because he only used these candles cut short in the little lantern he carried. The snuff he employed as the fiercest French criminals have used pepper: to fling it suddenly in dense masses in the face of a captor or pursuer. But the final proof is in the curious coincidence of the diamonds and the small steel wheels. Surely that makes everything plain to you? Diamonds and small steel wheels are the only two instruments with which you can cut out a pane of glass.”

The bough of a broken pine tree lashed heavily in the blast against the windowpane behind them, as if in parody of a burglar, but they did not turn round. Their eyes were fastened on Father Brown.

“Diamonds and small wheels,” repeated Craven ruminating. “Is that all that makes you think it the true explanation?”

“I don’t think it the true explanation,” replied the priest placidly; “but you said that nobody could connect the four things. The true tale, of course, is something much more humdrum. Glengyle had found, or thought he had found, precious stones on his estate. Somebody had bamboozled him with those loose brilliants, saying they were found in the castle caverns. The little wheels are some diamond-cutting affair. He had to do the thing very roughly and in a small way, with the help of a few shepherds or rude fellows on these hills. Snuff is the one great luxury of such Scotch shepherds; it’s the one thing with which you can bribe them. They didn’t have candlesticks because they didn’t want them; they held the candles in their hands when they explored the caves.”

“Is that all?” asked Flambeau after a long pause. “Have we got to the dull truth at last?”

“Oh, no,” said Father Brown.

As the wind died in the most distant pine woods with a long hoot as of
mockery Father Brown, with an utterly impassive face, went on:

“I only suggested that because you said one could not plausibly connect snuff with clockwork or candles with bright stones. Ten false philosophies will fit the universe; ten false theories will fit Glengyle Castle. But we want the real explanation of the castle and the universe. But are there no other exhibits?”

Craven laughed, and Flambeau rose smiling to his feet and strolled down the long table.

“Items five, six, seven, etc.,” he said, “and certainly more varied than instructive. A curious collection, not of lead pencils, but of the lead out of lead pencils. A senseless stick of bamboo, with the top rather splintered. It might be the instrument of the crime. Only, there isn’t any crime. The only other things are a few old missals and little Catholic pictures, which the Ogilvies kept, I suppose, from the Middle Ages—their family pride being stronger than their Puritanism. We only put them in the museum because they seem curiously cut about and defaced.”

The heady tempest without drove a dreadful wrack of clouds across Glengyle and threw the long room into darkness as Father Brown picked up the little illuminated pages to examine them. He spoke before the drift of darkness had passed; but it was the voice of an utterly new man.

“Mr. Craven,” said he, talking like a man ten years younger, “you have got a legal warrant, haven’t you, to go up and examine that grave? The sooner we do it the better, and get to the bottom of this horrible affair. If I were you I should start now.”

“Now,” repeated the astonished detective, “and why now?”

“Because this is serious,” answered Brown; “this is not spilt snuff or loose pebbles, that might be there for a hundred reasons. There is only one reason I know of for this being done; and the reason goes down to the roots of the world. These religious pictures are not just dirtied or torn or scrawled over, which might be done in idleness or bigotry, by children or by Protestants. These have been treated very carefully—and very queerly. In every place where the great ornamented name of God comes in the old illuminations it has been elaborately taken out. The only other thing that has been removed is the halo round the head of the Child Jesus. Therefore, I say, let us get our warrant and our spade and our hatchet, and go up and break open that coffin.”

“What do you mean?” demanded the London officer.

“I mean,” answered the little priest, and his voice seemed to rise slightly in the roar of the gale. “I mean that the great devil of the universe may be sitting on the
top tower of this castle at this moment, as big as a hundred elephants, and roaring like the Apocalypse. There is black magic somewhere at the bottom of this.”

“Black magic,” repeated Flambeau in a low voice, for he was too enlightened a man not to know of such things; “but what can these other things mean?”

“Oh, something damnable, I suppose,” replied Brown impatiently. “How should I know? How can I guess all their mazes down below? Perhaps you can make a torture out of snuff and bamboo. Perhaps lunatics lust after wax and steel filings. Perhaps there is a maddening drug made of lead pencils! Our shortest cut to the mystery is up the hill to the grave.”

His comrades hardly knew that they had obeyed and followed him till a blast of the night wind nearly flung them on their faces in the garden. Nevertheless they had obeyed him like automata; for Craven found a hatchet in his hand, and the warrant in his pocket; Flambeau was carrying the heavy spade of the strange gardener; Father Brown was carrying the little gilt book from which had been torn the name of God.

The path up the hill to the churchyard was crooked but short; only under that stress of wind it seemed laborious and long. Far as the eye could see, farther and farther as they mounted the slope, were seas beyond seas of pines, now all aslope one way under the wind. And that universal gesture seemed as vain as it was vast, as vain as if that wind were whistling about some unpeopled and purposeless planet. Through all that infinite growth of grey-blue forests sang, shrill and high, that ancient sorrow that is in the heart of all heathen things. One could fancy that the voices from the under world of unfathomable foliage were cries of the lost and wandering pagan gods: gods who had gone roaming in that irrational forest, and who will never find their way back to heaven.

“You see,” said Father Brown in low but easy tone, “Scotch people before Scotland existed were a curious lot. In fact, they’re a curious lot still. But in the prehistoric times I fancy they really worshipped demons. That,” he added genially, “is why they jumped at the Puritan theology.”

“My friend,” said Flambeau, turning in a kind of fury, “what does all that snuff mean?”

“My friend,” replied Brown, with equal seriousness, “there is one mark of all genuine religions: materialism. Now, devil-worship is a perfectly genuine religion.”

They had come up on the grassy scalp of the hill, one of the few bald spots that stood clear of the crashing and roaring pine forest. A mean enclosure, partly
timber and partly wire, rattled in the tempest to tell them the border of the graveyard. But by the time Inspector Craven had come to the corner of the grave, and Flambeau had planted his spade point downwards and leaned on it, they were both almost as shaken as the shaky wood and wire. At the foot of the grave grew great tall thistles, grey and silver in their decay. Once or twice, when a ball of thistledown broke under the breeze and flew past him, Craven jumped slightly as if it had been an arrow.

Flambeau drove the blade of his spade through the whistling grass into the wet clay below. Then he seemed to stop and lean on it as on a staff.

“Go on,” said the priest very gently. “We are only trying to find the truth. What are you afraid of?”

“I am afraid of finding it,” said Flambeau.

The London detective spoke suddenly in a high crowing voice that was meant to be conversational and cheery. “I wonder why he really did hide himself like that. Something nasty, I suppose; was he a leper?”

“Something worse than that,” said Flambeau.

“And what do you imagine,” asked the other, “would be worse than a leper?”

“I don’t imagine it,” said Flambeau.

He dug for some dreadful minutes in silence, and then said in a choked voice, “I’m afraid of his not being the right shape.”

“Nor was that piece of paper, you know,” said Father Brown quietly, “and we survived even that piece of paper.”

Flambeau dug on with a blind energy. But the tempest had shouldered away the choking grey clouds that clung to the hills like smoke and revealed grey fields of faint starlight before he cleared the shape of a rude timber coffin, and somehow tipped it up upon the turf. Craven stepped forward with his axe; a thistle-top touched him, and he flinched. Then he took a firmer stride, and hacked and wrenched with an energy like Flambeau’s till the lid was torn off, and all that was there lay glistening in the grey starlight.

“Bones,” said Craven; and then he added, “but it is a man,” as if that were something unexpected.

“Is he,” asked Flambeau in a voice that went oddly up and down, “is he all right?”

“Seems so,” said the officer huskily, bending over the obscure and decaying skeleton in the box. “Wait a minute.”

A vast heave went over Flambeau’s huge figure. “And now I come to think of it,” he cried, “why in the name of madness shouldn’t he be all right? What is it
gets hold of a man on these cursed cold mountains? I think it’s the black, brainless repetition; all these forests, and over all an ancient horror of unconsciousness. It’s like the dream of an atheist. Pine-trees and more pine-trees and millions more pine-trees—"

“God!” cried the man by the coffin, “but he hasn’t got a head.”

While the others stood rigid the priest, for the first time, showed a leap of startled concern.

“No head!” he repeated. “No head?” as if he had almost expected some other deficiency.

Half-witted visions of a headless baby born to Glengyle, of a headless youth hiding himself in the castle, of a headless man pacing those ancient halls or that gorgeous garden, passed in panorama through their minds. But even in that stiffened instant the tale took no root in them and seemed to have no reason in it. They stood listening to the loud woods and the shrieking sky quite foolishly, like exhausted animals. Thought seemed to be something enormous that had suddenly slipped out of their grasp.

“There are three headless men,” said Father Brown, “standing round this open grave.”

The pale detective from London opened his mouth to speak, and left it open like a yokel, while a long scream of wind tore the sky; then he looked at the axe in his hands as if it did not belong to him, and dropped it.

“Father,” said Flambeau in that infantile and heavy voice he used very seldom, “what are we to do?”

His friend’s reply came with the pent promptitude of a gun going off.

“Sleep!” cried Father Brown. “Sleep. We have come to the end of the ways. Do you know what sleep is? Do you know that every man who sleeps believes in God? It is a sacrament; for it is an act of faith and it is a food. And we need a sacrament, if only a natural one. Something has fallen on us that falls very seldom on men; perhaps the worst thing that can fall on them.”

Craven’s parted lips came together to say, “What do you mean?”

The priest had turned his face to the castle as he answered: “We have found the truth; and the truth makes no sense.”

He went down the path in front of them with a plunging and reckless step very rare with him, and when they reached the castle again he threw himself upon sleep with the simplicity of a dog.

Despite his mystic praise of slumber, Father Brown was up earlier than anyone else except the silent gardener; and was found smoking a big pipe and
watching that expert at his speechless labours in the kitchen garden. Towards daybreak the rocking storm had ended in roaring rains, and the day came with a curious freshness. The gardener seemed even to have been conversing, but at sight of the detectives he planted his spade sullenly in a bed and, saying something about his breakfast, shifted along the lines of cabbages and shut himself in the kitchen. “He’s a valuable man, that,” said Father Brown. “He does the potatoes amazingly. Still,” he added, with a dispassionate charity, “he has his faults; which of us hasn’t? He doesn’t dig this bank quite regularly. There, for instance,” and he stamped suddenly on one spot. “I’m really very doubtful about that potato.”

“And why?” asked Craven, amused with the little man’s hobby.

“I’m doubtful about it,” said the other, “because old Gow was doubtful about it himself. He put his spade in methodically in every place but just this. There must be a mighty fine potato just here.”

Flambeau pulled up the spade and impetuously drove it into the place. He turned up, under a load of soil, something that did not look like a potato, but rather like a monstrous, over-domed mushroom. But it struck the spade with a cold click; it rolled over like a ball, and grinned up at them.

“The Earl of Glengyle,” said Brown sadly, and looked down heavily at the skull.

Then, after a momentary meditation, he plucked the spade from Flambeau, and, saying “We must hide it again,” clamped the skull down in the earth. Then he leaned his little body and huge head on the great handle of the spade, that stood up stiffly in the earth, and his eyes were empty and his forehead full of wrinkles. “If one could only conceive,” he muttered, “the meaning of this last monstrosity.” And leaning on the large spade handle, he buried his brows in his hands, as men do in church.

All the corners of the sky were brightening into blue and silver; the birds were chattering in the tiny garden trees; so loud it seemed as if the trees themselves were talking. But the three men were silent enough.

“Well, I give it all up,” said Flambeau at last boisterously. “My brain and this world don’t fit each other; and there’s an end of it. Snuff, spoilt Prayer Books, and the insides of musical boxes—what—”

Brown threw up his bothered brow and rapped on the spade handle with an intolerance quite unusual with him. “Oh, tut, tut, tut, tut!” he cried. “All that is as plain as a pikestaff. I understood the snuff and clockwork, and so on, when I first opened my eyes this morning. And since then I’ve had it out with old Gow, the
gardener, who is neither so deaf nor so stupid as he pretends. There’s nothing amiss about the loose items. I was wrong about the torn mass-book, too; there’s no harm in that. But it’s this last business. Desecrating graves and stealing dead men’s heads—surely there’s harm in that? Surely there’s black magic still in that? That doesn’t fit in to the quite simple story of the snuff and the candles.”

And, striding about again, he smoked moodily.

“My friend,” said Flambeau, with a grim humour, “you must be careful with me and remember I was once a criminal. The great advantage of that estate was that I always made up the story myself, and acted it as quick as I chose. This detective business of waiting about is too much for my French impatience. All my life, for good or evil, I have done things at the instant; I always fought duels the next morning; I always paid bills on the nail; I never even put off a visit to the dentist—”

Father Brown’s pipe fell out of his mouth and broke into three pieces on the gravel path. He stood rolling his eyes, the exact picture of an idiot. “Lord, what a turnip I am!” he kept saying. “Lord, what a turnip!” Then, in a somewhat groggy kind of way, he began to laugh.

“The dentist!” he repeated. “Six hours in the spiritual abyss, and all because I never thought of the dentist! Such a simple, such a beautiful and peaceful thought! Friends, we have passed a night in hell; but now the sun is risen, the birds are singing, and the radiant form of the dentist consoles the world.”

“I will get some sense out of this,” cried Flambeau, striding forward, “if I use the tortures of the Inquisition.”

Father Brown repressed what appeared to be a momentary disposition to dance on the now sunlit lawn and cried quite piteously, like a child, “Oh, let me be silly a little. You don’t know how unhappy I have been. And now I know that there has been no deep sin in this business at all. Only a little lunacy, perhaps—and who minds that?”

He spun round once more, then faced them with gravity.

“This is not a story of crime,” he said; “rather it is the story of a strange and crooked honesty. We are dealing with the one man on earth, perhaps, who has taken no more than his due. It is a study in the savage living logic that has been the religion of this race.

“That old local rhyme about the house of Glengyle—

As green sap to the simmer trees
Is red gold to the Ogilvies—

was literal as well as metaphorical. It did not merely mean that the Glengyles sought for wealth; it was also true that they literally gathered gold; they had a huge collection of ornaments and utensils in that metal. They were, in fact, misers whose mania took that turn. In the light of that fact, run through all the things we found in the castle. Diamonds without their gold rings; candles without their gold candlesticks; snuff without the gold snuff-boxes; pencil-leads without the gold pencil-cases; a walking stick without its gold top; clockwork without the gold clocks—or rather watches. And, mad as it sounds, because the halos and the name of God in the old missals were of real gold; these also were taken away.”

The garden seemed to brighten, the grass to grow gayer in the strengthening sun, as the crazy truth was told. Flambeau lit a cigarette as his friend went on.

“Were taken away,” continued Father Brown; “were taken away—but not stolen. Thieves would never have left this mystery. Thieves would have taken the gold snuff-boxes, snuff and all; the gold pencil-cases, lead and all. We have to deal with a man with a peculiar conscience, but certainly a conscience. I found that mad moralist this morning in the kitchen garden yonder, and I heard the whole story.

“The late Archibald Ogilvie was the nearest approach to a good man ever born at Glengyle. But his bitter virtue took the turn of the misanthrope; he moped over the dishonesty of his ancestors, from which, somehow, he generalised a dishonesty of all men. More especially he distrusted philanthropy or free-giving; and he swore if he could find one man who took his exact rights he should have all the gold of Glengyle. Having delivered this defiance to humanity he shut himself up, without the smallest expectation of its being answered. One day, however, a deaf and seemingly senseless lad from a distant village brought him a belated telegram; and Glengyle, in his acrid pleasantries, gave him a new farthing. At least he thought he had done so, but when he turned over his change he found the new farthing still there and a sovereign gone. The accident offered him vistas of sneering speculation. Either way, the boy would show the greasy greed of the species. Either he would vanish, a thief stealing a coin; or he would sneak back with it virtuously, a snob seeking a reward. In the middle of that night Lord Glengyle was knocked up out of his bed—for he lived alone—and forced to open the door to the deaf idiot. The idiot brought with him, not the sovereign, but exactly nineteen shillings and eleven-pence three-farthings in change.
“Then the wild exactitude of this action took hold of the mad lord’s brain like fire. He swore he was Diogenes, that had long sought an honest man, and at last had found one. He made a new will, which I have seen. He took the literal youth into his huge, neglected house, and trained him up as his solitary servant and—after an odd manner—his heir. And whatever that queer creature understands, he understood absolutely his lord’s two fixed ideas: first, that the letter of right is everything; and second, that he himself was to have the gold of Glengyle. So far, that is all; and that is simple. He has stripped the house of gold, and taken not a grain that was not gold; not so much as a grain of snuff. He lifted the gold leaf off an old illumination, fully satisfied that he left the rest unspoilt. All that I understood; but I could not understand this skull business. I was really uneasy about that human head buried among the potatoes. It distressed me—till Flambeau said the word.

“It will be all right. He will put the skull back in the grave, when he has taken the gold out of the tooth.”

And, indeed, when Flambeau crossed the hill that morning, he saw that strange being, the just miser, digging at the desecrated grave, the plaid round his throat thrashing out in the mountain wind; the sober top hat on his head.
THE WRONG SHAPE

Certain of the great roads going north out of London continue far into the country a sort of attenuated and interrupted spectre of a street, with great gaps in the building, but preserving the line. Here will be a group of shops, followed by a fenced field or paddock, and then a famous public-house, and then perhaps a market garden or a nursery garden, and then one large private house, and then another field and another inn, and so on. If anyone walks along one of these roads he will pass a house which will probably catch his eye, though he may not be able to explain its attraction. It is a long, low house, running parallel with the road, painted mostly white and pale green, with a veranda and sun-blinds, and porches capped with those quaint sort of cupolas like wooden umbrellas that one sees in some old-fashioned houses. In fact, it is an old-fashioned house, very English and very suburban in the good old wealthy Clapham sense. And yet the house has a look of having been built chiefly for the hot weather. Looking at its white paint and sun-blinds one thinks vaguely of pugarees and even of palm trees. I cannot trace the feeling to its root; perhaps the place was built by an Anglo-Indian.

Anyone passing this house, I say, would be namelessly fascinated by it; would feel that it was a place about which some story was to be told. And he would have been right, as you shall shortly hear. For this is the story—the story of the strange things that did really happen in it in the Whitsuntide of the year 18—:

Anyone passing the house on the Thursday before Whit-Sunday at about half-past four p.m. would have seen the front door open, and Father Brown, of the small church of St. Mungo, come out smoking a large pipe in company with a very tall French friend of his called Flambeau, who was smoking a very small cigarette. These persons may or may not be of interest to the reader, but the truth is that they were not the only interesting things that were displayed when the front door of the white-and-green house was opened. There are further peculiarities about this house, which must be described to start with, not only that the reader may understand this tragic tale, but also that he may realise what it was that the opening of the door revealed.

The whole house was built upon the plan of a T, but a T with a very long cross piece and a very short tail piece. The long cross piece was the frontage that ran along in face of the street, with the front door in the middle; it was two stories high, and contained nearly all the important rooms. The short tail piece, which
ran out at the back immediately opposite the front door, was one story high, and consisted only of two long rooms, the one leading into the other. The first of these two rooms was the study in which the celebrated Mr. Quinton wrote his wild Oriental poems and romances. The farther room was a glass conservatory full of tropical blossoms of quite unique and almost monstrous beauty, and on such afternoons as these glowing with gorgeous sunlight. Thus when the hall door was open, many a passer-by literally stopped to stare and gasp; for he looked down a perspective of rich apartments to something really like a transformation scene in a fairy play: purple clouds and golden suns and crimson stars that were at once scorchingly vivid and yet transparent and far away.

Leonard Quinton, the poet, had himself most carefully arranged this effect; and it is doubtful whether he so perfectly expressed his personality in any of his poems. For he was a man who drank and bathed in colours, who indulged his lust for colour somewhat to the neglect of form—even of good form. This it was that had turned his genius so wholly to eastern art and imagery; to those bewildering carpets or blinding embroideries in which all the colours seem fallen into a fortunate chaos, having nothing to typify or to teach. He had attempted, not perhaps with complete artistic success, but with acknowledged imagination and invention, to compose epics and love stories reflecting the riot of violent and even cruel colour; tales of tropical heavens of burning gold or blood-red copper; of eastern heroes who rode with twelve-turbaned mitres upon elephants painted purple or peacock green; of gigantic jewels that a hundred negroes could not carry, but which burned with ancient and strange-hued fires.

In short (to put the matter from the more common point of view), he dealt much in eastern heavens, rather worse than most western hells; in eastern monarchs, whom we might possibly call maniacs; and in eastern jewels which a Bond Street jeweller (if the hundred staggering negroes brought them into his shop) might possibly not regard as genuine. Quinton was a genius, if a morbid one; and even his morbidity appeared more in his life than in his work. In temperament he was weak and waspish, and his health had suffered heavily from oriental experiments with opium. His wife—a handsome, hard-working, and, indeed, over-worked woman objected to the opium, but objected much more to a live Indian hermit in white and yellow robes, whom her husband insisted on entertaining for months together, a Virgil to guide his spirit through the heavens and the hells of the east.

It was out of this artistic household that Father Brown and his friend stepped on to the door-step; and to judge from their faces, they stepped out of it with
much relief. Flambeau had known Quinton in wild student days in Paris, and they had renewed the acquaintance for a week-end; but apart from Flambeau’s more responsible developments of late, he did not get on well with the poet now. Choking oneself with opium and writing little erotic verses on vellum was not his notion of how a gentleman should go to the devil. As the two paused on the door-step, before taking a turn in the garden, the front garden gate was thrown open with violence, and a young man with a billycock hat on the back of his head tumbled up the steps in his eagerness. He was a dissipated-looking youth with a gorgeous red necktie all awry, as if he had slept in it, and he kept fidgeting and lashing about with one of those little jointed canes.

“I say,” he said breathlessly, “I want to see old Quinton. I must see him. Has he gone?”

“Mr. Quinton is in, I believe,” said Father Brown, cleaning his pipe, “but I do not know if you can see him. The doctor is with him at present.”

The young man, who seemed not to be perfectly sober, stumbled into the hall; and at the same moment the doctor came out of Quinton’s study, shutting the door and beginning to put on his gloves.

“See Mr. Quinton?” said the doctor coolly. “No, I’m afraid you can’t. In fact, you mustn’t on any account. Nobody must see him; I’ve just given him his sleeping draught.”

“No, but look here, old chap,” said the youth in the red tie, trying affectionately to capture the doctor by the lapels of his coat. “Look here. I’m simply sewn up, I tell you. I—”

“It’s no good, Mr. Atkinson,” said the doctor, forcing him to fall back; “when you can alter the effects of a drug I’ll alter my decision,” and, settling on his hat, he stepped out into the sunlight with the other two. He was a bull-necked, good-tempered little man with a small moustache, inexpressibly ordinary, yet giving an impression of capacity.

The young man in the billycock, who did not seem to be gifted with any tact in dealing with people beyond the general idea of clutching hold of their coats, stood outside the door, as dazed as if he had been thrown out bodily, and silently watched the other three walk away together through the garden.

“That was a sound, spanking lie I told just now,” remarked the medical man, laughing. “In point of fact, poor Quinton doesn’t have his sleeping draught for nearly half an hour. But I’m not going to have him bothered with that little beast, who only wants to borrow money that he wouldn’t pay back if he could. He’s a dirty little scamp, though he is Mrs. Quinton’s brother, and she’s as fine a
woman as ever walked.”

“Yes,” said Father Brown. “She’s a good woman.”

“So I propose to hang about the garden till the creature has cleared off,” went on the doctor, “and then I’ll go in to Quinton with the medicine. Atkinson can’t get in, because I locked the door.”

“In that case, Dr. Harris,” said Flambeau, “we might as well walk round at the back by the end of the conservatory. There’s no entrance to it that way, but it’s worth seeing, even from the outside.”

“Yes, and I might get a squint at my patient,” laughed the doctor, “for he prefers to lie on an ottoman right at the end of the conservatory amid all those blood-red poinsettias; it would give me the creeps. But what are you doing?”

Father Brown had stopped for a moment, and picked up out of the long grass, where it had almost been wholly hidden, a queer, crooked Oriental knife, inlaid exquisitely in coloured stones and metals.

“What is this?” asked Father Brown, regarding it with some disfavour.

“Oh, Quinton’s, I suppose,” said Dr. Harris carelessly; “he has all sorts of Chinese knickknacks about the place. Or perhaps it belongs to that mild Hindoo of his whom he keeps on a string.”

“What Hindoo?” asked Father Brown, still staring at the dagger in his hand.

“Oh, some Indian conjuror,” said the doctor lightly; “a fraud, of course.”

“You don’t believe in magic?” asked Father Brown, without looking up.

“O crikey! magic!” said the doctor.

“It’s very beautiful,” said the priest in a low, dreaming voice; “the colours are very beautiful. But it’s the wrong shape.”

“What for?” asked Flambeau, staring.

“For anything. It’s the wrong shape in the abstract. Don’t you ever feel that about Eastern art? The colours are intoxicatingly lovely; but the shapes are mean and bad—deliberately mean and bad. I have seen wicked things in a Turkey carpet.”

“Mon Dieu!” cried Flambeau, laughing.

“They are letters and symbols in a language I don’t know; but I know they stand for evil words,” went on the priest, his voice growing lower and lower. “The lines go wrong on purpose—like serpents doubling to escape.”

“What the devil are you talking about?” said the doctor with a loud laugh.

Flambeau spoke quietly to him in answer. “The Father sometimes gets this mystic’s cloud on him,” he said; “but I give you fair warning that I have never known him to have it except when there was some evil quite near.”
“Oh, rats!” said the scientist.

“Why, look at it,” cried Father Brown, holding out the crooked knife at arm’s length, as if it were some glittering snake. “Don’t you see it is the wrong shape? Don’t you see that it has no hearty and plain purpose? It does not point like a spear. It does not sweep like a scythe. It does not look like a weapon. It looks like an instrument of torture.”

“Well, as you don’t seem to like it,” said the jolly Harris, “it had better be taken back to its owner. Haven’t we come to the end of this confounded conservatory yet? This house is the wrong shape, if you like.”

“You don’t understand,” said Father Brown, shaking his head. “The shape of this house is quaint—it is even laughable. But there is nothing wrong about it.”

As they spoke they came round the curve of glass that ended the conservatory, an uninterrupted curve, for there was neither door nor window by which to enter at that end. The glass, however, was clear, and the sun still bright, though beginning to set; and they could see not only the flamboyant blossoms inside, but the frail figure of the poet in a brown velvet coat lying languidly on the sofa, having, apparently, fallen half asleep over a book. He was a pale, slight man, with loose, chestnut hair and a fringe of beard that was the paradox of his face, for the beard made him look less manly. These traits were well known to all three of them; but even had it not been so, it may be doubted whether they would have looked at Quinton just then. Their eyes were riveted on another object.

Exactly in their path, immediately outside the round end of the glass building, was standing a tall man, whose drapery fell to his feet in faultless white, and whose bare, brown skull, face, and neck gleamed in the setting sun like splendid bronze. He was looking through the glass at the sleeper, and he was more motionless than a mountain.

“Who is that?” cried Father Brown, stepping back with a hissing intake of his breath.

“Oh, it is only that Hindoo humbug,” growled Harris; “but I don’t know what the deuce he’s doing here.”

“It looks like hypnotism,” said Flambeau, biting his black moustache.

“Why are you unmedical fellows always talking bosh about hypnotism?” cried the doctor. “It looks a deal more like burglary.”

“Well, we will speak to it, at any rate,” said Flambeau, who was always for action. One long stride took him to the place where the Indian stood. Bowing from his great height, which overtopped even the Oriental’s, he said with placid impudence:
“Good evening, sir. Do you want anything?”

Quite slowly, like a great ship turning into a harbour, the great yellow face turned, and looked at last over its white shoulder. They were startled to see that its yellow eyelids were quite sealed, as in sleep. “Thank you,” said the face in excellent English. “I want nothing.” Then, half opening the lids, so as to show a slit of opalescent eyeball, he repeated, “I want nothing.” Then he opened his eyes wide with a startling stare, said, “I want nothing,” and went rustling away into the rapidly darkening garden.

“The Christian is more modest,” muttered Father Brown; “he wants something.”

“What on earth was he doing?” asked Flambeau, knitting his black brows and lowering his voice.

“I should like to talk to you later,” said Father Brown.

The sunlight was still a reality, but it was the red light of evening, and the bulk of the garden trees and bushes grew blacker and blacker against it. They turned round the end of the conservatory, and walked in silence down the other side to get round to the front door. As they went they seemed to wake something, as one startles a bird, in the deeper corner between the study and the main building; and again they saw the white-robed fakir slide out of the shadow, and slip round towards the front door. To their surprise, however, he had not been alone. They found themselves abruptly pulled up and forced to banish their bewilderment by the appearance of Mrs. Quinton, with her heavy golden hair and square pale face, advancing on them out of the twilight. She looked a little stern, but was entirely courteous.

“Good evening, Dr. Harris,” was all she said.

“Good evening, Mrs. Quinton,” said the little doctor heartily. “I am just going to give your husband his sleeping draught.”

“Yes,” she said in a clear voice. “I think it is quite time.” And she smiled at them, and went sweeping into the house.

“That woman’s over-driven,” said Father Brown; “that’s the kind of woman that does her duty for twenty years, and then does something dreadful.”

The little doctor looked at him for the first time with an eye of interest. “Did you ever study medicine?” he asked.

“You have to know something of the mind as well as the body,” answered the priest; “we have to know something of the body as well as the mind.”

“Well,” said the doctor, “I think I’ll go and give Quinton his stuff.”

They had turned the corner of the front facade, and were approaching the front
doorway. As they turned into it they saw the man in the white robe for the third time. He came so straight towards the front door that it seemed quite incredible that he had not just come out of the study opposite to it. Yet they knew that the study door was locked.

Father Brown and Flambeau, however, kept this weird contradiction to themselves, and Dr. Harris was not a man to waste his thoughts on the impossible. He permitted the omnipresent Asiatic to make his exit, and then stepped briskly into the hall. There he found a figure which he had already forgotten. The inane Atkinson was still hanging about, humming and poking things with his knobby cane. The doctor’s face had a spasm of disgust and decision, and he whispered rapidly to his companion: “I must lock the door again, or this rat will get in. But I shall be out again in two minutes.”

He rapidly unlocked the door and locked it again behind him, just balking a blundering charge from the young man in the billycock. The young man threw himself impatiently on a hall chair. Flambeau looked at a Persian illumination on the wall; Father Brown, who seemed in a sort of daze, dully eyed the door. In about four minutes the door was opened again. Atkinson was quicker this time. He sprang forward, held the door open for an instant, and called out: “Oh, I say, Quinton, I want—”

From the other end of the study came the clear voice of Quinton, in something between a yawn and a yell of weary laughter.

“Oh, I know what you want. Take it, and leave me in peace. I’m writing a song about peacocks.”

Before the door closed half a sovereign came flying through the aperture; and Atkinson, stumbling forward, caught it with singular dexterity.

“So that’s settled,” said the doctor, and, locking the door savagely, he led the way out into the garden.

“Poor Leonard can get a little peace now,” he added to Father Brown; “he’s locked in all by himself for an hour or two.”

“Yes,” answered the priest; “and his voice sounded jolly enough when we left him.” Then he looked gravely round the garden, and saw the loose figure of Atkinson standing and jingling the half-sovereign in his pocket, and beyond, in the purple twilight, the figure of the Indian sitting bolt upright upon a bank of grass with his face turned towards the setting sun. Then he said abruptly: “Where is Mrs. Quinton!”

“She has gone up to her room,” said the doctor. “That is her shadow on the blind.”
Father Brown looked up, and frowningly scrutinised a dark outline at the gas-lit window.

“Yes,” he said, “that is her shadow,” and he walked a yard or two and threw himself upon a garden seat.

Flambeau sat down beside him; but the doctor was one of those energetic people who live naturally on their legs. He walked away, smoking, into the twilight, and the two friends were left together.

“My father,” said Flambeau in French, “what is the matter with you?”

Father Brown was silent and motionless for half a minute, then he said: “Superstition is irreligious, but there is something in the air of this place. I think it’s that Indian—at least, partly.”

He sank into silence, and watched the distant outline of the Indian, who still sat rigid as if in prayer. At first sight he seemed motionless, but as Father Brown watched him he saw that the man swayed ever so slightly with a rhythmic movement, just as the dark tree-tops swayed ever so slightly in the wind that was creeping up the dim garden paths and shuffling the fallen leaves a little.

The landscape was growing rapidly dark, as if for a storm, but they could still see all the figures in their various places. Atkinson was leaning against a tree with a listless face; Quinton’s wife was still at her window; the doctor had gone strolling round the end of the conservatory; they could see his cigar like a will-o’-the-wisp; and the fakir still sat rigid and yet rocking, while the trees above him began to rock and almost to roar. Storm was certainly coming.

“When that Indian spoke to us,” went on Brown in a conversational undertone, “I had a sort of vision, a vision of him and all his universe. Yet he only said the same thing three times. When first he said ‘I want nothing,’ it meant only that he was impenetrable, that Asia does not give itself away. Then he said again, ‘I want nothing,’ and I knew that he meant that he was sufficient to himself, like a cosmos, that he needed no God, neither admitted any sins. And when he said the third time, ‘I want nothing,’ he said it with blazing eyes. And I knew that he meant literally what he said; that nothing was his desire and his home; that he was weary for nothing as for wine; that annihilation, the mere destruction of everything or anything—”

Two drops of rain fell; and for some reason Flambeau started and looked up, as if they had stung him. And the same instant the doctor down by the end of the conservatory began running towards them, calling out something as he ran.

As he came among them like a bombshell the restless Atkinson happened to be taking a turn nearer to the house front; and the doctor clutched him by the
collar in a convulsive grip. “Foul play!” he cried; “what have you been doing to him, you dog?”

The priest had sprung erect, and had the voice of steel of a soldier in command.

“No fighting,” he cried coolly; “we are enough to hold anyone we want to. What is the matter, doctor?”

“Things are not right with Quinton,” said the doctor, quite white. “I could just see him through the glass, and I don’t like the way he’s lying. It’s not as I left him, anyhow.”

“Let us go in to him,” said Father Brown shortly. “You can leave Mr. Atkinson alone. I have had him in sight since we heard Quinton’s voice.”

“I will stop here and watch him,” said Flambeau hurriedly. “You go in and see.”

The doctor and the priest flew to the study door, unlocked it, and fell into the room. In doing so they nearly fell over the large mahogany table in the centre at which the poet usually wrote; for the place was lit only by a small fire kept for the invalid. In the middle of this table lay a single sheet of paper, evidently left there on purpose. The doctor snatched it up, glanced at it, handed it to Father Brown, and crying, “Good God, look at that!” plunged toward the glass room beyond, where the terrible tropic flowers still seemed to keep a crimson memory of the sunset.

Father Brown read the words three times before he put down the paper. The words were: “I die by my own hand; yet I die murdered!” They were in the quite inimitable, not to say illegible, handwriting of Leonard Quinton.

Then Father Brown, still keeping the paper in his hand, strode towards the conservatory, only to meet his medical friend coming back with a face of assurance and collapse. “He’s done it,” said Harris.

They went together through the gorgeous unnatural beauty of cactus and azalea and found Leonard Quinton, poet and romancer, with his head hanging downward off his ottoman and his red curls sweeping the ground. Into his left side was thrust the queer dagger that they had picked up in the garden, and his limp hand still rested on the hilt.

Outside the storm had come at one stride, like the night in Coleridge, and garden and glass roof were darkened with driving rain. Father Brown seemed to be studying the paper more than the corpse; he held it close to his eyes; and seemed trying to read it in the twilight. Then he held it up against the faint light, and, as he did so, lightning stared at them for an instant so white that the paper
looked black against it.

Darkness full of thunder followed, and after the thunder Father Brown’s voice said out of the dark: “Doctor, this paper is the wrong shape.”

“What do you mean?” asked Doctor Harris, with a frowning stare.

“It isn’t square,” answered Brown. “It has a sort of edge snipped off at the corner. What does it mean?”

“How the deuce should I know?” growled the doctor. “Shall we move this poor chap, do you think? He’s quite dead.”

“No,” answered the priest; “we must leave him as he lies and send for the police.” But he was still scrutinising the paper.

As they went back through the study he stopped by the table and picked up a small pair of nail scissors. “Ah,” he said, with a sort of relief, “this is what he did it with. But yet—” And he knitted his brows.

“Oh, stop fooling with that scrap of paper,” said the doctor emphatically. “It was a fad of his. He had hundreds of them. He cut all his paper like that,” as he pointed to a stack of sermon paper still unused on another and smaller table. Father Brown went up to it and held up a sheet. It was the same irregular shape.

“Quite so,” he said. “And here I see the corners that were snipped off.” And to the indignation of his colleague he began to count them.

“That’s all right,” he said, with an apologetic smile. “Twenty-three sheets cut and twenty-two corners cut off them. And as I see you are impatient we will rejoin the others.”

“Who is to tell his wife?” asked Dr. Harris. “Will you go and tell her now, while I send a servant for the police?”

“As you will,” said Father Brown indifferently. And he went out to the hall door.

Here also he found a drama, though of a more grotesque sort. It showed nothing less than his big friend Flambeau in an attitude to which he had long been unaccustomed, while upon the pathway at the bottom of the steps was sprawling with his boots in the air the amiable Atkinson, his billycock hat and walking cane sent flying in opposite directions along the path. Atkinson had at length wearied of Flambeau’s almost paternal custody, and had endeavoured to knock him down, which was by no means a smooth game to play with the Roi des Apaches, even after that monarch’s abdication.

Flambeau was about to leap upon his enemy and secure him once more, when the priest patted him easily on the shoulder.

“Make it up with Mr. Atkinson, my friend,” he said. “Beg a mutual pardon
and say ‘Good night.’ We need not detain him any longer.” Then, as Atkinson
rose somewhat doubtfully and gathered his hat and stick and went towards the
garden gate, Father Brown said in a more serious voice: “Where is that Indian?”

They all three (for the doctor had joined them) turned involuntarily towards
the dim grassy bank amid the tossing trees purple with twilight, where they had
last seen the brown man swaying in his strange prayers. The Indian was gone.

“Confound him,” cried the doctor, stamping furiously. “Now I know that it
was that nigger that did it.”

“I thought you didn’t believe in magic,” said Father Brown quietly.

“No more I did,” said the doctor, rolling his eyes. “I only know that I loathed
that yellow devil when I thought he was a sham wizard. And I shall loathe him
more if I come to think he was a real one.”

“Well, his having escaped is nothing,” said Flambeau. “For we could have
proved nothing and done nothing against him. One hardly goes to the parish
constable with a story of suicide imposed by witchcraft or auto-suggestion.”

Meanwhile Father Brown had made his way into the house, and now went to
break the news to the wife of the dead man.

When he came out again he looked a little pale and tragic, but what passed
between them in that interview was never known, even when all was known.

Flambeau, who was talking quietly with the doctor, was surprised to see his
friend reappear so soon at his elbow; but Brown took no notice, and merely drew
the doctor apart. “You have sent for the police, haven’t you?” he asked.

“Yes,” answered Harris. “They ought to be here in ten minutes.”

“Will you do me a favour?” said the priest quietly. “The truth is, I make a
collection of these curious stories, which often contain, as in the case of our
Hindoo friend, elements which can hardly be put into a police report. Now, I
want you to write out a report of this case for my private use. Yours is a clever
trade,” he said, looking the doctor gravely and steadily in the face. “I sometimes
think that you know some details of this matter which you have not thought fit to
mention. Mine is a confidential trade like yours, and I will treat anything you
write for me in strict confidence. But write the whole.”

The doctor, who had been listening thoughtfully with his head a little on one
side, looked the priest in the face for an instant, and said: “All right,” and went
into the study, closing the door behind him.

“Flambeau,” said Father Brown, “there is a long seat there under the veranda,
where we can smoke out of the rain. You are my only friend in the world, and I
want to talk to you. Or, perhaps, be silent with you.”
They established themselves comfortably in the veranda seat; Father Brown, against his common habit, accepted a good cigar and smoked it steadily in silence, while the rain shrieked and rattled on the roof of the veranda.

“My friend,” he said at length, “this is a very queer case. A very queer case.”

“I should think it was,” said Flambeau, with something like a shudder.

“You call it queer, and I call it queer,” said the other, “and yet we mean quite opposite things. The modern mind always mixes up two different ideas: mystery in the sense of what is marvellous, and mystery in the sense of what is complicated. That is half its difficulty about miracles. A miracle is startling; but it is simple. It is simple because it is a miracle. It is power coming directly from God (or the devil) instead of indirectly through nature or human wills. Now, you mean that this business is marvellous because it is miraculous, because it is witchcraft worked by a wicked Indian. Understand, I do not say that it was not spiritual or diabolic. Heaven and hell only know by what surrounding influences strange sins come into the lives of men. But for the present my point is this: If it was pure magic, as you think, then it is marvellous; but it is not mysterious—that is, it is not complicated. The quality of a miracle is mysterious, but its manner is simple. Now, the manner of this business has been the reverse of simple.”

The storm that had slackened for a little seemed to be swelling again, and there came heavy movements as of faint thunder. Father Brown let fall the ash of his cigar and went on:

“There has been in this incident,” he said, “a twisted, ugly, complex quality that does not belong to the straight bolts either of heaven or hell. As one knows the crooked track of a snail, I know the crooked track of a man.”

The white lightning opened its enormous eye in one wink, the sky shut up again, and the priest went on:

“Of all these crooked things, the crookedest was the shape of that piece of paper. It was crookeder than the dagger that killed him.”

“You mean the paper on which Quinton confessed his suicide,” said Flambeau.

“I mean the paper on which Quinton wrote, ‘I die by my own hand,’” answered Father Brown. “The shape of that paper, my friend, was the wrong shape; the wrong shape, if ever I have seen it in this wicked world.”

“It only had a corner snipped off,” said Flambeau, “and I understand that all Quinton’s paper was cut that way.”

“It was a very odd way,” said the other, “and a very bad way, to my taste and fancy. Look here, Flambeau, this Quinton—God receive his soul!—was perhaps
a bit of a cur in some ways, but he really was an artist, with the pencil as well as the pen. His handwriting, though hard to read, was bold and beautiful. I can’t prove what I say; I can’t prove anything. But I tell you with the full force of conviction that he could never have cut that mean little piece off a sheet of paper. If he had wanted to cut down paper for some purpose of fitting in, or binding up, or what not, he would have made quite a different slash with the scissors. Do you remember the shape? It was a mean shape. It was a wrong shape. Like this. Don’t you remember?”

And he waved his burning cigar before him in the darkness, making irregular squares so rapidly that Flambeau really seemed to see them as fiery hieroglyphics upon the darkness—hieroglyphics such as his friend had spoken of, which are undecipherable, yet can have no good meaning.

“But,” said Flambeau, as the priest put his cigar in his mouth again and leaned back, staring at the roof, “suppose somebody else did use the scissors. Why should somebody else, cutting pieces off his sermon paper, make Quinton commit suicide?”

Father Brown was still leaning back and staring at the roof, but he took his cigar out of his mouth and said: “Quinton never did commit suicide.”

Flambeau stared at him. “Why, confound it all,” he cried, “then why did he confess to suicide?”

The priest leant forward again, settled his elbows on his knees, looked at the ground, and said, in a low, distinct voice: “He never did confess to suicide.”

Flambeau laid his cigar down. “You mean,” he said, “that the writing was forged?”

“No,” said Father Brown. “Quinton wrote it all right.”

“Well, there you are,” said the aggravated Flambeau; “Quinton wrote, ‘I die by my own hand,’ with his own hand on a plain piece of paper.”

“Of the wrong shape,” said the priest calmly. “Oh, the shape be damned!” cried Flambeau. “What has the shape to do with it?”

“There were twenty-three snipped papers,” resumed Brown unmoved, “and only twenty-two pieces snipped off. Therefore one of the pieces had been destroyed, probably that from the written paper. Does that suggest anything to you?”

A light dawned on Flambeau’s face, and he said: “There was something else written by Quinton, some other words. ‘They will tell you I die by my own hand,’ or ‘Do not believe that—’”
“Hotter, as the children say,” said his friend. “But the piece was hardly half an inch across; there was no room for one word, let alone five. Can you think of anything hardly bigger than a comma which the man with hell in his heart had to tear away as a testimony against him?”

“I can think of nothing,” said Flambeau at last.

“What about quotation marks?” said the priest, and flung his cigar far into the darkness like a shooting star.

All words had left the other man’s mouth, and Father Brown said, like one going back to fundamentals:

“Leonard Quinton was a romancer, and was writing an Oriental romance about wizardry and hypnotism. He—”

At this moment the door opened briskly behind them, and the doctor came out with his hat on. He put a long envelope into the priest’s hands.

“That’s the document you wanted,” he said, “and I must be getting home. Good night.”

“Good night,” said Father Brown, as the doctor walked briskly to the gate. He had left the front door open, so that a shaft of gaslight fell upon them. In the light of this Brown opened the envelope and read the following words:

DEAR FATHER BROWN,—Vicisti Galilee. Otherwise, damn your eyes, which are very penetrating ones. Can it be possible that there is something in all that stuff of yours after all?

I am a man who has ever since boyhood believed in Nature and in all natural functions and instincts, whether men called them moral or immoral. Long before I became a doctor, when I was a schoolboy keeping mice and spiders, I believed that to be a good animal is the best thing in the world. But just now I am shaken; I have believed in Nature; but it seems as if Nature could betray a man. Can there be anything in your bosh? I am really getting morbid.

I loved Quinton’s wife. What was there wrong in that? Nature told me to, and it’s love that makes the world go round. I also thought quite sincerely that she would be happier with a clean animal like me than with that tormenting little lunatic. What was there wrong in that? I was only facing facts, like a man of science. She would have been happier.

According to my own creed I was quite free to kill Quinton, which was the best thing for everybody, even himself. But as a healthy animal I had no notion of killing myself. I resolved, therefore, that I would never do it until I saw a chance that would leave me scot free. I saw that chance this morning.

I have been three times, all told, into Quinton’s study today. The first time I
went in he would talk about nothing but the weird tale, called “The Cure of a Saint,” which he was writing, which was all about how some Indian hermit made an English colonel kill himself by thinking about him. He showed me the last sheets, and even read me the last paragraph, which was something like this: “The conqueror of the Punjab, a mere yellow skeleton, but still gigantic, managed to lift himself on his elbow and gasp in his nephew’s ear: ‘I die by my own hand, yet I die murdered!’” It so happened by one chance out of a hundred, that those last words were written at the top of a new sheet of paper. I left the room, and went out into the garden intoxicated with a frightful opportunity.

We walked round the house; and two more things happened in my favour. You suspected an Indian, and you found a dagger which the Indian might most probably use. Taking the opportunity to stuff it in my pocket I went back to Quinton’s study, locked the door, and gave him his sleeping draught. He was against answering Atkinson at all, but I urged him to call out and quiet the fellow, because I wanted a clear proof that Quinton was alive when I left the room for the second time. Quinton lay down in the conservatory, and I came through the study. I am a quick man with my hands, and in a minute and a half I had done what I wanted to do. I had emptied all the first part of Quinton’s romance into the fireplace, where it burnt to ashes. Then I saw that the quotation marks wouldn’t do, so I snipped them off, and to make it seem likelier, snipped the whole quire to match. Then I came out with the knowledge that Quinton’s confession of suicide lay on the front table, while Quinton lay alive but asleep in the conservatory beyond.

The last act was a desperate one; you can guess it: I pretended to have seen Quinton dead and rushed to his room. I delayed you with the paper, and, being a quick man with my hands, killed Quinton while you were looking at his confession of suicide. He was half-asleep, being drugged, and I put his own hand on the knife and drove it into his body. The knife was of so queer a shape that no one but an operator could have calculated the angle that would reach his heart. I wonder if you noticed this.

When I had done it, the extraordinary thing happened. Nature deserted me. I felt ill. I felt just as if I had done something wrong. I think my brain is breaking up; I feel some sort of desperate pleasure in thinking I have told the thing to somebody; that I shall not have to be alone with it if I marry and have children. What is the matter with me? . . . Madness . . . or can one have remorse, just as if one were in Byron’s poems! I cannot write any more.

James Erskine Harris.
Father Brown carefully folded up the letter, and put it in his breast pocket just as there came a loud peal at the gate bell, and the wet waterproofs of several policemen gleamed in the road outside.
THE SINS OF PRINCE SARADINE

When Flambeau took his month’s holiday from his office in Westminster he took it in a small sailing-boat, so small that it passed much of its time as a rowing-boat. He took it, moreover, in little rivers in the Eastern counties, rivers so small that the boat looked like a magic boat, sailing on land through meadows and cornfields. The vessel was just comfortable for two people; there was room only for necessities, and Flambeau had stocked it with such things as his special philosophy considered necessary. They reduced themselves, apparently, to four essentials: tins of salmon, if he should want to eat; loaded revolvers, if he should want to fight; a bottle of brandy, presumably in case he should faint; and a priest, presumably in case he should die. With this light luggage he crawled down the little Norfolk rivers, intending to reach the Broads at last, but meanwhile delighting in the overhanging gardens and meadows, the mirrored mansions or villages, lingering to fish in the pools and corners, and in some sense hugging the shore.

Like a true philosopher, Flambeau had no aim in his holiday; but, like a true philosopher, he had an excuse. He had a sort of half purpose, which he took just so seriously that its success would crown the holiday, but just so lightly that its failure would not spoil it. Years ago, when he had been a king of thieves and the most famous figure in Paris, he had often received wild communications of approval, denunciation, or even love; but one had, somehow, stuck in his memory. It consisted simply of a visiting-card, in an envelope with an English postmark. On the back of the card was written in French and in green ink: “If you ever retire and become respectable, come and see me. I want to meet you, for I have met all the other great men of my time. That trick of yours of getting one detective to arrest the other was the most splendid scene in French history.” On the front of the card was engraved in the formal fashion, “Prince Saradine, Reed House, Reed Island, Norfolk.”

He had not troubled much about the prince then, beyond ascertaining that he had been a brilliant and fashionable figure in southern Italy. In his youth, it was said, he had eloped with a married woman of high rank; the escapade was scarcely startling in his social world, but it had clung to men’s minds because of an additional tragedy: the alleged suicide of the insulted husband, who appeared to have flung himself over a precipice in Sicily. The prince then lived in Vienna for a time, but his more recent years seemed to have been passed in perpetual
and restless travel. But when Flambeau, like the prince himself, had left European celebrity and settled in England, it occurred to him that he might pay a surprise visit to this eminent exile in the Norfolk Broads. Whether he should find the place he had no idea; and, indeed, it was sufficiently small and forgotten. But, as things fell out, he found it much sooner than he expected.

They had moored their boat one night under a bank veiled in high grasses and short pollarded trees. Sleep, after heavy sculling, had come to them early, and by a corresponding accident they awoke before it was light. To speak more strictly, they awoke before it was daylight; for a large lemon moon was only just setting in the forest of high grass above their heads, and the sky was of a vivid violet-blue, nocturnal but bright. Both men had simultaneously a reminiscence of childhood, of the elfin and adventurous time when tall weeds close over us like woods. Standing up thus against the large low moon, the daisies really seemed to be giant daisies, the dandelions to be giant dandelions. Somehow it reminded them of the dado of a nursery wall-paper. The drop of the river-bed sufficed to sink them under the roots of all shrubs and flowers and make them gaze upwards at the grass. “By Jove!” said Flambeau, “it’s like being in fairyland.”

Father Brown sat bolt upright in the boat and crossed himself. His movement was so abrupt that his friend asked him, with a mild stare, what was the matter.

“The people who wrote the mediaeval ballads,” answered the priest, “knew more about fairies than you do. It isn’t only nice things that happen in fairyland.”

“Oh, bosh!” said Flambeau. “Only nice things could happen under such an innocent moon. I am for pushing on now and seeing what does really come. We may die and rot before we ever see again such a moon or such a mood.”

“All right,” said Father Brown. “I never said it was always wrong to enter fairyland. I only said it was always dangerous.”

They pushed slowly up the brightening river; the glowing violet of the sky and the pale gold of the moon grew fainter and fainter, and faded into that vast colourless cosmos that precedes the colours of the dawn. When the first faint stripes of red and gold and grey split the horizon from end to end they were broken by the black bulk of a town or village which sat on the river just ahead of them. It was already an easy twilight, in which all things were visible, when they came under the hanging roofs and bridges of this riverside hamlet. The houses, with their long, low, stooping roofs, seemed to come down to drink at the river, like huge grey and red cattle. The broadening and whitening dawn had already turned to working daylight before they saw any living creature on the wharves and bridges of that silent town. Eventually they saw a very placid and prosperous
man in his shirt sleeves, with a face as round as the recently sunken moon, and rays of red whisker around the low arc of it, who was leaning on a post above the sluggish tide. By an impulse not to be analysed, Flambeau rose to his full height in the swaying boat and shouted at the man to ask if he knew Reed Island or Reed House. The prosperous man’s smile grew slightly more expansive, and he simply pointed up the river towards the next bend of it. Flambeau went ahead without further speech.

The boat took many such grassy corners and followed many such reedy and silent reaches of river; but before the search had become monotonous they had swung round a specially sharp angle and come into the silence of a sort of pool or lake, the sight of which instinctively arrested them. For in the middle of this wider piece of water, fringed on every side with rushes, lay a long, low islet, along which ran a long, low house or bungalow built of bamboo or some kind of tough tropic cane. The upstanding rods of bamboo which made the walls were pale yellow, the sloping rods that made the roof were of darker red or brown, otherwise the long house was a thing of repetition and monotony. The early morning breeze rustled the reeds round the island and sang in the strange ribbed house as in a giant pan-pipe.

“By George!” cried Flambeau; “here is the place, after all! Here is Reed Island, if ever there was one. Here is Reed House, if it is anywhere. I believe that fat man with whiskers was a fairy.”

“Perhaps,” remarked Father Brown impartially. “If he was, he was a bad fairy.”

But even as he spoke the impetuous Flambeau had run his boat ashore in the rattling reeds, and they stood in the long, quaint islet beside the odd and silent house.

The house stood with its back, as it were, to the river and the only landing-stage; the main entrance was on the other side, and looked down the long island garden. The visitors approached it, therefore, by a small path running round nearly three sides of the house, close under the low eaves. Through three different windows on three different sides they looked in on the same long, well-lit room, panelled in light wood, with a large number of looking-glasses, and laid out as for an elegant lunch. The front door, when they came round to it at last, was flanked by two turquoise-blue flower pots. It was opened by a butler of the drearier type—long, lean, grey and listless—who murmured that Prince Saradine was from home at present, but was expected hourly; the house being kept ready for him and his guests. The exhibition of the card with the scrawl of green ink
awoke a flicker of life in the parchment face of the depressed retainer, and it was with a certain shaky courtesy that he suggested that the strangers should remain. “His Highness may be here any minute,” he said, “and would be distressed to have just missed any gentleman he had invited. We have orders always to keep a little cold lunch for him and his friends, and I am sure he would wish it to be offered.”

Moved with curiosity to this minor adventure, Flambeau assented gracefully, and followed the old man, who ushered him ceremoniously into the long, lightly panelled room. There was nothing very notable about it, except the rather unusual alternation of many long, low windows with many long, low oblongs of looking-glass, which gave a singular air of lightness and unsubstantialness to the place. It was somehow like lunching out of doors. One or two pictures of a quiet kind hung in the corners, one a large grey photograph of a very young man in uniform, another a red chalk sketch of two long-haired boys. Asked by Flambeau whether the soldierly person was the prince, the butler answered shortly in the negative; it was the prince’s younger brother, Captain Stephen Saradine, he said. And with that the old man seemed to dry up suddenly and lose all taste for conversation.

After lunch had tailed off with exquisite coffee and liqueurs, the guests were introduced to the garden, the library, and the housekeeper—a dark, handsome lady, of no little majesty, and rather like a plutonic Madonna. It appeared that she and the butler were the only survivors of the prince’s original foreign menage the other servants now in the house being new and collected in Norfolk by the housekeeper. This latter lady went by the name of Mrs. Anthony, but she spoke with a slight Italian accent, and Flambeau did not doubt that Anthony was a Norfolk version of some more Latin name. Mr. Paul, the butler, also had a faintly foreign air, but he was in tongue and training English, as are many of the most polished men-servants of the cosmopolitan nobility.

Pretty and unique as it was, the place had about it a curious luminous sadness. Hours passed in it like days. The long, well-windowed rooms were full of daylight, but it seemed a dead daylight. And through all other incidental noises, the sound of talk, the clink of glasses, or the passing feet of servants, they could hear on all sides of the house the melancholy noise of the river.

“We have taken a wrong turning, and come to a wrong place,” said Father Brown, looking out of the window at the grey-green sedges and the silver flood. “Never mind; one can sometimes do good by being the right person in the wrong place.”
Father Brown, though commonly a silent, was an oddly sympathetic little man, and in those few but endless hours he unconsciously sank deeper into the secrets of Reed House than his professional friend. He had that knack of friendly silence which is so essential to gossip; and saying scarcely a word, he probably obtained from his new acquaintances all that in any case they would have told. The butler indeed was naturally uncommunicative. He betrayed a sullen and almost animal affection for his master; who, he said, had been very badly treated. The chief offender seemed to be his highness’s brother, whose name alone would lengthen the old man’s lantern jaws and pucker his parrot nose into a sneer. Captain Stephen was a ne’er-do-weel, apparently, and had drained his benevolent brother of hundreds and thousands; forced him to fly from fashionable life and live quietly in this retreat. That was all Paul, the butler, would say, and Paul was obviously a partisan.

The Italian housekeeper was somewhat more communicative, being, as Brown fancied, somewhat less content. Her tone about her master was faintly acid; though not without a certain awe. Flambeau and his friend were standing in the room of the looking-glasses examining the red sketch of the two boys, when the housekeeper swept in swiftly on some domestic errand. It was a peculiarity of this glittering, glass-panelled place that anyone entering was reflected in four or five mirrors at once; and Father Brown, without turning round, stopped in the middle of a sentence of family criticism. But Flambeau, who had his face close up to the picture, was already saying in a loud voice, “The brothers Saradine, I suppose. They both look innocent enough. It would be hard to say which is the good brother and which the bad.” Then, realising the lady’s presence, he turned the conversation with some triviality, and strolled out into the garden. But Father Brown still gazed steadily at the red crayon sketch; and Mrs. Anthony still gazed steadily at Father Brown.

She had large and tragic brown eyes, and her olive face glowed darkly with a curious and painful wonder—as of one doubtful of a stranger’s identity or purpose. Whether the little priest’s coat and creed touched some southern memories of confession, or whether she fancied he knew more than he did, she said to him in a low voice as to a fellow plotter, “He is right enough in one way, your friend. He says it would be hard to pick out the good and bad brothers. Oh, it would be hard, it would be mighty hard, to pick out the good one.”

“I don’t understand you,” said Father Brown, and began to move away.

The woman took a step nearer to him, with thunderous brows and a sort of savage stoop, like a bull lowering his horns.
“There isn’t a good one,” she hissed. “There was badness enough in the captain taking all that money, but I don’t think there was much goodness in the prince giving it. The captain’s not the only one with something against him.”

A light dawned on the cleric’s averted face, and his mouth formed silently the word “blackmail.” Even as he did so the woman turned an abrupt white face over her shoulder and almost fell. The door had opened soundlessly and the pale Paul stood like a ghost in the doorway. By the weird trick of the reflecting walls, it seemed as if five Pauls had entered by five doors simultaneously.

“His Highness,” he said, “has just arrived.”

In the same flash the figure of a man had passed outside the first window, crossing the sunlit pane like a lighted stage. An instant later he passed at the second window and the many mirrors repainted in successive frames the same eagle profile and marching figure. He was erect and alert, but his hair was white and his complexion of an odd ivory yellow. He had that short, curved Roman nose which generally goes with long, lean cheeks and chin, but these were partly masked by moustache and imperial. The moustache was much darker than the beard, giving an effect slightly theatrical, and he was dressed up to the same dashing part, having a white top hat, an orchid in his coat, a yellow waistcoat and yellow gloves which he flapped and swung as he walked. When he came round to the front door they heard the stiff Paul open it, and heard the new arrival say cheerfully, “Well, you see I have come.” The stiff Mr. Paul bowed and answered in his inaudible manner; for a few minutes their conversation could not be heard. Then the butler said, “Everything is at your disposal;” and the glove-flapping Prince Saradine came gaily into the room to greet them. They beheld once more that spectral scene—five princes entering a room with five doors.

The prince put the white hat and yellow gloves on the table and offered his hand quite cordially.

“Delighted to see you here, Mr. Flambeau,” he said. “Knowing you very well by reputation, if that’s not an indiscreet remark.”

“Not at all,” answered Flambeau, laughing. “I am not sensitive. Very few reputations are gained by unsullied virtue.”

The prince flashed a sharp look at him to see if the retort had any personal point; then he laughed also and offered chairs to everyone, including himself.

“Pleasant little place, this, I think,” he said with a detached air. “Not much to do, I fear; but the fishing is really good.”

The priest, who was staring at him with the grave stare of a baby, was haunted
by some fancy that escaped definition. He looked at the grey, carefully curled hair, yellow white visage, and slim, somewhat foppish figure. These were not unnatural, though perhaps a shade prononcé, like the outfit of a figure behind the footlights. The nameless interest lay in something else, in the very framework of the face; Brown was tormented with a half memory of having seen it somewhere before. The man looked like some old friend of his dressed up. Then he suddenly remembered the mirrors, and put his fancy down to some psychological effect of that multiplication of human masks.

Prince Saradine distributed his social attentions between his guests with great gaiety and tact. Finding the detective of a sporting turn and eager to employ his holiday, he guided Flambeau and Flambeau’s boat down to the best fishing spot in the stream, and was back in his own canoe in twenty minutes to join Father Brown in the library and plunge equally politely into the priest’s more philosophic pleasures. He seemed to know a great deal both about the fishing and the books, though of these not the most edifying; he spoke five or six languages, though chiefly the slang of each. He had evidently lived in varied cities and very motley societies, for some of his cheerfulest stories were about gambling hells and opium dens, Australian bushrangers or Italian brigands. Father Brown knew that the once-celebrated Saradine had spent his last few years in almost ceaseless travel, but he had not guessed that the travels were so disreputable or so amusing.

Indeed, with all his dignity of a man of the world, Prince Saradine radiated to such sensitive observers as the priest, a certain atmosphere of the restless and even the unreliable. His face was fastidious, but his eye was wild; he had little nervous tricks, like a man shaken by drink or drugs, and he neither had, nor professed to have, his hand on the helm of household affairs. All these were left to the two old servants, especially to the butler, who was plainly the central pillar of the house. Mr. Paul, indeed, was not so much a butler as a sort of steward or, even, chamberlain; he dined privately, but with almost as much pomp as his master; he was feared by all the servants; and he consulted with the prince decorously, but somewhat unbendingly—rather as if he were the prince’s solicitor. The sombre housekeeper was a mere shadow in comparison; indeed, she seemed to efface herself and wait only on the butler, and Brown heard no more of those volcanic whispers which had half told him of the younger brother who blackmailed the elder. Whether the prince was really being thus bled by the absent captain, he could not be certain, but there was something insecure and secretive about Saradine that made the tale by no means incredible.
When they went once more into the long hall with the windows and the mirrors, yellow evening was dropping over the waters and the willowy banks; and a bittern sounded in the distance like an elf upon his dwarfish drum. The same singular sentiment of some sad and evil fairyland crossed the priest’s mind again like a little grey cloud. “I wish Flambeau were back,” he muttered.

“Do you believe in doom?” asked the restless Prince Saradine suddenly.

“No,” answered his guest. “I believe in Doomsday.”

The prince turned from the window and stared at him in a singular manner, his face in shadow against the sunset. “What do you mean?” he asked.

“I mean that we here are on the wrong side of the tapestry,” answered Father Brown. “The things that happen here do not seem to mean anything; they mean something somewhere else. Somewhere else retribution will come on the real offender. Here it often seems to fall on the wrong person.”

The prince made an inexplicable noise like an animal; in his shadowed face the eyes were shining queerly. A new and shrewd thought exploded silently in the other’s mind. Was there another meaning in Saradine’s blend of brilliancy and abruptness? Was the prince—Was he perfectly sane? He was repeating, “The wrong person—the wrong person,” many more times than was natural in a social exclamation.

Then Father Brown awoke tardily to a second truth. In the mirrors before him he could see the silent door standing open, and the silent Mr. Paul standing in it, with his usual pallid impassiveness.

“I thought it better to announce at once,” he said, with the same stiff respectfulness as of an old family lawyer, “a boat rowed by six men has come to the landing-stage, and there’s a gentleman sitting in the stern.”

“A boat!” repeated the prince; “a gentleman?” and he rose to his feet.

There was a startled silence punctuated only by the odd noise of the bird in the sedge; and then, before anyone could speak again, a new face and figure passed in profile round the three sunlit windows, as the prince had passed an hour or two before. But except for the accident that both outlines were aquiline, they had little in common. Instead of the new white topper of Saradine, was a black one of antiquated or foreign shape; under it was a young and very solemn face, clean shaven, blue about its resolute chin, and carrying a faint suggestion of the young Napoleon. The association was assisted by something old and odd about the whole get-up, as of a man who had never troubled to change the fashions of his fathers. He had a shabby blue frock coat, a red, soldierly looking waistcoat, and a kind of coarse white trousers common among the early Victorians, but
strangely incongruous today. From all this old clothes-shop his olive face stood out strangely young and monstrously sincere.

“The deuce!” said Prince Saradine, and clapping on his white hat he went to the front door himself, flinging it open on the sunset garden.

By that time the new-comer and his followers were drawn up on the lawn like a small stage army. The six boatmen had pulled the boat well up on shore, and were guarding it almost menacingly, holding their oars erect like spears. They were swarthy men, and some of them wore earrings. But one of them stood forward beside the olive-faced young man in the red waistcoat, and carried a large black case of unfamiliar form.

“Your name,” said the young man, “is Saradine?”

Saradine assented rather negligently.

The new-comer had dull, dog-like brown eyes, as different as possible from the restless and glittering grey eyes of the prince. But once again Father Brown was tortured with a sense of having seen somewhere a replica of the face; and once again he remembered the repetitions of the glass-panelled room, and put down the coincidence to that. “Confound this crystal palace!” he muttered. “One sees everything too many times. It’s like a dream.”

“If you are Prince Saradine,” said the young man, “I may tell you that my name is Antonelli.”

“Antonelli,” repeated the prince languidly. “Somehow I remember the name.”

“Permit me to present myself,” said the young Italian.

With his left hand he politely took off his old-fashioned top-hat; with his right he caught Prince Saradine so ringing a crack across the face that the white top hat rolled down the steps and one of the blue flower-pots rocked upon its pedestal.

The prince, whatever he was, was evidently not a coward; he sprang at his enemy’s throat and almost bore him backwards to the grass. But his enemy extricated himself with a singularly inappropriate air of hurried politeness.

“That is all right,” he said, panting and in halting English. “I have insulted. I will give satisfaction. Marco, open the case.”

The man beside him with the earrings and the big black case proceeded to unlock it. He took out of it two long Italian rapiers, with splendid steel hilts and blades, which he planted point downwards in the lawn. The strange young man standing facing the entrance with his yellow and vindictive face, the two swords standing up in the turf like two crosses in a cemetery, and the line of the ranked towers behind, gave it all an odd appearance of being some barbaric court of
justice. But everything else was unchanged, so sudden had been the interruption. The sunset gold still glowed on the lawn, and the bittern still boomed as announcing some small but dreadful destiny.

“Prince Saradine,” said the man called Antonelli, “when I was an infant in the cradle you killed my father and stole my mother; my father was the more fortunate. You did not kill him fairly, as I am going to kill you. You and my wicked mother took him driving to a lonely pass in Sicily, flung him down a cliff, and went on your way. I could imitate you if I chose, but imitating you is too vile. I have followed you all over the world, and you have always fled from me. But this is the end of the world—and of you. I have you now, and I give you the chance you never gave my father. Choose one of those swords.”

Prince Saradine, with contracted brows, seemed to hesitate a moment, but his ears were still singing with the blow, and he sprang forward and snatched at one of the hilts. Father Brown had also sprung forward, striving to compose the dispute; but he soon found his personal presence made matters worse. Saradine was a French freemason and a fierce atheist, and a priest moved him by the law of contraries. And for the other man neither priest nor layman moved him at all. This young man with the Bonaparte face and the brown eyes was something far sterner than a puritan—a pagan. He was a simple slayer from the morning of the earth; a man of the stone age—a man of stone.

One hope remained, the summoning of the household; and Father Brown ran back into the house. He found, however, that all the under servants had been given a holiday ashore by the autocrat Paul, and that only the sombre Mrs. Anthony moved uneasily about the long rooms. But the moment she turned a ghastly face upon him, he resolved one of the riddles of the house of mirrors. The heavy brown eyes of Antonelli were the heavy brown eyes of Mrs. Anthony; and in a flash he saw half the story.

“Your son is outside,” he said without wasting words; “either he or the prince will be killed. Where is Mr. Paul?”

“He is at the landing-stage,” said the woman faintly. “He is—he is—signalling for help.”

“Mrs. Anthony,” said Father Brown seriously, “there is no time for nonsense. My friend has his boat down the river fishing. Your son’s boat is guarded by your son’s men. There is only this one canoe; what is Mr. Paul doing with it?”

“Santa Maria! I do not know,” she said; and swooned all her length on the matted floor.

Father Brown lifted her to a sofa, flung a pot of water over her, shouted for
help, and then rushed down to the landing-stage of the little island. But the canoe was already in mid-stream, and old Paul was pulling and pushing it up the river with an energy incredible at his years.

“I will save my master,” he cried, his eyes blazing maniacally. “I will save him yet!”

Father Brown could do nothing but gaze after the boat as it struggled upstream and pray that the old man might waken the little town in time.

“A duel is bad enough,” he muttered, rubbing up his rough dust-coloured hair, “but there’s something wrong about this duel, even as a duel. I feel it in my bones. But what can it be?”

As he stood staring at the water, a wavering mirror of sunset, he heard from the other end of the island garden a small but unmistakable sound—the cold concussion of steel. He turned his head.

Away on the farthest cape or headland of the long islet, on a strip of turf beyond the last rank of roses, the duellists had already crossed swords. Evening above them was a dome of virgin gold, and, distant as they were, every detail was picked out. They had cast off their coats, but the yellow waistcoat and white hair of Saradine, the red waistcoat and white trousers of Antonelli, glittered in the level light like the colours of the dancing clockwork dolls. The two swords sparkled from point to pommel like two diamond pins. There was something frightful in the two figures appearing so little and so gay. They looked like two butterflies trying to pin each other to a cork.

Father Brown ran as hard as he could, his little legs going like a wheel. But when he came to the field of combat he found he was born too late and too early —too late to stop the strife, under the shadow of the grim Sicilians leaning on their oars, and too early to anticipate any disastrous issue of it. For the two men were singularly well matched, the prince using his skill with a sort of cynical confidence, the Sicilian using his with a murderous care. Few finer fencing matches can ever have been seen in crowded amphitheatres than that which tinkled and sparkled on that forgotten island in the reedy river. The dizzy fight was balanced so long that hope began to revive in the protesting priest; by all common probability Paul must soon come back with the police. It would be some comfort even if Flambeau came back from his fishing, for Flambeau, physically speaking, was worth four other men. But there was no sign of Flambeau, and, what was much queerer, no sign of Paul or the police. No other raft or stick was left to float on; in that lost island in that vast nameless pool, they were cut off as on a rock in the Pacific.
Almost as he had the thought the ringing of the rapiers quickened to a rattle, the prince’s arms flew up, and the point shot out behind between his shoulder-blades. He went over with a great whirling movement, almost like one throwing the half of a boy’s cart-wheel. The sword flew from his hand like a shooting star, and dived into the distant river. And he himself sank with so earth-shaking a subsidence that he broke a big rose-tree with his body and shook up into the sky a cloud of red earth—like the smoke of some heathen sacrifice. The Sicilian had made blood-offering to the ghost of his father.

The priest was instantly on his knees by the corpse; but only to make too sure that it was a corpse. As he was still trying some last hopeless tests he heard for the first time voices from farther up the river, and saw a police boat shoot up to the landing-stage, with constables and other important people, including the excited Paul. The little priest rose with a distinctly dubious grimace.

“Now, why on earth,” he muttered, “why on earth couldn’t he have come before?”

Some seven minutes later the island was occupied by an invasion of townsfolk and police, and the latter had put their hands on the victorious duellist, ritually reminding him that anything he said might be used against him.

“I shall not say anything,” said the monomaniac, with a wonderful and peaceful face. “I shall never say anything more. I am very happy, and I only want to be hanged.”

Then he shut his mouth as they led him away, and it is the strange but certain truth that he never opened it again in this world, except to say “Guilty” at his trial.

Father Brown had stared at the suddenly crowded garden, the arrest of the man of blood, the carrying away of the corpse after its examination by the doctor, rather as one watches the break-up of some ugly dream; he was motionless, like a man in a nightmare. He gave his name and address as a witness, but declined their offer of a boat to the shore, and remained alone in the island garden, gazing at the broken rose bush and the whole green theatre of that swift and inexplicable tragedy. The light died along the river; mist rose in the marshy banks; a few belated birds flitted fitfully across.

Stuck stubbornly in his sub-consciousness (which was an unusually lively one) was an unspeakable certainty that there was something still unexplained. This sense that had clung to him all day could not be fully explained by his fancy about “looking-glass land.” Somehow he had not seen the real story, but some game or masque. And yet people do not get hanged or run through the body for
the sake of a charade.

As he sat on the steps of the landing-stage ruminating he grew conscious of the tall, dark streak of a sail coming silently down the shining river, and sprang to his feet with such a backrush of feeling that he almost wept.

"Flambeau!" he cried, and shook his friend by both hands again and again, much to the astonishment of that sportsman, as he came on shore with his fishing tackle. "Flambeau," he said, "so you’re not killed?"

"Killed!" repeated the angler in great astonishment. "And why should I be killed?"

"Oh, because nearly everybody else is," said his companion rather wildly. "Saradine got murdered, and Antonelli wants to be hanged, and his mother’s fainted, and I, for one, don’t know whether I’m in this world or the next. But, thank God, you’re in the same one." And he took the bewildered Flambeau’s arm.

As they turned from the landing-stage they came under the eaves of the low bamboo house, and looked in through one of the windows, as they had done on their first arrival. They beheld a lamp-lit interior well calculated to arrest their eyes. The table in the long dining-room had been laid for dinner when Saradine’s destroyer had fallen like a stormbolt on the island. And the dinner was now in placid progress, for Mrs. Anthony sat somewhat sullenly at the foot of the table, while at the head of it was Mr. Paul, the major domo, eating and drinking of the best, his bleared, bluish eyes standing queerly out of his face, his gaunt countenance inscrutable, but by no means devoid of satisfaction.

With a gesture of powerful impatience, Flambeau rattled at the window, wrenched it open, and put an indignant head into the lamp-lit room.

"Well," he cried. "I can understand you may need some refreshment, but really to steal your master’s dinner while he lies murdered in the garden—"

"I have stolen a great many things in a long and pleasant life," replied the strange old gentleman placidly; "this dinner is one of the few things I have not stolen. This dinner and this house and garden happen to belong to me."

A thought flashed across Flambeau’s face. "You mean to say," he began, "that the will of Prince Saradine—"

"I am Prince Saradine," said the old man, munching a salted almond.

Father Brown, who was looking at the birds outside, jumped as if he were shot, and put in at the window a pale face like a turnip.

"You are what?" he repeated in a shrill voice.

"Paul, Prince Saradine, A vos ordres," said the venerable person politely,
lifting a glass of sherry. “I live here very quietly, being a domestic kind of fellow; and for the sake of modesty I am called Mr. Paul, to distinguish me from my unfortunate brother Mr. Stephen. He died, I hear, recently—in the garden. Of course, it is not my fault if enemies pursue him to this place. It is owing to the regrettable irregularity of his life. He was not a domestic character.”

He relapsed into silence, and continued to gaze at the opposite wall just above the bowed and sombre head of the woman. They saw plainly the family likeness that had haunted them in the dead man. Then his old shoulders began to heave and shake a little, as if he were choking, but his face did not alter.

“My God!” cried Flambeau after a pause, “he’s laughing!”

“Come away,” said Father Brown, who was quite white. “Come away from this house of hell. Let us get into an honest boat again.”

Night had sunk on rushes and river by the time they had pushed off from the island, and they went down-stream in the dark, warming themselves with two big cigars that glowed like crimson ships’ lanterns. Father Brown took his cigar out of his mouth and said:

“I suppose you can guess the whole story now? After all, it’s a primitive story. A man had two enemies. He was a wise man. And so he discovered that two enemies are better than one.”

“I do not follow that,” answered Flambeau.

“Oh, it’s really simple,” rejoined his friend. “Simple, though anything but innocent. Both the Saradines were scamps, but the prince, the elder, was the sort of scamp that gets to the top, and the younger, the captain, was the sort that sinks to the bottom. This squalid officer fell from beggar to blackmailer, and one ugly day he got his hold upon his brother, the prince. Obviously it was for no light matter, for Prince Paul Saradine was frankly ‘fast,’ and had no reputation to lose as to the mere sins of society. In plain fact, it was a hanging matter, and Stephen literally had a rope round his brother’s neck. He had somehow discovered the truth about the Sicilian affair, and could prove that Paul murdered old Antonelli in the mountains. The captain raked in the hush money heavily for ten years, until even the prince’s splendid fortune began to look a little foolish.

“But Prince Saradine bore another burden besides his blood-sucking brother. He knew that the son of Antonelli, a mere child at the time of the murder, had been trained in savage Sicilian loyalty, and lived only to avenge his father, not with the gibbet (for he lacked Stephen’s legal proof), but with the old weapons of vendetta. The boy had practised arms with a deadly perfection, and about the time that he was old enough to use them Prince Saradine began, as the society
papers said, to travel. The fact is that he began to flee for his life, passing from place to place like a hunted criminal; but with one relentless man upon his trail. That was Prince Paul’s position, and by no means a pretty one. The more money he spent on eluding Antonelli the less he had to silence Stephen. The more he gave to silence Stephen the less chance there was of finally escaping Antonelli. Then it was that he showed himself a great man—a genius like Napoleon.

“Instead of resisting his two antagonists, he surrendered suddenly to both of them. He gave way like a Japanese wrestler, and his foes fell prostrate before him. He gave up the race round the world, and he gave up his address to young Antonelli; then he gave up everything to his brother. He sent Stephen money enough for smart clothes and easy travel, with a letter saying roughly: ‘This is all I have left. You have cleaned me out. I still have a little house in Norfolk, with servants and a cellar, and if you want more from me you must take that. Come and take possession if you like, and I will live there quietly as your friend or agent or anything.’ He knew that the Sicilian had never seen the Saradine brothers save, perhaps, in pictures; he knew they were somewhat alike, both having grey, pointed beards. Then he shaved his own face and waited. The trap worked. The unhappy captain, in his new clothes, entered the house in triumph as a prince, and walked upon the Sicilian’s sword.

“There was one hitch, and it is to the honour of human nature. Evil spirits like Saradine often blunder by never expecting the virtues of mankind. He took it for granted that the Italian’s blow, when it came, would be dark, violent and nameless, like the blow it avenged; that the victim would be knifed at night, or shot from behind a hedge, and so die without speech. It was a bad minute for Prince Paul when Antonelli’s chivalry proposed a formal duel, with all its possible explanations. It was then that I found him putting off in his boat with wild eyes. He was fleeing, bareheaded, in an open boat before Antonelli should learn who he was.

“But, however agitated, he was not hopeless. He knew the adventurer and he knew the fanatic. It was quite probable that Stephen, the adventurer, would hold his tongue, through his mere histrionic pleasure in playing a part, his lust for clinging to his new cosy quarters, his rascal’s trust in luck, and his fine fencing. It was certain that Antonelli, the fanatic, would hold his tongue, and be hanged without telling tales of his family. Paul hung about on the river till he knew the fight was over. Then he roused the town, brought the police, saw his two vanquished enemies taken away forever, and sat down smiling to his dinner.”

“Laughing, God help us!” said Flambeau with a strong shudder. “Do they get
such ideas from Satan?”

“He got that idea from you,” answered the priest.

“God forbid!” ejaculated Flambeau. “From me! What do you mean!”

The priest pulled a visiting-card from his pocket and held it up in the faint glow of his cigar; it was scrawled with green ink.

“Don’t you remember his original invitation to you?” he asked, “and the compliment to your criminal exploit? ‘That trick of yours,’ he says, ‘of getting one detective to arrest the other’? He has just copied your trick. With an enemy on each side of him, he slipped swiftly out of the way and let them collide and kill each other.”

Flambeau tore Prince Saradine’s card from the priest’s hands and rent it savagely in small pieces.

“There’s the last of that old skull and crossbones,” he said as he scattered the pieces upon the dark and disappearing waves of the stream; “but I should think it would poison the fishes.”

The last gleam of white card and green ink was drowned and darkened; a faint and vibrant colour as of morning changed the sky, and the moon behind the grasses grew paler. They drifted in silence.

“Father,” said Flambeau suddenly, “do you think it was all a dream?”

The priest shook his head, whether in dissent or agnosticism, but remained mute. A smell of hawthorn and of orchards came to them through the darkness, telling them that a wind was awake; the next moment it swayed their little boat and swelled their sail, and carried them onward down the winding river to happier places and the homes of harmless men.
THE HAMMER OF GOD

The little village of Bohun Beacon was perched on a hill so steep that the tall spire of its church seemed only like the peak of a small mountain. At the foot of the church stood a smithy, generally red with fires and always littered with hammers and scraps of iron; opposite to this, over a rude cross of cobbled paths, was “The Blue Boar,” the only inn of the place. It was upon this crossway, in the lifting of a leaden and silver daybreak, that two brothers met in the street and spoke; though one was beginning the day and the other finishing it. The Rev. and Hon. Wilfred Bohun was very devout, and was making his way to some austere exercises of prayer or contemplation at dawn. Colonel the Hon. Norman Bohun, his elder brother, was by no means devout, and was sitting in evening dress on the bench outside “The Blue Boar,” drinking what the philosophic observer was free to regard either as his last glass on Tuesday or his first on Wednesday. The colonel was not particular.

The Bohuns were one of the very few aristocratic families really dating from the Middle Ages, and their pennon had actually seen Palestine. But it is a great mistake to suppose that such houses stand high in chivalric tradition. Few except the poor preserve traditions. Aristocrats live not in traditions but in fashions. The Bohuns had been Mohocks under Queen Anne and Mashers under Queen Victoria. But like more than one of the really ancient houses, they had rotted in the last two centuries into mere drunkards and dandy degenerates, till there had even come a whisper of insanity. Certainly there was something hardly human about the colonel’s wolfish pursuit of pleasure, and his chronic resolution not to go home till morning had a touch of the hideous clarity of insomnia. He was a tall, fine animal, elderly, but with hair still startlingly yellow. He would have looked merely blonde and leonine, but his blue eyes were sunk so deep in his face that they looked black. They were a little too close together. He had very long yellow moustaches; on each side of them a fold or furrow from nostril to jaw, so that a sneer seemed cut into his face. Over his evening clothes he wore a curious pale yellow coat that looked more like a very light dressing gown than an overcoat, and on the back of his head was stuck an extraordinary broad-brimmed hat of a bright green colour, evidently some oriental curiosity caught up at random. He was proud of appearing in such incongruous attires—proud of the fact that he always made them look congruous.

His brother the curate had also the yellow hair and the elegance, but he was
buttoned up to the chin in black, and his face was clean-shaven, cultivated, and a little nervous. He seemed to live for nothing but his religion; but there were some who said (notably the blacksmith, who was a Presbyterian) that it was a love of Gothic architecture rather than of God, and that his haunting of the church like a ghost was only another and purer turn of the almost morbid thirst for beauty which sent his brother raging after women and wine. This charge was doubtful, while the man’s practical piety was indubitable. Indeed, the charge was mostly an ignorant misunderstanding of the love of solitude and secret prayer, and was founded on his being often found kneeling, not before the altar, but in peculiar places, in the crypts or gallery, or even in the belfry. He was at the moment about to enter the church through the yard of the smithy, but stopped and frowned a little as he saw his brother’s cavernous eyes staring in the same direction. On the hypothesis that the colonel was interested in the church he did not waste any speculations. There only remained the blacksmith’s shop, and though the blacksmith was a Puritan and none of his people, Wilfred Bohun had heard some scandals about a beautiful and rather celebrated wife. He flung a suspicious look across the shed, and the colonel stood up laughing to speak to him.

“Good morning, Wilfred,” he said. “Like a good landlord I am watching sleeplessly over my people. I am going to call on the blacksmith.”

Wilfred looked at the ground, and said: “The blacksmith is out. He is over at Greenford.”

“I know,” answered the other with silent laughter; “that is why I am calling on him.”

“Norman,” said the cleric, with his eye on a pebble in the road, “are you ever afraid of thunderbolts?”

“What do you mean?” asked the colonel. “Is your hobby meteorology?”

“I mean,” said Wilfred, without looking up, “do you ever think that God might strike you in the street?”

“I beg your pardon,” said the colonel; “I see your hobby is folk-lore.”

“I know your hobby is blasphemy,” retorted the religious man, stung in the one live place of his nature. “But if you do not fear God, you have good reason to fear man.”

The elder raised his eyebrows politely. “Fear man?” he said.

“Barnes the blacksmith is the biggest and strongest man for forty miles round,” said the clergyman sternly. “I know you are no coward or weakling, but he could throw you over the wall.”
This struck home, being true, and the lowering line by mouth and nostril darkened and deepened. For a moment he stood with the heavy sneer on his face. But in an instant Colonel Bohun had recovered his own cruel good humour and laughed, showing two dog-like front teeth under his yellow moustache. “In that case, my dear Wilfred,” he said quite carelessly, “it was wise for the last of the Bohuns to come out partially in armour.”

And he took off the queer round hat covered with green, showing that it was lined within with steel. Wilfred recognised it indeed as a light Japanese or Chinese helmet torn down from a trophy that hung in the old family hall.

“It was the first hat to hand,” explained his brother airily; “always the nearest hat—and the nearest woman.”

“The blacksmith is away at Greenford,” said Wilfred quietly; “the time of his return is unsettled.”

And with that he turned and went into the church with bowed head, crossing himself like one who wishes to be quit of an unclean spirit. He was anxious to forget such grossness in the cool twilight of his tall Gothic cloisters; but on that morning it was fated that his still round of religious exercises should be everywhere arrested by small shocks. As he entered the church, hitherto always empty at that hour, a kneeling figure rose hastily to its feet and came towards the full daylight of the doorway. When the curate saw it he stood still with surprise. For the early worshipper was none other than the village idiot, a nephew of the blacksmith, one who neither would nor could care for the church or for anything else. He was always called “Mad Joe,” and seemed to have no other name; he was a dark, strong, slouching lad, with a heavy white face, dark straight hair, and a mouth always open. As he passed the priest, his moon-calf countenance gave no hint of what he had been doing or thinking of. He had never been known to pray before. What sort of prayers was he saying now? Extraordinary prayers surely.

Wilfred Bohun stood rooted to the spot long enough to see the idiot go out into the sunshine, and even to see his dissolute brother hail him with a sort of avuncular jocularity. The last thing he saw was the colonel throwing pennies at the open mouth of Joe, with the serious appearance of trying to hit it.

This ugly sunlit picture of the stupidity and cruelty of the earth sent the ascetic finally to his prayers for purification and new thoughts. He went up to a pew in the gallery, which brought him under a coloured window which he loved and always quieted his spirit; a blue window with an angel carrying lilies. There he began to think less about the half-wit, with his livid face and mouth like a fish.
He began to think less of his evil brother, pacing like a lean lion in his horrible hunger. He sank deeper and deeper into those cold and sweet colours of silver blossoms and sapphire sky.

In this place half an hour afterwards he was found by Gibbs, the village cobbler, who had been sent for him in some haste. He got to his feet with promptitude, for he knew that no small matter would have brought Gibbs into such a place at all. The cobbler was, as in many villages, an atheist, and his appearance in church was a shade more extraordinary than Mad Joe’s. It was a morning of theological enigmas.

“What is it?” asked Wilfred Bohun rather stiffly, but putting out a trembling hand for his hat.

The atheist spoke in a tone that, coming from him, was quite startlingly respectful, and even, as it were, huskily sympathetic.

“You must excuse me, sir,” he said in a hoarse whisper, “but we didn’t think it right not to let you know at once. I’m afraid a rather dreadful thing has happened, sir. I’m afraid your brother—”

Wilfred clenched his frail hands. “What devilry has he done now?” he cried in voluntary passion.

“Why, sir,” said the cobbler, coughing, “I’m afraid he’s done nothing, and won’t do anything. I’m afraid he’s done for. You had really better come down, sir.”

The curate followed the cobbler down a short winding stair which brought them out at an entrance rather higher than the street. Bohun saw the tragedy in one glance, flat underneath him like a plan. In the yard of the smithy were standing five or six men mostly in black, one in an inspector’s uniform. They included the doctor, the Presbyterian minister, and the priest from the Roman Catholic chapel, to which the blacksmith’s wife belonged. The latter was speaking to her, indeed, very rapidly, in an undertone, as she, a magnificent woman with red-gold hair, was sobbing blindly on a bench. Between these two groups, and just clear of the main heap of hammers, lay a man in evening dress, spread-eagled and flat on his face. From the height above Wilfred could have sworn to every item of his costume and appearance, down to the Bohun rings upon his fingers; but the skull was only a hideous splash, like a star of blackness and blood.

Wilfred Bohun gave but one glance, and ran down the steps into the yard. The doctor, who was the family physician, saluted him, but he scarcely took any notice. He could only stammer out: “My brother is dead. What does it mean?
What is this horrible mystery?” There was an unhappy silence; and then the cobbler, the most outspoken man present, answered: “Plenty of horror, sir,” he said; “but not much mystery.”

“What do you mean?” asked Wilfred, with a white face.

“It’s plain enough,” answered Gibbs. “There is only one man for forty miles round that could have struck such a blow as that, and he’s the man that had most reason to.”

“We must not prejudge anything,” put in the doctor, a tall, black-bearded man, rather nervously; “but it is competent for me to corroborate what Mr. Gibbs says about the nature of the blow, sir; it is an incredible blow. Mr. Gibbs says that only one man in this district could have done it. I should have said myself that nobody could have done it.”

A shudder of superstition went through the slight figure of the curate. “I can hardly understand,” he said.

“Mr. Bohun,” said the doctor in a low voice, “metaphors literally fail me. It is inadequate to say that the skull was smashed to bits like an eggshell. Fragments of bone were driven into the body and the ground like bullets into a mud wall. It was the hand of a giant.”

He was silent a moment, looking grimly through his glasses; then he added: “The thing has one advantage—that it clears most people of suspicion at one stroke. If you or I or any normally made man in the country were accused of this crime, we should be acquitted as an infant would be acquitted of stealing the Nelson column.”

“That’s what I say,” repeated the cobbler obstinately; “there’s only one man that could have done it, and he’s the man that would have done it. Where’s Simeon Barnes, the blacksmith?”

“He’s over at Greenford,” faltered the curate.

“More likely over in France,” muttered the cobbler.

“No; he is in neither of those places,” said a small and colourless voice, which came from the little Roman priest who had joined the group. “As a matter of fact, he is coming up the road at this moment.”

The little priest was not an interesting man to look at, having stubby brown hair and a round and stolid face. But if he had been as splendid as Apollo no one would have looked at him at that moment. Everyone turned round and peered at the pathway which wound across the plain below, along which was indeed walking, at his own huge stride and with a hammer on his shoulder, Simeon the smith. He was a bony and gigantic man, with deep, dark, sinister eyes and a dark
chin beard. He was walking and talking quietly with two other men; and though he was never specially cheerful, he seemed quite at his ease.

“My God!” cried the atheistic cobbler, “and there’s the hammer he did it with.”

“No,” said the inspector, a sensible-looking man with a sandy moustache, speaking for the first time. “There’s the hammer he did it with over there by the church wall. We have left it and the body exactly as they are.”

All glanced round and the short priest went across and looked down in silence at the tool where it lay. It was one of the smallest and the lightest of the hammers, and would not have caught the eye among the rest; but on the iron edge of it were blood and yellow hair.

After a silence the short priest spoke without looking up, and there was a new note in his dull voice. “Mr. Gibbs was hardly right,” he said, “in saying that there is no mystery. There is at least the mystery of why so big a man should attempt so big a blow with so little a hammer.”

“Oh, never mind that,” cried Gibbs, in a fever. “What are we to do with Simeon Barnes?”

“Leave him alone,” said the priest quietly. “He is coming here of himself. I know those two men with him. They are very good fellows from Greenford, and they have come over about the Presbyterian chapel.”

Even as he spoke the tall smith swung round the corner of the church, and strode into his own yard. Then he stood there quite still, and the hammer fell from his hand. The inspector, who had preserved impenetrable propriety, immediately went up to him.

“I won’t ask you, Mr. Barnes,” he said, “whether you know anything about what has happened here. You are not bound to say. I hope you don’t know, and that you will be able to prove it. But I must go through the form of arresting you in the King’s name for the murder of Colonel Norman Bohun.”

“You are not bound to say anything,” said the cobbler in officious excitement. “They’ve got to prove everything. They haven’t proved yet that it is Colonel Bohun, with the head all smashed up like that.”

“That won’t wash,” said the doctor aside to the priest. “That’s out of the detective stories. I was the colonel’s medical man, and I knew his body better than he did. He had very fine hands, but quite peculiar ones. The second and third fingers were the same length. Oh, that’s the colonel right enough.”

As he glanced at the brained corpse upon the ground the iron eyes of the motionless blacksmith followed them and rested there also.
“Is Colonel Bohun dead?” said the smith quite calmly. “Then he’s damned.”
“Don’t say anything! Oh, don’t say anything,” cried the atheist cobbler, dancing about in an ecstasy of admiration of the English legal system. For no man is such a legalist as the good Secularist.
The blacksmith turned on him over his shoulder the august face of a fanatic.
“It’s well for you infidels to dodge like foxes because the world’s law favours you,” he said; “but God guards His own in His pocket, as you shall see this day.”
Then he pointed to the colonel and said: “When did this dog die in his sins?”
“Moderate your language,” said the doctor.
“Moderate the Bible’s language, and I’ll moderate mine. When did he die?”
“I saw him alive at six o’clock this morning,” stammered Wilfred Bohun.
“God is good,” said the smith. “Mr. Inspector, I have not the slightest objection to being arrested. It is you who may object to arresting me. I don’t mind leaving the court without a stain on my character. You do mind perhaps leaving the court with a bad set-back in your career.”
The solid inspector for the first time looked at the blacksmith with a lively eye; as did everybody else, except the short, strange priest, who was still looking down at the little hammer that had dealt the dreadful blow.
“There are two men standing outside this shop,” went on the blacksmith with ponderous lucidity, “good tradesmen in Greenford whom you all know, who will swear that they saw me from before midnight till daybreak and long after in the committee room of our Revival Mission, which sits all night, we save souls so fast. In Greenford itself twenty people could swear to me for all that time. If I were a heathen, Mr. Inspector, I would let you walk on to your downfall. But as a Christian man I feel bound to give you your chance, and ask you whether you will hear my alibi now or in court.”
The inspector seemed for the first time disturbed, and said, “Of course I should be glad to clear you altogether now.”
The smith walked out of his yard with the same long and easy stride, and returned to his two friends from Greenford, who were indeed friends of nearly everyone present. Each of them said a few words which no one ever thought of disbelieving. When they had spoken, the innocence of Simeon stood up as solid as the great church above them.
One of those silences struck the group which are more strange and insufferable than any speech. Madly, in order to make conversation, the curate said to the Catholic priest:
“You seem very much interested in that hammer, Father Brown.”
“Yes, I am,” said Father Brown; “why is it such a small hammer?”

The doctor swung round on him.

“By George, that’s true,” he cried; “who would use a little hammer with ten larger hammers lying about?”

Then he lowered his voice in the curate’s ear and said: “Only the kind of person that can’t lift a large hammer. It is not a question of force or courage between the sexes. It’s a question of lifting power in the shoulders. A bold woman could commit ten murders with a light hammer and never turn a hair. She could not kill a beetle with a heavy one.”

Wilfred Bohun was staring at him with a sort of hypnotised horror, while Father Brown listened with his head a little on one side, really interested and attentive. The doctor went on with more hissing emphasis:

“Why do these idiots always assume that the only person who hates the wife’s lover is the wife’s husband? Nine times out of ten the person who most hates the wife’s lover is the wife. Who knows what insolence or treachery he had shown her—look there!”

He made a momentary gesture towards the red-haired woman on the bench. She had lifted her head at last and the tears were drying on her splendid face. But the eyes were fixed on the corpse with an electric glare that had in it something of idiocy.

The Rev. Wilfred Bohun made a limp gesture as if waving away all desire to know; but Father Brown, dusting off his sleeve some ashes blown from the furnace, spoke in his indifferent way.

“You are like so many doctors,” he said; “your mental science is really suggestive. It is your physical science that is utterly impossible. I agree that the woman wants to kill the co-respondent much more than the petitioner does. And I agree that a woman will always pick up a small hammer instead of a big one. But the difficulty is one of physical impossibility. No woman ever born could have smashed a man’s skull out flat like that.” Then he added reflectively, after a pause: “These people haven’t grasped the whole of it. The man was actually wearing an iron helmet, and the blow scattered it like broken glass. Look at that woman. Look at her arms.”

Silence held them all up again, and then the doctor said rather sulkily: “Well, I may be wrong; there are objections to everything. But I stick to the main point. No man but an idiot would pick up that little hammer if he could use a big hammer.”

With that the lean and quivering hands of Wilfred Bohun went up to his head
and seemed to clutch his scanty yellow hair. After an instant they dropped, and he cried: “That was the word I wanted; you have said the word.”

Then he continued, mastering his discomposure: “The words you said were, ‘No man but an idiot would pick up the small hammer.’”

“Yes,” said the doctor. “Well?”

“Well,” said the curate, “no man but an idiot did.” The rest stared at him with eyes arrested and riveted, and he went on in a febrile and feminine agitation.

“I am a priest,” he cried unsteadily, “and a priest should be no shedder of blood. I—I mean that he should bring no one to the gallows. And I thank God that I see the criminal clearly now—because he is a criminal who cannot be brought to the gallows.”

“You will not denounce him?” inquired the doctor.

“He would not be hanged if I did denounce him,” answered Wilfred with a wild but curiously happy smile. “When I went into the church this morning I found a madman praying there—that poor Joe, who has been wrong all his life. God knows what he prayed; but with such strange folk it is not incredible to suppose that their prayers are all upside down. Very likely a lunatic would pray before killing a man. When I last saw poor Joe he was with my brother. My brother was mocking him.”

“By Jove!” cried the doctor, “this is talking at last. But how do you explain—”

The Rev. Wilfred was almost trembling with the excitement of his own glimpse of the truth. “Don’t you see; don’t you see,” he cried feverishly; “that is the only theory that covers both the queer things, that answers both the riddles. The two riddles are the little hammer and the big blow. The smith might have struck the big blow, but would not have chosen the little hammer. His wife would have chosen the little hammer, but she could not have struck the big blow. But the madman might have done both. As for the little hammer—why, he was mad and might have picked up anything. And for the big blow, have you never heard, doctor, that a maniac in his paroxysm may have the strength of ten men?”

The doctor drew a deep breath and then said, “By golly, I believe you’ve got it.”

Father Brown had fixed his eyes on the speaker so long and steadily as to prove that his large grey, ox-like eyes were not quite so insignificant as the rest of his face. When silence had fallen he said with marked respect: “Mr. Bohun, yours is the only theory yet propounded which holds water every way and is essentially unassailable. I think, therefore, that you deserve to be told, on my positive knowledge, that it is not the true one.” And with that the old little man
walked away and stared again at the hammer.

“That fellow seems to know more than he ought to,” whispered the doctor peevishly to Wilfred. “Those popish priests are deucedly sly.”

“No, no,” said Bohun, with a sort of wild fatigue. “It was the lunatic. It was the lunatic.”

The group of the two clerics and the doctor had fallen away from the more official group containing the inspector and the man he had arrested. Now, however, that their own party had broken up, they heard voices from the others. The priest looked up quietly and then looked down again as he heard the blacksmith say in a loud voice:

“I hope I’ve convinced you, Mr. Inspector. I’m a strong man, as you say, but I couldn’t have flung my hammer bang here from Greenford. My hammer hasn’t got wings that it should come flying half a mile over hedges and fields.”

The inspector laughed amicably and said: “No, I think you can be considered out of it, though it’s one of the rummiest coincidences I ever saw. I can only ask you to give us all the assistance you can in finding a man as big and strong as yourself. By George! you might be useful, if only to hold him! I suppose you yourself have no guess at the man?”

“I may have a guess,” said the pale smith, “but it is not at a man.” Then, seeing the scared eyes turn towards his wife on the bench, he put his huge hand on her shoulder and said: “Nor a woman either.”

“What do you mean?” asked the inspector jocularly. “You don’t think cows use hammers, do you?”

“I think no thing of flesh held that hammer,” said the blacksmith in a stifled voice; “mortally speaking, I think the man died alone.”

Wilfred made a sudden forward movement and peered at him with burning eyes.

“No you mean to say, Barnes,” came the sharp voice of the cobbler, “that the hammer jumped up of itself and knocked the man down?”

“Oh, you gentlemen may stare and snigger,” cried Simeon; “you clergymen who tell us on Sunday in what a stillness the Lord smote Sennacherib. I believe that One who walks invisible in every house defended the honour of mine, and laid the defiler dead before the door of it. I believe the force in that blow was just the force there is in earthquakes, and no force less.”

Wilfred said, with a voice utterly undescirbable: “I told Norman myself to beware of the thunderbolt.”

“That agent is outside my jurisdiction,” said the inspector with a slight smile.
“You are not outside His,” answered the smith; “see you to it,” and, turning his broad back, he went into the house.

The shaken Wilfred was led away by Father Brown, who had an easy and friendly way with him. “Let us get out of this horrid place, Mr. Bohun,” he said. “May I look inside your church? I hear it’s one of the oldest in England. We take some interest, you know,” he added with a comical grimace, “in old English churches.”

Wilfred Bohun did not smile, for humour was never his strong point. But he nodded rather eagerly, being only too ready to explain the Gothic splendours to someone more likely to be sympathetic than the Presbyterian blacksmith or the atheist cobbler.

“By all means,” he said; “let us go in at this side.” And he led the way into the high side entrance at the top of the flight of steps. Father Brown was mounting the first step to follow him when he felt a hand on his shoulder, and turned to behold the dark, thin figure of the doctor, his face darker yet with suspicion.

“Sir,” said the physician harshly, “you appear to know some secrets in this black business. May I ask if you are going to keep them to yourself?”

“Why, doctor,” answered the priest, smiling quite pleasantly, “there is one very good reason why a man of my trade should keep things to himself when he is not sure of them, and that is that it is so constantly his duty to keep them to himself when he is sure of them. But if you think I have been discourteously reticent with you or anyone, I will go to the extreme limit of my custom. I will give you two very large hints.”

“Well, sir?” said the doctor gloomily.

“First,” said Father Brown quietly, “the thing is quite in your own province. It is a matter of physical science. The blacksmith is mistaken, not perhaps in saying that the blow was divine, but certainly in saying that it came by a miracle. It was no miracle, doctor, except in so far as man is himself a miracle, with his strange and wicked and yet half-heroic heart. The force that smashed that skull was a force well known to scientists—one of the most frequently debated of the laws of nature.”

The doctor, who was looking at him with frowning intentness, only said: “And the other hint?”

“The other hint is this,” said the priest. “Do you remember the blacksmith, though he believes in miracles, talking scornfully of the impossible fairy tale that his hammer had wings and flew half a mile across country?”

“Yes,” said the doctor, “I remember that.”
“Well,” added Father Brown, with a broad smile, “that fairy tale was the nearest thing to the real truth that has been said today.” And with that he turned his back and stumped up the steps after the curate.

The Reverend Wilfred, who had been waiting for him, pale and impatient, as if this little delay were the last straw for his nerves, led him immediately to his favourite corner of the church, that part of the gallery closest to the carved roof and lit by the wonderful window with the angel. The little Latin priest explored and admired everything exhaustively, talking cheerfully but in a low voice all the time. When in the course of his investigation he found the side exit and the winding stair down which Wilfred had rushed to find his brother dead, Father Brown ran not down but up, with the agility of a monkey, and his clear voice came from an outer platform above.

“Come up here, Mr. Bohun,” he called. “The air will do you good.”

Bohun followed him, and came out on a kind of stone gallery or balcony outside the building, from which one could see the illimitable plain in which their small hill stood, wooded away to the purple horizon and dotted with villages and farms. Clear and square, but quite small beneath them, was the blacksmith’s yard, where the inspector still stood taking notes and the corpse still lay like a smashed fly.

“Might be the map of the world, mightn’t it?” said Father Brown.

“Yes,” said Bohun very gravely, and nodded his head.

Immediately beneath and about them the lines of the Gothic building plunged outwards into the void with a sickening swiftness akin to suicide. There is that element of Titan energy in the architecture of the Middle Ages that, from whatever aspect it be seen, it always seems to be rushing away, like the strong back of some maddened horse. This church was hewn out of ancient and silent stone, bearded with old fungoids and stained with the nests of birds. And yet, when they saw it from below, it sprang like a fountain at the stars; and when they saw it, as now, from above, it poured like a cataract into a voiceless pit. For these two men on the tower were left alone with the most terrible aspect of Gothic; the monstrous foreshortening and disproportion, the dizzy perspectives, the glimpses of great things small and small things great; a topsy-turvydom of stone in the mid-air. Details of stone, enormous by their proximity, were relieved against a pattern of fields and farms, pygmy in their distance. A carved bird or beast at a corner seemed like some vast walking or flying dragon wasting the pastures and villages below. The whole atmosphere was dizzy and dangerous, as if men were upheld in air amid the gyrating wings of colossal genii; and the
whole of that old church, as tall and rich as a cathedral, seemed to sit upon the sunlit country like a cloudburst.

“I think there is something rather dangerous about standing on these high places even to pray,” said Father Brown. “Heights were made to be looked at, not to be looked from.”

“Do you mean that one may fall over,” asked Wilfred.

“I mean that one’s soul may fall if one’s body doesn’t,” said the other priest.

“I scarcely understand you,” remarked Bohun indistinctly.

“Look at that blacksmith, for instance,” went on Father Brown calmly; “a good man, but not a Christian—hard, imperious, unforgiving. Well, his Scotch religion was made up by men who prayed on hills and high crags, and learnt to look down on the world more than to look up at heaven. Humility is the mother of giants. One sees great things from the valley; only small things from the peak.”

“But he—he didn’t do it,” said Bohun tremulously.

“No,” said the other in an odd voice; “we know he didn’t do it.”

After a moment he resumed, looking tranquilly out over the plain with his pale grey eyes. “I knew a man,” he said, “who began by worshipping with others before the altar, but who grew fond of high and lonely places to pray from, corners or niches in the belfry or the spire. And once in one of those dizzy places, where the whole world seemed to turn under him like a wheel, his brain turned also, and he fancied he was God. So that, though he was a good man, he committed a great crime.”

Wilfred’s face was turned away, but his bony hands turned blue and white as they tightened on the parapet of stone.

“He thought it was given to him to judge the world and strike down the sinner. He would never have had such a thought if he had been kneeling with other men upon a floor. But he saw all men walking about like insects. He saw one especially strutting just below him, insolent and evident by a bright green hat—a poisonous insect.”

Rooks cawed round the corners of the belfry; but there was no other sound till Father Brown went on.

“This also tempted him, that he had in his hand one of the most awful engines of nature; I mean gravitation, that mad and quickening rush by which all earth’s creatures fly back to her heart when released. See, the inspector is strutting just below us in the smithy. If I were to toss a pebble over this parapet it would be something like a bullet by the time it struck him. If I were to drop a hammer—
even a small hammer—"

Wilfred Bohun threw one leg over the parapet, and Father Brown had him in a minute by the collar.

“Not by that door,” he said quite gently; “that door leads to hell.”

Bohun staggered back against the wall, and stared at him with frightful eyes.

“How do you know all this?” he cried. “Are you a devil?”

“I am a man,” answered Father Brown gravely; “and therefore have all devils in my heart. Listen to me,” he said after a short pause. “I know what you did—at least, I can guess the great part of it. When you left your brother you were racked with no unrighteous rage, to the extent even that you snatched up a small hammer, half inclined to kill him with his foulness on his mouth. Recoiling, you thrust it under your buttoned coat instead, and rushed into the church. You pray wildly in many places, under the angel window, upon the platform above, and a higher platform still, from which you could see the colonel’s Eastern hat like the back of a green beetle crawling about. Then something snapped in your soul, and you let God’s thunderbolt fall.”

Wilfred put a weak hand to his head, and asked in a low voice: “How did you know that his hat looked like a green beetle?”

“Oh, that,” said the other with the shadow of a smile, “that was common sense. But hear me further. I say I know all this; but no one else shall know it. The next step is for you; I shall take no more steps; I will seal this with the seal of confession. If you ask me why, there are many reasons, and only one that concerns you. I leave things to you because you have not yet gone very far wrong, as assassins go. You did not help to fix the crime on the smith when it was easy; or on his wife, when that was easy. You tried to fix it on the imbecile because you knew that he could not suffer. That was one of the gleams that it is my business to find in assassins. And now come down into the village, and go your own way as free as the wind; for I have said my last word.”

They went down the winding stairs in utter silence, and came out into the sunlight by the smithy. Wilfred Bohun carefully unlatched the wooden gate of the yard, and going up to the inspector, said: “I wish to give myself up; I have killed my brother.”
THE EYE OF APOLLO

That singular smoky sparkle, at once a confusion and a transparency, which is the strange secret of the Thames, was changing more and more from its grey to its glittering extreme as the sun climbed to the zenith over Westminster, and two men crossed Westminster Bridge. One man was very tall and the other very short; they might even have been fantastically compared to the arrogant clock-tower of Parliament and the humbler humped shoulders of the Abbey, for the short man was in clerical dress. The official description of the tall man was M. Hercule Flambeau, private detective, and he was going to his new offices in a new pile of flats facing the Abbey entrance. The official description of the short man was the Reverend J. Brown, attached to St. Francis Xavier’s Church, Camberwell, and he was coming from a Camberwell deathbed to see the new offices of his friend.

The building was American in its sky-scraping altitude, and American also in the oiled elaboration of its machinery of telephones and lifts. But it was barely finished and still understaffed; only three tenants had moved in; the office just above Flambeau was occupied, as also was the office just below him; the two floors above that and the three floors below were entirely bare. But the first glance at the new tower of flats caught something much more arresting. Save for a few relics of scaffolding, the one glaring object was erected outside the office just above Flambeau’s. It was an enormous gilt effigy of the human eye, surrounded with rays of gold, and taking up as much room as two or three of the office windows.

“What on earth is that?” asked Father Brown, and stood still. “Oh, a new religion,” said Flambeau, laughing; “one of those new religions that forgive your sins by saying you never had any. Rather like Christian Science, I should think. The fact is that a fellow calling himself Kalon (I don’t know what his name is, except that it can’t be that) has taken the flat just above me. I have two lady typewriters underneath me, and this enthusiastic old humbug on top. He calls himself the New Priest of Apollo, and he worships the sun.”

“Let him look out,” said Father Brown. “The sun was the cruellest of all the gods. But what does that monstrous eye mean?”

“As I understand it, it is a theory of theirs,” answered Flambeau, “that a man can endure anything if his mind is quite steady. Their two great symbols are the sun and the open eye; for they say that if a man were really healthy he could
“If a man were really healthy,” said Father Brown, “he would not bother to
stare at the sun.”

“Well, that’s all I can tell you about the new religion,” went on Flambeau
carelessly. “It claims, of course, that it can cure all physical diseases.”

“Can it cure the one spiritual disease?” asked Father Brown, with a serious
curiosity.

“And what is the one spiritual disease?” asked Flambeau, smiling.

“Oh, thinking one is quite well,” said his friend.

Flambeau was more interested in the quiet little office below him than in the
flamboyant temple above. He was a lucid Southerner, incapable of conceiving
himself as anything but a Catholic or an atheist; and new religions of a bright
and pallid sort were not much in his line. But humanity was always in his line,
especially when it was good-looking; moreover, the ladies downstairs were
characters in their way. The office was kept by two sisters, both slight and dark,
one of them tall and striking. She had a dark, eager and aquiline profile, and was
one of those women whom one always thinks of in profile, as of the clean-cut
edge of some weapon. She seemed to cleave her way through life. She had eyes
of startling brilliancy, but it was the brilliancy of steel rather than of diamonds;
and her straight, slim figure was a shade too stiff for its grace. Her younger sister
was like her shortened shadow, a little greyer, paler, and more insignificant.
They both wore a business-like black, with little masculine cuffs and collars.

For Pauline Stacey, the elder, was actually the heiress of a crest and half a
county, as well as great wealth; she had been brought up in castles and gardens,
before a frigid fierceness (peculiar to the modern woman) had driven her to what
she considered a harsher and a higher existence. She had not, indeed,
surrendered her money; in that there would have been a romantic or monkish
abandon quite alien to her masterful utilitarianism. She held her wealth, she
would say, for use upon practical social objects. Part of it she had put into her
business, the nucleus of a model typewriting emporium; part of it was distributed
in various leagues and causes for the advancement of such work among women.

How far Joan, her sister and partner, shared this slightly prosaic idealism no one
could be very sure. But she followed her leader with a dog-like affection which
was somehow more attractive, with its touch of tragedy, than the hard, high
spirits of the elder. For Pauline Stacey had nothing to say to tragedy; she was
understood to deny its existence.

Her rigid rapidity and cold impatience had amused Flambeau very much on the first occasion of his entering the flats. He had lingered outside the lift in the entrance hall waiting for the lift-boy, who generally conducts strangers to the various floors. But this bright-eyed falcon of a girl had openly refused to endure such official delay. She said sharply that she knew all about the lift, and was not dependent on boys—or men either. Though her flat was only three floors above, she managed in the few seconds of ascent to give Flambeau a great many of her fundamental views in an off-hand manner; they were to the general effect that she was a modern working woman and loved modern working machinery. Her bright black eyes blazed with abstract anger against those who rebuke mechanic science and ask for the return of romance. Everyone, she said, ought to be able to manage machines, just as she could manage the lift. She seemed almost to resent the fact of Flambeau opening the lift-door for her; and that gentleman went up to his own apartments smiling with somewhat mingled feelings at the memory of such spit-fire self-dependence.

She certainly had a temper, of a snappy, practical sort; the gestures of her thin, elegant hands were abrupt or even destructive.

Once Flambeau entered her office on some typewriting business, and found she had just flung a pair of spectacles belonging to her sister into the middle of the floor and stamped on them. She was already in the rapids of an ethical tirade about the "sickly medical notions" and the morbid admission of weakness implied in such an apparatus. She dared her sister to bring such artificial, unhealthy rubbish into the place again. She asked if she was expected to wear wooden legs or false hair or glass eyes; and as she spoke her eyes sparkled like the terrible crystal.

Flambeau, quite bewildered with this fanaticism, could not refrain from asking Miss Pauline (with direct French logic) why a pair of spectacles was a more morbid sign of weakness than a lift, and why, if science might help us in the one effort, it might not help us in the other.

"That is so different," said Pauline Stacey, loftily. "Batteries and motors and all those things are marks of the force of man—yes, Mr. Flambeau, and the force of woman, too! We shall take our turn at these great engines that devour distance and defy time. That is high and splendid—that is really science. But these nasty props and plasters the doctors sell—why, they are just badges of poltroonery. Doctors stick on legs and arms as if we were born cripples and sick slaves. But I was free-born, Mr. Flambeau! People only think they need these things because
they have been trained in fear instead of being trained in power and courage, just
as the silly nurses tell children not to stare at the sun, and so they can’t do it
without blinking. But why among the stars should there be one star I may not
see? The sun is not my master, and I will open my eyes and stare at him
whenever I choose.”

“Your eyes,” said Flambeau, with a foreign bow, “will dazzle the sun.” He
took pleasure in complimenting this strange stiff beauty, partly because it threw
her a little off her balance. But as he went upstairs to his floor he drew a deep
breath and whistled, saying to himself: “So she has got into the hands of that
conjurer upstairs with his golden eye.” For, little as he knew or cared about the
new religion of Kalon, he had heard of his special notion about sun-gazing.

He soon discovered that the spiritual bond between the floors above and below
him was close and increasing. The man who called himself Kalon was a
magnificent creature, worthy, in a physical sense, to be the pontiff of Apollo. He
was nearly as tall even as Flambeau, and very much better looking, with a
golden beard, strong blue eyes, and a mane flung back like a lion’s. In structure
he was the blonde beast of Nietzsche, but all this animal beauty was heightened,
brightened and softened by genuine intellect and spirituality. If he looked like
one of the great Saxon kings, he looked like one of the kings that were also
saints. And this despite the cockney incongruity of his surroundings; the fact that
he had an office half-way up a building in Victoria Street; that the clerk (a
commonplace youth in cuffs and collars) sat in the outer room, between him and
the corridor; that his name was on a brass plate, and the gilt emblem of his creed
hung above his street, like the advertisement of an oculist. All this vulgarity
could not take away from the man called Kalon the vivid oppression and
inspiration that came from his soul and body. When all was said, a man in the
presence of this quack did feel in the presence of a great man. Even in the loose
jacket-suit of linen that he wore as a workshop dress in his office he was a
fascinating and formidable figure; and when robed in the white vestments and
crowned with the golden circlet, in which he daily saluted the sun, he really
looked so splendid that the laughter of the street people sometimes died suddenly
on their lips. For three times in the day the new sun-worshipper went out on his
little balcony, in the face of all Westminster, to say some litany to his shining
lord: once at daybreak, once at sunset, and once at the shock of noon. And it was
while the shock of noon still shook faintly from the towers of Parliament and
parish church that Father Brown, the friend of Flambeau, first looked up and saw
the white priest of Apollo.
Flambeau had seen quite enough of these daily salutations of Phoebus, and plunged into the porch of the tall building without even looking for his clerical friend to follow. But Father Brown, whether from a professional interest in ritual or a strong individual interest in tomfoolery, stopped and stared up at the balcony of the sun-worshipper, just as he might have stopped and stared up at a Punch and Judy. Kalon the Prophet was already erect, with argent garments and uplifted hands, and the sound of his strangely penetrating voice could be heard all the way down the busy street uttering his solar litany. He was already in the middle of it; his eyes were fixed upon the flaming disc. It is doubtful if he saw anything or anyone on this earth; it is substantially certain that he did not see a stunted, round-faced priest who, in the crowd below, looked up at him with blinking eyes. That was perhaps the most startling difference between even these two far divided men. Father Brown could not look at anything without blinking; but the priest of Apollo could look on the blaze at noon without a quiver of the eyelid.

"O sun," cried the prophet, "O star that art too great to be allowed among the stars! O fountain that flowest quietly in that secret spot that is called space. White Father of all white unwearied things, white flames and white flowers and white peaks. Father, who art more innocent than all thy most innocent and quiet children; primal purity, into the peace of which—"

A rush and crash like the reversed rush of a rocket was cloven with a strident and incessant yelling. Five people rushed into the gate of the mansions as three people rushed out, and for an instant they all deafened each other. The sense of some utterly abrupt horror seemed for a moment to fill half the street with bad news—bad news that was all the worse because no one knew what it was. Two figures remained still after the crash of commotion: the fair priest of Apollo on the balcony above, and the ugly priest of Christ below him.

At last the tall figure and titanic energy of Flambeau appeared in the doorway of the mansions and dominated the little mob. Talking at the top of his voice like a fog-horn, he told somebody or anybody to go for a surgeon; and as he turned back into the dark and thronged entrance his friend Father Brown dipped in insignificantly after him. Even as he ducked and dived through the crowd he could still hear the magnificent melody and monotony of the solar priest still calling on the happy god who is the friend of fountains and flowers.

Father Brown found Flambeau and some six other people standing round the enclosed space into which the lift commonly descended. But the lift had not descended. Something else had descended; something that ought to have come
by a lift.

For the last four minutes Flambeau had looked down on it; had seen the 
brained and bleeding figure of that beautiful woman who denied the existence of 
tragedy. He had never had the slightest doubt that it was Pauline Stacey; and, 
though he had sent for a doctor, he had not the slightest doubt that she was dead.

He could not remember for certain whether he had liked her or disliked her; 
there was so much both to like and dislike. But she had been a person to him, 
and the unbearable pathos of details and habit stabbed him with all the small 
daggers of bereavement. He remembered her pretty face and priggish speeches 
with a sudden secret vividness which is all the bitterness of death. In an instant 
like a bolt from the blue, like a thunderbolt from nowhere, that beautiful and 
defiant body had been dashed down the open well of the lift to death at the 
bottom. Was it suicide? With so insolent an optimist it seemed impossible. Was 
it murder? But who was there in those hardly inhabited flats to murder anybody? 
In a rush of raucous words, which he meant to be strong and suddenly found 
weak, he asked where was that fellow Kalon. A voice, habitually heavy, quiet 
and full, assured him that Kalon for the last fifteen minutes had been away up on 
his balcony worshipping his god. When Flambeau heard the voice, and felt the 
hand of Father Brown, he turned his swarthy face and said abruptly:

“Then, if he has been up there all the time, who can have done it?”

“Perhaps,” said the other, “we might go upstairs and find out. We have half an 
hour before the police will move.”

Leaving the body of the slain heiress in charge of the surgeons, Flambeau 
dashed up the stairs to the typewriting office, found it utterly empty, and then 
dashed up to his own. Having entered that, he abruptly returned with a new and 
white face to his friend.

“Her sister,” he said, with an unpleasant seriousness, “her sister seems to have 
gone out for a walk.”

Father Brown nodded. “Or, she may have gone up to the office of that sun 
man,” he said. “If I were you I should just verify that, and then let us all talk it 
over in your office. No,” he added suddenly, as if remembering something, 
“shall I ever get over that stupidity of mine? Of course, in their office 
downstairs.”

Flambeau stared; but he followed the little father downstairs to the empty flat 
of the Staceys, where that impenetrable pastor took a large red-leather chair in 
the very entrance, from which he could see the stairs and landings, and waited. 
He did not wait very long. In about four minutes three figures descended the
stairs, alike only in their solemnity. The first was Joan Stacey, the sister of the dead woman—evidently she had been upstairs in the temporary temple of Apollo; the second was the priest of Apollo himself, his litany finished, sweeping down the empty stairs in utter magnificence—something in his white robes, beard and parted hair had the look of Dore’s Christ leaving the Pretorium; the third was Flambeau, black browed and somewhat bewildered.

Miss Joan Stacey, dark, with a drawn face and hair prematurely touched with grey, walked straight to her own desk and set out her papers with a practical flap. The mere action rallied everyone else to sanity. If Miss Joan Stacey was a criminal, she was a cool one. Father Brown regarded her for some time with an odd little smile, and then, without taking his eyes off her, addressed himself to somebody else.

“Prophet,” he said, presumably addressing Kalon, “I wish you would tell me a lot about your religion.”

“I shall be proud to do it,” said Kalon, inclining his still crowned head, “but I am not sure that I understand.”

“Why, it’s like this,” said Father Brown, in his frankly doubtful way: “We are taught that if a man has really bad first principles, that must be partly his fault. But, for all that, we can make some difference between a man who insults his quite clear conscience and a man with a conscience more or less clouded with sophistries. Now, do you really think that murder is wrong at all?”

“Is this an accusation?” asked Kalon very quietly.

“No,” answered Brown, equally gently, “it is the speech for the defence.”

In the long and startled stillness of the room the prophet of Apollo slowly rose; and really it was like the rising of the sun. He filled that room with his light and life in such a manner that a man felt he could as easily have filled Salisbury Plain. His robed form seemed to hang the whole room with classic draperies; his epic gesture seemed to extend it into grander perspectives, till the little black figure of the modern cleric seemed to be a fault and an intrusion, a round, black blot upon some splendour of Hellas.

“We meet at last, Caiaphas,” said the prophet. “Your church and mine are the only realities on this earth. I adore the sun, and you the darkening of the sun; you are the priest of the dying and I of the living God. Your present work of suspicion and slander is worthy of your coat and creed. All your church is but a black police; you are only spies and detectives seeking to tear from men confessions of guilt, whether by treachery or torture. You would convict men of crime, I would convict them of innocence. You would convince them of sin, I
would convince them of virtue.

“Reader of the books of evil, one more word before I blow away your baseless nightmares for ever. Not even faintly could you understand how little I care whether you can convict me or no. The things you call disgrace and horrible hanging are to me no more than an ogre in a child’s toy-book to a man once grown up. You said you were offering the speech for the defence. I care so little for the cloudland of this life that I will offer you the speech for the prosecution. There is but one thing that can be said against me in this matter, and I will say it myself. The woman that is dead was my love and my bride; not after such manner as your tin chapels call lawful, but by a law purer and sterner than you will ever understand. She and I walked another world from yours, and trod palaces of crystal while you were plodding through tunnels and corridors of brick. Well, I know that policemen, theological and otherwise, always fancy that where there has been love there must soon be hatred; so there you have the first point made for the prosecution. But the second point is stronger; I do not grudge it you. Not only is it true that Pauline loved me, but it is also true that this very morning, before she died, she wrote at that table a will leaving me and my new church half a million. Come, where are the handcuffs? Do you suppose I care what foolish things you do with me? Penal servitude will only be like waiting for her at a wayside station. The gallows will only be going to her in a headlong car.”

He spoke with the brain-shaking authority of an orator, and Flambeau and Joan Stacey stared at him in amazed admiration. Father Brown’s face seemed to express nothing but extreme distress; he looked at the ground with one wrinkle of pain across his forehead. The prophet of the sun leaned easily against the mantelpiece and resumed:

“In a few words I have put before you the whole case against me—the only possible case against me. In fewer words still I will blow it to pieces, so that not a trace of it remains. As to whether I have committed this crime, the truth is in one sentence: I could not have committed this crime. Pauline Stacey fell from this floor to the ground at five minutes past twelve. A hundred people will go into the witness-box and say that I was standing out upon the balcony of my own rooms above from just before the stroke of noon to a quarter-past—the usual period of my public prayers. My clerk (a respectable youth from Clapham, with no sort of connection with me) will swear that he sat in my outer office all the morning, and that no communication passed through. He will swear that I arrived a full ten minutes before the hour, fifteen minutes before any whisper of
the accident, and that I did not leave the office or the balcony all that time. No one ever had so complete an alibi; I could subpoena half Westminster. I think you had better put the handcuffs away again. The case is at an end.

“But last of all, that no breath of this idiotic suspicion remain in the air, I will tell you all you want to know. I believe I do know how my unhappy friend came by her death. You can, if you choose, blame me for it, or my faith and philosophy at least; but you certainly cannot lock me up. It is well known to all students of the higher truths that certain adepts and illuminati have in history attained the power of levitation—that is, of being self-sustained upon the empty air. It is but a part of that general conquest of matter which is the main element in our occult wisdom. Poor Pauline was of an impulsive and ambitious temper. I think, to tell the truth, she thought herself somewhat deeper in the mysteries than she was; and she has often said to me, as we went down in the lift together, that if one’s will were strong enough, one could float down as harmlessly as a feather. I solemnly believe that in some ecstasy of noble thoughts she attempted the miracle. Her will, or faith, must have failed her at the crucial instant, and the lower law of matter had its horrible revenge. There is the whole story, gentlemen, very sad and, as you think, very presumptuous and wicked, but certainly not criminal or in any way connected with me. In the short-hand of the police-courts, you had better call it suicide. I shall always call it heroic failure for the advance of science and the slow scaling of heaven.”

It was the first time Flambeau had ever seen Father Brown vanquished. He still sat looking at the ground, with a painful and corrugated brow, as if in shame. It was impossible to avoid the feeling which the prophet’s winged words had fanned, that here was a sullen, professional suspecor of men overwhelmed by a prouder and purer spirit of natural liberty and health. At last he said, blinking as if in bodily distress: “Well, if that is so, sir, you need do no more than take the testamentary paper you spoke of and go. I wonder where the poor lady left it.”

“It will be over there on her desk by the door, I think,” said Kalon, with that massive innocence of manner that seemed to acquit him wholly. “She told me specially she would write it this morning, and I actually saw her writing as I went up in the lift to my own room.”

“Was her door open then?” asked the priest, with his eye on the corner of the matting.

“Yes,” said Kalon calmly.

“Ah! it has been open ever since,” said the other, and resumed his silent study
of the mat.

“There is a paper over here,” said the grim Miss Joan, in a somewhat singular voice. She had passed over to her sister’s desk by the doorway, and was holding a sheet of blue foolscap in her hand. There was a sour smile on her face that seemed unfit for such a scene or occasion, and Flambeau looked at her with a darkening brow.

Kalon the prophet stood away from the paper with that loyal unconsciousness that had carried him through. But Flambeau took it out of the lady’s hand, and read it with the utmost amazement. It did, indeed, begin in the formal manner of a will, but after the words “I give and bequeath all of which I die possessed” the writing abruptly stopped with a set of scratches, and there was no trace of the name of any legatee. Flambeau, in wonder, handed this truncated testament to his clerical friend, who glanced at it and silently gave it to the priest of the sun.

An instant afterwards that pontiff, in his splendid sweeping draperies, had crossed the room in two great strides, and was towering over Joan Stacey, his blue eyes standing from his head.

“What monkey tricks have you been playing here?” he cried. “That’s not all Pauline wrote.”

They were startled to hear him speak in quite a new voice, with a Yankee shrillness in it; all his grandeur and good English had fallen from him like a cloak.

“That is the only thing on her desk,” said Joan, and confronted him steadily with the same smile of evil favour.

Of a sudden the man broke out into blasphemies and cataracts of incredulous words. There was something shocking about the dropping of his mask; it was like a man’s real face falling off.

“See here!” he cried in broad American, when he was breathless with cursing, “I may be an adventurer, but I guess you’re a murderess. Yes, gentlemen, here’s your death explained, and without any levitation. The poor girl is writing a will in my favour; her cursed sister comes in, struggles for the pen, drags her to the well, and throws her down before she can finish it. Sakes! I reckon we want the handcuffs after all.”

“As you have truly remarked,” replied Joan, with ugly calm, “your clerk is a very respectable young man, who knows the nature of an oath; and he will swear in any court that I was up in your office arranging some typewriting work for five minutes before and five minutes after my sister fell. Mr. Flambeau will tell you that he found me there.”
There was a silence.
“Why, then,” cried Flambeau, “Pauline was alone when she fell, and it was suicide!”
“She was alone when she fell,” said Father Brown, “but it was not suicide.”
“Then how did she die?” asked Flambeau impatiently.
“She was murdered.”
“But she was alone,” objected the detective.
“She was murdered when she was all alone,” answered the priest.
All the rest stared at him, but he remained sitting in the same old dejected attitude, with a wrinkle in his round forehead and an appearance of impersonal shame and sorrow; his voice was colourless and sad.
“What I want to know,” cried Kalon, with an oath, “is when the police are coming for this bloody and wicked sister. She’s killed her flesh and blood; she’s robbed me of half a million that was just as sacredly mine as——”
“Come, come, prophet,” interrupted Flambeau, with a kind of sneer; “remember that all this world is a cloudland.”
The hierophant of the sun-god made an effort to climb back on his pedestal. “It is not the mere money,” he cried, “though that would equip the cause throughout the world. It is also my beloved one’s wishes. To Pauline all this was holy. In Pauline’s eyes——”
Father Brown suddenly sprang erect, so that his chair fell over flat behind him. He was deathly pale, yet he seemed fired with a hope; his eyes shone.
“That’s it!” he cried in a clear voice. “That’s the way to begin. In Pauline’s eyes——”
The tall prophet retreated before the tiny priest in an almost mad disorder. “What do you mean? How dare you?” he cried repeatedly.
“In Pauline’s eyes,” repeated the priest, his own shining more and more. “Go on—in God’s name, go on. The foulest crime the fiends ever prompted feels lighter after confession; and I implore you to confess. Go on, go on—in Pauline’s eyes——”
“Let me go, you devil!” thundered Kalon, struggling like a giant in bonds. “Who are you, you cursed spy, to weave your spiders’ webs round me, and peep and peer? Let me go.”
“Shall I stop him?” asked Flambeau, bounding towards the exit, for Kalon had already thrown the door wide open.
“No; let him pass,” said Father Brown, with a strange deep sigh that seemed to come from the depths of the universe. “Let Cain pass by, for he belongs to God.”
There was a long-drawn silence in the room when he had left it, which was to Flambeau’s fierce wits one long agony of interrogation. Miss Joan Stacey very coolly tidied up the papers on her desk.

“Father,” said Flambeau at last, “it is my duty, not my curiosity only—it is my duty to find out, if I can, who committed the crime.”

“Which crime?” asked Father Brown.

“The one we are dealing with, of course,” replied his impatient friend.

“We are dealing with two crimes,” said Brown, “crimes of very different weight—and by very different criminals.”

Miss Joan Stacey, having collected and put away her papers, proceeded to lock up her drawer. Father Brown went on, noticing her as little as she noticed him.

“The two crimes,” he observed, “were committed against the same weakness of the same person, in a struggle for her money. The author of the larger crime found himself thwarted by the smaller crime; the author of the smaller crime got the money.”

“Oh, don’t go on like a lecturer,” groaned Flambeau; “put it in a few words.”

“I can put it in one word,” answered his friend.

Miss Joan Stacey skewered her business-like black hat on to her head with a business-like black frown before a little mirror, and, as the conversation proceeded, took her handbag and umbrella in an unhurried style, and left the room.

“The truth is one word, and a short one,” said Father Brown. “Pauline Stacey was blind.”

“Blind!” repeated Flambeau, and rose slowly to his whole huge stature.

“She was subject to it by blood,” Brown proceeded. “Her sister would have started eyeglasses if Pauline would have let her; but it was her special philosophy or fad that one must not encourage such diseases by yielding to them. She would not admit the cloud; or she tried to dispel it by will. So her eyes got worse and worse with straining; but the worst strain was to come. It came with this precious prophet, or whatever he calls himself, who taught her to stare at the hot sun with the naked eye. It was called accepting Apollo. Oh, if these new pagans would only be old pagans, they would be a little wiser! The old pagans knew that mere naked Nature-worship must have a cruel side. They knew that the eye of Apollo can blast and blind.”

There was a pause, and the priest went on in a gentle and even broken voice. “Whether or no that devil deliberately made her blind, there is no doubt that he
deliberately killed her through her blindness. The very simplicity of the crime is sickening. You know he and she went up and down in those lifts without official help; you know also how smoothly and silently the lifts slide. Kalon brought the lift to the girl’s landing, and saw her, through the open door, writing in her slow, sightless way the will she had promised him. He called out to her cheerily that he had the lift ready for her, and she was to come out when she was ready. Then he pressed a button and shot soundlessly up to his own floor, walked through his own office, out on to his own balcony, and was safely praying before the crowded street when the poor girl, having finished her work, ran gaily out to where lover and lift were to receive her, and stepped—”

“Don’t!” cried Flambeau.

“He ought to have got half a million by pressing that button,” continued the little father, in the colourless voice in which he talked of such horrors. “But that went smash. It went smash because there happened to be another person who also wanted the money, and who also knew the secret about poor Pauline’s sight. There was one thing about that will that I think nobody noticed: although it was unfinished and without signature, the other Miss Stacey and some servant of hers had already signed it as witnesses. Joan had signed first, saying Pauline could finish it later, with a typical feminine contempt for legal forms. Therefore, Joan wanted her sister to sign the will without real witnesses. Why? I thought of the blindness, and felt sure she had wanted Pauline to sign in solitude because she had wanted her not to sign at all.

“People like the Staceys always use fountain pens; but this was specially natural to Pauline. By habit and her strong will and memory she could still write almost as well as if she saw; but she could not tell when her pen needed dipping. Therefore, her fountain pens were carefully filled by her sister—all except this fountain pen. This was carefully not filled by her sister; the remains of the ink held out for a few lines and then failed altogether. And the prophet lost five hundred thousand pounds and committed one of the most brutal and brilliant murders in human history for nothing.”

Flambeau went to the open door and heard the official police ascending the stairs. He turned and said: “You must have followed everything devilish close to have traced the crime to Kalon in ten minutes.”

Father Brown gave a sort of start.

“Oh! to him,” he said. “No; I had to follow rather close to find out about Miss Joan and the fountain pen. But I knew Kalon was the criminal before I came into the front door.”
“You must be joking!” cried Flambeau.

“I’m quite serious,” answered the priest. “I tell you I knew he had done it, even before I knew what he had done.”

“But why?”

“These pagan stoics,” said Brown reflectively, “always fail by their strength. There came a crash and a scream down the street, and the priest of Apollo did not start or look round. I did not know what it was. But I knew that he was expecting it.”
THE SIGN OF THE BROKEN SWORD

The thousand arms of the forest were grey, and its million fingers silver. In a sky of dark green-blue-like slate the stars were bleak and brilliant like splintered ice. All that thickly wooded and sparsely tenanted countryside was stiff with a bitter and brittle frost. The black hollows between the trunks of the trees looked like bottomless, black caverns of that Scandinavian hell, a hell of incalculable cold. Even the square stone tower of the church looked northerly to the point of heathenry, as if it were some barbaric tower among the sea rocks of Iceland. It was a queer night for anyone to explore a churchyard. But, on the other hand, perhaps it was worth exploring.

It rose abruptly out of the ashen wastes of forest in a sort of hump or shoulder of green turf that looked grey in the starlight. Most of the graves were on a slant, and the path leading up to the church was as steep as a staircase. On the top of the hill, in the one flat and prominent place, was the monument for which the place was famous. It contrasted strangely with the featureless graves all round, for it was the work of one of the greatest sculptors of modern Europe; and yet his fame was at once forgotten in the fame of the man whose image he had made. It showed, by touches of the small silver pencil of starlight, the massive metal figure of a soldier recumbent, the strong hands sealed in an everlasting worship, the great head pillowed upon a gun. The venerable face was bearded, or rather whiskered, in the old, heavy Colonel Newcome fashion. The uniform, though suggested with the few strokes of simplicity, was that of modern war. By his right side lay a sword, of which the tip was broken off; on the left side lay a Bible. On glowing summer afternoons wagonettes came full of Americans and cultured suburbs to see the sepulchre; but even then they felt the vast forest land with its one dumpy dome of churchyard and church as a place oddly dumb and neglected. In this freezing darkness of mid-winter one would think he might be left alone with the stars. Nevertheless, in the stillness of those stiff woods a wooden gate creaked, and two dim figures dressed in black climbed up the little path to the tomb.

So faint was that frigid starlight that nothing could have been traced about them except that while they both wore black, one man was enormously big, and the other (perhaps by contrast) almost startlingly small. They went up to the great graven tomb of the historic warrior, and stood for a few minutes staring at it. There was no human, perhaps no living, thing for a wide circle; and a morbid
fancy might well have wondered if they were human themselves. In any case, the beginning of their conversation might have seemed strange. After the first silence the small man said to the other:

“Where does a wise man hide a pebble?”

And the tall man answered in a low voice: “On the beach.”

The small man nodded, and after a short silence said: “Where does a wise man hide a leaf?”

And the other answered: “In the forest.”

There was another stillness, and then the tall man resumed: “Do you mean that when a wise man has to hide a real diamond he has been known to hide it among sham ones?”

“No, no,” said the little man with a laugh, “we will let bygones be bygones.”

He stamped his cold feet for a second or two, and then said: “I’m not thinking of that at all, but of something else; something rather peculiar. Just strike a match, will you?”

The big man fumbled in his pocket, and soon a scratch and a flare painted gold the whole flat side of the monument. On it was cut in black letters the well-known words which so many Americans had reverently read: “Sacred to the Memory of General Sir Arthur St. Clare, Hero and Martyr, who Always Vanquished his Enemies and Always Spared Them, and Was Treacherously Slain by Them At Last. May God in Whom he Trusted both Reward and Revenge him.”

The match burnt the big man’s fingers, blackened, and dropped. He was about to strike another, but his small companion stopped him. “That’s all right, Flambeau, old man; I saw what I wanted. Or, rather, I didn’t see what I didn’t want. And now we must walk a mile and a half along the road to the next inn, and I will try to tell you all about it. For Heaven knows a man should have a fire and ale when he dares tell such a story.”

They descended the precipitous path, they relatched the rusty gate, and set off at a stamping, ringing walk down the frozen forest road. They had gone a full quarter of a mile before the smaller man spoke again. He said: “Yes; the wise man hides a pebble on the beach. But what does he do if there is no beach? Do you know anything of that great St. Clare trouble?”

“I know nothing about English generals, Father Brown,” answered the large man, laughing, “though a little about English policemen. I only know that you have dragged me a precious long dance to all the shrines of this fellow, whoever he is. One would think he got buried in six different places. I’ve seen a memorial
to General St. Clare in Westminster Abbey. I’ve seen a ramping equestrian statue of General St. Clare on the Embankment. I’ve seen a medallion of St. Clare in the street he was born in, and another in the street he lived in; and now you drag me after dark to his coffin in the village churchyard. I am beginning to be a bit tired of his magnificent personality, especially as I don’t in the least know who he was. What are you hunting for in all these crypts and effigies?”

“I am only looking for one word,” said Father Brown. “A word that isn’t there.”

“Well,” asked Flambeau; “are you going to tell me anything about it?”

“I must divide it into two parts,” remarked the priest. “First there is what everybody knows; and then there is what I know. Now, what everybody knows is short and plain enough. It is also entirely wrong.”

“Right you are,” said the big man called Flambeau cheerfully. “Let’s begin at the wrong end. Let’s begin with what everybody knows, which isn’t true.”

“If not wholly untrue, it is at least very inadequate,” continued Brown; “for in point of fact, all that the public knows amounts precisely to this: The public knows that Arthur St. Clare was a great and successful English general. It knows that after splendid yet careful campaigns both in India and Africa he was in command against Brazil when the great Brazilian patriot Olivier issued his ultimatum. It knows that on that occasion St. Clare with a very small force attacked Olivier with a very large one, and was captured after heroic resistance. And it knows that after his capture, and to the abhorrence of the civilised world, St. Clare was hanged on the nearest tree. He was found swinging there after the Brazilians had retired, with his broken sword hung round his neck.”

“And that popular story is untrue?” suggested Flambeau.

“No,” said his friend quietly, “that story is quite true, so far as it goes.”

“Well, I think it goes far enough!” said Flambeau; “but if the popular story is true, what is the mystery?”

They had passed many hundreds of grey and ghostly trees before the little priest answered. Then he bit his finger reflectively and said: “Why, the mystery is a mystery of psychology. Or, rather, it is a mystery of two psychologies. In that Brazilian business two of the most famous men of modern history acted flat against their characters. Mind you, Olivier and St. Clare were both heroes—the old thing, and no mistake; it was like the fight between Hector and Achilles. Now, what would you say to an affair in which Achilles was timid and Hector was treacherous?”

“Go on,” said the large man impatiently as the other bit his finger again.
“Sir Arthur St. Clare was a soldier of the old religious type—the type that saved us during the Mutiny,” continued Brown. “He was always more for duty than for dash; and with all his personal courage was decidedly a prudent commander, particularly indignant at any needless waste of soldiers. Yet in this last battle he attempted something that a baby could see was absurd. One need not be a strategist to see it was as wild as wind; just as one need not be a strategist to keep out of the way of a motor-bus. Well, that is the first mystery; what had become of the English general’s head? The second riddle is, what had become of the Brazilian general’s heart? President Olivier might be called a visionary or a nuisance; but even his enemies admitted that he was magnanimous to the point of knight errantry. Almost every other prisoner he had ever captured had been set free or even loaded with benefits. Men who had really wronged him came away touched by his simplicity and sweetness. Why the deuce should he diabolically revenge himself only once in his life; and that for the one particular blow that could not have hurt him? Well, there you have it. One of the wisest men in the world acted like an idiot for no reason. One of the best men in the world acted like a fiend for no reason. That’s the long and the short of it; and I leave it to you, my boy.”

“No, you don’t,” said the other with a snort. “I leave it to you; and you jolly well tell me all about it.”

“Well,” resumed Father Brown, “it’s not fair to say that the public impression is just what I’ve said, without adding that two things have happened since. I can’t say they threw a new light; for nobody can make sense of them. But they threw a new kind of darkness; they threw the darkness in new directions. The first was this. The family physician of the St. Clares quarrelled with that family, and began publishing a violent series of articles, in which he said that the late general was a religious maniac; but as far as the tale went, this seemed to mean little more than a religious man.

“Anyhow, the story fizzled out. Everyone knew, of course, that St. Clare had some of the eccentricities of puritan piety. The second incident was much more arresting. In the luckless and unsupported regiment which made that rash attempt at the Black River there was a certain Captain Keith, who was at that time engaged to St. Clare’s daughter, and who afterwards married her. He was one of those who were captured by Olivier, and, like all the rest except the general, appears to have been bounteously treated and promptly set free. Some twenty years afterwards this man, then Lieutenant-Colonel Keith, published a sort of autobiography called ‘A British Officer in Burmah and Brazil.’ In the place
where the reader looks eagerly for some account of the mystery of St. Clare’s
disaster may be found the following words: ‘Everywhere else in this book I have
narrated things exactly as they occurred, holding as I do the old-fashioned
opinion that the glory of England is old enough to take care of itself. The
exception I shall make is in this matter of the defeat by the Black River; and my
reasons, though private, are honourable and compelling. I will, however, add this
in justice to the memories of two distinguished men. General St. Clare has been
accused of incapacity on this occasion; I can at least testify that this action,
properly understood, was one of the most brilliant and sagacious of his life.
President Olivier by similar report is charged with savage injustice. I think it due
to the honour of an enemy to say that he acted on this occasion with even more
than his characteristic good feeling. To put the matter popularly, I can assure my
countrymen that St. Clare was by no means such a fool nor Olivier such a brute
as he looked. This is all I have to say; nor shall any earthly consideration induce
me to add a word to it.’”

A large frozen moon like a lustrous snowball began to show through the
tangle of twigs in front of them, and by its light the narrator had been able to
refresh his memory of Captain Keith’s text from a scrap of printed paper. As he
folded it up and put it back in his pocket Flambeau threw up his hand with a
French gesture.

“Wait a bit, wait a bit,” he cried excitedly. “I believe I can guess it at the first
go.”

He strode on, breathing hard, his black head and bull neck forward, like a man
winning a walking race. The little priest, amused and interested, had some
trouble in trotting beside him. Just before them the trees fell back a little to left
and right, and the road swept downwards across a clear, moonlit valley, till it
dived again like a rabbit into the wall of another wood. The entrance to the
farther forest looked small and round, like the black hole of a remote railway
tunnel. But it was within some hundred yards, and gaped like a cavern before
Flambeau spoke again.

“I’ve got it,” he cried at last, slapping his thigh with his great hand. “Four
minutes’ thinking, and I can tell your whole story myself.”

“All right,” assented his friend. “You tell it.”

Flambeau lifted his head, but lowered his voice. “General Sir Arthur St.
Clare,” he said, “came of a family in which madness was hereditary; and his
whole aim was to keep this from his daughter, and even, if possible, from his
future son-in-law. Rightly or wrongly, he thought the final collapse was close,
and resolved on suicide. Yet ordinary suicide would blazon the very idea he dreaded. As the campaign approached the clouds came thicker on his brain; and at last in a mad moment he sacrificed his public duty to his private. He rushed rashly into battle, hoping to fall by the first shot. When he found that he had only attained capture and discredit, the sealed bomb in his brain burst, and he broke his own sword and hanged himself.”

He stared firmly at the grey facade of forest in front of him, with the one black gap in it, like the mouth of the grave, into which their path plunged. Perhaps something menacing in the road thus suddenly swallowed reinforced his vivid vision of the tragedy, for he shuddered.

“A horrid story,” he said.
“A horrid story,” repeated the priest with bent head. “But not the real story.”
Then he threw back his head with a sort of despair and cried: “Oh, I wish it had been.”

The tall Flambeau faced round and stared at him.
“Yours is a clean story,” cried Father Brown, deeply moved. “A sweet, pure, honest story, as open and white as that moon. Madness and despair are innocent enough. There are worse things, Flambeau.”

Flambeau looked up wildly at the moon thus invoked; and from where he stood one black tree-bough curved across it exactly like a devil’s horn.

“Father—father,” cried Flambeau with the French gesture and stepping yet more rapidly forward, “do you mean it was worse than that?”

“Worse than that,” said Paul like a grave echo. And they plunged into the black cloister of the woodland, which ran by them in a dim tapestry of trunks, like one of the dark corridors in a dream.

They were soon in the most secret entrails of the wood, and felt close about them foliage that they could not see, when the priest said again:
“Where does a wise man hide a leaf? In the forest. But what does he do if there is no forest?”

“Well, well,” cried Flambeau irritably, “what does he do?”

“He grows a forest to hide it in,” said the priest in an obscure voice. “A fearful sin.”

“Look here,” cried his friend impatiently, for the dark wood and the dark saying got a little on his nerves; “will you tell me this story or not? What other evidence is there to go on?”

“There are three more bits of evidence,” said the other, “that I have dug up in holes and corners; and I will give them in logical rather than chronological order.
First of all, of course, our authority for the issue and event of the battle is in Olivier’s own dispatches, which are lucid enough. He was entrenched with two or three regiments on the heights that swept down to the Black River, on the other side of which was lower and more marshy ground. Beyond this again was gently rising country, on which was the first English outpost, supported by others which lay, however, considerably in its rear. The British forces as a whole were greatly superior in numbers; but this particular regiment was just far enough from its base to make Olivier consider the project of crossing the river to cut it off. By sunset, however, he had decided to retain his own position, which was a specially strong one. At daybreak next morning he was thunderstruck to see that this stray handful of English, entirely unsupported from their rear, had flung themselves across the river, half by a bridge to the right, and the other half by a ford higher up, and were massed upon the marshy bank below him.

“That they should attempt an attack with such numbers against such a position was incredible enough; but Olivier noticed something yet more extraordinary. For instead of attempting to seize more solid ground, this mad regiment, having put the river in its rear by one wild charge, did nothing more, but stuck there in the mire like flies in treacle. Needless to say, the Brazilians blew great gaps in them with artillery, which they could only return with spirited but lessening rifle fire. Yet they never broke; and Olivier’s curt account ends with a strong tribute of admiration for the mystic valour of these imbeciles. ‘Our line then advanced finally,’ writes Olivier, ‘and drove them into the river; we captured General St. Clare himself and several other officers. The colonel and the major had both fallen in the battle. I cannot resist saying that few finer sights can have been seen in history than the last stand of this extraordinary regiment; wounded officers picking up the rifles of dead soldiers, and the general himself facing us on horseback bareheaded and with a broken sword.’ On what happened to the general afterwards Olivier is as silent as Captain Keith.”

“Well,” grunted Flambeau, “get on to the next bit of evidence.”

“The next evidence,” said Father Brown, “took some time to find, but it will not take long to tell. I found at last in an almshouse down in the Lincolnshire Fens an old soldier who not only was wounded at the Black River, but had actually knelt beside the colonel of the regiment when he died. This latter was a certain Colonel Clancy, a big bull of an Irishman; and it would seem that he died almost as much of rage as of bullets. He, at any rate, was not responsible for that ridiculous raid; it must have been imposed on him by the general. His last edifying words, according to my informant, were these: ‘And there goes the
damned old donkey with the end of his sword knocked off. I wish it was his head.’ You will remark that everyone seems to have noticed this detail about the broken sword blade, though most people regard it somewhat more reverently than did the late Colonel Clancy. And now for the third fragment.”

Their path through the woodland began to go upward, and the speaker paused a little for breath before he went on. Then he continued in the same business-like tone:

“Only a month or two ago a certain Brazilian official died in England, having quarrelled with Olivier and left his country. He was a well-known figure both here and on the Continent, a Spaniard named Espado; I knew him myself, a yellow-faced old dandy, with a hooked nose. For various private reasons I had permission to see the documents he had left; he was a Catholic, of course, and I had been with him towards the end. There was nothing of his that lit up any corner of the black St. Clare business, except five or six common exercise books filled with the diary of some English soldier. I can only suppose that it was found by the Brazilians on one of those that fell. Anyhow, it stopped abruptly the night before the battle.

“But the account of that last day in the poor fellow’s life was certainly worth reading. I have it on me; but it’s too dark to read it here, and I will give you a resume. The first part of that entry is full of jokes, evidently flung about among the men, about somebody called the Vulture. It does not seem as if this person, whoever he was, was one of themselves, nor even an Englishman; neither is he exactly spoken of as one of the enemy. It sounds rather as if he were some local go-between and non-combatant; perhaps a guide or a journalist. He has been closeted with old Colonel Clancy; but is more often seen talking to the major. Indeed, the major is somewhat prominent in this soldier’s narrative; a lean, dark-haired man, apparently, of the name of Murray—a north of Ireland man and a Puritan. There are continual jests about the contrast between this Ulsterman’s austerity and the conviviality of Colonel Clancy. There is also some joke about the Vulture wearing bright-coloured clothes.

“But all these levities are scattered by what may well be called the note of a bugle. Behind the English camp and almost parallel to the river ran one of the few great roads of that district. Westward the road curved round towards the river, which it crossed by the bridge before mentioned. To the east the road swept backwards into the wilds, and some two miles along it was the next English outpost. From this direction there came along the road that evening a glitter and clatter of light cavalry, in which even the simple diarist could
recognise with astonishment the general with his staff. He rode the great white horse which you have seen so often in illustrated papers and Academy pictures; and you may be sure that the salute they gave him was not merely ceremonial. He, at least, wasted no time on ceremony, but, springing from the saddle immediately, mixed with the group of officers, and fell into emphatic though confidential speech. What struck our friend the diarist most was his special disposition to discuss matters with Major Murray; but, indeed, such a selection, so long as it was not marked, was in no way unnatural. The two men were made for sympathy; they were men who ‘read their Bibles’; they were both the old Evangelical type of officer. However this may be, it is certain that when the general mounted again he was still talking earnestly to Murray; and that as he walked his horse slowly down the road towards the river, the tall Ulsterman still walked by his bridle rein in earnest debate. The soldiers watched the two until they vanished behind a clump of trees where the road turned towards the river. The colonel had gone back to his tent, and the men to their pickets; the man with the diary lingered for another four minutes, and saw a marvellous sight.

“The great white horse which had marched slowly down the road, as it had marched in so many processions, flew back, galloping up the road towards them as if it were mad to win a race. At first they thought it had run away with the man on its back; but they soon saw that the general, a fine rider, was himself urging it to full speed. Horse and man swept up to them like a whirlwind; and then, reining up the reeling charger, the general turned on them a face like flame, and called for the colonel like the trumpet that wakes the dead.

“I conceive that all the earthquake events of that catastrophe tumbled on top of each other rather like lumber in the minds of men such as our friend with the diary. With the dazed excitement of a dream, they found themselves falling—literally falling—into their ranks, and learned that an attack was to be led at once across the river. The general and the major, it was said, had found out something at the bridge, and there was only just time to strike for life. The major had gone back at once to call up the reserve along the road behind; it was doubtful if even with that prompt appeal help could reach them in time. But they must pass the stream that night, and seize the heights by morning. It is with the very stir and throb of that romantic nocturnal march that the diary suddenly ends.”

Father Brown had mounted ahead; for the woodland path grew smaller, steeper, and more twisted, till they felt as if they were ascending a winding staircase. The priest’s voice came from above out of the darkness.

“There was one other little and enormous thing. When the general urged them
to their chivalric charge he half drew his sword from the scabbard; and then, as if ashamed of such melodrama, thrust it back again. The sword again, you see.”

A half-light broke through the network of boughs above them, flinging the ghost of a net about their feet; for they were mounting again to the faint luminosity of the naked night. Flambeau felt truth all round him as an atmosphere, but not as an idea. He answered with bewildered brain: “Well, what’s the matter with the sword? Officers generally have swords, don’t they?”

“They are not often mentioned in modern war,” said the other dispassionately; “but in this affair one falls over the blessed sword everywhere.”

“Well, what is there in that?” growled Flambeau; “it was a twopence coloured sort of incident; the old man’s blade breaking in his last battle. Anyone might bet the papers would get hold of it, as they have. On all these tombs and things it’s shown broken at the point. I hope you haven’t dragged me through this Polar expedition merely because two men with an eye for a picture saw St. Clare’s broken sword.”

“No,” cried Father Brown, with a sharp voice like a pistol shot; “but who saw his unbroken sword?”

“What do you mean?” cried the other, and stood still under the stars. They had come abruptly out of the grey gates of the wood.

“I say, who saw his unbroken sword?” repeated Father Brown obstinately. “Not the writer of the diary, anyhow; the general sheathed it in time.”

Flambeau looked about him in the moonlight, as a man struck blind might look in the sun; and his friend went on, for the first time with eagerness:

“Flambeau,” he cried, “I cannot prove it, even after hunting through the tombs. But I am sure of it. Let me add just one more tiny fact that tips the whole thing over. The colonel, by a strange chance, was one of the first struck by a bullet. He was struck long before the troops came to close quarters. But he saw St. Clare’s sword broken. Why was it broken? How was it broken? My friend, it was broken before the battle.”

“Oh!” said his friend, with a sort of forlorn jocularity; “and pray where is the other piece?”

“I can tell you,” said the priest promptly. “In the northeast corner of the cemetery of the Protestant Cathedral at Belfast.”

“Indeed?” inquired the other. “Have you looked for it?”

“I couldn’t,” replied Brown, with frank regret. “There’s a great marble monument on top of it; a monument to the heroic Major Murray, who fell fighting gloriously at the famous Battle of the Black River.”
Flambeau seemed suddenly galvanised into existence. “You mean,” he cried hoarsely, “that General St. Clare hated Murray, and murdered him on the field of battle because—”

“You are still full of good and pure thoughts,” said the other. “It was worse than that.”

“Well,” said the large man, “my stock of evil imagination is used up.”

The priest seemed really doubtful where to begin, and at last he said again:

“Where would a wise man hide a leaf? In the forest.”

The other did not answer.

“If there were no forest, he would make a forest. And if he wished to hide a dead leaf, he would make a dead forest.”

There was still no reply, and the priest added still more mildly and quietly:

“And if a man had to hide a dead body, he would make a field of dead bodies to hide it in.”

Flambeau began to stamp forward with an intolerance of delay in time or space; but Father Brown went on as if he were continuing the last sentence:

“Sir Arthur St. Clare, as I have already said, was a man who read his Bible. That was what was the matter with him. When will people understand that it is useless for a man to read his Bible unless he also reads everybody else’s Bible? A printer reads a Bible for misprints. A Mormon reads his Bible, and finds polygamy; a Christian Scientist reads his, and finds we have no arms and legs. St. Clare was an old Anglo-Indian Protestant soldier. Now, just think what that might mean; and, for Heaven’s sake, don’t cant about it. It might mean a man physically formidable living under a tropic sun in an Oriental society, and soaking himself without sense or guidance in an Oriental Book. Of course, he read the Old Testament rather than the New. Of course, he found in the Old Testament anything that he wanted—lust, tyranny, treason. Oh, I dare say he was honest, as you call it. But what is the good of a man being honest in his worship of dishonesty?

“In each of the hot and secret countries to which the man went he kept a harem, he tortured witnesses, he amassed shameful gold; but certainly he would have said with steady eyes that he did it to the glory of the Lord. My own theology is sufficiently expressed by asking which Lord? Anyhow, there is this about such evil, that it opens door after door in hell, and always into smaller and smaller chambers. This is the real case against crime, that a man does not become wilder and wilder, but only meaner and meaner. St. Clare was soon suffocated by difficulties of bribery and blackmail; and needed more and more
cash. And by the time of the Battle of the Black River he had fallen from world to world to that place which Dante makes the lowest floor of the universe.”

“What do you mean?” asked his friend again.

“I mean that,” retorted the cleric, and suddenly pointed at a puddle sealed with ice that shone in the moon. “Do you remember whom Dante put in the last circle of ice?”

“The traitors,” said Flambeau, and shuddered. As he looked around at the inhuman landscape of trees, with taunting and almost obscene outlines, he could almost fancy he was Dante, and the priest with the rivulet of a voice was, indeed, a Virgil leading him through a land of eternal sins.

The voice went on: “Olivier, as you know, was quixotic, and would not permit a secret service and spies. The thing, however, was done, like many other things, behind his back. It was managed by my old friend Espado; he was the bright-clad fop, whose hook nose got him called the Vulture. Posing as a sort of philanthropist at the front, he felt his way through the English Army, and at last got his fingers on its one corrupt man—please God!—and that man at the top. St. Clare was in foul need of money, and mountains of it. The discredited family doctor was threatening those extraordinary exposures that afterwards began and were broken off; tales of monstrous and prehistoric things in Park Lane; things done by an English Evangelist that smelt like human sacrifice and hordes of slaves. Money was wanted, too, for his daughter’s dowry; for to him the fame of wealth was as sweet as wealth itself. He snapped the last thread, whispered the word to Brazil, and wealth poured in from the enemies of England. But another man had talked to Espado the Vulture as well as he. Somehow the dark, grim young major from Ulster had guessed the hideous truth; and when they walked slowly together down that road towards the bridge Murray was telling the general that he must resign instantly, or be court-martialled and shot. The general temporised with him till they came to the fringe of tropic trees by the bridge; and there by the singing river and the sunlit palms (for I can see the picture) the general drew his sabre and plunged it through the body of the major.”

The wintry road curved over a ridge in cutting frost, with cruel black shapes of bush and thicket; but Flambeau fancied that he saw beyond it faintly the edge of an aureole that was not starlight and moonlight, but some fire such as is made by men. He watched it as the tale drew to its close.

“St. Clare was a hell-hound, but he was a hound of breed. Never, I’ll swear, was he so lucid and so strong as when poor Murray lay a cold lump at his feet.
Never in all his triumphs, as Captain Keith said truly, was the great man so great as he was in this last world-despised defeat. He looked coolly at his weapon to wipe off the blood; he saw the point he had planted between his victim’s shoulders had broken off in the body. He saw quite calmly, as through a club windowpane, all that must follow. He saw that men must find the unaccountable corpse; must extract the unaccountable sword-point; must notice the unaccountable broken sword—or absence of sword. He had killed, but not silenced. But his imperious intellect rose against the facer; there was one way yet. He could make the corpse less unaccountable. He could create a hill of corpses to cover this one. In twenty minutes eight hundred English soldiers were marching down to their death.”

The warmer glow behind the black winter wood grew richer and brighter, and Flambeau strode on to reach it. Father Brown also quickened his stride; but he seemed merely absorbed in his tale.

“Such was the valour of that English thousand, and such the genius of their commander, that if they had at once attacked the hill, even their mad march might have met some luck. But the evil mind that played with them like pawns had other aims and reasons. They must remain in the marshes by the bridge at least till British corpses should be a common sight there. Then for the last grand scene; the silver-haired soldier-saint would give up his shattered sword to save further slaughter. Oh, it was well organised for an impromptu. But I think (I cannot prove), I think that it was while they stuck there in the bloody mire that someone doubted—and someone guessed.”

He was mute a moment, and then said: “There is a voice from nowhere that tells me the man who guessed was the lover . . . the man to wed the old man’s child.”

“But what about Olivier and the hanging?” asked Flambeau.

“Olivier, partly from chivalry, partly from policy, seldom encumbered his march with captives,” explained the narrator. “He released everybody in most cases. He released everybody in this case.”

“Everybody but the general,” said the tall man.

“Everybody,” said the priest.

Flambeau knit his black brows. “I don’t grasp it all yet,” he said.

“There is another picture, Flambeau,” said Brown in his more mystical undertone. “I can’t prove it; but I can do more—I can see it. There is a camp breaking up on the bare, torrid hills at morning, and Brazilian uniforms massed in blocks and columns to march. There is the red shirt and long black beard of
Olivier, which blows as he stands, his broad-brimmed hat in his hand. He is saying farewell to the great enemy he is setting free—the simple, snow-headed English veteran, who thanks him in the name of his men. The English remnant stand behind at attention; beside them are stores and vehicles for the retreat. The drums roll; the Brazilians are moving; the English are still like statues. So they abide till the last hum and flash of the enemy have faded from the tropic horizon. Then they alter their postures all at once, like dead men coming to life; they turn their fifty faces upon the general—faces not to be forgotten.”

Flambeau gave a great jump. “Ah,” he cried, “you don’t mean—”

“Yes,” said Father Brown in a deep, moving voice. “It was an English hand that put the rope round St. Clare’s neck; I believe the hand that put the ring on his daughter’s finger. They were English hands that dragged him up to the tree of shame; the hands of men that had adored him and followed him to victory. And they were English souls (God pardon and endure us all!) who stared at him swinging in that foreign sun on the green gallows of palm, and prayed in their hatred that he might drop off it into hell.”

As the two topped the ridge there burst on them the strong scarlet light of a red-curtained English inn. It stood sideways in the road, as if standing aside in the amplitude of hospitality. Its three doors stood open with invitation; and even where they stood they could hear the hum and laughter of humanity happy for a night.

“I need not tell you more,” said Father Brown. “They tried him in the wilderness and destroyed him; and then, for the honour of England and of his daughter, they took an oath to seal up for ever the story of the traitor’s purse and the assassin’s sword blade. Perhaps—Heaven help them—they tried to forget it. Let us try to forget it, anyhow; here is our inn.”

“With all my heart,” said Flambeau, and was just striding into the bright, noisy bar when he stepped back and almost fell on the road.

“Look there, in the devil’s name!” he cried, and pointed rigidly at the square wooden sign that overhung the road. It showed dimly the crude shape of a sabre hilt and a shortened blade; and was inscribed in false archaic lettering, “The Sign of the Broken Sword.”

“Were you not prepared?” asked Father Brown gently. “He is the god of this country; half the inns and parks and streets are named after him and his story.”

“I thought we had done with the leper,” cried Flambeau, and spat on the road.

“You will never have done with him in England,” said the priest, looking down, “while brass is strong and stone abides. His marble statues will erect the
souls of proud, innocent boys for centuries, his village tomb will smell of loyalty as of lilies. Millions who never knew him shall love him like a father—this man whom the last few that knew him dealt with like dung. He shall be a saint; and the truth shall never be told of him, because I have made up my mind at last. There is so much good and evil in breaking secrets, that I put my conduct to a test. All these newspapers will perish; the anti-Brazil boom is already over; Olivier is already honoured everywhere. But I told myself that if anywhere, by name, in metal or marble that will endure like the pyramids, Colonel Clancy, or Captain Keith, or President Olivier, or any innocent man was wrongly blamed, then I would speak. If it were only that St. Clare was wrongly praised, I would be silent. And I will.”

They plunged into the red-curtained tavern, which was not only cosy, but even luxurious inside. On a table stood a silver model of the tomb of St. Clare, the silver head bowed, the silver sword broken. On the walls were coloured photographs of the same scene, and of the system of wagonettes that took tourists to see it. They sat down on the comfortable padded benches.

“Come, it’s cold,” cried Father Brown; “let’s have some wine or beer.”

“Or brandy,” said Flambeau.
Both by calling and conviction Father Brown knew better than most of us, that every man is dignified when he is dead. But even he felt a pang of incongruity when he was knocked up at daybreak and told that Sir Aaron Armstrong had been murdered. There was something absurd and unseemly about secret violence in connection with so entirely entertaining and popular a figure. For Sir Aaron Armstrong was entertaining to the point of being comic; and popular in such a manner as to be almost legendary. It was like hearing that Sunny Jim had hanged himself; or that Mr. Pickwick had died in Hanwell. For though Sir Aaron was a philanthropist, and thus dealt with the darker side of our society, he prided himself on dealing with it in the brightest possible style. His political and social speeches were cataracts of anecdotes and “loud laughter”; his bodily health was of a bursting sort; his ethics were all optimism; and he dealt with the Drink problem (his favourite topic) with that immortal or even monotonous gaiety which is so often a mark of the prosperous total abstainer.

The established story of his conversion was familiar on the more puritanic platforms and pulpits, how he had been, when only a boy, drawn away from Scotch theology to Scotch whisky, and how he had risen out of both and become (as he modestly put it) what he was. Yet his wide white beard, cherubic face, and sparkling spectacles, at the numberless dinners and congresses where they appeared, made it hard to believe, somehow, that he had ever been anything so morbid as either a dram-drinker or a Calvinist. He was, one felt, the most seriously merry of all the sons of men.

He had lived on the rural skirt of Hampstead in a handsome house, high but not broad, a modern and prosaic tower. The narrowest of its narrow sides overhung the steep green bank of a railway, and was shaken by passing trains. Sir Aaron Armstrong, as he boisterously explained, had no nerves. But if the train had often given a shock to the house, that morning the tables were turned, and it was the house that gave a shock to the train.

The engine slowed down and stopped just beyond that point where an angle of the house impinged upon the sharp slope of turf. The arrest of most mechanical things must be slow; but the living cause of this had been very rapid. A man clad completely in black, even (it was remembered) to the dreadful detail of black gloves, appeared on the ridge above the engine, and waved his black hands like some sable windmill. This in itself would hardly have stopped even a lingering
train. But there came out of him a cry which was talked of afterwards as something utterly unnatural and new. It was one of those shouts that are horridly distinct even when we cannot hear what is shouted. The word in this case was “Murder!”

But the engine-driver swears he would have pulled up just the same if he had heard only the dreadful and definite accent and not the word.

The train once arrested, the most superficial stare could take in many features of the tragedy. The man in black on the green bank was Sir Aaron Armstrong’s man-servant Magnus. The baronet in his optimism had often laughed at the black gloves of this dismal attendant; but no one was likely to laugh at him just now.

So soon as an inquirer or two had stepped off the line and across the smoky hedge, they saw, rolled down almost to the bottom of the bank, the body of an old man in a yellow dressing-gown with a very vivid scarlet lining. A scrap of rope seemed caught about his leg, entangled presumably in a struggle. There was a smear or so of blood, though very little; but the body was bent or broken into a posture impossible to any living thing. It was Sir Aaron Armstrong. A few more bewildered moments brought out a big fair-bearded man, whom some travellers could salute as the dead man’s secretary, Patrick Royce, once well known in Bohemian society and even famous in the Bohemian arts. In a manner more vague, but even more convincing, he echoed the agony of the servant. By the time the third figure of that household, Alice Armstrong, daughter of the dead man, had come already tottering and waving into the garden, the engine-driver had put a stop to his stoppage. The whistle had blown and the train had panted on to get help from the next station.

Father Brown had been thus rapidly summoned at the request of Patrick Royce, the big ex-Bohemian secretary. Royce was an Irishman by birth; and that casual kind of Catholic that never remembers his religion until he is really in a hole. But Royce’s request might have been less promptly complied with if one of the official detectives had not been a friend and admirer of the unofficial Flambeau; and it was impossible to be a friend of Flambeau without hearing numberless stories about Father Brown. Hence, while the young detective (whose name was Merton) led the little priest across the fields to the railway, their talk was more confidential than could be expected between two total strangers.

“As far as I can see,” said Mr. Merton candidly, “there is no sense to be made of it at all. There is nobody one can suspect. Magnus is a solemn old fool; far too much of a fool to be an assassin. Royce has been the baronet’s best friend for
years; and his daughter undoubtedly adored him. Besides, it’s all too absurd. Who would kill such a cheery old chap as Armstrong? Who could dip his hands in the gore of an after-dinner speaker? It would be like killing Father Christmas.”

“Yes, it was a cheery house,” assented Father Brown. “It was a cheery house while he was alive. Do you think it will be cheery now he is dead?”

Merton started a little and regarded his companion with an enlivened eye. “Now he is dead?” he repeated.

“Yes,” continued the priest stolidly, “he was cheerful. But did he communicate his cheerfulness? Frankly, was anyone else in the house cheerful but he?”

A window in Merton’s mind let in that strange light of surprise in which we see for the first time things we have known all along. He had often been to the Armstrongs, on little police jobs of the philanthropist; and, now he came to think of it, it was in itself a depressing house. The rooms were very high and very cold; the decoration mean and provincial; the draughty corridors were lit by electricity that was bleaker than moonlight. And though the old man’s scarlet face and silver beard had blazed like a bonfire in each room or passage in turn, it did not leave any warmth behind it. Doubtless this spectral discomfort in the place was partly due to the very vitality and exuberance of its owner; he needed no stoves or lamps, he would say, but carried his own warmth with him. But when Merton recalled the other inmates, he was compelled to confess that they also were as shadows of their lord. The moody man-servant, with his monstrous black gloves, was almost a nightmare; Royce, the secretary, was solid enough, a big bull of a man, in tweeds, with a short beard; but the straw-coloured beard was startlingly salted with grey like the tweeds, and the broad forehead was barred with premature wrinkles. He was good-natured enough also, but it was a sad sort of good-nature, almost a heart-broken sort—he had the general air of being some sort of failure in life. As for Armstrong’s daughter, it was almost incredible that she was his daughter; she was so pallid in colour and sensitive in outline. She was graceful, but there was a quiver in the very shape of her that was like the lines of an aspen. Merton had sometimes wondered if she had learnt to quail at the crash of the passing trains.

“You see,” said Father Brown, blinking modestly, “I’m not sure that the Armstrong cheerfulness is so very cheerful—for other people. You say that nobody could kill such a happy old man, but I’m not sure; ne nos inducas in tentationem. If ever I murdered somebody,” he added quite simply, “I dare say it might be an Optimist.”

“People like frequent laughter,” answered Father Brown, “but I don’t think they like a permanent smile. Cheerfulness without humour is a very trying thing.”

They walked some way in silence along the windy grassy bank by the rail, and just as they came under the far-flung shadow of the tall Armstrong house, Father Brown said suddenly, like a man throwing away a troublesome thought rather than offering it seriously: “Of course, drink is neither good nor bad in itself. But I can’t help sometimes feeling that men like Armstrong want an occasional glass of wine to sadden them.”

Merton’s official superior, a grizzled and capable detective named Gilder, was standing on the green bank waiting for the coroner, talking to Patrick Royce, whose big shoulders and bristly beard and hair towered above him. This was the more noticeable because Royce walked always with a sort of powerful stoop, and seemed to be going about his small clerical and domestic duties in a heavy and humbled style, like a buffalo drawing a go-cart.

He raised his head with unusual pleasure at the sight of the priest, and took him a few paces apart. Meanwhile Merton was addressing the older detective respectfully indeed, but not without a certain boyish impatience.

“Well, Mr. Gilder, have you got much farther with the mystery?”

“There is no mystery,” replied Gilder, as he looked under dreamy eyelids at the rooks.

“Well, there is for me, at any rate,” said Merton, smiling.

“It is simple enough, my boy,” observed the senior investigator, stroking his grey, pointed beard. “Three minutes after you’d gone for Mr. Royce’s parson the whole thing came out. You know that pasty-faced servant in the black gloves who stopped the train?”

“I should know him anywhere. Somehow he rather gave me the creeps.”

“Well,” drawled Gilder, “when the train had gone on again, that man had gone too. Rather a cool criminal, don’t you think, to escape by the very train that went off for the police?”

“You’re pretty sure, I suppose,” remarked the young man, “that he really did kill his master?”

“Yes, my son, I’m pretty sure,” replied Gilder drily, “for the trifling reason that he has gone off with twenty thousand pounds in papers that were in his master’s desk. No, the only thing worth calling a difficulty is how he killed him. The skull seems broken as with some big weapon, but there’s no weapon at all
lying about, and the murderer would have found it awkward to carry it away, unless the weapon was too small to be noticed.”

“Perhaps the weapon was too big to be noticed,” said the priest, with an odd little giggle.

Gilder looked round at this wild remark, and rather sternly asked Brown what he meant.

“Silly way of putting it, I know,” said Father Brown apologetically. “Sounds like a fairy tale. But poor Armstrong was killed with a giant’s club, a great green club, too big to be seen, and which we call the earth. He was broken against this green bank we are standing on.”

“How do you mean?” asked the detective quickly.

Father Brown turned his moon face up to the narrow facade of the house and blinked hopelessly up. Following his eyes, they saw that right at the top of this otherwise blind back quarter of the building, an attic window stood open.

“Don’t you see,” he explained, pointing a little awkwardly like a child, “he was thrown down from there?”

Gilder frowningly scrutinised the window, and then said: “Well, it is certainly possible. But I don’t see why you are so sure about it.”

Brown opened his grey eyes wide. “Why,” he said, “there’s a bit of rope round the dead man’s leg. Don’t you see that other bit of rope up there caught at the corner of the window?”

At that height the thing looked like the faintest particle of dust or hair, but the shrewd old investigator was satisfied. “You’re quite right, sir,” he said to Father Brown; “that is certainly one to you.”

Almost as he spoke a special train with one carriage took the curve of the line on their left, and, stopping, disgorged another group of policemen, in whose midst was the hangdog visage of Magnus, the absconded servant.

“By Jove! they’ve got him,” cried Gilder, and stepped forward with quite a new alertness.

“Have you got the money!” he cried to the first policeman.

The man looked him in the face with a rather curious expression and said: “No.” Then he added: “At least, not here.”

“Which is the inspector, please?” asked the man called Magnus.

When he spoke everyone instantly understood how this voice had stopped a train. He was a dull-looking man with flat black hair, a colourless face, and a faint suggestion of the East in the level slits in his eyes and mouth. His blood and name, indeed, had remained dubious, ever since Sir Aaron had “rescued”
him from a waitership in a London restaurant, and (as some said) from more infamous things. But his voice was as vivid as his face was dead. Whether through exactitude in a foreign language, or in deference to his master (who had been somewhat deaf), Magnus’s tones had a peculiarly ringing and piercing quality, and the whole group quite jumped when he spoke.

“I always knew this would happen,” he said aloud with brazen blandness. “My poor old master made game of me for wearing black; but I always said I should be ready for his funeral.”

And he made a momentary movement with his two dark-gloved hands.

“Sergeant,” said Inspector Gilder, eyeing the black hands with wrath, “aren’t you putting the bracelets on this fellow; he looks pretty dangerous.”

“Well, sir,” said the sergeant, with the same odd look of wonder, “I don’t know that we can.”

“What do you mean?” asked the other sharply. “Haven’t you arrested him?”

A faint scorn widened the slit-like mouth, and the whistle of an approaching train seemed oddly to echo the mockery.

“We arrested him,” replied the sergeant gravely, “just as he was coming out of the police station at Highgate, where he had deposited all his master’s money in the care of Inspector Robinson.”

Gilder looked at the man-servant in utter amazement. “Why on earth did you do that?” he asked of Magnus.

“To keep it safe from the criminal, of course,” replied that person placidly.

“Surely,” said Gilder, “Sir Aaron’s money might have been safely left with Sir Aaron’s family.”

The tail of his sentence was drowned in the roar of the train as it went rocking and clanking; but through all the hell of noises to which that unhappy house was periodically subject, they could hear the syllables of Magnus’s answer, in all their bell-like distinctness: “I have no reason to feel confidence in Sir Aaron’s family.”

All the motionless men had the ghostly sensation of the presence of some new person; and Merton was scarcely surprised when he looked up and saw the pale face of Armstrong’s daughter over Father Brown’s shoulder. She was still young and beautiful in a silvery style, but her hair was of so dusty and hueless a brown that in some shadows it seemed to have turned totally grey.

“Be careful what you say,” said Royce gruffly, “you’ll frighten Miss Armstrong.”

“I hope so,” said the man with the clear voice.
As the woman winced and everyone else wondered, he went on: “I am somewhat used to Miss Armstrong’s tremors. I have seen her trembling off and on for years. And some said she was shaking with cold and some she was shaking with fear, but I know she was shaking with hate and wicked anger—fiends that have had their feast this morning. She would have been away by now with her lover and all the money but for me. Ever since my poor old master prevented her from marrying that tipsy blackguard—”

“Stop,” said Gilder very sternly. “We have nothing to do with your family fancies or suspicions. Unless you have some practical evidence, your mere opinions—”

“Oh! I’ll give you practical evidence,” cut in Magnus, in his hacking accent. “You’ll have to subpoena me, Mr. Inspector, and I shall have to tell the truth. And the truth is this: An instant after the old man was pitched bleeding out of the window, I ran into the attic, and found his daughter swooning on the floor with a red dagger still in her hand. Allow me to hand that also to the proper authorities.” He took from his tail-pocket a long horn-hilted knife with a red smear on it, and handed it politely to the sergeant. Then he stood back again, and his slits of eyes almost faded from his face in one fat Chinese sneer.

Merton felt an almost bodily sickness at the sight of him; and he muttered to Gilder: “Surely you would take Miss Armstrong’s word against his?”

Father Brown suddenly lifted a face so absurdly fresh that it looked somehow as if he had just washed it. “Yes,” he said, radiating innocence, “but is Miss Armstrong’s word against his?”

The girl uttered a startled, singular little cry; everyone looked at her. Her figure was rigid as if paralysed; only her face within its frame of faint brown hair was alive with an appalling surprise. She stood like one of a sudden lassoed and throttled.

“This man,” said Mr. Gilder gravely, “actually says that you were found grasping a knife, insensible, after the murder.”

“He says the truth,” answered Alice.

The next fact of which they were conscious was that Patrick Royce strode with his great stooping head into their ring and uttered the singular words: “Well, if I’ve got to go, I’ll have a bit of pleasure first.”

His huge shoulder heaved and he sent an iron fist smash into Magnus’s bland Mongolian visage, laying him on the lawn as flat as a starfish. Two or three of the police instantly put their hands on Royce; but to the rest it seemed as if all reason had broken up and the universe were turning into a brainless
None of that, Mr. Royce,” Gilder had called out authoritatively. “I shall arrest you for assault.”

“No, you won’t,” answered the secretary in a voice like an iron gong, “you will arrest me for murder.”

Gilder threw an alarmed glance at the man knocked down; but since that outraged person was already sitting up and wiping a little blood off a substantially uninjured face, he only said shortly: “What do you mean?”

“It is quite true, as this fellow says,” explained Royce, “that Miss Armstrong fainted with a knife in her hand. But she had not snatched the knife to attack her father, but to defend him.”

“To defend him,” repeated Gilder gravely. “Against whom?”

“Against me,” answered the secretary.

Alice looked at him with a complex and baffling face; then she said in a low voice: “After it all, I am still glad you are brave.”

“Come upstairs,” said Patrick Royce heavily, “and I will show you the whole cursed thing.”

The attic, which was the secretary’s private place (and rather a small cell for so large a hermit), had indeed all the vestiges of a violent drama. Near the centre of the floor lay a large revolver as if flung away; nearer to the left was rolled a whisky bottle, open but not quite empty. The cloth of the little table lay dragged and trampled, and a length of cord, like that found on the corpse, was cast wildly across the windowsill. Two vases were smashed on the mantelpiece and one on the carpet.

“J was drunk,” said Royce; and this simplicity in the prematurely battered man somehow had the pathos of the first sin of a baby.

“You all know about me,” he continued huskily; “everybody knows how my story began, and it may as well end like that too. I was called a clever man once, and might have been a happy one; Armstrong saved the remains of a brain and body from the taverns, and was always kind to me in his own way, poor fellow! Only he wouldn’t let me marry Alice here; and it will always be said that he was right enough. Well, you can form your own conclusions, and you won’t want me to go into details. That is my whisky bottle half emptied in the corner; that is my revolver quite emptied on the carpet. It was the rope from my box that was found on the corpse, and it was from my window the corpse was thrown. You need not set detectives to grub up my tragedy; it is a common enough weed in this world. I give myself to the gallows; and, by God, that is enough!”
At a sufficiently delicate sign, the police gathered round the large man to lead him away; but their unobtrusiveness was somewhat staggered by the remarkable appearance of Father Brown, who was on his hands and knees on the carpet in the doorway, as if engaged in some kind of undignified prayers. Being a person utterly insensible to the social figure he cut, he remained in this posture, but turned a bright round face up at the company, presenting the appearance of a quadruped with a very comic human head.

“I say,” he said good-naturedly, “this really won’t do at all, you know. At the beginning you said we’d found no weapon. But now we’re finding too many; there’s the knife to stab, and the rope to strangle, and the pistol to shoot; and after all he broke his neck by falling out of a window! It won’t do. It’s not economical.” And he shook his head at the ground as a horse does grazing.

Inspector Gilder had opened his mouth with serious intentions, but before he could speak the grotesque figure on the floor had gone on quite volubly.

“And now three quite impossible things. First, these holes in the carpet, where the six bullets have gone in. Why on earth should anybody fire at the carpet? A drunken man lets fly at his enemy’s head, the thing that’s grinning at him. He doesn’t pick a quarrel with his feet, or lay siege to his slippers. And then there’s the rope”—and having done with the carpet the speaker lifted his hands and put them in his pocket, but continued unaffectedly on his knees—“in what conceivable intoxication would anybody try to put a rope round a man’s neck and finally put it round his leg? Royce, anyhow, was not so drunk as that, or he would be sleeping like a log by now. And, plainest of all, the whisky bottle. You suggest a dipsomaniac fought for the whisky bottle, and then having won, rolled it away in a corner, spilling one half and leaving the other. That is the very last thing a dipsomaniac would do.”

He scrambled awkwardly to his feet, and said to the self-accused murderer in tones of limpid penitence: “I’m awfully sorry, my dear sir, but your tale is really rubbish.”

“Sir,” said Alice Armstrong in a low tone to the priest, “can I speak to you alone for a moment?”

This request forced the communicative cleric out of the gangway, and before he could speak in the next room, the girl was talking with strange incisiveness.

“You are a clever man,” she said, “and you are trying to save Patrick, I know. But it’s no use. The core of all this is black, and the more things you find out the more there will be against the miserable man I love.”

“Why?” asked Brown, looking at her steadily.
“Because,” she answered equally steadily, “I saw him commit the crime myself.”

“Ahh!” said the unmoved Brown, “and what did he do?”

“I was in this room next to them,” she explained; “both doors were closed, but I suddenly heard a voice, such as I had never heard on earth, roaring ‘Hell, hell, hell,’ again and again, and then the two doors shook with the first explosion of the revolver. Thrice again the thing banged before I got the two doors open and found the room full of smoke; but the pistol was smoking in my poor, mad Patrick’s hand; and I saw him fire the last murderous volley with my own eyes. Then he leapt on my father, who was clinging in terror to the windowsill, and, grappling, tried to strangle him with the rope, which he threw over his head, but which slipped over his struggling shoulders to his feet. Then it tightened round one leg and Patrick dragged him along like a maniac. I snatched a knife from the mat, and, rushing between them, managed to cut the rope before I fainted.”

“I see,” said Father Brown, with the same wooden civility. “Thank you.”

As the girl collapsed under her memories, the priest passed stiffly into the next room, where he found Gilder and Merton alone with Patrick Royce, who sat in a chair, handcuffed. There he said to the Inspector submissively:

“Might I say a word to the prisoner in your presence; and might he take off those funny cuffs for a minute?”

“He is a very powerful man,” said Merton in an undertone. “Why do you want them taken off?”

“Why, I thought,” replied the priest humbly, “that perhaps I might have the very great honour of shaking hands with him.”

Both detectives stared, and Father Brown added: “Won’t you tell them about it, sir?”

The man on the chair shook his tousled head, and the priest turned impatiently.

“Then I will,” he said. “Private lives are more important than public reputations. I am going to save the living, and let the dead bury their dead.”

He went to the fatal window, and blinked out of it as he went on talking.

“I told you that in this case there were too many weapons and only one death. I tell you now that they were not weapons, and were not used to cause death. All those grisly tools, the noose, the bloody knife, the exploding pistol, were instruments of a curious mercy. They were not used to kill Sir Aaron, but to save him.”

“To save him!” repeated Gilder. “And from what?”
“From himself,” said Father Brown. “He was a suicidal maniac.”

“What?” cried Merton in an incredulous tone. “And the Religion of Cheerfulness—”

“It is a cruel religion,” said the priest, looking out of the window. “Why couldn’t they let him weep a little, like his fathers before him? His plans stiffened, his views grew cold; behind that merry mask was the empty mind of the atheist. At last, to keep up his hilarious public level, he fell back on that dram-drinking he had abandoned long ago. But there is this horror about alcoholism in a sincere teetotaler: that he pictures and expects that psychological inferno from which he has warned others. It leapt upon poor Armstrong prematurely, and by this morning he was in such a case that he sat here and cried he was in hell, in so crazy a voice that his daughter did not know it. He was mad for death, and with the monkey tricks of the mad he had scattered round him death in many shapes—a running noose and his friend’s revolver and a knife. Royce entered accidentally and acted in a flash. He flung the knife on the mat behind him, snatched up the revolver, and having no time to unload it, emptied it shot after shot all over the floor. The suicide saw a fourth shape of death, and made a dash for the window. The rescuer did the only thing he could—ran after him with the rope and tried to tie him hand and foot. Then it was that the unlucky girl ran in, and misunderstanding the struggle, strove to slash her father free. At first she only slashed poor Royce’s knuckles, from which has come all the little blood in this affair. But, of course, you noticed that he left blood, but no wound, on that servant’s face? Only before the poor woman swooned, she did hack her father loose, so that he went crashing through that window into eternity.”

There was a long stillness slowly broken by the metallic noises of Gilder unlocking the handcuffs of Patrick Royce, to whom he said: “I think I should have told the truth, sir. You and the young lady are worth more than Armstrong’s obituary notices.”

“Confound Armstrong’s notices,” cried Royce roughly. “Don’t you see it was because she mustn’t know?”

“Mustn’t know what?” asked Merton.

“Why, that she killed her father, you fool!” roared the other. “He’d have been alive now but for her. It might craze her to know that.”

“No, I don’t think it would,” remarked Father Brown, as he picked up his hat. “I rather think I should tell her. Even the most murderous blunders don’t poison life like sins; anyhow, I think you may both be the happier now. I’ve got to go
back to the Deaf School.”

As he went out on to the gusty grass an acquaintance from Highgate stopped him and said:
  “The Coroner has arrived. The inquiry is just going to begin.”
  “I’ve got to get back to the Deaf School,” said Father Brown. “I’m sorry I can’t stop for the inquiry.”
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

THE WISDOM OF FATHER BROWN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ONE
THE ABSENCE OF MR GLASS

TWO
THE PARADISE OF THIEVES

THREE
THE DUEL OF DR HIRSCH

FOUR
THE MAN IN THE PASSAGE

FIVE
THE MISTAKE OF THE MACHINE

SIX
THE HEAD OF CAESAR

SEVEN
THE PURPLE WIG

EIGHT
THE PERISHING OF THE PENDRAGONS

NINE
THE GOD OF THE GONGS

TEN
THE SALAD OF COLONEL CRAY

ELEVEN
THE STRANGE CRIME OF JOHN BOULNOIS

TWELVE
THE FAIRY TALE OF FATHER BROWN
ONE

THE ABSENCE OF MR GLASS

THE consulting-rooms of Dr Orion Hood, the eminent criminologist and specialist in certain moral disorders, lay along the sea-front at Scarborough, in a series of very large and well-lighted french windows, which showed the North Sea like one endless outer wall of blue-green marble. In such a place the sea had something of the monotony of a blue-green dado: for the chambers themselves were ruled throughout by a terrible tidiness not unlike the terrible tidiness of the sea. It must not be supposed that Dr Hood’s apartments excluded luxury, or even poetry. These things were there, in their place; but one felt that they were never allowed out of their place. Luxury was there: there stood upon a special table eight or ten boxes of the best cigars; but they were built upon a plan so that the strongest were always nearest the wall and the mildest nearest the window. A tantalus containing three kinds of spirit, all of a liqueur excellence, stood always on this table of luxury; but the fanciful have asserted that the whisky, brandy, and rum seemed always to stand at the same level. Poetry was there: the left-hand corner of the room was lined with as complete a set of English classics as the right hand could show of English and foreign physiologists. But if one took a volume of Chaucer or Shelley from that rank, its absence irritated the mind like a gap in a man’s front teeth. One could not say the books were never read; probably they were, but there was a sense of their being chained to their places, like the Bibles in the old churches. Dr Hood treated his private book-shelf as if it were a public library. And if this strict scientific intangibility steeped even the shelves laden with lyrics and ballads and the tables laden with drink and tobacco, it goes without saying that yet more of such heathen holiness protected the other shelves that held the specialist’s library, and the other tables that sustained the frail and even fairylike instruments of chemistry or mechanics.

Dr Hood paced the length of his string of apartments, bounded—as the boys’ geographies say—on the east by the North Sea and on the west by the serried ranks of his sociological and criminologist library. He was clad in an artist’s velvet, but with none of an artist’s negligence; his hair was heavily shot with grey, but growing thick and healthy; his face was lean, but sanguine and expectant. Everything about him and his room indicated something at once rigid and restless, like that great northern sea by which (on pure principles of hygiene)
he had built his home.

Fate, being in a funny mood, pushed the door open and introduced into those long, strict, sea-flanked apartments one who was perhaps the most startling opposite of them and their master. In answer to a curt but civil summons, the door opened inwards and there shambled into the room a shapeless little figure, which seemed to find its own hat and umbrella as unmanageable as a mass of luggage. The umbrella was a black and prosaic bundle long past repair; the hat was a broad-curved black hat, clerical but not common in England; the man was the very embodiment of all that is homely and helpless.

The doctor regarded the new-comer with a restrained astonishment, not unlike that he would have shown if some huge but obviously harmless sea-beast had crawled into his room. The new-comer regarded the doctor with that beaming but breathless geniality which characterizes a corpulent charwoman who has just managed to stuff herself into an omnibus. It is a rich confusion of social self-congratulation and bodily disarray. His hat tumbled to the carpet, his heavy umbrella slipped between his knees with a thud; he reached after the one and ducks after the other, but with an unimpaired smile on his round face spoke simultaneously as follows:

“My name is Brown. Pray excuse me. I’ve come about that business of the MacNabs. I have heard, you often help people out of such troubles. Pray excuse me if I am wrong.”

By this time he had sprawlingly recovered the hat, and made an odd little bobbing bow over it, as if setting everything quite right.

“I hardly understand you,” replied the scientist, with a cold intensity of manner. “I fear you have mistaken the chambers. I am Dr Hood, and my work is almost entirely literary and educational. It is true that I have sometimes been consulted by the police in cases of peculiar difficulty and importance, but—”

“Oh, this is of the greatest importance,” broke in the little man called Brown. “Why, her mother won’t let them get engaged.” And he leaned back in his chair in radiant rationality.

The brows of Dr Hood were drawn down darkly, but the eyes under them were bright with something that might be anger or might be amusement. “And still,” he said, “I do not quite understand.”

“You see, they want to get married,” said the man with the clerical hat. “Maggie MacNab and young Todhunter want to get married. Now, what can be more important than that?”

The great Orion Hood’s scientific triumphs had deprived him of many things
—some said of his health, others of his God; but they had not wholly despoiled him of his sense of the absurd. At the last plea of the ingenuous priest a chuckle broke out of him from inside, and he threw himself into an arm-chair in an ironical attitude of the consulting physician.

“Mr Brown,” he said gravely, “it is quite fourteen and a half years since I was personally asked to test a personal problem: then it was the case of an attempt to poison the French President at a Lord Mayor’s Banquet. It is now, I understand, a question of whether some friend of yours called Maggie is a suitable fiancee for some friend of hers called Todhunter. Well, Mr Brown, I am a sportsman. I will take it on. I will give the MacNab family my best advice, as good as I gave the French Republic and the King of England—no, better: fourteen years better. I have nothing else to do this afternoon. Tell me your story.”

The little clergyman called Brown thanked him with unquestionable warmth, but still with a queer kind of simplicity. It was rather as if he were thanking a stranger in a smoking-room for some trouble in passing the matches, than as if he were (as he was) practically thanking the Curator of Kew Gardens for coming with him into a field to find a four-leaved clover. With scarcely a semi-colon after his hearty thanks, the little man began his recital:

“I told you my name was Brown; well, that’s the fact, and I’m the priest of the little Catholic Church I dare say you’ve seen beyond those straggly streets, where the town ends towards the north. In the last and straggliest of those streets which runs along the sea like a sea-wall there is a very honest but rather sharp-tempered member of my flock, a widow called MacNab. She has one daughter, and she lets lodgings, and between her and the daughter, and between her and the lodgers—well, I dare say there is a great deal to be said on both sides. At present she has only one lodger, the young man called Todhunter; but he has given more trouble than all the rest, for he wants to marry the young woman of the house.”

“And the young woman of the house,” asked Dr Hood, with huge and silent amusement, “what does she want?”

“Why, she wants to marry him,” cried Father Brown, sitting up eagerly. “That is just the awful complication.”

“It is indeed a hideous enigma,” said Dr Hood.

“This young James Todhunter,” continued the cleric, “is a very decent man so far as I know; but then nobody knows very much. He is a bright, brownish little fellow, agile like a monkey, clean-shaven like an actor, and obliging like a born courtier. He seems to have quite a pocketful of money, but nobody knows what
his trade is. Mrs MacNab, therefore (being of a pessimistic turn), is quite sure it is something dreadful, and probably connected with dynamite. The dynamite must be of a shy and noiseless sort, for the poor fellow only shuts himself up for several hours of the day and studies something behind a locked door. He declares his privacy is temporary and justified, and promises to explain before the wedding. That is all that anyone knows for certain, but Mrs MacNab will tell you a great deal more than even she is certain of. You know how the tales grow like grass on such a patch of ignorance as that. There are tales of two voices heard talking in the room; though, when the door is opened, Todhunter is always found alone. There are tales of a mysterious tall man in a silk hat, who once came out of the sea-mists and apparently out of the sea, stepping softly across the sandy fields and through the small back garden at twilight, till he was heard talking to the lodger at his open window. The colloquy seemed to end in a quarrel. Todhunter dashed down his window with violence, and the man in the high hat melted into the sea-fog again. This story is told by the family with the fiercest mystification; but I really think Mrs MacNab prefers her own original tale: that the Other Man (or whatever it is) crawls out every night from the big box in the corner, which is kept locked all day. You see, therefore, how this sealed door of Todhunter’s is treated as the gate of all the fancies and monstrosities of the ‘Thousand and One Nights.’ And yet there is the little fellow in his respectable black jacket, as punctual and innocent as a parlour clock. He pays his rent to the tick; he is practically a teetotaller; he is tirelessly kind with the younger children, and can keep them amused for a day on end; and, last and most urgent of all, he has made himself equally popular with the eldest daughter, who is ready to go to church with him tomorrow.”

A man warmly concerned with any large theories has always a relish for applying them to any triviality. The great specialist having condescended to the priest’s simplicity, condescended expansively. He settled himself with comfort in his arm-chair and began to talk in the tone of a somewhat absent-minded lecturer:

“Even in a minute instance, it is best to look first to the main tendencies of Nature. A particular flower may not be dead in early winter, but the flowers are dying; a particular pebble may never be wetted with the tide, but the tide is coming in. To the scientific eye all human history is a series of collective movements, destructions or migrations, like the massacre of flies in winter or the return of birds in spring. Now the root fact in all history is Race. Race produces religion; Race produces legal and ethical wars. There is no stronger case than
that of the wild, unworldly and perishing stock which we commonly call the Celts, of whom your friends the MacNabs are specimens. Small, swarthy, and of this dreamy and drifting blood, they accept easily the superstitious explanation of any incidents, just as they still accept (you will excuse me for saying) that superstitious explanation of all incidents which you and your Church represent. It is not remarkable that such people, with the sea moaning behind them and the Church (excuse me again) droning in front of them, should put fantastic features into what are probably plain events. You, with your small parochial responsibilities, see only this particular Mrs MacNab, terrified with this particular tale of two voices and a tall man out of the sea. But the man with the scientific imagination sees, as it were, the whole clans of MacNab scattered over the whole world, in its ultimate average as uniform as a tribe of birds. He sees thousands of Mrs MacNabs, in thousands of houses, dropping their little drop of morbidity in the tea-cups of their friends; he sees—”

Before the scientist could conclude his sentence, another and more impatient summons sounded from without; someone with swishing skirts was marshalled hurriedly down the corridor, and the door opened on a young girl, decently dressed but disordered and red-hot with haste. She had sea-blown blonde hair, and would have been entirely beautiful if her cheek-bones had not been, in the Scotch manner, a little high in relief as well as in colour. Her apology was almost as abrupt as a command.

“I’m sorry to interrupt you, sir,” she said, “but I had to follow Father Brown at once; it’s nothing less than life or death.”

Father Brown began to get to his feet in some disorder. “Why, what has happened, Maggie?” he said.

“James has been murdered, for all I can make out,” answered the girl, still breathing hard from her rush. “That man Glass has been with him again; I heard them talking through the door quite plain. Two separate voices: for James speaks low, with a burr, and the other voice was high and quavery.”

“That man Glass?” repeated the priest in some perplexity.

“I know his name is Glass,” answered the girl, in great impatience. “I heard it through the door. They were quarrelling—about money, I think—for I heard James say again and again, ‘That’s right, Mr Glass,’ or ‘No, Mr Glass,’ and then, ‘Two or three, Mr Glass.’ But we’re talking too much; you must come at once, and there may be time yet.”

“But time for what?” asked Dr Hood, who had been studying the young lady with marked interest. “What is there about Mr Glass and his money troubles that
should impel such urgency?"

"I tried to break down the door and couldn’t," answered the girl shortly, "Then I ran to the back-yard, and managed to climb on to the window-sill that looks into the room. It was an dim, and seemed to be empty, but I swear I saw James lying huddled up in a corner, as if he were drugged or strangled."

"This is very serious," said Father Brown, gathering his errant hat and umbrella and standing up; "in point of fact I was just putting your case before this gentleman, and his view—"

"Has been largely altered," said the scientist gravely. "I do not think this young lady is so Celtic as I had supposed. As I have nothing else to do, I will put on my hat and stroll down town with you."

In a few minutes all three were approaching the dreary tail of the MacNabs’ street: the girl with the stern and breathless stride of the mountaineer, the criminologist with a lounging grace (which was not without a certain leopard-like swiftness), and the priest at an energetic trot entirely devoid of distinction. The aspect of this edge of the town was not entirely without justification for the doctor’s hints about desolate moods and environments. The scattered houses stood farther and farther apart in a broken string along the seashore; the afternoon was closing with a premature and partly lurid twilight; the sea was of an inky purple and murmuring ominously. In the scrappy back garden of the MacNabs which ran down towards the sand, two black, barren-looking trees stood up like demon hands held up in astonishment, and as Mrs MacNab ran down the street to meet them with lean hands similarly spread, and her fierce face in shadow, she was a little like a demon herself. The doctor and the priest made scant reply to her shrill reiterations of her daughter’s story, with more disturbing details of her own, to the divided vows of vengeance against Mr Glass for murdering, and against Mr Todhunter for being murdered, or against the latter for having dared to want to marry her daughter, and for not having lived to do it. They passed through the narrow passage in the front of the house until they came to the lodger’s door at the back, and there Dr Hood, with the trick of an old detective, put his shoulder sharply to the panel and burst in the door.

It opened on a scene of silent catastrophe. No one seeing it, even for a flash, could doubt that the room had been the theatre of some thrilling collision between two, or perhaps more, persons. Playing-cards lay littered across the table or fluttered about the floor as if a game had been interrupted. Two wine glasses stood ready for wine on a side-table, but a third lay smashed in a star of crystal upon the carpet. A few feet from it lay what looked like a long knife or
short sword, straight, but with an ornamental and pictured handle, its dull blade just caught a grey glint from the dreary window behind, which showed the black trees against the leaden level of the sea. Towards the opposite corner of the room was rolled a gentleman’s silk top hat, as if it had just been knocked off his head; so much so, indeed, that one almost looked to see it still rolling. And in the corner behind it, thrown like a sack of potatoes, but corded like a railway trunk, lay Mr James Todhunter, with a scarf across his mouth, and six or seven ropes knotted round his elbows and ankles. His brown eyes were alive and shifted alertly.

Dr Orion Hood paused for one instant on the doormat and drank in the whole scene of voiceless violence. Then he stepped swiftly across the carpet, picked up the tall silk hat, and gravely put it upon the head of the yet pinioned Todhunter. It was so much too large for him that it almost slipped down on to his shoulders.

“Mr Glass’s hat,” said the doctor, returning with it and peering into the inside with a pocket lens. “How to explain the absence of Mr Glass and the presence of Mr Glass’s hat? For Mr Glass is not a careless man with his clothes. That hat is of a stylish shape and systematically brushed and burnished, though not very new. An old dandy, I should think.”

“But, good heavens!” called out Miss MacNab, “aren’t you going to untie the man first?”

“I say ‘old’ with intention, though not with certainty” continued the expositor; “my reason for it might seem a little far-fetched. The hair of human beings falls out in very varying degrees, but almost always falls out slightly, and with the lens I should see the tiny hairs in a hat recently worn. It has none, which leads me to guess that Mr Glass is bald. Now when this is taken with the high-pitched and querulous voice which Miss MacNab described so vividly (patience, my dear lady, patience), when we take the hairless head together with the tone common in senile anger, I should think we may deduce some advance in years. Nevertheless, he was probably vigorous, and he was almost certainly tall. I might rely in some degree on the story of his previous appearance at the window, as a tall man in a silk hat, but I think I have more exact indication. This wineglass has been smashed all over the place, but one of its splinters lies on the high bracket beside the mantelpiece. No such fragment could have fallen there if the vessel had been smashed in the hand of a comparatively short man like Mr Todhunter.”

“By the way,” said Father Brown, “might it not be as well to untie Mr Todhunter?”
“Our lesson from the drinking-vessels does not end here,” proceeded the specialist. “I may say at once that it is possible that the man Glass was bald or nervous through dissipation rather than age. Mr Todhunter, as has been remarked, is a quiet thrifty gentleman, essentially an abstainer. These cards and wine-cups are no part of his normal habit; they have been produced for a particular companion. But, as it happens, we may go farther. Mr Todhunter may or may not possess this wine-service, but there is no appearance of his possessing any wine. What, then, were these vessels to contain? I would at once suggest some brandy or whisky, perhaps of a luxurious sort, from a flask in the pocket of Mr Glass. We have thus something like a picture of the man, or at least of the type: tall, elderly, fashionable, but somewhat frayed, certainly fond of play and strong waters, perhaps rather too fond of them. Mr Glass is a gentleman not unknown on the fringes of society.”

“Look here,” cried the young woman, “if you don’t let me pass to untie him I’ll run outside and scream for the police.”

“I should not advise you, Miss MacNab,” said Dr Hood gravely, “to be in any hurry to fetch the police. Father Brown, I seriously ask you to compose your flock, for their sakes, not for mine. Well, we have seen something of the figure and quality of Mr Glass; what are the chief facts known of Mr Todhunter? They are substantially three: that he is economical, that he is more or less wealthy, and that he has a secret. Now, surely it is obvious that there are the three chief marks of the kind of man who is blackmailed. And surely it is equally obvious that the faded finery, the profligate habits, and the shrill irritation of Mr Glass are the unmistakable marks of the kind of man who blackmails him. We have the two typical figures of a tragedy of hush money: on the one hand, the respectable man with a mystery; on the other, the West-end vulture with a scent for a mystery. These two men have met here today and have quarrelled, using blows and a bare weapon.”

“Are you going to take those ropes off?” asked the girl stubbornly.

Dr Hood replaced the silk hat carefully on the side table, and went across to the captive. He studied him intently, even moving him a little and half-turning him round by the shoulders, but he only answered:

“No; I think these ropes will do very well till your friends the police bring the handcuffs.”

Father Brown, who had been looking dully at the carpet, lifted his round face and said: “What do you mean?”

The man of science had picked up the peculiar dagger-sword from the carpet
and was examining it intently as he answered:

“Because you find Mr Todhunter tied up,” he said, “you all jump to the conclusion that Mr Glass had tied him up; and then, I suppose, escaped. There are four objections to this: First, why should a gentleman so dressy as our friend Glass leave his hat behind him, if he left of his own free will? Second,” he continued, moving towards the window, “this is the only exit, and it is locked on the inside. Third, this blade here has a tiny touch of blood at the point, but there is no wound on Mr Todhunter. Mr Glass took that wound away with him, dead or alive. Add to all this primary probability. It is much more likely that the blackmailed person would try to kill his incubus, rather than that the blackmailer would try to kill the goose that lays his golden egg. There, I think, we have a pretty complete story.”

“But the ropes?” inquired the priest, whose eyes had remained open with a rather vacant admiration.

“Ah, the ropes,” said the expert with a singular intonation. “Miss MacNab very much wanted to know why I did not set Mr Todhunter free from his ropes. Well, I will tell her. I did not do it because Mr Todhunter can set himself free from them at any minute he chooses.”

“What?” cried the audience on quite different notes of astonishment.

“I have looked at all the knots on Mr Todhunter,” reiterated Hood quietly. “I happen to know something about knots; they are quite a branch of criminal science. Every one of those knots he has made himself and could loosen himself; not one of them would have been made by an enemy really trying to pinion him. The whole of this affair of the ropes is a clever fake, to make us think him the victim of the struggle instead of the wretched Glass, whose corpse may be hidden in the garden or stuffed up the chimney.”

There was a rather depressed silence; the room was darkening, the sea-blighted boughs of the garden trees looked leaner and blacker than ever, yet they seemed to have come nearer to the window. One could almost fancy they were sea-monsters like krakens or cuttlefish, writhing polypi who had crawled up from the sea to see the end of this tragedy, even as he, the villain and victim of it, the terrible man in the tall hat, had once crawled up from the sea. For the whole air was dense with the morbidity of blackmail, which is the most morbid of human things, because it is a crime concealing a crime; a black plaster on a blacker wound.

The face of the little Catholic priest, which was commonly complacent and even comic, had suddenly become knotted with a curious frown. It was not the
blank curiosity of his first innocence. It was rather that creative curiosity which comes when a man has the beginnings of an idea. “Say it again, please,” he said in a simple, bothered manner; “do you mean that Todhunter can tie himself up all alone and untie himself all alone?”

“That is what I mean,” said the doctor.

“Jerusalem!” ejaculated Brown suddenly, “I wonder if it could possibly be that!”

He scuttled across the room rather like a rabbit, and peered with quite a new impulsiveness into the partially-covered face of the captive. Then he turned his own rather fatuous face to the company. “Yes, that’s it!” he cried in a certain excitement. “Can’t you see it in the man’s face? Why, look at his eyes!”

Both the Professor and the girl followed the direction of his glance. And though the broad black scarf completely masked the lower half of Todhunter’s visage, they did grow conscious of something struggling and intense about the upper part of it.

“His eyes do look queer,” cried the young woman, strongly moved. “You brutes; I believe it’s hurting him!”

“Not that, I think,” said Dr Hood; “the eyes have certainly a singular expression. But I should interpret those transverse wrinkles as expressing rather such slight psychological abnormality—”

“Oh, bosh!” cried Father Brown: “can’t you see he’s laughing?”

“Laughing!” repeated the doctor, with a start; “but what on earth can he be laughing at?”

“Well,” replied the Reverend Brown apologetically, “not to put too fine a point on it, I think he is laughing at you. And indeed, I’m a little inclined to laugh at myself, now I know about it.”

“Now you know about what?” asked Hood, in some exasperation.

“Now I know,” replied the priest, “the profession of Mr Todhunter.”

He shuffled about the room, looking at one object after another with what seemed to be a vacant stare, and then invariably bursting into an equally vacant laugh, a highly irritating process for those who had to watch it. He laughed very much over the hat, still more uproariously over the broken glass, but the blood on the sword point sent him into mortal convulsions of amusement. Then he turned to the fuming specialist.

“Dr Hood,” he cried enthusiastically, “you are a great poet! You have called an uncreated being out of the void. How much more godlike that is than if you had only ferreted out the mere facts! Indeed, the mere facts are rather
commonplace and comic by comparison.”

“I have no notion what you are talking about,” said Dr Hood rather haughtily;
“my facts are all inevitable, though necessarily incomplete. A place may be
permitted to intuition, perhaps (or poetry if you prefer the term), but only
because the corresponding details cannot as yet be ascertained. In the absence of
Mr Glass—”

“That’s it, that’s it,” said the little priest, nodding quite eagerly, “that’s the
first idea to get fixed; the absence of Mr Glass. He is so extremely absent. I
suppose,” he added reflectively, “that there was never anybody so absent as Mr
Glass.”

“Do you mean he is absent from the town?” demanded the doctor.

“I mean he is absent from everywhere,” answered Father Brown; “he is absent
from the Nature of Things, so to speak.”

“Do you seriously mean,” said the specialist with a smile, “that there is no
such person?”

The priest made a sign of assent. “It does seem a pity,” he said.

Orion Hood broke into a contemptuous laugh. “Well,” he said, “before we go
on to the hundred and one other evidences, let us take the first proof we found;
the first fact we fell over when we fell into this room. If there is no Mr Glass,
whose hat is this?”

“It is Mr Todhunter’s,” replied Father Brown.

“But it doesn’t fit him,” cried Hood impatiently. “He couldn’t possibly wear
it!”

Father Brown shook his head with ineffable mildness. “I never said he could
wear it,” he answered. “I said it was his hat. Or, if you insist on a shade of
difference, a hat that is his.”

“And what is the shade of difference?” asked the criminologist with a slight
sneer.

“My good sir,” cried the mild little man, with his first movement akin to
impatience, “if you will walk down the street to the nearest hatter’s shop, you
will see that there is, in common speech, a difference between a man’s hat and
the hats that are his.”

“But a hatter,” protested Hood, “can get money out of his stock of new hats.
What could Todhunter get out of this one old hat?”

“Rabbits,” replied Father Brown promptly.

“What?” cried Dr Hood.

“Rabbits, ribbons, sweetmeats, goldfish, rolls of coloured paper,” said the
reverend gentleman with rapidity. “Didn’t you see it all when you found out the faked ropes? It’s just the same with the sword. Mr Todhunter hasn’t got a scratch on him, as you say; but he’s got a scratch in him, if you follow me.”

“Do you mean inside Mr Todhunter’s clothes?” inquired Mrs MacNab sternly.

“I do not mean inside Mr Todhunter’s clothes,” said Father Brown. “I mean inside Mr Todhunter.”

“Well, what in the name of Bedlam do you mean?”

“Mr Todhunter,” explained Father Brown placidly, “is learning to be a professional conjurer, as well as juggler, ventriloquist, and expert in the rope trick. The conjuring explains the hat. It is without traces of hair, not because it is worn by the prematurely bald Mr Glass, but because it has never been worn by anybody. The juggling explains the three glasses, which Todhunter was teaching himself to throw up and catch in rotation. But, being only at the stage of practice, he smashed one glass against the ceiling. And the juggling also explains the sword, which it was Mr Todhunter’s professional pride and duty to swallow. But, again, being at the stage of practice, he very slightly grazed the inside of his throat with the weapon. Hence he has a wound inside him, which I am sure (from the expression on his face) is not a serious one. He was also practising the trick of a release from ropes, like the Davenport Brothers, and he was just about to free himself when we all burst into the room. The cards, of course, are for card tricks, and they are scattered on the floor because he had just been practising one of those dodges of sending them flying through the air. He merely kept his trade secret, because he had to keep his tricks secret, like any other conjurer. But the mere fact of an idler in a top hat having once looked in at his back window, and been driven away by him with great indignation, was enough to set us all on a wrong track of romance, and make us imagine his whole life overshadowed by the silk-hatted spectre of Mr Glass.”

“But What about the two voices?” asked Maggie, staring.

“Have you never heard a ventriloquist?” asked Father Brown. “Don’t you know they speak first in their natural voice, and then answer themselves in just that shrill, squeaky, unnatural voice that you heard?”

There was a long silence, and Dr Hood regarded the little man who had spoken with a dark and attentive smile. “You are certainly a very ingenious person,” he said; “it could not have been done better in a book. But there is just one part of Mr Glass you have not succeeded in explaining away, and that is his name. Miss MacNab distinctly heard him so addressed by Mr Todhunter.”

The Rev. Mr Brown broke into a rather childish giggle. “Well, that,” he said,
“that’s the silliest part of the whole silly story. When our juggling friend here threw up the three glasses in turn, he counted them aloud as he caught them, and also commented aloud when he failed to catch them. What he really said was: ‘One, two and three—missed a glass one, two—missed a glass.’ And so on.”

There was a second of stillness in the room, and then everyone with one accord burst out laughing. As they did so the figure in the corner complacently uncoiled all the ropes and let them fall with a flourish. Then, advancing into the middle of the room with a bow, he produced from his pocket a big bill printed in blue and red, which announced that ZALADIN, the World’s Greatest Conjurer, Contortionist, Ventriloquist and Human Kangaroo would be ready with an entirely new series of Tricks at the Empire Pavilion, Scarborough, on Monday next at eight o’clock precisely.
TWO

THE PARADISE OF THIEVES

THE great Muscari, most original of the young Tuscan poets, walked swiftly into his favourite restaurant, which overlooked the Mediterranean, was covered by an awning and fenced by little lemon and orange trees. Waiters in white aprons were already laying out on white tables the insignia of an early and elegant lunch; and this seemed to increase a satisfaction that already touched the top of swagger. Muscari had an eagle nose like Dante; his hair and neckerchief were dark and flowing; he carried a black cloak, and might almost have carried a black mask, so much did he bear with him a sort of Venetian melodrama. He acted as if a troubadour had still a definite social office, like a bishop. He went as near as his century permitted to walking the world literally like Don Juan, with rapier and guitar.

For he never travelled without a case of swords, with which he had fought many brilliant duels, or without a corresponding case for his mandolin, with which he had actually serenaded Miss Ethel Harrogate, the highly conventional daughter of a Yorkshire banker on a holiday. Yet he was neither a charlatan nor a child; but a hot, logical Latin who liked a certain thing and was it. His poetry was as straightforward as anyone else’s prose. He desired fame or wine or the beauty of women with a torrid directness inconceivable among the cloudy ideals or cloudy compromises of the north; to vaguer races his intensity smelt of danger or even crime. Like fire or the sea, he was too simple to be trusted.

The banker and his beautiful English daughter were staying at the hotel attached to Muscari’s restaurant; that was why it was his favourite restaurant. A glance flashed around the room told him at once, however, that the English party had not descended. The restaurant was glittering, but still comparatively empty. Two priests were talking at a table in a corner, but Muscari (an ardent Catholic) took no more notice of them than of a couple of crows. But from a yet farther seat, partly concealed behind a dwarf tree golden with oranges, there rose and advanced towards the poet a person whose costume was the most aggressively opposite to his own.

This figure was clad in tweeds of a piebald check, with a pink tie, a sharp collar and protuberant yellow boots. He contrived, in the true tradition of ‘Arry at Margate, to look at once startling and commonplace. But as the Cockney
apparition drew nearer, Muscari was astounded to observe that the head was distinctly different from the body. It was an Italian head: fuzzy, swarthy and very vivacious, that rose abruptly out of the standing collar like cardboard and the comic pink tie. In fact it was a head he knew. He recognized it, above all the dire erection of English holiday array, as the face of an old but forgotten friend name Ezza. This youth had been a prodigy at college, and European fame was promised him when he was barely fifteen; but when he appeared in the world he failed, first publicly as a dramatist and a demagogue, and then privately for years on end as an actor, a traveller, a commission agent or a journalist. Muscari had known him last behind the footlights; he was but too well attuned to the excitement of that profession, and it was believed that some moral calamity had swallowed him up.

“Ezza!” cried the poet, rising and shaking hands in a pleasant astonishment. “Well, I’ve seen you in many costumes in the green room; but I never expected to see you dressed up as an Englishman.”

“This,” answered Ezza gravely, “is not the costume of an Englishman, but of the Italian of the future.”

“In that case,” remarked Muscari, “I confess I prefer the Italian of the past.”

“That is your old mistake, Muscari,” said the man in tweeds, shaking his head; “and the mistake of Italy. In the sixteenth century we Tuscans made the morning: we had the newest steel, the newest carving, the newest chemistry. Why should we not now have the newest factories, the newest motors, the newest finance—the newest clothes?”

“Because they are not worth having,” answered Muscari. “You cannot make Italians really progressive; they are too intelligent. Men who see the short cut to good living will never go by the new elaborate roads.”

“Well, to me Marconi, or D’Annunzio, is the star of Italy” said the other. “That is why I have become a Futurist—and a courier.”

“A courier!” cried Muscari, laughing. “Is that the last of your list of trades? And whom are you conducting?”

“Oh, a man of the name of Harrogate, and his family, I believe.”

“Not the banker in this hotel?” inquired the poet, with some eagerness.

“That’s the man,” answered the courier.

“Does it pay well?” asked the troubadour innocently.

“It will pay me,” said Ezza, with a very enigmatic smile. “But I am a rather curious sort of courier.” Then, as if changing the subject, he said abruptly: “He has a daughter—and a son.”
“The daughter is divine,” affirmed Muscari, “the father and son are, I suppose, human. But granted his harmless qualities doesn’t that banker strike you as a splendid instance of my argument? Harrogate has millions in his safes, and I have—the hole in my pocket. But you daren’t say—you can’t say—that he’s cleverer than I, or bolder than I, or even more energetic. He’s not clever, he’s got eyes like blue buttons; he’s not energetic, he moves from chair to chair like a paralytic. He’s a conscientious, kindly old blockhead; but he’s got money simply because he collects money, as a boy collects stamps. You’re too strong-minded for business, Ezza. You won’t get on. To be clever enough to get all that money, one must be stupid enough to want it.”

“I’m stupid enough for that,” said Ezza gloomily. “But I should suggest a suspension of your critique of the banker, for here he comes.”

Mr Harrogate, the great financier, did indeed enter the room, but nobody looked at him. He was a massive elderly man with a boiled blue eye and faded grey-sandy moustaches; but for his heavy stoop he might have been a colonel. He carried several unopened letters in his hand. His son Frank was a really fine lad, curly-haired, sunburnt and strenuous; but nobody looked at him either. All eyes, as usual, were riveted, for the moment at least, upon Ethel Harrogate, whose golden Greek head and colour of the dawn seemed set purposely above that sapphire sea, like a goddess’s. The poet Muscari drew a deep breath as if he were drinking something, as indeed he was. He was drinking the Classic; which his fathers made. Ezza studied her with a gaze equally intense and far more baffling.

Miss Harrogate was specially radiant and ready for conversation on this occasion; and her family had fallen into the easier Continental habit, allowing the stranger Muscari and even the courier Ezza to share their table and their talk. In Ethel Harrogate conventionality crowned itself with a perfection and splendour of its own. Proud of her father’s prosperity, fond of fashionable pleasures, a fond daughter but an arrant flirt, she was all these things with a sort of golden good-nature that made her very pride pleasing and her worldly respectability a fresh and hearty thing.

They were in an eddy of excitement about some alleged peril in the mountain path they were to attempt that week. The danger was not from rock and avalanche, but from something yet more romantic. Ethel had been earnestly assured that brigands, the true cut-throats of the modern legend, still haunted that ridge and held that pass of the Apennines.

“They say,” she cried, with the awful relish of a schoolgirl, “that all that
country isn’t ruled by the King of Italy, but by the King of Thieves. Who is the King of Thieves?”

“A great man,” replied Muscari, “worthy to rank with your own Robin Hood, signorina. Montano, the King of Thieves, was first heard of in the mountains some ten years ago, when people said brigands were extinct. But his wild authority spread with the swiftness of a silent revolution. Men found his fierce proclamations nailed in every mountain village; his sentinels, gun in hand, in every mountain ravine. Six times the Italian Government tried to dislodge him, and was defeated in six pitched battles as if by Napoleon.”

“Now that sort of thing,” observed the banker weightily, “would never be allowed in England; perhaps, after all, we had better choose another route. But the courier thought it perfectly safe.”

“It is perfectly safe,” said the courier contemptuously. “I have been over it twenty times. There may have been some old jailbird called a King in the time of our grandmothers; but he belongs to history if not to fable. Brigandage is utterly stamped out.”

“It can never be utterly stamped out,” Muscari answered; “because armed revolt is a recreation natural to southerners. Our peasants are like their mountains, rich in grace and green gaiety, but with the fires beneath. There is a point of human despair where the northern poor take to drink—and our own poor take to daggers.”

“A poet is privileged,” replied Ezza, with a sneer. “If Signor Muscari were English he would still be looking for highwaymen in Wandsworth. Believe me, there is no more danger of being captured in Italy than of being scalped in Boston.”

“Then you propose to attempt it?” asked Mr Harrogate, frowning.

“Oh, it sounds rather dreadful,” cried the girl, turning her glorious eyes on Muscari. “Do you really think the pass is dangerous?”

Muscari threw back his black mane. “I know it is dangerous:” he said. “I am crossing it tomorrow.”

The young Harrogate was left behind for a moment emptying a glass of white wine and lighting a cigarette, as the beauty retired with the banker, the courier and the poet, distributing peals of silvery satire. At about the same instant the two priests in the corner rose; the taller, a white-haired Italian, taking his leave. The shorter priest turned and walked towards the banker’s son, and the latter was astonished to realize that though a Roman priest the man was an Englishman. He vaguely remembered meeting him at the social crushes of some of his Catholic
friends. But the man spoke before his memories could collect themselves.

“Mr Frank Harrogate, I think,” he said. “I have had an introduction, but I do not mean to presume on it. The odd thing I have to say will come far better from a stranger. Mr Harrogate, I say one word and go: take care of your sister in her great sorrow.”

Even for Frank’s truly fraternal indifference the radiance and derision of his sister still seemed to sparkle and ring; he could hear her laughter still from the garden of the hotel, and he stared at his sombre adviser in puzzlement.

“Do you mean the brigands?” he asked; and then, remembering a vague fear of his own, “or can you be thinking of Muscari?”

“One is never thinking of the real sorrow,” said the strange priest. “One can only be kind when it comes.”

And he passed promptly from the room, leaving the other almost with his mouth open.

A day or two afterwards a coach containing the company was really crawling and staggering up the spurs of the menacing mountain range. Between Ezza’s cheery denial of the danger and Muscari’s boisterous defiance of it, the financial family were firm in their original purpose; and Muscari made his mountain journey coincide with theirs. A more surprising feature was the appearance at the coast-town station of the little priest of the restaurant; he alleged merely that business led him also to cross the mountains of the midland. But young Harrogate could not but connect his presence with the mystical fears and warnings of yesterday.

The coach was a kind of commodious wagonette, invented by the modernist talent of the courier, who dominated the expedition with his scientific activity and breezy wit. The theory of danger from thieves was banished from thought and speech; though so far conceded in formal act that some slight protection was employed. The courier and the young banker carried loaded revolvers, and Muscari (with much boyish gratification) buckled on a kind of cutlass under his black cloak.

He had planted his person at a flying leap next to the lovely Englishwoman; on the other side of her sat the priest, whose name was Brown and who was fortunately a silent individual; the courier and the father and son were on the banc behind. Muscari was in towering spirits, seriously believing in the peril, and his talk to Ethel might well have made her think him a maniac. But there was something in the crazy and gorgeous ascent, amid crags like peaks loaded with woods like orchards, that dragged her spirit up alone with his into purple
preposterous heavens with wheeling suns. The white road climbed like a white cat; it spanned sunless chasms like a tight-rope; it was flung round far-off headlands like a lasso.

And yet, however high they went, the desert still blossomed like the rose. The fields were burnished in sun and wind with the colour of kingfisher and parrot and humming-bird, the hues of a hundred flowering flowers. There are no lovelier meadows and woodlands than the English, no nobler crests or chasms than those of Snowdon and Glencoe. But Ethel Harrogate had never before seen the southern parks tilted on the splintered northern peaks; the gorge of Glencoe laden with the fruits of Kent. There was nothing here of that chill and desolation that in Britain one associates with high and wild scenery. It was rather like a mosaic palace, rent with earthquakes; or like a Dutch tulip garden blown to the stars with dynamite.

“It’s like Kew Gardens on Beachy Head,” said Ethel.

“It is our secret,” answered he, “the secret of the volcano; that is also the secret of the revolution—that a thing can be violent and yet fruitful.”

“You are rather violent yourself,” and she smiled at him.

“And yet rather fruitless,” he admitted; “if I die tonight I die unmarried and a fool.”

“It is not my fault if you have come,” she said after a difficult silence.

“It is never your fault,” answered Muscari; “it was not your fault that Troy fell.”

As they spoke they came under overwhelming cliffs that spread almost like wings above a corner of peculiar peril. Shocked by the big shadow on the narrow ledge, the horses stirred doubtfully. The driver leapt to the earth to hold their heads, and they became ungovernable. One horse reared up to his full height—the titanic and terrifying height of a horse when he becomes a biped. It was just enough to alter the equilibrium; the whole coach heeled over like a ship and crashed through the fringe of bushes over the cliff. Muscari threw an arm round Ethel, who clung to him, and shouted aloud. It was for such moments that he lived.

At the moment when the gorgeous mountain walls went round the poet’s head like a purple windmill a thing happened which was superficially even more startling. The elderly and lethargic banker sprang erect in the coach and leapt over the precipice before the tilted vehicle could take him there. In the first flash it looked as wild as suicide; but in the second it was as sensible as a safe investment. The Yorkshireman had evidently more promptitude, as well as more
sagacity, than Muscari had given him credit for; for he landed in a lap of land which might have been specially padded with turf and clover to receive him. As it happened, indeed, the whole company were equally lucky, if less dignified in their form of ejection. Immediately under this abrupt turn of the road was a grassy and flowery hollow like a sunken meadow; a sort of green velvet pocket in the long, green, trailing garments of the hills. Into this they were all tipped or tumbled with little damage, save that their smallest baggage and even the contents of their pockets were scattered in the grass around them. The wrecked coach still hung above, entangled in the tough hedge, and the horses plunged painfully down the slope. The first to sit up was the little priest, who scratched his head with a face of foolish wonder. Frank Harrogate heard him say to himself: “Now why on earth have we fallen just here?”

He blinked at the litter around him, and recovered his own very clumsy umbrella. Beyond it lay the broad sombrero fallen from the head of Muscari, and beside it a sealed business letter which, after a glance at the address, he returned to the elder Harrogate. On the other side of him the grass partly hid Miss Ethel’s sunshade, and just beyond it lay a curious little glass bottle hardly two inches long. The priest picked it up; in a quick, unobtrusive manner he uncorked and sniffed it, and his heavy face turned the colour of clay.

“Heaven deliver us!” he muttered; “it can’t be hers! Has her sorrow come on her already?” He slipped it into his own waistcoat pocket. “I think I’m justified,” he said, “till I know a little more.”

He gazed painfully at the girl, at that moment being raised out of the flowers by Muscari, who was saying: “We have fallen into heaven; it is a sign. Mortals climb up and they fall down; but it is only gods and goddesses who can fall upwards.”

And indeed she rose out of the sea of colours so beautiful and happy a vision that the priest felt his suspicion shaken and shifted. “After all,” he thought, “perhaps the poison isn’t hers; perhaps it’s one of Muscari’s melodramatic tricks.”

Muscari set the lady lightly on her feet, made her an absurdly theatrical bow, and then, drawing his cutlass, hacked hard at the taut reins of the horses, so that they scrambled to their feet and stood in the grass trembling. When he had done so, a most remarkable thing occurred. A very quiet man, very poorly dressed and extremely sunburnt, came out of the bushes and took hold of the horses’ heads. He had a queer-shaped knife, very broad and crooked, buckled on his belt; there was nothing else remarkable about him, except his sudden and silent appearance.
The poet asked him who he was, and he did not answer.

Looking around him at the confused and startled group in the hollow, Muscari then perceived that another tanned and tattered man, with a short gun under his arm, was looking at them from the ledge just below, leaning his elbows on the edge of the turf. Then he looked up at the road from which they had fallen and saw, looking down on them, the muzzles of four other carbines and four other brown faces with bright but quite motionless eyes.

“The brigands!” cried Muscari, with a kind of monstrous gaiety. “This was a trap. Ezza, if you will oblige me by shooting the coachman first, we can cut our way out yet. There are only six of them.”

“The coachman,” said Ezza, who was standing grimly with his hands in his pockets, “happens to be a servant of Mr Harrogate’s.”

“Then shoot him all the more,” cried the poet impatiently; “he was bribed to upset his master. Then put the lady in the middle, and we will break the line up there—with a rush.”

And, wading in wild grass and flowers, he advanced fearlessly on the four carbines; but finding that no one followed except young Harrogate, he turned, brandishing his cutlass to wave the others on. He beheld the courier still standing slightly astride in the centre of the grassy ring, his hands in his pockets; and his lean, ironical Italian face seemed to grow longer and longer in the evening light.

“You thought, Muscari, I was the failure among our schoolfellows,” he said, “and you thought you were the success. But I have succeeded more than you and fill a bigger place in history. I have been acting epics while you have been writing them.”

“Come on, I tell you!” thundered Muscari from above. “Will you stand there talking nonsense about yourself with a woman to save and three strong men to help you? What do you call yourself?”

“I call myself Montano,” cried the strange courier in a voice equally loud and full. “I am the King of Thieves, and I welcome you all to my summer palace.”

And even as he spoke five more silent men with weapons ready came out of the bushes, and looked towards him for their orders. One of them held a large paper in his hand.

“This pretty little nest where we are all picnicking,” went on the courier-brigand, with the same easy yet sinister smile, “is, together with some caves underneath it, known by the name of the Paradise of Thieves. It is my principal stronghold on these hills; for (as you have doubtless noticed) the eyrie is invisible both from the road above and from the valley below. It is something
better than impregnable; it is unnoticeable. Here I mostly live, and here I shall
certainly die, if the gendarmes ever track me here. I am not the kind of criminal
that ‘reserves his defence,’ but the better kind that reserves his last bullet.”

All were staring at him thunderstruck and still, except Father Brown, who
heaved a huge sigh as of relief and fingered the little phial in his pocket. “Thank
God!” he muttered; “that’s much more probable. The poison belongs to this
robber-chief, of course. He carries it so that he may never be captured, like
Cato.”

The King of Thieves was, however, continuing his address with the same kind
of dangerous politeness. “It only remains for me,” he said, “to explain to my
guests the social conditions upon which I have the pleasure of entertaining them.
I need not expound the quaint old ritual of ransom, which it is incumbent upon
me to keep up; and even this only applies to a part of the company. The
Reverend Father Brown and the celebrated Signor Muscari I shall release
tomorrow at dawn and escort to my outposts. Poets and priests, if you will
pardon my simplicity of speech, never have any money. And so (since it is
impossible to get anything out of them), let us, seize the opportunity to show our
admiration for classic literature and our reverence for Holy Church.”

He paused with an unpleasing smile; and Father Brown blinked repeatedly at
him, and seemed suddenly to be listening with great attention. The brigand
captain took the large paper from the attendant brigand and, glancing over it,
continued: “My other intentions are clearly set forth in this public document,
which I will hand round in a moment; and which after that will be posted on a
tree by every village in the valley, and every cross-road in the hills. I will not
weary you with the verbalism, since you will be able to check it; the substance of
my proclamation is this: I announce first that I have captured the English
millionaire, the colossus of finance, Mr Samuel Harrogate. I next announce that I
have found on his person notes and bonds for two thousand pounds, which he
has given up to me. Now since it would be really immoral to announce such a
thing to a credulous public if it had not occurred, I suggest it should occur
without further delay. I suggest that Mr Harrogate senior should now give me the
two thousand pounds in his pocket.”

The banker looked at him under lowering brows, red-faced and sulky, but
seemingly cowed. That leap from the failing carriage seemed to have used up his
last virility. He had held back in a hang-dog style when his son and Muscari had
made a bold movement to break out of the brigand trap. And now his red and
trembling hand went reluctantly to his breast-pocket, and passed a bundle of
papers and envelopes to the brigand.

“Excellent!” cried that outlaw gaily; “so far we are all cosy. I resume the points of my proclamation, so soon to be published to all Italy. The third item is that of ransom. I am asking from the friends of the Harrogate family a ransom of three thousand pounds, which I am sure is almost insulting to that family in its moderate estimate of their importance. Who would not pay triple this sum for another day’s association with such a domestic circle? I will not conceal from you that the document ends with certain legal phrases about the unpleasant things that may happen if the money is not paid; but meanwhile, ladies and gentlemen, let me assure you that I am comfortably off here for accommodation, wine and cigars, and bid you for the present a sportsman-like welcome to the luxuries of the Paradise of Thieves.”

All the time that he had been speaking, the dubious-looking men with carbines and dirty slouch hats had been gathering silently in such preponderating numbers that even Muscari was compelled to recognize his sally with the sword as hopeless. He glanced around him; but the girl had already gone over to soothe and comfort her father, for her natural affection for his person was as strong or stronger than her somewhat snobbish pride in his success. Muscari, with the illogicality of a lover, admired this filial devotion, and yet was irritated by it. He slapped his sword back in the scabbard and went and flung himself somewhat sulkily on one of the green banks. The priest sat down within a yard or two, and Muscari turned his aquiline nose on him in an instantaneous irritation.

“Well,” said the poet tartly, “do people still think me too romantic? Are there, I wonder, any brigands left in the mountains?”

“There may be,” said Father Brown agnostically.

“What do you mean?” asked the other sharply.

“I mean I am puzzled,” replied the priest. “I am puzzled about Ezza or Montano, or whatever his name is. He seems to me much more inexplicable as a brigand even than he was as a courier.”

“But in what way?” persisted his companion. “Santa Maria! I should have thought the brigand was plain enough.”

“I find three curious difficulties,” said the priest in a quiet voice. “I should like to have your opinion on them. First of all I must tell you I was lunching in that restaurant at the seaside. As four of you left the room, you and Miss Harrogate went ahead, talking and laughing; the banker and the courier came behind, speaking sparely and rather low. But I could not help hearing Ezza say these words—‘Well, let her have a little fun; you know the blow may smash her any
minute.’ Mr Harrogate answered nothing; so the words must have had some meaning. On the impulse of the moment I warned her brother that she might be in peril; I said nothing of its nature, for I did not know. But if it meant this cap- 
cature in the hills, the thing is nonsense. Why should the brigand-courier warn 
his patron, even by a hint, when it was his whole purpose to lure him into the 
mountain-mousetrap? It could not have meant that. But if not, what is this disaster, known both to courier and banker, which hangs over Miss Harrogate’s head?”

“Disaster to Miss Harrogate!” ejaculated the poet, sitting up with some ferocity. “Explain yourself; go on.”

“All my riddles, however, revolve round our bandit chief,” resumed the priest reflectively. “And here is the second of them. Why did he put so prominently in his demand for ransom the fact that he had taken two thousand pounds from his victim on the spot? It had no faintest tendency to evoke the ransom. Quite the other way, in fact. Harrogate’s friends would be far likelier to fear for his fate if they thought the thieves were poor and desperate. Yet the spoliation on the spot was emphasized and even put first in the demand. Why should Ezza Montano want so specially to tell all Europe that he had picked the pocket before he levied the blackmail?”

“I cannot imagine,” said Muscari, rubbing up his black hair for once with an unaffected gesture. “You may think you enlighten me, but you are leading me deeper in the dark. What may be the third objection to the King of the Thieves?”

“The third objection,” said Father Brown, still in meditation, “is this bank we are sitting on. Why does our brigand-courier call this his chief fortress and the Paradise of Thieves? It is certainly a soft spot to fall on and a sweet spot to look at. It is also quite true, as he says, that it is invisible from valley and peak, and is therefore a hiding-place. But it is not a fortress. It never could be a fortress. I think it would be the worst fortress in the world. For it is actually commanded from above by the common high-road across the mountains—the very place where the police would most probably pass. Why, five shabby short guns held us helpless here about half an hour ago. The quarter of a company of any kind of soldiers could have blown us over the precipice. Whatever is the meaning of this odd little nook of grass and flowers, it is not an entrenched position. It is something else; it has some other strange sort of importance; some value that I do not understand. It is more like an accidental theatre or a natural green-room; it is like the scene for some romantic comedy; it is like. . . .”

As the little priest’s words lengthened and lost themselves in a dull and
dreamy sincerity, Muscari, whose animal senses were alert and impatient, heard a new noise in the mountains. Even for him the sound was as yet very small and faint; but he could have sworn the evening breeze bore with it something like the pulsation of horses’ hoofs and a distant hallooing.

At the same moment, and long before the vibration had touched the less-experienced English ears, Montano the brigand ran up the bank above them and stood in the broken hedge, steadying himself against a tree and peering down the road. He was a strange figure as he stood there, for he had assumed a flapped fantastic hat and swinging baldric and cutlass in his capacity of bandit king, but the bright prosaic tweed of the courier showed through in patches all over him.

The next moment he turned his olive, sneering face and made a movement with his hand. The brigands scattered at the signal, not in confusion, but in what was evidently a kind of guerrilla discipline. Instead of occupying the road along the ridge, they sprinkled themselves along the side of it behind the trees and the hedge, as if watching unseen for an enemy. The noise beyond grew stronger, beginning to shake the mountain road, and a voice could be clearly heard calling out orders. The brigands swayed and huddled, cursing and whispering, and the evening air was full of little metallic noises as they cocked their pistols, or loosened their knives, or trailed their scabbards over the stones. Then the noises from both quarters seemed to meet on the road above; branches broke, horses neighed, men cried out.

“A rescue!” cried Muscari, springing to his feet and waving his hat; “the gendarmes are on them! Now for freedom and a blow for it! Now to be rebels against robbers! Come, don’t let us leave everything to the police; that is so dreadfully modern. Fall on the rear of these ruffians. The gendarmes are rescuing us; come, friends, let us rescue the gendarmes!”

And throwing his hat over the trees, he drew his cutlass once more and began to escalade the slope up to the road. Frank Harrogate jumped up and ran across to help him, revolver in hand, but was astounded to hear himself imperatively recalled by the raucous voice of his father, who seemed to be in great agitation.

“I won’t have it,” said the banker in a choking voice; “I command you not to interfere.”

“But, father,” said Frank very warmly, “an Italian gentleman has led the way. You wouldn’t have it said that the English hung back.”

“It is useless,” said the older man, who was trembling violently, “it is useless. We must submit to our lot.”

Father Brown looked at the banker; then he put his hand instinctively as if on
his heart, but really on the little bottle of poison; and a great light came into his face like the light of the revelation of death.

Muscari meanwhile, without waiting for support, had crested the bank up to the road, and struck the brigand king heavily on the shoulder, causing him to stagger and swing round. Montano also had his cutlass unsheathed, and Muscari, without further speech, sent a slash at his head which he was compelled to catch and parry. But even as the two short blades crossed and clashed the King of Thieves deliberately dropped his point and laughed.

“What’s the good, old man?” he said in spirited Italian slang; “this damned farce will soon be over.”

“What do you mean, you shuffler?” panted the fire-eating poet. “Is your courage a sham as well as your honesty?”

“Everything about me is a sham,” responded the ex-courier in complete good humour. “I am an actor; and if I ever had a private character, I have forgotten it. I am no more a genuine brigand than I am a genuine courier. I am only a bundle of masks, and you can’t fight a duel with that.” And he laughed with boyish pleasure and fell into his old straddling attitude, with his back to the skirmish up the road.

Darkness was deepening under the mountain walls, and it was not easy to discern much of the progress of the struggle, save that tall men were pushing their horses’ muzzles through a clinging crowd of brigands, who seemed more inclined to harass and hustle the invaders than to kill them. It was more like a town crowd preventing the passage of the police than anything the poet had ever pictured as the last stand of doomed and outlawed men of blood. Just as he was rolling his eyes in bewilderment he felt a touch on his elbow, and found the odd little priest standing there like a small Noah with a large hat, and requesting the favour of a word or two.

“Signor Muscari,” said the cleric, “in this queer crisis personalities may be pardoned. I may tell you without offence of a way in which you will do more good than by helping the gendarmes, who are bound to break through in any case. You will permit me the impertinent intimacy, but do you care about that girl? Care enough to marry her and make her a good husband, I mean?”

“Yes,” said the poet quite simply.

“Does she care about you?”

“I think so,” was the equally grave reply.

“Then go over there and offer yourself,” said the priest: “offer her everything you can; offer her heaven and earth if you’ve got them. The time is short.”
“Why?” asked the astonished man of letters.

“Because,” said Father Brown, “her Doom is coming up the road.”

“Nothing is coming up the road,” argued Muscari, “except the rescue.”

“Well, you go over there,” said his adviser, “and be ready to rescue her from the rescue.”

Almost as he spoke the hedges were broken all along the ridge by a rush of the escaping brigands. They dived into bushes and thick grass like defeated men pursued; and the great cocked hats of the mounted gendarmerie were seen passing along above the broken hedge. Another order was given; there was a noise of dismounting, and a tall officer with cocked hat, a grey imperial, and a paper in his hand appeared in the gap that was the gate of the Paradise of Thieves. There was a momentary silence, broken in an extraordinary way by the banker, who cried out in a hoarse and strangled voice: “Robbed! I’ve been robbed!”

“Why, that was hours ago,” cried his son in astonishment: “when you were robbed of two thousand pounds.”

“Not of two thousand pounds,” said the financier, with an abrupt and terrible composure, “only of a small bottle.”

The policeman with the grey imperial was striding across the green hollow. Encountering the King of the Thieves in his path, he clapped him on the shoulder with something between a caress and a buffet and gave him a push that sent him staggering away. “You’ll get into trouble, too,” he said, “if you play these tricks.”

Again to Muscari’s artistic eye it seemed scarcely like the capture of a great outlaw at bay. Passing on, the policeman halted before the Harrogate group and said: “Samuel Harrogate, I arrest you in the name of the law for embezzlement of the funds of the Hull and Huddersfield Bank.”

The great banker nodded with an odd air of business assent, seemed to reflect a moment, and before they could interpose took a half turn and a step that brought him to the edge of the outer mountain wall. Then, flinging up his hands, he leapt exactly as he leapt out of the coach. But this time he did not fall into a little meadow just beneath; he fell a thousand feet below, to become a wreck of bones in the valley.

The anger of the Italian policeman, which he expressed volubly to Father Brown, was largely mixed with admiration. “It was like him to escape us at last,” he said. “He was a great brigand if you like. This last trick of his I believe to be absolutely unprecedented. He fled with the company’s money to Italy, and
actually got himself captured by sham brigands in his own pay, so as to explain both the disappearance of the money and the disappearance of himself. That demand for ransom was really taken seriously by most of the police. But for years he’s been doing things as good as that, quite as good as that. He will be a serious loss to his family.”

Muscari was leading away the unhappy daughter, who held hard to him, as she did for many a year after. But even in that tragic wreck he could not help having a smile and a hand of half-mocking friendship for the indefensible Ezza Montano. “And where are you going next?” he asked him over his shoulder.

“Birmingham,” answered the actor, puffing a cigarette. “Didn’t I tell you I was a Futurist? I really do believe in those things if I believe in anything. Change, bustle and new things every morning. I am going to Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Hull, Huddersfield, Glasgow, Chicago—in short, to enlightened, energetic, civilized society!”

“In short,” said Muscari, “to the real Paradise of Thieves.”
THREE

THE DUEL OF DR HIRSCH

M. MAURICE BRUN and M. Armand Armagnac were crossing the sunlit Champs Elysee with a kind of vivacious respectability. They were both short, brisk and bold. They both had black beards that did not seem to belong to their faces, after the strange French fashion which makes real hair look like artificial. M. Brun had a dark wedge of beard apparently affixed under his lower lip. M. Armagnac, by way of a change, had two beards; one sticking out from each corner of his emphatic chin. They were both young. They were both atheists, with a depressing fixity of outlook but great mobility of exposition. They were both pupils of the great Dr Hirsch, scientist, publicist and moralist.

M. Brun had become prominent by his proposal that the common expression “Adieu” should be obliterated from all the French classics, and a slight fine imposed for its use in private life. “Then,” he said, “the very name of your imagined God will have echoed for the last time in the ear of man.” M. Armagnac specialized rather in a resistance to militarism, and wished the chorus of the Marseillaise altered from “Aux armes, citoyens” to “Aux greves, citoyens.” But his antimilitarism was of a peculiar and Gallic sort. An eminent and very wealthy English Quaker, who had come to see him to arrange for the disarmament of the whole planet, was rather distressed by Armagnac’s proposal that (by way of beginning) the soldiers should shoot their officers.

And indeed it was in this regard that the two men differed most from their leader and father in philosophy. Dr Hirsch, though born in France and covered with the most triumphant favours of French education, was temperamentally of another type—mild, dreamy, humane; and, despite his sceptical system, not devoid of transcendentalism. He was, in short, more like a German than a Frenchman; and much as they admired him, something in the subconsciousness of these Gauls was irritated at his pleading for peace in so peaceful a manner. To their party throughout Europe, however, Paul Hirsch was a saint of science. His large and daring cosmic theories advertised his austere life and innocent, if somewhat frigid, morality; he held something of the position of Darwin doubled with the position of Tolstoy. But he was neither an anarchist nor an antipatriot; his views on disarmament were moderate and evolutionary—the Republican Government put considerable confidence in him as to various chemical
improvements. He had lately even discovered a noiseless explosive, the secret of which the Government was carefully guarding.

His house stood in a handsome street near the Elysee—a street which in that strong summer seemed almost as full of foliage as the park itself; a row of chestnuts shattered the sunshine, interrupted only in one place where a large cafe ran out into the street. Almost opposite to this were the white and green blinds of the great scientist’s house, an iron balcony, also painted green, running along in front of the first-floor windows. Beneath this was the entrance into a kind of court, gay with shrubs and tiles, into which the two Frenchmen passed in animated talk.

The door was opened to them by the doctor’s old servant, Simon, who might very well have passed for a doctor himself, having a strict suit of black, spectacles, grey hair, and a confidential manner. In fact, he was a far more presentable man of science than his master, Dr Hirsch, who was a forked radish of a fellow, with just enough bulb of a head to make his body insignificant. With all the gravity of a great physician handling a prescription, Simon handed a letter to M. Armagnac. That gentleman ripped it up with a racial impatience, and rapidly read the following:

I cannot come down to speak to you. There is a man in this house whom I refuse to meet. He is a Chauvinist officer, Dubosc. He is sitting on the stairs. He has been kicking the furniture about in all the other rooms; I have locked myself in my study, opposite that cafe. If you love me, go over to the cafe and wait at one of the tables outside. I will try to send him over to you. I want you to answer him and deal with him. I cannot meet him myself. I cannot: I will not.

There is going to be another Dreyfus case.

P. HIRSCH

M. Armagnac looked at M. Brun. M. Brun borrowed the letter, read it, and looked at M. Armagnac. Then both betook themselves briskly to one of the little tables under the chestnuts opposite, where they procured two tall glasses of horrible green absinthe, which they could drink apparently in any weather and at any time. Otherwise the cafe seemed empty, except for one soldier drinking coffee at one table, and at another a large man drinking a small syrup and a priest drinking nothing.

Maurice Brun cleared his throat and said: “Of course we must help the master in every way, but—”

There was an abrupt silence, and Armagnac said: “He may have excellent reasons for not meeting the man himself, but—”
Before either could complete a sentence, it was evident that the invader had been expelled from the house opposite. The shrubs under the archway swayed and burst apart, as that unwelcome guest was shot out of them like a cannon-ball.

He was a sturdy figure in a small and tilted Tyrolean felt hat, a figure that had indeed something generally Tyrolean about it. The man’s shoulders were big and broad, but his legs were neat and active in knee-breeches and knitted stockings. His face was brown like a nut; he had very bright and restless brown eyes; his dark hair was brushed back stiffly in front and cropped close behind, outlining a square and powerful skull; and he had a huge black moustache like the horns of a bison. Such a substantial head is generally based on a bull neck; but this was hidden by a big coloured scarf, swathed round up the man’s ears and falling in front inside his jacket like a sort of fancy waistcoat. It was a scarf of strong dead colours, dark red and old gold and purple, probably of Oriental fabrication. Altogether the man had something a shade barbaric about him; more like a Hungarian squire than an ordinary French officer. His French, however, was obviously that of a native; and his French patriotism was so impulsive as to be slightly absurd. His first act when he burst out of the archway was to call in a clarion voice down the street: “Are there any Frenchmen here?” as if he were calling for Christians in Mecca.

Armagnac and Brun instantly stood up; but they were too late. Men were already running from the street corners; there was a small but ever-clustering crowd. With the prompt French instinct for the politics of the street, the man with the black moustache had already run across to a corner of the cafe, sprung on one of the tables, and seizing a branch of chestnut to steady himself, shouted as Camille Desmoulins once shouted when he scattered the oak-leaves among the populace.

“Frenchmen!” he volleyed; “I cannot speak! God help me, that is why I am speaking! The fellows in their filthy parliaments who learn to speak also learn to be silent—silent as that spy cowering in the house opposite! Silent as he is when I beat on his bedroom door! Silent as he is now, though he hears my voice across this street and shakes where he sits! Oh, they can be silent eloquently—the politicians! But the time has come when we that cannot speak must speak. You are betrayed to the Prussians. Betrayed at this moment. Betrayed by that man. I am Jules Dubosc, Colonel of Artillery, Belfort. We caught a German spy in the Vosges yesterday, and a paper was found on him—a paper I hold in my hand. Oh, they tried to hush it up; but I took it direct to the man who wrote it—the man in that house! It is in his hand. It is signed with his initials. It is a direction for
finding the secret of this new Noiseless Powder. Hirsch invented it; Hirsch wrote this note about it. This note is in German, and was found in a German’s pocket. ‘Tell the man the formula for powder is in grey envelope in first drawer to the left of Secretary’s desk, War Office, in red ink. He must be careful. P.H.’”

He ratted short sentences like a quick-firing gun, but he was plainly the sort of man who is either mad or right. The mass of the crowd was Nationalist, and already in threatening uproar; and a minority of equally angry Intellectuals, led by Armagnac and Brun, only made the majority more militant.

“If this is a military secret,” shouted Brun, “why do you yell about it in the street?”

“I will tell you why I do!” roared Dubosc above the roaring crowd. “I went to this man in straight and civil style. If he had any explanation it could have been given in complete confidence. He refuses to explain. He refers me to two strangers in a café as to two flunkeys. He has thrown me out of the house, but I am going back into it, with the people of Paris behind me!”

A shout seemed to shake the very facade of mansions and two stones flew, one breaking a window above the balcony. The indignant Colonel plunged once more under the archway and was heard crying and thundering inside. Every instant the human sea grew wider and wider; it surged up against the rails and steps of the traitor’s house; it was already certain that the place would be burst into like the Bastille, when the broken French window opened and Dr Hirsch came out on the balcony. For an instant the fury half turned to laughter; for he was an absurd figure in such a scene. His long bare neck and sloping shoulders were the shape of a champagne bottle, but that was the only festive thing about him. His coat hung on him as on a peg; he wore his carrot-coloured hair long and weedy; his cheeks and chin were fully fringed with one of those irritating beards that begin far from the mouth. He was very pale, and he wore blue spectacles.

Livid as he was, he spoke with a sort of prim decision, so that the mob fell silent in the middle of his third sentence.

“. . . only two things to say to you now. The first is to my foes, the second to my friends. To my foes I say: It is true I will not meet M. Dubosc, though he is storming outside this very room. It is true I have asked two other men to confront him for me. And I will tell you why! Because I will not and must not see him—because it would be against all rules of dignity and honour to see him. Before I am triumphantly cleared before a court, there is another arbitration this gentleman owes me as a gentleman, and in referring him to my seconds I am strictly—”
Armagnac and Brun were waving their hats wildly, and even the Doctor’s enemies roared applause at this unexpected defiance. Once more a few sentences were inaudible, but they could hear him say: “To my friends—I myself should always prefer weapons purely intellectual, and to these an evolved humanity will certainly confine itself. But our own most precious truth is the fundamental force of matter and heredity. My books are successful; my theories are unrefuted; but I suffer in politics from a prejudice almost physical in the French. I cannot speak like Clemenceau and Deroulede, for their words are like echoes of their pistols. The French ask for a duellist as the English ask for a sportsman. Well, I give my proofs: I will pay this barbaric bribe, and then go back to reason for the rest of my life.”

Two men were instantly found in the crowd itself to offer their services to Colonel Dubosc, who came out presently, satisfied. One was the common soldier with the coffee, who said simply: “I will act for you, sir. I am the Duc de Valognes.” The other was the big man, whom his friend the priest sought at first to dissuade; and then walked away alone.

In the early evening a light dinner was spread at the back of the Cafe Charlemagne. Though unroofed by any glass or gilt plaster, the guests were nearly all under a delicate and irregular roof of leaves; for the ornamental trees stood so thick around and among the tables as to give something of the dimness and the dazzle of a small orchard. At one of the central tables a very stumpy little priest sat in complete solitude, and applied himself to a pile of whitebait with the gravest sort of enjoyment. His daily living being very plain, he had a peculiar taste for sudden and isolated luxuries; he was an abstemious epicure. He did not lift his eyes from his plate, round which red pepper, lemons, brown bread and butter, etc., were rigidly ranked, until a tall shadow fell across the table, and his friend Flambeau sat down opposite. Flambeau was gloomy.

“I’m afraid I must chuck this business,” said he heavily. “I’m all on the side of the French soldiers like Dubosc, and I’m all against the French atheists like Hirsch; but it seems to me in this case we’ve made a mistake. The Duke and I thought it as well to investigate the charge, and I must say I’m glad we did.”

“Is the paper a forgery, then?” asked the priest.

“That’s just the odd thing,” replied Flambeau. “It’s exactly like Hirsch’s writing, and nobody can point out any mistake in it. But it wasn’t written by Hirsch. If he’s a French patriot he didn’t write it, because it gives information to Germany. And if he’s a German spy he didn’t write it, well—because it doesn’t give information to Germany.”
“You mean the information is wrong?” asked Father Brown.

“Wrong,” replied the other, “and wrong exactly where Dr Hirsch would have been right—about the hiding-place of his own secret formula in his own official department. By favour of Hirsch and the authorities, the Duke and I have actually been allowed to inspect the secret drawer at the War Office where the Hirsch formula is kept. We are the only people who have ever known it, except the inventor himself and the Minister for War; but the Minister permitted it to save Hirsch from fighting. After that we really can’t support Dubosc if his revelation is a mare’s nest.”

“And it is?” asked Father Brown.

“It is,” said his friend gloomily. “It is a clumsy forgery by somebody who knew nothing of the real hiding-place. It says the paper is in the cupboard on the right of the Secretary’s desk. As a fact the cupboard with the secret drawer is some way to the left of the desk. It says the grey envelope contains a long document written in red ink. It isn’t written in red ink, but in ordinary black ink. It’s manifestly absurd to say that Hirsch can have made a mistake about a paper that nobody knew of but himself; or can have tried to help a foreign thief by telling him to fumble in the wrong drawer. I think we must chuck it up and apologize to old Carrots.”

Father Brown seemed to cogitate; he lifted a little whitebait on his fork. “You are sure the grey envelope was in the left cupboard?” he asked.

“Positive,” replied Flambeau. “The grey envelope—it was a white envelope really—was—”

Father Brown put down the small silver fish and the fork and stared across at his companion. “What?” he asked, in an altered voice.

“Well, what?” repeated Flambeau, eating heartily.

“It was not grey,” said the priest. “Flambeau, you frighten me.”

“What the deuce are you frightened of?”

“I’m frightened of a white envelope,” said the other seriously, “If it had only just been grey! Hang it all, it might as well have been grey. But if it was white, the whole business is black. The Doctor has been dabbling in some of the old brimstone after all.”

“But I tell you he couldn’t have written such a note!” cried Flambeau. “The note is utterly wrong about the facts. And innocent or guilty, Dr Hirsch knew all about the facts.”

“The man who wrote that note knew all about the facts,” said his clerical companion soberly. “He could never have got ’em so wrong without knowing
about ’em. You have to know an awful lot to be wrong on every subject—like the devil.”

“Do you mean—?”

“I mean a man telling lies on chance would have told some of the truth,” said his friend firmly. “Suppose someone sent you to find a house with a green door and a blue blind, with a front garden but no back garden, with a dog but no cat, and where they drank coffee but not tea. You would say if you found no such house that it was all made up. But I say no. I say if you found a house where the door was blue and the blind green, where there was a back garden and no front garden, where cats were common and dogs instantly shot, where tea was drunk in quarts and coffee forbidden—then you would know you had found the house. The man must have known that particular house to be so accurately inaccurate.”

“But what could it mean?” demanded the diner opposite.

“I can’t conceive,” said Brown; “I don’t understand this Hirsch affair at all. As long as it was only the left drawer instead of the right, and red ink instead of black, I thought it must be the chance blunders of a forger, as you say. But three is a mystical number; it finishes things. It finishes this. That the direction about the drawer, the colour of ink, the colour of envelope, should none of them be right by accident, that can’t be a coincidence. It wasn’t.”

“What was it, then? Treason?” asked Flambeau, resuming his dinner.

“I don’t know that either,” answered Brown, with a face of blank bewilderment. “The only thing I can think of. . . . Well, I never understood that Dreyfus case. I can always grasp moral evidence easier than the other sorts. I go by a man’s eyes and voice, don’t you know, and whether his family seems happy, and by what subjects he chooses—and avoids. Well, I was puzzled in the Dreyfus case. Not by the horrible things imputed both ways; I know (though it’s not modern to say so) that human nature in the highest places is still capable of being Cenci or Borgia. No—, what puzzled me was the sincerity of both parties. I don’t mean the political parties; the rank and file are always roughly honest, and often duped. I mean the persons of the play. I mean the conspirators, if they were conspirators. I mean the traitor, if he was a traitor. I mean the men who must have known the truth. Now Dreyfus went on like a man who knew he was a wronged man. And yet the French statesmen and soldiers went on as if they knew he wasn’t a wronged man but simply a wrong ‘un. I don’t mean they behaved well; I mean they behaved as if they were sure. I can’t describe these things; I know what I mean.”

“I wish I did,” said his friend. “And what has it to do with old Hirsch?”
“Suppose a person in a position of trust,” went on the priest, “began to give the enemy information because it was false information. Suppose he even thought he was saving his country by misleading the foreigner. Suppose this brought him into spy circles, and little loans were made to him, and little ties tied on to him. Suppose he kept up his contradictory position in a confused way by never telling the foreign spies the truth, but letting it more and more be guessed. The better part of him (what was left of it) would still say: ‘I have not helped the enemy; I said it was the left drawer.’ The meaner part of him would already be saying: ‘But they may have the sense to see that means the right.’ I think it is psychologically possible—in an enlightened age, you know.”

“It may be psychologically possible,” answered Flambeau, “and it certainly would explain Dreyfus being certain he was wronged and his judges being sure he was guilty. But it won’t wash historically, because Dreyfus’s document (if it was his document) was literally correct.”

“I wasn’t thinking of Dreyfus,” said Father Brown.

Silence had sunk around them with the emptying of the tables; it was already late, though the sunlight still clung to everything, as if accidentally entangled in the trees. In the stillness Flambeau shifted his seat sharply—making an isolated and echoing noise—and threw his elbow over the angle of it. “Well,” he said, rather harshly, “if Hirsch is not better than a timid treason-monger . . .”

“You mustn’t be too hard on them,” said Father Brown gently. “It’s not entirely their fault; but they have no instincts. I mean those things that make a woman refuse to dance with a man or a man to touch an investment. They’ve been taught that it’s all a matter of degree.”

“Anyhow,” cried Flambeau impatiently, “he’s not a patch on my principal; and I shall go through with it. Old Dubosc may be a bit mad, but he’s a sort of patriot after all.”

Father Brown continued to consume whitebait.

Something in the stolid way he did so caused Flambeau’s fierce black eyes to ramble over his companion afresh. “What’s the matter with you?” Flambeau demanded. “Dubosc’s all right in that way. You don’t doubt him?”

“My friend,” said the small priest, laying down his knife and fork in a kind of cold despair, “I doubt everything. Everything, I mean, that has happened today. I doubt the whole story, though it has been acted before my face. I doubt every sight that my eyes have seen since morning. There is something in this business quite different from the ordinary police mystery where one man is more or less lying and the other man more or less telling the truth. Here both men . . . Well!
I’ve told you the only theory I can think of that could satisfy anybody. It doesn’t satisfy me.”

“Nor me either,” replied Flambeau frowning, while the other went on eating fish with an air of entire resignation. “If all you can suggest is that notion of a message conveyed by contraries, I call it uncommonly clever, but . . . well, what would you call it?”

“I should call it thin,” said the priest promptly. “I should call it uncommonly thin. But that’s the queer thing about the whole business. The lie is like a schoolboy’s. There are only three versions, Dubosc’s and Hirsch’s and that fancy of mine. Either that note was written by a French officer to ruin a French official; or it was written by the French official to help German officers; or it was written by the French official to mislead German officers. Very well. You’d expect a secret paper passing between such people, officials or officers, to look quite different from that. You’d expect, probably a cipher, certainly abbreviations; most certainly scientific and strictly professional terms. But this thing’s elaborately simple, like a penny dreadful: ‘In the purple grotto you will find the golden casket.’ It looks as if . . . as if it were meant to be seen through at once.”

Almost before they could take it in a short figure in French uniform had walked up to their table like the wind, and sat down with a sort of thump.

“I have extraordinary news,” said the Duc de Valognes. “I have just come from this Colonel of ours. He is packing up to leave the country, and he asks us to make his excuses sur le terrain.”

“What?” cried Flambeau, with an incredulity quite frightful—“apologize?”

“Yes,” said the Duke gruffly; “then and there—before everybody—when the swords are drawn. And you and I have to do it while he is leaving the country.”

“But what can this mean?” cried Flambeau. “He can’t be afraid of that little Hirsch! Confound it!” he cried, in a kind of rational rage; “nobody could be afraid of Hirsch!”

“I believe it’s some plot!” snapped Valognes—“some plot of the Jews and Freemasons. It’s meant to work up glory for Hirsch . . .”

The face of Father Brown was commonplace, but curiously contented; it could shine with ignorance as well as with knowledge. But there was always one flash when the foolish mask fell, and the wise mask fitted itself in its place; and Flambeau, who knew his friend, knew that his friend had suddenly understood. Brown said nothing, but finished his plate of fish.

“Where did you last see our precious Colonel?” asked Flambeau, irritably.
“He’s round at the Hotel Saint Louis by the Elysee, where we drove with him. He’s packing up, I tell you.”

“Will he be there still, do you think?” asked Flambeau, frowning at the table.

“I don’t think he can get away yet,” replied the Duke; “he’s packing to go a long journey . . .”

“No,” said Father Brown, quite simply, but suddenly standing up, “for a very short journey. For one of the shortest, in fact. But we may still be in time to catch him if we go there in a motor-cab.”

Nothing more could be got out of him until the cab swept round the corner by the Hotel Saint Louis, where they got out, and he led the party up a side lane already in deep shadow with the growing dusk. Once, when the Duke impatiently asked whether Hirsch was guilty of treason or not, he answered rather absently: “No; only of ambition—like Caesar.” Then he somewhat inconsequently added: “He lives a very lonely life; he has had to do everything for himself.”

“Well, if he’s ambitious, he ought to be satisfied now,” said Flambeau rather bitterly. “All Paris will cheer him now our cursed Colonel has turned tail.”

“Don’t talk so loud,” said Father Brown, lowering his voice, “your cursed Colonel is just in front.”

The other two started and shrank farther back into the shadow of the wall, for the sturdy figure of their runaway principal could indeed be seen shuffling along in the twilight in front, a bag in each hand. He looked much the same as when they first saw him, except that he had changed his picturesque mountaineering knickers for a conventional pair of trousers. It was clear he was already escaping from the hotel.

The lane down which they followed him was one of those that seem to be at the back of things, and look like the wrong side of the stage scenery. A colourless, continuous wall ran down one flank of it, interrupted at intervals by dull-hued and dirt-stained doors, all shut fast and featureless save for the chalk scribbles of some passing gamin. The tops of trees, mostly rather depressing evergreens, showed at intervals over the top of the wall, and beyond them in the grey and purple gloaming could be seen the back of some long terrace of tall Parisian houses, really comparatively close, but somehow looking as inaccessible as a range of marble mountains. On the other side of the lane ran the high gilt railings of a gloomy park.

Flambeau was looking round him in rather a weird way. “Do you know,” he said, “there is something about this place that—”
“Hullo!” called out the Duke sharply; “that fellow’s disappeared. Vanished, like a blasted fairy!”

“He has a key,” explained their clerical friend. “He’s only gone into one of these garden doors,” and as he spoke they heard one of the dull wooden doors close again with a click in front of them.

Flambeau strode up to the door thus shut almost in his face, and stood in front of it for a moment, biting his black moustache in a fury of curiosity. Then he threw up his long arms and swung himself aloft like a monkey and stood on the top of the wall, his enormous figure dark against the purple sky, like the dark tree-tops.

The Duke looked at the priest. “Dubosc’s escape is more elaborate than we thought,” he said; “but I suppose he is escaping from France.”

“He is escaping from everywhere,” answered Father Brown.

Valognes’s eyes brightened, but his voice sank. “Do you mean suicide?” he asked.

“You will not find his body,” replied the other.

A kind of cry came from Flambeau on the wall above. “My God,” he exclaimed in French, “I know what this place is now! Why, it’s the back of the street where old Hirsch lives. I thought I could recognize the back of a house as well as the back of a man.”

“And Dubosc’s gone in there!” cried the Duke, smiting his hip. “Why, they’ll meet after all!” And with sudden Gallic vivacity he hopped up on the wall beside Flambeau and sat there positively kicking his legs with excitement. The priest alone remained below, leaning against the wall, with his back to the whole theatre of events, and looking wistfully across to the park palings and the twinkling, twilit trees.

The Duke, however stimulated, had the instincts of an aristocrat, and desired rather to stare at the house than to spy on it; but Flambeau, who had the instincts of a burglar (and a detective), had already swung himself from the wall into the fork of a straggling tree from which he could crawl quite close to the only illuminated window in the back of the high dark house. A red blind had been pulled down over the light, but pulled crookedly, so that it gaped on one side, and by risking his neck along a branch that looked as treacherous as a twig, Flambeau could just see Colonel Dubosc walking about in a brilliantly-lighted and luxurious bedroom. But close as Flambeau was to the house, he heard the words of his colleagues by the wall, and repeated them in a low voice.

“Yes, they will meet now after all!”
“They will never meet,” said Father Brown. “Hirsch was right when he said that in such an affair the principals must not meet. Have you read a queer psychological story by Henry James, of two persons who so perpetually missed meeting each other by accident that they began to feel quite frightened of each other, and to think it was fate? This is something of the kind, but more curious.”

“There are people in Paris who will cure them of such morbid fancies,” said Valognes vindictively. “They will jolly well have to meet if we capture them and force them to fight.”

“They will not meet on the Day of Judgement,” said the priest. “If God Almighty held the truncheon of the lists, if St Michael blew the trumpet for the swords to cross—even then, if one of them stood ready, the other would not come.”

“Oh, what does all this mysticism mean?” cried the Duc de Valognes, impatiently; “why on earth shouldn’t they meet like other people?”

“They are the opposite of each other,” said Father Brown, with a queer kind of smile. “They contradict each other. They cancel out, so to speak.”

He continued to gaze at the darkening trees opposite, but Valognes turned his head sharply at a suppressed exclamation from Flambeau. That investigator, peering into the lighted room, had just seen the Colonel, after a pace or two, proceed to take his coat off. Flambeau’s first thought was that this really looked like a fight; but he soon dropped the thought for another. The solidity and squareness of Dubosc’s chest and shoulders was all a powerful piece of padding and came off with his coat. In his shirt and trousers he was a comparatively slim gentleman, who walked across the bedroom to the bathroom with no more pugnacious purpose than that of washing himself. He bent over a basin, dried his dripping hands and face on a towel, and turned again so that the strong light fell on his face. His brown complexion had gone, his big black moustache had gone; he—was clean-shaven and very pate. Nothing remained of the Colonel but his bright, hawk-like, brown eyes. Under the wall Father Brown was going on in heavy meditation, as if to himself.

“It is all just like what I was saying to Flambeau. These opposites won’t do. They don’t work. They don’t fight. If it’s white instead of black, and solid instead of liquid, and so on all along the line—then there’s something wrong, Monsieur, there’s something wrong. One of these men is fair and the other dark, one stout and the other slim, one strong and the other weak. One has a moustache and no beard, so you can’t see his mouth; the other has a beard and no moustache, so you can’t see his chin. One has hair cropped to his skull, but a
scarf to hide his neck; the other has low shirt-collars, but long hair to bide his skull. It’s all too neat and correct, Monsieur, and there’s something wrong. Things made so opposite are things that cannot quarrel. Wherever the one sticks out the other sinks in. Like a face and a mask, like a lock and a key . . .”

Flambeau was peering into the house with a visage as white as a sheet. The occupant of the room was standing with his back to him, but in front of a looking-glass, and had already fitted round his face a sort of framework of rank red hair, hanging disordered from the head and clinging round the jaws and chin while leaving the mocking mouth uncovered. Seen thus in the glass the white face looked like the face of Judas laughing horribly and surrounded by capering flames of hell. For a spasm Flambeau saw the fierce, red-brown eyes dancing, then they were covered with a pair of blue spectacles. Slipping on a loose black coat, the figure vanished towards the front of the house. A few moments later a roar of popular applause from the street beyond announced that Dr Hirsch had once more appeared upon the balcony.
FOUR

THE MAN IN THE PASSAGE

TWO men appeared simultaneously at the two ends of a sort of passage running along the side of the Apollo Theatre in the Adelphi. The evening daylight in the streets was large and luminous, opalescent and empty. The passage was comparatively long and dark, so each man could see the other as a mere black inky silhouette at the other end. Nevertheless, each man knew the other, even in that outline; for they were both men of striking appearance and they hated each other.

The covered passage opened at one end on one of the steep streets of the Adelphi, and at the other on a terrace overlooking the sunset-coloured river. One side of the passage was a blank wall, for the building it supported was an old unsuccessful theatre restaurant, now shut up. The other side of the passage contained two doors, one at each end. Neither was what was commonly called the stage door; they were a sort of special and private stage doors used by very special performers, and in this case by the star actor and actress in the Shakespearean performance of the day. Persons of that eminence often like to have such private exits and entrances, for meeting friends or avoiding them.

The two men in question were certainly two such friends, men who evidently knew the doors and counted on their opening, for each approached the door at the upper end with equal coolness and confidence. Not, however, with equal speed; but the man who walked fast was the man from the other end of the tunnel, so they both arrived before the secret stage door almost at the same instant. They saluted each other with civility, and waited a moment before one of them, the sharper walker who seemed to have the shorter patience, knocked at the door.

In this and everything else each man was opposite and neither could be called inferior. As private persons both were handsome, capable and popular. As public persons, both were in the first public rank. But everything about them, from their glory to their good looks, was of a diverse and incomparable kind. Sir Wilson Seymour was the kind of man whose importance is known to everybody who knows. The more you mixed with the innermost ring in every polity or profession, the more often you met Sir Wilson Seymour. He was the one intelligent man on twenty unintelligent committees—on every sort of subject,
from the reform of the Royal Academy to the project of bimetallism for Greater Britain. In the Arts especially he was omnipotent. He was so unique that nobody could quite decide whether he was a great aristocrat who had taken up Art, or a great artist whom the aristocrats had taken up. But you could not meet him for five minutes without realizing that you had really been ruled by him all your life.

His appearance was “distinguished” in exactly the same sense; it was at once conventional and unique. Fashion could have found no fault with his high silk hat—, yet it was unlike anyone else’s hat—a little higher, perhaps, and adding something to his natural height. His tall, slender figure had a slight stoop yet it looked the reverse of feeble. His hair was silver-grey, but he did not look old; it was worn longer than the common yet he did not look effeminate; it was curly but it did not look curled. His carefully pointed beard made him look more manly and militant than otherwise, as it does in those old admirals of Velazquez with whose dark portraits his house was hung. His grey gloves were a shade bluer, his silver-knobbed cane a shade longer than scores of such gloves and canes flapped and flourished about the theatres and the restaurants.

The other man was not so tall, yet would have struck nobody as short, but merely as strong and handsome. His hair also was curly, but fair and cropped close to a strong, massive head—the sort of head you break a door with, as Chaucer said of the Miller’s. His military moustache and the carriage of his shoulders showed him a soldier, but he had a pair of those peculiar frank and piercing blue eyes which are more common in sailors. His face was somewhat square, his jaw was square, his shoulders were square, even his jacket was square. Indeed, in the wild school of caricature then current, Mr Max Beerbohm had represented him as a proposition in the fourth book of Euclid.

For he also was a public man, though with quite another sort of success. You did not have to be in the best society to have heard of Captain Cutler, of the siege of Hong-Kong, and the great march across China. You could not get away from hearing of him wherever you were; his portrait was on every other postcard; his maps and battles in every other illustrated paper; songs in his honour in every other music-hall turn or on every other barrel-organ. His fame, though probably more temporary, was ten times more wide, popular and spontaneous than the other man’s. In thousands of English homes he appeared enormous above England, like Nelson. Yet he had infinitely less power in England than Sir Wilson Seymour.

The door was opened to them by an aged servant or “dresser,” whose broken-down face and figure and black shabby coat and trousers contrasted queerly with
the glittering interior of the great actress’s dressing-room. It was fitted and filled with looking-glasses at every angle of refraction, so that they looked like the hundred facets of one huge diamond—if one could get inside a diamond. The other features of luxury, a few flowers, a few coloured cushions, a few scraps of stage costume, were multiplied by all the mirrors into the madness of the Arabian Nights, and danced and changed places perpetually as the shuffling attendant shifted a mirror outwards or shot one back against the wall.

They both spoke to the dingy dresser by name, calling him Parkinson, and asking for the lady as Miss Aurora Rome. Parkinson said she was in the other room, but he would go and tell her. A shade crossed the brow of both visitors; for the other room was the private room of the great actor with whom Miss Aurora was performing, and she was of the kind that does not inflame admiration without inflaming jealousy. In about half a minute, however, the inner door opened, and she entered as she always did, even in private life, so that the very silence seemed to be a roar of applause, and one well-deserved. She was clad in a somewhat strange garb of peacock green and peacock blue satins, that gleamed like blue and green metals, such as delight children and aesthetes, and her heavy, hot brown hair framed one of those magic faces which are dangerous to all men, but especially to boys and to men growing grey. In company with her male colleague, the great American actor, Isidore Bruno, she was producing a particularly poetical and fantastic interpretation of Midsummer Night’s Dream: in which the artistic prominence was given to Oberon and Titania, or in other words to Bruno and herself. Set in dreamy and exquisite scenery, and moving in mystical dances, the green costume, like burnished beetle-wings, expressed all the elusive individuality of an elfin queen. But when personally confronted in what was still broad daylight, a man looked only at the woman’s face.

She greeted both men with the beaming and baffling smile which kept so many males at the same just dangerous distance from her. She accepted some flowers from Cutler, which were as tropical and expensive as his victories; and another sort of present from Sir Wilson Seymour, offered later on and more nonchalantly by that gentleman. For it was against his breeding to show eagerness, and against his conventional unconventionality to give anything so obvious as flowers. He had picked up a trifle, he said, which was rather a curiosity, it was an ancient Greek dagger of the Mycenaean Epoch, and might well have been worn in the time of Theseus and Hippolyta. It was made of brass like all the Heroic weapons, but, oddly enough, sharp enough to prick anyone still. He had really been attracted to it by the leaf-like shape; it was as perfect as
a Greek vase. If it was of any interest to Miss Rome or could come in anywhere in the play, he hoped she would—

The inner door burst open and a big figure appeared, who was more of a contrast to the explanatory Seymour than even Captain Cutler. Nearly six-foot-six, and of more than theatrical thews and muscles, Isidore Bruno, in the gorgeous leopard skin and golden-brown garments of Oberon, looked like a barbaric god. He leaned on a sort of hunting-spear, which across a theatre looked a slight, silvery wand, but which in the small and comparatively crowded room looked as plain as a pike-staff—and as menacing. His vivid black eyes rolled volcanically, his bronzed face, handsome as it was, showed at that moment a combination of high cheekbones with set white teeth, which recalled certain American conjectures about his origin in the Southern plantations.

“Aurora,” he began, in that deep voice like a drum of passion that had moved so many audiences, “will you—”

He stopped indecisively because a sixth figure had suddenly presented itself just inside the doorway—a figure so incongruous in the scene as to be almost comic. It was a very short man in the black uniform of the Roman secular clergy, and looking (especially in such a presence as Bruno’s and Aurora’s) rather like the wooden Noah out of an ark. He did not, however, seem conscious of any contrast, but said with dull civility: “I believe Miss Rome sent for me.”

A shrewd observer might have remarked that the emotional temperature rather rose at so unemotional an interruption. The detachment of a professional celibate seemed to reveal to the others that they stood round the woman as a ring of amorous rivals; just as a stranger coming in with frost on his coat will reveal that a room is like a furnace. The presence of the one man who did not care about her increased Miss Rome’s sense that everybody else was in love with her, and each in a somewhat dangerous way: the actor with all the appetite of a savage and a spoilt child; the soldier with all the simple selfishness of a man of will rather than mind; Sir Wilson with that daily hardening concentration with which old Hedonists take to a hobby; nay, even the abject Parkinson, who had known her before her triumphs, and who followed her about the room with eyes or feet, with the dumb fascination of a dog.

A shrewd person might also have noted a yet odder thing. The man like a black wooden Noah (who was not wholly without shrewdness) noted it with a considerable but contained amusement. It was evident that the great Aurora, though by no means indifferent to the admiration of the other sex, wanted at this moment to get rid of all the men who admired her and be left alone with the man
who did not—did not admire her in that sense at least; for the little priest did admire and even enjoy the firm feminine diplomacy with which she set about her task. There was, perhaps, only one thing that Aurora Rome was clever about, and that was one half of humanity—the other half. The little priest watched, like a Napoleonic campaign, the swift precision of her policy for expelling all while banishing none. Bruno, the big actor, was so babyish that it was easy to send him off in brute sulks, banging the door. Cutler, the British officer, was pachydermatous to ideas, but punctilious about behaviour. He would ignore all hints, but he would die rather than ignore a definite commission from a lady. As to old Seymour, he had to be treated differently; he had to be left to the last. The only way to move him was to appeal to him in confidence as an old friend, to let him into the secret of the clearance. The priest did really admire Miss Rome as she achieved all these three objects in one selected action.

She went across to Captain Cutler and said in her sweetest manner: “I shall value all these flowers, because they must be your favourite flowers. But they won’t be complete, you know, without my favourite flower. Do go over to that shop round the corner and get me some lilies-of-the-valley, and then it will be quite lovely.”

The first object of her diplomacy, the exit of the enraged Bruno, was at once achieved. He had already handed his spear in a lordly style, like a sceptre, to the piteous Parkinson, and was about to assume one of the cushioned seats like a throne. But at this open appeal to his rival there glowed in his opal eyeballs all the sensitive insolence of the slave; he knotted his enormous brown fists for an instant, and then, dashing open the door, disappeared into his own apartments beyond. But meanwhile Miss Rome’s experiment in mobilizing the British Army had not succeeded so simply as seemed probable. Cutler had indeed risen stiffly and suddenly, and walked towards the door, hatless, as if at a word of command. But perhaps there was something ostentatiously elegant about the languid figure of Seymour leaning against one of the looking-glasses that brought him up short at the entrance, turning his head this way and that like a bewildered bulldog.

“I must show this stupid man where to go,” said Aurora in a whisper to Seymour, and ran out to the threshold to speed the parting guest.

Seymour seemed to be listening, elegant and unconscious as was his posture, and he seemed relieved when he heard the lady call out some last instructions to the Captain, and then turn sharply and run laughing down the passage towards the other end, the end on the terrace above the Thames. Yet a second or two after Seymour’s brow darkened again. A man in his position has so many rivals, and
he remembered that at the other end of the passage was the corresponding entrance to Bruno’s private room. He did not lose his dignity; he said some civil words to Father Brown about the revival of Byzantine architecture in the Westminster Cathedral, and then, quite naturally, strolled out himself into the upper end of the passage. Father Brown and Parkinson were left alone, and they were neither of them men with a taste for superfluous conversation. The dresser went round the room, pulling out looking-glasses and pushing them in again, his dingy dark coat and trousers looking all the more dismal since he was still holding the festive fairy spear of King Oberon. Every time he pulled out the frame of a new glass, a new black figure of Father Brown appeared; the absurd glass chamber was full of Father Browns, upside down in the air like angels, turning somersaults like acrobats, turning their backs to everybody like very rude persons.

Father Brown seemed quite unconscious of this cloud of witnesses, but followed Parkinson with an idly attentive eye till he took himself and his absurd spear into the farther room of Bruno. Then he abandoned himself to such abstract meditations as always amused him—calculating the angles of the mirrors, the angles of each refraction, the angle at which each must fit into the wall . . . when he heard a strong but strangled cry.

He sprang to his feet and stood rigidly listening. At the same instant Sir Wilson Seymour burst back into the room, white as ivory. “Who’s that man in the passage?” he cried. “Where’s that dagger of mine?”

Before Father Brown could turn in his heavy boots Seymour was plunging about the room looking for the weapon. And before he could possibly find that weapon or any other, a brisk running of feet broke upon the pavement outside, and the square face of Cutler was thrust into the same doorway. He was still grotesquely grasping a bunch of lilies-of-the-valley. “What’s this?” he cried. “What’s that creature down the passage? Is this some of your tricks?”

“My tricks!” hissed his pale rival, and made a stride towards him.

In the instant of time in which all this happened Father Brown stepped out into the top of the passage, looked down it, and at once walked briskly towards what he saw.

At this the other two men dropped their quarrel and darted after him, Cutler calling out: “What are you doing? Who are you?”

“My name is Brown,” said the priest sadly, as he bent over something and straightened himself again. “Miss Rome sent for me, and I came as quickly as I could. I have come too late.”
The three men looked down, and in one of them at least the life died in that late light of afternoon. It ran along the passage like a path of gold, and in the midst of it Aurora Rome lay lustrous in her robes of green and gold, with her dead face turned upwards. Her dress was torn away as in a struggle, leaving the right shoulder bare, but the wound from which the blood was welling was on the other side. The brass dagger lay flat and gleaming a yard or so away.

There was a blank stillness for a measurable time, so that they could hear far off a flower-girl’s laugh outside Charing Cross, and someone whistling furiously for a taxicab in one of the streets off the Strand. Then the Captain, with a movement so sudden that it might have been passion or play-acting, took Sir Wilson Seymour by the throat.

Seymour looked at him steadily without either fight or fear. “You need not kill me,” he said in a voice quite cold; “I shall do that on my own account.”

The Captain’s hand hesitated and dropped; and the other added with the same icy candour: “If I find I haven’t the nerve to do it with that dagger I can do it in a month with drink.”

“Drink isn’t good enough for me,” replied Cutler, “but I’ll have blood for this before I die. Not yours—but I think I know whose.”

And before the others could appreciate his intention he snatched up the dagger, sprang at the other door at the lower end of the passage, burst it open, bolt and all, and confronted Bruno in his dressing-room. As he did so, old Parkinson tottered in his wavering way out of the door and caught sight of the corpse lying in the passage. He moved shakily towards it; looked at it weakly with a working face; then moved shakily back into the dressing-room again, and sat down suddenly on one of the richly cushioned chairs. Father Brown instantly ran across to him, taking no notice of Cutler and the colossal actor, though the room already rang with their blows and they began to struggle for the dagger. Seymour, who retained some practical sense, was whistling for the police at the end of the passage.

When the police arrived it was to tear the two men from an almost ape-like grapple; and, after a few formal inquiries, to arrest Isidore Bruno upon a charge of murder, brought against him by his furious opponent. The idea that the great national hero of the hour had arrested a wrongdoer with his own hand doubtless had its weight with the police, who are not without elements of the journalist. They treated Cutler with a certain solemn attention, and pointed out that he had got a slight slash on the hand. Even as Cutler bore him back across tilted chair and table, Bruno had twisted the dagger out of his grasp and disabled him just
below the wrist. The injury was really slight, but till he was removed from the room the half-savage prisoner stared at the running blood with a steady smile.

“Looks a cannibal sort of chap, don’t he?” said the constable confidentially to Cutler.

Cutler made no answer, but said sharply a moment after: “We must attend to the . . . the death . . .” and his voice escaped from articulation.

“The two deaths,” came in the voice of the priest from the farther side of the room. “This poor fellow was gone when I got across to him.” And he stood looking down at old Parkinson, who sat in a black huddle on the gorgeous chair. He also had paid his tribute, not without eloquence, to the woman who had died.

The silence was first broken by Cutler, who seemed not untouched by a rough tenderness. “I wish I was him,” he said huskily. “I remember he used to watch her wherever she walked more than—anybody. She was his air, and he’s dried up. He’s just dead.”

“We are all dead,” said Seymour in a strange voice, looking down the road.

They took leave of Father Brown at the corner of the road, with some random apologies for any rudeness they might have shown. Both their faces were tragic, but also cryptic.

The mind of the little priest was always a rabbit-warren of wild thoughts that jumped too quickly for him to catch them. Like the white tail of a rabbit he had the vanishing thought that he was certain of their grief, but not so certain of their innocence.

“We had better all be going,” said Seymour heavily; “we have done all we can to help.”

“Will you understand my motives,” asked Father Brown quietly, “if I say you have done all you can to hurt?”

They both started as if guiltily, and Cutler said sharply: “To hurt whom?”

“To hurt yourselves,” answered the priest. “I would not add to your troubles if it weren’t common justice to warn you. You’ve done nearly everything you could do to hang yourselves, if this actor should be acquitted. They’ll be sure to subpoena me; I shall be bound to say that after the cry was heard each of you rushed into the room in a wild state and began quarrelling about a dagger. As far as my words on oath can go, you might either of you have done it. You hurt yourselves with that; and then Captain Cutler must have hurt himself with the dagger.”

“Hurt myself!” exclaimed the Captain, with contempt. “A silly little scratch.”

“Which drew blood,” replied the priest, nodding. “We know there’s blood on
the brass now. And so we shall never know whether there was blood on it before.”

There was a silence; and then Seymour said, with an emphasis quite alien to his daily accent: “But I saw a man in the passage.”

“I know you did,” answered the cleric Brown with a face of wood, “so did Captain Cutler. That’s what seems so improbable.”

Before either could make sufficient sense of it even to answer, Father Brown had politely excused himself and gone stumping up the road with his stumpy old umbrella.

As modern newspapers are conducted, the most honest and most important news is the police news. If it be true that in the twentieth century more space is given to murder than to politics, it is for the excellent reason that murder is a more serious subject. But even this would hardly explain the enormous omnipresence and widely distributed detail of “The Bruno Case,” or “The Passage Mystery,” in the Press of London and the provinces. So vast was the excitement that for some weeks the Press really told the truth; and the reports of examination and cross-examination, if interminable, even if intolerable are at least reliable. The true reason, of course, was the coincidence of persons. The victim was a popular actress; the accused was a popular actor; and the accused had been caught red-handed, as it were, by the most popular soldier of the patriotic season. In those extraordinary circumstances the Press was paralysed into probity and accuracy; and the rest of this somewhat singular business can practically be recorded from reports of Bruno’s trial.

The trial was presided over by Mr Justice Monkhouse, one of those who are jeered at as humorous judges, but who are generally much more serious than the serious judges, for their levity comes from a living impatience of professional solemnity; while the serious judge is really filled with frivolity, because he is filled with vanity. All the chief actors being of a worldly importance, the barristers were well balanced; the prosecutor for the Crown was Sir Walter Cowdray, a heavy, but weighty advocate of the sort that knows how to seem English and trustworthy, and how to be rhetorical with reluctance. The prisoner was defended by Mr Patrick Butler, K.C., who was mistaken for a mere flaneur by those who misunderstood the Irish character—and those who had not been examined by him. The medical evidence involved no contradictions, the doctor, whom Seymour had summoned on the spot, agreeing with the eminent surgeon who had later examined the body. Aurora Rome had been stabbed with some sharp instrument such as a knife or dagger; some instrument, at least, of which
the blade was short. The wound was just over the heart, and she had died instantly. When the doctor first saw her she could hardly have been dead for twenty minutes. Therefore when Father Brown found her she could hardly have been dead for three.

Some official detective evidence followed, chiefly concerned with the presence or absence of any proof of a struggle; the only suggestion of this was the tearing of the dress at the shoulder, and this did not seem to fit in particularly well with the direction and finality of the blow. When these details had been supplied, though not explained, the first of the important witnesses was called.

Sir Wilson Seymour gave evidence as he did everything else that he did at all—not only well, but perfectly. Though himself much more of a public man than the judge, he conveyed exactly the fine shade of self-effacement before the King’s justice; and though everyone looked at him as they would at the Prime Minister or the Archbishop of Canterbury, they could have said nothing of his part in it but that it was that of a private gentleman, with an accent on the noun. He was also refreshingly lucid, as he was on the committees. He had been calling on Miss Rome at the theatre; he had met Captain Cutler there; they had been joined for a short time by the accused, who had then returned to his own dressing-room; they had then been joined by a Roman Catholic priest, who asked for the deceased lady and said his name was Brown. Miss Rome had then gone just outside the theatre to the entrance of the passage, in order to point out to Captain Cutler a flower-shop at which he was to buy her some more flowers; and the witness had remained in the room, exchanging a few words with the priest. He had then distinctly heard the deceased, having sent the Captain on his errand, turn round laughing and run down the passage towards its other end, where was the prisoner’s dressing-room. In idle curiosity as to the rapid movement of his friends, he had strolled out to the head of the passage himself and looked down it towards the prisoner’s door. Did he see anything in the passage? Yes; he saw something in the passage.

Sir Walter Cowdray allowed an impressive interval, during which the witness looked down, and for all his usual composure seemed to have more than his usual pallor. Then the barrister said in a lower voice, which seemed at once sympathetic and creepy: “Did you see it distinctly?”

Sir Wilson Seymour, however moved, had his excellent brains in full working-order. “Very distinctly as regards its outline, but quite indistinctly, indeed not at all, as regards the details inside the outline. The passage is of such length that anyone in the middle of it appears quite black against the light at the
other end.” The witness lowered his steady eyes once more and added: “I had noticed the fact before, when Captain Cutler first entered it.” There was another silence, and the judge leaned forward and made a note.

“Well,” said Sir Walter patiently, “what was the outline like? Was it, for instance, like the figure of the murdered woman?”

“Not in the least,” answered Seymour quietly.

“What did it look like to you?”

“It looked to me,” replied the witness, “like a tall man.”

Everyone in court kept his eyes riveted on his pen, or his umbrella-handle, or his book, or his boots or whatever he happened to be looking at. They seemed to be holding their eyes away from the prisoner by main force; but they felt his figure in the dock, and they felt it as gigantic. Tall as Bruno was to the eye, he seemed to swell taller and taller when an eyes had been torn away from him.

Cowdray was resuming his seat with his solemn face, smoothing his black silk robes, and white silk whiskers. Sir Wilson was leaving the witness-box, after a few final particulars to which there were many other witnesses, when the counsel for the defence sprang up and stopped him.

“I shall only detain you a moment,” said Mr Butler, who was a rustic-looking person with red eyebrows and an expression of partial slumber. “Will you tell his lordship how you knew it was a man?”

A faint, refined smile seemed to pass over Seymour’s features. “I’m afraid it is the vulgar test of trousers,” he said. “When I saw daylight between the long legs I was sure it was a man, after all.”

Butler’s sleepy eyes opened as suddenly as some silent explosion. “After all!” he repeated slowly. “So you did think at first it was a woman?”

Seymour looked troubled for the first time. “It is hardly a point of fact,” he said, “but if his lordship would like me to answer for my impression, of course I shall do so. There was something about the thing that was not exactly a woman and yet was not quite a man; somehow the curves were different. And it had something that looked like long hair.”

“Thank you,” said Mr Butler, K.C., and sat down suddenly, as if he had got what he wanted.

Captain Cutler was a far less plausible and composed witness than Sir Wilson, but his account of the opening incidents was solidly the same. He described the return of Bruno to his dressing-room, the dispatching of himself to buy a bunch of lilies-of-the-valley, his return to the upper end of the passage, the thing he saw in the passage, his suspicion of Seymour, and his struggle with Bruno. But he
could give little artistic assistance about the black figure that he and Seymour had seen. Asked about its outline, he said he was no art critic—with a somewhat too obvious sneer at Seymour. Asked if it was a man or a woman, he said it looked more like a beast—with a too obvious snarl at the prisoner. But the man was plainly shaken with sorrow and sincere anger, and Cowdray quickly excused him from confirming facts that were already fairly clear.

The defending counsel also was again brief in his cross-examination; although (as was his custom) even in being brief, he seemed to take a long time about it. “You used a rather remarkable expression,” he said, looking at Cutler sleepily. “What do you mean by saying that it looked more like a beast than a man or a woman?”

Cutler seemed seriously agitated. “Perhaps I oughtn’t to have said that,” he said; “but when the brute has huge humped shoulders like a chimpanzee, and bristles sticking out of its head like a pig—”

Mr Butler cut short his curious impatience in the middle. “Never mind whether its hair was like a pig’s,” he said, “was it like a woman’s?”

“A woman’s!” cried the soldier. “Great Scott, no!”

“The last witness said it was,” commented the counsel, with unscrupulous swiftness. “And did the figure have any of those serpentine and semi-feminine curves to which eloquent allusion has been made? No? No feminine curves? The figure, if I understand you, was rather heavy and square than otherwise?”

“He may have been bending forward,” said Cutler, in a hoarse and rather faint voice.

“Or again, he may not,” said Mr Butler, and sat down suddenly for the second time.

The third, witness called by Sir Walter Cowdray was the little Catholic clergyman, so little, compared with the others, that his head seemed hardly to come above the box, so that it was like cross-examining a child. But unfortunately Sir Walter had somehow got it into his head (mostly by some ramifications of his family’s religion) that Father Brown was on the side of the prisoner, because the prisoner was wicked and foreign and even partly black. Therefore he took Father Brown up sharply whenever that proud pontiff tried to explain anything; and told him to answer yes or no, and tell the plain facts without any jesuitry. When Father Brown began, in his simplicity, to say who he thought the man in the passage was, the barrister told him that he did not want his theories.

“A black shape was seen in the passage. And you say you saw the black
shape. Well, what shape was it?”

Father Brown blinked as under rebuke; but he had long known the literal nature of obedience. “The shape,” he said, “was short and thick, but had two sharp, black projections curved upwards on each side of the head or top, rather like horns, and—”

“Oh! the devil with horns, no doubt,” ejaculated Cowdray, sitting down in triumphant jocularity. “It was the devil come to eat Protestants.”

“No,” said the priest dispassionately; “I know who it was.”

Those in court had been wrought up to an irrational, but real sense of some monstrosity. They had forgotten the figure in the dock and thought only of the figure in the passage. And the figure in the passage, described by three capable and respectable men who had all seen it, was a shifting nightmare: one called it a woman, and the other a beast, and the other a devil. . . .

The judge was looking at Father Brown with level and piercing eyes. “You are a most extraordinary witness,” he said; “but there is something about you that makes me think you are trying to tell the truth. Well, who was the man you saw in the passage?”

“He was myself,” said Father Brown.

Butler, K.C., sprang to his feet in an extraordinary stillness, and said quite calmly: “Your lordship will allow me to cross-examine?” And then, without stopping, he shot at Brown the apparently disconnected question: “You have heard about this dagger; you know the experts say the crime was committed with a short blade?”

“A short blade,” assented Brown, nodding solemnly like an owl, “but a very long hilt.”

Before the audience could quite dismiss the idea that the priest had really seen himself doing murder with a short dagger with a long hilt (which seemed somehow to make it more horrible), he had himself hurried on to explain.

“I mean daggers aren’t the only things with short blades. Spears have short blades. And spears catch at the end of the steel just like daggers, if they’re that sort of fancy spear they had in theatres; like the spear poor old Parkinson killed his wife with, just when she’d sent for me to settle their family troubles—and I came just too late, God forgive me! But he died penitent—he just died of being penitent. He couldn’t bear what he’d done.”

The general impression in court was that the little priest, who was gobbling away, had literally gone mad in the box. But the judge still looked at him with bright and steady eyes of interest; and the counsel for the defence went on with
his questions unperturbed.

“If Parkinson did it with that pantomime spear,” said Butler, “he must have thrust from four yards away. How do you account for signs of struggle, like the dress dragged off the shoulder?” He had slipped into treating his mere witness as an expert; but no one noticed it now.

“The poor lady’s dress was torn,” said the witness, “because it was caught in a panel that slid to just behind her. She struggled to free herself, and as she did so Parkinson came out of the prisoner’s room and lunged with the spear.”

“A panel?” repeated the barrister in a curious voice.

“It was a looking-glass on the other side,” explained Father Brown. “When I was in the dressing-room I noticed that some of them could probably be slid out into the passage.”

There was another vast and unnatural silence, and this time it was the judge who spoke. “So you really mean that when you looked down that passage, the man you saw was yourself—in a mirror?”

“Yes, my lord; that was what I was trying to say,” said Brown, “but they asked me for the shape; and our hats have corners just like horns, and so I—”

The judge leaned forward, his old eyes yet more brilliant, and said in specially distinct tones: “Do you really mean to say that when Sir Wilson Seymour saw that wild what-you-call-him with curves and a woman’s hair and a man’s trousers, what he saw was Sir Wilson Seymour?”

“Yes, my lord,” said Father Brown.

“And you mean to say that when Captain Cutler saw that chimpanzee with humped shoulders and hog’s bristles, he simply saw himself?”

“Yes, my lord.”

The judge leaned back in his chair with a luxuriance in which it was hard to separate the cynicism and the admiration. “And can you tell us why,” he asked, “you should know your own figure in a looking-glass, when two such distinguished men don’t?”

Father Brown blinked even more painfully than before; then he stammered: “Really, my lord, I don’t know unless it’s because I don’t look at it so often.”
FIVE

THE MISTAKE OF THE MACHINE

FLAMBEAU and his friend the priest were sitting in the Temple Gardens about sunset; and their neighbourhood or some such accidental influence had turned their talk to matters of legal process. From the problem of the licence in cross-examination, their talk strayed to Roman and mediaeval torture, to the examining magistrate in France and the Third Degree in America.

“I’ve been reading,” said Flambeau, “of this new psychometric method they talk about so much, especially in America. You know what I mean; they put a pulsmometer on a man’s wrist and judge by how his heart goes at the pronunciation of certain words. What do you think of it?”

“I think it very interesting,” replied Father Brown; “it reminds me of that interesting idea in the Dark Ages that blood would flow from a corpse if the murderer touched it.”

“Do you really mean,” demanded his friend, “that you think the two methods equally valuable?”

“I think them equally valueless,” replied Brown. “Blood flows, fast or slow, in dead folk or living, for so many more million reasons than we can ever know. Blood will have to flow very funnily; blood will have to flow up the Matterhorn, before I will take it as a sign that I am to shed it.”

“The method,” remarked the other, “has been guaranteed by some of the greatest American men of science.”

“What sentimentalists men of science are!” exclaimed Father Brown, “and how much more sentimental must American men of science be! Who but a Yankee would think of proving anything from heart-throbs? Why, they must be as sentimental as a man who thinks a woman is in love with him if she blushes. That’s a test from the circulation of the blood, discovered by the immortal Harvey; and a jolly rotten test, too.”

“But surely,” insisted Flambeau, “it might point pretty straight at something or other.”

“There’s a disadvantage in a stick pointing straight,” answered the other. “What is it? Why, the other end of the stick always points the opposite way. It depends whether you get hold of the stick by the right end. I saw the thing done once and I’ve never believed in it since.” And he proceeded to tell the story of
his disillusionment.

It happened nearly twenty years before, when he was chaplain to his co-religionists in a prison in Chicago—where the Irish population displayed a capacity both for crime and penitence which kept him tolerably busy. The official second-in-command under the Governor was an ex-detective named Greywood Usher, a cadaverous, careful-spoken Yankee philosopher, occasionally varying a very rigid visage with an odd apologetic grimace. He liked Father Brown in a slightly patronizing way; and Father Brown liked him, though he heartily disliked his theories. His theories were extremely complicated and were held with extreme simplicity.

One evening he had sent for the priest, who, according to his custom, took a seat in silence at a table piled and littered with papers, and waited. The official selected from the papers a scrap of newspaper cutting, which he handed across to the cleric, who read it gravely. It appeared to be an extract from one of the pinkest of American Society papers, and ran as follows:

“Society’s brightest widower is once more on the Freak Dinner stunt. All our exclusive citizens will recall the Perambulator Parade Dinner, in which Last-Trick Todd, at his palatial home at Pilgrim’s Pond, caused so many of our prominent debutantes to look even younger than their years. Equally elegant and more miscellaneous and large-hearted in social outlook was Last-Trick’s show the year previous, the popular Cannibal Crush Lunch, at which the confections handed round were sarcastically moulded in the forms of human arms and legs, and during which more than one of our gayest mental gymnasts was heard offering to eat his partner. The witticism which will inspire this evening is as yet in Mr Todd’s pretty reticent intellect, or locked in the jewelled bosoms of our city’s gayest leaders; but there is talk of a pretty parody of the simple manners and customs at the other end of Society’s scale. This would be all the more telling, as hospitable Todd is entertaining in Lord Falconroy, the famous traveller, a true-blooded aristocrat fresh from England’s oak-groves. Lord Falconroy’s travels began before his ancient feudal title was resurrected, he was in the Republic in his youth, and fashion murmurs a sly reason for his return. Miss Etta Todd is one of our deep-souled New Yorkers, and comes into an income of nearly twelve hundred million dollars.”

“Well,” asked Usher, “does that interest you?”

“Why, words rather fail me,” answered Father Brown. “I cannot think at this moment of anything in this world that would interest me less. And, unless the just anger of the Republic is at last going to electrocute journalists for writing
like that, I don’t quite see why it should interest you either.”

“Ah!” said Mr Usher dryly, and handing across another scrap of newspaper. “Well, does that interest you?”

The paragraph was headed “Savage Murder of a Warder. Convict Escapes,” and ran: “Just before dawn this morning a shout for help was heard in the Convict Settlement at Sequah in this State. The authorities, hurrying in the direction of the cry, found the corpse of the warder who patrols the top of the north wall of the prison, the steepest and most difficult exit, for which one man has always been found sufficient. The unfortunate officer had, however, been hurled from the high wall, his brains beaten out as with a club, and his gun was missing. Further inquiries showed that one of the cells was empty; it had been occupied by a rather sullen ruffian giving his name as Oscar Rian. He was only temporarily detained for some comparatively trivial assault; but he gave everyone the impression of a man with a black past and a dangerous future. Finally, when daylight had fully revealed the scene of murder, it was found that he had written on the wall above the body a fragmentary sentence, apparently with a finger dipped in blood: ‘This was self-defence and he had the gun. I meant no harm to him or any man but one. I am keeping the bullet for Pilgrim’s Pond—O.R.’ A man must have used most fiendish treachery or most savage and amazing bodily daring to have stormed such a wall in spite of an armed man.”

“Well, the literary style is somewhat improved,” admitted the priest cheerfully, “but still I don’t see what I can do for you. I should cut a poor figure, with my short legs, running about this State after an athletic assassin of that sort. I doubt whether anybody could find him. The convict settlement at Sequah is thirty miles from here; the country between is wild and tangled enough, and the country beyond, where he will surely have the sense to go, is a perfect no-man’s land tumbling away to the prairies. He may be in any hole or up any tree.”

“He isn’t in any hole,” said the governor; “he isn’t up any tree.”

“Why, how do you know?” asked Father Brown, blinking.

“Would you like to speak to him?” inquired Usher.

Father Brown opened his innocent eyes wide. “He is here?” he exclaimed. “Why, how did your men get hold of him?”

“I got hold of him myself,” drawled the American, rising and lazily stretching his lanky legs before the fire. “I got hold of him with the crooked end of a walking-stick. Don’t look so surprised. I really did. You know I sometimes take a turn in the country lanes outside this dismal place; well, I was walking early this evening up a steep lane with dark hedges and grey-looking ploughed fields
on both sides; and a young moon was up and silvering the road. By the light of it I saw a man running across the field towards the road; running with his body bent and at a good mile-race trot. He appeared to be much exhausted; but when he came to the thick black hedge he went through it as if it were made of spiders’ webs;—or rather (for I heard the strong branches breaking and snapping like bayonets) as if he himself were made of stone. In the instant in which he appeared up against the moon, crossing the road, I slung my hooked cane at his legs, tripping him and bringing him down. Then I blew my whistle long and loud, and our fellows came running up to secure him.”

“It would have been rather awkward,” remarked Brown, “if you had found he was a popular athlete practising a mile race.”

“He was not,” said Usher grimly. “We soon found out who he was; but I had guessed it with the first glint of the moon on him.”

“You thought it was the runaway convict,” observed the priest simply, “because you had read in the newspaper cutting that morning that a convict had run away.”

“I had somewhat better grounds,” replied the governor coolly. “I pass over the first as too simple to be emphasized—I mean that fashionable athletes do not run across ploughed fields or scratch their eyes out in bramble hedges. Nor do they run all doubled up like a crouching dog. There were more decisive details to a fairly well-trained eye. The man was clad in coarse and ragged clothes, but they were something more than merely coarse and ragged. They were so ill-fitting as to be quite grotesque; even as he appeared in black outline against the moonrise, the coat-collar in which his head was buried made him look like a hunchback, and the long loose sleeves looked as if he had no hands. It at once occurred to me that he had somehow managed to change his convict clothes for some confederate’s clothes which did not fit him. Second, there was a pretty stiff wind against which he was running; so that I must have seen the streaky look of blowing hair, if the hair had not been very short. Then I remembered that beyond these ploughed fields he was crossing lay Pilgrim’s Pond, for which (you will remember) the convict was keeping his bullet; and I sent my walking-stick flying.”

“A brilliant piece of rapid deduction,” said Father Brown; “but had he got a gun?”

As Usher stopped abruptly in his walk the priest added apologetically: “I’ve been told a bullet is not half so useful without it.”

“He had no gun,” said the other gravely; “but that was doubtless due to some
very natural mischance or change of plans. Probably the same policy that made him change the clothes made him drop the gun; he began to repent the coat he had left behind him in the blood of his victim."

“Well, that is possible enough,” answered the priest.

“And it’s hardly worth speculating on,” said Usher, turning to some other papers, “for we know it’s the man by this time.”

His clerical friend asked faintly: “But how?” And Greywood Usher threw down the newspapers and took up the two press-cuttings again.

“Well, since you are so obstinate,” he said, “let’s begin at the beginning. You will notice that these two cuttings have only one thing in common, which is the mention of Pilgrim’s Pond, the estate, as you know, of the millionaire Ireton Todd. You also know that he is a remarkable character; one of those that rose on stepping-stones—”

“Of our dead selves to higher things,” assented his companion. “Yes; I know that. Petroleum, I think.”

“Anyhow,” said Usher, “Last-Trick Todd counts for a great deal in this rum affair.”

He stretched himself once more before the fire and continued talking in his expansive, radiantly explanatory style.

“To begin with, on the face of it, there is no mystery here at all. It is not mysterious, it is not even odd, that a jailbird should take his gun to Pilgrim’s Pond. Our people aren’t like the English, who will forgive a man for being rich if he throws away money on hospitals or horses. Last-Trick Todd has made himself big by his own considerable abilities; and there’s no doubt that many of those on whom he has shown his abilities would like to show theirs on him with a shot-gun. Todd might easily get dropped by some man he’d never even heard of; some labourer he’d locked out, or some clerk in a business he’d busted. Last-Trick is a man of mental endowments and a high public character; but in this country the relations of employers and employed are considerably strained.

“That’s how the whole thing looks supposing this Rian made for Pilgrim’s Pond to kill Todd. So it looked to me, till another little discovery woke up what I have of the detective in me. When I had my prisoner safe, I picked up my cane again and strolled down the two or three turns of country road that brought me to one of the side entrances of Todd’s grounds, the one nearest to the pool or lake after which the place is named. It was some two hours ago, about seven by this time; the moonlight was more luminous, and I could see the long white streaks of it lying on the mysterious mere with its grey, greasy, half-liquid shores in
which they say our fathers used to make witches walk until they sank. I’d forgotten the exact tale; but you know the place I mean; it lies north of Todd’s house towards the wilderness, and has two queer wrinkled trees, so dismal that they look more like huge fungoids than decent foliage. As I stood peering at this misty pool, I fancied I saw the faint figure of a man moving from the house towards it, but it was all too dim and distant for one to be certain of the fact, and still less of the details. Besides, my attention was very sharply arrested by something much closer. I crouched behind the fence which ran not more than two hundred yards from one wing of the great mansion, and which was fortunately split in places, as if specially for the application of a cautious eye. A door had opened in the dark bulk of the left wing, and a figure appeared black against the illuminated interior—a muffled figure bending forward, evidently peering out into the night. It closed the door behind it, and I saw it was carrying a lantern, which threw a patch of imperfect light on the dress and figure of the wearer. It seemed to be the figure of a woman, wrapped up in a ragged cloak and evidently disguised to avoid notice; there was something very strange both about the rags and the furtiveness in a person coming out of those rooms lined with gold. She took cautiously the curved garden path which brought her within half a hundred yards of me—, then she stood up for an instant on the terrace of turf that looks towards the slimy lake, and holding her flaming lantern above her head she deliberately swung it three times to and fro as for a signal. As she swung it the second time a flicker of its light fell for a moment on her own face, a face that I knew. She was unnaturally pale, and her head was bundled in her borrowed plebeian shawl; but I am certain it was Etta Todd, the millionaire’s daughter.

“She retraced her steps in equal secrecy and the door closed behind her again. I was about to climb the fence and follow, when I realized that the detective fever that had lured me into the adventure was rather undignified; and that in a more authoritative capacity I already held all the cards in my hand. I was just turning away when a new noise broke on the night. A window was thrown up in one of the upper floors, but just round the corner of the house so that I could not see it; and a voice of terrible distinctness was heard shouting across the dark garden to know where Lord Falconroy was, for he was missing from every room in the house. There was no mistaking that voice. I have heard it on many a political platform or meeting of directors; it was Ireton Todd himself. Some of the others seemed to have gone to the lower windows or on to the steps, and were calling up to him that Falconroy had gone for a stroll down to the Pilgrim’s Pond an hour before, and could not be traced since. Then Todd cried ‘Mighty
Murder!’ and shut down the window violently; and I could hear him plunging down the stairs inside. Repossessing myself of my former and wiser purpose, I whipped out of the way of the general search that must follow; and returned here not later than eight o’clock.

“I now ask you to recall that little Society paragraph which seemed to you so painfully lacking in interest. If the convict was not keeping the shot for Todd, as he evidently wasn’t, it is most likely that he was keeping it for Lord Falconroy; and it looks as if he had delivered the goods. No more handy place to shoot a man than in the curious geological surroundings of that pool, where a body thrown down would sink through thick slime to a depth practically unknown. Let us suppose, then, that our friend with the cropped hair came to kill Falconroy and not Todd. But, as I have pointed out, there are many reasons why people in America might want to kill Todd. There is no reason why anybody in America should want to kill an English lord newly landed, except for the one reason mentioned in the pink paper—that the lord is paying his attentions to the millionaire’s daughter. Our crop-haired friend, despite his ill-fitting clothes, must be an aspiring lover.

“I know the notion will seem to you jarring and even comic; but that’s because you are English. It sounds to you like saying the Archbishop of Canterbury’s daughter will be married in St George’s, Hanover Square, to a crossing-sweeper on ticket-of-leave. You don’t do justice to the climbing and aspiring power of our more remarkable citizens. You see a good-looking grey-haired man in evening-dress with a sort of authority about him, you know he is a pillar of the State, and you fancy he had a father. You are in error. You do not realize that a comparatively few years ago he may have been in a tenement or (quite likely) in a jail. You don’t allow for our national buoyancy and uplift. Many of our most influential citizens have not only risen recently, but risen comparatively late in life. Todd’s daughter was fully eighteen when her father first made his pile; so there isn’t really anything impossible in her having a hanger-on in low life; or even in her hanging on to him, as I think she must be doing, to judge by the lantern business. If so, the hand that held the lantern may not be unconnected with the hand that held the gun. This case, sir, will make a noise.”

“Well,” said the priest patiently, “and what did you do next?”

“I reckon you’ll be shocked,” replied Greywood Usher, “as I know you don’t cotton to the march of science in these matters. I am given a good deal of discretion here, and perhaps take a little more than I’m given; and I thought it was an excellent opportunity to test that Psychometric Machine I told you about.
Now, in my opinion, that machine can’t lie.”

“No machine can lie,” said Father Brown; “nor can it tell the truth.”

“It did in this case, as I’ll show you,” went on Usher positively. “I sat the man in the ill-fitting clothes in a comfortable chair, and simply wrote words on a blackboard; and the machine simply recorded the variations of his pulse; and I simply observed his manner. The trick is to introduce some word connected with the supposed crime in a list of words connected with something quite different, yet a list in which it occurs quite naturally. Thus I wrote ‘heron’ and ‘eagle’ and ‘owl,’ and when I wrote ‘falcon’ he was tremendously agitated; and when I began to make an ‘r’ at the end of the word, that machine just bounded. Who else in this republic has any reason to jump at the name of a newly-arrived Englishman like Falconroy except the man who’s shot him? Isn’t that better evidence than a lot of gabble from witnesses—if the evidence of a reliable machine?”

“You always forget,” observed his companion, “that the reliable machine always has to be worked by an unreliable machine.”

“Why, what do you mean?” asked the detective.

“I mean Man,” said Father Brown, “the most unreliable machine I know of. I don’t want to be rude; and I don’t think you will consider Man to be an offensive or inaccurate description of yourself. You say you observed his manner; but how do you know you observed it right? You say the words have to come in a natural way; but how do you know that you did it naturally? How do you know, if you come to that, that he did not observe your manner? Who is to prove that you were not tremendously agitated? There was no machine tied on to your pulse.”

“I tell you,” cried the American in the utmost excitement, “I was as cool as a cucumber.”

“Criminals also can be as cool as cucumbers,” said Brown with a smile. “And almost as cool as you.”

“Well, this one wasn’t,” said Usher, throwing the papers about. “Oh, you make me tired!”

“I’m sorry,” said the other. “I only point out what seems a reasonable possibility. If you could tell by his manner when the word that might hang him had come, why shouldn’t he tell from your manner that the word that might hang him was coming? I should ask for more than words myself before I hanged anybody.”

Usher smote the table and rose in a sort of angry triumph.

“And that,” he cried, “is just what I’m going to give you. I tried the machine
first just in order to test the thing in other ways afterwards and the machine, sir, is right.”

He paused a moment and resumed with less excitement. “I rather want to insist, if it comes to that, that so far I had very little to go on except the scientific experiment. There was really nothing against the man at all. His clothes were ill-fitting, as I’ve said, but they were rather better, if anything, than those of the submerged class to which he evidently belonged. Moreover, under all the stains of his plunging through ploughed fields or bursting through dusty hedges, the man was comparatively clean. This might mean, of course, that he had only just broken prison; but it reminded me more of the desperate decency of the comparatively respectable poor. His demeanour was, I am bound to confess, quite in accordance with theirs. He was silent and dignified as they are; he seemed to have a big, but buried, grievance, as they do. He professed total ignorance of the crime and the whole question; and showed nothing but a sullen impatience for something sensible that might come to take him out of his meaningless scrape. He asked me more than once if he could telephone for a lawyer who had helped him a long time ago in a trade dispute, and in every sense acted as you would expect an innocent man to act. There was nothing against him in the world except that little finger on the dial that pointed to the change of his pulse.

“Then, sir, the machine was on its trial; and the machine was right. By the time I came with him out of the private room into the vestibule where all sorts of other people were awaiting examination, I think he had already more or less made up his mind to clear things up by something like a confession. He turned to me and began to say in a low voice: ‘Oh, I can’t stick this any more. If you must know all about me—’

“At the same instant one of the poor women sitting on the long bench stood up, screaming aloud and pointing at him with her finger. I have never in my life heard anything more demoniacally distinct. Her lean finger seemed to pick him out as if it were a pea-shooter. Though the word was a mere howl, every syllable was as clear as a separate stroke on the clock.

“‘Drugger Davis!’ she shouted. ‘They’ve got Drugger Davis!’

“Among the wretched women, mostly thieves and streetwalkers, twenty faces were turned, gaping with glee and hate. If I had never heard the words, I should have known by the very shock upon his features that the so-called Oscar Rian had heard his real name. But I’m not quite so ignorant, you may be surprised to hear. Drugger Davis was one of the most terrible and depraved criminals that
ever baffled our police. It is certain he had done murder more than once long before his last exploit with the warder. But he was never entirely fixed for it, curiously enough because he did it in the same manner as those milder—or meaner—crimes for which he was fixed pretty often. He was a handsome, well-bred-looking brute, as he still is, to some extent; and he used mostly to go about with barmaids or shop-girls and do them out of their money. Very often, though, he went a good deal farther; and they were found drugged with cigarettes or chocolates and their whole property missing. Then came one case where the girl was found dead; but deliberation could not quite be proved, and, what was more practical still, the criminal could not be found. I heard a rumour of his having reappeared somewhere in the opposite character this time, lending money instead of borrowing it; but still to such poor widows as he might personally fascinate, but still with the same bad result for them. Well, there is your innocent man, and there is his innocent record. Even, since then, four criminals and three warders have identified him and confirmed the story. Now what have you got to say to my poor little machine after that? Hasn’t the machine done for him? Or do you prefer to say that the woman and I have done for him?”

“As to what you’ve done for him,” replied Father Brown, rising and shaking himself in a floppy way, “you’ve saved him from the electrical chair. I don’t think they can kill Drugger Davis on that old vague story of the poison; and as for the convict who killed the warder, I suppose it’s obvious that you haven’t got him. Mr Davis is innocent of that crime, at any rate.”

“What do you mean?” demanded the other. “Why should he be innocent of that crime?”

“Why, bless us all!” cried the small man in one of his rare moments of animation, “why, because he’s guilty of the other crimes! I don’t know what you people are made of. You seem to think that all sins are kept together in a bag. You talk as if a miser on Monday were always a spendthrift on Tuesday. You tell me this man you have here spent weeks and months wheedling needy women out of small sums of money; that he used a drug at the best, and a poison at the worst; that he turned up afterwards as the lowest kind of moneylender, and cheated most poor people in the same patient and pacific style. Let it be granted —let us admit, for the sake of argument, that he did all this. If that is so, I will tell you what he didn’t do. He didn’t storm a spiked wall against a man with a loaded gun. He didn’t write on the wall with his own hand, to say he had done it. He didn’t stop to state that his justification was self-defence. He didn’t explain that he had no quarrel with the poor warder. He didn’t name the house of the rich
man to which he was going with the gun. He didn’t write his own, initials in a man’s blood. Saints alive! Can’t you see the whole character is different, in good and evil? Why, you don’t seem to be like I am a bit. One would think you’d never had any vices of your own.”

The amazed American had already parted his lips in protest when the door of his private and official room was hammered and rattled in an unceremonious way to which he was totally unaccustomed.

The door flew open. The moment before Greywood Usher had been coming to the conclusion that Father Brown might possibly be mad. The moment after he began to think he was mad himself. There burst and fell into his private room a man in the filthiest rags, with a greasy squash hat still askew on his head, and a shabby green shade shoved up from one of his eyes, both of which were glaring like a tiger’s. The rest of his face was almost undiscoverable, being masked with a matted beard and whiskers through which the nose could barely thrust itself, and further buried in a squalid red scarf or handkerchief. Mr Usher prided himself on having seen most of the roughest specimens in the State, but he thought he had never seen such a baboon dressed as a scarecrow as this. But, above all, he had never in all his placid scientific existence heard a man like that speak to him first.

“See here, old man Usher,” shouted the being in the red handkerchief, “I’m getting tired. Don’t you try any of your hide-and-seek on me; I don’t get fooled any. Leave go of my guests, and I’ll let up on the fancy clockwork. Keep him here for a split instant and you’ll feel pretty mean. I reckon I’m not a man with no pull.”

The eminent Usher was regarding the bellowing monster with an amazement which had dried up all other sentiments. The mere shock to his eyes had rendered his ears, almost useless. At last he rang a bell with a hand of violence. While the bell was still strong and pealing, the voice of Father Brown fell soft but distinct.

“I have a suggestion to make,” he said, “but it seems a little confusing. I don’t know this gentleman—but—but I think I know him. Now, you know him—you know him quite well—but you don’t know him—naturally. Sounds paradoxical, I know.”

“I reckon the Cosmos is cracked,” said Usher, and fell asprawl in his round office chair.

“Now, see here,” vociferated the stranger, striking the table, but speaking in a voice that was all the more mysterious because it was comparatively mild and
rational though still resounding. “I won’t let you in. I want—”

“Who in hell are you?” yelled Usher, suddenly sitting up straight.
“I think the gentleman’s name is Todd,” said the priest.

Then he picked up the pink slip of newspaper.

“I fear you don’t read the Society papers properly,” he said, and began to read out in a monotonous voice, “‘Or locked in the jewelled bosoms of our city’s gayest leaders; but there is talk of a pretty parody of the manners and customs of the other end of Society’s scale.’ There’s been a big Slum Dinner up at Pilgrim’s Pond tonight; and a man, one of the guests, disappeared. Mr Ireton Todd is a good host, and has tracked him here, without even waiting to take off his fancy-dress.”

“What man do you mean?”

“I mean the man with comically ill-fitting clothes you saw running across the ploughed field. Hadn’t you better go and investigate him? He will be rather impatient to get back to his champagne, from which he ran away in such a hurry, when the convict with the gun hove in sight.”

“Do you seriously mean—” began the official.

“Why, look here, Mr Usher,” said Father Brown quietly, “you said the machine couldn’t make a mistake; and in one sense it didn’t. But the other machine did; the machine that worked it. You assumed that the man in rags jumped at the name of Lord Falconroy, because he was Lord Falconroy’s murderer. He jumped at the name of Lord Falconroy because he is Lord Falconroy.”

“Then why the blazes didn’t he say so?” demanded the staring Usher.

“He felt his plight and recent panic were hardly patrician,” replied the priest, “so he tried to keep the name back at first. But he was just going to tell it you, when”—and Father Brown looked down at his boots—“when a woman found another name for him.”

“But you can’t be so mad as to say,” said Greywood Usher, very white, “that Lord Falconroy was Drugger Davis.”

The priest looked at him very earnestly, but with a baffling and undecipherable face.

“I am not saying anything about it,” he said. “I leave all the rest to you. Your pink paper says that the title was recently revived for him; but those papers are very unreliable. It says he was in the States in youth; but the whole story seems very strange. Davis and Falconroy are both pretty considerable cowards, but so are lots of other men. I would not hang a dog on my own opinion about this. But
I think,” he went on softly and reflectively, “I think you Americans are too modest. I think you idealize the English aristocracy—even in assuming it to be so aristocratic. You see a good-looking Englishman in evening-dress; you know he’s in the House of Lords; and you fancy he has a father. You don’t allow for our national buoyancy and uplift. Many of our most influential noblemen have not only risen recently, but—”

“Oh, stop it!” cried Greywood Usher, wringing one lean hand in impatience against a shade of irony in the other’s face.

“Don’t stay talking to this lunatic!” cried Todd brutally. “Take me to my friend.”

Next morning Father Brown appeared with the same demure expression, carrying yet another piece of pink newspaper.

“I’m afraid you neglect the fashionable press rather,” he said, “but this cutting may interest you.”

Usher read the headlines, “Last-Trick’s Strayed Revellers: Mirthful Incident near Pilgrim’s Pond.” The paragraph went on: “A laughable occurrence took place outside Wilkinson’s Motor Garage last night. A policeman on duty had his attention drawn by larrikins to a man in prison dress who was stepping with considerable coolness into the steering-seat of a pretty high-toned Panhard; he was accompanied by a girl wrapped in a ragged shawl. On the police interfering, the young woman threw back the shawl, and all recognized Millionaire Todd’s daughter, who had just come from the Slum Freak Dinner at the Pond, where all the choicest guests were in a similar deshabille. She and the gentleman who had donned prison uniform were going for the customary joy-ride.”

Under the pink slip Mr Usher found a strip of a later paper, headed, “Astounding Escape of Millionaire’s Daughter with Convict. She had Arranged Freak Dinner. Now Safe in—”

Mr Greenwood Usher lifted his eyes, but Father Brown was gone.
SIX

THE HEAD OF CAESAR

THERE is somewhere in Brompton or Kensington an interminable avenue of tall houses, rich but largely empty, that looks like a terrace of tombs. The very steps up to the dark front doors seem as steep as the side of pyramids; one would hesitate to knock at the door, lest it should be opened by a mummy. But a yet more depressing feature in the grey facade is its telescopic length and changeless continuity. The pilgrim walking down it begins to think he will never come to a break or a corner; but there is one exception—a very small one, but hailed by the pilgrim almost with a shout. There is a sort of mews between two of the tall mansions, a mere slit like the crack of a door by comparison with the street, but just large enough to permit a pigmy ale-house or eating-house, still allowed by the rich to their stable-servants, to stand in the angle. There is something cheery in its very dinginess, and something free and elfin in its very insignificance. At the feet of those grey stone giants it looks like a lighted house of dwarfs.

Anyone passing the place during a certain autumn evening, itself almost fairylike, might have seen a hand pull aside the red half-blind which (along with some large white lettering) half hid the interior from the street, and a face peer out not unlike a rather innocent goblin’s. It was, in fact, the face of one with the harmless human name of Brown, formerly priest of Cobhole in Essex, and now working in London. His friend, Flambeau, a semi-official investigator, was sitting opposite him, making his last notes of a case he had cleared up in the neighbourhood. They were sitting at a small table, close up to the window, when the priest pulled the curtain back and looked out. He waited till a stranger in the street had passed the window, to let the curtain fall into its place again. Then his round eyes rolled to the large white lettering on the window above his head, and then strayed to the next table, at which sat only a navvy with beer and cheese, and a young girl with red hair and a glass of milk. Then (seeing his friend put away the pocket-book), he said softly:

“If you’ve got ten minutes, I wish you’d follow that man with the false nose.”

Flambeau looked up in surprise; but the girl with the red hair also looked up, and with something that was stronger than astonishment. She was simply and even loosely dressed in light brown sacking stuff; but she was a lady, and even, on a second glance, a rather needlessly haughty one. “The man with the false
nose!” repeated Flambeau. “Who’s he?”

“I haven’t a notion,” answered Father Brown. “I want you to find out; I ask it as a favour. He went down there”—and he jerked his thumb over his shoulder in one of his undistinguished gestures—“and can’t have passed three lamp-posts yet. I only want to know the direction.”

Flambeau gazed at his friend for some time, with an expression between perplexity and amusement; and then, rising from the table; squeezed his huge form out of the little door of the dwarf tavern, and melted into the twilight.

Father Brown took a small book out of his pocket and began to read steadily; he betrayed no consciousness of the fact that the red-haired lady had left her own table and sat down opposite him. At last she leaned over and said in a low, strong voice: “Why do you say that? How do you know it’s false?”

He lifted his rather heavy eyelids, which fluttered in considerable embarrassment. Then his dubious eye roamed again to the white lettering on the glass front of the public-house. The young woman’s eyes followed his, and rested there also, but in pure puzzlement.

“No,” said Father Brown, answering her thoughts. “It doesn’t say ‘Sela,’ like the thing in the Psalms; I read it like that myself when I was wool-gathering just now; it says ‘Ales.’”

“Well?” inquired the staring young lady. “What does it matter what it says?”

His ruminating eye roved to the girl’s light canvas sleeve, round the wrist of which ran a very slight thread of artistic pattern, just enough to distinguish it from a working-dress of a common woman and make it more like the working-dress of a lady art-student. He seemed to find much food for thought in this; but his reply was very slow and hesitant. “You see, madam,” he said, “from outside the place looks—well, it is a perfectly decent place—but ladies like you don’t—don’t generally think so. They never go into such places from choice, except—”

“Well?” she repeated.

“Except an unfortunate few who don’t go in to drink milk.”

“You are a most singular person,” said the young lady. “What is your object in all this?”

“Not to trouble you about it,” he replied, very gently. “Only to arm myself with knowledge enough to help you, if ever you freely ask my help.”

“But why should I need help?”

He continued his dreamy monologue. “You couldn’t have come in to see protegees, humble friends, that sort of thing, or you’d have gone through into the parlour . . . and you couldn’t have come in because you were ill, or you’d have
spoken to the woman of the place, who’s obviously respectable . . . besides, you
don’t look ill in that way, but only unhappy. . . . This street is the only original
long lane that has no turning; and the houses on both sides are shut up. . . . I
could only suppose that you’d seen somebody coming whom you didn’t want to
meet; and found the public-house was the only shelter in this wilderness of
stone. . . . I don’t think I went beyond the licence of a stranger in glancing at the
only man who passed immediately after. . . . And as I thought he looked like the
wrong sort . . . and you looked like the right sort. . . . I held myself ready to help
if he annoyed you; that is all. As for my friend, he’ll be back soon; and he
certainly can’t find out anything by stumping down a road like this. . . . I didn’t
think he could.”

“Then why did you send him out?” she cried, leaning forward with yet warmer
curiosity. She had the proud, impetuous face that goes with reddish colouring,
and a Roman nose, as it did in Marie Antoinette.

He looked at her steadily for the first time, and said: “Because I hoped you
would speak to me.”

She looked back at him for some time with a heated face, in which there hung
a red shadow of anger; then, despite her anxieties, humour broke out of her eyes
and the corners of her mouth, and she answered almost grimly: “Well, if you’re
so keen on my conversation, perhaps you’ll answer my question.” After a pause
she added: “I had the honour to ask you why you thought the man’s nose was
false.”

“The wax always spots like that just a little in this weather,” answered Father
Brown with entire simplicity.

“But it’s such a crooked nose,” remonstrated the red-haired girl.

The priest smiled in his turn. “I don’t say it’s the sort of nose one would wear
out of mere foppery,” he admitted. “This man, I think, wears it because his real
nose is so much nicer.”

“But why?” she insisted.

“What is the nursery-rhyme?” observed Brown absent-mindedly. “There was a
crooked man and he went a crooked mile. . . . That man, I fancy, has gone a very
crooked road—by following his nose.”

“Why, what’s he done?” she demanded, rather shakily.

“I don’t want to force your confidence by a hair,” said Father Brown, very
quietly. “But I think you could tell me more about that than I can tell you.”

The girl sprang to her feet and stood quite quietly, but with clenched hands,
like one about to stride away; then her hands loosened slowly, and she sat down
again. “You are more of a mystery than all the others,” she said desperately, “but I feel there might be a heart in your mystery.”

“What we all dread most,” said the priest in a low voice, “is a maze with no centre. That is why atheism is only a nightmare.” “I will tell you everything,” said the red-haired girl doggedly, “except why I am telling you; and that I don’t know.”

She picked at the darned table-cloth and went on: “You look as if you knew what isn’t snobbery as well as what is; and when I say that ours is a good old family, you’ll understand it is a necessary part of the story; indeed, my chief danger is in my brother’s high-and-dry notions, noblesse oblige and all that. Well, my name is Christabel Carstairs; and my father was that Colonel Carstairs you’ve probably heard of, who made the famous Carstairs Collection of Roman coins. I could never describe my father to you; the nearest I can say is that he was very like a Roman coin himself. He was as handsome and as genuine and as valuable and as metallic and as out-of-date. He was prouder of his Collection than of his coat-of-arms—nobody could say more than that. His extraordinary character came out most in his will. He had two sons and one daughter. He quarrelled with one son, my brother Giles, and sent him to Australia on a small allowance. He then made a will leaving the Carstairs Collection, actually with a yet smaller allowance, to my brother Arthur. He meant it as a reward, as the highest honour he could offer, in acknowledgement of Arthur’s loyalty and rectitude and the distinctions he had already gained in mathematics and economics at Cambridge. He left me practically all his pretty large fortune; and I am sure he meant it in contempt.

“Arthur, you may say, might well complain of this; but Arthur is my father over again. Though he had some differences with my father in early youth, no sooner had he taken over the Collection than he became like a pagan priest dedicated to a temple. He mixed up these Roman halfpence with the honour of the Carstairs family in the same stiff, idolatrous way as his father before him. He acted as if Roman money must be guarded by all the Roman virtues. He took no pleasures; he spent nothing on himself; he lived for the Collection. Often he would not trouble to dress for his simple meals; but pattered about among the corded brown-paper parcels (which no one else was allowed to touch) in an old brown dressing-gown. With its rope and tassel and his pale, thin, refined face, it made him look like an old ascetic monk. Every now and then, though, he would appear dressed like a decidedly fashionable gentleman; but that was only when he went up to the London sales or shops to make an addition to the Carstairs
“Now, if you’ve known any young people, you won’t be shocked if I say that I got into rather a low frame of mind with all this; the frame of mind in which one begins to say that the Ancient Romans were all very well in their way. I’m not like my brother Arthur; I can’t help enjoying enjoyment. I got a lot of romance and rubbish where I got my red hair, from the other side of the family. Poor Giles was the same; and I think the atmosphere of coins might count in excuse for him; though he really did wrong and nearly went to prison. But he didn’t behave any worse than I did; as you shall hear.

“I come now to the silly part of the story. I think a man as clever as you can guess the sort of thing that would begin to relieve the monotony for an unruly girl of seventeen placed in such a position. But I am so rattled with more dreadful things that I can hardly read my own feeling; and don’t know whether I despise it now as a flirtation or bear it as a broken heart. We lived then at a little seaside watering-place in South Wales, and a retired sea-captain living a few doors off had a son about five years older than myself, who had been a friend of Giles before he went to the Colonies. His name does not affect my tale; but I tell you it was Philip Hawker, because I am telling you everything. We used to go shrimping together, and said and thought we were in love with each other; at least he certainly said he was, and I certainly thought I was. If I tell you he had bronzed curly hair and a falconish sort of face, bronzed by the sea also, it’s not for his sake, I assure you, but for the story; for it was the cause of a very curious coincidence.

“One summer afternoon, when I had promised to go shrimping along the sands with Philip, I was waiting rather impatiently in the front drawing-room, watching Arthur handle some packets of coins he had just purchased and slowly shunt them, one or two at a time, into his own dark study and museum which was at the back of the house. As soon as I heard the heavy door close on him finally, I made a bolt for my shrimping-net and tam-o’-shanter and was just going to slip out, when I saw that my brother had left behind him one coin that lay gleaming on the long bench by the window. It was a bronze coin, and the colour, combined with the exact curve of the Roman nose and something in the very lift of the long, wiry neck, made the head of Caesar on it the almost precise portrait of Philip Hawker. Then I suddenly remembered Giles telling Philip of a coin that was like him, and Philip wishing he had it. Perhaps you can fancy the wild, foolish thoughts with which my head went round; I felt as if I had had a gift from the fairies. It seemed to me that if I could only run away with this, and
give it to Philip like a wild sort of wedding-ring, it would be a bond between us for ever; I felt a thousand such things at once. Then there yawned under me, like the pit, the enormous, awful notion of what I was doing; above all, the unbearable thought, which was like touching hot iron, of what Arthur would think of it. A Carstairs a thief; and a thief of the Carstairs treasure! I believe my brother could see me burned like a witch for such a thing. But then, the very thought of such fanatical cruelty heightened my old hatred of his dingy old antiquarian fussiness and my longing for the youth and liberty that called to me from the sea. Outside was strong sunlight with a wind; and a yellow head of some broom or gorse in the garden rapped against the glass of the window. I thought of that living and growing gold calling to me from all the heaths of the world—and then of that dead, dull gold and bronze and brass of my brother’s growing dustier and dustier as life went by. Nature and the Carstairs Collection had come to grips at last.

“Nature is older than the Carstairs Collection. As I ran down the streets to the sea, the coin clenched tight in my fist, I felt all the Roman Empire on my back as well as the Carstairs pedigree. It was not only the old lion argent that was roaring in my ear, but all the eagles of the Caesars seemed flapping and screaming in pursuit of me. And yet my heart rose higher and higher like a child’s kite, until I came over the loose, dry sand-hills and to the flat, wet sands, where Philip stood already up to his ankles in the shallow shining water, some hundred yards out to sea. There was a great red sunset; and the long stretch of low water, hardly rising over the ankle for half a mile, was like a lake of ruby flame. It was not till I had torn off my shoes and stockings and waded to where he stood, which was well away from the dry land, that I turned and looked round. We were quite alone in a circle of sea-water and wet sand, and I gave him the head of Caesar.

“At the very instant I had a shock of fancy: that a man far away on the sand-hills was looking at me intently. I must have felt immediately after that it was a mere leap of unreasonable nerves; for the man was only a dark dot in the distance, and I could only just see that he was standing quite still and gazing, with his head a little on one side. There was no earthly logical evidence that he was looking at me; he might have been looking at a ship, or the sunset, or the sea-gulls, or at any of the people who still strayed here and there on the shore between us. Nevertheless, whatever my start sprang from was prophetic; for, as I gazed, he started walking briskly in a bee-line towards us across the wide wet sands. As he drew nearer and nearer I saw that he was dark and bearded, and that his eyes were marked with dark spectacles. He was dressed poorly but
respectably in black, from the old black top hat on his head to the solid black boots on his feet. In spite of these he walked straight into the sea without a flash of hesitation, and came on at me with the steadiness of a travelling bullet.

“I can’t tell you the sense of monstrosity and miracle I had when he thus silently burst the barrier between land and water. It was as if he had walked straight off a cliff and still marched steadily in mid-air. It was as if a house had flown up into the sky or a man’s head had fallen off. He was only wetting his boots; but he seemed to be a demon disregarding a law of Nature. If he had hesitated an instant at the water’s edge it would have been nothing. As it was, he seemed to look so much at me alone as not to notice the ocean. Philip was some yards away with his back to me, bending over his net. The stranger came on till he stood within two yards of me, the water washing half-way up to his knees. Then he said, with a clearly modulated and rather mincing articulation: ‘Would it discommode you to contribute elsewhere a coin with a somewhat different superscription?’

“With one exception there was nothing definably abnormal about him. His tinted glasses were not really opaque, but of a blue kind common enough, nor were the eyes behind them shifty, but regarded me steadily. His dark beard was not really long or wild—, but he looked rather hairy, because the beard began very high up in his face, just under the cheek-bones. His complexion was neither sallow nor livid, but on the contrary rather clear and youthful; yet this gave a pink-and-white wax look which somehow (I don’t know why) rather increased the horror. The only oddity one could fix was that his nose, which was otherwise of a good shape, was just slightly turned sideways at the tip; as if, when it was soft, it had been tapped on one side with a toy hammer. The thing was hardly a deformity; yet I cannot tell you what a living nightmare it was to me. As he stood there in the sunset-stained water he affected me as some hellish sea-monster just risen roaring out of a sea like blood. I don’t know why a touch on the nose should affect my imagination so much. I think it seemed as if he could move his nose like a finger. And as if he had just that moment moved it.

“‘Any little assistance,’ he continued with the same queer, priggish accent, ‘that may obviate the necessity of my communicating with the family.’

“Then it rushed over me that I was being blackmailed for the theft of the bronze piece; and all my merely superstitious fears and doubts were swallowed up in one overpowering, practical question. How could he have found out? I had stolen the thing suddenly and on impulse; I was certainly alone; for I always made sure of being unobserved when I slipped out to see Philip in this way. I
had not, to all appearance, been followed in the street; and if I had, they could not ‘X-ray’ the coin in my closed hand. The man standing on the sand-hills could no more have seen what I gave Philip than shoot a fly in one eye, like the man in the fairy-tale.

"‘Philip,’ I cried helplessly, ‘ask this man what he wants.’

“When Philip lifted his head at last from mending his net he looked rather red, as if sulky or ashamed; but it may have been only the exertion of stooping and the red evening light; I may have only had another of the morbid fancies that seemed to be dancing about me. He merely said gruffly to the man: ‘You clear out of this.’ And, motioning me to follow, set off wading shoreward without paying further attention to him. He stepped on to a stone breakwater that ran out from among the roots of the sand-hills, and so struck homeward, perhaps thinking our incubus would find it less easy to walk on such rough stones, green and slippery with seaweed, than we, who were young and used to it. But my persecutor walked as daintily as he talked; and he still followed me, picking his way and picking his phrases. I heard his delicate, detestable voice appealing to me over my shoulder, until at last, when we had crested the sand-hills, Philip’s patience (which was by no means so conspicuous on most occasions) seemed to snap. He turned suddenly, saying, ‘Go back. I can’t talk to you now.’ And as the man hovered and opened his mouth, Philip struck him a buffet on it that sent him flying from the top of the tallest sand-hill to the bottom. I saw him crawling out below, covered with sand.

“This stroke comforted me somehow, though it might well increase my peril; but Philip showed none of his usual elation at his own prowess. Though as affectionate as ever, he still seemed cast down; and before I could ask him anything fully, he parted with me at his own gate, with two remarks that struck me as strange. He said that, all things considered, I ought to put the coin back in the Collection; but that he himself would keep it ‘for the present.’ And then he added quite suddenly and irrelevantly: ‘You know Giles is back from Australia?’”

The door of the tavern opened and the gigantic shadow of the investigator Flambeau fell across the table. Father Brown presented him to the lady in his own slight, persuasive style of speech, mentioning his knowledge and sympathy in such cases; and almost without knowing, the girl was soon reiterating her story to two listeners. But Flambeau, as he bowed and sat down, handed the priest a small slip of paper. Brown accepted it with some surprise and read on it: “Cab to Wagga Wagga, 379, Mafeking Avenue, Putney.” The girl was going on
with her story.

“I went up the steep street to my own house with my head in a whirl; it had not begun to clear when I came to the doorstep, on which I found a milk-can—and the man with the twisted nose. The milk-can told me the servants were all out; for, of course, Arthur, browsing about in his brown dressing-gown in a brown study, would not hear or answer a bell. Thus there was no one to help me in the house, except my brother, whose help must be my ruin. In desperation I thrust two shillings into the horrid thing’s hand, and told him to call again in a few days, when I had thought it out. He went off sulking, but more sheepishly than I had expected—perhaps he had been shaken by his fall—and I watched the star of sand splashed on his back receding down the road with a horrid vindictive pleasure. He turned a corner some six houses down.

“Then I let myself in, made myself some tea, and tried to think it out. I sat at the drawing-room window looking on to the garden, which still glowed with the last full evening light. But I was too distracted and dreamy to look at the lawns and flower-pots and flower-beds with any concentration. So I took the shock the more sharply because I’d seen it so slowly.

“The man or monster I’d sent away was standing quite still in the middle of the garden. Oh, we’ve all read a lot about pale-faced phantoms in the dark; but this was more dreadful than anything of that kind could ever be. Because, though he cast a long evening shadow, he still stood in warm sunlight. And because his face was not pale, but had that waxen bloom still upon it that belongs to a barber’s dummy. He stood quite still, with his face towards me; and I can’t tell you how horrid he looked among the tulips and all those tall, gaudy, almost hothouse-looking flowers. It looked as if we’d stuck up a waxwork instead of a statue in the centre of our garden.

“Yet almost the instant he saw me move in the window he turned and ran out of the garden by the back gate, which stood open and by which he had undoubtedly entered. This renewed timidity on his part was so different from the impudence with which he had walked into the sea, that I felt vaguely comforted. I fancied, perhaps, that he feared confronting Arthur more than I knew. Anyhow, I settled down at last, and had a quiet dinner alone (for it was against the rules to disturb Arthur when he was rearranging the museum), and, my thoughts, a little released, fled to Philip and lost themselves, I suppose. Anyhow, I was looking blankly, but rather pleasantly than otherwise, at another window, uncurtained, but by this time black as a slate with the final night-fall. It seemed to me that something like a snail was on the outside of the window-pane. But when I stared
harder, it was more like a man’s thumb pressed on the pane; it had that curled look that a thumb has. With my fear and courage re-awakened together, I rushed at the window and then recoiled with a strangled scream that any man but Arthur must have heard.

“For it was not a thumb, any more than it was a snail. It was the tip of a crooked nose, crushed against the glass; it looked white with the pressure; and the staring face and eyes behind it were at first invisible and afterwards grey like a ghost. I slammed the shutters together somehow, rushed up to my room and locked myself in. But, even as I passed, I could swear I saw a second black window with something on it that was like a snail.

“It might be best to go to Arthur after all. If the thing was crawling close all around the house like a cat, it might have purposes worse even than blackmail. My brother might cast me out and curse me for ever, but he was a gentleman, and would defend me on the spot. After ten minutes’ curious thinking, I went down, knocked on the door and then went in: to see the last and worst sight.

“My brother’s chair was empty, and he was obviously out. But the man with the crooked nose was sitting waiting for his return, with his hat still insolently on his head, and actually reading one of my brother’s books under my brother’s lamp. His face was composed and occupied, but his nose-tip still had the air of being the most mobile part of his face, as if it had just turned from left to right like an elephant’s proboscis. I had thought him poisonous enough while he was pursuing and watching me; but I think his unconsciousness of my presence was more frightful still.

“I think I screamed loud and long; but that doesn’t matter. What I did next does matter: I gave him all the money I had, including a good deal in paper which, though it was mine, I dare say I had no right to touch. He went off at last, with hateful, tactful regrets all in long words; and I sat down, feeling ruined in every sense. And yet I was saved that very night by a pure accident. Arthur had gone off suddenly to London, as he so often did, for bargains; and returned, late but radiant, having nearly secured a treasure that was an added splendour even to the family Collection. He was so resplendent that I was almost emboldened to confess the abstraction of the lesser gem—, but he bore down all other topics with his overpowering projects. Because the bargain might still misfire any moment, he insisted on my packing at once and going up with him to lodgings he had already taken in Fulham, to be near the curio-shop in question. Thus in spite of myself, I fled from my foe almost in the dead of night—but from Philip also. . . . My brother was often at the South Kensington Museum, and, in order to
make some sort of secondary life for myself, I paid for a few lessons at the Art Schools. I was coming back from them this evening, when I saw the abomination of desolation walking alive down the long straight street and the rest is as this gentleman has said.

“I’ve got only one thing to say. I don’t deserve to be helped; and I don’t question or complain of my punishment; it is just, it ought to have happened. But I still question, with bursting brains, how it can have happened. Am I punished by miracle? or how can anyone but Philip and myself know I gave him a tiny coin in the middle of the sea?”

“It is an extraordinary problem,” admitted Flambeau.

“Not so extraordinary as the answer,” remarked Father Brown rather gloomily.

“Miss Carstairs, will you be at home if we call at your Fulham place in an hour and a half hence?”

The girl looked at him, and then rose and put her gloves on. “Yes,” she said, “I’ll be there”; and almost instantly left the place.

That night the detective and the priest were still talking of the matter as they drew near the Fulham house, a tenement strangely mean even for a temporary residence of the Carstairs family.

“Of course the superficial, on reflection,” said Flambeau, “would think first of this Australian brother who’s been in trouble before, who’s come back so suddenly and who’s just the man to have shabby confederates. But I can’t see how he can come into the thing by any process of thought, unless . . .”

“Well?” asked his companion patiently.

Flambeau lowered his voice. “Unless the girl’s lover comes in, too, and he would be the blacker villain. The Australian chap did know that Hawker wanted the coin. But I can’t see how on earth he could know that Hawker had got it, unless Hawker signalled to him or his representative across the shore.”

“That is true,” assented the priest, with respect.

“Have you noted another thing?” went on Flambeau eagerly, “this Hawker hears his love insulted, but doesn’t strike till he’s got to the soft sand-hills, where he can be victor in a mere sham-fight. If he’d struck amid rocks and sea, he might have hurt his ally.”

“That is true again,” said Father Brown, nodding.

“And now, take it from the start. It lies between few people, but at least three. You want one person for suicide; two people for murder; but at least three people for blackmail”

“Why?” asked the priest softly.
“Well, obviously,” cried his friend, “there must be one to be exposed; one to threaten exposure; and one at least whom exposure would horrify.”

After a long ruminant pause, the priest said: “You miss a logical step. Three persons are needed as ideas. Only two are needed as agents.”

“What can you mean?” asked the other.

“Why shouldn’t a blackmailer,” asked Brown, in a low voice, “threaten his victim with himself? Suppose a wife became a rigid teetotaller in order to frighten her husband into concealing his pub-frequenting, and then wrote him blackmailing letters in another hand, threatening to tell his wife! Why shouldn’t it work? Suppose a father forbade a son to gamble and then, following him in a good disguise, threatened the boy with his own sham paternal strictness! Suppose—but, here we are, my friend.”

“My God!” cried Flambeau; “you don’t mean—”

An active figure ran down the steps of the house and showed under the golden lamplight the unmistakable head that resembled the Roman coin. “Miss Carstairs,” said Hawker without ceremony, “wouldn’t go in till you came.”

“Well,” observed Brown confidently, “don’t you think it’s the best thing she can do to stop outside—with you to look after her? You see, I rather guess you have guessed it all yourself.”

“Yes,” said the young man, in an undertone, “I guessed on the sands and now I know; that was why I let him fall soft.”

Taking a latchkey from the girl and the coin from Hawker, Flambeau let himself and his friend into the empty house and passed into the outer parlour. It was empty of all occupants but one. The man whom Father Brown had seen pass the tavern was standing against the wall as if at bay; unchanged, save that he had taken off his black coat and was wearing a brown dressing-gown.

“We have come,” said Father Brown politely, “to give back this coin to its owner.” And he handed it to the man with the nose.

Flambeau’s eyes rolled. “Is this man a coin-collector?” he asked.

“This man is Mr Arthur Carstairs,” said the priest positively, “and he is a coin-collector of a somewhat singular kind.”

The man changed colour so horribly that the crooked nose stood out on his face like a separate and comic thing. He spoke, nevertheless, with a sort of despairing dignity. “You shall see, then,” he said, “that I have not lost all the family qualities.” And he turned suddenly and strode into an inner room, slamming the door.

“Stop him!” shouted Father Brown, bounding and half falling over a chair;
and, after a wrench or two, Flambeau had the door open. But it was too late. In dead silence Flambeau strode across and telephoned for doctor and police.

An empty medicine bottle lay on the floor. Across the table the body of the man in the brown dressing-gown lay amid his burst and gaping brown-paper parcels; out of which poured and rolled, not Roman, but very modern English coins.

The priest held up the bronze head of Caesar. “This,” he said, “was all that was left of the Carstairs Collection.”

After a silence he went on, with more than common gentleness: “It was a cruel will his wicked father made, and you see he did resent it a little. He hated the Roman money he had, and grew fonder of the real money denied him. He not only sold the Collection bit by bit, but sank bit by bit to the basest ways of making money—even to blackmailing his own family in a disguise. He blackmailed his brother from Australia for his little forgotten crime (that is why he took the cab to Wagga Wagga in Putney), he blackmailed his sister for the theft he alone could have noticed. And that, by the way, is why she had that supernatural guess when he was away on the sand-dunes. Mere figure and gait, however distant, are more likely to remind us of somebody than a well-made-up face quite close.”

There was another silence. “Well,” growled the detective, “and so this great numismatist and coin-collector was nothing but a vulgar miser.”

“Is there so great a difference?” asked Father Brown, in the same strange, indulgent tone. “What is there wrong about a miser that is not often as wrong about a collector? What is wrong, except . . . thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image; thou shalt not bow down to them nor serve them, for I . . . but we must go and see how the poor young people are getting on.”

“I think,” said Flambeau, “that in spite of everything, they are probably getting on very well.”
MR EDWARD NUTT, the industrious editor of the Daily Reformer, sat at his desk, opening letters and marking proofs to the merry tune of a typewriter, worked by a vigorous young lady.

He was a stoutish, fair man, in his shirt-sleeves; his movements were resolute, his mouth firm and his tones final; but his round, rather babyish blue eyes had a bewildered and even wistful look that rather contradicted all this. Nor indeed was the expression altogether misleading. It might truly be said of him, as for many journalists in authority, that his most familiar emotion was one of continuous fear; fear of libel actions, fear of lost advertisements, fear of misprints, fear of the sack.

His life was a series of distracted compromises between the proprietor of the paper (and of him), who was a senile soap-boiler with three ineradicable mistakes in his mind, and the very able staff he had collected to run the paper; some of whom were brilliant and experienced men and (what was even worse) sincere enthusiasts for the political policy of the paper.

A letter from one of these lay immediately before him, and rapid and resolute as he was, he seemed almost to hesitate before opening it. He took up a strip of proof instead, ran down it with a blue eye, and a blue pencil, altered the word “adultery” to the word “impropriety,” and the word “Jew” to the word “Alien,” rang a bell and sent it flying upstairs.

Then, with a more thoughtful eye, he ripped open the letter from his more distinguished contributor, which bore a postmark of Devonshire, and read as follows:

DEAR NUTT,—As I see you’re working Spooks and Dooks at the same time, what about an article on that rum business of the Eyres of Exmoor; or as the old women call it down here, the Devil’s Ear of Eyre? The head of the family, you know, is the Duke of Exmoor; he is one of the few really stiff old Tory aristocrats left, a sound old crusted tyrant it is quite in our line to make trouble about. And I think I’m on the track of a story that will make trouble.

Of course I don’t believe in the old legend about James I; and as for you, you don’t believe in anything, not even in journalism. The legend, you’ll probably remember, was about the blackest business in English history—the poisoning of
Overbury by that witch’s cat Frances Howard, and the quite mysterious terror which forced the King to pardon the murderers. There was a lot of alleged witchcraft mixed up with it; and the story goes that a man-servant listening at the keyhole heard the truth in a talk between the King and Carr; and the bodily ear with which he heard grew large and monstrous as by magic, so awful was the secret. And though he had to be loaded with lands and gold and made an ancestor of dukes, the elf-shaped ear is still recurrent in the family. Well, you don’t believe in black magic; and if you did, you couldn’t use it for copy. If a miracle happened in your office, you’d have to hush it up, now so many bishops are agnostics. But that is not the point The point is that there really is something queer about Exmoor and his family; something quite natural, I dare say, but quite abnormal. And the Ear is in it somehow, I fancy; either a symbol or a delusion or disease or something. Another tradition says that Cavaliers just after James I began to wear their hair long only to cover the ear of the first Lord Exmoor. This also is no doubt fanciful.

The reason I point it out to you is this: It seems to me that we make a mistake in attacking aristocracy entirely for its champagne and diamonds. Most men rather admire the nob for having a good time, but I think we surrender too much when we admit that aristocracy has made even the aristocrats happy. I suggest a series of articles pointing out how dreary, how inhuman, how downright diabolist, is the very smell and atmosphere of some of these great houses. There are plenty of instances; but you couldn’t begin with a better one than the Ear of the Eyres. By the end of the week I think I can get you the truth about it.—Yours ever, FRANCIS FINN.

Mr Nutt reflected a moment, staring at his left boot; then he called out in a strong, loud and entirely lifeless voice, in which every syllable sounded alike: “Miss Barlow, take down a letter to Mr Finn, please.”

DEAR FINN,—I think it would do; copy should reach us second post Saturday.—Yours, E. NUTT.

This elaborate epistle he articulated as if it were all one word; and Miss Barlow rattled it down as if it were all one word. Then he took up another strip of proof and a blue pencil, and altered the word “supernatural” to the word “marvellous,” and the expression “shoot down” to the expression “repress.”

In such happy, healthful activities did Mr Nutt disport himself, until the ensuing Saturday found him at the same desk, dictating to the same typist, and using the same blue pencil on the first instalment of Mr Finn’s revelations. The opening was a sound piece of slashing invective about the evil secrets of princes,
and despair in the high places of the earth. Though written violently, it was in excellent English; but the editor, as usual, had given to somebody else the task of breaking it up into sub-headings, which were of a spicier sort, as “Peeress and Poisons,” and “The Eerie Ear,” “The Eyres in their Eyrie,” and so on through a hundred happy changes. Then followed the legend of the Ear, amplified from Finn’s first letter, and then the substance of his later discoveries, as follows:

I know it is the practice of journalists to put the end of the story at the beginning and call it a headline. I know that journalism largely consists in saying “Lord Jones Dead” to people who never knew that Lord Jones was alive. Your present correspondent thinks that this, like many other journalistic customs, is bad journalism; and that the Daily Reformer has to set a better example in such things. He proposes to tell his story as it occurred, step by step. He will use the real names of the parties, who in most cases are ready to confirm his testimony. As for the headlines, the sensational proclamations—they will come at the end.

I was walking along a public path that threads through a private Devonshire orchard and seems to point towards Devonshire cider, when I came suddenly upon just such a place as the path suggested. It was a long, low inn, consisting really of a cottage and two barns; thatched all over with the thatch that looks like brown and grey hair grown before history. But outside the door was a sign which called it the Blue Dragon; and under the sign was one of those long rustic tables that used to stand outside most of the free English inns, before teetotallers and brewers between them destroyed freedom. And at this table sat three gentlemen, who might have lived a hundred years ago.

Now that I know them all better, there is no difficulty about disentangling the impressions; but just then they looked like three very solid ghosts. The dominant figure, both because he was bigger in all three dimensions, and because he sat centrally in the length of the table, facing me, was a tall, fat man dressed completely in black, with a rubicund, even apoplectic visage, but a rather bald and rather bothered brow. Looking at him again, more strictly, I could not exactly say what it was that gave me the sense of antiquity, except the antique cut of his white clerical necktie and the barred wrinkles across his brow.

It was even less easy to fix the impression in the case of the man at the right end of the table, who, to say truth, was as commonplace a person as could be seen anywhere, with a round, brown-haired head and a round snub nose, but also clad in clerical black, of a stricter cut. It was only when I saw his broad curved hat lying on the table beside him that I realized why I connected him with anything ancient. He was a Roman Catholic priest.
Perhaps the third man, at the other end of the table, had really more to do with it than the rest, though he was both slighter in physical presence and more inconsiderate in his dress. His lank limbs were clad, I might also say clutched, in very tight grey sleeves and pantaloons; he had a long, sallow, aquiline face which seemed somehow all the more saturnine because his lantern jaws were imprisoned in his collar and neck-cloth more in the style of the old stock; and his hair (which ought to have been dark brown) was of an odd dim, russet colour which, in conjunction with his yellow face, looked rather purple than red. The unobtrusive yet unusual colour was all the more notable because his hair was almost unnaturally healthy and curling, and he wore it full. But, after all analysis, I incline to think that what gave me my first old-fashioned impression was simply a set of tall, old-fashioned wine-glasses, one or two lemons and two churchwarden pipes. And also, perhaps, the old-world errand on which I had come.

Being a hardened reporter, and it being apparently a public inn, I did not need to summon much of my impudence to sit down at the long table and order some cider. The big man in black seemed very learned, especially about local antiquities; the small man in black, though he talked much less, surprised me with a yet wider culture. So we got on very well together; but the third man, the old gentleman in the tight pantaloons, seemed rather distant and haughty, until I slid into the subject of the Duke of Exmoor and his ancestry.

I thought the subject seemed to embarrass the other two a little; but it broke the spell of the third man’s silence most successfully. Speaking with restraint and with the accent of a highly educated gentleman, and puffing at intervals at his long churchwarden pipe, he proceeded to tell me some of the most horrible stories I have ever heard in my life: how one of the Eyres in the former ages had hanged his own father; and another had his wife scourged at the cart tail through the village; and another had set fire to a church full of children, and so on.

Some of the tales, indeed, are not fit for public print—, such as the story of the Scarlet Nuns, the abominable story of the Spotted Dog, or the thing that was done in the quarry. And all this red roll of impieties came from his thin, genteel lips rather primly than otherwise, as he sat sipping the wine out of his tall, thin glass.

I could see that the big man opposite me was trying, if anything, to stop him; but he evidently held the old gentleman in considerable respect, and could not venture to do so at all abruptly. And the little priest at the other end of the table, though free from any such air of embarrassment, looked steadily at the table, and
seemed to listen to the recital with great pain—as well as he might.

“You don’t seem,” I said to the narrator, “to be very fond of the Exmoor pedigree.”

He looked at me a moment, his lips still prim, but whitening and tightening; then he deliberately broke his long pipe and glass on the table and stood up, the very picture of a perfect gentleman with the framing temper of a fiend.

“These gentlemen,” he said, “will tell you whether I have cause to like it. The curse of the Eyres of old has lain heavy on this country, and many have suffered from it. They know there are none who have suffered from it as I have.” And with that he crushed a piece of the fallen glass under his heel, and strode away among the green twilight of the twinkling apple-trees.

“That is an extraordinary old gentleman,” I said to the other two; “do you happen to know what the Exmoor family has done to him? Who is he?”

The big man in black was staring at me with the wild air of a baffled bull; he did not at first seem to take it in. Then he said at last, “Don’t you know who he is?”

I reaffirmed my ignorance, and there was another silence; then the little priest said, still looking at the table, “That is the Duke of Exmoor.”

Then, before I could collect my scattered senses, he added equally quietly, but with an air of regularizing things: “My friend here is Doctor Mull, the Duke’s librarian. My name is Brown.”

“But,” I stammered, “if that is the Duke, why does he damn all the old dukes like that?”

“He seems really to believe,” answered the priest called Brown, “that they have left a curse on him.” Then he added, with some irrelevance, “That’s why he wears a wig.”

It was a few moments before his meaning dawned on me. “You don’t mean that fable about the fantastic ear?” I demanded. “I’ve heard of it, of course, but surely it must be a superstitious yarn spun out of something much simpler. I’ve sometimes thought it was a wild version of one of those mutilation stories. They used to crop criminals’ ears in the sixteenth century.”

“I hardly think it was that,” answered the little man thoughtfully, “but it is not outside ordinary science or natural law for a family to have some deformity frequently reappearing—such as one ear bigger than the other.”

The big librarian had buried his big bald brow in his big red hands, like a man trying to think out his duty. “No,” he groaned. “You do the man a wrong after all. Understand, I’ve no reason to defend him, or even keep faith with him. He
has been a tyrant to me as to everybody else. Don’t fancy because you see him
sitting here that he isn’t a great lord in the worst sense of the word. He would
fetch a man a mile to ring a bell a yard off—if it would summon another man
three miles to fetch a matchbox three yards off. He must have a footman to carry
his walking-stick; a body servant to hold up his opera-glasses—”

“But not a valet to brush his clothes,” cut in the priest, with a curious dryness,
“for the valet would want to brush his wig, too.”

The librarian turned to him and seemed to forget my presence; he was strongly
moved and, I think, a little heated with wine. “I don’t know how you know it,
Father Brown,” he said, “but you are right. He lets the whole world do
everything for him—except dress him. And that he insists on doing in a literal
solitude like a desert. Anybody is kicked out of the house without a character
who is so much as found near his dressing-room door.

“He seems a pleasant old party,” I remarked.

“No,” replied Dr Mull quite simply; “and yet that is just what I mean by
saying you are unjust to him after all. Gentlemen, the Duke does really feel the
bitterness about the curse that he uttered just now. He does, with sincere shame
and terror, hide under that purple wig something he thinks it would blast the sons
of man to see. I know it is so; and I know it is not a mere natural disfigurement,
like a criminal mutilation, or a hereditary disproportion in the features. I know it
is worse than that; because a man told me who was present at a scene that no
man could invent, where a stronger man than any of us tried to defy the secret,
and was scared away from it.”

I opened my mouth to speak, but Mull went on in oblivion of me, speaking out
of the cavern of his hands. “I don’t mind telling you, Father, because it’s really
more defending the poor Duke than giving him away. Didn’t you ever hear of
the time when he very nearly lost all the estates?”

The priest shook his head; and the librarian proceeded to tell the tale as he had
heard it from his predecessor in the same post, who had been his patron and
instructor, and whom he seemed to trust implicitly. Up to a certain point it was a
common enough tale of the decline of a great family’s fortunes—the tale of a
family lawyer. His lawyer, however, had the sense to cheat honestly, if the
expression explains itself. Instead of using funds he held in trust, he took
advantage of the Duke’s carelessness to put the family in a financial hole, in
which it might be necessary for the Duke to let him hold them in reality.

The lawyer’s name was Isaac Green, but the Duke always called him Elisha;
presumably in reference to the fact that he was quite bald, though certainly not
more than thirty. He had risen very rapidly, but from very dirty beginnings; being first a “nark” or informer, and then a money-lender: but as solicitor to the Eyres he had the sense, as I say, to keep technically straight until he was ready to deal the final blow. The blow fell at dinner; and the old librarian said he should never forget the very look of the lampshades and the decanters, as the little lawyer, with a steady smile, proposed to the great landlord that they should halve the estates between them. The sequel certainly could not be overlooked; for the Duke, in dead silence, smashed a decanter on the man’s bald head as suddenly as I had seen him smash the glass that day in the orchard. It left a red triangular scar on the scalp, and the lawyer’s eyes altered, but not his smile.

He rose tottering to his feet, and struck back as such men do strike. “I am glad of that,” he said, “for now I can take the whole estate. The law will give it to me.”

Exmoor, it seems, was white as ashes, but his eyes still blazed. “The law will give it you,” he said; “but you will not take it. . . . Why not? Why? because it would mean the crack of doom for me, and if you take it I shall take off my wig. . . . Why, you pitiful plucked fowl, anyone can see your bare head. But no man shall see mine and live.”

Well, you may say what you like and make it mean what you like. But Mull swears it is the solemn fact that the lawyer, after shaking his knotted fists in the air for an instant, simply ran from the room and never reappeared in the countryside; and since then Exmoor has been feared more for a warlock than even for a landlord and a magistrate.

Now Dr Mull told his story with rather wild theatrical gestures, and with a passion I think at least partisan. I was quite conscious of the possibility that the whole was the extravagance of an old braggart and gossip. But before I end this half of my discoveries, I think it due to Dr Mull to record that my two first inquiries have confirmed his story. I learned from an old apothecary in the village that there was a bald man in evening dress, giving the name of Green, who came to him one night to have a three-cornered cut on his forehead plastered. And I learnt from the legal records and old newspapers that there was a lawsuit threatened, and at least begun, by one Green against the Duke of Exmoor.

Mr Nutt, of the Daily Reformer, wrote some highly incongruous words across the top of the copy, made some highly mysterious marks down the side of it, and called to Miss Barlow in the same loud, monotonous voice: “Take down a letter to Mr Finn.”
DEAR FINN,—Your copy will do, but I have had to headline it a bit; and our public would never stand a Romanist priest in the story—you must keep your eye on the suburbs. I’ve altered him to Mr Brown, a Spiritualist.

Yours,

E. NUTT.

A day or two afterward found the active and judicious editor examining, with blue eyes that seemed to grow rounder and rounder, the second instalment of Mr Finn’s tale of mysteries in high life. It began with the words:

I have made an astounding discovery. I freely confess it is quite different from anything I expected to discover, and will give a much more practical shock to the public. I venture to say, without any vanity, that the words I now write will be read all over Europe, and certainly all over America and the Colonies. And yet I heard all I have to tell before I left this same little wooden table in this same little wood of apple-trees.

I owe it all to the small priest Brown; he is an extraordinary man. The big librarian had left the table, perhaps ashamed of his long tongue, perhaps anxious about the storm in which his mysterious master had vanished: anyway, he betook himself heavily in the Duke’s tracks through the trees. Father Brown had picked up one of the lemons and was eyeing it with an odd pleasure.

“What a lovely colour a lemon is!” he said. “There’s one thing I don’t like about the Duke’s wig—the colour.”

“I don’t think I understand,” I answered.

“I dare say he’s got good reason to cover his ears, like King Midas,” went on the priest, with a cheerful simplicity which somehow seemed rather flippant under the circumstances. “I can quite understand that it’s nicer to cover them with hair than with brass plates or leather flaps. But if he wants to use hair, why doesn’t he make it look like hair? There never was hair of that colour in this world. It looks more like a sunset-cloud coming through the wood. Why doesn’t he conceal the family curse better, if he’s really so ashamed of it? Shall I tell you? It’s because he isn’t ashamed of it. He’s proud of it.”

“It’s an ugly wig to be proud of—and an ugly story,” I said.

“Consider,” replied this curious little man, “how you yourself really feel about such things. I don’t suggest you’re either more snobbish or more morbid than the rest of us: but don’t you feel in a vague way that a genuine old family curse is rather a fine thing to have? Would you be ashamed, wouldn’t you be a little proud, if the heir of the Glamis horror called you his friend? or if Byron’s family had confided, to you only, the evil adventures of their race? Don’t be too hard on
the aristocrats themselves if their heads are as weak as ours would be, and they are snobs about their own sorrows.”

“By Jove!” I cried; “and that’s true enough. My own mother’s family had a banshee; and, now I come to think of it, it has comforted me in many a cold hour.”

“And think,” he went on, “of that stream of blood and poison that spurted from his thin lips the instant you so much as mentioned his ancestors. Why should he show every stranger over such a Chamber of Horrors unless he is proud of it? He doesn’t conceal his wig, he doesn’t conceal his blood, he doesn’t conceal his family curse, he doesn’t conceal the family crimes—but—”

The little man’s voice changed so suddenly, he shut his hand so sharply, and his eyes so rapidly grew rounder and brighter like a waking owl’s, that it had all the abruptness of a small explosion on the table.

“But,” he ended, “he does really conceal his toilet.”

It somehow completed the thrill of my fanciful nerves that at that instant the Duke appeared again silently among the glimmering trees, with his soft foot and sunset-hued hair, coming round the corner of the house in company with his librarian. Before he came within earshot, Father Brown had added quite composedly, “Why does he really hide the secret of what he does with the purple wig? Because it isn’t the sort of secret we suppose.”

The Duke came round the corner and resumed his seat at the head of the table with all his native dignity. The embarrassment of the librarian left him hovering on his hind legs, like a huge bear. The Duke addressed the priest with great seriousness. “Father Brown,” he said, “Doctor Mull informs me that you have come here to make a request. I no longer profess an observance of the religion of my fathers; but for their sakes, and for the sake of the days when we met before, I am very willing to hear you. But I presume you would rather be heard in private.”

Whatever I retain of the gentleman made me stand up. Whatever I have attained of the journalist made me stand still. Before this paralysis could pass, the priest had made a momentarily detaining motion. “If,” he said, “your Grace will permit me my real petition, or if I retain any right to advise you, I would urge that as many people as possible should be present. All over this country I have found hundreds, even of my own faith and flock, whose imaginations are poisoned by the spell which I implore you to break. I wish we could have all Devonshire here to see you do it.”

“To see me do what?” asked the Duke, arching his eyebrows.
“To see you take off your wig,” said Father Brown.

The Duke’s face did not move; but he looked at his petitioner with a glassy stare which was the most awful expression I have ever seen on a human face. I could see the librarian’s great legs wavering under him like the shadows of stems in a pool; and I could not banish from my own brain the fancy that the trees all around us were filling softly in the silence with devils instead of birds.

“I spare you,” said the Duke in a voice of inhuman pity. “I refuse. If I gave you the faintest hint of the load of horror I have to bear alone, you would lie shrieking at these feet of mine and begging to know no more. I will spare you the hint. You shall not spell the first letter of what is written on the altar of the Unknown God.”

“I know the Unknown God,” said the little priest, with an unconscious grandeur of certitude that stood up like a granite tower. “I know his name; it is Satan. The true God was made flesh and dwelt among us. And I say to you, wherever you find men ruled merely by mystery, it is the mystery of iniquity. If the devil tells you something is too fearful to look at, look at it. If he says something is too terrible to hear, hear it. If you think some truth unbearable, bear it. I entreat your Grace to end this nightmare now and here at this table.”

“If I did,” said the Duke in a low voice, “you and all you believe, and all by which alone you live, would be the first to shrivel and perish. You would have an instant to know the great Nothing before you died.”

“The Cross of Christ be between me and harm,” said Father Brown. “Take off your wig.”

I was leaning over the table in ungovernable excitement; in listening to this extraordinary duel half a thought had come into my head. “Your Grace,” I cried, “I call your bluff. Take off that wig or I will knock it off.”

I suppose I can be prosecuted for assault, but I am very glad I did it. When he said, in the same voice of stone, “I refuse,” I simply sprang on him. For three long instants he strained against me as if he had all hell to help him; but I forced his head until the hairy cap fell off it. I admit that, whilst wrestling, I shut my eyes as it fell.

I was awakened by a cry from Mull, who was also by this time at the Duke’s side. His head and mine were both bending over the bald head of the wigless Duke. Then the silence was snapped by the librarian exclaiming: “What can it mean? Why, the man had nothing to hide. His ears are just like everybody else’s.”

“Yes,” said Father Brown, “that is what he had to hide.”
The priest walked straight up to him, but strangely enough did not even glance at his ears. He stared with an almost comical seriousness at his bald forehead, and pointed to a three-cornered cicatrice, long healed, but still discernible. “Mr Green, I think.” he said politely, “and he did get the whole estate after all.”

And now let me tell the readers of the Daily Reformer what I think the most remarkable thing in the whole affair. This transformation scene, which will seem to you as wild and purple as a Persian fairy-tale, has been (except for my technical assault) strictly legal and constitutional from its first beginnings. This man with the odd scar and the ordinary tears is not an impostor. Though (in one sense) he wears another man’s wig and claims another man’s ear, he has not stolen another man’s coronet. He really is the one and only Duke of Exmoor.

What happened was this. The old Duke really had a slight malformation of the ear, which really was more or less hereditary. He really was morbid about it; and it is likely enough that he did invoke it as a kind of curse in the violent scene (which undoubtedly happened) in which he struck Green with the decanter. But the contest ended very differently. Green pressed his claim and got the estates; the dispossessed nobleman shot himself and died without issue. After a decent interval the beautiful English Government revived the “extinct” peerage of Exmoor, and bestowed it, as is usual, on the most important person, the person who had got the property.

This man used the old feudal fables—properly, in his snobbish soul, really envied and admired them. So that thousands of poor English people trembled before a mysterious chieftain with an ancient destiny and a diadem of evil stars—when they are really trembling before a guttersnipe who was a petitifogger and a pawnbroker not twelve years ago. I think it very typical of the real case against our aristocracy as it is, and as it will be till God sends us braver men.

Mr Nutt put down the manuscript and called out with unusual sharpness: “Miss Barlow, please take down a letter to Mr Finn.”

DEAR FINN,—You must be mad; we can’t touch this. I wanted vampires and the bad old days and aristocracy hand-in-hand with superstition. They like that But you must know the Exmoors would never forgive this. And what would our people say then, I should like to know! Why, Sir Simon is one of Exmoor’s greatest pals; and it would ruin that cousin of the Eyres that’s standing for us at Bradford. Besides, old Soap-Suds was sick enough at not getting his peerage last year; he’d sack me by wire if I lost him it with such lunacy as this. And what about Duffey? He’s doing us some rattling articles on “The Heel of the Norman.” And how can he write about Normans if the man’s only a solicitor?
Do be reasonable.—Yours, E. NUTT.

As Miss Barlow rattled away cheerfully, he crumpled up the copy and tossed it into the waste-paper basket; but not before he had, automatically and by force of habit, altered the word “God” to the word “circumstances.”
EIGHT

THE PERISHING OF THE PENDRAGONS

FATHER BROWN was in no mood for adventures. He had lately fallen ill with over-work, and when he began to recover, his friend Flambeau had taken him on a cruise in a small yacht with Sir Cecil Fanshaw, a young Cornish squire and an enthusiast for Cornish coast scenery. But Brown was still rather weak; he was no very happy sailor; and though he was never of the sort that either grumbles or breaks down, his spirits did not rise above patience and civility. When the other two men praised the ragged violet sunset or the ragged volcanic crags, he agreed with them. When Flambeau pointed out a rock shaped like a dragon, he looked at it and thought it very like a dragon. When Fanshaw more excitedly indicated a rock that was like Merlin, he looked at it, and signified assent. When Flambeau asked whether this rocky gate of the twisted river was not the gate of Fairyland, he said “Yes.” He heard the most important things and the most trivial with the same tasteless absorption. He heard that the coast was death to all but careful seamen; he also heard that the ship’s cat was asleep. He heard that Fanshaw couldn’t find his cigar-holder anywhere; he also heard the pilot deliver the oracle “Both eyes bright, she’s all right; one eye winks, down she sinks.” He heard Flambeau say to Fanshaw that no doubt this meant the pilot must keep both eyes open and be spry. And he heard Fanshaw say to Flambeau that, oddly enough, it didn’t mean this: it meant that while they saw two of the coast lights, one near and the other distant, exactly side by side, they were in the right river-channel; but that if one light was hidden behind the other, they were going on the rocks. He heard Fanshaw add that his country was full of such quaint fables and idioms; it was the very home of romance; he even pitted this part of Cornwall against Devonshire, as a claimant to the laurels of Elizabethan seamanship. According to him there had been captains among these coves and islets compared with whom Drake was practically a landsman. He heard Flambeau laugh, and ask if, perhaps, the adventurous title of “Westward Ho!” only meant that all Devonshire men wished they were living in Cornwall. He heard Fanshaw say there was no need to be silly; that not only had Cornish captains been heroes, but that they were heroes still: that near that very spot there was an old admiral, now retired, who was scarred by thrilling voyages full of adventures; and who had in his youth found the last group of eight Pacific Islands that was added to
the chart of the world. This Cecil Fanshaw was, in person, of the kind that commonly urges such crude but pleasing enthusiasms; a very young man, light-haired, high-coloured, with an eager profile; with a boyish bravado of spirits, but an almost girlish delicacy of tint and type. The big shoulders, black brows and black mousquetaire swagger of Flambeau were a great contrast.

All these trivialities Brown heard and saw; but heard them as a tired man hears a tune in the railway wheels, or saw them as a sick man sees the pattern of his wall-paper. No one can calculate the turns of mood in convalescence: but Father Brown’s depression must have had a great deal to do with his mere unfamiliarity with the sea. For as the river mouth narrowed like the neck of a bottle, and the water grew calmer and the air warmer and more earthly, he seemed to wake up and take notice like a baby. They had reached that phase just after sunset when air and water both look bright, but earth and all its growing things look almost black by comparison. About this particular evening, however, there was something exceptional. It was one of those rare atmospheres in which a smoked-glass slide seems to have been slid away from between us and Nature; so that even dark colours on that day look more gorgeous than bright colours on cloudier days. The trampled earth of the river-banks and the peaty stain in the pools did not look drab but glowing umber, and the dark woods astir in the breeze did not look, as usual, dim blue with mere depth of distance, but more like wind-tumbled masses of some vivid violet blossom. This magic clearness and intensity in the colours was further forced on Brown’s slowly reviving senses by something romantic and even secret in the very form of the landscape.

The river was still well wide and deep enough for a pleasure boat so small as theirs; but the curves of the country-side suggested that it was closing in on either hand; the woods seemed to be making broken and flying attempts at bridge-building—as if the boat were passing from the romance of a valley to the romance of a hollow and so to the supreme romance of a tunnel. Beyond this mere look of things there was little for Brown’s freshening fancy to feed on; he saw no human beings, except some gipsies trailing along the river bank, with faggots and osiers cut in the forest; and one sight no longer unconventional, but in such remote parts still uncommon: a dark-haired lady, bare-headed, and paddling her own canoe. If Father Brown ever attached any importance to either of these, he certainly forgot them at the next turn of the river which brought in sight a singular object.

The water seemed to widen and split, being cloven by the dark wedge of a fish-shaped and wooded islet. With the rate at which they went, the islet seemed
to swim towards them like a ship; a ship with a very high prow—or, to speak more strictly, a very high funnel. For at the extreme point nearest them stood up an odd-looking building, unlike anything they could remember or connect with any purpose. It was not specially high, but it was too high for its breadth to be called anything but a tower. Yet it appeared to be built entirely of wood, and that in a most unequal and eccentric way. Some of the planks and beams were of good, seasoned oak; some of such wood cut raw and recent; some again of white pinewood, and a great deal more of the same sort of wood painted black with tar. These black beams were set crooked or crisscross at all kinds of angles, giving the whole a most patchy and puzzling appearance. There were one or two windows, which appeared to be coloured and leaded in an old-fashioned but more elaborate style. The travellers looked at it with that paradoxical feeling we have when something reminds us of something, and yet we are certain it is something very different.

Father Brown, even when he was mystified, was clever in analysing his own mystification. And he found himself reflecting that the oddity seemed to consist in a particular shape cut out in an incongruous material; as if one saw a top-hat made of tin, or a frock-coat cut out of tartan. He was sure he had seen timbers of different tints arranged like that somewhere, but never in such architectural proportions. The next moment a glimpse through the dark trees told him all he wanted to know and he laughed. Through a gap in the foliage there appeared for a moment one of those old wooden houses, faced with black beams, which are still to be found here and there in England, but which most of us see imitated in some show called “Old London” or “Shakespeare’s England.” It was in view only long enough for the priest to see that, however old-fashioned, it was a comfortable and well-kept country-house, with flowerbeds in front of it. It had none of the piebald and crazy look of the tower that seemed made out of its refuse.

“What on earth’s this?” said Flambeau, who was still staring at the tower.

Fanshaw’s eyes were shining, and he spoke triumphantly. “Aha! you’ve not seen a place quite like this before, I fancy; that’s why I’ve brought you here, my friend. Now you shall see whether I exaggerate about the mariners of Cornwall. This place belongs to Old Pendragon, whom we call the Admiral; though he retired before getting the rank. The spirit of Raleigh and Hawkins is a memory with the Devon folk; it’s a modern fact with the Pendragons. If Queen Elizabeth were to rise from the grave and come up this river in a gilded barge, she would be received by the Admiral in a house exactly such as she was accustomed to, in
every corner and casement, in every panel on the wall or plate on the table. And she would find an English Captain still talking fiercely of fresh lands to be found in little ships, as much as if she had dined with Drake.”

“She’d find a rum sort of thing in the garden,” said Father Brown, “which would not please her Renaissance eye. That Elizabethan domestic architecture is charming in its way; but it’s against the very nature of it to break out into turrets.”

“And yet,” answered Fanshaw, “that’s the most romantic and Elizabethan part of the business. It was built by the Pendragons in the very days of the Spanish wars; and though it’s needed patching and even rebuilding for another reason, it’s always been rebuilt in the old way. The story goes that the lady of Sir Peter Pendragon built it in this place and to this height, because from the top you can just see the corner where vessels turn into the river mouth; and she wished to be the first to see her husband’s ship, as he sailed home from the Spanish Main.”

“For what other reason,” asked Father Brown, “do you mean that it has been rebuilt?”

“Oh, there’s a strange story about that, too,” said the young squire with relish. “You are really in a land of strange stories. King Arthur was here and Merlin and the fairies before him. The story goes that Sir Peter Pendragon, who (I fear) had some of the faults of the pirates as well as the virtues of the sailor, was bringing home three Spanish gentlemen in honourable captivity, intending to escort them to Elizabeth’s court. But he was a man of flaming and tigerish temper, and coming to high words with one of them, he caught him by the throat and flung him by accident or design, into the sea. A second Spaniard, who was the brother of the first, instantly drew his sword and flew at Pendragon, and after a short but furious combat in which both got three wounds in as many minutes, Pendragon drove his blade through the other’s body and the second Spaniard was accounted for. As it happened the ship had already turned into the river mouth and was close to comparatively shallow water. The third Spaniard sprang over the side of the ship, struck out for the shore, and was soon near enough to it to stand up to his waist in water. And turning again to face the ship, and holding up both arms to Heaven—like a prophet calling plagues upon a wicked city—he called out to Pendragon in a piercing and terrible voice, that he at least was yet living, that he would go on living, that he would live for ever; and that generation after generation the house of Pendragon should never see him or his, but should know by very certain signs that he and his vengeance were alive. With that he dived under the wave, and was either drowned or swam so long under water that no
hair of his head was seen afterwards.”

“There’s that girl in the canoe again,” said Flambeau irrelevantly, for good-looking young women would call him off any topic. “She seems bothered by the queer tower just as we were.”

Indeed, the black-haired young lady was letting her canoe float slowly and silently past the strange islet; and was looking intently up at the strange tower, with a strong glow of curiosity on her oval and olive face.

“Never mind girls,” said Fanshaw impatiently, “there are plenty of them in the world, but not many things like the Pendragon Tower. As you may easily suppose, plenty of superstitions and scandals have followed in the track of the Spaniard’s curse; and no doubt, as you would put it, any accident happening to this Cornish family would be connected with it by rural credulity. But it is perfectly true that this tower has been burnt down two or three times; and the family can’t be called lucky, for more than two, I think, of the Admiral’s near kin have perished by shipwreck; and one at least, to my own knowledge, on practically the same spot where Sir Peter threw the Spaniard overboard.”

“What a pity!” exclaimed Flambeau. “She’s going.”

“When did your friend the Admiral tell you this family history?” asked Father Brown, as the girl in the canoe paddled off, without showing the least intention of extending her interest from the tower to the yacht, which Fanshaw had already caused to lie alongside the island.

“Many years ago,” replied Fanshaw; “he hasn’t been to sea for some time now, though he is as keen on it as ever. I believe there’s a family compact or something. Well, here’s the landing stage; let’s come ashore and see the old boy.”

They followed him on to the island, just under the tower, and Father Brown, whether from the mere touch of dry land, or the interest of something on the other bank of the river (which he stared at very hard for some seconds), seemed singularly improved in briskness. They entered a wooded avenue between two fences of thin greyish wood, such as often enclose parks or gardens, and over the top of which the dark trees tossed to and fro like black and purple plumes upon the hearse of a giant. The tower, as they left it behind, looked all the quaintier, because such entrances are usually flanked by two towers; and this one looked lopsided. But for this, the avenue had the usual appearance of the entrance to a gentleman’s grounds; and, being so curved that the house was now out of sight, somehow looked a much larger park than any plantation on such an island could really be. Father Brown was, perhaps, a little fanciful in his fatigue, but he
almost thought the whole place must be growing larger, as things do in a
nightmare. Anyhow, a mystical monotony was the only character of their march,
until Fanshaw suddenly stopped, and pointed to something sticking out through
the grey fence—something that looked at first rather like the imprisoned horn of
some beast. Closer observation showed that it was a slightly curved blade of
metal that shone faintly in the fading light.

Flambeau, who like all Frenchmen had been a soldier, bent over it and said in
a startled voice: “Why, it’s a sabre! I believe I know the sort, heavy and curved,
but shorter than the cavalry; they used to have them in artillery and the—”

As he spoke the blade plucked itself out of the crack it had made and came
down again with a more ponderous slash, splitting the fissiparous fence to the
bottom with a rending noise. Then it was pulled out again, flashed above the
fence some feet further along, and again split it halfway down with the first
stroke; and after waggling a little to extricate itself (accompanied with curses in
the darkness) split it down to the ground with a second. Then a kick of devilish
energy sent the whole loosened square of thin wood flying into the pathway, and
a great gap of dark coppice gaped in the paling.

Fanshaw peered into the dark opening and uttered an exclamation of
astonishment. “My dear Admiral!” he exclaimed, “do you—er—do you
generally cut out a new front door whenever you want to go for a walk?”

The voice in the gloom swore again, and then broke into a jolly laugh. “No,” it
said; “I’ve really got to cut down this fence somehow; it’s spoiling all the plants,
and no one else here can do it. But I’ll only carve another bit off the front door,
and then come out and welcome you.”

And sure enough, he heaved up his weapon once more, and, hacking twice,
brought down another and similar strip of fence, making the opening about
fourteen feet wide in all. Then through this larger forest gateway he came out
into the evening light, with a chip of grey wood sticking to his sword-blade.

He momentarily fulfilled all Fanshaw’s fable of an old piratical Admiral;
though the details seemed afterwards to decompose into accidents. For instance,
he wore a broad-brimmed hat as protection against the sun; but the front flap of
it was turned up straight to the sky, and the two corners pulled down lower than
the ears, so that it stood across his forehead in a crescent like the old cocked hat
worn by Nelson. He wore an ordinary dark-blue jacket, with nothing special
about the buttons, but the combination of it with white linen trousers somehow
had a sailorish look. He was tall and loose, and walked with a sort of swagger,
which was not a sailor’s roll, and yet somehow suggested it; and he held in his
hand a short sabre which was like a navy cutlass, but about twice as big. Under
the bridge of the hat his eagle face looked eager, all the more because it was not
only clean-shaven, but without eyebrows. It seemed almost as if all the hair had
come off his face from his thrusting it through a throng of elements. His eyes
were prominent and piercing. His colour was curiously attractive, while partly
tropical; it reminded one vaguely of a blood-orange. That is, that while it was
ruddy and sanguine, there was a yellow in it that was in no way sickly, but
seemed rather to glow like gold apples of the Hesperides—Father Brown
thought he had never seen a figure so expressive of all the romances about the
countries of the Sun.

When Fanshaw had presented his two friends to their host he fell again into a
tone of rallying the latter about his wreckage of the fence and his apparent rage
of profanity. The Admiral pooh-poohed it at first as a piece of necessary but
annoying garden work; but at length the ring of real energy came back into his
laughter, and he cried with a mixture of impatience and good humour:

“Well, perhaps I do go at it a bit rabidly, and feel a kind of pleasure in
smashing anything. So would you if your only pleasure was in cruising about to
find some new Cannibal Islands, and you had to stick on this muddy little
rockery in a sort of rustic pond. When I remember how I’ve cut down a mile and
a half of green poisonous jungle with an old cutlass half as sharp as this; and
then remember I must stop here and chop this matchwood, because of some
confounded old bargain scribbled in a family Bible, why, I—”

He swung up the heavy steel again; and this time sundered the wall of wood
from top to bottom at one stroke.

“I feel like that,” he said laughing, but furiously flinging the sword some yards
down the path, “and now let’s go up to the house; you must have some dinner.”

The semicircle of lawn in front of the house was varied by three circular
garden beds, one of red tulips, a second of yellow tulips, and the third of some
white, waxen-looking blossoms that the visitors did not know and presumed to
be exotic. A heavy, hairy and rather sullen-looking gardener was hanging up a
heavy coil of garden hose. The corners of the expiring sunset which seemed to
cling about the corners of the house gave glimpses here and there of the colours
of remoter flowerbeds; and in a treeless space on one side of the house opening
upon the river stood a tall brass tripod on which was tilted a big brass telescope.
Just outside the steps of the porch stood a little painted green garden table, as if
someone had just had tea there. The entrance was flanked with two of those half-
featured lumps of stone with holes for eyes that are said to be South Sea idols;
and on the brown oak beam across the doorway were some confused carvings that looked almost as barbaric.

As they passed indoors, the little cleric hopped suddenly on to the table, and standing on it peered unaffectedly through his spectacles at the mouldings in the oak. Admiral Pendragon looked very much astonished, though not particularly annoyed; while Fanshaw was so amused with what looked like a performing pigmy on his little stand, that he could not control his laughter. But Father Brown was not likely to notice either the laughter or the astonishment.

He was gazing at three carved symbols, which, though very worn and obscure, seemed still to convey some sense to him. The first seemed to be the outline of some tower or other building, crowned with what looked like curly-pointed ribbons. The second was clearer: an old Elizabethan galley with decorative waves beneath it, but interrupted in the middle by a curious jagged rock, which was either a fault in the wood or some conventional representation of the water coming in. The third represented the upper half of a human figure, ending in an escalloped line like the waves; the face was rubbed and featureless, and both arms were held very stiffly up in the air.

“Well,” muttered Father Brown, blinking, “here is the legend of the Spaniard plain enough. Here he is holding up his arms and cursing in the sea; and here are the two curses: the wrecked ship and the burning of Pendragon Tower.”

Pendragon shook his head with a kind of venerable amusement. “And how many other things might it not be?” he said. “Don’t you know that that sort of half-man, like a half-lion or half-stag, is quite common in heraldry? Might not that line through the ship be one of those parti-per-pale lines, indented, I think they call it? And though the third thing isn’t so very heraldic, it would be more heraldic to suppose it a tower crowned with laurel than with fire; and it looks just as like it.”

“But it seems rather odd,” said Flambeau, “that it should exactly confirm the old legend.”

“Ah,” replied the sceptical traveller, “but you don’t know how much of the old legend may have been made up from the old figures. Besides, it isn’t the only old legend. Fanshaw, here, who is fond of such things, will tell you there are other versions of the tale, and much more horrible ones. One story credits my unfortunate ancestor with having had the Spaniard cut in two; and that will fit the pretty picture also. Another obligingly credits our family with the possession of a tower full of snakes and explains those little, wriggly things in that way. And a third theory supposes the crooked line on the ship to be a
conventionalized thunderbolt; but that alone, if seriously examined, would show what a very little way these unhappy coincidences really go.”

“Why, how do you mean?” asked Fanshaw.

“It so happens,” replied his host coolly, “that there was no thunder and lightning at all in the two or three shipwrecks I know of in our family.”

“Oh!” said Father Brown, and jumped down from the little table.

There was another silence in which they heard the continuous murmur of the river; then Fanshaw said, in a doubtful and perhaps disappointed tone: “Then you don’t think there is anything in the tales of the tower in flames?”

“There are the tales, of course,” said the Admiral, shrugging his shoulders; “and some of them, I don’t deny, on evidence as decent as one ever gets for such things. Someone saw a blaze hereabout, don’t you know, as he walked home through a wood; someone keeping sheep on the uplands inland thought he saw a flame hovering over Pendragon Tower. Well, a damp dab of mud like this confounded island seems the last place where one would think of fires.”

“What is that fire over there?” asked Father Brown with a gentle suddenness, pointing to the woods on the left river-bank. They were all thrown a little off their balance, and the more fanciful Fanshaw had even some difficulty in recovering his, as they saw a long, thin stream of blue smoke ascending silently into the end of the evening light.

Then Pendragon broke into a scornful laugh again. “Gipsies!” he said; “they’ve been camping about here for about a week. Gentlemen, you want your dinner,” and he turned as if to enter the house.

But the antiquarian superstition in Fanshaw was still quivering, and he said hastily: “But, Admiral, what’s that hissing noise quite near the island? It’s very like fire.”

“It’s more like what it is,” said the Admiral, laughing as he led the way; “it’s only some canoe going by.”

Almost as he spoke, the butler, a lean man in black, with very black hair and a very long, yellow face, appeared in the doorway and told him that dinner was served.

The dining-room was as nautical as the cabin of a ship; but its note was rather that of the modern than the Elizabethan captain. There were, indeed, three antiquated cutlasses in a trophy over the fireplace, and one brown sixteenth-century map with Tritons and little ships dotted about a curly sea. But such things were less prominent on the white panelling than some cases of quaint-coloured South American birds, very scientifically stuffed, fantastic shells from
the Pacific, and several instruments so rude and queer in shape that savages might have used them either to kill their enemies or to cook them. But the alien colour culminated in the fact that, besides the butler, the Admiral’s only servants were two negroes, somewhat quaintly clad in tight uniforms of yellow. The priest’s instinctive trick of analysing his own impressions told him that the colour and the little neat coat-tails of these bipeds had suggested the word “Canary,” and so by a mere pun connected them with southward travel. Towards the end of the dinner they took their yellow clothes and black faces out of the room, leaving only the black clothes and yellow face of the butler.

“I’m rather sorry you take this so lightly,” said Fanshaw to the host; “for the truth is, I’ve brought these friends of mine with the idea of their helping you, as they know a good deal of these things. Don’t you really believe in the family story at all?”

“I don’t believe in anything,” answered Pendragon very briskly, with a bright eye cocked at a red tropical bird. “I’m a man of science.”

Rather to Flambeau’s surprise, his clerical friend, who seemed to have entirely woken up, took up the digression and talked natural history with his host with a flow of words and much unexpected information, until the dessert and decanters were set down and the last of the servants vanished. Then he said, without altering his tone.

“Please don’t think me impertinent, Admiral Pendragon. I don’t ask for curiosity, but really for my guidance and your convenience. Have I made a bad shot if I guess you don’t want these old things talked of before your butler?”

The Admiral lifted the hairless arches over his eyes and exclaimed: “Well, I don’t know where you got it, but the truth is I can’t stand the fellow, though I’ve no excuse for discharging a family servant. Fanshaw, with his fairy tales, would say my blood moved against men with that black, Spanish-looking hair.”

Flambeau struck the table with his heavy fist. “By Jove!” he cried; “and so had that girl!”

“I hope it’ll all end tonight,” continued the Admiral, “when my nephew comes back safe from his ship. You looked surprised. You won’t understand, I suppose, unless I tell you the story. You see, my father had two sons; I remained a bachelor, but my elder brother married, and had a son who became a sailor like all the rest of us, and will inherit the proper estate. Well, my father was a strange man; he somehow combined Fanshaw’s superstition with a good deal of my scepticism—they were always fighting in him; and after my first voyages, he developed a notion which he thought somehow would settle finally whether the
curse was truth or trash. If all the Pendragons sailed about anyhow, he thought there would be too much chance of natural catastrophes to prove anything. But if we went to sea one at a time in strict order of succession to the property, he thought it might show whether any connected fate followed the family as a family. It was a silly notion, I think, and I quarrelled with my father pretty heartily; for I was an ambitious man and was left to the last, coming, by succession, after my own nephew.”

“And your father and brother,” said the priest, very gently, “died at sea, I fear.”

“Yes,” groaned the Admiral; “by one of those brutal accidents on which are built all the lying mythologies of mankind, they were both shipwrecked. My father, coming up this coast out of the Atlantic, was washed up on these Cornish rocks. My brother’s ship was sunk, no one knows where, on the voyage home from Tasmania. His body was never found. I tell you it was from perfectly natural mishap; lots of other people besides Pendragons were drowned; and both disasters are discussed in a normal way by navigators. But, of course, it set this forest of superstition on fire; and men saw the flaming tower everywhere. That’s why I say it will be all right when Walter returns. The girl he’s engaged to was coming today; but I was so afraid of some chance delay frightening her that I wired her not to come till she heard from me. But he’s practically sure to be here some time tonight, and then it’ll all end in smoke—tobacco smoke. We’ll crack that old lie when we crack a bottle of this wine.”

“Very good wine,” said Father Brown, gravely lifting his glass, “but, as you see, a very bad wine-bibber. I most sincerely beg your pardon”: for he had spilt a small spot of wine on the table-cloth. He drank and put down the glass with a composed face; but his hand had started at the exact moment when he became conscious of a face looking in through the garden window just behind the Admiral—the face of a woman, swarthy, with southern hair and eyes, and young, but like a mask of tragedy.

After a pause the priest spoke again in his mild manner. “Admiral,” he said, “will you do me a favour? Let me, and my friends if they like, stop in that tower of yours just for tonight? Do you know that in my business you’re an exorcist almost before anything else?”

Pendragon sprang to his feet and paced swiftly to and fro across the window, from which the face had instantly vanished. “I tell you there is nothing in it,” he cried, with ringing violence. “There is one thing I know about this matter. You may call me an atheist. I am an atheist.” Here he swung round and fixed Father
Brown with a face of frightful concentration. “This business is perfectly natural. There is no curse in it at all.”

Father Brown smiled. “In that case,” he said, “there can’t be any objection to my sleeping in your delightful summer-house.”

“The idea is utterly ridiculous,” replied the Admiral, beating a tattoo on the back of his chair.

“Please forgive me for everything,” said Brown in his most sympathetic tone, “including spilling the wine. But it seems to me you are not quite so easy about the flaming tower as you try to be.”

Admiral Pendragon sat down again as abruptly as he had risen; but he sat quite still, and when he spoke again it was in a lower voice. “You do it at your own peril,” he said; “but wouldn’t you be an atheist to keep sane in all this devilry?”

Some three hours afterwards Fanshaw, Flambeau and the priest were still dawdling about the garden in the dark; and it began to dawn on the other two that Father Brown had no intention of going to bed either in the tower or the house.

“I think the lawn wants weeding,” said he dreamily. “If I could find a spud or something I’d do it myself.”

They followed him, laughing and half remonstrating; but he replied with the utmost solemnity, explaining to them, in a maddening little sermon, that one can always find some small occupation that is helpful to others. He did not find a spud; but he found an old broom made of twigs, with which he began energetically to brush the fallen leaves off the grass.

“Always some little thing to be done,” he said with idiotic cheerfulness; “as George Herbert says: ‘Who sweeps an Admiral’s garden in Cornwall as for Thy laws makes that and the action fine.’ And now,” he added, suddenly slinging the broom away, “Let’s go and water the flowers.”

With the same mixed emotions they watched him uncoil some considerable lengths of the large garden hose, saying with an air of wistful discrimination: “The red tulips before the yellow, I think. Look a bit dry, don’t you think?”

He turned the little tap on the instrument, and the water shot out straight and solid as a long rod of steel.

“Look out, Samson,” cried Flambeau; “why, you’ve cut off the tulip’s head.”

Father Brown stood ruefully contemplating the decapitated plant.

“Mine does seem to be a rather kill or cure sort of watering,” he admitted, scratching his head. “I suppose it’s a pity I didn’t find the spud. You should have seen me with the spud! Talking of tools, you’ve got that swordstick, Flambeau,
you always carry? That’s right; and Sir Cecil could have that sword the Admiral threw away by the fence here. How grey everything looks!"

“The mist’s rising from the river,” said the staring Flambeau.

Almost as he spoke the huge figure of the hairy gardener appeared on a higher ridge of the trenched and terraced lawn, hailing them with a brandished rake and a horribly bellowing voice. “Put down that hose,” he shouted; “put down that hose and go to your—”

“I am fearfully clumsy,” replied the reverend gentleman weakly; “do you know, I upset some wine at dinner.” He made a wavering half-turn of apology towards the gardener, with the hose still spouting in his hand. The gardener caught the cold crash of the water full in his face like the crash of a cannon-ball; staggered, slipped and went sprawling with his boots in the air.

“How very dreadful!” said Father Brown, looking round in a sort of wonder. “Why, I’ve hit a man!”

He stood with his head forward for a moment as if looking or listening; and then set off at a trot towards the tower, still trailing the hose behind him. The tower was quite close, but its outline was curiously dim.

“Your river mist,” he said, “has a rum smell.”

“By the Lord it has,” cried Fanshaw, who was very white. “But you can’t mean—”

“I mean,” said Father Brown, “that one of the Admiral’s scientific predictions is coming true tonight. This story is going to end in smoke.”

As he spoke a most beautiful rose-red light seemed to burst into blossom like a gigantic rose; but accompanied with a crackling and rattling noise that was like the laughter of devils.

“My God! what is this?” cried Sir Cecil Fanshaw.

“The sign of the flaming tower,” said Father Brown, and sent the driving water from his hose into the heart of the red patch.

“Lucky we hadn’t gone to bed!” ejaculated Fanshaw. “I suppose it can’t spread to the house.”

“You may remember,” said the priest quietly, “that the wooden fence that might have carried it was cut away.”

Flambeau turned electrified eyes upon his friend, but Fanshaw only said rather absently: “Well, nobody can be killed, anyhow.”

“This is rather a curious kind of tower,” observed Father Brown, “when it takes to killing people, it always kills people who are somewhere else.”

At the same instant the monstrous figure of the gardener with the streaming
beard stood again on the green ridge against the sky, waving others to come on; but now waving not a rake but a cutlass. Behind him came the two negroes, also with the old crooked cutlasses out of the trophy. But in the blood-red glare, with their black faces and yellow figures, they looked like devils carrying instruments of torture. In the dim garden behind them a distant voice was heard calling out brief directions. When the priest heard the voice, a terrible change came over his countenance.

But he remained composed; and never took his eye off the patch of flame which had begun by spreading, but now seemed to shrink a little as it hissed under the torch of the long silver spear of water. He kept his finger along the nozzle of the pipe to ensure the aim, and attended to no other business, knowing only by the noise and that semi-conscious corner of the eye, the exciting incidents that began to tumble themselves about the island garden. He gave two brief directions to his friends. One was: “Knock these fellows down somehow and tie them up, whoever they are; there’s rope down by those faggots. They want to take away my nice hose.” The other was: “As soon as you get a chance, call out to that canoeing girl; she’s over on the bank with the gipsies. Ask her if they could get some buckets across and fill them from the river.” Then he closed his mouth and continued to water the new red flower as ruthlessly as he had watered the red tulip.

He never turned his head to look at the strange fight that followed between the foes and friends of the mysterious fire. He almost felt the island shake when Flambeau collided with the huge gardener; he merely imagined how it would whirl round them as they wrestled. He heard the crashing fall; and his friend’s gasp of triumph as he dashed on to the first negro; and the cries of both the blacks as Flambeau and Fanshaw bound them. Flambeau’s enormous strength more than redressed the odds in the fight, especially as the fourth man still hovered near the house, only a shadow and a voice. He heard also the water broken by the paddles of a canoe; the girl’s voice giving orders, the voices of gipsies answering and coming nearer, the plumping and sucking noise of empty buckets plunged into a full stream; and finally the sound of many feet around the fire. But all this was less to him than the fact that the red rent, which had lately once more increased, had once more slightly diminished.

Then came a cry that very nearly made him turn his head. Flambeau and Fanshaw, now reinforced by some of the gipsies, had rushed after the mysterious man by the house; and he heard from the other end of the garden the Frenchman’s cry of horror and astonishment. It was echoed by a howl not to be
called human, as the being broke from their hold and ran along the garden. Three times at least it raced round the whole island, in a way that was as horrible as the chase of a lunatic, both in the cries of the pursued and the ropes carried by the pursuers; but was more horrible still, because it somehow suggested one of the chasing games of children in a garden. Then, finding them closing in on every side, the figure sprang upon one of the higher river banks and disappeared with a splash into the dark and driving river.

“You can do no more, I fear,” said Brown in a voice cold with pain. “He has been washed down to the rocks by now, where he has sent so many others. He knew the use of a family legend.”

“Oh, don’t talk in these parables,” cried Flambeau impatiently. “Can’t you put it simply in words of one syllable?”

“Yes,” answered Brown, with his eye on the hose. “‘Both eyes bright, she’s all right; one eye blinks, down she sinks.’”

The fire hissed and shrieked more and more, like a strangled thing, as it grew narrower and narrower under the flood from the pipe and buckets, but Father Brown still kept his eye on it as he went on speaking:

“I thought of asking this young lady, if it were morning yet, to look through that telescope at the river mouth and the river. She might have seen something to interest her: the sign of the ship, or Mr Walter Pendragon coming home, and perhaps even the sign of the half-man, for though he is certainly safe by now, he may very well have waded ashore. He has been within a shave of another shipwreck; and would never have escaped it, if the lady hadn’t had the sense to suspect the old Admiral’s telegram and come down to watch him. Don’t let’s talk about the old Admiral. Don’t let’s talk about anything. It’s enough to say that whenever this tower, with its pitch and resin-wood, really caught fire, the spark on the horizon always looked like the twin light to the coast light-house.”

“And that,” said Flambeau, “is how the father and brother died. The wicked uncle of the legends very nearly got his estate after all.”

Father Brown did not answer; indeed, he did not speak again, save for civilities, till they were all safe round a cigar-box in the cabin of the yacht. He saw that the frustrated fire was extinguished; and then refused to linger, though he actually heard young Pendragon, escorted by an enthusiastic crowd, come tramping up the river bank; and might (had he been moved by romantic curiosities) have received the combined thanks of the man from the ship and the girl from the canoe. But his fatigue had fallen on him once more, and he only started once, when Flambeau abruptly told him he had dropped cigar-ash on his
“That’s no cigar-ash,” he said rather wearily. “That’s from the fire, but you don’t think so because you’re all smoking cigars. That’s just the way I got my first faint suspicion about the chart.”

“Do you mean Pendragon’s chart of his Pacific Islands?” asked Fanshaw.

“You thought it was a chart of the Pacific Islands,” answered Brown. “Put a feather with a fossil and a bit of coral and everyone will think it’s a specimen. Put the same feather with a ribbon and an artificial flower and everyone will think it’s for a lady’s hat. Put the same feather with an ink-bottle, a book and a stack of writing-paper, and most men will swear they’ve seen a quill pen. So you saw that map among tropic birds and shells and thought it was a map of Pacific Islands. It was the map of this river.”

“But how do you know?” asked Fanshaw.

“I saw the rock you thought was like a dragon, and the one like Merlin, and —”

“You seem to have noticed a lot as we came in,” cried Fanshaw. “We thought you were rather abstracted.”

“I was sea-sick,” said Father Brown simply. “I felt simply horrible. But feeling horrible has nothing to do with not seeing things.” And he closed his eyes.

“Do you think most men would have seen that?” asked Flambeau. He received no answer: Father Brown was asleep.
NINE

THE GOD OF THE GONGS

IT was one of those chilly and empty afternoons in early winter, when the daylight is silver rather than gold and pewter rather than silver. If it was dreary in a hundred bleak offices and yawning drawing-rooms, it was drearier still along the edges of the flat Essex coast, where the monotony was the more inhuman for being broken at very long intervals by a lamp-post that looked less civilized than a tree, or a tree that looked more ugly than a lamp-post. A light fall of snow had half-melted into a few strips, also looking leaden rather than silver, when it had been fixed again by the seal of frost; no fresh snow had fallen, but a ribbon of the old snow ran along the very margin of the coast, so as to parallel the pale ribbon of the foam.

The line of the sea looked frozen in the very vividness of its violet-blue, like the vein of a frozen finger. For miles and miles, forward and back, there was no breathing soul, save two pedestrians, walking at a brisk pace, though one had much longer legs and took much longer strides than the other.

It did not seem a very appropriate place or time for a holiday, but Father Brown had few holidays, and had to take them when he could, and he always preferred, if possible, to take them in company with his old friend Flambeau, ex-criminal and ex-detective. The priest had had a fancy for visiting his old parish at Cobhole, and was going north-eastward along the coast.

After walking a mile or two farther, they found that the shore was beginning to be formally embanked, so as to form something like a parade; the ugly lamp-posts became less few and far between and more ornamental, though quite equally ugly. Half a mile farther on Father Brown was puzzled first by little labyrinths of flowerless flower-pots, covered with the low, flat, quiet-coloured plants that look less like a garden than a tessellated pavement, between weak curly paths studded with seats with curly backs. He faintly sniffed the atmosphere of a certain sort of seaside town that he did not specially care about, and, looking ahead along the parade by the sea, he saw something that put the matter beyond a doubt. In the grey distance the big bandstand of a watering-place stood up like a giant mushroom with six legs.

“I suppose,” said Father Brown, turning up his coat-collar and drawing a woollen scarf rather closer round his neck, “that we are approaching a pleasure
“I fear,” answered Flambeau, “a pleasure resort to which few people just now have the pleasure of resorting. They try to revive these places in the winter, but it never succeeds except with Brighton and the old ones. This must be Seawood, I think—Lord Pooley’s experiment; he had the Sicilian Singers down at Christmas, and there’s talk about holding one of the great glove-fights here. But they’ll have to chuck the rotten place into the sea; it’s as dreary as a lost railway-carriage.”

They had come under the big bandstand, and the priest was looking up at it with a curiosity that had something rather odd about it, his head a little on one side, like a bird’s. It was the conventional, rather tawdry kind of erection for its purpose: a flattened dome or canopy, gilt here and there, and lifted on six slender pillars of painted wood, the whole being raised about five feet above the parade on a round wooden platform like a drum. But there was something fantastic about the snow combined with something artificial about the gold that haunted Flambeau as well as his friend with some association he could not capture, but which he knew was at once artistic and alien.

“I’ve got it,” he said at last. “It’s Japanese. It’s like those fanciful Japanese prints, where the snow on the mountain looks like sugar, and the gilt on the pagodas is like gilt on gingerbread. It looks just like a little pagan temple.”

“Yes,” said Father Brown. “Let’s have a look at the god.” And with an agility hardly to be expected of him, he hopped up on to the raised platform.

“Oh, very well,” said Flambeau, laughing; and the next instant his own towering figure was visible on that quaint elevation.

Slight as was the difference of height, it gave in those level wastes a sense of seeing yet farther and farther across land and sea. Inland the little wintry gardens faded into a confused grey copse; beyond that, in the distance, were long low barns of a lonely farmhouse, and beyond that nothing but the long East Anglian plains. Seawards there was no sail or sign of life save a few seagulls: and even they looked like the last snowflakes, and seemed to float rather than fly.

Flambeau turned abruptly at an exclamation behind him. It seemed to come from lower down than might have been expected, and to be addressed to his heels rather than his head. He instantly held out his hand, but he could hardly help laughing at what he saw. For some reason or other the platform had given way under Father Brown, and the unfortunate little man had dropped through to the level of the parade. He was just tall enough, or short enough, for his head alone to stick out of the hole in the broken wood, looking like St John the
Baptist’s head on a charger. The face wore a disconcerted expression, as did, perhaps, that of St John the Baptist.

In a moment he began to laugh a little. “This wood must be rotten,” said Flambeau. “Though it seems odd it should bear me, and you go through the weak place. Let me help you out.”

But the little priest was looking rather curiously at the corners and edges of the wood alleged to be rotten, and there was a sort of trouble on his brow.

“Come along,” cried Flambeau impatiently, still with his big brown hand extended. “Don’t you want to get out?”

The priest was holding a splinter of the broken wood between his finger and thumb, and did not immediately reply. At last he said thoughtfully: “Want to get out? Why, no. I rather think I want to get in.” And he dived into the darkness under the wooden floor so abruptly as to knock off his big curved clerical hat and leave it lying on the boards above, without any clerical head in it.

Flambeau looked once more inland and out to sea, and once more could see nothing but seas as wintry as the snow, and snows as level as the sea.

There came a scurrying noise behind him, and the little priest came scrambling out of the hole faster than he had fallen in. His face was no longer disconcerted, but rather resolute, and, perhaps only through the reflections of the snow, a trifle paler than usual.

“Well?” asked his tall friend. “Have you found the god of the temple?”

“No,” answered Father Brown. “I have found what was sometimes more important. The Sacrifice.”

“What the devil do you mean?” cried Flambeau, quite alarmed.

Father Brown did not answer. He was staring, with a knot in his forehead, at the landscape; and he suddenly pointed at it. “What’s that house over there?” he asked.

Following his finger, Flambeau saw for the first time the corners of a building nearer than the farmhouse, but screened for the most part with a fringe of trees. It was not a large building, and stood well back from the shore—but a glint of ornament on it suggested that it was part of the same watering-place scheme of decoration as the bandstand, the little gardens and the curly-backed iron seats.

Father Brown jumped off the bandstand, his friend following; and as they walked in the direction indicated the trees fell away to right and left, and they saw a small, rather flashy hotel, such as is common in resorts—the hotel of the Saloon Bar rather than the Bar Parlour. Almost the whole frontage was of gilt plaster and figured glass, and between that grey seascape and the grey, witch-
like trees, its gimcrack quality had something spectral in its melancholy. They both felt vaguely that if any food or drink were offered at such a hostelry, it would be the paste-board ham and empty mug of the pantomime.

In this, however, they were not altogether confirmed. As they drew nearer and nearer to the place they saw in front of the buffet, which was apparently closed, one of the iron garden-seats with curly backs that had adorned the gardens, but much longer, running almost the whole length of the frontage. Presumably, it was placed so that visitors might sit there and look at the sea, but one hardly expected to find anyone doing it in such weather.

Nevertheless, just in front of the extreme end of the iron seat stood a small round restaurant table, and on this stood a small bottle of Chablis and a plate of almonds and raisins. Behind the table and on the seat sat a dark-haired young man, bareheaded, and gazing at the sea in a state of almost astonishing immobility.

But though he might have been a waxwork when they were within four yards of him, he jumped up like a jack-in-the-box when they came within three, and said in a deferential, though not undignified, manner: “Will you step inside, gentlemen? I have no staff at present, but I can get you anything simple myself.”

“Much obliged,” said Flambeau. “So you are the proprietor?”

“Yes,” said the dark man, dropping back a little into his motionless manner. “My waiters are all Italians, you see, and I thought it only fair they should see their countryman beat the black, if he really can do it. You know the great fight between Malvoli and Nigger Ned is coming off after all?”

“I’m afraid we can’t wait to trouble your hospitality seriously,” said Father Brown. “But my friend would be glad of a glass of sherry, I’m sure, to keep out the cold and drink success to the Latin champion.”

Flambeau did not understand the sherry, but he did not object to it in the least. He could only say amiably: “Oh, thank you very much.”

“Sherry, sir—certainly,” said their host, turning to his hostel. “Excuse me if I detain you a few minutes. As I told you, I have no staff—” And he went towards the black windows of his shuttered and unlighted inn.

“Oh, it doesn’t really matter,” began Flambeau, but the man turned to reassure him.

“I have the keys,” he said. “I could find my way in the dark.”

“I didn’t mean—” began Father Brown.

He was interrupted by a bellowing human voice that came out of the bowels of the uninhabited hotel. It thundered some foreign name loudly but inaudibly, and
the hotel proprietor moved more sharply towards it than he had done for Flambeau’s sherry. As instant evidence proved, the proprietor had told, then and after, nothing but the literal truth. But both Flambeau and Father Brown have often confessed that, in all their (often outrageous) adventures, nothing had so chilled their blood as that voice of an ogre, sounding suddenly out of a silent and empty inn.

“My cook!” cried the proprietor hastily. “I had forgotten my cook. He will be starting presently. Sherry, sir?”

And, sure enough, there appeared in the doorway a big white bulk with white cap and white apron, as befits a cook, but with the needless emphasis of a black face. Flambeau had often heard that negroes made good cooks. But somehow something in the contrast of colour and caste increased his surprise that the hotel proprietor should answer the call of the cook, and not the cook the call of the proprietor. But he reflected that head cooks are proverbially arrogant; and, besides, the host had come back with the sherry, and that was the great thing.

“I rather wonder,” said Father Brown, “that there are so few people about the beach, when this big fight is coming on after all. We only met one man for miles.”

The hotel proprietor shrugged his shoulders. “They come from the other end of the town, you see—from the station, three miles from here. They are only interested in the sport, and will stop in hotels for the night only. After all, it is hardly weather for basking on the shore.”

“Or on the seat,” said Flambeau, and pointed to the little table.

“I have to keep a look-out,” said the man with the motionless face. He was a quiet, well-featured fellow, rather sallow; his dark clothes had nothing distinctive about them, except that his black necktie was worn rather high, like a stock, and secured by a gold pin with some grotesque head to it. Nor was there anything notable in the face, except something that was probably a mere nervous trick—a habit of opening one eye more narrowly than the other, giving the impression that the other was larger, or was, perhaps, artificial.

The silence that ensued was broken by their host saying quietly: “Whereabouts did you meet the one man on your march?”

“Curiously enough,” answered the priest, “close by here—just by that bandstand.”

Flambeau, who had sat on the long iron seat to finish his sherry, put it down and rose to his feet, staring at his friend in amazement. He opened his mouth to speak, and then shut it again.
“Curious,” said the dark-haired man thoughtfully. “What was he like?”

“It was rather dark when I saw him,” began Father Brown, “but he was—”

As has been said, the hotel-keeper can be proved to have told the precise truth. His phrase that the cook was starting presently was fulfilled to the letter, for the cook came out, pulling his gloves on, even as they spoke.

But he was a very different figure from the confused mass of white and black that had appeared for an instant in the doorway. He was buttoned and buckled up to his bursting eyeballs in the most brilliant fashion. A tall black hat was tilted on his broad black head—a hat of the sort that the French wit has compared to eight mirrors. But somehow the black man was like the black hat. He also was black, and yet his glossy skin flung back the light at eight angles or more. It is needless to say that he wore white spats and a white slip inside his waistcoat. The red flower stood up in his buttonhole aggressively, as if it had suddenly grown there. And in the way he carried his cane in one hand and his cigar in the other there was a certain attitude—an attitude we must always remember when we talk of racial prejudices: something innocent and insolent—the cake walk.

“Sometimes,” said Flambeau, looking after him, “I’m not surprised that they lynch them.”

“I am never surprised,” said Father Brown, “at any work of hell. But as I was saying,” he resumed, as the negro, still ostentatiously pulling on his yellow gloves, betook himself briskly towards the watering-place, a queer music-hall figure against that grey and frosty scene—“as I was saying, I couldn’t describe the man very minutely, but he had a flourish and old-fashioned whiskers and moustachios, dark or dyed, as in the pictures of foreign financiers, round his neck was wrapped a long purple scarf that thrashed out in the wind as he walked. It was fixed at the throat rather in the way that nurses fix children’s comforters with a safety-pin. Only this,” added the priest, gazing placidly out to sea, “was not a safety-pin.”

The man sitting on the long iron bench was also gazing placidly out to sea. Now he was once more in repose. Flambeau felt quite certain that one of his eyes was naturally larger than the other. Both were now well opened, and he could almost fancy the left eye grew larger as he gazed.

“It was a very long gold pin, and had the carved head of a monkey or some such thing,” continued the cleric; “and it was fixed in a rather odd way—he wore pince-nez and a broad black—”

The motionless man continued to gaze at the sea, and the eyes in his head might have belonged to two different men. Then he made a movement of
blinding swiftness.

Father Brown had his back to him, and in that flash might have fallen dead on his face. Flambeau had no weapon, but his large brown hands were resting on the end of the long iron seat. His shoulders abruptly altered their shape, and he heaved the whole huge thing high over his head, like a headsman’s axe about to fall. The mere height of the thing, as he held it vertical, looked like a long iron ladder by which he was inviting men to climb towards the stars. But the long shadow, in the level evening light, looked like a giant brandishing the Eiffel Tower. It was the shock of that shadow, before the shock of the iron crash, that made the stranger quail and dodge, and then dart into his inn, leaving the flat and shining dagger he had dropped exactly where it had fallen.

“We must get away from here instantly,” cried Flambeau, flinging the huge seat away with furious indifference on the beach. He caught the little priest by the elbow and ran him down a grey perspective of barren back garden, at the end of which there was a closed back garden door. Flambeau bent over it an instant in violent silence, and then said: “The door is locked.”

As he spoke a black feather from one of the ornamental firs fell, brushing the brim of his hat. It startled him more than the small and distant detonation that had come just before. Then came another distant detonation, and the door he was trying to open shook under the bullet buried in it. Flambeau’s shoulders again filled out and altered suddenly. Three hinges and a lock burst at the same instant, and he went out into the empty path behind, carrying the great garden door with him, as Samson carried the gates of Gaza.

Then he flung the garden door over the garden wall, just as a third shot picked up a spurt of snow and dust behind his heel. Without ceremony he snatched up the little priest, slung him astraddle on his shoulders, and went racing towards Seawood as fast as his long legs could carry him. It was not until nearly two miles farther on that he set his small companion down. It had hardly been a dignified escape, in spite of the classic model of Anchises, but Father Brown’s face only wore a broad grin.

“Well,” said Flambeau, after an impatient silence, as they resumed their more conventional tramp through the streets on the edge of the town, where no outrage need be feared, “I don’t know what all this means, but I take it I may trust my own eyes that you never met the man you have so accurately described.”

“I did meet him in a way,” Brown said, biting his finger rather nervously—“I did really. And it was too dark to see him properly, because it was under that bandstand affair. But I’m afraid I didn’t describe him so very accurately after all,
for his pince-nez was broken under him, and the long gold pin wasn’t stuck through his purple scarf but through his heart.”

“And I suppose,” said the other in a lower voice, “that glass-eyed guy had something to do with it.”

“I had hoped he had only a little,” answered Brown in a rather troubled voice, “and I may have been wrong in what I did. I acted on impulse. But I fear this business has deep roots and dark.”

They walked on through some streets in silence. The yellow lamps were beginning to be lit in the cold blue twilight, and they were evidently approaching the more central parts of the town. Highly coloured bills announcing the glove-fight between Nigger Ned and Malvoli were slapped about the walls.

“Well,” said Flambeau, “I never murdered anyone, even in my criminal days, but I can almost sympathize with anyone doing it in such a dreary place. Of all God-forsaken dustbins of Nature, I think the most heart-breaking are places like that bandstand, that were meant to be festive and are forlorn. I can fancy a morbid man feeling he must kill his rival in the solitude and irony of such a scene. I remember once taking a tramp in your glorious Surrey hills, thinking of nothing but gorse and skylarks, when I came out on a vast circle of land, and over me lifted a vast, voiceless structure, tier above tier of seats, as huge as a Roman amphitheatre and as empty as a new letter-rack. A bird sailed in heaven over it. It was the Grand Stand at Epsom. And I felt that no one would ever be happy there again.”

“It’s odd you should mention Epsom,” said the priest. “Do you remember what was called the Sutton Mystery, because two suspected men—ice-cream men, I think—happened to live at Sutton? They were eventually released. A man was found strangled, it was said, on the Downs round that part. As a fact, I know (from an Irish policeman who is a friend of mine) that he was found close up to the Epsom Grand Stand—in fact, only hidden by one of the lower doors being pushed back.”

“That is queer,” assented Flambeau. “But it rather confirms my view that such pleasure places look awfully lonely out of season, or the man wouldn’t have been murdered there.”

“I’m not so sure he—” began Brown, and stopped.

“Not so sure he was murdered?” queried his companion.

“Not so sure he was murdered out of the season,” answered the little priest, with simplicity. “Don’t you think there’s something rather tricky about this solitude, Flambeau? Do you feel sure a wise murderer would always want the
spot to be lonely? It’s very, very seldom a man is quite alone. And, short of that, the more alone he is, the more certain he is to be seen. No; I think there must be some other—Why, here we are at the Pavilion or Palace, or whatever they call it.”

They had emerged on a small square, brilliantly lighted, of which the principal building was gay with gilding, gaudy with posters, and flanked with two giant photographs of Malvoli and Nigger Ned.

“Hallo!” cried Flambeau in great surprise, as his clerical friend stumped straight up the broad steps. “I didn’t know pugilism was your latest hobby. Are you going to see the fight?”

“I don’t think there will be any fight,” replied Father Brown.

They passed rapidly through ante-rooms and inner rooms; they passed through the hall of combat itself, raised, roped, and padded with innumerable seats and boxes, and still the cleric did not look round or pause till he came to a clerk at a desk outside a door marked “Committee.” There he stopped and asked to see Lord Pooley.

The attendant observed that his lordship was very busy, as the fight was coming on soon, but Father Brown had a good-tempered tedium of reiteration for which the official mind is generally not prepared. In a few moments the rather baffled Flambeau found himself in the presence of a man who was still shouting directions to another man going out of the room. “Be careful, you know, about the ropes after the fourth—Well, and what do you want, I wonder!”

Lord Pooley was a gentleman, and, like most of the few remaining to our race, was worried—especially about money. He was half grey and half flaxen, and he had the eyes of fever and a high-bridged, frost-bitten nose.

“Only a word,” said Father Brown. “I have come to prevent a man being killed.”

Lord Pooley bounded off his chair as if a spring had flung him from it. “I’m damned if I’ll stand any more of this!” he cried. “You and your committees and parsons and petitions! Weren’t there parsons in the old days, when they fought without gloves? Now they’re fighting with the regulation gloves, and there’s not the rag of a possibility of either of the boxers being killed.”

“I didn’t mean either of the boxers,” said the little priest.

“Well, well, well!” said the nobleman, with a touch of frosty humour. “Who’s going to be killed? The referee?”

“I don’t know who’s going to be killed,” replied Father Brown, with a reflective stare. “If I did I shouldn’t have to spoil your pleasure. I could simply
get him to escape. I never could see anything wrong about prize-fights. As it is, I must ask you to announce that the fight is off for the present.”

“Anything else?” jeered the gentleman with feverish eyes. “And what do you say to the two thousand people who have come to see it?”

“I say there will be one thousand nine-hundred and ninety-nine of them left alive when they have seen it,” said Father Brown.

Lord Pooley looked at Flambeau. “Is your friend mad?” he asked.

“Far from it,” was the reply.

“And look here,” resumed Pooley in his restless way, “it’s worse than that. A whole pack of Italians have turned up to back Malvoli—swarthy, savage fellows of some country, anyhow. You know what these Mediterranean races are like. If I send out word that it’s off we shall have Malvoli storming in here at the head of a whole Corsican clan.”

“My lord, it is a matter of life and death,” said the priest. “Ring your bell. Give your message. And see whether it is Malvoli who answers.”

The nobleman struck the bell on the table with an odd air of new curiosity. He said to the clerk who appeared almost instantly in the doorway: “I have a serious announcement to make to the audience shortly. Meanwhile, would you kindly tell the two champions that the fight will have to be put off.”

The clerk stared for some seconds as if at a demon and vanished.

“What authority have you for what you say?” asked Lord Pooley abruptly.

“Whom did you consult?”

“I consulted a bandstand,” said Father Brown, scratching his head. “But, no, I’m wrong; I consulted a book, too. I picked it up on a bookstall in London—very cheap, too.”

He had taken out of his pocket a small, stout, leather-bound volume, and Flambeau, looking over his shoulder, could see that it was some book of old travels, and had a leaf turned down for reference.

“The only form in which Voodoo—” began Father Brown, reading aloud.

“In which what?” inquired his lordship.

“In which Voodoo,” repeated the reader, almost with relish, “is widely organized outside Jamaica itself is in the form known as the Monkey, or the God of the Gongs, which is powerful in many parts of the two American continents, especially among half-breeds, many of whom look exactly like white men. It differs from most other forms of devil-worship and human sacrifice in the fact that the blood is not shed formally on the altar, but by a sort of assassination among the crowd. The gongs beat with a deafening din as the doors of the shrine
open and the monkey-god is revealed; almost the whole congregation rivet
ecstatic eyes on him. But after—"

The door of the room was flung open, and the fashionable negro stood framed
in it, his eyeballs rolling, his silk hat still insolently tilted on his head. “Huh!” he
cried, showing his apish teeth. “What this? Huh! Huh! You steal a coloured
gentleman’s prize—prize his already—yo’ think yo’ jes’ save that white ‘Talian
trash—”

“The matter is only deferred,” said the nobleman quietly. “I will be with you
to explain in a minute or two.”

“Who you to—” shouted Nigger Ned, beginning to storm.

“My name is Pooley,” replied the other, with a creditable coolness. “I am the
organizing secretary, and I advise you just now to leave the room.”

“Who this fellow?” demanded the dark champion, pointing to the priest
disdainfully.

“My name is Brown,” was the reply. “And I advise you just now to leave the
country.”

The prize-fighter stood glaring for a few seconds, and then, rather to the
surprise of Flambeau and the others, strode out, sending the door to with a crash
behind him.

“Well,” asked Father Brown rubbing his dusty hair up, “what do you think of
Leonardo da Vinci? A beautiful Italian head.”

“Look here,” said Lord Pooley, “I’ve taken a considerable responsibility, on
your bare word. I think you ought to tell me more about this.”

“You are quite right, my lord,” answered Brown. “And it won’t take long to
tell.” He put the little leather book in his overcoat pocket. “I think we know all
that this can tell us, but you shall look at it to see if I’m right. That negro who
has just swaggered out is one of the most dangerous men on earth, for he has the
brains of a European, with the instincts of a cannibal. He has turned what was
clean, common-sense butchery among his fellow-barbarians into a very modern
and scientific secret society of assassins. He doesn’t know I know it, nor, for the
matter of that, that I can’t prove it.”

There was a silence, and the little man went on.

“But if I want to murder somebody, will it really be the best plan to make sure
I’m alone with him?”

Lord Pooley’s eyes recovered their frosty twinkle as he looked at the little
clergyman. He only said: “If you want to murder somebody, I should advise it.”

Father Brown shook his head, like a murderer of much riper experience. “So
Flambeau said,” he replied, with a sigh. “But consider. The more a man feels lonely the less he can be sure he is alone. It must mean empty spaces round him, and they are just what make him obvious. Have you never seen one ploughman from the heights, or one shepherd from the valleys? Have you never walked along a cliff, and seen one man walking along the sands? Didn’t you know when he’s killed a crab, and wouldn’t you have known if it had been a creditor? No! No! No! For an intelligent murderer, such as you or I might be, it is an impossible plan to make sure that nobody is looking at you.”

“But what other plan is there?”

“There is only one,” said the priest. “To make sure that everybody is looking at something else. A man is throttled close by the big stand at Epsom. Anybody might have seen it done while the stand stood empty—any tramp under the hedges or motorist among the hills. But nobody would have seen it when the stand was crowded and the whole ring roaring, when the favourite was coming in first—or wasn’t. The twisting of a neck-cloth, the thrusting of a body behind a door could be done in an instant—so long as it was that instant. It was the same, of course,” he continued turning to Flambeau, “with that poor fellow under the bandstand. He was dropped through the hole (it wasn’t an accidental hole) just at some very dramatic moment of the entertainment, when the bow of some great violinist or the voice of some great singer opened or came to its climax. And here, of course, when the knock-out blow came—it would not be the only one. That is the little trick Nigger Ned has adopted from his old God of Gongs.”

“By the way, Malvoli—” Pooley began.

“Malvoli,” said the priest, “has nothing to do with it. I dare say he has some Italians with him, but our amiable friends are not Italians. They are octoroons and African half-bloods of various shades, but I fear we English think all foreigners are much the same so long as they are dark and dirty. Also,” he added, with a smile, “I fear the English decline to draw any fine distinction between the moral character produced by my religion and that which blooms out of Voodoo.”

The blaze of the spring season had burst upon Seawood, littering its foreshore with famines and bathing-machines, with nomadic preachers and nigger minstrels, before the two friends saw it again, and long before the storm of pursuit after the strange secret society had died away. Almost on every hand the secret of their purpose perished with them. The man of the hotel was found drifting dead on the sea like so much seaweed; his right eye was closed in peace, but his left eye was wide open, and glistened like glass in the moon. Nigger Ned had been overtaken a mile or two away, and murdered three policemen with his
closed left hand. The remaining officer was surprised—nay, pained—and the negro got away. But this was enough to set all the English papers in a flame, and for a month or two the main purpose of the British Empire was to prevent the buck nigger (who was so in both senses) escaping by any English port. Persons of a figure remotely reconcilable with his were subjected to quite extraordinary inquisitions, made to scrub their faces before going on board ship, as if each white complexion were made up like a mask, of greasepaint. Every negro in England was put under special regulations and made to report himself; the outgoing ships would no more have taken a nigger than a basilisk. For people had found out how fearful and vast and silent was the force of the savage secret society, and by the time Flambeau and Father Brown were leaning on the parade parapet in April, the Black Man meant in England almost what he once meant in Scotland.

“He must be still in England,” observed Flambeau, “and horridly well hidden, too. They must have found him at the ports if he had only whitened his face.”

“You see, he is really a clever man,” said Father Brown apologetically. “And I’m sure he wouldn’t whiten his face.”

“Well, but what would he do?”

“I think,” said Father Brown, “he would blacken his face.”

Flambeau, leaning motionless on the parapet, laughed and said: “My dear fellow!”

Father Brown, also leaning motionless on the parapet, moved one finger for an instant into the direction of the soot-masked niggers singing on the sands.
TEN

THE SALAD OF COLONEL CRAY

FATHER BROWN was walking home from Mass on a white weird morning when the mists were slowly lifting—one of those mornings when the very element of light appears as something mysterious and new. The scattered trees outlined themselves more and more out of the vapour, as if they were first drawn in grey chalk and then in charcoal. At yet more distant intervals appeared the houses upon the broken fringe of the suburb; their outlines became clearer and clearer until he recognized many in which he had chance acquaintances, and many more the names of whose owners he knew. But all the windows and doors were sealed; none of the people were of the sort that would be up at such a time, or still less on such an errand. But as he passed under the shadow of one handsome villa with verandas and wide ornate gardens, he heard a noise that made him almost involuntarily stop. It was the unmistakable noise of a pistol or carbine or some light firearm discharged; but it was not this that puzzled him most. The first full noise was immediately followed by a series of fainter noises—as he counted them, about six. He supposed it must be the echo; but the odd thing was that the echo was not in the least like the original sound. It was not like anything else that he could think of; the three things nearest to it seemed to be the noise made by siphons of soda-water, one of the many noises made by an animal, and the noise made by a person attempting to conceal laughter. None of which seemed to make much sense.

Father Brown was made of two men. There was a man of action, who was as modest as a primrose and as punctual as a clock; who went his small round of duties and never dreamed of altering it. There was also a man of reflection, who was much simpler but much stronger, who could not easily be stopped; whose thought was always (in the only intelligent sense of the words) free thought. He could not help, even unconsciously, asking himself all the questions that there were to be asked, and answering as many of them as he could; all that went on like his breathing or circulation. But he never consciously carried his actions outside the sphere of his own duty; and in this case the two attitudes were aptly tested. He was just about to resume his trudge in the twilight, telling himself it was no affair of his, but instinctively twisting and untwisting twenty theories about what the odd noises might mean. Then the grey sky-line brightened into
silver, and in the broadening light he realized that he had been to the house which belonged to an Anglo-Indian Major named Putnam; and that the Major had a native cook from Malta who was of his communion. He also began to remember that pistol-shots are sometimes serious things; accompanied with consequences with which he was legitimately concerned. He turned back and went in at the garden gate, making for the front door.

Half-way down one side of the house stood out a projection like a very low shed; it was, as he afterwards discovered, a large dustbin. Round the corner of this came a figure, at first a mere shadow in the haze, apparently bending and peering about. Then, coming nearer, it solidified into a figure that was, indeed, rather unusually solid. Major Putnam was a bald-headed, bull-necked man, short and very broad, with one of those rather apoplectic faces that are produced by a prolonged attempt to combine the oriental climate with the occidental luxuries. But the face was a good-humoured one, and even now, though evidently puzzled and inquisitive, wore a kind of innocent grin. He had a large palm-leaf hat on the back of his head (suggesting a halo that was by no means appropriate to the face), but otherwise he was clad only in a very vivid suit of striped scarlet and yellow pyjamas; which, though glowing enough to behold, must have been, on a fresh morning, pretty chilly to wear. He had evidently come out of his house in a hurry, and the priest was not surprised when he called out without further ceremony: “Did you hear that noise?”

“Yes,” answered Father Brown; “I thought I had better look in, in case anything was the matter.”

The Major looked at him rather queerly with his good-humoured gooseberry eyes. “What do you think the noise was?” he asked.

“It sounded like a gun or something,” replied the other, with some hesitation; “but it seemed to have a singular sort of echo.”

The Major was still looking at him quietly, but with protruding eyes, when the front door was flung open, releasing a flood of gaslight on the face of the fading mist; and another figure in pyjamas sprang or tumbled out into the garden. The figure was much longer, leaner, and more athletic; the pyjamas, though equally tropical, were comparatively tasteful, being of white with a light lemon-yellow stripe. The man was haggard, but handsome, more sunburned than the other; he had an aquiline profile and rather deep-sunken eyes, and a slight air of oddity arising from the combination of coal-black hair with a much lighter moustache. All this Father Brown absorbed in detail more at leisure. For the moment he only saw one thing about the man; which was the revolver in his hand.
“Cray!” exclaimed the Major, staring at him; “did you fire that shot?”
“Yes, I did,” retorted the black-haired gentleman hotly; “and so would you in my place. If you were chased everywhere by devils and nearly—"

The Major seemed to intervene rather hurriedly. “This is my friend Father Brown,” he said. And then to Brown: “I don’t know whether you’ve met Colonel Cray of the Royal Artillery.”

“I have heard of him, of course,” said the priest innocently. “Did you—did you hit anything?”
“I thought so,” answered Cray with gravity.
“Did he—” asked Major Putnam in a lowered voice, “did he fall or cry out, or anything?”

Colonel Cray was regarding his host with a strange and steady stare. “I’ll tell you exactly what he did,” he said. “He sneezed.”

Father Brown’s hand went half-way to his head, with the gesture of a man remembering somebody’s name. He knew now what it was that was neither soda-water nor the snorting of a dog.

“Well,” ejaculated the staring Major, “I never heard before that a service revolver was a thing to be sneezed at.”

“Nor I,” said Father Brown faintly. “It’s lucky you didn’t turn your artillery on him or you might have given him quite a bad cold.” Then, after a bewildered pause, he said: “Was it a burglar?”

“Let us go inside,” said Major Putnam, rather sharply, and led the way into his house.

The interior exhibited a paradox often to be marked in such morning hours: that the rooms seemed brighter than the sky outside; even after the Major had turned out the one gaslight in the front hall. Father Brown was surprised to see the whole dining-table set out as for a festive meal, with napkins in their rings, and wine-glasses of some six unnecessary shapes set beside every plate. It was common enough, at that time of the morning, to find the remains of a banquet over-night; but to find it freshly spread so early was unusual.

While he stood wavering in the hall Major Putnam rushed past him and sent a raging eye over the whole oblong of the tablecloth. At last he spoke, spluttering: “All the silver gone!” he gasped. “Fish-knives and forks gone. Old cruet-stand gone. Even the old silver cream-jug gone. And now, Father Brown, I am ready to answer your question of whether it was a burglar.”

“They’re simply a blind,” said Cray stubbornly. “I know better than you why people persecute this house; I know better than you why—"
The Major patted him on the shoulder with a gesture almost peculiar to the soothing of a sick child, and said: “It was a burglar. Obviously it was a burglar.”

“A burglar with a bad cold,” observed Father Brown, “that might assist you to trace him in the neighbourhood.”

The Major shook his head in a sombre manner. “He must be far beyond trace now, I fear,” he said.

Then, as the restless man with the revolver turned again towards the door in the garden, he added in a husky, confidential voice: “I doubt whether I should send for the police, for fear my friend here has been a little too free with his bullets, and got on the wrong side of the law. He’s lived in very wild places; and, to be frank with you, I think he sometimes fancies things.”

“I think you once told me,” said Brown, “that he believes some Indian secret society is pursuing him.”

Major Putnam nodded, but at the same time shrugged his shoulders. “I suppose we’d better follow him outside,” he said. “I don’t want any more—shall we say, sneezing?”

They passed out into the morning light, which was now even tinged with sunshine, and saw Colonel Cray’s tall figure bent almost double, minutely examining the condition of gravel and grass. While the Major strolled unobtrusively towards him, the priest took an equally indolent turn, which took him round the next corner of the house to within a yard or two of the projecting dustbin.

He stood regarding this dismal object for some minute and a half—, then he stepped towards it, lifted the lid and put his head inside. Dust and other discolouring matter shook upwards as he did so; but Father Brown never observed his own appearance, whatever else he observed. He remained thus for a measurable period, as if engaged in some mysterious prayers. Then he came out again, with some ashes on his hair, and walked unconcernedly away.

By the time he came round to the garden door again he found a group there which seemed to roll away morbidities as the sunlight had already rolled away the mists. It was in no way rationally reassuring; it was simply broadly comic, like a cluster of Dickens’s characters. Major Putnam had managed to slip inside and plunge into a proper shirt and trousers, with a crimson cummerbund, and a light square jacket over all; thus normally set off, his red festive face seemed bursting with a commonplace cordiality. He was indeed emphatic, but then he was talking to his cook—the swarthy son of Malta, whose lean, yellow and rather careworn face contrasted quaintly with his snow-white cap and costume.
The cook might well be careworn, for cookery was the Major’s hobby. He was one of those amateurs who always know more than the professional. The only other person he ever admitted to be a judge of an omelette was his friend Cray—and as Brown remembered this, he turned to look for the other officer. In the new presence of daylight and people clothed and in their right mind, the sight of him was rather a shock. The taller and more elegant man was still in his night-garb, with tousled black hair, and now crawling about the garden on his hands and knees, still looking for traces of the burglar; and now and again, to all appearance, striking the ground with his hand in anger at not finding him. Seeing him thus quadrupedal in the grass, the priest raised his eyebrows rather sadly; and for the first time guessed that “fancies things” might be an euphemism.

The third item in the group of the cook and the epicure was also known to Father Brown; it was Audrey Watson, the Major’s ward and housekeeper; and at this moment, to judge by her apron, tucked-up sleeves and resolute manner, much more the housekeeper than the ward.

“It serves you right,” she was saying: “I always told you not to have that old-fashioned cruet-stand.”

“I prefer it,” said Putnam, placably. “I’m old-fashioned myself; and the things keep together.”

“And vanish together, as you see,” she retorted. “Well, if you are not going to bother about the burglar, I shouldn’t bother about the lunch. It’s Sunday, and we can’t send for vinegar and all that in the town; and you Indian gentlemen can’t enjoy what you call a dinner without a lot of hot things. I wish to goodness now you hadn’t asked Cousin Oliver to take me to the musical service. It isn’t over till half-past twelve, and the Colonel has to leave by then. I don’t believe you men can manage alone.”

“Oh yes, we can, my dear,” said the Major, looking at her very amiably. “Marco has all the sauces, and we’ve often done ourselves well in very rough places, as you might know by now. And it’s time you had a treat, Audrey; you mustn’t be a housekeeper every hour of the day; and I know you want to hear the music.”

“I want to go to church,” she said, with rather severe eyes.

She was one of those handsome women who will always be handsome, because the beauty is not in an air or a tint, but in the very structure of the head and features. But though she was not yet middle-aged and her auburn hair was of a Titianesque fullness in form and colour, there was a look in her mouth and around her eyes which suggested that some sorrows wasted her, as winds waste
at last the edges of a Greek temple. For indeed the little domestic difficulty of which she was now speaking so decisively was rather comic than tragic. Father Brown gathered, from the course of the conversation, that Cray, the other gourmet, had to leave before the usual lunch-time; but that Putnam, his host, not to be done out of a final feast with an old crony, had arranged for a special déjeuner to be set out and consumed in the course of the morning, while Audrey and other graver persons were at morning service. She was going there under the escort of a relative and old friend of hers, Dr Oliver Oman, who, though a scientific man of a somewhat bitter type, was enthusiastic for music, and would go even to church to get it. There was nothing in all this that could conceivably concern the tragedy in Miss Watson’s face; and by a half conscious instinct, Father Brown turned again to the seeming lunatic grubbing about in the grass.

When he strolled across to him, the black, unbrushed head was lifted abruptly, as if in some surprise at his continued presence. And indeed, Father Brown, for reasons best known to himself, had lingered much longer than politeness required; or even, in the ordinary sense, permitted.

“Well!” cried Cray, with wild eyes. “I suppose you think I’m mad, like the rest?”

“I have considered the thesis,” answered the little man, composedly. “And I incline to think you are not.”

“What do you mean?” snapped Cray quite savagely.

“Real madmen,” explained Father Brown, “always encourage their own morbidity. They never strive against it. But you are trying to find traces of the burglar; even when there aren’t any. You are struggling against it. You want what no madman ever wants.”

“And what is that?”

“You want to be proved wrong,” said Brown.

During the last words Cray had sprung or staggered to his feet and was regarding the cleric with agitated eyes. “By hell, but that is a true word!” he cried. “They are all at me here that the fellow was only after the silver—as if I shouldn’t be only too pleased to think so! She’s been at me,” and he tossed his tousled black head towards Audrey, but the other had no need of the direction, “she’s been at me today about how cruel I was to shoot a poor harmless house-breaker, and how I have the devil in me against poor harmless natives. But I was a good-natured man once—as good-natured as Putnam.”

After a pause he said: “Look here, I’ve never seen you before; but you shall judge of the whole story. Old Putnam and I were friends in the same mess; but,
owing to some accidents on the Afghan border, I got my command much sooner than most men; only we were both invalided home for a bit. I was engaged to Audrey out there; and we all travelled back together. But on the journey back things happened. Curious things. The result of them was that Putnam wants it broken off, and even Audrey keeps it hanging on—and I know what they mean. I know what they think I am. So do you.

“Well, these are the facts. The last day we were in an Indian city I asked Putnam if I could get some Trichinopoli cigars, he directed me to a little place opposite his lodgings. I have since found he was quite right; but ‘opposite’ is a dangerous word when one decent house stands opposite five or six squalid ones; and I must have mistaken the door. It opened with difficulty, and then only on darkness; but as I turned back, the door behind me sank back and settled into its place with a noise as of innumerable bolts. There was nothing to do but to walk forward; which I did through passage after passage, pitch-dark. Then I came to a flight of steps, and then to a blind door, secured by a latch of elaborate Eastern ironwork, which I could only trace by touch, but which I loosened at last. I came out again upon gloom, which was half turned into a greenish twilight by a multitude of small but steady lamps below. They showed merely the feet or fringes of some huge and empty architecture. Just in front of me was something that looked like a mountain. I confess I nearly fell on the great stone platform on which I had emerged, to realize that it was an idol. And worst of all, an idol with its back to me.

“It was hardly half human, I guessed; to judge by the small squat head, and still more by a thing like a tail or extra limb turned up behind and pointing, like a loathsome large finger, at some symbol graven in the centre of the vast stone back. I had begun, in the dim light, to guess at the hieroglyphic, not without horror, when a more horrible thing happened. A door opened silently in the temple wall behind me and a man came out, with a brown face and a black coat. He had a carved smile on his face, of copper flesh and ivory teeth; but I think the most hateful thing about him was that he was in European dress. I was prepared, I think, for shrouded priests or naked fakirs. But this seemed to say that the devilry was over all the earth. As indeed I found it to be.

“If you had only seen the Monkey’s Feet,’ he said, smiling steadily, and without other preface, ‘we should have been very gentle—you would only be tortured and die. If you had seen the Monkey’s Face, still we should be very moderate, very tolerant—you would only be tortured and live. But as you have seen the Monkey’s Tail, we must pronounce the worst sentence, which is—Go
Free.’

“When he said the words I heard the elaborate iron latch with which I had struggled, automatically unlock itself: and then, far down the dark passages I had passed, I heard the heavy street-door shifting its own bolts backwards.

‘It is vain to ask for mercy; you must go free,’ said the smiling man. ‘Henceforth a hair shall slay you like a sword, and a breath shall bite you like an adder; weapons shall come against you out of nowhere; and you shall die many times.’ And with that he was swallowed once more in the wall behind; and I went out into the street.’

Cray paused; and Father Brown unaffectedly sat down on the lawn and began to pick daisies.

Then the soldier continued: “Putnam, of course, with his jolly common sense, pooh-poohed all my fears; and from that time dates his doubt of my mental balance. Well, I’ll simply tell you, in the fewest words, the three things that have happened since; and you shall judge which of us is right.

“The first happened in an Indian village on the edge of the jungle, but hundreds of miles from the temple, or town, or type of tribes and customs where the curse had been put on me. I woke in black midnight, and lay thinking of nothing in particular, when I felt a faint tickling thing, like a thread or a hair, trailed across my throat. I shrank back out of its way, and could not help thinking of the words in the temple. But when I got up and sought lights and a mirror, the line across my neck was a line of blood.

“The second happened in a lodging in Port Said, later, on our journey home together. It was a jumble of tavern and curiosity-shop; and though there was nothing there remotely suggesting the cult of the Monkey, it is, of course, possible that some of its images or talismans were in such a place. Its curse was there, anyhow. I woke again in the dark with a sensation that could not be put in colder or more literal words than that a breath bit like an adder. Existence was an agony of extinction; I dashed my head against walls until I dashed it against a window; and fell rather than jumped into the garden below. Putnam, poor fellow, who had called the other thing a chance scratch, was bound to take seriously the fact of finding me half insensible on the grass at dawn. But I fear it was my mental state he took seriously; and not my story.

“The third happened in Malta. We were in a fortress there; and as it happened our bedrooms overlooked the open sea, which almost came up to our window-sills, save for a flat white outer wall as bare as the sea. I woke up again; but it was not dark. There was a full moon, as I walked to the window; I could have
seen a bird on the bare battlement, or a sail on the horizon. What I did see was a sort of stick or branch circling, self-supported, in the empty sky. It flew straight in at my window and smashed the lamp beside the pillow I had just quitted. It was one of those queer-shaped war-clubs some Eastern tribes use. But it had come from no human hand.”

Father Brown threw away a daisy-chain he was making, and rose with a wistful look. “Has Major Putnam,” he asked, “got any Eastern curios, idols, weapons and so on, from which one might get a hint?”

“Plenty of those, though not much use, I fear,” replied Cray; “but by all means come into his study.”

As they entered they passed Miss Watson buttoning her gloves for church, and heard the voice of Putnam downstairs still giving a lecture on cookery to the cook. In the Major’s study and den of curios they came suddenly on a third party, silk-hatted and dressed for the street, who was poring over an open book on the smoking-table—a book which he dropped rather guiltily, and turned.

Cray introduced him civilly enough, as Dr Oman, but he showed such disfavour in his very face that Brown guessed the two men, whether Audrey knew it or not, were rivals. Nor was the priest wholly unsympathetic with the prejudice. Dr Oman was a very well-dressed gentleman indeed; well-featured, though almost dark enough for an Asiatic. But Father Brown had to tell himself sharply that one should be in charity even with those who wax their pointed beards, who have small gloved hands, and who speak with perfectly modulated voices.

Cray seemed to find something specially irritating in the small prayer-book in Oman’s dark-gloved hand. “I didn’t know that was in your line,” he said rather rudely.

Oman laughed mildly, but without offence. “This is more so, I know,” he said, laying his hand on the big book he had dropped, “a dictionary of drugs and such things. But it’s rather too large to take to church.” Then he closed the larger book, and there seemed again the faintest touch of hurry and embarrassment.

“I suppose,” said the priest, who seemed anxious to change the subject, “all these spears and things are from India?”

“From everywhere,” answered the doctor. “Putnam is an old soldier, and has been in Mexico and Australia, and the Cannibal Islands for all I know.”

“I hope it was not in the Cannibal Islands,” said Brown, “that he learnt the art of cookery.” And he ran his eyes over the stew-pots or other strange utensils on the wall.
At this moment the jolly subject of their conversation thrust his laughing, lobsterish face into the room. “Come along, Cray,” he cried. “Your lunch is just coming in. And the bells are ringing for those who want to go to church.”

Cray slipped upstairs to change; Dr Oman and Miss Watson betook themselves solemnly down the street, with a string of other churchgoers; but Father Brown noticed that the doctor twice looked back and scrutinized the house; and even came back to the corner of the street to look at it again.

The priest looked puzzled. “He can’t have been at the dustbin,” he muttered. “Not in those clothes. Or was he there earlier today?”

Father Brown, touching other people, was as sensitive as a barometer; but today he seemed about as sensitive as a rhinoceros. By no social law, rigid or implied, could he be supposed to linger round the lunch of the Anglo-Indian friends; but he lingered, covering his position with torrents of amusing but quite needless conversation. He was the more puzzling because he did not seem to want any lunch. As one after another of the most exquisitely balanced kedgeree of curries, accompanied with their appropriate vintages, were laid before the other two, he only repeated that it was one of his fast-days, and munched a piece of bread and sipped and then left untasted a tumbler of cold water. His talk, however, was exuberant.

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do for you,” he cried—, “I’ll mix you a salad! I can’t eat it, but I’ll mix it like an angel! You’ve got a lettuce there.”

“Unfortunately it’s the only thing we have got,” answered the good-humoured Major. “You must remember that mustard, vinegar, oil and so on vanished with the cruet and the burglar.”

“I know,” replied Brown, rather vaguely. “That’s what I’ve always been afraid would happen. That’s why I always carry a cruet-stand about with me. I’m so fond of salads.”

And to the amazement of the two men he took a pepper-pot out of his waistcoat pocket and put it on the table.

“I wonder why the burglar wanted mustard, too,” he went on, taking a mustard-pot from another pocket. “A mustard plaster, I suppose. And vinegar”— and producing that condiment—“haven’t I heard something about vinegar and brown paper? As for oil, which I think I put in my left—”

His garrulity was an instant arrested; for lifting his eyes, he saw what no one else saw—the black figure of Dr Oman standing on the sunlit lawn and looking steadily into the room. Before he could quite recover himself Cray had cloven in.

“You’re an astounding card,” he said, staring. “I shall come and hear your
sermons, if they’re as amusing as your manners.” His voice changed a little, and he leaned back in his chair.

“Oh, there are sermons in a cruet-stand, too,” said Father Brown, quite gravely. “Have you heard of faith like a grain of mustard-seed; or charity that anoints with oil? And as for vinegar, can any soldiers forget that solitary soldier, who, when the sun was darkened—”

Colonel Cray leaned forward a little and clutched the tablecloth.

Father Brown, who was making the salad, tipped two spoonfuls of the mustard into the tumbler of water beside him; stood up and said in a new, loud and sudden voice—“Drink that!”

At the same moment the motionless doctor in the garden came running, and bursting open a window cried: “Am I wanted? Has he been poisoned?”

“Pretty near,” said Brown, with the shadow of a smile; for the emetic had very suddenly taken effect. And Cray lay in a deck-chair, gasping as for life, but alive.

Major Putnam had sprung up, his purple face mottled. “A crime!” he cried hoarsely. “I will go for the police!”

The priest could hear him dragging down his palm-leaf hat from the peg and tumbling out of the front door; he heard the garden gate slam. But he only stood looking at Cray; and after a silence said quietly:

“I shall not talk to you much; but I will tell you what you want to know. There is no curse on you. The Temple of the Monkey was either a coincidence or a part of the trick; the trick was the trick of a white man. There is only one weapon that will bring blood with that mere feathery touch: a razor held by a white man. There is one way of making a common room full of invisible, overpowering poison: turning on the gas—the crime of a white man. And there is only one kind of club that can be thrown out of a window, turn in mid-air and come back to the window next to it: the Australian boomerang. You’ll see some of them in the Major’s study.”

With that he went outside and spoke for a moment to the doctor. The moment after, Audrey Watson came rushing into the house and fell on her knees beside Cray’s chair. He could not hear what they said to each other; but their faces moved with amazement, not unhappiness. The doctor and the priest walked slowly towards the garden gate.

“I suppose the Major was in love with her, too,” he said with a sigh; and when the other nodded, observed: “You were very generous, doctor. You did a fine thing. But what made you suspect?”
“A very small thing,” said Oman; “but it kept me restless in church till I came back to see that all was well. That book on his table was a work on poisons; and was put down open at the place where it stated that a certain Indian poison, though deadly and difficult to trace, was particularly easily reversible by the use of the commonest emetics. I suppose he read that at the last moment—”

“And remembered that there were emetics in the cruet-stand,” said Father Brown. “Exactly. He threw the cruet in the dustbin—where I found it, along with other silver—for the sake of a burglary blind. But if you look at that pepper-pot I put on the table, you’ll see a small hole. That’s where Cray’s bullet struck, shaking up the pepper and making the criminal sneeze.”

There was a silence. Then Dr Oman said grimly: “The Major is a long time looking for the police.”

“Or the police in looking for the Major?” said the priest. “Well, good-bye.”
ELEVEN

THE STRANGE CRIME OF JOHN BOULNOIS

MR CALHOUN KIDD was a very young gentleman with a very old face, a face dried up with its own eagerness, framed in blue-black hair and a black butterfly tie. He was the emissary in England of the colossal American daily called the Western Sun—also humorously described as the “Rising Sunset.” This was in allusion to a great journalistic declaration (attributed to Mr Kidd himself) that “he guessed the sun would rise in the west yet, if American citizens did a bit more hustling.” Those, however, who mock American journalism from the standpoint of somewhat mellow traditions forget a certain paradox which partly redeems it. For while the journalism of the States permits a pantomimic vulgarity long past anything English, it also shows a real excitement about the most earnest mental problems, of which English papers are innocent, or rather incapable. The Sun was full of the most solemn matters treated in the most farcical way. William James figured there as well as “Weary Willie,” and pragmatists alternated with pugilists in the long procession of its portraits.

Thus, when a very unobtrusive Oxford man named John Boulnois wrote in a very unreadable review called the Natural Philosophy Quarterly a series of articles on alleged weak points in Darwinian evolution, it fluttered no corner of the English papers; though Boulnois’s theory (which was that of a comparatively stationary universe visited occasionally by convulsions of change) had some rather faddy fashionableness at Oxford, and got so far as to be named “Catastrophism.” But many American papers seized on the challenge as a great event; and the Sun threw the shadow of Mr Boulnois quite gigantically across its pages. By the paradox already noted, articles of valuable intelligence and enthusiasm were presented with headlines apparently written by an illiterate maniac, headlines such as “Darwin Chews Dirt; Critic Boulnois says He Jumps the Shocks”—or “Keep Catastrophic, says Thinker Boulnois.” And Mr Calhoun Kidd, of the Western Sun, was bidden to take his butterfly tie and lugubrious visage down to the little house outside Oxford where Thinker Boulnois lived in happy ignorance of such a title.

That fated philosopher had consented, in a somewhat dazed manner, to receive the interviewer, and had named the hour of nine that evening. The last of a summer sunset clung about Cumnor and the low wooded hills; the romantic
Yankee was both doubtful of his road and inquisitive about his surroundings; and seeing the door of a genuine feudal old-country inn, The Champion Arms, standing open, he went in to make inquiries.

In the bar parlour he rang the bell, and had to wait some little time for a reply to it. The only other person present was a lean man with close red hair and loose, horsey-looking clothes, who was drinking very bad whisky, but smoking a very good cigar. The whisky, of course, was the choice brand of The Champion Arms; the cigar he had probably brought with him from London. Nothing could be more different than his cynical negligence from the dapper dryness of the young American; but something in his pencil and open notebook, and perhaps in the expression of his alert blue eye, caused Kidd to guess, correctly, that he was a brother journalist.

“Could you do me the favour,” asked Kidd, with the courtesy of his nation, “of directing me to the Grey Cottage, where Mr Boulnois lives, as I understand?”

“It’s a few yards down the road,” said the red-haired man, removing his cigar; “I shall be passing it myself in a minute, but I’m going on to Pendragon Park to try and see the fun.”

“What is Pendragon Park?” asked Calhoun Kidd.

“Sir Claude Champion’s place—haven’t you come down for that, too?” asked the other pressman, looking up. “You’re a journalist, aren’t you?”

“I have come to see Mr Boulnois,” said Kidd.

“I’ve come to see Mrs Boulnois,” replied the other. “But I shan’t catch her at home.” And he laughed rather unpleasantly.

“Are you interested in Catastrophism?” asked the wondering Yankee.

“I’m interested in catastrophes; and there are going to be some,” replied his companion gloomily. “Mine’s a filthy trade, and I never pretend it isn’t.”

With that he spat on the floor; yet somehow in the very act and instant one could realize that the man had been brought up as a gentleman.

The American pressman considered him with more attention. His face was pale and dissipated, with the promise of formidable passions yet to be loosed; but it was a clever and sensitive face; his clothes were coarse and careless, but he had a good seal ring on one of his long, thin fingers. His name, which came out in the course of talk, was James Dalroy; he was the son of a bankrupt Irish landlord, and attached to a pink paper which he heartily despised, called Smart Society, in the capacity of reporter and of something painfully like a spy.

Smart Society, I regret to say, felt none of that interest in Boulnois on Darwin
which was such a credit to the head and hearts of the Western Sun. Dalroy had come down, it seemed, to snuff up the scent of a scandal which might very well end in the Divorce Court, but which was at present hovering between Grey Cottage and Pendragon Park.

Sir Claude Champion was known to the readers of the Western Sun as well as Mr Boulnois. So were the Pope and the Derby Winner; but the idea of their intimate acquaintanceship would have struck Kidd as equally incongruous. He had heard of (and written about, nay, falsely pretended to know) Sir Claude Champion, as “one of the brightest and wealthiest of England’s Upper Ten”; as the great sportsman who raced yachts round the world; as the great traveller who wrote books about the Himalayas, as the politician who swept constituencies with a startling sort of Tory Democracy, and as the great dabbler in art, music, literature, and, above all, acting. Sir Claude was really rather magnificent in other than American eyes. There was something of the Renascence Prince about his omnivorous culture and restless publicity—, he was not only a great amateur, but an ardent one. There was in him none of that antiquarian frivolity that we convey by the word “dilettante.”

That faultless falcon profile with purple-black Italian eye, which had been snap-shotted so often both for Smart Society and the Western Sun, gave everyone the impression of a man eaten by ambition as by a fire, or even a disease. But though Kidd knew a great deal about Sir Claude—a great deal more, in fact, than there was to know—it would never have crossed his wildest dreams to connect so showy an aristocrat with the newly-unearthed founder of Catastrophism, or to guess that Sir Claude Champion and John Boulnois could be intimate friends. Such, according to Dalroy’s account, was nevertheless the fact. The two had hunted in couples at school and college, and, though their social destinies had been very different (for Champion was a great landlord and almost a millionaire, while Boulnois was a poor scholar and, until just lately, an unknown one), they still kept in very close touch with each other. Indeed, Boulnois’s cottage stood just outside the gates of Pendragon Park.

But whether the two men could be friends much longer was becoming a dark and ugly question. A year or two before, Boulnois had married a beautiful and not unsuccessful actress, to whom he was devoted in his own shy and ponderous style; and the proximity of the household to Champion’s had given that flighty celebrity opportunities for behaving in a way that could not but cause painful and rather base excitement. Sir Claude had carried the arts of publicity to perfection; and he seemed to take a crazy pleasure in being equally ostentatious
in an intrigue that could do him no sort of honour. Footmen from Pendragon were perpetually leaving bouquets for Mrs Boulnois; carriages and motor-cars were perpetually calling at the cottage for Mrs Boulnois; balls and masquerades perpetually filled the grounds in which the baronet paraded Mrs Boulnois, like the Queen of Love and Beauty at a tournament. That very evening, marked by Mr Kidd for the exposition of Catastrophism, had been marked by Sir Claude Champion for an open-air rendering of Romeo and Juliet, in which he was to play Romeo to a Juliet it was needless to name.

“I don’t think it can go on without a smash,” said the young man with red hair, getting up and shaking himself. “Old Boulnois may be squared—or he may be square. But if he’s square he’s thick—what you might call cubic. But I don’t believe it’s possible.”

“He is a man of grand intellectual powers,” said Calhoun Kidd in a deep voice.

“Yes,” answered Dalroy; “but even a man of grand intellectual powers can’t be such a blighted fool as all that. Must you be going on? I shall be following myself in a minute or two.”

But Calhoun Kidd, having finished a milk and soda, betook himself smartly up the road towards the Grey Cottage, leaving his cynical informant to his whisky and tobacco. The last of the daylight had faded; the skies were of a dark, green-grey, like slate, studded here and there with a star, but lighter on the left side of the sky, with the promise of a rising moon.

The Grey Cottage, which stood entrenched, as it were, in a square of stiff, high thorn-hedges, was so close under the pines and palisades of the Park that Kidd at first mistook it for the Park Lodge. Finding the name on the narrow wooden gate, however, and seeing by his watch that the hour of the “Thinker’s” appointment had just struck, he went in and knocked at the front door. Inside the garden hedge, he could see that the house, though unpretentious enough, was larger and more luxurious than it looked at first, and was quite a different kind of place from a porter’s lodge. A dog-kennel and a beehive stood outside, like symbols of old English country-life; the moon was rising behind a plantation of prosperous pear trees, the dog that came out of the kennel was reverend-looking and reluctant to bark; and the plain, elderly man-servant who opened the door was brief but dignified.

“Mr Boulnois asked me to offer his apologies, sir,” he said, “but he has been obliged to go out suddenly.”

“But see here, I had an appointment,” said the interviewer, with a rising voice.
“Do you know where he went to?”

“To Pendragon Park, sir,” said the servant, rather sombrely, and began to close the door.

Kidd started a little.

“Did he go with Mrs—with the rest of the party?” he asked rather vaguely.

“No, sir,” said the man shortly; “he stayed behind, and then went out alone.” And he shut the door, brutally, but with an air of duty not done.

The American, that curious compound of impudence and sensitiveness, was annoyed. He felt a strong desire to hustle them all along a bit and teach them business habits; the hoary old dog and the grizzled, heavy-faced old butler with his prehistoric shirt-front, and the drowsy old moon, and above all the scatter-brained old philosopher who couldn’t keep an appointment.

“If that’s the way he goes on he deserves to lose his wife’s purest devotion,” said Mr Calhoun Kidd. “But perhaps he’s gone over to make a row. In that case I reckon a man from the Western Sun will be on the spot.”

And turning the corner by the open lodge-gates, he set off, stumping up the long avenue of black pine-woods that pointed in abrupt perspective towards the inner gardens of Pendragon Park. The trees were as black and orderly as plumes upon a hearse; there were still a few stars. He was a man with more literary than direct natural associations; the word “Ravenswood” came into his head repeatedly. It was partly the raven colour of the pine-woods; but partly also an indescribable atmosphere almost described in Scott’s great tragedy; the smell of something that died in the eighteenth century; the smell of dank gardens and broken urns, of wrongs that will never now be righted; of something that is none the less incurably sad because it is strangely unreal.

More than once, as he went up that strange, black road of tragic artifice, he stopped, startled, thinking he heard steps in front of him. He could see nothing in front but the twin sombre walls of pine and the wedge of starlit sky above them. At first he thought he must have fancied it or been mocked by a mere echo of his own tramp. But as he went on he was more and more inclined to conclude, with the remains of his reason, that there really were other feet upon the road. He thought hazily of ghosts; and was surprised how swiftly he could see the image of an appropriate and local ghost, one with a face as white as Pierrot’s, but patched with black. The apex of the triangle of dark-blue sky was growing brighter and bluer, but he did not realize as yet that this was because he was coming nearer to the lights of the great house and garden. He only felt that the atmosphere was growing more intense, there was in the sadness more violence
and secrecy—more—he hesitated for the word, and then said it with a jerk of laughter—Catastrophism.

More pines, more pathway slid past him, and then he stood rooted as by a blast of magic. It is vain to say that he felt as if he had got into a dream; but this time he felt quite certain that he had got into a book. For we human beings are used to inappropriate things; we are accustomed to the clatter of the incongruous; it is a tune to which we can go to sleep. If one appropriate thing happens, it wakes us up like the pang of a perfect chord. Something happened such as would have happened in such a place in a forgotten tale.

Over the black pine-wood came flying and flashing in the moon a naked sword—such a slender and sparkling rapier as may have fought many an unjust duel in that ancient park. It fell on the pathway far in front of him and lay there glistening like a large needle. He ran like a hare and bent to look at it. Seen at close quarters it had rather a showy look: the big red jewels in the hilt and guard were a little dubious. But there were other red drops upon the blade which were not dubious.

He looked round wildly in the direction from which the dazzling missile had come, and saw that at this point the sable facade of fir and pine was interrupted by a smaller road at right angles; which, when he turned it, brought him in full view of the long, lighted house, with a lake and fountains in front of it. Nevertheless, he did not look at this, having something more interesting to look at.

Above him, at the angle of the steep green bank of the terraced garden, was one of those small picturesque surprises common in the old landscape gardening; a kind of small round hill or dome of grass, like a giant mole-hill, ringed and crowned with three concentric fences of roses, and having a sundial in the highest point in the centre. Kidd could see the finger of the dial stand up dark against the sky like the dorsal fin of a shark and the vain moonlight clinging to that idle clock. But he saw something else clinging to it also, for one wild moment—the figure of a man.

Though he saw it there only for a moment, though it was outlandish and incredible in costume, being clad from neck to heel in tight crimson, with glints of gold, yet he knew in one flash of moonlight who it was. That white face flung up to heaven, clean-shaven and so unnaturally young, like Byron with a Roman nose, those black curls already grizzled—he had seen the thousand public portraits of Sir Claude Champion. The wild red figure reeled an instant against the sundial; the next it had rolled down the steep bank and lay at the American’s
feet, faintly moving one arm. A gaudy, unnatural gold ornament on the arm
suddenly reminded Kidd of Romeo and Juliet; of course the tight crimson suit
was part of the play. But there was a long red stain down the bank from which
the man had rolled—that was no part of the play. He had been run through the
body.

Mr Calhoun Kidd shouted and shouted again. Once more he seemed to hear
phantasmal footsteps, and started to find another figure already near him. He
knew the figure, and yet it terrified him. The dissipated youth who had called
himself Dalroy had a horribly quiet way with him; if Boulnois failed to keep
appointments that had been made, Dalroy had a sinister air of keeping
appointments that hadn’t. The moonlight discoloured everything, against
Dalroy’s red hair his wan face looked not so much white as pale green.

All this morbid impressionism must be Kidd’s excuse for having cried out,
brutally and beyond all reason: “Did you do this, you devil?”

James Dalroy smiled his unpleasing smile; but before he could speak, the
fallen figure made another movement of the arm, waving vaguely towards the
place where the sword fell; then came a moan, and then it managed to speak.

“Boulnois. . . . Boulnois, I say. . . . Boulnois did it . . . jealous of me . . . he
was jealous, he was, he was . . .”

Kidd bent his head down to hear more, and just managed to catch the words:

“Boulnois . . . with my own sword . . . he threw it . . .”

Again the failing hand waved towards the sword, and then fell rigid with a
thud. In Kidd rose from its depth all that acrid humour that is the strange salt of
the seriousness of his race.

“See here,” he said sharply and with command, “you must fetch a doctor. This
man’s dead.”

“And a priest, too, I suppose,” said Dalroy in an undecipherable manner. “All
these Champions are papists.”

The American knelt down by the body, felt the heart, propped up the head and
used some last efforts at restoration; but before the other journalist reappeared,
followed by a doctor and a priest, he was already prepared to assert they were
too late.

“Were you too late also?” asked the doctor, a solid prosperous-looking man,
with conventional moustache and whiskers, but a lively eye, which darted over
Kidd dubiously.

“In one sense,” drawled the representative of the Sun. “I was too late to save
the man, but I guess I was in time to hear something of importance. I heard the
dead man denounce his assassin.”

“And who was the assassin?” asked the doctor, drawing his eyebrows together.

“Boulnois,” said Calhoun Kidd, and whistled softly.

The doctor stared at him gloomily with a reddening brow—, but he did not contradict. Then the priest, a shorter figure in the background, said mildly: “I understood that Mr Boulnois was not coming to Pendragon Park this evening.”

“There again,” said the Yankee grimly, “I may be in a position to give the old country a fact or two. Yes, sir, John Boulnois was going to stay in all this evening; he fixed up a real good appointment there with me. But John Boulnois changed his mind; John Boulnois left his home abruptly and all alone, and came over to this darned Park an hour or so ago. His butler told me so. I think we hold what the all-wise police call a clue—have you sent for them?”

“Yes,” said the doctor, “but we haven’t alarmed anyone else yet.”

“Does Mrs Boulnois know?” asked James Dalroy, and again Kidd was conscious of an irrational desire to hit him on his curling mouth.

“I have not told her,” said the doctor gruffly—, “but here come the police.”

The little priest had stepped out into the main avenue, and now returned with the fallen sword, which looked ludicrously large and theatrical when attached to his dumpy figure, at once clerical and commonplace. “Just before the police come,” he said apologetically, “has anyone got a light?”

The Yankee journalist took an electric torch from his pocket, and the priest held it close to the middle part of the blade, which he examined with blinking care. Then, without glancing at the point or pommel, he handed the long weapon to the doctor.

“I fear I’m no use here,” he said, with a brief sigh. “I’ll say good night to you, gentlemen.” And he walked away up the dark avenue towards the house, his hands clasped behind him and his big head bent in cogitation.

The rest of the group made increased haste towards the lodge-gates, where an inspector and two constables could already be seen in consultation with the lodge-keeper. But the little priest only walked slower and slower in the dim cloister of pine, and at last stopped dead, on the steps of the house. It was his silent way of acknowledging an equally silent approach; for there came towards him a presence that might have satisfied even Calhoun Kidd’s demands for a lovely and aristocratic ghost. It was a young woman in silvery satins of a Renascence design; she had golden hair in two long shining ropes, and a face so startlingly pale between them that she might have been chryselephantine—made,
that is, like some old Greek statues, out of ivory and gold. But her eyes were very bright, and her voice, though low, was confident.

“Father Brown?” she said.

“Mrs Boulnois?” he replied gravely. Then he looked at her and immediately said: “I see you know about Sir Claude.”

“How do you know I know?” she asked steadily.

He did not answer the question, but asked another: “Have you seen your husband?”

“My husband is at home,” she said. “He has nothing to do with this.”

Again he did not answer; and the woman drew nearer to him, with a curiously intense expression on her face.

“Shall I tell you something more?” she said, with a rather fearful smile. “I don’t think he did it, and you don’t either.” Father Brown returned her gaze with a long, grave stare, and then nodded, yet more gravely.

“Father Brown,” said the lady, “I am going to tell you all I know, but I want you to do me a favour first. Will you tell me why you haven’t jumped to the conclusion of poor John’s guilt, as all the rest have done? Don’t mind what you say: I—I know about the gossip and the appearances that are against me.”

Father Brown looked honestly embarrassed, and passed his hand across his forehead. “Two very little things,” he said. “At least, one’s very trivial and the other very vague. But such as they are, they don’t fit in with Mr Boulnois being the murderer.”

He turned his blank, round face up to the stars and continued absentmindedly: “To take the vague idea first. I attach a good deal of importance to vague ideas. All those things that ‘aren’t evidence’ are what convince me. I think a moral impossibility the biggest of all impossibilities. I know your husband only slightly, but I think this crime of his, as generally conceived, something very like a moral impossibility. Please do not think I mean that Boulnois could not be so wicked. Anybody can be wicked—as wicked as he chooses. We can direct our moral wills; but we can’t generally change our instinctive tastes and ways of doing things. Boulnois might commit a murder, but not this murder. He would not snatch Romeo’s sword from its romantic scabbard; or slay his foe on the sundial as on a kind of altar; or leave his body among the roses, or fling the sword away among the pines. If Boulnois killed anyone he’d do it quietly and heavily, as he’d do any other doubtful thing—take a tenth glass of port, or read a loose Greek poet. No, the romantic setting is not like Boulnois. It’s more like Champion.”
“Ah!” she said, and looked at him with eyes like diamonds.

“And the trivial thing was this,” said Brown. “There were finger-prints on that sword; finger-prints can be detected quite a time after they are made if they’re on some polished surface like glass or steel. These were on a polished surface. They were half-way down the blade of the sword. Whose prints they were I have no earthly clue; but why should anybody hold a sword half-way down? It was a long sword, but length is an advantage in lunging at an enemy. At least, at most enemies. At all enemies except one.”

“Except one,” she repeated.

“There is only one enemy,” said Father Brown, “whom it is easier to kill with a dagger than a sword.”

“I know,” said the woman. “Oneself.”

There was a long silence, and then the priest said quietly but abruptly: “Am I right, then? Did Sir Claude kill himself?”

“Yes” she said, with a face like marble. “I saw him do it.”

“He died,” said Father Brown, “for love of you?”

An extraordinary expression flashed across her face, very different from pity, modesty, remorse, or anything her companion had expected: her voice became suddenly strong and full. “I don’t believe,” she said, “he ever cared about me a rap. He hated my husband.”

“Why?” asked the other, and turned his round face from the sky to the lady.

“He hated my husband because . . . it is so strange I hardly know how to say it . . . because . . .”

“Yes?” said Brown patiently.

“Because my husband wouldn’t hate him.”

Father Brown only nodded, and seemed still to be listening; he differed from most detectives in fact and fiction in a small point—he never pretended not to understand when he understood perfectly well.

Mrs Boulnois drew near once more with the same contained glow of certainty. “My husband,” she said, “is a great man. Sir Claude Champion was not a great man: he was a celebrated and successful man. My husband has never been celebrated or successful; and it is the solemn truth that he has never dreamed of being so. He no more expects to be famous for thinking than for smoking cigars. On all that side he has a sort of splendid stupidity. He has never grown up. He still liked Champion exactly as he liked him at school; he admired him as he would admire a conjuring trick done at the dinner-table. But he couldn’t be got to conceive the notion of envying Champion. And Champion wanted to be
envied. He went mad and killed himself for that.”

“Yes,” said Father Brown; “I think I begin to understand.”

“Oh, don’t you see?” she cried; “the whole picture is made for that—the place is planned for it. Champion put John in a little house at his very door, like a dependant—to make him feel a failure. He never felt it. He thinks no more about such things than—than an absentminded lion. Champion would burst in on John’s shabbiest hours or homeliest meals with some dazzling present or announcement or expedition that made it like the visit of Haroun Alraschid, and John would accept or refuse amiably with one eye off, so to speak, like one lazy schoolboy agreeing or disagreeing with another. After five years of it John had not turned a hair; and Sir Claude Champion was a monomaniac.”

“And Haman began to tell them,” said Father Brown, “of all the things wherein the king had honoured him; and he said: ‘All these things profit me nothing while I see Mordecai the Jew sitting in the gate.’”

“The crisis came,” Mrs Boulnois continued, “when I persuaded John to let me take down some of his speculations and send them to a magazine. They began to attract attention, especially in America, and one paper wanted to interview him. When Champion (who was interviewed nearly every day) heard of this little crumb of success falling to his unconscious rival, the last link snapped that held back his devilish hatred. Then he began to lay that insane siege to my own love and honour which has been the talk of the shire. You will ask me why I allowed such atrocious attentions. I answer that I could not have declined them except by explaining to my husband, and there are some things the soul cannot do, as the body cannot fly. Nobody could have explained to my husband. Nobody could do it now. If you said to him in so many words, ‘Champion is stealing your wife,’ he would think the joke a little vulgar: that it could be anything but a joke—that notion could find no crack in his great skull to get in by. Well, John was to come and see us act this evening, but just as we were starting he said he wouldn’t; he had got an interesting book and a cigar. I told this to Sir Claude, and it was his death-blow. The monomaniac suddenly saw despair. He stabbed himself, crying out like a devil that Boulnois was slaying him; he lies there in the garden dead of his own jealousy to produce jealousy, and John is sitting in the dining-room reading a book.”

There was another silence, and then the little priest said: “There is only one weak point, Mrs Boulnois, in all your very vivid account. Your husband is not sitting in the dining-room reading a book. That American reporter told me he had been to your house, and your butler told him Mr Boulnois had gone to
Pendragon Park after all."

Her bright eyes widened to an almost electric glare; and yet it seemed rather bewilderment than confusion or fear. “Why, what can you mean?” she cried. “All the servants were out of the house, seeing the theatricals. And we don’t keep a butler, thank goodness!”

Father Brown started and spun half round like an absurd teetotum. “What, what?” he cried seeming galvanized into sudden life. “Look here—I say—can I make your husband hear if I go to the house?”

“Oh, the servants will be back by now,” she said, wondering.

“Right, right!” rejoined the cleric energetically, and set off scuttling up the path towards the Park gates. He turned once to say: “Better get hold of that Yankee, or ‘Crime of John Boulnois’ will be all over the Republic in large letters.”

“You don’t understand,” said Mrs Boulnois. “He wouldn’t mind. I don’t think he imagines that America really is a place.”

When Father Brown reached the house with the beehive and the drowsy dog, a small and neat maid-servant showed him into the dining-room, where Boulnois sat reading by a shaded lamp, exactly as his wife described him. A decanter of port and a wineglass were at his elbow; and the instant the priest entered he noted the long ash stand out unbroken on his cigar.

“He has been here for half an hour at least,” thought Father Brown. In fact, he had the air of sitting where he had sat when his dinner was cleared away.

“Don’t get up, Mr Boulnois,” said the priest in his pleasant, prosaic way. “I shan’t interrupt you a moment. I fear I break in on some of your scientific studies.”

“No,” said Boulnois; “I was reading ‘The Bloody Thumb.’” He said it with neither frown nor smile, and his visitor was conscious of a certain deep and virile indifference in the man which his wife had called greatness. He laid down a gory yellow “shocker” without even feeling its incongruity enough to comment on it humorously. John Boulnois was a big, slow-moving man with a massive head, partly grey and partly bald, and blunt, burly features. He was in shabby and very old-fashioned evening-dress, with a narrow triangular opening of shirt-front: he had assumed it that evening in his original purpose of going to see his wife act Juliet.

“I won’t keep you long from ‘The Bloody Thumb’ or any other catastrophic affairs,” said Father Brown, smiling. “I only came to ask you about the crime you committed this evening.”
Boulnois looked at him steadily, but a red bar began to show across his broad brow; and he seemed like one discovering embarrassment for the first time.

“I know it was a strange crime,” assented Brown in a low voice. “Stranger than murder perhaps—to you. The little sins are sometimes harder to confess than the big ones—but that’s why it’s so important to confess them. Your crime is committed by every fashionable hostess six times a week: and yet you find it sticks to your tongue like a nameless atrocity.”

“It makes one feel,” said the philosopher slowly, “such a damned fool.”

“I know,” assented the other, “but one often has to choose between feeling a damned fool and being one.”

“I can’t analyse myself well,” went on Boulnois; “but sitting in that chair with that story I was as happy as a schoolboy on a half-holiday. It was security, eternity—I can’t convey it . . . the cigars were within reach . . . the matches were within reach . . . the Thumb had four more appearances to . . . it was not only a peace, but a plenitude. Then that bell rang, and I thought for one long, mortal minute that I couldn’t get out of that chair—literally, physically, muscullarly couldn’t. Then I did it like a man lifting the world, because I knew all the servants were out. I opened the front door, and there was a little man with his mouth open to speak and his notebook open to write in. I remembered the Yankee interviewer I had forgotten. His hair was parted in the middle, and I tell you that murder—”

“I understand,” said Father Brown. “I’ve seen him.”

“I didn’t commit murder,” continued the Catastrophist mildly, “but only perjury. I said I had gone across to Pendragon Park and shut the door in his face. That is my crime, Father Brown, and I don’t know what penance you would inflict for it.”

“I shan’t inflict any penance,” said the clerical gentleman, collecting his heavy hat and umbrella with an air of some amusement; “quite the contrary. I came here specially to let you off the little penance which would otherwise have followed your little offence.”

“And what,” asked Boulnois, smiling, “is the little penance I have so luckily been let off?”

“Being hanged,” said Father Brown.
THE FAIRY TALE OF FATHER BROWN

THE picturesque city and state of Heiligweldenstein was one of those toy kingdoms of which certain parts of the German Empire still consist. It had come under the Prussian hegemony quite late in history—hardly fifty years before the fine summer day when Flambeau and Father Brown found themselves sitting in its gardens and drinking its beer. There had been not a little of war and wild justice there within living memory, as soon will be shown. But in merely looking at it one could not dismiss that impression of childishness which is the most charming side of Germany—those little pantomime, paternal monarchies in which a king seems as domestic as a cook. The German soldiers by the innumerable sentry-boxes looked strangely like German toys, and the clean-cut battlements of the castle, gilded by the sunshine, looked the more like the gilt gingerbread. For it was brilliant weather. The sky was as Prussian a blue as Potsdam itself could require, but it was yet more like that lavish and glowing use of the colour which a child extracts from a shilling paint-box. Even the grey-ribbed trees looked young, for the pointed buds on them were still pink, and in a pattern against the strong blue looked like innumerable childish figures.

Despite his prosaic appearance and generally practical walk of life, Father Brown was not without a certain streak of romance in his composition, though he generally kept his daydreams to himself, as many children do. Amid the brisk, bright colours of such a day, and in the heraldic framework of such a town, he did feel rather as if he had entered a fairy tale. He took a childish pleasure, as a younger brother might, in the formidable sword-stick which Flambeau always flung as he walked, and which now stood upright beside his tall mug of Munich. Nay, in his sleepy irresponsibility, he even found himself eyeing the knobbed and clumsy head of his own shabby umbrella, with some faint memories of the ogre’s club in a coloured toy-book. But he never composed anything in the form of fiction, unless it be the tale that follows:

“I wonder,” he said, “whether one would have real adventures in a place like this, if one put oneself in the way? It’s a splendid back-scene for them, but I always have a kind of feeling that they would fight you with pasteboard sabres more than real, horrible swords.”

“You are mistaken,” said his friend. “In this place they not only fight with
swords, but kill without swords. And there’s worse than that.”

“Why, what do you mean?” asked Father Brown.

“Why,” replied the other, “I should say this was the only place in Europe where a man was ever shot without firearms.”

“Do you mean a bow and arrow?” asked Brown in some wonder.

“I mean a bullet in the brain,” replied Flambeau. “Don’t you know the story of the late Prince of this place? It was one of the great police mysteries about twenty years ago. You remember, of course, that this place was forcibly annexed at the time of Bismarck’s very earliest schemes of consolidation—forcibly, that is, but not at all easily. The empire (or what wanted to be one) sent Prince Otto of Grossenmark to rule the place in the Imperial interests. We saw his portrait in the gallery there—a handsome old gentleman if he’d had any hair or eyebrows, and hadn’t been wrinkled all over like a vulture; but he had things to harass him, as I’ll explain in a minute. He was a soldier of distinguished skill and success, but he didn’t have altogether an easy job with this little place. He was defeated in several battles by the celebrated Arnhold brothers—the three guerrilla patriots to whom Swinburne wrote a poem, you remember:

Wolves with the hair of the ermine,
Crows that are crowned and kings—
These things be many as vermin,
Yet Three shall abide these things.

Or something of that kind. Indeed, it is by no means certain that the occupation would ever have been successful had not one of the three brothers, Paul, despicably, but very decisively declined to abide these things any longer, and, by surrendering all the secrets of the insurrection, ensured its overthrow and his own ultimate promotion to the post of chamberlain to Prince Otto. After this, Ludwig, the one genuine hero among Mr Swinburne’s heroes, was killed, sword in hand, in the capture of the city; and the third, Heinrich, who, though not a traitor, had always been tame and even timid compared with his active brothers, retired into something like a hermitage, became converted to a Christian quietism which was almost Quakerish, and never mixed with men except to give nearly all he had to the poor. They tell me that not long ago he could still be seen about the neighbourhood occasionally, a man in a black cloak, nearly blind, with very wild, white hair, but a face of astonishing softness.”

“I know,” said Father Brown. “I saw him once.”

His friend looked at him in some surprise. “I didn’t know you’d been here before,” he said. “Perhaps you know as much about it as I do. Anyhow, that’s
the story of the Arnholds, and he was the last survivor of them. Yes, and of all
the men who played parts in that drama.”

“You mean that the Prince, too, died long before?”

“Died,” repeated Flambeau, “and that’s about as much as we can say. You
must understand that towards the end of his life he began to have those tricks of
the nerves not uncommon with tyrants. He multiplied the ordinary daily and
nightly guard round his castle till there seemed to be more sentry-boxes than
houses in the town, and doubtful characters were shot without mercy. He lived
almost entirely in a little room that was in the very centre of the enormous
labyrinth of all the other rooms, and even in this he erected another sort of
central cabin or cupboard, lined with steel, like a safe or a battleship. Some say
that under the floor of this again was a secret hole in the earth, no more than
large enough to hold him, so that, in his anxiety to avoid the grave, he was
willing to go into a place pretty much like it. But he went further yet. The
populace had been supposed to be disarmed ever since the suppression of the
revolt, but Otto now insisted, as governments very seldom insist, on an absolute
and literal disarmament. It was carried out, with extraordinary thoroughness and
severity, by very well-organized officials over a small and familiar area, and, so
far as human strength and science can be absolutely certain of anything, Prince
Otto was absolutely certain that nobody could introduce so much as a toy pistol
into Heiligwaldenstein.”

“Human science can never be quite certain of things like that,” said Father
Brown, still looking at the red budding of the branches over his head, “if only
because of the difficulty about definition and connotation. What is a weapon?
People have been murdered with the mildest domestic comforts; certainly with
tea-kettles, probably with tea-cosies. On the other hand, if you showed an
Ancient Briton a revolver, I doubt if he would know it was a weapon—until it
was fired into him, of course. Perhaps somebody introduced a firearm so new
that it didn’t even look like a firearm. Perhaps it looked like a thimble or
something. Was the bullet at all peculiar?”

“Not that I ever heard of,” answered Flambeau; “but my information is
fragmentary, and only comes from my old friend Grimm. He was a very able
detective in the German service, and he tried to arrest me; I arrested him instead,
and we had many interesting chats. He was in charge here of the inquiry about
Prince Otto, but I forgot to ask him anything about the bullet. According to
Grimm, what happened was this.” He paused a moment to drain the greater part
of his dark lager at a draught, and then resumed:
“On the evening in question, it seems, the Prince was expected to appear in one of the outer rooms, because he had to receive certain visitors whom he really wished to meet. They were geological experts sent to investigate the old question of the alleged supply of gold from the rocks round here, upon which (as it was said) the small city-state had so long maintained its credit and been able to negotiate with its neighbours even under the ceaseless bombardment of bigger armies. Hitherto it had never been found by the most exacting inquiry which could—"

“Which could be quite certain of discovering a toy pistol,” said Father Brown with a smile. “But what about the brother who ratted? Hadn’t he anything to tell the Prince?”

“He always asseverated that he did not know,” replied Flambeau; “that this was the one secret his brothers had not told him. It is only right to say that it received some support from fragmentary words—spoken by the great Ludwig in the hour of death, when he looked at Heinrich but pointed at Paul, and said, ‘You have not told him . . . ‘ and was soon afterwards incapable of speech. Anyhow, the deputation of distinguished geologists and mineralogists from Paris and Berlin were there in the most magnificent and appropriate dress, for there are no men who like wearing their decorations so much as the men of science—as anybody knows who has ever been to a soiree of the Royal Society. It was a brilliant gathering, but very late, and gradually the Chamberlain—you saw his portrait, too: a man with black eyebrows, serious eyes, and a meaningless sort of smile underneath—the Chamberlain, I say, discovered there was everything there except the Prince himself. He searched all the outer salons; then, remembering the man’s mad fits of fear, hurried to the inmost chamber. That also was empty, but the steel turret or cabin erected in the middle of it took some time to open. When it did open it was empty, too. He went and looked into the hole in the ground, which seemed deeper and somehow all the more like a grave—that is his account, of course. And even as he did so he heard a burst of cries and tumult in the long rooms and corridors without.

“First it was a distant din and thrill of something unthinkable on the horizon of the crowd, even beyond the castle. Next it was a wordless clamour startlingly close, and loud enough to be distinct if each word had not killed the other. Next came words of a terrible clearness, coming nearer, and next one man, rushing into the room and telling the news as briefly as such news is told.

“Otto, Prince of Heiligwaldenstein and Grossenmark, was lying in the dews of the darkening twilight in the woods beyond the castle, with his arms flung out
and his face flung up to the moon. The blood still pulsed from his shattered
temple and jaw, but it was the only part of him that moved like a living thing. He
was clad in his full white and yellow uniform, as to receive his guests within,
except that the sash or scarf had been unbound and lay rather crumpled by his
side. Before he could be lifted he was dead. But, dead or alive, he was a riddle—
he who had always hidden in the inmost chamber out there in the wet woods,
unarmed and alone.”

“Who found his body?” asked Father Brown.

“Some girl attached to the Court named Hedwig von something or other,”
replied his friend, “who had been out in the wood picking wild flowers.”

“Had she picked any?” asked the priest, staring rather vacantly at the veil of
the branches above him.

“Yes,” replied Flambeau. “I particularly remember that the Chamberlain, or
old Grimm or somebody, said how horrible it was, when they came up at her
call, to see a girl holding spring flowers and bending over that—that bloody
collapse. However, the main point is that before help arrived he was dead, and
the news, of course, had to be carried back to the castle. The consternation it
created was something beyond even that natural in a Court at the fall of a
potentate. The foreign visitors, especially the mining experts, were in the wildest
doubt and excitement, as well as many important Prussian officials, and it soon
began to be clear that the scheme for finding the treasure bulked much bigger in
the business than people had supposed. Experts and officials had been promised
great prizes or international advantages, and some even said that the Prince’s
secret apartments and strong military protection were due less to fear of the
populace than to the pursuit of some private investigation of—”

“Had the flowers got long stalks?” asked Father Brown.

Flambeau stared at him. “What an odd person you are!” he said. “That’s
exactly what old Grimm said. He said the ugliest part of it, he thought—uglier
than the blood and bullet—was that the flowers were quite short, plucked close
under the head.”

“Of course,” said the priest, “when a grown up girl is really picking flowers,
she picks them with plenty of stalk. If she just pulled their heads off, as a child
does, it looks as if—” And he hesitated.

“Well?” inquired the other.

“Well, it looks rather as if she had snatched them nervously, to make an
excuse for being there after—well, after she was there.”

“I know what you’re driving at,” said Flambeau rather gloomily. “But that and
every other suspicion breaks down on the one point—the want of a weapon. He could have been killed, as you say, with lots of other things—even with his own military sash; but we have to explain not how he was killed, but how he was shot. And the fact is we can’t. They had the girl most ruthlessly searched; for, to tell the truth, she was a little suspect, though the niece and ward of the wicked old Chamberlain, Paul Arnhold. But she was very romantic, and was suspected of sympathy with the old revolutionary enthusiasm in her family. All the same, however romantic you are, you can’t imagine a big bullet into a man’s jaw or brain without using a gun or pistol. And there was no pistol, though there were two pistol shots. I leave it to you, my friend.”

“How do you know there were two shots?” asked the little priest.

“There was only one in his head,” said his companion, “but there was another bullet-hole in the sash.”

Father Brown’s smooth brow became suddenly constricted. “Was the other bullet found?” he demanded.

Flambeau started a little. “I don’t think I remember,” he said.

“Hold on! Hold on! Hold on!” cried Brown, frowning more and more, with a quite unusual concentration of curiosity. “Don’t think me rude. Let me think this out for a moment.”

“All right,” said Flambeau, laughing, and finished his beer. A slight breeze stirred the budding trees and blew up into the sky cloudlets of white and pink that seemed to make the sky bluer and the whole coloured scene more quaint. They might have been cherubs flying home to the casements of a sort of celestial nursery. The oldest tower of the castle, the Dragon Tower, stood up as grotesque as the ale-mug, but as homely. Only beyond the tower glimmered the wood in which the man had lain dead.

“What became of this Hedwig eventually?” asked the priest at last.

“She is married to General Schwartz,” said Flambeau. “No doubt you’ve heard of his career, which was rather romantic. He had distinguished himself even, before his exploits at Sadowa and Gravelotte; in fact, he rose from the ranks, which is very unusual even in the smallest of the German . . .”

Father Brown sat up suddenly.

“Rose from the ranks!” he cried, and made a mouth as if to whistle. “Well, well, what a queer story! What a queer way of killing a man; but I suppose it was the only one possible. But to think of hate so patient—”

“What do you mean?” demanded the other. “In what way did they kill the man?”
“They killed him with the sash,” said Brown carefully; and then, as Flambeau protested: “Yes, yes, I know about the bullet. Perhaps I ought to say he died of having a sash. I know it doesn’t sound like having a disease.”

“I suppose,” said Flambeau, “that you’ve got some notion in your head, but it won’t easily get the bullet out of his. As I explained before, he might easily have been strangled. But he was shot. By whom? By what?”

“He was shot by his own orders,” said the priest.

“You mean he committed suicide?”

“I didn’t say by his own wish,” replied Father Brown. “I said by his own orders.”

“Well, anyhow, what is your theory?”

Father Brown laughed. “I am only on my holiday,” he said. “I haven’t got any theories. Only this place reminds me of fairy stories, and, if you like, I’ll tell you a story.”

The little pink clouds, that looked rather like sweet-stuff, had floated up to crown the turrets of the gilt gingerbread castle, and the pink baby fingers of the budding trees seemed spreading and stretching to reach them; the blue sky began to take a bright violet of evening, when Father Brown suddenly spoke again:

“It was on a dismal night, with rain still dropping from the trees and dew already clustering, that Prince Otto of Grossenmark stepped hurriedly out of a side door of the castle and walked swiftly into the wood. One of the innumerable sentries saluted him, but he did not notice it. He had no wish to be specially noticed himself. He was glad when the great trees, grey and already greasy with rain, swallowed him up like a swamp. He had deliberately chosen the least frequented side of his palace, but even that was more frequented than he liked. But there was no particular chance of officious or diplomatic pursuit, for his exit had been a sudden impulse. All the full-dressed diplomatists he left behind were unimportant. He had realized suddenly that he could do without them.

“His great passion was not the much nobler dread of death, but the strange desire of gold. For this legend of the gold he had left Grossenmark and invaded Heiligwaldenstein. For this and only this he had bought the traitor and butchered the hero, for this he had long questioned and cross-questioned the false Chamberlain, until he had come to the conclusion that, touching his ignorance, the renegade really told the truth. For this he had, somewhat reluctantly, paid and promised money on the chance of gaining the larger amount; and for this he had stolen out of his palace like a thief in the rain, for he had thought of another way to get the desire of his eyes, and to get it cheap.
“Away at the upper end of a rambling mountain path to which he was making his way, among the pillared rocks along the ridge that hangs above the town, stood the hermitage, hardly more than a cavern fenced with thorn, in which the third of the great brethren had long hidden himself from the world. He, thought Prince Otto, could have no real reason for refusing to give up the gold. He had known its place for years, and made no effort to find it, even before his new ascetic creed had cut him off from property or pleasures. True, he had been an enemy, but he now professed a duty of having no enemies. Some concession to his cause, some appeal to his principles, would probably get the mere money secret out of him. Otto was no coward, in spite of his network of military precautions, and, in any case, his avarice was stronger than his fears. Nor was there much cause for fear. Since he was certain there were no private arms in the whole principality, he was a hundred times more certain there were none in the Quaker’s little hermitage on the hill, where he lived on herbs, with two old rustic servants, and with no other voice of man for year after year. Prince Otto looked down with something of a grim smile at the bright, square labyrinths of the lamp-lit city below him. For as far as the eye could see there ran the rifles of his friends, and not one pinch of powder for his enemies. Rifles ranked so close even to that mountain path that a cry from him would bring the soldiers rushing up the hill, to say nothing of the fact that the wood and ridge were patrolled at regular intervals; rifles so far away, in the dim woods, dwarfed by distance, beyond the river, that an enemy could not slink into the town by any detour. And round the palace rifles at the west door and the east door, at the north door and the south, and all along the four facades linking them. He was safe.

“It was all the more clear when he had crested the ridge and found how naked was the nest of his old enemy. He found himself on a small platform of rock, broken abruptly by the three corners of precipice. Behind was the black cave, masked with green thorn, so low that it was hard to believe that a man could enter it. In front was the fall of the cliffs and the vast but cloudy vision of the valley. On the small rock platform stood an old bronze lectern or reading-stand, groaning under a great German Bible. The bronze or copper of it had grown green with the eating airs of that exalted place, and Otto had instantly the thought, ‘Even if they had arms, they must be rusted by now.’ Moonrise had already made a deathly dawn behind the crests and crags, and the rain had ceased.

“Behind the lectern, and looking across the valley, stood a very old man in a black robe that fell as straight as the cliffs around him, but whose white hair and
weak voice seemed alike to waver in the wind. He was evidently reading some
daily lesson as part of his religious exercises. ‘They trust in their horses . . . ‘

“‘Sir,’ said the Prince of Heiligwaldenstein, with quite unusual courtesy, ‘I
should like only one word with you.’

“‘. . . and in their chariots,’ went on the old man weakly, ‘but we will trust in
the name of the Lord of Hosts. . . . ‘ His last words were inaudible, but he closed
the book reverently and, being nearly blind, made a groping movement and
gripped the reading-stand. Instantly his two servants slipped out of the low-
browed cavern and supported him. They wore dull-black gowns like his own, but
they had not the frosty silver on the hair, nor the frost-bitten refinement of the
features. They were peasants, Croat or Magyar, with broad, blunt visages and
blinking eyes. For the first time something troubled the Prince, but his courage
and diplomatic sense stood firm.

“‘I fear we have not met,’ he said, ‘since that awful cannonade in which your
poor brother died.’

“‘All my brothers died,’ said the old man, still looking across the valley. Then,
for one instant turning on Otto his drooping, delicate features, and the wintry
hair that seemed to drip over his eyebrows like icicles, he added: ‘You see, I am
dead, too.’

“‘I hope you’ll understand,’ said the Prince, controlling himself almost to a
point of conciliation, ‘that I do not come here to haunt you, as a mere ghost of
those great quarrels. We will not talk about who was right or wrong in that, but
at least there was one point on which we were never wrong, because you were
always right. Whatever is to be said of the policy of your family, no one for one
moment imagines that you were moved by the mere gold; you have proved
yourself above the suspicion that . . . ‘

“The old man in the black gown had hitherto continued to gaze at him with
watery blue eyes and a sort of weak wisdom in his face. But when the word
‘gold’ was said he held out his hand as if in arrest of something, and turned away
his face to the mountains.

“‘He has spoken of gold,’ he said. ‘He has spoken of things not lawful. Let
him cease to speak.’

“Otto had the vice of his Prussian type and tradition, which is to regard
success not as an incident but as a quality. He conceived himself and his like as
perpetually conquering peoples who were perpetually being conquered. Conseque-
ently, he was ill acquainted with the emotion of surprise, and ill prepared for the next
movement, which startled and stiffened him. He had
opened his mouth to answer the hermit, when the mouth was stopped and the voice strangled by a strong, soft gag suddenly twisted round his head like a tourniquet. It was fully forty seconds before he even realized that the two Hungarian servants had done it, and that they had done it with his own military scarf.

“The old man went again weakly to his great brazen-supported Bible, turned over the leaves, with a patience that had something horrible about it, till he came to the Epistle of St James, and then began to read: ‘The tongue is a little member, but—’

“Something in the very voice made the Prince turn suddenly and plunge down the mountain-path he had climbed. He was half-way towards the gardens of the palace before he even tried to tear the strangling scarf from his neck and jaws. He tried again and again, and it was impossible; the men who had knotted that gag knew the difference between what a man can do with his hands in front of him and what he can do with his hands behind his head. His legs were free to leap like an antelope on the mountains, his arms were free to use any gesture or wave any signal, but he could not speak. A dumb devil was in him.

“He had come close to the woods that walled in the castle before he had quite realized what his wordless state meant and was meant to mean. Once more he looked down grimly at the bright, square labyrinths of the lamp-lit city below him, and he smiled no more. He felt himself repeating the phrases of his former mood with a murderous irony. Far as the eye could see ran the rifles of his friends, every one of whom would shoot him dead if he could not answer the challenge. Rifles were so near that the wood and ridge could be patrolled at regular intervals; therefore it was useless to hide in the wood till morning. Rifles were ranked so far away that an enemy could not slink into the town by any detour; therefore it was vain to return to the city by any remote course. A cry from him would bring his soldiers rushing up the hill. But from him no cry would come.

“The moon had risen in strengthening silver, and the sky showed in stripes of bright, nocturnal blue between the black stripes of the pines about the castle. Flowers of some wide and feathery sort—for he had never noticed such things before—were at once luminous and discoloured by the moonshine, and seemed indescribably fantastic as they clustered, as if crawling about the roots of the trees. Perhaps his reason had been suddenly unseated by the unnatural captivity he carried with him, but in that wood he felt something unfathomably German—the fairy tale. He knew with half his mind that he was drawing near to the castle
of an ogre—he had forgotten that he was the ogre. He remembered asking his mother if bears lived in the old park at home. He stooped to pick a flower, as if it were a charm against enchantment. The stalk was stronger than he expected, and broke with a slight snap. Carefully trying to place it in his scarf, he heard the halloo, ‘Who goes there?’ Then he remembered the scarf was not in its usual place.

“He tried to scream and was silent. The second challenge came; and then a shot that shrieked as it came and then was stilled suddenly by impact. Otto of Grossenmark lay very peacefully among the fairy trees, and would do no more harm either with gold or steel; only the silver pencil of the moon would pick out and trace here and there the intricate ornament of his uniform, or the old wrinkles on his brow. May God have mercy on his soul.

“The sentry who had fired, according to the strict orders of the garrison, naturally ran forward to find some trace of his quarry. He was a private named Schwartz, since not unknown in his profession, and what he found was a bald man in uniform, but with his face so bandaged by a kind of mask made of his own military scarf that nothing but open, dead eyes could be seen, glittering stonily in the moonlight. The bullet had gone through the gag into the jaw; that is why there was a shot-hole in the scarf, but only one shot. Naturally, if not correctly, young Schwartz tore off the mysterious silken mask and cast it on the grass; and then he saw whom he had slain.

“We cannot be certain of the next phase. But I incline to believe that there was a fairy tale, after all, in that little wood, horrible as was its occasion. Whether the young lady named Hedwig had any previous knowledge of the soldier she saved and eventually married, or whether she came accidentally upon the accident and their intimacy began that night, we shall probably never know. But we can know, I fancy, that this Hedwig was a heroine, and deserved to marry a man who became something of a hero. She did the bold and the wise thing. She persuaded the sentry to go back to his post, in which place there was nothing to connect him with the disaster; he was but one of the most loyal and orderly of fifty such sentries within call. She remained by the body and gave the alarm; and there was nothing to connect her with the disaster either, since she had not got, and could not have, any firearms.

“Well,” said Father Brown rising cheerfully “I hope they’re happy.”

“Where are you going?” asked his friend.

“I’m going to have another look at that portrait of the Chamberlain, the Arnhold who betrayed his brethren,” answered the priest. “I wonder what part—
I wonder if a man is less a traitor when he is twice a traitor?”

And he ruminated long before the portrait of a white-haired man with black eyebrows and a pink, painted sort of smile that seemed to contradict the black warning in his eyes.
THE MAN WHO
WAS THURSDAY

A NIGHTMARE

G. K. CHESTERTON
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TO EDMUND CLERIHEW BENTLEY

CHAPTER I
THE TWO POETS OF SAFFRON PARK

CHAPTER II
THE SECRET OF GABRIEL SYME

CHAPTER III
THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY

CHAPTER IV
THE TALE OF A DETECTIVE

CHAPTER V
THE FEAST OF FEAR

CHAPTER VI
THE EXPOSURE

CHAPTER VII
THE UNACCOUNTABLE CONDUCT OF PROFESSOR DE WORMS

CHAPTER VIII
THE PROFESSOR EXPLAINS

CHAPTER IX
THE MAN IN SPECTACLES

CHAPTER X
THE DUEL

CHAPTER XI
THE CRIMINALS CHASE THE POLICE

CHAPTER XII
THE EARTH IN ANARCHY

CHAPTER XIII
THE PURSUIT OF THE PRESIDENT

CHAPTER XIV
THE SIX PHILOSOPHERS

CHAPTER XV
THE ACCUSER
TO EDMUND CLERIHEW BENTLEY

A cloud was on the mind of men, and wailing went the weather, Yea, a sick cloud upon the soul when we were boys together. Science announced nonentity and art admired decay; The world was old and ended: but you and I were gay; Round us in antic order their crippled vices came—Lust that had lost its laughter, fear that had lost its shame. Like the white lock of Whistler, that lit our aimless gloom, Men showed their own white feather as proudly as a plume. Life was a fly that faded, and death a drone that stung; The world was very old indeed when you and I were young. They twisted even decent sin to shapes not to be named: Men were ashamed of honour; but we were not ashamed. Weak if we were and foolish, not thus we failed, not thus; When that black Baal blocked the heavens he had no hymns from us Children we were—our forts of sand were even as weak as we, High as they went we piled them up to break that bitter sea. Fools as we were in motley, all jangling and absurd, When all church bells were silent our cap and bells were heard.

Not all unhelped we held the fort, our tiny flags unfurled; Some giants laboured in that cloud to lift it from the world. I find again the book we found, I feel the hour that flings Far out of fish-shaped Paumanok some cry of cleaner things; And the Green Carnation withered, as in forest fires that pass, Roared in the wind of all the world ten million leaves of grass; Or sane and sweet and sudden as a bird sings in the rain—Truth out of Tusitala spoke and pleasure out of pain. Yea, cool and clear and sudden as a bird sings in the grey, Dunedin to Samoa spoke, and darkness unto day. But we were young; we lived to see God break their bitter charms. God and the good Republic come riding back in arms: We have seen the City of Mansoul, even as it rocked, relieved—Blessed are they who did not see, but being blind, believed.

This is a tale of those old fears, even of those emptied hells, And none but you shall understand the true thing that it tells—Of what colossal gods of shame could cow men and yet crash, Of what huge devils hid the stars, yet fell at a pistol flash. The doubts that were so plain to chase, so dreadful to withstand—Oh, who shall understand but you; yea, who shall understand? The doubts that drove us through the night as we two talked amain, And day had broken on the streets e’er it broke upon the brain. Between us, by the peace of God, such truth can now be told; Yea, there is strength in striking root and good in growing old. We have found common things at last and marriage and a creed, And I may
safely write it now, and you may safely read.

G. K. C.
CHAPTER I

THE TWO POETS OF SAFFRON PARK

THE suburb of Saffron Park lay on the sunset side of London, as red and ragged as a cloud of sunset. It was built of a bright brick throughout; its sky-line was fantastic, and even its ground plan was wild. It had been the outburst of a speculative builder, faintly tinged with art, who called its architecture sometimes Elizabethan and sometimes Queen Anne, apparently under the impression that the two sovereigns were identical. It was described with some justice as an artistic colony, though it never in any definable way produced any art. But although its pretensions to be an intellectual centre were a little vague, its pretensions to be a pleasant place were quite indisputable. The stranger who looked for the first time at the quaint red houses could only think how very oddly shaped the people must be who could fit in to them. Nor when he met the people was he disappointed in this respect. The place was not only pleasant, but perfect, if once he could regard it not as a deception but rather as a dream. Even if the people were not “artists,” the whole was nevertheless artistic. That young man with the long, auburn hair and the impudent face—that young man was not really a poet; but surely he was a poem. That old gentleman with the wild, white beard and the wild, white hat—that venerable humbug was not really a philosopher; but at least he was the cause of philosophy in others. That scientific gentleman with the bald, egg-like head and the bare, bird-like neck had no real right to the airs of science that he assumed. He had not discovered anything new in biology; but what biological creature could he have discovered more singular than himself? Thus, and thus only, the whole place had properly to be regarded; it had to be considered not so much as a workshop for artists, but as a frail but finished work of art. A man who stepped into its social atmosphere felt as if he had stepped into a written comedy.

More especially this attractive unreality fell upon it about nightfall, when the extravagant roofs were dark against the afterglow and the whole insane village seemed as separate as a drifting cloud. This again was more strongly true of the many nights of local festivity, when the little gardens were often illuminated, and the big Chinese lanterns glowed in the dwarfish trees like some fierce and monstrous fruit. And this was strongest of all on one particular evening, still vaguely remembered in the locality, of which the auburn-haired poet was the
hero. It was not by any means the only evening of which he was the hero. On many nights those passing by his little back garden might hear his high, didactic voice laying down the law to men and particularly to women. The attitude of women in such cases was indeed one of the paradoxes of the place. Most of the women were of the kind vaguely called emancipated, and professed some protest against male supremacy. Yet these new women would always pay to a man the extravagant compliment which no ordinary woman ever pays to him, that of listening while he is talking. And Mr. Lucian Gregory, the red-haired poet, was really (in some sense) a man worth listening to, even if one only laughed at the end of it. He put the old cant of the lawlessness of art and the art of lawlessness with a certain impudent freshness which gave at least a momentary pleasure. He was helped in some degree by the arresting oddity of his appearance, which he worked, as the phrase goes, for all it was worth. His dark red hair parted in the middle was literally like a woman’s, and curved into the slow curls of a virgin in a pre-Raphaelite picture. From within this almost saintly oval, however, his face projected suddenly broad and brutal, the chin carried forward with a look of cockney contempt. This combination at once tickled and terrified the nerves of a neurotic population. He seemed like a walking blasphemy, a blend of the angel and the ape.

This particular evening, if it is remembered for nothing else, will be remembered in that place for its strange sunset. It looked like the end of the world. All the heaven seemed covered with a quite vivid and palpable plumage; you could only say that the sky was full of feathers, and of feathers that almost brushed the face. Across the great part of the dome they were grey, with the strangest tints of violet and mauve and an unnatural pink or pale green; but towards the west the whole grew past description, transparent and passionate, and the last red-hot plumes of it covered up the sun like something too good to be seen. The whole was so close about the earth, as to express nothing but a violent secrecy. The very empyrean seemed to be a secret. It expressed that splendid smallness which is the soul of local patriotism. The very sky seemed small.

I say that there are some inhabitants who may remember the evening if only by that oppressive sky. There are others who may remember it because it marked the first appearance in the place of the second poet of Saffron Park. For a long time the red-haired revolutionary had reigned without a rival; it was upon the night of the sunset that his solitude suddenly ended. The new poet, who introduced himself by the name of Gabriel Syme was a very mild-looking
mortal, with a fair, pointed beard and faint, yellow hair. But an impression grew that he was less meek than he looked. He signalised his entrance by differing with the established poet, Gregory, upon the whole nature of poetry. He said that he (Syme) was poet of law, a poet of order; nay, he said he was a poet of respectability. So all the Saffron Parkers looked at him as if he had that moment fallen out of that impossible sky.

In fact, Mr. Lucian Gregory, the anarchic poet, connected the two events. “It may well be,” he said, in his sudden lyrical manner, “it may well be on such a night of clouds and cruel colours that there is brought forth upon the earth such a portent as a respectable poet. You say you are a poet of law; I say you are a contradiction in terms. I only wonder there were not comets and earthquakes on the night you appeared in this garden.”

The man with the meek blue eyes and the pale, pointed beard endured these thunders with a certain submissive solemnity. The third party of the group, Gregory’s sister Rosamond, who had her brother’s braids of red hair, but a kindlier face underneath them, laughed with such mixture of admiration and disapproval as she gave commonly to the family oracle.

Gregory resumed in high oratorical good humour. “An artist is identical with an anarchist,” he cried. “You might transpose the words anywhere. An anarchist is an artist. The man who throws a bomb is an artist, because he prefers a great moment to everything. He sees how much more valuable is one burst of blazing light, one peal of perfect thunder, than the mere common bodies of a few shapeless policemen. An artist disregards all governments, abolishes all conventions. The poet delights in disorder only. If it were not so, the most poetical thing in the world would be the Underground Railway.”

“So it is,” said Mr. Syme.

“Nonsense!” said Gregory, who was very rational when anyone else attempted paradox. “Why do all the clerks and navvies in the railway trains look so sad and tired, so very sad and tired? I will tell you. It is because they know that the train is going right. It is because they know that whatever place they have taken a ticket for that place they will reach. It is because after they have passed Sloane Square they know that the next station must be Victoria, and nothing but Victoria. Oh, their wild rapture! oh, their eyes like stars and their souls again in Eden, if the next station were unaccountably Baker Street!”

“It is you who are unpoetical,” replied the poet Syme. “If what you say of clerks is true, they can only be as prosaic as your poetry. The rare, strange thing
is to hit the mark; the gross, obvious thing is to miss it. We feel it is epical when man with one wild arrow strikes a distant bird. Is it not also epical when man with one wild engine strikes a distant station? Chaos is dull; because in chaos the train might indeed go anywhere, to Baker Street or to Bagdad. But man is a magician, and his whole magic is in this, that he does say Victoria, and lo! it is Victoria. No, take your books of mere poetry and prose; let me read a time table, with tears of pride. Take your Byron, who commemorates the defeats of man; give me Bradshaw, who commemorates his victories. Give me Bradshaw, I say!

“Must you go?” inquired Gregory sarcastically.

“I tell you,” went on Syme with passion, “that every time a train comes in I feel that it has broken past batteries of besiegers, and that man has won a battle against chaos. You say contemptuously that when one has left Sloane Square one must come to Victoria. I say that one might do a thousand things instead, and that whenever I really come there I have the sense of hairbreadth escape. And when I hear the guard shout out the word ‘Victoria,’ it is not an unmeaning word. It is to me the cry of a herald announcing conquest. It is to me indeed ‘Victoria;’ it is the victory of Adam.”

Gregory wagged his heavy, red head with a slow and sad smile.

“And even then,” he said, “we poets always ask the question, ‘And what is Victoria now that you have got there?’ You think Victoria is like the New Jerusalem. We know that the New Jerusalem will only be like Victoria. Yes, the poet will be discontented even in the streets of heaven. The poet is always in revolt.”

“There again,” said Syme irritably, “what is there poetical about being in revolt? You might as well say that it is poetical to be sea-sick. Being sick is a revolt. Both being sick and being rebellious may be the wholesome thing on certain desperate occasions; but I’m hanged if I can see why they are poetical. Revolt in the abstract is—revolting. It’s mere vomiting.”

The girl winced for a flash at the unpleasant word, but Syme was too hot to heed her.

“It is things going right,” he cried, “that is poetical! Our digestions, for instance, going sacredly and silently right, that is the foundation of all poetry. Yes, the most poetical thing, more poetical than the flowers, more poetical than the stars—the most poetical thing in the world is not being sick.”

“Really,” said Gregory superciliously, “the examples you choose—”

“I beg your pardon,” said Syme grimly, “I forgot we had abolished all conventions.”
For the first time a red patch appeared on Gregory’s forehead.
“You don’t expect me,” he said, “to revolutionise society on this lawn?”
Syme looked straight into his eyes and smiled sweetly.
“No, I don’t,” he said; “but I suppose that if you were serious about your anarchism, that is exactly what you would do.”
Gregory’s big bull’s eyes blinked suddenly like those of an angry lion, and one could almost fancy that his red mane rose.
“Don’t you think, then,” he said in a dangerous voice, “that I am serious about my anarchism?”
“I beg your pardon?” said Syme.
“Am I not serious about my anarchism?” cried Gregory, with knotted fists.
“My dear fellow!” said Syme, and strolled away.
With surprise, but with a curious pleasure, he found Rosamond Gregory still in his company.
“Mr. Syme,” she said, “do the people who talk like you and my brother often mean what they say? Do you mean what you say now?”
Syme smiled.
“Do you?” he asked.
“What do you mean?” asked the girl, with grave eyes.
“My dear Miss Gregory,” said Syme gently, “there are many kinds of sincerity and insincerity. When you say ‘thank you’ for the salt, do you mean what you say? No. When you say ‘the world is round,’ do you mean what you say? No. It is true, but you don’t mean it. Now, sometimes a man like your brother really finds a thing he does mean. It may be only a half-truth, quarter-truth, tenth-truth; but then he says more than he means—from sheer force of meaning it.”
She was looking at him from under level brows; her face was grave and open, and there had fallen upon it the shadow of that unreasoning responsibility which is at the bottom of the most frivolous woman, the maternal watch which is as old as the world.
“Is he really an anarchist, then?” she asked.
“Only in that sense I speak of,” replied Syme; “or if you prefer it, in that nonsense.”
She drew her broad brows together and said abruptly—
“He wouldn’t really use—bombs or that sort of thing?”
Syme broke into a great laugh, that seemed too large for his slight and somewhat dandified figure.
“Good Lord, no!” he said, “that has to be done anonymously.”
And at that the corners of her own mouth broke into a smile, and she thought with a simultaneous pleasure of Gregory’s absurdity and of his safety.

Syme strolled with her to a seat in the corner of the garden, and continued to pour out his opinions. For he was a sincere man, and in spite of his superficial airs and graces, at root a humble one. And it is always the humble man who talks too much; the proud man watches himself too closely. He defended respectability with violence and exaggeration. He grew passionate in his praise of tidiness and propriety. All the time there was a smell of lilac all round him. Once he heard very faintly in some distant street a barrel-organ begin to play, and it seemed to him that his heroic words were moving to a tiny tune from under or beyond the world.

He stared and talked at the girl’s red hair and amused face for what seemed to be a few minutes; and then, feeling that the groups in such a place should mix, rose to his feet. To his astonishment, he discovered the whole garden empty. Everyone had gone long ago, and he went himself with a rather hurried apology. He left with a sense of champagne in his head, which he could not afterwards explain. In the wild events which were to follow this girl had no part at all; he never saw her again until all his tale was over. And yet, in some indescribable way, she kept recurring like a motive in music through all his mad adventures afterwards, and the glory of her strange hair ran like a red thread through those dark and ill-drawn tapestries of the night. For what followed was so improbable, that it might well have been a dream.

When Syme went out into the starlit street, he found it for the moment empty. Then he realised (in some odd way) that the silence was rather a living silence than a dead one. Directly outside the door stood a street lamp, whose gleam gilded the leaves of the tree that bent out over the fence behind him. About a foot from the lamp-post stood a figure almost as rigid and motionless as the lamp-post itself. The tall hat and long frock coat were black; the face, in an abrupt shadow, was almost as dark. Only a fringe of fiery hair against the light, and also something aggressive in the attitude, proclaimed that it was the poet Gregory. He had something of the look of a masked bravo waiting sword in hand for his foe.

He made a sort of doubtful salute, which Syme somewhat more formally returned.

“I was waiting for you,” said Gregory. “Might I have a moment’s conversation?”

“Certainly. About what?” asked Syme in a sort of weak wonder.
Gregory struck out with his stick at the lamp-post, and then at the tree. “About this and this,” he cried; “about order and anarchy. There is your precious order, that lean, iron lamp, ugly and barren; and there is anarchy, rich, living, reproducing itself—there is anarchy, splendid in green and gold.”

“All the same,” replied Syme patiently, “just at present you only see the tree by the light of the lamp. I wonder when you would ever see the lamp by the light of the tree.” Then after a pause he said, “But may I ask if you have been standing out here in the dark only to resume our little argument?”

“No,” cried out Gregory, in a voice that rang down the street, “I did not stand here to resume our argument, but to end it for ever.”

The silence fell again, and Syme, though he understood nothing, listened instinctively for something serious. Gregory began in a smooth voice and with a rather bewildering smile.

“Mr. Syme,” he said, “this evening you succeeded in doing something rather remarkable. You did something to me that no man born of woman has ever succeeded in doing before.”

“Indeed!”

“Now I remember,” resumed Gregory reflectively, “one other person succeeded in doing it. The captain of a penny steamer (if I remember correctly) at Southend. You have irritated me.”

“I am very sorry,” replied Syme with gravity.

“I am afraid my fury and your insult are too shocking to be wiped out even with an apology,” said Gregory very calmly. “No duel could wipe it out. If I struck you dead I could not wipe it out. There is only one way by which that insult can be erased, and that way I choose. I am going, at the possible sacrifice of my life and honour, to prove to you that you were wrong in what you said.”

“In what I said?”

“You said I was not serious about being an anarchist.”

“There are degrees of seriousness,” replied Syme. “I have never doubted that you were perfectly sincere in this sense, that you thought what you said well worth saying, that you thought a paradox might wake men up to a neglected truth.”

Gregory stared at him steadily and painfully.

“And in no other sense,” he asked, “you think me serious? You think me a flaneur who lets fall occasional truths. You do not think that in a deeper, a more deadly sense, I am serious.”

Syme struck his stick violently on the stones of the road.
“Serious!” he cried. “Good Lord! is this street serious? Are these damned Chinese lanterns serious? Is the whole caboodle serious? One comes here and talks a pack of bosh, and perhaps some sense as well, but I should think very little of a man who didn’t keep something in the background of his life that was more serious than all this talking—something more serious, whether it was religion or only drink.”

“Very well,” said Gregory, his face darkening, “you shall see something more serious than either drink or religion.”

Syme stood waiting with his usual air of mildness until Gregory again opened his lips.

“You spoke just now of having a religion. Is it really true that you have one?”

“Oh,” said Syme with a beaming smile, “we are all Catholics now.”

“Then may I ask you to swear by whatever gods or saints your religion involves that you will not reveal what I am now going to tell you to any son of Adam, and especially not to the police? Will you swear that! If you will take upon yourself this awful abnegation if you will consent to burden your soul with a vow that you should never make and a knowledge you should never dream about, I will promise you in return—”

“You will promise me in return?” inquired Syme, as the other paused.

“I will promise you a very entertaining evening.” Syme suddenly took off his hat.

“Your offer,” he said, “is far too idiotic to be declined. You say that a poet is always an anarchist. I disagree; but I hope at least that he is always a sportsman. Permit me, here and now, to swear as a Christian, and promise as a good comrade and a fellow-artist, that I will not report anything of this, whatever it is, to the police. And now, in the name of Colney Hatch, what is it?”

“I think,” said Gregory, with placid irrelevancy, “that we will call a cab.”

He gave two long whistles, and a hansom came rattling down the road. The two got into it in silence. Gregory gave through the trap the address of an obscure public-house on the Chiswick bank of the river. The cab whisked itself away again, and in it these two fantasistics quitted their fantastic town.
CHAPTER II

THE SECRET OF GABRIEL SYME

THE cab pulled up before a particularly dreary and greasy beershop, into which Gregory rapidly conducted his companion. They seated themselves in a close and dim sort of bar-parlour, at a stained wooden table with one wooden leg. The room was so small and dark, that very little could be seen of the attendant who was summoned, beyond a vague and dark impression of something bulky and bearded.

“Will you take a little supper?” asked Gregory politely. “The pate de foie gras is not good here, but I can recommend the game.”

Syme received the remark with stolidity, imagining it to be a joke. Accepting the vein of humour, he said, with a well-bred indifference—

“Oh, bring me some lobster mayonnaise.”

To his indescribable astonishment, the man only said “Certainly, sir!” and went away apparently to get it.

“What will you drink?” resumed Gregory, with the same careless yet apologetic air. “I shall only have a crepe de menthe myself; I have dined. But the champagne can really be trusted. Do let me start you with a half-bottle of Pommery at least?”

“Thank you!” said the motionless Syme. “You are very good.”

His further attempts at conversation, somewhat disorganised in themselves, were cut short finally as by a thunderbolt by the actual appearance of the lobster. Syme tasted it, and found it particularly good. Then he suddenly began to eat with great rapidity and appetite.

“Excuse me if I enjoy myself rather obviously!” he said to Gregory, smiling. “I don’t often have the luck to have a dream like this. It is new to me for a nightmare to lead to a lobster. It is commonly the other way.”

“You are not asleep, I assure you,” said Gregory. “You are, on the contrary, close to the most actual and rousing moment of your existence. Ah, here comes your champagne! I admit that there may be a slight disproportion, let us say, between the inner arrangements of this excellent hotel and its simple and unpretentious exterior. But that is all our modesty. We are the most modest men that ever lived on earth.”

“And who are we?” asked Syme, emptying his champagne glass.
“It is quite simple,” replied Gregory. “We are the serious anarchists, in whom you do not believe.”

“Oh!” said Syme shortly. “You do yourselves well in drinks.”

“Yes, we are serious about everything,” answered Gregory.

Then after a pause he added—

“If in a few moments this table begins to turn round a little, don’t put it down to your inroads into the champagne. I don’t wish you to do yourself an injustice.”

“Well, if I am not drunk, I am mad,” replied Syme with perfect calm; “but I trust I can behave like a gentleman in either condition. May I smoke?”

“Certainly!” said Gregory, producing a cigar-case. “Try one of mine.”

Syme took the cigar, clipped the end off with a cigar-cutter out of his waistcoat pocket, put it in his mouth, lit it slowly, and let out a long cloud of smoke. It is not a little to his credit that he performed these rites with so much composure, for almost before he had begun them the table at which he sat had begun to revolve, first slowly, and then rapidly, as if at an insane seance.

“You must not mind it,” said Gregory; “it’s a kind of screw.”

“Quite so,” said Syme placidly, “a kind of screw. How simple that is!”

The next moment the smoke of his cigar, which had been waiving across the room in snaky twists, went straight up as if from a factory chimney, and the two, with their chairs and table, shot down through the floor as if the earth had swallowed them. They went rattling down a kind of roaring chimney as rapidly as a lift cut loose, and they came with an abrupt bump to the bottom. But when Gregory threw open a pair of doors and let in a red subterranean light, Syme was still smoking with one leg thrown over the other, and had not turned a yellow hair.

Gregory led him down a low, vaulted passage, at the end of which was the red light. It was an enormous crimson lantern, nearly as big as a fireplace, fixed over a small but heavy iron door. In the door there was a sort of hatchway or grating, and on this Gregory struck five times. A heavy voice with a foreign accent asked him who he was. To this he gave the more or less unexpected reply, “Mr. Joseph Chamberlain.” The heavy hinges began to move; it was obviously some kind of password.

Inside the doorway the passage gleamed as if it were lined with a network of steel. On a second glance, Syme saw that the glittering pattern was really made up of ranks and ranks of rifles and revolvers, closely packed or interlocked.

“I must ask you to forgive me all these formalities,” said Gregory; “we have to
be very strict here.”

“Oh, don’t apologise,” said Syme. “I know your passion for law and order,” and he stepped into the passage lined with the steel weapons. With his long, fair hair and rather foppish frock-coat, he looked a singularly frail and fanciful figure as he walked down that shining avenue of death.

They passed through several such passages, and came out at last into a queer steel chamber with curved walls, almost spherical in shape, but presenting, with its tiers of benches, something of the appearance of a scientific lecture-theatre. There were no rifles or pistols in this apartment, but round the walls of it were hung more dubious and dreadful shapes, things that looked like the bulbs of iron plants, or the eggs of iron birds. They were bombs, and the very room itself seemed like the inside of a bomb. Syme knocked his cigar ash off against the wall, and went in.

“And now, my dear Mr. Syme,” said Gregory, throwing himself in an expansive manner on the bench under the largest bomb, “now we are quite cosy, so let us talk properly. Now no human words can give you any notion of why I brought you here. It was one of those quite arbitrary emotions, like jumping off a cliff or falling in love. Suffice it to say that you were an inexpressibly irritating fellow, and, to do you justice, you are still. I would break twenty oaths of secrecy for the pleasure of taking you down a peg. That way you have of lighting a cigar would make a priest break the seal of confession. Well, you said that you were quite certain I was not a serious anarchist. Does this place strike you as being serious?”

“It does seem to have a moral under all its gaiety,” assented Syme; “but may I ask you two questions? You need not fear to give me information, because, as you remember, you very wisely extorted from me a promise not to tell the police, a promise I shall certainly keep. So it is in mere curiosity that I make my queries. First of all, what is it really all about? What is it you object to? You want to abolish Government?”

“To abolish God!” said Gregory, opening the eyes of a fanatic. “We do not only want to upset a few despotisms and police regulations; that sort of anarchism does exist, but it is a mere branch of the Nonconformists. We dig deeper and we blow you higher. We wish to deny all those arbitrary distinctions of vice and virtue, honour and treachery, upon which mere rebels base themselves. The silly sentimentalists of the French Revolution talked of the Rights of Man! We hate Rights as we hate Wrongs. We have abolished Right and Wrong.”
“And Right and Left,” said Syme with a simple eagerness, “I hope you will abolish them too. They are much more troublesome to me.”

“You spoke of a second question,” snapped Gregory.

“With pleasure,” resumed Syme. “In all your present acts and surroundings there is a scientific attempt at secrecy. I have an aunt who lived over a shop, but this is the first time I have found people living from preference under a public-house. You have a heavy iron door. You cannot pass it without submitting to the humiliation of calling yourself Mr. Chamberlain. You surround yourself with steel instruments which make the place, if I may say so, more impressive than homelike. May I ask why, after taking all this trouble to barricade yourselves in the bowels of the earth, you then parade your whole secret by talking about anarchism to every silly woman in Saffron Park?”

Gregory smiled.

“The answer is simple,” he said. “I told you I was a serious anarchist, and you did not believe me. Nor do they believe me. Unless I took them into this infernal room they would not believe me.”

Syme smoked thoughtfully, and looked at him with interest. Gregory went on.

“The history of the thing might amuse you,” he said. “When first I became one of the New Anarchists I tried all kinds of respectable disguises. I dressed up as a bishop. I read up all about bishops in our anarchist pamphlets, in Superstition the Vampire and Priests of Prey. I certainly understood from them that bishops are strange and terrible old men keeping a cruel secret from mankind. I was misinformed. When on my first appearing in episcopal gaiters in a drawing-room I cried out in a voice of thunder, ‘Down! down! presumptuous human reason!’ they found out in some way that I was not a bishop at all. I was nabbed at once. Then I made up as a millionaire; but I defended Capital with so much intelligence that a fool could see that I was quite poor. Then I tried being a major. Now I am a humanitarian myself, but I have, I hope, enough intellectual breadth to understand the position of those who, like Nietzsche, admire violence —the proud, mad war of Nature and all that, you know. I threw myself into the major. I drew my sword and waved it constantly. I called out ‘Blood!’ abstractedly, like a man calling for wine. I often said, ‘Let the weak perish; it is the Law.’ Well, well, it seems majors don’t do this. I was nabbed again. At last I went in despair to the President of the Central Anarchist Council, who is the greatest man in Europe.”

“What is his name?” asked Syme.

“You would not know it,” answered Gregory. “That is his greatness. Caesar
and Napoleon put all their genius into being heard of, and they were heard of. He puts all his genius into not being heard of, and he is not heard of. But you cannot be for five minutes in the room with him without feeling that Caesar and Napoleon would have been children in his hands.”

He was silent and even pale for a moment, and then resumed—

“But whenever he gives advice it is always something as startling as an epigram, and yet as practical as the Bank of England. I said to him, ‘What disguise will hide me from the world? What can I find more respectable than bishops and majors?’ He looked at me with his large but indecipherable face. ‘You want a safe disguise, do you? You want a dress which will guarantee you harmless; a dress in which no one would ever look for a bomb?’ I nodded. He suddenly lifted his lion’s voice. ‘Why, then, dress up as an anarchist, you fool!’ he roared so that the room shook. ‘Nobody will ever expect you to do anything dangerous then.’ And he turned his broad back on me without another word. I took his advice, and have never regretted it. I preached blood and murder to those women day and night, and—by God!—they would let me wheel their perambulators.”

Syme sat watching him with some respect in his large, blue eyes.

“You took me in,” he said. “It is really a smart dodge.”

Then after a pause he added—

“What do you call this tremendous President of yours?”

“We generally call him Sunday,” replied Gregory with simplicity. “You see, there are seven members of the Central Anarchist Council, and they are named after days of the week. He is called Sunday, by some of his admirers Bloody Sunday. It is curious you should mention the matter, because the very night you have dropped in (if I may so express it) is the night on which our London branch, which assembles in this room, has to elect its own deputy to fill a vacancy in the Council. The gentleman who has for some time past played, with propriety and general applause, the difficult part of Thursday, has died quite suddenly. Consequently, we have called a meeting this very evening to elect a successor.”

He got to his feet and strolled across the room with a sort of smiling embarrassment.

“I feel somehow as if you were my mother, Syme,” he continued casually. “I feel that I can confide anything to you, as you have promised to tell nobody. In fact, I will confide to you something that I would not say in so many words to the anarchists who will be coming to the room in about ten minutes. We shall, of
course, go through a form of election; but I don’t mind telling you that it is practically certain what the result will be.” He looked down for a moment modestly. “It is almost a settled thing that I am to be Thursday.”

“My dear fellow.” said Syme heartily, “I congratulate you. A great career!”

Gregory smiled in deprecation, and walked across the room, talking rapidly.

“As a matter of fact, everything is ready for me on this table,” he said, “and the ceremony will probably be the shortest possible.”

Syme also strolled across to the table, and found lying across it a walking-stick, which turned out on examination to be a sword-stick, a large Colt’s revolver, a sandwich case, and a formidable flask of brandy. Over the chair, beside the table, was thrown a heavy-looking cape or cloak.

“I have only to get the form of election finished,” continued Gregory with animation, “then I snatch up this cloak and stick, stuff these other things into my pocket, step out of a door in this cavern, which opens on the river, where there is a steam-tug already waiting for me, and then—then—oh, the wild joy of being Thursday!” And he clasped his hands.

Syme, who had sat down once more with his usual insolent languor, got to his feet with an unusual air of hesitation.

“Why is it,” he asked vaguely, “that I think you are quite a decent fellow? Why do I positively like you, Gregory?” He paused a moment, and then added with a sort of fresh curiosity, “Is it because you are such an ass?”

There was a thoughtful silence again, and then he cried out—

“Well, damn it all! this is the funniest situation I have ever been in in my life, and I am going to act accordingly. Gregory, I gave you a promise before I came into this place. That promise I would keep under red-hot pincers. Would you give me, for my own safety, a little promise of the same kind?”

“A promise?” asked Gregory, wondering.

“Yes,” said Syme very seriously, “a promise. I swore before God that I would not tell your secret to the police. Will you swear by Humanity, or whatever beastly thing you believe in, that you will not tell my secret to the anarchists?”

“Your secret?” asked the staring Gregory. “Have you got a secret?”

“Yes,” said Syme, “I have a secret.” Then after a pause, “Will you swear?”

Gregory glared at him gravely for a few moments, and then said abruptly—

“You must have bewitched me, but I feel a furious curiosity about you. Yes, I will swear not to tell the anarchists anything you tell me. But look sharp, for they will be here in a couple of minutes.”

Syme rose slowly to his feet and thrust his long, white hands into his long,
grey trousers’ pockets. Almost as he did so there came five knocks on the outer grating, proclaiming the arrival of the first of the conspirators.

“Well,” said Syme slowly, “I don’t know how to tell you the truth more shortly than by saying that your expedient of dressing up as an aimless poet is not confined to you or your President. We have known the dodge for some time at Scotland Yard.”

Gregory tried to spring up straight, but he swayed thrice.

“What do you say?” he asked in an inhuman voice.

“Yes,” said Syme simply, “I am a police detective. But I think I hear your friends coming.”

From the doorway there came a murmur of “Mr. Joseph Chamberlain.” It was repeated twice and thrice, and then thirty times, and the crowd of Joseph Chamberlains (a solemn thought) could be heard trampling down the corridor.
CHAPTER III

THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY

BEFORE one of the fresh faces could appear at the doorway, Gregory’s stunned surprise had fallen from him. He was beside the table with a bound, and a noise in his throat like a wild beast. He caught up the Colt’s revolver and took aim at Syme. Syme did not flinch, but he put up a pale and polite hand.

“Don’t be such a silly man,” he said, with the effeminate dignity of a curate. “Don’t you see it’s not necessary? Don’t you see that we’re both in the same boat? Yes, and jolly sea-sick.”

Gregory could not speak, but he could not fire either, and he looked his question.

“Don’t you see we’ve checkmated each other?” cried Syme. “I can’t tell the police you are an anarchist. You can’t tell the anarchists I’m a policeman. I can only watch you, knowing what you are; you can only watch me, knowing what I am. In short, it’s a lonely, intellectual duel, my head against yours. I’m a policeman deprived of the help of the police. You, my poor fellow, are an anarchist deprived of the help of that law and organisation which is so essential to anarchy. The one solitary difference is in your favour. You are not surrounded by inquisitive policemen; I am surrounded by inquisitive anarchists. I cannot betray you, but I might betray myself. Come, come! wait and see me betray myself. I shall do it so nicely.”

Gregory put the pistol slowly down, still staring at Syme as if he were a sea-monster.

“I don’t believe in immortality,” he said at last, “but if, after all this, you were to break your word, God would make a hell only for you, to howl in for ever.”

“I shall not break my word,” said Syme sternly, “nor will you break yours. Here are your friends.”

The mass of the anarchists entered the room heavily, with a slouching and somewhat weary gait; but one little man, with a black beard and glasses—a man somewhat of the type of Mr. Tim Healy—detached himself, and bustled forward with some papers in his hand.

“Comrade Gregory,” he said, “I suppose this man is a delegate?”

Gregory, taken by surprise, looked down and muttered the name of Syme; but Syme replied almost pertly—
“I am glad to see that your gate is well enough guarded to make it hard for anyone to be here who was not a delegate.”

The brow of the little man with the black beard was, however, still contracted with something like suspicion.

“What branch do you represent?” he asked sharply.

“I should hardly call it a branch,” said Syme, laughing; “I should call it at the very least a root.”

“What do you mean?”

“The fact is,” said Syme serenely, “the truth is I am a Sabbatarian. I have been specially sent here to see that you show a due observance of Sunday.”

The little man dropped one of his papers, and a flicker of fear went over all the faces of the group. Evidently the awful President, whose name was Sunday, did sometimes send down such irregular ambassadors to such branch meetings.

“Well, comrade,” said the man with the papers after a pause, “I suppose we’d better give you a seat in the meeting?”

“If you ask my advice as a friend,” said Syme with severe benevolence, “I think you’d better.”

When Gregory heard the dangerous dialogue end, with a sudden safety for his rival, he rose abruptly and paced the floor in painful thought. He was, indeed, in an agony of diplomacy. It was clear that Syme’s inspired impudence was likely to bring him out of all merely accidental dilemmas. Little was to be hoped from them. He could not himself betray Syme, partly from honour, but partly also because, if he betrayed him and for some reason failed to destroy him, the Syme who escaped would be a Syme freed from all obligation of secrecy, a Syme who would simply walk to the nearest police station. After all, it was only one night’s discussion, and only one detective who would know of it. He would let out as little as possible of their plans that night, and then let Syme go, and chance it.

He strode across to the group of anarchists, which was already distributing itself along the benches.

“I think it is time we began,” he said; “the steam-tug is waiting on the river already. I move that Comrade Buttons takes the chair.”

This being approved by a show of hands, the little man with the papers slipped into the presidential seat.

“Comrades,” he began, as sharp as a pistol-shot, “our meeting tonight is important, though it need not be long. This branch has always had the honour of electing Thursdays for the Central European Council. We have elected many and splendid Thursdays. We all lament the sad decease of the heroic worker who
occupied the post until last week. As you know, his services to the cause were considerable. He organised the great dynamite coup of Brighton which, under happier circumstances, ought to have killed everybody on the pier. As you also know, his death was as self-denying as his life, for he died through his faith in a hygienic mixture of chalk and water as a substitute for milk, which beverage he regarded as barbaric, and as involving cruelty to the cow. Cruelty, or anything approaching to cruelty, revolted him always. But it is not to acclaim his virtues that we are met, but for a harder task. It is difficult properly to praise his qualities, but it is more difficult to replace them. Upon you, comrades, it devolves this evening to choose out of the company present the man who shall be Thursday. If any comrade suggests a name I will put it to the vote. If no comrade suggests a name, I can only tell myself that that dear dynamiter, who is gone from us, has carried into the unknowable abysses the last secret of his virtue and his innocence.”

There was a stir of almost inaudible applause, such as is sometimes heard in church. Then a large old man, with a long and venerable white beard, perhaps the only real working-man present, rose lumberingly and said—

“I move that Comrade Gregory be elected Thursday,” and sat lumberingly down again.

“Does anyone second?” asked the chairman.

A little man with a velvet coat and pointed beard seconded.

“Before I put the matter to the vote,” said the chairman, “I will call on Comrade Gregory to make a statement.”

Gregory rose amid a great rumble of applause. His face was deadly pale, so that by contrast his queer red hair looked almost scarlet. But he was smiling and altogether at ease. He had made up his mind, and he saw his best policy quite plain in front of him like a white road. His best chance was to make a softened and ambiguous speech, such as would leave on the detective’s mind the impression that the anarchist brotherhood was a very mild affair after all. He believed in his own literary power, his capacity for suggesting fine shades and picking perfect words. He thought that with care he could succeed, in spite of all the people around him, in conveying an impression of the institution, subtly and delicately false. Syme had once thought that anarchists, under all their bravado, were only playing the fool. Could he not now, in the hour of peril, make Syme think so again?

“Comrades,” began Gregory, in a low but penetrating voice, “it is not necessary for me to tell you what is my policy, for it is your policy also. Our
belief has been slandered, it has been disfigured, it has been utterly confused and concealed, but it has never been altered. Those who talk about anarchism and its dangers go everywhere and anywhere to get their information, except to us, except to the fountain head. They learn about anarchists from sixpenny novels; they learn about anarchists from tradesmen’s newspapers; they learn about anarchists from Ally Sloper’s Half-Holiday and the Sporting Times. They never learn about anarchists from anarchists. We have no chance of denying the mountainous slanders which are heaped upon our heads from one end of Europe to another. The man who has always heard that we are walking plagues has never heard our reply. I know that he will not hear it tonight, though my passion were to rend the roof. For it is deep, deep under the earth that the persecuted are permitted to assemble, as the Christians assembled in the Catacombs. But if, by some incredible accident, there were here tonight a man who all his life had thus immensely misunderstood us, I would put this question to him: ‘When those Christians met in those Catacombs, what sort of moral reputation had they in the streets above? What tales were told of their atrocities by one educated Roman to another? Suppose’ (I would say to him), ‘suppose that we are only repeating that still mysterious paradox of history. Suppose we seem as shocking as the Christians because we are really as harmless as the Christians. Suppose we seem as mad as the Christians because we are really as meek.’"

The applause that had greeted the opening sentences had been gradually growing fainter, and at the last word it stopped suddenly. In the abrupt silence, the man with the velvet jacket said, in a high, squeaky voice—

“I’m not meek!”

“Comrade Witherspoon tells us,” resumed Gregory, “that he is not meek. Ah, how little he knows himself! His words are, indeed, extravagant; his appearance is ferocious, and even (to an ordinary taste) unattractive. But only the eye of a friendship as deep and delicate as mine can perceive the deep foundation of solid meekness which lies at the base of him, too deep even for himself to see. I repeat, we are the true early Christians, only that we come too late. We are simple, as they revere simple—look at Comrade Witherspoon. We are modest, as they were modest—look at me. We are merciful—”

“No, no!” called out Mr. Witherspoon with the velvet jacket.

“I say we are merciful,” repeated Gregory furiously, “as the early Christians were merciful. Yet this did not prevent their being accused of eating human flesh. We do not eat human flesh—”

“Shame!” cried Witherspoon. “Why not?”
“Comrade Witherspoon,” said Gregory, with a feverish gaiety, “is anxious to know why nobody eats him (laughter). In our society, at any rate, which loves him sincerely, which is founded upon love—”

“No, no!” said Witherspoon, “down with love.”

“Which is founded upon love,” repeated Gregory, grinding his teeth, “there will be no difficulty about the aims which we shall pursue as a body, or which I should pursue were I chosen as the representative of that body. Superbly careless of the slanders that represent us as assassins and enemies of human society, we shall pursue with moral courage and quiet intellectual pressure, the permanent ideals of brotherhood and simplicity.”

Gregory resumed his seat and passed his hand across his forehead. The silence was sudden and awkward, but the chairman rose like an automaton, and said in a colourless voice—

“Does anyone oppose the election of Comrade Gregory?”

The assembly seemed vague and sub-consciously disappointed, and Comrade Witherspoon moved restlessly on his seat and muttered in his thick beard. By the sheer rush of routine, however, the motion would have been put and carried. But as the chairman was opening his mouth to put it, Syme sprang to his feet and said in a small and quiet voice—

“Yes, Mr. Chairman, I oppose.”

The most effective fact in oratory is an unexpected change in the voice. Mr. Gabriel Syme evidently understood oratory. Having said these first formal words in a moderated tone and with a brief simplicity, he made his next word ring and volley in the vault as if one of the guns had gone off.

“Comrades!” he cried, in a voice that made every man jump out of his boots, “have we come here for this? Do we live underground like rats in order to listen to talk like this? This is talk we might listen to while eating buns at a Sunday School treat. Do we line these walls with weapons and bar that door with death lest anyone should come and hear Comrade Gregory saying to us, ‘Be good, and you will be happy,’ ‘Honesty is the best policy,’ and ‘Virtue is its own reward’? There was not a word in Comrade Gregory’s address to which a curate could not have listened with pleasure (hear, hear). But I am not a curate (loud cheers), and I did not listen to it with pleasure (renewed cheers). The man who is fitted to make a good curate is not fitted to make a resolute, forcible, and efficient Thursday (hear, hear).”

“Comrade Gregory has told us, in only too apologetic a tone, that we are not the enemies of society. But I say that we are the enemies of society, and so much
the worse for society. We are the enemies of society, for society is the enemy of humanity, its oldest and its most pitiless enemy (hear, hear). Comrade Gregory has told us (apologetically again) that we are not murderers. There I agree. We are not murderers, we are executioners (cheers).”

Ever since Syme had risen Gregory had sat staring at him, his face idiotic with astonishment. Now in the pause his lips of clay parted, and he said, with an automatic and lifeless distinctness—

“You damnable hypocrite!”

Syme looked straight into those frightful eyes with his own pale blue ones, and said with dignity—

“Comrade Gregory accuses me of hypocrisy. He knows as well as I do that I am keeping all my engagements and doing nothing but my duty. I do not mince words. I do not pretend to. I say that Comrade Gregory is unfit to be Thursday for all his amiable qualities. He is unfit to be Thursday because of his amiable qualities. We do not want the Supreme Council of Anarchy infected with a maudlin mercy (hear, hear). This is no time for ceremonial politeness, neither is it a time for ceremonial modesty. I set myself against Comrade Gregory as I would set myself against all the Governments of Europe, because the anarchist who has given himself to anarchy has forgotten modesty as much as he has forgotten pride (cheers). I am not a man at all. I am a cause (renewed cheers). I set myself against Comrade Gregory as impersonally and as calmly as I should choose one pistol rather than another out of that rack upon the wall; and I say that rather than have Gregory and his milk-and-water methods on the Supreme Council, I would offer myself for election—”

His sentence was drowned in a deafening cataract of applause. The faces, that had grown fiercer and fiercer with approval as his tirade grew more and more uncompromising, were now distorted with grins of anticipation or cloven with delighted cries. At the moment when he announced himself as ready to stand for the post of Thursday, a roar of excitement and assent broke forth, and became uncontrollable, and at the same moment Gregory sprang to his feet, with foam upon his mouth, and shouted against the shouting.

“Stop, you blasted madmen!” he cried, at the top of a voice that tore his throat. “Stop, you—”

But louder than Gregory’s shouting and louder than the roar of the room came the voice of Syme, still speaking in a peal of pitiless thunder—

“I do not go to the Council to rebut that slander that calls us murderers; I go to earn it (loud and prolonged cheering). To the priest who says these men are the
enemies of religion, to the judge who says these men are the enemies of law, to the fat parliamentarian who says these men are the enemies of order and public decency, to all these I will reply, ‘You are false kings, but you are true prophets. I am come to destroy you, and to fulfil your prophecies.’”

The heavy clamour gradually died away, but before it had ceased Witherspoon had jumped to his feet, his hair and beard all on end, and had said—

“I move, as an amendment, that Comrade Syme be appointed to the post.”

“Stop all this, I tell you!” cried Gregory, with frantic face and hands. “Stop it, it is all—”

The voice of the chairman clove his speech with a cold accent.

“Does anyone second this amendment?” he said. A tall, tired man, with melancholy eyes and an American chin beard, was observed on the back bench to be slowly rising to his feet. Gregory had been screaming for some time past; now there was a change in his accent, more shocking than any scream. “I end all this!” he said, in a voice as heavy as stone.

“This man cannot be elected. He is a—”

“Yes,” said Syme, quite motionless, “what is he?” Gregory’s mouth worked twice without sound; then slowly the blood began to crawl back into his dead face. “He is a man quite inexperienced in our work,” he said, and sat down abruptly.

Before he had done so, the long, lean man with the American beard was again upon his feet, and was repeating in a high American monotone—

“I beg to second the election of Comrade Syme.”

“The amendment will, as usual, be put first,” said Mr. Buttons, the chairman, with mechanical rapidity.

“The question is that Comrade Syme—”

Gregory had again sprung to his feet, panting and passionate.

“Comrades,” he cried out, “I am not a madman.”

“Oh, oh!” said Mr. Witherspoon.

“I am not a madman,” reiterated Gregory, with a frightful sincerity which for a moment staggered the room, “but I give you a counsel which you can call mad if you like. No, I will not call it a counsel, for I can give you no reason for it. I will call it a command. Call it a mad command, but act upon it. Strike, but hear me! Kill me, but obey me! Do not elect this man.” Truth is so terrible, even in fetters, that for a moment Syme’s slender and insane victory swayed like a reed. But you could not have guessed it from Syme’s bleak blue eyes. He merely began—

“Comrade Gregory commands—”
Then the spell was snapped, and one anarchist called out to Gregory—
“Who are you? You are not Sunday;” and another anarchist added in a heavier voice, “And you are not Thursday.”

“Comrades,” cried Gregory, in a voice like that of a martyr who in an ecstasy of pain has passed beyond pain, “it is nothing to me whether you detest me as a tyrant or detest me as a slave. If you will not take my command, accept my degradation. I kneel to you. I throw myself at your feet. I implore you. Do not elect this man.”

“Comrade Gregory,” said the chairman after a painful pause, “this is really not quite dignified.”

For the first time in the proceedings there was for a few seconds a real silence. Then Gregory fell back in his seat, a pale wreck of a man, and the chairman repeated, like a piece of clock-work suddenly started again—

“The question is that Comrade Syme be elected to the post of Thursday on the General Council.”

The roar rose like the sea, the hands rose like a forest, and three minutes afterwards Mr. Gabriel Syme, of the Secret Police Service, was elected to the post of Thursday on the General Council of the Anarchists of Europe.

Everyone in the room seemed to feel the tug waiting on the river, the sword-stick and the revolver, waiting on the table. The instant the election was ended and irrevocable, and Syme had received the paper proving his election, they all sprang to their feet, and the fiery groups moved and mixed in the room. Syme found himself, somehow or other, face to face with Gregory, who still regarded him with a stare of stunned hatred. They were silent for many minutes.

“You are a devil!” said Gregory at last.

“And you are a gentleman,” said Syme with gravity.

“It was you that entrapped me,” began Gregory, shaking from head to foot, “entrapped me into—”

“Talk sense,” said Syme shortly. “Into what sort of devils’ parliament have you entrapped me, if it comes to that? You made me swear before I made you. Perhaps we are both doing what we think right. But what we think right is so damned different that there can be nothing between us in the way of concession. There is nothing possible between us but honour and death,” and he pulled the great cloak about his shoulders and picked up the flask from the table.

“The boat is quite ready,” said Mr. Buttons, bustling up. “Be good enough to step this way.”

With a gesture that revealed the shop-walker, he led Syme down a short, iron-
bound passage, the still agonised Gregory following feverishly at their heels. At the end of the passage was a door, which Buttons opened sharply, showing a sudden blue and silver picture of the moonlit river, that looked like a scene in a theatre. Close to the opening lay a dark, dwarfish steam-launch, like a baby dragon with one red eye.

Almost in the act of stepping on board, Gabriel Syme turned to the gaping Gregory.

“You have kept your word,” he said gently, with his face in shadow. “You are a man of honour, and I thank you. You have kept it even down to a small particular. There was one special thing you promised me at the beginning of the affair, and which you have certainly given me by the end of it.”

“What do you mean?” cried the chaotic Gregory. “What did I promise you?”

“A very entertaining evening,” said Syme, and he made a military salute with the sword-stick as the steamboat slid away.
CHAPTER IV

THE TALE OF A DETECTIVE

GABRIEL SYME was not merely a detective who pretended to be a poet; he was really a poet who had become a detective. Nor was his hatred of anarchy hypocritical. He was one of those who are driven early in life into too conservative an attitude by the bewildering folly of most revolutionists. He had not attained it by any tame tradition. His respectability was spontaneous and sudden, a rebellion against rebellion. He came of a family of cranks, in which all the oldest people had all the newest notions. One of his uncles always walked about without a hat, and another had made an unsuccessful attempt to walk about with a hat and nothing else. His father cultivated art and self-realisation; his mother went in for simplicity and hygiene. Hence the child, during his tenderer years, was wholly unacquainted with any drink between the extremes of absinth and cocoa, of both of which he had a healthy dislike. The more his mother preached a more than Puritan abstinence the more did his father expand into a more than pagan latitude; and by the time the former had come to enforcing vegetarianism, the latter had pretty well reached the point of defending cannibalism.

Being surrounded with every conceivable kind of revolt from infancy, Gabriel had to revolt into something, so he revolted into the only thing left—sanity. But there was just enough in him of the blood of these fanatics to make even his protest for common sense a little too fierce to be sensible. His hatred of modern lawlessness had been crowned also by an accident. It happened that he was walking in a side street at the instant of a dynamite outrage. He had been blind and deaf for a moment, and then seen, the smoke clearing, the broken windows and the bleeding faces. After that he went about as usual—quiet, courteous, rather gentle; but there was a spot on his mind that was not sane. He did not regard anarchists, as most of us do, as a handful of morbid men, combining ignorance with intellectualism. He regarded them as a huge and pitiless peril, like a Chinese invasion.

He poured perpetually into newspapers and their waste-paper baskets a torrent of tales, verses and violent articles, warning men of this deluge of barbaric denial. But he seemed to be getting no nearer his enemy, and, what was worse, no nearer a living. As he paced the Thames embankment, bitterly biting a cheap
cigar and brooding on the advance of Anarchy, there was no anarchist with a bomb in his pocket so savage or so solitary as he. Indeed, he always felt that Government stood alone and desperate, with its back to the wall. He was too quixotic to have cared for it otherwise.

He walked on the Embankment once under a dark red sunset. The red river reflected the red sky, and they both reflected his anger. The sky, indeed, was so swarthy, and the light on the river relatively so lurid, that the water almost seemed of fiercer flame than the sunset it mirrored. It looked like a stream of literal fire winding under the vast caverns of a subterranean country.

Syme was shabby in those days. He wore an old-fashioned black chimney-pot hat; he was wrapped in a yet more old-fashioned cloak, black and ragged; and the combination gave him the look of the early villains in Dickens and Bulwer Lytton. Also his yellow beard and hair were more unkempt andleonine than when they appeared long afterwards, cut and pointed, on the lawns of Saffron Park. A long, lean, black cigar, bought in Soho for two pence, stood out from between his tightened teeth, and altogether he looked a very satisfactory specimen of the anarchists upon whom he had vowed a holy war. Perhaps this was why a policeman on the Embankment spoke to him, and said “Good evening.”

Syme, at a crisis of his morbid fears for humanity, seemed stung by the mere stolidity of the automatic official, a mere bulk of blue in the twilight.

“A good evening is it?” he said sharply. “You fellows would call the end of the world a good evening. Look at that bloody red sun and that bloody river! I tell you that if that were literally human blood, spilt and shining, you would still be standing here as solid as ever, looking out for some poor harmless tramp whom you could move on. You policemen are cruel to the poor, but I could forgive you even your cruelty if it were not for your calm.”

“If we are calm,” replied the policeman, “it is the calm of organised resistance.”

“Eh?” said Syme, staring.

“The soldier must be calm in the thick of the battle,” pursued the policeman. “The composure of an army is the anger of a nation.”

“Good God, the Board Schools!” said Syme. “Is this undenominational education?”

“No,” said the policeman sadly, “I never had any of those advantages. The Board Schools came after my time. What education I had was very rough and old-fashioned, I am afraid.”
“Where did you have it?” asked Syme, wondering.

“Oh, at Harrow,” said the policeman.

The class sympathies which, false as they are, are the truest things in so many men, broke out of Syme before he could control them.

“But, good Lord, man,” he said, “you oughtn’t to be a policeman!”

The policeman sighed and shook his head.

“I know,” he said solemnly, “I know I am not worthy.”

“But why did you join the police?” asked Syme with rude curiosity.

“For much the same reason that you abused the police,” replied the other. “I found that there was a special opening in the service for those whose fears for humanity were concerned rather with the aberrations of the scientific intellect than with the normal and excusable, though excessive, outbreaks of the human will. I trust I make myself clear.”

“If you mean that you make your opinion clear,” said Syme, “I suppose you do. But as for making yourself clear, it is the last thing you do. How comes a man like you to be talking philosophy in a blue helmet on the Thames embankment?”

“You have evidently not heard of the latest development in our police system,” replied the other. “I am not surprised at it. We are keeping it rather dark from the educated class, because that class contains most of our enemies. But you seem to be exactly in the right frame of mind. I think you might almost join us.”

“Join you in what?” asked Syme.

“I will tell you,” said the policemen slowly. “This is the situation: The head of one of our departments, one of the most celebrated detectives in Europe, has long been of opinion that a purely intellectual conspiracy would soon threaten the very existence of civilisation. He is certain that the scientific and artistic worlds are silently bound in a crusade against the Family and the State. He has, therefore, formed a special corps of policemen, policemen who are also philosophers. It is their business to watch the beginnings of this conspiracy, not merely in a criminal but in a controversial sense. I am a democrat myself, and I am fully aware of the value of the ordinary man in matters of ordinary valour or virtue. But it would obviously be undesirable to employ the common policeman in an investigation which is also a heresy hunt.”

Syme’s eyes were bright with a sympathetic curiosity.

“What do you do, then?” he said.

“The work of the philosophical policeman,” replied the man in blue, “is at
once bolder and more subtle than that of the ordinary detective. The ordinary detective goes to pot-houses to arrest thieves; we go to artistic tea-parties to detect pessimists. The ordinary detective discovers from a ledger or a diary that a crime has been committed. We discover from a book of sonnets that a crime will be committed. We have to trace the origin of those dreadful thoughts that drive men on at last to intellectual fanaticism and intellectual crime. We were only just in time to prevent the assassination at Hartlepool, and that was entirely due to the fact that our Mr. Wilks (a smart young fellow) thoroughly understood a triolet.”

“Do you mean,” asked Syme, “that there is really as much connection between crime and the modern intellect as all that?”

“You are not sufficiently democratic,” answered the policeman, “but you were right when you said just now that our ordinary treatment of the poor criminal was a pretty brutal business. I tell you I am sometimes sick of my trade when I see how perpetually it means merely a war upon the ignorant and the desperate. But this new movement of ours is a very different affair. We deny the snobbish English assumption that the uneducated are the dangerous criminals. We remember the Roman Emperors. We remember the great poisoning princes of the Renaissance. We say that the dangerous criminal is the educated criminal. We say that the most dangerous criminal now is the entirely lawless modern philosopher. Compared to him, burglars and bigamists are essentially moral men; my heart goes out to them. They accept the essential ideal of man; they merely seek it wrongly. Thieves respect property. They merely wish the property to become their property that they may more perfectly respect it. But philosophers dislike property as property; they wish to destroy the very idea of personal possession. Bigamists respect marriage, or they would not go through the highly ceremonial and even ritualistic formality of bigamy. But philosophers despise marriage as marriage. Murderers respect human life; they merely wish to attain a greater fulness of human life in themselves by the sacrifice of what seems to them to be lesser lives. But philosophers hate life itself, their own as much as other people’s.”

Syme struck his hands together.

“How true that is,” he cried. “I have felt it from my boyhood, but never could state the verbal antithesis. The common criminal is a bad man, but at least he is, as it were, a conditional good man. He says that if only a certain obstacle be removed—say a wealthy uncle—he is then prepared to accept the universe and to praise God. He is a reformer, but not an anarchist. He wishes to cleanse the
edifice, but not to destroy it. But the evil philosopher is not trying to alter things, but to annihilate them. Yes, the modern world has retained all those parts of police work which are really oppressive and ignominious, the harrying of the poor, the spying upon the unfortunate. It has given up its more dignified work, the punishment of powerful traitors in the State and powerful heresiarchs in the Church. The moderns say we must not punish heretics. My only doubt is whether we have a right to punish anybody else.”

“But this is absurd!” cried the policeman, clasping his hands with an excitement uncommon in persons of his figure and costume, “but it is intolerable! I don’t know what you’re doing, but you’re wasting your life. You must, you shall, join our special army against anarchy. Their armies are on our frontiers. Their bolt is ready to fall. A moment more, and you may lose the glory of working with us, perhaps the glory of dying with the last heroes of the world.”

“It is a chance not to be missed, certainly,” assented Syme, “but still I do not quite understand. I know as well as anybody that the modern world is full of lawless little men and mad little movements. But, beastly as they are, they generally have the one merit of disagreeing with each other. How can you talk of their leading one army or hurling one bolt. What is this anarchy?”

“Do not confuse it,” replied the constable, “with those chance dynamite outbreaks from Russia or from Ireland, which are really the outbreaks of oppressed, if mistaken, men. This is a vast philosophic movement, consisting of an outer and an inner ring. You might even call the outer ring the laity and the inner ring the priesthood. I prefer to call the outer ring the innocent section, the inner ring the supremely guilty section. The outer ring—the main mass of their supporters—are merely anarchists; that is, men who believe that rules and formulas have destroyed human happiness. They believe that all the evil results of human crime are the results of the system that has called it crime. They do not believe that the crime creates the punishment. They believe that the punishment has created the crime. They believe that if a man seduced seven women he would naturally walk away as blameless as the flowers of spring. They believe that if a man picked a pocket he would naturally feel exquisitely good. These I call the innocent section.”

“Oh!” said Syme.

“Naturally, therefore, these people talk about ‘a happy time coming’; ‘the paradise of the future’; ‘mankind freed from the bondage of vice and the bondage of virtue,’ and so on. And so also the men of the inner circle speak—the sacred priesthood. They also speak to applauding crowds of the happiness of the
future, and of mankind freed at last. But in their mouths”—and the policeman lowered his voice—“in their mouths these happy phrases have a horrible meaning. They are under no illusions; they are too intellectual to think that man upon this earth can ever be quite free of original sin and the struggle. And they mean death. When they say that mankind shall be free at last, they mean that mankind shall commit suicide. When they talk of a paradise without right or wrong, they mean the grave.

“They have but two objects, to destroy first humanity and then themselves. That is why they throw bombs instead of firing pistols. The innocent rank and file are disappointed because the bomb has not killed the king; but the high-priesthood are happy because it has killed somebody.”

“How can I join you?” asked Syme, with a sort of passion.

“I know for a fact that there is a vacancy at the moment,” said the policeman, “as I have the honour to be somewhat in the confidence of the chief of whom I have spoken. You should really come and see him. Or rather, I should not say see him, nobody ever sees him; but you can talk to him if you like.”

“Telephone?” inquired Syme, with interest.

“No,” said the policeman placidly, “he has a fancy for always sitting in a pitch-dark room. He says it makes his thoughts brighter. Do come along.”

Somewhat dazed and considerably excited, Syme allowed himself to be led to a side-door in the long row of buildings of Scotland Yard. Almost before he knew what he was doing, he had been passed through the hands of about four intermediate officials, and was suddenly shown into a room, the abrupt blackness of which startled him like a blaze of light. It was not the ordinary darkness, in which forms can be faintly traced; it was like going suddenly stone-blind.

“Are you the new recruit?” asked a heavy voice.

And in some strange way, though there was not the shadow of a shape in the gloom, Syme knew two things: first, that it came from a man of massive stature; and second, that the man had his back to him.

“Are you the new recruit?” said the invisible chief, who seemed to have heard all about it. “All right. You are engaged.”

Syme, quite swept off his feet, made a feeble fight against this irrevocable phrase.

“I really have no experience,” he began.

“No one has any experience,” said the other, “of the Battle of Armageddon.”

“But I am really unfit—”
“You are willing, that is enough,” said the unknown.
“Well, really,” said Syme, “I don’t know any profession of which mere willingness is the final test.”
“I do,” said the other—“martyrs. I am condemning you to death. Good day.”
Thus it was that when Gabriel Syme came out again into the crimson light of evening, in his shabby black hat and shabby, lawless cloak, he came out a member of the New Detective Corps for the frustration of the great conspiracy. Acting under the advice of his friend the policeman (who was professionally inclined to neatness), he trimmed his hair and beard, bought a good hat, clad himself in an exquisite summer suit of light blue-grey, with a pale yellow flower in the button-hole, and, in short, became that elegant and rather insupportable person whom Gregory had first encountered in the little garden of Saffron Park. Before he finally left the police premises his friend provided him with a small blue card, on which was written, “The Last Crusade,” and a number, the sign of his official authority. He put this carefully in his upper waistcoat pocket, lit a cigarette, and went forth to track and fight the enemy in all the drawing-rooms of London. Where his adventure ultimately led him we have already seen. At about half-past one on a February night he found himself steaming in a small tug up the silent Thames, armed with swordstick and revolver, the duly elected Thursday of the Central Council of Anarchists.

When Syme stepped out on to the steam-tug he had a singular sensation of stepping out into something entirely new; not merely into the landscape of a new land, but even into the landscape of a new planet. This was mainly due to the insane yet solid decision of that evening, though partly also to an entire change in the weather and the sky since he entered the little tavern some two hours before. Every trace of the passionate plumage of the cloudy sunset had been swept away, and a naked moon stood in a naked sky. The moon was so strong and full that (by a paradox often to be noticed) it seemed like a weaker sun. It gave, not the sense of bright moonshine, but rather of a dead daylight.

Over the whole landscape lay a luminous and unnatural discoloration, as of that disastrous twilight which Milton spoke of as shed by the sun in eclipse; so that Syme fell easily into his first thought, that he was actually on some other and emptier planet, which circled round some sadder star. But the more he felt this glittering desolation in the moonlit land, the more his own chivalric folly glowed in the night like a great fire. Even the common things he carried with him—the food and the brandy and the loaded pistol—took on exactly that concrete and material poetry which a child feels when he takes a gun upon a
journey or a bun with him to bed. The swordstick and the brandy-flask, though
in themselves only the tools of morbid conspirators, became the expressions of
his own more healthy romance. The swordstick became almost the sword of
chivalry, and the brandy the wine of the stirrup-cup. For even the most
dehumanised modern fantasies depend on some older and simpler figure; the
adventures may be mad, but the adventurer must be sane. The dragon without St.
George would not even be grotesque. So this inhuman landscape was only
imaginative by the presence of a man really human. To Syme’s exaggerative
mind the bright, bleak houses and terraces by the Thames looked as empty as the
mountains of the moon. But even the moon is only poetical because there is a
man in the moon.

The tug was worked by two men, and with much toil went comparatively
slowly. The clear moon that had lit up Chiswick had gone down by the time that
they passed Battersea, and when they came under the enormous bulk of
Westminster day had already begun to break. It broke like the splitting of great
bars of lead, showing bars of silver; and these had brightened like white fire
when the tug, changing its onward course, turned inward to a large landing stage
rather beyond Charing Cross.

The great stones of the Embankment seemed equally dark and gigantic as
Syme looked up at them. They were big and black against the huge white dawn.
They made him feel that he was landing on the colossal steps of some Egyptian
palace; and, indeed, the thing suited his mood, for he was, in his own mind,
mounting to attack the solid thrones of horrible and heathen kings. He leapt out
of the boat on to one slimy step, and stood, a dark and slender figure, amid the
enormous masonry. The two men in the tug put her off again and turned up
stream. They had never spoken a word.
CHAPTER V

THE FEAST OF FEAR

At first the large stone stair seemed to Syme as deserted as a pyramid; but before he reached the top he had realised that there was a man leaning over the parapet of the Embankment and looking out across the river. As a figure he was quite conventional, clad in a silk hat and frock-coat of the more formal type of fashion; he had a red flower in his buttonhole. As Syme drew nearer to him step by step, he did not even move a hair; and Syme could come close enough to notice even in the dim, pale morning light that his face was long, pale and intellectual, and ended in a small triangular tuft of dark beard at the very point of the chin, all else being clean-shaven. This scrap of hair almost seemed a mere oversight; the rest of the face was of the type that is best shaven—clear-cut, ascetic, and in its way noble. Syme drew closer and closer, noting all this, and still the figure did not stir.

At first an instinct had told Syme that this was the man whom he was meant to meet. Then, seeing that the man made no sign, he had concluded that he was not. And now again he had come back to a certainty that the man had something to do with his mad adventure. For the man remained more still than would have been natural if a stranger had come so close. He was as motionless as a waxwork, and got on the nerves somewhat in the same way. Syme looked again and again at the pale, dignified and delicate face, and the face still looked blankly across the river. Then he took out of his pocket the note from Buttons proving his election, and put it before that sad and beautiful face. Then the man smiled, and his smile was a shock, for it was all on one side, going up in the right cheek and down in the left.

There was nothing, rationally speaking, to scare anyone about this. Many people have this nervous trick of a crooked smile, and in many it is even attractive. But in all Syme’s circumstances, with the dark dawn and the deadly errand and the loneliness on the great dripping stones, there was something unnerving in it.

There was the silent river and the silent man, a man of even classic face. And there was the last nightmare touch that his smile suddenly went wrong.

The spasm of smile was instantaneous, and the man’s face dropped at once into its harmonious melancholy. He spoke without further explanation or
inquiry, like a man speaking to an old colleague.

“If we walk up towards Leicester Square,” he said, “we shall just be in time for breakfast. Sunday always insists on an early breakfast. Have you had any sleep?”

“No,” said Syme.

“Nor have I,” answered the man in an ordinary tone. “I shall try to get to bed after breakfast.”

He spoke with casual civility, but in an utterly dead voice that contradicted the fanaticism of his face. It seemed almost as if all friendly words were to him lifeless conveniences, and that his only life was hate. After a pause the man spoke again.

“Of course, the Secretary of the branch told you everything that can be told. But the one thing that can never be told is the last notion of the President, for his notions grow like a tropical forest. So in case you don’t know, I’d better tell you that he is carrying out his notion of concealing ourselves by not concealing ourselves to the most extraordinary lengths just now. Originally, of course, we met in a cell underground, just as your branch does. Then Sunday made us take a private room at an ordinary restaurant. He said that if you didn’t seem to be hiding nobody hunted you out. Well, he is the only man on earth, I know; but sometimes I really think that his huge brain is going a little mad in its old age. For now we flaunt ourselves before the public. We have our breakfast on a balcony—on a balcony, if you please—overlooking Leicester Square.”

“And what do the people say?” asked Syme.

“It’s quite simple what they say,” answered his guide.

“They say we are a lot of jolly gentlemen who pretend they are anarchists.”

“It seems to me a very clever idea,” said Syme.

“Clever! God blast your impudence! Clever!” cried out the other in a sudden, shrill voice which was as startling and discordant as his crooked smile. “When you’ve seen Sunday for a split second you’ll leave off calling him clever.”

With this they emerged out of a narrow street, and saw the early sunlight filling Leicester Square. It will never be known, I suppose, why this square itself should look so alien and in some ways so continental. It will never be known whether it was the foreign look that attracted the foreigners or the foreigners who gave it the foreign look. But on this particular morning the effect seemed singularly bright and clear. Between the open square and the sunlit leaves and the statue and the Saracenic outlines of the Alhambra, it looked the replica of some French or even Spanish public place. And this effect increased in Syme the
sensation, which in many shapes he had had through the whole adventure, the eerie sensation of having strayed into a new world. As a fact, he had bought bad cigars round Leicester Square ever since he was a boy. But as he turned that corner, and saw the trees and the Moorish cupolas, he could have sworn that he was turning into an unknown Place de something or other in some foreign town.

At one corner of the square there projected a kind of angle of a prosperous but quiet hotel, the bulk of which belonged to a street behind. In the wall there was one large French window, probably the window of a large coffee-room; and outside this window, almost literally overhanging the square, was a formidably buttressed balcony, big enough to contain a dining-table. In fact, it did contain a dining-table, or more strictly a breakfast-table; and round the breakfast-table, glowing in the sunlight and evident to the street, were a group of noisy and talkative men, all dressed in the insolence of fashion, with white waistcoats and expensive buttonholes. Some of their jokes could almost be heard across the square. Then the grave Secretary gave his unnatural smile, and Syme knew that this boisterous breakfast party was the secret conclave of the European Dynamiters.

Then, as Syme continued to stare at them, he saw something that he had not seen before. He had not seen it literally because it was too large to see. At the nearest end of the balcony, blocking up a great part of the perspective, was the back of a great mountain of a man. When Syme had seen him, his first thought was that the weight of him must break down the balcony of stone. His vastness did not lie only in the fact that he was abnormally tall and quite incredibly fat. This man was planned enormously in his original proportions, like a statue carved deliberately as colossal. His head, crowned with white hair, as seen from behind looked bigger than a head ought to be. The ears that stood out from it looked larger than human ears. He was enlarged terribly to scale; and this sense of size was so staggering, that when Syme saw him all the other figures seemed quite suddenly to dwindle and become dwarfish. They were still sitting there as before with their flowers and frock-coats, but now it looked as if the big man was entertaining five children to tea.

As Syme and the guide approached the side door of the hotel, a waiter came out smiling with every tooth in his head.

“The gentlemen are up there, saren,” he said. “They do talk and they do laugh at what they talk. They do say they will throw bombs at ze king.”

And the waiter hurried away with a napkin over his arm, much pleased with the singular frivolity of the gentlemen upstairs.
The two men mounted the stairs in silence.

Syme had never thought of asking whether the monstrous man who almost filled and broke the balcony was the great President of whom the others stood in awe. He knew it was so, with an unaccountable but instantaneous certainty. Syme, indeed, was one of those men who are open to all the more nameless psychological influences in a degree a little dangerous to mental health. Utterly devoid of fear in physical dangers, he was a great deal too sensitive to the smell of spiritual evil. Twice already that night little unmeaning things had peeped out at him almost pruriently, and given him a sense of drawing nearer and nearer to the head-quarters of hell. And this sense became overpowering as he drew nearer to the great President.

The form it took was a childish and yet hateful fancy. As he walked across the inner room towards the balcony, the large face of Sunday grew larger and larger; and Syme was gripped with a fear that when he was quite close the face would be too big to be possible, and that he would scream aloud. He remembered that as a child he would not look at the mask of Memnon in the British Museum, because it was a face, and so large.

By an effort, braver than that of leaping over a cliff, he went to an empty seat at the breakfast-table and sat down. The men greeted him with good-humoured raillery as if they had always known him. He sobered himself a little by looking at their conventional coats and solid, shining coffee-pot; then he looked again at Sunday. His face was very large, but it was still possible to humanity.

In the presence of the President the whole company looked sufficiently commonplace; nothing about them caught the eye at first, except that by the President’s caprice they had been dressed up with a festive respectability, which gave the meal the look of a wedding breakfast. One man indeed stood out at even a superficial glance. He at least was the common or garden Dynamiter. He wore, indeed, the high white collar and satin tie that were the uniform of the occasion; but out of this collar there sprang a head quite unmanageable and quite unmistakable, a bewildering bush of brown hair and beard that almost obscured the eyes like those of a Skye terrier. But the eyes did look out of the tangle, and they were the sad eyes of some Russian serf. The effect of this figure was not terrible like that of the President, but it had every diablerie that can come from the utterly grotesque. If out of that stiff tie and collar there had come abruptly the head of a cat or a dog, it could not have been a more idiotic contrast.

The man’s name, it seemed, was Gogol; he was a Pole, and in this circle of days he was called Tuesday. His soul and speech were incurably tragic; he could
not force himself to play the prosperous and frivolous part demanded of him by President Sunday. And, indeed, when Syme came in the President, with that daring disregard of public suspicion which was his policy, was actually chaffing Gogol upon his inability to assume conventional graces.

“Our friend Tuesday,” said the President in a deep voice at once of quietude and volume, “our friend Tuesday doesn’t seem to grasp the idea. He dresses up like a gentleman, but he seems to be too great a soul to behave like one. He insists on the ways of the stage conspirator. Now if a gentleman goes about London in a top hat and a frock-coat, no one need know that he is an anarchist. But if a gentleman puts on a top hat and a frock-coat, and then goes about on his hands and knees—well, he may attract attention. That’s what Brother Gogol does. He goes about on his hands and knees with such inexhaustible diplomacy, that by this time he finds it quite difficult to walk upright.”

“I am not good at goncealment,” said Gogol sulkily, with a thick foreign accent; “I am not ashamed of the cause.”

“Yes you are, my boy, and so is the cause of you,” said the President good-naturedly. “You hide as much as anybody; but you can’t do it, you see, you’re such an ass! You try to combine two inconsistent methods. When a householder finds a man under his bed, he will probably pause to note the circumstance. But if he finds a man under his bed in a top hat, you will agree with me, my dear Tuesday, that he is not likely even to forget it. Now when you were found under Admiral Biffin’s bed—”

“I am not good at deception,” said Tuesday gloomily, flushing.

“Right, my boy, right,” said the President with a ponderous heartiness, “you aren’t good at anything.”

While this stream of conversation continued, Syme was looking more steadily at the men around him. As he did so, he gradually felt all his sense of something spiritually queer return.

He had thought at first that they were all of common stature and costume, with the evident exception of the hairy Gogol. But as he looked at the others, he began to see in each of them exactly what he had seen in the man by the river, a demoniac detail somewhere. That lop-sided laugh, which would suddenly disfigure the fine face of his original guide, was typical of all these types. Each man had something about him, perceived perhaps at the tenth or twentieth glance, which was not normal, and which seemed hardly human. The only metaphor he could think of was this, that they all looked as men of fashion and presence would look, with the additional twist given in a false and curved
mirror.

Only the individual examples will express this half-concealed eccentricity. Syme’s original cicerone bore the title of Monday; he was the Secretary of the Council, and his twisted smile was regarded with more terror than anything, except the President’s horrible, happy laughter. But now that Syme had more space and light to observe him, there were other touches. His fine face was so emaciated, that Syme thought it must be wasted with some disease; yet somehow the very distress of his dark eyes denied this. It was no physical ill that troubled him. His eyes were alive with intellectual torture, as if pure thought was pain.

He was typical of each of the tribe; each man was subtly and differently wrong. Next to him sat Tuesday, the tousle-headed Gogol, a man more obviously mad. Next was Wednesday, a certain Marquis de St. Eustache, a sufficiently characteristic figure. The first few glances found nothing unusual about him, except that he was the only man at table who wore the fashionable clothes as if they were really his own. He had a black French beard cut square and a black English frock-coat cut even squarer. But Syme, sensitive to such things, felt somehow that the man carried a rich atmosphere with him, a rich atmosphere that suffocated. It reminded one irrationally of drowsy odours and of dying lamps in the darker poems of Byron and Poe. With this went a sense of his being clad, not in lighter colours, but in softer materials; his black seemed richer and warmer than the black shades about him, as if it were compounded of profound colour. His black coat looked as if it were only black by being too dense a purple. His black beard looked as if it were only black by being too deep a blue. And in the gloom and thickness of the beard his dark red mouth showed sensual and scornful. Whatever he was he was not a Frenchman; he might be a Jew; he might be something deeper yet in the dark heart of the East. In the bright coloured Persian tiles and pictures showing tyrants hunting, you may see just those almond eyes, those blue-black beards, those cruel, crimson lips.

Then came Syme, and next a very old man, Professor de Worms, who still kept the chair of Friday, though every day it was expected that his death would leave it empty. Save for his intellect, he was in the last dissolution of senile decay. His face was as grey as his long grey beard, his forehead was lifted and fixed finally in a furrow of mild despair. In no other case, not even that of Gogol, did the bridegroom brilliancy of the morning dress express a more painful contrast. For the red flower in his buttonhole showed up against a face that was literally discoloured like lead; the whole hideous effect was as if some drunken dandies had put their clothes upon a corpse. When he rose or sat down,
which was with long labour and peril, something worse was expressed than mere weakness, something indefinably connected with the horror of the whole scene. It did not express decrepitude merely, but corruption. Another hateful fancy crossed Syme’s quivering mind. He could not help thinking that whenever the man moved a leg or arm might fall off.

Right at the end sat the man called Saturday, the simplest and the most baffling of all. He was a short, square man with a dark, square face clean-shaven, a medical practitioner going by the name of Bull. He had that combination of savoir-faire with a sort of well-groomed coarseness which is not uncommon in young doctors. He carried his fine clothes with confidence rather than ease, and he mostly wore a set smile. There was nothing whatever odd about him, except that he wore a pair of dark, almost opaque spectacles. It may have been merely a crescendo of nervous fancy that had gone before, but those black discs were dreadful to Syme; they reminded him of half-remembered ugly tales, of some story about pennies being put on the eyes of the dead. Syme’s eye always caught the black glasses and the blind grin. Had the dying Professor worn them, or even the pale Secretary, they would have been appropriate. But on the younger and grosser man they seemed only an enigma. They took away the key of the face. You could not tell what his smile or his gravity meant. Partly from this, and partly because he had a vulgar virility wanting in most of the others it seemed to Syme that he might be the wickedest of all those wicked men. Syme even had the thought that his eyes might be covered up because they were too frightful to see.
CHAPTER VI

THE EXPOSURE

SUCH were the six men who had sworn to destroy the world. Again and again Syme strove to pull together his common sense in their presence. Sometimes he saw for an instant that these notions were subjective, that he was only looking at ordinary men, one of whom was old, another nervous, another short-sighted. The sense of an unnatural symbolism always settled back on him again. Each figure seemed to be, somehow, on the borderland of things, just as their theory was on the borderland of thought. He knew that each one of these men stood at the extreme end, so to speak, of some wild road of reasoning. He could only fancy, as in some old-world fable, that if a man went westward to the end of the world he would find something—say a tree—that was more or less than a tree, a tree possessed by a spirit; and that if he went east to the end of the world he would find something else that was not wholly itself—a tower, perhaps, of which the very shape was wicked. So these figures seemed to stand up, violent and unaccountable, against an ultimate horizon, visions from the verge. The ends of the earth were closing in.

Talk had been going on steadily as he took in the scene; and not the least of the contrasts of that bewildering breakfast-table was the contrast between the easy and unobtrusive tone of talk and its terrible purport. They were deep in the discussion of an actual and immediate plot. The waiter downstairs had spoken quite correctly when he said that they were talking about bombs and kings. Only three days afterwards the Czar was to meet the President of the French Republic in Paris, and over their bacon and eggs upon their sunny balcony these beaming gentlemen had decided how both should die. Even the instrument was chosen; the black-bearded Marquis, it appeared, was to carry the bomb.

Ordinarily speaking, the proximity of this positive and objective crime would have sobered Syme, and cured him of all his merely mystical tremors. He would have thought of nothing but the need of saving at least two human bodies from being ripped in pieces with iron and roaring gas. But the truth was that by this time he had begun to feel a third kind of fear, more piercing and practical than either his moral revulsion or his social responsibility. Very simply, he had no fear to spare for the French President or the Czar; he had begun to fear for himself. Most of the talkers took little heed of him, debating now with their faces
closer together, and almost uniformly grave, save when for an instant the smile of the Secretary ran aslant across his face as the jagged lightning runs aslant across the sky. But there was one persistent thing which first troubled Syme and at last terrified him. The President was always looking at him, steadily, and with a great and baffling interest. The enormous man was quite quiet, but his blue eyes stood out of his head. And they were always fixed on Syme.

Syme felt moved to spring up and leap over the balcony. When the President’s eyes were on him he felt as if he were made of glass. He had hardly the shred of a doubt that in some silent and extraordinary way Sunday had found out that he was a spy. He looked over the edge of the balcony, and saw a policeman, standing abstractedly just beneath, staring at the bright railings and the sunlit trees.

Then there fell upon him the great temptation that was to torment him for many days. In the presence of these powerful and repulsive men, who were the princes of anarchy, he had almost forgotten the frail and fanciful figure of the poet Gregory, the mere aesthete of anarchism. He even thought of him now with an old kindness, as if they had played together when children. But he remembered that he was still tied to Gregory by a great promise. He had promised never to do the very thing that he now felt himself almost in the act of doing. He had promised not to jump over that balcony and speak to that policeman. He took his cold hand off the cold stone balustrade. His soul swayed in a vertigo of moral indecision. He had only to snap the thread of a rash vow made to a villainous society, and all his life could be as open and sunny as the square beneath him. He had, on the other hand, only to keep his antiquated honour, and be delivered inch by inch into the power of this great enemy of mankind, whose very intellect was a torture-chamber. Whenever he looked down into the square he saw the comfortable policeman, a pillar of common sense and common order. Whenever he looked back at the breakfast-table he saw the President still quietly studying him with big, unbearable eyes.

In all the torrent of his thought there were two thoughts that never crossed his mind. First, it never occurred to him to doubt that the President and his Council could crush him if he continued to stand alone. The place might be public, the project might seem impossible. But Sunday was not the man who would carry himself thus easily without having, somehow or somewhere, set open his iron trap. Either by anonymous poison or sudden street accident, by hypnotism or by fire from hell, Sunday could certainly strike him. If he defied the man he was probably dead, either struck stiff there in his chair or long afterwards as by an
innocent ailment. If he called in the police promptly, arrested everyone, told all, and set against them the whole energy of England, he would probably escape; certainly not otherwise. They were a balconyful of gentlemen overlooking a bright and busy square; but he felt no more safe with them than if they had been a boatful of armed pirates overlooking an empty sea.

There was a second thought that never came to him. It never occurred to him to be spiritually won over to the enemy. Many moderns, inured to a weak worship of intellect and force, might have wavered in their allegiance under this oppression of a great personality. They might have called Sunday the super-man. If any such creature be conceivable, he looked, indeed, somewhat like it, with his earth-shaking abstraction, as of a stone statue walking. He might have been called something above man, with his large plans, which were too obvious to be detected, with his large face, which was too frank to be understood. But this was a kind of modern meanness to which Syme could not sink even in his extreme morbidity. Like any man, he was coward enough to fear great force; but he was not quite coward enough to admire it.

The men were eating as they talked, and even in this they were typical. Dr. Bull and the Marquis ate casually and conventionally of the best things on the table—cold pheasant or Strasbourg pie. But the Secretary was a vegetarian, and he spoke earnestly of the projected murder over half a raw tomato and three quarters of a glass of tepid water. The old Professor had such slops as suggested a sickening second childhood. And even in this President Sunday preserved his curious predominance of mere mass. For he ate like twenty men; he ate incredibly, with a frightful freshness of appetite, so that it was like watching a sausage factory. Yet continually, when he had swallowed a dozen crumpets or drunk a quart of coffee, he would be found with his great head on one side staring at Syme.

“I have often wondered,” said the Marquis, taking a great bite out of a slice of bread and jam, “whether it wouldn’t be better for me to do it with a knife. Most of the best things have been brought off with a knife. And it would be a new emotion to get a knife into a French President and wriggle it round.”

“You are wrong,” said the Secretary, drawing his black brows together. “The knife was merely the expression of the old personal quarrel with a personal tyrant. Dynamite is not only our best tool, but our best symbol. It is as perfect a symbol of us as is incense of the prayers of the Christians. It expands; it only destroys because it broadens; even so, thought only destroys because it broadens. A man’s brain is a bomb,” he cried out, loosening suddenly his strange passion
and striking his own skull with violence. “My brain feels like a bomb, night and day. It must expand! It must expand! A man’s brain must expand, if it breaks up the universe.”

“I don’t want the universe broken up just yet,” drawled the Marquis. “I want to do a lot of beastly things before I die. I thought of one yesterday in bed.”

“No, if the only end of the thing is nothing,” said Dr. Bull with his sphinx-like smile, “it hardly seems worth doing.”

The old Professor was staring at the ceiling with dull eyes.

“Every man knows in his heart,” he said, “that nothing is worth doing.”

There was a singular silence, and then the Secretary said—

“We are wandering, however, from the point. The only question is how Wednesday is to strike the blow. I take it we should all agree with the original notion of a bomb. As to the actual arrangements, I should suggest that tomorrow morning he should go first of all to—”

The speech was broken off short under a vast shadow. President Sunday had risen to his feet, seeming to fill the sky above them.

“Before we discuss that,” he said in a small, quiet voice, “let us go into a private room. I have something very particular to say.”

Syme stood up before any of the others. The instant of choice had come at last, the pistol was at his head. On the pavement before he could hear the policeman idly stir and stamp, for the morning, though bright, was cold.

A barrel-organ in the street suddenly sprang with a jerk into a jovial tune. Syme stood up taut, as if it had been a bugle before the battle. He found himself filled with a supernatural courage that came from nowhere. That jingling music seemed full of the vivacity, the vulgarity, and the irrational valour of the poor, who in all those unclean streets were all clinging to the decencies and the charities of Christendom. His youthful prank of being a policeman had faded from his mind; he did not think of himself as the representative of the corps of gentlemen turned into fancy constables, or of the old eccentric who lived in the dark room. But he did feel himself as the ambassador of all these common and kindly people in the street, who every day marched into battle to the music of the barrel-organ. And this high pride in being human had lifted him unaccountably to an infinite height above the monstrous men around him. For an instant, at least, he looked down upon all their sprawling eccentricities from the starry pinnacle of the commonplace. He felt towards them all that unconscious and elementary superiority that a brave man feels over powerful beasts or a wise man over powerful errors. He knew that he had neither the intellectual nor the
physical strength of President Sunday; but in that moment he minded it no more than the fact that he had not the muscles of a tiger or a horn on his nose like a rhinoceros. All was swallowed up in an ultimate certainty that the President was wrong and that the barrel-organ was right. There clanged in his mind that unanswerable and terrible truism in the song of Roland—

“Pagens ont tort et Chretiens ont droit.”

which in the old nasal French has the clang and groan of great iron. This liberation of his spirit from the load of his weakness went with a quite clear decision to embrace death. If the people of the barrel-organ could keep their old-world obligations, so could he. This very pride in keeping his word was that he was keeping it to miscreants. It was his last triumph over these lunatics to go down into their dark room and die for something that they could not even understand. The barrel-organ seemed to give the marching tune with the energy and the mingled noises of a whole orchestra; and he could hear deep and rolling, under all the trumpets of the pride of life, the drums of the pride of death.

The conspirators were already filing through the open window and into the rooms behind. Syme went last, outwardly calm, but with all his brain and body throbbing with romantic rhythm. The President led them down an irregular side stair, such as might be used by servants, and into a dim, cold, empty room, with a table and benches, like an abandoned boardroom. When they were all in, he closed and locked the door.

The first to speak was Gogol, the irreconcilable, who seemed bursting with inarticulate grievance.

“Zso! Zso!” he cried, with an obscure excitement, his heavy Polish accent becoming almost impenetrable. “You zay you nod ‘ide. You zay you show themselves. It is all nuzzinks. Ven you vant talk importance you run yourselves in a dark box!”

The President seemed to take the foreigner’s incoherent satire with entire good humour.

“You can’t get hold of it yet, Gogol,” he said in a fatherly way. “When once they have heard us talking nonsense on that balcony they will not care where we go afterwards. If we had come here first, we should have had the whole staff at the keyhole. You don’t seem to know anything about mankind.”

“I die for zem,” cried the Pole in thick excitement, “and I slay zare oppressors. I care not for these games of gonzealment. I would zmite ze tyrant in ze open square.”

“I see, I see,” said the President, nodding kindly as he seated himself at the top
of a long table. “You die for mankind first, and then you get up and smite their oppressors. So that’s all right. And now may I ask you to control your beautiful sentiments, and sit down with the other gentlemen at this table. For the first time this morning something intelligent is going to be said.”

Syme, with the perturbed promptitude he had shown since the original summons, sat down first. Gogol sat down last, grumbling in his brown beard about gombromise. No one except Syme seemed to have any notion of the blow that was about to fall. As for him, he had merely the feeling of a man mounting the scaffold with the intention, at any rate, of making a good speech.

“Comrades,” said the President, suddenly rising, “we have spun out this farce long enough. I have called you down here to tell you something so simple and shocking that even the waiters upstairs (long inured to our levities) might hear some new seriousness in my voice. Comrades, we were discussing plans and naming places. I propose, before saying anything else, that those plans and places should not be voted by this meeting, but should be left wholly in the control of some one reliable member. I suggest Comrade Saturday, Dr. Bull.”

They all stared at him; then they all started in their seats, for the next words, though not loud, had a living and sensational emphasis. Sunday struck the table.

“No one word more about the plans and places must be said at this meeting. Not one tiny detail more about what we mean to do must be mentioned in this company.”

Sunday had spent his life in astonishing his followers; but it seemed as if he had never really astonished them until now. They all moved feverishly in their seats, except Syme. He sat stiff in his, with his hand in his pocket, and on the handle of his loaded revolver. When the attack on him came he would sell his life dear. He would find out at least if the President was mortal.

Sunday went on smoothly—

“You will probably understand that there is only one possible motive for forbidding free speech at this festival of freedom. Strangers overhearing us matters nothing. They assume that we are joking. But what would matter, even unto death, is this, that there should be one actually among us who is not of us, who knows our grave purpose, but does not share it, who—”

The Secretary screamed out suddenly like a woman.

“It can’t be!” he cried, leaping. “There can’t—”

The President flapped his large flat hand on the table like the fin of some huge fish.

“Yes,” he said slowly, “there is a spy in this room. There is a traitor at this
table. I will waste no more words. His name—"

Syme half rose from his seat, his finger firm on the trigger.

“His name is Gogol,” said the President. “He is that hairy humbug over there who pretends to be a Pole.”

Gogol sprang to his feet, a pistol in each hand. With the same flash three men sprang at his throat. Even the Professor made an effort to rise. But Syme saw little of the scene, for he was blinded with a beneficent darkness; he had sunk down into his seat shuddering, in a palsy of passionate relief.
“SIT down!” said Sunday in a voice that he used once or twice in his life, a voice that made men drop drawn swords.

The three who had risen fell away from Gogol, and that equivocal person himself resumed his seat.

“Well, my man,” said the President briskly, addressing him as one addresses a total stranger, “will you oblige me by putting your hand in your upper waistcoat pocket and showing me what you have there?”

The alleged Pole was a little pale under this tangle of dark hair, but he put two fingers into the pocket with apparent coolness and pulled out a blue strip of card. When Syme saw it lying on the table, he woke up again to the world outside him. For although the card lay at the other extreme of the table, and he could read nothing of the inscription on it, it bore a startling resemblance to the blue card in his own pocket, the card which had been given to him when he joined the anti-anarchist constabulary.

“Pathetic Slav,” said the President, “tragic child of Poland, are you prepared in the presence of that card to deny that you are in this company—shall we say de trop?”

“Right oh!” said the late Gogol. It made everyone jump to hear a clear, commercial and somewhat cockney voice coming out of that forest of foreign hair. It was irrational, as if a Chinaman had suddenly spoken with a Scotch accent.

“I gather that you fully understand your position,” said Sunday.

“You bet,” answered the Pole. “I see it’s a fair cop. All I say is, I don’t believe any Pole could have imitated my accent like I did his.”

“I concede the point,” said Sunday. “I believe your own accent to be inimitable, though I shall practise it in my bath. Do you mind leaving your beard with your card?”

“Not a bit,” answered Gogol; and with one finger he ripped off the whole of his shaggy head-covering, emerging with thin red hair and a pale, pert face. “It was hot,” he added.

“I will do you the justice to say,” said Sunday, not without a sort of brutal
admiration, “that you seem to have kept pretty cool under it. Now listen to me. I like you. The consequence is that it would annoy me for just about two and a half minutes if I heard that you had died in torments. Well, if you ever tell the police or any human soul about us, I shall have that two and a half minutes of discomfort. On your discomfort I will not dwell. Good day. Mind the step.”

The red-haired detective who had masqueraded as Gogol rose to his feet without a word, and walked out of the room with an air of perfect nonchalance. Yet the astonished Syme was able to realise that this ease was suddenly assumed; for there was a slight stumble outside the door, which showed that the departing detective had not minded the step.

“Time is flying,” said the President in his gayest manner, after glancing at his watch, which like everything about him seemed bigger than it ought to be. “I must go off at once; I have to take the chair at a Humanitarian meeting.”

The Secretary turned to him with working eyebrows.

“Would it not be better,” he said a little sharply, “to discuss further the details of our project, now that the spy has left us?”

“No, I think not,” said the President with a yawn like an unobtrusive earthquake. “Leave it as it is. Let Saturday settle it. I must be off. Breakfast here next Sunday.”

But the late loud scenes had whipped up the almost naked nerves of the Secretary. He was one of those men who are conscientious even in crime.

“I must protest, President, that the thing is irregular,” he said. “It is a fundamental rule of our society that all plans shall be debated in full council. Of course, I fully appreciate your forethought when in the actual presence of a traitor—”

“Secretary,” said the President seriously, “if you’d take your head home and boil it for a turnip it might be useful. I can’t say. But it might.”

The Secretary reared back in a kind of equine anger.

“I really fail to understand—” he began in high offense.

“That’s it, that’s it,” said the President, nodding a great many times. “That’s where you fail right enough. You fail to understand. Why, you dancing donkey,” he roared, rising, “you didn’t want to be overheard by a spy, didn’t you? How do you know you aren’t overheard now?”

And with these words he shouldered his way out of the room, shaking with incomprehensible scorn.

Four of the men left behind gaped after him without any apparent glimmering of his meaning. Syme alone had even a glimmering, and such as it was it froze
him to the bone. If the last words of the President meant anything, they meant that he had not after all passed unsuspected. They meant that while Sunday could not denounce him like Gogol, he still could not trust him like the others.

The other four got to their feet grumbling more or less, and betook themselves elsewhere to find lunch, for it was already well past midday. The Professor went last, very slowly and painfully. Syme sat long after the rest had gone, revolving his strange position. He had escaped a thunderbolt, but he was still under a cloud. At last he rose and made his way out of the hotel into Leicester Square. The bright, cold day had grown increasingly colder, and when he came out into the street he was surprised by a few flakes of snow. While he still carried the sword-stick and the rest of Gregory’s portable luggage, he had thrown the cloak down and left it somewhere, perhaps on the steam-tug, perhaps on the balcony. Hoping, therefore, that the snow-shower might be slight, he stepped back out of the street for a moment and stood up under the doorway of a small and greasy hair-dresser’s shop, the front window of which was empty, except for a sickly wax lady in evening dress.

Snow, however, began to thicken and fall fast; and Syme, having found one glance at the wax lady quite sufficient to depress his spirits, stared out instead into the white and empty street. He was considerably astonished to see, standing quite still outside the shop and staring into the window, a man. His top hat was loaded with snow like the hat of Father Christmas, the white drift was rising round his boots and ankles; but it seemed as if nothing could tear him away from the contemplation of the colourless wax doll in dirty evening dress. That any human being should stand in such weather looking into such a shop was a matter of sufficient wonder to Syme; but his idle wonder turned suddenly into a personal shock; for he realised that the man standing there was the paralytic old Professor de Worms. It scarcely seemed the place for a person of his years and infirmities.

Syme was ready to believe anything about the perversions of this dehumanized brotherhood; but even he could not believe that the Professor had fallen in love with that particular wax lady. He could only suppose that the man’s malady (whatever it was) involved some momentary fits of rigidity or trance. He was not inclined, however, to feel in this case any very compassionate concern. On the contrary, he rather congratulated himself that the Professor’s stroke and his elaborate and limping walk would make it easy to escape from him and leave him miles behind. For Syme thirsted first and last to get clear of the whole poisonous atmosphere, if only for an hour. Then he could collect his
thoughts, formulate his policy, and decide finally whether he should or should not keep faith with Gregory.

He strolled away through the dancing snow, turned up two or three streets, down through two or three others, and entered a small Soho restaurant for lunch. He partook reflectively of four small and quaint courses, drank half a bottle of red wine, and ended up over black coffee and a black cigar, still thinking. He had taken his seat in the upper room of the restaurant, which was full of the chink of knives and the chatter of foreigners. He remembered that in old days he had imagined that all these harmless and kindly aliens were anarchists. He shuddered, remembering the real thing. But even the shudder had the delightful shame of escape. The wine, the common food, the familiar place, the faces of natural and talkative men, made him almost feel as if the Council of the Seven Days had been a bad dream; and although he knew it was nevertheless an objective reality, it was at least a distant one. Tall houses and populous streets lay between him and his last sight of the shameful seven; he was free in free London, and drinking wine among the free. With a somewhat easier action, he took his hat and stick and strolled down the stair into the shop below.

When he entered that lower room he stood stricken and rooted to the spot. At a small table, close up to the blank window and the white street of snow, sat the old anarchist Professor over a glass of milk, with his lifted livid face and pendent eyelids. For an instant Syme stood as rigid as the stick he leant upon. Then with a gesture as of blind hurry, he brushed past the Professor, dashing open the door and slamming it behind him, and stood outside in the snow.

“Can that old corpse be following me?” he asked himself, biting his yellow moustache. “I stopped too long up in that room, so that even such leaden feet could catch me up. One comfort is, with a little brisk walking I can put a man like that as far away as Timbuctoo. Or am I too fanciful? Was he really following me? Surely Sunday would not be such a fool as to send a lame man?”

He set off at a smart pace, twisting and whirling his stick, in the direction of Covent Garden. As he crossed the great market the snow increased, growing blinding and bewildering as the afternoon began to darken. The snow-flakes tormented him like a swarm of silver bees. Getting into his eyes and beard, they added their unremitting futility to his already irritated nerves; and by the time that he had come at a swinging pace to the beginning of Fleet Street, he lost patience, and finding a Sunday teashop, turned into it to take shelter. He ordered another cup of black coffee as an excuse. Scarcely had he done so, when Professor de Worms hobbled heavily into the shop, sat down with difficulty and
ordered a glass of milk.

Syme’s walking-stick had fallen from his hand with a great clang, which confessed the concealed steel. But the Professor did not look round. Syme, who was commonly a cool character, was literally gaping as a rustic gapes at a conjuring trick. He had seen no cab following; he had heard no wheels outside the shop; to all mortal appearances the man had come on foot. But the old man could only walk like a snail, and Syme had walked like the wind. He started up and snatched his stick, half crazy with the contradiction in mere arithmetic, and swung out of the swinging doors, leaving his coffee untasted. An omnibus going to the Bank went rattling by with an unusual rapidity. He had a violent run of a hundred yards to reach it; but he managed to spring, swaying upon the splashboard and, pausing for an instant to pant, he climbed on to the top. When he had been seated for about half a minute, he heard behind him a sort of heavy and asthmatic breathing.

Turning sharply, he saw rising gradually higher and higher up the omnibus steps a top hat soiled and dripping with snow, and under the shadow of its brim the short-sighted face and shaky shoulders of Professor de Worms. He let himself into a seat with characteristic care, and wrapped himself up to the chin in the mackintosh rug.

Every movement of the old man’s tottering figure and vague hands, every uncertain gesture and panic-stricken pause, seemed to put it beyond question that he was helpless, that he was in the last imbecility of the body. He moved by inches, he let himself down with little gasps of caution. And yet, unless the philosophical entities called time and space have no vestige even of a practical existence, it appeared quite unquestionable that he had run after the omnibus.

Syme sprang erect upon the rocking car, and after staring wildly at the wintry sky, that grew gloomier every moment, he ran down the steps. He had repressed an elemental impulse to leap over the side.

Too bewildered to look back or to reason, he rushed into one of the little courts at the side of Fleet Street as a rabbit rushes into a hole. He had a vague idea, if this incomprehensible old Jack-in-the-box was really pursuing him, that in that labyrinth of little streets he could soon throw him off the scent. He dived in and out of those crooked lanes, which were more like cracks than thoroughfares; and by the time that he had completed about twenty alternate angles and described an unthinkable polygon, he paused to listen for any sound of pursuit. There was none; there could not in any case have been much, for the little streets were thick with the soundless snow. Somewhere behind Red Lion
Court, however, he noticed a place where some energetic citizen had cleared away the snow for a space of about twenty yards, leaving the wet, glistening cobble-stones. He thought little of this as he passed it, only plunging into yet another arm of the maze. But when a few hundred yards farther on he stood still again to listen, his heart stood still also, for he heard from that space of rugged stones the clinking crutch and labouring feet of the infernal cripple.

The sky above was loaded with the clouds of snow, leaving London in a darkness and oppression premature for that hour of the evening. On each side of Syme the walls of the alley were blind and featureless; there was no little window or any kind of eve. He felt a new impulse to break out of this hive of houses, and to get once more into the open and lamp-lit street. Yet he rambled and dodged for a long time before he struck the main thoroughfare. When he did so, he struck it much farther up than he had fancied. He came out into what seemed the vast and void of Ludgate Circus, and saw St. Paul’s Cathedral sitting in the sky.

At first he was startled to find these great roads so empty, as if a pestilence had swept through the city. Then he told himself that some degree of emptiness was natural; first because the snow-storm was even dangerously deep, and secondly because it was Sunday. And at the very word Sunday he bit his lip; the word was henceforth for hire like some indecent pun. Under the white fog of snow high up in the heaven the whole atmosphere of the city was turned to a very queer kind of green twilight, as of men under the sea. The sealed and sullen sunset behind the dark dome of St. Paul’s had in it smoky and sinister colours—colours of sickly green, dead red or decaying bronze, that were just bright enough to emphasise the solid whiteness of the snow. But right up against these dreary colours rose the black bulk of the cathedral; and upon the top of the cathedral was a random splash and great stain of snow, still clinging as to an Alpine peak. It had fallen accidentally, but just so fallen as to half drape the dome from its very topmost point, and to pick out in perfect silver the great orb and the cross. When Syme saw it he suddenly straightened himself, and made with his sword-stick an involuntary salute.

He knew that that evil figure, his shadow, was creeping quickly or slowly behind him, and he did not care.

It seemed a symbol of human faith and valour that while the skies were darkening that high place of the earth was bright. The devils might have captured heaven, but they had not yet captured the cross. He had a new impulse to tear out the secret of this dancing, jumping and pursuing paralytic; and at the entrance of
the court as it opened upon the Circus he turned, stick in hand, to face his pursuer.

Professor de Worms came slowly round the corner of the irregular alley behind him, his unnatural form outlined against a lonely gas-lamp, irresistibly recalling that very imaginative figure in the nursery rhymes, “the crooked man who went a crooked mile.” He really looked as if he had been twisted out of shape by the tortuous streets he had been threading. He came nearer and nearer, the lamplight shining on his lifted spectacles, his lifted, patient face. Syme waited for him as St. George waited for the dragon, as a man waits for a final explanation or for death. And the old Professor came right up to him and passed him like a total stranger, without even a blink of his mournful eyelids.

There was something in this silent and unexpected innocence that left Syme in a final fury. The man’s colourless face and manner seemed to assert that the whole following had been an accident. Syme was galvanised with an energy that was something between bitterness and a burst of boyish derision. He made a wild gesture as if to knock the old man’s hat off, called out something like “Catch me if you can,” and went racing away across the white, open Circus. Concealment was impossible now; and looking back over his shoulder, he could see the black figure of the old gentleman coming after him with long, swinging strides like a man winning a mile race. But the head upon that bounding body was still pale, grave and professional, like the head of a lecturer upon the body of a harlequin.

This outrageous chase sped across Ludgate Circus, up Ludgate Hill, round St. Paul’s Cathedral, along Cheapside, Syme remembering all the nightmares he had ever known. Then Syme broke away towards the river, and ended almost down by the docks. He saw the yellow panes of a low, lighted public-house, flung himself into it and ordered beer. It was a foul tavern, sprinkled with foreign sailors, a place where opium might be smoked or knives drawn.

A moment later Professor de Worms entered the place, sat down carefully, and asked for a glass of milk.
CHAPTER VIII

THE PROFESSOR EXPLAINS

WHEN Gabriel Syme found himself finally established in a chair, and opposite to him, fixed and final also, the lifted eyebrows and leaden eyelids of the Professor, his fears fully returned. This incomprehensible man from the fierce council, after all, had certainly pursued him. If the man had one character as a paralytic and another character as a pursuer, the antithesis might make him more interesting, but scarcely more soothing. It would be a very small comfort that he could not find the Professor out, if by some serious accident the Professor should find him out. He emptied a whole pewter pot of ale before the professor had touched his milk.

One possibility, however, kept him hopeful and yet helpless. It was just possible that this escapade signified something other than even a slight suspicion of him. Perhaps it was some regular form or sign. Perhaps the foolish scamper was some sort of friendly signal that he ought to have understood. Perhaps it was a ritual. Perhaps the new Thursday was always chased along Cheapside, as the new Lord Mayor is always escorted along it. He was just selecting a tentative inquiry, when the old Professor opposite suddenly and simply cut him short. Before Syme could ask the first diplomatic question, the old anarchist had asked suddenly, without any sort of preparation—

“Are you a policeman?”

Whatever else Syme had expected, he had never expected anything so brutal and actual as this. Even his great presence of mind could only manage a reply with an air of rather blundering jocularity.

“A policeman?” he said, laughing vaguely. “Whatever made you think of a policeman in connection with me?”

“The process was simple enough,” answered the Professor patiently. “I thought you looked like a policeman. I think so now.”

“Did I take a policeman’s hat by mistake out of the restaurant?” asked Syme, smiling wildly. “Have I by any chance got a number stuck on to me somewhere? Have my boots got that watchful look? Why must I be a policeman? Do, do let me be a postman.”

The old Professor shook his head with a gravity that gave no hope, but Syme ran on with a feverish irony.
“But perhaps I misunderstood the delicacies of your German philosophy. Perhaps policeman is a relative term. In an evolutionary sense, sir, the ape fades so gradually into the policeman, that I myself can never detect the shade. The monkey is only the policeman that may be. Perhaps a maiden lady on Clapham Common is only the policeman that might have been. I don’t mind being the policeman that might have been. I don’t mind being anything in German thought.”

“Are you in the police service?” said the old man, ignoring all Syme’s improvised and desperate raillery. “Are you a detective?”

Syme’s heart turned to stone, but his face never changed.

“Your suggestion is ridiculous,” he began. “Why on earth—”

The old man struck his palsied hand passionately on the rickety table, nearly breaking it.

“Did you hear me ask a plain question, you pattering spy?” he shrieked in a high, crazy voice. “Are you, or are you not, a police detective?”

“No!” answered Syme, like a man standing on the hangman’s drop.

“You swear it,” said the old man, leaning across to him, his dead face becoming as it were loathsomely alive. “You swear it! You swear it! If you swear falsely, will you be damned? Will you be sure that the devil dances at your funeral? Will you see that the nightmare sits on your grave? Will there really be no mistake? You are an anarchist, you are a dynamiter! Above all, you are not in any sense a detective? You are not in the British police?”

He leant his angular elbow far across the table, and put up his large loose hand like a flap to his ear.

“I am not in the British police,” said Syme with insane calm.

Professor de Worms fell back in his chair with a curious air of kindly collapse.

“That’s a pity,” he said, “because I am.”

Syme sprang up straight, sending back the bench behind him with a crash.

“Because you are what?” he said thickly. “You are what?”

“I am a policeman,” said the Professor with his first broad smile, and beaming through his spectacles. “But as you think policeman only a relative term, of course I have nothing to do with you. I am in the British police force; but as you tell me you are not in the British police force, I can only say that I met you in a dynamiters’ club. I suppose I ought to arrest you.” And with these words he laid on the table before Syme an exact facsimile of the blue card which Syme had in his own waistcoat pocket, the symbol of his power from the police.

Syme had for a flash the sensation that the cosmos had turned exactly upside
down, that all trees were growing downwards and that all stars were under his
feet. Then came slowly the opposite conviction. For the last twenty-four hours
the cosmos had really been upside down, but now the capsized universe had
come right side up again. This devil from whom he had been fleeing all day was
only an elder brother of his own house, who on the other side of the table lay
back and laughed at him. He did not for the moment ask any questions of detail;
he only knew the happy and silly fact that this shadow, which had pursued him
with an intolerable oppression of peril, was only the shadow of a friend trying to
catch him up. He knew simultaneously that he was a fool and a free man. For
with any recovery from morbidity there must go a certain healthy humiliation.
There comes a certain point in such conditions when only three things are
possible: first a perpetuation of Satanic pride, secondly tears, and third laughter.
Syme’s egotism held hard to the first course for a few seconds, and then
suddenly adopted the third. Taking his own blue police ticket from his own waist
coat pocket, he tossed it on to the table; then he flung his head back until his
spike of yellow beard almost pointed at the ceiling, and shouted with a barbaric
laughter.

Even in that close den, perpetually filled with the din of knives, plates, cans,
clamorous voices, sudden struggles and stampedes, there was something
Homeric in Syme’s mirth which made many half-drunken men look round.
“What yer laughing at, guv’nor?” asked one wondering labourer from the
docks.
“At myself,” answered Syme, and went off again into the agony of his ecstatic
reaction.
“Pull yourself together,” said the Professor, “or you’ll get hysterical. Have
some more beer. I’ll join you.”
“You haven’t drunk your milk,” said Syme.
“My milk!” said the other, in tones of withering and unfathomable contempt,
“my milk! Do you think I’d look at the beastly stuff when I’m out of sight of the
bloody anarchists? We’re all Christians in this room, though perhaps,” he added,
glancing around at the reeling crowd, “not strict ones. Finish my milk? Great
blazes! yes, I’ll finish it right enough!” and he knocked the tumbler off the table,
making a crash of glass and a splash of silver fluid.
Syme was staring at him with a happy curiosity.
“I understand now,” he cried; “of course, you’re not an old man at all.”
“I can’t take my face off here,” replied Professor de Worms. “It’s rather an
elaborate make-up. As to whether I’m an old man, that’s not for me to say. I was
thirty-eight last birthday.”

“Yes, but I mean,” said Syme impatiently, “there’s nothing the matter with you.”

“Yes,” answered the other dispassionately. “I am subject to colds.”

Syme’s laughter at all this had about it a wild weakness of relief. He laughed at the idea of the paralytic Professor being really a young actor dressed up as if for the foot-lights. But he felt that he would have laughed as loudly if a pepperpot had fallen over.

The false Professor drank and wiped his false beard.

“Did you know,” he asked, “that that man Gogol was one of us?”

“I? No, I didn’t know it,” answered Syme in some surprise. “But didn’t you?”

“I knew no more than the dead,” replied the man who called himself de Worms. “I thought the President was talking about me, and I rattled in my boots.”

“And I thought he was talking about me,” said Syme, with his rather reckless laughter. “I had my hand on my revolver all the time.”

“So had I,” said the Professor grimly; “so had Gogol evidently.”

Syme struck the table with an exclamation.

“Why, there were three of us there!” he cried. “Three out of seven is a fighting number. If we had only known that we were three!”

The face of Professor de Worms darkened, and he did not look up.

“We were three,” he said. “If we had been three hundred we could still have done nothing.”

“Not if we were three hundred against four?” asked Syme, jeering rather boisterously.

“No,” said the Professor with sobriety, “not if we were three hundred against Sunday.”

And the mere name struck Syme cold and serious; his laughter had died in his heart before it could die on his lips. The face of the unforgettable President sprang into his mind as startling as a coloured photograph, and he remarked this difference between Sunday and all his satellites, that their faces, however fierce or sinister, became gradually blurred by memory like other human faces, whereas Sunday’s seemed almost to grow more actual during absence, as if a man’s painted portrait should slowly come alive.

They were both silent for a measure of moments, and then Syme’s speech came with a rush, like the sudden foaming of champagne.

“Professor,” he cried, “it is intolerable. Are you afraid of this man?”
The Professor lifted his heavy lids, and gazed at Syme with large, wide-open, blue eyes of an almost ethereal honesty.

“Yes, I am,” he said mildly. “So are you.”

Syme was dumb for an instant. Then he rose to his feet erect, like an insulted man, and thrust the chair away from him.

“Yes,” he said in a voice indescribable, “you are right. I am afraid of him. Therefore I swear by God that I will seek out this man whom I fear until I find him, and strike him on the mouth. If heaven were his throne and the earth his footstool, I swear that I would pull him down.”

“How?” asked the staring Professor. “Why?”

“Because I am afraid of him,” said Syme; “and no man should leave in the universe anything of which he is afraid.”

De Worms blinked at him with a sort of blind wonder. He made an effort to speak, but Syme went on in a low voice, but with an undercurrent of inhuman exaltation—

“Who would condescend to strike down the mere things that he does not fear? Who would debase himself to be merely brave, like any common prizefighter? Who would stoop to be fearless—like a tree? Fight the thing that you fear. You remember the old tale of the English clergyman who gave the last rites to the brigand of Sicily, and how on his death-bed the great robber said, ‘I can give you no money, but I can give you advice for a lifetime: your thumb on the blade, and strike upwards.’ So I say to you, strike upwards, if you strike at the stars.”

The other looked at the ceiling, one of the tricks of his pose.

“Sunday is a fixed star,” he said.

“You shall see him a falling star,” said Syme, and put on his hat.

The decision of his gesture drew the Professor vaguely to his feet.

“Have you any idea,” he asked, with a sort of benevolent bewilderment, “exactly where you are going?”

“Yes,” replied Syme shortly, “I am going to prevent this bomb being thrown in Paris.”

“Have you any conception how?” inquired the other.

“No,” said Syme with equal decision.

“You remember, of course,” resumed the soi-disant de Worms, pulling his beard and looking out of the window, “that when we broke up rather hurriedly the whole arrangements for the atrocity were left in the private hands of the Marquis and Dr. Bull. The Marquis is by this time probably crossing the Channel. But where he will go and what he will do it is doubtful whether even
the President knows; certainly we don’t know. The only man who does know is Dr. Bull.”

“Confound it!” cried Syme. “And we don’t know where he is.”

“Yes,” said the other in his curious, absent-minded way, “I know where he is myself.”

“Will you tell me?” asked Syme with eager eyes.

“I will take you there,” said the Professor, and took down his own hat from a peg.

Syme stood looking at him with a sort of rigid excitement.

“What do you mean?” he asked sharply. “Will you join me? Will you take the risk?”

“Young man,” said the Professor pleasantly, “I am amused to observe that you think I am a coward. As to that I will say only one word, and that shall be entirely in the manner of your own philosophical rhetoric. You think that it is possible to pull down the President. I know that it is impossible, and I am going to try it,” and opening the tavern door, which let in a blast of bitter air, they went out together into the dark streets by the docks.

Most of the snow was melted or trampled to mud, but here and there a clot of it still showed grey rather than white in the gloom. The small streets were sloppy and full of pools, which reflected the flaming lamps irregularly, and by accident, like fragments of some other and fallen world. Syme felt almost dazed as he stepped through this growing confusion of lights and shadows; but his companion walked on with a certain briskness, towards where, at the end of the street, an inch or two of the lamplit river looked like a bar of flame.

“Where are you going?” Syme inquired.

“Just now,” answered the Professor, “I am going just round the corner to see whether Dr. Bull has gone to bed. He is hygienic, and retires early.”

“Dr. Bull!” exclaimed Syme. “Does he live round the corner?”

“No,” answered his friend. “As a matter of fact he lives some way off, on the other side of the river, but we can tell from here whether he has gone to bed.”

Turning the corner as he spoke, and facing the dim river, flecked with flame, he pointed with his stick to the other bank. On the Surrey side at this point there ran out into the Thames, seeming almost to overhang it, a bulk and cluster of those tall tenements, dotted with lighted windows, and rising like factory chimneys to an almost insane height. Their special poise and position made one block of buildings especially look like a Tower of Babel with a hundred eyes. Syme had never seen any of the sky-scraping buildings in America, so he could
only think of the buildings in a dream.

Even as he stared, the highest light in this innumerable lighted turret abruptly went out, as if this black Argus had winked at him with one of his innumerable eyes.

Professor de Worms swung round on his heel, and struck his stick against his boot.

“We are too late,” he said, “the hygienic Doctor has gone to bed.”

“What do you mean?” asked Syme. “Does he live over there, then?”

“Yes,” said de Worms, “behind that particular window which you can’t see. Come along and get some dinner. We must call on him tomorrow morning.”

Without further parley, he led the way through several by-ways until they came out into the flare and clamour of the East India Dock Road. The Professor, who seemed to know his way about the neighbourhood, proceeded to a place where the line of lighted shops fell back into a sort of abrupt twilight and quiet, in which an old white inn, all out of repair, stood back some twenty feet from the road.

“You can find good English inns left by accident everywhere, like fossils,” explained the Professor. “I once found a decent place in the West End.”

“I suppose,” said Syme, smiling, “that this is the corresponding decent place in the East End?”

“It is,” said the Professor reverently, and went in.

In that place they dined and slept, both very thoroughly. The beans and bacon, which these unaccountable people cooked well, the astonishing emergence of Burgundy from their cellars, crowned Syme’s sense of a new comradeship and comfort. Through all this ordeal his root horror had been isolation, and there are no words to express the abyss between isolation and having one ally. It may be conceded to the mathematicians that four is twice two. But two is not twice one; two is two thousand times one. That is why, in spite of a hundred disadvantages, the world will always return to monogamy.

Syme was able to pour out for the first time the whole of his outrageous tale, from the time when Gregory had taken him to the little tavern by the river. He did it idly and amply, in a luxuriant monologue, as a man speaks with very old friends. On his side, also, the man who had impersonated Professor de Worms was not less communicative. His own story was almost as silly as Syme’s.

“That’s a good get-up of yours,” said Syme, draining a glass of Macon; “a lot better than old Gogol’s. Even at the start I thought he was a bit too hairy.”

“A difference of artistic theory,” replied the Professor pensively. “Gogol was
an idealist. He made up as the abstract or platonic ideal of an anarchist. But I am a realist. I am a portrait painter. But, indeed, to say that I am a portrait painter is an inadequate expression. I am a portrait.”

“I don’t understand you,” said Syme.

“I am a portrait,” repeated the Professor. “I am a portrait of the celebrated Professor de Worms, who is, I believe, in Naples.”

“You mean you are made up like him,” said Syme. “But doesn’t he know that you are taking his nose in vain?”

“He knows it right enough,” replied his friend cheerfully.

“Then why doesn’t he denounce you?”

“I have denounced him,” answered the Professor.

“Do explain yourself,” said Syme.

“With pleasure, if you don’t mind hearing my story,” replied the eminent foreign philosopher. “I am by profession an actor, and my name is Wilks. When I was on the stage I mixed with all sorts of Bohemian and blackguard company. Sometimes I touched the edge of the turf, sometimes the riff-raff of the arts, and occasionally the political refugee. In some den of exiled dreamers I was introduced to the great German Nihilist philosopher, Professor de Worms. I did not gather much about him beyond his appearance, which was very disgusting, and which I studied carefully. I understood that he had proved that the destructive principle in the universe was God; hence he insisted on the need for a furious and incessant energy, rending all things in pieces. Energy, he said, was the All. He was lame, shortsighted, and partially paralytic. When I met him I was in a frivolous mood, and I disliked him so much that I resolved to imitate him. If I had been a draughtsman I would have drawn a caricature. I was only an actor, I could only act a caricature. I made myself up into what was meant for a wild exaggeration of the old Professor’s dirty old self. When I went into the room full of his supporters I expected to be received with a roar of laughter, or (if they were too far gone) with a roar of indignation at the insult. I cannot describe the surprise I felt when my entrance was received with a respectful silence, followed (when I had first opened my lips) with a murmur of admiration. The curse of the perfect artist had fallen upon me. I had been too subtle, I had been too true. They thought I really was the great Nihilist Professor. I was a healthy-minded young man at the time, and I confess that it was a blow. Before I could fully recover, however, two or three of these admirers ran up to me radiating indignation, and told me that a public insult had been put upon me in the next room. I inquired its nature. It seemed that an impertinent fellow had dressed himself up as a
preposterous parody of myself. I had drunk more champagne than was good for me, and in a flash of folly I decided to see the situation through. Consequently it was to meet the glare of the company and my own lifted eyebrows and freezing eyes that the real Professor came into the room.

“I need hardly say there was a collision. The pessimists all round me looked anxiously from one Professor to the other Professor to see which was really the more feeble. But I won. An old man in poor health, like my rival, could not be expected to be so impressively feeble as a young actor in the prime of life. You see, he really had paralysis, and working within this definite limitation, he couldn’t be so jolly paralytic as I was. Then he tried to blast my claims intellectually. I countered that by a very simple dodge. Whenever he said something that nobody but he could understand, I replied with something which I could not even understand myself. ‘I don’t fancy,’ he said, ‘that you could have worked out the principle that evolution is only negation, since there inheres in it the introduction of lacuna, which are an essential of differentiation.’ I replied quite scornfully, ‘You read all that up in Pinckwerts; the notion that involution functioned eugenically was exposed long ago by Glumpe.’ It is unnecessary for me to say that there never were such people as Pinckwerts and Glumpe. But the people all round (rather to my surprise) seemed to remember them quite well, and the Professor, finding that the learned and mysterious method left him rather at the mercy of an enemy slightly deficient in scruples, fell back upon a more popular form of wit. ‘I see,’ he sneered, ‘you prevail like the false pig in Aesop.’ ‘And you fail,’ I answered, smiling, ‘like the hedgehog in Montaigne.’ Need I say that there is no hedgehog in Montaigne? ‘Your claptrap comes off,’ he said; ‘so would your beard.’ I had no intelligent answer to this, which was quite true and rather witty. But I laughed heartily, answered, ‘Like the Pantheist’s boots,’ at random, and turned on my heel with all the honours of victory. The real Professor was thrown out, but not with violence, though one man tried very patiently to pull off his nose. He is now, I believe, received everywhere in Europe as a delightful impostor. His apparent earnestness and anger, you see, make him all the more entertaining.”

“Well,” said Syme, “I can understand your putting on his dirty old beard for a night’s practical joke, but I don’t understand your never taking it off again.”

“That is the rest of the story,” said the impersonator. “When I myself left the company, followed by reverent applause, I went limping down the dark street, hoping that I should soon be far enough away to be able to walk like a human being. To my astonishment, as I was turning the corner, I felt a touch on the
shoulder, and turning, found myself under the shadow of an enormous policeman. He told me I was wanted. I struck a sort of paralytic attitude, and cried in a high German accent, ‘Yes, I am wanted—by the oppressed of the world. You are arresting me on the charge of being the great anarchist, Professor de Worms.’ The policeman impassively consulted a paper in his hand, ‘No, sir,’ he said civilly, ‘at least, not exactly, sir. I am arresting you on the charge of not being the celebrated anarchist, Professor de Worms.’ This charge, if it was criminal at all, was certainly the lighter of the two, and I went along with the man, doubtful, but not greatly dismayed. I was shown into a number of rooms, and eventually into the presence of a police officer, who explained that a serious campaign had been opened against the centres of anarchy, and that this, my successful masquerade, might be of considerable value to the public safety. He offered me a good salary and this little blue card. Though our conversation was short, he struck me as a man of very massive common sense and humour; but I cannot tell you much about him personally, because—”

Syme laid down his knife and fork.

“I know,” he said, “because you talked to him in a dark room.”
Professor de Worms nodded and drained his glass.
CHAPTER IX

THE MAN IN SPECTACLES

“BURGUNDY is a jolly thing,” said the Professor sadly, as he set his glass down.
“You don’t look as if it were,” said Syme; “you drink it as if it were medicine.”
“You must excuse my manner,” said the Professor dismally, “my position is rather a curious one. Inside I am really bursting with boyish merriment; but I acted the paralytic Professor so well, that now I can’t leave off. So that when I am among friends, and have no need at all to disguise myself, I still can’t help speaking slow and wrinkling my forehead—just as if it were my forehead. I can be quite happy, you understand, but only in a paralytic sort of way. The most buoyant exclamations leap up in my heart, but they come out of my mouth quite different. You should hear me say, ‘Buck up, old cock!’ It would bring tears to your eyes.”
“It does,” said Syme; “but I cannot help thinking that apart from all that you are really a bit worried.”

The Professor started a little and looked at him steadily.
“You are a very clever fellow,” he said, “it is a pleasure to work with you. Yes, I have rather a heavy cloud in my head. There is a great problem to face,” and he sank his bald brow in his two hands.
Then he said in a low voice—
“Can you play the piano?”
“Yes,” said Syme in simple wonder, “I’m supposed to have a good touch.”
Then, as the other did not speak, he added—
“I trust the great cloud is lifted.”
After a long silence, the Professor said out of the cavernous shadow of his hands—
“It would have done just as well if you could work a typewriter.”
“Thank you,” said Syme, “you flatter me.”
“Listen to me,” said the other, “and remember whom we have to see tomorrow. You and I are going tomorrow to attempt something which is very much more dangerous than trying to steal the Crown Jewels out of the Tower. We are trying to steal a secret from a very sharp, very strong, and very wicked
man. I believe there is no man, except the President, of course, who is so seriously startling and formidable as that little grinning fellow in goggles. He has not perhaps the white-hot enthusiasm unto death, the mad martyrdom for anarchy, which marks the Secretary. But then that very fanaticism in the Secretary has a human pathos, and is almost a redeeming trait. But the little Doctor has a brutal sanity that is more shocking than the Secretary’s disease. Don’t you notice his detestable virility and vitality. He bounces like an india-rubber ball. Depend on it, Sunday was not asleep (I wonder if he ever sleeps?) when he locked up all the plans of this outrage in the round, black head of Dr. Bull.”

“And you think,” said Syme, “that this unique monster will be soothed if I play the piano to him?”

“Don’t be an ass,” said his mentor. “I mentioned the piano because it gives one quick and independent fingers. Syme, if we are to go through this interview and come out sane or alive, we must have some code of signals between us that this brute will not see. I have made a rough alphabetical cypher corresponding to the five fingers—like this, see,” and he rippled with his fingers on the wooden table—“B A D, bad, a word we may frequently require.”

Syme poured himself out another glass of wine, and began to study the scheme. He was abnormally quick with his brains at puzzles, and with his hands at conjuring, and it did not take him long to learn how he might convey simple messages by what would seem to be idle taps upon a table or knee. But wine and companionship had always the effect of inspiring him to a farcical ingenuity, and the Professor soon found himself struggling with the too vast energy of the new language, as it passed through the heated brain of Syme.

“We must have several word-signs,” said Syme seriously—“words that we are likely to want, fine shades of meaning. My favourite word is ‘coeval.’ What’s yours?”

“Do stop playing the goat,” said the Professor plaintively. “You don’t know how serious this is.”

“‘Lush’ too,” said Syme, shaking his head sagaciously, “we must have ‘lush’—word applied to grass, don’t you know?”

“Do you imagine,” asked the Professor furiously, “that we are going to talk to Dr. Bull about grass?”

“There are several ways in which the subject could be approached,” said Syme reflectively, “and the word introduced without appearing forced. We might say, ‘Dr. Bull, as a revolutionist, you remember that a tyrant once advised us to eat
grass; and indeed many of us, looking on the fresh lush grass of summer . . . “

“Do you understand,” said the other, “that this is a tragedy?”

“Perfectly,” replied Syme; “always be comic in a tragedy. What the deuce else
can you do? I wish this language of yours had a wider scope. I suppose we could
not extend it from the fingers to the toes? That would involve pulling off our
boots and socks during the conversation, which however unobtrusively
performed—”

“Syme,” said his friend with a stern simplicity, “go to bed!”

Syme, however, sat up in bed for a considerable time mastering the new code.
He was awakened next morning while the east was still sealed with darkness,
and found his grey-bearded ally standing like a ghost beside his bed.

Syme sat up in bed blinking; then slowly collected his thoughts, threw off the
bedclothes, and stood up. It seemed to him in some curious way that all the
safety and sociability of the night before fell with the bedclothes off him, and he
stood up in an air of cold danger. He still felt an entire trust and loyalty towards
his companion; but it was the trust between two men going to the scaffold.

“Well,” said Syme with a forced cheerfulness as he pulled on his trousers, “I
dreamt of that alphabet of yours. Did it take you long to make it up?”

The Professor made no answer, but gazed in front of him with eyes the colour
of a wintry sea; so Syme repeated his question.

“I say, did it take you long to invent all this? I’m considered good at these
things, and it was a good hour’s grind. Did you learn it all on the spot?”

The Professor was silent; his eyes were wide open, and he wore a fixed but
very small smile.

“How long did it take you?”

The Professor did not move.

“Confound you, can’t you answer?” called out Syme, in a sudden anger that
had something like fear underneath. Whether or no the Professor could answer,
he did not.

Syme stood staring back at the stiff face like parchment and the blank, blue
eyes. His first thought was that the Professor had gone mad, but his second
thought was more frightful. After all, what did he know about this queer creature
whom he had heedlessly accepted as a friend? What did he know, except that the
man had been at the anarchist breakfast and had told him a ridiculous tale? How
improbable it was that there should be another friend there beside Gogol! Was
this man’s silence a sensational way of declaring war? Was this adamantine stare
after all only the awful sneer of some threefold traitor, who had turned for the
last time? He stood and strained his ears in this heartless silence. He almost fancied he could hear dynamiters come to capture him shifting softly in the corridor outside.

Then his eye strayed downwards, and he burst out laughing. Though the Professor himself stood there as voiceless as a statue, his five dumb fingers were dancing alive upon the dead table. Syme watched the twinkling movements of the talking hand, and read clearly the message—

“I will only talk like this. We must get used to it.”

He rapped out the answer with the impatience of relief—

“All right. Let’s get out to breakfast.”

They took their hats and sticks in silence; but as Syme took his sword-stick, he held it hard.

They paused for a few minutes only to stuff down coffee and coarse thick sandwiches at a coffee stall, and then made their way across the river, which under the grey and growing light looked as desolate as Acheron. They reached the bottom of the huge block of buildings which they had seen from across the river, and began in silence to mount the naked and numberless stone steps, only pausing now and then to make short remarks on the rail of the banisters. At about every other flight they passed a window; each window showed them a pale and tragic dawn lifting itself laboriously over London. From each the innumerable roofs of slate looked like the leaden surges of a grey, troubled sea after rain. Syme was increasingly conscious that his new adventure had somehow a quality of cold sanity worse than the wild adventures of the past. Last night, for instance, the tall tenements had seemed to him like a tower in a dream. As he now went up the weary and perpetual steps, he was daunted and bewildered by their almost infinite series. But it was not the hot horror of a dream or of anything that might be exaggeration or delusion. Their infinity was more like the empty infinity of arithmetic, something unthinkable, yet necessary to thought. Or it was like the stunning statements of astronomy about the distance of the fixed stars. He was ascending the house of reason, a thing more hideous than unreason itself.

By the time they reached Dr. Bull’s landing, a last window showed them a harsh, white dawn edged with banks of a kind of coarse red, more like red clay than red cloud. And when they entered Dr. Bull’s bare garret it was full of light.

Syme had been haunted by a half historic memory in connection with these empty rooms and that austere daybreak. The moment he saw the garret and Dr. Bull sitting writing at a table, he remembered what the memory was—the French
Revolution. There should have been the black outline of a guillotine against that heavy red and white of the morning. Dr. Bull was in his white shirt and black breeches only; his cropped, dark head might well have just come out of its wig; he might have been Marat or a more slipshod Robespierre.

Yet when he was seen properly, the French fancy fell away. The Jacobins were idealists; there was about this man a murderous materialism. His position gave him a somewhat new appearance. The strong, white light of morning coming from one side creating sharp shadows, made him seem both more pale and more angular than he had looked at the breakfast on the balcony. Thus the two black glasses that encased his eyes might really have been black cavities in his skull, making him look like a death’s-head. And, indeed, if ever Death himself sat writing at a wooden table, it might have been he.

He looked up and smiled brightly enough as the men came in, and rose with the resilient rapidity of which the Professor had spoken. He set chairs for both of them, and going to a peg behind the door, proceeded to put on a coat and waistcoat of rough, dark tweed; he buttoned it up neatly, and came back to sit down at his table.

The quiet good humour of his manner left his two opponents helpless. It was with some momentary difficulty that the Professor broke silence and began, “I’m sorry to disturb you so early, comrade,” said he, with a careful resumption of the slow de Worms manner. “You have no doubt made all the arrangements for the Paris affair?” Then he added with infinite slowness, “We have information which renders intolerable anything in the nature of a moment’s delay.”

Dr. Bull smiled again, but continued to gaze on them without speaking. The Professor resumed, a pause before each weary word—

“Please do not think me excessively abrupt; but I advise you to alter those plans, or if it is too late for that, to follow your agent with all the support you can get for him. Comrade Syme and I have had an experience which it would take more time to recount than we can afford, if we are to act on it. I will, however, relate the occurrence in detail, even at the risk of losing time, if you really feel that it is essential to the understanding of the problem we have to discuss.”

He was spinning out his sentences, making them intolerably long and lingering, in the hope of maddening the practical little Doctor into an explosion of impatience which might show his hand. But the little Doctor continued only to stare and smile, and the monologue was uphill work. Syme began to feel a new sickness and despair. The Doctor’s smile and silence were not at all like the cataleptic stare and horrible silence which he had confronted in the Professor
half an hour before. About the Professor’s makeup and all his antics there was always something merely grotesque, like a gollywog. Syme remembered those wild woes of yesterday as one remembers being afraid of Bogy in childhood. But here was daylight; here was a healthy, square-shouldered man in tweeds, not odd save for the accident of his ugly spectacles, not glaring or grinning at all, but smiling steadily and not saying a word. The whole had a sense of unbearable reality. Under the increasing sunlight the colours of the Doctor’s complexion, the pattern of his tweeds, grew and expanded outrageously, as such things grow too important in a realistic novel. But his smile was quite slight, the pose of his head polite; the only uncanny thing was his silence.

“As I say,” resumed the Professor, like a man toiling through heavy sand, “the incident that has occurred to us and has led us to ask for information about the Marquis, is one which you may think it better to have narrated; but as it came in the way of Comrade Syme rather than me—”

His words seemed to be dragging out like words in an anthem; but Syme, who was watching, saw his long fingers rattle quickly on the edge of the crazy table. He read the message, “You must go on. This devil has sucked me dry!”

Syme plunged into the breach with that bravado of improvisation which always came to him when he was alarmed.

“Yes, the thing really happened to me,” he said hastily. “I had the good fortune to fall into conversation with a detective who took me, thanks to my hat, for a respectable person. Wishing to clinch my reputation for respectability, I took him and made him very drunk at the Savoy. Under this influence he became friendly, and told me in so many words that within a day or two they hope to arrest the Marquis in France.

“So unless you or I can get on his track—”

The Doctor was still smiling in the most friendly way, and his protected eyes were still impenetrable. The Professor signalled to Syme that he would resume his explanation, and he began again with the same elaborate calm.

“Syme immediately brought this information to me, and we came here together to see what use you would be inclined to make of it. It seems to me unquestionably urgent that—”

All this time Syme had been staring at the Doctor almost as steadily as the Doctor stared at the Professor, but quite without the smile. The nerves of both comrades-in-arms were near snapping under that strain of motionless amiability, when Syme suddenly leant forward and idly tapped the edge of the table. His message to his ally ran, “I have an intuition.”
The Professor, with scarcely a pause in his monologue, signalled back, “Then sit on it.”

Syme telegraphed, “It is quite extraordinary.”

The other answered, “Extraordinary rot!”

Syme said, “I am a poet.”

The other retorted, “You are a dead man.”

Syme had gone quite red up to his yellow hair, and his eyes were burning feverishly. As he said he had an intuition, and it had risen to a sort of lightheaded certainty. Resuming his symbolic taps, he signalled to his friend, “You scarcely realise how poetic my intuition is. It has that sudden quality we sometimes feel in the coming of spring.”

He then studied the answer on his friend’s fingers. The answer was, “Go to hell!”

The Professor then resumed his merely verbal monologue addressed to the Doctor.

“Perhaps I should rather say,” said Syme on his fingers, “that it resembles that sudden smell of the sea which may be found in the heart of lush woods.”

His companion disdained to reply.

“Or yet again,” tapped Syme, “it is positive, as is the passionate red hair of a beautiful woman.”

The Professor was continuing his speech, but in the middle of it Syme decided to act. He leant across the table, and said in a voice that could not be neglected—

“Dr. Bull!”

The Doctor’s sleek and smiling head did not move, but they could have sworn that under his dark glasses his eyes darted towards Syme.

“Dr. Bull,” said Syme, in a voice peculiarly precise and courteous, “would you do me a small favour? Would you be so kind as to take off your spectacles?”

The Professor swung round on his seat, and stared at Syme with a sort of frozen fury of astonishment. Syme, like a man who has thrown his life and fortune on the table, leaned forward with a fiery face. The Doctor did not move.

For a few seconds there was a silence in which one could hear a pin drop, split once by the single hoot of a distant steamer on the Thames. Then Dr. Bull rose slowly, still smiling, and took off his spectacles.

Syme sprang to his feet, stepping backwards a little, like a chemical lecturer from a successful explosion. His eyes were like stars, and for an instant he could only point without speaking.

The Professor had also started to his feet, forgetful of his supposed paralysis.
He leant on the back of the chair and stared doubtfully at Dr. Bull, as if the Doctor had been turned into a toad before his eyes. And indeed it was almost as great a transformation scene.

The two detectives saw sitting in the chair before them a very boyish-looking young man, with very frank and happy hazel eyes, an open expression, cockney clothes like those of a city clerk, and an unquestionable breath about him of being very good and rather commonplace. The smile was still there, but it might have been the first smile of a baby.

“I knew I was a poet,” cried Syme in a sort of ecstasy. “I knew my intuition was as infallible as the Pope. It was the spectacles that did it! It was all the spectacles. Given those beastly black eyes, and all the rest of him his health and his jolly looks, made him a live devil among dead ones.”

“It certainly does make a queer difference,” said the Professor shakily. “But as regards the project of Dr. Bull—”

“Project be damned!” roared Syme, beside himself. “Look at him! Look at his face, look at his collar, look at his blessed boots! You don’t suppose, do you, that that thing’s an anarchist?”

“Syme!” cried the other in an apprehensive agony.

“Why, by God,” said Syme, “I’ll take the risk of that myself! Dr. Bull, I am a police officer. There’s my card,” and he flung down the blue card upon the table.

The Professor still feared that all was lost; but he was loyal. He pulled out his own official card and put it beside his friend’s. Then the third man burst out laughing, and for the first time that morning they heard his voice.

“I’m awfully glad you chaps have come so early,” he said, with a sort of schoolboy flippancy, “for we can all start for France together. Yes, I’m in the force right enough,” and he flicked a blue card towards them lightly as a matter of form.

Clapping a brisk bowler on his head and resuming his goblin glasses, the Doctor moved so quickly towards the door, that the others instinctively followed him. Syme seemed a little distraught, and as he passed under the doorway he suddenly struck his stick on the stone passage so that it rang.

“But Lord God Almighty,” he cried out, “if this is all right, there were more damned detectives than there were damned dynamiters at the damned Council!”

“We might have fought easily,” said Bull; “we were four against three.”

The Professor was descending the stairs, but his voice came up from below.

“No,” said the voice, “we were not four against three—we were not so lucky. We were four against One.”
The others went down the stairs in silence.

The young man called Bull, with an innocent courtesy characteristic of him, insisted on going last until they reached the street; but there his own robust rapidity asserted itself unconsciously, and he walked quickly on ahead towards a railway inquiry office, talking to the others over his shoulder.

“It is jolly to get some pals,” he said. “I’ve been half dead with the jumps, being quite alone. I nearly flung my arms round Gogol and embraced him, which would have been imprudent. I hope you won’t despise me for having been in a blue funk.”

“All the blue devils in blue hell,” said Syme, “contributed to my blue funk! But the worst devil was you and your infernal goggles.”

The young man laughed delightedly.

“Wasn’t it a rag?” he said. “Such a simple idea—not my own. I haven’t got the brains. You see, I wanted to go into the detective service, especially the anti-dynamite business. But for that purpose they wanted someone to dress up as a dynamiter; and they all swore by blazing that I could never look like a dynamiter. They said my very walk was respectable, and that seen from behind I looked like the British Constitution. They said I looked too healthy and too optimistic, and too reliable and benevolent; they called me all sorts of names at Scotland Yard. They said that if I had been a criminal, I might have made my fortune by looking so like an honest man; but as I had the misfortune to be an honest man, there was not even the remotest chance of my assisting them by ever looking like a criminal. But at last I was brought before some old josser who was high up in the force, and who seemed to have no end of a head on his shoulders. And there the others all talked hopelessly. One asked whether a bushy beard would hide my nice smile; another said that if they blacked my face I might look like a negro anarchist; but this old chap chipped in with a most extraordinary remark. ‘A pair of smoked spectacles will do it,’ he said positively. ‘Look at him now; he looks like an angelic office boy. Put him on a pair of smoked spectacles, and children will scream at the sight of him.’ And so it was, by George! When once my eyes were covered, all the rest, smile and big shoulders and short hair, made me look a perfect little devil. As I say, it was simple enough when it was done, like miracles; but that wasn’t the really miraculous part of it. There was one really staggering thing about the business, and my head still turns at it.”

“What was that?” asked Syme.

“I’ll tell you,” answered the man in spectacles. “This big pot in the police who sized me up so that he knew how the goggles would go with my hair and socks
—by God, he never saw me at all!”

Syme’s eyes suddenly flashed on him.

“How was that?” he asked. “I thought you talked to him.”

“So I did,” said Bull brightly; “but we talked in a pitch-dark room like a coalcellar. There, you would never have guessed that.”

“I could not have conceived it,” said Syme gravely.

“It is indeed a new idea,” said the Professor.

Their new ally was in practical matters a whirlwind. At the inquiry office he asked with businesslike brevity about the trains for Dover. Having got his information, he bundled the company into a cab, and put them and himself inside a railway carriage before they had properly realised the breathless process. They were already on the Calais boat before conversation flowed freely.

“I had already arranged,” he explained, “to go to France for my lunch; but I am delighted to have someone to lunch with me. You see, I had to send that beast, the Marquis, over with his bomb, because the President had his eye on me, though God knows how. I’ll tell you the story some day. It was perfectly choking. Whenever I tried to slip out of it I saw the President somewhere, smiling out of the bow-window of a club, or taking off his hat to me from the top of an omnibus. I tell you, you can say what you like, that fellow sold himself to the devil; he can be in six places at once.”

“So you sent the Marquis off, I understand,” asked the Professor. “Was it long ago? Shall we be in time to catch him?”

“Yes,” answered the new guide, “I’ve timed it all. He’ll still be at Calais when we arrive.”

“But when we do catch him at Calais,” said the Professor, “what are we going to do?”

At this question the countenance of Dr. Bull fell for the first time. He reflected a little, and then said—

“Theoretically, I suppose, we ought to call the police.”

“Not I,” said Syme. “Theoretically I ought to drown myself first. I promised a poor fellow, who was a real modern pessimist, on my word of honour not to tell the police. I’m no hand at casuistry, but I can’t break my word to a modern pessimist. It’s like breaking one’s word to a child.”

“I’m in the same boat,” said the Professor. “I tried to tell the police and I couldn’t, because of some silly oath I took. You see, when I was an actor I was a sort of all-round beast. Perjury or treason is the only crime I haven’t committed. If I did that I shouldn’t know the difference between right and wrong.”
“I’ve been through all that,” said Dr. Bull, “and I’ve made up my mind. I gave my promise to the Secretary—you know him, man who smiles upside down. My friends, that man is the most utterly unhappy man that was ever human. It may be his digestion, or his conscience, or his nerves, or his philosophy of the universe, but he’s damned, he’s in hell! Well, I can’t turn on a man like that, and hunt him down. It’s like whipping a leper. I may be mad, but that’s how I feel; and there’s jolly well the end of it.”

“I don’t think you’re mad,” said Syme. “I knew you would decide like that when first you—”

“Eh?” said Dr. Bull.

“When first you took off your spectacles.”

Dr. Bull smiled a little, and strolled across the deck to look at the sunlit sea. Then he strolled back again, kicking his heels carelessly, and a companionable silence fell between the three men.

“Well,” said Syme, “it seems that we have all the same kind of morality or immorality, so we had better face the fact that comes of it.”

“Yes,” assented the Professor, “you’re quite right; and we must hurry up, for I can see the Grey Nose standing out from France.”

“The fact that comes of it,” said Syme seriously, “is this, that we three are alone on this planet. Gogol has gone, God knows where; perhaps the President has smashed him like a fly. On the Council we are three men against three, like the Romans who held the bridge. But we are worse off than that, first because they can appeal to their organization and we cannot appeal to ours, and second because—”

“Because one of those other three men,” said the Professor, “is not a man.”

Syme nodded and was silent for a second or two, then he said—

“My idea is this. We must do something to keep the Marquis in Calais till tomorrow midday. I have turned over twenty schemes in my head. We cannot denounce him as a dynamiter; that is agreed. We cannot get him detained on some trivial charge, for we should have to appear; he knows us, and he would smell a rat. We cannot pretend to keep him on anarchist business; he might swallow much in that way, but not the notion of stopping in Calais while the Czar went safely through Paris. We might try to kidnap him, and lock him up ourselves; but he is a well-known man here. He has a whole bodyguard of friends; he is very strong and brave, and the event is doubtful. The only thing I can see to do is actually to take advantage of the very things that are in the Marquis’s favour. I am going to profit by the fact that he is a highly respected
nobleman. I am going to profit by the fact that he has many friends and moves in the best society.”

“What the devil are you talking about?” asked the Professor.

“The Symes are first mentioned in the fourteenth century,” said Syme; “but there is a tradition that one of them rode behind Bruce at Bannockburn. Since 1350 the tree is quite clear.”

“He’s gone off his head,” said the little Doctor, staring.

“Our bearings,” continued Syme calmly, “are ‘argent a chevron gules charged with three cross crosslets of the field.’ The motto varies.”

The Professor seized Syme roughly by the waistcoat.

“We are just inshore,” he said. “Are you seasick or joking in the wrong place?”

“My remarks are almost painfully practical,” answered Syme, in an unhurried manner. “The house of St. Eustache also is very ancient. The Marquis cannot deny that he is a gentleman. He cannot deny that I am a gentleman. And in order to put the matter of my social position quite beyond a doubt, I propose at the earliest opportunity to knock his hat off. But here we are in the harbour.”

They went on shore under the strong sun in a sort of daze. Syme, who had now taken the lead as Bull had taken it in London, led them along a kind of marine parade until he came to some cafes, embowered in a bulk of greenery and overlooking the sea. As he went before them his step was slightly swaggering, and he swung his stick like a sword. He was making apparently for the extreme end of the line of cafes, but he stopped abruptly. With a sharp gesture he motioned them to silence, but he pointed with one gloved finger to a cafe table under a bank of flowering foliage at which sat the Marquis de St. Eustache, his teeth shining in his thick, black beard, and his bold, brown face shadowed by a light yellow straw hat and outlined against the violet sea.
CHAPTER X

THE DUEL

SYME sat down at a cafe table with his companions, his blue eyes sparkling like the bright sea below, and ordered a bottle of Saumur with a pleased impatience. He was for some reason in a condition of curious hilarity. His spirits were already unnaturally high; they rose as the Saumur sank, and in half an hour his talk was a torrent of nonsense. He professed to be making out a plan of the conversation which was going to ensue between himself and the deadly Marquis. He jotted it down wildly with a pencil. It was arranged like a printed catechism, with questions and answers, and was delivered with an extraordinary rapidity of utterance.

“I shall approach. Before taking off his hat, I shall take off my own. I shall say, ‘The Marquis de Saint Eustache, I believe.’ He will say, ‘The celebrated Mr. Syme, I presume.’ He will say in the most exquisite French, ‘How are you?’ I shall reply in the most exquisite Cockney, ‘Oh, just the Syme—’”

“Oh, shut it,” said the man in spectacles. “Pull yourself together, and chuck away that bit of paper. What are you really going to do?”

“But it was a lovely catechism,” said Syme pathetically. “Do let me read it you. It has only forty-three questions and answers, and some of the Marquis’s answers are wonderfully witty. I like to be just to my enemy.”

“But what’s the good of it all?” asked Dr. Bull in exasperation.

“It leads up to my challenge, don’t you see,” said Syme, beaming. “When the Marquis has given the thirty-ninth reply, which runs—”

“Has it by any chance occurred to you,” asked the Professor, with a ponderous simplicity, “that the Marquis may not say all the forty-three things you have put down for him? In that case, I understand, your own epigrams may appear somewhat more forced.”

Syme struck the table with a radiant face.

“Why, how true that is,” he said, “and I never thought of it. Sir, you have an intellect beyond the common. You will make a name.”

“Ah, you’re as drunk as an owl!” said the Doctor.

“It only remains,” continued Syme quite unperturbed, “to adopt some other method of breaking the ice (if I may so express it) between myself and the man I wish to kill. And since the course of a dialogue cannot be predicted by one of its
parties alone (as you have pointed out with such recondite acumen), the only thing to be done, I suppose, is for the one party, as far as possible, to do all the dialogue by himself. And so I will, by George!” And he stood up suddenly, his yellow hair blowing in the slight sea breeze.

A band was playing in a café chantant hidden somewhere among the trees, and a woman had just stopped singing. On Syme’s heated head the bray of the brass band seemed like the jar and jingle of that barrel-organ in Leicester Square, to the tune of which he had once stood up to die. He looked across to the little table where the Marquis sat. The man had two companions now, solemn Frenchmen in frock-coats and silk hats, one of them with the red rosette of the Legion of Honour, evidently people of a solid social position. Besides these black, cylindrical costumes, the Marquis, in his loose straw hat and light spring clothes, looked Bohemian and even barbaric; but he looked the Marquis. Indeed, one might say that he looked the king, with his animal elegance, his scornful eyes, and his proud head lifted against the purple sea. But he was no Christian king, at any rate; he was, rather, some swarthy despot, half Greek, half Asiatic, who in the days when slavery seemed natural looked down on the Mediterranean, on his galley and his groaning slaves. Just so, Syme thought, would the brown-gold face of such a tyrant have shown against the dark green olives and the burning blue.

“Are you going to address the meeting?” asked the Professor peevishly, seeing that Syme still stood up without moving.

Syme drained his last glass of sparkling wine.

“I am,” he said, pointing across to the Marquis and his companions, “that meeting. That meeting displeases me. I am going to pull that meeting’s great ugly, mahogany-coloured nose.”

He stepped across swiftly, if not quite steadily. The Marquis, seeing him, arched his black Assyrian eyebrows in surprise, but smiled politely.

“You are Mr. Syme, I think,” he said.

Syme bowed.

“And you are the Marquis de Saint Eustache,” he said gracefully. “Permit me to pull your nose.”

He leant over to do so, but the Marquis started backwards, upsetting his chair, and the two men in top hats held Syme back by the shoulders.

“This man has insulted me!” said Syme, with gestures of explanation.

“Insulted you?” cried the gentleman with the red rosette, “when?”

“Oh, just now,” said Syme recklessly. “He insulted my mother.”
“Insulted your mother!” exclaimed the gentleman incredulously.

“Well, anyhow,” said Syme, conceding a point, “my aunt.”

“But how can the Marquis have insulted your aunt just now?” said the second gentleman with some legitimate wonder. “He has been sitting here all the time.”

“Ah, it was what he said!” said Syme darkly.

“I said nothing at all,” said the Marquis, “except something about the band. I only said that I liked Wagner played well.”

“It was an allusion to my family,” said Syme firmly. “My aunt played Wagner badly. It was a painful subject. We are always being insulted about it.”

“This seems most extraordinary,” said the gentleman who was decoré, looking doubtfully at the Marquis.

“Oh, I assure you,” said Syme earnestly, “the whole of your conversation was simply packed with sinister allusions to my aunt’s weaknesses.”

“This is nonsense!” said the second gentleman. “I for one have said nothing for half an hour except that I liked the singing of that girl with black hair.”

“Well, there you are again!” said Syme indignantly. “My aunt’s was red.”

“It seems to me,” said the other, “that you are simply seeking a pretext to insult the Marquis.”

“By George!” said Syme, facing round and looking at him, “what a clever chap you are!”

The Marquis started up with eyes flaming like a tiger’s.

“Seeking a quarrel with me!” he cried. “Seeking a fight with me! By God! there was never a man who had to seek long. These gentlemen will perhaps act for me. There are still four hours of daylight. Let us fight this evening.”

Syme bowed with a quite beautiful graciousness.

“Marquis,” he said, “your action is worthy of your fame and blood. Permit me to consult for a moment with the gentlemen in whose hands I shall place myself.”

In three long strides he rejoined his companions, and they, who had seen his champagne-inspired attack and listened to his idiotic explanations, were quite startled at the look of him. For now that he came back to them he was quite sober, a little pale, and he spoke in a low voice of passionate practicality.

“I have done it,” he said hoarsely. “I have fixed a fight on the beast. But look here, and listen carefully. There is no time for talk. You are my seconds, and everything must come from you. Now you must insist, and insist absolutely, on the duel coming off after seven tomorrow, so as to give me the chance of preventing him from catching the 7.45 for Paris. If he misses that he misses his
crime. He can’t refuse to meet you on such a small point of time and place. But this is what he will do. He will choose a field somewhere near a wayside station, where he can pick up the train. He is a very good swordsman, and he will trust to killing me in time to catch it. But I can fence well too, and I think I can keep him in play, at any rate, until the train is lost. Then perhaps he may kill me to console his feelings. You understand? Very well then, let me introduce you to some charming friends of mine,” and leading them quickly across the parade, he presented them to the Marquis’s seconds by two very aristocratic names of which they had not previously heard.

Syme was subject to spasms of singular common sense, not otherwise a part of his character. They were (as he said of his impulse about the spectacles) poetic intuitions, and they sometimes rose to the exaltation of prophecy.

He had correctly calculated in this case the policy of his opponent. When the Marquis was informed by his seconds that Syme could only fight in the morning, he must fully have realised that an obstacle had suddenly arisen between him and his bomb-throwing business in the capital. Naturally he could not explain this objection to his friends, so he chose the course which Syme had predicted. He induced his seconds to settle on a small meadow not far from the railway, and he trusted to the fatality of the first engagement.

When he came down very coolly to the field of honour, no one could have guessed that he had any anxiety about a journey; his hands were in his pockets, his straw hat on the back of his head, his handsome face brazen in the sun. But it might have struck a stranger as odd that there appeared in his train, not only his seconds carrying the sword-case, but two of his servants carrying a portmanteau and a luncheon basket.

Early as was the hour, the sun soaked everything in warmth, and Syme was vaguely surprised to see so many spring flowers burning gold and silver in the tall grass in which the whole company stood almost knee-deep.

With the exception of the Marquis, all the men were in sombre and solemn morning-dress, with hats like black chimney-pots; the little Doctor especially, with the addition of his black spectacles, looked like an undertaker in a farce. Syme could not help feeling a comic contrast between this funereal church parade of apparel and the rich and glistening meadow, growing wild flowers everywhere. But, indeed, this comic contrast between the yellow blossoms and the black hats was but a symbol of the tragic contrast between the yellow blossoms and the black business. On his right was a little wood; far away to his left lay the long curve of the railway line, which he was, so to speak, guarding
from the Marquis, whose goal and escape it was. In front of him, behind the black group of his opponents, he could see, like a tinted cloud, a small almond bush in flower against the faint line of the sea.

The member of the Legion of Honour, whose name it seemed was Colonel Ducroix, approached the Professor and Dr. Bull with great politeness, and suggested that the play should terminate with the first considerable hurt.

Dr. Bull, however, having been carefully coached by Syme upon this point of policy, insisted, with great dignity and in very bad French, that it should continue until one of the combatants was disabled. Syme had made up his mind that he could avoid disabling the Marquis and prevent the Marquis from disabling him for at least twenty minutes. In twenty minutes the Paris train would have gone by.

"To a man of the well-known skill and valour of Monsieur de St. Eustache," said the Professor solemnly, "it must be a matter of indifference which method is adopted, and our principal has strong reasons for demanding the longer encounter, reasons the delicacy of which prevent me from being explicit, but for the just and honourable nature of which I can—"

"Peste!" broke from the Marquis behind, whose face had suddenly darkened, "let us stop talking and begin," and he slashed off the head of a tall flower with his stick.

Syme understood his rude impatience and instinctively looked over his shoulder to see whether the train was coming in sight. But there was no smoke on the horizon.

Colonel Ducroix knelt down and unlocked the case, taking out a pair of twin swords, which took the sunlight and turned to two streaks of white fire. He offered one to the Marquis, who snatched it without ceremony, and another to Syme, who took it, bent it, and poised it with as much delay as was consistent with dignity.

Then the Colonel took out another pair of blades, and taking one himself and giving another to Dr. Bull, proceeded to place the men.

Both combatants had thrown off their coats and waistcoats, and stood sword in hand. The seconds stood on each side of the line of fight with drawn swords also, but still sombre in their dark frock-coats and hats. The principals saluted. The Colonel said quietly, "Engage!" and the two blades touched and tingled.

When the jar of the joined iron ran up Syme's arm, all the fantastic fears that have been the subject of this story fell from him like dreams from a man waking up in bed. He remembered them clearly and in order as mere delusions of the
nerves—how the fear of the Professor had been the fear of the tyrannic accidents of nightmare, and how the fear of the Doctor had been the fear of the airless vacuum of science. The first was the old fear that any miracle might happen, the second the more hopeless modern fear that no miracle can ever happen. But he saw that these fears were fancies, for he found himself in the presence of the great fact of the fear of death, with its coarse and pitiless common sense. He felt like a man who had dreamed all night of falling over precipices, and had woken up on the morning when he was to be hanged. For as soon as he had seen the sunlight run down the channel of his foe’s foreshortened blade, and as soon as he had felt the two tongues of steel touch, vibrating like two living things, he knew that his enemy was a terrible fighter, and that probably his last hour had come.

He felt a strange and vivid value in all the earth around him, in the grass under his feet; he felt the love of life in all living things. He could almost fancy that he heard the grass growing; he could almost fancy that even as he stood fresh flowers were springing up and breaking into blossom in the meadow—flowers blood red and burning gold and blue, fulfilling the whole pageant of the spring. And whenever his eyes strayed for a flash from the calm, staring, hypnotic eyes of the Marquis, they saw the little tuft of almond tree against the sky-line. He had the feeling that if by some miracle he escaped he would be ready to sit for ever before that almond tree, desiring nothing else in the world.

But while earth and sky and everything had the living beauty of a thing lost, the other half of his head was as clear as glass, and he was parrying his enemy’s point with a kind of clockwork skill of which he had hardly supposed himself capable. Once his enemy’s point ran along his wrist, leaving a slight streak of blood, but it either was not noticed or was tacitly ignored. Every now and then he riposted, and once or twice he could almost fancy that he felt his point go home, but as there was no blood on blade or shirt he supposed he was mistaken. Then came an interruption and a change.

At the risk of losing all, the Marquis, interrupting his quiet stare, flashed one glance over his shoulder to the line of railway on his right. Then he turned on Syme a face transfigured to that of a fiend, and began to fight as if with twenty weapons. The attack came so fast and furious, that the one shining sword seemed a shower of shining arrows. Syme had no chance to look at the railway; but also he had no need. He could guess the reason of the Marquis’s sudden madness of battle—the Paris train was in sight.

But the Marquis’s morbid energy over-reached itself. Twice Syme, parrying, knocked his opponent’s point far out of the fighting circle; and the third time his
riposte was so rapid, that there was no doubt about the hit this time. Syme’s sword actually bent under the weight of the Marquis’s body, which it had pierced.

Syme was as certain that he had stuck his blade into his enemy as a gardener that he has stuck his spade into the ground. Yet the Marquis sprang back from the stroke without a stagger, and Syme stood staring at his own sword-point like an idiot. There was no blood on it at all.

There was an instant of rigid silence, and then Syme in his turn fell furiously on the other, filled with a flaming curiosity. The Marquis was probably, in a general sense, a better fencer than he, as he had surmised at the beginning, but at the moment the Marquis seemed distraught and at a disadvantage. He fought wildly and even weakly, and he constantly looked away at the railway line, almost as if he feared the train more than the pointed steel. Syme, on the other hand, fought fiercely but still carefully, in an intellectual fury, eager to solve the riddle of his own bloodless sword. For this purpose, he aimed less at the Marquis’s body, and more at his throat and head. A minute and a half afterwards he felt his point enter the man’s neck below the jaw. It came out clean. Half mad, he thrust again, and made what should have been a bloody scar on the Marquis’s cheek. But there was no scar.

For one moment the heaven of Syme again grew black with supernatural terrors. Surely the man had a charmed life. But this new spiritual dread was a more awful thing than had been the mere spiritual topsy-turvydom symbolised by the paralytic who pursued him. The Professor was only a goblin; this man was a devil—perhaps he was the Devil! Anyhow, this was certain, that three times had a human sword been driven into him and made no mark. When Syme had that thought he drew himself up, and all that was good in him sang high up in the air as a high wind sings in the trees. He thought of all the human things in his story—of the Chinese lanterns in Saffron Park, of the girl’s red hair in the garden, of the honest, beer-swilling sailors down by the dock, of his loyal companions standing by. Perhaps he had been chosen as a champion of all these fresh and kindly things to cross swords with the enemy of all creation. “After all,” he said to himself, “I am more than a devil; I am a man. I can do the one thing which Satan himself cannot do—I can die,” and as the word went through his head, he heard a faint and far-off hoot, which would soon be the roar of the Paris train.

He fell to fighting again with a supernatural levity, like a Mohammedan panting for Paradise. As the train came nearer and nearer he fancied he could see
people putting up the floral arches in Paris; he joined in the growing noise and the glory of the great Republic whose gate he was guarding against Hell. His thoughts rose higher and higher with the rising roar of the train, which ended, as if proudly, in a long and piercing whistle. The train stopped.

Suddenly, to the astonishment of everyone the Marquis sprang back quite out of sword reach and threw down his sword. The leap was wonderful, and not the less wonderful because Syme had plunged his sword a moment before into the man’s thigh.

“Stop!” said the Marquis in a voice that compelled a momentary obedience. “I want to say something.”

“What is the matter?” asked Colonel Ducroix, staring. “Has there been foul play?”

“There has been foul play somewhere,” said Dr. Bull, who was a little pale. “Our principal has wounded the Marquis four times at least, and he is none the worse.”

The Marquis put up his hand with a curious air of ghastly patience.

“Please let me speak,” he said. “It is rather important. Mr. Syme,” he continued, turning to his opponent, “we are fighting today, if I remember right, because you expressed a wish (which I thought irrational) to pull my nose. Would you oblige me by pulling my nose now as quickly as possible? I have to catch a train.”

“I protest that this is most irregular,” said Dr. Bull indignantly.

“It is certainly somewhat opposed to precedent,” said Colonel Ducroix, looking wistfully at his principal. “There is, I think, one case on record (Captain Bellegarde and the Baron Zumpt) in which the weapons were changed in the middle of the encounter at the request of one of the combatants. But one can hardly call one’s nose a weapon.”

“Will you or will you not pull my nose?” said the Marquis in exasperation. “Come, come, Mr. Syme! You wanted to do it, do it! You can have no conception of how important it is to me. Don’t be so selfish! Pull my nose at once, when I ask you!” and he bent slightly forward with a fascinating smile. The Paris train, panting and groaning, had grated into a little station behind the neighbouring hill.

Syme had the feeling he had more than once had in these adventures—the sense that a horrible and sublime wave lifted to heaven was just toppling over. Walking in a world he half understood, he took two paces forward and seized the Roman nose of this remarkable nobleman. He pulled it hard, and it came off in
his hand.

He stood for some seconds with a foolish solemnity, with the pasteboard proboscis still between his fingers, looking at it, while the sun and the clouds and the wooded hills looked down upon this imbecile scene.

The Marquis broke the silence in a loud and cheerful voice.

"If anyone has any use for my left eyebrow," he said, "he can have it. Colonel Ducroix, do accept my left eyebrow! It’s the kind of thing that might come in useful any day," and he gravely tore off one of his swarthy Assyrian brows, bringing about half his brown forehead with it, and politely offered it to the Colonel, who stood crimson and speechless with rage.

"If I had known," he spluttered, "that I was acting for a poltroon who pads himself to fight—"

"Oh, I know, I know!" said the Marquis, recklessly throwing various parts of himself right and left about the field. "You are making a mistake; but it can’t be explained just now. I tell you the train has come into the station!"

"Yes," said Dr. Bull fiercely, "and the train shall go out of the station. It shall go out without you. We know well enough for what devil’s work—"

The mysterious Marquis lifted his hands with a desperate gesture. He was a strange scarecrow standing there in the sun with half his old face peeled off, and half another face glaring and grinning from underneath.

"Will you drive me mad?" he cried. "The train—"

"You shall not go by the train," said Syme firmly, and grasped his sword. The wild figure turned towards Syme, and seemed to be gathering itself for a sublime effort before speaking.

"You great fat, blasted, blear-eyed, blundering, thundering, brainless, Godforsaken, doddering, damned fool!" he said without taking breath. "You great silly, pink-faced, towheaded turnip! You—"

"You shall not go by this train," repeated Syme.

"And why the infernal blazes," roared the other, "should I want to go by the train?"

"We know all," said the Professor sternly. "You are going to Paris to throw a bomb!"

"Going to Jericho to throw a Jabberwock!" cried the other, tearing his hair, which came off easily.

"Have you all got softening of the brain, that you don’t realise what I am? Did you really think I wanted to catch that train? Twenty Paris trains might go by for me. Damn Paris trains!"
“Then what did you care about?” began the Professor.

“What did I care about? I didn’t care about catching the train; I cared about whether the train caught me, and now, by God! it has caught me.”

“I regret to inform you,” said Syme with restraint, “that your remarks convey no impression to my mind. Perhaps if you were to remove the remains of your original forehead and some portion of what was once your chin, your meaning would become clearer. Mental lucidity fulfils itself in many ways. What do you mean by saying that the train has caught you? It may be my literary fancy, but somehow I feel that it ought to mean something.”

“It means everything,” said the other, “and the end of everything. Sunday has us now in the hollow of his hand.”

“Us!” repeated the Professor, as if stupefied. “What do you mean by ‘us’?”

“The police, of course!” said the Marquis, and tore off his scalp and half his face.

The head which emerged was the blonde, well brushed, smooth-haired head which is common in the English constabulary, but the face was terribly pale.

“I am Inspector Ratcliffe,” he said, with a sort of haste that verged on harshness. “My name is pretty well known to the police, and I can see well enough that you belong to them. But if there is any doubt about my position, I have a card,” and he began to pull a blue card from his pocket.

The Professor gave a tired gesture.

“Oh, don’t show it us,” he said wearily; “we’ve got enough of them to equip a paper-chase.”

The little man named Bull, had, like many men who seem to be of a mere vivacious vulgarity, sudden movements of good taste. Here he certainly saved the situation. In the midst of this staggering transformation scene he stepped forward with all the gravity and responsibility of a second, and addressed the two seconds of the Marquis.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “we all owe you a serious apology; but I assure you that you have not been made the victims of such a low joke as you imagine, or indeed of anything undignified in a man of honour. You have not wasted your time; you have helped to save the world. We are not buffoons, but very desperate men at war with a vast conspiracy. A secret society of anarchists is hunting us like hares; not such unfortunate madmen as may here or there throw a bomb through starvation or German philosophy, but a rich and powerful and fanatical church, a church of eastern pessimism, which holds it holy to destroy mankind like vermin. How hard they hunt us you can gather from the fact that we are
driven to such disguises as those for which I apologise, and to such pranks as this one by which you suffer.”

The younger second of the Marquis, a short man with a black moustache, bowed politely, and said—

“Of course, I accept the apology; but you will in your turn forgive me if I decline to follow you further into your difficulties, and permit myself to say good morning! The sight of an acquaintance and distinguished fellow-townsman coming to pieces in the open air is unusual, and, upon the whole, sufficient for one day. Colonel Ducroix, I would in no way influence your actions, but if you feel with me that our present society is a little abnormal, I am now going to walk back to the town.”

Colonel Ducroix moved mechanically, but then tugged abruptly at his white moustache and broke out—

“No, by George! I won’t. If these gentlemen are really in a mess with a lot of low wreckers like that, I’ll see them through it. I have fought for France, and it is hard if I can’t fight for civilization.”

Dr. Bull took off his hat and waved it, cheering as at a public meeting.

“Don’t make too much noise,” said Inspector Ratcliffe, “Sunday may hear you.”

“Sunday!” cried Bull, and dropped his hat.

“Yes,” retorted Ratcliffe, “he may be with them.”

“With whom?” asked Syme.

“With the people out of that train,” said the other.

“What you say seems utterly wild,” began Syme. “Why, as a matter of fact—But, my God,” he cried out suddenly, like a man who sees an explosion a long way off, “by God! if this is true the whole bally lot of us on the Anarchist Council were against anarchy! Every born man was a detective except the President and his personal secretary. What can it mean?”

“Mean!” said the new policeman with incredible violence. “It means that we are struck dead! Don’t you know Sunday? Don’t you know that his jokes are always so big and simple that one has never thought of them? Can you think of anything more like Sunday than this, that he should put all his powerful enemies on the Supreme Council, and then take care that it was not supreme? I tell you he has bought every trust, he has captured every cable, he has control of every railway line—especially of that railway line!” and he pointed a shaking finger towards the small wayside station. “The whole movement was controlled by him; half the world was ready to rise for him. But there were just five people,
perhaps, who would have resisted him . . . and the old devil put them on the Supreme Council, to waste their time in watching each other. Idiots that we are, he planned the whole of our idiocies! Sunday knew that the Professor would chase Syme through London, and that Syme would fight me in France. And he was combining great masses of capital, and seizing great lines of telegraphy, while we five idiots were running after each other like a lot of confounded babies playing blind man’s buff.”

“Well?” asked Syme with a sort of steadiness.

“Well,” replied the other with sudden serenity, “he has found us playing blind man’s buff today in a field of great rustic beauty and extreme solitude. He has probably captured the world; it only remains to him to capture this field and all the fools in it. And since you really want to know what was my objection to the arrival of that train, I will tell you. My objection was that Sunday or his Secretary has just this moment got out of it.”

Syme uttered an involuntary cry, and they all turned their eyes towards the far-off station. It was quite true that a considerable bulk of people seemed to be moving in their direction. But they were too distant to be distinguished in any way.

“It was a habit of the late Marquis de St. Eustache,” said the new policeman, producing a leather case, “always to carry a pair of opera glasses. Either the President or the Secretary is coming after us with that mob. They have caught us in a nice quiet place where we are under no temptations to break our oaths by calling the police. Dr. Bull, I have a suspicion that you will see better through these than through your own highly decorative spectacles.”

He handed the fieldglasses to the Doctor, who immediately took off his spectacles and put the apparatus to his eyes.

“It cannot be as bad as you say,” said the Professor, somewhat shaken. “There are a good number of them certainly, but they may easily be ordinary tourists.”

“Do ordinary tourists,” asked Bull, with the fieldglasses to his eyes, “wear black masks half-way down the face?”

Syme almost tore the glasses out of his hand, and looked through them. Most men in the advancing mob really looked ordinary enough; but it was quite true that two or three of the leaders in front wore black half-masks almost down to their mouths. This disguise is very complete, especially at such a distance, and Syme found it impossible to conclude anything from the clean-shaven jaws and chins of the men talking in the front. But presently as they talked they all smiled and one of them smiled on one side.
CHAPTER XI

THE CRIMINALS CHASE THE POLICE

SYME put the field-glasses from his eyes with an almost ghastly relief.

“The President is not with them, anyhow,” he said, and wiped his forehead.

“But surely they are right away on the horizon,” said the bewildered Colonel, blinking and but half recovered from Bull’s hasty though polite explanation.

“Could you possibly know your President among all those people?”

“Could I know a white elephant among all those people!” answered Syme somewhat irritably. “As you very truly say, they are on the horizon; but if he were walking with them . . . by God! I believe this ground would shake.”

After an instant’s pause the new man called Ratcliffe said with gloomy decision—

“Of course the President isn’t with them. I wish to Gemini he were. Much more likely the President is riding in triumph through Paris, or sitting on the ruins of St. Paul’s Cathedral.”

“This is absurd!” said Syme. “Something may have happened in our absence; but he cannot have carried the world with a rush like that. It is quite true,” he added, frowning dubiously at the distant fields that lay towards the little station, “it is certainly true that there seems to be a crowd coming this way; but they are not all the army that you make out.”

“Oh, they,” said the new detective contemptuously; “no they are not a very valuable force. But let me tell you frankly that they are precisely calculated to our value—we are not much, my boy, in Sunday’s universe. He has got hold of all the cables and telegraphs himself. But to kill the Supreme Council he regards as a trivial matter, like a post card; it may be left to his private secretary,” and he spat on the grass.

Then he turned to the others and said somewhat austerely—

“There is a great deal to be said for death; but if anyone has any preference for the other alternative, I strongly advise him to walk after me.”

With these words, he turned his broad back and strode with silent energy towards the wood. The others gave one glance over their shoulders, and saw that the dark cloud of men had detached itself from the station and was moving with a mysterious discipline across the plain. They saw already, even with the naked eye, black blots on the foremost faces, which marked the masks they wore. They
turned and followed their leader, who had already struck the wood, and disappeared among the twinkling trees.

The sun on the grass was dry and hot. So in plunging into the wood they had a cool shock of shadow, as of divers who plunge into a dim pool. The inside of the wood was full of shattered sunlight and shaken shadows. They made a sort of shuddering veil, almost recalling the dizziness of a cinematograph. Even the solid figures walking with him Syme could hardly see for the patterns of sun and shade that danced upon them. Now a man’s head was lit as with a light of Rembrandt, leaving all else obliterated; now again he had strong and staring white hands with the face of a negro. The ex-Marquis had pulled the old straw hat over his eyes, and the black shade of the brim cut his face so squarely in two that it seemed to be wearing one of the black half-masks of their pursuers. The fancy tinted Syme’s overwhelming sense of wonder. Was he wearing a mask? Was anyone wearing a mask? Was anyone anything? This wood of witchery, in which men’s faces turned black and white by turns, in which their figures first swelled into sunlight and then faded into formless night, this mere chaos of chiaroscuro (after the clear daylight outside), seemed to Syme a perfect symbol of the world in which he had been moving for three days, this world where men took off their beards and their spectacles and their noses, and turned into other people. That tragic self-confidence which he had felt when he believed that the Marquis was a devil had strangely disappeared now that he knew that the Marquis was a friend. He felt almost inclined to ask after all these bewilderments what was a friend and what an enemy. Was there anything that was apart from what it seemed? The Marquis had taken off his nose and turned out to be a detective. Might he not just as well take off his head and turn out to be a hobgoblin? Was not everything, after all, like this bewildering woodland, this dance of dark and light? Everything only a glimpse, the glimpse always unforeseen, and always forgotten. For Gabriel Syme had found in the heart of that sun-splashed wood what many modern painters had found there. He had found the thing which the modern people call Impressionism, which is another name for that final scepticism which can find no floor to the universe.

As a man in an evil dream strains himself to scream and wake, Syme strove with a sudden effort to fling off this last and worst of his fancies. With two impatient strides he overtook the man in the Marquis’s straw hat, the man whom he had come to address as Ratcliffe. In a voice exaggeratedly loud and cheerful, he broke the bottomless silence and made conversation.

“May I ask,” he said, “where on earth we are all going to?”
So genuine had been the doubts of his soul, that he was quite glad to hear his companion speak in an easy, human voice.

“We must get down through the town of Lancy to the sea,” he said. “I think that part of the country is least likely to be with them.”

“What can you mean by all this?” cried Syme. “They can’t be running the real world in that way. Surely not many working men are anarchists, and surely if they were, mere mobs could not beat modern armies and police.”

“Mere mobs!” repeated his new friend with a snort of scorn. “So you talk about mobs and the working classes as if they were the question. You’ve got that eternal idiotic idea that if anarchy came it would come from the poor. Why should it? The poor have been rebels, but they have never been anarchists; they have more interest than anyone else in there being some decent government. The poor man really has a stake in the country. The rich man hasn’t; he can go away to New Guinea in a yacht. The poor have sometimes objected to being governed badly; the rich have always objected to being governed at all. Aristocrats were always anarchists, as you can see from the barons’ wars.”

“As a lecture on English history for the little ones,” said Syme, “this is all very nice; but I have not yet grasped its application.”

“Its application is,” said his informant, “that most of old Sunday’s right-hand men are South African and American millionaires. That is why he has got hold of all the communications; and that is why the last four champions of the anti-anarchist police force are running through a wood like rabbits.”

“Millionaires I can understand,” said Syme thoughtfully, “they are nearly all mad. But getting hold of a few wicked old gentlemen with hobbies is one thing; getting hold of great Christian nations is another. I would bet the nose off my face (forgive the allusion) that Sunday would stand perfectly helpless before the task of converting any ordinary healthy person anywhere.”

“Well,” said the other, “it rather depends what sort of person you mean.”

“Well, for instance,” said Syme, “he could never convert that person,” and he pointed straight in front of him.

They had come to an open space of sunlight, which seemed to express to Syme the final return of his own good sense; and in the middle of this forest clearing was a figure that might well stand for that common sense in an almost awful actuality. Burnt by the sun and stained with perspiration, and grave with the bottomless gravity of small necessary toils, a heavy French peasant was cutting wood with a hatchet. His cart stood a few yards off, already half full of timber; and the horse that cropped the grass was, like his master, valorous but
not desperate; like his master, he was even prosperous, but yet was almost sad. The man was a Norman, taller than the average of the French and very angular; and his swarthy figure stood dark against a square of sunlight, almost like some allegoric figure of labour frescoed on a ground of gold.

“Mr. Syme is saying,” called out Ratcliffe to the French Colonel, “that this man, at least, will never be an anarchist.”

“Mr. Syme is right enough there,” answered Colonel Ducroix, laughing, “if only for the reason that he has plenty of property to defend. But I forgot that in your country you are not used to peasants being wealthy.”

“He looks poor,” said Dr. Bull doubtfully.

“Quite so,” said the Colonel; “that is why he is rich.”

“I have an idea,” called out Dr. Bull suddenly; “how much would he take to give us a lift in his cart? Those dogs are all on foot, and we could soon leave them behind.”

“Oh, give him anything!” said Syme eagerly. “I have piles of money on me.”

“That will never do,” said the Colonel; “he will never have any respect for you unless you drive a bargain.”

“Oh, if he haggles!” began Bull impatiently.

“He haggles because he is a free man,” said the other. “You do not understand; he would not see the meaning of generosity. He is not being tipped.”

And even while they seemed to hear the heavy feet of their strange pursuers behind them, they had to stand and stamp while the French Colonel talked to the French wood-cutter with all the leisurely badinage and bickering of market-day. At the end of the four minutes, however, they saw that the Colonel was right, for the wood-cutter entered into their plans, not with the vague servility of a tout too-well paid, but with the seriousness of a solicitor who had been paid the proper fee. He told them that the best thing they could do was to make their way down to the little inn on the hills above Lancy, where the innkeeper, an old soldier who had become devout in his latter years, would be certain to sympathise with them, and even to take risks in their support. The whole company, therefore, piled themselves on top of the stacks of wood, and went rocking in the rude cart down the other and steeper side of the woodland. Heavy and ramshackle as was the vehicle, it was driven quickly enough, and they soon had the exhilarating impression of distancing altogether those, whoever they were, who were hunting them. For, after all, the riddle as to where the anarchists had got all these followers was still unsolved. One man’s presence had sufficed for them; they had fled at the first sight of the deformed smile of the Secretary.
Syme every now and then looked back over his shoulder at the army on their track.

As the wood grew first thinner and then smaller with distance, he could see the sunlit slopes beyond it and above it; and across these was still moving the square black mob like one monstrous beetle. In the very strong sunlight and with his own very strong eyes, which were almost telescopic, Syme could see this mass of men quite plainly. He could see them as separate human figures; but he was increasingly surprised by the way in which they moved as one man. They seemed to be dressed in dark clothes and plain hats, like any common crowd out of the streets; but they did not spread and sprawl and trail by various lines to the attack, as would be natural in an ordinary mob. They moved with a sort of dreadful and wicked woodenness, like a staring army of automatons.

Syme pointed this out to Ratcliffe.

“Yes,” replied the policeman, “that’s discipline. That’s Sunday. He is perhaps five hundred miles off, but the fear of him is on all of them, like the finger of God. Yes, they are walking regularly; and you bet your boots that they are talking regularly, yes, and thinking regularly. But the one important thing for us is that they are disappearing regularly.”

Syme nodded. It was true that the black patch of the pursuing men was growing smaller and smaller as the peasant belaboured his horse.

The level of the sunlit landscape, though flat as a whole, fell away on the farther side of the wood in billows of heavy slope towards the sea, in a way not unlike the lower slopes of the Sussex downs. The only difference was that in Sussex the road would have been broken and angular like a little brook, but here the white French road fell sheer in front of them like a waterfall. Down this direct descent the cart clattered at a considerable angle, and in a few minutes, the road growing yet steeper, they saw below them the little harbour of Lancy and a great blue arc of the sea. The travelling cloud of their enemies had wholly disappeared from the horizon.

The horse and cart took a sharp turn round a clump of elms, and the horse’s nose nearly struck the face of an old gentleman who was sitting on the benches outside the little cafe of “Le Soleil d’Or.” The peasant grunted an apology, and got down from his seat. The others also descended one by one, and spoke to the old gentleman with fragmentary phrases of courtesy, for it was quite evident from his expansive manner that he was the owner of the little tavern.

He was a white-haired, apple-faced old boy, with sleepy eyes and a grey moustache; stout, sedentary, and very innocent, of a type that may often be
found in France, but is still commoner in Catholic Germany. Everything about him, his pipe, his pot of beer, his flowers, and his beehive, suggested an ancestral peace; only when his visitors looked up as they entered the inn-parlour, they saw the sword upon the wall.

The Colonel, who greeted the innkeeper as an old friend, passed rapidly into the inn-parlour, and sat down ordering some ritual refreshment. The military decision of his action interested Syme, who sat next to him, and he took the opportunity when the old innkeeper had gone out of satisfying his curiosity.

“May I ask you, Colonel,” he said in a low voice, “why we have come here?”

Colonel Ducroix smiled behind his bristly white moustache.

“For two reasons, sir,” he said; “and I will give first, not the most important, but the most utilitarian. We came here because this is the only place within twenty miles in which we can get horses.”

“Horses!” repeated Syme, looking up quickly.

“Yes,” replied the other; “if you people are really to distance your enemies it is horses or nothing for you, unless of course you have bicycles and motor-cars in your pocket.”

“And where do you advise us to make for?” asked Syme doubtfully.

“Beyond question,” replied the Colonel, “you had better make all haste to the police station beyond the town. My friend, whom I seconded under somewhat deceptive circumstances, seems to me to exaggerate very much the possibilities of a general rising; but even he would hardly maintain, I suppose, that you were not safe with the gendarmes.”

Syme nodded gravely; then he said abruptly—

“And your other reason for coming here?”

“My other reason for coming here,” said Ducroix soberly, “is that it is just as well to see a good man or two when one is possibly near to death.”

Syme looked up at the wall, and saw a crudely-painted and pathetic religious picture. Then he said—

“You are right,” and then almost immediately afterwards, “Has anyone seen about the horses?”

“Yes,” answered Ducroix, “you may be quite certain that I gave orders the moment I came in. Those enemies of yours gave no impression of hurry, but they were really moving wonderfully fast, like a well-trained army. I had no idea that the anarchists had so much discipline. You have not a moment to waste.”

Almost as he spoke, the old innkeeper with the blue eyes and white hair came ambling into the room, and announced that six horses were saddled outside.
By Ducroix’s advice the five others equipped themselves with some portable form of food and wine, and keeping their duelling swords as the only weapons available, they clattered away down the steep, white road. The two servants, who had carried the Marquis’s luggage when he was a marquis, were left behind to drink at the cafe by common consent, and not at all against their own inclination.

By this time the afternoon sun was slanting westward, and by its rays Syme could see the sturdy figure of the old innkeeper growing smaller and smaller, but still standing and looking after them quite silently, the sunshine in his silver hair. Syme had a fixed, superstitious fancy, left in his mind by the chance phrase of the Colonel, that this was indeed, perhaps, the last honest stranger whom he should ever see upon the earth.

He was still looking at this dwindling figure, which stood as a mere grey blot touched with a white flame against the great green wall of the steep down behind him. And as he stared over the top of the down behind the innkeeper, there appeared an army of black-clad and marching men. They seemed to hang above the good man and his house like a black cloud of locusts. The horses had been saddled none too soon.
CHAPTER XII

THE EARTH IN ANARCHY

URGING the horses to a gallop, without respect to the rather rugged descent of the road, the horsemen soon regained their advantage over the men on the march, and at last the bulk of the first buildings of Lancy cut off the sight of their pursuers. Nevertheless, the ride had been a long one, and by the time they reached the real town the west was warming with the colour and quality of sunset. The Colonel suggested that, before making finally for the police station, they should make the effort, in passing, to attach to themselves one more individual who might be useful.

“Four out of the five rich men in this town,” he said, “are common swindlers. I suppose the proportion is pretty equal all over the world. The fifth is a friend of mine, and a very fine fellow; and what is even more important from our point of view, he owns a motor-car.”

“I am afraid,” said the Professor in his mirthful way, looking back along the white road on which the black, crawling patch might appear at any moment, “I am afraid we have hardly time for afternoon calls.”

“Doctor Renard’s house is only three minutes off,” said the Colonel.

“Our danger,” said Dr. Bull, “is not two minutes off.”

“Yes,” said Syme, “if we ride on fast we must leave them behind, for they are on foot.”

“He has a motor-car,” said the Colonel.

“But we may not get it,” said Bull.

“Yes, he is quite on your side.”

“But he might be out.”

“Hold your tongue,” said Syme suddenly. “What is that noise?”

For a second they all sat as still as equestrian statues, and for a second—for two or three or four seconds—heaven and earth seemed equally still. Then all their ears, in an agony of attention, heard along the road that indescribable thrill and throb that means only one thing—horses!

The Colonel’s face had an instantaneous change, as if lightning had struck it, and yet left it scatheless.

“They have done us,” he said, with brief military irony. “Prepare to receive cavalry!”
“Where can they have got the horses?” asked Syme, as he mechanically urged his steed to a canter.

The Colonel was silent for a little, then he said in a strained voice—

“I was speaking with strict accuracy when I said that the ‘Soleil d’Or’ was the only place where one can get horses within twenty miles.”

“No!” said Syme violently, “I don’t believe he’d do it. Not with all that white hair.”

“He may have been forced,” said the Colonel gently. “They must be at least a hundred strong, for which reason we are all going to see my friend Renard, who has a motor-car.”

With these words he swung his horse suddenly round a street corner, and went down the street with such thundering speed, that the others, though already well at the gallop, had difficulty in following the flying tail of his horse.

Dr. Renard inhabited a high and comfortable house at the top of a steep street, so that when the riders alighted at his door they could once more see the solid green ridge of the hill, with the white road across it, standing up above all the roofs of the town. They breathed again to see that the road as yet was clear, and they rang the bell.

Dr. Renard was a beaming, brown-bearded man, a good example of that silent but very busy professional class which France has preserved even more perfectly than England. When the matter was explained to him he pooh-poohed the panic of the ex-Marquis altogether; he said, with the solid French scepticism, that there was no conceivable probability of a general anarchist rising. “Anarchy,” he said, shrugging his shoulders, “it is childishness!”

“Et ca,” cried out the Colonel suddenly, pointing over the other’s shoulder, “and that is childishness, isn’t it?”

They all looked round, and saw a curve of black cavalry come sweeping over the top of the hill with all the energy of Attila. Swiftly as they rode, however, the whole rank still kept well together, and they could see the black vizards of the first line as level as a line of uniforms. But although the main black square was the same, though travelling faster, there was now one sensational difference which they could see clearly upon the slope of the hill, as if upon a slanted map. The bulk of the riders were in one block; but one rider flew far ahead of the column, and with frantic movements of hand and heel urged his horse faster and faster, so that one might have fancied that he was not the pursuer but the pursued. But even at that great distance they could see something so fanatical, so unquestionable in his figure, that they knew it was the Secretary himself. “I am
sorry to cut short a cultured discussion,” said the Colonel, “but can you lend me your motor-car now, in two minutes?”

“I have a suspicion that you are all mad,” said Dr. Renard, smiling sociably; “but God forbid that madness should in any way interrupt friendship. Let us go round to the garage.”

Dr. Renard was a mild man with monstrous wealth; his rooms were like the Musee de Cluny, and he had three motor-cars. These, however, he seemed to use very sparingly, having the simple tastes of the French middle class, and when his impatient friends came to examine them, it took them some time to assure themselves that one of them even could be made to work. This with some difficulty they brought round into the street before the Doctor’s house. When they came out of the dim garage they were startled to find that twilight had already fallen with the abruptness of night in the tropics. Either they had been longer in the place than they imagined, or some unusual canopy of cloud had gathered over the town. They looked down the steep streets, and seemed to see a slight mist coming up from the sea.

“It is now or never,” said Dr. Bull. “I hear horses.”

“No,” corrected the Professor, “a horse.”

And as they listened, it was evident that the noise, rapidly coming nearer on the rattling stones, was not the noise of the whole cavalcade but that of the one horseman, who had left it far behind—the insane Secretary.

Syme’s family, like most of those who end in the simple life, had once owned a motor, and he knew all about them. He had leapt at once into the chauffeur’s seat, and with flushed face was wrenching and tugging at the disused machinery. He bent his strength upon one handle, and then said quite quietly—

“I am afraid it’s no go.”

As he spoke, there swept round the corner a man rigid on his rushing horse, with the rush and rigidity of an arrow. He had a smile that thrust out his chin as if it were dislocated. He swept alongside of the stationary car, into which its company had crowded, and laid his hand on the front. It was the Secretary, and his mouth went quite straight in the solemnity of triumph.

Syme was leaning hard upon the steering wheel, and there was no sound but the rumble of the other pursuers riding into the town. Then there came quite suddenly a scream of scraping iron, and the car leapt forward. It plucked the Secretary clean out of his saddle, as a knife is whipped out of its sheath, trailed him kicking terribly for twenty yards, and left him flung flat upon the road far in front of his frightened horse. As the car took the corner of the street with a
splendid curve, they could just see the other anarchists filling the street and raising their fallen leader.

“I can’t understand why it has grown so dark,” said the Professor at last in a low voice.

“Going to be a storm, I think,” said Dr. Bull. “I say, it’s a pity we haven’t got a light on this car, if only to see by.”

“We have,” said the Colonel, and from the floor of the car he fished up a heavy, old-fashioned, carved iron lantern with a light inside it. It was obviously an antique, and it would seem as if its original use had been in some way semi-religious, for there was a rude moulding of a cross upon one of its sides.

“Where on earth did you get that?” asked the Professor.

“I got it where I got the car,” answered the Colonel, chuckling, “from my best friend. While our friend here was fighting with the steering wheel, I ran up the front steps of the house and spoke to Renard, who was standing in his own porch, you will remember. ‘I suppose,’ I said, ‘there’s no time to get a lamp.’ He looked up, blinking amiably at the beautiful arched ceiling of his own front hall. From this was suspended, by chains of exquisite ironwork, this lantern, one of the hundred treasures of his treasure house. By sheer force he tore the lamp out of his own ceiling, shattering the painted panels, and bringing down two blue vases with his violence. Then he handed me the iron lantern, and I put it in the car. Was I not right when I said that Dr. Renard was worth knowing?”

“You were,” said Syme seriously, and hung the heavy lantern over the front. There was a certain allegory of their whole position in the contrast between the modern automobile and its strange ecclesiastical lamp. Hitherto they had passed through the quietest part of the town, meeting at most one or two pedestrians, who could give them no hint of the peace or the hostility of the place. Now, however, the windows in the houses began one by one to be lit up, giving a greater sense of habitation and humanity. Dr. Bull turned to the new detective who had led their flight, and permitted himself one of his natural and friendly smiles.

“These lights make one feel more cheerful.”

Inspector Ratcliffe drew his brows together.

“There is only one set of lights that make me more cheerful,” he said, “and they are those lights of the police station which I can see beyond the town. Please God we may be there in ten minutes.”

Then all Bull’s boiling good sense and optimism broke suddenly out of him.

“Oh, this is all raving nonsense!” he cried. “If you really think that ordinary
people in ordinary houses are anarchists, you must be madder than an anarchist yourself. If we turned and fought these fellows, the whole town would fight for us.”

“No,” said the other with an immovable simplicity, “the whole town would fight for them. We shall see.”

While they were speaking the Professor had leant forward with sudden excitement.

“What is that noise?” he said.

“Oh, the horses behind us, I suppose,” said the Colonel. “I thought we had got clear of them.”

“The horses behind us! No,” said the Professor, “it is not horses, and it is not behind us.”

Almost as he spoke, across the end of the street before them two shining and rattling shapes shot past. They were gone almost in a flash, but everyone could see that they were motor-cars, and the Professor stood up with a pale face and swore that they were the other two motor-cars from Dr. Renard’s garage.

“I tell you they were his,” he repeated, with wild eyes, “and they were full of men in masks!”

“Absurd!” said the Colonel angrily. “Dr. Renard would never give them his cars.”

“He may have been forced,” said Ratcliffe quietly. “The whole town is on their side.”

“You still believe that,” asked the Colonel incredulously.

“You will all believe it soon,” said the other with a hopeless calm.

There was a puzzled pause for some little time, and then the Colonel began again abruptly—

“No, I can’t believe it. The thing is nonsense. The plain people of a peaceable French town—”

He was cut short by a bang and a blaze of light, which seemed close to his eyes. As the car sped on it left a floating patch of white smoke behind it, and Syme had heard a shot shriek past his ear.

“My God!” said the Colonel, “someone has shot at us.”

“It need not interrupt conversation,” said the gloomy Ratcliffe. “Pray resume your remarks, Colonel. You were talking, I think, about the plain people of a peaceable French town.”

The staring Colonel was long past minding satire. He rolled his eyes all round the street.
“It is extraordinary,” he said, “most extraordinary.”
“A fastidious person,” said Syme, “might even call it unpleasant. However, I suppose those lights out in the field beyond this street are the Gendarmerie. We shall soon get there.”
“No,” said Inspector Ratcliffe, “we shall never get there.”
He had been standing up and looking keenly ahead of him. Now he sat down and smoothed his sleek hair with a weary gesture.
“What do you mean?” asked Bull sharply.
“I mean that we shall never get there,” said the pessimist placidly. “They have two rows of armed men across the road already; I can see them from here. The town is in arms, as I said it was. I can only wallow in the exquisite comfort of my own exactitude.”
And Ratcliffe sat down comfortably in the car and lit a cigarette, but the others rose excitedly and stared down the road. Syme had slowed down the car as their plans became doubtful, and he brought it finally to a standstill just at the corner of a side street that ran down very steeply to the sea.
The town was mostly in shadow, but the sun had not sunk; wherever its level light could break through, it painted everything a burning gold. Up this side street the last sunset light shone as sharp and narrow as the shaft of artificial light at the theatre. It struck the car of the five friends, and lit it like a burning chariot. But the rest of the street, especially the two ends of it, was in the deepest twilight, and for some seconds they could see nothing. Then Syme, whose eyes were the keenest, broke into a little bitter whistle, and said,
“It is quite true. There is a crowd or an army or some such thing across the end of that street.”
“Well, if there is,” said Bull impatiently, “it must be something else—a sham fight or the mayor’s birthday or something. I cannot and will not believe that plain, jolly people in a place like this walk about with dynamite in their pockets. Get on a bit, Syme, and let us look at them.”
The car crawled about a hundred yards farther, and then they were all startled by Dr. Bull breaking into a high crow of laughter.
“Why, you silly mugs!” he cried, “what did I tell you. That crowd’s as law-abiding as a cow, and if it weren’t, it’s on our side.”
“How do you know?” asked the professor, staring.
“You blind bat,” cried Bull, “don’t you see who is leading them?”
They peered again, and then the Colonel, with a catch in his voice, cried out—
“Why, it’s Renard!”
There was, indeed, a rank of dim figures running across the road, and they could not be clearly seen; but far enough in front to catch the accident of the evening light was stalking up and down the unmistakable Dr. Renard, in a white hat, stroking his long brown beard, and holding a revolver in his left hand.

“What a fool I’ve been!” exclaimed the Colonel. “Of course, the dear old boy has turned out to help us.”

Dr. Bull was bubbling over with laughter, swinging the sword in his hand as carelessly as a cane. He jumped out of the car and ran across the intervening space, calling out—

“Dr. Renard! Dr. Renard!”

An instant after Syme thought his own eyes had gone mad in his head. For the philanthropic Dr. Renard had deliberately raised his revolver and fired twice at Bull, so that the shots rang down the road.

Almost at the same second as the puff of white cloud went up from this atrocious explosion a long puff of white cloud went up also from the cigarette of the cynical Ratcliffe. Like all the rest he turned a little pale, but he smiled. Dr. Bull, at whom the bullets had been fired, just missing his scalp, stood quite still in the middle of the road without a sign of fear, and then turned very slowly and crawled back to the car, and climbed in with two holes through his hat.

“Well,” said the cigarette smoker slowly, “what do you think now?”

“I think,” said Dr. Bull with precision, “that I am lying in bed at No. 217 Peabody Buildings, and that I shall soon wake up with a jump; or, if that’s not it, I think that I am sitting in a small cushioned cell in Hanwell, and that the doctor can’t make much of my case. But if you want to know what I don’t think, I’ll tell you. I don’t think what you think. I don’t think, and I never shall think, that the mass of ordinary men are a pack of dirty modern thinkers. No, sir, I’m a democrat, and I still don’t believe that Sunday could convert one average navvy or counter-jumper. No, I may be mad, but humanity isn’t.”

Syme turned his bright blue eyes on Bull with an earnestness which he did not commonly make clear.

“You are a very fine fellow,” he said. “You can believe in a sanity which is not merely your sanity. And you’re right enough about humanity, about peasants and people like that jolly old innkeeper. But you’re not right about Renard. I suspected him from the first. He’s rationalistic, and, what’s worse, he’s rich. When duty and religion are really destroyed, it will be by the rich.”

“They are really destroyed now,” said the man with a cigarette, and rose with his hands in his pockets. “The devils are coming on!”
The men in the motor-car looked anxiously in the direction of his dreamy gaze, and they saw that the whole regiment at the end of the road was advancing upon them, Dr. Renard marching furiously in front, his beard flying in the breeze.

The Colonel sprang out of the car with an intolerant exclamation.

“Gentlemen,” he cried, “the thing is incredible. It must be a practical joke. If you knew Renard as I do—it’s like calling Queen Victoria a dynamiter. If you had got the man’s character into your head—”

“Dr. Bull,” said Syme sardonically, “has at least got it into his hat.”

“I tell you it can’t be!” cried the Colonel, stamping.

“Renard shall explain it. He shall explain it to me,” and he strode forward.

“Don’t be in such a hurry,” drawled the smoker. “He will very soon explain it to all of us.”

But the impatient Colonel was already out of earshot, advancing towards the advancing enemy. The excited Dr. Renard lifted his pistol again, but perceiving his opponent, hesitated, and the Colonel came face to face with him with frantic gestures of remonstrance.

“It is no good,” said Syme. “He will never get anything out of that old heathen. I vote we drive bang through the thick of them, bang as the bullets went through Bull’s hat. We may all be killed, but we must kill a tidy number of them.”

“I won’t ‘ave it,” said Dr. Bull, growing more vulgar in the sincerity of his virtue. “The poor chaps may be making a mistake. Give the Colonel a chance.”

“Shall we go back, then?” asked the Professor.

“No,” said Ratcliffe in a cold voice, “the street behind us is held too. In fact, I seem to see there another friend of yours, Syme.”

Syme spun round smartly, and stared backwards at the track which they had travelled. He saw an irregular body of horsemen gathering and galloping towards them in the gloom. He saw above the foremost saddle the silver gleam of a sword, and then as it grew nearer the silver gleam of an old man’s hair. The next moment, with shattering violence, he had swung the motor round and sent it dashing down the steep side street to the sea, like a man that desired only to die.

“What the devil is up?” cried the Professor, seizing his arm.

“The morning star has fallen!” said Syme, as his own car went down the darkness like a falling star.

The others did not understand his words, but when they looked back at the street above they saw the hostile cavalry coming round the corner and down the
slopes after them; and foremost of all rode the good innkeeper, flushed with the fiery innocence of the evening light.

“The world is insane!” said the Professor, and buried his face in his hands.

“No,” said Dr. Bull in adamantine humility, “it is I.”

“What are we going to do?” asked the Professor.

“At this moment,” said Syme, with a scientific detachment, “I think we are going to smash into a lamppost.”

The next instant the automobile had come with a catastrophic jar against an iron object. The instant after that four men had crawled out from under a chaos of metal, and a tall lean lamppost that had stood up straight on the edge of the marine parade stood out, bent and twisted, like the branch of a broken tree.

“Well, we smashed something,” said the Professor, with a faint smile. “That’s some comfort.”

“You’re becoming an anarchist,” said Syme, dusting his clothes with his instinct of daintiness.

“Everyone is,” said Ratcliff.

As they spoke, the white-haired horseman and his followers came thundering from above, and almost at the same moment a dark string of men ran shouting along the sea-front. Syme snatched a sword, and took it in his teeth; he stuck two others under his arm-pits, took a fourth in his left hand and the lantern in his right, and leapt off the high parade on to the beach below.

The others leapt after him, with a common acceptance of such decisive action, leaving the debris and the gathering mob above them.

“We have one more chance,” said Syme, taking the steel out of his mouth. “Whatever all this pandemonium means, I suppose the police station will help us. We can’t get there, for they hold the way. But there’s a pier or breakwater runs out into the sea just here, which we could defend longer than anything else, like Horatius and his bridge. We must defend it till the Gendarmerie turn out. Keep after me.”

They followed him as he went crunching down the beach, and in a second or two their boots broke not on the sea gravel, but on broad, flat stones. They marched down a long, low jetty, running out in one arm into the dim, boiling sea, and when they came to the end of it they felt that they had come to the end of their story. They turned and faced the town.

That town was transfigured with uproar. All along the high parade from which they had just descended was a dark and roaring stream of humanity, with tossing arms and fiery faces, groping and glaring towards them. The long dark line was
dotted with torches and lanterns; but even where no flame lit up a furious face, they could see in the farthest figure, in the most shadowy gesture, an organised hate. It was clear that they were the accursed of all men, and they knew not why.

Two or three men, looking little and black like monkeys, leapt over the edge as they had done and dropped on to the beach. These came ploughing down the deep sand, shouting horribly, and strove to wade into the sea at random. The example was followed, and the whole black mass of men began to run and drip over the edge like black treacle.

Foremost among the men on the beach Syme saw the peasant who had driven their cart. He splashed into the surf on a huge cart-horse, and shook his axe at them.

“The peasant!” cried Syme. “They have not risen since the Middle Ages.”

“Even if the police do come now,” said the Professor mournfully, “they can do nothing with this mob.”

“Nonsense!” said Bull desperately; “there must be some people left in the town who are human.”

“No,” said the hopeless Inspector, “the human being will soon be extinct. We are the last of mankind.”

“It may be,” said the Professor absently. Then he added in his dreamy voice, “What is all that at the end of the ‘Dunciad’?

‘Nor public flame; nor private, dares to shine;
Nor human light is left, nor glimpse divine!
Lo! thy dread Empire, Chaos, is restored;
Light dies before thine uncreating word:
Thy hand, great Anarch, lets the curtain fall;
And universal darkness buries all.’”

“Stop!” cried Bull suddenly, “the gendarmes are out.”

The low lights of the police station were indeed blotted and broken with hurrying figures, and they heard through the darkness the clash and jingle of a disciplined cavalry.

“They are charging the mob!” cried Bull in ecstasy or alarm.

“No,” said Syme, “they are formed along the parade.”

“They have unslung their carbines,” cried Bull dancing with excitement.

“Yes,” said Ratcliffe, “and they are going to fire on us.”

As he spoke there came a long crackle of musketry, and bullets seemed to hop like hailstones on the stones in front of them.

“The gendarmes have joined them!” cried the Professor, and struck his
“I am in the padded cell,” said Bull solidly.
There was a long silence, and then Ratcliffe said, looking out over the swollen sea, all a sort of grey purple—
“What does it matter who is mad or who is sane? We shall all be dead soon.”
Syme turned to him and said—
“You are quite hopeless, then?”
Mr. Ratcliffe kept a stony silence; then at last he said quietly—
“No; oddly enough I am not quite hopeless. There is one insane little hope that I cannot get out of my mind. The power of this whole planet is against us, yet I cannot help wondering whether this one silly little hope is hopeless yet.”
“In what or whom is your hope?” asked Syme with curiosity.
“In a man I never saw,” said the other, looking at the leaden sea.
“I know what you mean,” said Syme in a low voice, “the man in the dark room. But Sunday must have killed him by now.”
“Perhaps,” said the other steadily; “but if so, he was the only man whom Sunday found it hard to kill.”
“I heard what you said,” said the Professor, with his back turned. “I also am holding hard on to the thing I never saw.”
All of a sudden Syme, who was standing as if blind with introspective thought, swung round and cried out, like a man waking from sleep—
“Where is the Colonel? I thought he was with us!”
“The Colonel! Yes,” cried Bull, “where on earth is the Colonel?”
“He went to speak to Renard,” said the Professor.
“We cannot leave him among all those beasts,” cried Syme. “Let us die like gentlemen if—”
“Do not pity the Colonel,” said Ratcliffe, with a pale sneer. “He is extremely comfortable. He is—”
“No! no! no!” cried Syme in a kind of frenzy, “not the Colonel too! I will never believe it!”
“Will you believe your eyes?” asked the other, and pointed to the beach.
Many of their pursuers had waded into the water shaking their fists, but the sea was rough, and they could not reach the pier. Two or three figures, however, stood on the beginning of the stone footway, and seemed to be cautiously advancing down it. The glare of a chance lantern lit up the faces of the two foremost. One face wore a black half-mask, and under it the mouth was twisting about in such a madness of nerves that the black tuft of beard wriggled round
and round like a restless, living thing. The other was the red face and white moustache of Colonel Ducroix. They were in earnest consultation.

“Yes, he is gone too,” said the Professor, and sat down on a stone. “Everything’s gone. I’m gone! I can’t trust my own bodily machinery. I feel as if my own hand might fly up and strike me.”

“When my hand flies up,” said Syme, “it will strike somebody else,” and he strode along the pier towards the Colonel, the sword in one hand and the lantern in the other.

As if to destroy the last hope or doubt, the Colonel, who saw him coming, pointed his revolver at him and fired. The shot missed Syme, but struck his sword, breaking it short at the hilt. Syme rushed on, and swung the iron lantern above his head.

“Judas before Herod!” he said, and struck the Colonel down upon the stones. Then he turned to the Secretary, whose frightful mouth was almost foaming now, and held the lamp high with so rigid and arresting a gesture, that the man was, as it were, frozen for a moment, and forced to hear.

“Do you see this lantern?” cried Syme in a terrible voice. “Do you see the cross carved on it, and the flame inside? You did not make it. You did not light it. Better men than you, men who could believe and obey, twisted the entrails of iron and preserved the legend of fire. There is not a street you walk on, there is not a thread you wear, that was not made as this lantern was, by denying your philosophy of dirt and rats. You can make nothing. You can only destroy. You will destroy mankind; you will destroy the world. Let that suffice you. Yet this one old Christian lantern you shall not destroy. It shall go where your empire of apes will never have the wit to find it.”

He struck the Secretary once with the lantern so that he staggered; and then, whirling it twice round his head, sent it flying far out to sea, where it flared like a roaring rocket and fell.

“Swords!” shouted Syme, turning his flaming face to the three behind him. “Let us charge these dogs, for our time has come to die.”

His three companions came after him sword in hand. Syme’s sword was broken, but he rent a bludgeon from the fist of a fisherman, flinging him down. In a moment they would have flung themselves upon the face of the mob and perished, when an interruption came. The Secretary, ever since Syme’s speech, had stood with his hand to his stricken head as if dazed; now he suddenly pulled off his black mask.

The pale face thus peeled in the lamplight revealed not so much rage as
astonishment. He put up his hand with an anxious authority.

“There is some mistake,” he said. “Mr. Syme, I hardly think you understand your position. I arrest you in the name of the law.”

“Of the law?” said Syme, and dropped his stick.

“Certainly!” said the Secretary. “I am a detective from Scotland Yard,” and he took a small blue card from his pocket.

“And what do you suppose we are?” asked the Professor, and threw up his arms.

“You,” said the Secretary stiffly, “are, as I know for a fact, members of the Supreme Anarchist Council. Disguised as one of you, I—”

Dr. Bull tossed his sword into the sea.

“There never was any Supreme Anarchist Council,” he said. “We were all a lot of silly policemen looking at each other. And all these nice people who have been peppering us with shot thought we were the dynamiters. I knew I couldn’t be wrong about the mob,” he said, beaming over the enormous multitude, which stretched away to the distance on both sides. “Vulgar people are never mad. I’m vulgar myself, and I know. I am now going on shore to stand a drink to everybody here.”
CHAPTER XIII

THE PURSUIT OF THE PRESIDENT

NEXT morning five bewildered but hilarious people took the boat for Dover. The poor old Colonel might have had some cause to complain, having been first forced to fight for two factions that didn’t exist, and then knocked down with an iron lantern. But he was a magnanimous old gentleman, and being much relieved that neither party had anything to do with dynamite, he saw them off on the pier with great geniality.

The five reconciled detectives had a hundred details to explain to each other. The Secretary had to tell Syme how they had come to wear masks originally in order to approach the supposed enemy as fellow-conspirators.

Syme had to explain how they had fled with such swiftness through a civilised country. But above all these matters of detail which could be explained, rose the central mountain of the matter that they could not explain. What did it all mean? If they were all harmless officers, what was Sunday? If he had not seized the world, what on earth had he been up to? Inspector Ratcliffe was still gloomy about this.

“I can’t make head or tail of old Sunday’s little game any more than you can,” he said. “But whatever else Sunday is, he isn’t a blameless citizen. Damn it! do you remember his face?”

“I grant you,” answered Syme, “that I have never been able to forget it.”

“Well,” said the Secretary, “I suppose we can find out soon, for tomorrow we have our next general meeting. You will excuse me,” he said, with a rather ghastly smile, “for being well acquainted with my secretarial duties.”

“I suppose you are right,” said the Professor reflectively. “I suppose we might find it out from him; but I confess that I should feel a bit afraid of asking Sunday who he really is.”

“Why,” asked the Secretary, “for fear of bombs?”

“No,” said the Professor, “for fear he might tell me.”

“Let us have some drinks,” said Dr. Bull, after a silence.

Throughout their whole journey by boat and train they were highly convivial, but they instinctively kept together. Dr. Bull, who had always been the optimist of the party, endeavoured to persuade the other four that the whole company could take the same hansom cab from Victoria; but this was over-ruled, and they
went in a four-wheeler, with Dr. Bull on the box, singing. They finished their journey at an hotel in Piccadilly Circus, so as to be close to the early breakfast next morning in Leicester Square. Yet even then the adventures of the day were not entirely over. Dr. Bull, discontented with the general proposal to go to bed, had strolled out of the hotel at about eleven to see and taste some of the beauties of London. Twenty minutes afterwards, however, he came back and made quite a clamour in the hall. Syme, who tried at first to soothe him, was forced at last to listen to his communication with quite new attention.

“I tell you I’ve seen him!” said Dr. Bull, with thick emphasis.

“Whom?” asked Syme quickly. “Not the President?”

“Not so bad as that,” said Dr. Bull, with unnecessary laughter, “not so bad as that. I’ve got him here.”

“Got whom here?” asked Syme impatiently.

“Hairy man,” said the other lucidly, “man that used to be hairy man—Gogol. Here he is,” and he pulled forward by a reluctant elbow the identical young man who five days before had marched out of the Council with thin red hair and a pale face, the first of all the sham anarchists who had been exposed.

“Why do you worry with me?” he cried. “You have expelled me as a spy.”

“We are all spies!” whispered Syme.

“We’re all spies!” shouted Dr. Bull. “Come and have a drink.”

Next morning the battalion of the reunited six marched stolidly towards the hotel in Leicester Square.

“This is more cheerful,” said Dr. Bull; “we are six men going to ask one man what he means.”

“I think it is a bit queerer than that,” said Syme. “I think it is six men going to ask one man what they mean.”

They turned in silence into the Square, and though the hotel was in the opposite corner, they saw at once the little balcony and a figure that looked too big for it. He was sitting alone with bent head, poring over a newspaper. But all his councillors, who had come to vote him down, crossed that Square as if they were watched out of heaven by a hundred eyes.

They had disputed much upon their policy, about whether they should leave the unmasked Gogol without and begin diplomatically, or whether they should bring him in and blow up the gunpowder at once. The influence of Syme and Bull prevailed for the latter course, though the Secretary to the last asked them why they attacked Sunday so rashly.

“My reason is quite simple,” said Syme. “I attack him rashly because I am
afraid of him.”

They followed Syme up the dark stair in silence, and they all came out simultaneously into the broad sunlight of the morning and the broad sunlight of Sunday’s smile.

“Delightful!” he said. “So pleased to see you all. What an exquisite day it is. Is the Czar dead?”

The Secretary, who happened to be foremost, drew himself together for a dignified outburst.

“No, sir,” he said sternly “there has been no massacre. I bring you news of no such disgusting spectacles.”

“Disgusting spectacles?” repeated the President, with a bright, inquiring smile. “You mean Dr. Bull’s spectacles?”

The Secretary choked for a moment, and the President went on with a sort of smooth appeal—

“Of course, we all have our opinions and even our eyes, but really to call them disgusting before the man himself—”

Dr. Bull tore off his spectacles and broke them on the table.

“My spectacles are blackguardly,” he said, “but I’m not. Look at my face.”

“I dare say it’s the sort of face that grows on one,” said the President, “in fact, it grows on you; and who am I to quarrel with the wild fruits upon the Tree of Life? I dare say it will grow on me some day.”

“We have no time for tomfoolery,” said the Secretary, breaking in savagely. “We have come to know what all this means. Who are you? What are you? Why did you get us all here? Do you know who and what we are? Are you a half-witted man playing the conspirator, or are you a clever man playing the fool? Answer me, I tell you.”

“Candidates,” murmured Sunday, “are only required to answer eight out of the seventeen questions on the paper. As far as I can make out, you want me to tell you what I am, and what you are, and what this table is, and what this Council is, and what this world is for all I know. Well, I will go so far as to rend the veil of one mystery. If you want to know what you are, you are a set of highly well-intentioned young jackasses.”

“And you,” said Syme, leaning forward, “what are you?”

“I? What am I?” roared the President, and he rose slowly to an incredible height, like some enormous wave about to arch above them and break. “You want to know what I am, do you? Bull, you are a man of science. Grub in the roots of those trees and find out the truth about them. Syme, you are a poet. Stare
at those morning clouds. But I tell you this, that you will have found out the truth of the last tree and the top-most cloud before the truth about me. You will understand the sea, and I shall be still a riddle; you shall know what the stars are, and not know what I am. Since the beginning of the world all men have hunted me like a wolf—kings and sages, and poets and lawgivers, all the churches, and all the philosophies. But I have never been caught yet, and the skies will fall in the time I turn to bay. I have given them a good run for their money, and I will now.”

Before one of them could move, the monstrous man had swung himself like some huge ourang-outang over the balustrade of the balcony. Yet before he dropped he pulled himself up again as on a horizontal bar, and thrusting his great chin over the edge of the balcony, said solemnly—

“There’s one thing I’ll tell you though about who I am. I am the man in the dark room, who made you all policemen.”

With that he fell from the balcony, bouncing on the stones below like a great ball of india-rubber, and went bounding off towards the corner of the Alhambra, where he hailed a hansom-cab and sprang inside it. The six detectives had been standing thunderstruck and livid in the light of his last assertion; but when he disappeared into the cab, Syme’s practical senses returned to him, and leaping over the balcony so recklessly as almost to break his legs, he called another cab.

He and Bull sprang into the cab together, the Professor and the Inspector into another, while the Secretary and the late Gogol scrambled into a third just in time to pursue the flying Syme, who was pursuing the flying President. Sunday led them a wild chase towards the north-west, his cabman, evidently under the influence of more than common inducements, urging the horse at breakneck speed. But Syme was in no mood for delicacies, and he stood up in his own cab shouting, “Stop thief!” until crowds ran along beside his cab, and policemen began to stop and ask questions. All this had its influence upon the President’s cabman, who began to look dubious, and to slow down to a trot. He opened the trap to talk reasonably to his fare, and in so doing let the long whip droop over the front of the cab. Sunday leant forward, seized it, and jerked it violently out of the man’s hand. Then standing up in front of the cab himself, he lashed the horse and roared aloud, so that they went down the streets like a flying storm. Through street after street and square after square went whirling this preposterous vehicle, in which the fare was urging the horse and the driver trying desperately to stop it. The other three cabs came after it (if the phrase be permissible of a cab) like panting hounds. Shops and streets shot by like rattling arrows.
At the highest ecstasy of speed, Sunday turned round on the splashboard where he stood, and sticking his great grinning head out of the cab, with white hair whistling in the wind, he made a horrible face at his pursuers, like some colossal urchin. Then raising his right hand swiftly, he flung a ball of paper in Syme’s face and vanished. Syme caught the thing while instinctively warding it off, and discovered that it consisted of two crumpled papers. One was addressed to himself, and the other to Dr. Bull, with a very long, and it is to be feared partly ironical, string of letters after his name. Dr. Bull’s address was, at any rate, considerably longer than his communication, for the communication consisted entirely of the words:—

“What about Martin Tupper now?”

“What does the old maniac mean?” asked Bull, staring at the words. “What does yours say, Syme?”

Syme’s message was, at any rate, longer, and ran as follows:—

“No one would regret anything in the nature of an interference by the Archdeacon more than I. I trust it will not come to that. But, for the last time, where are your goloshes? The thing is too bad, especially after what uncle said.”

The President’s cabman seemed to be regaining some control over his horse, and the pursuers gained a little as they swept round into the Edgware Road. And here there occurred what seemed to the allies a providential stoppage. Traffic of every kind was swerving to right or left or stopping, for down the long road was coming the unmistakable roar announcing the fire-engine, which in a few seconds went by like a brazen thunderbolt. But quick as it went by, Sunday had bounded out of his cab, sprung at the fire-engine, caught it, slung himself on to it, and was seen as he disappeared in the noisy distance talking to the astonished fireman with explanatory gestures.

“After him!” howled Syme. “He can’t go astray now. There’s no mistaking a fire-engine.”

The three cabmen, who had been stunned for a moment, whipped up their horses and slightly decreased the distance between themselves and their disappearing prey. The President acknowledged this proximity by coming to the back of the car, bowing repeatedly, kissing his hand, and finally flinging a neatly-folded note into the bosom of Inspector Ratcliffe. When that gentleman opened it, not without impatience, he found it contained the words:—

“Fly at once. The truth about your trouser-stretchers is known.

—A FRIEND.”

The fire-engine had struck still farther to the north, into a region that they did
not recognise; and as it ran by a line of high railings shadowed with trees, the six friends were startled, but somewhat relieved, to see the President leap from the fire-engine, though whether through another whim or the increasing protest of his entertainers they could not see. Before the three cabs, however, could reach up to the spot, he had gone up the high railings like a huge grey cat, tossed himself over, and vanished in a darkness of leaves.

Syme with a furious gesture stopped his cab, jumped out, and sprang also to the escalade. When he had one leg over the fence and his friends were following, he turned a face on them which shone quite pale in the shadow.

“What place can this be?” he asked. “Can it be the old devil’s house? I’ve heard he has a house in North London.”

“All the better,” said the Secretary grimly, planting a foot in a foothold, “we shall find him at home.”

“No, but it isn’t that,” said Syme, knitting his brows. “I hear the most horrible noises, like devils laughing and sneezing and blowing their devilish noses!”

“His dogs barking, of course,” said the Secretary.

“Why not say his black-beetles barking!” said Syme furiously, “snails barking! geraniums barking! Did you ever hear a dog bark like that?”

He held up his hand, and there came out of the thicket a long growling roar that seemed to get under the skin and freeze the flesh—a low thrilling roar that made a throbbing in the air all about them.

“The dogs of Sunday would be no ordinary dogs,” said Gogol, and shuddered. Syme had jumped down on the other side, but he still stood listening impatiently.

“Well, listen to that,” he said, “is that a dog—anybody’s dog?”

There broke upon their ear a hoarse screaming as of things protesting and clamouring in sudden pain; and then, far off like an echo, what sounded like a long nasal trumpet.

“Well, his house ought to be hell!” said the Secretary; “and if it is hell, I’m going in!” and he sprang over the tall railings almost with one swing.

The others followed. They broke through a tangle of plants and shrubs, and came out on an open path. Nothing was in sight, but Dr. Bull suddenly struck his hands together.

“Why, you asses,” he cried, “it’s the Zoo!”

As they were looking round wildly for any trace of their wild quarry, a keeper in uniform came running along the path with a man in plain clothes.

“Has it come this way?” gasped the keeper.
“Has what?” asked Syme.
“The elephant!” cried the keeper. “An elephant has gone mad and run away!”
“He has run away with an old gentleman,” said the other stranger breathlessly, “a poor old gentleman with white hair!”
“What sort of old gentleman?” asked Syme, with great curiosity.
“A very large and fat old gentleman in light grey clothes,” said the keeper eagerly.
“Well,” said Syme, “if he’s that particular kind of old gentleman, if you’re quite sure that he’s a large and fat old gentleman in grey clothes, you may take my word for it that the elephant has not run away with him. He has run away with the elephant. The elephant is not made by God that could run away with him if he did not consent to the elopement. And, by thunder, there he is!”

There was no doubt about it this time. Clean across the space of grass, about two hundred yards away, with a crowd screaming and scampering vainly at his heels, went a huge grey elephant at an awful stride, with his trunk thrown out as rigid as a ship’s bowsprit, and trumpeting like the trumpet of doom. On the back of the bellowing and plunging animal sat President Sunday with all the placidity of a sultan, but goading the animal to a furious speed with some sharp object in his hand.

“Stop him!” screamed the populace. “He’ll be out of the gate!”
“Stop a landslide!” said the keeper. “He is out of the gate!”

And even as he spoke, a final crash and roar of terror announced that the great grey elephant had broken out of the gates of the Zoological Gardens, and was careening down Albany Street like a new and swift sort of omnibus.

“Great Lord!” cried Bull, “I never knew an elephant could go so fast. Well, it must be hansom-cabs again if we are to keep him in sight.”

As they raced along to the gate out of which the elephant had vanished, Syme felt a glaring panorama of the strange animals in the cages which they passed. Afterwards he thought it queer that he should have seen them so clearly. He remembered especially seeing pelicans, with their preposterous, pendant throats. He wondered why the pelican was the symbol of charity, except it was that it wanted a good deal of charity to admire a pelican. He remembered a hornbill, which was simply a huge yellow beak with a small bird tied on behind it. The whole gave him a sensation, the vividness of which he could not explain, that Nature was always making quite mysterious jokes. Sunday had told them that they would understand him when they had understood the stars. He wondered whether even the archangels understood the hornbill.
The six unhappy detectives flung themselves into cabs and followed the elephant sharing the terror which he spread through the long stretch of the streets. This time Sunday did not turn round, but offered them the solid stretch of his unconscious back, which maddened them, if possible, more than his previous mockeries. Just before they came to Baker Street, however, he was seen to throw something far up into the air, as a boy does a ball meaning to catch it again. But at their rate of racing it fell far behind, just by the cab containing Gogol; and in faint hope of a clue or for some impulse unexplainable, he stopped his cab so as to pick it up. It was addressed to himself, and was quite a bulky parcel. On examination, however, its bulk was found to consist of thirty-three pieces of paper of no value wrapped one round the other. When the last covering was torn away it reduced itself to a small slip of paper, on which was written:—

“The word, I fancy, should be ‘pink.’”

The man once known as Gogol said nothing, but the movements of his hands and feet were like those of a man urging a horse to renewed efforts.

Through street after street, through district after district, went the prodigy of the flying elephant, calling crowds to every window, and driving the traffic left and right. And still through all this insane publicity the three cabs toiled after it, until they came to be regarded as part of a procession, and perhaps the advertisement of a circus. They went at such a rate that distances were shortened beyond belief, and Syme saw the Albert Hall in Kensington when he thought that he was still in Paddington. The animal’s pace was even more fast and free through the empty, aristocratic streets of South Kensington, and he finally headed towards that part of the sky-line where the enormous Wheel of Earl’s Court stood up in the sky. The wheel grew larger and larger, till it filled heaven like the wheel of stars.

The beast outstripped the cabs. They lost him round several corners, and when they came to one of the gates of the Earl’s Court Exhibition they found themselves finally blocked. In front of them was an enormous crowd; in the midst of it was an enormous elephant, heaving and shuddering as such shapeless creatures do. But the President had disappeared.

“Where has he gone to?” asked Syme, slipping to the ground.

“Gentleman rushed into the Exhibition, sir!” said an official in a dazed manner. Then he added in an injured voice: “Funny gentleman, sir. Asked me to hold his horse, and gave me this.”

He held out with distaste a piece of folded paper, addressed: “To the Secretary of the Central Anarchist Council.”
The Secretary, raging, rent it open, and found written inside it:—
“When the herring runs a mile,
Let the Secretary smile;
When the herring tries to fly,
Let the Secretary die.
Rustic Proverb.”

“Why the eternal crikey,” began the Secretary, “did you let the man in? Do people commonly come to your Exhibition riding on mad elephants? Do—”

“Look!” shouted Syme suddenly. “Look over there!”

“Look at what?” asked the Secretary savagely.

“Look at the captive balloon!” said Syme, and pointed in a frenzy.

“Why the blazes should I look at a captive balloon?” demanded the Secretary.

“What is there queer about a captive balloon?”

“Nothing,” said Syme, “except that it isn’t captive!”

They all turned their eyes to where the balloon swung and swelled above the Exhibition on a string, like a child’s balloon. A second afterwards the string came in two just under the car, and the balloon, broken loose, floated away with the freedom of a soap bubble.

“Ten thousand devils!” shrieked the Secretary. “He’s got into it!” and he shook his fists at the sky.

The balloon, borne by some chance wind, came right above them, and they could see the great white head of the President peering over the side and looking benevolently down on them.

“God bless my soul!” said the Professor with the elderly manner that he could never disconnect from his bleached beard and parchment face. “God bless my soul! I seemed to fancy that something fell on the top of my hat!”

He put up a trembling hand and took from that shelf a piece of twisted paper, which he opened absently only to find it inscribed with a true lover’s knot and, the words:—

“Your beauty has not left me indifferent.—From LITTLE SNOWDROP.”

There was a short silence, and then Syme said, biting his beard—

“I’m not beaten yet. The blasted thing must come down somewhere. Let’s follow it!”
CHAPTER XIV

THE SIX PHILOSOPHERS

ACROSS green fields, and breaking through blooming hedges, toiled six draggled detectives, about five miles out of London. The optimist of the party had at first proposed that they should follow the balloon across South England in hansom-cabs. But he was ultimately convinced of the persistent refusal of the balloon to follow the roads, and the still more persistent refusal of the cabmen to follow the balloon. Consequently the tireless though exasperated travellers broke through black thickets and ploughed through ploughed fields till each was turned into a figure too outrageous to be mistaken for a tramp. Those green hills of Surrey saw the final collapse and tragedy of the admirable light grey suit in which Syme had set out from Saffron Park. His silk hat was broken over his nose by a swinging bough, his coat-tails were torn to the shoulder by arresting thorns, the clay of England was splashed up to his collar; but he still carried his yellow beard forward with a silent and furious determination, and his eyes were still fixed on that floating ball of gas, which in the full flush of sunset seemed coloured like a sunset cloud.

“After all,” he said, “it is very beautiful!”

“It is singularly and strangely beautiful!” said the Professor. “I wish the beastly gas-bag would burst!”

“No,” said Dr. Bull, “I hope it won’t. It might hurt the old boy.”

“Hurt him!” said the vindictive Professor, “hurt him! Not as much as I’d hurt him if I could get up with him. Little Snowdrop!”

“I don’t want him hurt, somehow,” said Dr. Bull.

“What!” cried the Secretary bitterly. “Do you believe all that tale about his being our man in the dark room? Sunday would say he was anybody.”

“I don’t know whether I believe it or not,” said Dr. Bull. “But it isn’t that that I mean. I can’t wish old Sunday’s balloon to burst because—”

“Well,” said Syme impatiently, “because?”

“Well, because he’s so jolly like a balloon himself,” said Dr. Bull desperately. “I don’t understand a word of all that idea of his being the same man who gave us all our blue cards. It seems to make everything nonsense. But I don’t care who knows it, I always had a sympathy for old Sunday himself, wicked as he was. Just as if he was a great bouncing baby. How can I explain what my queer
sympathy was? It didn’t prevent my fighting him like hell! Shall I make it clear if I say that I liked him because he was so fat?"

“You will not,” said the Secretary.

“I’ve got it now,” cried Bull, “it was because he was so fat and so light. Just like a balloon. We always think of fat people as heavy, but he could have danced against a sylph. I see now what I mean. Moderate strength is shown in violence, supreme strength is shown in levity. It was like the old speculations—what would happen if an elephant could leap up in the sky like a grasshopper?”

“Our elephant,” said Syme, looking upwards, “has leapt into the sky like a grasshopper.”

“And somehow,” concluded Bull, “that’s why I can’t help liking old Sunday. No, it’s not an admiration of force, or any silly thing like that. There is a kind of gaiety in the thing, as if he were bursting with some good news. Haven’t you sometimes felt it on a spring day? You know Nature plays tricks, but somehow that day proves they are good-natured tricks. I never read the Bible myself, but that part they laugh at is literal truth, ‘Why leap ye, ye high hills?’ The hills do leap—at least, they try to. . . . Why do I like Sunday? . . . how can I tell you? . . . because he’s such a Bounder.”

There was a long silence, and then the Secretary said in a curious, strained voice—

“You do not know Sunday at all. Perhaps it is because you are better than I, and do not know hell. I was a fierce fellow, and a trifle morbid from the first. The man who sits in darkness, and who chose us all, chose me because I had all the crazy look of a conspirator—because my smile went crooked, and my eyes were gloomy, even when I smiled. But there must have been something in me that answered to the nerves in all these anarchic men. For when I first saw Sunday he expressed to me, not your airy vitality, but something both gross and sad in the Nature of Things. I found him smoking in a twilight room, a room with brown blind down, infinitely more depressing than the genial darkness in which our master lives. He sat there on a bench, a huge heap of a man, dark and out of shape. He listened to all my words without speaking or even stirring. I poured out my most passionate appeals, and asked my most eloquent questions. Then, after a long silence, the Thing began to shake, and I thought it was shaken by some secret malady. It shook like a loathsome and living jelly. It reminded me of everything I had ever read about the base bodies that are the origin of life—the deep sea lumps and protoplasm. It seemed like the final form of matter, the most shapeless and the most shameful. I could only tell myself, from its
shudderings, that it was something at least that such a monster could be miserable. And then it broke upon me that the bestial mountain was shaking with a lonely laughter, and the laughter was at me. Do you ask me to forgive him that? It is no small thing to be laughed at by something at once lower and stronger than oneself.”

“Surely you fellows are exaggerating wildly,” cut in the clear voice of Inspector Ratcliffe. “President Sunday is a terrible fellow for one’s intellect, but he is not such a Barnum’s freak physically as you make out. He received me in an ordinary office, in a grey check coat, in broad daylight. He talked to me in an ordinary way. But I’ll tell you what is a trifle creepy about Sunday. His room is neat, his clothes are neat, everything seems in order; but he’s absentminded. Sometimes his great bright eyes go quite blind. For hours he forgets that you are there. Now absentmindedness is just a bit too awful in a bad man. We think of a wicked man as vigilant. We can’t think of a wicked man who is honestly and sincerely dreamy, because we daren’t think of a wicked man alone with himself. An absentminded man means a good-natured man. It means a man who, if he happens to see you, will apologise. But how will you bear an absentminded man who, if he happens to see you, will kill you? That is what tries the nerves, abstraction combined with cruelty. Men have felt it sometimes when they went through wild forests, and felt that the animals there were at once innocent and pitiless. They might ignore or slay. How would you like to pass ten mortal hours in a parlour with an absentminded tiger?”

“And what do you think of Sunday, Gogol?” asked Syme.

“I don’t think of Sunday on principle,” said Gogol simply, “any more than I stare at the sun at noonday.”

“Well, that is a point of view,” said Syme thoughtfully. “What do you say, Professor?”

The Professor was walking with bent head and trailing stick, and he did not answer at all.

“Wake up, Professor!” said Syme genially. “Tell us what you think of Sunday.”

The Professor spoke at last very slowly.

“I think something,” he said, “that I cannot say clearly. Or, rather, I think something that I cannot even think clearly. But it is something like this. My early life, as you know, was a bit too large and loose.

“Well, when I saw Sunday’s face I thought it was too large—everybody does, but I also thought it was too loose. The face was so big, that one couldn’t focus it
or make it a face at all. The eye was so far away from the nose, that it wasn’t an eye. The mouth was so much by itself, that one had to think of it by itself. The whole thing is too hard to explain.”

He paused for a little, still trailing his stick, and then went on—

“But put it this way. Walking up a road at night, I have seen a lamp and a lighted window and a cloud make together a most complete and unmistakable face. If anyone in heaven has that face I shall know him again. Yet when I walked a little farther I found that there was no face, that the window was ten yards away, the lamp ten hundred yards, the cloud beyond the world. Well, Sunday’s face escaped me; it ran away to right and left, as such chance pictures run away. And so his face has made me, somehow, doubt whether there are any faces. I don’t know whether your face, Bull, is a face or a combination in perspective. Perhaps one black disc of your beastly glasses is quite close and another fifty miles away. Oh, the doubts of a materialist are not worth a dump. Sunday has taught me the last and the worst doubts, the doubts of a spiritualist. I am a Buddhist, I suppose; and Buddhism is not a creed, it is a doubt. My poor dear Bull, I do not believe that you really have a face. I have not faith enough to believe in matter.”

Syme’s eyes were still fixed upon the errant orb, which, reddened in the evening light, looked like some rosier and more innocent world.

“Have you noticed an odd thing,” he said, “about all your descriptions? Each man of you finds Sunday quite different, yet each man of you can only find one thing to compare him to—the universe itself. Bull finds him like the earth in spring, Gogol like the sun at noonday. The Secretary is reminded of the shapeless protoplasm, and the Inspector of the carelessness of virgin forests. The Professor says he is like a changing landscape. This is queer, but it is queerer still that I also have had my odd notion about the President, and I also find that I think of Sunday as I think of the whole world.”

“Get on a little faster, Syme,” said Bull; “never mind the balloon.”

“When I first saw Sunday,” said Syme slowly, “I only saw his back; and when I saw his back, I knew he was the worst man in the world. His neck and shoulders were brutal, like those of some apish god. His head had a stoop that was hardly human, like the stoop of an ox. In fact, I had at once the revolting fancy that this was not a man at all, but a beast dressed up in men’s clothes.”

“Get on,” said Dr. Bull.

“And then the queer thing happened. I had seen his back from the street, as he sat in the balcony. Then I entered the hotel, and coming round the other side of
him, saw his face in the sunlight. His face frightened me, as it did everyone; but not because it was brutal, not because it was evil. On the contrary, it frightened me because it was so beautiful, because it was so good.”

“Syme,” exclaimed the Secretary, “are you ill?”

“It was like the face of some ancient archangel, judging justly after heroic wars. There was laughter in the eyes, and in the mouth honour and sorrow. There was the same white hair, the same great, grey-clad shoulders that I had seen from behind. But when I saw him from behind I was certain he was an animal, and when I saw him in front I knew he was a god.”

“Pan,” said the Professor dreamily, “was a god and an animal.”

“Then, and again and always,” went on Syme like a man talking to himself, “that has been for me the mystery of Sunday, and it is also the mystery of the world. When I see the horrible back, I am sure the noble face is but a mask. When I see the face but for an instant, I know the back is only a jest. Bad is so bad, that we cannot but think good an accident; good is so good, that we feel certain that evil could be explained. But the whole came to a kind of crest yesterday when I raced Sunday for the cab, and was just behind him all the way.”

“Had you time for thinking then?” asked Ratcliffe.

“Time,” replied Syme, “for one outrageous thought. I was suddenly possessed with the idea that the blind, blank back of his head really was his face—an awful, eyeless face staring at me! And I fancied that the figure running in front of me was really a figure running backwards, and dancing as he ran.”

“Horrible!” said Dr. Bull, and shuddered.

“Horrible is not the word,” said Syme. “It was exactly the worst instant of my life. And yet ten minutes afterwards, when he put his head out of the cab and made a grimace like a gargoyle, I knew that he was only like a father playing hide-and-seek with his children.”

“It is a long game,” said the Secretary, and frowned at his broken boots.

“Listen to me,” cried Syme with extraordinary emphasis. “Shall I tell you the secret of the whole world? It is that we have only known the back of the world. We see everything from behind, and it looks brutal. That is not a tree, but the back of a tree. That is not a cloud, but the back of a cloud. Cannot you see that everything is stooping and hiding a face? If we could only get round in front—”

“Look!” cried out Bull clamorously, “the balloon is coming down!”

There was no need to cry out to Syme, who had never taken his eyes off it. He saw the great luminous globe suddenly stagger in the sky, right itself, and then
sink slowly behind the trees like a setting sun.

The man called Gogol, who had hardly spoken through all their weary travels, suddenly threw up his hands like a lost spirit.

“He is dead!” he cried. “And now I know he was my friend—my friend in the dark!”

“Dead!” snorted the Secretary. “You will not find him dead easily. If he has been tipped out of the car, we shall find him rolling as a colt rolls in a field, kicking his legs for fun.”

“Clashing his hoofs,” said the Professor. “The colts do, and so did Pan.”

“Pan again!” said Dr. Bull irritably. “You seem to think Pan is everything.”

“So he is,” said the Professor, “in Greek. He means everything.”

“Don’t forget,” said the Secretary, looking down, “that he also means Panic.”

Syme had stood without hearing any of the exclamations.

“It fell over there,” he said shortly. “Let us follow it!”

Then he added with an indescribable gesture—

“Oh, if he has cheated us all by getting killed! It would be like one of his larks.”

He strode off towards the distant trees with a new energy, his rags and ribbons fluttering in the wind. The others followed him in a more footsore and dubious manner. And almost at the same moment all six men realised that they were not alone in the little field.

Across the square of turf a tall man was advancing towards them, leaning on a strange long staff like a sceptre. He was clad in a fine but old-fashioned suit with knee-breeches; its colour was that shade between blue, violet and grey which can be seen in certain shadows of the woodland. His hair was whitish grey, and at the first glance, taken along with his knee-breeches, looked as if it was powdered. His advance was very quiet; but for the silver frost upon his head, he might have been one to the shadows of the wood.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “my master has a carriage waiting for you in the road just by.”

“Who is your master?” asked Syme, standing quite still.

“I was told you knew his name,” said the man respectfully.

There was a silence, and then the Secretary said—

“Where is this carriage?”

“It has been waiting only a few moments,” said the stranger. “My master has only just come home.”

Syme looked left and right upon the patch of green field in which he found
himself. The hedges were ordinary hedges, the trees seemed ordinary trees; yet he felt like a man entrapped in fairyland.

He looked the mysterious ambassador up and down, but he could discover nothing except that the man’s coat was the exact colour of the purple shadows, and that the man’s face was the exact colour of the red and brown and golden sky.

“Show us the place,” Syme said briefly, and without a word the man in the violet coat turned his back and walked towards a gap in the hedge, which let in suddenly the light of a white road.

As the six wanderers broke out upon this thoroughfare, they saw the white road blocked by what looked like a long row of carriages, such a row of carriages as might close the approach to some house in Park Lane. Along the side of these carriages stood a rank of splendid servants, all dressed in the grey-blue uniform, and all having a certain quality of stateliness and freedom which would not commonly belong to the servants of a gentleman, but rather to the officials and ambassadors of a great king. There were no less than six carriages waiting, one for each of the tattered and miserable band. All the attendants (as if in court-dress) wore swords, and as each man crawled into his carriage they drew them, and saluted with a sudden blaze of steel.

“What can it all mean?” asked Bull of Syme as they separated. “Is this another joke of Sunday’s?”

“I don’t know,” said Syme as he sank wearily back in the cushions of his carriage; “but if it is, it’s one of the jokes you talk about. It’s a good-natured one.”

The six adventurers had passed through many adventures, but not one had carried them so utterly off their feet as this last adventure of comfort. They had all become inured to things going roughly; but things suddenly going smoothly swamped them. They could not even feebly imagine what the carriages were; it was enough for them to know that they were carriages, and carriages with cushions. They could not conceive who the old man was who had led them; but it was quite enough that he had certainly led them to the carriages.

Syme drove through a drifting darkness of trees in utter abandonment. It was typical of him that while he had carried his bearded chin forward fiercely so long as anything could be done, when the whole business was taken out of his hands he fell back on the cushions in a frank collapse.

Very gradually and very vaguely he realised into what rich roads the carriage was carrying him. He saw that they passed the stone gates of what might have
been a park, that they began gradually to climb a hill which, while wooded on both sides, was somewhat more orderly than a forest. Then there began to grow upon him, as upon a man slowly waking from a healthy sleep, a pleasure in everything. He felt that the hedges were what hedges should be, living walls; that a hedge is like a human army, disciplined, but all the more alive. He saw high elms behind the hedges, and vaguely thought how happy boys would be climbing there. Then his carriage took a turn of the path, and he saw suddenly and quietly, like a long, low, sunset cloud, a long, low house, mellow in the mild light of sunset. All the six friends compared notes afterwards and quarrelled; but they all agreed that in some unaccountable way the place reminded them of their boyhood. It was either this elm-top or that crooked path, it was either this scrap of orchard or that shape of a window; but each man of them declared that he could remember this place before he could remember his mother.

When the carriages eventually rolled up to a large, low, cavernous gateway, another man in the same uniform, but wearing a silver star on the grey breast of his coat, came out to meet them. This impressive person said to the bewildered Syme—

“Refreshments are provided for you in your room.”

Syme, under the influence of the same mesmeric sleep of amazement, went up the large oaken stairs after the respectful attendant. He entered a splendid suite of apartments that seemed to be designed specially for him. He walked up to a long mirror with the ordinary instinct of this class, to pull his tie straight or to smooth his hair; and there he saw the frightful figure that he was—blood running down his face from where the bough had struck him, his hair standing out like yellow rags of rank grass, his clothes torn into long, wavering tatters. At once the whole enigma sprang up, simply as the question of how he had got there, and how he was to get out again. Exactly at the same moment a man in blue, who had been appointed as his valet, said very solemnly—

“I have put out your clothes, sir.”

“Clothes!” said Syme sardonically. “I have no clothes except these,” and he lifted two long strips of his frock-coat in fascinating festoons, and made a movement as if to twirl like a ballet girl.

“My master asks me to say,” said the attendant, “that there is a fancy dress ball tonight, and that he desires you to put on the costume that I have laid out. Meanwhile, sir, there is a bottle of Burgundy and some cold pheasant, which he hopes you will not refuse, as it is some hours before supper.”

“Cold pheasant is a good thing,” said Syme reflectively, “and Burgundy is a
spanking good thing. But really I do not want either of them so much as I want to know what the devil all this means, and what sort of costume you have got laid out for me. Where is it?"

The servant lifted off a kind of ottoman a long peacock-blue drapery, rather of the nature of a domino, on the front of which was emblazoned a large golden sun, and which was splashed here and there with flaming stars and crescents.

“You’re to be dressed as Thursday, sir,” said the valet somewhat affably.

“Dressed as Thursday!” said Syme in meditation. “It doesn’t sound a warm costume.”

“Oh, yes, sir,” said the other eagerly, “the Thursday costume is quite warm, sir. It fastens up to the chin.”

“Well, I don’t understand anything,” said Syme, sighing. “I have been used so long to uncomfortable adventures that comfortable adventures knock me out. Still, I may be allowed to ask why I should be particularly like Thursday in a green frock spotted all over with the sun and moon. Those orbs, I think, shine on other days. I once saw the moon on Tuesday, I remember.”

“Beg pardon, sir,” said the valet, “Bible also provided for you,” and with a respectful and rigid finger he pointed out a passage in the first chapter of Genesis. Syme read it wondering. It was that in which the fourth day of the week is associated with the creation of the sun and moon. Here, however, they reckoned from a Christian Sunday.

“This is getting wilder and wilder,” said Syme, as he sat down in a chair. “Who are these people who provide cold pheasant and Burgundy, and green clothes and Bibles? Do they provide everything?”

“Yes, sir, everything,” said the attendant gravely. “Shall I help you on with your costume?”

“Oh, hitch the bally thing on!” said Syme impatiently.

But though he affected to despise the mummery, he felt a curious freedom and naturalness in his movements as the blue and gold garment fell about him; and when he found that he had to wear a sword, it stirred a boyish dream. As he passed out of the room he flung the folds across his shoulder with a gesture, his sword stood out at an angle, and he had all the swagger of a troubadour. For these disguises did not disguise, but reveal.
CHAPTER XV

THE ACCUSER

AS Syme strode along the corridor he saw the Secretary standing at the top of a great flight of stairs. The man had never looked so noble. He was draped in a long robe of starless black, down the centre of which fell a band or broad stripe of pure white, like a single shaft of light. The whole looked like some very severe ecclesiastical vestment. There was no need for Syme to search his memory or the Bible in order to remember that the first day of creation marked the mere creation of light out of darkness. The vestment itself would alone have suggested the symbol; and Syme felt also how perfectly this pattern of pure white and black expressed the soul of the pale and austere Secretary, with his inhuman veracity and his cold frenzy, which made him so easily make war on the anarchists, and yet so easily pass for one of them. Syme was scarcely surprised to notice that, amid all the ease and hospitality of their new surroundings, this man’s eyes were still stern. No smell of ale or orchards could make the Secretary cease to ask a reasonable question.

If Syme had been able to see himself, he would have realised that he, too, seemed to be for the first time himself and no one else. For if the Secretary stood for that philosopher who loves the original and formless light, Syme was a type of the poet who seeks always to make the light in special shapes, to split it up into sun and star. The philosopher may sometimes love the infinite; the poet always loves the finite. For him the great moment is not the creation of light, but the creation of the sun and moon.

As they descended the broad stairs together they overtook Ratcliffe, who was clad in spring green like a huntsman, and the pattern upon whose garment was a green tangle of trees. For he stood for that third day on which the earth and green things were made, and his square, sensible face, with its not unfriendly cynicism, seemed appropriate enough to it.

They were led out of another broad and low gateway into a very large old English garden, full of torches and bonfires, by the broken light of which a vast carnival of people were dancing in motley dress. Syme seemed to see every shape in Nature imitated in some crazy costume. There was a man dressed as a windmill with enormous sails, a man dressed as an elephant, a man dressed as a balloon; the two last, together, seemed to keep the thread of their farcical
adventures. Syme even saw, with a queer thrill, one dancer dressed like an enormous hornbill, with a beak twice as big as himself—the queer bird which had fixed itself on his fancy like a living question while he was rushing down the long road at the Zoological Gardens. There were a thousand other such objects, however. There was a dancing lamppost, a dancing apple tree, a dancing ship. One would have thought that the untamable tune of some mad musician had set all the common objects of field and street dancing an eternal jig. And long afterwards, when Syme was middle-aged and at rest, he could never see one of those particular objects—a lamppost, or an apple tree, or a windmill—without thinking that it was a strayed reveller from that revel of masquerade.

On one side of this lawn, alive with dancers, was a sort of green bank, like the terrace in such old-fashioned gardens.

Along this, in a kind of crescent, stood seven great chairs, the thrones of the seven days. Gogol and Dr. Bull were already in their seats; the Professor was just mounting to his. Gogol, or Tuesday, had his simplicity well symbolised by a dress designed upon the division of the waters, a dress that separated upon his forehead and fell to his feet, grey and silver, like a sheet of rain. The Professor, whose day was that on which the birds and fishes—the ruder forms of life—were created, had a dress of dim purple, over which sprawled goggle-eyed fishes and outrageous tropical birds, the union in him of unfathomable fancy and of doubt. Dr. Bull, the last day of Creation, wore a coat covered with heraldic animals in red and gold, and on his crest a man rampant. He lay back in his chair with a broad smile, the picture of an optimist in his element.

One by one the wanderers ascended the bank and sat in their strange seats. As each of them sat down a roar of enthusiasm rose from the carnival, such as that with which crowds receive kings. Cups were clashed and torches shaken, and feathered hats flung in the air. The men for whom these thrones were reserved were men crowned with some extraordinary laurels. But the central chair was empty.

Syme was on the left hand of it and the Secretary on the right. The Secretary looked across the empty throne at Syme, and said, compressing his lips—

“We do not know yet that he is not dead in a field.”

Almost as Syme heard the words, he saw on the sea of human faces in front of him a frightful and beautiful alteration, as if heaven had opened behind his head. But Sunday had only passed silently along the front like a shadow, and had sat in the central seat. He was draped plainly, in a pure and terrible white, and his hair was like a silver flame on his forehead.
For a long time—it seemed for hours—that huge masquerade of mankind swayed and stamped in front of them to marching and exultant music. Every couple dancing seemed a separate romance; it might be a fairy dancing with a pillar-box, or a peasant girl dancing with the moon; but in each case it was, somehow, as absurd as Alice in Wonderland, yet as grave and kind as a love story. At last, however, the thick crowd began to thin itself. Couples strolled away into the garden-walks, or began to drift towards that end of the building where stood smoking, in huge pots like fish-kettles, some hot and scented mixtures of old ale or wine. Above all these, upon a sort of black framework on the roof of the house, roared in its iron basket a gigantic bonfire, which lit up the land for miles. It flung the homely effect of firelight over the face of vast forests of grey or brown, and it seemed to fill with warmth even the emptiness of upper night. Yet this also, after a time, was allowed to grow fainter; the dim groups gathered more and more round the great cauldrons, or passed, laughing and clattering, into the inner passages of that ancient house. Soon there were only some ten loiterers in the garden; soon only four. Finally the last stray merry-maker ran into the house whooping to his companions. The fire faded, and the slow, strong stars came out. And the seven strange men were left alone, like seven stone statues on their chairs of stone. Not one of them had spoken a word.

They seemed in no haste to do so, but heard in silence the hum of insects and the distant song of one bird. Then Sunday spoke, but so dreamily that he might have been continuing a conversation rather than beginning one.

“We will eat and drink later,” he said. “Let us remain together a little, we who have loved each other so sadly, and have fought so long. I seem to remember only centuries of heroic war, in which you were always heroes—epic on epic, iliad on iliad, and you always brothers in arms. Whether it was but recently (for time is nothing), or at the beginning of the world, I sent you out to war. I sat in the darkness, where there is not any created thing, and to you I was only a voice commanding valour and an unnatural virtue. You heard the voice in the dark, and you never heard it again. The sun in heaven denied it, the earth and sky denied it, all human wisdom denied it. And when I met you in the daylight I denied it myself.”

Syme stirred sharply in his seat, but otherwise there was silence, and the incomprehensible went on.

“But you were men. You did not forget your secret honour, though the whole cosmos turned an engine of torture to tear it out of you. I knew how near you were to hell. I know how you, Thursday, crossed swords with King Satan, and
how you, Wednesday, named me in the hour without hope.”

There was complete silence in the starlit garden, and then the black-browed Secretary, implacable, turned in his chair towards Sunday, and said in a harsh voice—

“Who and what are you?”

“I am the Sabbath,” said the other without moving. “I am the peace of God.”

The Secretary started up, and stood crushing his costly robe in his hand.

“I know what you mean,” he cried, “and it is exactly that that I cannot forgive you. I know you are contentment, optimism, what do they call the thing, an ultimate reconciliation. Well, I am not reconciled. If you were the man in the dark room, why were you also Sunday, an offense to the sunlight? If you were from the first our father and our friend, why were you also our greatest enemy? We wept, we fled in terror; the iron entered into our souls—and you are the peace of God! Oh, I can forgive God His anger, though it destroyed nations; but I cannot forgive Him His peace.”

Sunday answered not a word, but very slowly he turned his face of stone upon Syme as if asking a question.

“No,” said Syme, “I do not feel fierce like that. I am grateful to you, not only for wine and hospitality here, but for many a fine scamper and free fight. But I should like to know. My soul and heart are as happy and quiet here as this old garden, but my reason is still crying out. I should like to know.”

Sunday looked at Ratcliffe, whose clear voice said—

“It seems so silly that you should have been on both sides and fought yourself.”

Bull said—

“I understand nothing, but I am happy. In fact, I am going to sleep.”

“I am not happy,” said the Professor with his head in his hands, “because I do not understand. You let me stray a little too near to hell.”

And then Gogol said, with the absolute simplicity of a child—

“I wish I knew why I was hurt so much.”

Still Sunday said nothing, but only sat with his mighty chin upon his hand, and gazed at the distance. Then at last he said—

“I have heard your complaints in order. And here, I think, comes another to complain, and we will hear him also.”

The falling fire in the great cresset threw a last long gleam, like a bar of burning gold, across the dim grass. Against this fiery band was outlined in utter black the advancing legs of a black-clad figure. He seemed to have a fine close
suit with knee-breeches such as that which was worn by the servants of the house, only that it was not blue, but of this absolute sable. He had, like the servants, a kind of sword by his side. It was only when he had come quite close to the crescent of the seven and flung up his face to look at them, that Syme saw, with thunder-struck clearness, that the face was the broad, almost ape-like face of his old friend Gregory, with its rank red hair and its insulting smile.

“Gregory!” gasped Syme, half-rising from his seat. “Why, this is the real anarchist!”

“Yes,” said Gregory, with a great and dangerous restraint, “I am the real anarchist.”

“Now there was a day,” murmured Bull, who seemed really to have fallen asleep, “when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them.”

“You are right,” said Gregory, and gazed all round. “I am a destroyer. I would destroy the world if I could.”

A sense of a pathos far under the earth stirred up in Syme, and he spoke brokenly and without sequence.

“Oh, most unhappy man,” he cried, “try to be happy! You have red hair like your sister.”

“My red hair, like red flames, shall burn up the world,” said Gregory. “I thought I hated everything more than common men can hate anything; but I find that I do not hate everything so much as I hate you!”

“I never hated you,” said Syme very sadly.

Then out of this unintelligible creature the last thunders broke.

“You!” he cried. “You never hated because you never lived. I know what you are all of you, from first to last—you are the people in power! You are the police—the great fat, smiling men in blue and buttons! You are the Law, and you have never been broken. But is there a free soul alive that does not long to break you, only because you have never been broken? We in revolt talk all kind of nonsense doubtless about this crime or that crime of the Government. It is all folly! The only crime of the Government is that it governs. The unpardonable sin of the supreme power is that it is supreme. I do not curse you for being cruel. I do not curse you (though I might) for being kind. I curse you for being safe! You sit in your chairs of stone, and have never come down from them. You are the seven angels of heaven, and you have had no troubles. Oh, I could forgive you everything, you that rule all mankind, if I could feel for once that you had suffered for one hour a real agony such as I—”
Syme sprang to his feet, shaking from head to foot.

“I see everything,” he cried, “everything that there is. Why does each thing on the earth war against each other thing? Why does each small thing in the world have to fight against the world itself? Why does a fly have to fight the whole universe? Why does a dandelion have to fight the whole universe? For the same reason that I had to be alone in the dreadful Council of the Days. So that each thing that obeys law may have the glory and isolation of the anarchist. So that each man fighting for order may be as brave and good a man as the dynamiter. So that the real lie of Satan may be flung back in the face of this blasphemer, so that by tears and torture we may earn the right to say to this man, ‘You lie!’ No agonies can be too great to buy the right to say to this accuser, ‘We also have suffered.’

“It is not true that we have never been broken. We have been broken upon the wheel. It is not true that we have never descended from these thrones. We have descended into hell. We were complaining of unforgettable miseries even at the very moment when this man entered insolently to accuse us of happiness. I repel the slander; we have not been happy. I can answer for every one of the great guards of Law whom he has accused. At least—”

He had turned his eyes so as to see suddenly the great face of Sunday, which wore a strange smile.

“Have you,” he cried in a dreadful voice, “have you ever suffered?”

As he gazed, the great face grew to an awful size, grew larger than the colossal mask of Memnon, which had made him scream as a child. It grew larger and larger, filling the whole sky; then everything went black. Only in the blackness before it entirely destroyed his brain he seemed to hear a distant voice saying a commonplace text that he had heard somewhere, “Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?”

When men in books awake from a vision, they commonly find themselves in some place in which they might have fallen asleep; they yawn in a chair, or lift themselves with bruised limbs from a field. Syme’s experience was something much more psychologically strange if there was indeed anything unreal, in the earthly sense, about the things he had gone through. For while he could always remember afterwards that he had swooned before the face of Sunday, he could not remember having ever come to at all. He could only remember that gradually and naturally he knew that he was and had been walking along a country lane with an easy and conversational companion. That companion had been a part of his recent drama; it was the red-haired poet Gregory. They were walking like old
friends, and were in the middle of a conversation about some triviality. But Syme could only feel an unnatural buoyancy in his body and a crystal simplicity in his mind that seemed to be superior to everything that he said or did. He felt he was in possession of some impossible good news, which made every other thing a triviality, but an adorable triviality.

Dawn was breaking over everything in colours at once clear and timid; as if Nature made a first attempt at yellow and a first attempt at rose. A breeze blew so clean and sweet, that one could not think that it blew from the sky; it blew rather through some hole in the sky. Syme felt a simple surprise when he saw rising all round him on both sides of the road the red, irregular buildings of Saffron Park. He had no idea that he had walked so near London. He walked by instinct along one white road, on which early birds hopped and sang, and found himself outside a fenced garden. There he saw the sister of Gregory, the girl with the gold-red hair, cutting lilac before breakfast, with the great unconscious gravity of a girl.
THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH

G. K. CHESTERTON
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

THE MAN WHO KNEW TOO MUCH

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I
THE FACE IN THE TARGET

II
THE VANISHING PRINCE

III
THE SOUL OF THE SCHOOLBOY

IV
THE BOTTOMLESS WELL

V
THE FAD OF THE FISHERMAN

VI
THE HOLE IN THE WALL

VII
THE TEMPLE OF SILENCE

VIII
THE VENGEANCE OF THE STATUE
THE FACE IN THE TARGET

Harold March, the rising reviewer and social critic, was walking vigorously across a great tableland of moors and commons, the horizon of which was fringed with the far-off woods of the famous estate of Torwood Park. He was a good-looking young man in tweeds, with very pale curly hair and pale clear eyes. Walking in wind and sun in the very landscape of liberty, he was still young enough to remember his politics and not merely try to forget them. For his errand at Torwood Park was a political one; it was the place of appointment named by no less a person than the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Howard Horne, then introducing his so-called Socialist budget, and prepared to expound it in an interview with so promising a penman. Harold March was the sort of man who knows everything about politics, and nothing about politicians. He also knew a great deal about art, letters, philosophy, and general culture; about almost everything, indeed, except the world he was living in.

Abruptly, in the middle of those sunny and windy flats, he came upon a sort of cleft almost narrow enough to be called a crack in the land. It was just large enough to be the water-course for a small stream which vanished at intervals under green tunnels of undergrowth, as if in a dwarfish forest. Indeed, he had an odd feeling as if he were a giant looking over the valley of the pygmies. When he dropped into the hollow, however, the impression was lost; the rocky banks, though hardly above the height of a cottage, hung over and had the profile of a precipice. As he began to wander down the course of the stream, in idle but romantic curiosity, and saw the water shining in short strips between the great gray boulders and bushes as soft as great green mosses, he fell into quite an opposite vein of fantasy. It was rather as if the earth had opened and swallowed him into a sort of underworld of dreams. And when he became conscious of a human figure dark against the silver stream, sitting on a large boulder and looking rather like a large bird, it was perhaps with some of the premonitions proper to a man who meets the strangest friendship of his life.

The man was apparently fishing; or at least was fixed in a fisherman’s attitude with more than a fisherman’s immobility. March was able to examine the man almost as if he had been a statue for some minutes before the statue spoke. He was a tall, fair man, cadaverous, and a little lackadaisical, with heavy eyelids and
a highbridged nose. When his face was shaded with his wide white hat, his light mustache and lithe figure gave him a look of youth. But the Panama lay on the moss beside him; and the spectator could see that his brow was prematurely bald; and this, combined with a certain hollowness about the eyes, had an air of headwork and even headache. But the most curious thing about him, realized after a short scrutiny, was that, though he looked like a fisherman, he was not fishing.

He was holding, instead of a rod, something that might have been a landing-net which some fishermen use, but which was much more like the ordinary toy net which children carry, and which they generally use indifferently for shrimps or butterflies. He was dipping this into the water at intervals, gravely regarding its harvest of weed or mud, and emptying it out again.

“No, I haven’t caught anything,” he remarked, calmly, as if answering an unspoken query. “When I do I have to throw it back again; especially the big fish. But some of the little beasts interest me when I get ’em.”

“A scientific interest, I suppose?” observed March.

“Of a rather amateurish sort, I fear,” answered the strange fisherman. “I have a sort of hobby about what they call ‘phenomena of phosphorescence.’ But it would be rather awkward to go about in society carrying stinking fish.”

“I suppose it would,” said March, with a smile.

“Rather odd to enter a drawing-room carrying a large luminous cod,” continued the stranger, in his listless way. “How quaint it would be if one could carry it about like a lantern, or have little sprats for candles. Some of the seabeasts would really be very pretty like lampshades; the blue sea–snail that glitters all over like starlight; and some of the red starfish really shine like red stars. But, naturally, I’m not looking for them here.”

March thought of asking him what he was looking for; but, feeling unequal to a technical discussion at least as deep as the deep-sea fishes, he returned to more ordinary topics.

“Delightful sort of hole this is,” he said. “This little dell and river here. It’s like those places Stevenson talks about, where something ought to happen.”

“I know,” answered the other. “I think it’s because the place itself, so to speak, seems to happen and not merely to exist. Perhaps that’s what old Picasso and some of the Cubists are trying to express by angles and jagged lines. Look at that wall like low cliffs that juts forward just at right angles to the slope of turf sweeping up to it. That’s like a silent collision. It’s like a breaker and the backwash of a wave.”
March looked at the low–browed crag overhanging the green slope and
nodded. He was interested in a man who turned so easily from the technicalities
of science to those of art; and asked him if he admired the new angular artists.

“As I feel it, the Cubists are not Cubist enough,” replied the stranger. “I mean
they’re not thick enough. By making things mathematical they make them thin.
Take the living lines out of that landscape, simplify it to a right angle, and you
flatten it out to a mere diagram on paper. Diagrams have their own beauty; but it
is of just the other sort. They stand for the unalterable things; the calm, eternal,
mathematical sort of truths; what somebody calls the ‘white radiance of’—”

He stopped, and before the next word came something had happened almost
too quickly and completely to be realized. From behind the overhanging rock
came a noise and rush like that of a railway train; and a great motor car
appeared. It topped the crest of cliff, black against the sun, like a battle–chariot
rushing to destruction in some wild epic. March automatically put out his hand
in one futile gesture, as if to catch a falling tea–cup in a drawing–room.

For the fraction of a flash it seemed to leave the ledge of rock like a flying
ship; then the very sky seemed to turn over like a wheel, and it lay a ruin amid
the tall grasses below, a line of gray smoke going up slowly from it into the
silent air. A little lower the figure of a man with gray hair lay tumbled down the
steep green slope, his limbs lying all at random, and his face turned away.

The eccentric fisherman dropped his net and walked swiftly toward the spot,
his new acquaintance following him. As they drew near there seemed a sort of
monstrous irony in the fact that the dead machine was still throbbing and
thundering as busily as a factory, while the man lay so still.

He was unquestionably dead. The blood flowed in the grass from a hopelessly
fatal fracture at the back of the skull; but the face, which was turned to the sun,
was uninjured and strangely arresting in itself. It was one of those cases of a
strange face so unmistakable as to feel familiar. We feel, somehow, that we
ought to recognize it, even though we do not. It was of the broad, square sort
with great jaws, almost like that of a highly intellectual ape; the wide mouth shut
so tight as to be traced by a mere line; the nose short with the sort of nostrils that
seem to gape with an appetite for the air. The oddest thing about the face was
that one of the eyebrows was cocked up at a much sharper angle than the other.
March thought he had never seen a face so naturally alive as that dead one. And
its ugly energy seemed all the stranger for its halo of hoary hair. Some papers lay
half fallen out of the pocket, and from among them March extracted a card–case.
He read the name on the card aloud.
“Sir Humphrey Turnbull. I’m sure I’ve heard that name somewhere.”

His companion only gave a sort of a little sigh and was silent for a moment, as if ruminating, then he merely said, “The poor fellow is quite gone,” and added some scientific terms in which his auditor once more found himself out of his depth.

“As things are,” continued the same curiously well-informed person, “it will be more legal for us to leave the body as it is until the police are informed. In fact, I think it will be well if nobody except the police is informed. Don’t be surprised if I seem to be keeping it dark from some of our neighbors round here.” Then, as if prompted to regularize his rather abrupt confidence, he said: “I’ve come down to see my cousin at Torwood; my name is Horne Fisher. Might be a pun on my pottering about here, mightn’t it?”

“Is Sir Howard Horne your cousin?” asked March. “I’m going to Torwood Park to see him myself; only about his public work, of course, and the wonderful stand he is making for his principles. I think this Budget is the greatest thing in English history. If it fails, it will be the most heroic failure in English history. Are you an admirer of your great kinsman, Mr. Fisher?”

“Rather,” said Mr. Fisher. “He’s the best shot I know.”

Then, as if sincerely repentant of his nonchalance, he added, with a sort of enthusiasm:

“No, but really, he’s a beautiful shot.”

As if fired by his own words, he took a sort of leap at the ledges of the rock above him, and scaled them with a sudden agility in startling contrast to his general lassitude. He had stood for some seconds on the headland above, with his aquiline profile under the Panama hat relieved against the sky and peering over the countryside before his companion had collected himself sufficiently to scramble up after him.

The level above was a stretch of common turf on which the tracks of the fated car were plowed plainly enough; but the brink of it was broken as with rocky teeth; broken boulders of all shapes and sizes lay near the edge; it was almost incredible that any one could have deliberately driven into such a death trap, especially in broad daylight.

“I can’t make head or tail of it,” said March. “Was he blind? Or blind drunk?”

“Neither, by the look of him,” replied the other.

“Then it was suicide.”

“It doesn’t seem a cozy way of doing it,” remarked the man called Fisher. “Besides, I don’t fancy poor old Puggy would commit suicide, somehow.”
“Poor old who?” inquired the wondering journalist. “Did you know this unfortunate man?”

“Nobody knew him exactly,” replied Fisher, with some vagueness. “But one knew him, of course. He’d been a terror in his time, in Parliament and the courts, and so on; especially in that row about the aliens who were deported as undesirables, when he wanted one of ’em hanged for murder. He was so sick about it that he retired from the bench. Since then he mostly motored about by himself; but he was coming to Torwood, too, for the week-end; and I don’t see why he should deliberately break his neck almost at the very door. I believe Hoggs—I mean my cousin Howard—was coming down specially to meet him.”

“Torwood Park doesn’t belong to your cousin?” inquired March.

“No; it used to belong to the Winthrops, you know,” replied the other. “Now a new man’s got it; a man from Montreal named Jenkins. Hoggs comes for the shooting; I told you he was a lovely shot.”

This repeated eulogy on the great social statesman affected Harold March as if somebody had defined Napoleon as a distinguished player of nap. But he had another half-formed impression struggling in this flood of unfamiliar things, and he brought it to the surface before it could vanish.

“Jenkins,” he repeated. “Surely you don’t mean Jefferson Jenkins, the social reformer? I mean the man who’s fighting for the new cottage-estate scheme. It would be as interesting to meet him as any Cabinet Minister in the world, if you’ll excuse my saying so.”

“Yes; Hoggs told him it would have to be cottages,” said Fisher. “He said the breed of cattle had improved too often, and people were beginning to laugh. And, of course, you must hang a peerage on to something; though the poor chap hasn’t got it yet. Hullo, here’s somebody else.”

They had started walking in the tracks of the car, leaving it behind them in the hollow, still humming horribly like a huge insect that had killed a man. The tracks took them to the corner of the road, one arm of which went on in the same line toward the distant gates of the park. It was clear that the car had been driven down the long straight road, and then, instead of turning with the road to the left, had gone straight on over the turf to its doom. But it was not this discovery that had riveted Fisher’s eye, but something even more solid. At the angle of the white road a dark and solitary figure was standing almost as still as a finger post. It was that of a big man in rough shooting—clothes, bareheaded, and with tousled curly hair that gave him a rather wild look. On a nearer approach this first more fantastic impression faded; in a full light the figure took on more conventional
colors, as of an ordinary gentleman who happened to have come out without a hat and without very studiously brushing his hair. But the massive stature remained, and something deep and even cavernous about the setting of the eyes redeemed his animal good looks from the commonplace. But March had no time to study the man more closely, for, much to his astonishment, his guide merely observed, “Hullo, Jack!” and walked past him as if he had indeed been a signpost, and without attempting to inform him of the catastrophe beyond the rocks. It was relatively a small thing, but it was only the first in a string of singular antics on which his new and eccentric friend was leading him.

The man they had passed looked after them in rather a suspicious fashion, but Fisher continued serenely on his way along the straight road that ran past the gates of the great estate.

“That’s John Burke, the traveler,” he condescended to explain. “I expect you’ve heard of him; shoots big game and all that. Sorry I couldn’t stop to introduce you, but I dare say you’ll meet him later on.”

“I know his book, of course,” said March, with renewed interest. “That is certainly a fine piece of description, about their being only conscious of the closeness of the elephant when the colossal head blocked out the moon.”

“Yes, young Halkett writes jolly well, I think. What? Didn’t you know Halkett wrote Burke’s book for him? Burke can’t use anything except a gun; and you can’t write with that. Oh, he’s genuine enough in his way, you know, as brave as a lion, or a good deal braver by all accounts.”

“You seem to know all about him,” observed March, with a rather bewildered laugh, “and about a good many other people.”

Fisher’s bald brow became abruptly corrugated, and a curious expression came into his eyes.

“I know too much,” he said. “That’s what’s the matter with me. That’s what’s the matter with all of us, and the whole show; we know too much. Too much about one another; too much about ourselves. That’s why I’m really interested, just now, about one thing that I don’t know.”

“And that is?” inquired the other.

“Why that poor fellow is dead.”

They had walked along the straight road for nearly a mile, conversing at intervals in this fashion; and March had a singular sense of the whole world being turned inside out. Mr. Horne Fisher did not especially abuse his friends and relatives in fashionable society; of some of them he spoke with affection. But they seemed to be an entirely new set of men and women, who happened to
have the same nerves as the men and women mentioned most often in the
newspapers. Yet no fury of revolt could have seemed to him more utterly
revolutionary than this cold familiarity. It was like daylight on the other side of
stage scenery.

They reached the great lodge gates of the park, and, to March’s surprise,
passed them and continued along the interminable white, straight road. But he
was himself too early for his appointment with Sir Howard, and was not
disinclined to see the end of his new friend’s experiment, whatever it might be.
They had long left the moorland behind them, and half the white road was gray
in the great shadow of the Torwood pine forests, themselves like gray bars
shuttered against the sunshine and within, amid that clear noon, manufacturing
their own midnight. Soon, however, rifts began to appear in them like gleams of
colored windows; the trees thinned and fell away as the road went forward,
showing the wild, irregular copses in which, as Fisher said, the house–party had
been blazing away all day. And about two hundred yards farther on they came to
the first turn of the road.

At the corner stood a sort of decayed inn with the dingy sign of The Grapes.
The signboard was dark and indecipherable by now, and hung black against the
sky and the gray moorland beyond, about as inviting as a gallows. March
remarked that it looked like a tavern for vinegar instead of wine.

“A good phrase,” said Fisher, “and so it would be if you were silly enough to
drink wine in it. But the beer is very good, and so is the brandy.”

March followed him to the bar parlor with some wonder, and his dim sense of
repugnance was not dismissed by the first sight of the innkeeper, who was
widely different from the genial innkeepers of romance, a bony man, very silent
behind a black mustache, but with black, restless eyes. Taciturn as he was, the
investigator succeeded at last in extracting a scrap of information from him, by
dint of ordering beer and talking to him persistently and minutely on the subject
of motor cars. He evidently regarded the innkeeper as in some singular way an
authority on motor cars; as being deep in the secrets of the mechanism,
management, and mismanagement of motor cars; holding the man all the time
with a glittering eye like the Ancient Mariner. Out of all this rather mysterious
conversation there did emerge at last a sort of admission that one particular
motor car, of a given description, had stopped before the inn about an hour
before, and that an elderly man had alighted, requiring some mechanical
assistance. Asked if the visitor required any other assistance, the innkeeper said
shortly that the old gentleman had filled his flask and taken a packet of
sandwiches. And with these words the somewhat inhospitable host had walked hastily out of the bar, and they heard him banging doors in the dark interior.

Fisher’s weary eye wandered round the dusty and dreary inn parlor and rested dreamily on a glass case containing a stuffed bird, with a gun hung on hooks above it, which seemed to be its only ornament.

“Puggy was a humorist,” he observed, “at least in his own rather grim style. But it seems rather too grim a joke for a man to buy a packet of sandwiches when he is just going to commit suicide.”

“If you come to that,” answered March, “it isn’t very usual for a man to buy a packet of sandwiches when he’s just outside the door of a grand house he’s going to stop at.”

“No . . . no,” repeated Fisher, almost mechanically; and then suddenly cocked his eye at his interlocutor with a much livelier expression.

“By Jove! that’s an idea. You’re perfectly right. And that suggests a very queer idea, doesn’t it?”

There was a silence, and then March started with irrational nervousness as the door of the inn was flung open and another man walked rapidly to the counter. He had struck it with a coin and called out for brandy before he saw the other two guests, who were sitting at a bare wooden table under the window. When he turned about with a rather wild stare, March had yet another unexpected emotion, for his guide hailed the man as Hoggs and introduced him as Sir Howard Horne.

He looked rather older than his boyish portraits in the illustrated papers, as is the way of politicians; his flat, fair hair was touched with gray, but his face was almost comically round, with a Roman nose which, when combined with his quick, bright eyes, raised a vague reminiscence of a parrot. He had a cap rather at the back of his head and a gun under his arm. Harold March had imagined many things about his meeting with the great political reformer, but he had never pictured him with a gun under his arm, drinking brandy in a public house.

“So you’re stopping at Jink’s, too,” said Fisher. “Everybody seems to be at Jink’s.”

“Yes,” replied the Chancellor of the Exchequer. “Jolly good shooting. At least all of it that isn’t Jink’s shooting. I never knew a chap with such good shooting that was such a bad shot. Mind you, he’s a jolly good fellow and all that; I don’t say a word against him. But he never learned to hold a gun when he was packing pork or whatever he did. They say he shot the cockade off his own servant’s hat; just like him to have cockades, of course. He shot the weathercock off his own
ridiculous gilded summerhouse. It’s the only cock he’ll ever kill, I should think.
Are you coming up there now?”

Fisher said, rather vaguely, that he was following soon, when he had fixed something up; and the Chancellor of the Exchequer left the inn. March fancied he had been a little upset or impatient when he called for the brandy; but he had talked himself back into a satisfactory state, if the talk had not been quite what his literary visitor had expected. Fisher, a few minutes afterward, slowly led the way out of the tavern and stood in the middle of the road, looking down in the direction from which they had traveled. Then he walked back about two hundred yards in that direction and stood still again.

“I should think this is about the place,” he said.
“What place?” asked his companion.
“The place where the poor fellow was killed,” said Fisher, sadly.
“What do you mean?” demanded March.
“He was smashed up on the rocks a mile and a half from here.”
“No, he wasn’t,” replied Fisher. “He didn’t fall on the rocks at all. Didn’t you notice that he only fell on the slope of soft grass underneath? But I saw that he had a bullet in him already.”

Then after a pause he added:
“He was alive at the inn, but he was dead long before he came to the rocks. So he was shot as he drove his car down this strip of straight road, and I should think somewhere about here. After that, of course, the car went straight on with nobody to stop or turn it. It’s really a very cunning dodge in its way; for the body would be found far away, and most people would say, as you do, that it was an accident to a motorist. The murderer must have been a clever brute.”

“But wouldn’t the shot be heard at the inn or somewhere?” asked March.
“It would be heard. But it would not be noticed. That,” continued the investigator, “is where he was clever again. Shooting was going on all over the place all day; very likely he timed his shot so as to drown it in a number of others. Certainly he was a first-class criminal. And he was something else as well.”

“What do you mean?” asked his companion, with a creepy premonition of something coming, he knew not why.

“He was a first-class shot,” said Fisher. He had turned his back abruptly and was walking down a narrow, grassy lane, little more than a cart track, which lay opposite the inn and marked the end of the great estate and the beginning of the
open moors. March plodded after him with the same idle perseverance, and found him staring through a gap in giant weeds and thorns at the flat face of a painted paling. From behind the paling rose the great gray columns of a row of poplars, which filled the heavens above them with dark–green shadow and shook faintly in a wind which had sunk slowly into a breeze. The afternoon was already deepening into evening, and the titanic shadows of the poplars lengthened over a third of the landscape.

“Are you a first–class criminal?” asked Fisher, in a friendly tone. “I’m afraid I’m not. But I think I can manage to be a sort of fourth–rate burglar.”

And before his companion could reply he had managed to swing himself up and over the fence; March followed without much bodily effort, but with considerable mental disturbance. The poplars grew so close against the fence that they had some difficulty in slipping past them, and beyond the poplars they could see only a high hedge of laurel, green and lustrous in the level sun. Something in this limitation by a series of living walls made him feel as if he were really entering a shattered house instead of an open field. It was as if he came in by a disused door or window and found the way blocked by furniture.

When they had circumvented the laurel hedge, they came out on a sort of terrace of turf, which fell by one green step to an oblong lawn like a bowling green.

Beyond this was the only building in sight, a low conservatory, which seemed far away from anywhere, like a glass cottage standing in its own fields in fairyland. Fisher knew that lonely look of the outlying parts of a great house well enough. He realized that it is more of a satire on aristocracy than if it were choked with weeds and littered with ruins. For it is not neglected and yet it is deserted; at any rate, it is disused. It is regularly swept and garnished for a master who never comes.

Looking over the lawn, however, he saw one object which he had not apparently expected. It was a sort of tripod supporting a large disk like the round top of a table tipped sideways, and it was not until they had dropped on to the lawn and walked across to look at it that March realized that it was a target. It was worn and weatherstained; the gay colors of its concentric rings were faded; possibly it had been set up in those far–off Victorian days when there was a fashion of archery. March had one of his vague visions of ladies in cloudy crinolines and gentlemen in outlandish hats and whiskers revisiting that lost garden like ghosts.

Fisher, who was peering more closely at the target, startled him by an exclamation.
“Hullo!” he said. “Somebody has been peppering this thing with shot, after all, and quite lately, too. Why, I believe old Jink’s been trying to improve his bad shooting here.”

“Yes, and it looks as if it still wanted improving,” answered March, laughing. “Not one of these shots is anywhere near the bull’s-eye; they seem just scattered about in the wildest way.”

“In the wildest way,” repeated Fisher, still peering intently at the target. He seemed merely to assent, but March fancied his eye was shining under its sleepy lid and that he straightened his stooping figure with a strange effort.

“Excuse me a moment,” he said, feeling in his pockets. “I think I’ve got some of my chemicals; and after that we’ll go up to the house.” And he stooped again over the target, putting something with his finger over each of the shot–holes, so far as March could see merely a dull–gray smear. Then they went through the gathering twilight up the long green avenues to the great house.

Here again, however, the eccentric investigator did not enter by the front door. He walked round the house until he found a window open, and, leaping into it, introduced his friend to what appeared to be the gun–room. Rows of the regular instruments for bringing down birds stood against the walls; but across a table in the window lay one or two weapons of a heavier and more formidable pattern.

“Hullo! these are Burke’s big–game rifles,” said Fisher. “I never knew he kept them here.” He lifted one of them, examined it briefly, and put it down again, frowning heavily. Almost as he did so a strange young man came hurriedly into the room. He was dark and sturdy, with a bumpy forehead and a bulldog jaw, and he spoke with a curt apology.

“I left Major Burke’s guns here,” he said, “and he wants them packed up. He’s going away to–night.”

And he carried off the two rifles without casting a glance at the stranger; through the open window they could see his short, dark figure walking away across the glimmering garden. Fisher got out of the window again and stood looking after him.

“That’s Halkett, whom I told you about,” he said. “I knew he was a sort of secretary and had to do with Burke’s papers; but I never knew he had anything to do with his guns. But he’s just the sort of silent, sensible little devil who might be very good at anything; the sort of man you know for years before you find he’s a chess champion.”

He had begun to walk in the direction of the disappearing secretary, and they soon came within sight of the rest of the house–party talking and laughing on the
lawn. They could see the tall figure and loose mane of the lion-hunter dominating the little group.

“By the way,” observed Fisher, “when we were talking about Burke and Halkett, I said that a man couldn’t very well write with a gun. Well, I’m not so sure now. Did you ever hear of an artist so clever that he could draw with a gun? There’s a wonderful chap loose about here.”

Sir Howard hailed Fisher and his friend the journalist with almost boisterous amiability. The latter was presented to Major Burke and Mr. Halkett and also (by way of a parenthesis) to his host, Mr. Jenkins, a commonplace little man in loud tweeds, whom everybody else seemed to treat with a sort of affection, as if he were a baby.

The irrepressible Chancellor of the Exchequer was still talking about the birds he had brought down, the birds that Burke and Halkett had brought down, and the birds that Jenkins, their host, had failed to bring down. It seemed to be a sort of sociable monomania.

“You and your big game,” he ejaculated, aggressively, to Burke. “Why, anybody could shoot big game. You want to be a shot to shoot small game.”

“Quite so,” interposed Horne Fisher. “Now if only a hippopotamus could fly up in the air out of that bush, or you preserved flying elephants on the estate, why, then—”

“Why even Jink might hit that sort of bird,” cried Sir Howard, hilariously slapping his host on the back. “Even he might hit a haystack or a hippopotamus.”

“Look here, you fellows,” said Fisher. “I want you to come along with me for a minute and shoot at something else. Not a hippopotamus. Another kind of queer animal I’ve found on the estate. It’s an animal with three legs and one eye, and it’s all the colors of the rainbow.”

“What the deuce are you talking about?” asked Burke.

“You come along and see,” replied Fisher, cheerfully.

Such people seldom reject anything nonsensical, for they are always seeking for something new. They gravely rearmed themselves from the gun-room and trooped along at the tail of their guide, Sir Howard only pausing, in a sort of ecstasy, to point out the celebrated gilt summerhouse on which the gilt weathercock still stood crooked. It was dusk turning to dark by the time they reached the remote green by the poplars and accepted the new and aimless game of shooting at the old mark.

The last light seemed to fade from the lawn, and the poplars against the sunset were like great plumes upon a purple hearse, when the futile procession finally
curved round, and came out in front of the target. Sir Howard again slapped his
host on the shoulder, shoving him playfully forward to take the first shot. The
shoulder and arm he touched seemed unnaturally stiff and angular. Mr. Jenkins
was holding his gun in an attitude more awkward than any that his satiric friends
had seen or expected.

At the same instant a horrible scream seemed to come from nowhere. It was so
unnatural and so unsuited to the scene that it might have been made by some
inhuman thing flying on wings above them or eavesdropping in the dark woods
beyond. But Fisher knew that it had started and stopped on the pale lips of
Jefferson Jenkins, of Montreal, and no one at that moment catching sight of
Jefferson Jenkins’s face would have complained that it was commonplace. The
next moment a torrent of guttural but good–humored oaths came from Major
Burke as he and the two other men saw what was in front of them. The target
stood up in the dim grass like a dark goblin grinning at them, and it was literally
grinning. It had two eyes like stars, and in similar livid points of light were
picked out the two upturned and open nostrils and the two ends of the wide and
tight mouth. A few white dots above each eye indicated the hoary eyebrows; and
one of them ran upward almost erect. It was a brilliant caricature done in bright
dotted lines and March knew of whom. It shone in the shadowy grass, smeared
with sea fire as if one of the submarine monsters had crawled into the twilight
garden; but it had the head of a dead man.

“It’s only luminous paint,” said Burke. “Old Fisher’s been having a joke with
that phosphorescent stuff of his.”

“Seems to be meant for old Puggy” observed Sir Howard. “Hits him off very
well.”

With that they all laughed, except Jenkins. When they had all done, he made a
noise like the first effort of an animal to laugh, and Horne Fisher suddenly strode
across to him and said:

“Mr. Jenkins, I must speak to you at once in private.”

It was by the little watercourse in the moors, on the slope under the hanging
rock, that March met his new friend Fisher, by appointment, shortly after the
ugly and almost grotesque scene that had broken up the group in the garden.

“It was a monkey–trick of mine,” observed Fisher, gloomily, “putting
phosphorus on the target; but the only chance to make him jump was to give him
the horrors suddenly. And when he saw the face he’d shot at shining on the
target he practiced on, all lit up with an infernal light, he did jump. Quite enough
for my own intellectual satisfaction.”
"I’m afraid I don’t quite understand even now," said March, "exactly what he did or why he did it."

"You ought to," replied Fisher, with his rather dreary smile, "for you gave me the first suggestion yourself. Oh yes, you did; and it was a very shrewd one. You said a man wouldn’t take sandwiches with him to dine at a great house. It was quite true; and the inference was that, though he was going there, he didn’t mean to dine there. Or, at any rate, that he might not be dining there. It occurred to me at once that he probably expected the visit to be unpleasant, or the reception doubtful, or something that would prevent his accepting hospitality. Then it struck me that Turnbull was a terror to certain shady characters in the past, and that he had come down to identify and denounce one of them. The chances at the start pointed to the host—that is, Jenkins. I’m morally certain now that Jenkins was the undesirable alien Turnbull wanted to convict in another shooting-affair, but you see the shooting gentleman had another shot in his locker."

"But you said he would have to be a very good shot," protested March.

"Jenkins is a very good shot," said Fisher. "A very good shot who can pretend to be a very bad shot. Shall I tell you the second hint I hit on, after yours, to make me think it was Jenkins? It was my cousin’s account of his bad shooting. He’d shot a cockade off a hat and a weathercock off a building. Now, in fact, a man must shoot very well indeed to shoot so badly as that. He must shoot very neatly to hit the cockade and not the head, or even the hat. If the shots had really gone at random, the chances are a thousand to one that they would not have hit such prominent and picturesque objects. They were chosen because they were prominent and picturesque objects. They make a story to go the round of society. He keeps the crooked weathercock in the summerhouse to perpetuate the story of a legend. And then he lay in wait with his evil eye and wicked gun, safely ambushed behind the legend of his own incompetence.

"But there is more than that. There is the summerhouse itself. I mean there is the whole thing. There’s all that Jenkins gets chaffed about, the gilding and the gaudy colors and all the vulgarity that’s supposed to stamp him as an upstart. Now, as a matter of fact, upstarts generally don’t do this. God knows there’s enough of ’em in society; and one knows ’em well enough. And this is the very last thing they do. They’re generally only too keen to know the right thing and do it; and they instantly put themselves body and soul into the hands of art decorators and art experts, who do the whole thing for them. There’s hardly another millionaire alive who has the moral courage to have a gilt monogram on
a chair like that one in the gun–room. For that matter, there’s the name as well as the monogram. Names like Tompkins and Jenkins and Jinks are funny without being vulgar; I mean they are vulgar without being common. If you prefer it, they are commonplace without being common. They are just the names to be chosen to look ordinary, but they’re really rather extraordinary. Do you know many people called Tompkins? It’s a good deal rarer than Talbot. It’s pretty much the same with the comic clothes of the parvenu. Jenkins dresses like a character in Punch. But that’s because he is a character in Punch. I mean he’s a fictitious character. He’s a fabulous animal. He doesn’t exist.

“Have you ever considered what it must be like to be a man who doesn’t exist? I mean to be a man with a fictitious character that he has to keep up at the expense not merely of personal talents: To be a new kind of hypocrite hiding a talent in a new kind of napkin. This man has chosen his hypocrisy very ingeniously; it was really a new one. A subtle villain has dressed up as a dashing gentleman and a worthy business man and a philanthropist and a saint; but the loud checks of a comical little cad were really rather a new disguise. But the disguise must be very irksome to a man who can really do things. This is a dexterous little cosmopolitan guttersnipe who can do scores of things, not only shoot, but draw and paint, and probably play the fiddle. Now a man like that may find the hiding of his talents useful; but he could never help wanting to use them where they were useless. If he can draw, he will draw absent–mindedly on blotting paper. I suspect this rascal has often drawn poor old Puggy’s face on blotting paper. Probably he began doing it in blots as he afterward did it in dots, or rather shots. It was the same sort of thing; he found a disused target in a deserted yard and couldn’t resist indulging in a little secret shooting, like secret drinking. You thought the shots all scattered and irregular, and so they were; but not accidental. No two distances were alike; but the different points were exactly where he wanted to put them. There’s nothing needs such mathematical precision as a wild caricature. I’ve dabbled a little in drawing myself, and I assure you that to put one dot where you want it is a marvel with a pen close to a piece of paper. It was a miracle to do it across a garden with a gun. But a man who can work those miracles will always itch to work them, if it’s only in the dark.”

After a pause March observed, thoughtfully, “But he couldn’t have brought him down like a bird with one of those little guns.”

“No; that was why I went into the gun–room,” replied Fisher. “He did it with one of Burke’s rifles, and Burke thought he knew the sound of it. That’s why he
rushed out without a hat, looking so wild. He saw nothing but a car passing quickly, which he followed for a little way, and then concluded he’d made a mistake.”

There was another silence, during which Fisher sat on a great stone as motionless as on their first meeting, and watched the gray and silver river eddying past under the bushes. Then March said, abruptly, “Of course he knows the truth now.”

“Nobody knows the truth but you and I,” answered Fisher, with a certain softening in his voice. “And I don’t think you and I will ever quarrel.”

“What do you mean?” asked March, in an altered accent. “What have you done about it?”

Horne Fisher continued to gaze steadily at the eddying stream. At last he said, “The police have proved it was a motor accident.”

“But you know it was not.”

“I told you that I know too much,” replied Fisher, with his eye on the river. “I know that, and I know a great many other things. I know the atmosphere and the way the whole thing works. I know this fellow has succeeded in making himself something incurably commonplace and comic. I know you can’t get up a persecution of old Toole or Little Tich. If I were to tell Hoggs or Halkett that old Jink was an assassin, they would almost die of laughter before my eyes. Oh, I don’t say their laughter’s quite innocent, though it’s genuine in its way. They want old Jink, and they couldn’t do without him. I don’t say I’m quite innocent. I like Hoggs; I don’t want him to be down and out; and he’d be done for if Jink can’t pay for his coronet. They were devilish near the line at the last election. But the only real objection to it is that it’s impossible. Nobody would believe it; it’s not in the picture. The crooked weathercock would always turn it into a joke.”

“Don’t you think this is infamous?” asked March, quietly.

“I think a good many things,” replied the other. “If you people ever happen to blow the whole tangle of society to hell with dynamite, I don’t know that the human race will be much the worse. But don’t be too hard on me merely because I know what society is. That’s why I moon away my time over things like stinking fish.”

There was a pause as he settled himself down again by the stream; and then he added:

“I told you before I had to throw back the big fish.”
II

THE VANISHING PRINCE

This tale begins among a tangle of tales round a name that is at once recent and legendary. The name is that of Michael O’Neill, popularly called Prince Michael, partly because he claimed descent from ancient Fenian princes, and partly because he was credited with a plan to make himself prince president of Ireland, as the last Napoleon did of France. He was undoubtedly a gentleman of honorable pedigree and of many accomplishments, but two of his accomplishments emerged from all the rest. He had a talent for appearing when he was not wanted and a talent for disappearing when he was wanted, especially when he was wanted by the police. It may be added that his disappearances were more dangerous than his appearances. In the latter he seldom went beyond the sensational—pasting up seditious placards, tearing down official placards, making flamboyant speeches, or unfurling forbidden flags. But in order to effect the former he would sometimes fight for his freedom with startling energy, from which men were sometimes lucky to escape with a broken head instead of a broken neck. His most famous feats of escape, however, were due to dexterity and not to violence. On a cloudless summer morning he had come down a country road white with dust, and, pausing outside a farmhouse, had told the farmer’s daughter, with elegant indifference, that the local police were in pursuit of him. The girl’s name was Bridget Royce, a somber and even sullen type of beauty, and she looked at him darkly, as if in doubt, and said, “Do you want me to hide you?” Upon which he only laughed, leaped lightly over the stone wall, and strode toward the farm, merely throwing over his shoulder the remark, “Thank you, I have generally been quite capable of hiding myself.” In which proceeding he acted with a tragic ignorance of the nature of women; and there fell on his path in that sunshine a shadow of doom.

While he disappeared through the farmhouse the girl remained for a few moments looking up the road, and two perspiring policemen came plowing up to the door where she stood. Though still angry, she was still silent, and a quarter of an hour later the officers had searched the house and were already inspecting the kitchen garden and cornfield behind it. In the ugly reaction of her mood she might have been tempted even to point out the fugitive, but for a small difficulty that she had no more notion than the policemen had of where he could possibly
have gone. The kitchen garden was inclosed by a very low wall, and the cornfield beyond lay aslant like a square patch on a great green hill on which he could still have been seen even as a dot in the distance. Everything stood solid in its familiar place; the apple tree was too small to support or hide a climber; the only shed stood open and obviously empty; there was no sound save the droning of summer flies and the occasional flutter of a bird unfamiliar enough to be surprised by the scarecrow in the field; there was scarcely a shadow save a few blue lines that fell from the thin tree; every detail was picked out by the brilliant day light as if in a microscope. The girl described the scene later, with all the passionate realism of her race, and, whether or no the policemen had a similar eye for the picturesque, they had at least an eye for the facts of the case, and were compelled to give up the chase and retire from the scene. Bridget Royce remained as if in a trance, staring at the sunlit garden in which a man had just vanished like a fairy. She was still in a sinister mood, and the miracle took in her mind a character of unfriendliness and fear, as if the fairy were decidedly a bad fairy. The sun upon the glittering garden depressed her more than the darkness, but she continued to stare at it. Then the world itself went half–witted and she screamed. The scarecrow moved in the sun light. It had stood with its back to her in a battered old black hat and a tattered garment, and with all its tatters flying, it strode away across the hill.

She did not analyze the audacious trick by which the man had turned to his advantage the subtle effects of the expected and the obvious; she was still under the cloud of more individual complexities, and she noticed most of all that the vanishing scarecrow did not even turn to look at the farm. And the fates that were running so adverse to his fantastic career of freedom ruled that his next adventure, though it had the same success in another quarter, should increase the danger in this quarter. Among the many similar adventures related of him in this manner it is also said that some days afterward another girl, named Mary Cregan, found him concealed on the farm where she worked; and if the story is true, she must also have had the shock of an uncanny experience, for when she was busy at some lonely task in the yard she heard a voice speaking out of the well, and found that the eccentric had managed to drop himself into the bucket which was some little way below, the well only partly full of water. In this case, however, he had to appeal to the woman to wind up the rope. And men say it was when this news was told to the other woman that her soul walked over the border line of treason.

Such, at least, were the stories told of him in the countryside, and there were
many more—as that he had stood insolently in a splendid green dressing gown on the steps of a great hotel, and then led the police a chase through a long suite of grand apartments, and finally through his own bedroom on to a balcony that overhung the river. The moment the pursuers stepped on to the balcony it broke under them, and they dropped pell-mell into the eddying waters, while Michael, who had thrown off his gown and dived, was able to swim away. It was said that he had carefully cut away the props so that they would not support anything so heavy as a policeman. But here again he was immediately fortunate, yet ultimately unfortunate, for it is said that one of the men was drowned, leaving a family feud which made a little rift in his popularity. These stories can now be told in some detail, not because they are the most marvelous of his many adventures, but because these alone were not covered with silence by the loyalty of the peasantry. These alone found their way into official reports, and it is these which three of the chief officials of the country were reading and discussing when the more remarkable part of this story begins.

Night was far advanced and the lights shone in the cottage that served for a temporary police station near the coast. On one side of it were the last houses of the straggling village, and on the other nothing but a waste moorland stretching away toward the sea, the line of which was broken by no landmark except a solitary tower of the prehistoric pattern still found in Ireland, standing up as slender as a column, but pointed like a pyramid. At a wooden table in front of the window, which normally looked out on this landscape, sat two men in plain clothes, but with something of a military bearing, for indeed they were the two chiefs of the detective service of that district. The senior of the two, both in age and rank, was a sturdy man with a short white beard, and frosty eyebrows fixed in a frown which suggested rather worry than severity.

His name was Morton, and he was a Liverpool man long pickled in the Irish quarrels, and doing his duty among them in a sour fashion not altogether unsympathetic. He had spoken a few sentences to his companion, Nolan, a tall, dark man with a cadaverous equine Irish face, when he seemed to remember something and touched a bell which rang in another room. The subordinate he had summoned immediately appeared with a sheaf of papers in his hand.

“Sit down, Wilson,” he said. “Those are the depositions, I suppose.”

“Yes,” replied the third officer. “I think I’ve got all there is to be got out of them, so I sent the people away.”

“Did Mary Cregan give evidence?” asked Morton, with a frown that looked a little heavier than usual.
“No, but her master did,” answered the man called Wilson, who had flat, red hair and a plain, pale face, not without sharpness. “I think he’s hanging round the girl himself and is out against a rival. There’s always some reason of that sort when we are told the truth about anything. And you bet the other girl told right enough.”

“Well, let’s hope they’ll be some sort of use,” remarked Nolan, in a somewhat hopeless manner, gazing out into the darkness.

“Anything is to the good,” said Morton, “that lets us know anything about him.”

“Do we know anything about him?” asked the melancholy Irishman.

“We know one thing about him,” said Wilson, “and it’s the one thing that nobody ever knew before. We know where he is.”

“Are you sure?” inquired Morton, looking at him sharply.

“Quite sure,” replied his assistant. “At this very minute he is in that tower over there by the shore. If you go near enough you’ll see the candle burning in the window.”

As he spoke the noise of a horn sounded on the road outside, and a moment after they heard the throbbing of a motor car brought to a standstill before the door. Morton instantly sprang to his feet.

“Thank the Lord that’s the car from Dublin,” he said. “I can’t do anything without special authority, not if he were sitting on the top of the tower and putting out his tongue at us. But the chief can do what he thinks best.”

He hurried out to the entrance and was soon exchanging greetings with a big handsome man in a fur coat, who brought into the dingy little station the indescribable glow of the great cities and the luxuries of the great world.

For this was Sir Walter Carey, an official of such eminence in Dublin Castle that nothing short of the case of Prince Michael would have brought him on such a journey in the middle of the night. But the case of Prince Michael, as it happened, was complicated by legalism as well as lawlessness. On the last occasion he had escaped by a forensic quibble and not, as usual, by a private escapade; and it was a question whether at the moment he was amenable to the law or not. It might be necessary to stretch a point, but a man like Sir Walter could probably stretch it as far as he liked.

Whether he intended to do so was a question to be considered. Despite the almost aggressive touch of luxury in the fur coat, it soon became apparent that Sir Walter’s large leonine head was for use as well as ornament, and he considered the matter soberly and sanely enough. Five chairs were set round the
plain deal table, for who should Sir Walter bring with him but his young relative and secretary, Horne Fisher. Sir Walter listened with grave attention, and his secretary with polite boredom, to the string of episodes by which the police had traced the flying rebel from the steps of the hotel to the solitary tower beside the sea. There at least he was cornered between the moors and the breakers; and the scout sent by Wilson reported him as writing under a solitary candle, perhaps composing another of his tremendous proclamations. Indeed, it would have been typical of him to choose it as the place in which finally to turn to bay. He had some remote claim on it, as on a family castle; and those who knew him thought him capable of imitating the primitive Irish chieftains who fell fighting against the sea.

“I saw some queer–looking people leaving as I came in,” said Sir Walter Carey. “I suppose they were your witnesses. But why do they turn up here at this time of night?”

Morton smiled grimly. “They come here by night because they would be dead men if they came here by day. They are criminals committing a crime that is more horrible here than theft or murder.”

“What crime do you mean?” asked the other, with some curiosity.

“They are helping the law,” said Morton.

There was a silence, and Sir Walter considered the papers before him with an abstracted eye. At last he spoke.

“Quite so; but look here, if the local feeling is as lively as that there are a good many points to consider. I believe the new Act will enable me to collar him now if I think it best. But is it best? A serious rising would do us no good in Parliament, and the government has enemies in England as well as Ireland. It won’t do if I have done what looks a little like sharp practice, and then only raised a revolution.”

“It’s all the other way,” said the man called Wilson, rather quickly. “There won’t be half so much of a revolution if you arrest him as there will if you leave him loose for three days longer. But, anyhow, there can’t be anything nowadays that the proper police can’t manage.”

“Mr. Wilson is a Londoner,” said the Irish detective, with a smile.

“Yes, I’m a cockney, all right,” replied Wilson, “and I think I’m all the better for that. Especially at this job, oddly enough.”

Sir Walter seemed slightly amused at the pertinacity of the third officer, and perhaps even more amused at the slight accent with which he spoke, which rendered rather needless his boast about his origin.
“Do you mean to say,” he asked, “that you know more about the business here because you have come from London?”

“Sounds funny, I know, but I do believe it,” answered Wilson. “I believe these affairs want fresh methods. But most of all I believe they want a fresh eye.”

The superior officers laughed, and the red-haired man went on with a slight touch of temper:

“Well, look at the facts. See how the fellow got away every time, and you’ll understand what I mean. Why was he able to stand in the place of the scarecrow, hidden by nothing but an old hat? Because it was a village policeman who knew the scarecrow was there, was expecting it, and therefore took no notice of it. Now I never expect a scarecrow. I’ve never seen one in the street, and I stare at one when I see it in the field. It’s a new thing to me and worth noticing. And it was just the same when he hid in the well. You are ready to find a well in a place like that; you look for a well, and so you don’t see it. I don’t look for it, and therefore I do look at it.”

“It is certainly an idea,” said Sir Walter, smiling, “but what about the balcony? Balconies are occasionally seen in London.”

“But not rivers right under them, as if it was in Venice,” replied Wilson.

“It is certainly a new idea,” repeated Sir Walter, with something like respect. He had all the love of the luxurious classes for new ideas. But he also had a critical faculty, and was inclined to think, after due reflection, that it was a true idea as well.

Growing dawn had already turned the window panes from black to gray when Sir Walter got abruptly to his feet. The others rose also, taking this for a signal that the arrest was to be undertaken. But their leader stood for a moment in deep thought, as if conscious that he had come to a parting of the ways.

Suddenly the silence was pierced by a long, wailing cry from the dark moors outside. The silence that followed it seemed more startling than the shriek itself, and it lasted until Nolan said, heavily:

“Tis the banshee. Somebody is marked for the grave.”

His long, large–featured face was as pale as a moon, and it was easy to remember that he was the only Irishman in the room.

“Well, I know that banshee,” said Wilson, cheerfully, “ignorant as you think I am of these things. I talked to that banshee myself an hour ago, and I sent that banshee up to the tower and told her to sing out like that if she could get a glimpse of our friend writing his proclamation.”
“Do you mean that girl Bridget Royce?” asked Morton, drawing his frosty brows together. “Has she turned king’s evidence to that extent?”

“Yes,” answered Wilson. “I know very little of these local things, you tell me, but I reckon an angry woman is much the same in all countries.”

Nolan, however, seemed still moody and unlike himself. “It’s an ugly noise and an ugly business altogether,” he said. “If it’s really the end of Prince Michael it may well be the end of other things as well. When the spirit is on him he would escape by a ladder of dead men, and wade through that sea if it were made of blood.”

“Is that the real reason of your pious alarms?” asked Wilson, with a slight sneer.

The Irishman’s pale face blackened with a new passion.

“I have faced as many murderers in County Clare as you ever fought with in Clapham Junction, Mr. Cockney,” he said.

“Hush, please,” said Morton, sharply. “Wilson, you have no kind of right to imply doubt of your superior’s conduct. I hope you will prove yourself as courageous and trustworthy as he has always been.”

The pale face of the red–haired man seemed a shade paler, but he was silent and composed, and Sir Walter went up to Nolan with marked courtesy, saying, “Shall we go outside now, and get this business done?”

Dawn had lifted, leaving a wide chasm of white between a great gray cloud and the great gray moorland, beyond which the tower was outlined against the daybreak and the sea.

Something in its plain and primitive shape vaguely suggested the dawn in the first days of the earth, in some prehistoric time when even the colors were hardly created, when there was only blank daylight between cloud and clay. These dead hues were relieved only by one spot of gold—the spark of the candle alight in the window of the lonely tower, and burning on into the broadening daylight. As the group of detectives, followed by a cordon of policemen, spread out into a crescent to cut off all escape, the light in the tower flashed as if it were moved for a moment, and then went out. They knew the man inside had realized the daylight and blown out his candle.

“There are other windows, aren’t there?” asked Morton, “and a door, of course, somewhere round the corner? Only a round tower has no corners.”

“Another example of my small suggestion,” observed Wilson, quietly. “That queer tower was the first thing I saw when I came to these parts; and I can tell you a little more about it—or, at any rate, the outside of it. There are four
windows altogether, one a little way from this one, but just out of sight. Those are both on the ground floor, and so is the third on the other side, making a sort of triangle. But the fourth is just above the third, and I suppose it looks on an upper floor.”

“It’s only a sort of loft, reached by a ladder, said Nolan. “I’ve played in the place when I was a child. It’s no more than an empty shell.” And his sad face grew sadder, thinking perhaps of the tragedy of his country and the part that he played in it.

“The man must have got a table and chair, at any rate,” said Wilson, “but no doubt he could have got those from some cottage. If I might make a suggestion, sir, I think we ought to approach all the five entrances at once, so to speak. One of us should go to the door and one to each window; Macbride here has a ladder for the upper window.”

Mr. Horne Fisher languidly turned to his distinguished relative and spoke for the first time.

“I am rather a convert to the cockney school of psychology,” he said in an almost inaudible voice.

The others seemed to feel the same influence in different ways, for the group began to break up in the manner indicated. Morton moved toward the window immediately in front of them, where the hidden outlaw had just snuffed the candle; Nolan, a little farther westward to the next window; while Wilson, followed by Macbride with the ladder, went round to the two windows at the back. Sir Walter Carey himself, followed by his secretary, began to walk round toward the only door, to demand admittance in a more regular fashion.

“He will be armed, of course,” remarked Sir Walter, casually.

“By all accounts,” replied Horne Fisher, “he can do more with a candlestick than most men with a pistol. But he is pretty sure to have the pistol, too.”

Even as he spoke the question was answered with a tongue of thunder. Morton had just placed himself in front of the nearest window, his broad shoulders blocking the aperture. For an instant it was lit from within as with red fire, followed by a thundering throng of echoes. The square shoulders seemed to alter in shape, and the sturdy figure collapsed among the tall, rank grasses at the foot of the tower. A puff of smoke floated from the window like a little cloud. The two men behind rushed to the spot and raised him, but he was dead.

Sir Walter straightened himself and called out something that was lost in another noise of firing; it was possible that the police were already avenging their comrade from the other side. Fisher had already raced round to the next
window, and a new cry of astonishment from him brought his patron to the same spot. Nolan, the Irish policeman, had also fallen, sprawling all his great length in the grass, and it was red with his blood. He was still alive when they reached him, but there was death on his face, and he was only able to make a final gesture telling them that all was over; and, with a broken word and a heroic effort, motioning them on to where his other comrades were besieging the back of the tower. Stunned by these rapid and repeated shocks, the two men could only vaguely obey the gesture, and, finding their way to the other windows at the back, they discovered a scene equally startling, if less final and tragic. The other two officers were not dead or mortally wounded, but Macbride lay with a broken leg and his ladder on top of him, evidently thrown down from the top window of the tower; while Wilson lay on his face, quite still as if stunned, with his red head among the gray and silver of the sea holly. In him, however, the impotence was but momentary, for he began to move and rise as the others came round the tower.

“My God! it’s like an explosion!” cried Sir Walter; and indeed it was the only word for this unearthly energy, by which one man had been able to deal death or destruction on three sides of the same small triangle at the same instant.

Wilson had already scrambled to his feet and with splendid energy flew again at the window, revolver in hand. He fired twice into the opening and then disappeared in his own smoke; but the thud of his feet and the shock of a falling chair told them that the intrepid Londoner had managed at last to leap into the room. Then followed a curious silence; and Sir Walter, walking to the window through the thinning smoke, looked into the hollow shell of the ancient tower. Except for Wilson, staring around him, there was nobody there.

The inside of the tower was a single empty room, with nothing but a plain wooden chair and a table on which were pens, ink and paper, and the candlestick. Halfway up the high wall there was a rude timber platform under the upper window, a small loft which was more like a large shelf. It was reached only by a ladder, and it seemed to be as bare as the bare walls. Wilson completed his survey of the place and then went and stared at the things on the table. Then he silently pointed with his lean forefinger at the open page of the large notebook. The writer had suddenly stopped writing, even in the middle of a word.

“I said it was like an explosion,” said Sir Walter Carey at last. “And really the man himself seems to have suddenly exploded. But he has blown himself up somehow without touching the tower. He’s burst more like a bubble than a
bomb."

“He has touched more valuable things than the tower,” said Wilson, gloomily.

There was a long silence, and then Sir Walter said, seriously: “Well, Mr. Wilson, I am not a detective, and these unhappy happenings have left you in charge of that branch of the business. We all lament the cause of this, but I should like to say that I myself have the strongest confidence in your capacity for carrying on the work. What do you think we should do next?”

Wilson seemed to rouse himself from his depression and acknowledged the speaker’s words with a warmer civility than he had hitherto shown to anybody. He called in a few of the police to assist in routing out the interior, leaving the rest to spread themselves in a search party outside.

“I think,” he said, “the first thing is to make quite sure about the inside of this place, as it was hardly physically possible for him to have got outside. I suppose poor Nolan would have brought in his banshee and said it was supernaturally possible. But I’ve got no use for disembodied spirits when I’m dealing with facts. And the facts before me are an empty tower with a ladder, a chair, and a table.”

“The spiritualists,” said Sir Walter, with a smile, “would say that spirits could find a great deal of use for a table.”

“I dare say they could if the spirits were on the table—in a bottle,” replied Wilson, with a curl of his pale lip. “The people round here, when they’re all sodden up with Irish whisky, may believe in such things. I think they want a little education in this country.”

Horne Fisher’s heavy eyelids fluttered in a faint attempt to rise, as if he were tempted to a lazy protest against the contemptuous tone of the investigator.

“The Irish believe far too much in spirits to believe in spiritualism,” he murmured. “They know too much about ’em. If you want a simple and childlike faith in any spirit that comes along you can get it in your favorite London.”

“I don’t want to get it anywhere,” said Wilson, shortly. “I say I’m dealing with much simpler things than your simple faith, with a table and a chair and a ladder. Now what I want to say about them at the start is this. They are all three made roughly enough of plain wood. But the table and the chair are fairly new and comparatively clean. The ladder is covered with dust and there is a cobweb under the top rung of it. That means that he borrowed the first two quite recently from some cottage, as we supposed, but the ladder has been a long time in this rotten old dustbin. Probably it was part of the original furniture, an heirloom in this magnificent palace of the Irish kings.”
Again Fisher looked at him under his eyelids, but seemed too sleepy to speak, and Wilson went on with his argument.

“Now it’s quite clear that something very odd has just happened in this place. The chances are ten to one, it seems to me, that it had something specially to do with this place. Probably he came here because he could do it only here; it doesn’t seem very inviting otherwise. But the man knew it of old; they say it belonged to his family, so that altogether, I think, everything points to something in the construction of the tower itself.”

“Your reasoning seems to me excellent,” said Sir Walter, who was listening attentively. “But what could it be?”

“You see now what I mean about the ladder,” went on the detective; “it’s the only old piece of furniture here and the first thing that caught that cockney eye of mine. But there is something else. That loft up there is a sort of lumber room without any lumber. So far as I can see, it’s as empty as everything else; and, as things are, I don’t see the use of the ladder leading to it. It seems to me, as I can’t find anything unusual down here, that it might pay us to look up there.”

He got briskly off the table on which he was sitting (for the only chair was allotted to Sir Walter) and ran rapidly up the ladder to the platform above. He was soon followed by the others, Mr. Fisher going last, however, with an appearance of considerable nonchalance.

At this stage, however, they were destined to disappointment; Wilson nosed in every corner like a terrier and examined the roof almost in the posture of a fly, but half an hour afterward they had to confess that they were still without a clew. Sir Walter’s private secretary seemed more and more threatened with inappropriate slumber, and, having been the last to climb up the ladder, seemed now to lack the energy even to climb down again.

“Come along, Fisher,” called out Sir Walter from below, when the others had regained the floor. “We must consider whether we’ll pull the whole place to pieces to see what it’s made of.”

“I’m coming in a minute,” said the voice from the ledge above their heads, a voice somewhat suggestive of an articulate yawn.

“What are you waiting for?” asked Sir Walter, impatiently. “Can you see anything there?”

“Well, yes, in a way,” replied the voice, vaguely. “In fact, I see it quite plain now.”

“What is it?” asked Wilson, sharply, from the table on which he sat kicking his heels restlessly.
“Well, it’s a man,” said Horne Fisher.

Wilson bounded off the table as if he had been kicked off it. “What do you mean?” he cried. “How can you possibly see a man?”

“I can see him through the window,” replied the secretary, mildly. “I see him coming across the moor. He’s making a bee line across the open country toward this tower. He evidently means to pay us a visit. And, considering who it seems to be, perhaps it would be more polite if we were all at the door to receive him.”

And in a leisurely manner the secretary came down the ladder.

“What it seems to be!” repeated Sir Walter in astonishment.

“Well, I think it’s the man you call Prince Michael,” observed Mr. Fisher, airily. “In fact, I’m sure it is. I’ve seen the police portraits of him.”

There was a dead silence, and Sir Walter’s usually steady brain seemed to go round like a windmill.

“But, hang it all!” he said at last, “even supposing his own explosion could have thrown him half a mile away, without passing through any of the windows, and left him alive enough for a country walk—even then, why the devil should he walk in this direction? The murderer does not generally revisit the scene of his crime so rapidly as all that.”

“He doesn’t know yet that it is the scene of his crime,” answered Horne Fisher.

“What on earth do you mean? You credit him with rather singular absence of mind.”

“Well, the truth is, it isn’t the scene of his crime,” said Fisher, and went and looked out of the window.

There was another silence, and then Sir Walter said, quietly: “What sort of notion have you really got in your head, Fisher? Have you developed a new theory about how this fellow escaped out of the ring round him?”

“He never escaped at all,” answered the man at the window, without turning round. “He never escaped out of the ring because he was never inside the ring. He was not in this tower at all, at least not when we were surrounding it.”

He turned and leaned back against the window, but, in spite of his usual listless manner, they almost fancied that the face in shadow was a little pale.

“I began to guess something of the sort when we were some way from the tower,” he said. “Did you notice that sort of flash or flicker the candle gave before it was extinguished? I was almost certain it was only the last leap the flame gives when a candle burns itself out. And then I came into this room and I saw that.”
He pointed at the table and Sir Walter caught his breath with a sort of curse at his own blindness. For the candle in the candlestick had obviously burned itself away to nothing and left him, mentally, at least, very completely in the dark.

“Then there is a sort of mathematical question,” went on Fisher, leaning back in his limp way and looking up at the bare walls, as if tracing imaginary diagrams there. “It’s not so easy for a man in the third angle to face the other two at the same moment, especially if they are at the base of an isosceles. I am sorry if it sounds like a lecture on geometry, but—”

“I’m afraid we have no time for it,” said Wilson, coldly. “If this man is really coming back, I must give my orders at once.”

“I think I’ll go on with it, though,” observed Fisher, staring at the roof with insolent serenity.

“I must ask you, Mr. Fisher, to let me conduct my inquiry on my own lines,” said Wilson, firmly. “I am the officer in charge now.”

“Yes,” remarked Horne Fisher, softly, but with an accent that somehow chilled the hearer. “Yes. But why?”

Sir Walter was staring, for he had never seen his rather lackadaisical young friend look like that before. Fisher was looking at Wilson with lifted lids, and the eyes under them seemed to have shed or shifted a film, as do the eyes of an eagle.

“Why are you the officer in charge now?” he asked. “Why can you conduct the inquiry on your own lines now? How did it come about, I wonder, that the elder officers are not here to interfere with anything you do?”

Nobody spoke, and nobody can say how soon anyone would have collected his wits to speak when a noise came from without. It was the heavy and hollow sound of a blow upon the door of the tower, and to their shaken spirits it sounded strangely like the hammer of doom.

The wooden door of the tower moved on its rusty hinges under the hand that struck it and Prince Michael came into the room. Nobody had the smallest doubt about his identity. His light clothes, though frayed with his adventures, were of fine and almost foppish cut, and he wore a pointed beard, or imperial, perhaps as a further reminiscence of Louis Napoleon; but he was a much taller and more graceful man that his prototype. Before anyone could speak he had silenced everyone for an instant with a slight but splendid gesture of hospitality.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “this is a poor place now, but you are heartily welcome.”

Wilson was the first to recover, and he took a stride toward the newcomer.
Michael O’Neill, I arrest you in the king’s name for the murder of Francis Morton and James Nolan. It is my duty to warn you—"

“No, no, Mr. Wilson,” cried Fisher, suddenly. “You shall not commit a third murder.”

Sir Walter Carey rose from his chair, which fell over with a crash behind him. “What does all this mean?” he called out in an authoritative manner.

“It means,” said Fisher, “that this man, Hooker Wilson, as soon as he had put his head in at that window, killed his two comrades who had put their heads in at the other windows, by firing across the empty room. That is what it means. And if you want to know, count how many times he is supposed to have fired and then count the charges left in his revolver.”

Wilson, who was still sitting on the table, abruptly put a hand out for the weapon that lay beside him. But the next movement was the most unexpected of all, for the prince standing in the doorway passed suddenly from the dignity of a statue to the swiftness of an acrobat and rent the revolver out of the detective’s hand.

“You dog!” he cried. “So you are the type of English truth, as I am of Irish tragedy—you who come to kill me, wading through the blood of your brethren. If they had fallen in a feud on the hillside, it would be called murder, and yet your sin might be forgiven you. But I, who am innocent, I was to be slain with ceremony. There would be long speeches and patient judges listening to my vain plea of innocence, noting down my despair and disregarding it. Yes, that is what I call assassination. But killing may be no murder; there is one shot left in this little gun, and I know where it should go.”

Wilson turned quickly on the table, and even as he turned he twisted in agony, for Michael shot him through the body where he sat, so that he tumbled off the table like lumber.

The police rushed to lift him; Sir Walter stood speechless; and then, with a strange and weary gesture, Horne Fisher spoke.

“You are indeed a type of the Irish tragedy,” he said. “You were entirely in the right, and you have put yourself in the wrong.”

The prince’s face was like marble for a space then there dawned in his eyes a light not unlike that of despair. He laughed suddenly and flung the smoking pistol on the ground.

“I am indeed in the wrong,” he said. “I have committed a crime that may justly bring a curse on me and my children.”

Horne Fisher did not seem entirely satisfied with this very sudden repentance;
he kept his eyes on the man and only said, in a low voice, “What crime do you mean?”

“I have helped English justice,” replied Prince Michael. “I have avenged your king’s officers; I have done the work of his hangman. For that truly I deserve to be hanged.”

And he turned to the police with a gesture that did not so much surrender to them, but rather command them to arrest him.

This was the story that Horne Fisher told to Harold March, the journalist, many years after, in a little, but luxurious, restaurant near Piccadilly. He had invited March to dinner some time after the affair he called “The Face in the Target,” and the conversation had naturally turned on that mystery and afterward on earlier memories of Fisher’s life and the way in which he was led to study such problems as those of Prince Michael. Horne Fisher was fifteen years older; his thin hair had faded to frontal baldness, and his long, thin hands dropped less with affectation and more with fatigue. And he told the story of the Irish adventure of his youth, because it recorded the first occasion on which he had ever come in contact with crime, or discovered how darkly and how terribly crime can be entangled with law.

“Hooker Wilson was the first criminal I ever knew, and he was a policeman,” explained Fisher, twirling his wine glass. “And all my life has been a mixed-up business of the sort. He was a man of very real talent, and perhaps genius, and well worth studying, both as a detective and a criminal. His white face and red hair were typical of him, for he was one of those who are cold and yet on fire for fame; and he could control anger, but not ambition. He swallowed the snubs of his superiors in that first quarrel, though he boiled with resentment; but when he suddenly saw the two heads dark against the dawn and framed in the two windows, he could not miss the chance, not only of revenge, but of the removal of the two obstacles to his promotion. He was a dead shot and counted on silencing both, though proof against him would have been hard in any case. But, as a matter of fact, he had a narrow escape, in the case of Nolan, who lived just long enough to say, ‘Wilson’ and point. We thought he was summoning help for his comrade, but he was really denouncing his murderer. After that it was easy to throw down the ladder above him (for a man up a ladder cannot see clearly what is below and behind) and to throw himself on the ground as another victim of the catastrophe.

“But there was mixed up with his murderous ambition a real belief, not only in his own talents, but in his own theories. He did believe in what he called a fresh
eye, and he did want scope for fresh methods. There was something in his view, but it failed where such things commonly fail, because the fresh eye cannot see the unseen. It is true about the ladder and the scarecrow, but not about the life and the soul; and he made a bad mistake about what a man like Michael would do when he heard a woman scream. All Michael’s very vanity and vainglory made him rush out at once; he would have walked into Dublin Castle for a lady’s glove. Call it his pose or what you will, but he would have done it. What happened when he met her is another story, and one we may never know, but from tales I’ve heard since, they must have been reconciled. Wilson was wrong there; but there was something, for all that, in his notion that the newcomer sees most, and that the man on the spot may know too much to know anything. He was right about some things. He was right about me.”

“About you?” asked Harold March in some wonder.

“I am the man who knows too much to know anything, or, at any rate, to do anything,” said Horne Fisher. “I don’t mean especially about Ireland. I mean about England. I mean about the whole way we are governed, and perhaps the only way we can be governed. You asked me just now what became of the survivors of that tragedy. Well, Wilson recovered and we managed to persuade him to retire. But we had to pension that damnable murderer more magnificently than any hero who ever fought for England. I managed to save Michael from the worst, but we had to send that perfectly innocent man to penal servitude for a crime we know he never committed, and it was only afterward that we could connive in a sneakish way at his escape. And Sir Walter Carey is Prime Minister of this country, which he would probably never have been if the truth had been told of such a horrible scandal in his department. It might have done for us altogether in Ireland; it would certainly have done for him. And he is my father’s old friend, and has always smothered me with kindness. I am too tangled up with the whole thing, you see, and I was certainly never born to set it right. You look distressed, not to say shocked, and I’m not at all offended at it. Let us change the subject by all means, if you like. What do you think of this Burgundy? It’s rather a discovery of mine, like the restaurant itself.”

And he proceeded to talk learnedly and luxuriantly on all the wines of the world; on which subject, also, some moralists would consider that he knew too much.
III

THE SOUL OF THE SCHOOLBOY

A large map of London would be needed to display the wild and zigzag course of one day’s journey undertaken by an uncle and his nephew; or, to speak more truly, of a nephew and his uncle. For the nephew, a schoolboy on a holiday, was in theory the god in the car, or in the cab, tram, tube, and so on, while his uncle was at most a priest dancing before him and offering sacrifices. To put it more soberly, the schoolboy had something of the stolid air of a young duke doing the grand tour, while his elderly relative was reduced to the position of a courier, who nevertheless had to pay for everything like a patron. The schoolboy was officially known as Summers Minor, and in a more social manner as Stinks, the only public tribute to his career as an amateur photographer and electrician. The uncle was the Rev. Thomas Twyford, a lean and lively old gentleman with a red, eager face and white hair. He was in the ordinary way a country clergyman, but he was one of those who achieve the paradox of being famous in an obscure way, because they are famous in an obscure world. In a small circle of ecclesiastical archaeologists, who were the only people who could even understand one another’s discoveries, he occupied a recognized and respectable place. And a critic might have found even in that day’s journey at least as much of the uncle’s hobby as of the nephew’s holiday.

His original purpose had been wholly paternal and festive. But, like many other intelligent people, he was not above the weakness of playing with a toy to amuse himself, on the theory that it would amuse a child. His toys were crowns and miters and croziers and swords of state; and he had lingered over them, telling himself that the boy ought to see all the sights of London. And at the end of the day, after a tremendous tea, he rather gave the game away by winding up with a visit in which hardly any human boy could be conceived as taking an interest—an underground chamber supposed to have been a chapel, recently excavated on the north bank of the Thames, and containing literally nothing whatever but one old silver coin. But the coin, to those who knew, was more solitary and splendid than the Koh–i–noor. It was Roman, and was said to bear the head of St. Paul; and round it raged the most vital controversies about the ancient British Church. It could hardly be denied, however, that the controversies left Summers Minor comparatively cold.
Indeed, the things that interested Summers Minor, and the things that did not interest him, had mystified and amused his uncle for several hours. He exhibited the English schoolboy’s startling ignorance and startling knowledge—knowledge of some special classification in which he can generally correct and confound his elders. He considered himself entitled, at Hampton Court on a holiday, to forget the very names of Cardinal Wolsey or William of Orange; but he could hardly be dragged from some details about the arrangement of the electric bells in the neighboring hotel. He was solidly dazed by Westminster Abbey, which is not so unnatural since that church became the lumber room of the larger and less successful statuary of the eighteenth century. But he had a magic and minute knowledge of the Westminster omnibuses, and indeed of the whole omnibus system of London, the colors and numbers of which he knew as a herald knows heraldry. He would cry out against a momentary confusion between a light–green Paddington and a dark–green Bayswater vehicle, as his uncle would at the identification of a Greek ikon and a Roman image.

“Do you collect omnibuses like stamps?” asked his uncle. “They must need a rather large album. Or do you keep them in your locker?”

“I keep them in my head,” replied the nephew, with legitimate firmness.

“It does you credit, I admit,” replied the clergyman. “I suppose it were vain to ask for what purpose you have learned that out of a thousand things. There hardly seems to be a career in it, unless you could be permanently on the pavement to prevent old ladies getting into the wrong bus. Well, we must get out of this one, for this is our place. I want to show you what they call St. Paul’s Penny.”

“Is it like St. Paul’s Cathedral?” asked the youth with resignation, as they alighted.

At the entrance their eyes were arrested by a singular figure evidently hovering there with a similar anxiety to enter. It was that of a dark, thin man in a long black robe rather like a cassock; but the black cap on his head was of too strange a shape to be a biretta. It suggested, rather, some archaic headdress of Persia or Babylon. He had a curious black beard appearing only at the corners of his chin, and his large eyes were oddly set in his face like the flat decorative eyes painted in old Egyptian profiles. Before they had gathered more than a general impression of him, he had dived into the doorway that was their own destination.

Nothing could be seen above ground of the sunken sanctuary except a strong wooden hut, of the sort recently run up for many military and official purposes, the wooden floor of which was indeed a mere platform over the excavated cavity
below. A soldier stood as a sentry outside, and a superior soldier, an Anglo–Indian officer of distinction, sat writing at the desk inside. Indeed, the sightseers soon found that this particular sight was surrounded with the most extraordinary precautions. I have compared the silver coin to the Koh–i–noor, and in one sense it was even conventionally comparable, since by a historical accident it was at one time almost counted among the Crown jewels, or at least the Crown relics, until one of the royal princes publicly restored it to the shrine to which it was supposed to belong. Other causes combined to concentrate official vigilance upon it; there had been a scare about spies carrying explosives in small objects, and one of those experimental orders which pass like waves over bureaucracy had decreed first that all visitors should change their clothes for a sort of official sackcloth, and then (when this method caused some murmurs) that they should at least turn out their pockets. Colonel Morris, the officer in charge, was a short, active man with a grim and leathery face, but a lively and humorous eye—a contradiction borne out by his conduct, for he at once derided the safeguards and yet insisted on them.

“I don’t care a button myself for Paul’s Penny, or such things,” he admitted in answer to some antiquarian openings from the clergyman who was slightly acquainted with him, “but I wear the King’s coat, you know, and it’s a serious thing when the King’s uncle leaves a thing here with his own hands under my charge. But as for saints and relics and things, I fear I’m a bit of a Voltairian; what you would call a skeptic.”

“I’m not sure it’s even skeptical to believe in the royal family and not in the ‘Holy’ Family,” replied Mr. Twyford. “But, of course, I can easily empty my pockets, to show I don’t carry a bomb.”

The little heap of the parson’s possessions which he left on the table consisted chiefly of papers, over and above a pipe and a tobacco pouch and some Roman and Saxon coins. The rest were catalogues of old books, and pamphlets, like one entitled “The Use of Sarum,” one glance at which was sufficient both for the colonel and the schoolboy. They could not see the use of Sarum at all. The contents of the boy’s pockets naturally made a larger heap, and included marbles, a ball of string, an electric torch, a magnet, a small catapult, and, of course, a large pocketknife, almost to be described as a small tool box, a complex apparatus on which he seemed disposed to linger, pointing out that it included a pair of nippers, a tool for punching holes in wood, and, above all, an instrument for taking stones out of a horse’s hoof. The comparative absence of any horse he appeared to regard as irrelevant, as if it were a mere appendage
easily supplied. But when the turn came of the gentleman in the black gown, he did not turn out his pockets, but merely spread out his hands.

“I have no possessions,” he said.

“I’m afraid I must ask you to empty your pockets and make sure,” observed the colonel, gruffly.

“I have no pockets,” said the stranger.

Mr. Twyford was looking at the long black gown with a learned eye.

“Are you a monk?” he asked, in a puzzled fashion.

“I am a magus,” replied the stranger. “You have heard of the magi, perhaps? I am a magician.”

“Oh, I say!” exclaimed Summers Minor, with prominent eyes.

“But I was once a monk,” went on the other. “I am what you would call an escaped monk. Yes, I have escaped into eternity. But the monks held one truth at least, that the highest life should be without possessions. I have no pocket money and no pockets, and all the stars are my trinkets.”

“They are out of reach, anyhow,” observed Colonel Morris, in a tone which suggested that it was well for them. “I’ve known a good many magicians myself in India—mango plant and all. But the Indian ones are all frauds, I’ll swear. In fact, I had a good deal of fun showing them up. More fun than I have over this dreary job, anyhow. But here comes Mr. Symon, who will show you over the old cellar downstairs.”

Mr. Symon, the official guardian and guide, was a young man, prematurely gray, with a grave mouth which contrasted curiously with a very small, dark mustache with waxed points, that seemed somehow, separate from it, as if a black fly had settled on his face. He spoke with the accent of Oxford and the permanent official, but in as dead a fashion as the most indifferent hired guide. They descended a dark stone staircase, at the floor of which Symon pressed a button and a door opened on a dark room, or, rather, a room which had an instant before been dark. For almost as the heavy iron door swung open an almost blinding blaze of electric lights filled the whole interior. The fitful enthusiasm of Stinks at once caught fire, and he eagerly asked if the lights and the door worked together.

“Yes, it’s all one system,” replied Symon. “It was all fitted up for the day His Royal Highness deposited the thing here. You see, it’s locked up behind a glass case exactly as he left it.”

A glance showed that the arrangements for guarding the treasure were indeed as strong as they were simple. A single pane of glass cut off one corner of the
room, in an iron framework let into the rock walls and the wooden roof above; there was now no possibility of reopening the case without elaborate labor, except by breaking the glass, which would probably arouse the night watchman who was always within a few feet of it, even if he had fallen asleep. A close examination would have showed many more ingenious safeguards; but the eye of the Rev. Thomas Twyford, at least, was already riveted on what interested him much more—the dull silver disk which shone in the white light against a plain background of black velvet.

“St. Paul’s Penny, said to commemorate the visit of St. Paul to Britain, was probably preserved in this chapel until the eighth century,” Symon was saying in his clear but colorless voice. “In the ninth century it is supposed to have been carried away by the barbarians, and it reappears, after the conversion of the northern Goths, in the possession of the royal family of Gothland. His Royal Highness, the Duke of Gothland, retained it always in his own private custody, and when he decided to exhibit it to the public, placed it here with his own hand. It was immediately sealed up in such a manner—”

Unluckily at this point Summers Minor, whose attention had somewhat strayed from the religious wars of the ninth century, caught sight of a short length of wire appearing in a broken patch in the wall. He precipitated himself at it, calling out, “I say, does that connect?”

It was evident that it did connect, for no sooner had the boy given it a twitch than the whole room went black, as if they had all been struck blind, and an instant afterward they heard the dull crash of the closing door.

“Well, you’ve done it now,” said Symon, in his tranquil fashion. Then after a pause he added, “I suppose they’ll miss us sooner or later, and no doubt they can get it open; but it may take some little time.”

There was a silence, and then the unconquerable Stinks observed:

“Rotten that I had to leave my electric torch.”

“I think,” said his uncle, with restraint, “that we are sufficiently convinced of your interest in electricity.”

Then after a pause he remarked, more amiably: “I suppose if I regretted any of my own impedimenta, it would be the pipe. Though, as a matter of fact, it’s not much fun smoking in the dark. Everything seems different in the dark.”

“Everything is different in the dark,” said a third voice, that of the man who called himself a magician. It was a very musical voice, and rather in contrast with his sinister and swarthy visage, which was now invisible. “Perhaps you don’t know how terrible a truth that is. All you see are pictures made by the sun,
faces and furniture and flowers and trees. The things themselves may be quite strange to you. Something else may be standing now where you saw a table or a chair. The face of your friend may be quite different in the dark."

A short, indescribable noise broke the stillness. Twyford started for a second, and then said, sharply:

“Really, I don’t think it’s a suitable occasion for trying to frighten a child.”

“Who’s a child?” cried the indignant Summers, with a voice that had a crow, but also something of a crack in it. “And who’s a funk, either? Not me.”

“I will be silent, then,” said the other voice out of the darkness.

“But silence also makes and unmakes.”

The required silence remained unbroken for a long time until at last the clergyman said to Symon in a low voice:

“I suppose it’s all right about air?”

“Oh, yes,” replied the other aloud; “there’s a fireplace and a chimney in the office just by the door.”

A bound and the noise of a falling chair told them that the irrepressible rising generation had once more thrown itself across the room. They heard the ejaculation: “A chimney! Why, I’ll be—” and the rest was lost in muffled, but exultant, cries.

The uncle called repeatedly and vainly, groped his way at last to the opening, and, peering up it, caught a glimpse of a disk of daylight, which seemed to suggest that the fugitive had vanished in safety. Making his way back to the group by the glass case, he fell over the fallen chair and took a moment to collect himself again. He had opened his mouth to speak to Symon, when he stopped, and suddenly found himself blinking in the full shock of the white light, and looking over the other man’s shoulder, he saw that the door was standing open.

“So they’ve got at us at last,” he observed to Symon.

The man in the black robe was leaning against the wall some yards away, with a smile carved on his face.

“Here comes Colonel Morris,” went on Twyford, still speaking to Symon. “One of us will have to tell him how the light went out. Will you?”

But Symon still said nothing. He was standing as still as a statue, and looking steadily at the black velvet behind the glass screen. He was looking at the black velvet because there was nothing else to look at. St. Paul’s Penny was gone.

Colonel Morris entered the room with two new visitors; presumably two new sightseers delayed by the accident. The foremost was a tall, fair, rather languid-looking man with a bald brow and a high-bridged nose; his companion was a
younger man with light, curly hair and frank, and even innocent, eyes. Symon scarcely seemed to hear the newcomers; it seemed almost as if he had not realized that the return of the light revealed his brooding attitude. Then he started in a guilty fashion, and when he saw the elder of the two strangers, his pale face seemed to turn a shade paler.

“Why it’s Horne Fisher!” and then after a pause he said in a low voice, “I’m in the devil of a hole, Fisher.”

“There does seem a bit of a mystery to be cleared up,” observed the gentleman so addressed.

“It will never be cleared up,” said the pale Symon. “If anybody could clear it up, you could. But nobody could.”

“I rather think I could,” said another voice from outside the group, and they turned in surprise to realize that the man in the black robe had spoken again.

“You!” said the colonel, sharply. “And how do you propose to play the detective?”

“I do not propose to play the detective,” answered the other, in a clear voice like a bell. “I propose to play the magician. One of the magicians you show up in India, Colonel.”

No one spoke for a moment, and then Horne Fisher surprised everybody by saying, “Well, let’s go upstairs, and this gentleman can have a try.”

He stopped Symon, who had an automatic finger on the button, saying:

“No, leave all the lights on. It’s a sort of safeguard.”

“The thing can’t be taken away now,” said Symon, bitterly.

“It can be put back,” replied Fisher.

Twyford had already run upstairs for news of his vanishing nephew, and he received news of him in a way that at once puzzled and reassured him. On the floor above lay one of those large paper darts which boys throw at each other when the schoolmaster is out of the room. It had evidently been thrown in at the window, and on being unfolded displayed a scrawl of bad handwriting which ran: “Dear Uncle; I am all right. Meet you at the hotel later on,” and then the signature.

Insensibily comforted by this, the clergyman found his thoughts reverting voluntarily to his favorite relic, which came a good second in his sympathies to his favorite nephew, and before he knew where he was he found himself encircled by the group discussing its loss, and more or less carried away on the current of their excitement. But an undercurrent of query continued to run in his mind, as to what had really happened to the boy, and what was the boy’s exact
definition of being all right.

Meanwhile Horne Fisher had considerably puzzled everybody with his new tone and attitude. He had talked to the colonel about the military and mechanical arrangements, and displayed a remarkable knowledge both of the details of discipline and the technicalities of electricity. He had talked to the clergymen, and shown an equally surprising knowledge of the religious and historical interests involved in the relic. He had talked to the man who called himself a magician, and not only surprised but scandalized the company by an equally sympathetic familiarity with the most fantastic forms of Oriental occultism and psychic experiment. And in this last and least respectable line of inquiry he was evidently prepared to go farthest; he openly encouraged the magician, and was plainly prepared to follow the wildest ways of investigation in which that magus might lead him.

“How would you begin now?” he inquired, with an anxious politeness that reduced the colonel to a congestion of rage.

“It is all a question of a force; of establishing communications for a force,” replied that adept, affably, ignoring some military mutterings about the police force. “It is what you in the West used to call animal magnetism, but it is much more than that. I had better not say how much more. As to setting about it, the usual method is to throw some susceptible person into a trance, which serves as a sort of bridge or cord of communication, by which the force beyond can give him, as it were, an electric shock, and awaken his higher senses. It opens the sleeping eye of the mind.”

“I’m susceptible,” said Fisher, either with simplicity or with a baffling irony. “Why not open my mind’s eye for me? My friend Harold March here will tell you I sometimes see things, even in the dark.”

“Nobody sees anything except in the dark,” said the magician.

Heavy clouds of sunset were closing round the wooden hut, enormous clouds, of which only the corners could be seen in the little window, like purple horns and tails, almost as if some huge monsters were prowling round the place. But the purple was already deepening to dark gray; it would soon be night.

“Do not light the lamp,” said the magus with quiet authority, arresting a movement in that direction. “I told you before that things happen only in the dark.”

How such a topsy-turvy scene ever came to be tolerated in the colonel’s office, of all places, was afterward a puzzle in the memory of many, including the colonel. They recalled it like a sort of nightmare, like something they could
not control. Perhaps there was really a magnetism about the mesmerist; perhaps there was even more magnetism about the man mesmerized. Anyhow, the man was being mesmerized, for Horne Fisher had collapsed into a chair with his long limbs loose and sprawling and his eyes staring at vacancy; and the other man was mesmerizing him, making sweeping movements with his darkly draped arms as if with black wings. The colonel had passed the point of explosion, and he dimly realized that eccentric aristocrats are allowed their fling. He comforted himself with the knowledge that he had already sent for the police, who would break up any such masquerade, and with lighting a cigar, the red end of which, in the gathering darkness, glowed with protest.

“Yes, I see pockets,” the man in the trance was saying. “I see many pockets, but they are all empty. No; I see one pocket that is not empty.”

There was a faint stir in the stillness, and the magician said, “Can you see what is in the pocket?”

“Yes,” answered the other; “there are two bright things. I think they are two bits of steel. One of the pieces of steel is bent or crooked.”

“Have they been used in the removal of the relic from downstairs?”

“Yes.”

There was another pause and the inquirer added, “Do you see anything of the relic itself?”

“I see something shining on the floor, like the shadow or the ghost of it. It is over there in the corner beyond the desk.”

There was a movement of men turning and then a sudden stillness, as of their stiffening, for over in the corner on the wooden floor there was really a round spot of pale light. It was the only spot of light in the room. The cigar had gone out.

“It points the way,” came the voice of the oracle. “The spirits are pointing the way to penitence, and urging the thief to restitution. I can see nothing more.” His voice trailed off into a silence that lasted solidly for many minutes, like the long silence below when the theft had been committed. Then it was broken by the ring of metal on the floor, and the sound of something spinning and falling like a tossed halfpenny.

“Light the lamp!” cried Fisher in a loud and even jovial voice, leaping to his feet with far less languor than usual. “I must be going now, but I should like to see it before I go. Why, I came on purpose to see it.”

The lamp was lit, and he did see it, for St. Paul’s Penny was lying on the floor at his feet.
“Oh, as for that,” explained Fisher, when he was entertaining March and Twyford at lunch about a month later, “I merely wanted to play with the magician at his own game.”

“I thought you meant to catch him in his own trap,” said Twyford. “I can’t make head or tail of anything yet, but to my mind he was always the suspect. I don’t think he was necessarily a thief in the vulgar sense. The police always seem to think that silver is stolen for the sake of silver, but a thing like that might well be stolen out of some religious mania. A runaway monk turned mystic might well want it for some mystical purpose.”

“No,” replied Fisher, “the runaway monk is not a thief. At any rate he is not the thief. And he’s not altogether a liar, either. He said one true thing at least that night.”

“And what was that?” inquired March.

“He said it was all magnetism. As a matter of fact, it was done by means of a magnet.” Then, seeing they still looked puzzled, he added, “It was that toy magnet belonging to your nephew, Mr. Twyford.”

“But I don’t understand,” objected March. “If it was done with the schoolboy’s magnet, I suppose it was done by the schoolboy.”

“Well,” replied Fisher, reflectively, “it rather depends which schoolboy.”

“What on earth do you mean?”

“The soul of a schoolboy is a curious thing,” Fisher continued, in a meditative manner. “It can survive a great many things besides climbing out of a chimney. A man can grow gray in great campaigns, and still have the soul of a schoolboy. A man can return with a great reputation from India and be put in charge of a great public treasure, and still have the soul of a schoolboy, waiting to be awakened by an accident. And it is ten times more so when to the schoolboy you add the skeptic, who is generally a sort of stunted schoolboy. You said just now that things might be done by religious mania. Have you ever heard of irreligious mania? I assure you it exists very violently, especially in men who like showing up magicians in India. But here the skeptic had the temptation of showing up a much more tremendous sham nearer home.”

A light came into Harold March’s eyes as he suddenly saw, as if afar off, the wider implication of the suggestion. But Twyford was still wrestling with one problem at a time.

“Do you really mean,” he said, “that Colonel Morris took the relic?”

“He was the only person who could use the magnet,” replied Fisher. “In fact, your obliging nephew left him a number of things he could use. He had a ball of
string, and an instrument for making a hole in the wooden floor—I made a little play with that hole in the floor in my trance, by the way; with the lights left on below, it shone like a new shilling.” Twyford suddenly bounded on his chair. “But in that case,” he cried, in a new and altered voice, “why then of course—You said a piece of steel—?”

“I said there were two pieces of steel,” said Fisher. “The bent piece of steel was the boy’s magnet. The other was the relic in the glass case.”

“But that is silver,” answered the archaeologist, in a voice now almost unrecognizable.

“Oh,” replied Fisher, soothingly, “I dare say it was painted with silver a little.”

There was a heavy silence, and at last Harold March said, “But where is the real relic?”

“Where it has been for five years,” replied Horne Fisher, “in the possession of a mad millionaire named Vandam, in Nebraska. There was a playful little photograph about him in a society paper the other day, mentioning his delusion, and saying he was always being taken in about relics.”

Harold March frowned at the tablecloth; then, after an interval, he said: “I think I understand your notion of how the thing was actually done; according to that, Morris just made a hole and fished it up with a magnet at the end of a string. Such a monkey trick looks like mere madness, but I suppose he was mad, partly with the boredom of watching over what he felt was a fraud, though he couldn’t prove it. Then came a chance to prove it, to himself at least, and he had what he called ‘fun’ with it. Yes, I think I see a lot of details now. But it’s just the whole thing that knocks me. How did it all come to be like that?”

Fisher was looking at him with level lids and an immovable manner.

“Every precaution was taken,” he said. “The Duke carried the relic on his own person, and locked it up in the case with his own hands.”

March was silent; but Twyford stammered. “I don’t understand you. You give me the creeps. Why don’t you speak plainer?”

“If I spoke plainer you would understand me less,” said Horne Fisher.

“All the same I should try,” said March, still without lifting his head.

“Oh, very well,” replied Fisher, with a sigh; “the plain truth is, of course, that it’s a bad business. Everybody knows it’s a bad business who knows anything about it. But it’s always happening, and in one way one can hardly blame them. They get stuck on to a foreign princess that’s as stiff as a Dutch doll, and they have their fling. In this case it was a pretty big fling.”
The face of the Rev. Thomas Twyford certainly suggested that he was a little out of his depth in the seas of truth, but as the other went on speaking vaguely the old gentleman’s features sharpened and set.

“If it were some decent morganatic affair I wouldn’t say; but he must have been a fool to throw away thousands on a woman like that. At the end it was sheer blackmail; but it’s something that the old ass didn’t get it out of the taxpayers. He could only get it out of the Yank, and there you are.”

The Rev. Thomas Twyford had risen to his feet.

“Well, I’m glad my nephew had nothing to do with it,” he said. “And if that’s what the world is like, I hope he will never have anything to do with it.”

“I hope not,” answered Horne Fisher. “No one knows so well as I do that one can have far too much to do with it.”

For Summers Minor had indeed nothing to do with it; and it is part of his higher significance that he has really nothing to do with the story, or with any such stories. The boy went like a bullet through the tangle of this tale of crooked politics and crazy mockery and came out on the other side, pursuing his own unspoiled purposes. From the top of the chimney he climbed he had caught sight of a new omnibus, whose color and name he had never known, as a naturalist might see a new bird or a botanist a new flower. And he had been sufficiently enraptured in rushing after it, and riding away upon that fairy ship.
IV

THE BOTTOMLESS WELL

In an oasis, or green island, in the red and yellow seas of sand that stretch beyond Europe toward the sunrise, there can be found a rather fantastic contrast, which is none the less typical of such a place, since international treaties have made it an outpost of the British occupation. The site is famous among archaeologists for something that is hardly a monument, but merely a hole in the ground. But it is a round shaft, like that of a well, and probably a part of some great irrigation works of remote and disputed date, perhaps more ancient than anything in that ancient land. There is a green fringe of palm and prickly pear round the black mouth of the well; but nothing of the upper masonry remains except two bulky and battered stones standing like the pillars of a gateway of nowhere, in which some of the more transcendental archaeologists, in certain moods at moonrise or sunset, think they can trace the faint lines of figures or features of more than Babylonian monstrosity; while the more rationalistic archaeologists, in the more rational hours of daylight, see nothing but two shapeless rocks. It may have been noticed, however, that all Englishmen are not archaeologists. Many of those assembled in such a place for official and military purposes have hobbies other than archaeology. And it is a solemn fact that the English in this Eastern exile have contrived to make a small golf links out of the green scrub and sand; with a comfortable clubhouse at one end of it and this primeval monument at the other. They did not actually use this archaic abyss as a bunker, because it was by tradition unfathomable, and even for practical purposes unfathomable. Any sporting projectile sent into it might be counted most literally as a lost ball. But they often sauntered round it in their interludes of talking and smoking cigarettes, and one of them had just come down from the clubhouse to find another gazing somewhat moodily into the well.

Both the Englishmen wore light clothes and white pith helmets and puggreens, but there, for the most part, their resemblance ended. And they both almost simultaneously said the same word, but they said it on two totally different notes of the voice.

“Have you heard the news?” asked the man from the club. “Splendid.”

“Splendid,” replied the man by the well. But the first man pronounced the word as a young man might say it about a woman, and the second as an old man
might say it about the weather, not without sincerity, but certainly without fervor.

And in this the tone of the two men was sufficiently typical of them. The first, who was a certain Captain Boyle, was of a bold and boyish type, dark, and with a sort of native heat in his face that did not belong to the atmosphere of the East, but rather to the ardors and ambitions of the West. The other was an older man and certainly an older resident, a civilian official—Horne Fisher; and his drooping eyelids and drooping light mustache expressed all the paradox of the Englishman in the East. He was much too hot to be anything but cool.

Neither of them thought it necessary to mention what it was that was splendid. That would indeed have been superfluous conversation about something that everybody knew. The striking victory over a menacing combination of Turks and Arabs in the north, won by troops under the command of Lord Hastings, the veteran of so many striking victories, was already spread by the newspapers all over the Empire, let alone to this small garrison so near to the battlefield.

“Now, no other nation in the world could have done a thing like that,”cried Captain Boyle, emphatically.

Horne Fisher was still looking silently into the well; a moment later he answered: “We certainly have the art of unmaking mistakes. That’s where the poor old Prussians went wrong. They could only make mistakes and stick to them. There is really a certain talent in unmaking a mistake.”

“What do you mean,” asked Boyle, “what mistakes?”

“Well, everybody knows it looked like biting off more than he could chew,” replied Horne Fisher. It was a peculiarity of Mr. Fisher that he always said that everybody knew things which about one person in two million was ever allowed to hear of. “And it was certainly jolly lucky that Travers turned up so well in the nick of time. Odd how often the right thing’s been done for us by the second in command, even when a great man was first in command. Like Colborne at Waterloo.”

“It ought to add a whole province to the Empire,” observed the other.

“Well, I suppose the Zimmernes would have insisted on it as far as the canal,” observed Fisher, thoughtfully, “though everybody knows adding provinces doesn’t always pay much nowadays.”

Captain Boyle frowned in a slightly puzzled fashion. Being cloudily conscious of never having heard of the Zimmernes in his life, he could only remark, stolidly:

“Well, one can’t be a Little Englander.”
Horne Fisher smiled, and he had a pleasant smile.
“Every man out here is a Little Englander,” he said. “He wishes he were back in Little England.”
“I don’t know what you’re talking about, I’m afraid,” said the younger man, rather suspiciously. “One would think you didn’t really admire Hastings or—or—anything.”
“I admire him no end,” replied Fisher. “He’s by far the best man for this post; he understands the Moslems and can do anything with them. That’s why I’m all against pushing Travers against him, merely because of this last affair.”
“I really don’t understand what you’re driving at,” said the other, frankly.
“Perhaps it isn’t worth understanding,” answered Fisher, lightly, “and, anyhow, we needn’t talk politics. Do you know the Arab legend about that well?”
“I’m afraid I don’t know much about Arab legends,” said Boyle, rather stiffly.
“That’s rather a mistake,” replied Fisher, “especially from your point of view. Lord Hastings himself is an Arab legend. That is perhaps the very greatest thing he really is. If his reputation went it would weaken us all over Asia and Africa. Well, the story about that hole in the ground, that goes down nobody knows where, has always fascinated me, rather. It’s Mohammedan in form now, but I shouldn’t wonder if the tale is a long way older than Mohammed. It’s all about somebody they call the Sultan Aladdin, not our friend of the lamp, of course, but rather like him in having to do with genii or giants or something of that sort. They say he commanded the giants to build him a sort of pagoda, rising higher and higher above all the stars. The Utmost for the Highest, as the people said when they built the Tower of Babel. But the builders of the Tower of Babel were quite modest and domestic people, like mice, compared with old Aladdin. They only wanted a tower that would reach heaven—a mere trifle. He wanted a tower that would pass heaven and rise above it, and go on rising for ever and ever. And Allah cast him down to earth with a thunderbolt, which sank into the earth, boring a hole deeper and deeper, till it made a well that was without a bottom as the tower was to have been without a top. And down that inverted tower of darkness the soul of the proud Sultan is falling forever and ever.”
“What a queer chap you are,” said Boyle. “You talk as if a fellow could believe those fables.”
“Perhaps I believe the moral and not the fable,” answered Fisher.
“But here comes Lady Hastings. You know her, I think.”
The clubhouse on the golf links was used, of course, for many other purposes
besides that of golf. It was the only social center of the garrison beside the strictly military headquarters; it had a billiard room and a bar, and even an excellent reference library for those officers who were so perverse as to take their profession seriously. Among these was the great general himself, whose head of silver and face of bronze, like that of a brazen eagle, were often to be found bent over the charts and folios of the library. The great Lord Hastings believed in science and study, as in other severe ideals of life, and had given much paternal advice on the point to young Boyle, whose appearances in that place of research were rather more intermittent. It was from one of these snatches of study that the young man had just come out through the glass doors of the library on to the golf links. But, above all, the club was so appointed as to serve the social conveniences of ladies at least as much as gentlemen, and Lady Hastings was able to play the queen in such a society almost as much as in her own ballroom. She was eminently calculated and, as some said, eminently inclined to play such a part. She was much younger than her husband, an attractive and sometimes dangerously attractive lady; and Mr. Horne Fisher looked after her a little sardonically as she swept away with the young soldier. Then his rather dreary eye strayed to the green and prickly growths round the well, growths of that curious cactus formation in which one thick leaf grows directly out of the other without stalk or twig. It gave his fanciful mind a sinister feeling of a blind growth without shape or purpose. A flower or shrub in the West grows to the blossom which is its crown, and is content. But this was as if hands could grow out of hands or legs grow out of legs in a nightmare. “Always adding a province to the Empire,” he said, with a smile, and then added, more sadly, “but I doubt if I was right, after all!”

A strong but genial voice broke in on his meditations and he looked up and smiled, seeing the face of an old friend. The voice was, indeed, rather more genial than the face, which was at the first glance decidedly grim. It was a typically legal face, with angular jaws and heavy, grizzled eyebrows; and it belonged to an eminently legal character, though he was now attached in a semimilitary capacity to the police of that wild district. Cuthbert Grayne was perhaps more of a criminologist than either a lawyer or a policeman, but in his more barbarous surroundings he had proved successful in turning himself into a practical combination of all three. The discovery of a whole series of strange Oriental crimes stood to his credit. But as few people were acquainted with, or attracted to, such a hobby or branch of knowledge, his intellectual life was somewhat solitary. Among the few exceptions was Horne Fisher, who had a
curious capacity for talking to almost anybody about almost anything.

“Studying botany, or is it archaeology?” inquired Grayne. “I shall never come to the end of your interests, Fisher. I should say that what you don’t know isn’t worth knowing.”

“You are wrong,” replied Fisher, with a very unusual abruptness, and even bitterness. “It’s what I do know that isn’t worth knowing. All the seamy side of things, all the secret reasons and rotten motives and bribery and blackmail they call politics. I needn’t be so proud of having been down all these sewers that I should brag about it to the little boys in the street.”

“What do you mean? What’s the matter with you?” asked his friend.

“I never knew you taken like this before.”

“I’m ashamed of myself,” replied Fisher. “I’ve just been throwing cold water on the enthusiasms of a boy.”

“Even that explanation is hardly exhaustive,” observed the criminal expert.

“Damned newspaper nonsense the enthusiasms were, of course,” continued Fisher, “but I ought to know that at that age illusions can be ideals. And they’re better than the reality, anyhow. But there is one very ugly responsibility about jolting a young man out of the rut of the most rotten ideal.”

“And what may that be?” inquired his friend.

“It’s very apt to set him off with the same energy in a much worse direction,” answered Fisher; “a pretty endless sort of direction, a bottomless pit as deep as the bottomless well.”

Fisher did not see his friend until a fortnight later, when he found himself in the garden at the back of the clubhouse on the opposite side from the links, a garden heavily colored and scented with sweet semitropical plants in the glow of a desert sunset. Two other men were with him, the third being the now celebrated second in command, familiar to everybody as Tom Travers, a lean, dark man, who looked older than his years, with a furrow in his brow and something morose about the very shape of his black mustache. They had just been served with black coffee by the Arab now officiating as the temporary servant of the club, though he was a figure already familiar, and even famous, as the old servant of the general. He went by the name of Said, and was notable among other Semites for that unnatural length of his yellow face and height of his narrow forehead which is sometimes seen among them, and gave an irrational impression of something sinister, in spite of his agreeable smile.

“I never feel as if I could quite trust that fellow,” said Grayne, when the man had gone away. “It’s very unjust, I take it, for he was certainly devoted to
Hastings, and saved his life, they say. But Arabs are often like that, loyal to one man. I can’t help feeling he might cut anybody else’s throat, and even do it treacherously.”

“Well,” said Travers, with a rather sour smile, “so long as he leaves Hastings alone the world won’t mind much.”

There was a rather embarrassing silence, full of memories of the great battle, and then Horne Fisher said, quietly:

“The newspapers aren’t the world, Tom. Don’t you worry about them. Everybody in your world knows the truth well enough.”

“I think we’d better not talk about the general just now,” remarked Grayne, “for he’s just coming out of the club.”

“He’s not coming here,” said Fisher. “He’s only seeing his wife to the car.”

As he spoke, indeed, the lady came out on the steps of the club, followed by her husband, who then went swiftly in front of her to open the garden gate. As he did so she turned back and spoke for a moment to a solitary man still sitting in a cane chair in the shadow of the doorway, the only man left in the deserted club save for the three that lingered in the garden. Fisher peered for a moment into the shadow, and saw that it was Captain Boyle.

The next moment, rather to their surprise, the general reappeared and, remounting the steps, spoke a word or two to Boyle in his turn. Then he signaled to Said, who hurried up with two cups of coffee, and the two men re-entered the club, each carrying his cup in his hand. The next moment a gleam of white light in the growing darkness showed that the electric lamps had been turned on in the library beyond.

“Coffee and scientific researches,” said Travers, grimly. “All the luxuries of learning and theoretical research. Well, I must be going, for I have my work to do as well.” And he got up rather stiffly, saluted his companions, and strode away into the dusk.

“I only hope Boyle is sticking to scientific researches,” said Horne Fisher. “I’m not very comfortable about him myself. But let’s talk about something else.”

They talked about something else longer than they probably imagined, until the tropical night had come and a splendid moon painted the whole scene with silver; but before it was bright enough to see by Fisher had already noted that the lights in the library had been abruptly extinguished. He waited for the two men to come out by the garden entrance, but nobody came.

“They must have gone for a stroll on the links,” he said.
“Very possibly,” replied Grayne. “It’s going to be a beautiful night.”

A moment or two after he had spoken they heard a voice hailing them out of the shadow of the clubhouse, and were astonished to perceive Travers hurrying toward them, calling out as he came:

“I shall want your help, you fellows,” he cried. “There’s something pretty bad out on the links.”

They found themselves plunging through the club smoking room and the library beyond, in complete darkness, mental as well as material. But Horne Fisher, in spite of his affectation of indifference, was a person of a curious and almost transcendental sensibility to atmospheres, and he already felt the presence of something more than an accident. He collided with a piece of furniture in the library, and almost shuddered with the shock, for the thing moved as he could never have fancied a piece of furniture moving. It seemed to move like a living thing, yielding and yet striking back. The next moment Grayne had turned on the lights, and he saw he had only stumbled against one of the revolving bookstands that had swung round and struck him; but his involuntary recoil had revealed to him his own subconscious sense of something mysterious and monstrous. There were several of these revolving bookcases standing here and there about the library; on one of them stood the two cups of coffee, and on another a large open book. It was Budge’s book on Egyptian hieroglyphics, with colored plates of strange birds and gods, and even as he rushed past, he was conscious of something odd about the fact that this, and not any work of military science, should be open in that place at that moment. He was even conscious of the gap in the well–lined bookshelf from which it had been taken, and it seemed almost to gape at him in an ugly fashion, like a gap in the teeth of some sinister face.

A run brought them in a few minutes to the other side of the ground in front of the bottomless well, and a few yards from it, in a moonlight almost as broad as daylight, they saw what they had come to see.

The great Lord Hastings lay prone on his face, in a posture in which there was a touch of something strange and stiff, with one elbow erect above his body, the arm being doubled, and his big, bony hand clutching the rank and ragged grass. A few feet away was Boyle, almost as motionless, but supported on his hands and knees, and staring at the body. It might have been no more than shock and accident; but there was something ungainly and unnatural about the quadrupedal posture and the gaping face. It was as if his reason had fled from him. Behind, there was nothing but the clear blue southern sky, and the beginning of the desert, except for the two great broken stones in front of the well. And it was in
such a light and atmosphere that men could fancy they traced in them enormous and evil faces, looking down.

Horne Fisher stooped and touched the strong hand that was still clutching the grass, and it was as cold as a stone. He knelt by the body and was busy for a moment applying other tests; then he rose again, and said, with a sort of confident despair:

“Lord Hastings is dead.”

There was a stony silence, and then Travers remarked, gruffly: “This is your department, Grayne; I will leave you to question Captain Boyle. I can make no sense of what he says.”

Boyle had pulled himself together and risen to his feet, but his face still wore an awful expression, making it like a new mask or the face of another man.

“I was looking at the well,” he said, “and when I turned he had fallen down.”

Grayne’s face was very dark. “As you say, this is my affair,” he said. “I must first ask you to help me carry him to the library and let me examine things thoroughly.”

When they had deposited the body in the library, Grayne turned to Fisher and said, in a voice that had recovered its fullness and confidence, “I am going to lock myself in and make a thorough examination first. I look to you to keep in touch with the others and make a preliminary examination of Boyle. I will talk to him later. And just telephone to headquarters for a policeman, and let him come here at once and stand by till I want him.”

Without more words the great criminal investigator went into the lighted library, shutting the door behind him, and Fisher, without replying, turned and began to talk quietly to Travers. “It is curious,” he said, “that the thing should happen just in front of that place.”

“It would certainly be very curious,” replied Travers, “if the place played any part in it.”

“I think,” replied Fisher, “that the part it didn’t play is more curious still.”

And with these apparently meaningless words he turned to the shaken Boyle and, taking his arm, began to walk him up and down in the moonlight, talking in low tones.

Dawn had begun to break abrupt and white when Cuthbert Grayne turned out the lights in the library and came out on to the links. Fisher was lounging about alone, in his listless fashion; but the police messenger for whom he had sent was standing at attention in the background.

“I sent Boyle off with Travers,” observed Fisher, carelessly; “he’ll look after
him, and he’d better have some sleep, anyhow.”

“Did you get anything out of him?” asked Grayne. “Did he tell you what he and Hastings were doing?”

“Yes,” answered Fisher, “he gave me a pretty clear account, after all. He said that after Lady Hastings went off in the car the general asked him to take coffee with him in the library and look up a point about local antiquities. He himself was beginning to look for Budge’s book in one of the revolving bookstands when the general found it in one of the bookshelves on the wall. After looking at some of the plates they went out, it would seem, rather abruptly, on to the links, and walked toward the old well; and while Boyle was looking into it he heard a thud behind him, and turned round to find the general lying as we found him. He himself dropped on his knees to examine the body, and then was paralyzed with a sort of terror and could not come nearer to it or touch it. But I think very little of that; people caught in a real shock of surprise are sometimes found in the queerest postures.”

Grayne wore a grim smile of attention, and said, after a short silence:

“Well, he hasn’t told you many lies. It’s really a creditably clear and consistent account of what happened, with everything of importance left out.”

“Have you discovered anything in there?” asked Fisher.

“I have discovered everything,” answered Grayne.

Fisher maintained a somewhat gloomy silence, as the other resumed his explanation in quiet and assured tones.

“You were quite right, Fisher, when you said that young fellow was in danger of going down dark ways toward the pit. Whether or no, as you fancied, the jolt you gave to his view of the general had anything to do with it, he has not been treating the general well for some time. It’s an unpleasant business, and I don’t want to dwell on it; but it’s pretty plain that his wife was not treating him well, either. I don’t know how far it went, but it went as far as concealment, anyhow; for when Lady Hastings spoke to Boyle it was to tell him she had hidden a note in the Budge book in the library. The general overheard, or came somehow to know, and he went straight to the book and found it. He confronted Boyle with it, and they had a scene, of course. And Boyle was confronted with something else; he was confronted with an awful alternative, in which the life of one old man meant ruin and his death meant triumph and even happiness.”

“Well,” observed Fisher, at last, “I don’t blame him for not telling you the woman’s part of the story. But how do you know about the letter?”

“I found it on the general’s body,” answered Grayne, “but I found worse
things than that. The body had stiffened in the way rather peculiar to poisons of a
certain Asiatic sort. Then I examined the coffee cups, and I knew enough
chemistry to find poison in the dregs of one of them. Now, the General went
straight to the bookcase, leaving his cup of coffee on the bookstand in the middle
of the room. While his back was turned, and Boyle was pretending to examine
the bookstand, he was left alone with the coffee cup. The poison takes about ten
minutes to act, and ten minutes’ walk would bring them to the bottomless well.”

“Yes,” remarked Fisher, “and what about the bottomless well?”

“What has the bottomless well got to do with it?” asked his friend.

“It has nothing to do with it,” replied Fisher. “That is what I find utterly
confounding and incredible.”

“And why should that particular hole in the ground have anything to do with
it?”

“It is a particular hole in your case,” said Fisher. “But I won’t insist on that
just now. By the way, there is another thing I ought to tell you. I said I sent
Boyle away in charge of Travers. It would be just as true to say I sent Travers in
charge of Boyle.”

“You don’t mean to say you suspect Tom Travers?” cried the other.

“He was a deal bitterer against the general than Boyle ever was,” observed
Horne Fisher, with a curious indifference.

“Man, you’re not saying what you mean,” cried Grayne. “I tell you I found the
poison in one of the coffee cups.”

“There was always Said, of course,” added Fisher, “either for hatred or hire.
We agreed he was capable of almost anything.”

“And we agreed he was incapable of hurting his master,” retorted
Grayne.

“Well, well,” said Fisher, amiably, “I dare say you are right; but I should just
like to have a look at the library and the coffee cups.”

He passed inside, while Grayne turned to the policeman in attendance and
handed him a scribbled note, to be telegraphed from headquarters. The man
saluted and hurried off; and Grayne, following his friend into the library, found
him beside the bookstand in the middle of the room, on which were the empty
cups.

“This is where Boyle looked for Budge, or pretended to look for him,
according to your account,” he said.

As Fisher spoke he bent down in a half-crouching attitude, to look at the
volumes in the low, revolving shelf, for the whole bookstand was not much
higher than an ordinary table. The next moment he sprang up as if he had been stung.

“Oh, my God!” he cried.

Very few people, if any, had ever seen Mr. Horne Fisher behave as he behaved just then. He flashed a glance at the door, saw that the open window was nearer, went out of it with a flying leap, as if over a hurdle, and went racing across the turf, in the track of the disappearing policeman. Grayne, who stood staring after him, soon saw his tall, loose figure, returning, restored to all its normal limpness and air of leisure. He was fanning himself slowly with a piece of paper, the telegram he had so violently intercepted.

“Lucky I stopped that,” he observed. “We must keep this affair as quiet as death. Hastings must die of apoplexy or heart disease.”

“What on earth is the trouble?” demanded the other investigator.

“The trouble is,” said Fisher, “that in a few days we should have had a very agreeable alternative—of hanging an innocent man or knocking the British Empire to hell.”

“Do you mean to say,” asked Grayne, “that this infernal crime is not to be punished?”

Fisher looked at him steadily.

“It is already punished,” he said.

After a moment’s pause he went on. “You reconstructed the crime with admirable skill, old chap, and nearly all you said was true. Two men with two coffee cups did go into the library and did put their cups on the bookstand and did go together to the well, and one of them was a murderer and had put poison in the other’s cup. But it was not done while Boyle was looking at the revolving bookcase. He did look at it, though, searching for the Budge book with the note in it, but I fancy that Hastings had already moved it to the shelves on the wall. It was part of that grim game that he should find it first.

“Now, how does a man search a revolving bookcase? He does not generally hop all round it in a squatting attitude, like a frog. He simply gives it a touch and makes it revolve.”

He was frowning at the floor as he spoke, and there was a light under his heavy lids that was not often seen there. The mysticism that was buried deep under all the cynicism of his experience was awake and moving in the depths. His voice took unexpected turns and inflections, almost as if two men were speaking.

“That was what Boyle did; he barely touched the thing, and it went round as
easily as the world goes round. Yes, very much as the world goes round, for the hand that turned it was not his. God, who turns the wheel of all the stars, touched that wheel and brought it full circle, that His dreadful justice might return.”

“I am beginning,” said Grayne, slowly, “to have some hazy and horrible idea of what you mean.”

“It is very simple,” said Fisher, “when Boyle straightened himself from his stooping posture, something had happened which he had not noticed, which his enemy had not noticed, which nobody had noticed. The two coffee cups had exactly changed places.”

The rocky face of Grayne seemed to have sustained a shock in silence; not a line of it altered, but his voice when it came was unexpectedly weakened.

“I see what you mean,” he said, “and, as you say, the less said about it the better. It was not the lover who tried to get rid of the husband, but—the other thing. And a tale like that about a man like that would ruin us here. Had you any guess of this at the start?”

“The bottomless well, as I told you,” answered Fisher, quietly; “that was what stumped me from the start. Not because it had anything to do with it, because it had nothing to do with it.”

He paused a moment, as if choosing an approach, and then went on: “When a man knows his enemy will be dead in ten minutes, and takes him to the edge of an unfathomable pit, he means to throw his body into it. What else should he do? A born fool would have the sense to do it, and Boyle is not a born fool. Well, why did not Boyle do it? The more I thought of it the more I suspected there was some mistake in the murder, so to speak. Somebody had taken somebody there to throw him in, and yet he was not thrown in. I had already an ugly, unformed idea of some substitution or reversal of parts; then I stooped to turn the bookstand myself, by accident, and I instantly knew everything, for I saw the two cups revolve once more, like moons in the sky.”

After a pause, Cuthbert Grayne said, “And what are we to say to the newspapers?”

“My friend, Harold March, is coming along from Cairo to-day,” said Fisher. “He is a very brilliant and successful journalist. But for all that he’s a thoroughly honorable man, so you must not tell him the truth.”

Half an hour later Fisher was again walking to and fro in front of the clubhouse, with Captain Boyle, the latter by this time with a very buffeted and bewildered air; perhaps a sadder and a wiser man.

“What about me, then?” he was saying. “Am I cleared? Am I not going to be
cleared?"

“I believe and hope,” answered Fisher, “that you are not going to be suspected. But you are certainly not going to be cleared. There must be no suspicion against him, and therefore no suspicion against you. Any suspicion against him, let alone such a story against him, would knock us endways from Malta to Mandalay. He was a hero as well as a holy terror among the Moslems. Indeed, you might almost call him a Moslem hero in the English service. Of course he got on with them partly because of his own little dose of Eastern blood; he got it from his mother, the dancer from Damascus; everybody knows that.”

“Oh,” repeated Boyle, mechanically, staring at him with round eyes, “everybody knows that.”

“I dare say there was a touch of it in his jealousy and ferocious vengeance,” went on Fisher. “But, for all that, the crime would ruin us among the Arabs, all the more because it was something like a crime against hospitality. It’s been hateful for you and it’s pretty horrid for me. But there are some things that damned well can’t be done, and while I’m alive that’s one of them.”

“What do you mean?” asked Boyle, glancing at him curiously. “Why should you, of all people, be so passionate about it?”

Horne Fisher looked at the young man with a baffling expression.

“I suppose,” he said, “it’s because I’m a Little Englisher.”

“I can never make out what you mean by that sort of thing,” answered Boyle, doubtfully.

“Do you think England is so little as all that?” said Fisher, with a warmth in his cold voice, “that it can’t hold a man across a few thousand miles. You lectured me with a lot of ideal patriotism, my young friend; but it’s practical patriotism now for you and me, and with no lies to help it. You talked as if everything always went right with us all over the world, in a triumphant crescendo culminating in Hastings. I tell you everything has gone wrong with us here, except Hastings. He was the one name we had left to conjure with, and that mustn’t go as well, no, by God! It’s bad enough that a gang of infernal Jews should plant us here, where there’s no earthly English interest to serve, and all hell beating up against us, simply because Nosey Zimmern has lent money to half the Cabinet. It’s bad enough that an old pawnbroker from Bagdad should make us fight his battles; we can’t fight with our right hand cut off. Our one score was Hastings and his victory, which was really somebody else’s victory. Tom Travers has to suffer, and so have you.”
Then, after a moment’s silence, he pointed toward the bottomless well and said, in a quieter tone:

“I told you that I didn’t believe in the philosophy of the Tower of Aladdin. I don’t believe in the Empire growing until it reaches the sky; I don’t believe in the Union Jack going up and up eternally like the Tower. But if you think I am going to let the Union Jack go down and down eternally, like the bottomless well, down into the blackness of the bottomless pit, down in defeat and derision, amid the jeers of the very Jews who have sucked us dry—no I won’t, and that’s flat; not if the Chancellor were blackmailed by twenty millionaires with their gutter rags, not if the Prime Minister married twenty Yankee Jewesses, not if Woodville and Carstairs had shares in twenty swindling mines. If the thing is really tottering, God help it, it mustn’t be we who tip it over.”

Boyle was regarding him with a bewilderment that was almost fear, and had even a touch of distaste.

“Somehow,” he said, “there seems to be something rather horrid about the things you know.”

“There is,” replied Horne Fisher. “I am not at all pleased with my small stock of knowledge and reflection. But as it is partly responsible for your not being hanged, I don’t know that you need complain of it.”

And, as if a little ashamed of his first boast, he turned and strolled away toward the bottomless well.
THE FAD OF THE FISHERMAN

A thing can sometimes be too extraordinary to be remembered. If it is clean out of the course of things, and has apparently no causes and no consequences, subsequent events do not recall it, and it remains only a subconscious thing, to be stirred by some accident long after. It drifts apart like a forgotten dream; and it was in the hour of many dreams, at daybreak and very soon after the end of dark, that such a strange sight was given to a man sculling a boat down a river in the West country. The man was awake; indeed, he considered himself rather wide awake, being the political journalist, Harold March, on his way to interview various political celebrities in their country seats. But the thing he saw was so inconsequent that it might have been imaginary. It simply slipped past his mind and was lost in later and utterly different events; nor did he even recover the memory till he had long afterward discovered the meaning.

Pale mists of morning lay on the fields and the rushes along one margin of the river; along the other side ran a wall of tawny brick almost overhanging the water. He had shipped his oars and was drifting for a moment with the stream, when he turned his head and saw that the monotony of the long brick wall was broken by a bridge; rather an elegant eighteenth-century sort of bridge with little columns of white stone turning gray. There had been floods and the river still stood very high, with dwarfish trees waist deep in it, and rather a narrow arc of white dawn gleamed under the curve of the bridge.

As his own boat went under the dark archway he saw another boat coming toward him, rowed by a man as solitary as himself. His posture prevented much being seen of him, but as he neared the bridge he stood up in the boat and turned round. He was already so close to the dark entry, however, that his whole figure was black against the morning light, and March could see nothing of his face except the end of two long whiskers or mustaches that gave something sinister to the silhouette, like horns in the wrong place. Even these details March would never have noticed but for what happened in the same instant. As the man came under the low bridge he made a leap at it and hung, with his legs dangling, letting the boat float away from under him. March had a momentary vision of two black kicking legs; then of one black kicking leg; and then of nothing except the eddying stream and the long perspective of the wall. But whenever he
thought of it again, long afterward, when he understood the story in which it figured, it was always fixed in that one fantastic shape—as if those wild legs were a grotesque graven ornament of the bridge itself, in the manner of a gargoyle. At the moment he merely passed, staring, down the stream. He could see no flying figure on the bridge, so it must have already fled; but he was half conscious of some faint significance in the fact that among the trees round the bridgehead opposite the wall he saw a lamp-post; and, beside the lamp-post, the broad blue back of an unconscious policeman.

Even before reaching the shrine of his political pilgrimage he had many other things to think of besides the odd incident of the bridge; for the management of a boat by a solitary man was not always easy even on such a solitary stream. And indeed it was only by an unforeseen accident that he was solitary. The boat had been purchased and the whole expedition planned in conjunction with a friend, who had at the last moment been forced to alter all his arrangements. Harold March was to have traveled with his friend Horne Fisher on that inland voyage to Willowood Place, where the Prime Minister was a guest at the moment. More and more people were hearing of Harold March, for his striking political articles were opening to him the doors of larger and larger salons; but he had never met the Prime Minister yet. Scarcely anybody among the general public had ever heard of Horne Fisher; but he had known the Prime Minister all his life. For these reasons, had the two taken the projected journey together, March might have been slightly disposed to hasten it and Fisher vaguely content to lengthen it out. For Fisher was one of those people who are born knowing the Prime Minister. The knowledge seemed to have no very exhilarant effect, and in his case bore some resemblance to being born tired. But he was distinctly annoyed to receive, just as he was doing a little light packing of fishing tackle and cigars for the journey, a telegram from Willowood asking him to come down at once by train, as the Prime Minister had to leave that night. Fisher knew that his friend the journalist could not possibly start till the next day, and he liked his friend the journalist, and had looked forward to a few days on the river. He did not particularly like or dislike the Prime Minister, but he intensely disliked the alternative of a few hours in the train. Nevertheless, he accepted Prime Ministers as he accepted railway trains—as part of a system which he, at least, was not the revolutionist sent on earth to destroy. So he telephoned to March, asking him, with many apologetic curses and faint damns, to take the boat down the river as arranged, that they might meet at Willowood by the time settled; then he went outside and hailed a taxicab to take him to the railway station. There he paused
at the bookstall to add to his light luggage a number of cheap murder stories, which he read with great pleasure, and without any premonition that he was about to walk into as strange a story in real life.

A little before sunset he arrived, with his light suitcase in hand, before the gate of the long riverside gardens of Willowood Place, one of the smaller seats of Sir Isaac Hook, the master of much shipping and many newspapers. He entered by the gate giving on the road, at the opposite side to the river, but there was a mixed quality in all that watery landscape which perpetually reminded a traveler that the river was near. White gleams of water would shine suddenly like swords or spears in the green thickets. And even in the garden itself, divided into courts and curtained with hedges and high garden trees, there hung everywhere in the air the music of water. The first of the green courts which he entered appeared to be a somewhat neglected croquet lawn, in which was a solitary young man playing croquet against himself. Yet he was not an enthusiast for the game, or even for the garden; and his sallow but well–featured face looked rather sullen than otherwise. He was only one of those young men who cannot support the burden of consciousness unless they are doing something, and whose conceptions of doing something are limited to a game of some kind. He was dark and well dressed in a light holiday fashion, and Fisher recognized him at once as a young man named James Bullen, called, for some unknown reason, Bunker. He was the nephew of Sir Isaac; but, what was much more important at the moment, he was also the private secretary of the Prime Minister.

“Hullo, Bunker!” observed Horne Fisher. “You’re the sort of man I wanted to see. Has your chief come down yet?”

“He’s only staying for dinner,” replied Bullen, with his eye on the yellow ball. “He’s got a great speech to–morrow at Birmingham and he’s going straight through to–night. He’s motoring himself there; driving the car, I mean. It’s the one thing he’s really proud of.”

“You mean you’re staying here with your uncle, like a good boy?” replied Fisher. “But what will the Chief do at Birmingham without the epigrams whispered to him by his brilliant secretary?”

“Don’t you start ragging me,” said the young man called Bunker. “I’m only too glad not to go trailing after him. He doesn’t know a thing about maps or money or hotels or anything, and I have to dance about like a courier. As for my uncle, as I’m supposed to come into the estate, it’s only decent to be here sometimes.”

“Very proper,” replied the other. “Well, I shall see you later on,” and, crossing
the lawn, he passed out through a gap in the hedge.

He was walking across the lawn toward the landing stage on the river, and still felt all around him, under the dome of golden evening, an Old World savor and reverberation in that riverhaunted garden. The next square of turf which he crossed seemed at first sight quite deserted, till he saw in the twilight of trees in one corner of it a hammock and in the hammock a man, reading a newspaper and swinging one leg over the edge of the net.

Him also he hailed by name, and the man slipped to the ground and strolled forward. It seemed fated that he should feel something of the past in the accidents of that place, for the figure might well have been an early–Victorian ghost revisiting the ghosts of the croquet hoops and mallets. It was the figure of an elderly man with long whiskers that looked almost fantastic, and a quaint and careful cut of collar and cravat. Having been a fashionable dandy forty years ago, he had managed to preserve the dandyism while ignoring the fashions. A white top–hat lay beside the Morning Post in the hammock behind him. This was the Duke of Westmoreland, the relic of a family really some centuries old; and the antiquity was not heraldry but history. Nobody knew better than Fisher how rare such noblemen are in fact, and how numerous in fiction. But whether the duke owed the general respect he enjoyed to the genuineness of his pedigree or to the fact that he owned a vast amount of very valuable property was a point about which Mr. Fisher’s opinion might have been more interesting to discover.

“You were looking so comfortable,” said Fisher, “that I thought you must be one of the servants. I’m looking for somebody to take this bag of mine; I haven’t brought a man down, as I came away in a hurry.”

“Nor have I, for that matter,” replied the duke, with some pride. “I never do. If there’s one animal alive I loathe it’s a valet. I learned to dress myself at an early age and was supposed to do it decently. I may be in my second childhood, but I’ve not go so far as being dressed like a child.”

“The Prime Minister hasn’t brought a valet; he’s brought a secretary instead,” observed Fisher. “Devilish inferior job. Didn’t I hear that Harker was down here?”

“He’s over there on the landing stage,” replied the duke, indifferently, and resumed the study of the Morning Post.

Fisher made his way beyond the last green wall of the garden on to a sort of towing path looking on the river and a wooden island opposite. There, indeed, he saw a lean, dark figure with a stoop almost like that of a vulture, a posture well known in the law courts as that of Sir John Harker, the Attorney–General. His
face was lined with headwork, for alone among the three idlers in the garden he was a man who had made his own way; and round his bald brow and hollow temples clung dull red hair, quite flat, like plates of copper.

“I haven’t seen my host yet,” said Horne Fisher, in a slightly more serious tone than he had used to the others, “but I suppose I shall meet him at dinner.”

“You can see him now; but you can’t meet him,” answered Harker.

He nodded his head toward one end of the island opposite, and, looking steadily in the same direction, the other guest could see the dome of a bald head and the top of a fishing rod, both equally motionless, rising out of the tall undergrowth against the background of the stream beyond. The fisherman seemed to be seated against the stump of a tree and facing toward the other bank, so that his face could not be seen, but the shape of his head was unmistakable.

“He doesn’t like to be disturbed when he’s fishing,” continued Harker. “It’s a sort of fad of his to eat nothing but fish, and he’s very proud of catching his own. Of course he’s all for simplicity, like so many of these millionaires. He likes to come in saying he’s worked for his daily bread like a laborer.”

“Does he explain how he blows all the glass and stuffs all the upholstery,” asked Fisher, “and makes all the silver forks, and grows all the grapes and peaches, and designs all the patterns on the carpets? I’ve always heard he was a busy man.”

“I don’t think he mentioned it,” answered the lawyer. “What is the meaning of this social satire?”

“Well, I am a trifle tired,” said Fisher, “of the Simple Life and the Strenuous Life as lived by our little set. We’re all really dependent in nearly everything, and we all make a fuss about being independent in something. The Prime Minister prides himself on doing without a chauffeur, but he can’t do without a factotum and Jack—of—all—trades; and poor old Bunker has to play the part of a universal genius, which God knows he was never meant for. The duke prides himself on doing without a valet, but, for all that, he must give a lot of people an infernal lot of trouble to collect such extraordinary old clothes as he wears. He must have them looked up in the British Museum or excavated out of the tombs. That white hat alone must require a sort of expedition fitted out to find it, like the North Pole. And here we have old Hook pretending to produce his own fish when he couldn’t produce his own fish knives or fish forks to eat it with. He may be simple about simple things like food, but you bet he’s luxurious about luxurious things, especially little things. I don’t include you; you’ve worked too hard to enjoy playing at work.”
“I sometimes think,” said Harker, “that you conceal a horrid secret of being useful sometimes. Haven’t you come down here to see Number One before he goes on to Birmingham?”

Horne Fisher answered, in a lower voice: “Yes; and I hope to be lucky enough to catch him before dinner. He’s got to see Sir Isaac about something just afterward.”

“Hullo!” exclaimed Harker. “Sir Isaac’s finished his fishing. I know he prides himself on getting up at sunrise and going in at sunset.”

The old man on the island had indeed risen to his feet, facing round and showing a bush of gray beard with rather small, sunken features, but fierce eyebrows and keen, choleric eyes. Carefully carrying his fishing tackle, he was already making his way back to the mainland across a bridge of flat stepping–stones a little way down the shallow stream; then he veered round, coming toward his guests and civilly saluting them. There were several fish in his basket and he was in a good temper.

“Yes,” he said, acknowledging Fisher’s polite expression of surprise, “I get up before anybody else in the house, I think. The early bird catches the worm.”

“Unfortunately,” said Harker, “it is the early fish that catches the worm.”

“But the early man catches the fish,” replied the old man, gruffly.

“But from what I hear, Sir Isaac, you are the late man, too,” interposed Fisher. “You must do with very little sleep.”

“I never had much time for sleeping,” answered Hook, “and I shall have to be the late man to–night, anyhow. The Prime Minister wants to have a talk, he tells me, and, all things considered, I think we’d better be dressing for dinner.”

Dinner passed off that evening without a word of politics and little enough but ceremonial trifles. The Prime Minister, Lord Merivale, who was a long, slim man with curly gray hair, was gravely complimentary to his host about his success as a fisherman and the skill and patience he displayed; the conversation flowed like the shallow stream through the stepping–stones.

“It wants patience to wait for them, no doubt,” said Sir Isaac, “and skill to play them, but I’m generally pretty lucky at it.”

“Does a big fish ever break the line and get away?” inquired the politician, with respectful interest.

“Not the sort of line I use,” answered Hook, with satisfaction. “I rather specialize in tackle, as a matter of fact. If he were strong enough to do that, he’d be strong enough to pull me into the river.”

“A great loss to the community,” said the Prime Minister, bowing.
Fisher had listened to all these futilities with inward impatience, waiting for his own opportunity, and when the host rose he sprang to his feet with an alertness he rarely showed. He managed to catch Lord Merivale before Sir Isaac bore him off for the final interview. He had only a few words to say, but he wanted to get them said.

He said, in a low voice as he opened the door for the Premier, “I have seen Montmirail; he says that unless we protest immediately on behalf of Denmark, Sweden will certainly seize the ports.”

Lord Merivale nodded. “I’m just going to hear what Hook has to say about it,” he said.

“I imagine,” said Fisher, with a faint smile, “that there is very little doubt what he will say about it.”

Merivale did not answer, but lounged gracefully toward the library, whither his host had already preceded him. The rest drifted toward the billiard room, Fisher merely remarking to the lawyer: “They won’t be long. We know they’re practically in agreement.”

“Hook entirely supports the Prime Minister,” assented Harker.

“Or the Prime Minister entirely supports Hook,” said Horne Fisher, and began idly to knock the balls about on the billiard table.

Horne Fisher came down next morning in a late and leisurely fashion, as was his reprehensible habit; he had evidently no appetite for catching worms. But the other guests seemed to have felt a similar indifference, and they helped themselves to breakfast from the sideboard at intervals during the hours verging upon lunch. So that it was not many hours later when the first sensation of that strange day came upon them. It came in the form of a young man with light hair and a candid expression, who came sculling down the river and disembarked at the landing stage. It was, in fact, no other than Mr. Harold March, whose journey had begun far away up the river in the earliest hours of that day. He arrived late in the afternoon, having stopped for tea in a large riverside town, and he had a pink evening paper sticking out of his pocket. He fell on the riverside garden like a quiet and well–behaved thunderbolt, but he was a thunderbolt without knowing it.

The first exchange of salutations and introductions was commonplace enough, and consisted, indeed, of the inevitable repetition of excuses for the eccentric seclusion of the host. He had gone fishing again, of course, and must not be disturbed till the appointed hour, though he sat within a stone’s throw of where they stood.
“You see it’s his only hobby,” observed Harker, apologetically, “and, after all, it’s his own house; and he’s very hospitable in other ways.”

“I’m rather afraid,” said Fisher, in a lower voice, “that it’s becoming more of a mania than a hobby. I know how it is when a man of that age begins to collect things, if it’s only collecting those rotten little river fish. You remember Talbot’s uncle with his toothpicks, and poor old Buzzy and the waste of cigar ashes. Hook has done a lot of big things in his time—the great deal in the Swedish timber trade and the Peace Conference at Chicago—but I doubt whether he cares now for any of those big things as he cares for those little fish.”

“Oh, come, come,” protested the Attorney-General. “You’ll make Mr. March think he has come to call on a lunatic. Believe me, Hook only does it for fun, like any other sport, only he’s of the kind that takes his fun sadly. But I bet if there were big news about timber or shipping, he would drop his fun and his fish all right.”

“Well, I wonder,” said Horne Fisher, looking sleepily at the island in the river. “By the way, is there any news of anything?” asked Harker of Harold March. “I see you’ve got an evening paper; one of those enterprising evening papers that come out in the morning.”

“The beginning of Lord Merivale’s Birmingham speech,” replied March, handing him the paper. “It’s only a paragraph, but it seems to me rather good.”

Harker took the paper, flapped and refolded it, and looked at the “Stop Press” news. It was, as March had said, only a paragraph. But it was a paragraph that had a peculiar effect on Sir John Harker. His lowering brows lifted with a flicker and his eyes blinked, and for a moment his leathery jaw was loosened. He looked in some odd fashion like a very old man. Then, hardening his voice and handing the paper to Fisher without a tremor, he simply said:

“Well, here’s a chance for the bet. You’ve got your big news to disturb the old man’s fishing.”

Horne Fisher was looking at the paper, and over his more languid and less expressive features a change also seemed to pass. Even that little paragraph had two or three large headlines, and his eye encountered, “Sensational Warning to Sweden,” and, “We Shall Protest.”

“What the devil—” he said, and his words softened first to a whisper and then a whistle.

“We must tell old Hook at once, or he’ll never forgive us,” said Harker. “He’ll probably want to see Number One instantly, though it may be too late now. I’m going across to him at once. I bet I’ll make him forget his fish, anyhow.” And,
turning his back, he made his way hurriedly along the riverside to the causeway of flat stones.

March was staring at Fisher, in amazement at the effect his pink paper had produced.

“What does it all mean?” he cried. “I always supposed we should protest in defense of the Danish ports, for their sakes and our own. What is all this botheration about Sir Isaac and the rest of you? Do you think it bad news?”

“Bad news!” repeated Fisher, with a sort of soft emphasis beyond expression.

“As bad as all that?” asked his friend, at last.

“As bad as all that?” repeated Fisher. “Why of course it’s as good as it can be. It’s great news. It’s glorious news! That’s where the devil of it comes in, to knock us all silly. It’s admirable. It’s inestimable. It is also quite incredible.”

He gazed again at the gray and green colors of the island and the river, and his rather dreary eye traveled slowly round to the hedges and the lawns.

“I felt this garden was a sort of dream,” he said, “and I suppose I must be dreaming. But there is grass growing and water moving; and something impossible has happened.”

Even as he spoke the dark figure with a stoop like a vulture appeared in the gap of the hedge just above him.

“You have won your bet,” said Harker, in a harsh and almost croaking voice. “The old fool cares for nothing but fishing. He cursed me and told me he would talk no politics.”

“I thought it might be so,” said Fisher, modestly. “What are you going to do next?”

“I shall use the old idiot’s telephone, anyhow,” replied the lawyer. “I must find out exactly what has happened. I’ve got to speak for the Government myself to-morrow.” And he hurried away toward the house.

In the silence that followed, a very bewildering silence so far as March was concerned, they saw the quaint figure of the Duke of Westmoreland, with his white hat and whiskers, approaching them across the garden. Fisher instantly stepped toward him with the pink paper in his hand, and, with a few words, pointed out the apocalyptic paragraph. The duke, who had been walking slowly, stood quite still, and for some seconds he looked like a tailor’s dummy standing and staring outside some antiquated shop. Then March heard his voice, and it was high and almost hysterical:

“But he must see it; he must be made to understand. It cannot have been put to him properly.” Then, with a certain recovery of fullness and even pomposity in
the voice, “I shall go and tell him myself.”

Among the queer incidents of that afternoon, March always remembered something almost comical about the clear picture of the old gentleman in his wonderful white hat carefully stepping from stone to stone across the river, like a figure crossing the traffic in Piccadilly. Then he disappeared behind the trees of the island, and March and Fisher turned to meet the Attorney-General, who was coming out of the house with a visage of grim assurance.

“Everybody is saying,” he said, “that the Prime Minister has made the greatest speech of his life. Peroration and loud and prolonged cheers. Corrupt financiers and heroic peasants. We will not desert Denmark again.”

Fisher nodded and turned away toward the towing path, where he saw the duke returning with a rather dazed expression. In answer to questions he said, in a husky and confidential voice:

“I really think our poor friend cannot be himself. He refused to listen; he—ah—suggested that I might frighten the fish.”

A keen ear might have detected a murmur from Mr. Fisher on the subject of a white hat, but Sir John Harker struck it more decisively:

“Fisher was quite right. I didn’t believe it myself, but it’s quite clear that the old fellow is fixed on this fishing notion by now. If the house caught fire behind him he would hardly move till sunset.”

Fisher had continued his stroll toward the higher embanked ground of the towing path, and he now swept a long and searching gaze, not toward the island, but toward the distant wooded heights that were the walls of the valley. An evening sky as clear as that of the previous day was settling down all over the dim landscape, but toward the west it was now red rather than gold; there was scarcely any sound but the monotonous music of the river. Then came the sound of a half-stifled exclamation from Horne Fisher, and Harold March looked up at him in wonder.

“You spoke of bad news,” said Fisher. “Well, there is really bad news now. I am afraid this is a bad business.”

“What bad news do you mean?” asked his friend, conscious of something strange and sinister in his voice.

“The sun has set,” answered Fisher.

He went on with the air of one conscious of having said something fatal. “We must get somebody to go across whom he will really listen to. He may be mad, but there’s method in his madness. There nearly always is method in madness. It’s what drives men mad, being methodical. And he never goes on sitting there
after sunset, with the whole place getting dark. Where’s his nephew? I believe he’s really fond of his nephew.”

“Look!” cried March, abruptly. “Why, he’s been across already.

There he is coming back.”

And, looking up the river once more, they saw, dark against the sunset reflections, the figure of James Bullen stepping hastily and rather clumsily from stone to stone. Once he slipped on a stone with a slight splash. When he rejoined the group on the bank his olive face was unnaturally pale.

The other four men had already gathered on the same spot and almost simultaneously were calling out to him, “What does he say now?”

“Nothing. He says—nothing.”

Fisher looked at the young man steadily for a moment; then he started from his immobility and, making a motion to March to follow him, himself strode down to the river crossing. In a few moments they were on the little beaten track that ran round the wooded island, to the other side of it where the fisherman sat. Then they stood and looked at him, without a word.

Sir Isaac Hook was still sitting propped up against the stump of the tree, and that for the best of reasons. A length of his own infallible fishing line was twisted and tightened twice round his throat and then twice round the wooden prop behind him. The leading investigator ran forward and touched the fisherman’s hand, and it was as cold as a fish.

“The sun has set,” said Horne Fisher, in the same terrible tones, “and he will never see it rise again.”

Ten minutes afterward the five men, shaken by such a shock, were again together in the garden, looking at one another with white but watchful faces. The lawyer seemed the most alert of the group; he was articulate if somewhat abrupt.

“We must leave the body as it is and telephone for the police,” he said. “I think my own authority will stretch to examining the servants and the poor fellow’s papers, to see if there is anything that concerns them. Of course, none of you gentlemen must leave this place.”

Perhaps there was something in his rapid and rigorous legality that suggested the closing of a net or trap. Anyhow, young Bullen suddenly broke down, or perhaps blew up, for his voice was like an explosion in the silent garden.

“I never touched him,” he cried. “I swear I had nothing to do with it!”

“Who said you had?” demanded Harker, with a hard eye. “Why do you cry out before you’re hurt?”

“Because you all look at me like that,” cried the young man, angrily. “Do you
think I don’t know you’re always talking about my damned debts and expectations?”

Rather to March’s surprise, Fisher had drawn away from this first collision, leading the duke with him to another part of the garden. When he was out of earshot of the others he said, with a curious simplicity of manner:

“Westmoreland, I am going straight to the point.”

“Well?” said the other, staring at him stolidly.

“You have a motive for killing him,” said Fisher.

The duke continued to stare, but he seemed unable to speak.

“I hope you had a motive for killing him,” continued Fisher, mildly. “You see, it’s rather a curious situation. If you have a motive for murdering, you probably didn’t murder. But if you hadn’t any motive, why, then perhaps, you did.”

“What on earth are you talking about?” demanded the duke, violently.

“It’s quite simple,” said Fisher. “When you went across he was either alive or dead. If he was alive, it might be you who killed him, or why should you have held your tongue about his death? But if he was dead, and you had a reason for killing him, you might have held your tongue for fear of being accused.” Then after a silence he added, abstractedly: “Cyprus is a beautiful place, I believe. Romantic scenery and romantic people. Very intoxicating for a young man.”

The duke suddenly clenched his hands and said, thickly, “Well, I had a motive.”

“Then you’re all right,” said Fisher, holding out his hand with an air of huge relief. “I was pretty sure you wouldn’t really do it; you had a fright when you saw it done, as was only natural. Like a bad dream come true, wasn’t it?”

While this curious conversation was passing, Harker had gone into the house, disregarding the demonstrations of the sulky nephew, and came back presently with a new air of animation and a sheaf of papers in his hand.

“I’ve telephoned for the police,” he said, stopping to speak to Fisher, “but I think I’ve done most of their work for them. I believe I’ve found out the truth. There’s a paper here—” He stopped, for Fisher was looking at him with a singular expression; and it was Fisher who spoke next:

“Are there any papers that are not there, I wonder? I mean that are not there now?” After a pause he added: “Let us have the cards on the table. When you went through his papers in such a hurry, Harker, weren’t you looking for something to—to make sure it shouldn’t be found?”

Harker did not turn a red hair on his hard head, but he looked at the other out of the corners of his eyes.
“And I suppose,” went on Fisher, smoothly, “that is why you, too, told us lies about having found Hook alive. You knew there was something to show that you might have killed him, and you didn’t dare tell us he was killed. But, believe me, it’s much better to be honest now.”

Harker’s haggard face suddenly lit up as if with infernal flames.

“Honest,” he cried, “it’s not so damned fine of you fellows to be honest. You’re all born with silver spoons in your mouths, and then you swagger about with everlasting virtue because you haven’t got other people’s spoons in your pockets. But I was born in a Pimlico lodging house and I had to make my spoon, and there’d be plenty to say I only spoiled a horn or an honest man. And if a struggling man staggers a bit over the line in his youth, in the lower parts of the law which are pretty dingy, anyhow, there’s always some old vampire to hang on to him all his life for it.”

“Guatemalan Golcondas, wasn’t it?” said Fisher, sympathetically.

Harker suddenly shuddered. Then he said, “I believe you must know everything, like God Almighty.”

“I know too much,” said Horne Fisher, “and all the wrong things.”

The other three men were drawing nearer to them, but before they came too near, Harker said, in a voice that had recovered all its firmness:

“Yes, I did destroy a paper, but I really did find a paper, too; and I believe that it clears us all.”

“Very well,” said Fisher, in a louder and more cheerful tone; “let us all have the benefit of it.”

“On the very top of Sir Isaac’s papers,” explained Harker, “there was a threatening letter from a man named Hugo. It threatens to kill our unfortunate friend very much in the way that he was actually killed. It is a wild letter, full of taunts; you can see it for yourselves; but it makes a particular point of poor Hook’s habit of fishing from the island. Above all, the man professes to be writing from a boat. And, since we alone went across to him,” and he smiled in a rather ugly fashion, “the crime must have been committed by a man passing in a boat.”

“Why, dear me!” cried the duke, with something almost amounting to animation. “Why, I remember the man called Hugo quite well! He was a sort of body servant and bodyguard of Sir Isaac. You see, Sir Isaac was in some fear of assault. He was—he was not very popular with several people. Hugo was discharged after some row or other; but I remember him well. He was a great big Hungarian fellow with great mustaches that stood out on each side of his face.”
A door opened in the darkness of Harold March’s memory, or, rather, oblivion, and showed a shining landscape, like that of a lost dream. It was rather a waterscape than a landscape, a thing of flooded meadows and low trees and the dark archway of a bridge. And for one instant he saw again the man with mustaches like dark horns leap up on to the bridge and disappear.

“Good heavens!” he cried. “Why, I met the murderer this morning!”

Horne Fisher and Harold March had their day on the river, after all, for the little group broke up when the police arrived. They declared that the coincidence of March’s evidence had cleared the whole company, and clinched the case against the flying Hugo. Whether that Hungarian fugitive would ever be caught appeared to Horne Fisher to be highly doubtful; nor can it be pretended that he displayed any very demoniac detective energy in the matter as he leaned back in the boat cushions, smoking, and watching the swaying reeds slide past.

“It was a very good notion to hop up on to the bridge,” he said. “An empty boat means very little; he hasn’t been seen to land on either bank, and he’s walked off the bridge without walking on to it, so to speak. He’s got twenty–four hours’ start; his mustaches will disappear, and then he will disappear. I think there is every hope of his escape.”

“Hope?” repeated March, and stopped sculling for an instant.

“Yes, hope,” repeated the other. “To begin with, I’m not going to be exactly consumed with Corsican revenge because somebody has killed Hook. Perhaps you may guess by this time what Hook was. A damned blood–sucking blackmailer was that simple, strenuous, self–made captain of industry. He had secrets against nearly everybody; one against poor old Westmoreland about an early marriage in Cyprus that might have put the duchess in a queer position; and one against Harker about some flutter with his client’s money when he was a young solicitor. That’s why they went to pieces when they found him murdered, of course. They felt as if they’d done it in a dream. But I admit I have another reason for not wanting our Hungarian friend actually hanged for the murder.”

“And what is that?” asked his friend.

“Only that he didn’t commit the murder,” answered Fisher.

Harold March laid down the oars and let the boat drift for a moment.

“Do you know, I was half expecting something like that,” he said. “It was quite irrational, but it was hanging about in the atmosphere, like thunder in the air.”

“On the contrary, it’s finding Hugo guilty that’s irrational,” replied Fisher. “Don’t you see that they’re condemning him for the very reason for which they
acquit everybody else? Harker and Westmoreland were silent because they found him murdered, and knew there were papers that made them look like the murderers. Well, so did Hugo find him murdered, and so did Hugo know there was a paper that would make him look like the murderer. He had written it himself the day before.”

“But in that case,” said March, frowning, “at what sort of unearthly hour in the morning was the murder really committed? It was barely daylight when I met him at the bridge, and that’s some way above the island.”

“The answer is very simple,” replied Fisher. “The crime was not committed in the morning. The crime was not committed on the island.”

March stared at the shining water without replying, but Fisher resumed like one who had been asked a question:

“Every intelligent murder involves taking advantage of some one uncommon feature in a common situation. The feature here was the fancy of old Hook for being the first man up every morning, his fixed routine as an angler, and his annoyance at being disturbed. The murderer strangled him in his own house after dinner on the night before, carried his corpse, with all his fishing tackle, across the stream in the dead of night, tied him to the tree, and left him there under the stars. It was a dead man who sat fishing there all day. Then the murderer went back to the house, or, rather, to the garage, and went off in his motor car. The murderer drove his own motor car.”

Fisher glanced at his friend’s face and went on. “You look horrified, and the thing is horrible. But other things are horrible, too. If some obscure man had been hag–ridden by a blackmailer and had his family life ruined, you wouldn’t think the murder of his persecutor the most inexcusable of murders. Is it any worse when a whole great nation is set free as well as a family? By this warning to Sweden we shall probably prevent war and not precipitate it, and save many thousand lives rather more valuable than the life of that viper. Oh, I’m not talking sophistry or seriously justifying the thing, but the slavery that held him and his country was a thousand times less justifiable. If I’d really been sharp I should have guessed it from his smooth, deadly smiling at dinner that night. Do you remember that silly talk about how old Isaac could always play his fish? In a pretty hellish sense he was a fisher of men.”

Harold March took the oars and began to row again.

“I remember,” he said, “and about how a big fish might break the line and get away.”
VI

THE HOLE IN THE WALL

Two men, the one an architect and the other an archaeologist, met on the steps of the great house at Prior’s Park; and their host, Lord Bulmer, in his breezy way, thought it natural to introduce them. It must be confessed that he was hazy as well as breezy, and had no very clear connection in his mind, beyond the sense that an architect and an archaeologist begin with the same series of letters. The world must remain in a reverent doubt as to whether he would, on the same principles, have presented a diplomatist to a dipsomaniac or a ratiocinator to a rat catcher. He was a big, fair, bull–necked young man, abounding in outward gestures, unconsciously flapping his gloves and flourishing his stick.

“You two ought to have something to talk about,” he said, cheerfully. “Old buildings and all that sort of thing; this is rather an old building, by the way, though I say it who shouldn’t. I must ask you to excuse me a moment; I’ve got to go and see about the cards for this Christmas romp my sister’s arranging. We hope to see you all there, of course. Juliet wants it to be a fancy–dress affair—abbots and crusaders and all that. My ancestors, I suppose, after all.”

“I trust the abbot was not an ancestor,” said the archaeological gentleman, with a smile.

“Only a sort of great–uncle, I imagine,” answered the other, laughing; then his rather rambling eye rolled round the ordered landscape in front of the house; an artificial sheet of water ornamented with an antiquated nymph in the center and surrounded by a park of tall trees now gray and black and frosty, for it was in the depth of a severe winter.

“It’s getting jolly cold,” his lordship continued. “My sister hopes we shall have some skating as well as dancing.”

“If the crusaders come in full armor,” said the other, “you must be careful not to drown your ancestors.”

“Oh, there’s no fear of that,” answered Bulmer; “this precious lake of ours is not two feet deep anywhere.” And with one of his flourishing gestures he stuck his stick into the water to demonstrate its shallowness. They could see the short end bent in the water, so that he seemed for a moment to lean his large weight on a breaking staff.

“The worst you can expect is to see an abbot sit down rather suddenly,” he
added, turning away. “Well, au revoir; I’ll let you know about it later.”

The archaeologist and the architect were left on the great stone steps smiling at each other; but whatever their common interests, they presented a considerable personal contrast, and the fanciful might even have found some contradiction in each considered individually. The former, a Mr. James Haddow, came from a drowsy den in the Inns of Court, full of leather and parchment, for the law was his profession and history only his hobby; he was indeed, among other things, the solicitor and agent of the Prior’s Park estate. But he himself was far from drowsy and seemed remarkably wide awake, with shrewd and prominent blue eyes, and red hair brushed as neatly as his very neat costume. The latter, whose name was Leonard Crane, came straight from a crude and almost cockney office of builders and house agents in the neighboring suburb, sunning itself at the end of a new row of jerry-built houses with plans in very bright colors and notices in very large letters. But a serious observer, at a second glance, might have seen in his eyes something of that shining sleep that is called vision; and his yellow hair, while not affectedly long, was unaffectedly untidy. It was a manifest if melancholy truth that the architect was an artist. But the artistic temperament was far from explaining him; there was something else about him that was not definable, but which some even felt to be dangerous. Despite his dreaminess, he would sometimes surprise his friends with arts and even sports apart from his ordinary life, like memories of some previous existence. On this occasion, nevertheless, he hastened to disclaim any authority on the other man’s hobby.

“I mustn’t appear on false pretences,” he said, with a smile. “I hardly even know what an archaeologist is, except that a rather rusty remnant of Greek suggests that he is a man who studies old things.”

“Yes,” replied Haddow, grimly. “An archaeologist is a man who studies old things and finds they are new.”

Crane looked at him steadily for a moment and then smiled again.

“Dare one suggest,” he said, “that some of the things we have been talking about are among the old things that turn out not to be old?”

His companion also was silent for a moment, and the smile on his rugged face was fainter as he replied, quietly:

“The wall round the park is really old. The one gate in it is Gothic, and I cannot find any trace of destruction or restoration. But the house and the estate generally—well the romantic ideas read into these things are often rather recent romances, things almost like fashionable novels. For instance, the very name of
this place, Prior’s Park, makes everybody think of it as a moonlit mediaeval abbey; I dare say the spiritualists by this time have discovered the ghost of a monk there. But, according to the only authoritative study of the matter I can find, the place was simply called Prior’s as any rural place is called Podger’s. It was the house of a Mr. Prior, a farmhouse, probably, that stood here at some time or other and was a local landmark. Oh, there are a great many examples of the same thing, here and everywhere else. This suburb of ours used to be a village, and because some of the people slurred the name and pronounced it Holliwell, many a minor poet indulged in fancies about a Holy Well, with spells and fairies and all the rest of it, filling the suburban drawing–rooms with the Celtic twilight. Whereas anyone acquainted with the facts knows that ‘Hollinwall’ simply means ‘the hole in the wall,’ and probably referred to some quite trivial accident. That’s what I mean when I say that we don’t so much find old things as we find new ones.”

Crane seemed to have grown somewhat inattentive to the little lecture on antiquities and novelties, and the cause of his restlessness was soon apparent, and indeed approaching. Lord Bulmer’s sister, Juliet Bray, was coming slowly across the lawn, accompanied by one gentleman and followed by two others. The young architect was in the illogical condition of mind in which he preferred three to one.

The man walking with the lady was no other than the eminent Prince Borodino, who was at least as famous as a distinguished diplomatist ought to be, in the interests of what is called secret diplomacy. He had been paying a round of visits at various English country houses, and exactly what he was doing for diplomacy at Prior’s Park was as much a secret as any diplomatist could desire. The obvious thing to say of his appearance was that he would have been extremely handsome if he had not been entirely bald. But, indeed, that would itself be a rather bald way of putting it. Fantastic as it sounds, it would fit the case better to say that people would have been surprised to see hair growing on him; as surprised as if they had found hair growing on the bust of a Roman emperor. His tall figure was buttoned up in a tight–waisted fashion that rather accentuated his potential bulk, and he wore a red flower in his buttonhole. Of the two men walking behind one was also bald, but in a more partial and also a more premature fashion, for his drooping mustache was still yellow, and if his eyes were somewhat heavy it was with languor and not with age. It was Horne Fisher, and he was talking as easily and idly about everything as he always did. His companion was a more striking, and even more sinister, figure, and he had the
added importance of being Lord Bulmer’s oldest and most intimate friend. He was generally known with a severe simplicity as Mr. Brain; but it was understood that he had been a judge and police official in India, and that he had enemies, who had represented his measures against crime as themselves almost criminal. He was a brown skeleton of a man with dark, deep, sunken eyes and a black mustache that hid the meaning of his mouth. Though he had the look of one wasted by some tropical disease, his movements were much more alert than those of his lounging companion.

“It’s all settled,” announced the lady, with great animation, when they came within hailing distance. “You’ve all got to put on masquerade things and very likely skates as well, though the prince says they don’t go with it; but we don’t care about that. It’s freezing already, and we don’t often get such a chance in England.”

“Even in India we don’t exactly skate all the year round,” observed Mr. Brain.

“And even Italy is not primarily associated with ice,” said the Italian.

“Italy is primarily associated with ices,” remarked Mr. Horne Fisher. “I mean with ice cream men. Most people in this country imagine that Italy is entirely populated with ice cream men and organ grinders. There certainly are a lot of them; perhaps they’re an invading army in disguise.”

“How do you know they are not the secret emissaries of our diplomacy?” asked the prince, with a slightly scornful smile. “An army of organ grinders might pick up hints, and their monkeys might pick up all sort of things.”

“The organs are organized in fact,” said the flippant Mr. Fisher.

“Well, I’ve known it pretty cold before now in Italy and even in India, up on the Himalayan slopes. The ice on our own little round pond will be quite cozy by comparison.”

Juliet Bray was an attractive lady with dark hair and eyebrows and dancing eyes, and there was a geniality and even generosity in her rather imperious ways. In most matters she could command her brother, though that nobleman, like many other men of vague ideas, was not without a touch of the bully when he was at bay. She could certainly command her guests, even to the extent of decking out the most respectable and reluctant of them with her mediaeval masquerade. And it really seemed as if she could command the elements also, like a witch. For the weather steadily hardened and sharpened; that night the ice of the lake, glittering in the moonlight, was like a marble floor, and they had
begun to dance and skate on it before it was dark.

Prior’s Park, or, more properly, the surrounding district of Holinwall, was a country seat that had become a suburb; having once had only a dependent village at its doors, it now found outside all its doors the signals of the expansion of London. Mr. Haddow, who was engaged in historical researches both in the library and the locality, could find little assistance in the latter. He had already realized, from the documents, that Prior’s Park had originally been something like Prior’s Farm, named after some local figure, but the new social conditions were all against his tracing the story by its traditions. Had any of the real rustics remained, he would probably have found some lingering legend of Mr. Prior, however remote he might be. But the new nomadic population of clerks and artisans, constantly shifting their homes from one suburb to another, or their children from one school to another, could have no corporate continuity. They had all that forgetfulness of history that goes everywhere with the extension of education.

Nevertheless, when he came out of the library next morning and saw the wintry trees standing round the frozen pond like a black forest, he felt he might well have been far in the depths of the country. The old wall running round the park kept that inclosure itself still entirely rural and romantic, and one could easily imagine that the depths of that dark forest faded away indefinitely into distant vales and hills. The gray and black and silver of the wintry wood were all the more severe or somber as a contrast to the colored carnival groups that already stood on and around the frozen pool. For the house party had already flung themselves impatiently into fancy dress, and the lawyer, with his neat black suit and red hair, was the only modern figure among them.

“Aren’t you going to dress up?” asked Juliet, indignantly shaking at him a horned and towering blue headdress of the fourteenth century which framed her face very becomingly, fantastic as it was. “Everybody here has to be in the Middle Ages. Even Mr. Brain has put on a sort of brown dressing gown and says he’s a monk; and Mr. Fisher got hold of some old potato sacks in the kitchen and sewed them together; he’s supposed to be a monk, too. As to the prince, he’s perfectly glorious, in great crimson robes as a cardinal. He looks as if he could poison everybody. You simply must be something.”

“I will be something later in the day,” he replied. “At present I am nothing but an antiquary and an attorney. I have to see your brother presently, about some legal business and also some local investigations he asked me to make. I must look a little like a steward when I give an account of my stewardship.”
“Oh, but my brother has dressed up!” cried the girl. “Very much so. No end, if I may say so. Why he’s bearing down on you now in all his glory.”

The noble lord was indeed marching toward them in a magnificent sixteenth-century costume of purple and gold, with a gold-hilted sword and a plumed cap, and manners to match. Indeed, there was something more than his usual expansiveness of bodily action in his appearance at that moment. It almost seemed, so to speak, that the plumes on his hat had gone to his head. He flapped his great, gold-lined cloak like the wings of a fairy king in a pantomime; he even drew his sword with a flourish and waved it about as he did his walking stick. In the light of after events there seemed to be something monstrous and ominous about that exuberance, something of the spirit that is called fey. At the time it merely crossed a few people’s minds that he might possibly be drunk.

As he strode toward his sister the first figure he passed was that of Leonard Crane, clad in Lincoln green, with the horn and baldrick and sword appropriate to Robin Hood; for he was standing nearest to the lady, where, indeed, he might have been found during a disproportionate part of the time. He had displayed one of his buried talents in the matter of skating, and now that the skating was over seemed disposed to prolong the partnership. The boisterous Bulmer playfully made a pass at him with his drawn sword, going forward with the lunge in the proper fencing fashion, and making a somewhat too familiar Shakespearean quotation about a rodent and a Venetian coin.

Probably in Crane also there was a subdued excitement just then; anyhow, in one flash he had drawn his own sword and parried; and then suddenly, to the surprise of everyone, Bulmer’s weapon seemed to spring out of his hand into the air and rolled away on the ringing ice.

“Well, I never!” said the lady, as if with justifiable indignation.

“You never told me you could fence, too.”

Bulmer put up his sword with an air rather bewildered than annoyed, which increased the impression of something irresponsible in his mood at the moment; then he turned rather abruptly to his lawyer, saying:

“We can settle up about the estate after dinner; I’ve missed nearly all the skating as it is, and I doubt if the ice will hold till to-morrow night. I think I shall get up early and have a spin by myself.”

“You won’t be disturbed with my company,” said Horne Fisher, in his weary fashion. “If I have to begin the day with ice, in the American fashion, I prefer it in smaller quantities. But no early hours for me in December. The early bird catches the cold.”
“Oh, I shan’t die of catching a cold,” answered Bulmer, and laughed.

A considerable group of the skating party had consisted of the guests staying at the house, and the rest had tailed off in twos and threes some time before most of the guests began to retire for the night. Neighbors, always invited to Prior’s Park on such occasions, went back to their own houses in motors or on foot; the legal and archeological gentleman had returned to the Inns of Court by a late train, to get a paper called for during his consultation with his client; and most of the other guests were drifting and lingering at various stages on their way up to bed. Horne Fisher, as if to deprive himself of any excuse for his refusal of early rising, had been the first to retire to his room; but, sleepy as he looked, he could not sleep. He had picked up from a table the book of antiquarian topography, in which Haddow had found his first hints about the origin of the local name, and, being a man with a quiet and quaint capacity for being interested in anything, he began to read it steadily, making notes now and then of details on which his previous reading left him with a certain doubt about his present conclusions. His room was the one nearest to the lake in the center of the woods, and was therefore the quietest, and none of the last echoes of the evening’s festivity could reach him. He had followed carefully the argument which established the derivation from Mr. Prior’s farm and the hole in the wall, and disposed of any fashionable fancy about monks and magic wells, when he began to be conscious of a noise audible in the frozen silence of the night. It was not a particularly loud noise, but it seemed to consist of a series of thuds or heavy blows, such as might be struck on a wooden door by a man seeking to enter. They were followed by something like a faint creak or crack, as if the obstacle had either been opened or had given way. He opened his own bedroom door and listened, but as he heard talk and laughter all over the lower floors, he had no reason to fear that a summons would be neglected or the house left without protection. He went to his open window, looking out over the frozen pond and the moonlit statue in the middle of their circle of darkling woods, and listened again. But silence had returned to that silent place, and, after straining his ears for a considerable time, he could hear nothing but the solitary hoot of a distant departing train. Then he reminded himself how many nameless noises can be heard by the wakeful during the most ordinary night, and shrugging his shoulders, went wearily to bed.

He awoke suddenly and sat up in bed with his ears filled, as with thunder, with the throbbing echoes of a rending cry. He remained rigid for a moment, and then sprang out of bed, throwing on the loose gown of sacking he had worn all day. He went first to the window, which was open, but covered with a thick curtain,
so that his room was still completely dark; but when he tossed the curtain aside and put his head out, he saw that a gray and silver daybreak had already appeared behind the black woods that surrounded the little lake, and that was all that he did see. Though the sound had certainly come in through the open window from this direction, the whole scene was still and empty under the morning light as under the moonlight. Then the long, rather lackadaisical hand he had laid on a window sill gripped it tighter, as if to master a tremor, and his peering blue eyes grew bleak with fear. It may seem that his emotion was exaggerated and needless, considering the effort of common sense by which he had conquered his nervousness about the noise on the previous night. But that had been a very different sort of noise. It might have been made by half a hundred things, from the chopping of wood to the breaking of bottles. There was only one thing in nature from which could come the sound that echoed through the dark house at daybreak. It was the awful articulate voice of man; and it was something worse, for he knew what man.

He knew also that it had been a shout for help. It seemed to him that he had heard the very word; but the word, short as it was, had been swallowed up, as if the man had been stifled or snatched away even as he spoke. Only the mocking reverberations of it remained even in his memory, but he had no doubt of the original voice. He had no doubt that the great bull’s voice of Francis Bray, Baron Bulmer, had been heard for the last time between the darkness and the lifting dawn.

How long he stood there he never knew, but he was startled into life by the first living thing that he saw stirring in that half–frozen landscape. Along the path beside the lake, and immediately under his window, a figure was walking slowly and softly, but with great composure—a stately figure in robes of a splendid scarlet; it was the Italian prince, still in his cardinal’s costume. Most of the company had indeed lived in their costumes for the last day or two, and Fisher himself had assumed his frock of sacking as a convenient dressing gown; but there seemed, nevertheless, something unusually finished and formal, in the way of an early bird, about this magnificent red cockatoo. It was as if the early bird had been up all night.

“What is the matter?” he called, sharply, leaning out of the window, and the Italian turned up his great yellow face like a mask of brass.

“We had better discuss it downstairs,” said Prince Borodino.

Fisher ran downstairs, and encountered the great, red–robed figure entering the doorway and blocking the entrance with his bulk.
“Did you hear that cry?” demanded Fisher.
“I heard a noise and I came out,” answered the diplomatist, and his face was too dark in the shadow for its expression to be read.
“It was Bulmer’s voice,” insisted Fisher. “I’ll swear it was Bulmer’s voice.”
“Did you know him well?” asked the other.
The question seemed irrelevant, though it was not illogical, and Fisher could only answer in a random fashion that he knew Lord Bulmer only slightly.
“Nobody seems to have known him well,” continued the Italian, in level tones.
“Nobody except that man Brain. Brain is rather older than Bulmer, but I fancy they shared a good many secrets.”
Fisher moved abruptly, as if waking from a momentary trance, and said, in a new and more vigorous voice, “But look here, hadn’t we better get outside and see if anything has happened.”
“The ice seems to be thawing,” said the other, almost with indifference.
When they emerged from the house, dark stains and stars in the gray field of ice did indeed indicate that the frost was breaking up, as their host had prophesied the day before, and the very memory of yesterday brought back the mystery of to-day.
“He knew there would be a thaw,” observed the prince. “He went out skating quite early on purpose. Did he call out because he landed in the water, do you think?”
Fisher looked puzzled. “Bulmer was the last man to bellow like that because he got his boots wet. And that’s all he could do here; the water would hardly come up to the calf of a man of his size. You can see the flat weeds on the floor of the lake, as if it were through a thin pane of glass. No, if Bulmer had only broken the ice he wouldn’t have said much at the moment, though possibly a good deal afterward. We should have found him stamping and damning up and down this path, and calling for clean boots.”
“Let us hope we shall find him as happily employed,” remarked the diplomatist. “In that case the voice must have come out of the wood.”
“I’ll swear it didn’t come out of the house,” said Fisher; and the two disappeared together into the twilight of wintry trees.
The plantation stood dark against the fiery colors of sunrise, a black fringe having that feathery appearance which makes trees when they are bare the very reverse of rugged. Hours and hours afterward, when the same dense, but
delicate, margin was dark against the greenish colors opposite the sunset, the
search thus begun at sunrise had not come to an end. By successive stages, and
to slowly gathering groups of the company, it became apparent that the most
extraordinary of all gaps had appeared in the party; the guests could find no trace
of their host anywhere. The servants reported that his bed had been slept in and
his skates and his fancy costume were gone, as if he had risen early for the
purpose he had himself avowed. But from the top of the house to the bottom,
from the walls round the park to the pond in the center, there was no trace of
Lord Bulmer, dead or alive. Horne Fisher realized that a chilling premonition
had already prevented him from expecting to find the man alive. But his bald
brow was wrinkled over an entirely new and unnatural problem, in not finding
the man at all.

He considered the possibility of Bulmer having gone off of his own accord,
for some reason; but after fully weighing it he finally dismissed it. It was
inconsistent with the unmistakable voice heard at daybreak, and with many other
practical obstacles. There was only one gateway in the ancient and lofty wall
round the small park; the lodge keeper kept it locked till late in the morning, and
the lodge keeper had seen no one pass. Fisher was fairly sure that he had before
him a mathematical problem in an inclosed space. His instinct had been from the
first so attuned to the tragedy that it would have been almost a relief to him to
find the corpse. He would have been grieved, but not horrified, to come on the
nobleman’s body dangling from one of his own trees as from a gibbet, or
floating in his own pool like a pallid weed. What horrified him was to find
nothing.

He soon became conscious that he was not alone even in his most individual
and isolated experiments. He often found a figure following him like his shadow,
in silent and almost secret clearings in the plantation or outlying nooks and
corners of the old wall. The dark–mustached mouth was as mute as the deep
eyes were mobile, darting incessantly hither and thither, but it was clear that
Brain of the Indian police had taken up the trail like an old hunter after a tiger.
Seeing that he was the only personal friend of the vanished man, this seemed
natural enough, and Fisher resolved to deal frankly with him.

“This silence is rather a social strain,” he said. “May I break the ice by talking
about the weather?—which, by the way, has already broken the ice. I know that
breaking the ice might be a rather melancholy metaphor in this case.”

“I don’t think so,” replied Brain, shortly. “I don’t fancy the ice had much to do
with it. I don’t see how it could.”
“What would you propose doing?” asked Fisher.

“Well, we’ve sent for the authorities, of course, but I hope to find something out before they come,” replied the Anglo–Indian. “I can’t say I have much hope from police methods in this country. Too much red tape, habeas corpus and that sort of thing. What we want is to see that nobody bolts; the nearest we could get to it would be to collect the company and count them, so to speak. Nobody’s left lately, except that lawyer who was poking about for antiquities.”

“Oh, he’s out of it; he left last night,” answered the other. “Eight hours after Bulmer’s chauffeur saw his lawyer off by the train I heard Bulmer’s own voice as plain as I hear yours now.”

“I suppose you don’t believe in spirits?” said the man from India. After a pause he added: “There’s somebody else I should like to find, before we go after a fellow with an alibi in the Inner Temple. What’s become of that fellow in green—the architect dressed up as a forester? I haven’t seem him about.”

Mr. Brain managed to secure his assembly of all the distracted company before the arrival of the police. But when he first began to comment once more on the young architect’s delay in putting in an appearance, he found himself in the presence of a minor mystery, and a psychological development of an entirely unexpected kind.

Juliet Bray had confronted the catastrophe of her brother’s disappearance with a somber stoicism in which there was, perhaps, more paralysis than pain; but when the other question came to the surface she was both agitated and angry.

“We don’t want to jump to any conclusions about anybody,” Brain was saying in his staccato style. “But we should like to know a little more about Mr. Crane. Nobody seems to know much about him, or where he comes from. And it seems a sort of coincidence that yesterday he actually crossed swords with poor Bulmer, and could have stuck him, too, since he showed himself the better swordsman. Of course, that may be an accident and couldn’t possibly be called a case against anybody; but then we haven’t the means to make a real case against anybody. Till the police come we are only a pack of very amateur sleuthhounds.”

“And I think you’re a pack of snobs,” said Juliet. “Because Mr. Crane is a genius who’s made his own way, you try to suggest he’s a murderer without daring to say so. Because he wore a toy sword and happened to know how to use it, you want us to believe he used it like a bloodthirsty maniac for no reason in the world. And because he could have hit my brother and didn’t, you deduce that he did. That’s the sort of way you argue. And as for his having disappeared,
you’re wrong in that as you are in everything else, for here he comes.”

And, indeed, the green figure of the fictitious Robin Hood slowly detached itself from the gray background of the trees, and came toward them as she spoke. He approached the group slowly, but with composure; but he was decidedly pale, and the eyes of Brain and Fisher had already taken in one detail of the green-clad figure more clearly than all the rest. The horn still swung from his baldrick, but the sword was gone.

Rather to the surprise of the company, Brain did not follow up the question thus suggested; but, while retaining an air of leading the inquiry, had also an appearance of changing the subject.

“Now we’re all assembled,” he observed, quietly, “there is a question I want to ask to begin with. Did anybody here actually see Lord Bulmer this morning?”

Leonard Crane turned his pale face round the circle of faces till he came to Juliet’s; then he compressed his lips a little and said:

“Yes, I saw him.”

“Was he alive and well?” asked Brain, quickly. “How was he dressed?”

“He appeared exceedingly well,” replied Crane, with a curious intonation. “He was dressed as he was yesterday, in that purple costume copied from the portrait of his ancestor in the sixteenth century. He had his skates in his hand.”

“And his sword at his side, I suppose,” added the questioner. “Where is your own sword, Mr. Crane?”

“I threw it away.”

In the singular silence that ensued, the train of thought in many minds became involuntarily a series of colored pictures.

They had grown used to their fanciful garments looking more gay and gorgeous against the dark gray and streaky silver of the forest, so that the moving figures glowed like stained-glass saints walking. The effect had been more fitting because so many of them had idly parodied pontifical or monastic dress. But the most arresting attitude that remained in their memories had been anything but merely monastic; that of the moment when the figure in bright green and the other in vivid violet had for a moment made a silver cross of their crossing swords. Even when it was a jest it had been something of a drama; and it was a strange and sinister thought that in the gray daybreak the same figures in the same posture might have been repeated as a tragedy.

“Did you quarrel with him?” asked Brain, suddenly.

“Yes,” replied the immovable man in green. “Or he quarreled with me.”

“Why did he quarrel with you?” asked the investigator; and Leonard
Crane made no reply.

Horne Fisher, curiously enough, had only given half his attention to this crucial cross-examination. His heavy-lidded eyes had languidly followed the figure of Prince Borodino, who at this stage had strolled away toward the fringe of the wood; and, after a pause, as of meditation, had disappeared into the darkness of the trees.

He was recalled from his irrelevance by the voice of Juliet Bray, which rang out with an altogether new note of decision:

“If that is the difficulty, it had best be cleared up. I am engaged to Mr. Crane, and when we told my brother he did not approve of it; that is all.”

Neither Brain nor Fisher exhibited any surprise, but the former added, quietly:

“Except, I suppose, that he and your brother went off into the wood to discuss it, where Mr. Crane mislaid his sword, not to mention his companion.”

“And may I ask,” inquired Crane, with a certain flicker of mockery passing over his pallid features, “what I am supposed to have done with either of them? Let us adopt the cheerful thesis that I am a murderer; it has yet to be shown that I am a magician. If I ran your unfortunate friend through the body, what did I do with the body? Did I have it carried away by seven flying dragons, or was it merely a trifling matter of turning it into a milk-white hind?”

“It is no occasion for sneering,” said the Anglo-Indian judge, with abrupt authority. “It doesn’t make it look better for you that you can joke about the loss.”

Fisher’s dreamy, and even dreary, eye was still on the edge of the wood behind, and he became conscious of masses of dark red, like a stormy sunset cloud, glowing through the gray network of the thin trees, and the prince in his cardinal’s robes reemerged on to the pathway. Brain had had half a notion that the prince might have gone to look for the lost rapier. But when he reappeared he was carrying in his hand, not a sword, but an ax.

The incongruity between the masquerade and the mystery had created a curious psychological atmosphere. At first they had all felt horribly ashamed at being caught in the foolish disguises of a festival, by an event that had only too much the character of a funeral. Many of them would have already gone back and dressed in clothes that were more funereal or at least more formal. But somehow at the moment this seemed like a second masquerade, more artificial and frivolous than the first. And as they reconciled themselves to their ridiculous trappings, a curious sensation had come over some of them, notably over the more sensitive, like Crane and Fisher and Juliet, but in some degree over
everybody except the practical Mr. Brain. It was almost as if they were the
ghosts of their own ancestors haunting that dark wood and dismal lake, and
playing some old part that they only half remembered. The movements of those
colored figures seemed to mean something that had been settled long before, like
a silent heraldry. Acts, attitudes, external objects, were accepted as an allegory
even without the key; and they knew when a crisis had come, when they did not
know what it was. And somehow they knew subconsciously that the whole tale
had taken a new and terrible turn, when they saw the prince stand in the gap of
the gaunt trees, in his robes of angry crimson and with his lowering face of
bronze, bearing in his hand a new shape of death. They could not have named a
reason, but the two swords seemed indeed to have become toy swords and the
whole tale of them broken and tossed away like a toy. Borodino looked like the
Old World headsman, clad in terrible red, and carrying the ax for the execution
of the criminal. And the criminal was not Crane.

Mr. Brain of the Indian police was glaring at the new object, and it was a
moment or two before he spoke, harshly and almost hoarsely.

“What are you doing with that?” he asked. “Seems to be a woodman’s
chopper.”

“A natural association of ideas,” observed Horne Fisher. “If you meet a cat in
a wood you think it’s a wildcat, though it may have just strolled from the
drawing-room sofa. As a matter of fact, I happen to know that is not the
woodman’s chopper. It’s the kitchen chopper, or meat ax, or something like that,
that somebody has thrown away in the wood. I saw it in the kitchen myself when
I was getting the potato sacks with which I reconstructed a mediaeval hermit.”

“All the same, it is not without interest,” remarked the prince, holding out the
instrument to Fisher, who took it and examined it carefully. “A butcher’s cleaver
that has done butcher’s work.”

“It was certainly the instrument of the crime,” assented Fisher, in a low voice.

Brain was staring at the dull blue gleam of the ax head with fierce and
fascinated eyes. “I don’t understand you,” he said. “There is no—there are no
marks on it.”

“It has shed no blood,” answered Fisher, “but for all that it has committed a
crime. This is as near as the criminal came to the crime when he committed it.”

“What do you mean?”

“He was not there when he did it,” explained Fisher. “It’s a poor sort of
murderer who can’t murder people when he isn’t there.”

“You seem to be talking merely for the sake of mystification,” said Brain. “If
you have any practical advice to give you might as well make it intelligible.”

“The only practical advice I can suggest,” said Fisher, thoughtfully, “is a little research into local topography and nomenclature. They say there used to be a Mr. Prior, who had a farm in this neighborhood. I think some details about the domestic life of the late Mr. Prior would throw a light on this terrible business.”

“And you have nothing more immediate than your topography to offer,” said Brain, with a sneer, “to help me avenge my friend?”

“Well,” said Fisher, “I should find out the truth about the Hole in the Wall.”

That night, at the close of a stormy twilight and under a strong west wind that followed the breaking of the frost, Leonard Crane was wending his way in a wild rotatory walk round and round the high, continuous wall that inclosed the little wood. He was driven by a desperate idea of solving for himself the riddle that had clouded his reputation and already even threatened his liberty. The police authorities, now in charge of the inquiry, had not arrested him, but he knew well enough that if he tried to move far afield he would be instantly arrested. Horne Fisher’s fragmentary hints, though he had refused to expand them as yet, had stirred the artistic temperament of the architect to a sort of wild analysis, and he was resolved to read the hieroglyph upside down and every way until it made sense. If it was something connected with a hole in the wall he would find the hole in the wall; but, as a matter of fact, he was unable to find the faintest crack in the wall. His professional knowledge told him that the masonry was all of one workmanship and one date, and, except for the regular entrance, which threw no light on the mystery, he found nothing suggesting any sort of hiding place or means of escape. Walking a narrow path between the winding wall and the wild eastward bend and sweep of the gray and feathery trees, seeing shifting gleams of a lost sunset winking almost like lightning as the clouds of tempest scudded across the sky and mingling with the first faint blue light from a slowly strengthened moon behind him, he began to feel his head going round as his heels were going round and round the blind recurrent barrier. He had thoughts on the border of thought; fancies about a fourth dimension which was itself a hole to hide anything, of seeing everything from a new angle out of a new window in the senses; or of some mystical light and transparency, like the new rays of chemistry, in which he could see Bulmer’s body, horrible and glaring, floating in a lurid halo over the woods and the wall. He was haunted also with the hint, which somehow seemed to be equally horrifying, that it all had something to do with Mr. Prior. There seemed even to be something creepy in the fact that he was always respectfully referred to as Mr. Prior, and that it was in the domestic
life of the dead farmer that he had been bidden to seek the seed of these dreadful things. As a matter of fact, he had found that no local inquiries had revealed anything at all about the Prior family.

The moonlight had broadened and brightened, the wind had driven off the clouds and itself died fitfully away, when he came round again to the artificial lake in front of the house. For some reason it looked a very artificial lake; indeed, the whole scene was like a classical landscape with a touch of Watteau; the Palladian facade of the house pale in the moon, and the same silver touching the very pagan and naked marble nymph in the middle of the pond. Rather to his surprise, he found another figure there beside the statue, sitting almost equally motionless; and the same silver pencil traced the wrinkled brow and patient face of Horne Fisher, still dressed as a hermit and apparently practicing something of the solitude of a hermit. Nevertheless, he looked up at Leonard Crane and smiled, almost as if he had expected him.

“Look here,” said Crane, planting himself in front of him, “can you tell me anything about this business?”

“I shall soon have to tell everybody everything about it,” replied Fisher, “but I’ve no objection to telling you something first. But, to begin with, will you tell me something? What really happened when you met Bulmer this morning? You did throw away your sword, but you didn’t kill him.”

“I didn’t kill him because I threw away my sword,” said the other.

“I did it on purpose—or I’m not sure what might have happened.”

After a pause he went on, quietly: “The late Lord Bulmer was a very breezy gentleman, extremely breezy. He was very genial with his inferiors, and would have his lawyer and his architect staying in his house for all sorts of holidays and amusements. But there was another side to him, which they found out when they tried to be his equals. When I told him that his sister and I were engaged, something happened which I simply can’t and won’t describe. It seemed to me like some monstrous upheaval of madness. But I suppose the truth is painfully simple. There is such a thing as the coarseness of a gentleman. And it is the most horrible thing in humanity.”

“I know,” said Fisher. “The Renaissance nobles of the Tudor time were like that.”

“It is odd that you should say that,” Crane went on. “For while we were talking there came on me a curious feeling that we were repeating some scene of the past, and that I was really some outlaw, found in the woods like Robin Hood, and that he had really stepped in all his plumes and purple out of the picture.
frame of the ancestral portrait. Anyhow, he was the man in possession, and he
ever feared God nor regarded man. I defied him, of course, and walked away.
I might really have killed him if I had not walked away.”
“‘Yes,’” said Fisher, nodding, “his ancestor was in possession and he was in
possession, and this is the end of the story. It all fits in.”
“Fits in with what?” cried his companion, with sudden impatience. “I can’t
make head or tail of it. You tell me to look for the secret in the hole in the wall,
but I can’t find any hole in the wall.”
“There isn’t any,” said Fisher. “That’s the secret.” After reflecting a moment,
he added: “Unless you call it a hole in the wall of the world. Look here; I’ll tell
you if you like, but I’m afraid it involves an introduction. You’ve got to
understand one of the tricks of the modern mind, a tendency that most people
obey without noticing it. In the village or suburb outside there’s an inn with the
sign of St. George and the Dragon. Now suppose I went about telling everybody
that this was only a corruption of King George and the Dragoon. Scores of
people would believe it, without any inquiry, from a vague feeling that it’s
probable because it’s prosaic. It turns something romantic and legendary into
something recent and ordinary. And that somehow makes it sound rational,
though it is unsupported by reason. Of course some people would have the sense
to remember having seen St. George in old Italian pictures and French romances,
but a good many wouldn’t think about it at all. They would just swallow the
skepticism because it was skepticism. Modern intelligence won’t accept
anything on authority. But it will accept anything without authority. That’s
exactly what has happened here.
“When some critic or other chose to say that Prior’s Park was not a priory, but
was named after some quite modern man named Prior, nobody really tested the
theory at all. It never occurred to anybody repeating the story to ask if there was
any Mr. Prior, if anybody had ever seen him or heard of him. As a matter of fact,
it was a priory, and shared the fate of most priories—that is, the Tudor
gentleman with the plumes simply stole it by brute force and turned it into his
own private house; he did worse things, as you shall hear. But the point here is
that this is how the trick works, and the trick works in the same way in the other
part of the tale. The name of this district is printed Holinwall in all the best maps
produced by the scholars; and they allude lightly, not without a smile, to the fact
that it was pronounced Holiwell by the most ignorant and old-fashioned of the
poor. But it is spelled wrong and pronounced right.”
“Do you mean to say,” asked Crane, quickly, “that there really was a well?”
“There is a well,” said Fisher, “and the truth lies at the bottom of it.”

As he spoke he stretched out his hand and pointed toward the sheet of water in front of him.

“The well is under that water somewhere,” he said, “and this is not the first tragedy connected with it. The founder of this house did something which his fellow ruffians very seldom did; something that had to be hushed up even in the anarchy of the pillage of the monasteries. The well was connected with the miracles of some saint, and the last prior that guarded it was something like a saint himself; certainly he was something very like a martyr. He defied the new owner and dared him to pollute the place, till the noble, in a fury, stabbed him and flung his body into the well, whither, after four hundred years, it has been followed by an heir of the usurper, clad in the same purple and walking the world with the same pride.”

“But how did it happen,” demanded Crane, “that for the first time Bulmer fell in at that particular spot?”

“Because the ice was only loosened at that particular spot, by the only man who knew it,” answered Horne Fisher. “It was cracked deliberately, with the kitchen chopper, at that special place; and I myself heard the hammering and did not understand it. The place had been covered with an artificial lake, if only because the whole truth had to be covered with an artificial legend. But don’t you see that it is exactly what those pagan nobles would have done, to desecrate it with a sort of heathen goddess, as the Roman Emperor built a temple to Venus on the Holy Sepulchre. But the truth could still be traced out, by any scholarly man determined to trace it. And this man was determined to trace it.”

“What man?” asked the other, with a shadow of the answer in his mind.

“The only man who has an alibi,” replied Fisher. “James Haddow, the antiquarian lawyer, left the night before the fatality, but he left that black star of death on the ice. He left abruptly, having previously proposed to stay; probably, I think, after an ugly scene with Bulmer, at their legal interview. As you know yourself, Bulmer could make a man feel pretty murderous, and I rather fancy the lawyer had himself irregularities to confess, and was in danger of exposure by his client. But it’s my reading of human nature that a man will cheat in his trade, but not in his hobby. Haddow may have been a dishonest lawyer, but he couldn’t help being an honest antiquary. When he got on the track of the truth about the Holy Well he had to follow it up; he was not to be bamboozled with newspaper anecdotes about Mr. Prior and a hole in the wall; he found out everything, even to the exact location of the well, and he was rewarded, if being a successful
assassin can be regarded as a reward.”

“And how did you get on the track of all this hidden history?” asked the young architect.

A cloud came across the brow of Horne Fisher. “I knew only too much about it already,” he said, “and, after all, it’s shameful for me to be speaking lightly of poor Bulmer, who has paid his penalty; but the rest of us haven’t. I dare say every cigar I smoke and every liqueur I drink comes directly or indirectly from the harrying of the holy places and the persecution of the poor. After all, it needs very little poking about in the past to find that hole in the wall, that great breach in the defenses of English history. It lies just under the surface of a thin sheet of sham information and instruction, just as the black and blood-stained well lies just under that floor of shallow water and flat weeds. Oh, the ice is thin, but it bears; it is strong enough to support us when we dress up as monks and dance on it, in mockery of the dear, quaint old Middle Ages. They told me I must put on fancy dress; so I did put on fancy dress, according to my own taste and fancy. I put on the only costume I think fit for a man who has inherited the position of a gentleman, and yet has not entirely lost the feelings of one.”

In answer to a look of inquiry, he rose with a sweeping and downward gesture.

“Sackcloth,” he said; “and I would wear the ashes as well if they would stay on my bald head.”
VII

THE TEMPLE OF SILENCE

Harold March and the few who cultivated the friendship of Horne Fisher, especially if they saw something of him in his own social setting, were conscious of a certain solitude in his very sociability. They seemed to be always meeting his relations and never meeting his family. Perhaps it would be truer to say that they saw much of his family and nothing of his home. His cousins and connections ramified like a labyrinth all over the governing class of Great Britain, and he seemed to be on good, or at least on good–humored, terms with most of them. For Horne Fisher was remarkable for a curious impersonal information and interest touching all sorts of topics, so that one could sometimes fancy that his culture, like his colorless, fair mustache and pale, drooping features, had the neutral nature of a chameleon. Anyhow, he could always get on with viceroy and Cabinet Ministers and all the great men responsible for great departments, and talk to each of them on his own subject, on the branch of study with which he was most seriously concerned. Thus he could converse with the Minister for War about silkworms, with the Minister of Education about detective stories, with the Minister of Labor about Limoges enamel, and with the Minister of Missions and Moral Progress (if that be his correct title) about the pantomime boys of the last four decades. And as the first was his first cousin, the second his second cousin, the third his brother–in–law, and the fourth his uncle by marriage, this conversational versatility certainly served in one sense to create a happy family. But March never seemed to get a glimpse of that domestic interior to which men of the middle classes are accustomed in their friendships, and which is indeed the foundation of friendship and love and everything else in any sane and stable society. He wondered whether Horne Fisher was both an orphan and an only child.

It was, therefore, with something like a start that he found that Fisher had a brother, much more prosperous and powerful than himself, though hardly, March thought, so entertaining. Sir Henry Harland Fisher, with half the alphabet after his name, was something at the Foreign Office far more tremendous than the Foreign Secretary. Apparently, it ran in the family, after all; for it seemed there was another brother, Ashton Fisher, in India, rather more tremendous than the Viceroy. Sir Henry Fisher was a heavier, but handsomer edition of his
brother, with a brow equally bald, but much more smooth. He was very courteous, but a shade patronizing, not only to March, but even, as March fancied, to Horne Fisher as well. The latter gentleman, who had many intuitions about the half-formed thoughts of others, glanced at the topic himself as they came away from the great house in Berkeley Square.

“Why, don’t you know,” he observed quietly, “that I am the fool of the family?”

“It must be a clever family,” said Harold March, with a smile.

“Very gracefully expressed,” replied Fisher; “that is the best of having a literary training. Well, perhaps it is an exaggeration to say I am the fool of the family. It’s enough to say I am the failure of the family.”

“It seems queer to me that you should fail especially,” remarked the journalist. “As they say in the examinations, what did you fail in?”

“Politics,” replied his friend. “I stood for Parliament when I was quite a young man and got in by an enormous majority, with loud cheers and chairing round the town. Since then, of course, I’ve been rather under a cloud.”

“I’m afraid I don’t quite understand the ‘of course,’” answered March, laughing.

“That part of it isn’t worth understanding,” said Fisher. “But as a matter of fact, old chap, the other part of it was rather odd and interesting. Quite a detective story in its way, as well as the first lesson I had in what modern politics are made of. If you like, I’ll tell you all about it.” And the following, recast in a less allusive and conversational manner, is the story that he told.

Nobody privileged of late years to meet Sir Henry Harland Fisher would believe that he had ever been called Harry. But, indeed, he had been boyish enough when a boy, and that serenity which shone on him through life, and which now took the form of gravity, had once taken the form of gayety. His friends would have said that he was all the more ripe in his maturity for having been young in his youth. His enemies would have said that he was still light minded, but no longer light hearted. But in any case, the whole of the story Horne Fisher had to tell arose out of the accident which had made young Harry Fisher private secretary to Lord Saltoun. Hence his later connection with the Foreign Office, which had, indeed, come to him as a sort of legacy from his lordship when that great man was the power behind the throne. This is not the place to say much about Saltoun, little as was known of him and much as there was worth knowing. England has had at least three or four such secret statesmen. An aristocratic polity produces every now and then an aristocrat who is also an
accident, a man of intellectual independence and insight, a Napoleon born in the purple. His vast work was mostly invisible, and very little could be got out of him in private life except a crusty and rather cynical sense of humor. But it was certainly the accident of his presence at a family dinner of the Fishers, and the unexpected opinion he expressed, which turned what might have been a dinner-table joke into a sort of small sensational novel.

Save for Lord Saltoun, it was a family party of Fishers, for the only other distinguished stranger had just departed after dinner, leaving the rest to their coffee and cigars. This had been a figure of some interest—a young Cambridge man named Eric Hughes who was the rising hope of the party of Reform, to which the Fisher family, along with their friend Saltoun, had long been at least formally attached. The personality of Hughes was substantially summed up in the fact that he talked eloquently and earnestly through the whole dinner, but left immediately after to be in time for an appointment. All his actions had something at once ambitious and conscientious; he drank no wine, but was slightly intoxicated with words. And his face and phrases were on the front page of all the newspapers just then, because he was contesting the safe seat of Sir Francis Verner in the great by-election in the west. Everybody was talking about the powerful speech against squirarchy which he had just delivered; even in the Fisher circle everybody talked about it except Horne Fisher himself who sat in a corner, lowering over the fire.

“We jolly well have to thank him for putting some new life into the old party,” Ashton Fisher was saying. “This campaign against the old squires just hits the degree of democracy there is in this county. This act for extending county council control is practically his bill; so you may say he’s in the government even before he’s in the House.”

“One’s easier than the other,” said Harry, carelessly. “I bet the squire’s a bigger pot than the county council in that county. Verner is pretty well rooted; all these rural places are what you call reactionary. Damning aristocrats won’t alter it.”

“He damns them rather well,” observed Ashton. “We never had a better meeting than the one in Barkington, which generally goes Constitutional. And when he said, ‘Sir Francis may boast of blue blood; let us show we have red blood,’ and went on to talk about manhood and liberty, the room simply rose at him.”

“Speaks very well,” said Lord Saltoun, gruffly, making his only contribution to the conversation so far.
Then the almost equally silent Horne Fisher suddenly spoke, without taking
his brooding eyes off the fire.

“What I can’t understand,” he said, “is why nobody is ever slanged for the real
reason.”

“Hullo!” remarked Harry, humorously, “you beginning to take notice?”

“Well, take Verner,” continued Horne Fisher. “If we want to attack Verner,
why not attack him? Why compliment him on being a romantic reactionary
aristocrat? Who is Verner? Where does he come from? His name sounds old, but
I never heard of it before, as the man said of the Crucifixion. Why talk about his
blue blood? His blood may be gamboge yellow with green spots, for all anybody
knows. All we know is that the old squire, Hawker, somehow ran through his
money (and his second wife’s, I suppose, for she was rich enough), and sold the
estate to a man named Verner. What did he make his money in? Oil? Army
contracts?”

“I don’t know,” said Saltoun, looking at him thoughtfully.

“First thing I ever knew you didn’t know,” cried the exuberant
Harry.

“And there’s more, besides,” went on Horne Fisher, who seemed to have
suddenly found his tongue. “If we want country people to vote for us, why don’t
we get somebody with some notion about the country? We don’t talk to people
in Threadneedle Street about nothing but turnips and pigsties. Why do we talk to
people in Somerset about nothing but slums and socialism? Why don’t we give
the squire’s land to the squire’s tenants, instead of dragging in the county
council?”

“Three acres and a cow,” cried Harry, emitting what the
Parliamentary reports call an ironical cheer.

“Yes,” replied his brother, stubbornly. “Don’t you think agricultural laborers
would rather have three acres and a cow than three acres of printed forms and a
committee? Why doesn’t somebody start a yeoman party in politics, appealing to
the old traditions of the small landowner? And why don’t they attack men like
Verner for what they are, which is something about as old and traditional as an
American oil trust?”

“You’d better lead the yeoman party yourself,” laughed Harry.

“Don’t you think it would be a joke, Lord Saltoun, to see my brother
and his merry men, with their bows and bills, marching down to
Somerset all in Lincoln green instead of Lincoln and Bennet hats?”

“No,” answered Old Saltoun, “I don’t think it would be a joke. I think it would
be an exceedingly serious and sensible idea.”

“Well, I’m jiggered!” cried Harry Fisher, staring at him. “I said just now it was the first fact you didn’t know, and I should say this is the first joke you didn’t see.”

“I’ve seen a good many things in my time,” said the old man, in his rather sour fashion. “I’ve told a good many lies in my time, too, and perhaps I’ve got rather sick of them. But there are lies and lies, for all that. Gentlemen used to lie just as schoolboys lie, because they hung together and partly to help one another out. But I’m damned if I can see why we should lie for these cosmopolitan cads who only help themselves. They’re not backing us up any more; they’re simply crowding us out. If a man like your brother likes to go into Parliament as a yeoman or a gentleman or a Jacobite or an Ancient Briton, I should say it would be a jolly good thing.”

In the rather startled silence that followed Horne Fisher sprang to his feet and all his dreary manner dropped off him.

“I’m ready to do it to–morrow,” he cried. “I suppose none of you fellows would back me up.”

Then Harry Fisher showed the finer side of his impetuosity. He made a sudden movement as if to shake hands.

“You’re a sport,” he said, “and I’ll back you up, if nobody else will. But we can all back you up, can’t we? I see what Lord Saltoun means, and, of course, he’s right. He’s always right.”

“So I will go down to Somerset,” said Horne Fisher.

“Yes, it is on the way to Westminster,” said Lord Saltoun, with a smile.

And so it happened that Horne Fisher arrived some days later at the little station of a rather remote market town in the west, accompanied by a light suitcase and a lively brother. It must not be supposed, however, that the brother’s cheerful tone consisted entirely of chaff. He supported the new candidate with hope as well as hilarity; and at the back of his boisterous partnership there was an increasing sympathy and encouragement. Harry Fisher had always had an affection for his more quiet and eccentric brother, and was now coming more and more to have a respect for him. As the campaign proceeded the respect increased to ardent admiration. For Harry was still young, and could feel the sort of enthusiasm for his captain in electioneering that a schoolboy can feel for his captain in cricket.

Nor was the admiration undeserved. As the new three-cornered contest developed it became apparent to others besides his devoted kinsman that there
was more in Horne Fisher than had ever met the eye. It was clear that his outbreak by the family fireside had been but the culmination of a long course of brooding and studying on the question. The talent he retained through life for studying his subject, and even somebody else’s subject, had long been concentrated on this idea of championing a new peasantry against a new plutocracy. He spoke to a crowd with eloquence and replied to an individual with humor, two political arts that seemed to come to him naturally. He certainly knew much more about rural problems than either Hughes, the Reform candidate, or Verner, the Constitutional candidate. And he probed those problems with a human curiosity, and went below the surface in a way that neither of them dreamed of doing. He soon became the voice of popular feelings that are never found in the popular press. New angles of criticism, arguments that had never before been uttered by an educated voice, tests and comparisons that had been made only in dialect by men drinking in the little local public houses, crafts half forgotten that had come down by sign of hand and tongue from remote ages when their fathers were free—all this created a curious and double excitement. It startled the well informed by being a new and fantastic idea they had never encountered. It startled the ignorant by being an old and familiar idea they never thought to have seen revived. Men saw things in a new light, and knew not even whether it was the sunset or the dawn.

Practical grievances were there to make the movement formidable. As Fisher went to and fro among the cottages and country inns, it was borne in on him without difficulty that Sir Francis Verner was a very bad landlord. Nor was the story of his acquisition of the land any more ancient and dignified than he had supposed; the story was well known in the county and in most respects was obvious enough. Hawker, the old squire, had been a loose, unsatisfactory sort of person, had been on bad terms with his first wife (who died, as some said, of neglect), and had then married a flashy South American Jewess with a fortune. But he must have worked his way through this fortune also with marvelous rapidity, for he had been compelled to sell the estate to Verner and had gone to live in South America, possibly on his wife’s estates. But Fisher noticed that the laxity of the old squire was far less hated than the efficiency of the new squire. Verner’s history seemed to be full of smart bargains and financial flutters that left other people short of money and temper. But though he heard a great deal about Verner, there was one thing that continually eluded him; something that nobody knew, that even Saltoun had not known. He could not find out how Verner had originally made his money.
“He must have kept it specially dark,” said Horne Fisher to himself. “It must be something he’s really ashamed of. Hang it all! what is a man ashamed of nowadays?”

And as he pondered on the possibilities they grew darker and more distorted in his mind; he thought vaguely of things remote and repulsive, strange forms of slavery or sorcery, and then of ugly things yet more unnatural but nearer home. The figure of Verner seemed to be blackened and transfigured in his imagination, and to stand against varied backgrounds and strange skies.

As he strode up a village street, brooding thus, his eyes encountered a complete contrast in the face of his other rival, the Reform candidate. Eric Hughes, with his blown blond hair and eager undergraduate face, was just getting into his motor car and saying a few final words to his agent, a sturdy, grizzled man named Gryce. Eric Hughes waved his hand in a friendly fashion; but Gryce eyed him with some hostility. Eric Hughes was a young man with genuine political enthusiasms, but he knew that political opponents are people with whom one may have to dine any day. But Mr. Gryce was a grim little local Radical, a champion of the chapel, and one of those happy people whose work is also their hobby. He turned his back as the motor car drove away, and walked briskly up the sunlit high street of the little town, whistling, with political papers sticking out of his pocket.

Fisher looked pensively after the resolute figure for a moment, and then, as if by an impulse, began to follow it. Through the busy market place, amid the baskets and barrows of market day, under the painted wooden sign of the Green Dragon, up a dark side entry, under an arch, and through a tangle of crooked cobbled streets the two threaded their way, the square, strutting figure in front and the lean, lounging figure behind him, like his shadow in the sunshine. At length they came to a brown brick house with a brass plate, on which was Mr. Gryce’s name, and that individual turned and beheld his pursuer with a stare.

“Could I have a word with you, sir?” asked Horne Fisher, politely. The agent stared still more, but assented civilly, and led the other into an office littered with leaflets and hung all round with highly colored posters which linked the name of Hughes with all the higher interests of humanity.

“Mr. Horne Fisher, I believe,” said Mr. Gryce. “Much honored by the call, of course. Can’t pretend to congratulate you on entering the contest, I’m afraid; you won’t expect that. Here we’ve been keeping the old flag flying for freedom and reform, and you come in and break the battle line.”

For Mr. Elijah Gryce abounded in military metaphors and in denunciations of
militarism. He was a square–jawed, blunt–featured man with a pugnacious cock of the eyebrow. He had been pickled in the politics of that countryside from boyhood, he knew everybody’s secrets, and electioneering was the romance of his life.

“I suppose you think I’m devoured with ambition,” said Horne Fisher, in his rather listless voice, “aiming at a dictatorship and all that. Well, I think I can clear myself of the charge of mere selfish ambition. I only want certain things done. I don’t want to do them. I very seldom want to do anything. And I’ve come here to say that I’m quite willing to retire from the contest if you can convince me that we really want to do the same thing.”

The agent of the Reform party looked at him with an odd and slightly puzzled expression, and before he could reply, Fisher went on in the same level tones:

“You’d hardly believe it, but I keep a conscience concealed about me; and I am in doubt about several things. For instance, we both want to turn Verner out of Parliament, but what weapon are we to use? I’ve heard a lot of gossip against him, but is it right to act on mere gossip? Just as I want to be fair to you, so I want to be fair to him. If some of the things I’ve heard are true he ought to be turned out of Parliament and every other club in London. But I don’t want to turn him out of Parliament if they aren’t true.”

At this point the light of battle sprang into Mr. Gryce’s eyes and he became voluble, not to say violent. He, at any rate, had no doubt that the stories were true; he could testify, to his own knowledge, that they were true. Verner was not only a hard landlord, but a mean landlord, a robber as well as a rackrenter; any gentleman would be justified in hounding him out. He had cheated old Wilkins out of his freehold by a trick fit for a pickpocket; he had driven old Mother Biddle to the workhouse; he had stretched the law against Long Adam, the poacher, till all the magistrates were ashamed of him.

“So if you’ll serve under the old banner,” concluded Mr. Gryce, more genially, “and turn out a swindling tyrant like that, I’m sure you’ll never regret it.”

“And if that is the truth,” said Horne Fisher, “are you going to tell it?”

“What do you mean? Tell the truth?” demanded Gryce.

“I mean you are going to tell the truth as you have just told it,” replied Fisher. “You are going to placard this town with the wickedness done to old Wilkins. You are going to fill the newspapers with the infamous story of Mrs. Biddle. You are going to denounce Verner from a public platform, naming him for what he did and naming the poacher he did it to. And you’re going to find out by what
trade this man made the money with which he bought the estate; and when you
know the truth, as I said before, of course you are going to tell it. Upon those
terms I come under the old flag, as you call it, and haul down my little pennon.”

The agent was eying him with a curious expression, surly but not entirely
unsympathetic. “Well,” he said, slowly, “you have to do these things in a regular
way, you know, or people don’t understand. I’ve had a lot of experience, and I’m
afraid what you say wouldn’t do. People understand slanging squires in a general
way, but those personalities aren’t considered fair play. Looks like hitting below
the belt.”

“Old Wilkins hasn’t got a belt, I suppose,” replied Horne Fisher. “Verner can
hit him anyhow, and nobody must say a word. It’s evidently very important to
have a belt. But apparently you have to be rather high up in society to have one.
Possibly,” he added, thoughtfully—“possibly the explanation of the phrase ‘a
belted earl,’ the meaning of which has always escaped me.”

“I mean those personalities won’t do,” returned Gryce, frowning at the table.

“And Mother Biddle and Long Adam, the poacher, are not personalities,” said
Fisher, “and suppose we mustn’t ask how Verner made all the money that
enabled him to become—a personality.”

Gryce was still looking at him under lowering brows, but the singular light in
his eyes had brightened. At last he said, in another and much quieter voice:

“Look here, sir. I like you, if you don’t mind my saying so. I think you are
really on the side of the people and I’m sure you’re a brave man. A lot braver
than you know, perhaps. We daren’t touch what you propose with a barge pole;
and so far from wanting you in the old party, we’d rather you ran your own risk
by yourself. But because I like you and respect your pluck, I’ll do you a good
turn before we part. I don’t want you to waste time barking up the wrong tree.
You talk about how the new squire got the money to buy, and the ruin of the old
squire, and all the rest of it. Well, I’ll give you a hint about that, a hint about
something precious few people know.”

“I am very grateful,” said Fisher, gravely. “What is it?”

“It’s in two words,” said the other. “The new squire was quite poor when he
bought. The old squire was quite rich when he sold.”

Horne Fisher looked at him thoughtfully as he turned away abruptly and
busied himself with the papers on his desk. Then Fisher uttered a short phrase of
thanks and farewell, and went out into the street, still very thoughtful.

His reflection seemed to end in resolution, and, falling into a more rapid
stride, he passed out of the little town along a road leading toward the gate of the
great park, the country seat of Sir Francis Verner. A glitter of sunlight made the early winter more like a late autumn, and the dark woods were touched here and there with red and golden leaves, like the last rays of a lost sunset. From a higher part of the road he had seen the long, classical facade of the great house with its many windows, almost immediately beneath him, but when the road ran down under the wall of the estate, topped with towering trees behind, he realized that it was half a mile round to the lodge gates. After walking for a few minutes along the lane, however, he came to a place where the wall had cracked and was in process of repair. As it was, there was a great gap in the gray masonry that looked at first as black as a cavern and only showed at a second glance the twilight of the twinkling trees. There was something fascinating about that unexpected gate, like the opening of a fairy tale.

Horne Fisher had in him something of the aristocrat, which is very near to the anarchist. It was characteristic of him that he turned into this dark and irregular entry as casually as into his own front door, merely thinking that it would be a short cut to the house. He made his way through the dim wood for some distance and with some difficulty, until there began to shine through the trees a level light, in lines of silver, which he did not at first understand. The next moment he had come out into the daylight at the top of a steep bank, at the bottom of which a path ran round the rim of a large ornamental lake. The sheet of water which he had seen shimmering through the trees was of considerable extent, but was walled in on every side with woods which were not only dark, but decidedly dismal. At one end of the path was a classical statue of some nameless nymph, and at the other end it was flanked by two classical urns; but the marble was weather–stained and streaked with green and gray. A hundred other signs, smaller but more significant, told him that he had come on some outlying corner of the grounds neglected and seldom visited. In the middle of the lake was what appeared to be an island, and on the island what appeared to be meant for a classical temple, not open like a temple of the winds, but with a blank wall between its Doric pillars. We may say it only seemed like an island, because a second glance revealed a low causeway of flat stones running up to it from the shore and turning it into a peninsula. And certainly it only seemed like a temple, for nobody knew better than Horne Fisher that no god had ever dwelt in that shrine.

“That’s what makes all this classical landscape gardening so desolate,” he said to himself. “More desolate than Stonehenge or the Pyramids. We don’t believe in Egyptian mythology, but the Egyptians did; and I suppose even the Druids
believed in Druidism. But the eighteenth-century gentleman who built these temples didn’t believe in Venus or Mercury any more than we do; that’s why the reflection of those pale pillars in the lake is truly only the shadow of a shade. They were men of the age of Reason; they, who filled their gardens with these stone nymphs, had less hope than any men in all history of really meeting a nymph in the forest.”

His monologue stopped abruptly with a sharp noise like a thundercrack that rolled in dreary echoes round the dismal mere. He knew at once what it was—somebody had fired off a gun. But as to the meaning of it he was momentarily staggered, and strange thoughts thronged into his mind. The next moment he laughed; for he saw lying a little way along the path below him the dead bird that the shot had brought down.

At the same moment, however, he saw something else, which interested him more. A ring of dense trees ran round the back of the island temple, framing the facade of it in dark foliage, and he could have sworn he saw a stir as of something moving among the leaves. The next moment his suspicion was confirmed, for a rather ragged figure came from under the shadow of the temple and began to move along the causeway that led to the bank. Even at that distance the figure was conspicuous by its great height and Fisher could see that the man carried a gun under his arm. There came back into his memory at once the name Long Adam, the poacher.

With a rapid sense of strategy he sometimes showed, Fisher sprang from the bank and raced round the lake to the head of the little pier of stones. If once a man reached the mainland he could easily vanish into the woods. But when Fisher began to advance along the stones toward the island, the man was cornered in a blind alley and could only back toward the temple. Putting his broad shoulders against it, he stood as if at bay; he was a comparatively young man, with fine lines in his lean face and figure and a mop of ragged red hair. The look in his eyes might well have been disquieting to anyone left alone with him on an island in the middle of a lake.

“Good morning,” said Horne Fisher, pleasantly. “I thought at first you were a murderer. But it seems unlikely, somehow, that the partridge rushed between us and died for love of me, like the heroines in the romances; so I suppose you are a poacher.”

“I suppose you would call me a poacher,” answered the man; and his voice was something of a surprise coming from such a scarecrow; it had that hard fastidiousness to be found in those who have made a fight for their own
refinement among rough surroundings. “I consider I have a perfect right to shoot game in this place. But I am well aware that people of your sort take me for a thief, and I suppose you will try to land me in jail.”

“There are preliminary difficulties,” replied Fisher. “To begin with, the mistake is flattering, but I am not a gamekeeper. Still less am I three gamekeepers, who would be, I imagine, about your fighting weight. But I confess I have another reason for not wanting to jail you.”

“And what is that?” asked the other.

“Only that I quite agree with you,” answered Fisher. “I don’t exactly say you have a right to poach, but I never could see that it was as wrong as being a thief. It seems to me against the whole normal notion of property that a man should own something because it flies across his garden. He might as well own the wind, or think he could write his name on a morning cloud. Besides, if we want poor people to respect property we must give them some property to respect. You ought to have land of your own; and I’m going to give you some if I can.”

“Going to give me some land!” repeated Long Adam.

“I apologize for addressing you as if you were a public meeting,” said Fisher, “but I am an entirely new kind of public man who says the same thing in public and in private. I’ve said this to a hundred huge meetings throughout the country, and I say it to you on this queer little island in this dismal pond. I would cut up a big estate like this into small estates for everybody, even for poachers. I would do in England as they did in Ireland—buy the big men out, if possible; get them out, anyhow. A man like you ought to have a little place of his own. I don’t say you could keep pheasants, but you might keep chickens.”

The man stiffened suddenly and he seemed at once to blanch and flame at the promise as if it were a threat.

“Chickens!” he repeated, with a passion of contempt.

“Why do you object?” asked the placid candidate. “Because keeping hens is rather a mild amusement for a poacher? What about poaching eggs?”

“Because I am not a poacher,” cried Adam, in a rending voice that rang round the hollow shrines and urns like the echoes of his gun. “Because the partridge lying dead over there is my partridge. Because the land you are standing on is my land. Because my own land was only taken from me by a crime, and a worse crime than poaching. This has been a single estate for hundreds and hundreds of years, and if you or any meddlesome mountebank comes here and talks of cutting it up like a cake, if I ever hear a word more of you and your leveling lies —”
“You seem to be a rather turbulent public,” observed Horne Fisher, “but do go on. What will happen if I try to divide this estate decently among decent people?”

The poacher had recovered a grim composure as he replied. “There will be no partridge to rush in between.”

With that he turned his back, evidently resolved to say no more, and walked past the temple to the extreme end of the islet, where he stood staring into the water. Fisher followed him, but, when his repeated questions evoked no answer, turned back toward the shore. In doing so he took a second and closer look at the artificial temple, and noted some curious things about it. Most of these theatrical things were as thin as theatrical scenery, and he expected the classic shrine to be a shallow thing, a mere shell or mask. But there was some substantial bulk of it behind, buried in the trees, which had a gray, labyrinthian look, like serpents of stone, and lifted a load of leafy towers to the sky. But what arrested Fisher’s eye was that in this bulk of gray–white stone behind there was a single door with great, rusty bolts outside; the bolts, however, were not shot across so as to secure it. Then he walked round the small building, and found no other opening except one small grating like a ventilator, high up in the wall. He retraced his steps thoughtfully along the causeway to the banks of the lake, and sat down on the stone steps between the two sculptured funeral urns. Then he lit a cigarette and smoked it in ruminant manner; eventually he took out a notebook and wrote down various phrases, numbering and renumbering them till they stood in the following order: “(1) Squire Hawker disliked his first wife. (2) He married his second wife for her money. (3) Long Adam says the estate is really his. (4) Long Adam hangs round the island temple, which looks like a prison. (5) Squire Hawker was not poor when he gave up the estate. (6) Verner was poor when he got the estate.”

He gazed at these notes with a gravity which gradually turned to a hard smile, threw away his cigarette, and resumed his search for a short cut to the great house. He soon picked up the path which, winding among clipped hedges and flower beds, brought him in front of its long Palladian facade. It had the usual appearance of being, not a private house, but a sort of public building sent into exile in the provinces.

He first found himself in the presence of the butler, who really looked much older than the building, for the architecture was dated as Georgian; but the man’s face, under a highly unnatural brown wig, was wrinkled with what might have been centuries. Only his prominent eyes were alive and alert, as if with protest.
Fisher glanced at him, and then stopped and said:

“Excuse me. Weren’t you with the late squire, Mr. Hawker?”

“Yes, sir,” said the man, gravely. “Usher is my name. What can I do for you?”

“Only take me into Sir Francis Verner,” replied the visitor.

Sir Francis Verner was sitting in an easy chair beside a small table in a large room hung with tapestries. On the table were a small flask and glass, with the green glimmer of a liqueur and a cup of black coffee. He was clad in a quiet gray suit with a moderately harmonious purple tie; but Fisher saw something about the turn of his fair mustache and the lie of his flat hair—it suddenly revealed that his name was Franz Werner.

“You are Mr. Horne Fisher,” he said. “Won’t you sit down?”

“No, thank you,” replied Fisher. “I fear this is not a friendly occasion, and I shall remain standing. Possibly you know that I am already standing—standing for Parliament, in fact—”

“I am aware we are political opponents,” replied Verner, raising his eyebrows. “But I think it would be better if we fought in a sporting spirit; in a spirit of English fair play.”

“Much better,” assented Fisher. “It would be much better if you were English and very much better if you had ever played fair. But what I’ve come to say can be said very shortly. I don’t quite know how we stand with the law about that old Hawker story, but my chief object is to prevent England being entirely ruled by people like you. So whatever the law would say, I will say no more if you will retire from the election at once.”

“You are evidently a lunatic,” said Verner.

“My psychology may be a little abnormal,” replied Horne Fisher, in a rather hazy manner. “I am subject to dreams, especially day–dreams. Sometimes what is happening to me grows vivid in a curious double way, as if it had happened before. Have you ever had that mystical feeling that things have happened before?”

“I hope you are a harmless lunatic,” said Verner.

But Fisher was still staring in an absent fashion at the golden gigantic figures and traceries of brown and red in the tapestries on the walls; then he looked again at Verner and resumed: “I have a feeling that this interview has happened before, here in this tapestried room, and we are two ghosts revisiting a haunted chamber. But it was Squire Hawker who sat where you sit and it was you who stood where I stand.” He paused a moment and then added, with simplicity, “I suppose I am a blackmailer, too.”
“If you are,” said Sir Francis, “I promise you you shall go to jail.” But his face had a shade on it that looked like the reflection of the green wine gleaming on the table. Horne Fisher regarded him steadily and answered, quietly enough:

“Blackmailers do not always go to jail. Sometimes they go to Parliament. But, though Parliament is rotten enough already, you shall not go there if I can help it. I am not so criminal as you were in bargaining with crime. You made a squire give up his country seat. I only ask you to give up your Parliamentary seat.”

Sir Francis Verner sprang to his feet and looked about for one of the bell ropes of the old–fashioned, curtained room.

“Where is Usher?” he cried, with a livid face.

“And who is Usher?” said Fisher, softly. “I wonder how much Usher knows of the truth.”

Verner’s hand fell from the bell rope and, after standing for a moment with rolling eyes, he strode abruptly from the room. Fisher went but by the other door, by which he had entered, and, seeing no sign of Usher, let himself out and betook himself again toward the town.

That night he put an electric torch in his pocket and set out alone in the darkness to add the last links to his argument. There was much that he did not know yet; but he thought he knew where he could find the knowledge. The night closed dark and stormy and the black gap in the wall looked blacker than ever; the wood seemed to have grown thicker and darker in a day. If the deserted lake with its black woods and gray urns and images looked desolate even by daylight, under the night and the growing storm it seemed still more like the pool of Acheron in the land of lost souls. As he stepped carefully along the jetty stones he seemed to be traveling farther and farther into the abyss of night, and to have left behind him the last points from which it would be possible to signal to the land of the living. The lake seemed to have grown larger than a sea, but a sea of black and slimy waters that slept with abominable serenity, as if they had washed out the world. There was so much of this nightmare sense of extension and expansion that he was strangely surprised to come to his desert island so soon. But he knew it for a place of inhuman silence and solitude; and he felt as if he had been walking for years.

Nerving himself to a more normal mood, he paused under one of the dark dragon trees that branched out above him, and, taking out his torch, turned in the direction of the door at the back of the temple. It was unbolted as before, and the thought stirred faintly in him that it was slightly open, though only by a crack. The more he thought of it, however, the more certain he grew that this was but
one of the common illusions of light coming from a different angle. He studied in a more scientific spirit the details of the door, with its rusty bolts and hinges, when he became conscious of something very near him—indeed, nearly above his head. Something was dangling from the tree that was not a broken branch. For some seconds he stood as still as a stone, and as cold. What he saw above him were the legs of a man hanging, presumably a dead man hanged. But the next moment he knew better. The man was literally alive and kicking; and an instant after he had dropped to the ground and turned on the intruder. Simultaneously three or four other trees seemed to come to life in the same fashion. Five or six other figures had fallen on their feet from these unnatural nests. It was as if the place were an island of monkeys. But a moment after they had made a stampede toward him, and when they laid their hands on him he knew that they were men.

With the electric torch in his hand he struck the foremost of them so furiously in the face that the man stumbled and rolled over on the slimy grass; but the torch was broken and extinguished, leaving everything in a denser obscurity. He flung another man flat against the temple wall, so that he slid to the ground; but a third and fourth carried Fisher off his feet and began to bear him, struggling, toward the doorway. Even in the bewilderment of the battle he was conscious that the door was standing open. Somebody was summoning the roughs from inside.

The moment they were within they hurled him upon a sort of bench or bed with violence, but no damage; for the settee, or whatever it was, seemed to be comfortably cushioned for his reception. Their violence had in it a great element of haste, and before he could rise they had all rushed for the door to escape. Whatever bandits they were that infested this desert island, they were obviously uneasy about their job and very anxious to be quit of it. He had the flying fancy that regular criminals would hardly be in such a panic. The next moment the great door crashed to and he could hear the bolts shriek as they shot into their place, and the feet of the retreating men scampering and stumbling along the causeway. But rapidly as it happened, it did not happen before Fisher had done something that he wanted to do. Unable to rise from his sprawling attitude in that flash of time, he had shot out one of his long legs and hooked it round the ankle of the last man disappearing through the door. The man swayed and toppled over inside the prison chamber, and the door closed between him and his fleeing companions. Clearly they were in too much haste to realize that they had left one of their company behind.
The man sprang to his feet again and hammered and kicked furiously at the door. Fisher’s sense of humor began to recover from the struggle and he sat up on his sofa with something of his native nonchalance. But as he listened to the captive captor beating on the door of the prison, a new and curious reflection came to him.

The natural course for a man thus wishing to attract his friends’ attention would be to call out, to shout as well as kick. This man was making as much noise as he could with his feet and hands, but not a sound came from his throat. Why couldn’t he speak? At first he thought the man might be gagged, which was manifestly absurd. Then his fancy fell back on the ugly idea that the man was dumb. He hardly knew why it was so ugly an idea, but it affected his imagination in a dark and disproportionate fashion. There seemed to be something creepy about the idea of being left in a dark room with a deaf mute. It was almost as if such a defect were a deformity. It was almost as if it went with other and worse deformities. It was as if the shape he could not trace in the darkness were some shape that should not see the sun.

Then he had a flash of sanity and also of insight. The explanation was very simple, but rather interesting. Obviously the man did not use his voice because he did not wish his voice to be recognized. He hoped to escape from that dark place before Fisher found out who he was. And who was he? One thing at least was clear. He was one or other of the four or five men with whom Fisher had already talked in these parts, and in the development of that strange story.

“Now I wonder who you are,” he said, aloud, with all his old lazy urbanity. “I suppose it’s no use trying to throttle you in order to find out; it would be displeasing to pass the night with a corpse. Besides I might be the corpse. I’ve got no matches and I’ve smashed my torch, so I can only speculate. Who could you be, now? Let us think.”

The man thus genially addressed had desisted from drumming on the door and retreated sullenly into a corner as Fisher continued to address him in a flowing monologue.

“Probably you are the poacher who says he isn’t a poacher. He says he’s a landed proprietor; but he will permit me to inform him that, whatever he is, he’s a fool. What hope can there ever be of a free peasantry in England if the peasants themselves are such snobs as to want to be gentlemen? How can we make a democracy with no democrats? As it is, you want to be a landlord and so you consent to be a criminal. And in that, you know, you are rather like somebody else. And, now I think of it, perhaps you are somebody else.”
There was a silence broken by breathing from the corner and the murmur of the rising storm, that came in through the small grating above the man’s head. Horne Fisher continued:

“Are you only a servant, perhaps, that rather sinister old servant who was butler to Hawker and Verner? If so, you are certainly the only link between the two periods. But if so, why do you degrade yourself to serve this dirty foreigner, when you at least saw the last of a genuine national gentry? People like you are generally at least patriotic. Doesn’t England mean anything to you, Mr. Usher? All of which eloquence is possibly wasted, as perhaps you are not Mr. Usher.

“More likely you are Verner himself; and it’s no good wasting eloquence to make you ashamed of yourself. Nor is it any good to curse you for corrupting England; nor are you the right person to curse. It is the English who deserve to be cursed, and are cursed, because they allowed such vermin to crawl into the high places of their heroes and their kings. I won’t dwell on the idea that you’re Verner, or the throttling might begin, after all. Is there anyone else you could be? Surely you’re not some servant of the other rival organization. I can’t believe you’re Gryce, the agent; and yet Gryce had a spark of the fanatic in his eye, too; and men will do extraordinary things in these paltry feuds of politics. Or if not the servant, is it the... No, I can’t believe it... not the red blood of manhood and liberty... not the democratic ideal...”

He sprang up in excitement, and at the same moment a growl of thunder came through the grating beyond. The storm had broken, and with it a new light broke on his mind. There was something else that might happen in a moment.

“Do you know what that means?” he cried. “It means that God himself may hold a candle to show me your infernal face.”

Then next moment came a crash of thunder; but before the thunder a white light had filled the whole room for a single split second.

Fisher had seen two things in front of him. One was the black–and–white pattern of the iron grating against the sky; the other was the face in the corner. It was the face of his brother.

Nothing came from Horne Fisher’s lips except a Christian name, which was followed by a silence more dreadful than the dark. At last the other figure stirred and sprang up, and the voice of Harry Fisher was heard for the first time in that horrible room.

“You’ve seen me, I suppose,” he said, “and we may as well have a light now. You could have turned it on at any time, if you’d found the switch.”

He pressed a button in the wall and all the details of that room sprung into
something stronger than daylight. Indeed, the details were so unexpected that for a moment they turned the captive’s rocking mind from the last personal revelation. The room, so far from being a dungeon cell, was more like a drawing-room, even a lady’s drawing-room, except for some boxes of cigars and bottles of wine that were stacked with books and magazines on a side table. A second glance showed him that the more masculine fittings were quite recent, and that the more feminine background was quite old. His eye caught a strip of faded tapestry, which startled him into speech, to the momentary oblivion of bigger matters.

“This place was furnished from the great house,” he said.

“Yes,” replied the other, “and I think you know why.”

“I think I do,” said Horne Fisher, “and before I go on to more extraordinary things I will, say what I think. Squire Hawker played both the bigamist and the bandit. His first wife was not dead when he married the Jewess; she was imprisoned on this island. She bore him a child here, who now haunts his birthplace under the name of Long Adam. A bankruptcy company promoter named Werner discovered the secret and blackmailed the squire into surrendering the estate. That’s all quite clear and very easy. And now let me go on to something more difficult. And that is for you to explain what the devil you are doing kidnaping your born brother.”

After a pause Henry Fisher answered:

“I suppose you didn’t expect to see me,” he said. “But, after all, what could you expect?”

“I’m afraid I don’t follow,” said Horne Fisher.

“I mean what else could you expect, after making such a muck of it?” said his brother, sulkily. “We all thought you were so clever. How could we know you were going to be—well, really, such a rotten failure?”

“This is rather curious,” said the candidate, frowning. “Without vanity, I was not under the impression that my candidature was a failure. All the big meetings were successful and crowds of people have promised me votes.”

“I should jolly well think they had,” said Henry, grimly. “You’ve made a landslide with your confounded acres and a cow, and Werner can hardly get a vote anywhere. Oh, it’s too rotten for anything!”

“What on earth do you mean?”

“Why, you lunatic,” cried Henry, in tones of ringing sincerity, “you don’t suppose you were meant to win the seat, did you? Oh, it’s too childish! I tell you Werner’s got to get in. Of course he’s got to get in. He’s to have the Exchequer
next session, and there’s the Egyptian loan and Lord knows what else. We only wanted you to split the Reform vote because accidents might happen after Hughes had made a score at Barkington.”

“I see,” said Fisher, “and you, I think, are a pillar and ornament of the Reform party. As you say, I am not clever.”

The appeal to party loyalty fell on deaf ears; for the pillar of Reform was brooding on other things. At last he said, in a more troubled voice:

“I didn’t want you to catch me; I knew it would be a shock. But I tell you what, you never would have caught me if I hadn’t come here myself, to see they didn’t ill treat you and to make sure everything was as comfortable as it could be.” There was even a sort of break in his voice as he added, “I got those cigars because I knew you liked them.”

Emotions are queer things, and the idiocy of this concession suddenly softened Horne Fisher like an unfathomable pathos.

“Never mind, old chap,” he said; “we’ll say no more about it. I’ll admit that you’re really as kind–hearted and affectionate a scoundrel and hypocrite as ever sold himself to ruin his country. There, I can’t say handsomer than that. Thank you for the cigars, old man. I’ll have one if you don’t mind.”

By the time that Horne Fisher had ended his telling of this story to Harold March they had come out into one of the public parks and taken a seat on a rise of ground overlooking wide green spaces under a blue and empty sky; and there was something incongruous in the words with which the narration ended.

“I have been in that room ever since,” said Horne Fisher. “I am in it now. I won the election, but I never went to the House. My life has been a life in that little room on that lonely island. Plenty of books and cigars and luxuries, plenty of knowledge and interest and information, but never a voice out of that tomb to reach the world outside. I shall probably die there.” And he smiled as he looked across the vast green park to the gray horizon.
VIII

THE VENGEANCE OF THE STATUE

It was on the sunny veranda of a seaside hotel, overlooking a pattern of flower beds and a strip of blue sea, that Horne Fisher and Harold March had their final explanation, which might be called an explosion.

Harold March had come to the little table and sat down at it with a subdued excitement smoldering in his somewhat cloudy and dreamy blue eyes. In the newspapers which he tossed from him on to the table there was enough to explain some if not all of his emotion. Public affairs in every department had reached a crisis. The government which had stood so long that men were used to it, as they are used to a hereditary despotism, had begun to be accused of blunders and even of financial abuses. Some said that the experiment of attempting to establish a peasantry in the west of England, on the lines of an early fancy of Horne Fisher’s, had resulted in nothing but dangerous quarrels with more industrial neighbors. There had been particular complaints of the ill treatment of harmless foreigners, chiefly Asiatics, who happened to be employed in the new scientific works constructed on the coast. Indeed, the new Power which had arisen in Siberia, backed by Japan and other powerful allies, was inclined to take the matter up in the interests of its exiled subjects; and there had been wild talk about ambassadors and ultimatums. But something much more serious, in its personal interest for March himself, seemed to fill his meeting with his friend with a mixture of embarrassment and indignation.

Perhaps it increased his annoyance that there was a certain unusual liveliness about the usually languid figure of Fisher. The ordinary image of him in March’s mind was that of a pallid and bald–browed gentleman, who seemed to be prematurely old as well as prematurely bald. He was remembered as a man who expressed the opinions of a pessimist in the language of a lounging. Even now March could not be certain whether the change was merely a sort of masquerade of sunshine, or that effect of clear colors and clean–cut outlines that is always visible on the parade of a marine resort, relieved against the blue dado of the sea. But Fisher had a flower in his buttonhole, and his friend could have sworn he carried his cane with something almost like the swagger of a fighter. With such clouds gathering over England, the pessimist seemed to be the only man who carried his own sunshine.
“Look here,” said Harold March, abruptly, “you’ve been no end of a friend to me, and I never was so proud of a friendship before; but there’s something I must get off my chest. The more I found out, the less I understood how you could stand it. And I tell you I’m going to stand it no longer.”

Horne Fisher gazed across at him gravely and attentively, but rather as if he were a long way off.

“You know I always liked you,” said Fisher, quietly, “but I also respect you, which is not always the same thing. You may possibly guess that I like a good many people I don’t respect. Perhaps it is my tragedy, perhaps it is my fault. But you are very different, and I promise you this: that I will never try to keep you as somebody to be liked, at the price of your not being respected.”

“I know you are magnanimous,” said March after a silence, “and yet you tolerate and perpetuate everything that is mean.” Then after another silence he added: “Do you remember when we first met, when you were fishing in that brook in the affair of the target? And do you remember you said that, after all, it might do no harm if I could blow the whole tangle of this society to hell with dynamite.”

“Yes, and what of that?” asked Fisher.

“Only that I’m going to blow it to hell with dynamite,” said Harold March, “and I think it right to give you fair warning. For a long time I didn’t believe things were as bad as you said they were. But I never felt as if I could have bottled up what you knew, supposing you really knew it. Well, the long and the short of it is that I’ve got a conscience; and now, at last, I’ve also got a chance. I’ve been put in charge of a big independent paper, with a free hand, and we’re going to open a cannonade on corruption.”

“That will be—Attwood, I suppose,” said Fisher, reflectively.

“Timber merchant. Knows a lot about China.”

“He knows a lot about England,” said March, doggedly, “and now I know it, too, we’re not going to hush it up any longer. The people of this country have a right to know how they’re ruled—or, rather, ruined. The Chancellor is in the pocket of the money lenders and has to do as he is told; otherwise he’s bankrupt, and a bad sort of bankruptcy, too, with nothing but cards and actresses behind it. The Prime Minister was in the petrol–contract business; and deep in it, too. The Foreign Minister is a wreck of drink and drugs. When you say that plainly about a man who may send thousands of Englishmen to die for nothing, you’re called personal. If a poor engine driver gets drunk and sends thirty or forty people to death, nobody complains of the exposure being personal. The engine driver is
not a person.”

“I quite agree with you,” said Fisher, calmly. “You are perfectly right.”

“If you agree with us, why the devil don’t you act with us?” demanded his friend. “If you think it’s right, why don’t you do what’s right? It’s awful to think of a man of your abilities simply blocking the road to reform.”

“We have often talked about that,” replied Fisher, with the same composure. “The Prime Minister is my father’s friend. The Foreign Minister married my sister. The Chancellor of the Exchequer is my first cousin. I mention the genealogy in some detail just now for a particular reason. The truth is I have a curious kind of cheerfulness at the moment. It isn’t altogether the sun and the sea, sir. I am enjoying an emotion that is entirely new to me; a happy sensation I never remember having had before.”

“What the devil do you mean?”

“I am feeling proud of my family,” said Horne Fisher.

Harold March stared at him with round blue eyes, and seemed too much mystified even to ask a question. Fisher leaned back in his chair in his lazy fashion, and smiled as he continued.

“Look there, my dear fellow. Let me ask a question in turn. You imply that I have always known these things about my unfortunate kinsmen. So I have. Do you suppose that Attwood hasn’t always known them? Do you suppose he hasn’t always known you as an honest man who would say these things when he got a chance? Why does Attwood unmuzzle you like a dog at this moment, after all these years? I know why he does; I know a good many things, far too many things. And therefore, as I have the honor to remark, I am proud of my family at last.”

“But why?” repeated March, rather feebly.

“I am proud of the Chancellor because he gambled and the Foreign Minister because he drank and the Prime Minister because he took a commission on a contract,” said Fisher, firmly. “I am proud of them because they did these things, and can be denounced for them, and know they can be denounced for them, and are standing firm for all that. I take off my hat to them because they are defying blackmail, and refusing to smash their country to save themselves. I salute them as if they were going to die on the battlefield.”

After a pause he continued: “And it will be a battlefield, too, and not a metaphorical one. We have yielded to foreign financiers so long that now it is war or ruin, Even the people, even the country people, are beginning to suspect that they are being ruined. That is the meaning of the regrettable incidents in the
newspapers."

"The meaning of the outrages on Orientals?" asked March.

"The meaning of the outrages on Orientals," replied Fisher, "is that the financiers have introduced Chinese labor into this country with the deliberate intention of reducing workmen and peasants to starvation. Our unhappy politicians have made concession after concession; and now they are asking concessions which amount to our ordering a massacre of our own poor. If we do not fight now we shall never fight again. They will have put England in an economic position of starving in a week. But we are going to fight now; I shouldn't wonder if there were an ultimatum in a week and an invasion in a fortnight. All the past corruption and cowardice is hampering us, of course; the West country is pretty stormy and doubtful even in a military sense; and the Irish regiments there, that are supposed to support us by the new treaty, are pretty well in mutiny; for, of course, this infernal coolie capitalism is being pushed in Ireland, too. But it’s to stop now; and if the government message of reassurance gets through to them in time, they may turn up after all by the time the enemy lands. For my poor old gang is going to stand to its guns at last. Of course it’s only natural that when they have been whitewashed for half a century as paragons, their sins should come back on them at the very moment when they are behaving like men for the first time in their lives. Well, I tell you, March, I know them inside out; and I know they are behaving like heroes. Every man of them ought to have a statue, and on the pedestal words like those of the noblest ruffian of the Revolution: ‘Que mon nom soit fletri; que la France soit libre.’"

"Good God!" cried March, "shall we never get to the bottom of your mines and countermines?"

After a silence Fisher answered in a lower voice, looking his friend in the eyes.

"Did you think there was nothing but evil at the bottom of them?" he asked, gently. "Did you think I had found nothing but filth in the deep seas into which fate has thrown me? Believe me, you never know the best about men till you know the worst about them. It does not dispose of their strange human souls to know that they were exhibited to the world as impossibly impeccable wax works, who never looked after a woman or knew the meaning of a bribe. Even in a palace, life can be lived well; and even in a Parliament, life can be lived with occasional efforts to live it well. I tell you it is as true of these rich fools and rascals as it is true of every poor footpad and pickpocket; that only God knows how good they have tried to be. God alone knows what the conscience can
survive, or how a man who has lost his honor will still try to save his soul.”

There was another silence, and March sat staring at the table and Fisher at the sea. Then Fisher suddenly sprang to his feet and caught up his hat and stick with all his new alertness and even pugnacity.

“Look here, old fellow,” he cried, “let us make a bargain. Before you open your campaign for Attwood come down and stay with us for one week, to hear what we’re really doing. I mean with the Faithful Few, formerly known as the Old Gang, occasionally to be described as the Low Lot. There are really only five of us that are quite fixed, and organizing the national defense; and we’re living like a garrison in a sort of broken–down hotel in Kent. Come and see what we’re really doing and what there is to be done, and do us justice. And after that, with unalterable love and affection for you, publish and be damned.”

Thus it came about that in the last week before war, when events moved most rapidly, Harold March found himself one of a sort of small house party of the people he was proposing to denounce. They were living simply enough, for people with their tastes, in an old brown–brick inn faced with ivy and surrounded by rather dismal gardens. At the back of the building the garden ran up very steeply to a road along the ridge above; and a zigzag path scaled the slope in sharp angles, turning to and fro amid evergreens so somber that they might rather be called everblack. Here and there up the slope were statues having all the cold monstrosity of such minor ornaments of the eighteenth century; and a whole row of them ran as on a terrace along the last bank at the bottom, opposite the back door. This detail fixed itself first in March’s mind merely because it figured in the first conversation he had with one of the cabinet ministers.

The cabinet ministers were rather older than he had expected to find them. The Prime Minister no longer looked like a boy, though he still looked a little like a baby. But it was one of those old and venerable babies, and the baby had soft gray hair. Everything about him was soft, to his speech and his way of walking; but over and above that his chief function seemed to be sleep. People left alone with him got so used to his eyes being closed that they were almost startled when they realized in the stillness that the eyes were wide open, and even watching. One thing at least would always make the old gentleman open his eyes. The one thing he really cared for in this world was his hobby of armored weapons, especially Eastern weapons, and he would talk for hours about Damascus blades and Arab swordsmanship. Lord James Herries, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was a short, dark, sturdy man with a very sallow face and a
very sullen manner, which contrasted with the gorgeous flower in his buttonhole and his festive trick of being always slightly overdressed. It was something of a euphemism to call him a well-known man about town. There was perhaps more mystery in the question of how a man who lived for pleasure seemed to get so little pleasure out of it. Sir David Archer, the Foreign Secretary, was the only one of them who was a self-made man, and the only one of them who looked like an aristocrat. He was tall and thin and very handsome, with a grizzled beard; his gray hair was very curly, and even rose in front in two rebellious ringlets that seemed to the fanciful to tremble like the antennae of some giant insect, or to stir sympathetically with the restless tufted eyebrows over his rather haggard eyes. For the Foreign Secretary made no secret of his somewhat nervous condition, whatever might be the cause of it.

“Do you know that mood when one could scream because a mat is crooked?” he said to March, as they walked up and down in the back garden below the line of dingy statues. “Women get into it when they’ve worked too hard; and I’ve been working pretty hard lately, of course. It drives me mad when Herries will wear his hat a little crooked—habit of looking like a gay dog. Sometime I swear I’ll knock it off. That statue of Britannia over there isn’t quite straight; it sticks forward a bit as if the lady were going to topple over. The damned thing is that it doesn’t topple over and be done with it. See, it’s clamped with an iron prop. Don’t be surprised if I get up in the middle of the night to hike it down.”

They paced the path for a few moments in silence and then he continued. “It’s odd those little things seem specially big when there are bigger things to worry about. We’d better go in and do some work.”

Horne Fisher evidently allowed for all the neurotic possibilities of Archer and the dissipated habits of Herries; and whatever his faith in their present firmness, did not unduly tax their time and attention, even in the case of the Prime Minister. He had got the consent of the latter finally to the committing of the important documents, with the orders to the Western armies, to the care of a less conspicuous and more solid person—an uncle of his named Horne Hewitt, a rather colorless country squire who had been a good soldier, and was the military adviser of the committee. He was charged with expediting the government pledge, along with the concerted military plans, to the half-mutinous command in the west; and the still more urgent task of seeing that it did not fall into the hands of the enemy, who might appear at any moment from the east. Over and above this military official, the only other person present was a police official, a certain Doctor Prince, originally a police surgeon and now a distinguished
detective, sent to be a bodyguard to the group. He was a square-faced man with big spectacles and a grimace that expressed the intention of keeping his mouth shut. Nobody else shared their captivity except the hotel proprietor, a crusty Kentish man with a crab-apple face, one or two of his servants, and another servant privately attached to Lord James Herries. He was a young Scotchman named Campbell, who looked much more distinguished than his bilious-looking master, having chestnut hair and a long saturnine face with large but fine features. He was probably the one really efficient person in the house.

After about four days of the informal council, March had come to feel a sort of grotesque sublimity about these dubious figures, defiant in the twilight of danger, as if they were hunchbacks and cripples left alone to defend a town. All were working hard; and he himself looked up from writing a page of memoranda in a private room to see Horne Fisher standing in the doorway, accoutered as if for travel. He fancied that Fisher looked a little pale; and after a moment that gentleman shut the door behind him and said, quietly:

“Well, the worst has happened. Or nearly the worst.”

“The enemy has landed,” cried March, and sprang erect out of his chair.

“Oh, I knew the enemy would land,” said Fisher, with composure. “Yes, he’s landed; but that’s not the worst that could happen. The worst is that there’s a leak of some sort, even from this fortress of ours. It’s been a bit of a shock to me, I can tell you; though I suppose it’s illogical. After all, I was full of admiration at finding three honest men in politics. I ought not to be full of astonishment if I find only two.”

He ruminated a moment and then said, in such a fashion that March could hardly tell if he were changing the subject or no:

“It’s hard at first to believe that a fellow like Herries, who had pickled himself in vice like vinegar, can have any scruple left. But about that I’ve noticed a curious thing. Patriotism is not the first virtue. Patriotism rots into Prussianism when you pretend it is the first virtue. But patriotism is sometimes the last virtue. A man will swindle or seduce who will not sell his country. But who knows?”

“But what is to be done?” cried March, indignantly.

“My uncle has the papers safe enough,” replied Fisher, “and is sending them west to-night; but somebody is trying to get at them from outside, I fear with the assistance of somebody inside. All I can do at present is to try to head off the man outside; and I must get away now and do it. I shall be back in about twenty-four hours. While I’m away I want you to keep an eye on these people and find out what you can. Au revoir.” He vanished down the stairs; and from the
window March could see him mount a motor cycle and trail away toward the neighboring town.

On the following morning, March was sitting in the window seat of the old inn parlor, which was oak-paneled and ordinarily rather dark; but on that occasion it was full of the white light of a curiously clear morning—the moon had shone brilliantly for the last two or three nights. He was himself somewhat in shadow in the corner of the window seat; and Lord James Herries, coming in hastily from the garden behind, did not see him. Lord James clutched the back of a chair, as if to steady himself, and, sitting down abruptly at the table, littered with the last meal, poured himself out a tumbler of brandy and drank it. He sat with his back to March, but his yellow face appeared in a round mirror beyond and the tinge of it was like that of some horrible malady. As March moved he started violently and faced round.

“My God!” he cried, “have you seen what’s outside?”

“Outside?” repeated the other, glancing over his shoulder at the garden.

“Oh, go and look for yourself,” cried Herries in a sort of fury.

“Hewitt’s murdered and his papers stolen, that’s all.”

He turned his back again and sat down with a thud; his square shoulders were shaking. Harold March darted out of the doorway into the back garden with its steep slope of statues.

The first thing he saw was Doctor Prince, the detective, peering through his spectacles at something on the ground; the second was the thing he was peering at. Even after the sensational news he had heard inside, the sight was something of a sensation.

The monstrous stone image of Britannia was lying prone and face downward on the garden path; and there stuck out at random from underneath it, like the legs of a smashed fly, an arm clad in a white shirt sleeve and a leg clad in a khaki trouser, and hair of the unmistakable sandy gray that belonged to Horne Fisher’s unfortunate uncle. There were pools of blood and the limbs were quite stiff in death.

“Couldn’t this have been an accident?” said March, finding words at last.

“Look for yourself, I say,” repeated the harsh voice of Herries, who had followed him with restless movements out of the door. “The papers are gone, I tell you. The fellow tore the coat off the corpse and cut the papers out of the inner pocket. There’s the coat over there on the bank, with the great slash in it.”

“But wait a minute,” said the detective, Prince, quietly. “In that case there seems to be something of a mystery. A murderer might somehow have managed
to throw the statue down on him, as he seems to have done. But I bet he couldn’t easily have lifted it up again. I’ve tried; and I’m sure it would want three men at least. Yet we must suppose, on that theory, that the murderer first knocked him down as he walked past, using the statue as a stone club, then lifted it up again, took him out and deprived him of his coat, then put him back again in the posture of death and neatly replaced the statue. I tell you it’s physically impossible. And how else could he have unclothed a man covered with that stone monument? It’s worse than the conjurer’s trick, when a man shuffles a coat off with his wrists tied.”

“Could he have thrown down the statue after he’d stripped the corpse?” asked March.

“And why?” asked Prince, sharply. “If he’d killed his man and got his papers, he’d be away like the wind. He wouldn’t potter about in a garden excavating the pedestals of statues. Besides—Hullo, who’s that up there?”

High on the ridge above them, drawn in dark thin lines against the sky, was a figure looking so long and lean as to be almost spidery. The dark silhouette of the head showed two small tufts like horns; and they could almost have sworn that the horns moved.

“Archer!” shouted Herries, with sudden passion, and called to him with curses to come down. The figure drew back at the first cry, with an agitated movement so abrupt as almost to be called an antic. The next moment the man seemed to reconsider and collect himself, and began to come down the zigzag garden path, but with obvious reluctance, his feet falling in slower and slower rhythm. Through March’s mind were throbbing the phrases that this man himself had used, about going mad in the middle of the night and wrecking the stone figure. Just so, he could fancy, the maniac who had done such a thing might climb the crest of the hill, in that feverish dancing fashion, and look down on the wreck he had made. But the wreck he had made here was not only a wreck of stone.

When the man emerged at last on to the garden path, with the full light on his face and figure, he was walking slowly indeed, but easily, and with no appearance of fear.

“This is a terrible thing,” he said. “I saw it from above; I was taking a stroll along the ridge.”

“Do you mean that you saw the murder?” demanded March, “or the accident? I mean did you see the statue fall?”

“No,” said Archer, “I mean I saw the statue fallen.”

Prince seemed to be paying but little attention; his eye was riveted on an
object lying on the path a yard or two from the corpse. It seemed to be a rusty iron bar bent crooked at one end.

“One thing I don’t understand,” he said, “is all this blood. The poor fellow’s skull isn’t smashed; most likely his neck is broken; but blood seems to have spouted as if all his arteries were severed. I was wondering if some other instrument . . . that iron thing, for instance; but I don’t see that even that is sharp enough. I suppose nobody knows what it is.”

“I know what it is,” said Archer in his deep but somewhat shaky voice. “I’ve seen it in my nightmares. It was the iron clamp or prop on the pedestal, stuck on to keep the wretched image upright when it began to wobble, I suppose. Anyhow, it was always stuck in the stonework there; and I suppose it came out when the thing collapsed.”

Doctor Prince nodded, but he continued to look down at the pools of blood and the bar of iron.

“I’m certain there’s something more underneath all this,” he said at last. “Perhaps something more underneath the statue. I have a huge sort of hunch that there is. We are four men now and between us we can lift that great tombstone there.”

They all bent their strength to the business; there was a silence save for heavy breathing; and then, after an instant of the tottering and staggering of eight legs, the great carven column of rock was rolled away, and the body lying in its shirt and trousers was fully revealed. The spectacles of Doctor Prince seemed almost to enlarge with a restrained radiance like great eyes; for other things were revealed also. One was that the unfortunate Hewitt had a deep gash across the jugular, which the triumphant doctor instantly identified as having been made with a sharp steel edge like a razor. The other was that immediately under the bank lay littered three shining scraps of steel, each nearly a foot long, one pointed and another fitted into a gorgeously jeweled hilt or handle. It was evidently a sort of long Oriental knife, long enough to be called a sword, but with a curious wavy edge; and there was a touch or two of blood on the point.

“I should have expected more blood, hardly on the point,” observed Doctor Prince, thoughtfully, “but this is certainly the instrument. The slash was certainly made with a weapon shaped like this, and probably the slashing of the pocket as well. I suppose the brute threw in the statue, by way of giving him a public funeral.”

March did not answer; he was mesmerized by the strange stones that glittered on the strange sword hilt; and their possible significance was broadening upon
him like a dreadful dawn. It was a curious Asiatic weapon. He knew what name was connected in his memory with curious Asiatic weapons. Lord James spoke his secret thought for him, and yet it startled him like an irrelevance.

“Where is the Prime Minister?” Herries had cried, suddenly, and somehow like the bark of a dog at some discovery.

Doctor Prince turned on him his goggles and his grim face; and it was grimmer than ever.

“I cannot find him anywhere,” he said. “I looked for him at once, as soon as I found the papers were gone. That servant of yours, Campbell, made a most efficient search, but there are no traces.”

There was a long silence, at the end of which Herries uttered another cry, but upon an entirely new note.

“Well, you needn’t look for him any longer,” he said, “for here he comes, along with your friend Fisher. They look as if they’d been for a little walking tour.”

The two figures approaching up the path were indeed those of Fisher, splashed with the mire of travel and carrying a scratch like that of a bramble across one side of his bald forehead, and of the great and gray-haired statesman who looked like a baby and was interested in Eastern swords and swordsmanship. But beyond this bodily recognition, March could make neither head nor tail of their presence or demeanor, which seemed to give a final touch of nonsense to the whole nightmare. The more closely he watched them, as they stood listening to the revelations of the detective, the more puzzled he was by their attitude—Fisher seemed grieved by the death of his uncle, but hardly shocked at it; the older man seemed almost openly thinking about something else, and neither had anything to suggest about a further pursuit of the fugitive spy and murderer, in spite of the prodigious importance of the documents he had stolen. When the detective had gone off to busy himself with that department of the business, to telephone and write his report, when Herries had gone back, probably to the brandy bottle, and the Prime Minister had blandly sauntered away toward a comfortable armchair in another part of the garden, Horne Fisher spoke directly to Harold March.

“My friend,” he said, “I want you to come with me at once; there is no one else I can trust so much as that. The journey will take us most of the day, and the chief business cannot be done till nightfall. So we can talk things over thoroughly on the way. But I want you to be with me; for I rather think it is my hour.”

March and Fisher both had motor bicycles; and the first half of their day’s
journey consisted in coasting eastward amid the unconversational noise of those uncomfortable engines. But when they came out beyond Canterbury into the flats of eastern Kent, Fisher stopped at a pleasant little public house beside a sleepy stream; and they sat down to eat and to drink and to speak almost for the first time. It was a brilliant afternoon, birds were singing in the wood behind, and the sun shone full on their ale bench and table; but the face of Fisher in the strong sunlight had a gravity never seen on it before.

“Before we go any farther,” he said, “there is something you ought to know. You and I have seen some mysterious things and got to the bottom of them before now; and it’s only right that you should get to the bottom of this one. But in dealing with the death of my uncle I must begin at the other end from where our old detective yarns began. I will give you the steps of deduction presently, if you want to listen to them; but I did not reach the truth of this by steps of deduction. I will first of all tell you the truth itself, because I knew the truth from the first. The other cases I approached from the outside, but in this case I was inside. I myself was the very core and center of everything.”

Something in the speaker’s pendent eyelids and grave gray eyes suddenly shook March to his foundations; and he cried, distractedly, “I don’t understand!” as men do when they fear that they do understand. There was no sound for a space but the happy chatter of the birds, and then Horne Fisher said, calmly:

“It was I who killed my uncle. If you particularly want more, it was I who stole the state papers from him.”

“Fisher!” cried his friend in a strangled voice.

“Let me tell you the whole thing before we part,” continued the other, “and let me put it, for the sake of clearness, as we used to put our old problems. Now there are two things that are puzzling people about that problem, aren’t there? The first is how the murderer managed to slip off the dead man’s coat, when he was already pinned to the ground with that stone incubus. The other, which is much smaller and less puzzling, is the fact of the sword that cut his throat being slightly stained at the point, instead of a good deal more stained at the edge. Well, I can dispose of the first question easily. Horne Hewitt took off his own coat before he was killed. I might say he took off his coat to be killed.”

“Do you call that an explanation?” exclaimed March. “The words seem more meaningless, than the facts.”

“Well, let us go on to the other facts,” continued Fisher, equably.

“The reason that particular sword is not stained at the edge with Hewitt’s blood is that it was not used to kill Hewitt.”
“But the doctor,” protested March, “declared distinctly that the wound was made by that particular sword.”

“I beg your pardon,” replied Fisher. “He did not declare that it was made by that particular sword. He declared it was made by a sword of that particular pattern.”

“But it was quite a queer and exceptional pattern,” argued March; “surely it is far too fantastic a coincidence to imagine—”

“It was a fantastic coincidence,” reflected Horne Fisher. “It’s extraordinary what coincidences do sometimes occur. By the oddest chance in the world, by one chance in a million, it so happened that another sword of exactly the same shape was in the same garden at the same time. It may be partly explained, by the fact that I brought them both into the garden myself . . . come, my dear fellow; surely you can see now what it means. Put those two things together; there were two duplicate swords and he took off his coat for himself. It may assist your speculations to recall the fact that I am not exactly an assassin.”

“A duel!” exclaimed March, recovering himself. “Of course I ought to have thought of that. But who was the spy who stole the papers?”

“My uncle was the spy who stole the papers,” replied Fisher, “or who tried to steal the papers when I stopped him—in the only way I could. The papers, that should have gone west to reassure our friends and give them the plans for repelling the invasion, would in a few hours have been in the hands of the invader. What could I do? To have denounced one of our friends at this moment would have been to play into the hands of your friend Attwood, and all the party of panic and slavery. Besides, it may be that a man over forty has a subconscious desire to die as he has lived, and that I wanted, in a sense, to carry my secrets to the grave. Perhaps a hobby hardens with age; and my hobby has been silence. Perhaps I feel that I have killed my mother’s brother, but I have saved my mother’s name. Anyhow, I chose a time when I knew you were all asleep, and he was walking alone in the garden. I saw all the stone statues standing in the moonlight; and I myself was like one of those stone statues walking. In a voice that was not my own, I told him of his treason and demanded the papers; and when he refused, I forced him to take one of the two swords. The swords were among some specimens sent down here for the Prime Minister’s inspection; he is a collector, you know; they were the only equal weapons I could find. To cut an ugly tale short, we fought there on the path in front of the Britannia statue; he was a man of great strength, but I had somewhat the advantage in skill. His sword grazed my forehead almost at the moment when mine sank into the joint
in his neck. He fell against the statue, like Caesar against Pompey’s, hanging on to the iron rail; his sword was already broken. When I saw the blood from that deadly wound, everything else went from me; I dropped my sword and ran as if to lift him up. As I bent toward him something happened too quick for me to follow. I do not know whether the iron bar was rotted with rust and came away in his hand, or whether he rent it out of the rock with his apelike strength; but the thing was in his hand, and with his dying energies he swung it over my head, as I knelt there unarmed beside him. I looked up wildly to avoid the blow, and saw above us the great bulk of Britannia leaning outward like the figurehead of a ship. The next instant I saw it was leaning an inch or two more than usual, and all the skies with their outstanding stars seemed to be leaning with it. For the third second it was as if the skies fell; and in the fourth I was standing in the quiet garden, looking down on that flat ruin of stone and bone at which you were looking to-day. He had plucked out the last prop that held up the British goddess, and she had fallen and crushed the traitor in her fall. I turned and darted for the coat which I knew to contain the package, ripped it up with my sword, and raced away up the garden path to where my motor bike was waiting on the road above. I had every reason for haste; but I fled without looking back at the statue and the body; and I think the thing I fled from was the sight of that appalling allegory.

“Then I did the rest of what I had to do. All through the night and into the daybreak and the daylight I went humming through the villages and markets of South England like a traveling bullet, till I came to the headquarters in the West where the trouble was. I was just in time. I was able to placard the place, so to speak, with the news that the government had not betrayed them, and that they would find supports if they would push eastward against the enemy. There’s no time to tell you all that happened; but I tell you it was the day of my life. A triumph like a torchlight procession, with torchlights that might have been firebrands. The mutinies simmered down; the men of Somerset and the western counties came pouring into the market places; the men who died with Arthur and stood firm with Alfred. The Irish regiments rallied to them, after a scene like a riot, and marched eastward out of the town singing Fenian songs. There was all that is not understood, about the dark laughter of that people, in the delight with which, even when marching with the English to the defense of England, they shouted at the top of their voices, ‘High upon the gallows tree stood the noble–hearted three . . . With England’s cruel cord about them cast.’ However, the chorus was ‘God save Ireland,’ and we could all have sung that just then, in one
sense or another.

“But there was another side to my mission. I carried the plans of the defense; and to a great extent, luckily, the plans of the invasion also. I won’t worry you with strategics; but we knew where the enemy had pushed forward the great battery that covered all his movements; and though our friends from the West could hardly arrive in time to intercept the main movement, they might get within long artillery range of the battery and shell it, if they only knew exactly where it was. They could hardly tell that unless somebody round about here sent up some sort of signal. But, somehow, I rather fancy that somebody will.”

With that he got up from the table, and they remounted their machines and went eastward into the advancing twilight of evening. The levels of the landscape were repeated in flat strips of floating cloud and the last colors of day clung to the circle of the horizon. Receding farther and farther behind them was the semicircle of the last hills; and it was quite suddenly that they saw afar off the dim line of the sea. It was not a strip of bright blue as they had seen it from the sunny veranda, but of a sinister and smoky violet, a tint that seemed ominous and dark. Here Horne Fisher dismounted once more.

“We must walk the rest of the way,” he said, “and the last bit of all I must walk alone.”

He bent down and began to unstrap something from his bicycle. It was something that had puzzled his companion all the way in spite of what held him to more interesting riddles; it appeared to be several lengths of pole strapped together and wrapped up in paper. Fisher took it under his arm and began to pick his way across the turf. The ground was growing more tumbled and irregular and he was walking toward a mass of thickets and small woods; night grew darker every moment. “We must not talk any more,” said Fisher. “I shall whisper to you when you are to halt. Don’t try to follow me then, for it will only spoil the show; one man can barely crawl safely to the spot, and two would certainly be caught.”

“I would follow you anywhere,” replied March, “but I would halt, too, if that is better.”

“I know you would,” said his friend in a low voice. “Perhaps you’re the only man I ever quite trusted in this world.”

A few paces farther on they came to the end of a great ridge or mound looking monstrous against the dim sky; and Fisher stopped with a gesture. He caught his companion’s hand and wrung it with a violent tenderness, and then darted forward into the darkness. March could faintly see his figure crawling along under the shadow of the ridge, then he lost sight of it, and then he saw it again
standing on another mound two hundred yards away. Beside him stood a singular erection made apparently of two rods. He bent over it and there was the flare of a light; all March’s schoolboy memories woke in him, and he knew what it was. It was the stand of a rocket. The confused, incongruous memories still possessed him up to the very moment of a fierce but familiar sound; and an instant after the rocket left its perch and went up into endless space like a starry arrow aimed at the stars. March thought suddenly of the signs of the last days and knew he was looking at the apocalyptic meteor of something like a Day of judgment.

Far up in the infinite heavens the rocket drooped and sprang into scarlet stars. For a moment the whole landscape out to the sea and back to the crescent of the wooded hills was like a lake of ruby light, of a red strangely rich and glorious, as if the world were steeped in wine rather than blood, or the earth were an earthly paradise, over which paused forever the sanguine moment of morning.

“God save England!” cried Fisher, with a tongue like the peal of a trumpet. “And now it is for God to save.”

As darkness sank again over land and sea, there came another sound; far away in the passes of the hills behind them the guns spoke like the baying of great hounds. Something that was not a rocket, that came not hissing but screaming, went over Harold March’s head and expanded beyond the mound into light and deafening din, staggering the brain with unbearable brutalities of noise. Another came, and then another, and the world was full of uproar and volcanic vapor and chaotic light. The artillery of the West country and the Irish had located the great enemy battery, and were pounding it to pieces.

In the mad excitement of that moment March peered through the storm, looking again for the long lean figure that stood beside the stand of the rocket. Then another flash lit up the whole ridge. The figure was not there.

Before the fires of the rocket had faded from the sky, long before the first gun had sounded from the distant hills, a splutter of rifle fire had flashed and flickered all around from the hidden trenches of the enemy. Something lay in the shadow at the foot of the ridge, as stiff as the stick of the fallen rocket; and the man who knew too much knew what is worth knowing.
THE NAPOLEON OF NOTTING HILL

G. K. CHESTERTON
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

THE NAPOLEON OF NOTTING HILL

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BOOK I

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTORY REMARKS ON THE ART OF PROPHECY

CHAPTER II
THE MAN IN GREEN

CHAPTER III
THE HILL OF HUMOUR

BOOK II

CHAPTER I
THE CHARTER OF THE CITIES

CHAPTER II
THE COUNCIL OF THE PROVOSTS

CHAPTER III
ENTER A LUNATIC

BOOK III

CHAPTER I
THE MENTAL CONDITION OF ADAM WAYNE

CHAPTER II
THE REMARKABLE MR. TURNBULL

CHAPTER III
THE EXPERIMENT OF MR. BUCK

BOOK IV

CHAPTER I
THE BATTLE OF THE LAMPS

CHAPTER II
THE CORRESPONDENT OF THE COURT JOURNAL

CHAPTER III
THE GREAT ARMY OF SOUTH KENSINGTON
BOOK V

CHAPTER I
THE EMPIRE OF NOTTING HILL

CHAPTER II
THE LAST BATTLE

CHAPTER III
TWO VOICES
BOOK I
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS ON THE ART OF PROPHECY

The human race, to which so many of my readers belong, has been playing at children’s games from the beginning, and will probably do it till the end, which is a nuisance for the few people who grow up. And one of the games to which it is most attached is called “Keep to–morrow dark,” and which is also named (by the rustics in Shropshire, I have no doubt) “Cheat the Prophet.” The players listen very carefully and respectfully to all that the clever men have to say about what is to happen in the next generation. The players then wait until all the clever men are dead, and bury them nicely. They then go and do something else. That is all. For a race of simple tastes, however, it is great fun.

For human beings, being children, have the childish wilfulness and the childish secrecy. And they never have from the beginning of the world done what the wise men have seen to be inevitable. They stoned the false prophets, it is said; but they could have stoned true prophets with a greater and juster enjoyment. Individually, men may present a more or less rational appearance, eating, sleeping, and scheming. But humanity as a whole is changeful, mystical, fickle, delightful. Men are men, but Man is a woman.

But in the beginning of the twentieth century the game of Cheat the Prophet was made far more difficult than it had ever been before. The reason was, that there were so many prophets and so many prophecies, that it was difficult to elude all their ingenuities. When a man did something free and frantic and entirely his own, a horrible thought struck him afterwards; it might have been predicted. Whenever a duke climbed a lamp–post, when a dean got drunk, he could not be really happy, he could not be certain that he was not fulfilling some prophecy. In the beginning of the twentieth century you could not see the ground for clever men. They were so common that a stupid man was quite exceptional, and when they found him, they followed him in crowds down the street and treasured him up and gave him some high post in the State. And all these clever men were at work giving accounts of what would happen in the next age, all quite clear, all quite keen–sighted and ruthless, and all quite different. And it seemed that the good old game of hoodwinking your ancestors could not really be managed this time, because the ancestors neglected meat and sleep and practical politics, so that they might meditate day and night on what their
descendants would be likely to do.

But the way the prophets of the twentieth century went to work was this. They took something or other that was certainly going on in their time, and then said that it would go on more and more until something extraordinary happened. And very often they added that in some odd place that extraordinary thing had happened, and that it showed the signs of the times.

Thus, for instance, there were Mr. H. G. Wells and others, who thought that science would take charge of the future; and just as the motor–car was quicker than the coach, so some lovely thing would be quicker than the motor–car; and so on for ever. And there arose from their ashes Dr. Quilp, who said that a man could be sent on his machine so fast round the world that he could keep up a long, chatty conversation in some old–world village by saying a word of a sentence each time he came round. And it was said that the experiment had been tried on an apoplectic old major, who was sent round the world so fast that there seemed to be (to the inhabitants of some other star) a continuous band round the earth of white whiskers, red complexion and tweeds—a thing like the ring of Saturn.

Then there was the opposite school. There was Mr. Edward Carpenter, who thought we should in a very short time return to Nature, and live simply and slowly as the animals do. And Edward Carpenter was followed by James Pickie, D.D. (of Pocohontas College), who said that men were immensely improved by grazing, or taking their food slowly and continuously, after the manner of cows. And he said that he had, with the most encouraging results, turned city men out on all fours in a field covered with veal cutlets. Then Tolstoy and the Humanitarians said that the world was growing more merciful, and therefore no one would ever desire to kill. And Mr. Mick not only became a vegetarian, but at length declared vegetarianism doomed (“shedding,” as he called it finely, “the green blood of the silent animals”), and predicted that men in a better age would live on nothing but salt. And then came the pamphlet from Oregon (where the thing was tried), the pamphlet called “Why should Salt suffer?” and there was more trouble.

And on the other hand, some people were predicting that the lines of kinship would become narrower and sterner. There was Mr. Cecil Rhodes, who thought that the one thing of the future was the British Empire, and that there would be a gulf between those who were of the Empire and those who were not, between the Chinaman in Hong Kong and the Chinaman outside, between the Spaniard on the Rock of Gibraltar and the Spaniard off it, similar to the gulf between man
and the lower animals. And in the same way his impetuous friend, Dr. Zoppi ("the Paul of Anglo–Saxonism"), carried it yet further, and held that, as a result of this view, cannibalism should be held to mean eating a member of the Empire, not eating one of the subject peoples, who should, he said, be killed without needless pain. His horror at the idea of eating a man in British Guiana showed how they misunderstood his stoicism who thought him devoid of feeling. He was, however, in a hard position; as it was said that he had attempted the experiment, and, living in London, had to subsist entirely on Italian organ–grinders. And his end was terrible, for just when he had begun, Sir Paul Swiller read his great paper at the Royal Society, proving that the savages were not only quite right in eating their enemies, but right on moral and hygienic grounds, since it was true that the qualities of the enemy, when eaten, passed into the eater. The notion that the nature of an Italian organ–man was irrevocably growing and burgeoning inside him was almost more than the kindly old professor could bear.

There was Mr. Benjamin Kidd, who said that the growing note of our race would be the care for and knowledge of the future. His idea was developed more powerfully by William Borker, who wrote that passage which every schoolboy knows by heart, about men in future ages weeping by the graves of their descendants, and tourists being shown over the scene of the historic battle which was to take place some centuries afterwards.

And Mr. Stead, too, was prominent, who thought that England would in the twentieth century be united to America; and his young lieutenant, Graham Podge, who included the states of France, Germany, and Russia in the American Union, the State of Russia being abbreviated to Ra.

There was Mr. Sidney Webb, also, who said that the future would see a continuously increasing order and neatness in the life of the people, and his poor friend Fipps, who went mad and ran about the country with an axe, hacking branches off the trees whenever there were not the same number on both sides.

All these clever men were prophesying with every variety of ingenuity what would happen soon, and they all did it in the same way, by taking something they saw "going strong," as the saying is, and carrying it as far as ever their imagination could stretch. This, they said, was the true and simple way of anticipating the future. "Just as," said Dr. Pellkins, in a fine passage,—"just as when we see a pig in a litter larger than the other pigs, we know that by an unalterable law of the Inscrutable it will some day be larger than an elephant,—just as we know, when we see weeds and dandelions growing more and more
thickly in a garden, that they must, in spite of all our efforts, grow taller than the chimney–pots and swallow the house from sight, so we know and reverently acknowledge, that when any power in human politics has shown for any period of time any considerable activity, it will go on until it reaches to the sky.”

And it did certainly appear that the prophets had put the people (engaged in the old game of Cheat the Prophet) in a quite unprecedented difficulty. It seemed really hard to do anything without fulfilling some of their prophecies.

But there was, nevertheless, in the eyes of labourers in the streets, of peasants in the fields, of sailors and children, and especially women, a strange look that kept the wise men in a perfect fever of doubt. They could not fathom the motionless mirth in their eyes. They still had something up their sleeve; they were still playing the game of Cheat the Prophet.

Then the wise men grew like wild things, and swayed hither and thither, crying, “What can it be? What can it be? What will London be like a century hence? Is there anything we have not thought of? Houses upside down—more hygienic, perhaps? Men walking on hands—make feet flexible, don’t you know? Moon . . . motor–cars . . . no heads. . . .” And so they swayed and wondered until they died and were buried nicely.

Then the people went and did what they liked. Let me no longer conceal the painful truth. The people had cheated the prophets of the twentieth century. When the curtain goes up on this story, eighty years after the present date, London is almost exactly like what it is now.
CHAPTER II

THE MAN IN GREEN

Very few words are needed to explain why London, a hundred years hence, will be very like it is now, or rather, since I must slip into a prophetic past, why London, when my story opens, was very like it was in those enviable days when I was still alive.

The reason can be stated in one sentence. The people had absolutely lost faith in revolutions. All revolutions are doctrinal—such as the French one, or the one that introduced Christianity. For it stands to common sense that you cannot upset all existing things, customs, and compromises, unless you believe in something outside them, something positive and divine. Now, England, during this century, lost all belief in this. It believed in a thing called Evolution. And it said, “All theoretic changes have ended in blood and ennui. If we change, we must change slowly and safely, as the animals do. Nature’s revolutions are the only successful ones. There has been no conservative reaction in favour of tails.”

And some things did change. Things that were not much thought of dropped out of sight. Things that had not often happened did not happen at all. Thus, for instance, the actual physical force ruling the country, the soldiers and police, grew smaller and smaller, and at last vanished almost to a point. The people combined could have swept the few policemen away in ten minutes: they did not, because they did not believe it would do them the least good. They had lost faith in revolutions.

Democracy was dead; for no one minded the governing class governing. England was now practically a despotism, but not an hereditary one. Some one in the official class was made King. No one cared how: no one cared who. He was merely an universal secretary.

In this manner it happened that everything in London was very quiet. That vague and somewhat depressed reliance upon things happening as they have always happened, which is with all Londoners a mood, had become an assumed condition. There was really no reason for any man doing anything but the thing he had done the day before.

There was therefore no reason whatever why the three young men who had always walked up to their Government office together should not walk up to it together on this particular wintry and cloudy morning. Everything in that age
had become mechanical, and Government clerks especially. All those clerks assembled regularly at their posts. Three of those clerks always walked into town together. All the neighbourhood knew them: two of them were tall and one short. And on this particular morning the short clerk was only a few seconds late to join the other two as they passed his gate: he could have overtaken them in three strides; he could have called after them easily. But he did not.

For some reason that will never be understood until all souls are judged (if they are ever judged; the idea was at this time classed with fetish worship) he did not join his two companions, but walked steadily behind them. The day was dull, their dress was dull, everything was dull; but in some odd impulse he walked through street after street, through district after district, looking at the backs of the two men, who would have swung round at the sound of his voice. Now, there is a law written in the darkest of the Books of Life, and it is this: If you look at a thing nine hundred and ninety-nine times, you are perfectly safe; if you look at it the thousandth time, you are in frightful danger of seeing it for the first time.

So the short Government official looked at the coat-tails of the tall Government officials, and through street after street, and round corner after corner, saw only coat-tails, coat-tails, and again coat-tails—when, he did not in the least know why, something happened to his eyes.

Two black dragons were walking backwards in front of him. Two black dragons were looking at him with evil eyes. The dragons were walking backwards it was true, but they kept their eyes fixed on him none the less. The eyes which he saw were, in truth, only the two buttons at the back of a frock-coat: perhaps some traditional memory of their meaningless character gave this half-witted prominence to their gaze. The slit between the tails was the nose-line of the monster: whenever the tails flapped in the winter wind the dragons licked their lips. It was only a momentary fancy, but the small clerk found it imbedded in his soul ever afterwards. He never could again think of men in frock-coats except as dragons walking backwards. He explained afterwards, quite tactfully and nicely, to his two official friends, that (while feeling an inexpressible regard for each of them) he could not seriously regard the face of either of them as anything but a kind of tail. It was, he admitted, a handsome tail—a tail elevated in the air. But if, he said, any true friend of theirs wished to see their faces, to look into the eyes of their soul, that friend must be allowed to walk reverently round behind them, so as to see them from the rear. There he would see the two black dragons with the blind eyes.

But when first the two black dragons sprang out of the fog upon the small
clerk, they had merely the effect of all miracles—they changed the universe. He discovered the fact that all romantics know—that adventures happen on dull days, and not on sunny ones. When the chord of monotony is stretched most tight, then it breaks with a sound like song. He had scarcely noticed the weather before, but with the four dead eyes glaring at him he looked round and realised the strange dead day.

The morning was wintry and dim, not misty, but darkened with that shadow of cloud or snow which steeps everything in a green or copper twilight. The light there is on such a day seems not so much to come from the clear heavens as to be a phosphorescence clinging to the shapes themselves. The load of heaven and the clouds is like a load of waters, and the men move like fishes, feeling that they are on the floor of a sea. Everything in a London street completes the fantasy; the carriages and cabs themselves resemble deep-sea creatures with eyes of flame. He had been startled at first to meet two dragons. Now he found he was among deep-sea dragons possessing the deep sea.

The two young men in front were like the small young man himself, well-dressed. The lines of their frock-coats and silk hats had that luxuriant severity which makes the modern fop, hideous as he is, a favourite exercise of the modern draughtsman; that element which Mr. Max Beerbohm has admirably expressed in speaking of “certain congruities of dark cloth and the rigid perfection of linen.”

They walked with the gait of an affected snail, and they spoke at the longest intervals, dropping a sentence at about every sixth lamp-post.

They crawled on past the lamp-posts; their mien was so immovable that a fanciful description might almost say, that the lamp-posts crawled past the men, as in a dream. Then the small man suddenly ran after them and said—

“I want to get my hair cut. I say, do you know a little shop anywhere where they cut your hair properly? I keep on having my hair cut, but it keeps on growing again.”

One of the tall men looked at him with the air of a pained naturalist.

“Why, here is a little place,” cried the small man, with a sort of imbecile cheerfulness, as the bright bulging window of a fashionable toilet-saloon glowed abruptly out of the foggy twilight. “Do you know, I often find hair-dressers when I walk about London. I’ll lunch with you at Cicconani’s. You know, I’m awfully fond of hair-dressers’ shops. They’re miles better than those nasty butchers.” And he disappeared into the doorway.

The man called James continued to gaze after him, a monocle screwed into his
“What the devil do you make of that fellow?” he asked his companion, a pale young man with a high nose.

The pale young man reflected conscientiously for some minutes, and then said—

“Had a knock on his head when he was a kid, I should think.”

“No, I don’t think it’s that,” replied the Honourable James Barker. “I’ve sometimes fancied he was a sort of artist, Lambert.”

“Bosh!” cried Mr. Lambert, briefly.

“I admit I can’t make him out,” resumed Barker, abstractedly; “he never opens his mouth without saying something so indescribably half-witted that to call him a fool seems the very feeblest attempt at characterisation. But there’s another thing about him that’s rather funny. Do you know that he has the one collection of Japanese lacquer in Europe? Have you ever seen his books? All Greek poets and mediaeval French and that sort of thing. Have you ever been in his rooms? It’s like being inside an amethyst. And he moves about in all that and talks like—like a turnip.”

“Well, damn all books. Your blue books as well,” said the ingenuous Mr. Lambert, with a friendly simplicity. “You ought to understand such things. What do you make of him?”

“He’s beyond me,” returned Barker. “But if you asked me for my opinion, I should say he was a man with a taste for nonsense, as they call it—artistic fooling, and all that kind of thing. And I seriously believe that he has talked nonsense so much that he has half bewildered his own mind and doesn’t know the difference between sanity and insanity. He has gone round the mental world, so to speak, and found the place where the East and the West are one, and extreme idiocy is as good as sense. But I can’t explain these psychological games.”

“You can’t explain them to me,” replied Mr. Wilfrid Lambert, with candour.

As they passed up the long streets towards their restaurant the copper twilight cleared slowly to a pale yellow, and by the time they reached it they stood discernible in a tolerable winter daylight. The Honourable James Barker, one of the most powerful officials in the English Government (by this time a rigidly official one), was a lean and elegant young man, with a blank handsome face and bleak blue eyes. He had a great amount of intellectual capacity, of that peculiar kind which raises a man from throne to throne and lets him die loaded with honours without having either amused or enlightened the mind of a single man.
Wilfrid Lambert, the youth with the nose which appeared to impoverish the rest of his face, had also contributed little to the enlargement of the human spirit, but he had the honourable excuse of being a fool.

Lambert would have been called a silly man; Barker, with all his cleverness, might have been called a stupid man. But mere silliness and stupidity sank into insignificance in the presence of the awful and mysterious treasures of foolishness apparently stored up in the small figure that stood waiting for them outside Cicconani’s. The little man, whose name was Auberon Quin, had an appearance compounded of a baby and an owl. His round head, round eyes, seemed to have been designed by nature playfully with a pair of compasses. His flat dark hair and preposterously long frock-coat gave him something of the look of a child’s “Noah.” When he entered a room of strangers, they mistook him for a small boy, and wanted to take him on their knees, until he spoke, when they perceived that a boy would have been more intelligent.

“I have been waiting quite a long time,” said Quin, mildly. “It’s awfully funny I should see you coming up the street at last.”

“Why?” asked Lambert, staring. “You told us to come here yourself.”

“My mother used to tell people to come to places,” said the sage.

They were about to turn into the restaurant with a resigned air, when their eyes were caught by something in the street. The weather, though cold and blank, was now quite clear, and across the dull brown of the wood pavement and between the dull grey terraces was moving something not to be seen for miles round—not to be seen perhaps at that time in England—a man dressed in bright colours. A small crowd hung on the man’s heels.

He was a tall stately man, clad in a military uniform of brilliant green, splashed with great silver facings. From the shoulder swung a short green furred cloak, somewhat like that of a Hussar, the lining of which gleamed every now and then with a kind of tawny crimson. His breast glittered with medals; round his neck was the red ribbon and star of some foreign order; and a long straight sword, with a blazing hilt, trailed and clattered along the pavement. At this time the pacific and utilitarian development of Europe had relegated all such customs to the Museums. The only remaining force, the small but well-organised police, were attired in a sombre and hygienic manner. But even those who remembered the last Life Guards and Lancers who disappeared in 1912 must have known at a glance that this was not, and never had been, an English uniform; and this conviction would have been heightened by the yellow aquiline face, like Dante carved in bronze, which rose, crowned with white hair, out of the green military
collar, a keen and distinguished, but not an English face.

The magnificence with which the green–clad gentleman walked down the centre of the road would be something difficult to express in human language. For it was an ingrained simplicity and arrogance, something in the mere carriage of the head and body, which made ordinary moderns in the street stare after him; but it had comparatively little to do with actual conscious gestures or expression. In the matter of these merely temporary movements, the man appeared to be rather worried and inquisitive, but he was inquisitive with the inquisitiveness of a despot and worried as with the responsibilities of a god. The men who lounged and wondered behind him followed partly with an astonishment at his brilliant uniform, that is to say, partly because of that instinct which makes us all follow one who looks like a madman, but far more because of that instinct which makes all men follow (and worship) any one who chooses to behave like a king. He had to so sublime an extent that great quality of royalty—an almost imbecile unconsciousness of everybody, that people went after him as they do after kings—to see what would be the first thing or person he would take notice of. And all the time, as we have said, in spite of his quiet splendour, there was an air about him as if he were looking for somebody; an expression of inquiry.

Suddenly that expression of inquiry vanished, none could tell why, and was replaced by an expression of contentment. Amid the rapt attention of the mob of idlers, the magnificent green gentleman deflected himself from his direct course down the centre of the road and walked to one side of it. He came to a halt opposite to a large poster of Colman’s Mustard erected on a wooden hoarding. His spectators almost held their breath.

He took from a small pocket in his uniform a little penknife; with this he made a slash at the stretched paper. Completing the rest of the operation with his fingers, he tore off a strip or rag of paper, yellow in colour and wholly irregular in outline. Then for the first time the great being addressed his adoring onlookers—

“Can any one,” he said, with a pleasing foreign accent, “lend me a pin?”

Mr. Lambert, who happened to be nearest, and who carried innumerable pins for the purpose of attaching innumerable buttonholes, lent him one, which was received with extravagant but dignified bows, and hyperboles of thanks.

The gentleman in green, then, with every appearance of being gratified, and even puffed up, pinned the piece of yellow paper to the green silk and silver–lace adornments of his breast. Then he turned his eyes round again, searching and unsatisfied.
“Anything else I can do, sir?” asked Lambert, with the absurd politeness of the Englishman when once embarrassed.

“Red,” said the stranger, vaguely, “red.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“I beg yours also, señor,” said the stranger, bowing. “I was wondering whether any of you had any red about you.”

“Any red about us?—well really—no, I don’t think I have—I used to carry a red bandanna once, but—”

“Barker,” asked Auberon Quin, suddenly, “where’s your red cockatoo? Where’s your red cockatoo?”

“What do you mean?” asked Barker, desperately. “What cockatoo? You’ve never seen me with any cockatoo!”

“I know,” said Auberon, vaguely mollified. “Where’s it been all the time?”

Barker swung round, not without resentment.

“I am sorry, sir,” he said, shortly but civilly, “none of us seem to have anything red to lend you. But why, if one may ask—”

“I thank you, señor, it is nothing. I can, since there is nothing else, fulfil my own requirements.”

And standing for a second of thought with the penknife in his hand, he stabbed his left palm. The blood fell with so full a stream that it struck the stones without dripping. The foreigner pulled out his handkerchief and tore a piece from it with his teeth. The rag was immediately soaked in scarlet.

“Since you are so generous, señor,” he said, “another pin, perhaps.”

Lambert held one out, with eyes protruding like a frog’s.

The red linen was pinned beside the yellow paper, and the foreigner took off his hat.

“I have to thank you all, gentlemen,” he said; and wrapping the remainder of the handkerchief round his bleeding hand, he resumed his walk with an overwhelming stateliness.

While all the rest paused, in some disorder, little Mr. Auberon Quin ran after the stranger and stopped him, with hat in hand. Considerably to everybody’s astonishment, he addressed him in the purest Spanish—

“Señor,” he said in that language, “pardon a hospitality, perhaps indiscreet, towards one who appears to be a distinguished, but a solitary guest in London. Will you do me and my friends, with whom you have held some conversation, the honour of lunching with us at the adjoining restaurant?”

The man in the green uniform had turned a fiery colour of pleasure at the mere
sound of his own language, and he accepted the invitation with that profusion of bows which so often shows, in the case of the Southern races, the falsehood of the notion that ceremony has nothing to do with feeling.

“Señor,” he said, “your language is my own; but all my love for my people shall not lead me to deny to yours the possession of so chivalrous an entertainer. Let me say that the tongue is Spanish but the heart English.” And he passed with the rest into Cicconani’s.

“Now, perhaps,” said Barker, over the fish and sherry, intensely polite, but burning with curiosity, “perhaps it would be rude of me to ask why you did that?”

“Did what, Señor?” asked the guest, who spoke English quite well, though in a manner indefinably American.

“Well,” said the Englishman, in some confusion, “I mean tore a strip off a hoarding and . . . er . . . cut yourself . . . and . . .”

“To tell you that, Señor,” answered the other, with a certain sad pride, “involves merely telling you who I am. I am Juan del Fuego, President of Nicaragua.”

The manner with which the President of Nicaragua leant back and drank his sherry showed that to him this explanation covered all the facts observed and a great deal more. Barker’s brow, however, was still a little clouded.

“And the yellow paper,” he began, with anxious friendliness, “and the red rag.

“The yellow paper and the red rag,” said Fuego, with indescribable grandeur, “are the colours of Nicaragua.”

“But Nicaragua . . .” began Barker, with great hesitation, “Nicaragua is no longer a . . .”

“Nicaragua has been conquered like Athens. Nicaragua has been annexed like Jerusalem,” cried the old man, with amazing fire. “The Yankee and the German and the brute powers of modernity have trampled it with the hoofs of oxen. But Nicaragua is not dead. Nicaragua is an idea.”

Auberon Quin suggested timidly, “A brilliant idea.”

“Yes,” said the foreigner, snatching at the word. “You are right, generous Englishman. An idea brilliant, a burning thought. Señor, you asked me why, in my desire to see the colours of my country, I snatched at paper and blood. Can you not understand the ancient sanctity of colours? The Church has her symbolic colours. And think of what colours mean to us—think of the position of one like myself, who can see nothing but those two colours, nothing but the red and the
yellow. To me all shapes are equal, all common and noble things are in a democracy of combination. Wherever there is a field of marigolds and the red cloak of an old woman, there is Nicaragua. Wherever there is a field of poppies and a yellow patch of sand, there is Nicaragua. Wherever there is a lemon and a red sunset, there is my country. Wherever I see a red pillar–box and a yellow sunset, there my heart beats. Blood and a splash of mustard can be my heraldry. If there be yellow mud and red mud in the same ditch, it is better to me than white stars.”

“And if,” said Quin, with equal enthusiasm, “there should happen to be yellow wine and red wine at the same lunch, you could not confine yourself to sherry. Let me order some Burgundy, and complete, as it were, a sort of Nicaraguan heraldry in your inside.”

Barker was fiddling with his knife, and was evidently making up his mind to say something, with the intense nervousness of the amiable Englishman.

“I am to understand, then,” he said at last, with a cough, “that you, ahem, were the President of Nicaragua when it made its—er—one must, of course, agree—its quite heroic resistance to—er—”

The ex–President of Nicaragua waved his hand.

“You need not hesitate in speaking to me,” he said. “I’m quite fully aware that the whole tendency of the world of to–day is against Nicaragua and against me. I shall not consider it any diminution of your evident courtesy if you say what you think of the misfortunes that have laid my republic in ruins.”

Barker looked immeasurably relieved and gratified.

“You are most generous, President,” he said, with some hesitation over the title, “and I will take advantage of your generosity to express the doubts which, I must confess, we moderns have about such things as—er—the Nicaraguan independence.”

“So your sympathies are,” said Del Fuego, quite calmly, “with the big nation which—”

“Pardon me, pardon me, President,” said Barker, warmly; “my sympathies are with no nation. You misunderstand, I think, the modern intellect. We do not disapprove of the fire and extravagance of such commonwealths as yours only to become more extravagant on a larger scale. We do not condemn Nicaragua because we think Britain ought to be more Nicaraguan. We do not discourage small nationalities because we wish large nationalities to have all their smallness, all their uniformity of outlook, all their exaggeration of spirit. If I differ with the greatest respect from your Nicaraguan enthusiasm, it is not
because a nation or ten nations were against you; it is because civilisation was against you. We moderns believe in a great cosmopolitan civilisation, one which shall include all the talents of all the absorbed peoples—"

“The Señor will forgive me,” said the President. “May I ask the Señor how, under ordinary circumstances, he catches a wild horse?”

“I never catch a wild horse,” replied Barker, with dignity.

“Precisely,” said the other; “and there ends your absorption of the talents. That is what I complain of your cosmopolitanism. When you say you want all peoples to unite, you really mean that you want all peoples to unite to learn the tricks of your people. If the Bedouin Arab does not know how to read, some English missionary or schoolmaster must be sent to teach him to read, but no one ever says, ‘This schoolmaster does not know how to ride on a camel; let us pay a Bedouin to teach him.’ You say your civilisation will include all talents. Will it? Do you really mean to say that at the moment when the Esquimaux has learnt to vote for a County Council, you will have learnt to spear a walrus? I recur to the example I gave. In Nicaragua we had a way of catching wild horses—by lassoing the fore feet—which was supposed to be the best in South America. If you are going to include all the talents, go and do it. If not, permit me to say what I have always said, that something went from the world when Nicaragua was civilised.”

“Something, perhaps,” replied Barker, “but that something a mere barbarian dexterity. I do not know that I could chip flints as well as a primeval man, but I know that civilisation can make these knives which are better, and I trust to civilisation.”

“You have good authority,” answered the Nicaraguan. “Many clever men like you have trusted to civilisation. Many clever Babylonians, many clever Egyptians, many clever men at the end of Rome. Can you tell me, in a world that is flagrant with the failures of civilisation, what there is particularly immortal about yours?”

“I think you do not quite understand, President, what ours is,” answered Barker. “You judge it rather as if England was still a poor and pugnacious island; you have been long out of Europe. Many things have happened.”

“And what,” asked the other, “would you call the summary of those things?”

“The summary of those things,” answered Barker, with great animation, “is that we are rid of the superstitions, and in becoming so we have not merely become rid of the superstitions which have been most frequently and most enthusiastically so described. The superstition of big nationalities is bad, but the
superstition of small nationalities is worse. The superstition of reverencing our own country is bad, but the superstition of reverencing other people’s countries is worse. It is so everywhere, and in a hundred ways. The superstition of monarchy is bad, and the superstition of aristocracy is bad, but the superstition of democracy is the worst of all.”

The old gentleman opened his eyes with some surprise.

“Are you, then,” he said, “no longer a democracy in England?”

Barker laughed.

“The situation invites paradox,” he said. “We are, in a sense, the purest democracy. We have become a despotism. Have you not noticed how continually in history democracy becomes despotism? People call it the decay of democracy. It is simply its fulfilment. Why take the trouble to number and register and enfranchise all the innumerable John Robinsons, when you can take one John Robinson with the same intellect or lack of intellect as all the rest, and have done with it? The old idealistic republicans used to found democracy on the idea that all men were equally intelligent. Believe me, the sane and enduring democracy is founded on the fact that all men are equally idiotic. Why should we not choose out of them one as much as another. All that we want for Government is a man not criminal and insane, who can rapidly look over some petitions and sign some proclamations. To think what time was wasted in arguing about the House of Lords, Tories saying it ought to be preserved because it was clever, and Radicals saying it ought to be destroyed because it was stupid, and all the time no one saw that it was right because it was stupid, because that chance mob of ordinary men thrown there by accident of blood, were a great democratic protest against the Lower House, against the eternal insolence of the aristocracy of talents. We have established now in England, the thing towards which all systems have dimly groped, the dull popular despotism without illusions. We want one man at the head of our State, not because he is brilliant or virtuous, but because he is one man and not a chattering crowd. To avoid the possible chance of hereditary diseases or such things, we have abandoned hereditary monarchy. The King of England is chosen like a juryman upon an official rotation list. Beyond that the whole system is quietly despotic, and we have not found it raise a murmur.”

“Do you really mean,” asked the President, incredulously, “that you choose any ordinary man that comes to hand and make him despot—that you trust to the chance of some alphabetical list. . . .”

“And why not?” cried Barker. “Did not half the historical nations trust to the
chance of the eldest sons of eldest sons, and did not half of them get on tolerably well? To have a perfect system is impossible; to have a system is indispensable. All hereditary monarchies were a matter of luck: so are alphabetical monarchies. Can you find a deep philosophical meaning in the difference between the Stuarts and the Hanoverians? Believe me, I will undertake to find a deep philosophical meaning in the contrast between the dark tragedy of the A’s, and the solid success of the B’s.”

“And you risk it?” asked the other. “Though the man may be a tyrant or a cynic or a criminal.”

“We risk it,” answered Barker, with a perfect placidity. “Suppose he is a tyrant—he is still a check on a hundred tyrants. Suppose he is a cynic, it is to his interest to govern well. Suppose he is a criminal—by removing poverty and substituting power, we put a check on his criminality. In short, by substituting despotism we have put a total check on one criminal and a partial check on all the rest.”

The Nicaraguan old gentleman leaned over with a queer expression in his eyes.

“My church, sir,” he said, “has taught me to respect faith. I do not wish to speak with any disrespect of yours, however fantastic. But do you really mean that you will trust to the ordinary man, the man who may happen to come next, as a good despot?”

“I do,” said Barker, simply. “He may not be a good man. But he will be a good despot. For when he comes to a mere business routine of government he will endeavour to do ordinary justice. Do we not assume the same thing in a jury?”

The old President smiled.

“I don’t know,” he said, “that I have any particular objection in detail to your excellent scheme of Government. My only objection is a quite personal one. It is, that if I were asked whether I would belong to it, I should ask first of all, if I was not permitted, as an alternative, to be a toad in a ditch. That is all. You cannot argue with the choice of the soul.”

“Of the soul,” said Barker, knitting his brows, “I cannot pretend to say anything, but speaking in the interests of the public—”

Mr. Auberon Quin rose suddenly to his feet.

“If you’ll excuse me, gentlemen,” he said, “I will step out for a moment into the air.”

“I’m so sorry, Auberon,” said Lambert, good–naturally; “do you feel bad?”
“Not bad exactly,” said Auberon, with self-restraint; “rather good, if anything. Strangely and richly good. The fact is, I want to reflect a little on those beautiful words that have just been uttered. ‘Speaking,’ yes, that was the phrase, ‘speaking in the interests of the public.’ One cannot get the honey from such things without being alone for a little.”

“Is he really off his chump, do you think?” asked Lambert.

The old President looked after him with queerly vigilant eyes.

“He is a man, I think,” he said, “who cares for nothing but a joke. He is a dangerous man.”

Lambert laughed in the act of lifting some maccaroni to his mouth.

“Dangerous!” he said. “You don’t know little Quin, sir!”

“Every man is dangerous,” said the old man without moving, “who cares only for one thing. I was once dangerous myself.”

And with a pleasant smile he finished his coffee and rose, bowing profoundly, passed out into the fog, which had again grown dense and sombre. Three days afterwards they heard that he had died quietly in lodgings in Soho.

Drowned somewhere else in the dark sea of fog was a little figure shaking and quaking, with what might at first sight have seemed terror or ague: but which was really that strange malady, a lonely laughter. He was repeating over and over to himself with a rich accent—“But speaking in the interests of the public. . . .”
CHAPTER III

THE HILL OF HUMOUR

“In a little square garden of yellow roses, beside the sea,” said Auberon Quin, “there was a Nonconformist minister who had never been to Wimbledon. His family did not understand his sorrow or the strange look in his eyes. But one day they repented their neglect, for they heard that a body had been found on the shore, battered, but wearing patent leather boots. As it happened, it turned out not to be the minister at all. But in the dead man’s pocket there was a return ticket to Maidstone.”

There was a short pause as Quin and his friends Barker and Lambert went swinging on through the slushy grass of Kensington Gardens. Then Auberon resumed.

“That story,” he said reverently, “is the test of humour.”

They walked on further and faster, wading through higher grass as they began to climb a slope.

“I perceive,” continued Auberon, “that you have passed the test, and consider the anecdote excruciatingly funny; since you say nothing. Only coarse humour is received with pot–house applause. The great anecdote is received in silence, like a benediction. You felt pretty benedicted, didn’t you, Barker?”

“I saw the point,” said Barker, somewhat loftily.

“Do you know,” said Quin, with a sort of idiot gaiety, “I have lots of stories as good as that. Listen to this one.”

And he slightly cleared his throat.

“Dr. Polycarp was, as you all know, an unusually sallow bimetallist. ‘There,’ people of wide experience would say, ‘There goes the sallowest bimetallist in Cheshire.’ Once this was said so that he overheard it: it was said by an actuary, under a sunset of mauve and grey. Polycarp turned upon him. ‘Sallow!’ he cried fiercely, ‘sallow! Quis tulerit Gracchos de seditione querentes.’ It was said that no actuary ever made game of Dr. Polycarp again.”

Barker nodded with a simple sagacity. Lambert only grunted.

“Here is another,” continued the insatiable Quin. “In a hollow of the grey–green hills of rainy Ireland, lived an old, old woman, whose uncle was always Cambridge at the Boat Race. But in her grey–green hollows, she knew nothing of this: she didn’t know that there was a Boat Race. Also she did not know that
she had an uncle. She had heard of nobody at all, except of George the First, of whom she had heard (I know not why), and in whose historical memory she put her simple trust. And by and by in God’s good time, it was discovered that this uncle of hers was not really her uncle, and they came and told her so. She smiled through her tears, and said only, ‘Virtue is its own reward.’

Again there was a silence, and then Lambert said—

“It seems a bit mysterious.”

“Mysterious!” cried the other. “The true humour is mysterious. Do you not realise the chief incident of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries?”

“And what’s that?” asked Lambert, shortly.

“It is very simple,” replied the other. “Hitherto it was the ruin of a joke that people did not see it. Now it is the sublime victory of a joke that people do not see it. Humour, my friends, is the one sanctity remaining to mankind. It is the one thing you are thoroughly afraid of. Look at that tree.”

His interlocutors looked vaguely towards a beech that leant out towards them from the ridge of the hill.

“If,” said Mr. Quin, “I were to say that you did not see the great truths of science exhibited by that tree, though they stared any man of intellect in the face, what would you think or say? You would merely regard me as a pedant with some unimportant theory about vegetable cells. If I were to say that you did not see in that tree the vile mismanagement of local politics, you would dismiss me as a Socialist crank with some particular fad about public parks. If I were to say that you were guilty of the supreme blasphemy of looking at that tree and not seeing in it a new religion, a special revelation of God, you would simply say I was a mystic, and think no more about me. But if”—and he lifted a pontifical hand—“if I say that you cannot see the humour of that tree, and that I see the humour of it—my God! you will roll about at my feet.”

He paused a moment, and then resumed.

“Yes; a sense of humour, a weird and delicate sense of humour, is the new religion of mankind! It is towards that men will strain themselves with the asceticism of saints. Exercises, spiritual exercises, will be set in it. It will be asked, ‘Can you see the humour of this iron railing?’ or ‘Can you see the humour of this field of corn? Can you see the humour of the stars? Can you see the humour of the sunsets?’ How often I have laughed myself to sleep over a violet sunset.”

“Quite so,” said Mr. Barker, with an intelligent embarrassment.

“Let me tell you another story. How often it happens that the M.P.’s for Essex
are less punctual than one would suppose. The least punctual Essex M.P., perhaps, was James Wilson, who said, in the very act of plucking a poppy—"

Lambert suddenly faced round and struck his stick into the ground in a defiant attitude.

“Auberon,” he said, “chuck it. I won’t stand it. It’s all bosh.”

Both men stared at him, for there was something very explosive about the words, as if they had been corked up painfully for a long time.

“You have,” began Quin, “no—”

“I don’t care a curse,” said Lambert, violently, “whether I have ‘a delicate sense of humour’ or not. I won’t stand it. It’s all a confounded fraud. There’s no joke in those infernal tales at all. You know there isn’t as well as I do.”

“Well,” replied Quin, slowly, “it is true that I, with my rather gradual mental processes, did not see any joke in them. But the finer sense of Barker perceived it.”

Barker turned a fierce red, but continued to stare at the horizon.

“You ass,” said Lambert; “why can’t you be like other people? Why can’t you say something really funny, or hold your tongue? The man who sits on his hat in a pantomime is a long sight funnier than you are.”

Quin regarded him steadily. They had reached the top of the ridge and the wind struck their faces.

“Lambert,” said Auberon, “you are a great and good man, though I’m hanged if you look it. You are more. You are a great revolutionist or deliverer of the world, and I look forward to seeing you carved in marble between Luther and Danton, if possible in your present attitude, the hat slightly on one side. I said as I came up the hill that the new humour was the last of the religions. You have made it the last of the superstitions. But let me give you a very serious warning. Be careful how you ask me to do anything outré, to imitate the man in the pantomime, and to sit on my hat. Because I am a man whose soul has been emptied of all pleasures but folly. And for twopence I’d do it.”

“Do it, then,” said Lambert, swinging his stick impatiently. “It would be funnier than the bosh you and Barker talk.”

Quin, standing on the top of the hill, stretched his hand out towards the main avenue of Kensington Gardens.

“Two hundred yards away,” he said, “are all your fashionable acquaintances with nothing on earth to do but to stare at each other and at us. We are standing upon an elevation under the open sky, a peak as it were of fantasy, a Sinai of humour. We are in a great pulpit or platform, lit up with sunlight, and half
London can see us. Be careful how you suggest things to me. For there is in me a madness which goes beyond martyrdom, the madness of an utterly idle man.”

“I don’t know what you are talking about,” said Lambert, contemptuously. “I only know I’d rather you stood on your silly head, than talked so much.”

“Auberon! for goodness’ sake. . . .” cried Barker, springing forward; but he was too late. Faces from all the benches and avenues were turned in their direction. Groups stopped and small crowds collected; and the sharp sunlight picked out the whole scene in blue, green and black, like a picture in a child’s toy-book. And on the top of the small hill Mr. Auberon Quin stood with considerable athletic neatness upon his head, and waved his patent-leather boots in the air.

“For God’s sake, Quin, get up, and don’t be an idiot,” cried Barker, wringing his hands; “we shall have the whole town here.”

“Yes, get up, get up, man,” said Lambert, amused and annoyed. “I was only fooling; get up.”

Auberon did so with a bound, and flinging his hat higher than the trees, proceeded to hop about on one leg with a serious expression. Barker stamped wildly.

“Oh, let’s get home, Barker, and leave him,” said Lambert; “some of your proper and correct police will look after him. Here they come!”

Two grave-looking men in quiet uniforms came up the hill towards them. One held a paper in his hand.

“There he is, officer,” said Lambert, cheerfully; “we ain’t responsible for him.”

The officer looked at the capering Mr. Quin with a quiet eye.

“We have not come, gentlemen,” he said, “about what I think you are alluding to. We have come from head-quarters to announce the selection of His Majesty the King. It is the rule, inherited from the old régime, that the news should be brought to the new Sovereign immediately, wherever he is; so we have followed you across Kensington Gardens.”

Barker’s eyes were blazing in his pale face. He was consumed with ambition throughout his life. With a certain dull magnanimity of the intellect he had really believed in the chance method of selecting despots. But this sudden suggestion, that the selection might have fallen upon him, unnerved him with pleasure.

“Which of us,” he began, and the respectful official interrupted him.

“Not you, sir, I am sorry to say. If I may be permitted to say so, we know your services to the Government, and should be very thankful if it were. The choice
has fallen. . . ."

“God bless my soul!” said Lambert, jumping back two paces. “Not me. Don’t say I’m autocrat of all the Russias.”

“No, sir,” said the officer, with a slight cough and a glance towards Auberon, who was at that moment putting his head between his legs and making a noise like a cow; “the gentleman whom we have to congratulate seems at the moment —er—er—occupied.”

“Not Quin!” shrieked Barker, rushing up to him; “it can’t be. Auberon, for God’s sake pull yourself together. You’ve been made King!”

With his head still upside down between his legs, Mr. Quin answered modestly—

“I am not worthy. I cannot reasonably claim to equal the great men who have previously swayed the sceptre of Britain. Perhaps the only peculiarity that I can claim is that I am probably the first monarch that ever spoke out his soul to the people of England with his head and body in this position. This may in some sense give me, to quote a poem that I wrote in my youth—

A nobler office on the earth
Than valour, power of brain, or birth
Could give the warrior kings of old.
The intellect clarified by this posture—"

Lambert and Barker made a kind of rush at him.

“Don’t you understand?” cried Lambert. “It’s not a joke. They’ve really made you King. By gosh! they must have rum taste.”

“The great Bishops of the Middle Ages,” said Quin, kicking his legs in the air, as he was dragged up more or less upside down, “were in the habit of refusing the honour of election three times and then accepting it. A mere matter of detail separates me from those great men. I will accept the post three times and refuse it afterwards. Oh! I will toil for you, my faithful people! You shall have a banquet of humour.”

By this time he had been landed the right way up, and the two men were still trying in vain to impress him with the gravity of the situation.

“Did you not tell me, Wilfrid Lambert,” he said, “that I should be of more public value if I adopted a more popular form of humour? And when should a popular form of humour be more firmly riveted upon me than now, when I have become the darling of a whole people? Officer,” he continued, addressing the startled messenger, “are there no ceremonies to celebrate my entry into the city?”
“Ceremonies,” began the official, with embarrassment, “have been more or less neglected for some little time, and—”

Auberon Quin began gradually to take off his coat.

“All ceremony,” he said, “consists in the reversal of the obvious. Thus men, when they wish to be priests or judges, dress up like women. Kindly help me on with this coat.” And he held it out.

“But, your Majesty,” said the officer, after a moment’s bewilderment and manipulation, “you’re putting it on with the tails in front.”

“The reversal of the obvious,” said the King, calmly, “is as near as we can come to ritual with our imperfect apparatus. Lead on.”

The rest of that afternoon and evening was to Barker and Lambert a nightmare, which they could not properly realise or recall. The King, with his coat on the wrong way, went towards the streets that were awaiting him, and the old Kensington Palace which was the Royal residence. As he passed small groups of men, the groups turned into crowds, and gave forth sounds which seemed strange in welcoming an autocrat. Barker walked behind, his brain reeling, and, as the crowds grew thicker and thicker, the sounds became more and more unusual. And when he had reached the great market-place opposite the church, Barker knew that he had reached it, though he was roods behind, because a cry went up such as had never before greeted any of the kings of the earth.
BOOK II
CHAPTER I

THE CHARTER OF THE CITIES

Lambert was standing bewildered outside the door of the King’s apartments amid the scurry of astonishment and ridicule. He was just passing out into the street, in a dazed manner, when James Barker dashed by him.

“Where are you going?” he asked.

“To stop all this foolery, of course,” replied Barker; and he disappeared into the room.

He entered it headlong, slamming the door, and slapping his incomparable silk hat on the table. His mouth opened, but before he could speak, the King said—

“Your hat, if you please.”

Fidgetting with his fingers, and scarcely knowing what he was doing, the young politician held it out.

The King placed it on his own chair, and sat on it.

“A quaint old custom,” he explained, smiling above the ruins. “When the King receives the representatives of the House of Barker, the hat of the latter is immediately destroyed in this manner. It represents the absolute finality of the act of homage expressed in the removal of it. It declares that never until that hat shall once more appear upon your head (a contingency which I firmly believe to be remote) shall the House of Barker rebel against the Crown of England.”

Barker stood with clenched fist, and shaking lip.

“Your jokes,” he began, “and my property—” and then exploded with an oath, and stopped again.

“Continue, continue,” said the King, waving his hands.

“What does it all mean?” cried the other, with a gesture of passionate rationality. “Are you mad?”

“Not in the least,” replied the King, pleasantly. “Madmen are always serious; they go mad from lack of humour. You are looking serious yourself, James.”

“Why can’t you keep it to your own private life?” expostulated the other. “You’ve got plenty of money, and plenty of houses now to play the fool in, but in the interests of the public—”

“Epigrammatic,” said the King, shaking his finger sadly at him. “None of your daring scintillations here. As to why I don’t do it in private, I rather fail to understand your question. The answer is of comparative limpidity. I don’t do it
in private, because it is funnier to do it in public. You appear to think that it would be amusing to be dignified in the banquet hall and in the street, and at my own fireside (I could procure a fireside) to keep the company in a roar. But that is what every one does. Every one is grave in public, and funny in private. My sense of humour suggests the reversal of this; it suggests that one should be funny in public, and solemn in private. I desire to make the State functions, parliaments, coronations, and so on, one roaring old-fashioned pantomime. But, on the other hand, I shut myself up alone in a small store-room for two hours a day, where I am so dignified that I come out quite ill.”

By this time Barker was walking up and down the room, his frock coat flapping like the black wings of a bird.

“Well, you will ruin the country, that’s all,” he said shortly.

“It seems to me,” said Auberon, “that the tradition of ten centuries is being broken, and the House of Barker is rebelling against the Crown of England. It would be with regret (for I admire your appearance) that I should be obliged forcibly to decorate your head with the remains of this hat, but—”

“What I can’t understand,” said Barker flinging up his fingers with a feverish American movement, “is why you don’t care about anything else but your games.”

The King stopped sharply in the act of lifting the silken remnants, dropped them, and walked up to Barker, looking at him steadily.

“I made a kind of vow,” he said, “that I would not talk seriously, which always means answering silly questions. But the strong man will always be gentle with politicians.

‘The shape my scornful looks deride
Required a God to form;’

if I may so theologically express myself. And for some reason I cannot in the least understand, I feel impelled to answer that question of yours, and to answer it as if there were really such a thing in the world as a serious subject. You ask me why I don’t care for anything else. Can you tell me, in the name of all the gods you don’t believe in, why I should care for anything else?”

“Don’t you realise common public necessities?” cried Barker. “Is it possible that a man of your intelligence does not know that it is every one’s interest—”

“Don’t you believe in Zoroaster? Is it possible that you neglect Mumbo–Jumbo?” returned the King, with startling animation. “Does a man of your intelligence come to me with these damned early Victorian ethics? If, on studying my features and manner, you detect any particular resemblance to the
Prince Consort, I assure you you are mistaken. Did Herbert Spencer ever convince you—did he ever convince anybody—did he ever for one mad moment convince himself—that it must be to the interest of the individual to feel a public spirit? Do you believe that, if you rule your department badly, you stand any more chance, or one half of the chance, of being guillotined, that an angler stands of being pulled into the river by a strong pike? Herbert Spencer refrained from theft for the same reason that he refrained from wearing feathers in his hair, because he was an English gentleman with different tastes. I am an English gentleman with different tastes. He liked philosophy. I like art. He liked writing ten books on the nature of human society. I like to see the Lord Chamberlain walking in front of me with a piece of paper pinned to his coat-tails. It is my humour. Are you answered? At any rate, I have said my last serious word today, and my last serious word I trust for the remainder of my life in this Paradise of Fools. The remainder of my conversation with you to-day, which I trust will be long and stimulating, I propose to conduct in a new language of my own by means of rapid and symbolic movements of the left leg.” And he began to pirouette slowly round the room with a preoccupied expression.

Barker ran round the room after him, bombarding him with demands and entreaties. But he received no response except in the new language. He came out banging the door again, and sick like a man coming on shore. As he strode along the streets he found himself suddenly opposite Cicconani’s restaurant, and for some reason there rose up before him the green fantastic figure of the Spanish General, standing, as he had seen him last, at the door, with the words on his lips, “You cannot argue with the choice of the soul.”

The King came out from his dancing with the air of a man of business legitimately tired. He put on an overcoat, lit a cigar, and went out into the purple night.

“I will go,” he said, “and mingle with the people.”

He passed swiftly up a street in the neighbourhood of Notting Hill, when suddenly he felt a hard object driven into his waistcoat. He paused, put up his single eye-glass, and beheld a boy with a wooden sword and a paper cocked hat, wearing that expression of awed satisfaction with which a child contemplates his work when he has hit some one very hard. The King gazed thoughtfully for some time at his assailant, and slowly took a note-book from his breast-pocket.

“I have a few notes,” he said, “for my dying speech;” and he turned over the leaves. “Dying speech for political assassination; ditto, if by former friend—h’m, h’m. Dying speech for death at hands of injured husband (repentant). Dying
speech for same (cynical). I am not quite sure which meets the present. . . .”

“I’m the King of the Castle,” said the boy, truculently, and very pleased with nothing in particular.

The King was a kind–hearted man, and very fond of children, like all people who are fond of the ridiculous.

“Infant,” he said, “I’m glad you are so stalwart a defender of your old inviolate Notting Hill. Look up nightly to that peak, my child, where it lifts itself among the stars so ancient, so lonely, so unutterably Notting. So long as you are ready to die for the sacred mountain, even if it were ringed with all the armies of Bayswater—”

The King stopped suddenly, and his eyes shone.

“Perhaps,” he said, “perhaps the noblest of all my conceptions. A revival of the arrogance of the old mediæval cities applied to our glorious suburbs. Clapham with a city guard. Wimbledon with a city wall. Surbiton tolling a bell to raise its citizens. West Hampstead going into battle with its own banner. It shall be done. I, the King, have said it.” And, hastily presenting the boy with half a crown, remarking, “For the war–chest of Notting Hill,” he ran violently home at such a rate of speed that crowds followed him for miles. On reaching his study, he ordered a cup of coffee, and plunged into profound meditation upon the project. At length he called his favourite Equerry, Captain Bowler, for whom he had a deep affection, founded principally upon the shape of his whiskers.

“Bowler,” he said, “isn’t there some society of historical research, or something of which I am an honorary member?”

“Yes, sir,” said Captain Bowler, rubbing his nose, “you are a member of ‘The Encouragers of Egyptian Renaissance,’ and ‘The Teutonic Tombs Club,’ and ‘The Society for the Recovery of London Antiquities,’ and—”

“That is admirable,” said the King. “The London Antiquities does my trick. Go to the Society for the Recovery of London Antiquities and speak to their secretary, and their sub–secretary, and their president, and their vice–president, saying, ‘The King of England is proud, but the honorary member of the Society for the Recovery of London Antiquities is prouder than kings. I should like to tell you of certain discoveries I have made touching the neglected traditions of the London boroughs. The revelations may cause some excitement, stirring burning memories and touching old wounds in Shepherd’s Bush and Bayswater, in Pimlico and South Kensington. The King hesitates, but the honorary member is firm. I approach you invoking the vows of my initiation, the Sacred Seven Cats, the Poker of Perfection, and the Ordeal of the Indescribable Instant
(forgive me if I mix you up with the Clan–na–Gael or some other club I belong to), and ask you to permit me to read a paper at your next meeting on the “Wars of the London Boroughs.” Say all this to the Society, Bowler. Remember it very carefully, for it is most important, and I have forgotten it altogether, and send me another cup of coffee and some of the cigars that we keep for vulgar and successful people. I am going to write my paper.”

The Society for the Recovery of London Antiquities met a month after in a corrugated iron hall on the outskirts of one of the southern suburbs of London. A large number of people had collected there under the coarse and flaring gas–jets when the King arrived, perspiring and genial. On taking off his great–coat, he was perceived to be in evening dress, wearing the Garter. His appearance at the small table, adorned only with a glass of water, was received with respectful cheering.

The chairman (Mr. Huggins) said that he was sure that they had all been pleased to listen to such distinguished lecturers as they had heard for some time past (hear, hear). Mr. Burton (hear, hear), Mr. Cambridge, Professor King (loud and continued cheers), our old friend Peter Jessop, Sir William White (loud laughter), and other eminent men, had done honour to their little venture (cheers). But there were other circumstances which lent a certain unique quality to the present occasion (hear, hear). So far as his recollection went, and in connection with the Society for the Recovery of London Antiquities it went very far (loud cheers), he did not remember that any of their lecturers had borne the title of King. He would therefore call upon King Auberon briefly to address the meeting.

The King began by saying that this speech might be regarded as the first declaration of his new policy for the nation. “At this supreme hour of my life I feel that to no one but the members of the Society for the Recovery of London Antiquities can I open my heart (cheers). If the world turns upon my policy, and the storms of popular hostility begin to rise (no, no), I feel that it is here, with my brave Recoverers around me, that I can best meet them, sword in hand” (loud cheers).

His Majesty then went on to explain that, now old age was creeping upon him, he proposed to devote his remaining strength to bringing about a keener sense of local patriotism in the various municipalities of London. How few of them knew the legends of their own boroughs! How many there were who had never heard of the true origin of the Wink of Wandsworth! What a large proportion of the younger generation in Chelsea neglected to perform the old Chelsea Chuff!
Pimlico no longer pumped the Pimlies. Battersea had forgotten the name of Blick.

There was a short silence, and then a voice said “Shame!”

The King continued: “Being called, however unworthily, to this high estate, I have resolved that, so far as possible, this neglect shall cease. I desire no military glory. I lay claim to no constitutional equality with Justinian or Alfred. If I can go down to history as the man who saved from extinction a few old English customs, if our descendants can say it was through this man, humble as he was, that the Ten Turnips are still eaten in Fulham, and the Putney parish councillor still shaves one half of his head, I shall look my great fathers reverently but not fearfully in the face when I go down to the last house of Kings.”

The King paused, visibly affected, but collecting himself, resumed once more.

“I trust that to very few of you, at least, I need dwell on the sublime origins of these legends. The very names of your boroughs bear witness to them. So long as Hammersmith is called Hammersmith, its people will live in the shadow of that primal hero, the Blacksmith, who led the democracy of the Broadway into battle till he drove the chivalry of Kensington before him and overthrew them at that place which in honour of the best blood of the defeated aristocracy is still called Kensington Gore. Men of Hammersmith will not fail to remember that the very name of Kensington originated from the lips of their hero. For at the great banquet of reconciliation held after the war, when the disdainful oligarchs declined to join in the songs of the men of the Broadway (which are to this day of a rude and popular character), the great Republican leader, with his rough humour, said the words which are written in gold upon his monument, ‘Little birds that can sing and won’t sing, must be made to sing.’ So that the Eastern Knights were called Cansings or Kensings ever afterwards. But you also have great memories, O men of Kensington! You showed that you could sing, and sing great war–songs. Even after the dark day of Kensington Gore, history will not forget those three Knights who guarded your disordered retreat from Hyde Park (so called from your hiding there), those three Knights after whom Knightsbridge is named. Nor will it forget the day of your re–emergence, purged in the fire of calamity, cleansed of your oligarchic corruptions, when, sword in hand, you drove the Empire of Hammersmith back mile by mile, swept it past its own Broadway, and broke it at last in a battle so long and bloody that the birds of prey have left their name upon it. Men have called it, with austere irony, the Ravenscourt. I shall not, I trust, wound the patriotism of Bayswater, or the lonelier pride of Brompton, or that of any other historic township, by taking
these two special examples. I select them, not because they are more glorious than the rest, but partly from personal association (I am myself descended from one of the three heroes of Knightsbridge), and partly from the consciousness that I am an amateur antiquarian, and cannot presume to deal with times and places more remote and more mysterious. It is not for me to settle the question between two such men as Professor Hugg and Sir William Whisky as to whether Notting Hill means Nutting Hill (in allusion to the rich woods which no longer cover it), or whether it is a corruption of Nothing–ill, referring to its reputation among the ancients as an Earthly Paradise. When a Podkins and a Jossy confess themselves doubtful about the boundaries of West Kensington (said to have been traced in the blood of Oxen), I need not be ashamed to confess a similar doubt. I will ask you to excuse me from further history, and to assist me with your encouragement in dealing with the problem which faces us to–day. Is this ancient spirit of the London townships to die out? Are our omnibus conductors and policemen to lose altogether that light which we see so often in their eyes, the dreamy light of

‘Old unhappy far–off things
And battles long ago’

—to quote the words of a little–known poet who was a friend of my youth? I have resolved, as I have said, so far as possible, to preserve the eyes of policemen and omnibus conductors in their present dreamy state. For what is a state without dreams? And the remedy I propose is as follows:—

“To–morrow morning at twenty–five minutes past ten, if Heaven spares my life, I purpose to issue a Proclamation. It has been the work of my life, and is about half finished. With the assistance of a whisky and soda, I shall conclude the other half to–night, and my people will receive it to–morrow. All these boroughs where you were born, and hope to lay your bones, shall be reinstated in their ancient magnificence,—Hammersmith, Kensington, Bayswater, Chelsea, Battersea, Clapham, Balham, and a hundred others. Each shall immediately build a city wall with gates to be closed at sunset. Each shall have a city guard, armed to the teeth. Each shall have a banner, a coat–of–arms, and, if convenient, a gathering cry. I will not enter into the details now, my heart is too full. They will be found in the proclamation itself. You will all, however, be subject to enrolment in the local city guards, to be summoned together by a thing called the Tocsin, the meaning of which I am studying in my researches into history. Personally, I believe a tocsin to be some kind of highly paid official. If, therefore, any of you happen to have such a thing as a halberd in the house, I should advise you to practise with it in the garden.”
Here the King buried his face in his handkerchief and hurriedly left the platform, overcome by emotions.

The members of the Society for the Recovery of London Antiquities rose in an indescribable state of vagueness. Some were purple with indignation; an intellectual few were purple with laughter; the great majority found their minds a blank. There remains a tradition that one pale face with burning blue eyes remained fixed upon the lecturer, and after the lecture a red–haired boy ran out of the room.
CHAPTER II

THE COUNCIL OF THE PROVOSTS

The King got up early next morning and came down three steps at a time like a schoolboy. Having eaten his breakfast hurriedly, but with an appetite, he summoned one of the highest officials of the Palace, and presented him with a shilling. “Go and buy me,” he said, “a shilling paint–box, which you will get, unless the mists of time mislead me, in a shop at the corner of the second and dirtier street that leads out of Rochester Row. I have already requested the Master of the Buckhounds to provide me with cardboard. It seemed to me (I know not why) that it fell within his department.”

The King was happy all that morning with his cardboard and his paint–box. He was engaged in designing the uniforms and coats–of–arms for the various municipalities of London. They gave him deep and no inconsiderable thought. He felt the responsibility.

“I cannot think,” he said, “why people should think the names of places in the country more poetical than those in London. Shallow romanticists go away in trains and stop in places called Hugmy–in–the–Hole, or Bumps–on–the–Puddle. And all the time they could, if they liked, go and live at a place with the dim, divine name of St. John’s Wood. I have never been to St. John’s Wood. I dare not. I should be afraid of the innumerable night of fir trees, afraid to come upon a blood–red cup and the beating of the wings of the Eagle. But all these things can be imagined by remaining reverently in the Harrow train.”

And he thoughtfully retouched his design for the head–dress of the halberdier of St. John’s Wood, a design in black and red, compounded of a pine tree and the plumage of an eagle. Then he turned to another card. “Let us think of milder matters,” he said. “Lavender Hill! Could any of your glebes and combes and all the rest of it produce so fragrant an idea? Think of a mountain of lavender lifting itself in purple poignancy into the silver skies and filling men’s nostrils with a new breath of life—a purple hill of incense. It is true that upon my few excursions of discovery on a halfpenny tram I have failed to hit the precise spot. But it must be there; some poet called it by its name. There is at least warrant enough for the solemn purple plumes (following the botanical formation of lavender) which I have required people to wear in the neighbourhood of Clapham Junction. It is so everywhere, after all. I have never been actually to
Southfields, but I suppose a scheme of lemons and olives represent their austral instincts. I have never visited Parson’s Green, or seen either the Green or the Parson, but surely the pale–green shovel–hats I have designed must be more or less in the spirit. I must work in the dark and let my instincts guide me. The great love I bear to my people will certainly save me from distressing their noble spirit or violating their great traditions.”

As he was reflecting in this vein, the door was flung open, and an official announced Mr. Barker and Mr. Lambert.

Mr. Barker and Mr. Lambert were not particularly surprised to find the King sitting on the floor amid a litter of water–colour sketches. They were not particularly surprised because the last time they had called on him they had found him sitting on the floor, surrounded by a litter of children’s bricks, and the time before surrounded by a litter of wholly unsuccessful attempts to make paper darts. But the trend of the royal infant’s remarks, uttered from amid this infantile chaos, was not quite the same affair.

For some time they let him babble on, conscious that his remarks meant nothing. And then a horrible thought began to steal over the mind of James Barker. He began to think that the King’s remarks did not mean nothing.

“In God’s name, Auberon,” he suddenly volleyed out, startling the quiet hall, “you don’t mean that you are really going to have these city guards and city walls and things?”

“I am, indeed,” said the infant, in a quiet voice. “Why shouldn’t I have them? I have modelled them precisely on your political principles. Do you know what I’ve done, Barker? I’ve behaved like a true Barkerian. I’ve . . . but perhaps it won’t interest you, the account of my Barkerian conduct.”

“Oh, go on, go on,” cried Barker.

“The account of my Barkerian conduct,” said Auberon, calmly, “seems not only to interest, but to alarm you. Yet it is very simple. It merely consists in choosing all the provosts under any new scheme by the same principle by which you have caused the central despot to be appointed. Each provost, of each city, under my charter, is to be appointed by rotation. Sleep, therefore, my Barker, a rosy sleep.”

Barker’s wild eyes flared.

“But, in God’s name, don’t you see, Quin, that the thing is quite different? In the centre it doesn’t matter so much, just because the whole object of despotism is to get some sort of unity. But if any damned parish can go to any damned man . . .”
“I see your difficulty,” said King Auberon, calmly. “You feel that your talents may be neglected. Listen!” And he rose with immense magnificence. “I solemnly give to my liege subject, James Barker, my special and splendid favour, the right to override the obvious text of the Charter of the Cities, and to be, in his own right, Lord High Provost of South Kensington. And now, my dear James, you are all right. Good day.”

“But—” began Barker.

“The audience is at an end, Provost,” said the King, smiling.

How far his confidence was justified, it would require a somewhat complicated description to explain. “The Great Proclamation of the Charter of the Free Cities” appeared in due course that morning, and was posted by bill–stickers all over the front of the Palace, the King assisting them with animated directions, and standing in the middle of the road, with his head on one side, contemplating the result. It was also carried up and down the main thoroughfares by sandwichmen, and the King was, with difficulty, restrained from going out in that capacity himself, being, in fact, found by the Groom of the Stole and Captain Bowler, struggling between two boards. His excitement had positively to be quieted like that of a child.

The reception which the Charter of the Cities met at the hands of the public may mildly be described as mixed. In one sense it was popular enough. In many happy homes that remarkable legal document was read aloud on winter evenings amid uproarious appreciation, when everything had been learnt by heart from that quaint but immortal old classic, Mr. W. W. Jacobs. But when it was discovered that the King had every intention of seriously requiring the provisions to be carried out, of insisting that the grotesque cities, with their tocsins and city guards, should really come into existence, things were thrown into a far angrier confusion. Londoners had no particular objection to the King making a fool of himself, but they became indignant when it became evident that he wished to make fools of them; and protests began to come in.

The Lord High Provost of the Good and Valiant City of West Kensington wrote a respectful letter to the King, explaining that upon State occasions it would, of course, be his duty to observe what formalities the King thought proper, but that it was really awkward for a decent householder not to be allowed to go out and put a post–card in a pillar–box without being escorted by five heralds, who announced, with formal cries and blasts of a trumpet, that the Lord High Provost desired to catch the post.

The Lord High Provost of North Kensington, who was a prosperous draper,
wrote a curt business note, like a man complaining of a railway company, stating that definite inconvenience had been caused him by the presence of the halberdiers, whom he had to take with him everywhere. When attempting to catch an omnibus to the City, he had found that while room could have been found for himself, the halberdiers had a difficulty in getting in to the vehicle—believe him, theirs faithfully.

The Lord High Provost of Shepherd’s Bush said his wife did not like men hanging round the kitchen.

The King was always delighted to listen to these grievances, delivering lenient and kingly answers, but as he always insisted, as the absolute sine qua non, that verbal complaints should be presented to him with the fullest pomp of trumpets, plumes, and halberds, only a few resolute spirits were prepared to run the gauntlet of the little boys in the street.

Among these, however, was prominent the abrupt and business–like gentleman who ruled North Kensington. And he had before long, occasion to interview the King about a matter wider and even more urgent than the problem of the halberdiers and the omnibus. This was the great question which then and for long afterwards brought a stir to the blood and a flush to the cheek of all the speculative builders and house agents from Shepherd’s Bush to the Marble Arch, and from Westbourne Grove to High Street, Kensington. I refer to the great affair of the improvements in Notting Hill. The scheme was conducted chiefly by Mr. Buck, the abrupt North Kensington magnate, and by Mr. Wilson, the Provost of Bayswater. A great thoroughfare was to be driven through three boroughs, through West Kensington, North Kensington and Notting Hill, opening at one end into Hammersmith Broadway, and at the other into Westbourne Grove. The negotiations, buyings, sellings, bullying and bribing took ten years, and by the end of it Buck, who had conducted them almost single–handed, had proved himself a man of the strongest type of material energy and material diplomacy. And just as his splendid patience and more splendid impatience had finally brought him victory, when workmen were already demolishing houses and walls along the great line from Hammersmith, a sudden obstacle appeared that had neither been reckoned with nor dreamed of, a small and strange obstacle, which, like a speck of grit in a great machine, jarred the whole vast scheme and brought it to a stand–still, and Mr. Buck, the draper, getting with great impatience into his robes of office and summoning with indescribable disgust his halberdiers, hurried over to speak to the King.

Ten years had not tired the King of his joke. There were still new faces to be
seen looking out from the symbolic head–gears he had designed, gazing at him from amid the pastoral ribbons of Shepherd’s Bush or from under the sombre hoods of the Blackfriars Road. And the interview which was promised him with the Provost of North Kensington he anticipated with a particular pleasure, for “he never really enjoyed,” he said, “the full richness of the mediæval garments unless the people compelled to wear them were very angry and business–like.”

Mr. Buck was both. At the King’s command the door of the audience–chamber was thrown open and a herald appeared in the purple colours of Mr. Buck’s commonwealth emblazoned with the Great Eagle which the King had attributed to North Kensington, in vague reminiscence of Russia, for he always insisted on regarding North Kensington as some kind of semi–arctic neighbourhood. The herald announced that the Provost of that city desired audience of the King.

“From North Kensington?” said the King, rising graciously. “What news does he bring from that land of high hills and fair women? He is welcome.”

The herald advanced into the room, and was immediately followed by twelve guards clad in purple, who were followed by an attendant bearing the banner of the Eagle, who was followed by another attendant bearing the keys of the city upon a cushion, who was followed by Mr. Buck in a great hurry. When the King saw his strong animal face and steady eyes, he knew that he was in the presence of a great man of business, and consciously braced himself.

“Well, well,” he said, cheerily coming down two or three steps from a daïs, and striking his hands lightly together, “I am glad to see you. Never mind, never mind. Ceremony is not everything.”

“I don’t understand your Majesty,” said the Provost, stolidly.

“Never mind, never mind,” said the King, gaily. “A knowledge of Courts is by no means an unmixed merit; you will do it next time, no doubt.”

The man of business looked at him sulkily from under his black brows and said again without show of civility—

“I don’t follow you.”

“Well, well,” replied the King, good–naturally, “if you ask me I don’t mind telling you, not because I myself attach any importance to these forms in comparison with the Honest Heart. But it is usual—it is usual—that is all, for a man when entering the presence of Royalty to lie down on his back on the floor and elevating his feet towards heaven (as the source of Royal power) to say three times ‘Monarchical institutions improve the manners.’ But there, there—such pomp is far less truly dignified than your simple kindliness.”
The Provost’s face was red with anger, and he maintained silence.

“And now,” said the King, lightly, and with the exasperating air of a man softening a snub; “what delightful weather we are having! You must find your official robes warm, my Lord. I designed them for your own snow-bound land.”

“They’re as hot as hell,” said Buck, briefly. “I came here on business.”

“Right,” said the King, nodding a great number of times with quite unmeaning solemnity; “right, right, right. Business, as the sad glad old Persian said, is business. Be punctual. Rise early. Point the pen to the shoulder. Point the pen to the shoulder, for you know not whence you come nor why. Point the pen to the shoulder, for you know not when you go nor where.”

The Provost pulled a number of papers from his pocket and savagely flapped them open.

“Your Majesty may have heard,” he began, sarcastically, “of Hammersmith and a thing called a road. We have been at work ten years buying property and getting compulsory powers and fixing compensation and squaring vested interests, and now at the very end, the thing is stopped by a fool. Old Prout, who was Provost of Notting Hill, was a business man, and we dealt with him quite satisfactorily. But he’s dead, and the cursed lot has fallen on a young man named Wayne, who’s up to some game that’s perfectly incomprehensible to me. We offer him a better price than any one ever dreamt of, but he won’t let the road go through. And his Council seems to be backing him up. It’s midsummer madness.”

The King, who was rather inattentively engaged in drawing the Provost’s nose with his finger on the window-pane, heard the last two words.

“What a perfect phrase that is!” he said. “‘Midsummer madness’!”

“The chief point is,” continued Buck, doggedly, “that the only part that is really in question is one dirty little street—Pump Street—a street with nothing in it but a public-house and a penny toy-shop, and that sort of thing. All the respectable people of Notting Hill have accepted our compensation. But the ineffable Wayne sticks out over Pump Street. Says he’s Provost of Notting Hill. He’s only Provost of Pump Street.”

“A good thought,” replied Auberon. “I like the idea of a Provost of Pump Street. Why not let him alone?”

“And drop the whole scheme!” cried out Buck, with a burst of brutal spirit. “I’ll be damned if we do. No. I’m for sending in workmen to pull down without more ado.”

“Strike for the purple Eagle!” cried the King, hot with historical associations.
“I’ll tell you what it is,” said Buck, losing his temper altogether. “If your Majesty would spend less time in insulting respectable people with your silly coats-of-arms, and more time over the business of the nation—”

The King’s brow wrinkled thoughtfully.

“The situation is not bad,” he said; “the haughty burgher defying the King in his own Palace. The burgher’s head should be thrown back and the right arm extended; the left may be lifted towards Heaven, but that I leave to your private religious sentiment. I have sunk back in this chair, stricken with baffled fury. Now again, please.”

Buck’s mouth opened like a dog’s, but before he could speak another herald appeared at the door.

“The Lord High Provost of Bayswater,” he said, “desires an audience.”

“Admit him,” said Auberon. “This is a jolly day.”

The halberdiers of Bayswater wore a prevailing uniform of green, and the banner which was borne after them was emblazoned with a green bay-wreath on a silver ground, which the King, in the course of his researches into a bottle of champagne, had discovered to be the quaint old punning cognisance of the city of Bayswater.

“It is a fit symbol,” said the King, “your immortal bay-wreath. Fulham may seek for wealth, and Kensington for art, but when did the men of Bayswater care for anything but glory?”

Immediately behind the banner, and almost completely hidden by it, came the Provost of the city, clad in splendid robes of green and silver with white fur and crowned with bay. He was an anxious little man with red whiskers, originally the owner of a small sweet-stuff shop.

“Our cousin of Bayswater,” said the King, with delight; “what can we get for you?” The King was heard also distinctly to mutter, “Cold beef, cold ‘am, cold chicken,” his voice dying into silence.

“I came to see your Majesty,” said the Provost of Bayswater, whose name was Wilson, “about that Pump Street affair.”

“I have just been explaining the situation to his Majesty,” said Buck, curtly, but recovering his civility. “I am not sure, however, whether his Majesty knows how much the matter affects you also.”

“It affects both of us, yer see, yer Majesty, as this scheme was started for the benefit of the ‘ole neighbourhood. So Mr. Buck and me we put our ‘eads together—”

The King clasped his hands.
“Perfect!” he cried in ecstasy. “Your heads together! I can see it! Can’t you do it now? Oh, do do it now!”

A smothered sound of amusement appeared to come from the halberdiers, but Mr. Wilson looked merely bewildered, and Mr. Buck merely diabolical.

“I suppose,” he began bitterly, but the King stopped him with a gesture of listening.

“Hush,” he said, “I think I hear some one else coming. I seem to hear another herald, a herald whose boots creak.”

As he spoke another voice cried from the doorway—

“The Lord High Provost of South Kensington desires an audience.”

“The Lord High Provost of South Kensington!” cried the King. “Why, that is my old friend James Barker! What does he want, I wonder? If the tender memories of friendship have not grown misty, I fancy he wants something for himself, probably money. How are you, James?”

Mr. James Barker, whose guard was attired in a splendid blue, and whose blue banner bore three gold birds singing, rushed, in his blue and gold robes, into the room. Despite the absurdity of all the dresses, it was worth noticing that he carried his better than the rest, though he loathed it as much as any of them. He was a gentleman, and a very handsome man, and could not help unconsciously wearing even his preposterous robe as it should be worn. He spoke quickly, but with the slight initial hesitation he always showed in addressing the King, due to suppressing an impulse to address his old acquaintance in the old way.

“Your Majesty—pray forgive my intrusion. It is about this man in Pump Street. I see you have Buck here, so you have probably heard what is necessary. I—”

The King swept his eyes anxiously round the room, which now blazed with the trappings of three cities.

“There is one thing necessary,” he said.

“Yes, your Majesty,” said Mr. Wilson of Bayswater, a little eagerly. “What does yer Majesty think necessary?”

“A little yellow,” said the King, firmly. “Send for the Provost of West Kensington.”

Amid some materialistic protests he was sent for, and arrived with his yellow halberdiers in his saffron robes, wiping his forehead with a handkerchief. After all, placed as he was, he had a good deal to say on the matter.

“Welcome, West Kensington,” said the King. “I have long wished to see you touching that matter of the Hammersmith land to the south of the Rowton House.
Will you hold it feudally from the Provost of Hammersmith? You have only to do him homage by putting his left arm in his overcoat and then marching home in state."

“No, your Majesty; I’d rather not,” said the Provost of West Kensington, who was a pale young man with a fair moustache and whiskers, who kept a successful dairy.

The King struck him heartily on the shoulder.

“The fierce old West Kensington blood,” he said; “they are not wise who ask it to do homage.”

Then he glanced again round the room. It was full of a roaring sunset of colour, and he enjoyed the sight, possible to so few artists—the sight of his own dreams moving and blazing before him. In the foreground the yellow of the West Kensington liveries outlined itself against the dark blue draperies of South Kensington. The crests of these again brightened suddenly into green as the almost woodland colours of Bayswater rose behind them. And over and behind all, the great purple plumes of North Kensington showed almost funereal and black.

“There is something lacking,” said the King—“something lacking. What can—Ah, there it is! there it is!”

In the doorway had appeared a new figure, a herald in flaming red. He cried in a loud but unemotional voice—

“The Lord High Provost of Notting Hill desires an audience.”
CHAPTER III

ENTER A LUNATIC

The King of the Fairies, who was, it is to be presumed, the godfather of King Auberon, must have been very favourable on this particular day to his fantastic godchild, for with the entrance of the guard of the Provost of Notting Hill there was a certain more or less inexplicable addition to his delight. The wretched navvies and sandwich-men who carried the colours of Bayswater or South Kensington, engaged merely for the day to satisfy the Royal hobby, slouched into the room with a comparatively hang-dog air, and a great part of the King’s intellectual pleasure consisted in the contrast between the arrogance of their swords and feathers and the meek misery of their faces. But these Notting Hill halberdiers in their red tunics belted with gold had the air rather of an absurd gravity. They seemed, so to speak, to be taking part in the joke. They marched and wheeled into position with an almost startling dignity and discipline.

They carried a yellow banner with a great red lion, named by the King as the Notting Hill emblem, after a small public-house in the neighbourhood, which he once frequented.

Between the two lines of his followers there advanced towards the King a tall, red-haired young man, with high features and bold blue eyes. He would have been called handsome, but that a certain indefinable air of his nose being too big for his face, and his feet for his legs, gave him a look of awkwardness and extreme youth. His robes were red, according to the King’s heraldry, and, alone among the Provosts, he was girt with a great sword. This was Adam Wayne, the intractable Provost of Notting Hill.

The King flung himself back in his chair, and rubbed his hands.

“What a day, what a day!” he said to himself. “Now there’ll be a row. I’d no idea it would be such fun as it is. These Provosts are so very indignant, so very reasonable, so very right. This fellow, by the look in his eyes, is even more indignant than the rest. No sign in those large blue eyes, at any rate, of ever having heard of a joke. He’ll remonstrate with the others, and they’ll remonstrate with him, and they’ll all make themselves sumptuously happy remonstrating with me.”

“Welcome, my Lord,” he said aloud. “What news from the Hill of a Hundred Legends? What have you for the ear of your King? I know that troubles have
arisen between you and these others, our cousins, but these troubles it shall be our pride to compose. And I doubt not, and cannot doubt, that your love for me is not less tender, no less ardent, than theirs.”

Mr. Buck made a bitter face, and James Barker’s nostrils curled; Wilson began to giggle faintly, and the Provost of West Kensington followed in a smothered way. But the big blue eyes of Adam Wayne never changed, and he called out in an odd, boyish voice down the hall—

“I bring homage to my King. I bring him the only thing I have—my sword.”

And with a great gesture he flung it down on the ground, and knelt on one knee behind it.

There was a dead silence.

“I beg your pardon,” said the King, blankly.

“You speak well, sire,” said Adam Wayne, “as you ever speak, when you say that my love is not less than the love of these. Small would it be if it were not more. For I am the heir of your scheme—the child of the great Charter. I stand here for the rights the Charter gave me, and I swear, by your sacred crown, that where I stand, I stand fast.”

The eyes of all five men stood out of their heads.

Then Buck said, in his jolly, jarring voice: “Is the whole world mad?”

The King sprang to his feet, and his eyes blazed.

“Yes,” he cried, in a voice of exultation, “the whole world is mad, but Adam Wayne and me. It is true as death what I told you long ago, James Barker, seriousness sends men mad. You are mad, because you care for politics, as mad as a man who collects tram tickets. Buck is mad, because he cares for money, as mad as a man who lives on opium. Wilson is mad, because he thinks himself right, as mad as a man who thinks himself God Almighty. The Provost of West Kensington is mad, because he thinks he is respectable, as mad as a man who thinks he is a chicken. All men are mad but the humorist, who cares for nothing and possesses everything. I thought that there was only one humorist in England. Fools!—dolts!—open your cows’ eyes; there are two! In Notting Hill—in that unpromising elevation—there has been born an artist! You thought to spoil my joke, and bully me out of it, by becoming more and more modern, more and more practical, more and more bustling and rational. Oh, what a feast it was to answer you by becoming more and more august, more and more gracious, more and more ancient and mellow! But this lad has seen how to bowl me out. He has answered me back, vaunt for vaunt, rhetoric for rhetoric. He has lifted the only shield I cannot break, the shield of an impenetrable pomposity. Listen to him.
You have come, my Lord, about Pump Street?”

“About the city of Notting Hill,” answered Wayne, proudly, “of which Pump Street is a living and rejoicing part.”

“Not a very large part,” said Barker, contemptuously.

“That which is large enough for the rich to covet,” said Wayne, drawing up his head, “is large enough for the poor to defend.”

The King slapped both his legs, and waved his feet for a second in the air.

“Every respectable person in Notting Hill,” cut in Buck, with his cold, coarse voice, “is for us and against you. I have plenty of friends in Notting Hill.”

“Your friends are those who have taken your gold for other men’s hearthstones, my Lord Buck,” said Provost Wayne. “I can well believe they are your friends.”

“They’ve never sold dirty toys, anyhow,” said Buck, laughing shortly.

“They’ve sold dirtier things,” said Wayne, calmly: “they have sold themselves.”

“It’s no good, my Buckling,” said the King, rolling about on his chair. “You can’t cope with this chivalrous eloquence. You can’t cope with an artist. You can’t cope with the humorist of Notting Hill. Oh, Nunc dimittis—that I have lived to see this day! Provost Wayne, you stand firm?”

“Let them wait and see,” said Wayne. “If I stood firm before, do you think I shall weaken now that I have seen the face of the King? For I fight for something greater, if greater there can be, than the hearthstones of my people and the Lordship of the Lion. I fight for your royal vision, for the great dream you dreamt of the League of the Free Cities. You have given me this liberty. If I had been a beggar and you had flung me a coin, if I had been a peasant in a dance and you had flung me a favour, do you think I would have let it be taken by any ruffians on the road? This leadership and liberty of Notting Hill is a gift from your Majesty, and if it is taken from me, by God! it shall be taken in battle, and the noise of that battle shall be heard in the flats of Chelsea and in the studios of St. John’s Wood.”

“It is too much—it is too much,” said the King. “Nature is weak. I must speak to you, brother artist, without further disguise. Let me ask you a solemn question. Adam Wayne, Lord High Provost of Notting Hill, don’t you think it splendid?”

“Splendid!” cried Adam Wayne. “It has the splendour of God.”

“Bowled out again,” said the King. “You will keep up the pose. Funnily, of course, it is serious. But seriously, isn’t it funny?”
“What?” asked Wayne, with the eyes of a baby.
“Hang it all, don’t play any more. The whole business—the Charter of the Cities. Isn’t it immense?”
“Immense is no unworthy word for that glorious design.”
“Oh, hang you! But, of course, I see. You want me to clear the room of these reasonable sows. You want the two humorists alone together. Leave us, gentlemen.”
Buck threw a sour look at Barker, and at a sullen signal the whole pageant of blue and green, of red, gold, and purple, rolled out of the room, leaving only two in the great hall, the King sitting in his seat on the daïs, and the red-clad figure still kneeling on the floor before his fallen sword.
The King bounded down the steps and smacked Provost Wayne on the back.
“Before the stars were made,” he cried, “we were made for each other. It is too beautiful. Think of the valiant independence of Pump Street. That is the real thing. It is the deification of the ludicrous.”
The kneeling figure sprang to his feet with a fierce stagger.
“Ludicrous!” he cried, with a fiery face.
“Oh, come, come,” said the King, impatiently, “you needn’t keep it up with me. The augurs must wink sometimes from sheer fatigue of the eyelids. Let us enjoy this for half an hour, not as actors, but as dramatic critics. Isn’t it a joke?”
Adam Wayne looked down like a boy, and answered in a constrained voice—
“I do not understand your Majesty. I cannot believe that while I fight for your royal charter your Majesty deserts me for these dogs of the gold hunt.”
“Oh, damn your—But what’s this? What the devil’s this?”
The King stared into the young Provost’s face, and in the twilight of the room began to see that his face was quite white and his lip shaking.
“What in God’s name is the matter?” cried Auberon, holding his wrist.
Wayne flung back his face, and the tears were shining on it.
“I am only a boy,” he said, “but it’s true. I would paint the Red Lion on my shield if I had only my blood.”
King Auberon dropped the hand and stood without stirring, thunderstruck.
“My God in Heaven!” he said; “is it possible that there is within the four seas of Britain a man who takes Notting Hill seriously?”
“And my God in Heaven!” said Wayne passionately; “is it possible that there is within the four seas of Britain a man who does not take it seriously?”
The King said nothing, but merely went back up the steps of the daïs, like a man dazed. He fell back in his chair again and kicked his heels.
“If this sort of thing is to go on,” he said weakly, “I shall begin to doubt the superiority of art to life. In Heaven’s name, do not play with me. Do you really mean that you are—God help me!—a Notting Hill patriot; that you are—?”

Wayne made a violent gesture, and the King soothed him wildly.

“All right—all right—I see you are; but let me take it in. You do really propose to fight these modern improvers with their boards and inspectors and surveyors and all the rest of it?”

“Are they so terrible?” asked Wayne, scornfully.

The King continued to stare at him as if he were a human curiosity.

“And I suppose,” he said, “that you think that the dentists and small tradesmen and maiden ladies who inhabit Notting Hill, will rally with war–hymns to your standard?”

“If they have blood they will,” said the Provost.

“And I suppose,” said the King, with his head back among the cushions, “that it never crossed your mind that”—his voice seemed to lose itself luxuriantly—“never crossed your mind that any one ever thought that the idea of a Notting Hill idealism was—er—slightly—slightly ridiculous?”

“Of course they think so,” said Wayne. “What was the meaning of mocking the prophets?”

“Where,” asked the King, leaning forward—“where in Heaven’s name did you get this miraculously inane idea?”

“You have been my tutor, Sire,” said the Provost, “in all that is high and honourable.”

“Eh?” said the King.

“It was your Majesty who first stirred my dim patriotism into flame. Ten years ago, when I was a boy (I am only nineteen), I was playing on the slope of Pump Street, with a wooden sword and a paper helmet, dreaming of great wars. In an angry trance I struck out with my sword, and stood petrified, for I saw that I had struck you, Sire, my King, as you wandered in a noble secrecy, watching over your people’s welfare. But I need have had no fear. Then was I taught to understand Kingliness. You neither shrank nor frowned. You summoned no guards. You invoked no punishments. But in august and burning words, which are written in my soul, never to be erased, you told me ever to turn my sword against the enemies of my inviolate city. Like a priest pointing to the altar, you pointed to the hill of Notting. ‘So long,’ you said, ‘as you are ready to die for the sacred mountain, even if it were ringed with all the armies of Bayswater.’ I have not forgotten the words, and I have reason now to remember them, for the hour
is come and the crown of your prophecy. The sacred hill is ringed with the armies of Bayswater, and I am ready to die.”

The King was lying back in his chair, a kind of wreck.

“Oh, Lord, Lord, Lord,” he murmured, “what a life! what a life! All my work! I seem to have done it all. So you’re the red-haired boy that hit me in the waistcoat. What have I done? God, what have I done? I thought I would have a joke, and I have created a passion. I tried to compose a burlesque, and it seems to be turning halfway through into an epic. What is to be done with such a world? In the Lord’s name, wasn’t the joke broad and bold enough? I abandoned my subtle humour to amuse you, and I seem to have brought tears to your eyes. What’s to be done with people when you write a pantomime for them—call the sausages classic festoons, and the policeman cut in two a tragedy of public duty? But why am I talking? Why am I asking questions of a nice young gentleman who is totally mad? What is the good of it? What is the good of anything? Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord!”

Suddenly he pulled himself upright.

“Don’t you really think the sacred Notting Hill at all absurd?”

“Absurd?” asked Wayne, blankly. “Why should I?”

The King stared back equally blankly.

“I beg your pardon,” he said.

“Notting Hill,” said the Provost, simply, “is a rise or high ground of the common earth, on which men have built houses to live, in which they are born, fall in love, pray, marry, and die. Why should I think it absurd?”

The King smiled.

“Because, my Leonidas—” he began, then suddenly, he knew not how, found his mind was a total blank. After all, why was it absurd? Why was it absurd? He felt as if the floor of his mind had given way. He felt as all men feel when their first principles are hit hard with a question. Barker always felt so when the King said, “Why trouble about politics?”

The King’s thoughts were in a kind of rout; he could not collect them.

“It is generally felt to be a little funny,” he said vaguely.

“I suppose,” said Adam, turning on him with a fierce suddenness—“I suppose you fancy crucifixion was a serious affair?”

“Well, I—” began Auberon—“I admit I have generally thought it had its graver side.”

“Then you are wrong,” said Wayne, with incredible violence. “Crucifixion is comic. It is exquisitely diverting. It was an absurd and obscene kind of impaling
reserved for people who were made to be laughed at—for slaves and provincials, for dentists and small tradesmen, as you would say. I have seen the grotesque gallows–shape, which the little Roman gutter–boys scribbled on walls as a vulgar joke, blazing on the pinnacles of the temples of the world. And shall I turn back?”

The King made no answer.

Adam went on, his voice ringing in the roof.

“This laughter with which men tyrannise is not the great power you think it. Peter was crucified, and crucified head downwards. What could be funnier than the idea of a respectable old Apostle upside down? What could be more in the style of your modern humour? But what was the good of it? Upside down or right side up, Peter was Peter to mankind. Upside down he stills hangs over Europe, and millions move and breathe only in the life of his Church.”

King Auberon got up absently.

“There is something in what you say,” he said. “You seem to have been thinking, young man.”

“Only feeling, sire,” answered the Provost. “I was born, like other men, in a spot of the earth which I loved because I had played boys’ games there, and fallen in love, and talked with my friends through nights that were nights of the gods. And I feel the riddle. These little gardens where we told our loves. These streets where we brought out our dead. Why should they be commonplace? Why should they be absurd? Why should it be grotesque to say that a pillar–box is poetic when for a year I could not see a red pillar–box against the yellow evening in a certain street without being wracked with something of which God keeps the secret, but which is stronger than sorrow or joy? Why should any one be able to raise a laugh by saying ‘the Cause of Notting Hill’?—Notting Hill where thousands of immortal spirits blaze with alternate hope and fear.”

Auberon was flicking dust off his sleeve with quite a new seriousness on his face, distinct from the owlish solemnity which was the pose of his humour.

“It is very difficult,” he said at last. “It is a damned difficult thing. I see what you mean; I agree with you even up to a point—or I should like to agree with you, if I were young enough to be a prophet and poet. I feel a truth in everything you say until you come to the words ‘Notting Hill.’ And then I regret to say that the old Adam awakes roaring with laughter and makes short work of the new Adam, whose name is Wayne.”

For the first time Provost Wayne was silent, and stood gazing dreamily at the floor. Evening was closing in, and the room had grown darker.
“I know,” he said, in a strange, almost sleepy voice, “there is truth in what you say, too. It is hard not to laugh at the common names—I only say we should not. I have thought of a remedy; but such thoughts are rather terrible.”

“What thoughts?” asked Auberon.

The Provost of Notting Hill seemed to have fallen into a kind of trance; in his eyes was an elvish light.

“I know of a magic wand, but it is a wand that only one or two may rightly use, and only seldom. It is a fairy wand of great fear, stronger than those who use it—often frightful, often wicked to use. But whatever is touched with it is never again wholly common; whatever is touched with it takes a magic from outside the world. If I touch, with this fairy wand, the railways and the roads of Notting Hill, men will love them, and be afraid of them for ever.”

“What the devil are you talking about?” asked the King.

“It has made mean landscapes magnificent, and hovels outlast cathedrals,” went on the madman. “Why should it not make lamp–posts fairer than Greek lamps; and an omnibus–ride like a painted ship? The touch of it is the finger of a strange perfection.”

“What is your wand?” cried the King, impatiently.

“There it is,” said Wayne; and pointed to the floor, where his sword lay flat and shining.

“The sword!” cried the King; and sprang up straight on the daïs.

“Yes, yes,” cried Wayne, hoarsely. “The things touched by that are not vulgar; the things touched by that—”

King Auberon made a gesture of horror.

“You will shed blood for that!” he cried. “For a cursed point of view—”

“Oh, you kings, you kings!” cried out Adam, in a burst of scorn. “How humane you are, how tender, how considerate! You will make war for a frontier, or the imports of a foreign harbour; you will shed blood for the precise duty on lace, or the salute to an admiral. But for the things that make life itself worthy or miserable—how humane you are! I say here, and I know well what I speak of, there were never any necessary wars but the religious wars. There were never any just wars but the religious wars. For these men were fighting for something that claimed, at least, to be the happiness of a man, the virtue of a man. A Crusader thought, at least, that Islam hurt the soul of every man, king or tinker, that it could really capture. I think Buck and Barker and these rich vultures hurt the soul of every man, hurt every inch of the ground, hurt every brick of the houses, that they can really
capture. Do you think I have no right to fight for Notting Hill, you whose English Government has so often fought for tomfooleries? If, as your rich friends say, there are no gods, and the skies are dark above us, what should a man fight for, but the place where he had the Eden of childhood and the short heaven of first love? If no temples and no scriptures are sacred, what is sacred if a man’s own youth is not sacred?"

The King walked a little restlessly up and down the daïs.

“It is hard,” he said, biting his lips, “to assent to a view so desperate—so responsible..."

As he spoke, the door of the audience chamber fell ajar, and through the aperture came, like the sudden chatter of a bird, the high, nasal, but well–bred voice of Barker.

“I said to him quite plainly—the public interests—"

Auberon turned on Wayne with violence.

“What the devil is all this? What am I saying? What are you saying? Have you hypnotised me? Curse your uncanny blue eyes! Let me go. Give me back my sense of humour. Give it me back—give it me back, I say!”

“I solemnly assure you,” said Wayne, uneasily, with a gesture, as if feeling all over himself, “that I haven’t got it.”

The King fell back in his chair, and went into a roar of Rabelaisian laughter.

“I don’t think you have,” he cried.
BOOK III
CHAPTER I

THE MENTAL CONDITION OF ADAM WAYNE

A little while after the King’s accession a small book of poems appeared, called “Hymns on the Hill.” They were not good poems, nor was the book successful, but it attracted a certain amount of attention from one particular school of critics. The King himself, who was a member of the school, reviewed it in his capacity of literary critic to “Straight from the Stables,” a sporting journal. They were known as the Hammock School, because it had been calculated malignantly by an enemy that no less than thirteen of their delicate criticisms had begun with the words, “I read this book in a hammock: half asleep in the sleepy sunlight, I . . .”; after that there were important differences. Under these conditions they liked everything, but especially everything silly. “Next to authentic goodness in a book,” they said—“next to authentic goodness in a book (and that, alas! we never find) we desire a rich badness.” Thus it happened that their praise (as indicating the presence of a rich badness) was not universally sought after, and authors became a little disquieted when they found the eye of the Hammock School fixed upon them with peculiar favour.

The peculiarity of “Hymns on the Hill” was the celebration of the poetry of London as distinct from the poetry of the country. This sentiment or affectation was, of course, not uncommon in the twentieth century, nor was it, although sometimes exaggerated, and sometimes artificial, by any means without a great truth at its root, for there is one respect in which a town must be more poetical than the country, since it is closer to the spirit of man; for London, if it be not one of the masterpieces of man, is at least one of his sins. A street is really more poetical than a meadow, because a street has a secret. A street is going somewhere, and a meadow nowhere. But, in the case of the book called “Hymns on the Hill,” there was another peculiarity, which the King pointed out with great acumen in his review. He was naturally interested in the matter, for he had himself published a volume of lyrics about London under his pseudonym of “Daisy Daydream.”

This difference, as the King pointed out, consisted in the fact that, while mere artificers like “Daisy Daydream” (on whose elaborate style the King, over his signature of “Thunderbolt,” was perhaps somewhat too severe) thought to praise London by comparing it to the country—using nature, that is, as a background
from which all poetical images had to be drawn—the more robust author of “Hymns on the Hill” praised the country, or nature, by comparing it to the town, and used the town itself as a background. “Take,” said the critic, “the typically feminine lines, ‘To the Inventor of The Hansom Cab’—

‘Poet, whose cunning carved this amorous shell,
Where twain may dwell.’”

“Surely,” wrote the King, “no one but a woman could have written those lines. A woman has always a weakness for nature; with her art is only beautiful as an echo or shadow of it. She is praising the hansom cab by theme and theory, but her soul is still a child by the sea, picking up shells. She can never be utterly of the town, as a man can; indeed, do we not speak (with sacred propriety) of ‘a man about town’? Who ever spoke of a woman about town? However much, physically, ‘about town’ a woman may be, she still models herself on nature; she tries to carry nature with her; she bids grasses to grow on her head, and furry beasts to bite her about the throat. In the heart of a dim city, she models her hat on a flaring cottage garden of flowers. We, with our nobler civic sentiment, model ours on a chimney pot; the ensign of civilisation. And rather than be without birds, she will commit massacre, that she may turn her head into a tree, with dead birds to sing on it.”

This kind of thing went on for several pages, and then the critic remembered his subject, and returned to it.

“Poet, whose cunning carved this amorous shell,
Where twain may dwell.”

“The peculiarity of these fine though feminine lines,” continued “Thunderbolt,” “is, as we have said, that they praise the hansom cab by comparing it to the shell, to a natural thing. Now, hear the author of ‘Hymns on the Hill,’ and how he deals with the same subject. In his fine nocturne, entitled ‘The Last Omnibus’ he relieves the rich and poignant melancholy of the theme by a sudden sense of rushing at the end—

‘The wind round the old street corner
Swung sudden and quick as a cab.’

‘Here the distinction is obvious. ‘Daisy Daydream’ thinks it a great compliment to a hansom cab to be compared to one of the spiral chambers of the sea. And the author of ‘Hymns on the Hill’ thinks it a great compliment to the immortal whirlwind to be compared to a hackney coach. He surely is the real admirer of London. We have no space to speak of all his perfect applications of the idea; of the poem in which, for instance, a lady’s eyes are compared, not to
stars, but to two perfect street–lamps guiding the wanderer. We have no space to speak of the fine lyric, recalling the Elizabethan spirit, in which the poet, instead of saying that the rose and the lily contend in her complexion, says, with a purer modernism, that the red omnibus of Hammersmith and the white omnibus of Fulham fight there for the mastery. How perfect the image of two contending omnibuses!”

Here, somewhat abruptly, the review concluded, probably because the King had to send off his copy at that moment, as he was in some want of money. But the King was a very good critic, whatever he may have been as King, and he had, to a considerable extent, hit the right nail on the head. “Hymns on the Hill” was not at all like the poems originally published in praise of the poetry of London. And the reason was that it was really written by a man who had seen nothing else but London, and who regarded it, therefore, as the universe. It was written by a raw, red–headed lad of seventeen, named Adam Wayne, who had been born in Notting Hill. An accident in his seventh year prevented his being taken away to the seaside, and thus his whole life had been passed in his own Pump Street, and in its neighbourhood. And the consequence was, that he saw the street–lamps as things quite as eternal as the stars; the two fires were mingled. He saw the houses as things enduring, like the mountains, and so he wrote about them as one would write about mountains. Nature puts on a disguise when she speaks to every man; to this man she put on the disguise of Notting Hill. Nature would mean to a poet born in the Cumberland hills, a stormy skyline and sudden rocks. Nature would mean to a poet born in the Essex flats, a waste of splendid waters and splendid sunsets. So nature meant to this man Wayne a line of violet roofs and lemon lamps, the chiaroscuro of the town. He did not think it clever or funny to praise the shadows and colours of the town; he had seen no other shadows or colours, and so he praised them—because they were shadows and colours. He saw all this because he was a poet, though in practice a bad poet. It is too often forgotten that just as a bad man is nevertheless a man, so a bad poet is nevertheless a poet.

Mr. Wayne’s little volume of verse was a complete failure; and he submitted to the decision of fate with a quite rational humility, went back to his work, which was that of a draper’s assistant, and wrote no more. He still retained his feeling about the town of Notting Hill, because he could not possibly have any other feeling, because it was the back and base of his brain. But he does not seem to have made any particular attempt to express it or insist upon it.

He was a genuine natural mystic, one of those who live on the border of
fairyland. But he was perhaps the first to realise how often the boundary of fairyland runs through a crowded city. Twenty feet from him (for he was very short-sighted) the red and white and yellow suns of the gas–lights thronged and melted into each other like an orchard of fiery trees, the beginning of the woods of elf–land.

But, oddly enough, it was because he was a small poet that he came to his strange and isolated triumph. It was because he was a failure in literature that he became a portent in English history. He was one of those to whom nature has given the desire without the power of artistic expression. He had been a dumb poet from his cradle. He might have been so to his grave, and carried unuttered into the darkness a treasure of new and sensational song. But he was born under the lucky star of a single coincidence. He happened to be at the head of his dingy municipality at the time of the King’s jest, at the time when all municipalities were suddenly commanded to break out into banners and flowers. Out of the long procession of the silent poets, who have been passing since the beginning of the world, this one man found himself in the midst of an heraldic vision, in which he could act and speak and live lyrically. While the author and the victims alike treated the whole matter as a silly public charade, this one man, by taking it seriously, sprang suddenly into a throne of artistic omnipotence. Armour, music, standards, watch–fires, the noise of drums, all the theatrical properties were thrown before him. This one poor rhymster, having burnt his own rhymes, began to live that life of open air and acted poetry of which all the poets of the earth have dreamed in vain; the life for which the Iliad is only a cheap substitute.

Upwards from his abstracted childhood, Adam Wayne had grown strongly and silently in a certain quality or capacity which is in modern cities almost entirely artificial, but which can be natural, and was primarily almost brutally natural in him, the quality or capacity of patriotism. It exists, like other virtues and vices, in a certain undiluted reality. It is not confused with all kinds of other things. A child speaking of his country or his village may make every mistake in Mandeville or tell every lie in Munchausen, but in his statement there will be no psychological lies any more than there can be in a good song. Adam Wayne, as a boy, had for his dull streets in Notting Hill the ultimate and ancient sentiment that went out to Athens or Jerusalem. He knew the secret of the passion, those secrets which make real old national songs sound so strange to our civilisation. He knew that real patriotism tends to sing about sorrows and forlorn hopes much more than about victory. He knew that in proper names themselves is half the poetry of all national poems. Above all, he knew the supreme psychological fact
about patriotism, as certain in connection with it as that a fine shame comes to all lovers, the fact that the patriot never under any circumstances boasts of the largeness of his country, but always, and of necessity, boasts of the smallness of it.

All this he knew, not because he was a philosopher or a genius, but because he was a child. Any one who cares to walk up a side slum like Pump Street, can see a little Adam claiming to be king of a paving–stone. And he will always be proudest if the stone is almost too narrow for him to keep his feet inside it.

It was while he was in such a dream of defensive battle, marking out some strip of street or fortress of steps as the limit of his haughty claim, that the King had met him, and, with a few words flung in mockery, ratified for ever the strange boundaries of his soul. Thenceforward the fanciful idea of the defence of Notting Hill in war became to him a thing as solid as eating or drinking or lighting a pipe. He disposed his meals for it, altered his plans for it, lay awake in the night and went over it again. Two or three shops were to him an arsenal; an area was to him a moat; corners of balconies and turns of stone steps were points for the location of a culverin or an archer. It is almost impossible to convey to any ordinary imagination the degree to which he had transmitted the leaden London landscape to a romantic gold. The process began almost in babyhood, and became habitual like a literal madness. It was felt most keenly at night, when London is really herself, when her lights shine in the dark like the eyes of innumerable cats, and the outline of the dark houses has the bold simplicity of blue hills. But for him the night revealed instead of concealing, and he read all the blank hours of morning and afternoon, by a contradictory phrase, in the light of that darkness. To this man, at any rate, the inconceivable had happened. The artificial city had become to him nature, and he felt the curbstones and gas–lamps as things as ancient as the sky.

One instance may suffice. Walking along Pump Street with a friend, he said, as he gazed dreamily at the iron fence of a little front garden, “How those railings stir one’s blood!”

His friend, who was also a great intellectual admirer, looked at them painfully, but without any particular emotion. He was so troubled about it that he went back quite a large number of times on quiet evenings and stared at the railings, waiting for something to happen to his blood, but without success. At last he took refuge in asking Wayne himself. He discovered that the ecstasy lay in the one point he had never noticed about the railings even after his six visits—the fact that they were, like the great majority of others—in London, shaped at the
top after the manner of a spear. As a child, Wayne had half unconsciously compared them with the spears in pictures of Lancelot and St. George, and had grown up under the shadow of the graphic association. Now, whenever he looked at them, they were simply the serried weapons that made a hedge of steel round the sacred homes of Notting Hill. He could not have cleansed his mind of that meaning even if he tried. It was not a fanciful comparison, or anything like it. It would not have been true to say that the familiar railings reminded him of spears; it would have been far truer to say that the familiar spears occasionally reminded him of railings.

A couple of days after his interview with the King, Adam Wayne was pacing like a caged lion in front of five shops that occupied the upper end of the disputed street. They were a grocer’s, a chemist’s, a barber’s, an old curiosity shop and a toy–shop that sold also newspapers. It was these five shops which his childish fastidiousness had first selected as the essentials of the Notting Hill campaign, the citadel of the city. If Notting Hill was the heart of the universe, and Pump Street was the heart of Notting Hill, this was the heart of Pump Street. The fact that they were all small and side by side realised that feeling for a formidable comfort and compactness which, as we have said, was the heart of his patriotism, and of all patriotism. The grocer (who had a wine and spirit licence) was included because he could provision the garrison; the old curiosity shop because it contained enough swords, pistols, partisans, cross–bows, and blunderbusses to arm a whole irregular regiment; the toy and paper shop because Wayne thought a free press an essential centre for the soul of Pump Street; the chemist’s to cope with outbreaks of disease among the besieged; and the barber’s because it was in the middle of all the rest, and the barber’s son was an intimate friend and spiritual affinity.

It was a cloudless October evening settling down through purple into pure silver around the roofs and chimneys of the steep little street, which looked black and sharp and dramatic. In the deep shadows the gas–lit shop fronts gleamed like five fires in a row, and before them, darkly outlined like a ghost against some purgatorial furnaces, passed to and fro the tall bird–like figure and eagle nose of Adam Wayne.

He swung his stick restlessly, and seemed fitfully talking to himself.

“There are, after all, enigmas,” he said “even to the man who has faith. There are doubts that remain even after the true philosophy is completed in every rung and rivet. And here is one of them. Is the normal human need, the normal human condition, higher or lower than those special states of the soul which call out a
doubtful and dangerous glory? those special powers of knowledge or sacrifice which are made possible only by the existence of evil? Which should come first to our affections, the enduring sanities of peace or the half–maniacal virtues of battle? Which should come first, the man great in the daily round or the man great in emergency? Which should come first, to return to the enigma before me, the grocer or the chemist? Which is more certainly the stay of the city, the swift chivalrous chemist or the benignant all–providing grocer? In such ultimate spiritual doubts it is only possible to choose a side by the higher instincts, and to abide the issue. In any case, I have made my choice. May I be pardoned if I choose wrongly, but I choose the grocer.”

“Good morning, sir,” said the grocer, who was a middle–aged man, partially bald, with harsh red whiskers and beard, and forehead lined with all the cares of the small tradesman. “What can I do for you, sir?”

Wayne removed his hat on entering the shop, with a ceremonious gesture, which, slight as it was, made the tradesman eye him with the beginnings of wonder.

“I come, sir,” he said soberly, “to appeal to your patriotism.”

“Why, sir,” said the grocer, “that sounds like the times when I was a boy and we used to have elections.”

“You will have them again,” said Wayne, firmly, “and far greater things. Listen, Mr. Mead. I know the temptations which a grocer has to a too cosmopolitan philosophy. I can imagine what it must be to sit all day as you do surrounded with wares from all the ends of the earth, from strange seas that we have never sailed and strange forests that we could not even picture. No Eastern king ever had such argosies or such cargoes coming from the sunrise and the sunset, and Solomon in all his glory was not enriched like one of you. India is at your elbow,” he cried, lifting his voice and pointing his stick at a drawer of rice, the grocer making a movement of some alarm, “China is before you, Demerara is behind you, America is above your head, and at this very moment, like some old Spanish admiral, you hold Tunis in your hands.”

Mr. Mead dropped the box of dates which he was just lifting, and then picked it up again vaguely.

Wayne went on with a heightened colour, but a lowered voice,

“I know, I say, the temptations of so international, so universal a vision of wealth. I know that it must be your danger not to fall like many tradesmen into too dusty and mechanical a narrowness, but rather to be too broad, to be too general, too liberal. If a narrow nationalism be the danger of the pastry–cook,
who makes his own wares under his own heavens, no less is cosmopolitanism
the danger of the grocer. But I come to you in the name of that patriotism which
no wanderings or enlightenments should ever wholly extinguish, and I ask you
to remember Notting Hill. For, after all, in this cosmopolitan magnificence, she
has played no small part. Your dates may come from the tall palms of Barbary,
your sugar from the strange islands of the tropics, your tea from the secret
villages of the Empire of the Dragon. That this room might be furnished, forests
may have been spoiled under the Southern Cross, and leviathans speared under
the Polar Star. But you yourself—surely no inconsiderable treasure—you
yourself, the brain that wields these vast interests—you yourself, at least, have
grown to strength and wisdom between these grey houses and under this rainy
sky. This city which made you, and thus made your fortunes, is threatened with
war. Come forth and tell to the ends of the earth this lesson. Oil is from the
North and fruits from the South; rices are from India and spices from Ceylon;
sheep are from New Zealand and men from Notting Hill.”

The grocer sat for some little while, with dim eyes and his mouth open,
looking rather like a fish. Then he scratched the back of his head, and said
nothing. Then he said—

“Anything out of the shop, sir?”

Wayne looked round in a dazed way. Seeing a pile of tins of pine–apple
chunks, he waved his stick generally towards them.

“Yes,” he said; “I’ll take those.”

“All those, sir?” said the grocer, with greatly increased interest.

“Yes, yes; all those,” replied Wayne, still a little bewildered, like a man
splashed with cold water.

“Very good, sir; thank you, sir,” said the grocer with animation. “You may
count upon my patriotism, sir.”

“I count upon it already,” said Wayne, and passed out into the gathering night.
The grocer put the box of dates back in its place.

“What a nice fellow he is!” he said. “It’s odd how often they are nice. Much
ger than those as are all right.”

Meanwhile Adam Wayne stood outside the glowing chemist’s shop,
unmistakably wavering.

“What a weakness it is!” he muttered. “I have never got rid of it from
childhood—the fear of this magic shop. The grocer is rich, he is romantic, he is
poetical in the truest sense, but he is not—no, he is not supernatural. But the
chemist! All the other shops stand in Notting Hill, but this stands in Elf–land.
Look at those great burning bowls of colour. It must be from them that God paints the sunsets. It is superhuman, and the superhuman is all the more uncanny when it is beneficent. That is the root of the fear of God. I am afraid. But I must be a man and enter.”

He was a man, and entered. A short, dark young man was behind the counter with spectacles, and greeted him with a bright but entirely business–like smile.

“A fine evening, sir,” he said.

“Fine indeed, strange Father,” said Adam, stretching his hands somewhat forward. “It is on such clear and mellow nights that your shop is most itself. Then they appear most perfect, those moons of green and gold and crimson, which from afar oft guide the pilgrim of pain and sickness to this house of merciful witchcraft.”

“Can I get you anything?” asked the chemist.

“Let me see,” said Wayne, in a friendly but vague manner. “Let me have some sal volatile.”

“Eightpence, tenpence, or one and sixpence a bottle?” said the young man, genially.

“One and six—one and six,” replied Wayne, with a wild submissiveness. “I come to ask you, Mr. Bowles, a terrible question.”

He paused and collected himself.

“It is necessary,” he muttered—“it is necessary to be tactful, and to suit the appeal to each profession in turn.”

“I come,” he resumed aloud, “to ask you a question which goes to the roots of your miraculous toils. Mr. Bowles, shall all this witchery cease?” And he waved his stick around the shop.

Meeting with no answer, he continued with animation—

“In Notting Hill we have felt to its core the elfish mystery of your profession. And now Notting Hill itself is threatened.”

“Anything more, sir?” asked the chemist.

“Oh,” said Wayne, somewhat disturbed—“oh, what is it chemists sell? Quinine, I think. Thank you. Shall it be destroyed? I have met these men of Bayswater and North Kensington—Mr. Bowles, they are materialists. They see no witchery in your work, even when it is wrought within their own borders. They think the chemist is commonplace. They think him human.”

The chemist appeared to pause, only a moment, to take in the insult, and immediately said—

“And the next article, please?”
“Alum,” said the Provost, wildly. “I resume. It is in this sacred town alone that your priesthood is reverenced. Therefore, when you fight for us you fight not only for yourself, but for everything you typify. You fight not only for Notting Hill, but for Fairyland, for as surely as Buck and Barker and such men hold sway, the sense of Fairyland in some strange manner diminishes.”

“Anything more, sir?” asked Mr. Bowles, with unbroken cheerfulness.

“Oh yes, jujubes—Gregory powder—magnesia. The danger is imminent. In all this matter I have felt that I fought not merely for my own city (though to that I owe all my blood), but for all places in which these great ideas could prevail. I am fighting not merely for Notting Hill, but for Bayswater itself; for North Kensington itself. For if the gold–hunters prevail, these also will lose all their ancient sentiments and all the mystery of their national soul. I know I can count upon you.”

“Oh yes, sir,” said the chemist, with great animation; “we are always glad to oblige a good customer.”

Adam Wayne went out of the shop with a deep sense of fulfilment of soul.

“It is so fortunate,” he said, “to have tact, to be able to play upon the peculiar talents and specialities, the cosmopolitanism of the grocer and the world–old necromancy of the chemist. Where should I be without tact?”
CHAPTER II

THE REMARKABLE MR. TURNBULL

After two more interviews with shopmen, however, the patriot’s confidence in his own psychological diplomacy began vaguely to wane. Despite the care with which he considered the peculiar rationale and the peculiar glory of each separate shop, there seemed to be something unresponsive about the shopmen. Whether it was a dark resentment against the uninitiate for peeping into their masonic magnificence, he could not quite conjecture.

His conversation with the man who kept the shop of curiosities had begun encouragingly. The man who kept the shop of curiosities had, indeed, enchanted him with a phrase. He was standing drearily at the door of his shop, a wrinkled man with a grey pointed beard, evidently a gentleman who had come down in the world.

“And how does your commerce go, you strange guardian of the past?” said Wayne, affably.

“Well, sir, not very well,” replied the man, with that patient voice of his class which is one of the most heart–breaking things in the world. “Things are terribly quiet.”

Wayne’s eyes shone suddenly.

“A great saying,” he said, “worthy of a man whose merchandise is human history. Terribly quiet; that is in two words the spirit of this age, as I have felt it from my cradle. I sometimes wondered how many other people felt the oppression of this union between quietude and terror. I see blank well–ordered streets and men in black moving about inoffensively, sullenly. It goes on day after day, day after day, and nothing happens; but to me it is like a dream from which I might wake screaming. To me the straightness of our life is the straightness of a thin cord stretched tight. Its stillness is terrible. It might snap with a noise like thunder. And you who sit, amid the débris of the great wars, you who sit, as it were, upon a battlefield, you know that war was less terrible than this evil peace; you know that the idle lads who carried those swords under Francis or Elizabeth, the rude Squire or Baron who swung that mace about in Picardy or Northumberland battles, may have been terribly noisy, but were not like us, terribly quiet.”

Whether it was a faint embarrassment of conscience as to the original source
and date of the weapons referred to, or merely an engrained depression, the guardian of the past looked, if anything, a little more worried.

“But I do not think,” continued Wayne, “that this horrible silence of modernity will last, though I think for the present it will increase. What a farce is this modern liberality! Freedom of speech means practically, in our modern civilisation, that we must only talk about unimportant things. We must not talk about religion, for that is illiberal; we must not talk about bread and cheese, for that is talking shop; we must not talk about death, for that is depressing; we must not talk about birth, for that is indecent. It cannot last. Something must break this strange indifference, this strange dreamy egoism, this strange loneliness of millions in a crowd. Something must break it. Why should it not be you and I? Can you do nothing else but guard relics?”

The shopman wore a gradually clearing expression, which would have led those unsympathetic with the cause of the Red Lion to think that the last sentence was the only one to which he had attached any meaning.

“I am rather old to go into a new business,” he said, “and I don’t quite know what to be, either.”

“Why not,” said Wayne, gently having reached the crisis of his delicate persuasion—“why not be a colonel?”

It was at this point, in all probability, that the interview began to yield more disappointing results. The man appeared inclined at first to regard the suggestion of becoming a colonel as outside the sphere of immediate and relevant discussion. A long exposition of the inevitable war of independence, coupled with the purchase of a doubtful sixteenth-century sword for an exaggerated price, seemed to resettle matters. Wayne left the shop, however, somewhat infected with the melancholy of its owner.

That melancholy was completed at the barber’s.

“Shaving, sir?” inquired that artist from inside his shop.

“War!” replied Wayne, standing on the threshold.

“I beg your pardon,” said the other, sharply.

“War!” said Wayne, warmly. “But not for anything inconsistent with the beautiful and the civilised arts. War for beauty. War for society. War for peace. A great chance is offered you of repelling that slander which, in defiance of the lives of so many artists, attributes poltroonery to those who beautify and polish the surface of our lives. Why should not hairdressers be heroes? Why should not—”

“Now, you get out,” said the barber, irascibly. “We don’t want any of your
sort here. You get out.”

And he came forward with the desperate annoyance of a mild person when enraged.

Adam Wayne laid his hand for a moment on the sword, then dropped it.

“Notting Hill,” he said, “will need her bolder sons;” and he turned gloomily to the toy-shop.

It was one of those queer little shops so constantly seen in the side streets of London, which must be called toy-shops only because toys upon the whole predominate; for the remainder of goods seem to consist of almost everything else in the world—tobacco, exercise-books, sweet-stuff, novelettes, halfpenny paper clips, halfpenny pencil sharpeners, bootlaces, and cheap fireworks. It also sold newspapers, and a row of dirty-looking posters hung along the front of it.

“I am afraid,” said Wayne, as he entered, “that I am not getting on with these tradesmen as I should. Is it that I have neglected to rise to the full meaning of their work? Is there some secret buried in each of these shops which no mere poet can discover?”

He stepped to the counter with a depression which he rapidly conquered as he addressed the man on the other side of it,—a man of short stature, and hair prematurely white, and the look of a large baby.

“Sir,” said Wayne, “I am going from house to house in this street of ours, seeking to stir up some sense of the danger which now threatens our city. Nowhere have I felt my duty so difficult as here. For the toy-shop keeper has to do with all that remains to us of Eden before the first wars began. You sit here meditating continually upon the wants of that wonderful time when every staircase leads to the stars, and every garden-path to the other end of nowhere. Is it thoughtlessly, do you think, that I strike the dark old drum of peril in the paradise of children? But consider a moment; do not condemn me hastily. Even that paradise itself contains the rumour or beginning of that danger, just as the Eden that was made for perfection contained the terrible tree. For judge childhood, even by your own arsenal of its pleasures. You keep bricks; you make yourself thus, doubtless, the witness of the constructive instinct older than the destructive. You keep dolls; you make yourself the priest of that divine idolatry. You keep Noah’s Arks; you perpetuate the memory of the salvation of all life as a precious, an irreplaceable thing. But do you keep only, sir, the symbols of this prehistoric sanity, this childish rationality of the earth? Do you not keep more terrible things? What are those boxes, seemingly of lead soldiers, that I see in that glass case? Are they not witnesses to that terror and beauty, that
desire for a lovely death, which could not be excluded even from the immortality of Eden? Do not despise the lead soldiers, Mr. Turnbull."

“I don’t,” said Mr. Turnbull, of the toy–shop, shortly, but with great emphasis. "I am glad to hear it," replied Wayne. “I confess that I feared for my military schemes the awful innocence of your profession. How, I thought to myself, will this man, used only to the wooden swords that give pleasure, think of the steel swords that give pain? But I am at least partly reassured. Your tone suggests to me that I have at least the entry of a gate of your fairyland—the gate through which the soldiers enter, for it cannot be denied—I ought, sir, no longer to deny, that it is of soldiers that I come to speak. Let your gentle employment make you merciful towards the troubles of the world. Let your own silvery experience tone down our sanguine sorrows. For there is war in Notting Hill.”

The little toy–shop keeper sprang up suddenly, slapping his fat hands like two fans on the counter.

“War?” he cried. “Not really, sir? Is it true? Oh, what a joke! Oh, what a sight for sore eyes!”

Wayne was almost taken aback by this outburst.

“I am delighted,” he stammered. “I had no notion—”

He sprang out of the way just in time to avoid Mr. Turnbull, who took a flying leap over the counter and dashed to the front of the shop.

“You look here, sir,” he said; “you just look here.”

He came back with two of the torn posters in his hand which were flapping outside his shop.

“Look at those, sir,” he said, and flung them down on the counter.

Wayne bent over them, and read on one—

“LAST FIGHTING.
REDUCTION OF THE CENTRAL DERVISH CITY.
REMARKABLE, ETC.”

On the other he read—

“LAST SMALL REPUBLIC ANNEXED.
NICARAGUAN CAPITAL SURRENDERS AFTER A MONTH’S FIGHTING.
GREAT SLAUGHTER.”

Wayne bent over them again, evidently puzzled; then he looked at the dates. They were both dated in August fifteen years before.

“Why do you keep these old things?” he said, startled entirely out of his absurd tact of mysticism. “Why do you hang them outside your shop?”
“Because,” said the other, simply, “they are the records of the last war. You mentioned war just now. It happens to be my hobby.”

Wayne lifted his large blue eyes with an infantile wonder.

“Come with me,” said Turnbull, shortly, and led him into a parlour at the back of the shop.

In the centre of the parlour stood a large deal table. On it were set rows and rows of the tin and lead soldiers which were part of the shopkeeper’s stock. The visitor would have thought nothing of it if it had not been for a certain odd grouping of them, which did not seem either entirely commercial or entirely haphazard.

“You are acquainted, no doubt,” said Turnbull, turning his big eyes upon Wayne—“you are acquainted, no doubt, with the arrangement of the American and Nicaraguan troops in the last battle;” and he waved his hand towards the table.

“I am afraid not,” said Wayne. “I—”

“Ah! you were at that time occupied too much, perhaps, with the Dervish affair. You will find it in this corner.” And he pointed to a part of the floor where there was another arrangement of children’s soldiers grouped here and there.

“You seem,” said Wayne, “to be interested in military matters.”

“I am interested in nothing else,” answered the toy-shop keeper, simply.

Wayne appeared convulsed with a singular, suppressed excitement.

“In that case,” he said, “I may approach you with an unusual degree of confidence. Touching the matter of the defence of Notting Hill, I—”

“Defence of Notting Hill? Yes, sir. This way, sir,” said Turnbull, with great perturbation. “Just step into this side room;” and he led Wayne into another apartment, in which the table was entirely covered with an arrangement of children’s bricks. A second glance at it told Wayne that the bricks were arranged in the form of a precise and perfect plan of Notting Hill. “Sir,” said Turnbull, impressively, “you have, by a kind of accident, hit upon the whole secret of my life. As a boy, I grew up among the last wars of the world, when Nicaragua was taken and the dervishes wiped out. And I adopted it as a hobby, sir, as you might adopt astronomy or bird-stuffing. I had no ill-will to any one, but I was interested in war as a science, as a game. And suddenly I was bowled out. The big Powers of the world, having swallowed up all the small ones, came to that confounded agreement, and there was no more war. There was nothing more for me to do but to do what I do now—to read the old campaigns in dirty old newspapers, and to work them out with tin soldiers. One other thing had
occurred to me. I thought it an amusing fancy to make a plan of how this district or ours ought to be defended if it were ever attacked. It seems to interest you too.”

“If it were ever attacked,” repeated Wayne, awed into an almost mechanical enunciation. “Mr. Turnbull, it is attacked. Thank Heaven, I am bringing to at least one human being the news that is at bottom the only good news to any son of Adam. Your life has not been useless. Your work has not been play. Now, when the hair is already grey on your head, Turnbull, you shall have your youth. God has not destroyed, He has only deferred it. Let us sit down here, and you shall explain to me this military map of Notting Hill. For you and I have to defend Notting Hill together.”

Mr. Turnbull looked at the other for a moment, then hesitated, and then sat down beside the bricks and the stranger. He did not rise again for seven hours, when the dawn broke.

The headquarters of Provost Adam Wayne and his Commander–in–Chief consisted of a small and somewhat unsuccessful milk–shop at the corner of Pump Street. The blank white morning had only just begun to break over the blank London buildings when Wayne and Turnbull were to be found seated in the cheerless and unswept shop. Wayne had something feminine in his character; he belonged to that class of persons who forget their meals when anything interesting is in hand. He had had nothing for sixteen hours but hurried glasses of milk, and, with a glass standing empty beside him, he was writing and sketching and dotting and crossing out with inconceivable rapidity with a pencil and a piece of paper. Turnbull was of that more masculine type in which a sense of responsibility increases the appetite, and with his sketch–map beside him he was dealing strenuously with a pile of sandwiches in a paper packet, and a tankard of ale from the tavern opposite, whose shutters had just been taken down. Neither of them spoke, and there was no sound in the living stillness except the scratching of Wayne’s pencil and the squealing of an aimless–looking cat. At length Wayne broke the silence by saying—

“Seventeen pounds eight shillings and ninepence.”

Turnbull nodded and put his head in the tankard.

“That,” said Wayne, “is not counting the five pounds you took yesterday. What did you do with it?”

“Ah, that is rather interesting!” replied Turnbull, with his mouth full. “I used that five pounds in a kindly and philanthropic act.”

Wayne was gazing with mystification in his queer and innocent eyes.
“I used that five pounds,” continued the other, “in giving no less than forty little London boys rides in hansom cabs.”

“Are you insane?” asked the Provost.

“It is only my light touch,” returned Turnbull. “These hansom–cab rides will raise the tone—raise the tone, my dear fellow—of our London youths, widen their horizon, brace their nervous system, make them acquainted with the various public monuments of our great city. Education, Wayne, education. How many excellent thinkers have pointed out that political reform is useless until we produce a cultured populace. So that twenty years hence, when these boys are grown up—”

“Mad!” said Wayne, laying down his pencil; “and five pounds gone!”

“You are in error,” explained Turnbull. “You grave creatures can never be brought to understand how much quicker work really goes with the assistance of nonsense and good meals. Stripped of its decorative beauties, my statement was strictly accurate. Last night I gave forty half–crowns to forty little boys, and sent them all over London to take hansom cabs. I told them in every case to tell the cabman to bring them to this spot. In half an hour from now the declaration of war will be posted up. At the same time the cabs will have begun to come in, you will have ordered out the guard, the little boys will drive up in state, we shall commandeer the horses for cavalry, use the cabs for barricade, and give the men the choice between serving in our ranks and detention in our basements and cellars. The little boys we can use as scouts. The main thing is that we start the war with an advantage unknown in all the other armies—horses. And now,” he said, finishing his beer, “I will go and drill the troops.”

And he walked out of the milk–shop, leaving the Provost staring.

A minute or two afterwards, the Provost laughed. He only laughed once or twice in his life, and then he did it in a queer way as if it were an art he had not mastered. Even he saw something funny in the preposterous coup of the half–crowns and the little boys. He did not see the monstrous absurdity of the whole policy and the whole war. He enjoyed it seriously as a crusade, that is, he enjoyed it far more than any joke can be enjoyed. Turnbull enjoyed it partly as a joke, even more perhaps as a reversion from the things he hated—modernity and monotony and civilisation. To break up the vast machinery of modern life and use the fragments as engines of war, to make the barricade of omnibuses and points of vantage of chimney–pots, was to him a game worth infinite risk and trouble. He had that rational and deliberate preference which will always to the end trouble the peace of the world, the rational and deliberate preference for a
short life and a merry one.
CHAPTER III

THE EXPERIMENT OF MR. BUCK

An earnest and eloquent petition was sent up to the King signed with the names of Wilson, Barker, Buck, Swindon, and others. It urged that at the forthcoming conference to be held in his Majesty’s presence touching the final disposition of the property in Pump Street, it might be held not inconsistent with political decorum and with the unutterable respect they entertained for his Majesty if they appeared in ordinary morning dress, without the costume decreed for them as Provosts. So it happened that the company appeared at that council in frock–coats and that the King himself limited his love of ceremony to appearing (after his not unusual manner), in evening dress with one order—in this case not the Garter, but the button of the Club of Old Clipper’s Best Pals, a decoration obtained (with difficulty) from a halfpenny boy’s paper. Thus also it happened that the only spot of colour in the room was Adam Wayne, who entered in great dignity with the great red robes and the great sword.

“We have met,” said Auberon, “to decide the most arduous of modern problems. May we be successful.” And he sat down gravely.

Buck turned his chair a little, and flung one leg over the other.

“Our Majesty,” he said, quite good–humouredly, “there is only one thing I can’t understand, and that is why this affair is not settled in five minutes. Here’s a small property which is worth a thousand to us and is not worth a hundred to any one else. We offer the thousand. It’s not business–like, I know, for we ought to get it for less, and it’s not reasonable and it’s not fair on us, but I’m damned if I can see why it’s difficult.”

“The difficulty may be very simply stated,” said Wayne. “You may offer a million and it will be very difficult for you to get Pump Street.”

“But look here, Mr. Wayne,” cried Barker, striking in with a kind of cold excitement. “Just look here. You’ve no right to take up a position like that. You’ve a right to stand out for a bigger price, but you aren’t doing that. You’re refusing what you and every sane man knows to be a splendid offer simply from malice or spite—it must be malice or spite. And that kind of thing is really criminal; it’s against the public good. The King’s Government would be justified in forcing you.”

With his lean fingers spread on the table, he stared anxiously at Wayne’s face,
which did not move.

“In forcing you . . . it would,” he repeated.

“It shall,” said Buck, shortly, turning to the table with a jerk. “We have done our best to be decent.”

Wayne lifted his large eyes slowly.

“Was it my Lord Buck,” he inquired, “who said that the King of England ‘shall’ do something?”

Buck flushed and said testily—

“I mean it must—it ought to. As I say, we’ve done our best to be generous; I defy any one to deny it. As it is, Mr. Wayne, I don’t want to say a word that’s uncivil. I hope it’s not uncivil to say that you can be, and ought to be, in gaol. It is criminal to stop public works for a whim. A man might as well burn ten thousand onions in his front garden or bring up his children to run naked in the street, as do what you say you have a right to do. People have been compelled to sell before now. The King could compel you, and I hope he will.”

“Until he does,” said Wayne, calmly, “the power and government of this great nation is on my side and not yours, and I defy you to defy it.”

“In what sense,” cried Barker, with his feverish eyes and hands, “is the Government on your side?”

With one ringing movement Wayne unrolled a great parchment on the table. It was decorated down the sides with wild water-colour sketches of vestrymen in crowns and wreaths.

“The Charter of the Cities,” he began.

Buck exploded in a brutal oath and laughed.

“That tomfool’s joke. Haven’t we had enough—”

“And there you sit,” cried Wayne, springing erect and with a voice like a trumpet, “with no argument but to insult the King before his face.”

Buck rose also with blazing eyes.

“I am hard to bully,” he began—and the slow tones of the King struck in with incomparable gravity—

“My Lord Buck, I must ask you to remember that your King is present. It is not often that he needs to protect himself among his subjects.”

Barker turned to him with frantic gestures.

“For God’s sake don’t back up the madman now,” he implored. “Have your joke another time. Oh, for Heaven’s sake—”

“My Lord Provost of South Kensington,” said King Auberon, steadily, “I do not follow your remarks, which are uttered with a rapidity unusual at Court. Nor
do your well–meant efforts to convey the rest with your fingers materially assist me. I say that my Lord Provost of North Kensington, to whom I spoke, ought not in the presence of his Sovereign to speak disrespectfully of his Sovereign’s ordinances. Do you disagree?”

Barker turned restlessly in his chair, and Buck cursed without speaking. The King went on in a comfortable voice—

“My Lord Provost of Notting Hill, proceed.”

Wayne turned his blue eyes on the King, and to every one’s surprise there was a look in them not of triumph, but of a certain childish distress.

“I am sorry, your Majesty,” he said; “I fear I was more than equally to blame with the Lord Provost of North Kensington. We were debating somewhat eagerly, and we both rose to our feet. I did so first, I am ashamed to say. The Provost of North Kensington is, therefore, comparatively innocent. I beseech your Majesty to address your rebuke chiefly, at least, to me. Mr. Buck is not innocent, for he did no doubt, in the heat of the moment, speak disrespectfully. But the rest of the discussion he seems to me to have conducted with great good temper.”

Buck looked genuinely pleased, for business men are all simple–minded, and have therefore that degree of communion with fanatics. The King, for some reason, looked, for the first time in his life, ashamed.

“This very kind speech of the Provost of Notting Hill,” began Buck, pleasantly, “seems to me to show that we have at least got on to a friendly footing. Now come, Mr. Wayne. Five hundred pounds have been offered to you for a property you admit not to be worth a hundred. Well, I am a rich man and I won’t be outdone in generosity. Let us say fifteen hundred pounds, and have done with it. And let us shake hands;” and he rose, glowing and laughing.

“Fifteen hundred pounds,” whispered Mr. Wilson of Bayswater; “can we do fifteen hundred pounds?”

“I’ll stand the racket,” said Buck, heartily. “Mr. Wayne is a gentleman and has spoken up for me. So I suppose the negotiations are at an end.”

Wayne bowed.

“They are indeed at an end. I am sorry I cannot sell you the property.”

“What?” cried Mr. Barker, starting to his feet.

“Mr. Buck has spoken correctly,” said the King.

“I have, I have,” cried Buck, springing up also; “I said—”

“Mr. Buck has spoken correctly,” said the King; “the negotiations are at an end.”
All the men at the table rose to their feet; Wayne alone rose without excitement.

“Have I, then,” he said, “your Majesty’s permission to depart? I have given my last answer.”

“You have it,” said Auberon, smiling, but not lifting his eyes from the table. And amid a dead silence the Provost of Notting Hill passed out of the room.

“Well?” said Wilson, turning round to Barker—“well?”

Barker shook his head desperately.

“The man ought to be in an asylum,” he said. “But one thing is clear—we need not bother further about him. The man can be treated as mad.”

“Of course,” said Buck, turning to him with sombre decisiveness. “You’re perfectly right, Barker. He is a good enough fellow, but he can be treated as mad. Let’s put it in simple form. Go and tell any twelve men in any town, go and tell any doctor in any town, that there is a man offered fifteen hundred pounds for a thing he could sell commonly for four hundred, and that when asked for a reason for not accepting it he pleads the inviolate sanctity of Notting Hill and calls it the Holy Mountain. What would they say? What more can we have on our side than the common sense of everybody? On what else do all laws rest? I’ll tell you, Barker, what’s better than any further discussion. Let’s send in workmen on the spot to pull down Pump Street. And if old Wayne says a word, arrest him as a lunatic. That’s all.”

Barker’s eyes kindled.

“I always regarded you, Buck, if you don’t mind my saying so, as a very strong man. I’ll follow you.”

“So, of course, will I,” said Wilson.

Buck rose again impulsively.

“Your Majesty,” he said, glowing with popularity, “I beseech your Majesty to consider favourably the proposal to which we have committed ourselves. Your Majesty’s leniency, our own offers, have fallen in vain on that extraordinary man. He may be right. He may be God. He may be the devil. But we think it, for practical purposes, more probable that he is off his head. Unless that assumption were acted on, all human affairs would go to pieces. We act on it, and we propose to start operations in Notting Hill at once.”

The King leaned back in his chair.

“The Charter of the Cities . . .,” he said with a rich intonation.

But Buck, being finally serious, was also cautious, and did not again make the mistake of disrespect.
“Your Majesty,” he said, bowing, “I am not here to say a word against anything your Majesty has said or done. You are a far better educated man than I, and no doubt there were reasons, upon intellectual grounds, for those proceedings. But may I ask you and appeal to your common good—nature for a sincere answer? When you drew up the Charter of the Cities, did you contemplate the rise of a man like Adam Wayne? Did you expect that the Charter—whether it was an experiment, or a scheme of decoration, or a joke—could ever really come to this—to stopping a vast scheme of ordinary business, to shutting up a road, to spoiling the chances of cabs, omnibuses, railway stations, to disorganising half a city, to risking a kind of civil war? Whatever were your objects, were they that?”

Barker and Wilson looked at him admiringly; the King more admiringly still.

“Provost Buck,” said Auberon, “you speak in public uncommonly well. I give you your point with the magnanimity of an artist. My scheme did not include the appearance of Mr. Wayne. Alas! would that my poetic power had been great enough.”

“I thank your Majesty,” said Buck, courteously, but quickly. “Your Majesty’s statements are always clear and studied; therefore I may draw a deduction. As the scheme, whatever it was, on which you set your heart did not include the appearance of Mr. Wayne, it will survive his removal. Why not let us clear away this particular Pump Street, which does interfere with our plans, and which does not, by your Majesty’s own statement, interfere with yours.”

“Caught out!” said the King, enthusiastically and quite impersonally, as if he were watching a cricket match.

“This man Wayne,” continued Buck, “would be shut up by any doctors in England. But we only ask to have it put before them. Meanwhile no one’s interests, not even in all probability his own, can be really damaged by going on with the improvements in Notting Hill. Not our interests, of course, for it has been the hard and quiet work of ten years. Not the interests of Notting Hill, for nearly all its educated inhabitants desire the change. Not the interests of your Majesty, for you say, with characteristic sense, that you never contemplated the rise of the lunatic at all. Not, as I say, his own interests, for the man has a kind heart and many talents, and a couple of good doctors would probably put him righter than all the free cities and sacred mountains in creation. I therefore assume, if I may use so bold a word, that your Majesty will not offer any obstacle to our proceeding with the improvements.”

And Mr. Buck sat down amid subdued but excited applause among the allies.
“Mr. Buck,” said the King, “I beg your pardon, for a number of beautiful and sacred thoughts, in which you were generally classified as a fool. But there is another thing to be considered. Suppose you send in your workmen, and Mr. Wayne does a thing regrettable indeed, but of which, I am sorry to say, I think him quite capable—knocks their teeth out?”

“I have thought of that, your Majesty,” said Mr. Buck, easily, “and I think it can simply be guarded against. Let us send in a strong guard of, say, a hundred men—a hundred of the North Kensington Halberdiers” (he smiled grimly), “of whom your Majesty is so fond. Or say a hundred and fifty. The whole population of Pump Street, I fancy, is only about a hundred.”

“Still they might stand together and lick you,” said the King, dubiously.

“Then say two hundred,” said Buck, gaily.

“It might happen,” said the King, restlessly, “that one Notting Hiller fought better than two North Kensingtions.”

“It might,” said Buck, coolly; “then say two hundred and fifty.”

The King bit his lip.

“And if they are beaten too?” he said viciously.

“Your Majesty,” said Buck, and leaned back easily in his chair, “suppose they are. If anything be clear, it is clear that all fighting matters are mere matters of arithmetic. Here we have a hundred and fifty, say, of Notting Hill soldiers. Or say two hundred. If one of them can fight two of us—we can send in, not four hundred, but six hundred, and smash him. That is all. It is out of all immediate probability that one of them could fight four of us. So what I say is this. Run no risks. Finish it at once. Send in eight hundred men and smash him—smash him almost without seeing him. And go on with the improvements.”

And Mr. Buck pulled out a bandanna and blew his nose.

“Do you know, Mr. Buck,” said the King, staring gloomily at the table, “the admirable clearness of your reason produces in my mind a sentiment which I trust I shall not offend you by describing as an aspiration to punch your head. You irritate me sublimely. What can it be in me? Is it the relic of a moral sense?”

“But your Majesty,” said Barker, eagerly and suavely, “does not refuse our proposals?”

“My dear Barker, your proposals are as damnable as your manners. I want to have nothing to do with them. Suppose I stopped them altogether. What would happen?”

Barker answered in a very low voice—

“Revolution.”
The King glanced quickly at the men round the table. They were all looking down silently: their brows were red.

He rose with a startling suddenness, and an unusual pallor.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “you have overruled me. Therefore I can speak plainly. I think Adam Wayne, who is as mad as a hatter, worth more than a million of you. But you have the force, and, I admit, the common sense, and he is lost. Take your eight hundred halberdiers and smash him. It would be more sportsmanlike to take two hundred.”

“More sportsmanlike,” said Buck, grimly, “but a great deal less humane. We are not artists, and streets purple with gore do not catch our eye in the right way.”

“It is pitiful,” said Auberon. “With five or six times their number, there will be no fight at all.”

“I hope not,” said Buck, rising and adjusting his gloves. “We desire no fight, your Majesty. We are peaceable business men.”

“Well,” said the King, wearily, “the conference is at an end at last.”

And he went out of the room before any one else could stir.

Forty workmen, a hundred Bayswater Halberdiers, two hundred from South, and three from North Kensington, assembled at the foot of Holland Walk and marched up it, under the general direction of Barker, who looked flushed and happy in full dress. At the end of the procession a small and sulky figure lingered like an urchin. It was the King.

“Barker,” he said at length, appealingly, “you are an old friend of mine—you understand my hobbies as I understand yours. Why can’t you let it alone? I hoped that such fun might come out of this Wayne business. Why can’t you let it alone? It doesn’t really so much matter to you—what’s a road or so? For me it’s the one joke that may save me from pessimism. Take fewer men and give me an hour’s fun. Really and truly, James, if you collected coins or humming-birds, and I could buy one with the price of your road, I would buy it. I collect incidents—those rare, those precious things. Let me have one. Pay a few pounds for it. Give these Notting Hillers a chance. Let them alone.”

“Auberon,” said Barker, kindly, forgetting all royal titles in a rare moment of sincerity, “I do feel what you mean. I have had moments when these hobbies have hit me. I have had moments when I have sympathised with your humours. I have had moments, though you may not easily believe it, when I have sympathised with the madness of Adam Wayne. But the world, Auberon, the real world, is not run on these hobbies. It goes on great brutal wheels of facts—
wheels on which you are the butterfly; and Wayne is the fly on the wheel.”

Auberon’s eyes looked frankly at the other’s.

“Thank you, James; what you say is true. It is only a parenthetical consolation to me to compare the intelligence of flies somewhat favourably with the intelligence of wheels. But it is the nature of flies to die soon, and the nature of wheels to go on for ever. Go on with the wheel. Good–bye, old man.”

And James Barker went on, laughing, with a high colour, slapping his bamboo on his leg.

The King watched the tail of the retreating regiment with a look of genuine depression, which made him seem more like a baby than ever. Then he swung round and struck his hands together.

“In a world without humour,” he said, “the only thing to do is to eat. And how perfect an exception! How can these people strike dignified attitudes, and pretend that things matter, when the total ludicrousness of life is proved by the very method by which it is supported? A man strikes the lyre, and says, ‘Life is real, life is earnest,’ and then goes into a room and stuffs alien substances into a hole in his head. I think Nature was indeed a little broad in her humour in these matters. But we all fall back on the pantomime, as I have in this municipal affair. Nature has her farces, like the act of eating or the shape of the kangaroo, for the more brutal appetite. She keeps her stars and mountains for those who can appreciate something more subtly ridiculous.” He turned to his equerry. “But, as I said ‘eating,’ let us have a picnic like two nice little children. Just run and bring me a table and a dozen courses or so, and plenty of champagne, and under these swinging boughs, Bowler, we will return to Nature.”

It took about an hour to erect in Holland Lane the monarch’s simple repast, during which time he walked up and down and whistled, but still with an unaffected air of gloom. He had really been done out of a pleasure he had promised himself, and had that empty and sickened feeling which a child has when disappointed of a pantomime. When he and the equerry had sat down, however, and consumed a fair amount of dry champagne, his spirits began mildly to revive.

“Things take too long in this world,” he said. “I detest all this Barkerian business about evolution and the gradual modification of things. I wish the world had been made in six days, and knocked to pieces again in six more. And I wish I had done it. The joke’s good enough in a broad way, sun and moon and the image of God, and all that, but they keep it up so damnably long. Did you ever long for a miracle, Bowler?”
“No, sir,” said Bowler, who was an evolutionist, and had been carefully brought up.

“Then I have,” answered the King. “I have walked along a street with the best cigar in the cosmos in my mouth, and more Burgundy inside me than you ever saw in your life, and longed that the lamp-post would turn into an elephant to save me from the hell of blank existence. Take my word for it, my evolutionary Bowler, don’t you believe people when they tell you that people sought for a sign, and believed in miracles because they were ignorant. They did it because they were wise, filthily, vilely wise—too wise to eat or sleep or put on their boots with patience. This seems delightfully like a new theory of the origin of Christianity, which would itself be a thing of no mean absurdity. Take some more wine.”

The wind blew round them as they sat at their little table, with its white cloth and bright wine-cups, and flung the tree-tops of Holland Park against each other, but the sun was in that strong temper which turns green into gold. The King pushed away his plate, lit a cigar slowly, and went on—

“Yesterday I thought that something next door to a really entertaining miracle might happen to me before I went to amuse the worms. To see that red-haired maniac waving a great sword, and making speeches to his incomparable followers, would have been a glimpse of that Land of Youth from which the Fates shut us out. I had planned some quite delightful things. A Congress of Knightsbridge with a treaty, and myself in the chair, and perhaps a Roman triumph, with jolly old Barker led in chains. And now these wretched prigs have gone and stamped out the exquisite Mr. Wayne altogether, and I suppose they will put him in a private asylum somewhere in their damned humane way. Think of the treasures daily poured out to this unappreciative keeper! I wonder whether they would let me be his keeper. But life is a vale. Never forget at any moment of your existence to regard it in the light of a vale. This graceful habit, if not acquired in youth—”

The King stopped, with his cigar lifted, for there had slid into his eyes the startled look of a man listening. He did not move for a few moments; then he turned his head sharply towards the high, thin, and lath-like paling which fenced certain long gardens and similar spaces from the lane. From behind it there was coming a curious scrambling and scraping noise, as of a desperate thing imprisoned in this box of thin wood. The King threw away his cigar, and jumped on to the table. From this position he saw a pair of hands hanging with a hungry clutch on the top of the fence. Then the hands quivered with a convulsive effort,
and a head shot up between them—the head of one of the Bayswater Town Council, his eyes and whiskers wild with fear. He swung himself over, and fell on the other side on his face, and groaned openly and without ceasing. The next moment the thin, taut wood of the fence was struck as by a bullet, so that it reverberated like a drum, and over it came tearing and cursing, with torn clothes and broken nails and bleeding faces, twenty men at one rush. The King sprang five feet clear off the table on to the ground. The moment after the table was flung over, sending bottles and glasses flying, and the débris was literally swept along the ground by that stream of men pouring past, and Bowler was borne along with them, as the King said in his famous newspaper article, “like a captured bride.” The great fence swung and split under the load of climbers that still scaled and cleared it. Tremendous gaps were torn in it by this living artillery; and through them the King could see more and more frantic faces, as in a dream, and more and more men running. They were as miscellaneous as if some one had taken the lid off a human dustbin. Some were untouched, some were slashed and battered and bloody, some were splendidly dressed, some tattered and half naked, some were in the fantastic garb of the burlesque cities, some in the dullest modern dress. The King stared at all of them, but none of them looked at the King. Suddenly he stepped forward.

“Barker,” he said, “what is all this?”

“Beaten,” said the politician—“beaten all to hell!” And he plunged past with nostrils shaking like a horse’s, and more and more men plunged after him.

Almost as he spoke, the last standing strip of fence bowed and snapped, flinging, as from a catapult, a new figure upon the road. He wore the flaming red of the halberdiers of Notting Hill, and on his weapon there was blood, and in his face victory. In another moment masses of red glowed through the gaps of the fence, and the pursuers, with their halberds, came pouring down the lane. Pursued and pursuers alike swept by the little figure with the owlish eyes, who had not taken his hands out of his pockets.

The King had still little beyond the confused sense of a man caught in a torrent—the feeling of men eddying by. Then something happened which he was never able afterwards to describe, and which we cannot describe for him. Suddenly in the dark entrance, between the broken gates of a garden, there appeared framed a flaming figure.

Adam Wayne, the conqueror, with his face flung back, and his mane like a lion’s, stood with his great sword point upwards, the red raiment of his office flapping round him like the red wings of an archangel. And the King saw, he
knew not how, something new and overwhelming. The great green trees and the
great red robes swung together in the wind. The sword seemed made for the
sunlight. The preposterous masquerade, born of his own mockery, towered over
him and embraced the world. This was the normal, this was sanity, this was
nature; and he himself, with his rationality and his detachment and his black
frock–coat, he was the exception and the accident—a blot of black upon a world
of crimson and gold.
BOOK IV
CHAPTER I

THE BATTLE OF THE LAMPS

Mr. Buck, who, though retired, frequently went down to his big drapery stores in Kensington High Street, was locking up those premises, being the last to leave. It was a wonderful evening of green and gold, but that did not trouble him very much. If you had pointed it out, he would have agreed seriously, for the rich always desire to be artistic.

He stepped out into the cool air, buttoning up his light yellow coat, and blowing great clouds from his cigar, when a figure dashed up to him in another yellow overcoat, but unbuttoned and flying behind him.


“Oh, don’t chatter,” cried Barker, stamping. “We’ve been beaten.”

“Beaten—by what?” asked Buck, mystified.

“By Wayne.”

Buck looked at Barker’s fierce white face for the first time, as it gleamed in the lamplight.

“Come and have a drink,” he said.

They adjourned to a cushioned and glaring buffet, and Buck established himself slowly and lazily in a seat, and pulled out his cigar-case.

“Have a smoke,” he said.

Barker was still standing, and on the fret, but after a moment’s hesitation, he sat down as if he might spring up again the next minute. They ordered drinks in silence.

“How did it happen?” asked Buck, turning his big bold eyes on him.


“Well,” said Buck, coolly, “how did they? You ought to know.”

“I don’t know; I can’t describe,” said the other, drumming on the table. “It seemed like this. We were six hundred, and marched with those damned poleaxes of Auberon’s—the only weapons we’ve got. We marched two abreast. We went up Holland Walk, between the high palings which seemed to me to go straight as an arrow for Pump Street. I was near the tail of the line, and it was a long one. When the end of it was still between the high palings, the head of the
line was already crossing Holland Park Avenue. Then the head plunged into the network of narrow streets on the other side, and the tail and myself came out on the great crossing. When we also had reached the northern side and turned up a small street that points, crookedly as it were, towards Pump Street, the whole thing felt different. The streets dodged and bent so much that the head of our line seemed lost altogether: it might as well have been in North America. And all this time we hadn’t seen a soul.

Buck, who was idly dabbing the ash of his cigar on the ash–tray, began to move it deliberately over the table, making feathery grey lines, a kind of map.

“But though the little streets were all deserted (which got a trifle on my nerves), as we got deeper and deeper into them, a thing began to happen that I couldn’t understand. Sometimes a long way ahead—three turns or corners ahead, as it were—there broke suddenly a sort of noise, clattering, and confused cries, and then stopped. Then, when it happened, something, I can’t describe it—a kind of shake or stagger went down the line, as if the line were a live thing, whose head had been struck, or had been an electric cord. None of us knew why we were moving, but we moved and jostled. Then we recovered, and went on through the little dirty streets, round corners, and up twisted ways. The little crooked streets began to give me a feeling I can’t explain—as if it were a dream. I felt as if things had lost their reason, and we should never get out of the maze. Odd to hear me talk like that, isn’t it? The streets were quite well–known streets, all down on the map. But the fact remains. I wasn’t afraid of something happening. I was afraid of nothing ever happening—nothing ever happening for all God’s eternity.”

He drained his glass and called for more whisky. He drank it, and went on.

“And then something did happen. Buck, it’s the solemn truth, that nothing has ever happened to you in your life. Nothing had ever happened to me in my life.”

“Nothing ever happened!” said Buck, staring. “What do you mean?”

“Nothing has ever happened,” repeated Barker, with a morbid obstinacy. “You don’t know what a thing happening means? You sit in your office expecting customers, and customers come; you walk in the street expecting friends, and friends meet you; you want a drink, and get it; you feel inclined for a bet, and make it. You expect either to win or lose, and you do either one or the other. But things happening!” and he shuddered ungovernably.

“Go on,” said Buck, shortly. “Get on.”

“As we walked wearily round the corners, something happened. When something happens, it happens first, and you see it afterwards. It happens of
itself, and you have nothing to do with it. It proves a dreadful thing—that there are other things besides one’s self. I can only put it in this way. We went round one turning, two turnings, three turnings, four turnings, five. Then I lifted myself slowly up from the gutter where I had been shot half senseless, and was beaten down again by living men crashing on top of me, and the world was full of roaring, and big men rolling about like nine–pins.”

Buck looked at his map with knitted brows.

“Was that Portobello Road?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Barker—“yes; Portobello Road. I saw it afterwards; but, my God, what a place it was! Buck, have you ever stood and let a six foot of man lash and lash at your head with six feet of pole with six pounds of steel at the end? Because, when you have had that experience, as Walt Whitman says, ‘you re–examine philosophies and religions.’”

“I have no doubt,” said Buck. “If that was Portobello Road, don’t you see what happened?”

“I know what happened exceedingly well. I was knocked down four times; an experience which, as I say, has an effect on the mental attitude. And another thing happened, too. I knocked down two men. After the fourth fall (there was not much bloodshed—more brutal rushing and throwing—for nobody could use their weapons), after the fourth fall, I say, I got up like a devil, and I tore a poleaxe out of a man’s hand and struck where I saw the scarlet of Wayne’s fellows, struck again and again. Two of them went over, bleeding on the stones, thank God; and I laughed and found myself sprawling in the gutter again, and got up again, and struck again, and broke my halberd to pieces. I hurt a man’s head, though.”

Buck set down his glass with a bang, and spat out curses through his thick moustache.

“What is the matter?” asked Barker, stopping, for the man had been calm up to now, and now his agitation was far more violent than his own.

“The matter?” said Buck, bitterly; “don’t you see how these maniacs have got us? Why should two idiots, one a clown and the other a screaming lunatic, make sane men so different from themselves? Look here, Barker; I will give you a picture. A very well–bred young man of this century is dancing about in a frock–coat. He has in his hands a nonsensical seventeenth–century halberd, with which he is trying to kill men in a street in Notting Hill. Damn it! don’t you see how they’ve got us? Never mind how you felt—that is how you looked. The King would put his cursed head on one side and call it exquisite. The Provost of
Notting Hill would put his cursed nose in the air and call it heroic. But in Heaven’s name what would you have called it—two days before?”

Barker bit his lip.

“You haven’t been through it, Buck,” he said. “You don’t understand fighting—the atmosphere.”

“I don’t deny the atmosphere,” said Buck, striking the table. “I only say it’s their atmosphere. It’s Adam Wayne’s atmosphere. It’s the atmosphere which you and I thought had vanished from an educated world for ever.”

“Well, it hasn’t,” said Barker; “and if you have any lingering doubts, lend me a poleaxe, and I’ll show you.”

There was a long silence, and then Buck turned to his neighbour and spoke in that good–tempered tone that comes of a power of looking facts in the face—the tone in which he concluded great bargains.

“Barker,” he said, “you are right. This old thing—this fighting, has come back. It has come back suddenly and taken us by surprise. So it is first blood to Adam Wayne. But, unless reason and arithmetic and everything else have gone crazy, it must be next and last blood to us. But when an issue has really arisen, there is only one thing to do—to study that issue as such and win in it. Barker, since it is fighting, we must understand fighting. I must understand fighting as coolly and completely as I understand drapery; you must understand fighting as coolly and completely as you understand politics. Now, look at the facts. I stick without hesitation to my original formula. Fighting, when we have the stronger force, is only a matter of arithmetic. It must be. You asked me just now how two hundred men could defeat six hundred. I can tell you. Two hundred men can defeat six hundred when the six hundred behave like fools. When they forget the very conditions they are fighting in; when they fight in a swamp as if it were a mountain; when they fight in a forest as if it were a plain; when they fight in streets without remembering the object of streets.”

“What is the object of streets?” asked Barker.

“What is the object of supper?” cried Buck, furiously. “Isn’t it obvious? This military science is mere common sense. The object of a street is to lead from one place to another; therefore all streets join; therefore street fighting is quite a peculiar thing. You advanced into that hive of streets as if you were advancing into an open plain where you could see everything. Instead of that, you were advancing into the bowels of a fortress, with streets pointing at you, streets turning on you, streets jumping out at you, and all in the hands of the enemy. Do you know what Portobello Road is? It is the only point on your journey where
two side streets run up opposite each other. Wayne massed his men on the two sides, and when he had let enough of your line go past, cut it in two like a worm. Don’t you see what would have saved you?”

Barker shook his head.

“Can’t your ‘atmosphere’ help you?” asked Buck, bitterly. “Must I attempt explanations in the romantic manner? Suppose that, as you were fighting blindly with the red Notting Hillers who imprisoned you on both sides, you had heard a shout from behind them. Suppose, oh, romantic Barker! that behind the red tunics you had seen the blue and gold of South Kensington taking them in the rear, surrounding them in their turn and hurling them on to your halberds.”

“If the thing had been possible,” began Barker, cursing.

“The thing would have been as possible,” said Buck, simply, “as simple as arithmetic. There are a certain number of street entries that lead to Pump Street. There are not nine hundred; there are not nine million. They do not grow in the night. They do not increase like mushrooms. It must be possible, with such an overwhelming force as we have, to advance by all of them at once. In every one of the arteries, or approaches, we can put almost as many men as Wayne can put into the field altogether. Once do that, and we have him to demonstration. It is like a proposition of Euclid.”

“You think that is certain?” said Barker, anxious, but dominated delightfully.

“I’ll tell you what I think,” said Buck, getting up jovially. “I think Adam Wayne made an uncommonly spirited little fight; and I think I am confoundedly sorry for him.”

“Buck, you are a great man!” cried Barker, rising also. “You’ve knocked me sensible again. I am ashamed to say it, but I was getting romantic. Of course, what you say is adamantine sense. Fighting, being physical, must be mathematical. We were beaten because we were neither mathematical nor physical nor anything else—because we deserved to be beaten. Hold all the approaches, and with our force we must have him. When shall we open the next campaign?”

“Now,” said Buck, and walked out of the bar.

“Now!” cried Barker, following him eagerly. “Do you mean now? It is so late.”

Buck turned on him, stamping.

“Do you think fighting is under the Factory Acts?” he said; and he called a cab. “Notting Hill Gate Station,” he said; and the two drove off.

A genuine reputation can sometimes be made in an hour. Buck, in the next
sixty or eighty minutes, showed himself a really great man of action. His cab carried him like a thunderbolt from the King to Wilson, from Wilson to Swindon, from Swindon to Barker again; if his course was jagged, it had the jaggedness of the lightning. Only two things he carried with him—his inevitable cigar and the map of North Kensington and Notting Hill. There were, as he again and again pointed out, with every variety of persuasion and violence, only nine possible ways of approaching Pump Street within a quarter of a mile round it; three out of Westbourne Grove, two out of Ladbroke Grove, and four out of Notting Hill High Street. And he had detachments of two hundred each, stationed at every one of the entrances before the last green of that strange sunset had sunk out of the black sky.

The sky was particularly black, and on this alone was one false protest raised against the triumphant optimism of the Provost of North Kensington. He overruled it with his infectious common sense.

"There is no such thing," he said, "as night in London. You have only to follow the line of street lamps. Look, here is the map. Two hundred purple North Kensington soldiers under myself march up Ossington Street, two hundred more under Captain Bruce, of the North Kensington Guard, up Clanricarde Gardens. [Clanricarde Gardens at this time was no longer a cul-de-sac, but was connected by Pump Street to Pembridge Square.] Two hundred yellow West Kensingtions under Provost Swindon attack from Pembridge Road. Two hundred more of my men from the eastern streets, leading away from Queen’s Road. Two detachments of yellows enter by two roads from Westbourne Grove. Lastly, two hundred green Bayswaters come down from the North through Chepstow Place, and two hundred more under Provost Wilson himself, through the upper part of Pembridge Road. Gentlemen, it is mate in two moves. The enemy must either mass in Pump Street and be cut to pieces; or they must retreat past the Gaslight & Coke Co., and rush on my four hundred; or they must retreat past St. Luke’s Church, and rush on the six hundred from the West. Unless we are all mad, it’s plain. Come on. To your quarters and await Captain Brace’s signal to advance. Then you have only to walk up a line of gas–lamps and smash this nonsense by pure mathematics. To–morrow we shall all be civilians again."

His optimism glowed like a great fire in the night, and ran round the terrible ring in which Wayne was now held helpless. The fight was already over. One man’s energy for one hour had saved the city from war.

For the next ten minutes Buck walked up and down silently beside the motionless clump of his two hundred. He had not changed his appearance in any
way, except to sling across his yellow overcoat a case with a revolver in it. So that his light-clad modern figure showed up oddly beside the pompous purple uniforms of his halberdiers, which darkly but richly coloured the black night.

At length a shrill trumpet rang from some way up the street; it was the signal of advance. Buck briefly gave the word, and the whole purple line, with its dimly shining steel, moved up the side alley. Before it was a slope of street, long, straight, and shining in the dark. It was a sword pointed at Pump Street, the heart at which nine other swords were pointed that night.

A quarter of an hour’s silent marching brought them almost within earshot of any tumult in the doomed citadel. But still there was no sound and no sign of the enemy. This time, at any rate, they knew that they were closing in on it mechanically, and they marched on under the lamplight and the dark without any of that eerie sense of ignorance which Barker had felt when entering the hostile country by one avenue alone.

“Halt—point arms!” cried Buck, suddenly, and as he spoke there came a clatter of feet tumbling along the stones. But the halberds were levelled in vain. The figure that rushed up was a messenger from the contingent of the North.

“Victory, Mr. Buck!” he cried, panting; “they are ousted. Provost Wilson of Bayswater has taken Pump Street.”

Buck ran forward in his excitement.

“Then, which way are they retreating? It must be either by St. Luke’s to meet Swindon, or by the Gas Company to meet us. Run like mad to Swindon, and see that the yellows are holding the St. Luke’s Road. We will hold this, never fear. We have them in an iron trap. Run!”

As the messenger dashed away into the darkness, the great guard of North Kensington swung on with the certainty of a machine. Yet scarcely a hundred yards further their halberd-points again fell in line gleaming in the gaslight; for again a clatter of feet was heard on the stones, and again it proved to be only the messenger.

“Mr. Provost,” he said, “the yellow West Kensingtions have been holding the road by St. Luke’s for twenty minutes since the capture of Pump Street. Pump Street is not two hundred yards away; they cannot be retreating down that road.”

“Then they are retreating down this,” said Provost Buck, with a final cheerfulness, “and by good fortune down a well-lighted road, though it twists about. Forward!”

As they moved along the last three hundred yards of their journey, Buck fell, for the first time in his life, perhaps, into a kind of philosophical reverie, for men
of his type are always made kindly, and as it were melancholy, by success.

“I am sorry for poor old Wayne, I really am,” he thought. “He spoke up splendidly for me at that Council. And he blacked old Barker’s eye with considerable spirit. But I don’t see what a man can expect when he fights against arithmetic, to say nothing of civilisation. And what a wonderful hoax all this military genius is! I suspect I’ve just discovered what Cromwell discovered, that a sensible tradesman is the best general, and that a man who can buy men and sell men can lead and kill them. The thing’s simply like adding up a column in a ledger. If Wayne has two hundred men, he can’t put two hundred men in nine places at once. If they’re ousted from Pump Street they’re flying somewhere. If they’re not flying past the church they’re flying past the Works. And so we have them. We business men should have no chance at all except that cleverer people than we get bees in their bonnets that prevent them from reasoning properly—so we reason alone. And so I, who am comparatively stupid, see things as God sees them, as a vast machine. My God, what’s this?” and he clapped his hands to his eyes and staggered back.

Then through the darkness he cried in a dreadful voice—
“Did I blaspheme God? I am struck blind.”
“What?” wailed another voice behind him, the voice of a certain Wilfred Jarvis of North Kensington.
“Blind!” cried Buck; “blind!”
“I’m blind too!” cried Jarvis, in an agony.
“Fools, all of you,” said a gross voice behind them; “we’re all blind. The lamps have gone out.”
“How are we to get on? How are we to chase the enemy? Where have they gone?”
“The enemy went—” said the rough voice behind, and then stopped doubtfully.
“Where?” shouted Buck, stamping like a madman.
“They went,” said the gruff voice, “past the Gas Works, and they’ve used their chance.”
“Great God!” thundered Buck, and snatched at his revolver; “do you mean they’ve turned out—”
But almost before he had spoken the words, he was hurled like a stone from catapult into the midst of his own men.
“Notting Hill! Notting Hill!” cried frightful voices out of the darkness, and
they seemed to come from all sides, for the men of North Kensington, unacquainted with the road, had lost all their bearings in the black world of blindness.

“Notting Hill! Notting Hill!” cried the invisible people, and the invaders were hewn down horribly with black steel, with steel that gave no glint against any light.

Buck, though badly maimed with the blow of a halberd, kept an angry but splendid sanity. He groped madly for the wall and found it. Struggling with crawling fingers along it, he found a side opening and retreated into it with the remnants of his men. Their adventures during that prodigious night are not to be described. They did not know whether they were going towards or away from the enemy. Not knowing where they themselves were, or where their opponents were, it was mere irony to ask where was the rest of their army. For a thing had descended upon them which London does not know—darkness, which was before the stars were made, and they were as much lost in it as if they had been made before the stars. Every now and then, as those frightful hours wore on, they buffeted in the darkness against living men, who struck at them and at whom they struck, with an idiot fury. When at last the grey dawn came, they found they had wandered back to the edge of the Uxbridge Road. They found that in those horrible eyeless encounters, the North Kensingtongs and the Bayswaters and the West Kensingtongs had again and again met and butchered each other, and they heard that Adam Wayne was barricaded in Pump Street.
CHAPTER II

THE CORRESPONDENT OF THE COURT JOURNAL

Journalism had become, like most other such things in England under the cautious government and philosophy represented by James Barker, somewhat sleepy and much diminished in importance. This was partly due to the disappearance of party government and public speaking, partly to the compromise or dead-lock which had made foreign wars impossible, but mostly, of course, to the temper of the whole nation which was that of a people in a kind of back-water. Perhaps the most well known of the remaining newspapers was the Court Journal, which was published in a dusty but genteel-looking office just out of Kensington High Street. For when all the papers of a people have been for years growing more and more dim and decorous and optimistic, the dimmest and most decorous and most optimistic is very likely to win. In the journalistic competition which was still going on at the beginning of the twentieth century, the final victor was the Court Journal.

For some mysterious reason the King had a great affection for hanging about in the Court Journal office, smoking a morning cigarette and looking over files. Like all ingrainedly idle men, he was very fond of lounging and chatting in places where other people were doing work. But one would have thought that, even in the prosaic England of his day, he might have found a more bustling centre.

On this particular morning, however, he came out of Kensington Palace with a more alert step and a busier air than usual. He wore an extravagantly long frock-coat, a pale-green waistcoat, a very full and dégagé black tie, and curious yellow gloves. This was his uniform as Colonel of a regiment of his own creation, the 1st Decadents Green. It was a beautiful sight to see him drilling them. He walked quickly across the Park and the High Street, lighting his cigarette as he went, and flung open the door of the Court Journal office.

“You’ve heard the news, Pally—you’ve heard the news?” he said.

The Editor’s name was Hoskins, but the King called him Pally, which was an abbreviation of Paladium of our Liberties.

“Well, your Majesty,” said Hoskins, slowly (he was a worried, gentlemanly looking person, with a wandering brown beard)—“well, your Majesty, I have heard rather curious things, but I—”
“You’ll hear more of them,” said the King, dancing a few steps of a kind of negro shuffle. “You’ll hear more of them, my blood–and–thunder tribune. Do you know what I am going to do for you?”

“No, your Majesty,” replied the Paladium, vaguely.

“I’m going to put your paper on strong, dashing, enterprising lines,” said the King. “Now, where are your posters of last night’s defeat?”

“I did not propose, your Majesty,” said the Editor, “to have any posters exactly—”

“Paper, paper!” cried the King, wildly; “bring me paper as big as a house. I’ll do you posters. Stop, I must take my coat off.” He began removing that garment with an air of set intensity, flung it playfully at Mr. Hoskins’ head, entirely enveloping him, and looked at himself in the glass. “The coat off,” he said, “and the hat on. That looks like a sub–editor. It is indeed the very essence of sub–editing. Well,” he continued, turning round abruptly, “come along with that paper.”

The Paladium had only just extricated himself reverently from the folds of the King’s frock–coat, and said bewildered—

“I am afraid, your Majesty—”

“Oh, you’ve got no enterprise,” said Auberon. “What’s that roll in the corner? Wall–paper? Decorations for your private residence? Art in the home, Pally? Fling it over here, and I’ll paint such posters on the back of it that when you put it up in your drawing–room you’ll paste the original pattern against the wall.” And the King unrolled the wall–paper, spreading it over the whole floor. “Now give me the scissors,” he cried, and took them himself before the other could stir.

He slit the paper into about five pieces, each nearly as big as a door. Then he took a big blue pencil, and went down on his knees on the dusty oil–cloth and began to write on them, in huge letters—

“FROM THE FRONT.
GENERAL BUCK DEFEATED.
DARKNESS, DANGER, AND DEATH.
WAYNE SAID TO BE IN PUMP STREET.
FEELING IN THE CITY.”

He contemplated it for some time, with his head on one side, and got up, with a sigh.

“Not quite intense enough,” he said—“not alarming. I want the Court Journal to be feared as well as loved. Let’s try something more hard–hitting.” And he went down on his knees again. After sucking the blue pencil for some time, he
began writing again busily. “How will this do?” he said—

WAYNE’S WONDERFUL VICTORY.”

“I suppose,” he said, looking up appealingly, and sucking the pencil—“I suppose we couldn’t say ‘wictory’—‘Wayne’s wonderful wictory’? No, no. Refinement, Pally, refinement. I have it.”

“WAYNE WINS.

ASTOUNDING FIGHT IN THE DARK.
The gas–lamps in their courses fought against Buck.”

“(Nothing like our fine old English translation.) What else can we say? Well, anything to annoy old Buck;” and he added, thoughtfully, in smaller letters—

“Rumoured Court–martial on General Buck.”

“Those will do for the present,” he said, and turned them both face downwards. “Paste, please.”

The Paladium, with an air of great terror, brought the paste out of an inner room.

The King slabbed it on with the enjoyment of a child messing with treacle. Then taking one of his huge compositions fluttering in each hand, he ran outside, and began pasting them up in prominent positions over the front of the office.

“And now,” said Auberon, entering again with undiminished vivacity—“now for the leading article.”

He picked up another of the large strips of wall–paper, and, laying it across a desk, pulled out a fountain–pen and began writing with feverish intensity, reading clauses and fragments aloud to himself, and rolling them on his tongue like wine, to see if they had the pure journalistic flavour.

“The news of the disaster to our forces in Notting Hill, awful as it is—awful as it is—(no, distressing as it is), may do some good if it draws attention to the what’s–his–name inefficiency (scandalous inefficiency, of course) of the Government’s preparations. In our present state of information, it would be premature (what a jolly word!)—it would be premature to cast any reflections upon the conduct of General Buck, whose services upon so many stricken fields (ha, ha!), and whose honourable scars and laurels, give him a right to have judgment upon him at least suspended. But there is one matter on which we must speak plainly. We have been silent on it too long, from feelings, perhaps of mistaken caution, perhaps of mistaken loyalty. This situation would never have arisen but for what we can only call the indefensible conduct of the King. It pains us to say such things, but, speaking as we do in the public interests (I plagiarise from Barker’s famous epigram), we shall not shrink because of the
distress we may cause to any individual, even the most exalted. At this crucial moment of our country, the voice of the People demands with a single tongue, ‘Where is the King?’ What is he doing while his subjects tear each other in pieces in the streets of a great city? Are his amusements and his dissipations (of which we cannot pretend to be ignorant) so engrossing that he can spare no thought for a perishing nation? It is with a deep sense of our responsibility that we warn that exalted person that neither his great position nor his incomparable talents will save him in the hour of delirium from the fate of all those who, in the madness of luxury or tyranny, have met the English people in the rare day of its wrath.”

“I am now,” said the King, “going to write an account of the battle by an eye–witness.” And he picked up a fourth sheet of wall–paper. Almost at the same moment Buck strode quickly into the office. He had a bandage round his head.

“I was told,” he said, with his usual gruff civility, “that your Majesty was here.”

“And of all things on earth,” cried the King, with delight, “here is an eye–witness! An eye–witness who, I regret to observe, has at present only one eye to witness with. Can you write us the special article, Buck? Have you a rich style?”

Buck, with a self–restraint which almost approached politeness, took no notice whatever of the King’s maddening geniality.

“I took the liberty, your Majesty,” he said shortly, “of asking Mr. Barker to come here also.”

As he spoke, indeed, Barker came swinging into the office, with his usual air of hurry.

“What is happening now?” asked Buck, turning to him with a kind of relief.

“Fighting still going on,” said Barker. “The four hundred from West Kensington were hardly touched last night. They hardly got near the place. Poor Wilson’s Bayswater men got cut about, though. They fought confoundedly well. They took Pump Street once. What mad things do happen in the world. To think that of all of us it should be little Wilson with the red whiskers who came out best.”

The King made a note on his paper—

“Romantic Conduct of Mr. Wilson.”

“Yes,” said Buck; “it makes one a bit less proud of one’s h’s.”

The King suddenly folded or crumpled up the paper, and put it in his pocket.

“I have an idea,” he said. “I will be an eye–witness. I will write you such letters from the Front as will be more gorgeous than the real thing. Give me my
coat, Paladium. I entered this room a mere King of England. I leave it, Special War Correspondent of the Court Journal. It is useless to stop me, Pally; it is vain to cling to my knees, Buck; it is hopeless, Barker, to weep upon my neck. ‘When duty calls’—the remainder of the sentiment escapes me. You will receive my first article this evening by the eight–o’clock post.”

And, running out of the office, he jumped upon a blue Bayswater omnibus that went swinging by.

“Well,” said Barker, gloomily, “well.”

“Barker,” said Buck, “business may be lower than politics, but war is, as I discovered last night, a long sight more like business. You politicians are such ingrained demagogues that even when you have a despotism you think of nothing but public opinion. So you learn to tack and run, and are afraid of the first breeze. Now we stick to a thing and get it. And our mistakes help us. Look here! at this moment we’ve beaten Wayne.”

“Beaten Wayne,” repeated Barker.

“Why the dickens not?” cried the other, flinging out his hands. “Look here. I said last night that we had them by holding the nine entrances. Well, I was wrong. We should have had them but for a singular event—the lamps went out. But for that it was certain. Has it occurred to you, my brilliant Barker, that another singular event has happened since that singular event of the lamps going out?”

“What event?” asked Barker.

“By an astounding coincidence, the sun has risen,” cried out Buck, with a savage air of patience. “Why the hell aren’t we holding all those approaches now, and passing in on them again? It should have been done at sunrise. The confounded doctor wouldn’t let me go out. You were in command.”

Barker smiled grimly.

“It is a gratification to me, my dear Buck, to be able to say that we anticipated your suggestions precisely. We went as early as possible to reconnoitre the nine entrances. Unfortunately, while we were fighting each other in the dark, like a lot of drunken navvies, Mr. Wayne’s friends were working very hard indeed. Three hundred yards from Pump Street, at every one of those entrances, there is a barricade nearly as high as the houses. They were finishing the last, in Pembridge Road, when we arrived. Our mistakes,” he cried bitterly, and flung his cigarette on the ground. “It is not we who learn from them.”

There was a silence for a few moments, and Barker lay back wearily in a chair. The office clock ticked exactly in the stillness.
At length Barker said suddenly—

“Buck, does it ever cross your mind what this is all about? The Hammersmith to Maida Vale thoroughfare was an uncommonly good speculation. You and I hoped a great deal from it. But is it worth it? It will cost us thousands to crush this ridiculous riot. Suppose we let it alone?”

“And be thrashed in public by a red–haired madman whom any two doctors would lock up?” cried out Buck, starting to his feet. “What do you propose to do, Mr. Barker? To apologise to the admirable Mr. Wayne? To kneel to the Charter of the Cities? To clasp to your bosom the flag of the Red Lion? To kiss in succession every sacred lamp–post that saved Notting Hill? No, by God! My men fought jolly well—they were beaten by a trick. And they’ll fight again.”

“Buck,” said Barker, “I always admired you. And you were quite right in what you said the other day.”

“In what?”

“In saying,” said Barker, rising quietly, “that we had all got into Adam Wayne’s atmosphere and out of our own. My friend, the whole territorial kingdom of Adam Wayne extends to about nine streets, with barricades at the end of them. But the spiritual kingdom of Adam Wayne extends, God knows where—it extends to this office, at any rate. The red–haired madman whom any two doctors would lock up is filling this room with his roaring, unreasonable soul. And it was the red–haired madman who said the last word you spoke.”

Buck walked to the window without replying. “You understand, of course,” he said at last, “I do not dream of giving in.”

The King, meanwhile, was rattling along on the top of his blue omnibus. The traffic of London as a whole had not, of course, been greatly disturbed by these events, for the affair was treated as a Notting Hill riot, and that area was marked off as if it had been in the hands of a gang of recognised rioters. The blue omnibuses simply went round as they would have done if a road were being mended, and the omnibus on which the correspondent of the Court Journal was sitting swept round the corner of Queen’s Road, Bayswater.

The King was alone on the top of the vehicle, and was enjoying the speed at which it was going.

“Forward, my beauty, my Arab,” he said, patting the omnibus encouragingly, “fleetest of all thy bounding tribe. Are thy relations with thy driver, I wonder, those of the Bedouin and his steed? Does he sleep side by side with thee—”

His meditations were broken by a sudden and jarring stoppage. Looking over the edge, he saw that the heads of the horses were being held by men in the
uniform of Wayne’s army, and heard the voice of an officer calling out orders.

King Auberon descended from the omnibus with dignity. The guard or picket of red halberdiers who had stopped the vehicle did not number more than twenty, and they were under the command of a short, dark, clever-looking young man, conspicuous among the rest as being clad in an ordinary frock-coat, but girt round the waist with a red sash and a long seventeenth-century sword. A shiny silk hat and spectacles completed the outfit in a pleasing manner.

“To whom have I the honour of speaking?” said the King, endeavouring to look like Charles I., in spite of personal difficulties.

The dark man in spectacles lifted his hat with equal gravity.

“My name is Bowles,” he said, “I am a chemist. I am also a captain of O company of the army of Notting Hill. I am distressed at having to incommode you by stopping the omnibus, but this area is covered by our proclamation, and we intercept all traffic. May I ask to whom I have the honour—Why, good gracious, I beg your Majesty’s pardon. I am quite overwhelmed at finding myself concerned with the King.”

Auberon put up his hand with indescribable grandeur.

“Not with the King,” he said; “with the special war correspondent of the Court Journal.”

“I beg your Majesty’s pardon,” began Mr. Bowles, doubtfully.

“Do you call me Majesty? I repeat,” said Auberon, firmly, “I am a representative of the press. I have chosen, with a deep sense of responsibility, the name of Pinker. I should desire a veil to be drawn over the past.”

“Very well, sir,” said Mr. Bowles, with an air of submission, “in our eyes the sanctity of the press is at least as great as that of the throne. We desire nothing better than that our wrongs and our glories should be widely known. May I ask, Mr. Pinker, if you have any objection to being presented to the Provost and to General Turnbull?”

“The Provost I have had the honour of meeting,” said Auberon, easily. “We old journalists, you know, meet everybody. I should be most delighted to have the same honour again. General Turnbull, also, it would be a gratification to know. The younger men are so interesting. We of the old Fleet Street gang lose touch with them.”

“Will you be so good as to step this way?” said the leader of O company.

“I am always good,” said Mr. Pinker. “Lead on.”
CHAPTER III

THE GREAT ARMY OF SOUTH KENSINGTON

The article from the special correspondent of the Court Journal arrived in due course, written on very coarse copy-paper in the King’s arabesque of handwriting, in which three words filled a page, and yet were illegible. Moreover, the contribution was the more perplexing at first, as it opened with a succession of erased paragraphs. The writer appeared to have attempted the article once or twice in several journalistic styles. At the side of one experiment was written, “Try American style,” and the fragment began—

“The King must go. We want gritty men. Flapdoodle is all very . . . ;” and then broke off, followed by the note, “Good sound journalism safer. Try it.”

The experiment in good sound journalism appeared to begin—

“The greatest of English poets has said that a rose by any . . .”

This also stopped abruptly. The next annotation at the side was almost undecipherable, but seemed to be something like—

“How about old Steevens and the mot juste? E.g. . . .”

“Morning winked a little wearily at me over the curt edge of Campden Hill and its houses with their sharp shadows. Under the abrupt black cardboard of the outline, it took some little time to detect colours; but at length I saw a brownish yellow shifting in the obscurity, and I knew that it was the guard of Swindon’s West Kensington army. They are being held as a reserve, and lining the whole ridge above the Bayswater Road. Their camp and their main force is under the great Waterworks Tower on Campden Hill. I forgot to say that the Waterworks Tower looked swart.

“As I passed them and came over the curve of Silver Street, I saw the blue cloudy masses of Barker’s men blocking the entrance to the high-road like a sapphire smoke (good). The disposition of the allied troops, under the general management of Mr. Wilson, appears to be as follows: The Yellow army (if I may so describe the West Kensingtonians) lies, as I have said, in a strip along the ridge, its furthest point westward being the west side of Campden Hill Road, its furthest point eastward the beginning of Kensington Gardens. The Green army of Wilson lines the Notting Hill High Road itself from Queen’s Road to the corner of Pembridge Road, curving round the latter, and extending some three hundred yards up towards Westbourne Grove. Westbourne Grove itself is
occupied by Barker of South Kensington. The fourth side of this rough square, the Queen’s Road side, is held by some of Buck’s Purple warriors.

“The whole resembles some ancient and dainty Dutch flower–bed. Along the crest of Campden Hill lie the golden crocuses of West Kensington. They are, as it were, the first fiery fringe of the whole. Northward lies our hyacinth Barker, with all his blue hyacinths. Round to the south–west run the green rushes of Wilson of Bayswater, and a line of violet irises (aptly symbolised by Mr. Buck) complete the whole. The argent exterior . . . (I am losing the style. I should have said ‘Curving with a whisk’ instead of merely ‘Curving.’ Also I should have called the hyacinths ‘sudden.’ I cannot keep this up. War is too rapid for this style of writing. Please ask office–boy to insert mots justes.)

“The truth is that there is nothing to report. That commonplace element which is always ready to devour all beautiful things (as the Black Pig in the Irish Mythology will finally devour the stars and gods); that commonplace element, as I say, has in its Black Piggish way devoured finally the chances of any romance in this affair; that which once consisted of absurd but thrilling combats in the streets, has degenerated into something which is the very prose of warfare—it has degenerated into a siege. A siege may be defined as a peace plus the inconvenience of war. Of course Wayne cannot hold out. There is no more chance of help from anywhere else than of ships from the moon. And if old Wayne had stocked his street with tinned meats till all his garrison had to sit on them, he couldn’t hold out for more than a month or two. As a matter of melancholy fact, he has done something rather like this. He has stocked his street with food until there must be uncommonly little room to turn round. But what is the good? To hold out for all that time and then to give in of necessity, what does it mean? It means waiting until your victories are forgotten, and then taking the trouble to be defeated. I cannot understand how Wayne can be so inartistic.

“And how odd it is that one views a thing quite differently when one knows it is defeated! I always thought Wayne was rather fine. But now, when I know that he is done for, there seem to be nothing else but Wayne. All the streets seem to point at him, all the chimneys seem to lean towards him. I suppose it is a morbid feeling; but Pump Street seems to be the only part of London that I feel physically. I suppose, I say, that it is morbid. I suppose it is exactly how a man feels about his heart when his heart is weak. ‘Pump Street’—the heart is a pump. And I am drivelling.

“Our finest leader at the front is, beyond all question, General Wilson. He has adopted alone among the other Provosts the uniform of his own halberdiers,
although that fine old sixteenth–century garb was not originally intended to go with red side–whiskers. It was he who, against a most admirable and desperate defence, broke last night into Pump Street and held it for at least half an hour. He was afterwards expelled from it by General Turnbull, of Notting Hill, but only after desperate fighting and the sudden descent of that terrible darkness which proved so much more fatal to the forces of General Buck and General Swindon.

“Provost Wayne himself, with whom I had, with great good fortune, a most interesting interview, bore the most eloquent testimony to the conduct of General Wilson and his men. His precise words are as follows: ‘I have bought sweets at his funny little shop when I was four years old, and ever since. I never noticed anything, I am ashamed to say, except that he talked through his nose, and didn’t wash himself particularly. And he came over our barricade like a devil from hell.’ I repeated this speech to General Wilson himself, with some delicate improvements, and he seemed pleased with it. He does not, however, seem pleased with anything so much just now as he is with the wearing of a sword. I have it from the front on the best authority that General Wilson was not completely shaved yesterday. It is believed in military circles that he is growing a moustache. . . .

“As I have said, there is nothing to report. I walk wearily to the pillar–box at the corner of Pembridge Road to post my copy. Nothing whatever has happened, except the preparations for a particularly long and feeble siege, during which I trust I shall not be required to be at the Front. As I glance up Pembridge Road in the growing dusk, the aspect of that road reminds me that there is one note worth adding. General Buck has suggested, with characteristic acumen, to General Wilson that, in order to obviate the possibility of such a catastrophe as overwhelmed the allied forces in the last advance on Notting Hill (the catastrophe, I mean, of the extinguished lamps), each soldier should have a lighted lantern round his neck. This is one of the things which I really admire about General Buck. He possesses what people used to mean by ‘the humility of the man of science,’ that is, he learns steadily from his mistakes. Wayne may score off him in some other way, but not in that way. The lanterns look like fairy lights as they curve round the end of Pembridge Road.

“Later.—I write with some difficulty, because the blood will run down my face and make patterns on the paper. Blood is a very beautiful thing; that is why it is concealed. If you ask why blood runs down my face, I can only reply that I was kicked by a horse. If you ask me what horse, I can reply with some pride that it was a war–horse. If you ask me how a war–horse came on the scene in our
simple pedestrian warfare, I am reduced to the necessity, so painful to a special correspondent, of recounting my experiences.

“I was, as I have said, in the very act of posting my copy at the pillar-box, and of glancing as I did so up the glittering curve of Pembridge Road, studded with the lights of Wilson’s men. I don’t know what made me pause to examine the matter, but I had a fancy that the line of lights, where it melted into the indistinct brown twilight, was more indistinct than usual. I was almost certain that in a certain stretch of the road where there had been five lights there were now only four. I strained my eyes; I counted them again, and there were only three. A moment after there were only two; an instant after only one; and an instant after that the lanterns near to me swung like jangled bells, as if struck suddenly. They flared and fell; and for the moment the fall of them was like the fall of the sun and stars out of heaven. It left everything in a primal blindness. As a matter of fact, the road was not yet legitimately dark. There were still red rays of a sunset in the sky, and the brown gloaming was still warmed, as it were, with a feeling as of firelight. But for three seconds after the lanterns swung and sank, I saw in front of me a blackness blocking the sky. And with the fourth second I knew that this blackness which blocked the sky was a man on a great horse; and I was trampled and tossed aside as a swirl of horsemen swept round the corner. As they turned I saw that they were not black, but scarlet; they were a sortie of the besieged, Wayne riding ahead.

“I lifted myself from the gutter, blinded with blood from a very slight skin–wound, and, queerly enough, not caring either for the blindness or for the slightness of the wound. For one mortal minute after that amazing cavalcade had spun past, there was dead stillness on the empty road. And then came Barker and all his halberdiers running like devils in the track of them. It had been their business to guard the gate by which the sortie had broken out; but they had not reckoned, and small blame to them, on cavalry. As it was, Barker and his men made a perfectly splendid run after them, almost catching Wayne’s horses by the tails.

“Nobody can understand the sortie. It consists only of a small number of Wayne’s garrison. Turnbull himself, with the vast mass of it, is undoubtedly still barricaded in Pump Street. Sorties of this kind are natural enough in the majority of historical sieges, such as the siege of Paris in 1870, because in such cases the besieged are certain of some support outside. But what can be the object of it in this case? Wayne knows (or if he is too mad to know anything, at least Turnbull knows) that there is not, and never has been, the smallest chance of support for
him outside; that the mass of the sane modern inhabitants of London regard his farcical patriotism with as much contempt as they do the original idiocy that gave it birth—the folly of our miserable King. What Wayne and his horsemen are doing nobody can even conjecture. The general theory round here is that he is simply a traitor, and has abandoned the besieged. But all such larger but yet more soluble riddles are as nothing compared to the one small but unanswerable riddle: Where did they get the horses?

“Later.—I have heard a most extraordinary account of the origin of the appearance of the horses. It appears that that amazing person, General Turnbull, who is now ruling Pump Street in the absence of Wayne, sent out, on the morning of the declaration of war, a vast number of little boys (or cherubs of the gutter, as we pressmen say), with half-crowns in their pockets, to take cabs all over London. No less than a hundred and sixty cabs met at Pump Street; were commandeered by the garrison. The men were set free, the cabs used to make barricades, and the horses kept in Pump Street, where they were fed and exercised for several days, until they were sufficiently rapid and efficient to be used for this wild ride out of the town. If this is so, and I have it on the best possible authority, the method of the sortie is explained. But we have no explanation of its object. Just as Barker’s Blues were swinging round the corner after them, they were stopped, but not by an enemy; only by the voice of one man, and he a friend. Red Wilson of Bayswater ran alone along the main road like a madman, waving them back with a halberd snatched from a sentinel. He was in supreme command, and Barker stopped at the corner, staring and bewildered. We could hear Wilson’s voice loud and distinct out of the dusk, so that it seemed strange that the great voice should come out of the little body. ‘Halt, South Kensington! Guard this entry, and prevent them returning. I will pursue. Forward, the Green Guards!’

“A wall of dark blue uniforms and a wood of pole-axes was between me and Wilson, for Barker’s men blocked the mouth of the road in two rigid lines. But through them and through the dusk I could hear the clear orders and the clank of arms, and see the green army of Wilson marching by towards the west. They were our great fighting-men. Wilson had filled them with his own fire; in a few days they had become veterans. Each of them wore a silver medal of a pump, to boast that they alone of all the allied armies had stood victorious in Pump Street.

“I managed to slip past the detachment of Barker’s Blues, who are guarding the end of Pembridge Road, and a sharp spell of running brought me to the tail of Wilson’s green army as it swung down the road in pursuit of the flying
Wayne. The dusk had deepened into almost total darkness; for some time I only heard the throb of the marching pace. Then suddenly there was a cry, and the tall fighting men were flung back on me, almost crushing me, and again the lanterns swung and jingled, and the cold nozzles of great horses pushed into the press of us. They had turned and charged us.

“‘You fools!’ came the voice of Wilson, cleaving our panic with a splendid cold anger. ‘Don’t you see? the horses have no riders!’

“It was true. We were being plunged at by a stampede of horses with empty saddles. What could it mean? Had Wayne met some of our men and been defeated? Or had he flung these horses at us as some kind of ruse or mad new mode of warfare, such as he seemed bent on inventing? Or did he and his men want to get away in disguise? Or did they want to hide in houses somewhere?

“Never did I admire any man’s intellect (even my own) so much as I did Wilson’s at that moment. Without a word, he simply pointed the halberd (which he still grasped) to the southern side of the road. As you know, the streets running up to the ridge of Campden Hill from the main road are peculiarly steep, they are more like sudden flights of stairs. We were just opposite Aubrey Road, the steepest of all; up that it would have been far more difficult to urge half-trained horses than to run up on one’s feet.

“‘Left wheel!’ hallooed Wilson. ‘They have gone up here,’ he added to me, who happened to be at his elbow.

“‘Why?’ I ventured to ask.

“‘Can’t say for certain,’ replied the Bayswater General. ‘They’ve gone up here in a great hurry, anyhow. They’ve simply turned their horses loose, because they couldn’t take them up. I fancy I know. I fancy they’re trying to get over the ridge to Kensington or Hammersmith, or somewhere, and are striking up here because it’s just beyond the end of our line. Damned fools, not to have gone further along the road, though. They’ve only just shaved our last outpost. Lambert is hardly four hundred yards from here. And I’ve sent him word.’

“‘Lambert!’ I said. ‘Not young Wilfrid Lambert—my old friend.’

“‘Wilfrid Lambert’s his name,’ said the General; ‘used to be a “man about town;” silly fellow with a big nose. That kind of man always volunteers for some war or other; and what’s funnier, he generally isn’t half bad at it. Lambert is distinctly good. The yellow West Kensingtons I always reckoned the weakest part of the army; but he has pulled them together uncommonly well, though he’s subordinate to Swindon, who’s a donkey. In the attack from Pembridge Road the other night he showed great pluck.’
“‘He has shown greater pluck than that,’ I said. ‘He has criticised my sense of humour. That was his first engagement.’

“This remark was, I am sorry to say, lost on the admirable commander of the allied forces. We were in the act of climbing the last half of Aubrey Road, which is so abrupt a slope that it looks like an old–fashioned map leaning up against the wall. There are lines of little trees, one above the other, as in the old–fashioned map.

“We reached the top of it, panting somewhat, and were just about to turn the corner by a place called (in chivalrous anticipation of our wars of sword and axe) Tower Crécy, when we were suddenly knocked in the stomach (I can use no other term) by a horde of men hurled back upon us. They wore the red uniform of Wayne; their halberds were broken; their foreheads bleeding; but the mere impetus of their retreat staggered us as we stood at the last ridge of the slope.

“‘Good old Lambert!’ yelled out suddenly the stolid Mr. Wilson of Bayswater, in an uncontrollable excitement. ‘Damned jolly old Lambert! He’s got there already! He’s driving them back on us! Hurrah! hurrah! Forward, the Green Guards!’

“We swung round the corner eastwards, Wilson running first, brandishing the halberd—

“Will you pardon a little egotism? Every one likes a little egotism, when it takes the form, as mine does in this case, of a disgraceful confession. The thing is really a little interesting, because it shows how the merely artistic habit has bitten into men like me. It was the most intensely exciting occurrence that had ever come to me in my life; and I was really intensely excited about it. And yet, as we turned that corner, the first impression I had was of something that had nothing to do with the fight at all. I was stricken from the sky as by a thunderbolt, by the height of the Waterworks Tower on Campden Hill. I don’t know whether Londoners generally realise how high it looks when one comes out, in this way, almost immediately under it. For the second it seemed to me that at the foot of it even human war was a triviality. For the second I felt as if I had been drunk with some trivial orgie, and that I had been sobered by the shock of that shadow. A moment afterwards, I realised that under it was going on something more enduring than stone, and something wilder than the dizziness height—the agony of man. And I knew that, compared to that, this overwhelming tower was itself a triviality; it was a mere stalk of stone which humanity could snap like a stick.

“I don’t know why I have talked so much about this silly old Waterworks
Tower, which at the very best was only a tremendous background. It was that, certainly, a sombre and awful landscape, against which our figures were relieved. But I think the real reason was, that there was in my own mind so sharp a transition from the tower of stone to the man of flesh. For what I saw first when I had shaken off, as it were, the shadow of the tower, was a man, and a man I knew.

“Lambert stood at the further corner of the street that curved round the tower, his figure outlined in some degree by the beginning of moonrise. He looked magnificent, a hero; but he looked something much more interesting than that. He was, as it happened, in almost precisely the same swaggering attitude in which he had stood nearly fifteen years ago, when he swung his walking–stick and struck it into the ground, and told me that all my subtlety was drivel. And, upon my soul, I think he required more courage to say that than to fight as he does now. For then he was fighting against something that was in the ascendant, fashionable, and victorious. And now he is fighting (at the risk of his life, no doubt) merely against something which is already dead, which is impossible, futile; of which nothing has been more impossible and futile than this very sortie which has brought him into contact with it. People nowadays allow infinitely too little for the psychological sense of victory as a factor in affairs. Then he was attacking the degraded but undoubtedly victorious Quin; now he is attacking the interesting but totally extinguished Wayne.

“His name recalls me to the details of the scene. The facts were these. A line of red halberdiers, headed by Wayne, were marching up the street, close under the northern wall, which is, in fact, the bottom of a sort of dyke or fortification of the Waterworks. Lambert and his yellow West Kensingtons had that instant swept round the corner and had shaken the Waynites heavily, hurling back a few of the more timid, as I have just described, into our very arms. When our force struck the tail of Wayne’s, every one knew that all was up with him. His favourite military barber was struck down. His grocer was stunned. He himself was hurt in the thigh, and reeled back against the wall. We had him in a trap with two jaws. ‘Is that you?’ shouted Lambert, genially, to Wilson, across the hemmed–in host of Notting Hill. ‘That’s about the ticket,’ replied General Wilson; ‘keep them under the wall.’

“The men of Notting Hill were falling fast. Adam Wayne threw up his long arms to the wall above him, and with a spring stood upon it; a gigantic figure against the moon. He tore the banner out of the hands of the standard–bearer below him, and shook it out suddenly above our heads, so that it was like
thunder in the heavens.

“‘Round the Red Lion!’ he cried. ‘Swords round the Red Lion! Halberds round the Red Lion! They are the thorns round rose.’

“His voice and the crack of the banner made a momentary rally, and Lambert, whose idiotic face was almost beautiful with battle, felt it as by an instinct, and cried—

“‘Drop your public-house flag, you footler! Drop it!’

“‘The banner of the Red Lion seldom stoops,’ said Wayne, proudly, letting it out luxuriantly on the night wind.

“The next moment I knew that poor Adam’s sentimental theatricality had cost him much. Lambert was on the wall at a bound, his sword in his teeth, and had slashed at Wayne’s head before he had time to draw his sword, his hands being busy with the enormous flag. He stepped back only just in time to avoid the first cut, and let the flag–staff fall, so that the spear–blade at the end of it pointed to Lambert.

“‘The banner stoops,’ cried Wayne, in a voice that must have startled streets. ‘The banner of Notting Hill stoops to a hero.’ And with the words he drove the spear–point and half the flag–staff through Lambert’s body and dropped him dead upon the road below, a stone upon the stones of the street.

“‘Notting Hill! Notting Hill!’ cried Wayne, in a sort of divine rage. ‘Her banner is all the holier for the blood of a brave enemy! Up on the wall, patriots! Up on the wall! Notting Hill!’

“With his long strong arm he actually dragged a man up on to the wall to be silhouetted against the moon, and more and more men climbed up there, pulled themselves and were pulled, till clusters and crowds of the half–massacred men of Pump Street massed upon the wall above us.

“‘Notting Hill! Notting Hill!’ cried Wayne, unceasingly.

“‘Well, what about Bayswater?’ said a worthy working–man in Wilson’s army, irritably. ‘Bayswater for ever!’

“‘We have won!’ cried Wayne, striking his flag–staff in the ground. ‘Bayswater for ever! We have taught our enemies patriotism!’

“‘Oh, cut these fellows up and have done with it!’ cried one of Lambert’s lieutenants, who was reduced to something bordering on madness by the responsibility of succeeding to the command.

“‘Let us by all means try,’ said Wilson, grimly; and the two armies closed round the third.

“I simply cannot describe what followed. I am sorry, but there is such a thing
as physical fatigue, as physical nausea, and, I may add, as physical terror. Suffice it to say that the above paragraph was written about 11 p.m., and that it is now about 2 a.m., and that the battle is not finished, and is not likely to be. Suffice it further to say that down the steep streets which lead from the Waterworks Tower to the Notting Hill High Road, blood has been running, and is running, in great red serpents, that curl out into the main thoroughfare and shine in the moon.

“Later.—The final touch has been given to all this terrible futility. Hours have passed; morning has broken; men are still swaying and fighting at the foot of the tower and round the corner of Aubrey Road; the fight has not finished. But I know it is a farce.

“News has just come to show that Wayne’s amazing sortie, followed by the amazing resistance through a whole night on the wall of the Waterworks, is as if it had not been. What was the object of that strange exodus we shall probably never know, for the simple reason that every one who knew will probably be cut to pieces in the course of the next two or three hours.

“I have heard, about three minutes ago, that Buck and Buck’s methods have won after all. He was perfectly right, of course, when one comes to think of it, in holding that it was physically impossible for a street to defeat a city. While we thought he was patrolling the eastern gates with his Purple army; while we were rushing about the streets and waving halberds and lanterns; while poor old Wilson was scheming like Moltke and fighting like Achilles to entrap the wild Provost of Notting Hill—Mr. Buck, retired draper, has simply driven down in a hansom cab and done something about as plain as butter and about as useful and nasty. He has gone down to South Kensington, Brompton, and Fulham, and by spending about four thousand pounds of his private means, has raised an army of nearly as many men; that is to say, an army big enough to beat, not only Wayne, but Wayne and all his present enemies put together. The army, I understand, is encamped along High Street, Kensington, and fills it from the Church to Addison Road Bridge. It is to advance by ten different roads uphill to the north.

“I cannot endure to remain here. Everything makes it worse than it need be. The dawn, for instance, has broken round Campden Hill; splendid spaces of silver, edged with gold, are torn out of the sky. Worse still, Wayne and his men feel the dawn; their faces, though bloody and pale, are strangely hopeful . . . insupportably pathetic. Worst of all, for the moment they are winning. If it were not for Buck and the new army they might just, and only just, win.

“I repeat, I cannot stand it. It is like watching that wonderful play of old
Maeterlinck’s (you know my partiality for the healthy, jolly old authors of the nineteenth century), in which one has to watch the quiet conduct of people inside a parlour, while knowing that the very men are outside the door whose word can blast it all with tragedy. And this is worse, for the men are not talking, but writhing and bleeding and dropping dead for a thing that is already settled—and settled against them. The great grey masses of men still toil and tug and sway hither and thither around the great grey tower; and the tower is still motionless, as it will always be motionless. These men will be crushed before the sun is set; and new men will arise and be crushed, and new wrongs done, and tyranny will always rise again like the sun, and injustice will always be as fresh as the flowers of spring. And the stone tower will always look down on it. Matter, in its brutal beauty, will always look down on those who are mad enough to consent to die, and yet more mad, since they consent to live.”

Thus ended abruptly the first and last contribution of the Special Correspondent of the Court Journal to that valued periodical.

The Correspondent himself, as has been said, was simply sick and gloomy at the last news of the triumph of Buck. He slouched sadly down the steep Aubrey Road, up which he had the night before run in so unusual an excitement, and strolled out into the empty dawn–lit main road, looking vaguely for a cab. He saw nothing in the vacant space except a blue–and–gold glittering thing, running very fast, which looked at first like a very tall beetle, but turned out, to his great astonishment, to be Barker.

“Have you heard the good news?” asked that gentleman.

“Yes,” said Quin, with a measured voice. “I have heard the glad tidings of great joy. Shall we take a hansom down to Kensington? I see one over there.”

They took the cab, and were, in four minutes, fronting the ranks of the multitudinous and invincible army. Quin had not spoken a word all the way, and something about him had prevented the essentially impressionable Barker from speaking either.

The great army, as it moved up Kensington High Street, calling many heads to the numberless windows, for it was long indeed—longer than the lives of most of the tolerably young—since such an army had been seen in London. Compared with the vast organisation which was now swallowing up the miles, with Buck at its head as leader, and the King hanging at its tail as journalist, the whole story of our problem was insignificant. In the presence of that army the red Notting Hills and the green Bayswaters were alike tiny and straggling groups. In its presence the whole struggle round Pump Street was like an ant–hill under the
hoof of an ox. Every man who felt or looked at that infinity of men knew that it was the triumph of Buck’s brutal arithmetic. Whether Wayne was right or wrong, wise or foolish, was quite a fair matter for discussion. But it was a matter of history. At the foot of Church Street, opposite Kensington Church, they paused in their glowing good humour.

“Let us send some kind of messenger or herald up to them,” said Buck, turning to Barker and the King. “Let us send and ask them to cave in without more muddle.”

“What shall we say to them?” said Barker, doubtfully.

“The facts of the case are quite sufficient,” rejoined Buck. “It is the facts of the case that make an army surrender. Let us simply say that our army that is fighting their army, and their army that is fighting our army, amount altogether to about a thousand men. Say that we have four thousand. It is very simple. Of the thousand fighting, they have at the very most, three hundred, so that, with those three hundred, they have now to fight four thousand seven hundred men. Let them do it if it amuses them.”

And the Provost of North Kensington laughed.

The herald who was despatched up Church Street in all the pomp of the South Kensington blue and gold, with the Three Birds on his tabard, was attended by two trumpeters.

“What will they do when they consent?” asked Barker, for the sake of saying something in the sudden stillness of that immense army.

“I know my Wayne very well,” said Buck, laughing. “When he submits he will send a red herald flaming with the Lion of Notting Hill. Even defeat will be delightful to him, since it is formal and romantic.”

The King, who had strolled up to the head of the line, broke silence for the first time.

“I shouldn’t wonder,” he said, “if he defied you, and didn’t send the herald after all. I don’t think you do know your Wayne quite so well as you think.”

“All right, your Majesty,” said Buck, easily; “if it isn’t disrespectful, I’ll put my political calculations in a very simple form. I’ll lay you ten pounds to a shilling the herald comes with the surrender.”

“All right,” said Auberon. “I may be wrong, but it’s my notion of Adam Wayne that he’ll die in his city, and that, till he is dead, it will not be a safe property.”

“The bet’s made, your Majesty,” said Buck.

Another long silence ensued, in the course of which Barker alone, amid the
motionless army, strolled and stamped in his restless way.

Then Buck suddenly leant forward.

“It’s taking your money, your Majesty,” he said. “I knew it was. There comes the herald from Adam Wayne.”

“It’s not,” cried the King, peering forward also. “You brute, it’s a red omnibus.”

“It’s not,” said Buck, calmly; and the King did not answer, for down the centre of the spacious and silent Church Street was walking, beyond question, the herald of the Red Lion, with two trumpeters.

Buck had something in him which taught him how to be magnanimous. In his hour of success he felt magnanimous towards Wayne, whom he really admired; magnanimous towards the King, off whom he had scored so publicly; and, above all, magnanimous towards Barker, who was the titular leader of this vast South Kensington army, which his own talent had evoked.

“General Barker,” he said, bowing, “do you propose now to receive the message from the besieged?”

Barker bowed also, and advanced towards the herald.

“Has your master, Mr. Adam Wayne, received our request for surrender?” he asked.

The herald conveyed a solemn and respectful affirmative.

Barker resumed, coughing slightly, but encouraged.

“What answer does your master send?”

The herald again inclined himself submissively, and answered in a kind of monotone.

“My message is this. Adam Wayne, Lord High Provost of Notting Hill, under the charter of King Auberon and the laws of God and all mankind, free and of a free city, greets James Barker, Lord High Provost of South Kensington, by the same rights free and honourable, leader of the army of the South. With all friendly reverence, and with all constitutional consideration, he desires James Barker to lay down his arms, and the whole army under his command to lay down their arms also.”

Before the words were ended the King had run forward into the open space with shining eyes. The rest of the staff and the forefront of the army were literally struck breathless. When they recovered they began to laugh beyond restraint; the revulsion was too sudden.

“The Lord High Provost of Notting Hill,” continued the herald, “does not propose, in the event of your surrender, to use his victory for any of those
repressive purposes which others have entertained against him. He will leave you your free laws and your free cities, your flags and your governments. He will not destroy the religion of South Kensington, or crush the old customs of Bayswater.”

An irreplaceable explosion of laughter went up from the forefront of the great army.

“The King must have had something to do with this humour,” said Buck, slapping his thigh. “It’s too deliciously insolent. Barker, have a glass of wine.”

And in his conviviality he actually sent a soldier across to the restaurant opposite the church and brought out two glasses for a toast.

When the laughter had died down, the herald continued quite monotonously—

“In the event of your surrendering your arms and dispersing under the superintendence of our forces, these local rights of yours shall be carefully observed. In the event of your not doing so, the Lord High Provost of Notting Hill desires to announce that he has just captured the Waterworks Tower, just above you, on Campden Hill, and that within ten minutes from now, that is, on the reception through me of your refusal, he will open the great reservoir and flood the whole valley where you stand in thirty feet of water. God save King Auberon!”

Buck had dropped his glass and sent a great splash of wine over the road.

“But—but—” he said; and then by a last and splendid effort of his great sanity, looked the facts in the face.

“We must surrender,” he said. “You could do nothing against fifty thousand tons of water coming down a steep hill, ten minutes hence. We must surrender. Our four thousand men might as well be four. Vicisti Galilæe! Perkins, you may as well get me another glass of wine.”

In this way the vast army of South Kensington surrendered and the Empire of Notting Hill began. One further fact in this connection is perhaps worth mentioning—the fact that, after his victory, Adam Wayne caused the great tower on Campden Hill to be plated with gold and inscribed with a great epitaph, saying that it was the monument of Wilfrid Lambert, the heroic defender of the place, and surmounted with a statue, in which his large nose was done something less than justice to.
BOOK V
CHAPTER I

THE EMPIRE OF NOTTING HILL

On the evening of the third of October, twenty years after the great victory of Notting Hill, which gave it the dominion of London, King Auberon came, as of old, out of Kensington Palace.

He had changed little, save for a streak or two of grey in his hair, for his face had always been old, and his step slow, and, as it were, decrepit.

If he looked old, it was not because of anything physical or mental. It was because he still wore, with a quaint conservatism, the frock–coat and high hat of the days before the great war. “I have survived the Deluge,” he said. “I am a pyramid, and must behave as such.”

As he passed up the street the Kensingtonians, in their picturesque blue smocks, saluted him as a King, and then looked after him as a curiosity. It seemed odd to them that men had once worn so elvish an attire.

The King, cultivating the walk attributed to the oldest inhabitant (“Gaffer Auberon” his friends were now confidentially desired to call him), went toddling northward. He paused, with reminiscence in his eye, at the Southern Gate of Notting Hill, one of those nine great gates of bronze and steel, wrought with reliefs of the old battles, by the hand of Chiffy himself.

“Ah!” he said, shaking his head and assuming an unnecessary air of age, and a provincialism of accent—“Ah! I mind when there warn’t none of this here.”

He passed through the Ossington Gate, surmounted by a great lion, wrought in red copper on yellow brass, with the motto, “Nothing Ill.” The guard in red and gold saluted him with his halberd.

It was about sunset, and the lamps were being lit. Auberon paused to look at them, for they were Chiffy’s finest work, and his artistic eye never failed to feast on them. In memory of the Great Battle of the Lamps, each great iron lamp was surmounted by a veiled figure, sword in hand, holding over the flame an iron hood or extinguisher, as if ready to let it fall if the armies of the South and West should again show their flags in the city. Thus no child in Notting Hill could play about the streets without the very lamp–posts reminding him of the salvation of his country in the dreadful year.

“Old Wayne was right in a way,” commented the King. “The sword does make things beautiful. It has made the whole world romantic by now. And to
think people once thought me a buffoon for suggesting a romantic Notting Hill. Deary me, deary me! (I think that is the expression)—it seems like a previous existence.”

Turning a corner, he found himself in Pump Street, opposite the four shops which Adam Wayne had studied twenty years before. He entered idly the shop of Mr. Mead, the grocer. Mr. Mead was somewhat older, like the rest of the world, and his red beard, which he now wore with a moustache, and long and full, was partly blanched and discoloured. He was dressed in a long and richly embroidered robe of blue, brown, and crimson, interwoven with an Eastern complexity of pattern, and covered with obscure symbols and pictures, representing his wares passing from hand to hand and from nation to nation. Round his neck was the chain with the Blue Argosy cut in turquoise, which he wore as Grand Master of the Grocers. The whole shop had the sombre and sumptuous look of its owner. The wares were displayed as prominently as in the old days, but they were now blended and arranged with a sense of tint and grouping, too often neglected by the dim grocers of those forgotten days. The wares were shown plainly, but shown not so much as an old grocer would have shown his stock, but rather as an educated virtuoso would have shown his treasures. The tea was stored in great blue and green vases, inscribed with the nine indispensable sayings of the wise men of China. Other vases of a confused orange and purple, less rigid and dominant, more humble and dreamy, stored symbolically the tea of India. A row of caskets of a simple silvery metal contained tinned meats. Each was wrought with some rude but rhythmic form, as a shell, a horn, a fish, or an apple, to indicate what material had been canned in it.

“Your Majesty,” said Mr. Mead, sweeping an Oriental reverence. “This is an honour to me, but yet more an honour to the city.”

Auberon took off his hat.

“Mr. Mead,” he said, “Notting Hill, whether in giving or taking, can deal in nothing but honour. Do you happen to sell liquorice?”

“Liquorice, sire,” said Mr. Mead, “is not the least important of our benefits out of the dark heart of Arabia.”

And going reverently towards a green and silver canister, made in the form of an Arabian mosque, he proceeded to serve his customer.

“I was just thinking, Mr. Mead,” said the King, reflectively, “I don’t know why I should think about it just now, but I was just thinking of twenty years ago. Do you remember the times before the war?”
The grocer, having wrapped up the liquorice sticks in a piece of paper (inscribed with some appropriate sentiment), lifted his large grey eyes dreamily, and looked at the darkening sky outside.

“Oh yes, your Majesty,” he said. “I remember these streets before the Lord Provost began to rule us. I can’t remember how we felt very well. All the great songs and the fighting change one so; and I don’t think we can really estimate all we owe to the Provost; but I can remember his coming into this very shop twenty–two years ago, and I remember the things he said. The singular thing is that, as far as I remember, I thought the things he said odd at that time. Now it’s the things that I said, as far as I can recall them, that seem to me odd—as odd as a madman’s antics.”

“Ah!” said the King; and looked at him with an unfathomable quietness.

“I thought nothing of being a grocer then,” he said. “Isn’t that odd enough for anybody? I thought nothing of all the wonderful places that my goods come from, and wonderful ways that they are made. I did not know that I was for all practical purposes a king with slaves spearing fishes near the secret pool, and gathering fruits in the islands under the world. My mind was a blank on the thing. I was as mad as a hatter.”

The King turned also, and stared out into the dark, where the great lamps that commemorated the battle were already flaming.

“And is this the end of poor old Wayne?” he said, half to himself. “To inflame every one so much that he is lost himself in the blaze. Is this his victory that he, my incomparable Wayne, is now only one in a world of Waynes? Has he conquered and become by conquest commonplace? Must Mr. Mead, the grocer, talk as high as he? Lord! what a strange world in which a man cannot remain unique even by taking the trouble to go mad!”

And he went dreamily out of the shop.

He paused outside the next one almost precisely as the Provost had done two decades before.

“How uncommonly creepy this shop looks!” he said. “But yet somehow encouragingly creepy, invitingly creepy. It looks like something in a jolly old nursery story in which you are frightened out of your skin, and yet know that things always end well. The way those low sharp gables are carved like great black bat’s wings folded down, and the way those queer–coloured bowls underneath are made to shine like giants eye–balls. It looks like a benevolent warlock’s hut. It is apparently a chemist’s.”

Almost as he spoke, Mr. Bowles, the chemist, came to his shop door in a long
black velvet gown and hood, monastic as it were, but yet with a touch of the diabolic. His hair was still quite black, and his face even paler than of old. The only spot of colour he carried was a red star cut in some precious stone of strong tint, hung on his breast. He belonged to the Society of the Red Star of Charity, founded on the lamps displayed by doctors and chemists.

“A fine evening, sir,” said the chemist. “Why, I can scarcely be mistaken in supposing it to be your Majesty. Pray step inside and share a bottle of sal–volatile, or anything that may take your fancy. As it happens, there is an old acquaintance of your Majesty’s in my shop carousing (if I may be permitted the term) upon that beverage at this moment.”

The King entered the shop, which was an Aladdin’s garden of shades and hues, for as the chemist’s scheme of colour was more brilliant than the grocer’s scheme, so it was arranged with even more delicacy and fancy. Never, if the phrase may be employed, had such a nosegay of medicines been presented to the artistic eye.

But even the solemn rainbow of that evening interior was rivalled or even eclipsed by the figure standing in the centre of the shop. His form, which was a large and stately one, was clad in a brilliant blue velvet, cut in the richest Renaissance fashion, and slashed so as to show gleams and gaps of a wonderful lemon or pale yellow. He had several chains round his neck, and his plumes, which were of several tints of bronze and gold, hung down to the great gold hilt of his long sword. He was drinking a dose of sal–volatile, and admiring its opal tint. The King advanced with a slight mystification towards the tall figure, whose face was in shadow; then he said—

“By the Great Lord of Luck, Barker!”

The figure removed his plumed cap, showing the same dark head and long, almost equine face which the King had so often seen rising out of the high collar of Bond Street. Except for a grey patch on each temple, it was totally unchanged.

“You Majesty,” said Barker, “this is a meeting nobly retrospective, a meeting that has about it a certain October gold. I drink to old days;” and he finished his sal–volatile with simple feeling.

“I am delighted to see you again, Barker,” said the King. “It is indeed long since we met. What with my travels in Asia Minor, and my book having to be written (you have read my ‘Life of Prince Albert for Children,’ of course?), we have scarcely met twice since the Great War. That is twenty years ago.”

“I wonder,” said Barker, thoughtfully, “if I might speak freely to your Majesty?”
“Well,” said Auberon, “it’s rather late in the day to start speaking respectfully. Flap away, my bird of freedom.”

“Well, your Majesty,” replied Barker, lowering his voice, “I don’t think it will be so long to the next war.”

“What do you mean?” asked Auberon.

“We will stand this insolence no longer,” burst out Barker, fiercely. “We are not slaves because Adam Wayne twenty years ago cheated us with a water–pipe. Notting Hill is Notting Hill; it is not the world. We in South Kensington, we also have memories—ay, and hopes. If they fought for these trumpery shops and a few lamp–posts, shall we not fight for the great High Street and the sacred Natural History Museum?”

“Great Heavens!” said the astounded Auberon. “Will wonders never cease? Have the two greatest marvels been achieved? Have you turned altruistic, and has Wayne turned selfish? Are you the patriot, and he the tyrant?”

“It is not from Wayne himself altogether that the evil comes,” answered Barker. “He, indeed, is now mostly wrapped in dreams, and sits with his old sword beside the fire. But Notting Hill is the tyrant, your Majesty. Its Council and its crowds have been so intoxicated by the spreading over the whole city of Wayne’s old ways and visions, that they try to meddle with every one, and rule every one, and civilise every one, and tell every one what is good for him. I do not deny the great impulse which his old war, wild as it seemed, gave to the civic life of our time. It came when I was still a young man, and I admit it enlarged my career. But we are not going to see our own cities flouted and thwarted from day to day because of something Wayne did for us all nearly a quarter of a century ago. I am just waiting here for news upon this very matter. It is rumoured that Notting Hill has vetoed the statue of General Wilson they are putting up opposite Chepstow Place. If that is so, it is a black and white shameless breach of the terms on which we surrendered to Turnbull after the battle of the Tower. We were to keep our own customs and self–government. If that is so—”

“It is so,” said a deep voice; and both men turned round.

A burly figure in purple robes, with a silver eagle hung round his neck and moustaches almost as florid as his plumes, stood in the doorway.

“Yes,” he said, acknowledging the King’s start, “I am Provost Buck, and the news is true. These men of the Hill have forgotten that we fought round the Tower as well as they, and that it is sometimes foolish, as well as base, to despise the conquered.”
“Let us step outside,” said Barker, with a grim composure.
Buck did so, and stood rolling his eyes up and down the lamp–lit street.
“I would like to have a go at smashing all this,” he muttered, “though I am
over sixty. I would like—”

His voice ended in a cry, and he reeled back a step, with his hands to his eyes,
as he had done in those streets twenty years before.
“Darkness!” he cried—“darkness again! What does it mean?”

For in truth every lamp in the street had gone out, so that they could not see
even each other’s outline, except faintly. The voice of the chemist came with
startling cheerfulness out of the density.
“Oh, don’t you know?” he said. “Did they never tell you this is the Feast of
the Lamps, the anniversary of the great battle that almost lost and just saved
Notting Hill? Don’t you know, your Majesty, that on this night twenty–one years
ago we saw Wilson’s green uniforms charging down this street, and driving
Wayne and Turnbull back upon the gas–works, fighting with their handful like
fiends from hell? And that then, in that great hour, Wayne sprang through a
window of the gas–works, with one blow of his hand brought darkness on the
whole city, and then with a cry like a lion’s, that was heard through four streets,
flew at Wilson’s men, sword in hand, and swept them, bewildered as they were,
and ignorant of the map, clear out of the sacred street again? And don’t you
know that upon that night every year all lights are turned out for half an hour
while we sing the Notting Hill anthem in the darkness? Hark! there it begins.”

Through the night came a crash of drums, and then a strong swell of human
voices—

“When the world was in the balance, there was night on Notting Hill,
(There was night on Notting Hill): it was nobler than the day;
On the cities where the lights are and the firesides glow,
From the seas and from the deserts came the thing we did not know,
Came the darkness, came the darkness, came the darkness on the foe,
And the old guard of God turned to bay.
For the old guard of God turns to bay, turns to bay,
And the stars fall down before it ere its banners fall to-day:
For when armies were around us as a howling and a horde,
When falling was the citadel and broken was the sword,
The darkness came upon them like the Dragon of the Lord,
When the old guard of God turned to bay.”

The voices were just uplifting themselves in a second verse when they were
stopped by a scurry and a yell. Barker had bounded into the street with a cry of
“South Kensington!” and a drawn dagger. In less time than a man could blink,
the whole packed street was full of curses and struggling. Barker was flung back against the shop–front, but used the second only to draw his sword as well as his dagger, and calling out, “This is not the first time I’ve come through the thick of you,” flung himself again into the press. It was evident that he had drawn blood at last, for a more violent outcry arose, and many other knives and swords were discernible in the faint light. Barker, after having wounded more than one man, seemed on the point of being flung back again, when Buck suddenly stepped out into the street. He had no weapon, for he affected rather the peaceful magnificence of the great burgher, than the pugnacious dandyism which had replaced the old sombre dandyism in Barker. But with a blow of his clenched fist he broke the pane of the next shop, which was the old curiosity shop, and, plunging in his hand, snatched a kind of Japanese scimitar, and calling out, “Kensington! Kensington!” rushed to Barker’s assistance.

Barker’s sword was broken, but he was laying about him with his dagger. Just as Buck ran up, a man of Notting Hill struck Barker down, but Buck struck the man down on top of him, and Barker sprang up again, the blood running down his face.

Suddenly all these cries were cloven by a great voice, that seemed to fall out of heaven. It was terrible to Buck and Barker and the King, from its seeming to come out the empty skies; but it was more terrible because it was a familiar voice, and one which at the same time they had not heard for so long.

“Turn up the lights,” said the voice from above them, and for a moment there was no reply, but only a tumult.

“In the name of Notting Hill and of the great Council of the City, turn up the lights.”

There was again a tumult and a vagueness for a moment, then the whole street and every object in it sprang suddenly out of the darkness, as every lamp sprang into life. And looking up they saw, standing upon a balcony near the roof of one of the highest houses, the figure and the face of Adam Wayne, his red hair blowing behind him, a little streaked with grey.

“What is this, my people?” he said. “Is it altogether impossible to make a thing good without it immediately insisting on being wicked? The glory of Notting Hill in having achieved its independence, has been enough for me to dream of for many years, as I sat beside the fire. Is it really not enough for you, who have had so many other affairs to excite and distract you? Notting Hill is a nation. Why should it condescend to be a mere Empire? You wish to pull down the statue of General Wilson, which the men of Bayswater have so rightly
erected in Westbourne Grove. Fools! Who erected that statue? Did Bayswater erect it? No. Notting Hill erected it. Do you not see that it is the glory of our achievement that we have infected the other cities with the idealism of Notting Hill? It is we who have created not only our own side, but both sides of this controversy. O too humble fools, why should you wish to destroy your enemies? You have done something more to them. You have created your enemies. You wish to pull down that gigantic silver hammer, which stands, like an obelisk, in the centre of the Broadway of Hammersmith. Fools! Before Notting Hill arose, did any person passing through Hammersmith Broadway expect to see there a gigantic silver hammer? You wish to abolish the great bronze figure of a knight standing upon the artificial bridge at Knightsbridge. Fools! Who would have thought of it before Notting Hill arose? I have even heard, and with deep pain I have heard it, that the evil eye of our imperial envy has been cast towards the remote horizon of the west, and that we have objected to the great black monument of a crowned raven, which commemorates the skirmish of Ravenscourt Park. Who created all these things? Were they there before we came? Cannot you be content with that destiny which was enough for Athens, which was enough for Nazareth? the destiny, the humble purpose, of creating a new world. Is Athens angry because Romans and Florentines have adopted her phraseology for expressing their own patriotism? Is Nazareth angry because as a little village it has become the type of all little villages out of which, as the Snobs say, no good can come? Has Athens asked every one to wear the chlamys? Are all followers of the Nazarene compelled to wear turbans. No! but the soul of Athens went forth and made men drink hemlock, and the soul of Nazareth went forth and made men consent to be crucified. So has the soul of Notting Hill gone forth and made men realise what it is to live in a city. Just as we inaugurated our symbols and ceremonies, so they have inaugurated theirs; and are you so mad as to contend against them? Notting Hill is right; it has always been right. It has moulded itself on its own necessities, its own sine quâ non; it has accepted its own ultimatum. Because it is a nation it has created itself; and because it is a nation it can destroy itself. Notting Hill shall always be the judge. If it is your will because of this matter of General Wilson’s statue to make war upon Bayswater—"

A roar of cheers broke in upon his words, and further speech was impossible. Pale to the lips, the great patriot tried again and again to speak; but even his authority could not keep down the dark and roaring masses in the street below him. He said something further, but it was not audible. He descended at last
sadly from the garret in which he lived, and mingled with the crowd at the foot of the houses. Finding General Turnbull, he put his hand on his shoulder with a queer affection and gravity, and said—

“To–morrow, old man, we shall have a new experience, as fresh as the flowers of spring. We shall be defeated. You and I have been through three battles together, and have somehow or other missed this peculiar delight. It is unfortunate that we shall not probably be able to exchange our experiences, because, as it most annoyingly happens, we shall probably both be dead.”

Turnbull looked dimly surprised.

“I don’t mind so much about being dead,” he said, “but why should you say that we shall be defeated?”

“The answer is very simple,” replied Wayne, calmly. “It is because we ought to be defeated. We have been in the most horrible holes before now; but in all those I was perfectly certain that the stars were on our side, and that we ought to get out. Now I know that we ought not to get out; and that takes away from me everything with which I won.”

As Wayne spoke he started a little, for both men became aware that a third figure was listening to them—a small figure with wondering eyes.

“Is it really true, my dear Wayne,” said the King, interrupting, “that you think you will be beaten to–morrow?”

“There can be no doubt about it whatever,” replied Adam Wayne; “the real reason is the one of which I have just spoken. But as a concession to your materialism, I will add that they have an organised army of a hundred allied cities against our one. That in itself, however, would be unimportant.”

Quin, with his round eyes, seemed strangely insistent.

“You are quite sure,” he said, “that you must be beaten?”

“I am afraid,” said Turnbull, gloomily, “that there can be no doubt about it.”

“Then,” cried the King, flinging out his arms, “give me a halberd! Give me a halberd, somebody! I desire all men to witness that I, Auberon, King of England, do here and now abdicate, and implore the Provost of Notting Hill to permit me to enlist in his army. Give me a halberd!”

He seized one from some passing guard, and, shouldering it, stamped solemnly after the shouting columns of halberdiers which were, by this time, parading the streets. He had, however, nothing to do with the wrecking of the statue of General Wilson, which took place before morning.
CHAPTER II

THE LAST BATTLE

The day was cloudy when Wayne went down to die with all his army in Kensington Gardens; it was cloudy again when that army had been swallowed up by the vast armies of a new world. There had been an almost uncanny interval of sunshine, in which the Provost of Notting Hill, with all the placidity of an onlooker, had gazed across to the hostile armies on the great spaces of verdure opposite; the long strips of green and blue and gold lay across the park in squares and oblongs like a proposition in Euclid wrought in a rich embroidery. But the sunlight was a weak and, as it were, a wet sunlight, and was soon swallowed up. Wayne spoke to the King, with a queer sort of coldness and languor, as to the military operations. It was as he had said the night before—that being deprived of his sense of an impracticable rectitude, he was, in effect, being deprived of everything. He was out of date, and at sea in a mere world of compromise and competition, of Empire against Empire, of the tolerably right and the tolerably wrong. When his eye fell on the King, however, who was marching very gravely with a top hat and a halberd, it brightened slightly.

“Well, your Majesty,” he said, “you at least ought to be proud to-day. If your children are fighting each other, at least those who win are your children. Other kings have distributed justice, you have distributed life. Other kings have ruled a nation, you have created nations. Others have made kingdoms, you have begotten them. Look at your children, father!” and he stretched his hand out towards the enemy.

Auberon did not raise his eyes.

“See how splendidly,” cried Wayne, “the new cities come on—the new cities from across the river. See where Battersea advances over there—under the flag of the Lost Dog; and Putney—don’t you see the Man on the White Boar shining on their standard as the sun catches it? It is the coming of a new age, your Majesty. Notting Hill is not a common empire; it is a thing like Athens, the mother of a mode of life, of a manner of living, which shall renew the youth of the world—a thing like Nazareth. When I was young I remember, in the old dreary days, wiseacres used to write books about how trains would get faster, and all the world be one empire, and tram–cars go to the moon. And even as a child I used to say to myself, ‘Far more likely that we shall go on the crusades
again, or worship the gods of the city.’ And so it has been. And I am glad, though this is my last battle.”

Even as he spoke there came a crash of steel from the left, and he turned his head.

“Wilson!” he cried, with a kind of joy. “Red Wilson has charged our left. No one can hold him in; he eats swords. He is as keen a soldier as Turnbull, but less patient—less really great. Ha! and Barker is moving. How Barker has improved; how handsome he looks! It is not all having plumes; it is also having a soul in one’s daily life. Ha!”

And another crash of steel on the right showed that Barker had closed with Notting Hill on the other side.

“Turnbull is there!” cried Wayne. “See him hurl them back! Barker is checked! Turnbull charges—wins! But our left is broken. Wilson has smashed Bowles and Mead, and may turn our flank. Forward, the Provost’s Guard!”

And the whole centre moved forward, Wayne’s face and hair and sword flaming in the van.

The King ran suddenly forward.

The next instant a great jar that went through it told that it had met the enemy. And right over against them through the wood of their own weapons Auberon saw the Purple Eagle of Buck of North Kensington.

On the left Red Wilson was storming the broken ranks, his little green figure conspicuous even in the tangle of men and weapons, with the flaming red moustaches and the crown of laurel. Bowles slashed at his head and tore away some of the wreath, leaving the rest bloody, and, with a roar like a bull’s, Wilson sprang at him, and, after a rattle of fencing, plunged his point into the chemist, who fell, crying, “Notting Hill!” Then the Notting Hillers wavered, and Bayswater swept them back in confusion. Wilson had carried everything before him.

On the right, however, Turnbull had carried the Red Lion banner with a rush against Barker’s men, and the banner of the Golden Birds bore up with difficulty against it. Barker’s men fell fast. In the centre Wayne and Buck were engaged, stubborn and confused. So far as the fighting went, it was precisely equal. But the fighting was a farce. For behind the three small armies with which Wayne’s small army was engaged lay the great sea of the allied armies, which looked on as yet as scornful spectators, but could have broken all four armies by moving a finger.

Suddenly they did move. Some of the front contingents, the pastoral chiefs
from Shepherd’s Bush, with their spears and fleeces, were seen advancing, and the rude clans from Paddington Green. They were advancing for a very good reason. Buck, of North Kensington, was signalling wildly; he was surrounded, and totally cut off. His regiments were a struggling mass of people, islanded in a red sea of Notting Hill.

The allies had been too careless and confident. They had allowed Barker’s force to be broken to pieces by Turnbull, and the moment that was done, the astute old leader of Notting Hill swung his men round and attacked Buck behind and on both sides. At the same moment Wayne cried, “Charge!” and struck him in front like a thunderbolt.

Two-thirds of Buck’s men were cut to pieces before their allies could reach them. Then the sea of cities came on with their banners like breakers, and swallowed Notting Hill for ever. The battle was not over, for not one of Wayne’s men would surrender, and it lasted till sundown, and long after. But it was decided; the story of Notting Hill was ended.

When Turnbull saw it, he ceased a moment from fighting, and looked round him. The evening sunlight struck his face; it looked like a child’s.

“I have had my youth,” he said. Then, snatching an axe from a man, he dashed into the thick of the spears of Shepherd’s Bush, and died somewhere far in the depths of their reeling ranks. Then the battle roared on; every man of Notting Hill was slain before night.

Wayne was standing by a tree alone after the battle. Several men approached him with axes. One struck at him. His foot seemed partly to slip; but he flung his hand out, and steadied himself against the tree.

Barker sprang after him, sword in hand, and shaking with excitement.

“How large now, my lord,” he cried, “is the Empire of Notting Hill?”

Wayne smiled in the gathering dark.

“Always as large as this,” he said, and swept his sword round in a semicircle of silver.

Barker dropped, wounded in the neck; and Wilson sprang over his body like a tiger–cat, rushing at Wayne. At the same moment there came behind the Lord of the Red Lion a cry and a flare of yellow, and a mass of the West Kensington halberdiers ploughed up the slope, knee–deep in grass, bearing the yellow banner of the city before them, and shouting aloud.

At the same second Wilson went down under Wayne’s sword, seemingly smashed like a fly. The great sword rose again like a bird, but Wilson seemed to rise with it, and, his sword being broken, sprang at Wayne’s throat like a dog.
The foremost of the yellow halberdiers had reached the tree and swung his axe above the struggling Wayne. With a curse the King whirled up his own halberd, and dashed the blade in the man’s face. He reeled and rolled down the slope, just as the furious Wilson was flung on his back again. And again he was on his feet, and again at Wayne’s throat. Then he was flung again, but this time laughing triumphantly. Grasped in his hand was the red and yellow favour that Wayne wore as Provost of Notting Hill. He had torn it from the place where it had been carried for twenty-five years.

With a shout the West Kensington men closed round Wayne, the great yellow banner flapping over his head.

“Where is your favour now, Provost?” cried the West Kensington leader.

And a laugh went up.

Adam struck at the standard-bearer and brought him reeling forward. As the banner stooped, he grasped the yellow folds and tore off a shred. A halberdier struck him on the shoulder, wounding bloodily.

“Here is one colour!” he cried, pushing the yellow into his belt; “and here!” he cried, pointing to his own blood—“here is the other.”

At the same instant the shock of a sudden and heavy halberd laid the King stunned or dead. In the wild visions of vanishing consciousness, he saw again something that belonged to an utterly forgotten time, something that he had seen somewhere long ago in a restaurant. He saw, with his swimming eyes, red and yellow, the colours of Nicaragua.

Quin did not see the end. Wilson, wild with joy, sprang again at Adam Wayne, and the great sword of Notting Hill was whirled above once more. Then men ducked instinctively at the rushing noise of the sword coming down out of the sky, and Wilson of Bayswater was smashed and wiped down upon the floor like a fly. Nothing was left of him but a wreck; but the blade that had broken him was broken. In dying he had snapped the great sword and the spell of it; the sword of Wayne was broken at the hilt. One rush of the enemy carried Wayne by force against the tree. They were too close to use halberd or even sword; they were breast to breast, even nostrils to nostrils. But Buck got his dagger free.

“Kill him!” he cried, in a strange stifled voice. “Kill him! Good or bad, he is none of us! Do not be blinded by the face! . . . God! have we not been blinded all along!” and he drew his arm back for a stab, and seemed to close his eyes.

Wayne did not drop the hand that hung on to the tree-branch. But a mighty heave went over his breast and his whole huge figure, like an earthquake over great hills. And with that convulsion of effort he rent the branch out of the tree,
with tongues of torn wood; and, swaying it once only, he let the splintered club fall on Buck, breaking his neck. The planner of the Great Road fell face foremost dead, with his dagger in a grip of steel.

“For you and me, and for all brave men, my brother,” said Wayne, in his strange chant, “there is good wine poured in the inn at the end of the world.”

The packed men made another lurch or heave towards him; it was almost too dark to fight clearly. He caught hold of the oak again, this time getting his hand into a wide crevice and grasping, as it were, the bowels of the tree. The whole crowd, numbering some thirty men, made a rush to tear him away from it; they hung on with all their weight and numbers, and nothing stirred. A solitude could not have been stiller than that group of straining men. Then there was a faint sound.

“His hand is slipping,” cried two men in exultation.

“You don’t know much of him,” said another, grimly (a man of the old war). “More likely his bone cracks.”

“It is neither—by God, it is neither!” said one of the first two.

“What is it, then?” asked the second.

“The tree is falling,” he replied.

“As the tree falleth, so shall it lie,” said Wayne’s voice out of the darkness, and it had the same sweet and yet horrible air that it had had throughout, of coming from a great distance, from before or after the event. Even when he was struggling like an eel or battering like a madman, he spoke like a spectator. “As the tree falleth, so shall it lie,” he said. “Men have called that a gloomy text. It is the essence of all exultation. I am doing now what I have done all my life, what is the only happiness, what is the only universality. I am clinging to something. Let it fall, and there let it lie. Fools, you go about and see the kingdoms of the earth, and are liberal and wise and cosmopolitan, which is all that the devil can give you—all that he could offer to Christ, only to be spurned away. I am doing what the truly wise do. When a child goes out into the garden and takes hold of a tree, saying, ‘Let this tree be all I have,’ that moment its roots take hold on hell and its branches on the stars. The joy I have is what the lover knows when a woman is everything. It is what a savage knows when his idol is everything. It is what I know when Notting Hill is everything. I have a city. Let it stand or fall.”

As he spoke, the turf lifted itself like a living thing, and out of it rose slowly, like crested serpents, the roots of the oak. Then the great head of the tree, that seemed a green cloud among grey ones, swept the sky suddenly like a broom, and the whole tree heeled over like a ship, smashing every one in its fall.
CHAPTER III

TWO VOICES

In a place in which there was total darkness for hours, there was also for hours total silence. Then a voice spoke out of the darkness, no one could have told from where, and said aloud—

“So ends the Empire of Notting Hill. As it began in blood, so it ended in blood, and all things are always the same.”

And there was silence again, and then again there was a voice, but it had not the same tone; it seemed that it was not the same voice.

“If all things are always the same, it is because they are always heroic. If all things are always the same, it is because they are always new. To each man one soul only is given; to each soul only is given a little power—the power at some moments to outgrow and swallow up the stars. If age after age that power comes upon men, whatever gives it to them is great. Whatever makes men feel old is mean—an empire or a skin–flint shop. Whatever makes men feel young is great—a great war or a love–story. And in the darkest of the books of God there is written a truth that is also a riddle. It is of the new things that men tire—of fashions and proposals and improvements and change. It is the old things that startle and intoxicate. It is the old things that are young. There is no sceptic who does not feel that many have doubted before. There is no rich and fickle man who does not feel that all his novelties are ancient. There is no worshipper of change who does not feel upon his neck the vast weight of the weariness of the universe. But we who do the old things are fed by nature with a perpetual infancy. No man who is in love thinks that any one has been in love before. No woman who has a child thinks that there have been such things as children. No people that fight for their own city are haunted with the burden of the broken empires. Yes, O dark voice, the world is always the same, for it is always unexpected.”

A little gust of wind blew through the night, and then the first voice answered—

“But in this world there are some, be they wise or foolish, whom nothing intoxicates. There are some who see all your disturbances like a cloud of flies. They know that while men will laugh at your Notting Hill, and will study and rehearse and sing of Athens and Jerusalem, Athens and Jerusalem were silly
suburbs like your Notting Hill. They know that the earth itself is a suburb, and can feel only drearily and respectably amused as they move upon it.”

“They are philosophers or they are fools,” said the other voice. “They are not men. Men live, as I say, rejoicing from age to age in something fresher than progress—in the fact that with every baby a new sun and a new moon are made. If our ancient humanity were a single man, it might perhaps be that he would break down under the memory of so many loyalties, under the burden of so many diverse heroisms, under the load and terror of all the goodness of men. But it has pleased God so to isolate the individual soul that it can only learn of all other souls by hearsay, and to each one goodness and happiness come with the youth and violence of lightning, as momentary and as pure. And the doom of failure that lies on all human systems does not in real fact affect them any more than the worms of the inevitable grave affect a children’s game in a meadow. Notting Hill has fallen; Notting Hill has died. But that is not the tremendous issue. Notting Hill has lived.”

“But if,” answered the other voice, “if what is achieved by all these efforts be only the common contentment of humanity, why do men so extravagantly toil and die in them? Has nothing been done by Notting Hill than any chance clump of farmers or clan of savages would not have done without it? What might have been done to Notting Hill if the world had been different may be a deep question; but there is a deeper. What could have happened to the world if Notting Hill had never been?”

The other voice replied—

“The same that would have happened to the world and all the starry systems if an apple–tree grew six apples instead of seven; something would have been eternally lost. There has never been anything in the world absolutely like Notting Hill. There will never be anything quite like it to the crack of doom. I cannot believe anything but that God loved it as He must surely love anything that is itself and unreplaceable. But even for that I do not care. If God, with all His thunders, hated it, I loved it.”

And with the voice a tall, strange figure lifted itself out of the débris in the half–darkness.

The other voice came after a long pause, and as it were hoarsely.

“But suppose the whole matter were really a hocus–pocus. Suppose that whatever meaning you may choose in your fancy to give to it, the real meaning of the whole was mockery. Suppose it was all folly. Suppose—”

“I have been in it,” answered the voice from the tall and strange figure, “and I
know it was not.”

A smaller figure seemed half to rise in the dark.

“Suppose I am God,” said the voice, “and suppose I made the world in idleness. Suppose the stars, that you think eternal, are only the idiot fireworks of an everlasting schoolboy. Suppose the sun and the moon, to which you sing alternately, are only the two eyes of one vast and sneering giant, opened alternately in a never–ending wink. Suppose the trees, in my eyes, are as foolish as enormous toad–stools. Suppose Socrates and Charlemagne are to me only beasts, made funnier by walking on their hind legs. Suppose I am God, and having made things, laugh at them.”

“And suppose I am man,” answered the other. “And suppose that I give the answer that shatters even a laugh. Suppose I do not laugh back at you, do not blaspheme you, do not curse you. But suppose, standing up straight under the sky, with every power of my being, I thank you for the fools’ paradise you have made. Suppose I praise you, with a literal pain of ecstasy, for the jest that has brought me so terrible a joy. If we have taken the child’s games, and given them the seriousness of a Crusade, if we have drenched your grotesque Dutch garden with the blood of martyrs, we have turned a nursery into a temple. I ask you, in the name of Heaven, who wins?”

The sky close about the crests of the hills and trees was beginning to turn from black to grey, with a random suggestion of the morning. The slight figure seemed to crawl towards the larger one, and the voice was more human.

“But suppose, friend,” it said, “suppose that, in a bitterer and more real sense, it was all a mockery. Suppose that there had been, from the beginning of these great wars, one who watched them with a sense that is beyond expression, a sense of detachment, of responsibility, of irony, of agony. Suppose that there were one who knew it was all a joke.”

The tall figure answered—

“He could not know it. For it was not all a joke.”

And a gust of wind blew away some clouds that sealed the sky–line, and showed a strip of silver behind his great dark legs. Then the other voice came, having crept nearer still.

“Adam Wayne,” it said, “there are men who confess only in articulo mortis; there are people who blame themselves only when they can no longer help others. I am one of them. Here, upon the field of the bloody end of it all, I come to tell you plainly what you would never understand before. Do you know who I am?”
“I know you, Auberon Quin,” answered the tall figure, “and I shall be glad to unburden your spirit of anything that lies upon it.”

“Adam Wayne,” said the other voice, “of what I have to say you cannot in common reason be glad to unburden me. Wayne, it was all a joke. When I made these cities, I cared no more for them than I care for a centaur, or a merman, or a fish with legs, or a pig with feathers, or any other absurdity. When I spoke to you solemnly and encouragingly about the flag of your freedom and the peace of your city, I was playing a vulgar practical joke on an honest gentleman, a vulgar practical joke that has lasted for twenty years. Though no one could believe it of me, perhaps, it is the truth that I am a man both timid and tender-hearted. I never dared in the early days of your hope, or the central days of your supremacy, to tell you this; I never dared to break the colossal calm of your face. God knows why I should do it now, when my farce has ended in tragedy and the ruin of all your people! But I say it now. Wayne, it was done as a joke.”

There was silence, and the freshening breeze blew the sky clearer and clearer, leaving great spaces of the white dawn.

At last Wayne said, very slowly—
“You did it all only as a joke?”
“Yes,” said Quin, briefly.
“When you conceived the idea,” went on Wayne, dreamily, “of an army for Bayswater and a flag for Notting Hill, there was no gleam, no suggestion in your mind that such things might be real and passionate?”
“No,” answered Auberon, turning his round white face to the morning with a dull and splendid sincerity; “I had none at all.”

Wayne sprang down from the height above him and held out his hand.
“I will not stop to thank you,” he said, with a curious joy in his voice, “for the great good for the world you have actually wrought. All that I think of that I have said to you a moment ago, even when I thought that your voice was the voice of a derisive omnipotence, its laughter older than the winds of heaven. But let me say what is immediate and true. You and I, Auberon Quin, have both of us throughout our lives been again and again called mad. And we are mad. We are mad, because we are not two men, but one man. We are mad, because we are two lobes of the same brain, and that brain has been cloven in two. And if you ask for the proof of it, it is not hard to find. It is not merely that you, the humorist, have been in these dark days stripped of the joy of gravity. It is not merely that I, the fanatic, have had to grope without humour. It is that, though we seem to be opposite in everything, we have been opposite like man and
woman, aiming at the same moment at the same practical thing. We are the father and the mother of the Charter of the Cities.”

Quin looked down at the débris of leaves and timber, the relics of the battle and stampede, now glistening in the growing daylight, and finally said—

“Yet nothing can alter the antagonism—the fact that I laughed at these things and you adored them.”

Wayne’s wild face flamed with something god–like, as he turned it to be struck by the sunrise.

“I know of something that will alter that antagonism, something that is outside us, something that you and I have all our lives perhaps taken too little account of. The equal and eternal human being will alter that antagonism, for the human being sees no real antagonism between laughter and respect, the human being, the common man, whom mere geniuses like you and me can only worship like a god. When dark and dreary days come, you and I are necessary, the pure fanatic, the pure satirist. We have between us remedied a great wrong. We have lifted the modern cities into that poetry which every one who knows mankind knows to be immeasurably more common than the commonplace. But in healthy people there is no war between us. We are but the two lobes of the brain of a ploughman. Laughter and love are everywhere. The cathedrals, built in the ages that loved God, are full of blasphemous grotesques. The mother laughs continually at the child, the lover laughs continually at the lover, the wife at the husband, the friend at the friend. Auberon Quin, we have been too long separated; let us go out together. You have a halberd and I a sword, let us start our wanderings over the world. For we are its two essentials. Come, it is already day.”

In the blank white light Auberon hesitated a moment. Then he made the formal salute with his halberd, and they went away together into the unknown world.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

THE FLYING INN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I
A SERMON ON INNS

CHAPTER II
THE END OF OLIVE ISLAND

CHAPTER III
THE SIGN OF “THE OLD SHIP”

CHAPTER IV
THE INN FINDS WINGS

CHAPTER V
THE ASTONISHMENT OF THE AGENT

CHAPTER VI
THE HOLE IN HEAVEN

CHAPTER VII
THE SOCIETY OF SIMPLE SOULS

CHAPTER VIII
VOX POPULI VOX DEI

CHAPTER IX
THE HIGHER CRITICISM AND MR. HIBBS

CHAPTER X
THE CHARACTER OF QUOODLE

CHAPTER XI
VEGETARIANISM IN THE DRAWING–ROOM

CHAPTER XII
VEGETARIANISM IN THE FOREST

CHAPTER XIII
THE BATTLE OF THE TUNNEL

CHAPTER XIV
THE CREATURE THAT MAN FORGETS
CHAPTER XV
THE SONGS OF THE CAR CLUB

CHAPTER XVI
THE SEVEN MOODS OF DORIAN

CHAPTER XVII
THE POET IN PARLIAMENT

CHAPTER XVIII
THE REPUBLIC OF PEACEWAYS

CHAPTER XIX
THE HOSPITALITY OF THE CAPTAIN

CHAPTER XX
THE TURK AND THE FUTURISTS

CHAPTER XXI
THE ROAD TO ROUNDABOUT

CHAPTER XXII
THE CHEMISTRY OF MR. CROOKE

CHAPTER XXIII
THE MARCH ON IVYWOOD

CHAPTER XXIV
THE ENIGMAS OF LADY JOAN

CHAPTER XXV
THE FINDING OF THE SUPERMAN
CHAPTER I

A SERMON ON INNS

THE sea was a pale elfin green and the afternoon had already felt the fairy touch of evening as a young woman with dark hair, dressed in a crinkly copper-coloured sort of dress of the artistic order, was walking rather listlessly along the parade of Pebblewick–on–Sea, trailing a parasol and looking out upon the sea’s horizon. She had a reason for looking instinctively out at the sea–line; a reason that many young women have had in the history of the world. But there was no sail in sight.

On the beach below the parade were a succession of small crowds, surrounding the usual orators of the seaside; whether niggers or socialists, whether clowns or clergymen. Here would stand a man doing something or other with paper boxes; and the holiday makers would watch him for hours in the hope of some time knowing what it was that he was doing with them. Next to him would be a man in a top hat with a very big Bible and a very small wife, who stood silently beside him, while he fought with his clenched fist against the heresy of Milnian Sublapsarianism so wide–spread in fashionable watering–places. It was not easy to follow him, he was so very much excited; but every now and then the words “our Sublapsarian friends” would recur with a kind of wailing sneer. Next was a young man talking of nobody knew what (least of all himself), but apparently relying for public favour mainly on having a ring of carrots round his hat. He had more money lying in front of him than the others. Next were niggers. Next was a children’s service conducted by a man with a long neck who beat time with a little wooden spade. Farther along there was an atheist, in a towering rage, who pointed every now and then at the children’s service and spoke of Nature’s fairest things being corrupted with the secrets of the Spanish Inquisition–by the man with the little spade, of course. The atheist (who wore a red rosette) was very withering to his own audience as well. “Hypocrites!” he would say; and then they would throw him money. “Dupes and dastards!” and then they would throw him more money. But between the atheist and the children’s service was a little owlish man in a red fez, weakly waving a green gamp umbrella. His face was brown and wrinkled like a walnut, his nose was of the sort we associate with Judaea, his beard was the sort of black wedge we associate rather with Persia. The young woman had never seen him before;
he was a new exhibit in the now familiar museum of cranks and quacks. The young woman was one of those people in whom a real sense of humour is always at issue with a certain temperamental tendency to boredom or melancholia; and she lingered a moment, and leaned on the rail to listen.

It was fully four minutes before she could understand a word the man was saying; he spoke English with so extraordinary an accent that she supposed at first that he was talking in his own oriental tongue. All the noises of that articulation were odd; the most marked was an extreme prolongation of the short “u” into “oo”; as in “poo–oot” for “put.” Gradually the girl got used to the dialect, and began to understand the words; though some time elapsed even then before she could form any conjecture of their subject matter. Eventually it appeared to her that he had some fad about English civilisation having been founded by the Turks; or, perhaps by the Saracens after their victory in the Crusades. He also seemed to think that Englishmen would soon return to this way of thinking; and seemed to be urging the spread of teetotalism as an evidence of it. The girl was the only person listening to him.

“Loo–ook,” he said, wagging a curled brown finger, “loo–ook at your own inns” (which he pronounced as “ince”). “Your inns of which you write in your boo–ooks! Those inns were not poo–oot up in the beginning to sell ze alcoholic Christian drink. They were put up to sell ze non–alcoholic Islamic drinks. You can see this in the names of your inns. They are eastern names, Asiatic names. You have a famous public house to which your omnibuses go on the pilgrimage. It is called the Elephant and Castle. That is not an English name. It is an Asiatic name. You will say there are castles in England, and I will agree with you. There is the Windsor Castle. But where,” he cried sternly, shaking his green umbrella at the girl in an angry oratorical triumph, “where is the Windsor Elephant? I have searched all Windsor Park. No elephants.”

The girl with the dark hair smiled, and began to think that this man was better than any of the others. In accordance with the strange system of concurrent religious endowment which prevails at watering–places, she dropped a two shilling piece into the round copper tray beside him. With honourable and disinterested eagerness, the old gentleman in the red fez took no notice of this, but went on warmly, if obscurely, with his argument.

“Then you have a place of drink in this town which you call The Bool!”

“We generally call it The Bull,” said the interested young lady, with a very melodious voice.

“You have a place of drink, which you call The Bool,” he reiterated in a sort
of abstract fury, “and surely you see that this is all vary ridiculous!”

“No, no!” said the girl, softly, and in deprecation.

“Why should there be a Bull?” he cried, prolonging the word in his own way. “Why should there be a Bull in connection with a festive locality? Who thinks about a Bull in gardens of delight? What need is there of a Bull when we watch the tulip-tinted maidens dance or pour the sparkling shérbert? You yourselves, my friends?” And he looked around radiantly, as if addressing an enormous mob. “You yourselves have a proverb, ‘It is not calculated to promote prosperity to have a Bull in a china shop.’ Equally, my friends, it would not be calculated to promote prosperity to have a Bull in a wine shop. All this is clear.”

He stuck his umbrella upright in the sand and struck one finger against another, like a man getting to business at last.

“It iss as clear as the sun at noon,” he said solemnly. “It iss as clear as the sun at noon that this word Bull, which is devoid of restful and pleasurable associations, is but the corruption of another word, which possesses restful and pleasurable associations. The word is not Bull; it is the Bul–Bul!” His voice rose suddenly like a trumpet and he spread abroad his hands like the fans of a tropic palm–tree.

After this great effect he was a little more subdued and leaned gravely on his umbrella. “You will find the same trace of Asiatic nomenclature in the names of all your English inns,” he went on. “Nay, you will find it, I am almost certain, in all your terms in any way connected with your revelries and your reposes. Why, my good friends, the very name of that insidious spirit by which you make strong your drinks is an Arabic word: alcohol. It is obvious, is it not, that this is the Arabic article ‘Al,’ as in Alhambra, as in Algebra; and we need not pause here to pursue its many appearances in connection with your festive institutions, as in your Alsop’s beer, your Ally Sloper, and your partly joyous institution of the Albert Memorial. Above all, in your greatest feasting day–your Christmas day–which you so erroneously suppose to be connected with your religion, what do you say then? Do you say the names of the Christian Nations? Do you say, ‘I will have a little France. I will have a little Ireland. I will have a little Scotland. I will have a little Spain?’ No–o.” And the noise of the negative seemed to waggle as does the bleating of a sheep. “You say, ‘I will have a little Turkey,’ which is your name for the Country of the Servant of the Prophet!”

And once more he stretched out his arms sublimely to the east and west and appealed to earth and heaven. The young lady, looking at the sea–green horizon with a smile, clapped her grey gloved hands softly together as if at a peroration.
But the little old man with the fez was far from exhausted yet.

“In reply to this you will object—” he began.

“O no, no,” breathed the young lady in a sort of dreamy rapture. “I don’t object. I don’t object the littlest bit!”

“In reply to this you will object—” proceeded her preceptor, “that some inns are actually named after the symbols of your national superstitions. You will hasten to point out to me that the Golden Cross is situated opposite Charing Cross, and you will expatiate at length on King’s Cross, Gerrard’s Cross and the many crosses that are to be found in or near London. But you must not forget,” and here he wagged his green umbrella roguishly at the girl, as if he was going to poke her with it, “none of you, my friends, must forget what a large number of Crescents there are in London! Denmark Crescent; Mornington Crescent! St. Mark’s Crescent! St. George’s Crescent! Grosvenor Crescent! Regent’s Park Crescent! Nay, Royal Crescent! And why should we forget Pelham Crescent? Why, indeed? Everywhere, I say, homage paid to the holy symbol of the religion of the Prophet! Compare with this network and pattern of crescents, this city almost consisting of crescents, the meagre array of crosses, which remain to attest the ephemeral superstition to which you were, for one weak moment, inclined.”

The crowds on the beach were rapidly thinning as tea–time drew nearer. The west grew clearer and clearer with the evening, till the sunshine seemed to have got behind the pale green sea and be shining through, as through a wall of thin green glass. The very transparency of sky and sea might have to this girl, for whom the sea was the romance and the tragedy, the hint of a sort of radiant hopelessness. The flood made of a million emeralds was ebbing as slowly as the sun was sinking: but the river of human nonsense flowed on for ever.

“I will not for one moment maintain,” said the old gentleman, “that there are no difficulties in my case; or that all the examples are as obviously true as those that I have just demonstrated. No–o. It is obvious, let us say, that the ‘Saracen’s Head’ is a corruption of the historic truth ‘The Saracen is Ahead’–I am far from saying it is equally obvious that the ‘Green Dragon’ was originally ‘the Agreeing Dragoman’; though I hope to prove in my book that it is so. I will only say here that it is su–urely more probable that one poo–ooting himself forward to attract the wayfarer in the desert, would compare himself to a friendly and persuadable guide or courier, rather than to a voracious monster. Sometimes the true origin is very hard to trace; as in the inn that commemorates our great Moslem Warrior, Amir Ali Ben Bhoze, whom you have so quaintly abbreviated into Admiral
Benbow. Sometimes it is even more difficult for the seeker after truth. There is a place of drink near to here called ‘The Old Ship’—"

The eyes of the girl remained on the ring of the horizon as rigid as the ring itself; but her whole face had coloured and altered. The sands were almost emptied by now: the atheist was as non-existent as his God; and those who had hoped to know what was being done to the paper boxes had gone away to their tea without knowing it. But the young woman still leaned on the railing. Her face was suddenly alive; and it looked as if her body could not move.

“It shood be admitted—” bleated the old man with the green umbrella, “that there is no literally self-evident trace of the Asiatic nomenclature in the words ‘the old ship.’ But even here the see-eeker after Truth can poot himself in touch with facts. I questioned the proprietor of ‘The Old Ship’ who is, according to such notes as I have kept, a Mr. Pumph.”

The girl’s lip trembled.

“Poor old Hump!” she said. “Why, I’d forgotten about him. He must be very nearly as worried as I am! I hope this man won’t be too silly about this! I’d rather it weren’t about this!”

“And Mr. Pumph to–old me the inn was named by a vary intimate friend of his, an Irishman who had been a Captain in the Britannic Royal Navy, but had resigned his po–ost in anger at the treatment of Ireland. Though quitting the service, he retained joost enough of the superstition of your western sailors, to wish his friend’s inn to be named after his old ship. But as the name of the ship was ‘The United Kingdom–’"

His female pupil, if she could not exactly be said to be sitting at his feet, was undoubtedly leaning out very eagerly above his head. Amid the solitude of the sands she called out in a loud and clear voice, “Can you tell me the Captain’s name?”

The old gentleman jumped, blinked and stared like a startled owl. Having been talking for hours as if he had an audience of thousands, he seemed suddenly very much embarrassed to find that he had even an audience of one. By this time they seemed to be almost the only human creatures along the shore; almost the only living creatures, except the seagulls. The sun, in dropping finally, seemed to have broken as a blood orange might break; and lines of blood–red light were spilt along the split, low, level skies. This abrupt and belated brilliance took all the colour out of the man’s red cap and green umbrella; but his dark figure, distinct against the sea and the sunset, remained the same, save that it was more agitated than before.
“The name,” he said, “the Captain’s name. I—I understood it was Dalroy. But what I wish to indicate, what I wish to expound, is that here again the seeker after truth can find the connection of his ideas. It was explained to me by Mr. Pumph that he was rearranging the place of festivity, in no inconsiderable proportion because of the anticipated return of the Captain in question, who had, as it appeared, taken service in some not very large Navy, but had left it and was coming home. Now, mark all of you, my friends,” he said to the seagulls “that even here the chain of logic holds.”

He said it to the seagulls because the young lady, after staring at him with starry eyes for a moment and leaning heavily on the railing, had turned her back and disappeared rapidly into the twilight. After her hasty steps had fallen silent there was no other noise than the faint but powerful purring of the now distant sea, the occasional shriek of a sea–bird, and the continuous sound of a soliloquy.

“Mark, all of you,” continued the man flourishing his green umbrella so furiously that it almost flew open like a green flag unfurled, and then striking it deep in the sand, in the sand in which his fighting fathers had so often struck their tents, “mark all of you this marvellous fact! That when, being for a time, for a time, astonished–embarrassed–brought up as you would say short–by the absence of any absolute evidence of Eastern influence in the phrase ‘the old ship,’ I inquired from what country the Captain was returning, Mr. Pumph said to me in solemnity, ‘From Turkey.’ From Turkey! From the nearest country of the Religion! I know men say it is not our country; that no man knows where we come from, of what is our country. What does it matter where we come from if we carry a message from Paradise? With a great galloping of horses we carry it, and have no time to stop in places. But what we bring is the only creed that has regarded what you will call in your great words the virginity of a man’s reason, that has put no man higher than a prophet, and has respected the solitude of God.”

And again he spread his arms out, as if addressing a mass meeting of millions, all alone on the dark seashore.
CHAPTER II

THE END OF OLIVE ISLAND

THE great sea–dragon of the changing colours that wriggles round the world like a chameleon, was pale green as it washed on Pebblewick, but strong blue where it broke on the Ionian Isles. One of the innumerable islets, hardly more than a flat white rock in the azure expanse, was celebrated as the Isle of Olives; not because it was rich in such vegetation, but because, by some freak of soil or climate, two or three little olives grew there to an unparalleled height. Even in the full heat of the South it is very unusual for an olive tree to grow any taller than a small pear tree; but the three olives that stood up as signals on this sterile place might well be mistaken, except for the shape, for moderate sized pines or larches of the north. It was also connected with some ancient Greek legend about Pallas the patroness of the olive; for all that sea was alive with the first fairyland of Hellas; and from the platform of marble under the olive trees could be seen the grey outline of Ithaca.

On the island and under the trees was a table set in the open air and covered with papers and inkstands. At the table were sitting four men, two in uniform and two in plain black clothes. Aides–de–camps, equerries and such persons stood in a group in the background; and behind them a string of two or three silent battle–ships lay along the sea. For peace was being given to Europe.

There had just come to an end the long agony of one of the many unsuccessful efforts to break the strength of Turkey and save the small Christian tribes. There had been many other such meetings in the later phases of the matter as, one after another, the smaller nations gave up the struggle, or the greater nations came in to coerce them. But the interested parties had now dwindled to these four. For the Powers of Europe being entirely agreed on the necessity for peace on a Turkish basis, were content to leave the last negotiations to England and Germany, who could be trusted to enforce it; there was a representative of the Sultan, of course; and there was a representative of the only enemy of the Sultan who had not hitherto come to terms.

For one tiny power had alone carried on the war month after month, and with a tenacity and temporary success that was a new nine–days marvel every morning. An obscure and scarcely recognized prince calling himself the King of Ithaca had filled the Eastern Mediterranean with exploits that were not unworthy
of the audacious parallel that the name of his island suggested. Poets could not help asking if it were Odysseus come again; patriotic Greeks, even if they themselves had been forced to lay down their arms, could not help feeling curious as to what Greek race or name was boasted by the new and heroic royal house. It was, therefore, with some amusement that the world at last discovered that the descendant of Ulysses was a cheeky Irish adventurer named Patrick Dalroy; who had once been in the English Navy, had got into a quarrel through his Fenian sympathies and resigned his commission. Since then he had seen many adventures in many uniforms; and always got himself or some one else into hot water with an extraordinary mixture of cynicism and quixotry. In his fantastic little kingdom, of course, he had been his own General, his own Admiral, his own Foreign Secretary and his own Ambassador; but he was always careful to follow the wishes of his people in the essentials of peace and war; and it was at their direction that he had come to lay down his sword at last. Besides his professional skill, he was chiefly famous for his enormous bodily strength and stature. It is the custom in newspapers nowadays to say that mere barbaric muscular power is valueless in modern military actions, but this view may be as much exaggerated as its opposite. In such wars as these of the Near East, where whole populations are slightly armed and personal assault is common, a leader who can defend his head often has a real advantage; and it is not true, even in a general way, that strength is of no use. This was admitted by Lord Ivywood, the English Minister, who was pointing out in detail to King Patrick the hopeless superiority of the light pattern of Turkish field gun; and the King of Ithaca, remarking that he was quite convinced, said he would take it with him, and ran away with it under his arm. It would be conceded by the greatest of the Turkish warriors, the terrifying Oman Pasha, equally famous for his courage in war and his cruelty in peace; but who carried on his brow a scar from Patrick’s sword, taken after three hours mortal combat—and taken without spite or shame, be it said, for the Turk is always at his best in that game. Nor would the quality be doubted by Mr. Hart, a financial friend of the German Minister, whom Patrick Dalroy, after asking him which of his front windows he would prefer to be thrown into, threw into his bedroom window on the first floor with so considerate an exactitude that he alighted on the bed, where he was in a position to receive any medical attention. But, when all is said, one muscular Irish gentleman on an island cannot fight all Europe for ever, and he came, with a kind of gloomy good humour, to offer the terms now dictated to him by his adopted country. He could not even knock all the diplomatists down (for which
he possessed both the power and the inclination), for he realised, with the juster part of his mind, that they were only obeying orders, as he was. So he sat heavily and sleepily at the little table, in the green and white uniform of the Navy of Ithaca (invented by himself); a big bull of a man, monstrously young for his size, with a bull neck and two blue bull’s eyes for eyes, and red hair rising so steadily off his scalp that it looked as if his head had caught fire: as some said it had.

The most dominant person present was the great Oman Pasha himself, with his strong face starved by the asceticism of war, his hair and mustache seeming rather blasted with lightning than blanched with age; a red fez on his head, and between the red fez and mustache, a scar at which the King of Ithaca did not look. His eyes had an awful lack of expression.

Lord Ivywood, the English Minister, was probably the handsomest man in England, save that he was almost colourless both in hair and complexion. Against that blue marble sea he might almost have been one of its old marble statues that are faultless in line but show nothing but shades of grey or white. It seemed a mere matter of the luck of lighting whether his hair looked dull silver or pale brown; and his splendid mask never changed in colour or expression. He was one of the last of the old Parliamentary orators; and yet he was probably a comparatively young man; he could make anything he had to mention blossom into verbal beauty; yet his face remained dead while his lips were alive. He had little old-fashioned ways, as out of old Parliaments; for instance, he would always stand up, as in a Senate, to speak to those three other men, alone on a rock in the ocean.

In all this he perhaps appeared more personal in contrast to the man sitting next to him, who never spoke at all but whose face seemed to speak for him. He was Dr. Gluck, the German Minister, whose face had nothing German about it; neither the German vision nor the German sleep. His face was as vivid as a highly coloured photograph and altered like a cinema: but his scarlet lips never moved in speech. His almond eyes seemed to shine with all the shifting fires of the opal; his small, curled black mustache seemed sometimes almost to hoist itself afresh, like a live, black snake; but there came from him no sound. He put a paper in front of Lord Ivywood. Lord Ivywood took a pair of eyeglasses to read it, and looked ten years older by the act.

It was merely a statement of agenda; of the few last things to be settled at this last conference. The first item ran:

“The Ithacan Ambassador asks that the girls taken to harems after the capture of Pylos be restored to their families. This cannot be granted.” Lord Ivywood
rose. The mere beauty of his voice startled everyone who had not heard it before.

“Your Excellencies and gentlemen,” he said, “a statement to whose policy I by no means assent, but to whose historic status I could not conceivably aspire, has familiarised you with a phrase about peace with honour. But when we have to celebrate a peace between such historic soldiers as Oman Pasha and His Majesty the King of Ithaca, I think we may say that it is peace with glory.”

He paused for half an instant; yet even the silence of sea and rock seemed full of multitudinous applause, so perfectly had the words been spoken.

“I think there is but one thought among us, whatever our many just objections through these long and harassing months of negotiations–I think there is but one thought now. That the peace may be as full as the war–that the peace may be as fearless as the war.”

Once more he paused an instant; and felt a phantom clapping, as it were, not from the hands but the heads of the men. He went on.

“If we are to leave off fighting, we may surely leave off haggling. A statute of limitations or, if you will, an amnesty, is surely proper when so sublime a peace seals so sublime a struggle. And if there be anything in which an old diplomatist may advise you, I would most strongly say this: that there should be no new disturbance of whatever amicable or domestic ties have been formed during this disturbed time. I will admit I am sufficiently old–fashioned to think any interference with the interior life of the family a precedent of no little peril. Nor will I be so illiberal as not to extend to the ancient customs of Islam what I would extend to the ancient customs of Christianity. A suggestion has been brought before us that we should enter into a renewed war of recrimination as to whether certain women have left their homes with or without their own consent. I can conceive no controversy more perilous to begin or more impossible to conclude. I will venture to say that I express all your thoughts, when I say that, whatever wrongs may have been wrought on either side, the homes, the marriages, the family arrangements of this great Ottoman Empire, shall remain as they are today.”

No one moved except Patrick Dalroy, who put his hand on his sword–hilt for a moment and looked at them all with bursting eyes; then his hand fell and he laughed out loud and sudden.

Lord Ivywood took no notice, but picked up the agenda paper again, and again fitted on the glasses that made him look older. He read the second item–needless to say, not aloud. The German Minister with the far from German face, had written this note for him:
“Both Coote and the Bernsteins insist there must be Chinese for the marble. Greeks cannot be trusted in the quarries just now.”

“But while,” continued Lord Ivywood, “we desire these fundamental institutions, such as the Moslem family, to remain as they are even at this moment, we do not assent to social stagnation. Nor do we say for one moment that the great tradition of Islam is capable alone of sustaining the necessities of the Near East. But I would seriously ask your Excellencies, why should we be so vain as to suppose that the only cure for the Near East is of necessity the Near West? If new ideas are needed, if new blood is needed, would it not be more natural to appeal to those most living, those most laborious civilisations which form the vast reserve of the Orient? Asia in Europe, if my friend Oman Pasha will allow me the criticism, has hitherto been Asia in arms. May we not yet see Asia in Europe and yet Asia in peace? These at least are the reasons which lead me to consent to a scheme of colonisation.”

Patrick Dalroy sprang erect, pulling himself out of his seat by clutching at an olive-branch above his head. He steadied himself by putting one hand on the trunk of the tree, and simply stared at them all. There fell on him the huge helplessness of mere physical power. He could throw them into the sea; but what good would that do? More men on the wrong side would be accredited to the diplomatic campaign; and the only man on the right side would be discredited for anything. He shook the branching olive tree above him in his fury. But he did not for one moment disturb Lord Ivywood, who had just read the third item on his private agenda (“Oman Pasha insists on the destruction of the vineyards”) and was by this time engaged in a peroration which afterwards became famous and may be found in many rhetorical text books and primers. He was well into the middle of it before Dalroy’s rage and wonder allowed him to follow the words.

“. . . do we indeed owe nothing,” the diplomatist was saying “to that gesture of high refusal in which so many centuries ago the great Arabian mystic put the wine-cup from his lips? Do we owe nothing to the long vigil of a valiant race, the long fast by which they have testified against the venomous beauty of the Vine? Ours is an age when men come more and more to see that the creeds hold treasures for each other, that each religion has a secret for its neighbour, that faith unto faith uttereth speech, and church unto church sheweth knowledge. If it be true, and I claim again the indulgence of Oman Pasha when I say I think it is true, that we of the West have brought some light to Islam in the matter of the preciousness of peace and of civil order, may we not say that Islam in answer
shall give us peace in a thousand homes, and encourage us to cut down that curse that has done so much to thwart and madden the virtues of Western Christendom. Already in my own country the orgies that made horrible the nights of the noblest families are no more. Already the legislature takes more and more sweeping action to deliver the populace from the bondage of the all-destroying drug. Surely the prophet of Mecca is reaping his harvest; the cession of the disputed vineyards to the greatest of his champions is of all acts the most appropriate to this day; to this happy day that may yet deliver the East from the curse of war and the West from the curse of wine. The gallant prince who meets us here at last, to offer an olive branch even more glorious than his sword, may well have our sympathy if he himself views the cession with some sentimental regret; but I have little doubt that he also will live to rejoice in it at last. And I would remind you that it is not the vine alone that has been the sign of the glory of the South. There is another sacred tree unstained by loose and violent memories, guiltless of the blood of Pentheus or of Orpheus and the broken lyre. We shall pass from this place in a little while as all things pass and perish:

“Far called, our navies melt away. On dune and headland sinks the fire, And all our pomp of yesterday Is one with Nineveh and Tyre.

“But so long as sun can shine and soil can nourish, happier men and women after us shall look on this lovely islet and it shall tell its own story; for they shall see these three holy olive trees lifted in everlasting benediction, over the humble spot out of which came the peace of the world.”

The other two men were staring at Patrick Dalroy; his hand had tightened on the tree, and a giant billow of effort went over his broad breast. A small stone jerked itself out of the ground at the foot of the tree as if it were a grasshopper jumping; and then the coiled roots of the olive tree rose very slowly out of the earth like the limbs of a dragon lifting itself from sleep.

“I offer an olive branch,” said the King of Ithaca, totteringly leaning the loose tree so that its vast shadow, much larger than itself, fell across the whole council. “An olive branch,” he gasped, “more glorious than my sword. Also heavier.”

Then he made another effort and tossed it into the sea below.

The German, who was no German, had put up his arm in apprehension when the shadow fell across him. Now he got up and edged away from the table; seeing that the wild Irishman was tearing up the second tree. This one came out more easily; and before he flung it after the first, he stood with it a moment; looking like a man juggling with a tower.

Lord Ivywood showed more firmness; but he rose in tremendous
remonstrance. Only the Turkish Pasha still sat with blank eyes, immovable. Dalroy rent out the last tree and hurled it, leaving the island bare.

“There!” said Dalroy, when the third and last olive had splashed in the tide. “Now I will go. I have seen something today that is worse than death: and the name of it is Peace.”

Oman Pasha rose and held out his hand.

“You are right,” he said in French, “and I hope we meet again in the only life that is a good life. Where are you going now?”

“I am going,” said Dalroy, dreamily, “to ‘The Old Ship.’”

“Do you mean?” asked the Turk, “that you are going back to the warships of the English King?”

“No,” answered the other, “I am going back to ‘The Old Ship’ that is behind the apple trees by Pebblewick; where the Ule flows among the trees. I fear I shall never see you there.”

After an instant’s hesitation he wrung the red hand of the great tyrant and walked to his boat without a glance at the diplomatists.
CHAPTER III

THE SIGN OF “THE OLD SHIP”

UPON few of the children of men has the surname of Pump fallen, and of these few have been maddened into naming a child Humphrey in addition to it. To such extremity, however, had the parents of the innkeeper at “The Old Ship” proceeded, that their son might come at last to be called “Hump” by his dearest friends, and “Pumph” by an aged Turk with a green umbrella. All this, or all he knew of it, he endured with a sour smile; for he was of a stoical temper.

Mr. Humphrey Pump stood outside his inn, which stood almost on the seashore, screened only by one line of apple trees, dwarfed, twisted and salted by the sea air; but in front of it was a highly banked bowling green, and behind it the land sank abruptly; so that one very steep sweeping road vanished into the depth and mystery of taller trees. Mr. Pump was standing immediately under his trim sign, which stood erect in the turf; a wooden pole painted white and suspending a square white board, also painted white but further decorated with a highly grotesque blue ship, such as a child might draw, but into which Mr. Pump’s patriotism had insinuated a disproportionately large red St. George’s cross.

Mr. Humphrey Pump was a man of middle size, with very broad shoulders, wearing a sort of shooting suit with gaiters. Indeed, he was engaged at the moment in cleaning and reloading a double–barrelled gun, a short but powerful weapon which he had invented, or at least improved, himself; and which, though eccentric enough as compared with latest scientific arms, was neither clumsy nor necessarily out of date. For Pump was one of those handy men who seem to have a hundred hands like Briareus; he made nearly everything for himself and everything in his house was slightly different from the same thing in anyone else’s house. He was also as cunning as Pan or a poacher in everything affecting every bird or dish, every leaf or berry in the woods. His mind was a rich soil of subconscious memories and traditions; and he had a curious kind of gossip so allusive as to almost amount to reticence; for he always took it for granted that everyone knew his county and its tales as intimately as he did; so he would mention the most mysterious and amazing things without relaxing a muscle on his face, which seemed to be made of knotted wood. His dark brown hair ended in two rudimentary side whiskers, giving him a slightly horsy look, but in the
old–fashioned sportsman’s style. His smile was rather wry and crabbed; but his brown eyes were kindly and soft. He was very English.

As a rule his movements, though quick, were cool; but on this occasion he put down the gun on the table outside the inn in a rather hurried manner and came forward dusting his hands in an unusual degree of animation and even defiance. Beyond the goblin green apple trees and against the sea had appeared the tall, slight figure of a girl, in a dress about the colour of copper and a large shady hat. Under the hat her face was grave and beautiful though rather swarthy. She shook hands with Mr. Pump; then he very ceremoniously put a chair for her and called her “Lady Joan.”

“I thought I would like a look at the old place,” she said. “We have had some happy times here when we were boys and girls. I suppose you hardly see any of your old friends now.”

“Very little,” answered Pump, rubbing his short whisker reflectively. “Lord Ivywood’s become quite a Methody parson, you know, since he took the place; he’s pulling down beer–shops right and left. And Mr. Charles was sent to Australia for lying down flat at the funeral. Pretty stiff I call it; but the old lady was a terror.”

“Do you ever hear,” asked Lady Joan Brett, carelessly, “of that Irishman, Captain Dalroy?”

“Yes, more often than from the rest,” answered the innkeeper. “He seems to have done wonders in this Greek business. Ah! He was a sad loss to the Navy!”

“They insulted his country,” said the girl, looking at the sea with a heightened colour. “After all, Ireland was his country; and he had a right to resent it being spoken of like that.”

“And when they found he’d painted him green,” went on Mr. Pump.

“Painted him what?” asked Lady Joan.

“Painted Captain Dawson green,” continued Mr. Pump in colourless tones. “Captain Dawson said green was the colour of Irish traitors, so Dalroy painted him green. It was a great temptation, no doubt, with this fence being painted at the time and the pail of stuff there; but, of course, it had a very prejudicial effect on his professional career.”

“What an extraordinary story!” said the staring Lady Joan, breaking into a rather joyless laugh. “It must go down among your county legends. I never heard that version before. Why, it might be the origin of the ‘Green Man’ over there by the town.”

“Oh, no,” said Pump, simply, “that’s been there since before Waterloo times.
Poor old Noyle had it until they put him away. You remember old Noyle, Lady Joan. Still alive, I hear, and still writing love-letters to Queen Victoria. Only of course they aren’t posted now.”

“Have you heard from your Irish friend lately?” asked the girl, keeping a steady eye on the sky-line.

“Yes, I had a letter last week,” answered the innkeeper. “It seems not impossible that he may return to England. He’s been acting for one of these Greek places, and the negotiations seem to be concluded. It’s a queer thing that his lordship himself was the English minister in charge of them.”

“You mean Lord Ivywood,” said Lady Joan, rather coldly. “Yes, he has a great career before him, evidently.”

“I wish he hadn’t got his knife into us so much,” chuckled Pump. “I don’t believe there’ll be an inn left in England. But the Ivywoods were always cranky. It’s only fair to him to remember his grandfather.”

“I think it’s very ungallant on your part,” said Lady Joan, with a mournful smile, “to ask a lady to remember his grandfather.”

“You know what I mean, Lady Joan,” said her host, good humouredly. “And I never was hard on the case myself; we all have our little ways. I shouldn’t like it done to my pig; but I don’t see why a man shouldn’t have his own pig in his own pew with him if he likes it. It wasn’t a free seat. It was the family pew.”

Lady Joan broke out laughing again. “What horrible things you do seem to have heard of,” she said. “Well, I must be going, Mr. Hump—I mean Mr. Pump—I used to call you Hump . . . oh, Hump, do you think any of us will ever be happy again?”

“I suppose it rests with Providence,” he said, looking at the sea.

“Oh, do say Providence again!” cried the girl. “It’s as good as ‘Masterman Ready.’”

With which inconsequent words she betook herself again to the path by the apple trees and walked back by the sea front to Pebblewick.

The inn of “The Old Ship” lay a little beyond the old fishing village of Pebblewick; and that again was separated by an empty half-mile or so from the new watering-place of Pebblewick-on-Sea. But the dark-haired lady walked steadily along the sea-front, on a sort of parade which had been stretched out to east and west in the insane optimism of watering-places, and, as she approached the more crowded part, looked more and more carefully at the groups on the beach. Most of them were much the same as she had seen them more than a month before. The seekers after truth (as the man in the fez would say) who
assembled daily to find out what the man was doing with the paper–boxes, had not found out yet; neither had they wearied of their intellectual pilgrimage. Pennies were still thrown to the thundering atheist in acknowledgment of his incessant abuse; and this was all the more mysterious because the crowd was obviously indifferent, and the atheist was obviously sincere. The man with the long neck who led Low Church hymns with a little wooden spade had indeed disappeared; for children’s services of this kind are generally a moving feast; but the man whose only claim consisted of carrots round his hat was still there; and seemed to have even more money than before. But Lady Joan could see no sign of the little old man in the fez. She could only suppose that he had failed entirely; and, being in a bitter mood, she told herself bitterly that he had sunk out of sight precisely because there was in his rubbish a touch of unearthly and insane clearheadedness of which all these vulgar idiots were incapable. She did not confess to herself consciously that what had made both the man in the fez and the man at the inn interesting was the subject of which they had spoken.

As she walked on rather wearily along the parade she caught sight of a girl in black with faint fair hair and a tremulous, intelligent face which she was sure she had seen before. Pulling together all her aristocratic training for the remembering of middle class people, she managed to remember that this was a Miss Browning who had done typewriting work for her a year or two before; and immediately went forward to greet her, partly out of genuine good nature and partly as a relief from her own rather dreary thoughts. Her tone was so seriously frank and friendly that the lady in black summoned the social courage to say:

“I’ve so often wanted to introduce you to my sister who’s much cleverer than I am, though she does live at home; which I suppose is very old–fashioned. She knows all sorts of intellectual people. She is talking to one of them now; this Prophet of the Moon that everyone’s talking about. Do let me introduce you.”

Lady Joan Brett had met many prophets of the moon and of other things. But she had the spontaneous courtesy which redeems the vices of her class, and she followed Miss Browning to a seat on the parade. She greeted Miss Browning’s sister with glowing politeness; and this may really be counted to her credit; for she had great difficulty in looking at Miss Browning’s sister at all. For on the seat beside her, still in a red fez but in a brilliantly new black frock coat and every appearance of prosperity, sat the old gentleman who had lectured on the sands about the inns of England.

“He lectured at our Ethical Society,” whispered Miss Browning, “on the word Alcohol. Just on the word Alcohol. He was perfectly thrilling. All about Arabia
and Algebra, you know, and how everything comes from the East. You really would be interested.”

“I am interested,” said Lady Joan.

“Poot it to yourselves,” the man in the fez was saying to Miss Browning’s sister, “joost what sort of meaning the names of your ince can have if they do not commemorate the unlimitable influence of Islam. There is a vary populous Inn in London, one of the most distinguished, one of the most of the Centre, and it is called the Horseshoe? Now, my friendss, why should anyone commemorate a horse–shoe? It iss but an appendage to a creature more interesting than itself. I have already demonstrated to you that the very fact that you have in your town a place of drink called the Bool–”

“I should like to ask–” began Lady Joan, suddenly.

“A place of drink called the Bool,” went on the man in the fez, deaf to all distractions, “and I have urged that the Bool is a disturbing thought, while the Bul–Bul is a reassuring thought. But even you my friends, would not name a place after a ring in a Bool’s nose and not after the Bool? Why then name an equivalent place after the shoo, the mere shoo, upon a horse’s hoof, and not after the noble horse? Surely it is clear, surely it is evident that the term ‘horse–shoe’ is a cryptic term, an esoteric term, a term made during the days when the ancient Moslem faith of this English country was oppressed by the passing superstition of the Galileans. That bent shape, that duplex curving shape, which you call horse–shoe, is it not clearly the Crescent?” and he cast his arms wide as he had done on the sands, “the Crescent of the Prophet of the only God?”

“I should like to ask,” began Lady Joan, again, “how you would explain the name of the inn called ‘The Green Man,’ just behind that row of houses.”

“Exactly! exactly!” cried the Prophet of the Moon, in almost insane excitement. “The seeker after truth could not at all probably find a more perfect example of these principles. My friendss, how could there be a green man? You are acquainted with green grass, with green leaves, with green cheese, with green chartreuse. I ask if any one of you, however wide her social circle, has ever been acquainted with a green man. Surely, surely, it is evident, my friendss, that this is an imperfect version, an abbreviated version, of the original words. What can be clearer than that the original expression, was ‘the green–turban’d man,’ in allusion to the well–known uniform of the descendants of the Prophet? ‘Turban’d’ surely is just the sort of word, exactly the sort of foreign and unfamiliar word, that might easily be slurred over and ultimately suppressed.”

“There is a legend in these parts,” said Lady Joan, steadily, “that a great hero,
hearing the colour that was sacred to his holy island insulted, really poured it over his enemy for a reply.”

“A legend! a fable!” cried the man in the fez, with another radiant and rational expansion of the hands. “Is it not evident that no such thing can have really happened?”

“Oh, yes—it really happened,” said the young lady, softly. “There is not much to comfort one in this world; but there are some things. Oh, it really happened.”

And taking a graceful farewell of the group, she resumed her rather listless walk along the parade.
CHAPTER IV

THE INN FINDS WINGS

MR. HUMPHREY PUMP stood in front of his inn once more, the cleaned and loaded gun still lay on the table, and the white sign of The Ship still swung in the slight sea breeze over his head; but his leatherish features were knotted over a new problem. He held two letters in his hand, letters of a very different sort, but letters that pointed to the same difficult problem. The first ran:

“DEAR HUMP—‘I’m so bothered that I simply must call you by the old name again. You understand I’ve got to keep in with my people. Lord Ivywood is a sort of cousin of mine, and for that and some other reasons, my poor old mother would just die if I offended him. You know her heart is weak; you know everything there is to know in this county. Well, I only write to warn you that something is going to be done against your dear old inn. I don’t know what this Country’s coming to. Only a month or two ago I saw a shabby old pantaloon on the beach with a green gamp, talking the craziest stuff you ever heard in your life. Three weeks ago I heard he was lecturing at Ethical Societies—whatever they are—for a handsome salary. Well, when I was last at Ivywood—I must go because Mamma likes it—there was the living lunatic again, in evening dress, and talked about by people who really know. I mean who know better.

“Lord Ivywood is entirely under his influence and thinks him the greatest prophet the world has ever seen. And Lord Ivywood is not a fool; one can’t help admiring him. Mamma, I think, wants me to do more than admire him. I am telling you everything, Hump, because I think perhaps this is the last honest letter I shall ever write in the world. And I warn you seriously that Lord Ivywood is sincere, which is perfectly terrible. He will be the biggest English statesman, and he does really mean to ruin—the old ships. If ever you see me here again taking part in such work, I hope you may forgive me.

“Somebody we mentioned, whom I shall never see again, I leave to your friendship. It is the second best thing I can give, and I am not sure it may not be better than the first would have been. Goodbye. J. B.”

This letter seemed to distress Mr. Pump rather than puzzle him. It ran as follows:

“SIR—‘The Committee of the Imperial Commission of Liquor Control is directed to draw your attention to the fact you have disregarded the Committee’s
communications under section 5A of the Act for the Regulation of Places of Public Entertainment; and that you are now under Section 47C of the Act amending the Act for the Regulation of Places of Public Entertainment aforesaid. The charges on which prosecution will be founded are as follows:

“(1) Violation of sub–section 23f of the Act, which enacts that no pictorial signs shall be exhibited before premises of less than the ratable value of £2000 per annum.

“(2) Violation of sub–section 113d of the Act, which enacts that no liquor containing alcohol shall be sold in any inn, hotel, tavern or public–house, except when demanded under a medical certificate from one of the doctors licensed by the State Medical Council, or in the specially excepted cases of Claridge’s Hotel and the Criterion Bar, where urgency has already been proved.

“As you have failed to acknowledge previous communications on this subject, this is to warn you that legal steps will be taken immediately,

“We are yours truly,

“IVYWOOD, President. J. LEVESON, Secretary.”

Mr. Humphrey Pump sat down at the table outside his inn and whistled in a way which, combined with his little whiskers made him for the moment seem literally like an ostler. Then, the very real wit and learning he had returned slowly into his face and with his warm, brown eyes he considered the cold, grey sea. There was not much to be got out of the sea. Humphrey Pump might drown himself in the sea; which would be better for Humphrey Pump than being finally separated from “The Old Ship.” England might be sunk under the sea; which would be better for England than never again having such places as “The Old Ship.” But these were not serious remedies nor rationally attainable; and Pump could only feel that the sea had simply warped him as it had warped his apple trees. The sea was a dreary business altogether. There was only one figure walking on the sands. It was only when the figure drew nearer and nearer and grew to more than human size, that he sprang to his feet with a cry. Also the level light of morning lit the man’s hair, and it was red.

The late King of Ithaca came casually and slowly up the slope of the beach that led to “The Old Ship.” He had landed in a boat from a battleship that could still be seen near the horizon, and he still wore the astounding uniform of apple–green and silver which he had himself invented as that of a navy that had never existed very much, and which now did not exist at all. He had a straight naval sword at his side; for the terms of his capitulation had never required him to surrender it; and inside the uniform and beside the sword there was what there
always had been, a big and rather bewildered man with rough red hair, whose misfortune was that he had good brains, but that his bodily strength and bodily passions were a little too strong for his brains.

He had flung his crashing weight on the chair outside the inn before the innkeeper could find words to express his astounded pleasure in seeing him. His first words were “have you got any rum?”

Then, as if feeling that his attitude needed explanation, he added, “I suppose I shall never be a sailor again after tonight. So I must have rum.”

Humphrey Pump had a talent for friendship, and understood his old friend. He went into the inn without a word; and came back idly pushing or rolling with an alternate foot (as if he were playing football with two balls at once) two objects that rolled very easily. One was a big keg or barrel of rum and the other a great solid drum of a cheese. Among his thousand other technical tricks he had a way of tapping a cask without a tap, or anything that could impair its revolutionary or revolving qualities. He was feeling in his pocket for the instrument with which he solved such questions, when his Irish friend suddenly sat bolt upright, as one startled out of sleep, and spoke with his strongest and most unusual brogue.

“Oh thank ye, Hump, a thousand times; and I don’t think I really want something to drink at arl. Now I know I can have it, I don’t seem to want it at arl. But hwhat I do want—” and he suddenly dashed his big fist on the little table so that one of its legs leapt and nearly snapped—“hwhat I do want is some sort of account of what’s happening in this England of yours that shan’t be just obviously rubbish.”

“Ah,” said Pump, fingering the two letters thoughtfully. “And what do you mean by rubbish?”

“I carl it rubbish” cried Patrick Dalroy, “when ye put the Koran into the Bible and not the Apocrypha; and I carl it rubbish when a mad parson’s allowed to propose to put a crescent on St. Paul’s Cathedral. I know the Turks are our allies now, but they often were before, and I never heard that Palmerston or Colin Campbell had any truck with such trash.”

“Lord Ivywood is very enthusiastic, I know,” said Pump, with a restrained amusement. “He was saying only the other day at the Flower Show here that the time had come for a full unity between Christianity and Islam.”

“Something called Chrislam perhaps,” said the Irishman, with a moody eye. He was gazing across the grey and purple woodlands that stretched below them at the back of the inn; and into which the steep, white road swept downwards
and disappeared. The steep road looked like the beginning of an adventure; and he was an adventurer.

“But you exaggerate, you know,” went on Pump, polishing his gun, “about the crescent on St. Paul’s. It wasn’t exactly that. What Dr. Moole suggested, I think, was some sort of double emblem, you know, combining cross and crescent.”

“And carled the Croscents,” muttered Dalroy.

“And you can’t call Dr. Moole a parson either,” went on Mr. Humphrey Pump, polishing industriously. “Why, they say he’s a sort of atheist, or what they call an agnostic, like Squire Brunton who used to bite elm trees by Marley. The grand folks have these fashions, Captain, but they’ve never lasted long that I know of.”

“I think it’s serious this time,” said his friend, shaking his big red head. “This is the last inn on this coast, and will soon be the last inn in England. Do you remember the ‘Saracen’s Head’ in Plumsea, along the shore there?”

“I know,” assented the innkeeper. “My aunt was there when he hanged his mother; but it’s a charming place.”

“I passed there just now; and it has been destroyed,” said Dalroy.

“Destroyed by fire?” asked Pump, pausing in his gun-scrubbing.

“No,” said Dalroy, “destroyed by lemonade. They’ve taken away its license or whatever you call it. I made a song about it, which I’ll sing to you now!” And with an astounding air of suddenly revived spirits, he roared in a voice like thunder the following verses, to a simple but spirited tune of his own invention:

“The Saracen’s Head looks down the lane, Where we shall never drink wine again; For the wicked old Women who feel well–bred Have turned to a tea–shop the Saracen’s Head.

“The Saracen’s Head out of Araby came, King Richard riding in arms like flame, And where he established his folk to be fed He set up his spear–and the Saracen’s Head.

“But the Saracen’s Head outlived the Kings, It thought and it thought of most horrible things; Of Health and of Soap and of Standard Bread, And of Saracen drinks at the Saracen’s Head.”

“Hullo!” cried Pump, with another low whistle. “Why here comes his lordship. And I suppose that young man in the goggles is a Committee or something.”

“Let him come,” said Dalroy, and continued in a yet more earthquake bellow:

“So the Saracen’s Head fulfils its name, They drink no wine–a ridiculous game–And I shall wonder until I’m dead, How it ever came into the Saracen’s
Head.”

As the last echo of this lyrical roar rolled away among the apple–trees, and down the steep, white road into the woods, Captain Dalroy leaned back in his chair and nodded good humouredly to Lord Ivywood, who was standing on the lawn with his usual cold air, but with slightly compressed lips. Behind him was a dark young man with double eyeglasses and a number of printed papers in his hand; presumably J. Leveson, Secretary. In the road outside stood a group of three which struck Pump as strangely incongruous, like a group in a three act farce. The first was a police inspector in uniform; the second was a workman in a leather apron, more or less like a carpenter, and the third was an old man in a scarlet Turkish fez, but otherwise dressed in very fashionable English clothes in which he did not seem very comfortable. He was explaining something about the inn to the policeman and the carpenter, who appeared to be restraining their amusement.

“Fine song that, my lord,” said Dalroy, with cheerful egotism. “I’ll sing you another,” and he cleared his throat.

“Mr. Pump,” said Lord Ivywood, in his bell–like and beautiful voice, “I thought I would come in person, if only to make it clear that every indulgence has been shown you. The mere date of this inn brings it within the statute of 1909; it was erected when my great grandfather was Lord of the Manor here, though I believe it then bore a different name, and–”

“Ah, my lord,” broke in Pump with a sigh, “I’d rather deal with your great grandfather, I would, though he married a hundred negresses instead of one, than see a gentleman of your family taking away a poor man’s livelihood.”

“The act is specially designed in the interests of the relief of poverty,” proceeded Lord Ivywood, in an unruffled manner, “and its final advantages will accrue to all citizens alike.” He turned for an instant to the dark secretary, saying, “You have that second report?” and received a folded paper in answer.

“It is here fully explained,” said Lord Ivywood, putting on his elderly eyeglasses, “that the purpose of the Act is largely to protect the savings of the more humble and necessitous classes. I find in paragraph three, ‘we strongly advise that the deleterious element of alcohol be made illegal save in such few places as the Government may specially exempt for Parliamentary or other public reasons, and that the provocative and demoralising display on inn signs be strictly forbidden except in the cases thus specially exempted: the absence of such temptations will, in our opinion, do much to improve the precarious financial conditions of the working class.’ That disposes, I think, of any such
suggestion as Mr. Pump’s, that our inevitable acts of social reform are in any sense oppressive. To Mr. Pump’s prejudice it may appear for the moment to bear hardly upon him; but” (and here Lord Ivywood’s voice took one of its moving oratorical turns), “what better proof could we desire of the insidiousness of the sleepy poison we denounce, what better evidence could we offer of the civic corruption that we seek to cure, than the very fact that good and worthy men of established repute in the county can, by living in such places as these, become so stagnant and sodden and unsocial, whether through the fumes of wine or through meditations as maudlin about the past, that they consider the case solely as their own case, and laugh at the long agony of the poor.”

Captain Dalroy had been studying Ivywood with a very bright blue eye; and he spoke now much more quietly than he generally did.

“Excuse me one moment, my lord,” he said. “But there was one point in your important explanation which I am not sure I have got right. Do I understand you to say that, though sign–boards are to be generally abolished, yet where, if anywhere, they are retained, the right to sell fermented liquor will be retained also? In other words, though an Englishman may at last find only one inn–sign left in England, yet if the place has an inn–sign, it will also have your gracious permission to be really an inn?”

Lord Ivywood had an admirable command of temper, which had helped him much in his career as a statesman. He did not waste time in wrangling about the Captain’s locus standi in the matter. He replied quite simply,

“Yes, Your statement of the facts is correct.”

“Whenever I find an inn–sign permitted by the police, I may go in and ask for a glass of beer–also permitted by the police.”

“If you find any such, yes,” answered Ivywood, quite temperately. “But we hope soon to have removed them altogether.”

Captain Patrick Dalroy rose enormously from his seat with a sort of stretch and yawn.

“Well, Hump,” he said to his friend, “the best thing, it seems to me, is to take the important things with us.”

With two sight–staggering kicks he sent the keg of rum and the round cheese flying over the fence, in such a direction that they bounded on the descending road and rolled more and more rapidly down toward the dark woods into which the path disappeared. Then he gripped the pole of the inn–sign, shook it twice and plucked it out of the turf like a tuft of grass.

It had all happened before anyone could move, but as he strode out into the
road the policeman ran forward. Dalroy smote him flat across face and chest with the wooden sign–board, so as to send him flying into the ditch on the other side of the road. Then turning on the man in the fez he poked him with the end of the pole so sharply in his new white waistcoat and watch–chain as to cause him to sit down suddenly in the road, looking very serious and thoughtful.

The dark secretary made a movement of rescue, but Humphrey Pump, with a cry, caught up his gun from the table and pointed it at him, which so alarmed J. Leveson, Secretary, as to cause him almost to double up with his emotions. The next moment Pump, with his gun under his arm, was scampering down the hill after the Captain, who was scampering after the barrel and the cheese.

Before the policeman had struggled out of the ditch, they had all disappeared into the darkness of the forest. Lord Ivywood who had remained firm through the scene, without a sign of fear or impatience (or, I will add, amusement), held up his hand and stopped the policeman in his pursuit.

“We should only make ourselves and the law ridiculous,” he said, “by pursuing those ludicrous rowdies now. They can’t escape or do any real harm in the state of modern communications. What is far more important, gentlemen, is to destroy their stores and their base. Under the Act of 1911 we have a right to confiscate and destroy any property in an inn where the law has been violated.”

And he stood for hours on the lawn, watching the smashing of bottles and the breaking up of casks and feeding on fanatical pleasure: the pleasure his strange, cold, courageous nature could not get from food or wine or woman.
CHAPTER V

THE ASTONISHMENT OF THE AGENT

LORD IVYWOOD shared the mental weakness of most men who have fed on books; he ignored, not the value but the very existence of other forms of information. Thus Humphrey Pump was perfectly aware that Lord Ivywood considered him an ignorant man who carried a volume of Pickwick and could not be got to read any other book. But Lord Ivywood was quite unaware that Humphrey never looked at him without thinking that he could be most successfully hidden in a wood of small beeches, as his grey–brown hair and sallow, ashen face exactly reproduced the three predominant tints of such a sylvan twilight. Mr. Pump, I fear, had sometimes partaken of partridge or pheasant, in his early youth, under circumstances in which Lord Ivywood was not only unconscious of the hospitality he was dispensing, but would have sworn that it was physically impossible for anyone to elude the vigilance of his efficient system of game–keeping. But it is very unwise in one who counts himself superior to physical things to talk about physical impossibility.

Lord Ivywood was in error, therefore, when he said that the fugitives could not possibly escape in modern England. You can do a great many things in modern England if you have noticed; some things, in fact, which others know by pictures or current speech; if you know, for instance, that most roadside hedges are taller and denser than they look, and that even the largest man lying just behind them, takes up far less room than you would suppose; if you know that many natural sounds are much more like each other than the enlightened ear can believe, as in the case of wind in leaves and of the sea; if you know that it is easier to walk in socks than in boots, if you know how to take hold of the ground; if you know that the proportion of dogs who will bite a man under any circumstances is rather less than the proportion of men who will murder you in a railway carriage; if you know that you need not be drowned even in a river, unless the tide is very strong, and unless you practise putting yourself into the special attitudes of a suicide; if you know that country stations have objectless, extra waiting rooms that nobody ever goes into; and if you know that county folk will forget you if you speak to them, but talk about you all day if you don’t.

By the exercise of these and other arts and sciences Humphrey Pump was able to guide his friend across country, mostly in the character of trespasser and
occasionally in that of something like housebreaker, and eventually, with sign, keg, cheese and all to step out of a black pinewood onto a white road in a part of the county where they would not be sought for the present.

Opposite them was a cornfield and on their right, in the shades of the pine trees, a cottage, a very tumbledown cottage that seemed to have collapsed under its own thatch. The red–haired Irishman’s face wore a curious smile. He stuck the inn–sign erect in the road and went and hammered on the door.

It was opened tremulously by an old man with a face so wrinkled that the wrinkles seemed more distinctly graven than the features themselves, which seemed lost in the labyrinth of them. He might have crawled out of the hole in a gnarled tree and he might have been a thousand years old.

He did not seem to notice the sign–board, which stood rather to the left of the door; and what life remained in his eyes seemed to awake in wonder at Dalroy’s stature and strange uniform and the sword at his side. “I beg your pardon,” said the Captain, courteously. “I fear my uniform startles you. It is Lord Ivywood’s livery. All his servants are to dress like this. In fact, I understand the tenants also and even yourself, perhaps . . . excuse my sword. Lord Ivywood is very particular that every man should have a sword. You know his beautiful, eloquent way of putting his views. ‘How can we profess,’ he was saying to me yesterday, while I was brushing his trousers. ‘How can we profess that all men are brothers while we refuse to them the symbol of manhood; or with what assurance can we claim it as a movement of modern emancipation to deny the citizen that which has in all ages marked the difference between the free man and the slave. Nor need we anticipate any such barbaric abuses as my honourable friend who is cleaning the knives has prophesied, for this gift is a sublime act of confidence in your universal passion for the severe splendours of Peace; and he that has the right to strike is he who has learnt to spare.’”

Talking all this nonsense with extreme rapidity and vast oratorical flourishes of the hand, Captain Dalroy proceeded to trundle both the big cheese and the cask of rum into the house of the astonished cottager: Mr. Pump following with a grim placidity and his gun under his arm.

“Lord Ivywood,” said Dalroy, setting the rum cask with a bump on the plain deal table, “wishes to take wine with you. Or, more strictly speaking, rum. Don’t you run away, my friend, with any of these stories about Lord Ivywood being opposed to drink. Three–bottle Ivywood, we call him in the kitchen. But it must be rum; nothing but rum for the Ivywoods. ‘Wine may be a mocker,’ he was saying the other day (and I particularly noted the phrasing, which seemed to be
very happy even for his lordship; he was standing at the top of the steps, and I
stopped cleaning them to make a note of it), ‘wine may be a mocker; strong
drink may be raging, but nowhere in the sacred pages will you find one word of
censure of the sweeter spirit sacred to them that go down to the sea in ships; no
tongue of priest and prophet was ever lifted to break the sacred silence of Holy
Writ about Rum.’ He then explained to me,” went on Dalroy, signing to Pump to
tap the cask according to his own technical secret, “that the great tip for avoiding
any bad results that a bottle or two of rum might have on young and
inexperienced people was to eat cheese with it, particularly this kind of cheese
that I have here. I’ve forgotten its name.”

“Cheddar,” said Pump, quite gravely.

“But mind you!” continued the Captain almost ferociously, shaking his big
finger in warning at the aged man. “Mind you ‘no bread with the cheese. All the
devastating ruin wrought by cheese and the once happy homes of this country,
has been due to the reckless and insane experiment of eating bread with it.’
You’ll get no bread from me, my friend. Indeed, Lord Ivywood has given
directions that the allusion to this ignorant and depraved habit shall be
eliminated from the Lord’s Prayer. Have a drink.”

He had already poured out a little of the spirit into two thick tumblers and a
broken teacup, which he had induced the aged man to produce; and now
solemnly pledged him.

“Thank ye kindly, sir,” said the old man, using his cracked voice for the first
time. Then he drank; and his old face changed as if it were an old horn lantern in
which the flame began to rise.

“Ar,” he said. “My son he be a sailor.”

“I wish him a happy voyage,” said the Captain. “And I’ll sing you a song
about the first sailor there ever was in the world; and who (as Lord Ivywood
acutely observes) lived before the time of rum.”

He sat down on a wooden chair and lifted his loud voice once more, beating
on the table with the broken tea–cup.

“Old Noah, he had an ostrich farm, and fowls on the greatest scale; He ate his
egg with a ladle in an egg–cup big as a pail, And the soup he took was Elephant
Soup and the fish he took was Whale; But they all were small to the cellar he
took when he set out to sail; And Noah, he often said to his wife when he sat
down to dine, ‘I don’t care where the water goes if it doesn’t get into the wine.’

“The cataract of the cliff of heaven fell blinding off the brink, As if it would
wash the stars away as suds go down a sink, The seven heavens came roaring
down for the throats of hell to drink, And Noah, he cocked his eye and said, ‘It looks like rain, I think, The water has drowned the Matterhorn as deep as a Mendip mine, But I don’t care where the water goes if it doesn’t get into the wine.’

“But Noah he sinned, and we have sinned; on tipsy feet we trod, Till a great big black teetotaller was sent to us for a rod, And you can’t get wine at a P. S. A. or chapel or Eisteddfod; For the Curse of Water has come again because of the wrath of God, And water is on the Bishop’s board and the Higher Thinker’s shrine, But I don’t care where the water goes if it doesn’t get into the wine.”

“Lord Ivywood’s favourite song,” concluded Mr. Patrick Dalroy, drinking. “Sing us a song yourself.”

Rather to the surprise of the two humourists, the old gentleman actually began in a quavering voice to chant,

“King George that lives in London Town, I hope they will defend this crown, And Bonyparte be quite put down On Christmas Day in the morning.

“Old Squire is gone to the Meet today All in this–”

It is perhaps fortunate for the rapidity of this narrative that the old gentleman’s favourite song, which consists of forty–seven verses, was interrupted by a curious incident. The door of the cottage opened and a sheepish–looking man in corduroys stood silently in the room for a few seconds and then said, without preface or further explanation,

“Four ale.”

“I beg your pardon?” inquired the polite Captain.

“Four ale,” said the man with solidity; then catching sight of Humphrey seemed to find a few more words in his vocabulary.

“Morning, Mr. Pump. Didn’t know as how you’d moved ‘The Old Ship.’”

Mr. Pump, with a twist of a smile, pointed to the old man whose song had been interrupted.

“Mr. Marne’s seeing after it now, Mr. Gowl,” said Pump with the strict etiquette of the country side. “But he’s got nothing but this rum in stock as yet.”

“Better’n nowt,” said the laconic Mr. Gowl; and put down some money in front of the aged Marne, who eyed it wonderingly. As he was turning with a farewell and wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, the door once more moved, letting in white sunlight and a man in a red neckerchief.

“Morning, Mr. Marne; Morning, Mr. Pump; Morning, Mr. Gowl,” said the man in the red neckerchief.

“Morning, Mr. Coote,” said the other three, one after another.
“Have some rum, Mr. Coote?” asked Humphrey Pump, genially. “That’s all Mr. Marne’s got just now.”

Mr. Coote also had a little rum; and also laid a little money under the rather vague gaze of the venerable cottager. Mr. Coote was just proceeding to explain that these were bad times, but if you saw a sign you were all right still; a lawyer up at Grunton Abbot had told him so; when the company was increased and greatly excited by the arrival of a boisterous and popular tinker, who ordered glasses all round and said he had his donkey and cart outside. A prolonged, rich and confused conversation about the donkey and cart then ensued, in which the most varied views were taken of their merits; and it gradually began to dawn on Dalroy that the tinker was trying to sell them.

An idea, suited to the romantic opportunism of his present absurd career, suddenly swept over his mind, and he rushed out to look at the cart and donkey. The next moment he was back again, asking the tinker what his price was, and almost in the same breath offering a much bigger price than the tinker would have dreamed of asking. This was considered, however, as a lunacy specially allowed to gentlemen; the tinker had some more rum on the strength of the payment, and then Dalroy, offering his excuses, sealed up the cask and took it and the cheese to be stowed in the bottom of the cart. The money, however, he still left lying in shining silver and copper before the silver beard of old Marne.

No one acquainted with the quaint and often wordless camaraderie of the English poor will require to be told that they all went out and stared at him as he loaded the cart and saw to the harness of the donkey—all except the old cottager, who sat as if hypnotised by the sight of the money. While they were standing there they saw coming down the white, hot road, where it curled over the hill, a figure that gave them no pleasure, even when it was a mere marching black spot in the distance. It was a Mr. Bullrose, the agent of Lord Ivywood’s estates.

Mr. Bullrose was a short, square man with a broad, square head with ridges of close, black curls on it, with a heavy, froglike face and starting, suspicious eyes; a man with a good silk hat but a square business jacket. Mr. Bullrose was not a nice man. The agent on that sort of estate hardly ever is a nice man. The landlord often is; and even Lord Ivywood had an arctic magnanimity of his own, which made most people want, if possible, to see him personally. But Mr. Bullrose was petty. Every really practical tyrant must be petty.

He evidently failed to understand the commotion in front of Mr. Marne’s partly collapsed cottage, but he felt there must be something wrong about it. He wanted to get rid of the cottage altogether, and had not, of course, the faintest
intention of giving the cottager any compensation for it. He hoped the old man would die; but in any case he could easily clear him out if it became suddenly necessary, for he could not possibly pay the rent for this week. The rent was not very much; but it was immeasurably too much for the old man who had no conceivable way of borrowing or earning it. That is where the chivalry of our aristocratic land system comes in.

“Good–bye, my friends,” the enormous man in the fantastic uniform was saying, “all roads lead to rum, as Lord Ivywood said in one of his gayer moments, and we hope to be back soon, establishing a first class hotel here, of which prospectuses will soon be sent out.”

The heavy froglike face of Mr. Bullrose, the agent, grew uglier with astonishment; and the eyes stood out more like a snail’s than a frog’s. The indefensible allusion to Lord Ivywood would in any case have caused a choleric intervention, if it had not been swallowed up in the earthquake suggestion of an unlicensed hotel on the estate. This again would have effected the explosion, if that and everything else had not been struck still and rigid by the sight of a solid, wooden sign–post already erected outside old Marne’s miserable cottage.

“I’ve got him now,” muttered Mr. Bullrose. “He can’t possibly pay; and out he shall go.” And he walked swiftly towards the door of the cottage, almost at the same moment that Dalroy went to the donkey’s head, as if to lead it off along the road.

“Look here, my man,” burst out Bullrose, the instant he was inside the cottage. “You’ve cooked yourself this time. His lordship has been a great deal too indulgent with you; but this is going to be the end of it. The insolence of what you’ve done outside, especially when you know his lordship’s wishes in such things, has just put the lid on.” He stopped a moment and sneered. “So unless you happen to have the exact rent down to a farthing or two about you, out you go. We’re sick of your sort.”

In a very awkward and fumbling manner, the old man pushed a heap of coins across the table. Mr. Bullrose sat down suddenly on the wooden chair with his silk hat on, and began counting them furiously. He counted them once; he counted them twice; and he counted them again. Then he stared at them more steadily than the cottager had done.

“Where did you get this money?” he asked in a thick, gross voice. “Did you steal it?”

“I ain’t very spry for stealin,’” said the old man in quavering comedy.

Bullrose looked at him and then at the money; and remembered with fury that
Ivywood was a just though cold magistrate on the bench.

“Well, anyhow,” he cried, in a hot, heady way, “we’ve got enough against you to turn you out of this. Haven’t you broken the law, my man, to say nothing of the regulations for tenants, in sticking up that fancy sign of yours outside the cottage? Eh?”

The tenant was silent.

“Eh?” reiterated the agent.

“Ar,” replied the tenant.

“Have you or have you not a sign–board outside this house?” shouted Bullrose, hammering the table.

The tenant looked at him for a long time with a patient and venerable face, and then said: “Mubbe, yes. Mubbe, no.”

“I’ll mubbe you,” cried Mr. Bullrose, springing up and sticking his silk hat on the back of his head. “I don’t know whether you people are too drunk to see anything, but I saw the thing with my own eyes out in the road. Come out, and deny it if you dare!”

“Ar,” said Mr. Marne, dubiously.

He tottered after the agent, who flung open the door with a businesslike fury and stood outside on the threshold. He stood there quite a long time, and he did not speak. Deep in the hardened mud of his materialistic mind there had stirred two things that were its ancient enemies; the old fairy tale in which every thing can be believed; the new scepticism in which nothing can be believed–not even one’s own eyes. There was no sign, nor sign of a sign, in the landscape.

On the withered face of the old man Marne there was a faint renewal of that laughter that has slept since the Middle Ages.
CHAPTER VI

THE HOLE IN HEAVEN

THAT delicate ruby light which is one of the rarest but one of the most exquisite of evening effects warmed the land, sky and seas as if the whole world were washed in wine; and dyed almost scarlet the strong red head of Patrick Dalroy as he stood on the waste of furze and bracken, where he and his friends had halted. One of his friends was re-examining a short gun, rather like a double-barrelled carbine, the other was eating thistles.

Dalroy himself was idle and ruminant, with his hands in his pockets and his eye on the horizon. Landwards the hills, plains and woods lay bathed in the rose-red light; but it changed somewhat to purple, to cloud and something like storm over the distant violet strip of sea. It was towards the sea that he was staring.

Suddenly he woke up; and seemed almost to rub his eyes, or at any rate, to rub his red eyebrow.

“Why, we’re on the road back of Pebblewick,” he said. “That’s the damned little tin chapel by the beach.”

“I know,” answered his friend and guide. “We’ve done the old hare trick; doubled, you know. Nine times out of ten it’s the best. Parson Whitelady used to do it when they were after him for dog-stealing. I’ve pretty much followed his trail; you can’t do better than stick to the best examples. They tell you in London that Dick Turpin rode to York. Well, I know he didn’t; for my old grandfather up at Cobble’s End knew the Turpins intimately—threw one of them into the river on a Christmas day; but I think I can guess what he did do and how the tale got about. If Dick was wise, he went flying up the old North Road, shouting ‘York! York!’ or what not, before people recognised him; then if he did the thing properly, he might half an hour afterwards walk down the Strand with a pipe in his mouth. They say old Boney said, ‘Go where you aren’t expected,’ and I suppose as a soldier he was right. But for a gentleman dodging the police like yourself, it isn’t exactly the right way of putting it. I should say, ‘Go where you ought to be expected’—and you’ll generally find your fellow creatures don’t do what they ought about expecting any more than about anything else.”

“Well, this bit between here and the sea,” said the Captain, in a brown study, “I know it so well—so well that—that I rather wish I’d never seen it again. Do you
know,” he asked, suddenly pointing to a patch and pit of sand that showed white in the dusky heath a hundred yards away, “do you know what makes that spot so famous in history?”

“Yes,” answered Mr. Pump, “that’s where old Mother Grouch shot the Methodist.”

“You are in error,” said the Captain. “Such an incident as you describe would in no case call for special comment or regret. No, that spot is famous because a very badly brought up girl once lost a ribbon off a plait of black hair and somebody helped her to find it.”

“Has the other person been well brought up?” asked Pump, with a faint smile.

“No,” said Dalroy, staring at the sea. “He has been brought down.” Then, rousing himself again, he made a gesture toward a further part of the heath. “Do you know the remarkable history of that old wall, the one beyond the last gorge over there?”

“No,” replied the other, “unless you mean Dead Man’s Circus, and that happened further along.”

“I do not mean Dead Man’s Circus,” said the Captain. “The remarkable history of that wall is that somebody’s shadow once fell on it; and that shadow was more desirable than the substance of all other living things. It is this,” he cried, almost violently, resuming his flippant tone, “it is this circumstance, Hump, and not the trivial and everyday incident of a dead man going to a circus to which you have presumed to compare it, it is this historical event which Lord Ivywood is about to commemorate by rebuilding the wall with solid gold and Greek marbles stolen by the Turks from the grave of Socrates, enclosing a column of solid gold four hundred feet high and surmounted by a colossal equestrian statue of a bankrupt Irishman riding backwards on a donkey.”

He lifted one of his long legs over the animal, as if about to pose for the group; then swung back on both feet again, and again looked at the purple limit of the sea.

“Do you know, Hump,” he said, “I think modern people have somehow got their minds all wrong about human life. They seem to expect what Nature has never promised; and then try to ruin all that Nature has really given. At all those atheist chapels of Ivywood’s they’re always talking of Peace, Perfect Peace, and Utter Peace, and Universal Joy and souls that beat as one. But they don’t look any more cheerful than anyone else; and the next thing they do is to start smashing a thousand good jokes and good stories and good songs and good friendships by pulling down ‘The Old Ship.’” He gave a glance at the loose
sign–post lying on the heath beside him, almost as if to reassure himself that it was not stolen. “Now it seems to me,” he went on, “that this is asking for too much and getting too little. I don’t know whether God means a man to have happiness in that All in All and Utterly Utter sense of happiness. But God does mean a man to have a little Fun; and I mean to go on having it. If I mustn’t satisfy my heart, I can gratify my humour. The cynical fellows who think themselves so damned clever have a sort of saying, ‘Be good and you will be happy; but you will not have a jolly time.’ The cynical fellows are quite wrong, as they generally are. They have got hold of the exact opposite of the truth. God knows I don’t set up to be good; but even a rascal sometimes has to fight the world in the same way as a saint. I think I have fought the world; et militavi non sine–what’s the Latin for having a lark? I can’t pretend to Peace and Joy, and all the rest of it, particularly in this original briar–patch. I haven’t been happy, Hump, but I have had a jolly time.”

The sunset stillness settled down again, save for the cropping of the donkey in the undergrowth; and Pump said nothing sympathetically; and it was Dalroy once more who took up his parable.

“So I think there’s too much of this playing on our emotions, Hump; as this place is certainly playing the cat and banjo with mine. Damn it all, there are other things to do with the rest of one’s life! I don’t like all this fuss about feeling things–it only makes people miserable. In my present frame of mind I’m in favour of doing things. All of which, Hump,” he said with a sudden lift of the voice that always went in him with a rushing, irrational return of merely animal spirits–”All of which I have put into a Song Against Songs, that I will now sing you.”

“I shouldn’t sing it here,” said Humphrey Pump, picking up his gun and putting it under his arm. “You look large in this open place; and you sound large. But I’ll take you to the Hole in Heaven you’ve been talking about so much, and hide you as I used to hide you from that tutor–I couldn’t catch his name–man who could only get drunk on Greek wine at Squire Wimpole’s.”

“Hump!” cried the Captain, “I abdicate the throne of Ithaca. You are far wiser than Ulysses. Here I have had my heart torn with temptations to ten thousand things between suicide and abduction, and all by the mere sight of that hole in the heath, where we used to have picnics. And all that time I’d forgotten we used to call it the Hole in Heaven. And, by God, what a good name–in both senses.”

“I thought you’d have remembered it, Captain,” said the innkeeper, “from the joke young Mr. Matthews made.”
“In the heat of some savage hand to hand struggle in Albania,” said Mr. Dalroy, sadly, passing his palm across his brow, “I must have forgotten for one fatal instant the joke young Mr. Matthews made.”

“It wasn’t very good,” said Mr. Pump, simply. “Ah, his aunt was the one for things like that. She went too far with old Gudgeon, though.”

With these words he jumped and seemed to be swallowed up by the earth. But they had merely strolled the few yards needed to bring them to the edge of the sand–pit on the heath of which they had been speaking. And it is one of the truths concealed by Heaven from Lord Ivywood, and revealed by Heaven to Mr. Pump, that a hiding–place can be covered when you are close to it; and yet be open and visible from some spot of vantage far off. From the side by which they approached it, the sudden hollow of sand, a kind of collapsed chamber in the heath, seemed covered with a natural curve of fern and furze, and flashed out of sight like a fairy.

“It’s all right,” he called out from under a floor or roof of leaves. “You’ll remember it all when you get there. This is the place to sing your song, Captain. Lord bless me, Captain, don’t I remember your singing that Irish song you made up at college–bellowing it like a bull of Bashan–all about hearts and sleeves or some such things–and her ladyship and the tutor never heard a breath, because that bank of sand breaks everything. It’s worth knowing all this, you know. It’s a pity it’s not part of a young gentleman’s education. Now you shall sing me the song in favour of having no feelings, or whatever you call it.”

Dalroy was staring about him at the cavern of his old picnics, so forgotten and so startlingly familiar. He seemed to have lost all thought of singing anything, and simply to be groping in the dark house of his own boyhood. There was a slight trickle from a natural spring in sandstone just under the ferns, and he remembered they used to try to boil the water in a kettle. He remembered a quarrel about who had upset the kettle which, in the morbidity of first love, had given him for days the tortures of the damned. When the energetic Pump broke once more through the rather thorny roof, on an impulse to accumulate their other eccentric possessions, Patrick remembered about a thorn in a finger, that made his heart stop with something that was pain and perfect music. When Pump returned with the rum–keg and the cheese and rolled them with a kick down the shelving sandy side of the hole, he remembered, with almost wrathful laughter, that in the old days he had rolled down that slope himself, and thought it a rather fine thing to do. He felt then as if he were rolling down a smooth side of the Matterhorn. He observed now that the height was rather less than that of
the second storey of one of the stunted cottages he had noted on his return. He suddenly understood he had grown bigger; bigger in a bodily sense. He had doubts about any other.

“The Hole in Heaven!” he said. “What a good name! What a good poet I was in those days! The Hole in Heaven. But does it let one in, or let one out?”

In the last level shafts of the fallen sun the fantastic shadow of the long–eared quadruped, whom Pump had now tethered to a new and nearer pasture, fell across the last sunlit scrap of sand. Dalroy looked at the long exaggerated shadow of the ass; and laughed that short explosive laugh he had uttered when the doors of the harems had been closed after the Turkish war. He was normally a man much too loquacious; but he never explained those laughs.

Humphrey Pump plunged down again into the sunken nest, and began to broach the cask of rum in his own secret style, saying—“We can get something else somehow tomorrow. For tonight we can eat cheese and drink rum, especially as there’s water on tap, so to speak. And now, Captain, sing us the Song Against Songs.”

Patrick Dalroy drank a little rum out of a small medicine glass which the generally unaccountable Mr. Pump unaccountably produced from his waistcoat pocket; but Patrick’s colour had risen, his brow was almost as red as his hair; and he was evidently reluctant.

“I don’t see why I should sing all the songs,” he said. “Why the divil don’t you sing a song yourself? And now I come to think of it,” he cried, with an accumulating brogue, not, perhaps, wholly unaffected by the rum, which he had not, in fact, drunk for years, “and now I come to think of it, what about that song of yours? All me youth’s coming back in this blest and cursed place; and I remember that song of yours, that never existed nor ever will. Don’t ye remember now, Humphrey Pump, that night when I sang ye no less than seventeen songs of me own composition?”

“I remember it very well,” answered the Englishman, with restraint.

“And don’t ye remember,” went on the exhilarated Irishman, with solemnity, “that unless ye could produce a poetic lyric of your own, written and sung by yourself, I threatened to . . .”

“To sing again,” said the impenetrable Pump. “Yes, I know.”

He calmly proceeded to take out of his pockets, which were, alas, more like those of a poacher than an innkeeper, a folded and faded piece of paper.

“I wrote it when you asked me,” he said simply. “I have never tried to sing it. But I’ll sing it myself, when you’ve sung your song, against anybody singing at
all."

“All right,” cried the somewhat excited Captain, “to hear a song from you—
why, I’ll sing anything. This is the Song Against Songs, Hump.”

And again he let his voice out like a bellow against the evening silence.

“The song of the sorrow of Melisande is a weary and a dreary song, The
glory of Mariana’s grange had got into great decay, The song of the Raven
Never More has never been called a cheery song, And the brightest things in
Baudelaire are anything else but gay. But who will write us a riding song, Or a
hunting song or a drinking song, Fit for them that arose and rode, When day and
the wine were red? But bring me a quart of claret out, And I will write you a
clinking song, A song of war and a song of wine, And a song to wake the dead.

“The song of the fury of Fragolette is a florid song and a torrid song, The song
of the sorrow of Tara is sung to a harp unstrung, The song of the cheerful
Shropshire Kid I consider a perfectly horrid song, And the song of the happy
Futurist is a song that can’t be sung. But who will write us a riding song, Or a
fighting song or a drinking song, Fit for the fathers of you and me, That knew
how to think and thrive? But the song of Beauty and Art and Love Is simply an
utterly stinking song, To double you up and drag you down, And damn your soul
alive.

“Take some more rum,” concluded the Irish officer, affably, “and let’s hear
your song at last.”

With the gravity inseparable from the deep conventionality of country people,
Mr. Pump unfolded the paper on which he had recorded the only antagonistic
emotion that was strong enough in him to screw his infinite English tolerance to
the pitch of song. He read out the title very carefully and in full.

“Song Against Grocers, by Humphrey Pump, sole proprietor of ‘The Old
Ship,’ Pebblewick. Good Accommodation for Man and Beast. Celebrated as the
House at which both Queen Charlotte and Jonathan Wilde put up on different
occasions; and where the Ice–cream man was mistaken for Bonaparte. This song
is written against Grocers.”

“God made the wicked Grocer, For a mystery and a sign, That men might
shun the awful shops, And go to inns to dine; Where the bacon’s on the rafter
And the wine is in the wood, And God that made good laughter Has seen that
they are good.

“The evil–hearted Grocer Would call his mother ‘Ma’am,’ And bow at her
and bob at her, Her aged soul to damn; And rub his horrid hands and ask, What
article was next; Though mortis in articulo, Should be her proper text.
“His props are not his children But pert lads underpaid, Who call out ‘Cash!’
and bang about, To work his wicked trade; He keeps a lady in a cage, Most
cruelly all day, And makes her count and calls her ‘Miss,’ Until she fades away.
“The righteous minds of inn–keepers Induce them now and then To crack a
bottle with a friend, Or treat unmoneyed men; But who hath seen the Grocer
Treat housemaids to his teas, Or crack a bottle of fish–sauce, Or stand a man a
cheese?
“He sells us sands of Araby As sugar for cash down, He sweeps his shop and
sells the dust, The purest salt in town; He crams with cans of poisoned meat Poor
subjects of the King, And when they die by thousands Why, he laughs like
anything.
“The Wicked Grocer groces In spirits and in wine, Not frankly and in
fellowship, As men in inns do dine; But packed with soap and sardines And
carried off by grooms, For to be snatched by Duchesses, And drunk in dressing–
rooms.
“The hell–instructed Grocer Has a temple made of tin, And the ruin of good
inn–keepers Is loudly urged therein; But now the sands are running out From
sugar of a sort, The Grocer trembles; for his time Just like his weight is short.”
Captain Dalroy was getting considerably heated with his nautical liquor, and
his appreciation of Pump’s song was not merely noisy but active. He leapt to his
feet and waved his glass. “Ye ought to be Poet Laureate, Hump–ye’re right, ye’re right; we’ll stand all this no longer!”
He dashed wildly up the sand slope and pointed with the sign–post towards
the darkening shore, where the low shed of corrugated iron stood almost
isolated.
“There’s your tin temple!” he said. “Let’s burn it!”
They were some way along the coast from the large watering–place of
Pebblewick and between the gathering twilight and the rolling country it could
not be clearly seen. Nothing was now in sight but the corrugated iron hall by the
beach and three half–built red brick villas.
Dalroy appeared to regard the hall and the empty houses with great
malevolence.
“Look at it!” he said. “Babylon!”
He brandished the inn–sign in the air like a banner, and began to stride
towards the place, showering curses.
“In forty days,” he cried, “shall Pebblewick be destroyed. Dogs shall lap the
blood of J. Leveson, Secretary, and Unicorns—”
“Come back Pat,” cried Humphrey, “you’ve had too much rum.”
“Lions shall howl in its high places,” vociferated the Captain.
“Donkeys will howl, anyhow,” said Pump. “But I suppose the other donkey
must follow.”
And loading and untethering the quadruped, he began to lead him along.
CHAPTER VII

THE SOCIETY OF SIMPLE SOULS

UNDER sunset, at once softer and more sombre, under which the leaden sea took on a Lenten purple, a tint appropriate to tragedy, Lady Joan Brett was once more drifting moodily along the sea–front. The evening had been rainy and lowering; the watering-place season was nearly over; and she was almost alone on the shore; but she had fallen into the habit of restlessly pacing the place, and it seemed to satisfy some subconscious hunger in her rather mixed psychology. Through all her brooding her animal senses always remained abnormally active: she could smell the sea when it had ebbed almost to the horizon, and in the same way she heard, through every whisper of waves or wind, the swish or flutter of another woman’s skirt behind her. There is, she felt, something unmistakable about the movements of a lady who is generally very dignified and rather slow, and who happens to be in a hurry.

She turned to look at the lady who was thus hastening to overtake her; lifted her eyebrows a little and held out her hand. The interruption was known to her as Lady Enid Wimpole, cousin of Lord Ivywood; a tall and graceful lady who unbalanced her own elegance by a fashionable costume that was at once funereal and fantastic; her fair hair was pale but plentiful; her face was not only handsome and fastidious in the aquiline style, but when considered seriously was sensitive, modest, and even pathetic, but her wan blue eyes seemed slightly prominent, with that expression of cold eagerness that is seen in the eyes of ladies who ask questions at public meetings.

Joan Brett was herself, as she had said, a connection of the Ivywood family; but Lady Enid was Ivywood’s first cousin, and for all practical purposes his sister. For she kept house for him and his mother, who was now so incredibly old that she only survived to satisfy conventional opinion in the character of a speechless and useless chaperon. And Ivywood was not the sort who would be likely to call out any activity in an old lady exercising that office. Nor, for that matter, was Lady Enid Wimpole; there seemed to shine on her face the same kind of inhuman, absent–minded common sense that shone on her cousin’s.

“Oh, I’m so glad I’ve caught you up,” she said to Joan. “Lady Ivywood wants you so much to come to us for the week–end or so, while Philip is still there. He always admired your sonnet on Cyprus so much, and he wants to talk to you
about this policy of his in Turkey. Of course he’s awfully busy, but I shall be seeing him tonight after the meeting.”

“No living creature,” said Lady Joan, with a smile, “ever saw him except before or after a meeting.”

“Are you a Simple Soul?” asked Lady Enid, carelessly.

“Am I a simple soul?” asked Joan, drawing her black brows together. “Merciful Heavens, no! What can you mean?”

“Their meeting’s on tonight at the small Universal Hall, and Philip’s taking the chair,” explained the other lady. “He’s very annoyed that he has to leave early to get up to the House, but Mr. Leveson can take the chair for the last bit. They’ve got Misysra Ammon.”

“Got Mrs. Who?” asked Joan, in honest doubt.

“You make game of everything,” said Lady Enid, in cheerless amiability. “It’s the man everyone’s talking about—you know as well as I do. It’s really his influence that has made the Simple Souls.”

“Oh!” said Lady Joan Brett.

Then after a long silence, she added: “Who are the Simple Souls? I should be interested in them, if I could meet any.” And she turned her dark, brooding face on the darkening purple sea.

“Do you mean to say, my dear,” asked Lady Enid Wimpole, “that you haven’t met any of them yet?”

“No,” said Joan, looking at the last dark line of sea. “I never met but one simple soul in my life.”

“But you must come to the meeting!” cried Lady Enid, with frosty and sparkling gaiety. “You must come at once! Philip is certain to be eloquent on a subject like this, and of course Misysra Ammon is always so wonderful.”

Without any very distinct idea of where she was going or why she was going there, Joan allowed herself to be piloted to a low lead or tin shed, beyond the last straggling hotels, out of the echoing shell of which she could prematurely hear a voice that she thought she recognised. When she came in Lord Ivywood was on his feet, in exquisite evening dress, but with a light overcoat thrown over the seat behind him. Beside him, in less tasteful but more obvious evening dress, was the little old man she had heard on the beach.

No one else was on the platform, but just under it, rather to Joan’s surprise, sat Miss Browning, her old typewriting friend in her old black dress, industriously taking down Lord Ivywood’s words in shorthand. A yard or two off, even more to her surprise, sat Miss Browning’s more domestic sister, also taking down the
same words in shorthand.

“That is Misysra Ammon,” whispered Lady Enid, earnestly, pointing a delicate finger at the little old man beside the chairman.

“I know him,” said Joan. “Where’s the umbrella?”

“. . . at least evident,” Lord Ivywood was saying, “that one of those ancestral impossibilities is no longer impossible. The East and the West are one. The East is no longer East nor the West West; for a small isthmus has been broken, and the Atlantic and Pacific are a single sea. No man assuredly has done more of this mighty work of unity than the brilliant and distinguished philosopher to whom you will have the pleasure of listening tonight; and I profoundly wish that affairs more practical, for I will not call them more important, did not prevent my remaining to enjoy his eloquence, as I have so often enjoyed it before. Mr. Leveson has kindly consented to take my place, and I can do no more than express my deep sympathy with the aims and ideals which will be developed before you tonight. I have long been increasingly convinced that underneath a certain mask of stiffness which the Mahommedan religion has worn through certain centuries, as a somewhat similar mask has been worn by the religion of the Jews, Islam has in it the potentialities of being the most progressive of all religions; so that a century or two to come we may see the cause of peace, of science and of reform everywhere supported by Islam as it is everywhere supported by Israel. Not in vain, I think, is the symbol of that faith the Crescent, the growing thing. While other creeds carry emblems implying more or less of finality, for this great creed of hope its very imperfection is its pride, and men shall walk fearlessly in new and wonderful paths, following the increasing curve which contains and holds up before them the eternal promises of the orb.”

It was characteristic of Lord Ivywood that, though he was really in a hurry, he sat down slowly and gravely amid the outburst of applause. The quiet resumption of the speaker’s seat, like the applause itself, was an artistic part of the peroration. When the last clap or stamp had subsided, he sprang up alertly, his light great–coat over his arm, shook hands with the lecturer, bowed to the audience and slid quickly out of the hall. Mr. Leveson, the swarthy young man with the drooping double–eyeglass rather bashfully to the front, took the empty seat on the platform, and in a few words presented the eminent Turkish mystic Misysra Ammon, sometimes called the Prophet of the Moon.

Lady Joan found the Prophet’s English accent somewhat improved by good society, but he still elongated the letter “u” in the same bleating manner, and his remarks had exactly the same rabidly wrong–headed ingenuity as his lecture
upon English inns. It appeared that he was speaking on the higher Polygamy; but he began with a sort of general defence of the Moslem civilisation, especially against the charge of sterility and worldly ineffectiveness.

“It iss joost in the practical tings,” he was saying, “it iss joost in the practical tings, if you could come to consider them in a manner quite equal, that our methods are better than your methods. My ancestors invented the curved swords, because one cuts better with a curved sword. Your ancestors possessed the straight swords out of some romantic fancy of being what you call straight; or, I will take a more plain example, of which I have myself experience. When I first had the honour of meeting Lord Ivywood, I was unused to your various ceremonies and had a little difficulty, joost a little difficulty, in entering Mr. Claridge’s hotel, where his lordship had invited me. A servant of the hotel was standing joost beside me on the doorstep. I stoo–ooped down to take off my boo–oots, and he asked me what I was dooing. I said to him: ‘My friend, I am taking off my boo–oots.’”

A smothered sound came from Lady Joan Brett, but the lecturer did not notice it and went on with a beautiful simplicity.

“I told him that in my country, when showing respect for any spot, we do not take off our hats; we take off our boo–oots. And because I would keep on my hat and take off my boo–oots, he suggested to me that I had been afflicted by Allah, in the head. Now was not that foony?”

“Very,” said Lady Joan, inside her handkerchief, for she was choking with laughter. Something like a faint smile passed over the earnest faces of the two or three most intelligent of the Simple Souls, but for the most part the Souls seemed very simple indeed, helpless looking people with limp hair and gowns like green curtains, and their dry faces were as dry as ever.

“But I explained to him. I explained to him for a long time, for a carefully occupied time, that it was more practical, more business–like, more altogether for utility, to take off the boo–oots than to remove the hat. ‘Let us,’ I said to him, ‘consider what many complaints are made against the footwear, what few complaints against the headwear. You complain if in your drawing–rooms is the marching about of muddy boo–oots. Are any of your drawing–rooms marked thus with the marching about of muddy hats? How very many of your husbands kick you with the boo–oot! Yet how few of your husbands on any occasion butt you with the hat?’”

He looked round with a radiant seriousness, which made Lady Joan almost as speechless for sympathy as she was for amusement. With all that was most
sound in his too complicated soul she realised the presence of a man really convinced.

“The man on the doorstep, he would not listen to me,” went on Misysra Ammon, pathetically. “He said there would be a crowd if I stood on the doorstep, holding in my hand my boo–oots. Well, I do not know why, in your country you always send the young males to be the first of your crowds. They certainly were making a number of noises, the young males.”

Lady Joan Brett stood up suddenly and displayed enormous interest in the rest of the audience in the back parts of the hall. She felt that if she looked for one moment more at the serious face with the Jewish nose and the Persian beard, she would publicly disgrace herself; or, what was quite as bad (for she was the generous sort of aristocrat) publicly insult the lecturer. She had a feeling that the sight of all the Simple Souls in bulk might have a soothing effect. It had. It had what might have been mistaken for a depressing effect. Lady Joan resumed her seat with a controlled countenance.

“Now, why,” asked the Eastern philosopher, “do I tell so simple a little story of your London streets—a thing happening any day? The little mistake had no prejudicial effect. Lord Ivywood came out, at the end. He made no attempt to explain the true view of so important matters to Mr. Claridge’s servant, though Mr. Claridge’s servant remained on the doorstep. But he commanded Mr. Claridge’s servant to restore to me one of my boo–oots, which had fallen down the front steps, while I was explaining this harmlessness of the hat in the home. So all was, for me, very well. But why do I tell such little tales?”

He spread out his hands again, in his fanlike eastern style. Then he clapped them together, so suddenly that Joan jumped, and looked instinctively for the entrance of five hundred negro slaves, laden with jewels. But it was only his emphatic gesture of eloquence. He went on with an excited thickening of the accent.

“Because, my friends, this is the best example I could give of the wrong and slanderous character of the charge that we fail in our domesticities. That we fail especially in our treatment of the womankind. I appeal to any lady, to any Christian lady. Is not the boo–oot more devastating, more dreaded in the home than the hat? The boot jumps, he bound, he run about, he break things, he leave on the carpet the earths of the garden. The hat, he remain quiet on his hat–peg. Look at him on his hat–peg; how quiet and good he remain! Why not let him remain quiet also on his head?”

Lady Joan applauded warmly, as did several other ladies, and the sage went
on, encouraged.

“Can you not therefore trust, dear ladies, this great religion to understand you concerning other things, as it understands you regarding boo–oots? What is the common objection our worthy enemies make against our polygamy? That it is disdainful of the womanhood. But how can this be so, my friends, when it allows the womanhood to be present in so large numbers? When in your House of Commons you put a hundred English members and joost one little Welsh member, you do not say ‘The Welshman is on top; he is our Sultan; may he live for ever!’ If your jury contained eleven great large ladies and one leetle man you would not say ‘this is unfair to the great large ladies.’ Why should you shrink, then, ladies, from this great polygamical experiment which Lord Ivywood himself–”

Joan’s dark eyes were still fixed on the wrinkled, patient face of the lecturer, but every word of the rest of the lecture was lost to her. Under her glowing Spanish tint she had turned pale with extraordinary emotions, but she did not stir a hair.

The door of the hall stood open, and occasional sounds came even from that deserted end of the town. Two men seemed to be passing along the distant parade; one of them was singing. It was common enough for workmen to sing going home at night, and the voice, though a loud one, would have been too far off for Joan to hear the words. Only Joan happened to know the words. She could almost see them before her, written in a round swaggering hand on the pink page of an old school–girl album at home. She knew the words and the voice.

“I come from Castlepatrick and my heart is on my sleeve, And any sword or pistol boy can hit ut with me leave, It shines there for an epaulette, as golden as a flame, As naked as me ancestors, as noble as me name. For I come from Castlepatrick and my heart is on my sleeve, But a lady stole it from me on St. Gallowglass’s Eve.”

Startlingly and with strong pain there sprang up before Joan’s eyes a patch of broken heath with a very deep hollow of white sand, blinding in the sun. No words, no name, only the place.

“The folks that live in Liverpool, their heart is in their boots; They go to Hell like lambs, they do, because the hooter hoots. Where men may not be dancin,’ though the wheels may dance all day; And men may not be smokin,’ but only chimneys may. But I come from Castlepatrick and my heart is on my sleeve, But a lady stole it from me on St. Poleyander’s Eve.
“The folks that live in black Belfast, their heart is in their mouth; They see us making murders in the meadows of the South; They think a plough’s a rack they do, and cattle–calls are creeds, And they think we’re burnin’ witches when we’re only burnin’ weeds. But I come from Castlepatrick, and me heart is on me sleeve; But a lady stole it from me on St. Barnabas’s Eve.”

The voice had stopped suddenly, but the last lines were so much more distinct that it was certain the singer had come nearer, and was not marching away.

It was only after all this, and through a sort of cloud, that Lady Joan heard the indomitable Oriental bringing his whole eloquent address to a conclusion.

“. . . And if you do not refu–use the sun that returns and rises in the East with every morning, you will not refu–use either this great social experiment, this great polygamical method which also arose out of the East, and always returns. For this is that Higher Polygamy which always comes, like the sun itself, out of the orient, but is only at its noontide splendour when the sun is high in heaven.”

She was but vaguely conscious of Mr. Leveson, the man with the dark face and the eyeglasses, acknowledging the entrancing lecture in suitable terms, and calling on any of the Simple Souls who might have questions to ask, to ask them. It was only when the Simple Souls had displayed their simplicity with the usual parade of well–bred reluctance and fussy self–effacement, that anyone addressed the chair. And it was only after somebody had been addressing the chair for some time that Joan gradually awoke to the fact that the address was somewhat unusual.
CHAPTER VIII

VOX POPULI VOX DEI

“I AM sure,” Mr. Leveson, the Secretary, had said, with a somewhat constrained smile, “that after the eloquent and epoch–making speech to which we have listened there will be some questions asked, and we hope to have a debate afterwards. I am sure somebody will ask a question.” Then he looked interrogatively at one weary looking gentleman in the fourth row and said, “Mr. Hinch?”

Mr. Hinch shook his head with a pallid passion of refusal, wonderful to watch, and said, “I couldn’t! I really couldn’t!”

“We should be very pleased,” said Mr. Leveson, “if any lady would ask a question.”

In the silence that followed it was somehow psychologically borne in on the whole audience that one particular great large lady (as the lecturer would say) sitting at the end of the second row was expected to ask a question. Her own wax–work immobility was witness both to the expectation and its disappointment. “Are there any other questions?” asked Mr. Leveson—as if there had been any yet. He seemed to speak with a slight air of relief.

There was a sort of stir at the back of the hall and half way down one side of it. Choked whispers could be heard of “Now then, Garge!”—”Go it Garge! Is there any questions! Gor!”

Mr. Leveson looked up with an alertness somewhat akin to alarm. He realised for the first time that a few quite common men in coarse, unclean clothes, had somehow strolled in through the open door. They were not true rustics, but the semi–rustic labourers that linger about the limits of the large watering–places. There was no “Mr.” among them. There was a general tendency to call everybody George.

Mr. Leveson saw the situation and yielded to it. He modelled himself on Lord Ivywood and did much what he would have done in all cases, but with a timidity Lord Ivywood would not have shown. And the same social training that made him ashamed to be with such men, made him ashamed to own his shame. The same modern spirit that taught him to loathe such rags, also taught him to lie about his loathing.

“I am sure we should be very glad,” he said, nervously, “if any friends from
outside care to join in our inquiry. Of course, we’re all Democrats,” and he looked round at the grand ladies with a ghastly smile, “and believe in the Voice of the People and so on. If our friend at the back of the hall will put his question briefly, we need not insist, I think, on his putting it in writing?”

There were renewed hoarse encouragements to George (that rightly christened champion) and he wavered forward on legs tied in the middle with string. He did not appear to have had any seat since his arrival, and made his remarks standing half way down what we may call the central aisle.

“Well, I want to ask the proprietor,” he began.

“Questions,” said Mr. Leveson, swiftly seizing a chance for that construction of debate which is the main business of a modern chairman, “must be asked of the chair, if they are points of order. If they concern the address, they should be asked of the lecturer.”

“Well, I ask the lecturer,” said the patient Garge, “whether it ain’t right that when you ‘ave the thing outside you should ‘ave the thing inside.” (Hoarse applause at the back.)

Mr. Leveson was evidently puzzled and already suspicious that something was quite wrong. But the enthusiasm of the Prophet of the Moon sprang up instantly at any sort of question and swept the Chairman along with it.

“But it iss the essence of our who–ole message,” he cried, spreading out his arms to embrace the world, “that the outer manifestation should be one with the inner manifestation. My friendss, it iss this very tru–uth our friend has stated, that iss responsible for our apparent lack of symbolism in Islam! We appear to neglect the symbol because we insist on the satisfactory symbol. My friend in the middle will walk round all our mosques and say loudly, ‘Where is the statue of Allah?’ But can my friend in the middle really execute a complete and generally approved statue of Allah?”

Misysra Ammon sat down greatly satisfied with his answer, but it was doubted by many whether, he had conveyed the satisfaction to his friend in the middle. That seeker after truth wiped his mouth with the back of his hand with an unsatisfied air and said:

“No offence, sir. But ain’t it the Law, sir, that if you ‘ave that outside we’re all right? I came in ‘ere as natural as could be. But Gorlumme, I never see a place like this afore.” (Hoarse laughter behind.)

“No apology is needed, my friend,” cried the Eastern sage, eagerly, “I can conceive you are not perhaps du–uly conversant with such schools of truth. But the Law is All. The Law is Allah. The inmost u–unity of–”
“Well, ain’t it the Law?” repeated the dogged George, and every time he mentioned the Law the poor men who are its chief victims applauded loudly. “I’m not one to make a fuss. I never was one to make a fuss. I’m a law–abidin’ man, I am. (More applause.) Ain’t it the Law that if so be such is your sign and such is your profession, you ought to serve us?”

“I fear I not quite follow,” cried the eager Turk. “I ought?”

“To serve us,” shouted a throng of thick voices from the back of the hall, which was already much more crowded than before.

“Serve you!” cried Misysra, leaping up like a spring released, “The Holy Prophet came from Heaven to serve you! The virtue and valour of a thousand years, my friends, has had no hunger but to serve you! We are of all faiths, the most the faith of service. Our highest prophet is no more than the servant of God, as I am, as you all are. Even for our symbol we choose a satellite, and honour the Moon because it only serves the Earth, and does not pretend to be the Sun.”

“I’m sure,” cried Mr. Leveson, jumping up with a tactful grin, “that the lecturer has answered this last point in a most eloquent and effective way, and the motor cars are waiting for some of the ladies who have come from some distance, and I really think the proceedings—”

All the artistic ladies were already getting on their wraps, with faces varying from bewilderment to blank terror. Only Lady Joan lingered, trembling with unexplained excitement. The hitherto speechless Hinch had slid up to the Chairman’s seat and whispered to him:

“You must get all the ladies away. I can’t imagine what’s up, but something’s up.”

“Well?” repeated the patient George. “So be it’s the Law, where is it?”

“Ladies and Gentlemen,” said Mr. Leveson, in his most ingratiating manner, “I think we have had a most delightful evening, and—”

“No, we ain’t,” cried a new and nastier voice from a corner of the room. “Where is it?”

“That’s what we got a right to know,” said the law–abiding George. “Where is it?”

“Where is what?” cried the nearly demented secretary in the chair. “What do you want?”

The law–abiding Mr. George made a half turn and a gesture towards the man in the corner and said:

“What’s yours, Jim?”
“I’ll ‘ave a drop of Scotch,” said the man in the corner.

Lady Enid Wimpole, who had lingered a little in loyalty to Joan, the only other lady still left, caught both her wrists and cried in a thrilling whisper,

“Oh, we must go to the car, dear! They’re using the most awful language!”

Away on the wettest edge of the sands by the sea the prints of two wheels and four hoofs were being slowly washed away by a slowly rising tide; which was, indeed, the only motive of the man Humphrey Pump, leading the donkey cart, in leading it almost ankle deep in water.

“I hope you’re sober again now,” he said with some seriousness to his companion, a huge man walking heavily and even humbly with a straight sword swinging to and fro at his hip—”for honestly it was a mug’s game to go and stick up the old sign before that tin place. I haven’t often spoken to you like this, Captain, but I don’t believe any other man in the county could get you out of the hole as I can. But to go down there and frighten the ladies—why there’s been nothing so silly here since Bishop’s Folly. You could hear the ladies screaming before we left.”

“I heard worse than that long before we left,” said the large man, without lifting his head. “I heard one of them laugh. . . . Christ, do you think I shouldn’t hear her laugh?”

There was a silence. “I didn’t mean to speak sharp,” said Humphrey Pump with that incorruptible kindliness which was the root of his Englishry, and may yet save the soul of the English. “But it’s the truth I was pretty well bothered about how to get out of this business. You’re braver than I am, you see, and I own I was frightened about both of us. If I hadn’t known my way to the lost tunnel, I should be fairly frightened still.”

“Known your way to what?” asked the Captain, lifting his red head for the first time.

“Oh, you know all about No More Ivywood’s lost tunnel,” said Pump, carelessly. “Why, we all used to look for it when we were boys. Only I happened to find it.”

“Have mercy on an exile,” said Dalroy, humbly. “I don’t know which hurt him most, the things he forgets or the things he remembers.”

Mr. Pump was silent for a little while and then said, more seriously than usual, “Well, the people from London say you must put up placards and statues and subscriptions and epitaphs and the Lord knows what, to the people who’ve found some new trick and made it come off. But only a man that knows his own land for forty miles round, knows what a lot of people, and clever people too, there
were who found new tricks, and had to hide them because they didn’t come off. There was Dr. Boone, up by Gill–in–Hugby, who held out against Dr. Collison and the vaccination. His treatment saved sixty patients who had got small–pox; and Dr. Collison’s killed ninety–two patients who hadn’t got anything. But Boone had to keep it dark; naturally, because all his lady patients grew mustaches. It was a result of the treatment. But it wasn’t a result he wishes to dwell on. Then there was old Dean Arthur, who discovered balloons if ever a man did. He discovered them long before they were discovered. But people were suspicious about such things just then—there was a revival of the witch business in spite of all the parsons—and he had to sign a paper saying where he’d got the notion. Well, it stands to reason, you wouldn’t like to sign a paper saying you’d got it from the village idiot when you were both blowing soap–bubbles; and that’s all he could have signed, for he was an honest gentleman, the poor old Dean. Then there was Jack Arlingham and the diving bell—but you remember all about that. Well, it was just the same with the man that made this tunnel—one of the mad Ivywoods. There’s many a man, Captain, that has a statue in the great London squares for helping to make the railway trains. There’s many a man has his name in Westminster Abbey for doing something in discovering steamboats. Poor old Ivywood discovered both at once; and had to be put under control. He had a notion that a railway train might be made to rush right into the sea and turn into a steamboat; and it seemed all right, according as he worked it out. But his family were so ashamed of the thing, that they didn’t like the tunnel even mentioned. I don’t think anybody knows where it is but me and Bunchy Robinson. We shall be there in a minute or two. They’ve thrown the rocks about at this end; and let the thick plantation grow at the other, but I’ve got a race horse through before now, to save it from Colonel Chepstow’s little games, and I think I can manage this donkey. Honestly, I think it’s the only place we’ll be safe in after what we’ve left behind us at Pebblewick. But it’s the best place in the world, there’s no doubt, for lying low and starting afresh. Here we are. You think you can’t get behind that rock, but you can. In fact, you have.”

Dalroy found himself, with some bewilderment, round the corner of a rock and in a long bore or barrel of blackness that ended in a very dim spot of green. Hearing the hoofs of the ass and the feet of his friend behind him, he turned his head, but could see nothing but the pitch darkness of a closed coal cellar. He turned again to the dim green speck, and marching forward was glad to see it grow larger and brighter, like a big emerald, till he came out on a throng of trees, mostly thin, but growing so thickly and so close to the cavernous entrance of the
tunnel that it was quite clear the place was meant to be choked up by forests and forgotten. The light that came glimmering through the trees was so broken and tremulous that it was hard to tell whether it was daybreak or moonrise.

“I know there’s water here,” said Pump. “They couldn’t keep it out of the stone–work when they made the tunnel, and old Ivywood hit the hydraulic engineer with a spirit level. With the bit of covert here and the sea behind us we ought to be able to get food of one kind or another, when the cheese has given out, and donkeys can eat anything. By the way,” he added with some embarrassment, “you don’t mind my saying it, Captain, but I think we’d better keep that rum for rare occasions. It’s the best rum in England, and may be the last, if these mad games are going on. It’ll do us good to feel it’s there, so we can have it when we want it. The cask’s still nearly full.”

Dalroy put out his hand and shook the other’s. “Hump,” he said, seriously, “you’re right. It’s a sacred trust for Humanity; and we’ll only drink it ourselves to celebrate great victories. In token of which I will take a glass now, to celebrate our glorious victory over Leveson and his tin tabernacle.”

He drained one glass and then sat down on the cask, as if to put temptation behind him. His blue ruminant bull’s eye seemed to plunge deeper and deeper into the emerald twilight of the trees in front of him, and it was long before he spoke again.

At last he observed, “I think you said, Hump, that a friend of yours—a gentleman named Bunchy Robinson, I think—was also a habitué here.”

“Yes, he knew the way,” answered Pump, leading the donkey to the most suitable patch of pasturage.

“May we, do you think, have the pleasure of a visit from Mr. Robinson?” inquired the Captain.

“Not unless they’re jolly careless up in Blackstone Gaol,” replied Pump. And he moved the cheese well into the arch of the tunnel. Dalroy still sat with his square chin on his hand, staring at the mystery of the little wood.

“You seem absent–minded, Captain,” remarked Humphrey.

“The deepest thoughts are all commonplaces,” said Dalroy. “That is why I believe in Democracy, which is more than you do, you foul blood–stained old British Tory. And the deepest commonplace of all is that Vanitas Vanitatem, which is not pessimism but is really the opposite of pessimism. It is man’s futility that makes us feel he must be a god. And I think of this tunnel, and how the poor old lunatic walked about on this grass, watching it being built, the soul in him on fire with the future. And he saw the whole world changed and the seas
thronged with his new shipping; and now,” and Dalroy’s voice changed and broke, “now there is good pasture for the donkey and it is very quiet here.”

“Yes,” said Pump, in some way that conveyed his knowledge that the Captain was thinking of other things also. The Captain went on dreamily:

“And I think about another Lord Ivywood recorded in history who also had a great vision. For it is a great vision after all, and though the man is a prig, he is brave. He also wants to drive a tunnel—between East and West—to make the Indian Empire more British; to effect what he calls the orientation of England, and I call the ruin of Christendom. And I am wondering just now whether the clear intellect and courageous will of a madman will be strong enough to burst and drive that tunnel, as everything seems to show at this moment that it will. Or whether there be indeed enough life and growth in your England to leave it at last as this is left, buried in English forests and wasted by an English sea.”

The silence fell between them again, and again there was only the slight sound the animal made in eating. As Dalroy had said, it was very quiet there.

But it was not quiet in Pebblewick that night; when the Riot Act was read, and all the people who had seen the sign-board outside fought all the people who hadn’t seen the sign-board outside; or when babies and scientists next morning, seeking for shells and other common objects of the sea-shore, found that their study included fragments of the outer clothing of Leveson and scraps of corrugated iron.
CHAPTER IX

THE HIGHER CRITICISM AND MR. HIBBS

PEBBLEWICK boasted an enterprising evening paper of its own, called “The Pebblewick Globe,” and it was the great vaunt of the editor’s life that he had got out an edition announcing the mystery of the vanishing sign–board, almost simultaneously with its vanishing. In the rows that followed sandwich men found no little protection from the blows indiscriminately given them behind and before, in the large wooden boards they carried inscribed:

THE VANISHING PUB PEBBLEWICK’S FAIRY TALE SPECIAL

And the paper contained a categorical and mainly correct account of what had happened, or what seemed to have happened, to the eyes of the amazed Garge and his crowd of sympathisers. “George Burn, carpenter of this town, with Samuel Gripes, drayman in the service of Messrs. Jay and Gubbins, brewers, together with a number of other well–known residents, passed by the new building erected on the West Beach for various forms of entertainment and popularly called the small Universal Hall. Seeing outside it one of the old inn–signs now so rare, they drew the quite proper inference that the place retained the license to sell alcoholic liquors, which so many other places in this neighbourhood have recently lost. The persons inside, however, appear to have denied all knowledge of the fact, and when the party (after some regrettable scenes in which no life was lost) came out on the beach again, it was found that the inn–sign had been destroyed or stolen. All parties were quite sober, and had indeed obtained no opportunity to be anything else. The mystery is underlying inquiry.”

But this comparatively realistic record was local and spontaneous, and owed not a little to the accidental honesty of the editor. Moreover, evening papers are often more honest than morning papers, because they are written by ill–paid and hardworked underlings in a great hurry, and there is no time for more timid people to correct them. By the time the morning papers came out next day a faint but perceptible change had passed over the story of the vanishing sign–board. In the daily paper which had the largest circulation and the most influence in that part of the world, the problem was committed to a gentleman known by what seemed to the non–journalistic world the singular name of Hibbs However. It had been affixed to him in jest in connection with the almost complicated
caution with which all his public criticisms were qualified at every turn; so that everything came to depend upon the conjunctions; upon “but” and “yet” and “though” and similar words. As his salary grew larger (for editors and proprietors like that sort of thing) and his old friends fewer (for the most generous of friends cannot but feel faintly acid at a success which has in it nothing of the infectious flavour of glory) he grew more and more to value himself as a diplomatist; a man who always said the right thing. But he was not without his intellectual nemesis; for at last he became so very diplomatic as to be darkly and densely unintelligible. People who knew him had no difficulty in believing that what he had said was the right thing, the tactful thing, the thing that should save the situation; but they had great difficulty in discovering what it was. In his early days he had had a great talent for one of the worst tricks of modern journalism, the trick of dismissing the important part of a question as if it could wait, and appearing to get to business on the unimportant part of it. Thus, he would say, “Whatever we may think of the rights and wrongs of the vivisection of pauper children, we shall all agree that it should only be done, in any event, by fully qualified practitioners.” But in the later and darker days of his diplomacy, he seemed rather to dismiss the important part of a subject, and get to grips with some totally different subject, following some timid and elusive train of associations of his own. In his late bad manner, as they say of painters, he was just as likely to say, “Whatever we may think of the rights and wrongs of the vivisection of pauper children, no progressive mind can doubt that the influence of the Vatican is on the decline.” His nickname had stuck to him in honour of a paragraph he was alleged to have written when the American President was wounded by a bullet fired by a lunatic in New Orleans, and which was said to have run, “The President passed a good night and his condition is greatly improved. The assassin is not, however, a German, as was at first supposed.” Men stared at that mysterious conjunction till they wanted to go mad and to shoot somebody themselves.

Hibbs However was a long, lank man, with straight, yellowish hair and a manner that was externally soft and mild but secretly supercilious. He had been, when at Cambridge, a friend of Leveson, and they had both prided themselves on being moderate politicians. But if you have had your hat smashed over your nose by one who has very recently described himself as a “law–abidin’ man,” and if you have had to run for your life with one coat–tail, and encouraged to further bodily activity by having irregular pieces of a corrugated iron roof thrown after you by men more energetic than yourself, you will find you emerge
with emotions which are not solely those of a moderate politician. Hibbs
However had already composed a leaderette on the Pebblewick incident, which
rather pointed to the truth of the story, so far as his articles ever pointed to
anything. His motives for veering vaguely in this direction were, as usual,
complex. He knew the millionaire who owned the paper had a hobby of
Spiritualism, and something might always come out of not suppressing a
marvellous story. He knew that two at least of the prosperous artisans or small
tradesmen who had attested the tale were staunch supporters of The Party. He
knew that Lord Ivywood must be mildly but not effectually checked; for Lord
Ivywood was of The Other Party. And there could be no milder or less effectual
way of checking him than by allowing the paper to lend at least a temporary
credit to a well–supported story that came from outside, and certainly had not
been (like so many stories) created in the office. Amid all these considerations
had Hibbs However steered his way to a more or less confirmatory article, when
the sudden apparition of J. Leveson, Secretary, in the sub–editor’s room with a
burst collar and broken eyeglasses, led Mr. Hibbs into a long, private
conversation with him and a comparative reversal of his plans. But of course he
did not write a new article; he was not of that divine order who make all things
new. He chopped and changed his original article in such a way that it was
something quite beyond the most bewildering article he had written in the past;
and is still prized by those highly cultured persons who collect the worst
literature of the world.

It began, indeed, with the comparatively familiar formula, “Whether we take
the more lax or the more advanced view of the old disputed problem of the
morality or immorality of the wooden sign–board as such, we shall all agree that
the scenes enacted at Pebblewick were very discreditable, to most, though not
all, concerned.” After that, tact degenerated into a riot of irrelevance. It was a
wonderful article. The reader could get from it a faint glimpse of Mr. Hibbs’s
opinion on almost every other subject except the subject of the article. The first
half of the next sentence made it quite clear that Mr. Hibbs (had he been present)
would not have lent his active assistance to the Massacre of St. Bartholomew or
the Massacres of September. But the second half of the sentence suggested with
equal clearness that, since these two acts were no longer, as it were, in
contemplation, and all attempts to prevent them would probably arrive a little
late, he felt the warmest friendship for the French nation. He merely insisted that
his friendship should never be mentioned except in the French language. It must
be called an “entente” in the language taught to tourists by waiters. It must on no
account be called an “understanding,” in a language understood of the people. From the first half of the sentence following it might safely be inferred that Mr. Hibbs had read Milton, or at least the passage about sons of Belial; from the second half that he knew nothing about bad wine, let alone good. The next sentence began with the corruption of the Roman Empire and contrived to end with Dr. Clifford. Then there was a weak plea for Eugenics; and a warm plea against Conscription, which was not True Eugenics. That was all; and it was headed “The Riot at Pebblewick.”

Yet some injustice would be done to Hibbs however if we concealed the fact that this chaotic leader was followed by quite a considerable mass of public correspondence. The people who write to newspapers are, it may be supposed, a small, eccentric body, like most of those that sway a modern state. But at least, unlike the lawyers, or the financiers, or the members of Parliament, or the men of science, they are people of all kinds scattered all over the country, of all classes, counties, ages, sects, sexes, and stages of insanity. The letters that followed Hibbs’s article are still worth looking up in the dusty old files of his paper.

A dear old lady in the densest part of the Midlands wrote to suggest that there might really have been an old ship wrecked on the shore, during the proceedings. “Mr. Leveson may have omitted to notice it, or, at that late hour of the evening, it may have been mistaken for a sign–board, especially by a person of defective sight. My own sight has been failing for some time; but I am still a diligent reader of your paper.” If Mr. Hibbs’s diplomacy had left one nerve in his soul undrugged, he would have laughed, or burst into tears, or got drunk, or gone into a monastery over a letter like that. As it was, he measured it with a pencil, and decided that it was just too long to get into the column.

Then there was a letter from a theorist, and a theorist of the worst sort. There is no great harm in the theorist who makes up a new theory to fit a new event. But the theorist who starts with a false theory and then sees everything as making it come true is the most dangerous enemy of human reason. The letter began like a bullet let loose by the trigger. “Is not the whole question met by Ex. iv. 3? I enclose pamphlets in which I have proved the point quite plainly, and which none of the Bishops or the so–called Free Church Ministers have attempted to answer. The connection between the rod or pole and the snake so clearly indicated in Scripture is no less clear in this case. It is well known that those who follow after strong drink often announce themselves as having seen a snake. Is it not clear that those unhappy revellers beheld it in its transformed
state as a pole; see also Deut. xviii. 2. If our so–called religious leaders,” etc. The letter went on for thirty–three pages and Hibbs was perhaps justified in this case in thinking the letter rather too long.

Then there was the scientific correspondent who said–Might it not be due to the acoustic qualities of the hall? He had never believed in the corrugated iron hall. The very word “hall” itself (he added playfully) was often so sharpened and shortened by the abrupt echoes of those repeated metallic curves, that it had every appearance of being the word “hell,” and had caused many theological entanglements, and some police prosecutions. In the light of these facts, he wished to draw the editor’s attention to some very curious details about this supposed presence or absence of an inn–sign. It would be noted that many of the witnesses, and especially the most respectable of them, constantly refer to something that is supposed to be outside. The word “outside” occurs at least five times in the depositions of the complaining persons. Surely by all scientific analogy we may infer that the unusual phrase “inn–sign” is an acoustic error for “inside.” The word “inside” would so naturally occur in any discussion either about the building or the individual, when the debate was of a hygienic character. This letter was signed “Medical Student,” and the less intelligent parts of it were selected for publication in the paper.

Then there was a really humorous man, who wrote and said there was nothing at all inexplicable or unusual about the case. He himself (he said) had often seen a sign–board outside a pub when he went into it, and been quite unable to see it when he came out. This letter (the only one that had any quality of literature) was sternly set aside by Mr. Hibbs.

Then came a cultured gentleman with a light touch, who merely made a suggestion. Had anyone read H. G. Wells’s story about the kink in space? He contrived, indescribably, to suggest that no one had even heard of it except himself; or, perhaps, of Mr. Wells either. The story indicated that men’s feet might be in one part of the world and their eyes in another. He offered the suggestion for what it was worth. The particular pile of letters on which Hibbs However threw it, showed only too clearly what it was worth.

Then there was a man, of course, who called it all a plot of frenzied foreigners against Britain’s shore. But as he did not make it quite clear whether the chief wickedness of these aliens had lain in sticking the sign up or in pulling it down, his remarks (the remainder of which referred exclusively to the conversational misconduct of an Italian ice–cream man, whose side of the case seemed insufficiently represented) carried the less weight.
And then, last but the reverse of least, there plunged in all the people who think they can solve a problem they cannot understand by abolishing everything that has contributed to it. We all know these people. If a barber has cut his customer’s throat because the girl has changed her partner for a dance or donkey ride on Hampstead Heath, there are always people to protest against the mere institutions that led up to it. This would not have happened if barbers were abolished, or if cutlery were abolished, or if the objection felt by girls to imperfectly grown beards were abolished, or if the girls were abolished, or if heaths and open spaces were abolished, or if dancing were abolished, or if donkeys were abolished. But donkeys, I fear, will never be abolished.

There were plenty of such donkeys in the common land of this particular controversy. Some made it an argument against democracy, because poor Garge was a carpenter. Some made it an argument against Alien Immigration, because Misysra Ammon was a Turk. Some proposed that ladies should no longer be admitted to any lectures anywhere, because they had constituted a slight and temporary difficulty at this one, without the faintest fault of their own. Some urged that all holiday resorts should be abolished; some urged that all holidays should be abolished. Some vaguely denounced the sea–side; some, still more vaguely, proposed to remove the sea. All said that if this or that, stones or seaweed or strange visitors or bad weather or bathing machines were swept away with a strong hand, this which had happened would not have happened. They only had one slight weakness, all of them; that they did not seem to have the faintest notion of what had happened. And in this they were not inexcusable. Nobody did know what had happened; nobody knows it to this day, of course, or it would be unnecessary to write this story. No one can suppose this story is written from any motive save that of telling the plain, humdrum truth.

That queer confused cunning which was the only definable quality possessed by Hibbs However had certainly scored a victory so far, for the tone of the weekly papers followed him, with more intelligence and less trepidation; but they followed him. It seemed more and more clear that some kind of light and sceptical explanation was to be given of the whole business, and that the whole business was to be dropped.

The story of the sign–board and the ethical chapel of corrugated iron was discussed and somewhat disparaged in all the more serious and especially in the religious weeklies, though the Low Church papers seemed to reserve their distaste chiefly for the sign–board; and the High Church papers chiefly for the Chapel. All agreed that the combination was incongruous, and most treated it as
fabulous. The only intellectual organs which seemed to think it might have happened were the Spiritualist papers, and their interpretation had not that solidity which would have satisfied Mr. George.

It was not until almost a year after that it was felt in philosophical circles that the last word had been said on the matter. An estimate of the incident and of its bearing on natural and supernatural history occurred in Professor Widge’s celebrated “Historicity of the Petro–Piscatorial Phenomena”; which so profoundly affected modern thought when it came out in parts in the Hibbert Journal. Everyone remembers Professor Widge’s main contention, that the modern critic must apply to the thaumaturgics of the Lake of Tiberias the same principle of criticism which Dr. Bunk and others have so successfully applied to the thaumaturgics of the Cana narrative: “Authorities as final as Pink and Toscher,” wrote the Professor, “have now shown with an emphasis that no emancipated mind is entitled to question, that the Aqua–Vinic thaumaturgy at Cana is wholly inconsistent with the psychology of the ‘master of the feast,’ as modern research has analysed it; and indeed with the whole Judaeo–Aramaic psychology at that stage of its development, as well as being painfully incongruous with the elevated ideals of the ethical teacher in question. But as we rise to higher levels of moral achievement, it will probably be found necessary to apply the Canaic principle to other and later events in the narrative. This principle has, of course, been mainly expounded by Huscher in the sense that the whole episode is unhistorical, while the alternative theory, that the wine was non–alcoholic and was naturally infused into the water, can claim on its side the impressive name of Minns. It is clear that if we apply the same alternative to the so–called Miraculous Draught of Fishes we must either hold with Gilp, that the fishes were stuffed representations of fishes artificially placed in the lake (see the Rev. Y. Wyse’s “Christo–Vegetarianism as a World–System,” where this position is forcibly set forth), or we must, on the Huscherian hypothesis, deprive the Piscatorial narrative of all claim to historicity whatever.

“The difficulty felt by the most daring critics (even Pooke) in adopting this entirely destructive attitude, is the alleged improbability of so detailed a narrative being founded on so slight a phrase as the anti–historical critics refer it to. It is urged by Pooke, with characteristic relentless reasoning, that according to Huscher’s theory a metaphorical but at least noticeable remark, such as, ‘I will make you fishers of men,’ was expanded into a realistic chronicle of events which contains no mention, even in the passages evidently interpolated, of any men actually found in the nets when they were hauled up out of the sea; or, more
“It must appear presumptuous or even bad taste for anyone in the modern world to differ on any subject from Pooke; but I would venture to suggest that the very academic splendour and unique standing of the venerable professor (whose ninety-seventh birthday was so beautifully celebrated in Chicago last year), may have forbidden him all but intuitive knowledge of how errors arise among the vulgar. I crave pardon for mentioning a modern case known to myself (not indeed by personal presence, but by careful study of all the reports) which presents a curious parallel to such ancient expansions of a text into an incident, in accordance with Huscher’s law.

“It occurred at Pebblewick, in the south of England. The town had long been in a state of dangerous religious excitement. The great religious genius who has since so much altered our whole attitude to the religions of the world, Misysra Ammon, had been lecturing on the sands to thousands of enthusiastic hearers. Their meetings were often interrupted, both by children’s services run on the most ruthless lines of orthodoxy and by the League of the Red Rosette, the formidable atheist and anarchist organization. As if this were not enough to swell the whirlpool of fanaticism, the old popular controversy between the Milnian and the Complete Sublapsarians broke out again on the fated beach. It is natural to conjecture that in the thickening atmosphere of theology in Pebblewick, some controversialist quoted the text ‘An evil and adulterous generation seek for a sign. But no sign shall be given it save the sign of the prophet Jonas.’

“A mind like that of Pooke will find it hard to credit, but it seems certain that the effect of this text on the ignorant peasantry of southern England was actually to make them go about looking for a sign, in the sense of those old tavern signs now so happily disappearing. The ‘sign of the Prophet Jonas,’ they somehow translated in their stunted minds into a sign-board of the ship out of which Jonah was thrown. They went about literally looking for ‘The Sign of the Ship,’ and there are some cases of their suffering Smail’s Hallucination and actually seeing it. The whole incident is a curious parallel to the Gospel narrative and a triumphant vindication of Huscher’s law.”

Lord Ivywood paid a public compliment to Professor Widge, saying that he had rolled back from his country what might have been an ocean of superstitions. But, indeed, poor Hibbs had struck the first and stunning blow that scattered the brains of all men.
CHAPTER X

THE CHARACTER OF QUOODLE

THERE lay about in Lord Ivywood’s numerous gardens, terraces, outhouses, stable yards and similar places, a dog that came to be called by the name of Quoodle. Lord Ivywood did not call him Quoodle. Lord Ivywood was almost physically incapable of articulating such sounds. Lord Ivywood did not care for dogs. He cared for the Cause of dogs, of course; and he cared still more for his own intellectual self-respect and consistency. He would never have permitted a dog in his house to be physically ill-treated; nor, for that matter, a rat; nor, for that matter, even a man. But if Quoodle was not physically ill-treated, he was at least socially neglected, and Quoodle did not like it. For dogs care for companionship more than for kindness itself.

Lord Ivywood would probably have sold the dog, but he consulted experts (as he did on everything he didn’t understand and many things that he did), and the impression he gathered from them was that the dog, technically considered, would fetch very little; mostly, it seemed, because of the mixture of qualities that it possessed. It was a sort of mongrel bull-terrier, but with rather too much of the bull-dog; and this fact seemed to weaken its price as much as it strengthened its jaw. His Lordship also gained a hazy impression that the dog might have been valuable as a watch-dog if it had not been able to follow game like a pointer; and that even in the latter walk of life it would always be discredited by an unfortunate talent for swimming as well as a retriever. But Lord Ivywood’s impressions may very well have been slightly confused, as he was probably thinking about the Black stone of Mecca, or some such subject at the moment. The victim of this entanglement of virtues, therefore, still lay about in the sunlight of Ivywood, exhibiting no general result of that entanglement except the most appalling ugliness.

Now Lady Joan Brett did appreciate dogs. It was the whole of her type and a great deal of her tragedy that all that was natural in her was still alive under all that was artificial; and she could smell hawthorn or the sea as far off as a dog can smell his dinner. Like most aristocrats she would carry cynicism almost to the suburbs of the city of Satan; she was quite as irreligious as Lord Ivywood, or rather more. She could be quite equally frigid or supercilious when she felt inclined. And in the great social talent of being tired, she could beat him any day
of the week. But the difference remained in spite of her sophistries and ambitions; that her elemental communications were not cut, and his were. For her the sunrise was still the rising of a sun, and not the turning on of a light by a convenient cosmic servant. For her the Spring was really the Season in the country, and not merely the Season in town. For her cocks and hens were natural appendages to an English house; and not (as Lord Ivywood had proved to her from an encyclopaedia) animals of Indian origin, recently imported by Alexander the Great. And so for her a dog was a dog, and not one of the higher animals, nor one of the lower animals, nor something that had the sacredness of life, nor something that ought to be muzzled, nor something that ought not to be vivisected. She knew that in every practical sense proper provision would be made for the dog; as, indeed, provision was made for the yellow dogs in Constantinople by Abdul Hamid, whose life Lord Ivywood was writing for the Progressive Potentates series. Nor was she in the least sentimental about the dog or anxious to turn him into a pet. It simply came natural to her in passing to rub all his hair the wrong way and call him something which she instantly forgot.

The man who was mowing the garden lawn looked up for a moment, for he had never seen the dog behave in exactly that way before. Quoodle arose, shook himself, and trotted on in front of the lady, leading her up an iron side staircase, of which, as it happened, she had never made use before. It was then, most probably, that she first took any special notice of him; and her pleasure, like that which she took in the sublime prophet from Turkey, was of a humorous character. For the complex quadruped had retained the bow legs of the bull–dog; and, seen from behind, reminded her ridiculously of a swaggering little Major waddling down to his Club.

The dog and the iron stairway between them led her into a series of long rooms, one opening into the other. They formed part of what she had known in earlier days as the disused Wing of Ivywood House, which had been neglected or shut up, probably because it bore some defacements from the fancies of the mad ancestor, the memory of whom the present Lord Ivywood did not think helpful to his own political career. But it seemed to Joan that there were indications of a recent attempt to rehabilitate the place. There was a pail of whitewash in one of the empty rooms, a step–ladder in another, here and there a curtain rod, and at last, in the fourth room a curtain. It hung all alone on the old woodwork, but it was a very gorgeous curtain, being a kind of orange–gold relieved with wavy bars of crimson, which somehow seemed to suggest the very spirit and presence of serpents, though they had neither eyes nor mouths among
them.

In the next of the endless series of rooms she came upon a kind of ottoman, striped with green and silver standing alone on the bare floor. She sat down on it from a mixed motive of fatigue and of impudence, for she dimly remembered a story which she had always thought one of the funniest in the world, about a lady only partly initiated in Theosophy who had been in the habit of resting on a similar object, only to discover afterward that it was a Mahatma, covered with his eastern garment and prostrate and rigid in ecstasy. She had no hopes of sitting on a Mahatma herself, but the very thought of it made her laugh, because it would make Lord Ivywood look such a fool. She was not sure whether she liked or disliked Lord Ivywood, but she felt quite certain that it would gratify her to make him look a fool. The moment she had sat down on the ottoman, the dog, who had been trotting beside her, sat down also, and on the edge of her skirt.

After a minute or two she rose (and the dog rose), and she looked yet farther down that long perspective of large rooms, in which men like Philip Ivywood forget that they are only men. The next was more ornate and the next yet more so; it was plain that the scheme of decoration that was in progress had been started at the other end. She could now see that the long lane ended in rooms that from afar off looked like the end of a kaleidoscope, rooms like nests made only from humming birds or palaces built of fixed fireworks. Out of this furnace of fragmentary colours she saw Ivywood advancing toward her, with his black suit and his white face accented by the contrast. His lips were moving, for he was talking to himself, as many orators do. He did not seem to see her, and she had to strangle a subconscious and utterly senseless cry, “He is blind!”

The next moment he was welcoming her intrusion with the well–bred surprise and rather worldly simplicity suitable to such a case, and Joan fancied she understood why his face had seemed a little bleaker and blinder than usual. It was by contrast. He was carrying clutched to his forefinger, as his ancestors might have carried a falcon clutched to the wrist, a small bright coloured semi–tropical bird, the expression of whose head, neck and eye was the very opposite of his own. Joan thought she had never seen a living creature with a head so lively and insulting. Its provocative eye and pointed crest seemed to be offering to fight fifty game–cocks. It was no wonder (she told herself) that by the side of this gaudy gutter–snipe with feathers Ivywood’s faint–coloured hair and frigid face looked like the hair and face of a corpse walking.

“You’ll never know what this is,” said Ivywood, in his most charming manner. “You’ve heard of him a hundred times and never had a notion of what
he was. This is the Bulbul.”

“I never knew,” replied Joan. “I am afraid I never cared. I always thought it was something like a nightingale.”

“Ah, yes,” answered Ivywood, “but this is the real Bulbul peculiar to the East, Pycnonotus Haemorrhous. You are thinking of Daulias Golzii.”

“I suppose I am,” replied Lady Joan with a faint smile. “It is an obsession. When shall I not be thinking of Daulias Galsworthy? Was it Galsworthy?” Then feeling quite touched by the soft austerity of her companion’s face, she caressed the gaudy and pugnacious bird with one finger and said, “It’s a dear little thing.”

The quadruped intimately called Quoodle did not approve of all this at all. Like most dogs, he liked to be with human beings when they were silent, and he extended a magnificent toleration to them as long as they were talking to each other. But conversational attention paid to any other animal at all remote from a mongrel bull–terrier wounded Mr. Quoodle in his most sensitive and gentlemanly feelings. He emitted a faint growl. Joan, with all the instincts that were in her, bent down and pulled his hair about once more, and felt the instant necessity of diverting the general admiration from Pycnonotus Haemorrhous. She turned it to the decoration at the end of the refurnished wing; for they had already come to the last of the long suite of rooms, which ended in some unfinished but exquisite panelling in white and coloured woods, inlaid in the oriental manner. At one corner the whole corridor ended by curving into a round turret chamber overlooking the landscape; and which Joan, who had known the house in childhood, was sure was an innovation. On the other hand a black gap, still left in the lower left–hand corner of the oriental woodwork, suddenly reminded her of something she had forgotten.

“Surely,” she said (after much mere aesthetic ecstasy), “there used to be a staircase there, leading to the old kitchen garden, or the old chapel or something.”

Ivywood nodded gravely. “Yes,” he said, “it did lead to the ruins of a Mediaeval Chapel, as you say. The truth is it led to several things that I cannot altogether consider a credit to the family in these days. All that scandal and joking about the unsuccessful tunnel (your mother may have told you of it), well, it did us no good in the County, I’m afraid; so as it’s a mere scrap of land bordering on the sea, I’ve fenced it off and let it grow wild. But I’m boarding up the end of the room here for quite another reason. I want you to come and see it.”

He led her into the round corner turret in which the new architecture ended,
and Joan, with her thirst for the beautiful, could not stifle a certain thrill of beatitude at the prospect. Five open windows of a light and exquisite Saracenic outline looked out over the bronze and copper and purple of the Autumn parks and forests to the peacock colours of the sea. There was neither house nor living thing in sight, and, familiar as she had been with that coast, she knew she was looking out from a new angle of vision on a new landscape of Ivywood.

“You can write sonnets?” said Ivywood with something more like emotion in his voice than she had ever heard in it. “What comes first into your mind with these open windows?”

“I know what you mean,” said Joan after a silence. “The same hath oft . . .”

“Yes,” he said. “That is how I felt . . . of perilous seas in fairy lands forlorn.”

There was another silence and the dog sniffed round and round the circular turret chamber.

“I want it to be like that,” said Ivywood in a low and singularly moved intonation. “I want this to be the end of the house. I want this to be the end of the world. Don’t you feel that is the real beauty of all this eastern art; that it is coloured like the edges of things, like the little clouds of morning and the islands of the blest? Do you know,” and he lowered his voice yet more, “it has the power over me of making me feel as if I were myself absent and distant; some oriental traveller who was lost and for whom men were looking. When I see that greenish lemon yellow enamel there let into the white, I feel that I am standing thousands of leagues from where I stand.”

“You are right,” said Joan, looking at him with some wonder, “I have felt like that myself.”

“This art,” went on Ivywood as in a dream, “does indeed take the wings of the morning and abide in the uttermost parts of the sea. They say it contains no form of life, but surely we can read its alphabet as easily as the red hieroglyphics of sunrise and sunset which are on the fringes of the robe of God.”

“I never heard you talk like that before,” said the lady, and again stroked the vivid violet feathers of the small eastern bird.

Mr. Quoodle could stand it no longer. He had evidently formed a very low opinion of the turret chamber and of oriental art generally, but seeing Joan’s attention once more transferred to his rival, he trotted out into the longer room, and finding the gap in the woodwork which was soon to be boarded up, but which still opened on an old dark staircase, he went “galumphing” down the stairs.

Lord Ivywood gently placed the bird on the girl’s own finger, and went to one
of the open windows, leaning out a little.

“Look here,” he said, “doesn’t this express what we both feel? Isn’t this the sort of fairy–tale house that ought to hang on the last wall of the world?”

And he motioned her to the window–sill, just outside which hung the bird’s empty cage, beautifully wrought in brass or some of the yellow metals.

“Why that is the best of all!” cried Lady Joan. “It makes one feel as if it really were the Arabian Nights. As if this were a tower of the gigantic Genii with turrets up to the moon; and this were an enchanted Prince caged in a golden palace suspended by the evening star.”

Something stirred in her dim but teeming subconsciousness, something like a chill or change like that by which we half know that weather has altered, or distant and unnoticed music suddenly ceased.

“Where is the dog?” she asked suddenly.

Ivywood turned with a mild, grey eye.

“Was there a dog here?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Lady Joan Brett, and gave him back the bird, which he restored carefully to its cage.

The dog after whom she inquired had in truth trundled down a dark, winding staircase and turned into the daylight, into a part of the garden he had never seen before; nor, indeed, had anybody else for some time past. It was altogether tangled and overgrown with weeds, and the only trace of human handiwork, the wreck of an old Gothic Chapel, stood waist high in numberless nettles and soiled with crawling fungoids. Most of these merely discoloured the grey crumbling stone with shades of bronze or brown; but some of them, particularly on the side farthest from the house, were of orange or purple tints almost bright enough for Lord Ivywood’s oriental decoration. Some fanciful eyes that fell on the place afterward found something like an allegory in those graven and broken saints or archangels feeding such fiery and ephemeral parasites as those toadstools like blood or gold. But Mr. Quoodle had never set himself up as an allegorist, and he merely trotted deeper and deeper into the grey–green English jungle. He grumbled very much at the thistles and nettles, much as a city man will grumble at the jostling of a crowd. But he continued to press forward, with his nose near the ground, as if he had already smelt something that interested him. And, indeed, he had smelt something in which a dog, except on special occasions, is much more interested than he is in dogs. Breaking through a last barrier of high and hoary purple thistles he came out on a semicircle of somewhat clearer ground, dotted with slender trees, and having, by way of back scene, the brown
brick arch of an old tunnel. The tunnel was boarded up with a very irregular fence or mask made of motley wooden lathes, and looked, somehow, rather like a pantomime cottage. In front of this a sturdy man in very shabby shooting clothes was standing attending to a battered old frying–pan which he held over a rather irregular flame which, small as it was, smelt strongly of burnt rum. In the frying–pan, and also on the top of a cask or barrel that served for a table hard by, were a number of the grey, brown, and even orange fungi which were plastered over the stone angels and dragons of the fallen chapel.

“Hullo, old man,” said the person in the shooting jacket with tranquillity and without looking up from his cooking. “Come to pay us a visit? Come along then.” He flashed one glance at the dog and returned to the frying pan. “If your tail were two inches shorter, you’d be worth a hundred pounds. Had any breakfast?”

The dog trotted across to him and began nosing and sniffing round his dilapidated leather gaiters. The man did not interrupt his cookery, on which his eyes were fixed and both his hands were busy; but he crooked his knee and foot so as to caress the quadruped in a nerve under the angle of the jaw, the stimulation of which (as some men of science have held) is for a dog what a good cigar is for a man. At the same moment a huge voice like on ogre’s came from within the masked tunnel, calling out, “And who are ye talking to?”

A very crooked kind of window in the upper part of the pantomime cottage burst open and an enormous head, with erect, startling, and almost scarlet hair and blue eyes as big as a bullfrog’s, was thrust out above the scene.

“Hump,” cried the ogre. “Me moral counsels have been thrown away. In the last week I’ve sung you fourteen and a half songs of me own composition; instead of which you go about stealing dogs. You’re following in the path of Parson Whats–his–name in every way, I’m afraid.”

“No,” said the man with the frying pan, impartially, “Parson Whitelady struck a very good path for doubling on Pebblewick, that I was glad to follow. But I think he was quite silly to steal dogs. He was young and brought up pious. I know too much about dogs to steal one.”

“Well,” asked the large red–haired man, “and how do you get a dog like that?”

“I let him steal me,” said the person stirring the pan. And indeed the dog was sitting erect and even arrogant at his feet, as if he was a watch–dog at a high salary, and had been there before the building of the tunnel.
CHAPTER XI

VEGETARIANISM IN THE DRAWING–ROOM

THE Company that assembled to listen to the Prophet of the Moon, on the next occasion of his delivering any formal address, was much more select than the comparatively mixed and middle–class society of the Simple Souls. Miss Browning and her sister, Mrs. Mackintosh, were indeed present; for Lord Ivywood had practically engaged them both as private secretaries, and kept them pretty busy, too. There was also Mr. Leveson, because Lord Ivywood believed in his organizing power; and also Mr. Hibbs, because Mr. Leveson believed in his political judgment, whenever he could discover what it was. Mr. Leveson had straight, dark hair, and looked nervous. Mr. Hibbs had straight, fair hair, and also looked nervous. But the rest of the company were more of Ivywood’s own world, or the world of high finance with which it mixes both here and on the continent. Lord Ivywood welcomed, with something approaching to warmth, a distinguished foreign diplomatist, who was, indeed, none other than that silent German representative who had sat beside him in that last conference on the Island of the Olives. Dr. Gluck was no longer in his quiet, black suit, but wore an ornate, diplomatic uniform with a sword and Prussian, Austrian or Turkish Orders; for he was going on from Ivywood to a function at Court. But his curl of red lips, his screw of black mustache, and his unanswering almond eyes had no more changed than the face of a wax figure in a barber’s shop window.

The Prophet had also effected an improvement in his dress. When he had orated on the sands his costume, except for the fez, was the shabby but respectable costume of any rather unsuccessful English clerk. But now that he had come among aristocrats who petted their souls as they did their senses, there must be no such incongruity. He must be a proper, fresh–picked oriental tulip or lotus. So–he wore long, flowing robes of white, relieved here and there by flame–coloured threads of tracery, and round his head was a turban of a kind of pale golden green. He had to look as if he had come flying across Europe on the magic carpet, or fallen a moment before from his paradise in the moon.

The ladies of Lord Ivywood’s world were much as we have already found them. Lady Enid Wimpole still overwhelmed her earnest and timid face with a tremendous costume, that was more like a procession than a dress. It looked rather like the funeral procession of Aubrey Beardsley. Lady Joan Brett still
looked like a very beautiful Spaniard with no illusions left about her castle in Spain. The large and resolute lady who had refused to ask any questions at Misysra’s earlier lecture, and who was known as Lady Crump, the distinguished Feminist, still had the air of being so full and bursting with questions fatal to Man as to have passed the speaking and reached the speechless stage of hostility. Throughout the proceedings she contributed nothing but bursting silence and a malevolent eye. And old Lady Ivywood, under the oldest and finest lace and the oldest and finest manners, had a look like death on her, which can often be seen in the parents of pure intellectuals. She had that face of a lost mother that is more pathetic than the face of a lost child.

“And what are you going to delight us with today?” Lady Enid was asking of the Prophet.

“My lecture,” answered Misysra, gravely, “is on the Pig.”

It was part of a simplicity really respectable in him that he never saw any incongruity in the arbitrary and isolated texts or symbols out of which he spun his thousand insane theories. Lady Enid endured the impact of this singular subject for debate without losing that expression of wistful sweetness which she wore on principle when talking to such people.

“The Pig, he is a large subject,” continued the Prophet, making curves in the air, as if embracing some particularly prize specimen. “He includes many subjects. It is to me very strange that the Christians should so laugh and be surprised because we hold ourselves to be defiled by pork; we and also another of the Peoples of the Book. But, surely, you Christians yourselves consider the pig as a manner of pollution; since it is your most usual expression of your despising, of your very great dislike. You say ‘swine,’ my dear lady; you do not say animals far more unpopular, such as the alligator.”

“I see,” said the lady, “how wonderful!”

“If you are annoyed,” went on the encouraged and excited gentleman, “if you are annoyed with anyone, with a—what you say?—a lady’s maid, you do not say to her ‘Horse.’ You do not say to her ‘Camel.’”

“Ah, no,” said Lady Enid, earnestly.

“‘Pig of a lady’s maid,’ you say in your colloquial English,” continued the Prophet, triumphantly. “And yet this great and awful Pig, this monster whose very name, when whispered, you think will wither all your enemies, you allow, my dear lady, to approach yet closer to you. You incorporate this great Pig in the substance of your own person.”

Lady Enid Wimpole was looking a little dazed at last, at this description of her
habits, and Joan gave Lord Ivywood a hint that the lecturer had better be transferred to his legitimate sphere of lecturing. Ivywood led the way into a larger room that was full of ranked chairs, with a sort of lectern at the other end, and flanked on all four sides with tables laden with all kinds of refreshments. It was typical of the strange, half–fictitious enthusiasm and curiosity of that world, that one long table was set out entirely with vegetarian foods, especially of an eastern sort (like a table spread in the desert for a rather fastidious Indian hermit); but that tables covered with game patties, lobster and champagne were equally provided, and very much more frequented. Even Mr. Hibbs, who would honestly have thought entering a public–house more disgraceful than entering a brothel, could not connect any conception of disgrace with Lord Ivywood’s champagne.

For the purpose of the lecture was not wholly devoted to the great and awful Pig, and the purpose of the meeting even less. Lord Ivywood, the white furnace of whose mind was always full of new fancies hardening into ambitions, wanted to have a debate on the diet of East and West, and felt that Misysra might very appropriately open with an account of the Moslem veto on pork or other coarse forms of flesh food. He reserved it to himself to speak second.

The Prophet began, indeed, with some of his dizziest flights. He informed the Company that they, the English, had always gone in hidden terror and loathing of the Pig, as a sacred symbol of evil. He proved it by the common English custom of drawing a pig with one’s eyes shut. Lady Joan smiled, and yet she asked herself (in a doubt that had been darkening round her about many modern things lately) whether it was really much more fanciful than many things the scientists told her: as, the traces of Marriage by Capture which they found in that ornamental and even frivolous being, the Best Man.

He said that the dawn of greater enlightenment is shown in the use of the word “gammon,” which still expresses disgust at “the porcine image,” but no longer fear of it, but rather a rational disdain and disbelief. “Rowley,” said the Prophet, solemnly, and then after a long pause, “Powley, Gammon and Spinach.”

Lady Joan smiled again, but again asked herself if it was much more farfetched than a history book she had read, which proved the unpopularity of Catholicism in Tudor times from the word “hocus pocus.”

He got into a most amazing labyrinth of philology between the red primeval sins of the first pages of Genesis and the Common English word “ham.” But, again, Joan wondered whether it was much wilder than the other things she had heard said about Primitive Man by people who had never seen him.
He suggested that the Irish were set to keep pigs because they were a low and defiled caste, and the serfs of the pig–scorning Saxon; and Joan thought it was about as sensible as what the dear old Archdeacon had said about Ireland years ago; which had caused an Irishman of her acquaintance to play “the Shan Van Voght” and then smash the piano.

Joan Brett had been thoughtful for the last few days. It was partly due to the scene in the turret, where she had struck a sensitive and artistic side of Philip Ivywood she had never seen before, and partly to disturbing news of her mother’s health, which, though not menacing, made her feel hypothetically how isolated she was in the world. On all previous occasions she had merely enjoyed the mad lecturer now at the reading–desk. Today she felt a strange desire to analyse him, and imagine how a man could be so connected and so convinced and yet so wildly wide of the mark. As she listened carefully, looking at the hands in her lap, she began to think she understood.

The lecturer did really try to prove that the “porcine image” had never been used in English history or literature, except in contempt. And the lecturer really did know a very great deal about English history and literature: much more than she did; much more than the aristocrats round her did. But she noted that in every case what he knew was a fragmentary fact. In every case what he did not know was the truth behind the fact. What he did not know was the atmosphere. What he did not know was the tradition. She found herself ticking off the cases like counts in an indictment.

Misysra Ammon knew, what next to none of the English present knew, that Richard III was called a “boar” by an eighteenth century poet and a “hog” by a fifteenth century poet. What he did not know was the habit of sport and of heraldry. He did not know (what Joan knew instantly, though she had never thought of it before in her life) that beasts courageous and hard to kill are noble beasts, by the law of chivalry. Therefore, the boar was a noble beast, and a common crest for great captains. Misysra tried to show that Richard had only been called a pig after he was cold pork at Bosworth.

Misysra Ammon knew, what next to none of the English present knew, that there never was such a person as Lord Bacon. The phrase is a falsification of what should be Lord Verulam or Lord St. Albans. What he did not know was exactly what Joan did know (though it had never crossed her mind till that moment) that when all is said and done, a title is a sort of joke, while a surname is a serious thing. Bacon was a gentleman, and his name was Bacon; whatever titles he took. But Misysra seriously tried to prove that “Bacon” was a term of
abuse applied to him during his unpopularity or after his fall.

Misysra Ammon knew, what next to none of the English present knew, that the poet Shelley had a friend called Hogg, who treated him on one occasion with grave treachery. He instantly tried to prove that the man was only called “Hogg” because he had treated Shelley with grave treachery. And he actually adduced the fact that another poet, practically contemporary, was called “Hogg” as completing the connection with Shelley. What he did not know was just what Joan had always known without knowing it: the kind of people concerned, the traditions of aristocrats like the Shelleys or of Borderers like the Ettrick Shepherd.

The lecturer concluded with a passage of impenetrable darkness about pig–iron and pigs of lead, which Joan did not even venture to understand. She could only say that if it did not mean that some day our diet might become so refined that we ate lead and iron, she could form no fancy of what it did mean.

“Can Philip Ivywood believe this kind of thing?” she asked herself; and even as she did so, Philip Ivywood rose.

He had, as Pitt and Gladstone had, an impromptu classicism of diction, his words wheeling and deploying into their proper places like a well–disciplined army in its swiftest advance. And it was not long before Joan perceived that the last phase of the picture, obscure and monstrous as it seemed, gave Ivywood exactly the opening he wanted. Indeed, she felt, no doubt, that he had arranged for it beforehand.

“It is within my memory,” said Lord Ivywood, “though it need in no case have encumbered yours, that when it was my duty to precede the admired lecturer whom I now feel it a privilege even to follow, I submitted a suggestion which, however simple, would appear to many paradoxical. I affirmed or implied the view that the religion of Mahomet was, in a peculiar sense, a religion of progress. This is so contrary, not only to historical convention but to common platitude, that I shall find no ground either of surprise or censure if it takes a perceptible time before it sinks into the mind of the English public. But I think, ladies and gentlemen, that this period is notably abbreviated by the remarkable exposition which we have heard today. For this question of the attitude of Islam toward food affords as excellent an example of its special mode of progressive purification as the more popular example of its attitude toward drink. For it illustrates that principle which I have ventured to call the principle of the Crescent: the principle of perpetual growth toward an implied and infinite perfection.
“The great religion of Islam does not of itself forbid the eating of flesh foods. But, in accordance with that principle of growth which is its life, it has pointed the way to a perfection not yet perhaps fully attainable by our nature; it has taken a plain and strong example of the dangers of meat-eating; and hung up the repellent carcass as a warning and a sign. In the gradual emergence of mankind from a gross and sanguinary mode of sustenance, the Semite has led the way. He has laid, as it were, a symbolic embargo upon the beast typical, the beast of beasts. With the instinct of the true mystic, he selected for exemption from such cannibal feasts the creature which appeals to both sides of the higher vegetarian ethic. The pig is at once the creature whose helplessness most moves our pity and whose ugliness most repels our taste.

“It would be foolish to affirm that no difficulty arises out of the different stages of moral evolution in which the different races find themselves. Thus it is constantly said, and such things are not said without some excuse in document or incident, that followers of the Prophet have specialised in the arts of war and have come into a contact, not invariably friendly, with those Hindoos of India who have specialised in the arts of Peace. In the same way the Hindoos, it must be confessed, have been almost as much in advance of Islam in the question of meat as Islam is in advance of Christianity in the matter of drink. It must be remembered again and again, ladies and gentlemen, that every allegation we have of any difference between Hindoo and Moslem comes through a Christian channel, and is therefore tainted evidence. But in this matter, even, can we not see the perils of disregarding such plain danger signals as the veto on pork? Did not an Empire nearly slip out of our hands because our hands were greased with cow–fat? And did not the well of Cawnpore brim with blood instead of water because we would not listen to the instinct of the Oriental about the shedding of sacred blood?

“But if it be proposed, with whatever graduation, to approach that repudiation of flesh food which Buddhism mainly and Islam partly recommends, it will always be asked by those who hate the very vision of Progress—’Where do you draw the line? May I eat oysters? May I eat eggs? May I drink milk?’ You may. You may eat or drink anything essential to your stage of evolution, so long as you are evolving toward a clearer and cleaner ideal of bodily life. If,” he said gravely, “I may employ a phrase of flippancy, I would say that you may eat six dozen oysters today, but I should strongly advise five dozen oysters tomorrow. For how else has all progress in public or private manners been achieved? Would not the primitive cannibals be surprised at the strange distinction we draw
between men and beasts? All historians pay high honour to the Huguenots, and
the great Huguenot Prince, Henri Quatre. None need deny that his aspiration that
every Frenchman should have a chicken in his pot was, for his period, a high
aspiration. It is no disrespect to him that we, mounting to higher levels, and
looking down longer perspectives, consider the chicken. And this august march
of discovery passes figures higher than that of Henry of Navarre. I shall always
give a high place, as Islam has always given a high place, to that figure, mythical
or no, which we find presiding over the foundations of Christianity. I cannot
doubt that the fable, incredible and revolting otherwise, which records the rush
of swine into the sea, was an allegory of his early realisation that a spirit, evil
indeed, does reside in all animals in so far as they tempt us to devour them. I
cannot doubt that the Prodigal leaving his sins among the swine is another
illustration of the great thesis of the Prophet of the Moon. But here, also,
progress and relativity are relentless in their advance; and not a few of us may
have risen today to the point of regretting that the joyful sounds around the
return of the Prodigal should be marred by the moaning of a calf.

“For the rest, he who asks us whither we go knows not the meaning of
Progress. If we come at last to live on light, as men said of the chameleon, if
some cosmic magic closed to us now, as radium was but recently closed, allows
us to transmute the very metals into flesh without breaking into the bloody house
of life, we shall know these things when we have achieved them. It is enough for
us now if we have reached a spiritual station, in which at least the living head we
lop has not eyes to reproach us; and the herbs we gather cannot cry against our
cruelty like the mandrake.”

Lord Ivywood resumed his seat, his colourless lips still moving. By some
previous arrangement, probably, Mr. Leveson rose to move a motion about
Vegetarianism. Mr. Leveson was of opinion that the Jewish and Moslem veto on
pork had been the origin of Vegetarianism. He thought it was a great step, and
showed how progressive the creed could be. He thought the persecution of the
Hindoos by Moslems had probably been much exaggerated; he thought our
experience in the Indian Mutiny showed we considered the feeling of Easterners
too little in such matters. He thought Vegetarianism in some ways an advance on
orthodox Christianity. He thought we must be ready for yet further advances;
and he sat down. And as he had said precisely, clause by clause, everything that
Lord Ivywood had said, it is needless to say that that nobleman afterward
congratulated him on the boldness and originality of his brilliant speech.

At a similar sort of preconcerted signal, Hibbs However rose rather vaguely to
his feet to second the motion. He rather prided himself on being a man of few words, in the vocal sense; he was no orator, as Brutus was. It was only with pen in hand, in an office lined with works of reference, that he could feel that sense of confused responsibility that was the one pleasure of his life. But on this occasion he was brighter than usual; partly because he liked being in a lord’s house; partly because he had never tasted champagne before, and he felt as if it agreed with him; partly because he saw in the subject of Progress an infinite opportunity of splitting hairs.

“Whatever,” said Hibbs, with a solemn cough, “whatever we may think of the old belief that Moslems have differed from Buddhism in a regrettable way, there can be no doubt the responsibility lay with the Christian Churches. Had the Free Churches put their foot down and met Messrs. Opalstein’s demand, we should have heard nothing of these old differences between one belief and another.” As it was, it reminded him of Napoleon. He gave his own opinion for what it was worth, but he was not afraid to say at any cost, even there and in that company, that this business of Asiatic vegetation had occupied less of the time of the Wesleyan Conference than it should have done. He would be the last to say, of course, that anyone was in any sense to blame. They all knew Dr. Coon’s qualifications. They all knew as well as he did, that a more strenuous social worker than Charles Chadder had never rallied the forces of progress. But that which was not really an indiscretion might be represented as an indiscretion, and perhaps we had had enough of that just lately. It was all very well to talk about Coffe but it should be remembered, with no disrespect to those in Canada to whom we owe so much, that all that happened before 1891. No one had less desire to offend our Ritualistic friends than he did, but he had no hesitation in saying that the question was a question that could be asked, and though no doubt, from one point of view the goat’s—.

Lady Joan moved sharply in her chair, as if gripped by sudden pain. And, indeed, she had suddenly felt the chronic and recurrent pain of her life. She was brave about bodily pain, as are most women, even luxurious women: but the torment that from time to time returned and tore her was one to which many philosophical names have been given, but no name so philosophical as Boredom.

She felt she could not stand a minute more of Mr. Hibbs. She felt she would die if she heard about the goats—from one or any point of view. She slipped from her chair and somehow slid round the corner, in pretence of seeking one of the tables of refreshment in the new wing. She was soon among the new oriental apartments, now almost completed; but she took no refreshments, though
attenuated tables could still be found here and there. She threw herself on an ottoman and stared toward the empty and elfin turret chambers in which Ivywood had made her understand that he, also, could thirst for beauty and desire to be at peace. He certainly had a poetry of his own, after all; a poetry that never touched earth; the poetry of Shelley rather than Shakespeare. His phrase about the fairy turret was true: it did look like the end of the world. It did seem to teach her that there is always some serene limit at last.

She started and half rose on her elbow with a small laugh. A dog of ludicrous but familiar appearance came shuffling toward her and she lifted herself in the act of lifting him. She also lifted her head, and saw something that seemed to her, in a sense more Christian and catastrophic, very like the end of the world.
CHAPTER XII

VEGETARIANISM IN THE FOREST

HUMPHREY PUMP’S cooking of a fungus in an old frying–pan (which he had found on the beach) was extremely typical of him. He was, indeed, without any pretence of book–learning, a certain kind of scientific man that science has really been unfortunate in losing. He was the old–fashioned English Naturalist like Gilbert White or even Isaac Walton, who learned things not academically like an American Professor, but actually, like an American Indian. And every truth a man has found out as a man of science is always subtly different from any truth he has found out as a man, because a man’s family, friends, habits and social type have always got well under way before he has thoroughly learned the theory of anything. For instance, any eminent botanist at a Soirée of the Royal Society could tell you, of course, that other edible fungi exist, as well as mushrooms and truffles. But long before he was a botanist, still less an eminent botanist, he had begun, so to speak, on a basis of mushrooms and truffles. He felt, in a vague way, that these were really edible, that mushrooms were a moderate luxury, proper to the middle classes, while truffles were a much more expensive luxury, more suitable to the Smart Set. But the old English Naturalists, of whom Isaac Walton was perhaps the first, and Humphrey Pump perhaps the last, had in many cases really begun at the other end, and found by experience (often most disastrous experience) that some fungi are wholesome and some are not; but the wholesome ones are, on a whole, the majority. So a man like Pump was no more afraid of a fungus as such than he was of an animal as such. He no more started with the supposition that a grey or purple growth on a stone must be a poisonous growth than he started with the supposition that the dog who came to him out of the wood must be a mad dog. Most of them he knew; those he did not know he treated with rational caution, but to him, as a whole race, these weird–hued and one–legged goblins of the forests were creatures friendly to man.

“You see,” he said to his friend the Captain, “eating vegetables isn’t half bad, so long as you know what vegetables there are and eat all of them that you can. But there are two ways where it goes wrong among the gentry. First, they’ve never had to eat a carrot or a potato because it was all there was in the house; so they’ve never learnt how to be really hungry for carrots, as that donkey might be.
They only know the vegetables that are meant to help the meat. They know you take duck and peas; and when they turn vegetarian they can only think of the peas without the duck. They know you take lobster in a salad; and when they turn vegetarian they can only think of the salad without the lobster. But the other reason is worse. There’s plenty of good people even round here, and still more in the north, who get meat very seldom. But then, when they do get it, they gobble it up like good ‘uns. But the trouble with the gentry is different. The trouble is, the same sort of gentry that don’t want to eat meat don’t really want to eat anything. The man called a Vegetarian who goes to Ivywood House is generally like a cow trying to live on a blade of grass a day. You and I, Captain, have pretty well been vegetarians for some time, so as not to break into the cheese, and we haven’t found it so difficult, because we eat as much as we can.”

“It’s not so difficult as being teetotallers,” answered Dalroy, “so as not to break into the cask. But I’ll never deny that I feel the better for that, too, on the whole. But only because I could leave off being one whenever I chose. And, now I come to think of it,” he cried, with one of his odd returns of animal energy, “if I’m to be a vegetarian why shouldn’t I drink? Why shouldn’t I have a purely vegetarian drink? Why shouldn’t I take vegetables in their highest form, so to speak? The modest vegetarians ought obviously to stick to wine or beer, plain vegetarian drinks, instead of filling their goblets with the blood of bulls and elephants, as all conventional meat–eaters do, I suppose. What is the matter?”

“Nothing,” answered Pump. “I was looking out for somebody who generally turns up about this time. But I think I’m fast.”

“I should never have thought so from the look of you,” answered the Captain, “but what I’m saying is that the drinking of decent fermented liquor is just simply the triumph of vegetarianism. Why, it’s an inspiring idea! I could write a sort of song about it. As, for instance—“You will find me drinking rum Like a sailor in a slum, You will find me drinking beer like a Bavarian; You will find me drinking gin In the lowest kind of inn, Because I am a rigid Vegetarian.”

Why, it’s a vista of verbal felicity and spiritual edification! It has I don’t know how many hundred aspects! Let’s see; how could the second verse go? Something like—“So I cleared the inn of wine, And I tried to climb the Sign; And I tried to hail the constable as ‘Marion’; But he said I couldn’t speak, And he bowled me to the Beak, Because I was a Happy Vegetarian.”

“I really think something instructive to the human race may come out of all this . . . Hullo! Is that what you were looking for?”

The quadruped Quoodle came in out of the woods a whole minute later than
the usual time and took his seat beside Humphrey’s left foot with a preoccupied air.

“Good old boy,” said the Captain. “You seem to have taken quite a fancy to us. I doubt, Hump, if he’s properly looked after up at the house. I particularly don’t want to talk against Ivywood, Hump. I don’t want his soul to be able in all eternity to accuse my soul of a mean detraction. I want to be fair to him, because I hate him like hell, and he has taken from me all for which I lived. But I don’t think, with all this in my mind, I don’t think I say anything beyond what he would own himself (for his brain is clear) when I say that he could never understand an animal. And so he could never understand the animal side of a man. He doesn’t know to this day, Hump, that your sight and hearing are sixty times quicker than his. He doesn’t know that I have a better circulation. That explains the extraordinary people he picks up and acts with; he never looks at them as you and I look at that dog. There was a fellow calling himself Gluck who was (mainly by Ivywood’s influence, I believe) his colleague on the Turkish Conferences, being supposed to represent Germany. My dear Hump, he was a man that a great gentleman like Ivywood ought not to have touched with a barge-pole. It’s not the race he was—if it was one race—it’s the Sort he was. A coarse, common, Levantine nark and eaves-dropper—but you mustn’t lose your temper, Hump. I implore you, Hump, to control this tendency to lose your temper when talking at any length about such people. Have recourse, Hump, to that consoling system of versification which I have already explained to you.

“Oh I knew a Doctor Gluck, And his nose it had a hook, And his attitudes were anything but Aryan; So I gave him all the pork That I had, upon a fork; Because I am myself a Vegetarian.”

“If you are,” said Humphrey Pump, “You’d better come and eat some vegetables. The White Hat can be eaten cold—or raw, for that matter. But Bloodspots wants some cooking.”

“You are right, Hump,” said Dalroy, seating himself with every appearance of speechless greed. “I will be silent. As the poet says—“I am silent in the Club, I am silent in the pub, I am silent on a bally peak in Darien; For I stuff away for life, Shoving peas in with a knife, Because I am at heart a Vegetarian.”

He fell to his food with great gusto, dispatched a good deal of it in a very short time, threw a glance of gloomy envy at the cask, and then sprang to his feet again. He caught up the inn-sign from where it leant against the Pantomime Cottage, and planted it like a pike in the ground beside him. Then he began to sing again, in an even louder voice than before.
“O, Lord Ivywood may lop, And his privilege is sylvan and riparian; And is also free to top, But—.”

“Do you know,” said Hump, also finishing his lunch, “that I’m rather tired of that particular tune?”

“Tired, is it?” said the indignant Irishman, “then I’ll sing you a longer song, to an even worse tune, about more and more vegetarians, and you shall see me dance as well; and I will dance till you burst into tears and offer me the half of your kingdom; and I shall ask for Mr. Leveson’s head on the frying-pan. For this, let me tell you, is a song of oriental origin, celebrating the caprices of an ancient Babylonian Sultan and should be performed in palaces of ivory with palm trees and a bulbul accompaniment.”

And he began to bellow another and older lyric of his own on vegetarianism.

“Nebuchadnezzar, the King of the Jews, Suffered from new and original views, He crawled on his hands and knees it’s said, With grass in his mouth and a crown on his head, With a wowtyiddly, etc.

“Those in traditional paths that trod, Thought the thing was a curse from God; But a Pioneer men always abuse, Like Nebuchadnezzar the King of the Jews.”

Dalroy, as he sang this, actually began to dance about like a ballet girl, an enormous and ridiculous figure in the sunlight, waving the wooden sign around his head. Quoodle opened his eyes and pricked up his ears and seemed much interested in these extraordinary evolutions. Suddenly, with one of those startling changes that will transfigure the most sedentary dogs, Quoodle decided that the dance was a game, and began to bark and bound round the performer, sometimes leaping so far into the air as almost to threaten the man’s throat. But, though the sailor naturally knew less about dogs than the countryman, he knew enough about them (as about many other things) not to be afraid, and the voice he sang with might have drowned the baying of a pack.

“Black Lord Foulon the Frenchmen slew, Thought it a Futurist thing to do; He offered them grass instead of bread, So they stuffed him with grass when they cut off his head. With a wowtyiddly, etc.

“For the pride of his soul he perished then, But of course it is always of Pride that men A Man in Advance of his Age accuse Like Nebuchadnezzar the King of the Jews.

“Simeon Scudder of Styx, in Maine, Thought of the thing and was at it again; He gave good grass and water in pails To a thousand Irishmen hammering rails, With a wowtyiddly, etc.

“Appetites differ, and tied to a stake, He was tarred and feathered for
Conscience Sake; But stoning the prophets is ancient news, Like Nebuchadnezzar the King of the Jews.”

In an abandon, unusual even for him, he had danced his way down through the thistles into the jungle of weeds risen round the sunken Chapel. And the dog, now fully convinced that it was not only a game but an expedition, perhaps a hunting expedition, ran barking in front of him, along the path that his own dog’s paws had already burst through the tangle. Before Patrick Dalroy well knew what he was doing, or even remembered that he still carried the ridiculous sign-board in his hand, he found himself outside the open porch of a sort of narrow tower at the angle of a building which, to the best of his recollection, he had never seen before. Quoodle instantly ran up four or five steps in the dark staircase inside, and then, lifting his ears again, looked back for his companion.

There is, perhaps, such a thing as asking too much of a man. If there is, it was asking too much of Patrick Dalroy to ask him not to accept so eccentric an invitation. Hurriedly plunging his unwieldy wooden ensign upright in the thick of thistles and grass, he bent his gigantic neck and shoulders to enter the porch, and proceeded to climb the stairs. It was quite dark, and it was only after at least two twists of the stone spiral that he saw light ahead of him, and then it was a sort of rent in the wall that seemed to him as ragged as the mouth of a Cornish cave. It was also so low that he had some difficulty in squeezing his bulk through it, but the dog had jumped through with an air of familiarity, and once more looked back to see him follow.

If he had found himself inside any ordinary domestic interior, he would instantly have repented his escapade and gone back. But he found himself in surroundings which he had never seen before, or even, in one sense, believed possible.

His first feeling was that he was walking in the most sealed and secret suite of apartments in the castle of a dream. All the chambers had that air of perpetually opening inwards which is the soul of the Arabian Nights. And the ornament was of the same tradition; gorgeous and flamboyant, yet featureless and stiff. A purple mansion seemed to be built inside a green mansion and a golden mansion inside that. And the quaintly cut doorways or fretted lattices all had wavy lines like a dancing sea, and for some reason (sea-sickness for all he knew) this gave him a feeling as if the place were beautiful but faintly evil: as if it were bored and twisted for the fallen palace of the Worm.

But he had also another sensation which he could not analyze; for it reminded him of being a fly on the ceiling or the wall. Was it the Hanging Gardens of
Babylon coming back to his imagination; or the Castle East of the Sun and West of the Moon? Then he remembered that in some boyish illness he had stared at a rather Moorish sort of wall paper, which was like rows and rows of brightly coloured corridors, empty and going on forever. And he remembered that a fly was walking along one of the parallel lines; and it seemed to his childish fancy that the corridors were all dead in front of the fly, but all came to life as he passed.

“By George!” he cried, “I wonder whether that’s the real truth about East and West! That the gorgeous East offers everything needed for adventures except the man to enjoy them. It would explain the tradition of the Crusades uncommonly well. Perhaps that’s what God meant by Europe and Asia. We dress the characters and they paint the scenery. Well, anyhow, three of the least Asiatic things in the world are lost in this endless Asiatic palace—a good dog, a straight sword, and an Irishman.”

But as he went down this telescope of tropical colours he really felt something of that hard fatalistic freedom of the heroes (or should we say villains?) in the Arabian Nights. He was prepared for any impossibility. He would hardly have been surprised if from under the lid of one of the porcelain pots standing in a corner had come a serpentine string of blue or yellow smoke, as if some wizard’s oil were within. He would hardly have been surprised if from under the curtains or closed doors had crawled out a snaky track of blood, or if a dumb negro dressed in white had come out with a bow string, having done his work. He would not have been surprised if he had walked suddenly into the still chamber of some Sultan asleep, whom to wake was a death in torments. And yet he was very much more surprised by what he did see, and when he saw it, he was certain at last that he was only wandering in the labyrinth of his own brain. For what he saw was what was really in the core of all his dreams.

What he saw, indeed, was more appropriate to that inmost eastern chamber than anything he had imagined. On a divan of blood–red and orange cushions lay a startlingly beautiful woman, with a skin almost swarthy enough for an Arab’s, and who might well have been the Princess proper to such an Arabian tale. But in truth it was not her appropriateness to the scene, but rather her inappropriateness, that made his heart bound. It was not her strangeness but her familiarity that made his big feet suddenly stop.

The dog ran on yet more rapidly, and the princess on the sofa welcomed him warmly, lifting him on his short hind legs. Then she looked up, and seemed turned to stone.
“Bismillah,” said the oriental traveller, affably, “may your shadow never grow less—or more, as the ladies would say. The Commander of the Faithful has deputed his least competent slave to bring you back a dog. Owing to temporary delay in collecting the fifteen largest diamonds in the moon, he has been compelled to send the animal without any collar. Those responsible for the delay will instantly be beaten to death, with the tails of dragons—”

The frightful shock, which had not yet left the lady’s face, brought him back to responsible speech.

“In short,” he said, “in the name of the Prophet, dog. I say, Joan, I wish this wasn’t a dream.”

“It isn’t,” said the girl, speaking for the first time, “and I don’t know yet whether I wish it was.”

“Well,” argued the dreamer, rationally, “what are you, anytime, if you’re not a dream—or a vision? And what are all these rooms, if they aren’t a dream—or rather a nightmare?”

“This is the new wing of Ivywood House,” said the lady addressed as Joan, speaking with great difficulty. “Lord Ivywood has fitted them up in the eastern style; he is inside conducting a most interesting debate in defence of Eastern Vegetarianism. I only came out because the room was rather hot.”

“Vegetarian!” cried Dalroy, with abrupt and rather unreasonable exasperation. “That table seems to fall a bit short of Vegetarianism.” And he pointed to one of the long, narrow tables, laid somewhere in almost all the central rooms, and loaded with elaborate cold meats and expensive wines.

“He must be liberal–minded,” cried Joan, who seemed to be on the verge of something, possibly temper. “He can’t expect people suddenly to begin being Vegetarians when they’ve never been before.”

“It has been done,” said Dalroy, tranquilly, walking across to look at the table. “I say, your ascetical friends seem to have made a pretty good hole in the champagne. You may not believe it, Joan, but I haven’t touched what you call alcohol for a month.”

With which words he filled with champagne a large tumbler intended for claret cup and swallowed it at a draught.

Lady Joan Brett stood up straight but trembling.

“Now that’s really wrong, Pat,” she cried. “Oh, don’t be silly–you know I don’t care about the alcohol or all that. But you’re in the man’s house, uninvited, and he doesn’t know. That wasn’t like you.”

“He shall know, all right,” said the large man, quietly. “I know the exact price
of a tumbler of that champagne.”

And he scribbled some words in pencil on the back of a bill of fare on the table, and then carefully laid three shillings on top of it.

“And there you do Philip the worst wrong of all,” cried Lady Joan, flaming white. “You know as well as I do, anyhow, that he would not take your money.” Patrick Dalroy stood looking at her for some seconds with an expression on his broad and unusually open face which she found utterly puzzling.

“Curiously enough,” he observed, at last, and with absolutely even temper, “curiously enough, it is you who are doing Philip Ivywood a wrong. I think him quite capable of breaking England or Creation. But I do honestly think he would never break his word. And what is more, I think the more arbitrary and literal his word had been, the more he would keep it. You will never understand a man like that, till you understand that he can have devotion to a definition; even a new definition. He can really feel about an amendment to an Act of Parliament, inserted at the last moment, as you feel about England or your mother.”

“Oh, don’t philosophise,” cried Joan suddenly. “Can’t you see this has been a shock?”

“I only want you to see the point,” he replied. “Lord Ivywood clearly told me, with his own careful lips, that I might go in and pay for fermented liquor in any place displaying a public sign outside. And he won’t go back on that definition or on any definition. If he finds me here, he may quite possibly put me in prison on some other charge, as a thief or a vagabond, or what not. But he will not grudge the champagne. And he will accept the three shillings. And I shall honour him for his glorious consistency.”

“I don’t understand,” said Joan, “one word of what you are talking about. Which way did you come? How can I get you away? You don’t seem to grasp that you’re in Ivywood House.”

“You see there’s a new name outside the gate,” observed Patrick, conversationally, and led the lady to the end of the corridor by which he had entered and into its ultimate turret chamber.

Following his indications, Lady Joan peered a little over the edge of the window where hung the brilliant purple bird in its brilliant golden cage. Almost immediately below, outside the entrance to the half–closed stairway, stood a wooden tavern sign, as solid and still as if it had been there for centuries.

“All back at the sign of ‘The Old Ship,’ you see,” said the Captain. “Can I offer you anything in a lady–like way?”

There was a vast impudence in the slight, hospitable movement of his hand,
that disturbed Lady Joan’s features with an emotion other than any that she
desired to show.

“Well!” cried Patrick, with a wild geniality, “I’ve made you laugh again, my
dear.”

He caught her to him as in a whirlwind, and then vanished from the fairy turret
like a blast, leaving her standing with her hand up to her wild black hair.
CHAPTER XIII

THE BATTLE OF THE TUNNEL

WHAT Joan Brett really felt, as she went back from the second tête–à–tête she had experienced in the turret, it is doubtful if anyone will ever know. But she was full of the pungent feminine instinct to “drive at practice,” and what she did clearly realise was the pencil writing Dalroy had left on the back of Lord Ivywood’s menu. Heaven alone knew what it was, and (as it pleased her profane temper to tell herself) she was not satisfied with Heaven alone knowing. She went swiftly back, with swishing skirts, to the table where it had been left. But her skirts fell more softly and her feet trailed slower and more in her usual manner as she came near the table. For standing at it was Lord Ivywood, reading the card with tranquil lowered eyelids, that set off perfectly the long and perfect oval of his face. He put down the card with a quite natural action; and, seeing Joan, smiled at her in her most sympathetic way.

“So you’ve come out too,” he said. “So have I; it’s really too hot for anything. Dr. Gluck is making an uncommonly good speech, but I couldn’t stop even for that. Don’t you think my eastern decorations are rather a success after all? A sort of Vegetarianism in design, isn’t it?”

He led her up and down the corridors, pointing out lemon–coloured crescents or crimson pomegranates in the scheme of ornament, with such utter detachment that they twice passed the open mouth of the hall of debate, and Joan could distinctly hear the voice of the diplomatic Gluck saying:

“Indeed, we owe our knowledge of the pollution of the pork primarily to the Jewth and not the Mothlemth. I do not share that prejudithe against the Jewth, which ith too common in my family and all the arithtocratic and military Prutthian familieth. I think we Prutthian arithtocrats owe everything to the Jewth. The Jewth have given to our old Teutonic rugged virtueth, juth that touch of refinement, juth that intellectual thuperiority which—.”

And then the voice would die away behind, as Lord Ivywood lectured luxuriantly, and very well, on the peacock tail in decoration, or some more extravagant eastern version of the Greek Key. But the third time they turned, they heard the noise of subdued applause and the breaking up the meeting; and people came pouring forth.

With stillness and swiftness, Ivywood pitched on the people he wanted and
held them. He button–holed Leveson and was evidently asking him to do something which neither of the two liked doing.

“If your lordship insists,” she heard Leveson whispering, “of course I will go myself; but there is a great deal to be done here with your lordship’s immediate matters. And if there were anyone else—.”

If Philip, Lord Ivywood, had ever looked at a human being in his life, he would have seen that J. Leveson, Secretary, was suffering from a very ancient human malady, excusable in all men and rather more excusable in one who has had his top–hat smashed over his eyes and has run for his life. As it was, he saw nothing, but merely said, “Oh, well, get someone else. What about your friend Hibbs?”

Leveson ran across to Hibbs, who was drinking another glass of champagne at one of the innumerable buffets.

“Hibbs,” said Leveson, rather nervously, “will you do Lord Ivywood a favour? He says you have so much tact. It seems possible that a man may be hanging about the grounds just below that turret there. He is a man it would certainly be Lord Ivywood’s public duty to put into the hands of the police, if he is there. But then, again, he is quite capable of not being there at all—I mean of having sent his message from somewhere else and in some other way. Naturally, Lord Ivywood doesn’t want to alarm the ladies and perhaps turn the laugh against himself, by getting up a sort of police raid about nothing. He wants some sensible, tactful friend of his to go down and look round the place—it’s a sort of disused garden—and report if there’s anyone about. I’d go myself, but I’m wanted here.”

Hibbs nodded, and filled another glass.

“But there’s a further difficulty,” went on Leveson. “He’s a clever brute, it seems, a ‘remarkable and a dangerous man,’ were his lordship’s words; and it looks as if he’d spotted a very good hiding-place, a disused tunnel leading to the sands, just beyond the disused garden and chapel. It’s a smart choice, you see, for he can bolt into the woods if anyone comes from the shore, or on to the shore if anyone comes from the woods. But it would take a good time even to get the police here, and it would take ten times longer to get ’em round to the sea end of the tunnel, especially as the sea comes up to the cliffs once or twice between here and Pebblewick. So we mustn’t frighten him away, or he’ll get a start. If you meet anyone down there talk to him quite naturally, and come back with the news. We won’t send for the police till you come. Talk as if you were just wandering like himself. His lordship wishes your presence to appear quite accidental.”

When the feverish Leveson had flashed off satisfied, Hibbs took a glass or two more of wine; feeling that he was going on a great diplomatic mission to please a lord. Then he went through the opening, picked his way down the stair, and somehow found his way out into the neglected garden and shrubbery.

It was already evening, and an early moon was brightening over the sunken chapel with its dragon–coloured scales of fungus. The night breeze was very fresh and had a marked effect on Mr. Hibbs. He found himself taking a meaningless pleasure in the scene; especially in one fungus that was white with brown spots. He laughed shortly, to think that it should be white with brown spots. Then he said, with carefully accurate articulation, “His lordship wishes my presence to appear quite accidental.” Then he tried to remember something else that Leveson had said.

He began to wade through the waves of weed and thorn past the Chapel, but he found the soil much more uneven and obstructive than he had supposed.

He slipped, and sought to save himself by throwing one arm round a broken stone angel at a corner of the heap of Gothic fragments; but it was loose and rocked in its socket.

Mr. Hibbs presented for a moment the appearance of waltzing with the Angel in the moonlight, in a very amorous and irreverent manner. Then the statue rolled over one way and he rolled over the other, and lay on his face in the grass, making inaudible remarks. He might have lain there for some time, or at least found some difficulty in rising, but for another circumstance. The dog Quoodle, with characteristic officiousness, had followed him down the dark stairs and out of the doorway, and, finding him in this unusual posture, began to bark as if the house were on fire.

This brought a heavy human footstep from the more hidden parts of the copse; and in a minute or two the large man with the red hair was looking down at him in undisguised wonder. Hibbs said, in a muffled voice which came obscurely from under his hidden face, “Wish my presence to appear quite accidental.”

“It does,” said the Captain, “can I help you up? Are you hurt?”

He gently set the prostrate gentleman on his feet, and looked genuinely concerned. The fall had somewhat sobered Lord Ivywood’s representative; and he really had a red graze on the left cheek that looked more ugly than it was.

“I am so sorry,” said Patrick Dalroy, cordially, “come and sit down in our camp. My friend Pump will be back presently, and he’s a capital doctor.”

His friend Pump may or may not have been a capital doctor, but the Captain
himself was certainly a most inefficient one. So small was his talent for diagnosing the nature of a disease at sight, that having given Mr. Hibbs a seat on a fallen tree by the tunnel, he proceeded to give him (in mere automatic hospitality) a glass of rum.

Mr. Hibbs’s eyes awoke again, when he had sipped it, but they awoke to a new world.

“Wharever may be our invidual pinions,” he said, and looked into space with an expression of humorous sagacity.

He then put his hand hazily in his pocket, as if to find some letter he had to deliver. He found nothing but his old journalistic note book, which he often carried when there was a chance of interviewing anybody. The feel of it under his fingers changed the whole attitude of his mind. He took it out and said:

“And wha’ would you say of Vegetarianism, Colonel Pump?”

“I think it palls,” replied the recipient of this complex title, staring.

“Sha’ we say,” asked Hibbs brightly, turning a leaf in his note book, “sha’ we say long been strong vegetarian by conviction?”

“No; I have only once been convicted,” answered Dalroy, with restraint, “and I hope to lead a better life when I come out.”

“Hopes lead better life,” murmured Hibbs, writing eagerly, with the wrong end of his pencil. “And wha’ would you shay was best veg’able food for really strong vegetarian by conviction?”

“Thistles,” said the Captain, wearily. “But I don’t know much about it, you know.”

“Lord Ivywoo’ strong veg’arian by conviction,” said Mr. Hibbs, shaking his head with unction. “Lord Ivywoo’ says tact. Talk to him naturally. And so I do. That’s what I do. Talk to him naturally.”

Humphrey Pump came through the clearer part of the wood, leading the donkey, who had just partaken of the diet recommended to a vegetarian by conviction; the dog sprang up and ran to them. Pump was, perhaps, the most naturally polite man in the world, and said nothing. But his eyes had accepted, with one snap of surprise, the other fact, also not unconnected with diet, which had escaped Dalroy’s notice when he administered rum as a restorative.

“Lord Ivywoo’ says,” murmured the journalistic diplomatist. “Lord Ivywoo’ says, ‘talk as if you were just wandering.’ That’s it. That’s tact. That’s what I’ve got to do—talk as if I was just wandering. Long way round to other end tunnel; sea and cliffs. Don’ sphose they can swim.” He seized his note book again and looked in vain for his pencil. “Good subjec’ correspondence. Can policym’n
swim?”

“Policemen?” said Dalroy, in a dead silence. The dog looked up, and the innkeeper did not.

“Get to Iivywoo’ one thing,” reasoned the diplomatist. “Get policemen beach other end other thing. No good do one thing no’ do other thing, ‘no goo’ do other thing no’ do other thing. Wish my presence appear quite accidental. Haw!”

“I’ll harness the donkey,” said Pump.

“Will he go through that door?” asked Dalroy, with a gesture toward the entrance of the rough boarding with which they had faced the tunnel, “or shall I smash it all at once?”

“He’ll go through all right,” answered Pump. “I saw to that when I made it. And I think I’ll get him to the safe end of the tunnel before I load him up. The best thing you can do is to pull up one of those saplings to bar the door with. That’ll delay them a minute or two; though I think we’ve got warning in pretty easy time.”

He led this donkey to the cart, and carefully harnessed the donkey; like all men cunning in the old healthy sense he knew that the last chance of leisure ought to be leisurely, in order that it may be lucid. Then he led the whole equipment through the temporary wooden door of the tunnel, the inquisitive Quoodle, of course, following at his heels.

“Excuse me if I take a tree,” said Dalroy, politely, to his guest, like a man reaching across another man for a match. And with that he rent up a young tree by its roots, as he had done in the Island of the Olives, and carried it on his shoulder, like the club of Hercules.

Up in Iivywood House Lord Iivywood had telephoned twice to Pebblewick. It was a delay he seldom suffered; and, though he never expressed impatience in unnecessary words he expressed it in unnecessary walking. He would not yet send for the police without news from his Ambassador, but he thought a preliminary conversation with some police authorities he knew well, might advance matters. Seeing Leveson rather shrunk in a corner, he wheeled round in his walk and said abruptly:

“You must go and see what has happened to Hibbs. If you have any other duties here, I authorize you to neglect them. Otherwise, I can only say—”

At this moment the telephone rang, and the impatient nobleman rushed for his delayed call with a rapidity he seldom showed. There was simply nothing for Leveson to do except to do as he was told, or be sacked. He walked swiftly toward the staircase, and only stopped once at the table where Hibbs had stood
and gulped down two goblets of the same wine. But let no man attribute to Mr. Leveson the loose and luxurious social motives of Mr. Hibbs. Mr. Leveson did not drink for pleasure; in fact, he hardly knew what he was drinking. His motive was something far more simple and sincere; a sentiment forcibly described in legal phraseology as going in bodily fear.

He was partly nerved, but by no means reconciled to his adventure, when he crept carefully down the stairs and peered about the thicket for any signs of his diplomatic friend. He could find neither sight nor sound to guide him, except a sort of distant singing, which greatly increased in volume of sound as he pursued it. The first words he heard seemed to run something like—“No more the milk of cows Shall pollute my private house, Than the milk of the wild mares of the Barbarian; I will stick to port and sherry, For they are so very, very, So very, very, very, very Vegetarian.”

Leveson did not know the huge and horrible voice in which these words were shouted, but he had a most strange and even sickening suspicion that he did know the voice, however altered, the quavering and rather refined voice that joined in the chorus and sang,

“Because they are so vegy, So vegy, vegy, vegy Vegetarian.”

Terror lit up his wits, and he made a wild guess at what had happened. With a gasp of relief he realised that he had now good excuse for returning to the house with the warning. He ran there like a hare, still hearing the great voice from the woods like the roaring of a lion in his ear.

He found Lord Ivywood in consultation with Dr. Gluck, and also with Mr. Bullrose the Agent, whose froglike eyes hardly seemed to have recovered yet from the fairy-tale of the flying sign-board in the English lane; but who, to do him justice, was more plucky and practical than most of Lord Ivywood’s present advisers.

“I’m afraid Mr. Hibbs has inadvertently,” stammered Leveson. “I’m afraid he has—I’m afraid the man is making his escape, my lord. You had better send for the police.”

Ivywood turned to the agent. “You go and see what’s happening,” he said simply. “I will come myself when I’ve rung them up. And get some of the servants up with sticks and things. Fortunately the ladies have gone to bed. Hullo! Is that the Police Station?”

Bullrose went down into the shrubbery and had, for many reasons, less difficulty in crossing it than the hilarious Hibbs. The moon had increased to an almost unnatural brilliancy, so that the whole scene was like a rather silver
daylight; and in this clear medium he beheld a very tall man with erect, red hair and a colossal cylinder of cheese carried under one arm, while he employed the other to wag a big forefinger at a dog with whom he was conversing.

It was the Agent’s duty and desire to hold the man, whom he recognised from the sign–board mystery, in play and conversation, and prevent his final escape. But there are some people who really cannot be courteous, even when they want to be, and Mr. Bullrose was one of them.

“Lord Ivywood,” he said abruptly, “wants to know what you want.”

“Do not, however, fall into the common error, Quoodle,” Dalroy was saying to the dog, whose unfathomable eyes were fixed on his face, “of supposing that the phrase ‘good dog’ is used in its absolute sense. A dog is good or bad negatively to a limited scheme of duties created by human civilization—”

“What are you doing here?” asked Mr. Bullrose.

“A dog, my dear Quoodle,” continued the Captain, “cannot be either so good or bad as a man. Nay, I should go farther. I would almost say a dog cannot be so stupid as a man. He cannot be utterly wanting as a dog—as some men are as men.”

“Answer me, you there!” roared the Agent.

“It is all the more pathetic,” continued the Captain, to whose monologue Quoodle seemed to listen with magnetized attention. “It is all the more pathetic because this mental insufficiency is sometimes found in the good; though there are, I should imagine, at least an equal number of opposite examples. The person standing a few feet off us, for example, is both stupid and wicked. But be very careful, Quoodle, to remember that any disadvantage under which we place him should be based on the moral and not his mental defects. Should I say to you at any time, ‘Go for him, Quoodle,’ or ‘Hold him, Quoodle,’ be certain in your own mind, please, that it is solely because he is wicked and not because he is stupid, that I am entitled to do so. The fact that he is stupid would not justify me in saying ‘hold him, Quoodle,’ with the realistic intonation I now employ—”

“Curse you, call him off!” cried Mr. Bullrose, retreating, for Quoodle was coming toward him with the bulldog part of his pedigree very prominently displayed, like a pennon. “Should Mr. Bullrose find it expedient to climb a tree, or even a sign–post,” proceeded Dalroy, for indeed the Agent had already clasped the pole of “The Old Ship,” which was stouter than the slender trees standing just around it, “you will keep an eye on him, Quoodle, and, I doubt not, constantly remind him that it is his wickedness, and not, as he might hastily be inclined to suppose, stupidity that has placed him on so conspicuous an
elevation–"

“Some of you’ll wish yourself dead for this,” said the Agent; who was by this time clinging to the wooden sign like a monkey on a stick, while Quoodle watched him from below with an unsated interest. “Some of you’ll see something. Here comes his lordship and the police, I reckon.”

“Good morning, my lord,” said Dalroy, as Ivywood, paler than ever in the strong moonshine, came through the thicket toward them. It seemed to be his fate that his faultless and hueless face should always be contrasted with richer colours; and even now it was thrown up by the gorgeous diplomatic uniform of Dr. Gluck, who walked just behind him.

“I am glad to see you, my lord,” said Dalroy, in a stately manner, “it is always so awkward doing business with an Agent. Especially for the Agent.”

“Captain Dalroy,” said Lord Ivywood, with a more serious dignity, “I am sorry we meet again like this, and such things are not of my seeking. It is only right to tell you that the police will be here in a moment.”

“Quite time, too!” said Dalroy, shaking his head. “I never saw anything so disgraceful in my life. Of course, I am sorry it’s a friend of yours; and I hope the police will keep Ivywood House out of the papers. But I won’t be a party to one law for the rich and another for the poor, and it would be a great shame if a man in that state got off altogether merely because he had got the stuff at your house.”

“I do not understand you,” said Ivywood. “What are you talking of?”

“Why of him,” replied the Captain, with a genial gesture toward a fallen tree trunk that lay a yard or two from the tunnel wall, “the poor chap the police are coming for.”

Lord Ivywood looked at the forest log by the tunnel which he had not glanced at before, and in his pale eyes, perhaps for the first time, stood a simple astonishment.

Above the log appeared two duplicate objects, which, after a prolonged stare, he identified as the soles of a pair of patent leather shoes, offered to his gaze, as if demanding his opinion in the matter of resoling. They were all that was visible of Mr. Hibbs who had fallen backward off his woodland seat and seemed contented with his new situation.

His lordship put up the pince–nez that made him look ten years older, and said with a sharp, steely accent, “What is all this?”

The only effect of his voice upon the faithful Hibbs was to cause him to feebly wave his legs in the air in recognition of a feudal superior. He clearly considered
it hopeless to attempt to get up, so Dalroy, striding across to him, lugged him up by his shirt collar and exhibited him, limp and wild–eyed to the company.

“You won’t want many policemen to take him to the station,” said the Captain. “I’m sorry, Lord Ivywood, I’m afraid it’s no use your asking me to overlook it again. We can’t afford it,” and he shook his head implacably. “We’ve always kept a respectable house, Mr. Pump and I. ‘The Old Ship’ has a reputation all over the country–in quite a lot of different parts, in fact. People in the oddest places have found it a quiet, family house. Nothing gadabout in ‘The Old Ship.’ And if you think you can send all your staggering revellers–”

“Captain Dalroy,” said Ivywood, simply, “you seem to be under a misapprehension, which I think it would be hardly honourable to leave undisturbed. Whatever these extraordinary events may mean and whatever be fitting in the case of this gentleman, when I spoke of the police coming, I meant they were coming for you and your confederate.”

“For me!” cried the Captain, with a stupendous air of surprise. “Why, I have never done anything naughty in my life.”

“You have been selling alcohol contrary to Clause V. of the Act of–”

“But I’ve got a sign,” cried Dalroy, excitedly, “you told me yourself it was all right if I’d got a sign. Oh, do look at our new sign! The ‘Sign of the Agile Agent.’”

Mr. Bullrose had remained silent, feeling his position none of the most dignified, and hoping his employer would go away. But Lord Ivywood looked up at him, and thought he had wandered into a planet of monsters.

As he slowly recovered himself Patrick Dalroy said briskly, “All quite correct and conventional, you see. You can’t run us in for not having a sign; we’ve rather an extra life–like one. And you can’t run us in as rogues and vagabonds either. Visible means of subsistence,” and he slapped the huge cheese under his arm with his great flat hand, so that it reverberated like a drum. “Quite visible. Perceptible,” he added, holding it out suddenly almost under Lord Ivywood’s nose. “Perceptible to the naked eye through your lordship’s eyeglasses.”

He turned abruptly, burst open the pantomime door behind him and bowled the big cheese down the tunnel with a noise like thunder, which ended in a cry of acception in the distant voice of Mr. Humphrey Pump. It was the last of their belongings left at this end of the tunnel, and Dalroy turned again, a man totally transfigured.

“And now, Ivywood,” he said, “what can I be charged with? Well, I have a suggestion to make. I will surrender to the police quite quietly when they come,
if you will do me one favour. Let me choose my crime.”

“I don’t understand you,” answered the other coolly, “what crime? What favour?”

Captain Dalroy unsheathed the straight sword that still hung on his now shabby uniform. The slender blade sparkled splendidly in the moonlight as he pointed it straight at Dr. Gluck.

“Take away his sword from the little pawnbroker,” he said. “It’s about the length of mine; or we’ll change if you like. Give me ten minutes on that strip of turf. And then it may be, Ivywood, that I shall be removed from your public path in a way a little worthier of enemies who have once been friends, than if you tripped me up with Bow Street runners, of whose help every ancestor you have would have been ashamed. Or, on the other hand, it may be—that when the police come there will be something to arrest me for.”

There was a long silence, and the elf of irresponsibility peeped out again for an instant in Dalroy’s mind.

“Mr. Bullrose will see fair play for you, from a throne above the lists,” he said. “I have already put my honour in the hands of Mr. Hibbs.”

“I must decline Captain Dalroy’s invitation,” said Ivywood at last, in a curious tone. “Not so much because—”

Before he could proceed, Leveson came racing across the copse, hallooing, “The police are here!”

Dalroy, who loved leaving everything to the last instant, tore up the sign, with Bullrose literally hanging to it, shook him off like a ripe fruit, and then plunged into the tunnel, the clamorous Quoodle at his heels. Before even Ivywood (the promptest of his party) could reach the spot, he had clashed to the wood door and bolted it across with his wooden staple. He had not had time even to sheath his sword.

“Break down this door,” said Lord Ivywood, calmly. “I noticed they haven’t finished loading their cart.”

Under his directions, and vastly against their will, Bullrose and Leveson lifted the tree–trunk vacated by Hibbs, and swinging it thrice as a battering–ram, burst in the door. Lord Ivywood instantly sprang into the entrance.

A voice called out to him quietly from the other end of the tunnel. There was something touching and yet terrible about a voice so human coming out of that inhuman darkness. If Philip Ivywood had been really a poet, and not rather its opposite, an aesthete, he would have known that all the past and people of England were uttering their oracle out of the cavern. As it was, he only heard a
publican wanted by the police.–Yet even he paused, and indeed seemed spellbound.

“My lord, I would like a word. I learned my catechism and never was with the Radicals. I want you to look at what you’ve done to me. You’ve stolen a house that was mine as that one’s yours. You’ve made me a dirty tramp, that was a man respected in church and market. Now you send me where I might have cells or the Cat. If I might make so bold, what do you suppose I think of you? Do you think because you go up to London and settle it with lords in Parliament and bring back a lot of papers and long words, that makes any difference to the man you do it to? By what I can see, you’re just a bad and cruel master, like those God punished in the old days; like Squire Varney the weasels killed in Holy Wood. Well, parson always said one might shoot at robbers, and I want to tell your lordship,” he ended respectfully, “that I have a gun.”

Ivywood instantly stepped into the darkness, and spoke in a voice shaken with some emotion, the nature of which was never certainly known.

“The police are here,” he said, “but I’ll arrest you myself.”

A shot shrieked and rattled through the thousand echoes of the tunnel. Lord Ivywood’s legs doubled and twisted under him, and he collapsed on the earth with a bullet above his knee.

Almost at the same instant a shout and a bark announced that the cart had started as a complete equipage. It was even more than complete, for the instant before it moved Mr. Quoodle had sprung into it, and, as it was driven off, sat erect in it, looking solemn.
CHAPTER XIV

THE CREATURE THAT MAN FORGETS

DESPITE the natural hubbub round the wound of Lord Ivywood and the difficulties of the police in finding their way to the shore, the fugitives of the Flying Inn must almost certainly have been captured but for a curious accident, which also flowed, as it happened, from the great Ivywood debate on Vegetarianism.

The comparatively late hour at which Lord Ivywood had made his discovery had been largely due to a very long speech which Joan had not heard, and which was delivered immediately before the few concluding observations she had heard from Dr. Gluck. The speech was made by an eccentric, of course. Most of those who attended, and nearly all of those who talked, were eccentric in one way or another. But he was an eccentric of great wealth and good family, an M.P., a J.P., a relation of Lady Enid, a man well known in art and letters; in short, a personality who could not be prevented from being anything he chose, from a revolutionist to a bore. Dorian Wimpole had first become famous outside his own class under the fanciful title of the Poet of the Birds. A volume of verse, expanding the several notes or cries of separate song–birds into fantastic soliloquies of these feathered philosophers, had really contained a great deal of ingenuity and elegance. Unfortunately, he was one of those who always tend to take their own fancies seriously, and in whose otherwise legitimate extravagance there is too little of the juice of jest. Hence, in his later works, when he explained “The Fable of the Angel,” by trying to prove that the fowls of the air were creatures higher than man or the anthropoids, his manner was felt to be too austere; and when he moved an amendment to Lord Ivywood’s scheme for the model village called Peaceways, urging that its houses should all follow the more hygienic architecture of nests hung in trees, many regretted that he had lost his light touch. But, when he went beyond birds and filled his poems with conjectural psychology about all the Zoological Gardens, his meaning became obscure; and Lady Susan had even described it as his bad period. It was all the more uncomfortable reading because he poured forth the imaginary hymns, love–songs and war–songs of the lower animals, without a word of previous explanation. Thus, if someone seeking for an ordinary drawing–room song came on lines that were headed “A Desert Love Song,” and which began—“Her head is
high against the stars, Her hump is heaved in pride,”

the compliment to the lady would at first seem startling, until the reader realised that all the characters in the idyll were camels. Or, if he began a poem simply entitled, “The March of Democracy,” and found in the first lines—“Comrades, marching evermore, Fix your teeth in floor and door,”

he might be doubtful about such a policy for the masses; until he discovered that it was supposed to be addressed by an eloquent and aspiring rat to the social solidarity of his race. Lord Ivywood had nearly quarrelled with his poetic relative over the uproarious realism of the verses called “A Drinking Song,” until it was carefully explained to him that the drink was water, and that the festive company consisted of bison. His vision of the perfect husband, as it exists in the feelings of the young female walrus, is thoughtful and suggestive; but would doubtless receive many emendations from anyone who had experienced those feelings. And in his sonnet called “Motherhood” he has made the young scorpion consistent and convincing, yet somehow not wholly lovable. In justice to him, however, it should be remembered that he attacked the most difficult cases on principle, declaring that there was no earthly creature that a poet should forget.

He was of the blond type of his cousin, with flowing fair hair and mustache, and a bright blue, absent-minded eye; he was very well dressed in the carefully careless manner, with a brown velvet jacket and the image on his ring of one of those beasts men worshipped in Egypt.

His speech was graceful and well worded and enormously long, and it was all about an oyster. He passionately protested against the suggestion of some humanitarians who were vegetarians in other respects, but maintained that organisms so simple might fairly be counted as exceptions. Man, he said, even at his miserable best, was always trying to excommunicate some one citizen of the cosmos, to forget some one creature that he should remember. Now, it seemed that creature was the oyster. He gave a long account of the tragedy of the oyster, a really imaginative and picturesque account; full of fantastic fishes, and coral crags crawling and climbing, and bearded creatures streaking the seashore and the green darkness in the cellars of the sea.

“What a horrid irony it is,” he cried, “that this is the only one of the lower creatures whom we call a Native! We speak of him, and of him alone as if he were a native of the country. Whereas, indeed, he is an exile in the universe. What can be conceived more pitiful than the eternal frenzy of the impotent amphibian? What is more terrible than the tear of an oyster? Nature herself has
sealed it with the hard seal of eternity. The creature man forgets bears against 
him a testimony that cannot be forgotten. For the tears of widows and of captives 
are wiped away at last like the tears of children. They vanish like the mists of 
morning or the small pools after a flood. But the tear of the oyster is a pearl.”

The Poet of the Birds was so excited with his own speech that, after the 
meeting, he walked out with a wild eye to the motor car, which had been long 
awaiting him, the chauffeur giving some faint signs of relief.

“Toward home, for the present,” said the poet, and stared at the moon with an 
inspired face.

He was very fond of motoring, finding it fed him with inspirations; and he had 
been doing it from an early hour that morning, having enjoyed a slightly 
lessened sleep. He had scarcely spoken to anybody until he spoke to the cultured 
crowd at Ivywood. He did not wish to speak to anyone for many hours yet. His 
ideas were racing. He had thrown on a fur coat over his velvet jacket, but he let 
it fly open, having long forgotten the coldness in the splendour of the 
moonstruck night. He realised only two things: the swiftness of his car and the 
swiftness of his thoughts. He felt, as it were, a fury of omniscience; he seemed 
 flying with every bird that sped or spun above the woods, with every squirrel 
that had leapt and tumbled within them, with every tree that had swung under 
and sustained the blast.

Yet in a few moments he leaned forward and tapped the glass frontage of the 
car, and the chauffeur suddenly squaring his shoulders, jarringly stopped the 
wheels. Dorian Wimpole had just seen something in the clear moonlight by the 
roadside, which appealed both to this and to the other side of his tradition; 
something that appealed to Wimpole as well as to Dorian.

Two shabby looking men, one in tattered gaiters and the other in what looked 
like the remains of fancy dress with the addition of hair, of so wild a red that it 
looked like a wig, were halted under the hedge, apparently loading a donkey 
cart. At least two rounded, rudely cylindrical objects, looking more or less like 
tubs, stood out in the road beside the wheels, along with a sort of loose wooden 
post that lay along the road beside them. As a matter of fact, the man in the old 
gaiters had just been feeding and watering the donkey, and was now adjusting its 
harness more easily. But Dorian Wimpole naturally did not expect that sort of 
thing from that sort of man. There swelled up in him the sense that his 
 omnipotence went beyond the poetical; that he was a gentleman, a magistrate, an 
M.P. and J.P., and so on. This callousness or ignorance about animals should not 
go on while he was a J.P.; especially since Ivywood’s last Act. He simply strode
across to the stationary cart and said:

“You are overloading that animal, and it is forfeited. And you must come with me to the police station.”

Humphrey Pump, who was very considerate to animals, and had always tried to be considerate to gentlemen, in spite of having put a bullet into one of their legs, was simply too astounded and distressed to make any answer at all. He moved a step or two backward and stared with brown, blinking eyes at the poet, the donkey, the cask, the cheese, and the sign-board lying in the road.

But Captain Dalroy, with the quicker recovery of his national temperament, swept the poet and magistrate a vast fantastic bow and said with agreeable impudence, “interested in donkeys, no doubt?”

“I am interested in all things men forget,” answered the poet, with a fine touch of pride, “but mostly in those like this, that are most easily forgotten.”

Somehow from those two first sentences Pump realised that these two eccentric aristocrats had unconsciously recognised each other. The fact that it was unconscious seemed, somehow, to exclude him all the more. He stirred a little the moonlit dust of the road with his rather dilapidated boots and eventually strolled across to speak to the chauffeur.

“Is the next police station far from here?” he asked.

The chauffeur answered with one syllable of which the nearest literal rendering is “dno.” Other spellings have been attempted, but the sentiment expressed is that of agnosticism.

But something of special brutality of abbreviation made the shrewd, and therefore sensitive, Mr. Pump look at the man’s face. And he saw it was not only the moonlight that made it white.

With that dumb delicacy that was so English in him, Pump looked at the man again, and saw he was leaning heavily on the car with one arm, and saw that the arm was shaking. He understood his countrymen enough to know that whatever he said he must say in a careless manner.

“I hope it’s nearer to your place. You must be a bit done up.”

“Oh hell!” said the driver and spat on the road.

Pump was sympathetically silent, and Mr. Wimpole’s chauffeur broke out incoherently, as if in another place.

“Blarsted beauties o’ dibrike and no breakfast. Blarsted lunch Hivywood and no lunch. Blarsted black everlastin’ hours artsde while ‘e ‘as ‘is cike an’ champine. And then it’s a dornkey.”

“You don’t mean to say,” said Pump in a very serious voice, “that you’ve had
no food today?”

“Ow no!” replied the cockney, with the irony of the deathbed. “Ow, of course not.”

Pump strolled back into the road again, picked up the cheese in his left hand, and landed it on the seat beside the driver. Then his right hand went to one of his large loose equivocal pockets, and the blade of a big jack–knife caught and recaught the steady splendours of the moon.

The driver stared for several instants at the cheese, with the knife shaking in his hand. Then he began to hack it, and in that white witchlike light the happiness of his face was almost horrible.

Pump was wise in all such things, and knew that just as a little food will sometimes prevent sheer intoxication, so a little stimulant will sometimes prevent sudden and dangerous indigestion. It was practically impossible to make the man stop eating cheese. It was far better to give him a very little of the rum, especially as it was very good rum, and better than anything he could find in any of the public–houses that were still permitted. He walked across the road again and picked up the small cask, which he put on the other side of the cheese and from which he filled, in his own manner, the little cup he carried in his pocket.

But at the sight of this the cockney’s eyes lit at once with terror and desire.

“But yer cawnt do it,” he whispered hoarsely, “its the pleece. It’s gile for that, with no doctor’s letter nor sign–board nor nothink.”

Mr. Humphrey Pump made yet another march back into the road. When he got there he hesitated for the first time, but it was quite clear from the attitude of the two insane aristocrats who were arguing and posturing in the road that they would notice nothing except each other. He picked the loose post off the road and brought it to the car, humorously propping it erect in the aperture between keg and cheese.

The little glass of rum was wavering in the poor chauffeur’s hand exactly as the big knife had done, but when he looked up and actually saw the wooden sign above him, he seemed not so much to pluck up his courage, but rather to drag up some forgotten courage from the foundations of some unfathomable sea. It was indeed the forgotten courage of the people.

He looked once at the bleak, black pinewoods around him and took the mouthful of golden liquid at a gulp, as if it were a fairy potion. He sat silent; and then, very slowly, a sort of stony glitter began to come into his eyes. The brown and vigilant eyes of Humphrey Pump were studying him with some anxiety or even fear. He did look rather like a man enchanted or turned to stone. But he
spoke very suddenly.

“The blighter!” he said. “I’ll give ‘im ‘ell. I’ll give ‘im bleeding ‘ell. I’ll give ‘im somethink wot ‘e don’t expect.”

“What do you mean?” asked the inn-keeper.

“Why,” answered the chauffeur, with abrupt composure, “I’ll give ‘im a little donkey.”

Mr. Pump looked troubled. “Do you think,” he observed, affecting to speak lightly, “that he’s fit to be trusted even with a little donkey?”

“Ow, yes,” said the man. “He’s very amiable with donkeys, and donkeys we is to be amiable with ‘im.”

Pump still looked at him doubtfully, appearing or affecting not to follow his meaning. Then he looked equally anxiously across at the other two men; but they were still talking. Different as they were in every other way, they were of the sort who forget everything, class, quarrel, time, place and physical facts in front of them, in the lust of lucid explanation and equal argument.

Thus, when the Captain began by lightly alluding to the fact that after all it was his donkey, since he had bought it from a tinker for a just price, the police station practically vanished from Wimpole’s mind—and I fear the donkey-cart also. Nothing remained but the necessity of dissipating the superstition of personal property.

“I own nothing,” said the poet, waving his hands outward, “I own nothing save in the sense that I own everything. All depends whether wealth or power be used for or against the higher purposes of the cosmos.”

“Indeed,” replied Dalroy, “and how does your motor car serve the higher purposes of the cosmos?”

“It helps me,” said Mr. Wimpole, with honourable simplicity, “to produce my poems.”

“And if it could be used for some higher purpose (if such a thing could be), if some new purpose had come into the cosmos’s head by accident,” inquired the other, “I suppose it would cease to be your property.”

“Certainly,” replied the dignified Dorian. “I should not complain. Nor have you any title to complain when the donkey ceases to be yours when you depress it in the cosmic scale.”

“What makes you think,” asked Dalroy, “that I wanted to depress it?”

“It is my firm belief,” replied Dorian Wimpole, sternly, “that you wanted to ride on it” (for indeed the Captain had once repeated his playful gesture of putting his large leg across). “Is not that so?”
“No,” answered the Captain, innocently, “I never ride on a donkey. I’m afraid of it.”
“Afraid of a donkey!” cried Wimpole, incredulously.
“Afraid of an historical comparison,” said Dalroy.

There was a short pause, and Wimpole said coolly enough, “Oh, well, we’ve outlived those comparisons.”
“Easily,” answered the Irish Captain. “It is wonderful how easily one outlives someone else’s crucifixion.”
“In this case,” said the other grimly, “I think it is the donkey’s crucifixion.”

“Why, you must have drawn that old Roman caricature of the crucified donkey,” said Patrick Dalroy, with an air of some wonder. “How well you have worn; why, you look quite young! Well, of course, if this donkey is crucified, he must be uncruified. But are you quite sure,” he added, very gravely, “that you know how to uncruify a donkey? I assure you it’s one of the rarest of human arts. All a matter of knack. It’s like the doctors with the rare diseases, you know; the necessity so seldom arises. Granted that, by the higher purposes of the cosmos, I am unfit to look after this donkey, I must still feel a faint shiver of responsibility in passing him on to you. Will you understand this donkey? He is a delicate-minded donkey. He is a complex donkey. How can I be certain that, on so short an acquaintance, you will understand every shade of his little likes and dislikes?”

The dog Quoodle, who had been sitting as still as the sphinx under the shadow of the pine trees, waddled out for an instant into the middle of the road and then returned. He ran out when a slight noise as of rotatory grinding was heard; and ran back when it had ceased. But Dorian Wimpole was much too keen on his philosophical discovery to notice either dog or wheel.

“I shall not sit on its back, anyhow,” he said proudly, “but if that were all it would be a small matter. It is enough for you that you have left it in the hands of the only person who could really understand it; one who searches the skies and seas so as not to neglect the smallest creature.”

“This is a very curious creature,” said the Captain, anxiously, “he has all sorts of odd antipathies. He can’t stand a motor car, for instance, especially one that throbs like that while it’s standing still. He doesn’t mind a fur coat so much, but if you wear a brown velvet jacket under it, he bites you. And you must keep him out of the way of a certain kind of people. I don’t suppose you’ve met them; but they always think that anybody with less than two hundred a year is drunk and very cruel, and that anybody with more than two thousand a year is conducting
the Day of Judgment. If you will keep our dear donkey from the society of such persons—Hullo! Hullo! Hullo!"

He turned in genuine disturbance, and dashed after the dog, who had dashed after the motor car and jumped inside. The Captain jumped in after the dog, to pull him out again. But before he could do so, he found the car was flying along too fast for any such leap. He looked up and saw the sign of “The Old Ship” erect in the front like a rigid banner; and Pump, with his cask and cheese, sitting solidly beside the driver.

The thing was more of an earthquake and transformation to him even than to any of the others; but he rose waveringly to his feet and shouted out to Wimpole.

“You’ve left it in the right hands. I’ve never been cruel to a motor.”

In the moonlight of the magic pine—wood far behind, Dorian and the donkey were left looking at each other.

To the mystical mind, when it is a mind at all (which is by no means always the case), there are no two things more impressive and symbolical than a poet and a donkey. And the donkey was a very genuine donkey, and the poet was a very genuine poet; however lawfully he might be mistaken for the other animal at times. The interest of the donkey in the poet will never be known. The interest of the poet in the donkey was perfectly genuine; and survived even that appalling private interview in the owlish secrecy of the woods.

But I think even the poet would have been enlightened if he had seen the white, set, frantic face of the man on the driver’s seat of his vanishing motor. If he had seen it he might have remembered the name, or, perhaps, even begun to understand the nature of a certain animal which is neither the donkey nor the oyster; but the creature whom man has always found it easiest to forget, since the hour he forgot God in a Garden.
CHAPTER XV

THE SONGS OF THE CAR CLUB

MORE than once as the car flew through black and silver fairylands of fir wood and pine wood, Dalroy put his head out of the side window and remonstrated with the chauffeur without effect. He was reduced at last to asking him where he was going.

“I’m goin’ ‘ome,” said the driver in an undecipherable voice. “I’m a goin’ ‘ome to my mar.”

“And where does she live?” asked Dalroy, with something more like diffidence than he had ever shown before in his life.

“Wiles,” said the man, “but I ain’t seen ‘er since I was born. But she’ll do.”

“You must realise,” said Dalroy, with difficulty, “that you may be arrested—it’s the man’s own car; and he’s left behind with nothing to eat, so to speak.”

“‘E’s got ‘is dornkey,” grunted the man. “Let the stinker eat ‘is dornkey, with thistle sauce. ‘E would if ‘e was as ‘ollow as I was.”

Humphrey Pump opened the glass window that separated him from the rear part of the car, and turned to speak to his friend over his square elbow and shoulder.

“I’m afraid,” he said, “he won’t stop for anything just yet. He’s as mad as Moody’s aunt, as they say.”

“Do they say it?” asked the Captain, with a sort of anxiety. “They never said it in Ithaca.”

“Honestly, I think you’d better leave him alone,” answered Pump, with his sagacious face. “He’d just run us into a Scotch Express like Dandy Mutton did, when they said he was driving carelessly. We can send the car back to Ivywood somehow later on, and really, I don’t think it’ll do the gentleman any harm to spend a night with a donkey. The donkey might teach him something, I tell you.”

“It’s true he denied the Principle of Private Property,” said Dalroy, reflectively, “but I fancy he was thinking of a plain house fixed on the ground. A house on wheels, such as this, he might perhaps think a more permanent possession. But I never understand it;” and again he passed a weary palm across his open forehead. “Have you ever noticed, Hump, what is really odd about those people?”

The car shot on amid the comfortable silence of Pump, and then the Irishman
“That poet in the pussy–cat clothes wasn’t half bad. Lord Ivywood isn’t cruel; but he’s inhuman. But that man wasn’t inhuman. He was ignorant, like most cultured fellows. But what’s odd about them is that they try to be simple and never clear away a single thing that’s complicated. If they have to choose between beef and pickles, they always abolish the beef. If they have to choose between a meadow and a motor, they forbid the meadow. Shall I tell you the secret? These men only surrender the things that bind them to other men. Go and dine with a temperance millionaire and you won’t find he’s abolished the hors d’oeuvres or the five courses or even the coffee. What he’s abolished is the port and sherry, because poor men like that as well as rich. Go a step farther, and you won’t find he’s abolished the fine silver forks and spoons, but he’s abolished the meat, because poor men like meat—when they can get it. Go a step farther, and you won’t find he goes without gardens or gorgeous rooms, which poor men can’t enjoy at all. But you will find he boasts of early rising, because sleep is a thing poor men can still enjoy. About the only thing they can still enjoy. Nobody ever heard of a modern philanthropist giving up petrol or typewriting or troops of servants. No, no! What he gives up must be some simple and universal thing. He will give up beef or beer or sleep—because these pleasures remind him that he is only a man.”

Humphrey Pump nodded, but still answered nothing; and the voice of the sprawling Dalroy took one of its upward turns of a sort of soaring flippancy; which commonly embodied itself in remembering some song he had composed.

“Such,” he said, “was the case of the late Mr. Mandragon, so long popular in English aristocratic society as a bluff and simple democrat from the West, until he was unfortunately sand–bagged by six men whose wives he had had shot by private detectives, on his incautiously landing on American soil.

“Mr. Mandragon the Millionaire, he wouldn’t have wine or wife, He couldn’t endure complexity; he lived the simple life; He ordered his lunch by megaphone in manly, simple tones, And used all his motors for canvassing voters, and twenty telephones; Besides a dandy little machine, Cunning and neat as ever was seen, With a hundred pulleys and cranks between, Made of iron and kept quite clean, To hoist him out of his healthful bed on every day of his life, And wash him and brush him and shave him and dress him to live the Simple Life.

“Mr. Mandragon was most refined and quietly, neatly dressed, Say all the American newspapers that know refinement best; Quiet and neat the hair and hat, and the coat quiet and neat, A trouser worn upon either leg, while boots
adorned the feet; And not, as anyone might expect, A Tiger Skin, all striped and specked, And a Peacock Hat with the tail erect, A scarlet tunic with sunflowers decked—That might have had a more marked effect, And pleased the pride of a weaker man that yearned for wine or wife; But fame and the flagon for Mr. Mandragon obscured the Simple Life.

“Mr. Mandragon the Millionaire, I am happy to say, is dead. He enjoyed a quiet funeral in a crematorium shed, And he lies there fluffy and soft and grey and certainly quite refined, When he might have rotted to flowers and fruit with Adam and all mankind. Or been eaten by bears that fancy blood, Or burnt on a big tall tower of wood, In a towering flame as a heathen should, Or even sat with us here at food, Merrily taking twopenny rum and cheese with a pocket knife, But these were luxuries lost for him that lived for the Simple Life.”

Mr. Pump had made many attempts to arrest this song, but they were as vain as all attempts to arrest the car. The angry chauffeur seemed, indeed, rather inspired to further energy by the violent vocal noises behind; and Pump again found it best to fall back on conversation.

“Well, Captain,” he said, amicably. “I can’t quite agree with you about those things. Of course, you can trust foreigners too much as poor Thompson did; but then you can go too far the other way. Aunt Sarah lost a thousand pounds that way. I told her again and again he wasn’t a nigger, but she wouldn’t believe me. And, of course, that was just the kind of thing to offend an ambassador if he was an Austrian. It seems to me, Captain, you aren’t quite fair to these foreign chaps. Take these Americans, now! There were many Americans went by Pebblewick, you may suppose. But in all the lot there was never a bad lot; never a nasty American, nor a stupid American—nor, well, never an American that I didn’t rather like.”

“I know,” said Dalroy, “you mean there was never an American who did not appreciate ‘The Old Ship.’”

“I suppose I do mean that,” answered the inn–keeper, “and somehow, I feel ‘The Old Ship’ might appreciate the American too.”

“You English are an extraordinary lot,” said the Irishman, with a sudden and sombre quietude. “I sometimes feel you may pull through after all.”

After another silence he said, “You’re always right, Hump, and one oughtn’t to think of Yankees like that. The rich are the scum of the earth in every country. And a vast proportion of the real Americans are among the most courteous, intelligent, self–respecting people in the world. Some attribute this to the fact that a vast proportion of the real Americans are Irishmen.”
Pump was still silent, and the Captain resumed in a moment.

“All the same,” he said, “it’s very hard for a man, especially a man of a small country like me, to understand how it must feel to be an American; especially in the matter of nationality. I shouldn’t like to have to write the American National Anthem, but fortunately there is no great probability of the commission being given. The shameful secret of my inability to write an American patriotic song is one that will die with me.”

“Well, what about an English one,” said Pump, sturdily. “You might do worse, Captain.”

“English, you bloody tyrant,” said Patrick, indignantly. “I could no more fancy a song by an Englishman than you could one by that dog.”

Mr. Humphrey Pump gravely took the paper from his pocket, on which he had previously inscribed the sin and desolation of grocers, and felt in another of his innumerable pockets for a pencil.

“Hullo,” cried Dalroy. “Are you going to have a shy at the Ballad of Quoodle?”

Quoodle lifted his ears at his name. Mr. Pump smiled a slight and embarrassed smile. He was secretly proud of Dalroy’s admiration for his previous literary attempts and he had some natural knack for verse as a game, as he had for all games; and his reading, though desultory, had not been merely rustic or low.

“On condition,” he said, deprecatingly, “that you write a song for the English.”

“Oh, very well,” said Patrick, with a huge sigh that really indicated the very opposite of reluctance. “We must do something till the thing stops, I suppose, and this seems a blameless parlour game. ‘Songs of the Car Club.’ Sounds quite aristocratic.”

And he began to make marks with a pencil on the fly-leaf of a little book he had in his pocket—Wilson’s Noctes Ambrosianae. Every now and then, however, he looked up and delayed his own composition by watching Pump and the dog, whose proceedings amused him very much. For the owner of “The Old Ship” sat sucking his pencil and looking at Mr. Quoodle with eyes of fathomless attention. Every now and then he slightly scratched his brown hair with the pencil, and wrote down a word. And the dog Quoodle, with that curious canine power of either understanding or most brazenly pretending to understand what is going on, sat erect with his head at an angle, as if he were sitting for his portrait.

Hence it happened that though Pump’s poem was a little long, as are often the poems of inexperienced poets, and though Dalroy’s poem was very short (being
much hurried toward the end) the long poem was finished some time before the short one.

Therefore it was that there was first produced for the world the song more familiarly known as “No Noses,” or more correctly called “The Song of Quoodle.” Part of it ran eventually thus:—“They haven’t got no noses The fallen sons of Eve, Even the smell of roses Is not what they supposes, But more than mind discloses, And more than men believe.

“They haven’t got no noses, They cannot even tell When door and darkness closes The park a Jew encloses, Where even the Law of Moses Will let you steal a smell;

“The brilliant smell of water, The brave smell of a stone, The smell of dew and thunder And old bones buried under, Are things in which they blunder And err, if left alone.

“The wind from winter forests, The scent of scentless flowers, The breath of bride’s adorning, The smell of snare and warning, The smell of Sunday morning, God gave to us for ours.”

“And Quoodle here discloses All things that Quoodle can; They haven’t got no noses, They haven’t got no noses, And goodness only knowses The Noselessness of Man.”

This poem also shows traces of haste in its termination, and the present editor (who has no aim save truth) is bound to confess that parts of it were supplied in the criticisms of the Captain, and even enriched (in later and livelier circumstances) by the Poet of the Birds himself. At the actual moment the chief features of this realistic song about dogs was a crashing chorus of “Bow–wow, wow,” begun by Mr. Patrick Dalroy; but immediately imitated (much more successfully) by Mr. Quoodle. In the face of all this Dalroy suffered some real difficulty in fulfilling the bargain by reading out his much shorter poem about what he imagined an Englishman might feel. Indeed there was something very rough and vague in his very voice as he read it out; as of one who had not found the key to his problem. The present compiler (who has no aim save truth) must confess that the verses ran as follows:—“St. George he was for England, And before he killed the dragon He drank a pint of English ale Out of an English flagon. For though he fast right readily In hair–shirt or in mail, It isn’t safe to give him cakes Unless you give him ale.

“St. George he was for England, And right gallantly set free The lady left for dragon’s meat And tied up to a tree; But since he stood for England And knew what England means, Unless you give him bacon, You mustn’t give him beans.
“St. George he was for England, And shall wear the shield he wore When we go out in armour, With the battle–cross before; But though he is jolly company And very pleased to dine, It isn’t safe to give him nuts Unless you give him wine.

“Very philosophical song that,” said Dalroy, shaking his head solemnly, “full of deep thought. I really think that is about the truth of the matter, in the case of the Englishman. Your enemies say you’re stupid, and you boast of being illogical—which is about the only thing you do that really is stupid. As if anybody ever made an Empire or anything else by saying that two and two make five. Or as if anyone was ever the stronger for not understanding anything—if it were only tip–cat or chemistry. But this is true about you Hump. You English are supremely an artistic people, and therefore you go by associations, as I said in my song. You won’t have one thing without the other thing that goes with it. And as you can’t imagine a village without a squire and parson, or a college without port and old oak, you get the reputation of a Conservative people. But it’s because you’re sensitive, Hump, not because you’re stupid, that you won’t part with things. It’s lies, lies and flattery they tell you, Hump, when they tell you you’re fond of compromise. I tell ye, Hump, every real revolution is a compromise. D’ye think Wolfe Tone or Charles Stuart Parnell never compromised? But it’s just because you’re afraid of a compromise that you won’t have a revolution. If you really overhauled ‘The Old Ship’–or Oxford–you’d have to make up your mind what to take and what to leave, and it would break your heart, Humphrey Pump.”

He stared in front of him with a red and ruminant face, and at length added, somewhat more gloomily,

“This aesthetic way we have, Hump, has only two little disadvantages which I will now explain to you. The first is exactly what has sent us flying in this contraption. When the beautiful, smooth, harmonious thing you’ve made is worked by a new type, in a new spirit, then I tell you it would be better for you a thousand times to be living under the thousand paper constitutions of Condorcet and Sieyès. When the English oligarchy is run by an Englishman who hasn’t got an English mind–then you have Lord Ivywood and all this nightmare, of which God could only guess the end.”

The car had beaten some roods of dust behind it, and he ended still more darkly:

“And the other disadvantage, my amiable aesthete, is this. If ever, in blundering about the planet, you come on an island in the Atlantic–Atlantis, let
us say—which won’t accept all your pretty picture—to which you can’t give everything—why you will probably decide to give nothing. You will say in your hearts: ‘Perhaps they will starve soon’; and you will become, for that island, the deafest and the most evil of all the princes of the earth.”

It was already daybreak, and Pump, who knew the English boundaries almost by intuition, could tell even through the twilight that the tail of the little town they were leaving behind was of a new sort, the sort to be seen in the western border. The chauffeur’s phrase about his mother might merely have been a music-hall joke; but certainly he had driven darkly in that direction.

White morning lay about the grey stony streets like spilt milk. A few proletarian early risers, wearier at morning than most men at night, seemed merely of opinion that it was no use crying over it. The two or three last houses, which looked almost too tired to stand upright, seemed to have moved the Captain into another sleepy explosion.

“There are two kinds of idealists, as everybody knows—or must have thought of. There are those who idealize the real and those who (precious seldom) realise the ideal. Artistic and poetical people like the English generally idealize the real. This I have expressed in a song, which—”

“No, really,” protested the innkeeper, “really now, Captain—”

“This I have expressed in a song,” repeated Dalroy, in an adamantine manner, “which I will now sing with every circumstance of leisure, loudness, or any other—”

He stopped because the flying universe seemed to stop. Charging hedgerows came to a halt, as if challenged by the bugle. The racing forests stood rigid. The last few tottering houses stood suddenly at attention. For a noise like a pistol-shot from the car itself had stopped all that race, as a pistol-shot might start any other.

The driver clambered out very slowly, and stood about in various tragic attitudes round the car. He opened an unsuspected number of doors and windows in the car, and touched things and twisted things and felt things.

“I must back as best I can to that there garrige, sir,” he said, in a heavy and husky tone they had not heard from him before.

Then he looked round on the long woods and the last houses, and seemed to gnaw his lip, like a great general who has made a great mistake. His brow seemed as black as ever, yet his voice, when he spoke again, had fallen many further degrees toward its dull and daily tone.

“Yer see, this is a bit bad,” he said. “It’ll be a beastly job even at the best
"Getting back," repeated Dalroy, opening the blue eyes of a bull. "Back where?"

"Well, yer see," said the chauffeur, reasonably, "I was bloody keen to show ‘im it was me drove the car and not ‘im. By a bit o’ bad luck, I done damage to ‘is car. Well—if you can stick in ‘is car—"

Captain Patrick Dalroy sprang out of the car so rapidly that he almost reeled and slipped upon the road. The dog sprang after him, barking furiously.

"Hump," said Patrick, quietly. "I’ve found out everything about you. I know what always bothered me about the Englishman."

Then, after an instant’s silence, he said, "That Frenchman was right who said (I forget how he put it) that you march to Trafalgar Square to rid yourself of your temper; not to rid yourself of your tyrant. Our friend was quite ready to rebel, rushing away. To rebel sitting still was too much for him. Do you read Punch? I am sure you do. Pump and Punch must be almost the only survivors of the Victorian Age. Do you remember an old joke in an excellent picture, representing two ragged Irishmen with guns, waiting behind a stone wall to shoot a landlord? One of the Irishmen says the landlord is late, and adds, ‘I hope no accident’s happened to the poor gentleman.’ Well, it’s all perfectly true; I knew that Irishman intimately, but I want to tell you a secret about him. He was an Englishman."

The chauffeur had backed with breathless care to the entrance of the garage, which was next door to a milkman’s or merely separated from it by a black and lean lane, looking no larger than the crack of a door. It must, however, have been larger than it looked, because Captain Dalroy disappeared down it.

He seemed to have beckoned the driver after him; at any rate that functionary instantly followed. The functionary came out again in an almost guilty haste, touching his cap and stuffing loose papers into his pocket. Then the functionary returned yet again from what he called the “garrige,” carrying larger and looser things over his arm.

All this did Mr. Humphrey Pump observe, not without interest. The place, remote as it was, was evidently a rendez-vous for motorists. Otherwise a very tall motorist, throttled and masked in the most impenetrable degree, would hardly have strolled up to speak to him. Still less would the tall motorist have handed him a similar horrid disguise of wraps and goggles, in a bundle over his arm. Least of all would any motorist, however tall, have said to him from behind the cap and goggles, “Put on these things, Hump, and then we’ll go into the milk
shop. I’m waiting for the car. Which car, my seeker after truth? Why the car I’m going to buy for you to drive.”

The remorseful chauffeur, after many adventures, did actually find his way back to the little moonlit wood where he had left his master and the donkey. But his master and the donkey had vanished.
CHAPTER XVI

THE SEVEN MOODS OF DORIAN

THAT timeless clock of all lunatics, which was so bright in the sky that night, may really have had some elfin luck about it, like a silver penny. Not only had it initiated Mr. Hibbs into the mysteries of Dionysius, and Mr. Bullrose into the arboreal habits of his ancestors, but one night of it made a very considerable and rather valuable change in Mr. Dorian Wimpole, the Poet of the Birds. He was a man neither foolish nor evil, any more than Shelley; only a man made sterile by living in a world of indirectness and insincerity, with words rather than with things. He had not had the smallest intention of starving his chauffeur; he did not realise that there was worse spiritual murder in merely forgetting him. But as hour after hour passed over him, alone with the donkey and the moon, he went through a raging and shifting series of frames of mind, such as his cultured friends would have described as moods.

The First Mood, I regret to say, was one of black and grinding hatred. He had no notion of the chauffeur’s grievance, and could only suppose he had been bribed or intimidated by the demonic donkey–torturers. But Mr. Wimpole was much more capable at that moment of torturing a chauffeur than Mr. Pump had ever been of torturing a donkey; for no sane man can hate an animal. He kicked the stones in the road, sending them flying into the forest, and wished that each one of them was a chauffeur. The bracken by the roadside he tore up by the roots, as representing the hair of the chauffeur, to which it bore no resemblance. He hit with his fist such trees, as, I suppose, seemed in form and expression most reminiscent of the chauffeur; but desisted from this, finding that in this apparently one–sided contest the tree had rather the best of it. But the whole wood and the whole world had become a kind of omnipresent and pantheistic chauffeur, and he hit at him everywhere.

The thoughtful reader will realise that Mr. Wimpole had already taken a considerable upward stride in what he would have called the cosmic scale. The next best thing to really loving a fellow creature is really hating him: especially when he is a poorer man separated from you otherwise by mere social stiffness. The desire to murder him is at least an acknowledgment that he is alive. Many a man has owed the first white gleams of the dawn of Democracy in his soul to a desire to find a stick and beat the butler. And we have it on the unimpeachable
local authority of Mr. Humphrey Pump that Squire Merriman chased his librarian through three villages with a horse–pistol; and was a Radical ever after.

His rage also did him good merely as a relief, and he soon passed into a second and more positive mood of meditation.

“The damnable monkeys go on like this,” he muttered, “and then they call a donkey one of the Lower Animals. Ride on a donkey would he? I’d like to see the donkey riding on him for a bit. Good old man.”

The patient ass turned mild eyes on him when he patted it, and Dorian Wimpole discovered, with a sort of subconscious surprise, that he really was fond of the donkey. Deeper still in his subliminal self he knew that he had never been fond of an animal before. His poems about fantastic creatures had been quite sincere, and quite cold. When he said he loved a shark, he meant he saw no reason for hating a shark, which was right enough. There is no reason for hating a shark, however much reason there may be for avoiding one. There is no harm in a craken if you keep it in a tank—or in a sonnet.

But he also realised that his love of creatures had been turned round and was working from the other end. The donkey was a companion, and not a monstrosity. It was dear because it was near, not because it was distant. The oyster had attracted him because it was utterly unlike a man; unless it be counted a touch of masculine vanity to grow a beard. The fancy is no idler than that he had himself used, in suggesting a sort of feminine vanity in the permanence of a pearl. But in that maddening vigil among the mystic pines, he found himself more and more drawn toward the donkey, because it was more like a man than anything else around him; because it had eyes to see, and ears to hear—and the latter even unduly developed.

“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear,” he said, scratching those grey hairy flappers with affection. “Haven’t you lifted your ears toward Heaven? And will you be the first to hear the Last Trumpet?”

The ass rubbed his nose against him with what seemed almost like a human caress. And Dorian caught himself wondering how a caress from an oyster could be managed. Everything else around him was beautiful, but inhuman. Only in the first glory of anger could he really trace in a tall pine–tree the features of an ex–taxi–cabman from Kennington. Trees and ferns had no living ears that they could wag nor mild eyes that they could move. He patted the donkey again.

But the donkey had reconciled him to the landscape, and in his third mood he began to realise how beautiful it was. On a second study, he was not sure it was so inhuman. Rather he felt that its beauty at least was half human; that the
aureole of the sinking moon behind the woods was chiefly lovely because it was like the tender–coloured aureole of an early saint; and that the young trees were, after all, noble because they held up their heads like virgins. Cloudily there crowded into his mind ideas with which it was imperfectly familiar, especially an idea which he had heard called “The Image of God.” It seemed to him more and more that all these things, from the donkey to the very docks and ferns by the roadside, were dignified and sanctified by their partial resemblance to something else. It was as if they were baby drawings: the wild, crude sketches of Nature in her first sketch–books of stone.

He had flung himself on a pile of pine–needles to enjoy the gathering darkness of the pinewoods as the moon sank behind them. There is nothing more deep and wonderful than really impenetrable pinewoods where the nearer trees show against the more shadowy; a tracery of silver upon grey and of grey upon black.

It was by this time, in pure pleasure and idleness that he picked up a pine–needle to philosophise about it.

“Think of sitting on needles!” he said. “Yet, I suppose this is the sort of needle that Eve, in the old legend, used in Eden. Aye, and the old legend was right, too! Think of sitting on all the needles in London! Think of sitting on all the needles in Sheffield! Think of sitting on any needles, except on all the needles of Paradise! Oh, yes, the old legend was right enough. The very needles of God are softer than the carpets of men.”

He took a pleasure in watching the weird little forest animals creeping out from under the green curtains of the wood. He reminded himself that in the old legend they had been as tame as the ass, as well as being as comic. He thought of Adam naming the animals, and said to a beetle, “I should call you Budger.”

The slugs gave him great entertainment, and so did the worms. He felt a new and realistic interest in them which he had not known before; it was, indeed, the interest that a man feels in a mouse in a dungeon; the interest of any man tied by the leg and forced to see the fascination of small things. Creatures of the wormy kind, especially, crept out at very long intervals; yet he found himself waiting patiently for hours for the pleasure of their acquaintance. One of them rather specially arrested his eye, because it was a little longer than most worms and seemed to be turning its head in the direction of the donkey’s left foreleg. Also, it had a head to turn, which most worms have not.

Dorian Wimpole did not know much about exact Natural History, except what he had once got up very thoroughly from an encyclopaedia for the purposes of a sympathetic vilanelle. But as this information was entirely concerned with the
conjectural causes of laughter in the Hyena, it was not directly helpful in this case. But though he did not know much Natural History, he knew some. He knew enough to know that a worm ought not to have a head, and especially not a squared and flattened head, shaped like a spade or a chisel. He knew enough to know that a creeping thing with a head of that pattern survives in the English country sides, though it is not common. In short, he knew enough to step across the road and set a sharp and savage boot-heel on the neck and spine of the creature, breaking it into three black bits that writhed once more before they stiffened.

Then he gave out a great explosive sigh. The donkey, whose leg had been in such danger, looked at the dead adder with eyes that had never lost their moony mildness. Even Dorian, himself, looked at it for a long time, and with feelings he could neither arrest nor understand, before he remembered that he had been comparing the little wood to Eden.

“And even in Eden,” he said at last; and then the words of Fitzgerald failed upon his lips.

And while he was warring with such words and thoughts, something happened about him and behind him; something he had written about a hundred times and read about a thousand; something he had never seen in his life. It flung faintly across the broad foliage a wan and pearly light far more mysterious than the lost moonshine. It seemed to enter through all the doors and windows of the woodland, pale and silent but confident, like men that keep a tryst; soon its white robes had threads of gold and scarlet: and the name of it was morning.

For some time past, loud and in vain, all the birds had been singing to the Poet of the Birds. But when that minstrel actually saw broad daylight breaking over wood and road, the effect on him was somewhat curious. He stood staring at it in gaping astonishment, until it had fulfilled the fulness of its shining fate; and the pine-cones and the curling ferns and the live donkey and the dead viper were almost as distinct as they could be at noon, or in a Preraphaelite picture. And then the Fourth Mood fell upon him like a bolt from the blue, and he strode across and took the donkey’s bridle, as if to lead it along.

“Damn it all,” he cried, in a voice as cheerful as the cockcrow that rang recently from the remote village, “it’s not everybody who’s killed a snake.” Then he added, reflectively, “I bet Dr. Gluck never did. Come along, donkey, let’s have some adventures.”

The finding and fighting of positive evil is the beginning of all fun—and even of all farce. All the wild woodland looked jolly now the snake was killed. It was
one of the fallacies of his literary clique to refer all natural emotions to literary names, but it might not untruly be said that he had passed out of the mood of Maeterlinck into the mood of Whitman, and out of the mood of Whitman into the mood of Stevenson. He had not been a hypocrite when he asked for gilded birds of Asia or purple polypi out of the Southern Seas; he was not a hypocrite now, when he asked for mere comic adventures along a common English road. It was his misfortune and not his fault if his first adventure was his last; and was much too comic to laugh at.

Already the wan morning had warmed into a pale blue and was spotted with those little plump pink clouds which must surely have been the origin of the story that pigs might fly. The insects of the grass chattered so cheerfully that every green tongue seemed to be talking. The skyline on every side was broken only by objects that encouraged such swashbucklering comedy. There was a windmill that Chaucer’s Miller might have inhabited or Cervantes’s champion charged. There was an old leaden church spire that might have been climbed by Robert Clive. Away toward Pebblewick and the sea, there were the two broken stumps of wood which Humphrey Pump declares to this day to have been the stands for an unsuccessful children’s swing; but which tourists always accept as the remains of the antique gallows. In the gaiety of such surroundings, it is small wonder if Dorian and the donkey stepped briskly along the road. The very donkey reminded him of Sancho Panza.

He did not wake out of this boisterous reverie of the white road and the wind till a motor horn had first hooted and then howled, till the ground had shaken with the shock of a stoppage, and till a human hand fell heavily and tightly on his shoulder. He looked up and saw the complete costume of a Police Inspector. He did not worry about the face. And there fell on him the Fifth, or Unexpected Mood, which is called by the vulgar Astonishment.

In despair he looked at the motor car itself that had anchored so abruptly under the opposite hedge. The man at the steering wheel was so erect and unresponsive that Dorian felt sure he was feasting his eyes on yet another policeman. But on the seat behind was a very different figure, a figure that baffled him all the more because he felt certain he had seen it somewhere. The figure was long and slim, with sloping shoulders, and the costume, which was untidy, yet contrived to give the impression that it was tidy on other occasions. The individual had bright yellow hair, one lock of which stuck straight up and was exalted, like the little horn in his favourite scriptures. Another tuft of it, in a bright but blinding manner, fell across and obscured the left optic, as in literal fulfilment of the
parable of a beam in the eye. The eyes, with or without beams in them, looked a little bewildered, and the individual was always nervously resettling his necktie. For the individual went by the name of Hibbs, and had only recently recovered from experiences wholly new to him.

“What on earth do you want?” asked Wimpole of the policeman.

His innocent and startled face, and perhaps other things about his appearance, evidently caused the Inspector to waver.

“Well, it’s about this ‘ere donkey, sir,” he said.

“Do you think I stole it?” cried the indignant aristocrat. “Well, of all the mad worlds! A pack of thieves steal my Limousine, I save their damned donkey’s life at the risk of my own—and I’m run in for stealing.”

The clothes of the indignant aristocrat probably spoke louder than his tongue; the officer dropped his hand, and after consulting some papers in his hand, walked across to consult with the unkempt gentleman in the car.

“That seems to be a similar cart and donkey,” Dorian heard him saying, “but the clothes don’t seem to fit your description of the men you saw.”

Now, Mr. Hibbs had extremely vague and wild recollections of the men he saw; he could not even tell what he had done and what he had merely dreamed. If he had spoken sincerely, he would have described a sort of green nightmare of forests, in which he found himself in the power of an ogre about twelve feet high, with scarlet flames for hair and dressed rather like Robin Hood. But a long course of what is known as “keeping the party together” had made it as unnatural to him to tell anyone (even himself) what he really thought about anything, as it would have been to spit—or to sing. He had at present only three motives and strong resolves: (1) not to admit that he had been drunk; (2) not to let anyone escape whom Lord Ivywood might possibly want to question; and (3) not to lose his reputation for sagacity and tact.

“This party has a brown velvet suit, you see, and a fur overcoat,” the Inspector continued, “and in the notes I have from you, you say the man wore a uniform.”

“When we say uniform,” said Mr. Hibbs, frowning intellectually, “when we say uniform, of course—we must distinguish some of our friends who don’t quite see eye to eye with us, you know,” and he smiled with tender leniency, “some of our friends wouldn’t like it called a uniform perhaps. But—of course—well, it wasn’t a police uniform, for instance. Ha! Ha!”

“I should hope not,” said the official, shortly.

“So—in a way—however,” said Hibbs, clutching his verbal talisman at last, “it might be brown velvet in the dark.”
The Inspector replied to this helpful suggestion with some wonder. “But it was a moon, like limelight,” he protested.

“Yars, yars,” cried Hibbs, in a high tone that can only be described as a hasty drawl. “Yars—discolours everything of course. The flowers and things—”

“But look here,” said the Inspector, “you said the principal man’s hair was red.”

“A blond type! A blond type!” said Hibbs, waving his hand with a solemn lightness. “Reddish, yellowish, brownish sort of hair, you know.” Then he shook his head and said with the heaviest solemnity the word was capable of carrying, “Teutonic, purely Teutonic.”

The Inspector began to feel some wonder that, even in the confusion following on Lord Ivywood’s fall, he had been put under the guidance of this particular guide. The truth was that Leveson, once more masking his own fears under his usual parade of hurry, had found Hibbs at a table by an open window, with wild hair and sleepy eyes, picking himself up with some sort of medicine. Finding him already fairly clear-headed in a dreary way, he had not scrupled to use the remains of his bewilderment to despatch him with the police in the first pursuit. Even the mind of a semi-recovered drunkard, he thought, could be trusted to recognise anyone so unmistakable as the Captain.

But, though the diplomatist’s debauch was barely over, his strange, soft fear and cunning were awake. He felt fairly certain the man in the fur coat had something to do with the mystery, as men with fur coats do not commonly wander about with donkeys. He was afraid of offending Lord Ivywood, and at the same time, afraid of exposing himself to a policeman.

“You have large discretion,” he said, gravely. “Very right you should have large discretion in the interests of the public. I think you would be quite authorised, for the present, in preventing the man’s escape.”

“And the other man?” inquired the officer, with knitted brow. “Do you suppose he has escaped?”

“The other man,” repeated Hibbs However, regarding the distant windmill through half-closed lids, as if this were a new fine shade introduced into an already delicate question.

“Well, hang it all,” said the police officer, “you must know whether there were two men or one.”

Gradually it dawned, in a grey dawn of horror, over the brain of Hibbs that this was what he specially couldn’t know. He had always heard, and read in comic papers, that a drunken man “sees double” and beholds two lamp-posts,
one of which is (as the Higher Critic would have said) purely subjective. For all he knew (being a mere novice) inebriation might produce the impression of the two men of his dream-like adventure, when in truth there had only been one.

“Two men, you know—one man,” he said with a sort of moody carelessness. “Well we can go into their numbers later; they can’t have a very large following.” Here he shook his head very firmly. “Quite impossible. And as the late Lord Goschen used to say, ‘You can prove anything by statistics.’”

And here came an interruption from the other side of the road.

“And how long am I to wait here for you and your Goschens, you silly goat,” were the intemperate wood-notes issuing from the Poet of the Birds. “I’m shot if I’ll stand this! Come along, donkey, and let’s pray for a better adventure next time. These are very inferior specimens of your own race.”

And seizing the bridle of the ass again, he strode past them swiftly, and almost as if urging the animal to a gallop.

Unfortunately this disdainful dash for liberty was precisely what was wanting to weigh down the rocking intelligence of the Inspector on the wrong side. If Wimpole had stood still a minute or two longer, the official, who was no fool, might have ended in disbelieving Hibbs’s story altogether. As it was, there was a scuffle, not without blows on both sides, and eventually the Honourable Dorian Wimpole, donkey and all, was marched off to the village, in which there was a Police Station; in which was a temporary cell; in which a Sixth Mood was experienced.

His complaints, however, were at once so clamorous and so convincing, and his coat was so unquestionably covered with fur, that after some questioning and cross purposes they agreed to take him in the afternoon to Iivywood House, where there was a magistrate incapacitated by a shot only recently extracted from his leg.

They found Lord Ivywood lying on a purple ottoman, in the midst of his Chinese puzzle of oriental apartments. He continued to look away as they entered, as if expecting, with Roman calm, the entrance of a recognised enemy. But Lady Enid Wimpole, who was attending to the wants of the invalid, gave a sharp cry of astonishment; and the next moment the three cousins were looking at each other. One could almost have guessed they were cousins, all being (as Mr. Hibbs subtly put it) a blond type. But two of the blond types expressed amazement, and one blond type merely rage.

“I am sorry, Dorian,” said Ivywood, when he had heard the whole story. “These fanatics are capable of anything, I fear, and you very rightly resent their
stealing your car—"

“You are wrong, Philip,” answered the poet, emphatically. “I do not even faintly resent their stealing my car. What I do resent is the continued existence on God’s earth of this Fool” (pointing to the serious Hibbs) “and of that Fool” (pointing to the Inspector) “and—yes, by thunder, of that Fool, too” (and he pointed straight at Lord Ivywood). “And I tell you frankly, Philip, if there really are, as you say, two men who are bent on smashing your schemes and making your life a hell—I am very happy to put my car at their disposal. And now I’m off.”

“You’ll stop to dinner?” inquired Ivywood, with frigid forgiveness.

“No, thanks,” said the disappearing bard, “I’m going up to town.”

The Seventh Mood of Dorian Wimpole had a grand finale at the Café Royal, and consisted largely of oysters.
CHAPTER XVII

THE POET IN PARLIAMENT

DURING the singular entrance and exit of Dorian Wimpole, M.P., J.P., etc., Lady Joan was looking out of the magic casements of that turret room which was now literally, and not only poetically, the last limit of Ivywood House. The old broken hole and black staircase up which the lost dog Quoodle used to come and go, had long ago been sealed up and cemented with a wall of exquisite Eastern workmanship. All through the patterns Lord Ivywood had preserved and repeated the principle that no animal shape must appear. But, like all lucid dogmatists, he perceived all the liberties his dogma allowed him. And he had irradiated this remote end of Ivywood with sun and moon and solar and starry systems, with the Milky Way for a dado and a few comets for comic relief. The thing was well done of its kind (as were all the things that Philip Ivywood got done for him); and if all the windows of the turret were closed with their peacock curtains, a poet with anything like a Hibbsian appreciation of the family champagne might almost fancy he was looking out across the sea on a night crowded with stars. And (what was yet more important) even Misysra (that exact thinker) could not call the moon a live animal without falling into idolatry.

But Joan, looking out of real windows on a real sky and sea, thought no more about the astronomical wall–paper than about any other wall–paper. She was asking herself in sullen emotionalism, and for the thousandth time, a question she had never been able to decide. It was the final choice between an ambition and a memory. And there was this heavy weight in the scale: that the ambition would probably materialise, and the memory probably wouldn’t. It has been the same weight in the same scale a million times since Satan became the prince of this world. But the evening stars were strengthening over the old sea–shore, and they also wanted weighing like diamonds.

As once before at the same stage of brooding, she heard behind her the swish of Lady Enid’s skirts, that never came so fast save for serious cause.

“Joan! Please do come! Nobody but you, I do believe, could move him.” Joan looked at Lady Enid and realised that the lady was close on crying. She turned a trifle pale and asked quietly for the question. “Philip says he’s going to London now, with that leg and all,” cried Enid, “and he won’t let us say a word.”

“But how did it all happen?” asked Joan.
Lady Enid Wimpole was quite incapable of explaining how it all happened, so the task must for the moment devolve on the author. The simple fact was that Ivywood in the course of turning over magazines on his sofa, happened to look at a paper from the Midlands.

“The Turkish news,” said Mr. Leveson, rather nervously, “is on the other side of the page.”

But Lord Ivywood continued to look at the side of the paper that did not contain the Turkish news, with the same dignity of lowered eyelids and unconscious brow with which he had looked at the Captain’s message when Joan found him by the turret.

On the page covered merely with casual, provincial happenings was a paragraph, “Echo of Pebblewick Mystery. Reported Reappearance of the Vanishing Inn.” Underneath was printed, in smaller letters:

“An almost incredible report from Wyddington announces that the mysterious ‘Sign of the Old Ship’ has once more been seen in this country; though it has long been relegated by scientific investigators to the limbo of old rustic superstitions. According to the local version, Mr. Simmons, a dairyman of Wyddington, was serving in his shop when two motorists entered, one of them asking for a glass of milk. They were in the most impenetrable motoring panoply, with darkened goggles and waterproof collars turned up, so that nothing can be recalled of them personally, except that one was a person of unusual stature. In a few moments, this latter individual went out of the shop again and returned with a miserable specimen out of the street, one of the tattered loafers that linger about our most prosperous towns, tramping the streets all night and even begging in defiance of the police. The filth and disease of the creature were so squalid that Mr. Simmons at first refused to serve him with the glass of milk which the taller motorist wished to provide for him. At length, however, Mr. Simmons consented, and was immediately astonished by an incident against which he certainly had a more assured right to protest.

“The taller motorist, saying to the loafer, ‘but, man, you’re blue in the face,’ made a species of signs to the smaller motorist, who thereupon appears to have pierced a sort of cylindrical trunk or chest that seemed to be his only luggage, and drawn from it a few drops of a yellow liquid which he deliberately dropped into the ragged creature’s milk. It was afterward discovered to be rum, and the protests of Mr. Simmons may be imagined. The tall motorist, however, warmly defended his action, having apparently some wild idea that he was doing an act of kindness. ‘Why, I found the man nearly fainting,’ he said. ‘If you’d picked
him off a raft, he couldn’t be more collapsed with cold and sickness; and if you’d picked him off a raft you’d have given him rum–yes, by St. Patrick, if you were a bloody pirate and made him walk the plank afterward.’ Mr. Simmons replied with dignity, that he did not know how it was with rafts, and could not permit such language in his shop. He added that he would lay himself open to a police prosecution if he permitted the consumption of alcohol in his shop; since he did not display a sign. The motorist then made the amazing reply, ‘But you do display a sign, you jolly old man. Did you think I couldn’t find my way to the sign of The Old Ship, you sly boots?’ Mr. Simmons was now fully convinced of the intoxication of his visitors, and refusing a glass of rum rather boisterously offered him, went outside his shop to look round for a policeman. To his surprise he found the officer engaged in dispersing a considerable crowd, which was staring up at some object behind him. On looking round (he states in his deposition) he ‘saw what was undoubtedly one of the low tavern signs at one time common in England.’ He was wholly unable to explain its presence outside his premises, and as it undoubtedly legalised the motorist’s action, the police declined to move in the matter.

“Later. The two motorists have apparently left the town, unmolested, in a small second-hand two-seater. There is no clue to their destination, except it be indicated by a single incident. It appears that when they were waiting for the second glass of milk, one of them drew attention to a milk can of a shape seemingly unfamiliar to him, which was, of course, the Mountain Milk now so much recommended by doctors. The taller motorist (who seemed in every way strangely ignorant of modern science and social life) asked his companion where it came from, receiving, of course, the reply that it is manufactured in the model village of Peaceways, under the personal superintendence of its distinguished and philanthropic inventor, Dr. Meadows. Upon this the taller person, who appeared highly irresponsible, actually bought the whole can; observing, as he tucked it under his arm, that it would help him to remember the address.

“Later. Our readers will be glad to hear that the legend of ‘The Old Ship’ sign has once more yielded to the wholesome scepticism of science. Our representative reached Wyddington after the practical jokers, or whatever they were, had left; but he searched the whole frontage of Mr. Simmons’s shop, and we are in a position to assure the public that there is no trace of the alleged sign.”

Lord Ivywood laid down the newspaper and looked at the rich and serpentine embroideries on the wall with the expression that a great general might have if he saw a chance of really ruining his enemy, if he would also ruin all his
previous plan of campaign. His pallid and classic profile was as immovable as a cameo; but anyone who had known him at all would have known that his brain was going like a motor car that has broken the speed limit long ago.

Then he turned his head and said, “Please tell Hicks to bring round the long blue car in half an hour; it can be fitted up for a sofa. And ask the gardener to cut a pole of about four feet nine inches, and put a cross-piece for a crutch. I’m going up to London to-night.”

Mr. Leveson’s lower jaw literally fell with astonishment.

“The Doctor said three weeks,” he said. “If I may ask it, where are you going?”


“Surely,” said Mr. Leveson, “I could take a message.”

“You could take a message,” assented Ivywood, “I’m afraid they would not allow you to make a speech.”

It was a moment or two afterward that Enid Wimpole had come into the room, and striven in vain to shake his decision. Then it was that Joan had been brought out of the turret and saw Philip standing, sustained upon a crutch of garden timber; and admired him as she had never admired him before. While he was being helped downstairs, while he was being propped in the car with such limited comfort as was possible, she did really feel in him something worthy of his ancient roots, worthy of such hills and of such a sea. For she felt God’s wind from nowhere which is called the Will; and is man’s only excuse upon this earth. In the small toot of the starting motor she could hear a hundred trumpets, such as might have called her ancestors and his to the glories of the Third Crusade.

Such imaginary military honours were not, at least in the strategic sense, undeserved. Lord Ivywood really had seen the whole map of the situation in front of him, and swiftly formed a plan to meet it, in a manner not unworthy of Napoleon. The realities of the situation unrolled themselves before him, and his mind was marking them one by one as with a pencil.

First, he knew that Dalroy would probably go to the Model Village. It was just the sort of place he would go to. He knew Dalroy was almost constitutionally incapable of not kicking up some kind of row in a place of that kind.

Second, he knew that if he missed Dalroy at this address, it was very likely to be his last address; he and Mr. Pump were quite clever enough to leave no more hints behind.

Third, he guessed, by careful consideration of map and clock, that they could not get to so remote a region in so cheap a car under something like two days,
nor do anything very conclusive in less than three. Thus, he had just time to turn round in.

Fourth, he realised that ever since that day when Dalroy swung round the sign–board and smote the policeman into the ditch, Dalroy had swung round the Ivywood Act on Lord Ivywood. He (Lord Ivywood) had thought, and might well have thought rightly, that by restricting the old sign–posts to a few places so select that they can afford to be eccentric, and forbidding such artistic symbols to all other places, he could sweep fermented liquor for all practical purposes out of the land. The arrangement was exactly that at which all such legislation is consciously or unconsciously aiming. A sign–board could be a favour granted by the governing class to itself. If a gentleman wished to claim the liberties of a Bohemian, the path would be open. If a Bohemian wished to claim the liberties of a gentleman, the path would be shut. So, gradually, Lord Ivywood had thought, the old signs which can alone sell alcohol, will dwindle down to mere curiosities, like Audit Ale or the Mead that may still be found in the New Forest. The calculation was by no means unstatesmanlike. But, like many other statesmanlike calculations, it did not take into account the idea of dead wood walking about. So long as his flying foes might set up their sign anywhere, it mattered little whether the result was enjoyment or disappointment for the populace. In either case it must mean constant scandal or riot. If there was one thing worse than the appearance of “The Old Ship” it was its disappearance.

He realised that his own law was letting them loose every time; for the local authorities hesitated to act on the spot, in defiance of a symbol now so exclusive and therefore impressive. He realised that the law must be altered. Must be altered at once. Must be altered, if possible, before the fugitives broke away from the Model Village of Peaceways.

He realised that it was Thursday. This was the day on which any private member of Parliament could introduce any private bill of the kind called “non–contentious,” and pass it without a division, so long as no particular member made any particular fuss. He realised that it was improbable that any particular member would make any particular fuss about Lord Ivywood’s own improvement on Lord Ivywood’s own Act.

Finally, he realised that the whole case could be met by so slight an improvement as this. Change the words of the Act (which he knew by heart, as happier men might know a song): “If such sign be present liquids containing alcohol can be sold on the premises,” to these other words: “Liquids containing alcohol can be sold, if previously preserved for three days on the premises”; it
was mate in a few moves. Parliament could never reject or even examine so slight an emendation. And the revolution of “The Old Ship” and the late King of Ithaca would be crushed for ever.

It does undoubtedly show, as we have said, something Napoleonic in the man’s mind that the whole of this excellent and even successful plan was complete long before he saw the great glowing clock on the towers of Westminster; and knew he was in time.

It was unfortunate, perhaps, that about the same time, or not long after, another gentleman of the same rank, and indirectly of the same family, having left the restaurant in Regent Street and the tangle of Piccadilly, had drifted serenely down Whitehall, and had seen the same great golden goblin’s eye on the tall tower of St. Stephen.

The Poet of the Birds, like most aesthetes, had known as little of the real town as he had of the real country. But he had remembered a good place for supper; and as he passed certain great cold clubs, built of stone and looking like Assyrian Sarcophagi, he remembered that he belonged to many of them. And so when he saw afar off, sitting above the river, what has been very erroneously described as the best club in London, he suddenly remembered that he belonged to that too. He could not at the moment recall what constituency in South England it was that he sat for; but he knew he could walk into the place if he wanted to. He might not so have expressed the matter, but he knew that in an oligarchy things go by respect for persons and not for claims; by visiting cards and not by voting cards. He had not been near the place for years, being permanently paired against a famous Patriot who had accepted an important government appointment in a private madhouse. Even in his silliest days, he had never pretended to feel any respect for modern politics, and made all haste to put his “leaders” and the mad patriot’s “leaders” on the well selected list of the creatures whom man forgets. He had made one really eloquent speech in the House (on the subject of gorillas), and then found he was speaking against his party. It was an indescribable sort of place, anyhow. Even Lord Ivywood did not go to it except to do some business that could be done nowhere else; as was the case that night.

Ivywood was what is called a peer by courtesy; his place was in the Commons, and for the time being on the Opposition side. But, though he visited the House but seldom, he knew far too much about it to go into the Chamber itself. He limped into the Smoking Room (though he did not smoke), procured a needless cigarette and a much–needed sheet of note–paper, and composed a curt
but careful note to the one member of the government whom he knew must be in
the House. Having sent it up to him, he waited.

Outside, Mr. Dorian Wimpole also waited, leaning on the parapet of
Westminster Bridge and looking down the river. He was becoming one with the
oysters in a more solemn and solid sense than he had hitherto conceived
possible, and also with a strictly Vegetarian beverage which bears the noble and
starry name of Nuits. He felt at peace with all things, even in a manner with
politics. It was one of those magic hours of evening when the red and golden
lights of men are already lit along the river, and look like the lights of goblins,
but daylight still lingers in a cold and delicate green. He felt about the river
something of that smiling and glorious sadness which two Englishmen have
expressed under the figure of the white wood of an old ship fading like a
phantom; Turner, in painting, and Henry Newbolt, in poetry. He had come back
to earth like a man fallen from the moon; he was at bottom not only a poet but a
patriot, and a patriot is always a little sad. Yet his melancholy was mixed up
with that immutable yet meaningless faith which few Englishmen, even in
modern times, fail to feel at the unexpected sight either of Westminster or of that
height on which stands the temple of St. Paul.

“While flows the sacred river, While stands the sacred hill,”

he murmured in some schoolboy echo of the ballad of Lake Regillus,

“While flows the sacred river, While stands the sacred hill, The proud old
pantaloons and nincompoops, Who yawn at the very length of their own lies in
that accursed sanhedrim where people put each other’s hats on in a poisonous
room with no more windows than hell Shall have such honour still.”

Relieved by this rendering of Macaulay in the style known among his cultured
friends as vers libre, or poesy set free from the shackles of formal metre, he
strolled toward the members’ entrance and went in.

Lacking Lord Ivywood’s experience, he strolled into the Common’s Chamber
itself and sat down on a green bench, under the impression that the House was
not sitting. He was, however, gradually able to distinguish some six or eight
drowsy human forms from the seats on which they sat; and to hear a senile voice
with an Essex accent, saying, all on one note, and without beginning or end, in a
manner which it is quite impossible to punctuate,

“. . . no wish at all that this proposal should be regarded except in the right
way and have tried to put it in the right way and cannot think the honourable
member was altogether adding to his reputation in putting it in what those who
think with me must of course consider the wrong way and I for one am free to
say that if in his desire to settle this great question he takes this hasty course and this revolutionary course about slate pencils he may not be able to prevent the extremists behind him from applying it to lead pencils and while I should be the last to increase the heat and the excitement and the personalities of this debate if I could possibly help it I must confess that in my opinion the honourable gentleman has himself encouraged that heat and personality in a manner that he now doubtless regrets I have no desire to use abusive terms indeed you Mr. Speaker would not allow me of course to use abusive terms but I must tell the honourable member face to face that the perambulators with which he has twitted me cannot be germane to this discussion I should be the last person. . . .”

Dorian Wimpole had softly risen to go, when he was arrested by the sight of someone sliding into the House and handing a note to the solitary young man with heavy eyelids who was at that moment governing all England from the Treasury Bench. Seeing him go out, Dorian had a sickening sweetness of hope (as he might have said in his earlier poems), that something intelligible might happen after all, and followed him out almost with alacrity.

The solitary and sleepy governor of Great Britain went down into the lower crypts of its temple of freedom and turned into an apartment where Wimpole was astonished to see his cousin Ivywood sitting at a little table with a large crutch leaning beside him, as serene as Long John Silver. The young man with the heavy eyelids sat down opposite him and they had a conversation which Wimpole, of course, did not hear. He withdrew into an adjoining room where he managed to procure coffee and a liqueur; an excellent liqueur which he had forgotten and of which he had more than one glass.

But he had so posted himself that Ivywood could not come out without passing him, and he waited for what might happen with exquisite patience. The only thing that seemed to him queer was that every now and then a bell rang in several rooms at once. And whenever the bell rang, Lord Ivywood nodded, as if he were part of the electrical machinery. And whenever Lord Ivywood nodded the young man turned and sped upstairs like a mountaineer, returning in a short time to resume the conversation. On the third occasion the poet began to observe that many others from the other rooms could be heard running upstairs at the sound of this bell, and returning with the slightly less rapid step which expresses relief after a duty done. Yet did he not know that this duty was Representative Government; and that it is thus that the cry of Cumberland or Cornwall can come to the ears of an English King.

Suddenly the sleepy young man sprang erect, uninspired by any bell, and
strode out once more. The poet could not help hearing him say as he left the table, jotting down something with a pencil: “Alcohol can be sold if previously preserved for three days on the premises. I think we can do it, but you can’t come on for half an hour.”

Saying this, he darted upstairs again, and when Dorian saw Ivywood come out laboriously, afterward, on his large country crutch, he had exactly the same revulsion in his favour that Joan had had. Jumping up from his table, which was in one of the private dining–rooms, he touched the other on the elbow and said:

“I want to apologise to you, Philip, for my rudeness this afternoon. Honestly, I am sorry. Pinewoods and prison–cells try a man’s temper, but I had no rag of excuse for not seeing that for neither of them were you to blame. I’d no notion you were coming up to town tonight; with your leg and all. You mustn’t knock yourself up like this. Do sit down a minute.”

It seemed to him that the bleak face of Philip softened a little; how far he really softened will never be known until such men as he are understood by their fellows. It is certain that he carefully unhooked himself from his crutch and sat down opposite his cousin. Whereupon his cousin struck the table so that it rang like a dinner–bell and called out, “Waiter!” as if he were in a crowded restaurant. Then, before Lord Ivywood could protest, he said:

“It’s awfully jolly that we’ve met. I suppose you’ve come up to make a speech. I should like to hear it. We haven’t always agreed; but, by God, if there’s anything good left in literature it’s your speeches reported in a newspaper. That thing of yours that ended, ‘death and the last shutting of the iron doors of defeat’—Why you must go back to Strafford’s last speech for such English. Do let me hear your speech! I’ve got a seat upstairs, you know.”

“If you wish it,” said Ivywood hurriedly, “but I shan’t make much of a speech to–night.” And he looked at the wall behind Wimpole’s head with thunderous wrinkles thickening on his brow. It was essential to his brilliant and rapid scheme, of course, that the Commons should make no comment at all on his little alteration in the law.

An attendant hovered near in response to the demand for a waiter, and was much impressed by the presence and condition of Lord Ivywood. But as that exalted cripple resolutely refused anything in the way of liquor, his cousin was so kind as to have a little more himself, and resumed his remarks.

“It’s about this public–house affair of yours, I suppose. I’d like to hear you speak on that. P’raps I’ll speak myself. I’ve been thinking about it a good deal all day, and a good deal of last night, too. Now, here’s what I should say to the
House, if I were you. To begin with, can you abolish the public-house? Are you important enough now to abolish the public-house? Whether it’s right or wrong, can you in the long run prevent haymakers having ale any more than you can prevent me having this glass of Chartreuse?”

The attendant, hearing the word, once more drew near; but heard no further order; or, rather, the orders he heard were such as he was less able to cope with.

“Remember the curate!” said Dorian, abstractedly shaking his head at the functionary, “remember the sensible little High–Church curate, who when asked for a Temperance Sermon preached on the text ‘Suffer us not to be overwhelmed in the water–floods.’ Indeed, indeed, Philip, you are in deeper waters than you know. You will abolish ale! You will make Kent forget hop–poles, and Devonshire forget cider! The fate of the Inn is to be settled in that hot little room upstairs! Take care its fate and yours are not settled in the Inn. Take care Englishmen don’t sit in judgment on you as they do on many another corpse at an inquest—at a common public–house! Take care that the one tavern that is really neglected and shut up and passed like a house of pestilence is not the tavern in which I drink to–night, and that merely because it is the worst tavern on the King’s highway. Take care this place where we sit does not get a name like any pub where sailors are hocussed or girls debauched. That is what I shall say to them,” said he, rising cheerfully, “that’s what I shall say. See you to it,” he cried with sudden passion and apparently to the waiter, “see you to it if the sign that is destroyed is not the sign of ‘The Old Ship’ but the sign of the Mace and Bauble, and, in the words of a highly historical brewer, if we see a dog bark at your going.”

Lord Ivywood was observing him with a deathly quietude; another idea had come into his fertile mind. He knew his cousin, though excited, was not in the least intoxicated; he knew he was quite capable of making a speech and even a good one. He knew that any speech, good or bad, would wreck his whole plan and send the wild inn flying again. But the orator had resumed his seat and drained his glass, passing a hand across his brow. And he remembered that a man who keeps a vigil in a wood all night and drinks wine on the following evening is liable to an accident that is not drunkenness, but something much healthier.

“I suppose your speech will come on pretty soon,” said Dorian, looking at the table. “You’ll let me know when it does, of course. Really and truly, I don’t want to miss it. And I’ve forgotten all the ways here, and feel pretty tired. You’ll let me know?”
“Yes,” said Lord Ivywood.
Stillness fell along all the rooms until Lord Ivywood broke it by saying:
“Debate is a most necessary thing; but there are times when it rather impedes
than assists parliamentary government.”
He received no reply. Dorian still sat as if looking at the table, but his eyelids
had lightly fallen; he was asleep. Almost at the same moment the Member of
Government, who was nearly asleep, appeared at the entrance of the long room
and made some sort of weary signal.
Philip Ivywood raised himself on his crutch and stood for a moment looking at
the sleeping man. Then he and his crutch trailed out of the long room, leaving
the sleeping man behind. Nor was that the only thing that he left behind. He also
left behind an unlighted cigarette and his honour and all the England of his
father’s; everything that could really distinguish that high house beside the river
from any tavern for the hocussing of sailors. He went upstairs and did his
business in twenty minutes in the only speech he had ever delivered without any
trace of eloquence. And from that hour forth he was the naked fanatic; and could
feed on nothing but the future.
CHAPTER XVIII

THE REPUBLIC OF PEACEWAYS

IN a hamlet round about Windermere, let us say, or somewhere in Wordsworth’s country, there could be found a cottage, in which could be found a cottager. So far all is as it should be; and the visitor would first be conscious of a hearty and even noisy elderly man, with an apple face and a short white beard. This person would then loudly proffer to the visitor the opportunity of seeing his father, a somewhat more elderly man, with a somewhat longer white beard, but still “up and about.” And these two together would then initiate the neophyte into the joys of the society of a grandfather, who was more than a hundred years old, and still very proud of the fact.

This miracle, it seemed, had been worked entirely on milk. The subject of this diet the oldest of the three men continued to discuss in enormous detail. For the rest, it might be said that his pleasures were purely arithmetical. Some men count their years with dismay, and he counted his with a juvenile vanity. Some men collect stamps or coins, and he collected days. Newspaper men interviewed him about the historic times through which he had lived, without eliciting anything whatever; except that he had apparently taken to an exclusive milk diet at about the age when most of us leave it off. Asked if he was alive in 1815, he said that was the very year he found it wasn’t any milk, but must be Mountain Milk, like Dr. Meadows says. Nor would his calculating creed of life have allowed him to understand you if you had said that in a meadowland oversea that lies before the city of Brussels, boys of his old school in that year gained the love of the gods and died young.

It was the philanthropic Dr. Meadows, of course, who discovered this deathless tribe, and erected on it the whole of his great dietetic philosophy, to say nothing of the houses and dairies of Peaceways. He attracted many pupils and backers among the wealthy and influential; young men who were, so to speak, training for extreme old age, infant old men, embryo nonagenarians. It would be an exaggeration to say that they watched joyfully for the first white hair as Fascination Fledgeby watched for his first whisker; but it is quite true to say that they seemed to have scorned the beauty of woman and the feasting of friends and, above all, the old idea of death with glory; in comparison with this vision of the sports of second childhood.
Peaceways was in its essential plan much like what we call a Garden City; a ring of buildings where the work people did their work, with a pretty ornamental town in the centre, where they lived in the open country outside. This was no doubt much healthier than the factory system in the great towns and may have partly accounted for the serene expression of Dr. Meadows and his friends, if any part of the credit can be spared from the splendours of Mountain Milk. The place lay far from the common highways of England, and its inhabitants were enabled to enjoy their quiet skies and level woods almost undisturbed, and fully absorb whatever may be valuable in the Meadows method and view; until one day a small and very dirty motor drove into the middle of their town. It stopped beside one of those triangular islets of grass that are common at forked roads, and two men in goggles, one tall and the other short, got out and stood on the central space of grass, as if they were buffoons about to do tricks. As, indeed, they were.

Before entering the town they had stopped by a splendid mountain stream quickening and thickening rapidly into a river; unhelmed and otherwise eased themselves, eaten a little bread bought at Wyddington and drank the water of the widening current which opened on the valley of Peaceways.

“I’m beginning quite to like water,” said the taller of the two knights. “I used to think it a most dangerous drink. In theory, of course, it ought only to be given to people who are fainting. It’s really good for them, much better than brandy. Besides, think of wasting good brandy on people who are fainting! But I don’t go so far as I did; I shouldn’t insist on a doctor’s prescription before I allow people water. That was the too severe morality of youth; that was my innocence and goodness. I thought that if I fell once, water-drinking might become a habit. But I do see the good side of water now. How good it is when you’re really thirsty, how it glitters and gurgles! How alive it is! After all, it’s the best of drinks, after the other. As it says in the song:

“Feast on wine or fast on water, And your honour shall stand sure; God Almighty’s son and daughter, He the valiant, she the pure. If an angel out of heaven Brings you other things to drink, Thank him for his kind intentions, Go and pour them down the sink.

“Tea is like the East he grows in, A great yellow Mandarin, With urbanity of manner, And unconsciousness of sin; All the women, like a harem, At his pig-tail troop along, And, like all the East he grows in, He is Poison when he’s strong.

“Tea, although an Oriental, Is a gentleman at least; Cocoa is a cad and coward,
Cocoa is a vulgar beast; Cocoa is a dull, disloyal, Lying, crawling cad and clown, And may very well be grateful To the fool that takes him down.

“As for all the windy waters, They were rained like trumpets down, When good drink had been dishonoured By the tipplers of the town. When red wine had brought red ruin, And the death–dance of our times, Heaven sent us Soda Water As a torment for our crimes.”

“Upon my soul, this water tastes quite nice. I wonder what vintage now?” and he smacked his lips with solemnity. “It tastes just like the year 1881 tasted.”

“You can fancy anything in the tasting way,” returned his shorter companion. “Mr. Jack, who was always up to his tricks, did serve plain water in those little glasses they drink liqueurs out of, and everyone swore it was a delicious liqueur, and wanted to know where they could get it–all except old Admiral Guffin, who said it tasted too strong of olives. But water’s much the best for our game, certainly.”

Patrick nodded, and then said: “I doubt if I could do it, if it weren’t for the comfort of looking at that,” and he kicked the rum–keg, “and feeling we shall have a good swig at it some day. It feels like a fairy–tale, carrying that about–as if rum were a pirate’s treasure, as if it were molten gold. Besides, we can have such fun with it with other people–what was that joke I thought of this morning? Oh, I remember! Where’s that milk can of mine?”

For the next twenty minutes he was industriously occupied with his milk can and the cask; Pump watching him with an interest amounting to anxiety. Lifting his head, however, at the end of that time, he knotted his red brows and said, “What’s that?”

“What’s what?” asked the other traveller.

“That!” said Captain Patrick Dalroy, and pointed to a figure approaching on the road parallel to the river, “I mean, what’s it for?”

The figure had a longish beard and very long hair falling far below its shoulders. It had a serious and steadfast expression. It was dressed in what the inexperienced Mr. Pump at first took to be its nightgown; but afterward learned to be its complete goats’ hair tunic, unmixed even with a thread of the destructive and deadly wool of the sheep. It had no boots on its feet. It walked very swiftly to a particular turn of the stream and then turned very sharply (since it had accomplished its constitutional), and walked back toward the perfect town of Peaceways.

“I suppose it’s somebody from that milk place,” said Humphrey Pump,
indulgently. “They seem to be pretty mad.”

“I don’t mind that so much,” said Dalroy, “I’m mad myself sometimes. But a madman has only one merit and last link with God. A madman is always logical. Now what is the logical connection between living on milk and wearing your hair long? Most of us lived on milk when we had no hair at all. How do they connect it up? Are there any heads even for a synopsis? Is it, say, ‘milk–water–shaving–water–shaving–hair?’ Is it ‘milk–kindness–unkindness–convicts–hair?’ What is the logical connection between having too much hair and having far too few boots? What can it be? Is it ‘hair–hair–trunk–leather–trunk–leather–boots?’ Is it ‘hair–beard–oysters–seaside–paddling–no boots?’ Man is liable to err—especially when every mistake he makes is called a movement—but why should all the lunacies live together?”

“Because all the lunatics should live together,” said Humphrey, “and if you’d seen what happened up at Crampton, with the farming–out idea, you’d know. It’s all very well, Captain; but if people can prevent a guest of great importance being buried up to the neck in farm manure, they will. They will, really.” He coughed almost apologetically. He was about to attempt a resumption of the conversation, when he saw his companion slap the milk can and keg back into the car, and get into it himself. “You drive,” he said, “drive me where those things live; you know, Hump.”

They did not, however, arrive in the civic centre of such things without yet another delay. They left the river and followed the man with the long hair and the goatskin frock; and he stopped as it happened at a house on the outskirts of the village. The adventurers stopped also, out of curiosity, and were at first relieved to see the man almost instantly reappear, having transacted his business with a quickness that seemed incredible. A second glance showed them it was not the man, but another man dressed exactly like him. A few minutes more of inquisitive delay, showed them many of the kilty and goatish sect going in and out of this particular place, each clad in his innocent uniform.

“This must be the temple and chapel,” muttered Patrick, “it must be here they sacrifice a glass of milk to a cow, or whatever it is they do. Well, the joke is pretty obvious, but we must wait for a lull in the crowding of the congregation.”

When the last long–haired phantom had faded up the road, Dalroy sprang from the car and drove the sign–board deep into the earth with savage violence, and then very quietly knocked at the door.

The apparent owner of the place, of whom the two last of the long–haired and bare–footed idealists were taking a rather hurried farewell, was a man curiously
ill–fitted for the part he seemed cast for in the only possible plot.

Both Pump and Dalroy thought they had never seen a man look so sullen. His face was of the rubicund sort that does not suggest jollity, but merely a stagnant indigestion in the head. His mustache hung heavy and dark, his brows yet heavier and darker. Dalroy had seen something of the sort on the faces of defeated people disgracefully forced into submission, but he could not make head or tail of it in connection with the priggish perfections of Peaceways. It was all the odder because he was manifestly prosperous; his clothes were smartly cut in something of the sporting manner, and the inside of his house was at least four times grander than the outside.

But what mystified them most was this, that he did not so much exhibit the natural curiosity of a gentleman whose private house is entered by strangers, but rather an embarrassed and restless expectation. During Dalroy’s eager apologies and courteous inquiries about the direction and accommodations of Peaceways, his eye (which was of the boiled gooseberry order) perpetually wandered from them to the cupboard and then again to the window, and at last he got up and went to look out into the road.

“Oh, yes, sir; very healthy place, Peaceways,” he said, peering through the lattice. “Very . . . dash it, what do they mean? . . . Very healthy place. Of course they have their little ways.”

“All drink pure milk, don’t they?” asked Dalroy.

The householder looked at him with a rather wild eye and grunted.

“Yes; so they say,” and he went again to the window.

“I’ve bought some of it,” said Patrick, patting his pet milk can, which he carried under his arm, as if unable to be separated from Dr. Meadows’s discovery. “Have a glass of milk, sir.”

The man’s boiled eye began to bulge in anger—or some other emotion.

“What do you want?” he muttered, “are you ‘tecs or what?”

“Agents and Distributors of the Meadows’s Mountain Milk,” said the Captain, with simple pride, “taste it?”

The dazed householder took a glass of the blameless liquid and sipped it; and the change on his face was extraordinary.

“Well, I’m jiggered,” he said, with a broad and rather coarse grin. “That’s a queer dodge. You’re in the joke, I see.” Then he went again restlessly to the window; and added, “but if we’re all friends, why the blazes don’t the others come in? I’ve never known trade so slow before.”

“Who are the others?” asked Mr. Pump.
“Oh, the usual Peaceways people,” said the other. “They generally come here before work. Dr. Meadows don’t work them for very long hours, that wouldn’t be healthy or whatever he calls it; but he’s particular about their being punctual. I’ve seen ’em running, with all their pure-minded togs on, when the hooter gave the last call.”

Then he abruptly opened the front door and called out impatiently, but not loudly:

“Come along in if you’re coming. You’ll give the show away if you play the fool out there.”

Patrick looked out also and the view of the road outside was certainly rather singular. He was used to crowds, large and small, collecting outside houses which he had honoured with the sign of “The Old Ship,” but they generally stared up at it in unaffected wonder and amusement. But outside this open door, some twenty or thirty persons in what Pump had called their night-gowns were moving to and fro like somnambulists, apparently blind to the presence of the sign; looking at the other side of the road, looking at the horizon, looking at the clouds of morning; and only occasionally stopping to whisper to each other. But when the owner of the house called to one of these ostentatiously abstracted beings and asked him hoarsely what the devil was the matter, it was natural for the milk-fed one to turn his feeble eye toward the sign. The gooseberry eyes followed his, and the face to which they belonged was a study in apoplectic astonishment.

“What the hell have you done to my house?” he demanded. “Of course they can’t come in if this thing’s here.”

“I’ll take it down, if you like,” said Dalroy, stepping out and picking it up like a flower from the front garden (to the amazement of the men in the road, who thought they had strayed into a nursery fairy-tale), “but I wish, in return, you’d give me some idea of what the blazes all this means.”

“Wait till I’ve served these men,” replied his host.

The goat-garbed persons went very sheepishly (or goatishly) into the now signless building, and were rapidly served with raw spirits, which Mr. Pump suspected to be of no very superior quality. When the last goat was gone, Captain Dalroy said:

“I mean that all this seems to me topsy-turvy. I understood that as the law stands now, if there’s a sign they are allowed to drink and if there isn’t they aren’t.”

“The Law!” said the man, in a voice thick with scorn. “Do you think these
poor brutes are afraid of the Law as they are of the Doctor?”

“Why should they be afraid of the Doctor?” asked Dalroy, innocently. “I always heard that Peaceways was a self–governing republic.”

“Self–governing be damned,” was the illiberal reply. “Don’t he own all the houses and could turn ’em out in a snow storm? Don’t ‘e pay all the wages and could starve ’em stiff in a month? The Law!” And he snorted. A moment after he squared his elbows on the table and began to explain more fully.

“I was a brewer about here and had the biggest brewery in these parts. There were only two houses which didn’t belong to me, and the magistrates took away their licenses after a time. Ten years ago you could see Hugby’s Ales written beside every sign in the county. Then came these cursed Radicals, and our leader, Lord Ivywood, must go over to their side about it, and let this Doctor buy all the land under some new law that there shan’t be any pubs at all. And so my business is ruined so that he can sell his milk. Luckily I’d done pretty well before and had some compensation, of course; and I still do a fair trade on the Q.T., as you see. But of course that don’t amount to half the old one, for they’re afraid of old Meadows finding out. Snuffling old blighter!”

And the gentleman with the good clothes spat on the carpet.

“I am a Radical myself,” said the Irishman, rather coldly, “for all information on the Conservative party I must refer you to my friend, Mr. Pump, who is, of course, in the inmost secrets of his leaders. But it seems to me very rum sort of Radicalism to eat and drink at the orders of a master who is a madman, merely because he’s also a millionaire. 0 Liberty, what very complicated and even unsatisfactory social developments are committed in thy name! Why don’t they kick the old ass round the town a bit? No boots? Is that why they’re allowed no boots? Oh, roll him down hill in a milk can: he can’t object to that.”

“I don’t know,” said Pump, in his ruminant way, “Master Christian’s aunt did, but ladies are more particular, of course.”

“Look here!” cried Dalroy, in some excitement, “if I stick up that sign outside, and stay here to help, will you defy them? You’d be strictly within the law, and any private coercion I can promise you they shall repent. Plant the sign and sell the stuff openly like a man, and you may stand in English history like a deliverer.”

Mr. Hugby, of Hugby’s Ales, only looked gloomily at the table. His was not the sort of drinking nor the sort of drink–selling on which the revolutionary sentiment flourishes.

“Well,” said the Captain, “will you come with me and say ‘Hear, hear!’ and
‘How true!’—‘What matchless eloquence!’ if I make a speech in the market-place? Come along! There’s room in our car.”

“Well, I’ll come with you, if you like,” replied Mr. Hugby, heavily. “It’s true if yours is allowed we might get our trade back, too.” And putting on a silk hat he followed the Captain and the innkeeper out to their little car. The model village was not an appropriate background for Mr. Hugby’s silk hat. Indeed, the hat somehow seemed to bring out by contrast all that was fantastic in the place.

It was a superb morning, some hours after sunrise. The edges of the sky touching the ring of dim woods and distant hills were still jewelled with the tiny transparent clouds of daybreak, delicate red and green or yellow. But above the vault of Heaven rose through turquoise into a torrid and solid blue in which the other clouds, the colossal cumuli, tumbled about like a celestial pillow–fight. The bulk of the houses were as white as the clouds, so that it looked (to use another simile) as if some of the whitewashed cottages were flying and falling about the sky. But most of the white houses were picked out here and there with bright colours, here an ornament in orange or there a stripe of lemon yellow, as if by the brush of a baby giant. The houses had no thatching (thatching is not hygienic) but were mostly covered with a sort of peacock green tiles bought cheap at a Preraphaelite Bazaar; or, less frequently, by some still more esoteric sort of terra cotta bricks. The houses were not English, nor homelike, nor suited to the landscape; for the houses had not been built by free men for themselves, but at the fancy of a whimsical lord. But considered as a sort of elfin city in a pantomime it was a really picturesque background for pantomimic proceedings.

I fear Mr. Dalroy’s proceedings from the first rather deserved that name. To begin with, he left the sign, the cask, and the keg all wrapped and concealed in the car, but removed all the wraps of his own disguise, and stood on the central patch of grass in that green uniform that looked all the more insolent for being as ragged as the grass. Even that was less ragged than his red hair, which no red jungle of the East could imitate. Then he took out, almost tenderly, the large milk can, and deposited it, almost reverently, on the island of turf. Then he stood beside it, like Napoleon beside a gun, with an expression of tremendous seriousness and even severity. Then he drew his sword, and with that flashing weapon, as with a flail, lashed and thrashed the echoing metal can till the din was deafening, and Mr. Hugby hastily got out of the car and withdrew to a slight distance, stopping his ears. Mr. Pump sat solidly at the steering wheel, well knowing it might be necessary to start in some haste.

“Gather, gather, gather, Peaceways,” shouted Patrick, still banging on the can
and lamenting the difficulties of adapting “Macgregor’s Gathering” to the name and occasion, “We’re landless, landless, landless, Peaceways!”

Two or three of the goat-clad, recognising Mr. Hugby with a guilty look, drew near with great caution, and the Captain shouted at them as if they were an army covering Salisbury Plain.

“Citizens,” he roared, saying anything that came into his head, “try the only original unadulterated Mountain Milk, for which alone Mahomet came to the mountain. The original milk of the land flowing with milk and honey; the high quality of which could alone have popularised so unappetising a combination. Try our milk! None others are genuine! Who can do without milk. Even whales can’t do without milk. If any lady or gentleman keeps a favourite whale at home, now’s their chance! The early whale catches the milk. Just look at our milk! If you say you can’t look at the milk, because it’s in the can—well, look at the can! You must look at the can! You simply must! When Duty whispers low ‘Thou Must!’” he bellowed at the top of his voice in a highly impromptu peroration, “When Duty whispers low ‘Thou Must,’ the Youth replies, ‘I can!’” And with the word “Can” he hit the can with a shocking and shattering noise, like a peal of demoniac bells of steel.

This introductory speech is open to criticism from those who regard it as intended for the study rather than the stage. The present chronicler (who has no aim save truth) is bound to record that for its own unscrupulous purpose it was extremely successful: a great mass of the citizens of Peaceways having been attracted by the noise of one man shouting like a crowd. There are crowds who do not care to revolt; but there are no crowds who do not like someone else to do it for them; a fact which the safest oligarchs may be wise to learn.

But Dalroy’s ultimate triumph (I regret to say) consisted in actually handing to a few of the foremost of his audience some samples of his blameless beverage. The fact was certainly striking. Some were paralysed with surprise. Some were abruptly broken double with laughter. Many chuckled. Some cheered. All looked radiantly toward the eccentric orator.

And yet the radiance died quietly and suddenly from their faces. And only because one little old man had joined the group; a little old man in white linen with a white pointed beard and a white powder–puff of hair like thistledown: a man whom almost every man present could have killed with the left arm.
CHAPTER XIX

THE HOSPITALITY OF THE CAPTAIN

DR. MOSES MEADOWS, whether that was his name or an Anglicised version of it, had certainly come in the first instance from a little town in Germany and his first two books were written in German. His first two books were his best, for he began with a genuine enthusiasm for physical science, and this was adulterated with nothing worse than a hatred of what he thought was superstition, and what many of us think is the soul of the state. The first enthusiasm was most notable in the first book, which was concerned to show that “in the female not upsprouting of the whiskers was from the therewith increasing arrested mentality derived.” In his second book he came more to grips with delusions, and for some time he was held to have proved (to everyone who agreed with him already) that the Time Ghost had been walking particularly “rapidly, lately; and that the Christus Mythus was by the alcoholic mind’s trouble explained.” Then, unfortunately, he came across the institution called Death, and began to argue with it. Not seeing any rational explanation of this custom of dying, so prevalent among his fellow–citizens, he concluded that it was merely traditional (which he thought meant “effete”), and began to think of nothing but ways of evading or delaying it. This had a rather narrowing effect on him, and he lost much of that acrid ardour which had humanised the atheism of his youth, when he would almost have committed suicide for the pleasure of taunting God with not being there. His later idealism grew more and more into materialism and consisted of his changing hypotheses and discoveries about the healthiest foods. There is no need to detain the reader over what has been called his Oil Period; his Sea–weed Period has been authoritatively expounded in Professor Nym’s valuable little work; and on the events of his Glue Period it is, perhaps, not very generous to dwell. It was during his prolonged stay in England that he chanced on the instance of the longevity of milk consumers, and built on it a theory which was, at the beginning at least, sincere. Unfortunately it was also successful: wealth flowed in to the inventor and proprietor of Mountain Milk, and he began to feel a fourth and last enthusiasm, which, also, can come late in life and have a narrowing effect on the mind.

In the altercation which naturally followed on his discovery of the antics of Mr. Patrick Dalroy, he was very dignified, but naturally not very tolerant; for he
was quite unused to anything happening in spite of him, or anything important even happening without him, in the land that lay around. At first he hinted severely that the Captain had stolen the milk can from the milk–producing premises, and sent several workmen to count the cans in each shed; but Dalroy soon put him right about that.

“I bought it in a shop at Wyddington,” he said, “and since then I have used no other. You’ll hardly believe me” he said, with some truth, “but when I went into that shop I was quite a little man. I had one glass of your Mountain Milk; and look at me now.”

“You have no right to sell the milk here,” said Dr. Meadows, with the faintest trace of a German accent. “You are not in my employment; I am not responsible for your methods. You are not a representative of the business.”

“I’m an Advertisement,” said the Captain. “We advertise you all over England. You see that lean, skimp[y] little man over there,” pointing to the indignant Mr. Pump, “He’s Before Taking Meadows’s Mountain Milk. I’m After,” added Mr. Dalroy, with satisfaction.

“You shall laugh at the magistrate,” said the other, with a thickening accent.

“I shall,” agreed Patrick. “Well, I’ll make a clean breast of it, sir. The truth is it isn’t your milk at all. It has quite a different taste. These gentlemen will tell you so.”

A smothered giggle sent all the blood to the eminent capitalist’s face.

“Then, either you have stolen my can and are a thief,” he said, stamping, “or you have introduced inferior substances into my discovery and are an adulterer–er–”

“Try adulteratist,” said Dalroy, kindly. “Prince Albert always said ‘adulteratarian.’ Dear old Albert! It seems like yesterday! But it is, of course, today. And it’s as true as daylight that this stuff tastes different. I can’t tell you what the taste is” (subdued guffaws from the outskirts of the crowd). “It’s something between the taste of your first sugar–stick and the fag–end of your father’s cigar. It’s as innocent as Heaven and as hot as hell. It tastes like a paradox. It tastes like a prehistoric inconsistency–I trust I make myself clear. The men who taste it most are the simplest men that God has made, and it always reminds them of the salt, because it is made out of sugar. Have some!”

And with a gesture of staggering hospitality, he shot out his long arm with the little glass at the end of it. The despotic curiosity in the Prussian overcame even his despotic dignity. He took a sip of the liquid, and his eyes stood out from his face.
“You’ve been mixing something with the milk,” were the first words that came to him.

“Yes,” answered Dalroy, “and so have you, unless you’re a swindler. Why is your milk advertised as different from everyone else’s milk, if you haven’t made the difference? Why does a glass of your milk cost three pence, and a glass of ordinary milk, a penny, if you haven’t put twopennyworth of something into it? Now, look here, Dr. Meadows. The Public Analyst who would judge this, happens to be an honest man. I have a list of the twenty-one and a half honest men still employed in such posts. I make you a fair offer. He shall decide what it is I add to the milk, if you let him decide what it is you add to the milk. You must add something to the milk, or what can all these wheels and pumps and pulleys be for? Will you tell me, here and now, what you add to the milk which makes it so exceedingly Mountain?”

There was a long silence, full of the same sense of submerged mirth in the mob. But the philanthropist had fallen into a naked frenzy in the sunlight, and shaking his fists aloft in a way unknown to all the English around him, he cried out:

“Ach! but I know what you add! I know what you add! It is the Alcohol! And you have no sign and you shall laugh at a magistrate.”

Dalroy, with a bow, retired to the car, removed a number of wrappings and produced the prodigious wooden sign–post of “The Old Ship,” with its blue three-decker and red St. George’s cross conspicuously displayed. This he planted on his narrow territory of turf and looked round serenely.

“In this old oak–panelled inn of mine,” he said, “I will laugh at a million magistrates. Not that there’s anything unhygienic about this inn. No low ceilings or stuffiness here. Windows open everywhere, except in the floor. And as I hear some are saying there ought always to be food sold with fermented liquor, why, my dear Dr. Meadows, I’ve got a cheese here that will make another man of you. At least, we’ll hope so. We can but try.”

But Dr. Meadows was long past being merely angry. The exhibition of the sign had put him into a serious difficulty. Like most sceptics, like even the most genuine sceptics such as Bradlaugh, he was as legal as he was sceptical. He had a profound fear, which also had in it something better than fear, of being ultimately found in the wrong in a police court or a public inquiry. And he also suffered the tragedy of all such men living in modern England; that he must always be certain to respect the law, while never being certain of what it was. He could only remember generally that Lord Ivywood, when introducing or
defending the great Ivywood Act on this matter, had dwelt very strongly on the
unique and significant nature of the sign. And he could not be certain that if he
disregarded it altogether, he might not eventually be cast in heavy damages—or
even go to prison, in spite of his success in business. Of course he knew quite
well that he had a thousand answers to such nonsense: that a patch of grass in the
road couldn’t be an inn; that the sign wasn’t even produced when the Captain
began to hand round the rum. But he also knew quite well that in the black peril
we call British law that is not the point. He had heard points quite as obvious
urged to a judge and urged in vain. At the bottom of his mind he found this fact:
rich as he was, Lord Ivywood had made him—and on which side would Lord
Ivywood be?

“Captain,” said Humphrey Pump, speaking for the first time, “we’d better be
getting away. I feel it in my bones.”

“Inhospitable innkeeper!” cried the Captain, indignantly. “And after I have
gone out of the way to license your premises! Why, this is the dawn of peace in
the great city of Peaceways. I don’t despair of Dr. Meadows tossing off another
bumper before we’ve done. For the moment, Brother Hugby will engage.”

As he spoke, he served out milk and rum at random; and still the Doctor had
too much terror of our legal technicalities to make a final interference. But when
Mr. Hugby, of Hugby’s Ales, heard his name called, he first of all jumped so as
almost to dislodge the silk hat, then he stood quite still. Then he accepted a glass
of the new Mountain Milk; and then his very face became full of speech, before
he had spoken a word.

“There’s a motor coming along the road from the far hills,” said Humphrey,
quietly. “It’ll be across the last bridge down stream in ten minutes and come up
on this side.”

“Well,” said the Captain, impatiently, “I suppose you’ve seen a motor before.”

“Not in this valley all this morning,” answered Pump.

“Mr. Chairman,” said Mr. Hugby, feeling a dim disposition to say “Mr. Vice,”
in memory of old commercial banquets, “I’m sure we’re all law–abiding people
here, and wish to remain friends, especially with our good friend the Doctor;
may he never want a friend or a bottle—that is in short, anything he wants, as we
go up the hill of prosperity, and so on. But, as our friend here with the sign–
board seems to be within his rights, well, I think the time’s come when we can
look at these things more broadly, so to speak. Now I know it’s quite true those
dirty little pubs do a lot of harm to a property, and you get a lot of ignorant
people there who are just like pigs; and I don’t say our friend the Doctor hasn’t
done good by clearing 'em away. But a big, well–managed business with plenty of capital behind it is quite another thing. Well, friends, you all know that I was originally in the Trade; though I have, of course, left off selling under the new regulations.” Here the goats looked rather guiltily at their cloven hoofs. “But I’ve got my little bit and I wouldn’t mind putting it into this ‘Old Ship’ here, if our friend would allow it to be run on business lines. And especially if he’d enlarge the premises a bit. Ha! ha! And if our good friend, the Doctor–”

“You rascal fellow!” spluttered Meadows, “your goot friend the doctor will make you dance before a magistrate.”

“Now, don’t be unbusinesslike,” reasoned the brewer. “It won’t hurt your sales. It’s quite a different public, don’t you see? Do talk like a business man.”

“I am not a business man,” said the scientist, with fiery eyes, “I am a servant of humanity.”

“Then,” said Dalroy, “why do you never do what your master tells you?”

“The motor has crossed the river,” said Humphrey Pump.

“You would undo all my works,” cried the Doctor, with sincere passion. “When I have built this town myself, when I have made it sober and healthful myself, when I am awake and about before anyone in the town myself, watching over its interests—you would ruin all to sell your barbaric and fundamentally beastly beer. And then you call me a goot friend. I am not a goot friend!”

“That I can’t say,” growled Hugby, “but if it comes to that–aren’t you trying to sell–”

A motor car drove up with a white explosion of dust, and about six very dusty people got out of it. Even through the densest disguise of the swift motorist, Pump perceived in many of them the peculiar style and bodily carriage of the police. The most evident exception was a long and more slender figure, which, on removing its cap and goggles, disclosed the dark and drooping features of J. Leveson, Secretary. He walked across to the little, old millionaire, who instantly recognized him and shook hands. They confabulated for some little time, turning over some official documents. Dr. Meadows cleared his throat and said to the whole crowd.

“I am very glad to be able to announce to you all that this extraordinary outrage has been too late attempted. Lord Ivywood, with the promptitude he so invariably shows, has immediately communicated to places of importance such as this a most just and right alteration of the law, which exactly meets the present case.

“We shall sleep in jail tonight,” said Humphrey, Pump. “I know it in my
bones."

"It is enough to say," proceeded the millionaire, "that by the law as it now stands, any innkeeper, even if he display a sign, is subject to imprisonment if he sells alcohol on premises where it has not been previously kept for three days."

"I thought it would be something like that," muttered Pump. "Shall we give up, Captain, or shall we try a bolt for it?"

Even the impudence of Dalroy appeared for the instant dazed and stilled. He was staring forlornly up into the abyss of sky above him, as if, like Shelley, he could get inspiration from the last and purest clouds and the perfect hues of the ends of Heaven.

At last he said, in a soft and meditative voice, the single syllable, "Sells!"

Pump looked at him sharply with a remarkable expression growing on his grim face. But the Doctor was far too rabidly rejoicing in his triumph to understand the Captain’s meaning.

"Sells alcohol, are the exact words," he insisted, brandishing the blue oblong of the new Act of Parliament.

"So far as I am concerned they are inexact words," said Captain Dalroy, with polite indifference. "I have not been selling alcohol, I have been giving it away. Has anybody here paid me money? Has anybody here seen anybody else pay me money? I’m a philanthropist just like Dr. Meadows. I’m his living image!"

Mr. Leveson and Dr. Meadows looked across at each other, and on the face of the first was consternation, and on the second a full return of all his terrors of the complicated law.

"I shall remain here for several weeks," continued the Captain, leaning elegantly on the can, "and shall give away, gratis, such supplies of this excellent drink as may be demanded by the citizens. It appears that there is no such supply at present in this district, and I feel sure that no person present can object to so strictly legal and highly charitable an arrangement."

In this he was apparently in error; for several persons present seemed to object to it. But curiously enough it was not the withered and fanatical face of the philanthropist Meadows, nor the dark and equine face of the official Leveson, which stood out most vividly as a picture of protest. The face most strangely unsympathetic with this form of charity was that of the ex–proprietor of Hugby’s Ales. His gooseberry eyes were almost dropping from his head and his words sprang from his lips before he could stop them.

"And you blooming well think you can come here like a big buffoon, you
beast, and take away all my trade—"

Old Meadows turned on him with the swiftness of an adder.

“And what is your trade, Mr. Hugby?” he asked.

The brewer bubbled with a sort of bursting anger. The goats all looked at the ground as is, according to a Roman poet, the habit of the lower animals. Man (in the character of Mr. Patrick Dalroy) taking advantage of a free but fine translation of the Latin passage, “looked aloft, and with uplifted eyes beheld his own hereditary skies.”

“Well, all I can say is,” roared Mr. Hugby, “if the police come all this way and can’t lock up a dirty loafer whose coat’s all in rags, there’s an end of me paying these fat infernal taxes and—”

“Yes,” said Dalroy, in a voice that fell like an axe, “there is an end of you, please God. It’s brewers like you that have made the inns stink with poison, till even good men asked for no inns at all. And you are worse than the teetotallers, for you prevented what they never knew. And as for you, eminent man of science, great philanthropist, idealist and destroyer of inns, let me give one cold fact for your information. You are not respected. You are obeyed. Why should I or anyone respect you particularly? You say you built this town and get up at daybreak to watch this town. You built it for money and you watch it for more money. Why should I respect you because you are fastidious about food, that your poor old digestion may outlive the hearts of better men? Why should you be the god of this valley, whose god is your belly, merely because you do not even love your god, but only fear him? Go home to your prayers, old man; for all men shall die. Read the Bible, if you like, as they do in your German home; and I suppose you once read it to pick texts as you now read it to pick holes. I don’t read it myself, I’m afraid, but I remember some words in old Mulligan’s translation; and I leave them with you. ‘Unless God,’” and he made a movement with his arm, so natural and yet so vast that for an instant the town really looked like a toy of bright coloured cardboard at the feet of the giant; “‘unless God build the city, their labour is but lost that build it; unless God keep the city, the watchman watcheth in vain. It is lost labour that you rise up early in the morning and eat the bread of carefulness; while He giveth His beloved sleep.’ Try and understand what that means, and never mind whether it’s Elohistic. And now, Hump, we’ll away and away. I’m tired of the green tiles over there. Come, fill up my cup,” and he banged down the cask in the car, “come saddle my horses and call out my men. And tremble, gay goats, in the midst of your glee; for you’ve no’ seen the last of my milk can and me.”
This song was joyously borne away with Mr. Dalroy in the disappearing car; and the motorists were miles beyond pursuit from Peaceways before they thought of halting again. But they were still beside the bank of that noble and enlarging river; and in a place of deep fern and fairy–ribboned birches with the glowing and gleaming water behind them, Patrick asked his friend to stop the car.

“By the way,” said Humphrey, suddenly, “there was one thing I didn’t understand. Why was he so afraid of the Public Analyst? What poison and chemicals does he put in the milk?”

“H20,” answered the Captain, “I take it without milk myself.”

And he bent over as if to drink of the stream, as he had done at daybreak.
CHAPTER XX

THE TURK AND THE FUTURISTS

MR. ADRIAN CROOKE was a successful chemist whose shop was in the neighbourhood of Victoria, but his face expressed more than is generally required in a successful chemist. It was a curious face, prematurely old and like parchment, but acute and decisive, with real headwork in every line of it. Nor was his conversation, when he did converse, out of keeping with this: he had lived in many countries, and had a rich store of anecdote about the more quaint and sometimes the more sinister side of his work, visions of the vapour of eastern drugs or guesses at the ingredients of Renascence poisons. He himself, it need hardly be said, was a most respectable and reliable apothecary, or he would not have had the custom of families, especially among the upper classes; but he enjoyed as a hobby, the study of the dark days and lands where his science had lain sometimes on the borders of magic and sometimes upon the borders of murder. Hence it often happened that persons, who in their serious senses were well aware of his harmless and useful habits, would leave his shop on some murky and foggy night, with their heads so full of wild tales of the eating of hemp or the poisoning of roses, they could hardly help fancying that the shop, with its glowing moon of crimson or saffron, like bowls of blood and sulphur, was really a house of the Black Art.

It was doubtless for such conversational pleasures, in part, that Hibbs However entered the shop; as well as for a small glass of the same restorative medicine which he had been taking when Leveson found him by the open window. But this did not prevent Hibbs from expressing considerable surprise and some embarrassment when Leveson entered the same chemist’s and asked for the same chemical. Indeed, Leveson looked harassed and weary enough to want it.

“You’ve been out of town, haven’t you?” said Leveson. “No luck. They got away again on some quibble. The police wouldn’t make the arrest; and even old Meadows thought it might be illegal. I’m sick of it. Where are you going?”

“I thought,” said Mr. Hibbs, “of dropping in at this Post–Futurist exhibition. I believe Lord Ivywood will be there; he is showing it to the Prophet. I don’t pretend to know much about art, but I hear it’s very fine.”

There was a long silence and Mr. Leveson said, “People always prejudiced
against new ideas.”

Then there was another long silence and Mr. Hibbs said, “After all, they said the same of Whistler.”

Refreshed by this ritual, Mr. Leveson became conscious of the existence of Crooke, and said to him, cheerfully, “That’s so in your department, too, isn’t it? I suppose the greatest pioneers in chemistry were unpopular in their own time.”

“Look at the Borgias,” said Mr. Crooke. “They got themselves quite disliked.”

“You’re very flippant, you know,” said Leveson, in a fatigued way. “Well, so long. Are you coming, Hibbs?”

And the two gentlemen, who were both attired in high hats and afternoon callers’ coats, betook themselves down the street. It was a fine, sunny day, the twin of the day before that had shone so brightly on the white town of Peaceways; and their walk was a pleasant one, along a handsome street with high houses and small trees that overlooked the river all the way. For the pictures were exhibited in a small but famous gallery, a rather rococo building of which the entrance steps almost descended upon the Thames. The building was girt on both sides and behind with gaudy flower-beds, and on the top of the steps, in front of the Byzantine doorway, stood their old friend, Misysra Ammon, smiling broadly, and in an unusually sumptuous costume. But even the sight of that fragrant eastern flower did not seem to revive altogether the spirits of the drooping Secretary.

“You have coome,” said the beaming Prophet, “to see the decoration? It is approo–ooved. I haf approo–ooved it.”

“We came to see the Post–Futurist pictures,” began Hibbs; but Leveson was silent.

“There are no pictures,” said the Turk, simply, “if there had been I could not haf approo–ooved. For those of our Religion pictures are not goo–ood; they are Idols, my friends. Loo–ook in there,” and he turned and darted a solemn forefinger just under his nose toward the gates of the gallery; “Loo–ook in there and you will find no Idols. No Idols at all. I have most carefully loo–ooked into every one of the frames. Every one I have approo–ooved. No trace of ze Man form. No trace of ze Animal form. All decoration as goo–ood as the goo–oodest of carpets; it harms not. Lord Ivywood smile of happiness; for I tell him Islam indeed progresses. Ze old Moslems allow to draw the picture of the vegetable. Here I hunt even for the vegetable. And there is no vegetable.”

Hibbs, whose trade was tact, naturally did not think it wise that the eminent Misysra should go on lecturing from a tall flight of steps to the whole street and
river, so he had slipped past with a general proposal to go in and see. The Prophet and the Secretary followed; and all entered the outer hall where Lord Ivywood stood with the white face of a statue. He was the only statue the New Moslems were allowed to worship.

On a sofa like a purple island in the middle of the sea of floor sat Enid Wimpole, talking eagerly to her cousin, Dorian; doing, in fact, her best to prevent the family quarrel, which threatened to follow hard on the incident at Westminster. In the deeper perspective of the rooms Lady Joan Brett was floating about. And if her attitude before the Post–Futurist pictures could not be called humble, or even inquiring, it is but just to that school to say that she seemed to be quite as bored with the floor that she walked on, and the parasol she held. Bit by bit other figures or groups of that world drifted through the Exhibition of the Post–Futurists. It is a very small world, but it is just big enough and just small enough to govern a country—that is, a country with no religion. And it has all the vanity of a mob; and all the reticence of a secret society.

Leveson instantly went up to Lord Ivywood, pulled papers from his pocket and was plainly telling him of the escape from Peaceways. Ivywood’s face hardly changed; he was, or felt, above some things; and one of them was blaming a servant before the servant’s social superiors. But no one could say he looked less like cold marble than before.

“I made all possible inquiries about their subsequent route,” the Secretary was heard saying, “and the most serious feature is that they seem to have taken the road for London.”

“Quite so,” replied the statue, “they will be easier to capture here.”

Lady Enid, by a series of assurances (most of which were, I regret to say, lies) had succeeded in preventing the scandal of her cousin, Dorian, actually cutting her cousin, Philip. But she knew very little of the masculine temper if she really thought she had prevented the profound intellectual revolt of the poet against the politician. Ever since he heard Mr. Hibbs say, “Yars! Yars!,” and order his arrest by a common policeman, the feelings of Dorian Wimpole had flowed for some four days and nights in a direction highly contrary to the ideals of Mr. Hibbs, and the sudden appearance of that blameless diplomatist quickened the mental current to a cataract. But as he could not insult Hibbs, whom socially he did not even know; and could not insult Ivywood, with whom he had just had a formal reconciliation, it was absolutely necessary that he should insult something else instead. All watchers for the Dawn will be deeply distressed to know that the Post–Futurist School of Painting received the full effects of this perverted wrath.
In vain did Mr. Leveson affirm from time to time, “People always prejudiced against new ideas.” Vainly did Mr. Hibbs say at the proper intervals, “After all, they said the same of Whistler.” Not by such decent formalities was the frenzy of Dorian to be appeased.

“That little Turk has more sense than you have,” he said, “he passes it as a good wall–paper. I should say it was a bad wall–paper; the sort of wall–paper that gives a sick man fever when he hasn’t got it. But to call it pictures–you might as well call it seats for the Lord Mayor’s Show. A seat isn’t a seat if you can’t see the Lord Mayor’s Show. A picture isn’t a picture if you can’t see any picture. You can sit down at home more comfortably than you can at a procession. And you can walk about at home more comfortably than you can at a picture gallery. There’s only one thing to be said for a street show or a picture show–and that is whether there is anything to be shown. Now, then! Show me something!”

“Well,” said Lord Ivywood, good humouredly, motioning toward the wall in front of him, “let me show you the ‘Portrait of an Old Lady.’”

“Well,” said Dorian, stolidly, “which is it?”

Mr. Hibbs made a hasty gesture of identification, but was so unfortunate as to point to the picture of “Rain in the Apennines,” instead of the “Portrait of an Old Lady,” and his intervention increased the irritation of Dorian Wimpole. Most probably, as Mr. Hibbs afterward explained, it was because a vivacious movement of the elbow of Mr. Wimpole interfered with the exact pointing of the forefinger of Mr. Hibbs. In any case, Mr. Hibbs was sharply and horridly fixed by embarrassment; so that he had to go away to the refreshment bar and eat three lobster–patties, and even drink a glass of that champagne that had once been his ruin. But on this occasion he stopped at one glass, and returned with a full diplomatic responsibility.

He returned to find that Dorian Wimpole had forgotten all the facts of time, place, and personal pride, in an argument with Lord Ivywood, exactly as he had forgotten such facts in an argument with Patrick Dalroy, in a dark wood with a donkey–cart. And Philip Ivywood was interested also; his cold eyes even shone; for though his pleasure was almost purely intellectual, it was utterly sincere.

“And I do trust the untried; I do follow the inexperienced,” he was saying quietly, with his fine inflections of voice. “You say this is changing the very nature of Art. I want to change the very nature of Art. Everything lives by turning into something else. Exaggeration is growth.”

“But exaggeration of what?” demanded Dorian. “I cannot see a trace of
exaggeration in these pictures; because I cannot find a hint of what it is they want to exaggerate. You can’t exaggerate the feathers of a cow or the legs of a whale. You can draw a cow with feathers or a whale with legs for a joke—though I hardly think such jokes are in your line. But don’t you see, my good Philip, that even then the joke depends on its looking like a cow and not only like a thing with feathers. Even then the joke depends on the whale as well as the legs. You can combine up to a certain point; you can distort up to a certain point; after that you lose the identity; and with that you lose everything. A Centaur is so much of a man with so much of a horse. The Centaur must not be hastily identified with the Horsy Man. And the Mermaid must be maidenly; even if there is something fishy about her social conduct.”

“No,” said Lord Ivywood, in the same quiet way, “I understand what you mean, and I don’t agree. I should like the Centaur to turn into something else, that is neither man nor horse.”

“But not something that has nothing of either?” asked the poet.

“Yes,” answered Ivywood, with the same queer, quiet gleam in his colourless eyes, “something that has nothing of either.”

“But what’s the good?” argued Dorian. “A thing that has changed entirely has not changed at all. It has no bridge of crisis. It can remember no change. If you wake up tomorrow and you simply are Mrs. Dope, an old woman who lets lodgings at Broadstairs—well, I don’t doubt Mrs. Dope is a saner and happier person than you are. But in what way have you progressed? What part of you is better? Don’t you see this prime fact of identity is the limit set on all living things?”

“No,” said Philip, with suppressed but sudden violence, “I deny that any limit is set upon living things.”

“Why, then I understand,” said Dorian, “why, though you make such good speeches, you have never written any poetry.”

Lady Joan, who was looking with tedium at a rich pattern of purple and green in which Misysra attempted to interest her (imploring her to disregard the mere title, which idolatrously stated it as “First Communion in the Snow”), abruptly turned her full face to Dorian. It was a face to which few men could feel indifferent, especially when thus suddenly shown them.

“Why can’t he write poetry?” she asked. “Do you mean he would resent the limits of metre and rhyme and so on?”

The poet reflected for a moment and then said, “Well, partly; but I mean more than that too. As one can be candid in the family, I may say that what everyone
says about him is that he has no humour. But that’s not my complaint at all. I think my complaint is that he has no pathos. That is, he does not feel human limitations. That is, he will not write poetry.”

Lord Ivywood was looking with his cold, unconscious profile into a little black and yellow picture called “Enthusiasm”; but Joan Brett leaned across to him with swarthy eagerness and cried quite provocatively,

“Dorian says you’ve no pathos. Have you any pathos? He says it’s a sense of human limitations.”

Ivywood did not remove his gaze from the picture of “Enthusiasm,” but simply said “No; I have no sense of human limitations.” Then he put up his elderly eyeglass to examine the picture better. Then he dropped it again and confronted Joan with a face paler than usual.

“Joan,” he said, “I would walk where no man has walked; and find something beyond tears and laughter. My road shall be my road indeed; for I will make it, like the Romans. And my adventures shall not be in the hedges and the gutters, but in the borders of the ever advancing brain. I will think what was unthinkable until I thought it; I will love what never lived until I loved it–I will be as lonely as the First Man.”

“They say,” she said, after a silence, “that the first man fell.”

“You mean the priests?” he answered. “Yes, but even they admit that he discovered good and evil. So are these artists trying to discover some distinction that is still dark to us.”

“Oh,” said Joan, looking at him with a real and unusual interest, “then you don’t see anything in the pictures, yourself?”

“I see the breaking of the barriers,” he answered, “beyond that I see nothing.”

She looked at the floor for a little time and traced patterns with her parasol, like one who has really received food for thought. Then she said, suddenly,

“But perhaps the breaking of barriers might be the breaking of everything.”

The clear and colourless eyes looked at her quite steadily.

“Perhaps,” said Lord Ivywood.

Dorian Wimpole made a sudden movement a few yards off, where he was looking at a picture, and said, “Hullo! What’s this?” Mr. Hibbs was literally gaping in the direction of the entrance.

Framed in that fine Byzantine archway stood a great big, bony man in threadbare but careful clothes, with a harsh, high–featured, intelligent face, to which a dark beard under the chin gave something of the Puritanic cast. Somehow his whole personality seemed to be pulled together and explained
when he spoke with a North Country accent.

“Weel, lards,” he said, genially, “t’hoose be main great on t’pictures. But I coom for suthin’ in a moog. Haw! Haw!”

Leveson and Hibbs looked at each other. Then Leveson rushed from the room. Lord Ivywood did not move a finger; but Mr. Wimpole, with a sort of poetic curiosity, drew nearer to the stranger, and studied him.

“It’s perfectly awful,” cried Enid Wimpole, in a loud whisper, “the man must be drunk.”

“Na, lass,” said the man with gallantry, “a’ve not been droonk, nobbut at Hurley Fair, these years and all; a’m a decent lad and workin’ ma way back t’Wharfdale. No harm in a moog of ale, lass.”

“Are you quite sure,” asked Dorian Wimpole, with a singular sort of delicate curiosity, “are you quite sure you’re not drunk.”

“A’m not droonk,” said the man, jovially.

“Even if these were licensed premises,” began Dorian, in the same diplomatic manner.

“There’s t’sign on t’hoose,” said the stranger.

The black, bewildered look on the face of Joan Brett suddenly altered. She took four steps toward the doorway, and then went back and sat on the purple ottoman. But Dorian seemed fascinated with his inquiry into the alleged decency of the lad who was working his way to Wharfdale.

“Even if these were licensed premises,” he repeated, “drink could be refused you if you were drunk. Now, are you really sure you’re not drunk. Would you know if it was raining, say?”

“Aye,” said the man, with conviction.

“Would you know any common object of your countryside,” inquired Dorian, scientifically, “a woman–let us say an old woman.”

“Aye,” said the man, with good humour.

“What on earth are you doing with the creature?” whispered Enid, feverishly.

“I am trying,” answered the poet, “to prevent a very sensible man from smashing a very silly shop. I beg your pardon, sir. As I was saying, would you know these things in a picture, now? Do you know what a landscape is and what a portrait is? Forgive my asking; you see we are responsible while we keep the place going.”

There soared up into the sky like a cloud of rooks the eager vanity of the North.

“We collier lads are none so badly educated, lad,” he said. “In the town a’ was
born in there was a gallery of pictures as fine as Lunnon. Aye, and a’ knew ’em, too.”

“Thank you,” said Wimpole, pointing suddenly at the wall. “Would you be so kind, for instance, as to look at those two pictures. One represents an old woman and the other rain in the hills. It’s a mere formality. You shall have your drink when you’ve said which is which.”

The northerner bowed his huge body before the two frames and peered into them patiently. The long stillness that followed seemed to be something of a strain on Joan, who rose in a restless manner, first went to look out of a window and then went out of the front door.

At length the art–critic lifted a large, puzzled but still philosophical face.

“Soomehow or other,” he said, “a’ mun be droonk after all.”

“You have testified,” cried Dorian with animation. “You have all but saved civilization. And by God, you shall have your drink.”

And he brought from the refreshment table a huge bumper of the Hibbsian champagne, and declined payment by the rapid method of running out of the gallery on to the steps outside.

Joan was already standing there. Out the little side window she had seen the incredible thing she expected to see; which explained the ludicrous scene inside. She saw the red and blue wooden flag of Mr. Pump standing up in the flower–beds in the sun, as serenely as if it were a tall and tropical flower; and yet, in the brief interval between the window and the door it had vanished, as if to remind her it was a flying dream. But two men were in a little motor outside, which was in the very act of starting. They were in motoring disguise, but she knew who they were. All that was deep in her, all that was sceptical, all that was stoical, all that was noble, made her stand as still as one of the pillars of the porch; but a dog, bearing the name of Quoodle, sprang up in the moving car, and barked with joy at the mere sight of her, and though she had borne all else, something in that bestial innocence of an animal suddenly blinded her with tears.

It could not, however, blind her to the extraordinary fact that followed. Mr. Dorian Wimpole, attired in anything but motoring costume, dressed in that compromise between fashion and art which seems proper to the visiting of picture–galleries, did not by any means stand as still as one of the pillars of the porch. He rushed down the steps, ran after the car and actually sprang into it, without disarranging his Whistlerian silk hat.

“Good afternoon,” he said to Dalroy, pleasantly. “You owe me a motor–ride, you know.”
CHAPTER XXI

THE ROAD TO ROUNDBOUGHT

PATRICK DALROY looked at the invader with a heavy and yet humorous expression, and merely said, “I didn’t steal your car; really, I didn’t.”

“Oh, no,” answered Dorian, “I’ve heard all about it since, and as you’re rather the persecuted party, so to speak, it wouldn’t be fair not to tell you that I don’t agree much with Ivywood about all this. I disagree with him; or rather, to speak medically, he disagrees with me. He has, ever since I woke up after an oyster supper and found myself in the House of Commons with policemen calling out, ‘Who goes home?’”


“Yes,” answered Wimpole, indifferently, “it’s a part of some old custom in the days when Members of Parliament might be attacked in the street.”

“Well,” inquired Patrick, in a rational tone, “why aren’t they attacked in the street?”

There was a silence. “It is a holy mystery,” said the Captain at last. “But, ‘Who goes home?’—that is uncommonly good.”

The Captain had received the poet into the car with all possible expressions of affability and satisfaction, but the poet, who was keen–sighted enough about people of his own sort, could not help thinking that the Captain was a little absent–minded. As they flew thundering through the mazes of South London (for Pump had crossed Westminster Bridge and was making for the Surrey hills), the big blue eyes of the big red–haired man rolled perpetually up and down the streets; and, after longer and longer silences, he found expression for his thoughts.

“Doesn’t it strike you that there are a very large number of chemists in London nowadays?”

“Are there?” asked Wimpole, carelessly. “Well, there certainly are two very close to each other just over there.”

“Yes, and both the same name,” replied Dalroy, “Crooke. And I saw the same Mr. Crooke chemicalizing round the corner. He seems to be a highly omnipresent deity.”

“A large business, I suppose,” observed Dorian Wimpole.
“Too large for its profits, I should say,” said Dalroy. “What can people want with two chemists of the same sort within a few yards of each other? Do they put one leg into one shop and one into the other and have their corns done in both at once? Or, do they take an acid in one shop and an alkali in the next, and wait for the fizz? Or, do they take the poison in the first shop and the emetic in the second shop? It seems like carrying delicacy too far. It almost amounts to living a double life.”

“But, perhaps,” said Dorian, “he is an uproariously popular chemist, this Mr. Crooke. Perhaps there’s a rush on some specialty of his.”

“It seems to me,” said the Captain, “that there are certain limitations to such popularity in the case of a chemist. If a man sells very good tobacco, people may smoke more and more of it from sheer self-indulgence. But I never heard of anybody exceeding in cod-liver oil. Even castor-oil, I should say, is regarded with respect rather than true affection.”

After a few minutes of silence, he said, “Is it safe to stop here for an instant, Pump?”

“I think so,” replied Humphrey, “if you’ll promise me not to have any adventures in the shop.”

The motor car stopped before yet a fourth arsenal of Mr. Crooke and his pharmacy, and Dalroy went in. Before Pump and his companion could exchange a word, the Captain came out again, with a curious expression on his countenance, especially round the mouth.

“Mr. Wimpole,” said Dalroy, “will you give us the pleasure of dining with us this evening? Many would consider it an unceremonious invitation to an unconventional meal; and it may be necessary to eat it under a hedge or even up a tree; but you are a man of taste, and one does not apologise for Hump’s rum or Hump’s cheese to persons of taste. We will eat and drink of our best tonight. It is a banquet. I am not very certain whether you and I are friends or enemies, but at least there shall be peace tonight.”

“Friends, I hope,” said the poet, smiling, “but why peace especially tonight?”

“Because there will be war tomorrow,” answered Patrick Dalroy, “whichever side of it you may be on. I have just made a singular discovery.”

And he relapsed into his silence as they flew out of the fringe of London into the woods and hills beyond Croydon. Dalroy remained in the same mood of brooding, Dorian was brushed by the butterfly wing of that fleeting slumber that will come on a man hurried, through the air, after long lounging in hot drawing rooms; even the dog Quoodle was asleep at the bottom of the car. As for
Humphrey Pump, he very seldom talked when he had anything else to do. Thus it happened that long landscapes and perspectives were shot past them like suddenly shifted slides, and long stretches of time elapsed before any of them spoke again. The sky was changing from the pale golds and greens of evening to the burning blue of a strong summer night, a night of strong stars. The walls of woodland that flew past them like long assegais, were mostly, at first, of the fenced and park-like sort; endless oblong blocks of black pinewood shut in by boxes of thin grey wood. But soon fences began to sink, and pinewoods to straggle, and roads to split and even to sprawl. Half an hour later Dalroy had begun to realise something romantic and even faintly reminiscent in the roll of the country, and Humphrey Pump had long known he was on the marches of his native land.

So far as the difference could be defined by a detail, it seemed to consist not so much in the road rising as in the road perpetually winding. It was more like a path; and even where it was abrupt or aimless, it seemed the more alive. They appeared to be ascending a big, dim hill that was built of a crowd of little hills with rounded tops; it was like a cluster of domes. Among these domes the road climbed and curled in multitudinous curves and angles. It was almost impossible to believe that it could turn itself and round on itself so often without tying itself in a knot and choking.

“I say,” said Dalroy, breaking the silence suddenly, “this car will get giddy and fall down.”

“Perhaps,” said Dorian, beaming at him, “my car, as you may have noticed, was much steadier.”

Patrick laughed, but not without a shade of confusion. “I hope you got back your car all right,” he said. “This is really nothing for speed; but it’s an uncommonly good little climber, and it seems to have some climbing to do just now. And even more wandering.”

“The roads certainly seem to be very irregular,” said Dorian, reflectively.

“Well,” cried Patrick, with a queer kind of impatience, “you’re English and I’m not. You ought to know why the road winds about like this. Why, the Saints deliver us!” he cried, “it’s one of the wrongs of Ireland that she can’t understand England. England won’t understand herself, England won’t tell us why these roads go wriggling about. Englishmen won’t tell us! You won’t tell us!”

“Don’t be too sure,” said Dorian, with a quiet irony.

Dalroy, with an irony far from quiet emitted a loud yell of victory.

“Right,” he shouted. “More songs of the car club! We’re all poets here, I hope.
Each shall write something about why the road jerks about so much. So much as this, for example,” he added, as the whole vehicle nearly rolled over in a ditch.

For, indeed, Pump appeared to be attacking such inclines as are more suitable for a goat than a small motor car. This may have been exaggerated in the emotions of his companions, who had both, for different reasons, seen much of mere flat country lately. The sensation was like a combination of trying to get into the middle of the maze at Hampton Court, and climbing the spiral staircase to the Belfry at Bruges.

“This is the right way to Roundabout,” said Dalroy, cheerfully, “charming place; salubrious spot. You can’t miss it. First to the left and right and straight on round the corner and back again. That’ll do for my poem. Get on, you slackers; why aren’t you writing your poems?”

“I’ll try one if you like,” said Dorian, treating his flattered egotism lightly. “But it’s too dark to write; and getting darker.”

Indeed they had come under a shadow between them and the stars, like the brim of a giant’s hat; only through the holes and rents in which the summer stars could now look down on them. The hill, like a cluster of domes, though smooth and even bare in its lower contours was topped with a tangle of spanning trees that sat above them like a bird brooding over its nest. The wood was larger and vaguer than the clump that is the crown of the hill at Chanctonbury, but was rather like it and held much the same high and romantic position. The next moment they were in the wood itself, and winding in and out among the trees by a ribbon of paths. The emerald twilight between the stems, combined with the dragon–like contortions of the great grey roots of the beeches, had a suggestion of monsters and the deep sea; especially as a long litter of crimson and copper–coloured fungi, which might well have been the more gorgeous types of anemone or jelly–fish, reddened the ground like a sunset dropped from the sky.

And yet, contradictorily enough, they had also a strong sense of being high up; and even near to heaven; and the brilliant summer stars that stared through the chinks of the leafy roof might almost have been white starry blossoms on the trees of the wood.

But though they had entered the wood as if it were a house, their strongest sensation still was the rotatory; it seemed as if that high green house went round and round like a revolving lighthouse or the whiz–gig temple in the old pantomimes. The stars seemed, to circle over their heads; and Dorian felt almost certain he had seen the same beech–tree twice.

At length they came to a central place where the hill rose in a sort of cone in
the thick of its trees, lifting its trees with it. Here Pump stopped the car, and clambering up the slope, came to the crawling colossal roots of a very large but very low beech–tree. It spread out to the four quarters of heaven more in the manner of an octopus than a tree, and within its low crown of branches there was a kind of hollow, like a cup, into which Mr. Humphrey Pump, of “The Old Ship,” Pebblewick, suddenly and entirely disappeared.

When he appeared it was with a kind of rope ladder, which he politely hung over the side for his companions to ascend by, but the Captain preferred to swing himself onto one of the octopine branches with a whirl of large wild legs worthy of a chimpanzee. When they were established there, each propped in the hollow against a branch, almost as comfortably as in an arm chair, Humphrey himself descended once more and began to take out their simple stores. The dog was still asleep in the car.

“An old haunt of yours, Hump, I suppose,” said the Captain. “You seem quite at home.”

“I am at home,” answered Pump, with gravity, “at the sign of ‘The Old Ship.’” And he stuck the old blue and red sign–board erect among the toadstools, as if inviting the passer–by to climb the trees for a drink.

The tree just topped the mound or clump of trees, and from it they could see the whole champaign of the country they had passed, with the silver roads roaming about in it like rivers. They were so exalted they could almost fancy the stars would burn them.

“Those roads remind me of the songs you’ve all promised,” said Dalroy at last. “Let’s have some supper, Hump, and then recite.”

Humphrey had hung one of the motor lanterns onto a branch above him, and proceeded by the light of it to tap the keg of rum and hand round the cheese.

“What an extraordinary thing,” exclaimed Dorian Wimpole, suddenly. “Why, I’m quite comfortable! Such a thing has never happened before, I should imagine. And how holy this cheese tastes.”

“It has gone on a pilgrimage,” answered Dalroy, “or rather a Crusade. It’s a heroic, a fighting cheese. ‘Cheese of all Cheeses, Cheeses of all the world,’ as my compatriot, Mr. Yeats, says to the Something–or–other of Battle. It’s almost impossible that this cheese can have come out of such a coward as a cow. I suppose,” he added, wistfully, “I suppose it wouldn’t do to explain that in this case Hump had milked the bull. That would be classed by scientists among Irish legends–those that have the Celtic glamour and all that. No, I think this cheese must have come from that Dun Cow of Dunsmore Heath, who had horns bigger
than elephant’s tusks, and who was so ferocious that one of the greatest of the old heroes of chivalry was required to do battle with it. The rum’s good, too. I’ve earned this glass of rum—earned it by Christian humility. For nearly a month I’ve lowered myself to the beasts of the field, and gone about on all fours like a teetotaller. Hump, circulate the bottle—I mean the cask—and let us have some of this poetry you’re so keen about. Each poem must have the same title, you know; it’s a rattling good title. It’s called ‘An Inquiry into the Causes geological, historical, agricultural, psychological, psychical, moral, spiritual and theological of the alleged cases of double, treble, quadruple and other curvature in the English Road, conducted by a specially appointed secret commission in a hole in a tree, by admittedly judicious and academic authorities specially appointed by themselves to report to the Dog Quoodle, having power to add to their number and also to take away the number they first thought of; God save the King.” Having delivered this formula with blinding rapidity, he added rather breathlessly, “that’s the note to strike, the lyric note.”

For all this rather formless hilarity, Dalroy still impressed the poet as being more distract than the others, as if his mind were labouring with some bigger thing in the background. He was in a sort of creative trance; and Humphrey Pump, who knew him like his own soul, knew well that it was not mere literary creation. Rather it was a kind of creation which many modern moralists would call destruction. For Patrick Dalroy was, not a little to his misfortune, what is called a man of action; as Captain Dawson realised when he found his entire person a bright pea–green. Fond as he was of jokes and rhymes, nothing he could write or even sing ever satisfied him like something he could do.

Thus it happened that his contribution to the metrical inquiry into the crooked roads was avowedly hasty and flippant. While Dorian who was of the opposite temper, the temper that receives impressions instead of pushing out to make them, found his artist’s love of beauty fulfilled as it had never been before in that noble nest; and was far more serious and human than usual. Patrick’s verses ran:

“Some say that Guy of Warwick, The man that killed the Cow, And brake the mighty Boar alive, Beyond the Bridge at Slough, Went up against a Loathly Worm That wasted all the Downs, And so the roads they twist and squirm (If I may be allowed the term) From the writhing of the stricken Worm That died in seven towns. I see no scientific proof That this idea is sound, And I should say they wound about To find the town of Roundabout, The merry town of Roundabout That makes the world go round.

“Some say that Robin Goodfellow, Whose lantern lights the meads, (To steal a
phrase Sir Walter Scott In heaven no longer needs) Such dance around the
trysting–place The moonstruck lover leads; Which superstition I should scout;
There is more faith in honest doubt, (As Tennyson has pointed out) Than in
those nasty creeds. But peace and righteousness (St. John) In Roundabout can
kiss, And since that’s all that’s found about The pleasant town of Roundabout,
The roads they simply bound about To find out where it is.

“Some say that when Sir Lancelot Went forth to find the Grail, Grey Merlin
wrinkled up the roads For hope that he should fail; All roads led back to
Lyonesse And Camelot in the Vale; I cannot yield assent to this Extravagant
hypothesis, The plain, shrewd Briton will dismiss Such rumours (Daily Mail).
But in the streets of Roundabout Are no such factions found, Or theories to
expound about Or roll upon the ground about, In the happy town of Roundabout
That makes the world go round.”

Patrick Dalroy relieved his feelings by finishing with a shout, draining a stiff
glass of his sailor’s wine, turning restlessly on his elbow and looking across the
landscape toward London.

Dorian Wimpole had been drinking golden rum and strong starlight and the
fragrance of forests; and, though his verses, too, were burlesque, he read them
more emotionally than was his wont.

“Before the Roman came to Rye or out to Severn strode, The rolling English
drunkard made the rolling English road. A reeling road, a rolling road, that
rambles round the shire, And after him the parson ran, the sexton and the squire.
A merry road, a mazy road, and such as we did tread That night we went to
Birmingham by way of Beachy Head.

“I knew no harm of Bonaparte and plenty of the Squire, And for to fight the
Frenchmen I did not much desire; But I did bash their baggonets because they
came arrayed To straighten out the crooked road an English drunkard made,
Where you and I went down the lane with ale–mugs in our hands The night we
went to Glastonbury by way of Goodwin Sands.

“His sins they were forgiven him; or why do flowers run Behind him; and the
hedges all strengthening in the sun? The wild thing went from left to right and
knew not which was which, But the wild rose was above him when they found
him in the ditch. God pardon us, nor harden us; we did not see so clear The night
we went to Bannockburn by way of Brighton Pier.

“My friends, we will not go again or ape an ancient rage, Or stretch the folly
of our youth to be the shame of age, But walk with clearer eyes and ears this
path that wandereth, And see undrugged in evening light the decent inn of death;
For there is good news yet to hear and fine things to be seen Before we go to Paradise by way of Kensal Green.”

“Have you written one, Hump?” asked Dalroy. Humphrey, who had been scribbling hard under the lamp, looked up with a dismal face.

“Yes,” he said. “But I write under a great disadvantage. You see, I know why the road curves about.” And he read very rapidly, all on one note:

“The road turned first toward the left Where Pinker’s quarry made the cleft; The path turned next toward the right Because the mastiff used to bite; Then left, because of Slippery Height, And then again toward the right. We could not take the left because It would have been against the laws; Squire closed it in King William’s day Because it was a Right of Way. Still right; to dodge the ridge of chalk Where Parson’s Ghost it used to walk, Till someone Parson used to know Met him blind drunk in Callao. Then left, a long way round, to skirt The good land where old Doggy Burt Was owner of the Crown and Cup, And would not give his freehold up; Right, missing the old river-bed, They tried to make him take instead Right, since they say Sir Gregory Went mad and let the Gypsies be, And so they have their camp secure. And, though not honest, they are poor, And that is something; then along And first to right–no, I am wrong! Second to right, of course; the first Is what the holy sisters cursed, And none defy their awful oaths Since the policeman lost his clothes Because of fairies; right again, What used to be High Toby Lane, Left by the double larch and right Until the milestone is in sight, Because the road is firm and good From past the milestone to the wood; And I was told by Dr. Lowe Whom Mr. Wimpole’s aunt would know, Who lives at Oxford writing books, And ain’t so silly as he looks; The Romans did that little bit And we’ve done all the rest of it; By which we hardly seem to score; Left, and then forward as before To where they nearly hanged Miss Browne, Who told them not to cut her down, But loose the rope or let her swing, Because it was a waste of string; Left once again by Hunker’s Cleft, And right beyond the elm, and left, By Pill’s right by Nineteen Nicks And left—”

“No! No! No’! Hump! Hump! Hump!” cried Dalroy in a sort of terror. “Don’t be exhaustive! Don’t be a scientist, Hump, and lay waste fairyland! How long does it go on? Is there a lot more of it?”

“Yes,” said Pump, in a stony manner. “There is a lot more of it.”

“And it’s all true?” inquired Dorian Wimpole, with interest.

“Yes,” replied Pump with a smile, “it’s all true.”

“My complaint, exactly,” said the Captain. “What you want is legends. What you want is lies, especially at this time of night, and on rum like this, and on our
first and our last holiday. What do you think about rum?” he asked Wimpole.

“About this particular rum, in this particular tree, at this particular moment,” answered Wimpole, “I think it is the nectar of the younger gods. If you ask me in a general, synthetic sense what I think of rum—well, I think it’s rather rum.”

“You find it a trifle sweet, I suppose,” said Dalroy, with some bitterness. “Sybarite! By the way,” he said abruptly, “what a silly word that word ‘Hedonist’ is! The really self-indulgent people generally like sour things and not sweet; bitter things like caviar and curries or what not. It’s the Saints who like the sweets. At least I’ve known at least five women who were practically saints, and they all preferred sweet champagne. Look here, Wimpole! Shall I tell you the ancient oral legend about the origin of rum? I told you what you wanted was legends. Be careful to preserve this one, and hand it on to your children; for, unfortunately, my parents carelessly neglected the duty of handing it on to me. After the words ‘A Farmer had three sons . . .’ all that I owe to tradition ceases. But when the three boys last met in the village market-place, they were all sucking sugar-sticks. Nevertheless, they were all discontented, and, on that day parted for ever. One remained on his father’s farm, hungering for his inheritance. One went up to London to seek his fortune, as fortunes are found today in that town forgotten of God. The third ran away to sea. And the first two flung away their sugar-sticks in shame; and he on the farm was always drinking smaller and sourer beer for the love of money; and he that was in town was always drinking richer and richer wines, that men might see that he was rich. But he who ran away to sea actually ran on board with the sugar-stick in his mouth; and St. Peter or St. Andrew, or whoever is the patron of men in boats, touched it and turned it into a fountain for the comfort of men upon the sea. That is the sailor’s theory of the origin of rum. Inquiry addressed to any busy Captain with a new crew in the act of shipping an unprecedented cargo, will elicit a sympathetic agreement.”

“Your rum at least,” said Dorian, good-humouredly, “may well produce a fairy-tale. But, indeed, I think all this would have been a fairy-tale without it.”

Patrick raised himself from his arboreal throne, and leaned against his branch with a curious and sincere sense of being rebuked.

“Yours was a good poem,” he said, with seeming irrelevance, “and mine was a bad one. Mine was bad, partly because I’m not a poet as you are; but almost as much because I was trying to make up another song at the same time. And it went to another tune, you see.”

He looked out over the rolling roads and said almost to himself:
“In the city set upon slime and loam They cry in their parliament ‘Who goes home?’ And there is no answer in arch or dome, For none in the city of graves goes home. Yet these shall perish and understand, For God has pity on this great land. Men that are men again; who goes home? Tocsin and trumpeter! Who goes home? For there’s blood on the field and blood on the foam, And blood on the body when man goes home. And a voice valedictory–Who is for Victory? Who is for Liberty? Who goes home?”

Softly and idly as he had said this second rhyme, there were circumstances about his attitude that must have troubled or interested anyone who did not know him well.

“May I ask,” asked Dorian, laughing, “why it is necessary to draw your sword at this stage of the affair?”

“Because we have left the place called Roundabout,” answered Patrick, “and we have come to a place called Rightabout.”

And he lifted his sword toward London, and the grey glint upon it came from a low, grey light in the east.
CHAPTER XXII

THE CHEMISTRY OF MR. CROOEKE

WHEN the celebrated Hibbs next visited the shop of Crooke, that mystic and criminologist chemist, he found the premises were impressively and even amazingly enlarged with decorations in the eastern style. Indeed, it would not have been too much to say that Mr. Crooke’s shop occupied the whole of one side of a showy street in the West End; the other side being a blank façade of public buildings. It would be no exaggeration to say that Mr. Crooke was the only shopkeeper for some distance round. Mr. Crooke still served in his shop, however; and politely hastened to serve his customer with the medicine that was customary. Unfortunately, for some reason or other, history was, in connection with this shop, only too prone to repeat itself. And after a vague but soothing conversation with the chemist (on the subject of vitriol and its effects on human happiness), Mr. Hibbs experienced the acute annoyance of once more beholding his most intimate friend, Mr. Joseph Leveson, enter the same fashionable emporium. But, indeed, Leveson’s own annoyance was much too acute for him to notice any on the part of Hibbs.

“Well,” he said, stopping dead in the middle of the shop, “here is a fine confounded kettle of fish!”

It is one of the tragedies of the diplomatic that they are not allowed to admit either knowledge or ignorance; so Hibbs looked gloomily wise; and said, pursing his lips, “you mean the general situation.”

“I mean the situation about this everlasting business of the inn–signs,” said Leveson, impatiently. “Lord Ivywood went up specially, when his leg was really bad, to get it settled in the House in a small non–contentious bill, providing that the sign shouldn’t be enough if the liquor hadn’t been on the spot three days.”

“Oh, but,” said Hibbs, sinking his voice to a soft solemnity, as being one of the initiate, “a thing like that can be managed, don’t you know.”

“Of course it can,” said the other, still with the same slightly irritable air. “It was. But it doesn’t seem to occur to you, any more than it did to his lordship, that there is rather a weak point after all in this business of passing acts quietly because they’re unpopular. Has it ever occurred to you that if a law is really kept too quiet to be opposed, it may also be kept too quiet to be obeyed. It’s not so easy to hush it up from a big politician without running the risk of hushing it up
even from a common policeman.”

“But surely that can’t happen, by the nature of things?”

“Can’t it, by God,” said J. Leveson, appealing to a less pantheistic authority.

He unfolded a number of papers from his pocket, chiefly cheap local newspapers, but some of them letters and telegrams.

“Listen to this!” he said. “A curious incident occurred in the village of Poltwell in Surrey yesterday morning. The baker’s shop of Mr. Whiteman was suddenly besieged by a knot of the looser types of the locality, who appear to have demanded beer instead of bread; basing their claim on some ornamental object erected outside the shop; which object they asserted to be a sign-board within the meaning of the act. There, you see, they haven’t even heard of the new act! What do you think of this, from the Clapton Conservator. ‘The contempt of Socialists for the law was well illustrated yesterday, when a crowd, collected round some wooden ensign of Socialism set up before Mr. Dugdale’s Drapery Stores, refused to disperse, though told that their action was contrary to the law. Eventually the malcontents joined the procession following the wooden emblem.’ And what do you say to this? ‘Stop—press news. A chemist in Pimlico has been invaded by a huge crowd, demanding beer; and asserting the provision of it to be among his duties. The chemist is, of course, well acquainted with his immunities in the matter, especially under the new act; but the old notion of the importance of the sign seems still to possess the populace and even, to a certain extent, to paralyze the police.’ What do you say to that? Isn’t it as plain as Monday morning that this Flying Inn has flown a day in front of us, as all such lies do?” There was a diplomatic silence.

“Well,” asked the still angry Leveson of the still dubious Hibbs, “what do you make of all that?”

One ill-acquainted with that relativity essential to all modern minds, might possibly have fancied that Mr. Hibbs could not make much of it. However that may be, his explanations or incapacity for explanations, were soon tested with a fairly positive test. For Lord Ivywood actually walked into the shop of Mr. Crooke.

“Good day, gentlemen,” he said, looking at them with an expression which they both thought baffling and even a little disconcerting. “Good morning, Mr. Crooke. I have a celebrated visitor for you.” And he introduced the smiling Misysra. The Prophet had fallen back on a comparatively quiet costume this morning, a mere matter of purple and orange or what not; but his aged face was now perennially festive.

“I have heard many,” said Hibbs, gracefully, “that can be so described.”

“The Prophet means what I was saying about the Ballot Paper Amendment Act,” said Ivywood, casually. “It seems to be the alphabet of statesmanship to recognise now that the great oriental British Empire has become one corporate whole with the occidental one. Look at our universities, with their Mohammedan students; soon they may be a majority. Now are we,” he went on, still more quietly, “are we to rule this country under the forms of representative government? I do not pretend to believe in democracy, as you know, but I think it would be extremely unsettling and incalculable to destroy representative government. If we are to give Moslem Britain representative government, we must not make the mistake we made about the Hindoos and military organization—which led to the Mutiny. We must not ask them to make a cross on their ballot papers; for though it seems a small thing, it may offend them. So I brought in a little bill to make it optional between the old–fashioned cross and an upward curved mark that might stand for a crescent—and as it’s rather easier to make, I believe it will be generally adopted.”

“And so,” said the radiant old Turk, “the little, light, easily made, curly mark is substituted for the hard, difficult, double–made, cutting both ways mark. It is the more good for hygi–e–ene. For you must know, and indeed our good and wise Chemist will tell you, that the Saracenic and the Arabian and the Turkish physicians were the first of all physicians; and taught all medicals to the barbarians of the Frankish territories. And many of the moost modern, the moost fashionable remedies, are thus of the oriental origin.”

“Yes, that is quite true,” said Crooke, in his rather cryptic and unsympathetic way, “the powder called Arenine, lately popularised by Mr. Boze, now Lord Helvellyn, who tried it first on birds, is made of plain desert sand. And what you see in prescriptions as Cannabis Indiensis is what our lively neighbours of Asia describe more energetically as bhang.”

“And so–o–in the sa–ame way,” said Misysra, making soothing passes with his brown hand like a mesmerist, “in the sa–ame way the making of the crescent is hy–gienic; the making of the cross is non–hy–gienic. The crescent was a little wave, as a leaf, as a little curling feather,” and he waved his hand with real artistic enthusiasm toward the capering curves of the new Turkish decoration which Ivywood had made fashionable in many of the fashionable shops. “But when you make the cross you must make the one line so–o,” and he swept the
horizon with the brown hand, “and then you must go back and make the other line so–o,” and he made an upward gesture suggestive of one constrained to lift a pine–tree. “And then you become very ill.”

“As a matter of fact, Mr. Crooke,” said Ivywood, in his polite manner, “I brought the Prophet here to consult you as the best authority on the very point you have just mentioned—the use of hashish or the hemp–plant. I have it on my conscience to decide whether these oriental stimulants or sedatives shall come under the general veto we are attempting to impose on the vulgar intoxicants. Of course one has heard of the horrible and voluptuous visions, and a kind of insanity attributed to the Assassins and the Old Man of the Mountain. But, on the one hand, we must clearly discount much for the illimitable pro–Christian bias with which the history of these eastern tribes is told in this country. Would you say the effect of hashish was extremely bad?” And he turned first to the Prophet.

“You will see mosques,” said that seer with candour, “many mosques–more mosques–taller and taller mosques till they reach the moon and you bear a dreadful voice in the very high mosque calling the muezzin; and you will think it is Allah. Then you will see wives–many, many wives–more wives than you yet have. Then you will be rolled over and over in a great pink and purple sea–which is still wives. Then you will go to sleep. I have only done it once,” he concluded mildly.

“And what do you think about hashish, Mr. Crooke?” asked Ivywood, thoughtfully.

“I think it’s hemp at both ends,” said the Chemist.

“I fear,” said Lord Ivywood, “I don’t quite understand you.”

“A hempen drink, a murder, and a hempen rope. That’s my experience in India,” said Mr. Crooke.

“It is true,” said Ivywood, yet more reflectively, “that the thing is not Moslem in any sense in its origin. There is that against the Assassins always. And, of course,” he added, with a simplicity that had something noble about it, “their connection with St. Louis discredits them rather.”

After a space of silence, he said suddenly, looking at Crooke, “So it isn’t the sort of thing you chiefly sell?”

“No, my lord, it isn’t what I chiefly sell,” said the Chemist. He also looked steadily, and the wrinkles of his young–old face were like hieroglyphics.

“The Cause progress! Everywhere it progress!” cried Misysra, spreading his arms and relieving a momentary tension of which he was totally unaware. “The hygienic curve of the crescent will soon superimpose himself for your plus sign.
You already use him for the short syllables in your dactyl; which is doubtless of oriental origin. You see the new game?"

He said this so suddenly that everyone turned round, to see him produce from his purple clothing a brightly coloured and highly polished apparatus from one of the grand toy–shops; which, on examination, seemed to consist of a kind of blue slate in a red and yellow frame; a number of divisions being already marked on the slate, about seventeen slate pencils with covers of different colours, and a vast number of printed instructions, stating that it was but recently introduced from the remote East, and was called Naughts and Crescents.

Strangely enough, Lord Ivywood, with all his enthusiasm, seemed almost annoyed at the emergence of this Asiatic discovery; more especially as he really wanted to look at Mr. Crooke, as hard as Mr. Crooke was looking at him.

Hibbs coughed considerately and said, “Of course all our things came from the East, and”—and he paused, being suddenly unable to remember anything but curry; to which he was very rightly attached. He then remembered Christianity, and mentioned that too. “Everything from the East is good, of course,” he ended, with an air of light omniscience.

Those who in later ages and other fashions failed to understand how Misysra had ever got a mental hold on men like Lord Ivywood, left out two elements in the man, which are very attractive, especially to other men. One was that there was no subject on which the little Turk could not instantly produce a theory. The other was that though the theories were crowded, they were consistent. He was never known to accept an illogical compliment.

“You are in error,” he said, solemnly, to Hibbs, “because you say all things from the East are good. There is the east wind. I do not like him. He is not good. And I think very much that all the warmth and all the wealthiness and the colours and the poems and the religiousness that the East was meant to give you have been much poisoned by this accident, this east wind. When you see the green flag of the Prophet, you do not think of a green field in Summer, you think of a green wave in your seas of Winter; for you think it blown by the east wind. When you read of the moon–faced houris you think not of our moons like oranges but of your moons like snowballs—”

Here a new voice contributed to the conversation. Its contribution, though imperfectly understood, appeared to be “Nar! Why sh’d I wite for a little Jew in ‘is dressin’ gown? Little Jews in their dressin’ gowns ‘as their drinks, and we ‘as our drinks. Bitter, miss.”

The speaker, who appeared to be a powerful person of the plastering
occupation, looked round for the unmarried female he had ceremonially addressed; and seemed honestly abashed that she was not present.

Ivywood looked at the man with that expression of one turned to stone, which his physique made so effective in him. But J. Leveson, Secretary, could summon no such powers of self-petrification. Upon his soul the slaughter red of that unhallowed eve arose when first the Ship and he were foes; when he discovered that the poor are human beings, and therefore are polite and brutal within a comparatively short space of time. He saw that two other men were standing behind the plastering person, one of them apparently urging him to counsels of moderation; which was an ominous sign. And then he lifted his eyes and saw something worse than any omen.

All the glass frontage of the shop was a cloud of crowding faces. They could not be clearly seen, since night was closing in on the street; and the dazzling fires of ruby and amethyst which the lighted shop gave to its great globes of liquid, rather veiled than revealed them. But the foremost actually flattened and whitened their noses on the glass, and the most distant were nearer than Mr. Leveson wanted them. Also he saw a shape erect outside the shop; the shape of an upright staff and a square board. He could not see what was on the board. He did not need to see.

Those who saw Lord Ivywood at such moments understood why he stood out so strongly in the history of his time, in spite of his frozen face and his fanciful dogmas. He had all the negative nobility that is possible to man. Unlike Nelson and most of the great heroes, he knew not fear. Thus he was never conquered by a surprise, but was cold and collected when other men had lost their heads even if they had not lost their nerve.

“I will not conceal from you, gentlemen,” said Lord Ivywood, “that I have been expecting this. I will not even conceal from you that I have been occupying Mr. Crooke’s time until it occurred. So far from excluding the crowd, I suggest it would be an excellent thing if Mr. Crooke could accommodate them all in this shop. I want to tell, as soon as possible, as large a crowd as possible that the law is altered and this folly about the Flying Inn has ceased. Come in, all of you! Come in and listen!”

“Thank yer,” said a man connected in some way with motor buses, who lurched in behind the plasterer.

“Thanky, sir,” said a bright little clock-mender from Croydon, who immediately followed him.

“Thanks,” said a rather bewildered clerk from Camberwell, who came next in
the rather bewildered procession.

“Thank you,” said Mr. Dorian Wimpole, who entered, carrying a large round cheese.

“Thank you,” said Captain Dalroy, who entered carrying a large cask of rum.

“Thank you very much,” said Mr. Humphrey Pump, who entered the shop carrying the sign of “The Old Ship.”

I fear it must be recorded that the crowd which followed them dispensed with all expressions of gratitude. But though the crowd filled the shop so that there was no standing room to spare, Leveson still lifted his gloomy eyes and beheld his gloomy omen. For, though there were very many more people standing in the shop, there seemed to be no less people looking in at the window.

“Gentlemen,” said Ivywood, “all jokes come to an end. This one has gone so far as to be serious; and it might have become impossible to correct public opinion, and expound to law–abiding citizens the true state of the law, had I not been able to meet so representative an assembly in so central a place. It is not pertinent to my purpose to indicate what I think of the jest which Captain Dalroy and his friends have been playing upon you for the last few weeks. But I think Captain Dalroy will himself concede that I am not jesting.”

“With all my heart,” said Dalroy, in a manner that was unusually serious and even sad. Then he added with a sigh, “And as you truly say, my jest has come to an end.”

“That wooden sign,” said Ivywood, pointing at the queer blue ship, “can be cut up for firewood. It shall lead decent citizens a devil’s dance no more. Understand it once and for all, before you learn it from policemen or prison warders. You are under a new law. That sign is the sign of nothing. You can no more buy and sell alcohol by having that outside your house, than if it were a lamp–post.”

“D’you meaner say, guv’ner,” said the plasterer, with a dawn of intelligence on his large face which was almost awful to watch, “that I ain’t to ‘ave a glass o’ bitter?”

“Try a glass of rum,” said Patrick.

“Captain Dalroy,” said Lord Ivywood, “if you give one drop from that cask to that man, you are breaking the law and you shall sleep in jail.”

“Are you quite sure?” asked Dalroy, with a strange sort of anxiety. “I might escape.”

“I am quite sure,” said Ivywood. “I have posted the police with full powers for the purpose, as you will find. I mean that this business shall end here tonight.”
“If I find that pleeceman what told me I could ‘ave a drink just now, I’ll knock ‘is ‘elmet into a fancy necktie, I will,” said the plasterer. “Why ain’t people allowed to know the law?”

“They ain’t got no right to alter the law in the dark like that,” said the clock–mender. “Damn the new law.”

“What is the new law?” asked the clerk.

“The words inserted by the recent Act,” said Lord Ivywood, with the cold courtesy of the Conqueror, “are to the effect that alcohol cannot be sold, even under a lawful sign, unless alcoholic liquors have been kept for three days on the premises. Captain Dalroy, that cask of yours has not, I think, been three days on these premises. I command you to seal it up and take it away.”

“Surely,” said Patrick, with an innocent air, “the best remedy would be to wait till it has been three days on the premises. We might all get to know each other better.” And he looked round at the ever–increasing multitude with hazy benevolence.

“You shall do nothing of the kind,” said his lordship, with sudden fierceness.

“Well,” answered Patrick, wearily, “now I come to think of it, perhaps I won’t. I’ll have one drink here and go home to bed like a good little boy.”

“And the constables shall arrest you,” thundered Ivywood.

“Why, nothing seems to suit you,” said the surprised Dalroy. “Thank you, however, for explaining the new law so clearly—’unless alcoholic liquors have been three days on the premises’ I shall remember it now. You always explain such things so clearly. You only made one legal slip. The constables will not arrest me.”

“And why not?” demanded the nobleman, white with passion.

“Because,” cried Patrick Dalroy; and his voice lifted itself like a lonely trumpet before the charge, “because I shall not have broken the law. Because alcoholic liquors have been three days on these premises. Three months more likely. Because this is a common grog–shop, Philip Ivywood. Because that man behind the counter lives by selling spirits to all the cowards and hypocrites who are rich enough to bribe a bad doctor.”

And he pointed suddenly at the small medicine glass on the counter by Hibbs and Leveson.

“What is that man drinking?” he demanded.

Hibbs put out his hand hastily for his glass, but the indignant clock–mender had snatched it first and drained it at a gulp.

“Scortch,” he said, and dashed the glass to atoms on the floor. “Right you are
too,” roared the plasterer, seizing a big medicine bottle in each hand. “We’re goin’ to ‘ave a little of the fun now, we are. What’s in that big red bowl up there—I reckon it’s port. Fetch it down, Bill.”

Ivywood turned to Crooke and said, scarcely moving his lips of marble, “This is a lie.”

“It is the truth,” answered Crooke, looking back at him with equal steadiness. “Do you think you made the world, that you should make it over again so easily?”

“The world was made badly,” said Philip, with a terrible note in his voice, “and I will make it over again.”

Almost as he spoke the glass front of the shop fell inward, shattered, and there was wreckage among the moonlike, coloured bowls; almost as if spheres of celestial crystal cracked at his blasphemy. Through the broken windows came the roar of that confused tongue that is more terrible than the elements; the cry that the deaf kings have heard at last; the terrible voice of mankind. All the way down the long, fashionable street, lined with the Crooke plate–glass, that glass was crashing amid the cries of a crowd. Rivers of gold and purple wines sprawled about the pavement.

“Out in the open!” shouted Dalroy, rushing out of the shop, sign–board in hand, the dog Quoodle barking furiously at his heels, while Dorian with the cheese and Humphrey with the keg followed as rapidly as they could.

“Goodnight, my lord.

“Perhaps our meeting next may fall, At Tomworth in your castle hall.

“Come along, friends, and form up. Don’t waste time destroying property. We’re all to start now.”

“Where are we all going to?” asked the plasterer.

“We’re all going into Parliament,” answered the Captain, as he went to the head of the crowd.

The marching crowd turned two or three corners, and at the end of the next long street, Dorian Wimpole, who was toward the tail of the procession, saw again the grey Cyclops tower of St. Stephens, with its one great golden eye, as he had seen it against that pale green sunset that was at once quiet and volcanic on the night he was betrayed by sleep and by a friend. Almost as far off, at the head of the procession, he could see the sign with the ship and the cross going before them like an ensign, and hear a great voice singing—“Men that are men again, Who goes home? Tocsin and trumpeter! Who goes home? The voice valedictory—who is for Victory? Who is for Liberty? Who goes home?”
CHAPTER XXIII

THE MARCH ON IVYWOOD

THAT storm–spirit, or eagle of liberty, which is the sudden soul in a crowd, had descended upon London after a foreign tour of some centuries in which it had commonly alighted upon other capitals. It is always impossible to define the instant and the turn of mood which makes the whole difference between danger being worse than endurance and endurance being worse than danger. The actual outbreak generally has a symbolic or artistic, or, what some would call whimsical cause. Somebody fires off a pistol or appears in an unpopular uniform, or refers in a loud voice to a scandal that is never mentioned in the newspapers; somebody takes off his hat, or somebody doesn’t take off his hat; and a city is sacked before midnight. When the ever–swelling army of revolt smashed a whole street full of the shops of Mr. Crooke, the chemist, and then went on to Parliament, the Tower of London and the road to the sea, the sociologists hiding in their coal–cellars could think (in that clarifying darkness) of many material and spiritual explanations of such a storm in human souls; but of none that explained it quite enough. Doubtless there was a great deal of sheer drunkenness when the urns and goblets of Aesculapius were reclaimed as belonging to Bacchus: and many who went roaring down that road were merely stored with rich wines and liqueurs which are more comfortably and quietly digested at a City banquet or a West End restaurant. But many of these had been blind drunk twenty times without a thought of rebellion; you could not stretch the material explanation to cover a corner of the case. Much more general was a savage sense of the meanness of Crooke’s wealthy patrons, in keeping a door open for themselves which they had wantonly shut on less happy people. But no explanation can explain it; and no man can say when it will come.

Dorian Wimpole was at the tail of the procession, which grew more and more crowded every moment. For one space of the march he even had the misfortune to lose it altogether; owing to the startling activity which the rotund cheese when it escaped from his hands showed, in descending a somewhat steep road toward the river. But in recent days he had gained a pleasure in practical events which was like a second youth. He managed to find a stray taxi–cab; and had little difficulty in picking up again the trail of the extraordinary cortège. Inquiries addressed to a policeman with a black eye outside the House of Commons
informed him sufficiently of the rebels’ line of retreat or advance, or whatever it was; and in a very short time he beheld the unmistakable legion once more. It was unmistakable, because in front of it there walked a red–headed giant, apparently carrying with him a wooden portion of some public building; and also because so big a crowd had never followed any man in England for a long time past. But except for such things the unmistakable crowd might well have been mistaken for another one. Its aspect had been altered almost as much as if it had grown horns or tusks; for many of the company walked with outlandish weapons like iron teeth or horns, bills and pole axes, and spears with strangely shaped heads. What was stranger still, whole rows and rows of them had rifles, and even marched with a certain discipline; and yet again, others seemed to have snatched up household or work–shop tools, meat axes, pick axes, hammers and even carving knives. Such things need be none the less deadly because they are domestic. They have figured in millions of private murders before they appeared in any public war.

Dorian was so fortunate as to meet the flame–haired Captain almost face to face, and easily fell into step with him at the head of the march. Humphrey Pump walked on the other side, with the celebrated cask suspended round his neck by something resembling braces, as if it were a drum. Mr. Wimpole had himself taken the opportunity of his brief estrangement to carry the cheese somewhat more easily in a very large, loose, waterproof knapsack on his shoulders. The effect in both cases was to suggest dreadful deformities in two persons who happened to be exceptionally cleanly built. The Captain, who seemed to be in tearing and towering spirits, gained great pleasure from this. But Dorian had his sources of amusement too.

“What have you been doing with yourselves since you lost my judicious guidance?” he asked, laughing, “and why are parts of you a dull review and parts of you a fancy dress ball? What have you been up to?”

“We’ve been shopping,” said Mr. Patrick Dalroy, with some pride. “We are country cousins. I know all about shopping; let us see, what are the phrases about it? Look at those rifles now! We got them quite at a bargain. We went to all the best gunsmiths in London, and we didn’t pay much. In fact, we didn’t pay anything. That’s what is called a bargain, isn’t it? Surely, I’ve seen in those things they send to ladies something about ‘giving them away.’ Then we went to a remnant sale. At least, it was a remnant sale when we left. And we bought that piece of stuff we’ve tied round the sign. Surely, it must be what ladies called chiffon?”
Dorian lifted his eyes and perceived that a very coarse strip of red rag, possibly collected from a dust bin, had been tied round the wooden sign-post by way of a red flag of revolution.

“Not what ladies call chiffon?” inquired the Captain with anxiety. “Well, anyhow, it is what chiffoniers call it. But as I’m going to call on a lady shortly, I’ll try to remember the distinction.”

“Is your shopping over, may I ask?” asked Mr. Wimpole.

“All but one thing,” answered the other. “I must find a music shop—you know what I mean. Place where they sell pianos and things of that sort.”

“Look here,” said Dorian, “this cheese is pretty heavy as it is. Have I got to carry a piano, too?”

“You misunderstand me,” said the Captain, calmly. And as he had never thought of music shops until his eye had caught one an instant before, he darted into the doorway. Returning almost immediately with a long parcel under his arm, he resumed the conversation.

“Did you go anywhere else,” asked Dorian, “except to shops?”

“Anywhere else!” cried Patrick, indignantly, “haven’t you got any country cousins? Of course we went to all the right places. We went to the Houses of Parliament. But Parliament isn’t sitting; so there are no eggs of the quality suitable for elections. We went to the Tower of London—you can’t tire country cousins like us. We took away some curiosities of steel and iron. We even took away the halberds from the Beef-eaters. We pointed out that for the purpose of eating beef (their only avowed public object) knives and forks had always been found more convenient. To tell the truth, they seemed rather relieved to be relieved of them.”

“And may I ask,” said the other with a smile, “where you are off to now?”

“Another beauty spot!” cried the Captain, boisterously, “no tiring the country cousin! I am going to show my young friends from the provinces what is perhaps the finest old country house in England. We are going to Ivywood, not far from that big watering place they call Pebblewick.”

“I see,” said Dorian; and for the first time looked back with intelligent trouble on his face, on the marching ranks behind him.

“Captain Dalroy,” said Dorian Wimpole, in a slightly altered tone, “there is one thing that puzzles me. Ivywood talked about having set the police to catch us; and though this is a pretty big crowd, I simply cannot believe that the police, as I knew them in my youth, could not catch us. But where are the police? You seem to have marched through half London with much (if you’ll excuse me) of
the appearance of carrying murderous weapons. Lord Ivywood threatened that
the police would stop us. Well, why didn’t they stop us?”
“Your subject,” said Patrick, cheerfully, “divides itself into three heads.”
“I hope not,” said Dorian.
“There really are three reasons why the police should not be prominent in this
business; as their worst enemy cannot say that they were.”
He began ticking off the three on his own huge fingers; and seemed to be quite
serious about it.
“First,” he said, “you have been a long time away from town. Probably you do
not know a policeman when you see him. They do not wear helmets, as our line
regiments did after the Prussians had won. They wear fezzes, because the Turks
have won. Shortly, I have little doubt, they will wear pigtails, because the
Chinese have won. It is a very interesting branch of moral science. It is called
Efficiency.
“Second,” explained the Captain, “you have, perhaps, omitted to notice that a
very considerable number of those wearing such fezzes are walking just behind
us. Oh, yes, it’s quite true. Don’t you remember that the whole French
Revolution really began because a sort of City Militia refused to fire on their
own fathers and wives; and even showed some slight traces of a taste for firing
on the other side? You’ll see lots of them behind; and you can tell them by their
revolver belts and their walking in step; but don’t look back on them too much.
It makes them nervous.”
“And the third reason?” asked Dorian.
“For the real reason,” answered Patrick, “I am not fighting a hopeless fight.
People who have fought in real fights don’t, as a rule. But I noticed something
singular about the very point you mention. Why are there no more police? Why
are there no more soldiers? I will tell you. There really are very few policemen
or soldiers left in England today.”
“Surely, that,” said Wimpole, “is an unusual complaint.”
“But very clear,” said the Captain, gravely, “to anyone who has ever seen
sailors or soldiers. I will tell you the truth. Our rulers have come to count on the
bare bodily cowardice of a mass of Englishmen, as a sheep dog counts on the
cowardice of a flock of sheep. Now, look here, Mr. Wimpole, wouldn’t a
shepherd be wise to limit the number of his dogs if he could make his sheep pay
by it? At the end you might find millions of sheep managed by a solitary dog.
But that is because they are sheep. Suppose the sheep were turned by a miracle
into wolves. There are very few dogs they could not tear in pieces. But, what is
my practical point, there are really very few dogs to tear.”

“You don’t mean,” said Dorian, “that the British Army is practically disbanded?”

“There are the sentinels outside Whitehall,” replied Patrick, in a low voice. “But, indeed, your question puts me in a difficulty. No; the army is not entirely disbanded, of course. But the British army—. Did you ever hear, Wimpole, of the great destiny of the Empire?”

“I seem to have heard the phrase,” replied his companion.

“It is in four acts,” said Dalroy. “Victory over barbarians. Employment of barbarians. Alliance with barbarians. Conquest by barbarians. That is the great destiny of Empire.”

“I think I begin to see what you mean,” returned Dorian Wimpole. “Of course Ivywood and the authorities do seem very prone to rely on the sepoy troops.”

“And other troops as well,” said Patrick. “I think you will be surprised when you see them.”

He tramped on for a while in silence and then said, with some air of abruptness, which yet did not seem to be entirely a changing of the subject,

“Do you know the man who lives now on the estate next to Ivywood?”

“No,” replied Dorian, “I am told he keeps himself very much to himself.”

“And his estate, too,” said Patrick, rather gloomily. “If you would climb his garden—wall, Wimpole, I think you would find an answer to a good many of your questions. Oh, yes, the right honourable gentlemen are making full provision for public order and national defence—in a way.”

He fell into an almost sullen silence again; and several villages had been passed before he spoke again.

They tramped through the darkness; and dawn surprised them somewhere in the wilder and more wooded parts where the roads began to rise and roam. Dalroy gave an exclamation of pleasure and pointed ahead, drawing the attention of Dorian to the distance. Against the silver and scarlet bars of the daybreak could be seen afar a dark purple dome, with a crown of dark green leaves; the place they had called Roundabout.

Dalroy’s spirit seemed to revive at the sight, with the customary accompaniment of the threat of vocalism.

“Been making any poems lately?” he asked of Wimpole.

“Nothing particular,” replied the poet.

“Then,” said the Captain, portentously, clearing his throat, “you shall listen to one of mine, whether you like it or not—nay, the more you dislike it the longer
and longer it will be. I begin to understand why soldiers want to sing when on the march; and also why they put up with such rotten songs.

“The Druids waved their golden knives And danced around the Oak, When they had sacrificed a man; But though the learned search and scan No single modern person can Entirely see the joke; But though they cut the throats of men They cut not down the tree, And from the blood the saplings sprang Of oak–woods yet to be. But Ivywood, Lord Ivywood, He rots the tree as ivy would, He clings and crawls as ivy would About the sacred tree.

“King Charles he fled from Worcester fight And hid him in an Oak; In convent schools no man of tact Would trace and praise his every act, Or argue that he was in fact A strict and sainted bloke; But not by him the sacred woods Have lost their fancies free, And though he was extremely big, He did not break the tree. But Ivywood, Lord Ivywood, He breaks the tree as ivy would And eats the woods as ivy would Between us and the sea.

“Great Collingwood walked down the glade And flung the acorns free, That oaks might still be in the grove As oaken as the beams above When the great Lover sailors love Was kissed by Death at sea. But though for him the oak–trees fell To build the oaken ships, The woodman worshipped what he smote And honoured even the chips. But Ivywood, Lord Ivywood, He hates the tree as ivy would, As the dragon of the ivy would, That has us in his grips.”

They were ascending a sloping road, walled in on both sides by solemn woods, which somehow seemed as watchful as owls awake. Though daybreak was going over them with banners, scrolls of scarlet and gold, and with a wind like trumpets of triumph, the dark woods seemed to hold their secret like dark, cool cellars; nor was the strong sunlight seen in them, save in one or two brilliant shafts, that looked like splintered emeralds.

“I should not wonder,” said Dorian, “if the ivy does not find the tree knows a thing or two also.”

“The tree does,” assented the Captain. “The trouble was that until a little while ago the tree did not know that it knew.”

There was a silence; and as they went up the incline grew steeper and steeper, and the tall trees seemed more and more to be guarding something from sight, as with the grey shields of giants.

“Do you remember this road, Hump?” asked Dalroy of the innkeeper.

“Yes,” answered Humphrey Pump, and said no more; but few have ever heard such fulness in an affirmative.

They marched on in silence and about two hours afterward, toward eleven
o’clock, Dalroy called a halt in the forest, and said that everybody had better have a few hours’ sleep. The impenetrable quality in the woods and the comparative softness of the carpet of beech–mast, made the spot as appropriate as the time was inappropriate. And if anyone thinks that common people, casually picked up in a street, could not follow a random leader on such a journey or sleep at his command in such a spot, given the state of the soul, then someone knows no history.

“I’m afraid,” said Dalroy, “you’ll have to have your supper for breakfast. I know an excellent place for having breakfast, but it’s too exposed for sleep. And sleep you must have; so we won’t unpack the stores just now. We’ll lie down like Babes in the Wood, and any bird of an industrious disposition is free to start covering me with leaves. Really, there are things coming, before which you will want sleep.”

When they resumed the march it was nearly the middle of the afternoon; and the meal which Dalroy insisted buoyantly on describing as breakfast was taken about that mysterious hour when ladies die without tea. The steep road had consistently grown steeper and steeper; and steeper; and at last, Dalroy said to Dorian Wimpole,

“Don’t drop that cheese again just here, or it will roll right away down into the woods. I know it will. No scientific calculations of grades and angles are necessary; because I have seen it do so myself. In fact, I have run after it.”

Wimpole realised they were mounting to the sharp edge of a ridge, and in a few moments he knew by the oddness in the shape of the trees what it had been that the trees were hiding.

They had been walking along a swelling, woodland path beside the sea. On a particular high plateau, projecting above the shore, stood some dwarfed and crippled apple–trees, of whose apples no man alive would have eaten, so sour and salt they must be. All the rest of the plateau was bald and featureless, but Pump looked at every inch of it, as if at an inhabited place.

“This is where we’ll have breakfast,” he said, pointing to the naked grassy waste. “It’s the best inn in England.”

Some of his audience began to laugh, but somehow suddenly ceased doing so, as Dalroy strode forward and planted the sign of “The Old Ship” on the desolate sea–shore.

“And now,” he said, “you have charge of the stores we brought, Hump, and we will picnic. As it said in a song I once sang,

“The Saracen’s Head out of Araby came, King Richard riding in arms like
flame, And where he established his folk to be fed He set up his spear, and the Saracen’s Head.”

It was nearly dusk before the mob, much swelled by the many discontented on the Ivywood estates, reached the gates of Ivywood House. Strategically, and for the purposes of a night surprise, this might have done credit to the Captain’s military capacity. But the use to which he put it actually was what some might call eccentric. When he had disposed his forces, with strict injunctions of silence for the first few minutes, he turned to Pump, and said,

“And now, before we do anything else, I’m going to make a noise.”

And he produced from under brown paper what appeared to be a musical instrument.

“A summons to parley?” inquired Dorian, with interest, “a trumpet of defiance, or something of that kind?”

“No,” said Patrick, “a serenade.”
CHAPTER XXIV

THE ENIGMAS OF LADY JOAN

ON an evening when the sky was clear and only its fringes embroidered with the purple arabesques of the sunset, Joan Brett was walking on the upper lawn of the terraced garden at Ivywood, where the peacocks trail themselves about. She was not unlike one of the peacocks herself in beauty, and some might have said, in inutility; she had the proud head and the sweeping train; nor was she, in these days, devoid of the occasional disposition to scream. For, indeed, for some time past she had felt her existence closing round her with an incomprehensible quietude; and that is harder for the patience than an incomprehensible noise. Whenever she looked at the old yew hedges of the garden they seemed to be higher than when she saw them last; as if those living walls could still grow to shut her in. Whenever from the turret windows she had a sight of the sea, it seemed to be farther away. Indeed, the whole closing of the end of the turret wing with the new wall of eastern woodwork seemed to symbolise all her shapeless sensations. In her childhood the wing had ended with a broken–down door and a disused staircase. They led to an uncultivated copse and an abandoned railway tunnel, to which neither she nor anyone else ever wanted to go. Still, she knew what they led to. Now it seemed that this scrap of land had been sold and added to the adjoining estate; and about the adjoining estate nobody seemed to know anything in particular. The sense of things closing in increased upon her. All sorts of silly little details magnified the sensation. She could discover nothing about this new landlord next door, so to speak, since he was, it seemed, an elderly man who preferred to live in the greatest privacy. Miss Browning, Lord Ivywood’s secretary, could give her no further information than that he was a gentleman from the Mediterranean coast; which singular form of words seemed to have been put into her mouth. As a Mediterranean gentleman might mean anything from an American gentleman living in Venice to a black African on the edge of the Atlas, the description did not illuminate; and probably was not intended to do so. She occasionally saw his liveried servants going about; and their liveries were not like English liveries. She was also, in her somewhat morbid state, annoyed by the fact that the uniforms of the old Pebblewick militia had been changed, under the influence of the Turkish prestige in the recent war. They wore fezzes like the French Zouaves, which
were certainly much more practical than the heavy helmets they used to wear. It was a small matter, but it annoyed Lady Joan, who was, like so many clever women, at once subtle and conservative. It made her feel as if the whole world was being altered outside, and she was not allowed to know about it.

But she had deeper spiritual troubles also, while, under the pathetic entreaties of old, Lady Ivywood and her own sick mother, she stayed on week after week at Ivywood House. If the matter be stated cynically (as she herself was quite capable of stating it) she was engaged in the established feminine occupation of trying to like a man. But the cynicism would have been false; as cynicism nearly always is; for during the most crucial days of that period, she had really liked the man.

She had liked him when he was brought in with Pump’s bullet in his leg; and was still the strongest and calmest man in the room. She had liked him when the hurt took a dangerous turn, and when he bore pain to admiration. She had liked him when he showed no malice against the angry Dorian; she had liked him with something like enthusiasm on the night he rose rigid on his rude crutch, and, crushing all remonstrance, made his rash and swift rush to London. But, despite the queer closing–in–sensations of which we have spoken, she never liked him better than that evening when he lifted himself laboriously on his crutch up the terraces of the old garden and came to speak to her as she stood among the peacocks. He even tried to pat a peacock in a hazy way, as if it were a dog. He told her that these beautiful birds were, of course, imported from the East–by the semi–eastern empire of Macedonia. But, all the same, Joan had a dim suspicion that he had never noticed before that there were any peacocks at Ivywood. His greatest fault was a pride in the faultlessness of his mental and moral strength; but, if he had only known, something faintly comic in the unconscious side of him did him more good with the woman than all the rest.

“They were said to be the birds of Juno,” he said, “but I have little doubt that Juno, like so much else of the Homeric mythology, has also an Asiatic origin.”

“I always thought,” said Joan, “that Juno was rather too stately for the seraglio.”

“You ought to know,” replied Ivywood, with a courteous gesture, “for I never saw anyone who looked so like Juno as you do. But, indeed, there is a great deal of misunderstanding about the Arabian or Indian view of women. It is, somehow, too simple and solid for our paradoxical Christendom to comprehend. Even the vulgar joke against the Turks, that they like their brides fat, has in it a sort of distorted shadow of what I mean. They do not look so much at the
individual, as at Womanhood and the power of Nature.”

“I sometimes think,” said Joan, “that these fascinating theories are a little strained. Your friend Misysra told me the other day that women had the highest freedom in Turkey; as they were allowed to wear trousers.”

Ivywood smiled his rare and dry smile. “The Prophet has something of a simplicity often found with genius,” he answered. “I will not deny that some of the arguments he has employed have seemed to me crude and even fanciful. But he is right at the root. There is a kind of freedom that consists in never rebelling against Nature; and I think they understand it in the Orient better than we do in the West. You see, Joan, it is all very well to talk about love in our narrow, personal, romantic way; but there is something higher than the love of a lover or the love of love.”

“What is that?” asked Joan, looking down.

“The love of Fate,” said Lord Ivywood, with something like spiritual passion in his eyes. “Doesn’t Nietzsche say somewhere that the delight in destiny is the mark of the hero? We are mistaken if we think that the heroes and saints of Islam say ‘Kismet’ with bowed heads and in sorrow. They say ‘Kismet’ with a shout of joy. That which is fitting—that is what they really mean. In the Arabian tales, the most perfect prince is wedded to the most perfect princess—because it is fitting. The spiritual giants, the Genii, achieve it—that is, the purposes of Nature. In the selfish, sentimental European novels, the loveliest princess on earth might have run away with her middle-aged drawing-master. These things are not in the Path. The Turk rides out to wed the fairest queen of the earth; he conquers empires to do it; and he is not ashamed of his laurels.”

The crumpled violet clouds around the edge of the silver evening looked to Lady Joan more and more like vivid violet embroideries hemming some silver curtain in the closed corridor at Ivywood. The peacocks looked more lustrous and beautiful than they ever had before; but for the first time she really felt they came out of the land of the Arabian Nights.

“Joan,” said Philip Ivywood, very softly, in the twilight, “I am not ashamed of my laurels, I see no meaning in what these Christians call humility. I will be the greatest man in the world if I can; and I think I can. Therefore, something that is higher than love itself, Fate and what is fitting, make it right that I should wed the most beautiful woman in the world. And she stands among the peacocks and is more beautiful and more proud than they.”

Joan’s troubled eyes were on the violet horizon and her troubled lips could utter nothing but something like “don’t.”
“Joan,” said Philip, again, “I have told you, you are the woman one of the
great heroes could have desired. Let me now tell you something I could have
told no one to whom I had not thus spoken of love and betrothal. When I was
twenty years old in a town in Germany, pursuing my education, I did what the
West calls falling in love. She was a fisher-girl from the coast; for this town was
near the sea. My story might have ended there. I could not have entered
diplomacy with such a wife, but I should not have minded then. But a little while
after, I wandered into the edges of Flanders, and found myself standing above
some of the last grand reaches of the Rhine. And things came over me but for
which I might be crying stinking fish to this day. I thought how many holy or
lovely nooks that river had left behind, and gone on. It might anywhere in
Switzerland have spent its weak youth in a spirit over a high crag, or anywhere
in the Rhinelands lost itself in a marsh covered with flowers. But it went on to
the perfect sea, which is the fulfilment of a river.”

Again, Joan could not speak; and again it was Philip who went on.

“Here is yet another thing that could not be said, till the hand of the prince had
been offered to the princess. It may be that in the East they carry too far this
matter of infant marriages. But look round on the mad young marriages that go
to pieces everywhere! And ask yourself whether you don’t wish they had been
infant marriages! People talk in the newspapers of the heartlessness of royal
marriages. But you and I do not believe the newspapers, I suppose. We know
there is no King in England; nor has been since his head fell before Whitehall.
You know that you and I and the families are the Kings of England; and our
marriages are royal marriages. Let the suburbs call them heartless. Let us say
they need the brave heart that is the only badge of aristocracy. Joan,” he said,
very gently, “perhaps you have been near a crag in Switzerland, or a marsh
covered with flowers. Perhaps you have known—a fisher-girl. But there is
something greater and simpler than all that; something you find in the great epics
of the East—the beautiful woman, and the great man, and Fate.”

“My lord,” said Joan, using the formal phrase by an unfathomable instinct,
“will you allow me a little more time to think of this? And let there be no notion
of disloyalty, if my decision is one way or the other?”

“Why, of course,” said Ivywood, bowing over his crutch; and he limped off,
picking his way among the peacocks.

For days afterward Joan tried to build the foundations of her earthly destiny.
She was still quite young, but she felt as if she had lived thousands of years,
worrying over the same question. She told herself again and again, and truly, that
many a better woman than she had taken a second–best which was not so first–class a second–best. But there was something complicated in the very atmosphere. She liked listening to Philip Ivywood at his best, as anyone likes listening to a man who can really play the violin; but the great trouble always is that at certain awful moments you cannot be certain whether it is the violin or the man.

Moreover, there was a curious tone and spirit in the Ivywood household, especially after the wound and convalescence of Ivywood, about which she could say nothing except that it annoyed her somehow. There was something in it glorious–but also languorous. By an impulse by no means uncommon among intelligent, fashionable people, she felt a desire to talk to a sensible woman of the middle or lower classes; and almost threw herself on the bosom of Miss Browning for sympathy.

But Miss Browning, with her curling, reddish hair and white, very clever face, struck the same indescribable note. Lord Ivywood was assumed as a first principle; as if he were Father Time, or the Clerk of the Weather. He was called “He.” The fifth time he was called “He,” Joan could not understand why she seemed to smell the plants in the hot conservatory.

“You see,” said Miss Browning, “we mustn’t interfere with his career; that is the important thing. And, really, I think the quieter we keep about everything the better. I am sure he is maturing very big plans. You heard what the Prophet said the other night?”

“The last thing the Prophet said to me,” said the darker lady, in a dogged manner, “was that when we English see the English youth, we cry out ‘He is crescent!’ But when we see the English aged man, we cry out ‘He is cross!’”

A lady with so clever a face could not but laugh faintly; but she continued on a determined theme, “The Prophet said, you know, that all real love had in it an element of fate. And I am sure that is his view, too. People cluster round a centre as little stars do round a star; because a star is a magnet. You are never wrong when destiny blows behind you like a great big wind; and I think many things have been judged unfairly that way. It’s all very well to talk about the infant marriages in India.”

“Miss Browning,” said Joan, “are you interested in the infant marriages in India?”

“Well–” said Miss Browning.

“Is your sister interested in them? I’ll run and ask her,” cried Joan, plunging across the room to where Mrs. Mackintosh was sitting at a table scribbling
secretarial notes.

“Well,” said Mrs. Mackintosh, turning up a rich–haired, resolute head, more handsome than her sister’s, “I believe the Indian way is the best. When people are left to themselves in early youth, any of them might marry anything. We might have married a nigger or a fish–wife or–a criminal.”

“Now, Mrs. Mackintosh,” said Joan, with black–browed severity, “you well know you would never have married a fish–wife. Where is Enid?” she ended suddenly.

“Lady Enid,” said Miss Browning, “is looking out music in the music room, I think.”

Joan walked swiftly through several long salons, and found her fair–haired and pallid relative actually at the piano.

“Enid,” cried Joan, “you know I’ve always been fond of you. For God’s sake tell me what is the matter with this house? I admire Philip as everybody does. But what is the matter with the house? Why do all these rooms and gardens seem to be shutting me in and in and in? Why does everything look more and more the same? Why does everybody say the same thing? Oh, I don’t often talk metaphysics; but there is a purpose in this. That’s the only way of putting it; there is a purpose. And I don’t know what it is.”

Lady Enid Wimpole played a preliminary bar or two on the piano. Then she said,

“Nor do I, Joan. I don’t indeed. I know exactly what you mean. But it’s just because there is a purpose that I have faith in him and trust him.” She began softly to play a ballad tune of the Rhineland; and perhaps the music suggested her next remark. “Suppose you were looking at some of the last reaches of the Rhine, where it flows–”

“Enid!” cried Joan, “if you say ‘into the North Sea,’ I shall scream. Scream, do you hear, louder than all the peacocks together.”

“Well,” expostulated Lady Enid, looking up rather wildly, “The Rhine does flow into the North Sea, doesn’t it?”

“I dare say,” said Joan, recklessly, “but the Rhine might have flowed into the Round Pond, before you would have known or cared, until–”

“Until what?” asked Enid; and her music suddenly ceased. “Until something happened that I cannot understand,” said Joan, moving away.

“You are something I cannot understand,” said Enid Wimpole. “But I will play something else, if this annoys you.” And she fingered the music again with an eye to choice.
Joan walked back through the corridor of the music room, and restlessly resumed her seat in the room with the two lady secretaries.

“Well,” asked the red–haired and good–humoured Mrs. Mackintosh, without looking up from her work of scribbling, “have you discovered anything?”

For some moments Joan appeared to be in a blacker state of brooding than usual; then she said, in a candid and friendly tone, which somehow contrasted with her knit and swarthy brows—“No, really. At least I think I’ve only found out two things; and they are only things about myself. I’ve discovered that I do like heroism, but I don’t like hero worship.”

“Surely,” said Miss Browning, in the Girton manner, “the one always flows from the other.”

“I hope not,” said Joan.

“But what else can you do with the hero?” asked Mrs. Mackintosh, still without looking up from her writing, “except worship him?”

“You might crucify him,” said Joan, with a sudden return of savage restlessness, as she rose from her chair. “Things seem to happen then.”

“Aren’t you tired?” asked the Miss Browning who had the clever face.

“Yes,” said Joan, “and the worst sort of tiredness; when you don’t even know what you’re tired of. To tell the honest truth, I think I’m tired of this house.”

“It’s very old, of course, and parts of it are still dismal,” said Miss Browning, “but he has enormously improved it. The decoration, with the moon and stars, down in the wing with the turret is really—”

Away in the distant music room, Lady Enid, having found the music she preferred, was fingering its prelude on the piano. At the first few notes of it, Joan Brett stood up, like a tigress.

“Thanks—” she said, with a hoarse softness, “that’s it, of course! and that’s just what we all are! She’s found the right tune now.”

“What tune is it?” asked the wondering secretary.

“The tune of harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer and all kinds of music,” said Joan, softly and fiercely, “when we shall bow down and worship the Golden Image that Nebuchadnezzar the King has set up. Girls! Women! Do you know what this place is? Do you know why it is all doors within doors and lattice behind lattice; and everything is curtained and cushioned; and why the flowers that are so fragrant here are not the flowers of our hills?”

From the distant and slowly darkening music room, Enid Wimpole’s song came thin and clear:

“Less than the dust beneath thy chariot wheel, Less than the rust that never
stained thy sword—"

“Do you know what we are?” demanded Joan Brett, again. “We are a Harem.”

“Why, what can you mean?” cried the younger girl, in great agitation. “Why, Lord Ivywood has never”

“I know he has never. I am not sure,” said Joan, “even whether he would ever. I shall never understand that man, nor will anybody else. But I tell you that is the spirit. That is what we are. And this room stinks of polygamy as certainly as it smells of tube–roses.”

“Why, Joan,” cried Lady Enid, entering the room like a well–bred ghost, “what on earth is the matter with you. You all look as white as sheets.”

Joan took no heed of her but went on with her own obstinate argument.

“And, besides,” she said, “if there’s one thing we do know about him it is that he believes on principle in doing things slowly. He calls it evolution and relativity and the expanding of an idea into larger ideas. How do we know he isn’t doing that slowly; getting us accustomed to living like this, so that it may be the less shock when he goes further–steeping us in the atmosphere before he actually introduces,” and she shuddered, “the institution. Is it any more calmly outrageous a scheme than any other of Ivywood’s schemes; than a sepoy commander–in–chief, or Misysra preaching in Westminster Abbey, or the destruction of all the inns in England? I will not wait and expand. I will not be evolved. I will not develop into something that is not me. My feet shall be outside these walls if I walk the roads for it afterward; or I will scream as I would scream trapped in any den by the Docks.”

She swept down the rooms toward the turret, with a sudden passion for solitude; but as she passed the astronomical wood–carving that had closed up the end of the old wing, Enid saw her strike it with her clinched hand.

It was in the turret that she had a strange experience. She was again, later on, using its isolation to worry out the best way of having it out with Philip, when he should return from his visit to London; for to tell old Lady Ivywood what was on her mind would be about as kind and useful as describing Chinese tortures to a baby. The evening was very quiet, of the pale grey sort, and all that side of Ivywood lay before her eyes, undisturbed. She was the more surprised when her dreaming took note of a sort of stirring in the grey–purple dusk of the bushes; of whisperings; and of many footsteps. Then the silence settled down again; and then it was startlingly broken by a big voice singing in the dark distance. It was accompanied by faint sounds that might have been from the fingering of some lute or viol:
“Lady, the light is dying in the skies, Lady, and let us die when honour dies, Your dear, dropped glove was like a gauntlet flung, When you and I were young. For something more than splendour stood; and ease was not the only good About the woods in Ivywood when you and I were young.

“Lady, the stars are falling pale and small, Lady, we will not live if life be all Forgetting those good stars in heaven hung When all the world was young, For more than gold was in a ring, and love was not a little thing Between the trees in Ivywood when all the world was young.”

The singing ceased; and the bustle in the bushes could hardly be called more than a whisper. But sounds of the same sort and somewhat louder seemed wafted round corners from other sides of the house; and the whole night seemed full of something that was alive, but was more than a single man.

She heard a cry behind her, and Enid rushed into the room as white as one of the lilies.

“What awful thing is happening?” she cried. “The courtyard is full of men shouting, and there are torches everywhere and—”

Joan heard a tramp of men marching and heard, afar off, another song, sung on a more derisive note, something like—“But Ivywood, Lord Ivywood, He rots the tree as ivy would.”

“I think,” said Joan, thoughtfully, “it is the End of the World.”

“But where are the police?” wailed her cousin. “They don’t seem to be anywhere about since they wore those fezzes. We shall be murdered or—”

Three thundering and measured blows shook the decorative wood panelling at the end of the wing; as if admittance were demanded with the club of a giant. Enid remembered that she had thought Joan’s little blow energetic, and shuddered. Both the girls stared at the stars and moons and suns blazoned on that sacred wall that leapt and shuddered under the strokes of the doom.

Then the sun fell from Heaven, and the moon and stars dropped down and were scattered about the Persian carpet; and by the opening of the end of the world, Patrick Dalroy came in, carrying a mandolin.
CHAPTER XXV

THE FINDING OF THE SUPERMAN

“I’VE brought you a little dog,” said Mr. Dalroy, introducing the rampant Quoodle. “I had him brought down here in a large hamper labelled ‘Explosives,’ a title which appears to have been well selected.”

He had bowed to Lady Enid on entering and taken Joan’s hand with the least suggestion that he wanted to do something else with it; but he resolutely resumed his conversation, which was on the subject of dogs.

“People who bring back dogs,” he said, “are always under a cloud of suspicion. Sometimes it is hideously hinted that the citizen who brings the dog back with him is identical with the citizen who took the dog away with him. In my case, of course, such conduct is inconceivable. But the returners of dogs, that prosperous and increasing class, are also accused,” he went on, looking straight at Joan, with blank blue eyes, “of coming back for a Reward. There is more truth in this charge.”

Then, with a change of manner more extraordinary than any revolution, even the revolution that was roaring round the house, he took her hand again and kissed it, saying, with a confounding seriousness,

“I know at least that you will pray for my soul.”

“You had better pray for mine, if I have one,” answered Joan, “but why now?”

“Because,” said Patrick, “you will hear from outside, you may even see from that turret window something which in brute fact has never been seen in England since Poor Monmouth’s army went down. In spirit and in truth it has not happened since Saladin and Coeur de Lion crashed together. I only add one thing, and that you know already. I have lived loving you and I shall die loving you. It is the only dimension of the Universe in which I have not wandered and gone astray. I leave the dog to guard you;” and he disappeared down the old broken staircase.

Lady Enid was much mystified that no popular pursuit assailed this stair or invaded the house. But Lady Joan knew better. She had gone, on the suggestion she most cared about, into the turret room and looked out of its many windows on to the abandoned copse and tunnel, which were now fenced off with high walls, the boundary of the mysterious property next door. Across that high barrier she could not even see the tunnel, and barely the tops of the tallest trees
which hid its entrance from sight. But in an instant she knew that Dalroy was not hurling his forces on Ivywood at all, but on the house and estate beyond it.

And then followed a sight that was not an experience but rather a revolving vision. She could never describe it afterward, nor could any of those involved in so violent and mystical a wheel. She had seen a huge wall of a breaker wash all over the parade at Pebblewick; and wondered that so huge a hammer could be made merely of water. She had never had a notion of what it is like when it is made of men.

The palisade, put up by the new landlord in front of the old tangled ground by the tunnel, she had long regarded as something as settled and ordinary as one of the walls of the drawing room. It swung and split and sprang into a thousand pieces under the mere blow of human bodies bursting with rage; and the great wave crested the obstacle more clearly than she had ever seen any great wave crest the parade. Only, when the fence was broken, she saw behind it something that robbed her of reason; so that she seemed to be living in all ages and all lands at once. She never could describe the vision afterward; but she always denied it was a dream. She said it was worse; it was something more real than reality. It was a line of real soldiers, which is always a magnificent sight. But they might have been the soldiers of Hannibal or of Attila, they might have been dug up from the cemeteries of Sidon and Babylon, for all Joan had to do with them. There, encamped in English meadows, with a hawthorn–tree in front of them and three beeches behind, was something that has never been in camp nearer than some leagues south of Paris, since that Carolus called The Hammer broke it backward at Tours.

There flew the green standard of that great faith and strong civilization which has so often almost entered the great cities of the West; which long encircled Vienna, which was barely barred from Paris; but which had never before been seen in arms on the soil of England. At one end of the line stood Philip Ivywood, in a uniform of his own special creation, a compromise between the Sepoy and the Turkish uniform. The compromise worked more and more wildly in Joan’s mind. If any impression remained it was merely that England had conquered India and Turkey had conquered England. Then she saw that Ivywood, for all his uniform, was not the Commander of these forces, for an old man, with a great scar on his face, which was not a European face, set himself in the front of the battle, as if it had been a battle in the old epics, and crossed swords with Patrick Dalroy. He had come to return the scar upon his forehead; and he returned it with many wounds, though at last it was he who sank under the sword thrust. He
fell on his face; and Dalroy looked at him with something that is much more
great than pity. Blood was flowing from Patrick’s wrist and forehead, but he
made a salute with his sword. As he was doing so, the corpse, as it appeared,
laboriously lifted a face, with feeble eyelids. And, seeming to understand the
quarters of the sky by instinct, Oman Pasha dragged himself a foot or so to the
left; and fell with his face toward Mecca.

After that the turret turned round and round about Joan and she knew not
whether the things she saw were history or prophecy. Something in that last fact
of being crushed by the weapons of brown men and yellow, secretly entrenched
in English meadows, had made the English what they had not been for centuries.
The hawthorn–tree was twisted and broken, as it was at the Battle of Ashdown,
when Alfred led his first charge against the Danes. The beech–trees were
splashed up to their lowest branches with the mingling of brave heathen and
brave Christian blood. She knew no more than that when a column of the
Christian rebels, led by Humphrey of the Sign of the Ship, burst through the
choked and forgotten tunnel and took the Turkish regiment in the rear, it was the
end.

That violent and revolving vision became something beyond the human voice
or human ear. She could not intelligently hear even the shots and shouts round
the last magnificent rally of the Turks. It was natural, therefore, that she should
not hear the words Lord Ivywood addressed to his next–door neighbour, a
Turkish officer, or rather to himself. But his words were:

“I have gone where God has never dared to go. I am above the silly supermen
as they are above mere men. Where I walk in the Heavens, no man has walked
before me; and I am alone in a garden. All this passing about me is like the
lonely plucking of garden flowers. I will have this blossom, I will have that.”

The sentence ended so suddenly that the officer looked at him, as if expecting
him to speak. But he did not speak.

But Patrick and Joan, wandering together in a world made warm and fresh
again, as it can be for few in a world that calls courage frenzy and love
superstition, feeling every branching tree as a friend with arms open for the man,
or every sweeping slope as a great train trailing behind the woman, did one day
climb up to the little white cottage that was now the home of the Superman.

He sat playing with a pale, reposeful face, with scraps of flower and weed put
before him on a wooden table. He did not notice them, nor anything else around
him; scarcely even Enid Wimpole, who attended to all his wants.

“He is perfectly happy,” she said quietly.
Joan, with the glow on her dark face, could not prevent herself from replying, “And we are so happy.”
“Yes,” said Enid, “but his happiness will last,” and she wept.
“I understand,” said Joan, and kissed her cousin, not without tears of her own.
MANALIVE

G. K. CHESTERTON
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

MANALIVE

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### PART I

#### THE ENIGMAS OF INNOCENT SMITH

**CHAPTER I**  
HOW THE GREAT WIND CAME TO BEACON HOUSE

**CHAPTER II**  
THE LUGGAGE OF AN OPTIMIST

**CHAPTER III**  
THE BANNER OF BEACON

**CHAPTER IV**  
THE GARDEN OF THE GOD

**CHAPTER V**  
THE ALLEGORICAL PRACTICAL JOKER

### PART II

#### THE EXPLANATIONS OF INNOCENT SMITH

**CHAPTER I**  
THE EYE OF DEATH; OR, THE MURDER CHARGE

**CHAPTER II**  
THE TWO CURATES; OR, THE BURGLARY CHARGE

**CHAPTER III**  
THE ROUND ROAD; OR, THE DESERTION CHARGE

**CHAPTER IV**  
THE WILD WEDDINGS; OR, THE POLYGAMY CHARGE

**CHAPTER V**  
HOW THE GREAT WIND WENT FROM BEACON HOUSE
PART I

THE ENIGMAS OF INNOCENT SMITH
CHAPTER I

HOW THE GREAT WIND CAME TO BEACON HOUSE

A wind sprang high in the west, like a wave of unreasonable happiness, and tore eastward across England, trailing with it the frosty scent of forests and the cold intoxication of the sea. In a million holes and corners it refreshed a man like a flagon, and astonished him like a blow. In the inmost chambers of intricate and embowered houses it woke like a domestic explosion, littering the floor with some professor’s papers till they seemed as precious as fugitive, or blowing out the candle by which a boy read “Treasure Island” and wrapping him in roaring dark. But everywhere it bore drama into undramatic lives, and carried the trump of crisis across the world. Many a harassed mother in a mean backyard had looked at five dwarfish shirts on the clothes-line as at some small, sick tragedy; it was as if she had hanged her five children. The wind came, and they were full and kicking as if five fat imps had sprung into them; and far down in her oppressed subconscious she half–remembered those coarse comedies of her fathers when the elves still dwelt in the homes of men. Many an unnoticed girl in a dank walled garden had tossed herself into the hammock with the same intolerant gesture with which she might have tossed herself into the Thames; and that wind rent the waving wall of woods and lifted the hammock like a balloon, and showed her shapes of quaint clouds far beyond, and pictures of bright villages far below, as if she rode heaven in a fairy boat. Many a dusty clerk or cleric, plodding a telescopic road of poplars, thought for the hundredth time that they were like the plumes of a hearse; when this invisible energy caught and swung and clashed them round his head like a wreath or salutation of seraphic wings. There was in it something more inspired and authoritative even than the old wind of the proverb; for this was the good wind that blows nobody harm.

The flying blast struck London just where it scales the northern heights, terrace above terrace, as precipitous as Edinburgh. It was round about this place that some poet, probably drunk, looked up astonished at all those streets gone skywards, and (thinking vaguely of glaciers and roped mountaineers) gave it the name of Swiss Cottage, which it has never been able to shake off. At some stage of those heights a terrace of tall gray houses, mostly empty and almost as desolate as the Grampians, curved round at the western end, so that the last building, a boarding establishment called “Beacon House,” offered abruptly to
the sunset its high, narrow and towering termination, like the prow of some deserted ship.

The ship, however, was not wholly deserted. The proprietor of the boarding-house, a Mrs. Duke, was one of those helpless persons against whom fate wars in vain; she smiled vaguely both before and after all her calamities; she was too soft to be hurt. But by the aid (or rather under the orders) of a strenuous niece she always kept the remains of a clientele, mostly of young but listless folks. And there were actually five inmates standing disconsolately about the garden when the great gale broke at the base of the terminal tower behind them, as the sea bursts against the base of an outstanding cliff.

All day that hill of houses over London had been domed and sealed up with cold cloud. Yet three men and two girls had at last found even the gray and chilly garden more tolerable than the black and cheerless interior. When the wind came it split the sky and shouldered the cloudland left and right, unbarring great clear furnaces of evening gold. The burst of light released and the burst of air blowing seemed to come almost simultaneously; and the wind especially caught everything in a throttling violence. The bright short grass lay all one way like brushed hair. Every shrub in the garden tugged at its roots like a dog at the collar, and strained every leaping leaf after the hunting and exterminating element. Now and again a twig would snap and fly like a bolt from an arbalist. The three men stood stiffly and aslant against the wind, as if leaning against a wall. The two ladies disappeared into the house; rather, to speak truly, they were blown into the house. Their two frocks, blue and white, looked like two big broken flowers, driving and drifting upon the gale. Nor is such a poetic fancy inappropriate, for there was something oddly romantic about this inrush of air and light after a long, leaden and unlifting day. Grass and garden trees seemed glittering with something at once good and unnatural, like a fire from fairyland. It seemed like a strange sunrise at the wrong end of the day.

The girl in white dived in quickly enough, for she wore a white hat of the proportions of a parachute, which might have wafted her away into the coloured clouds of evening. She was their one splash of splendour, and irradiated wealth in that impecunious place (staying there temporarily with a friend), an heiress in a small way, by name Rosamund Hunt, brown-eyed, round-faced, but resolute and rather boisterous. On top of her wealth she was good-humoured and rather good-looking; but she had not married, perhaps because there was always a crowd of men around her. She was not fast (though some might have called her vulgar), but she gave irresolute youths an impression of being at once popular
and inaccessible. A man felt as if he had fallen in love with Cleopatra, or as if he were asking for a great actress at the stage door. Indeed, some theatrical spangles seemed to cling about Miss Hunt; she played the guitar and the mandoline; she always wanted charades; and with that great rending of the sky by sun and storm, she felt a girlish melodrama swell again within her. To the crashing orchestration of the air the clouds rose like the curtain of some long–expected pantomime.

Nor, oddly, was the girl in blue entirely unimpressed by this apocalypse in a private garden; though she was one of most prosaic and practical creatures alive. She was, indeed, no other than the strenuous niece whose strength alone upheld that mansion of decay. But as the gale swung and swelled the blue and white skirts till they took on the monstrous contours of Victorian crinolines, a sunken memory stirred in her that was almost romance—a memory of a dusty volume of Punch in an aunt’s house in infancy: pictures of crinoline hoops and croquet hoops and some pretty story, of which perhaps they were a part. This half–perceptible fragrance in her thoughts faded almost instantly, and Diana Duke entered the house even more promptly than her companion. Tall, slim, aquiline, and dark, she seemed made for such swiftness. In body she was of the breed of those birds and beasts that are at once long and alert, like greyhounds or herons or even like an innocent snake. The whole house revolved on her as on a rod of steel. It would be wrong to say that she commanded; for her own efficiency was so impatient that she obeyed herself before any one else obeyed her. Before electricians could mend a bell or locksmiths open a door, before dentists could pluck a tooth or butlers draw a tight cork, it was done already with the silent violence of her slim hands. She was light; but there was nothing leaping about her lightness. She spurned the ground, and she meant to spurn it. People talk of the pathos and failure of plain women; but it is a more terrible thing that a beautiful woman may succeed in everything but womanhood.

“It’s enough to blow your head off,” said the young woman in white, going to the looking–glass.

The young woman in blue made no reply, but put away her gardening gloves, and then went to the sideboard and began to spread out an afternoon cloth for tea.

“Enough to blow your head off, I say,” said Miss Rosamund Hunt, with the unruffled cheeriness of one whose songs and speeches had always been safe for an encore.

“Only your hat, I think,” said Diana Duke, “but I dare say that is sometimes
more important.”

Rosamund’s face showed for an instant the offence of a spoilt child, and then the humour of a very healthy person. She broke into a laugh and said, “Well, it would have to be a big wind to blow your head off.”

There was another silence; and the sunset breaking more and more from the sundering clouds, filled the room with soft fire and painted the dull walls with ruby and gold.

“Somebody once told me,” said Rosamund Hunt, “that it’s easier to keep one’s head when one has lost one’s heart.”

“Oh, don’t talk such rubbish,” said Diana with savage sharpness.

Outside, the garden was clad in a golden splendour; but the wind was still stiffly blowing, and the three men who stood their ground might also have considered the problem of hats and heads. And, indeed, their position, touching hats, was somewhat typical of them. The tallest of the three abode the blast in a high silk hat, which the wind seemed to charge as vainly as that other sullen tower, the house behind him. The second man tried to hold on a stiff straw hat at all angles, and ultimately held it in his hand. The third had no hat, and, by his attitude, seemed never to have had one in his life. Perhaps this wind was a kind of fairy wand to test men and women, for there was much of the three men in this difference.

The man in the solid silk hat was the embodiment of silkiness and solidity. He was a big, bland, bored and (as some said) boring man, with flat fair hair and handsome heavy features; a prosperous young doctor by the name of Warner. But if his blondness and blandness seemed at first a little fatuous, it is certain that he was no fool. If Rosamund Hunt was the only person there with much money, he was the only person who had as yet found any kind of fame. His treatise on “The Probable Existence of Pain in the Lowest Organisms” had been universally hailed by the scientific world as at once solid and daring. In short, he undoubtedly had brains; and perhaps it was not his fault if they were the kind of brains that most men desire to analyze with a poker.

The young man who put his hat off and on was a scientific amateur in a small way, and worshipped the great Warner with a solemn freshness. It was, in fact, at his invitation that the distinguished doctor was present; for Warner lived in no such ramshackle lodging–house, but in a professional palace in Harley Street. This young man was really the youngest and best–looking of the three. But he was one of those persons, both male and female, who seem doomed to be good–looking and insignificant. Brown–haired, high–coloured, and shy, he seemed to
lose the delicacy of his features in a sort of blur of brown and red as he stood blushing and blinking against the wind. He was one of those obvious unnoticeable people: every one knew that he was Arthur Inglewood, unmarried, moral, decidedly intelligent, living on a little money of his own, and hiding himself in the two hobbies of photography and cycling. Everybody knew him and forgot him; even as he stood there in the glare of golden sunset there was something about him indistinct, like one of his own red–brown amateur photographs.

The third man had no hat; he was lean, in light, vaguely sporting clothes, and the large pipe in his mouth made him look all the leaner. He had a long ironical face, blue–black hair, the blue eyes of an Irishman, and the blue chin of an actor. An Irishman he was, an actor he was not, except in the old days of Miss Hunt’s charades, being, as a matter of fact, an obscure and flippant journalist named Michael Moon. He had once been hazily supposed to be reading for the Bar; but (as Warner would say with his rather elephantine wit) it was mostly at another kind of bar that his friends found him. Moon, however, did not drink, nor even frequently get drunk; he simply was a gentleman who liked low company. This was partly because company is quieter than society: and if he enjoyed talking to a barmaid (as apparently he did), it was chiefly because the barmaid did the talking. Moreover he would often bring other talent to assist her. He shared that strange trick of all men of his type, intellectual and without ambition—the trick of going about with his mental inferiors. There was a small resilient Jew named Moses Gould in the same boarding–house, a man whose negro vitality and vulgarity amused Michael so much that he went round with him from bar to bar, like the owner of a performing monkey.

The colossal clearance which the wind had made of that cloudy sky grew clearer and clearer; chamber within chamber seemed to open in heaven. One felt one might at last find something lighter than light. In the fullness of this silent effulgence all things collected their colours again: the gray trunks turned silver, and the drab gravel gold. One bird fluttered like a loosened leaf from one tree to another, and his brown feathers were brushed with fire.

“Inglewood,” said Michael Moon, with his blue eye on the bird, “have you any friends?”

Dr. Warner mistook the person addressed, and turning a broad beaming face, said,—

“Oh yes, I go out a great deal.”

Michael Moon gave a tragic grin, and waited for his real informant, who
spoke a moment after in a voice curiously cool, fresh and young, as coming out of that brown and even dusty interior.

“Really,” answered Inglewood, “I’m afraid I’ve lost touch with my old friends. The greatest friend I ever had was at school, a fellow named Smith. It’s odd you should mention it, because I was thinking of him to-day, though I haven’t seen him for seven or eight years. He was on the science side with me at school—a clever fellow though queer; and he went up to Oxford when I went to Germany. The fact is, it’s rather a sad story. I often asked him to come and see me, and when I heard nothing I made inquiries, you know. I was shocked to learn that poor Smith had gone off his head. The accounts were a bit cloudy, of course, some saying that he had recovered again; but they always say that. About a year ago I got a telegram from him myself. The telegram, I’m sorry to say, put the matter beyond a doubt.”

“Quite so,” assented Dr. Warner stolidly; “insanity is generally incurable.”

“So is sanity,” said the Irishman, and studied him with a dreary eye.

“Symptoms?” asked the doctor. “What was this telegram?”

“It’s a shame to joke about such things,” said Inglewood, in his honest, embarrassed way; “the telegram was Smith’s illness, not Smith. The actual words were, ‘Man found alive with two legs.’”

“Alive with two legs,” repeated Michael, frowning. “Perhaps a version of alive and kicking? I don’t know much about people out of their senses; but I suppose they ought to be kicking.”

“And people in their senses?” asked Warner, smiling.

“Oh, they ought to be kicked,” said Michael with sudden heartiness.

“The message is clearly insane,” continued the impenetrable Warner.

“The best test is a reference to the undeveloped normal type. Even a baby does not expect to find a man with three legs.”

“Three legs,” said Michael Moon, “would be very convenient in this wind.”

A fresh eruption of the atmosphere had indeed almost thrown them off their balance and broken the blackened trees in the garden. Beyond, all sorts of accidental objects could be seen scouring the wind–scoured sky—straws, sticks, rags, papers, and, in the distance, a disappearing hat. Its disappearance, however, was not final; after an interval of minutes they saw it again, much larger and closer, like a white panama, towering up into the heavens like a balloon, staggering to and fro for an instant like a stricken kite, and then settling in the centre of their own lawn as falteringingly as a fallen leaf.

“Somebody’s lost a good hat,” said Dr. Warner shortly.
Almost as he spoke, another object came over the garden wall, flying after the fluttering panama. It was a big green umbrella. After that came hurtling a huge yellow Gladstone bag, and after that came a figure like a flying wheel of legs, as in the shield of the Isle of Man.

But though for a flash it seemed to have five or six legs, it alighted upon two, like the man in the queer telegram. It took the form of a large light–haired man in gay green holiday clothes. He had bright blonde hair that the wind brushed back like a German’s, a flushed eager face like a cherub’s, and a prominent pointing nose, a little like a dog’s. His head, however, was by no means cherubic in the sense of being without a body. On the contrary, on his vast shoulders and shape generally gigantesque, his head looked oddly and unnaturally small. This gave rise to a scientific theory (which his conduct fully supported) that he was an idiot.

Inglewood had a politeness instinctive and yet awkward. His life was full of arrested half gestures of assistance. And even this prodigy of a big man in green, leaping the wall like a bright green grasshopper, did not paralyze that small altruism of his habits in such a matter as a lost hat. He was stepping forward to recover the green gentleman’s head–gear, when he was struck rigid with a roar like a bull’s.

“Unsportsmanlike!” bellowed the big man. “Give it fair play, give it fair play!” And he came after his own hat quickly but cautiously, with burning eyes. The hat had seemed at first to droop and dawdle as in ostentatious langour on the sunny lawn; but the wind again freshening and rising, it went dancing down the garden with the devilry of a pas de quatre. The eccentric went bounding after it with kangaroo leaps and bursts of breathless speech, of which it was not always easy to pick up the thread: “Fair play, fair play . . . sport of kings . . . chase their crowns . . . quite humane . . . tramontana . . . cardinals chase red hats . . . old English hunting . . . started a hat in Bramber Combe . . . hat at bay . . . mangled hounds . . . Got him!”

As the wind rose out of a roar into a shriek, he leapt into the sky on his strong, fantastic legs, snatched at the vanishing hat, missed it, and pitched sprawling face foremost on the grass. The hat rose over him like a bird in triumph. But its triumph was premature; for the lunatic, flung forward on his hands, threw up his boots behind, waved his two legs in the air like symbolic ensigns (so that they actually thought again of the telegram), and actually caught the hat with his feet. A prolonged and piercing yell of wind split the welkin from end to end. The eyes of all the men were blinded by the invisible blast, as by a strange, clear cataract
of transparency rushing between them and all objects about them. But as the large man fell back in a sitting posture and solemnly crowned himself with the hat, Michael found, to his incredulous surprise, that he had been holding his breath, like a man watching a duel.

While that tall wind was at the top of its sky-scraping energy, another short cry was heard, beginning very querulous, but ending very quick, swallowed in abrupt silence. The shiny black cylinder of Dr. Warner's official hat sailed off his head in the long, smooth parabola of an airship, and in almost cresting a garden tree was caught in the topmost branches. Another hat was gone. Those in that garden felt themselves caught in an unaccustomed eddy of things happening; no one seemed to know what would blow away next. Before they could speculate, the cheering and halloowing hat-hunter was already halfway up the tree, swinging himself from fork to fork with his strong, bent, grasshopper legs, and still giving forth his gasping, mysterious comments.

"Tree of life . . . Ygdrasil . . . climb for centuries perhaps . . . owls nesting in the hat . . . remotest generations of owls . . . still usurpers . . . gone to heaven . . . man in the moon wears it . . . brigand . . . not yours . . . belongs to depressed medical man . . . in garden . . . give it up . . . give it up!"

The tree swung and swept and thrashed to and fro in the thundering wind like a thistle, and flamed in the full sunshine like a bonfire. The green, fantastic human figure, vivid against its autumn red and gold, was already among its highest and craziest branches, which by bare luck did not break with the weight of his big body. He was up there among the last tossing leaves and the first twinkling stars of evening, still talking to himself cheerfully, reasoningly, half apologetically, in little gasps. He might well be out of breath, for his whole preposterous raid had gone with one rush; he had bounded the wall once like a football, swept down the garden like a slide, and shot up the tree like a rocket. The other three men seemed buried under incident piled on incident—a wild world where one thing began before another thing left off. All three had the first thought. The tree had been there for the five years they had known the boarding-house. Each one of them was active and strong. No one of them had even thought of climbing it. Beyond that, Inglewood felt first the mere fact of colour. The bright brisk leaves, the bleak blue sky, the wild green arms and legs, reminded him irrationally of something glowing in his infancy, something akin to a gaudy man on a golden tree; perhaps it was only painted monkey on a stick. Oddly enough, Michael Moon, though more of a humourist, was touched on a tenderer nerve, half remembered the old, young theatricals with Rosamund, and
was amused to find himself almost quoting Shakespeare—

“For valour. Is not love a Hercules,
Still climbing trees in the Hesperides?”

Even the immovable man of science had a bright, bewildered sensation that the Time Machine had given a great jerk, and gone forward with rather rattling rapidity.

He was not, however, wholly prepared for what happened next. The man in green, riding the frail topmost bough like a witch on a very risky broomstick, reached up and rent the black hat from its airy nest of twigs. It had been broken across a heavy bough in the first burst of its passage, a tangle of branches in torn and scored and scratched it in every direction, a clap of wind and foliage had flattened it like a concertina; nor can it be said that the obliging gentleman with the sharp nose showed any adequate tenderness for its structure when he finally unhooked it from its place. When he had found it, however, his proceedings were by some counted singular. He waved it with a loud whoop of triumph, and then immediately appeared to fall backwards off the tree, to which, however, he remained attached by his long strong legs, like a monkey swung by his tail. Hanging thus head downwards above the unhelmeted Warner, he gravely proceeded to drop the battered silk cylinder upon his brows. “Every man a king,” explained the inverted philosopher, “every hat (consequently) a crown. But this is a crown out of heaven.”

And he again attempted the coronation of Warner, who, however, moved away with great abruptness from the hovering diadem; not seeming, strangely enough, to wish for his former decoration in its present state.

“Wrong, wrong!” cried the obliging person hilariously. “Always wear uniform, even if it’s shabby uniform! Ritualists may always be untidy. Go to a dance with soot on your shirt–front; but go with a shirt–front. Huntsman wears old coat, but old pink coat. Wear a topper, even if it’s got no top. It’s the symbol that counts, old cock. Take your hat, because it is your hat after all; its nap rubbed all off by the bark, dears, and its brim not the least bit curled; but for old sakes’ sake it is still, dears, the nobbiest tile in the world.”

Speaking thus, with a wild comfortableness, he settled or smashed the shapeless silk hat over the face of the disturbed physician, and fell on his feet among the other men, still talking, beaming and breathless.

“Why don’t they make more games out of wind?” he asked in some excitement.

“Kites are all right, but why should it only be kites? Why, I thought
of three other games for a windy day while I was climbing that tree.

Here’s one of them: you take a lot of pepper—”

“I think,” interposed Moon, with a sardonic mildness, “that your games are already sufficiently interesting. Are you, may I ask, a professional acrobat on a tour, or a travelling advertisement of Sunny Jim? How and why do you display all this energy for clearing walls and climbing trees in our melancholy, but at least rational, suburbs?”

The stranger, so far as so loud a person was capable of it, appeared to grow confidential.

“Well, it’s a trick of my own,” he confessed candidly.

“I do it by having two legs.”

Arthur Inglewood, who had sunk into the background of this scene of folly, started and stared at the newcomer with his short-sighted eyes screwed up and his high colour slightly heightened.

“Why, I believe you’re Smith,” he cried with his fresh, almost boyish voice; and then after an instant’s stare, “and yet I’m not sure.”

“I have a card, I think,” said the unknown, with baffling solemnity—“a card with my real name, my titles, offices, and true purpose on this earth.”

He drew out slowly from an upper waistcoat pocket a scarlet card-case, and as slowly produced a very large card. Even in the instant of its production, they fancied it was of a queer shape, unlike the cards of ordinary gentlemen. But it was there only for an instant; for as it passed from his fingers to Arthur’s, one or another slipped his hold. The strident, tearing gale in that garden carried away the stranger’s card to join the wild waste paper of the universe; and that great western wind shook the whole house and passed.
CHAPTER II

THE LUGGAGE OF AN OPTIMIST

We all remember the fairy tales of science in our infancy, which played with the supposition that large animals could jump in the proportion of small ones. If an elephant were as strong as a grasshopper, he could (I suppose) spring clean out of the Zoological Gardens and alight trumpeting upon Primrose Hill. If a whale could leap from the sea like a trout, perhaps men might look up and see one soaring above Yarmouth like the winged island of Laputa. Such natural energy, though sublime, might certainly be inconvenient, and much of this inconvenience attended the gaiety and good intentions of the man in green. He was too large for everything, because he was lively as well as large. By a fortunate physical provision, most very substantial creatures are also reposeful; and middle-class boarding-houses in the lesser parts of London are not built for a man as big as a bull and excitable as a kitten.

When Inglewood followed the stranger into the boarding-house, he found him talking earnestly (and in his own opinion privately) to the helpless Mrs. Duke. That fat, faint lady could only goggle up like a dying fish at the enormous new gentleman, who politely offered himself as a lodger, with vast gestures of the wide white hat in one hand, and the yellow Gladstone bag in the other. Fortunately, Mrs. Duke’s more efficient niece and partner was there to complete the contract; for, indeed, all the people of the house had somehow collected in the room. This fact, in truth, was typical of the whole episode. The visitor created an atmosphere of comic crisis; and from the time he came into the house to the time he left it, he somehow got the company to gather and even follow (though in derision) as children gather and follow a Punch and Judy. An hour ago, and for four years previously, these people had avoided each other, even when they had really liked each other. They had slid in and out of dismal and deserted rooms in search of particular newspapers or private needlework. Even now they all came casually, as with varying interests; but they all came. There was the embarrassed Inglewood, still a sort of red shadow; there was the unembarrassed Warner, a pallid but solid substance. There was Michael Moon offering like a riddle the contrast of the horsy crudeness of his clothes and the sombre sagacity of his visage. He was now joined by his yet more comic crony, Moses Gould. Swaggering on short legs with a prosperous purple tie, he was the
gayest of godless little dogs; but like a dog also in this, that however he danced and wagged with delight, the two dark eyes on each side of his protuberant nose glistened gloomily like black buttons. There was Miss Rosamund Hunt, still with the fine white hat framing her square, good-lookmg face, and still with her native air of being dressed for some party that never came off. She also, like Mr. Moon, had a new companion, new so far as this narrative goes, but in reality an old friend and a protegee. This was a slight young woman in dark gray, and in no way notable but for a load of dull red hair, of which the shape somehow gave her pale face that triangular, almost peaked, appearance which was given by the lowering headdress and deep rich ruff of the Elizabethan beauties. Her surname seemed to be Gray, and Miss Hunt called her Mary, in that indescribable tone applied to a dependent who has practically become a friend. She wore a small silver cross on her very business-like gray clothes, and was the only member of the party who went to church. Last, but the reverse of least, there was Diana Duke, studying the newcomer with eyes of steel, and listening carefully to every idiotic word he said. As for Mrs. Duke, she smiled up at him, but never dreamed of listening to him. She had never really listened to any one in her life; which, some said, was why she had survived.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Duke was pleased with her new guest’s concentration of courtesy upon herself; for no one ever spoke seriously to her any more than she listened seriously to any one. And she almost beamed as the stranger, with yet wider and almost whirling gestures of explanation with his huge hat and bag, apologized for having entered by the wall instead of the front door. He was understood to put it down to an unfortunate family tradition of neatness and care of his clothes.

“My mother was rather strict about it, to tell the truth,” he said, lowering his voice, to Mrs. Duke. “She never liked me to lose my cap at school. And when a man’s been taught to be tidy and neat it sticks to him.”

Mrs. Duke weakly gasped that she was sure he must have had a good mother; but her niece seemed inclined to probe the matter further.

“You’ve got a funny idea of neatness,” she said, “if it’s jumping garden walls and clambering up garden trees. A man can’t very well climb a tree tidily.”

“He can clear a wall neatly,” said Michael Moon; “I saw him do it.”

Smith seemed to be regarding the girl with genuine astonishment.

“My dear young lady,” he said, “I was tidying the tree. You don’t want last year’s hats there, do you, any more than last year’s leaves? The wind takes off the leaves, but it couldn’t manage the hat; that wind,
I suppose, has tidied whole forests to–day. Rum idea this is, that tidiness is a timid, quiet sort of thing; why, tidiness is a toil for giants.
You can’t tidy anything without untidying yourself; just look at my trousers.
Don’t you know that? Haven’t you ever had a spring cleaning?”

“Oh yes, sir,” said Mrs. Duke, almost eagerly. “You will find everything of that sort quite nice.” For the first time she had heard two words that she could understand.

Miss Diana Duke seemed to be studying the stranger with a sort of spasm of calculation; then her black eyes snapped with decision, and she said that he could have a particular bedroom on the top floor if he liked: and the silent and sensitive Inglewood, who had been on the rack through these cross–purposes, eagerly offered to show him up to the room. Smith went up the stairs four at a time, and when he bumped his head against the ultimate ceiling, Inglewood had an odd sensation that the tall house was much shorter than it used to be.

Arthur Inglewood followed his old friend—or his new friend, for he did not very clearly know which he was. The face looked very like his old schoolfellow’s at one second and very unlike at another. And when Inglewood broke through his native politeness so far as to say suddenly, “Is your name Smith?” he received only the unenlightening reply, “Quite right; quite right. Very good. Excellent!” Which appeared to Inglewood, on reflection, rather the speech of a new–born babe accepting a name than of a grown–up man admitting one.

Despite these doubts about identity, the hapless Inglewood watched the other unpack, and stood about his bedroom in all the impotent attitudes of the male friend. Mr. Smith unpacked with the same kind of whirling accuracy with which he climbed a tree—throwing things out of his bag as if they were rubbish, yet managing to distribute quite a regular pattern all round him on the floor.

As he did so he continued to talk in the same somewhat gasping manner (he had come upstairs four steps at a time, but even without this his style of speech was breathless and fragmentary), and his remarks were still a string of more or less significant but often separate pictures.

“Like the day of judgement,” he said, throwing a bottle so that it somehow settled, rocking on its right end. “People say vast universe . . . infinity and astronomy; not sure . . . I think things are too close together . . . packed up; for travelling . . . stars too close, really . . . why, the sun’s a star, too close to be seen properly; the earth’s a star, too close to be seen at all . . . too many pebbles on the beach; ought all to be put in rings; too many blades of grass to study . . .
feathers on a bird make the brain reel; wait till the big bag is unpacked . . . may all be put in our right places then.”

Here he stopped, literally for breath—throwing a shirt to the other end of the room, and then a bottle of ink so that it fell quite neatly beyond it. Inglewood looked round on this strange, half–symmetrical disorder with an increasing doubt.

In fact, the more one explored Mr. Smith’s holiday luggage, the less one could make anything of it. One peculiarity of it was that almost everything seemed to be there for the wrong reason; what is secondary with every one else was primary with him. He would wrap up a pot or pan in brown paper; and the unthinking assistant would discover that the pot was valueless or even unnecessary, and that it was the brown paper that was truly precious. He produced two or three boxes of cigars, and explained with plain and perplexing sincerity that he was no smoker, but that cigar–box wood was by far the best for fretwork. He also exhibited about six small bottles of wine, white and red, and Inglewood, happening to note a Volnay which he knew to be excellent, supposed at first that the stranger was an epicure in vintages. He was therefore surprised to find that the next bottle was a vile sham claret from the colonies, which even colonials (to do them justice) do not drink. It was only then that he observed that all six bottles had those bright metallic seals of various tints, and seemed to have been chosen solely because they have the three primary and three secondary colours: red, blue, and yellow; green, violet and orange. There grew upon Inglewood an almost creepy sense of the real childishness of this creature. For Smith was really, so far as human psychology can be, innocent. He had the sensualities of innocence: he loved the stickiness of gum, and he cut white wood greedily as if he were cutting a cake. To this man wine was not a doubtful thing to be defended or denounced; it was a quaintly coloured syrup, such as a child sees in a shop window. He talked dominantly and rushed the social situation; but he was not asserting himself, like a superman in a modern play. He was simply forgetting himself, like a little boy at a party. He had somehow made the giant stride from babyhood to manhood, and missed that crisis in youth when most of us grow old.

As he shunted his big bag, Arthur observed the initials I. S. printed on one side of it, and remembered that Smith had been called Innocent Smith at school, though whether as a formal Christian name or a moral description he could not remember. He was just about to venture another question, when there was a knock at the door, and the short figure of Mr. Gould offered itself, with the
melancholy Moon, standing like his tall crooked shadow, behind him. They had drifted up the stairs after the other two men with the wandering gregariousness of the male.

“Hope there’s no intrusion,” said the beaming Moses with a glow of good nature, but not the airiest tinge of apology.

“The truth is,” said Michael Moon with comparative courtesy, “we thought we might see if they had made you comfortable. Miss Duke is rather—”

“I know,” cried the stranger, looking up radiantly from his bag; “magnificent, isn’t she? Go close to her—hear military music going by, like Joan of Arc.”

Inglewood stared and stared at the speaker like one who has just heard a wild fairy tale, which nevertheless contains one small and forgotten fact. For he remembered how he had himself thought of Jeanne d’Arc years ago, when, hardly more than a schoolboy, he had first come to the boarding–house. Long since the pulverizing rationalism of his friend Dr. Warner had crushed such youthful ignorances and disproportionate dreams. Under the Warnerian scepticism and science of hopeless human types, Inglewood had long come to regard himself as a timid, insufficient, and “weak” type, who would never marry; to regard Diana Duke as a materialistic maidservant; and to regard his first fancy for her as the small, dull farce of a collegian kissing his landlady’s daughter. And yet the phrase about military music moved him queerly, as if he had heard those distant drums.

“She has to keep things pretty tight, as is only natural,” said Moon, glancing round the rather dwarfish room, with its wedge of slanted ceiling, like the conical hood of a dwarf.

“Rather a small box for you, sir,” said the waggish Mr. Gould.

“Splendid room, though,” answered Mr. Smith enthusiastically, with his head inside his Gladstone bag. “I love these pointed sorts of rooms, like Gothic. By the way,” he cried out, pointing in quite a startling way, “where does that door lead to?”

“To certain death, I should say,” answered Michael Moon, staring up at a dust–stained and disused trapdoor in the sloping roof of the attic. “I don’t think there’s a loft there; and I don’t know what else it could lead to.” Long before he had finished his sentence the man with the strong green legs had leapt at the door in the ceiling, swung himself somehow on to the ledge beneath it, wrenched it open after a struggle, and clambered through it. For a moment they saw the two symbolic legs standing like a truncated statue; then they vanished. Through the hole thus burst in the roof appeared the empty and lucid sky of evening, with one
great many–coloured cloud sailing across it like a whole county upside down.

“Hullo, you fellows!” came the far cry of Innocent Smith, apparently from some remote pinnacle. “Come up here; and bring some of my things to eat and drink. It’s just the spot for a picnic.”

With a sudden impulse Michael snatched two of the small bottles of wine, one in each solid fist; and Arthur Inglewood, as if mesmerized, groped for a biscuit tin and a big jar of ginger. The enormous hand of Innocent Smith appearing through the aperture, like a giant’s in a fairy tale, received these tributes and bore them off to the eyrie; then they both hoisted themselves out of the window. They were both athletic, and even gymnastic; Inglewood through his concern for hygiene, and Moon through his concern for sport, which was not quite so idle and inactive as that of the average sportsman. Also they both had a light–headed burst of celestial sensation when the door was burst in the roof, as if a door had been burst in the sky, and they could climb out on to the very roof of the universe. They were both men who had long been unconsciously imprisoned in the commonplace, though one took it comically, and the other seriously. They were both men, nevertheless, in whom sentiment had never died. But Mr. Moses Gould had an equal contempt for their suicidal athletics and their subconscious transcendentalism, and he stood and laughed at the thing with the shameless rationality of another race.

When the singular Smith, astride of a chimney–pot, learnt that Gould was not following, his infantile officiousness and good nature forced him to dive back into the attic to comfort or persuade; and Inglewood and Moon were left alone on the long gray–green ridge of the slate roof, with their feet against gutters and their backs against chimney–pots, looking agnostically at each other. Their first feeling was that they had come out into eternity, and that eternity was very like topsy–turvydom. One definition occurred to both of them—that he had come out into the light of that lucid and radiant ignorance in which all beliefs had begun. The sky above them was full of mythology. Heaven seemed deep enough to hold all the gods. The round of the ether turned from green to yellow gradually like a great unripe fruit. All around the sunken sun it was like a lemon; round all the east it was a sort of golden green, more suggestive of a greengage; but the whole had still the emptiness of daylight and none of the secrecy of dusk. Tumbled here and there across this gold and pale green were shards and shattered masses of inky purple cloud, which seemed falling towards the earth in every kind of colossal perspective. One of them really had the character of some many–mitred, many–bearded, many–winged Assyrian image, huge head downwards, hurled
out of heaven—a sort of false Jehovah, who was perhaps Satan. All the other clouds had preposterous pinnacled shapes, as if the god’s palaces had been flung after him.

And yet, while the empty heaven was full of silent catastrophe, the height of human buildings above which they sat held here and there a tiny trivial noise that was the exact antithesis; and they heard some six streets below a newsboy calling, and a bell bidding to chapel. They could also hear talk out of the garden below; and realized that the irrepressible Smith must have followed Gould downstairs, for his eager and pleading accents could be heard, followed by the half–humourous protests of Miss Duke and the full and very youthful laughter of Rosamund Hunt. The air had that cold kindness that comes after a storm. Michael Moon drank it in with as serious a relish as he had drunk the little bottle of cheap claret, which he had emptied almost at a draught. Inglewood went on eating ginger very slowly and with a solemnity unfathomable as the sky above him. There was still enough stir in the freshness of the atmosphere to make them almost fancy they could smell the garden soil and the last roses of autumn. Suddenly there came from the darkening room a silvery ping and pong which told them that Rosamund had brought out the long–neglected mandoline. After the first few notes there was more of the distant bell–like laughter.

“Inglewood,” said Michael Moon, “have you ever heard that I am a blackguard?”

“I haven’t heard it, and I don’t believe it,” answered Inglewood, after an odd pause. “But I have heard you were—what they call rather wild.”

“If you have heard that I am wild, you can contradict the rumour,” said Moon, with an extraordinary calm; “I am tame. I am quite tame; I am about the tamest beast that crawls. I drink too much of the same kind of whisky at the same time every night. I even drink about the same amount too much. I go to the same number of public–houses. I meet the same damned women with mauve faces. I hear the same number of dirty stories—generally the same dirty stories. You may assure my friends, Inglewood, that you see before you a person whom civilization has thoroughly tamed.”

Arthur Inglewood was staring with feelings that made him nearly fall off the roof, for indeed the Irishman’s face, always sinister, was now almost demoniacal.

“Christ confound it!” cried out Moon, suddenly clutching the empty claret bottle, “this is about the thinnest and filthiest wine I ever uncorked, and it’s the only drink I have really enjoyed for nine years. I was never wild until just ten
minutes ago.” And he sent the bottle whizzing, a wheel of glass, far away beyond the garden into the road, where, in the profound evening silence, they could even hear it break and part upon the stones.

“Moon,” said Arthur Inglewood, rather huskily, “you mustn’t be so bitter about it. Everyone has to take the world as he finds it; of course one often finds it a bit dull—”

“That fellow doesn’t,” said Michael decisively; “I mean that fellow Smith. I have a fancy there’s some method in his madness. It looks as if he could turn into a sort of wonderland any minute by taking one step out of the plain road. Who would have thought of that trapdoor? Who would have thought that this cursed colonial claret could taste quite nice among the chimney–pots? Perhaps that is the real key of fairyland. Perhaps Nosey Gould’s beastly little Empire Cigarettes ought only to be smoked on stilts, or something of that sort. Perhaps Mrs. Duke’s cold leg of mutton would seem quite appetizing at the top of a tree. Perhaps even my damned, dirty, monotonous drizzle of Old Bill Whisky—”

“Don’t be so rough on yourself,” said Inglewood, in serious distress. “The dullness isn’t your fault or the whisky’s. Fellows who don’t—fellows like me I mean—have just the same feeling that it’s all rather flat and a failure. But the world’s made like that; it’s all survival. Some people are made to get on, like Warner; and some people are made to stick quiet, like me. You can’t help your temperament. I know you’re much cleverer than I am; but you can’t help having all the loose ways of a poor literary chap, and I can’t help having all the doubts and helplessness of a small scientific chap, any more than a fish can help floating or a fern can help curling up. Humanity, as Warner said so well in that lecture, really consists of quite different tribes of animals all disguised as men.”

In the dim garden below the buzz of talk was suddenly broken by Miss Hunt’s musical instrument banging with the abruptness of artillery into a vulgar but spirited tune.

Rosamund’s voice came up rich and strong in the words of some fatuous, fashionable coon song:—“Darkies sing a song on the old plantation, Sing it as we sang it in days long since gone by.”

Inglewood’s brown eyes softened and saddened still more as he continued his monologue of resignation to such a rollicking and romantic tune. But the blue eyes of Michael Moon brightened and hardened with a light that Inglewood did not understand. Many centuries, and many villages and valleys, would have been happier if Inglewood or Inglewood’s countrymen had ever understood that light, or guessed at the first blink that it was the battle star of Ireland.
“Nothing can ever alter it; it’s in the wheels of the universe,” went on Inglewood, in a low voice: “some men are weak and some strong, and the only thing we can do is to know that we are weak. I have been in love lots of times, but I could not do anything, for I remembered my own fickleness. I have formed opinions, but I haven’t the cheek to push them, because I’ve so often changed them. That’s the upshot, old fellow. We can’t trust ourselves—and we can’t help it.”

Michael had risen to his feet, and stood poised in a perilous position at the end of the roof, like some dark statue hung above its gable. Behind him, huge clouds of an almost impossible purple turned slowly topsy–turvy in the silent anarchy of heaven. Their gyration made the dark figure seem yet dizzier.

“Let us . . .” he said, and was suddenly silent.

“Let us what?” asked Arthur Inglewood, rising equally quick though somewhat more cautiously, for his friend seemed to find some difficulty in speech.

“Let us go and do some of these things we can’t do,” said Michael.

At the same moment there burst out of the trapdoor below them the cockatoo hair and flushed face of Innocent Smith, calling to them that they must come down as the “concert” was in full swing, and Mr. Moses Gould was about to recite “Young Lochinvar.”

As they dropped into Innocent’s attic they nearly tumbled over its entertaining impedimenta again. Inglewood, staring at the littered floor, thought instinctively of the littered floor of a nursery. He was therefore the more moved, and even shocked, when his eye fell on a large well–polished American revolver.

“Hullo!” he cried, stepping back from the steely glitter as men step back from a serpent; “are you afraid of burglars? or when and why do you deal death out of that machine gun?”

“Oh, that!” said Smith, throwing it a single glance; “I deal life out of that,” and he went bounding down the stairs.
CHAPTER III

THE BANNER OF BEACON

All next day at Beacon House there was a crazy sense that it was everybody’s birthday. It is the fashion to talk of institutions as cold and cramping things. The truth is that when people are in exceptionally high spirits, really wild with freedom and invention, they always must, and they always do, create institutions. When men are weary they fall into anarchy; but while they are gay and vigorous they invariably make rules. This, which is true of all the churches and republics of history, is also true of the most trivial parlour game or the most unsophisticated meadow romp. We are never free until some institution frees us; and liberty cannot exist till it is declared by authority. Even the wild authority of the harlequin Smith was still authority, because it produced everywhere a crop of crazy regulations and conditions. He filled every one with his own half-lunatic life; but it was not expressed in destruction, but rather in a dizzy and toppling construction. Each person with a hobby found it turning into an institution. Rosamund’s songs seemed to coalesce into a kind of opera; Michael’s jests and paragraphs into a magazine. His pipe and her mandoline seemed between them to make a sort of smoking concert. The bashful and bewildered Arthur Inglewood almost struggled against his own growing importance. He felt as if, in spite of him, his photographs were turning into a picture gallery, and his bicycle into a gymkhana. But no one had any time to criticize these impromptu estates and offices, for they followed each other in wild succession like the topics of a rambling talker.

Existence with such a man was an obstacle race made out of pleasant obstacles. Out of any homely and trivial object he could drag reels of exaggeration, like a conjurer. Nothing could be more shy and impersonal than poor Arthur’s photography. Yet the preposterous Smith was seen assisting him eagerly through sunny morning hours, and an indefensible sequence described as “Moral Photography” began to unroll about the boarding-house. It was only a version of the old photographer’s joke which produces the same figure twice on one plate, making a man play chess with himself, dine with himself, and so on. But these plates were more hysterical and ambitious—as, “Miss Hunt forgets Herself,” showing that lady answering her own too rapturous recognition with a most appalling stare of ignorance; or “Mr. Moon questions Himself,” in which
Mr. Moon appeared as one driven to madness under his own legal cross-examination, which was conducted with a long forefinger and an air of ferocious waggery. One highly successful trilogy—representing Inglewood recognizing Inglewood, Inglewood prostrating himself before Inglewood, and Inglewood severely beating Inglewood with an umbrella—Innocent Smith wanted to have enlarged and put up in the hall, like a sort of fresco, with the inscription,—

“Self–reverence, self–knowledge, self–control—
These three alone will make a man a prig.”
—Tennyson.

Nothing, again, could be more prosaic and impenetrable than the domestic energies of Miss Diana Duke. But Innocent had somehow blundered on the discovery that her thrifty dressmaking went with a considerable feminine care for dress—the one feminine thing that had never failed her solitary self–respect. In consequence Smith pestered her with a theory (which he really seemed to take seriously) that ladies might combine economy with magnificence if they would draw light chalk patterns on a plain dress and then dust them off again. He set up “Smith’s Lightning Dressmaking Company,” with two screens, a cardboard placard, and box of bright soft crayons; and Miss Diana actually threw him an abandoned black overall or working dress on which to exercise the talents of a modiste. He promptly produced for her a garment aflame with red and gold sunflowers; she held it up an instant to her shoulders, and looked like an empress. And Arthur Inglewood, some hours afterwards cleaning his bicycle (with his usual air of being inextricably hidden in it), glanced up; and his hot face grew hotter, for Diana stood laughing for one flash in the doorway, and her dark robe was rich with the green and purple of great decorative peacocks, like a secret garden in the “Arabian Nights.” A pang too swift to be named pain or pleasure went through his heart like an old–world rapier. He remembered how pretty he thought her years ago, when he was ready to fall in love with anybody; but it was like remembering a worship of some Babylonian princess in some previous existence. At his next glimpse of her (and he caught himself awaiting it) the purple and green chalk was dusted off, and she went by quickly in her working clothes.

As for Mrs. Duke, none who knew that matron could conceive her as actively resisting this invasion that had turned her house upside down. But among the most exact observers it was seriously believed that she liked it. For she was one of those women who at bottom regard all men as equally mad, wild animals of some utterly separate species. And it is doubtful if she really saw anything more
eccentric or inexplicable in Smith’s chimney-pot picnics or crimson sunflowers
than she had in the chemicals of Inglewood or the sardonic speeches of Moon.
Courtesy, on the other hand, is a thing that anybody can understand, and Smith’s
manners were as courteous as they were unconventional. She said he was “a real
gentleman,” by which she simply meant a kind-hearted man, which is a very
different thing. She would sit at the head of the table with fat, folded hands and a
fat, folded smile for hours and hours, while every one else was talking at once.
At least, the only other exception was Rosamund’s companion, Mary Gray,
whose silence was of a much more eager sort. Though she never spoke she
always looked as if she might speak any minute. Perhaps this is the very
definition of a companion. Innocent Smith seemed to throw himself, as into
other adventures, into the adventure of making her talk. He never succeeded, yet
he was never snubbed; if he achieved anything, it was only to draw attention to
this quiet figure, and to turn her, by ever so little, from a modesty to a mystery.
But if she was a riddle, every one recognized that she was a fresh and unspoilt
riddle, like the riddle of the sky and the woods in spring. Indeed, though she was
rather older than the other two girls, she had an early morning ardour, a fresh
earnestness of youth, which Rosamund seemed to have lost in the mere spending
of money, and Diana in the mere guarding of it. Smith looked at her again and
again. Her eyes and mouth were set in her face the wrong way—which was
really the right way. She had the knack of saying everything with her face: her
silence was a sort of steady applause.

But among the hilarious experiments of that holiday (which seemed more like
a week’s holiday than a day’s) one experiment towers supreme, not because it
was any sillier or more successful than the others, but because out of this
particular folly flowed all of the odd events that were to follow. All the other
practical jokes exploded of themselves, and left vacancy; all the other fictions
returned upon themselves, and were finished like a song. But the string of solid
and startling events—which were to include a hansom cab, a detective, a pistol,
and a marriage licence—were all made primarily possible by the joke about the
High Court of Beacon.

It had originated, not with Innocent Smith, but with Michael Moon. He was in
a strange glow and pressure of spirits, and talked incessantly; yet he had never
been more sarcastic, and even inhuman. He used his old useless knowledge as a
barrister to talk entertainingly of a tribunal that was a parody on the pompous
anomalies of English law. The High Court of Beacon, he declared, was a
splendid example of our free and sensible constitution. It had been founded by
King John in defiance of the Magna Carta, and now held absolute power over windmills, wine and spirit licences, ladies traveling in Turkey, revision of sentences for dog–stealing and parricide, as well as anything whatever that happened in the town of Market Bosworth. The whole hundred and nine seneschals of the High Court of Beacon met once in every four centuries; but in the intervals (as Mr. Moon explained) the whole powers of the institution were vested in Mrs. Duke. Tossed about among the rest of the company, however, the High Court did not retain its historical and legal seriousness, but was used somewhat unscrupulously in a riot of domestic detail. If somebody spilt the Worcester Sauce on the tablecloth, he was quite sure it was a rite without which the sittings and findings of the Court would be invalid; or if somebody wanted a window to remain shut, he would suddenly remember that none but the third son of the lord of the manor of Penge had the right to open it. They even went to the length of making arrests and conducting criminal inquiries. The proposed trial of Moses Gould for patriotism was rather above the heads of the company, especially of the criminal; but the trial of Inglewood on a charge of photographic libel, and his triumphant acquittal upon a plea of insanity, were admitted to be in the best tradition of the Court.

But when Smith was in wild spirits he grew more and more serious, not more and more flippant like Michael Moon. This proposal of a private court of justice, which Moon had thrown off with the detachment of a political humourist, Smith really caught hold of with the eagerness of an abstract philosopher. It was by far the best thing they could do, he declared, to claim sovereign powers even for the individual household.

“You believe in Home Rule for Ireland; I believe in Home Rule for homes,” he cried eagerly to Michael. “It would be better if every father COULD kill his son, as with the old Romans; it would be better, because nobody would be killed. Let’s issue a Declaration of Independence from Beacon House. We could grow enough greens in that garden to support us, and when the tax–collector comes let’s tell him we’re self–supporting, and play on him with the hose. . . . Well, perhaps, as you say, we couldn’t very well have a hose, as that comes from the main; but we could sink a well in this chalk, and a lot could be done with water–jugs. . . . Let this really be Beacon House. Let’s light a bonfire of independence on the roof, and see house after house answering it across the valley of the Thames! Let us begin the League of the Free Families! Away with Local Government! A fig for Local Patriotism! Let every house be a sovereign state as this is, and judge its own children by its own law, as we do by the Court of
Beacon. Let us cut the painter, and begin to be happy together, as if we were on a desert island."

“I know that desert island,” said Michael Moon; “it only exists in the ‘Swiss Family Robinson.’ A man feels a strange desire for some sort of vegetable milk, and crash comes down some unexpected cocoa–nut from some undiscovered monkey. A literary man feels inclined to pen a sonnet, and at once an officious porcupine rushes out of a thicket and shoots out one of his quills.”

“Don’t you say a word against the ‘Swiss Family Robinson,’” cried Innocent with great warmth. “It mayn’t be exact science, but it’s dead accurate philosophy. When you’re really shipwrecked, you do really find what you want. When you’re really on a desert island, you never find it a desert. If we were really besieged in this garden, we’d find a hundred English birds and English berries that we never knew were here. If we were snowed up in this room, we’d be the better for reading scores of books in that bookcase that we don’t even know are there; we’d have talks with each other, good, terrible talks, that we shall go to the grave without guessing; we’d find materials for everything—christening, marriage, or funeral; yes, even for a coronation—if we didn’t decide to be a republic.”

“A coronation on ‘Swiss Family’ lines, I suppose,” said Michael, laughing. “Oh, I know you would find everything in that atmosphere. If we wanted such a simple thing, for instance, as a Coronation Canopy, we should walk down beyond the geraniums and find the Canopy Tree in full bloom. If we wanted such a trifle as a crown of gold, why, we should be digging up dandelions, and we should find a gold mine under the lawn. And when we wanted oil for the ceremony, why I suppose a great storm would wash everything on shore, and we should find there was a Whale on the premises.”

“And so there IS a whale on the premises for all you know,” asseverated Smith, striking the table with passion. “I bet you’ve never examined the premises! I bet you’ve never been round at the back as I was this morning—for I found the very thing you say could only grow on a tree. There’s an old sort of square tent up against the dustbin; it’s got three holes in the canvas, and a pole’s broken, so it’s not much good as a tent, but as a Canopy—” And his voice quite failed him to express its shining adequacy; then he went on with controversial eagerness: “You see I take every challenge as you make it. I believe every blessed thing you say couldn’t be here has been here all the time. You say you want a whale washed up for oil. Why, there’s oil in that cruet–stand at your elbow; and I don’t believe anybody has touched it or thought of it for years. And
as for your gold crown, we’re none of us wealthy here, but we could collect
enough ten–shilling bits from our own pockets to string round a man’s head for
half an hour; or one of Miss Hunt’s gold bangles is nearly big enough to—”

The good–humoured Rosamund was almost choking with laughter.
“All is not gold that glitters,” she said, “and besides—”
“What a mistake that is!” cried Innocent Smith, leaping up in great
excitement. “All is gold that glitters—especially now we are a Sovereign State.
What’s the good of a Sovereign State if you can’t define a sovereign? We can
make anything a precious metal, as men could in the morning of the world. They
didn’t choose gold because it was rare; your scientists can tell you twenty sorts
of slime much rarer. They chose gold because it was bright—because it was a
hard thing to find, but pretty when you’ve found it. You can’t fight with golden
swords or eat golden biscuits; you can only look at it—and you can look at it out
here.”

With one of his incalculable motions he sprang back and burst open the doors
into the garden. At the same time also, with one of his gestures that never
seemed at the instant so unconventional as they were, he stretched out his hand
to Mary Gray, and led her out on to the lawn as if for a dance.
The French windows, thus flung open, let in an evening even lovelier than that
of the day before. The west was swimming with sanguine colours, and a sort of
sleepy flame lay along the lawn. The twisted shadows of the one or two garden
trees showed upon this sheen, not gray or black, as in common daylight, but like
arabesques written in vivid violet ink on some page of Eastern gold. The sunset
was one of those festive and yet mysterious conflagrations in which common
things by their colours remind us of costly or curious things. The slates upon the
sloping roof burned like the plumes of a vast peacock, in every mysterious blend
of blue and green. The red–brown bricks of the wall glowed with all the October
tints of strong ruby and tawny wines. The sun seemed to set each object alight
with a different coloured flame, like a man lighting fireworks; and even
Innocent’s hair, which was of a rather colourless fairness, seemed to have a
flame of pagan gold on it as he strode across the lawn towards the one tall ridge
of rockery.
“What would be the good of gold,” he was saying, “if it did not glitter? Why
should we care for a black sovereign any more than for a black sun at noon? A
black button would do just as well. Don’t you see that everything in this garden
looks like a jewel? And will you kindly tell me what the deuce is the good of a
jewel except that it looks like a jewel? Leave off buying and selling, and start
looking! Open your eyes, and you’ll wake up in the New Jerusalem.

“All is gold that glitters—
Tree and tower of brass;
Rolls the golden evening air
Down the golden grass.
Kick the cry to Jericho,
How yellow mud is sold;
All is gold that glitters,
For the glitter is the gold.”

“And who wrote that?” asked Rosamund, amused.

“No one will ever write it,” answered Smith, and cleared the rockery with a flying leap.

“Really,” said Rosamund to Michael Moon, “he ought to be sent to an asylum. Don’t you think so?”

“I beg your pardon,” inquired Michael, rather sombrely; his long, swarthy head was dark against the sunset, and, either by accident or mood, he had the look of something isolated and even hostile amid the social extravagance of the garden.

“I only said Mr. Smith ought to go to an asylum,” repeated the lady.

The lean face seemed to grow longer and longer, for Moon was unmistakably sneering. “No,” he said; “I don’t think it’s at all necessary.”

“What do you mean?” asked Rosamund quickly. “Why not?”

“Because he is in one now,” answered Michael Moon, in a quiet but ugly voice.

“Why, didn’t you know?”

“What?” cried the girl, and there was a break in her voice; for the Irishman’s face and voice were really almost creepy. With his dark figure and dark sayings in all that sunshine he looked like the devil in paradise.

“I’m sorry,” he continued, with a sort of harsh humility. “Of course we don’t talk about it much . . . but I thought we all really knew.”

“Knew what?”

“Well,” answered Moon, “that Beacon House is a certain rather singular sort of house—a house with the tiles loose, shall we say? Innocent Smith is only the doctor that visits us; hadn’t you come when he called before? As most of our maladies are melancholic, of course he has to be extra cheery. Sanity, of course, seems a very bumptious eccentric thing to us. Jumping over a wall, climbing a tree—that’s his bedside manner.”
“You daren’t say such a thing!” cried Rosamund in a rage.
“You daren’t suggest that I—”
“Not more than I am,” said Michael soothingly; “not more than the rest of us. Haven’t you ever noticed that Miss Duke never sits still—a notorious sign? Haven’t you ever observed that Inglewood is always washing his hands—a known mark of mental disease? I, of course, am a dipsomaniac.”
“I don’t believe you,” broke out his companion, not without agitation.
“I’ve heard you had some bad habits—”
“All habits are bad habits,” said Michael, with deadly calm.
“Madness does not come by breaking out, but by giving in; by settling down in some dirty, little, self–repeating circle of ideas; by being tamed. YOU went mad about money, because you’re an heiress.”
“It’s a lie,” cried Rosamund furiously. “I never was mean about money.”
“You were worse,” said Michael, in a low voice and yet violently. “You thought that other people were. You thought every man who came near you must be a fortune–hunter; you would not let yourself go and be sane; and now you’re mad and I’m mad, and serve us right.”
“You brute!” said Rosamund, quite white. “And is this true?”

With the intellectual cruelty of which the Celt is capable when his abysses are in revolt, Michael was silent for some seconds, and then stepped back with an ironical bow. “Not literally true, of course,” he said; “only really true. An allegory, shall we say? a social satire.”
“And I hate and despise your satires,” cried Rosamund Hunt, letting loose her whole forcible female personality like a cyclone, and speaking every word to wound. “I despise it as I despise your rank tobacco, and your nasty, loungy ways, and your snarling, and your Radicalism, and your old clothes, and your potty little newspaper, and your rotten failure at everything. I don’t care whether you call it snobbishness or not, I like life and success, and jolly things to look at, and action. You won’t frighten me with Diogenes; I prefer Alexander.”
“Victrix causa deae—” said Michael gloomily; and this angered her more, as, not knowing what it meant, she imagined it to be witty.
“Oh, I dare say you know Greek,” she said, with cheerful inaccuracy; “you haven’t done much with that either.” And she crossed the garden, pursuing the vanished Innocent and Mary.

In doing so she passed Inglewood, who was returning to the house slowly, and with a thought–clouded brow. He was one of those men who are quite clever, but quite the reverse of quick. As he came back out of the sunset garden into the
twilight parlour, Diana Duke slipped swiftly to her feet and began putting away the tea things. But it was not before Inglewood had seen an instantaneous picture so unique that he might well have snapshotted it with his everlasting camera. For Diana had been sitting in front of her unfinished work with her chin on her hand, looking straight out of the window in pure thoughtless thought.

“You are busy,” said Arthur, oddly embarrassed with what he had seen, and wishing to ignore it.

“There’s no time for dreaming in this world,” answered the young lady with her back to him.

“I have been thinking lately,” said Inglewood in a low voice, “that there’s no time for waking up.”

She did not reply, and he walked to the window and looked out on the garden.

“I don’t smoke or drink, you know,” he said irrelevantly, “because I think they’re drugs. And yet I fancy all hobbies, like my camera and bicycle, are drugs too. Getting under a black hood, getting into a dark room—getting into a hole anyhow. Drugging myself with speed, and sunshine, and fatigue, and fresh air. Pedalling the machine so fast that I turn into a machine myself. That’s the matter with all of us. We’re too busy to wake up.”

“Well,” said the girl solidly, “what is there to wake up to?”

“There must be!” cried Inglewood, turning round in a singular excitement—“there must be something to wake up to! All we do is preparations—your cleanliness, and my healthiness, and Warner’s scientific appliances. We’re always preparing for something—something that never comes off. I ventilate the house, and you sweep the house; but what is going to HAPPEN in the house?”

She was looking at him quietly, but with very bright eyes, and seemed to be searching for some form of words which she could not find.

Before she could speak the door burst open, and the boisterous Rosamund Hunt, in her flamboyant white hat, boa, and parasol, stood framed in the doorway. She was in a breathing heat, and on her open face was an expression of the most infantile astonishment.

“Well, here’s a fine game!” she said, panting. “What am I to do now, I wonder? I’ve wired for Dr. Warner; that’s all I can think of doing.”

“What is the matter?” asked Diana, rather sharply, but moving forward like one used to be called upon for assistance.

“It’s Mary,” said the heiress, “my companion Mary Gray: that cracked friend of yours called Smith has proposed to her in the garden, after ten hours’ acquaintance, and he wants to go off with her now for a special licence.”
Arthur Inglewood walked to the open French windows and looked out on the garden, still golden with evening light. Nothing moved there but a bird or two hopping and twittering; but beyond the hedge and railings, in the road outside the garden gate, a hansom cab was waiting, with the yellow Gladstone bag on top of it.
CHAPTER IV

THE GARDEN OF THE GOD

Diana Duke seemed inexplicably irritated at the abrupt entrance and utterance of the other girl.

“Well,” she said shortly, “I suppose Miss Gray can decline him if she doesn’t want to marry him.”

“But she DOES want to marry him!” cried Rosamund in exasperation.

“She’s a wild, wicked fool, and I won’t be parted from her.”

“Perhaps,” said Diana icily, “but I really don’t see what we can do.”

“But the man’s balmy, Diana,” reasoned her friend angrily.

“I can’t let my nice governess marry a man that’s balmy! You or somebody MUST stop it!—Mr. Inglewood, you’re a man; go and tell them they simply can’t.”

“Unfortunately, it seems to me they simply can,” said Inglewood, with a depressed air. “I have far less right of intervention than Miss Duke, besides having, of course, far less moral force than she.”

“You haven’t either of you got much,” cried Rosamund, the last stays of her formidable temper giving way; “I think I’ll go somewhere else for a little sense and pluck. I think I know some one who will help me more than you do, at any rate . . . he’s a cantankerous beast, but he’s a man, and has a mind, and knows it . . .” And she flung out into the garden, with cheeks aflame, and the parasol whirling like a Catherine wheel.

She found Michael Moon standing under the garden tree, looking over the hedge; hunched like a bird of prey, with his large pipe hanging down his long blue chin. The very hardness of his expression pleased her, after the nonsense of the new engagement and the shilly–shallying of her other friends.

“I am sorry I was cross, Mr. Moon,” she said frankly. “I hated you for being a cynic; but I’ve been well punished, for I want a cynic just now. I’ve had my fill of sentiment—I’m fed up with it. The world’s gone mad, Mr. Moon—all except the cynics, I think. That maniac Smith wants to marry my old friend Mary, and she—and she—doesn’t seem to mind.”

Seeing his attentive face still undisturbedly smoking, she added smartly,

“I’m not joking; that’s Mr. Smith’s cab outside. He swears he’ll take her off now to his aunt’s, and go for a special licence.
Do give me some practical advice, Mr. Moon.”

Mr. Moon took his pipe out of his mouth, held it in his hand for an instant reflectively, and then tossed it to the other side of the garden. “My practical advice to you is this,” he said: “Let him go for his special licence, and ask him to get another one for you and me.”

“Is that one of your jokes?” asked the young lady.

“Do say what you really mean.”

“I mean that Innocent Smith is a man of business,” said Moon with ponderous precision—“a plain, practical man: a man of affairs; a man of facts and the daylight. He has let down twenty ton of good building bricks suddenly on my head, and I am glad to say they have woken me up. We went to sleep a little while ago on this very lawn, in this very sunlight. We have had a little nap for five years or so, but now we’re going to be married, Rosamund, and I can’t see why that cab . . .”

“Really,” said Rosamund stoutly, “I don’t know what you mean.”

“What a lie!” cried Michael, advancing on her with brightening eyes. “I’m all for lies in an ordinary way; but don’t you see that to-night they won’t do? We’ve wandered into a world of facts, old girl. That grass growing, and that sun going down, and that cab at the door, are facts. You used to torment and excuse yourself by saying I was after your money, and didn’t really love you. But if I stood here now and told you I didn’t love you—you wouldn’t believe me: for truth is in this garden to-night.”

“Really, Mr. Moon . . .” said Rosamund, rather more faintly.

He kept two big blue magnetic eyes fixed on her face. “Is my name Moon?” he asked. “Is your name Hunt? On my honour, they sound to me as quaint and as distant as Red Indian names. It’s as if your name was ‘Swim’ and my name was ‘Sunrise.’ But our real names are Husband and Wife, as they were when we fell asleep.”

“It is no good,” said Rosamund, with real tears in her eyes; “one can never go back.”

“I can go where I damn please,” said Michael, “and I can carry you on my shoulder.”

“But really, Michael, really, you must stop and think!” cried the girl earnestly. “You could carry me off my feet, I dare say, soul and body, but it may be bitter bad business for all that. These things done in that romantic rush, like Mr. Smith’s, they—they do attract women, I don’t deny it. As you say, we’re all telling the truth to-night. They’ve attracted poor Mary, for one. They attract me,
Michael. But the cold fact remains: imprudent marriages do lead to long unhappiness and disappointment—you’ve got used to your drinks and things—I shan’t be pretty much longer—"

“Imprudent marriages!” roared Michael. “And pray where in earth or heaven are there any prudent marriages? Might as well talk about prudent suicides. You and I have dawdled round each other long enough, and are we any safer than Smith and Mary Gray, who met last night? You never know a husband till you marry him. Unhappy! of course you’ll be unhappy. Who the devil are you that you shouldn’t be unhappy, like the mother that bore you? Disappointed! of course we’ll be disappointed. I, for one, don’t expect till I die to be so good a man as I am at this minute—a tower with all the trumpets shouting."

“You see all this,” said Rosamund, with a grand sincerity in her solid face, “and do you really want to marry me?”

“My darling, what else is there to do?” reasoned the Irishman. “What other occupation is there for an active man on this earth, except to marry you? What’s the alternative to marriage, barrng sleep? It’s not liberty, Rosamund. Unless you marry God, as our nuns do in Ireland, you must marry Man—that is Me. The only third thing is to marry yourself—you yourself, yourself—the only companion that is never satisfied—and never satisfactory.”

“Michael,” said Miss Hunt, in a very soft voice, “if you won’t talk so much, I’ll marry you.”

“It’s no time for talking,” cried Michael Moon; “singing is the only thing. Can’t you find that mandoline of yours, Rosamund?”

“Go and fetch it for me,” said Rosamund, with crisp and sharp authority.

The lounging Mr. Moon stood for one split second astonished; then he shot away across the lawn, as if shod with the feathered shoes out of the Greek fairy tale. He cleared three yards and fifteen daisies at a leap, out of mere bodily levity; but when he came within a yard or two of the open parlour windows, his flying feet fell in their old manner like lead; he twisted round and came back slowly, whistling. The events of that enchanted evening were not at an end.

Inside the dark sitting–room of which Moon had caught a glimpse a curious thing had happened, almost an instant after the intemperate exit of Rosamund. It was something which, occurring in that obscure parlour, seemed to Arthur Inglewood like heaven and earth turning head over heels, the sea being the ceiling and the stars the floor. No words can express how it astonished him, as it astonishes all simple men when it happens. Yet the stiffest female stoicism seems separated from it only by a sheet of paper or a sheet of steel. It indicates
no surrender, far less any sympathy. The most rigid and ruthless woman can begin to cry, just as the most effeminate man can grow a beard. It is a separate sexual power, and proves nothing one way or the other about force of character. But to young men ignorant of women, like Arthur Inglewood, to see Diana Duke crying was like seeing a motor–car shedding tears of petrol.

He could never have given (even if his really manly modesty had permitted it) any vaguest vision of what he did when he saw that portent. He acted as men do when a theatre catches fire—very differently from how they would have conceived themselves as acting, whether for better or worse. He had a faint memory of certain half–stifled explanations, that the heiress was the one really paying guest, and she would go, and the bailiffs (in consequence) would come; but after that he knew nothing of his own conduct except by the protests it evoked.

“Leave me alone, Mr. Inglewood—leave me alone; that’s not the way to help.”

“But I can help you,” said Arthur, with grinding certainty;
“I can, I can, I can . . .”
“Why, you said,” cried the girl, “that you were much weaker than me.”
“So I am weaker than you,” said Arthur, in a voice that went vibrating through everything, “but not just now.”
“Let go my hands!” cried Diana. “I won’t be bullied.”

In one element he was much stronger than she—the matter of humour. This leapt up in him suddenly, and he laughed, saying: “Well, you are mean. You know quite well you’ll bully me all the rest of my life.

You might allow a man the one minute of his life when he’s allowed to bully.”

It was as extraordinary for him to laugh as for her to cry, and for the first time since her childhood Diana was entirely off her guard.

“Do you mean you want to marry me?” she said.

“Why, there’s a cab at the door!” cried Inglewood, springing up with an unconscious energy and bursting open the glass doors that led into the garden.

As he led her out by the hand they realized somehow for the first time that the house and garden were on a steep height over London. And yet, though they felt the place to be uplifted, they felt it also to be secret: it was like some round walled garden on the top of one of the turrets of heaven.

Inglewood looked around dreamily, his brown eyes devouring all sorts of details with a senseless delight. He noticed for the first time that the railings of the gate beyond the garden bushes were moulded like little spearheads and
painted blue. He noticed that one of the blue spears was loosened in its place, and hung sideways; and this almost made him laugh. He thought it somehow exquisitely harmless and funny that the railing should be crooked; he thought he should like to know how it happened, who did it, and how the man was getting on.

When they were gone a few feet across that fiery grass they realized that they were not alone. Rosamund Hunt and the eccentric Mr. Moon, both of whom they had last seen in the blackest temper of detachment, were standing together on the lawn. They were standing in quite an ordinary manner, and yet they looked somehow like people in a book.

“Oh,” said Diana, “what lovely air!”

“I know,” called out Rosamund, with a pleasure so positive that it rang out like a complaint. “It’s just like that horrid, beastly fizzy stuff they gave me that made me feel happy.”

“Oh, it isn’t like anything but itself!” answered Diana, breathing deeply.

“Why, it’s all cold, and yet it feels like fire.”

“Balmy is the word we use in Fleet Street,” said Mr. Moon. “Balmy—especially on the crumpet.” And he fanned himself quite unnecessarily with his straw hat. They were all full of little leaps and pulsations of objectless and airy energy. Diana stirred and stretched her long arms rigidly, as if crucified, in a sort of excruciating restfulness; Michael stood still for long intervals, with gathered muscles, then spun round like a teetotum, and stood still again; Rosamund did not trip, for women never trip, except when they fall on their noses, but she struck the ground with her foot as she moved, as if to some inaudible dance tune; and Inglewood, leaning quite quietly against a tree, had unconsciously clutched a branch and shaken it with a creative violence. Those giant gestures of Man, that made the high statues and the strokes of war, tossed and tormented all their limbs. Silently as they strolled and stood they were bursting like batteries with an animal magnetism.

“And now,” cried Moon quite suddenly, stretching out a hand on each side, “let’s dance round that bush!”

“Why, what bush do you mean?” asked Rosamund, looking round with a sort of radiant rudeness.

“The bush that isn’t there,” said Michael—“the Mulberry Bush.”

They had taken each other’s hands, half laughing and quite ritually; and before they could disconnect again Michael spun them all round, like a demon spinning the world for a top. Diana felt, as the circle of the horizon flew instantaneously
around her, a far aerial sense of the ring of heights beyond London and corners where she had climbed as a child; she seemed almost to hear the rooks cawing about the old pines on Highgate, or to see the glowworms gathering and kindling in the woods of Box Hill.

The circle broke—as all such perfect circles of levity must break—and sent its author, Michael, flying, as by centrifugal force, far away against the blue rails of the gate. When reeling there he suddenly raised shout after shout of a new and quite dramatic character.

“Why, it’s Warner!” he shouted, waving his arms. “It’s jolly old Warner—with a new silk hat and the old silk moustache!”

“Is that Dr. Warner?” cried Rosamund, bounding forward in a burst of memory, amusement, and distress. “Oh, I’m so sorry! Oh, do tell him it’s all right!”

“Let’s take hands and tell him,” said Michael Moon. For indeed, while they were talking, another hansom cab had dashed up behind the one already waiting, and Dr. Herbert Warner, leaving a companion in the cab, had carefully deposited himself on the pavement.

Now, when you are an eminent physician and are wired for by an heiress to come to a case of dangerous mania, and when, as you come in through the garden to the house, the heiress and her landlady and two of the gentlemen boarders join hands and dance round you in a ring, calling out, “It’s all right! it’s all right!” you are apt to be flustered and even displeased. Dr. Warner was a placid but hardly a placable person. The two things are by no means the same; and even when Moon explained to him that he, Warner, with his high hat and tall, solid figure, was just such a classic figure as ought to be danced round by a ring of laughing maidens on some old golden Greek seashore—even then he seemed to miss the point of the general rejoicing.

“Ingleswood!” cried Dr. Warner, fixing his former disciple with a stare, “are you mad?”

Arthur flushed to the roots of his brown hair, but he answered, easily and quietly enough, “Not now. The truth is, Warner, I’ve just made a rather important medical discovery—quite in your line.”

“What do you mean?” asked the great doctor stiffly—“what discovery?”

“I’ve discovered that health really is catching, like disease,” answered Arthur.

“Yes; sanity has broken out, and is spreading,” said Michael, performing a pas seul with a thoughtful expression. “Twenty thousand more cases taken to the hospitals; nurses employed night and day.”
Dr. Warner studied Michael’s grave face and lightly moving legs with an unfathomed wonder. “And is THIS, may I ask,” he said, “the sanity that is spreading?”

“You must forgive me, Dr. Warner,” cried Rosamund Hunt heartily. “I know I’ve treated you badly; but indeed it was all a mistake. I was in a frightfully bad temper when I sent for you, but now it all seems like a dream—and and Mr. Smith is the sweetest, most sensible, most delightful old thing that ever existed, and he may marry any one he likes—except me.”

“I should suggest Mrs. Duke,” said Michael.

The gravity of Dr. Warner’s face increased. He took a slip of pink paper from his waistcoat pocket, with his pale blue eyes quietly fixed on Rosamund’s face all the time. He spoke with a not inexcusable frigidity.

“Really, Miss Hunt,” he said, “you are not yet very reassuring. You sent me this wire only half an hour ago: ‘Come at once, if possible, with another doctor. Man—Innocent Smith—gone mad on premises, and doing dreadful things. Do you know anything of him?’ I went round at once to a distinguished colleague of mine, a doctor who is also a private detective and an authority on criminal lunacy; he has come round with me, and is waiting in the cab. Now you calmly tell me that this criminal madman is a highly sweet and sane old thing, with accompaniments that set me speculating on your own definition of sanity. I hardly comprehend the change.”

“Oh, how can one explain a change in sun and moon and everybody’s soul?” cried Rosamund, in despair. “Must I confess we had got so morbid as to think him mad merely because he wanted to get married; and that we didn’t even know it was only because we wanted to get married ourselves? We’ll humiliate ourselves, if you like, doctor; we’re happy enough.”

“Where is Mr. Smith?” asked Warner of Inglewood very sharply.

Arthur started; he had forgotten all about the central figure of their farce, who had not been visible for an hour or more.

“I—I think he’s on the other side of the house, by the dustbin,” he said.

“He may be on the road to Russia,” said Warner, “but he must be found.” And he strode away and disappeared round a corner of the house by the sunflowers.

“I hope,” said Rosamund, “he won’t really interfere with Mr. Smith.”

“Interfere with the daisies!” said Michael with a snort.

“A man can’t be locked up for falling in love—at least I hope not.”

“No; I think even a doctor couldn’t make a disease out of him.
He’d throw off the doctor like the disease, don’t you know?
I believe it’s a case of a sort of holy well. I believe Innocent Smith
is simply innocent, and that is why he is so extraordinary.”
It was Rosamund who spoke, restlessly tracing circles in the grass with the
point of her white shoe.
“I think,” said Inglewood, “that Smith is not extraordinary at all. He’s comic
just because he’s so startlingly commonplace. Don’t you know what it is to be
all one family circle, with aunts and uncles, when a schoolboy comes home for
the holidays? That bag there on the cab is only a schoolboy’s hamper. This tree
here in the garden is only the sort of tree that any schoolboy would have
climbed. Yes, that’s the thing that has haunted us all about him, the thing we
could never fit a word to. Whether he is my old schoolfellow or no, at least he is
all my old schoolfellows. He is the endless bun—eating, ball—throwing animal
that we have all been.”
“That is only you absurd boys,” said Diana. “I don’t believe any girl was ever
so silly, and I’m sure no girl was ever so happy, except—” and she stopped.
“I will tell you the truth about Innocent Smith,” said Michael Moon in a low
voice. “Dr. Warner has gone to look for him in vain. He is not there. Haven’t
you noticed that we never saw him since we found ourselves? He was an astral
baby born on all four of us; he was only our own youth returned. Long before
poor old Warner had clambered out of his cab, the thing we called Smith had
dissolved into dew and light on this lawn. Once or twice more, by the mercy of
God, we may feel the thing, but the man we shall never see. In a spring garden
before breakfast we shall smell the smell called Smith. In the snapping of brisk
twigs in tiny fires we shall hear a noise named Smith. Everything insatiable and
innocent in the grasses that gobble up the earth like babies at a bun feast, in the
white mornings that split the sky as a boy splits up white firwood, we may feel
for one instant the presence of an impetuous purity; but his innocence was too
close to the unconsciousness of inanimate things not to melt back at a mere
touch into the mild hedges and heavens; he—”
He was interrupted from behind the house by a bang like that of a bomb.
Almost at the same instant the stranger in the cab sprang out of it, leaving it
rocking upon the stones of the road. He clutched the blue railings of the garden,
and peered eagerly over them in the direction of the noise. He was a small, loose,
yet alert man, very thin, with a face that seemed made out of fish bones, and a
silk hat quite as rigid and resplendent as Warner’s, but thrust back recklessly on
the hinder part of his head.
“Murder!” he shrieked, in a high and feminine but very penetrating voice.

“Stop that murderer there!”

Even as he shrieked a second shot shook the lower windows of the house, and with the noise of it Dr. Herbert Warner came flying round the corner like a leaping rabbit. Yet before he had reached the group a third discharge had deafened them, and they saw with their own eyes two spots of white sky drilled through the second of the unhappy Herbert’s high hats. The next moment the fugitive physician fell over a flowerpot, and came down on all fours, staring like a cow. The hat with the two shot-holes in it rolled upon the gravel path before him, and Innocent Smith came round the corner like a railway train. He was looking twice his proper size—a giant clad in green, the big revolver still smoking in his hand, his face sanguine and in shadow, his eyes blazing like all stars, and his yellow hair standing out all ways like Struwelpeter’s.

Though this startling scene hung but an instant in stillness, Inglewood had time to feel once more what he had felt when he saw the other lovers standing on the lawn—the sensation of a certain cut and coloured clearness that belongs rather to the things of art than to the things of experience. The broken flowerpot with its red-hot geraniums, the green bulk of Smith and the black bulk of Warner, the blue-spiked railings behind, clutched by the stranger’s yellow vulture claws and peered over by his long vulture neck, the silk hat on the gravel, and the little cloudlet of smoke floating across the garden as innocently as the puff of a cigarette—all these seemed unnaturally distinct and definite. They existed, like symbols, in an ecstasy of separation. Indeed, every object grew more and more particular and precious because the whole picture was breaking up. Things look so bright just before they burst.

Long before his fancies had begun, let alone ceased, Arthur had stepped across and taken one of Smith’s arms. Simultaneously the little stranger had run up the steps and taken the other. Smith went into peals of laughter, and surrendered his pistol with perfect willingness. Moon raised the doctor to his feet, and then went and leaned sullenly on the garden gate. The girls were quiet and vigilant, as good women mostly are in instants of catastrophe, but their faces showed that, somehow or other, a light had been dashed out of the sky. The doctor himself, when he had risen, collected his hat and wits, and dusting himself down with an air of great disgust, turned to them in brief apology. He was very white with his recent panic, but he spoke with perfect self-control.

“You will excuse us, ladies,” he said; “my friend and Mr. Inglewood are both scientists in their several ways.
I think we had better all take Mr. Smith indoors, and communicate with you later.”

And under the guard of the three natural philosophers the disarmed Smith was led tactfully into the house, still roaring with laughter.

From time to time during the next twenty minutes his distant boom of mirth could again be heard through the half-open window; but there came no echo of the quiet voices of the physicians. The girls walked about the garden together, rubbing up each other’s spirits as best they might; Michael Moon still hung heavily against the gate. Somewhere about the expiration of that time Dr. Warner came out of the house with a face less pale but even more stern, and the little man with the fish-bone face advanced gravely in his rear. And if the face of Warner in the sunlight was that of a hanging judge, the face of the little man behind was more like a death’s head.

“Miss Hunt,” said Dr. Herbert Warner, “I only wish to offer you my warm thanks and admiration. By your prompt courage and wisdom in sending for us by wire this evening, you have enabled us to capture and put out of mischief one of the most cruel and terrible of the enemies of humanity—a criminal whose plausibility and pitilessness have never been before combined in flesh.”

Rosamund looked across at him with a white, blank face and blinking eyes.

“What do you mean?” she asked. “You can’t mean Mr. Smith?”

“He has gone by many other names,” said the doctor gravely, “and not one he did not leave to be cursed behind him. That man, Miss Hunt, has left a track of blood and tears across the world. Whether he is mad as well as wicked, we are trying, in the interests of science, to discover. In any case, we shall have to take him to a magistrate first, even if only on the road to a lunatic asylum. But the lunatic asylum in which he is confined will have to be sealed with wall within wall, and ringed with guns like a fortress, or he will break out again to bring forth carnage and darkness on the earth.”

Rosamund looked at the two doctors, her face growing paler and paler. Then her eyes strayed to Michael, who was leaning on the gate; but he continued to lean on it without moving, with his face turned away towards the darkening road.
CHAPTER V

THE ALLEGORICAL PRACTICAL JOKER

The criminal specialist who had come with Dr. Warner was a somewhat more urbane and even dapper figure than he had appeared when clutching the railings and craning his neck into the garden. He even looked comparatively young when he took his hat off, having fair hair parted in the middle and carefully curled on each side, and lively movements, especially of the hands. He had a dandified monocle slung round his neck by a broad black ribbon, and a big bow tie, as if a big American moth had alighted on him. His dress and gestures were bright enough for a boy’s; it was only when you looked at the fish–bone face that you beheld something acrid and old. His manners were excellent, though hardly English, and he had two half–conscious tricks by which people who only met him once remembered him. One was a trick of closing his eyes when he wished to be particularly polite; the other was one of lifting his joined thumb and forefinger in the air as if holding a pinch of snuff, when he was hesitating or hovering over a word. But those who were longer in his company tended to forget these oddities in the stream of his quaint and solemn conversation and really singular views.

“Miss Hunt,” said Dr. Warner, “this is Dr. Cyrus Pym.”

Dr. Cyrus Pym shut his eyes during the introduction, rather as if he were “playing fair” in some child’s game, and gave a prompt little bow, which somehow suddenly revealed him as a citizen of the United States.

“Dr. Cyrus Pym,” continued Warner (Dr. Pym shut his eyes again), “is perhaps the first criminological expert of America. We are very fortunate to be able to consult with him in this extraordinary case—”

“I can’t make head or tail of anything,” said Rosamund. “How can poor Mr. Smith be so dreadful as he is by your account?”

“Or by your telegram,” said Herbert Warner, smiling.

“Oh, you don’t understand,” cried the girl impatiently.

“Why, he’s done us all more good than going to church.”

“I think I can explain to the young lady,” said Dr. Cyrus Pym. “This criminal or maniac Smith is a very genius of evil, and has a method of his own, a method of the most daring ingenuity. He is popular wherever he goes, for he invades every house as an uproarious child. People are getting suspicious of all the
respectable disguises for a scoundrel; so he always uses the disguise of—what shall I say—the Bohemian, the blameless Bohemian. He always carries people off their feet. People are used to the mask of conventional good conduct. He goes in for eccentric good–nature. You expect a Don Juan to dress up as a solemn and solid Spanish merchant; but you’re not prepared when he dresses up as Don Quixote. You expect a humbug to behave like Sir Charles Grandison; because (with all respect, Miss Hunt, for the deep, tear–moving tenderness of Samuel Richardson) Sir Charles Grandison so often behaved like a humbug. But no real red–blooded citizen is quite ready for a humbug that models himself not on Sir Charles Grandison but on Sir Roger de Coverly. Setting up to be a good man a little cracked is a new criminal incognito, Miss Hunt. It’s been a great notion, and uncommonly successful; but its success just makes it mighty cruel. I can forgive Dick Turpin if he impersonates Dr. Busby; I can’t forgive him when he impersonates Dr. Johnson. The saint with a tile loose is a bit too sacred, I guess, to be parodied.”

“But how do you know,” cried Rosamund desperately, “that Mr. Smith is a known criminal?”

“I collated all the documents,” said the American, “when my friend Warner knocked me up on receipt of your cable. It is my professional affair to know these facts, Miss Hunt; and there’s no more doubt about them than about the Bradshaw down at the depot. This man has hitherto escaped the law, through his admirable affectations of infancy or insanity. But I myself, as a specialist, have privately authenticated notes of some eighteen or twenty crimes attempted or achieved in this manner. He comes to houses as he has to this, and gets a grand popularity. He makes things go. They do go; when he’s gone the things are gone. Gone, Miss Hunt, gone, a man’s life or a man’s spoons, or more often a woman. I assure you I have all the memoranda.”

“I have seen them,” said Warner solidly, “I can assure you that all this is correct.”

“The most unmanly aspect, according to my feelings,” went on the American doctor, “is this perpetual deception of innocent women by a wild simulation of innocence. From almost every house where this great imaginative devil has been, he has taken some poor girl away with him; some say he’s got a hypnotic eye with his other queer features, and that they go like automata. What’s become of all those poor girls nobody knows. Murdered, I dare say; for we’ve lots of instances, besides this one, of his turning his hand to murder, though none ever brought him under the law. Anyhow, our most modern methods of research can’t
find any trace of the wretched women. It’s when I think of them that I am really moved, Miss Hunt. And I’ve really nothing else to say just now except what Dr. Warner has said.”

“Quite so,” said Warner, with a smile that seemed moulded in marble—“that we all have to thank you very much for that telegram.”

The little Yankee scientist had been speaking with such evident sincerity that one forgot the tricks of his voice and manner—the falling eyelids, the rising intonation, and the poised finger and thumb—which were at other times a little comic. It was not so much that he was cleverer than Warner; perhaps he was not so clever, though he was more celebrated. But he had what Warner never had, a fresh and unaffected seriousness—the great American virtue of simplicity. Rosamund knitted her brows and looked gloomily toward the darkening house that contained the dark prodigy.

Broad daylight still endured; but it had already changed from gold to silver, and was changing from silver to gray. The long plumy shadows of the one or two trees in the garden faded more and more upon a dead background of dusk. In the sharpest and deepest shadow, which was the entrance to the house by the big French windows, Rosamund could watch a hurried consultation between Inglewood (who was still left in charge of the mysterious captive) and Diana, who had moved to his assistance from without. After a few minutes and gestures they went inside, shutting the glass doors upon the garden; and the garden seemed to grow grayer still.

The American gentleman named Pym seemed to be turning and on the move in the same direction; but before he started he spoke to Rosamund with a flash of that guileless tact which redeemed much of his childish vanity, and with something of that spontaneous poetry which made it difficult, pedantic as he was, to call him a pedant.

“I’m vurry sorry, Miss Hunt,” he said; “but Dr. Warner and I, as two quali–FIED practitioners, had better take Mr. Smith away in that cab, and the less said about it the better. Don’t you agitate yourself, Miss Hunt. You’ve just got to think that we’re taking away a monstrosity, something that oughtn’t to be at all—something like one of those gods in your Britannic Museum, all wings, and beards, and legs, and eyes, and no shape. That’s what Smith is, and you shall soon be quit of him.”

He had already taken a step towards the house, and Warner was about to follow him, when the glass doors were opened again and Diana Duke came out with more than her usual quickness across the lawn. Her face was aquiver with
worry and excitement, and her dark earnest eyes fixed only on the other girl.

“Rosamund,” she cried in despair, “what shall I do with her?”

“With her?” cried Miss Hunt, with a violent jump. “O lord, he isn’t a woman too, is he?”

“No, no, no,” said Dr. Pym soothingly, as if in common fairness.

“A woman? no, really, he is not so bad as that.”

“I mean your friend Mary Gray,” retorted Diana with equal tartness.

“What on earth am I to do with her?”

“How can we tell her about Smith, you mean,” answered Rosamund, her face at once clouded and softening. “Yes, it will be pretty painful.”

“But I HAVE told her,” exploded Diana, with more than her congenital exasperation. “I have told her, and she doesn’t seem to mind. She still says she’s going away with Smith in that cab.”

“But it’s impossible!” ejaculated Rosamund. “Why, Mary is really religious. She—”

She stopped in time to realize that Mary Gray was comparatively close to her on the lawn. Her quiet companion had come down very quietly into the garden, but dressed very decisively for travel. She had a neat but very ancient blue tam–o’–shanter on her head, and was pulling some rather threadbare gray gloves on to her hands. Yet the two tints fitted excellently with her heavy copper–coloured hair; the more excellently for the touch of shabbiness: for a woman’s clothes never suit her so well as when they seem to suit her by accident.

But in this case the woman had a quality yet more unique and attractive. In such gray hours, when the sun is sunk and the skies are already sad, it will often happen that one reflection at some occasional angle will cause to linger the last of the light. A scrap of window, a scrap of water, a scrap of looking–glass, will be full of the fire that is lost to all the rest of the earth. The quaint, almost triangular face of Mary Gray was like some triangular piece of mirror that could still repeat the splendour of hours before. Mary, though she was always graceful, could never before have properly been called beautiful; and yet her happiness amid all that misery was so beautiful as to make a man catch his breath.

“O Diana,” cried Rosamund in a lower voice and altering her phrase; “but how did you tell her?”

“It is quite easy to tell her,” answered Diana sombly; “it makes no impression at all.”

“I’m afraid I’ve kept everything waiting,” said Mary Gray apologetically, “and now we must really say good–bye. Innocent is taking me to his aunt’s over
at Hampstead, and I’m afraid she goes to bed early.”

Her words were quite casual and practical, but there was a sort of sleepy light in her eyes that was more baffling than darkness; she was like one speaking absently with her eye on some very distant object.

“Mary, Mary,” cried Rosamund, almost breaking down, “I’m so sorry about it, but the thing can’t be at all. We—we have found out all about Mr. Smith.”

“All?” repeated Mary, with a low and curious intonation; “why, that must be awfully exciting.”

There was no noise for an instant and no motion except that the silent Michael Moon, leaning on the gate, lifted his head, as it might be to listen. Then Rosamund remaining speechless, Dr. Pym came to her rescue in a definite way.

“To begin with,” he said, “this man Smith is constantly attempting murder. The Warden of Brakespeare College—”

“I know,” said Mary, with a vague but radiant smile. “Innocent told me.”

“I can’t say what he told you,” replied Pym quickly, “but I’m very much afraid it wasn’t true. The plain truth is that the man’s stained with every known human crime. I assure you I have all the documents. I have evidence of his committing burglary, signed by a most eminent English curate. I have—”

“Oh, but there were two curates,” cried Mary, with a certain gentle eagerness; “that was what made it so much funnier.”

The darkened glass doors of the house opened once more, and Inglewood appeared for an instant, making a sort of signal. The American doctor bowed, the English doctor did not, but they both set out stolidly towards the house. No one else moved, not even Michael hanging on the gate; but the back of his head and shoulders had still an indescribable indication that he was listening to every word.

“But don’t you understand, Mary,” cried Rosamund in despair; “don’t you know that awful things have happened even before our very eyes. I should have thought you would have heard the revolver shots upstairs.”

“Yes, I heard the shots,” said Mary almost brightly; “but I was busy packing just then. And Innocent had told me he was going to shoot at Dr. Warner; so it wasn’t worth while to come down.”

“Oh, I don’t understand what you mean,” cried Rosamund Hunt, stamping, “but you must and shall understand what I mean. I don’t care how cruelly I put it, if only I can save you. I mean that your Innocent Smith is the most awfully wicked man in the world. He has sent bullets at lots of other men and gone off in
cabs with lots of other women. And he seems to have killed the women too, for nobody can find them.”

“He is really rather naughty sometimes,” said Mary Gray, laughing softly as she buttoned her old gray gloves.

“Oh, this is really mesmerism, or something,” said Rosamund, and burst into tears.

At the same moment the two black-clad doctors appeared out of the house with their great green-clad captive between them. He made no resistance, but was still laughing in a groggy and half-witted style. Arthur Inglewood followed in the rear, a dark and red study in the last shades of distress and shame. In this black, funereal, and painfully realistic style the exit from Beacon House was made by a man whose entrance a day before had been effected by the happy leaping of a wall and the hilarious climbing of a tree. No one moved of the groups in the garden except Mary Gray, who stepped forward quite naturally, calling out, “Are you ready, Innocent? Our cab’s been waiting such a long time.”

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said Dr. Warner firmly, “I must insist on asking this lady to stand aside. We shall have trouble enough as it is, with the three of us in a cab.”

“But it IS our cab,” persisted Mary. “Why, there’s Innocent’s yellow bag on the top of it.”

“Stand aside,” repeated Warner roughly. “And you, Mr. Moon, please be so obliging as to move a moment. Come, come! the sooner this ugly business is over the better—and how can we open the gate if you will keep leaning on it?”

Michael Moon looked at his long lean forefinger, and seemed to consider and reconsider this argument. “Yes,” he said at last; “but how can I lean on this gate if you keep on opening it?”

“Oh, get out of the way!” cried Warner, almost good-humouredly.

“You can lean on the gate any time.”

“No,” said Moon reflectively. “Seldom the time and the place and the blue gate altogether; and it all depends whether you come of an old country family. My ancestors leaned on gates before any one had discovered how to open them.”

“Michael!” cried Arthur Inglewood in a kind of agony, “are you going to get out of the way?”

“Why, no; I think not,” said Michael, after some meditation, and swung himself slowly round, so that he confronted the company, while still, in a lounging attitude, occupying the path.

“Hullo!” he called out suddenly; “what are you doing to Mr. Smith?”
“Taking him away,” answered Warner shortly, “to be examined.”

“Matriculation?” asked Moon brightly.

“By a magistrate,” said the other curtly.

“And what other magistrate,” cried Michael, raising his voice, “dares to try what befell on this free soil, save only the ancient and independent Dukes of Beacon? What other court dares to try one of our company, save only the High Court of Beacon? Have you forgotten that only this afternoon we flew the flag of independence and severed ourselves from all the nations of the earth?”

“Michael,” cried Rosamund, wringing her hands, “how can you stand there talking nonsense? Why, you saw the dreadful thing yourself. You were there when he went mad. It was you that helped the doctor up when he fell over the flower–pot.”

“And the High Court of Beacon,” replied Moon with hauteur, “has special powers in all cases concerning lunatics, flower–pots, and doctors who fall down in gardens. It’s in our very first charter from Edward I: ‘Si medicus quisquam in horto prostratus—’”

“Out of the way!” cried Warner with sudden fury, “or we will force you out of it.”

“What!” cried Michael Moon, with a cry of hilarious fierceness. “Shall I die in defence of this sacred pale? Will you paint these blue railings red with my gore?” and he laid hold of one of the blue spikes behind him. As Inglewood had noticed earlier in the evening, the railing was loose and crooked at this place, and the painted iron staff and spearhead came away in Michael’s hand as he shook it.

“See!” he cried, brandishing this broken javelin in the air,

“the very lances round Beacon Tower leap from their places to defend it.

Ah, in such a place and hour it is a fine thing to die alone!”

And in a voice like a drum he rolled the noble lines of Ronsard—

“Ou pour l’honneur de Dieu, ou pour le droit de mon prince, Navre, poitrine ouverte, au bord de mon province.”

“Sakes alive!” said the American gentleman, almost in an awed tone.

Then he added, “Are there two maniacs here?”

“No; there are five,” thundered Moon. “Smith and I are the only sane people left.”

“Michael!” cried Rosamund; “Michael, what does it mean?”

“It means bosh!” roared Michael, and slung his painted spear hurtling to the other end of the garden. “It means that doctors are bosh, and criminology is
bosh, and Americans are bosh—much more bosh than our Court of Beacon. It means, you fatheads, that Innocent Smith is no more mad or bad than the bird on that tree.”

“But, my dear Moon,” began Inglewood in his modest manner, “these gentlemen—”

“On the word of two doctors,” exploded Moon again, without listening to anybody else, “shut up in a private hell on the word of two doctors! And such doctors! Oh, my hat! Look at ’em!—do just look at ’em! Would you read a book, or buy a dog, or go to a hotel on the advice of twenty such? My people came from Ireland, and were Catholics. What would you say if I called a man wicked on the word of two priests?”

“But it isn’t only their word, Michael,” reasoned Rosamund; “they’ve got evidence too.”

“Have you looked at it?” asked Moon.

“No,” said Rosamund, with a sort of faint surprise; “these gentlemen are in charge of it.”

“And of everything else, it seems to me,” said Michael. “Why, you haven’t even had the decency to consult Mrs. Duke.”

“Oh, that’s no use,” said Diana in an undertone to Rosamund; “Auntie can’t say ‘Bo!’ to a goose.”

“I am glad to hear it,” answered Michael, “for with such a flock of geese to say it to, the horrid expletive might be constantly on her lips. For my part, I simply refuse to let things be done in this light and airy style. I appeal to Mrs. Duke—it’s her house.”

“Mrs. Duke?” repeated Inglewood doubtfully.


“If you ask Auntie,” said Diana quietly, “she’ll only be for doing nothing at all. Her only idea is to hush things up or to let things slide. That just suits her.”

“Yes,” replied Michael Moon; “and, as it happens, it just suits all of us. You are impatient with your elders, Miss Duke; but when you are as old yourself you will know what Napoleon knew—that half one’s letters answer themselves if you can only refrain from the fleshly appetite of answering them.”

He was still lounging in the same absurd attitude, with his elbow on the grate, but his voice had altered abruptly for the third time; just as it had changed from the mock heroic to the humanly indignant, it now changed to the airy incisiveness of a lawyer giving good legal advice.

“It isn’t only your aunt who wants to keep this quiet if she can,” he said; “we
all want to keep it quiet if we can. Look at the large facts—the big bones of the case. I believe those scientific gentlemen have made a highly scientific mistake. I believe Smith is as blameless as a buttercup. I admit buttercups don’t often let off loaded pistols in private houses; I admit there is something demanding explanation. But I am morally certain there’s some blunder, or some joke, or some allegory, or some accident behind all this. Well, suppose I’m wrong. We’ve disarmed him; we’re five men to hold him; he may as well go to a lock-up later on as now. But suppose there’s even a chance of my being right. Is it anybody’s interest here to wash this linen in public?

“Come, I’ll take each of you in order. Once take Smith outside that gate, and you take him into the front page of the evening papers. I know; I’ve written the front page myself. Miss Duke, do you or your aunt want a sort of notice stuck up over your boarding-house—‘Doctors shot here.’? No, no—doctors are rubbish, as I said; but you don’t want the rubbish shot here. Arthur, suppose I am right, or suppose I am wrong. Smith has appeared as an old schoolfellow of yours. Mark my words, if he’s proved guilty, the Organs of Public Opinion will say you introduced him. If he’s proved innocent, they will say you helped to collar him. Rosamund, my dear, suppose I am right or wrong. If he’s proved guilty, they’ll say you engaged your companion to him. If he’s proved innocent, they’ll print that telegram. I know the Organs, damn them.”

He stopped an instant; for this rapid rationalism left him more breathless than had either his theatrical or his real denunciation. But he was plainly in earnest, as well as positive and lucid; as was proved by his proceeding quickly the moment he had found his breath.

“It is just the same,” he cried, “with our medical friends. You will say that Dr. Warner has a grievance. I agree. But does he want specially to be snapped by all the journalists prostratus in horto? It was no fault of his, but the scene was not very dignified even for him. He must have justice; but does he want to ask for justice, not only on his knees, but on his hands and knees? Does he want to enter the court of justice on all fours? Doctors are not allowed to advertise; and I’m sure no doctor wants to advertise himself as looking like that. And even for our American guest the interest is the same. Let us suppose that he has conclusive documents. Let us assume that he has revelations really worth reading. Well, in a legal inquiry (or a medical inquiry, for that matter) ten to one he won’t be allowed to read them. He’ll be tripped up every two or three minutes with some tangle of old rules. A man can’t tell the truth in public nowadays. But he can still tell it in private; he can tell it inside that house.”
“It is quite true,” said Dr. Cyrus Pym, who had listened throughout the speech with a seriousness which only an American could have retained through such a scene. “It is true that I have been perceptibly less hampered in private inquiries.”

“Dr. Pym!” cried Warner in a sort of sudden anger.

“Dr. Pym! you aren’t really going to admit—”

“Smith may be mad,” went on the melancholy Moon in a monologue that seemed as heavy as a hatchet, “but there was something after all in what he said about Home Rule for every home. Yes, there is something, when all’s said and done, in the High Court of Beacon. It is really true that human beings might often get some sort of domestic justice where just now they can only get legal injustice—oh, I am a lawyer too, and I know that as well. It is true that there’s too much official and indirect power. Often and often the thing a whole nation can’t settle is just the thing a family could settle. Scores of young criminals have been fined and sent to jail when they ought to have been thrashed and sent to bed. Scores of men, I am sure, have had a lifetime at Hanwell when they only wanted a week at Brighton. There IS something in Smith’s notion of domestic self-government; and I propose that we put it into practice. You have the prisoner; you have the documents. Come, we are a company of free, white, Christian people, such as might be besieged in a town or cast up on a desert island. Let us do this thing ourselves. Let us go into that house there and sit down and find out with our own eyes and ears whether this thing is true or not; whether this Smith is a man or a monster. If we can’t do a little thing like that, what right have we to put crosses on ballot papers?”

Inglewood and Pym exchanged a glance; and Warner, who was no fool, saw in that glance that Moon was gaining ground. The motives that led Arthur to think of surrender were indeed very different from those which affected Dr. Cyrus Pym. All Arthur’s instincts were on the side of privacy and polite settlement; he was very English and would often endure wrongs rather than right them by scenes and serious rhetoric. To play at once the buffoon and the knight-errant, like his Irish friend, would have been absolute torture to him; but even the semi-official part he had played that afternoon was very painful. He was not likely to be reluctant if any one could convince him that his duty was to let sleeping dogs lie.

On the other hand, Cyrus Pym belonged to a country in which things are possible that seem crazy to the English. Regulations and authorities exactly like one of Innocent’s pranks or one of Michael’s satires really exist, propped by
placid policemen and imposed on bustling business men. Pym knew whole States which are vast and yet secret and fanciful; each is as big as a nation yet as private as a lost village, and as unexpected as an apple–pie bed. States where no man may have a cigarette, States where any man may have ten wives, very strict prohibition States, very lax divorce States—all these large local vagaries had prepared Cyrus Pym’s mind for small local vagaries in a smaller country. Infinitely more remote from England than any Russian or Italian, utterly incapable of even conceiving what English conventions are, he could not see the social impossibility of the Court of Beacon. It is firmly believed by those who shared the experiment, that to the very end Pym believed in that phantasmal court and supposed it to be some Britannic institution.

Towards the synod thus somewhat at a standstill there approached through the growing haze and gloaming a short dark figure with a walk apparently founded on the imperfect repression of a negro breakdown. Something at once in the familiarity and the incongruity of this being moved Michael to even heartier outbursts of a healthy and humane flippancy.

“Why, here’s little Nosey Gould,” he exclaimed. “Isn’t the mere sight of him enough to banish all your morbid reflections?”

“Really,” replied Dr. Warner, “I really fail to see how Mr. Gould affects the question; and I once more demand—”

“Hello! what’s the funeral, gents?” inquired the newcomer with the air of an uproarious umpire. “Doctor demandin’ something? Always the way at a boarding–house, you know. Always lots of demand. No supply.”

As delicately and impartially as he could, Michael restated his position, and indicated generally that Smith had been guilty of certain dangerous and dubious acts, and that there had even arisen an allegation that he was insane.

“Well, of course he is,” said Moses Gould equably; “it don’t need old ‘Olmes to see that. The ‘awk–like face of ‘Olmes,” he added with abstract relish, “showed a shide of disappointment, the sleuth–like Gould ‘avin’ got there before ‘im.”

“If he is mad,” began Inglewood.

“Well,” said Moses, “when a cove gets out on the tile the first night there’s generally a tile loose.”

“You never objected before,” said Diana Duke rather stiffly, “and you’re generally pretty free with your complaints.”

“I don’t compline of him,” said Moses magnanimously, “the poor chap’s ‘armless enough; you might tie ‘im up in the garden here and ‘e’d make noises at
the burglars.”

“Moses,” said Moon with solemn fervour, “you are the incarnation of Common Sense. You think Mr. Innocent is mad. Let me introduce you to the incarnation of Scientific Theory. He also thinks Mr. Innocent is mad.—Doctor, this is my friend Mr. Gould.—Moses, this is the celebrated Dr. Pym.” The celebrated Dr. Cyrus Pym closed his eyes and bowed. He also murmured his national war–cry in a low voice, which sounded like “Pleased to meet you.”

“Now you two people,” said Michael cheerfully, “who both think our poor friend mad, shall jolly well go into that house over there and prove him mad. What could be more powerful than the combination of Scientific Theory with Common Sense? United you stand; divided you fall. I will not be so uncivil as to suggest that Dr. Pym has no common sense; I confine myself to recording the chronological accident that he has not shown us any so far. I take the freedom of an old friend in staking my shirt that Moses has no scientific theory. Yet against this strong coalition I am ready to appear, armed with nothing but an intuition—which is American for a guess.”

“Distinguished by Mr. Gould’s assistance,” said Pym, opening his eyes suddenly. “I gather that though he and I are identical in primary di–agnosis there is yet between us something that cannot be called a disagreement, something which we may perhaps call a—” He put the points of thumb and forefinger together, spreading the other fingers exquisitely in the air, and seemed to be waiting for somebody else to tell him what to say.

“Catchin’ flies?” inquired the affable Moses.

“A divergence,” said Dr. Pym, with a refined sigh of relief; “a divergence. Granted that the man in question is deranged, he would not necessarily be all that science requires in a homicidal maniac—”

“Has it occurred to you,” observed Moon, who was leaning on the gate again, and did not turn round, “that if he were a homicidal maniac he might have killed us all here while we were talking.”

Something exploded silently underneath all their minds, like sealed dynamite in some forgotten cellars. They all remembered for the first time for some hour or two that the monster of whom they were talking was standing quietly among them. They had left him in the garden like a garden statue; there might have been a dolphin coiling round his legs, or a fountain pouring out of his mouth, for all the notice they had taken of Innocent Smith. He stood with his crest of blonde, blown hair thrust somewhat forward, his fresh–coloured, rather short–sighted face looking patiently downwards at nothing in particular, his huge shoulders
humped, and his hands in his trousers pockets. So far as they could guess he had not moved at all. His green coat might have been cut out of the green turf on which he stood. In his shadow Pym had expounded and Rosamund expostulated, Michael had ranted and Moses had ragged. He had remained like a thing graven; the god of the garden. A sparrow had perched on one of his heavy shoulders; and then, after correcting its costume of feathers, had flown away.

“Why,” cried Michael, with a shout of laughter, “the Court of Beacon has opened—and shut up again too. You all know now I am right. Your buried common sense has told you what my buried common sense has told me. Smith might have fired off a hundred cannons instead of a pistol, and you would still know he was harmless as I know he is harmless. Back we all go to the house and clear a room for discussion. For the High Court of Beacon, which has already arrived at its decision, is just about to begin its inquiry.”

“Just a goin’ to begin!” cried little Mr. Moses in an extraordinary sort of disinterested excitement, like that of an animal during music or a thunderstorm. “Follow on to the ‘Igh Court of Eggs and Bacon; ‘ave a kipper from the old firm! ‘Is Lordship complimented Mr. Gould on the ‘igh professional delicacy ‘e had shown, and which was worthy of the best traditions of the Saloon Bar—and three of Scotch hot, miss! Oh, chase me, girls!”

The girls betraying no temptation to chase him, he went away in a sort of waddling dance of pure excitement; and had made a circuit of the garden before he reappeared, breathless but still beaming. Moon had known his man when he realized that no people presented to Moses Gould could be quite serious, even if they were quite furious. The glass doors stood open on the side nearest to Mr. Moses Gould; and as the feet of that festive idiot were evidently turned in the same direction, everybody else went that way with the unanimity of some uproarious procession. Only Diana Duke retained enough rigidity to say the thing that had been boiling at her fierce feminine lips for the last few hours. Under the shadow of tragedy she had kept it back as unsympathetic. “In that case,” she said sharply, “these cabs can be sent away.”

“Well, Innocent must have his bag, you know,” said Mary with a smile.

“I dare say the cabman would get it down for us.”

“I’ll get the bag,” said Smith, speaking for the first time in hours; his voice sounded remote and rude, like the voice of a statue.

Those who had so long danced and disputed round his immobility were left breathless by his precipitance. With a run and spring he was out of the garden into the street; with a spring and one quivering kick he was actually on the roof
of the cab. The cabman happened to be standing by the horse’s head, having just removed its emptied nose–bag. Smith seemed for an instant to be rolling about on the cab’s back in the embraces of his Gladstone bag. The next instant, however, he had rolled, as if by a royal luck, into the high seat behind, and with a shriek of piercing and appalling suddenness had sent the horse flying and scampering down the street.

His evanescence was so violent and swift, that this time it was all the other people who were turned into garden statues. Mr. Moses Gould, however, being ill–adapted both physically and morally for the purposes of permanent sculpture, came to life some time before the rest, and, turning to Moon, remarked, like a man starting chattily with a stranger on an omnibus, “Tile loose, eh? Cab loose anyhow.” There followed a fatal silence; and then Dr. Warner said, with a sneer like a club of stone,—

“This is what comes of the Court of Beacon, Mr. Moon. You have let loose a maniac on the whole metropolis.”

Beacon House stood, as has been said, at the end of a long crescent of continuous houses. The little garden that shut it in ran out into a sharp point like a green cape pushed out into the sea of two streets. Smith and his cab shot up one side of the triangle, and certainly most of those standing inside of it never expected to see him again. At the apex, however, he turned the horse sharply round and drove with equal violence up the other side of the garden, visible to all those in the group. With a common impulse the little crowd ran across the lawn as if to stop him, but they soon had reason to duck and recoil. Even as he vanished up street for the second time, he let the big yellow bag fly from his hand, so that it fell in the centre of the garden, scattering the company like a bomb, and nearly damaging Dr. Warner’s hat for the third time. Long before they had collected themselves, the cab had shot away with a shriek that went into a whisper.

“Well,” said Michael Moon, with a queer note in his voice; “you may as well all go inside anyhow. We’ve got two relics of Mr. Smith at least; his fiancee and his trunk.”

“Well do you want us to go inside?” asked Arthur Inglewood, in whose red brow and rough brown hair botheration seemed to have reached its limit.

“I want the rest to go in,” said Michael in a clear voice, “because I want the whole of this garden in which to talk to you.”

There was an atmosphere of irrational doubt; it was really getting colder, and a night wind had begun to wave the one or two trees in the twilight.
however, spoke in a voice devoid of indecision.

“I refuse to listen to any such proposal,” he said; “you have lost this ruffian, and I must find him.”

“I don’t ask you to listen to any proposal,” answered Moon quietly;

“I only ask you to listen.”

He made a silencing movement with his hand, and immediately the whistling noise that had been lost in the dark streets on one side of the house could be heard from quite a new quarter on the other side. Through the night-maze of streets the noise increased with incredible rapidity, and the next moment the flying hoofs and flashing wheels had swept up to the blue-railed gate at which they had originally stood. Mr. Smith got down from his perch with an air of absent-mindedness, and coming back into the garden stood in the same elephantine attitude as before.

“Get inside! get inside!” cried Moon hilariously, with the air of one shooing a company of cats. “Come, come, be quick about it! Didn’t I tell you I wanted to talk to Inglewood?”

How they were all really driven into the house again it would have been difficult afterwards to say. They had reached the point of being exhausted with incongruities, as people at a farce are ill with laughing, and the brisk growth of the storm among the trees seemed like a final gesture of things in general. Inglewood lingered behind them, saying with a certain amicable exasperation, “I say, do you really want to speak to me?”

“I do,” said Michael, “very much.”

Night had come as it generally does, quicker than the twilight had seemed to promise. While the human eye still felt the sky as light gray, a very large and lustrous moon appearing abruptly above a bulk of roofs and trees, proved by contrast that the sky was already a very dark gray indeed. A drift of barren leaves across the lawn, a drift of riven clouds across the sky, seemed to be lifted on the same strong and yet laborious wind.

“Arthur,” said Michael, “I began with an intuition; but now I am sure. You and I are going to defend this friend of yours before the blessed Court of Beacon, and to clear him too—clear him of both crime and lunacy. Just listen to me while I preach to you for a bit.” They walked up and down the darkening garden together as Michael Moon went on.

“Can you,” asked Michael, “shut your eyes and see some of those queer old hieroglyphics they stuck up on white walls in the old hot countries. How stiff they were in shape and yet how gaudy in colour. Think of some alphabet of
arbitrary figures picked out in black and red, or white and green, with some old Semitic crowd of Nosey Gould’s ancestors staring at it, and try to think why the people put it up at all.”

Inglewood’s first instinct was to think that his perplexing friend had really gone off his head at last; there seemed so reckless a flight of irrelevancy from the tropic—pictured walls he was asked to imagine to the gray, wind–swept, and somewhat chilly suburban garden in which he was actually kicking his heels. How he could be more happy in one by imagining the other he could not conceive. Both (in themselves) were unpleasant.

“Why does everybody repeat riddles,” went on Moon abruptly, “even if they’ve forgotten the answers? Riddles are easy to remember because they are hard to guess. So were those stiff old symbols in black, red, or green easy to remember because they had been hard to guess. Their colours were plain. Their shapes were plain. Everything was plain except the meaning.”

Inglewood was about to open his mouth in an amiable protest, but Moon went on, plunging quicker and quicker up and down the garden and smoking faster and faster. “Dances, too,” he said; “dances were not frivolous. Dances were harder to understand than inscriptions and texts. The old dances were stiff, ceremonial, highly coloured but silent. Have you noticed anything odd about Smith?”

“Well, really,” cried Inglewood, left behind in a collapse of humour, “have I noticed anything else?”

“Have you noticed this about him,” asked Moon, with unshaken persistency, “that he has done so much and said so little? When first he came he talked, but in a gasping, irregular sort of way, as if he wasn’t used to it. All he really did was actions—painting red flowers on black gowns or throwing yellow bags on to the grass. I tell you that big green figure is figurative—like any green figure capering on some white Eastern wall.”

“My dear Michael,” cried Inglewood, in a rising irritation which increased with the rising wind, “you are getting absurdly fanciful.”

“I think of what has just happened,” said Michael steadily. “The man has not spoken for hours; and yet he has been speaking all the time. He fired three shots from a six–shooter and then gave it up to us, when he might have shot us dead in our boots. How could he express his trust in us better than that? He wanted to be tried by us. How could he have shown it better than by standing quite still and letting us discuss it? He wanted to show that he stood there willingly, and could escape if he liked. How could he have shown it better than by escaping in the
cab and coming back again? Innocent Smith is not a madman—he is a ritualist. He wants to express himself, not with his tongue, but with his arms and legs—with my body I thee worship, as it says in the marriage service. I begin to understand the old plays and pageants. I see why the mutes at a funeral were mute. I see why the mummers were mum. They MEANT something; and Smith means something too. All other jokes have to be noisy—like little Nosey Gould’s jokes, for instance. The only silent jokes are the practical jokes. Poor Smith, properly considered, is an allegorical practical joker. What he has really done in this house has been as frantic as a war-dance, but as silent as a picture.”

“I suppose you mean,” said the other dubiously, “that we have got to find out what all these crimes meant, as if they were so many coloured picture-puzzles. But even supposing that they do mean something—why, Lord bless my soul!”

Taking the turn of the garden quite naturally, he had lifted his eyes to the moon, by this time risen big and luminous, and had seen a huge, half-human figure sitting on the garden wall. It was outlined so sharply against the moon that for the first flash it was hard to be certain even that it was human: the hunched shoulders and outstanding hair had rather the air of a colossal cat. It resembled a cat also in the fact that when first startled it sprang up and ran with easy activity along the top of the wall. As it ran, however, its heavy shoulders and small stooping head rather suggested a baboon. The instant it came within reach of a tree it made an ape-like leap and was lost in the branches. The gale, which by this time was shaking every shrub in the garden, made the identification yet more difficult, since it melted the moving limbs of the fugitive in the multitudinous moving limbs of the tree.

“Oh, Who is there?” shouted Arthur. “Who are you? Are you Innocent?”

“Not quite,” answered an obscure voice among the leaves.

“I cheated you once about a penknife.”

The wind in the garden had gathered strength, and was throwing the tree backwards and forwards with the man in the thick of it, just as it had on the gay and golden afternoon when he had first arrived.

“But are you Smith?” asked Inglewood as in an agony.

“Very nearly,” said the voice out of the tossing tree.

“But you must have some real names,” shrieked Inglewood in despair.

“You must call yourself something.”

“Call myself something,” thundered the obscure voice, shaking the tree so that all its ten thousand leaves seemed to be talking at once.

“I call myself Roland Oliver Isaiah Charlemagne Arthur Hildebrand
Homer Danton Michaelangelo Shakespeare Brakespeare—"
“But, manalive!” began Inglewood in exasperation.
“That’s right! that’s right!” came with a roar out of the rocking tree; “that’s my real name.” And he broke a branch, and one or two autumn leaves fluttered away across the moon.
PART II

THE EXPLANATIONS OF INNOCENT SMITH
CHAPTER I

THE EYE OF DEATH; OR, THE MURDER CHARGE

The dining–room of the Dukes had been set out for the Court of Beacon with a certain impromptu pomposity that seemed somehow to increase its cosiness. The big room was, as it were, cut up into small rooms, with walls only waist high—the sort of separation that children make when they are playing at shops. This had been done by Moses Gould and Michael Moon (the two most active members of this remarkable inquiry) with the ordinary furniture of the place. At one end of the long mahogany table was set the one enormous garden chair, which was surmounted by the old torn tent or umbrella which Smith himself had suggested as a coronation canopy. Inside this erection could be perceived the dumpy form of Mrs. Duke, with cushions and a form of countenance that already threatened slumber. At the other end sat the accused Smith, in a kind of dock; for he was carefully fenced in with a quadrilateral of light bedroom chairs, any of which he could have tossed out the window with his big toe. He had been provided with pens and paper, out of the latter of which he made paper boats, paper darts, and paper dolls contentedly throughout the whole proceedings. He never spoke or even looked up, but seemed as unconscious as a child on the floor of an empty nursery.

On a row of chairs raised high on the top of a long settee sat the three young ladies with their backs up against the window, and Mary Gray in the middle; it was something between a jury box and the stall of the Queen of Beauty at a tournament. Down the centre of the long table Moon had built a low barrier out of eight bound volumes of “Good Words” to express the moral wall that divided the conflicting parties. On the right side sat the two advocates of the prosecution, Dr. Pym and Mr. Gould; behind a barricade of books and documents, chiefly (in the case of Dr. Pym) solid volumes of criminology. On the other side, Moon and Inglewood, for the defence, were also fortified with books and papers; but as these included several old yellow volumes by Ouida and Wilkie Collins, the hand of Mr. Moon seemed to have been somewhat careless and comprehensive. As for the victim and prosecutor, Dr. Warner, Moon wanted at first to have him kept entirely behind a high screen in the corner, urging the indelicacy of his appearance in court, but privately assuring him of an unofficial permission to peep over the top now and then. Dr. Warner, however, failed to rise to the
chivalry of such a course, and after some little disturbance and discussion he was accommodated with a seat on the right side of the table in a line with his legal advisers.

It was before this solidly–established tribunal that Dr. Cyrus Pym, after passing a hand through the honey–coloured hair over each ear, rose to open the case. His statement was clear and even restrained, and such flights of imagery as occurred in it only attracted attention by a certain indescribable abruptness, not uncommon in the flowers of American speech.

He planted the points of his ten frail fingers on the mahogany, closed his eyes, and opened his mouth. “The time has gone by,” he said, “when murder could be regarded as a moral and individual act, important perhaps to the murderer, perhaps to the murdered. Science has profoundly . . .” here he paused, poising his compressed finger and thumb in the air as if he were holding an elusive idea very tight by its tail, then he screwed up his eyes and said “modified,” and let it go—“has profoundly Modified our view of death. In superstitious ages it was regarded as the termination of life, catastrophic, and even tragic, and was often surrounded by solemnity. Brighter days, however, have dawned, and we now see death as universal and inevitable, as part of that great soul–stirring and heart–upholding average which we call for convenience the order of nature. In the same way we have come to consider murder SOCIA ally. Rising above the mere private feelings of a man while being forcibly deprived of life, we are privileged to behold murder as a mighty whole, to see the rich rotation of the cosmos, bringing, as it brings the golden harvests and the golden–bearded harvesters, the return for ever of the slayers and the slain.”

He looked down, somewhat affected with his own eloquence, coughed slightly, putting up four of his pointed fingers with the excellent manners of Boston, and continued: “There is but one result of this happier and humaner outlook which concerns the wretched man before us. It is that thoroughly elucidated by a Milwaukee doctor, our great secret–guessing Sonnenschein, in his great work, ‘The Destructive Type.’ We do not denounce Smith as a murderer, but rather as a murderous man. The type is such that its very life—I might say its very health—is in killing. Some hold that it is not properly an aberration, but a newer and even a higher creature. My dear old friend Dr. Bulger, who kept ferrets—” (here Moon suddenly ejaculated a loud “hurrah!” but so instantaneously resumed his tragic expression that Mrs. Duke looked everywhere else for the sound); Dr. Pym continued somewhat sternly—“who, in the interests of knowledge, kept ferrets, felt that the creature’s ferocity is not
utilitarian, but absolutely an end in itself. However this may be with ferrets, it is certainly so with the prisoner. In his other iniquities you may find the cunning of the maniac; but his acts of blood have almost the simplicity of sanity. But it is the awful sanity of the sun and the elements—a cruel, an evil sanity. As soon stay the iris–leapt cataracts of our virgin West as stay the natural force that sends him forth to slay. No environment, however scientific, could have softened him. Place that man in the silver–silent purity of the palest cloister, and there will be some deed of violence done with the crozier or the alb. Rear him in a happy nursery, amid our brave–browed Anglo–Saxon infancy, and he will find some way to strangle with the skipping–rope or brain with the brick. Circumstances may be favourable, training may be admirable, hopes may be high, but the huge elemental hunger of Innocent Smith for blood will in its appointed season burst like a well–timed bomb.”

Arthur Inglewood glanced curiously for an instant at the huge creature at the foot of the table, who was fitting a paper figure with a cocked hat, and then looked back at Dr. Pym, who was concluding in a quieter tone.

“It only remains for us,” he said, “to bring forward actual evidence of his previous attempts. By an agreement already made with the Court and the leaders of the defence, we are permitted to put in evidence authentic letters from witnesses to these scenes, which the defence is free to examine. Out of several cases of such outrages we have decided to select one—the clearest and most scandalous. I will therefore, without further delay, call on my junior, Mr. Gould, to read two letters—one from the Sub–Warden and the other from the porter of Brakespeare College, in Cambridge University.”

Gould jumped up with a jerk like a jack–in–the–box, an academic–looking paper in his hand and a fever of importance on his face. He began in a loud, high, cockney voice that was as abrupt as a cock–crow:—

“Sir,—Hi am the Sub–Warden of Brikespeare College, Cambridge—”

“Lord have mercy on us,” muttered Moon, making a backward movement as men do when a gun goes off.

“Hi am the Sub–Warden of Brikespeare College, Cambridge,” proclaimed the uncompromising Moses, “and I can endorse the description you gave of the un’appy Smith. It was not alone my unfortunate duty to rebuke many of the lesser violences of his undergraduate period, but I was actually a witness to the last iniquity which terminated that period. Hi happened to passing under the house of my friend the Warden of Brikespeare, which is semi–detached from the College and connected with it by two or three very ancient arches or props, like
bridges, across a small strip of water connected with the river. To my grive
astonishment I be’eld my eminent friend suspended in mid–air and clinging to
one of these pieces of masonry, his appearance and attitude indicatin’ that he
suffered from the grivest apprehensions. After a short time I heard two very loud
shots, and distinctly perceived the unfortunate undergraduate Smith leaning far
out of the Warden’s window and aiming at the Warden repeatedly with a
revolver. Upon seeing me, Smith burst into a loud laugh (in which impertinence
was mingled with insanity), and appeared to desist. I sent the college porter for a
ladder, and he succeeded in detaching the Warden from his painful position.
Smith was sent down. The photograph I enclose is from the group of the
University Rifle Club prizemen, and represents him as he was when at the
College.—Hi am, your obedient servant, Amos Boulter.

“The other letter,” continued Gould in a glow of triumph, “is from the porter,
and won’t take long to read.

“Dear Sir,—It is quite true that I am the porter of Brikespeare College, and
that I ’elped the Warden down when the young man was shooting at him, as Mr.
Boulter has said in his letter. The young man who was shooting at him was Mr.
Smith, the same that is in the photograph Mr. Boulter sends.—Yours
respectfully, Samuel Barker.”

Gould handed the two letters across to Moon, who examined them. But for the
vocal divergences in the matter of h’s and a’s, the Sub–Warden’s letter was
exactly as Gould had rendered it; and both that and the porter’s letter were
plainly genuine. Moon handed them to Inglewood, who handed them back in
silence to Moses Gould.

“So far as this first charge of continual attempted murder is concerned,” said
Dr. Pym, standing up for the last time, “that is my case.”

Michael Moon rose for the defence with an air of depression which gave little
hope at the outset to the sympathizers with the prisoner. He did not, he said,
propose to follow the doctor into the abstract questions. “I do not know enough
to be an agnostic,” he said, rather wearily, “and I can only master the known and
admitted elements in such controversies. As for science and religion, the known
and admitted facts are plain enough. All that the parsons say is unproved. All
that the doctors say is disproved. That’s the only difference between science and
religion there’s ever been, or will be. Yet these new discoveries touch me,
somehow,” he said, looking down sorrowfully at his boots. “They remind me of
a dear old great–aunt of mine who used to enjoy them in her youth. It brings
tears to my eyes. I can see the old bucket by the garden fence and the line of
shimmering poplars behind—"

“Hi! here, stop the ‘bus a bit,” cried Mr. Moses Gould, rising in a sort of perspiration. “We want to give the defence a fair run—like gents, you know; but any gent would draw the line at shimmering poplars.”

“Well, hang it all,” said Moon, in an injured manner, “if Dr. Pym may have an old friend with ferrets, why mayn’t I have an old aunt with poplars?”

“I am sure,” said Mrs. Duke, bridling, with something almost like a shaky authority, “Mr. Moon may have what aunts he likes.”

“Why, as to liking her,” began Moon, “I—but perhaps, as you say, she is scarcely the core of the question. I repeat that I do not mean to follow the abstract speculations. For, indeed, my answer to Dr. Pym is simple and severely concrete. Dr. Pym has only treated one side of the psychology of murder. If it is true that there is a kind of man who has a natural tendency to murder, is it not equally true”—here he lowered his voice and spoke with a crushing quietude and earnestness—“is it not equally true that there is a kind of man who has a natural tendency to get murdered? Is it not at least a hypothesis holding the field that Dr. Warner is such a man? I do not speak without the book, any more than my learned friend. The whole matter is expounded in Dr. Moonenschein’s monumental work, ‘The Destructible Doctor,’ with diagrams, showing the various ways in which such a person as Dr. Warner may be resolved into his elements. In the light of these facts—”

“Hi, stop the ‘bus! stop the ‘bus!” cried Moses, jumping up and down and gesticulating in great excitement. “My principal’s got something to say! My principal wants to do a bit of talkin.”

Dr. Pym was indeed on his feet, looking pallid and rather vicious. “I have strictly CON–fined myself,” he said nasally, “to books to which immediate reference can be made. I have Sonnenschsein’s ‘Destructive Type’ here on the table, if the defence wish to see it. Where is this wonderful work on Destructability Mr. Moon is talking about? Does it exist? Can he produce it?”

“Produce it!” cried the Irishman with a rich scorn.

“I’ll produce it in a week if you’ll pay for the ink and paper.”

“Would it have much authority?” asked Pym, sitting down.

“Oh, authority!” said Moon lightly; “that depends on a fellow’s religion.”

Dr. Pym jumped up again. “Our authority is based on masses of accurate detail,” he said. “It deals with a region in which things can be handled and tested. My opponent will at least admit that death is a fact of experience.”

“Not of mine,” said Moon mournfully, shaking his head.
“I’ve never experienced such a thing in all my life.”
“Well, really,” said Dr. Pym, and sat down sharply amid a crackle of papers.
“So we see,” resumed Moon, in the same melancholy voice, “that a man like Dr. Warner is, in the mysterious workings of evolution, doomed to such attacks. My client’s onslaught, even if it occurred, was not unique. I have in my hand letters from more than one acquaintance of Dr. Warner whom that remarkable man has affected in the same way. Following the example of my learned friends I will read only two of them. The first is from an honest and laborious matron living off the Harrow Road.

“Mr. Moon, Sir,—Yes, I did throw a sorsepan at him. Wot then? It was all I had to throw, all the soft things being porned, and if your Docter Warner doesn’t like having sorsepans thrown at him, don’t let him wear his hat in a respectable woman’s parler, and tell him to leave orf smiling or tell us the joke.—Yours respectfully, Hannah Miles.

“The other letter is from a physician of some note in Dublin, with whom Dr. Warner was once engaged in consultation. He writes as follows:—

“Dear Sir,—The incident to which you refer is one which I regret, and which, moreover, I have never been able to explain. My own branch of medicine is not mental; and I should be glad to have the view of a mental specialist on my singular momentary and indeed almost automatic action. To say that I ‘pulled Dr. Warner’s nose,’ is, however, inaccurate in a respect that strikes me as important. That I punched his nose I must cheerfully admit (I need not say with what regret); but pulling seems to me to imply a precision of objective with which I cannot reproach myself. In comparison with this, the act of punching was an outward, instantaneous, and even natural gesture.—Believe me, yours faithfully, Burton Lestrange.

“I have numberless other letters,” continued Moon, “all bearing witness to this widespread feeling about my eminent friend; and I therefore think that Dr. Pym should have admitted this side of the question in his survey. We are in the presence, as Dr. Pym so truly says, of a natural force. As soon stay the cataract of the London water–works as stay the great tendency of Dr. Warner to be assassinated by somebody. Place that man in a Quakers’ meeting, among the most peaceful of Christians, and he will immediately be beaten to death with sticks of chocolate. Place him among the angels of the New Jerusalem, and he will be stoned to death with precious stones. Circumstances may be beautiful and wonderful, the average may be heart–upholding, the harvester may be golden–bearded, the doctor may be secret–guessing, the cataract may be iris–
leapt, the Anglo–Saxon infant may be brave–browed, but against and above all these prodigies the grand simple tendency of Dr. Warner to get murdered will still pursue its way until it happily and triumphantly succeeds at last.”

He pronounced this peroration with an appearance of strong emotion. But even stronger emotions were manifesting themselves on the other side of the table. Dr. Warner had leaned his large body quite across the little figure of Moses Gould and was talking in excited whispers to Dr. Pym. That expert nodded a great many times and finally started to his feet with a sincere expression of sternness.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he cried indignantly, “as my colleague has said, we should be delighted to give any latitude to the defence—if there were a defence. But Mr. Moon seems to think he is there to make jokes—very good jokes I dare say, but not at all adapted to assist his client. He picks holes in science. He picks holes in my client’s social popularity. He picks holes in my literary style, which doesn’t seem to suit his high–toned European taste. But how does this picking of holes affect the issue? This Smith has picked two holes in my client’s hat, and with an inch better aim would have picked two holes in his head. All the jokes in the world won’t unpick those holes or be any use for the defence.”

Inglewood looked down in some embarrassment, as if shaken by the evident fairness of this, but Moon still gazed at his opponent in a dreamy way. “The defence?” he said vaguely—“oh, I haven’t begun that yet.”

“You certainly have not,” said Pym warmly, amid a murmur of applause from his side, which the other side found it impossible to answer. “Perhaps, if you have any defence, which has been doubtful from the very beginning—”

“While you’re standing up,” said Moon, in the same almost sleepy style, “perhaps I might ask you a question.”

“A question? Certainly,” said Pym stiffly. “It was distinctly arranged between us that as we could not cross–examine the witnesses, we might vicariously cross–examine each other. We are in a position to invite all such inquiry.”

“I think you said,” observed Moon absently, “that none of the prisoner’s shots really hit the doctor.”

“For the cause of science,” cried the complacent Pym, “fortunately not.”

“Yet they were fired from a few feet away.”

“Yes; about four feet.”

“And no shots hit the Warden, though they were fired quite close to him too?” asked Moon.

“That is so,” said the witness gravely.
“I think,” said Moon, suppressing a slight yawn, “that your Sub–Warden mentioned that Smith was one of the University’s record men for shooting.”

“Why, as to that—” began Pym, after an instant of stillness.

“A second question,” continued Moon, comparatively curtly.

“You said there were other cases of the accused trying to kill people. Why have you not got evidence of them?”

The American planted the points of his fingers on the table again. “In those cases,” he said precisely, “there was no evidence from outsiders, as in the Cambridge case, but only the evidence of the actual victims.”

“Why didn’t you get their evidence?”

“In the case of the actual victims,” said Pym, “there was some difficulty and reluctance, and—”

“Do you mean,” asked Moon, “that none of the actual victims would appear against the prisoner?”

“That would be exaggerative,” began the other.

“A third question,” said Moon, so sharply that every one jumped.

“You’ve got the evidence of the Sub–Warden who heard some shots; where’s the evidence of the Warden himself who was shot at? The Warden of Brakespeare lives, a prosperous gentleman.”

“We did ask for a statement from him,” said Pym a little nervously; “but it was so eccentrically expressed that we suppressed it out of deference to an old gentleman whose past services to science have been great.”

Moon leaned forward. “You mean, I suppose,” he said, “that his statement was favourable to the prisoner.”

“It might be understood so,” replied the American doctor; “but, really, it was difficult to understand at all. In fact, we sent it back to him.”

“You have no longer, then, any statement signed by the Warden of Brakespeare.”

“No.”

“I only ask,” said Michael quietly, “because we have. To conclude my case I will ask my junior, Mr. Inglewood, to read a statement of the true story—a statement attested as true by the signature of the Warden himself.”

Arthur Inglewood rose with several papers in his hand, and though he looked somewhat refined and self–effacing, as he always did, the spectators were surprised to feel that his presence was, upon the whole, more efficient and sufficing than his leader’s. He was, in truth, one of those modest men who cannot speak until they are told to speak; and then can speak well. Moon was
entirely the opposite. His own impudences amused him in private, but they slightly embarrassed him in public; he felt a fool while he was speaking, whereas Inglewood felt a fool only because he could not speak. The moment he had anything to say he could speak; and the moment he could speak, speaking seemed quite natural. Nothing in this universe seemed quite natural to Michael Moon.

“As my colleague has just explained,” said Inglewood, “there are two enigmas or inconsistencies on which we base the defence. The first is a plain physical fact. By the admission of everybody, by the very evidence adduced by the prosecution, it is clear that the accused was celebrated as a specially good shot. Yet on both the occasions complained of he shot from a distance of four or five feet, and shot at him four or five times, and never hit him once. That is the first startling circumstance on which we base our argument. The second, as my colleague has urged, is the curious fact that we cannot find a single victim of these alleged outrages to speak for himself. Subordinates speak for him. Porters climb up ladders to him. But he himself is silent. Ladies and gentlemen, I propose to explain on the spot both the riddle of the shots and the riddle of the silence. I will first of all read the covering letter in which the true account of the Cambridge incident is contained, and then that document itself. When you have heard both, there will be no doubt about your decision. The covering letter runs as follows:—

“Dear Sir,—The following is a very exact and even vivid account of the incident as it really happened at Brakespeare College. We, the undersigned, do not see any particular reason why we should refer it to any isolated authorship. The truth is, it has been a composite production; and we have even had some difference of opinion about the adjectives. But every word of it is true.—We are, yours faithfully,

“Wilfred Emerson Eames,
“Warden of Brakespeare College, Cambridge.
“Innocent Smith.
“The enclosed statement,” continued Inglewood, “runs as follows:—
“A celebrated English university backs so abruptly on the river, that it has, so to speak, to be propped up and patched with all sorts of bridges and semi-detached buildings. The river splits itself into several small streams and canals, so that in one or two corners the place has almost the look of Venice. It was so especially in the case with which we are concerned, in which a few flying buttresses or airy ribs of stone sprang across a strip of water to connect
Brakespeare College with the house of the Warden of Brakespeare.

“The country around these colleges is flat; but it does not seem flat when one is thus in the midst of the colleges. For in these flat fens there are always wandering lakes and lingering rivers of water. And these always change what might have been a scheme of horizontal lines into a scheme of vertical lines. Wherever there is water the height of high buildings is doubled, and a British brick house becomes a Babylonian tower. In that shining unshaken surface the houses hang head downwards exactly to their highest or lowest chimney. The coral–coloured cloud seen in that abyss is as far below the world as its original appears above it. Every scrap of water is not only a window but a skylight. Earth splits under men’s feet into precipitous aerial perspectives, into which a bird could as easily wing its way as—”

Dr. Cyrus Pym rose in protest. The documents he had put in evidence had been confined to cold affirmation of fact. The defence, in a general way, had an indubitable right to put their case in their own way, but all this landscape gardening seemed to him (Dr. Cyrus Pym) to be not up to the business. “Will the leader of the defence tell me,” he asked, “how it can possibly affect this case, that a cloud was cor’l–coloured, or that a bird could have winged itself anywhere?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Michael, lifting himself lazily; “you see, you don’t know yet what our defence is. Till you know that, don’t you see, anything may be relevant. Why, suppose,” he said suddenly, as if an idea had struck him, “suppose we wanted to prove the old Warden colour–blind. Suppose he was shot by a black man with white hair, when he thought he was being shot by a white man with yellow hair! To ascertain if that cloud was really and truly coral–coloured might be of the most massive importance.”

He paused with a seriousness which was hardly generally shared, and continued with the same fluency: “Or suppose we wanted to maintain that the Warden committed suicide—that he just got Smith to hold the pistol as Brutus’s slave held the sword. Why, it would make all the difference whether the Warden could see himself plain in still water. Still water has made hundreds of suicides: one sees oneself so very—well, so very plain.”

“Do you, perhaps,” inquired Pym with austere irony, “maintain that your client was a bird of some sort—say, a flamingo?”

“In the matter of his being a flamingo,” said Moon with sudden severity, “my client reserves his defence.”

No one quite knowing what to make of this, Mr. Moon resumed his seat and
Inglewood resumed the reading of his document:—

“There is something pleasing to a mystic in such a land of mirrors.
For a mystic is one who holds that two worlds are better than one.
In the highest sense, indeed, all thought is reflection.
“This is the real truth, in the saying that second thoughts are best. Animals have no second thoughts; man alone is able to see his own thought double, as a drunkard sees a lamp-post; man alone is able to see his own thought upside down as one sees a house in a puddle. This duplication of mentality, as in a mirror, is (we repeat) the inmost thing of human philosophy. There is a mystical, even a monstrous truth, in the statement that two heads are better than one. But they ought both to grow on the same body.”
“I know it’s a little transcendental at first,” interposed Inglewood, beaming round with a broad apology, “but you see this document was written in collaboration by a don and a—”
“Drunkard, eh?” suggested Moses Gould, beginning to enjoy himself.
“I rather think,” proceeded Inglewood with an unruffled and critical air, “that this part was written by the don. I merely warn the Court that the statement, though indubitably accurate, bears here and there the trace of coming from two authors.”
“In that case,” said Dr. Pym, leaning back and sniffing,
“I cannot agree with them that two heads are better than one.”
“The undersigned persons think it needless to touch on a kindred problem so often discussed at committees for University Reform: the question of whether dons see double because they are drunk, or get drunk because they see double. It is enough for them (the undersigned persons) if they are able to pursue their own peculiar and profitable theme—which is puddles. What (the undersigned persons ask themselves) is a puddle? A puddle repeats infinity, and is full of light; nevertheless, if analyzed objectively, a puddle is a piece of dirty water spread very thin on mud. The two great historic universities of England have all this large and level and reflective brilliance. Nevertheless, or, rather, on the other hand, they are puddles—puddles, puddles, puddles, puddles. The undersigned persons ask you to excuse an emphasis inseparable from strong conviction.”
Inglewood ignored a somewhat wild expression on the faces of some present, and continued with eminent cheerfulness:—
“Such were the thoughts that failed to cross the mind of the undergraduate Smith as he picked his way among the stripes of canal and the glittering rainy gutters into which the water broke up round the back of Brakespeare College.
Had these thoughts crossed his mind he would have been much happier than he was. Unfortunately he did not know that his puzzles were puddles. He did not know that the academic mind reflects infinity and is full of light by the simple process of being shallow and standing still. In his case, therefore, there was something solemn, and even evil about the infinity implied. It was half–way through a starry night of bewildering brilliancy; stars were both above and below. To young Smith’s sullen fancy the skies below seemed even hollower than the skies above; he had a horrible idea that if he counted the stars he would find one too many in the pool.

“In crossing the little paths and bridges he felt like one stepping on the black and slender ribs of some cosmic Eiffel Tower. For to him, and nearly all the educated youth of that epoch, the stars were cruel things. Though they glowed in the great dome every night, they were an enormous and ugly secret; they uncovered the nakedness of nature; they were a glimpse of the iron wheels and pulleys behind the scenes. For the young men of that sad time thought that the god always comes from the machine. They did not know that in reality the machine only comes from the god. In short, they were all pessimists, and starlight was atrocious to them—atrocious because it was true. All their universe was black with white spots.

“Smith looked up with relief from the glittering pools below to the glittering skies and the great black bulk of the college. The only light other than stars glowed through one peacock–green curtain in the upper part of the building, marking where Dr. Emerson Eames always worked till morning and received his friends and favourite pupils at any hour of the night. Indeed, it was to his rooms that the melancholy Smith was bound. Smith had been at Dr. Eames’s lecture for the first half of the morning, and at pistol practice and fencing in a saloon for the second half. He had been sculling madly for the first half of the afternoon and thinking idly (and still more madly) for the second half. He had gone to a supper where he was uproarious, and on to a debating club where he was perfectly insufferable, and the melancholy Smith was melancholy still. Then, as he was going home to his diggings he remembered the eccentricity of his friend and master, the Warden of Brakespeare, and resolved desperately to turn in to that gentleman’s private house.

“Emerson Eames was an eccentric in many ways, but his throne in philosophy and metaphysics was of international eminence; the university could hardly have afforded to lose him, and, moreover, a don has only to continue any of his bad habits long enough to make them a part of the British Constitution. The bad
habits of Emerson Eames were to sit up all night and to be a student of Schopenhauer. Personally, he was a lean, lounging sort of man, with a blond pointed beard, not so very much older than his pupil Smith in the matter of mere years, but older by centuries in the two essential respects of having a European reputation and a bald head.

“I came, against the rules, at this unearthly hour,” said Smith, who was nothing to the eye except a very big man trying to make himself small, ‘because I am coming to the conclusion that existence is really too rotten. I know all the arguments of the thinkers that think otherwise—bishops, and agnostics, and those sort of people. And knowing you were the greatest living authority on the pessimist thinkers—’

“All thinkers,’ said Eames, ‘are pessimist thinkers.’

“After a patch of pause, not the first—for this depressing conversation had gone on for some hours with alternations of cynicism and silence—the Warden continued with his air of weary brilliancy: ‘It’s all a question of wrong calculation. The moth flies into the candle because he doesn’t happen to know that the game is not worth the candle. The wasp gets into the jam in hearty and hopeful efforts to get the jam into him. In the same way the vulgar people want to enjoy life just as they want to enjoy gin—because they are too stupid to see that they are paying too big a price for it. That they never find happiness—that they don’t even know how to look for it—is proved by the paralyzing clumsiness and ugliness of everything they do. Their discordant colours are cries of pain. Look at the brick villas beyond the college on this side of the river. There’s one with spotted blinds; look at it! just go and look at it!’

“Of course,’ he went on dreamily, ‘one or two men see the sober fact a long way off—they go mad. Do you notice that maniacs mostly try either to destroy other things, or (if they are thoughtful) to destroy themselves? The madman is the man behind the scenes, like the man that wanders about the coulisse of a theater. He has only opened the wrong door and come into the right place. He sees things at the right angle. But the common world—’

“Oh, hang the common world!’ said the sullen Smith, letting his fist fall on the table in an idle despair.

“Let’s give it a bad name first,’ said the Professor calmly, ‘and then hang it. A puppy with hydrophobia would probably struggle for life while we killed it; but if we were kind we should kill it. So an omniscient god would put us out of our pain. He would strike us dead.’

“Why doesn’t he strike us dead?’ asked the undergraduate abstractedly,
plunging his hands into his pockets.

“‘He is dead himself,’ said the philosopher; ‘that is where he is really enviable.’

“‘To any one who thinks,’ proceeded Eames, ‘the pleasures of life, trivial and soon tasteless, are bribes to bring us into a torture chamber. We all see that for any thinking man mere extinction is the . . . What are you doing? . . . Are you mad? . . . Put that thing down.’

“Dr. Eames had turned his tired but still talkative head over his shoulder, and had found himself looking into a small round black hole, rimmed by a six–sided circlet of steel, with a sort of spike standing up on the top. It fixed him like an iron eye. Through those eternal instants during which the reason is stunned he did not even know what it was. Then he saw behind it the chambered barrel and cocked hammer of a revolver, and behind that the flushed and rather heavy face of Smith, apparently quite unchanged, or even more mild than before.

“‘I’lI’ll help you out of your hole, old man,’ said Smith, with rough tenderness. ‘I’ll put the puppy out of his pain.’

“Emerson Eames retreated towards the window. ‘Do you mean to kill me?’ he cried.

“‘It’s not a thing I’d do for every one,’ said Smith with emotion; ‘but you and I seem to have got so intimate to–night, somehow. I know all your troubles now, and the only cure, old chap.’

“‘Put that thing down,’ shouted the Warden.

“‘It’ll soon be over, you know,’ said Smith with the air of a sympathetic dentist. And as the Warden made a run for the window and balcony, his benefactor followed him with a firm step and a compassionate expression.

“Both men were perhaps surprised to see that the gray and white of early daybreak had already come. One of them, however, had emotions calculated to swallow up surprise. Brakespeare College was one of the few that retained real traces of Gothic ornament, and just beneath Dr. Eames’s balcony there ran out what had perhaps been a flying buttress, still shapelessly shaped into gray beasts and devils, but blinded with mosses and washed out with rains. With an ungainly and most courageous leap, Eames sprang out on this antique bridge, as the only possible mode of escape from the maniac. He sat astride of it, still in his academic gown, dangling his long thin legs, and considering further chances of flight. The whitening daylight opened under as well as over him that impression of vertical infinity already remarked about the little lakes round Brakespeare. Looking down and seeing the spires and chimneys pendent in the pools, they felt
alone in space. They felt as if they were looking over the edge from the North Pole and seeing the South Pole below.

"'Hang the world, we said,' observed Smith, ‘and the world is hanged. ‘He has hanged the world upon nothing,” says the Bible. Do you like being hanged upon nothing? I’m going to be hanged upon something myself. I’m going to swing for you . . . Dear, tender old phrase,’ he murmured; ‘never true till this moment. I am going to swing for you. For you, dear friend. For your sake. At your express desire.’

"'Help!' cried the Warden of Brakespeare College; ‘help!’

"The puppy struggles,’ said the undergraduate, with an eye of pity, ‘the poor puppy struggles. How fortunate it is that I am wiser and kinder than he,’ and he sighted his weapon so as exactly to cover the upper part of Eames’s bald head.

"Smith,’ said the philosopher with a sudden change to a sort of ghastly lucidity, ‘I shall go mad.’

"And so look at things from the right angle,’ observed Smith, sighing gently. ‘Ah, but madness is only a palliative at best, a drug. The only cure is an operation—an operation that is always successful: death.’

“As he spoke the sun rose. It seemed to put colour into everything, with the rapidity of a lightning artist. A fleet of little clouds sailing across the sky changed from pigeon–gray to pink. All over the little academic town the tops of different buildings took on different tints: here the sun would pick out the green enameled on a pinnacle, there the scarlet tiles of a villa; here the copper ornament on some artistic shop, and there the sea–blue slates of some old and steep church roof. All these coloured crests seemed to have something oddly individual and significant about them, like crests of famous knights pointed out in a pageant or a battlefield: they each arrested the eye, especially the rolling eye of Emerson Eames as he looked round on the morning and accepted it as his last. Through a narrow chink between a black timber tavern and a big gray college he could see a clock with gilt hands which the sunshine set on fire. He stared at it as though hypnotized; and suddenly the clock began to strike, as if in personal reply. As if at a signal, clock after clock took up the cry: all the churches awoke like chickens at cockcrow. The birds were already noisy in the trees behind the college. The sun rose, gathering glory that seemed too full for the deep skies to hold, and the shallow waters beneath them seemed golden and brimming and deep enough for the thirst of the gods. Just round the corner of the College, and visible from his crazy perch, were the brightest specks on that bright landscape, the villa with the spotted blinds which he had made his text that night. He
wondered for the first time what people lived in them.

“Suddenly he called out with mere querulous authority, as he might have called to a student to shut a door.

‘Let me come off this place,’ he cried; ‘I can’t bear it.’

‘I rather doubt if it will bear you,’ said Smith critically; ‘but before you break your neck, or I blow out your brains, or let you back into this room (on which complex points I am undecided) I want the metaphysical point cleared up. Do I understand that you want to get back to life?’

‘I’d give anything to get back,’ replied the unhappy professor.

‘Give anything!’ cried Smith; ‘then, blast your impudence, give us a song!’

‘What song do you mean?’ demanded the exasperated Eames; ‘what song?’

‘A hymn, I think, would be most appropriate,’ answered the other gravely.

‘I’ll let you off if you’ll repeat after me the words—

‘I thank the goodness and the grace
That on my birth have smiled.
And perched me on this curious place,
A happy English child.’

“Dr. Emerson Eames having briefly complied, his persecutor abruptly told him to hold his hands up in the air. Vaguely connecting this proceeding with the usual conduct of brigands and bushrangers, Mr. Eames held them up, very stiffly, but without marked surprise. A bird alighting on his stone seat took no more notice of him than of a comic statue.

‘You are now engaged in public worship,’ remarked Smith severely, ‘and before I have done with you, you shall thank God for the very ducks on the pond.’

“The celebrated pessimist half articulately expressed his perfect readiness to thank God for the ducks on the pond.

‘Not forgetting the drakes,’ said Smith sternly. (Eames weakly conceded the drakes.) ‘Not forgetting anything, please. You shall thank heaven for churches and chapels and villas and vulgar people and puddles and pots and pans and sticks and rags and bones and spotted blinds.’

‘All right, all right,’ repeated the victim in despair; ‘sticks and rags and bones and blinds.’

‘Spotted blinds, I think we said,’ remarked Smith with a rogueish ruthlessness, and wagging the pistol–barrel at him like a long metallic finger.

‘Spotted blinds,’ said Emerson Eames faintly.

‘You can’t say fairer than that,’ admitted the younger man, ‘and now I’ll just
tell you this to wind up with. If you really were what you profess to be, I don’t see that it would matter to snail or seraph if you broke your impious stiff neck and dashed out all your drivelling devil-worshipping brains. But in strict biographical fact you are a very nice fellow, addicted to talking putrid nonsense, and I love you like a brother. I shall therefore fire off all my cartridges round your head so as not to hit you (I am a good shot, you may be glad to hear), and then we will go in and have some breakfast.’

“He then let off two barrels in the air, which the Professor endured with singular firmness, and then said, ‘But don’t fire them all off.’

‘Why not’ asked the other buoyantly.

‘Keep them,’ asked his companion, ‘for the next man you meet who talks as we were talking.’

“It was at this moment that Smith, looking down, perceived apoplectic terror upon the face of the Sub–Warden, and heard the refined shriek with which he summoned the porter and the ladder.

“It took Dr. Eames some little time to disentangle himself from the ladder, and some little time longer to disentangle himself from the Sub–Warden. But as soon as he could do so unobtrusively, he rejoined his companion in the late extraordinary scene. He was astonished to find the gigantic Smith heavily shaken, and sitting with his shaggy head on his hands. When addressed, he lifted a very pale face.

“‘Why, what is the matter?’ asked Eames, whose own nerves had by this time twittered themselves quiet, like the morning birds.

“‘I must ask your indulgence,’ said Smith, rather brokenly.

‘I must ask you to realize that I have just had an escape from death.’

‘YOU have had an escape from death?’ repeated the Professor in not unpardonable irritation. ‘Well, of all the cheek—’

‘Oh, don’t you understand, don’t you understand?’ cried the pale young man impatiently. ‘I had to do it, Eames; I had to prove you wrong or die. When a man’s young, he nearly always has some one whom he thinks the top-water mark of the mind of man—some one who knows all about it, if anybody knows.

‘Well, you were that to me; you spoke with authority, and not as the scribes. Nobody could comfort me if YOU said there was no comfort. If you really thought there was nothing anywhere, it was because you had been there to see. Don’t you see that I HAD to prove you didn’t really mean it?—or else drown myself in the canal.’

“‘Well,’ said Eames hesitatingly, ‘I think perhaps you confuse—’
“‘Oh, don’t tell me that!’ cried Smith with the sudden clairvoyance of mental pain; ‘don’t tell me I confuse enjoyment of existence with the Will to Live! That’s German, and German is High Dutch, and High Dutch is Double Dutch. The thing I saw shining in your eyes when you dangled on that bridge was enjoyment of life and not “the Will to Live.” What you knew when you sat on that damned gargoyle was that the world, when all is said and done, is a wonderful and beautiful place; I know it, because I knew it at the same minute. I saw the gray clouds turn pink, and the little gilt clock in the crack between the houses. It was THOSE things you hated leaving, not Life, whatever that is. Eames, we’ve been to the brink of death together; won’t you admit I’m right?’

“‘Yes,’ said Eames very slowly, ‘I think you are right. You shall have a First!’

“‘Right!’ cried Smith, springing up reanimated. ‘I’ve passed with honours, and now let me go and see about being sent down.’

“‘You needn’t be sent down,’ said Eames with the quiet confidence of twelve years of intrigue. ‘Everything with us comes from the man on top to the people just round him: I am the man on top, and I shall tell the people round me the truth.’

“The massive Mr. Smith rose and went firmly to the window, but he spoke with equal firmness. ‘I must be sent down,’ he said, ‘and the people must not be told the truth.’

“‘And why not’ asked the other.

“‘Because I mean to follow your advice,’ answered the massive youth, ‘I mean to keep the remaining shots for people in the shameful state you and I were in last night—I wish we could even plead drunkenness. I mean to keep those bullets for pessimists—pills for pale people. And in this way I want to walk the world like a wonderful surprise—to float as idly as the thistledown, and come as silently as the sunrise; not to be expected any more than the thunderbolt, not to be recalled any more than the dying breeze. I don’t want people to anticipate me as a well-known practical joke. I want both my gifts to come virgin and violent, the death and the life after death. I am going to hold a pistol to the head of the Modern Man. But I shall not use it to kill him—only to bring him to life. I begin to see a new meaning in being the skeleton at the feast.’

“‘You can scarcely be called a skeleton,’ said Dr. Eames, smiling.

“‘That comes of being so much at the feast,’ answered the massive youth. ‘No skeleton can keep his figure if he is always dining out. But that is not quite what I meant: what I mean is that I caught a kind of glimpse of the meaning of death
and all that—the skull and cross–bones, the *memento mori*. It isn’t only meant to remind us of a future life, but to remind us of a present life too. With our weak spirits we should grow old in eternity if we were not kept young by death. Providence has to cut immortality into lengths for us, as nurses cut the bread and butter into fingers.’

“Then he added suddenly in a voice of unnatural actuality, ‘But I know something now, Eames. I knew it when I saw the clouds turn pink.’

“‘What do you mean?’ asked Eames. ‘What did you know?’

“‘I knew for the first time that murder is really wrong.’

“He gripped Dr. Eames’s hand and groped his way somewhat unsteadily to the door. Before he had vanished through it he had added, ‘It’s very dangerous, though, when a man thinks for a split second that he understands death.’

“Dr. Eames remained in repose and rumination some hours after his late assailant had left. Then he rose, took his hat and umbrella, and went for a brisk if rotatory walk. Several times, however, he stood outside the villa with the spotted blinds, studying them intently with his head slightly on one side. Some took him for a lunatic and some for an intending purchaser. He is not yet sure that the two characters would be widely different.

“The above narrative has been constructed on a principle which is, in the opinion of the undersigned persons, new in the art of letters. Each of the two actors is described as he appeared to the other. But the undersigned persons absolutely guarantee the exactitude of the story; and if their version of the thing be questioned, they, the undersigned persons, would deucedly well like to know who does know about it if they don’t.

“The undersigned persons will now adjourn to ‘The Spotted Dog’ for beer. Farewell.

“(Signed) James Emerson Eames,

“Warden of Brakespeare College, Cambridge.

“Innocent Smith.”
CHAPTER II

THE TWO CURATES; OR, THE BURGLARY CHARGE

Arthur Inglewood handed the document he had just read to the leaders of the prosecution, who examined it with their heads together. Both the Jew and the American were of sensitive and excitable stocks, and they revealed by the jumpings and bumpings of the black head and the yellow that nothing could be done in the way of denial of the document. The letter from the Warden was as authentic as the letter from the Sub–Warden, however regrettably different in dignity and social tone.

“Very few words,” said Inglewood, “are required to conclude our case in this matter. Surely it is now plain that our client carried his pistol about with the eccentric but innocent purpose of giving a wholesome scare to those whom he regarded as blasphemers. In each case the scare was so wholesome that the victim himself has dated from it as from a new birth. Smith, so far from being a madman, is rather a mad doctor—he walks the world curing frenzies and not distributing them. That is the answer to the two unanswerable questions which I put to the prosecutors. That is why they dared not produce a line by any one who had actually confronted the pistol. All who had actually confronted the pistol confessed that they had profited by it. That was why Smith, though a good shot, never hit anybody. He never hit anybody because he was a good shot. His mind was as clear of murder as his hands are of blood. This, I say, is the only possible explanation of these facts and of all the other facts. No one can possibly explain the Warden’s conduct except by believing the Warden’s story. Even Dr. Pym, who is a very factory of ingenious theories, could find no other theory to cover the case.”

“There are promising per–spectives in hypnotism and dual personality,” said Dr. Cyrus Pym dreamily; “the science of criminology is in its infancy, and—”

“Infancy!” cried Moon, jerking his red pencil in the air with a gesture of enlightenment; “why, that explains it!”

“I repeat,” proceeded Inglewood, “that neither Dr. Pym nor any one else can account on any other theory but ours for the Warden’s signature, for the shots missed and the witnesses missing.”

The little Yankee had slipped to his feet with some return of a cock–fighting coolness. “The defence,” he said, “omits a coldly colossal fact. They say we
produce none of the actual victims. Wal, here is one victim—England’s celebrated and stricken Warner. I reckon he is pretty well produced. And they suggest that all the outrages were followed by reconciliation. Wal, there’s no flies on England’s Warner; and he isn’t reconciliated much.”

“My learned friend,” said Moon, getting elaborately to his feet, “must remember that the science of shooting Dr. Warner is in its infancy. Dr. Warner would strike the idlest eye as one specially difficult to startle into any recognition of the glory of God. We admit that our client, in this one instance, failed, and that the operation was not successful. But I am empowered to offer, on behalf of my client, a proposal for operating on Dr. Warner again, at his earliest convenience, and without further fees.”

“‘Ang it all, Michael,” cried Gould, quite serious for the first time in his life, “you might give us a bit of bally sense for a chinge.”

“What was Dr. Warner talking about just before the first shot?” asked Moon sharply.

“The creature,” said Dr. Warner superciliously, “asked me, with characteristic rationality, whether it was my birthday.”

“And you answered, with characteristic swank,” cried Moon, shooting out a long lean finger, as rigid and arresting as the pistol of Smith, “that you didn’t keep your birthday.”

“Something like that,” assented the doctor.

“Then,” continued Moon, “he asked you why not, and you said it was because you didn’t see that birth was anything to rejoice over. Agreed? Now is there any one who doubts that our tale is true?”

There was a cold crash of stillness in the room; and Moon said, “Pax populi vox Dei; it is the silence of the people that is the voice of God. Or in Dr. Pym’s more civilized language, it is up to him to open the next charge. On this we claim an acquittal.”

It was about an hour later. Dr. Cyrus Pym had remained for an unprecedented time with his eyes closed and his thumb and finger in the air. It almost seemed as if he had been “struck so,” as the nurses say; and in the deathly silence Michael Moon felt forced to relieve the strain with some remark. For the last half–hour or so the eminent criminologist had been explaining that science took the same view of offences against property as it did of offences against life. “Most murder,” he had said, “is a variation of homicidal mania, and in the same way most theft is a version of kleptomania. I cannot entertain any doubt that my learned friends opposite adequately con–ceive how this must involve a scheme
of punishment more tol’rant and humane than the cruel methods of ancient
codes. They will doubtless exhibit consciousness of a chasm so eminently
yawning, so thought–arresting, so—” It was here that he paused and indulged in
the delicate gesture to which allusion has been made; and Michael could bear it
no longer.

“Yes, yes,” he said impatiently, “we admit the chasm. The old cruel codes
accuse a man of theft and send him to prison for ten years. The tolerant and
humane ticket accuses him of nothing and sends him to prison for ever. We pass
the chasm.”

It was characteristic of the eminent Pym, in one of his trances of verbal
fastidiousness, that he went on, unconscious not only of his opponent’s
interruption, but even of his own pause.

“So stock–improving,” continued Dr. Cyrus Pym, “so fraught with real high
hopes of the future. Science therefore regards thieves, in the abstract, just as it
regards murderers. It regards them not as sinners to be punished for an arbitrary
period, but as patients to be detained and cared for,” (his first two digits closed
again as he hesitated)—“in short, for the required period. But there is something
special in the case we investigate here. Kleptomania commonly con–joins itself
—”

“I beg pardon,” said Michael; “I did not ask just now because, to tell the truth,
I really thought Dr. Pym, though seemingly vertical, was enjoying well–earned
slumber, with a pinch in his fingers of scentless and delicate dust. But now that
things are moving a little more, there is something I should really like to know. I
have hung on Dr. Pym’s lips, of course, with an interest that it were weak to call
rapture, but I have so far been unable to form any conjecture about what the
accused, in the present instance, is supposed to have been and gone and done.”

“If Mr. Moon will have patience,” said Pym with dignity, “he will find that
this was the very point to which my exposition was di–rected. Kleptomania, I
say, exhibits itself as a kind of physical attraction to certain defined materials;
and it has been held (by no less a man than Harris) that this is the ultimate
explanation of the strict specialism and vurry narrow professional outlook of
most criminals. One will have an irresistible physical impulsion towards pearl
sleeve–links, while he passes over the most elegant and celebrated diamond
sleeve–links, placed about in the most conspicuous locations. Another will
impede his flight with no less than forty–seven buttoned boots, while elastic–
sided boots leave him cold, and even sarcastic. The specialism of the criminal, I
repeat, is a mark rather of insanity than of any brightness of business habits; but
there is one kind of depredator to whom this principle is at first sight hard to apply. I allude to our fellow–citizen the housebreaker.

“It has been maintained by some of our boldest young truth–seekers, that the eye of a burglar beyond the back–garden wall could hardly be caught and hypnotized by a fork that is insulated in a locked box under the butler’s bed. They have thrown down the gauntlet to American science on this point. They declare that diamond links are not left about in conspicuous locations in the haunts of the lower classes, as they were in the great test experiment of Calypso College. We hope this experiment here will be an answer to that young ringing challenge, and will bring the burglar once more into line and union with his fellow criminals.”

Moon, whose face had gone through every phase of black bewilderment for five minutes past, suddenly lifted his hand and struck the table in explosive enlightenment.

“Oh, I see!” he cried; “you mean that Smith is a burglar.”

“I thought I made it quite ad’quately lucid,” said Mr. Pym, folding up his eyelids. It was typical of this topsy–turvy private trial that all the eloquent extras, all the rhetoric or digression on either side, was exasperating and unintelligible to the other. Moon could not make head or tail of the solemnity of a new civilization. Pym could not make head or tail of the gaiety of an old one.

“All the cases in which Smith has figured as an expropriator,” continued the American doctor, “are cases of burglary. Pursuing the same course as in the previous case, we select the indubitable instance from the rest, and we take the most correct cast–iron evidence. I will now call on my colleague, Mr. Gould, to read a letter we have received from the earnest, unspotted Canon of Durham, Canon Hawkins.”

Mr. Moses Gould leapt up with his usual alacrity to read the letter from the earnest and unspotted Hawkins. Moses Gould could imitate a farmyard well, Sir Henry Irving not so well, Marie Lloyd to a point of excellence, and the new motor horns in a manner that put him upon the platform of great artists. But his imitation of a Canon of Durham was not convincing; indeed, the sense of the letter was so much obscured by the extraordinary leaps and gasps of his pronunciation that it is perhaps better to print it here as Moon read it when, a little later, it was handed across the table.

“Dear Sir,—I can scarcely feel surprise that the incident you mention, private as it was, should have filtered through our omnivorous journals to the mere populace; for the position I have since attained makes me, I conceive, a public
character, and this was certainly the most extraordinary incident in a not uneventful and perhaps not an unimportant career. I am by no means without experience in scenes of civil tumult. I have faced many a political crisis in the old Primrose League days at Herne Bay, and, before I broke with the wilder set, have spent many a night at the Christian Social Union. But this other experience was quite inconceivable. I can only describe it as the letting loose of a place which it is not for me, as a clergyman, to mention.

“It occurred in the days when I was, for a short period, a curate at Hoxton; and the other curate, then my colleague, induced me to attend a meeting which he described, I must say profanely described, as calculated to promote the kingdom of God. I found, on the contrary, that it consisted entirely of men in corduroys and greasy clothes whose manners were coarse and their opinions extreme.

“Of my colleague in question I wish to speak with the fullest respect and friendliness, and I will therefore say little. No one can be more convinced than I of the evil of politics in the pulpit; and I never offer my congregation any advice about voting except in cases in which I feel strongly that they are likely to make an erroneous selection. But, while I do not mean to touch at all upon political or social problems, I must say that for a clergyman to countenance, even in jest, such discredited nostrums of dissipated demagogues as Socialism or Radicalism partakes of the character of the betrayal of a sacred trust. Far be it from me to say a word against the Reverend Raymond Percy, the colleague in question. He was brilliant, I suppose, and to some apparently fascinating; but a clergyman who talks like a Socialist, wears his hair like a pianist, and behaves like an intoxicated person, will never rise in his profession, or even obtain the admiration of the good and wise. Nor is it for me to utter my personal judgements of the appearance of the people in the hall. Yet a glance round the room, revealing ranks of debased and envious faces—"

“Adopting,” said Moon explosively, for he was getting restive—“adopting the reverend gentleman’s favourite figure of logic, may I say that while tortures would not tear from me a whisper about his intellect, he is a blasted old jackass.”

“Really!” said Dr. Pym; “I protest.”

“You must keep quiet, Michael,” said Inglewood; “they have a right to read their story.”

“Chair! Chair! Chair!” cried Gould, rolling about exuberantly in his own; and Pym glanced for a moment towards the canopy which covered all the authority of the Court of Beacon.

“Oh, don’t wake the old lady,” said Moon, lowering his voice in a moody

Before the little eddy of interruption was ended the reading of the clergymen’s letter was already continuing.

“The proceedings opened with a speech from my colleague, of which I will say nothing. It was deplorable. Many of the audience were Irish, and showed the weakness of that impetuous people. When gathered together into gangs and conspiracies they seem to lose altogether that lovable good–nature and readiness to accept anything one tells them which distinguishes them as individuals.”

With a slight start, Michael rose to his feet, bowed solemnly, and sat down again.

“These persons, if not silent, were at least applausive during the speech of Mr. Percy. He descended to their level with witticisms about rent and a reserve of labour. Confiscation, expropriation, arbitration, and such words with which I cannot soil my lips, recurred constantly. Some hours afterward the storm broke. I had been addressing the meeting for some time, pointing out the lack of thrift in the working classes, their insufficient attendance at evening service, their neglect of the Harvest Festival, and of many other things that might materially help them to improve their lot. It was, I think, about this time that an extraordinary interruption occurred. An enormous, powerful man, partly concealed with white plaster, arose in the middle of the hall, and offered (in a loud, roaring voice, like a bull’s) some observations which seemed to be in a foreign language. Mr. Raymond Percy, my colleague, descended to his level by entering into a duel of repartee, in which he appeared to be the victor. The meeting began to behave more respectfully for a little; yet before I had said twelve sentences more the rush was made for the platform. The enormous plasterer, in particular, plunged towards us, shaking the earth like an elephant; and I really do not know what would have happened if a man equally large, but not quite so ill–dressed, had not jumped up also and held him away. This other big man shouted a sort of speech to the mob as he was shoving them back. I don’t know what he said, but, what with shouting and shoving and such horseplay, he got us out at a back door, while the wretched people went roaring down another passage.

“Then follows the truly extraordinary part of my story. When he had got us outside, in a mean backyard of blistered grass leading into a lane with a very lonely–looking lamp–post, this giant addressed me as follows: ‘You’re well out of that, sir; now you’d better come along with me. I want you to help me in an act of social justice, such as we’ve all been talking about. Come along!’ And turning his big back abruptly, he led us down the lean old lane with the one lean
old lamp–post, we scarcely knowing what to do but to follow him. He had certainly helped us in a most difficult situation, and, as a gentleman, I could not treat such a benefactor with suspicion without grave grounds. Such also was the view of my Socialistic colleague, who (with all his dreadful talk of arbitration) is a gentleman also. In fact, he comes of the Staffordshire Percys, a branch of the old house and has the black hair and pale, clear–cut face of the whole family. I cannot but refer it to vanity that he should heighten his personal advantages with black velvet or a red cross of considerable ostentation, and certainly—but I digress.

“A fog was coming up the street, and that last lost lamp–post faded behind us in a way that certainly depressed the mind.

The large man in front of us looked larger and larger in the haze.

He did not turn round, but he said with his huge back to us,

‘All that talking’s no good; we want a little practical Socialism.’

‘I quite agree,’ said Percy; ‘but I always like to understand things in theory before I put them into practice.’

‘Oh, you just leave that to me,’ said the practical Socialist, or whatever he was, with the most terrifying vagueness. ‘I have a way with me. I’m a Permeator.’

“I could not imagine what he meant, but my companion laughed, so I was sufficiently reassured to continue the unaccountable journey for the present. It led us through most singular ways; out of the lane, where we were already rather cramped, into a paved passage, at the end of which we passed through a wooden gate left open. We then found ourselves, in the increasing darkness and vapour, crossing what appeared to be a beaten path across a kitchen garden. I called out to the enormous person going on in front, but he answered obscurely that it was a short cut.

“I was just repeating my very natural doubt to my clerical companion when I was brought up against a short ladder, apparently leading to a higher level of road. My thoughtless colleague ran up it so quickly that I could not do otherwise than follow as best I could. The path on which I then planted my feet was quite unprecedentedly narrow. I had never had to walk along a thoroughfare so exiguous. Along one side of it grew what, in the dark and density of air, I first took to be some short, strong thicket of shrubs. Then I saw that they were not short shrubs; they were the tops of tall trees. I, an English gentleman and clergyman of the Church of England—I was walking along the top of a garden wall like a tom cat.
“I am glad to say that I stopped within my first five steps, and let loose my just reprobation, balancing myself as best I could all the time.

“‘It’s a right–of–way,’ declared my indefensible informant.

‘It’s closed to traffic once in a hundred years.’

“‘Mr. Percy, Mr. Percy!’ I called out; ‘you are not going on with this blackguard?’

‘Why, I think so,’ answered my unhappy colleague flippantly. ‘I think you and I are bigger blackguards than he is, whatever he is.’

“‘I am a burglar,’ explained the big creature quite calmly. ‘I am a member of the Fabian Society. I take back the wealth stolen by the capitalist, not by sweeping civil war and revolution, but by reform fitted to the special occasion—here a little and there a little. Do you see that fifth house along the terrace with the flat roof? I’m permeating that one to–night.’

“‘Whether this is a crime or a joke,’ I cried, ‘I desire to be quit of it.’

“‘The ladder is just behind you,’ answered the creature with horrible courtesy; ‘and, before you go, do let me give you my card.’

“If I had had the presence of mind to show any proper spirit I should have flung it away, though any adequate gesture of the kind would have gravely affected my equilibrium upon the wall. As it was, in the wildness of the moment, I put it in my waistcoat pocket, and, picking my way back by wall and ladder, landed in the respectable streets once more. Not before, however, I had seen with my own eyes the two awful and lamentable facts—that the burglar was climbing up a slanting roof towards the chimneys, and that Raymond Percy (a priest of God and, what was worse, a gentleman) was crawling up after him. I have never seen either of them since that day.

“In consequence of this soul–searching experience I severed my connection with the wild set. I am far from saying that every member of the Christian Social Union must necessarily be a burglar. I have no right to bring any such charge. But it gave me a hint of what such courses may lead to in many cases; and I saw them no more.

“I have only to add that the photograph you enclose, taken by a Mr. Inglewood, is undoubtedly that of the burglar in question. When I got home that night I looked at his card, and he was inscribed there under the name of Innocent Smith.—Yours faithfully,

“John Clement Hawkins.”

Moon merely went through the form of glancing at the paper. He knew that the prosecutors could not have invented so heavy a document; that Moses Gould
(for one) could no more write like a canon than he could read like one. After handing it back he rose to open the defence on the burglary charge.

“We wish,” said Michael, “to give all reasonable facilities to the prosecution; especially as it will save the time of the whole court. The latter object I shall once again pursue by passing over all those points of theory which are so dear to Dr. Pym. I know how they are made. Perjury is a variety of aphasia, leading a man to say one thing instead of another. Forgery is a kind of writer’s cramp, forcing a man to write his uncle’s name instead of his own. Piracy on the high seas is probably a form of sea–sickness. But it is unnecessary for us to inquire into the causes of a fact which we deny. Innocent Smith never did commit burglary at all.

“I should like to claim the power permitted by our previous arrangement, and ask the prosecution two or three questions.”

Dr. Cyrus Pym closed his eyes to indicate a courteous assent.

“In the first place,” continued Moon, “have you the date of Canon Hawkins’s last glimpse of Smith and Percy climbing up the walls and roofs?”

“Ho, yus!” called out Gould smartly. “November thirteen, eighteen ninety–one.”

“Have you,” continued Moon, “identified the houses in Hoxton up which they climbed?”

“Must have been Ladysmith Terrace out of the highroad,” answered Gould with the same clockwork readiness.

“Well,” said Michael, cocking an eyebrow at him, “was there any burglary in that terrace that night? Surely you could find that out.”

“There may well have been,” said the doctor primly, after a pause, “an unsuccessful one that led to no legalities.”

“Another question,” proceeded Michael. “Canon Hawkins, in his blood–and–thunder boyish way, left off at the exciting moment. Why don’t you produce the evidence of the other clergyman, who actually followed the burglar and presumably was present at the crime?”

Dr. Pym rose and planted the points of his fingers on the table, as he did when he was specially confident of the clearness of his reply.

“We have entirely failed,” he said, “to track the other clergyman, who seems to have melted into the ether after Canon Hawkins had seen him as–cending the gutters and the leads. I am fully aware that this may strike many as sing’lar; yet, upon reflection, I think it will appear pretty natural to a bright thinker. This Mr. Raymond Percy is admittedly, by the canon’s evidence, a minister of eccentric
ways. His con–nection with England’s proudest and fairest does not seemingly prevent a taste for the society of the real low–down. On the other hand, the prisoner Smith is, by general agreement, a man of irr’sistible fascination. I entertain no doubt that Smith led the Revered Percy into the crime and forced him to hide his head in the real crim’nal class. That would fully account for his non–appearance, and the failure of all attempts to trace him.”

“It is impossible, then, to trace him?” asked Moon.

“Impossible,” repeated the specialist, shutting his eyes.

“You are sure it’s impossible?”

“Oh dry up, Michael,” cried Gould, irritably. “We’d ‘ave found ‘im if we could, for you bet ‘e saw the burglary. Don’t YOU start looking for ‘im. Look for your own ‘ead in the dustbin. You’ll find that—after a bit,” and his voice died away in grumbling.

“Arthur,” directed Michael Moon, sitting down, “kindly read Mr. Raymond Percy’s letter to the court.”

“Wishing, as Mr. Moon has said, to shorten the proceedings as much as possible,” began Inglewood, “I will not read the first part of the letter sent to us. It is only fair to the prosecution to admit the account given by the second clergyman fully ratifies, as far as facts are concerned, that given by the first clergyman. We concede, then, the canon’s story so far as it goes. This must necessarily be valuable to the prosecutor and also convenient to the court. I begin Mr. Percy’s letter, then, at the point when all three men were standing on the garden wall:—

“As I watched Hawkins wavering on the wall, I made up my own mind not to waver. A cloud of wrath was on my brain, like the cloud of copper fog on the houses and gardens round. My decision was violent and simple; yet the thoughts that led up to it were so complicated and contradictory that I could not retrace them now. I knew Hawkins was a kind, innocent gentleman; and I would have given ten pounds for the pleasure of kicking him down the road. That God should allow good people to be as bestially stupid as that—rose against me like a towering blasphemy.

“At Oxford, I fear, I had the artistic temperament rather badly; and artists love to be limited. I liked the church as a pretty pattern; discipline was mere decoration. I delighted in mere divisions of time; I liked eating fish on Friday. But then I like fish; and the fast was made for men who like meat. Then I came to Hoxton and found men who had fasted for five hundred years; men who had to gnaw fish because they could not get meat—and fish–bones when they could
not get fish. As too many British officers treat the army as a review, so I had treated the Church Militant as if it were the Church Pageant. Hoxton cures that. Then I realized that for eighteen hundred years the Church Militant had not been a pageant, but a riot—and a suppressed riot. There, still living patiently in Hoxton, were the people to whom the tremendous promises had been made. In the face of that I had to become a revolutionary if I was to continue to be religious. In Hoxton one cannot be a conservative without being also an atheist—and a pessimist. Nobody but the devil could want to conserve Hoxton.

“On the top of all this comes Hawkins. If he had cursed all the Hoxton men, excommunicated them, and told them they were going to hell, I should have rather admired him. If he had ordered them all to be burned in the market-place, I should still have had that patience that all good Christians have with the wrongs inflicted on other people. But there is no priestcraft about Hawkins—nor any other kind of craft. He is as perfectly incapable of being a priest as he is of being a carpenter or a cabman or a gardener or a plasterer. He is a perfect gentleman; that is his complaint. He does not impose his creed, but simply his class. He never said a word of religion in the whole of his damnable address. He simply said all the things his brother, the major, would have said. A voice from heaven assures me that he has a brother, and that this brother is a major.

“When this helpless aristocrat had praised cleanliness in the body and convention in the soul to people who could hardly keep body and soul together, the stampede against our platform began. I took part in his undeserved rescue, I followed his obscure deliverer, until (as I have said) we stood together on the wall above the dim gardens, already clouding with fog. Then I looked at the curate and at the burglar, and decided, in a spasm of inspiration, that the burglar was the better man of the two. The burglar seemed quite as kind and human as the curate was—and he was also brave and self-reliant, which the curate was not. I knew there was no virtue in the upper class, for I belong to it myself; I knew there was not so very much in the lower class, for I had lived with it a long time. Many old texts about the despised and persecuted came back to my mind, and I thought that the saints might well be hidden in the criminal class. About the time Hawkins let himself down the ladder I was crawling up a low, sloping, blue-slate roof after the large man, who went leaping in front of me like a gorilla.

“This upward scramble was short, and we soon found ourselves tramping along a broad road of flat roofs, broader than many big thoroughfares, with chimney-pots here and there that seemed in the haze as bulky as small forts. The
asphyxiation of the fog seemed to increase the somewhat swollen and morbid anger under which my brain and body laboured. The sky and all those things that are commonly clear seemed overpowered by sinister spirits. Tall spectres with turbans of vapour seemed to stand higher than the sun or moon, eclipsing both. I thought dimly of illustrations to the ‘Arabian Nights’ on brown paper with rich but sombre tints, showing genii gathering round the Seal of Solomon. By the way, what was the Seal of Solomon? Nothing to do with sealing–wax really, I suppose; but my muddled fancy felt the thick clouds as being of that heavy and clinging substance, of strong opaque colour, poured out of boiling pots and stamped into monstrous emblems.

“The first effect of the tall turbaned vapours was that discoloured look of pea–soup or coffee brown of which Londoners commonly speak. But the scene grew subtler with familiarity. We stood above the average of the housetops and saw something of that thing called smoke, which in great cities creates the strange thing called fog. Beneath us rose a forest of chimney–pots. And there stood in every chimney–pot, as if it were a flower–pot, a brief shrub or a tall tree of coloured vapour. The colours of the smoke were various; for some chimneys were from firesides and some from factories, and some again from mere rubbish heaps. And yet, though the tints were all varied, they all seemed unnatural, like fumes from a witch’s pot. It was as if the shameful and ugly shapes growing shapeless in the cauldron sent up each its separate spurt of steam, coloured according to the fish or flesh consumed. Here, aglow from underneath, were dark red clouds, such as might drift from dark jars of sacrificial blood; there the vapour was dark indigo gray, like the long hair of witches steeped in the hell–broth. In another place the smoke was of an awful opaque ivory yellow, such as might be the disembodiment of one of their old, leprous waxy images. But right across it ran a line of bright, sinister, sulphurous green, as clear and crooked as Arabic—”

Mr. Moses Gould once more attempted the arrest of the ‘bus. He was understood to suggest that the reader should shorten the proceedings by leaving out all the adjectives. Mrs. Duke, who had woken up, observed that she was sure it was all very nice, and the decision was duly noted down by Moses with a blue, and by Michael with a red pencil. Inglewood then resumed the reading of the document.

“Then I read the writing of the smoke. Smoke was like the modern city that makes it; it is not always dull or ugly, but it is always wicked and vain.

“Modern England was like a cloud of smoke; it could carry all colours, but it
could leave nothing but a stain. It was our weakness and not our strength that put a rich refuse in the sky. These were the rivers of our vanity pouring into the void. We had taken the sacred circle of the whirlwind, and looked down on it, and seen it as a whirlpool. And then we had used it as a sink. It was a good symbol of the mutiny in my own mind. Only our worst things were going to heaven. Only our criminals could still ascend like angels.

“As my brain was blinded with such emotions, my guide stopped by one of the big chimney–pots that stood at the regular intervals like lamp–posts along that uplifted and aerial highway. He put his heavy hand upon it, and for the moment I thought he was merely leaning on it, tired with his steep scramble along the terrace. So far as I could guess from the abysses, full of fog on either side, and the veiled lights of red brown and old gold glowing through them now and again, we were on the top of one of those long, consecutive, and genteel rows of houses which are still to be found lifting their heads above poorer districts, the remains of some rage of optimism in earlier speculative builders. Probably enough, they were entirely untenanted, or tenanted only by such small clans of the poor as gather also in the old emptied palaces of Italy. Indeed, some little time later, when the fog had lifted a little, I discovered that we were walking round a semi–circle of crescent which fell away below us into one flat square or wide street below another, like a giant stairway, in a manner not unknown in the eccentric building of London, and looking like the last ledges of the land. But a cloud sealed the giant stairway as yet.

“My speculations about the sullen skyscape, however, were interrupted by something as unexpected as the moon falling from the sky. Instead of my burglar lifting his hand from the chimney he leaned on, he leaned on it a little more heavily, and the whole chimney–pot turned over like the opening top of an inkstand. I remembered the short ladder leaning against the low wall and felt sure he had arranged his criminal approach long before.

“The collapse of the big chimney–pot ought to have been the culmination of my chaotic feelings; but, to tell the truth, it produced a sudden sense of comedy and even of comfort. I could not recall what connected this abrupt bit of housebreaking with some quaint but still kindly fancies. Then I remembered the delightful and uproarious scenes of roofs and chimneys in the harlequinades of my childhood, and was darkly and quite irrationally comforted by a sense of unsubstantiality in the scene, as if the houses were of lath and paint and pasteboard, and were only meant to be tumbled in and out of by policemen and pantaloons. The law–breaking of my companion seemed not only seriously
excusable, but even comically excusable. Who were all these pompous preposterous people with their footmen and their foot-scrapers, their chimney-pots and their chimney-pot hats, that they should prevent a poor clown from getting sausages if he wanted them? One would suppose that property was a serious thing. I had reached, as it were, a higher level of that mountainous and vapourous visions, the heaven of a higher levity.

“My guide had jumped down into the dark cavity revealed by the displaced chimney-pot. He must have landed at a level considerably lower, for, tall as he was, nothing but his weirdly tousled head remained visible. Something again far off, and yet familiar, pleased me about this way of invading the houses of men. I thought of little chimney-sweeps, and ‘The Water Babies;’ but I decided that it was not that. Then I remembered what it was that made me connect such topsy-turvy trespass with ideas quite opposite to the idea of crime. Christmas Eve, of course, and Santa Claus coming down the chimney.

“Almost at the same instant the hairy head disappeared into the black hole; but I heard a voice calling to me from below. A second or two afterwards, the hairy head reappeared; it was dark against the more fiery part of the fog, and nothing could be spelt of its expression, but its voice called on me to follow with that enthusiastic impatience proper only among old friends. I jumped into the gulf, and as blindly as Curtius, for I was still thinking of Santa Claus and the traditional virtue of such vertical entrance.

“In every well-appointed gentleman’s house, I reflected, there was the front door for the gentlemen, and the side door for the tradesmen; but there was also the top door for the gods. The chimney is, so to speak, the underground passage between earth and heaven. By this starry tunnel Santa Claus manages—like the skylark—to be true to the kindred points of heaven and home. Nay, owing to certain conventions, and a widely distributed lack of courage for climbing, this door was, perhaps, little used. But Santa Claus’s door was really the front door: it was the door fronting the universe.

“I thought this as I groped my way across the black garret, or loft below the roof, and scrambled down the squat ladder that let us down into a yet larger loft below. Yet it was not till I was half-way down the ladder that I suddenly stood still, and thought for an instant of retracing all my steps, as my companion had retraced them from the beginning of the garden wall. The name of Santa Claus had suddenly brought me back to my senses. I remembered why Santa Clause came, and why he was welcome.

“I was brought up in the propertied classes, and with all their horror of
offences against property. I had heard all the regular denunciations of robbery, both right and wrong; I had read the Ten Commandments in church a thousand times. And then and there, at the age of thirty-four, half-way down a ladder in a dark room in the bodily act of burglar, I saw suddenly for the first time that theft, after all, is really wrong.

“It was too late to turn back, however, and I followed the strangely soft footsteps of my huge companion across the lower and larger loft, till he knelt down on a part of the bare flooring and, after a few fumbling efforts, lifted a sort of trapdoor. This released a light from below, and we found ourselves looking down into a lamp–lit sitting room, of the sort that in large houses often leads out of a bedroom, and is an adjunct to it. Light thus breaking from beneath our feet like a soundless explosion, showed that the trapdoor just lifted was clogged with dust and rust, and had doubtless been long disused until the advent of my enterprising friend. But I did not look at this long, for the sight of the shining room underneath us had an almost unnatural attractiveness. To enter a modern interior at so strange an angle, by so forgotten a door, was an epoch in one’s psychology. It was like having found a fourth dimension.

“My companion dropped from the aperture into the room so suddenly and soundlessly, that I could do nothing but follow him; though, for lack of practice in crime, I was by no means soundless. Before the echo of my boots had died away, the big burglar had gone quickly to the door, half opened it, and stood looking down the staircase and listening. Then, leaving the door still half open, he came back into the middle of the room, and ran his roving blue eye round its furniture and ornament. The room was comfortably lined with books in that rich and human way that makes the walls seem alive; it was a deep and full, but slovenly, bookcase, of the sort that is constantly ransacked for the purposes of reading in bed. One of those stunted German stoves that look like red goblins stood in a corner, and a sideboard of walnut wood with closed doors in its lower part. There were three windows, high but narrow. After another glance round, my housebreaker plucked the walnut doors open and rummaged inside. He found nothing there, apparently, except an extremely handsome cut–glass decanter, containing what looked like port. Somehow the sight of the thief returning with this ridiculous little luxury in his hand woke within me once more all the revelation and revulsion I had felt above.

“‘Don’t do it!’ I cried quite incoherently, ‘Santa Claus—’

“‘Ah,’ said the burglar, as he put the decanter on the table and stood looking at me, ‘you’ve thought about that, too.’
“‘I can’t express a millionth part of what I’ve thought of,’ I cried, ‘but it’s something like this . . . oh, can’t you see it? Why are children not afraid of Santa Claus, though he comes like a thief in the night? He is permitted secrecy, trespass, almost treachery—because there are more toys where he has been. What should we feel if there were less? Down what chimney from hell would come the goblin that should take away the children’s balls and dolls while they slept? Could a Greek tragedy be more gray and cruel than that daybreak and awakening? Dog–stealer, horse–stealer, man–stealer—can you think of anything so base as a toy–stealer?’

“The burglar, as if absently, took a large revolver from his pocket and laid it on the table beside the decanter, but still kept his blue reflective eyes fixed on my face.

“‘Man!’ I said, ‘all stealing is toy–stealing. That’s why it’s really wrong. The goods of the unhappy children of men should be really respected because of their worthlessness. I know Naboth’s vineyard is as painted as Noah’s Ark. I know Nathan’s ewe–lamb is really a woolly baa–lamb on a wooden stand. That is why I could not take them away. I did not mind so much, as long as I thought of men’s things as their valuables; but I dare not put a hand upon their vanities.’

“After a moment I added abruptly, ‘Only saints and sages ought to be robbed. They may be stripped and pillaged; but not the poor little worldly people of the things that are their poor little pride.’

“He set out two wineglasses from the cupboard, filled them both, and lifted one of them with a salutation towards his lips.

“‘Don’t do it!’ I cried. ‘It might be the last bottle of some rotten vintage or other. The master of this house may be quite proud of it. Don’t you see there’s something sacred in the silliness of such things?’

“‘It’s not the last bottle,’ answered my criminal calmly; ‘there’s plenty more in the cellar.’

“‘You know the house, then?’ I said.

“‘Too well,’ he answered, with a sadness so strange as to have something eerie about it. ‘I am always trying to forget what I know—and to find what I don’t know.’ He drained his glass. ‘Besides,’ he added, ‘it will do him good.’

“‘What will do him good?’

“‘The wine I’m drinking,’ said the strange person.

“‘Does he drink too much, then?’ I inquired.

“‘No,’ he answered, ‘not unless I do.’

“‘Do you mean,’ I demanded, ‘that the owner of this house approves of all you
“‘God forbid,’ he answered; ‘but he has to do the same.’

“The dead face of the fog looking in at all three windows unreasonable increased a sense of riddle, and even terror, about this tall, narrow house we had entered out of the sky. I had once more the notion about the gigantic genii—I fancied that enormous Egyptian faces, of the dead reds and yellows of Egypt, were staring in at each window of our little lamp–lit room as at a lighted stage of marionettes. My companion went on playing with the pistol in front of him, and talking with the same rather creepy confidentialness.

“‘I am always trying to find him—to catch him unawares. I come in through skylights and trapdoors to find him; but whenever I find him—he is doing what I am doing.’

“I sprang to my feet with a thrill of fear. ‘There is some one coming,’ I cried, and my cry had something of a shriek in it. Not from the stairs below, but along the passage from the inner bedchamber (which seemed somehow to make it more alarming), footsteps were coming nearer. I am quite unable to say what mystery, or monster, or double, I expected to see when the door was pushed open from within. I am only quite certain that I did not expect to see what I did see.

“Framed in the open doorway stood, with an air of great serenity, a rather tall young woman, definitely though indefinably artistic—her dress the colour of spring and her hair of autumn leaves, with a face which, though still comparatively young, conveyed experience as well as intelligence. All she said was, ‘I didn’t hear you come in.’

“‘I came in another way,’ said the Permeator, somewhat vaguely.

‘I’d left my latchkey at home.’

“I got to my feet in a mixture of politeness and mania.

‘I’m really very sorry,’ I cried. ‘I know my position is irregular. Would you be so obliging as to tell me whose house this is?’

“‘Mine,’ said the burglar, ‘May I present you to my wife?’

“I doubtfully, and somewhat slowly, resumed my seat; and I did not get out of it till nearly morning. Mrs. Smith (such was the prosaic name of this far from prosaic household) lingered a little, talking slightly and pleasantly. She left on my mind the impression of a certain odd mixture of shyness and sharpness; as if she knew the world well, but was still a little harmlessly afraid of it. Perhaps the possession of so jumpy and incalculable a husband had left her a little nervous. Anyhow, when she had retired to the inner chamber once more, that
extraordinary man poured forth his apologia and autobiography over the dwindling wine.

“He had been sent to Cambridge with a view to a mathematical and scientific, rather than a classical or literary, career. A starless nihilism was then the philosophy of the schools; and it bred in him a war between the members and the spirit, but one in which the members were right. While his brain accepted the black creed, his very body rebelled against it. As he put it, his right hand taught him terrible things. As the authorities of Cambridge University put it, unfortunately, it had taken the form of his right hand flourishing a loaded firearm in the very face of a distinguished don, and driving him to climb out of the window and cling to a waterspout. He had done it solely because the poor don had professed in theory a preference for non–existence. For this very unacademic type of argument he had been sent down. Vomiting as he was with revulsion, from the pessimism that had quailed under his pistol, he made himself a kind of fanatic of the joy of life. He cut across all the associations of serious–minded men. He was gay, but by no means careless. His practical jokes were more in earnest than verbal ones. Though not an optimist in the absurd sense of maintaining that life is all beer and skittles, he did really seem to maintain that beer and skittles are the most serious part of it. ‘What is more immortal,’ he would cry, ‘than love and war? Type of all desire and joy—beer. Type of all battle and conquest—skittles.’

“There was something in him of what the old world called the solemnity of revels—when they spoke of ‘solemnizing’ a mere masquerade or wedding banquet. Nevertheless he was not a mere pagan any more than he was a mere practical joker. His eccentricities sprang from a static fact of faith, in itself mystical, and even childlike and Christian.

“‘I don’t deny,’ he said, ‘that there should be priests to remind men that they will one day die. I only say that at certain strange epochs it is necessary to have another kind of priests, called poets, actually to remind men that they are not dead yet. The intellectuals among whom I moved were not even alive enough to fear death. They hadn’t enough blood in them to be cowards. Until a pistol barrel was poked under their very noses they never even knew they had been born. For ages looking up an eternal perspective it might be true that life is a learning to die. But for these little white rats it was just as true that death was their only chance of learning to live.’

“His creed of wonder was Christian by this absolute test; that he felt it continually slipping from himself as much as from others. He had the same
pistol for himself, as Brutus said of the dagger. He continually ran preposterous risks of high precipice or headlong speed to keep alive the mere conviction that he was alive. He treasured up trivial and yet insane details that had once reminded him of the awful subconscious reality. When the don had hung on the stone gutter, the sight of his long dangling legs, vibrating in the void like wings, somehow awoke the naked satire of the old definition of man as a two-legged animal without feathers. The wretched professor had been brought into peril by his head, which he had so elaborately cultivated, and only saved by his legs, which he had treated with coldness and neglect. Smith could think of no other way of announcing or recording this, except to send a telegram to an old friend (by this time a total stranger) to say that he had just seen a man with two legs; and that the man was alive.

“The uprush of his released optimism burst into stars like a rocket when he suddenly fell in love. He happened to be shooting a high and very headlong weir in a canoe, by way of proving to himself that he was alive; and he soon found himself involved in some doubt about the continuance of the fact. What was worse, he found he had equally jeopardized a harmless lady alone in a rowing-boat, and one who had provoked death by no professions of philosophic negation. He apologized in wild gasps through all his wild wet labours to bring her to the shore, and when he had done so at last, he seems to have proposed to her on the bank. Anyhow, with the same impetuosity with which he had nearly murdered her, he completely married her; and she was the lady in green to whom I had recently said ‘good-night.’

“They had settled down in these high narrow houses near Highbury. Perhaps, indeed, that is hardly the word. One could strictly say that Smith was married, that he was very happily married, that he not only did not care for any woman but his wife, but did not seem to care for any place but his home; but perhaps one could hardly say that he had settled down. ‘I am a very domestic fellow,’ he explained with gravity, ‘and have often come in through a broken window rather than be late for tea.’

“He lashed his soul with laughter to prevent it falling asleep. He lost his wife a series of excellent servants by knocking at the door as a total stranger, and asking if Mr. Smith lived there and what kind of a man he was. The London general servant is not used to the master indulging in such transcendental ironies. And it was found impossible to explain to her that he did it in order to feel the same interest in his own affairs that he always felt in other people’s.

“‘I know there’s a fellow called Smith,’ he said in his rather weird way,
‘living in one of the tall houses in this terrace. I know he is really happy, and yet I can never catch him at it.’

“Sometimes he would, of a sudden, treat his wife with a kind of paralyzed politeness, like a young stranger struck with love at first sight. Sometimes he would extend this poetic fear to the very furniture; would seem to apologize to the chair he sat on, and climb the staircase as cautiously as a cragsman, to renew in himself the sense of their skeleton of reality. Every stair is a ladder and every stool a leg, he said. And at other times he would play the stranger exactly in the opposite sense, and would enter by another way, so as to feel like a thief and a robber. He would break and violate his own home, as he had done with me that night. It was near morning before I could tear myself from this queer confidence of the Man Who Would Not Die, and as I shook hands with him on the doorstep the last load of fog was lifting, and rifts of daylight revealed the stairway of irregular street levels that looked like the end of the world.

“It will be enough for many to say that I had passed a night with a maniac. What other term, it will be said, could be applied to such a being? A man who reminds himself that he is married by pretending not to be married! A man who tries to covet his own goods instead of his neighbor’s! On this I have but one word to say, and I feel it of my honour to say it, though no one understands. I believe the maniac was one of those who do not merely come, but are sent; sent like a great gale upon ships by Him who made His angels winds and His messengers a flaming fire. This, at least, I know for certain. Whether such men have laughed or wept, we have laughed at their laughter as much as at their weeping. Whether they cursed or blessed the world, they have never fitted it. It is true that men have shrunk from the sting of a great satirist as if from the sting of an adder. But it is equally true that men flee from the embrace of a great optimist as from the embrace of a bear. Nothing brings down more curses than a real benediction. For the goodness of good things, like the badness of bad things, is a prodigy past speech; it is to be pictured rather than spoken. We shall have gone deeper than the deeps of heaven and grown older than the oldest angels before we feel, even in its first faint vibrations, the everlasting violence of that double passion with which God hates and loves the world.—I am, yours faithfully, ‘Raymond Percy.”


The instant he had spoken all the rest knew they had been in an almost religious state of submission and assent. Something had bound them together; something in the sacred tradition of the last two words of the letter; something
also in the touching and boyish embarrassment with which Inglewood had read them—for he had all the thin–skinned reverence of the agnostic. Moses Gould was as good a fellow in his way as ever lived; far kinder to his family than more refined men of pleasure, simple and steadfast in his admiration, a thoroughly wholesome animal and a thoroughly genuine character. But wherever there is conflict, crises come in which any soul, personal or racial, unconsciously turns on the world the most hateful of its hundred faces. English reverence, Irish mysticism, American idealism, looked up and saw on the face of Moses a certain smile. It was that smile of the Cynic Triumphant, which has been the tocsin for many a cruel riot in Russian villages or mediaeval towns.


Finding that this was not well received, he explained further, exuberance deepening on his dark exuberant features.

“Always fun to see a bloke swallow a wasp when ‘e’s corfin’ up a fly,” he said pleasantly. “Don’t you see you’ve bunged up old Smith anyhow. If this parson’s tale’s O.K.—why, Smith is ‘ot. ‘E’s pretty ‘ot. We find him elopin’ with Miss Gray (best respects!) in a cab. Well, what abart this Mrs. Smith the curate talks of, with her blarsted shyness—transmigogrified into a blighted sharpness? Miss Gray ain’t been very sharp, but I reckon she’ll be pretty shy.”

“Don’t be a brute,” growled Michael Moon.

None could lift their eyes to look at Mary; but Inglewood sent a glance along the table at Innocent Smith. He was still bowed above his paper toys, and a wrinkle was on his forehead that might have been worry or shame. He carefully plucked out one corner of a complicated paper and tucked it in elsewhere; then the wrinkle vanished and he looked relieved.
CHAPTER III

THE ROUND ROAD; OR, THE DESERTION CHARGE

Pym rose with sincere embarrassment; for he was an American, and his respect for ladies was real, and not at all scientific.

“Ignoring,” he said, “the delicate and considerable knightly protests that have been called forth by my colleague’s native sense of oration, and apologizing to all for whom our wild search for truth seems unsuitable to the grand ruins of a feudal land, I still think my colleague’s question by no means devoid of relevancy. The last charge against the accused was one of burglary; the next charge on the paper is of bigamy and desertion. It does without question appear that the defence, in aspiring to rebut this last charge, have really admitted the next. Either Innocent Smith is still under a charge of attempted burglary, or else that is exploded; but he is pretty well fixed for attempted bigamy. It all depends on what view we take of the alleged letter from Curate Percy. Under these conditions I feel justified in claiming my right to questions. May I ask how the defence got hold of the letter from Curate Percy? Did it come direct from the prisoner?”

“We have had nothing direct from the prisoner,” said Moon quietly. “The few documents which the defence guarantees came to us from another quarter.”

“If you insist,” answered Moon, “we had them from Miss Gray.”

“Dr. Cyrus Pym quite forgot to close his eyes, and, instead, opened them very wide.

“Do you really mean to say,” he said, “that Miss Gray was in possession of this document testifying to a previous Mrs. Smith?”

“Quite so,” said Inglewood, and sat down.

The doctor said something about infatuation in a low and painful voice, and then with visible difficulty continued his opening remarks.

“Unfortunately the tragic truth revealed by Curate Percy’s narrative is only too crushingly confirmed by other and shocking documents in our own possession. Of these the principal and most certain is the testimony of Innocent Smith’s gardener, who was present at the most dramatic and eye–opening of his many acts of marital infidelity. Mr. Gould, the gardener, please.”

Mr. Gould, with his tireless cheerfulness, arose to present the gardener. That
functionary explained that he had served Mr. and Mrs. Innocent Smith when they had a little house on the edge of Croydon. From the gardener’s tale, with its many small allusions, Inglewood grew certain he had seen the place. It was one of those corners of town or country that one does not forget, for it looked like a frontier. The garden hung very high above the lane, and its end was steep and sharp, like a fortress. Beyond was a roll of real country, with a white path sprawling across it, and the roots, boles, and branches of great gray trees writhing and twisting against the sky. But as if to assert that the lane itself was suburban, were sharply relieved against that gray and tossing upland a lamp-post painted a peculiar yellow-green and a red pillar-box that stood exactly at the corner. Inglewood was sure of the place; he had passed it twenty times in his constitutionals on the bicycle; he had always dimly felt it was a place where something might occur. But it gave him quite a shiver to feel that the face of his frightful friend or enemy Smith might at any time have appeared over the garden bushes above. The gardener’s account, unlike the curate’s, was quite free from decorative adjectives, however many he may have uttered privately when writing it. He simply said that on a particular morning Mr. Smith came out and began to play about with a rake, as he often did. Sometimes he would tickle the nose of his eldest child (he had two children); sometimes he would hook the rake on to the branch of a tree, and hoist himself up with horrible gymnastic jerks, like those of a giant frog in its final agony. Never, apparently, did he think of putting the rake to any of its proper uses, and the gardener, in consequence, treated his actions with coldness and brevity. But the gardener was certain that on one particular morning in October he (the gardener) had come round the corner of the house carrying the hose, had seen Mr. Smith standing on the lawn in a striped red and white jacket (which might have been his smoking-jacket, but was quite as like a part of his pyjamas), and had heard him then and there call out to his wife, who was looking out of the bedroom window on to the garden, these decisive and very loud expressions—

“I won’t stay here any longer. I’ve got another wife and much better children a long way from here. My other wife’s got redder hair than yours, and my other garden’s got a much finer situation; and I’m going off to them.”

With these words, apparently, he sent the rake flying far up into the sky, higher than many could have shot an arrow, and caught it again. Then he cleared the hedge at a leap and alighted on his feet down in the lane below, and set off up the road without even a hat. Much of the picture was doubtless supplied by Inglewood’s accidental memory of the place. He could see with his mind’s eye
that big bare–headed figure with the ragged rake swaggering up the crooked woodland road, and leaving lamp–post and pillar–box behind. But the gardener, on his own account, was quite prepared to swear to the public confession of bigamy, to the temporary disappearance of the rake in the sky, and the final disappearance of the man up the road. Moreover, being a local man, he could swear that, beyond some local rumours that Smith had embarked on the south–eastern coast, nothing was known of him again.

This impression was somewhat curiously clinched by Michael Moon in the few but clear phrases in which he opened the defence upon the third charge. So far from denying that Smith had fled from Croydon and disappeared on the Continent, he seemed prepared to prove all this on his own account. “I hope you are not so insular,” he said, “that you will not respect the word of a French innkeeper as much as that of an English gardener. By Mr. Inglewood’s favour we will hear the French innkeeper.”

Before the company had decided the delicate point Inglewood was already reading the account in question. It was in French. It seemed to them to run something like this:—

“Sir,—Yes; I am Durobin of Durobin’s Cafe on the sea–front at Gras, rather north of Dunquerque. I am willing to write all I know of the stranger out of the sea.

“I have no sympathy with eccentrics or poets. A man of sense looks for beauty in things deliberately intended to be beautiful, such as a trim flower–bed or an ivory statuette. One does not permit beauty to pervade one’s whole life, just as one does not pave all the roads with ivory or cover all the fields with geraniums. My faith, but we should miss the onions!

“But whether I read things backwards through my memory, or whether there are indeed atmospheres of psychology which the eye of science cannot as yet pierce, it is the humiliating fact that on that particular evening I felt like a poet—like any little rascal of a poet who drinks absinthe in the mad Montmartre.

“Positively the sea itself looked like absinthe, green and bitter and poisonous. I had never known it look so unfamiliar before. In the sky was that early and stormy darkness that is so depressing to the mind, and the wind blew shrilly round the little lonely coloured kiosk where they sell the newspapers, and along the sand–hills by the shore. There I saw a fishing–boat with a brown sail standing in silently from the sea. It was already quite close, and out of it clambered a man of monstrous stature, who came wading to shore with the water not up to his knees, though it would have reached the hips of many men. He
leaned on a long rake or pole, which looked like a trident, and made him look like a Triton. Wet as he was, and with strips of seaweed clinging to him, he walked across to my cafe, and, sitting down at a table outside, asked for cherry brandy, a liqueur which I keep, but is seldom demanded. Then the monster, with great politeness, invited me to partake of a vermouth before my dinner, and we fell into conversation. He had apparently crossed from Kent by a small boat got at a private bargain because of some odd fancy he had for passing promptly in an easterly direction, and not waiting for any of the official boats. He was, he somewhat vaguely explained, looking for a house. When I naturally asked him where the house was, he answered that he did not know; it was on an island; it was somewhere to the east; or, as he expressed it with a hazy and yet impatient gesture, ‘over there.’

“I asked him how, if he did not know the place, he would know it when he saw it. Here he suddenly ceased to be hazy, and became alarmingly minute. He gave a description of the house detailed enough for an auctioneer. I have forgotten nearly all the details except the last two, which were that the lamp–post was painted green, and that there was a red pillar–box at the corner.

“A red pillar–box!’ I cried in astonishment. ‘Why, the place must be in England!’

“I had forgotten,’ he said, nodding heavily. ‘That is the island’s name.’

“But, nom du nom,’ I cried testily, ‘you’ve just come from England, my boy.’

“They SAID it was England,’ said my imbecile, conspiratorially. ‘They said it was Kent. But Kentish men are such liars one can’t believe anything they say.’

“Monsieur,’ I said, ‘you must pardon me. I am elderly, and the fumisteries of the young men are beyond me. I go by common sense, or, at the largest, by that extension of applied common sense called science.’

“Science!’ cried the stranger. ‘There is only one good thing science ever discovered—a good thing, good tidings of great joy—that the world is round.’

“I told him with civility that his words conveyed no impression to my intelligence. ‘I mean,’ he said, ‘that going right round the world is the shortest way to where you are already.’

“Is it not even shorter,’ I asked, ‘to stop where you are?’

“No, no, no!’ he cried emphatically. ‘That way is long and very weary. At the end of the world, at the back of the dawn, I shall find the wife I really married and the house that is really mine. And that house will have a greener lamp–post and a redder pillar–box. Do you,’ he asked with a sudden intensity, ‘do you never want to rush out of your house in order to find it?’
“‘No, I think not,’ I replied; ‘reason tells a man from
the first to adapt his desires to the probable supply of life.
I remain here, content to fulfil the life of man.
All my interests are here, and most of my friends, and—’
“‘And yet,’ he cried, starting to his almost terrific height, ‘you made the
French Revolution!’
“‘Pardon me,’ I said, ‘I am not quite so elderly.
A relative perhaps.’
“‘I mean your sort did!’ exclaimed this personage. ‘Yes, your damned smug,
settled, sensible sort made the French Revolution. Oh! I know some say it was
no good, and you’re just back where you were before. Why, blast it all, that’s
just where we all want to be—back where we were before! That is revolution—
going right round! Every revolution, like a repentance, is a return.’
“He was so excited that I waited till he had taken his seat again, and then said
something indifferent and soothing; but he struck the tiny table with his colossal
fist and went on.
“‘I am going to have a revolution, not a French Revolution, but an English
Revolution. God has given to each tribe its own type of mutiny. The Frenchmen
march against the citadel of the city together; the Englishman marches to the
outskirts of the city, and alone. But I am going to turn the world upside down,
too. I’m going to turn myself upside down. I’m going to walk upside down in the
cursed upsidedownland of the Antipodes, where trees and men hang head
downward in the sky. But my revolution, like yours, like the earth’s, will end up
in the holy, happy place—the celestial, incredible place—the place where we
were before.’
“With these remarks, which can scarcely be reconciled with reason, he leapt
from the seat and strode away into the twilight, swinging his pole and leaving
behind him an excessive payment, which also pointed to some loss of mental
balance. This is all I know of the episode of the man landed from the fishing–
boat, and I hope it may serve the interests of justice.—Accept, Sir, the
assurances of the very high consideration, with which I have the honour to be
your obedient servant, “Jules Durobin.”
“The next document in our dossier,” continued Inglewood, “comes from the
town of Crazok, in the central plains of Russia, and runs as follows:—
“Sir,—My name is Paul Nickolaiovitch: I am the stationmaster at the station
near Crazok. The great trains go by across the plains taking people to China, but
very few people get down at the platform where I have to watch. This makes my
life rather lonely, and I am thrown back much upon the books I have. But I cannot discuss these very much with my neighbours, for enlightened ideas have not spread in this part of Russia so much as in other parts. Many of the peasants round here have never heard of Bernard Shaw.

“I am a Liberal, and do my best to spread Liberal ideas; but since the failure of the revolution this has been even more difficult. The revolutionists committed many acts contrary to the pure principles of humanitarianism, with which indeed, owing to the scarcity of books, they were ill acquainted. I did not approve of these cruel acts, though provoked by the tyranny of the government; but now there is a tendency to reproach all Intelligents with the memory of them. This is very unfortunate for Intelligents.

“It was when the railway strike was almost over, and a few trains came through at long intervals, that I stood one day watching a train that had come in. Only one person got out of the train, far away up at the other end of it, for it was a very long train. It was evening, with a cold, greenish sky. A little snow had fallen, but not enough to whiten the plain, which stretched away a sort of sad purple in all directions, save where the flat tops of some distant tablelands caught the evening light like lakes. As the solitary man came stamping along on the thin snow by the train he grew larger and larger; I thought I had never seen so large a man. But he looked even taller than he was, I think, because his shoulders were very big and his head comparatively little. From the big shoulders hung a tattered old jacket, striped dull red and dirty white, very thin for the winter, and one hand rested on a huge pole such as peasants rake in weeds with to burn them.

“Before he had traversed the full length of the train he was entangled in one of those knots of rowdies that were the embers of the extinct revolution, though they mostly disgraced themselves upon the government side. I was just moving to his assistance, when he whirled up his rake and laid out right and left with such energy that he came through them without scathe and strode right up to me, leaving them staggered and really astonished.

“Yet when he reached me, after so abrupt an assertion of his aim, he could only say rather dubiously in French that he wanted a house.

“‘There are not many houses to be had round here,’ I answered in the same language, ‘the district has been very disturbed. A revolution, as you know, has recently been suppressed. Any further building—’

“‘Oh! I don’t mean that,’ he cried; ‘I mean a real house—a live house.
It really is a live house, for it runs away from me.’

“‘I am ashamed to say that something in his phrase or gesture moved me profoundly. We Russians are brought up in an atmosphere of folk-lore, and its unfortunate effects can still be seen in the bright colours of the children’s dolls and of the ikons. For an instant the idea of a house running away from a man gave me pleasure, for the enlightenment of man moves slowly.

“‘Have you no other house of your own?’ I asked.

“‘I have left it,’ he said very sadly. ‘It was not the house that grew dull, but I that grew dull in it. My wife was better than all women, and yet I could not feel it.’

“‘And so,’ I said with sympathy, ‘you walked straight out of the front door, like a masculine Nora.’

“‘Nora?’ he inquired politely, apparently supposing it to be a Russian word.

“‘I mean Nora in “The Doll’s House,”’ I replied.

“At this he looked very much astonished, and I knew he was an Englishman; for Englishmen always think that Russians study nothing but ‘ukases.’

“‘“The Doll’s House”? he cried vehemently; ‘why, that is just where Ibsen was so wrong! Why, the whole aim of a house is to be a doll’s house. Don’t you remember, when you were a child, how those little windows WERE windows, while the big windows weren’t. A child has a doll’s house, and shrieks when a front door opens inwards. A banker has a real house, yet how numerous are the bankers who fail to emit the faintest shriek when their real front doors open inwards.’

“Something from the folk-lore of my infancy still kept me foolishly silent; and before I could speak, the Englishman had leaned over and was saying in a sort of loud whisper, ‘I have found out how to make a big thing small. I have found out how to turn a house into a doll’s house. Get a long way off it: God lets us turn all things into toys by his great gift of distance. Once let me see my old brick house standing up quite little against the horizon, and I shall want to go back to it again. I shall see the funny little toy lamp-post painted green against the gate, and all the dear little people like dolls looking out of the window. For the windows really open in my doll’s house.’

“‘But why?’ I asked, ‘should you wish to return to that particular doll’s house? Having taken, like Nora, the bold step against convention, having made yourself in the conventional sense disreputable, having dared to be free, why should you not take advantage of your freedom? As the greatest modern writers have pointed out, what you called your marriage was only your mood. You have a
right to leave it all behind, like the clippings of your hair or the parings of your nails. Having once escaped, you have the world before you. Though the words may seem strange to you, you are free in Russia.’

“He sat with his dreamy eyes on the dark circles of the plains, where the only moving thing was the long and labouring trail of smoke out of the railway engine, violet in tint, volcanic in outline, the one hot and heavy cloud of that cold clear evening of pale green.

“Yes,’ he said with a huge sigh, ‘I am free in Russia. You are right. I could really walk into that town over there and have love all over again, and perhaps marry some beautiful woman and begin again, and nobody could ever find me. Yes, you have certainly convinced me of something.’

“His tone was so queer and mystical that I felt impelled to ask him what he meant, and of what exactly I had convinced him.

“You have convinced me,’ he said with the same dreamy eye, ‘why it is really wicked and dangerous for a man to run away from his wife.’

“And why is it dangerous?’ I inquired.

“Why, because nobody can find him,’ answered this odd person, ‘and we all want to be found.’

“The most original modern thinkers,’ I remarked, ‘Ibsen, Gorki, Nietzsche, Shaw, would all rather say that what we want most is to be lost: to find ourselves in untrodden paths, and to do unprecedented things: to break with the past and belong to the future.’

“He rose to his whole height somewhat sleepily, and looked round on what was, I confess, a somewhat desolate scene—the dark purple plains, the neglected railroad, the few ragged knots of malcontents. ‘I shall not find the house here,’ he said. ‘It is still eastward—further and further eastward.’

“Then he turned upon me with something like fury, and struck the foot of his pole upon the frozen earth.

“And if I do go back to my country,’ he cried, ‘I may be locked up in a madhouse before I reach my own house. I have been a bit unconventional in my time! Why, Nietzsche stood in a row of ramrods in the silly old Prussian army, and Shaw takes temperance beverages in the suburbs; but the things I do are unprecedented things. This round road I am treading is an untrodden path. I do believe in breaking out; I am a revolutionist. But don’t you see that all these real leaps and destructions and escapes are only attempts to get back to Eden—to something we have had, to something we at least have heard of? Don’t you see one only breaks the fence or shoots the moon in order to get HOME?’
“‘No,’ I answered after due reflection, ‘I don’t think I should accept that.’

‘Ah,’ he said with a sort of a sigh, ‘then you have explained a second thing to me.’

‘What do you mean?’ I asked; ‘what thing?’

‘Why your revolution has failed,’ he said; and walking across quite suddenly to the train he got into it just as it was steaming away at last. And as I saw the long snaky tail of it disappear along the darkening flats.

“I saw no more of him. But though his views were adverse to the best advanced thought, he struck me as an interesting person: I should like to find out if he has produced any literary works.—Yours, etc., “Paul Nickolaiovitch.”

There was something in this odd set of glimpses into foreign lives which kept the absurd tribunal quieter than it had hitherto been, and it was again without interruption that Inglewood opened another paper upon his pile. “The Court will be indulgent,” he said, “if the next note lacks the special ceremonies of our letter-writing. It is ceremonious enough in its own way:—

“The Celestial Principles are permanent: Greeting.—I am Wong–Hi, and I tend the temple of all the ancestors of my family in the forest of Fu. The man that broke through the sky and came to me said that it must be very dull, but I showed him the wrongness of his thought. I am indeed in one place, for my uncle took me to this temple when I was a boy, and in this I shall doubtless die. But if a man remain in one place he shall see that the place changes. The pagoda of my temple stands up silently out of all the trees, like a yellow pagoda above many green pagodas. But the skies are sometimes blue like porcelain, and sometimes green like jade, and sometimes red like garnet. But the night is always ebony and always returns, said the Emperor Ho.

“The sky-breaker came at evening very suddenly, for I had hardly seen any stirring in the tops of the green trees over which I look as over a sea, when I go to the top of the temple at morning. And yet when he came, it was as if an elephant had strayed from the armies of the great kings of India. For palms snapped, and bamboos broke, and there came forth in the sunshine before the temple one taller than the sons of men.

“Strips of red and white hung about him like ribbons of a carnival, and he carried a pole with a row of teeth on it like the teeth of a dragon. His face was white and discomposed, after the fashion of the foreigners, so that they look like dead men filled with devils; and he spoke our speech brokenly.

“He said to me, ‘This is only a temple; I am trying to find a house.’ And then he told me with indelicate haste that the lamp outside his house was green, and
that there was a red post at the corner of it.

“I have not seen your house nor any houses,’ I answered.
‘I dwell in this temple and serve the gods.’

‘Do you believe in the gods?’ he asked with hunger in his eyes, like the hunger of dogs. And this seemed to me a strange question to ask, for what should a man do except what men have done?

‘My Lord,’ I said, ‘it must be good for men to hold up their hands even if the skies are empty. For if there are gods, they will be pleased, and if there are none, then there are none to be displeased. Sometimes the skies are gold and sometimes porphyry and sometimes ebony, but the trees and the temple stand still under it all. So the great Confucius taught us that if we do always the same things with our hands and our feet as do the wise beasts and birds, with our heads we may think many things: yes, my Lord, and doubt many things. So long as men offer rice at the right season, and kindle lanterns at the right hour, it matters little whether there be gods or no. For these things are not to appease gods, but to appease men.’

“He came yet closer to me, so that he seemed enormous; yet his look was very gentle.

‘Break your temple,’ he said, ‘and your gods will be freed.’

‘And I, smiling at his simplicity, answered: ‘And so, if there be no gods, I shall have nothing but a broken temple.’

‘And at this, that giant from whom the light of reason was withheld threw out his mighty arms and asked me to forgive him. And when I asked him for what he should be forgiven he answered: ‘For being right.’

‘Your idols and emperors are so old and wise and satisfying,’ he cried, ‘it is a shame that they should be wrong. We are so vulgar and violent, we have done you so many iniquities—it is a shame we should be right after all.’

‘And I, still enduring his harmlessness, asked him why he thought that he and his people were right.

‘And he answered: ‘We are right because we are bound where men should be bound, and free where men should be free. We are right because we doubt and destroy laws and customs—but we do not doubt our own right to destroy them. For you live by customs, but we live by creeds. Behold me! In my country I am called Smip. My country is abandoned, my name is defiled, because I pursue around the world what really belongs to me. You are steadfast as the trees because you do not believe. I am as fickle as the tempest because I do believe. I
do believe in my own house, which I shall find again. And at the last remaineth the green lantern and the red post.’

“I said to him: ‘At the last remaineth only wisdom.’

“But even as I said the word he uttered a horrible shout, and rushing forward disappeared among the trees. I have not seen this man again nor any other man. The virtues of the wise are of fine brass.

“Wong–Hi.”

“The next letter I have to read,” proceeded Arthur Inglewood, “will probably make clear the nature of our client’s curious but innocent experiment. It is dated from a mountain village in California, and runs as follows:—

“Sir,—A person answering to the rather extraordinary description required certainly went, some time ago, over the high pass of the Sierras on which I live and of which I am probably the sole stationary inhabitant. I keep a rudimentary tavern, rather ruder than a hut, on the very top of this specially steep and threatening pass. My name is Louis Hara, and the very name may puzzle you about my nationality. Well, it puzzles me a great deal. When one has been for fifteen years without society it is hard to have patriotism; and where there is not even a hamlet it is difficult to invent a nation. My father was an Irishman of the fiercest and most free–shooting of the old Californian kind. My mother was a Spaniard, proud of descent from the old Spanish families round San Francisco, yet accused for all that of some admixture of Red Indian blood. I was well educated and fond of music and books. But, like many other hybrids, I was too good or too bad for the world; and after attempting many things I was glad enough to get a sufficient though a lonely living in this little cabaret in the mountains. In my solitude I fell into many of the ways of a savage. Like an Eskimo, I was shapeless in winter; like a Red Indian, I wore in hot summers nothing but a pair of leather trousers, with a great straw hat as big as a parasol to defend me from the sun. I had a bowie knife at my belt and a long gun under my arm; and I dare say I produced a pretty wild impression on the few peaceable travellers that could climb up to my place. But I promise you I never looked as mad as that man did. Compared with him I was Fifth Avenue.

“I dare say that living under the very top of the Sierras has an odd effect on the mind; one tends to think of those lonely rocks not as peaks coming to a point, but rather as pillars holding up heaven itself. Straight cliffs sail up and away beyond the hope of the eagles; cliffs so tall that they seem to attract the stars and collect them as sea–crags collect a mere glitter of phosphorous. These terraces
and towers of rock do not, like smaller crests, seem to be the end of the world. Rather they seem to be its awful beginning: its huge foundations. We could almost fancy the mountain branching out above us like a tree of stone, and carrying all those cosmic lights like a candelabrum. For just as the peaks failed us, soaring impossibly far, so the stars crowded us (as it seemed), coming impossibly near. The spheres burst about us more like thunderbolts hurled at the earth than planets circling placidly about it.

“All this may have driven me mad; I am not sure. I know there is one angle of the road down the pass where the rock leans out a little, and on windy nights I seem to hear it clashing overhead with other rocks—yes, city against city and citadel against citadel, far up into the night. It was on such an evening that the strange man struggled up the pass. Broadly speaking, only strange men did struggle up the pass. But I had never seen one like this one before.

“He carried (I cannot conceive why) a long, dilapidated garden rake, all bearded and bedraggled with grasses, so that it looked like the ensign of some old barbarian tribe. His hair, which was as long and rank as the grass, hung down below his huge shoulders; and such clothes as clung about him were rags and tongues of red and yellow, so that he had the air of being dressed like an Indian in feathers or autumn leaves. The rake or pitchfork, or whatever it was, he used sometimes as an alpenstock, sometimes (I was told) as a weapon. I do not know why he should have used it as a weapon, for he had, and afterwards showed me, an excellent six–shooter in his pocket. ‘But THAT,’ he said, ‘I use only for peaceful purposes.’ I have no notion what he meant.

“He sat down on the rough bench outside my inn and drank some wine from the vineyards below, sighing with ecstasy over it like one who had travelled long among alien, cruel things and found at last something that he knew. Then he sat staring rather foolishly at the rude lantern of lead and coloured glass that hangs over my door. It is old, but of no value; my grandmother gave it to me long ago: she was devout, and it happens that the glass is painted with a crude picture of Bethlehem and the Wise Men and the Star. He seemed so mesmerized with the transparent glow of Our Lady’s blue gown and the big gold star behind, that he led me also to look at the thing, which I had not done for fourteen years.

“Then he slowly withdrew his eyes from this and looked out eastward where the road fell away below us. The sunset sky was a vault of rich velvet, fading away into mauve and silver round the edges of the dark mountain amphitheatre; and between us and the ravine below rose up out of the deeps and went up into the heights the straight solitary rock we call Green Finger. Of a queer volcanic
colour, and wrinkled all over with what looks undecipherable writing, it hung there like a Babylonian pillar or needle.

“The man silently stretched out his rake in that direction, and before he spoke I knew what he meant. Beyond the great green rock in the purple sky hung a single star.

“‘A star in the east,’ he said in a strange hoarse voice like one of our ancient eagles. ‘The wise men followed the star and found the house. But if I followed the star, should I find the house?’

“‘It depends perhaps,’ I said, smiling, ‘on whether you are a wise man.’

I refrained from adding that he certainly didn’t look it.

“‘You may judge for yourself,’ he answered. ‘I am a man who left his own house because he could no longer bear to be away from it.’

“‘It certainly sounds paradoxical,’ I said.

“‘I heard my wife and children talking and saw them moving about the room,’ he continued, ‘and all the time I knew they were walking and talking in another house thousands of miles away, under the light of different skies, and beyond the series of the seas. I loved them with a devouring love, because they seemed not only distant but unattainable. Never did human creatures seem so dear and so desirable: but I seemed like a cold ghost; therefore I cast off their dust from my feet for a testimony. Nay, I did more. I spurned the world under my feet so that it swung full circle like a treadmill.’

“‘Do you really mean,’ I cried, ‘that you have come right round the world? Your speech is English, yet you are coming from the west.’

“‘My pilgrimage is not yet accomplished,’ he replied sadly.

‘I have become a pilgrim to cure myself of being an exile.’

“Something in the word ‘pilgrim’ awoke down in the roots of my ruinous experience memories of what my fathers had felt about the world, and of something from whence I came. I looked again at the little pictured lantern at which I had not looked for fourteen years.

“‘My grandmother,’ I said in a low tone, ‘would have said that we were all in exile, and that no earthly house could cure the holy home–sickness that forbids us rest.’

“He was silent a long while, and watched a single eagle drift out beyond the Green Finger into the darkening void.

“Then he said, ‘I think your grandmother was right,’ and stood up leaning on his grassy pole. ‘I think that must be the reason,’ he said—‘the secret of this life of man, so ecstatic and so unappeased. But I think there is more to be said. I
think God has given us the love of special places, of a hearth and of a native land, for a good reason.’

“I dare say,’ I said. ‘What reason?’

“Because otherwise,’ he said, pointing his pole out at the sky and the abyss, ‘we might worship that.’

“What do you mean?’ I demanded.

“Eternity,’ he said in his harsh voice, ‘the largest of the idols—the mightiest of the rivals of God.’

“You mean pantheism and infinity and all that,’ I suggested.

“I mean,’ he said with increasing vehemence, ‘that if there be a house for me in heaven it will either have a green lamp–post and a hedge, or something quite as positive and personal as a green lamp–post and a hedge. I mean that God bade me love one spot and serve it, and do all things however wild in praise of it, so that this one spot might be a witness against all the infinities and the sophistries, that Paradise is somewhere and not anywhere, is something and not anything. And I would not be so very much surprised if the house in heaven had a real green lamp–post after all.’

“With which he shouldered his pole and went striding down the perilous paths below, and left me alone with the eagles. But since he went a fever of homelessness will often shake me. I am troubled by rainy meadows and mud cabins that I have never seen; and I wonder whether America will endure.— Yours faithfully, Louis Hara.”

After a short silence Inglewood said: “And, finally, we desire to put in as evidence the following document:—

“This is to say that I am Ruth Davis, and have been housemaid to Mrs. I. Smith at ‘The Laurels’ in Croydon for the last six months. When I came the lady was alone, with two children; she was not a widow, but her husband was away. She was left with plenty of money and did not seem disturbed about him, though she often hoped he would be back soon. She said he was rather eccentric and a little change did him good. One evening last week I was bringing the tea–things out on to the lawn when I nearly dropped them. The end of a long rake was suddenly stuck over the hedge, and planted like a jumping–pole; and over the hedge, just like a monkey on a stick, came a huge, horrible man, all hairy and ragged like Robinson Crusoe. I screamed out, but my mistress didn’t even get out of her chair, but smiled and said he wanted shaving. Then he sat down quite calmly at the garden table and took a cup of tea, and then I realized that this must be Mr. Smith himself. He has stopped here ever since and does not really give
much trouble, though I sometimes fancy he is a little weak in his head. “Ruth Davis.

“P.S.—I forgot to say that he looked round at the garden and said, very loud and strong: ‘Oh, what a lovely place you’ve got;’ just as if he’d never seen it before.”

The room had been growing dark and drowsy; the afternoon sun sent one heavy shaft of powdered gold across it, which fell with an intangible solemnity upon the empty seat of Mary Gray, for the younger women had left the court before the more recent of the investigations. Mrs. Duke was still asleep, and Innocent Smith, looking like a large hunchback in the twilight, was bending closer and closer to his paper toys. But the five men really engaged in the controversy, and concerned not to convince the tribunal but to convince each other, still sat round the table like the Committee of Public Safety.

Suddenly Moses Gould banged one big scientific book on top of another, cocked his little legs up against the table, tipped his chair backwards so far as to be in direct danger of falling over, emitted a startling and prolonged whistle like a steam engine, and asserted that it was all his eye.

When asked by Moon what was all his eye, he banged down behind the books again and answered with considerable excitement, throwing his papers about. “All those fairy–tales you’ve been reading out,” he said. “Oh! don’t talk to me! I ain’t littery and that, but I know fairy–tales when I hear ’em. I got a bit stumped in some of the philosophical bits and felt inclined to go out for a B. and S. But we’re living in West ‘Ampstead and not in ‘Ell; and the long and the short of it is that some things ‘appen and some things don’t ‘appen. Those are the things that don’t ‘appen.”

“I thought,” said Moon gravely, “that we quite clearly explained—”

“Oh yes, old chap, you quite clearly explained,” assented Mr. Gould with extraordinary volubility. “You’d explain an elephant off the doorstep, you would. I ain’t a clever chap like you; but I ain’t a born natural, Michael Moon, and when there’s an elephant on my doorstep I don’t listen to no explanations. ‘It’s got a trunk,’ I says.—‘My trunk,’ you says: ‘I’m fond of travellin,’ and a change does me good.’—‘But the blasted thing’s got tusks,’ I says.—‘Don’t look a gift ‘orse in the mouth,’ you says, ‘but thank the goodness and the graice that on your birth ‘as smiled.’—‘But it’s nearly as big as the ‘ouse,’ I says.—‘That’s the bloomin’ perspective,’ you says, ‘and the sacred magic of distance.’—‘Why, the elephant’s trumpetin’ like the Day of Judgement,’ I says.—‘That’s your own conscience a–talking to you, Moses Gould,’ you says in a grive and tender voice.
Well, I ‘ave got a conscience as much as you. I don’t believe most of the things they tell you in church on Sundays; and I don’t believe these ‘ere things any more because you goes on about ’em as if you was in church. I believe an elephant’s a great big ugly dingerous beast—and I believe Smith’s another.”

“Do you mean to say,” asked Inglewood, “that you still doubt the evidence of exculpation we have brought forward?”

“Yes, I do still doubt it,” said Gould warmly. “It’s all a bit too far–fetched, and some of it a bit too far off. ‘Ow can we test all those tales? ‘Ow can we drop in and buy the ‘Pink ‘Un’ at the railway station at Kosky Wosky or whatever it was? ‘Ow can we go and do a gargle at the saloon–bar on top of the Sierra Mountains? But anybody can go and see Bunting’s boarding–house at Worthing.”

Moon regarded him with an expression of real or assumed surprise.

“Any one,” continued Gould, “can call on Mr. Trip.”

“It is a comforting thought,” replied Michael with restraint; “but why should any one call on Mr. Trip?”

“For just exactly the sime reason,” cried the excited Moses, hammering on the table with both hands, “for just exactly the sime reason that he should communicate with Messrs. ‘Anbury and Bootle of Paternoster Row and with Miss Gridley’s ‘igh class Academy at ‘Endon, and with old Lady Bullingdon who lives at Penge.”

“Again, to go at once to the moral roots of life,” said Michael, “why is it among the duties of man to communicate with old Lady Bullingdon who lives at Penge?”

“It ain’t one of the duties of man,” said Gould, “nor one of his pleasures, either, I can tell you. She takes the crumpet, does Lady Bullingdon at Penge. But it’s one of the duties of a prosecutor pursuin’ the innocent, blameless butterfly career of your friend Smith, and it’s the sime with all the others I mentioned.”

“But why do you bring in these people here?” asked Inglewood.

“Why! Because we’ve got proof enough to sink a steamboat,” roared Moses; “because I’ve got the papers in my very ‘and; because your precious Innocent is a blackguard and ‘ome smasher, and these are the ‘omes he’s smashed. I don’t set up for a ‘oly man; but I wouldn’t ‘ave all those poor girls on my conscience for something. And I think a chap that’s capable of deserting and perhaps killing ’em all is about capable of cracking a crib or shootin’ an old schoolmaster—so I don’t care much about the other yarns one way or another.”

“I think,” said Dr. Cyrus Pym with a refined cough, “that we are approaching
this matter rather irregularly. This is really the fourth charge on the charge sheet, and perhaps I had better put it before you in an ordered and scientific manner.”

Nothing but a faint groan from Michael broke the silence of the darkening room.
CHAPTER IV

THE WILD WEDDINGS; OR, THE POLYGAMY CHARGE

“A modern man,” said Dr. Cyrus Pym, “must, if he be thoughtful, approach the problem of marriage with some caution. Marriage is a stage—doubtless a suitable stage—in the long advance of mankind towards a goal which we cannot as yet conceive; which we are not, perhaps, as yet fitted even to desire. What, gentlemen, is the ethical position of marriage? Have we outlived it?”

“Outlived it?” broke out Moon; “why, nobody’s ever survived it! Look at all the people married since Adam and Eve—and all as dead as mutton.”

“This is no doubt an inter–pellation joc’lar in its character,” said Dr. Pym frigidly. “I cannot tell what may be Mr. Moon’s matured and ethical view of marriage—”

“I can tell,” said Michael savagely, out of the gloom. “Marriage is a duel to the death, which no man of honour should decline.”

“Michael,” said Arthur Inglewood in a low voice, “you MUST keep quiet.”

“Mr. Moon,” said Pym with exquisite good temper, “probably regards the institution in a more antiquated manner. Probably he would make it stringent and uniform. He would treat divorce in some great soul of steel—the divorce of a Julius Caesar or of a Salt Ring Robinson—exactly as he would treat some no–account tramp or labourer who scoots from his wife. Science has views broader and more humane. Just as murder for the scientist is a thirst for absolute destruction, just as theft for the scientist is a hunger for monotonous acquisition, so polygamy for the scientist is an extreme development of the instinct for variety. A man thus afflicted is incapable of constancy. Doubtless there is a physical cause for this flitting from flower to flower—as there is, doubtless, for the intermittent groaning which appears to afflict Mr. Moon at the present moment. Our own world–scorning Winterbottom has even dared to say, ‘For a certain rare and fine physical type polygamy is but the realization of the variety of females, as comradeship is the realization of the variety of males.’ In any case, the type that tends to variety is recognized by all authoritative inquirers. Such a type, if the widower of a negress, does in many ascertained cases espouse en seconde noces an albino; such a type, when freed from the gigantic embraces of a female Patagonian, will often evolve from its own imaginative instinct the consoling figure of an Eskimo. To such a type there can be no doubt that the
prisoner belongs. If blind doom and unbearable temptation constitute any slight excuse for a man, there is no doubt that he has these excuses.

“Earlier in the inquiry the defence showed real chivalric ideality in admitting half of our story without further dispute. We should like to acknowledge and imitate so eminently large–hearted a style by conceding also that the story told by Curate Percy about the canoe, the weir, and the young wife seems to be substantially true. Apparently Smith did marry a young woman he had nearly run down in a boat; it only remains to be considered whether it would not have been kinder of him to have murdered her instead of marrying her. In confirmation of this fact I can now con–cede to the defence an unquestionable record of such a marriage.”

So saying, he handed across to Michael a cutting from the “Maidenhead Gazette” which distinctly recorded the marriage of the daughter of a “coach,” a tutor well known in the place, to Mr. Innocent Smith, late of Brakespeare College, Cambridge.

When Dr. Pym resumed it was realized that his face had grown at once both tragic and triumphant.

“I pause upon this pre–liminary fact,” he said seriously, “because this fact alone would give us the victory, were we aspiring after victory and not after truth. As far as the personal and domestic problem holds us, that problem is solved. Dr. Warner and I entered this house at an instant of highly emotional diff’culty. England’s Warner has entered many houses to save human kind from sickness; this time he entered to save an innocent lady from a walking pestilence. Smith was just about to carry away a young girl from this house; his cab and bag were at the very door. He had told her she was going to await the marriage license at the house of his aunt. That aunt,” continued Cyrus Pym, his face darkening grandly—“that visionary aunt had been the dancing will–o’–the–wisp who had led many a high–souled maiden to her doom. Into how many virginal ears has he whispered that holy word? When he said ‘aunt’ there glowed about her all the merriment and high morality of the Anglo–Saxon home. Kettles began to hum, pussy cats to purr, in that very wild cab that was being driven to destruction.”

Inglewood looked up, to find, to his astonishment (as many another denizen of the eastern hemisphere has found), that the American was not only perfectly serious, but was really eloquent and affecting—when the difference of the hemispheres was adjusted.

“It is therefore atrociously evident that the man Smith has at least represented
himself to one innocent female of this house as an eligible bachelor, being, in fact, a married man. I agree with my colleague, Mr. Gould, that no other crime could approximate to this. As to whether what our ancestors called purity has any ultimate ethical value indeed, science hesitates with a high, proud hesitation. But what hesitation can there be about the baseness of a citizen who ventures, by brutal experiments upon living females, to anticipate the verdict of science on such a point?

“The woman mentioned by Curate Percy as living with Smith in Highbury may or may not be the same as the lady he married in Maidenhead. If one short sweet spell of constancy and heart repose interrupted the plunging torrent of his profligate life, we will not deprive him of that long past possibility. After that conjectural date, alas, he seems to have plunged deeper and deeper into the shaking quagmires of infidelity and shame.”

Dr. Pym closed his eyes, but the unfortunate fact that there was no more light left this familiar signal without its full and proper moral effect. After a pause, which almost partook of the character of prayer, he continued.

“The first instance of the accused’s repeated and irregular nuptials,” he exclaimed, “comes from Lady Bullingdon, who expresses herself with the high haughtiness which must be excused in those who look out upon all mankind from the turrets of a Norman and ancestral keep. The communication she has sent to us runs as follows:—

“Lady Bullingdon recalls the painful incident to which reference is made, and has no desire to deal with it in detail. The girl Polly Green was a perfectly adequate dressmaker, and lived in the village for about two years. Her unattached condition was bad for her as well as for the general morality of the village. Lady Bullingdon, therefore, allowed it to be understood that she favoured the marriage of the young woman. The villagers, naturally wishing to oblige Lady Bullingdon, came forward in several cases; and all would have been well had it not been for the deplorable eccentricity or depravity of the girl Green herself. Lady Bullingdon supposes that where there is a village there must be a village idiot, and in her village, it seems, there was one of these wretched creatures. Lady Bullingdon only saw him once, and she is quite aware that it is really difficult to distinguish between actual idiots and the ordinary heavy type of the rural lower classes. She noticed, however, the startling smallness of his head in comparison to the rest of his body; and, indeed, the fact of his having appeared upon election day wearing the rosette of both the two opposing parties appears to Lady Bullingdon to put the matter quite beyond doubt. Lady
Bullingdon was astounded to learn that this afflicted being had put himself forward as one of the suitors of the girl in question. Lady Bullingdon’s nephew interviewed the wretch upon the point, telling him that he was a ‘donkey’ to dream of such a thing, and actually received, along with an imbecile grin, the answer that donkeys generally go after carrots. But Lady Bullingdon was yet further amazed to find the unhappy girl inclined to accept this monstrous proposal, though she was actually asked in marriage by Garth, the undertaker, a man in a far superior position to her own. Lady Bullingdon could not, of course, countenance such an arrangement for a moment, and the two unhappy persons escaped for a clandestine marriage. Lady Bullingdon cannot exactly recall the man’s name, but thinks it was Smith. He was always called in the village the Innocent. Later, Lady Bullingdon believes he murdered Green in a mental outbreak.”

“The next communication,” proceeded Pym, “is more conspicuous for brevity, but I am of the opinion that it will adequately convey the upshot. It is dated from the offices of Messrs. Hanbury and Bootle, publishers, and is as follows:—

“Sir,—Yrs. rcd. and conts. noted. Rumour re typewriter possibly refers to a Miss Blake or similar name, left here nine years ago to marry an organ–grinder. Case was undoubtedly curious, and attracted police attention. Girl worked excellently till about Oct. 1907, when apparently went mad. Record was written at the time, part of which I enclose.—Yrs., etc., W. Trip.

“The fuller statement runs as follows:—

“On October 12 a letter was sent from this office to Messrs. Bernard and Juke, bookbinders. Opened by Mr. Juke, it was found to contain the following: ‘Sir, our Mr. Trip will call at 3, as we wish to know whether it is really decided 00000073bb!!!!!xy.’ To this Mr. Juke, a person of a playful mind, returned the answer: ‘Sir, I am in a position to give it as my most decided opinion that it is not really decided that 00000073bb!!!!!xy. Yrs., etc., ‘J. Juke.’

“On receiving this extraordinary reply, our Mr. Trip asked for the original letter sent from him, and found that the typewriter had indeed substituted these demented hieroglyphics for the sentences really dictated to her. Our Mr. Trip interviewed the girl, fearing that she was in an unbalanced state, and was not much reassured when she merely remarked that she always went like that when she heard the barrel organ. Becoming yet more hysterical and extravagant, she made a series of most improbable statements—as, that she was engaged to the barrel–organ man, that he was in the habit of serenading her on that instrument, that she was in the habit of playing back to him upon the typewriter (in the style
of King Richard and Blondel), and that the organ man’s musical ear was so exquisite and his adoration of herself so ardent that he could detect the note of the different letters on the machine, and was enraptured by them as by a melody. To all these statements of course our Mr. Trip and the rest of us only paid that sort of assent that is paid to persons who must as quickly as possible be put in the charge of their relations. But on our conducting the lady downstairs, her story received the most startling and even exasperating confirmation; for the organ–grinder, an enormous man with a small head and manifestly a fellow–lunatic, had pushed his barrel organ in at the office doors like a battering–ram, and was boisterously demanding his alleged fiancee. When I myself came on the scene he was flinging his great, ape–like arms about and reciting a poem to her. But we were used to lunatics coming and reciting poems in our office, and we were not quite prepared for what followed. The actual verse he uttered began, I think,

‘O vivid, inviolate head,
Ringed—’

but he never got any further. Mr. Trip made a sharp movement towards him, and the next moment the giant picked up the poor lady typewriter like a doll, sat her on top of the organ, ran it with a crash out of the office doors, and raced away down the street like a flying wheelbarrow. I put the police upon the matter; but no trace of the amazing pair could be found. I was sorry myself; for the lady was not only pleasant but unusually cultivated for her position. As I am leaving the service of Messrs. Hanbury and Bootle, I put these things in a record and leave it with them. (Signed) Aubrey Clarke, Publishers’ Reader.

“And the last document,” said Dr. Pym complacently, “is from one of those high–souled women who have in this age introduced your English girlhood to hockey, the higher mathematics, and every form of ideality.

“Dear Sir (she writes),—I have no objection to telling you the facts about the absurd incident you mention; though I would ask you to communicate them with some caution, for such things, however entertaining in the abstract, are not always auxiliary to the success of a girls’ school. The truth is this: I wanted some one to deliver a lecture on a philological or historical question—a lecture which, while containing solid educational matter, should be a little more popular and entertaining than usual, as it was the last lecture of the term. I remembered that a Mr. Smith of Cambridge had written somewhere or other an amusing essay about his own somewhat ubiquitous name—an essay which showed considerable knowledge of genealogy and topography. I wrote to him, asking if he would
come and give us a bright address upon English surnames; and he did. It was very bright, almost too bright. To put the matter otherwise, by the time that he was halfway through it became apparent to the other mistresses and myself that the man was totally and entirely off his head. He began rationally enough by dealing with the two departments of place names and trade names, and he said (quite rightly, I dare say) that the loss of all significance in names was an instance of the deadening of civilization. But then he went on calmly to maintain that every man who had a place name ought to go to live in that place, and that every man who had a trade name ought instantly to adopt that trade; that people named after colours should always dress in those colours, and that people named after trees or plants (such as Beech or Rose) ought to surround and decorate themselves with these vegetables. In a slight discussion that arose afterwards among the elder girls the difficulties of the proposal were clearly, and even eagerly, pointed out. It was urged, for instance, by Miss Younghusband that it was substantially impossible for her to play the part assigned to her; Miss Mann was in a similar dilemma, from which no modern views on the sexes could apparently extricate her; and some young ladies, whose surnames happened to be Low, Coward, and Craven, were quite enthusiastic against the idea. But all this happened afterwards. What happened at the crucial moment was that the lecturer produced several horseshoes and a large iron hammer from his bag, announced his immediate intention of setting up a smithy in the neighbourhood, and called on every one to rise in the same cause as for a heroic revolution. The other mistresses and I attempted to stop the wretched man, but I must confess that by an accident this very intercession produced the worst explosion of his insanity. He was waving the hammer, and wildly demanding the names of everybody; and it so happened that Miss Brown, one of the younger teachers, was wearing a brown dress—a reddish–brown dress that went quietly enough with the warmer colour of her hair, as well she knew. She was a nice girl, and nice girls do know about those things. But when our maniac discovered that we really had a Miss Brown who WAS brown, his idee fixe blew up like a powder magazine, and there, in the presence of all the mistresses and girls, he publicly proposed to the lady in the red–brown dress. You can imagine the effect of such a scene at a girls’ school. At least, if you fail to imagine it, I certainly fail to describe it.

“Of course, the anarchy died down in a week or two, and I can think of it now as a joke. There was only one curious detail, which I will tell you, as you say your inquiry is vital; but I should desire you to consider it a little more confidential than the rest. Miss Brown, who was an excellent girl in every way,
did quite suddenly and surreptitiously leave us only a day or two afterwards. I should never have thought that her head would be the one to be really turned by so absurd an excitement.—Believe me, yours faithfully, Ada Gridley.

“I think,” said Pym, with a really convincing simplicity and seriousness, “that these letters speak for themselves.”

Mr. Moon rose for the last time in a darkness that gave no hint of whether his native gravity was mixed with his native irony.

“Throughout this inquiry,” he said, “but especially in this its closing phase, the prosecution has perpetually relied upon one argument; I mean the fact that no one knows what has become of all the unhappy women apparently seduced by Smith. There is no sort of proof that they were murdered, but that implication is perpetually made when the question is asked as to how they died. Now I am not interested in how they died, or when they died, or whether they died. But I am interested in another analogous question—that of how they were born, and when they were born, and whether they were born. Do not misunderstand me. I do not dispute the existence of these women, or the veracity of those who have witnessed to them. I merely remark on the notable fact that only one of these victims, the Maidenhead girl, is described as having any home or parents. All the rest are boarders or birds of passage—a guest, a solitary dressmaker, a bachelor–girl doing typewriting. Lady Bullingdon, looking from her turrets, which she bought from the Whartons with the old soap–boiler’s money when she jumped at marrying an unsuccessful gentleman from Ulster—Lady Bullingdon, looking out from those turrets, did really see an object which she describes as Green. Mr. Trip, of Hanbury and Bootle, really did have a typewriter betrothed to Smith. Miss Gridley, though idealistic, is absolutely honest. She did house, feed, and teach a young woman whom Smith succeeded in decoying away. We admit that all these women really lived. But we still ask whether they were ever born?”

“Oh, crikey!” said Moses Gould, stifled with amusement.

“There could hardly,” interposed Pym with a quiet smile, “be a better instance of the neglect of true scientific process. The scientist, when once convinced of the fact of vitality and consciousness, would infer from these the previous process of generation.”

“If these gals,” said Gould impatiently—“if these gals were all alive (all alive O!) I’d chance a fiver they were all born.”

“You’d lose your fiver,” said Michael, speaking gravely out of the gloom. “All those admirable ladies were alive. They were more alive for having come into contact with Smith. They were all quite definitely alive, but only one of
them was ever born.”

“Are you asking us to believe—” began Dr. Pym.

“I am asking you a second question,” said Moon sternly. “Can the court now sitting throw any light on a truly singular circumstance? Dr. Pym, in his interesting lecture on what are called, I believe, the relations of the sexes, said that Smith was the slave of a lust for variety which would lead a man first to a negress and then to an albino, first to a Patagonian giantess and then to a tiny Eskimo. But is there any evidence of such variety here? Is there any trace of a gigantic Patagonian in the story? Was the typewriter an Eskimo? So picturesque a circumstance would not surely have escaped remark. Was Lady Bullingdon’s dressmaker a negress? A voice in my bosom answers, ‘No!’ Lady Bullingdon, I am sure, would think a negress so conspicuous as to be almost Socialistic, and would feel something a little rakish even about an albino.

“But was there in Smith’s taste any such variety as the learned doctor describes? So far as our slight materials go, the very opposite seems to be the case. We have only one actual description of any of the prisoner’s wives—the short but highly poetic account by the aesthetic curate. ‘Her dress was the colour of spring, and her hair of autumn leaves.’ Autumn leaves, of course, are of various colours, some of which would be rather startling in hair (green, for instance); but I think such an expression would be most naturally used of the shades from red–brown to red, especially as ladies with their coppery–coloured hair do frequently wear light artistic greens. Now when we come to the next wife, we find the eccentric lover, when told he is a donkey, answering that donkeys always go after carrots; a remark which Lady Bullingdon evidently regarded as pointless and part of the natural table–talk of a village idiot, but which has an obvious meaning if we suppose that Polly’s hair was red. Passing to the next wife, the one he took from the girls’ school, we find Miss Gridley noticing that the schoolgirl in question wore ‘a reddish–brown dress, that went quietly enough with the warmer colour of her hair.’ In other words, the colour of the girl’s hair was something redder than red–brown. Lastly, the romantic organ–grinder declaimed in the office some poetry that only got as far as the words,—

‘O vivid, inviolate head,
Ringed—’

But I think that a wide study of the worst modern poets will enable us to guess that ‘ringed with a glory of red,’ or ‘ringed with its passionate red,’ was the line that rhymed to ‘head.’ In this case once more, therefore, there is good reason to
suppose that Smith fell in love with a girl with some sort of auburn or darkish-red hair—rather,” he said, looking down at the table, “rather like Miss Gray’s hair.”

Cyrus Pym was leaning forward with lowered eyelids, ready with one of his more pedantic interpellations; but Moses Gould suddenly struck his forefinger on his nose, with an expression of extreme astonishment and intelligence in his brilliant eyes.

“Mr. Moon’s contention at present,” interposed Pym, “is not, even if veracious, inconsistent with the lunatico–criminal view of I. Smith, which we have nailed to the mast. Science has long anticipated such a complication. An incurable attraction to a particular type of physical woman is one of the commonest of criminal per–versities, and when not considered narrowly, but in the light of induction and evolution—”

“At this late stage,” said Michael Moon very quietly, “I may perhaps relieve myself of a simple emotion that has been pressing me throughout the proceedings, by saying that induction and evolution may go and boil themselves. The Missing Link and all that is well enough for kids, but I’m talking about things we know here. All we know of the Missing Link is that he is missing—and he won’t be missed either. I know all about his human head and his horrid tail; they belong to a very old game called ‘Heads I win, tails you lose.’ If you do find a fellow’s bones, it proves he lived a long while ago; if you don’t find his bones, it proves how long ago he lived. That is the game you’ve been playing with this Smith affair. Because Smith’s head is small for his shoulders you call him microcephalous; if it had been large, you’d have called it water–on–the–brain. As long as poor old Smith’s seraglio seemed pretty various, variety was the sign of madness: now, because it’s turning out to be a bit monochrome—now monotony is the sign of madness. I suffer from all the disadvantages of being a grown–up person, and I’m jolly well going to get some of the advantages too; and with all politeness I propose not to be bullied with long words instead of short reasons, or consider your business a triumphant progress merely because you’re always finding out that you were wrong. Having relieved myself of these feelings, I have merely to add that I regard Dr. Pym as an ornament to the world far more beautiful than the Parthenon, or the monument on Bunker’s Hill, and that I propose to resume and conclude my remarks on the many marriages of Mr. Innocent Smith.

“Besides this red hair, there is another unifying thread that runs through these scattered incidents. There is something very peculiar and suggestive about the
names of these women. Mr. Trip, you will remember, said he thought the typewriter’s name was Blake, but could not remember exactly. I suggest that it might have been Black, and in that case we have a curious series: Miss Green in Lady Bullingdon’s village; Miss Brown at the Hendon School; Miss Black at the publishers. A chord of colours, as it were, which ends up with Miss Gray at Beacon House, West Hampstead.”

Amid a dead silence Moon continued his exposition. “What is the meaning of this queer coincidence about colours? Personally I cannot doubt for a moment that these names are purely arbitrary names, assumed as part of some general scheme or joke. I think it very probable that they were taken from a series of costumes—that Polly Green only meant Polly (or Mary) when in green, and that Mary Gray only means Mary (or Polly) when in gray. This would explain—”

Cyrus Pym was standing up rigid and almost pallid.

“Do you actually mean to suggest—” he cried.

“Yes,” said Michael; “I do mean to suggest that. Innocent Smith has had many wooings, and many weddings for all I know; but he has had only one wife. She was sitting on that chair an hour ago, and is now talking to Miss Duke in the garden.

“Yes, Innocent Smith has behaved here, as he has on hundreds of other occasions, upon a plain and perfectly blameless principle. It is odd and extravagant in the modern world, but not more than any other principle plainly applied in the modern world would be. His principle can be quite simply stated: he refuses to die while he is still alive. He seeks to remind himself, by every electric shock to the intellect, that he is still a man alive, walking on two legs about the world. For this reason he fires bullets at his best friends; for this reason he arranges ladders and collapsible chimneys to steal his own property; for this reason he goes plodding around a whole planet to get back to his own home; and for this reason he has been in the habit of taking the woman whom he loved with a permanent loyalty, and leaving her about (so to speak) at schools, boarding–houses, and places of business, so that he might recover her again and again with a raid and a romantic elopement. He seriously sought by a perpetual recapture of his bride to keep alive the sense of her perpetual value, and the perils that should be run for her sake.

“So far his motives are clear enough; but perhaps his convictions are not quite so clear. I think Innocent Smith has an idea at the bottom of all this. I am by no means sure that I believe it myself, but I am quite sure that it is worth a man’s uttering and defending.
“The idea that Smith is attacking is this. Living in an entangled civilization, we have come to think certain things wrong which are not wrong at all. We have come to think outbreak and exuberance, banging and barging, rotting and wrecking, wrong. In themselves they are not merely pardonable; they are unimpeachable. There is nothing wicked about firing a pistol off even at a friend, so long as you do not mean to hit him and know you won’t. It is no more wrong than throwing a pebble at the sea—less, for you do occasionally hit the sea. There is nothing wrong in bashing down a chimney-pot and breaking through a roof, so long as you are not injuring the life or property of other men. It is no more wrong to choose to enter a house from the top than to choose to open a packing-case from the bottom. There is nothing wicked about walking round the world and coming back to your own house; it is no more wicked than walking round the garden and coming back to your own house. And there is nothing wicked about picking up your wife here, there, and everywhere, if, forsaking all others, you keep only to her so long as you both shall live. It is as innocent as playing a game of hide-and-seek in the garden. You associate such acts with blackguardism by a mere snobbish association, as you think there is something vaguely vile about going (or being seen going) into a pawnbroker’s or a public-house. You think there is something squalid and commonplace about such a connection. You are mistaken.

“This man’s spiritual power has been precisely this, that he has distinguished between custom and creed. He has broken the conventions, but he has kept the commandments. It is as if a man were found gambling wildly in a gambling hell, and you found that he only played for trouser buttons. It is as if you found a man making a clandestine appointment with a lady at a Covent Garden ball, and then you found it was his grandmother. Everything is ugly and discreditable, except the facts; everything is wrong about him, except that he has done no wrong.

“It will then be asked, ‘Why does Innocent Smith continue far into his middle age a farcical existence, that exposes him to so many false charges?’ To this I merely answer that he does it because he really is happy, because he really is hilarious, because he really is a man and alive. He is so young that climbing garden trees and playing silly practical jokes are still to him what they once were to us all. And if you ask me yet again why he alone among men should be fed with such inexhaustible follies, I have a very simple answer to that, though it is one that will not be approved.

“There is but one answer, and I am sorry if you don’t like it. If Innocent is happy, it is because he IS innocent. If he can defy the conventions, it is just
because he can keep the commandments. It is just because he does not want to kill but to excite to life that a pistol is still as exciting to him as it is to a schoolboy. It is just because he does not want to steal, because he does not covet his neighbour’s goods, that he has captured the trick (oh, how we all long for it!), the trick of coveting his own goods. It is just because he does not want to commit adultery that he achieves the romance of sex; it is just because he loves one wife that he has a hundred honeymoons. If he had really murdered a man, if he had really deserted a woman, he would not be able to feel that a pistol or a love-letter was like a song—at least, not a comic song.”

“Do not imagine, please, that any such attitude is easy to me or appeals in any particular way to my sympathies. I am an Irishman, and a certain sorrow is in my bones, bred either of the persecutions of my creed, or of my creed itself. Speaking singly, I feel as if man was tied to tragedy, and there was no way out of the trap of old age and doubt. But if there is a way out, then, by Christ and St. Patrick, this is the way out. If one could keep as happy as a child or a dog, it would be by being as innocent as a child, or as sinless as a dog. Barely and brutally to be good—that may be the road, and he may have found it. Well, well, well, I see a look of skepticism on the face of my old friend Moses. Mr. Gould does not believe that being perfectly good in all respects would make a man merry.”

“No,” said Gould, with an unusual and convincing gravity; “I do not believe that being perfectly good in all respects would make a man merry.”

“Well,” said Michael quietly, “will you tell me one thing? Which of us has ever tried it?”

A silence ensued, rather like the silence of some long geological epoch which awaits the emergence of some unexpected type; for there rose at last in the stillness a massive figure that the other men had almost completely forgotten.

“Well, gentlemen,” said Dr. Warner cheerfully, “I’ve been pretty well entertained with all this pointless and incompetent tomfoolery for a couple of days; but it seems to be wearing rather thin, and I’m engaged for a city dinner. Among the hundred flowers of futility on both sides I was unable to detect any sort of reason why a lunatic should be allowed to shoot me in the back garden.”

He had settled his silk hat on his head and gone out sailing placidly to the garden gate, while the almost wailing voice of Pym still followed him: “But really the bullet missed you by several feet.” And another voice added: “The bullet missed him by several years.”

There was a long and mainly unmeaning silence, and then
Moon said suddenly, “We have been sitting with a ghost. Dr. Herbert Warner died years ago.”
CHAPTER V

HOW THE GREAT WIND WENT FROM BEACON HOUSE

Mary was walking between Diana and Rosamund slowly up and down the garden; they were silent, and the sun had set. Such spaces of daylight as remained open in the west were of a warm–tinted white, which can be compared to nothing but a cream cheese; and the lines of plumy cloud that ran across them had a soft but vivid violet bloom, like a violet smoke. All the rest of the scene swept and faded away into a dove–like gray, and seemed to melt and mount into Mary’s dark–gray figure until she seemed clothed with the garden and the skies. There was something in these last quiet colours that gave her a setting and a supremacy; and the twilight, which concealed Diana’s statelier figure and Rosamund’s braver array, exhibited and emphasized her, leaving her the lady of the garden, and alone.

When they spoke at last it was evident that a conversation long fallen silent was being revived.

“But where is your husband taking you?” asked Diana in her practical voice.

“To an aunt,” said Mary; “that’s just the joke. There really is an aunt, and we left the children with her when I arranged to be turned out of the other boarding–house down the road. We never take more than a week of this kind of holiday, but sometimes we take two of them together.”

“Does the aunt mind much?” asked Rosamund innocently. “Of course, I dare say it’s very narrow–minded and—what’s that other word?—you know, what Goliath was—but I’ve known many aunts who would think it—well, silly.”

“Silly?” cried Mary with great heartiness. “Oh, my Sunday hat! I should think it was silly! But what do you expect?

He really is a good man, and it might have been snakes or something.”

“Snakes?” inquired Rosamund, with a slightly puzzled interest.

“Uncle Harry kept snakes, and said they loved him,” replied Mary with perfect simplicity. “Auntie let him have them in his pockets, but not in the bedroom.”

“And you—” began Diana, knitting her dark brows a little.

“Oh, I do as auntie did,” said Mary; “as long as we’re not away from the children more than a fortnight together I play the game. He calls me ‘Manalive’; and you must write it all one word, or he’s quite flustered.”

“But if men want things like that,” began Diana.
“Oh, what’s the good of talking about men?” cried Mary impatiently; “why, one might as well be a lady novelist or some horrid thing. There aren’t any men. There are no such people. There’s a man; and whoever he is he’s quite different.”

“So there is no safety,” said Diana in a low voice.

“Oh, I don’t know,” answered Mary, lightly enough; “there’s only two things generally true of them. At certain curious times they’re just fit to take care of us, and they’re never fit to take care of themselves.”

“There is a gale getting up,” said Rosamund suddenly. “Look at those trees over there, a long way off, and the clouds going quicker.”

“I know what you’re thinking about,” said Mary; “and don’t you be silly fools. Don’t you listen to the lady novelists. You go down the king’s highway; for God’s truth, it is God’s. Yes, my dear Michael will often be extremely untidy. Arthur Inglewood will be worse—he’ll be untidy. But what else are all the trees and clouds for, you silly kittens?”

“The clouds and trees are all waving about,” said Rosamund. “There is a storm coming, and it makes me feel quite excited, somehow. Michael is really rather like a storm: he frightens me and makes me happy.”

“Don’t you be frightened,” said Mary. “All over, these men have one advantage; they are the sort that go out.”

A sudden thrust of wind through the trees drifted the dying leaves along the path, and they could hear the far-off trees roaring faintly.

“I mean,” said Mary, “they are the kind that look outwards and get interested in the world. It doesn’t matter a bit whether it’s arguing, or bicycling, or breaking down the ends of the earth as poor old Innocent does. Stick to the man who looks out of the window and tries to understand the world. Keep clear of the man who looks in at the window and tries to understand you. When poor old Adam had gone out gardening (Arthur will go out gardening), the other sort came along and wormed himself in, nasty old snake.”

“You agree with your aunt,” said Rosamund, smiling: “no snakes in the bedroom.”

“I didn’t agree with my aunt very much,” replied Mary simply, “but I think she was right to let Uncle Harry collect dragons and griffins, so long as it got him out of the house.”

Almost at the same moment lights sprang up inside the darkened house, turning the two glass doors into the garden into gates of beaten gold. The golden gates were burst open, and the enormous Smith, who had sat like a clumsy statue
for so many hours, came flying and turning cart-wheels down the lawn and shouting, “Acquitted! acquitted!” Echoing the cry, Michael scampered across the lawn to Rosamund and wildly swung her into a few steps of what was supposed to be a waltz. But the company knew Innocent and Michael by this time, and their extravagances were gaily taken for granted; it was far more extraordinary that Arthur Inglewood walked straight up to Diana and kissed her as if it had been his sister’s birthday. Even Dr. Pym, though he refrained from dancing, looked on with real benevolence; for indeed the whole of the absurd revelation had disturbed him less than the others; he half supposed that such irresponsible tribunals and insane discussions were part of the mediaeval mummeries of the Old Land.

While the tempest tore the sky as with trumpets, window after window was lighted up in the house within; and before the company, broken with laughter and the buffeting of the wind, had groped their way to the house again, they saw that the great apish figure of Innocent Smith had clambered out of his own attic window, and roaring again and again, “Beacon House!” whirled round his head a huge log or trunk from the wood fire below, of which the river of crimson flame and purple smoke drove out on the deafening air.

He was evident enough to have been seen from three counties; but when the wind died down, and the party, at the top of their evening’s merriment, looked again for Mary and for him, they were not to be found.
THE BALL AND THE CROSS

G. K. CHESTERTON
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

THE BALL AND THE CROSS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I
A DISCUSSION SOMEWHAT IN THE AIR

II
THE RELIGION OF THE STIPENDIARY MAGISTRATE

III
SOME OLD CURiosITIES

IV
A DISCUSSION AT DAWN

V
THE PEACEMAKER

VI
THE OTHER PHILOSOPHER

VII
THE VILLAGE OF GRASSLEY–IN–THE–HOLE

VIII
AN INTERLUDE OF ARGUMENT

IX
THE STRANGE LADY

X
THE SWORDS REJOINED

XI
A SCANDAL IN THE VILLAGE

XII
THE DESERT ISLAND

XIII
THE GARDEN OF PEACE

XIV
A MUSEUM OF SOULS
I

A DISCUSSION SOMEWHAT IN THE AIR

The flying ship of Professor Lucifer sang through the skies like a silver arrow; the bleak white steel of it, gleaming in the bleak blue emptiness of the evening. That it was far above the earth was no expression for it; to the two men in it, it seemed to be far above the stars. The professor had himself invented the flying machine, and had also invented nearly everything in it. Every sort of tool or apparatus had, in consequence, to the full, that fantastic and distorted look which belongs to the miracles of science. For the world of science and evolution is far more nameless and elusive and like a dream than the world of poetry and religion; since in the latter images and ideas remain themselves eternally, while it is the whole idea of evolution that identities melt into each other as they do in a nightmare.

All the tools of Professor Lucifer were the ancient human tools gone mad, grown into unrecognizable shapes, forgetful of their origin, forgetful of their names. That thing which looked like an enormous key with three wheels was really a patent and very deadly revolver. That object which seemed to be created by the entanglement of two corkscrews was really the key. The thing which might have been mistaken for a tricycle turned upside–down was the inexpressibly important instrument to which the corkscrew was the key. All these things, as I say, the professor had invented; he had invented everything in the flying ship, with the exception, perhaps, of himself. This he had been born too late actually to inaugurate, but he believed at least, that he had considerably improved it.

There was, however, another man on board, so to speak, at the time. Him, also, by a curious coincidence, the professor had not invented, and him he had not even very greatly improved, though he had fished him up with a lasso out of his own back garden, in Western Bulgaria, with the pure object of improving him. He was an exceedingly holy man, almost entirely covered with white hair. You could see nothing but his eyes, and he seemed to talk with them. A monk of immense learning and acute intellect he had made himself happy in a little stone hut and a little stony garden in the Balkans, chiefly by writing the most crushing refutations of exposures of certain heresies, the last professors of which had been burnt (generally by each other) precisely 1,119 years previously. They were
really very plausible and thoughtful heresies, and it was really a creditable or even glorious circumstance, that the old monk had been intellectual enough to detect their fallacy; the only misfortune was that nobody in the modern world was intellectual enough even to understand their argument. The old monk, one of whose names was Michael, and the other a name quite impossible to remember or repeat in our Western civilization, had, however, as I have said, made himself quite happy while he was in a mountain hermitage in the society of wild animals. And now that his luck had lifted him above all the mountains in the society of a wild physicist, he made himself happy still.

“I have no intention, my good Michael,” said Professor Lucifer, “of endeavouring to convert you by argument. The imbecility of your traditions can be quite finally exhibited to anybody with mere ordinary knowledge of the world, the same kind of knowledge which teaches us not to sit in draughts or not to encourage friendliness in impecunious people. It is folly to talk of this or that demonstrating the rationalist philosophy. Everything demonstrates it. Rubbing shoulders with men of all kinds—”

“You will forgive me,” said the monk, meekly from under loads of white beard, “but I fear I do not understand; was it in order that I might rub my shoulder against men of all kinds that you put me inside this thing?”

“An entertaining retort, in the narrow and deductive manner of the Middle Ages,” replied the Professor, calmly, “but even upon your own basis I will illustrate my point. We are up in the sky. In your religion and all the religions, as far as I know (and I know everything), the sky is made the symbol of everything that is sacred and merciful. Well, now you are in the sky, you know better. Phrase it how you like, twist it how you like, you know that you know better. You know what are a man’s real feelings about the heavens, when he finds himself alone in the heavens, surrounded by the heavens. You know the truth, and the truth is this. The heavens are evil, the sky is evil, the stars are evil. This mere space, this mere quantity, terrifies a man more than tigers or the terrible plague. You know that since our science has spoken, the bottom has fallen out of the Universe. Now, heaven is the hopeless thing, more hopeless than any hell. Now, if there be any comfort for all your miserable progeny of morbid apes, it must be in the earth, underneath you, under the roots of the grass, in the place where hell was of old. The fiery crypts, the lurid cellars of the underworld, to which you once condemned the wicked, are hideous enough, but at least they are more homely than the heaven in which we ride. And the time will come when you will all hide in them, to escape the horror of the stars.”
“I hope you will excuse my interrupting you,” said Michael, with a slight 
cough, “but I have always noticed–”

“Go on, pray go on,” said Professor Lucifer, radiantly, “I really like to draw 
out your simple ideas.”

“Well, the fact is,” said the other, “that much as I admire your rhetoric and the 
rhetoric of your school, from a purely verbal point of view, such little study of 
you and your school in human history as I have been enabled to make has led me 
to–er–rather singular conclusion, which I find great difficulty in expressing, 
especially in a foreign language.”

“Come, come,” said the Professor, encouragingly, “I’ll help you out. How did 
my view strike you?”

“Well, the truth is, I know I don’t express it properly, but somehow it seemed 
to me that you always convey ideas of that kind with most eloquence, when–er–
when—”

“Oh! get on,” cried Lucifer, boisterously.

“Well, in point of fact when your flying ship is just going to run into 
something. I thought you wouldn’t mind my mentioning it, but it’s running into 
something now.”

Lucifer exploded with an oath and leapt erect, leaning hard upon the handle 
that acted as a helm to the vessel. For the last ten minutes they had been shooting 
downwards into great cracks and caverns of cloud. Now, through a sort of purple 
haze, could be seen comparatively near to them what seemed to be the upper part 
of a huge, dark orb or sphere, islanded in a sea of cloud. The Professor’s eyes 
were blazing like a maniac’s.

“It is a new world,” he cried, with a dreadful mirth. “It is a new planet and it 
shall bear my name. This star and not that other vulgar one shall be ‘Lucifer, sun 
of the morning.’ Here we will have no chartered lunacies, here we will have no 
gods. Here man shall be as innocent as the daisies, as innocent and as cruel–here 
the intellect–”

“There seems,” said Michael, timidly, “to be something sticking up in the 
middle of it.”

“So there is,” said the Professor, leaning over the side of the ship, his 
spectacles shining with intellectual excitement. “What can it be? It might of 
course be merely a–”

Then a shriek indescribable broke out of him of a sudden, and he flung up his 
arms like a lost spirit. The monk took the helm in a tired way; he did not seem 
much astonished for he came from an ignorant part of the world in which it is
not uncommon for lost spirits to shriek when they see the curious shape which
the Professor had just seen on the top of the mysterious ball, but he took the
helm only just in time, and by driving it hard to the left he prevented the flying
ship from smashing into St. Paul’s Cathedral.

A plain of sad-coloured cloud lay along the level of the top of the Cathedral
dome, so that the ball and the cross looked like a buoy riding on a leaden sea. As
the flying ship swept towards it, this plain of cloud looked as dry and definite
and rocky as any grey desert. Hence it gave to the mind and body a sharp and
unearthly sensation when the ship cut and sank into the cloud as into any
common mist, a thing without resistance. There was, as it were, a deadly shock
in the fact that there was no shock. It was as if they had cloven into ancient cliffs
like so much butter. But sensations awaited them which were much stranger than
those of sinking through the solid earth. For a moment their eyes and nostrils
were stopped with darkness and opaque cloud; then the darkness warmed into a
kind of brown fog. And far, far below them the brown fog fell until it warmed
into fire. Through the dense London atmosphere they could see below them the
flaming London lights; lights which lay beneath them in squares and oblongs of
fire. The fog and fire were mixed in a passionate vapour; you might say that the
fog was drowning the flames; or you might say that the flames had set the fog on
fire. Beside the ship and beneath it (for it swung just under the ball), the
immeasurable dome itself shot out and down into the dark like a combination of
voiceless cataracts. Or it was like some cyclopean sea-beast sitting above
London and letting down its tentacles bewilderingly on every side, a monstrosity
in that starless heaven. For the clouds that belonged to London had closed over
the heads of the voyagers sealing up the entrance of the upper air. They had
broken through a roof and come into a temple of twilight.

They were so near to the ball that Lucifer leaned his hand against it, holding
the vessel away, as men push a boat off from a bank. Above it the cross already
draped in the dark mists of the borderland was shadowy and more awful in shape
and size.

Professor Lucifer slapped his hand twice upon the surface of the great orb as if
he were caressing some enormous animal. “This is the fellow,” he said, “this is
the one for my money.”

“May I with all respect inquire,” asked the old monk, “what on earth you are
talking about?”

“Why this,” cried Lucifer, smiting the ball again, “here is the only symbol, my
boy. So fat. So satisfied. Not like that scraggy individual, stretching his arms in
stark weariness.” And he pointed up to the cross, his face dark with a grin. “I was telling you just now, Michael, that I can prove the best part of the rationalist case and the Christian humbug from any symbol you liked to give me, from any instance I came across. Here is an instance with a vengeance. What could possibly express your philosophy and my philosophy better than the shape of that cross and the shape of this ball? This globe is reasonable; that cross is unreasonable. It is a four–legged animal, with one leg longer than the others. The globe is inevitable. The cross is arbitrary. Above all the globe is at unity with itself; the cross is primarily and above all things at enmity with itself. The cross is the conflict of two hostile lines, of irreconcilable direction. That silent thing up there is essentially a collision, a crash, a struggle in stone. Pah! that sacred symbol of yours has actually given its name to a description of desperation and muddle. When we speak of men at once ignorant of each other and frustrated by each other, we say they are at cross–purposes. Away with the thing! The very shape of it is a contradiction in terms.”

“What you say is perfectly true,” said Michael, with serenity. “But we like contradictions in terms. Man is a contradiction in terms; he is a beast whose superiority to other beasts consists in having fallen. That cross is, as you say, an eternal collision; so am I. That is a struggle in stone. Every form of life is a struggle in flesh. The shape of the cross is irrational, just as the shape of the human animal is irrational. You say the cross is a quadruped with one limb longer than the rest. I say man is a quadruped who only uses two of his legs.”

The Professor frowned thoughtfully for an instant, and said: “Of course everything is relative, and I would not deny that the element of struggle and self–contradiction, represented by that cross, has a necessary place at a certain evolutionary stage. But surely the cross is the lower development and the sphere the higher. After all it is easy enough to see what is really wrong with Wren’s architectural arrangement.”

“And what is that, pray?” inquired Michael, meekly.

“The cross is on top of the ball,” said Professor Lucifer, simply. “That is surely wrong. The ball should be on top of the cross. The cross is a mere barbaric prop; the ball is perfection. The cross at its best is but the bitter tree of man’s history; the ball is the rounded, the ripe and final fruit. And the fruit should be at the top of the tree, not at the bottom of it.”

“Oh!” said the monk, a wrinkle coming into his forehead, “so you think that in a rationalistic scheme of symbolism the ball should be on top of the cross?”

“It sums up my whole allegory,” said the professor.
“Well, that is really very interesting,” resumed Michael slowly, “because I think in that case you would see a most singular effect, an effect that has generally been achieved by all those able and powerful systems which rationalism, or the religion of the ball, has produced to lead or teach mankind. You would see, I think, that thing happen which is always the ultimate embodiment and logical outcome of your logical scheme.”

“What are you talking about?” asked Lucifer. “What would happen?”

“I mean it would fall down,” said the monk, looking wistfully into the void.

Lucifer made an angry movement and opened his mouth to speak, but Michael, with all his air of deliberation, was proceeding before he could bring out a word.

“I once knew a man like you, Lucifer,” he said, with a maddening monotony and slowness of articulation. “He took this—”

“There is no man like me,” cried Lucifer, with a violence that shook the ship.

“As I was observing,” continued Michael, “this man also took the view that the symbol of Christianity was a symbol of savagery and all unreason. His history is rather amusing. It is also a perfect allegory of what happens to rationalists like yourself. He began, of course, by refusing to allow a crucifix in his house, or round his wife’s neck, or even in a picture. He said, as you say, that it was an arbitrary and fantastic shape, that it was a monstrosity, loved because it was paradoxical. Then he began to grow fiercer and more eccentric; he would batter the crosses by the roadside; for he lived in a Roman Catholic country. Finally in a height of frenzy he climbed the steeple of the Parish Church and tore down the cross, waving it in the air, and uttering wild soliloquies up there under the stars. Then one still summer evening as he was wending his way homewards, along a lane, the devil of his madness came upon him with a violence and transfiguration which changes the world. He was standing smoking, for a moment, in the front of an interminable line of palings, when his eyes were opened. Not a light shifted, not a leaf stirred, but he saw as if by a sudden change in the eyesight that this paling was an army of innumerable crosses linked together over hill and dale. And he whirléd up his heavy stick and went at it as if at an army. Mile after mile along his homeward path he broke it down and tore it up. For he hated the cross and every paling is a wall of crosses. When he returned to his house he was a literal madman. He sat upon a chair and then started up from it for the cross–bars of the carpentry repeated the intolerable image. He flung himself upon a bed only to remember that this, too, like all workmanlike things, was constructed on the accursed plan. He broke his
furniture because it was made of crosses. He burnt his house because it was made of crosses. He was found in the river.”

Lucifer was looking at him with a bitten lip.

“Is that story really true?” he asked.

“Oh, no,” said Michael, airily. “It is a parable. It is a parable of you and all your rationalists. You begin by breaking up the Cross; but you end by breaking up the habitable world. We leave you saying that nobody ought to join the Church against his will. When we meet you again you are saying that no one has any will to join it with. We leave you saying that there is no such place as Eden. We find you saying that there is no such place as Ireland. You start by hating the irrational and you come to hate everything, for everything is irrational and so—”

Lucifer leapt upon him with a cry like a wild beast’s. “Ah,” he screamed, “to every man his madness. You are mad on the cross. Let it save you.”

And with a herculean energy he forced the monk backwards out of the reeling car on to the upper part of the stone ball. Michael, with as abrupt an agility, caught one of the beams of the cross and saved himself from falling. At the same instant Lucifer drove down a lever and the ship shot up with him in it alone.

“Ha! ha!” he yelled, “what sort of a support do you find it, old fellow?”

“For practical purposes of support,” replied Michael grimly, “it is at any rate a great deal better than the ball. May I ask if you are going to leave me here?”

“Yes, yes. I mount! I mount!” cried the professor in ungovernable excitement.

“Altiora peto. My path is upward.”

“How often have you told me, Professor, that there is really no up or down in space?” said the monk. “I shall mount up as much as you will.”

“Indeed,” said Lucifer, leering over the side of the flying ship. “May I ask what you are going to do?”

The monk pointed downward at Ludgate Hill. “I am going,” he said, “to climb up into a star.”

Those who look at the matter most superficially regard paradox as something which belongs to jesting and light journalism. Paradox of this kind is to be found in the saying of the dandy, in the decadent comedy, “Life is much too important to be taken seriously.” Those who look at the matter a little more deeply or delicately see that paradox is a thing which especially belongs to all religions. Paradox of this kind is to be found in such a saying as “The meek shall inherit the earth.” But those who see and feel the fundamental fact of the matter know that paradox is a thing which belongs not to religion only, but to all vivid and violent practical crises of human living. This kind of paradox may be clearly
perceived by anybody who happens to be hanging in mid–space, clinging to one
arm of the Cross of St. Paul’s.

Father Michael in spite of his years, and in spite of his asceticism (or because
of it, for all I know), was a very healthy and happy old gentleman. And as he
swung on a bar above the sickening emptiness of air, he realized, with that sort
of dead detachment which belongs to the brains of those in peril, the deathless
and hopeless contradiction which is involved in the mere idea of courage. He
was a happy and healthy old gentleman and therefore he was quite careless about
it. And he felt as every man feels in the taut moment of such terror that his chief
danger was terror itself; his only possible strength would be a coolness
amounting to carelessness, a carelessness amounting almost to a suicidal
swagger. His one wild chance of coming out safely would be in not too
desperately desiring to be safe. There might be footholds down that awful
facade, if only he could not care whether they were footholds or no. If he were
foolhardy he might escape; if he were wise he would stop where he was till he
dropped from the cross like a stone. And this antinomy kept on repeating itself in
his mind, a contradiction as large and staring as the immense contradiction of the
Cross; he remembered having often heard the words, “Whosoever shall lose his
life the same shall save it.” He remembered with a sort of strange pity that this
had always been made to mean that whoever lost his physical life should save
his spiritual life. Now he knew the truth that is known to all fighters, and
hunters, and climbers of cliffs. He knew that even his animal life could only be
saved by a considerable readiness to lose it.

Some will think it improbable that a human soul swinging desperately in mid–
air should think about philosophical inconsistencies. But such extreme states are
dangerous things to dogmatize about. Frequently they produce a certain useless
and joyless activity of the mere intellect, thought not only divorced from hope
but even from desire. And if it is impossible to dogmatize about such states, it is
still more impossible to describe them. To this spasm of sanity and clarity in
Michael’s mind succeeded a spasm of the elemental terror; the terror of the
animal in us which regards the whole universe as its enemy; which, when it is
victorious, has no pity, and so, when it is defeated has no imaginable hope. Of
that ten minutes of terror it is not possible to speak in human words. But then
again in that damnable darkness there began to grow a strange dawn as of grey
and pale silver. And of this ultimate resignation or certainty it is even less
possible to write; it is something stranger than hell itself; it is perhaps the last of
the secrets of God. At the highest crisis of some incurable anguish there will
suddenly fall upon the man the stillness of an insane contentment. It is not hope, for hope is broken and romantic and concerned with the future; this is complete and of the present. It is not faith, for faith by its very nature is fierce, and as it were at once doubtful and defiant; but this is simply a satisfaction. It is not knowledge, for the intellect seems to have no particular part in it. Nor is it (as the modern idiots would certainly say it is) a mere numbness or negative paralysis of the powers of grief. It is not negative in the least; it is as positive as good news. In some sense, indeed, it is good news. It seems almost as if there were some equality among things, some balance in all possible contingencies which we are not permitted to know lest we should learn indifference to good and evil, but which is sometimes shown to us for an instant as a last aid in our last agony.

Michael certainly could not have given any sort of rational account of this vast unmeaning satisfaction which soaked through him and filled him to the brim. He felt with a sort of half-witted lucidity that the cross was there, and the ball was there, and the dome was there, that he was going to climb down from them, and that he did not mind in the least whether he was killed or not. This mysterious mood lasted long enough to start him on his dreadful descent and to force him to continue it. But six times before he reached the highest of the outer galleries terror had returned on him like a flying storm of darkness and thunder. By the time he had reached that place of safety he almost felt (as in some impossible fit of drunkenness) that he had two heads; one was calm, careless, and efficient; the other saw the danger like a deadly map, was wise, careful, and useless. He had fancied that he would have to let himself vertically down the face of the whole building. When he dropped into the upper gallery he still felt as far from the terrestrial globe as if he had only dropped from the sun to the moon. He paused a little, panting in the gallery under the ball, and idly kicked his heels, moving a few yards along it. And as he did so a thunderbolt struck his soul. A man, a heavy, ordinary man, with a composed indifferent face, and a prosaic sort of uniform, with a row of buttons, blocked his way. Michael had no mind to wonder whether this solid astonished man, with the brown moustache and the nickel buttons, had also come on a flying ship. He merely let his mind float in an endless felicity about the man. He thought how nice it would be if he had to live up in that gallery with that one man for ever. He thought how he would luxuriate in the nameless shades of this man’s soul and then hear with an endless excitement about the nameless shades of the souls of all his aunts and uncles. A moment before he had been dying alone. Now he was living in the same world with a man; an inexhaustible ecstasy. In the gallery below the ball Father
Michael had found that man who is the noblest and most divine and most lovable of all men, better than all the saints, greater than all the heroes—man Friday.

In the confused colour and music of his new paradise, Michael heard only in a faint and distant fashion some remarks that this beautiful solid man seemed to be making to him; remarks about something or other being after hours and against orders. He also seemed to be asking how Michael “got up” there. This beautiful man evidently felt as Michael did that the earth was a star and was set in heaven.

At length Michael sated himself with the mere sensual music of the voice of the man in buttons. He began to listen to what he said, and even to make some attempt at answering a question which appeared to have been put several times and was now put with some excess of emphasis. Michael realized that the image of God in nickel buttons was asking him how he had come there. He said that he had come in Lucifer’s ship. On his giving this answer the demeanour of the image of God underwent a remarkable change. From addressing Michael gruffly, as if he were a malefactor, he began suddenly to speak to him with a sort of eager and feverish amiability as if he were a child. He seemed particularly anxious to coax him away from the balustrade. He led him by the arm towards a door leading into the building itself, soothing him all the time. He gave what even Michael (slight as was this knowledge of the world) felt to be an improbable account of the sumptuous pleasures and varied advantages awaiting him downstairs. Michael followed him, however, if only out of politeness, down an apparently interminable spiral of staircase. At one point a door opened. Michael stepped through it, and the unaccountable man in buttons leapt after him and pinioned him where he stood. But he only wished to stand; to stand and stare. He had stepped as it were into another infinity, out under the dome of another heaven. But this was a dome of heaven made by man. The gold and green and crimson of its sunset were not in the shapeless clouds but in shapes of cherubim and seraphim, awful human shapes with a passionate plumage. Its stars were not above but far below, like fallen stars still in unbroken constellations; the dome itself was full of darkness. And far below, lower even than the lights, could be seen creeping or motionless, great black masses of men. The tongue of a terrible organ seemed to shake the very air in the whole void; and through it there came up to Michael the sound of a tongue more terrible; the dreadful everlasting voice of man, calling to his gods from the beginning to the end of the world. Michael felt almost as if he were a god, and all the voices were hurled at him.

“No, the pretty things aren’t here,” said the demi–god in buttons, caressingly. “The pretty things are downstairs. You come along with me. There’s something
that will surprise you downstairs; something you want very much to see.”

Evidently the man in buttons did not feel like a god, so Michael made no attempt to explain his feelings to him, but followed him meekly enough down the trail of the serpentine staircase. He had no notion where or at what level he was. He was still full of the cold splendour of space, and of what a French writer has brilliantly named the “vertigo of the infinite,” when another door opened, and with a shock indescribable he found himself on the familiar level, in a street full of faces, with the houses and even the lamp-posts above his head. He felt suddenly happy and suddenly indescribably small. He fancied he had been changed into a child again; his eyes sought the pavement seriously as children’s do, as if it were a thing with which something satisfactory could be done. He felt the full warmth of that pleasure from which the proud shut themselves out; the pleasure which not only goes with humiliation, but which almost is humiliation. Men who have escaped death by a hair have it, and men whose love is returned by a woman unexpectedly, and men whose sins are forgiven them. Everything his eye fell on it feasted on, not aesthetically, but with a plain, jolly appetite as of a boy eating buns. He relished the squareness of the houses; he liked their clean angles as if he had just cut them with a knife. The lit squares of the shop windows excited him as the young are excited by the lit stage of some promising pantomime. He happened to see in one shop which projected with a bulging bravery on to the pavement some square tins of potted meat, and it seemed like a hint of a hundred hilarious high teas in a hundred streets of the world. He was, perhaps, the happiest of all the children of men. For in that unendurable instant when he hung, half slipping, to the ball of St. Paul’s, the whole universe had been destroyed and re-created.

Suddenly through all the din of the dark streets came a crash of glass. With that mysterious suddenness of the Cockney mob, a rush was made in the right direction, a dingy office, next to the shop of the potted meat. The pane of glass was lying in splinters about the pavement. And the police already had their hands on a very tall young man, with dark, lank hair and dark, dazed eyes, with a grey plaid over his shoulder, who had just smashed the shop window with a single blow of his stick.

“I’d do it again,” said the young man, with a furious white face. “Anybody would have done it. Did you see what it said? I swear I’d do it again.” Then his eyes encountered the monkish habit of Michael, and he pulled off his grey tam o’shanter with the gesture of a Catholic.

“Father, did you see what they said?” he cried, trembling. “Did you see what
they dared to say? I didn’t understand it at first. I read it half through before I broke the window.”

Michael felt he knew not how. The whole peace of the world was pent up painfully in his heart. The new and childlike world which he had seen so suddenly, men had not seen at all. Here they were still at their old bewildering, pardonable, useless quarrels, with so much to be said on both sides, and so little that need be said at all. A fierce inspiration fell on him suddenly; he would strike them where they stood with the love of God. They should not move till they saw their own sweet and startling existence. They should not go from that place till they went home embracing like brothers and shouting like men delivered. From the Cross from which he had fallen fell the shadow of its fantastic mercy; and the first three words he spoke in a voice like a silver trumpet, held men as still as stones. Perhaps if he had spoken there for an hour in his illumination he might have founded a religion on Ludgate Hill. But the heavy hand of his guide fell suddenly on his shoulder.

“This poor fellow is dotty,” he said good-humouredly to the crowd. “I found him wandering in the Cathedral. Says he came in a flying ship. Is there a constable to spare to take care of him?”

There was a constable to spare. Two other constables attended to the tall young man in grey; a fourth concerned himself with the owner of the shop, who showed some tendency to be turbulent. They took the tall young man away to a magistrate, whither we shall follow him in an ensuing chapter. And they took the happiest man in the world away to an asylum.
II

THE RELIGION OF THE STIPENDIARY MAGISTRATE

The editorial office of The Atheist had for some years past become less and less prominently interesting as a feature of Ludgate Hill. The paper was unsuited to the atmosphere. It showed an interest in the Bible unknown in the district, and a knowledge of that volume to which nobody else on Ludgate Hill could make any conspicuous claim. It was in vain that the editor of The Atheist filled his front window with fierce and final demands as to what Noah in the Ark did with the neck of the giraffe. It was in vain that he asked violently, as for the last time, how the statement “God is Spirit” could be reconciled with the statement “The earth is His footstool.” It was in vain that he cried with an accusing energy that the Bishop of London was paid £12,000 a year for pretending to believe that the whale swallowed Jonah. It was in vain that he hung in conspicuous places the most thrilling scientific calculations about the width of the throat of a whale. Was it nothing to them all they that passed by? Did this sudden and splendid and truly sincere indignation never stir any of the people pouring down Ludgate Hill? Never. The little man who edited The Atheist would rush from his shop on starlit evenings and shake his fist at St. Paul’s in the passion of his holy war upon the holy place. He might have spared his emotion. The cross at the top of St. Paul’s and The Atheist shop at the foot of it were alike remote from the world. The shop and the Cross were equally uplifted and alone in the empty heavens.

To the little man who edited The Atheist, a fiery little Scotchman, with fiery, red hair and beard, going by the name of Turnbull, all this decline in public importance seemed not so much sad or even mad, but merely bewildering and unaccountable. He had said the worst thing that could be said; and it seemed accepted and ignored like the ordinary second best of the politicians. Every day his blasphemies looked more glaring, and every day the dust lay thicker upon them. It made him feel as if he were moving in a world of idiots. He seemed among a race of men who smiled when told of their own death, or looked vacantly at the Day of Judgement. Year after year went by, and year after year the death of God in a shop in Ludgate became a less and less important occurrence. All the forward men of his age discouraged Turnbull. The socialists said he was cursing priests when he should be cursing capitalists. The artists said
that the soul was most spiritual, not when freed from religion, but when freed from morality. Year after year went by, and at least a man came by who treated Mr. Turnbull’s secularist shop with a real respect and seriousness. He was a young man in a grey plaid, and he smashed the window.

He was a young man, born in the Bay of Arisaig, opposite Rum and the Isle of Skye. His high, hawklike features and snaky black hair bore the mark of that unknown historic thing which is crudely called Celtic, but which is probably far older than the Celts, whoever they were. He was in name and stock a Highlander of the Macdonalds; but his family took, as was common in such cases, the name of a subordinate sept as a surname, and for all the purposes which could be answered in London, he called himself Evan MacIan. He had been brought up in some loneliness and seclusion as a strict Roman Catholic, in the midst of that little wedge of Roman Catholics which is driven into the Western Highlands. And he had found his way as far as Fleet Street, seeking some half-promise employment, without having properly realized that there were in the world any people who were not Roman Catholics. He had uncovered himself for a few moments before the statue of Queen Anne, in front of St. Paul’s Cathedral, under the firm impression that it was a figure of the Virgin Mary. He was somewhat surprised at the lack of deference shown to the figure by the people bustling by. He did not understand that their one essential historical principle, the one law truly graven on their hearts, was the great and comforting statement that Queen Anne is dead. This faith was as fundamental as his faith, that Our Lady was alive. Any persons he had talked to since he had touched the fringe of our fashion or civilization had been by a coincidence, sympathetic or hypocritical. Or if they had spoken some established blasphemies, he had been unable to understand them merely owing to the preoccupied satisfaction of his mind.

On that fantastic fringe of the Gaelic land where he walked as a boy, the cliffs were as fantastic as the clouds. Heaven seemed to humble itself and come closer to the earth. The common paths of his little village began to climb quite suddenly and seemed resolved to go to heaven. The sky seemed to fall down towards the hills; the hills took hold upon the sky. In the sumptuous sunset of gold and purple and peacock green cloudlets and islets were the same. Evan lived like a man walking on a borderland, the borderland between this world and another. Like so many men and nations who grow up with nature and the common things, he understood the supernatural before he understood the natural. He had looked at dim angels standing knee-deep in the grass before he had looked at the grass. He knew that Our Lady’s robes were blue before he knew
the wild roses round her feet were red. The deeper his memory plunged into the
dark house of childhood the nearer and nearer he came to the things that cannot
be named. All through his life he thought of the daylight world as a sort of
divine debris, the broken remainder of his first vision. The skies and mountains
were the splendid off-scourings of another place. The stars were lost jewels of
the Queen. Our Lady had gone and left the stars by accident.

His private tradition was equally wild and unworldly. His great-grandfather
had been cut down at Culloden, certain in his last instant that God would restore
the King. His grandfather, then a boy of ten, had taken the terrible claymore
from the hand of the dead and hung it up in his house, burnishing it and
sharpening it for sixty years, to be ready for the next rebellion. His father, the
youngest son and the last left alive, had refused to attend on Queen Victoria in
Scotland. And Evan himself had been of one piece with his progenitors; and was
not dead with them, but alive in the twentieth century. He was not in the least the
pathetic Jacobite of whom we read, left behind by a final advance of all things.
He was, in his own fancy, a conspirator, fierce and up to date. In the long, dark
afternoons of the Highland winter, he plotted and fumed in the dark. He drew
plans of the capture of London on the desolate sand of Arisaig.

When he came up to capture London, it was not with an army of white
cockades, but with a stick and a satchel. London overawed him a little, not
because he thought it grand or even terrible, but because it bewildered him; it
was not the Golden City or even hell; it was Limbo. He had one shock of
sentiment, when he turned that wonderful corner of Fleet Street and saw St.
Paul’s sitting in the sky.

“Ah,” he said, after a long pause, “that sort of thing was built under the
Stuarts!” Then with a sour grin he asked himself what was the corresponding
monument of the Brunswicks and the Protestant Constitution. After some
warning, he selected a sky-sign of some pill.

Half an hour afterwards his emotions left him with an emptied mind on the
same spot. And it was in a mood of mere idle investigation that he happened to
come to a standstill opposite the office of The Atheist. He did not see the word
“atheist,” or if he did, it is quite possible that he did not know the meaning of the
word. Even as it was, the document would not have shocked even the innocent
Highlander, but for the troublesome and quite unforeseen fact that the innocent
Highlander read it stolidly to the end; a thing unknown among the most
enthusiastic subscribers to the paper, and calculated in any case to create a new
situation.
With a smart journalistic instinct characteristic of all his school, the editor of The Atheist had put first in his paper and most prominently in his window an article called “The Mesopotamian Mythology and its Effects on Syriac Folk Lore.” Mr. Evan MacIan began to read this quite idly, as he would have read a public statement beginning with a young girl dying in Brighton and ending with Bile Beans. He received the very considerable amount of information accumulated by the author with that tired clearness of the mind which children have on heavy summer afternoons—that tired clearness which leads them to go on asking questions long after they have lost interest in the subject and are as bored as their nurse. The streets were full of people and empty of adventures. He might as well know about the gods of Mesopotamia as not; so he flattened his long, lean face against the dim bleak pane of the window and read all there was to read about Mesopotamian gods. He read how the Mesopotamians had a god named Sho (sometimes pronounced Ji), and that he was described as being very powerful, a striking similarity to some expressions about Jahveh, who is also described as having power. Evan had never heard of Jahveh in his life, and imagining him to be some other Mesopotamian idol, read on with a dull curiosity. He learnt that the name Sho, under its third form of Psa, occurs in an early legend which describes how the deity, after the manner of Jupiter on so many occasions, seduced a Virgin and begat a hero. This hero, whose name is not essential to our existence, was, it was said, the chief hero and Saviour of the Mesopotamian ethical scheme. Then followed a paragraph giving other examples of such heroes and Saviours being born of some profligate intercourse between God and mortal. Then followed a paragraph—but Evan did not understand it. He read it again and then again. Then he did understand it. The glass fell in ringing fragments on to the pavement, and Evan sprang over the barrier into the shop, brandishing his stick.

“What is this?” cried little Mr. Turnbull, starting up with hair aflame. “How dare you break my window?”

“Because it was the quickest cut to you,” cried Evan, stamping. “Stand up and fight, you crapulous coward. You dirty lunatic, stand up, will you? Have you any weapons here?”

“Are you mad?” asked Turnbull, glaring.

“Are you?” cried Evan. “Can you be anything else when you plaster your own house with that God–defying filth? Stand up and fight, I say.”

A great light like dawn came into Mr. Turnbull’s face. Behind his red hair and beard he turned deadly pale with pleasure. Here, after twenty lone years of
useless toil, he had his reward. Someone was angry with the paper. He bounded to his feet like a boy; he saw a new youth opening before him. And as not unfrequently happens to middle–aged gentlemen when they see a new youth opening before them, he found himself in the presence of the police.

The policemen, after some ponderous questionings, collared both the two enthusiasts. They were more respectful, however, to the young man who had smashed the window, than to the miscreant who had had his window smashed. There was an air of refined mystery about Evan MacIan, which did not exist in the irate little shopkeeper, an air of refined mystery which appealed to the policemen, for policemen, like most other English types, are at once snobs and poets. MacIan might possibly be a gentleman, they felt; the editor manifestly was not. And the editor’s fine rational republican appeals to his respect for law, and his ardour to be tried by his fellow citizens, seemed to the police quite as much gibberish as Evan’s mysticism could have done. The police were not used to hearing principles, even the principles of their own existence.

The police magistrate, before whom they were hurried and tried, was a Mr. Cumberland Vane, a cheerful, middle–aged gentleman, honourably celebrated for the lightness of his sentences and the lightness of his conversation. He occasionally worked himself up into a sort of theoretic rage about certain particular offenders, such as the men who took pokers to their wives, talked in a loose, sentimental way about the desirability of flogging them, and was hopelessly bewildered by the fact that the wives seemed even more angry with him than with their husbands. He was a tall, spruce man, with a twist of black moustache and incomparable morning dress. He looked like a gentleman, and yet, somehow, like a stage gentleman.

He had often treated serious crimes against mere order or property with a humane flippancy. Hence, about the mere breaking of an editor’s window, he was almost uproarious.

“Come, Mr. MacIan, come,” he said, leaning back in his chair, “do you generally enter you friends’ houses by walking through the glass?” (Laughter.)

“He is not my friend,” said Evan, with the stolidity of a dull child.

“Not your friend, eh?” said the magistrate, sparkling. “Is he your brother–in–law?” (Loud and prolonged laughter.)

“He is my enemy,” said Evan, simply; “he is the enemy of God.”

Mr. Vane shifted sharply in his seat, dropping the eye–glass out of his eye in a momentary and not unmanly embarrassment.

“You mustn’t talk like that here,” he said, roughly, and in a kind of hurry,
“that has nothing to do with us.”

Evan opened his great, blue eyes; “God,” he began.

“Be quiet,” said the magistrate, angrily, “it is most undesirable that things of that sort should be spoken about–a–in public, and in an ordinary Court of Justice. Religion is–a–too personal a matter to be mentioned in such a place.”

“Is it?” answered the Highlander, “then what did those policemen swear by just now?”

“That is no parallel,” answered Vane, rather irritably; “of course there is a form of oath–to be taken reverently–reverently, and there’s an end of it. But to talk in a public place about one’s most sacred and private sentiments–well, I call it bad taste. (Slight applause.) I call it irreverent. I call it irreverent, and I’m not specially orthodox either.”

“I see you are not,” said Evan, “but I am.”

“We are wondering from the point,” said the police magistrate, pulling himself together.

“May I ask why you smashed this worthy citizen’s window?”

Evan turned a little pale at the mere memory, but he answered with the same cold and deadly literalism that he showed throughout.

“Because he blasphemed Our Lady.”

“I tell you once and for all,” cried Mr. Cumberland Vane, rapping his knuckles angrily on the table, “I tell you, once and for all, my man, that I will not have you turning on any religious rant or cant here. Don’t imagine that it will impress me. The most religious people are not those who talk about it. (Applause.) You answer the questions and do nothing else.”

“I did nothing else,” said Evan, with a slight smile.

“Eh,” cried Vane, glaring through his eye–glass.

“You asked me why I broke his window,” said MacIan, with a face of wood. “I answered, ‘Because he blasphemed Our Lady.’ I had no other reason. So I have no other answer.” Vane continued to gaze at him with a sternness not habitual to him.

“You are not going the right way to work, Sir,” he said, with severity. “You are not going the right way to work to–a–have your case treated with special consideration. If you had simply expressed regret for what you had done, I should have been strongly inclined to dismiss the matter as an outbreak of temper. Even now, if you say that you are sorry I shall only–”

“But I am not in the least sorry,” said Evan, “I am very pleased.”

“I really believe you are insane,” said the stipendiary, indignantly, for he had
really been doing his best as a good–natured man, to compose the dispute. “What conceivable right have you to break other people’s windows because their opinions do not agree with yours? This man only gave expression to his sincere belief.”

“So did I,” said the Highlander.

“And who are you?” exploded Vane. “Are your views necessarily the right ones? Are you necessarily in possession of the truth?”

“Yes,” said MacIan.

The magistrate broke into a contemptuous laugh.

“Oh, you want a nurse to look after you,” he said. “You must pay L10.”

Evan MacIan plunged his hands into his loose grey garment and drew out a queer looking leather purse. It contained exactly twelve sovereigns. He paid down the ten, coin by coin, in silence, and equally silently returned the remaining two to the receptacle. Then he said, “May I say a word, your worship?”

Cumberland Vane seemed half hypnotized with the silence and automatic movements of the stranger; he made a movement with his head which might have been either “yes” or “no.” “I only wished to say, your worship,” said MacIan, putting back the purse in his trouser pocket, “that smashing that shop window was, I confess, a useless and rather irregular business. It may be excused, however, as a mere preliminary to further proceedings, a sort of preface. Wherever and whenever I meet that man,” and he pointed to the editor of The Atheist, “whether it be outside this door in ten minutes from now, or twenty years hence in some distant country, wherever and whenever I meet that man, I will fight him. Do not be afraid. I will not rush at him like a bully, or bear him down with any brute superiority. I will fight him like a gentleman; I will fight him as our fathers fought. He shall choose how, sword or pistol, horse or foot. But if he refuses, I will write his cowardice on every wall in the world. If he had said of my mother what he said of the Mother of God, there is not a club of clean men in Europe that would deny my right to call him out. If he had said it of my wife, you English would yourselves have pardoned me for beating him like a dog in the market place. Your worship, I have no mother; I have no wife. I have only that which the poor have equally with the rich; which the lonely have equally with the man of many friends. To me this whole strange world is homely, because in the heart of it there is a home; to me this cruel world is kindly, because higher than the heavens there is something more human than humanity. If a man must not fight for this, may he fight for anything? I would
fight for my friend, but if I lost my friend, I should still be there. I would fight for my country, but if I lost my country, I should still exist. But if what that devil dreams were true, I should not be–I should burst like a bubble and be gone. I could not live in that imbecile universe. Shall I not fight for my own existence?”

The magistrate recovered his voice and his presence of mind. The first part of the speech, the bombastic and brutally practical challenge, stunned him with surprise; but the rest of Evan’s remarks, branching off as they did into theoretic phrases, gave his vague and very English mind (full of memories of the hedging and compromise in English public speaking) an indistinct sensation of relief, as if the man, though mad, were not so dangerous as he had thought. He went into a sort of weary laughter.

“For Heaven’s sake, man,” he said, “don’t talk so much. Let other people have a chance (laughter). I trust all that you said about asking Mr. Turnbull to fight, may be regarded as rubbish. In case of accidents, however, I must bind you over to keep the peace.”

“To keep the peace,” repeated Evan, “with whom?”

“With Mr. Turnbull,” said Vane.

“Certainly not,” answered MacIan. “What has he to do with peace?”

“Do you mean to say,” began the magistrate, “that you refuse to . . .” The voice of Turnbull himself clove in for the first time.

“Might I suggest,” he said, “That I, your worship, can settle to some extent this absurd matter myself. This rather wild gentleman promises that he will not attack me with any ordinary assault–and if he does, you may be sure the police shall hear of it. But he says he will not. He says he will challenge me to a duel; and I cannot say anything stronger about his mental state than to say that I think that it is highly probable that he will. (Laughter.) But it takes two to make a duel, your worship (renewed laughter). I do not in the least mind being described on every wall in the world as the coward who would not fight a man in Fleet Street, about whether the Virgin Mary had a parallel in Mesopotamian mythology. No, your worship. You need not trouble to bind him over to keep the peace. I bind myself over to keep the peace, and you may rest quite satisfied that there will be no duel with me in it.”

Mr. Cumberland Vane rolled about, laughing in a sort of relief.

“You’re like a breath of April, sir,” he cried. “You’re ozone after that fellow. You’re perfectly right. Perhaps I have taken the thing too seriously. I should love to see him sending you challenges and to see you smiling. Well, well.”

Evan went out of the Court of Justice free, but strangely shaken, like a sick
man. Any punishment of suppression he would have felt as natural; but the sudden juncture between the laughter of his judge and the laughter of the man he had wronged, made him feel suddenly small, or at least, defeated. It was really true that the whole modern world regarded his world as a bubble. No cruelty could have shown it, but their kindness showed it with a ghastly clearness. As he was brooding, he suddenly became conscious of a small, stern figure, fronting him in silence. Its eyes were grey and awful, and its beard red. It was Turnbull.

“Well, sir,” said the editor of The Atheist, “where is the fight to be? Name the field, sir.”

Evan stood thunderstruck. He stammered out something, he knew not what; he only guessed it by the answer of the other.

“Do I want to fight? Do I want to fight?” cried the furious Free–thinker. “Why, you moonstruck scarecrow of superstition, do you think your dirty saints are the only people who can die? Haven’t you hung atheists, and burned them, and boiled them, and did they ever deny their faith? Do you think we don’t want to fight? Night and day I have prayed–I have longed–for an atheist revolution–I have longed to see your blood and ours on the streets. Let it be yours or mine?”

“But you said….” began MacIan.

“I know,” said Turnbull scornfully. “And what did you say? You damned fool, you said things that might have got us locked up for a year, and shadowed by the coppers for half a decade. If you wanted to fight, why did you tell that ass you wanted to? I got you out, to fight if you want to. Now, fight if you dare.”

“I swear to you, then,” said MacIan, after a pause. “I swear to you that nothing shall come between us. I swear to you that nothing shall be in my heart or in my head till our swords clash together. I swear it by the God you have denied, by the Blessed Lady you have blasphemed; I swear it by the seven swords in her heart. I swear it by the Holy Island where my fathers are, by the honour of my mother, by the secret of my people, and by the chalice of the Blood of God.”

The atheist drew up his head. “And I,” he said, “give my word.”
III

SOME OLD CURIOSITIES

The evening sky, a dome of solid gold, unflaked even by a single sunset cloud, steeped the meanest sights of London in a strange and mellow light. It made a little greasy street of St. Martin’s Lane look as if it were paved with gold. It made the pawnbroker’s half-way down it shine as if it were really that Mountain of Piety that the French poetic instinct has named it; it made the mean pseudo-French bookshop, next but one to it, a shop packed with dreary indecency, show for a moment a kind of Parisian colour. And the shop that stood between the pawnshop and the shop of dreary indecency, showed with quite a blaze of old world beauty, for it was, by accident, a shop not unbeautiful in itself. The front window had a glimmer of bronze and blue steel, lit, as by a few stars, by the sparks of what were alleged to be jewels; for it was in brief, a shop of bric-a-brac and old curiosities. A row of half-burnished seventeenth-century swords ran like an ornate railing along the front of the window; behind was a darker glimmer of old oak and old armour; and higher up hung the most extraordinary looking South Sea tools or utensils, whether designed for killing enemies or merely for cooking them, no mere white man could possibly conjecture. But the romance of the eye, which really on this rich evening, clung about the shop, had its main source in the accident of two doors standing open, the front door that opened on the street and a back door that opened on an odd green square of garden, that the sun turned to a square of gold. There is nothing more beautiful than thus to look as it were through the archway of a house; as if the open sky were an interior chamber, and the sun a secret lamp of the place.

I have suggested that the sunset light made everything lovely. To say that it made the keeper of the curiosity shop lovely would be a tribute to it perhaps too extreme. It would easily have made him beautiful if he had been merely squalid; if he had been a Jew of the Fagin type. But he was a Jew of another and much less admirable type; a Jew with a very well-sounding name. For though there are no hard tests for separating the tares and the wheat of any people, one rude but efficient guide is that the nice Jew is called Moses Solomon, and the nasty Jew is called Thornton Percy. The keeper of the curiosity shop was of the Thornton Percy branch of the chosen people; he belonged to those Lost Ten Tribes whose industrious object is to lose themselves. He was a man still young, but already
corpulent, with sleek dark hair, heavy handsome clothes, and a full, fat, permanent smile, which looked at the first glance kindly, and at the second cowardly. The name over his shop was Henry Gordon, but two Scotchmen who were in his shop that evening could come upon no trace of a Scotch accent.

These two Scotchmen in this shop were careful purchasers, but free–handed payers. One of them who seemed to be the principal and the authority (whom, indeed, Mr. Henry Gordon fancied he had seen somewhere before), was a small, sturdy fellow, with fine grey eyes, a square red tie and a square red beard, that he carried aggressively forward as if he defied anyone to pull it. The other kept so much in the background in comparison that he looked almost ghostly in his grey cloak or plaid, a tall, sallow, silent young man.

The two Scotchmen were interested in seventeenth–century swords. They were fastidious about them. They had a whole armoury of these weapons brought out and rolled clattering about the counter, until they found two of precisely the same length. Presumably they desired the exact symmetry for some decorative trophy. Even then they felt the points, poised the swords for balance and bent them in a circle to see that they sprang straight again; which, for decorative purposes, seems carrying realism rather far.

“These will do,” said the strange person with the red beard. “And perhaps I had better pay for them at once. And as you are the challenger, Mr. MacIan, perhaps you had better explain the situation.”

The tall Scotchman in grey took a step forward and spoke in a voice quite clear and bold, and yet somehow lifeless, like a man going through an ancient formality.

“The fact is, Mr. Gordon, we have to place our honour in your hands. Words have passed between Mr. Turnbull and myself on a grave and invaluable matter, which can only be atoned for by fighting. Unfortunately, as the police are in some sense pursuing us, we are hurried, and must fight now and without seconds. But if you will be so kind as to take us into your little garden and see fair play, we shall feel how–”

The shopman recovered himself from a stunning surprise and burst out:

“Gentlemen, are you drunk? A duel! A duel in my garden. Go home, gentlemen, go home. Why, what did you quarrel about?”

“We quarrelled,” said Evan, in the same dead voice, “about religion.” The fat shopkeeper rolled about in his chair with enjoyment.

“Well, this is a funny game,” he said. “So you want to commit murder on behalf of religion. Well, well my religion is a little respect for humanity, and–”
“Excuse me,” cut in Turnbull, suddenly and fiercely, pointing towards the pawnbroker’s next door. “Don’t you own that shop?”

“Why—er—yes,” said Gordon.

“And don’t you own that shop?” repeated the secularist, pointing backward to the pornographic bookseller.

“What if I do?”

“Why, then,” cried Turnbull, with grating contempt. “I will leave the religion of humanity confidently in your hands; but I am sorry I troubled you about such a thing as honour. Look here, my man. I do believe in humanity. I do believe in liberty. My father died for it under the swords of the Yeomanry. I am going to die for it, if need be, under that sword on your counter. But if there is one sight that makes me doubt it is your foul fat face. It is hard to believe you were not meant to be ruled like a dog or killed like a cockroach. Don’t try your slave’s philosophy on me. We are going to fight, and we are going to fight in your garden, with your swords. Be still! Raise your voice above a whisper, and I run you through the body.”

Turnbull put the bright point of the sword against the gay waistcoat of the dealer, who stood choking with rage and fear, and an astonishment so crushing as to be greater than either.

“Maclan,” said Turnbull, falling almost into the familiar tone of a business partner, “Maclan, tie up this fellow and put a gag in this mouth. Be still, I say, or I kill you where you stand.”

The man was too frightened to scream, but he struggled wildly, while Evan Maclan, whose long, lean hands were unusually powerful, tightened some old curtain cords round him, strapped a rope gag in his mouth and rolled him on his back on the floor.

“There’s nothing very strong here,” said Evan, looking about him. “I’m afraid he’ll work through that gag in half an hour or so.”

“Yes,” said Turnbull, “but one of us will be killed by that time.”

“Well, let’s hope so,” said the Highlander, glancing doubtfully at the squirming thing on the floor.

“And now,” said Turnbull, twirling his fiery moustache and fingering his sword, “let us go into the garden. What an exquisite summer evening!”

Maclan said nothing, but lifting his sword from the counter went out into the sun.

The brilliant light ran along the blades, filling the channels of them with white fire; the combatants stuck their swords in the turf and took off their hats, coats,
waistcoats, and boots. Evan said a short Latin prayer to himself, during which
Turnbull made something of a parade of lighting a cigarette which he flung away
the instant after, when he saw MacIan apparently standing ready. Yet MacIan
was not exactly ready. He stood staring like a man stricken with a trance.

“What are you staring at?” asked Turnbull. “Do you see the bobbies?”
“I see Jerusalem,” said Evan, “all covered with the shields and standards of
the Saracens.”

“Jerusalem!” said Turnbull, laughing. “Well, we’ve taken the only inhabitant
into captivity.”

And he picked up his sword and made it whistle like a boy’s wand.

“I beg your pardon,” said MacIan, dryly. “Let us begin.”

MacIan made a military salute with his weapon, which Turnbull copied or
parodied with an impatient contempt; and in the stillness of the garden the
swords came together with a clear sound like a bell. The instant the blades
touched, each felt them tingle to their very points with a personal vitality, as if
they were two naked nerves of steel. Evan had worn throughout an air of apathy,
which might have been the stale apathy of one who wants nothing. But it was
indeed the more dreadful apathy of one who wants something and will care for
nothing else. And this was seen suddenly; for the instant Evan engaged he
disengaged and lunged with an infernal violence. His opponent with a desperate
promptitude parried and riposted; the parry only just succeeded, the riposte
failed. Something big and unbearable seemed to have broken finally out of Evan
in that first murderous lunge, leaving him lighter and cooler and quicker upon
his feet. He fell to again, fiercely still, but now with a fierce caution. The next
moment Turnbull lunged; MacIan seemed to catch the point and throw it away
from him, and was thrusting back like a thunderbolt, when a sound paralysed
him; another sound beside their ringing weapons. Turnbull, perhaps from an
equal astonishment, perhaps from chivalry, stopped also and forebore to send his
sword through his exposed enemy.

“What’s that?” asked Evan, hoarsely.

A heavy scraping sound, as of a trunk being dragged along a littered floor,
came from the dark shop behind them.

“The old Jew has broken one of his strings, and he’s crawling about,” said
Turnbull. “Be quick! We must finish before he gets his gag out.”

“Yes, yes, quick! On guard!” cried the Highlander. The blades crossed again
with the same sound like song, and the men went to work again with the same
white and watchful faces. Evan, in his impatience, went back a little to his
wildness. He made windmills, as the French duellists say, and though he was probably a shade the better fencer of the two, he found the other’s point pass his face twice so close as almost to graze his cheek. The second time he realized the actual possibility of defeat and pulled himself together under a shock of the sanity of anger. He narrowed, and, so to speak, tightened his operations: he fenced (as the swordsman’s boast goes), in a wedding ring; he turned Turnbull’s thrusts with a maddening and almost mechanical click, like that of a machine. Whenever Turnbull’s sword sought to go over that other mere white streak it seemed to be caught in a complex network of steel. He turned one thrust, turned another, turned another. Then suddenly he went forward at the lunge with his whole living weight. Turnbull leaped back, but Evan lunged and lunged and lunged again like a devilish piston rod or battering ram. And high above all the sound of the struggle there broke into the silent evening a bellowing human voice, nasal, raucous, at the highest pitch of pain. “Help! Help! Police! Murder! Murder!” The gag was broken; and the tongue of terror was loose.

“Keep on!” gasped Turnbull. “One may be killed before they come.”

The voice of the screaming shopkeeper was loud enough to drown not only the noise of the swords but all other noises around it, but even through its rending din there seemed to be some other stir or scurry. And Evan, in the very act of thrusting at Turnbull, saw something in his eyes that made him drop his sword. The atheist, with his grey eyes at their widest and wildest, was staring straight over his shoulder at the little archway of shop that opened on the street beyond. And he saw the archway blocked and blackened with strange figures.

“We must bolt, MacIan,” he said abruptly. “And there isn’t a damned second to lose either. Do as I do.”

With a bound he was beside the little cluster of his clothes and boots that lay on the lawn; he snatched them up, without waiting to put any of them on; and tucking his sword under his other arm, went wildly at the wall at the bottom of the garden and swung himself over it. Three seconds after he had alighted in his socks on the other side, MacIan alighted beside him, also in his socks and also carrying clothes and sword in a desperate bundle.

They were in a by–street, very lean and lonely itself, but so close to a crowded thoroughfare that they could see the vague masses of vehicles going by, and could even see an individual hansom cab passing the corner at the instant. Turnbull put his fingers to his mouth like a gutter–snipe and whistled twice. Even as he did so he could hear the loud voices of the neighbours and the police coming down the garden.
The hansom swung sharply and came tearing down the little lane at his call. When the cabman saw his fares, however, two wild-haired men in their shirts and socks with naked swords under their arms, he not unnaturally brought his readiness to a rigid stop and stared suspiciously.

“You talk to him a minute,” whispered Turnbull, and stepped back into the shadow of the wall.

“We want you,” said MacIan to the cabman, with a superb Scotch drawl of indifference and assurance, “to drive us to St. Pancras Station—verra quick.”

“Very sorry, sir,” said the cabman, “but I’d like to know it was all right. Might I arst where you come from, sir?”

A second after he spoke MacIan heard a heavy voice on the other side of the wall, saying: “I suppose I’d better get over and look for them. Give me a back.”

“Cabby,” said MacIan, again assuming the most deliberate and lingering lowland Scotch intonation, “if ye’re really verra anxious to ken whar a’ come fra,’ I’ll tell ye as a verra great secret. A’ come from Scotland. And a’m gaein’ to St. Pancras Station. Open the doors, cabby.”

The cabman stared, but laughed. The heavy voice behind the wall said: “Now then, a better back this time, Mr. Price.” And from the shadow of the wall Turnbull crept out. He had struggled wildly into his coat (leaving his waistcoat on the pavement), and he was with a fierce pale face climbing up the cab behind the cabman. MacIan had no glimmering notion of what he was up to, but an instinct of discipline, inherited from a hundred men of war, made him stick to his own part and trust the other man’s.

“Open the doors, cabby,” he repeated, with something of the obstinate solemnity of a drunkard, “open the doors. Did ye no hear me say St. Pancras Station?”

The top of a policeman’s helmet appeared above the garden wall. The cabman did not see it, but he was still suspicious and began:

“Very sorry, sir, but . . .” and with that the catlike Turnbull tore him out of his seat and hurled him into the street below, where he lay suddenly stunned.

“Give me his hat,” said Turnbull in a silver voice, that the other obeyed like a bugle. “And get inside with the swords.”

And just as the red and raging face of a policeman appeared above the wall, Turnbull struck the horse with a terrible cut of the whip and the two went whirling away like a boomerang.

They had spun through seven streets and three or four squares before anything further happened. Then, in the neighbourhood of Maida Vale, the driver opened
the trap and talked through it in a manner not wholly common in conversations through that aperture.

“Mr. MacIan,” he said shortly and civilly.

“Mr. Turnbull,” replied his motionless fare.

“Under circumstances such as those in which we were both recently placed there was no time for anything but very abrupt action. I trust therefore that you have no cause to complain of me if I have deferred until this moment a consultation with you on our present position or future action. Our present position, Mr. MacIan, I imagine that I am under no special necessity of describing. We have broken the law and we are fleeing from its officers. Our future action is a thing about which I myself entertain sufficiently strong views; but I have no right to assume or to anticipate yours, though I may have formed a decided conception of your character and a decided notion of what they will probably be. Still, by every principle of intellectual justice, I am bound to ask you now and seriously whether you wish to continue our interrupted relations.”

MacIan leant his white and rather weary face back upon the cushions in order to speak up through the open door.

“Mr. Turnbull,” he said, “I have nothing to add to what I have said before. It is strongly borne in upon me that you and I, the sole occupants of this runaway cab, are at this moment the two most important people in London, possibly in Europe. I have been looking at all the streets as we went past, I have been looking at all the shops as we went past, I have been looking at all the churches as we went past. At first, I felt a little dazed with the vastness of it all. I could not understand what it all meant. But now I know exactly what it all means. It means us. This whole civilization is only a dream. You and I are the realities.”

“Religious symbolism,” said Mr. Turnbull, through the trap, “does not, as you are probably aware, appeal ordinarily to thinkers of the school to which I belong. But in symbolism as you use it in this instance, I must, I think, concede a certain truth. We must fight this thing out somewhere; because, as you truly say, we have found each other’s reality. We must kill each other—or convert each other. I used to think all Christians were hypocrites, and I felt quite mildly towards them really. But I know you are sincere—and my soul is mad against you. In the same way you used, I suppose, to think that all atheists thought atheism would leave them free for immorality—and yet in your heart you tolerated them entirely. Now you know that I am an honest man, and you are mad against me, as I am against you. Yes, that’s it. You can’t be angry with bad men. But a good man in the wrong—why one thirsts for his blood. Yes, you open for me a vista of thought.”
“Don’t run into anything,” said Evan, immovably.
“There’s something in that view of yours, too,” said Turnbull, and shut down the trap.

They sped on through shining streets that shot by them like arrows. Mr. Turnbull had evidently a great deal of unused practical talent which was unrolling itself in this ridiculous adventure. They had got away with such stunning promptitude that the police chase had in all probability not even properly begun. But in case it had, the amateur cabman chose his dizzy course through London with a strange dexterity. He did not do what would have first occurred to any ordinary outsider desiring to destroy his tracks. He did not cut into by–ways or twist his way through mean streets. His amateur common sense told him that it was precisely the poor street, the side street, that would be likely to remember and report the passing of a hansom cab, like the passing of a royal procession. He kept chiefly to the great roads, so full of hansoms that a wilder pair than they might easily have passed in the press. In one of the quieter streets Evan put on his boots.

Towards the top of Albany Street the singular cabman again opened the trap.
“Mr. MacIan,” he said, “I understand that we have now definitely settled that in the conventional language honour is not satisfied. Our action must at least go further than it has gone under recent interrupted conditions. That, I believe, is understood.”

“Perfectly,” replied the other with his bootlace in his teeth.

“Under those conditions,” continued Turnbull, his voice coming through the hole with a slight note of trepidation very unusual with him, “I have a suggestion to make, if that can be called a suggestion, which has probably occurred to you as readily as to me. Until the actual event comes off we are practically in the position if not of comrades, at least of business partners. Until the event comes off, therefore I should suggest that quarrelling would be inconvenient and rather inartistic; while the ordinary exchange of politeness between man and man would be not only elegant but uncommonly practical.”

“You are perfectly right,” answered MacIan, with his melancholy voice, “in saying that all this has occurred to me. All duellists should behave like gentlemen to each other. But we, by the queerness of our position, are something much more than either duellists or gentlemen. We are, in the oddest and most exact sense of the term, brothers—in arms.”

“Mr. MacIan,” replied Turnbull, calmly, “no more need be said.” And he closed the trap once more.
They had reached Finchley Road before he opened it again.

Then he said, “Mr. MacIan, may I offer you a cigar. It will be a touch of realism.”

“Thank you,” answered Evan. “You are very kind.” And he began to smoke in the cab.
A DISCUSSION AT DAWN

The duellists had from their own point of view escaped or conquered the chief powers of the modern world. They had satisfied the magistrate, they had tied the tradesman neck and heels, and they had left the police behind. As far as their own feelings went they had melted into a monstrous sea; they were but the fare and driver of one of the million hansoms that fill London streets. But they had forgotten something; they had forgotten journalism. They had forgotten that there exists in the modern world, perhaps for the first time in history, a class of people whose interest is not that things should happen well or happen badly, should happen successfully or happen unsuccessfully, should happen to the advantage of this party or the advantage of that party, but whose interest simply is that things should happen.

It is the one great weakness of journalism as a picture of our modern existence, that it must be a picture made up entirely of exceptions. We announce on flaring posters that a man has fallen off a scaffolding. We do not announce on flaring posters that a man has not fallen off a scaffolding. Yet this latter fact is fundamentally more exciting, as indicating that that moving tower of terror and mystery, a man, is still abroad upon the earth. That the man has not fallen off a scaffolding is really more sensational; and it is also some thousand times more common. But journalism cannot reasonably be expected thus to insist upon the permanent miracles. Busy editors cannot be expected to put on their posters, “Mr. Wilkinson Still Safe,” or “Mr. Jones, of Worthing, Not Dead Yet.” They cannot announce the happiness of mankind at all. They cannot describe all the forks that are not stolen, or all the marriages that are not judiciously dissolved. Hence the complete picture they give of life is of necessity fallacious; they can only represent what is unusual. However democratic they may be, they are only concerned with the minority.

The incident of the religious fanatic who broke a window on Ludgate Hill was alone enough to set them up in good copy for the night. But when the same man was brought before a magistrate and defied his enemy to mortal combat in the open court, then the columns would hardly hold the excruciating information, and the headlines were so large that there was hardly room for any of the text. The Daily Telegraph headed a column, “A Duel on Divinity,” and there was a
correspondence afterwards which lasted for months, about whether police
magistrates ought to mention religion. The Daily Mail in its dull, sensible way,
headed the events, “ Wanted to fight for the Virgin.” Mr. James Douglas, in The
Star, presuming on his knowledge of philosophical and theological terms,
described the Christian’s outbreak under the title of “Dualist and Duellist.” The
Daily News inserted a colourless account of the matter, but was pursued and
eaten up for some weeks, with letters from outlying ministers, headed “Murder
and Mariolatry.” But the journalistic temperature was steadily and consistently
heated by all these influences; the journalists had tasted blood, prospectively,
and were in the mood for more; everything in the matter prepared them for
further outbursts of moral indignation. And when a gasping reporter rushed in in
the last hours of the evening with the announcement that the two heroes of the
Police Court had literally been found fighting in a London back garden, with a
shopkeeper bound and gagged in the front of the house, the editors and sub–
editors were stricken still as men are by great beatitudes.

The next morning, five or six of the great London dailies burst out
simultaneously into great blossoms of eloquent leader–writing. Towards the end
all the leaders tended to be the same, but they all began differently. The Daily
Telegraph, for instance began, “There will be little difference among our readers
or among all truly English and law–abiding men touching the etc., etc.” The
Daily Mail said, “People must learn, in the modern world, to keep their
theological differences to themselves. The fracas, etc., etc.” The Daily News
started, “Nothing could be more inimical to the cause of true religion than, etc.,
etc.” The Times began with something about Celtic disturbances of the
equilibrium of Empire, and the Daily Express distinguished itself splendidly by
omitting altogether so controversial a matter and substituting a leader about
goloshes.

And the morning after that, the editors and the newspapers were in such a
state, that, as the phrase is, there was no holding them. Whatever secret and
elvish thing it is that broods over editors and suddenly turns their brains, that
thing had seized on the story of the broken glass and the duel in the garden. It
became monstrous and omnipresent, as do in our time the unimportant doings of
the sect of the Agapemonites, or as did at an earlier time the dreary dishonesties
of the Rhodesian financiers. Questions were asked about it, and even answered,
in the House of Commons. The Government was solemnly denounced in the
papers for not having done something, nobody knew what, to prevent the
window being broken. An enormous subscription was started to reimburse Mr.
Gordon, the man who had been gagged in the shop. Mr. MacIan, one of the combatants, became for some mysterious reason, singly and hugely popular as a comic figure in the comic papers and on the stage of the music hall. He was always represented (in defiance of fact), with red whiskers, and a very red nose, and in full Highland costume. And a song, consisting of an unimaginable number of verses, in which his name was rhymed with flat iron, the British Lion, sly ‘un, dandelion, Spion (With Kop in the next line), was sung to crowded houses every night. The papers developed a devouring thirst for the capture of the fugitives; and when they had not been caught for forty-eight hours, they suddenly turned the whole matter into a detective mystery. Letters under the heading, “Where are They,” poured in to every paper, with every conceivable kind of explanation, running them to earth in the Monument, the Twopenny Tube, Epping Forest, Westminster Abbey, rolled up in carpets at Shoolbreds, locked up in safes in Chancery Lane. Yes, the papers were very interesting, and Mr. Turnbull unrolled a whole bundle of them for the amusement of Mr. MacIan as they sat on a high common to the north of London, in the coming of the white dawn.

The darkness in the east had been broken with a bar of grey; the bar of grey was split with a sword of silver and morning lifted itself laboriously over London. From the spot where Turnbull and MacIan were sitting on one of the barren steeps behind Hampstead, they could see the whole of London shaping itself vaguely and largely in the grey and growing light, until the white sun stood over it and it lay at their feet, the splendid monstrosity that it is. Its bewildering squares and parallelograms were compact and perfect as a Chinese puzzle; an enormous hieroglyphic which man must decipher or die. There fell upon both of them, but upon Turnbull more than the other, because he know more what the scene signified, that quite indescribable sense as of a sublime and passionate and heart-moving futility, which is never evoked by deserts or dead men or men neglected and barbarous, which can only be invoked by the sight of the enormous genius of man applied to anything other than the best. Turnbull, the old idealistic democrat, had so often reviled the democracy and reviled them justly for their supineness, their snobbishness, their evil reverence for idle things. He was right enough; for our democracy has only one great fault; it is not democratic. And after denouncing so justly average modern men for so many years as sophists and as slaves, he looked down from an empty slope in Hampstead and saw what gods they are. Their achievement seemed all the more heroic and divine, because it seemed doubtful whether it was worth doing at all.
There seemed to be something greater than mere accuracy in making such a mistake as London. And what was to be the end of it all? what was to be the ultimate transformation of this common and incredible London man, this workman on a tram in Battersea, his clerk on an omnibus in Cheapside? Turnbull, as he stared drearily, murmured to himself the words of the old atheistic and revolutionary Swinburne who had intoxicated his youth:

“And still we ask if God or man Can loosen thee Lazarus; Bid thee rise up republican, And save thyself and all of us. But no disciple’s tongue can say If thou can’t take our sins away.”

Turnbull shivered slightly as if behind the earthly morning he felt the evening of the world, the sunset of so many hopes. Those words were from “Songs before Sunrise.” But Turnbull’s songs at their best were songs after sunrise, and sunrise had been no such great thing after all. Turnbull shivered again in the sharp morning air. MacIan was also gazing with his face towards the city, but there was that about his blind and mystical stare that told one, so to speak, that his eyes were turned inwards. When Turnbull said something to him about London, they seemed to move as at a summons and come out like two householders coming out into their doorways.

“Yes,” he said, with a sort of stupidity. “It’s a very big place.”

There was a somewhat unmeaning silence, and then Maclan said again:

“It’s a very big place. When I first came into it I was frightened of it. Frightened exactly as one would be frightened at the sight of a man forty feet high. I am used to big things where I come from, big mountains that seem to fill God’s infinity, and the big sea that goes to the end of the world. But then these things are all shapeless and confused things, not made in any familiar form. But to see the plain, square, human things as large as that, houses so large and streets so large, and the town itself so large, was like having screwed some devil’s magnifying glass into one’s eye. It was like seeing a porridge bowl as big as a house, or a mouse-trap made to catch elephants.”

“Like the land of the Brobdinagians,” said Turnbull, smiling.

“Oh! Where is that?” said MacIan.

Turnbull said bitterly, “In a book,” and the silence fell suddenly between them again.

They were sitting in a sort of litter on the hillside; all the things they had hurriedly collected, in various places, for their flight, were strewn indiscriminately round them. The two swords with which they had lately sought each other’s lives were flung down on the grass at random, like two idle
walking–sticks. Some provisions they had bought last night, at a low public house, in case of undefined contingencies, were tossed about like the materials of an ordinary picnic, here a basket of chocolate, and there a bottle of wine. And to add to the disorder finally, there were strewn on top of everything, the most disorderly of modern things, newspapers, and more newspapers, and yet again newspapers, the ministers of the modern anarchy. Turnbull picked up one of them drearily, and took out a pipe.

“There’s a lot about us,” he said. “Do you mind if I light up?”

“Why should I mind?” asked MacIan.

Turnbull eyed with a certain studious interest, the man who did not understand any of the verbal courtesies; he lit his pipe and blew great clouds out of it.

“Yes,” he resumed. “The matter on which you and I are engaged is at this moment really the best copy in England. I am a journalist, and I know. For the first time, perhaps, for many generations, the English are really more angry about a wrong thing done in England than they are about a wrong thing done in France.”

“It is not a wrong thing,” said MacIan.

Turnbull laughed. “You seem unable to understand the ordinary use of the human language. If I did not suspect that you were a genius, I should certainly know you were a blockhead. I fancy we had better be getting along and collecting our baggage.”

And he jumped up and began shoving the luggage into his pockets, or strapping it on to his back. As he thrust a tin of canned meat, anyhow, into his bursting side pocket, he said casually:

“I only meant that you and I are the most prominent people in the English papers.”

“Well, what did you expect?” asked MacIan, opening his great grave blue eyes.

“The papers are full of us,” said Turnbull, stooping to pick up one of the swords.

MacIan stooped and picked up the other.

“Yes,” he said, in his simple way. “I have read what they have to say. But they don’t seem to understand the point.”

“The point of what?” asked Turnbull.

“The point of the sword,” said MacIan, violently, and planted the steel point in the soil like a man planting a tree.

“That is a point,” said Turnbull, grimly, “that we will discuss later. Come
Turnbull tied the last tin of biscuits desperately to himself with string; and then spoke, like a diver girt for plunging, short and sharp.

"Now, Mr. MacIan, you must listen to me. You must listen to me, not merely because I know the country, which you might learn by looking at a map, but because I know the people of the country, whom you could not know by living here thirty years. That infernal city down there is awake; and it is awake against us. All those endless rows of windows and windows are all eyes staring at us. All those forests of chimneys are fingers pointing at us, as we stand here on the hillside. This thing has caught on. For the next six mortal months they will think of nothing but us, as for six mortal months they thought of nothing but the Dreyfus case. Oh, I know it’s funny. They let starving children, who don’t want to die, drop by the score without looking round. But because two gentlemen, from private feelings of delicacy, do want to die, they will mobilize the army and navy to prevent them. For half a year or more, you and I, Mr. MacIan, will be an obstacle to every reform in the British Empire. We shall prevent the Chinese being sent out of the Transvaal and the blocks being stopped in the Strand. We shall be the conversational substitute when anyone recommends Home Rule, or complains of sky signs. Therefore, do not imagine, in your innocence, that we have only to melt away among those English hills as a Highland cateran might into your god–forsaken Highland mountains. We must be eternally on our guard; we must live the hunted life of two distinguished criminals. We must expect to be recognized as much as if we were Napoleon escaping from Elba. We must be prepared for our descriptions being sent to every tiny village, and for our faces being recognized by every ambitious policeman. We must often sleep under the stars as if we were in Africa. Last and most important we must not dream of effecting our–our final settlement, which will be a thing as famous as the Phoenix Park murders, unless we have made real and precise arrangements for our isolation–I will not say our safety. We must not, in short, fight until we have thrown them off our scent, if only for a moment. For, take my word for it, Mr. MacIan, if the British Public once catches us up, the British Public will prevent the duel, if it is only by locking us both up in asylums for the rest of our days."

MacIan was looking at the horizon with a rather misty look.

"I am not at all surprised," he said, "at the world being against us. It makes me feel I was right to–""

"Yes?" said Turnbull.

"To smash your window," said MacIan. "I have woken up the world."
“Very well, then,” said Turnbull, stolidly. “Let us look at a few final facts. Beyond that hill there is comparatively clear country. Fortunately, I know the part well, and if you will follow me exactly, and, when necessary, on your stomach, we may be able to get ten miles out of London, literally without meeting anyone at all, which will be the best possible beginning, at any rate. We have provisions for at least two days and two nights, three days if we do it carefully. We may be able to get fifty or sixty miles away without even walking into an inn door. I have the biscuits and the tinned meat, and the milk. You have the chocolate, I think? And the brandy?”

“Yes,” said MacIan, like a soldier taking orders.

“Very well, then, come on. March. We turn under that third bush and so down into the valley.” And he set off ahead at a swinging walk.

Then he stopped suddenly; for he realized that the other was not following. Evan MacIan was leaning on his sword with a lowering face, like a man suddenly smitten still with doubt.

“What on earth is the matter?” asked Turnbull, staring in some anger.

Evan made no reply.

“What the deuce is the matter with you?” demanded the leader, again, his face slowly growing as red as his beard; then he said, suddenly, and in a more human voice, “Are you in pain, MacIan?”

“Yes,” replied the Highlander, without lifting his face.

“Take some brandy,” cried Turnbull, walking forward hurriedly towards him. “You’ve got it.”

“It’s not in the body,” said MacIan, in his dull, strange way. “The pain has come into my mind. A very dreadful thing has just come into my thoughts.”

“What the devil are you talking about?” asked Turnbull.

MacIan broke out with a queer and living voice.

“We must fight now, Turnbull. We must fight now. A frightful thing has come upon me, and I know it must be now and here. I must kill you here,” he cried, with a sort of tearful rage impossible to describe. “Here, here, upon this blessed grass.”

“Why, you idiot,” began Turnbull.

“The hour has come—the black hour God meant for it. Quick, it will soon be gone. Quick!”

And he flung the scabbard from him furiously, and stood with the sunlight sparkling along his sword.

“You confounded fool,” repeated Turnbull. “Put that thing up again, you ass;
people will come out of that house at the first clash of the steel.”

“One of us will be dead before they come,” said the other, hoarsely, “for this is the hour God meant.”

“Well, I never thought much of God,” said the editor of The Atheist, losing all patience. “And I think less now. Never mind what God meant. Kindly enlighten my pagan darkness as to what the devil you mean.”

“The hour will soon be gone. In a moment it will be gone,” said the madman. “It is now, now, now that I must nail your blaspheming body to the earth—now, now that I must avenge Our Lady on her vile slanderer. Now or never. For the dreadful thought is in my mind.”

“And what thought,” asked Turnbull, with frantic composure, “occupies what you call your mind?”

“I must kill you now,” said the fanatic, “because—”

“Well, because,” said Turnbull, patiently.

“Because I have begun to like you.”

Turnbull’s face had a sudden spasm in the sunlight, a change so instantaneous that it left no trace behind it; and his features seemed still carved into a cold stare. But when he spoke again he seemed like a man who was placidly pretending to misunderstand something that he understood perfectly well.

“Your affection expresses itself in an abrupt form,” he began, but MacIan broke the brittle and frivolous speech to pieces with a violent voice. “Do not trouble to talk like that,” he said. “You know what I mean as well as I know it. Come on and fight, I say. Perhaps you are feeling just as I do.”

Turnbull’s face flinched again in the fierce sunlight, but his attitude kept its contemptuous ease.

“Your Celtic mind really goes too fast for me,” he said; “let me be permitted in my heavy Lowland way to understand this new development. My dear Mr. MacIan, what do you really mean?”

MacIan still kept the shining sword—point towards the other’s breast.

“You know what I mean. You mean the same yourself. We must fight now or else—”

“Or else?” repeated Turnbull, staring at him with an almost blinding gravity.

“Or else we may not want to fight at all,” answered Evan, and the end of his speech was like a despairing cry.

Turnbull took out his own sword suddenly as if to engage; then planting it point downwards for a moment, he said, “Before we begin, may I ask you a question?”
MacIan bowed patiently, but with burning eyes.

“You said, just now,” continued Turnbull, presently, “that if we did not fight now, we might not want to fight at all. How would you feel about the matter if we came not to want to fight at all?”

“I should feel,” answered the other, “just as I should feel if you had drawn your sword, and I had run away from it. I should feel that because I had been weak, justice had not been done.”

“Justice,” answered Turnbull, with a thoughtful smile, “but we are talking about your feelings. And what do you mean by justice, apart from your feelings?”

MacIan made a gesture of weary recognition! “Oh, Nominalism,” he said, with a sort of sigh, “we had all that out in the twelfth century.”

“I wish we could have it out now,” replied the other, firmly. “Do you really mean that if you came to think me right, you would be certainly wrong?”

“If I had a blow on the back of my head, I might come to think you a green elephant,” answered MacIan, “but have I not the right to say now, that if I thought that I should think wrong?”

“Then you are quite certain that it would be wrong to like me?” asked Turnbull, with a slight smile.

“No,” said Evan, thoughtfully, “I do not say that. It may not be the devil, it may be some part of God I am not meant to know. But I had a work to do, and it is making the work difficult.”

“And I suppose,” said the atheist, quite gently, “that you and I know all about which part of God we ought to know.”

MacIan burst out like a man driven back and explaining everything.

“The Church is not a thing like the Athenaeum Club,” he cried. “If the Athenaeum Club lost all its members, the Athenaeum Club would dissolve and cease to exist. But when we belong to the Church we belong to something which is outside all of us; which is outside everything you talk about, outside the Cardinals and the Pope. They belong to it, but it does not belong to them. If we all fell dead suddenly, the Church would still somehow exist in God. Confound it all, don’t you see that I am more sure of its existence than I am of my own existence? And yet you ask me to trust my temperament, my own temperament, which can be turned upside down by two bottles of claret or an attack of the jaundice. You ask me to trust that when it softens towards you and not to trust the thing which I believe to be outside myself and more real than the blood in my body.”
“Stop a moment,” said Turnbull, in the same easy tone, “Even in the very act of saying that you believe this or that, you imply that there is a part of yourself that you trust even if there are many parts which you mistrust. If it is only you that like me, surely, also, it is only you that believe in the Catholic Church.”

Evan remained in an unmoved and grave attitude. “There is a part of me which is divine,” he answered, “a part that can be trusted, but there are also affections which are entirely animal and idle.”

“And you are quite certain, I suppose,” continued Turnbull, “that if even you esteem me the esteem would be wholly animal and idle?” For the first time MacIan started as if he had not expected the thing that was said to him. At last he said:

“Whatsoever in earth or heaven it is that has joined us two together, it seems to be something which makes it impossible to lie. No, I do not think that the movement in me towards you was . . . was that surface sort of thing. It may have been something deeper . . . something strange. I cannot understand the thing at all. But understand this and understand it thoroughly, if I loved you my love might be divine. No, it is not some trifle that we are fighting about. It is not some superstition or some symbol. When you wrote those words about Our Lady, you were in that act a wicked man doing a wicked thing. If I hate you it is because you have hated goodness. And if I like you . . . it is because you are good.”

Turnbull’s face wore an indecipherable expression.

“Well, shall we fight now?” he said.

“Yes,” said MacIan, with a sudden contraction of his black brows, “yes, it must be now.”

The bright swords crossed, and the first touch of them, travelling down blade and arm, told each combatant that the heart of the other was awakened. It was not in that way that the swords rang together when they had rushed on each other in the little garden behind the dealer’s shop.

There was a pause, and then MacIan made a movement as if to thrust, and almost at the same moment Turnbull suddenly and calmly dropped his sword. Evan stared round in an unusual bewilderment, and then realized that a large man in pale clothes and a Panama hat was strolling serenely towards them.
THE PEACEMAKER

When the combatants, with crossed swords, became suddenly conscious of a third party, they each made the same movement. It was as quick as the snap of a pistol, and they altered it instantaneously and recovered their original pose, but they had both made it, they had both seen it, and they both knew what it was. It was not a movement of anger at being interrupted. Say or think what they would, it was a movement of relief. A force within them, and yet quite beyond them, seemed slowly and pitilessly washing away the adamant of their oath. As mistaken lovers might watch the inevitable sunset of first love, these men watched the sunset of their first hatred.

Their hearts were growing weaker and weaker against each other. When their weapons rang and riposted in the little London garden, they could have been very certain that if a third party had interrupted them something at least would have happened. They would have killed each other or they would have killed him. But now nothing could undo or deny that flash of fact, that for a second they had been glad to be interrupted. Some new and strange thing was rising higher and higher in their hearts like a high sea at night. It was something that seemed all the more merciless, because it might turn out an enormous mercy. Was there, perhaps, some such fatalism in friendship as all lovers talk about in love? Did God make men love each other against their will?

“I’m sure you’ll excuse my speaking to you,” said the stranger, in a voice at once eager and deprecating.

The voice was too polite for good manners. It was incongruous with the eccentric spectacle of the duellists which ought to have startled a sane and free man. It was also incongruous with the full and healthy, though rather loose physique of the man who spoke. At the first glance he looked a fine animal, with curling gold beard and hair, and blue eyes, unusually bright. It was only at the second glance that the mind felt a sudden and perhaps unmeaning irritation at the way in which the gold beard retreated backwards into the waistcoat, and the way in which the finely shaped nose went forward as if smelling its way. And it was only, perhaps, at the hundredth glance that the bright blue eyes, which normally before and after the instant seemed brilliant with intelligence, seemed as it were to be brilliant with idiocy. He was a heavy, healthy–looking man, who looked all
the larger because of the loose, light coloured clothes that he wore, and that had in their extreme lightness and looseness, almost a touch of the tropics. But a closer examination of his attire would have shown that even in the tropics it would have been unique; but it was all woven according to some hygienic texture which no human being had ever heard of before, and which was absolutely necessary even for a day’s health. He wore a huge broad–brimmed hat, equally hygienic, very much at the back of his head, and his voice coming out of so heavy and hearty a type of man was, as I have said, startlingly shrill and deferential.

“I’m sure you’ll excuse my speaking to you,” he said. “Now, I wonder if you are in some little difficulty which, after all, we could settle very comfortably together? Now, you don’t mind my saying this, do you?”

The face of both combatants remained somewhat solid under this appeal. But the stranger, probably taking their silence for a gathering shame, continued with a kind of gaiety:

“So you are the young men I have read about in the papers. Well, of course, when one is young, one is rather romantic. Do you know what I always say to young people?”

A blank silence followed this gay inquiry. Then Turnbull said in a colourless voice:

“As I was forty–seven last birthday, I probably came into the world too soon for the experience.”

“Very good, very good,” said the friendly person. “Dry Scotch humour. Dry Scotch humour. Well now. I understand that you two people want to fight a duel. I suppose you aren’t much up in the modern world. We’ve quite outgrown duelling, you know. In fact, Tolstoy tells us that we shall soon outgrow war, which he says is simply a duel between nations. A duel between nations. But there is no doubt about our having outgrown duelling.”

Waiting for some effect upon this wooden auditors, the stranger stood beaming for a moment and then resumed:

“Now, they tell me in the newspapers that you are really wanting to fight about something connected with Roman Catholicism. Now, do you know what I always say to Roman Catholics?”

“No,” said Turnbull, heavily. “Do they?” It seemed to be a characteristic of the hearty, hygienic gentleman that he always forgot the speech he had made the moment before. Without enlarging further on the fixed form of his appeal to the Church of Rome, he laughed cordially at Turnbull’s answer; then his wandering
blue eyes caught the sunlight on the swords, and he assumed a good–humoured gravity.

“But you know this is a serious matter,” he said, eyeing Turnbull and MacIan, as if they had just been keeping the table in a roar with their frivolities. “I am sure that if I appealed to your higher natures . . . your higher natures. Every man has a higher nature and a lower nature. Now, let us put the matter very plainly, and without any romantic nonsense about honour or anything of that sort. Is not bloodshed a great sin?”

“No,” said MacIan, speaking for the first time.

“Well, really, really!” said the peacemaker.

“Murder is a sin,” said the immovable Highlander. “There is no sin of bloodshed.”

“Well, we won’t quarrel about a word,” said the other, pleasantly.

“Why on earth not?” said MacIan, with a sudden asperity. “Why shouldn’t we quarrel about a word? What is the good of words if they aren’t important enough to quarrel over? Why do we choose one word more than another if there isn’t any difference between them? If you called a woman a chimpanzee instead of an angel, wouldn’t there be a quarrel about a word? If you’re not going to argue about words, what are you going to argue about? Are you going to convey your meaning to me by moving your ears? The Church and the heresies always used to fight about words, because they are the only things worth fighting about. I say that murder is a sin, and bloodshed is not, and that there is as much difference between those words as there is between the word ‘yes’ and the word ‘no’; or rather more difference, for ‘yes’ and ‘no,’ at least, belong to the same category. Murder is a spiritual incident. Bloodshed is a physical incident. A surgeon commits bloodshed.

“Ah, you’re a casuist!” said the large man, wagging his head. “Now, do you know what I always say to casuists . . .?”

MacIan made a violent gesture; and Turnbull broke into open laughter. The peacemaker did not seem to be in the least annoyed, but continued in unabated enjoyment.

“Well, well,” he said, “let us get back to the point. Now Tolstoy has shown that force is no remedy; so you see the position in which I am placed. I am doing my best to stop what I’m sure you won’t mind my calling this really useless violence, this really quite wrong violence of yours. But it’s against my principles to call in the police against you, because the police are still on a lower moral plane, so to speak, because, in short, the police undoubtedly sometimes employ
force. Tolstoy has shown that violence merely breeds violence in the person towards whom it is used, whereas Love, on the other hand, breeds Love. So you see how I am placed. I am reduced to use Love in order to stop you. I am obliged to use Love.”

He gave to the word an indescribable sound of something hard and heavy, as if he were saying “boots.” Turnbull suddenly gripped his sword and said, shortly, “I see how you are placed quite well, sir. You will not call the police. Mr. MacIan, shall we engage?” MacIan plucked his sword out of the grass.

“I must and will stop this shocking crime,” cried the Tolstoian, crimson in the face. “It is against all modern ideas. It is against the principle of love. How you, sir, who pretend to be a Christian . . .

MacIan turned upon him with a white face and bitter lip. “Sir,” he said, “talk about the principle of love as much as you like. You seem to me colder than a lump of stone; but I am willing to believe that you may at some time have loved a cat, or a dog, or a child. When you were a baby, I suppose you loved your mother. Talk about love, then, till the world is sick of the word. But don’t you talk about Christianity. Don’t you dare to say one word, white or black, about it. Christianity is, as far as you are concerned, a horrible mystery. Keep clear of it, keep silent upon it, as you would upon an abomination. It is a thing that has made men slay and torture each other; and you will never know why. It is a thing that has made men do evil that good might come; and you will never understand the evil, let alone the good. Christianity is a thing that could only make you vomit, till you are other than you are. I would not justify it to you even if I could. Hate it, in God’s name, as Turnbull does, who is a man. It is a monstrous thing, for which men die. And if you will stand here and talk about love for another ten minutes it is very probable that you will see a man die for it.”

And he fell on guard. Turnbull was busy settling something loose in his elaborate hilt, and the pause was broken by the stranger.

“Suppose I call the police?” he said, with a heated face.

“And deny your most sacred dogma,” said MacIan.

“Dogma!” cried the man, in a sort of dismay. “Oh, we have no dogmas, you know!”

There was another silence, and he said again, airily:

“You know, I think, there’s something in what Shaw teaches about no moral principles being quite fixed. Have you ever read The Quintessence of Ibsenism? Of course he went very wrong over the war.”

Turnbull, with a bent, flushed face, was tying up the loose piece of the
pommel with string. With the string in his teeth, he said, “Oh, make up your damned mind and clear out!”

“It’s a serious thing,” said the philosopher, shaking his head. “I must be alone and consider which is the higher point of view. I rather feel that in a case so extreme as this . . .” and he went slowly away. As he disappeared among the trees, they heard him murmuring in a sing-song voice, “New occasions teach new duties,” out of a poem by James Russell Lowell.

“Ah,” said MacIan, drawing a deep breath. “Don’t you believe in prayer now? I prayed for an angel.”

“I am afraid I don’t understand,” answered Turnbull.

“An hour ago,” said the Highlander, in his heavy meditative voice, “I felt the devil weakening my heart and my oath against you, and I prayed that God would send an angel to my aid.”

“Well?” inquired the other, finishing his mending and wrapping the rest of the string round his hand to get a firmer grip.

“Well?”

“Well, that man was an angel,” said MacIan.

“I didn’t know they were as bad as that,” answered Turnbull.

“We know that devils sometimes quote Scripture and counterfeit good,” replied the mystic. “Why should not angels sometimes come to show us the black abyss of evil on whose brink we stand. If that man had not tried to stop us . . . I might . . . I might have stopped.”

“I know what you mean,” said Turnbull, grimly.

“But then he came,” broke out MacIan, “and my soul said to me: ‘Give up fighting, and you will become like That. Give up vows and dogmas, and fixed things, and you may grow like That. You may learn, also, that fog of false philosophy. You may grow fond of that mire of crawling, cowardly morals, and you may come to think a blow bad, because it hurts, and not because it humiliates. You may come to think murder wrong, because it is violent, and not because it is unjust.’ Oh, you blasphemer of the good, an hour ago I almost loved you! But do not fear for me now. I have heard the word Love pronounced in his intonation; and I know exactly what it means. On guard!”

The swords caught on each other with a dreadful clang and jar, full of the old energy and hate; and at once plunged and replunged. Once more each man’s heart had become the magnet of a mad sword. Suddenly, furious as they were, they were frozen for a moment motionless.

“What noise is that?” asked the Highlander, hoarsely.
“I think I know,” replied Turnbull.
“What? . . . What?” cried the other.
“The student of Shaw and Tolstoy has made up his remarkable mind,” said Turnbull, quietly. “The police are coming up the hill.”
VI

THE OTHER PHILOSOPHER

Between high hedges in Hertfordshire, hedges so high as to create a kind of grove, two men were running. They did not run in a scampering or feverish manner, but in the steady swing of the pendulum. Across the great plains and uplands to the right and left of the lane, a long tide of sunset light rolled like a sea of ruby, lighting up the long terraces of the hills and picking out the few windows of the scattered hamlets in startling blood–red sparks. But the lane was cut deep in the hill and remained in an abrupt shadow. The two men running in it had an impression not uncommonly experienced between those wild green English walls; a sense of being led between the walls of a maze.

Though their pace was steady it was vigorous; their faces were heated and their eyes fixed and bright. There was, indeed, something a little mad in the contrast between the evening’s stillness over the empty country–side, and these two figures fleeing wildly from nothing. They had the look of two lunatics, possibly they were.

“Are you all right?” said Turnbull, with civility. “Can you keep this up?”
“Quite easily, thank you,” replied MacIan. “I run very well.”
“Is that a qualification in a family of warriors?” asked Turnbull.
“Undoubtedly. Rapid movement is essential,” answered MacIan, who never saw a joke in his life.

Turnbull broke out into a short laugh, and silence fell between them, the panting silence of runners.

Then MacIan said: “We run better than any of those policemen. They are too fat. Why do you make your policemen so fat?”

“I didn’t do much towards making them fat myself,” replied Turnbull, genially, “but I flatter myself that I am now doing something towards making them thin. You’ll see they will be as lean as rakes by the time they catch us. They will look like your friend, Cardinal Manning.”

“But they won’t catch us,” said MaClan, in his literal way.

“No, we beat them in the great military art of running away,” returned the other. “They won’t catch us unless—”

MacIan turned his long equine face inquiringly. “Unless what?” he said, for Turnbull had gone silent suddenly, and seemed to be listening intently as he ran
as a horse does with his ears turned back.

“Unless what?” repeated the Highlander.

“Unless they do—what they have done. Listen.” MacIan slackened his trot, and turned his head to the trail they had left behind them. Across two or three billows of the up and down lane came along the ground the unmistakable throbbing of horses’ hoofs.

“They have put the mounted police on us,” said Turnbull, shortly. “Good Lord, one would think we were a Revolution.”

“So we are,” said MacIan calmly. “What shall we do? Shall we turn on them with our points?”

“It may come to that,” answered Turnbull, “though if it does, I reckon that will be the last act. We must put it off if we can.” And he stared and peered about him between the bushes. “If we could hide somewhere the beasts might go by us,” he said. “The police have their faults, but thank God they’re inefficient. Why, here’s the very thing. Be quick and quiet. Follow me.”

He suddenly swung himself up the high bank on one side of the lane. It was almost as high and smooth as a wall, and on the top of it the black hedge stood out over them as an angle, almost like a thatched roof of the lane. And the burning evening sky looked down at them through the tangle with red eyes as of an army of goblins.

Turnbull hoisted himself up and broke the hedge with his body. As his head and shoulders rose above it they turned to flame in the full glow as if lit up by an immense firelight. His red hair and beard looked almost scarlet, and his pale face as bright as a boy’s. Something violent, something that was at once love and hatred, surged in the strange heart of the Gael below him. He had an unutterable sense of epic importance, as if he were somehow lifting all humanity into a prouder and more passionate region of the air. As he swung himself up also into the evening light he felt as if he were rising on enormous wings.

Legends of the morning of the world which he had heard in childhood or read in youth came back upon him in a cloudy splendour, purple tales of wrath and friendship, like Roland and Oliver, or Balin and Balan, reminding him of emotional entanglements. Men who had loved each other and then fought each other; men who had fought each other and then loved each other, together made a mixed but monstrous sense of momentousness. The crimson seas of the sunset seemed to him like a bursting out of some sacred blood, as if the heart of the world had broken.

Turnbull was wholly unaffected by any written or spoken poetry; his was a
powerful and prosaic mind. But even upon him there came for the moment something out of the earth and the passionate ends of the sky. The only evidence was in his voice, which was still practical but a shade more quiet.

“Do you see that summer–house–looking thing over there?” he asked shortly. “That will do for us very well.”

Keeping himself free from the tangle of the hedge he strolled across a triangle of obscure kitchen garden, and approached a dismal shed or lodge a yard or two beyond it. It was a weather–stained hut of grey wood, which with all its desolation retained a tag or two of trivial ornament, which suggested that the thing had once been a sort of summer–house, and the place probably a sort of garden.

“That is quite invisible from the road,” said Turnbull, as he entered it, “and it will cover us up for the night.”

MacIan looked at him gravely for a few moments. “Sir,” he said, “I ought to say something to you. I ought to say–”

“Hush,” said Turnbull, suddenly lifting his hand; “be still, man.”

In the sudden silence, the drumming of the distant horses grew louder and louder with inconceivable rapidity, and the cavalcade of police rushed by below them in the lane, almost with the roar and rattle of an express train.

“I ought to tell you,” continued MacIan, still staring stolidly at the other, “that you are a great chief, and it is good to go to war behind you.”

Turnbull said nothing, but turned and looked out of the foolish lattice of the little windows, then he said, “We must have food and sleep first.”

When the last echo of their eluded pursuers had died in the distant uplands, Turnbull began to unpack the provisions with the easy air of a man at a picnic. He had just laid out the last items, put a bottle of wine on the floor, and a tin of salmon on the window–ledge, when the bottomless silence of that forgotten place was broken. And it was broken by three heavy blows of a stick delivered upon the door.

Turnbull looked up in the act of opening a tin and stared silently at his companion. MacIan’s long, lean mouth had shut hard.

“Who the devil can that be?” said Turnbull.

“God knows,” said the other. “It might be God.”

Again the sound of the wooden stick reverberated on the wooden door. It was a curious sound and on consideration did not resemble the ordinary effects of knocking on a door for admittance. It was rather as if the point of a stick were plunged again and again at the panels in an absurd attempt to make a hole in
A wild look sprang into MacIan’s eyes and he got up half stupidly, with a kind of stagger, put his hand out and caught one of the swords. “Let us fight at once,” he cried, “it is the end of the world.”

“You’re overdone, MacIan,” said Turnbull, putting him on one side. “It’s only someone playing the goat. Let me open the door.”

But he also picked up a sword as he stepped to open it.

He paused one moment with his hand on the handle and then flung the door open. Almost as he did so the ferrule of an ordinary bamboo cane came at his eyes, so that he had actually to parry it with the naked weapon in his hands. As the two touched, the point of the stick was dropped very abruptly, and the man with the stick stepped hurriedly back.

Against the heraldic background of sprawling crimson and gold offered him by the expiring sunset, the figure of the man with the stick showed at first merely black and fantastic. He was a small man with two wisps of long hair that curled up on each side, and seen in silhouette, looked like horns. He had a bow tie so big that the two ends showed on each side of his neck like unnatural stunted wings. He had his long black cane still tilted in his hand like a fencing foil and half presented at the open door. His large straw hat had fallen behind him as he leapt backwards.

“With reference to your suggestion, MacIan,” said Turnbull, placidly, “I think it looks more like the Devil.”

“Who on earth are you?” cried the stranger in a high shrill voice, brandishing his cane defensively.

“Let me see,” said Turnbull, looking round to MacIan with the same blandness. “Who are we?”

“Come out,” screamed the little man with the stick.

“Certainly,” said Turnbull, and went outside with the sword, MacIan following.

Seen more fully, with the evening light on his face, the strange man looked a little less like a goblin. He wore a square pale–grey jacket suit, on which the grey butterfly tie was the only indisputable touch of affectation. Against the great sunset his figure had looked merely small: seen in a more equal light it looked tolerably compact and shapely. His reddish–brown hair, combed into two great curls, looked like the long, slow curling hair of the women in some pre–Raphaelite pictures. But within this feminine frame of hair his face was unexpectedly impudent, like a monkey’s.
“What are you doing here?” he said, in a sharp small voice.
“Well,” said MacIan, in his grave childish way, “what are you doing here?”
“I,” said the man, indignantly, “I’m in my own garden.”
“Oh,” said MacIan, simply, “I apologize.”

Turnbull was coolly curling his red moustache, and the stranger stared from one to the other, temporarily stunned by their innocent assurance.
“But, may I ask,” he said at last, “what the devil you are doing in my summer–house?”
“Certainly,” said MacIan. “We were just going to fight.”
“To fight!” repeated the man.
“We had better tell this gentleman the whole business,” broke in Turnbull. Then turning to the stranger he said firmly, “I am sorry, sir, but we have something to do that must be done. And I may as well tell you at the beginning and to avoid waste of time or language, that we cannot admit any interference.”
“We were just going to take some slight refreshment when you interrupted us . . .”

The little man had a dawning expression of understanding and stooped and picked up the unused bottle of wine, eyeing it curiously.

Turnbull continued:
“But that refreshment was preparatory to something which I fear you will find less comprehensible, but on which our minds are entirely fixed, sir. We are forced to fight a duel. We are forced by honour and an internal intellectual need. Do not, for your own sake, attempt to stop us. I know all the excellent and ethical things that you will want to say to us. I know all about the essential requirements of civil order: I have written leading articles about them all my life. I know all about the sacredness of human life; I have bored all my friends with it. Try and understand our position. This man and I are alone in the modern world in that we think that God is essentially important. I think He does not exist; that is where the importance comes in for me. But this man thinks that He does exist, and thinking that very properly thinks Him more important than anything else. Now we wish to make a great demonstration and assertion—something that will set the world on fire like the first Christian persecutions. If you like, we are attempting a mutual martyrdom. The papers have posted up every town against us. Scotland Yard has fortified every police station with our enemies; we are driven therefore to the edge of a lonely lane, and indirectly to taking liberties with your summer–house in order to arrange our . . .”

“Stop!” roared the little man in the butterfly necktie. “Put me out of my
intellectual misery. Are you really the two tomfools I have read of in all the papers? Are you the two people who wanted to spit each other in the Police Court? Are you? Are you?"

“Yes,” said MacIan, “it began in a Police Court.”

The little man slung the bottle of wine twenty yards away like a stone.

“Come up to my place,” he said. “I’ve got better stuff than that. I’ve got the best Beaune within fifty miles of here. Come up. You’re the very men I wanted to see.”

Even Turnbull, with his typical invulnerability, was a little taken aback by this boisterous and almost brutal hospitality.

“Why . . . sir . . .” he began.

“Come up! Come in!” howled the little man, dancing with delight. “I’ll give you a dinner. I’ll give you a bed! I’ll give you a green smooth lawn and your choice of swords and pistols. Why, you fools, I adore fighting! It’s the only good thing in God’s world! I’ve walked about these damned fields and longed to see somebody cut up and killed and the blood running. Ha! Ha!”

And he made sudden lunges with his stick at the trunk of a neighbouring tree so that the ferrule made fierce prints and punctures in the bark.

“Excuse me,” said MacIan suddenly with the wide–eyed curiosity of a child, “excuse me, but . . .”

“Well?” said the small fighter, brandishing his wooden weapon.

“Excuse me,” repeated MacIan, “but was that what you were doing at the door?”

The little man stared an instant and then said: “Yes,” and Turnbull broke into a guffaw.

“Come on!” cried the little man, tucking his stick under his arm and taking quite suddenly to his heels. “Come on! Confound me, I’ll see both of you eat and then I’ll see one of you die. Lord bless me, the gods must exist after all—they have sent me one of my day–dreams! Lord! A duel!”

He had gone flying along a winding path between the borders of the kitchen garden, and in the increasing twilight he was as hard to follow as a flying hare. But at length the path after many twists betrayed its purpose and led abruptly up two or three steps to the door of a tiny but very clean cottage. There was nothing about the outside to distinguish it from other cottages, except indeed its ominous cleanliness and one thing that was out of all the custom and tradition of all cottages under the sun. In the middle of the little garden among the stocks and marigolds there surged up in shapeless stone a South Sea Island idol. There was
something gross and even evil in that eyeless and alien god among the most innocent of the English flowers.

“Come in!” cried the creature again. “Come in! it’s better inside!”

Whether or no it was better inside it was at least a surprise. The moment the two duellists had pushed open the door of that inoffensive, whitewashed cottage they found that its interior was lined with fiery gold. It was like stepping into a chamber in the Arabian Nights. The door that closed behind them shut out England and all the energies of the West. The ornaments that shone and shimmered on every side of them were subtly mixed from many periods and lands, but were all oriental. Cruel Assyrian bas–reliefs ran along the sides of the passage; cruel Turkish swords and daggers glinted above and below them; the two were separated by ages and fallen civilizations. Yet they seemed to sympathize since they were both harmonious and both merciless. The house seemed to consist of chamber within chamber and created that impression as of a dream which belongs also to the Arabian Nights themselves. The innermost room of all was like the inside of a jewel. The little man who owned it all threw himself on a heap of scarlet and golden cushions and struck his hands together. A negro in a white robe and turban appeared suddenly and silently behind them.

“Selim,” said the host, “these two gentlemen are staying with me tonight. Send up the very best wine and dinner at once. And Selim, one of these gentlemen will probably die tomorrow. Make arrangements, please.”

The negro bowed and withdrew.

Evan MacIan came out the next morning into the little garden to a fresh silver day, his long face looking more austere than ever in that cold light, his eyelids a little heavy. He carried one of the swords. Turnbull was in the little house behind him, demolishing the end of an early breakfast and humming a tune to himself, which could be heard through the open window. A moment or two later he leapt to his feet and came out into the sunlight, still munching toast, his own sword stuck under his arm like a walking–stick.

Their eccentric host had vanished from sight, with a polite gesture, some twenty minutes before. They imagined him to be occupied on some concerns in the interior of the house, and they waited for his emergence, stamping the garden in silence—the garden of tall, fresh country flowers, in the midst of which the monstrous South Sea idol lifted itself as abruptly as the prow of a ship riding on a sea of red and white and gold.

It was with a start, therefore, that they came upon the man himself already in the garden. They were all the more startled because of the still posture in which
they found him. He was on his knees in front of the stone idol, rigid and motionless, like a saint in a trance or ecstasy. Yet when Turnbull’s tread broke a twig, he was on his feet in a flash.

“Excuse me,” he said with an irradiation of smiles, but yet with a kind of bewilderment. “So sorry . . . family prayers . . . old fashioned . . . mother’s knee. Let us go on to the lawn behind.”

And he ducked rapidly round the statue to an open space of grass on the other side of it.

“This will do us best, Mr. MacIan,” said he. Then he made a gesture towards the heavy stone figure on the pedestal which had now its blank and shapeless back turned towards them. “Don’t you be afraid,” he added, “he can still see us.”

MacIan turned his blue, blinking eyes, which seemed still misty with sleep (or sleeplessness) towards the idol, but his brows drew together.

The little man with the long hair also had his eyes on the back view of the god. His eyes were at once liquid and burning, and he rubbed his hands slowly against each other.

“Do you know,” he said, “I think he can see us better this way. I often think that this blank thing is his real face, watching, though it cannot be watched. He! he! Yes, I think he looks nice from behind. He looks more cruel from behind, don’t you think?”

“What the devil is the thing?” asked Turnbull gruffly.

“It is the only Thing there is,” answered the other. “It is Force.”

“Oh!” said Turnbull shortly.

“Yes, my friends,” said the little man, with an animated countenance, fluttering his fingers in the air, “it was no chance that led you to this garden; surely it was the caprice of some old god, some happy, pitiless god. Perhaps it was his will, for he loves blood; and on that stone in front of him men have been butchered by hundreds in the fierce, feasting islands of the South. In this cursed, craven place I have not been permitted to kill men on his altar. Only rabbits and cats, sometimes.”

In the stillness MacIan made a sudden movement, unmeaning apparently, and then remained rigid.

“But today, today,” continued the small man in a shrill voice. “Today his hour is come. Today his will is done on earth as it is in heaven. Men, men, men will bleed before him today.” And he bit his forefinger in a kind of fever.

Still, the two duellists stood with their swords as heavily as statues, and the silence seemed to cool the eccentric and call him back to more rational speech.
“Perhaps I express myself a little too lyrically,” he said with an amicable abruptness. “My philosophy has its higher ecstasies, but perhaps you are hardly worked up to them yet. Let us confine ourselves to the unquestioned. You have found your way, gentlemen, by a beautiful accident, to the house of the only man in England (probably) who will favour and encourage your most reasonable project. From Cornwall to Cape Wrath this country is one horrible, solid block of humanitarianism. You will find men who will defend this or that war in a distant continent. They will defend it on the contemptible ground of commerce or the more contemptible ground of social good. But do not fancy that you will find one other person who will comprehend a strong man taking the sword in his hand and wiping out his enemy. My name is Wimpey, Morrice Wimpey. I had a Fellowship at Magdalen. But I assure you I had to drop it, owing to my having said something in a public lecture infringing the popular prejudice against those great gentlemen, the assassins of the Italian Renaissance. They let me say it at dinner and so on, and seemed to like it. But in a public lecture . . . so inconsistent. Well, as I say, here is your only refuge and temple of honour. Here you can fall back on that naked and awful arbitration which is the only thing that balances the stars—a still, continuous violence. Vae Victis! Down, down, down with the defeated! Victory is the only ultimate fact. Carthage was destroyed, the Red Indians are being exterminated: that is the single certainty. In an hour from now that sun will still be shining and that grass growing, and one of you will be conquered; one of you will be the conqueror. When it has been done, nothing will alter it. Heroes, I give you the hospitality fit for heroes. And I salute the survivor. Fall on!”

The two men took their swords. Then MacIan said steadily: “Mr. Turnbull, lend me your sword a moment.”

Turnbull, with a questioning glance, handed him the weapon. MacIan took the second sword in his left hand and, with a violent gesture, hurled it at the feet of little Mr. Wimpey.

“Fight!” he said in a loud, harsh voice. “Fight me now!”

Wimpey took a step backward, and bewildered words bubbled on his lips.

“Pick up that sword and fight me,” repeated MacIan, with brows as black as thunder.

The little man turned to Turnbull with a gesture, demanding judgement or protection.

“Really, sir,” he began, “this gentleman confuses . . .”

“You stinking little coward,” roared Turnbull, suddenly releasing his wrath.
“Fight, if you’re so fond of fighting! Fight, if you’re so fond of all that filthy philosophy! If winning is everything, go in and win! If the weak must go to the wall, go to the wall! Fight, you rat! Fight, or if you won’t fight—run!”

And he ran at Wimpey, with blazing eyes.

Wimpey staggered back a few paces like a man struggling with his own limbs. Then he felt the furious Scotchman coming at him like an express train, doubling his size every second, with eyes as big as windows and a sword as bright as the sun. Something broke inside him, and he found himself running away, tumbling over his own feet in terror, and crying out as he ran.

“Chase him!” shouted Turnbull as MacIan snatched up the sword and joined in the scamper. “Chase him over a county! Chase him into the sea! Shoo! Shoo! Shoo!”

The little man plunged like a rabbit among the tall flowers, the two duellists after him. Turnbull kept at his tail with savage ecstasy, still shooing him like a cat. But MacIan, as he ran past the South Sea idol, paused an instant to spring upon its pedestal. For five seconds he strained against the inert mass. Then it stirred; and he sent it over with a great crash among the flowers, that engulfed it altogether. Then he went bounding after the runaway.

In the energy of his alarm the ex–Fellow of Magdalen managed to leap the paling of his garden. The two pursuers went over it after him like flying birds. He fled frantically down a long lane with his two terrors on his trail till he came to a gap in the hedge and went across a steep meadow like the wind. The two Scotchmen, as they ran, kept up a cheery bellowing and waved their swords. Up three slanting meadows, down four slanting meadows on the other side, across another road, across a heath of snapping bracken, through a wood, across another road, and to the brink of a big pool, they pursued the flying philosopher. But when he came to the pool his pace was so precipitate that he could not stop it, and with a kind of lurching stagger, he fell splash into the greasy water. Getting dripping to his feet, with the water up to his knees, the worshipper of force and victory waded disconsolately to the other side and drew himself on to the bank. And Turnbull sat down on the grass and went off into reverberations of laughter. A second afterwards the most extraordinary grimaces were seen to distort the stiff face of MacIan, and unholy sounds came from within. He had never practised laughing, and it hurt him very much.
At about half-past one, under a strong blue sky, Turnbull got up out of the grass and fern in which he had been lying, and his still intermittent laughter ended in a kind of yawn.

“I’m hungry,” he said shortly. “Are you?”

“I have not noticed,” answered Maclan. “What are you going to do?”

“There’s a village down the road, past the pool,” answered Turnbull. “I can see it from here. I can see the whitewashed walls of some cottages and a kind of corner of the church. How jolly it all looks. It looks so—I don’t know what the word is—so sensible. Don’t fancy I’m under any illusions about Arcadian virtue and the innocent villagers. Men make beasts of themselves there with drink, but they don’t deliberately make devils of themselves with mere talking. They kill wild animals in the wild woods, but they don’t kill cats to the God of Victory. They don’t—” He broke off and suddenly spat on the ground.

“Excuse me,” he said; “it was ceremonial. One has to get the taste out of one’s mouth.”

“The taste of what?” asked Maclan.

“I don’t know the exact name for it,” replied Turnbull. “Perhaps it is the South Sea Islands, or it may be Magdalen College.”

There was a long pause, and Maclan also lifted his large limbs off the ground—his eyes particularly dreamy.

“I know what you mean, Turnbull,” he said, “but . . . I always thought you people agreed with all that.”

“With all that about doing as one likes, and the individual, and Nature loving the strongest, and all the things which that cockroach talked about.”

Turnbull’s big blue-grey eyes stood open with a grave astonishment.

“Do you really mean to say, Maclan,” he said, “that you fancied that we, the Free-thinkers, that Bradlaugh, or Holyoake, or Ingersoll, believe all that dirty, immoral mysticism about Nature? Damn Nature!”

“I supposed you did,” said Maclan calmly. “It seems to me your most conclusive position.”

“And you mean to tell me,” rejoined the other, “that you broke my window, and challenged me to mortal combat, and tied a tradesman up with ropes, and
chased an Oxford Fellow across five meadows–all under the impression that I am such an illiterate idiot as to believe in Nature!”

“I supposed you did,” repeated MacIan with his usual mildness; “but I admit that I know little of the details of your belief–or disbelief.”

Turnbull swung round quite suddenly, and set off towards the village.

“Come along,” he cried. “Come down to the village. Come down to the nearest decent inhabitable pub. This is a case for beer.”

“I do not quite follow you,” said the Highlander.

“Yes, you do,” answered Turnbull. “You follow me slap into the inn–parlour. I repeat, this is a case for beer. We must have the whole of this matter out thoroughly before we go a step farther. Do you know that an idea has just struck me of great simplicity and of some cogency. Do not by any means let us drop our intentions of settling our differences with two steel swords. But do you not think that with two pewter pots we might do what we really have never thought of doing yet–discover what our difference is?”

“It never occurred to me before,” answered MacIan with tranquillity. “It is a good suggestion.”

And they set out at an easy swing down the steep road to the village of Grassley–in–the–Hole.

Grassley–in–the–Hole was a rude parallelogram of buildings, with two thoroughfares which might have been called two high streets if it had been possible to call them streets. One of these ways was higher on the slope than the other, the whole parallelogram lying aslant, so to speak, on the side of the hill. The upper of these two roads was decorated with a big public house, a butcher’s shop, a small public house, a sweetstuff shop, a very small public house, and an illegible signpost. The lower of the two roads boasted a horse–pond, a post office, a gentleman’s garden with very high hedges, a microscopically small public house, and two cottages. Where all the people lived who supported all the public houses was in this, as in many other English villages, a silent and smiling mystery. The church lay a little above and beyond the village, with a square grey tower dominating it decisively.

But even the church was scarcely so central and solemn an institution as the large public house, the Valencourt Arms. It was named after some splendid family that had long gone bankrupt, and whose seat was occupied by a man who had invented a hygienic bootjack; but the unfathomable sentimentalism of the English people insisted in regarding the Inn, the seat and the sitter in it, as alike parts of a pure and marmoreal antiquity. And in the Valencourt Arms festivity
itself had some solemnity and decorum; and beer was drunk with reverence, as it ought to be. Into the principal parlour of this place entered two strangers, who found themselves, as is always the case in such hostels, the object, not of fluttered curiosity or pert inquiry, but of steady, ceaseless, devouring ocular study. They had long coats down to their heels, and carried under each coat something that looked like a stick. One was tall and dark, the other short and red–haired. They ordered a pot of ale each.

“MacIan,” said Turnbull, lifting his tankard, “the fool who wanted us to be friends made us want to go on fighting. It is only natural that the fool who wanted us to fight should make us friendly. MacIan, your health!”

Dusk was already dropping, the rustics in the tavern were already lurching and lumbering out of it by twos and threes, crying clamorous good nights to a solitary old toper that remained, before MacIan and Turnbull had reached the really important part of their discussion.

MacIan wore an expression of sad bewilderment not uncommon with him. “I am to understand, then,” he said, “that you don’t believe in nature.”

“You may say so in a very special and emphatic sense,” said Turnbull. “I do not believe in nature, just as I do not believe in Odin. She is a myth. It is not merely that I do not believe that nature can guide us. It is that I do not believe that nature exists.”

“Exists?” said MacIan in his monotonous way, settling his pewter pot on the table.

“Yes, in a real sense nature does not exist. I mean that nobody can discover what the original nature of things would have been if things had not interfered with it. The first blade of grass began to tear up the earth and eat it; it was interfering with nature, if there is any nature. The first wild ox began to tear up the grass and eat it; he was interfering with nature, if there is any nature. In the same way,” continued Turnbull, “the human when it asserts its dominance over nature is just as natural as the thing which it destroys.”

“And in the same way,” said MacIan almost dreamily, “the superhuman, the supernatural is just as natural as the nature which it destroys.”

Turnbull took his head out of his pewter pot in some anger.

“The supernatural, of course,” he said, “is quite another thing; the case of the supernatural is simple. The supernatural does not exist.”

“Quite so,” said MacIan in a rather dull voice; “you said the same about the natural. If the natural does not exist the supernatural obviously can’t.” And he yawned a little over his ale.
Turnbull turned for some reason a little red and remarked quickly, “That may be jolly clever, for all I know. But everyone does know that there is a division between the things that as a matter of fact do commonly happen and the things that don’t. Things that break the evident laws of nature—”

“Which does not exist,” put in MacIan sleepily. Turnbull struck the table with a sudden hand.

“Good Lord in heaven!” he cried—“Who does not exist,” murmured MacIan.

“Good Lord in heaven!” thundered Turnbull, without regarding the interruption. “Do you really mean to sit there and say that you, like anybody else, would not recognize the difference between a natural occurrence and a supernatural one—if there could be such a thing? If I flew up to the ceiling—”

“You would bump your head badly,” cried MacIan, suddenly starting up.

“One can’t talk of this kind of thing under a ceiling at all. Come outside! Come outside and ascend into heaven!”

He burst the door open on a blue abyss of evening and they stepped out into it: it was suddenly and strangely cool.

“Turnbull,” said MacIan, “you have said some things so true and some so false that I want to talk; and I will try to talk so that you understand. For at present you do not understand at all. We don’t seem to mean the same things by the same words.”

He stood silent for a second or two and then resumed.

“A minute or two ago I caught you out in a real contradiction. At that moment logically I was right. And at that moment I knew I was wrong. Yes, there is a real difference between the natural and the supernatural: if you flew up into that blue sky this instant, I should think that you were moved by God—or the devil. But if you want to know what I really think . . . I must explain.”

He stopped again, abstractedly boring the point of his sword into the earth, and went on:

“I was born and bred and taught in a complete universe. The supernatural was not natural, but it was perfectly reasonable. Nay, the supernatural to me is more reasonable than the natural; for the supernatural is a direct message from God, who is reason. I was taught that some things are natural and some things divine. I mean that some things are mechanical and some things divine. But there is the great difficulty, Turnbull. The great difficulty is that, according to my teaching, you are divine.”

“Me! Divine?” said Turnbull truculently. “What do you mean?”

“That is just the difficulty,” continued MacIan thoughtfully. “I was told that
there was a difference between the grass and a man’s will; and the difference was that a man’s will was special and divine. A man’s free will, I heard, was supernatural.”

“Rubbish!” said Turnbull.

“Oh,” said MacIan patiently, “then if a man’s free will isn’t supernatural, why do your materialists deny that it exists?”

Turnbull was silent for a moment. Then he began to speak, but MacIan continued with the same steady voice and sad eyes:

“So what I feel is this: Here is the great divine creation I was taught to believe in. I can understand your disbelieving in it, but why disbelieve in a part of it? It was all one thing to me. God had authority because he was God. Man had authority because he was man. You cannot prove that God is better than a man; nor can you prove that a man is better than a horse. Why permit any ordinary thing? Why do you let a horse be saddled?”

“Some modern thinkers disapprove of it,” said Turnbull a little doubtfully.

“I know,” said MacIan grimly; “that man who talked about love, for instance.”

Turnbull made a humorous grimace; then he said: “We seem to be talking in a kind of shorthand; but I won’t pretend not to understand you. What you mean is this: that you learnt about all your saints and angels at the same time as you learnt about common morality, from the same people, in the same way. And you mean to say that if one may be disputed, so may the other. Well, let that pass for the moment. But let me ask you a question in turn. Did not this system of yours, which you swallowed whole, contain all sorts of things that were merely local, the respect for the chief of your clan, or such things; the village ghost, the family feud, or what not? Did you not take in those things, too, along with your theology?”

MacIan stared along the dim village road, down which the last straggler from the inn was trailing his way.

“What you say is not unreasonable,” he said. “But it is not quite true. The distinction between the chief and us did exist; but it was never anything like the distinction between the human and the divine, or the human and the animal. It was more like the distinction between one animal and another. But—”

“Well?” said Turnbull.

MacIan was silent.

“Go on,” repeated Turnbull; “what’s the matter with you? What are you staring at?”

“I am staring,” said MacIan at last, “at that which shall judge us both.”
“Oh, yes,” said Turnbull in a tired way, “I suppose you mean God.”
“No, I don’t,” said MacIan, shaking his head. “I mean him.”
And he pointed to the half–tipsy yokel who was ploughing down the road.
“What do you mean?” asked the atheist.
“I mean him,” repeated MacIan with emphasis. “He goes out in the early dawn; he digs or he ploughs a field. Then he comes back and drinks ale, and then he sings a song. All your philosophies and political systems are young compared to him. All your hoary cathedrals, yes, even the Eternal Church on earth is new compared to him. The most mouldering gods in the British Museum are new facts beside him. It is he who in the end shall judge us all.”
And MacIan rose to his feet with a vague excitement.
“What are you going to do?”
“I am going to ask him,” cried MacIan, “which of us is right.”
Turnbull broke into a kind of laugh. “Ask that intoxicated turnip–eater–” he began.
“Yes–which of us is right,” cried MacIan violently. “Oh, you have long words and I have long words; and I talk of every man being the image of God; and you talk of every man being a citizen and enlightened enough to govern. But if every man typifies God, there is God. If every man is an enlightened citizen, there is your enlightened citizen. The first man one meets is always man. Let us catch him up.”
And in gigantic strides the long, lean Highlander whirled away into the grey twilight, Turnbull following with a good–humoured oath.
The track of the rustic was easy to follow, even in the faltering dark; for he was enlivening his wavering walk with song. It was an interminable poem, beginning with some unspecified King William, who (it appeared) lived in London town and who after the second rise vanished rather abruptly from the train of thought. The rest was almost entirely about beer and was thick with local topography of a quite unrecognizable kind. The singer’s step was neither very rapid, nor, indeed, exceptionally secure; so the song grew louder and louder and the two soon overtook him.
He was a man elderly or rather of any age, with lean grey hair and a lean red face, but with that remarkable rustic physiognomy in which it seems that all the features stand out independently from the face; the rugged red nose going out like a limb; the bleared blue eyes standing out like signals.
He gave them greeting with the elaborate urbanity of the slightly intoxicated. MacIan, who was vibrating with one of his silent, violent decisions, opened the
question without delay. He explained the philosophic position in words as short and simple as possible. But the singular old man with the lank red face seemed to think uncommonly little of the short words. He fixed with a fierce affection upon one or two of the long ones.

“Atheists!” he repeated with luxurious scorn. “Atheists! I know their sort, master. Atheists! Don’t talk to me about ‘un. Atheists!”

The grounds of his disdain seemed a little dark and confused; but they were evidently sufficient. Maclan resumed in some encouragement:

“You think as I do, I hope; you think that a man should be connected with the Church; with the common Christian—”

The old man extended a quivering stick in the direction of a distant hill.

“There’s the church,” he said thickly. “Grassley old church that is. Pulled down it was, in the old squire’s time, and—”

“I mean,” explained Maclan elaborately, “that you think that there should be someone typifying religion, a priest—”


“They want you,” said Maclan.

“Quite so,” said Turnbull, “and me; but they won’t get us. Maclan, your attempt on the primitive innocence does not seem very successful. Let me try. What you want, my friend, is your rights. You don’t want any priests or churches. A vote, a right to speak is what you—”

“Who says I a’n’t got a right to speak?” said the old man, facing round in an irrational frenzy. “I got a right to speak. I’m a man, I am. I don’t want no votin’ nor priests. I say a man’s a man; that’s what I say. If a man a’n’t a man, what is he? That’s what I say, if a man a’n’t a man, what is he? When I sees a man, I sez ‘e’s a man.”

“Quite so,” said Turnbull, “a citizen.”

“I say he’s a man,” said the rustic furiously, stopping and striking his stick on the ground. “Not a city or owt else. He’s a man.”

“You’re perfectly right,” said the sudden voice of Maclan, falling like a sword. “And you have kept close to something the whole world of today tries to forget.”

“Good night.”

And the old man went on wildly singing into the night.

“A jolly old creature,” said Turnbull; “he didn’t seem able to get much beyond that fact that a man is a man.”
“Has anybody got beyond it?” asked MacIan.

Turnbull looked at him curiously. “Are you turning an agnostic?” he asked.

“Oh, you do not understand!” cried out MacIan. “We Catholics are all agnostics. We Catholics have only in that sense got as far as realizing that man is a man. But your Ibsens and your Zolas and your Shaws and your Tolstoys have not even got so far.”
AN INTERLUDE OF ARGUMENT

Morning broke in bitter silver along the grey and level plain; and almost as it did so Turnbull and MacIan came out of a low, scrubby wood on to the empty and desolate flats. They had walked all night.

They had walked all night and talked all night also, and if the subject had been capable of being exhausted they would have exhausted it. Their long and changing argument had taken them through districts and landscapes equally changing. They had discussed Haeckel upon hills so high and steep that in spite of the coldness of the night it seemed as if the stars might burn them. They had explained and re–explained the Massacre of St. Bartholomew in little white lanes walled in with standing corn as with walls of gold. They had talked about Mr. Kensit in dim and twinkling pine woods, amid the bewildering monotony of the pines. And it was with the end of a long speech from MacIan, passionately defending the practical achievements and the solid prosperity of the Catholic tradition, that they came out upon the open land.

MacIan had learnt much and thought more since he came out of the cloudy hills of Arisaig. He had met many typical modern figures under circumstances which were sharply symbolic; and, moreover, he had absorbed the main modern atmosphere from the mere presence and chance phrases of Turnbull, as such atmospheres can always be absorbed from the presence and the phrases of any man of great mental vitality. He had at last begun thoroughly to understand what are the grounds upon which the mass of the modern world solidly disapprove of her creed; and he threw himself into replying to them with a hot intellectual enjoyment.

“I begin to understand one or two of your dogmas, Mr. Turnbull,” he had said emphatically as they ploughed heavily up a wooded hill. “And every one that I understand I deny. Take any one of them you like. You hold that your heretics and sceptics have helped the world forward and handed on a lamp of progress. I deny it. Nothing is plainer from real history than that each of your heretics invented a complete cosmos of his own which the next heretic smashed entirely to pieces. Who knows now exactly what Nestorius taught? Who cares? There are only two things that we know for certain about it. The first is that Nestorius, as a heretic, taught something quite opposite to the teaching of Arius, the heretic who
came before him, and something quite useless to James Turnbull, the heretic who comes after. I defy you to go back to the Free–thinkers of the past and find any habitation for yourself at all. I defy you to read Godwin or Shelley or the deists of the eighteenth century of the nature–worshipping humanists of the Renaissance, without discovering that you differ from them twice as much as you differ from the Pope. You are a nineteenth–century sceptic, and you are always telling me that I ignore the cruelty of nature. If you had been an eighteenth–century sceptic you would have told me that I ignore the kindness and benevolence of nature. You are an atheist, and you praise the deists of the eighteenth century. Read them instead of praising them, and you will find that their whole universe stands or falls with the deity. You are a materialist, and you think Bruno a scientific hero. See what he said and you will think him an insane mystic. No, the great Free–thinker, with his genuine ability and honesty, does not in practice destroy Christianity. What he does destroy is the Free–thinker who went before. Free–thought may be suggestive, it may be inspiriting, it may have as much as you please of the merits that come from vivacity and variety. But there is one thing Free–thought can never be by any possibility–Free–thought can never be progressive. It can never be progressive because it will accept nothing from the past; it begins every time again from the beginning; and it goes every time in a different direction. All the rational philosophers have gone along different roads, so it is impossible to say which has gone farthest. Who can discuss whether Emerson was a better optimist than Schopenhauer was pessimist? It is like asking if this corn is as yellow as that hill is steep. No; there are only two things that really progress; and they both accept accumulations of authority. They may be progressing uphill and down; they may be growing steadily better or steadily worse; but they have steadily increased in certain definable matters; they have steadily advanced in a certain definable direction; they are the only two things, it seems, that ever can progress. The first is strictly physical science. The second is the Catholic Church.”

“Physical science and the Catholic Church!” said Turnbull sarcastically; “and no doubt the first owes a great deal to the second.”

“If you pressed that point I might reply that it was very probable,” answered MacIan calmly. “I often fancy that your historical generalizations rest frequently on random instances; I should not be surprised if your vague notions of the Church as the persecutor of science was a generalization from Galileo. I should not be at all surprised if, when you counted the scientific investigations and discoveries since the fall of Rome, you found that a great mass of them had been
made by monks. But the matter is irrelevant to my meaning. I say that if you want an example of anything which has progressed in the moral world by the same method as science in the material world, by continually adding to without unsettling what was there before, then I say that there is only one example of it. And that is Us.”

“With this enormous difference,” said Turnbull, “that however elaborate be the calculations of physical science, their net result can be tested. Granted that it took millions of books I never read and millions of men I never heard of to discover the electric light. Still I can see the electric light. But I cannot see the supreme virtue which is the result of all your theologies and sacraments.”

“Catholic virtue is often invisible because it is the normal,” answered MacIan. “Christianity is always out of fashion because it is always sane; and all fashions are mild insanities. When Italy is mad on art the Church seems too Puritanical; when England is mad on Puritanism the Church seems too artistic. When you quarrel with us now you class us with kingship and despotism; but when you quarrelled with us first it was because we would not accept the divine despotism of Henry VIII. The Church always seems to be behind the times, when it is really beyond the times; it is waiting till the last fad shall have seen its last summer. It keeps the key of a permanent virtue.”

“Oh, I have heard all that!” said Turnbull with genial contempt. “I have heard that Christianity keeps the key of virtue, and that if you read Tom Paine you will cut your throat at Monte Carlo. It is such rubbish that I am not even angry at it. You say that Christianity is the prop of morals; but what more do you do? When a doctor attends you and could poison you with a pinch of salt, do you ask whether he is a Christian? You ask whether he is a gentleman, whether he is an M.D.–anything but that. When a soldier enlists to die for his country or disgrace it, do you ask whether he is a Christian? You are more likely to ask whether he is Oxford or Cambridge at the boat race. If you think your creed essential to morals why do you not make it a test for these things?”

“We once did make it a test for these things,” said MacIan smiling, “and then you told us that we were imposing by force a faith unsupported by argument. It seems rather hard that having first been told that our creed must be false because we did use tests, we should now be told that it must be false because we don’t. But I notice that most anti–Christian arguments are in the same inconsistent style.”

“That is all very well as a debating–club answer,” replied Turnbull good–humouredly, “but the question still remains: Why don’t you confine yourself
more to Christians if Christians are the only really good men?"

“Who talked of such folly?” asked MacIan disdainfully. “Do you suppose that the Catholic Church ever held that Christians were the only good men? Why, the Catholics of the Catholic Middle Ages talked about the virtues of all the virtuous Pagans until humanity was sick of the subject. No, if you really want to know what we mean when we say that Christianity has a special power of virtue, I will tell you. The Church is the only thing on earth that can perpetuate a type of virtue and make it something more than a fashion. The thing is so plain and historical that I hardly think you will ever deny it. You cannot deny that it is perfectly possible that tomorrow morning, in Ireland or in Italy, there might appear a man not only as good but good in exactly the same way as St. Francis of Assisi. Very well, now take the other types of human virtue; many of them splendid. The English gentleman of Elizabeth was chivalrous and idealistic. But can you stand still here in this meadow and be an English gentleman of Elizabeth? The austere republican of the eighteenth century, with his stern patriotism and his simple life, was a fine fellow. But have you ever seen him? have you ever seen an austere republican? Only a hundred years have passed and that volcano of revolutionary truth and valour is as cold as the mountains of the moon. And so it is and so it will be with the ethics which are buzzing down Fleet Street at this instant as I speak. What phrase would inspire the London clerk or workman just now? Perhaps that he is a son of the British Empire on which the sun never sets; perhaps that he is a prop of his Trades Union, or a class–conscious proletarian something or other; perhaps merely that he is a gentleman when he obviously is not. Those names and notions are all honourable; but how long will they last? Empires break; industrial conditions change; the suburbs will not last for ever. What will remain? I will tell you. The Catholic Saint will remain.”

“And suppose I don’t like him?” said Turnbull.

“On my theory the question is rather whether he will like you: or more probably whether he will ever have heard of you. But I grant the reasonableness of your query. You have a right, if you speak as the ordinary man, to ask if you will like the saint. But as the ordinary man you do like him. You revel in him. If you dislike him it is not because you are a nice ordinary man, but because you are (if you will excuse me) a sophisticated prig of a Fleet Street editor. That is just the funny part of it. The human race has always admired the Catholic virtues, however little it can practise them; and oddly enough it has admired most those of them that the modern world most sharply disputes. You complain
of Catholicism for setting up an ideal of virginity; it did nothing of the kind. The whole human race set up an ideal of virginity; the Greeks in Athene, the Romans in the Vestal fire, set up an ideal of virginity. What then is your real quarrel with Catholicism? Your quarrel can only be, your quarrel really only is, that Catholicism has achieved an ideal of virginity; that it is no longer a mere piece of floating poetry. But if you, and a few feverish men, in top hats, running about in a street in London, choose to differ as to the ideal itself, not only from the Church, but from the Parthenon whose name means virginity, from the Roman Empire which went outwards from the virgin flame, from the whole legend and tradition of Europe, from the lion who will not touch virgins, from the unicorn who respects them, and who make up together the bearers of your own national shield, from the most living and lawless of your own poets, from Massinger, who wrote the Virgin Martyr, from Shakespeare, who wrote Measure for Measure—if you in Fleet Street differ from all this human experience, does it never strike you that it may be Fleet Street that is wrong?”

“No,” answered Turnbull; “I trust that I am sufficiently fair-minded to canvass and consider the idea; but having considered it, I think Fleet Street is right, yes—even if the Parthenon is wrong. I think that as the world goes on new psychological atmospheres are generated, and in these atmospheres it is possible to find delicacies and combinations which in other times would have to be represented by some ruder symbol. Every man feels the need of some element of purity in sex; perhaps they can only typify purity as the absence of sex. You will laugh if I suggest that we may have made in Fleet Street an atmosphere in which a man can be so passionate as Sir Lancelot and as pure as Sir Galahad. But, after all, we have in the modern world erected many such atmospheres. We have, for instance, a new and imaginative appreciation of children.”

“Quite so,” replied MacIan with a singular smile. “It has been very well put by one of the brightest of your young authors, who said: ‘Unless you become as little children ye shall in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven.’ But you are quite right; there is a modern worship of children. And what, I ask you, is this modern worship of children? What, in the name of all the angels and devils, is it except a worship of virginity? Why should anyone worship a thing merely because it is small or immature? No; you have tried to escape from this thing, and the very thing you point to as the goal of your escape is only the thing again. Am I wrong in saying that these things seem to be eternal?”

And it was with these words that they came in sight of the great plains. They went a little way in silence, and then James Turnbull said suddenly, “But I
cannot believe in the thing.” MacIan answered nothing to the speech; perhaps it is unanswerable. And indeed they scarcely spoke another word to each other all that day.
THE STRANGE LADY

Moonrise with a great and growing moon opened over all those flats, making them seem flatter and larger than they were, turning them to a lake of blue light. The two companions trudged across the moonlit plain for half an hour in full silence. Then MacIan stopped suddenly and planted his sword–point in the ground like one who plants his tent–pole for the night. Leaving it standing there, he clutched his black–haired skull with his great claws of hands, as was his custom when forcing the pace of his brain. Then his hands dropped again and he spoke.

“I’m sure you’re thinking the same as I am,” he said; “how long are we to be on this damned seesaw?”

The other did not answer, but his silence seemed somehow solid as assent; and MacIan went on conversationally. Neither noticed that both had instinctively stood still before the sign of the fixed and standing sword.

“It is hard to guess what God means in this business. But he means something—or the other thing, or both. Whenever we have tried to fight each other something has stopped us. Whenever we have tried to be reconciled to each other, something has stopped us again. By the run of our luck we have never had time to be either friends or enemies. Something always jumped out of the bushes.”

Turnbull nodded gravely and glanced round at the huge and hedgeless meadow which fell away towards the horizon into a glimmering high road.

“Nothing will jump out of bushes there anyhow,” he said.

“That is what I meant,” said MacIan, and stared steadily at the heavy hilt of his standing sword, which in the slight wind swayed on its tempered steel like some huge thistle on its stalk.

“That is what I meant; we are quite alone here. I have not heard a horse–hoof or a footstep or the hoot of a train for miles. So I think we might stop here and ask for a miracle.”

“Oh! might we?” said the atheistic editor with a sort of gusto of disgust.

“I beg your pardon,” said MacIan, meekly. “I forgot your prejudices.” He eyed the wind–swung sword–hilt in sad meditation and resumed: “What I mean is, we might find out in this quiet place whether there really is any fate or any
commandment against our enterprise. I will engage on my side, like Elijah, to accept a test from heaven. Turnbull, let us draw swords here in this moonlight and this monstrous solitude. And if here in this moonlight and solitude there happens anything to interrupt us—if it be lightning striking our sword—blades or a rabbit running under our legs—I will take it as a sign from God and we will shake hands for ever.”

Turnbull’s mouth twitched in angry humour under his red moustache. He said: “I will wait for signs from God until I have any signs of His existence; but God—or Fate—forbid that a man of scientific culture should refuse any kind of experiment.”

“Very well, then,” said MacIan, shortly. “We are more quiet here than anywhere else; let us engage.” And he plucked his sword—point out of the turf.

Turnbull regarded him for a second and a half with a baffling visage almost black against the moonrise; then his hand made a sharp movement to his hip and his sword shone in the moon.

As old chess–players open every game with established gambits, they opened with a thrust and parry, orthodox and even frankly ineffectual. But in MacIan’s soul more formless storms were gathering, and he made a lunge or two so savage as first to surprise and then to enrage his opponent. Turnbull ground his teeth, kept his temper, and waiting for the third lunge, and the worst, had almost spitted the lunger when a shrill, small cry came from behind him, a cry such as is not made by any of the beasts that perish.

Turnbull must have been more superstitious than he knew, for he stopped in the act of going forward. MacIan was brazenly superstitious, and he dropped his sword. After all, he had challenged the universe to send an interruption; and this was an interruption, whatever else it was. An instant afterwards the sharp, weak cry was repeated. This time it was certain that it was human and that it was female.

MacIan stood rolling those great blue Gaelic eyes that contrasted with his dark hair. “It is the voice of God,” he said again and again.

“God hasn’t got much of a voice,” said Turnbull, who snatched at every chance of cheap profanity. “As a matter of fact, MacIan, it isn’t the voice of God, but it’s something a jolly sight more important—it is the voice of man—or rather of woman. So I think we’d better scoot in its direction.”

MacIan snatched up his fallen weapon without a word, and the two raced away towards that part of the distant road from which the cry was now constantly renewed.
They had to run over a curve of country that looked smooth but was very rough; a neglected field which they soon found to be full of the tallest grasses and the deepest rabbit–holes. Moreover, that great curve of the countryside which looked so slow and gentle when you glanced over it, proved to be highly precipitous when you scampered over it; and Turnbull was twice nearly flung on his face. MacIan, though much heavier, avoided such an overthrow only by having the quick and incalculable feet of the mountaineer; but both of them may be said to have leapt off a low cliff when they leapt into the road.

The moonlight lay on the white road with a more naked and electric glare than on the grey–green upland, and though the scene which it revealed was complicated, it was not difficult to get its first features at a glance.

A small but very neat black–and–yellow motor–car was standing stolidly, slightly to the left of the road. A somewhat larger light–green motor–car was tipped half–way into a ditch on the same side, and four flushed and staggering men in evening dress were tipped out of it. Three of them were standing about the road, giving their opinions to the moon with vague but echoing violence. The fourth, however, had already advanced on the chauffeur of the black–and–yellow car, and was threatening him with a stick. The chauffeur had risen to defend himself. By his side sat a young lady.

She was sitting bolt upright, a slender and rigid figure gripping the sides of her seat, and her first few cries had ceased. She was clad in close–fitting dark costume, a mass of warm brown hair went out in two wings or waves on each side of her forehead; and even at that distance it could be seen that her profile was of the aquiline and eager sort, like a young falcon hardly free of the nest.

Turnbull had concealed in him somewhere a fund of common sense and knowledge of the world of which he himself and his best friends were hardly aware. He was one of those who take in much of the shows of things absent–mindedly, and in an irrelevant reverie. As he stood at the door of his editorial shop on Ludgate Hill and meditated on the non–existence of God, he silently absorbed a good deal of varied knowledge about the existence of men. He had come to know types by instinct and dilemmas with a glance; he saw the crux of the situation in the road, and what he saw made him redouble his pace.

He knew that the men were rich; he knew that they were drunk; and he knew, what was worst of all, that they were fundamentally frightened. And he knew this also, that no common ruffian (such as attacks ladies in novels) is ever so savage and ruthless as a coarse kind of gentleman when he is really alarmed. The reason is not recondite; it is simply because the police–court is not such a
menacing novelty to the poor ruffian as it is to the rich. When they came within hail and heard the voices, they confirmed all Turnbull’s anticipations. The man in the middle of the road was shouting in a hoarse and groggy voice that the chauffeur had smashed their car on purpose; that they must get to the Cri that evening, and that he would jolly well have to take them there. The chauffeur had mildly objected that he was driving a lady. “Oh! we’ll take care of the lady,” said the red–faced young man, and went off into gurgling and almost senile laughter.

By the time the two champions came up, things had grown more serious. The intoxication of the man talking to the chauffeur had taken one of its perverse and catlike jumps into mere screaming spite and rage. He lifted his stick and struck at the chauffeur, who caught hold of it, and the drunkard fell backwards, dragging him out of his seat on the car. Another of the rowdies rushed forward booing in idiot excitement, fell over the chauffeur, and, either by accident or design, kicked him as he lay. The drunkard got to his feet again; but the chauffeur did not.

The man who had kicked kept a kind of half–witted conscience or cowardice, for he stood staring at the senseless body and murmuring words of inconsequent self–justification, making gestures with his hands as if he were arguing with somebody. But the other three, with a mere whoop and howl of victory, were boarding the car on three sides at once. It was exactly at this moment that Turnbull fell among them like one fallen from the sky. He tore one of the climbers backward by the collar, and with a hearty push sent him staggering over into the ditch upon his nose. One of the remaining two, who was too far gone to notice anything, continued to clamber ineffectually over the high back of the car, kicking and pouring forth a rivulet of soliloquy. But the other dropped at the interruption, turned upon Turnbull and began a battering bout of fisticuffs. At the same moment the man crawled out of the ditch in a masquerade of mud and rushed at his old enemy from behind. The whole had not taken a second; and an instant after MacIan was in the midst of them.

Turnbull had tossed away his sheathed sword, greatly preferring his hands, except in the avowed etiquette of the duel; for he had learnt to use his hands in the old street–battles of Bradlaugh. But to MacIan the sword even sheathed was a more natural weapon, and he laid about him on all sides with it as with a stick. The man who had the walking–stick found his blows parried with promptitude; and a second after, to his great astonishment, found his own stick fly up in the air as by a conjuring trick, with a turn of the swordsman’s wrist. Another of the
revellers picked the stick out of the ditch and ran in upon MacIan, calling to his companion to assist him.

“I haven’t got a stick,” grumbled the disarmed man, and looked vaguely about the ditch.

“Perhaps,” said MacIan, politely, “you would like this one.” With the word the drunkard found his hand that had grasped the stick suddenly twisted and empty; and the stick lay at the feet of his companion on the other side of the road. MacIan felt a faint stir behind him; the girl had risen to her feet and was leaning forward to stare at the fighters. Turnbull was still engaged in countering and pommelling with the third young man. The fourth young man was still engaged with himself, kicking his legs in helpless rotation on the back of the car and talking with melodious rationality.

At length Turnbull’s opponent began to back before the battery of his heavy hands, still fighting, for he was the soberest and boldest of the four. If these are annals of military glory, it is due to him to say that he need not have abandoned the conflict; only that as he backed to the edge of the ditch his foot caught in a loop of grass and he went over in a flat and comfortable position from which it took him a considerable time to rise. By the time he had risen, Turnbull had come to the rescue of MacIan, who was at bay but belabouring his two enemies handsomely. The sight of the liberated reserve was to them like that of Blucher at Waterloo; the two set off at a sullen trot down the road, leaving even the walking–stick lying behind them in the moonlight. MacIan plucked the struggling and aspiring idiot off the back of the car like a stray cat, and left him swaying unsteadily in the moon. Then he approached the front part of the car in a somewhat embarrassed manner and pulled off his cap.

For some solid seconds the lady and he merely looked at each other, and MacIan had an irrational feeling of being in a picture hung on a wall. That is, he was motionless, even lifeless, and yet staringly significant, like a picture. The white moonlight on the road, when he was not looking at it, gave him a vision of the road being white with snow. The motor–car, when he was not looking at it, gave him a rude impression of a captured coach in the old days of highwaymen. And he whose whole soul was with the swords and stately manners of the eighteenth century, he who was a Jacobite risen from the dead, had an overwhelming sense of being once more in the picture, when he had so long been out of the picture.

In that short and strong silence he absorbed the lady from head to foot. He had never really looked at a human being before in his life. He saw her face and hair
first, then that she had long suede gloves; then that there was a fur cap at the back of her brown hair. He might, perhaps, be excused for this hungry attention. He had prayed that some sign might come from heaven; and after an almost savage scrutiny he came to the conclusion that his one did. The lady’s instantaneous arrest of speech might need more explaining; but she may well have been stunned with the squalid attack and the abrupt rescue. Yet it was she who remembered herself first and suddenly called out with self-accusing horror:

“Oh, that poor, poor man!”

They both swung round abruptly and saw that Turnbull, with his recovered sword under his arm–pit, was already lifting the fallen chauffeur into the car. He was only stunned and was slowly awakening, feebly waving his left arm.

The lady in long gloves and the fur cap leapt out and ran rapidly towards them, only to be reassured by Turnbull, who (unlike many of his school) really knew a little science when he invoked it to redeem the world. “He’s all right,” said he; “he’s quite safe. But I’m afraid he won’t be able to drive the car for half an hour or so.”

“I can drive the car,” said the young woman in the fur cap with stony practicability.

“Oh, in that case,” began MacIan, uneasily; and that paralysing shyness which is a part of romance induced him to make a backward movement as if leaving her to herself. But Turnbull was more rational than he, being more indifferent.

“I don’t think you ought to drive home alone, ma’am,” he said, gruffly. “There seem to be a lot of rowdy parties along this road, and the man will be no use for an hour. If you will tell us where you are going, we will see you safely there and say good night.”

The young lady exhibited all the abrupt disturbance of a person who is not commonly disturbed. She said almost sharply and yet with evident sincerity: “Of course I am awfully grateful to you for all you’ve done–and there’s plenty of room if you’ll come in.”

Turnbull, with the complete innocence of an absolutely sound motive, immediately jumped into the car; but the girl cast an eye at MacIan, who stood in the road for an instant as if rooted like a tree. Then he also tumbled his long legs into the tonneau, having that sense of degradedly diving into heaven which so many have known in so many human houses when they consented to stop to tea or were allowed to stop to supper. The slowly reviving chauffeur was set in the back seat; Turnbull and MacIan had fallen into the middle one; the lady with a steely coolness had taken the driver’s seat and all the handles of that headlong
machine. A moment afterwards the engine started, with a throb and leap unfamiliar to Turnbull, who had only once been in a motor during a general election, and utterly unknown to MacIan, who in his present mood thought it was the end of the world. Almost at the same instant that the car plucked itself out of the mud and whipped away up the road, the man who had been flung into the ditch rose waveringly to his feet. When he saw the car escaping he ran after it and shouted something which, owing to the increasing distance, could not be heard. It is awful to reflect that, if his remark was valuable, it is quite lost to the world.

The car shot on up and down the shining moonlit lanes, and there was no sound in it except the occasional click or catch of its machinery; for through some cause or other no soul inside it could think of a word to say. The lady symbolized her feelings, whatever they were, by urging the machine faster and faster until scattered woodlands went by them in one black blotch and heavy hills and valleys seemed to ripple under the wheels like mere waves. A little while afterwards this mood seemed to slacken and she fell into a more ordinary pace; but still she did not speak. Turnbull, who kept a more common and sensible view of the case than anyone else, made some remark about the moonlight; but something indescribable made him also relapse into silence.

All this time MacIan had been in a sort of monstrous delirium, like some fabulous hero snatched up into the moon. The difference between this experience and common experiences was analogous to that between waking life and a dream. Yet he did not feel in the least as if he were dreaming; rather the other way; as waking was more actual than dreaming, so this seemed by another degree more actual than waking itself. But it was another life altogether, like a cosmos with a new dimension.

He felt he had been hurled into some new incarnation: into the midst of new relations, wrongs and rights, with towering responsibilities and almost tragic joys which he had as yet had no time to examine. Heaven had not merely sent him a message; Heaven itself had opened around him and given him an hour of its own ancient and star–shattering energy. He had never felt so much alive before; and yet he was like a man in a trance. And if you had asked him on what his throbbing happiness hung, he could only have told you that it hung on four or five visible facts, as a curtain hangs on four of five fixed nails. The fact that the lady had a little fur at her throat; the fact that the curve of her cheek was a low and lean curve and that the moonlight caught the height of her cheek–bone; the fact that her hands were small but heavily gloved as they gripped the steering–
wheel; the fact that a white witch light was on the road; the fact that the brisk breeze of their passage stirred and fluttered a little not only the brown hair of her head but the black fur on her cap. All these facts were to him certain and incredible, like sacraments.

When they had driven half a mile farther, a big shadow was flung across the path, followed by its bulky owner, who eyed the car critically but let it pass. The silver moonlight picked out a piece or two of pewter ornament on his blue uniform; and as they went by they knew it was a sergeant of police. Three hundred yards farther on another policeman stepped out into the road as if to stop them, then seemed to doubt his own authority and stepped back again. The girl was a daughter of the rich; and this police suspicion (under which all the poor live day and night) stung her for the first time into speech.

“What can they mean?” she cried out in a kind of temper; “this car’s going like a snail.”

There was a short silence, and then Turnbull said: “It is certainly very odd, you are driving quietly enough.”

“You are driving nobly,” said MacIan, and his words (which had no meaning whatever) sounded hoarse and ungainly even in his own ears.

They passed the next mile and a half swiftly and smoothly; yet among the many things which they passed in the course of it was a clump of eager policemen standing at a cross-road. As they passed, one of the policemen shouted something to the others; but nothing else happened. Eight hundred yards farther on, Turnbull stood up suddenly in the swaying car.

“My God, MacIan!” he called out, showing his first emotion of that night. “I don’t believe it’s the pace; it couldn’t be the pace. I believe it’s us.”

MacIan sat motionless for a few moments and then turned up at his companion a face that was as white as the moon above it.

“You may be right,” he said at last; “if you are, I must tell her.”

“I will tell the lady if you like,” said Turnbull, with his unconquered good temper.

“You!” said MacIan, with a sort of sincere and instinctive astonishment. “Why should you—no, I must tell her, of course—”

And he leant forward and spoke to the lady in the fur cap.

“I am afraid, madam, that we may have got you into some trouble,” he said, and even as he said it it sounded wrong, like everything he said to this particular person in the long gloves. “The fact is,” he resumed, desperately, “the fact is, we are being chased by the police.” Then the last flattening hammer fell upon poor
Evan’s embarrassment; for the fluffy brown head with the furry black cap did not turn by a section of the compass.

“We are chased by the police,” repeated MacIan, vigorously; then he added, as if beginning an explanation, “You see, I am a Catholic.”

The wind whipped back a curl of the brown hair so as to necessitate a new theory of aesthetics touching the line of the cheek–bone; but the head did not turn.

“You see,” began MacIan, again blunderingly, “this gentleman wrote in his newspaper that Our Lady was a common woman, a bad woman, and so we agreed to fight; and we were fighting quite a little time ago—but that was before we saw you.”

The young lady driving her car had half turned her face to listen; and it was not a reverent or a patient face that she showed him. Her Norman nose was tilted a trifle too high upon the slim stalk of her neck and body.

When MacIan saw that arrogant and uplifted profile pencilled plainly against the moonshine, he accepted an ultimate defeat. He had expected the angels to despise him if he were wrong, but not to despise him so much as this.

“You see,” said the stumbling spokesman, “I was angry with him when he insulted the Mother of God, and I asked him to fight a duel with me; but the police are all trying to stop it.”

Nothing seemed to waver or flicker in the fair young falcon profile; and it only opened its lips to say, after a silence: “I thought people in our time were supposed to respect each other’s religion.”

Under the shadow of that arrogant face MacIan could only fall back on the obvious answer: “But what about a man’s irreligion?” The face only answered: “Well, you ought to be more broadminded.”

If anyone else in the world had said the words, MacIan would have snorted with his equine neigh of scorn. But in this case he seemed knocked down by a superior simplicity, as if his eccentric attitude were rebuked by the innocence of a child. He could not dissociate anything that this woman said or did or wore from an idea of spiritual rarity and virtue. Like most others under the same elemental passion, his soul was at present soaked in ethics. He could have applied moral terms to the material objects of her environment. If someone had spoken of “her generous ribbon” or “her chivalrous gloves” or “her merciful shoe–buckle,” it would not have seemed to him nonsense.

He was silent, and the girl went on in a lower key as if she were momentarily softened and a little saddened also. “It won’t do, you know,” she said; “you can’t
find out the truth in that way. There are such heaps of churches and people thinking different things nowadays, and they all think they are right. My uncle was a Swedenborgian.”

MacIan sat with bowed head, listening hungrily to her voice but hardly to her words, and seeing his great world drama grow smaller and smaller before his eyes till it was no bigger than a child’s toy theatre.

“The time’s gone by for all that,” she went on; “you can’t find out the real thing like that—if there is really anything to find—” and she sighed rather drearily; for, like many of the women of our wealthy class, she was old and broken in thought, though young and clean enough in her emotions.

“Our object,” said Turnbull, shortly, “is to make an effective demonstration”; and after that word, MacIan looked at his vision again and found it smaller than ever.

“It would be in the newspapers, of course,” said the girl. “People read the newspapers, but they don’t believe them, or anything else, I think.” And she sighed again.

She drove in silence a third of a mile before she added, as if completing the sentence: “Anyhow, the whole thing’s quite absurd.”

“I don’t think,” began Turnbull, “that you quite realize—Hullo! hullo—hullo—what’s this?”

The amateur chauffeur had been forced to bring the car to a staggering stoppage, for a file of fat, blue policemen made a wall across the way. A sergeant came to the side and touched his peaked cap to the lady.

“Beg your pardon, miss,” he said with some embarrassment, for he knew her for a daughter of a dominant house, “but we have reason to believe that the gentlemen in your car are—” and he hesitated for a polite phrase.

“I am Evan MacIan,” said that gentleman, and stood up in a sort of gloomy pomp, not wholly without a touch of the sulks of a schoolboy.

“Yes, we will get out, sergeant,” said Turnbull, more easily; “my name is James Turnbull. We must not incommode the lady.”

“What are you taking them up for?” asked the young woman, looking straight in front of her along the road.

“It’s under the new act,” said the sergeant, almost apologetically. “Incurable disturbers of the peace.”

“What will happen to them?” she asked, with the same frigid clearness.

“Westgate Adult Reformatory,” he replied, briefly.

“Until when?”
“Until they are cured,” said the official.

“Very well, sergeant,” said the young lady, with a sort of tired common sense. “I am sure I don’t want to protect criminals or go against the law; but I must tell you that these gentlemen have done me a considerable service; you won’t mind drawing your men a little farther off while I say good night to them. Men like that always misunderstand.”

The sergeant was profoundly disquieted from the beginning at the mere idea of arresting anyone in the company of a great lady; to refuse one of her minor requests was quite beyond his courage. The police fell back to a few yards behind the car. Turnbull took up the two swords that were their only luggage; the swords that, after so many half duels, they were now to surrender at last. MacIan, the blood thundering in his brain at the thought of that instant of farewell, bent over, fumbled at the handle and flung open the door to get out.

But he did not get out. He did not get out, because it is dangerous to jump out of a car when it is going at full speed. And the car was going at full speed, because the young lady, without turning her head or so much as saying a syllable, had driven down a handle that made the machine plunge forward like a buffalo and then fly over the landscape like a greyhound. The police made one rush to follow, and then dropped so grotesque and hopeless a chase. Away in the vanishing distance they could see the sergeant furiously making notes.

The open door, still left loose on its hinges, swung and banged quite crazily as they went whizzing up one road and down another. Nor did MacIan sit down; he stood up stunned and yet staring, as he would have stood up at the trumpet of the Last Day. A black dot in the distance sprang up a tall black forest, swallowed them and spat them out again at the other end. A railway bridge grew larger and larger till it leapt upon their backs bellowing, and was in its turn left behind. Avenues of poplars on both sides of the road chased each other like the figures in a zoetrope. Now and then with a shock and rattle they went through sleeping moonlit villages, which must have stirred an instant in their sleep as at the passing of a fugitive earthquake. Sometimes in an outlying house a light in one erratic, unexpected window would give them a nameless hint of the hundred human secrets which they left behind them with their dust. Sometimes even a slouching rustic would be afoot on the road and would look after them, as after a flying phantom. But still MacIan stood up staring at earth and heaven; and still the door he had flung open flapped loose like a flag. Turnbull, after a few minutes of dumb amazement, had yielded to the healthiest element in his nature and gone off into uncontrollable fits of laughter. The girl had not stirred an inch.
After another half mile that seemed a mere flash, Turnbull leant over and locked the door. Evan staggered at last into his seat and hid his throbbing head in his hands; and still the car flew on and its driver sat inflexible and silent. The moon had already gone down, and the whole darkness was faintly troubled with twilight and the first movement of beasts and fowls. It was that mysterious moment when light is coming as if it were something unknown whose nature one could not guess—a mere alteration in everything. They looked at the sky and it seemed as dark as ever; then they saw the black shape of a tower or tree against it and knew that it was already grey. Save that they were driving southward and had certainly passed the longitude of London, they knew nothing of their direction; but Turnbull, who had spent a year on the Hampshire coast in his youth, began to recognize the unmistakable but quite indescribable villages of the English south. Then a white witch fire began to burn between the black stems of the fir–trees; and, like so many things in nature, though not in books on evolution, the daybreak, when it did come, came much quicker than one would think. The gloomy heavens were ripped up and rolled away like a scroll, revealing splendours, as the car went roaring up the curve of a great hill; and above them and black against the broadening light, there stood one of those crouching and fantastic trees that are first signals of the sea.
The Swords Rejoined

As they came over the hill and down on the other side of it, it is not too much to say that the whole universe of God opened over them and under them, like a thing unfolding to five times its size. Almost under their feet opened the enormous sea, at the bottom of a steep valley which fell down into a bay; and the sea under their feet blazed at them almost as lustrous and almost as empty as the sky. The sunrise opened above them like some cosmic explosion, shining and shattering and yet silent; as if the world were blown to pieces without a sound. Round the rays of the victorious sun swept a sort of rainbow of confused and conquered colours—brown and blue and green and flaming rose–colour; as though gold were driving before it all the colours of the world. The lines of the landscape down which they sped, were the simple, strict, yet swerving, lines of a rushing river; so that it was almost as if they were being sucked down in a huge still whirlpool. Turnbull had some such feeling, for he spoke for the first time for many hours.

“If we go down at this rate we shall be over the sea cliff,” he said.

“How glorious!” said MacIan.

When, however, they had come into the wide hollow at the bottom of that landslide, the car took a calm and graceful curve along the side of the sea, melted into the fringe of a few trees, and quietly, yet astonishingly, stopped. A belated light was burning in the broad morning in the window of a sort of lodge—or gate–keepers’ cottage; and the girl stood up in the car and turned her splendid face to the sun.

Evan seemed startled by the stillness, like one who had been born amid sound and speed. He waivered on his long legs as he stood up; he pulled himself together, and the only consequence was that he trembled from head to foot. Turnbull had already opened the door on his side and jumped out.

The moment he had done so the strange young woman had one more mad movement, and deliberately drove the car a few yards farther. Then she got out with an almost cruel coolness and began pulling off her long gloves and almost whistling.

“You can leave me here,” she said, quite casually, as if they had met five minutes before. “That is the lodge of my father’s place. Please come in, if you
like—but I understood that you had some business.”

Evan looked at that lifted face and found it merely lovely; he was far too much of a fool to see that it was working with a final fatigue and that its austerity was agony. He was even fool enough to ask it a question. “Why did you save us?” he said, quite humbly.

The girl tore off one of her gloves, as if she were tearing off her hand. “Oh, I don’t know,” she said, bitterly. “Now I come to think of it, I can’t imagine.”

Evan’s thoughts, that had been piled up to the morning star, abruptly let him down with a crash into the very cellars of the emotional universe. He remained in a stunned silence for a long time; and that, if he had only known, was the wisest thing that he could possibly do at the moment.

Indeed, the silence and the sunrise had their healing effect, for when the extraordinary lady spoke again, her tone was more friendly and apologetic. “I’m not really ungrateful,” she said; “it was very good of you to save me from those men.”

“But why?” repeated the obstinate and dazed MacIan, “why did you save us from the other men? I mean the policemen?”

The girl’s great brown eyes were lit up with a flash that was at once final desperation and the loosening of some private and passionate reserve.

“Oh, God knows!” she cried. “God knows that if there is a God He has turned His big back on everything. God knows I have had no pleasure in my life, though I am pretty and young and father has plenty of money. And then people come and tell me that I ought to do things and I do them and it’s all drivel. They want you to do work among the poor; which means reading Ruskin and feeling self–righteous in the best room in a poor tenement. Or to help some cause or other, which always means bundling people out of crooked houses, in which they’ve always lived, into straight houses, in which they often die. And all the time you have inside only the horrid irony of your own empty head and empty heart. I am to give to the unfortunate, when my whole misfortune is that I have nothing to give. I am to teach, when I believe nothing at all that I was taught. I am to save the children from death, and I am not even certain that I should not be better dead. I suppose if I actually saw a child drowning I should save it. But that would be from the same motive from which I have saved you, or destroyed you, whichever it is that I have done.”

“What was the motive?” asked Evan, in a low voice.

“My motive is too big for my mind,” answered the girl.

Then, after a pause, as she stared with a rising colour at the glittering sea, she
said: “It can’t be described, and yet I am trying to describe it. It seems to me not only that I am unhappy, but that there is no way of being happy. Father is not happy, though he is a Member of Parliament—” She paused a moment and added with a ghost of a smile: “Nor Aunt Mabel, though a man from India has told her the secret of all creeds. But I may be wrong; there may be a way out. And for one stark, insane second, I felt that, after all, you had got the way out and that was why the world hated you. You see, if there were a way out, it would be sure to be something that looked very queer.”

Evan put his hand to his forehead and began stumblingly: “Yes, I suppose we do seem—”

“Oh, yes, you look queer enough,” she said, with ringing sincerity. “You’ll be all the better for a wash and brush up.”

“You forget our business, madam,” said Evan, in a shaking voice; “we have no concern but to kill each other.”

“Well, I shouldn’t be killed looking like that if I were you,” she replied, with inhuman honesty.

Evan stood and rolled his eyes in masculine bewilderment. Then came the final change in this Proteus, and she put out both her hands for an instant and said in a low tone on which he lived for days and nights:

“Don’t you understand that I did not dare to stop you? What you are doing is so mad that it may be quite true. Somehow one can never really manage to be an atheist.”

Turnbull stood staring at the sea; but his shoulders showed that he heard, and after one minute he turned his head. But the girl had only brushed Evan’s hand with hers and had fled up the dark alley by the lodge gate.

Evan stood rooted upon the road, literally like some heavy statue hewn there in the age of the Druids. It seemed impossible that he should ever move. Turnbull grew restless with this rigidity, and at last, after calling his companion twice or thrice, went up and clapped him impatiently on one of his big shoulders. Evan winced and leapt away from him with a repulsion which was not the hate of an unclean thing nor the dread of a dangerous one, but was a spasm of awe and separation from something from which he was now sundered as by the sword of God. He did not hate the atheist; it is possible that he loved him. But Turnbull was now something more dreadful than an enemy: he was a thing sealed and devoted—a thing now hopelessly doomed to be either a corpse or an executioner.

“What is the matter with you?” asked Turnbull, with his hearty hand still in
the air; and yet he knew more about it than his innocent action would allow.

“James,” said Evan, speaking like one under strong bodily pain, “I asked for God’s answer and I have got it—got it in my vitals. He knows how weak I am, and that I might forget the peril of the faith, forget the face of Our Lady—yes, even with your blow upon her cheek. But the honour of this earth has just this about it, that it can make a man’s heart like iron. I am from the Lords of the Isles and I dare not be a mere deserter. Therefore, God has tied me by the chain of my worldly place and word, and there is nothing but fighting now.”

“I think I understand you,” said Turnbull, “but you say everything tail foremost.”

“She wants us to do it,” said Evan, in a voice crushed with passion. “She has hurt herself so that we might do it. She has left her good name and her good sleep and all her habits and dignity flung away on the other side of England in the hope that she may hear of us and that we have broken some hole into heaven.”

“I thought I knew what you mean,” said Turnbull, biting his beard; “it does seem as if we ought to do something after all she has done this night.”

“I never liked you so much before,” said MacIan, in bitter sorrow.

As he spoke, three solemn footmen came out of the lodge gate and assembled to assist the chauffeur to his room. The mere sight of them made the two wanderers flee as from a too frightful incongruity, and before they knew where they were, they were well upon the grassy ledge of England that overlooks the Channel. Evan said suddenly: “Will they let me see her in heaven once in a thousand ages?” and addressed the remark to the editor of The Atheist, as on which he would be likely or qualified to answer. But no answer came; a silence sank between the two.

Turnbull strode sturdily to the edge of the cliff and looked out, his companion following, somewhat more shaken by his recent agitation.

“If that’s the view you take,” said Turnbull, “and I don’t say you are wrong, I think I know where we shall be best off for the business. As it happens, I know this part of the south coast pretty well. And unless I am mistaken there’s a way down the cliff just here which will land us on a stretch of firm sand where no one is likely to follow us.”

The Highlander made a gesture of assent and came also almost to the edge of the precipice. The sunrise, which was broadening over sea and shore, was one of those rare and splendid ones in which there seems to be no mist or doubt, and nothing but a universal clarification more and more complete. All the colours
were transparent. It seemed like a triumphant prophecy of some perfect world where everything being innocent will be intelligible; a world where even our bodies, so to speak, may be as of burning glass. Such a world is faintly though fiercely figured in the coloured windows of Christian architecture. The sea that lay before them was like a pavement of emerald, bright and almost brittle; the sky against which its strict horizon hung was almost absolutely white, except that close to the sky line, like scarlet braids on the hem of a garment, lay strings of flaky cloud of so gleaming and gorgeous a red that they seemed cut out of some strange blood–red celestial metal, of which the mere gold of this earth is but a drab yellow imitation.

“The hand of Heaven is still pointing,” muttered the man of superstition to himself. “And now it is a blood–red hand.”

The cool voice of his companion cut in upon his monologue, calling to him from a little farther along the cliff, to tell him that he had found the ladder of descent. It began as a steep and somewhat greasy path, which then tumbled down twenty or thirty feet in the form of a fall of rough stone steps. After that, there was a rather awkward drop on to a ledge of stone and then the journey was undertaken easily and even elegantly by the remains of an ornamental staircase, such as might have belonged to some long–disused watering–place. All the time that the two travellers sank from stage to stage of this downward journey, there closed over their heads living bridges and caverns of the most varied foliage, all of which grew greener, redder, or more golden, in the growing sunlight of the morning. Life, too, of the more moving sort rose at the sun on every side of them. Birds whirred and fluttered in the undergrowth, as if imprisoned in green cages. Other birds were shaken up in great clouds from the tree–tops, as if they were blossoms detached and scattered up to heaven. Animals which Turnbull was too much of a Londoner and MacIan too much of a Northerner to know, slipped by among the tangle or ran pattering up the tree–trunks. Both the men, according to their several creeds, felt the full thunder of the psalm of life as they had never heard it before; MacIan felt God the Father, benignant in all His energies, and Turnbull that ultimate anonymous energy, that Natura Naturans, which is the whole theme of Lucretius. It was down this clamorous ladder of life that they went down to die.

They broke out upon a brown semicircle of sand, so free from human imprint as to justify Turnbull’s profession. They strode out upon it, stuck their swords in the sand, and had a pause too important for speech. Turnbull eyed the coast curiously for a moment, like one awakening memories of childhood; then he said
abruptly, like a man remembering somebody’s name: “But, of course, we shall be better off still round the corner of Cragness Point; nobody ever comes there at all.” And picking up his sword again, he began striding towards a big bluff of the rocks which stood out upon their left. MacIan followed him round the corner and found himself in what was certainly an even finer fencing court, of flat, firm sand, enclosed on three sides by white walls of rock, and on the fourth by the green wall of the advancing sea.

“We are quite safe here,” said Turnbull, and, to the other’s surprise, flung himself down, sitting on the brown beach.

“You see, I was brought up near here,” he explained. “I was sent from Scotland to stop with my aunt. It is highly probable that I may die here. Do you mind if I light a pipe?”

“Of course, do whatever you like,” said MacIan, with a choking voice, and he went and walked alone by himself along the wet, glistening sands.

Ten minutes afterwards he came back again, white with his own whirlwind of emotions; Turnbull was quite cheerful and was knocking out the end of his pipe.

“You see, we have to do it,” said Maclan. “She tied us to it.”

“Of course, my dear fellow,” said the other, and leapt up as lightly as a monkey.

They took their places gravely in the very centre of the great square of sand, as if they had thousands of spectators. Before saluting, MacIan, who, being a mystic, was one inch nearer to Nature, cast his eye round the huge framework of their heroic folly. The three walls of rock all leant a little outward, though at various angles; but this impression was exaggerated in the direction of the incredible by the heavy load of living trees and thickets which each wall wore on its top like a huge shock of hair. On all that luxurious crest of life the risen and victorious sun was beating, burnishing it all like gold, and every bird that rose with that sunrise caught a light like a star upon it like the dove of the Holy Spirit. Imaginative life had never so much crowded upon MacIan. He felt that he could write whole books about the feelings of a single bird. He felt that for two centuries he would not tire of being a rabbit. He was in the Palace of Life, of which the very tapestries and curtains were alive. Then he recovered himself, and remembered his affairs. Both men saluted, and iron rang upon iron. It was exactly at the same moment that he realized that his enemy’s left ankle was encircled with a ring of salt water that had crept up to his feet.

“What is the matter?” said Turnbull, stopping an instant, for he had grown used to every movement of his extraordinary fellow–traveller’s face.
MacIan glanced again at that silver anklet of sea-water and then looked beyond at the next promontory round which a deep sea was boiling and leaping. Then he turned and looked back and saw heavy foam being shaken up to heaven about the base of Cragness Point.

“The sea has cut us off,” he said, curtly.

“I have noticed it,” said Turnbull with equal sobriety. “What view do you take of the development?”

Evan threw away his weapon, and, as his custom was, imprisoned his big head in his hands. Then he let them fall and said: “Yes, I know what it means; and I think it is the fairest thing. It is the finger of God—red as blood—still pointing. But now it points to two graves.”

There was a space filled with the sound of the sea, and then MacIan spoke again in a voice pathetically reasonable: “You see, we both saved her—and she told us both to fight—and it would not be just that either should fail and fall alone, while the other—”

“You mean,” said Turnbull, in a voice surprisingly soft and gentle, “that there is something fine about fighting in a place where even the conqueror must die?”

“Oh, you have got it right, you have got it right!” cried out Evan, in an extraordinary childish ecstasy. “Oh, I’m sure that you really believe in God!”

Turnbull answered not a word, but only took up his fallen sword.

For the third time Evan MacIan looked at those three sides of English cliff hung with their noisy load of life. He had been at a loss to understand the almost ironical magnificence of all those teeming creatures and tropical colours and smells that smoked happily to heaven. But now he knew that he was in the closed court of death and that all the gates were sealed.

He drank in the last green and the last red and the last gold, those unique and indescribable things of God, as a man drains good wine at the bottom of his glass. Then he turned and saluted his enemy once more, and the two stood up and fought till the foam flowed over their knees.

Then MacIan stepped backward suddenly with a splash and held up his hand. “Turnbull!” he cried; “I can’t help it—fair fighting is more even than promises. And this is not fair fighting.”

“What the deuce do you mean?” asked the other, staring.

“I’ve only just thought of it,” cried Evan, brokenly. “We’re very well matched—it may go on a good time—the tide is coming up fast—and I’m a foot and a half taller. You’ll be washed away like seaweed before it’s above my breeches. I’ll not fight foul for all the girls and angels in the universe.”
“Will you oblige me,” said Turnbull, with staring grey eyes and a voice of distinct and violent politeness; “will you oblige me by jolly well minding your own business? Just you stand up and fight, and we’ll see who will be washed away like seaweed. You wanted to finish this fight and you shall finish it, or I’ll denounce you as a coward to the whole of that assembled company.”

Evan looked very doubtful and offered a somewhat wavering weapon; but he was quickly brought back to his senses by his opponent’s sword-point, which shot past him, shaving his shoulder by a hair. By this time the waves were well up Turnbull’s thigh, and what was worse, they were beginning to roll and break heavily around them.

MacIan parried this first lunge perfectly, the next less perfectly; the third in all human probability he would not have parried at all; the Christian champion would have been pinned like a butterfly, and the atheistic champion left to drown like a rat, with such consolation as his view of the cosmos afforded him. But just as Turnbull launched his heaviest stroke, the sea, in which he stood up to his hips, launched a yet heavier one. A wave breaking beyond the others smote him heavily like a hammer of water. One leg gave way, he was swung round and sucked into the retreating sea, still gripping his sword.

MacIan put his sword between his teeth and plunged after his disappearing enemy. He had the sense of having the whole universe on top of him as crest after crest struck him down. It seemed to him quite a cosmic collapse, as if all the seven heavens were falling on him one after the other. But he got hold of the atheist’s left leg and he did not let it go.

After some ten minutes of foam and frenzy, in which all the senses at once seemed blasted by the sea, Evan found himself laboriously swimming on a low, green swell, with the sword still in his teeth and the editor of The Atheist still under his arm. What he was going to do he had not even the most glimmering idea; so he merely kept his grip and swam somehow with one hand.

He ducked instinctively as there bulked above him a big, black wave, much higher than any that he had seen. Then he saw that it was hardly the shape of any possible wave. Then he saw that it was a fisherman’s boat, and, leaping upward, caught hold of the bow. The boat pitched forward with its stern in the air for just as much time as was needed to see that there was nobody in it. After a moment or two of desperate clambering, however, there were two people in it, Mr. Evan MacIan, panting and sweating, and Mr. James Turnbull, uncommonly close to being drowned. After ten minutes’ aimless tossing in the empty fishing-boat he recovered, however, stirred, stretched himself, and looked round on the rolling
waters. Then, while taking no notice of the streams of salt water that were pouring from his hair, beard, coat, boots, and trousers, he carefully wiped the wet off his sword-blade to preserve it from the possibilities of rust.

MacIan found two oars in the bottom of the deserted boat and began somewhat drearily to row.

A rainy twilight was clearing to cold silver over the moaning sea, when the battered boat that had rolled and drifted almost aimlessly all night, came within sight of land, though of land which looked almost as lost and savage as the waves. All night there had been but little lifting in the leaden sea, only now and then the boat had been heaved up, as on a huge shoulder which slipped from under it; such occasional sea-quakes came probably from the swell of some steamer that had passed it in the dark; otherwise the waves were harmless though restless. But it was piercingly cold, and there was, from time to time, a splutter of rain like the splutter of the spray, which seemed almost to freeze as it fell. MacIan, more at home than his companion in this quite barbarous and elemental sort of adventure, had rowed toilsomely with the heavy oars whenever he saw anything that looked like land; but for the most part had trusted with grim transcendentalism to wind and tide. Among the implements of their first outfit the brandy alone had remained to him, and he gave it to his freezing companion in quantities which greatly alarmed that temperate Londoner; but MacIan came from the cold seas and mists where a man can drink a tumbler of raw whisky in a boat without it making him wink.

When the Highlander began to pull really hard upon the oars, Turnbull craned his dripping red head out of the boat to see the goal of his exertions. It was a sufficiently uninviting one; nothing so far as could be seen but a steep and shelving bank of shingle, made of loose little pebbles such as children like, but slanting up higher than a house. On the top of the mound, against the sky line, stood up the brown skeleton of some broken fence or breakwater. With the grey and watery dawn crawling up behind it, the fence really seemed to say to our philosophic adventurers that they had come at last to the other end of nowhere.

Bent by necessity to his labour, MacIan managed the heavy boat with real power and skill, and when at length he ran it up on a smoother part of the slope it caught and held so that they could clamber out, not sinking farther than their knees into the water and the shingle. A foot or two farther up their feet found the beach firmer, and a few moments afterwards they were leaning on the ragged breakwater and looking back at the sea they had escaped.

They had a dreary walk across wastes of grey shingle in the grey dawn before
they began to come within hail of human fields or roads; nor had they any notion of what fields or roads they would be. Their boots were beginning to break up and the confusion of stones tried them severely, so that they were glad to lean on their swords, as if they were the staves of pilgrims. MacIan thought vaguely of a weird ballad of his own country which describes the soul in Purgatory as walking on a plain full of sharp stones, and only saved by its own charities upon earth.

If ever thou gavest hosen and shoon Every night and all, Sit thee down and put them on, And Christ receive thy soul.

Turnbull had no such lyrical meditations, but he was in an even worse temper.

At length they came to a pale ribbon of road, edged by a shelf of rough and almost colourless turf; and a few feet up the slope there stood grey and weather-stained, one of those big wayside crucifixes which are seldom seen except in Catholic countries.

MacIan put his hand to his head and found that his bonnet was not there. Turnbull gave one glance at the crucifix—a glance at once sympathetic and bitter, in which was concentrated the whole of Swinburne’s poem on the same occasion.

O hidden face of man, whereover The years have woven a viewless veil, If thou wert verily man's lover What did thy love or blood avail? Thy blood the priests mix poison of, And in gold shekels coin thy love.

Then, leaving MacIan in his attitude of prayer, Turnbull began to look right and left very sharply, like one looking for something. Suddenly, with a little cry, he saw it and ran forward. A few yards from them along the road a lean and starved sort of hedge came pitifully to an end. Caught upon its prickly angle, however, there was a very small and very dirty scrap of paper that might have hung there for months, since it escaped from someone tearing up a letter or making a spill out of a newspaper. Turnbull snatched at it and found it was the corner of a printed page, very coarsely printed, like a cheap novelette, and just large enough to contain the words: “et c’est elle qui—”

“Hurrah!” cried Turnbull, waving his fragment; “we are safe at last. We are free at last. We are somewhere better than England or Eden or Paradise. MacIan, we are in the Land of the Duel!”

“Where do you say?” said the other, looking at him heavily and with knitted brows, like one almost dazed with the grey doubts of desolate twilight and drifting sea.

“We are in France!” cried Turnbull, with a voice like a trumpet, “in the land
where things really happen—Tout arrive en France. We arrive in France. Look at this little message,” and he held out the scrap of paper. “There’s an omen for you superstitious hill folk. C’est elle qui—Mais oui, mais oui, c’est elle qui sauvera encore le monde.”

“France!” repeated MacIan, and his eyes awoke again in his head like large lamps lighted.

“Yes, France!” said Turnbull, and all the rhetorical part of him came to the top, his face growing as red as his hair. “France, that has always been in rebellion for liberty and reason. France, that has always assailed superstition with the club of Rabelais or the rapier of Voltaire. France, at whose first council table sits the sublime figure of Julian the Apostate. France, where a man said only the other day those splendid unanswerable words”—with a superb gesture—”we have extinguisched in heaven those lights that men shall never light again.”

“No,” said MacIan, in a voice that shook with a controlled passion. “But France, which was taught by St. Bernard and led to war by Joan of Arc. France that made the crusades. France that saved the Church and scattered the heresies by the mouths of Bossuet and Massillon. France, which shows today the conquering march of Catholicism, as brain after brain surrenders to it, Brunetière, Coppée, Hauptmann, Barrès, Bourget, Lemaître.”

“France!” asserted Turnbull with a sort of rollicking self-exaggeration, very unusual with him, “France, which is one torrent of splendid scepticism from Abelard to Anatole France.”

“France,” said MacIan, “which is one cataract of clear faith from St. Louis to Our Lady of Lourdes.”

“France at least,” cried Turnbull, throwing up his sword in schoolboy triumph, “in which these things are thought about and fought about. France, where reason and religion clash in one continual tournament. France, above all, where men understand the pride and passion which have plucked our blades from their scabbards. Here, at least, we shall not be chased and spied on by sickly parsons and greasy policemen, because we wish to put our lives on the game. Courage, my friend, we have come to the country of honour.”

MacIan did not even notice the incongruous phrase “my friend,” but nodding again and again, drew his sword and flung the scabbard far behind him in the road.

“Yes,” he cried, in a voice of thunder, “we will fight here and He shall look on at it.”
Turnbull glanced at the crucifix with a sort of scowling good–humour and then said: “He may look and see His cross defeated.”

“The cross cannot be defeated,” said Maclan, “for it is Defeat.”

A second afterwards the two bright, blood–thirsty weapons made the sign of the cross in horrible parody upon each other.

They had not touched each other twice, however, when upon the hill, above the crucifix, there appeared another horrible parody of its shape; the figure of a man who appeared for an instant waving his outspread arms. He had vanished in an instant; but Maclan, whose fighting face was set that way, had seen the shape momentarily but quite photographically. And while it was like a comic repetition of the cross, it was also, in that place and hour, something more incredible. It had been only instantaneously on the retina of his eye; but unless his eye and mind were going mad together, the figure was that of an ordinary London policeman.

He tried to concentrate his senses on the sword–play; but one half of his brain was wrestling with the puzzle; the apocalyptic and almost seraphic apparition of a stout constable out of Clapham on top of a dreary and deserted hill in France. He did not, however, have to puzzle long. Before the duellists had exchanged half a dozen passes, the big, blue policeman appeared once more on the top of the hill, a palpable monstrosity in the eye of heaven. He was waving only one arm now and seemed to be shouting directions. At the same moment a mass of blue blocked the corner of the road behind the small, smart figure of Turnbull, and a small company of policemen in the English uniform came up at a kind of half–military double.

Turnbull saw the stare of consternation in his enemy’s face and swung round to share its cause. When he saw it, cool as he was, he staggered back.

“What the devil are you doing here?” he called out in a high, shrill voice of authority, like one who finds a tramp in his own larder.

“Well, sir,” said the sergeant in command, with that sort of heavy civility shown only to the evidently guilty, “seems to me we might ask what are you doing here?”

“We are having an affair of honour,” said Turnbull, as if it were the most rational thing in the world. “If the French police like to interfere, let them interfere. But why the blue blazes should you interfere, you great blue blundering sausages?”

“I’m afraid, sir,” said the sergeant with restraint, “I’m afraid I don’t quite follow you.”
“I mean, why don’t the French police take this up if it’s got to be taken up? I always heard that they were spry enough in their own way.”

“Well, sir,” said the sergeant reflectively, “you see, sir, the French police don’t take this up—well, because you see, sir, this ain’t France. This is His Majesty’s dominions, same as ‘Ampstead eath.”

“Not France?” repeated Turnbull, with a sort of dull incredulity.

“No, sir,” said the sergeant; “though most of the people talk French. This is the island called St. Loup, sir, an island in the Channel. We’ve been sent down specially from London, as you were such specially distinguished criminals, if you’ll allow me to say so. Which reminds me to warn you that anything you say may be used against you at your trial.”

“Quite so,” said Turnbull, and lurched suddenly against the sergeant, so as to tip him over the edge of the road with a crash into the shingle below. Then leaving MacIan and the policemen equally and instantaneously nailed to the road, he ran a little way along it, leapt off on to a part of the beach, which he had found in his journey to be firmer, and went across it with a clatter of pebbles. His sudden calculation was successful; the police, unacquainted with the various levels of the loose beach, tried to overtake him by the shorter cut and found themselves, being heavy men, almost up to their knees in shoals of slippery shingle. Two who had been slower with their bodies were quicker with their minds, and seeing Turnbull’s trick, ran along the edge of the road after him. Then MacIan finally awoke, and leaving half his sleeve in the grip of the only man who tried to hold him, took the two policemen in the small of their backs with the impetus of a cannon-ball and, sending them also flat among the stones, went tearing after his twin defier of the law.

As they were both good runners, the start they had gained was decisive. They dropped over a high breakwater farther on upon the beach, turned sharply, and scrambled up a line of ribbed rocks, crowned with a thicket, crawled through it, scratching their hands and faces, and dropped into another road; and there found that they could slacken their speed into a steady trot. In all this desperate dart and scramble, they still kept hold of their drawn swords, which now, indeed, in the vigorous phrase of Bunyan, seemed almost to grow out of their hands.

They had run another half mile or so when it became apparent that they were entering a sort of scattered village. One or two whitewashed cottages and even a shop had appeared along the side of the road. Then, for the first time, Turnbull twisted round his red bear to get a glimpse of his companion, who was a foot or two behind, and remarked abruptly: “Mr. MacIan, we’ve been going the wrong
way to work all along. We’re traced everywhere, because everybody knows about us. It’s as if one went about with Kruger’s beard on Mafeking Night.”

“What do you mean?” said Maclan, innocently.

“I mean,” said Turnbull, with steady conviction, “that what we want is a little diplomacy, and I am going to buy some in a shop.”
A SCANDAL IN THE VILLAGE

In the little hamlet of Haroc, in the Isle of St. Loup, there lived a man who—though living under the English flag—was absolutely untypical of the French tradition. He was quite unnoticeable, but that was exactly where he was quite himself. He was not even extraordinarily French; but then it is against the French tradition to be extraordinarily French. Ordinary Englishmen would only have thought him a little old-fashioned; imperialistic Englishmen would really have mistaken him for the old John Bull of the caricatures. He was stout; he was quite undistinguished; and he had side-whiskers, worn just a little longer than John Bull’s. He was by name Pierre Durand; he was by trade a wine merchant; he was by politics a conservative republican; he had been brought up a Catholic, had always thought and acted as an agnostic, and was very mildly returning to the Church in his later years. He had a genius (if one can even use so wild a word in connexion with so tame a person) a genius for saying the conventional thing on every conceivable subject; or rather what we in England would call the conventional thing. For it was not convention with him, but solid and manly conviction. Convention implies cant or affectation, and he had not the faintest smell of either. He was simply an ordinary citizen with ordinary views; and if you had told him so he would have taken it as an ordinary compliment. If you had asked him about women, he would have said that one must preserve their domesticity and decorum; he would have used the stalest words, but he would have in reserve the strongest arguments. If you had asked him about government, he would have said that all citizens were free and equal, but he would have meant what he said. If you had asked him about education, he would have said that the young must be trained up in habits of industry and of respect for their parents. Still he would have set them the example of industry, and he would have been one of the parents whom they could respect. A state of mind so hopelessly central is depressing to the English instinct. But then in England a man announcing these platitudes is generally a fool and a frightened fool, announcing them out of mere social servility. But Durand was anything but a fool; he had read all the eighteenth century, and could have defended his platitudes round every angle of eighteenth-century argument. And certainly he was anything but a coward: swollen and sedentary as he was, he could have hit any man back who
touched him with the instant violence of an automatic machine; and dying in a uniform would have seemed to him only the sort of thing that sometimes happens. I am afraid it is impossible to explain this monster amid the exaggerative sects and the eccentric clubs of my country. He was merely a man.

He lived in a little villa which was furnished well with comfortable chairs and tables and highly uncomfortable classical pictures and medallions. The art in his home contained nothing between the two extremes of hard, meagre designs of Greek heads and Roman togas, and on the other side a few very vulgar Catholic images in the crudest colours; these were mostly in his daughter’s room. He had recently lost his wife, whom he had loved heartily and rather heavily in complete silence, and upon whose grave he was constantly in the habit of placing hideous little wreaths, made out of a sort of black–and–white beads. To his only daughter he was equally devoted, though he restricted her a good deal under a sort of theoretic alarm about her innocence; an alarm which was peculiarly unnecessary, first, because she was an exceptionally reticent and religious girl, and secondly, because there was hardly anybody else in the place.

Madeleine Durand was physically a sleepy young woman, and might easily have been supposed to be morally a lazy one. It is, however, certain that the work of her house was done somehow, and it is even more rapidly ascertainable that nobody else did it. The logician is, therefore, driven back upon the assumption that she did it; and that lends a sort of mysterious interest to her personality at the beginning. She had very broad, low, and level brows, which seemed even lower because her warm yellow hair clustered down to her eyebrows; and she had a face just plump enough not to look as powerful as it was. Anything that was heavy in all this was abruptly lightened by two large, light china–blue eyes, lightened all of a sudden as if it had been lifted into the air by two big blue butterflies. The rest of her was less than middle–sized, and was of a casual and comfortable sort; and she had this difference from such girls as the girl in the motor–car, that one did not incline to take in her figure at all, but only her broad and leonine and innocent head.

Both the father and the daughter were of the sort that would normally have avoided all observation; that is, all observation in that extraordinary modern world which calls out everything except strength. Both of them had strength below the surface; they were like quiet peasants owning enormous and unquarried mines. The father with his square face and grey side whiskers, the daughter with her square face and golden fringe of hair, were both stronger than they know; stronger than anyone knew. The father believed in civilization, in the
storied tower we have erected to affront nature; that is, the father believed in Man. The daughter believed in God; and was even stronger. They neither of them believed in themselves; for that is a decadent weakness.

The daughter was called a devotee. She left upon ordinary people the impression—the somewhat irritating impression—produced by such a person; it can only be described as the sense of strong water being perpetually poured into some abyss. She did her housework easily; she achieved her social relations sweetly; she was never neglectful and never unkind. This accounted for all that was soft in her, but not for all that was hard. She trod firmly as if going somewhere; she flung her face back as if defying something; she hardly spoke a cross word, yet there was often battle in her eyes. The modern man asked doubtfully where all this silent energy went to. He would have stared still more doubtfully if he had been told that it all went into her prayers.

The conventions of the Isle of St. Loup were necessarily a compromise or confusion between those of France and England; and it was vaguely possible for a respectable young lady to have half–attached lovers, in a way that would be impossible to the bourgeoisie of France. One man in particular had made himself an unmistakable figure in the track of this girl as she went to church. He was a short, prosperous–looking man, whose long, bushy black beard and clumsy black umbrella made him seem both shorter and older than he really was; but whose big, bold eyes, and step that spurned the ground, gave him an instant character of youth.

His name was Camille Bert, and he was a commercial traveller who had only been in the island an idle week before he began to hover in the tracks of Madeleine Durand. Since everyone knows everyone in so small a place, Madeleine certainly knew him to speak to; but it is not very evident that she ever spoke. He haunted her, however; especially at church, which was, indeed, one of the few certain places for finding her. In her home she had a habit of being invisible, sometimes through insatiable domesticity, sometimes through an equally insatiable solitude. M. Bert did not give the impression of a pious man, though he did give, especially with his eyes, the impression of an honest one. But he went to Mass with a simple exactitude that could not be mistaken for a pose, or even for a vulgar fascination. It was perhaps this religious regularity which eventually drew Madeleine into recognition of him. At least it is certain that she twice spoke to him with her square and open smile in the porch of the church; and there was human nature enough in the hamlet to turn even that into gossip.
But the real interest arose suddenly as a squall arises with the extraordinary affair that occurred about five days after. There was about a third of a mile beyond the village of Haroc a large but lonely hotel upon the London or Paris model, but commonly almost entirely empty. Among the accidental group of guests who had come to it at this season was a man whose nationality no one could fix and who bore the non-committal name of Count Gregory. He treated everybody with complete civility and almost in complete silence. On the few occasions when he spoke, he spoke either French, English, or once (to the priest) Latin; and the general opinion was that he spoke them all wrong. He was a large, lean man, with the stoop of an aged eagle, and even the eagle’s nose to complete it; he had old-fashioned military whiskers and moustache dyed with a garish and highly incredible yellow. He had the dress of a showy gentleman and the manners of a decayed gentleman; he seemed (as with a sort of simplicity) to be trying to be a dandy when he was too old even to know that he was old. Ye he was decidedly a handsome figure with his curled yellow hair and lean fastidious face; and he wore a peculiar frock-coat of bright turquoise blue, with an unknown order pinned to it, and he carried a huge and heavy cane. Despite his silence and his dandified dress and whiskers, the island might never have heard of him but for the extraordinary event of which I have spoken, which fell about in the following way:

In such casual atmospheres only the enthusiastic go to Benediction; and as the warm blue twilight closed over the little candle-lit church and village, the line of worshippers who went home from the former to the latter thinned out until it broke. On one such evening at least no one was in church except the quiet, unconquerable Madeleine, four old women, one fisherman, and, of course, the irrepressible M. Camille Bert. The others seemed to melt away afterwards into the peacock colours of the dim green grass and the dark blue sky. Even Durand was invisible instead of being merely reverentially remote; and Madeleine set forth through the patch of black forest alone. She was not in the least afraid of loneliness, because she was not afraid of devils. I think they were afraid of her.

In a clearing of the wood, however, which was lit up with a last patch of the perishing sunlight, there advanced upon her suddenly one who was more startling than a devil. The incomprehensible Count Gregory, with his yellow hair like flame and his face like the white ashes of the flame, was advancing bareheaded towards her, flinging out his arms and his long fingers with a frantic gesture.

“We are alone here,” he cried, “and you would be at my mercy, only that I am
Then his frantic hands fell by his sides and he looked up under his brows with an expression that went well with his hard breathing. Madeleine Durand had come to a halt at first in childish wonder, and now, with more than masculine self-control, “I fancy I know your face, sir,” she said, as if to gain time.

“I know I shall not forget yours,” said the other, and extended once more his ungainly arms in an unnatural gesture. Then of a sudden there came out of him a spout of wild and yet pompous phrases. “It is as well that you should know the worst and the best. I am a man who knows no limit; I am the most callous of criminals, the most unrepentant of sinners. There is no man in my dominions so vile as I. But my dominions stretch from the olives of Italy to the fir-woods of Denmark, and there is no nook of all of them in which I have not done a sin. But when I bear you away I shall be doing my first sacrilege, and also my first act of virtue.” He seized her suddenly by the elbow; and she did not scream but only pulled and tugged. Yet though she had not screamed, someone astray in the woods seemed to have heard the struggle. A short but nimble figure came along the woodland path like a humming bullet and had caught Count Gregory a crack across the face before his own could be recognized. When it was recognized it was that of Camille, with the black elderly beard and the young ardent eyes.

Up to the moment when Camille had hit the Count, Madeleine had entertained no doubt that the Count was merely a madman. Now she was startled with a new sanity; for the tall man in the yellow whiskers and yellow moustache first returned the blow of Bert, as if it were a sort of duty, and then stepped back with a slight bow and an easy smile.

“This need go no further here, M. Bert,” he said. “I need not remind you how far it should go elsewhere.”

“Certainly, you need remind me of nothing,” answered Camille, stolidly. “I am glad that you are just not too much of a scoundrel for a gentleman to fight.”

“We are detaining the lady,” said Count Gregory, with politeness; and, making a gesture suggesting that he would have taken off his hat if he had had one, he strode away up the avenue of trees and eventually disappeared. He was so complete an aristocrat that he could offer his back to them all the way up that avenue; and his back never once looked uncomfortable.

“You must allow me to see you home,” said Bert to the girl, in a gruff and almost stifled voice; “I think we have only a little way to go.”

“Only a little way,” she said, and smiled once more that night, in spite of fatigue and fear and the world and the flesh and the devil. The glowing and
transparent blue of twilight had long been covered by the opaque and slatelike blue of night, when he handed her into the lamp–lit interior of her home. He went out himself into the darkness, walking sturdily, but tearing at his black beard.

All the French or semi–French gentry of the district considered this a case in which a duel was natural and inevitable, and neither party had any difficulty in finding seconds, strangers as they were in the place. Two small landowners, who were careful, practising Catholics, willingly undertook to represent that strict church–goer Camille Burt; while the profligate but apparently powerful Count Gregory found friends in an energetic local doctor who was ready for social promotion and an accidental Californian tourist who was ready for anything. As no particular purpose could be served by delay, it was arranged that the affair should fall out three days afterwards. And when this was settled the whole community, as it were, turned over again in bed and thought no more about the matter. At least there was only one member of it who seemed to be restless, and that was she who was commonly most restful. On the next night Madeleine Durand went to church as usual; and as usual the stricken Camille was there also. What was not so usual was that when they were a bow–shot from the church Madeleine turned round and walked back to him. “Sir,” she began, “it is not wrong of me to speak to you,” and the very words gave him a jar of unexpected truth; for in all the novels he had ever read she would have begun: “It is wrong of me to speak to you.” She went on with wide and serious eyes like an animal’s: “It is not wrong of me to speak to you, because your soul, or anybody’s soul, matters so much more than what the world says about anybody. I want to talk to you about what you are going to do.”

Bert saw in front of him the inevitable heroine of the novels trying to prevent bloodshed; and his pale firm face became implacable.

“I would do anything but that for you,” he said; “but no man can be called less than a man.”

She looked at him for a moment with a face openly puzzled, and then broke into an odd and beautiful half–smile.

“Oh, I don’t mean that,” she said; “I don’t talk about what I don’t understand. No one has ever hit me; and if they had I should not feel as a man may. I am sure it is not the best thing to fight. It would be better to forgive—if one could really forgive. But when people dine with my father and say that fighting a duel is mere murder—of course I can see that is not just. It’s all so different—having a reason—and letting the other man know—and using the same guns and things—and
doing it in front of your friends. I’m awfully stupid, but I know that men like you aren’t murderers. But it wasn’t that that I meant.”

“What did you mean?” asked the other, looking broodingly at the earth.

“Don’t you know,” she said, “there is only one more celebration? I thought that as you always go to church—I thought you would communicate this morning.”

Bert stepped backward with a sort of action she had never seen in him before. It seemed to alter his whole body.

“You may be right or wrong to risk dying,” said the girl, simply; “the poor women in our village risk it whenever they have a baby. You men are the other half of the world. I know nothing about when you ought to die. But surely if you are daring to try and find God beyond the grave and appeal to Him—you ought to let Him find you when He comes and stands there every morning in our little church.”

And placid as she was, she made a little gesture of argument, of which the pathos wrung the heart.

M. Camille Bert was by no means placid. Before that incomplete gesture and frankly pleading face he retreated as if from the jaws of a dragon. His dark black hair and beard looked utterly unnatural against the startling pallor of his face. When at last he said something it was: “O God! I can’t stand this!” He did not say it in French. Nor did he, strictly speaking, say it in English. The truth (interesting only to anthropologists) is that he said it in Scotch.

“There will be another mass in a matter of eight hours,” said Madeleine, with a sort of business eagerness and energy, “and you can do it then before the fighting. You must forgive me, but I was so frightened that you would not do it at all.”

Bert seemed to crush his teeth together until they broke, and managed to say between them: “And why should you suppose that I shouldn’t do as you say—I mean not to do it at all?”

“You always go to Mass,” answered the girl, opening her wide blue eyes, “and the Mass is very long and tiresome unless one loves God.”

Then it was that Bert exploded with a brutality which might have come from Count Gregory, his criminal opponent. He advanced upon Madeleine with flaming eyes, and almost took her by the two shoulders. “I do not love God,” he cried, speaking French with the broadest Scotch accent; “I do not want to find Him; I do not think He is there to be found. I must burst up the show; I must and will say everything. You are the happiest and honestest thing I ever saw in this
godless universe. And I am the dirtiest and most dishonest.”

Madeleine looked at him doubtfully for an instant, and then said with a sudden simplicity and cheerfulness: “Oh, but if you are really sorry it is all right. If you are horribly sorry it is all the better. You have only to go and tell the priest so and he will give you God out of his own hands.”

“I hate your priest and I deny your God!” cried the man, “and I tell you God is a lie and a fable and a mask. And for the first time in my life I do not feel superior to God.”

“What can it all mean?” said Madeleine, in massive wonder.

“Because I am a fable also and a mask,” said the man. He had been plucking fiercely at his black beard and hair all the time; now he suddenly plucked them off and flung them like moulted feathers in the mire. This extraordinary spoliation left in the sunlight the same face, but a much younger head—a head with close chestnut curls and a short chestnut beard.

“Now you know the truth,” he answered, with hard eyes. “I am a cad who has played a crooked trick on a quiet village and a decent woman for a private reason of his own. I might have played it successfully on any other woman; I have hit the one woman on whom it cannot be played. It’s just like my damned luck. The plain truth is,” and here when he came to the plain truth he boggled and blundered as Evan had done in telling it to the girl in the motor-car.

“The plain truth is,” he said at last, “that I am James Turnbull the atheist. The police are after me; not for atheism but for being ready to fight for it.”

“I saw something about you in a newspaper,” said the girl, with a simplicity which even surprise could never throw off its balance.

“Evan MacIan said there was a God,” went on the other, stubbornly, “and I say there isn’t. And I have come to fight for the fact that there is no God; it is for that that I have seen this cursed island and your blessed face.”

“You want me really to believe,” said Madeleine, with parted lips, “that you think—”

“I want you to hate me!” cried Turnbull, in agony. “I want you to be sick when you think of my name. I am sure there is no God.”

“But there is,” said Madeleine, quite quietly, and rather with the air of one telling children about an elephant. “Why, I touched His body only this morning.”

“You touched a bit of bread,” said Turnbull, biting his knuckles. “Oh, I will say anything that can madden you!”

“You think it is only a bit of bread,” said the girl, and her lips tightened ever so little.
“I know it is only a bit of bread,” said Turnbull, with violence.

She flung back her open face and smiled. “Then why did you refuse to eat it?” she said.

James Turnbull made a little step backward, and for the first time in his life there seemed to break out and blaze in his head thoughts that were not his own.

“Why, how silly of them,” cried out Madeleine, with quite a schoolgirl gaiety, “why, how silly of them to call you a blasphemer! Why, you have wrecked your whole business because you would not commit blasphemy.”

The man stood, a somewhat comic figure in his tragic bewilderment, with the honest red head of James Turnbull sticking out of the rich and fictitious garments of Camille Bert. But the startled pain of his face was strong enough to obliterate the oddity.

“You come down here,” continued the lady, with that female emphasis which is so pulverizing in conversation and so feeble at a public meeting, “you and your MacIan come down here and put on false beards or noses in order to fight. You pretend to be a Catholic commercial traveller from France. Poor Mr. MacIan has to pretend to be a dissolute nobleman from nowhere. Your scheme succeeds; you pick a quite convincing quarrel; you arrange a quite respectable duel; the duel you have planned so long will come off tomorrow with absolute certainty and safety. And then you throw off your wig and throw up your scheme and throw over your colleague, because I ask you to go into a building and eat a bit of bread. And then you dare to tell me that you are sure there is nothing watching us. Then you say you know there is nothing on the very altar you run away from. You know—”

“I only know,” said Turnbull, “that I must run away from you. This has got beyond any talking.” And he plunged along into the village, leaving his black wig and beard lying behind him on the road.

As the market-place opened before him he saw Count Gregory, that distinguished foreigner, standing and smoking in elegant meditation at the corner of the local café. He immediately made his way rapidly towards him, considering that a consultation was urgent. But he had hardly crossed half of that stony quadrangle when a window burst open above him and a head was thrust out, shouting. The man was in his woollen undershirt, but Turnbull knew the energetic, apologetic head of the sergeant of police. He pointed furiously at Turnbull and shouted his name. A policeman ran excitedly from under an archway and tried to collar him. Two men selling vegetables dropped their baskets and joined in the chase. Turnbull dodged the constable, upset one of the
men into his own basket, and bounding towards the distinguished foreign Count, called to him clamorously: “Come on, MacIan, the hunt is up again.”

The prompt reply of Count Gregory was to pull off his large yellow whiskers and scatter them on the breeze with an air of considerable relief. Then he joined the flight of Turnbull, and even as he did so, with one wrench of his powerful hands rent and split the strange, thick stick that he carried. Inside it was a naked old–fashioned rapier. The two got a good start up the road before the whole town was awakened behind them; and half–way up it a similar transformation was seen to take place in Mr. Turnbull’s singular umbrella.

The two had a long race for the harbour; but the English police were heavy and the French inhabitants were indifferent. In any case, they got used to the notion of the road being clear; and just as they had come to the cliffs MacIan banged into another gentleman with unmistakable surprise. How he knew he was another gentleman merely by banging into him, must remain a mystery. MacIan was a very poor and very sober Scotch gentleman. The other was a very drunk and very wealthy English gentleman. But there was something in the staggered and openly embarrassed apologies that made them understand each other as readily and as quickly and as much as two men talking French in the middle of China. The nearest expression of the type is that it either hits or apologizes; and in this case both apologized.

“You seem to be in a hurry,” said the unknown Englishman, falling back a step or two in order to laugh with an unnatural heartiness. “What’s it all about, eh?” Then before MacIan could get past his sprawling and staggering figure he ran forward again and said with a sort of shouting and ear–shattering whisper: “I say, my name is Wilkinson. You know–Wilkinson’s Entire was my grandfather. Can’t drink beer myself. Liver.” And he shook his head with extraordinary sagacity.

“We really are in a hurry, as you say,” said MacIan, summoning a sufficiently pleasant smile, “so if you will let us pass—”

“I’ll tell you what, you fellows,” said the sprawling gentleman, confidentially, while Evan’s agonized ears heard behind him the first paces of the pursuit, “if you really are, as you say, in a hurry, I know what it is to be in a hurry–Lord, what a hurry I was in when we all came out of Cartwright’s rooms—if you really are in a hurry”—and he seemed to steady his voice into a sort of solemnity—”if you are in a hurry, there’s nothing like a good yacht for a man in a hurry.”

“No doubt you’re right,” said MacIan, and dashed past him in despair. The head of the pursuing host was just showing over the top of the hill behind him.
Turnbull had already ducked under the intoxicated gentleman’s elbow and fled far in front.

“No, but look here,” said Mr. Wilkinson, enthusiastically running after MacIan and catching him by the sleeve of his coat. “If you want to hurry you should take a yacht, and if”—he said, with a burst of rationality, like one leaping to a further point in logic—”if you want a yacht—you can have mine.”

Evan pulled up abruptly and looked back at him. “We are really in the devil of a hurry,” he said, “and if you really have a yacht, the truth is that we would give our ears for it.”

“You’ll find it in harbour,” said Wilkinson, struggling with his speech. “Left side of harbour—called Gibson Girl—can’t think why, old fellow, I never lent it you before.”

With these words the benevolent Mr. Wilkinson fell flat on his face in the road, but continued to laugh softly, and turned towards his flying companion a face of peculiar peace and benignity. Evan’s mind went through a crisis of instantaneous casuistry, in which it may be that he decided wrongly; but about how he decided his biographer can profess no doubt. Two minutes afterwards he had overtaken Turnbull and told the tale; ten minutes afterwards he and Turnbull had somehow tumbled into the yacht called the Gibson Girl and had somehow pushed off from the Isle of St. Loup.
XII

THE DESERT ISLAND

Those who happen to hold the view (and Mr. Evan MacIan, now alive and comfortable, is among the number) that something supernatural, some eccentric kindness from god or fairy had guided our adventurers through all their absurd perils, might have found his strongest argument perhaps in their management or mismanagement of Mr. Wilkinson’s yacht. Neither of them had the smallest qualification for managing such a vessel; but MacIan had a practical knowledge of the sea in much smaller and quite different boats, while Turnbull had an abstract knowledge of science and some of its applications to navigation, which was worse. The presence of the god or fairy can only be deduced from the fact that they never definitely ran into anything, either a boat, a rock, a quicksand, or a man–of–war. Apart from this negative description, their voyage would be difficult to describe. It took at least a fortnight, and MacIan, who was certainly the shrewder sailor of the two, realized that they were sailing west into the Atlantic and were probably by this time past the Scilly Isles. How much farther they stood out into the western sea it was impossible to conjecture. But they felt certain, at least, that they were far enough into that awful gulf between us and America to make it unlikely that they would soon see land again. It was therefore with legitimate excitement that one rainy morning after daybreak they saw that distinct shape of a solitary island standing up against the encircling strip of silver which ran round the skyline and separated the grey and green of the billows from the grey and mauve of the morning clouds.

“What can it be?” cried MacIan, in a dry–throated excitement. “I didn’t know there were any Atlantic islands so far beyond the Scillies–Good Lord, it can’t be Madeira, yet?”

“I thought you were fond of legends and lies and fables,” said Turnbull, grimly. “Perhaps it’s Atlantis.”

“Of course, it might be,” answered the other, quite innocently and gravely; “but I never thought the story about Atlantis was very solidly established.”

“Whatsoever it is, we are running on to it,” said Turnbull, equably, “and we shall be shipwrecked twice, at any rate.”

The naked–looking nose of land projecting from the unknown island was, indeed, growing larger and larger, like the trunk of some terrible and advancing
elephant. There seemed to be nothing in particular, at least on this side of the island, except shoals of shellfish lying so thick as almost to make it look like one of those toy grottos that the children make. In one place, however, the coast offered a soft, smooth bay of sand, and even the rudimentary ingenuity of the two amateur mariners managed to run up the little ship with her prow well on shore and her bowsprit pointing upward, as in a sort of idiotic triumph.

They tumbled on shore and began to unload the vessel, setting the stores out in rows upon the sand with something of the solemnity of boys playing at pirates. There were Mr. Wilkinson’s cigar–boxes and Mr. Wilkinson’s dozen of champagne and Mr. Wilkinson’s tinned salmon and Mr. Wilkinson’s tinned tongue and Mr. Wilkinson’s tinned sardines, and every sort of preserved thing that could be seen at the Army and Navy stores. Then MacIan stopped with a jar of pickles in his hand and said abruptly:

“I don’t know why we’re doing all this; I suppose we ought really to fall to and get it over.”

Then he added more thoughtfully: “Of course this island seems rather bare and the survivor–”

“The question is,” said Turnbull, with cheerful speculation, “whether the survivor will be in a proper frame of mind for potted prawns.”

MacIan looked down at the rows of tins and bottles, and the cloud of doubt still lowered upon his face.

“You will permit me two liberties, my dear sir,” said Turnbull at last: “The first is to break open this box and light one of Mr. Wilkinson’s excellent cigars, which will, I am sure, assist my meditations; the second is to offer a penny for your thoughts; or rather to convulse the already complex finances of this island by betting a penny that I know them.”

“What on earth are you talking about?” asked MacIan, listlessly, in the manner of an inattentive child.

“I know what you are really thinking, MacIan,” repeated Turnbull, laughing. “I know what I am thinking, anyhow. And I rather fancy it’s the same.”

“What are you thinking?” asked Evan.

“I am thinking and you are thinking,” said Turnbull, “that it is damned silly to waste all that champagne.”

Something like the spectre of a smile appeared on the unsmiling visage of the Gael; and he made at least no movement of dissent.

“We could drink all the wine and smoke all the cigars easily in a week,” said Turnbull; “and that would be to die feasting like heroes.”
“Yes, and there is something else,” said MacIan, with slight hesitation. “You see, we are on an almost unknown rock, lost in the Atlantic. The police will never catch us; but then neither may the public ever hear of us; and that was one of the things we wanted.” Then, after a pause, he said, drawing in the sand with his sword-point: “She may never hear of it at all.”

“Well?” inquired the other, puffing at his cigar.

“Well,” said MacIan, “we might occupy a day or two in drawing up a thorough and complete statement of what we did and why we did it, and all about both our points of view. Then we could leave one copy on the island whatever happens to us and put another in an empty bottle and send it out to sea, as they do in the books.”

“A good idea,” said Turnbull, “and now let us finish unpacking.”

As MacIan, a tall, almost ghostly figure, paced along the edge of sand that ran round the islet, the purple but cloudy poetry which was his native element was piled up at its thickest upon his soul. The unique island and the endless sea emphasized the thing solely as an epic. There were no ladies or policemen here to give him a hint either of its farce or its tragedy.

“Perhaps when the morning stars were made,” he said to himself, “God built this island up from the bottom of the world to be a tower and a theatre for the fight between yea and nay.”

Then he wandered up to the highest level of the rock, where there was a roof or plateau of level stone. Half an hour afterwards, Turnbull found him clearing away the loose sand from this table-land and making it smooth and even.

“We will fight up here, Turnbull,” said MacIan, “when the time comes. And till the time comes this place shall be sacred.”

“I thought of having lunch up here,” said Turnbull, who had a bottle of champagne in his hand.

“No, no—not up here,” said MacIan, and came down from the height quite hastily. Before he descended, however, he fixed the two swords upright, one at each end of the platform, as if they were human sentinels to guard it under the stars.

Then they came down and lunched plentifully in a nest of loose rocks. In the same place that night they supped more plentifully still. The smoke of Mr. Wilkinson’s cigars went up ceaseless and strong smelling, like a pagan sacrifice; the golden glories of Mr. Wilkinson’s champagne rose to their heads and poured out of them in fancies and philosophies. And occasionally they would look up at the starlight and the rock and see the space guarded by the two cross-hilted
swords, which looked like two black crosses at either end of a grave.

In this primitive and Homeric truce the week passed by; it consisted almost entirely of eating, drinking, smoking, talking, and occasionally singing. They wrote their records and cast loose their bottle. They never ascended to the ominous plateau; they had never stood there save for that single embarrassed minute when they had had no time to take stock of the seascape or the shape of the land. They did not even explore the island; for MacIan was partly concerned in prayer and Turnbull entirely concerned with tobacco; and both these forms of inspiration can be enjoyed by the secluded and even the sedentary. It was on a golden afternoon, the sun sinking over the sea, rayed like the very head of Apollo, when Turnbull tossed off the last half-pint from the emptied Wilkinsonian bottle, hurled the bottle into the sea with objectless energy, and went up to where his sword stood waiting for him on the hill. MacIan was already standing heavily by his with bent head and eyes reading the ground. He had not even troubled to throw a glance round the island or the horizon. But Turnbull being of a more active and birdlike type of mind did throw a glance round the scene. The consequence of which was that he nearly fell off the rock.

On three sides of this shelly and sandy islet the sea stretched blue and infinite without a speck of land or sail; the same as Turnbull had first seen it, except that the tide being out it showed a few yards more of slanting sand under the roots of the rocks. But on the fourth side the island exhibited a more extraordinary feature. In fact, it exhibited the extraordinary feature of not being an island at all. A long, curving neck of sand, as smooth and wet as the neck of the sea serpent, ran out into the sea and joined their rock to a line of low, billowing, and glistening sand-hills, which the sinking sea had just bared to the sun. Whether they were firm sand or quicksand it was difficult to guess; but there was at least no doubt that they lay on the edge of some larger land; for colourless hills appeared faintly behind them and no sea could be seen beyond.

“Sakes alive!” cried Turnbull, with rolling eyes; “this ain’t an island in the Atlantic. We’ve butted the bally continent of America.”

MacIan turned his head, and his face, already pale, grew a shade paler. He was by this time walking in a world of omens and hieroglyphics, and he could not read anything but what was baffling or menacing in this brown gigantic arm of the earth stretched out into the sea to seize him.

“MacIan,” said Turnbull, in his temperate way, “whatever our eternal interrupted tête–à–têtes have taught us or not taught us, at least we need not fear the charge of fear. If it is essential to your emotions, I will cheerfully finish the
fight here and now; but I must confess that if you kill me here I shall die with my curiosity highly excited and unsatisfied upon a minor point of geography.”

“I do not want to stop now,” said the other, in his elephantine simplicity, “but we must stop for a moment, because it is a sign—perhaps it is a miracle. We must see what is at the end of the road of sand; it may be a bridge built across the gulf by God.”

“So long as you gratify my query,” said Turnbull, laughing and letting back his blade into the sheath, “I do not care for what reason you choose to stop.”

They clambered down the rocky peninsula and trudged along the sandy isthmus with the plodding resolution of men who seemed almost to have made up their minds to be wanderers on the face of the earth. Despite Turnbull’s air of scientific eagerness, he was really the less impatient of the two; and the Highlander went on well ahead of him with passionate strides. By the time they had walked for about half an hour in the ups and downs of those dreary sands, the distance between the two had lengthened and Maclan was only a tall figure silhouetted for an instant upon the crest of some sand–dune and then disappearing behind it. This rather increased the Robinson Crusoe feeling in Mr. Turnbull, and he looked about almost disconsolately for some sign of life. What sort of life he expected it to be if it appeared, he did not very clearly know. He has since confessed that he thinks that in his subconsciousness he expected an alligator.

The first sign of life that he did see, however, was something more extraordinary than the largest alligator. It was nothing less than the notorious Mr. Evan Maclan coming bounding back across the sand–heaps breathless, without his cap and keeping the sword in his hand only by a habit now quite hardened.

“Take care, Turnbull,” he cried out from a good distance as he ran, “I’ve seen a native.”

“A native?” repeated his companion, whose scenery had of late been chiefly of shellfish, “what the deuce! Do you mean an oyster?”

“No,” said Maclan, stopping and breathing hard, “I mean a savage. A black man.”

“Why, where did you see him?” asked the staring editor.

“Over there—behind that hill,” said the gasping Maclan. “He put up his black head and grinned at me.”

Turnbull thrust his hands through his red hair like one who gives up the world as a bad riddle. “Lord love a duck,” said he, “can it be Jamaica?”

Then glancing at his companion with a small frown, as of one slightly
suspicious, he said: “I say, don’t think me rude—but you’re a visionary kind of fellow—and then we drank a great deal. Do you mind waiting here while I go and see for myself?”

“Shout if you get into trouble,” said the Celt, with composure; “you will find it as I say.”

Turnbull ran off ahead with a rapidity now far greater than his rival’s, and soon vanished over the disputed sand-hill. Then five minutes passed, and then seven minutes; and MacIan bit his lip and swung his sword, and the other did not reappear. Finally, with a Gaelic oath, Evan started forward to the rescue, and almost at the same moment the small figure of the missing man appeared on the ridge against the sky.

Even at that distance, however, there was something odd about his attitude; so odd that MacIan continued to make his way in that direction. It looked as if he were wounded; or, still more, as if he were ill. He wavered as he came down the slope and seemed flinging himself into peculiar postures. But it was only when he came within three feet of MacIan’s face, that that observer of mankind fully realized that Mr. James Turnbull was roaring with laughter.

“You are quit right,” sobbed that wholly demoralized journalist. “He’s black, oh, there’s no doubt the black’s all right—as far as it goes.” And he went off again into convulsions of his humorous ailment.

“What ever is the matter with you?” asked MacIan, with stern impatience.

“Did you see the nigger—”

“I saw the nigger,” gasped Turnbull. “I saw the splendid barbarian Chief. I saw the Emperor of Ethiopia—oh, I saw him all right. The nigger’s hands and face are a lovely colour—and the nigger—” And he was overtaken once more.

“Well, well, well,” said Evan, stamping each monosyllable on the sand, “what about the nigger?”

“Well, the truth is,” said Turnbull, suddenly and startlingly, becoming quite grave and precise, “the truth is, the nigger is a Margate nigger, and we are now on the edge of the Isle of Thanet, a few miles from Margate.”

Then he had a momentary return of his hysteria and said: “I say, old boy, I should like to see a chart of our fortnight’s cruise in Wilkinson’s yacht.”

MacIan had no smile in answer, but his eager lips opened as if parched for the truth. “You mean to say,” he began—“Yes, I mean to say,” said Turnbull, “and I mean to say something funnier still. I have learnt everything I wanted to know from the partially black musician over there, who has taken a run in his war-paint to meet a friend in a quiet pub along the coast—the noble savage has told
me all about it. The bottle containing our declaration, doctrines, and dying sentiments was washed up on Margate beach yesterday in the presence of one alderman, two bathing–machine men, three policemen, seven doctors, and a hundred and thirteen London clerks on a holiday, to all of whom, whether directly or indirectly, our composition gave enormous literary pleasure. Buck up, old man, this story of ours is a switchback. I have begun to understand the pulse and the time of it; now we are up in a cathedral and then we are down in a theatre, where they only play farces. Come, I am quite reconciled–let us enjoy the farce.”

But MacIan said nothing, and an instant afterwards Turnbull himself called out in an entirely changed voice: “Oh, this is damnable! This is not to be borne!”

MacIan followed his eye along the sand–hills. He saw what looked like the momentary and waving figure of the nigger minstrel, and then he saw a heavy running policeman take the turn of the sand–hill with the smooth solemnity of a railway train.
XIII

THE GARDEN OF PEACE

Up to this instant Evan MacIan had really understood nothing; but when he saw the policeman he saw everything. He saw his enemies, all the powers and princes of the earth. He suddenly altered from a staring statue to a leaping man of the mountains.

“We must break away from him here,” he cried, briefly, and went like a whirlwind over the sand ridge in a straight line and at a particular angle. When the policeman had finished his admirable railway curve, he found a wall of failing sand between him and the pursued. By the time he had scaled it thrice, slid down twice, and crested it in the third effort, the two flying figures were far in front. They found the sand harder farther on; it began to be crusted with scraps of turf and in a few moments they were flying easily over an open common of rank sea–grass. They had no easy business, however; for the bottle which they had so innocently sent into the chief gate of Thanet had called to life the police of half a county on their trail. From every side across the grey–green common figures could be seen running and closing in; and it was only when MacIan with his big body broke down the tangled barrier of a little wood, as men break down a door with the shoulder; it was only when they vanished crashing into the underworld of the black wood, that their hunters were even instantaneously thrown off the scent.

At the risk of struggling a little longer like flies in that black web of twigs and trunks, Evan (who had an instinct of the hunter or the hunted) took an incalculable course through the forest, which let them out at last by a forest opening–quite forgotten by the leaders of the chase. They ran a mile or two farther along the edge of the wood until they reached another and somewhat similar opening. Then MacIan stood utterly still and listened, as animals listen, for every sound in the universe. Then he said: “We are quit of them.” And Turnbull said: “Where shall we go now?”

MacIan looked at the silver sunset that was closing in, barred by plump lines of purple cloud; he looked at the high tree–tops that caught the last light and at the birds going heavily homeward, just as if all these things were bits of written advice that he could read.

Then he said: “The best place we can go to is to bed. If we can get some sleep
in this wood, now everyone has cleared out of it, it will be worth a handicap of two hundred yards tomorrow.”

Turnbull, who was exceptionally lively and laughing in his demeanour, kicked his legs about like a schoolboy and said he did not want to go to sleep. He walked incessantly and talked very brilliantly. And when at last he lay down on the hard earth, sleep struck him senseless like a hammer.

Indeed, he needed the strongest sleep he could get; for the earth was still full of darkness and a kind of morning fog when his fellow–fugitive shook him awake.

“No more sleep, I’m afraid,” said Evan, in a heavy, almost submissive, voice of apology. “They’ve gone on past us right enough for a good thirty miles; but now they’ve found out their mistake, and they’re coming back.”

“Are you sure?” said Turnbull, sitting up and rubbing his red eyebrows with his hand.

The next moment, however, he had jumped up alive and leaping like a man struck with a shock of cold water, and he was plunging after MacIan along the woodland path. The shape of their old friend the constable had appeared against the pearl and pink of the sunrise. Somehow, it always looked a very funny shape when seen against the sunrise.

A wash of weary daylight was breaking over the country–side, and the fields and roads were full of white mist–the kind of white mist that clings in corners like cotton wool. The empty road, along which the chase had taken its turn, was overshadowed on one side by a very high discoloured wall, stained, and streaked green, as with seaweed–evidently the high–shouldered sentinel of some great gentleman’s estate. A yard or two from the wall ran parallel to it a linked and tangled line of lime–trees, forming a kind of cloister along the side of the road. It was under this branching colonnade that the two fugitives fled, almost concealed from their pursuers by the twilight, the mist and the leaping zotrope of shadows. Their feet, though beating the ground furiously, made but a faint noise; for they had kicked away their boots in the wood; their long, antiquated weapons made no jingle or clatter, for they had strapped them across their backs like guitars. They had all the advantages that invisibility and silence can add to speed.

A hundred and fifty yards behind them down the centre of the empty road the first of their pursuers came pounding and panting–a fat but powerful policeman who had distanced all the rest. He came on at a splendid pace for so portly a figure; but, like all heavy bodies in motion, he gave the impression that it would
be easier for him to increase his pace than to slacken it suddenly. Nothing short of a brick wall could have abruptly brought him up. Turnbull turned his head slightly and found breath to say something to MacIan. MacIan nodded.

Pursuer and pursued were fixed in their distance as they fled, for some quarter of a mile, when they came to a place where two or three of the trees grew twistedly together, making a special obscurity. Past this place the pursuing policeman went thundering without thought or hesitation. But he was pursuing his shadow or the wind; for Turnbull had put one foot in a crack of the tree and gone up it as quickly and softly as a cat. Somewhat more laboriously but in equal silence the long legs of the Highlander had followed; and crouching in crucial silence in the cloud of leaves, they saw the whole posse of their pursuers go by and die into the dust and mists of the distance.

The white vapour lay, as it often does, in lean and palpable layers; and even the head of the tree was above it in the half–daylight, like a green ship swinging on a sea of foam. But higher yet behind them, and readier to catch the first coming of the sun, ran the rampart of the top of the wall, which in their excitement of escape looked at once indispensable and unattainable, like the wall of heaven. Here, however, it was MacIan’s turn to have the advantage; for, though less light–limbed and feline, he was longer and stronger in the arms. In two seconds he had tugged up his chin over the wall like a horizontal bar; the next he sat astride of it, like a horse of stone. With his assistance Turnbull vaulted to the same perch, and the two began cautiously to shift along the wall in the direction by which they had come, doubling on their tracks to throw off the last pursuit. MacIan could not rid himself of the fancy of bestriding a steed; the long, grey coping of the wall shot out in front of him, like the long, grey neck of some nightmare Rosinante. He had the quaint thought that he and Turnbull were two knights on one steed on the old shield of the Templars.

The nightmare of the stone horse was increased by the white fog, which seemed thicker inside the wall than outside. They could make nothing of the enclosure upon which they were partial trespassers, except that the green and crooked branches of a big apple–tree came crawling at them out of the mist, like the tentacles of some green cuttlefish. Anything would serve, however, that was likely to confuse their trail, so they both decided without need of words to use this tree also as a ladder–a ladder of descent. When they dropped from the lowest branch to the ground their stockinged feet felt hard gravel beneath them.

They had alighted in the middle of a very broad garden path, and the clearing mist permitted them to see the edge of a well–clipped lawn. Though the white
vapour was still a veil, it was like the gauzy veil of a transformation scene in a
pantomime; for through it there glowed shapeless masses of colour, masses
which might be clouds of sunrise or mosaics of gold and crimson, or ladies
robed in ruby and emerald draperies. As it thinned yet farther they saw that it
was only flowers; but flowers in such insolent mass and magnificence as can
seldom be seen out of the tropics. Purple and crimson rhododendrons rose
arrogantly, like rampant heraldic animals against their burning background of
laburnum gold. The roses were red hot; the clematis was, so to speak, blue hot.
And yet the mere whiteness of the syringa seemed the most violent colour of all.
As the golden sunlight gradually conquered the mists, it had really something of
the sensational sweetness of the slow opening of the gates of Eden. MacIan,
whose mind was always haunted with such seraphic or titanic parallels, made
some such remark to his companion. But Turnbull only cursed and said that it
was the back garden of some damnable rich man.

When the last haze had faded from the ordered paths, the open lawns, and the
flaming flower–beds, the two realized, not without an abrupt re–examination
of their position, that they were not alone in the garden.

Down the centre of the central garden path, preceded by a blue cloud from a
cigarette, was walking a gentleman who evidently understood all the relish of a
garden in the very early morning. He was a slim yet satisfied figure, clad in a
suit of pale–grey tweed, so subdued that the pattern was imperceptible–a
costume that was casual but not by any means careless. His face, which was
reflective and somewhat over–refined, was the face of a quite elderly man,
though his stringy hair and moustache were still quite yellow. A double eye–
glass, with a broad, black ribbon, drooped from his aquiline nose, and he smiled,
as he communed with himself, with a self–content which was rare and almost
irritating. The straw panama on his head was many shades shabbier than his
clothes, as if he had caught it up by accident.

It needed the full shock of the huge shadow of MacIan, falling across his
sunlit path, to rouse him from his smiling reverie. When this had fallen on him
he lifted his head a little and blinked at the intruders with short–sighted
benevolence, but with far less surprise than might have been expected. He was a
gentleman; that is, he had social presence of mind, whether for kindness or for
insolence.

“Can I do anything for you?” he said, at last.

MacIan bowed. “You can extend to us your pardon,” he said, for he also came
of a whole race of gentlemen–of gentlemen without shirts to their backs. “I am
afraid we are trespassing. We have just come over the wall.”

“Over the wall?” repeated the smiling old gentleman, still without letting his surprise come uppermost.

“I suppose I am not wrong, sir,” continued MacIan, “in supposing that these grounds inside the wall belong to you?”

The man in the panama looked at the ground and smoked thoughtfully for a few moments, after which he said, with a sort of matured conviction:

“Yes, certainly; the grounds inside the wall really belong to me, and the grounds outside the wall, too.”

“A large proprietor, I imagine,” said Turnbull, with a truculent eye.

“Yes,” answered the old gentleman, looking at him with a steady smile. “A large proprietor.”

Turnbull’s eye grew even more offensive, and he began biting his red beard; but MacIan seemed to recognize a type with which he could deal and continued quite easily:

“I am sure that a man like you will not need to be told that one sees and does a good many things that do not get into the newspapers. Things which, on the whole, had better not get into the newspapers.”

The smile of the large proprietor broadened for a moment under his loose, light moustache, and the other continued with increased confidence:

“One sometimes wants to have it out with another man. The police won’t allow it in the streets—and then there’s the County Council—and in the fields even nothing’s allowed but posters of pills. But in a gentleman’s garden, now—”

The strange gentleman smiled again and said, easily enough: “Do you want to fight? What do you want to fight about?”

MacIan had understood his man pretty well up to that point; an instinct common to all men with the aristocratic tradition of Europe had guided him. He knew that the kind of man who in his own back garden wears good clothes and spoils them with a bad hat is not the kind of man who has an abstract horror of illegal actions of violence or the evasion of the police. But a man may understand ragging and yet be very far from understanding religious ragging. This seeming host of theirs might comprehend a quarrel of husband and lover or a difficulty at cards or even escape from a pursuing tailor; but it still remained doubtful whether he would feel the earth fail under him in that earthquake instant when the Virgin is compared to a goddess of Mesopotamia. Even MacIan, therefore (whose tact was far from being his strong point), felt the necessity for some compromise in the mode of approach. At last he said, and
even then with hesitation:

“We are fighting about God; there can be nothing so important as that.”

The tilted eye–glasses of the old gentleman fell abruptly from his nose, and he thrust his aristocratic chin so far forward that his lean neck seemed to shoot out longer like a telescope.

“About God?” he queried, in a key completely new.

“Look here!” cried Turnbull, taking his turn roughly, “I’ll tell you what it’s all about. I think that there’s no God. I take it that it’s nobody’s business but mine—or God’s, if there is one. This young gentleman from the Highlands happens to think that it’s his business. In consequence, he first takes a walking–stick and smashes my shop; then he takes the same walking–stick and tries to smash me. To this I naturally object. I suggest that if it comes to that we should both have sticks. He improves on the suggestion and proposes that we should both have steel–pointed sticks. The police (with characteristic unreasonableness) will not accept either of our proposals; the result is that we run about dodging the police and have jumped over your garden wall into your magnificent garden to throw ourselves on your magnificent hospitality.”

The face of the old gentleman had grown redder and redder during this address, but it was still smiling; and when he broke out it was with a kind of guffaw.

“So you really want to fight with drawn swords in my garden,” he asked, “about whether there is really a God?”

“Why not?” said MacIan, with his simple monstrosity of speech; “all man’s worship began when the Garden of Eden was founded.”

“Yes, by–!” said Turnbull, with an oath, “and ended when the Zoological Gardens were founded.”

“In this garden! In my presence!” cried the stranger, stamping up and down the gravel and choking with laughter, “whether there is a God!” And he went stamping up and down the garden, making it echo with his unintelligible laughter. Then he came back to them more composed and wiping his eyes.

“Why, how small the world is!” he cried at last. “I can settle the whole matter. Why, I am God!”

And he suddenly began to kick and wave his well–clad legs about the lawn.

“You are what?” repeated Turnbull, in a tone which is beyond description.

“Why, God, of course!” answered the other, thoroughly amused. “How funny it is to think that you have tumbled over a garden wall and fallen exactly on the right person! You might have gone floundering about in all sorts of churches and
chapels and colleges and schools of philosophy looking for some evidence of the existence of God. Why, there is no evidence, except seeing him. And now you’ve seen him. You’ve seen him dance!”

And the obliging old gentleman instantly stood on one leg without relaxing at all the grave and cultured benignity of his expression.

“I understood that this garden—” began the bewildered MacIan.

“Quite so! Quite so!” said the man on one leg, nodding gravely. “I said this garden belonged to me and the land outside it. So they do. So does the country beyond that and the sea beyond that and all the rest of the earth. So does the moon. So do the sun and stars.” And he added, with a smile of apology: “You see, I’m God.”

Turnbull and MacIan looked at him for one moment with a sort of notion that perhaps he was not too old to be merely playing the fool. But after staring steadily for an instant Turnbull saw the hard and horrible earnestness in the man’s eyes behind all his empty animation. Then Turnbull looked very gravely at the strict gravel walls and the gay flower–beds and the long rectangular red–brick building, which the mist had left evident beyond them. Then he looked at MacIan.

Almost at the same moment another man came walking quickly round the regal clump of rhododendrons. He had the look of a prosperous banker, wore a good tall silk hat, was almost stout enough to burst the buttons of a fine frock–coat; but he was talking to himself, and one of his elbows had a singular outward jerk as he went by.
A MUSEUM OF SOULS

The man with the good hat and the jumping elbow went by very quickly; yet the man with the bad hat, who thought he was God, overtook him. He ran after him and jumped over a bed of geraniums to catch him.

“"I beg your Majesty’s pardon,” he said, with mock humility, “but here is a quarrel which you ought really to judge.”

Then as he led the heavy, silk–hatted man back towards the group, he caught MacIan’s ear in order to whisper: “This poor gentleman is mad; he thinks he is Edward VII.” At this the self–appointed Creator slightly wrinkled. “Of course you won’t trust him much; come to me for everything. But in my position one has to meet so many people. One has to be broadminded.”

The big banker in the black frock–coat and hat was standing quite grave and dignified on the lawn, save for this slight twitch of one limb, and he did not seem by any means unworthy of the part which the other promptly forced upon him.

“My dear fellow,” said the man in the straw hat, “these two gentlemen are going to fight a duel of the utmost importance. Your own royal position and my much humbler one surely indicate us as the proper seconds. Seconds—yes, seconds—” and here the speaker was once more shaken with his old malady of laughter.

“Yes, you and I are both seconds—and these two gentlemen can obviously fight in front of us. You, he—he, are the king. I am God; really, they could hardly have better supporters. They have come to the right place.”

Then Turnbull, who had been staring with a frown at the fresh turf, burst out with a rather bitter laugh and cried, throwing his red head in the air:

“Yes, by God, MacIan, I think we have come to the right place!” And MacIan answered, with an adamantine stupidity:

“Any place is the right place where they will let us do it.”

There was a long stillness, and their eyes involuntarily took in the landscape, as they had taken in all the landscapes of their everlasting combat; the bright, square garden behind the shop; the whole lift and leaning of the side of Hampstead Heath; the little garden of the decadent choked with flowers; the square of sand beside the sea at sunrise. They both felt at the same moment all the breadth and blossoming beauty of that paradise, the coloured trees, the
natural and restful nooks and also the great wall of stone—more awful than the wall of China—from which no flesh could flee.

Turnbull was moodily balancing his sword in his hand as the other spoke; then he started, for a mouth whispered quite close to his ear. With a softness incredible in any cat, the huge, heavy man in the black hat and frock—coat had crept across the lawn from his own side and was saying in his ear: “Don’t trust that second of yours. He’s mad and not so mad, either; for he frightfully cunning and sharp. Don’t believe the story he tells you about why I hate him. I know the story he’ll tell; I overheard it when the housekeeper was talking to the postman. It’s too long to talk about now, and I expect we’re watched, but—”

Something in Turnbull made him want suddenly to be sick on the grass; the mere healthy and heathen horror of the unclean; the mere inhumane hatred of the inhuman state of madness. He seemed to hear all round him the hateful whispers of that place, innumerable as leaves whispering in the wind, and each of them telling eagerly some evil that had not happened or some terrific secret which was not true. All the rationalist and plain man revolted within him against bowing down for a moment in that forest of deception and egotistical darkness. He wanted to blow up that palace of delusions with dynamite; and in some wild way, which I will not defend, he tried to do it.

He looked across at MacIan and said: “Oh, I can’t stand this!”

“Can’t stand what?” asked his opponent, eyeing him doubtfully.

“Shall we say the atmosphere?” replied Turnbull; “one can’t use uncivil expressions even to a—deity. The fact is, I don’t like having God for my second.”

“Sir!” said that being in a state of great offence, “in my position I am not used to having my favours refused. Do you know who I am?”

The editor of The Atheist turned upon him like one who has lost all patience, and exploded: “Yes, you are God, aren’t you?” he said, abruptly, “why do we have two sets of teeth?”

“Teeth?” spluttered the genteel lunatic; “teeth?”

“Yes,” cried Turnbull, advancing on him swiftly and with animated gestures, “why does teething hurt? Why do growing pains hurt? Why are measles catching? Why does a rose have thorns? Why do rhinoceroses have horns? Why is the horn on the top of the nose? Why haven’t I a horn on the top of my nose, eh?” And he struck the bridge of his nose smartly with his forefinger to indicate the place of the omission and then wagged the finger menacingly at the Creator.

“I’ve often wanted to meet you,” he resumed, sternly, after a pause, “to hold you accountable for all the idiocy and cruelty of this muddled and meaningless
world of yours. You make a hundred seeds and only one bears fruit. You make a million worlds and only one seems inhabited. What do you mean by it, eh? What do you mean by it?"

The unhappy lunatic had fallen back before this quite novel form of attack, and lifted his burnt-out cigarette almost like one warding off a blow. Turnbull went on like a torrent.

“A man died yesterday in Ealing. You murdered him. A girl had the toothache in Croydon. You gave it her. Fifty sailors were drowned off Selsey Bill. You scuttled their ship. What have you got to say for yourself, eh?”

The representative of omnipotence looked as if he had left most of these things to his subordinates; he passed a hand over his wrinkling brow and said in a voice much saner than any he had yet used:

“Well, if you dislike my assistance, of course—perhaps the other gentleman—”

“The other gentleman,” cried Turnbull, scornfully, “is a submissive and loyal and obedient gentleman. He likes the people who wear crowns, whether of diamonds or of stars. He believes in the divine right of kings, and it is appropriate enough that he should have the king for his second. But it is not appropriate to me that I should have God for my second. God is not good enough. I dislike and I deny the divine right of kings. But I dislike more and I deny more the divine right of divinity.”

Then after a pause in which he swallowed his passion, he said to MacIan:

“You have got the right second, anyhow.”

The Highlander did not answer, but stood as if thunderstruck with one long and heavy thought. Then at last he turned abruptly to his second in the silk hat and said: “Who are you?”

The man in the silk hat blinked and bridled in affected surprise, like one who was in truth accustomed to be doubted.

“I am King Edward VII,” he said, with shaky arrogance. “Do you doubt my word?”

“I do not doubt it in the least,” answered MacIan.

“Then, why,” said the large man in the silk hat, trembling from head to foot, “why do you wear your hat before the king?”

“Why should I take it off,” retorted MacIan, with equal heat, “before a usurper?”

Turnbull swung round on his heel. “Well, really,” he said, “I thought at least you were a loyal subject.”

“I am the only loyal subject,” answered the Gael. “For nearly thirty years I
have walked these islands and have not found another.”

“You are always hard to follow,” remarked Turnbull, genially, “and sometimes so much so as to be hardly worth following.”

“I alone am loyal,” insisted MacIan; “for I alone am in rebellion. I am ready at any instant to restore the Stuarts. I am ready at any instant to defy the Hanoverian brood—and I defy it now even when face to face with the actual ruler of the enormous British Empire!”

And folding his arms and throwing back his lean, hawklike face, he haughtily confronted the man with the formal frock-coat and the eccentric elbow.

“What right had you stunted German squires,” he cried, “to interfere in a quarrel between Scotch and English and Irish gentlemen? Who made you, whose fathers could not splutter English while they walked in Whitehall, who made you the judge between the republic of Sidney and the monarchy of Montrose? What had your sires to do with England that they should have the foul offering of the blood of Derwentwater and the heart of Jimmy Dawson? Where are the corpses of Culloden? Where is the blood of Lochiel?” MacIan advanced upon his opponent with a bony and pointed finger, as if indicating the exact pocket in which the blood of that Cameron was probably kept; and Edward VII fell back a few paces in considerable confusion.

“What good have you ever done to us?” he continued in harsher and harsher accents, forcing the other back towards the flower-beds. “What good have you ever done, you race of German sausages? Yards of barbarian etiquette, to throttle the freedom of aristocracy! Gas of northern metaphysics to blow up Broad Church bishops like balloons. Bad pictures and bad manners and pantheism and the Albert Memorial. Go back to Hanover, you humbug! Go to—”

Before the end of this tirade the arrogance of the monarch had entirely given way; he had fairly turned tail and was trundling away down the path. MacIan strode after him still preaching and flourishing his large, lean hands. The other two remained in the centre of the lawn—Turnbull in convulsions of laughter, the lunatic in convulsions of disgust. Almost at the same moment a third figure came stepping swiftly across the lawn.

The advancing figure walked with a stoop, and yet somehow flung his forked and narrow beard forward. That carefully cut and pointed yellow beard was, indeed, the most emphatic thing about him. When he clasped his hands behind him, under the tails of his coat, he would wag his beard at a man like a big forefinger. It performed almost all his gestures; it was more important than the glittering eye—glasses through which he looked or the beautiful bleating voice in
which he spoke. His face and neck were of a lusty red, but lean and stringy; he always wore his expensive gold-rimmed eye-glasses slightly askew upon his aquiline nose; and he always showed two gleaming foreteeth under his moustache, in a smile so perpetual as to earn the reputation of a sneer. But for the crooked glasses his dress was always exquisite; and but for the smile he was perfectly and perennially depressed.

“Don’t you think,” said the new-comer, with a sort of supercilious entreaty, “that we had better all come into breakfast? It is such a mistake to wait for breakfast. It spoils one’s temper so much.”

“Quite so,” replied Turnbull, seriously.

“There seems almost to have been a little quarrelling here,” said the man with the goatish beard.

“It is rather a long story,” said Turnbull, smiling. “Originally, it might be called a phase in the quarrel between science and religion.”

The new-comer started slightly, and Turnbull replied to the question on his face.

“Oh, yes,” he said, “I am science!”

“I congratulate you heartily,” answered the other, “I am Doctor Quayle.”

Turnbull’s eyes did not move, but he realized that the man in the panama hat had lost all his ease of a landed proprietor and had withdrawn to a distance of thirty yards, where he stood glaring with all the contraction of fear and hatred that can stiffen a cat.

MacIan was sitting somewhat disconsolately on a stump of tree, his large black head half buried in his large brown hands, when Turnbull strode up to him chewing a cigarette. He did not look up, but his comrade and enemy addressed him like one who must free himself of his feelings.

“Well, I hope, at any rate,” he said, “that you like your precious religion now. I hope you like the society of this poor devil whom your damned tracts and hymns and priests have driven out of his wits. Five men in this place, they tell me, five men in this place who might have been fathers of families, and every one of them thinks he is God the Father. Oh! you may talk about the ugliness of science, but there is no one here who thinks he is Protoplasm.”

“They naturally prefer a bright part,” said MacIan, wearily. “Protoplasm is not worth going mad about.”

“At least,” said Turnbull, savagely, “it was your Jesus Christ who started all this bosh about being God.”

For one instant MacIan opened the eyes of battle; then his tightened lips took a
crooked smile and he said, quite calmly:

“No, the idea is older; it was Satan who first said that he was God.”

“Then, what,” asked Turnbull, very slowly, as he softly picked a flower, “what is the difference between Christ and Satan?”

“It is quite simple,” replied the Highlander. “Christ descended into hell; Satan fell into it.”

“Does it make much odds?” asked the free-thinker.

“It makes all the odds,” said the other. “One of them wanted to go up and went down; the other wanted to go down and went up. A god can be humble, a devil can only be humbled.”

“Why are you always wanting to humble a man?” asked Turnbull, knitting his brows. “It affects me as ungenerous.”

“Why were you wanting to humble a god when you found him in this garden?” asked MacIan.

“That was an extreme case of impudence,” said Turnbull.

“Granting the man his almighty pretensions, I think he was very modest,” said MacIan. “It is we who are arrogant, who know we are only men. The ordinary man in the street is more of a monster than that poor fellow; for the man in the street treats himself as God Almighty when he knows he isn’t. He expects the universe to turn round him, though he knows he isn’t the centre.”

“Well,” said Turnbull, sitting down on the grass, “this is a digression, anyhow. What I want to point out is, that your faith does end in asylums and my science doesn’t.”

“Doesn’t it, by George!” cried MacIan, scornfully. “There are a few men here who are mad on God and a few who are mad on the Bible. But I bet there are many more who are simply mad on madness.”

“Do you really believe it?” asked the other.

“Scores of them, I should say,” answered MacIan. “Fellows who have read medical books or fellows whose fathers and uncles had something hereditary in their heads—the whole air they breathe is mad.”

“All the same,” said Turnbull, shrewdly, “I bet you haven’t found a madman of that sort.”

“I bet I have!” cried Evan, with unusual animation. “I’ve been walking about the garden talking to a poor chap all the morning. He’s simply been broken down and driven raving by your damned science. Talk about believing one is God—why, it’s quite an old, comfortable, fireside fancy compared with the sort of things this fellow believes. He believes that there is a God, but that he is better
than God. He says God will be afraid to face him. He says one is always progressing beyond the best. He put his arm in mine and whispered in my ear, as if it were the apocalypse: ‘Never trust a God that you can’t improve on.’”

“What can he have meant?” said the atheist, with all his logic awake. “Obviously one should not trust any God that one can improve on.”

“It is the way he talks,” said MacIan, almost indifferently; “but he says rummier things than that. He says that a man’s doctor ought to decide what woman he marries; and he says that children ought not to be brought up by their parents, because a physical partiality will then distort the judgement of the educator.”

“Oh, dear!” said Turnbull, laughing, “you have certainly come across a pretty bad case, and incidentally proved your own. I suppose some men do lose their wits through science as through love and other good things.”

“And he says,” went on MacIan, monotonously, “that he cannot see why anyone should suppose that a triangle is a three–sided figure. He says that on some higher plane—”

Turnbull leapt to his feet as by an electric shock. “I never could have believed,” he cried, “that you had humour enough to tell a lie. You’ve gone a bit too far, old man, with your little joke. Even in a lunatic asylum there can’t be anybody who, having thought about the matter, thinks that a triangle has not got three sides. If he exists he must be a new era in human psychology. But he doesn’t exist.”

“I will go and fetch him,” said MacIan, calmly; “I left the poor fellow wandering about by the nasturtium bed.”

MacIan vanished, and in a few moments returned, trailing with him his own discovery among lunatics, who was a slender man with a fixed smile and an unfixed and rolling head. He had a goatlike beard just long enough to be shaken in a strong wind. Turnbull sprang to his feet and was like one who is speechless through choking a sudden shout of laughter.

“Why, you great donkey,” he shouted, in an ear–shattering whisper, “that’s not one of the patients at all. That’s one of the doctors.”

Evan looked back at the leering head with the long–pointed beard and repeated the word inquiringly: “One of the doctors?”

“Oh, you know what I mean,” said Turnbull, impatiently. “The medical authorities of the place.”

Evan was still staring back curiously at the beaming and bearded creature behind him.
“The mad doctors,” said Turnbull, shortly.
“Quite so,” said MacIan.
After a rather restless silence Turnbull plucked MacIan by the elbow and pulled him aside.
“For goodness sake,” he said, “don’t offend this fellow; he may be as mad as ten hatters, if you like, but he has us between his finger and thumb. This is the very time he appointed to talk with us about our—well, our exeat.”
“But what can it matter?” asked the wondering MacIan. “He can’t keep us in the asylum. We’re not mad.”
“Jackass!” said Turnbull, heartily, “of course we’re not mad. Of course, if we are medically examined and the thing is thrashed out, they will find we are not mad. But don’t you see that if the thing is thrashed out it will mean letters to this reference and telegrams to that; and at the first word of who we are, we shall be taken out of a madhouse, where we may smoke, to a jail, where we mayn’t. No, if we manage this very quietly, he may merely let us out at the front door as stray revellers. If there’s half an hour of inquiry, we are cooked.”

MacIan looked at the grass frowningly for a few seconds, and then said in a new, small and childish voice: “I am awfully stupid, Mr. Turnbull; you must be patient with me.”

Turnbull caught Evan’s elbow again with quite another gesture. “Come,” he cried, with the harsh voice of one who hides emotion, “come and let us be tactful in chorus.”

The doctor with the pointed beard was already slanting it forward at a more than usually acute angle, with the smile that expressed expectancy.
“I hope I do not hurry you, gentlemen,” he said, with the faintest suggestion of a sneer at their hurried consultation, “but I believe you wanted to see me at half—past eleven.”

“I am most awfully sorry, Doctor,” said Turnbull, with ready amiability; “I never meant to keep you waiting; but the silly accident that has landed us in your garden may have some rather serious consequences to our friends elsewhere, and my friend here was just drawing my attention to some of them.”

“Quite so! Quite so!” said the doctor, hurriedly. “If you really want to put anything before me, I can give you a few moments in my consulting-room.”

He led them rapidly into a small but imposing apartment, which seemed to be built and furnished entirely in red–varnished wood. There was one desk occupied with carefully docketed papers; and there were several chairs of the red–varnished wood—though of different shape. All along the wall ran something
that might have been a bookcase, only that it was not filled with books, but with flat, oblong slabs or cases of the same polished dark–red consistency. What those flat wooden cases were they could form no conception.

The doctor sat down with a polite impatience on his professional perch; MacIan remained standing, but Turnbull threw himself almost with luxury into a hard wooden arm–chair.

““This is a most absurd business, Doctor,” he said, “and I am ashamed to take up the time of busy professional men with such pranks from outside. The plain fact is, that he and I and a pack of silly men and girls have organized a game across this part of the country—a sort of combination of hare and hounds and hide and seek—I dare say you’ve heard of it. We are the hares, and, seeing your high wall look so inviting, we tumbled over it, and naturally were a little startled with what we found on the other side.”

“Quite so!” said the doctor, mildly. “I can understand that you were startled.”

Turnbull had expected him to ask what place was the headquarters of the new exhilarating game, and who were the male and female enthusiasts who had brought it to such perfection; in fact, Turnbull was busy making up these personal and topographical particulars. As the doctor did not ask the question, he grew slightly uneasy, and risked the question: “I hope you will accept my assurance that the thing was an accident and that no intrusion was meant.”

“Oh, yes, sir,” replied the doctor, smiling, “I accept everything that you say.”

“In that case,” said Turnbull, rising genially, “we must not further interrupt your important duties. I suppose there will be someone to let us out?”

“No,” said the doctor, still smiling steadily and pleasantly, “there will be no one to let you out.”

“Can we let ourselves out, then?” asked Turnbull, in some surprise.

“Why, of course not,” said the beaming scientist; “think how dangerous that would be in a place like this.”

“Then, how the devil are we to get out?” cried Turnbull, losing his manners for the first time.

“It is a question of time, of receptivity, and treatment,” said the doctor, arching his eyebrows indifferently. “I do not regard either of your cases as incurable.”

And with that the man of the world was struck dumb, and, as in all intolerable moments, the word was with the unworldly.

MacIan took one stride to the table, leant across it, and said: “We can’t stop here, we’re not mad people!”
“We don’t use the crude phrase,” said the doctor, smiling at his patent-leather boots.

“But you can’t think us mad,” thundered MacIan. “You never saw us before. You know nothing about us. You haven’t even examined us.”

The doctor threw back his head and beard. “Oh, yes,” he said, “very thoroughly.”

“But you can’t shut a man up on your mere impressions without documents or certificates or anything?”

The doctor got languidly to his feet. “Quite so,” he said. “You certainly ought to see the documents.”

He went across to the curious mock book-shelves and took down one of the flat mahogany cases. This he opened with a curious key at his watch-chain, and laying back a flap revealed a quire of foolscap covered with close but quite clear writing. The first three words were in such large copy-book hand that they caught the eye even at a distance. They were: “MacIan, Evan Stuart.”

Evan bent his angry eagle face over it; yet something blurred it and he could never swear he saw it distinctly. He saw something that began: “Prenatal influences predisposing to mania. Grandfather believed in return of the Stuarts. Mother carried bone of St. Eulalia with which she touched children in sickness. Marked religious mania at early age—”

Evan fell back and fought for his speech. “Oh!” he burst out at last. “Oh! if all this world I have walked in had been as sane as my mother was.”

Then he compressed his temples with his hands, as if to crush them. And then lifted suddenly a face that looked fresh and young, as if he had dipped and washed it in some holy well.

“Very well,” he cried; “I will take the sour with the sweet. I will pay the penalty of having enjoyed God in this monstrous modern earth that cannot enjoy man or beast. I will die happy in your madhouse, only because I know what I know. Let it be granted, then—MacIan is a mystic; MacIan is a maniac. But this honest shopkeeper and editor whom I have dragged on my inhuman escapades, you cannot keep him. He will go free, thank God, he is not down in any damned document. His ancestor, I am certain, did not die at Culloden. His mother, I swear, had no relics. Let my friend out of your front door, and as for me—”

The doctor had already gone across to the laden shelves, and after a few minutes’ short-sighted peering, had pulled down another parallelogram of dark-red wood.

This also he unlocked on the table, and with the same unerring egotistic eye
one of the company saw the words, written in large letters: “Turnbull, James.”

Hitherto Turnbull himself had somewhat scornfully surrendered his part in the whole business; but he was too honest and unaffected not to start at his own name. After the name, the inscription appeared to run: “Unique case of Eleutheromania. Parentage, as so often in such cases, prosaic and healthy. Eleutheromaniac signs occurred early, however, leading him to attach himself to the individualist Bradlaugh. Recent outbreak of pure anarchy—”

Turnbull slammed the case to, almost smashing it, and said with a burst of savage laughter: “Oh! come along, MacIan; I don’t care so much, even about getting out of the madhouse, if only we get out of this room. You were right enough, MacIan, when you spoke about—about mad doctors.”

Somehow they found themselves outside in the cool, green garden, and then, after a stunned silence, Turnbull said: “There is one thing that was puzzling me all the time, and I understand it now.”

“What do you mean?” asked Evan.

“No man by will or wit,” answered Turnbull, “can get out of this garden; and yet we got into it merely by jumping over a garden wall. The whole thing explains itself easily enough. That undefended wall was an open trap. It was a trap laid for two celebrated lunatics. They saw us get in right enough. And they will see that we do not get out.”

Evan gazed at the garden wall, gravely for more than a minute, and then he nodded without a word.
XV

THE DREAM OF MACIAN

The system of espionage in the asylum was so effective and complete that in practice the patients could often enjoy a sense of almost complete solitude. They could stray up so near to the wall in an apparently unwatched garden as to find it easy to jump over it. They would only have found the error of their calculations if they had tried to jump.

Under this insulting liberty, in this artificial loneliness, Evan Maclan was in the habit of creeping out into the garden after dark—especially upon moonlight nights. The moon, indeed, was for him always a positive magnet in a manner somewhat hard to explain to those of a robuster attitude. Evidently, Apollo is to the full as poetical as Diana; but it is not a question of poetry in the matured and intellectual sense of the word. It is a question of a certain solid and childish fancy. The sun is in the strict and literal sense invisible; that is to say, that by our bodily eyes it cannot properly be seen. But the moon is a much simpler thing; a naked and nursery sort of thing. It hangs in the sky quite solid and quite silver and quite useless; it is one huge celestial snowball. It was at least some such infantile facts and fancies which led Evan again and again during his dehumanized imprisonment to go out as if to shoot the moon.

He was out in the garden on one such luminous and ghostly night, when the steady moonshine toned down all the colours of the garden until almost the strongest tints to be seen were the strong soft blue of the sky and the large lemon moon. He was walking with his face turned up to it in that rather half-witted fashion which might have excused the error of his keepers; and as he gazed he became aware of something little and lustrous flying close to the lustrous orb, like a bright chip knocked off the moon. At first he thought it was a mere sparkle or refraction in his own eyesight; he blinked and cleared his eyes. Then he thought it was a falling star; only it did not fall. It jerked awkwardly up and down in a way unknown among meteors and strangely reminiscent of the works of man. The next moment the thing drove right across the moon, and from being silver upon blue, suddenly became black upon silver; then although it passed the field of light in a flash its outline was unmistakable though eccentric. It was a flying ship.

The vessel took one long and sweeping curve across the sky and came nearer
and nearer to MacIan, like a steam-engine coming round a bend. It was of pure white steel, and in the moon it gleamed like the armour of Sir Galahad. The simile of such virginity is not inappropriate; for, as it grew larger and larger and lower and lower, Evan saw that the only figure in it was robed in white from head to foot and crowned with snow-white hair, on which the moonshine lay like a benediction. The figure stood so still that he could easily have supposed it to be a statue. Indeed, he thought it was until it spoke.

“Evan,” said the voice, and it spoke with the simple authority of some forgotten father revisiting his children, “you have remained here long enough, and your sword is wanted elsewhere.”

“Wanted for what?” asked the young man, accepting the monstrous event with a queer and clumsy naturalness; “what is my sword wanted for?”

“For all that you hold dear,” said the man standing in the moonlight; “for the thrones of authority and for all ancient loyalty to law.”

Evan looked up at the lunar orb again as if in irrational appeal—a moon calf bleating to his mother the moon. But the face of Luna seemed as witless as his own; there is no help in nature against the supernatural; and he looked again at the tall marble figure that might have been made out of solid moonlight.

Then he said in a loud voice: “Who are you?” and the next moment was seized by a sort of choking terror lest his question should be answered. But the unknown preserved an impenetrable silence for a long space and then only answered: “I must not say who I am until the end of the world; but I may say what I am. I am the law.”

And he lifted his head so that the moon smote full upon his beautiful and ancient face.

The face was the face of a Greek god grown old, but not grown either weak or ugly; there was nothing to break its regularity except a rather long chin with a cleft in it, and this rather added distinction than lessened beauty. His strong, well-opened eyes were very brilliant but quite colourless like steel.

MacIan was one of those to whom a reverence and self-submission in ritual come quite easy, and are ordinary things. It was not artificial in him to bend slightly to this solemn apparition or to lower his voice when he said: “Do you bring me some message?”

“I do bring you a message,” answered the man of moon and marble. “The king has returned.”

Evan did not ask for or require any explanation. “I suppose you can take me to the war,” he said, and the silent silver figure only bowed its head again. MacIan
clambered into the silver boat, and it rose upward to the stars.

To say that it rose to the stars is no mere metaphor, for the sky had cleared to that occasional and astonishing transparency in which one can see plainly both stars and moon.

As the white-robed figure went upward in his white chariot, he said quite quietly to Evan: “There is an answer to all the folly talked about equality. Some stars are big and some small; some stand still and some circle around them as they stand. They can be orderly, but they cannot be equal.”

“They are all very beautiful,” said Evan, as if in doubt.

“They are all beautiful,” answered the other, “because each is in his place and owns his superior. And now England will be beautiful after the same fashion. The earth will be as beautiful as the heavens, because our kings have come back to us.”

“The Stuart—” began Evan, earnestly.

“Yes,” answered the old man, “that which has returned is Stuart and yet older than Stuart. It is Capet and Plantagenet and Pendragon. It is all that good old time of which proverbs tell, that golden reign of Saturn against which gods and men were rebels. It is all that was ever lost by insolence and overwhelmed in rebellion. It is your own forefather, Maclan with the broken sword, bleeding without hope at Culloden. It is Charles refusing to answer the questions of the rebel court. It is Mary of the magic face confronting the gloomy and grasping peers and the boorish moralities of Knox. It is Richard, the last Plantagenet, giving his crown to Bolingbroke as to a common brigand. It is Arthur, overwhelmed in Lyonesse by heathen armies and dying in the mist, doubtful if ever he shall return.”

“But now—” said Evan, in a low voice.

“But now!” said the old man; “he has returned.”

“Is the war still raging?” asked Maclan.

“It rages like the pit itself beyond the sea whither I am taking you,” answered the other. “But in England the king enjoys his own again. The people are once more taught and ruled as is best; they are happy knights, happy squires, happy servants, happy serfs, if you will; but free at last of that load of vexation and lonely vanity which was called being a citizen.”

“Is England, indeed, so secure?” asked Evan.

“Look out and see,” said the guide. “I fancy you have seen this place before.”

They were driving through the air towards one region of the sky where the hollow of night seemed darkest and which was quite without stars. But against
this black background there sprang up, picked out in glittering silver, a dome and a cross. It seemed that it was really newly covered with silver, which in the strong moonlight was like white flame. But, however, covered or painted, Evan had no difficult in knowing the place again. He saw the great thoroughfare that sloped upward to the base of its huge pedestal of steps. And he wondered whether the little shop was still by the side of it and whether its window had been mended.

As the flying ship swept round the dome he observed other alterations. The dome had been redecorated so as to give it a more solemn and somewhat more ecclesiastical note; the ball was draped or destroyed, and round the gallery, under the cross, ran what looked like a ring of silver statues, like the little leaden images that stood round the hat of Louis XI. Round the second gallery, at the base of the dome, ran a second rank of such images, and Evan thought there was another round the steps below. When they came closer he saw that they were figures in complete armour of steel or silver, each with a naked sword, point upward; and then he saw one of the swords move. These were not statues but an armed order of chivalry thrown in three circles round the cross. MacIan drew in his breath, as children do at anything they think utterly beautiful. For he could imagine nothing that so echoed his own visions of pontifical or chivalric art as this white dome sitting like a vast silver tiara over London, ringed with a triple crown of swords.

As they went sailing down Ludgate Hill, Evan saw that the state of the streets fully answered his companion’s claim about the reintroduction of order. All the old blackcoated bustle with its cockney vivacity and vulgarity had disappeared. Groups of labourers, quietly but picturesquely clad, were passing up and down in sufficiently large numbers; but it required but a few mounted men to keep the streets in order. The mounted men were not common policemen, but knights with spurs and plume whose smooth and splendid armour glittered like diamond rather than steel. Only in one place—at the corner of Bouverie Street—did there appear to be a moment’s confusion, and that was due to hurry rather than resistance. But one old grumbling man did not get out of the way quick enough, and the man on horseback struck him, not severely, across the shoulders with the flat of his sword.

“The soldier had no business to do that,” said MacIan, sharply. “The old man was moving as quickly as he could.”

“We attach great importance to discipline in the streets,” said the man in white, with a slight smile.
“Discipline is not so important as justice,” said MacIan. The other did not answer.

Then after a swift silence that took them out across St. James’s Park, he said: “The people must be taught to obey; they must learn their own ignorance. And I am not sure,” he continued, turning his back on Evan and looking out of the prow of the ship into the darkness, “I am not sure that I agree with your little maxim about justice. Discipline for the whole society is surely more important than justice to an individual.”

Evan, who was also leaning over the edge, swung round with startling suddenness and stared at the other’s back.

“Discipline for society—” he repeated, very staccato, “more important—justice to individual?”

Then after a long silence he called out: “Who and what are you?”

“I am an angel,” said the white-robbed figure, without turning round.

“You are not a Catholic,” said MacIan.

The other seemed to take no notice, but reverted to the main topic.

“In our armies up in heaven we learn to put a wholesome fear into subordinates.”

MacIan sat craning his neck forward with an extraordinary and unaccountable eagerness.

“Go on!” he cried, twisting and untwisting his long, bony fingers, “go on!”

“Besides,” continued he, in the prow, “you must allow for a certain high spirit and haughtiness in the superior type.”

“Go on!” said Evan, with burning eyes.

“Just as the sight of sin offends God,” said the unknown, “so does the sight of ugliness offend Apollo. The beautiful and princely must, of necessity, be impatient with the squalid and—”

“Why, you great fool!” cried MacIan, rising to the top of his tremendous stature, “did you think I would have doubted only for that rap with a sword? I know that noble orders have bad knights, that good knights have bad tempers, that the Church has rough priests and coarse cardinals; I have known it ever since I was born. You fool! you had only to say, ‘Yes, it is rather a shame,’ and I should have forgotten the affair. But I saw on your mouth the twitch of your infernal sophistry; I knew that something was wrong with you and your cathedrals. Something is wrong; everything is wrong. You are not an angel. That is not a church. It is not the rightful king who has come home.”

“That is unfortunate,” said the other, in a quiet but hard voice, “because you
are going to see his Majesty.”

“No,” said MacIan, “I am going to jump over the side.”

“Do you desire death?”

“No,” said Evan, quite composedly, “I desire a miracle.”

“From whom do you ask it? To whom do you appeal?” said his companion, sternly. “You have betrayed the king, renounced his cross on the cathedral, and insulted an archangel.”

“I appeal to God,” said Evan, and sprang up and stood upon the edge of the swaying ship.

The being in the prow turned slowly round; he looked at Evan with eyes which were like two suns, and put his hand to his mouth just too late to hide an awful smile.

“And how do you know,” he said, “how do you know that I am not God?”

MacIan screamed. “Ah!” he cried. “Now I know who you really are. You are not God. You are not one of God’s angels. But you were once.”

The being’s hand dropped from his mouth and Evan dropped out of the car.
THE DREAM OF TURNBULL

Turnbull was walking rather rampantly up and down the garden on a gusty evening chewing his cigar and in that mood when every man suppresses an instinct to spit. He was not, as a rule, a man much acquainted with moods; and the storms and sunbursts of MacIan’s soul passed before him as an impressive but unmeaning panorama, like the anarchy of Highland scenery. Turnbull was one of those men in whom a continuous appetite and industry of the intellect leave the emotions very simple and steady. His heart was in the right place; but he was quite content to leave it there. It was his head that was his hobby. His mornings and evenings were marked not by impulses or thirsty desires, not by hope or by heart-break; they were filled with the fallacies he had detected, the problems he had made plain, the adverse theories he had wrestled with and thrown, the grand generalizations he had justified. But even the cheerful inner life of a logician may be upset by a lunatic asylum, to say nothing of whiffs of memory from a lady in Jersey, and the little red-bearded man on this windy evening was in a dangerous frame of mind.

Plain and positive as he was, the influence of earth and sky may have been greater on him than he imagined; and the weather that walked the world at that moment was as red and angry as Turnbull. Long strips and swirls of tattered and tawny cloud were dragged downward to the west exactly as torn red raiment would be dragged. And so strong and pitiless was the wind that it whipped away fragments of red-flowering bushes or of copper beech, and drove them also across the garden, a drift of red leaves, like the leaves of autumn, as in parody of the red and driven rags of cloud.

There was a sense in earth and heaven as of everything breaking up, and all the revolutionist in Turnbull rejoiced that it was breaking up. The trees were breaking up under the wind, even in the tall strength of their bloom: the clouds were breaking up and losing even their large heraldic shapes. Shards and shreds of copper cloud split off continually and floated by themselves, and for some reason the truculent eye of Turnbull was attracted to one of these careering cloudlets, which seemed to him to career in an exaggerated manner. Also it kept its shape, which is unusual with clouds shaken off; also its shape was of an odd sort.
Turnbull continued to stare at it, and in a little time occurred that crucial instant when a thing, however incredible, is accepted as a fact. The copper cloud was tumbling down towards the earth, like some gigantic leaf from the copper beeches. And as it came nearer it was evident, first, that it was not a cloud, and, second, that it was not itself of the colour of copper; only, being burnished like a mirror, it had reflected the red–brown colours of the burning clouds. As the thing whirled like a windswept leaf down towards the wall of the garden it was clear that it was some sort of air–ship made of metal, and slapping the air with big broad fins of steel. When it came about a hundred feet above the garden, a shaggy, lean figure leapt up in it, almost black against the bronze and scarlet of the west, and, flinging out a kind of hook or anchor, caught on to the green apple–tree just under the wall; and from that fixed holding ground the ship swung in the red tempest like a captive balloon.

While our friend stood frozen for an instant by his astonishment, the queer figure in the airy car tipped the vehicle almost upside down by leaping over the side of it, seemed to slide or drop down the rope like a monkey, and alighted (with impossible precision and placidity) seated on the edge of the wall, over which he kicked and dangled his legs as he grinned at Turnbull. The wind roared in the trees yet more ruinous and desolate, the red tails of the sunset were dragged downward like red dragons sucked down to death, and still on the top of the asylum wall sat the sinister figure with the grimace, swinging his feet in tune with the tempest; while above him, at the end of its tossing or tightened cord, the enormous iron air–ship floated as light and as little noticed as a baby’s balloon upon its string.

Turnbull’s first movement after sixty motionless seconds was to turn round and look at the large, luxuriant parallelogram of the garden and the long, low rectangular building beyond. There was not a soul or a stir of life within sight. And he had a quite meaningless sensation, as if there never really had been any one else there except he since the foundation of the world.

Stiffening in himself the masculine but mirthless courage of the atheist, he drew a little nearer to the wall and, catching the man at a slightly different angle of the evening light, could see his face and figure quite plain. Two facts about him stood out in the picked colours of some piratical schoolboy’s story. The first was that his lean brown body was bare to the belt of his loose white trousers; the other that through hygiene, affectation, or whatever other cause, he had a scarlet handkerchief tied tightly but somewhat aslant across his brow. After these two facts had become emphatic, others appeared sufficiently important. One was that
under the scarlet rag the hair was plentiful, but white as with the last snows of mortality. Another was that under the mop of white and senile hair the face was strong, handsome, and smiling, with a well-cut profile and a long cloven chin. The length of this lower part of the face and the strange cleft in it (which gave the man, in quite another sense from the common one, a double chin) faintly spoilt the claim of the face to absolute regularity, but it greatly assisted it in wearing the expression of half-smiling and half-sneering arrogance with which it was staring at all the stones, all the flowers, but especially at the solitary man.

“What do you want?” shouted Turnbull.

“I want you, Jimmy,” said the eccentric man on the wall, and with the very word he had let himself down with a leap on to the centre of the lawn, where he bounded once literally like an India-rubber ball and then stood grinning with his legs astride. The only three facts that Turnbull could now add to his inventory were that the man had an ugly-looking knife swinging at his trousers belt, that his brown feet were as bare as his bronzed trunk and arms, and that his eyes had a singular bleak brilliancy which was of no particular colour.

“Excuse my not being in evening dress,” said the newcomer with an urbane smile. “We scientific men, you know—I have to work my own engines—electrical engineer—very hot work.”

“Look here,” said Turnbull, sturdily clenching his fists in his trousers pockets, “I am bound to expect lunatics inside these four walls; but I do bar their coming from outside, bang out of the sunset clouds.”

“And yet you came from the outside, too, Jim,” said the stranger in a voice almost affectionate.

“What do you want?” asked Turnbull, with an explosion of temper as sudden as a pistol shot.

“I have already told you,” said the man, lowering his voice and speaking with evident sincerity; “I want you.”

“What do you want with me?”


Turnbull looked at the fire-swept sky and the wind-stricken woodlands, and kept on repeating the word voicelessly to himself—the word that did indeed so thoroughly express his mood of rage as it had been among those red clouds and rocking tree-tops. “Revolution!” he said to himself. “The Revolution—yes, that is what I want right enough—anything, so long as it is a Revolution.”

To some cause he could never explain he found himself completing the
sentence on the top of the wall, having automatically followed the stranger so far. But when the stranger silently indicated the rope that led to the machine, he found himself pausing and saying: “I can’t leave Maclan behind in this den.”

“We are going to destroy the Pope and all the kings,” said the new–comer. “Would it be wiser to take him with us?”

Somehow the muttering Turnbull found himself in the flying ship also, and it swung up into the sunset.

“All the great rebels have been very little rebels,” said the man with the red scarf. “They have been like fourth–form boys who sometimes venture to hit a fifth–form boy. That was all the worth of their French Revolution and regicide. The boys never really dared to defy the schoolmaster.”

“Whom do you mean by the schoolmaster?” asked Turnbull.

“You know whom I mean,” answered the strange man, as he lay back on cushions and looked up into the angry sky.

They seemed rising into stronger and stronger sunlight, as if it were sunrise rather than sunset. But when they looked down at the earth they saw it growing darker and darker. The lunatic asylum in its large rectangular grounds spread below them in a foreshortened and infantile plan, and looked for the first time the grotesque thing that it was. But the clear colours of the plan were growing darker every moment. The masses of rose or rhododendron deepened from crimson to violet. The maze of gravel pathways faded from gold to brown. By the time they had risen a few hundred feet higher nothing could be seen of that darkening landscape except the lines of lighted windows, each one of which, at least, was the light of one lost intelligence. But on them as they swept upward better and braver winds seemed to blow, and on them the ruby light of evening seemed struck, and splashed like red spurs from the grapes of Dionysus. Below them the fallen lights were literally the fallen stars of servitude. And above them all the red and raging clouds were like the leaping flags of liberty.

The man with the cloven chin seemed to have a singular power of understanding thoughts; for, as Turnbull felt the whole universe tilt and turn over his head, the stranger said exactly the right thing.

“Doesn’t it seem as if everything were being upset?” said he; “and if once everything is upset, He will be upset on top of it.”

Then, as Turnbull made no answer, his host continued:

“That is the really fine thing about space. It is topsy–turvy. You have only to climb far enough towards the morning star to feel that you are coming down to it. You have only to dive deep enough into the abyss to feel that you are rising.
That is the only glory of this universe—it is a giddy universe.”

Then, as Turnbull was still silent, he added:

“The heavens are full of revolution—of the real sort of revolution. All the high things are sinking low and all the big things looking small. All the people who think they are aspiring find they are falling head foremost. And all the people who think they are condescending find they are climbing up a precipice. That is the intoxication of space. That is the only joy of eternity—doubt. There is only one pleasure the angels can possibly have in flying, and that is, that they do not know whether they are on their head or their heels.”

Then, finding his companion still mute, he fell himself into a smiling and motionless meditation, at the end of which he said suddenly:

“So Maclan converted you?”

Turnbull sprang up as if spurning the steel car from under his feet. “Converted me!” he cried. “What the devil do you mean? I have known him for a month, and I have not retracted a single—”

“This Catholicism is a curious thing,” said the man of the cloven chin in uninterrupted reflectiveness, leaning his elegant elbows over the edge of the vessel; “it soaks and weakens men without their knowing it, just as I fear it has soaked and weakened you.”

Turnbull stood in an attitude which might well have meant pitching the other man out of the flying ship.

“I am an atheist,” he said, in a stifled voice. “I have always been an atheist. I am still an atheist.” Then, addressing the other’s indolent and indifferent back, he cried: “In God’s name what do you mean?”

And the other answered without turning round:

“I mean nothing in God’s name.”

Turnbull spat over the edge of the car and fell back furiously into his seat.

The other continued still unruffled, and staring over the edge idly as an angler stares down at a stream.

“The truth is that we never thought that you could have been caught,” he said; “we counted on you as the one red–hot revolutionary left in the world. But, of course, these men like Maclan are awfully clever, especially when they pretend to be stupid.”

Turnbull leapt up again in a living fury and cried: “What have I got to do with Maclan? I believe all I ever believed, and disbelieve all I ever disbelieved. What does all this mean, and what do you want with me here?”

Then for the first time the other lifted himself from the edge of the car and
faced him.

“I have brought you here,” he answered, “to take part in the last war of the world.”

“The last war!” repeated Turnbull, even in his dazed state a little touchy about such a dogma; “how do you know it will be the last?”

The man laid himself back in his reposeful attitude, and said:

“It is the last war, because if it does not cure the world for ever, it will destroy it.”

“What do you mean?”

“I only mean what you mean,” answered the unknown in a temperate voice. “What was it that you always meant on those million and one nights when you walked outside your Ludgate Hill shop and shook your hand in the air?”

“Still I do not see,” said Turnbull, stubbornly.

“You will soon,” said the other, and abruptly bent downward one iron handle of his huge machine. The engine stopped, stooped, and dived almost as deliberately as a man bathing; in their downward rush they swept within fifty yards of a big bulk of stone that Turnbull knew only too well. The last red anger of the sunset was ended; the dome of heaven was dark; the lanes of flaring light in the streets below hardly lit up the base of the building. But he saw that it was St. Paul’s Cathedral, and he saw that on the top of it the ball was still standing erect, but the cross was stricken and had fallen sideways. Then only he cared to look down into the streets, and saw that they were inflamed with uproar and tossing passions.

“We arrive at a happy moment,” said the man steering the ship. “The insurgents are bombarding the city, and a cannon–ball has just hit the cross. Many of the insurgents are simple people, and they naturally regard it as a happy omen.”

“Quite so,” said Turnbull, in a rather colourless voice.

“Yes,” replied the other. “I thought you would be glad to see your prayer answered. Of course I apologize for the word prayer.”

“Don’t mention it,” said Turnbull.

The flying ship had come down upon a sort of curve, and was now rising again. The higher and higher it rose the broader and broader became the scenes of flame and desolation underneath.

Ludgate Hill indeed had been an uncaptured and comparatively quiet height, altered only by the startling coincidence of the cross fallen awry. All the other thoroughfares on all sides of that hill were full of the pulsation and the pain of
battle, full of shaking torches and shouting faces. When at length they had risen high enough to have a bird’s–eye view of the whole campaign, Turnbull was already intoxicated. He had smelt gunpowder, which was the incense of his own revolutionary religion.

“Have the people really risen?” he asked, breathlessly. “What are they fighting about?”

“The programme is rather elaborate,” said his entertainer with some indifference. “I think Dr. Hertz drew it up.”

Turnbull wrinkled his forehead. “Are all the poor people with the Revolution?” he asked.

The other shrugged his shoulders. “All the instructed and class–conscious part of them without exception,” he replied. “There were certainly a few districts; in fact, we are passing over them just now–”

Turnbull looked down and saw that the polished car was literally lit up from underneath by the far–flung fires from below. Underneath whole squares and solid districts were in flames, like prairies or forests on fire.

“If Hertz has convinced everybody,” said Turnbull’s cicerone in a smooth voice, “that nothing can really be done with the real slums. His celebrated maxim has been quite adopted. I mean the three celebrated sentences: ‘No man should be unemployed. Employ the employables. Destroy the unemployables.’”

There was a silence, and then Turnbull said in a rather strained voice: “And do I understand that this good work is going on under here?”

“Going on splendidly,” replied his companion in the heartiest voice. “You see, these people were much too tired and weak even to join the social war. They were a definite hindrance to it.”

“And so you are simply burning them out?”

“It does seem absurdly simple,” said the man, with a beaming smile, “when one thinks of all the worry and talk about helping a hopeless slave population, when the future obviously was only crying to be rid of them. There are happy babes unborn ready to burst the doors when these drivellers are swept away.”

“Will you permit me to say,” said Turnbull, after reflection, “that I don’t like all this?”

“And will you permit me to say,” said the other, with a snap, “that I don’t like Mr. Evan MacIan?”

Somewhat to the speaker’s surprise this did not inflame the sensitive sceptic; he had the air of thinking thoroughly, and then he said: “No, I don’t think it’s my friend MacIan that taught me that. I think I should always have said that I don’t
like this. These people have rights.”

“Rights!” repeated the unknown in a tone quite indescribable. Then he added with a more open sneer: “Perhaps they also have souls.”

“They have lives!” said Turnbull, sternly; “that is quite enough for me. I understood you to say that you thought life sacred.”

“Yes, indeed!” cried his mentor with a sort of idealistic animation. “Yes, indeed! Life is sacred—but lives are not sacred. We are improving Life by removing lives. Can you, as a free-thinker, find any fault in that?”

“Yes,” said Turnbull with brevity.

“Yet you applaud tyrannicide,” said the stranger with rationalistic gaiety. “How inconsistent! It really comes to this: You approve of taking away life from those to whom it is a triumph and a pleasure. But you will not take away life from those to whom it is a burden and a toil.”

Turnbull rose to his feet in the car with considerable deliberation, but his face seemed oddly pale. The other went on with enthusiasm.

“Life, yes, Life is indeed sacred!” he cried; “but new lives for old! Good lives for bad! On that very place where now there sprawls one drunken wastrel of a pavement artist more or less wishing he were dead—on that very spot there shall in the future be living pictures; there shall be golden girls and boys leaping in the sun.”

Turnbull, still standing up, opened his lips. “Will you put me down, please?” he said, quite calmly, like one stopping an omnibus.

“Put you down—what do you mean?” cried his leader. “I am taking you to the front of the revolutionary war, where you will be one of the first of the revolutionary leaders.”

“Thank you,” replied Turnbull with the same painful constraint. “I have heard about your revolutionary war, and I think on the whole that I would rather be anywhere else.”

“Do you want to be taken to a monastery,” snarled the other, “with Maclan and his winking Madonnas?”

“I want to be taken to a madhouse,” said Turnbull distinctly, giving the direction with a sort of precision. “I want to go back to exactly the same lunatic asylum from which I came.”

“Why?” asked the unknown.

“Because I want a little sane and wholesome society,” answered Turnbull.

There was a long and peculiar silence, and then the man driving the flying machine said quite coolly: “I won’t take you back.”
And then Turnbull said equally coolly: “Then I’ll jump out of the car.”

The unknown rose to his full height, and the expression in his eyes seemed to be made of ironies behind ironies, as two mirrors infinitely reflect each other. At last he said, very gravely: “Do you think I am the devil?”

“Yes,” said Turnbull, violently. “For I think the devil is a dream, and so are you. I don’t believe in you or your flying ship or your last fight of the world. It is all a nightmare. I say as a fact of dogma and faith that it is all a nightmare. And I will be a martyr for my faith as much as St. Catherine, for I will jump out of this ship and risk waking up safe in bed.”

After swaying twice with the swaying vessel he dived over the side as one dives into the sea. For some incredible moments stars and space and planets seemed to shoot up past him as the sparks fly upward; and yet in that sickening descent he was full of some unnatural happiness. He could connect it with no idea except one that half escaped him—what Evan had said of the difference between Christ and Satan; that it was by Christ’s own choice that He descended into hell.

When he again realized anything, he was lying on his elbow on the lawn of the lunatic asylum, and the last red of the sunset had not yet disappeared.
XVII

THE IDIOT

Evan MacIan was standing a few yards off looking at him in absolute silence.

He had not the moral courage to ask MacIan if there had been anything astounding in the manner of his coming there, nor did MacIan seem to have any question to ask, or perhaps any need to ask it. The two men came slowly towards each other, and found the same expression on each other’s faces. Then, for the first time in all their acquaintance, they shook hands.

Almost as if this were a kind of unconscious signal, it brought Dr. Quayle bounding out of a door and running across the lawn.

“Oh, there you are!” he exclaimed with a relieved giggle. “Will you come inside, please? I want to speak to you both.”

They followed him into his shiny wooden office where their damning record was kept. Dr. Quayle sat down on a swivel chair and swung round to face them. His carved smile had suddenly disappeared.

“I will be plain with you gentlemen,” he said, abruptly; “you know quite well we do our best for everybody here. Your cases have been under special consideration, and the Master himself has decided that you ought to be treated specially and–er–under somewhat simpler conditions.”

“You mean treated worse, I suppose,” said Turnbull, gruffly.

The doctor did not reply, and MacIan said: “I expected this.” His eyes had begun to glow.

The doctor answered, looking at his desk and playing with a key: “Well, in certain cases that give anxiety—it is often better–”

“Give anxiety,” said Turnbull, fiercely. “Confound your impudence! What do you mean? You imprison two perfectly sane men in a madhouse because you have made up a long word. They take it in good temper, walk and talk in your garden like monks who have found a vocation, are civil even to you, you damned druggists’ hack! Behave not only more sanely than any of your patients, but more sanely than half the sane men outside, and you have the soul–stifling cheek to say that they give anxiety.”

“The head of the asylum has settled it all,” said Dr. Quayle, still looking down.

MacIan took one of his immense strides forward and stood over the doctor
with flaming eyes.

“If the head has settled it let the head announce it,” he said. “I won’t take it from you. I believe you to be a low, gibbering degenerate. Let us see the head of the asylum.”

“See the head of the asylum,” repeated Dr. Quayle. “Certainly not.”

The tall Highlander, bending over him, put one hand on his shoulder with fatherly interest.

“You don’t seem to appreciate the peculiar advantages of my position as a lunatic,” he said. “I could kill you with my left hand before such a rat as you could so much as squeak. And I wouldn’t be hanged for it.”

“I certainly agree with Mr. MacIan,” said Turnbull with sobriety and perfect respectfulness, “that you had better let us see the head of the institution.”

Dr. Quayle got to his feet in a mixture of sudden hysteria and clumsy presence of mind.

“Oh, certainly,” he said with a weak laugh. “You can see the head of the asylum if you particularly want to.” He almost ran out of the room, and the two followed swiftly on his flying coat tails. He knocked at an ordinary varnished door in the corridor. When a voice said, “Come in,” MacIan’s breath went hissing back through his teeth into his chest. Turnbull was more impetuous, and opened the door.

It was a neat and well–appointed room entirely lined with a medical library. At the other end of it was a ponderous and polished desk with an incandescent lamp on it, the light of which was just sufficient to show a slender, well–bred figure in an ordinary medical black frock–coat, whose head, quite silvered with age, was bent over neat piles of notes. This gentleman looked up for an instant as they entered, and the lamplight fell on his glittering spectacles and long, clean–shaven face—a face which would have been simply like an aristocrat’s but that a certain lion poise of the head and long cleft in the chin made it look more like a very handsome actor’s. It was only for a flash that his face was thus lifted. Then he bent his silver head over his notes once more, and said, without looking up again:

“I told you, Dr. Quayle, that these men were to go to cells B and C.”

Turnbull and MacIan looked at each other, and said more than they could ever say with tongues or swords. Among other things they said that to that particular Head of the institution it was a waste of time to appeal, and they followed Dr. Quayle out of the room.

The instant they stepped out into the corridor four sturdy figures stepped from
four sides, pinioned them, and ran them along the galleries. They might very likely have thrown their captors right and left had they been inclined to resist, but for some nameless reason they were more inclined to laugh. A mixture of mad irony with childish curiosity made them feel quite inclined to laugh. A mixture of mad irony with childish curiosity made them feel quite inclined to see what next twist would be taken by their imbecile luck. They were dragged down countless cold avenues lined with glazed tiles, different only in being of different lengths and set at different angles. They were so many and so monotonous that to escape back by them would have been far harder than fleeing from the Hampton Court maze. Only the fact that windows grew fewer, coming at longer intervals, and the fact that when the windows did come they seemed shadowed and let in less light, showed that they were winding into the core or belly of some enormous building. After a little time the glazed corridors began to be lit by electricity.

At last, when they had walked nearly a mile in those white and polished tunnels, they came with quite a shock to the futile finality of a cul–de–sac. All that white and weary journey ended suddenly in an oblong space and a blank white wall. But in the white wall there were two iron doors painted white on which were written, respectively, in neat black capitals B and C.

“You go in here, sir,” said the leader of the officials, quite respectfully, “and you in here.”

But before the doors had clanged upon their dazed victims, MacIan had been able to say to Turnbull with a strange drawl of significance: “I wonder who A is.”

Turnbull made an automatic struggle before he allowed himself to be thrown into the cell. Hence it happened that he was the last to enter, and was still full of the exhilaration of the adventures for at least five minutes after the echo of the clanging door had died away.

Then, when silence had sunk deep and nothing happened for two and a half hours, it suddenly occurred to him that this was the end of his life. He was hidden and sealed up in this little crack of stone until the flesh should fall off his bones. He was dead, and the world had won.

His cell was of an oblong shape, but very long in comparison with its width. It was just wide enough to permit the arms to be fully extended with the dumb–bells, which were hung up on the left wall, very dusty. It was, however, long enough for a man to walk one thirty–fifth part of a mile if he traversed it entirely. On the same principle a row of fixed holes, quite close together, let in to the cells by pipes what was alleged to be the freshest air. For these great scientific organizers insisted that a man should be healthy even if he was
miserable. They provided a walk long enough to give him exercise and holes large enough to give him oxygen. There their interest in human nature suddenly ceased. It seemed never to have occurred to them that the benefit of exercise belongs partly to the benefit of liberty. They had not entertained the suggestion that the open air is only one of the advantages of the open sky. They administered air in secret, but in sufficient doses, as if it were a medicine. They suggested walking, as if no man had ever felt inclined to walk. Above all, the asylum authorities insisted on their own extraordinary cleanliness. Every morning, while Turnbull was still half asleep on his iron bedstead which was lifted half-way up the wall and clamped to it with iron, four sluices or metal mouths opened above him at the four corners of the chamber and washed it white of any defilement. Turnbull’s solitary soul surged up against this sickening daily solemnity.

“I am buried alive!” he cried, bitterly; “they have hidden me under mountains. I shall be here till I rot. Why the blazes should it matter to them whether I am dirty or clean.”

Every morning and evening an iron hatchway opened in his oblong cell, and a brown hairy hand or two thrust in a plate of perfectly cooked lentils and a big bowl of cocoa. He was not underfed any more than he was underexercised or asphyxiated. He had ample walking space, ample air, ample and even filling food. The only objection was that he had nothing to walk towards, nothing to feast about, and no reason whatever for drawing the breath of life.

Even the shape of his cell especially irritated him. It was a long, narrow parallelogram, which had a flat wall at one end and ought to have had a flat wall at the other; but that end was broken by a wedge or angle of space, like the prow of a ship. After three days of silence and cocoa, this angle at the end began to infuriate Turnbull. It maddened him to think that two lines came together and pointed at nothing. After the fifth day he was reckless, and poked his head into the corner. After twenty-five days he almost broke his head against it. Then he became quite cool and stupid again, and began to examine it like a sort of Robinson Crusoe.

Almost unconsciously it was his instinct to examine outlets, and he found himself paying particular attention to the row of holes which let in the air into his last house of life. He soon discovered that these air-holes were all the ends and mouths of long leaden tubes which doubtless carried air from some remote watering-place near Margate. One evening while he was engaged in the fifth investigation he noticed something like twilight in one of these dumb mouths, as
compared with the darkness of the others. Thrusting his finger in as far as it would go, he found a hole and flapping edge in the tube. This he rent open and instantly saw a light behind; it was at least certain that he had struck some other cell.

It is a characteristic of all things now called “efficient,” which means mechanical and calculated, that if they go wrong at all they go entirely wrong. There is no power of retrieving a defeat, as in simpler and more living organisms. A strong gun can conquer a strong elephant, but a wounded elephant can easily conquer a broken gun. Thus the Prussian monarchy in the eighteenth century, or now, can make a strong army merely by making the men afraid. But it does it with the permanent possibility that the men may some day be more afraid of their enemies than of their officers. Thus the drainage in our cities so long as it is quite solid means a general safety, but if there is one leak it means concentrated poison—an explosion of deathly germs like dynamite, a spirit of stink. Thus, indeed, all that excellent machinery which is the swiftest thing on earth in saving human labour is also the slowest thing on earth in resisting human interference. It may be easier to get chocolate for nothing out of a shopkeeper than out of an automatic machine. But if you did manage to steal the chocolate, the automatic machine would be much less likely to run after you.

Turnbull was not long in discovering this truth in connexion with the cold and colossal machinery of this great asylum. He had been shaken by many spiritual states since the instant when he was pitched head foremost into that private cell which was to be his private room till death. He had felt a high fit of pride and poetry, which had ebbed away and left him deadly cold. He had known a period of mere scientific curiosity, in the course of which he examined all the tiles of his cell, with the gratifying conclusion that they were all the same shape and size; but was greatly puzzled about the angle in the wall at the end, and also about an iron peg or spike that stood out from the wall, the object of which he does not know to this day. Then he had a period of mere madness not to be written of by decent men, but only by those few dirty novelists hallooed on by the infernal huntsman to hunt down and humiliate human nature. This also passed, but left behind it a feverish distaste for many of the mere objects around him. Long after he had returned to sanity and such hopeless cheerfulness as a man might have on a desert island, he disliked the regular squares of the pattern of wall and floor and the triangle that terminated his corridor. Above all, he had a hatred, deep as the hell he did not believe in, for the objectless iron peg in the wall.
But in all his moods, sane or insane, intolerant or stoical, he never really doubted this: that the machine held him as light and as hopelessly as he had from his birth been held by the hopeless cosmos of his own creed. He knew well the ruthless and inexhaustible resources of our scientific civilization. He no more expected rescue from a medical certificate than rescue from the solar system. In many of his Robinson Crusoe moods he thought kindly of MacIan as of some quarrelsome school–fellow who had long been dead. He thought of leaving in the cell when he died a rigid record of his opinions, and when he began to write them down on scraps of envelope in his pocket, he was startled to discover how much they had changed. Then he remembered the Beauchamp Tower, and tried to write his blazing scepticism on the wall, and discovered that it was all shiny tiles on which nothing could be either drawn or carved. Then for an instant there hung and broke above him like a high wave the whole horror of scientific imprisonment, which manages to deny a man not only liberty, but every accidental comfort of bondage. In the old filthy dungeons men could carve their prayers or protests in the rock. Here the white and slippery walls escaped even from bearing witness. The old prisoners could make a pet of a mouse or a beetle strayed out of a hole. Here the unpierceable walls were washed every morning by an automatic sluice. There was no natural corruption and no merciful decay by which a living thing could enter in. Then James Turnbull looked up and saw the high invincible hatefulness of the society in which he lived, and saw the hatefulness of something else also, which he told himself again and again was not the cosmos in which he believed. But all the time he had never once doubted that the five sides of his cell were for him the wall of the world henceforward, and it gave him a shock of surprise even to discover the faint light through the aperture in the ventilation tube. But he had forgotten how close efficiency has to pack everything together and how easily, therefore, a pipe here or there may leak.

Turnbull thrust his first finger down the aperture, and at last managed to make a slight further fissure in the piping. The light that came up from beyond was very faint, and apparently indirect; it seemed to fall from some hole or window higher up. As he was screwing his eye to peer at this grey and greasy twilight he was astonished to see another human finger very long and lean come down from above towards the broken pipe and hook it up to something higher. The lighted aperture was abruptly blackened and blocked, presumably by a face and mouth, for something human spoke down the tube, though the words were not clear.

"Who is that?" asked Turnbull, trembling with excitement, yet wary and quite
resolved not to spoil any chance.

After a few indistinct sounds the voice came down with a strong Argyllshire accent:

“I say, Turnbull, we couldn’t fight through this tube, could we?”

Sentiments beyond speech surged up in Turnbull and silenced him for a space just long enough to be painful. Then he said with his old gaiety: “I vote we talk a little first; I don’t want to murder the first man I have met for ten million years.”

“I know what you mean,” answered the other. “It has been awful. For a mortal month I have been alone with God.”

Turnbull started, and it was on the tip of his tongue to answer: “Alone with God! Then you do not know what loneliness is.”

But he answered, after all, in his old defiant style: “Alone with God, were you? And I suppose you found his Majesty’s society rather monotonous?”

“Oh, no,” said MacIan, and his voice shuddered; “it was a great deal too exciting.”

After a very long silence the voice of MacIan said: “What do you really hate most in your place?”

“You’d think I was really mad if I told you,” answered Turnbull, bitterly.

“Then I expect it’s the same as mine,” said the other voice.

“I am sure it’s not the same as anybody’s,” said Turnbull, “for it has no rhyme or reason. Perhaps my brain really has gone, but I detest that iron spike in the left wall more than the damned desolation or the damned cocoa. Have you got one in your cell?”

“Not now,” replied MacIan with serenity. “I’ve pulled it out.”

His fellow–prisoner could only repeat the words.

“I pulled it out the other day when I was off my head,” continued the tranquil Highland voice. “It looked so unnecessary.”

“You must be ghastly strong,” said Turnbull.

“One is, when one is mad,” was the careless reply, “and it had worn a little loose in the socket. Even now I’ve got it out I can’t discover what it was for. But I’ve found out something a long sight funnier.”

“What do you mean?” asked Turnbull.

“I have found out where A is,” said the other.

Three weeks afterwards MacIan had managed to open up communications which made his meaning plain. By that time the two captives had fully discovered and demonstrated that weakness in the very nature of modern machinery to which we have already referred. The very fact that they were
isolated from all companions meant that they were free from all spies, and as there were no gaolers to be bribed, so there were none to be baffled. Machinery brought them their cocoa and cleaned their cells; that machinery was as helpless as it was pitiless. A little patient violence, conducted day after day amid constant mutual suggestion, opened an irregular hole in the wall, large enough to let in a small man, in the exact place where there had been before the tiny ventilation holes. Turnbull tumbled somehow into MacIan’s apartment, and his first glance found out that the iron spike was indeed plucked from its socket, and left, moreover, another ragged hole into some hollow place behind. But for this MacIan’s cell was the duplicate of Turnbull’s—a long oblong ending in a wedge and lined with cold and lustrous tiles. The small hole from which the peg had been displaced was in that short oblique wall at the end nearest to Turnbull’s. That individual looked at it with a puzzled face.

“What is in there?” he asked.

MacIan answered briefly: “Another cell.”

“But where can the door of it be?” said his companion, even more puzzled; “the doors of our cells are at the other end.”

“It has no door,” said Evan.

In the pause of perplexity that followed, an eerie and sinister feeling crept over Turnbull’s stubborn soul in spite of himself. The notion of the doorless room chilled him with that sense of half-witted curiosity which one has when something horrible is half understood.

“James Turnbull,” said MacIan, in a low and shaken voice, “these people hate us more than Nero hated Christians, and fear us more than any man feared Nero. They have filled England with frenzy and galloping in order to capture us and wipe us out—in order to kill us. And they have killed us, for you and I have only made a hole in our coffins. But though this hatred that they felt for us is bigger than they felt for Bonaparte, and more plain and practical than they would feel for Jack the Ripper, yet it is not we whom the people of this place hate most.”

A cold and quivering impatience continued to crawl up Turnbull’s spine; he had never felt so near to superstition and supernaturalism, and it was not a pretty sort of superstition either.

“There is another man more fearful and hateful,” went on MacIan, in his low monotone voice, “and they have buried him even deeper. God knows how they did it, for he was let in by neither door nor window, nor lowered through any opening above. I expect these iron handles that we both hate have been part of some damned machinery for walling him up. He is there. I have looked through
the hole at him; but I cannot stand looking at him long, because his face is turned away from me and he does not move.”

Al Turnbull’s unnatural and uncompleted feelings found their outlet in rushing to the aperture and looking into the unknown room.

It was a third oblong cell exactly like the other two except that it was doorless, and except that on one of the walls was painted a large black A like the B and C outside their own doors. The letter in this case was not painted outside, because this prison had no outside.

On the same kind of tiled floor, of which the monotonous squares had maddened Turnbull’s eye and brain, was sitting a figure which was startlingly short even for a child, only that the enormous head was ringed with hair of a frosty grey. The figure was draped, both insecurely and insufficiently, in what looked like the remains of a brown flannel dressing-gown; an emptied cup of cocoa stood on the floor beside it, and the creature had his big grey head cocked at a particular angle of inquiry or attention which amid all that gathering gloom and mystery struck one as comic if not cocksure.

After six still seconds Turnbull could stand it no longer, but called out to the dwarfish thing—in what words heaven knows. The thing got up with the promptitude of an animal, and turning round offered the spectacle of two owlish eyes and a huge grey–and–white beard not unlike the plumage of an owl. This extraordinary beard covered him literally to his feet (not that that was very far), and perhaps it was as well that it did, for portions of his remaining clothing seemed to fall off whenever he moved. One talks trivially of a face like parchment, but this old man’s face was so wrinkled that it was like a parchment loaded with hieroglyphics. The lines of his face were so deep and complex that one could see five or ten different faces besides the real one, as one can see them in an elaborate wall-paper. And yet while his face seemed like a scripture older than the gods, his eyes were quite bright, blue, and startled like those of a baby. They looked as if they had only an instant before been fitted into his head.

Everything depended so obviously upon whether this buried monster spoke that Turnbull did not know or care whether he himself had spoken. He said something or nothing. And then he waited for this dwarfish voice that had been hidden under the mountains of the world. At last it did speak, and spoke in English, with a foreign accent that was neither Latin nor Teutonic. He suddenly stretched out a long and very dirty forefinger, and cried in a voice of clear recognition, like a child’s: “That’s a hole.”

He digested the discovery for some seconds, sucking his finger, and then he
cried, with a crow of laughter: “And that’s a head come through it.”

The hilarious energy in this idiot attitude gave Turnbull another sick turn. He had grown to tolerate those dreary and mumbling madmen who trailed themselves about the beautiful asylum gardens. But there was something new and subversive of the universe in the combination of so much cheerful decision with a body without a brain.

“Why did they put you in such a place?” he asked at last with embarrassment.

“Good place. Yes,” said the old man, nodding a great many times and beaming like a flattered landlord. “Good shape. Long and narrow, with a point. Like this,” and he made lovingly with his hands a map of the room in the air.

“But that’s not the best,” he added, confidentially. “Squares very good; I have a nice long holiday, and can count them. But that’s not the best.”

“What is the best?” asked Turnbull in great distress.

“Spike is the best,” said the old man, opening his blue eyes blazing; “it sticks out.”

The words Turnbull spoke broke out of him in pure pity. “Can’t we do anything for you?” he said.

“I am very happy,” said the other, alphabetically. “You are a good man. Can I help you?”

“No, I don’t think you can, sir,” said Turnbull with rough pathos; “I am glad you are contented at least.”

The weird old person opened his broad blue eyes and fixed Turnbull with a stare extraordinarily severe. “You are quite sure,” he said, “I cannot help you?”

“Quite sure, thank you,” said Turnbull with broken brevity. “Good day.”

Then he turned to MacIan who was standing close behind him, and whose face, now familiar in all its moods, told him easily that Evan had heard the whole of the strange dialogue.

“Curse those cruel beasts!” cried Turnbull. “They’ve turned him to an imbecile just by burying him alive. His brain’s like a pin–point now.”

“You are sure he is a lunatic?” said Evan, slowly.

“Not a lunatic,” said Turnbull, “an idiot. He just points to things and says that they stick out.”

“He had a notion that he could help us,” said MacIan moodily, and began to pace towards the other end of his cell.

“Yes, it was a bit pathetic,” assented Turnbull; “such a Thing offering help, and besides–Hallo! Hallo! What’s the matter?”

“God Almighty guide us all!” said MacIan.
He was standing heavy and still at the other end of the room and staring quietly at the door which for thirty days had sealed them up from the sun. Turnbull, following the other’s eye, stared at the door likewise, and then he also uttered an exclamation. The iron door was standing about an inch and a half open.

“He said—” began Evan, in a trembling voice—”he offered—”

“Come along, you fool!” shouted Turnbull with a sudden and furious energy. “I see it all now, and it’s the best stroke of luck in the world. You pulled out that iron handle that had screwed up his cell, and it somehow altered the machinery and opened all the doors.”

Seizing MacIan by the elbow he bundled him bodily out into the open corridor and ran him on till they saw daylight through a half-darkened window.

“All the same,” said Evan, like one answering in an ordinary conversation, “he did ask you whether he could help you.”

All this wilderness of windowless passages was so built into the heart of that fortress of fear that it seemed more than an hour before the fugitives had any good glimpse of the outer world. They did not even know what hour of the day it was; and when, turning a corner, they saw the bare tunnel of the corridor end abruptly in a shining square of garden, the grass burning in that strong evening sunshine which makes it burnished gold rather than green, the abrupt opening on to the earth seemed like a hole knocked in the wall of heaven. Only once or twice in life is it permitted to a man thus to see the very universe from outside, and feel existence itself as an adorable adventure not yet begun. As they found this shining escape out of that hellish labyrinth they both had simultaneously the sensation of being babes unborn, of being asked by God if they would like to live upon the earth. They were looking in at one of the seven gates of Eden.

Turnbull was the first to leap into the garden, with an earth-spurning leap like that of one who could really spread his wings and fly. MacIan, who came an instant after, was less full of mere animal gusto and fuller of a more fearful and quivering pleasure in the clear and innocent flower colours and the high and holy trees. With one bound they were in that cool and cleared landscape, and they found just outside the door the black-clad gentleman with the cloven chin smilingly regarding them; and his chin seemed to grow longer and longer as he smiled.
A RIDDLE OF FACES

Just behind him stood two other doctors: one, the familiar Dr. Quayle, of the blinking eyes and bleating voice; the other, a more commonplace but much more forcible figure, a stout young doctor with short, well-brushed hair and a round but resolute face. At the sight of the escape these two subordinates uttered a cry and sprang forward, but their superior remained motionless and smiling, and somehow the lack of his support seemed to arrest and freeze them in the very gesture of pursuit.

“Let them be,” he cried in a voice that cut like a blade of ice; and not only of ice, but of some awful primordial ice that had never been water.

“I want no devoted champions,” said the cutting voice; “even the folly of one’s friends bores one at last. You don’t suppose I should have let these lunatics out of their cells without good reason. I have the best and fullest reason. They can be let out of their cell today, because today the whole world has become their cell. I will have no more medieval mummeries of chains and doors. Let them wander about the earth as they wandered about this garden, and I shall still be their easy master. Let them take the wings of the morning and abide in the uttermost parts of the sea—I am there. Whither shall they go from my presence and whither shall they flee from my spirit? Courage, Dr. Quayle, and do not be downhearted; the real days of tyranny are only beginning on this earth.”

And with that the Master laughed and swung away from them, almost as if his laugh was a bad thing for people to see.

“Might I speak to you a moment?” said Turnbull, stepping forward with a respectful resolution. But the shoulders of the Master only seemed to take on a new and unexpected angle of mockery as he strode away.

Turnbull swung round with great abruptness to the other two doctors, and said, harshly: “What in snakes does he mean—and who are you?”

“My name is Hutton,” said the short, stout man, “and I am—well, one of those whose business it is to uphold this establishment.”

“My name is Turnbull,” said the other; “I am one of those whose business it is to tear it to the ground.”

The small doctor smiled, and Turnbull’s anger seemed suddenly to steady
him.

“But I don’t want to talk about that,” he said, calmly; “I only want to know what the Master of this asylum really means.”

Dr. Hutton’s smile broke into a laugh which, short as it was, had the suspicion of a shake in it. “I suppose you think that quite a simple question,” he said.

“I think it a plain question,” said Turnbull, “and one that deserves a plain answer. Why did the Master lock us up in a couple of cupboards like jars of pickles for a mortal month, and why does he now let us walk free in the garden again?”

“I understand,” said Hutton, with arched eyebrows, “that your complaint is that you are now free to walk in the garden.”

“My complaint is,” said Turnbull, stubbornly, “that if I am fit to walk freely now, I have been as fit for the last month. No one has examined me, no one has come near me. Your chief says that I am only free because he has made other arrangements. What are those arrangements?”

The young man with the round face looked down for a little while and smoked reflectively. The other and elder doctor had gone pacing nervously by himself upon the lawn. At length the round face was lifted again, and showed two round blue eyes with a certain frankness in them.

“Well, I don’t see that it can do any harm to tell you know,” he said. “You were shut up just then because it was just during that month that the Master was bringing off his big scheme. He was getting his bill through Parliament, and organizing the new medical police. But of course you haven’t heard of all that; in fact, you weren’t meant to.”

“ Heard of all what?” asked the impatient inquirer.

“There’s a new law now, and the asylum powers are greatly extended. Even if you did escape now, any policeman would take you up in the next town if you couldn’t show a certificate of sanity from us.”

“Well,” continued Dr. Hutton, “the Master described before both Houses of Parliament the real scientific objection to all existing legislation about lunacy. As he very truly said, the mistake was in supposing insanity to be merely an exception or an extreme. Insanity, like forgetfulness, is simply a quality which enters more or less into all human beings; and for practical purposes it is more necessary to know whose mind is really trustworthy than whose has some accidental taint. We have therefore reversed the existing method, and people now have to prove that they are sane. In the first village you entered, the village constable would notice that you were not wearing on the left lapel of your coat
the small pewter S which is now necessary to any one who walks about beyond asylum bounds or outside asylum hours.”

“You mean to say,” said Turnbull, “that this was what the Master of the asylum urged before the House of Commons?”

Dr. Hutton nodded with gravity.

“And you mean to say,” cried Turnbull, with a vibrant snort, “that that proposal was passed in an assembly that calls itself democratic?”

The doctor showed his whole row of teeth in a smile. “Oh, the assembly calls itself Socialist now,” he said, “but we explained to them that this was a question for men of science.”

Turnbull gave one stamp upon the gravel, then pulled himself together, and resumed: “But why should your infernal head medicine–man lock us up in separate cells while he was turning England into a madhouse? I’m not the Prime Minister; we’re not the House of Lords.”

“He wasn’t afraid of the Prime Minister,” replied Dr. Hutton; “he isn’t afraid of the House of Lords. But–”

“Well?” inquired Turnbull, stamping again.

“He is afraid of you,” said Hutton, simply. “Why, didn’t you know?”

MacIan, who had not spoken yet, made one stride forward and stood with shaking limbs and shining eyes.

“He was afraid!” began Evan, thickly. “You mean to say that we–”

“I mean to say the plain truth now that the danger is over,” said Hutton, calmly; “most certainly you two were the only people he ever was afraid of.” Then he added in a low but not inaudible voice: “Except one–whom he feared worse, and has buried deeper.”

“Come away,” cried MacIan, “this has to be thought about.”

Turnbull followed him in silence as he strode away, but just before he vanished, turned and spoke again to the doctors.

“But what has got hold of people?” he asked, abruptly. “Why should all England have gone dotty on the mere subject of dottiness?”

Dr. Hutton smiled his open smile once more and bowed slightly. “As to that also,” he replied, “I don’t want to make you vain.”

Turnbull swung round without a word, and he and his companion were lost in the lustrous leafage of the garden. They noticed nothing special about the scene, except that the garden seemed more exquisite than ever in the deepening sunset, and that there seemed to be many more people, whether patients or attendants, walking about in it.
From behind the two black-coated doctors as they stood on the lawn another figure somewhat similarly dressed strode hurriedly past them, having also grizzled hair and an open flapping frock-coat. Both his decisive step and dapper black array marked him out as another medical man, or at least a man in authority, and as he passed Turnbull the latter was aroused by a strong impression of having seen the man somewhere before. It was no one that he knew well, yet he was certain that it was someone at whom he had at sometime or other looked steadily. It was neither the face of a friend nor of an enemy; it aroused neither irritation nor tenderness, yet it was a face which had for some reason been of great importance in his life. Turning and returning, and making detours about the garden, he managed to study the man’s face again and again—a moustached, somewhat military face with a monocle, the sort of face that is aristocratic without being distinguished. Turnbull could not remember any particular doctors in his decidedly healthy existence. Was the man a long-lost uncle, or was he only somebody who had sat opposite him regularly in a railway train? At that moment the man knocked down his own eye-glass with a gesture of annoyance; Turnbull remembered the gesture, and the truth sprang up solid in front of him. The man with the moustaches was Cumberland Vane, the London police magistrate before whom he and MacIan had once stood on their trial. The magistrate must have been transferred to some other official duties—to something connected with the inspection of asylums.

Turnbull’s heart gave a leap of excitement which was half hope. As a magistrate Mr. Cumberland Vane had been somewhat careless and shallow, but certainly kindly, and not inaccessible to common sense so long as it was put to him in strictly conventional language. He was at least an authority of a more human and refreshing sort than the crank with the wagging beard or the fiend with the forked chin.

He went straight up to the magistrate, and said: “Good evening, Mr. Vane; I doubt if you remember me.”

Cumberland Vane screwed the eye-glass into his scowling face for an instant, and then said curtly but not uncivilly: “Yes, I remember you, sir; assault or battery, wasn’t it—a fellow broke your window. A tall fellow—McSomething—case made rather a noise afterwards.”

“MacIan is the name, sir,” said Turnbull, respectfully; “I have him here with me.”

“Eh!” said Vane very sharply. “Confound him! Has he got anything to do with this game?”
“Mr. Vane,” said Turnbull, pacifically, “I will not pretend that either he or I acted quite decorously on that occasion. You were very lenient with us, and did not treat us as criminals when you very well might. So I am sure you will give us your testimony that, even if we were criminals, we are not lunatics in any legal or medical sense whatever. I am sure you will use your influence for us.”

“My influence!” repeated the magistrate, with a slight start. “I don’t quite understand you.”

“I don’t know in what capacity you are here,” continued Turnbull, gravely, “but a legal authority of your distinction must certainly be here in an important one. Whether you are visiting and inspecting the place, or attached to it as some kind of permanent legal adviser, your opinion must still—”

Cumberland Vane exploded with a detonation of oaths; his face was transfigured with fury and contempt, and yet in some odd way he did not seem specially angry with Turnbull.

“But Lord bless us and save us!” he gasped, at length; “I’m not here as an official at all. I’m here as a patient. The cursed pack of rat-catching chemists all say that I’ve lost my wits.”

“You!” cried Turnbull with terrible emphasis. “You! Lost your wits!”

In the rush of his real astonishment at this towering unreality Turnbull almost added: “Why, you haven’t got any to lose.” But he fortunately remembered the remains of his desperate diplomacy.

“This can’t go on,” he said, positively. “Men like MacIan and I may suffer unjustly all our lives, but a man like you must have influence.”

“There is only one man who has any influence in England now,” said Vane, and his high voice fell to a sudden and convincing quietude.

“Whom do you mean?” asked Turnbull.

“I mean that cursed fellow with the long split chin,” said the other.

“Is it really true,” asked Turnbull, “that he has been allowed to buy up and control such a lot? What put the country into such a state?”

Mr. Cumberland Vane laughed outright. “What put the country into such a state?” he asked. “Why, you did. When you were fool enough to agree to fight MacIan, after all, everybody was ready to believe that the Bank of England might paint itself pink with white spots.”

“I don’t understand,” answered Turnbull. “Why should you be surprised at my fighting? I hope I have always fought.”

“Well,” said Cumberland Vane, airily, “you didn’t believe in religion, you see—so we thought you were safe at any rate. You went further in your language
than most of us wanted to go; no good in just hurting one’s mother’s feelings, I think. But of course we all knew you were right, and, really, we relied on you.”

“Did you?” said the editor of The Atheist with a bursting heart. “I am sorry you did not tell me so at the time.”

He walked away very rapidly and flung himself on a garden seat, and for some six minutes his own wrongs hid from him the huge and hilarious fact that Cumberland Vane had been locked up as a lunatic.

The garden of the madhouse was so perfectly planned, and answered so exquisitely to every hour of daylight, that one could almost fancy that the sunlight was caught there tangled in its tinted trees, as the wise men of Gotham tried to chain the spring to a bush. Or it seemed as if this ironic paradise still kept its unique dawn or its special sunset while the rest of the earthly globe rolled through its ordinary hours. There was one evening, or late afternoon, in particular, which Evan MacIan will remember in the last moments of death. It was what artists call a daffodil sky, but it is coarsened even by reference to a daffodil. It was of that innocent lonely yellow which has never heard of orange, though it might turn quite unconsciously into green. Against it the tops, one might say the turrets, of the clipt and ordered trees were outlined in that shade of veiled violet which tints the tops of lavender. A white early moon was hardly traceable upon that delicate yellow. MacIan, I say, will remember this tender and transparent evening, partly because of its virgin gold and silver, and partly because he passed beneath it through the most horrible instant of his life.

Turnbull was sitting on his seat on the lawn, and the golden evening impressed even his positive nature, as indeed it might have impressed the oxen in a field. He was shocked out of his idle mood of awe by seeing MacIan break from behind the bushes and run across the lawn with an action he had never seen in the man before, with all his experience of the eccentric humours of this Celt. MacIan fell on the bench, shaking it so that it rattled, and gripped it with his knees like one in dreadful pain of body. That particular run and tumble is typical only of a man who has been hit by some sudden and incurable evil, who is bitten by a viper or condemned to be hanged. Turnbull looked up in the white face of his friend and enemy, and almost turned cold at what he saw there. He had seen the blue but gloomy eyes of the western Highlander troubled by as many tempests as his own west Highland seas, but there had always been a fixed star of faith behind the storms. Now the star had gone out, and there was only misery.

Yet MacIan had the strength to answer the question where Turnbull, taken by
surprise, had not the strength to ask it.

“They are right, they are right!” he cried. “O my God! they are right, Turnbull. I ought to be here!”

He went on with shapeless fluency as if he no longer had the heart to choose or check his speech. “I suppose I ought to have guessed long ago—all my big dreams and schemes—and everyone being against us—but I was stuck up, you know.”

“Do tell me about it, really,” cried the atheist, and, faced with the furnace of the other’s pain, he did not notice that he spoke with the affection of a father.

“I am mad, Turnbull,” said Evan, with a dead clearness of speech, and leant back against the garden seat.

“Nonsense,” said the other, clutching at the obvious cue of benevolent brutality, “this is one of your silly moods.”

MacIan shook his head. “I know enough about myself,” he said, “to allow for any mood, though it opened heaven or hell. But to see things—to see them walking solid in the sun—things that can’t be there—real mystics never do that, Turnbull.”

“What things?” asked the other, incredulously.

MacIan lowered his voice. “I saw her,” he said, “three minutes ago—walking here in this hell yard.”

Between trying to look scornful and really looking startled, Turnbull’s face was confused enough to emit no speech, and Evan went on in monotonous sincerity:

“I saw her walk behind those blessed trees against that holy sky of gold as plain as I can see her whenever I shut my eyes. I did shut them, and opened them again, and she was still there—that is, of course, she wasn’t—She still had a little fur round her neck, but her dress was a shade brighter than when I really saw her.”

“My dear fellow,” cried Turnbull, rallying a hearty laugh, “the fancies have really got hold of you. You mistook some other poor girl here for her.”

“Mistook some other—” said MacIan, and words failed him altogether.

They sat for some moments in the mellow silence of the evening garden, a silence that was stifling for the sceptic, but utterly empty and final for the man of faith. At last he broke out again with the words: “Well, anyhow, if I’m mad, I’m glad I’m mad on that.”

Turnbull murmured some clumsy deprecation, and sat stolidly smoking to collect his thoughts; the next instant he had all his nerves engaged in the mere
effort to sit still.

Across the clear space of cold silver and a pale lemon sky which was left by the gap in the ilex–trees there passed a slim, dark figure, a profile and the poise of a dark head like a bird’s, which really pinned him to his seat with the point of coincidence. With an effort he got to his feet, and said with a voice of affected insouciance: “By George! MacIan, she is uncommonly like–”

“What!” cried MacIan, with a leap of eagerness that was heart–breaking, “do you see her, too?” And the blaze came back into the centre of his eyes.

Turnbull’s tawny eyebrows were pulled together with a peculiar frown of curiosity, and all at once he walked quickly across the lawn. MacIan sat rigid, but peered after him with open and parched lips. He saw the sight which either proved him sane or proved the whole universe half–witted; he saw the man of flesh approach that beautiful phantom, saw their gestures of recognition, and saw them against the sunset joining hands.

He could stand it no longer, but ran across to the path, turned the corner and saw standing quite palpable in the evening sunlight, talking with a casual grace to Turnbull, the face and figure which had filled his midnights with frightfully vivid or desperately half–forgotten features. She advanced quite pleasantly and coolly, and put out her hand. The moment that he touched it he knew that he was sane even if the solar system was crazy.

She was entirely elegant and unembarrassed. That is the awful thing about women–they refuse to be emotional at emotional moments, upon some such ludicrous pretext as there being someone else there. But MacIan was in a condition of criticism much less than the average masculine one, being in fact merely overturned by the rushing riddle of the events.

Evan does not know to this day what particular question he asked, but he vividly remembers that she answered, and every line or fluctuation of her face as she said it.

“Oh, don’t you know?” she said, smiling, and suddenly lifting her level brown eyebrows. “Haven’t you heard the news? I’m a lunatic.”

Then she added after a short pause, and with a sort of pride: “I’ve got a certificate.”

Her manner, by the matchless social stoicisms of her sex, was entirely suited to a drawing–room, but Evan’s reply fell somewhat far short of such a standard, as he only said: “What the devil in hell does all this nonsense mean?”

“Really,” said the young lady, and laughed.

“I beg your pardon,” said the unhappy young man, rather wildly, “but what I
mean is, why are you here in an asylum?”

The young woman broke again into one of the maddening and mysterious
laughs of femininity. Then she composed her features, and replied with equal
dignity: “Well, if it comes to that, why are you?”

The fact that Turnbull had strolled away and was investigating rhododendrons
may have been due to Evan’s successful prayers to the other world, or possibly
to his own pretty successful experience of this one. But though they two were as
isolated as a new Adam and Eve in a pretty ornamental Eden, the lady did not
relax by an inch the rigour of her badinage.

“I am locked up in the madhouse,” said Evan, with a sort of stiff pride,
“because I tried to keep my promise to you.”

“Quite so,” answered the inexplicable lady, nodding with a perfectly blazing
smile, “and I am locked up because it was to me you promised.”

“It is outrageous!” cried Evan; “it is impossible!”

“Oh, you can see my certificate if you like,” she replied with some hauteur.

MacIan stared at her and then at his boots, and then at the sky and then at her
again. He was quite sure now that he himself was not mad, and the fact rather
added to his perplexity.

Then he drew nearer to her, and said in a dry and dreadful voice: “Oh, don’t
condescend to play the fool with such a fool as me. Are you really locked up
here as a patient—because you helped us to escape?”

“Yes,” she said, still smiling, but her steady voice had a shake in it.

Evan flung his big elbow across his forehead and burst into tears.

The pure lemon of the sky faded into purer white as the great sunset silently
collapsed. The birds settled back into the trees; the moon began to glow with its
own light. Mr. James Turnbull continued his botanical researches into the
structure of the rhododendron. But the lady did not move an inch until Evan had
flung up his face again; and when he did he saw by the last gleam of sunlight
that it was not only his face that was wet.

Mr. James Turnbull had all his life professed a profound interest in physical
science, and the phenomena of a good garden were really a pleasure to him; but
after three-quarters of an hour or so even the apostle of science began to find
rhododendrus a bore, and was somewhat relieved when an unexpected
development of events obliged him to transfer his researches to the equally
interesting subject of hollyhocks, which grew some fifty feet farther along the
path. The ostensible cause of his removal was the unexpected reappearance of
his two other acquaintances walking and talking laboriously along the way, with
the black head bent close to the brown one. Even hollyhocks detained Turnbull but a short time. Having rapidly absorbed all the important principles affecting the growth of those vegetables, he jumped over a flower–bed and walked back into the building. The other two came up along the slow course of the path talking and talking. No one but God knows what they said (for they certainly have forgotten), and if I remembered it I would not repeat it. When they parted at the head of the walk she put out her hand again in the same well–bred way, although it trembled; he seemed to restrain a gesture as he let it fall.

“If it is really always to be like this,” he said, thickly, “it would not matter if we were here for ever.”

“You tried to kill yourself four times for me,” she said, unsteadily, “and I have been chained up as a madwoman for you. I really think that after that–”

“Yes, I know,” said Evan in a low voice, looking down. “After that we belong to each other. We are sort of sold to each other–until the stars fall.” Then he looked up suddenly, and said: “By the way, what is your name?”

“My name is Beatrice Drake,” she replied with complete gravity. “You can see it on my certificate of lunacy.”
XIX

THE LAST PARLEY

Turnbull walked away, wildly trying to explain to himself the presence of two personal acquaintances so different as Vane and the girl. As he skirted a low hedge of laurel, an enormously tall young man leapt over it, stood in front of him, and almost fell on his neck as if seeking to embrace him.

“Don’t you know me?” almost sobbed the young man, who was in the highest spirits. “Ain’t I written on your heart, old boy? I say, what did you do with my yacht?”

“Take your arms off my neck,” said Turnbull, irritably. “Are you mad?”

The young man sat down on the gravel path and went into ecstasies of laughter. “No, that’s just the fun of it—I’m not mad,” he replied. “They’ve shut me up in this place, and I’m not mad.” And he went off again into mirth as innocent as wedding-bells.

Turnbull, whose powers of surprise were exhausted, rolled his round grey eyes and said, “Mr. Wilkinson, I think,” because he could not think of anything else to say.

The tall man sitting on the gravel bowed with urbanity, and said: “Quite at your service. Not to be confused with the Wilkinson’s of Cumberland; and as I say, old boy, what have you done with my yacht? You see, they’ve locked me up here—in this garden—and a yacht would be a sort of occupation for an unmarried man.”

“I am really horribly sorry,” began Turnbull, in the last stage of bated bewilderment and exasperation, “but really—”

“Oh, I can see you can’t have it on you at the moment,” said Mr. Wilkinson with much intellectual magnanimity.

“Well, the fact is—” began Turnbull again, and then the phrase was frozen on his mouth, for round the corner came the goatlike face and gleaming eye—glasses of Dr. Quayle.

“Ah, my dear Mr. Wilkinson,” said the doctor, as if delighted at a coincidence; “and Mr. Turnbull, too. Why, I want to speak to Mr. Turnbull.”

Mr. Turnbull made some movement rather of surrender than assent, and the doctor caught it up exquisitely, showing even more of his two front teeth. “I am sure Mr. Wilkinson will excuse us a moment.” And with flying frock—coat he led
Turnbull rapidly round the corner of a path.

“My dear sir,” he said, in a quite affectionate manner, “I do not mind telling you—you are such a very hopeful case—you understand so well the scientific point of view; and I don’t like to see you bothered by the really hopeless cases. They are monotonous and maddening. The man you have just been talking to, poor fellow, is one of the strongest cases of pure idee fixe that we have. It’s very sad, and I’m afraid utterly incurable. He keeps on telling everybody”—and the doctor lowered his voice confidentially—”he tells everybody that two people have taken is yacht. His account of how he lost it is quite incoherent.”

Turnbull stamped his foot on the gravel path, and called out: “Oh, I can’t stand this. Really—”

“I know, I know,” said the psychologist, mournfully; “it is a most melancholy case, and also fortunately a very rare one. It is so rare, in fact, that in one classification of these maladies it is entered under a heading by itself—Perdinavititis, mental inflammation creating the impression that one has lost a ship. Really,” he added, with a kind of half–embarrassed guilt, “it’s rather a feather in my cap. I discovered the only existing case of perdinavititis.”

“But this won’t do, doctor,” said Turnbull, almost tearing his hair, “this really won’t do. The man really did lose a ship. Indeed, not to put too fine a point on it, I took his ship.”

Dr. Quayle swung round for an instant so that his silk–lined overcoat rustled, and stared singularly at Turnbull. Then he said with hurried amiability: “Why, of course you did. Quite so, quite so,” and with courteous gestures went striding up the garden path. Under the first laburnum–tree he stopped, however, and pulling out his pencil and notebook wrote down feverishly: “Singular development in the Eleuthero–maniac, Turnbull. Sudden manifestation of Rapinavititis—the delusion that one has stolen a ship. First case ever recorded.”

Turnbull stood for an instant staggered into stillness. Then he ran raging round the garden to find MacIan, just as a husband, even a bad husband, will run raging to find his wife if he is full of a furious query. He found MacIan stalking moodily about the half–lit garden, after his extraordinary meeting with Beatrice. No one who saw his slouching stride and sunken head could have known that his soul was in the seventh heaven of ecstasy. He did not think; he did not even very definitely desire. He merely wallowed in memories, chiefly in material memories; words said with a certain cadence or trivial turns of the neck or wrist. Into the middle of his stationary and senseless enjoyment were thrust abruptly the projecting elbow and the projecting red beard of Turnbull. MacIan stepped
back a little, and the soul in his eyes came very slowly to its windows. When James Turnbull had the glittering sword–point planted upon his breast he was in far less danger. For three pulsating seconds after the interruption MacIan was in a mood to have murdered his father.

And yet his whole emotional anger fell from him when he saw Turnbull’s face, in which the eyes seemed to be bursting from the head like bullets. All the fire and fragrance even of young and honourable love faded for a moment before that stiff agony of interrogation.

“Are you hurt, Turnbull?” he asked, anxiously.

“I am dying,” answered the other quite calmly. “I am in the quite literal sense of the words dying to know something. I want to know what all this can possibly mean.”

MacIan did not answer, and he continued with asperity: “You are still thinking about that girl, but I tell you the whole thing is incredible. She’s not the only person here. I’ve met the fellow Wilkinson, whose yacht we lost. I’ve met the very magistrate you were hauled up to when you broke my window. What can it mean—meeting all these old people again? One never meets such old friends again except in a dream.”

Then after a silence he cried with a rending sincerity: “Are you really there, Evan? Have you ever been really there? Am I simply dreaming?”

MacIan had been listening with a living silence to every word, and now his face flamed with one of his rare revelations of life.

“No, you good atheist,” he cried; “no, you clean, courteous, reverent, pious old blasphemer. No, you are not dreaming—you are waking up.”

“What do you mean?”

“There are two states where one meets so many old friends,” said MacIan; “one is a dream, the other is the end of the world.”

“And you say—”

“I say this is not a dream,” said Evan in a ringing voice.

“You really mean to suggest—” began Turnbull.

“Be silent! or I shall say it all wrong,” said MacIan, breathing hard. “It’s hard to explain, anyhow. An apocalypse is the opposite of a dream. A dream is falser than the outer life. But the end of the world is more actual than the world it ends. I don’t say this is really the end of the world, but it’s something like that—it’s the end of something. All the people are crowding into one corner. Everything is coming to a point.”

“What is the point?” asked Turnbull.
“I can’t see it,” said Evan; “it is too large and plain.”

Then after a silence he said: “I can’t see it—and yet I will try to describe it. Turnbull, three days ago I saw quite suddenly that our duel was not right after all.”

“Three days ago!” repeated Turnbull. “When and why did this illumination occur?”

“I knew I was not quite right,” answered Evan, “the moment I saw the round eyes of that old man in the cell.”

“Old man in the cell!” repeated his wondering companion. “Do you mean the poor old idiot who likes spikes to stick out?”

“Yes,” said MacIan, after a slight pause, “I mean the poor old idiot who likes spikes to stick out. When I saw his eyes and heard his old croaking accent, I knew that it would not really have been right to kill you. It would have been a venial sin.”

“I am much obliged,” said Turnbull, gruffly.

“You must give me time,” said MacIan, quite patiently, “for I am trying to tell the whole truth. I am trying to tell more of it than I know.”

“So you see I confess”—he went on with laborious distinctness—“I confess that all the people who called our duel mad were right in a way. I would confess it to old Cumberland Vane and his eye-glass. I would confess it even to that old ass in brown flannel who talked to us about Love. Yes, they are right in a way. I am a little mad.”

He stopped and wiped his brow as if he were literally doing heavy labour. Then he went on:

“I am a little mad; but, after all, it is only a little madness. When hundreds of high-minded men had fought duels about a jostle with the elbow or the ace of spades, the whole world need not have gone wild over my one little wildness. Plenty of other people have killed themselves between then and now. But all England has gone into captivity in order to take us captive. All England has turned into a lunatic asylum in order to prove us lunatics. Compared with the general public, I might positively be called sane.”

He stopped again, and went on with the same air of travailing with the truth:

“When I saw that, I saw everything; I saw the Church and the world. The Church in its earthly action has really touched morbid things—tortures and bleeding visions and blasts of extermination. The Church has had her madesses, and I am one of them. I am the massacre of St. Bartholomew. I am the Inquisition of Spain. I do not say that we have never gone mad, but I say that we
are fit to act as keepers to our enemies. Massacre is wicked even with a
provocation, as in the Bartholomew. But your modern Nietzsche will tell you
that massacre would be glorious without a provocation. Torture should be
violently stopped, though the Church is doing it. But your modern Tolstoy will
tell you that it ought not to be violently stopped whoever is doing it. In the long
run, which is most mad—the Church or the world? Which is madder, the Spanish
priest who permitted tyranny, or the Prussian sophist who admired it? Which is
madder, the Russian priest who discourages righteous rebellion, or the Russian
novelist who forbids it? That is the final and blasting test. The world left to itself
grows wilder than any creed. A few days ago you and I were the maddest people
in England. Now, by God! I believe we are the sanest. That is the only real
question—whether the Church is really madder than the world. Let the rationalists
run their own race, and let us see where they end. If the world has some healthy
balance other than God, let the world find it. Does the world find it? Cut the
world loose,” he cried with a savage gesture. “Does the world stand on its own
end? Does it stand, or does it stagger?”

Turnbull remained silent, and MacIan said to him, looking once more at the
earth: “It staggers, Turnbull. It cannot stand by itself; you know it cannot. It has
been the sorrow of your life. Turnbull, this garden is not a dream, but an
apocalyptic fulfilment. This garden is the world gone mad.”

Turnbull did not move his head, and he had been listening all the time; yet,
somehow, the other knew that for the first time he was listening seriously.

“The world has gone mad,” said MacIan, “and it has gone mad about Us. The
world takes the trouble to make a big mistake about every little mistake made by
the Church. That is why they have turned ten counties to a madhouse; that is
why crowds of kindly people are poured into this filthy melting-pot. Now is the
judgement of this world. The Prince of this World is judged, and he is judged
exactly because he is judging. There is at last one simple solution to the quarrel
between the ball and the cross—”

Turnbull for the first time started.

“The ball and—” he repeated.

“What is the matter with you?” asked MacIan.

“I had a dream,” said Turnbull, thickly and obscurely, “in which I saw the
cross struck crooked and the ball secure—”

“I had a dream,” said MacIan, “in which I saw the cross erect and the ball
invisible. They were both dreams from hell. There must be some round earth to
plant the cross upon. But here is the awful difference—that the round world will
not consent even to continue round. The astronomers are always telling us that it
is shaped like an orange, or like an egg, or like a German sausage. They beat the
old world about like a bladder and thump it into a thousand shapeless shapes.
Turnbull, we cannot trust the ball to be always a ball; we cannot trust reason to
be reasonable. In the end the great terrestrial globe will go quite lop–sided, and
only the cross will stand upright.”

There was a long silence, and then Turnbull said, hesitatingly: “Has it
occurred to you that since–since those two dreams, or whatever they were–”

“Well?” murmured MacIan.

“Since then,” went on Turnbull, in the same low voice, “since then we have
never even looked for our swords.”

“You are right,” answered Evan almost inaudibly. “We have found something
which we both hate more than we ever hated each other, and I think I know its
name.”

Turnbull seemed to frown and flinch for a moment. “It does not much matter
what you call it,” he said, “so long as you keep out of its way.”

The bushes broke and snapped abruptly behind them, and a very tall figure
towered above Turnbull with an arrogant stoop and a projecting chin, a chin of
which the shape showed queerly even in its shadow upon the path.

“You see that is not so easy,” said MacIan between his teeth.

They looked up into the eyes of the Master, but looked only for a moment.
The eyes were full of a frozen and icy wrath, a kind of utterly heartless hatred.
His voice was for the first time devoid of irony. There was no more sarcasm in it
than there is in an iron club.

“You will be inside the building in three minutes,” he said, with pulverizing
precision, “or you will be fired on by the artillery at all the windows. There is
too much talking in this garden; we intend to close it. You will be
accommodated indoors.”

“Ah!” said MacIan, with a long and satisfied sigh, “then I was right.”

And he turned his back and walked obediently towards the building. Turnbull
seemed to canvass for a few minutes the notion of knocking the Master down,
and then fell under the same almost fairy fatalism as his companion. In some
strange way it did seem that the more smoothly they yielded, the more swiftly
would events sweep on to some great collision.
XX

DIES IRAE

As they advanced towards the asylum they looked up at its rows on rows of windows, and understood the Master’s material threat. By means of that complex but concealed machinery which ran like a network of nerves over the whole fabric, there had been shot out under every window–ledge rows and rows of polished–steel cylinders, the cold miracles of modern gunnery. They commanded the whole garden and the whole country–side, and could have blown to pieces an army corps.

This silent declaration of war had evidently had its complete effect. As MacIan and Turnbull walked steadily but slowly towards the entrance hall of the institution, they could see that most, or at least many, of the patients had already gathered there as well as the staff of doctors and the whole regiment of keepers and assistants. But when they entered the lamp–lit hall, and the high iron door was clashed to and locked behind them, yet a new amazement leapt into their eyes, and the stalwart Turnbull almost fell. For he saw a sight which was indeed, as MacIan had said–either the Day of Judgement or a dream.

Within a few feet of him at one corner of the square of standing people stood the girl he had known in Jersey, Madeleine Durand. She looked straight at him with a steady smile which lit up the scene of darkness and unreason like the light of some honest fireside. Her square face and throat were thrown back, as her habit was, and there was something almost sleepy in the geniality of her eyes. He saw her first, and for a few seconds saw her only; then the outer edge of his eyesight took in all the other staring faces, and he saw all the faces he had ever seen for weeks and months past. There was the Tolstoyan in Jaeger flannel, with the yellow beard that went backward and the foolish nose and eyes that went forward, with the curiosity of a crank. He was talking eagerly to Mr. Gordon, the corpulent Jew shopkeeper whom they had once gagged in his own shop. There was the tipsy old Hertfordshire rustic; he was talking energetically to himself. There was not only Mr. Vane the magistrate, but the clerk of Mr. Vane, the magistrate. There was not only Miss Drake of the motor–car, but also Miss Drake’s chauffeur. Nothing wild or unfamiliar could have produced upon Turnbull such a nightmare impression as that ring of familiar faces. Yet he had one intellectual shock which was greater than all the others. He stepped
impulsively forward towards Madeleine, and then wavered with a kind of wild humility. As he did so he caught sight of another square face behind Madeleine’s, a face with long grey whiskers and an austere stare. It was old Durand, the girl’s father; and when Turnbull saw him he saw the last and worst marvel of that monstrous night. He remembered Durand; he remembered his monotonous, everlasting lucidity, his stupefyingly sensible views of everything, his colossal contentment with truisms merely because they were true. “Confound it all!” cried Turnbull to himself, “if he is in the asylum, there can’t be anyone outside.” He drew nearer to Madeleine, but still doubtfully and all the more so because she still smiled at him. MacIan had already gone across to Beatrice with an air of fright.

Then all these bewildered but partly amicable recognitions were cloven by a cruel voice which always made all human blood turn bitter. The Master was standing in the middle of the room surveying the scene like a great artist looking at a completed picture. Handsome as he looked, they had never seen so clearly what was really hateful in his face; and even then they could only express it by saying that the arched brows and the long emphatic chin gave it always a look of being lit from below, like the face of some infernal actor.

“This is indeed a cosy party,” he said, with glittering eyes.

The Master evidently meant to say more, but before he could say anything M. Durand had stepped right up to him and was speaking.

He was speaking exactly as a French bourgeois speaks to the manager of a restaurant. That is, he spoke with rattling and breathless rapidity, but with no incoherence, and therefore with no emotion. It was a steady, monotonous vivacity, which came not seemingly from passion, but merely from the reason having been sent off at a gallop. He was saying something like this:

“You refuse me my half–bottle of Medoc, the drink the most wholesome and the most customary. You refuse me the company and obedience of my daughter, which Nature herself indicates. You refuse me the beef and mutton, without pretence that it is a fast of the Church. You now forbid me the promenade, a thing necessary to a person of my age. It is useless to tell me that you do all this by law. Law rests upon the social contract. If the citizen finds himself despoiled of such pleasures and powers as he would have had even in the savage state, the social contract is annulled.”

“It’s no good chattering away, Monsieur,” said Hutton, for the Master was silent. “The place is covered with machine–guns. We’ve got to obey our orders, and so have you.”
“The machinery is of the most perfect,” assented Durand, somewhat irrelevantly; “worked by petroleum, I believe. I only ask you to admit that if such things fall below the comfort of barbarism, the social contract is annulled. It is a pretty little point of theory.”

“Oh! I dare say,” said Hutton.

Durand bowed quite civilly and withdrew.

“A cosy party,” resumed the Master, scornfully, “and yet I believe some of you are in doubt about how we all came together. I will explain it, ladies and gentlemen; I will explain everything. To whom shall I specially address myself? To Mr. James Turnbull. He has a scientific mind.”

Turnbull seemed to choke with sudden protest. The Master seemed only to cough out of pure politeness and proceeded: “Mr. Turnbull will agree with me,” he said, “when I say that we long felt in scientific circles that great harm was done by such a legend as that of the Crucifixion.”

Turnbull growled something which was presumably assent.

The Master went on smoothly: “It was in vain for us to urge that the incident was irrelevant; that there were many such fanatics, many such executions. We were forced to take the thing thoroughly in hand, to investigate it in the spirit of scientific history, and with the assistance of Mr. Turnbull and others we were happy in being able to announce that this alleged Crucifixion never occurred at all.”

MacIan lifted his head and looked at the Master steadily, but Turnbull did not look up.

“This, we found, was the only way with all superstitions,” continued the speaker; “it was necessary to deny them historically, and we have done it with great success in the case of miracles and such things. Now within our own time there arose an unfortunate fuss which threatened (as Mr. Turnbull would say) to galvanize the corpse of Christianity into a fictitious life—the alleged case of a Highland eccentric who wanted to fight for the Virgin.”

MacIan, quite white, made a step forward, but the speaker did not alter his easy attitude or his flow of words. “Again we urged that this duel was not to be admired, that it was a mere brawl, but the people were ignorant and romantic. There were signs of treating this alleged Highlander and his alleged opponent as heroes. We tried all other means of arresting this reactionary hero worship. Working men who betted on the duel were imprisoned for gambling. Working men who drank the health of a duellist were imprisoned for drunkenness. But the popular excitement about the alleged duel continued, and we had to fall back on
our old historical method. We investigated, on scientific principles, the story of MacIan’s challenge, and we are happy to be able to inform you that the whole story of the attempted duel is a fable. There never was any challenge. There never was any man named MacIan. It is a melodramatic myth, like Calvary.”

Not a soul moved save Turnbull, who lifted his head; yet there was the sense of a silent explosion.

“The whole story of the MacIan challenge,” went on the Master, beaming at them all with a sinister benignity, “has been found to originate in the obsessions of a few pathological types, who are now all fortunately in our care. There is, for instance, a person here of the name of Gordon, formerly the keeper of a curiosity shop. He is a victim of the disease called Vinculomania—the impression that one has been bound or tied up. We have also a case of Fugacity (Mr. Whimpey), who imagines that he was chased by two men.”

The indignant faces of the Jew shopkeeper and the Magdalen Don started out of the crowd in their indignation, but the speaker continued:

“One poor woman we have with us,” he said, in a compassionate voice, “believes she was in a motor–car with two such men; this is the well–known illusion of speed on which I need not dwell. Another wretched woman has the simple egotistic mania that she has caused the duel. Madeleine Durand actually professes to have been the subject of the fight between MacIan and his enemy, a fight which, if it occurred at all, certainly began long before. But it never occurred at all. We have taken in hand every person who professed to have seen such a thing, and proved them all to be unbalanced. That is why they are here.”

The Master looked round the room, just showing his perfect teeth with the perfection of artistic cruelty, exalted for a moment in the enormous simplicity of his success, and then walked across the hall and vanished through an inner door. His two lieutenants, Quayle and Hutton, were left standing at the head of the great army of servants and keepers.

“I hope we shall have no more trouble,” said Dr. Quayle pleasantly enough, and addressing Turnbull, who was leaning heavily upon the back of a chair.

Still looking down, Turnbull lifted the chair an inch or two from the ground. Then he suddenly swung it above his head and sent it at the inquiring doctor with an awful crash which sent one of its wooden legs loose along the floor and crammed the doctor gasping into a corner. MacIan gave a great shout, snatched up the loose chair–leg, and, rushing on the other doctor, felled him with a blow. Twenty attendants rushed to capture the rebels; MacIan flung back three of them and Turnbull went over on top of one, when from behind them all came a shriek
as of something quite fresh and frightful.

Two of the three passages leading out of the hall were choked with blue smoke. Another instant and the hall was full of the fog of it, and red sparks began to swarm like scarlet bees.

“The place is on fire!” cried Quayle with a scream of indecent terror. “Oh, who can have done it? How can it have happened?”

A light had come into Turnbull’s eyes. “How did the French Revolution happen?” he asked.

“Oh, how should I know!” wailed the other.

“Then I will tell you,” said Turnbull; “it happened because some people fancied that a French grocer was as respectable as he looked.”

Even as he spoke, as if by confirmation, old Mr. Durand re-entered the smoky room quite placidly, wiping the petroleum from his hands with a handkerchief. He had set fire to the building in accordance with the strict principles of the social contract.

But MacIan had taken a stride forward and stood there shaken and terrible. “Now,” he cried, panting, “now is the judgement of the world. The doctors will leave this place; the keepers will leave this place. They will leave us in charge of the machinery and the machine–guns at the windows. But we, the lunatics, will wait to be burned alive if only we may see them go.”

“How do you know we shall go?” asked Hutton, fiercely.

“You believe nothing,” said MacIan, simply, “and you are insupportably afraid of death.”

“So this is suicide,” sneered the doctor; “a somewhat doubtful sign of sanity.”

“Not at all–this is vengeance,” answered Turnbull, quite calmly; “a thing which is completely healthy.”

“You think the doctors will go,” said Hutton, savagely.

“The keepers have gone already,” said Turnbull.

Even as they spoke the main doors were burst open in mere brutal panic, and all the officers and subordinates of the asylum rushed away across the garden pursued by the smoke. But among the ticketed maniacs not a man or woman moved.

“We hate dying,” said Turnbull, with composure, “but we hate you even more. This is a successful revolution.”

In the roof above their heads a panel shot back, showing a strip of star–lit sky and a huge thing made of white metal, with the shape and fins of a fish, swinging as if at anchor. At the same moment a steel ladder slid down from the opening
and struck the floor, and the cleft chin of the mysterious Master was thrust into the opening. “Quayle, Hutton,” he said, “you will escape with me.” And they went up the ladder like automata of lead.

Long after they had clambered into the car, the creature with the cloven face continued to leer down upon the smoke–stung crowd below. Then at last he said in a silken voice and with a smile of final satisfaction:

“By the way, I fear I am very absent minded. There is one man specially whom, somehow, I always forget. I always leave him lying about. Once I mislaid him on the Cross of St. Paul’s. So silly of me; and now I’ve forgotten him in one of those little cells where your fire is burning. Very unfortunate—especially for him.” And nodding genially, he climbed into his flying ship.

MacIan stood motionless for two minutes, and then rushed down one of the suffocating corridors till he found the flames. Turnbull looked once at Madeleine, and followed.

MacIan, with singed hair, smoking garments, and smarting hands and face, had already broken far enough through the first barriers of burning timber to come within cry of the cells he had once known. It was impossible, however, to see the spot where the old man lay dead or alive; not now through darkness, but through scorching and aching light. The site of the old half–wit’s cell was now the heart of a standing forest of fire—the flames as thick and yellow as a cornfield. Their incessant shrieking and crackling was like a mob shouting against an orator. Yet through all that deafening density MacIan thought he heard a small and separate sound. When he heard it he rushed forward as if to plunge into that furnace, but Turnbull arrested him by an elbow.

“Let me go!” cried Evan, in agony; “it’s the poor old beggar’s voice—he’s still alive, and shouting for help.”

“Listen!” said Turnbull, and lifted one finger from his clenched hand.

“Or else he is shrieking with pain,” protested MacIan. “I will not endure it.”

“Listen!” repeated Turnbull, grimly. “Did you ever hear anyone shout for help or shriek with pain in that voice?”

The small shrill sounds which came through the crash of the conflagration were indeed of an odd sort, and MacIan turned a face of puzzled inquiry to his companion.

“He is singing,” said Turnbull, simply.

A remaining rampart fell, crushing the fire, and through the diminished din of it the voice of the little old lunatic came clearer. In the heart of that white–hot hell he was singing like a bird. What he was singing it was not very easy to
follow, but it seemed to be something about playing in the golden hay.

“Good Lord!” cried Turnbull, bitterly, “there seem to be some advantages in really being an idiot.” Then advancing to the fringe of the fire he called out on chance to the invisible singer: “Can you come out? Are you cut off?”

“God help us all!” said MacIan, with a shudder; “he’s laughing now.”

At whatever stage of being burned alive the invisible now found himself, he was now shaking out peals of silvery and hilarious laughter. As he listened, MacIan’s two eyes began to glow, as if a strange thought had come into his head.

“Fool, come out and save yourself!” shouted Turnbull.

“No, by Heaven! that is not the way,” cried Evan, suddenly. “Father,” he shouted, “come out and save us all!”

The fire, though it had dropped in one or two places, was, upon the whole, higher and more unconquerable than ever. Separate tall flames shot up and spread out above them like the fiery cloisters of some infernal cathedral, or like a grove of red tropical trees in the garden of the devil. Higher yet in the purple hollow of the night the topmost flames leapt again and again fruitlessly at the stars, like golden dragons chained but struggling. The towers and domes of the oppressive smoke seemed high and far enough to drown distant planets in a London fog. But if we exhausted all frantic similes for that frantic scene, the main impression about the fire would still be its ranked upstanding rigidity and a sort of roaring stillness. It was literally a wall of fire.

“Father,” cried MacIan, once more, “come out of it and save us all!” Turnbull was staring at him as he cried.

The tall and steady forest of fire must have been already a portent visible to the whole circle of land and sea. The red flush of it lit up the long sides of white ships far out in the German Ocean, and picked out like piercing rubies the windows in the villages on the distant heights. If any villagers or sailors were looking towards it they must have seen a strange sight as MacIan cried out for the third time.

That forest of fire wavered, and was cloven in the centre; and then the whole of one half of it leaned one way as a cornfield leans all one way under the load of the wind. Indeed, it looked as if a great wind had sprung up and driven the great fire aslant. Its smoke was no longer sent up to choke the stars, but was trailed and dragged across county after county like one dreadful banner of defeat.

But it was not the wind; or, if it was the wind, it was two winds blowing in
opposite directions. For while one half of the huge fire sloped one way towards the inland heights, the other half, at exactly the same angle, sloped out eastward towards the sea. So that earth and ocean could behold, where there had been a mere fiery mass, a thing divided like a V—a cloven tongue of flame. But if it were a prodigy for those distant, it was something beyond speech for those quite near. As the echoes of Evan’s last appeal rang and died in the universal uproar, the fiery vault over his head opened down the middle, and, reeling back in two great golden billows, hung on each side as huge and harmless as two sloping hills lie on each side of a valley. Down the centre of this trough, or chasm, a little path ran, cleared of all but ashes, and down this little path was walking a little old man singing as if he were alone in a wood in spring.

When James Turnbull saw this he suddenly put out a hand and seemed to support himself on the strong shoulder of Madeleine Durand. Then after a moment’s hesitation he put his other hand on the shoulder of MacIan. His blue eyes looked extraordinarily brilliant and beautiful. In many sceptical papers and magazines afterwards he was sadly or sternly rebuked for having abandoned the certainties of materialism. All his life up to that moment he had been most honestly certain that materialism was a fact. But he was unlike the writers in the magazines precisely in this—that he preferred a fact even to materialism.

As the little singing figure came nearer and nearer, Evan fell on his knees, and after an instant Beatrice followed; then Madeleine fell on her knees, and after a longer instant Turnbull followed. Then the little old man went past them singing down that corridor of flames. They had not looked at his face.

When he had passed they looked up. While the first light of the fire had shot east and west, painting the sides of ships with fire—light or striking red sparks out of windowed houses, it had not hitherto struck upward, for there was above it the ponderous and rococo cavern of its own monstrous coloured smoke. But now the fire was turned to left and right like a woman’s hair parted in the middle, and now the shafts of its light could shoot up into empty heavens and strike anything, either bird or cloud. But it struck something that was neither cloud nor bird. Far, far away up in those huge hollows of space something was flying swiftly and shining brightly, something that shone too bright and flew too fast to be any of the fowls of the air, though the red light lit it from underneath like the breast of a bird. Everyone knew it was a flying ship, and everyone knew whose.

As they stared upward the little speck of light seemed slightly tilted, and two black dots dropped from the edge of it. All the eager, upturned faces watched the two dots as they grew bigger and bigger in their downward rush. Then someone
screamed, and no one looked up any more. For the two bodies, larger every second flying, spread out and sprawling in the fire–light, were the dead bodies of the two doctors whom Professor Lucifer had carried with him—the weak and sneering Quayle, the cold and clumsy Hutton. They went with a crash into the thick of the fire.

“They are gone!” screamed Beatrice, hiding her head. “O God! The are lost!”

Evan put his arm about her, and remembered his own vision.

“No, they are not lost,” he said. “They are saved. He has taken away no souls with him, after all.”

He looked vaguely about at the fire that was already fading, and there among the ashes lay two shining things that had survived the fire, his sword and Turnbull’s, fallen haphazard in the pattern of a cross.
THE CLUB OF QUEER TRADES

G. K. CHESTERTON
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INDEX

## THE CLUB OF QUEER TRADES

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**CHAPTER 1**  
THE TREMENDOUS ADVENTURES OF MAJOR BROWN

**CHAPTER 2**  
THE PAINFUL FALL OF A GREAT REPUTATION

**CHAPTER 3**  
THE AWFUL REASON OF THE VICAR’S VISIT

**CHAPTER 4**  
THE SINGULAR SPECULATION OF THE HOUSE-AGENT

**CHAPTER 5**  
THE NOTICEABLE CONDUCT OF PROFESSOR CHADD

**CHAPTER 6**  
THE ECCENTRIC SECLUSION OF THE OLD LADY
CHAPTER 1

THE TREMENDOUS ADVENTURES OF MAJOR BROWN

Rabelais, or his wild illustrator Gustave Dore, must have had something to do with the designing of the things called flats in England and America. There is something entirely Gargantuan in the idea of economising space by piling houses on top of each other, front doors and all. And in the chaos and complexity of those perpendicular streets anything may dwell or happen, and it is in one of them, I believe, that the inquirer may find the offices of the Club of Queer Trades. It may be thought at the first glance that the name would attract and startle the passer-by, but nothing attracts or startles in these dim immense hives. The passer-by is only looking for his own melancholy destination, the Montenegro Shipping Agency or the London office of the Rutland Sentinel, and passes through the twilight passages as one passes through the twilight corridors of a dream. If the Thugs set up a Strangers’ Assassination Company in one of the great buildings in Norfolk Street, and sent in a mild man in spectacles to answer inquiries, no inquiries would be made. And the Club of Queer Trades reigns in a great edifice hidden like a fossil in a mighty cliff of fossils.

The nature of this society, such as we afterwards discovered it to be, is soon and simply told. It is an eccentric and Bohemian Club, of which the absolute condition of membership lies in this, that the candidate must have invented the method by which he earns his living. It must be an entirely new trade. The exact definition of this requirement is given in the two principal rules. First, it must not be a mere application or variation of an existing trade. Thus, for instance, the Club would not admit an insurance agent simply because instead of insuring men’s furniture against being burnt in a fire, he insured, let us say, their trousers against being torn by a mad dog. The principle (as Sir Bradcock Burnaby-Bradcock, in the extraordinarily eloquent and soaring speech to the club on the occasion of the question being raised in the Stormby Smith affair, said wittily and keenly) is the same. Secondly, the trade must be a genuine commercial source of income, the support of its inventor. Thus the Club would not receive a man simply because he chose to pass his days collecting broken sardine tins, unless he could drive a roaring trade in them. Professor Chick made that quite clear. And when one remembers what Professor Chick’s own new trade was, one doesn’t know whether to laugh or cry.
The discovery of this strange society was a curiously refreshing thing; to realize that there were ten new trades in the world was like looking at the first ship or the first plough. It made a man feel what he should feel, that he was still in the childhood of the world. That I should have come at last upon so singular a body was, I may say without vanity, not altogether singular, for I have a mania for belonging to as many societies as possible: I may be said to collect clubs, and I have accumulated a vast and fantastic variety of specimens ever since, in my audacious youth, I collected the Athenaeum. At some future day, perhaps, I may tell tales of some of the other bodies to which I have belonged. I will recount the doings of the Dead Man’s Shoes Society (that superficially immoral, but darkly justifiable communion); I will explain the curious origin of the Cat and Christian, the name of which has been so shamefully misinterpreted; and the world shall know at last why the Institute of Typewriters coalesced with the Red Tulip League. Of the Ten Teacups, of course I dare not say a word. The first of my revelations, at any rate, shall be concerned with the Club of Queer Trades, which, as I have said, was one of this class, one which I was almost bound to come across sooner or later, because of my singular hobby. The wild youth of the metropolis call me facetiously ‘The King of Clubs.’ They also call me ‘The Cherub,’ in allusion to the roseate and youthful appearance I have presented in my declining years. I only hope the spirits in the better world have as good dinners as I have. But the finding of the Club of Queer Trades has one very curious thing about it. The most curious thing about it is that it was not discovered by me; it was discovered by my friend Basil Grant, a star-gazer, a mystic, and a man who scarcely stirred out of his attic.

Very few people knew anything of Basil; not because he was in the least unsociable, for if a man out of the street had walked into his rooms he would have kept him talking till morning. Few people knew him, because, like all poets, he could do without them; he welcomed a human face as he might welcome a sudden blend of colour in a sunset; but he no more felt the need of going out to parties than he felt the need of altering the sunset clouds. He lived in a queer and comfortable garret in the roofs of Lambeth. He was surrounded by a chaos of things that were in odd contrast to the slums around him; old fantastic books, swords, armour—the whole dust-hole of romanticism. But his face, amid all these quixotic relics, appeared curiously keen and modern—a powerful, legal face. And no one but I knew who he was.

Long ago as it is, everyone remembers the terrible and grotesque scene that occurred in—, when one of the most acute and forcible of the English judges
suddenly went mad on the bench. I had my own view of that occurrence; but
about the facts themselves there is no question at all. For some months, indeed
for some years, people had detected something curious in the judge’s conduct.
He seemed to have lost interest in the law, in which he had been beyond
expression brilliant and terrible as a K.C., and to be occupied in giving personal
and moral advice to the people concerned. He talked more like a priest or a
doctor, and a very outspoken one at that. The first thrill was probably given
when he said to a man who had attempted a crime of passion: “I sentence you to
three years imprisonment, under the firm, and solemn, and God-given
conviction, that what you require is three months at the seaside.” He accused
criminals from the bench, not so much of their obvious legal crimes, but of
things that had never been heard of in a court of justice, monstrous egoism, lack
of humour, and morbidity deliberately encouraged. Things came to a head in that
celebrated diamond case in which the Prime Minister himself, that brilliant
patrician, had to come forward, gracefully and reluctantly, to give evidence
against his valet. After the detailed life of the household had been thoroughly
exhibited, the judge requested the Premier again to step forward, which he did
with quiet dignity. The judge then said, in a sudden, grating voice: “Get a new
soul. That thing’s not fit for a dog. Get a new soul.” All this, of course, in the
eyes of the sagacious, was premonitory of that melancholy and farcical day
when his wits actually deserted him in open court. It was a libel case between
two very eminent and powerful financiers, against both of whom charges of
considerable defalcation were brought. The case was long and complex; the
advocates were long and eloquent; but at last, after weeks of work and rhetoric,
the time came for the great judge to give a summing-up; and one of his
celebrated masterpieces of lucidity and pulverizing logic was eagerly looked for.
He had spoken very little during the prolonged affair, and he looked sad and
lowering at the end of it. He was silent for a few moments, and then burst into a
stentorian song. His remarks (as reported) were as follows:

“Oh Rowty-owty tiddly-owty Tiddly-owty tiddly-owty Highty-ighty tiddly-
ighty Tiddly-ighty ow.”

He then retired from public life and took the garret in Lambeth.

I was sitting there one evening, about six o’clock, over a glass of that
gorgeous Burgundy which he kept behind a pile of black-letter folios; he was
striding about the room, fingering, after a habit of his, one of the great swords in
his collection; the red glare of the strong fire struck his square features and his
fierce grey hair; his blue eyes were even unusually full of dreams, and he had
opened his mouth to speak dreamily, when the door was flung open, and a pale, fiery man, with red hair and a huge furred overcoat, swung himself panting into
the room.

“Sorry to bother you, Basil,” he gasped. “I took a liberty—made an
appointment here with a man—a client—in five minutes—I beg your pardon, sir,” and he gave me a bow of apology.

Basil smiled at me. “You didn’t know,” he said, “that I had a practical brother. This is Rupert Grant, Esquire, who can and does all there is to be done. Just as I was a failure at one thing, he is a success at everything. I remember him as a journalist, a house-agent, a naturalist, an inventor, a publisher, a schoolmaster, a
—what are you now, Rupert?”

“I am and have been for some time,” said Rupert, with some dignity, “a private detective, and there’s my client.”

A loud rap at the door had cut him short, and, on permission being given, the
door was thrown sharply open and a stout, dapper man walked swiftly into the
room, set his silk hat with a clap on the table, and said, “Good evening, gentlemen,” with a stress on the last syllable that somehow marked him out as a martinet, military, literary and social. He had a large head streaked with black and grey, and an abrupt black moustache, which gave him a look of fierceness which was contradicted by his sad sea-blue eyes.

Basil immediately said to me, “Let us come into the next room, Gully,” and was moving towards the door, but the stranger said:

“Not at all. Friends remain. Assistance possibly.”

The moment I heard him speak I remembered who he was, a certain Major Brown I had met years before in Basil’s society. I had forgotten altogether the
black dandified figure and the large solemn head, but I remembered the peculiar speech, which consisted of only saying about a quarter of each sentence, and that sharply, like the crack of a gun. I do not know, it may have come from giving orders to troops.

Major Brown was a V.C., and an able and distinguished soldier, but he was anything but a warlike person. Like many among the iron men who recovered
British India, he was a man with the natural beliefs and tastes of an old maid. In his dress he was dapper and yet demure; in his habits he was precise to the point of the exact adjustment of a tea-cup. One enthusiasm he had, which was of the nature of a religion—the cultivation of pansies. And when he talked about his collection, his blue eyes glittered like a child’s at a new toy, the eyes that had remained untroubled when the troops were roaring victory round Roberts at
Candahar.

“Well, Major,” said Rupert Grant, with a lordly heartiness, flinging himself into a chair, “what is the matter with you?”


We glanced at each other with inquisitiveness. Basil, who had his eyes shut in his abstracted way, said simply:

“I beg your pardon.”

“Fact is. Street, you know, man, pansies. On wall. Death to me. Something. Preposterous.”

We shook our heads gently. Bit by bit, and mainly by the seemingly sleepy assistance of Basil Grant, we pieced together the Major’s fragmentary, but excited narration. It would be infamous to submit the reader to what we endured; therefore I will tell the story of Major Brown in my own words. But the reader must imagine the scene. The eyes of Basil closed as in a trance, after his habit, and the eyes of Rupert and myself getting rounder and rounder as we listened to one of the most astounding stories in the world, from the lips of the little man in black, sitting bolt upright in his chair and talking like a telegram.

Major Brown was, I have said, a successful soldier, but by no means an enthusiastic one. So far from regretting his retirement on half-pay, it was with delight that he took a small neat villa, very like a doll’s house, and devoted the rest of his life to pansies and weak tea. The thought that battles were over when he had once hung up his sword in the little front hall (along with two patent stew-pots and a bad water-colour), and betaken himself instead to wielding the rake in his little sunlit garden, was to him like having come into a harbour in heaven. He was Dutch-like and precise in his taste in gardening, and had, perhaps, some tendency to drill his flowers like soldiers. He was one of those men who are capable of putting four umbrellas in the stand rather than three, so that two may lean one way and two another; he saw life like a pattern in a freehand drawing-book. And assuredly he would not have believed, or even understood, any one who had told him that within a few yards of his brick paradise he was destined to be caught in a whirlpool of incredible adventure, such as he had never seen or dreamed of in the horrible jungle, or the heat of battle.

One certain bright and windy afternoon, the Major, attired in his usual faultless manner, had set out for his usual constitutional. In crossing from one great residential thoroughfare to another, he happened to pass along one of those
aimless-looking lanes which lie along the back-garden walls of a row of mansions, and which in their empty and discoloured appearance give one an odd sensation as of being behind the scenes of a theatre. But mean and sulky as the scene might be in the eyes of most of us, it was not altogether so in the Major’s, for along the coarse gravel footway was coming a thing which was to him what the passing of a religious procession is to a devout person. A large, heavy man, with fish-blue eyes and a ring of irradiating red beard, was pushing before him a barrow, which was ablaze with incomparable flowers. There were splendid specimens of almost every order, but the Major’s own favourite pansies predominated. The Major stopped and fell into conversation, and then into bargaining. He treated the man after the manner of collectors and other mad men, that is to say, he carefully and with a sort of anguish selected the best roots from the less excellent, praised some, disparaged others, made a subtle scale ranging from a thrilling worth and rarity to a degraded insignificance, and then bought them all. The man was just pushing off his barrow when he stopped and came close to the Major.

“I’ll tell you what, sir,” he said. “If you’re interested in them things, you just get on to that wall.”

“On the wall!” cried the scandalised Major, whose conventional soul quailed within him at the thought of such fantastic trespass.

“Finest show of yellow pansies in England in that there garden, sir,” hissed the tempter. “I’ll help you up, sir.”

How it happened no one will ever know but that positive enthusiasm of the Major’s life triumphed over all its negative traditions, and with an easy leap and swing that showed that he was in no need of physical assistance, he stood on the wall at the end of the strange garden. The second after, the flapping of the frock-coat at his knees made him feel inexpressibly a fool. But the next instant all such trifling sentiments were swallowed up by the most appalling shock of surprise the old soldier had ever felt in all his bold and wandering existence. His eyes fell upon the garden, and there across a large bed in the centre of the lawn was a vast pattern of pansies; they were splendid flowers, but for once it was not their horticultural aspects that Major Brown beheld, for the pansies were arranged in gigantic capital letters so as to form the sentence:

DEATH TO MAJOR BROWN

A kindly looking old man, with white whiskers, was watering them. Brown
looked sharply back at the road behind him; the man with the barrow had suddenly vanished. Then he looked again at the lawn with its incredible inscription. Another man might have thought he had gone mad, but Brown did not. When romantic ladies gushed over his V.C. and his military exploits, he sometimes felt himself to be a painfully prosaic person, but by the same token he knew he was incurably sane. Another man, again, might have thought himself a victim of a passing practical joke, but Brown could not easily believe this. He knew from his own quaint learning that the garden arrangement was an elaborate and expensive one; he thought it extravagantly improbable that any one would pour out money like water for a joke against him. Having no explanation whatever to offer, he admitted the fact to himself, like a clear-headed man, and waited as he would have done in the presence of a man with six legs.

At this moment the stout old man with white whiskers looked up, and the watering can fell from his hand, shooting a swirl of water down the gravel path.

“Who on earth are you?” he gasped, trembling violently.

“I am Major Brown,” said that individual, who was always cool in the hour of action.

The old man gaped helplessly like some monstrous fish. At last he stammered wildly, “Come down—come down here!”

“At your service,” said the Major, and alighted at a bound on the grass beside him, without disarranging his silk hat.

The old man turned his broad back and set off at a sort of waddling run towards the house, followed with swift steps by the Major. His guide led him through the back passages of a gloomy, but gorgeously appointed house, until they reached the door of the front room. Then the old man turned with a face of apoplectic terror dimly showing in the twilight.

“For heaven’s sake,” he said, “don’t mention jackals.”

Then he threw open the door, releasing a burst of red lamplight, and ran downstairs with a clatter.

The Major stepped into a rich, glowing room, full of red copper, and peacock and purple hangings, hat in hand. He had the finest manners in the world, and, though mystified, was not in the least embarrassed to see that the only occupant was a lady, sitting by the window, looking out.

“Madam,” he said, bowing simply, “I am Major Brown.”

“Sit down,” said the lady; but she did not turn her head.

She was a graceful, green-clad figure, with fiery red hair and a flavour of Bedford Park. “You have come, I suppose,” she said mournfully, “to tax me
about the hateful title-deeds."

“..."I have come, madam,” he said, “to know what is the matter. To know why my name is written across your garden. Not amicably either.”

He spoke grimly, for the thing had hit him. It is impossible to describe the effect produced on the mind by that quiet and sunny garden scene, the frame for a stunning and brutal personality. The evening air was still, and the grass was golden in the place where the little flowers he studied cried to heaven for his blood.

“...You know I must not turn round,” said the lady; “..."ever afternoon till the stroke of six I must keep my face turned to the street.”

Some queer and unusual inspiration made the prosaic soldier resolute to accept these outrageous riddles without surprise.

“...It is almost six,” he said; and even as he spoke the barbaric copper clock upon the wall clanged the first stroke of the hour. At the sixth the lady sprang up and turned on the Major one of the queerest and yet most attractive faces he had ever seen in his life; open, and yet tantalising, the face of an elf.

“...That makes the third year I have waited,” she cried. “...This is an anniversary. The waiting almost makes one wish the frightful thing would happen once and for all.”

And even as she spoke, a sudden rending cry broke the stillness. From low down on the pavement of the dim street (it was already twilight) a voice cried out with a raucous and merciless distinctness:

“...Major Brown, Major Brown, where does the jackal dwell?”

Brown was decisive and silent in action. He strode to the front door and looked out. There was no sign of life in the blue gloaming of the street, where one or two lamps were beginning to light their lemon sparks. On returning, he found the lady in green trembling.

“...It is the end,” she cried, with shaking lips; “...it may be death for both of us. Whenever—”

But even as she spoke her speech was cloven by another hoarse proclamation from the dark street, again horribly articulate.

“...Major Brown, Major Brown, how did the jackal die?”

Brown dashed out of the door and down the steps, but again he was frustrated; there was no figure in sight, and the street was far too long and empty for the shouter to have run away. Even the rational Major was a little shaken as he returned in a certain time to the drawing-room. Scarcely had he done so than the terrific voice came:
“Major Brown, Major Brown, where did—”

Brown was in the street almost at a bound, and he was in time—in time to see something which at first glance froze the blood. The cries appeared to come from a decapitated head resting on the pavement.

The next moment the pale Major understood. It was the head of a man thrust through the coal-hole in the street. The next moment, again, it had vanished, and Major Brown turned to the lady. “Where’s your coal-cellar?” he said, and stepped out into the passage.

She looked at him with wild grey eyes. “You will not go down,” she cried, “alone, into the dark hole, with that beast?”

“Is this the way?” replied Brown, and descended the kitchen stairs three at a time. He flung open the door of a black cavity and stepped in, feeling in his pocket for matches. As his right hand was thus occupied, a pair of great slimy hands came out of the darkness, hands clearly belonging to a man of gigantic stature, and seized him by the back of the head. They forced him down, down in the suffocating darkness, a brutal image of destiny. But the Major’s head, though upside down, was perfectly clear and intellectual. He gave quietly under the pressure until he had slid down almost to his hands and knees. Then finding the knees of the invisible monster within a foot of him, he simply put out one of his long, bony, and skilful hands, and gripping the leg by a muscle pulled it off the ground and laid the huge living man, with a crash, along the floor. He strove to rise, but Brown was on top like a cat. They rolled over and over. Big as the man was, he had evidently now no desire but to escape; he made sprawls hither and thither to get past the Major to the door, but that tenacious person had him hard by the coat collar and hung with the other hand to a beam. At length there came a strain in holding back this human bull, a strain under which Brown expected his hand to rend and part from the arm. But something else rent and parted; and the dim fat figure of the giant vanished out of the cellar, leaving the torn coat in the Major’s hand; the only fruit of his adventure and the only clue to the mystery. For when he went up and out at the front door, the lady, the rich hangings, and the whole equipment of the house had disappeared. It had only bare boards and whitewashed walls.

“The lady was in the conspiracy, of course,” said Rupert, nodding. Major Brown turned brick red. “I beg your pardon,” he said, “I think not.”

Rupert raised his eyebrows and looked at him for a moment, but said nothing. When next he spoke he asked:

“Was there anything in the pockets of the coat?”
“There was sevenpence halfpenny in coppers and a threepenny-bit,” said the Major carefully; “there was a cigarette-holder, a piece of string, and this letter,” and he laid it on the table. It ran as follows:

Dear Mr Plover,

I am annoyed to hear that some delay has occurred in the arrangements re Major Brown. Please see that he is attacked as per arrangement tomorrow The coal-cellar, of course.

Yours faithfully, P. G. Northover.

Rupert Grant was leaning forward listening with hawk-like eyes. He cut in:

“Is it dated from anywhere?”

“No—oh, yes!” replied Brown, glancing upon the paper; “14 Tanner’s Court, North—”

Rupert sprang up and struck his hands together.

“Then why are we hanging there? Let’s get along. Basil, lend me your revolver.”

Basil was staring into the embers like a man in a trance; and it was some time before he answered:

“I don’t think you’ll need it.”

“Perhaps not,” said Rupert, getting into his fur coat. “One never knows. But going down a dark court to see criminals—”

“Do you think they are criminals?” asked his brother.

Rupert laughed stoutly. “Giving orders to a subordinate to strangle a harmless stranger in a coal-cellar may strike you as a very blameless experiment, but—”

“Do you think they wanted to strangle the Major?” asked Basil, in the same distant and monotonous voice.

“My dear fellow, you’ve been asleep. Look at the letter.”

“I am looking at the letter,” said the mad judge calmly; though, as a matter of fact, he was looking at the fire. “I don’t think it’s the sort of letter one criminal would write to another.”

“My dear boy, you are glorious,” cried Rupert, turning round, with laughter in his blue bright eyes. “Your methods amaze me. Why, there is the letter. It is written, and it does give orders for a crime. You might as well say that the Nelson Column was not at all the sort of thing that was likely to be set up in Trafalgar Square.”

Basil Grant shook all over with a sort of silent laughter, but did not otherwise move.

“That’s rather good,” he said; “but, of course, logic like that’s not what is
really wanted. It’s a question of spiritual atmosphere. It’s not a criminal letter.”

“It is. It’s a matter of fact,” cried the other in an agony of reasonableness.

“Facts,” murmured Basil, like one mentioning some strange, far-off animals, “how facts obscure the truth. I may be silly—in fact, I’m off my head—but I never could believe in that man—what’s his name, in those capital stories?—Sherlock Holmes. Every detail points to something, certainly; but generally to the wrong thing. Facts point in all directions, it seems to me, like the thousands of twigs on a tree. It’s only the life of the tree that has unity and goes up—only the green blood that springs, like a fountain, at the stars.”

“But what the deuce else can the letter be but criminal?”

“We have eternity to stretch our legs in,” replied the mystic. “It can be an infinity of things. I haven’t seen any of them—I’ve only seen the letter. I look at that, and say it’s not criminal.”

“Then what’s the origin of it?”

“I haven’t the vaguest idea.”

“Then why don’t you accept the ordinary explanation?”

Basil continued for a little to glare at the coals, and seemed collecting his thoughts in a humble and even painful way. Then he said:

“Suppose you went out into the moonlight. Suppose you passed through silent, silvery streets and squares until you came into an open and deserted space, set with a few monuments, and you beheld one dressed as a ballet girl dancing in the argent glimmer. And suppose you looked, and saw it was a man disguised. And suppose you looked again, and saw it was Lord Kitchener. What would you think?”

He paused a moment, and went on:

“You could not adopt the ordinary explanation. The ordinary explanation of putting on singular clothes is that you look nice in them; you would not think that Lord Kitchener dressed up like a ballet girl out of ordinary personal vanity. You would think it much more likely that he inherited a dancing madness from a great grandmother; or had been hypnotised at a seance; or threatened by a secret society with death if he refused the ordeal. With Baden-Powell, say, it might be a bet—but not with Kitchener. I should know all that, because in my public days I knew him quite well. So I know that letter quite well, and criminals quite well. It’s not a criminal’s letter. It’s all atmospheres.” And he closed his eyes and passed his hand over his forehead.

Rupert and the Major were regarding him with a mixture of respect and pity. The former said,
“Well, I’m going, anyhow, and shall continue to think—until your spiritual mystery turns up—that a man who sends a note recommending a crime, that is, actually a crime that is actually carried out, at least tentatively, is, in all probability, a little casual in his moral tastes. Can I have that revolver?”

“Certainly,” said Basil, getting up. “But I am coming with you.” And he flung an old cape or cloak round him, and took a sword-stick from the corner.

“You!” said Rupert, with some surprise, “you scarcely ever leave your hole to look at anything on the face of the earth.”

Basil fitted on a formidable old white hat.

“I scarcely ever,” he said, with an unconscious and colossal arrogance, “hear of anything on the face of the earth that I do not understand at once, without going to see it.”

And he led the way out into the purple night.

We four swung along the flaring Lambeth streets, across Westminster Bridge, and along the Embankment in the direction of that part of Fleet Street which contained Tanner’s Court. The erect, black figure of Major Brown, seen from behind, was a quaint contrast to the hound-like stoop and flapping mantle of young Rupert Grant, who adopted, with childlike delight, all the dramatic poses of the detective of fiction. The finest among his many fine qualities was his boyish appetite for the colour and poetry of London. Basil, who walked behind, with his face turned blindly to the stars, had the look of a somnambulist.

Rupert paused at the corner of Tanner’s Court, with a quiver of delight at danger, and gripped Basil’s revolver in his great-coat pocket.

“Shall we go in now?” he asked.

“Not get police?” asked Major Brown, glancing sharply up and down the street.

“I am not sure,” answered Rupert, knitting his brows. “Of course, it’s quite clear, the thing’s all crooked. But there are three of us, and—”

“I shouldn’t get the police,” said Basil in a queer voice. Rupert glanced at him and stared hard.

“Basil,” he cried, “you’re trembling. What’s the matter—are you afraid?”

“Cold, perhaps,” said the Major, eyeing him. There was no doubt that he was shaking.

At last, after a few moments’ scrutiny, Rupert broke into a curse.

“You’re laughing,” he cried. “I know that confounded, silent, shaky laugh of yours. What the deuce is the amusement, Basil? Here we are, all three of us, within a yard of a den of ruffians—”
“But I shouldn’t call the police,” said Basil. “We four heroes are quite equal to a host,” and he continued to quake with his mysterious mirth.

Rupert turned with impatience and strode swiftly down the court, the rest of us following. When he reached the door of No. 14 he turned abruptly, the revolver glittering in his hand.

“Stand close,” he said in the voice of a commander. “The scoundrel may be attempting an escape at this moment. We must fling open the door and rush in.”

The four of us cowered instantly under the archway, rigid, except for the old judge and his convulsion of merriment.

“Now,” hissed Rupert Grant, turning his pale face and burning eyes suddenly over his shoulder, “when I say ‘Four,’ follow me with a rush. If I say ‘Hold him,’ pin the fellows down, whoever they are. If I say ‘Stop,’ stop. I shall say that if there are more than three. If they attack us I shall empty my revolver on them. Basil, have your sword-stick ready. Now—one, two three, four!”

With the sound of the word the door burst open, and we fell into the room like an invasion, only to stop dead.

The room, which was an ordinary and neatly appointed office, appeared, at the first glance, to be empty. But on a second and more careful glance, we saw seated behind a very large desk with pigeonholes and drawers of bewildering multiplicity, a small man with a black waxed moustache, and the air of a very average clerk, writing hard. He looked up as we came to a standstill.

“Did you knock?” he asked pleasantly. “I am sorry if I did not hear. What can I do for you?”

There was a doubtful pause, and then, by general consent, the Major himself, the victim of the outrage, stepped forward.

The letter was in his hand, and he looked unusually grim.

“Is your name P. G. Northover?” he asked.

“That is my name,” replied the other, smiling.

“I think,” said Major Brown, with an increase in the dark glow of his face, “that this letter was written by you.” And with a loud clap he struck open the letter on the desk with his clenched fist. The man called Northover looked at it with unaffected interest and merely nodded.

“Well, sir,” said the Major, breathing hard, “what about that?”

“What about it, precisely,” said the man with the moustache.

“I am Major Brown,” said that gentleman sternly.

Northover bowed. “Pleased to meet you, sir. What have you to say to me?”

“Say!” cried the Major, loosing a sudden tempest; “why, I want this
confounded thing settled. I want—"

“Certainly, sir,” said Northover, jumping up with a slight elevation of the eyebrows. “Will you take a chair for a moment.” And he pressed an electric bell just above him, which thrilled and tinkled in a room beyond. The Major put his hand on the back of the chair offered him, but stood chafing and beating the floor with his polished boot.

The next moment an inner glass door was opened, and a fair, weedy, young man, in a frock-coat, entered from within.

“Mr Hopson,” said Northover, “this is Major Brown. Will you please finish that thing for him I gave you this morning and bring it in?”

“Yes, sir,” said Mr Hopson, and vanished like lightning.

“You will excuse me, gentlemen,” said the egregious Northover, with his radiant smile, “if I continue to work until Mr Hopson is ready. I have some books that must be cleared up before I get away on my holiday tomorrow. And we all like a whiff of the country, don’t we? Ha! ha!”

The criminal took up his pen with a childlike laugh, and a silence ensued; a placid and busy silence on the part of Mr P. G. Northover; a raging silence on the part of everybody else.

At length the scratching of Northover’s pen in the stillness was mingled with a knock at the door, almost simultaneous with the turning of the handle, and Mr Hopson came in again with the same silent rapidity, placed a paper before his principal, and disappeared again.

The man at the desk pulled and twisted his spiky moustache for a few moments as he ran his eye up and down the paper presented to him. He took up his pen, with a slight, instantaneous frown, and altered something, muttering—“Careless.” Then he read it again with the same impenetrable reflectiveness, and finally handed it to the frantic Brown, whose hand was beating the devil’s tattoo on the back of the chair.

“I think you will find that all right, Major,” he said briefly.

The Major looked at it; whether he found it all right or not will appear later, but he found it like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 1, to account rendered</td>
<td>5 6 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 9, to potting and embedding of zoo pansies</td>
<td>2 0 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To cost of trolley with flowers</td>
<td>0 15 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To hiring of man with trolley</td>
<td>0 5 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To hire of house and garden for one day</td>
<td>1 0 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To furnishing of room in peacock curtains, copper ornaments, etc. 3 0 0
To salary of Miss Jameson 1 0 0
To salary of Mr Plover 1 0 0

Total L14 6 0
A Remittance will oblige.

“What,” said Brown, after a dead pause, and with eyes that seemed slowly rising out of his head, “What in heaven’s name is this?”

“What is it?” repeated Northover, cocking his eyebrow with amusement. “It’s your account, of course.”

“My account!” The Major’s ideas appeared to be in a vague stampede. “My account! And what have I got to do with it?”

“Well,” said Northover, laughing outright, “naturally I prefer you to pay it.”

The Major’s hand was still resting on the back of the chair as the words came. He scarcely stirred otherwise, but he lifted the chair bodily into the air with one hand and hurled it at Northover’s head.

The legs crashed against the desk, so that Northover only got a blow on the elbow as he sprang up with clenched fists, only to be seized by the united rush of the rest of us. The chair had fallen clattering on the empty floor.

“Let me go, you scamps,” he shouted. “Let me—”

“Stand still,” cried Rupert authoritatively. “Major Brown’s action is excusable. The abominable crime you have attempted—”

“A customer has a perfect right,” said Northover hotly, “to question an alleged overcharge, but, confound it all, not to throw furniture.”

“What, in God’s name, do you mean by your customers and overcharges?” shrieked Major Brown, whose keen feminine nature, steady in pain or danger, became almost hysterical in the presence of a long and exasperating mystery. “Who are you? I’ve never seen you or your insolent tomfool bills. I know one of your cursed brutes tried to choke me—”

“Mad,” said Northover, gazing blankly round; “all of them mad. I didn’t know they travelled in quartettes.”

“Enough of this prevarication,” said Rupert; “your crimes are discovered. A policeman is stationed at the corner of the court. Though only a private detective myself, I will take the responsibility of telling you that anything you say—”

“Mad,” repeated Northover, with a weary air.

And at this moment, for the first time, there struck in among them the strange, sleepy voice of Basil Grant.
“Major Brown,” he said, “may I ask you a question?”

The Major turned his head with an increased bewilderment.

“You?” he cried; “certainly, Mr Grant.”

“Can you tell me,” said the mystic, with sunken head and lowering brow, as he traced a pattern in the dust with his sword-stick, “can you tell me what was the name of the man who lived in your house before you?”

The unhappy Major was only faintly more disturbed by this last and futile irrelevancy, and he answered vaguely:

“Yes, I think so; a man named Gurney something—a name with a hyphen—Gurney-Brown; that was it.”

“And when did the house change hands?” said Basil, looking up sharply. His strange eyes were burning brilliantly.

“I came in last month,” said the Major.

And at the mere word the criminal Northover suddenly fell into his great office chair and shouted with a volleying laughter.

“Oh! it’s too perfect—it’s too exquisite,” he gasped, beating the arms with his fists. He was laughing deafeningly; Basil Grant was laughing voicelessly; and the rest of us only felt that our heads were like weathercocks in a whirlwind.

“Confound it, Basil,” said Rupert, stamping. “If you don’t want me to go mad and blow your metaphysical brains out, tell me what all this means.”

Northover rose.

“Permit me, sir, to explain,” he said. “And, first of all, permit me to apologize to you, Major Brown, for a most abominable and unpardonable blunder, which has caused you menace and inconvenience, in which, if you will allow me to say so, you have behaved with astonishing courage and dignity. Of course you need not trouble about the bill. We will stand the loss.” And, tearing the paper across, he flung the halves into the waste-paper basket and bowed.

Poor Brown’s face was still a picture of distraction. “But I don’t even begin to understand,” he cried. “What bill? what blunder? what loss?”

Mr P. G. Northover advanced in the centre of the room, thoughtfully, and with a great deal of unconscious dignity. On closer consideration, there were apparent about him other things beside a screwed moustache, especially a lean, sallow face, hawk-like, and not without a careworn intelligence. Then he looked up abruptly.

“Do you know where you are, Major?” he said.

“God knows I don’t,” said the warrior, with fervour.

“You are standing,” replied Northover, “in the office of the Adventure and
Romance Agency, Limited.”

“And what’s that?” blankly inquired Brown.

The man of business leaned over the back of the chair, and fixed his dark eyes on the other’s face.

“Major,” said he, “did you ever, as you walked along the empty street upon some idle afternoon, feel the utter hunger for something to happen—something, in the splendid words of Walt Whitman: ‘Something pernicious and dread; something far removed from a puny and pious life; something unproved; something in a trance; something loosed from its anchorage, and driving free.’ Did you ever feel that?”

“Certainly not,” said the Major shortly.

“Then I must explain with more elaboration,” said Mr Northover, with a sigh. “The Adventure and Romance Agency has been started to meet a great modern desire. On every side, in conversation and in literature, we hear of the desire for a larger theatre of events for something to waylay us and lead us splendidly astray. Now the man who feels this desire for a varied life pays a yearly or a quarterly sum to the Adventure and Romance Agency; in return, the Adventure and Romance Agency undertakes to surround him with startling and weird events. As a man is leaving his front door, an excited sweep approaches him and assures him of a plot against his life; he gets into a cab, and is driven to an opium den; he receives a mysterious telegram or a dramatic visit, and is immediately in a vortex of incidents. A very picturesque and moving story is first written by one of the staff of distinguished novelists who are at present hard at work in the adjoining room. Yours, Major Brown (designed by our Mr Grigsby), I consider peculiarly forcible and pointed; it is almost a pity you did not see the end of it. I need scarcely explain further the monstrous mistake. Your predecessor in your present house, Mr Gurney-Brown, was a subscriber to our agency, and our foolish clerks, ignoring alike the dignity of the hyphen and the glory of military rank, positively imagined that Major Brown and Mr Gurney-Brown were the same person. Thus you were suddenly hurled into the middle of another man’s story.”

“How on earth does the thing work?” asked Rupert Grant, with bright and fascinated eyes.

“We believe that we are doing a noble work,” said Northover warmly. “It has continually struck us that there is no element in modern life that is more lamentable than the fact that the modern man has to seek all artistic existence in a sedentary state. If he wishes to float into fairyland, he reads a book; if he
wishes to dash into the thick of battle, he reads a book; if he wishes to soar into heaven, he reads a book; if he wishes to slide down the banisters, he reads a book. We give him these visions, but we give him exercise at the same time, the necessity of leaping from wall to wall, of fighting strange gentlemen, of running down long streets from pursuers—all healthy and pleasant exercises. We give him a glimpse of that great morning world of Robin Hood or the Knights Errant, when one great game was played under the splendid sky. We give him back his childhood, that godlike time when we can act stories, be our own heroes, and at the same instant dance and dream.”

Basil gazed at him curiously. The most singular psychological discovery had been reserved to the end, for as the little business man ceased speaking he had the blazing eyes of a fanatic.

Major Brown received the explanation with complete simplicity and good humour.

“Of course; awfully dense, sir,” he said. “No doubt at all, the scheme excellent. But I don’t think—” He paused a moment, and looked dreamily out of the window. “I don’t think you will find me in it. Somehow, when one’s seen—seen the thing itself, you know—blood and men screaming, one feels about having a little house and a little hobby; in the Bible, you know, ‘There remaineth a rest.’”

Northover bowed. Then after a pause he said:

“Gentlemen, may I offer you my card. If any of the rest of you desire, at any time, to communicate with me, despite Major Brown’s view of the matter—”

“I should be obliged for your card, sir,” said the Major, in his abrupt but courteous voice. “Pay for chair.”

The agent of Romance and Adventure handed his card, laughing.

It ran, “P. G. Northover, B.A., C.Q.T., Adventure and Romance Agency, 14 Tanner’s Court, Fleet Street.”

“What on earth is ‘C.Q.T.’?” asked Rupert Grant, looking over the Major’s shoulder.

“Don’t you know?” returned Northover. “Haven’t you ever heard of the Club of Queer Trades?”

“There seems to be a confounded lot of funny things we haven’t heard of,” said the little Major reflectively. “What’s this one?”

“The Club of Queer Trades is a society consisting exclusively of people who have invented some new and curious way of making money. I was one of the earliest members.”
“You deserve to be,” said Basil, taking up his great white hat, with a smile, and speaking for the last time that evening.

When they had passed out the Adventure and Romance agent wore a queer smile, as he trod down the fire and locked up his desk. “A fine chap, that Major; when one hasn’t a touch of the poet one stands some chance of being a poem. But to think of such a clockwork little creature of all people getting into the nets of one of Grigsby’s tales,” and he laughed out aloud in the silence.

Just as the laugh echoed away, there came a sharp knock at the door. An owlish head, with dark moustaches, was thrust in, with deprecating and somewhat absurd inquiry.

“What! back again, Major?” cried Northover in surprise. “What can I do for you?”

The Major shuffled feverishly into the room.

“It’s horribly absurd,” he said. “Something must have got started in me that I never knew before. But upon my soul I feel the most desperate desire to know the end of it all.”

“The end of it all?”

“Yes,” said the Major. “‘Jackals,’ and the title-deeds, and ‘Death to Major Brown.’”

The agent’s face grew grave, but his eyes were amused.

“I am terribly sorry, Major,” said he, “but what you ask is impossible. I don’t know any one I would sooner oblige than you; but the rules of the agency are strict. The Adventures are confidential; you are an outsider; I am not allowed to let you know an inch more than I can help. I do hope you understand—”

“There is no one,” said Brown, “who understands discipline better than I do. Thank you very much. Good night.”

And the little man withdrew for the last time.

He married Miss Jameson, the lady with the red hair and the green garments. She was an actress, employed (with many others) by the Romance Agency; and her marriage with the prim old veteran caused some stir in her languid and intellectualized set. She always replied very quietly that she had met scores of men who acted splendidly in the charades provided for them by Northover, but that she had only met one man who went down into a coal-cellar when he really thought it contained a murderer.

The Major and she are living as happily as birds, in an absurd villa, and the former has taken to smoking. Otherwise he is unchanged—except, perhaps, there are moments when, alert and full of feminine unselfishness as the Major is by
nature, he falls into a trance of abstraction. Then his wife recognizes with a concealed smile, by the blind look in his blue eyes, that he is wondering what were the title-deeds, and why he was not allowed to mention jackals. But, like so many old soldiers, Brown is religious, and believes that he will realize the rest of those purple adventures in a better world.
CHAPTER 2

THE PAINFUL FALL OF A GREAT REPUTATION

Basil Grant and I were talking one day in what is perhaps the most perfect place for talking on earth—the top of a tolerably deserted tramcar. To talk on the top of a hill is superb, but to talk on the top of a flying hill is a fairy tale.

The vast blank space of North London was flying by; the very pace gave us a sense of its immensity and its meaness. It was, as it were, a base infinitude, a squalid eternity, and we felt the real horror of the poor parts of London, the horror that is so totally missed and misrepresented by the sensational novelists who depict it as being a matter of narrow streets, filthy houses, criminals and maniacs, and dens of vice. In a narrow street, in a den of vice, you do not expect civilization, you do not expect order. But the horror of this was the fact that there was civilization, that there was order, but that civilisation only showed its morbidity, and order only its monotony. No one would say, in going through a criminal slum, “I see no statues. I notice no cathedrals.” But here there were public buildings; only they were mostly lunatic asylums. Here there were statues; only they were mostly statues of railway engineers and philanthropists—two dingy classes of men united by their common contempt for the people. Here there were churches; only they were the churches of dim and erratic sects, Agapemonites or Irvingites. Here, above all, there were broad roads and vast crossings and tramway lines and hospitals and all the real marks of civilization. But though one never knew, in one sense, what one would see next, there was one thing we knew we should not see—anything really great, central, of the first class, anything that humanity had adored. And with revulsion indescribable our emotions returned, I think, to those really close and crooked entries, to those really mean streets, to those genuine slums which lie round the Thames and the City, in which nevertheless a real possibility remains that at any chance corner the great cross of the great cathedral of Wren may strike down the street like a thunderbolt.

“But you must always remember also,” said Grant to me, in his heavy abstracted way, when I had urged this view, “that the very vileness of the life of these ordered plebeian places bears witness to the victory of the human soul. I agree with you. I agree that they have to live in something worse than barbarism. They have to live in a fourth-rate civilization. But yet I am practically certain
that the majority of people here are good people. And being good is an adventure far more violent and daring than sailing round the world. Besides—"

"Go on," I said.
No answer came.
"Go on," I said, looking up.
The big blue eyes of Basil Grant were standing out of his head and he was paying no attention to me. He was staring over the side of the tram.
"What is the matter?" I asked, peering over also.
"It is very odd," said Grant at last, grimly, "that I should have been caught out like this at the very moment of my optimism. I said all these people were good, and there is the wickedest man in England."
"Where?" I asked, leaning over further, "where?"
"Oh, I was right enough," he went on, in that strange continuous and sleepy tone which always angered his hearers at acute moments, "I was right enough when I said all these people were good. They are heroes; they are saints. Now and then they may perhaps steal a spoon or two; they may beat a wife or two with the poker. But they are saints all the same; they are angels; they are robed in white; they are clad with wings and haloes—at any rate compared to that man."
"Which man?" I cried again, and then my eye caught the figure at which Basil’s bull’s eyes were glaring.
He was a slim, smooth person, passing very quickly among the quickly passing crowd, but though there was nothing about him sufficient to attract a startled notice, there was quite enough to demand a curious consideration when once that notice was attracted. He wore a black top-hat, but there was enough in it of those strange curves whereby the decadent artist of the eighties tried to turn the top-hat into something as rhythmic as an Etruscan vase. His hair, which was largely grey, was curled with the instinct of one who appreciated the gradual beauty of grey and silver. The rest of his face was oval and, I thought, rather Oriental; he had two black tufts of moustache.
"What has he done?" I asked.
"I am not sure of the details," said Grant, "but his besetting sin is a desire to intrigue to the disadvantage of others. Probably he has adopted some imposture or other to effect his plan."
"What plan?" I asked. "If you know all about him, why don’t you tell me why he is the wickedest man in England? What is his name?"
Basil Grant stared at me for some moments.
“I think you’ve made a mistake in my meaning,” he said. “I don’t know his name. I never saw him before in my life.”

“Never saw him before!” I cried, with a kind of anger; “then what in heaven’s name do you mean by saying that he is the wickedest man in England?”

“I meant what I said,” said Basil Grant calmly. “The moment I saw that man, I saw all these people stricken with a sudden and splendid innocence. I saw that while all ordinary poor men in the streets were being themselves, he was not being himself. I saw that all the men in these slums, cadgers, pickpockets, hooligans, are all, in the deepest sense, trying to be good. And I saw that that man was trying to be evil.”

“But if you never saw him before—” I began.

“In God’s name, look at his face,” cried out Basil in a voice that startled the driver. “Look at the eyebrows. They mean that infernal pride which made Satan so proud that he sneered even at heaven when he was one of the first angels in it. Look at his moustaches, they are so grown as to insult humanity. In the name of the sacred heavens look at his hair. In the name of God and the stars, look at his hat.”

I stirred uncomfortably.

“But, after all,” I said, “this is very fanciful—perfectly absurd. Look at the mere facts. You have never seen the man before, you—”

“Oh, the mere facts,” he cried out in a kind of despair. “The mere facts! Do you really admit—are you still so sunk in superstitions, so clinging to dim and prehistoric altars, that you believe in facts? Do you not trust an immediate impression?”

“Well, an immediate impression may be,” I said, “a little less practical than facts.”

“Bosh,” he said. “On what else is the whole world run but immediate impressions? What is more practical? My friend, the philosophy of this world may be founded on facts, its business is run on spiritual impressions and atmospheres. Why do you refuse or accept a clerk? Do you measure his skull? Do you read up his physiological state in a handbook? Do you go upon facts at all? Not a scrap. You accept a clerk who may save your business—you refuse a clerk that may rob your till, entirely upon those immediate mystical impressions under the pressure of which I pronounce, with a perfect sense of certainty and sincerity, that that man walking in that street beside us is a humbug and a villain of some kind.”

“You always put things well,” I said, “but, of course, such things cannot
immediately be put to the test."

Basil sprang up straight and swayed with the swaying car.

“Let us get off and follow him,” he said. “I bet you five pounds it will turn out as I say.”

And with a scuttle, a jump, and a run, we were off the car.

The man with the curved silver hair and the curved Eastern face walked along for some time, his long splendid frock-coat flying behind him. Then he swung sharply out of the great glaring road and disappeared down an ill-lit alley. We swung silently after him.

“This is an odd turning for a man of that kind to take,” I said.

“A man of what kind?” asked my friend.

“Well,” I said, “a man with that kind of expression and those boots. I thought it rather odd, to tell the truth, that he should be in this part of the world at all.”

“Ah, yes,” said Basil, and said no more.

We tramped on, looking steadily in front of us. The elegant figure, like the figure of a black swan, was silhouetted suddenly against the glare of intermittent gaslight and then swallowed again in night. The intervals between the lights were long, and a fog was thickening the whole city. Our pace, therefore, had become swift and mechanical between the lamp-posts; but Basil came to a standstill suddenly like a reined horse; I stopped also. We had almost run into the man. A great part of the solid darkness in front of us was the darkness of his body.

At first I thought he had turned to face us. But though we were hardly a yard off he did not realize that we were there. He tapped four times on a very low and dirty door in the dark, crabbed street. A gleam of gas cut the darkness as it opened slowly. We listened intently, but the interview was short and simple and inexplicable as an interview could be. Our exquisite friend handed in what looked like a paper or a card and said:

“At once. Take a cab.”

A heavy, deep voice from inside said:

“Right you are.”

And with a click we were in the blackness again, and striding after the striding stranger through a labyrinth of London lanes, the lights just helping us. It was only five o’clock, but winter and the fog had made it like midnight.

“This is really an extraordinary walk for the patent-leather boots,” I repeated.

“I don’t know,” said Basil humbly. “It leads to Berkeley Square.”

As I tramped on I strained my eyes through the dusky atmosphere and tried to
make out the direction described. For some ten minutes I wondered and doubted; at the end of that I saw that my friend was right. We were coming to the great dreary spaces of fashionable London—more dreary, one must admit, even than the dreary plebeian spaces.

“This is very extraordinary!” said Basil Grant, as we turned into Berkeley Square.

“What is extraordinary?” I asked. “I thought you said it was quite natural.”

“I do not wonder,” answered Basil, “at this walking through nasty streets; I do not wonder at his going to Berkeley Square. But I do wonder at his going to the house of a very good man.”

“What very good man?” I asked with exasperation.

“The operation of time is a singular one,” he said with his imperturbable irrelevancy. “It is not a true statement of the case to say that I have forgotten my career when I was a judge and a public man. I remember it all vividly, but it is like remembering some novel. But fifteen years ago I knew this square as well as Lord Rosebery does, and a confounded long sight better than that man who is going up the steps of old Beaumont’s house.”

“Who is old Beaumont?” I asked irritably.

“A perfectly good fellow. Lord Beaumont of Foxwood—don’t you know his name? He is a man of transparent sincerity, a nobleman who does more work than a navvy, a socialist, an anarchist, I don’t know what; anyhow, he’s a philosopher and philanthropist. I admit he has the slight disadvantage of being, beyond all question, off his head. He has that real disadvantage which has arisen out of the modern worship of progress and novelty; and he thinks anything odd and new must be an advance. If you went to him and proposed to eat your grandmother, he would agree with you, so long as you put it on hygienic and public grounds, as a cheap alternative to cremation. So long as you progress fast enough it seems a matter of indifference to him whether you are progressing to the stars or the devil. So his house is filled with an endless succession of literary and political fashions; men who wear long hair because it is romantic; men who wear short hair because it is medical; men who walk on their feet only to exercise their hands; and men who walk on their hands for fear of tiring their feet. But though the inhabitants of his salons are generally fools, like himself, they are almost always, like himself, good men. I am really surprised to see a criminal enter there.”

“My good fellow,” I said firmly, striking my foot on the pavement, “the truth of this affair is very simple. To use your own eloquent language, you have the
‘slight disadvantage’ of being off your head. You see a total stranger in a public street; you choose to start certain theories about his eyebrows. You then treat him as a burglar because he enters an honest man’s door. The thing is too monstrous. Admit that it is, Basil, and come home with me. Though these people are still having tea, yet with the distance we have to go, we shall be late for dinner.”

Basil’s eyes were shining in the twilight like lamps.

“I thought,” he said, “that I had outlived vanity.”

“What do you want now?” I cried.

“I want,” he cried out, “what a girl wants when she wears her new frock; I want what a boy wants when he goes in for a clanging match with a monitor—I want to show somebody what a fine fellow I am. I am as right about that man as I am about your having a hat on your head. You say it cannot be tested. I say it can. I will take you to see my old friend Beaumont. He is a delightful man to know.”

“Do you really mean—?” I began.

“I will apologize,” he said calmly, “for our not being dressed for a call,” and walking across the vast misty square, he walked up the dark stone steps and rang at the bell.

A severe servant in black and white opened the door to us: on receiving my friend’s name his manner passed in a flash from astonishment to respect. We were ushered into the house very quickly, but not so quickly but that our host, a white-haired man with a fiery face, came out quickly to meet us.

“My dear fellow,” he cried, shaking Basil’s hand again and again, “I have not seen you for years. Have you been—er—” he said, rather wildly, “have you been in the country?”

“Not for all that time,” answered Basil, smiling. “I have long given up my official position, my dear Philip, and have been living in a deliberate retirement. I hope I do not come at an inopportune moment.”

“An inopportune moment,” cried the ardent gentleman. “You come at the most opportune moment I could imagine. Do you know who is here?”

“I do not,” answered Grant, with gravity. Even as he spoke a roar of laughter came from the inner room.

“Basil,” said Lord Beaumont solemnly, “I have Wimpole here.”

“And who is Wimpole?”

“Basil,” cried the other, “you must have been in the country. You must have been in the antipodes. You must have been in the moon. Who is Wimpole? Who
was Shakespeare?"

“As to who Shakespeare was,” answered my friend placidly, “my views go no further than thinking that he was not Bacon. More probably he was Mary Queen of Scots. But as to who Wimpole is—” and his speech also was cloven with a roar of laughter from within.

“Wimpole!” cried Lord Beaumont, in a sort of ecstasy. “Haven’t you heard of the great modern wit? My dear fellow, he has turned conversation, I do not say into an art—for that, perhaps, it always was but into a great art, like the statuary of Michael Angelo—an art of masterpieces. His repartees, my good friend, startle one like a man shot dead. They are final; they are—”

Again there came the hilarious roar from the room, and almost with the very noise of it, a big, panting apoplectic old gentleman came out of the inner house into the hall where we were standing.

“Now, my dear chap,” began Lord Beaumont hastily.

“I tell you, Beaumont, I won’t stand it,” exploded the large old gentleman. “I won’t be made game of by a twopenny literary adventurer like that. I won’t be made a guy. I won’t—”

“Come, come,” said Beaumont feverishly. “Let me introduce you. This is Mr Justice Grant—that is, Mr Grant. Basil, I am sure you have heard of Sir Walter Cholmondeliegh.”

“Who has not?” asked Grant, and bowed to the worthy old baronet, eyeing him with some curiosity. He was hot and heavy in his momentary anger, but even that could not conceal the noble though opulent outline of his face and body, the florid white hair, the Roman nose, the body stalwart though corpulent, the chin aristocratic though double. He was a magnificent courtly gentleman; so much of a gentleman that he could show an unquestionable weakness of anger without altogether losing dignity; so much of a gentleman that even his faux pas were well-bred.

“I am distressed beyond expression, Beaumont,” he said gruffly, “to fail in respect to these gentlemen, and even more especially to fail in it in your house. But it is not you or they that are in any way concerned, but that flashy half-caste jackanapes—”

At this moment a young man with a twist of red moustache and a sombre air came out of the inner room. He also did not seem to be greatly enjoying the intellectual banquet within.

“I think you remember my friend and secretary, Mr Drummond,” said Lord Beaumont, turning to Grant, “even if you only remember him as a schoolboy.”
“Perfectly,” said the other. Mr Drummond shook hands pleasantly and respectfully, but the cloud was still on his brow. Turning to Sir Walter Cholmondeliegh, he said:

“I was sent by Lady Beaumont to express her hope that you were not going yet, Sir Walter. She says she has scarcely seen anything of you.”

The old gentleman, still red in the face, had a temporary internal struggle; then his good manners triumphed, and with a gesture of obeisance and a vague utterance of, “If Lady Beaumont . . . a lady, of course,” he followed the young man back into the salon. He had scarcely been deposited there half a minute before another peal of laughter told that he had (in all probability) been scored off again.

“Of course, I can excuse dear old Cholmondeliegh,” said Beaumont, as he helped us off with our coats. “He has not the modern mind.”

“What is the modern mind?” asked Grant.

“Oh, it’s enlightened, you know, and progressive—and faces the facts of life seriously.” At this moment another roar of laughter came from within.

“I only ask,” said Basil, “because of the last two friends of yours who had the modern mind; one thought it wrong to eat fishes and the other thought it right to eat men. I beg your pardon—this way, if I remember right.”

“Do you know,” said Lord Beaumont, with a sort of feverish entertainment, as he trotted after us towards the interior, “I can never quite make out which side you are on. Sometimes you seem so liberal and sometimes so reactionary. Are you a modern, Basil?”

“No,” said Basil, loudly and cheerfully, as he entered the crowded drawing-room.

This caused a slight diversion, and some eyes were turned away from our slim friend with the Oriental face for the first time that afternoon. Two people, however, still looked at him. One was the daughter of the house, Muriel Beaumont, who gazed at him with great violet eyes and with the intense and awful thirst of the female upper class for verbal amusement and stimulus. The other was Sir Walter Cholmondeliegh, who looked at him with a still and sullen but unmistakable desire to throw him out of the window.

He sat there, coiled rather than seated on the easy chair; everything from the curves of his smooth limbs to the coils of his silvered hair suggesting the circles of a serpent more than the straight limbs of a man—the unmistakable, splendid serpentine gentleman we had seen walking in North London, his eyes shining with repeated victory.
“What I can’t understand, Mr Wimpole,” said Muriel Beaumont eagerly, “is how you contrive to treat all this so easily. You say things quite philosophical and yet so wildly funny. If I thought of such things, I’m sure I should laugh outright when the thought first came.”

“I agree with Miss Beaumont,” said Sir Walter, suddenly exploding with indignation. “If I had thought of anything so futile, I should find it difficult to keep my countenance.”

“Difficult to keep your countenance,” cried Mr Wimpole, with an air of alarm; “oh, do keep your countenance! Keep it in the British Museum.”

Every one laughed uproariously, as they always do at an already admitted readiness, and Sir Walter, turning suddenly purple, shouted out:

“Do you know who you are talking to, with your confounded tomfooleries?”

“I never talk tomfooleries,” said the other, “without first knowing my audience.”

Grant walked across the room and tapped the red-moustached secretary on the shoulder. That gentleman was leaning against the wall regarding the whole scene with a great deal of gloom; but, I fancied, with very particular gloom when his eyes fell on the young lady of the house rapturously listening to Wimpole.

“May I have a word with you outside, Drummond?” asked Grant. “It is about business. Lady Beaumont will excuse us.”

I followed my friend, at his own request, greatly wondering, to this strange external interview. We passed abruptly into a kind of side room out of the hall.

“Drummond,” said Basil sharply, “there are a great many good people, and a great many sane people here this afternoon. Unfortunately, by a kind of coincidence, all the good people are mad, and all the sane people are wicked. You are the only person I know of here who is honest and has also some common sense. What do you make of Wimpole?”

Mr Secretary Drummond had a pale face and red hair; but at this his face became suddenly as red as his moustache.

“I am not a fair judge of him,” he said.

“Why not?” asked Grant.

“Because I hate him like hell,” said the other, after a long pause and violently. Neither Grant nor I needed to ask the reason; his glances towards Miss Beaumont and the stranger were sufficiently illuminating. Grant said quietly:

“But before—before you came to hate him, what did you really think of him?”

“I am in a terrible difficulty,” said the young man, and his voice told us, like a clear bell, that he was an honest man. “If I spoke about him as I feel about him
now, I could not trust myself. And I should like to be able to say that when I first saw him I thought he was charming. But again, the fact is I didn’t. I hate him, that is my private affair. But I also disapprove of him—really I do believe I disapprove of him quite apart from my private feelings. When first he came, I admit he was much quieter, but I did not like, so to speak, the moral swell of him. Then that jolly old Sir Walter Cholmondeliegh got introduced to us, and this fellow, with his cheap-jack wit, began to score off the old man in the way he does now. Then I felt that he must be a bad lot; it must be bad to fight the old and the kindly. And he fights the poor old chap savagely, unceasingly, as if he hated old age and kindliness. Take, if you want it, the evidence of a prejudiced witness. I admit that I hate the man because a certain person admires him. But I believe that apart from that I should hate the man because old Sir Walter hates him.”

This speech affected me with a genuine sense of esteem and pity for the young man; that is, of pity for him because of his obviously hopeless worship of Miss Beaumont, and of esteem for him because of the direct realistic account of the history of Wimpole which he had given. Still, I was sorry that he seemed so steadily set against the man, and could not help referring it to an instinct of his personal relations, however nobly disguised from himself.

In the middle of these meditations, Grant whispered in my ear what was perhaps the most startling of all interruptions.

“In the name of God, let’s get away.”

I have never known exactly in how odd a way this odd old man affected me. I only know that for some reason or other he so affected me that I was, within a few minutes, in the street outside.

“This,” he said, “is a beastly but amusing affair.”

“What is?” I asked, baldly enough.

“This affair. Listen to me, my old friend. Lord and Lady Beaumont have just invited you and me to a grand dinner-party this very night, at which Mr Wimpole will be in all his glory. Well, there is nothing very extraordinary about that. The extraordinary thing is that we are not going.”

“Well, really,” I said, “it is already six o’clock and I doubt if we could get home and dress. I see nothing extraordinary in the fact that we are not going.”

“Don’t you?” said Grant. “I’ll bet you’ll see something extraordinary in what we’re doing instead.”

I looked at him blankly.

“Doing instead?” I asked. “What are we doing instead?”
“Why,” said he, “we are waiting for one or two hours outside this house on a winter evening. You must forgive me; it is all my vanity. It is only to show you that I am right. Can you, with the assistance of this cigar, wait until both Sir Walter Cholmondeliegh and the mystic Wimpole have left this house?”

“Certainly,” I said. “But I do not know which is likely to leave first. Have you any notion?”

“No,” he said. “Sir Walter may leave first in a glow of rage. Or again, Mr Wimpole may leave first, feeling that his last epigram is a thing to be flung behind him like a firework. And Sir Walter may remain some time to analyse Mr Wimpole’s character. But they will both have to leave within reasonable time, for they will both have to get dressed and come back to dinner here tonight.”

As he spoke the shrill double whistle from the porch of the great house drew a dark cab to the dark portal. And then a thing happened that we really had not expected. Mr Wimpole and Sir Walter Cholmondeliegh came out at the same moment.

They paused for a second or two opposite each other in a natural doubt; then a certain geniality, fundamental perhaps in both of them, made Sir Walter smile and say: “The night is foggy. Pray take my cab.”

Before I could count twenty the cab had gone rattling up the street with both of them. And before I could count twenty-three Grant had hissed in my ear:

“Run after the cab; run as if you were running from a mad dog—run.”

We pelted on steadily, keeping the cab in sight, through dark mazy streets. God only, I thought, knows why we are running at all, but we are running hard. Fortunately we did not run far. The cab pulled up at the fork of two streets and Sir Walter paid the cabman, who drove away rejoicing, having just come in contact with the more generous among the rich. Then the two men talked together as men do talk together after giving and receiving great insults, the talk which leads either to forgiveness or a duel—at least so it seemed as we watched it from ten yards off. Then the two men shook hands heartily, and one went down one fork of the road and one down another.

Basil, with one of his rare gestures, flung his arms forward.

“Run after that scoundrel,” he cried; “let us catch him now.”

We dashed across the open space and reached the juncture of two paths.

“Stop!” I shouted wildly to Grant. “That’s the wrong turning.”

He ran on.

“Idiot!” I howled. “Sir Walter’s gone down there. Wimpole has slipped us. He’s half a mile down the other road. You’re wrong . . . Are you deaf? You’re
wrong!"
   “I don’t think I am,” he panted, and ran on.
   “But I saw him!” I cried. “Look in front of you. Is that Wimpole? It’s the old man . . . What are you doing? What are we to do?”
   “Keep running,” said Grant.
   Running soon brought us up to the broad back of the pompous old baronet, whose white whiskers shone silver in the fitful lamplight. My brain was utterly bewildered. I grasped nothing.
   “Charlie,” said Basil hoarsely, “can you believe in my common sense for four minutes?”
   “Of course,” I said, panting.
   “Then help me to catch that man in front and hold him down. Do it at once when I say ‘Now.’ Now!”
   We sprang on Sir Walter Cholmondeliegh, and rolled that portly old gentleman on his back. He fought with a commendable valour, but we got him tight. I had not the remotest notion why. He had a splendid and full-blooded vigour; when he could not box he kicked, and we bound him; when he could not kick he shouted, and we gagged him. Then, by Basil’s arrangement, we dragged him into a small court by the street side and waited. As I say, I had no notion why.
   “I am sorry to incommode you,” said Basil calmly out of the darkness; “but I have made an appointment here.”
   “An appointment!” I said blankly.
   “Yes,” he said, glancing calmly at the apoplectic old aristocrat gagged on the ground, whose eyes were starting impotently from his head. “I have made an appointment here with a thoroughly nice young fellow. An old friend. Jasper Drummond his name is—you may have met him this afternoon at the Beaumonts. He can scarcely come though till the Beaumonts’ dinner is over.”
   For I do not know how many hours we stood there calmly in the darkness. By the time those hours were over I had thoroughly made up my mind that the same thing had happened which had happened long ago on the bench of a British Court of Justice. Basil Grant had gone mad. I could imagine no other explanation of the facts, with the portly, purple-faced old country gentleman flung there strangled on the floor like a bundle of wood.
   After about four hours a lean figure in evening dress rushed into the court. A glimpse of gaslight showed the red moustache and white face of Jasper Drummond.
“Mr Grant,” he said blankly, “the thing is incredible. You were right; but what did you mean? All through this dinner-party, where dukes and duchesses and editors of Quarterlies had come especially to hear him, that extraordinary Wimpole kept perfectly silent. He didn’t say a funny thing. He didn’t say anything at all. What does it mean?”

Grant pointed to the portly old gentleman on the ground.

“That is what it means,” he said.

Drummond, on observing a fat gentleman lying so calmly about the place, jumped back, as from a mouse.

“What?” he said weakly, “. . . what?”

Basil bent suddenly down and tore a paper out of Sir Walter’s breastpocket, a paper which the baronet, even in his hampered state, seemed to make some effort to retain.

It was a large loose piece of white wrapping paper, which Mr Jasper Drummond read with a vacant eye and undisguised astonishment. As far as he could make out, it consisted of a series of questions and answers, or at least of remarks and replies, arranged in the manner of a catechism. The greater part of the document had been torn and obliterated in the struggle, but the termination remained. It ran as follows:

W. Keep . . . British Museum.
C. Know whom talk . . . absurdities.
W. Never talk absurdities without

“What is it?” cried Drummond, flinging the paper down in a sort of final fury.

“What is it?” replied Grant, his voice rising into a kind of splendid chant.

“What is it? It is a great new profession. A great new trade. A trifle immoral, I admit, but still great, like piracy.”

“A new profession!” said the young man with the red moustache vaguely; “a new trade!”

“A new trade,” repeated Grant, with a strange exultation, “a new profession! What a pity it is immoral.”

“But what the deuce is it?” cried Drummond and I in a breath of blasphemy.

“It is,” said Grant calmly, “the great new trade of the Organizer of Repartee. This fat old gentleman lying on the ground strikes you, as I have no doubt, as very stupid and very rich. Let me clear his character. He is, like ourselves, very clever and very poor. He is also not really at all fat; all that is stuffing. He is not particularly old, and his name is not Cholmondeliegh. He is a swindler, and a
swindler of a perfectly delightful and novel kind. He hires himself out at dinner-parties to lead up to other people’s repartees. According to a preconcerted scheme (which you may find on that piece of paper), he says the stupid things he has arranged for himself, and his client says the clever things arranged for him. In short, he allows himself to be scored off for a guinea a night.”

“And this fellow Wimpole—” began Drummond with indignation.

“This fellow Wimpole,” said Basil Grant, smiling, “will not be an intellectual rival in the future. He had some fine things, elegance and silvered hair, and so on. But the intellect is with our friend on the floor.”

“That fellow,” cried Drummond furiously, “that fellow ought to be in gaol.”

“Not at all,” said Basil indulgently; “he ought to be in the Club of Queer Trades.”
CHAPTER 3

THE AWFUL REASON OF THE VICAR’S VISIT

The revolt of Matter against Man (which I believe to exist) has now been reduced to a singular condition. It is the small things rather than the large things which make war against us and, I may add, beat us. The bones of the last mammoth have long ago decayed, a mighty wreck; the tempests no longer devour our navies, nor the mountains with hearts of fire heap hell over our cities. But we are engaged in a bitter and eternal war with small things; chiefly with microbes and with collar studs. The stud with which I was engaged (on fierce and equal terms) as I made the above reflections, was one which I was trying to introduce into my shirt collar when a loud knock came at the door.

My first thought was as to whether Basil Grant had called to fetch me. He and I were to turn up at the same dinner-party (for which I was in the act of dressing), and it might be that he had taken it into his head to come my way, though we had arranged to go separately. It was a small and confidential affair at the table of a good but unconventional political lady, an old friend of his. She had asked us both to meet a third guest, a Captain Fraser, who had made something of a name and was an authority on chimpanzees. As Basil was an old friend of the hostess and I had never seen her, I felt that it was quite possible that he (with his usual social sagacity) might have decided to take me along in order to break the ice. The theory, like all my theories, was complete; but as a fact it was not Basil.

I was handed a visiting card inscribed: “Rev. Ellis Shorter,” and underneath was written in pencil, but in a hand in which even hurry could not conceal a depressing and gentlemanly excellence, “Asking the favour of a few moments’ conversation on a most urgent matter.”!

I had already subdued the stud, thereby proclaiming that the image of God has supremacy over all matters (a valuable truth), and throwing on my dress-coat and waistcoat, hurried into the drawing-room. He rose at my entrance, flapping like a seal; I can use no other description. He flapped a plaid shawl over his right arm; he flapped a pair of pathetic black gloves; he flapped his clothes; I may say, without exaggeration, that he flapped his eyelids, as he rose. He was a bald-browed, white-haired, white-whiskered old clergyman, of a flappy and floppy type. He said:
“I am so sorry. I am so very sorry. I am so extremely sorry. I come—I can only say—I can only say in my defence, that I come—upon an important matter. Pray forgive me.”

I told him I forgave perfectly and waited.

“What I have to say,” he said brokenly, “is so dreadful—it is so dreadful—I have lived a quiet life.”

I was burning to get away, for it was already doubtful if I should be in time for dinner. But there was something about the old man’s honest air of bitterness that seemed to open to me the possibilities of life larger and more tragic than my own.

I said gently: “Pray go on.”

Nevertheless the old gentleman, being a gentleman as well as old, noticed my secret impatience and seemed still more unmanned.

“I’m so sorry,” he said meekly; “I wouldn’t have come—but for—your friend Major Brown recommended me to come here.”

“Major Brown!” I said, with some interest.

“Yes,” said the Reverend Mr Shorter, feverishly flapping his plaid shawl about. “He told me you helped him in a great difficulty—and my difficulty! Oh, my dear sir, it’s a matter of life and death.”

I rose abruptly, in an acute perplexity. “Will it take long, Mr Shorter?” I asked. “I have to go out to dinner almost at once.”

He rose also, trembling from head to foot, and yet somehow, with all his moral palsy, he rose to the dignity of his age and his office.

“I have no right, Mr Swinburne—I have no right at all,” he said. “If you have to go out to dinner, you have of course—a perfect right—of course a perfect right. But when you come back—a man will be dead.”

And he sat down, quaking like a jelly.

The triviality of the dinner had been in those two minutes dwarfed and drowned in my mind. I did not want to go and see a political widow, and a captain who collected apes; I wanted to hear what had brought this dear, doddering old vicar into relation with immediate perils.

“Will you have a cigar?” I said.

“No, thank you,” he said, with indescribable embarrassment, as if not smoking cigars was a social disgrace.

“A glass of wine?” I said.

“No, thank you, no, thank you; not just now,” he repeated with that hysterical eagerness with which people who do not drink at all often try to convey that on
any other night of the week they would sit up all night drinking rum-punch. “Not just now, thank you.”

“Nothing else I can get for you?” I said, feeling genuinely sorry for the well-mannered old donkey. “A cup of tea?”

I saw a struggle in his eye and I conquered. When the cup of tea came he drank it like a dipsomaniac gulping brandy. Then he fell back and said:

“I have had such a time, Mr Swinburne. I am not used to these excitements. As Vicar of Chuntsey, in Essex’—he threw this in with an indescribable airiness of vanity—‘I have never known such things happen.”

“What things happen?” I asked.

He straightened himself with sudden dignity.

“As Vicar of Chuntsey, in Essex,” he said, “I have never been forcibly dressed up as an old woman and made to take part in a crime in the character of an old woman. Never once. My experience may be small. It may be insufficient. But it has never occurred to me before.”

“I have never heard of it,” I said, “as among the duties of a clergyman. But I am not well up in church matters. Excuse me if perhaps I failed to follow you correctly. Dressed up—as what?”

“As an old woman,” said the vicar solemnly, “as an old woman.”

I thought in my heart that it required no great transformation to make an old woman of him, but the thing was evidently more tragic than comic, and I said respectfully:

“May I ask how it occurred?”

“I will begin at the beginning,” said Mr Shorter, “and I will tell my story with the utmost possible precision. At seventeen minutes past eleven this morning I left the vicarage to keep certain appointments and pay certain visits in the village. My first visit was to Mr Jervis, the treasurer of our League of Christian Amusements, with whom I concluded some business touching the claim made by Parkes the gardener in the matter of the rolling of our tennis lawn. I then visited Mrs Arnett, a very earnest churchwoman, but permanently bedridden. She is the author of several small works of devotion, and of a book of verse, entitled (unless my memory misleads me) Eglantine.”

He uttered all this not only with deliberation, but with something that can only be called, by a contradictory phrase, eager deliberation. He had, I think, a vague memory in his head of the detectives in the detective stories, who always sternly require that nothing should be kept back.

“I then proceeded,” he went on, with the same maddening conscientiousness
of manner, “to Mr Carr (not Mr James Carr, of course; Mr Robert Carr) who is temporarily assisting our organist, and having consulted with him (on the subject of a choir boy who is accused, I cannot as yet say whether justly or not, of cutting holes in the organ pipes), I finally dropped in upon a Dorcas meeting at the house of Miss Brett. The Dorcas meetings are usually held at the vicarage, but my wife being unwell, Miss Brett, a newcomer in our village, but very active in church work, had very kindly consented to hold them. The Dorcas society is entirely under my wife’s management as a rule, and except for Miss Brett, who, as I say, is very active, I scarcely know any members of it. I had, however, promised to drop in on them, and I did so.

“When I arrived there were only four other maiden ladies with Miss Brett, but they were sewing very busily. It is very difficult, of course, for any person, however strongly impressed with the necessity in these matters of full and exact exposition of the facts, to remember and repeat the actual details of a conversation, particularly a conversation which (though inspired with a most worthy and admirable zeal for good work) was one which did not greatly impress the hearer’s mind at the time and was in fact—er—mostly about socks. I can, however, remember distinctly that one of the spinster ladies (she was a thin person with a woollen shawl, who appeared to feel the cold, and I am almost sure she was introduced to me as Miss James) remarked that the weather was very changeable. Miss Brett then offered me a cup of tea, which I accepted, I cannot recall in what words. Miss Brett is a short and stout lady with white hair. The only other figure in the group that caught my attention was a Miss Mowbray, a small and neat lady of aristocratic manners, silver hair, and a high voice and colour. She was the most emphatic member of the party; and her views on the subject of pinafores, though expressed with a natural deference to myself, were in themselves strong and advanced. Beside her (although all five ladies were dressed simply in black) it could not be denied that the others looked in some way what you men of the world would call dowdy.

“After about ten minutes’ conversation I rose to go, and as I did so I heard something which—I cannot describe it—something which seemed to—but I really cannot describe it.”

“What did you hear?” I asked, with some impatience.

“I heard,” said the vicar solemnly, “I heard Miss Mowbray (the lady with the silver hair) say to Miss James (the lady with the woollen shawl), the following extraordinary words. I committed them to memory on the spot, and as soon as circumstances set me free to do so, I noted them down on a piece of paper. I
believe I have it here.” He fumbled in his breast-pocket, bringing out mild things, note-books, circulars and programmes of village concerts. “I heard Miss Mowbray say to Miss James, the following words: ‘Now’s your time, Bill.’”

He gazed at me for a few moments after making this announcement, gravely and unflinchingly, as if conscious that here he was unshaken about his facts. Then he resumed, turning his bald head more towards the fire.

“This appeared to me remarkable. I could not by any means understand it. It seemed to me first of all peculiar that one maiden lady should address another maiden lady as ‘Bill.’ My experience, as I have said, may be incomplete; maiden ladies may have among themselves and in exclusively spinster circles wilder customs than I am aware of. But it seemed to me odd, and I could almost have sworn (if you will not misunderstand the phrase), I should have been strongly impelled to maintain at the time that the words, ‘Now’s your time, Bill,’ were by no means pronounced with that upper-class intonation which, as I have already said, had up to now characterized Miss Mowbray’s conversation. In fact, the words, ‘Now’s your time, Bill,’ would have been, I fancy, unsuitable if pronounced with that upper-class intonation.

“I was surprised, I repeat, then, at the remark. But I was still more surprised when, looking round me in bewilderment, my hat and umbrella in hand, I saw the lean lady with the woollen shawl leaning upright against the door out of which I was just about to make my exit. She was still knitting, and I supposed that this erect posture against the door was only an eccentricity of spinsterhood and an oblivion of my intended departure.

“I said genially, ‘I am so sorry to disturb you, Miss James, but I must really be going. I have—er—’ I stopped here, for the words she had uttered in reply, though singularly brief and in tone extremely business-like, were such as to render that arrest of my remarks, I think, natural and excusable. I have these words also noted down. I have not the least idea of their meaning; so I have only been able to render them phonetically. But she said,” and Mr Shorter peered short-sightedly at his papers, “she said: ‘Chuck it, fat ‘ead,’ and she added something that sounded like ‘It’s a kop,’ or (possibly) ‘a kopt.’ And then the last cord, either of my sanity or the sanity of the universe, snapped suddenly. My esteemed friend and helper, Miss Brett, standing by the mantelpiece, said: ‘Put ‘is old ‘ead in a bag, Sam, and tie ‘im up before you start jawin.’ You’ll be kopt yourselves some o’ these days with this way of coin’ things, har lar theater.’

“My head went round and round. Was it really true, as I had suddenly fancied a moment before, that unmarried ladies had some dreadful riotous society of
their own from which all others were excluded? I remembered dimly in my classical days (I was a scholar in a small way once, but now, alas! rusty), I remembered the mysteries of the Bona Dea and their strange female freemasonry. I remembered the witches’ Sabbaths. I was just, in my absurd lightheadedness, trying to remember a line of verse about Diana’s nymphs, when Miss Mowbray threw her arm round me from behind. The moment it held me I knew it was not a woman’s arm.

“Miss Brett—or what I had called Miss Brett—was standing in front of me with a big revolver in her hand and a broad grin on her face. Miss James was still leaning against the door, but had fallen into an attitude so totally new, and so totally unfeminine, that it gave one a shock. She was kicking her heels, with her hands in her pockets and her cap on one side. She was a man. I mean he was a wo—no, that is I saw that instead of being a woman she—he, I mean—that is, it was a man.”

Mr Shorter became indescribably flurried and flapping in endeavouring to arrange these genders and his plaid shawl at the same time. He resumed with a higher fever of nervousness:

“As for Miss Mowbray, she—he, held me in a ring of iron. He had her arm—that is she had his arm—round her neck—my neck I mean—and I could not cry out. Miss Brett—that is, Mr Brett, at least Mr something who was not Miss Brett—had the revolver pointed at me. The other two ladies—or er—gentlemen, were rummaging in some bag in the background. It was all clear at last: they were criminals dressed up as women, to kidnap me! To kidnap the Vicar of Chuntsey, in Essex. But why? Was it to be Nonconformists?

“The brute leaning against the door called out carelessly, ‘Urry up, ‘Arry. Show the old bloke what the game is, and let’s get off.’

“‘Curse ‘is eyes,’ said Miss Brett—I mean the man with the revolver—‘why should we show ‘im the game?’

“‘If you take my advice you bloomin’ well will,’ said the man at the door, whom they called Bill. ‘A man wot knows wet ‘e’s doin’ is worth ten wot don’t, even if ‘e’s a potty old parson.’

“‘Bill’s right enough,’ said the coarse voice of the man who held me (it had been Miss Mowbray’s), ‘Bring out the picture, ‘Arry.’

“The man with the revolver walked across the room to where the other two women—I mean men—were turning over baggage, and asked them for something which they gave him. He came back with it across the room and held it out in front of me. And compared to the surprise of that display, all the
previous surprises of this awful day shrank suddenly.

“It was a portrait of myself. That such a picture should be in the hands of these scoundrels might in any case have caused a mild surprise; but no more. It was no mild surprise that I felt. The likeness was an extremely good one, worked up with all the accessories of the conventional photographic studio. I was leaning my head on my hand and was relieved against a painted landscape of woodland. It was obvious that it was no snapshot; it was clear that I had sat for this photograph. And the truth was that I had never sat for such a photograph. It was a photograph that I had never had taken.

“I stared at it again and again. It seemed to me to be touched up a good deal; it was glazed as well as framed, and the glass blurred some of the details. But there unmistakably was my face, my eyes, my nose and mouth, my head and hand, posed for a professional photographer. And I had never posed so for any photographer.

“'Be’old the bloomin’ miracle,’ said the man with the revolver, with ill-timed facetiousness. ‘Parson, prepare to meet your God.’ And with this he slid the glass out of the frame. As the glass moved, I saw that part of the picture was painted on it in Chinese white, notably a pair of white whiskers and a clerical collar. And underneath was a portrait of an old lady in a quiet black dress, leaning her head on her hand against the woodland landscape. The old lady was as like me as one pin is like another. It had required only the whiskers and the collar to make it me in every hair.

“'Entertainin,’ ain’t it?’ said the man described as ‘Arry, as he shot the glass back again. ‘Remarkable resemblance, parson. Gratifyin’ to the lady. Gratifyin’ to you. And hi may hadd, particlery gratifyin’ to us, as bein’ the probable source of a very tolerable haul. You know Colonel Hawker, the man who’s come to live in these parts, don’t you?’

“I nodded.

“'Well,’ said the man ‘Arry, pointing to the picture, ‘that’s ‘is mother. ‘Oo ran to catch ‘im when ‘e fell? She did,’ and he flung his fingers in a general gesture towards the photograph of the old lady who was exactly like me.

“'Tell the old gent wot ‘e’s got to do and be done with it,’ broke out Bill from the door. ‘Look ‘ere, Reverend Shorter, we ain’t goin’ to do you no ‘arm. We’ll give you a sov. for your trouble if you like. And as for the old woman’s clothes —why, you’ll look lovely in ’em.’

“'You ain’t much of a ‘and at a description, Bill,’ said the man behind me. ‘Mr Shorter, it’s like this. We’ve got to see this man Hawker tonight. Maybe
‘e’ll kiss us all and ‘ave up the champagne when ‘e sees us. Maybe on the other ‘and—‘e won’t. Maybe ‘e’ll be dead when we goes away. Maybe not. But we’ve got to see ‘im. Now as you know, ‘e shuts ‘isself up and never opens the door to a soul; only you don’t know why and we does. The only one as can ever get at ‘im is ‘is mother. Well, it’s a confounded funny coincidence,’ he said, accenting the penultimate, ‘it’s a very unusual piece of good luck, but you’re ‘is mother.’

“‘When first I saw ‘er picture,’ said the man Bill, shaking his head in a ruminant manner, ‘when I first saw it I said—old Shorter. Those were my exact words—old Shorter.’

“‘What do you mean, you wild creatures?’ I gasped. ‘What am I to do?’

“‘That’s easy said, your ‘oldness,’ said the man with the revolver, good-humouredly; ‘you’ve got to put on those clothes,’ and he pointed to a poke-bonnet and a heap of female clothes in the corner of the room.

“I will not dwell, Mr Swinburne, upon the details of what followed. I had no choice. I could not fight five men, to say nothing of a loaded pistol. In five minutes, sir, the Vicar of Chuntsey was dressed as an old woman—as somebody else’s mother, if you please—and was dragged out of the house to take part in a crime.

“It was already late in the afternoon, and the nights of winter were closing in fast. On a dark road, in a blowing wind, we set out towards the lonely house of Colonel Hawker, perhaps the queerest cortege that ever straggled up that or any other road. To every human eye, in every external, we were six very respectable old ladies of small means, in black dresses and refined but antiquated bonnets; and we were really five criminals and a clergyman.

“I will cut a long story short. My brain was whirling like a windmill as I walked, trying to think of some manner of escape. To cry out, so long as we were far from houses, would be suicidal, for it would be easy for the ruffians to knife me or to gag me and fling me into a ditch. On the other hand, to attempt to stop strangers and explain the situation was impossible, because of the frantic folly of the situation itself. Long before I had persuaded the chance postman or carrier of so absurd a story, my companions would certainly have got off themselves, and in all probability would have carried me off, as a friend of theirs who had the misfortune to be mad or drunk. The last thought, however, was an inspiration; though a very terrible one. Had it come to this, that the Vicar of Chuntsey must pretend to be mad or drunk? It had come to this.

“I walked along with the rest up the deserted road, imitating and keeping pace, as far as I could, with their rapid and yet lady-like step, until at length I saw a
lamp-post and a policeman standing under it. I had made up my mind. Until we reached them we were all equally demure and silent and swift. When we reached them I suddenly flung myself against the railings and roared out: ‘Hooray! Hooray! Hooray! Rule Britannia! Get your ‘air cut. Hoop-la! Boo!’ It was a condition of no little novelty for a man in my position.

“The constable instantly flashed his lantern on me, or the draggled, drunken old woman that was my travesty. ‘Now then, mum,’ he began gruffly.

‘Come along quiet, or I’ll eat your heart,’ cried Sam in my ear hoarsely. ‘Stop, or I’ll flay you.’ It was frightful to hear the words and see the neatly shawled old spinster who whispered them.

“I yelled, and yelled—I was in for it now. I screamed comic refrains that vulgar young men had sung, to my regret, at our village concerts; I rolled to and fro like a ninepin about to fall.

“If you can’t get your friend on quiet, ladies,’ said the policeman, ‘I shall have to take ‘er up. Drunk and disorderly she is right enough.’

“I redoubled my efforts. I had not been brought up to this sort of thing; but I believe I eclipsed myself. Words that I did not know I had ever heard of seemed to come pouring out of my open mouth.

“When we get you past,’ whispered Bill, ‘you’ll howl louder; you’ll howl louder when we’re burning your feet off.’

“I screamed in my terror those awful songs of joy. In all the nightmares that men have ever dreamed, there has never been anything so blighting and horrible as the faces of those five men, looking out of their poke-bonnets; the figures of district visitors with the faces of devils. I cannot think there is anything so heart-breaking in hell.

“For a sickening instant I thought that the bustle of my companions and the perfect respectability of all our dresses would overcome the policeman and induce him to let us pass. He wavered, so far as one can describe anything so solid as a policeman as wavering. I lurched suddenly forward and ran my head into his chest, calling out (if I remember correctly), ‘Oh, crikey, blimey, Bill.’ It was at that moment that I remembered most dearly that I was the Vicar of Chuntsey, in Essex.

“My desperate coup saved me. The policeman had me hard by the back of the neck.

‘You come along with me,’ he began, but Bill cut in with his perfect imitation of a lady’s finnicking voice.

“Oh, pray, constable, don’t make a disturbance with our poor friend. We will
get her quietly home. She does drink too much, but she is quite a lady—only eccentric.’

‘She butted me in the stomach,’ said the policeman briefly.

‘Eccentricities of genius,’ said Sam earnestly.

‘Pray let me take her home,’ reiterated Bill, in the resumed character of Miss James, ‘she wants looking after.’ ‘She does,’ said the policeman, ‘but I’ll look after her.’

‘That’s no good,’ cried Bill feverishly. ‘She wants her friends. She wants a particular medicine we’ve got.’

‘Yes,’ assented Miss Mowbray, with excitement, ‘no other medicine any good, constable. Complaint quite unique.’

‘I’m all righ.’ Cutchy, cutchy, coo!’ remarked, to his eternal shame, the Vicar of Chuntsey.

‘Look here, ladies,’ said the constable sternly, ‘I don’t like the eccentricity of your friend, and I don’t like ‘er songs, or ‘er ‘ead in my stomach. And now I come to think of it, I don’t like the looks of you I’ve seen many as quiet dressed as you as was wrong ‘uns. Who are you?’

‘We’ve not our cards with us,’ said Miss Mowbray, with indescribable dignity. ‘Nor do we see why we should be insulted by any Jack-in-office who chooses to be rude to ladies, when he is paid to protect them. If you choose to take advantage of the weakness of our unfortunate friend, no doubt you are legally entitled to take her. But if you fancy you have any legal right to bully us, you will find yourself in the wrong box.’

‘The truth and dignity of this staggered the policeman for a moment. Under cover of their advantage my five persecutors turned for an instant on me faces like faces of the damned and then swished off into the darkness. When the constable first turned his lantern and his suspicions on to them, I had seen the telegraphic look flash from face to face saying that only retreat was possible now.

‘By this time I was sinking slowly to the pavement, in a state of acute reflection. So long as the ruffians were with me, I dared not quit the role of drunkard. For if I had begun to talk reasonably and explain the real case, the officer would merely have thought that I was slightly recovered and would have put me in charge of my friends. Now, however, if I liked I might safely undeceive him.

‘But I confess I did not like. The chances of life are many, and it may doubtless sometimes lie in the narrow path of duty for a clergyman of the
Church of England to pretend to be a drunken old woman; but such necessities are, I imagine, sufficiently rare to appear to many improbable. Suppose the story got about that I had pretended to be drunk. Suppose people did not all think it was pretence!

“I lurched up, the policeman half-lifting me. I went along weakly and quietly for about a hundred yards. The officer evidently thought that I was too sleepy and feeble to effect an escape, and so held me lightly and easily enough. Past one turning, two turnings, three turnings, four turnings, he trailed me with him, a limp and slow and reluctant figure. At the fourth turning, I suddenly broke from his hand and tore down the street like a maddened stag. He was unprepared, he was heavy, and it was dark. I ran and ran and ran, and in five minutes’ running, found I was gaining. In half an hour I was out in the fields under the holy and blessed stars, where I tore off my accursed shawl and bonnet and buried them in clean earth.”

The old gentleman had finished his story and leant back in his chair. Both the matter and the manner of his narration had, as time went on, impressed me favourably. He was an old duffer and pedant, but behind these things he was a country-bred man and gentleman, and had showed courage and a sporting instinct in the hour of desperation. He had told his story with many quaint formalities of diction, but also with a very convincing realism.

“And now—” I began.

“And now,” said Shorter, leaning forward again with something like servile energy, “and now, Mr Swinburne, what about that unhappy man Hawker. I cannot tell what those men meant, or how far what they said was real. But surely there is danger. I cannot go to the police, for reasons that you perceive. Among other things, they wouldn’t believe me. What is to be done?”

I took out my watch. It was already half past twelve.

“My friend Basil Grant,” I said, “is the best man we can go to. He and I were to have gone to the same dinner tonight; but he will just have come back by now. Have you any objection to taking a cab?”

“Not at all,” he replied, rising politely, and gathering up his absurd plaid shawl.

A rattle in a hansom brought us underneath the sombre pile of workmen’s flats in Lambeth which Grant inhabited; a climb up a wearisome wooden staircase brought us to his garret. When I entered that wooden and scrappy interior, the white gleam of Basil’s shirt-front and the lustre of his fur coat flung on the wooden settle, struck me as a contrast. He was drinking a glass of wine before
retiring. I was right; he had come back from the dinner-party.

He listened to the repetition of the story of the Rev. Ellis Shorter with the genuine simplicity and respect which he never failed to exhibit in dealing with any human being. When it was over he said simply:

“Do you know a man named Captain Fraser?”

I was so startled at this totally irrelevant reference to the worthy collector of chimpanzees with whom I ought to have dined that evening, that I glanced sharply at Grant. The result was that I did not look at Mr Shorter. I only heard him answer, in his most nervous tone, “No.”

Basil, however, seemed to find something very curious about his answer or his demeanour generally, for he kept his big blue eyes fixed on the old clergyman, and though the eyes were quite quiet they stood out more and more from his head.

“You are quite sure, Mr Shorter,” he repeated, “that you don’t know Captain Fraser?”

“Quite,” answered the vicar, and I was certainly puzzled to find him returning so much to the timidity, not to say the demoralization, of his tone when he first entered my presence.

Basil sprang smartly to his feet.

“Then our course is clear,” he said. “You have not even begun your investigation, my dear Mr Shorter; the first thing for us to do is to go together to see Captain Fraser.”

“When?” asked the clergyman, stammering.

“Now,” said Basil, putting one arm in his fur coat.

The old clergyman rose to his feet, quaking all over.

“I really do not think that it is necessary,” he said.

Basil took his arm out of the fur coat, threw it over the chair again, and put his hands in his pockets.

“Oh,” he said, with emphasis. “Oh—you don’t think it necessary; then,” and he added the words with great clearness and deliberation, “then, Mr Ellis Shorter, I can only say that I would like to see you without your whiskers.”

And at these words I also rose to my feet, for the great tragedy of my life had come. Splendid and exciting as life was in continual contact with an intellect like Basil’s, I had always the feeling that that splendour and excitement were on the borderland of sanity. He lived perpetually near the vision of the reason of things which makes men lose their reason. And I felt of his insanity as men feel of the death of friends with heart disease. It might come anywhere, in a field, in a
hansom cab, looking at a sunset, smoking a cigarette. It had come now. At the very moment of delivering a judgement for the salvation of a fellow creature, Basil Grant had gone mad.

“Your whiskers,” he cried, advancing with blazing eyes. “Give me your whiskers. And your bald head.”

The old vicar naturally retreated a step or two. I stepped between.

“Sit down, Basil,” I implored, “you’re a little excited. Finish your wine.”

“Whiskers,” he answered sternly, “whiskers.”

And with that he made a dash at the old gentleman, who made a dash for the door, but was intercepted. And then, before I knew where I was the quiet room was turned into something between a pantomime and a pandemonium by those two. Chairs were flung over with a crash, tables were vaulted with a noise like thunder, screens were smashed, crockery scattered in smithereens, and still Basil Grant bounded and bellowed after the Rev. Ellis Shorter.

And now I began to perceive something else, which added the last half-witted touch to my mystification. The Rev. Ellis Shorter, of Chuntsey, in Essex, was by no means behaving as I had previously noticed him to behave, or as, considering his age and station, I should have expected him to behave. His power of dodging, leaping, and fighting would have been amazing in a lad of seventeen, and in this doddering old vicar looked like a sort of farcical fairy-tale. Moreover, he did not seem to be so much astonished as I had thought. There was even a look of something like enjoyment in his eyes; so there was in the eye of Basil. In fact, the unintelligible truth must be told. They were both laughing.

At length Shorter was cornered.

“Come, come, Mr Grant,” he panted, “you can’t do anything to me. It’s quite legal. And it doesn’t do any one the least harm. It’s only a social fiction. A result of our complex society, Mr Grant.”

“I don’t blame you, my man,” said Basil coolly. “But I want your whiskers. And your bald head. Do they belong to Captain Fraser?”

“No, no,” said Mr Shorter, laughing, “we provide them ourselves. They don’t belong to Captain Fraser.”

“What the deuce does all this mean?” I almost screamed. “Are you all in an infernal nightmare? Why should Mr Shorter’s bald head belong to Captain Fraser? How could it? What the deuce has Captain Fraser to do with the affair? What is the matter with him? You dined with him, Basil.”

“No,” said Grant, “I didn’t.”

“Didn’t you go to Mrs Thornton’s dinner-party?” I asked, staring. “Why not?”
“Well,” said Basil, with a slow and singular smile, “the fact is I was detained by a visitor. I have him, as a point of fact, in my bedroom.”

“In your bedroom?” I repeated; but my imagination had reached that point when he might have said in his coal scuttle or his waistcoat pocket.

Grant stepped to the door of an inner room, flung it open and walked in. Then he came out again with the last of the bodily wonders of that wild night. He introduced into the sitting-room, in an apologetic manner, and by the nape of the neck, a limp clergyman with a bald head, white whiskers and a plaid shawl.

“Sit down, gentlemen,” cried Grant, striking his hands heartily. “Sit down all of you and have a glass of wine. As you say, there is no harm in it, and if Captain Fraser had simply dropped me a hint I could have saved him from dropping a good sum of money. Not that you would have liked that, eh?”

The two duplicate clergymen, who were sipping their Burgundy with two duplicate grins, laughed heartily at this, and one of them carelessly pulled off his whiskers and laid them on the table.

“Basil,” I said, “if you are my friend, save me. What is all this?”

He laughed again.

“Only another addition, Cherub, to your collection of Queer Trades. These two gentlemen (whose health I have now the pleasure of drinking) are Professional Detainers.”

“And what on earth’s that?” I asked.

“It’s really very simple, Mr Swinburne,” began he who had once been the Rev. Ellis Shorter, of Chuntsey, in Essex; and it gave me a shock indescribable to hear out of that pompous and familiar form come no longer its own pompous and familiar voice, but the brisk sharp tones of a young city man. “It is really nothing very important. We are paid by our clients to detain in conversation, on some harmless pretext, people whom they want out of the way for a few hours. And Captain Fraser—” and with that he hesitated and smiled.

Basil smiled also. He intervened.

“The fact is that Captain Fraser, who is one of my best friends, wanted us both out of the way very much. He is sailing tonight for East Africa, and the lady with whom we were all to have dined is—er—what is I believe described as ‘the romance of his life.’ He wanted that two hours with her, and employed these two reverend gentlemen to detain us at our houses so as to let him have the field to himself.”

“And of course,” said the late Mr Shorter apologetically to me, “as I had to keep a gentleman at home from keeping an appointment with a lady, I had to
come with something rather hot and strong—rather urgent. It wouldn’t have done to be tame.”

“Oh,” I said, “I acquit you of tameness.”

“Thank you, sir,” said the man respectfully, “always very grateful for any recommendation, sir.”

The other man idly pushed back his artificial bald head, revealing close red hair, and spoke dreamily, perhaps under the influence of Basil’s admirable Burgundy.

“It’s wonderful how common it’s getting, gentlemen. Our office is busy from morning till night. I’ve no doubt you’ve often knocked up against us before. You just take notice. When an old bachelor goes on boring you with hunting stories, when you’re burning to be introduced to somebody, he’s from our bureau. When a lady calls on parish work and stops hours, just when you wanted to go to the Robinsons,’ she’s from our bureau. The Robinson hand, sir, may be darkly seen.”

“There is one thing I don’t understand,” I said. “Why you are both vicars.”

A shade crossed the brow of the temporary incumbent of Chuntsey, in Essex.

“That may have been a mistake, sir,” he said. “But it was not our fault. It was all the munificence of Captain Fraser. He requested that the highest price and talent on our tariff should be employed to detain you gentlemen. Now the highest payment in our office goes to those who impersonate vicars, as being the most respectable and more of a strain. We are paid five guineas a visit. We have had the good fortune to satisfy the firm with our work; and we are now permanently vicars. Before that we had two years as colonels, the next in our scale. Colonels are four guineas.”
CHAPTER 4

THE SINGULAR SPECULATION OF THE HOUSE-AGENT

Lieutenant Drummond Keith was a man about whom conversation always burst like a thunderstorm the moment he left the room. This arose from many separate touches about him. He was a light, loose person, who wore light, loose clothes, generally white, as if he were in the tropics; he was lean and graceful, like a panther, and he had restless black eyes.

He was very impecunious. He had one of the habits of the poor, in a degree so exaggerated as immeasurably to eclipse the most miserable of the unemployed; I mean the habit of continual change of lodgings. There are inland tracts of London where, in the very heart of artificial civilization, humanity has almost become nomadic once more. But in that restless interior there was no ragged tramp so restless as the elegant officer in the loose white clothes. He had shot a great many things in his time, to judge from his conversation, from partridges to elephants, but his slangier acquaintances were of opinion that “the moon” had been not unfrequently amid the victims of his victorious rifle. The phrase is a fine one, and suggests a mystic, elvish, nocturnal hunting.

He carried from house to house and from parish to parish a kit which consisted practically of five articles. Two odd-looking, large-bladed spears, tied together, the weapons, I suppose, of some savage tribe, a green umbrella, a huge and tattered copy of the Pickwick Papers, a big game rifle, and a large sealed jar of some unholy Oriental wine. These always went into every new lodging, even for one night; and they went in quite undisguised, tied up in wisps of string or straw, to the delight of the poetic gutter boys in the little grey streets.

I had forgotten to mention that he always carried also his old regimental sword. But this raised another odd question about him. Slim and active as he was, he was no longer very young. His hair, indeed, was quite grey, though his rather wild almost Italian moustache retained its blackness, and his face was careworn under its almost Italian gaiety. To find a middle-aged man who has left the Army at the primitive rank of lieutenant is unusual and not necessarily encouraging. With the more cautious and solid this fact, like his endless flitting, did the mysterious gentleman no good.

Lastly, he was a man who told the kind of adventures which win a man admiration, but not respect. They came out of queer places, where a good man
would scarcely find himself, out of opium dens and gambling hells; they had the heat of the thieves’ kitchens or smelled of a strange smoke from cannibal incantations. These are the kind of stories which discredit a person almost equally whether they are believed or no. If Keith’s tales were false he was a liar; if they were true he had had, at any rate, every opportunity of being a scamp.

He had just left the room in which I sat with Basil Grant and his brother Rupert, the voluble amateur detective. And as I say was invariably the case, we were all talking about him. Rupert Grant was a clever young fellow, but he had that tendency which youth and cleverness, when sharply combined, so often produce, a somewhat extravagant scepticism. He saw doubt and guilt everywhere, and it was meat and drink to him. I had often got irritated with this boyish incredulity of his, but on this particular occasion I am bound to say that I thought him so obviously right that I was astounded at Basil’s opposing him, however banteringly.

I could swallow a good deal, being naturally of a simple turn, but I could not swallow Lieutenant Keith’s autobiography.

“You don’t seriously mean, Basil,” I said, “that you think that that fellow really did go as a stowaway with Nansen and pretend to be the Mad Mullah and __”

“He has one fault,” said Basil thoughtfully, “or virtue, as you may happen to regard it. He tells the truth in too exact and bald a style; he is too veracious.”

“Oh! if you are going to be paradoxical,” said Rupert contemptuously, “be a bit funnier than that. Say, for instance, that he has lived all his life in one ancestral manor.”

“No, he’s extremely fond of change of scene,” replied Basil dispassionately, “and of living in odd places. That doesn’t prevent his chief trait being verbal exactitude. What you people don’t understand is that telling a thing crudely and coarsely as it happened makes it sound frightfully strange. The sort of things Keith recounts are not the sort of things that a man would make up to cover himself with honour; they are too absurd. But they are the sort of things that a man would do if he were sufficiently filled with the soul of skylarking.”

“So far from paradox,” said his brother, with something rather like a sneer, “you seem to be going in for journalese proverbs. Do you believe that truth is stranger than fiction?”

“Truth must of necessity be stranger than fiction,” said Basil placidly. “For fiction is the creation of the human mind, and therefore is congenial to it.”

“Well, your lieutenant’s truth is stranger, if it is truth, than anything I ever
heard of,” said Rupert, relapsing into flippancy. “Do you, on your soul, believe in all that about the shark and the camera?”

“I believe Keith’s words,” answered the other. “He is an honest man.”

“I should like to question a regiment of his landladies,” said Rupert cynically.

“I must say, I think you can hardly regard him as unimpeachable merely in himself,” I said mildly; “his mode of life—”

Before I could complete the sentence the door was flung open and Drummond Keith appeared again on the threshold, his white Panama on his head.

“I say, Grant,” he said, knocking off his cigarette ash against the door, “I’ve got no money in the world till next April. Could you lend me a hundred pounds? There’s a good chap.”

Rupert and I looked at each other in an ironical silence. Basil, who was sitting by his desk, swung the chair round idly on its screw and picked up a quill-pen.

“Shall I cross it?” he asked, opening a cheque-book.

“Really,” began Rupert, with a rather nervous loudness, “since Lieutenant Keith has seen fit to make this suggestion to Basil before his family, I—”

“Here you are, Ugly,” said Basil, fluttering a cheque in the direction of the quite nonchalant officer. “Are you in a hurry?”

“Yes,” replied Keith, in a rather abrupt way. “As a matter of fact I want it now. I want to see my—er—business man.”

Rupert was eyeing him sarcastically, and I could see that it was on the tip of his tongue to say, inquiringly, “Receiver of stolen goods, perhaps.” What he did say was:

“A business man? That’s rather a general description, Lieutenant Keith.”

Keith looked at him sharply, and then said, with something rather like ill-temper:

“He’s a thingum-my Bob, a house-agent, say. I’m going to see him.”

“Oh, you’re going to see a house-agent, are you?” said Rupert Grant grimly.

“Do you know, Mr Keith, I think I should very much like to go with you?”

Basil shook with his soundless laughter. Lieutenant Keith started a little; his brow blackened sharply.

“I beg your pardon,” he said. “What did you say?”

Rupert’s face had been growing from stage to stage of ferocious irony, and he answered:

“I was saying that I wondered whether you would mind our strolling along with you to this house-agent’s.”

The visitor swung his stick with a sudden whirling violence.
“Oh, in God’s name, come to my house-agent’s! Come to my bedroom. Look under my bed. Examine my dust-bin. Come along!” And with a furious energy which took away our breath he banged his way out of the room.

Rupert Grant, his restless blue eyes dancing with his detective excitement, soon shouldered alongside him, talking to him with that transparent camaraderie which he imagined to be appropriate from the disguised policeman to the disguised criminal. His interpretation was certainly corroborated by one particular detail, the unmistakable unrest, annoyance, and nervousness of the man with whom he walked. Basil and I tramped behind, and it was not necessary for us to tell each other that we had both noticed this.

Lieutenant Drummond Keith led us through very extraordinary and unpromising neighbourhoods in the search for his remarkable house-agent. Neither of the brothers Grant failed to notice this fact. As the streets grew closer and more crooked and the roofs lower and the gutters grosser with mud, a darker curiosity deepened on the brows of Basil, and the figure of Rupert seen from behind seemed to fill the street with a gigantic swagger of success. At length, at the end of the fourth or fifth lean grey street in that sterile district, we came suddenly to a halt, the mysterious lieutenant looking once more about him with a sort of sulky desperation. Above a row of shutters and a door, all indescribably dingy in appearance and in size scarce sufficient even for a penny toyshop, ran the inscription: “P. Montmorency, House-Agent.”

“This is the office of which I spoke,” said Keith, in a cutting voice. “Will you wait here a moment, or does your astonishing tenderness about my welfare lead you to wish to overhear everything I have to say to my business adviser?”

Rupert’s face was white and shaking with excitement; nothing on earth would have induced him now to have abandoned his prey.

“If you will excuse me,” he said, clenching his hands behind his back, “I think I should feel myself justified in—”

“Oh! Come along in,” exploded the lieutenant. He made the same gesture of savage surrender. And he slammed into the office, the rest of us at his heels.

P. Montmorency, House-Agent, was a solitary old gentleman sitting behind a bare brown counter. He had an egglike head, froglike jaws, and a grey hairy fringe of aureole round the lower part of his face; the whole combined with a reddish, aquiline nose. He wore a shabby black frock-coat, a sort of semi-clerical tie worn at a very unclerical angle, and looked, generally speaking, about as unlike a house-agent as anything could look, short of something like a sandwich man or a Scotch Highlander.
We stood inside the room for fully forty seconds, and the odd old gentleman did not look at us. Neither, to tell the truth, odd as he was, did we look at him. Our eyes were fixed, where his were fixed, upon something that was crawling about on the counter in front of him. It was a ferret.

The silence was broken by Rupert Grant. He spoke in that sweet and steely voice which he reserved for great occasions and practised for hours together in his bedroom. He said:

“Mr Montmorency, I think?”

The old gentleman started, lifted his eyes with a bland bewilderment, picked up the ferret by the neck, stuffed it alive into his trousers pocket, smiled apologetically, and said:

“Sir.”

“You are a house-agent, are you not?” asked Rupert.

To the delight of that criminal investigator, Mr Montmorency’s eyes wandered unquietly towards Lieutenant Keith, the only man present that he knew.

“A house-agent,” cried Rupert again, bringing out the word as if it were “burglar.”

“Yes . . . oh, yes,” said the man, with a quavering and almost coquettish smile.

“I am a house-agent . . . oh, yes.”

“Well, I think,” said Rupert, with a sardonic sleekness, “that Lieutenant Keith wants to speak to you. We have come in by his request.”

Lieutenant Keith was lowering gloomily, and now he spoke.

“I have come, Mr Montmorency, about that house of mine.”

“Yes, sir,” said Montmorency, spreading his fingers on the flat counter. “It’s all ready, sir. I’ve attended to all your suggestions er—about the br—”

“Right,” cried Keith, cutting the word short with the startling neatness of a gunshot. “We needn’t bother about all that. If you’ve done what I told you, all right.”

And he turned sharply towards the door.

Mr Montmorency, House-Agent, presented a picture of pathos. After stammering a moment he said: “Excuse me . . . Mr Keith . . . there was another matter . . . about which I wasn’t quite sure. I tried to get all the heating apparatus possible under the circumstances . . . but in winter . . . at that elevation . . .”

“Can’t expect much, eh?” said the lieutenant, cutting in with the same sudden skill. “No, of course not. That’s all right, Montmorency. There can’t be any more difficulties,” and he put his hand on the handle of the door.

“I think,” said Rupert Grant, with a satanic suavity, “that Mr Montmorency
has something further to say to you, lieutenant.”

“Only,” said the house-agent, in desperation, “what about the birds?”

“I beg your pardon,” said Rupert, in a general blank.

“What about the birds?” said the house-agent doggedly.

Basil, who had remained throughout the proceedings in a state of Napoleonic calm, which might be more accurately described as a state of Napoleonic stupidity, suddenly lifted his leonine head.

“Before you go, Lieutenant Keith,” he said. “Come now. Really, what about the birds?”

“I’ll take care of them,” said Lieutenant Keith, still with his long back turned to us; “they shan’t suffer.”

“Thank you, sir, thank you,” cried the incomprehensible house-agent, with an air of ecstasy. “You’ll excuse my concern, sir. You know I’m wild on wild animals. I’m as wild as any of them on that. Thank you, sir. But there’s another thing . . .”

The lieutenant, with his back turned to us, exploded with an indescribable laugh and swung round to face us. It was a laugh, the purport of which was direct and essential, and yet which one cannot exactly express. As near as it said anything, verbally speaking, it said: “Well, if you must spoil it, you must. But you don’t know what you’re spoiling.”

“There is another thing,” continued Mr Montmorency weakly. “Of course, if you don’t want to be visited you’ll paint the house green, but—”

“Green!” shouted Keith. “Green! Let it be green or nothing. I won’t have a house of another colour. Green!” and before we could realize anything the door had banged between us and the street.

Rupert Grant seemed to take a little time to collect himself; but he spoke before the echoes of the door died away.

“Your client, Lieutenant Keith, appears somewhat excited,” he said. “What is the matter with him? Is he unwell?”

“Oh, I should think not,” said Mr Montmorency, in some confusion. “The negotiations have been somewhat difficult—the house is rather—”

“Green,” said Rupert calmly. “That appears to be a very important point. It must be rather green. May I ask you, Mr Montmorency, before I rejoin my companion outside, whether, in your business, it is usual to ask for houses by their colour? Do clients write to a house-agent asking for a pink house or a blue house? Or, to take another instance, for a green house?”

“Only,” said Montmorency, trembling, “only to be inconspicuous.”
Rupert had his ruthless smile. “Can you tell me any place on earth in which a green house would be inconspicuous?”

The house-agent was fidgeting nervously in his pocket. Slowly drawing out a couple of lizards and leaving them to run on the counter, he said:

“No; I can’t.”

“You can’t suggest an explanation?”

“No,” said Mr Montmorency, rising slowly and yet in such a way as to suggest a sudden situation, “I can’t. And may I, as a busy man, be excused if I ask you, gentlemen, if you have any demand to make of me in connection with my business. What kind of house would you desire me to get for you, sir?”

He opened his blank blue eyes on Rupert, who seemed for the second staggered. Then he recovered himself with perfect common sense and answered:

“I am sorry, Mr Montmorency. The fascination of your remarks has unduly delayed us from joining our friend outside. Pray excuse my apparent impertinence.”

“Not at all, sir,” said the house-agent, taking a South American spider idly from his waistcoat pocket and letting it climb up the slope of his desk. “Not at all, sir. I hope you will favour me again.”

Rupert Grant dashed out of the office in a gust of anger, anxious to face Lieutenant Keith. He was gone. The dull, starlit street was deserted.

“What do you say now?” cried Rupert to his brother. His brother said nothing now.

We all three strode down the street in silence, Rupert feverish, myself dazed, Basil, to all appearance, merely dull. We walked through grey street after grey street, turning corners, traversing squares, scarcely meeting anyone, except occasional drunken knots of two or three.

In one small street, however, the knots of two or three began abruptly to thicken into knots of five or six and then into great groups and then into a crowd. The crowd was stirring very slightly. But anyone with a knowledge of the eternal populace knows that if the outside rim of a crowd stirs ever so slightly it means that there is madness in the heart and core of the mob. It soon became evident that something really important had happened in the centre of this excitement. We wormed our way to the front, with the cunning which is known only to cockneys, and once there we soon learned the nature of the difficulty. There had been a brawl concerned with some six men, and one of them lay almost dead on the stones of the street. Of the other four, all interesting matters were, as far as we were concerned, swallowed up in one stupendous fact. One of the four
survivors of the brutal and perhaps fatal scuffle was the immaculate Lieutenant Keith, his clothes torn to ribbons, his eyes blazing, blood on his knuckles. One other thing, however, pointed at him in a worse manner. A short sword, or very long knife, had been drawn out of his elegant walking-stick, and lay in front of him upon the stones. It did not, however, appear to be bloody.

The police had already pushed into the centre with their ponderous omnipotence, and even as they did so, Rupert Grant sprang forward with his incontrollable and intolerable secret.

“That is the man, constable,” he shouted, pointing at the battered lieutenant. “He is a suspicious character. He did the murder.”

“There’s been no murder done, sir,” said the policeman, with his automatic civility. “The poor man’s only hurt. I shall only be able to take the names and addresses of the men in the scuffle and have a good eye kept on them.”

“Have a good eye kept on that one,” said Rupert, pale to the lips, and pointing to the ragged Keith.

“All right, sir,” said the policeman unemotionally, and went the round of the people present, collecting the addresses. When he had completed his task the dusk had fallen and most of the people not immediately connected with the examination had gone away. He still found, however, one eager-faced stranger lingering on the outskirts of the affair. It was Rupert Grant.

“Constable,” he said, “I have a very particular reason for asking you a question. Would you mind telling me whether that military fellow who dropped his sword-stick in the row gave you an address or not?”

“Yes, sir,” said the policeman, after a reflective pause; “yes, he gave me his address.”

“My name is Rupert Grant,” said that individual, with some pomp. “I have assisted the police on more than one occasion. I wonder whether you would tell me, as a special favour, what address?”

The constable looked at him.

“Yes,” he said slowly, “if you like. His address is: The Elms, Buxton Common, near Purley, Surrey.”

“Thank you,” said Rupert, and ran home through the gathering night as fast as his legs could carry him, repeating the address to himself.

Rupert Grant generally came down late in a rather lordly way to breakfast; he contrived, I don’t know how, to achieve always the attitude of the indulged younger brother. Next morning, however, when Basil and I came down we found him ready and restless.
“Well,” he said sharply to his brother almost before we sat down to the meal. “What do you think of your Drummond Keith now?”

“What do I think of him?” inquired Basil slowly. “I don’t think anything of him.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” said Rupert, buttering his toast with an energy that was somewhat exultant. “I thought you’d come round to my view, but I own I was startled at your not seeing it from the beginning. The man is a translucent liar and knave.”

“I think,” said Basil, in the same heavy monotone as before, “that I did not make myself clear. When I said that I thought nothing of him I meant grammatically what I said. I meant that I did not think about him; that he did not occupy my mind. You, however, seem to me to think a lot of him, since you think him a knave. I should say he was glaringly good myself.”

“I sometimes think you talk paradox for its own sake,” said Rupert, breaking an egg with unnecessary sharpness. “What the deuce is the sense of it? Here’s a man whose original position was, by our common agreement, dubious. He’s a wanderer, a teller of tall tales, a man who doesn’t conceal his acquaintance with all the blackest and bloodiest scenes on earth. We take the trouble to follow him to one of his appointments, and if ever two human beings were plotting together and lying to every one else, he and that impossible house-agent were doing it. We followed him home, and the very same night he is in the thick of a fatal, or nearly fatal, brawl, in which he is the only man armed. Really, if this is being glaringly good, I must confess that the glare does not dazzle me.”

Basil was quite unmoved. “I admit his moral goodness is of a certain kind, a quaint, perhaps a casual kind. He is very fond of change and experiment. But all the points you so ingeniously make against him are mere coincidence or special pleading. It’s true he didn’t want to talk about his house business in front of us. No man would. It’s true that he carries a sword-stick. Any man might. It’s true he drew it in the shock of a street fight. Any man would. But there’s nothing really dubious in all this. There’s nothing to confirm—”

As he spoke a knock came at the door.

“If you please, sir,” said the landlady, with an alarmed air, “there’s a policeman wants to see you.”

“Show him in,” said Basil, amid the blank silence.

The heavy, handsome constable who appeared at the door spoke almost as soon as he appeared there.

“I think one of you gentlemen,” he said, curtly but respectfully, “was present
at the affair in Copper Street last night, and drew my attention very strongly to a particular man.”

Rupert half rose from his chair, with eyes like diamonds, but the constable went on calmly, referring to a paper.

“A young man with grey hair. Had light grey clothes, very good, but torn in the struggle. Gave his name as Drummond Keith.”

“This is amusing,” said Basil, laughing. “I was in the very act of clearing that poor officer’s character of rather fanciful aspersions. What about him?”

“Well, sir,” said the constable, “I took all the men’s addresses and had them all watched. It wasn’t serious enough to do more than that. All the other addresses are all right. But this man Keith gave a false address. The place doesn’t exist.”

The breakfast table was nearly flung over as Rupert sprang up, slapping both his thighs.

“Well, by all that’s good,” he cried. “This is a sign from heaven.”

“It’s certainly very extraordinary,” said Basil quietly, with knitted brows. “It’s odd the fellow should have given a false address, considering he was perfectly innocent in the—”

“Oh, you jolly old early Christian duffer,” cried Rupert, in a sort of rapture, “I don’t wonder you couldn’t be a judge. You think every one as good as yourself. Isn’t the thing plain enough now? A doubtful acquaintance; rowdy stories, a most suspicious conversation, mean streets, a concealed knife, a man nearly killed, and, finally, a false address. That’s what we call glaring goodness.”

“It’s certainly very extraordinary,” repeated Basil. And he strolled moodily about the room. Then he said: “You are quite sure, constable, that there’s no mistake? You got the address right, and the police have really gone to it and found it was a fraud?”

“It was very simple, sir,” said the policeman, chuckling. “The place he named was a well-known common quite near London, and our people were down there this morning before any of you were awake. And there’s no such house. In fact, there are hardly any houses at all. Though it is so near London, it’s a blank moor with hardly five trees on it, to say nothing of Christians. Oh, no, sir, the address was a fraud right enough. He was a clever rascal, and chose one of those scraps of lost England that people know nothing about. Nobody could say off-hand that there was not a particular house dropped somewhere about the heath. But as a fact, there isn’t.”

Basil’s face during this sensible speech had been growing darker and darker
with a sort of desperate sagacity. He was cornered almost for the first time since I had known him; and to tell the truth I rather wondered at the almost childish obstinacy which kept him so close to his original prejudice in favour of the wildly questionable lieutenant. At length he said:

“You really searched the common? And the address was really not known in the district—by the way, what was the address?”

The constable selected one of his slips of paper and consulted it, but before he could speak Rupert Grant, who was leaning in the window in a perfect posture of the quiet and triumphant detective, struck in with the sharp and suave voice he loved so much to use.

“Why, I can tell you that, Basil,” he said graciously as he idly plucked leaves from a plant in the window. “I took the precaution to get this man’s address from the constable last night.”

“And what was it?” asked his brother gruffly.

“The constable will correct me if I am wrong,” said Rupert, looking sweetly at the ceiling. “It was: The Elms, Buxton Common, near Purley, Surrey.”

“Right, sir,” said the policeman, laughing and folding up his papers.

There was a silence, and the blue eyes of Basil looked blindly for a few seconds into the void. Then his head fell back in his chair so suddenly that I started up, thinking him ill. But before I could move further his lips had flown apart (I can use no other phrase) and a peal of gigantic laughter struck and shook the ceiling—laughter that shook the laughter, laughter redoubled, laughter incurable, laughter that could not stop.

Two whole minutes afterwards it was still unended; Basil was ill with laughter; but still he laughed. The rest of us were by this time ill almost with terror.

“Excuse me,” said the insane creature, getting at last to his feet. “I am awfully sorry. It is horribly rude. And stupid, too. And also unpractical, because we have not much time to lose if we’re to get down to that place. The train service is confoundedly bad, as I happen to know. It’s quite out of proportion to the comparatively small distance.”

“Get down to that place?” I repeated blankly. “Get down to what place?”

“I have forgotten its name,” said Basil vaguely, putting his hands in his pockets as he rose. “Something Common near Purley. Has any one got a timetable?”

“You don’t seriously mean,” cried Rupert, who had been staring in a sort of confusion of emotions. “You don’t mean that you want to go to Buxton
Common, do you? You can’t mean that!”

“Why shouldn’t I go to Buxton Common?” asked Basil, smiling.

“Why should you?” said his brother, catching hold again restlessly of the plant in the window and staring at the speaker.

“To find our friend, the lieutenant, of course,” said Basil Grant. “I thought you wanted to find him?”

Rupert broke a branch brutally from the plant and flung it impatiently on the floor. “And in order to find him,” he said, “you suggest the admirable expedient of going to the only place on the habitable earth where we know he can’t be.”

The constable and I could not avoid breaking into a kind of assenting laugh, and Rupert, who had family eloquence, was encouraged to go on with a reiterated gesture:

“He may be in Buckingham Palace; he may be sitting astride the cross of St Paul’s; he may be in jail (which I think most likely); he may be in the Great Wheel; he may be in my pantry; he may be in your store cupboard; but out of all the innumerable points of space, there is only one where he has just been systematically looked for and where we know that he is not to be found—and that, if I understand you rightly, is where you want us to go.”

“Exactly,” said Basil calmly, getting into his great-coat; “I thought you might care to accompany me. If not, of course, make yourselves jolly here till I come back.”

It is our nature always to follow vanishing things and value them if they really show a resolution to depart. We all followed Basil, and I cannot say why, except that he was a vanishing thing, that he vanished decisively with his great-coat and his stick. Rupert ran after him with a considerable flurry of rationality.

“My dear chap,” he cried, “do you really mean that you see any good in going down to this ridiculous scrub, where there is nothing but beaten tracks and a few twisted trees, simply because it was the first place that came into a rowdy lieutenant’s head when he wanted to give a lying reference in a scrape?”

“Yes,” said Basil, taking out his watch, “and, what’s worse, we’ve lost the train.”

He paused a moment and then added: “As a matter of fact, I think we may just as well go down later in the day. I have some writing to do, and I think you told me, Rupert, that you thought of going to the Dulwich Gallery. I was rather too impetuous. Very likely he wouldn’t be in. But if we get down by the 5.15, which gets to Purley about 6, I expect we shall just catch him.”

“Catch him!” cried his brother, in a kind of final anger. “I wish we could.
Where the deuce shall we catch him now?"

“I keep forgetting the name of the common,” said Basil, as he buttoned up his coat. “The Elms—what is it? Buxton Common, near Purley. That’s where we shall find him.”

“But there is no such place,” groaned Rupert; but he followed his brother downstairs.

We all followed him. We snatched our hats from the hat-stand and our sticks from the umbrella-stand; and why we followed him we did not and do not know. But we always followed him, whatever was the meaning of the fact, whatever was the nature of his mastery. And the strange thing was that we followed him the more completely the more nonsensical appeared the thing which he said. At bottom, I believe, if he had risen from our breakfast table and said: “I am going to find the Holy Pig with Ten Tails,” we should have followed him to the end of the world.

I don’t know whether this mystical feeling of mine about Basil on this occasion has got any of the dark and cloudy colour, so to speak, of the strange journey that we made the same evening. It was already very dense twilight when we struck southward from Purley. Suburbs and things on the London border may be, in most cases, commonplace and comfortable. But if ever by any chance they really are empty solitudes they are to the human spirit more desolate and dehumanized than any Yorkshire moors or Highland hills, because the suddenness with which the traveller drops into that silence has something about it as of evil elf-land. It seems to be one of the ragged suburbs of the cosmos half-forgotten by God—such a place was Buxton Common, near Purley.

There was certainly a sort of grey futility in the landscape itself. But it was enormously increased by the sense of grey futility in our expedition. The tracts of grey turf looked useless, the occasional wind-stricken trees looked useless, but we, the human beings, more useless than the hopeless turf or the idle trees. We were maniacs akin to the foolish landscape, for we were come to chase the wild goose which has led men and left men in bogs from the beginning. We were three dazed men under the captaincy of a madman going to look for a man whom we knew was not there in a house that had no existence. A livid sunset seemed to look at us with a sort of sickly smile before it died.

Basil went on in front with his coat collar turned up, looking in the gloom rather like a grotesque Napoleon. We crossed swell after swell of the windy common in increasing darkness and entire silence. Suddenly Basil stopped and turned to us, his hands in his pockets. Through the dusk I could just detect that
he wore a broad grin as of comfortable success.

“Well,” he cried, taking his heavily gloved hands out of his pockets and slapping them together, “here we are at last.”

The wind swirled sadly over the homeless heath; two desolate elms rocked above us in the sky like shapeless clouds of grey. There was not a sign of man or beast to the sullen circle of the horizon, and in the midst of that wilderness Basil Grant stood rubbing his hands with the air of an innkeeper standing at an open door.

“How jolly it is,” he cried, “to get back to civilization. That notion that civilization isn’t poetical is a civilised delusion. Wait till you’ve really lost yourself in nature, among the devilish woodlands and the cruel flowers. Then you’ll know that there’s no star like the red star of man that he lights on his hearthstone; no river like the red river of man, the good red wine, which you, Mr Rupert Grant, if I have any knowledge of you, will be drinking in two or three minutes in enormous quantities.”

Rupert and I exchanged glances of fear. Basil went on heartily, as the wind died in the dreary trees.

“You’ll find our host a much more simple kind of fellow in his own house. I did when I visited him when he lived in the cabin at Yarmouth, and again in the loft at the city warehouse. He’s really a very good fellow. But his greatest virtue remains what I said originally.”

“What do you mean?” I asked, finding his speech straying towards a sort of sanity. “What is this greatest virtue?”

“His greatest virtue,” replied Basil, “is that he always tells the literal truth.”

“Well, really,” cried Rupert, stamping about between cold and anger, and slapping himself like a cabman, “he doesn’t seem to have been very literal or truthful in this case, nor you either. Why the deuce, may I ask, have you brought us out to this infernal place?”

“He was too truthful, I confess,” said Basil, leaning against the tree; “too hardly veracious, too severely accurate. He should have indulged in a little more suggestiveness and legitimate romance. But come, it’s time we went in. We shall be late for dinner.”

Rupert whispered to me with a white face:

“Is it a hallucination, do you think? Does he really fancy he sees a house?”

“I suppose so,” I said. Then I added aloud, in what was meant to be a cheery and sensible voice, but which sounded in my ears almost as strange as the wind:

“Come, come, Basil, my dear fellow. Where do you want us to go?”
“Why, up here,” cried Basil, and with a bound and a swing he was above our heads, swarming up the grey column of the colossal tree.

“Come up, all of you,” he shouted out of the darkness, with the voice of a schoolboy. “Come up. You’ll be late for dinner.”

The two great elms stood so close together that there was scarcely a yard anywhere, and in some places not more than a foot, between them. Thus occasional branches and even bosses and boles formed a series of footholds that almost amounted to a rude natural ladder. They must, I supposed, have been some sport of growth, Siamese twins of vegetation.

Why we did it I cannot think; perhaps, as I have said, the mystery of the waste and dark had brought out and made primary something wholly mystical in Basil’s supremacy. But we only felt that there was a giant’s staircase going somewhere, perhaps to the stars; and the victorious voice above called to us out of heaven. We hoisted ourselves up after him.

Half-way up some cold tongue of the night air struck and sobered me suddenly. The hypnotism of the madman above fell from me, and I saw the whole map of our silly actions as clearly as if it were printed. I saw three modern men in black coats who had begun with a perfectly sensible suspicion of a doubtful adventurer and who had ended, God knows how, half-way up a naked tree on a naked moorland, far from that adventurer and all his works, that adventurer who was at that moment, in all probability, laughing at us in some dirty Soho restaurant. He had plenty to laugh at us about, and no doubt he was laughing his loudest; but when I thought what his laughter would be if he knew where we were at that moment, I nearly let go of the tree and fell.

“Swinburne,” said Rupert suddenly, from above, “what are we doing? Let’s get down again,” and by the mere sound of his voice I knew that he too felt the shock of wakening to reality.

“We can’t leave poor Basil,” I said. “Can’t you call to him or get hold of him by the leg?”

“He’s too far ahead,” answered Rupert; “he’s nearly at the top of the beastly thing. Looking for Lieutenant Keith in the rooks’ nests, I suppose.”

We were ourselves by this time far on our frantic vertical journey. The mighty trunks were beginning to sway and shake slightly in the wind. Then I looked down and saw something which made me feel that we were far from the world in a sense and to a degree that I cannot easily describe. I saw that the almost straight lines of the tall elm trees diminished a little in perspective as they fell. I was used to seeing parallel lines taper towards the sky. But to see them taper
towards the earth made me feel lost in space, like a falling star.

“Can nothing be done to stop Basil?” I called out.

“No,” answered my fellow climber. “He’s too far up. He must get to the top, and when he finds nothing but wind and leaves he may go sane again. Hark at him above there; you can just hear him talking to himself.”

“Perhaps he’s talking to us,” I said.

“No,” said Rupert, “he’d shout if he was. I’ve never known him to talk to himself before; I’m afraid he really is bad tonight; it’s a known sign of the brain going.”

“Yes,” I said sadly, and listened. Basil’s voice certainly was sounding above us, and not by any means in the rich and riotous tones in which he had hailed us before. He was speaking quietly, and laughing every now and then, up there among the leaves and stars.

After a silence mingled with this murmur, Rupert Grant suddenly said, “My God!” with a violent voice.

“What’s the matter—are you hurt?” I cried, alarmed.

“No. Listen to Basil,” said the other in a very strange voice. “He’s not talking to himself.”

“Then he is talking to us,” I cried.

“No,” said Rupert simply, “he’s talking to somebody else.”

Great branches of the elm loaded with leaves swung about us in a sudden burst of wind, but when it died down I could still hear the conversational voice above. I could hear two voices.

Suddenly from aloft came Basil’s boisterous hailing voice as before: “Come up, you fellows. Here’s Lieutenant Keith.”

And a second afterwards came the half-American voice we had heard in our chambers more than once. It called out:

“Happy to see you, gentlemen; pray come in.”

Out of a hole in an enormous dark egg-shaped thing, pendent in the branches like a wasps’ nest, was protruding the pale face and fierce moustache of the lieutenant, his teeth shining with that slightly Southern air that belonged to him.

Somehow or other, stunned and speechless, we lifted ourselves heavily into the opening. We fell into the full glow of a lamp-lit, cushioned, tiny room, with a circular wall lined with books, a circular table, and a circular seat around it. At this table sat three people. One was Basil, who, in the instant after alighting there, had fallen into an attitude of marmoreal ease as if he had been there from boyhood; he was smoking a cigar with a slow pleasure. The second was
Lieutenant Drummond Keith, who looked happy also, but feverish and doubtful compared with his granite guest. The third was the little bald-headed house-agent with the wild whiskers, who called himself Montmorency. The spears, the green umbrella, and the cavalry sword hung in parallels on the wall. The sealed jar of strange wine was on the mantelpiece, the enormous rifle in the corner. In the middle of the table was a magnum of champagne. Glasses were already set for us.

The wind of the night roared far below us, like an ocean at the foot of a lighthouse. The room stirred slightly, as a cabin might in a mild sea.

Our glasses were filled, and we still sat there dazed and dumb. Then Basil spoke.

“You seem still a little doubtful, Rupert. Surely there is no further question about the cold veracity of our injured host.”

“I don’t quite grasp it all,” said Rupert, blinking still in the sudden glare. “Lieutenant Keith said his address was—”

“It’s really quite right, sir,” said Keith, with an open smile. “The bobby asked me where I lived. And I said, quite truthfully, that I lived in the elms on Buxton Common, near Purley. So I do. This gentleman, Mr Montmorency, whom I think you have met before, is an agent for houses of this kind. He has a special line in arboreal villas. It’s being kept rather quiet at present, because the people who want these houses don’t want them to get too common. But it’s just the sort of thing a fellow like myself, racketing about in all sorts of queer corners of London, naturally knocks up against.”

“Are you really an agent for arboreal villas?” asked Rupert eagerly, recovering his ease with the romance of reality.

Mr Montmorency, in his embarrassment, fingered one of his pockets and nervously pulled out a snake, which crawled about the table.

“W-well, yes, sir,” he said. “The fact was—er—my people wanted me very much to go into the house-agency business. But I never cared myself for anything but natural history and botany and things like that. My poor parents have been dead some years now, but—naturally I like to respect their wishes. And I thought somehow that an arboreal villa agency was a sort of—of compromise between being a botanist and being a house-agent.”

Rupert could not help laughing. “Do you have much custom?” he asked.

“N-not much,” replied Mr Montmorency, and then he glanced at Keith, who was (I am convinced) his only client. “But what there is—very select.”

The first is that though when you are guessing about any one who is sane, the sanest thing is the most likely; when you are guessing about any one who is, like our host, insane, the maddest thing is the most likely. The second is to remember that very plain literal fact always seems fantastic. If Keith had taken a little brick box of a house in Clapham with nothing but railings in front of it and had written ‘The Elms’ over it, you wouldn’t have thought there was anything fantastic about that. Simply because it was a great blaring, swaggering lie you would have believed it.”

“Drink your wine, gentlemen,” said Keith, laughing, “for this confounded wind will upset it.”

We drank, and as we did so, although the hanging house, by a cunning mechanism, swung only slightly, we knew that the great head of the elm tree swayed in the sky like a stricken thistle.
CHAPTER 5

THE NOTICEABLE CONDUCT OF PROFESSOR CHADD

Basil Grant had comparatively few friends besides myself; yet he was the reverse of an unsociable man. He would talk to any one anywhere, and talk not only well but with perfectly genuine concern and enthusiasm for that person’s affairs. He went through the world, as it were, as if he were always on the top of an omnibus or waiting for a train. Most of these chance acquaintances, of course, vanished into darkness out of his life. A few here and there got hooked on to him, so to speak, and became his lifelong intimates, but there was an accidental look about all of them as if they were windfalls, samples taken at random, goods fallen from a goods train or presents fished out of a bran-pie. One would be, let us say, a veterinary surgeon with the appearance of a jockey; another, a mild prebendary with a white beard and vague views; another, a young captain in the Lancers, seemingly exactly like other captains in the Lancers; another, a small dentist from Fulham, in all reasonable certainty precisely like every other dentist from Fulham. Major Brown, small, dry, and dapper, was one of these; Basil had made his acquaintance over a discussion in a hotel cloak-room about the right hat, a discussion which reduced the little major almost to a kind of masculine hysterics, the compound of the selfishness of an old bachelor and the scrupulosity of an old maid. They had gone home in a cab together and then dined with each other twice a week until they died. I myself was another. I had met Grant while he was still a judge, on the balcony of the National Liberal Club, and exchanged a few words about the weather. Then we had talked for about an hour about politics and God; for men always talk about the most important things to total strangers. It is because in the total stranger we perceive man himself; the image of God is not disguised by resemblances to an uncle or doubts of the wisdom of a moustache.

One of the most interesting of Basil’s motley group of acquaintances was Professor Chadd. He was known to the ethnological world (which is a very interesting world, but a long way off this one) as the second greatest, if not the greatest, authority on the relations of savages to language. He was known to the neighbourhood of Hart Street, Bloomsbury, as a bearded man with a bald head, spectacles, and a patient face, the face of an unaccountable Nonconformist who had forgotten how to be angry. He went to and fro between the British Museum
and a selection of blameless tea-shops, with an armful of books and a poor but honest umbrella. He was never seen without the books and the umbrella, and was supposed (by the lighter wits of the Persian MS. room) to go to bed with them in his little brick villa in the neighbourhood of Shepherd’s Bush. There he lived with three sisters, ladies of solid goodness, but sinister demeanour. His life was happy, as are almost all the lives of methodical students, but one would not have called it exhilarating. His only hours of exhilaration occurred when his friend, Basil Grant, came into the house, late at night, a tornado of conversation.

Basil, though close on sixty, had moods of boisterous babyishness, and these seemed for some reason or other to descend upon him particularly in the house of his studious and almost dingy friend. I can remember vividly (for I was acquainted with both parties and often dined with them) the gaiety of Grant on that particular evening when the strange calamity fell upon the professor. Professor Chadd was, like most of his particular class and type (the class that is at once academic and middle-class), a Radical of a solemn and old-fashioned type. Grant was a Radical himself, but he was that more discriminating and not uncommon type of Radical who passes most of his time in abusing the Radical party. Chadd had just contributed to a magazine an article called “Zulu Interests and the New Makango Frontier,’ in which a precise scientific report of his study of the customs of the people of T’Chaka was reinforced by a severe protest against certain interferences with these customs both by the British and the Germans. He was sitting with the magazine in front of him, the lamplight shining on his spectacles, a wrinkle in his forehead, not of anger, but of perplexity, as Basil Grant strode up and down the room, shaking it with his voice, with his high spirits and his heavy tread.

“It’s not your opinions that I object to, my esteemed Chadd,” he was saying, “it’s you. You are quite right to champion the Zulus, but for all that you do not sympathize with them. No doubt you know the Zulu way of cooking tomatoes and the Zulu prayer before blowing one’s nose; but for all that you don’t understand them as well as I do, who don’t know an assegai from an alligator. You are more learned, Chadd, but I am more Zulu. Why is it that the jolly old barbarians of this earth are always championed by people who are their antithesis? Why is it? You are sagacious, you are benevolent, you are well informed, but, Chadd, you are not savage. Live no longer under that rosy illusion. Look in the glass. Ask your sisters. Consult the librarian of the British Museum. Look at this umbrella.” And he held up that sad but still respectable article. “Look at it. For ten mortal years to my certain knowledge you have
carried that object under your arm, and I have no sort of doubt that you carried it at the age of eight months, and it never occurred to you to give one wild yell and hurl it like a javelin—thus—"

And he sent the umbrella whizzing past the professor’s bald head, so that it knocked over a pile of books with a crash and left a vase rocking.

Professor Chadd appeared totally unmoved, with his face still lifted to the lamp and the wrinkle cut in his forehead.

“Your mental processes,” he said, “always go a little too fast. And they are stated without method. There is no kind of inconsistency”—and no words can convey the time he took to get to the end of the word—“between valuing the right of the aborigines to adhere to their stage in the evolutionary process, so long as they find it congenial and requisite to do so. There is, I say, no inconsistency between this concession which I have just described to you and the view that the evolutionary stage in question is, nevertheless, so far as we can form any estimate of values in the variety of cosmic processes, definable in some degree as an inferior evolutionary stage.”

Nothing but his lips had moved as he spoke, and his glasses still shone like two pallid moons.

Grant was shaking with laughter as he watched him.

“True,” he said, “there is no inconsistency, my son of the red spear. But there is a great deal of incompatibility of temper. I am very far from being certain that the Zulu is on an inferior evolutionary stage, whatever the blazes that may mean. I do not think there is anything stupid or ignorant about howling at the moon or being afraid of devils in the dark. It seems to me perfectly philosophical. Why should a man be thought a sort of idiot because he feels the mystery and peril of existence itself? Suppose, my dear Chadd, suppose it is we who are the idiots because we are not afraid of devils in the dark?”

Professor Chadd slit open a page of the magazine with a bone paper-knife and the intent reverence of the bibliophile.

“Beyond all question,” he said, “it is a tenable hypothesis. I allude to the hypothesis which I understand you to entertain, that our civilization is not or may not be an advance upon, and indeed (if I apprehend you), is or may be a retrogression from states identical with or analogous to the state of the Zulus. Moreover, I shall be inclined to concede that such a proposition is of the nature, in some degree at least, of a primary proposition, and cannot adequately be argued, in the same sense, I mean, that the primary proposition of pessimism, or the primary proposition of the non-existence of matter, cannot adequately be
argued. But I do not conceive you to be under the impression that you have demonstrated anything more concerning this proposition than that it is tenable, which, after all, amounts to little more than the statement that it is not a contradiction in terms.”

Basil threw a book at his head and took out a cigar.

“You don’t understand,” he said, “but, on the other hand, as a compensation, you don’t mind smoking. Why you don’t object to that disgustingly barbaric rite I can’t think. I can only say that I began it when I began to be a Zulu, about the age of ten. What I maintained was that although you knew more about Zulus in the sense that you are a scientist, I know more about them in the sense that I am a savage. For instance, your theory of the origin of language, something about its having come from the formulated secret language of some individual creature, though you knocked me silly with facts and scholarship in its favour, still does not convince me, because I have a feeling that that is not the way that things happen. If you ask me why I think so I can only answer that I am a Zulu; and if you ask me (as you most certainly will) what is my definition of a Zulu, I can answer that also. He is one who has climbed a Sussex apple-tree at seven and been afraid of a ghost in an English lane.”

“Your process of thought—” began the immovable Chadd, but his speech was interrupted. His sister, with that masculinity which always in such families concentrates in sisters, flung open the door with a rigid arm and said:

“James, Mr Bingham of the British Museum wants to see you again.”

The philosopher rose with a dazed look, which always indicates in such men the fact that they regard philosophy as a familiar thing, but practical life as a weird and unnerving vision, and walked dubiously out of the room.

“I hope you do not mind my being aware of it, Miss Chadd,” said Basil Grant, “but I hear that the British Museum has recognized one of the men who have deserved well of their commonwealth. It is true, is it not, that Professor Chadd is likely to be made keeper of Asiatic manuscripts?”

The grim face of the spinster betrayed a great deal of pleasure and a great deal of pathos also. “I believe it’s true,” she said. “If it is, it will not only be great glory which women, I assure you, feel a great deal, but great relief, which they feel more; relief from worry from a lot of things. James’ health has never been good, and while we are as poor as we are he had to do journalism and coaching, in addition to his own dreadful grinding notions and discoveries, which he loves more than man, woman, or child. I have often been afraid that unless something of this kind occurred we should really have to be careful of his brain. But I
believe it is practically settled.”

“I am delighted,” began Basil, but with a worried face, “but these red-tape negotiations are so terribly chancy that I really can’t advise you to build on hope, only to be hurled down into bitterness. I’ve known men, and good men like your brother, come nearer than this and be disappointed. Of course, if it is true—”

“If it is true,” said the woman fiercely, “it means that people who have never lived may make an attempt at living.”

Even as she spoke the professor came into the room still with the dazed look in his eyes.

“Is it true?” asked Basil, with burning eyes.

“Not a bit true,” answered Chadd after a moment’s bewilderment. “Your argument was in three points fallacious.”

“What do you mean?” demanded Grant.

“Well,” said the professor slowly, “in saying that you could possess a knowledge of the essence of Zulu life distinct from—”

“Oh! confound Zulu life,” cried Grant, with a burst of laughter. “I mean, have you got the post?”

“You mean the post of keeper of the Asiatic manuscripts,” he said, opening his eye with childlike wonder. “Oh, yes, I got that. But the real objection to your argument, which has only, I admit, occurred to me since I have been out of the room, is that it does not merely presuppose a Zulu truth apart from the facts, but infers that the discovery of it is absolutely impeded by the facts.”

“I am crushed,” said Basil, and sat down to laugh, while the professor’s sister retired to her room, possibly, possibly not.

It was extremely late when we left the Chadds, and it is an extremely long and tiresome journey from Shepherd’s Bush to Lambeth. This may be our excuse for the fact that we (for I was stopping the night with Grant) got down to breakfast next day at a time inexpressibly criminal, a time, in point of fact, close upon noon. Even to that belated meal we came in a very lounging and leisurely fashion. Grant, in particular, seemed so dreamy at table that he scarcely saw the pile of letters by his plate, and I doubt if he would have opened any of them if there had not lain on the top that one thing which has succeeded amid modern carelessness in being really urgent and coercive—a telegram. This he opened with the same heavy distraction with which he broke his egg and drank his tea. When he read it he did not stir a hair or say a word, but something, I know not what, made me feel that the motionless figure had been pulled together suddenly as strings are tightened on a slack guitar. Though he said nothing and did not
move, I knew that he had been for an instant cleared and sharpened with a shock of cold water. It was scarcely any surprise to me when a man who had drifted sullenly to his seat and fallen into it, kicked it away like a cur from under him and came round to me in two strides.

“What do you make of that?” he said, and flattened out the wire in front of me. It ran: “Please come at once. James’ mental state dangerous. Chadd.”

“What does the woman mean?” I said after a pause, irritably. “Those women have been saying that the poor old professor was mad ever since he was born.”

“You are mistaken,” said Grant composedly. “It is true that all sensible women think all studious men mad. It is true, for the matter of that, all women of any kind think all men of any kind mad. But they don’t put it in telegrams, any more than they wire to you that grass is green or God all-merciful. These things are truisms, and often private ones at that. If Miss Chadd has written down under the eye of a strange woman in a post-office that her brother is off his head you may be perfectly certain that she did it because it was a matter of life and death, and she can think of no other way of forcing us to come promptly.”

“It will force us of course,” I said, smiling.

“Oh, yes,” he replied; “there is a cab-rank near.”

Basil scarcely said a word as we drove across Westminster Bridge, through Trafalgar Square, along Piccadilly, and up the Uxbridge Road. Only as he was opening the gate he spoke.

“I think you will take my word for it, my friend,” he said; “this is one of the most queer and complicated and astounding incidents that ever happened in London or, for that matter, in any high civilization.”

“I confess with the greatest sympathy and reverence that I don’t quite see it,” I said. “Is it so very extraordinary or complicated that a dreamy somnambulant old invalid who has always walked on the borders of the inconceivable should go mad under the shock of great joy? Is it so very extraordinary that a man with a head like a turnip and a soul like a spider’s web should not find his strength equal to a confounding change of fortunes? Is it, in short, so very extraordinary that James Chadd should lose his wits from excitement?”

“It would not be extraordinary in the least,” answered Basil, with placidity. “It would not be extraordinary in the least,” he repeated, “if the professor had gone mad. That was not the extraordinary circumstance to which I referred.”

“What,” I asked, stamping my foot, “was the extraordinary thing?”

“The extraordinary thing,” said Basil, ringing the bell, “is that he has not gone mad from excitement.”
The tall and angular figure of the eldest Miss Chadd blocked the doorway as the door opened. Two other Miss Chadds seemed in the same way to be blocking the narrow passage and the little parlour. There was a general sense of their keeping something from view. They seemed like three black-clad ladies in some strange play of Maeterlinck, veiling the catastrophe from the audience in the manner of the Greek chorus.

“Sit down, won’t you?” said one of them, in a voice that was somewhat rigid with pain. “I think you had better be told first what has happened.”

Then, with her bleak face looking unmeaningly out of the window, she continued, in an even and mechanical voice:

“I had better state everything that occurred just as it occurred. This morning I was clearing away the breakfast things, my sisters were both somewhat unwell, and had not come down. My brother had just gone out of the room, I believe, to fetch a book. He came back again, however, without it, and stood for some time staring at the empty grate. I said, ‘Were you looking for anything I could get?’ He did not answer, but this constantly happens, as he is often very abstracted. I repeated my question, and still he did not answer. Sometimes he is so wrapped up in his studies that nothing but a touch on the shoulder would make him aware of one’s presence, so I came round the table towards him. I really do not know how to describe the sensation which I then had. It seems simply silly, but at the moment it seemed something enormous, upsetting one’s brain. The fact is, James was standing on one leg.”

Grant smiled slowly and rubbed his hands with a kind of care.

“Standing on one leg?” I repeated.

“Yes,” replied the dead voice of the woman without an inflection to suggest that she felt the fantasticality of her statement. “He was standing on the left leg and the right drawn up at a sharp angle, the toe pointing downwards. I asked him if his leg hurt him. His only answer was to shoot the leg straight at right angles to the other, as if pointing to the other with his toe to the wall. He was still looking quite gravely at the fireplace.

‘James, what is the matter?’ I cried, for I was thoroughly frightened. James gave three kicks in the air with the right leg, flung up the other, gave three kicks in the air with it also and spun round like a teetotum the other way. ‘Are you mad?’ I cried. ‘Why don’t you answer me?’ He had come to a standstill facing me, and was looking at me as he always does, with his lifted eyebrows and great spectacled eyes. When I had spoken he remained a second or two motionless, and then his only reply was to lift his left foot slowly from the floor and describe
circles with it in the air. I rushed to the door and shouted for Christina. I will not dwell on the dreadful hours that followed. All three of us talked to him, implored him to speak to us with appeals that might have brought back the dead, but he has done nothing but hop and dance and kick with a solemn silent face. It looks as if his legs belonged to some one else or were possessed by devils. He has never spoken to us from that time to this.”

“Where is he now?” I said, getting up in some agitation. “We ought not to leave him alone.”

“Doctor Colman is with him,” said Miss Chadd calmly. “They are in the garden. Doctor Colman thought the air would do him good. And he can scarcely go into the street.”

Basil and I walked rapidly to the window which looked out on the garden. It was a small and somewhat smug suburban garden; the flower beds a little too neat and like the pattern of a coloured carpet; but on this shining and opulent summer day even they had the exuberance of something natural, I had almost said tropical. In the middle of a bright and verdant but painfully circular lawn stood two figures. One of them was a small, sharp-looking man with black whiskers and a very polished hat (I presume Dr Colman), who was talking very quietly and clearly, yet with a nervous twitch, as it were, in his face. The other was our old friend, listening with his old forbearing expression and owlish eyes, the strong sunlight gleaming on his glasses as the lamplight had gleamed the night before, when the boisterous Basil had rallied him on his studious decorum. But for one thing the figure of this morning might have been the identical figure of last night. That one thing was that while the face listened reposefully the legs were industriously dancing like the legs of a marionette. The neat flowers and the sunny glitter of the garden lent an indescribable sharpness and incredibility to the prodigy—the prodigy of the head of a hermit and the legs of a harlequin. For miracles should always happen in broad daylight. The night makes them credible and therefore commonplace.

The second sister had by this time entered the room and came somewhat drearily to the window.

“You know, Adelaide,” she said, “that Mr Bingham from the Museum is coming again at three.”

“I know,” said Adelaide Chadd bitterly. “I suppose we shall have to tell him about this. I thought that no good fortune would ever come easily to us.”

Grant suddenly turned round. “What do you mean?” he said. “What will you have to tell Mr Bingham?”
“You know what I shall have to tell him,” said the professor’s sister, almost fiercely. “I don’t know that we need give it its wretched name. Do you think that the keeper of Asiatic manuscripts will be allowed to go on like that?” And she pointed for an instant at the figure in the garden, the shining, listening face and the unresting feet.

Basil Grant took out his watch with an abrupt movement. “When did you say the British Museum man was coming?” he said.

“Three o’clock,” said Miss Chadd briefly.

“Then I have an hour before me,” said Grant, and without another word threw up the window and jumped out into the garden. He did not walk straight up to the doctor and lunatic, but strolling round the garden path drew near them cautiously and yet apparently carelessly. He stood a couple of feet off them, seemingly counting halfpence out of his trousers pocket, but, as I could see, looking up steadily under the broad brim of his hat.

Suddenly he stepped up to Professor Chadd’s elbow, and said, in a loud familiar voice, “Well, my boy, do you still think the Zulus our inferiors?”

The doctor knitted his brows and looked anxious, seeming to be about to speak. The professor turned his bald and placid head towards Grant in a friendly manner, but made no answer, idly flinging his left leg about.

“Have you converted Dr Colman to your views?” Basil continued, still in the same loud and lucid tone.

Chadd only shuffled his feet and kicked a little with the other leg, his expression still benevolent and inquiring. The doctor cut in rather sharply. “Shall we go inside, professor?” he said. “Now you have shown me the garden. A beautiful garden. A most beautiful garden. Let us go in,” and he tried to draw the kicking ethnologist by the elbow, at the same time whispering to Grant: “I must ask you not to trouble him with questions. Most risky. He must be soothed.”

Basil answered in the same tone, with great coolness:

“Of course your directions must be followed out, doctor. I will endeavour to do so, but I hope it will not be inconsistent with them if you will leave me alone with my poor friend in this garden for an hour. I want to watch him. I assure you, Dr Colman, that I shall say very little to him, and that little shall be as soothing as—as syrup.”

The doctor wiped his eyeglass thoughtfully.

“It is rather dangerous for him,” he said, “to be long in the strong sun without his hat. With his bald head, too.”

“That is soon settled,” said Basil composedly, and took off his own big hat
and clapped it on the egglike skull of the professor. The latter did not turn round but danced away with his eyes on the horizon.

The doctor put on his glasses again, looked severely at the two for some seconds, with his head on one side like a bird’s, and then saying, shortly, “All right,” strutted away into the house, where the three Misses Chadd were all looking out from the parlour window on to the garden. They looked out on it with hungry eyes for a full hour without moving, and they saw a sight which was more extraordinary than madness itself.

Basil Grant addressed a few questions to the madman, without succeeding in making him do anything but continue to caper, and when he had done this slowly took a red note-book out of one pocket and a large pencil out of another.

He began hurriedly to scribble notes. When the lunatic skipped away from him he would walk a few yards in pursuit, stop, and make notes again. Thus they followed each other round and round the foolish circle of turf, the one writing in pencil with the face of a man working out a problem, the other leaping and playing like a child.

After about three-quarters of an hour of this imbecile scene, Grant put the pencil in his pocket, but kept the note-book open in his hand, and walking round the mad professor, planted himself directly in front of him.

Then occurred something that even those already used to that wild morning had not anticipated or dreamed. The professor, on finding Basil in front of him, stared with a blank benignity for a few seconds, and then drew up his left leg and hung it bent in the attitude that his sister had described as being the first of all his antics. And the moment he had done it Basil Grant lifted his own leg and held it out rigid before him, confronting Chadd with the flat sole of his boot. The professor dropped his bent leg, and swinging his weight on to it kicked out the other behind, like a man swimming. Basil crossed his feet like a saltire cross, and then flung them apart again, giving a leap into the air. Then before any of the spectators could say a word or even entertain a thought about the matter, both of them were dancing a sort of jig or hornpipe opposite each other; and the sun shone down on two madmen instead of one.

They were so stricken with the deafness and blindness of monomania that they did not see the eldest Miss Chadd come out feverishly into the garden with gestures of entreaty, a gentleman following her. Professor Chadd was in the wildest posture of a pas-de-quatre, Basil Grant seemed about to turn a cart—wheel, when they were frozen in their follies by the steely voice of Adelaide Chadd saying, “Mr Bingham of the British Museum.”
Mr Bingham was a slim, well-clad gentleman with a pointed and slightly effeminate grey beard, unimpeachable gloves, and formal but agreeable manners. He was the type of the over-civilized, as Professor Chadd was of the uncivilized pedant. His formality and agreeableness did him some credit under the circumstances. He had a vast experience of books and a considerable experience of the more dilettante fashionable salons. But neither branch of knowledge had accustomed him to the spectacle of two grey-haired middle-class gentlemen in modern costume throwing themselves about like acrobats as a substitute for an after-dinner nap.

The professor continued his antics with perfect placidity, but Grant stopped abruptly. The doctor had reappeared on the scene, and his shiny black eyes, under his shiny black hat, moved restlessly from one of them to the other.

“Dr Colman,” said Basil, turning to him, “will you entertain Professor Chadd again for a little while? I am sure that he needs you. Mr Bingham, might I have the pleasure of a few moments’ private conversation? My name is Grant.”

Mr Bingham, of the British Museum, bowed in a manner that was respectful but a trifle bewildered.

“Miss Chadd will excuse me,” continued Basil easily, “if I know my way about the house.” And he led the dazed librarian rapidly through the back door into the parlour.

“Mr Bingham,” said Basil, setting a chair for him, “I imagine that Miss Chadd has told you of this distressing occurrence.”

“She has, Mr Grant,” said Bingham, looking at the table with a sort of compassionate nervousness. “I am more pained than I can say by this dreadful calamity. It seems quite heart-rending that the thing should have happened just as we have decided to give your eminent friend a position which falls far short of his merits. As it is, of course—really, I don’t know what to say. Professor Chadd may, of course, retain—I sincerely trust he will—his extraordinarily valuable intellect. But I am afraid—I am really afraid—that it would not do to have the curator of the Asiatic manuscripts—er—dancing about.”

“I have a suggestion to make,” said Basil, and sat down abruptly in his chair, drawing it up to the table.

“I am delighted, of course,” said the gentleman from the British Museum, coughing and drawing up his chair also.

The clock on the mantelpiece ticked for just the moments required for Basil to clear his throat and collect his words, and then he said:

“My proposal is this. I do not know that in the strict use of words you could
altogether call it a compromise, still it has something of that character. My proposal is that the Government (acting, as I presume, through your Museum) should pay Professor Chadd L800 a year until he stops dancing.”

“Eight hundred a year!” said Mr Bingham, and for the first time lifted his mild blue eyes to those of his interlocutor—and he raised them with a mild blue stare. “I think I have not quite understood you. Did I understand you to say that Professor Chadd ought to be employed, in his present state, in the Asiatic manuscript department at eight hundred a year?”

Grant shook his head resolutely.

“No,” he said firmly. “No. Chadd is a friend of mine, and I would say anything for him I could. But I do not say, I cannot say, that he ought to take on the Asiatic manuscripts. I do not go so far as that. I merely say that until he stops dancing you ought to pay him L800. Surely you have some general fund for the endowment of research.”

Mr Bingham looked bewildered.

“I really don’t know,” he said, blinking his eyes, “what you are talking about. Do you ask us to give this obvious lunatic nearly a thousand a year for life?”

“Not at all,” cried Basil, keenly and triumphantly. “I never said for life. Not at all.”

“What for, then?” asked the meek Bingham, suppressing an instinct meekly to tear his hair. “How long is this endowment to run? Not till his death? Till the Judgement day?”

“No,” said Basil, beaming, “but just what I said. Till he has stopped dancing.” And he lay back with satisfaction and his hands in his pockets.

Bingham had by this time fastened his eyes keenly on Basil Grant and kept them there.

“Come, Mr Grant,” he said. “Do I seriously understand you to suggest that the Government pay Professor Chadd an extraordinarily high salary simply on the ground that he has (pardon the phrase) gone mad? That he should be paid more than four good clerks solely on the ground that he is flinging his boots about in the back yard?”

“Precisely,” said Grant composedly.

“That this absurd payment is not only to run on with the absurd dancing, but actually to stop with the absurd dancing?”

“One must stop somewhere,” said Grant. “Of course.”

Bingham rose and took up his perfect stick and gloves.

“There is really nothing more to be said, Mr Grant,” he said coldly. “What you
are trying to explain to me may be a joke—a slightly unfeeling joke. It may be your sincere view, in which case I ask your pardon for the former suggestion. But, in any case, it appears quite irrelevant to my duties. The mental morbidity, the mental downfall, of Professor Chadd, is a thing so painful to me that I cannot easily endure to speak of it. But it is clear there is a limit to everything. And if the Archangel Gabriel went mad it would sever his connection, I am sorry to say, with the British Museum Library."

He was stepping towards the door, but Grant’s hand, flung out in dramatic warning, arrested him.

“Stop!” said Basil sternly. “Stop while there is yet time. Do you want to take part in a great work, Mr Bingham? Do you want to help in the glory of Europe—in the glory of science? Do you want to carry your head in the air when it is bald or white because of the part that you bore in a great discovery? Do you want—”

Bingham cut in sharply:

“And if I do want this, Mr Grant—”

“Then,” said Basil lightly, “your task is easy. Get Chadd L800 a year till he stops dancing.”

With a fierce flap of his swinging gloves Bingham turned impatiently to the door, but in passing out of it found it blocked. Dr Colman was coming in.

“Forgive me, gentlemen,” he said, in a nervous, confidential voice, “the fact is, Mr Grant, I—er—have made a most disturbing discovery about Mr Chadd.”

Bingham looked at him with grave eyes.

“I was afraid so,” he said. “Drink, I imagine.”

“Drink!” echoed Colman, as if that were a much milder affair. “Oh, no, it’s not drink.”

Mr Bingham became somewhat agitated, and his voice grew hurried and vague. “Homicidal mania”—he began.

“No, no,” said the medical man impatiently.

“Thinks he’s made of glass,” said Bingham feverishly, “or says he’s God—or—”

“No,” said Dr Colman sharply; “the fact is, Mr Grant, my discovery is of a different character. The awful thing about him is—”

“Oh, go on, sir,” cried Bingham, in agony.

“The awful thing about him is,” repeated Colman, with deliberation, “that he isn’t mad.”

“Not mad!”

“There are quite well-known physical tests of lunacy,” said the doctor shortly;
“he hasn’t got any of them.”

“But why does he dance?” cried the despairing Bingham. “Why doesn’t he answer us? Why hasn’t he spoken to his family?”

“The devil knows,” said Dr Colman coolly. “I’m paid to judge of lunatics, but not of fools. The man’s not mad.”

“What on earth can it mean? Can’t we make him listen?” said Mr Bingham. “Can none get into any kind of communication with him?”

Grant’s voice struck in sudden and clear, like a steel bell:

“I shall be very happy,” he said, “to give him any message you like to send.”

Both men stared at him.

“Give him a message?” they cried simultaneously. “How will you give him a message?”

Basil smiled in his slow way.

“If you really want to know how I shall give him your message,” he began, but Bingham cried:

“Of course, of course,” with a sort of frenzy.

“Well,” said Basil, “like this.” And he suddenly sprang a foot into the air, coming down with crashing boots, and then stood on one leg.

His face was stern, though this effect was slightly spoiled by the fact that one of his feet was making wild circles in the air.

“You drive me to it,” he said. “You drive me to betray my friend. And I will, for his own sake, betray him.”

The sensitive face of Bingham took on an extra expression of distress as of one anticipating some disgraceful disclosure. “Anything painful, of course—” he began.

Basil let his loose foot fall on the carpet with a crash that struck them all rigid in their feeble attitudes.

“I idiots!” he cried. “Have you seen the man? Have you looked at James Chadd going dismally to and fro from his dingy house to your miserable library, with his futile books and his confounded umbrella, and never seen that he has the eyes of a fanatic? Have you never noticed, stuck casually behind his spectacles and above his seedy old collar, the face of a man who might have burned heretics, or died for the philosopher’s stone? It is all my fault, in a way: I lit the dynamite of his deadly faith. I argued against him on the score of his famous theory about language—the theory that language was complete in certain individuals and was picked up by others simply by watching them. I also chaffed him about not understanding things in rough and ready practice. What has this
glorious bigot done? He has answered me. He has worked out a system of
language of his own (it would take too long to explain); he has made up, I say, a
language of his own. And he has sworn that till people understand it, till he can
speak to us in this language, he will not speak in any other. And he shall not. I
have understood, by taking careful notice; and, by heaven, so shall the others.
This shall not be blown upon. He shall finish his experiment. He shall have L800
a year from somewhere till he has stopped dancing. To stop him now is an
infamous war on a great idea. It is religious persecution.”

Mr Bingham held out his hand cordially.

“I thank you, Mr Grant,” he said. “I hope I shall be able to answer for the
source of the L800 and I fancy that I shall. Will you come in my cab?”

“No, thank you very much, Mr Bingham,” said Grant heartily. “I think I will
go and have a chat with the professor in the garden.”

The conversation between Chadd and Grant appeared to be personal and
friendly. They were still dancing when I left.
CHAPTER 6

THE ECCENTRIC SECLUSION OF THE OLD LADY

The conversation of Rupert Grant had two great elements of interest—first, the long fantasias of detective deduction in which he was engaged, and, second, his genuine romantic interest in the life of London. His brother Basil said of him: “His reasoning is particularly cold and clear, and invariably leads him wrong. But his poetry comes in abruptly and leads him right.” Whether this was true of Rupert as a whole, or no, it was certainly curiously supported by one story about him which I think worth telling.

We were walking along a lonely terrace in Brompton together. The street was full of that bright blue twilight which comes about half past eight in summer, and which seems for the moment to be not so much a coming of darkness as the turning on of a new azure illuminator, as if the earth were lit suddenly by a sapphire sun. In the cool blue the lemon tint of the lamps had already begun to flame, and as Rupert and I passed them, Rupert talking excitedly, one after another the pale sparks sprang out of the dusk. Rupert was talking excitedly because he was trying to prove to me the nine hundred and ninety-ninth of his amateur detective theories. He would go about London, with this mad logic in his brain, seeing a conspiracy in a cab accident, and a special providence in a falling fusee. His suspicions at the moment were fixed upon an unhappy milkman who walked in front of us. So arresting were the incidents which afterwards overtook us that I am really afraid that I have forgotten what were the main outlines of the milkman’s crime. I think it had something to do with the fact that he had only one small can of milk to carry, and that of that he had left the lid loose and walked so quickly that he spilled milk on the pavement. This showed that he was not thinking of his small burden, and this again showed that he anticipated some other than lacteal business at the end of his walk, and this (taken in conjunction with something about muddy boots) showed something else that I have entirely forgotten. I am afraid that I derided this detailed revelation unmercifully; and I am afraid that Rupert Grant, who, though the best of fellows, had a good deal of the sensitiveness of the artistic temperament, slightly resented my derision. He endeavoured to take a whiff of his cigar, with the placidity which he associated with his profession, but the cigar, I think, was nearly bitten through.
“My dear fellow,” he said acidly, “I’ll bet you half a crown that wherever that milkman comes to a real stop I’ll find out something curious.”

“My resources are equal to that risk,” I said, laughing. “Done.”

We walked on for about a quarter of an hour in silence in the trail of the mysterious milkman. He walked quicker and quicker, and we had some ado to keep up with him; and every now and then he left a splash of milk, silver in the lamplight. Suddenly, almost before we could note it, he disappeared down the area steps of a house. I believe Rupert really believed that the milkman was a fairy; for a second he seemed to accept him as having vanished. Then calling something to me which somehow took no hold on my mind, he darted after the mystic milkman, and disappeared himself into the area.

I waited for at least five minutes, leaning against a lamp-post in the lonely street. Then the milkman came swinging up the steps without his can and hurried off clattering down the road. Two or three minutes more elapsed, and then Rupert came bounding up also, his face pale but yet laughing; a not uncommon contradiction in him, denoting excitement.

“My friend,” he said, rubbing his hands, “so much for all your scepticism. So much for your philistine ignorance of the possibilities of a romantic city. Two and sixpence, my boy, is the form in which your prosaic good nature will have to express itself.”

“What?” I said incredulously, “do you mean to say that you really did find anything the matter with the poor milkman?”

His face fell.

“Oh, the milkman,” he said, with a miserable affectation at having misunderstood me. “No, I—I—didn’t exactly bring anything home to the milkman himself, I—”

“What did the milkman say and do?” I said, with inexorable sternness.

“Well, to tell the truth,” said Rupert, shifting restlessly from one foot to another, “the milkman himself, as far as merely physical appearances went, just said, ‘Milk, Miss,’ and handed in the can. That is not to say, of course, that he did not make some secret sign or some—”

I broke into a violent laugh. “You idiot,” I said, “why don’t you own yourself wrong and have done with it? Why should he have made a secret sign any more than any one else? You own he said nothing and did nothing worth mentioning. You own that, don’t you?”

His face grew grave.

“Well, since you ask me, I must admit that I do. It is possible that the milkman
did not betray himself. It is even possible that I was wrong about him.”

“Then come along with you,” I said, with a certain amicable anger, “and remember that you owe me half a crown.”

“As to that, I differ from you,” said Rupert coolly. “The milkman’s remarks may have been quite innocent. Even the milkman may have been. But I do not owe you half a crown. For the terms of the bet were, I think, as follows, as I propounded them, that wherever that milkman came to a real stop I should find out something curious.”

“Well?” I said.

“Well,” he answered, “I jolly well have. You just come with me,” and before I could speak he had turned tail once more and whisked through the blue dark into the moat or basement of the house. I followed almost before I made any decision.

When we got down into the area I felt indescribably foolish literally, as the saying is, in a hole. There was nothing but a closed door, shuttered windows, the steps down which we had come, the ridiculous well in which I found myself, and the ridiculous man who had brought me there, and who stood there with dancing eyes. I was just about to turn back when Rupert caught me by the elbow.

“Just listen to that,” he said, and keeping my coat gripped in his right hand, he rapped with the knuckles of his left on the shutters of the basement window. His air was so definite that I paused and even inclined my head for a moment towards it. From inside was coming the murmur of an unmistakable human voice.

“Have you been talking to somebody inside?” I asked suddenly, turning to Rupert.

“No, I haven’t,” he replied, with a grim smile, “but I should very much like to. Do you know what somebody is saying in there?”

“No, of course not,” I replied.

“Then I recommend you to listen,” said Rupert sharply.

In the dead silence of the aristocratic street at evening, I stood a moment and listened. From behind the wooden partition, in which there was a long lean crack, was coming a continuous and moaning sound which took the form of the words: “When shall I get out? When shall I get out? Will they ever let me out?” or words to that effect.

“Do you know anything about this?” I said, turning upon Rupert very abruptly.

“Perhaps you think I am the criminal,” he said sardonically, “instead of being
in some small sense the detective. I came into this area two or three minutes ago, having told you that I knew there was something funny going on, and this woman behind the shutters (for it evidently is a woman) was moaning like mad. No, my dear friend, beyond that I do not know anything about her. She is not, startling as it may seem, my disinherited daughter, or a member of my secret seraglio. But when I hear a human being wailing that she can’t get out, and talking to herself like a mad woman and beating on the shutters with her fists, as she was doing two or three minutes ago, I think it worth mentioning, that is all.”

“My dear fellow,” I said, “I apologize; this is no time for arguing. What is to be done?”

Rupert Grant had a long clasp-knife naked and brilliant in his hand.

“First of all,” he said, “house-breaking.” And he forced the blade into the crevice of the wood and broke away a huge splinter, leaving a gap and glimpse of the dark window-pane inside. The room within was entirely unlighted, so that for the first few seconds the window seemed a dead and opaque surface, as dark as a strip of slate. Then came a realization which, though in a sense gradual, made us step back and catch our breath. Two large dim human eyes were so close to us that the window itself seemed suddenly to be a mask. A pale human face was pressed against the glass within, and with increased distinctness, with the increase of the opening came the words:

“When shall I get out?”

“What can all this be?” I said.

Rupert made no answer, but lifting his walking-stick and pointing the ferrule like a fencing sword at the glass, punched a hole in it, smaller and more accurate than I should have supposed possible. The moment he had done so the voice spouted out of the hole, so to speak, piercing and querulous and clear, making the same demand for liberty.

“Can’t you get out, madam?” I said, drawing near the hole in some perturbation.

“Get out? Of course I can’t,” moaned the unknown female bitterly. “They won’t let me. I told them I would be let out. I told them I’d call the police. But it’s no good. Nobody knows, nobody comes. They could keep me as long as they liked only—”

I was in the very act of breaking the window finally with my stick, incensed with this very sinister mystery, when Rupert held my arm hard, held it with a curious, still, and secret rigidity as if he desired to stop me, but did not desire to be observed to do so. I paused a moment, and in the act swung slightly round, so
that I was facing the supporting wall of the front door steps. The act froze me into a sudden stillness like that of Rupert, for a figure almost as motionless as the pillars of the portico, but unmistakably human, had put his head out from between the doorposts and was gazing down into the area. One of the lighted lamps of the street was just behind his head, throwing it into abrupt darkness. Consequently, nothing whatever could be seen of his face beyond one fact, that he was unquestionably staring at us. I must say I thought Rupert’s calmness magnificent. He rang the area bell quite idly, and went on talking to me with the easy end of a conversation which had never had any beginning. The black glaring figure in the portico did not stir. I almost thought it was really a statue. In another moment the grey area was golden with gaslight as the basement door was opened suddenly and a small and decorous housemaid stood in it.

“Pray excuse me,” said Rupert, in a voice which he contrived to make somehow or other at once affable and underbred, “but we thought perhaps that you might do something for the Waifs and Strays. We don’t expect—”

“Not here,” said the small servant, with the incomparable severity of the menial of the non-philanthropic, and slammed the door in our faces.

“Very sad, very sad—the indifference of these people,” said the philanthropist with gravity, as we went together up the steps. As we did so the motionless figure in the portico suddenly disappeared.

“Well, what do you make of that?” asked Rupert, slapping his gloves together when we got into the street.

I do not mind admitting that I was seriously upset. Under such conditions I had but one thought.

“Don’t you think,” I said a trifle timidly, “that we had better tell your brother?”

“Oh, if you like,” said Rupert, in a lordly way. “He is quite near, as I promised to meet him at Gloucester Road Station. Shall we take a cab? Perhaps, as you say, it might amuse him.”

Gloucester Road Station had, as if by accident, a somewhat deserted look. After a little looking about we discovered Basil Grant with his great head and his great white hat blocking the ticket-office window. I thought at first that he was taking a ticket for somewhere and being an astonishingly long time about it. As a matter of fact, he was discussing religion with the booking-office clerk, and had almost got his head through the hole in his excitement. When we dragged him away it was some time before he would talk of anything but the growth of an Oriental fatalism in modern thought, which had been well typified by some of
the official’s ingenious but perverse fallacies. At last we managed to get him to understand that we had made an astounding discovery. When he did listen, he listened attentively, walking between us up and down the lamp-lit street, while we told him in a rather feverish duet of the great house in South Kensington, of the equivocal milkman, of the lady imprisoned in the basement, and the man staring from the porch. At length he said:

“If you’re thinking of going back to look the thing up, you must be careful what you do. It’s no good you two going there. To go twice on the same pretext would look dubious. To go on a different pretext would look worse. You may be quite certain that the inquisitive gentleman who looked at you looked thoroughly, and will wear, so to speak, your portraits next to his heart. If you want to find out if there is anything in this without a police raid I fancy you had better wait outside. I’ll go in and see them.”

His slow and reflective walk brought us at length within sight of the house. It stood up ponderous and purple against the last pallor of twilight. It looked like an ogre’s castle. And so apparently it was.

“Do you think it’s safe, Basil,” said his brother, pausing, a little pale, under the lamp, “to go into that place alone? Of course we shall be near enough to hear if you yell, but these devils might do something—something sudden—or odd. I can’t feel it’s safe.”

“I know of nothing that is safe,” said Basil composedly, “except, possibly—death,” and he went up the steps and rang at the bell. When the massive respectable door opened for an instant, cutting a square of gaslight in the gathering dark, and then closed with a bang, burying our friend inside, we could not repress a shudder. It had been like the heavy gaping and closing of the dim lips of some evil leviathan. A freshening night breeze began to blow up the street, and we turned up the collars of our coats. At the end of twenty minutes, in which we had scarcely moved or spoken, we were as cold as icebergs, but more, I think, from apprehension than the atmosphere. Suddenly Rupert made an abrupt movement towards the house.

“I can’t stand this,” he began, but almost as he spoke sprang back into the shadow, for the panel of gold was again cut out of the black house front, and the burly figure of Basil was silhouetted against it coming out. He was roaring with laughter and talking so loudly that you could have heard every syllable across the street. Another voice, or, possibly, two voices, were laughing and talking back at him from within.

“No, no, no,” Basil was calling out, with a sort of hilarious hostility. “That’s
quite wrong. That’s the most ghastly heresy of all. It’s the soul, my dear chap, the soul that’s the arbiter of cosmic forces. When you see a cosmic force you don’t like, trick it, my boy. But I must really be off.”

“Come and pitch into us again,” came the laughing voice from out of the house. “We still have some bones unbroken.”

“Thanks very much, I will—good night,” shouted Grant, who had by this time reached the street.

“Good night,” came the friendly call in reply, before the door closed.

“Basil,” said Rupert Grant, in a hoarse whisper, “what are we to do?”

The elder brother looked thoughtfully from one of us to the other.

“What is to be done, Basil?” I repeated in uncontrollable excitement.

“I’m not sure,” said Basil doubtfully. “What do you say to getting some dinner somewhere and going to the Court Theatre tonight? I tried to get those fellows to come, but they couldn’t.”

We stared blankly.

“Go to the Court Theatre?” repeated Rupert. “What would be the good of that?”

“Good? What do you mean?” answered Basil, staring also. “Have you turned Puritan or Passive Resister, or something? For fun, of course.”

“But, great God in Heaven! What are we going to do, I mean!” cried Rupert.

“What about the poor woman locked up in that house? Shall I go for the police?”

Basil’s face cleared with immediate comprehension, and he laughed.

“Oh, that,” he said. “I’d forgotten that. That’s all right. Some mistake, possibly. Or some quite trifling private affair. But I’m sorry those fellows couldn’t come with us. Shall we take one of these green omnibuses? There is a restaurant in Sloane Square.”

“I sometimes think you play the fool to frighten us,” I said irritably. “How can we leave that woman locked up? How can it be a mere private affair? How can crime and kidnapping and murder, for all I know, be private affairs? If you found a corpse in a man’s drawing-room, would you think it bad taste to talk about it just as if it was a confounded dado or an infernal etching?”

Basil laughed heartily.

“That’s very forcible,” he said. “As a matter of fact, though, I know it’s all right in this case. And there comes the green omnibus.”

“How do you know it’s all right in this case?” persisted his brother angrily.

“My dear chap, the thing’s obvious,” answered Basil, holding a return ticket between his teeth while he fumbled in his waistcoat pocket. “Those two fellows
never committed a crime in their lives. They’re not the kind. Have either of you chaps got a halfpenny? I want to get a paper before the omnibus comes.”

“Oh, curse the paper!” cried Rupert, in a fury. “Do you mean to tell me, Basil Grant, that you are going to leave a fellow creature in pitch darkness in a private dungeon, because you’ve had ten minutes’ talk with the keepers of it and thought them rather good men?”

“Good men do commit crimes sometimes,” said Basil, taking the ticket out of his mouth. “But this kind of good man doesn’t commit that kind of crime. Well, shall we get on this omnibus?”

The great green vehicle was indeed plunging and lumbering along the dim wide street towards us. Basil had stepped from the curb, and for an instant it was touch and go whether we should all have leaped on to it and been borne away to the restaurant and the theatre.

“Basil,” I said, taking him firmly by the shoulder, “I simply won’t leave this street and this house.”

“Nor will I,” said Rupert, glaring at it and biting his fingers. “There’s some black work going on there. If I left it I should never sleep again.”

Basil Grant looked at us both seriously.

“Of course if you feel like that,” he said, “we’ll investigate further. You’ll find it’s all right, though. They’re only two young Oxford fellows. Extremely nice, too, though rather infected with this pseudo-Darwinian business. Ethics of evolution and all that.”

“I think,” said Rupert darkly, ringing the bell, “that we shall enlighten you further about their ethics.”

“And may I ask,” said Basil gloomily, “what it is that you propose to do?”

“I propose, first of all,” said Rupert, “to get into this house; secondly, to have a look at these nice young Oxford men; thirdly, to knock them down, bind them, gag them, and search the house.”

Basil stared indignantly for a few minutes. Then he was shaken for an instant with one of his sudden laughs.

“Poor little boys,” he said. “But it almost serves them right for holding such silly views, after all,” and he quaked again with amusement “there’s something confoundedly Darwinian about it.”

“I suppose you mean to help us?” said Rupert.

“Oh, yes, I’ll be in it,” answered Basil, “if it’s only to prevent your doing the poor chaps any harm.”

He was standing in the rear of our little procession, looking indifferent and
sometimes even sulky, but somehow the instant the door opened he stepped first into the hall, glowing with urbanity.

“So sorry to haunt you like this,” he said. “I met two friends outside who very much want to know you. May I bring them in?”

“Delighted, of course,” said a young voice, the unmistakable voice of the Isis, and I realized that the door had been opened, not by the decorous little servant girl, but by one of our hosts in person. He was a short, but shapely young gentleman, with curly dark hair and a square, snub-nosed face. He wore slippers and a sort of blazer of some incredible college purple.

“This way,” he said; “mind the steps by the staircase. This house is more crooked and old-fashioned than you would think from its snobbish exterior. There are quite a lot of odd corners in the place really.”

“That,” said Rupert, with a savage smile, “I can quite believe.”

We were by this time in the study or back parlour, used by the young inhabitants as a sitting-room, an apartment littered with magazines and books ranging from Dante to detective stories. The other youth, who stood with his back to the fire smoking a corncob, was big and burly, with dead brown hair brushed forward and a Norfolk jacket. He was that particular type of man whose every feature and action is heavy and clumsy, and yet who is, you would say, rather exceptionally a gentleman.

“Any more arguments?” he said, when introductions had been effected. “I must say, Mr Grant, you were rather severe upon eminent men of science such as we. I’ve half a mind to chuck my D.Sc. and turn minor poet.”

“Bosh,” answered Grant. “I never said a word against eminent men of science. What I complain of is a vague popular philosophy which supposes itself to be scientific when it is really nothing but a sort of new religion and an uncommonly nasty one. When people talked about the fall of man they knew they were talking about a mystery, a thing they didn’t understand. Now that they talk about the survival of the fittest they think they do understand it, whereas they have not merely no notion, they have an elaborately false notion of what the words mean. The Darwinian movement has made no difference to mankind, except that, instead of talking unphilosophically about philosophy, they now talk unscientifically about science.”

“That is all very well,” said the big young man, whose name appeared to be Burrows. “Of course, in a sense, science, like mathematics or the violin, can only be perfectly understood by specialists. Still, the rudiments may be of public use. Greenwood here,” indicating the little man in the blazer, “doesn’t know one note
of music from another. Still, he knows something. He knows enough to take off
his hat when they play ‘God save the King.’ He doesn’t take it off by mistake
when they play ‘Oh, dem Golden Slippers.’ Just in the same way science—"

Here Mr Burrows stopped abruptly. He was interrupted by an argument
uncommon in philosophical controversy and perhaps not wholly legitimate.
Rupert Grant had bounded on him from behind, flung an arm round his throat,
and bent the giant backwards.

“Knock the other fellow down, Swinburne,” he called out, and before I knew
where I was I was locked in a grapple with the man in the purple blazer. He was
a wiry fighter, who bent and sprang like a whalebone, but I was heavier and had
taken him utterly by surprise. I twitched one of his feet from under him; he
swung for a moment on the single foot, and then we fell with a crash amid the
litter of newspapers, myself on top.

My attention for a moment released by victory, I could hear Basil’s voice
finishing some long sentence of which I had not heard the beginning.

“. . . wholly, I must confess, unintelligible to me, my dear sir, and I need not
say unpleasant. Still one must side with one’s old friends against the most
fascinating new ones. Permit me, therefore, in tying you up in this antimacassar,
to make it as commodious as handcuffs can reasonably be while . . .”

I had staggered to my feet. The gigantic Burrows was toiling in the garotte of
Rupert, while Basil was striving to master his mighty hands. Rupert and Basil
were both particularly strong, but so was Mr Burrows; how strong, we knew a
second afterwards. His head was held back by Rupert’s arm, but a convulsive
heave went over his whole frame. An instant after his head plunged forward like
a bull’s, and Rupert Grant was slung head over heels, a catherine wheel of legs,
on the floor in front of him. Simultaneously the bull’s head butted Basil in the
chest, bringing him also to the ground with a crash, and the monster, with a
Berserker roar, leaped at me and knocked me into the corner of the room,
smashing the waste-paper basket. The bewildered Greenwood sprang furiously
to his feet. Basil did the same. But they had the best of it now.

Greenwood dashed to the bell and pulled it violently, sending peals through
the great house. Before I could get panting to my feet, and before Rupert, who
had been literally stunned for a few moments, could even lift his head from the
floor, two footmen were in the room. Defeated even when we were in a majority,
we were now outnumbered. Greenwood and one of the footmen flung
themselves upon me, crushing me back into the corner upon the wreck of the
paper basket. The other two flew at Basil, and pinned him against the wall.
Rupert lifted himself on his elbow, but he was still dazed.

In the strained silence of our helplessness I heard the voice of Basil come with a loud incongruous cheerfulness.

“Now this,” he said, “is what I call enjoying oneself.”

I caught a glimpse of his face, flushed and forced against the bookcase, from between the swaying limbs of my captors and his. To my astonishment his eyes were really brilliant with pleasure, like those of a child heated by a favourite game.

I made several apoplectic efforts to rise, but the servant was on top of me so heavily that Greenwood could afford to leave me to him. He turned quickly to come to reinforce the two who were mastering Basil. The latter’s head was already sinking lower and lower, like a leaking ship, as his enemies pressed him down. He flung up one hand just as I thought him falling and hung on to a huge tome in the bookcase, a volume, I afterwards discovered, of St Chrysostom’s theology. Just as Greenwood bounded across the room towards the group, Basil plucked the ponderous tome bodily out of the shelf, swung it, and sent it spinning through the air, so that it struck Greenwood flat in the face and knocked him over like a rolling ninepin. At the same instant Basil’s stiffness broke, and he sank, his enemies closing over him.

Rupert’s head was clear, but his body shaken; he was hanging as best he could on to the half-prostrate Greenwood. They were rolling over each other on the floor, both somewhat enfeebled by their falls, but Rupert certainly the more so. I was still successfully held down. The floor was a sea of torn and trampled papers and magazines, like an immense waste-paper basket. Burrows and his companion were almost up to the knees in them, as in a drift of dead leaves. And Greenwood had his leg stuck right through a sheet of the Pall Mall Gazette, which clung to it ludicrously, like some fantastic trouser frill.

Basil, shut from me in a human prison, a prison of powerful bodies, might be dead for all I knew. I fancied, however, that the broad back of Mr Burrows, which was turned towards me, had a certain bend of effort in it as if my friend still needed some holding down. Suddenly that broad back swayed hither and thither. It was swaying on one leg; Basil, somehow, had hold of the other. Burrows’ huge fists and those of the footman were battering Basil’s sunken head like an anvil, but nothing could get the giant’s ankle out of his sudden and savage grip. While his own head was forced slowly down in darkness and great pain, the right leg of his captor was being forced in the air. Burrows swung to and fro with a purple face. Then suddenly the floor and the walls and the ceiling
shook together, as the colossus fell, all his length seeming to fill the floor. Basil sprang up with dancing eyes, and with three blows like battering-rams knocked the footman into a cocked hat. Then he sprang on top of Burrows, with one antimacassar in his hand and another in his teeth, and bound him hand and foot almost before he knew clearly that his head had struck the floor. Then Basil sprang at Greenwood, whom Rupert was struggling to hold down, and between them they secured him easily. The man who had hold of me let go and turned to his rescue, but I leaped up like a spring released, and, to my infinite satisfaction, knocked the fellow down. The other footman, bleeding at the mouth and quite demoralized, was stumbling out of the room. My late captor, without a word, slunk after him, seeing that the battle was won. Rupert was sitting astride the pinioned Mr Greenwood, Basil astride the pinioned Mr Burrows.

To my surprise the latter gentleman, lying bound on his back, spoke in a perfectly calm voice to the man who sat on top of him.

“And now, gentlemen,” he said, “since you have got your own way, perhaps you wouldn’t mind telling us what the deuce all this is?”

“This,” said Basil, with a radiant face, looking down at his captive, “this is what we call the survival of the fittest.”

Rupert, who had been steadily collecting himself throughout the latter phases of the fight, was intellectually altogether himself again at the end of it. Springing up from the prostrate Greenwood, and knotting a handkerchief round his left hand, which was bleeding from a blow, he sang out quite coolly:

“Basil, will you mount guard over the captive of your bow and spear and antimacassar? Swinburne and I will clear out the prison downstairs.”

“All right,” said Basil, rising also and seating himself in a leisured way in an armchair. “Don’t hurry for us,” he said, glancing round at the litter of the room, “we have all the illustrated papers.”

Rupert lurched thoughtfully out of the room, and I followed him even more slowly; in fact, I lingered long enough to hear, as I passed through the room, the passages and the kitchen stairs, Basil’s voice continuing conversationally:

“And now, Mr Burrows,” he said, settling himself sociably in the chair, “there’s no reason why we shouldn’t go on with that amusing argument. I’m sorry that you have to express yourself lying on your back on the floor, and, as I told you before, I’ve no more notion why you are there than the man in the moon. A conversationalist like yourself, however, can scarcely be seriously handicapped by any bodily posture. You were saying, if I remember right, when this incidental fracas occurred, that the rudiments of science might with
advantage be made public.”

“Precisely,” said the large man on the floor in an easy tone. “I hold that nothing more than a rough sketch of the universe as seen by science can be . . .”

And here the voices died away as we descended into the basement. I noticed that Mr Greenwood did not join in the amicable controversy. Strange as it may appear, I think he looked back upon our proceedings with a slight degree of resentment. Mr Burrows, however, was all philosophy and chattiness. We left them, as I say, together, and sank deeper and deeper into the under-world of that mysterious house, which, perhaps, appeared to us somewhat more Tartarean than it really was, owing to our knowledge of its semi-criminal mystery and of the human secret locked below.

The basement floor had several doors, as is usual in such a house; doors that would naturally lead to the kitchen, the scullery, the pantry, the servants’ hall, and so on. Rupert flung open all the doors with indescribable rapidity. Four out of the five opened on entirely empty apartments. The fifth was locked. Rupert broke the door in like a bandbox, and we fell into the sudden blackness of the sealed, unlighted room.

Rupert stood on the threshold, and called out like a man calling into an abyss:

“Whoever you are, come out. You are free. The people who held you captive are captives themselves. We heard you crying and we came to deliver you. We have bound your enemies upstairs hand and foot. You are free.”

For some seconds after he had spoken into the darkness there was a dead silence in it. Then there came a kind of muttering and moaning. We might easily have taken it for the wind or rats if we had not happened to have heard it before. It was unmistakably the voice of the imprisoned woman, drearily demanding liberty, just as we had heard her demand it.

“Has anybody got a match?” said Rupert grimly. “I fancy we have come pretty near the end of this business.”

I struck a match and held it up. It revealed a large, bare, yellow-papered apartment with a dark-clad figure at the other end of it near the window. An instant after it burned my fingers and dropped, leaving darkness. It had, however, revealed something more practical—an iron gas bracket just above my head. I struck another match and lit the gas. And we found ourselves suddenly and seriously in the presence of the captive.

At a sort of workbox in the window of this subterranean breakfast-room sat an elderly lady with a singularly high colour and almost startling silver hair. She had, as if designedly to relieve these effects, a pair of Mephistophelian black
eyebrows and a very neat black dress. The glare of the gas lit up her piquant hair and face perfectly against the brown background of the shutters. The background was blue and not brown in one place; at the place where Rupert’s knife had torn a great opening in the wood about an hour before.

“Madam,” said he, advancing with a gesture of the hat, “permit me to have the pleasure of announcing to you that you are free. Your complaints happened to strike our ears as we passed down the street, and we have therefore ventured to come to your rescue.”

The old lady with the red face and the black eyebrows looked at us for a moment with something of the apoplectic stare of a parrot. Then she said, with a sudden gust or breathing of relief:

“Rescue? Where is Mr Greenwood? Where is Mr Burrows? Did you say you had rescued me?”

“Yes, madam,” said Rupert, with a beaming condescension. “We have very satisfactorily dealt with Mr Greenwood and Mr Burrows. We have settled affairs with them very satisfactorily.”

The old lady rose from her chair and came very quickly towards us.

“What did you say to them? How did you persuade them?” she cried.

“We persuaded them, my dear madam,” said Rupert, laughing, “by knocking them down and tying them up. But what is the matter?”

To the surprise of every one the old lady walked slowly back to her seat by the window.

“Do I understand,” she said, with the air of a person about to begin knitting, “that you have knocked down Mr Burrows and tied him up?”

“We have,” said Rupert proudly; “we have resisted their oppression and conquered it.”

“Oh, thanks,” answered the old lady, and sat down by the window.

A considerable pause followed.

“The road is quite clear for you, madam,” said Rupert pleasantly.

The old lady rose, cocking her black eyebrows and her silver crest at us for an instant.

“But what about Greenwood and Burrows?” she said. “What did I understand you to say had become of them?”

“They are lying on the floor upstairs,” said Rupert, chuckling. “Tied hand and foot.”

“Well, that settles it,” said the old lady, coming with a kind of bang into her seat again, “I must stop where I am.”
Rupert looked bewildered.
“Stop where you are?” he said. “Why should you stop any longer where you are? What power can force you now to stop in this miserable cell?”
“The question rather is,” said the old lady, with composure, “what power can force me to go anywhere else?”
We both stared wildly at her and she stared tranquilly at us both.
At last I said, “Do you really mean to say that we are to leave you here?”
“I suppose you don’t intend to tie me up,” she said, “and carry me off? I certainly shall not go otherwise.”
“But, my dear madam,” cried out Rupert, in a radiant exasperation, “we heard you with our own ears crying because you could not get out.”
“Eavesdroppers often hear rather misleading things,” replied the captive grimly. “I suppose I did break down a bit and lose my temper and talk to myself. But I have some sense of honour for all that.”
“Some sense of honour?” repeated Rupert, and the last light of intelligence died out of his face, leaving it the face of an idiot with rolling eyes.
He moved vaguely towards the door and I followed. But I turned yet once more in the toils of my conscience and curiosity. “Can we do nothing for you, madam?” I said forlornly.
“Why,” said the lady, “if you are particularly anxious to do me a little favour you might untie the gentlemen upstairs.”
Rupert plunged heavily up the kitchen staircase, shaking it with his vague violence. With mouth open to speak he stumbled to the door of the sitting-room and scene of battle.
“Theoretically speaking, that is no doubt true,” Mr Burrows was saying, lying on his back and arguing easily with Basil; “but we must consider the matter as it appears to our sense. The origin of morality . . .”
“Basil,” cried Rupert, gasping, “she won’t come out.”
“Who won’t come out?” asked Basil, a little cross at being interrupted in an argument.
“The lady downstairs,” replied Rupert. “The lady who was locked up. She won’t come out. And she says that all she wants is for us to let these fellows loose.”
“And a jolly sensible suggestion,” cried Basil, and with a bound he was on top of the prostrate Burrows once more and was unknitting his bonds with hands and teeth.
“A brilliant idea. Swinburne, just undo Mr Greenwood.”
In a dazed and automatic way I released the little gentleman in the purple jacket, who did not seem to regard any of the proceedings as particularly sensible or brilliant. The gigantic Burrows, on the other hand, was heaving with herculean laughter.

“Well,” said Basil, in his cheeriest way, “I think we must be getting away. We’ve so much enjoyed our evening. Far too much regard for you to stand on ceremony. If I may so express myself, we’ve made ourselves at home. Good night. Thanks so much. Come along, Rupert.”

“Basil,” said Rupert desperately, “for God’s sake come and see what you can make of the woman downstairs. I can’t get the discomfort out of my mind. I admit that things look as if we had made a mistake. But these gentlemen won’t mind perhaps . . .”

“No, no,” cried Burrows, with a sort of Rabelaisian uproariousness. “No, no, look in the pantry, gentlemen. Examine the coal-hole. Make a tour of the chimneys. There are corpses all over the house, I assure you.”

This adventure of ours was destined to differ in one respect from others which I have narrated. I had been through many wild days with Basil Grant, days for the first half of which the sun and the moon seemed to have gone mad. But it had almost invariably happened that towards the end of the day and its adventure things had cleared themselves like the sky after rain, and a luminous and quiet meaning had gradually dawned upon me. But this day’s work was destined to end in confusion worse confounded. Before we left that house, ten minutes afterwards, one half-witted touch was added which rolled all our minds in cloud. If Rupert’s head had suddenly fallen off on the floor, if wings had begun to sprout out of Greenwood’s shoulders, we could scarcely have been more suddenly stricken. And yet of this we had no explanation. We had to go to bed that night with the prodigy and get up next morning with it and let it stand in our memories for weeks and months. As will be seen, it was not until months afterwards that by another accident and in another way it was explained. For the present I only state what happened.

When all five of us went down the kitchen stairs again, Rupert leading, the two hosts bringing up the rear, we found the door of the prison again closed. Throwing it open we found the place again as black as pitch. The old lady, if she was still there, had turned out the gas: she seemed to have a weird preference for sitting in the dark.

Without another word Rupert lit the gas again. The little old lady turned her bird-like head as we all stumbled forward in the strong gaslight. Then, with a
quickness that almost made me jump, she sprang up and swept a sort of old-fashioned curtsey or reverence. I looked quickly at Greenwood and Burrows, to whom it was natural to suppose this subservience had been offered. I felt irritated at what was implied in this subservience, and desired to see the faces of the tyrants as they received it. To my surprise they did not seem to have seen it at all: Burrows was paring his nails with a small penknife. Greenwood was at the back of the group and had hardly entered the room. And then an amazing fact became apparent. It was Basil Grant who stood foremost of the group, the golden gaslight lighting up his strong face and figure. His face wore an expression indescribably conscious, with the suspicion of a very grave smile. His head was slightly bent with a restrained bow. It was he who had acknowledged the lady’s obeisance. And it was he, beyond any shadow of reasonable doubt, to whom it had really been directed.

“So I hear,” he said, in a kindly yet somehow formal voice, “I hear, madam, that my friends have been trying to rescue you. But without success.”

“No one, naturally, knows my faults better than you,” answered the lady with a high colour. “But you have not found me guilty of treachery.”

“I willingly attest it, madam,” replied Basil, in the same level tones, “and the fact is that I am so much gratified with your exhibition of loyalty that I permit myself the pleasure of exercising some very large discretionary powers. You would not leave this room at the request of these gentlemen. But you know that you can safely leave it at mine.”

The captive made another reverence. “I have never complained of your injustice,” she said. “I need scarcely say what I think of your generosity.”

And before our staring eyes could blink she had passed out of the room, Basil holding the door open for her.

He turned to Greenwood with a relapse into joviality. “This will be a relief to you,” he said.

“Yes, it will,” replied that immovable young gentleman with a face like a sphinx.

We found ourselves outside in the dark blue night, shaken and dazed as if we had fallen into it from some high tower.

“Basil,” said Rupert at last, in a weak voice, “I always thought you were my brother. But are you a man? I mean—are you only a man?”

“At present,” replied Basil, “my mere humanity is proved by one of the most unmistakable symbols—hunger. We are too late for the theatre in Sloane Square. But we are not too late for the restaurant. Here comes the green omnibus!” and
he had leaped on it before we could speak.

As I said, it was months after that Rupert Grant suddenly entered my room, swinging a satchel in his hand and with a general air of having jumped over the garden wall, and implored me to go with him upon the latest and wildest of his expeditions. He proposed to himself no less a thing than the discovery of the actual origin, whereabouts, and headquarters of the source of all our joys and sorrows—the Club of Queer Trades. I should expand this story for ever if I explained how ultimately we ran this strange entity to its lair. The process meant a hundred interesting things. The tracking of a member, the bribing of a cabman, the fighting of roughs, the lifting of a paving stone, the finding of a cellar, the finding of a cellar below the cellar, the finding of the subterranean passage, the finding of the Club of Queer Trades.

I have had many strange experiences in my life, but never a stranger one than that I felt when I came out of those rambling, sightless, and seemingly hopeless passages into the sudden splendour of a sumptuous and hospitable dining-room, surrounded upon almost every side by faces that I knew. There was Mr Montmorency, the Arboreal House-Agent, seated between the two brisk young men who were occasionally vicars, and always Professional Detainers. There was Mr P. G. Northover, founder of the Adventure and Romance Agency. There was Professor Chadd, who invented the dancing Language.

As we entered, all the members seemed to sink suddenly into their chairs, and with the very action the vacancy of the presidential seat gaped at us like a missing tooth.

"The president’s not here,” said Mr P. G. Northover, turning suddenly to Professor Chadd.

"N—no,” said the philosopher, with more than his ordinary vagueness. “I can’t imagine where he is.”

“Good heavens,” said Mr Montmorency, jumping up, “I really feel a little nervous. I’ll go and see.” And he ran out of the room.

An instant after he ran back again, twittering with a timid ecstasy.

“He’s there, gentlemen—he’s there all right—he’s coming in now,” he cried, and sat down. Rupert and I could hardly help feeling the beginnings of a sort of wonder as to who this person might be who was the first member of this insane brotherhood. Who, we thought indistinctly, could be maddest in this world of madmen: what fantastic was it whose shadow filled all these fantastics with so loyal an expectation?

Suddenly we were answered. The door flew open and the room was filled and
shaken with a shout, in the midst of which Basil Grant, smiling and in evening
dress, took his seat at the head of the table.

How we ate that dinner I have no idea. In the common way I am a person
particularly prone to enjoy the long luxuriance of the club dinner. But on this
occasion it seemed a hopeless and endless string of courses. Hors-d’oeuvre
sardines seemed as big as herrings, soup seemed a sort of ocean, larks were
ducks, ducks were ostriches until that dinner was over. The cheese course was
maddening. I had often heard of the moon being made of green cheese. That
night I thought the green cheese was made of the moon. And all the time Basil
Grant went on laughing and eating and drinking, and never threw one glance at
us to tell us why he was there, the king of these capering idiots.

At last came the moment which I knew must in some way enlighten us, the
time of the club speeches and the club toasts. Basil Grant rose to his feet amid a
surge of songs and cheers.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “it is a custom in this society that the president for the
year opens the proceedings not by any general toast of sentiment, but by calling
upon each member to give a brief account of his trade. We then drink to that
calling and to all who follow it. It is my business, as the senior member, to open
by stating my claim to membership of this club. Years ago, gentlemen, I was a
judge; I did my best in that capacity to do justice and to administer the law. But
it gradually dawned on me that in my work, as it was, I was not touching even
the fringe of justice. I was seated in the seat of the mighty, I was robed in scarlet
and ermine; nevertheless, I held a small and lowly and futile post. I had to go by
a mean rule as much as a postman, and my red and gold was worth no more than
his. Daily there passed before me taut and passionate problems, the stringency of
which I had to pretend to relieve by silly imprisonments or silly damages, while
I knew all the time, by the light of my living common sense, that they would
have been far better relieved by a kiss or a thrashing, or a few words of
explanation, or a duel, or a tour in the West Highlands. Then, as this grew on
me, there grew on me continuously the sense of a mountainous frivolity. Every
word said in the court, a whisper or an oath, seemed more connected with life
than the words I had to say. Then came the time when I publicly blasphemed the
whole bosh, was classed as a madman and melted from public life.”

Something in the atmosphere told me that it was not only Rupert and I who
were listening with intensity to this statement.

“Well, I discovered that I could be of no real use. I offered myself privately as
a purely moral judge to settle purely moral differences. Before very long these
unofficial courts of honour (kept strictly secret) had spread over the whole of society. People were tried before me not for the practical trifles for which nobody cares, such as committing a murder, or keeping a dog without a licence. My criminals were tried for the faults which really make social life impossible. They were tried before me for selfishness, or for an impossible vanity, or for scandalmongering, or for stinginess to guests or dependents. Of course these courts had no sort of real coercive powers. The fulfilment of their punishments rested entirely on the honour of the ladies and gentlemen involved, including the honour of the culprits. But you would be amazed to know how completely our orders were always obeyed. Only lately I had a most pleasing example. A maiden lady in South Kensington whom I had condemned to solitary confinement for being the means of breaking off an engagement through backbiting, absolutely refused to leave her prison, although some well-meaning persons had been inopportune enough to rescue her.”

Rupert Grant was staring at his brother, his mouth fallen agape. So, for the matter of that, I expect, was I. This, then, was the explanation of the old lady’s strange discontent and her still stranger content with her lot. She was one of the culprits of his Voluntary Criminal Court. She was one of the clients of his Queer Trade.

We were still dazed when we drank, amid a crash of glasses, the health of Basil’s new judiciary. We had only a confused sense of everything having been put right, the sense men will have when they come into the presence of God. We dimly heard Basil say:

“Mr P. G. Northover will now explain the Adventure and Romance Agency.”

And we heard equally dimly Northover beginning the statement he had made long ago to Major Brown. Thus our epic ended where it had begun, like a true cycle.
THE TREES
OF PRIDE

G. K. CHESTERTON
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

THE TREES OF PRIDE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I
THE TALE OF THE PEACOCK TREES

II
THE WAGER OF SQUIRE VANE

III
THE MYSTERY OF THE WELL

IV
THE CHASE AFTER THE TRUTH
THE TALE OF THE PEACOCK TREES

Squire Vane was an elderly schoolboy of English education and Irish extraction. His English education, at one of the great public schools, had preserved his intellect perfectly and permanently at the stage of boyhood. But his Irish extraction subconsciously upset in him the proper solemnity of an old boy, and sometimes gave him back the brighter outlook of a naughty boy. He had a bodily impatience which played tricks upon him almost against his will, and had already rendered him rather too radiant a failure in civil and diplomatic service. Thus it is true that compromise is the key of British policy, especially as effecting an impartiality among the religions of India; but Vane’s attempt to meet the Moslem halfway by kicking off one boot at the gates of the mosque, was felt not so much to indicate true impartiality as something that could only be called an aggressive indifference. Again, it is true that an English aristocrat can hardly enter fully into the feelings of either party in a quarrel between a Russian Jew and an Orthodox procession carrying relics; but Vane’s idea that the procession might carry the Jew as well, himself a venerable and historic relic, was misunderstood on both sides. In short, he was a man who particularly prided himself on having no nonsense about him; with the result that he was always doing nonsensical things. He seemed to be standing on his head merely to prove that he was hard–headed.

He had just finished a hearty breakfast, in the society of his daughter, at a table under a tree in his garden by the Cornish coast. For, having a glorious circulation, he insisted on as many outdoor meals as possible, though spring had barely touched the woods and warmed the seas round that southern extremity of England. His daughter Barbara, a good–looking girl with heavy red hair and a face as grave as one of the garden statues, still sat almost motionless as a statue when her father rose. A fine tall figure in light clothes, with his white hair and mustache flying backwards rather fiercely from a face that was good–humored enough, for he carried his very wide Panama hat in his hand, he strode across the terraced garden, down some stone steps flanked with old ornamental urns to a more woodland path fringed with little trees, and so down a zigzag road which descended the craggy Cliff to the shore, where he was to meet a guest arriving by boat. A yacht was already in the blue bay, and he could see a boat pulling
toward the little paved pier.

And yet in that short walk between the green turf and the yellow sands he was destined to find. his hard–headedness provoked into a not unfamiliar phase which the world was inclined to call hot–headedness. The fact was that the Cornish peasantry, who composed his tenantry and domestic establishment, were far from being people with no nonsense about them. There was, alas! a great deal of nonsense about them; with ghosts, witches, and traditions as old as Merlin, they seemed to surround him with a fairy ring of nonsense. But the magic circle had one center: there was one point in which the curving conversation of the rustics always returned. It was a point that always pricked the Squire to exasperation, and even in this short walk he seemed to strike it everywhere. He paused before descending the steps from the lawn to speak to the gardener about potting some foreign shrubs, and the gardener seemed to be gloomily gratified, in every line of his leathery brown visage, at the chance of indicating that he had formed a low opinion of foreign shrubs.

“We wish you’d get rid of what you’ve got here, sir,” he observed, digging doggedly. “Nothing’ll grow right with them here.”

“Shrubs!” said the Squire, laughing. “You don’t call the peacock trees shrubs, do you? Fine tall trees–you ought to be proud of them.”

“Ill weeds grow apace,” observed the gardener. “Weeds can grow as houses when somebody plants them.” Then he added: “Him that sowed tares in the Bible, Squire.”

“Oh, blast your–” began the Squire, and then replaced the more apt and alliterative word “Bible” by the general word “superstition.” He was himself a robust rationalist, but he went to church to set his tenants an example. Of what, it would have puzzled him to say.

A little way along the lower path by the trees he encountered a woodcutter, one Martin, who was more explicit, having more of a grievance. His daughter was at that time seriously ill with a fever recently common on that coast, and the Squire, who was a kind–hearted gentleman, would normally have made allowances for low spirits and loss of temper. But he came near to losing his own again when the peasant persisted in connecting his tragedy with the traditional monomania about the foreign trees.

“If she were well enough I’d move her,” said the woodcutter, “as we can’t move them, I suppose. I’d just like to get my chopper into them and feel ’em come crashing down.”

“One would think they were dragons,” said Vane.
“And that’s about what they look like,” replied Martin. “Look at ’em!”

The woodman was naturally a rougher and even wilder figure than the gardener. His face also was brown, and looked like an antique parchment, and it was framed in an outlandish arrangement of raven beard and whiskers, which was really a fashion fifty years ago, but might have been five thousand years old or older. Phoenicians, one felt, trading on those strange shores in the morning of the world, might have combed or curled or braided their blue–black hair into some such quaint patterns. For this patch of population was as much a corner of Cornwall as Cornwall is a corner of England; a tragic and unique race, small and interrelated like a Celtic clan. The clan was older than the Vane family, though that was old as county families go. For in many such parts of England it is the aristocrats who are the latest arrivals. It was the sort of racial type that is supposed to be passing, and perhaps has already passed.

The obnoxious objects stood some hundred yards away from the speaker, who waved toward them with his ax; and there was something suggestive in the comparison. That coast, to begin with, stretching toward the sunset, was itself almost as fantastic as a sunset cloud. It was cut out against the emerald or indigo of the sea in graven horns and crescents that might be the cast or mold of some such crested serpents; and, beneath, was pierced and fretted by caves and crevices, as if by the boring of some such titanic worms. Over and above this draconian architecture of the earth a veil of gray woods hung thinner like a vapor; woods which the witchcraft of the sea had, as usual, both blighted and blown out of shape. To the right the trees trailed along the sea front in a single line, each drawn out in thin wild lines like a caricature. At the other end of their extent they multiplied into a huddle of hunchbacked trees, a wood spreading toward a projecting part of the high coast. It was here that the sight appeared to which so many eyes and minds seemed to be almost automatically turning.

Out of the middle of this low, and more or less level wood, rose three separate stems that shot up and soared into the sky like a lighthouse out of the waves or a church spire out of the village roofs. They formed a clump of three columns close together, which might well be the mere bifurcation, or rather trifurcation, of one tree, the lower part being lost or sunken in the thick wood around. Everything about them suggested something stranger and more southern than anything even in that last peninsula of Britain which pushes out farthest toward Spain and Africa and the southern stars. Their leathery leafage had sprouted in advance of the faint mist of yellow–green around them, and it was of another and less natural green, tinged with blue, like the colors of a kingfisher. But one
might fancy it the scales of some three-headed dragon towering over a herd of huddled and fleeing cattle.

“I am exceedingly sorry your girl is so unwell,” said Vane shortly. “But really—” and he strode down the steep road with plunging strides.

The boat was already secured to the little stone jetty, and the boatman, a younger shadow of the woodcutter—and, indeed, a nephew of that useful malcontent—saluted his territorial lord with the sullen formality of the family. The Squire acknowledged it casually and had soon forgotten all such things in shaking hands with the visitor who had just come ashore. The visitor was a long, loose man, very lean to be so young, whose long, fine features seemed wholly fitted together of bone and nerve, and seemed somehow to contrast with his hair, that showed in vivid yellow patches upon his hollow temples under the brim of his white holiday hat. He was carefully dressed in exquisite taste, though he had come straight from a considerable sea voyage; and he carried something in his hand which in his long European travels, and even longer European visits, he had almost forgotten to call a gripsack.

Mr. Cyprian Paynter was an American who lived in Italy. There was a good deal more to be said about him, for he was a very acute and cultivated gentleman; but those two facts would, perhaps, cover most of the others. Storing his mind like a museum with the wonder of the Old World, but all lit up as by a window with the wonder of the New, he had fallen heir to some thing of the unique critical position of Ruskin or Pater, and was further famous as a discoverer of minor poets. He was a judicious discoverer, and he did not turn all his minor poets into major prophets. If his geese were swans, they were not all Swans of Avon. He had even incurred the deadly suspicion of classicism by differing from his young friends, the Punctuist Poets, when they produced versification consisting exclusively of commas and colons. He had a more humane sympathy with the modern flame kindled from the embers of Celtic mythology, and it was in reality the recent appearance of a Cornish poet, a sort of parallel to the new Irish poets, which had brought him on this occasion to Cornwall. He was, indeed, far too well—mannered to allow a host to guess that any pleasure was being sought outside his own hospitality. He had a long standing invitation from Vane, whom he had met in Cyprus in the latter’s days of undiplomatic diplomacy; and Vane was not aware that relations had only been thus renewed after the critic had read Merlin and Other Verses, by a new writer named John Treherne. Nor did the Squire even begin to realize the much more diplomatic diplomacy by which he had been induced to invite the local bard to
lunch on the very day of the American critic’s arrival.

Mr. Paynter was still standing with his gripsack, gazing in a trance of true admiration at the hollowed crags, topped by the gray, grotesque wood, and crested finally by the three fantastic trees.

“It is like being shipwrecked on the coast of fairyland,” he said,
“I hope you haven’t been shipwrecked much,” replied his host, smiling. “I fancy Jake here can look after you very well.”

Mr. Paynter looked across at the boatman and smiled also. “I am afraid,” he said, “our friend is not quite so enthusiastic for this landscape as I am.”

“Oh, the trees, I suppose!” said the Squire wearily.

The boatman was by normal trade a fisherman; but as his house, built of black tarred timber, stood right on the foreshore a few yards from the pier, he was employed in such cases as a sort of ferryman. He was a big, black–browed youth generally silent, but something seemed now to sting him into speech.

“Well, sir,” he said, “everybody knows it’s not natural. Everybody knows the sea blights trees and beats them under, when they’re only just trees. These things thrive like some unholy great seaweed that don’t belong to the land at all. It’s like the—the blessed sea serpent got on shore, Squire, and eating everything up.”

“There is some stupid legend,” said Squire Vane gruffly. “But come up into the garden; I want to introduce you to my daughter.”

When, however, they reached the little table under the tree, the apparently immovable young lady had moved away after all, and it was some time before they came upon the track of her. She had risen, though languidly, and wandered slowly along the upper path of the terraced garden looking down on the lower path where it ran closer to the main bulk of the little wood by the sea.

Her languor was not a feebleness but rather a fullness of life, like that of a child half awake; she seemed to stretch herself and enjoy everything without noticing anything. She passed the wood, into the gray huddle of which a single white path vanished through a black hole. Along this part of the terrace ran something like a low rampart or balustrade, embowered with flowers at intervals; and she leaned over it, looking down at another glimpse of the glowing sea behind the clump of trees, and on another irregular path tumbling down to the pier and the boatman’s cottage on the beach.

As she gazed, sleepily enough, she saw that a strange figure was very actively climbing the path, apparently coming from the fisherman’s cottage; so actively that a moment afterwards it came out between the trees and stood upon the path just below her. It was not only a figure strange to her, but one somewhat strange
in itself. It was that of a man still young, and seeming somehow younger than his own clothes, which were not only shabby but antiquated; clothes common enough in texture, yet carried in an uncommon fashion. He wore what was presumably a light waterproof, perhaps through having come off the sea; but it was held at the throat by one button, and hung, sleeves and all, more like a cloak than a coat. He rested one bony hand on a black stick; under the shadow of his broad hat his black hair hung down in a tuft or two. His face, which was swarthy, but rather handsome in itself, wore something that may have been a slightly embarrassed smile, but had too much the appearance of a sneer.

Whether this apparition was a tramp or a trespasser, or a friend of some of the fishers or woodcutters, Barbara Vane was quite unable to guess. He removed his hat, still with his unaltered and rather sinister smile, and said civilly: “Excuse me. The Squire asked me to call.” Here he caught sight of Martin, the woodman, who was shifting along the path, thinning the thin trees; and the stranger made a familiar salute with one finger.

The girl did not know what to say. “Have you—have you come about cutting the wood?” she asked at last.

“I would I were so honest a man,” replied the stranger. “Martin is, I fancy, a distant cousin of mine; we Cornish folk just round here are nearly all related, you know; but I do not cut wood. I do not cut anything, except, perhaps, capers. I am, so to speak, a jongleur.”

“A what?” asked Barbara.

“A minstrel, shall we say?” answered the newcomer, and looked up at her more steadily. During a rather odd silence their eyes rested on each other. What she saw has been already noted, though by her, at any rate, not in the least understood. What he saw was a decidedly beautiful woman with a statuesque face and hair that shone in the sun like a helmet of copper.

“Do you know,” he went on, “that in this old place, hundreds of years ago, a jongleur may really have stood where I stand, and a lady may really have looked over that wall and thrown him money?”

“Do you want money?” she asked, all at sea.

“Well,” drawled the stranger, “in the sense of lacking it, perhaps, but I fear there is no place now for a minstrel, except nigger minstrel. I must apologize for not blacking my face.”

She laughed a little in her bewilderment, and said: “Well, I hardly think you need do that.”

“You think the natives here are dark enough already, perhaps,” he observed
calmly. “After all, we are aborigines, and are treated as such.”

She threw out some desperate remark about the weather or the scenery, and wondered what would happen next.

“The prospect is certainly beautiful,” he assented, in the same enigmatic manner. “There is only one thing in it I am doubtful about.”

While she stood in silence he slowly lifted his black stick like a long black finger and pointed it at the peacock trees above the wood. And a queer feeling of disquiet fell on the girl, as if he were, by that mere gesture, doing a destructive act and could send a blight upon the garden.

The strained and almost painful silence was broken by the voice of Squire Vane, loud even while it was still distant.

“We couldn’tt make out where you’d got to, Barbara,” he said. “This is my friend, Mr. Cyprian Paynter.” The next moment he saw the stranger and stopped, a little puzzled. it was only Mr. Cyprian Paynter himself who was equal to the situation. He had seen months ago a portrait of the new Cornish poet in some American literary magazine, and he found himself, to his surprise, the introducer instead of the introduced.

“Why, Squire,” he said in considerable astonishment, “don’t you know Mr. Treherne? I supposed, of course, he was a neighbor.”

“Delighted to see you, Mr. Treherne,” said the Squire, recovering his manners with a certain genial confusion. “So pleased you were able to come. This is Mr. Paynter–my daughter,” and, turning with a certain boisterous embarrassment, he led the way to the table under the tree.

Cyprian Paynter followed, inwardly revolving a puzzle which had taken even his experience by surprise. The American, if intellectually an aristocrat, was still socially and subconsciously a democrat. It had never crossed his mind that the poet should be counted lucky to know the squire and not the squire to know the poet. The honest patronage in Vane’s hospitality was something which made Paynter feel he was, after all, an exile in England.

The Squire, anticipating the trial of luncheon with a strange literary man, had dealt with the case tactfully from his own standpoint. County society might have made the guest feel like a fish out of water; and, except for the American critic and the local lawyer and doctor, worthy middle–class people who fitted into the picture, he had kept it as a family party. He was a widower, and when the meal had been laid out on the garden table, it was Barbara who presided as hostess. She had the new poet on her right hand and it made her very uncomfortable. She had practically offered that fallacious jongleur money, and it did not make it
easier to offer him lunch.

“The whole countryside’s gone mad,” announced the Squire, by way of the latest local news. “It’s about this infernal legend of ours.”

“I collect legends,” said Paynter, smiling.

“You must remember I haven’t yet had a chance to collect yours. And this,” he added, looking round at the romantic coast, “is a fine theater for anything dramatic.”

“Oh, it’s dramatic in its way,” admitted Vane, not without a faint satisfaction. “It’s all about those things over there we call the peacock trees—I suppose, because of the queer color of the leaf, you know, though I have heard they make a shrill noise in a high wind that’s supposed to be like the shriek of a peacock; something like a bamboo in the botanical structure, perhaps. Well, those trees are supposed to have been brought over from Barbary by my ancestor Sir Walter Vane, one of the Elizabethan patriots or pirates, or whatever you call them. They say that at the end of his last voyage the villagers gathered on the beach down there and saw the boat standing in from the sea, and the new trees stood up in the boat like a mast, all gay with leaves out of season, like green bunting. And as they watched they thought at first that the boat was steering oddly, and then that it wasn’t steering at all; and when it drifted to the shore at last every man in that boat was dead, and Sir Walter Vane, with his sword drawn, was leaning up against the tree trunk, as stiff as the tree.”

“Now this is rather curious,” remarked Paynter thoughtfully. “I told you I collected legends, and I fancy I can tell you the beginning of the story of which that is the end, though it comes hundreds of miles across the sea.”

He tapped meditatively on the table with his thin, taper fingers, like a man trying to recall a tune. He had, indeed, made a hobby of such fables, and he was not without vanity about his artistic touch in telling them.

“Oh, do tell us your part of it?” cried Barbara Vane, whose air of sunny sleepiness seemed in some vague degree to have fallen from her.

The American bowed across the table with a serious politeness, and then began playing idly with a quaint ring on his long finger as he talked.

“If you go down to the Barbary Coast, where the last wedge of the forest narrows down between the desert and the great tideless sea, you will find the natives still telling a strange story about a saint of the Dark Ages. There, on the twilight border of the Dark Continent, you feel the Dark Ages. I have only visited the place once, though it lies, so to speak, opposite to the Italian city where I lived for years, and yet you would hardly believe how the topsy–
turvydom and transmigration of this myth somehow seemed less mad than they really are, with the wood loud with lions at night and that dark red solitude beyond. They say that the hermit St. Securis, living there among trees, grew to love them like companions; since, though great giants with many arms like Briareus, they were the mildest and most blameless of the creatures; they did not de vour like the lions, but rather opened their arms to all the little birds. And he prayed that they might be loosened from time to time to walk like other things. And the trees were moved upon the prayers of Securis, as they were at the songs of Orpheus. The men of the desert were stricken from afar with fear, seeing the saint walking with a walking grove, like a schoolmaster with his boys. For the trees were thus freed under strict conditions of discipline. They were to return at the sound of the hermit’s bell, and, above all, to copy the wild beasts in walking only to destroy and devour nothing. Well, it is said that one of the trees heard a voice that was not the saint’s; that in the warm green twilight of one summer evening it became conscious of some thing sitting and speaking in its branches in the guise of a great bird, and it was that which once spoke from a tree in the guise of a great serpent. As the voice grew louder among its murmuring leaves the tree was torn with a great desire to stretch out and snatch at the birds that flew harmlessly about their nests, and pluck them to pieces. Finally, the tempter filled the tree–top with his own birds of pride, the starry pageant of the peacocks. And the spirit of the brute overcame the spirit of the tree, and it rent and consumed the blue–green birds till not a plume was left, and returned to the quiet tribe of trees. But they say that when spring came all the other trees put forth leaves, but this put forth feathers of a strange hue and pattern. And by that monstrous assimilation the saint knew of the sin, and he rooted that one tree to the earth with a judgment, so that evil should fall on any who removed it again. That, Squire, is the beginning in the deserts of the tale that ended here, almost in this garden.”

“And the end is about as reliable as the beginning, I should say,” said Vane. “Yours is a nice plain tale for a small tea–party; a quiet little bit of still–life, that is.”

“What a queer, horrible story,” exclaimed Barbara. “It makes one feel like a cannibal.”

“Ex Africa,” said the lawyer, smiling. “it comes from a cannibal country. I think it’s the touch of the tar–brush, that nightmare feeling that you don’t know whether the hero is a plant or a man or a devil. Don’t you feel it sometimes in ‘Uncle Remus’?”
“True,” said Paynter. “Perfectly true.” And he looked at the lawyer with a new interest. The lawyer, who had been introduced as Mr. Ashe, was one of those people who are more worth looking at than most people realize when they look. If Napoleon had been red–haired, and had bent all his powers with a curious contentment upon the petty lawsuits of a province, he might have looked much the same; the head with the red hair was heavy and powerful; the figure in its dark, quiet clothes was comparatively insignificant, as was Napoleon’s. He seemed more at case in the Squire’s society than the doctor, who, though a gentleman, was a shy one, and a mere shadow of his professional brother.

“As you truly say,” remarked Paynter, “the story seems touched with quite barbarous elements, probably Negro. Originally, though, I think there was really a hagiological story about some hermit, though some of the higher critics say St. Securis never existed, but was only an allegory of arboriculture, since his name is the Latin for an ax.”

“Oh, if you come to that,” remarked the poet Treherne, “you might as well say Squire Vane doesn’t exist, and that he’s only an allegory for a weathercock.” Something a shade too cool about this sally drew the lawyer’s red brows together. He looked across the table and met the poet’s somewhat equivocal smile.

“Do I understand, Mr. Treherne,” asked Ashe, “that you support the miraculous claims of St. Securis in this case. Do you, by any chance, believe in the walking trees?”

“I see men as trees walking,” answered the poet, “like the man cured of blindness in the Gospel. By the way, do I understand that you support the miraculous claims of that–thaumaturgist?”

Paynter intervened swiftly and suavely. “Now that sounds a fascinating piece of psychology. You see men as trees?”

“As I can’t imagine why men should walk, I can’t imagine why trees shouldn’t,” answered Treherne.

“Obviously, it is the nature of the organism,” interposed the medical guest, Dr. Burton Brown; “it is necessary in the very type of vegetable structure.”

“In other words, a tree sticks in the mud from year’s end to year’s end,” answered Treherne. “So do you stop in your consulting room from ten to eleven every day. And don’t you fancy a fairy, looking in at your window for a flash after having just jumped over the moon and played mulberry bush with the Pleiades, would think you were a vegetable structure, and that sitting still was the nature of the organism?”

“I don’t happen to believe in fairies,” said the doctor rather stiffly, for the
argumentum ad hominem was becoming too common. A sulphurous subconscious anger seemed to radiate from the dark poet.

“Well, I should hope not, Doctor,” began the Squire, in his loud and friendly style, and then stopped, seeing the other’s attention arrested. The silent butler waiting on the guests had appeared behind the doctor’s chair, and was saying something in the low, level tones of the welltrained servant. He was so smooth a specimen of the type that others never noticed, at first, that he also repeated the dark portrait, however varnished, so common in this particular family of Cornish Celts. His face was sallow and even yellow, and his hair indigo black. He went by the name of Miles. Some felt oppressed by the tribal type in this tiny corner of England. They felt somehow as if all these dark faces were the masks of a secret society.

The doctor rose with a half apology. “I must ask pardon for disturbing this pleasant party; I am called away on duty. Please don’t let anybody move. We have to be ready for these things, you know. Perhaps Mr. Treherne will admit that my habits are not so very vegetable, after all.” With this Parthian shaft, at which there was some laughter, he strode away very rapidly across the sunny lawn to where the road dipped down toward the village.

“He is very good among the poor,” said the girl with an honorable seriousness.

“A capital fellow,” agreed the Squire. “Where is Miles? You will have a cigar, Mr. Treherne?” And he got up from the table; the rest followed, and the group broke up on the lawn.

“Remarkable man, Treherne,” said the American to the lawyer conversationally.

“Remarkable is the word,” assented Ashe rather grimly. “But I don’t think I’ll make any remark about him.”

The Squire, too impatient to wait for the yellow–faced Miles, had betaken himself indoors for the cigars, and Barbara found herself once more paired off with the poet, as she floated along the terrace garden; but this time, symbolically enough, upon the same level of lawn. Mr. Treherne looked less eccentric after having shed his curious cloak, and seemed a quieter and more casual figure.

“I didn’t mean to be rude to you just now,” she said abruptly.

“And that’s the worst of it,” replied the man of letters, “for I’m horribly afraid I did mean to be rude to you. When I looked up and saw you up there something surged up in me that was in all the revolutions of history. Oh, there was admiration in it too! Perhaps there was idolatry in all the iconoclasts.”

He seemed to have a power of reaching rather intimate conversation in one
silent and cat–like bound, as he had scaled the steep road, and it made her feel
him to be dangerous, and perhaps unscrupulous. She changed the subject
sharply, not without it movement toward gratifying her own curiosity.

“What DID you mean by all that about walking trees?” she asked. “Don’t tell
me you really believe in a magic tree that eats birds!”

“I should probably surprise you,” said Treherne gravely, “more by what I
don’t believe than by what I do.”

Then, after a pause, lie made a general gesture toward the house and garden.
“I’m afraid I don’t believe in all this; for instance, in Elizabethan houses and
Elizabethan families and the way estates have been improved, and the rest of it.
Look at our friend the woodcutter now.” And he pointed to the man with the
quaint black beard, who was still plying his ax upon the timber below.

“That man’s family goes back for ages, and it was far richer and freer in what
you call the Dark Ages than it is now. Wait till the Cornish peasant writes a
history of Cornwall.”

“But what in the world,” she demanded, “has this to do with whether you
believe in a tree eating birds?”

“Why should I confess what I believe in?” he said, a muffled drum of mutiny
in his voice. “The gentry came here and took our land and took our labor and
took our customs. And now, after exploitation, a viler thing, education! They
must take our dreams!”

“Well, this dream was rather a nightmare, wasn’t it?” asked Barbara, smiling;
and the next moment grew quite grave, saying almost anxiously: “But here’s
Doctor Brown back again. Why, he looks quite upset.”

The doctor, a black figure on the green lawn, was, indeed, coming toward
them at a very vigorous walk. His body and gait very much younger than his
face, which seemed prematurely lined as with worry; his brow was bald, and
projected from the straight, dark hair behind it. He was visibly paler than when
he left the lunch table.

“I am sorry to say, Miss Vane,” he said, “that I am the bearer of bad news to
poor Martin, the woodman here. His daughter died half an hour ago.”

“Oh,” cried Barbara warmly, “I am SO sorry!”

“So am I,” said the doctor, and passed on rather abruptly; he ran down the
stone steps between the stone urns; and they saw him in talk with the
woodcutter. They could not see the woodcutter’s face. He stood with his back to
them, but they saw something that seemed more moving than any change of
countenance. The man’s hand holding the ax rose high above his head, and for a
flash it seemed as if he would have cut down the doctor. But in fact he was not looking at the doctor. His face was set toward the cliff, where, sheer out of the dwarf forest, rose, gigantic and gilded by the sun, the trees of pride.

The strong brown hand made a movement and was empty. The ax went circling swiftly through the air, its head showing like a silver crescent against the gray twilight of the trees. It did not reach its tall objective, but fell among the undergrowth, shaking up a flying litter of birds. But in the poet’s memory, full of primal things, something seemed to say that he had seen the birds of some pagan augury, the ax of some pagan sacrifice.

A moment after the man made a heavy movement forward, as if to recover his tool; but the doctor put a hand on his arm.

“Never mind that now,” they heard him say sadly and kindly. “The Squire will excuse you any more work, I know.”

Something made the girl look at Treherne. He stood gazing, his head a little bent, and one of his black elf–locks had fallen forward over his forehead. And again she had the sense of a shadow over the grass; she almost felt as if the grass were a host of fairies, and that the fairies were not her friends.
II

THE WAGER OF SQUIRE VANE

It was more than a month before the legend of the peacock trees was again discussed in the Squire’s circle. It fell out one evening, when his eccentric taste for meals in the garden that gathered the company round the same table, now lit with a lamp and laid out for dinner in a glowing spring twilight. It was even the same company, for in the few weeks intervening they had insensibly grown more and more into each other’s lives, forming a little group like a club. The American aesthete was of course the most active agent, his resolution to pluck out the heart of the Cornish poet’s mystery leading him again and again to influence his flighty host for such reunions. Even Mr. Ashe, the lawyer, seemed to have swallowed his half–humorous prejudices; and the doctor, though a rather sad and silent, was a companionable and considerate man. Paynter had even read Treherne’s poetry aloud, and he read admirably; he had also read other things, not aloud, grubbing up everything in the neighborhood, from guidebooks to epitaphs, that could throw a light on local antiquities. And it was that evening when the lamplight and the last daylight had kindled the colors of the wine and silver on the table under the tree, that he announced a new discovery.

“Say, Squire,” he remarked, with one of his rare Americanisms, “about those bogey trees of yours; I don’t believe you know half the tales told round here about them. It seems they have a way of eating things. Not that I have any ethical objection to eating things,” he continued, helping himself elegantly to green cheese. “But I have more or less, broadly speaking, an objection to eating people.”

“Eating people!” repeated Barbara Vane.

“I know a globe–trotter mustn’t be fastidious,” replied Mr. Paynter. “But I repeat firmly, an objection to eating people. The peacock trees seem to have progressed since the happy days of innocence when they only ate peacocks. If you ask the people here—the fisherman who lives on that beach, or the man that mows this very lawn in front of us—they’ll tell you tales taller than any tropical one I brought you from the Barbary Coast. If you ask them what happened to the fisherman Peters, who got drunk on All Hallows Eve, they’ll tell you he lost his way in that little wood, tumbled down asleep under the wicked trees, and then—evaporated, vanished, was licked up like dew by the sun. If you ask them where
Harry Hawke is, the widow’s little son, they’ll just tell you he’s swallowed; that he was dared to climb the trees and sit there all night, and did it. What the trees did God knows; the habits of a vegetable ogre leave one a little vague. But they even add the agreeable detail that a new branch appears on the tree when somebody has petered out in this style.”

“What new nonsense is this?” cried Vane. “I know there’s some crazy yarn about the trees spreading fever, though every educated man knows why these epidemics return occasionally. And I know they say you can tell the noise of them among other trees in a gale, and I dare say you can. But even Cornwall isn’t a lunatic asylum, and a tree that dines on a passing tourist—”

“Well, the two tales are reconcilable enough,” put in the poet quietly. “If there were a magic that killed men when they came close, it’s likely to strike them with sickness when they stand far off. In the old romance the dragon, that devours people, often blasts others with a sort of poisonous breath.”

Ashe looked across at the speaker steadily, not to say stonily.

“Do I understand,” he inquired, “that you swallow the swallowing trees too?”

Treherne’s dark smile was still on the defensive; his fencing always annoyed the other, and he seemed not without malice in the matter.

“Swallowing is a metaphor,” he said, “about me, if not about the trees. And metaphors take us at once into dreamland—no bad place, either. This garen, I think, gets more and more like a dream at this corner of the day and night, that might lead us anywhere.”

The yellow horn of the moon had appeared silently and as if suddenly over the black horns of the seaweed, seeming to announce as night something which till then had been evening. A night breeze came in between the trees and raced stealthily across the turf, and as they ceased speaking they heard, not only the seething grass, but the sea itself move and sound in all the cracks and caves round them and below them and on every side. They all felt the note that had been struck—the American as an art critic and the poet as a poet; and the Squire, who believed himself boiling with an impatience purely rational, did not really understand his own impatience. In him, more perhaps than the others—more certainly than he knew himself—the sea wind went to the head like wine.

“Credulity is a curious thing,” went on Treherne in a low voice. “It is more negative than positive, and yet it is infinite. Hundreds of men will avoid walking under a ladder; they don’t know where the door of the ladder will lead. They don’t really think God would throw a thunderbolt at them for such a thing. They don’t know what would happen, that is just the point; but yet they step aside as
from a precipice. So the poor people here may or may not believe anything; they
don’t go into those trees at night.”

“I walk under a ladder whenever I can,” cried Vane, in quite unnecessary
excitement.

“You belong to a Thirteen Club,” said the poet. “You walk under a ladder on
Friday to dine thirteen at a table, everybody spilling the salt. But even you don’t
go into those trees at night.”

Squire Vane stood up, his silver hair flaming in the wind.

“I’ll stop all night in your tomfool wood and up your tomfool trees,” he said.
“I’ll do it for twopence or two thousand pounds, if anyone will take the bet.”

Without waiting for reply, he snatched up his wide white hat and settled it on
with a fierce gesture, and had gone off in great leonine strides across the lawn
before anyone at the table could move.

The stillness was broken by Miles, the butler, who dropped and broke one of
the plates he carried. He stood looking after his master with his long, angular
chin thrust out, looking yel–lower where it caught the yellow light of the lamp
below. His face was thus sharply in shadow, but Paynter fancied for a moment it
was convulsed by some passion passing surprise. But the face was quite as usual
when it turned, and Paynter realized that a night of fancies had begun, like the
cross purposes of the “Midsummer Night’s Dream.”

The wood of the strange trees, toward which the Squire was walking, lay so
far forward on the headland, which ultimately almost overhung the sea, that it
could be approached by only one path, which shone clearly like a silver ribbon
in the twilight. The ribbon ran along the edge of the cliff, where the single row
of deformed trees ran beside it all the way, and eventually plunged into the
closer mass of trees by one natural gateway, a mere gap in the wood, looking
dark, like a lion’s mouth. What became of the path inside could not be seen, but
it doubtless led round the hidden roots of the great central trees. The Squire was
already within a yard or two of this dark entry when his daughter rose from the
table and took a step or two after him as if to call him back.

Treherne had also risen, and stood as if dazed at the effect of his idle defiance.
When Barbara moved he seemed to recover himself, and stepping after her, said
something which Paynter did not hear. He said it casually and even distantly
enough, but it clearly suggested something to her mind; for, after a moment’s
thought, she nodded and walked back, not toward the table, but apparently
toward the house. Paynter looked after her with a momentary curiosity, and
when he turned again the Squire had vanished into the hole in the wood.
“He’s gone,” said Treherne, with a clang of finality in his tones, like the slamming of a door.

“Well, suppose he has?” cried the lawyer, roused at the voice. “The Squire can go into his own wood, I suppose! What the devil’s all the fuss about, Mr. Paynter? Don’t tell me you think there’s any harm in that plantation of sticks.”

“No, I don’t,” said Paynter, throwing one leg over another and lighting a cigar. “But I shall stop here till he comes out.”

“Very well,” said Ashe shortly, “I’ll stop with you, if only to see the end of this farce.”

The doctor said nothing, but he also kept his seat and accepted one of the American’s cigars. If Treherne had been attending to the matter he might have noted, with his sardonic superstition, a curious fact—that, while all three men were tacitly condemning themselves to stay out all night if necessary, all, by one blank omission or oblivion, assumed that it was impossible to follow their host into the wood just in front of them. But Treherne, though still in the garden, had wandered away from the garden table, and was pacing along the single line of trees against the dark sea. They had in their regular interstices, showing the sea as through a series of windows, something of the look of the ghost or skeleton of a cloister, and he, having thrown his coat once more over his neck, like a cape, passed to and fro like the ghost of some not very sane monk.

All these men, whether skeptics or mystics, looked back for the rest of their lives on that night as on something unnatural. They sat still or started up abruptly, and paced the great garden in long detours, so that it seemed that no three of them were together at a time, and none knew who would be his companion; yet their rambling remained within the same dim and mazy space. They fell into snatches of uneasy slumber; these were very brief, and yet they felt as if the whole sitting, strolling, or occasional speaking had been parts of a single dream.

Paynter woke once, and found Ashe sitting opposite him at a table otherwise empty; his face dark in shadow and his cigar–end like the red eye of a Cyclops. Until the lawyer spoke, in his steady voice, Paynter was positively afraid of him. He answered at random and nodded again; when he again woke the lawyer was gone, and what was opposite him was the bald, pale brow of the doctor; there seemed suddenly something ominous in the familiar fact that he wore spectacles. And yet the vanishing Ashe had only vanished a few yards away, for he turned at that instant and strolled back to the table. With a jerk Paynter realized that his nightmare was but a trick of sleep or sleeplessness, and spoke in his natural
voice, but rather loud.

“So you’ve joined us again; where’s Treherne?”

“Oh, still revolving, I suppose, like a polar bear under those trees on the cliff,” replied Ashe, motioning with his cigar, “looking at what an older (and you will forgive me for thinking a somewhat better) poet called the wine–dark sea. It really has a sort of purple shade; look at it.”

Paynter looked; he saw the wine–dark sea and the fantastic trees that fringed it, but he did not see the poet; the cloister was already empty of its restless monk.

“Gone somewhere else,” he said, with futility far from characteristic. “He’ll be back here presently. This is an interesting vigil, but a vigil loses some of its intensity when you can’t keep awake. Ah! Here’s Treherne; so we’re all mustered, as the politician said when Mr. Colman came late for dinner. No, the doctor’s off again. how restless we all are!” The poet had drawn near, his feet were falling soft on the grass, and was gazing at them with a singular attentiveness.

“It will soon be over,” he said.

“What?” snapped Ashe very abruptly.

“The night, of course,” replied Treherne in a motionless manner. “The darkest hour has passed.”

“Didn’t some other minor poet remark,” inquired Paynter flippantly, “that the darkest hour before the dawn—? My God, what was that? It was like a scream.”

“It was a scream,” replied the poet. “The scream of a peacock.”

Ashe stood up, his strong pale face against his red hair, and said furiously: “What the devil do you mean?”

“Oh, perfectly natural causes, as Dr. Brown would say,” replied Treherne. “Didn’t the Squire tell us the trees had a shrill note of their own when the wind blew? The wind’s beating up again from the sea; I shouldn’t wonder if there was a storm before dawn.”

Dawn indeed came gradually with a growing noise of wind, and the purple sea began to boil about the dark volcanic cliffs. The first change in the sky showed itself only in the shapes of the wood and the single stems growing darker but clearer; and above the gray clump, against a glimpse of growing light, they saw aloft the evil trinity of the trees. In their long lines there seemed to Paynter something faintly serpentine and even spiral. He could almost fancy he saw them slowly revolving as in some cyclic dance, but this, again, was but a last delusion of dreamland, for a few seconds later he was again asleep. In dreams he toiled through a tangle of inconclusive tales, each filled with the same stress and noise.
of sea and sea wind; and above and outside all other voices the wailing of the Trees of Pride.

When he woke it was broad day, and a bloom of early light lay on wood and garden and on fields and farms for miles away. The comparative common sense that daylight brings even to the sleepless drew him alertly to his feet, and showed him all his companions standing about the lawn in similar attitudes of expectancy. There was no need to ask what they were expecting. They were waiting to hear the nocturnal experiences, comic or commonplace or whatever they might prove to be, of that eccentric friend, whose experiment (whether from some subconscious fear or some fancy of honor) they had not ventured to interrupt. Hour followed hour, and still nothing stirred in the wood save an occasional bird. The Squire, like most men of his type, was an early riser, and it was not likely that he would in this case sleep late; it was much more likely, in the excitement in which he had left them, that he would not sleep at all. Yet it was clear that he must be sleeping, perhaps by some reaction from a strain. By the time the sun was high in heaven Ashe the lawyer, turning to the others, spoke abruptly and to the point.

“Shall we go into the wood now?” asked Paynter, and almost seemed to hesitate.

“I will go in,” said Treherne simply. Then, drawing up his dark head in answer to their glances, he added:

“No, do not trouble yourselves. It is never the believer who is afraid.”

For the second time they saw a man mount the white curling path and disappear into the gray tangled wood, but this time they did not have to wait long to see him again.

A few minutes later he reappeared in the woodland gateway, and came slowly toward them across the grass. He stopped before the doctor, who stood nearest, and said something. It was repeated to the others, and went round the ring with low cries of incredulity. The others plunged into the wood and returned wildly, and were seen speaking to others again who gathered from the house; the wild wireless telegraphy which is the education of countryside communities spread it farther and farther before the fact itself was fully realized; and before nightfall a quarter of the county knew that Squire Vane had vanished like a burst bubble.

Widely as the wild story was repeated, and patiently as it was pondered, it was long before there was even the beginning of a sequel to it. In the interval Paynter had politely removed himself from the house of mourning, or rather of questioning, but only so far as the village inn; for Barbara Vane was glad of the
traveler’s experience and sympathy, in addition to that afforded her by the lawyer and doctor as old friends of the family. Even Treherne was not discouraged from his occasional visits with a view to helping the hunt for the lost man. The five held many counsels round the old garden table, at which the unhappy master of the house had dined for the last time; and Barbara wore her old mask of stone, if it was now a more tragic mask. She had shown no passion after the first morning of discovery, when she had broken forth once, speaking strangely enough in the view of some of her hearers.

She had come slowly out of the house, to which her own or some one else’s wisdom had relegated her during the night of the wager; and it was clear from her face that somebody had told her the truth; Miles, the butler, stood on the steps behind her; and it was probably he.

“Do not be much distressed, Miss Vane,” said Doctor Brown, in a low and rather uncertain voice. “The search in the wood has hardly begun. I am convinced we shall find—something quite simple.”

“The doctor is right,” said Ashe, in his firm tones; “I myself—”

“The doctor is not right,” said the girl, turning a white face on the speaker, “I know better. The poet is right. The poet is always right. Oh, he has been here from the beginning of the world, and seen wonders and terrors that are all round our path, and only hiding behind a bush or a stone. You and your doctoring and your science—why, you have only been here for a few fumbling generations; and you can’t conquer even your own enemies of the flesh. Oh, forgive me, Doctor, I know you do splendidly; but the fever comes in the village, and the people die and die for all that. And now it’s my poor father. God help us all I The only thing left is to believe in God; for we can’t help believing in devils.” And she left them, still walking quite slowly, but in such a fashion that no one could go after her.

The spring had already begun to ripen into summer, and spread a green tent from the tree over the garden table, when the American visitor, sitting there with his two professional companions, broke the silence by saying what had long been in his mind.

“Well,” he said, “I suppose whatever we may think it wise to say, we have all begun to think of a possible conclusion. It can’t be put very delicately anyhow; but, after all, there’s a very necessary business side to it. What are we going to do about poor Vane’s affairs, apart from himself? I suppose you know,” he added, in a low voice to the lawyer, “whether he made a will?”

“He left everything to his daughter unconditionally,” replied Ashe. “But
nothing can be done with it. There’s no proof whatever that he’s dead.” “No legal proof?” remarked Paynter dryly. A wrinkle of irritation had appeared in the big bald brow of Doctor Brown; and he made an impatient movement.

“Of course he’s dead,” he said. “What’s the sense of all this legal fuss? We were watching this side of the wood, weren’t we? A man couldn’t have flown off those high cliffs over the sea; he could only have fallen off. What else can he be but dead?”

“I speak as a lawyer,” returned Ashe, raising his eyebrows. “We can’t presume his death, or have an inquest or anything till we find the poor fellow’s body, or some remains that may reasonably be presumed to be his body.”

“I see,” observed Paynter quietly. “You speak as a lawyer; but I don’t think it’s very hard to guess what you think as a man.”

“I own I’d rather be a man than a lawyer,” said the doctor, rather roughly. “I’d no notion the law was such an ass. What’s the good of keeping the poor girl out of her property, and the estate all going to pieces? Well, I must be off, or my patients will be going to pieces too.”

And with a curt salutation he pursued his path down to the village.

“That man does his duty, if anybody does,” remarked Paynter. “We must pardon his—shall I say manners or manner?”

“Oh, I bear him no malice,” replied Ashe good–humoredly, “But I’m glad he’s gone, because—well, because I don’t want him to know how jolly right he is.” And he leaned back in his chair and stared up at the roof of green leaves.

“You are sure,” said Paynter, looking at the table, “that Squire Vane is dead?”

“More than that,” said Ashe, still staring at the leaves. “I’m sure of how he died.”

“Aha!” said the American, with an intake of breath, and they remained for a moment, one gazing at the tree and the other at the table.

“Sure is perhaps too strong a word,” continued Ashe. “But my conviction will want some shaking. I don’t envy the counsel for the defense.”

“The counsel for the defense,” repeated Paynter, and looked up quickly at his companion. He was struck again by the man’s Napoleon’ic chin and jaw, as he had been when they first talked of the legend of St. Securis.

“Then,” he began, “you don’t think the trees—”

“The trees be damned!” snorted the lawyer. “The tree had two legs on that evening. What our friend the poet,” he added, with a sneer, “would call a walking tree. Apropos of our friend the poet, you seemed surprised that night to find he was not walking poetically by the sea all the time, and I fear I affected to
share your ignorance. I was not so sure then as I am now.”

“Sure of what?” demanded the other.

“To begin with,” said Ashe, “I’m sure our friend the poet followed Vane into the wood that night, for I saw him coming out again.”

Paynter leaned forward, suddenly pale with excitement, and struck the wooden table so that it rattled.

“Mr. Ashe, you’re wrong,” he cried. “You’re a wonderful man and you’re wrong. You’ve probably got tons of true convincing evidence, and you’re wrong. I know this poet; I know him as a poet; and that’s just what you don’t. I know you think he gave you crooked answers, and seemed to be all smiles and black looks at once; but you don’t understand the type. I know now why you don’t understand the Irish. Sometimes you think it’s soft, and sometimes sly, and sometimes murderous, and sometimes uncivilized; and all the time it’s only civilized; quivering with the sensitive irony of understanding all that you don’t understand.”

“Well,” said Ashe shortly, “we’ll see who’s right.”

“We will,” cried Cyprian, and rose suddenly from the table. All the drooping of the aesthete had dropped from him; his Yankee accent rose high, like a horn of defiance, and there was nothing about him but the New World.

“I guess I will look into this myself,” he said, stretching his long limbs like an athlete. “I search that little wood of yours to–morrow. It’s a bit late, or I’d do it now.”

“The wood has been searched,” said the lawyer, rising also.

“Yes,” drawled the American. “It’s been searched by servants, policemen, local policeman, and quite a lot of people; and do you know I have a notion that nobody round here is likely to have searched it at all.”

“And what are you going to do with it?” asked Ashe.

“What I bet they haven’t done,” replied Cyprian. “I’m going to climb a tree.”

And with a quaint air of renewed cheerfulness he took himself away at a rapid walk to his inn.

He appeared at daybreak next morning outside the Vane Arms with all the air of one setting out on his travels in distant lands. He had a field glass slung over his shoulder, and a very large sheath knife buckled by a belt round his waist, and carried with the cool bravado of the bowie knife of a cowboy. But in spite of this backwoodsman’s simplicity, or perhaps rather because of it, he eyed with rising relish the picturesque plan and sky line of the antiquated village, and especially the wooden square of the old inn sign that hung over his head; a shield, of which
the charges seemed to him a mere medley of blue dolphins, gold crosses, and scarlet birds. The colors and cubic corners of that painted board pleased him like a play or a puppet show. He stood staring and straddling for some moments on the cobbles of the little market place; then he gave a short laugh and began to mount the steep streets toward the high park and garden beyond. From the high lawn, above the tree and table, he could see on one side the land stretch away past the house into a great rolling plain, which under the clear edges of the dawn seemed dotted with picturesque details. The woods here and there on the plain looked like green hedgehogs, as grotesque as the incongruous beasts found unaccountably walking in the blank spaces of mediaeval maps. The land, cut up into colored fields, recalled the heraldry of the signboard; this also was at once ancient and gay. On the other side the ground to seaward swept down and then up again to the famous or infamous wood; the square of strange trees lay silently tilted on the slope, also suggesting, if not a map, or least a bird’s–eye view. Only the triple centerpiece of the peacock trees rose clear of the sky line; and these stood up in tranquil sunlight as things almost classical, a triangular temple of the winds. They seemed pagan in a newer and more placid sense; and he felt a newer and more boyish curiosity and courage for the consulting of the oracle. In all his wanderings he had never walked so lightly, for the connoisseur of sensations had found something to do at last; he was fighting for a friend.

He was brought to a standstill once, however, and that at the very gateway of the garden of the trees of knowledge. just outside the black entry of the wood, now curtained with greener and larger leafage, he came on a solitary figure.

It was Martin, the woodcutter, wading in the bracken and looking about him in rather a lost fashion. The man seemed to be talking to himself.

“I dropped it here,” he was saying. “But I’ll never work with it again I reckon. Doctor wouldn’t let me pick it up, when I wanted to pick it up; and now they’ve got it, like they’ve got the Squire. Wood and iron, wood and iron, but eating it’s nothing to them.”

“Come!” said Paynter kindly, remembering the man’s domestic trouble. “Miss Vane will see you have anything you want, I know. And look here, don’t brood on all those stories about the Squire. Is there the slightest trace of the trees having anything to do with it? Is there even this extra branch the idiots talked about?”

There had been growing on Paynter the suspicion that the man before him was not perfectly sane; yet he was much more startled by the sudden and cold sanity that looked for. an instant out of the woodman’s eyes, as he answered in his
ordinary manner.

“Well, sir, did you count the branches before?”

Then he seemed to relapse; and Paynter left him wandering and wavering in the undergrowth; and entered the wood like one across whose sunny path a shadow has fallen for an instant.

Diving under the wood, he was soon threading a leafy path which, even under that summer sun, shone only with an emerald twilight, as if it were on the floor of the sea. It wound about more shakily than he had supposed, as if resolved to approach the central trees as if they were the heart of the maze at Hampton Court. They were the heart of the maze for him, anyhow; he sought them as straight as a crooked road would carry him; and, turning a final corner, he beheld, for the first time, the foundations of those towers of vegetation he had as yet only seen from above, as they stood waist–high in the woodland. He found the suspicion correct which supposed the tree branched from one great root, like a candelabrum; the fork, though stained and slimy with green fungoids, was quite near the ground, and offered a first foothold. He put his foot in it, and without a flash of hesitation went aloft, like Jack climbing the Bean stalk.

Above him the green roof of leaves and boughs seemed sealed like a firmament of foliage; but, by bending and breaking the branches to right and left he slowly forced a passage upward; and had at last, and suddenly, the sensation coming out on the top of the world. He felt as if he had never been in the open air before. Sea and land lay in a circle below and about him, as he sat astride a branch of the tall tree; he was almost surprised to see the sun still comparatively low in the sky; as if he were looking over a land of eternal sunrise.

“Silent upon a peak in Darien,” he remarked, in a needlessly loud and cheerful voice; and though the claim, thus expressed, was illogical, it was not inappropriate. He did feel as if he were a primitive adventurer just come to the New World, instead of a modern traveler just come from it.

“I wonder,” he proceeded, “whether I am really the first that ever burst into this silent tree. It looks like it. Those–”

He stopped and sat on his branch quite motionless, but his eyes were turned on a branch a little below it, and they were brilliant with a vigilance, like those of a man watching a snake.

What he was looking at might, at first sight, have been a large white fungus spreading on the smooth and monstrous trunk; but it was not.

Leaning down dangerously from his perch, he detached it from the twig on which it had caught, and then sat holding it in his hand and gazing at it. It was
Squire Vane’s white Panama hat, but there was no Squire Vane under it. Paynter felt a nameless relief in the very fact that there was not.

There in the clear sunlight and sea air, for an instant, all the tropical terrors of his own idle tale surrounded and suffocated him. It seemed indeed some demon tree of the swamps; a vegetable serpent that fed on men. Even the hideous farce in the fancy of digesting a whole man with the exception of his hat, seemed only to simplify the nightmare. And he found himself gazing dully at one leaf of the tree, which happened to be turned toward him, so that the odd markings, which had partly made the legend, really looked a little like the eye in a peacock’s feather. It was as if the sleeping tree had opened one eye upon him.

With a sharp effort he steadied himself in mind and posture on the bough; his reason returned, and he began to descend with the hat in his teeth. When he was back in the underworld of the wood, he studied the hat again and with closer attention. In one place in the crown there was a hole or rent, which certainly had not been there when it had last lain on the table under the garden tree. He sat down, lit a cigarette, and reflected for a long time.

A wood, even a small wood, is not an easy thing to search minutely; but he provided himself with some practical tests in the matter. In one sense the very density of the thicket was a help; he could at least see where anyone had strayed from the path, by broken and trampled growths of every kind. After many hours’ industry, he had made a sort of new map of the place; and had decided beyond doubt that some person or persons had so strayed, for some purpose, in several defined directions. There was a way burst through the bushes, making a short cut across a loop of the wandering path; there was another forking out from it as an alternative way into the central space. But there was one especially which was unique, and which seemed to him, the more he studied it, to point to some essential of the mystery.

One of these beaten and broken tracks went from the space under the peacock trees outward into the wood for about twenty yards and then stopped. Beyond that point not a twig was broken nor a leaf disturbed. It had no exit, but he could not believe that it had no goal. After some further reflection, he knelt down and began to cut away grass and clay with his knife, and was surprised at the ease with which they detached themselves. In a few moments a whole section of the soil lifted like a lid; it was a round lid and presented a quaint appearance, like a flat cap with green feathers. For though the disc itself was made of wood, there was a layer of earth on it with the live grass still growing there. And the removal of the round lid revealed a round hole, black as night and seemingly bottomless.
Paynter understood it instantly. It was rather near the sea for a well to be sunk, but the traveler had known wells sunk even nearer. He rose to his feet with the great knife in his hand, a frown on his face, and his doubts resolved. He no longer shrank from naming what he knew. This was not the first corpse that had been thrown down a well; here, without stone or epitaph, was the grave of Squire Vane. In a flash all the mythological follies about saints and peacocks were forgotten; he was knocked on the head, as with a stone club, by the human common sense of crime.

Cyprian Paynter stood long by the well in the wood, walked round it in meditation, examined its rim and the ring of grass about it, searched the surrounding soil thoroughly, came back and stood beside the well once more. His researches and reflections had been so long that he had not realized that the day had passed and that the wood and the world round it were beginning already to be steeped in the enrichment of evening. The day had been radiantly calm; the sea seemed to be as still as the well, and the well was as still as a mirror. And then, quite without warning, the mirror moved of itself like a living thing.

In the well, in the wood, the water leapt and gurgled, with a grotesque noise like something swallowing, and then settled again with a second sound. Cyprian could not see into the well clearly, for the opening, from where he stood, was an ellipse, a mere slit, and half masked by thistles and rank grass like a green beard. For where he stood now was three yards away from the well, and he had not yet himself realized that he had sprung back all that distance from the brink when the water spoke.
III

THE MYSTERY OF THE WELL

Cyprian Paynter did not know what he expected to see rise out of the well—the corpse of the murdered man or merely the spirit of the fountain. Anyhow, neither of them rose out of it, and he recognized after an instant that this was, after all, perhaps the more natural course of things. Once more he pulled himself together, walked to the edge of the well and looked down. He saw, as before, a dim glimmer of water, at that depth no brighter than ink; he fancied he still heard a faint convulsion and murmur, but it gradually subsided to an utter stillness. Short of suicidally diving in, there was nothing to be done. He realized that, with all his equipment, he had not even brought anything like a rope or basket, and at length decided to return for them. As he retraced his steps to the entrance, he recurred to, and took stock of, his more solid discoveries. Somebody had gone into the wood, killed the Squire and thrown him down the well, but he did not admit for a moment that it was his friend the poet; but if the latter had actually been seen coming out of the wood the matter was serious. As he walked the rapidly darkening twilight was cloven with red gleams, that made him almost fancy for a moment that some fantastic criminal had set fire to the tiny forest as he fled. A second glance showed him nothing but one of those red sunsets in which such serene days sometimes close.

As he came out of the gloomy gate of trees into the full glow he saw a dark figure standing quite still in the dim bracken, on the spot where he had left the woodcutter. It was not the woodcutter.

It was topped by a tall black hat of a funeral type, and the whole figure stood so black against the field of crimson fire that edged the sky line that he could not for an instant understand or recall it. When he did, it was with an odd change in the whole channel of his thoughts.

“Doctor Brown!” he cried. “Why, what are you doing up here?”

“I have been talking to poor Martin,” answered the doctor, and made a rather awkward movement with his hand toward the road down to the village. Following the gesture, Paynter dimly saw another dark figure walking down in the blood–red distance. He also saw that the hand motioning was really black, and not merely in shadow; and, coming nearer, found the doctor’s dress was really funereal, down to the detail of the dark gloves. It gave the American a
small but queer shock, as if this were actually an undertaker come up to bury the
corpse that could not be found.

“Poor Martin’s been looking for his chopper,” observed Doctor Brown, “but I
told him I’d picked it up and kept it for him. Between ourselves, I hardly think
he’s fit to be trusted with it.” Then, seeing the glance at his black garb, he added:
“I’ve just been to a funeral. Did you know there’s been another loss? Poor Jake
the fisherman’s wife, down in the cottage on the shore, you know. This infernal
fever, of course.”

As they both turned, facing the red evening light, Paynter instinctively made a
closer study, not merely of the doctor’s clothes, but of the doctor. Dr. Burton
Brown was a, tall, alert man, neatly dressed, who would otherwise have had an
almost military air but for his spectacles and an almost painful intellectualism
in his lean brown face and bald brow. The contrast was clinched by the fact that,
while his face was of the ascetic type generally conceived as clean–shaven, he
had a strip of dark mustache cut too short for him to bite, and yet a mouth that
often moved as if trying to bite it. He might have been a very intelligent army
surgeon, but he had more the look of an engineer or one of those services that
combine a military silence with a more than military science. Paynter had always
respected something ruggedly reliable about the man, and after a little hesitation
he told him all the discoveries.

The doctor took the hat of the dead Squire in his hand, and examined it with
frowning care. He put one finger through the hole in the crown and moved it
meditatively. And Paynter realized how fanciful his own fatigue must have made
him; for so silly a thing as the black finger waggling through the rent in that
frayed white relic unreasonably displeased him, The doctor soon made the same
discovery with professional acuteness, and applied it much further. For when
Paynter began to tell him of the moving water in the well he looked at him a
moment through his spectacles, and then said:

“Did you have any lunch?”

Paynter for the first time realized that he had, as a fact, worked and thought
furiously all day without food.

“Please don’t fancy I mean you had too much lunch,” said the medical man,
with mournful humor. “On the contrary, I mean you had too little. I think you are
a bit knocked out, and your nerves exaggerate things. Anyhow, let me advise
you not to do any more to–night. There’s nothing to be done without ropes or
some sort of fishing tackle, if with that; but I think I can get you some of the sort
of grappling irons the fishermen use for dragging. Poor Jake’s got some, I know;
I’ll bring them round to you tomorrow morning. The fact is, I’m staying there for a bit as he’s rather in a state, and I think is better for me to ask for the things and not a stranger. I am sure you’ll understand.”

Paynter understood sufficiently to assent, and hardly knew why he stood vacantly watching the doctor make his way down the steep road to the shore and the fisher’s cottage. Then he threw off thoughts he had not examined, or even consciously entertained, and walked slowly and rather heavily back to the Vane Arms.

The doctor, still funereal in manner, though no longer so in costume, appeared punctually under the wooden sign next morning, laden with what he had promised; an apparatus of hooks and a hanging net for hoisting up anything sunk to a reasonable depth. He was about to proceed on his professional round, and said nothing further to deter the American from proceeding on his own very unprofessional experiment as a detective. That buoyant amateur had indeed recovered most, if not all, of yesterday’s buoyancy, was now well fitted to pass any medical examination, and returned with all his own energy to the scene of yesterday’s labors.

It may well have brightened and made breezier his second day’s toil that he had not only the sunlight and the bird’s singing in the little wood, to say nothing of a more scientific apparatus to work with, but also human companionship, and that of the most intelligent type. After leaving the doctor and before leaving the village he had bethought himself of seeking the little court or square where stood the quiet brown house of Andrew Ashe, solicitor, and the operations of dragging were worked in double harness. Two heads were peering over the well in the wood: one yellow–haired, lean and eager; the other red-haired, heavy and pondering; and if it be true that two heads are better than one, it is truer that four hands are better than two. In any case, their united and repeated efforts bore fruit at last, if anything so hard and meager and forlorn can be called a fruit. It weighed loosely in the net as it was lifted, and rolled out on the grassy edge of the well; it was a bone.

Ashe picked it up and stood with it in his hand, frowning.

“We want Doctor Brown here,” he said. “This may be the bone of some animal. Any dog or sheep might fall into a hidden well.” Then he broke off, for his companion was already detaching a second bone from the net.

After another half hour’s effort Paynter had occasion to remark, “It must have been rather a large dog.” There were already a heap of such white fragments at his feet.
“I have seen nothing yet,” said Ashe, speaking more plainly. “That is certainly a human bone.” “I fancy this must be a human bone,” said the American.

And he turned away a little as he handed the other a skull.

There was no doubt of what sort of skull; there was the one unique curve that holds the mystery of reason, and underneath it the two black holes that had held human eyes. But just above that on the left was another and smaller black hole, which was not an eye.

Then the lawyer said, with something like an effort: “We may admit it is a man without admitting it is–any particular man. There may be something, after all, in that yarn about the drunkard; he may have tumbled into the well. Under certain conditions, after certain natural processes, I fancy, the bones might be stripped in this way, even without the skill of any assassin. We want the doctor again.”

Then he added suddenly, and the very sound of his voice suggested that he hardly believed his own words.

“Haven’t you got poor Vane’s hat there?”

He took it from the silent American’s hand, and with a sort of hurry fitted it on the bony head.

“Don’t!” said the other involuntarily.

The lawyer had put his finger, as the doctor had done, through the hole in the hat, and it lay exactly over the hole in the skull.

“I have the better right to shrink,” he said steadily, but in a vibrant voice. “I think I am the older friend.”

Paynter nodded without speech, accepting the final identification. The last doubt, or hope, had departed, and he turned to the dragging apparatus, and did not speak till he had made his last find.

The singing of the birds seemed to grow louder about them, and the dance of the green summer leaves was repeated beyond in the dance of the green summer sea. Only the great roots of the mysterious trees could be seen, the rest being far aloft, and all round it was a wood of little, lively and happy things. They might have been two innocent naturalists, or even two children fishing for eels or tittlebats on that summer holiday when Paynter pulled up something that weighed in the net more heavily than any bone. It nearly broke the meshes, and fell against a mossy stone with a clang.

“Truth lies at the bottom of a well,” cried the American, with lift in his voice. “The woodman’s ax.”

It lay, indeed, flat and gleaming in the grasses by the well in the wood, just as
it had lain in the thicket where the woodman threw it in the beginning of all these things. But on one corner of the bright blade was a dull brown stain.

“I see,” said Ashe, “the woodman’s ax, and therefore the Woodman. Your deductions are rapid.”

“My deductions are reasonable,” said Paynter, “Look here, Mr. Ashe; I know what you’re thinking. I know you distrust Treherne; but I’m sure you will be just for all that. To begin with, surely the first assumption is that the woodman’s ax is used by the Woodman. What have you to say to it?”

“I say ‘No’ to it,” replied the lawyer. “The last weapon a woodman would use would be a woodman’s ax; that is if he is a sane man.”

“He isn’t,” said Paynter quietly; “you said you wanted the doctor’s opinion just now. The doctor’s opinion on this point is the same as my own. We both found him meandering about outside there; it’s obvious this business has gone to his head, at any rate. If the murderer were a man of business like yourself, what you say might be sound. But this murderer is a mystic. He was driven by some fanatical fad about the trees. It’s quite likely he thought there was something solemn and sacrificial about the ax, and would have liked to cut off Vane’s head before a crowd, like Charles I’s. He’s looking for the ax still, and probably thinks it a holy relic.”

“For which reason,” said Ashe, smiling, “he instantly chucked it down a well.” Paynter laughed.

“You have me there certainly,” he said. “But I think you have something else in your mind. You’ll say, I suppose, that we were all watching the wood; but were we? Frankly, I could almost fancy the peacock trees did strike me with a sort of sickness—a sleeping sickness.”

“Well,” admitted Ashe, “you have me there too. I’m afraid I couldn’t swear I was awake all the time; but I don’t put it down to magic trees—only to a private hobby of going to bed at night. But look here, Mr. Paynter; there’s another and better argument against any outsider from the village or countryside having committed the crime. Granted he might have slipped past us somehow, and gone for the Squire. But why should he go for him in the wood? How did he know he was in the wood? You remember how suddenly the poor old boy bolted into it, on what a momentary impulse. ‘It’s the last place where one would normally look for such a man, in the middle of the night. No, it’s an ugly thing to say, but we, the group round that garden table, were the only people who knew. Which brings me back to the one point in your remarks which I happen to think perfectly true.”
“What was that?” inquired the other.
“That the murderer was a mystic,” said Ashe. “But a cleverer mystic than poor old Martin.”

Paynter made a murmur of protest, and then fell silent.
“Let us talk plainly,” resumed the lawyer. “Treherne had all those mad motives you yourself admit against the woodcutter. He had the knowledge of Vane’s whereabouts, which nobody can possibly attribute to the woodcutter. But he had much more. Who taunted and goaded the Squire to go into the wood at all? Treherne. Who practically prophesied, like an infernal quack astrologer, that something would happen to him if he did go into the wood? Treherne. Who was, for some reason, no matter what, obviously burning with rage and restlessness all that night, kicking his legs impatiently to and fro on the cliff, and breaking out with wild words about it being all over soon? Treherne. And on top of all this, when I walked closer to the wood, whom did I see slip out of it swiftly and silently like a shadow, but turning his face once to the moon? On my oath and on my honor—Treherne.”

“It is awful,” said Paynter, like a man stunned. “What you say is simply awful.”

“Yes,” said Ashe seriously, “very awful, but very simple. Treherne knew where the ax was originally thrown. I saw him, on that day he lunched here first, watching it like a wolf, while Miss Vane was talking to him. On that dreadful night he could easily have picked it up as he went into the wood. He knew about the well, no doubt; who was so likely to know any old traditions about the peacock trees? He hid the hat in the trees, where perhaps he hoped (though the point is unimportant) that nobody would dare to look. Anyhow, he hid it, simply because it was the one thing that would not sink in the well. Mr. Paynter, do you think I would say this of any man in mere mean dislike? Could any man say it of any man unless the case was complete, as this is complete?”

“It is complete,” said Paynter, very pale. “I have nothing left against it but a faint, irrational feeling; a feeling that, somehow or other, if poor Vane could stand alive before us at this moment he might tell some other and even more incredible tale.”

Ashe made a mournful gesture.
“Can these dry bones live?” he said.
“Lord Thou knowest,” answered the other mechanically. “Even these dry bones—”

And he stopped suddenly with his mouth open, a blinding light of wonder in
his pale eyes.

“See here,” he said hoarsely and hastily. “You have said the word. What does it mean? What can it mean? Dry? Why are these bones dry?”

The lawyer started and stared down at the heap.

“Your case complete!” cried Paynter, in mounting excitement. “Where is the water in the well? The water I saw leap like a flame? Why did it leap? Where is it gone to? Complete! We are buried under riddles.”

Ashe stooped, picked up a bone and looked at it.

“You are right,” he said, in a low and shaken voice: “this bone is as dry—as a bone.”

“Yes, I am right,” replied Cyprian. “And your mystic is still as mysterious as a mystic.”

There was a long silence. Ashe laid down the bone, picked up the ax and studied it more closely. Beyond the dull stain at the corner of the steel there was nothing unusual about it save a broad white rag wrapped round the handle, perhaps to give a better grip. The lawyer thought it worth, noting, however, that the rag was certainly newer and cleaner than the chopper. But both were quite dry.

“Mr. Paynter,” he said at last, “I admit you have scored, in the spirit if not in the letter. In strict logic, this greater puzzle is not a reply to my case. If this ax has not been dipped in water, it has been dipped in blood; and the water jumping out of the well is not an explanation of the poet jumping out of the wood. But I admit that morally and practically it does make a vital difference. We are not faced with a colossal contradiction, and we don’t know how far it extends. The body might have been broken up or boiled down to its bones by the murderer, though it may be hard to connect it with the conditions of the murder. It might conceivably have been so reduced by some property in the water and soil, for decomposition varies vastly with these things. I should not dismiss my strong prima facie case against the likely person because of these difficulties. But here we have something entirely different. That the bones themselves should remain dry in a well full of water, or a well that yesterday was full of water—that brings us to the edge of something beyond which we can make no guess. There is a new factor, enormous and quite unknown. While we can’t fit together such prodigious facts, we can’t fit together a case against Treherne or against anybody. No; there is only one thing to be done now. Since we can’t accuse Treherne, we must appeal to him. We must put the case against him frankly before him, and trust he has an explanation—and will give it. I suggest we go
back and do it now.”

Paynter, beginning to follow, hesitated a moment, and then said: “Forgive me for a kind of liberty; as you say, you are an older friend of the family. I entirely agree with your suggestion, but before you act on your present suspicions, do you know, I think Miss Vane ought to be warned a little? I rather fear all this will be a new shock to her.”

“Very well,” said Ashe, after looking at him steadily for an instant. “Let us go across to her first.”

From the opening of the wood they could see Barbara Vane writing at the garden table, which was littered with correspondence, and the butler with his yellow face waiting behind her chair. As the lengths of grass lessened between them, and the little group at the table grew larger and clearer in the sunlight, Paynter had a painful sense of being part of an embassy of doom. It sharpened when the girl looked up from the table and smiled on seeing them.

“I should like to speak to you rather particularly if I may,” said the lawyer, with a touch of authority in his respect; and when the butler was dismissed he laid open the whole matter before her, speaking sympathetically, but leaving out nothing, from the strange escape of the poet from the wood to the last detail of the dry bones out of the well. No fault could be found with any one of his tones or phrases, and yet Cyprian, tingling in every nerve with the fine delicacy of his nation about the other sex, felt as if she were faced with an inquisitor. He stood about uneasily, watched the few colored clouds in the clear sky and the bright birds darting about the wood, and he heartily wished him up the tree again.

Soon, however, the way the girl took it began to move him to perplexity rather than pity. It was like nothing he had expected, and yet he could not name the shade of difference. The final identification of her father’s skull, by the hole in the hat, turned her a little pale, but left her composed; this was, perhaps, explicable, since she had from the first taken the pessimistic view. But during the rest of the tale there rested on her broad brows under her copper coils of hair, a brooding spirit that was itself a mystery. He could only tell himself that she was less merely receptive, either firmly or weakly, than he would have expected. It was as if she revolved, not their problem, but her own. She was silent a long time, and said at last:

“Thank you, Mr. Ashe, I am really very grateful for this. After all, it brings things to the point where they must have come sooner or later.” She looked dreamily at the wood and sea, and went on: “I’ve not only had myself to consider, you see; but if you’re really thinking THAT, it’s time I spoke out,
without asking anybody. You say, as if it were something very dreadful, ‘Mr. Treherne was in the wood that night.’ Well, it’s not quite so dreadful to me, you see, because I know he was. In fact, we were there together.”

“Together!” repeated the lawyer.

“We were together,” she said quietly, “because we had a right to be together.”

“Do you mean,” stammered Ashe, surprised out of himself, “that you were engaged?”

“No, no,” she said. “We were married.”

Then, amid a startled silence, she added, as a kind of afterthought:

“In fact, we are still.”

Strong as was his composure, the lawyer sat back in his chair with a sort of solid stupefaction at which Paynter could not help smiling.

“You will ask me, of course,” went on Barbara in the same measured manner, “why we should be married secretly, so that even my poor father did not know. Well, I answer you quite frankly to begin with; because, if he had known, he would certainly have cut me off with a shilling. He did not like my husband, and I rather fancy you do not like him either. And when I tell you this, I know perfectly well what you will say—the usual adventurer getting hold of the usual heiress. It is quite reasonable, and, as it happens, it is quite wrong. If I had deceived my father for the sake of the money, or even for the sake of a man, I should be a little ashamed to talk to you about it. And I think you can see that I am not ashamed.”

“Yes,” said the American, with a grave inclination, “yes, I can see that.”

She looked at him thoughtfully for a moment, as if seeking words for an obscure matter, and then said:

“Do you remember, Mr. Paynter, that day you first lunched here and told us about the African trees? Well, it was my birthday; I mean my first birthday. I was born then, or woke up or something. I had walked in this garden like a somnambulist in the sun. I think there are many such somnambulists in our set and our society; stunned with health, drugged with good manners, fitting their surroundings too well to be alive. Well, I came alive somehow; and you know how deep in us are the things we first realize when we were babies and began to take notice. I began to take notice. One of the first things I noticed was your own story, Mr. Paynter. I feel as if I heard of St. Securis as children hear of Santa Claus, and as if that big tree were a bogey I still believed in. For I do still believe in such things, or rather I believe in them more and more; I feel certain my poor father drove on the rocks by disbelieving, and you are all racing to ruin after
him. That is why I do honestly want the estate, and that is why I am not ashamed of wanting it. I am perfectly certain, Mr. Paynter, that nobody can save this perishing land and this perishing people but those who understand. I mean who understand a thousand little signs and guides in the very soil and lie of the land, and traces that are almost trampled out. My husband understands, and I have begun to understand; my father would never have understood. There are powers, there is the spirit of a place, there are presences that are not to be put by. Oh, don’t fancy I am sentimental and hanker after the good old days. The old days were not all good; that is just the point, and we must understand enough to know the good from the evil. We must understand enough to save the traces of a saint or a sacred tradition, or, where a wicked god has been worshiped, to destroy his altar and to cut down his grove.”

“His grove,” said Paynter automatically, and looked toward the little wood, where the sunbright birds were flying.

“Mrs. Treherne,” said Ashe, with a formidable quietness, “I am not so unsympathetic with all this as you may perhaps suppose. I will not even say it is all moonshine, for it is something better. It is, if I may say so, honeymoonshine. I will never deny the saying that it makes the world go round, if it makes people’s heads go round too. But there are other sentiments, madam, and other duties. I need not tell you your father was a good man, and that what has befallen him would be pitiable, even as the fate of the wicked. This is a horrible thing, and it is chiefly among horrors that we must keep our common sense. There are reasons for everything, and when my old friend lies butchered do not come to me with even the most beautiful fairy tales about a saint and his enchanted grove.”

“Well, and you!” she cried, and rose radiantly and swiftly. “With what kind of fairy tales do you come to me? In what enchanted groves are YOU walking? You come and tell me that Mr. Paynter found a well where the water danced and then disappeared; but of course miracles are all moonshine! You tell me you yourself fished bones from under the same water, and every bone was as dry as a biscuit; but for Heaven’s sake let us say nothing that makes anybody’s head go round! Really, Mr. Ashe, you must try to preserve your common sense!”

She was smiling, but with blazing eyes; and Ashe got to his feet with an involuntary laugh of surrender.

“Well, we must–be going,” he said. “May I say that a tribute is really due to your new transcendental training? If I may say so, I always knew you had brains; and you’ve been learning to use them.”
The two amateur detectives went back to the wood for the moment, that Ashe might consider the removal of the unhappy Squire’s remains. As he pointed out, it was now legally possible to have an inquest, and, even at that early stage of investigations, he was in favor of having it at once.

“I shall be the coroner,” he said, “and I think it will be a case of ‘some person or persons unknown.’ Don’t be surprised; it is often done to give the guilty a false security. This is not the first time the police have found it convenient to have the inquest first and the inquiry afterward.”

But Paynter had paid little attention to the point; for his great gift of enthusiasm, long wasted on arts and affectations, was lifted to inspiration by the romance of real life into which he had just walked. He was really a great critic; he had a genius for admiration, and his admiration varied fittingly with everything he admired.

“A splendid girl and a splendid story,” he cried. “I feel as if I were in love again myself, not so much with her as with Eve or Helen of Troy, or some such tower of beauty in the morning of the world. Don’t you love all heroic things, that gravity and great candor, and the way she took one step from a sort of throne to stand in a wilderness with a vagabond? Oh, believe me, it is she who is the poet; she has the higher reason, and honor and valor are at rest in her soul.”

“In short, she is uncommonly pretty,” replied Ashe, with some cynicism. “I knew a murderess rather well who was very much like her, and had just that colored hair.”

“You talk as if a murderer could be caught red–haired instead of red–handed,” retorted Paynter. “Why, at this very minute, you could be caught red–haired yourself. Are you a murderer, by any chance?”

Ashe looked up quickly, and then smiled.

“I’m afraid I’m a connoisseur in murderers, as you are in poets,” he answered, “and I assure you they are of all colors in hair as well as temperament. I suppose it’s inhumane, but mine is a monstrously interesting trade, even in a little place like this. As for that girl, of course I’ve known her all her life, and–But–but that is just the question. Have I known her all her life? Have I known her at all? Was she even there to be known? You admire her for telling the truth; and so she did, by God, when she said that some people wake up late, who have never lived before. Do we know what they might do–we, who have only seen them asleep?”

“Great heavens!” cried Paynter. “You don’t dare suggest that she–”

“No, I don’t,” said the lawyer, with composure, “but there are other reasons. . . . I don’t suggest anything fully, till we’ve had our interview with this poet of
yours. I think I know where to find him.”

They found him, in fact, before they expected him, sitting on the bench outside the Vane Arms, drinking a mug of cider and waiting for the return of his American friend; so it was not difficult to open conversation with him. Nor did he in any way avoid the subject of the tragedy; and the lawyer, seating himself also on the long bench that fronted the little market place, was soon putting the last developments as lucidly as he had put them to Barbara.

“Well,” said Treherne at last, leaning back and frowning at the signboard, with the colored birds and dolphins, just about his head; “suppose somebody did kill the Squire. He’d killed a good many people with his hygiene and his enlightened landlordism.”

Paynter was considerably uneasy at this alarming opening; but the poet went on quite coolly, with his hands in his pockets and his feet thrust out into the street.

“When a man has the power of a Sultan in Turkey, and uses it with the ideas of a spinster in Tooting, I often wonder that nobody puts a knife in him. I wish there were more sympathy for murderers, somehow. I’m very sorry the poor old fellow’s gone myself; but you gentlemen always seem to forget there are any other people in the world. He’s all right; he was a good fellow, and his soul, I fancy, has gone to the happiest paradise of all.”

The anxious American could read nothing of the effect of this in the dark Napoleonic face of the lawyer, who merely said: “What do you mean?”

“The fool’s paradise,” said Treherne, and drained his pot of cider.

The lawyer rose. He did not look at Treherne, or speak to him; but looked and spoke straight across him to the American, who found the utterance not a little unexpected.

“Mr. Paynter,” said Ashe, “you thought it rather morbid of me to collect murderers; but it’s fortunate for your own view of the case that I do. It may surprise you to know that Mr. Treherne has now, in my eyes, entirely cleared himself of suspicion. I have been intimate with several assassins, as I remarked; but there’s one thing none of them ever did. I never knew a murderer to talk about the murder, and then at once deny it and defend it. No, if a man is concealing his crime, why should he go out of his way to apologize for it?”

“Well,” said Paynter, with his ready appreciation, “I always said you were a remarkable man; and that’s certainly a remarkable idea.”

“Do I understand,” asked the poet, kicking his heels on the cobbles, “that both you gentlemen have been kindly directing me toward the gallows?”
“No,” said Paynter thoughtfully. “I never thought you guilty; and even supposing I had, if you understand me, I should never have thought it quite so guilty to be guilty. It would not have been for money or any mean thing, but for something a little wilder and worthier of a man of genius. After all, I suppose, the poet has passions like great unearthly appetites; and the world has always judged more gently of his sins. But now that Mr. Ashe admits your innocence, I can honestly say I have always affirmed it.”

The poet rose also. “Well, I am innocent, oddly enough,” he said. “I think I can make a guess about your vanishing well, but of the death and dry bones I know no more than the dead if so much. And, by the way, my dear Paynter”—and he turned two bright eyes on the art critic—”I will excuse you from excusing me for all the things I haven’t done; and you, I hope, will excuse me if I differ from you altogether about the morality of poets. As you suggest, it is a fashionable view, but I think it is a fallacy. No man has less right to be lawless than a man of imagination. For he has spiritual adventures, and can take his holidays when he likes. I could picture the poor Squire carried off to elfland whenever I wanted him carried off, and that wood needed no crime to make it wicked for me. That red sunset the other night was all that a murder would have been to many men. No, Mr. Ashe; show, when next you sit in judgment, a little mercy to some wretched man who drinks and robs because he must drink beer to taste it, and take it to drink it. Have compassion on the next batch of poor thieves, who have to hold things in order to have them. But if ever you find ME stealing one small farthing, when I can shut my eyes and see the city of El Dorado, then”—and he lifted his head like a falcon—”show me no mercy, for I shall deserve none.”

“Well,” remarked Ashe, after a pause, “I must go and fix things up for the inquest. Mr. Treherne, your attitude is singularly interesting; I really almost wish I could add you to my collection of murderers. They are a varied and extraordinary set.”

“Has it ever occurred to you,” asked Paynter, “that perhaps the men who have never committed murder are a varied and very extraordinary set? Perhaps every plain man’s life holds the real mystery, the secret of sins avoided.”

“Possibly,” replied Ashe. “It would be a long business to stop the next man in the street and ask him what crimes he never committed and why not. And I happen to be busy, so you’ll excuse me.”

“What,” asked the American, when he and the poet were alone, “is this guess of yours about the vanishing water?”

“Well, I’m not sure I’ll tell you yet,” answered Treherne, something of the old
mischief coming back into his dark eyes. “But I’ll tell you something else, which may be connected with it; something I couldn’t tell until my wife had told you about our meeting in the wood.” His face had grown grave again, and he resumed after a pause:

“When my wife started to follow her father I advised her to go back first to the house, to leave it by another door and to meet me in the wood in half an hour. We often made these assignations, of course, and generally thought them great fun, but this time the question was serious, and I didn’t want the wrong thing done in a hurry. It was a question whether anything could be done to undo an experiment we both vaguely felt to be dangerous, and she especially thought, after reflection, that interference would make things worse. She thought the old sportsman, having been dared to do something, would certainly not be dissuaded by the very man who had dared him or by a woman whom he regarded as a child. She left me at last in a sort of despair, but I lingered with a last hope of doing something, and drew doubtfully near to the heart of the wood; and there, instead of the silence I expected, I heard a voice. It seemed as if the Squire must be talking to himself, and I had the unpleasant fancy that he had already lost his reason in that wood of witchcraft. But I soon found that if he was talking he was talking with two voices. Other fancies attacked me, as that the other was the voice of the tree or the voices of the three trees talking together, and with no man near. But it was not the voice of the tree. The next moment I knew the voice, for I had heard it twenty times across the table. It was the voice of that doctor of yours; I heard it as certainly as you hear my voice now.”

After a moment’s silence, he resumed: “I left the wood, I hardly knew why, and with wild and bewildered feelings; and as I came out into the faint moonshine I saw that old lawyer standing quietly, but staring at me like an owl. At least, the light touched his red hair with fire, but his square old face was in shadow. But I knew, if I could have read it, that it was the face of a hanging judge.”

He threw himself on the bench again, smiled a little, and added: “Only, like a good many hanging judges, I fancy, he was waiting patiently to hang the wrong man.”

“And the right man–” said Paynter mechanically. Treherne shrugged his shoulders, sprawling on the ale bench, and played with his empty pot.
IV

THE CHASE AFTER THE TRUTH

Some time after the inquest, which had ended in the inconclusive verdict which Mr. Andrew Ashe had himself predicted and achieved, Paynter was again sitting on the bench outside the village inn, having on the little table in front of it a tall glass of light ale, which he enjoyed much more as local color than as liquor. He had but one companion on the bench, and that a new one, for the little market place was empty at that hour, and he had lately, for the rest, been much alone. He was not unhappy, for he resembled his great countryman, Walt Whitman, in carrying a kind of universe with him like an open umbrella; but he was not only alone, but lonely. For Ashe had gone abruptly up to London, and since his return had been occupied obscurely with legal matters, doubtless bearing on the murder. And Treherne had long since taken up his position openly, at the great house, as the husband of the great lady, and he and she were occupied with sweeping reforms on the estate. The lady especially, being of the sort whose very dreams “drive at practice,” was landscape gardening as with the gestures of a giantess. It was natural, therefore, that so sociable a spirit as Paynter should fall into speech with the one other stranger who happened to be staying at the inn, evidently a bird of passage like himself. This man, who was smoking a pipe on the bench beside him, with his knapsack before him on the table, was an artist come to sketch on that romantic coast; a tall man in a velvet jacket, with a shock of tow–colored hair, a long fair beard, but eyes of dark brown, the effect of which contrast reminded Paynter vaguely, he hardly knew why, of a Russian. The stranger carried his knapsack into many picturesque corners; he obtained permission to set up his easel in that high garden where the late Squire had held his al fresco banquets. But Paynter had never had an opportunity of judging of the artist’s work, nor did he find it easy to get the artist even to talk of his art. Cyprian himself was always ready to talk of any art, and he talked of it excellently, but with little response. He gave his own reasons for preferring the Cubists to the cult of Picasso, but his new friend seemed to have but a faint interest in either. He insinuated that perhaps the Neo–Primitives were after all only thinning their line, while the true Primitives were rather tightening it; but the stranger seemed to receive the insinuation without any marked reaction of feeling. When Paynter had even gone back as far into the past aA the Post–
Impressionists to find a common ground, and not found it, other memories began to creep back into his mind. He was just reflecting, rather darkly, that after all the tale of the peacock trees needed a mysterious stranger to round it off, and this man had much the air of being one, when the mysterious stranger himself said suddenly:

“Well, I think I’d better show you the work I’m doing down here.”

He had his knapsack before him on the table, and he smiled rather grimly as he began to unstrap it. Paynter looked on with polite expressions of interest, but was considerably surprised when the artist unpacked and placed on the table, not any recognizable works of art, even of the most Cubist description, but (first) a quire of foolscap closely written with notes in black and red ink, and (second), to the American’s extreme amazement, the old woodman’s ax with the linen wrapper, which he had himself found in the well long ago.

“Sorry to give you a start, sir,” said the Russian artist, with a marked London accent. “But I’d better explain straight off that I’m a policeman.”

“You don’t look it,” said Paynter.

“I’m not supposed to,” replied the other. “Mr. Ashe brought me down here from the Yard to investigate; but he told me to report to you when I’d got anything to go on. Would you like to go into the matter now?

“When I took this matter up,” explained the detective, “I did it at Mr. Ashe’s request, and largely, of course, on Mr. Ashe’s lines. Mr. Ashe is a great criminal lawyer; with a beautiful brain, sir, as full as the Newgate Calendar. I took, as a working notion, his view that only you five gentlemen round the table in the Squire’s garden were acquainted with the Squire’s movements. But you gentlemen, if I may say so, have a way of forgetting certain other things and other people which we are rather taught to look for first. And as I followed Mr. Ashe’s inquiries through the stages you know already, through certain suspicions I needn’t discuss because they’ve been dropped, I found the thing shaping after all toward something, in the end, which I think we should have considered at the beginning. Now, to begin with, it is not true that there were five men round the table. There were six.”

The creepy conditions of that garden vigil vaguely returned upon Paynter; and he thought of a ghost, or something more nameless than a ghost. But the deliberate speech of the detective soon enlightened him.

“There were six men and five gentlemen, if you like to put it so,” he proceeded. “That man Miles, the butler, saw the Squire vanish as plainly as you did; and I soon found that Miles was a man worthy of a good deal of attention.”
A light of understanding dawned on Paynter’s face. “So that was it, was it!” he muttered.

“Does all our mythological mystery end with a policeman collaring a butler? Well, I agree with you he is far from an ordinary butler, even to look at; and the fault in imagination is mine. Like many faults in imagination, it was simply snobbishness.”

“We don’t go quite so fast as that,” observed the officer, in an impassive manner. “I only said I found the inquiry pointing to Miles; and that he was well worthy of attention. He was much more in the old Squire’s confidence than many people supposed; and when I cross–examined him he told me a good deal that was worth knowing. I’ve got it all down in these notes here; but at the moment I’ll only trouble you with one detail of it. One night this butler was just outside the Squire’s dining–room door, when he heard the noise of a violent quarrel. The Squire was a violent gentleman, from time to time; but the curious thing about this scene was that the other gentleman was the more violent of the two. Miles heard him say repeatedly that the Squire was a public nuisance, and that his death would be a good riddance for everybody. I only stop now to tell you that the other gentleman was Dr. Burton Brown, the medical man of this village.

“The next examination I made was that of Martin, the woodcutter. Upon one point at least his evidence is quite clear, and is, as you will see, largely confirmed by other witnesses. He says first that the doctor prevented him from recovering his ax, and this is corroborated by Mr. and Mrs. Treherne. But he says further that the doctor admitted having the thing himself; and this again finds support in other evidence by the gardener, who saw the doctor, some time afterward, come by himself and pick up the chopper. Martin says that Doctor Brown repeatedly refused to give it up, alleging some fanciful excuse every time. And, finally, Mr. Paynter, we will hear the evidence of the ax itself.”

He laid the woodman’s tool on the table in front of him, and began to rip up and unwrap the curious linen covering round the handle.

“You will admit this is an odd bandage,” he said. “And that’s just the odd thing about it, that it really is a bandage. This white stuff is the sort of lint they use in hospitals, cut into strips like this. But most doctors keep some; and I have the evidence of Jake the fisherman, with whom Doctor Brown lived for some time, that the doctor had this useful habit. And, last,” he added, flattening out a corner of the rag on the table, “isn’t it odd that it should be marked T.B.B.?”

The American gazed at the rudely inked initials, but hardly saw them. What he
saw, as in a mirror in his darkened memory, was the black figure with the black gloves against the blood–red sunset, as he had seen it when he came out of the wood, and which had always haunted him, he knew not why.

“Of course, I see what you mean,” he said, “and it’s very painful for me, for I knew and respected the man. But surely, also, it’s very far from explaining everything. If he is a murderer, is he a magician? Why did the well water all evaporate in a night, and leave the dead man’s bones dry as dust? That’s not a common operation in the hospitals, is it?”

“As to the water, we do know the explanation,” said the detective. “I didn’t tumble to it at first myself, being a Cockney; but a little talk with Jake and the other fisherman about the old smuggling days put me straight about that. But I admit the dried remains still stump us all. All the same—”

A shadow fell across the table, and his talk was sharply cut short. Ashe was standing under the painted sign, buttoned up grimly in black, and with the face of the hanging judge, of which the poet had spoken, plain this time in the broad sunlight. Behind him stood two big men in plain clothes, very still; but Paynter knew instantly who they were.

“We must move at once,” said I the lawyer. “Dr. Burton Brown is leaving the village.”

The tall detective sprang to his feet, and Paynter instinctively imitated him.

“He has gone up to the Trehernes possibly to say good–by,” went on Ashe rapidly. “I’M sorry, but we must arrest him in the garden there, if necessary. I’ve kept the lady out of the way, I think. But you”—addressing the factitious landscape painter—”must go up at once and rig up that easel of yours near the table and be ready. We will follow quietly, and come up behind the tree. We must be careful, for it’s clear he’s got wind of us, or he wouldn’t be doing a bolt.”

“I don’t like this job,” remarked Paynter, as they mounted toward the park and garden, the detective darting on ahead.

“Do you suppose I do?” asked Ashe; and, indeed, his strong, heavy face looked so lined and old that the red hair seemed unnatural, like a red wig. “I’ve known him longer than you, though perhaps I’ve suspected him longer as well.”

When they topped the slope of the garden the detective had already erected his easel, though a strong breeze blowing toward the sea rattled and flapped his apparatus and blew about his fair (and false) beard in the wind. Little clouds curled like feathers, were scudding seaward across the many–colored landscape, which the American art critic had once surveyed on a happier morning; but it is
doubtful if the landscape painter paid much attention to it. Treherne was dimly discernible in the doorway of what was now his house; he would come no nearer, for he hated such a public duty more bitterly than the rest. The others posted themselves a little way behind the tree. Between the lines of these masked batteries the black figure of the doctor could be seen coming across the green lawn, traveling straight, as a bullet, as he had done when he brought the bad news to the woodcutter. To-day he was smiling, under the dark mustache that was cut short of the upper lip, though they fancied him a little pale, and he seemed to pause a moment and peer through his spectacles at the artist.

The artist turned from his easel with a natural movement, and then in a flash had captured the doctor by the coat collar.

“I arrest you—” he began; but Doctor Brown plucked himself free with startling promptitude, took a flying leap at the other, tore off his sham beard, tossing it into the air like one of the wild wisps of the cloud; then, with one wild kick, sent the easel flying topsy-turvy, and fled like a hare for the shore. Even at that dazzling instant Paynter felt that this wild reception was a novelty and almost an anticlimax; but he had no time for analysis when he and the whole pack had to follow in the hunt; even Treherne bringing up the rear with a renewed curiosity and energy.

The fugitive collided with one of the policemen who ran to head him off, sending him sprawling down the slope; indeed, the fugitive seemed inspired with the strength of a wild ape. He cleared at a bound the rampart of flowers, over which Barbara had once leaned to look at her future lover, and tumbled with blinding speed down the steep path up which that troubadour had climbed. Racing with the rushing wind they all streamed across the garden after him, down the path, and finally on to the seashore by the fisher’s cot, and the pierced crags and caverns the American had admired when he first landed. The runaway did not, however, make for the house he had long inhabited, but rather for the pier, as if with a mind to seize the boat or to swim. Only when he reached the other end of the small stone jetty did he turn, and show them the pale face with the spectacles; and they saw that it was still smiling.

“I’m rather glad of this,” said Treherne, with a great sigh. “The man is mad.”

Nevertheless, the naturalness of the doctor’s voice, when he spoke, startled them as much as a shriek.

“Gentleman,” he said, “I won’t protract your painful duties by asking you what you want; but I will ask at once for a small favor, which will not prejudice those duties in any way. I came down here rather in a hurry perhaps; but the
truth is I thought I was late for an appointment.” He looked dispassionately at his
watch. “I find there is still some fifteen minutes. Will you wait with me here for
that short time; after which I am quite at your service.”

There was a bewildered silence, and then Paynter said: “For my part, I feel as
if it would really be better to humor him.”

“Ashe,” said the doctor, with a new note of seriousness, “for old friendship,
grant me this last little indulgence. It will make no difference; I have no arms or
means of escape; you can search me if you like. I know you think you are doing
right, and I also know you will do it as fairly as you can. Well, after all, you get
friends to help you; look at our friend with the beard, or the remains of the beard.
Why shouldn’t I have a friend to help me? A man will be here in a few minutes
in whom I put some confidence; a great authority on these things. Why not, if
only out of curiosity, wait and hear his view of the case?”

“This seems all moonshine,” said Ashe, “but on the chance of any light on
things—well, from the moon—I don’t mind waiting a quarter of an hour. Who is
this friend, I wonder; some amateur detective, I suppose.”

“I thank you,” said the doctor, with some dignity. “I think you will trust him
when you have talked to him a little. And now,” he added with an air of amiably
relaxing into lighter matters, “let us talk about the murder.

“This case,” he said in a detached manner, “will be found, I suspect, to be
rather unique. There is a very clear and conclusive combination of evidence
against Thomas Burton Brown, otherwise myself. But there is one peculiarity
about that evidence, which you may perhaps have noticed. It all comes
ultimately from one source, and that a rather unusual one. Thus, the woodcutter
says I had his ax, but what makes him think so? He says I told him I had his ax;
that I told him so again and again. Once more, Mr. Paynter here pulled up the ax
out of the well; but how? I think Mr. Paynter will testify that I brought him the
tackle for fishing it up, tackle he might never have got in any other way.
Curious, is it not? Again, the ax is found to be wrapped in lint that was in my
possession, according to the fisherman. But who showed the lint to the
fisherman? I did. Who marked it with large letters as mine? I did. Who wrapped
it round the handle at all? I did. Rather a singular thing to do; has anyone ever
explained it?”

His words, which had been heard at first with painful coldness were beginning
to hold more and more of their attention.

“Then there is the well itself,” proceeded the doctor, with the same air of
insane calm. “I suppose some of you by this time know at least the secret of that.
The secret of the well is simply that it is not a well. It is purposely shaped at the top so as to look like one, but it is really a sort of chimney opening from the roof of one of those caves over there; a cave that runs inland just under the wood, and indeed IS connected by tunnels and secret passages with other openings miles and miles away. It is a sort of labyrinth used by smugglers and such people for ages past. This doubtless explains many of those disappearances we have heard of. But to return to the well that is not a well, in case some of you still don’t know about it. When the sea rises very high at certain seasons it fills the low cave, and even rises a little way in the funnel above, making it look more like a well than ever. The noise Mr. Paynter heard was the natural eddy of a breaker from outside, and the whole experience depended on something so elementary as the tide.”

The American was startled into ordinary speech.

“The tide!” he said. “And I never even thought of it! I guess that comes of living by the Mediterranean.”

“The next step will be obvious enough,” continued the speaker, “to a logical mind like that of Mr. Ashe, for instance. If it be asked why, even so, the tide did not wash away the Squire’s remains that had lain there since his disappearance, there is only one possible answer. The remains had NOT lain there since his disappearance. The remains had been deliberately put there in the cavern under the wood, and put there AFTER Mr. Paynter had made his first investigation. They were put there, in short, after the sea had retreated and the cave was again dry. That is why they were dry; of course, much drier than the cave. Who put them there, I wonder?”

He was gazing gravely through his spectacles over their heads into vacancy, and suddenly he smiled.

“Ahh,” he cried, jumping up from the rock with alacrity, “here is the amateur detective at last!”

Ashe turned his head over his shoulder, and for a few seconds did not move it again, but stood as if with a stiff neck. In the cliff just behind him was one of the clefts or cracks into which it was everywhere cloven. Advancing from this into the sunshine, as if from a narrow door, was Squire Vane, with a broad smile on his face.

The wind was tearing from the top of the high cliff out to sea, passing over their heads, and they had the sensation that everything was passing over their heads and out of their control. Paynter felt as if his head had been blown off like a hat. But none of this gale of unreason seemed to stir a hair on the white head of
the Squire, whose bearing, though self–important and bordering on a swagger, seemed if anything more comfortable than in the old days. His red face was, however, burnt like a sailor’s, and his light clothes had a foreign look.

“Well, gentlemen,” he said genially, “so this is the end of the legend of the peacock trees. Sorry to spoil that delightful traveler’s tale, Mr. Paynter, but the joke couldn’t be kept up forever. Sorry to put a stop to your best poem, Mr. Treherne, but I thought all this poetry had been going a little too far. So Doctor Brown and I fixed up a little surprise for you. And I must say, without vanity, that you look a little surprised.”

“What on earth,” asked Ashe at last, “is the meaning of all this?”

The Squire laughed pleasantly, and even a little apologetically,

“I’m afraid I’m fond of practical jokes,” he said, “and this I suppose is my last grand practical joke. But I want you to understand that the joke is really practical. I flatter myself it will be of very practical use to the cause of progress and common sense, and the killing of such superstitions everywhere. The best part of it, I admit, was the doctor’s idea and not mine. All I meant to do was to pass a night in the trees, and then turn up as fresh as paint to tell you what fools you were. But Doctor Brown here followed me into the wood, and we had a little talk which rather changed my plans. He told me that a disappearance for a few hours like that would never knock the nonsense on the head; most people would never even hear of it, and those who did would say that one night proved nothing. He showed me a much better way, which had been tried in several cases where bogus miracles had been shown up. The thing to do was to get the thing really believed everywhere as a miracle, and then shown up everywhere as a sham miracle. I can’t put all the arguments as well as he did, but that was the notion, I think.”

The doctor nodded, gazing silently at the sand; and the Squire resumed with undiminished relish.

“We agreed that I should drop through the hole into the cave, and make my way through the tunnels, where I often used to play as a boy, to the railway station a few miles from here, and there take a train for London. It was necessary for the joke, of course, that I should disappear without being traced; so I made my way to a port, and put in a very pleasant month or two round my old haunts in Cyprus and the Mediterranean. There’s no more to say of that part of the business, except that I arranged to be back by a particular time; and here I am. But I’ve heard enough of what’s gone on round here to be satisfied that I’ve done the trick. Everybody in Cornwall and most people in South England have
heard of the Vanishing Squire; and thousands of noodles have been nodding their heads over crystals and tarot cards at this marvelous proof of an unseen world. I reckon the Reappearing Squire will scatter their cards and smash their crystals, so that such rubbish won’t appear again in the twentieth century. I’ll make the peacock trees the laughing stock of all Europe and America.”

“Well,” said the lawyer, who was the first to rearrange his wits, “I’m sure we’re all only too delighted to see you again, Squire; and I quite understand your explanation and your own very natural motives in the matter. But I’m afraid I haven’t got the hang of everything yet. Granted that you wanted to vanish, was it necessary to put bogus bones in the cave, so as nearly to put a halter round the neck of Doctor Brown? And who put it there? The statement would appear perfectly maniacal; but so far as I can make head or tail out of anything, Doctor Brown seems to have put it there himself.”

The doctor lifted his head for the first time.

“Yes; I put the bones there,” he said. “I believe I am the first son of Adam who ever manufactured all the evidence of a murder charge against himself.”

It was the Squire’s turn to look astonished. The old gentleman looked rather wildly from one to the other.

“Bones! Murder charge!” he ejaculated. “What the devil is all this? Whose bones?”

“Your bones, in a manner of speaking,” delicately conceded the doctor. “I had to make sure you had really died, and not disappeared by magic.”

The Squire in his turn seemed more hopelessly puzzled than the whole crowd of his friends had been over his own escapade. “Why not?” he demanded. “I thought it was the whole point to make it look like magic. Why did you want me to die so much?”

Doctor Brown had lifted his head; and he now very slowly lifted his hand. He pointed with outstretched arm at the headland overhanging the foreshore, just above the entrance to the cave. It was the exact part of the beach where Paynter had first landed, on that spring morning when he had looked up in his first fresh wonder at the peacock trees. But the trees were gone.

The fact itself was no surprise to them; the clearance had naturally been one of the first of the sweeping changes of the Treherne regime. But though they knew it well, they had wholly forgotten it; and its significance returned on them suddenly like a sign in heaven.

“That is the reason,” said the doctor. “I have worked for that for fourteen years.”
They no longer looked at the bare promontory on which the feathery trees had once been so familiar a sight; for they had something else to look at. Anyone seeing the Squire now would have shifted his opinion about where to find the lunatic in that crowd. It was plain in a flash that the change had fallen on him like a thunderbolt; that he, at least, had never had the wildest notion that the tale of the Vanishing Squire had been but a prelude to that of the vanishing trees. The next half hour was full of his ravings and expostulations, which gradually died away into demands for explanation and incoherent questions repeated again and again. He had practically to be overruled at last, in spite of the respect in which he was held, before anything like a space and silence were made in which the doctor could tell his own story. It was perhaps a singular story, of which he alone had ever had the knowledge; and though its narration was not uninterrupted, it may be set forth consecutively in his own words.

“First, I wish it clearly understood that I believe in nothing. I do not even give the nothing I believe a name; or I should be an atheist. I have never had inside my head so much as a hint of heaven and hell. I think it most likely we are worms in the mud; but I happen to be sorry for the other worms under the wheel. And I happen myself to be a sort of worm that turns when he can. If I care nothing for piety, I care less for poetry. I’m not like Ashe here, who is crammed with criminology, but has all sorts of other culture as well. I know nothing about culture, except bacteria culture. I sometimes fancy Mr. Ashe is as much an art critic as Mr. Paynter; only he looks for his heroes, or villains, in real life. But I am a very practical man; and my stepping stones have been simply scientific facts. In this village I found a fact—a fever. I could not classify it; it seemed peculiar to this corner of the coast; it had singular reactions of delirium and mental breakdown. I studied it exactly as I should a queer case in the hospital, and corresponded and compared notes with other men of science. But nobody had even a working hypothesis about it, except of course the ignorant peasantry, who said the peacock trees were in some wild way poisonous.

“Well, the peacock trees were poisonous. The peacock trees did produce the fever. I verified the fact in the plain plodding way required, comparing all the degrees and details of a vast number of cases; and there were a shocking number to compare. At the end of it I had discovered the thing as Harvey discovered the circulation of the blood. Everybody was the worse for being near the things; those who came off best were exactly the exceptions that proved the rule, abnormally healthy and energetic people like the Squire and his daughter. In other words, the peasants were right. But if I put it that way, somebody will cry:
‘But do you believe it was supernatural then?’ In fact, that’s what you’ll all say; and that’s exactly what I complain of. I fancy hundreds of men have been left dead and diseases left undiscovered, by this suspicion of superstition, this stupid fear of fear. Unless you see daylight through the forest of facts from the first, you won’t venture into the wood at all. Unless we can promise you beforehand that there shall be what you call a natural explanation, to save your precious dignity from miracles, you won’t even hear the beginning of the plain tale. Suppose there isn’t a natural explanation! Suppose there is, and we never find it! Suppose I haven’t a notion whether there is or not I What the devil has that to do with you, or with me in dealing with the facts I do know? My own instinct is to think there is; that if my researches could be followed far enough it would be found that some horrible parody of hay fever, some effect analogous to that of pollen, would explain all the facts. I have never found the explanation. What I have found are the facts. And the fact is that those trees on the top there dealt death right and left, as certainly as if they had been giants, standing on a hill and knocking men down in crowds with a club. It will be said that now I had only to produce my proofs and have the nuisance removed. Perhaps I might have convinced the scientific world finally, when more and more processions of dead men had passed through the village to the cemetery. But I had not got to convince the scientific world, but the Lord of the Manor. The Squire will pardon my saying that it was a very different thing. I tried it once; I lost my temper, and said things I do not defend; and I left the Squire’s prejudices rooted anew, like the trees. I was confronted with one colossal coincidence that was an obstacle to all my aims. One thing made all my science sound like nonsense. It was the popular legend.

“Squire, if there were a legend of hay fever, you would not believe in hay fever. If there were a popular story about pollen, you would say that pollen was only a popular story. I had something against me heavier and more hopeless than the hostility of the learned; I had the support of the ignorant. My truth was hopelessly tangled up with a tale that the educated were resolved to regard as entirely a lie. I never tried to explain again; on the contrary, I apologized, affected a conversion to the common–sense view, and watched events. And all the time the lines of a larger, if more crooked plan, began to get clearer in my mind. I knew that Miss Vane, whether or no she were married to Mr. Treherne, as I afterward found she was, was so much under his influence that the first day of her inheritance would be the last day of the poisonous trees. But she could not inherit, or even interfere, till the Squire died. It became simply self–evident, to a
rational mind, that the Squire must die. But wishing to be humane as well as rational, I desired his death to be temporary.

“Doubtless my scheme was completed by a chapter of accidents, but I was watching for such accidents. Thus I had a foreshadowing of how the ax would figure in the tale when it was first flung at the trees; it would have surprised the woodman to know how near our minds were, and how I was but laying a more elaborate siege to the towers of pestilence. But when the Squire spontaneously rushed on what half the countryside would call certain death, I jumped at my chance. I followed him, and told him all that he has told you. I don’t suppose he’ll ever forgive me now, but that shan’t prevent me saying that I admire him hugely for being what people would call a lunatic and what is really a sportsman. It takes rather a grand old man to make a joke in the grand style. He came down so quick from the tree he had climbed that he had no time to pull his hat off the bough it had caught in.

“At first I found I had made a miscalculation. I thought his disappearance would be taken as his death, at least after a little time; but Ashe told me there could be no formalities without a corpse. I fear I was a little annoyed, but I soon set myself to the duty of manufacturing a corpse. It’s not hard for a doctor to get a skeleton; indeed, I had one, but Mr. Paynter’s energy was a day too early for me, and I only got the bones into the well when he had already found it. His story gave me another chance, however; I noted where the hole was in the hat, and made a precisely corresponding hole in the skull. The reason for creating the other clews may not be so obvious. It may not yet be altogether apparent to you that I am not a fiend in human form. I could not substantiate a murder without at least suggesting a murderer, and I was resolved that if the crime happened to be traced to anybody, it should be to me. So I’m not surprised you were puzzled about the purpose of the rag round the ax, because it had no purpose, except to incriminate the man who put it there. The chase had to end with me, and when it was closing in at last the joke of it was too much for me, and I fear I took liberties with the gentleman’s easel and beard. I was the only person who could risk it, being the only person who could at the last moment produce the Squire and prove there had been no crime at all. That, gentlemen, is the true story of the peacock trees; and that bare crag up there, where the wind is whistling as it would over a wilderness, is a waste place I have labored to make, as many men have labored to make a cathedral.

“I don’t think there is any more to say, and yet something moves in my blood and I will try to say it. Could you not have trusted a little these peasants whom
you already trust so much? These men are men, and they meant something; even their fathers were not wholly fools. If your gardener told you of the trees you called him a madman, but he did not plan and plant your garden like a madman. You would not trust your woodman about these trees, yet you trusted him with all the others. Have you ever thought what all the work of the world would be like if the poor were so senseless as you think them? But no, you stuck to your rational principle. And your rational principle was that a thing must be false because thousands of men had found it true; that BECAUSE many human eyes had seen something it could not be there.”

He looked across at Ashe with a sort of challenge, but though the sea wind ruffled the old lawyer’s red mane, his Napoleonic mask was unruffled; it even had a sort of beauty from its new benignity.

“I am too happy just now in thinking how wrong I have been,” he answered, “to quarrel with you, doctor, about our theories. And yet, in justice to the Squire as well as myself, I should demur to your sweeping inference. I respect these peasants, I respect your regard for them; but their stories are a different matter. I think I would do anything for them but believe them. Truth and fancy, after all, are mixed in them, when in the more instructed they are separate; and I doubt if you have considered what would be involved in taking their word for anything. Half the ghosts of those who died of fever may be walking by now; and kind as these people are, I believe they might still burn a witch. No, doctor, I admit these people have been badly used, I admit they are in many ways our betters, but I still could not accept anything in their evidence.”

The doctor bowed gravely and respectfully enough, and then, for the last time that day, they saw his rather sinister smile.

“Quite so,” he said. “But you would have hanged me on their evidence.”

And, turning his back on them, as if automatically, he set his face toward the village, where for so many years he had gone his round.
THE DONNINGTON AFFAIR

G. K. CHESTERTON
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

THE DONNINGTON AFFAIR

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE DONNINGTON AFFAIR

PEMBERTON’S CHALLENGE

I

II

III

IV
THE DONNINGTON AFFAIR

In 1914 Sir Max Pemberton proposed challenges to several leading mystery writers of the day, including Chesterton. The following chapter was printed in the October issue of the Premier magazine. Father Brown’s Solution was published in the following month’s magazine.
Pemberton’s Challenge

The following statement of the Donnington affair has been written from the original notes by the Priest-in-charge of the Parish of Borrow-in-the-Vale.

John Barrington Cope came to Sussex from King’s College, Cambridge, at a time when the aged vicar could no longer undertake single-handed even the pleasant duties of that rural charge.

He had been nearly two years at Borrow when the tragedy occurred. A man of considerable scholastic attainment, he appears immediately to have realised the magnitude of the mystery and to have set down, without loss of time, an orderly statement of the facts as they presented themselves to him.

The accepted lover of Evelyn Donnington’s sister Harriet, he enjoyed the liberties of Borrow Close, and was almost daily at the house. It was at his suggestion that “another” was summoned from London to investigate a case which promised at an early moment to baffle alike the vigilance of the police and the curiosity of the public.

Mr. Cope’s notes were written primarily for Father Brown’s perusal. An amplification of them seems to be the swiftest method of putting the reading public in possession of the salient features of this amazing occurrence.
I

My name is John Barrington Cope, and I had been priest-in-charge of the parish of Borrow-in-the-Vale for twenty-one months.

I last saw Evelyn Donnington alive on Sunday evening at a quarter past ten o’clock. I had supped at Borrow Close as it has been my privilege to do almost every Sunday evening since I came to the parish. The fact that my fiancée, Harriet Donnington, was and is at Bath made no difference.

Sir Borrow Donnington has few friends. He is not a man who loves the society of other men, nor, for that matter, of women. It may be that I understand him a little better than his fellows. I am welcome at Borrow Close, and there is no other house which has a prior claim upon me.

I saw Evelyn Donnington alive and well at a quarter past ten on the evening of Sunday last, the 24th day of July. She came to the porch with me to tell me of a letter she had received from Harriet on the previous day, and there I said “good-night” to her.

The rectory stands perhaps a third part of a mile across the park, and is best reached by a bridle-path through what is known as Adam’s Thicket. The way is dark and shut in by the magnificent beeches for which Borrow is famous. I saw no living thing as I returned to the rectory, nor heard any sound that was ominous.

Two hours later a footman from the Close awakened me to say that Evelyn was dead. “Murdered, sir!” he gasped, and without another word he ran on headlong towards the doctor’s house.

I had fallen into a light sleep when this man’s ring awakened me. There had been much trouble at Borrow Close since I came to the parish. The world is well acquainted with the nature of this, and knows much of the shame which has overtaken the Donnington family. Whatever sympathy it may have withheld from Sir Borrow Donnington himself, it has lavished freely upon his daughters.

To me Evelyn was already as a sister. I was to have married Harriet in September, though God knows what may be in store for us now.

Men deride omens, though often they are but the mind’s logic waging a war upon our optimism. Though the affair of Southby Donnington would appear to have been settled by his conviction and imprisonment, I dreaded from the first that such could not be the end of it; and it was of Southby Donnington, Sir Borrow’s only son, that I had been dreaming in my sleep when the footman
awakened me.

What a sardonic chapter in the history of human nature! An only son—a wealthy father! Upon the one side a profligacy almost without parallel, upon the other side a parsimony stupendous in its ironic selfishness.

Southby Donnington was sent to Eton and to Trinity (Cambridge) as an Army candidate. A disgraceful affair at a gambling den in London, with a subsequent appearance at a police-court, finished his university career in his first term. He could not even pass the trivial examination now demanded for Sandhurst. He would suggest no other vocation. The man became a derelict in the dangerous seas of London’s underworld. In vain his sisters pleaded with Sir Borrow. The baronet had finished with his son. A man of iron resolution which nothing could bend, he swore that Southby should never enter his house again. There followed the cataclysm.

We heard of the boy’s arrest in London upon a charge of forgery. He was committed for trial, defended with what money his sisters could supply him, sent to the Old Bailey, convicted. The sentence was one of three years’ penal servitude. We learned that he had been taken to Wormwood Scrubs, and nine months later that he was at Parkhurst.

It is no place here to dwell upon the secrets of the stricken house or of the aftermath of this terrible downfall.

Borrow Close is an old mansion lying between Ashdown Forest and Crowborough. It has always been remote from men and affairs, and there is no domain in the south of England so wonderful in its solitudes.

All about it is the forest. The very park is primeval woodland; here abounding in undergrowth so thick that the foot of man might never have been set therein; there characterised by marshy pools and groves where noonday is but a shimmer of reluctant light. Few were admitted to the house even in the days when Lady Donnington was its mistress. Since her death it has become mediaeval in its isolation. The old baronet had nothing in common with his neighbours; his daughters were always afraid of him, and they go through life as it were on tiptoe, fearing that if they speak above a whisper they will awake the curiosity of the world beyond their gates.

It is true that Southby flouted the sanctities of this retreat, despite the baronet’s displeasure. Parties of wild undergraduates made the “welkin ring” during the vacations; the story of Evelyn and Harriet’s beauty was not unknown in the courts at Cambridge. Few of the boys, however, had the courage to persist, and I think that even Southby himself was astonished when Captain Willy Kennington
appeared suddenly upon the scene as a suitor for Evelyn’s hand, and was not to be repulsed even by Sir Borrow’s savage discouragement.

Captain Kennington had met Evelyn at her aunt’s house in Kensington some three months before the downfall. Her womanly gifts should have made an appeal to any man who became well acquainted with them, and I do not wonder that the young soldier surrendered to the spell.

Very simple in all her ideas, not a little afraid of the world, yet gifted with an imagination which years of solitary reading had stimulated, she seemed to be at once the woman and the child; wise above her years, yet afflicted by those ideals for which woman often pays so dearly. Fear of her father forbade that immediate acceptance of the soldier’s advances which her heart dictated. She returned to Borrow Close, and was followed there shortly by the captain himself.

What was my astonishment to hear a few days later that Sir Borrow had refused all discussion of the matter, and in one of those violent paroxysms of temper, with which neither God nor man could reason, had ordered the captain from his house.

To give him his due, Southby played a man’s part in this affair. He interceded warmly for his sister, returning from South Africa for that purpose. The scene between father and son is remembered at the Close as the culminating episode of an estrangement as discreditable to one as to the other. Passion dominated it, and set finality upon it. No word was spoken between these two men until the end.

Three months later Southby was a convict, and I remained the one man who visited the baronet in the days of his shame.
These are the events of sixteen months ago. I have already disclaimed any intention of dwelling upon the intimate days of sorrow which followed after. “The evil that men do lives after them,” and while for the world the tragedy was but a nine days’ wonder, it lay heavy upon the house of Borrow. No longer did the old baronet receive the visits of the few friends hitherto admitted to the Close. He shut the doors alike upon the old world and the new. His daughters saw no one but the servants and myself. In their turn, his neighbours shrank from him. Men had come to say that lust of gold drove Southby to the crime, and to believe that the boy was less guilty than the father.

The one man who stood by the stricken family was Captain Kennington, who owed so little to the baronet. Now, in the darkest hour, he came forward to demand Evelyn’s hand anew. It went without saying that she would not accept him. A rare type of womanhood, the very fact that she loved was the barrier between them. Nothing, she felt, could ever blot out the shame of this happening, or minimise its consequences. The harvest of sin was not gathered in Parkhurst Prison, but here in the ancient house, where women reaped with sickles of tears.

My own relations to Harriet were, God be praised, but superficially affected by Southby’s downfall. We had learned to know each other so well before the trouble came that it but set a seal upon our mutual sense of help and sacrifice, and although I knew that she would not marry me immediately, I left the future to lead us as it might. Sir Donnington himself now seemed to find in my society the sole consolation of his declining years. He did not go to church, but I visited them for worship early every Sunday morning, and was always at the Close to supper when in residence at the rectory.

So the months rolled on, and time, the healer, came to our aid. The bitterness of fear and doubt had passed down and given place to a brave attempt to face the future. We made many plans for Southby upon his release, and were determined to start him in a farm in South Africa if we could. Kennington went so far as to visit the prison and see the convict. His own father was one of the visiting inspectors, as it chanced, and so an advantage was permitted him.

He told us that he found Southby quite resigned to his fate, and he spoke of him as a man who was convinced that he had not committed a crime, but had been the victim of those who had betrayed him when they discovered that
nothing was to be extorted from the baronet.

Parkhurst, it seems, is the gentleman’s prison, and Southby was in aristocratic company there. I confess that the intimation was not without its saving humour, and permitted some reflection upon the permanence of those social aspirations which could afflict men even in a prison. Better, it appeared, to pick oakum with a lord than to earn an honest living among plebeians.

Kennington spoke of cheerfulness and of content, but I remembered afterwards one phrase in his letter which should have struck me as significant. Prison makes strange bedfellows, and so far as man may have a confidant in captivity, Southby had found one in a man by the name of Mester.

“This fellow,” said Kennington, “is the cheeriest soul possible. He has been well educated in France, where he fell upon evil times. Then he became chauffeur to an Austrian baron, entered a motor-car factory at Suresnes, turned his attention to flying at Issy, and finally was accused of a savage assault and an attempt to rob an old lady at Dover who was about to establish him in a motor-car business there.”

Mester declared to the end that the crime was the work of others. He protested that he was the victim of circumstances, and that the clues upon which the police convicted him were false. Nevertheless, he was found guilty and sentenced to four years’ penal servitude upon the day following Southby’s conviction.

Between these men a strange friendship took root. Each believed himself wrongfully convicted; each could sympathise with the other. And just as Mester declared that he would bring the old baronet to his senses when he got out, so could Southby interest himself in Mester’s story, and implore certain old colleagues on the Press to investigate it.

As we know, one great novelist has already busied himself with the affair, and is convinced of the man’s innocence. Admittedly a person of no stable character and unquestionably the associate of thieves, there would yet seem to be a doubt whether the graver crime were committed, and quite a reasonable supposition that the police may have been in error.

Mester himself did not hesitate to affirm that if he were free for a month he would establish his innocence beyond all question. So convinced was he of this that he appears to have told Southby quite plainly that he would escape from Parkhurst if the opportunity presented itself.

I thought nothing of the matter at the time, and, indeed, the threat must be one often made by prisoners to whom crime has not become a habit and the cell a refuge. But I confess that astonishment was no word for it when, a few weeks
later, upon opening my morning paper, I read that two men had escaped from Parkhurst, and, despite the efforts of the police, were still at large.

“Southby and Mester,” I said to myself. I was not wrong, as you shall presently hear.
III

Here was an upset if you will, and one to send me running to the Close with the tidings. Sir Borrow himself I would not tell, dreading the effect of the news upon a mind so deranged; but Evelyn and Harriet heard me eagerly, and the former I began to suspect was already in possession of the story. This fact did not in the beginning impress me as it should have done. Some letter, I thought, must have come from Southby himself, and yet had I reflected upon it I would have perceived that such a thing was hardly possible under the circumstances.

The man had escaped but yesterday, and even had a letter been posted from the Isle of Wight or the mainland on the previous evening, it would not have reached Borrow Close at nine o’clock. Later on I discovered, quite accidentally, that Captain Kennington hinted at some such possibility in a letter received on the previous day, and whatever thoughts the discovery suggested, I kept them strictly to myself. The immediate thing was the excitement the news occasioned at the Close, and the momentous events which must follow upon it.

For my own part, I was early of the opinion that the fugitives would swiftly be overtaken, and that that would be the end of the matter. Their escape, briefly narrated in the newspapers, had been admirably contrived. It appears that they scaled a high wall at a moment when a heavy mist drifted across the island from the mainland, that they then crossed an enclosure in which other prisoners were at work, climbed a second wall by the aid of a silk ladder, which they left behind them, and so made their way to the sea.

Authority believed that their flight was there cut short, and that they had not succeeded in reaching the mainland; but another account spoke of a mysterious motor boat which had been seen recently off St. Catherine’s Point, and, remembering Mester’s acquaintance with the motor fraternity and its less desirable characters, the writer of the report seemed to be of the opinion that this might have some connection with the matter. The latter, I must confess, occurred to me as a plausible deduction. These flying people are unusually clever. They possess a daring which is proved, and their resources are many. I detected now the meaning of Southby’s friendship for this undesirable mechanic, and I saw that the men were pledged to make the attempt together. For the moment it looked as though they had succeeded.

It was a little before nine o’clock when I arrived at the Close, and not until after lunch that I left. As usual, Sir Borrow spent the morning about his gardens,
and kept me some while with him speaking of this plant or that with which I was always familiar, but never naming the son who would succeed to this splendid inheritance. When he retired to his study at twelve o’clock, I took the girls aside and resumed a conversation so full of meaning for us all. Naturally, we asked each other many questions which we were unable to answer. Where would Southby go if he reached the mainland? Could he get money? Would he return to Borrow?

“If he comes here,” said I, “he is lost! It will be the first place the police will watch!”

Harriet agreed with me in this. Yet where else could he go with any prospect of getting money, by which alone ultimate success could be assured?

We thought of many places, but of one with conviction. Sir Borrow’s sister, the aged Lady Rosmar, then lived at Bath. She had been staunch to the boy as far as her means permitted, and might be still a friend to him in such an emergency as this. We decided that Harriet should go to Bath without loss of time, in case she could be of any assistance there. Evelyn and I, meanwhile, would watch and wait at Borrow. God knows what we hoped to do if the boy came there, yet I think we both prayed for his coming.

It seemed such an impossible thing that he could evade the hue and cry which must attend this flight. Yet if he did evade it, might not we take up his burden and start him in that new life wherein so much might be achieved if the lesson had been truly learned? Foolish the hope may have been, yet it came natural to those who had suffered so much, and over whom the prison gate was ever the emblem of a terrible sorrow. We believed that Southby would come, and in ten days’ time our faith was justified. He was there at Borrow Close, the police upon his heels, his own father ignorant that the house harboured him. Of such dire things have I now to tell in the story that comes after.
IV

I have said that we supposed the house would be watched by the police, and in this we were not mistaken.

Frequently, in the few days immediately prior to Southby’s return, I had seen strange men in the park, and more than once I had been stopped upon an idle pretence and questioned concerning Sir Borrow and his affairs. Such a subterfuge would have deceived no one, and, fortunately, I was able to deal with the men quite frankly.

“You are a police-officer,” I said to one of them.

And he did not deny it.

“The lad’s sure to come here, sir,” was his answer, “and, if he does, we shall take him. There isn’t a road within ten miles we are not watching.”

We fell to other talk, and chiefly of the escape. Officially the police thought there had been some connivance on the part of the warders, but of this I naturally knew nothing.

“The young men had a lot of friends between them,” the detective said, “and as for Lionel Mester, he knows half the crooks in Europe!”

I replied that in such a case the friends in question might be expected to shelter their comrades.

“And,” said I, “it is idle to look for your men here. Surely you know of the relations between Sir Borrow and his son?”

He was much interested in this, and questioned me closely—a proceeding I did not resent under the circumstances. A few days later I was stopped in the park by an American lady and her daughter, who pretended to be much interested in the old place, and asked me if it were not possible to get permission to visit it. In these I recognised also the agents of the police, and I put them off with what excuses I could; not that it would have mattered at such a time, for Southby had not then returned. He was to come three days afterwards, at dead of night, and the two who were to know of his coming would have stood at nothing for his sake. They were his sister Evelyn and Wellman, the butler, who had loved Southby as his own son.

It was from Wellman himself that I had the news at nine o’clock on the following morning. He came carrying a pretended letter from Sir Borrow, and not until we were alone in my study, and the door shut behind us, did he dare to speak freely.
“Mr. Southby’s home, sir,” he said in a whisper. “He’s in the priest’s room.”

I feared to speak for a moment. Instantly I had visions of the hunted lad, fleeing from thicket to thicket of the forest he knew so well, and finally gaining that deep glen wherein is the subterranean entrance to the Close. That he had thought of it when none of us remembered! Of course, the police would know nothing of that. The very servants, save Wellman alone, are in ignorance of the existence of the passage, and locally it is believed that it perished long ago. Sir Borrow let them think so.

It was one of his humours to have the place opened up by the engineers who came from London to sink his artesian well. He liked to go to and fro as he pleased, to catch his servants when they least expected him. And so he used the priest’s room for the purpose, or did use it until the tragedy happened. Nothing afterwards interested him. The secret chamber remained unopened after Southby was convicted. The rest of us, I think, had almost forgotten its existence.

The chamber lies at the western end of the long gallery. There is an octagon tower there, with an ancient stone staircase cunningly built within its walls. To this you gain access from the gallery by opening a panel upon the right-hand side of the smaller chimney. The room lies at the foot of one flight of stairs, and is lighted from two narrow windows giving upon the battlements. These are filled by stained glass of the fourteenth century, and show former abbots of Borrow in alb and chasuble. The room itself is large and commodious, and has a fireplace and an alcove for the bed. Those who desire to go from it to the forest descend the staircase until they find themselves in the old crypt which dates from Saxon times. The subterranean passage leads from that to Adam’s Thicket, where it enters an ancient well, long dried up, and now but a pit of grass and bramble. I did not doubt that Southby had gained the forest by a devious route and had made his way by one of those paths which no stranger would discover. And so he had gone straight to the priest’s chamber, and thence to Evelyn’s bedroom.

“He waked her about one this morning,” said Wellman, who still appeared to be trembling with the excitement of the news. “They wouldn’t let you know sooner, sir, for fear of the police. Miss Evelyn is dreadfully afraid that the squire will find out, and so I came to you at once. Lucky for us, it was only yesterday afternoon that Superintendent Matthews searched the Close from garret to cellar. He must have had wind that Mr. Southby was on the road.”

I was astonished to hear this.

“Superintendent Matthews—yesterday!” I exclaimed. “Is it really possible, and Miss Evelyn told me nothing of it? But, of course, it may have been difficult
to send. Does he know anything of the priest’s hole, Wellman? Surely you don’t fear that?”

He shook his head, being a man of uncommon caution.

“They know a great deal too much nowadays, sir—more’s the pity. The question is, what are we to do with the young master, since Miss Evelyn is at her wits’ end? She would be pleased to see you at the Close, indeed and she would. It’s a hard task for a young lady, as you can well imagine, sir.”

I agreed, and, putting on my hat, went over with him immediately. Our way lay through Adam’s Thicket, and I confess that I suffered some alarm when a stranger appeared upon our path not a hundred paces from the ancient basin by which the passage is reached. He was a short, thick-set man, wearing a serge suit with black leather leggings and a peaked cap, and when he saw us he stopped abruptly for a moment, then turned his back upon us and pretended to light a cigarette while we passed.

“He is no policeman,” I said to Wellman, when the stranger was out of hearing. The old servant agreed with me.

“But he might be an inquiry agent, sir. I’ve heard tell in London of the tricks they play with their clothes. Don’t trust him too far.”

“I am not going to trust him at all,” said I. “The fellow looked to me as though he were a chauffeur.”

“A bad lot, believe me, sir. There’s been few honest men upon wheels since they robbed us of our horses. A man wants the nose of a setter to keep track of such as him. I wouldn’t trust one of them with a silver-plated soup-ladle, upon my word I wouldn’t.”

I told him he was a laudator temporis acti, but as that conveyed nothing to him we pushed on, and found Evelyn in the boudoir.

She was dreadfully agitated, but Sir Borrow being there, no word of the affair might pass between us. The baronet plainly thought that his daughter had become hysterical, and when I was alone with him he hinted that she must have had some news from that d—d scoundrel.

“Whatever it is,” he added, “I don’t want to hear of it or of him. It would be a great day for me if the fellow were six feet underground, and I hope to God he soon will be. That’s the truth, Cope, and none of your philosophy can change it. I have no longer a son; I am trying to forget that I ever had one.”

I shrank from his anger, knowing well how little such a man would suffer a rebuke. Happily, he set out to drive into the town almost immediately, and Evelyn and I went at once to the priest’s hole and interviewed Southby. He was
in a sorry plight, I must say, his face and hands torn by the brambles of the thickets, his clothes splashed with mud, his beard unshaved, and his eyes bloodshot. I thought also a little delirious from want of food and exposure, and he talked incoherently of ships and the sea, of men who had betrayed him, and of others who were his friends. By-and-by, when he became calmer, he told me that the ignominy of prison affected him to such an extent that he would have gone mad if he had remained at Parkhurst.

“I couldn’t have done it, Cope, by God I couldn’t,” he said. “You don’t know what it means to a man who has lived as I have. I had to go or it would have been all up with me. If they take me I will shoot myself. That’s an oath and I’ll keep it.”

“But,” cried I, “whatever will you do, Southby? You must know that we cannot long protect you here.”

He laughed defiantly, pushing the black hair from his forehead quite in the old way.

“Lionel will do it,” he said. “I trust Lionel. He got me out; he’ll see I don’t get in again. You must know Lionel. He’s a white man all through, and the prison that can hold him has got to be made. Why, it was his idea about the motor-boat—who else would have thought of it?—he and his friend at Hendon. They picked us up in the cove at high tide, and we were landed at Hayling Island before morning. I knew we should get through when Lionel undertook it.”

“Then,” exclaimed I, quite at hazard, “Captain Kennington knew nothing of it?”

His brow darkened at this. He looked at Evelyn curiously, and appeared afraid to speak out.

“No, I don’t trust Kennington—not much. Mind what you’re doing in that quarter, Evelyn. Kennington isn’t thirty cents—you remember it.”

She flashed out at this, a girl of spirit and a good heart.

“Do not say a word against Captain Kennington!” she cried. “He is the only friend you ever had who remained staunch to you. You should be grateful to him.”

He still persisted, though with a weakening resolution.

“That may or may not be. It’s my opinion he tried to give us away, and I shall stick to it. Now, get me a drink for heaven’s sake. I am as dry as a camel.”

She fetched him a brandy-and-soda, and he drank it eagerly. It was already a danger to pass to and from the long gallery, and I began to perceive the peril of the situation. Let the servants know and sooner or later the news would go to the
village, and thence to the police. When we discussed it frankly between ourselves there seemed but one solution. Evelyn must be ill, and Harriet must be recalled from Bath to wait upon her. Meanwhile, Wellman must have a confidant, and none seemed better suited to the purpose than Turner, the head housemaid. Sooner or later this woman would discover us. We determined that it should be sooner, and, calling her to the conference, we put our fortunes into her hands. Good woman, she had a brother of her own, and Evelyn was beloved by them all.

We made our plans, and for the moment they were successful. Harriet, unfortunately, could not return from Bath, her aunt being taken seriously ill and really requiring her assistance. Evelyn, however, feigned an indisposition very cleverly, and although it put me to some conscientious difficulty, I suffered myself to think of the greater good of that unhappy family and to acquiesce. Nevertheless, I understood that it was but a brief respite. The perils of the situation were manifest. Any day, any hour might discover us, and we began to go as those who feared their own shadows.

Perhaps my fears may have been responsible for a delusion, but there were moments when I thought that Sir Borrow suspected us. His manner became suddenly aggressive, and he questioned me more closely than he had done for a long time. Had I heard from that “d—d” son of his? Was Evelyn worrying about “the worthless scoundrel”? To all of which I responded with what wit I could, though God knows my position was difficult. Later on I discovered him in Evelyn’s bedroom, and that very night, after dinner, he spoke of Kennington. Oddly enough, his opinion of that gallant soldier was exactly that of his son. He did not trust him, doubted his record, and stigmatised him most unjustly as a penniless adventurer. As to my knowledge the captain is in possession of an income of eight hundred pounds a year, I resented the slander, and did not fear to speak my mind. The result was a sharp quarrel, and the expression upon his part of a shabby apology, with which in any other circumstances I would have been far from satisfied. As it was, I had to bear with him, and to listen while he told me that, whatever happened, he would not have Kennington in the house again. Then he went off to his study, I to the priest’s room to tell them of my suspicions.

Southby had always been afraid of his father. My news alarmed him, and he did not hesitate to affirm that the old man would deliver him up to the police should he be discovered at the close. Evelyn herself appeared to be of the same opinion, and when we were alone she confessed the terror of her situation.
“Captain Kennington is coming here at the week-end,” she said.
I told her what sir Borrow had said, and it did but alarm her the more.
“Sometimes I wish I were dead,” she declared.
And I, who knew how much that gentle soul had suffered, prayed to God that strength might be granted her.
The following night I was to meet Lionel Mester in the thicket, and to experience an apprehension more acute than any I had yet suffered in this woeful affair.

It was the Sabbath eve, and I was returning from the Close to the choir practice in our beautiful old parish church. A hundred yards from the well’s head, where the secret entrance lies, I met again the short, thick-set man whom Wellman had declared to be a detective. This time he stopped, and begging me to step aside into the thicket, he introduced himself immediately.

“You’ll have heard of me, sir—Lionel Mester, Mr. Southby’s pal.”
“Yes,” I said, “I have heard of you. Why do you come to this dangerous place?”

“Because there’s something Southby must know, and it can’t come any other way. You see him every day, and can take this letter to him. I’ve been hanging about nearly a week trying to get it delivered. Usually I don’t trust devil dodgers—not much. But you’ve got a decent mug on you, and I’m going to trust you. Take him this letter, and tell him, if he acts on it, it’s all right and the wheels go round. Otherwise I do a double watch, and be d—d to it! Lord, I’ve been sleeping on stinging nettles for a week, and that’s about enough of it! Tell Southby so, and you’ll see no more of me.”

He thrust a bulky letter into my hand, and was about to say more when we heard a sound of footsteps, and instantly he plunged into the undergrowth with the agility of a wild-cat. He was shod, I saw, in rubber-soled shoes, and carried a formidable stick; but the quickness of his movements was the surprising thing, and uttering but one word “police,” he disappeared from my view. For my part, I thrust the letter into the inner pocket of my coat and at once regained the path. Fifty paces further on I passed Superintendent Matthews, and exchanged a good-night with him. He appeared to be in a hurry, and was going towards the Hall. But he did not stop to gossip with me, as he usually does, and for that I was grateful.

It will be understood that this unexpected turn perplexed me very much. I had expected that Lionel Mester would come to Borrow sooner or later, but now that he had come I perceived how considerable a danger he must be to us all. It was
not to be hidden from me that I myself might be the victim of this unhappy family, and must answer to the law for the part that I had played. So much I was willing to do for a woman’s sake, but now that discovery trod upon our heels, and all the shame and suffering of exposure hovered in the shadows about that ancient house, I confess that my courage almost failed me. The letter seemed a damming document which would convict me in any court. Yet I determined to deliver it, and that very night, about ten o’clock, I went up to the Hall and put it into Evelyn’s hands. Upon my return an unknown man followed me through the thicket, and watched me enter the rectory. I believe that he was a police officer, though whether he were so or not mattered little since the letter was delivered.

That night I slept but ill, fearing so many things, dreading the peril of a situation which had become almost intolerable. The next day was the Sabbath, given almost entirely to the schools and the church, and it was not until we sat down to supper at the Close that I got the news of Evelyn. She had given out that she was a little better, and would sit down with us. The few words we exchanged in the porch when I said “Good night” to her were of some moment, though not unexpected.

“Southby is going to-night,” she said.

I answered, “Thank God,” for I knew that none of us could stand the strain of it much longer.

And so we parted, and I was never to see her alive again. So brave, so gentle she was, blessed among women truly, an offering to man’s sin, a martyr for whom men’s tears should fall. They heard a loud cry in the house a little before midnight. Sir Borrow was awake, and first upon the scene. They found her lying at the foot of the circular staircase which leads down from the long gallery to the secret room. Evidently there had been a struggle. A jagged bar of iron lay upon the stairs at her feet. The lamp she had carried was shattered; the very window in the angle of the octagon was broken, and the glass littered about. What was not a little remarkable was the discovery of nine pounds in gold wrapped in a yellow kid glove, the very shape and colour of the gloves always worn by Captain Kennington.

She was dressed in a long bedgown, I should tell you, and wore a dressing gown over it. The door of the secret chamber stood open, but no one was to be discerned within. Southby had fled the house. Sir Borrow and Wellman alone stooped to the assistance of the stricken woman.

She was quite dead, a terrible wound in the throat having deprived her of life almost instantaneously. Naturally the police were called upon the instant, and
not a moment was lost by them. Beaters began to search every thicket of the forest round about; there were motors abroad upon every road. Yet nothing was discovered, not a shadow of a clue to be found. Even Captain Kennington could offer no suggestion. I discovered to my surprise that he had come to Borrow on Saturday evening as he promised, but hearing Evelyn’s story had gone to the town to sleep. The hue and cry waked him—to such a morn as few men are called upon to live.

And so here is this terrible crime committed, and no man to be brought to justice for it. God send us enlightenment that the guilty may be punished!

Proofs of the above mystery story have been sent to Mr. G. K. CHESTERTON, the creator of that famous detective of fiction, “FATHER BROWN.”

This is quite a new idea of story-telling, and Mr. Chesterton has entered into the spirit of the scheme with characteristic enthusiasm. His, or, rather, “Father Brown’s,” solution of ‘The Donnington Affair’ will be embodied in a complete story which will appear in next month’s PREMIER.

I am now in negotiation with other famous fiction detectives, and for the present I will merely mention that the next pair of stories in this series are in the capable hands of

SIR ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH

and

BARONESS ORCZY

Max Pemberton
FATHER BROWN’S SOLUTION

Mr. Chesterton has carefully weighed the evidence in Mr. Pemberton’s story, and his deductions constitute a remarkable structure of criminal detection.

It was natural, of course, that we should think of calling in expert opinion on the tragedy; or, at least, something subtler than the passing policeman. But I could think of few people or none whom it would be useful to consult thus privately. I remembered an investigator who had taken some interest in Southby’s original trouble; merely because I remembered the curious surname of
Shrike; but report told me that he had since grown rich and retired, and was now yachting inaccessibly among the Pacific Islands.

My old friend Brown, the Roman priest at Cobhole, who had often given me good advice in small problems, had wired that he feared he could not come down, even for an hour. He merely added—what, I confess, I thought inconsequent—that the key might be found in the sentence that “Mester was the cheeriest soul possible.” Superintendent Matthews still carries weight with any considering person who has actually talked to him; but he is naturally in most cases officially reticent, and in some cases officially slow.

Sir Borrow seemed stricken rigid by this final tragedy; a thing pardonable enough in a very old man who, whatever his faults, had never had anything but tragedy upon tragedy out of his own blood and name.

Wellman can be trusted with anything up to the Crown jewels; but not with an idea. Harriet is far too good a woman to be a good detective. So I was left with my unsatisfied appetite for expert advice. I think the others shared it to some extent; I think we wished a man different from all of us would walk into the room, a man of the world outside us, a man of wider experience, a man of experience so wide—if it were possible—that he should know even one case that was like our own. Certainly none of us had the wildest suspicion of who the man would be.

I have explained that when poor Evelyn’s body was found it was clad in a dressing gown, as if she had been suddenly summoned from her room, and the door of the Priest’s Room stood open. Acting on I know not what impulse, I had closed it to; and, so far as I know, it was not opened again till it was opened from within. I confess that for me that opening was terrible.

Sir Borrow, Wellman, and I were alone in the chamber of slaughter. At least we were alone till a total stranger strolled into the room, without even pulling the peaked cap off his head. He was a sturdy man, stained with travel, especially as regards his leggings, which were loaded with clay and slime of innumerable ditches. But he was entirely unconcerned, which is more than I was. For, despite his extra dirt and his extra impudence, I recognised him as the fugitive convict, Mester, whose letter I had so foolishly passed on to his fellow convict. He entered the room with his hands in his pockets, and whistling. Then the whistling ceased, and he said:

“You seem to have shut the door again. I suppose you know it’s not easy to open again on this side.”

Through the broken window which gave upon the garden I could see
Superintendent Matthews standing passively among the shrubs, with his broad back to the house. I walked to the window, and also whistled, but in a far more practical spirit. And yet, I know not why I should call it practical, for the superintendent, who must have heard me, did not turn his head, nor so much as shift a shoulder.

“I shouldn’t worry poor old Matthews,” said the man in the peaked cap in a friendly tone, “he is one of the best men in the service, and he must be awfully tired. I expect I can answer nearly all the questions that he could.” And he relighted a cigarette.

“Mr. Mester,” I replied with some heat, “I was sending for the superintendent to arrest you!”

“Quite so,” he answered, throwing his wax match out of the window. “Well, he won’t!”

He was gazing at me with a grave stolidity. And yet I fancy that the gravity of his full face had less effect on me than the large, indifferent back of the policeman.

The man called Mester resumed.

“I mean that my position there may not be quite what you suppose. It’s true enough I assisted the young fellow to escape; but I don’t imagine you know why I did it. It is an old rule in our profession—”

Before he could finish I had uttered a cry.

“Stop!” I cried out. “Who is that behind the door?”

I could see, by the very movement of Mester’s mouth, that he was just about to answer, “What door?” But before the lips could move he also was answered. And from behind the sealed door of the secret chamber came the noise of something that was alive, if it were not human, or was moving, if it were not alive.

“What is in the Priest’s Room?” I cried, and looked round for something with which to break down the door. I had half lifted the piece of jagged iron bar for the purpose. And then the horrid part it had played in that night overwhelmed me, and I fell against the door and beat on it with feeble hands, only repeating, “What is in the Priest’s Room?” It was the awful fact that a voice, obscure but human, answered from behind the closed door, “The Priest!”

The heavy door was opened very slowly, apparently pushed by a hand no stronger than my own. The same voice which had said “The Priest,” said in rather simpler tones, “Whom else did you expect?” The door swung out slowly to the full compass of its hinges, and revealed the black silhouette of a stumpy,
apologetic person, with a big hat and a bad umbrella. He was in every way a very unromantic and inappropriate person to be in the Priest’s Room, save in the accidental detail of being a priest.

He walked straight up to me before I could cry: “You have come, after all!”

He shook my hand, and, before he dropped it, looked at me with a steady and singular expression, sad, and yet rather serious than sad. I can only say it was the face we wear at the funeral of one dear as a friend, not that we wear by the deathbed of any directly dear to us.

“I can at least congratulate you,” said Father Brown. I think I put my hand wildly through my hair. I am sure I answered:

“And what is there in this nightmare on which I can be congratulated?”

He answered me with the same solid face:

“On the innocence of the woman who will be your wife.”

“No one,” I cried indignantly, “has attempted to connect her with the matter.”

He nodded gravely, as if in assent.

“That was the danger, doubtless,” he said with a slight sigh, “but she’s all right now, thank God. Isn’t she?” And as if to give the last touch to the topsyturvydom, he turned to ask his question of the man in the peaked cap.

“Oh, she’s safe enough!” said the man called Mester.

I cannot deny that there was suddenly lifted off my heart a load of doubt, which I had never known was there. But I was bound to pursue the problem.

“Do you mean, Father Brown,” I asked, “that you know who was the guilty person?”

“In a sense, yes,” he answered. “But you must remember that in a murder case the guiltiest person is not always the murderer.”

“Well, the guiltiest person, then,” I cried impatiently. “How are we to bring the guiltiest person to punishment?”

“The guiltiest person is punished,” said Father Brown.

“In a sense, yes,” he answered. “But you must remember that in a murder case the guiltiest person is not always the murderer.”

“Well, the guiltiest person, then,” I cried impatiently. “How are we to bring the guiltiest person to punishment?”

“The guiltiest person is punished,” said Father Brown.

There was a long silence in the twilight turret, and my mind laboured with doubts that were too large for it. At last Mester said gruffly, but not without a kind of good-nature:

“I think you two reverend gentlemen had better go and have a talk somewhere.
About Hades, say, or hassocks, or whatever you do talk about. I shall have to look into this by myself. My name is Stephen Shrike; you may have heard of me.”

Even before such fancies had been swallowed up in my sudden fear at the movements in the secret room, I had faced the startling possibility that this escaped convict was really a detective. But I had not dreamed of his being so famous a one. The man who had been concerned for Southby, and since gained colossal prestige, had some claim in the case; and I followed Brown, who had already strolled down towards the entrance of the garden.

“The distinction between Hades and hassocks—” began Father Brown.

“Don’t play the fool!” I said, roughly enough.

“Was not without some philosophical value,” continued the little priest, with unruffled good temper. “Human troubles are mostly of two kinds. There is an accidental kind, that you can’t see because they are so close you fall over as you do over a hassock. And there is the other kind of evil, the real kind. And that a man will go to seek however far off it is—down, down, into the lost abyss.” And he unconsciously pointed his stumpy finger downward towards the grass, which was sprinkled with daisies.

“It was good of you to come, after all,” I said; “but I wish I could make more sense of the things you say.”

“Well,” he replied patiently, “have you made sense of the one thing I did say before I came down?”

“Why, you made some wild statement,” I replied, “that the key of the story was in Mester’s being cheerful, but—why, bless my soul, and so it is the key, in a way!”

“Only the key, so far,” said my companion, “but my first guess seems to have been right. It is not very common to find such sparkling gaiety in people undergoing penal servitude, especially when ruined on a false charge. And it seemed to me that Mester’s optimism was a little overdone. I also suspected that his aviation, and all the rest of it, true or false, were simply meant to make Southby think the escape feasible. But if Mester was such a demon for escaping, why didn’t he escape by himself? Why was he so anxious to lug along a young gentleman who does not seem to have been much use to him? As I was wondering, my eye fell on another sentence in your manuscript.”

“What was that?” I asked.

He took out a scrap of paper on which there were some scribbles in pencil, and read out:
“They then crossed an enclosure in which other prisoners were at work.’ “

After another pause, he resumed:

“That, of course, was plain enough. What kind of convict prison is it where prisoners work without any warders overseeing or walking about? What sort of warders are they to allow two convicts to climb two walls and go off as if for a picnic? All that is plain. And the conclusion is plainer from many other sentences. ‘It seemed such an impossible thing that he could evade the hue and cry that must attend this flight.’ It would have been impossible if there had been any hue and cry. ‘Evelyn and Harriet heard me eagerly, and the former, I began to suspect, was already in possession of the story.’ How could she be in possession of it so early as that, unless the police cars and telephones helped to send word from Southby? Could the convicts catch a camel or an ostrich? And look at the motor-boat. Do motor-boats grow on trees? No, that’s all simple. Not only was the companion in the escape a police detective, but the whole scheme of the escape was a police scheme, engineered by the highest authorities of the prison.”

But why?” I asked, staring. “And what has Southby to do with it?”

“Southby had nothing to do with it,” he answered. “I believe he is now hiding in some ditch or wood in the sincere belief that he is a hunted fugitive. But they won’t trouble him any more. He has done their work for them. He is innocent. It was essential that he should be innocent.”

“Oh, I don’t understand all this!” I cried impatiently.

“I don’t understand half of this,” said Father Brown. “There are all sorts of difficulties I will ask you about later. You knew the family. I only say that the sentence about cheerfulness did turn out to be a key-sentence, after all. Now, I want you to concentrate your attention on another key-sentence. ‘We decided that Harriet should go to Bath without loss of time, in case she should be of any assistance there.’ Note that this comes soon after your expression of surprise that someone should have communicated with Evelyn so early. Well, I suppose we none of us think the governor of the prison wired to her: ‘Have connived at escape of your brother, Convict 99.’ The message must have come in Southby’s name, at any rate.”

I ruminated, looking at the roll of the downs as it rose and repeated itself through every gap in the garden trees; then I said, “Kennington?”

My old friend looked at me for a moment with a look which, this time, I could not analyse.

“Captain Kennington’s part in the business is unique in my experience,” he
said, “and I think we had better return to him later. It is enough that, by your own account, Southby did not give him his confidence.”

I looked again at the glimpses of the downs, and they looked grander but greyer, as my companion went on, like one who can only put things in their proper order.

“I mean the argument here is close, but clear. If she had any secret message from her brother about his escaping, why shouldn’t she have a message about where he was escaping to? Why should she send off her sister to Bath, when she might just as well have been told that her brother wasn’t going there? Surely a young gentleman might more safely say, in a private letter, that he was going to Bath than that he was escaping from prison? Somebody or something must have influenced Southby to leave his destination uncertain. And who could influence Southby except the companion of his flight?”

“Who was acting for the police, on your theory.”

“No. On this confession.” After a sort of snorting silence, Brown said, with an emphasis I have never seen in him, throwing himself on a garden-seat: “I tell you this whole business of the two cities of refuge—this whole business of Harriet Donnington going to Bath—was a suggestion that came through Southby, but from Mester, or Shrike, or whatever his name is, and is the key of the police plot.”

He had settled himself on a seat facing me, clasping his hands over the huge head of his umbrella in a more truculent manner than was typical of him. But an evening moon was brightening above the little plantation under which he sat, and when I saw his plain face again, I saw it was as mild as the moon.

“But why,” I asked, “should they want such a plot?”

“To separate the sisters,” he said. “That is the key.”

I answered quickly: “The sisters could not really be separated.”

“Yes, they could,” said Father Brown, “quite simply, and that is why—” Here his simplicity failed, and he hesitated.

“That is why?” I insisted.

“That is why I can congratulate you,” he said at last.

Silence sank again for a little, and I could not define the irritation with which I answered:

“Oh, I suppose you know all about it?”

“No, no, really!” he said, leaning forward as if to deny an accusation of injustice. “I am puzzled about the whole business. Why didn’t the warders find it sooner? Why did they find it at all? Was it slipped in the lining? Or is the
handwriting so bad as that? I know about the thing being gentlemanly; but surely they took his clothes! How could the message come? It must be the lining.”

His face was turned up as honestly as a flat and floating fish, and I could say with corresponding mildness:

“I really do not know what you are talking about, you and your linings. But if you mean how could Southby get his message safely to his sister without the risks of interception, I should say there were no people more likely to do it successfully. The boy and girl were always great friends from childhood, and had, to my knowledge, one of those secret languages that children often have, which may easily have been turned afterwards into some sort of cypher. And now I come to think of it—”

The heavy-knobbed umbrella slipped from the seat and slammed on the gravel, and the priest stood upright.

“What an idiot I am!” he said. “Why, anybody might have thought of a cypher! That was a score for you, my friend. I suppose you know all about it now?”

I am certain he did not realise that he was repeating in sincerity what I had said in irony.

“No,” I answered, with real seriousness; “I do not know all about it, but I think it quite possible that you do. Tell me the story.”

“It is not a good story,” he said, in a rather stony way—”at least, the good thing about it is that it is over. But first let me say what I least like saying—that you must be prepared for a different view of a character that you knew well. I have thought a good deal about a certain kind of intellectual English lady, especially when she is at once aristocratic and provincial. I think she is judged much too easily. Or, perhaps, I should say, judged much too hardly; since she is supposed to be incapable of mortal passions and temptations. Let her decline champagne at dinner, let her be beautiful and know what is meant by dignity in dress, let her read a great many books and talk about high ideals, and you all assume that she alone of her kind cannot covet or lie; that her ideas are always simple, and her ideals always fulfilled. But, really and truly, my friend, by your account of it, the character was more mixed than that. Evelyn feigned an indisposition very cleverly. Assuming her to be blameless, I cannot see why she needed to feign anything. But, anyhow, it is scarcely one of the powers given to the saints. You ‘began to suspect’ that Evelyn already knew about the escape. Why didn’t she tell you she already knew about it? You were astonished that Superintendent Matthews had called, and she had been silent about it; but you
supposed it was difficult to send. Why should it be difficult to send? You seem to have been sent for whenever you were really wanted. No; I will try to speak of this woman as of one for whose soul I will pray, and whose true defence I shall never hear. But while there are living people whose honour is in cruel danger undeservedly, I simply refuse to start with the assumption that Evelyn Donnington could do no wrong.”

The noble hills of Sussex looked as dreary as Yorkshire moors as he went on heavily, prodding the earth with his umbrella.

“The first facts in her defence, if she needed one, are that her father is a miser, that he has a violent temper combined with a rather Puritanic sort of family pride; and, above all, that she was afraid of him. Now, suppose she really wanted money, perhaps for a good purpose; or, again, perhaps not. She and her brother, you told me, had always had secret languages and plots; they are common among cowed and terrorised children. I firmly believe myself that she went a step further in some desperate strait, and that she was really and criminally responsible for the false document with which her brother seemed to be seeking financial help. We know there is often a family resemblance in handwritings almost amounting to facsimile. I cannot see, therefore, why there should not be a similar family resemblance in the flaws by which experts detect a forgery. Anyhow, the brother had a bad record, which goes for a great deal more than it ought with the police; and he was sent to gaol. I think you will agree that he has a very good record now.”

“You mean,” I said, curiously thrilled by the very restraint of his expression, “that Southby suffered all that time rather than speak?”

“Rejoice not against me, Satan, mine enemy,” said Father Brown, “for when I fall I shall arise. This part of the story really is good.”

After a silence he continued:

“When he was arrested, I am now almost certain, he had on him some letter or message from his sister. I hope and believe that it was some sort of penitent message. But whatever it was, it must have contained two things—some admission or allusion that made her own guilt clear, and some urgent request that her brother should come straight to her as soon as he was free to do so. Most important of all, it was not signed with a Christian name, but only ‘Your unhappy sister.’ “

“But, my good man,” I cried, “you talk as if you had seen the letter!”

“I see it in its consequences,” he answered. “The friendship with Mester, the quarrel with Kennington, the sister in Bath and the brother in the Priest’s Room,
came from that letter, and no other letter.”

“The letter, however, was in cypher; and one very hard to follow, having been invented by children. Does that strike you as paradoxical? Don’t you know that the hardest signs to read are arbitrary ones? And if two children agree that ‘grunk’ means bedtime and ‘splosh’ means Uncle William, it would take an expert much longer to learn this than to expose any system of substituted letters or numbers. Consequently, though the police found the paper, of course, it took them half-way through Southby’s term to make head or tail of it. Then they knew that one of Southby’s sisters was guilty, that he was innocent; and by this time they had the sense to see that he would never betray the truth. The rest, as I said, was simple and logical. The only other thing they could do was to take advantage of Southby being asked to go straight to his guilty correspondent. He was given every facility for escaping and communicating as quickly as possible, so long as the police could secure the separation of the sisters, by Mester getting the other one to Bath. Given that, the sister Southby went for must be the guilty one. And when, through those awful nights, the police gathered round you thick as wolves and still as ghosts—it was not for Southby they were waiting.”

“But why did they wait for anyone?” I asked suddenly, after a silence. “If they were sure, why didn’t they arrest?”

He nodded and sighed:

“Perhaps you’re right. Perhaps it’s best to take the Kennington case there. Well, of course, he knew all about it from the inside. You yourself noticed that he had privileges in that prison. It will grieve you, as a law-abiding person, to learn that he used his power to intercept what had been decided. A good deal can be done by missing appointments. A good deal more can be done by not missing people—vulgarly known as hitting them. He used every chance, right or wrong, to delay the arrest. One of the thousand small, desperate delays was ‘feigning illness.’

“Why did Southby call him a traitor?” I said suspiciously.

“On exceedingly good grounds,” said my friend. “Suppose you had broken prison in all innocence, and your friend sent his car for you and it took you back there? Suppose your friend offered to get you away in his yacht, and it took the wrong course, till overtaken by a motor-boat? Suppose Southby was trying to get to Sussex, and Kennington always headed him off towards Cornwall or Ireland or Normandy, what would you expect Southby to call him?”

“Well,” I said, “what would you call him?”

“Oh,” said Father Brown, “I call him a hero.”
I peered at his rather featureless face through the moony twilight; and then he suddenly rose and paced the path with the impatience of a schoolboy.

“If I could put pen to paper, I would write the best adventure story ever written about this. Was there ever such a situation? Southby was kicked backwards and forwards, as unconscious as a football, between two very able and vigorous men, one of whom wanted to make the footprints point towards the guilty sister, while the other wanted to twist the feet away at every turn. And Southby thought the friend of his house was his enemy, and the destroyer of his house his friend. The two that knew must fight in silence, for Mester could not speak without warning Southby, and Kennington could not speak without denouncing Evelyn. It is clear from Southby’s words, about false friends and the sea, that Kennington eventually kidnapped Southby in a yacht, but lord knows in how many tangled woods, or river islands, or lanes leading nowhere, the same fight was fought; the fugitive and detective trying to keep the trail, the traitor and true lover trying to confuse it. When Mester won, and his men gathered round this house, the captain could do no more than come here and offer his help, but Evelyn would not open the door to him.”

“But why not?”

“Because she had the fine side of fear as well as the bad side,” said Father Brown. “‘Not a little afraid of life,’ you said, with great penetration. She was afraid to go to prison; but, to her honour, she was afraid to get married, too. It is a type produced by all this refinement. My friend, I want to tell you and all your modern world a secret. You will never get to the good in people till you have been through the bad in them.”

After a moment he added that we ought to be returning to the house, and walked yet more briskly in that direction.

“Of course,” he remarked, as he did so, “the packet of banknotes you took through to Southby was only to help him away and spare him Evelyn’s arrest. Mester’s not a bad fellow for a ‘tec. But she realised her danger, and was trying to get into the Priest’s Room.”

I was still brooding on the queer case of Kennington.

“Was not the glove found?” I asked.

“Was not the window broken?” he asked in return. “A man’s glove twisted properly and loaded with nine pounds in gold, and probably a letter as well, will break most windows if it is slung by a man who has been a bowler. Of course, there was a note. And, of course, the note was imprudent. It left money for escape, and left the proofs of what she was escaping from.”
“And then what happened to her?” I asked dully.

“Something of what happened to you,” he said. “You also found the secret door difficult to open from outside. You also caught up that crooked curtain-rod or window bar to beat on it. You also saw the door opening slowly from within. But you did not see what she saw.”

“And what did she see?” I said at last.

“She saw the man she had wronged most,” said Father Brown.

“Do you mean Southby?”

“No,” he said, “Southby has shown heroic virtue, and he is happy. The man she wronged most was a man who had never had, or tried to have, more than one virtue—a kind of acrid justice. And she had made him unjust all his life—made him pamper the wicked woman and ruin the righteous man. You told me in your notes that he often hid in the Priest’s Room, to discover who was faithful or unfaithful. This time he came out holding a sword left in that room in the days when men hunted my religion. He found the letter, but, of course, he destroyed it after he had done—what he did. Yes, old friend, I can feel the horror on your face without seeing it. But, indeed, you modern people do not know how many kinds of men there are in the world. I am not talking of approval, but of sympathy—the sort of sympathy I give to Evelyn Donnington. Have you no sympathy with cold, barbaric justice, or with the awful appeasements of such an intellectual appetite? Have you no sympathy with the Brutus who killed his friend? Have you no sympathy with the monarch who killed his son? Have you no sympathy with Virginius, who killed—. But I think we must go in now.”

We mounted the stairs in silence, but my surging soul expected some scene surpassing all the scenes of that tower. And in a sense I had it. The room was empty, save for Wellman, who stood behind an empty chair as impassively as if there had been a thousand guests.

“They have sent for Dr. Browning, sir,” he said in colourless tones.

“What do you mean?” I cried. “There was no question about the death?”

“No, sir,” he said, with a slight cough; “Dr. Browning required another doctor to be sent from Chichester, and they took Sir Borrow away.”
OTHER SHORT STORIES

G. K. CHESTERTON
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

OTHER SHORT STORIES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE SHOP OF GHOSTS

TELEGRAPH POLES

FOR LOVERS ONLY

THE DISADVANTAGE OF HAVING TWO HEADS
THE SHOP OF GHOSTS

1909
Nearly all the best and most precious things in the universe you can get for a halfpenny. I make an exception, of course, of the sun, the moon, the earth, people, stars, thunderstorms, and such trifles. You can get them for nothing. Also I make an exception of another thing, which I am not allowed to mention in this paper, and of which the lowest price is a penny halfpenny. But the general principle will be at once apparent. In the street behind me, for instance, you can now get a ride on an electric tram for a halfpenny. To be on an electric tram is to be on a flying castle in a fairy tale. You can get quite a large number of brightly coloured sweets for a halfpenny. Also you can get the chance of reading this article for a halfpenny; along, of course, with other and irrelevant matter.

But if you want to see what a vast and bewildering array of valuable things you can get at a halfpenny each you should do as I was doing last night. I was gluing my nose against the glass of a very small and dimly lit toy shop in one of the greyest and leanest of the streets of Battersea. But dim as was that square of light, it was filled (as a child once said to me) with all the colours God ever made. Those toys of the poor were like the children who buy them; they were all dirty; but they were all bright. For my part, I think brightness more important than cleanliness; since the first is of the soul, and the second of the body. You must excuse me; I am a democrat; I know I am out of fashion in the modern world.

As I looked at that palace of pigmy wonders, at small green omnibuses, at small blue elephants, at small black dolls, and small red Noah’s arks, I must have fallen into some sort of unnatural trance. That lit shop-window became like the brilliantly lit stage when one is watching some highly coloured comedy. I forgot the grey houses and the grimy people behind me as one forgets the dark galleries and the dim crowds at a theatre. It seemed as if the little objects behind the glass were small, not because they were toys, but because they were objects far away. The green omnibus was really a green omnibus, a green Bayswater omnibus, passing across some huge desert on its ordinary way to Bayswater. The blue elephant was no longer blue with paint; he was blue with distance. The black doll was really a negro relieved against passionate tropic foliage in the land where every weed is flaming and only man is black. The red Noah’s ark was really the enormous ship of earthly salvation riding on the rain-swollen sea,
red in the first morning of hope.

Every one, I suppose, knows such stunning instants of abstraction, such brilliant blanks in the mind. In such moments one can see the face of one’s own best friend as an unmeaning pattern of spectacles or moustaches. They are commonly marked by the two signs of the slowness of their growth and the suddenness of their termination. The return to real thinking is often as abrupt as bumping into a man. Very often indeed (in my case) it is bumping into a man. But in any case the awakening is always emphatic and, generally speaking, it is always complete. Now, in this case, I did come back with a shock of sanity to the consciousness that I was, after all, only staring into a dingy little toy-shop; but in some strange way the mental cure did not seem to be final. There was still in my mind an unmanageable something that told me that I had strayed into some odd atmosphere, or that I had already done some odd thing. I felt as if I had worked a miracle or committed a sin. It was as if I had at any rate, stepped across some border in the soul.

To shake off this dangerous and dreamy sense I went into the shop and tried to buy wooden soldiers. The man in the shop was very old and broken, with confused white hair covering his head and half his face, hair so startlingly white that it looked almost artificial. Yet though he was senile and even sick, there was nothing of suffering in his eyes; he looked rather as if he were gradually falling asleep in a not unkindly decay. He gave me the wooden soldiers, but when I put down the money he did not at first seem to see it; then he blinked at it feebly, and then he pushed it feebly away.

“No, no,” he said vaguely. “I never have. I never have. We are rather old-fashioned here.”

“Not taking money,” I replied, “seems to me more like an uncommonly new fashion than an old one.”

“I never have,” said the old man, blinking and blowing his nose; “I’ve always given presents. I’m too old to stop.”

“Good heavens!” I said. “What can you mean? Why, you might be Father Christmas.”

“I am Father Christmas,” he said apologetically, and blew his nose again.

The lamps could not have been lighted yet in the street outside. At any rate, I could see nothing against the darkness but the shining shop-window. There were no sounds of steps or voices in the street; I might have strayed into some new and sunless world. But something had cut the chords of common sense, and I could not feel even surprise except sleepily. Something made me say, “You look
ill, Father Christmas.”

“I am dying,” he said.

I did not speak, and it was he who spoke again.

“All the new people have left my shop. I cannot understand it. They seem to object to me on such curious and inconsistent sort of grounds, these scientific men, and these innovators. They say that I give people superstitions and make them too visionary; they say I give people sausages and make them too coarse. They say my heavenly parts are too heavenly; they say my earthly parts are too earthly; I don’t know what they want, I’m sure. How can heavenly things be too heavenly, or earthly things too earthly? How can one be too good, or too jolly? I don’t understand. But I understand one thing well enough. These modern people are living and I am dead.”

“You may be dead,” I replied. “You ought to know. But as for what they are doing, do not call it living.”

A silence fell suddenly between us which I somehow expected to be unbroken. But it had not fallen for more than a few seconds when, in the utter stillness, I distinctly heard a very rapid step coming nearer and nearer along the street. The next moment a figure flung itself into the shop and stood framed in the doorway. He wore a large white hat tilted back as if in impatience; he had tight black old-fashioned pantaloons, a gaudy old-fashioned stock and waistcoat, and an old fantastic coat. He had large, wide-open, luminous eyes like those of an arresting actor; he had a pale, nervous face, and a fringe of beard. He took in the shop and the old man in a look that seemed literally a flash and uttered the exclamation of a man utterly staggered.

“Good lord!” he cried out; “it can’t be you! It isn’t you! I came to ask where your grave was.”

“I’m not dead yet, Mr. Dickens,” said the old gentleman, with a feeble smile; “but I’m dying,” he hastened to add reassuringly.

“But, dash it all, you were dying in my time,” said Mr. Charles Dickens with animation; “and you don’t look a day older.”

“I’ve felt like this for a long time,” said Father Christmas.

Mr. Dickens turned his back and put his head out of the door into the darkness.

“Dick,” he roared at the top of his voice; “he’s still alive.”

Another shadow darkened the doorway, and a much larger and more full-blooded gentleman in an enormous periwig came in, fanning his flushed face with a military hat of the cut of Queen Anne. He carried his head well back like
a soldier, and his hot face had even a look of arrogance, which was suddenly contradicted by his eyes, which were literally as humble as a dog’s. His sword made a great clatter, as if the shop were too small for it.

“Indeed,” said Sir Richard Steele, “’tis a most prodigious matter, for the man was dying when I wrote about Sir Roger de Coverley and his Christmas Day.”

My senses were growing dimmer and the room darker. It seemed to be filled with newcomers.

“It hath ever been understood,” said a burly man, who carried his head humorously and obstinately a little on one side (I think he was Ben Jonson) “It hath ever been understood, consule Jacobo, under our King James and her late Majesty, that such good and hearty customs were fallen sick, and like to pass from the world. This grey beard most surely was no lustier when I knew him than now.”

And I also thought I heard a green-clad man, like Robin Hood, say in some mixed Norman French, “But I saw the man dying.”

“I have felt like this a long time,” said Father Christmas, in his feeble way again.

Mr. Charles Dickens suddenly leant across to him.

“Since when?” he asked. “Since you were born?”

“Yes,” said the old man, and sank shaking into a chair. “I have been always dying.”

Mr. Dickens took off his hat with a flourish like a man calling a mob to rise.

“I understand it now,” he cried, “you will never die.”
TELEGRAPH POLES

1911

MY friend and I were walking in one of those wastes of pine-wood which make inland seas of solitude in every part of Western Europe; which have the true terror of a desert, since they are uniform, and so one may lose one’s way in them. Stiff, straight, and similar, stood up all around us the pines of the wood, like the pikes of a silent mutiny. There is a truth in talking of the variety of Nature; but I think that Nature often shows her chief strangeness in her sameness. There is weird rhythm in this very repetition; it is as if the earth were resolved to repeat a single shape until the shape shall turn terrible.

Have you ever tried the experiment of saying some plain word, such as “dog,” thirty times? By the thirtieth time it has become a word like “snark” or “pobble.” It does not become tame, it becomes wild, by repetition. In the end a dog walks about as startling and undecipherable as Leviathan or Croquemitaine.

It may be that this explains the repetitions in Nature; it may be for this reason that there are so many million leaves and pebbles. Perhaps they are not repeated so that they may grow familiar. Perhaps they are repeated only in the hope that they may at last grow unfamiliar. Perhaps a man is not startled at the first cat he sees, but jumps into the air with surprise at the seventy-ninth cat. Perhaps he has to pass through thousands of pine trees before he finds the one that is really a pine tree. However, this may be, there is something singularly thrilling, even something urgent and intolerant, about the endless forest repetitions; there is the hint of something like madness in that musical monotony of the pines.

I said something like this to my friend; and he answered with sardonic truth, “Ah, you wait till we come to a telegraph post.”

My friend was right, as he occasionally is in our discussions, especially upon points of fact. We had crossed the pine forest by one of its paths which happened to follow the wires of the provincial telegraphy; and though the poles occurred at long intervals they made a difference when they came. The instant we came to the straight pole we could see that the pines were not really straight. It was like a hundred straight lines drawn with schoolboy pencils all brought to judgment suddenly by one straight line drawn with a ruler. All the amateur lines seemed to reel to right and left. A moment before I could have sworn they stood as straight as lances; now I could see them curve and waver everywhere, like scimitars and yataghans. Compared with the telegraph post the pines were crooked-and alive.
That lonely vertical rod at once deformed and enfranchised the forest. It tangled it all together and yet made it free, like any grotesque undergrowth of oak or holly.

“Yes,” said my gloomy friend, answering my thoughts. “You don’t know what a wicked shameful thing straightness is if you think these trees are straight. You never will know till your precious intellectual civilization builds a forty-mile forest of telegraph poles.”

We had started walking from our temporary home later in the day than we intended; and the long afternoon was already lengthening itself out into a yellow evening when we came out of the forest on to the hills above a strange town or village, of which the lights had already begun to glitter in the darkening valley. The change had already happened which is the test and definition of evening, I mean that while the sun seemed still as bright, the earth was growing blacker against it, especially at the edges, he hills and the pine-tops. This brought out yet more clearly the owlish secrecy of pine-woods; and my friend cast a regretful glance at them as he came out under the sky. Then he turned to the view in front; and, as it happened, one of the telegraph posts stood up in front of him in the last sunlight. It was no longer crossed and softened by the more delicate lines of pine wood; it stood up ugly, arbitrary, and angular as any crude figure in geometry. My friend stopped, pointing his stick at it, and all his anarchic philosophy rushed to his lips.

“Demon,” he said to me briefly, “behold your work. That place of proud trees behind us is what the world was before you civilized men, Christians or democrats or the rest, came to make it dull with your dreary rules of morals and equality. In the silent fight of that forest, tree fights speechless against tree, branch against branch. And the upshot of that dumb battle is inequality—and beauty. Now lift up your eyes and look at equality and ugliness. See how regularly the white buttons are arranged on that black stick, and defend your dogmas if you dare.”

“Is that telegraph post so much a symbol of democracy?” I asked. “I fancy that while three men have made the telegraph to get dividends, about a thousand men have preserved the forest to cut wood. But if the telegraph pole is hideous (as I admit) it is not due to doctrine but rather to commercial anarchy. If any one had a doctrine about a telegraph pole it might be carved in ivory and decked with gold. Modern things are ugly, because modern men are careless, not because they are careful.”

“No,” answered my friend with his eye on the end of a splendid and sprawling
sunset, “there is something intrinsically deadening about the very idea of a
doctrine. A straight line is always ugly. Beauty is always crooked. These rigid
posts at regular intervals are ugly because they are carrying across the world the
real message of democracy.”

“At this moment,” I answered, “they are probably carrying across the world
the message, ‘Buy Bulgarian Rails.’ They are probably the prompt
communication between some two of the wealthiest and wickedest of His
children with whom God has ever had patience. No; these telegraph poles are
ugly and detestable, they are inhuman and indecent. But their baseness lies in
their privacy, not in their publicity. That black stick with white buttons is not the
creation of the soul of a multitude. It is the mad creation of the souls of two
millionaires.”

“At least you have to explain,” answered my friend gravely, “how it is that the
hard democratic doctrine and the hard telegraphic outline have appeared
together; you have . . . But bless my soul, we must be getting home. I had no
idea it was so late. Let me see, I think this is our way through the wood. Come,
let us both curse the telegraph post for entirely different reasons and get home
before it is dark.”

We did not get home before it was dark. For one reason or another we had
underestimated the swiftness of twilight and the suddenness of night, especially
in the threading of thick woods. When my friend, after the first five minutes’
march, had fallen over a log, and I, ten minutes after, had stuck nearly to the
knees in mire, we began to have some suspicion of our direction. At last my
friend said, in a low, husky voice:

“I’m afraid we’re on the wrong path. It’s pitch dark.”
“I thought we went the right way,” I said, tentatively.
“Well,” he said; and then, after a long pause, “I can’t see any telegraph poles.
I’ve been looking for them.”
“So have I,” I said. “They’re so straight.”

We groped away for about two hours of darkness in the thick of the fringe of
trees which seemed to dance round us in derision. Here and there, however, it
was possible to trace the outline of something just too erect and rigid to be a pine
tree. By these we finally felt our way home, arriving in a cold green twilight
before dawn.
FOR LOVERS ONLY

An Impetuous Painter and a Discerning Critic

Gabriel Gale was energetically painting a new sign for the Rising Sun Inn when his attention was engaged by a new arrival, Diana Westermaine.

The lady was tall and dark, and Gale looked at her steadily and rather longer than is strictly polite—but painters are absent-minded.

When he left off looking at her, she began looking at him. She saw genuine artistry in his dazzling rendition of the rising sun, and she recognized a real thread of thought running through his rambling conversation.

Then he stood on his head for a moment and with a sort of cartwheel alighted on his feet. “It’s a very good thing for a painter to see things upside down—as they really are. When angels hang head downwards, we know they come from above. It’s only those that come from below that always have their noses in the air.”

She laughed. But then a shadow came between them in the shape of the artist’s friend, Hurrel. Diana explained to herself that she had no reason to be angry, but she was exceedingly angry. The increase of the group from two to three had the painful effect of an intrusion. But the two men were inseparable companions.

Months later, Gale was able to tell her of the rash vow that had bound him to Hurrel who, as it happened, was a hopeless madman.

“I was the only person who could handle him,” Gale explained. “The poor fellow once did me a great service, and I could only repay it by looking after him.”

“Your vow was certainly rash enough,” she said. “It doesn’t seem right to be tied to a lunatic by a few words.”

“Don’t say that!” he cried.

“Why not?” she asked.

“Because, I want you to make a rash vow. I want you to tie yourself to a lunatic with a few words.”

There was a silence, at the end of which she smiled suddenly and put her hand on his arm.

“I don’t think my vow will be so very rash—oh, for heavens sake!”

Gabriel Gale was standing on his head again.
A little boy once looked over the garden fence and saw four knights with enormous crests riding by. As he is now married to a princess and moves in rather good society, he has desired me not to mention his name: so we will call him Redlegs. Being interested in such things he climbed over the fence and ran after the knights to see where they were going. They came to a very old man, who was sitting on the very sharp point of a rock, balancing himself. The knights, seeing by his sugar-loaf hat and white beard that he was a Magician, asked him where they could find the Princess Japonica (for so the Princess, who is a relative of mine, desires to be described). “The Princess Japonica,” replied the Magician, “lives in the Castle beyond the Last Wood in the World, in the place where it is always sunset. She cannot come and visit anyone, and no one can visit her, because there are only two roads to it: and the right hand road is held by a Giant with One Head, and the left hand road is held by a Giant with Two Heads.” Then the first knight said with great excitement (he was Bromley Smunk on the mother’s side, and you know what they are), “I will soon clear the giant out of the way. But I think I will confine myself to the giant with one head. For I am a humane man and desire to cut off as few heads as possible.”

So the first knight set out along the road to the One-Headed Giant. And a little while after the second knight set out & then the third & then the fourth, all the same way. The little boy stopped behind and talked to the Magician about the Fiscal Question. Scarcely had they dismissed this brief topic, then they saw a sad string of people coming along the road from the One-Headed Giant. They were the four knights & and I am sorry to say that they were rather smashed. Then Redlegs said suddenly, “I should very much like to see a Two-Headed Giant. Lend me a sword.” Then they all roared with laughter and told him how silly he was to think that he could kill the Two-Headed Giant when they couldn’t kill even the One-Headed Giant. But he went off all the same, with his head in the air & he found the Two-Headed Giant on the great hills where it is always sunset. And then he found out a funny thing. The Two-Headed Giant did not rush at him and tear him to pieces as he had expected.

It did certainly scream & shout and bellow and blare and with its two heads
together. But the two heads were, as a matter of fact, screaming and shouting & bellowing and blaring in an odd way. They were screaming and shouting and bellowing & blaring at each other. One head said, “You are a Pro-Boer”: the other said, with bitter humour, “You’re another”; in fact, the argument might have gone on for ever, growing more savage & brilliant every moment, but it was cut short by Redlegs, who took out the great sword he had borrowed from one of the knights & poked it sharpely into the giant & killed him. The huge creature sprawled & writhed for a moment in death & said “You are beneath my notice.” Then it died happily.

Redlegs went on along the road that had been guarded by the Two-Headed Giant, until he came to the Castle of the Princess. After a few words of explanation, I need hardly say they were married—and lived happily ever after. The Magician, who gave the bride away, said after the conclusion of the ceremony the following cabalistic and totally unintelligible words: “My son, the Giant who had one head was stronger than the Giant who had two. When you grow up there will come to you other magicians who will say, ‘[Something in Greek; I don’t have the font for it, and don’t know what it says anyway]. Examine your soul, wretched kid. Cultivate a sense of the differentiations possible in a single psychology. Have nineteen religions suitable to different moods.’ My son, these will be wicked magicians; they will want to turn you into a two-headed giant.” Redlegs did not know what this meant and nor do I.
—BIOGRAPHY—

INDEX

—BIOGRAPHY—

CHARLES DICKENS

APPRECIATIONS AND CRITICISMS OF THE WORKS OF CHARLES DICKENS

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

ROBERT BROWNING

LORD KITCHENER
CHARLES DICKENS

A CRITICAL STUDY

G. K. CHESTERTON
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

CHARLES DICKENS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART ONE

CHAPTER I
THE DICKENS PERIOD

CHAPTER II
THE BOYHOOD OF DICKENS

CHAPTER III
THE YOUTH OF DICKENS

CHAPTER IV
“THE PICKWICK PAPERS”

CHAPTER V
THE GREAT POPULARITY

CHAPTER VI
DICKENS AND AMERICA

PART TWO

CHAPTER VII
DICKENS AND CHRISTMAS

CHAPTER VIII
THE TIME OF TRANSITION

CHAPTER IX
LATER LIFE AND WORKS

CHAPTER X
THE GREAT DICKENS CHARACTERS

CHAPTER XI
ON THE ALLEGED OPTIMISM OF DICKENS

CHAPTER XII
A NOTE ON THE FUTURE OF DICKENS
PART ONE
CHAPTER I

THE DICKENS PERIOD

Much of our modern difficulty, in religion and other things, arises merely from this: that we confuse the word “indefinable” with the word “vague.” If some one speaks of a spiritual fact as “indefinable” we promptly picture something misty, a cloud with indeterminate edges. But this is an error even in commonplace logic. The thing that cannot be defined is the first thing; the primary fact. It is our arms and legs, our pots and pans, that are indefinable. The indefinable is the indisputable. The man next door is indefinable, because he is too actual to be defined. And there are some to whom spiritual things have the same fierce and practical proximity; some to whom God is too actual to be defined.

But there is a third class of primary terms. There are popular expressions which every one uses and no one can explain; which the wise man will accept and reverence, as he reverences desire or darkness or any elemental thing. The prigs of the debating club will demand that he should define his terms. And, being a wise man, he will flatly refuse. This first inexplicable term is the most important term of all. The word that has no definition is the word that has no substitute. If a man falls back again and again on some such word as “vulgar” or “manly,” do not suppose that the word means nothing because he cannot say what it means. If he could say what the word means he would say what it means instead of saying the word. When the Game Chicken (that fine thinker) kept on saying to Mr. Toots, “It’s mean. That’s what it is—it’s mean,” he was using language in the wisest possible way. For what else could he say? There is no word for mean except mean. A man must be very mean himself before he comes to defining meanness. Precisely because the word is indefinable, the word is indispensable.

In everyday talk, or in any of our journals, we may find the loose but important phrase, “Why have we no great men to-day? Why have we no great men like Thackeray, or Carlyle, or Dickens?” Do not let us dismiss this expression, because it appears loose or arbitrary. “Great” does mean something, and the test of its actuality is to be found by noting how instinctively and decisively we do apply it to some men and not to others; above all, how instinctively and decisively we do apply it to four or five men in the Victorian era, four or five men of whom Dickens was not the least. The term is found to fit
a definite thing. Whatever the word “great” means, Dickens was what it means. Even the fastidious and unhappy who cannot read his books without a continuous critical exasperation, would use the word of him without stopping to think. They feel that Dickens is a great writer even if he is not a good writer. He is treated as a classic; that is, as a king who may now be deserted, but who cannot now be dethroned. The atmosphere of this word clings to him; and the curious thing is that we cannot get it to cling to any of the men of our own generation. “Great” is the first adjective which the most supercilious modern critic would apply to Dickens. And “great” is the last adjective that the most supercilious modern critic would apply to himself. We dare not claim to be great men, even when we claim to be superior to them.

Is there, then, any vital meaning in this idea of “greatness” or in our laments over its absence in our own time? Some people say, indeed, that this sense of mass is but a mirage of distance, and that men always think dead men great and live men small. They seem to think that the law of perspective in the mental world is the precise opposite to the law of perspective in the physical world. They think that figures grow larger as they walk away. But this theory cannot be made to correspond with the facts. We do not lack great men in our own day because we decline to look for them in our own day; on the contrary, we are looking for them all day long. We are not, as a matter of fact, mere examples of those who stone the prophets and leave it to their posterity to build their sepulchres. If the world would only produce our perfect prophet, solemn, searching, universal, nothing would give us keener pleasure than to build his sepulchre. In our eagerness we might even bury him alive. Nor is it true that the great men of the Victorian era were not called great in their own time. By many they were called great from the first. Charlotte Brontë held this heroic language about Thackeray. Ruskin held it about Carlyle. A definite school regarded Dickens as a great man from the first days of his fame: Dickens certainly belonged to this school.

In reply to this question, “Why have we no great men to-day?” many modern explanations are offered. Advertisement, cigarette-smoking, the decay of religion, the decay of agriculture, too much humanitarianism, too little humanitarianism, the fact that people are educated insufficiently, the fact that they are educated at all, all these are reasons given. If I give my own explanation, it is not for its intrinsic value; it is because my answer to the question, “Why have we no great men?” is a short way of stating the deepest and most catastrophic difference between the age in which we live and the early
nineteenth century; the age under the shadow of the French Revolution, the age in which Dickens was born.

The soundest of the Dickens critics, a man of genius, Mr. George Gissing, opens his criticism by remarking that the world in which Dickens grew up was a hard and cruel world. He notes its gross feeding, its fierce sports, its fighting and foul humour, and all this he summarises in the words hard and cruel. It is curious how different are the impressions of men. To me this old English world seems infinitely less hard and cruel than the world described in Gissing’s own novels. Coarse external customs are merely relative, and easily assimilated. A man soon learnt to harden his hands and harden his head. Faced with the world of Gissing, he can do little but harden his heart. But the fundamental difference between the beginning of the nineteenth century and the end of it is a difference simple but enormous. The first period was full of evil things, but it was full of hope. The second period, the fin de siècle, was even full (in some sense) of good things. But it was occupied in asking what was the good of good things. Joy itself became joyless; and the fighting of Cobbett was happier than the feasting of Walter Pater. The men of Cobbett’s day were sturdy enough to endure and inflict brutality; but they were also sturdy enough to alter it. This “hard and cruel” age was, after all, the age of reform. The gibbet stood up black above them; but it was black against the dawn.

This dawn, against which the gibbet and all the old cruelties stood out so black and clear, was the developing idea of liberalism, the French Revolution. It was a clear and a happy philosophy. And only against such philosophies do evils appear evident at all. The optimist is a better reformer than the pessimist; and the man who believes life to be excellent is the man who alters it most. It seems a paradox, yet the reason of it is very plain. The pessimist can be enraged at evil. But only the optimist can be surprised at it. From the reformer is required a simplicity of surprise. He must have the faculty of a violent and virgin astonishment. It is not enough that he should think injustice distressing; he must think injustice absurd, an anomaly in existence, a matter less for tears than for a shattering laughter. On the other hand, the pessimists at the end of the century could hardly curse even the blackest thing; for they could hardly see it against its black and eternal background. Nothing was bad, because everything was bad. Life in prison was infamous—like life anywhere else. The fires of persecution were vile—like the stars. We perpetually find this paradox of a contented discontent. Dr. Johnson takes too sad a view of humanity, but he is also too satisfied a Conservative. Rousseau takes too rosy a view of humanity, but he
causes a revolution. Swift is angry, but a Tory. Shelley is happy, and a rebel. Dickens, the optimist, satirises the Fleet, and the Fleet is gone. Gissing, the pessimist, satirises Suburbia, and Suburbia remains.

Mr. Gissing’s error, then, about the early Dickens period we may put thus: in calling it hard and cruel he omits the wind of hope and humanity that was blowing through it. It may have been full of inhuman institutions, but it was full of humanitarian people. And this humanitarianism was very much the better (in my view) because it was a rough and even rowdy humanitarianism. It was free from all the faults that cling to the name. It was, if you will, a coarse humanitarianism. It was a shouting, fighting, drinking philanthropy—a noble thing. But, in any case, this atmosphere was the atmosphere of the Revolution; and its main idea was the idea of human equality. I am not concerned here to defend the egalitarian idea against the solemn and babyish attacks made upon it by the rich and learned of to-day. I am merely concerned to state one of its practical consequences. One of the actual and certain consequences of the idea that all men are equal is immediately to produce very great men. I would say superior men, only that the hero thinks of himself as great, but not as superior. This has been hidden from us of late by a foolish worship of sinister and exceptional men, men without comrade-ship, or any infectious virtue. This type of Cæsar does exist. There is a great man who makes every man feel small. But the real great man is the man who makes every man feel great.

The spirit of the early century produced great men, because it believed that men were great. It made strong men by encouraging weak men. Its education, its public habits, its rhetoric, were all addressed towards encouraging the greatness in everybody. And by encouraging the greatness in everybody, it naturally encouraged superlative greatness in some. Superiority came out of the high rapture of equality. It is precisely in this sort of passionate unconsciousness and bewildering community of thought that men do become more than themselves. No man by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature; but a man may add many cubits to his stature by not taking thought. The best men of the Revolution were simply common men at their best. This is why our age can never understand Napoleon. Because he was something great and triumphant, we suppose that he must have been something extraordinary, something inhuman. Some say he was the Devil; some say he was the Superman. Was he a very, very bad man? Was he a good man with some greater moral code? We strive in vain to invent the mysteries behind that immortal mask of brass. The modern world with all its subtleness will never guess his strange secret; for his strange secret
was that he was very like other people.

And almost without exception all the great men have come out of this atmosphere of equality. Great men may make despotisms; but democracies make great men. The other main factory of heroes besides a revolution is a religion. And a religion again, is a thing which, by its nature, does not think of men as more or less valuable, but of men as all intensely and painfully valuable, a democracy of eternal danger. For religion all men are equal, as all pennies are equal, because the only value in any of them is that they bear the image of the King. This fact has been quite insufficiently observed in the study of religious heroes. Piety produces intellectual greatness precisely because piety in itself is quite indifferent to intellectual greatness. The strength of Cromwell was that he cared for religion. But the strength of religion was that it did not care for Cromwell; did not care for him, that is, any more than for anybody else. He and his footman were equally welcomed to warm places in the hospitality of hell. It has often been said, very truly, that religion is the thing that makes the ordinary man feel extraordinary; it is an equally important truth that religion is the thing that makes the extraordinary man feel ordinary.

Carlyle killed the heroes; there have been none since his time. He killed the heroic (which he sincerely loved) by forcing upon each man this question: “Am I strong or weak?” To which the answer from any honest man whatever (yes, from Cæsar or Bismarck) would “weak.” He asked for candidates for a definite aristocracy, for men who should hold themselves consciously above their fellows. He advertised for them, so to speak; he promised them glory; he promised them omnipotence. They have not appeared yet. They never will. For the real heroes of whom he wrote had appeared out of an ecstasy of the ordinary. I have already instanced such a case as Cromwell. But there is no need to go through all the great men of Carlyle. Carlyle himself was as great as any of them; and if ever there was a typical child of the French Revolution, it was he. He began with the wildest hopes from the Reform Bill, and although he soured afterwards, he had been made and moulded by those hopes. He was disappointed with Equality; but Equality was not disappointed with him. Equality is justified of all her children.

But we, in the post-Carlylean period, have become fastidious about great men. Every man examines himself, every man examines his neighbours, to see whether they or he quite come up to the exact line of greatness. The answer is, naturally, “No.” And many a man calls himself contentedly “a minor poet” who would then have been inspired to be a major prophet. We are hard to please and
of little faith. We can hardly believe that there is such a thing as a great man. They could hardly believe there was such a thing as a small one. But we are always praying that our eyes may behold greatness, instead of praying that our hearts may be filled with it. Thus, for instance, the Liberal party (to which I belong) was, in its period of exile, always saying, “O for a Gladstone!” and such things. We were always asking that it might be strengthened from above, instead of ourselves strengthening it from below, with our hope and our anger and our youth. Every man was waiting for a leader. Every man ought to be waiting for a chance to lead. If a god does come upon the earth, he will descend at the sight of the brave. Our prostrations and litanies are of no avail; our new moons and our sabbaths are an abomination. The great man will come when all of us are feeling great, not when all of us are feeling small. He will ride in at some splendid moment when we all feel that we could do without him.

We are then able to answer in some manner the question, “Why have we no great men?” We have no great men chiefly because we are always looking for them. We are connoisseurs of greatness, and connoisseurs can never be great; we are fastidious, that is, we are small. When Diogenes went about with a lantern looking for an honest man, I am afraid he had very little time to be honest himself. And when anybody goes about on his hands and knees looking for a great man to worship, he is making sure that one man at any rate shall not be great. Now, the error of Diogenes is evident. The error of Diogenes lay in the fact that he omitted to notice that every man is both an honest man and a dishonest man. Diogenes looked for his honest man inside every crypt and cavern; but he never thought of looking inside the thief. And that is where the Founder of Christianity found the honest man; he found him on a gibbet and promised him Paradise. Just as Christianity looked for the honest man inside the thief, democracy looked for the wise man inside the fool. It encouraged the fool to be wise. We can call this thing sometimes optimism, sometimes equality; the nearest name for it is encouragement. It had its exaggerations—failure to understand original sin, notions that education would make all men good, the childlike yet pedantic philosophies of human perfectibility. But the whole was full of a faith in the infinity of human souls, which is in itself not only Christian but orthodox; and this we have lost amid the limitations of a pessimistic science. Christianity said that any man could be a saint if he chose; democracy, that any man could be a citizen if he chose. The note of the last few decades in art and ethics has been that a man is stamped with an irrevocable psychology, and is cramped for perpetuity in the prison of his skull. It was a world that expected
everything of everybody. It was a world that encouraged anybody to be anything. And in England and literature its living expression was Dickens.

We shall consider Dickens in many other capacities, but let us put this one first. He was the voice in England of this humane intoxication and expansion, this encouraging of anybody to be anything. His best books are a carnival of liberty, and there is more of the real spirit of the French Revolution in “Nicholas Nickleby” than in “The Tale of Two Cities.” His work has the great glory of the Revolution, the bidding of every man to be himself; it has also the revolutionary deficiency: it seems to think that this mere emancipation is enough. No man encouraged his characters so much as Dickens. “I am an affectionate father,” he says, “to every child of my fancy.” He was not only an affectionate father, he was an over-indulgent father. The children of his fancy are spoilt children. They shake the house like heavy and shouting schoolboys; they smash the story to pieces like so much furniture. When we moderns write stories our characters are better controlled. But, alas! our characters are rather easier to control. We are in no danger from the gigantic gambols of creatures like Mantalini and Micawber. We are in no danger of giving our readers too much Weller or Wegg. We have not got it to give. When we experience the ungovernable sense of life which goes along with the old Dickens sense of liberty, we experience the best of the revolution. We are filled with the first of all democratic doctrines, that all men are interesting; Dickens tried to make some of his people appear dull people, but he could not keep them dull. He could not make a monotonous man. The bores in his books are brighter than the wits in other books.

I have put this position first for a defined reason. It is useless for us to attempt to imagine Dickens and his life unless we are able at least to imagine this old atmosphere of a democratic optimism—a confidence in common men. Dickens depends upon such a comprehension in a rather unusual manner, a manner worth explanation, or at least remark.

The disadvantage under which Dickens has fallen, both as an artist and a moralist, is very plain. His misfortune is that neither of the two last movements in literary criticism has done him any good. He has suffered alike from his enemies, and from the enemies of his enemies. The facts to which I refer are familiar. When the world first awoke from the mere hypnotism of Dickens, from the direct tyranny of his temperament, there was, of course, a reaction. At the head of it came the Realists, with their documents, like Miss Flite. They declared that scenes and types in Dickens were wholly impossible (in which they were perfectly right), and on this rather paradoxical ground objected to them as
literature. They were not “like life,” and there, they thought, was an end of the matter. The realist for a time prevailed. But Realists did not enjoy their victory (if they enjoyed anything) very long. A more symbolic school of criticism soon arose. Men saw that it was necessary to give a much deeper and more delicate meaning to the expression “like life.” Streets are not life, cities and civilisations are not life, faces even and voices are not life itself. Life is within, and no man hath seen it at any time. As for our meals, and our manners, and our daily dress, these are things exactly like sonnets; they are random symbols of the soul. One man tries to express himself in books, another in boots; both probably fail. Our solid houses and square meals are in the strict sense fiction. They are things made up to typify our thoughts. The coat a man wears may be wholly fictitious; the movement of his hands may be quite unlike life.

This much the intelligence of men soon perceived. And by this much Dickens’s fame should have greatly profited. For Dickens is “like life” in the truer sense, in the sense that he is akin to the living principle in us and in the universe; he is like life, at least in this detail, that he is alive. His art is like life, because, like life, it cares for nothing outside itself, and goes on its way rejoicing. Both produce monsters with a kind of carelessness, like enormous by-products; life producing the rhinoceros, and art Mr. Bunsby. Art indeed copies life in not copying life, for life copies nothing. Dickens’s art is like life because, like life, it is irresponsible, because, like life, it is incredible.

Yet the return of this realisation has not greatly profited Dickens, the return of romance has been almost useless to this great romantic. He has gained as little from the fall of the realists as from their triumph; there has been a revolution, there has been a counter revolution, there has been no restoration. And the reason of this brings us back to that atmosphere of popular optimism of which I spoke. And the shortest way of expressing the more recent neglect of Dickens is to say that for our time and taste he exaggerates the wrong thing.

Exaggeration is the definition of art. That both Dickens and the Moderns understood. Art is, in its inmost nature, fantastic. Time brings queer revenges, and while the realists were yet living, the art of Dickens was justified by Aubrey Beardsley. But men like Aubrey Beardsley were allowed to be fantastic, because the mood which they overstrained and overstated was a mood which their period understood. Dickens overstrains and overstates a mood our period does not understand. The truth he exaggerates is exactly this old Revolution sense of infinite opportunity and boisterous brotherhood. And we resent his undue sense of it, because we ourselves have not even a due sense of it. We feel troubled with
too much where we have too little; we wish he would keep it within bounds. For we are all exact and scientific on the subjects we do not care about. We all immediately detect exaggeration in an exposition of Mormonism or a patriotic speech from Paraguay. We all require sobriety on the subject of the sea-serpent. But the moment we begin to believe a thing ourselves, that moment we begin easily to overstate it; and the moment our souls become serious, our words become a little wild. And certain moderns are thus placed towards exaggeration. They permit any writer to emphasise doubts for instance, for doubts are their religion, but they permit no man to emphasise dogmas. If a man be the mildest Christian, they smell “cant;” but he can be a raving windmill of pessimism, “and they call it ‘temperament.” If a moralist paints a wild picture of immorality, they doubt its truth, they say that devils are not so black as they are painted. But if a pessimist paints a wild picture of melancholy, they accept the whole horrible psychology, and they never ask if devils are as blue as they are painted.

It is evident, in short, why even those who admire exaggeration do not admire Dickens. He is exaggerating the wrong thing. They know what it is to feel a sadness so strange and deep that only impossible characters can express it: they do not know what it is to feel a joy so vital and violent that only impossible characters can express that. They know that the soul can be so sad as to dream naturally of the blue faces of the corpses of Baudelaire: they do not know that the soul can be so cheerful as to dream naturally of the blue face of Major Bagstock. They know that there is a point of depression at which one believes in Tintagiles: they do not know that there is a point of exhilaration at which one believes in Mr. Wegg. To them the impossibilities of Dickens seem much more impossible than they really are, because they are already attuned to the opposite impossibilities of Maeterlinck. For every mood there is an appropriate impossibility—a decent and tactful impossibility—fitted to the frame of mind. Every train of thought may end in an ecstasy, and all roads lead to Elfland. But few now walk far enough along the street of Dickens to find the place where the cockney villas grow so comic that they become poetical. People do not know how far mere good spirits will go. For instance, we never think (as the old folklore did) of good spirits reaching to the spiritual world. We see this in the complete absence from modern, popular supernaturalism of the old popular mirth. We hear plenty to-day of the wisdom of the spiritual world; but we do not hear, as our fathers did, of the folly of the spiritual world, of the tricks of the gods, and the jokes of the patron saints. Our popular tales tell us of a man who is so wise that he touches the supernatural, like Dr. Nikola; but they never tell us
(like the popular tales of the past) of a man who was so silly that he touched the supernatural, like Bottom the Weaver. We do not understand the dark and transcendental sympathy between fairies and fools. We understand a devout occultism, an evil occultism, a tragic occultism, but a farcical occultism is beyond us. Yet a farcical occultism is the very essence of “The Midsummer Night’s Dream.” It is also the right and credible essence of “The Christmas Carol.” Whether we understand it depends upon whether we can understand that exhilaration is not a physical accident, but a mystical fact; that exhilaration can be infinite, like sorrow; that a joke can be so big that it breaks the roof of the stars. By simply going on being absurd, a thing can become godlike; there is but one step from the ridiculous to the sublime.

Dickens was great because he was immoderately possessed with all this; if we are to understand him at all we must also be moderately possessed with it. We must understand this old limitless hilarity and human confidence, at least enough to be able to endure it when it is pushed a great deal too far. For Dickens did push it too far; he did push the hilarity to the point of incredible character-drawing; he did push the human confidence to the point of an unconvincing sentimentalism. You can trace, if you will, the revolutionary joy till it reaches the incredible Sapsea epitaph; you can trace the revolutionary hope till it reaches the repentance of Dombey. There is plenty to carp at in this man if you are inclined to carp; you may easily find him vulgar if you cannot see that he is divine; and if you cannot laugh with Dickens, undoubtedly you can laugh at him.

I believe myself that this braver world of his will certainly return; for I believe that it is bound up with the realities, like morning and the spring. But for those who beyond remedy regard it as an error, I put this appeal before any other observations on Dickens. First let us sympathise, if only for an instant, with the hopes of the Dickens period, with that cheerful trouble of change. If democracy has disappointed you, do not think of it as a burst bubble, but at least as a broken heart, an old love-affair. Do not sneer at the time when the creed of humanity was on its honeymoon; treat it with the dreadful reverence that is due to youth. For you, perhaps, a drearier philosophy has covered and eclipsed the earth. The fierce poet of the Middle Ages wrote, “Abandon hope, all ye who enter here,” over the gates of the lower world. The emancipated poets of to-day have written it over the gates of this world. But if we are to understand the story which follows, we must erase that apocalyptic writing, if only for an hour. We must recreate the faith of our fathers, if only as an artistic atmosphere If, then, you are a pessimist, in reading this story, forego for a little the pleasures of pessimism.
Dream for one mad moment that the grass is green. Unlearn that sinister learning that you think so clear; deny that deadly knowledge that you think you know. Surrender the very flower of your culture; give up the very jewel of your pride; abandon hopelessness, all ye who enter here.
CHAPTER II

THE BOYHOOD OF DICKENS

Charles Dickens was born at Landport, in Portsea, on February 7, 1812. His father was a clerk in the Navy Pay-office, and was temporarily on duty in the neighbourhood. Very soon after the birth of Charles Dickens, however, the family moved for a short period to Norfolk Street, Bloomsbury, and then for a long period to Chatham, which thus became the real home, and for all serious purposes, the native place of Dickens. The whole story of his life moves like a Canterbury pilgrimage along the great roads of Kent.

John Dickens, his father, was, as stated, a clerk; but such mere terms of trade tell us little of the tone or status of a family. Browning’s father (to take an instance at random) would also be described as a clerk and a man of the middle class; but the Browning family and the Dickens family have the colour of two different civilisations. The difference cannot be conveyed merely by saying that Browning stood many strata above Dickens. It must also be conveyed that Browning belonged to that section of the middle class which tends (in the small social sense) to rise; the Dickenses to that section which tends in the same sense to fall. If Browning had not been a poet, he would have been a better clerk than his father, and his son probably a better and richer clerk than he. But if they had not been lifted in the air by the enormous accident of a man of genius, the Dickenses, I fancy, would have appeared in poorer and poorer places, as inventory clerks, as caretakers, as addressers of envelopes, until they melted into the masses of the poor.

Yet at the time of Dickens’s birth and childhood this weakness in their worldly destiny was in no way apparent; especially it was not apparent to the little Charles himself. He was born and grew up in a paradise of small prosperity. He fell into the family, so to speak, during one of its comfortable periods, and he never in those early days thought of himself as anything but as a comfortable middle-class child, the son of a comfortable middle-class man. The father whom he found provided for him, was one from whom comfort drew forth his most pleasant and reassuring qualities, though not perhaps his most interesting and peculiar. John Dickens seemed, most probably, a hearty and kindly character, a little florid of speech, a little careless of duty in some details, notably in the detail of education. His neglect of his son’s mental training in later and more
trying times was a piece of unconscious selfishness which remained a little acrimoniously in his son’s mind through life. But even in this earlier and easier period what records there are of John Dickens give out the air of a somewhat idle and irresponsible fatherhood. He exhibited towards his son that contradiction in conduct which is always shown by the too thoughtless parent to the too thoughtful child. He contrived at once to neglect his mind, and also to over-stimulate it.

There are many recorded tales and traits of the author’s infancy, but one small fact seems to me more than any other to strike the note and give the key to his whole strange character. His father found it more amusing to be an audience than to be an instructor; and instead of giving the child intellectual pleasure, called upon him, almost before he was out of petticoats, to provide it. Some of the earliest glimpses we have of Charles Dickens show him to us perched on some chair or table singing comic songs in an atmosphere of perpetual applause. So, almost as soon as he can toddle, he steps into the glare of the footlights. He never stepped out of it until he died. He was a good man, as men go in this bewildering world of ours, brave, transparent, tender-hearted, scrupulously independent and honourable; he was not a man whose weaknesses should be spoken of without some delicacy and doubt. But there did mingle with his merits all his life this theatrical quality, this atmosphere of being shown off—a sort of hilarious self-consciousness. His literary life was a triumphal procession; he died drunken with glory. And behind all this nine years’ wonder that filled the world, behind his gigantic tours and his ten thousand editions, the crowded lectures and the crashing brass, behind all the thing we really see is the flushed face of a little boy singing music-hall songs to a circle of aunts and uncles. And this precocious pleasure explains much, too, in the moral way. Dickens had all his life the faults of the little boy who is kept up too late at night. The boy in such a case exhibits a psychological paradox; he is a little too irritable because he is a little too happy. Dickens was always a little too irritable because he was a little too happy. Like the overwrought child in society, he was splendidly sociable, and yet suddenly quarrelsome. In all the practical relations of his life he was what the child is in the last hours of an evening party, genuinely delighted, genuinely delightful, genuinely affectionate and happy, and yet in some strange way fundamentally exasperated and dangerously close to tears.

There was another touch about the boy which made his case more peculiar, and perhaps his intelligence more fervid; the touch of ill-health. It could not be called more than a touch, for he suffered from no formidable malady and could
always through life endure a great degree of exertion, even if it was only the exertion of walking violently all night. Still the streak of sickness was sufficient to take him out of the common unconscious life of the community of boys; and for good or evil that withdrawal is always a matter of deadly importance to the mind. He was thrown back perpetually upon the pleasures of the intelligence, and these began to burn in his head like a pent and painful furnace. In his own unvaryingly vivid way he has described how he crawled up into an unconsidered garret, and there found, in a dusty heap, the undying literature of England. The books he mentions chiefly are “Humphrey Clinker” and “Tom Jones.” When he opened those two books in the garret he caught hold of the only past with which he is at all connected, the great comic writers of England of whom he was destined to be the last.

It must be remembered (as I have suggested before) that there was something about the county in which he lived, and the great roads along which he travelled that sympathised with and stimulated his pleasure in this old picaresque literature. The groups that came along the road, that passed through his town and out of it, were of the motley laughable type that tumbled into ditches or beat down the doors of taverns under the escort of Smollett and Fielding. In our time the main roads of Kent have upon them very often a perpetual procession of tramps and tinkers unknown on the quiet hills of Sussex; and it may have been so also in Dickens’s boyhood. In his neighbourhood were definite memorials of yet older and yet greater English comedy. From the height of Gads-hill at which he stared unceasingly there looked down upon him the monstrous ghost of Falstaff, Falstaff who might well have been the spiritual father of all Dickens’s adorable knaves, Falstaff the great mountain of English laughter and English sentimentalism, the great, healthy, humane English humbug, not to be matched among the nations.

At this eminence of Gads-hill Dickens used to stare even as a boy with the steady purpose of some day making it his own. It is characteristic of the consistency which underlies the superficially erratic career of Dickens that he actually did live to make it his own. The truth is that he was a precocious child, precocious not only on the more poetical but on the more prosaic side of life. He was ambitious as well as enthusiastic. No one can ever know what visions they were that crowded into the head of the clever little brat as he ran about the streets of Chatham or stood glowering at Gads-hill. But I think that quite mundane visions had a very considerable share in the matter. He longed to go to school (a strange wish), to go to college, to make a name, nor did he merely aspire to these
things; the great number of them he also expected. He regarded himself as a child of good position just about to enter on a life of good luck. He thought his home and family a very good spring-board or jumping-off place from which to fling himself to the positions which he desired to reach. And almost as he was about to spring the whole structure broke under him, and he and all that belonged to him disappeared into a darkness far below.

Everything had been struck down as with the finality of a thunder-bolt. His lordly father was a bankrupt, and in the Marshalsea prison. His mother was in a mean home in the north of London, wildly proclaiming herself the principal of a girl’s school, a girl’s school to which nobody would go. And he himself, the conqueror of the world and the prospective purchaser of Gads-hill, passed some distracted and bewildering days in pawning the household necessities to Fagins in foul shops, and then found himself somehow or other one of a row of ragged boys in a great dreary factory, pasting the same kinds of labels on to the same kinds of blacking-bottles from morning till night.

Although it seemed sudden enough to him, the disintegration had, as a matter of fact, of course, been going on for a long time. He had only heard from his father dark and melodramatic allusions to a “deed” which, from the way it was mentioned, might have been a claim to the crown or a compact with the devil, but which was in truth an unsuccessful documentary attempt on the part of John Dickens to come to a composition with his creditors. And now, in the lurid light of his sunset, the character of John Dickens began to take on those purple colours which have made him under another name absurd and immortal. It required a tragedy to bring out this man’s comedy. So long as John Dickens was in easy circumstances, he seemed only an easy man, a little long and luxuriant in his phrases, a little careless in his business routine. He seemed only a wordy man, who lived on bread and beef like his neighbours; but as bread and beef were successively taken away from him, it was discovered that he lived on words. For him to be involved in a calamity only meant to be cast for the first part in a tragedy. For him blank ruin was only a subject for blank verse. Henceforth we feel scarcely inclined to call him John Dickens at all; we feel inclined to call him by the name through which his son celebrated this preposterous and sublime victory of the human spirit over circumstances. Dickens, in “David Copperfield,” called him Wilkins Micawber. In his personal correspondence he called him the Prodigal Father.

Young Charles had been hurriedly flung into the factory by the more or less careless good-nature of James Lamert, a relation of his mother’s; it was a
blacking factory, supposed to be run as a rival to Warren’s by another and “original” Warren, both practically conducted by another of the Lamerts. It was situated near Hungerford Market. Dickens worked there drearily, like one stunned with disappointment. To a child excessively intellectualised, and at this time, I fear, excessively egotistical, the coarseness of the whole thing—the work, the rooms, the boys, the language—was a sort of bestial nightmare. Not only did he scarcely speak of it then, but he scarcely spoke of it afterwards. Years later, in the fulness of his fame, he heard from Forster that a man had spoken of knowing him. On hearing the name, he somewhat curtly acknowledged it, and spoke of having seen the man once. Forster, in his innocence, answered that the man said he had seen Dickens many times in a factory by Hungerford Market. Dickens was suddenly struck with a long and extraordinary silence. Then he invited Forster, as his best friend, to a particular interview, and, with every appearance of difficulty and distress, told him the whole story for the first and the last time. A long while after that he told the world some part of the matter in the account of Murdstone and Grinby’s in “David Copperfield.” He never spoke of the whole experience except once or twice, and he never spoke of it otherwise than as a man might speak of hell.

It need not be suggested, I think, that this agony in the child was exaggerated by the man. It is true that he was not incapable of the vice of exaggeration, if it be a vice. There was about him much vanity and a certain virulence in his version of many things. Upon the whole, indeed, it would hardly be too much to say that he would have exaggerated any sorrow he talked about. But this was a sorrow with a very strange position in Dickens’s life; it was a sorrow he did not talk about. Upon this particular dark spot he kept a sort of deadly silence for twenty years. An accident revealed part of the truth to the dearest of all his friends. He then told the whole truth to the dearest of all his friends. He never told anybody else. I do not think that this arose from any social sense of disgrace; if he had it slightly at the time, he was far too self-satisfied a man to have taken it seriously in after life. I really think that his pain at this time was so real and ugly that the thought of it filled him with that sort of impersonal but unbearable shame with which we are filled, for instance, by the notion of physical torture, of something that humiliates humanity. He felt that such agony was something obscene. Moreover there are two other good reasons for thinking that his sense of hopelessness was very genuine. First of all, this starless outlook is common in the calamities of boyhood. The bitterness of boyish distresses does not lie in the fact that they are large; it lies in the fact that we do not know that
they are small. About any early disaster there is a dreadful finality; a lost child can suffer like a lost soul.

It is currently said that hope goes with youth, and lends to youth its wings of a butterfly; but I fancy that hope is the last gift given to man, and the only gift not given to youth. Youth is preeminently the period in which a man can be lyric, fanatical, poetic; but youth is the period in which a man can be hopeless. The end of every episode is the end of the world. But the power of hoping through everything, the knowledge that the soul survives its adventures, that great inspiration comes to the middle-aged; God has kept that good wine until now. It is from the backs of the elderly gentlemen that the wings of the butterfly should burst. There is nothing that so much mystifies the young as the consistent frivolity of the old. They have discovered their indestructibility. They are in their second and clearer childhood, and there is a meaning in the merriment of their eyes. They have seen the end of the End of the World.

First, then, the desolate finality of Dickens’s childish mood makes me think it was a real one. And there is another thing to be remembered. Dickens was not a saintly child, after the style of Little Dorrit or Little Nell. He had not, at this time at any rate, set his heart wholly upon higher things, even upon things such as personal tenderness or loyalty. He had been, and was, unless I am very much mistaken, sincerely, stubbornly, bitterly ambitious. He had, I fancy, a fairly clear idea previous to the downfall of all his family’s hopes of what he wanted to do in the world, and of the mark that he meant to make there. In no dishonourable sense, but still in a definite sense, he might, in early life, be called worldly; and the children of this world are in their generation infinitely more sensitive than the children of light. A saint after repentance will forgive himself for a sin; a man about town will never forgive himself for a faux pas. There are ways of getting absolved for murder; there are no ways of getting absolved for upsetting the soup. This thin-skinned quality in all very mundane people is a thing too little remembered; and it must not be wholly forgotten in connection with a clever, restless lad who dreamed of a destiny. That part of his distress which concerned himself and his social standing was among the other parts of it the least noble; but perhaps it was the most painful. For pride is not only, as the modern world fails to understand, a sin to be condemned; it is also (as it understands even less) a weakness to be very much commiserated. A very vitalising touch is given in one of his own reminiscences. His most unendurable moment did not come in any bullying in the factory or any famine in the streets. It came when he went to see his sister Fanny take a prize at the Royal Academy
of Music. “I could not bear to think of myself—beyond the reach of all such honourable emulation and success. The tears ran down my face. I felt as if my heart were rent. I prayed when I went to bed that night to be lifted out of the humiliation and neglect in which I was. I never had suffered so much before. There was no envy in this.” I do not think that there was, though the poor little wretch could hardly have been blamed if there had been. There was only a furious sense of frustration; a spirit like a wild beast in a cage. It was only a small matter in the external and obvious sense; it was only Dickens prevented from being Dickens.

If we put these facts together, that the tragedy seemed final, and that the tragedy was concerned with the supersensitive matters of the ego and the gentleman, I think we can imagine a pretty genuine case of internal depression. And when we add to the case of internal depression the case of the external oppression, the case of the material circumstances by which he was surrounded, we have reached a sort of midnight. All day he worked on insufficient food at a factory. It is sufficient to say that it afterwards appeared in his works as Murdstone and Grinby’s. At night he returned disconsolately to a lodging-house for such lads, kept by an old lady. It is sufficient to say that she appeared afterwards as Mrs. Pipchin. Once a week only he saw anybody for whom he cared a straw; that was when he went to the Marshalsea prison, and that gave his juvenile pride, half manly and half snobbish, bitter annoyance of another kind. Add to this, finally, that physically he was always very weak and never very well. Once he was struck down in the middle of his work with sudden bodily pain. The boy who worked next to him, a coarse and heavy lad named Bob Fagin, who had often attacked Dickens on the not unreasonable ground of his being a “gentleman,” suddenly showed that enduring sanity of compassion which Dickens had destined to show so often in the characters of the common and unclean. Fagin made a bed for his sick companion out of the straw in the workroom, and filled empty blacking bottles with hot water all day. When the evening came, and Dickens was somewhat recovered, Bob Fagin insisted on escorting the boy home to his father. The situation was as poignant as a sort of tragic farce. Fagin in his wooden-headed chivalry would have died in order to take Dickens to his family; Dickens in his bitter gentility would have died rather than let Fagin know that his family were in the Marshalsea. So these two young idiots tramped the tedious streets, both stubborn, both suffering for an idea. The advantage certainly was with Fagin, who was suffering for a Christian compassion, while Dickens was suffering for a pagan pride. At last Dickens
flung off his friend with desperate farewell and thanks, and dashed up the steps of a strange house on the Surrey side. He knocked and rang as Bob Fagin, his benefactor and his incubus, disappeared round the corner. And when the servant came to open the door, he asked, apparently with gravity, whether Mr. Robert Fagin lived there. It is a strange touch. The immortal Dickens woke in him for an instant in that last wild joke of that weary evening. Next morning, however, he was again well enough to make himself ill again, and the wheels of the great factory went on. They manufactured a number of bottles of Warren’s Blacking, and in the course of the process they manufactured also the greatest optimist of the nineteenth century.

This boy who dropped down groaning at his work, who was hungry four or five times a week, whose best feelings and worst feelings were alike flayed alive, was the man on whom two generations of comfortable critics have visited the complaint that his view of life was too rosy to be anything but unreal. Afterwards, and in its proper place, I shall speak of what is called the optimism of Dickens, and of whether it was really too cheerful or too smooth. But this boyhood of his may be recorded now as a mere fact. If he was too happy, this was where he learnt it. If his school of thought was a vulgar optimism, this is where he went to school. If he learnt to whitewash the universe, it was in a blacking factory that he learnt it.

As a fact, there is no shred of evidence to show that those who have had sad experiences tend to have a sad philosophy. There are numberless points upon which Dickens is spiritually at one with the poor, that is, with the great mass of mankind. But there is no point in which he is more perfectly at one with them than in showing that there is no kind of connection between a man being unhappy and a man being pessimistic. Sorrow and pessimism are indeed, in a sense, opposite things, since sorrow is founded on the value of something, and pessimism upon the value of nothing. And in practice we find that those poets or political leaders who come from the people, and whose experiences have really been searching and cruel, are the most sanguine people in the world. These men out of the old agony are always optimists; they are sometimes offensive optimists. A man like Robert Burns, whose father (like Dickens’s father) goes bankrupt, whose whole life is a struggle against miserable external powers and internal weaknesses yet more miserable—a man whose life begins grey and ends black—Burns does not merely sing about the goodness of life, he positively rants and cants about it. Rousseau, whom all his friends and acquaintances treated almost as badly as he treated them—Rousseau does not grow merely
eloquent, he grows gushing and sentimental, about the inherent goodness of human nature. Charles Dickens, who was most miserable at the receptive age when most people are most happy, is afterwards happy when all men weep. Circumstances break men’s bones; it has never been shown that they break men’s optimism. These great popular leaders do all kinds of desperate things under the immediate scourge of tragedy. They become drunkards; they become demagogues; they become morphomaniacs. They never become pessimists. Most unquestionably there are ragged and unhappy men whom we could easily understand being pessimists. But as a matter of fact they are not pessimists. Most unquestionably there are whole dim hordes of humanity whom we should promptly pardon if they cursed God. But they don’t. The pessimists are aristocrats like Byron; the men who curse God are aristocrats like Swinburne. But when those who starve and suffer speak for a moment, they do not profess merely an optimism, they profess a cheap optimism; they are too poor to afford a dear one. They cannot indulge in any detailed or merely logical defence of life; that would be to delay the enjoyment of it. These higher optimists, of whom Dickens was one, do not approve of the universe; they do not even admire the universe; they fall in love with it. They embrace life too close to criticise or even to see it. Existence to such men has the wild beauty of a woman, and those love her with most intensity who love her with least cause.
CHAPTER III

THE YOUTH OF DICKENS

There are popular phrases so picturesque that even when they are intentionally funny they are unintentionally poetical. I remember, to take one instance out of many, hearing a heated Secularist in Hyde Park apply to some parson or other the exquisite expression, “a sky-pilot.” Subsequent inquiry has taught me that the term is intended to be comic and even contemptuous; but in the first freshness of it I went home repeating it to myself like a new poem. Few of the pious legends have conceived so strange and yet celestial a picture as this of a pilot in the sky, leaning on his helm above the empty heavens, and carrying his cargo of souls higher than the loneliest cloud. The phrase is like a lyric of Shelley. Or, to take another instance from another language, the French have an incomparable idiom for a boy playing truant; “Il fait l’école buissonnière”—he goes to the bushy school, or the school among the bushes. How admirably this accidental expression, “the bushy school” (not to be lightly confounded with the Art School at Bushey)—how admirably this “bushy school” expresses half the modern notions of a more natural education! The two words express the whole poetry of Wordsworth, the whole philosophy of Thoreau, and are quite as good literature as either.

Now, among a million of such scraps of inspired slang there is one which describes a certain side of Dickens better than pages of explanation. The phrase, appropriately enough, occurs at least once in his works, and that on a fitting occasion. When Job Trotter is sent by Sam on a wild chase after Mr. Perker, the solicitor, Mr. Perker’s clerk consoles with Job upon the lateness of the hour, and the fact that all habitable places are shut up. “My friend,” says Mr. Perker’s clerk, “you’ve got the key of the street.” Mr. Perker’s clerk, who was a flippant and scornful young man, may perhaps be pardoned if he used this expression in a flippant and scornful sense; but let us hope that Dickens did not. Let us hope that Dickens saw the strange, yet satisfying, imaginative justice of the words; for Dickens himself had, in the most sacred and serious sense of the term, the key of the street. When we shut ‘out anything, we are shut out of that thing. When we shut out the street, we are shut out of the street. Few of us understand the street. Even when we step into it, as into a house or room of strangers. Few of us see through the shining riddle of the street, the strange folk that belong to the street
only—the street-walker or the street-arab, the nomads who, generation after generation, have kept their ancient secrets in the full blaze of the sun. Of the street at night many of us know even less. The street at night is a great house locked up. But Dickens had, if ever man had, the key of the street; his stars were the lamps of the street; his hero was the man in the street. He could open the inmost door of his house—the door that leads into that secret passage which is lined with houses and roofed with stars.

This silent transformation into a citizen of the street took place during those dark days of boyhood, when Dickens was drudging at the factory. When ever he had done drudging, he had no other resource but drifting, and he drifted over half London. He was a dreamy child, thinking mostly of his own dreary prospects. Yet he saw and remembered much of the streets and squares he passed. Indeed, as a matter of fact, he went the right way to work unconsciously to do so. He did not go in for “observation,” a priggish habit; he did not look at Charing Cross to improve his mind or count the lamp-posts in Holborn to practise his arithmetic. But unconsciously he made all these places the scenes of the monstrous drama in his miserable little soul. He walked in darkness under the lamps of Holborn, and was crucified at Charing Cross. So for him ever afterwards these places had the beauty that only belongs to battlefields. For our memory never fixes the facts which we have merely observed. The only way to remember a place for ever is to live in the place for an hour; and the only way to live in the place for an hour is to forget the place for an hour. The undying scenes we can all see if we shut our eyes are not the scenes that we have stared at under the direction of guide-books; the scenes we see are the scenes at which we did not look at all—the scenes in which we walked when we were thinking about something else—about a sin, or a love affair, or some childish sorrow. We can see the background now because we did not see it then. So Dickens did not stamp these places on his mind; he stamped his mind on these places. For him ever afterwards these streets were mortally romantic; they were dipped in the purple dyes of youth and its tragedy, and rich with irrevocable sunsets.

Herein is the whole secret of that eerie realism with which Dickens could always vitalise some dark or dull corner of London. There are details in the Dickens descriptions—a window, or a railing, or the keyhole of a door—which he endows with demoniac life. The things seem more actual than things really are. Indeed, that degree of realism does not exist in reality; it is the unbearable realism of a dream. And this kind of realism can only be gained by walking dreamily in a place; it cannot be gained by walking observantly. Dickens himself
has given a perfect instance of how these nightmare minutiae grew upon him in his trance of abstraction. He mentions among the coffee-shops into which he crept in those wretched days one in St. Martin’s Lane, “of which I only recollect it stood near the church, and that in the door there was an oval glass plate with ‘COFFEE ROOM’ painted on it, addressed towards the street. If I ever find myself in a very different kind of coffee-room now, but where there is an inscription on glass, and read it backwards on the wrong side, MOOR EEFFFOC (as I often used to do then in a dismal reverie), a shock goes through my blood.” That wild word, “Moor Eeffoc,” is the motto of all effective realism; it is the masterpiece of the good realistic principle—the principle that the most fantastic thing of all is often the precise fact. And that elfish kind of realism Dickens adopted everywhere. His world was alive with inanimate object. The date on the door danced over Mr. Grewgious’s, the knocker grinned at Mr. Scrooge, the Roman on the ceiling pointed down at Mr. Tulkinghorn, the elderly armchair leered at Tom Smart—these are all moor eeffcocish things. A man sees them because he does not look at them.

And so the little Dickens Dickensised London. He prepared the way for all his personages. Into whatever cranny of our city his characters might crawl, Dickens had been there before them. However wild were the events he narrated as outside him, they could not be wilder than the things that had gone on within. However queer a character of Dickens might be, he could hardly be queerer than Dickens was. The whole secret of his after-writings is sealed up in those silent years of which no written word remains. Those years did him harm perhaps, as his biographer, Forster, has thoughtfully suggested, by sharpening a certain fierce individualism in him which once or twice during his genial life flashed like a half-hidden knife. He was always generous; but things had gone too hardly with him for him to be always easy-going. He was always kind-hearted; he was not always good-humoured. Those years may also, in their strange mixture of morbidity and reality, have increased in him his tendency to exaggeration. But we can scarcely lament this in a literary sense; exaggeration is almost the definition of art—and it is entirely the definition of Dickens’s art. Those years may have given him many moral and mental wounds, from which he never recovered. But they gave him the key of the street.

There is a weird contradiction in the soul of the born optimist. He can be happy and unhappy at the same time. With Dickens the practical depression of his life at this time did nothing to prevent him from laying up those hilarious memories of which all his books are made. No doubt he was genuinely unhappy
in the poor place where his mother kept school. Nevertheless it was there that he noticed the unfathomable quaintness of the little servant whom he made into the Marchioness. No doubt he was comfortless enough at the boarding-house of Mrs. Roylance; but he perceived with a dreadful joy that Mrs. Roylance’s name was Pipchin. There seems to be no incompatibility between taking in tragedy and giving out comedy; they are able to run parallel in the same personality. One incident which he described in his unfinished “autobiography,” and which he afterwards transferred almost verbatim to David Copperfield, was peculiarly rich and impressive. It was the inauguration of a petition to the King for a bounty, drawn up by a committee of the prisoners in the Marshalsea, a committee of which Dickens’s father was the president, no doubt in virtue of his oratory, and also the scribe no doubt in virtue of his genuine love of literary flights.

“As many of the principal officers of this body as could be got into a small room without filling it up, supported him in front of the petition; and my old friend, Captain Porter (who had washed himself to do honour to so solemn an occasion), stationed himself close to it, to read it to all who were unacquainted with its contents. The door was then thrown open, and they began to come in in a long file; several waiting on the landing outside, while one entered, affixed his signature, and went out. To everybody in succession Captain Porter said, ‘Would you like to hear it read?’ If he weakly showed the least disposition to hear it, Captain Porter in a loud sonorous voice gave him every word of it. I remember a certain luscious roll he gave to such words as ‘Majesty—Gracious Majesty—Your Gracious Majesty’s unfortunate subjects—Your Majesty’s well-known munificence,’ as if the words were something real in his mouth and delicious to taste: my poor father meanwhile listening with a little of an author’s vanity and contemplating (not severely) the spike on the opposite wall. Whatever was comical or pathetic in this scene, I sincerely believe I perceived in my corner, whether I demonstrated it or not, quite as well as I should perceive it now. I made out my own little character and story for every man who put his name to the sheet of paper.”

Here we see very plainly that Dickens did not merely look back in after days and see that these humours had been delightful. He was delighted at the same moment that he was desperate. The two opposite things existed in him simultaneously, and each in its full strength. His soul was not a mixed colour like grey and purple, caused by no component colour being quite itself. His soul was like a shot silk of black and crimson, a shot silk of misery and joy.

Seen from the outside, his little pleasures and extravagances seem more
pathetic than his grief. Once the solemn little figure went into a public-house in Parliament Street, and addressed the man behind the bar in the following terms—“What is your very best—the VERY best ale a glass?” The man replied, “Twopence.” “Then,” said the infant, “just draw me a glass of that, if you please, with a good head to it.” “The landlord,” says Dickens, in telling the story, “looked at me in return over the bar from head to foot with a strange smile on his face; and instead of drawing the beer looked round the screen and said something to his wife, who came out from behind it with her work in her hand and joined him in surveying me. . . . They asked me a good many questions as to what my name was, how old I was, where I lived, how I was employed, etc., etc. To all of which, that I might commit nobody, I invented appropriate answers. They served me with the ale, though I suspect it was not the strongest on the premises; and the landlord’s wife, opening the little half-door, and bending down, gave me a kiss.” Here he touches that other side of common life which he was chiefly to champion; he was to show that there is no ale like the ale of a poor man’s festival, and no pleasures like the pleasures of the poor. At other places of refreshment he was yet more majestic. “I remember,” he says, “tucking my own bread (which I had brought from home in the morning) under my arm, wrapt up in a piece of paper like a book, and going into the best dining-room in Johnson’s Alamode Beef House in Clare Court, Drury Lane, and magnificently ordering a small plate of à-la-mode beef to eat with it. What the waiter thought of such a strange little apparition coming in all alone I don’t know; but I can see him now staring at me as I ate my dinner, and bringing up the other waiter to look. I gave him a halfpenny, and I wish, now, that he hadn’t taken it.”

For the boy individually the prospect seemed to be growing drearier and drearier. This phrase indeed hardly expresses the fact; for, as he felt it, it was not so much a run of worsening luck as the closing in of a certain and quiet calamity like the coming on of twilight and dark. He felt that he would die and be buried in blacking. Through all this he does not seem to have said much to his parents of his distress. They who were in prison had certainly a much jollier time than he who was free. But of all the strange ways in which the human being proves that he is not a rational being, whatever else he is, no case is so mysterious and unaccountable as the secrecy of childhood. We learn of the cruelty of some school or child-factory from journalists; we learn it from inspectors, we learn it from doctors, we learn it even from shame-stricken schoolmasters and repentant sweaters; but we never learn it from the children; we never learn it from the victims. It would seem as if a living creature had to be taught, like an art of
culture, the art of crying out when it is hurt. It would seem as if patience were the natural thing; it would seem as if impatience were an accomplishment like whist. However this may be, it is wholly certain that Dickens might have drudged and died drudging, and buried the unborn Pickwick, but for an external accident.

He was, as has been said, in the habit of visiting his father at the Marshalsea every week. The talks between the two must have been a comedy at once more cruel and more delicate than Dickens ever described. Meredith might picture the comparison between the child whose troubles were so childish, but who felt them like a damned spirit, and the middle-aged man whose trouble was final ruin, and who felt it no more than a baby. Once, it would appear, the boy broke down altogether—perhaps under the unbearable buoyancy of his oratorical papa—and implored to be freed from the factory—implored it, I fear, with a precocious and almost horrible eloquence. The old optimist was astounded—too much astounded to do anything in particular. Whether the incident had really anything to do with what followed cannot be decided, but ostensibly it had not. Ostensibly the cause of Charles’s ultimate liberation was a quarrel between his father and Lamert, the head of the factory. Dickens the elder (who had at last left the Marshalsea) could no doubt conduct a quarrel with the magnificence of Micawber; the result of this talent, at any rate, was to leave Mr. Lamert in a towering rage. He had a stormy interview with Charles, in which he tried to be good-tempered to the boy, but could hardly master his tongue about the boy’s father. Finally he told him he must go, and with every observance the little creature was solemnly expelled from hell.

His mother, with a touch of strange harshness, was for patching up the quarrel and sending him back. Perhaps, with the fierce feminine responsibility, she felt that the first necessity was to keep the family out of debt. But old John Dickens put his foot down here—put his foot down with that ringing but very rare decision with which (once in ten years, and often on some trivial matter) the weakest man will overwhelm the strongest woman. The boy was miserable; the boy was clever; the boy should go to school. The boy went to school; he went to the Wellington House Academy, Mornington Place. It was an odd experience for anyone to go from the world to a school, instead of going from school to the world. Dickens, we may say, had his boyhood after his youth. He had seen life at its coarsest before he began his training for it, and knew the worst words in the English language probably before the best. This odd chronology, it will be remembered, he retained in his semi-autobiographical account of the adventures
of David Copperfield, who went into the business of Murdstone and Grinby’s before he went to the school kept by Dr. Strong. David Copperfield, also, went to be carefully prepared for a world that he had seen already. Outside David Copperfield, the records of Dickens at this time reduce themselves to a few glimpses provided by accidental companions of his schooldays, and little can be deduced from them about his personality beyond a general impression of sharpness and, perhaps, of bravado, of bright eyes and bright speeches. Probably the young creature was recuperating himself for his misfortunes, was making the most of his liberty, was flapping the wings of that wild spirit that had just not been broken. We hear of things that sound suddenly juvenile after his maturer troubles, of a secret language sounding like mere gibberish, and of a small theatre, with paint and red fire; such as that which Stevenson loved. It was not an accident that Dickens and Stevenson loved it. It is a stage unsuited for psychological realism; the cardboard characters cannot analyze each other with any effect. But it is a stage almost divinely suited for making surroundings, for making that situation and background which belongs peculiarly to romance. A toy theatre, in fact, is the opposite of private theatricals. In the latter you can do anything with the people if you do not ask much from the scenery; in the former you can do anything in scenery if you do not ask much from the people. In a toy theatre you could hardly manage a modern dialogue on marriage, but the Day of Judgment would be quite easy.

After leaving school, Dickens found employment as a clerk to Mr. Blackmore, a solicitor, as one of those inconspicuous under-clerks whom he afterwards turned to many grotesque uses. Here, no doubt, he met Lowten and Swiveller, Chuckster and Wobbler, in so far as such sacred creatures ever had embodiments on this lower earth. But it is typical of him that he had no fancy at all to remain a solicitor’s clerk. The resolution to rise which had glowed in him even as a dawdling boy, when he gazed at Gads-hill, which had been darkened but not quite destroyed by his fall into the factory routine, which had been released again by his return to normal boyhood and the boundaries of school, was not likely to content itself now with the copying out of agreements. He set to work, without any advice or help, to learn to be a reporter. He worked all day at law, and all night at shorthand. It is an art which can only be effected by time, and he had to effect it by overtime. But learning the thing under every disadvantage, without a teacher, without the possibility of concentration or complete mental force without ordinary human sleep, he made himself one of the most rapid reporters then alive. There is a curious contrast between the casualness of the
mental training to which his parents and others subjected him and the savage seriousness of the training to which he subjected himself. Somebody once asked old John Dickens where his son Charles was educated. “Well, really,” said the great creature, in his spacious way, “he may be said—ah—to have educated himself.” He might indeed.

This practical intensity of Dickens is worth our dwelling on, because it illustrates an elementary antithesis in his character, or what appears as an antithesis in our modern popular psychology. We are always talking about strong men against weak men; but Dickens was not only both a weak man and a strong man, he was a very weak man and also a very strong man. He was everything that we currently call a weak man; he was a man hung on wires; he was a man who might at any moment cry like a child; he was so sensitive to criticism that one may say that he lacked a skin; he was so nervous that he allowed great tragedies in his life to arise only out of nerves. But in the matter where all ordinary strong men are miserably weak—in the matter of concentrated toil and clear purpose and unconquerable worldly courage—he was like a straight sword. Mrs. Carlyle, who in her human epithets often hit the right nail so that it rang, said of him once, “He has a face made of steel.” This was probably felt in a flash when she saw, in some social crowd, the clear, eager face of Dickens cutting through those near him like a knife. Any people who had met him from year to year would each year have found a man weakly troubled about his worldly decline; and each year they would have found him higher up in the world. His was a character very hard for any man of slow and placable temperament to understand; he was the character whom anybody can hurt and nobody can kill.

When he began to report in the House of Commons he was still only nineteen. His father, who had been released from his prison a short time before Charles had been released from his, had also become, among many other things, a reporter. But old John Dickens could enjoy doing anything without any particular aspiration after doing it well. But Charles was of a very different temper. He was, as I have said, consumed with an enduring and almost angry thirst to excel. He learnt shorthand with a dark self-devotion as if it were a sacred hieroglyph. Of this self-instruction, as of everything else, he has left humorous and illuminating phrases. He describes how, after he had learnt the whole exact alphabet, “there then appeared a procession of new horrors, called arbitrary characters—the most despotc characters I have ever known; who insisted for instance, that a thing like the beginning of a cobweb meant ‘expectation,’ and that a pen-and-ink sky rocket stood for ‘disadvantageous.””
He concludes, “It was almost heartbreaking.” But it is significant that somebody else, a colleague of his, concluded, “There never was such a shorthand writer.”

Dickens succeeded in becoming a shorthand writer; succeeded in becoming a reporter; succeeded ultimately in becoming a highly effective journalist. He was appointed as a reporter of the speeches in Parliament, first by The True Son, then by The Mirror of Parliament, and last by The Morning Chronicle. He reported the speeches very well, and if we must analyze his internal opinions, much better than they deserved. For it must be remembered that this lad went into the reporter’s gallery full of the triumphant Radicalism which was then the rising tide of the world. He was, it must be confessed, very little overpowered by the dignity of the Mother of Parliaments; he regarded the House of Commons much as he regarded the House of Lords, as a sort of venerable joke. It was, perhaps, while he watched, pale with weariness from the reporter’s gallery, that there sank into him a thing that never left him, his unfathomable contempt for the British Constitution. Then perhaps he heard from the Government benches the immortal apologies of the Circumlocution Office. “Then would the noble lord or right honourable gentleman, in whose department it was to defend the Circumlocution Office, put an orange in his pocket, and make a regular field-day of the occasion. Then would he come down to that house with a slap upon the table and meet the honourable gentleman foot to foot. Then would he be there to tell that honourable gentleman that the Circumlocution Office was not only blameless in this matter, but was commendable in this matter, was extollable to the skies in this matter. Then would he be there to tell that honourable gentleman that although the Circumlocution Office was invariably right, and wholly right, it never was so right in this matter. Then would he be there to tell the honourable gentleman that it would have been more to his honour, more to his credit, more to his good taste, more to his good sense, more to half the dictionary of common places if he had left the Circumlocution Office alone and never approached this matter. Then would he keep one eye upon a coach or crammer from the Circumlocution Office below the bar, and smash the honourable gentleman with the Circumlocution Office account of this matter. And although one of two things always happened; namely, either that the Circumlocution Office had nothing to say, and said it, or that it had something to say of which the noble lord or right honourable gentleman blundered one half and forgot the other; the Circumlocution Office was always voted immaculate by an accommodating majority.” We are now generally told that Dickens has destroyed these abuses, and that this is no longer a true picture of public life. Such, at any rate; is the
Circumlocution Office account of this matter. But Dickens as a good Radical would, I fancy, much prefer that we should continue his battle than that we should celebrate his triumph; especially when it has not come. England is still ruled by the great Barnacle family. Parliament is still ruled by the great Barnacle trinity—the solemn old Barnacle who knew that the Circumlocution Office was protection, the sprightly young Barnacle who knew that it was a fraud, and the bewildered young Barnacle who knew nothing about it. From these three types our Cabinets are still exclusively recruited. People talk of the tyrannies and anomalies which Dickens denounced as things of the past like the Star Chamber. They believe that the days of the old stupid optimism and the old brutal indifference are gone for ever. In truth, this very belief is only the countenance of the old stupid optimism and the old brutal indifference. We believe in a free England and a pure England, because we still believe in the Circumlocution Office account of this matter. Undoubtedly our serenity is wide-spread. We believe that England is really reformed, we believe that England is really democratic, we believe that English politics are free from corruption. But this general satisfaction of ours does not show that Dickens has beaten the Barnacles. It only shows that the Barnacles have beaten Dickens.

It cannot be too often said, then, that we must read into young Dickens and his works this old Radical tone towards institutions. That tone was a sort of happy impatience. And when Dickens had to listen for hours to the speech of the noble lord in defence of the Circumlocution Office, when, that is, he had to listen to what he regarded as the last vapourings of a vanishing oligarchy, the impatience rather predominated over the happiness. His incurably restless nature found more pleasure in the wandering side of journalism. He went about wildly in post-chaises to report political meetings for the Morning Chronicle. “And what gentlemen they were to serve,” he exclaimed, “in such things at the old Morning Chronicle. Great or small it did not matter. I have had to charge for half a dozen breakdowns in half a dozen times as many miles. I have had to charge for the damage of a great-coat from the drippings of a blazing wax candle, in writing through the smallest hours of the night in a swift flying carriage and pair.” And again, “I have often transcribed for the printer from my shorthand notes important public speeches in which the strictest accuracy was required, and a mistake in which would have been to a young man severely compromising, writing on the palm of my hand, by the light of a dark lantern, in a post-chaise and four, galloping through a wild country and through the dead of the night, at the then surprising rate of fifteen miles an hour.” The whole of Dickens’s life
goes with the throb of that nocturnal gallop. All its real wildness shot through with an imaginative wickedness he afterwards uttered in the drive of Jonas Chuzzlewit through the storm.

All this time, and indeed, from a time of which no measure can be taken, the creative part of his mind had been in a stir or even a fever. While still a small boy he had written for his own amusement some sketches of queer people he had met; notably, one of his uncle’s barber, whose principal hobby was pointing out what Napoleon ought to have done in the matter of military tactics. He had a note-book full of such sketches. He had sketches not only of persons, but of places, which were to him almost more personal than persons. In the December of 1833 he published one of these fragments in the Old Monthly Magazine. This was followed by nine others in the same paper, and when the paper (which was a romantically Radical venture, run by a veteran soldier of Bolivar) itself collapsed, Dickens continued the series in the Evening Chronicle, an offshoot of the morning paper of the same name. These were the pieces afterwards published and known as the “Sketches by Boz”; and with them Dickens enters literature. He also enters upon many things about this time; he enters manhood, and among other things marriage. A friend of his on the Chronicle, George Hogarth, had several daughters. With all of them Dickens appears to have been on terms of great affection. This sketch is wholly literary, and I do not feel it necessary to do more than touch upon such incidents as his marriage, just I shall do no more than touch upon the tragedy that ultimately overtook it. But it may be suggested here that the final misfortunes were in some degree due to the circumstances attending the original action. A very young man fighting his way, and excessively poor, with no memories for years past that were not monotonous and mean, and with his strongest and most personal memories quite ignominious and unendurable, was suddenly thrown into the society of a whole family of girls. I think it does not overstate his weakness, and I think it partly constitutes his excuse, to say that he fell in love with the chance of love. As sometimes happens in the undeveloped youth, an abstract femininity simply intoxicated him. In what came afterwards he was enormously to blame. But I do not think that his was a case of cold division from a woman whom he had once seriously and singly loved. He had been bewildered in a burning haze, I will not say even of first love, but of first flirtations. The whole family stimulated him before he fell in love with one of them; and it continued to stimulate him long after he had quarrelled with her for causes that did not even destroy his affection for her. This view is strikingly supported by all the details of his attitude towards all the other
members of the sacred house of Hogarth. One of the sisters remained, of course, his dearest friend till death. Another who had died, he worshipped like a saint, and he always asked to be buried in her grave. He was married on April 2, 1836. Forster remarks that a few days before the announcement of their marriage in the Times, the same paper contained another announcement that on the 31st would be published the first number of a work called “The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club.” It is the beginning of his career.

The “Sketches,” apart from splendid splashes of humour here and there, are not manifestations of the man of genius. We might almost say that this book is one of the few books by Dickens which would not, standing alone, have made his fame. And yet standing alone it did make his fame. His contemporaries could see a new spirit in it, where we, familiar with the larger fruits of that spirit, can only see a continuation of the prosaic and almost wooden wit of the comic books of that day. But in any case we should hardly look in the man’s first book for the fulness of his contribution to letters. Youth is almost everything else, but it is hardly ever original. We read of young men bursting on the old world with a new message. But youth in actual experience is the period of imitation and even of obedience. Subjectively its emotions may be furious and headlong; but its only external outcome is a furious imitation and a headlong obedience. As we grow older we learn the special thing we have to do. As a man goes on towards the grave he discovers gradually a philosophy he can really call fresh, a style he can really call his own, and as he becomes an older man he becomes a new writer. Ibsen, in his youth, wrote almost classic plays about vikings; it was in his old age that he began to break windows and throw fireworks. The only fault, it was said, of Browning’s first poems was that they had “too much beauty of imagery, and too little wealth of thought.” The only fault, that is, of Browning’s first poems, was that they were not Browning’s.

In one way, however, the “Sketches by Boz” do stand out very symbolically in the life of Dickens. They constitute in a manner the dedication of him to his especial task; the sympathetic and yet exaggerated painting of the poorer middle-class. He was to make men feel that this dull middle-class was actually a kind of elf-land. But here, again, the work is rude and undeveloped; and this is shown in the fact that it is a great deal more exaggerative than it is sympathetic. We are not, of course, concerned with the kind of people who say that they wish that Dickens was more refined. If those people are ever refined it will be by fire. But there is in this earliest work, an element which almost vanished in the later ones, an element which is typical of the middle-classes in England, and which is in a
more real sense to be called vulgar. I mean that in these little farces there is a trace in the author as well as in the characters, of that petty sense of social precedence, that hubbub of little unheard-of oligarchies, which is the only serious sin of bourgeoisie of Britain. It may seem pragmatical, for example, to instance such rowdy farce as the story of Horatio Sparkins, which tells how a tuft-hunting family entertained a rhetorical youth thinking he was a lord, and found he was a draper’s assistant. No doubt they were very snobbish in thinking that a lord must be eloquent; but we cannot help feeling that Dickens is almost equally snobbish in feeling it so very funny that a draper’s assistant should be eloquent. A free man, one would think, would despise the family quite as much if Horatio had been a peer. Here, and here only, there is just a touch of the vulgarity, of the only vulgarity of the world out of which Dickens came. For the only element of lowness that there really is in our populace is exactly that they are full of superiorities and very conscious of class. Shades, imperceptible to the eyes of others, but as hard and haughty as a Brahmin caste, separate one kind of charwoman from another kind of charwoman. Dickens was destined to show with inspired symbolism all the immense virtues of the democracy. He was to show them as the most humorous part of our civilisation; which they certainly are. He was to show them as the most promptly and practically compassionate part of our civilisation; which they certainly are. The democracy has a hundred exuberant good qualities; the democracy has only one outstanding sin—it is not democratic.
CHAPTER IV

“THE PICKWICK PAPERS”

Round the birth of “Pickwick” broke one of those literary quarrels that were too common in the life of Dickens. Such quarrels indeed generally arose from some definite mistake or misdemeanour on the part of somebody else; but they were also made possible by an indefinite touchiness and susceptibility in Dickens himself. He was so sensitive on points of personal authorship that even his sacred sense of humour deserted him. He turned people into mortal enemies whom he might have turned very easily into immortal jokes. It was not that he was lawless; in a sense it was that he was too legal; but he did not understand the principle of de minimis non curat lex. Anybody could draw him; any fool could make a fool of him. Any obscure madman who chose to say that he had written the whole of “Martin Chuzzlewit”; any penny-a-liner who chose to say that Dickens wore no shirt-collar, could call forth the most passionate and public denials as of a man pleading “not guilty” to witchcraft or high treason. Hence the letters of Dickens are filled with a certain singular type of quarrels and complaints, quarrels and complaints in which one cannot say that he was on the wrong side, but that merely even in being on the right side he was in the wrong place. He was not only a generous man, he was even a just man; to have made against anybody a charge or claim which was unfair would have been insupportable to him. His weakness was that he found the unfair claim or charge, however small, equally insupportable when brought against himself. No one can say of him that he was often wrong; we can only say of him as of many pugnacious people, that he was too often right.

The incidents attending the inauguration of “The Pickwick Papers” are not, perhaps, a perfect example of this trait, because Dickens was here a hand-to-mouth journalist, and the blow might possibly have been more disabling than those struck at him in his days of triumph. But all through those days of triumph, and to the day of his death, Dickens took this old tea-cup tempest with the most terrible gravity, drew up declarations, called witnesses, preserved pulverising documents, and handed on to his children the forgotten folly as if it had been a Highland feud. Yet the unjust claim made on him was so much more ridiculous even than it was unjust, that it seems strange that he should have remembered it for a month except for his amusement. The facts are simple and familiar to most
people. The publishers—Chapman & Hall—wished to produce some kind of serial with comic illustrations by a popular caricaturist named Seymour. This artist was chiefly famous for his rendering of the farcical side of sport, and to suit this speciality it was very vaguely suggested to Dickens by the publishers that he should write about a Nimrod Club, or some such thing, a club of amateur sportsmen, doomed to perpetual ignominies. Dickens objected in substance upon two very sensible grounds—first, that sporting sketches were stale; and second, that he knew nothing about sport. He changed the idea to that of a general club for travel and investigation, the Pickwick Club, and only retained one fated sportsman, Mr. Winkle, the melancholy remnant of the Nimrod Club that never was. The first seven pictures appeared with the signature of Seymour and the letter press of Dickens, and in them Winkle and his woes were fairly, but not extraordinarily prominent. Before the eighth picture appeared Seymour had blown his brains out. After a brief interval of the employment of a man named Buss, Dickens obtained the assistance of Hablot K. Browne, whom we all call “Phiz,” and may almost, in a certain sense, be said to have gone into partnership with him. They were as suited to each other and to the common creation of a unique thing as Gilbert and Sullivan. No other illustrator ever created the true Dickens characters with the precise and correct quantum of exaggeration. No other illustrator ever breathed the true Dickens atmosphere, in which clerks are clerks and yet at the same time elves.

To the tame mind the above affair does not seem to offer anything very promising in the way of a row. But Seymour’s widow managed to evolve out of it the proposition that somehow or other her husband had written “Pickwick,” or, at least, had been responsible for the genius and success of it. It does not appear that she had anything at all resembling a reason for this opinion except the unquestionable fact that the publishers had started with the idea of employing Seymour. This was quite true, and Dickens (who over and above his honesty was far too quarrelsome a man not to try and keep in the right, and who showed a sort of fierce carefulness in telling the truth in such cases) never denied it or attempted to conceal it. It was quite true, that at the beginning, instead of Seymour being employed to illustrate Dickens, Dickens may be said to have been employed to illustrate Seymour. But that Seymour invented anything in the letterpress large or small, that he invented either the outline of Mr. Pickwick’s character, or the number of Mr. Pickwick’s cabman, that he invented either the story, or so much as a semi-colon in the story was not only never proved, but was never very lucidly alleged. Dickens fills his letters with all that there is to be
said against Mrs. Seymour’s idea; it is not very clear whether there was anything definitely said for it.

Upon the mere superficial fact and law of the affair, Dickens ought to have been superior to this silly business. But in a much deeper and a much more real sense he ought to have been superior to it. It did not really touch him or his greatness at all, even as an abstract allegation. If Seymour had started the story, had provided Dickens with his puppets, Tupman or Jingle, Dickens would still have been Dickens and Seymour only Seymour. As a matter of fact, it happened to be a contemptible lie, but it would have been an equally contemptible truth. For the fact is that the greatness of Dickens and especially the greatness of Pickwick is not of a kind that could be affected by somebody else suggesting the first idea. It could not be affected by somebody else writing the first chapter. If it could be shown that another man had suggested to Hawthorne (let us say) the primary conception of “The Scarlet Letter,” Hawthorne who worked it out would still be an exquisite workman; but he would be by so much less a creator. But in a case like Pickwick there is a simple test. If Seymour gave Dickens the main idea of Pickwick, what was it? There is no primary conception of Pickwick for anyone to suggest. Dickens not only did not get the general plan from Seymour, he did not get it at all. In Pickwick, and, indeed, in Dickens, generally it is in the details that the author is creative, it is in the details that he is vast. The power of the book lies in the perpetual torrent of ingenious and inventive treatment; the theme (at least at the beginning) simply does not exist. The idea of Tupman, the fat lady-killer, is in itself quite dreary and vulgar; it is the detailed Tupman, as he is developed, who is unexpectedly amusing. The idea of Winkle, the clumsy sportsman, is in itself quite stale; it is as he goes on repeating himself that he becomes original. We hear of men whose imagination can touch with magic the dull facts of our life, but Dickens’s yet more indomitable fancy could touch with magic even our dull fiction. Before we are half-way through the book the stock characters of dead and damned farces astonish us like splendid strangers.

Seymour’s claim, then, viewed symbolically, was even a compliment. It was true in spirit that Dickens obtained (or might have obtained) the start of Pickwick from somebody else, from anybody else. For he had a more gigantic energy than the energy of the intense artist, the energy which is prepared to write something. He had the energy which is prepared to write anything. He could have finished any man’s tale. He could have breathed a mad life into any man’s characters. If it had been true that Seymour had planned out Pickwick, if Seymour had fixed the chapters and named and numbered the characters, his
slave would have shown even in these shackles such a freedom as would have shaken the world. If Dickens had been forced to make his incidents out of a chapter in a child’s reading-book, or the names in a scrap of newspaper, he would have turned them in ten pages into creatures of his own. Seymour, as I say, was in a manner right in spirit. Dickens would at this time get his materials from anywhere, in the sense that he cared little what materials they were. He would not have stolen; but if he had stolen he would never have imitated. The power which he proceeded at once to exhibit was the one power in letters which literally cannot be imitated, the primary inexhaustible creative energy, the enormous prodigality of genius which no one but another genius could parody. To claim to have originated an idea of Dickens is like claiming to have contributed one glass of water to Niagara. Wherever this stream or that stream started the colossal cataract of absurdity went roaring night and day. The volume of his invention overwhelmed all doubt of his inventiveness; Dickens was evidently a great man; unless he was a thousand men.

The actual circumstances of the writing and publishing of “Pickwick” shows that while Seymour’s specific claim was absurd, Dickens’s indignant exactitude about every jot and tittle of authorship was also inappropriate and misleading. “The Pickwick Papers,” when all is said and done, did emerge out of a haze of suggestions and proposals in which more than one person was involved. The publishers failed to base the story on a Nimrod Club, but they succeeded in basing it on a club. Seymour, by virtue of his idiosyncrasy, if he did not create, brought about the creation of Mr. Winkle. Seymour sketched Mr. Pickwick as a tall, thin man. Mr. Chapman (apparently without any word from Dickens) boldly turned him into a short, fat man. Chapman took the type from a corpulent old dandy named Foster, who wore tights and gaiters and lived at Richmond. In this sense, were we affected by this idle aspect of the thing, we might call Chapman the real originator of “Pickwick.” But as I have suggested, originating “Pickwick” is not the point. It was quite easy to originate “Pickwick.” The difficulty was to write it.

However such things may be, there can be no question of the result of this chaos. In “The Pickwick Papers” Dickens sprang suddenly from a comparatively low level to a very high one. To the level of “Sketches by Boz” he never afterwards descended. To the level of “The Pickwick Papers” it is doubtful if he ever afterwards rose. “Pickwick,” indeed, is not a good novel; but it is not a bad novel, for it is not a novel at all. In one sense, indeed, it is something nobler than a novel, for no novel with a plot and a proper termination could emit that sense
of everlasting youth—a sense as of the gods gone wandering in England. This is not a novel, for all novels have an end; and “Pickwick,” properly speaking, has no end—he is equal unto the angels. The point at which, as a fact, we find the printed matter terminates is not an end in any artistic sense of the word. Even as a boy I believed there were some more pages that were torn out of my copy, and I am looking for them still. The book might have been cut short anywhere else. It might have been cut short after Mr. Pickwick was released by Mr. Nupkins, or after Mr. Pickwick was fished out of the water, or at a hundred other places. And we should still have known that this was not really the story’s end. We should have known that Mr. Pickwick was still having the same high adventures on the same high roads. As it happens the book ends after Mr. Pickwick has taken a house in the neighbourhood of Dulwich. But we know he did not stop there. We know he broke out, that he took again the road of the high adventures; we know that if we take it ourselves in any acre of England, we may come suddenly upon him in a lane.

But this relation of “Pickwick” to the strict form of fiction demands a further word, which should indeed be said in any case before the consideration of any or all of the Dickens tales. Dickens’s work is not to be reckoned in novels at all. Dickens’s work is to be reckoned always by characters, sometimes by groups, oftener by episodes, but never by novels. You cannot discuss whether “Nicholas Nickleby” is a good novel, or whether “Our Mutual Friend” is a bad novel. Strictly, there is no such novel as “Nicholas Nickleby.” There is no such novel as “Our Mutual Friend.” They are simply lengths cut from the flowing and mixed substance called Dickens—a substance of which any given length will be certain to contain a given proportion of brilliant and of bad stuff. You can say, according to your opinions, “the Crummles part is perfect,” or “the Boffins are a mistake,” just as a man watching a river go by him could count here a floating flower, and there a streak of scum. But you cannot artistically divide the output into books. The best of his work can be found in the worst of his works. “The Tale of Two Cities” is a good novel; “Little Dorrit” is not a good novel. But the description of “The Circumlocution Office” in “Little Dorrit” is quite as good as the description of “Tellson’s Bank” in “The Tale of Two Cities.” “The Old Curiosity Shop” is not so good as “David Copperfield,” but Swiveller is quite as good as Micawber. Nor is there any reason why these superb creatures, as a general rule, should be in one novel any more than another. There is no reason why Sam Weller, in the course of his wanderings, should not wander into “Nicholas Nickleby.” There is no reason why Major Bagstock, in his brisk way,
should not walk straight out of “Dombey and Son” and straight into “Martin Chuzzlewit.” To this generalisation some modification should be added. “Pickwick” stands by itself, and has even a sort of unity in not pretending to unity. “David Copperfield,” in a less degree, stands by itself, as being the only book in which Dickens wrote of himself; and “The Tale of Two Cities” stands by itself as being the only book in which Dickens slightly altered himself. But as a whole, this should be firmly grasped, that the units of Dickens, the primary elements, are not the stories, but the characters who affect the stories—or, more often still, the characters who do not affect the stories.

This is a plain matter; but, unless it be stated and felt, Dickens may be greatly misunderstood and greatly underrated. For not only is his whole machinery directed to facilitating the self-display of certain characters, but something more deep and more unmodern still is also true of him. It is also true that all the moving machinery exists only to display entirely static character. Things in the Dickens story shift and change only in order to give us glimpses of great characters that do not change at all. If we had a sequel of Pickwick ten years afterwards, Pickwick would be exactly the same age. We know he would not have fallen into that strange and beautiful second childhood which soothed and simplified the end of Colonel Newcome. Newcome, throughout the book, is in an atmosphere of time: Pickwick, throughout the book, is not. This will probably be taken by most modern people as praise of Thackeray and dispraise of Dickens. But this only shows how few modern people understand Dickens. It also shows how few understand the faiths and the fables of mankind. The matter can only be roughly stated in one way. Dickens did not strictly make a literature; he made a mythology.

For a few years our corner of Western Europe has had a fancy for this thing we call fiction; that is, for writing down our own lives or similar lives in order to look at them. But though we call it fiction, it differs from older literatures chiefly in being less fictitious. It imitates not only life, but the limitations of life it not only reproduces life, it reproduces death. But outside us, in every other country, in every other age, there has been going on from the beginning a more fictitious kind of fiction. I mean the kind now called folklore, the literature of the people. Our modern novels, which deal with men as they are, are chiefly produced by a small and educated section of society. But this other literature deals with men greater than they are—with demi-gods and heroes; and that is far too important a matter to be trusted to the educated classes. The fashioning of these portents is a popular trade, like ploughing or bricklaying; the men who made hedges, the men
who made ditches, were the men who made deities. Men could not elect their kings, but they could elect their gods. So we find ourselves faced with a fundamental contrast between what is called fiction and what is called folklore. The one exhibits an abnormal degree of dexterity operating within our daily limitations; the other exhibits quite normal desires extended beyond those limitations. Fiction means the common things as seen by the uncommon people. Fairy tales mean the uncommon things as seen by the common people.

As our world advances through history towards its present epoch, it becomes more specialist, less democratic, and folklore turns gradually into fiction. But it is only slowly that the old elfin fire fades into the light of common realism. For ages after our characters have dressed up in the clothes of mortals they betray the blood of the gods. Even our phraseology is full of relics of this. When a modern novel is devoted to the bewilderments of a weak young clerk who cannot decide which woman he wants to marry, or which new religion he believes in, we still give this knock-kneed cad the name of “the hero”—the name which is the crown of Achilles. The popular preference for a story with “a happy ending” is not, or at least was not, a mere sweet-stuff optimism; it is the remains of the old idea of the triumph of the dragon-slayer, the ultimate apotheosis of the man beloved of heaven.

But there is another and more intangible trace of this fading supernaturalism—a trace very vivid to the reader, but very elusive to the critic. It is a certain air of endlessness in the episodes, even in the shortest episodes—a sense that, although we leave them, they still go on. Our modern attraction to short stories is not an accident of form; it is the sign of a real sense of fleetingness and fragility; it means that existence is only an impression, and, perhaps, only an illusion. A short story of to-day has the air of a dream; it has the irrevocable beauty of a falsehood; we get a glimpse of grey streets of London or red plains of India, as in an opium vision; we see people—arresting people with fiery and appealing faces. But when the story is ended, the people are ended. We have no instinct of anything ultimate and enduring behind the episodes. The moderns, in a word, describe life in short stories because they are possessed with the sentiment that life itself is an uncommonly short story, and perhaps not a true one. But in this elder literature, even in the comic literature (indeed, especially in the comic literature), the reverse is true. The characters are felt to be fixed things of which we have fleeting glimpses; that is, they are felt to be divine. Uncle Toby is talking for ever, as the elves are dancing for ever. We feel that whenever we hammer on the house of Falstaff, Falstaff will be at home. We feel it as a Pagan
would feel that, if a cry broke the silence after ages of unbelief, Apollo would still be listening in his temple. These writers may tell short stories, but we feel they are only parts of a long story. And herein lies the peculiar significance, the peculiar sacredness even, of penny dreadfuls and the common printed matter made for our errand-boys. Here in dim and desperate forms, under the ban of our base culture, stormed at by silly magistrates, sneered at by silly schoolmasters,—here is the old popular literature still popular; here is the unmistakable voluminousness, the thousand and one tales of Dick Deadshot, like the thousand and one tales of Robin Hood. Here is the splendid and static boy, the boy who remains a boy through a thousand volumes and a thousand years. Here in mean alleys and dim shops, shadowed and shamed by the police, mankind is still driving its dark trade in heroes. And elsewhere, and in all other ages, in braver fashion, under cleaner skies, the same eternal tale-telling goes on, and the whole mortal world is a factory of immortals.

Dickens was a mythologist rather than a novelist; he was the last of the mythologists, and perhaps the greatest. He did not always manage to make his characters men, but he always managed, at the least, to make them gods. They are creatures like Punch or Father Christmas. They live statically, in a perpetual summer of being themselves. It was not the aim of Dickens to show the effect of time and circumstance upon a character; it was not even his aim to show the effect of a character on time and circumstance. It is worth remark, in passing, that whenever he tried to describe change in a character, he made a mess of it, as in the repentance of Dombey or the apparent deterioration of Boffin. It was his aim to show character hung in a kind of happy void, in a world apart from time,—yes, and essentially apart from circumstance, though the phrase may seem odd in connection with the godlike horse-play of “Pickwick.” But all the Pickwickian events, wild as they often are, were only designed to display the greater wildness of souls, or sometimes merely to bring the reader within touch, so to speak, of that wildness. The author would have fired Mr. Pickwick out of a can non to get him to Wardle’s by Christmas; he would have taken the roof off to drop him into Bob Sawyer’s party. But once put Pickwick at Wardle’s, with his punch and a group of gorgeous personalities, and nothing will move him from his chair. Once he is at Sawyer’s party, he forgets how he got there; he forgets Mrs. Bardell and all his story. For the story was but an incantation to call up a god, and the god (Mr. Jack Hopkins) is present in divine power. Once the great characters are face to face, the ladder by which they climbed is forgotten and falls down, the structure of the story drops to pieces, the plot is abandoned; the other characters
deserted at every kind of crisis; the whole crowded thoroughfare of the tale is blocked by two or three talkers, who take their immortal ease as if they were already in Paradise. For they do not exist for the story; the story exists for them; and they know it.

To every man alive, one must hope, it has in some manner happened that he has talked with his more fascinating friends round a table on some night when all the numerous personalities unfolded themselves like great tropical flowers. All fell into their parts as in some delightful impromptu play. Every man was more himself than he had ever been in this vale of tears. Every man was a beautiful caricature of himself. The man who has known such nights will understand the exaggerations of “Pickwick.” The man who has not known such nights will not enjoy “Pickwick” nor (I imagine) heaven. For, as I have said, Dickens is, in this matter, close to popular religion, which is the ultimate and reliable religion. He conceives an endless joy; he conceives creatures as permanent as Puck or Pan—creatures whose will to live æons upon æons cannot satisfy. He is not come, as a writer, that his creatures may copy life and copy its narrowness; he is come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. It is absurd indeed that Christians should be called the enemies of life because they wish life to last for ever; it is more absurd still to call the old comic writers dull because they wished their unchanging characters to last for ever. Both popular religion, with its endless joys, and the old comic story, with its endless jokes, have in our time faded together. We are too weak to desire that undying vigour. We believe that you can have too much of a good thing—a blasphemous belief, which at one blow wrecks all the heavens that men have hoped for. The grand old defiers of God were not afraid of an eternity of torment. We have come to be afraid of an eternity of joy. It is not my business here to take sides in this division between those who like life and long novels and those who like death and short stories; my only business is to point out that those who see in Dickens’s unchanging characters and recurring catch-words a mere stiffness and lack of living movement miss the point and nature of his work. His tradition is another tradition altogether; his aim is another aim altogether to those of the modern novelists who trace the alchemy of experience and the autumn tints of character. He is there, like the common people of all ages, to make deities; he is there, as I have said, to exaggerate life in the direction of life. The spirit he at bottom celebrates is that of two friends drinking wine together and talking through the night. But for him they are two deathless friends talking through an endless night and pouring wine from an inexhaustible bottle.
This, then, is the first firm fact to grasp about “Pickwick”—about “Pickwick” more than about any of the other stories. It is, first and foremost, a supernatural story. Mr. Pickwick was a fairy. So was old Mr. Weller. This does not imply that they were suited to swing in a trapeze of gossamer; it merely implies that if they had fallen out of it on their heads they would not have died. But, to speak more strictly, Mr. Samuel Pickwick is not the fairy; he is the fairy prince; that is to say, he is the abstract wanderer and wonderer, the Ulysses of comedy; the half-human and half-elfin creature—human enough to wander, human enough to wonder, but still sustained with that merry fatalism that is natural to immortal beings—sustained by that hint of divinity which tells him in the darkest hour that he is doomed to live happily ever afterwards. He has set out walking to the end of the world, but he knows he will find an inn there.

And this brings us to the best and boldest element of originality in “Pickwick.” It has not, I think, been observed, and it may be that Dickens did not observe it. Certainly he did not plan it; it grew gradually, perhaps out of the unconscious part of his soul, and warmed the whole story like a slow fire. Of course it transformed the whole story also; transformed it out of all likeness to itself. About this latter point was waged one of the numberless little wars of Dickens. It was a part of his pugnacious vanity that he refused to admit the truth of the mildest criticism. Moreover, he used his inexhaustible ingenuity to find an apologia that was generally an afterthought. Instead of laughingly admitting, in answer to criticism, the glorious improbability of Pecksniff, he retorted with a sneer, clever and very unjust, that he was not surprised that the Pecksniffs should deny the portrait of Pecksniff. When it was objected that the pride of old Paul Dombey breaks as abruptly as a stick, he tried to make out that there had been an absorbing psychological struggle going on in that gentleman all the time, which the reader was too stupid to perceive. Which is, I am afraid, rubbish. And so, in a similar vein, he answered those who pointed out to him the obvious and not very shocking fact that our sentiments about Pickwick are very different in the second part of the book from our sentiments in the first; that we find ourselves at the beginning setting out in the company of a farcical old fool, if not a farcical old humbug, and that we find ourselves at the end saying farewell to a fine old England merchant, a monument of genial sanity. Dickens answered with the same ingenious self-justification as in the other cases—that surely it often happened that a man met us first arrayed in his more grotesque qualities, and that fuller acquaintance unfolded his more serious merits. This, of course, is quite true; but I think any honest admirer of “Pickwick” will feel that it is not an
answer. For the fault in “Pickwick” (if it be a fault) is a change not in the hero but in the whole atmosphere. The point is not that Pickwick turns into a different kind of man; it is that “The Pickwick Papers” turns into a different kind of book. And however artistic both parts may be, this combination must, in strict art, be called inartistic. A man is quite artistically justified in writing a tale in which a man as cowardly as Bob Acres becomes a man as brave as Hector. But a man is not artistically justified in writing a tale which begins in the style of “The Rivals” and ends in the style of the “Iliad.” In other words, we do not mind the hero changing in the course of a book; but we are not prepared for the author changing in the course of the book. And the author did change in the course of this book. He made, in the midst of this book, a great discovery, which was the discovery of his destiny, or, what is more important, of his duty. That discovery turned him from the author of “Sketches by Boz” to the author of “David Copperfield.” And that discovery constituted the thing of which I have spoken—the outstanding and arresting original feature in “The Pickwick Papers.”

“Pickwick,” I have said, is a romance of adventure, and Samuel Pickwick is the romantic adventurer. So much is indeed obvious. But the strange and stirring discovery which Dickens made was this—that having chosen a fat old man of the middle classes as a good thing of which to make a butt, he found that a fat old man of the middle classes is the very best thing of which to make a romantic adventurer. “Pickwick” is supremely original in that it is the adventures of an old man. It is a fairy tale in which the victor is not the youngest of the three brothers, but one of the oldest of their uncles. The result is both noble and new and true. There is nothing which so much needs simplicity as adventure. And there is no one who so much possesses simplicity as an honest and elderly man of business. For romance he is better than a troop of young troubadours; for the swaggering young fellow anticipates his adventures, just as he anticipates his income. Hence both the adventures and the income, when he comes up to them, are not there. But a man in late middle-age has grown used to the plain necessities, and his first holiday is a second youth. A good man, as Thackeray said with such thorough and searching truth, grows simpler as he grows older. Samuel Pickwick in his youth was probably an insufferable young coxcomb. He knew then, or thought he knew, all about the confidence tricks of swindlers like Jingle. He knew then, or thought he knew, all about the amatory designs of sly ladies like Mrs. Bardell. But years and real life have relieved him of this idle and evil knowledge. He has had the high good luck in losing the follies of youth to lose the wisdom of youth also. Dickens has caught, in a manner at once wild and
convincing, this queer innocence of the afternoon of life. The round, moonlike face, the round, moonlike spectacles of Samuel Pickwick move through the tale as emblems of a certain spherical simplicity. They are fixed in that grave surprise that may be seen in babies; that grave surprise which is the only real happiness that is possible to man. Pickwick’s round face is like a round and honourable mirror, in which are reflected all the fantasies of earthly existence; for surprise is, strictly speaking, the only kind of reflection. All this grew gradually on Dickens. It is odd to recall to our minds the original plan, the plan of the Nimrod Club, and the author who was to be wholly occupied in playing practical jokes on his characters. He had chosen (or somebody else had chosen) that corpulent old simpleton as a person peculiarly fitted to fall down trapdoors, to shoot over butter slides, to struggle with apple-pie beds, to be tipped out of carts and dipped into horse-ponds. But Dickens, and Dickens only, discovered as he went on how fitted the fat old man was to rescue ladies, to defy tyrants, to dance, to leap, to experiment with life, to be a deus ex machinâ and even a knight errant. Dickens made this discovery. Dickens went into the Pickwick Club to scoff, and Dickens remained to pray.

Molière and his marquises are very much amused when M. Jourdain, the fat old middle-class fellow, discovers with delight that he has been talking prose all his life. I have often wondered whether Molière saw how in this fact M. Jourdain towers above them all and touches the stars. He has the freshness to enjoy a fresh fact, the freshness to enjoy even an old one. He can feel that the common thing prose is an accomplishment like verse; and it is an accomplishment like verse; it is the miracle of language. He can feel the subtle taste of water, and roll it on his tongue like wine. His simple vanity and voracity, his innocent love of living, his ignorant love of learning, are things far fuller of romance than the weariness and foppishness of the sniggering cavaliers. When he consciously speaks prose, he unconsciously thinks poetry. It would be better for us all if we were as conscious that supper is supper or that life is life, as this true romantic was that prose is actually prose. M. Jourdain is here the type, Mr. Pickwick is elsewhere the type, of this true and neglected thing, the romance of the middle classes. It is the custom in our little epoch to sneer at the middle classes. Cockney artists profess to find the bourgeoisie dull, as if artists had any business to find anything dull. Decadents talk contemptuously of its conventions and its set tasks; it never occurs to them that conventions and set tasks are the very way to keep that greenness in the grass and that redness in the roses—which they have lost for ever. Stevenson, in his incomparable “Lantern Bearers,” describes the ecstasy of
a schoolboy in the mere fact of buttoning a dark lantern under a dark great-coat. If you wish for that ecstasy of the schoolboy, you must have the boy; but you must also have the school. Strict opportunities and defined hours are the very outline of that enjoyment. A man like Mr. Pickwick has been at school all his life, and when he comes out he astonishes the youngsters. His heart, as that acute psychologist, Mr. Weller, points out, had been born later than his body. It will be remembered that Mr. Pickwick also, when on the escapade of Winkle and Miss Allen, took immoderate pleasure in the performances of a dark lantern which was not dark enough, and was nothing but a nuisance to everybody. His soul also was with Stevenson’s boys on the grey sands of Haddington, talking in the dark by the sea. He also was of the league of the “Lantern Bearers.” Stevenson, I remember, says that in the shops of that town they could purchase “penny Pickwicks (that remarkable cigar).” Let us hope they smoked them, and that the rotund ghost of Pickwick hovered over the rings of smoke.

Pickwick goes through life with that godlike gullibility which is the key to all adventures. The greenhorn is the ultimate victor in everything; it is he that gets the most out of life. Because Pickwick is led away by Jingle, he will be led to the White Hart Inn, and see the only Weller cleaning boots in the courtyard. Because he is bamboozled by Dodson and Fogg, he will enter the prison house like a paladin, and rescue the man and the woman who have wronged him most. His soul will never starve for exploits or excitements who is wise enough to be made a fool of. He will make himself happy in the traps that have been laid for him; he will roll in their nets and sleep. All doors will fly open to him who has a mildness more defiant than mere courage. The whole is unerringly expressed in one fortunate phrase—he will be always “taken in.” To be taken in everywhere is to see the inside of everything. It is the hospitality of circumstance. With torches and trumpets, like a guest, the greenhorn is taken in by Life. And the sceptic is cast out by it.
CHAPTER V

THE GREAT POPULARITY

There is one aspect of Charles Dickens which must be of interest even to that subterranean race which does not admire his books. Even if we are not interested in Dickens as a great event in English literature, we must still be interested in him as a great event in English history. If he had not his place with Fielding and Thackeray, he would still have his place with Wat Tyler and Wilkes; for the man led a mob. He did what no English statesman, perhaps, has really done; he called out the people. He was popular in a sense of which we moderns have not even a notion. In that sense there is no popularity now. There are no popular authors today. We call such authors as Mr. Guy Boothby or Mr. William Le Queux popular authors. But this is popularity altogether in a weaker sense; not only in quantity, but in quality. The old popularity was positive; the new is negative. There is a great deal of difference between the eager man who wants to read a book, and the tired man who wants a book to read. A man reading a Le Queux mystery wants to get to the end of it. A man reading the Dickens novel wished that it might never end. Men read a Dickens story six times because they knew it so well. If a man can read a Le Queux story six times it is only because he can forget it six times. In short, the Dickens novel was popular not because it was an unreal world, but because it was a real world; a world in which the soul could live. The modern “shocker” at its very best is an interlude in life. But in the days when Dickens’s work was coming out in serial, people talked as if real life were itself the interlude between one issue of “Pickwick” and another.

In reaching the period of the publication of “Pickwick,” we reach this sudden apotheosis of Dickens. Henceforward he filled the literary world in a way hard to imagine. Fragments of that huge fashion remain in our daily language; in the talk of every trade or public question are embedded the wrecks of that enormous religion. Men give out the airs of Dickens without even opening his books; just as Catholics can live in a tradition of Christianity without having looked at the New Testament. The man in the street has more memories of Dickens, whom he has not read, than of Marie Corelli, whom he has. There is nothing in any way parallel to this omnipresence and vitality in the great comic characters of Boz. There are no modern Bumbles and Pecksniffs, no modern Gamps and Micawbers. Mr. Rudyard Kipling (to take an author of a higher type than those
before mentioned) is called, and called justly, a popular author; that is to say, he is widely read, greatly enjoyed, and highly remunerated; he has achieved the paradox of at once making poetry and making money. But let anyone who wishes to see the difference try the experiment of assuming the Kipling characters to be common property like the Dickens characters. Let anyone go into an average parlour and allude to Strickland as he would allude to Mr. Bumble, the Beadle. Let anyone say that somebody is “a perfect Learoyd,” as he would say “a perfect Pecksniff.” Let anyone write a comic paragraph for a halfpenny paper, and allude to Mrs. Hawksbee instead of to Mrs. Gamp. He will soon discover that the modern world has forgotten its own fiercest booms more completely than it has forgotten this formless tradition from its fathers. The mere dregs of it come to more than any contemporary excitement; the gleaning of the grapes of “Pickwick” is more than the whole vintage of “Soldiers Three.” There is one instance, and I think only one, of an exception to this generalisation; there is one figure in our popular literature which would really be recognised by the populace. Ordinary men would understand you if you referred currently to Sherlock Holmes. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle would no doubt be justified in rearing his head to the stars, remembering that Sherlock Holmes is the only really familiar figure in modern fiction. But let him droop that head again with a gentle sadness, remembering that if Sherlock Holmes is the only familiar figure in modern fiction Sherlock Holmes is also the only familiar figure in the Sherlock Holmes tales. Not many people could say offhand what was the name of the owner of Silver Blaze, or whether Mrs. Watson was dark or fair. But if Dickens had written the Sherlock Holmes stories, every character in them would have been equally arresting and memorable. A Sherlock Holmes would have cooked the dinner for Sherlock Holmes; a Sherlock Holmes would have driven his cab. If Dickens brought in a man merely to carry a letter, he had time for a touch or two, and made him a giant. Dickens not only conquered the world, he conquered it with minor characters. Mr. John Smauker, the servant of Mr. Cyrus Bantam, though he merely passes across the stage, is almost as vivid to us as Mr. Samuel Weller, the servant of Mr. Samuel Pickwick. The young man with the lumpy forehead, who only says “Esker” to Mr. Podsnap’s foreign gentleman, is as good as Mr. Podsnap himself. They appear only for a fragment of time, but they belong to eternity. We have them only for an instant, but they have us for ever.

In dealing with Dickens, then, we are dealing with a man whose public success was a marvel and almost a monstrosity. And here I perceive that my friend, the purely artistic critic, primed himself with Flaubert and Turgenev, can
contain himself no longer. He leaps to his feet, upsetting his cup of cocoa, and asks contemptuously what all this has to do with criticism. “Why begin your study of an author,” he says, “with trash about popularity? Boothby is popular, and Le Queux is popular, and Mother Siegel is popular. If Dickens was even more popular, it may only mean that Dickens was even worse. The people like bad literature. If your object is to show that Dickens was good literature, you should rather apologise for his popularity, and try to explain it away. You should seek to show that Dickens’s work was good literature, although it was popular. Yes, that is your task, to prove that Dickens was admirable, although he was admired!”

I ask the artistic critic to be patient for a little and to believe that I have a serious reason for registering this historic popularity. To that we shall come presently. But as a manner of approach I may perhaps ask leave to examine this actual and fashionable statement, to which I have supposed him to have recourse—the statement that the people like bad literature, and even like literature because it is bad. This way of stating the thing is an error, and in that error lies matter of much import to Dickens and his destiny in letters. The public does not like bad literature. The public likes a certain kind of literature and likes that kind of literature even when it is bad better than another kind of literature even when it is good. Nor is this unreasonable; for the line between different types of literature is as real as the line between tears and laughter; and to tell people who can only get bad comedy that you have some first-class tragedy is as irrational as to offer a man who is shivering over weak warm coffee a really superior sort of ice.

Ordinary people dislike the delicate modern work, not because it is good or because it is bad, but because it is not the thing that they asked for. If, for instance, you find them pent in sterile streets and hungering for adventure and a violent secrecy, and if you then give them their choice between “A Study in Scarlet,” a good detective story, and “The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford,” a good psychological monologue, no doubt they will prefer “A Study in Scarlet.” But they will not do so because “The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford” is a very good monologue, but because it is evidently a very poor detective story. They will be indifferent to “Les Aveugles,” not because it is good drama, but because it is bad melodrama. They do not like good introspective sonnets; but neither do they like bad introspective sonnets, of which there are many. When they walk behind the brass of the Salvation Army band, instead of listening to harmonies at Queen’s Hall, it is always assumed that they prefer bad music. But
it may be merely that they prefer military music, music marching down the open street, and that if Dan Godfrey’s band could be smitten with salvation and lead them they would like that even better. And while they might easily get more satisfaction out of a screaming article in The War Cry than out of a page of Emerson about the Oversoul, this would not be because the page of Emerson is another and superior kind of literature. It would be because the page of Emerson is another (and inferior) kind of religion.

Dickens stands first as a defiant monument of what happens when a great literary genius has a literary taste akin to that of the community. For this kinship was deep and spiritual. Dickens was not like our ordinary demagogues and journalists. Dickens did not write what the people wanted. Dickens wanted what the people wanted. And with this was connected that other fact which must never be forgotten, and which I have more than once insisted on, that Dickens and his school had a hilarious faith in democracy and thought of the service of it as a sacred priesthood. Hence there was this vital point in his popularism, that there was no condescension in it. The belief that the rabble will only read rubbish can be read between the lines of all our contemporary writers, even of those writers whose rubbish the rabble reads. Mr. Fergus Hume has no more respect for the populace than Mr. George Moore. The only difference lies between those writers who will consent to talk down to the people, and those writers who will not consent to talk down to the people. But Dickens never talked down to the people. He talked up to the people. He approached the people like a deity and poured out his riches and his blood. This is what makes the immortal bond between him and the masses of men. He had not merely produced something they could understand, but he took it seriously, and toiled and agonised to produce it. They were not only enjoying one of the best writers, they were enjoying the best he could do. His raging and sleepless nights, his wild walks in the darkness, his note-books crowded, his nerves in rags, all this extraordinary output was but a fit sacrifice to the ordinary man. He climbed towards the lower classes. He panted upwards on weary wings to reach the heaven of the poor.

His power, then, lay in the fact that he expressed with an energy and brilliancy quite uncommon the things close to the common mind. But with this mere phrase, the common mind, we collide with a current error. Commonness and the common mind are now generally spoken of as meaning in some manner inferiority and the inferior mind; the mind of the mere mob. But the common mind means the mind of all the artists and heroes; or else it would not be common. Plato had the common mind; Dante had the common mind; or that
mind was not common. Commonness means the quality common to the saint and the sinner, to the philosopher and the fool; and it was this that Dickens grasped and developed. In everybody there is a certain thing that loves babies, that fears death, that likes sunlight that thing enjoys Dickens. And everybody does not mean uneducated crowds; everybody means everybody: everybody means Mrs. Meynell. This lady, a cloistered and fastidious writer, has written one of the best eulogies of Dickens that exist, an essay in praise of his pungent perfection of epithet. And when I say that everybody understands Dickens I do not mean that he is suited to the untaught intelligence. I mean that he is so plain that even scholars can understand him.

The best expression of the fact, however, is to be found in noting the two things in which he is most triumphant. In order of artistic value, next after his humour, comes his horror. And both his humour and his horror are of a kind strictly to be called human; that is, they belong to the basic part of us, below the lowest roots of our variety. His horror for instance is a healthy churchyard horror, a fear of the grotesque defamation called death; and this every man has, even if he also has the more delicate and depraved fears that come of an evil spiritual outlook. We may be afraid of a fine shade with Henry James; that is, we may be afraid of the world. We may be afraid of a taut silence with Maeterlinck, that is, we may be afraid of our own souls. But every one will certainly be afraid of a Cock Lane Ghost, including Henry James and Maeterlinck. This latter is literally a mortal fear, a fear of death; it is not the immortal fear, or fear of damnation, which belongs to all the more refined intellects of our day. In a word, Dickens does, in the exact sense, make the flesh creep; he does not, like the decadents, make the soul crawl. And the creeping of the flesh on being reminded of its fleshly failure is a strictly universal thing which we can all feel, while some of us are as yet uninstructed in the art of spiritual crawling. In the same way the Dickens mirth is a part of man and universal. All men can laugh at broad humour, even the subtle humorists. Even the modern flâneur, who can smile at a particular combination of green and yellow, would laugh at Mr. Lammle’s request for Mr. Fledgeby’s nose. In a word—the common things are common—even to the uncommon people.

These two primary dispositions of Dickens, to make the flesh creep and to make the sides ache, were a sort of twins of his spirit; they were never far apart and the fact of their affinity is interestingly exhibited in the first two novels.

Generally he mixed the two up in a book and mixed a great many other things with them. As a rule he cared little if he kept six stories of quite different colours
running in the same book. The effect was sometimes similar to that of playing
six tunes at once. He does not mind the coarse tragic figure of Jonas Chuzzlewit
crossing the mental stage which is full of the allegorical pantomime of Eden, Mr.
Chollop and The Watertoast Gazette, a scene which is as much of a satire as
“Gulliver,” and nearly as much of a fairy tale. He does not mind binding up a
rather pompous sketch of prostitution in the same book with an adorable
impossibility like Bunsby. But “Pickwick” is so far a coherent thing that it is
coherently comic and consistently rambling. And as a consequence his next book
was, upon the whole, coherently and consistently horrible. As his natural turn for
terrors was kept down in “Pickwick,” so his natural turn for joy and laughter is
kept down in “Oliver Twist.” In “Oliver Twist” the smoke of the thieves’ kitchen
hangs over the whole tale, and the shadow of Fagin falls everywhere. The little
lamp-lit rooms of Mr. Brownlow and Rose Maylie are to all appearance
purposely kept subordinate, a mere foil to the foul darkness without. It was a
strange and appropriate accident that Cruikshank and not “Phiz” should have
illustrated this book. There was about Cruikshank’s art a kind of cramped energy
which is almost the definition of the criminal mind. His drawings have a dark
strength: yet he does not only draw morbidly, he draws meanly. In the doubled-
up figure and frightful eyes of Fagin in the condemned cell there is not only a
baseness of subject; there is a kind of baseness in the very technique of it. It is
not drawn with the free lines of a free man; it has the half-witted secreties of a
hunted thief. It does not look merely like a picture of Fagin; it looks like a
picture by Fagin. Among these dark and detestable plates there is one which has,
with a kind of black directness, the dreadful poetry that does inhere in the story,
stumbling as it often is. It represents Oliver asleep at an open window in the
house of one of his humaner patrons. And outside the window, but as big and
close as if they were in the room, stand Fagin and the foul-laced Monks, staring
at him with dark monstrous visages and great white wicked eyes, in the style of
the simple devilry of the draughtsman. The very naïveté of the horror is
horrifying: the very woodenness of the two wicked men seems to make them
worse than mere men who are wicked. But this picture of big devils at the
window-sill does express, as has been suggested above, the thread of poetry in
the whole thing; the sense, that is, of the thieves as a kind of army of devils
compassing earth and sky crying for Oliver’s soul and besieging the house in
which he is barred for safety. In this matter there is, I think, a difference between
the author and the illustrator. In Cruikshank there was surely something morbid;
but, sensitive and sentimental as Dickens was, there was nothing morbid in him.
He had, as Stevenson had, more of the mere boy’s love of suffocating stories of blood and darkness; of skulls, of gibbets, of all the things, in a word, that are sombre without being sad. There is a ghastly joy in remembering our boyish reading about Sikes and his flight; especially about the voice of that unbearable pedlar which went on in a monotonous and maddening sing-song, “will wash out grease-stains, mud-stains, blood-stains,” until Sikes fled almost screaming. For this boyish mixture of appetite and repugnance there is a good popular phrase, “supping on horrors.” Dickens supped on horrors as he supped on Christmas pudding. He supped on horrors because he was an optimist and could sup on anything. There was no saner or simpler schoolboy than Traddles, who covered all his books with skeletons.

“Oliver Twist” had begun in Bentley’s Miscellany, which Dickens edited in 1837. It was interrupted by a blow that for the moment broke the author’s spirit and seemed to have broken his heart. His wife’s sister, Mary Hogarth, died suddenly. To Dickens his wife’s family seems to have been like his own; his affections were heavily committed to the sisters, and of this one he was peculiarly fond. All his life, through much conceit and sometimes something bordering on selfishness, we can feel the redeeming note of an almost tragic tenderness; he was a man who could really have died of love or sorrow. He took up the work of “Oliver Twist” again later in the year, and finished it at the end of 1838. His work was incessant and almost bewildering. In 1838 he had already brought out the first number of “Nicholas Nickleby.” But the great popularity went booming on; the whole world was roaring for books by Dickens, and more books by Dickens, and Dickens was labouring night and day like a factory. Among other things he edited the “Memoirs of Grimaldi,” The incident is only worth mentioning for the sake of one more example of the silly ease with which Dickens was drawn by criticism and the clever ease with which he managed, in these small squabbles, to defend himself. Somebody mildly suggested that, after all, Dickens had never known Grimaldi. Dickens was down on him like a thunderbolt, sardonically asking how close an intimacy Lord Braybrooke had with Mr. Samuel Pepys.

“Nicholas Nickleby” is the most typical perhaps of the tone of his earlier works. It is in form a very rambling, old-fashioned romance, the kind of romance in which the hero is only a convenience for the frustration of the villain. Nicholas is what is called in theatricals a stick. But any stick is good enough to beat a Squeers with. That strong thwack, that simplified energy is the whole object of such a story; and the whole of this tale is full of a kind of highly
picturesque platitude. The wicked aristocrats, Sir Mulberry Hawk, Lord Verisopht and the rest are inadequate versions of the fashionable profligate. But this is not (as some suppose) because Dickens in his vulgarity could not comprehend the refinement of patrician vice. There is no idea more vulgar or more ignorant than the notion that a gentleman is generally what is called refined. The error of the Hawk conception is that, if anything, he is too refined. Real aristocratic blackguards do not swagger and rant so well. A real fast baronet would not have defied Nicholas in the tavern with so much oratorical dignity. A real fast baronet would probably have been choked with apoplectic embarrassment and said nothing at all. But Dickens read into this aristocracy a grandiloquence and a natural poetry which, like all melodrama, is really the precious jewel of the poor.

But the book contains something which is much more Dickensian. It is exquisitely characteristic of Dickens that the truly great achievement of the story is the person who delays the story. Mrs. Nickleby, with her beautiful mazes of memory, does her best to prevent the story of Nicholas Nickleby from being told. And she does well. There is no particular necessity that we should know what happens to Madeline Bray. There is a desperate and crying necessity that we should know Mrs. Nickleby once had a foot-boy who had a wart on his nose and a driver who had a green shade over his left eye. If Mrs. Nickleby is a fool, she is one of those fools who are wiser than the world. She stands for a great truth which we must not forget; the truth that experience is not in real life a saddening thing at all. The people who have had misfortunes are generally the people who love to talk about them. Experience is really one of the gaieties of old age, one of its dissipations. Mere memory becomes a kind of debauch. Experience may be disheartening to those who are foolish enough to try to co-ordinate it and to draw deductions from it. But to those happy souls, like Mrs. Nickleby, to whom relevancy is nothing, the whole of their past life is like an inexhaustible fairyland. Just as we take a rambling walk because we know that a whole district is beautiful, so they indulge a rambling mind because they know that a whole existence is interesting. A boy does not plunge into his future more romantically and at random, than they plunge into their past.

Another gleam in the book is Mr. Mantalini. Of him, as of all the really great comic characters of Dickens, it is impossible to speak with any critical adequacy. Perfect absurdity is a direct thing, like physical pain, or a strong smell. A joke is a fact. However indefensible it is it cannot be attacked. However defensible it is it cannot be defended. That Mr. Mantalini should say in praising the “outline” of
his wife, “The two Countesses had no outlines, and the Dowager’s was a demned outline,”—this can only be called an unanswerable absurdity. You may try to analyze it, as Charles Lamb did the indefensible joke about the hare; you may dwell for a moment on the dark distinctions between the negative disqualification of the Countess and the positive disqualification of the Dowager, but you will not capture the violent beauty of it in any way. “She will be a lovely widow. I shall be a body. Some handsome women will cry; she will laugh demnebly.” This vision of demoniac heartlessness has the same defiant finality. I mention the matter here, but it has to be remembered in connection with all the comic masterpieces of Dickens. Dickens has greatly suffered with the critics precisely through this stunning simplicity in his best work. The critic is called upon to describe his sensations while enjoying Mantalini and Micawber, and he can no more describe them than he can describe a blow in the face, Thus Dickens, in this self-conscious, analytical and descriptive age, loses both ways. He is doubly unfitted for the best modern criticism, His bad work is below that criticism. His good work is above it.

But gigantic as were Dickens’s labours, gigantic as were the exactions from him, his own plans were more gigantic still. He had the type of mind that wishes to do every kind of work at once; to do everybody’s work as well as its own. There floated before him a vision of a monstrous magazine, entirely written by himself. It is true that when this scheme came to be discussed, he suggested that other pens might be occasionally employed; but, reading between the lines, it is sufficiently evident that he thought of the thing as a kind of vast multiplication of himself, with Dickens as editor opening letters, Dickens as leader-writer writing leaders, Dickens as reporter reporting meetings, Dickens as reviewer reviewing books, Dickens, for all I know, as office-boy opening and shutting doors. This serial, of which he spoke to Messrs. Chapman & Hall, began and broke off and remains as a colossal fragment bound together under the title of “Master Humphrey’s Clock.” One characteristic thing he wished to have in the periodical. He suggested an Arabian Nights of London, in which Gog and Magog, the giants of the city, should give forth chronicles as enormous as themselves. He had a taste for these schemes or frameworks for many tales. He made and abandoned many; many he half-fulfilled. I strongly suspect that he meant Major Jackman, in “Mrs. Lirriper’s Lodgings” and “Mrs. Lirriper’s Legacy,” to start a series of studies of that lady’s lodgers, a kind of history of No. 81, Norfolk Street, Strand. “The Seven Poor Travellers” was planned for seven stories; we will not say seven poor stories. Dickens had meant, probably,
to write a tale for each article of “Somebody’s Luggage”: he only got as far as the hat and the boots. This gigantesque scale of literary architecture, huge and yet curiously cozy, is characteristic of his spirit, fond of size and yet fond of comfort. He liked to have story within story, like room within room of some labyrinthine but comfortable castle. In this spirit he wished “Master Humphrey’s Clock” to begin, and to be a big frame or bookcase for numberless novels. The clock started; but the clock stopped.

In the prologue by Master Humphrey reappear Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller, and of that resurrection many things have been said, chiefly expressions of a reasonable regret. Doubtless they do not add much to their author’s reputation, but they add a great deal to their author’s pleasure. It was ingrained in him to wish to meet old friends. All his characters are, so to speak, designed to be old friends; in a sense every Dickens character is an old friend, even when he first appears. He comes to us mellow out of many implied interviews, and carries the firelight on his face. Dickens was simply pleased to meet Pickwick again, and being pleased, he made the old man too comfortable to be amusing.

But “Master Humphrey’s Clock” is now scarcely known except as the shell of one of the well-known novels. “The Old Curiosity Shop” was published in accordance with the original “Clock” scheme. Perhaps the most typical thing about it is the title. There seems no reason in particular, at the first and most literal glance, why the story should be called after the Old Curiosity Shop. Only two of the characters have anything to do with such a shop, and they leave it for ever in the first few pages. It is as if Thackeray had called the whole novel of “Vanity Fair” “Miss Pinkerton’s Academy.” It is as if Scott had given the whole story of “The Antiquary” the title of “The Hawes Inn.” But when we feel the situation with more fidelity we realise that this title is something in the nature of a key to the whole Dickens romance. His tales always started from some splendid hint in the streets. And shops, perhaps the most poetical of all things, often set off his fancy galloping. Every shop, in fact, was to him the door of romance. Among all the huge serial schemes of which we have spoken, it is a matter of wonder that he never started an endless periodical called “The Street,” and divided it into shops. He could have written an exquisite romance called “The Baker’s Shop”; another called “The Chemist’s Shop”; another called “The Oil Shop,” to keep company with “The Old Curiosity Shop.” Some incomparable baker he invented and forgot. Some gorgeous chemist might have been. Some more than mortal oil-man is lost to us for ever. This Old Curiosity Shop he did happen to linger by: its tale he did happen to tell.
Around “Little Nell,” of course, a controversy raged and rages; some implored Dickens not to kill her at the end of the story: some regret that he did not kill her at the beginning. To me the chief interest in this young person lies in the fact that she is an example, and the most celebrated example of what must have been, I think, a personal peculiarity, perhaps, a personal experience of Dickens. There is, of course, no paradox at all in saying that if we find in a good book a wildly impossible character it is very probable indeed that it was copied from a real person. This is one of the commonplaces of good art criticism. For although people talk of the restraints of fact and the freedom of fiction, the case for most artistic purposes is quite the other way. Nature is as free as air: art is forced to look probable. There may be a million things that do happen, and yet only one thing that convinces us is likely to happen. Out of a million possible things there may be only one appropriate thing. I fancy, therefore, that many stiff, unconvincing characters are copied from the wild freak-show of real life. And in many parts of Dickens’s work there is evidence of some peculiar affection on his part for a strange sort of little girl; a little girl with a premature sense of responsibility and duty; a sort of saintly precocity. Did he know some little girl of this kind? Did she die, perhaps, and remain in his memory in colours too ethereal and pale? In any case there are a great number of them in his works. Little Dorrit was one of them, and Florence Dombey with her brother, and even Agnes in infancy; and, of course, Little Nell. And, in any case, one thing is evident; whatever charm these children may have they have not the charm of childhood. They are not little children: they are “little mothers.” The beauty and divinity in a child lie in his not being worried, not being conscientious, not being like Little Nell. Little Nell has never any of the sacred bewilderment of a baby. She never wears that face, beautiful but almost half-witted, with which a real child half understands that there is evil in the universe.

As usual, however, little as the story has to do with the title, the splendid and satisfying pages have even less to do with the story. Dick Swiveller is perhaps the noblest of all the noble creations of Dickens. He has all the overwhelming absurdity of Mantalini, with the addition of being human and credible, for he knows he is absurd. His high-falutin is not done because he seriously thinks it right and proper, like that of Mr. Snodgrass, nor is it done because he thinks it will serve his turn, like that of Mr. Pecksniff, for both these beliefs are improbable; it is done because he really loves high-falutin, because he has a lonely literary pleasure in exaggerative language. Great draughts of words are to him like great draughts of wine—pungent and yet refreshing, light and yet
leaving him in a glow. In unerring instinct for the perfect folly of a phrase he has no equal, even among the giants of Dickens. “I am sure,” says Miss Wackles, when she had been flirting with Cheggs, the market-gardener, and reduced Mr. Swiveller to Byronic renunciation, “I am sure I’m very sorry if—” “Sorry,” said Mr. Swiveller, “sorry in the possession of a Cheggs!” The abyss of bitterness is unfathomable. Scarcely less precious is the poise of Mr. Swiveller when he imitates the stage brigand. After crying, “Some wine here! Ho!” he hands the flagon to himself with profound humility, and receives it haughtily. Perhaps the very best scene in the book is that between Mr. Swiveller and the single gentleman with whom he endeavours to remonstrate for having remained in bed all day: “We cannot have single gentlemen coming into the place and sleeping like double gentlemen without paying extra. . . . An equal amount of slumber was never got out of one bed, and if you want to sleep like that you must pay for a double-bedded room.” His relations with the Marchioness are at once purely romantic and purely genuine; there is nothing even of Dickens’s legitimate exaggerations about them. A shabby, larky, good-natured clerk would, as a matter of fact, spend hours in the society of a little servant girl if he found her about the house. It would arise partly from a dim kindliness, and partly from that mysterious instinct which is sometimes called, mistakenly, a love of low company—that mysterious instinct which makes so many men of pleasure find something soothing in the society of uneducated people, particularly uneducated women. It is the instinct which accounts for the otherwise unaccountable popularity of barmaids.

And still the pot of that huge popularity boiled. In 1841 another novel was demanded, and “Barnaby Rudge” supplied. It is chiefly of interest as an embodiment of that other element in Dickens, the picturesque or even the pictorial. Barnaby Rudge, the idiot with his rags and his feathers and his raven, the bestial hangman, the blind mob—all make a picture, though they hardly make a novel. One touch there is in it of the richer and more humorous Dickens, the boy-conspirator, Mr. Sim Tappertit. But he might have been treated with more sympathy—with as much sympathy, for instance, as Mr. Dick Swiveller; for he is only the romantic guttersnipe, the bright boy at the particular age when it is most fascinating to found a secret society and most difficult to keep a secret. And if ever there was a romantic guttersnipe on earth it was Charles Dickens. “Barnaby Rudge” is no more an historical novel than Sim’s secret league was a political movement; but they are both beautiful creations. When all is said, however, the main reason for mentioning the work here is that it is the next
bubble in the pot, the next thing that burst out of that whirling, seething head. The tide of it rose and smoked and sang till it boiled over the pot of Britain and poured over all America. In the January of 1842 he set out for the United States.
CHAPTER VI

DICKENS AND AMERICA

The essential of Dickens’s character was the conjunction of common sense with uncommon sensibility. The two things are not, indeed, in such an antithesis as is commonly imagined. Great English literary authorities, such as Jane Austen and Mr. Chamberlain, have put the word “sense” and the word “sensibility” in a kind of opposition to each other. But not only are they not opposite words: they are actually the same word. They both mean receptiveness or approachability by the facts outside us. To have a sense of colour is the same as to have a sensibility to colour. A person who realises that beef-steaks are appetising shows his sensibility. A person who realises that moonrise is romantic shows his sense. But it is not difficult to see the meaning and need of the popular distinction between sensibility and sense, particularly in the form called common sense. Common sense is a sensibility duly distributed in all normal directions; sensibility has come to mean a specialised sensibility in one. This is unfortunate, for it is not the sensibility that is bad, but the specialising; that is, the lack of sensibility to everything else. A young lady who stays out all night to look at the stars should not be blamed for her sensibility to starlight, but for her insensibility to other people. A poet who recites his own verses from ten to five with the tears rolling down his face should decidedly be rebuked for his lack of, sensibility—his lack of sensibility to those grand rhythms of the social harmony, crudely called manners. For all politeness is a long poem, since it is full of recurrences. This balance of all the sensibilities we call sense; and it is in this capacity that it becomes of great importance as an attribute of the character of Dickens.

Dickens, I repeat, had common sense and uncommon sensibility. That is to say, the proportion of interests in him was about the same as that of an ordinary man, but he felt all of them more excitedly. This is a distinction not easy for us to keep in mind, because we hear to-day chiefly of two types, the dull man who likes ordinary things mildly, and the extraordinary man who likes extraordinary things wildly. But Dickens liked quiet ordinary things; he merely made an extraordinary fuss about them. His excitement was sometimes like an epileptic fit; but it must not be confused with the fury of the man of one idea or one line of ideas. He had the excess of the eccentric, but not the defects, the narrowness. Even when he raved like a maniac he did not rave like a monomaniac. He had no
particular spot of sensibility or spot of insensitivity: he was merely a normal man minus a normal self-command. He had no special point of mental pain or repugnance, like Ruskin’s horror of steam and iron, or Mr. Bernard Shaw’s permanent irritation against romantic love. He was annoyed at the ordinary annoyances: only he was more annoyed than was necessary. He did not desire strange delights, blue wine or black women with Baudelaire, or cruel sights east of Suez with Mr. Kipling. He wanted what a healthy man wants, only he was ill with wanting it. To understand him, in a word, we must keep well in mind the medical distinction between delicacy and disease. Perhaps we shall comprehend it and him more clearly if we think of a woman rather than a man. There was much that was feminine about Dickens, and nothing more so than this abnormal normality. A woman is often, in comparison with a man, at once more sensitive and more sane.

This distinction must be especially remembered in all his quarrels. And it must be most especially remembered in what may be called his great quarrel with America, which we have now to approach. The whole incident is so typical of Dickens’s attitude to everything and anything, and especially of Dickens’s attitude to anything political, that I may ask permission to approach the matter by another, a somewhat long and curving avenue.

Common sense is a fairy thread, thin and faint, and as easily lost as gossamer. Dickens (in large matters) never lost it. Take, as an example, his political tone, or drift throughout his life. His views, of course, may have been right or wrong; the reforms he supported may have been successful or otherwise: that is not a matter for this book. But if we compare him with the other men that wanted the same things (or the other men that wanted the other things) we feel a startling absence of cant, a startling sense of humanity as it is and of the eternal weakness. He was a fierce democrat, but in his best vein he laughed at the cocksure Radical of common life, the red-faced man who said, “Prove it!” when anybody said anything. He fought for the right to elect: but he would not whitewash elections. He believed in Parliamentary government; but he did not, like our contemporary newspapers, pretend that Parliament is something much more heroic and imposing than it is. He fought for the rights of the grossly oppressed Nonconformists, but he spat out of his mouth theunction of that too easy seriousness with which they oiled everything, and held up to them like a horrible mirror the foul fat face of Chadband. He saw that Mr. Podsnap thought too little of places outside England. But he saw that Mrs. Jellaby thought too much of them. In the last book he wrote he gives us, in Mr. Honeythunder, a
hateful and wholesome picture of all the Liberal catchwords pouring out of one illiberal man. But perhaps the best evidence of this steadiness and sanity is the fact that, dogmatic as he was, he never tied himself to any passing dogma: he never got into any cul de sac or civic or economic fanaticism: he went down the broad road of the Revolution. He never admitted that economically, we must make hells of workhouses, any more than Rousseau would have admitted it. He never said the State had no right to teach children or save their bones, any more than Danton would have said it. He was a fierce Radical; but he was never a Manchester Radical. He used the test of Utility, but he was never a Utilitarian. While economists were writing soft words he wrote “Hard Times,” which Macaulay called “sullen Socialism,” because it was not complacent Whiggism. But Dickens was never a Socialist any more than he was an Individualist; and, whatever else he was, he certainly was not sullen. He was not even a politician of any kind. He was simply a man of very clear, airy judgment on things that did not inflame his private temper, and he perceived that any theory that tried to run the living State entirely on one force and motive was probably nonsense. Whenever the Liberal philosophy had embedded in it something hard and heavy and lifeless, by an instinct he dropped it out. He was too romantic, perhaps, but he would have to do only with real things. He may have cared too much about Liberty. But he cared nothing about “Laissez Faire.”

Now, among many interests of his contact with America this interest emerges as infinitely the largest and most striking, that it gave a final example of this queer, unexpected coolness and candour of his, this abrupt and sensational rationality. Apart altogether from any question of the accuracy of his picture of America, the American indignation was particularly natural and inevitable. For the large circumstances of the age must be taken into account. At the end of the previous epoch the whole of our Christian civilisation had been startled from its sleep by trumpets to take sides in a bewildering Armageddon, often with eyes still misty. Germany and Austria found themselves on the side of the old order, France and America on the side of the new. England, as at the Reformation, took up eventually a dark middle position, maddeningly difficult to define. She created a democracy, but she kept an aristocracy: she reformed the House of Commons, but left the magistracy (as it is still) a mere league of gentlemen against the world. But underneath all this doubt and compromise there was in England a great and perhaps growing mass of dogmatic democracy; certainly thousands, probably millions expected a Republic in fifty years. And for these the first instinct was obvious. The first instinct was to look across the Atlantic to
where lay a part of ourselves already Republican, the van of the advancing English on the road to liberty. Nearly all the great Liberals of the nineteenth century enormously idealised America. On the other hand, to the Americans, fresh from their first epic of arms, the defeated mother country, with its coronets and county magistrates, was only a broken feudal keep.

So much is self-evident. But nearly half-way through the nineteenth century there came out of England the voice of a violent satirist. In its political quality it seemed like the half-choked cry of the frustrated republic. It had no patience with the pretence that England was already free, that we had gained all that was valuable from the Revolution. It poured a cataract of contempt on the so-called working compromises of England, on the oligarchic cabinets, on the two artificial parties, on the government offices, on the J.P.'s, on the vestries, on the voluntary charities. This satirist was Dickens, and it must be remembered that he was not only fierce, but uproariously readable. He really damaged the things he struck at, a very rare thing. He stepped up to the grave official of the vestry, really trusted by the rulers, really feared like a god by the poor, and he tied round his neck a name that choked him; never again now can he be anything but Bumble. He confronted the fine old English gentleman who gives his patriotic services for nothing as a local magistrate, and he nailed him up as Nupkins, an owl in open day. For to this satire there is literally no answer; it cannot be denied that a man like Nupkins can be and is a magistrate, so long as we adopt the amazing method of letting the rich man of a district actually be the judge in it. We can only avoid the vision of the fact by shutting our eyes, and imagining the nicest rich man we can think of; and that, of course, is what we do. But Dickens, in this matter, was merely realistic; he merely asked us to look on Nupkins, on the wild, strange thing that we had made. Thus Dickens seemed to see England not at all as the country where freedom slowly broadened down from precedent to precedent, but as a rubbish heap of seventeenth-century bad habits abandoned by everybody else. That is, he looked at England almost with the eyes of an American democrat.

And so, when the voice, swelling in volume, reached America and the Americans, the Americans said, “Here is a man who will hurry the old country along, and tip her kings and beadle into the sea. Let him come here, and we will show him a race of free men such as he dreams of, alive upon the ancient earth. Let him come here and tell the English of the divine democracy towards which he drives them. There he has a monarchy and an oligarchy to make game of. Here is a republic for him to praise.” It seemed, indeed, a very natural sequel,
that having denounced undemocratic England as the wilderness, he should announce democratic America as the promised land. Any ordinary person would have prophesied that as he had pushed his rage at the old order almost to the edge of rant, he would push his encomium of the new order almost to the edge of cant. Amid a roar of republican idealism, compliments, hope, and anticipatory gratitude, the great democrat entered the great democracy. He looked about him; he saw a complete America, unquestionably progressive, unquestionably self-governing. Then, with a more than American coolness, and a more than American impudence, he sat down and wrote “Martin Chuzzlewit.” That tricky and perverse sanity of his had mutinied again. Common sense is a wild thing, savage, and beyond rules; and it had turned on them and rent them.

The main course of action was as follows; and it is right to record it before we speak of the justice of it. When I speak of his sitting down and writing “Martin Chuzzlewit,” I use, of course, an elliptical expression. He wrote the notes of the American part of “Martin Chuzzlewit” while he was still in America; but it was a later decision presumably that such impressions should go into a book, and it was little better than an afterthought that they should go into “Martin Chuzzlewit.” Dickens had an uncommonly bad habit (artistically speaking) of altering a story in the middle as he did in the case of “Our Mutual Friend.” And it is on record that he only sent young Martin to America because he did not know what else to do with him, and because (to say truth) the sales were falling off. But the first action, which Americans regarded as an equally hostile one, was the publication of “American Notes,” the history of which should first be given. His notion of visiting America had come to him as a very vague notion, even before the appearance of “The Old Curiosity Shop.” But it had grown in him through the whole ensuing period in the plaguing and persistent way that ideas did grow in him and live with him. He contended against the idea in a certain manner. He had much to induce him to contend against it. Dickens was by this time not only a husband, but a father, the father of several children, and their existence made a difficulty in itself. His wife, he said, cried whenever the project was mentioned. But it was a point in him that he could never, with any satisfaction, part with a project. He had that restless optimism, that kind of nervous optimism, which would always tend to say “Yes;” which is stricken with an immortal repentance, if ever it says “No.” The idea of seeing America might be doubtful, but the idea of not seeing America was dreadful. “To miss this opportunity would be a sad thing,” he says. “... God willing, I think it must be managed somehow!” It was managed somehow. First of all he wanted to take
his children as well as his wife. Final obstacles to this fell upon him, but they did not frustrate him. A serious illness fell on him; but that did not frustrate him. He sailed for America in 1842.

He landed in America, and he liked it. As John Forster very truly says, it is due to him, as well as to the great country that welcomed him, that his first good impression should be recorded, and that it should be “considered independently of any modification it afterwards underwent.” But the modification it afterwards underwent was, as I have said above, simply a sudden kicking against cant, that is, against repetition. He was quite ready to believe that all Americans were free men. He would have believed it if they had not all told him so. He was quite prepared to be pleased with America. He would have been pleased with it if it had not been so much pleased with itself. The “modification” his views underwent did not arise from any modification of America as he first saw it. His admiration did not change because America changed. It changed because America did not change. The Yankees enraged him at last, not by saying different things, but by saying the same things. They were a republic; they were a new and vigorous nation; it seemed natural that they should say so to a famous foreigner first stepping on to their shore. But it seemed maddening that they should say so to each other in every car and drinking saloon from morning till night. It was not that the Americans in any way ceased from praising him. It was rather that they went on praising him. It was not merely that their praises of him sounded beautiful when he first heard them. Their praises of themselves sounded beautiful when he first heard them. That democracy was grand, and that Charles Dickens was a remarkable person, were two truths that he certainly never doubted to his dying day. But, as I say, it was a soulless repetition that stung his sense of humour out of sleep; it woke like a wild beast for hunting, the lion of his laughter. He had heard the truth once too often. He had heard the truth for the nine hundred and ninety-ninth time, and he suddenly saw that it was falsehood.

It is true that a particular circumstance sharpened and defined his disappointment. He felt very hotly, as he felt everything, whether selfish or unselfish, the injustice of the American piracies of English literature, resulting from the American copyright laws. He did not go to America with any idea of discussing this; when, some time afterwards, somebody said that he did, he violently rejected the view as only describable “in one of the shortest words in the English language.” But his entry into America was almost triumphal; the rostrum or pulpit was ready for him; he felt strong enough to say anything. He had been most warmly entertained by many American men of letters, especially
by Washington Irving, and in his consequent glow of confidence he stepped up to the dangerous question of American copyright. He made many speeches attacking the American law and theory of the matter as unjust to English writers and to American readers. The effect appears to have astounded him. “I believe there is no country,” he writes, “on the face of the earth where there is less freedom of opinion on any subject in reference to which there is a broad difference of opinion than in this. There! I write the words with reluctance, disappointment, and sorrow; but I believe it from the bottom of my soul. . . . The notion that I, a man alone by myself in America, should venture to suggest to the Americans that there was one point on which they were neither just to their own countrymen nor to us, actually struck the boldest dumb! Washington Irving, Prescott, Hoffman, Bryant, Halleck, Dana, Washington Allston—every man who writes in this country is devoted to the question, and not one of them dares to raise his voice and complain of the atrocious state of the law. . . . The wonder is that a breathing man can be found with temerity enough to suggest to the Americans the possibility of their having done wrong. I wish you could have seen the faces that I saw down both sides of the table at Hartford when I began to talk about Scott. I wish you could have heard how I gave it out. My blood so boiled when I thought of the monstrous injustice that I felt as if I were twelve feet high when I thrust it down their throats.”

That is almost a portrait of Dickens. We can almost see the erect little figure, its face and hair like a flame.

For such reasons, among others, Dickens was angry with America. But if America was angry with Dickens, there were also reasons for it. I do not think that the rage against his copyright speeches was, as he supposed, merely national insolence and self-satisfaction. America is a mystery to any good Englishman; but I think Dickens managed somehow to touch it on a queer nerve. There is one thing, at any rate, that must strike all Englishmen who have the good fortune to have American friends; that is, that while there is no materialism so crude or so material as American materialism, there is also no idealism so crude or so ideal as American idealism. America will always affect an Englishman as being soft in the wrong place and hard in the wrong place; coarse exactly where all civilised men are delicate, delicate exactly where all grown-up men are coarse. Some beautiful ideal runs through this people, but it runs aslant. The only existing picture in which the thing I mean has been embodied is in Stevenson’s “Wrecker,” in the blundering delicacy of Jim Pinkerton. America has a new delicacy, a coarse, rank refinement. But there is another way of embodying the
idea, and that is to say this—that nothing is more likely than that the Americans thought it very shocking in Dickens, the divine author, to talk about being done out of money. Nothing would be more American than to expect a genius to be too high-toned for trade. It is certain that they deplored his selfishness in the matter; it is probable that they deplored his indelicacy. A beautiful young dreamer, with flowing brown hair, ought not to be even conscious of his copyrights. For it is quite unjust to say that the Americans worship the dollar. They really do worship intellect—another of the passing superstitions of our time.

If America had then this Pinkertonian propriety, this new, raw sensibility, Dickens was the man to rasp it. He was its precise opposite in every way. The decencies he did respect were old-fashioned and fundamental. On top of these he had that lounging liberty and comfort which can only be had on the basis of very old conventions, like the carelessness of gentlemen and the deliberation of rustics. He had no fancy for being strung up to that taut and quivering ideality demanded by American patriots and public speakers. And there was something else also, connected especially with the question of copyright and his own pecuniary claims. Dickens was not in the least desirous of being thought too “high-souled” to want his wages, nor was he in the least ashamed of asking for them. Deep in him (whether the modern reader likes the quality or no) was a sense very strong in the old Radicals—very strong especially in the old English Radical—a sense of personal rights, one’s own rights included, as something not merely useful but sacred. He did not think a claim any less just and solemn because it happened to be selfish; he did not divide claims into selfish and unselfish, but into right and wrong. It is significant that when he asked for his money, he never asked for it with that shamefaced cynicism, that sort of embarrassed brutality, with which the modern man of the world mutters something about business being business or looking after number one. He asked for his money in a valiant and ringing voice, like a man asking for his honour. While his American critics were moaning and snarling at his interested motives as a disqualification, he brandished his interested motives like a banner. “It is nothing to them,” he cries in astonishment, “that, of all men living, I am the greatest loser by it” (the Copyright Law). “It is nothing that I have a claim to speak and be heard.” The thing they set up as a barrier he actually presents as a passport. They think that he, of all men, ought not to speak because he is interested. He thinks that he, of all men, ought to speak because he is wronged.

But this particular disappointment with America in the matter of the tyranny
of its public opinion was not merely the expression of the fact that Dickens was a typical Englishman; that is a man with a very sharp insistence upon individual freedom. It also worked back ultimately to that larger and vaguer disgust of which I have spoken—the disgust at the perpetual posturing of the people before a mirror. The tyranny was irritating, not so much because of the suffering it inflicted on the minority, but because of the awful glimpses that it gave of the huge and imbecile happiness of the majority. The very vastness of the vain race enraged him, its immensity, its unity, its peace. He was annoyed more with its contentment than with any of its discontents. The thought of that unthinkable mass of millions, every one of them saying that Washington was the greatest man on earth, and that the Queen lived in the Tower of London, rode his riotous fancy like a nightmare. But to the end he retained the outlines of his original republican ideal and lamented over America not as being too Liberal, but as not being Liberal enough. Among others, he used these somewhat remarkable words: “I tremble for a Radical coming here, unless he is a Radical on principle, by reason and reflection, and from the sense of right. I fear that if he were anything else he would return home a Tory. . . . I say no more on that head for two months from this time, save that I do fear that the heaviest blow ever dealt at liberty will be dealt by this country, in the failure of its example on the earth.”

We are still waiting to see if that prediction has been fulfilled; but nobody can say that it has been falsified.

He went west on the great canals; he went south and touched the region of slavery; he saw America superficially indeed, but as a whole. And the great mass of his experience was certainly pleasant, though he vibrated with anticipatory passion against slave-holders, though he swore he would accept no public tribute in the slave country (a resolve which he broke under the pressure of the politeness of the South), yet his actual collisions with slavery and its upholders were few and brief. In these he bore himself with his accustomed vivacity and fire, but it would be a great mistake to convey the impression that his mental reaction against America was chiefly, or even largely, due to his horror at the negro problem. Over and above the cant of which we have spoken; the weary rush of words, the chief complaint he made was a complaint against bad manners; and on a large view his anti-Americanism would seem to be more founded on spitting than on slavery. When, however, it did happen that the primary morality of man-owning came up for discussion, Dickens displayed an honourable impatience. One man, full of anti-abolitionist ardour, button-holed him and bombarded him with the well-known argument in defence of slavery,
that it was not to the financial interest of a slave-owner to damage or weaken his own slaves. Dickens, in telling the story of this interview, writes as follows: “I told him quietly that it was not a man’s interest to get drunk, or to steal, or to game, or to indulge in any other vice; but he did indulge in it for all that. That cruelty and the abuse of irresponsible power were two of the bad passions of human nature, with the gratification of which considerations of interest or of ruin had nothing whatever to do. . . .” It is hardly possible to doubt that Dickens, in telling the man this, told him something sane and logical and unanswerable. But it is perhaps permissible to doubt whether he told it to him quietly.

He returned home in the spring of 1842, and in the later part of the year his “American Notes” appeared, and the cry against him that had begun over copyright swelled into a roar in his rear. Yet when we read the “Notes” we can find little offence in them, and, to say truth, less interest than usual. They are no true picture of America, or even of his vision of America, and this for two reasons. First, that he deliberately excluded from them all mention of that copyright question which had really given him his glimpse of how tyrannical a democracy can be. Second, that here he chiefly criticises America for faults which are not, after all, especially American. For example, he is indignant with the inadequate character of the prisons, and compares them unfavourably with those in England, controlled by Lieutenant Tracey, and by Captain Chesterton at Coldbath Fields, two reformers of prison discipline for whom he had a high regard. But it was a mere accident that American gaols were inferior to English. There was and is nothing in the American spirit to prevent their effecting all the reforms of Tracey and Chesterton, nothing to prevent their doing anything that money and energy and organisation can do. America might have (for all I know, does have) a prison system cleaner and more humane and more efficient than any other in the world. And the evil genius of America might still remain—everything might remain that makes Pogram or Chollop irritating or absurd. And against the evil genius of America Dickens was now to strike a second and a very different blow.

In January, 1843, appeared the first number of the novel called “Martin Chuzzlewit.” The earlier part of the book and the end, which have no connection with America or the American problem, in any case require a passing word. But except for the two gigantic grotesques on each side of the gateway of the tale, Pecksniff and Mrs. Gamp, “Martin Chuzzlewit” will be chiefly admired for its American excursion. It is a good satire embedded in an indifferent novel. Mrs. Gamp is, indeed, a sumptuous study, laid on in those rich, oily, almost greasy
colours that go to make the English comic characters, that make the very diction of Falstaff fat, and quaking with jolly degradation. Pecksniff also is almost perfect, and much too good to be true. The only other thing to be noticed about him is that here, as almost everywhere else in the novels, the best figures are at their best when they have least to do. Dickens’s characters are perfect as long as he can keep them out of his stories. Bumble is divine until a dark and practical secret is entrusted to him—as if anybody but a lunatic would entrust a secret to Bumble. Micawber is noble when he is doing nothing; but he is quite unconvincing when he is spying on Uriah Heep, for obviously neither Micawber nor anyone else would employ Micawber as a private detective. Similarly, while Pecksniff is the best thing in the story, the story is the worst thing in Pecksniff. His plot against old Martin can only be described by saying that it is as silly as old Martin’s plot against him. His fall at the end is one of the rare falls of Dickens. Surely it was not necessary to take Pecksniff so seriously. Pecksniff is a merely laughable character; he is so laughable that he is lovable. Why take such trouble to unmask a man whose mask you have made transparent? Why collect all the characters to witness the exposure of a man in whom none of the characters believe? Why toil and triumph to have the laugh of a man who was only made to be laughed at?

But it is the American part of “Martin Chuzzlewit” which is our concern, and which is memorable. It has the air of a great satire; but if it is only a great slander it is still great. His serious book on America was merely a squib, perhaps a damp squib. In any case, we all know that America will survive such serious books. But his fantastic book may survive America. It may survive America as “The Knights” has survived Athens. “Martin Chuzzlewit” has this quality of great satire that the critic forgets to ask whether the portrait is true to the original, because the portrait is so much more important than the original. Who cares whether Aristophanes correctly described Kleon, who is dead, when he so perfectly describes the demagogue, who cannot die? Just as little, it may be, will some future age care whether the ancient civilisation of the west, the lost cities of New York and St. Louis, were fairly depicted in the colossal monument of Elijah Pogram. For there is much more in the American episodes than their intoxicating absurdity; there is more than humour in the young man who made the speech about the British Lion, and said, “I taunt that lion. Alone I dare him;” or in the other man who told Martin that when he said that Queen Victoria did not live in the Tower of London he “fell into an error not uncommon among his countrymen.” He has his finger on the nerve of an evil which was not only in his
enemies, but in himself. The great democrat has hold of one of the dangers of
democracy. The great optimist confronts a horrible nightmare of optimism.
Above all, the genuine Englishman attacks a sin that is not merely American, but
English also. The eternal, complacent iteration of patriotic half-truths; the
perpetual buttering of one’s self all over with the same stale butter; above all, the
big defiances of small enemies, or the very urgent challenges to very distant
enemies; the cowardice so habitual and unconscious that it wears the plumes of
courage—all this is an English temptation as well as an American one. “Martin
Chuzzlewit” may be a caricature of America. America may be a caricature of
England. But in the gravest college, in the quietest country house of England,
there is the seed of the same essential madness that fills Dickens’s book, like an
asylum, with brawling Chollop and raving Jefferson Bricks. That essential
madness is the idea that the good patriot is the man who feels at ease about his
country. This notion of patriotism was unknown in the little pagan republics
where our European patriotism began. It was unknown in the Middle Ages. In
the eighteenth century, in the making of modern politics, a “patriot” meant a
discontented man. It was opposed to the word “courtier,” which meant an
upholder of present conditions. In all other modern countries, especially in
countries like France and Ireland, where real difficulties have been faced, the
word “patriot” means something like a political pessimist. This view and these
countries have exaggerations and dangers of their own; but the exaggeration and
danger of England is the same as the exaggeration and danger of The Watertoast
Gazette. The thing which is rather foolishly called the Anglo-Saxon civilisation
is at present soaked through with a weak pride. It uses great masses of men not
to procure discussion but to procure the pleasure of unanimity; it uses masses
like bolsters. It uses its organs of public opinion not to warn the public, but to
soothe it. It really succeeds not only in ignoring the rest of the world, but
actually in forgetting it. And when a civilisation really forgets the rest of the
world—lets it fall as something obviously dim and barbaric—then there is only
one adjective for the ultimate fate of that civilisation, and that adjective is
“Chinese.”

Martin Chuzzlewit’s America is a mad-house: but it is a mad-house we are all
on the road to. For completeness and even comfort are almost the definitions of
insanity. The lunatic is the man who lives in a small world but thinks it is a large
one: he is the man who lives in a tenth of the truth, and thinks it is the whole.
The madman cannot conceive any cosmos outside a certain tale or conspiracy or
vision. Hence the more clearly we see the world divided into Saxons and non-
Saxons, into our splendid selves and the rest, the more certain we may be that we are slowly and quietly going mad. The more plain and satisfying our state appears, the more we may know that we are living in an unreal world. For the real world is not satisfying. The more clear become the colours and facts of Anglo-Saxon superiority, the more surely we may know we are in a dream. For the real world is not clear or plain. The real world is full of bracing bewilderments and brutal surprises. Comfort is the blessing and the curse of the English, and of Americans of the Pogram type also. With them it is a loud comfort, a wild comfort, a screaming and capering comfort; but comfort at bottom still. For there is but an inch of difference between the cushioned chamber and the padded cell.
PART TWO
CHAPTER VII

DICKENS AND CHRISTMAS

In the July of 1844 Dickens went on an Italian tour, which he afterwards summarised in the book called “Pictures from Italy.” They are, of course, very vivacious, but there is no great need to insist on them considered as Italian sketches; there is no need whatever to worry about them as a phase of the mind of Dickens when he travelled out of England. He never travelled out of England. There is no trace in all these amusing pages that he really felt the great foreign things which lie in wait for us in the south of Europe, the Latin civilisation, the Catholic Church, the art of the centre, the endless end of Rome. His travels are not travels in Italy, but travels in Dickensland. He sees amusing things; he describes them amusingly. But he would have seen things just as good in a street in Pimlico, and described them just as well. Few things were racier, even in his raciest novel, than his description of the marionette play of the death of Napoleon. Nothing could be more perfect than the figure of the doctor, which had something wrong with its wires, and hence “hovered about the couch and delivered medical opinions in the air.” Nothing could be better as a catching of the spirit of all popular drama than the colossal depravity of the wooden image of “Sir Uudson Low.” But there is nothing Italian about it. Dickens would have made just as good fun, indeed just the same fun, of a Punch and Judy show performing in Long Acre or Lincoln’s Inn Fields.

Dickens uttered just and sincere satire on Plornish and Podsnap; but Dickens was as English as any Podsnap or any Plornish. He had a hearty humanitarianism, and a hearty sense of justice to all nations so far as he understood it. But that very kind of humanitarianism, that very kind of justice, were English. He was the Englishman of the type that made Free Trade, the most English of all things, since it was at once calculating and optimistic. He respected catacombs and gondolas, but that very respect was English. He wondered at brigands and volcanoes, but that very wonder was English. The very conception that Italy consists of these things was an English conception. The root things he never understood, the Roman legend, the ancient life of the Mediterranean, the world-old civilisation of the vine and olive, the mystery of the immutable Church. He never understood these things, and I am glad he never understood them: he could only have understood them by ceasing to be the
inspired cockney that he was, the rousing English Radical of the great Radical age in England. That spirit of his was one of the things that we have had which were truly national. All other forces we have borrowed, especially those which flatter us most. Imperialism is foreign, socialism is foreign, militarism is foreign, education is foreign, strictly even Liberalism is foreign. But Radicalism was our own; as English as the hedgerows.

Dickens abroad, then, was for all serious purposes simply the Englishman abroad; the Englishman man abroad is for all serious purposes simply the Englishman at home. Of this generalisation one modification must be made. Dickens did feel a direct pleasure in the bright and busy exterior of the French life, the clean caps, the coloured uniforms, the skies like blue enamel, the little green trees, the little white houses, the scene picked out in primary colours, like a child’s picture—book. This he felt, and this he put (by a stroke of genius) into the mouth of Mrs. Lirriper, a London landlady on a holiday: for Dickens always knew that it is the simple and not the subtle who feel differences; and he saw all his colours through the clear eyes of the poor. And in thus taking to his heart the streets, as it were, rather than the spires of the Continent, he showed beyond question that combination of which we have spoken—of common sense with common sensibility. For it is for the sake of the streets and shops and the coats and hats, that we should go abroad; they are far better worth going to see than the castles and cathedrals and Roman camps. For the wonders of the world are the same all over the world, at least all over the European world. Castles that throw valleys in shadow, minsters that strike the sky, roads so old that they seem to have been made by the gods, these are in all Christian countries. The marvels of man are at all our doors. A labourer hoeing turnips in Sussex has no need to be ignorant that the bones of Europe are the Roman roads. A clerk living in Lambeth has no need not to know that there was a Christian art exuberant in the thirteenth century; for only across the river he can see the live stones of the Middle Ages surging together towards the stars. But exactly the things that do strike the traveller as extraordinary are the ordinary things, the food, the clothes, the vehicles; the strange things are cosmopolitan, the common things are national and peculiar. Cologne spire is lifted on the same arches as Canterbury; but the thing you cannot see out of Germany is a German beer-garden. There is no need for a Frenchman to go to look at Westminster Abbey as a piece of English architecture; it is not in the special sense a piece of English architecture. But a hansom cab is a piece of English architecture; a thing produced by the peculiar poetry of our cities, a symbol of a certain reckless comfort which is
really English; a thing to draw a pilgrimage of the nations. The imaginative Englishman will be found all day in a café; the imaginative Frenchman in a hansom cab.

This sort of pleasure Dickens took in the Latin life; but no deeper kind. And the strongest of all possible indications of his fundamental detachment from it can be found in one fact. A great part of the time that he was in Italy he was engaged in writing “The Chimes,” and such Christmas tales, tales of Christmas in the English towns, tales full of fog and snow and hail and happiness.

Dickens could find in any street divergences between man and man deeper than the divisions of nations. His fault was to exaggerate differences. He could find types almost as distinct as separate tribes of animals in his own brain and his own city, those two homes of a magnificent chaos. The only two southerners introduced prominently into his novels, the two in “Little Dorrit,” are popular English foreigners, I had almost said stage foreigners. Villainy is, in English eyes, a southern trait, therefore one of the foreigners is villainous. Vivacity is, in English eyes, another southern trait, therefore the other foreigner is vivacious. But we can see from the outlines of both that Dickens did not have to go to Italy to get them. While poor panting millionaires, poor tired earls and poor God-forsaken American men of culture are plodding about Italy for literary inspiration, Charles Dickens made up the whole of that Italian romance (as I strongly suspect) from the faces of two London organ-grinders.

In the sunlight of the southern world, he was still dreaming of the firelight of the north. Among the palaces and the white campanili, he shut his eyes to see Marylebone and dreamed a lovely dream of chimney-pots. He was not happy, he said, without streets. The very foulness and smoke of London were lovable in his eyes and fill his Christmas tales with a vivid vapour. In the clear skies of the south he saw afar off the fog of London like a sunset cloud and longed to be in the core of it.

This Christmas tone of Dickens, in connection with his travels, is a matter that can only be expressed by a parallel with one of his other works. Much the same that has here been said of his “Pictures from Italy,” may be said about his “Child’s History of England;” with the difference that while the “Pictures from Italy” do in a sense add to his fame, the “History of England” in almost every sense detracts from it. But the nature of the limitation is the same. What Dickens was travelling in distant lands, that he was travelling in distant ages; a sturdy, sentimental English Radical with a large heart and a narrow mind. He could not help falling into that besetting sin or weakness of the modern progressive, the
habit of regarding the contemporary questions as the eternal questions and the latest word as the last. He could not get out of his head the instinctive conception that the real problem before St. Dunstan was whether he should support Lord John Russell or Sir Robert Peel. He could not help seeing the remotest peaks lit up by the raging bonfire of his own passionate political crisis. He lived for the instant and its urgency; that is, he did what St. Dunstan did. He lived in an eternal present like all simple men. It is indeed “A Child’s History of England;” but the child is the writer and not the reader.

But Dickens in his cheapest cockney utilitarianism was not only English, but unconsciously historic. Upon him descended the real tradition of “Merry England,” and not upon the pallid mediaevalists who thought they were reviving it. The Pre-Raphaelites, the Gothicists, the admirers of the Middle Ages, had in their subtlety and sadness the spirit of the present day. Dickens had in his buffoonery and bravery the spirit of the Middle Ages. He was much more mediaeval in his attacks on mediaevalism than they were in their defences of it. It was he who had the things of Chaucer, the love of large jokes and long stories and brown ale and all the white roads of England. Like Chaucer he loved story within story, every man telling a tale. Like Chaucer he saw something openly comic in men’s motley trades. Sam Weller would have been a great gain to the Canterbury Pilgrimage and told an admirable story. Rosetti’s Damozel would have been a great bore, regarded as too fast by the Prioress and too priggish by the Wife of Bath. It is said that in the somewhat sickly Victorian revival of feudalism which was called “Young England,” a nobleman hired a hermit to live in his grounds. It is also said that the hermit struck for more beer. Whether this anecdote be true or not, it is always told as showing a collapse from the ideal of the Middle Ages to the level of the present day. But in the mere act of striking for beer the holy man was very much more “medieval” than the fool who employed him.

It would be hard to find a better example of this than Dickens’s great defence of Christmas. In fighting for Christmas he was fighting for the old European festival. Pagan and Christian, for that trinity of eating, drinking and praying which to moderns appears irreverent, for the holy day which is really a holiday. He had himself the most babyish ideas about the past. He supposed the Middle Ages to have consisted of tournaments and torture-chambers, he supposed himself to be a brisk man of the manufacturing age, almost a Utilitarian. But for all that he defended the mediaeval feast which was going out against the Utilitarianism which was coming in. He could only see all that was bad in
mediævalism. But he fought for all that was good in it. And he was all the more really in sympathy with the old strength and simplicity because he only knew that it was good and did not know that it was old. He cared as little for mediævalism as the mediævals did. He cared as much as they did for lustiness and virile laughter and sad tales of good lovers and pleasant tales of good livers. He would have been very much bored by Ruskin and Walter Pater if they had explained to him the strange sunset tints of Lippi and Botticelli. He had no pleasure in looking on the dying Middle Ages. But he looked on the living Middle Ages, on a piece of the old uproarious superstition still unbroken; and he hailed it like a new religion. The Dickens character ate pudding to an extent at which the modern mediævalists turned pale. They would do every kind of honour to an old observance, except observing it. They would pay to a Church feast every sort of compliment except feasting.

And (as I have said) as were his unconscious relations to our European past, so were his unconscious relations to England. He imagined himself to be, if anything, a sort of cosmopolitan; at any rate to be a champion of the charms and merits of continental lands against the arrogance of our island. But he was in truth very much more a champion of the old and genuine England against that comparatively cosmopolitan England which we have all lived to see. And here again the supreme example is Christmas. Christmas is, as I have said, one of numberless old European feasts of which the essence is the combination of religion with merry-making. But among those feasts it is also especially and distinctively English in the style of its merry-making and even in the style of its religion. For the character of Christmas (as distinct, for instance, from the continental Easter) lies chiefly in two things; first on the terrestrial side the note of comfort rather than the note of brightness; and on the spiritual side, Christian charity rather than Christian ecstasy. And comfort is, like charity, a very English instinct. Nay, comfort is, like charity, an English merit; though our comfort may and does degenerate into materialism, just as our charity may and does degenerate into laxity and make-believe.

This ideal of comfort belongs peculiarly to England; it belongs peculiarly to Christmas; above all, it belongs pre-eminently to Dickens. And it is astonishingly misunderstood. It is misunderstood by the continent of Europe; it is, if possible, still more misunderstood by the English of to-day. On the Continent the restaurateurs provide us with raw beef, as if we were savages; yet old English cooking takes as much care as French. And in England has arisen a parvenu patriotism which represents the English as everything but English; as a
blend of Chinese stoicism, Latin militarism, Prussian rigidity, and American bad
taste. And so England, whose fault is gentility and whose virtue is geniality,
England with her tradition of the great gay gentlemen of Elizabeth, is
represented to the four quarters of the world (as in Mr. Kipling’s religious
poems) in the enormous image of a solemn cad. And because it is very difficult
to be comfortable in the suburbs, the suburbs have voted that comfort is a gross
and material thing. Comfort, especially this vision of Christmas comfort, is the
reverse of a gross or material thing. It is far more poetical, properly speaking,
than the Garden of Epicurus. It is far more artistic than the Palace of Art. It is
more artistic because it is based upon a contrast, a contrast between the fire and
wine within the house and the winter and the roaring rains without. It is far more
poetical, because there is in it a note of defence, almost of war; a note of being
besieged by the snow and hail; of making merry in the belly of a fort. The man
who said that an Englishman’s house is his castle said much more than he meant.
The Englishman thinks of his house as something fortified and provisioned, and
his very surliness is at root romantic. And this sense would naturally be strongest
in wild winter nights, when the lowered portcullis and the lifted drawbridge do
not merely bar people out, but bar people in. The Englishman’s house is most
sacred, not merely when the King cannot enter it, but when the Englishman
cannot get out of it.

This comfort, then, is an abstract thing, a principle. The English poor shut all
their doors and windows till their rooms reek like the Black Hole. They are
suffering for an idea. Mere animal hedonism would not dream, as we English do,
of winter feasts and little rooms, but of eating fruit in large and idle gardens.
Mere sensuality would desire to please all its senses. But to our good dreams this
dark and dangerous background is essential; the highest pleasure we can imagine
is a defiant pleasure, a happiness that stands at bay. The word “comfort” is not
indeed the right word, it conveys too much of the slander of mere sense; the true
word is “cosiness,” a word not translatable. One, at least, of the essentials of it is
smallness, smallness in preference to largeness, smallness for smallness’ sake.
The merry-maker wants a pleasant parlour, he would not give twopence for a
pleasant continent. In our difficult time, of course, a fight for mere space has
become necessary. Instead of being greedy for ale and Christmas pudding we are
greedy for mere air, an equally sensual appetite. In abnormal conditions this is
wise; and the illimitable veldt is an excellent thing for nervous people. But our
fathers were large and healthy enough to make a thing humane, and not worry
about whether it was hygienic. They were big enough to get into small rooms.
Of this quite deliberate and artistic quality in the close Christmas chamber, the standing evidence is Dickens in Italy. He created these dim firelit tales like little dim red jewels, as an artistic necessity, in the centre of an endless summer. Amid the white cities of Tuscany he hungered for something romantic, and wrote about a rainy Christmas. Amid the pictures of the Uffizi he starved for something beautiful, and fed his memory on London fog. His feeling for the fog was especially poignant and typical. In the first of his Christmas tales, the popular “Christmas Carol,” he suggested the very soul of it in one simile, when he spoke of the dense air, suggesting that “Nature was brewing on a large scale.”

This sense of the thick atmosphere as something to eat or drink, something not only solid but satisfactory, may seem almost insane, but it is no exaggeration of Dickens’s emotion. We speak of a fog “that you could cut with a knife.” Dickens would have liked the phrase as suggesting that the fog was a colossal cake. He liked even more his own phrase of the Titanic brewery, and no dream would have given him a wilder pleasure than to grope his way to some such tremendous vats and drink the ale of the giants.

There is a current prejudice against fogs, and Dickens, perhaps, is their only poet. Considered hygienically, no doubt this may be more or less excusable. But, considered poetically, fog is not undeserving, it has a real significance. We have in our great cities abolished the clean and sane darkness of the country. We have outlawed night and sent her wandering in wild meadows; we have lit eternal watch-fires against her return. We have made a new cosmos, and as a consequence our own sun and stars. And as a consequence also, and most justly, we have made our own darkness. Just as every lamp is a warm human moon, so every fog is a rich human nightfall. If it were not for this mystic accident we should never see darkness, and he who has never seen darkness has never seen the sun. Fog for us is the chief form of that outward pressure which compresses mere luxury into real comfort. It makes the world small, in the same spirit as in that common and happy cry that the world is small, meaning that it is full of friends. The first man that emerges out of the mist with a light, is for us Prometheus, a saviour bringing fire to men. He is that greatest and best of all men, greater than the heroes, better than the saints, Man Friday. Every rumble of a cart, every cry in the distance, marks the heart of humanity beating undaunted in the darkness. It is wholly human; man toiling in his own cloud. If real darkness is like the embrace of God, this is the dark embrace of man.

In such a sacred cloud the tale called “The Christmas Carol” begins, the first and most typical of all his Christmas tales. It is not irrelevant to dilate upon the
geniality of this darkness, because it is characteristic of Dickens that his atmospheres are more important than his stories. The Christmas atmosphere is more important than Scrooge, or the ghosts either; in a sense, the background is more important than the figures. The same thing may be noticed in his dealings with that other atmosphere (besides that of good humour) which he excelled in creating, an atmosphere of mystery and wrong, such as that which gathers round Mrs. Clennam, rigid in her chair, or old Miss Havisham, ironically robed as a bride. Here again the atmosphere altogether eclipses the story, which often seems disappointing in comparison. The secrecy is sensational; the secret is tame. The surface of the thing seems more awful than the core of it. It seems almost as if these grisly figures, Mrs. Chadband and Mrs. Clennam, Miss Havisham, and Miss Flite, Nemo and Sally Brass, were keeping something back from the author as well as from the reader. When the book closes we do not know their real secret. They soothed the optimistic Dickens with something less terrible than the truth. The dark house of Arthur Clennam’s childhood really depresses us; it is a true glimpse into that quiet street in hell, where live the children of that unique dispensation which theologians call Calvinism and Christians devil-worship. But some stranger crime had really been done there, some more monstrous blasphemy or human sacrifice than the suppression of some silly document advantageous to the silly Dorrits. Something worse than a common tale of jilting lay behind the masquerade and madness of the awful Miss Havisham. Something worse was whispered by the misshapen Quilp to the sinister Sally in that wild, wet summer-house by the river, something worse than the clumsy plot against the clumsy Kit. These dark pictures seem almost as if they were literally visions; things, that is, that Dickens saw but did not understand.

And as with his backgrounds of gloom, so with his backgrounds of good-will, in such tales as “The Christmas Carol.” The tone of the tale is kept throughout in a happy monotony, though the tale is everywhere irregular and in some places weak. It has the same kind of artistic unity that belongs to a dream. A dream may begin with the end of the world and end with a tea-party; but either the end of the world will seem as trivial as a tea-party or that tea-party will be as terrible as the day of doom. The incidents change wildly; the story scarcely changes at all. “The Christmas Carol” is a kind of philanthropic dream, an enjoyable nightmare, in which the scenes shift bewilderingly and seem as miscellaneous as the pictures in a scrap-book, but in which there is one constant state of the soul, a state of rowdy benediction and a hunger for human faces. The beginning is bout
a winter day and a miser; yet the beginning is in no way bleak. The author starts with a kind of happy howl; he bangs on our door like a drunken carol singer; his style is festive and popular; he compares the snow and hail to philanthropists who “come down handsomely;” he compares the fog to unlimited beer. Scrooge is not really inhuman at the beginning any more than he is at the end. There is a heartiness in his inhospitable sentiments that is akin to humour and therefore to human; he is only a crusty old bachelor, and had (I strongly suspect) given away turkeys secretly all his life. The beauty and the real blessing of the story do not lie in the mechanical plot of it, the repentance of Scrooge, probable or improbable; they lie in the great furnace of real happiness that glows through Scrooge and everything around him; that great furnace, the heart of Dickens. Whether the Christmas visions would or would not convert Scrooge, they convert us. Whether or no the visions were evoked by real Spirits of the Past, Present, and Future, they were evoked by that truly exalted order of angels who are correctly called High Spirits. They are impelled and sustained by a quality which our contemporary artists ignore or almost deny, but which in a life decently lived is as normal and attainable as sleep, positive, passionate, conscious joy. The story sings from end to end like a happy man going home; and, like a happy and good man, when it cannot sing it yells. It is lyric and exclamatory, from the first exclamatory words of it. It is strictly a Christmas carol.

Dickens, as has been said, went to Italy with this kindly cloud still about him, still meditating on Yule mysteries. Among the olives and the orange-trees he wrote his second great Christmas tale, “The Chimes,” at Genoa in 1844, a Christmas tale only differing from “The Christmas Carol” in being fuller of the grey rains of winter and the north. “The Chimes” is, like the “Carol,” an appeal for charity and mirth, but it is a stern and fighting appeal: if the other is a Christmas carol, this is a Christmas war-song. In it Dickens hurled himself with even more than his usual militant joy and scorn into an attack upon a cant, which he said made his blood boil. This cant was nothing more nor less than the whole tone taken by three-quarters of the political and economic world towards the poor. It was a vague and vulgar Benthamism with a rollicking Tory touch in it. It explained to the poor their duties with a cold and coarse philanthropy unendurable by any free man. It had also at its command a kind of brutal banter, a loud good humour which Dickens sketches savagely in Alderman Cute. He fell furiously on all their ideas: the cheap advice to live cheaply, the base advice to live basely, above all, the preposterous primary assumption that the rich are to
advise the poor and not the poor the rich. There were and are hundreds of these benevolent bullies. Some say that the poor should give up having children, which means that they should give up their great virtue of sexual sanity. Some say that they should give up “treating” each other, which means that they should give up all that remains to them of the virtue of hospitality. Against all of this Dickens thundered very thoroughly in “The Chimes.” It may be remarked in passing that this affords another instance of a confusion already referred to, the confusion whereby Dickens supposed himself to be exalting the present over the past, whereas he was really dealing deadly blows at things strictly peculiar to the present. Embedded in this very book is a somewhat useless interview between Trotty Veck and the church bells, in which the latter lecture the former for having supposed (why, I don’t know) that they were expressing regret for the disappearance of the Middle Ages. There is no reason why Trotty Veck or anyone else should idealise the Middle Ages, but certainly he was the last man in the world to be asked to idealise the nineteenth century, seeing that the smug and stingy philosophy, which poisons his life through the book, was an exclusive creation of that century. But, as I have said before, the fieriest mediævalist may forgive Dickens for disliking the good things the Middle Ages took away, considering how he loved whatever good things the Middle Ages left behind. It matters very little that he hated old feudal castles when they were already old. It matters very much that he hated the New Poor Law while it was still new.

The moral of this matter in “The Chimes” is essential. Dickens had sympathy with the poor in the Greek and literal sense; he suffered with them mentally; for the things that irritated them were the things that irritated him. He did not pity the people, or even champion the people, or even merely love the people; in this matter he was the people. He alone in our literature is the voice not merely of the social substratum, but even of the subconsciousness of the substratum. He utters the secret anger of the humble. He says what the uneducated only think, or even only feel, about the educated. And in nothing is he so genuinely such a voice as in this fact of his fiercest mood being reserved for methods that are counted scientific and progressive. Pure and exalted atheists talk themselves into believing that the working-classes are turning with indignant scorn from the churches. The working-classes are not indignant against the churches in the least. The things the working-classes really are indignant against are the hospitals. The people has no definite disbelief in the temples of theology. The people has a very fiery and practical disbelief in the temples of physical science. The things the poor hate are the modern things, the rationalistic things—doctors,
inspectors, poor law guardians, professional philanthropy. They never showed any reluctance to be helped by the old and corrupt monasteries. They will often die rather than be helped by the modern and efficient workhouse. Of all this anger, good or bad, Dickens is the voice of an accusing energy. When, in “The Christmas Carol,” Scrooge refers to the surplus population, the Spirit tells him, very justly, not to speak till he knows what the surplus is and where it is. The implication is severe but sound. When a group of superciliously benevolent economists look down into the abyss for the surplus population, assuredly there is only one answer that should be given to them; and that is to say, “If there is a surplus, you are a surplus.” And if anyone were ever cut off, they would be. If the barricades went up in our streets and the poor became masters, I think the priests would escape, I fear the gentlemen would; but I believe the gutters would be simply running with the blood of philanthropists.

Lastly, he was at one with the poor in this chief matter of Christmas, in the matter, that is, of special festivity. There is nothing on which the poor are more criticised than on the point of spending large sums on small feasts; and though there are material difficulties, there is nothing in which they are more right. It is said that a Boston paradox-monger said, “Give us the luxuries of life and we will dispense with the necessities.” But it is the whole human race that says it, from the first savage wearing feathers instead of clothes to the last costermonger having a treat instead of three meals.

The third of his Christmas stories, “The Cricket on the Hearth,” calls for no extensive comment, though it is very characteristic. It has all the qualities which we have called dominant qualities in his Christmas sentiment. It has cosiness, that is the comfort that depends upon a discomfort surrounding it. It has a sympathy with the poor, and especially with the extravagance of the poor; with what may be called the temporary wealth of the poor. It has the sentiment of the hearth, that is, the sentiment of the open fire being the red heart of the room. That open fire is the veritable flame of England, still kept burning in the midst of a mean civilisation of stoves. But everything that is valuable in “The Cricket on the Hearth” is perhaps as well expressed in the title as it is in the story. The tale itself, in spite of some of those inimitable things that Dickens never failed to say, is a little too comfortable to be quite convincing. “The Christmas Carol” is the conversion of an anti-Christmas character. “The Chimes” is a slaughter of anti-Christmas characters. “The Cricket,” perhaps, fails for lack of this crusading note. For everything has its weak side, and when full justice has been done to this neglected note of poetic comfort, we must remember that it has its very real
weak side. The defect of it in the work of Dickens was that he tended sometimes
to pile up the cushions until none of the characters could move. He is so much
interested in effecting his state of static happiness that he forgets to make a story
at all. His princes at the start of the story begin to live happily ever afterwards.
We feel this strongly in “Master Humphrey’s Clock” and we feel it sometimes in
these Christmas stories. He makes his characters so comfortable that his
characters begin to dream and drivel. And he makes his reader so comfortable
that his reader goes to sleep.

The actual tale of the carrier and his wife sounds somewhat sleepily in our
ears; we cannot keep our attention fixed on it, though we are conscious of a kind
of warmth from it as from a great wood fire. We know so well that everything
will soon be all right that we do not suspect when the carrier suspects, and are
not frightened when the gruff Tackleton growls. The sound of the festivities at
the end come fainter on our ears than did the shout of the Cratchits or the bells of
Trotty Veck. All the good figures that followed Scrooge when he came growling
out of the fog fade into the fog again.
CHAPTER VIII

THE TIME OF TRANSITION

Dickens was back in London by the June of 1845. About this time he became the first editor of The Daily News, a paper which he had largely planned and suggested, and which, I trust, remembers its semi-divine origin. That his thoughts had been running, as suggested in the last chapter, somewhat monotonously on his Christmas domesticities, is again suggested by the rather singular fact that he originally wished The Daily News to be called The Cricket. Probably he was haunted again with his old vision of a homely, tale-telling periodical such as had broken off in “Master Humphrey’s Clock.” About this time, however, he was peculiarly unsettled. Almost as soon as he had taken the editorship he threw it up; and having only recently come back to England, he soon made up his mind to go back to the Continent. In the May of 1846 he ran over to Switzerland and tried to write “Dombey and Son” at Lausanne. Tried to, I say, because his letters are full of an angry impotence. He could not get on. He attributed this especially to his love of London and his loss of it, “the absence of streets and numbers of figures. . . . My figures seem disposed to stagnate without crowds about them.” But he also, with shrewdness, attributed it more generally to the laxer and more wandering life he had led for the last two years, the American tour, the Italian tour, diversified, generally speaking, only with slight literary productions. His ways were never punctual or healthy, but they were also never unconscientious as far as work was concerned. If he walked all night he could write all day. But in this strange exile or interregnum he did not seem able to fall into any habits, even bad habits. A restlessness beyond all his experience had fallen for a season upon the most restless of the children of men.

It may be a mere coincidence: but this break in his life very nearly coincided with the important break in his art. “Dombey and Son,” planned in all probability some time before, was destined to be the last of a quite definite series, the early novels of Dickens. The difference between the books from the beginning up to “Dombey,” and the books from “David Copperfield” to the end may be hard to state dogmatically, but is evident to every one with any literary sense. Very coarsely, the case may be put by saying that he diminished, in the story as a whole, the practice of pure caricature. Still more coarsely it may be put in the phrase that he began to practise realism. If we take Mr. Stiggins, say, as a
clergyman depicted at the beginning of his literary career, and Mr. Crisparkle, say, as a clergyman depicted at the end of it, it is evident that the difference does not merely consist in the fact that the first is a less desirable clergyman than the second. It consists in the nature of our desire for either of them. The glory of Mr. Crisparkle partly consists in the fact that he might really exist anywhere, in any country town into which we may happen to stray. The glory of Mr. Stiggins wholly consists in the fact that he could not possibly exist anywhere except in the head of Dickens. Dickens has the secret recipe of that divine dish. In some sense, therefore, when we say that he became less of a caricaturist we mean that he became less of a creator. That original violent vision of all things which he had seen from his boyhood began to be mixed with other men’s milder visions and with the light of common day. He began to understand and practise other than his own mad merits; began to have some movement towards the merits of other writers, towards the mixed emotion of Thackeray, or the solidity of George Eliot. And this must be said for the process; that the fierce wine of Dickens could endure some dilution. On the whole, perhaps, his primal personalism was all the better when surging against some saner restraints. Perhaps a flavour of strong Stiggins goes a long way. Perhaps the colossal Crummles might be cut down into six or seven quite creditable characters. For my own part, for reasons which I shall afterwards mention, I am in real doubt about the advantage of this realistic education of Dickens. I am not sure that it made his books better; but I am sure it made them less bad. He made fewer mistakes undoubtedly; he succeeded in eliminating much of the mere rant or cant of his first books; he threw away much of the old padding, all the more annoying, perhaps, in a literary sense, because he did not mean it for padding, but for essential eloquence. But he did not produce anything actually better than Mr. Chuckster. But then there is nothing better than Mr. Chuckster. Certain works of art, such as the Venus of Milo, exhaust our aspiration. Upon the whole this may, perhaps, be safely said of the transition. Those who have any doubt about Dickens can have no doubt of the superiority of the later books. Beyond question they have less of what annoys us in Dickens. But do not, if you are in the company of any ardent adorers of Dickens (as I hope for your sake you are), do not insist too urgently and exclusively on the splendour of Dickens’s last works, or they will discover that you do not like him.

“Dombey and Son” is the last novel in the first manner: “David Copperfield” is the first novel in the last. The increase in care and realism in the second of the two is almost startling. Yet even in “Dombey and Son” we can see the coming of
a change, however faint, if we compare it with his first fantasies such as “Nicholas Nickleby” or “The Old Curiosity Shop.” The central story is still melodrama, but it is much more tactful and effective melodrama. Melodrama is a form of art, legitimate like any other, as noble as farce, almost as noble as pantomime. The essence of melodrama is that it appeals to the moral sense in a highly simplified state, just as farce appeals to the sense of humour in a highly simplified state. Farce creates people who are so intellectually simple as to hide in packing-cases or pretend to be their own aunts. Melodrama creates people so morally simple as to kill their enemies in Oxford Street, and repent on seeing their mother’s photograph. The object of the simplification in farce and melodrama is the same, and quite artistically legitimate, the object of gaining a resounding rapidity of action which subtleties would obstruct. And this can be done well or ill. The simplified villain can be a spirited charcoal sketch or a mere black smudge. Carker is a spirited charcoal sketch: Ralph Nickleby is a mere black smudge. The tragedy of Edith Dombey teems with unlikelihood, but it teems with life. That Dombey should give his own wife censure through his own business manager is impossible, I will not say in a gentleman, but in a person of ordinary sane self-conceit. But once having got the inconceivable trio before the footlights, Dickens gives us good ringing dialogue very different from the mere rants in which Ralph Nickleby figures in the unimaginable character of a rhetorical money-lender. And there is another point of technical improvement in this book over such books as “Nicholas Nickleby.” It has not only a basic idea, but a good basic idea. There is a real artistic opportunity in the conception of a solemn and selfish man of affairs, feeling for his male heir, his first and last emotion, mingled of a thin flame of tenderness and a strong flame of pride. But with all these possibilities, the serious episode of the Dombeyes serves ultimately only to show how unfitted Dickens was for such things, how fitted he was for something opposite.

The incurable poetic character, the hopelessly non-realistic character of Dickens’s essential genius could not have a better example than the story of the Dombeyes. For the story itself is probable; it is the treatment that makes it unreal. In attempting to paint the dark pagan devotion of the father (as distant from the ecstatic and Christian devotion of the mother) Dickens was painting something that was really there. This is no wild theme, like the wanderings of Nell’s grandfather, or the marriage of Gride. A man of Dombey’s type would love his son as he loves Paul. He would neglect his daughter as he neglects Florence. And yet we feel the utter unreality of it all, while we feel the utter reality of
monsters like Stiggins or Mantalini. Dickens could only work in his own way, and that way was the wild way. We may almost say this: that he could only make his characters probable if he was allowed to make them impossible. Give him licence to say and do anything, and he could create beings as vivid as our own aunts and uncles. Keep him to likelihood and he could not tell the plainest tale so as to make it seem likely. The story of “Pickwick” is credible, although it is not possible. The story of Florence Dombey is incredible although it is true.

An excellent example can be found in the same story. Major Bagstock is a grotesque, and yet he contains touch after touch of Dickens’s quiet and sane observation of things as they are. He was always most accurate when he was most fantastic. Dombey and Florence are perfectly reasonable, but we simply know that they do not exist. The Major is mountainously exaggerated, but we all feel that we have met him at Brighton. Nor is the rationale of the paradox difficult to see; Dickens exaggerated when he had found a real truth to exaggerate. It is a deadly error (an error at the back of much of the false placidity of our politics) to suppose that lies are told with excess and luxuriance, and truths told with modesty and restraint. Some of the most frantic lies on the face of life are told with modesty and restraint; for the simple reason that only modesty and restraint will save them. Many official declarations are just as dignified as Mr. Dombey, because they are just as fictitious. On the other hand, the man who has found a truth dances about like a boy who has found a shilling; he breaks into extravagances, as the Christian churches broke into gargoyles. In one sense truth alone can be exaggerated; nothing else can stand the strain. The outrageous Bagstock is a glowing and glaring exaggeration of a thing we have all seen in life—the worst and most dangerous of all its hypocries. For the worst and most dangerous hypocrite is not he who affects unpopular virtue, but he who affects popular vice. The jolly fellow of the saloon bar and the racecourse is the real deceiver of mankind; he has misled more than any false prophet, and his victims cry to him out of hell. The excellence of the Bagstock conception can best be seen if we compare it with the much weaker and more improbable knavery of Pecksniff. It would not be worth a man’s while, with any worldly object, to pretend to be a holy and high-minded architect. The world does not admire holy and high-minded architects. The world does admire rough and tough old army men who swear at waiters and wink at women. Major Bagstock is simply the perfect prophecy of that decadent jingoism which corrupted England of late years. England has been duped, not by the cant of goodness, but by the cant of badness. It has been fascinated by a quite fictitious
cynicism, and reached that last and strangest of all impostures in which the mask is as repulsive as the face.

“Dombey and Son” provides us with yet another instance of this general fact in Dickens. He could only get to the most solemn emotions adequately if he got to them through the grotesque. He could only, so to speak, really get into the inner chamber by coming down the chimney, like his own most lovable lunatic in “Nicholas Nickleby.” A good example is such a character as Toots. Toots is what none of Dickens’s dignified characters are, in the most serious sense, a true lover. He is the twin of Romeo. He has passion, humility, self-knowledge, a mind lifted into all magnanimous thoughts, everything that goes with the best kind of romantic love. His excellence in the art of love can only be expressed by the somewhat violent expression that he is as good a lover as Walter Gay is a bad one. Florence surely deserved her father’s scorn if she could prefer Gay to Toots. It is neither a joke nor any kind of exaggeration to say that in the vacillations of Toots, Dickens not only came nearer to the psychology of true love than he ever came elsewhere, but nearer than anyone else ever came. To ask for the loved one, and then not to dare to cross the threshold, to be invited by her, to long to accept, and then to lie in order to decline, these are the funny things that Mr. Toots did, and that every honest man who yells with laughter at him has done also. For the moment, however, I only mention this matter as a pendant case to the case of Major Bagstock, an example of the way in which Dickens had to be ridiculous in order to begin to be true. His characters that begin solemn end futile; his characters that begin frivolous end solemn in the best sense. His foolish figures are not only more entertaining than his serious figures, they are also much more serious. The Marchioness is not only much more laughable than Little Nell; she is also much more of all that Little Nell was meant to be; much more really devoted, pathetic, and brave. Dick Swiveller is not only a much funnier fellow than Kit, he is also a much more genuine fellow, being free from that slight stain of “meekness,” or the snobbishness of the respectable poor, which the wise and perfect Chuckster wisely and perfectly perceived in Kit. Susan Nipper is not only more of a comic character than Florence; she is more of a heroine than Florence any day of the week. In “Our Mutual Friend” we do not, for some reason or other, feel really very much excited about the fall or rescue of Lizzie Hexam. She seems too romantic to be really pathetic. But we do feel excited about the rescue of Miss Podsnap, because she is, like Toots, a holy fool; because her pink nose and pink elbows, and candid outcry and open indecent affections do convey to us a sense of
innocence helpless among human dragons, of Andromeda tied naked to a rock. Dickens had to make a character humorous before he could make it human; it was the only way he knew, and he ought to have always adhered to it. Whether he knew it or not, the only two really touching figures in “Martin Chuzzlewit” are the Misses Pecksniff. Of the things he tried to treat unsmilingly and grandly we can all make game to our heart’s content. But when once he has laughed at a thing it is sacred for ever.

“Dombey,” however, means first and foremost the finale of the early Dickens. It is difficult to say exactly in what it is that we perceive that the old crudity ends here, and does not reappear in “David Copperfield” or in any of the novels after it. But so certainly it is. In detached scenes and characters, indeed, Dickens kept up his farcical note almost or quite to the end. But this is the last farce; this is the last work in which a farcical licence is tacitly claimed, a farcical note struck to start with. And in a sense his next novel may be called his first novel. But the growth of this great novel, “David Copperfield,” is a thing very interesting, but at the same time very dark, for it is a growth in the soul. We have seen that Dickens’s mind was in a stir of change; that he was dreaming of art and even of realism. Hugely delighted as he invariably was with his own books, he was humble enough to be ambitious. He was even humble enough to be envious. In the matter of art, for instance, in the narrower sense, of arrangement and proportion in fictitious things, he began to be conscious of his deficiency, and even, in a stormy sort of way, ashamed of it; he tried to gain completeness even while raging at anyone who called him incomplete. And in this manner of artistic construction, his ambition (and his success too) grew steadily up to the instant of his death. The end finds him attempting things that are at the opposite pole to the frank formlessness of “Pickwick.” His last book, “The Mystery of Edwin Drood,” depends entirely upon construction, even upon a centralised strategy. He staked everything upon a plot; he who had been the weakest of plotters, weaker than Sim Tappertit. He essayed a detective story, he who could never keep a secret; and he has kept it to this day. A new Dickens was really being born when Dickens died.

And as with art, so with reality. He wished to show that he could construct as well as anybody. He also wished to show that he could be as accurate as anybody. And in this connection (as in many others) we must recur constantly to the facts mentioned in connection with America and with his money-matters. We must recur, I mean, to the central fact that his desires were extravagant in quantity, but not in quality; that his wishes were excessive, but not eccentric. It
must never be forgotten that sanity was his ideal, even when he seemed almost insane. It was thus with his literary aspirations. He was brilliant; but he wished sincerely to be solid. Nobody out of an asylum could deny that he was a genius and an unique writer; but he did not wish to be an unique writer, but an universal writer. Much of the manufactured pathos or rhetoric against which his enemies quite rightly rail, is really due to his desire to give all sides of life at once, to make his book a cosmos instead of a tale. He was sometimes really vulgar in his wish to be a literary Whiteley, an universal provider. Thus it was that he felt about realism and truth to live. Nothing is easier than to defend Dickens as Dickens, but Dickens wished to be everybody else. Nothing is easier than to defend Dickens’s world as a fairyland, of which he alone has the key; to defend him as one defends Maeterlinck, or any other original writer. But Dickens was not content with being original, he had a wild wish to be true. He loved truth so much in the abstract that he sacrificed to the shadow of it his own glory. He denied his own divine originality, and pretended that he had plagiarised from life. He disowned his own soul’s children, and said he had picked them up in the street.

And in this mixed and heated mood of anger and ambition, vanity and doubt, a new and great design was born. He loved to be romantic, yet he desired to be real. How if he wrote of a thing that was real and showed that it was romantic? He loved real life; but he also loved his own way. How if he wrote his own real life, but wrote it in his own way? How if he showed the carping critics who doubted the existence of his strange characters, his own yet stranger existence? How if he forced these pedants and unbelievers to admit that Weller and Pecksniff, Crummles and Swiveller, whom they thought so improbably wild and wonderful, were less wild and wonderful than Charles Dickens? What if he ended the quarrels about whether his romances could occur, by confessing that his romance had occurred?

For some time past, probably during the greater part of his life, he had made notes for an autobiography. I have already quoted an admirable passage from these notes, a passage reproduced in “David Copperfield,” with little more alteration than a change of proper names—the passage which describes Captain Porter and the debtor’s petition in the Marshalsea. But he probably perceived at last what a less keen intelligence must ultimately have perceived, that if an autobiography is really to be honest it must be turned into a work of fiction. If it is really to tell the truth, it must at all costs profess not to. No man dare say of himself, over his own name, how badly he has behaved. No man dare say of
himself over his own name, how well he has behaved. Moreover, of course, a touch of fiction is almost always essential to the real conveying of fact, because fact, as experienced, has a fragmentariness which is bewildering at first hand and quite blinding at second hand. Facts have at least to be sorted into compartments and the proper head and tail given back to each. The perfection and pointedness of art are a sort of substitute for the pungency of actuality. Without this selection and completion our life seems a tangle of unfinished tales, a heap of novels, all volume one. Dickens determined to make one complete novel of it.

For though there are many other aspects of “David Copperfield,” this autobiographical aspect is, after all, the greatest. The point of the book is that, unlike all the other books of Dickens, it is concerned with quite common actualities, but it is concerned with them warmly and with the warlike sympathies. It is not only both realistic and romantic; it is realistic because it is romantic. It is human nature described with the human exaggeration. We all know the actual types in the book; they are not like the turgid and preternatural types elsewhere in Dickens. They are not purely poetic creations like Mr. Kenwigs or Mr. Bunsby. We all know that they exist. We all know the stiff-necked and humorous old-fashioned nurse, so conventional and yet so original, so dependent and yet so independent. We all know the intrusive stepfather, the abstract strange male, coarse, handsome, sulky, successful, a breaker-up of homes. We all know the erect and sardonic spinster, the spinster who is so mad in small things and so sane in great ones. We all know the cock of the school; we all know Steerforth, the creature whom the gods love and even the servants respect. We know his poor and aristocratic mother, so proud, so gratified, so desolate. We know the Rosa Dartle type, the lonely woman in whom affection itself has stagnated into a sort of poison.

But while these are real characters they are real characters lit up with the colours of youth and passion. They are real people romantically felt; that is to say, they are real people felt as real people feel them. They are exaggerated, like all Dickens’s figures: but they are not exaggerated as personalities are exaggerated by an artist; they are exaggerated as personalities are exaggerated by their own friends and enemies. The strong souls are seen through the glorious haze of the emotions that strong souls really create. We have Murdstone as he would be to a boy who hated him; and rightly, for a boy would hate him. We have Steerforth as he would be to a boy who adored him; and rightly, for a boy would adore him. It may be that if these persons had a mere terrestrial existence, they appeared to other eyes more insignificant. It may be that Murdstone in
common life was only a heavy business man with a human side that David was too sulky to find. It may be that Steerforth was only an inch or two taller than David, and only a shade or two above him in the lower middle classes; but this does not make the book less true. In cataloguing the facts of life the author must not omit that massive fact, illusion.

When we say the book is true to life we must stipulate that it is especially true to youth: even to boyhood. All the characters seem a little larger than they really were, for David is looking up at them. And the early pages of the book are in particular astonishingly vivid. Parts of it seem like fragments of our forgotten infancy. The dark house of childhood, the loneliness, the things half understood, the nurse with her inscrutable sulks and her more inscrutable tenderness, the sudden deportations to distant places, the seaside and its childish friendships, all this stirs in us when we read it, like something out of a previous existence. Above all, Dickens has excellently depicted the child enthroned in that humble circle which only in after years he perceives to have been humble. Modern and cultured persons, I believe, object to their children seeing kitchen company or being taught by a woman like Peggotty. But surely it is more important to be educated in a sense of human dignity and equality than in anything else in the world. And a child who has once had to respect a kind and capable woman of the lower classes will respect the lower classes for ever. The true way to overcome the evil in class distinction is not to denounce them as revolutionists denounce them, but to ignore them as children ignore them.

The early youth of David Copperfield is psychologically almost as good as his childhood. In one touch especially Dickens pierced the very core of the sensibility of boyhood; it was when he made David more afraid of a manservant than of anybody or anything else. The lowering Murdstone, the awful Mrs. Steerforth are not so alarming to him as Mr. Littimer, the unimpeachable gentleman’s gentleman. This is exquisitely true to the masculine emotions, especially in their undeveloped state. A youth of common courage does not fear anything violent, but he is in mortal fear of anything correct. This may or may not be the reason that so few female writers understand their male characters, but this fact remains that the more sincere and passionate and even headlong a lad is the more certain he is to be conventional. The bolder and freer he seems the more the traditions of the college or the rules of the club will hold him with their gyves of gossamer; and the less afraid he is of his enemies the more cravenly he will be afraid of his friends. Herein lies indeed the darkest period of our ethical doubt and chaos. The fear is that as morals become less urgent, manners will
become more so; and men who have forgotten the fear of God will retain the fear of Littimer. We shall merely sink into a much meaner bondage. For when you break the great laws, you do not get liberty; you do not even get anarchy. You get the small laws.

The sting and strength of this piece of fiction, then, do (by a rare accident) lie in the circumstance that it was so largely founded on fact. “David Copperfield” is the great answer of a great romancer to the realists. David says in effect: “What! you say that the Dickens tales are too purple really to have happened! Why, this is what happened to me, and it seemed the most purple of all. You say that the Dickens heroes are too handsome and triumphant! Why, no prince or paladin in Ariosto was ever so handsome and triumphant as the Head Boy seemed to me walking before me in the sun. You say the Dickens villains are too black I Why, there was no ink in the devil’s inkstand black enough for my own stepfather when I had to live in the same house with him. The facts are quite the other way to what you suppose. This life of grey studies and half-tones, the absence of which you regret in Dickens, is only life as it is looked at. This life of heroes and villains is life as it is lived. The life a man knows best is exactly the life he finds most full of fierce certainties and battles between good and ill—his own. Oh yes, the life we do not care about may easily be a psychological comedy. Other people’s lives may easily be human documents. But a man’s own life is always a melodrama.”

There are other effective things in “David Copperfield;” they are not all autobiographical, but they nearly all have this new note of quietude and reality. Micawber is gigantic; an immense assertion of the truth that the way to live is to exaggerate everything. But of him I shall have to speak more fully in another connection. Mrs. Micawber, artistically speaking, is even better. She is very nearly the best thing in Dickens. Nothing could be more absurd, and at the same time more true, than her clear argumentative manner of speech as she sits smiling and expounding in the midst of ruin. What could be more lucid and logical and unanswerable than her statement of the prolegomena of the Medway problem, of which the first step must be to “see the Medway,” or of the coal-trade, which required talent and capital. “Talent Mr. Micawber has. Capital Mr. Micawber has not.” It seems as if something should have come at last out of so clear and scientific an arrangement of the ideas. Indeed if (as has been suggested) we regard “David Copperfield” as an unconscious defence of the poetic view of life, we might regard Mrs. Micawber as an unconscious satire on the logical view of life. She sits as a monument of the hopelessness and
helplessness of reason in the face of this romantic and unreasonable world.

As I have taken “Dombey and Son” as the book before the transition, and “David Copperfield” as typical of the transition itself, I may perhaps take “Bleak House” as the book after the transition, and so complete the description. Bleak House has every characteristic of his new realistic culture. Dickens never now, as in his early books, revels in the parts he likes and scamps the parts he does not, after the manner of Scott. He does not, as in previous tales, leave his heroes and heroines mere walking gentlemen and ladies with nothing at all to do but walk: he expends upon them at least ingenuity. By the expedients (successful or not) of the self-revelation of Esther or the humorous inconsistencies of Rick, he makes his younger figures if not lovable at least readable. Everywhere we see this tighter and more careful grip. He does not, for instance, when he wishes to denounce a dark institution, sandwich it in as a mere episode in a rambling story of adventure, as the debtor’s prison is embedded in the body of “Pickwick” or the low Yorkshire school in the body of “Nicholas Nickleby.” He puts the Court of Chancery in the centre of the stage, a sombre and sinister temple, and groups round it in artistic relation decaying and frantic figures, its offspring and its satirists, An old dipsomaniac keeps a rag and bone shop, type of futility and antiquity, and calls himself the Lord Chancellor. A little mad old maid hangs about the courts on a forgotten or imaginary lawsuit, and says with perfect and pungent irony, “I am expecting a judgment shortly. On the Day of Judgment.” Rick and Ada and Esther are not mere strollers who have strayed into the court of law, they are its children, its symbols, and its victims. The righteous indignation of the book is not at the red heat of anarchy, but at the white heat of art. Its anger is patient and plodding, like some historic revenge. Moreover, it slowly and carefully creates the real psychology of oppression. The endless formality, the endless unemotional urbanity, the endless hope deferred, these things make one feel the fact of injustice more than the madness of Nero. For it is not the activeness of tyranny that maddens, but its passiveness. We hate the deafness of the god more than his strength. Silence is the unbearable repartee.

Again we can see in this book strong traces of an increase in social experience. Dickens, as his fame carried him into more fashionable circles, began really to understand something of what is strong and what is weak in the English upper class. Sir Leicester Dedlock is a far more effective condemnation of oligarchy than the ugly swagger of Sir Mulberry Hawk, because pride stands out more plainly in all its impotence and insolence as the one weakness of a good man, than as one of the million weaknesses of a bad one. Dickens, like all
young Radicals, had imagined in his youth that aristocracy rested upon the hardness of somebody; he found, as we all do, that it rests upon the softness of everybody. It is very hard not to like Sir Leicester Dedlock, not to applaud his silly old speeches, so foolish, so manly, so genuinely English, so disastrous to England. It is true that the English people love a lord, but it is not true that they fear him; rather, if anything, they pity him; there creeps into their love something of the feeling they have towards a baby or a black man. In their hearts they think it admirable that Sir Leicester Dedlock should be able to speak at all. And so a system, which no iron laws and no bloody battles could possibly force upon a people, is preserved from generation to generation by pure, weak good-nature.

In “Bleak House” occurs the character of Harold Skimpole, the character whose alleged likeness to Leigh Hunt has laid Dickens open to so much disapproval. Unjust disapproval, I think, as far as fundamental morals are concerned. In method he was a little clamorous and clumsy, as, indeed, he was apt to be. But when he said that it was possible to combine a certain tone of conversation taken from a particular man with other characteristics which were not meant to be his, he surely said what all men who write stories know. A work of fiction often consists in combining a pair of whiskers seen in one street with a crime seen in another. He may quite possibly have really meant only to make Leigh Hunt’s light philosophy the mask for a new kind of scamp, as a variant on the pious mask of Pecksniff or the candid mask of Bagstock. He may never once have had the unfriendly thought, “Suppose Hunt behaved like a rascal!” he may have only had the fanciful thought, “Suppose a rascal behaved like Hunt!”

But there is a good reason for mentioning Skimpole especially. In the character of Skimpole, Dickens displayed again a quality that was very admirable in him—I mean a disposition to see things sanely and to satirise even his own faults. He was commonly occupied in satirising the Gradgrinds, the economists, the men of Smiles and Self-Help. For him there was nothing poorer than their wealth, nothing more selfish than their self-denial. And against them he was in the habit of pitting the people of a more expansive habit—the happy Swivellers and Micawbers, who, if they were poor, were at least as rich as their last penny could make them. He loved that great Christian carelessness that seeks its meat from God. It was merely a kind of uncontrollable honesty that forced him into urging the other side. He could not disguise from himself or from the world that man who began by seeking his meat from his neighbour without apprising his neighbour of the fact. He had shown how good
irresponsibility could be; he could not stoop to hide how bad it could be. He created Skimpole; and Skimpole is the dark underside of Micawber.

In attempting Skimpole he attempted something with a great and urgent meaning. He attempted it, I say; I do not assert that he carried it through. As has been remarked, he was never successful in describing psychological change; his characters are the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. And critics have complained very justly of the crude villainy of Skimpole’s action in the matter of Joe and Mr. Bucket. Certainly Skimpole had no need to commit a clumsy treachery to win a clumsy bribe; he had only to call on Mr. Jarndyce. He had lost his honour too long to need to sell it.

The effect is bad; but I repeat that the aim was great. Dickens wished, under the symbol of Skimpole, to point out a truth which is perhaps the most terrible in moral psychology. I mean the fact that it is by no means easy to draw the line between light and heavy offence. He desired to show that there are no faults, however kindly, that we can afford to flatter or to let alone; he meant that perhaps Skimpole had once been as good a man as Swiveller. If flattered or let alone, our kindliest fault can destroy our kindliest virtue. A thing may begin as a very human weakness and end as a very inhuman weakness. Skimpole means that the extremes of evil are much nearer than we think. A man may begin by being too generous to pay his debts, and end by being too mean to pay his debts. For the vices are very strangely in league, and encourage each other. A sober man may become a drunkard through being a coward. A brave man may become a coward through being a drunkard. That is the thing Dickens was darkly trying to convey in Skimpole—that a man might become a mountain of selfishness if he attended only to the Dickens virtues. There is nothing that can be neglected; there is no such thing (he meant) as a peccadillo.

I have dwelt on this consciousness of his because, alas, it had a very sharp edge for himself. Even while he was permitting a fault originally small to make a comedy of Skimpole, a fault originally small was making a tragedy of Charles Dickens. For Dickens also had a bad quality, not intrinsically very terrible, which he allowed to wreck his life. He also had a small weakness that could sometimes become stronger than all his strengths. His selfishness was not, it need hardly be said, the selfishness of Gradgrind; he was particularly compassionate and liberal. Nor was it in the least the selfishness of Skimpole. He was entirely self-dependent, industrious, and dignified. His selfishness was wholly a selfishness of the nerves. Whatever his whim or the temperature of the instant told him to do must be done. He was the type of man who would break a
window if it would not open and give him air. And this weakness of his had, by the time of which we speak, led to a breach between himself and his wife which he was too exasperated and excited to heal in time. Everything must be put right, and put right at once, with him. If London bored him, he must go to the Continent at once; if the Continent bored him, he must come back to London at once. If the day was too noisy, the whole household must be quiet; if night was too quiet, the whole household must wake up. Above all, he had the supreme character of the domestic despot—that his good temper was, if possible, more despotic than his bad temper. When he was miserable (as he often was, poor fellow), they only had to listen to his railings. When he was happy they had to listen to his novels. All this, which was mainly mere excitability, did not seem to amount to much; it did not in the least mean that he had ceased to be a clean-living and kind-hearted and quiet honest man. But there was this evil about it—that he did not resist his little weakness at all; he pampered it as Skimpole pampered his. And it separated him and his wife. A mere silly trick of temperament did everything that the blackest misconduct could have done. A random sensibility, started about the shuffling of papers or the shutting of a window, ended by tearing two clean, Christian people from each other, like a blast of bigamy or adultery.
CHAPTER IX

LATER LIFE AND WORKS

I have deliberately in this book mentioned only such facts in the life of Dickens as were, I will not say significant (for all facts must be significant, including the million facts that can never be mentioned by anybody), but such facts as illustrated my own immediate meaning. I have observed this method consistently and without shame because I think that we can hardly make too evident a chasm between books which profess to be statements of all the ascertainable facts, and books which (like this one) profess only to contain a particular opinion or a summary deducible from the facts. Books like Forster’s exhaustive work and others exist, and are as accessible as St. Paul’s Cathedral; we have them in common as we have the facts of the physical universe; and it seems highly desirable that the function of making an exhaustive catalogue and that of making an individual generalisation should not be confused. No catalogue, of course, can contain all the facts even of five minutes; every catalogue, however long and learned, must be not only a bold, but, one may say, an audacious selection. But if a great many facts are given, the reader gains a blurred belief that all the facts are being given. In a professedly personal judgment it is therefore clearer and more honest to give only a few illustrative facts, leaving the other obtainable facts to balance them. For thus it is made quite clear that the thing is a sketch, an affair of a few lines.

It is as well, however, to make at this point a pause sufficient to indicate the main course of the later life of the novelist. And it is best to begin with the man himself, as he appeared in those last days of popularity and public distinction. Many are still alive who remember him in his after-dinner speeches, his lectures, and his many public activities; as I am not one of these, I cannot correct my notions with that flash of the living features without which a description may be subtly and entirely wrong. Once a man is dead, if it be only yesterday, the newcomer must piece him together from descriptions really as much at random as if he were describing Cæsar or Henry II. Allowing, however, for this inevitable falsity, a figure vivid and a little fantastic, does walk across the stage of Forster’s “Life.”

Dickens was of a middle size and his vivacity and relative physical insignificance probably gave rather the impression of small size; certainly of the
absence of bulk. In early life he wore, even for that epoch, extravagant clusters of brown hair, and in later years a brown moustache and a fringe of brown beard (cut like a sort of broad and bushy imperial) sufficiently individual in shape to give him a faint air as of a foreigner. His face had a peculiar tint or quality which is hard to describe even after one has contrived to imagine it. It was the quality which Mrs. Carlyle felt to be, as it were metallic, and compared to clear steel. It was, I think, a sort of pale glitter and animation, very much alive and yet with something deathly about it, like a corpse galvanised by a god. His face (if this was so) was curiously a counterpart of his character. For the essence of all Dickens’s character was that it was at once tremulous and yet hard and sharp, just as the bright blade of a sword is tremulous and yet hard and sharp. He vibrated at every touch and yet he was indestructible; you could bend him, but you could not break him. Brown of hair and beard, somewhat pale of visage (especially in his later days of excitement and ill-health), he had quite exceptionally bright and active eyes that were always darting about like brilliant birds to pick up all the tiny things of which he made more, perhaps, than any novelist has done; for he was a sort of poetical Sherlock Holmes. The mouth behind the brown beard was large and mobile, like the mouth of an actor; indeed he was an actor, in many things too much of an actor. In his lectures, in later years, he could turn his strange face into any of the innumerable mad masks that were the faces of his grotesque characters. He could make his face fall suddenly into the blank inanity of Mrs. Raddle’s servant, or swell, as if to twice its size, into the apoplectic energy of Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz. But the outline of his face itself, from his youth upwards, was cut quite delicate and decisive and in repose, and in its own keen way, may even have looked effeminate.

The dress of the comfortable classes during the later years of Dickens was, compared with ours, somewhat slipshod and somewhat gaudy. It was the time of loose pegtop trousers of an almost Turkish oddity, of large ties, of loose short jackets and of loose long whiskers. Yet even this expansive period, it must be confessed, considered Dickens a little too flashy or, as some put it, too Frenchified in his dress. Such a man would wear velvet coats and wild waistcoats that were like incredible sunsets; he would wear those old white hats of an unnecessary and startling whiteness. He did not mind being seen in sensational dressing-gowns; it is said he had his portrait painted in one of them. All this is not meritorious; neither is it particularly discreditable; it is a characteristic only, but an important one. He was an absolutely independent and entirely self-respecting man. But he had none of that old lusty, half-dignified
English feeling upon which Thackeray was so sensitive; I mean the desire to be regarded as a private gentleman, which means at bottom the desire to be left alone. This again is not a merit; it is only one of the milder aspects of aristocracy. But meritorious or not, Dickens did not possess it. He had no objection to being stared at, if he were also admired. He did not exactly pose in the oriental manner of Disraeli; his instincts were too clean for that; but he did pose somewhat in the French manner, of some leaders like Mirabeau and Gambetta. Nor had he the dull desire to “get on” which makes men die contented as inarticulate Under-Secretaries of State. He did not desire success so much as fame, the old human glory, the applause and wonder of the people. Such he was as he walked down the street in his Frenchified clothes, probably with a slight swagger.

His private life consisted of one tragedy and ten thousand comedies. By one tragedy I mean one real and rending moral tragedy—the failure of his marriage. He loved his children dearly, and more than one of them died; but in sorrows like these there is no violence and above all no shame. The end of life is not tragic like the end of love. And by the ten thousand comedies I mean the whole texture of his life, his letters, his conversation, which were one incessant carnival of insane and inspired improvisation So far as he could prevent it, he never permitted a day of his life to be ordinary. There was always some prank, some impetuous proposal, some practical joke, some sudden hospitality, some sudden disappearance. It is related of him (I give one anecdote out of a hundred) that in his last visit to America, when he was already reeling as it were under the blow that was to be mortal, he remarked quite casually to his companions that a row of painted cottages looked exactly like the painted shops in a pantomime. No sooner had the suggestion passed his lips than he leapt at the nearest doorway and in exact imitation of the clown in the harlequinade, beat conscientiously with his fist, not on the door (for that would have burst the canvas scenery of course), but on the side of the doorpost. Having done this he lay down ceremoniously across the doorstep for the owner to fall over him if he should come rushing out. He then got up gravely and went on his way. His whole life was full of such unexpected energies, precisely like those of the pantomime clown. Dickens had indeed a great and fundamental affinity with the landscape, or rather house-scape, of the harlequinade. He liked high houses, and sloping roofs, and deep areas. But he would have been really happy if some good fairy of the eternal pantomime had given him the power of flying off the roofs and pitching harmlessly down the height of the houses and bounding out of the areas
like an indiarubber ball. The divine lunatic in “Nicholas Nickleby” comes nearest to his dream. I really think Dickens would rather have been that one of his characters than any of the others. With what excitement he would have struggled down the chimney. With what ecstatic energy he would have hurled the cucumbers over the garden wall.

His letters exhibit even more the same incessant creative force. His letters are as creative as any of his literary creation. His shortest postcard is often as good as his ablest novel; each one of them is spontaneous; each one of them is different. He varies even the form and shape of the letter as far as possible; now it is in absurd French; now it is from one of his characters; now it is an advertisement for himself as a stray dog. All of them are very funny; they are not only very funny, but they are quite as funny as his finished and published work. This is the ultimately amazing thing about Dickens; the amount there is of him. He wrote, at the very least, sixteen thick important books packed full of original creation. And if you had burnt them all he could have written sixteen more, as a man writes idle letters to his friend.

In connection with this exuberant part of his nature there is another thing to be noted, if we are to make a personal picture of him. Many modern people, chiefly women, have been heard to object to the Bacchic element in the books of Dickens, that celebration of social drinking as a supreme symbol of social living, which those books share with almost all the great literature of mankind, including the New Testament. Undoubtedly there is an abnormal amount of drinking in a page of Dickens, as there is an abnormal amount of fighting, say, in a page of Dumas. If you reckon up the beers and brandies of Mr. Bob Sawyer, with the care of an arithmetician and the deductions of a pathologist, they rise alarmingly like a rising tide at sea. Dickens did defend drink clamorously, praised it with passion, and described whole orgies of it with enormous gusto. Yet it is wonderfully typical of his prompt and impatient nature that he himself drank comparatively little. He was the type of man who could be so eager in praising the cup that he left the cup untasted. It was a part of his active and feverish temperament that he did not drink wine very much. But it was a part of his humane philosophy, of his religion, that he did drink wine. To healthy European philosophy wine is a symbol; to European religion it is a sacrament. Dickens approved it because it was a great human institution, one of the rites of civilisation, and this it certainly is. The teetotaller who stands outside it may have perfectly clear ethical reasons of his own, as a man may have who stands outside education or nationality, who refuses to go to a University or to serve in
an Army. But he is neglecting one of the great social things that man has added to nature. The teetotaller has chosen a most unfortunate phrase for the drunkard when he says that the drunkard is making a beast of himself. The man who drinks ordinarily makes nothing but an ordinary man of himself. The man who drinks excessively makes a devil of himself. But nothing connected with a human and artistic thing like wine can bring one nearer to the brute life of nature. The only man who is, in the exact and literal sense of the words, making a beast of himself is the teetotaller.

The tone of Dickens towards religion, though like that of most of his contemporaries, philosophically disturbed and rather historically ignorant, had an element that was very characteristic of himself. He had all the prejudices of his time. He had, for instance, that dislike of defined dogmas, which really means a preference for unexamined dogmas. He had the usual vague notion that the whole of our human past was packed with nothing but insane Tories. He had, in a word, al the old Radical ignorances which went along with the old Radical acuteness and courage and public spirit. But this spirit tended, in almost all the others who held it, to a specific dislike of the Church of England; and a disposition to set the other sects against it, as truer types of inquiry, or of individualism. Dickens had a definite tenderness for the Church of England. He might have even called it a weakness for the Church of England, but he had it. Something in those placid services, something in that reticent and humane liturgy pleased him against all the tendencies of his time; pleased him in the best part of himself, his virile love of charity and peace. Once, in a puff of anger at the Church’s political stupidity (which is indeed profound), he left it for a week or two and went to an Unitarian Chapel; in a week or two he came back. This curious and sentimental hold of the English Church upon him increased with years. In the book he was at work on when he died he describes the Minor Canon, humble, chivalrous, tender-hearted, answering with indignant simplicity the froth and platform righteousness of the sectarian philanthropist. He upholds Canon Crisparkle and satirises Mr. Honeythunder. Almost every one of the other Radicals, his friends, would have upheld Mr. Honeythunder and satirised Canon Crisparkle.

I have mentioned this matter for a special reason. It brings us back to that apparent contradiction or dualism in Dickens to which, in one connection or another, I have often adverted, and which, in one shape or another, constitutes the whole crux of his character. I mean the union of a general wildness approaching lunacy, with a sort of secret moderation almost amounting to
mediocrity. Dickens was, more or less, the man I have described—sensitive, theatrical, amazing, a bit of a dandy, a bit of a buffoon. Nor are such characteristics, whether weak or wild, entirely accidents or externals. He had some false theatrical tendencies integral in his nature. For instance, he had one most unfortunate habit, a habit that often put him in the wrong, even when he happened to be in the right. He had an incurable habit of explaining himself. This reduced his admirers to the mental condition of the authentic but hitherto uncelebrated little girl who said to her mother, “I think I should understand if only you wouldn’t explain.” Dickens always would explain. It was a part of that instinctive publicity of his which made him at once a splendid democrat and a little too much of an actor. He carried it to the craziest lengths. He actually printed, in Household Words, an apology for his own action in the matter of his marriage. That incident alone is enough to suggest that his external offers and proposals were sometimes like screams heard from Bedlam. Yet it remains true that he had in him a central part that was pleased only by the most decent and the most reposeful rites, by things of which the Anglican Prayer-book is very typical. It is certainly true that he was often extravagant. It is most certainly equally true that he detested and despised extravagant.

The best explanation can be found in his literary genius. His literary genius consisted in a contradictory capacity at once to entertain and to deride—very ridiculous ideas. If he is a buffoon, he is laughing at buffoonery. His books were in some ways the wildest on the face of the world. Rabelais did not introduce into Paphlagonia or the Kingdom of the Coqcigrues satiric figures more frantic and misshapen than Dickens made to walk about the Strand and Lincoln’s Inn. But for all that, you come, in the core of him, on a sudden quietude and good sense. Such, I think, was the core of Rabelais, such were all the far-stretching and violent satirists. This is a point essential to Dickens, though very little comprehended in our current tone of thought. Dickens was an immoderate jester, but a moderate thinker. He was an immoderate jester because he was a moderate thinker. What we moderns call the wildness of his imagination was actually created by what we moderns call the tameness of his thought. I mean that he felt the full insanity of all extreme tendencies, because he was himself so sane; he felt eccentricities, because he was in the centre. We are always, in these days, asking our violent prophets to write violent satires; but violent prophets can never possibly write violent satires. In order to write satire like that of Rabelais—satire that juggles with the stars and kicks the world about like a football—it is necessary to be one’s self temperate, and even mild. A modern man like
Nietzsche, a modern man like Gorky, a modern man like d’Annunzio, could not possibly write real and riotous satire. They are themselves too much on the borderlands. They could not be a success as caricaturists, for they are already a great success as caricatures.

I have mentioned his religious preference merely as an instance of this interior moderation. To say, as some have done, that he attacked Nonconformity is quite a false way of putting it. It is clean across the whole trend of the man and his time to suppose that he could have felt bitterness against any theological body as a theological body; but anything like religious extravagance, whether Protestant or Catholic, moved him to an extravagance of satire. And he flung himself into the drunken energy of Stiggins, he piled up to the stars the “verbose flights of stairs” of Mr. Chadband, exactly because his own conception of religion was the quiet and impersonal Morning Prayer. It is typical of him that he had a peculiar hatred for speeches at the grave-side.

An even clearer case of what I mean can be found in his political attitude. He seemed to some an almost anarchic satirist. He made equal fun of the system which reformers made war on, and of the instruments on which reformers relied. He made no secret of his feeling that the average English premier was an accidental ass. In two superb sentences he summed up and swept away the whole British constitution: “England, for the last week, has been in an awful state. Lord Coodle would go out, Sir Thomas Doodle wouldn’t come in, and there being no people in England to speak of except Coodle and Doodle, the country has been without a government.” He lumped all cabinets and all government offices together, and made the same game of them all. He created his most staggering humbugs, his most adorable and incredible idiots, and set them in the highest thrones of our national system. To many moderate and progressive people, such a satirist seemed to be insulting heaven and earth, ready to wreck society for some mad alternative, prepared to pull down St. Paul’s, and on its ruins erect a gory guillotine. Yet as a matter of fact, this apparent wildness of his came from his being, if anything, a very moderate politician. It came, not at all from fanaticism, but from a rather rational detachment. He had the sense to see that the British Constitution was not democracy, but the British Constitution. It was an artificial system—like any other, good in some ways, bad in others. His satire of it sounded wild to those that worshipped it; but his satire of it arose not from his having any wild enthusiasm against it, but simply from his not having, like every one else, a wild enthusiasm for it. Alone, as far as I know, among all the great Englishmen of that age, he realised the thing that Frenchmen and Irishmen
understand. I mean the fact that popular government is one thing, and representative government another. He realised that representative government has many minor disadvantages, one of them being that it is never representative. He speaks of his “hope to have made every man in England feel something of the contempt for the House of Commons that I have.” He says also these two things, both of which are wonderfully penetrating as coming from a good Radical in 1855, for they contain a perfect statement of the peril in which we now stand, and which may, if it please God, sting us into avoiding the long vista at the end of which one sees so closely the dignity and the decay of Venice—

“I am hourly strengthened,” he says, “in my old belief, that our political aristocracy and our tuft-hunting are the death of England. In all this business I don’t see a gleam of hope. As to the popular spirit, it has come to be so entirely separated from the Parliament and the Government, and so perfectly apathetic about them both, that I seriously think it a most portentous sign.” And he says also this: “I really am serious in thinking—and I have given as painful consideration to the subject as a man with children to live and suffer after him can possibly give it—that representative government is become altogether a failure with us, that the English gentilities and subserviences render the people more unfit for it, and the whole thing has broken down since the great seventeenth-century time, and has no hope in it.”

These are the words of a wise and perhaps melancholy man, but certainly not of an unduly excited one. It is worth noting, for instance, how much more directly Dickens goes to the point than Carlyle did, who noted many of the same evils. But Carlyle fancied that our modern English government was wordy and long-winded because it was democratic government. Dickens saw, what is certainly the fact, that it is wordy and long-winded because it is aristocratic government, the two most pleasant aristocratic qualities being a love of literature and an unconsciousness of time. But all this amounts to the same conclusion of the matter. Frantic figures like Stiggins and Chadband were created out of the quietude of his religious preference. Wild creations like the Barnacles and the Bounderbys were produced in a kind of ecstasy of the ordinary, of the obvious in political justice. His monsters were made out of his level and his moderation, as the old monsters were made out of the level sea.

Such was the man of genius we must try to imagine; violently emotional, yet with a good judgment; pugnacious, but only when he thought himself oppressed; prone to think himself oppressed, yet not cynical about human motives. He was a man remarkably hard to understand or to reanimate. He almost always had
reasons for his action; his error was that he always expounded them. Sometimes his nerve snapped; and then he was mad. Unless it did so he was quite unusually sane.

Such a rough sketch at least must suffice us in order to summarise his later years. Those years were occupied, of course, in two main additions to his previous activities. The first was the series of public readings and lectures which he now began to give systematically. The second was his successive editorship of Household Words and of All the Year Round. He was of a type that enjoys every new function and opportunity. He had been so many things in his life, a reporter, an actor, a conjuror, a poet. As he had enjoyed them all, so he enjoyed being a lecturer, and enjoyed being an editor. It is certain that his audiences (who sometimes stacked themselves so thick that they lay flat on the platform all round him) enjoyed his being a lecturer. It is not so certain that the sub-editors enjoyed his being an editor. But in both connections the main matter of importance is the effect on the permanent work of Dickens himself. The readings were important for this reason, that they fixed, as if by some public and pontifical pronouncement, what was Dickens’s interpretation of Dickens’s work. Such a knowledge is mere tradition, but it is very forcible. My own family has handed on to me, and I shall probably hand on to the next generation, a definite memory of how Dickens made his face suddenly like the face of an idiot in impersonating Mrs. Raddle’s servant, Betsy. This does serve one of the permanent purposes of tradition; it does make it a little more difficult for any ingenious person to prove that Betsy was meant to be a brilliant satire on the over-cultivation of the intellect.

As for his relation to his two magazines, it is chiefly important, first for the admirable things that he wrote in the magazines himself (one cannot forbear to mention the inimitable monologue of the waiter in “Somebody’s Luggage”), and secondly for the fact that in his capacity of editor he made one valuable discovery. He discovered Wilkie Collins. Wilkie Collins was the one man of unmistakable genius who has a certain affinity with Dickens; an affinity in this respect, that they both combine in a curious way a modern and cockney and even commonplace opinion about things with a huge elemental sympathy with strange oracles and spirits and old night. There were no two men in Mid-Victorian England, with their top-hats and umbrellas, more typical of its rationality and dull reform; and there were no two men who could touch them at a ghost-story. No two men would have more contempt for superstitions; and no two men could so create the superstitious thrill. Indeed, our modern mystics make a mistake
when they wear long hair or loose ties to attract the spirits. The elves and the old gods when they revisit the earth really go straight for a dull top-hat. For it means simplicity, which the gods love.

Meanwhile his books, appearing from time to time, while as brilliant as ever, bore witness to that increasing tendency to a more careful and responsible treatment which we have remarked in the transition which culminated in “Bleak House.” His next important book, “Hard Times,” strikes an almost unexpected note of severity. The characters are indeed exaggerated but they are bitterly and deliberately exaggerated; they are not exaggerated with the old unconscious high spirits of Nicholas Nickleby or Martin Chuzzlewit. Dickens exaggerates Bounderby because he really hates him. He exaggerated Pecksniff because he really loved him. “Hard Times” is not one of the greatest books of Dickens; but it is perhaps in a sense one of his greatest monuments. It stamps and records the reality of Dickens’s emotion on a great many things that were then considered unphilosophical grumblings, but which since have swelled into the immense phenomena of the socialist philosophy. To call Dickens a Socialist is a wild exaggeration; but the truth and peculiarity of his position might be expressed thus: that even when everybody thought that Liberalism meant individualism he was emphatically a Liberal and emphatically not an individualist. Or the truth might be better still stated in this manner: that he saw that there was a secret thing, called humanity, to which both extreme socialism and extreme individualism were profoundly and inexpressibly indifferent, and that this permanent and presiding humanity was the thing he happened to understand; he knew that individualism is nothing and non-individualism is nothing but the keeping of the commandment of man. He felt, as a novelist should, that the question is too much discussed as to whether a man is in favour of this or that scientific philosophy; that there is another question, whether the scientific philosophy is in favour of the man. That is why such books as “Hard Times” will remain always a part of the power and tradition of Dickens. He saw that economic systems are not things like the stars, but things like the lamp-posts, manifestations of the human mind, and things to be judged by the human heart.

Thenceforward until the end his books grow consistently graver, and as it were, more responsible; he improves as an artist if not always as a creator. “Little Dorrit” (published in 1857) is at once in some ways so much more subtle and in every way so much more sad than the rest of his work that it bores Dickensians and especially pleases George Gissing. It is the only one of the Dickens tales which could please Gissing, not only by its genius, but also by its
atmosphere. There is something a little modern and a little sad, something also out of tune with the main trend of Dickens’s moral feeling, about the description of the character of Dorrit as actually and finally weakened by his wasting experiences, as not lifting any cry above the conquered years. It is but a faint fleck of shadow. But the illimitable white light of human hopefulness, of which I spoke at the beginning, is ebbing away, the work of the revolution is growing weaker everywhere; and the night of necessitarianism cometh when no man can work. For the first time in a book by Dickens perhaps we really do feel that the hero is forty-five. Clennam is certainly very much older than Mr. Pickwick.

This was indeed only a fugitive grey cloud; he went on to breezier operations. But whatever they were, they still had the note of the later days. They’ have a more cautious craftsmanship; they have a more mellow and a more mixed human sentiment. Shadows fell upon his page from the other and saddler figures out of the Victorian decline. A good instance of this is his next book, “The Tale of Two Cities” (1859). In dignity and eloquence it almost stands alone among the books by Dickens. But it also stands alone among his books in this respect, that it is not entirely by Dickens. It owes its inspiration avowedly to the passionate and cloudy pages of Carlyle’s “French Revolution.” And there is something quite essentially inconsistent between Carlyle’s disturbed and half-sceptical transcendentalism and the original school and spirit to which Dickens belonged, the lucid and laughing decisiveness of the old convinced and contented Radicalism. Hence the genius of Dickens cannot save him, just as the great genius of Carlyle could not save him from making a picture of the French Revolution, which was delicately and yet deeply erroneous. Both tend too much to represent it as a mere elemental outbreak of hunger or vengeance; they do not see enough that it was a war for intellectual principles, even for intellectual platitudes. We, the modern English, cannot easily understand the French Revolution, because we cannot easily understand the idea of bloody battle for pure common sense; we cannot understand common sense in arms and conquering. In modern England common sense appears to mean putting up with existing conditions. For us a practical politician really means a man who can be thoroughly trusted to do nothing at all; that is where his practicality comes in. The French feeling—the feeling at the back of the Revolution—was that the more sensible a man was, the more you must look out for slaughter.

In all the imitators of Carlyle, including Dickens, there is an obscure sentiment that the thing for which the Frenchmen died must have been something new and queer, a paradox, a strange idolatry. But when such blood ran in the streets, it
was for the sake of a truism; when those cities were shaken to their foundations, they were shaken to their foundations by a truism.

I have mentioned this historical matter because it illustrates these later and more mingled influences which at once improve and as it were perplex the later work of Dickens. For Dickens had in his original mental composition capacities for understanding this cheery and sensible element in the French Revolution far better than Carlyle. The French Revolution was, among other things, French, and, so far as that goes, could never have a precise counterpart in so jolly and autochthonous an Englishman as Charles Dickens. But there was a great deal of the actual and unbroken tradition of the Revolution itself in his early radical indictments; in his denunciation of the Fleet Prison there was a great deal of the capture of the Bastille. There was, above all, a certain reasonable impatience which was the essence of the old Republican, and which is quite unknown to the Revolutionist in modern Europe. The old Radical did not feel exactly that he was “in revolt”; he felt if anything that a number of idiotic institutions had revolted against reason and against him. Dickens, I say, had the revolutionary idea, though an English form of it, by clear and conscious inheritance; Carlyle had to rediscover the Revolution by a violence of genius and vision. If Dickens, then, took from Carlyle (as he said he did) his image of the Revolution, it does certainly mean that he had forgotten something of his own youth and come under the more complex influences of the end of the nineteenth century. His old hilarious and sentimental view of human nature seems for a moment dimmed in “Little Dorrit.” His old political simplicity has been slightly disturbed by Carlyle.

I repeat that this graver note is varied, but it remains a graver note. We see it struck, I think, with particular and remarkable success in “Great Expectations” (1860–61). This fine story is told with a consistency and quietude of individuality which is rare in Dickens. But so far had he travelled along the road of a heavier reality, that he even intended to give the tale an unhappy ending, making Pip lose Estella for ever; and he was only dissuaded from it by the robust romanticism of Bulwer Lytton. But the best part of the tale—the account of the vacillations of the hero between the humble life to which he owes everything, and the gorgeous life from which he expects something, touches a very true and somewhat tragic part of morals; for the great paradox of morality (the paradox to which only the religions have given an adequate expression) is that the very vilest kind of fault is exactly the most easy kind. We read in books and ballads about the wild fellow who might kill a man or smoke opium, but who would
never stoop to lying or cowardice or to “anything mean.” But for actual human beings opium and slaughter have only occasional charm; the permanent human temptation is the temptation to be mean. The one standing probability is the probability of becoming a cowardly hypocrite. The circle of the traitors is the lowest of the abyss, and it is also the easiest to fall into. That is one of the ringing realities of the Bible, that it does not make its great men commit grand sins; it makes its great men (such as David and St. Peter) commit small sins and behave like sneaks.

Dickens has dealt with this easy descent of desertion, this silent treason, with remarkable accuracy in the account of the indecisions of Pip. It contains a good suggestion of that weak romance which is the root of all snobbishness: that the mystery which belongs to patrician life excites us more than the open, even the indecent virtues of the humble. Pip is keener about Miss Havisham, who may mean well by him, than about Joe Gargery, who evidently does. All this is very strong and wholesome; but it is still a little stern. “Our Mutual Friend,” 1864, brings us back a little into his merrier and more normal manner; some of the satire, such as that upon Veneering’s election, is in the best of his old style, so airy and fanciful, yet hitting so suddenly and so hard. But even here we find the fuller and more serious treatment of psychology; notably in the two facts that he creates a really human villain, Bradley Headstone, and also one whom we might call a really human hero, Eugene, if it were not that he is much too human to be called a hero at all. It has been said (invariably by cads) that Dickens never described a gentleman; it is like saying that he never described a zebra. A gentleman is a very rare animal among human creatures, and to people like Dickens, interested in all humanity, not a supremely important one. But in Eugene Wrayburne he does, whether consciously or not, turn that accusation with a vengeance. For he not only describes a gentleman but describes the inner weakness and peril that belong to a gentleman, the devil that is always rending the entrails of an idle and agreeable man. In Eugene’s purposeless pursuit of Lizzie Hexam, in his yet more purposeless torturing of Bradley Headstone, the author has marvellously realised that singular empty obstinacy that drives the whims and pleasures of a leisured class. He sees that there is nothing that such a man more stubbornly adheres to, than the thing that he does not particularly want to do. We are still in serious psychology.

His last book represents yet another new departure, dividing him from the chaotic Dickens of days long before. His last book is not merely an attempt to improve his power of construction in a story: it is an attempt to rely entirely on
that power of construction. It not only has a plot, it is a plot. “The Mystery of Edwin Drood,” 1870, was in such a sense, perhaps the most ambitious book that Dickens ever attempted. It is, as every one knows, a detective story, and certainly a very successful one, as is attested by the tumult of discussion as to its proper solution. In this, quite apart from its unfinished state, it stands, I think, alone among the author’s works. Elsewhere, if he introduced a mystery, he seldom took the trouble to make it very mysterious. “Bleak House” is finished, but if it were only half finished I think anyone would guess that Lady Dedlock and Nemo had sinned in the past. “Edwin Drood” is not finished; for in the very middle of it Dickens died.

He had altogether overstrained himself in a last lecturing tour in America. He was a man in whom any serious malady would naturally make very rapid strides; for he had the temper of an irrational invalid. I have said before that there was in his curious character something that was feminine. Certainly there was nothing more entirely feminine than this, that he worked because he was tired. Fatigue bred in him a false and feverish industry, and his case increased, like the case of a man who drinks to cure the effects of drink. He died in 1870 and the whole nation mourned him as no public man has ever been mourned; for prime ministers and princes were private persons compared with Dickens. He had been a great popular king, like a king of some more primal age whom his people could come and see, giving judgment under an oak tree. He had in essence held great audiences of millions, and made proclamations to more than one of the nations of the earth. His obvious omnipresence in every part of public life was like the omnipresence of the sovereign. His secret omnipresence in every house and hut of private life was more like the omnipresence of a deity. Compared with that popular leadership all the fusses of the last forty years are diversions in idleness. Compared with such a case as his it may be said that we play with our politicians, and manage to endure our authors. We shall never have again such a popularity until we have again a people.

He left behind him this almost sombre fragment, “The Mystery of Edwin Drood.” As one turns it over the tragic element of its truncation mingles somewhat with an element of tragedy in the thing itself; the passionate and predestined Landless, or the half maniacal Jasper carving devils out of his own heart. The workmanship of it is very fine; the right hand has not only not lost, but is still gaining its cunning. But as we turn the now enigmatic pages the thought creeps into us again which I have suggested earlier, and which is never far off the mind of a true lover of Dickens. Had he lost or gained by the growth
of technique and probability in his later work? His later characters were more like men; but were not his earlier characters more like immortals? He has become able to perform a social scene so that it is possible at any rate; but where is that Dickens who once performed the impossible? Where is that young poet who created such majors and architects as Nature will never dare to create? Dickens learnt to describe daily life as Thackeray and Jane Austen could describe it; but Thackeray could not have thought such a thought as Crummles; and it is painful to think of Miss Austen attempting to imagine Mantalini. After all, we feel there are many able novelists; but there is only one Dickens, and whither has he fled?

He was alive to the end. And in this last dark and secretive story of Edwin Drood he makes one splendid and staggering appearance, like a magician saying farewell to mankind. In the centre of this otherwise reasonable and rather melancholy book, this grey story of a good clergyman and the quiet Cloisterham Towers, Dickens has calmly inserted one entirely delightful and entirely insane passage. I mean the frantic and inconceivable epitaph of Mrs. Sapsea, that which describes her as “the reverential wife” of Thomas Sapsea, speaks of her consistency in “looking up to him,” and ends with the words, spaced out so admirably on the tombstone, “Stranger pause. And ask thyself this question, Canst thou do likewise? If not, with a blush retire.” Not the wildest tale in Pickwick contains such an impossibility as that; Dickens dare scarcely have introduced it, even as one of Jingle’s lies. In no human churchyard will you find that invaluable tombstone; indeed, you could scarcely find it in any world where there are churchyards. You could scarcely have such immortal folly as that in a world where there is also death. Mr. Sapsea is one of the golden things stored up for us in a better world.

Yes, there were many other Dickenses: a clever Dickens, an industrious Dickens, a public-spirited Dickens; but this was the great one. This last outbreak of insane humour reminds us wherein lay his power and his supremacy. The praise of such beatific buffoonery should be the final praise, the ultimate word in his honour. The wild epitaph of Mrs. Sapsea should be the serious epitaph of Dickens.
CHAPTER X

THE GREAT DICKENS CHARACTERS

All criticism tends too much to become criticism of criticism; and the reason is very evident. It is that criticism of creation is so very staggering a thing. We see this in the difficulty of criticising any artistic creation. We see it again in the difficulty of criticising that creation which is spelt with a capital C. The pessimists who attack the Universe are always under this disadvantage. They have an exhilarating consciousness that they could make the sun and moon better; but they also have the depressing consciousness that they could not make the sun and moon at all. A man looking at a hippopotamus may sometimes be tempted to regard a hippopotamus as an enormous mistake; but he is also bound to confess that a fortunate inferiority prevents him personally from making such mistakes. It is neither a blasphemy nor an exaggeration to say that we feel something of the same difficulty in judging of the very creative element in human literature. And this is the first and last dignity of Dickens; that he was a creator. He did not point out things, he made them. We may disapprove of Mr. Guppy, but we recognise him as a creation flung down like a miracle out of an upper sphere; we can pull him to pieces, but we could not have put him together. We can destroy Mrs. Gamp in our wrath, but we could not have made her in our joy. Under this disadvantage any book about Dickens must definitely labour. Real primary creation (such as the sun or the birth of a child) calls forth not criticism, not appreciation, but a kind of incoherent gratitude. This is why most hymns about God are bad; and this is why most eulogies on Dickens are bad. The eulogists of the divine and of the human creator are alike inclined to appear sentimentalists because they are talking about something as very real. In the same way love-letters always sound florid and artificial because they are about something real.

Any chapter such as this chapter must therefore in a sense be inadequate. There is no way of dealing properly with the ultimate greatness of Dickens, except by offering sacrifice to him as a god; and this is opposed to the etiquette of our time. But something can perhaps be done in the way of suggesting what was the quality of this creation. But even in considering its quality we ought to remember that quality is not the whole question. One of the godlike things about Dickens is his quantity, his quantity as such, the enormous output, the incredible
fecundity of his invention, I have said a moment ago that not one of us could have invented Mr. Guppy. But even if we could have stolen Mr. Guppy from Dickens we have still to confront the fact that Dickens would have been able to invent another quite inconceivable character to take his place. Perhaps we could have created Mr. Guppy; but the effort would certainly have exhausted us; we should be ever afterwards wheeled about in a bath-chair at Bournemouth.

Nevertheless there is something that is worth saying about the quality of Dickens. At the very beginning of this review I remarked that the reader must be in a mood, at least, of democracy. To some it may have sounded irrelevant; but the Revolution was as much behind all the books of the nineteenth century as the Catholic religion (let us say) was behind all the colours and carving of the Middle Ages. Another great name of the nineteenth century will afford an evidence of this; and will also bring us most sharply to the problem of the literary quality of Dickens.

Of all these nineteenth-century writers there is none, in the noblest sense, more democratic than Walter Scott. As this may be disputed, and as it is relevant, I will expand the remark. There are two rooted spiritual realities out of which grow all kinds of democratic conception or sentiment of human equality. There are two things in which all men are manifestly and unmistakably equal. They are not equally clever or equally muscular or equally fat, as the sages of the modern reaction (with piercing insight) perceive. But this is a spiritual certainty, that all men are tragic. And this, again, is an equally sublime spiritual certainty, that all men are comic. No special and private sorrow can be so dreadful as the fact of having to die. And no freak or deformity can be so funny as the mere fact of having two legs. Every man is important if he loses his life; and every man is funny if he loses his hat, and has to run after it. And the universal test everywhere of whether a thing is popular, of the people, is whether it employs vigorously these extremes of the tragic and the comic. Shelley, for instance, was an aristocrat, if ever there was one in this world. He was a Republican, but he was not a democrat: in his poetry there is every perfect quality except this pungent and popular stab. For the tragic and the comic you must go, say, to Burns, a poor man. And all over the world, the folk literature, the popular literature, is the same. It consists of very dignified sorrow and very undignified fun. Its sad tales are of broken hearts; its happy tales are of broken heads.

These, I say, are two roots of democratic reality. But they have in more civilised literature, a more civilised embodiment of form. In literature such as that of the nineteenth century the two elements appear somewhat thus. Tragedy
becomes a profound sense of human dignity. The other and jollier element becomes a delighted sense of human variety. The first supports equality by saying that all men are equally sublime. The second supports equality by observing that all men are equally interesting.

In this democratic aspect of the interest and variety of all men, there is, of course, no democrat so great as Dickens. But in the other matter, in the idea of the dignity of all men, I repeat that there is no democrat so great as Scott. This fact, which is the moral and enduring magnificence of Scott, has been astonishingly overlooked. His rich and dramatic effects are gained in almost every case by some grotesque or beggarly figure rising into a human pride and rhetoric. The common man, in the sense of the paltry man, becomes the common man in the sense of the universal man. He declares his humanity. For the meanest of all the modernities has been the notion that the heroic is an oddity or variation, and that the things that unite us are merely flat or foul. The common things are terrible and startling, death, for instance, and first love: the things that are common are the things that are not commonplace. Into such high and central passions the comic Scott character will suddenly rise. Remember the firm and almost stately answer of the preposterous Nicol Jarvie when Helen Macgregor seeks to browbeat him into condoning lawlessness and breaking his bourgeois decency. That speech is a great monument of the middle class. Molière made M. Jourdain talk prose; but Scott made him talk poetry. Think of the rising and rousing voice of the dull and gluttonous Athelstane when he answers and overwhels De Bracy. Think of the proud appeal of the old beggar in the “Antiquary” when he rebukes the duellists. Scott was fond of describing kings in disguise. But all his characters are kings in disguise. He was, with all his errors, profoundly possessed with the old religious conception, the only possible democratic basis, the idea that man himself is a king in disguise.

In all this Scott, though a Royalist and a Tory, had in the strangest way, the heart of the Revolution. For instance, he regarded rhetoric, the art of the orator, as the immediate weapon of the oppressed. All his poor men make grand speeches, as they did in the Jacobin Club, which Scott would have so much detested. And it is odd to reflect that he was, as an author, giving free speech to fictitious rebels while he was, as a stupid politician, denying it to real ones. But the point for us here is this that all this popular sympathy of his rests on the graver basis, on the dark dignity of man. “Can you find no way?” asks Sir Arthur Wardour of the beggar when they are cut off by the tide. “I’ll give you a farm . . . I’ll make you rich.” . . .”Our riches will soon be equal,” says the beggar, and
looks out across the advancing sea.

Now, I have dwelt on this strong point of Scott because it is the best illustration of the one weak point of Dickens. Dickens had little or none of this sense of the concealed sublimity of every separate man. Dickens’s sense of democracy was entirely of the other kind; it rested on the other of the two supports of which I have spoken. It rested on the sense that all men were wildly interesting and wildly varied. When a Dickens character becomes excited he becomes more and more himself. He does not, like the Scott beggar, turn more and more into man. As he rises he grows more and more into a gargoyle or grotesque. He does not, like the fine speaker in Scott, grow more classical as he grows more passionate, more universal as he grows more intense. The thing can only be illustrated by a special case. Dickens did more than once, of course, make one of his quaint or humble characters assert himself in a serious crisis or defy the powerful. There is, for instance, the quite admirable scene in which Susan Nipper (one of the greatest of Dickens’s achievements) faces and rebukes Mr. Dombey. But it is still true (and quite appropriate in its own place and manner) that Susan Nipper remains a purely comic character throughout her speech, and even grows more comic as she goes on. She is more serious than usual in her meaning, but not more serious in her style. Dickens keeps the natural diction of Nipper, but makes her grow more Nipperish as she grows more warm. But Scott keeps the natural diction of Baillie Jarvie, but insensibly sobers and uplifts the style until it reaches a plain and appropriate eloquence. This plain and appropriate eloquence was (except in a few places at the end of “Pickwick”) almost unknown to Dickens. Whenever he made comic characters talk sentiment comically, as in the instance of Susan, it was a success, but an avowedly extravagant success. Whenever he made comic characters talk sentiment seriously it was an extravagant failure. Humour was his medium; his only way of approaching emotion. Wherever you do not get humour, you get unconscious humour.

As I have said elsewhere in this book Dickens was deeply and radically English; the most English of our great writers. And there is something very English in this contentment with a grotesque democracy; and in this absence of the eloquence and elevation of Scott. The English democracy is the most humorous democracy in the world. The Scotch democracy is the most dignified, while the whole abandon and satiric genius of the English populace come from its being quite undignified in every way. A comparison of the two types might be found, for instance, by putting a Scotch Labour Leader like Mr. Keir Hardie
alongside an English Labour Leader like Mr. Will Crooks. Both are good men, honest, and responsible and compassionate; but we can feel that the Scotchman carries himself seriously and universally, the Englishman personally and with an obstinate humour. Mr. Keir Hardie wishes to hold up his head as Man, Mr. Crooks wishes to follow his nose as Crooks. Mr. Keir Hardie is very like a poor man in Walter Scott. Mr. Crooks is very like a poor man in Dickens.

Dickens then had this English feeling of a grotesque democracy. By that is more properly meant a vastly varying democracy. The intoxicating variety of men—that was his vision and conception of human brotherhood. And certainly it is a great part of human brotherhood. In one sense things can only be equal if they are entirely different. Thus, for instance, people talk with a quite astonishing gravity about the inequality or equality of the sexes; as if there could possibly be any inequality between a lock and a key. Wherever there is no element of variety, wherever all the items literally have an identical aim, there is at once and of necessity inequality. A woman is only inferior to man in the matter of being not so manly; she is inferior in nothing else. Man is inferior to woman in so far as he is not a woman; there is no other reason. And the same applies in some degree to all genuine differences. It is a great mistake to suppose that love unites and unifies men. Love diversifies them, because love is directed towards individuality. The thing that really unites men and makes them like to each other is hatred. Thus, for instance, the more we love Germany the more pleased we shall be that Germany should be something different from ourselves, should keep her own ritual and conviviality and we ours. But the more we hate Germany the more we shall copy German guns and German fortifications in order to be armed against Germany. The more modern nations detest each other the more meekly they follow each other; for all competition is in its nature only a furious plagiarism. As competition means always similarity, it is equally true that similarity always means inequality. If everything is trying to be green, some things will be greener than others; but there is an immortal and indestructible equality between green and red. Something of the same kind of irrefutable equality exists between the violent and varying creations of such a writer as Dickens. They are all equally ecstatic fulfilments of a separate line of development. It would be hard to say that there could be any comparison or inequality, let us say between Mr. Sapsea and Mr. Elijah Pogram. They are both in the same difficulty; they can neither of them contrive to exist in this world; they are both too big for the gate of birth.

Of the high virtue of this variation I shall speak more adequately in a moment;
but certainly this love of mere variation (which I have contrasted with the classicism of Scott) is the only intelligent statement of the common case against the exaggeration of Dickens. This is the meaning, the only sane or endurable meaning, which people have in their minds when they say that Dickens is a mere caricaturist. They do not mean merely that Uncle Pumblechook does not exist. A fictitious character ought not to be a person who exists; he ought to be an entirely new combination, an addition to the creatures already existing on the earth. They do not mean that Uncle Pumblechook could not exist; for on that obviously they can have no knowledge whatever. They do not mean that Uncle Pumblechook’s utterances are selected and arranged so as to bring out his essential Pumblechookery; to say that is simply to say that he occurs in a work of art. But what they do really mean is this, and there is an element of truth in it. They mean that Dickens nowhere makes the reader feel that Pumblechook has any kind of fundamental human dignity at all. It is nowhere suggested that Pumblechook will some day die. He is felt rather as one of the idle and evil fairies, who are innocuous and yet malignant, and who live for ever because they never really live at all. This dehumanised vitality, this fantasy, this irresponsibility of creation, does in some sense truly belong to Dickens. It is the lower side of his hilarious human variety. But now we come to the higher side of his human variety, and it is far more difficult to state.

Mr. George Gissing, from the point of view of the passing intellectualism of our day, has made (among his many wise tributes to Dickens) a characteristic complaint about him. He has said that Dickens, with all his undoubted sympathy for the lower classes, never made a working man, a poor man, specifically and highly intellectual. An exception does exist, which he must at least have realised—a wit, a diplomatist, a great philosopher. I mean, of course, Mr. Weller. Broadly, however, the accusation has a truth, though it is a truth that Mr. Gissing did not grasp in its entirety. It is not only true that Dickens seldom made a poor character what we call intellectual; it is also true that he seldom made any character what we call intellectual. Intellectualism was not at all present to his imagination. What was present to his imagination was character—a thing which is not only more important than intellect, but is also much more entertaining. When some English moralists write about the importance of having character, they appear to mean only the importance of having a dull character. But character is brighter than wit, and much more complex than sophistry. The whole superiority of the democracy of Dickens over the democracy of such a man as Gissing lies exactly in the fact that Gissing would have liked to prove
that poor men could instruct themselves and could instruct others. It was of final importance to Dickens that poor men could amuse themselves and could amuse him. He troubled little about the mere education of that life; he declared two essential things about it—that it was laughable, and that it was livable. The humble characters of Dickens do not amuse each other with epigrams; they amuse each other with themselves. The present that each man brings in hand is his own incredible personality. In the most sacred sense, and in the most literal sense of the phrase, he “gives himself away.” Now, the man who gives himself away does the last act of generosity; he is like a martyr, a lover, or a monk. But he is also almost certainly what we commonly call a fool.

The key of the great characters of Dickens is that they are all great fools. There is the same difference between a great fool and a small fool as there is between a great poet and a small poet. The great fool is a being who is above wisdom rather than below it. That element of greatness of which I spoke at the beginning of this book is nowhere more clearly indicated than in such characters. A man can be entirely great while he is entirely foolish. We see this in the epic heroes, such as Achilles. Nay, a man can be entirely great because he is entirely foolish. We see this in all the great comic characters of all the great comic writers of whom Dickens was the last. Bottom the Weaver is great because he is foolish; Mr. Toots is great because he is foolish. The thing I mean can be observed, for instance, in innumerable actual characters. Which of us has not known, for instance, a great rustic?—a character so incurably characteristic that he seemed to break through all canons about cleverness or stupidity; we do not know whether he is an enormous idiot or an enormous philosopher; we know only that he is enormous, like a hill. These great, grotesque characters are almost entirely to be found where Dickens found them—among the poorer classes. The gentry only attain this greatness by going slightly mad. But who has not known an unfathomably personal old nurse? Who has not known an abysmal butler? The truth is that our public life consists almost exclusively of small men. Our public men are small because they have to prove that they are in the commonplace interpretation clever, because they have to pass examinations, to learn codes of manners, to imitate a fixed type. It is in private life that we find the great characters. They are too great to get into the public world. It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a great man to enter into the kingdoms of the earth. The truly great and gorgeous personality, he who talks as no one else could talk and feels with an elementary fire, you will never find this man on any cabinet bench, in any literary circle, at any society dinner.
Least of all will you find him in artistic society; he is utterly unknown in Bohemia. He is more than clever, he is amusing. He is more than successful, he is alive. You will find him stranded here and there in all sorts of unknown positions, almost always in unsuccessful positions. You will find him adrift as an impecunious commercial traveller like Micawber. You will find him but one of a batch of silly clerks, like Swiveller. You will find him as an unsuccessful actor, like Crummles. You will find him as an unsuccessful doctor, like Sawyer. But you will always find this rich and reeking personality where Dickens found it—among the poor. For the glory of this world is a very small and priggish affair, and these men are too large to get in line with it. They are too strong to conquer.

It is impossible to do justice to these figures because the essential of them is their multiplicity. The whole point of Dickens is that he not only made them, but made them by myriads; that he stamped his foot, and armies came out of the earth. But let us, for the sake of showing the true Dickens method, take one of them, a very sublime one, Toots. If affords a good example of the real work of Dickens, which was the revealing of a certain grotesque greatness inside an obscure and even unattractive type. It reveals the great paradox of all spiritual things; that the inside is always larger than the outside.

Toots is a type that we all know as well as we know chimney-pots. And of all conceivable human figures he is apparently the most futile and the most dull. He is the blockhead who hangs on at a private school, overgrown and under-developed. He is always backward in his lessons, but forward in certain cheap ways of the world; he can smoke before he can spell. Toots is a perfect and pungent picture of the wretched youth. Toots has, as this youth always has, a little money of his own; enough to waste in a semi-dissipation he does not enjoy, and in a gaping regard for sports in which he could not possibly excel. Toots has, as this youth always has, bits of surreptitious finery, in his case the incomparable ring. In Toots, above all, is exactly rendered the central and most startling contradiction; the contrast between a jauntiness and a certain impudence of the attire, with the profound shame and sheepishness of the visage and the character. In him, too, is expressed the larger contrast between the external gaiety of such a lad’s occupations, and the infinite, disconsolate sadness of his empty eyes. This is Toots; we know him, we pity him, and we avoid him. Schoolmasters deal with him in despair or in a heart-breaking patience. His family is vague about him. His low-class hangers-on (like the Game Chicken) lead him by the nose. The very parasites that live on him despise him. But Dickens does not despise him. Without denying one of the dreary details which make us avoid the man,
Dickens makes him a man whom we long to meet. He does not gloss over one of his dismal deficiencies, but he makes them seem suddenly like violent virtues that we would go to the world’s end to see. Without altering one fact, he manages to alter the whole atmosphere, the whole universe of Toots. He makes us not only like, but love, not only love, but reverence this little dunce and cad. The power to do this is a power truly and literally to be called divine.

For this is the very wholesome point. Dickens does not alter Toots in any vital point. The thing he does alter is us. He makes us lively where we were bored, kind where we were cruel, and above all, free for an universal human laughter where we were cramped in a small competition about that sad and solemn tiling, the intellect. His enthusiasm fills us, as does the love of God, with a glorious shame; after all, he has only found in Toots what we might have found for ourselves. He has only made us as much interested in Toots as Toots is in himself. He does not alter the proportions of Toots; he alters only the scale; we seem as if we were staring at a rat risen to the stature of an elephant. Hitherto we have passed him by; now we feel that nothing could induce us to pass him by; that is the nearest way of putting the truth. He has not been whitewashed in the least; he has not been depicted as any cleverer than he is. He has been turned from a small fool into a great fool. We know Toots is not clever; but we are not inclined to quarrel with Toots because he is not clever. We are more likely to quarrel with cleverness because it is not Toots. All the examinations he could not pass, all the schools he could not enter, all the temporary tests of brain and culture which surrounded him shall pass, and Toots shall remain like a mountain.

It may be noticed that the great artists always choose great fools rather than great intellectuals to embody humanity. Hamlet does express the æsthetic dreams and the bewilderments of the intellect; but Bottom the Weaver expresses them much better. In the same manner Toots expresses certain permanent dignities in human nature more than any of Dickens’s more dignified characters can do it. For instance, Toots expresses admirably the enduring fear, which is the very essence of falling in love. When Toots is invited by Florence to come in, when he longs to come in, but still stays out, he is embodying a sort of insane and perverse humility which is elementary in the lover.

There is an apostolic injunction to suffer fools gladly. We always lay the stress on the word “suffer,” and interpret the passage as one urging resignation. It might be better, perhaps, to lay the stress upon the word “gladly,” and make our familiarity with fools a delight, and almost a dissipation. Nor is it necessary that our pleasure in fools (or at least in great and godlike fools) should be merely
satiric or cruel. The great fool is he in whom we cannot tell which is the conscious and which the unconscious humour; we laugh with him and laugh at him at the same time. An obvious instance is that of ordinary and happy marriage. A man and a woman cannot live together without having against each other a kind of everlasting joke. Each has discovered that the other is a fool, but a great fool. This largeness, this grossness and gorgeousness of folly is the thing which we all find about those with whom we are in intimate contact; and it is the one enduring basis of affection, and even of respect. When we know an individual named Tomkins, we know that he has succeeded where all others have failed; he has succeeded in being Tomkins. Just so Mr. Toots succeeded; he was defeated in all scholastic examinations, but he was the victor in that visionary battle in which unknown competitors vainly tried to be Toots.

If we are to look for lessons, here at least is the last and deepest lesson of Dickens. It is in our own daily life that we are to look for the portents and the prodigies. This is the truth, not merely of the fixed figures of our life; the wife, the husband, the fool that fills the sky. It is true of the whole stream and substance of our daily experience; every instant we reject a great fool merely because he is foolish. Every day we neglect Tootses and Swivellers, Guppys and Joblings, Simmerys and Flashers. Every day we lose the last sight of Jobling and Chuckster, the Analytical Chemist, or the Marchioness. Every day we are missing a monster whom we might easily love, and an imbecile whom we should certainly admire.

This is the real gospel of Dickens; the inexhaustible opportunities offered by the liberty and the variety of man. Compared with this life, all public life, all fame, all wisdom, is by its nature cramped and cold and small. For on that defined and lighted public stage men are of necessity forced to profess one set of accomplishments, to rise to one rigid standard. It is the utterly unknown people who can grow in all directions like an exuberant tree. It is in our interior lives that we find that people are too much themselves. It is in our private life that we find them swelling into the enormous contours, and taking on the colours of caricature. Many of us live publicly with featureless public puppets, images of the small public abstractions. It is when we pass our own private gate, and open our own secret door, that we step into the land of the giants.
CHAPTER XI

ON THE ALLEGED OPTIMISM OF DICKENS

In one of the plays of the decadent period, an intellectual expressed the atmosphere of his epoch by referring to Dickens as “a vulgar optimist.” I have in a previous chapter suggested something of the real strangeness of such a term. After all, the main matter of astonishment (or rather of admiration) is that optimism should be vulgar. In a world in which physical distress is almost the common lot, we actually complain that happiness is too common. In a world in which the majority is physically miserable we actually complain of the sameness of praise; we are bored with the abundance of approval. When we consider what the conditions of the vulgar really are, it is difficult to imagine a stranger or more splendid tribute to humanity than such a phrase as vulgar optimism. It is as if one spoke of “vulgar martyrdom” or “common crucifixion.”

First, however, let it be said frankly that there is a foundation for the charge against Dickens which is implied in the phrase about vulgar optimism. It does not concern itself with Dickens’s confidence in the value of existence and the intrinsic victory of virtue; that is not optimism but religion. It is not concerned with his habit of making bright occasions bright, and happy stories happy; that is not optimism, but literature. Nor is it concerned even with his peculiar genius for the description of an almost bloated joviality; that is not optimism, it is simply Dickens. With all these higher variations of optimism I deal elsewhere. But over and above all these there is a real sense in which Dickens laid himself open to the accusation of a vulgar optimism, and I desire to put the admission of this first, before the discussion that follows. Dickens did have a disposition to make his characters at all costs happy, or, to speak more strictly, he had a disposition to make them comfortable rather than happy. He had a sort of literary hospitality; he too often treated his characters as if they were his guests. From a host is always expected, and always ought to be expected as long as human civilisation is healthy, a strictly physical benevolence, if you will, a kind of coarse benevolence. Food and fire and such things should always be the symbols of the man entertaining men; because they are things which all men beyond question have in common. But something more than this is needed from a man who is imagining and making men, the artist, the man who is not receiving men, but rather sending them forth.
As I shall remark in a moment in the matter of the Dickens villains, it is not true that he made every one thus at home. But he did do it to a certain wide class of incongruous characters, he did it to all who had been in any way unfortunate. It had needed its origin (a very beautiful origin) in his realisation of how much a little pleasure was to such people. He knew well that the greatest happiness that has been known since Eden is the happiness of the unhappy. So far he is admirable. And as long as he was describing the ecstasy of the poor, the borderland between pain and pleasure, he was at his highest. Nothing that has ever been written about human delights, no Earthly Paradise, no Utopia has ever come so near the quick nerve of happiness as his descriptions of the rare extravagances of the poor; such an admirable description, for instance, as that of Kit Nubbles taking his family to the theatre. For he seizes on the real source of the whole pleasure; a holy fear. Kit tells the waiter to bring the beer. And the waiter, instead of saying, “Did you address that language to me,” said, “Pot of beer, sir; yes, sir.” That internal and quivering humility of Kit is the only way to enjoy life or banquets; and the fear of the waiter is the beginning of dining. People in this mood “take their pleasures sadly”; which is the only way of taking them at all.

So far Dickens is supremely right. As long as he was dealing with such penury and such festivity his touch was almost invariably sure. But when he came to more difficult cases, to people who for one reason or another could not be cured with one good dinner, he did develop this other evil, this genuinely vulgar optimism of which I speak. And the mark of it is this: that he gave the characters a comfort that had no especial connection with themselves; he threw comfort at them like alms. There are cases at the end of his stories in which his kindness to his characters is a careless and insolent kindness. He loses his real charity and adopts the charity of the Charity Organisation Society; the charity that is not kind, the charity that is puffed up, and that does behave itself unseemly. At the end of some of his stories he deals out his characters a kind of out-door relief.

I will give two instances. The whole meaning of the character of Mr. Micawber is that a man can be always almost rich by constantly expecting riches. The lesson is a really important one in our sweeping modern sociology. We talk of the man whose life is a failure; but Micawber’s life never is a failure, because it is always a crisis. We think constantly of the man who if he looked back would see that his existence was unsuccessful; but Micawber never does look back; he always looks forward, because the bailiff is coming to-morrow. You cannot say he is defeated, for his absurd battle never ends; he cannot
despair of life, for he is so much occupied in living. All this is of immense importance in the understanding of the poor; it is worth all the slum novelists that ever insulted democracy. But how did it happen that the man who created this Micawber could pension him off at the end of the story and make him a successful colonial mayor? Micawber never did succeed, never ought to succeed; his kingdom is not of this world. But this is an excellent instance of Dickens’s disposition to make his characters grossly and incongruously comfortable. There is another instance in the same book. Dora, the first wife of David Copperfield, is a very genuine and amusing figure; she has certainly far more force of character than Agnes. She represents the infinite and divine irrationality of the human heart. What possessed Dickens to make her such a dehumanised prig as to recommend her husband to marry another woman? One could easily respect a husband who after time and development made such a marriage, but surely not a wife who desired it. If Dora had died hating Agnes we should know that everything was right, and that God would reconcile the irreconcilable. When Dora dies recommending Agnes we know that everything is wrong, at least if hypocrisy and artificiality and moral vulgarity are wrong. There, again, Dickens yields to a mere desire to give comfort. He wishes to pile up pillows round Dora; and he smothers her with them, like Othello.

This is the real vulgar optimism of Dickens: it does exist; and I have deliberately put it first. Let us admit that Dickens’s mind was far too much filled with pictures of satisfaction and cosiness and repose. Let us admit that he thought principally of the pleasures of the oppressed classes; let us admit that it hardly cost him any artistic pang to make out human beings as much happier than they are. Let us admit all this, and a curious fact remains.

For it was this too easily contented Dickens, this man with cushions at his back and (it sometimes seems) cotton wool in his ears; it was this happy dreamer, this vulgar optimist who alone of modern writers did really destroy some of the wrongs he hated and bring about some of the reforms he desired. Dickens did help to pull down the debtors’ prisons; and if he was too much of an optimist he was quite enough of a destroyer. Dickens did drive Squeers out of his Yorkshire den; and if Dickens was too contented, it was more than Squeers was. Dickens did leave his mark on parochialism, on nursing, on funerals, on public executions, on workhouses, on the Court of Chancery. These things were altered; they are different. It may be that such reforms are not adequate remedies; that is another question altogether. The next sociologists may think these old Radical reforms quite narrow or accidental. But such as they were, the
old Radicals got them done; and the new sociologists cannot get anything done at all. And in the practical doing of them Dickens played a solid and quite demonstrable part; that is the plain matter that concerns us here. If Dickens was an optimist he was an uncommonly active and useful kind of optimist. If Dickens was a sentimentalist he was a very practical sentimentalist.

And the reason of this is one that goes deep into Dickens’s social reform, and like every other real and desirable thing, involves a kind of mystical contradiction. If we are to save the oppressed, we must have two apparently antagonistic emotions in us at the same time. We must think the oppressed man intensely miserable, and at the same time intensely attractive and important. We must insist with violence upon his degradation; we must insist with the same violence upon his dignity. For if we relax by one inch the one assertion, men will say he does not need saving. And if we relax by one inch the other assertion, men will say he is not worth saving. The optimists will say that reform is needless. The pessimists will say that reform is hopeless. We must apply both simultaneously to the same oppressed man; we must say that he is a worm and a god; and we must thus lay ourselves open to the accusation (or the compliment) of transcendentalism. This is, indeed, the strongest argument for the religious conception of life. If the dignity of man is an earthly dignity we shall be tempted to deny his earthly degradation. If it is a heavenly dignity we can admit the earthly degradation with all the candour of Zola. If we are idealists about the other world we can be realists about this world. But that is not here the point. What is quite evident is that if a logical praise of the poor man is pushed too far, and if a logical distress about him is pushed too far, either will involve wreckage to the central paradox of reform. If the poor man is made too admirable he ceases to be pitiable; if the poor man is made too pitiable he becomes merely contemptible. There is a school of smug optimists who will deny that he is a poor man. There is a school of scientific pessimists who will deny that he is a man.

Out of this perennial contradiction arises the fact that there are always two types of the reformer. The first we may call for convenience the pessimistic, the second the optimistic reformer. One dwells upon the fact that souls are being lost; the other dwells upon the fact that they are worth saving. Both, of course, are (so far as that is concerned) quite right, but they naturally tend to a difference of method, and sometimes to a difference of perception. The pessimistic reformer points out the good elements that oppression has destroyed; the optimistic reformer, with an even fiercer joy, points out the good elements that it
has not destroyed. It is the case for the first reformer that slavery has made men slavish. It is the case for the second reformer that slavery has not made men slavish. The first describes how bad men are under bad conditions. The second describes how good men are under bad conditions. Of the first class of writers, for instance, is Gorky. Of the second class of writers is Dickens.

But here we must register a real and somewhat startling fact. In the face of all apparent probability, it is certainly true that the optimistic reformer reforms much more completely than the pessimistic reformer. People produce violent changes by being contented, by being far too contented. The man who said that “revolutions are not made with rose-water” was obviously inexperienced in practical human affairs. Men like Rousseau and Shelley do make revolutions, and do make them with rose-water; that is, with a too rosy and sentimental view of human goodness. Figures that come before and create convulsion and change (for instance, the central figure of the New Testament) always have the air of walking in an unnatural sweetness and calm. They give us their peace ultimately in blood and battle and division; not as the world giveth give they unto us.

Nor is the real reason of the triumph of the too-contented reformer particularly difficult to define. He triumphs because he keeps alive in the human soul an invincible sense of the thing being worth doing, of the war being worth winning, of the people being worth their deliverance. I remember that Mr. William Archer, some time ago, published in one of his interesting series of interviews, an interview with Mr. Thomas Hardy. That powerful writer was represented as saying, in the course of the conversation, that he did not wish at the particular moment to define his opinion with regard to the ultimate problem of whether life itself was worth living. There are, he said, hundreds of remediable evils in this world. When we have remedied all these (such was his argument), it will be time enough to ask whether existence itself under its best possible conditions is valuable or desirable. Here we have presented, with a considerable element of what can only be called unconscious humour, the plain reason of the failure of the pessimist as a reformer. Mr. Hardy is asking us, I will not say to buy a pig in a poke; he is asking us to buy a poke on the remote chance of there being a pig in it. When we have for some few frantic centuries tortured ourselves to save mankind, it will then be “time enough” to discuss whether they can possibly be saved. When, in the case of infant mortality, for example, we have exhausted ourselves with the earthshaking efforts required to save the life of every individual baby, it will then be time enough to consider whether every individual baby would not have been happier dead. We are to remove mountains and bring
the millennium, because then we can have a quiet moment to discuss whether the millennium is at all desirable. Here we have the low-water mark of the impotence of the sad reformer. And here we have the reason of the paradoxical triumph of the happy one. His triumph is a religious triumph; it rests upon his perpetual assertion of the value of the human soul and of human daily life. It rests upon his assertion that human life is enjoyable because it is human. And he will never admit, like so many compassionate pessimists, that human life ever ceases to be human. He does not merely pity the lowness of men; he feels an insult to their elevation. Brute pity should be given only to brutes. Cruelty to animals is cruelty and a vile thing; but cruelty to a man is not cruelty, it is treason. Tyranny over a man is not tyranny, it is rebellion, for man is royal. Now, the practical weakness of the vast mass of modern pity for the poor and the oppressed is precisely that it is merely pity; the pity is pitiful, but not respectful. Men feel that the cruelty to the poor is a kind of cruelty to animals. They never feel that it is justice to equals; nay, it is treachery to comrades. This dark scientific pity, this brutal pity, has an elemental sincerity of its own; but it is entirely useless for all ends of social reform. Democracy swept Europe with the sabre when it was founded upon the Rights of Man. It has done literally nothing at all since it has been founded only upon the wrongs of man. Or, more strictly speaking, its recent failure has been due to its not admitting the existence of any rights, or wrongs, or indeed of any humanity. Evolution (the sinister enemy of revolution) does not especially deny the existence of God; what it does deny is the existence of man. And all the despair about the poor, and the cold and repugnant pity for them, has been largely due to the vague sense that they have literally relapsed into the state of the lower animals.

A writer sufficiently typical of recent revolutionism—Gorky—has called one of his books by the eerie and effective title “Creatures that once were Men.” That title explains the whole failure of the Russian revolution. And the reason why the English writers, such as Dickens, did with all their limitations achieve so many of the actual things at which they aimed was that they could not possibly have put such a title upon a human hook. Dickens really helped the unfortunate in the matters to which he set himself. And the reason is that across all his books and sketches about the unfortunate might be written the common title, “Creatures that Still are Men.”

There does exist, then, this strange optimistic reformer; the man whose work begins with approval and ends with earthquake. Jesus Christ was destined to found a faith which made the rich poorer and the poor rich; but even when He
was going to enrich them, He began with the phrase, “Blessed are the poor.” The Gissings and the Gorkys say, as an universal literary motto, “Cursed are the poor.” Among a million who have faintly followed Christ in this divine contradiction, Dickens stands out especially. He said, in all his reforming utterances, “Cure poverty;” but he said in all his actual descriptions, “Blessed are the poor.” He described their happiness, and men rushed to remove their sorrow. He described them as human, and men resented the insults to their humanity. It is not difficult to see why, as I said at an earlier stage of this book, Dickens’s denunciations have had so much more practical an effect than the denunciations of such a man as Gissing. Both agreed that the souls of the people were in a kind of prison. But Gissing said that the prison was full of dead souls. Dickens said that the prison was full of living souls. And the fiery cavalcade of rescuers felt that they had not come too late.

Of this general fact about Dickens’s descriptions of poverty there will not, I suppose, be any serious dispute. The dispute will only be about the truth of those descriptions. It is clear that whereas Gissing would say, “See how their poverty depresses the Smiths or the Browns,” Dickens says, “See how little, after all, their poverty can depress the Cratchits.” No one will deny that he made a special feature of the poor. We will come to the discussion of the veracity of these scenes in a moment. It is here sufficient to register in conclusion of our examination of the reforming optimist, that Dickens certainly was such an optimist, and that he made it his business to insist upon what happiness there is in the lives of the unhappy. His poor man is always a Mark Tapley, a man the optimism of whose spirit increases if anything with the pessimism of his experience. It can also be registered as a fact equally solid and quite equally demonstrable that this optimistic Dickens did effect great reforms.

The reforms in which Dickens was instrumental were indeed, from the point of view of our sweeping social panaceas, special and limited. But perhaps, for that reason especially, they afford a compact and concrete instance of the psychological paradox of which we speak. Dickens did definitely destroy—or at the very least help to destroy—certain institutions; he destroyed those institutions simply by describing them. But the crux and peculiarity of the whole matter is this, that, in a sense, it can really be said that he described these things too optimistically. In a real sense, he described Dotheboys Hall as a better place than it is. In a real sense, he made out the workhouse as a pleasanter place than it can ever be. For the chief glory of Dickens is that he made these places interesting; and the chief infamy of England is that it has made these places dull.
Dullness was the thing that Dickens's genius could never succeed in describing; his vitality was so violent that he could not introduce into his books the genuine impression even of a moment of monotony. If there is anywhere in his novels an instant of silence, we only hear more clearly the hero whispering with the heroine, the villain sharpening his dagger, or the creaking of the machinery that is to give out the god from the machine. He could splendidly describe gloomy places, but he could not describe dreary places. He could describe miserable marriages, but not monotonous marriages. It must have been genuinely entertaining to be married to Mr. Quilp. This sense of a still incessant excitement he spreads over every inch of his story, and over every dark tract of his landscape. His idea of a desolate place is a place where anything can happen, he has no idea of that desolate place where nothing can happen. This is a good thing for his soul, for the place where nothing can happen is hell. But still, it might reasonably be maintained by the modern mind that he is hampered in describing human evil and sorrow by this inability to imagine tedium, this dullness in the matter of dullness. For, after all, it is certainly true that the worst part of the lot of the unfortunate is the fact that they have long spaces in which to review the irrevocability of their doom. It is certainly true that the worst days of the oppressed man are the nine days out of ten in which he is not oppressed. This sense of sickness and sameness Dickens did certainly fail or refuse to give. When we read such a description as that excellent one—in detail—of Dotheboys Hall, we feel that, while everything else is accurate, the author does, in the words of the excellent Captain Nares in Stevenson’s “Wrecker,” “draw the dreariness rather mild.” The boys at Dotheboys were, perhaps, less bullied, but they were certainly more bored. For, indeed, how could anyone be bored with the society of so sumptuous a creature as Mr. Squeers? Who would not put up with a few illogical floggings in order to enjoy the conversation of a man who could say, “She’s a rum ‘un is Natur.’ . . . Natur’ is more easier conceived than described.” The same principle applies to the workhouse in “Oliver Twist.” We feel vaguely that neither Oliver nor anyone else could be entirely unhappy in the presence of the purple personality of Mr. Bumble. The one thing he did not describe in any of the abuses he denounced was the soul-destroying potency of routine. He made out the bad school, the bad parochial system, the bad debtor’s prison as very much jollier and more exciting than they may really have been. In a sense, then, he flattered them; but he destroyed them with the flattery. By making Mrs. Gamp delightful he made her impossible. He gave every one an interest in Mr. Bumble’s existence; and by the same act gave every one an interest in his
destruction. It would be difficult to find a stronger instance of the utility and energy of the method which we have, for the sake of argument, called the method of the optimistic reformer. As long as low Yorkshire schools were entirely colourless and dreary, they continued quietly tolerated by the public and quietly intolerable to the victims. So long as Squeers was dull as well as cruel he was permitted; the moment he became amusing as well as cruel he was destroyed. As long as Bumble was merely inhuman he was allowed. When he became human, humanity wiped him right out. For in order to do these great acts of justice we must always realise not only the humanity of the oppressed, but even the humanity of the oppressor. The satirist had, in a sense, to create the images in the mind before, as an iconoclast, he could destroy them. Dickens had to make Squeers live before be could make him die.

In connection with the accusation of vulgar optimism, which I have taken as a text for this chapter, there is another somewhat odd thing to notice. Nobody in the world was ever less optimistic than Dickens in his treatment of evil or the evil man. When I say optimist in this matter I mean optimism, in the modern sense, of an attempt to whitewash evil. Nobody ever made less attempt to whitewash evil than Dickens. Nobody black was ever less white than Dickens’s black. He painted his villains and lost characters more black than they really are. He crowds his stories with a kind of villain rare in modern fiction—the villain really without any “redeeming point.” There is no redeeming point in Squeers, or in Monks, or in Ralph Nickleby, or in Bill Sikes, or in Quilp, or in Brass, or in Mr. Chester, or in Mr. Pecksniff, or in Jonas Chuzzlewit, or in Carker, or in Uriah Heep, or in Blandois, or in a hundred more. So far as the balance of good and evil in human characters is concerned, Dickens certainly could not be called a vulgar optimist. His emphasis on evil was melodramatic. He might be called a vulgar pessimist.

Some will dismiss this lurid villainy as a detail of his artificial romance. I am not inclined to do so. He inherited, undoubtedly, this unqualified villain as he inherited so many other things, from the whole history of European literature. But he breathed into the blackguard a peculiar and vigorous life of his own. He did not show any tendency to modify his blackguardism in accordance with the increasing considerateness of the age; he did not seem to wish to make his villain less villainous; he did not wish to imitate the analysis of George Eliot, or the reverent scepticism of Thackeray. And all this works back, I think, to a real thing in him, that he wished to have an obstreperous and incalculable enemy. He wished to keep alive the idea of combat, which means, of necessity, a combat
against something individual and alive. I do not know whether, in the kindly rationalism of his epoch, he kept any belief in a personal devil in his theology, but he certainly created a personal devil in every one of his books.

A good example of my meaning can be found, for instance, in such a character as Quilp. Dickens may, for all I know, have had originally some idea of describing Quilp as the bitter and unhappy cripple, a deformity whose mind is stunted along with his body. But if he had such an idea, he soon abandoned it. Quilp is not in the least unhappy. His whole picturesqueness consists in the fact that he has a kind of hellish happiness, an atrocious hilarity that makes him go bounding about like an indiarubber ball. Quilp is not in the least bitter; he has an unaffected gaiety, an expansiveness, an universality. He desires to hurt people in the same hearty way that a good-natured man desires to help them. He likes to poison people with the same kind of clamorous camaraderie with which an honest man likes to stand them drink. Quilp is not in the least stunted in mind; he is not in reality even stunted in body—his body, that is, does not in any way fall short of what he wants it to do. His smallness gives him rather the promptitude of a bird or the precipitance of a bullet. In a word, Quilp is precisely the devil of the Middle Ages; he belongs to that amazingly healthy period when even lost spirits were hilarious.

This heartiness and vivacity in the villains of Dickens is worthy of note because it is directly connected with his own cheerfulness. This is a truth little understood in our time, but it is a very essential one. If optimism means a general approval, it is certainly true that the more a man becomes an optimist the more he becomes a melancholy man. If he manages to praise everything, his praise will develop an alarming resemblance to a polite boredom. He will say that the marsh is as good as the garden; he will mean that the garden is as dull as the marsh. He may force himself to say that emptiness is good, but he will hardly prevent himself from asking what is the good of such good. This optimism does exist—this optimism which is more hopeless than pessimism—this optimism which is the very heart of hell.

Against such an aching vacuum of joyless approval there is only one antidote—a sudden and pugnacious belief in positive evil. This world can be made beautiful again by beholding it as a battlefield. When we have defined and isolated the evil thing, the colours come back into everything else. When evil things have become evil, good things, in a blazing apocalypse, become good. There are some men who are dreary because they do not believe in God; but there are many others who are dreary because they do not believe in the devil.
The grass grows green again when we believe in the devil, the roses grow red again when we believe in the devil.

No man was more filled with the sense of this bellicose basis of all cheerfulness than Dickens. He knew very well the essential truth, that the true optimist can only continue an optimist so long as he is discontented. For the full value of this life can only be got by fighting; the violent take it by storm. And if we have accepted everything, we have missed something—war. This life of ours is a very enjoyable fight, but a very miserable truce. And it appears strange to me that so few critics of Dickens or of other romantic writers have noticed this philosophical meaning in the undiluted villain. The villain is not in the story to be a character; he is there to be a danger—a ceaseless, ruthless, and uncompromising menace, like that of wild beasts or the sea. For the full satisfaction of the sense of combat, which everywhere and always involves a sense of equality, it is necessary to make the evil thing a man; but it is not always necessary, it is not even always artistic, to make him a mixed and probable man. In any tale, the tone of which is at all symbolic, he may quite legitimately be made an aboriginal and infernal energy. He must be a man only in the sense that he must have a wit and will to be matched with the wit and will of the man chiefly fighting. The evil may be inhuman, but it must not be impersonal, which is almost exactly the position occupied by Satan in the theological scheme.

But when all is said, as I have remarked before, the chief fountain in Dickens of what I have called cheerfulness, and some prefer to call optimism, is something deeper than a verbal philosophy. It is, after all, an incomparable hunger and pleasure for the vitality and the variety, for the infinite eccentricity of existence. And this word “eccentricity” brings us, perhaps, nearer to the matter than any other. It is, perhaps, the strongest mark of the divinity of man that he talks of this world as “a strange world,” though he has seen no other. We feel that all there is is eccentric, though we do not know what is the centre. This sentiment of the grotesqueness of the universe ran through Dickens’s brain and body like the mad blood of the elves. He saw all his streets in fantastic perspectives, he saw all his cockney villas as top heavy and wild, he saw every man’s nose twice as big as it was, and very man’s eyes like saucers. And this was the basis of his gaiety—the only real basis of any philosophical gaiety. This world is not to be justified as it is justified by the mechanical optimists; it is not to be justified as the best of all possible worlds. Its merit is not that it is orderly and explicable; its merit is that it is wild and utterly unexplained. Its merit is
precisely that none of us could have conceived such a thing, that we should have rejected the bare idea of it as miracle and unreason. It is the best of all impossible worlds.
CHAPTER XII

A NOTE ON THE FUTURE OF DICKENS

The hardest thing to remember about our own time, of course, is simply that it is a time; we all instinctively think of it as the Day of Judgment. But all the things in it which belong to it merely as this time will probably be rapidly turned upside down; all the things that can pass will pass. It is not merely true that all old things are already dead; it is also true that all new things are already dead; for the only undying things are the things that are neither new nor old. The more you are up with this year’s fashion, the more (in a sense) you are already behind next year’s. Consequently, in attempting to decide whether an author will, as it is cantly expressed, live, it is necessary to have very firm convictions about what part, if any part, of man is unchangeable. And it is very hard to have this if you have not a religion or, at least, a dogmatic philosophy.

The equality of men needs preaching quite as much as regards the ages as regards the classes of men. To feel infinitely superior to a man in the twelfth century is just precisely as snobbish as to feel infinitely superior to a man in the Old Kent Road. There are differences between the man and us, there may be superiorities in us over the man; but our sin in both cases consists in thinking of the small things wherein we differ when we ought to be confounded and intoxicated by the terrible and joyful matters in which we are at one. But here again the difficulty always is that the things near us seem larger than they are, and so seem to be a permanent part of mankind, when they may really be only one of its parting modes of expression. Few people, for instance, realise that a time may easily come when we shall see the great outburst of Science in the nineteenth century as something quite as splendid, brief, unique, and ultimately abandoned, as the outburst of Art at the Renascence. Few people realise that the general habit of fiction, of telling tales in prose, may fade, like the general habit of the ballad, of telling tales in verse, has for the time faded. Few people realise that reading and writing are only arbitrary, and perhaps temporary sciences, like heraldry.

The immortal mind will remain, and by that writers like Dickens will be securely judged. That Dickens will have a high place in permanent literature there is, I imagine, no prig surviving to deny. But though all prediction is in the dark, I would devote this chapter to suggesting that his place in nineteenth-
century England will not only be high, but altogether the highest. At a certain period of his contemporary fame, an average Englishman would have said that there were at that moment in England about five or six able and equal novelists. He could have made a list, Dickens, Bulwer Lytton, Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot, perhaps more. Forty years or more have passed and some of them have slipped to a lower place. Some would now say that the highest platform is left to Thackeray and Dickens; some to Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot; some to Dickens, Thackeray, and Charlotte Brontë. I venture to offer the proposition that when more years have passed and more weeding has been effected, Dickens will dominate the whole England of the nineteenth century; he will be left on that platform alone.

I know that this is an almost impertinent thing to assert, and that its tendency is to bring in those disparaging discussions of other writers in which Mr. Swinburne brilliantly embroiled himself in his suggestive study of Dickens. But my disparagement of the other English Novelists is wholly relative and not in the least positive. It is certain that men will always return to such a writer as Thackeray, with his rich emotional autumn, his feeling that life is a sad but sacred retrospect in which at least we should forget nothing. It is not likely that wise men will forget him. So, for instance, wise and scholarly men do from time to time return to the lyricists of French Renascence, to the delicate poignancy of Du Bellay: so they will go back to Thackeray. But I mean that Dickens will bestride and dominate our time as the vast figure of Rabelais dominates Du Bellay, dominates the Renascence and the world.

Let me put a negative reason first. The particular things for which Dickens is condemned (and justly condemned) by his critics, are precisely those things which have never prevented a man from being immortal. The chief of them is the unquestionable fact that he wrote an enormous amount of bad work. This does lead to a man being put below his place in his own time: it does not affect his permanent place, to all appearance, at all. Shakespeare, for instance, and Wordsworth wrote not only an enormous amount of bad work, but an enormous amount of enormously bad work. Humanity edits such writers’ works for them. Virgil was mistaken in cutting out his inferior lines; we would have undertaken the job. Moreover in the particular case of Dickens there are special reasons for regarding his bad work, as I have previously suggested, under a kind of general ambition that had nothing to do with his special genius; an ambition to be a public provider of everything, a warehouse of all human emotions. He held a kind of literary day of judgment. He distributed bad characters as punishments
and good characters as rewards. My meaning can be best conveyed by one instance out of many. The character of the kind old Jew in “Our Mutual Friend” (a needless and unconvincing character) was actually introduced because some Jewish correspondent complains that the bad old Jew in “Oliver Twist” conveyed the suggestion that all Jews were bad. The principle is so light-headedly absurd that it is hard to imagine any literary man submitting to it for an instant. If ever he invented a bad auctioneer he must immediately balance him with a good auctioneer; if he should have conceived an unkind philanthropist, he must on the spot, with whatever natural agony and toil, imagine a kind philanthropist. The complaint is frantic; yet Dickens, who tore people in pieces for much fairer complaints, liked this complaint of his Jewish correspondent. It pleased him to be mistaken for a public arbiter: it pleased him to be asked (in a double sense) to judge Israel. All this is so much another thing, a non-literary vanity, that there is much less difficulty than usual in separating it from his serious genius: and by his serious genius, I need hardly say, I mean his comic genius. Such irrelevant ambitions as this are easily passed over, like the sonnets of great statesmen. We feel that such things can be set aside, as the ignorant experiments of men otherwise great, like the politics of Professor Tyndall or the philosophy of Professor Haeckel. Hence, I think, posterity will not care that Dickens has done bad work, but will know that he has done good.

Again, the other chief accusation against Dickens was that his characters and their actions were exaggerated and impossible. But this only meant that they were exaggerated and impossible as compared with the modern world and with certain writers (like Thackeray or Trollope) who were making a very exact copy of the manners of the modern world. Some people, oddly enough, have suggested that Dickens has suffered or will suffer from the change of manners. Surely this is irrational. It is not the creators of the impossible who will suffer from the process of time: Mr. Bunsby can never be any more impossible than he was when Dickens made him. The writers who will obviously suffer from time will be the careful and realistic writers, the writers who have observed every detail of the fashion of this world which passeth away. It is surely obvious that there is nothing so fragile as a fact, that a fact flies away quicker than a fancy. A fancy will endure for two thousand years. For instance, we all have fancy for an entirely fearless man, a hero; and the Achilles of Homer still remains. But exactly the thing we do not know about Achilles is how far he was possible. The realistic narrators of the time are all forgotten (thank God), so we cannot tell whether Homer slightly exaggerated or wildly exaggerated or did not exaggerate
at all, the personal activity of a Mycenaean captain in battle; for the fancy has survived the facts. So the fancy of Podsnap may survive the facts of English commerce: and no one will know whether Podsnap was possible, but only know that he is desirable, like Achilles.

The positive argument for the permanence of Dickens comes back to the thing that can only be stated and cannot be discussed: creation. He made things which nobody else could possibly make. He made Dick Swiveller in a very different sense from that in which Thackeray made Colonel Newcome. Thackeray’s creation was observation: Dickens’s was poetry, and is therefore permanent. But there is one other test that can be added. The immortal writer, I conceive, is commonly he who does something Universal in a special manner. I mean that he does something interesting to all men in a way in which only one man or one land can do. Other men in that land, who do only what other men in other lands are doing as well, tend to have a great reputation in their day and to sink slowly into a second or a third or a fourth place. A parallel from war will make the point clear. I cannot think that anyone will doubt that, although Wellington and Nelson were always bracketed, Nelson will steadily become more important and Wellington less. For the fame of Wellington rests upon the fact that he was a good soldier in the service of England, exactly as twenty similar men were good soldiers in the service of Austria or Prussia or France. But Nelson is the symbol of a special mode of attack, which is at once universal and yet especially English, the sea. Now Dickens is at once as universal as the sea and as English as Nelson. Thackeray and George Eliot and the other great figures of that great England, were comparable to Wellington in this, that the kind of thing they were doing,—realism, the acute study of intellectual things, numerous men in France, Germany and Italy were doing as well or better than they. But Dickens was really doing something universal, yet something that no one but an Englishman could do. This is attested by the fact that he and Byron are the men who, like pinnacles, strike the eye of the continent. The points would take long to study: yet they may take only a moment to indicate. No one but an Englishman could have filled his books at once with a furious caricature and with a positively furious kindness. In more central countries, full of cruel memories of political change, caricature is always inhumane. No one but an Englishman could have described the democracy as consisting of free men, but yet of funny men. In other countries where the democratic issue has been more bitterly fought, it is felt that unless you describe a man as dignified you are describing him as a slave. This is the only final greatness of a man; that he does for all the world
what all the world cannot do for itself. Dickens, I believe, did it.

The hour of absinthe is over. We shall not be much further troubled with the little artists who found Dickens too sane for their sorrows and too clean for their delights. But we have a long way to travel before we get back to what Dickens meant: and the passage is along a rambling English road, a twisting road such as Mr. Pickwick travelled. But this at least is part of what he meant; that comradeship and serious joy are not interludes in our travel; but that rather our travels are interludes in comradeship and joy, which through God shall endure for ever. The inn does not point to the road; the road points to the inn. And all roads point at last to an ultimate inn, where we shall meet Dickens and all his characters: and when we drink again it shall be from the great flagons in the tavern at the end of the world.
APPRECIATIONS AND CRITICISMS OF THE WORKS OF CHARLES DICKENS

G. K. CHESTERTON
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INDEX

**APPRECIATIONS AND CRITICISMS OF THE WORKS OF CHARLES DICKENS**

- TABLE OF CONTENTS
- INTRODUCTION
  - LITTLE DORRIT
  - REPRINTED PIECES
  - OUR MUTUAL FRIEND
  - DAVID COPPERFIELD
  - CHRISTMAS BOOKS
  - TALE OF TWO CITIES
  - BARNABY RUDGE
  - THE UNCOMMERCIAL TRAVELLER
- SKETCHES BY BOZ
- PICKWICK PAPERS
- NICHOLAS NICKLEBY
- OLIVER TWIST
- OLD CURIOSITY SHOP
- BARNABY RUDGE
- AMERICAN NOTES
- PICTURES FROM ITALY
- MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT
- CHRISTMAS BOOKS
- DOMBEY AND SON
- DAVID COPPERFIELD
- CHRISTMAS STORIES
BLEAK HOUSE
CHILD’S HISTORY OF ENGLAND
HARD TIMES
LITTLE DORRIT
A TALE OF TWO CITIES
GREAT EXPECTATIONS
OUR MUTUAL FRIEND
EDWIN DROOD
MASTER HUMPHREY’S CLOCK
REPRINTED PIECES
INTRODUCTION

These papers were originally published as prefaces to the separate books of Dickens in one of the most extensive of those cheap libraries of the classics which are one of the real improvements of recent times. Thus they were harmless, being diluted by, or rather drowned in Dickens. My scrap of theory was a mere dry biscuit to be taken with the grand tawny port of great English comedy; and by most people it was not taken at all—like the biscuit. Nevertheless the essays were not in intention so aimless as they appear in fact. I had a general notion of what needed saying about Dickens to the new generation, though probably I did not say it. I will make another attempt to do so in this prologue, and, possibly fail again.

There was a painful moment (somewhere about the eighties) when we watched anxiously to see whether Dickens was fading from the modern world. We have watched a little longer, and with great relief we begin to realise that it is the modern world that is fading. All that universe of ranks and respectabilities in comparison with which Dickens was called a caricaturist, all that Victorian universe in which he seemed vulgar—all that is itself breaking up like a cloudland. And only the caricatures of Dickens remain like things carved in stone. This, of course, is an old story in the case of a man reproached with any excess of the poetic. Again and again when the man of visions was pinned by the sly dog who knows the world,

“The man recovered of the bite,
The dog it was that died.”

To call Thackeray a cynic, which means a sly dog, was indeed absurd; but it is fair to say that in comparison with Dickens he felt himself a man of the world. Nevertheless, that world of which he was a man is coming to an end before our eyes; its aristocracy has grown corrupt, its middle class insecure, and things that he never thought of are walking about the drawing-rooms of both. Thackeray has described for ever the Anglo-Indian Colonel; but what on earth would he have done with an Australian Colonel? What can it matter whether Dickens’s clerks talked cockney now that half the duchesses talk American? What would Thackeray have made of an age in which a man in the position of Lord Kew may actually be the born brother of Mr. Moss of Wardour Street? Nor does this apply merely to Thackeray, but to all those Victorians who prided themselves on the
realism or sobriety of their descriptions; it applies to Anthony Trollope and, as much as any one, to George Eliot. For we have not only survived that present which Thackeray described: we have even survived that future to which George Eliot looked forward. It is no longer adequate to say that Dickens did not understand that old world of gentility, of parliamentary politeness and the balance of the constitution. That world is rapidly ceasing to understand itself. It is vain to repeat the complaint of the old Quarterly Reviewers, that Dickens had not enjoyed a university education. What would the old Quarterly Reviewers themselves have thought of the Rhodes Scholarships? It is useless to repeat the old tag that Dickens could not describe a gentleman. A gentleman in our time has become something quite indescribable.

Now the interesting fact is this: That Dickens, whom so many considered to be at the best a vulgar enthusiast, saw the coming change in our society much more soberly and scientifically than did his better educated and more pretentious contemporaries. I give but one example out of many. Thackeray was a good Victorian radical, who seems to have gone to his grave quite contented with the early Victorian radical theory—the theory which Macaulay preached with unparalleled luminosity and completeness; the theory that true progress goes on so steadily through human history, that while reaction is indefensible, revolution is unnecessary. Thackeray seems to have been quite content to think that the world would grow more and more liberal in the limited sense; that Free Trade would get freer; that ballot boxes would grow more and more secret; that at last (as some satirist of Liberalism puts it) every man would have two votes instead of one. There is no trace in Thackeray of the slightest consciousness that progress could ever change its direction. There is in Dickens. The whole of Hard Times is the expression of just such a realisation. It is not true to say that Dickens was a Socialist, but it is not absurd to say so. And it would be simply absurd to say it of any of the great Individualist novelists of the Victorian time. Dickens saw far enough ahead to know that the time was coming when the people would be imploring the State to save them from mere freedom, as from some frightful foreign oppressor. He felt the society changing; and Thackeray never did.

As talking about Socialism and Individualism is one of the greatest bores ever endured among men, I will take another instance to illustrate my meaning, even though the instance be a queer and even a delicate one. Even if the reader does not agree with my deduction, I ask his attention to the fact itself, which I think a curiosity of literature. In the last important work of Dickens, that excellent book
Our Mutual Friend, there is an odd thing about which I cannot make up my mind; I do not know whether it is unconscious observation or fiendish irony. But it is this. In Our Mutual Friend is an old patriarch named Aaron, who is a saintly Jew made to do the dirty work of an abominable Christian usurer. In an artistic sense I think the patriarch Aaron as much of a humbug as the patriarch Casby. In a moral sense there is no doubt at all that Dickens introduced the Jew with a philanthropic idea of doing justice to Judaism, which he was told he had affronted by the great gargoyle of Fagin. If this was his motive, it was morally a most worthy one. But it is certainly unfortunate for the Hebrew cause that the bad Jew should be so very much more convincing than the good one. Old Aaron is not an exaggeration of Jewish virtues; he is simply not Jewish, because he is not human. There is nothing about him that in any way suggests the nobler sort of Jew, such a man as Spinoza or Mr. Zangwill. He is simply a public apology, and like most public apologies, he is very stiff and not very convincing.

So far so good. Now we come to the funny part. To describe the high visionary and mystic Jew like Spinoza or Zangwill is a great and delicate task in which even Dickens might have failed. But most of us know something of the make and manners of the low Jew, who is generally the successful one. Most of us know the Jew who calls himself De Valancourt. Now to any one who knows a low Jew by sight or hearing, the story called Our Mutual Friend is literally full of Jews. Like all Dickens’s best characters they are vivid; we know them. And we know them to be Hebrew. Mr. Veneering, the Man from Nowhere, dark, sphinx-like, smiling, with black curling hair, and a taste in florid vulgar furniture—of what stock was he? Mr. Lammle, with “too much nose in his face, too much ginger in his whiskers, too much sparkle in his studs and manners”—of what blood was he? Mr. Lammle’s friends, coarse and thick-lipped, with fingers so covered with rings that they could hardly hold their gold pencils—do they remind us of anybody? Mr. Fledgeby, with his little ugly eyes and social flashiness and craven bodily servility—might not some fanatic like M. Drumont make interesting conjectures about him? The particular types that people hate in Jewry, the types that are the shame of all good Jews, absolutely run riot in this book, which is supposed to contain an apology to them. It looks at first sight as if Dickens’s apology were one hideous sneer. It looks as if he put in one good Jew whom nobody could believe in, and then balanced him with ten bad Jews whom nobody could fail to recognise. It seems as if he had avenged himself for the doubt about Fagin by introducing five or six Fagins—triumphant Fagins, fashionable Fagins, Fagins who had changed their names. The impeccable old
Aaron stands up in the middle of this ironic carnival with a peculiar solemnity and silliness. He looks like one particularly stupid Englishman pretending to be a Jew, amidst all that crowd of clever Jews who are pretending to be Englishmen.

But this notion of a sneer is not admissible. Dickens was far too frank and generous a writer to employ such an elaborate plot of silence. His satire was always intended to attack, never to entrap; moreover, he was far too vain a man not to wish the crowd to see all his jokes. Vanity is more divine than pride, because it is more democratic than pride. Third, and most important, Dickens was a good Liberal, and would have been horrified at the notion of making so venomous a vendetta against one race or creed. Nevertheless the fact is there, as I say, if only as a curiosity of literature. I defy any man to read through Our Mutual Friend after hearing this suggestion, and to get out of his head the conviction that Lammle is the wrong kind of Jew. The explanation lies, I think, in this, that Dickens was so wonderfully sensitive to that change that has come over our society, that he noticed the type of the oriental and cosmopolitan financier without even knowing that it was oriental or cosmopolitan. He had, in fact, fallen a victim to a very simple fallacy affecting this problem. Somebody said, with great wit and truth, that treason cannot prosper, because when it prospers it cannot be called treason. The same argument soothed all possible Anti-Semitism in men like Dickens. Jews cannot be sneaks and snobs, because when they are sneaks and snobs they do not admit that they are Jews.

I have taken this case of the growth of the cosmopolitan financier, because it is not so stale in discussion as its parallel, the growth of Socialism. But as regards Dickens, the same criticism applies to both. Dickens knew that Socialism was coming, though he did not know its name. Similarly, Dickens knew that the South African millionaire was coming, though he did not know the millionaire’s name. Nobody does. His was not a type of mind to disentangle either the abstract truths touching the Socialist, nor the highly personal truth about the millionaire. He was a man of impressions; he has never been equalled in the art of conveying what a man looks like at first sight—and he simply felt the two things as atmospheric facts. He felt that the mercantile power was oppressive, past all bearing by Christian men; and he felt that this power was no longer wholly in the hands even of heavy English merchants like Podsnap. It was largely in the hands of a feverish and unfamiliar type, like Lammle and Veneering. The fact that he felt these things is almost more impressive because he did not understand them.

Now for this reason Dickens must definitely be considered in the light of the
changes which his soul foresaw. Thackeray has become classical; but Dickens has done more: he has remained modern. The grand retrospective spirit of Thackeray is by its nature attached to places and times; he belongs to Queen Victoria as much as Addison belongs to Queen Anne, and it is not only Queen Anne who is dead. But Dickens, in a dark prophetic kind of way, belongs to the developments. He belongs to the times since his death when Hard Times grew harder, and when Veneering became not only a Member of Parliament, but a Cabinet Minister; the times when the very soul and spirit of Fledgeby carried war into Africa. Dickens can be criticised as a contemporary of Bernard Shaw or Anatole France or C. F. G. Masterman. In talking of him one need no longer talk merely of the Manchester School or Puseyism or the Charge of the Light Brigade; his name comes to the tongue when we are talking of Christian Socialists or Mr. Roosevelt or County Council Steam Boats or Guilds of Play. He can be considered under new lights, some larger and some meaner than his own; and it is a very rough effort so to consider him which is the excuse of these pages. Of the essays in this book I desire to say as little as possible; I will discuss any other subject in preference with a readiness which reaches to avidity. But I may very curtly apply the explanation used above to the cases of two or three of them. Thus in the article on David Copperfield I have done far less than justice to that fine book considered in its relation to eternal literature; but I have dwelt at some length upon a particular element in it which has grown enormous in England after Dickens’s death. Thus again, in introducing the Sketches by Boz I have felt chiefly that I am introducing them to a new generation insufficiently in sympathy with such palpable and unsophisticated fun. A Board School education, evolved since Dickens’s day, has given to our people a queer and inadequate sort of refinement, one which prevents them from enjoying the raw jests of the Sketches by Boz, but leaves them easily open to that slight but poisonous sentimentalism which I note amid all the merits of David Copperfield. In the same way I shall speak of Little Dorrit, with reference to a school of pessimistic fiction which did not exist when it was written, of Hard Times in the light of the most modern crises of economics, and of The Child’s History of England in the light of the most matured authority of history. In short, these criticisms are an intrinsically ephemeral comment from one generation upon work that will delight many more. Dickens was a very great man, and there are many ways of testing and stating the fact. But one permissible way is to say this, that he was an ignorant man, ill-read in the past, and often confused about the present. Yet he remains great and true, and even essentially reliable, if we
suppose him to have known not only all that went before his lifetime, but also all
that was to come after.

From this vanishing of the Victorian compromise (I might say the Victorian
illusion) there begins to emerge a menacing and even monstrous thing—we may
begin again to behold the English people. If that strange dawn ever comes, it will
be the final vindication of Dickens. It will be proved that he is hardly even a
caricaturist; that he is something very like a realist. Those comic monstrosities
which the critics found incredible will be found to be the immense majority of
the citizens of this country. We shall find that Sweedlepipe cuts our hair and
Pumblechook sells our cereals; that Sam Weller blacks our boots and Tony
Weller drives our omnibus. For the exaggerated notion of the exaggerations of
Dickens (as was admirably pointed out by my old friend and enemy Mr.
Blatchford in a Clarion review) is very largely due to our mixing with only one
social class, whose conventions are very strict, and to whose affectations we are
accustomed. In cabmen, in cobblers, in charwomen, individuality is often pushed
to the edge of insanity. But as long as the Thackerayan platform of gentility
stood firm all this was, comparatively speaking, concealed. For the English, of
all nations, have the most uniform upper class and the most varied democracy. In
France it is the peasants who are solid to uniformity; it is the marquises who are
a little mad. But in England, while good form restrains and levels the universities
and the army, the poor people are the most motley and amusing creatures in the
world, full of humorous affections and prejudices and twists of irony. Frenchmen
tend to be alike, because they are all soldiers; Prussians because they are
all something else, probably policemen; even Americans are all something,
though it is not easy to say what it is; it goes with hawk-like eyes and an
irrational eagerness. Perhaps it is savages. But two English cabmen will be as
grotesquely different as Mr. Weller and Mr. Wegg. Nor is it true to say that I see
this variety because it is in my own people. For I do not see the same degree of
variety in my own class or in the class above it; there is more superficial
resemblance between two Kensington doctors or two Highland dukes. No; the
democracy is really composed of Dickens characters, for the simple reason that
Dickens was himself one of the democracy.

There remains one thing to be added to this attempt to exhibit Dickens in the
growing and changing lights of our time. God forbid that any one (especially any
Dickensian) should dilute or discourage the great efforts towards social
improvement. But I wish that social reformers would more often remember that
they are imposing their rules not on dots and numbers, but on Bob Sawyer and
Tim Linkinwater, on Mrs. Lirriper and Dr. Marigold. I wish Mr. Sidney Webb would shut his eyes until he sees Sam Weller.

A great many circumstances have led to the neglect in literature of these exuberant types which do actually exist in the ruder classes of society. Perhaps the principal cause is that since Dickens’s time the study of the poor has ceased to be an art and become a sort of sham science. Dickens took the poor individually: all modern writing tends to take them collectively. It is said that the modern realist produces a photograph rather than a picture. But this is an inadequate objection. The real trouble with the realist is not that he produces a photograph, but that he produces a composite photograph. It is like all composite photographs, blurred; like all composite photographs, hideous; and like all composite photographs, unlike anything or anybody. The new sociological novels, which attempt to describe the abstract type of the working-classes, sin in practice against the first canon of literature, true when all others are subject to exception. Literature must always be a pointing out of what is interesting in life; but these books are duller than the life they represent. Even supposing that Dickens did exaggerate the degree to which one man differs from another—that was at least an exaggeration upon the side of literature; it was better than a mere attempt to reduce what is actually vivid and unmistakable to what is in comparison colourless or unnoticeable. Even the creditable and necessary efforts of our time in certain matters of social reform have discouraged the old distinctive Dickens treatment. People are so anxious to do something for the poor man that they have a sort of subconscious desire to think that there is only one kind of man to do it for. Thus while the old accounts were sometimes too steep and crazy, the new became too sweeping and flat. People write about the problem of drink, for instance, as if it were one problem. Dickens could have told them that there is the abyss between heaven and hell between the incongruous excesses of Mr. Pickwick and the fatalistic soaking of Mr. Wickfield. He could have shown that there was nothing in common between the brandy and water of Bob Sawyer and the rum and water of Mr. Stiggins. People talk of imprudent marriages among the poor, as if it were all one question. Dickens could have told them that it is one thing to marry without much money, like Stephen Blackpool, and quite another to marry without the smallest intention of ever trying to get any, like Harold Skimpole. People talk about husbands in the working-classes being kind or brutal to their wives, as if that was the one permanent problem and no other possibility need be considered. Dickens could have told them that there was the case (the by no means
uncommon case) of the husband of Mrs. Gargery as well as of the wife of Mr. Quilp. In short, Dickens saw the problem of the poor not as a dead and definite business, but as a living and very complex one. In some ways he would be called much more conservative than the modern sociologists, in some ways much more revolutionary.

LITTLE DORRIT

In the time of the decline and death of Dickens, and even more strongly after it, there arose a school of criticism which substantially maintained that a man wrote better when he was ill. It was some such sentiment as this that made Mr. George Gissing, that able writer, come near to contending that Little Dorrit is Dickens’s best book. It was the principle of his philosophy to maintain (I know not why) that a man was more likely to perceive the truth when in low spirits than when in high spirits.

REPRINTED PIECES

The three articles on Sunday of which I speak are almost the last expression of an articulate sort in English literature of the ancient and existing morality of the English people. It is always asserted that Puritanism came in with the seventeenth century and thoroughly soaked and absorbed the English. We are now, it is constantly said, an incurably Puritanic people. Personally, I have my doubts about this. I shall not refuse to admit to the Puritans that they conquered and crushed the English people; but I do not think that they ever transformed it. My doubt is chiefly derived from three historical facts. First, that England was never so richly and recognisably English as in the Shakespearian age before the Puritan had appeared. Second, that ever since he did appear there has been a long unbroken line of brilliant and typical Englishmen who belonged to the Shakespearian and not the Puritanic tradition; Dryden, Johnson, Wilkes, Fox, Nelson, were hardly Puritans. And third, that the real rise of a new, cold, and illiberal morality in these matters seems to me to have occurred in the time of Queen Victoria, and not of Queen Elizabeth. All things considered, it is likely that future historians will say that the Puritans first really triumphed in the twentieth century, and that Dickens was the last cry of Merry England.

And about these additional, miscellaneous, and even inferior works of Dickens there is, moreover, another use and fascination which all Dickensians will
understand; which, after a manner, is not for the profane. All who love Dickens have a strange sense that he is really inexhaustible. It is this fantastic infinity that divides him even from the strongest and healthiest romantic artists of a later day— from Stevenson, for example. I have read Treasure Island twenty times; nevertheless I know it. But I do not really feel as if I knew all Pickwick; I have not so much read it twenty times as read in it a million times; and it almost seemed as if I always read something new. We of the true faith look at each other and understand; yes, our master was a magician. I believe the books are alive; I believe that leaves still grow in them, as leaves grow on the trees. I believe that this fairy library flourishes and increases like a fairy forest: but the world is listening to us, and we will put our hand upon our mouth.

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND

One thing at least seems certain. Dickens may or may not have been socialist in his tendencies; one might quote on the affirmative side his satire against Mr. Podsnap, who thought Centralisation “un-English”; one might quote in reply the fact that he satirised quite as unmercifully state and municipal officials of the most modern type. But there is one condition of affairs which Dickens would certainly have detested and denounced, and that is the condition in which we actually stand to-day. At this moment it is vain to discuss whether socialism will be a selling of men’s liberty for bread. The men have already sold the liberty; only they have not yet got the bread. A most incessant and exacting interference with the poor is already in operation; they are already ruled like slaves, only they are not fed like slaves. The children are forcibly provided with a school; only they are not provided with a house. Officials give the most detailed domestic directions about the fireguard; only they do not give the fireguard. Officials bring round the most stringent directions about the milk; only they do not bring round the milk. The situation is perhaps the most humorous in the whole history of oppression. We force the nigger to dig; but as a concession to him we do not give him a spade. We compel Sambo to cook; but we consult his dignity so far as to refuse him a fire.

This state of things at least cannot conceivably endure. We must either give the workers more property and liberty, or we must feed them properly as we work them properly. If we insist on sending the menu into them, they will naturally send the bill into us. This may possibly result (it is not my purpose here to prove that it will) in the drilling of the English people into hordes of humanely
herded serfs; and this again may mean the fading from our consciousness of all those elves and giants, monsters and fantastics whom we are faintly beginning to feel and remember in the land. If this be so, the work of Dickens may be considered as a great vision—a vision, as Swinburne said, between a sleep and a sleep. It can be said that between the grey past of territorial depression and the grey future of economic routine the strange clouds lifted, and we beheld the land of the living.

Lastly, Dickens is even astonishingly right about Eugene Wrayburne. So far from reproaching him with not understanding a gentleman, the critic will be astonished at the accuracy with which he has really observed the worth and the weakness of the aristocrat. He is quite right when he suggests that such a man has intelligence enough to despise the invitations which he has not the energy to refuse. He is quite right when he makes Eugene (like Mr. Balfour) constantly right in argument even when he is obviously wrong in fact. Dickens is quite right when he describes Eugene as capable of cultivating a sort of secondary and false industry about anything that is not profitable; or pursuing with passion anything that is not his business. He is quite right in making Eugene honestly appreciative of essential goodness—in other people. He is quite right in making him really good at the graceful combination of satire and sentiment, both perfectly sincere. He is also right in indicating that the only cure for this intellectual condition is a violent blow on the head.

DAVID COPPERFIELD

The real achievement of the earlier part of David Copperfield lies in a certain impression of the little Copperfield living in a land of giants. It is at once Gargantuan in its fancy and grossly vivid in its facts; like Gulliver in the land of Brobdingnag when he describes mountainous hands and faces filling the sky, bristles as big as hedges, or moles as big as molehills. To him parents and guardians are not Olympians (as in Mr. Kenneth Grahame’s clever book), mysterious and dignified, dwelling upon a cloudy hill. Rather they are all the more visible for being large. They come all the closer because they are colossal. Their queer features and weaknesses stand out large in a sort of gigantic domesticity, like the hairs and freckles of a Brobdingnagian. We feel the sombre Murdstone coming upon the house like a tall storm striding through the sky. We watch every pucker of Peggotty’s peasant face in its moods of flinty prejudice or whimsical hesitation. We look up and feel that Aunt Betsey in her garden gloves
was really terrible—especially her garden gloves. But one cannot avoid the impression that as the boy grows larger these figures grow smaller, and are not perhaps so completely satisfactory.

CHRISTMAS BOOKS

And there is doubtless a certain poetic unity and irony in gathering together three or four of the crudest and most cocksure of the modern theorists, with their shrill voices and metallic virtues, under the fulness and the sonorous sanity of Christian bells. But the figures satirised in The Chimes cross each other’s path and spoil each other in some degree. The main purpose of the book was a protest against that impudent and hard-hearted utilitarianism which arranges the people only in rows of men or even in rows of figures. It is a flaming denunciation of that strange mathematical morality which was twisted often unfairly out of Bentham and Mill: a morality by which each citizen must regard himself as a fraction, and a very vulgar fraction. Though the particular form of this insolent patronage has changed, this revolt and rebuke is still of value, and may be wholesome for those who are teaching the poor to be provident. Doubtless it is a good idea to be provident, in the sense that Providence is provident, but that should mean being kind, and certainly not merely being cold.

The Cricket on the Hearth, though popular, I think, with many sections of the great army of Dickensians, cannot be spoken of in any such abstract or serious terms. It is a brief domestic glimpse; it is an interior. It must be remembered that Dickens was fond of interiors as such; he was like a romantic tramp who should go from window to window looking in at the parlours. He had that solid, indescribable delight in the mere solidity and neatness of funny little humanity in its funny little houses, like doll’s houses. To him every house was a box, a Christmas box, in which a dancing human doll was tied up in bricks and slates instead of string and brown paper. He went from one gleaming window to another, looking in at the lamp-lit parlours. Thus he stood for a little while looking in at this cosy if commonplace interior of the carrier and his wife; but he did not stand there very long. He was on his way to quainter towns and villages. Already the plants were sprouting upon the balcony of Miss Tox; and the great wind was rising that flung Mr. Pecksniff against his own front door.

TALE OF TWO CITIES
It was well for him, at any rate, that the people rose in France. It was well for him, at any rate, that the guillotine was set up in the Place de la Concorde. Unconsciously, but not accidentally, Dickens was here working out the whole true comparison between swift revolutionism in Paris and slow evolutionism in London. Sidney Carton is one of those sublime ascetics whose head offends them, and who cut it off. For him at least it was better that the blood should flow in Paris than that the wine should flow any longer in London. And if I say that even now the guillotine might be the best cure for many a London lawyer, I ask you to believe that I am not merely flippant. But you will not believe it.

BARNABY RUDGE

It may be said that there is no comparison between that explosive opening of the intellect in Paris and an antiquated madman leading a knot of provincial Protestants. The Man of the Hill, says Victor Hugo somewhere, fights for an idea; the Man of the Forest for a prejudice. Nevertheless it remains true that the enemies of the red cap long attempted to represent it as a sham decoration in the style of Sim Tappertit. Long after the revolutionists had shown more than the qualities of men, it was common among lords and lacqueys to attribute to them the stagey and piratical pretentiousness of urchins. The kings called Napoleon’s pistol a toy pistol even while it was holding up their coach and mastering their money or their lives; they called his sword a stage sword even while they ran away from it. Something of the same senile inconsistency can be found in an English and American habit common until recently: that of painting the South Americans at once as ruffians wading in carnage, and also as poltroons playing at war. They blame them first for the cruelty of having a fight; and then for the weakness of having a sham fight. Such, however, since the French Revolution and before it, has been the fatuous attitude of certain Anglo-Saxons towards the whole revolutionary tradition. Sim Tappertit was a sort of answer to everything; and the young men were mocked as ’prentices long after they were masters. The rising fortune of the South American republics to-day is symbolical and even menacing of many things; and it may be that the romance of riot will not be so much extinguished as extended; and nearer home we may have boys being boys again, and in London the cry of “clubs.”

THE UNCOMMERCIAL TRAVELLER
The Uncommercial Traveller is a collection of Dickens’s memories rather than of his literary purposes; but it is due to him to say that memory is often more startling in him than prophecy in anybody else. They have the character which belongs to all his vivid incidental writing: that they attach themselves always to some text which is a fact rather than an idea. He was one of those sons of Eve who are fonder of the Tree of Life than of the Tree of Knowledge—even of the knowledge of good and of evil. He was in this profoundest sense a realist. Critics have talked of an artist with his eye on the object. Dickens as an essayist always had his eye on an object before he had the faintest notion of a subject. All these works of his can best be considered as letters; they are notes of personal travel, scribbles in a diary about this or that that really happened. But Dickens was one of the few men who have the two talents that are the whole of literature—and have them both together. First, he could make a thing happen over again; and second, he could make it happen better. He can be called exaggerative; but mere exaggeration conveys nothing of his typical talent. Mere whirlwinds of words, mere melodramas of earth and heaven do not affect us as Dickens affects us, because they are exaggerations of nothing. If asked for an exaggeration of something, their inventors would be entirely dumb. They would not know how to exaggerate a broom-stick; for the life of them they could not exaggerate a tenpenny nail. Dickens always began with the nail or the broom-stick. He always began with a fact even when he was most fanciful; and even when he drew the long bow he was careful to hit the white.

This riotous realism of Dickens has its disadvantage—a disadvantage that comes out more clearly in these casual sketches than in his constructed romances. One grave defect in his greatness is that he was altogether too indifferent to theories. On large matters he went right by the very largeness of his mind; but in small matters he suffered from the lack of any logical test and ready reckoner. Hence his comment upon the details of civilisation or reform are sometimes apt to be jerky and jarring, and even grossly inconsistent. So long as a thing was heroic enough to admire, Dickens admired it; whenever it was absurd enough to laugh at he laughed at it: so far he was on sure ground. But about all the small human projects that lie between the extremes of the sublime and the ridiculous, his criticism was apt to have an accidental quality. As Matthew Arnold said of the remarks of the Young Man from the Country about the perambulator, they are felt not to be at the heart of the situation. On a great many occasions the Uncommercial Traveller seems, like other hasty travellers, to be criticising elements and institutions which he has quite inadequately understood;
and once or twice the Uncommercial Traveller might almost as well be a Commercial Traveller for all he knows of the countryside.

An instance of what I mean may be found in the amusing article about the nightmares of the nursery. Superficially read it might almost be taken to mean that Dickens disapproved of ghost stories—disapproved of that old and genial horror which nurses can hardly supply fast enough for the children who want it. Dickens, one would have thought, should have been the last man in the world to object to horrible stories, having himself written some of the most horrible that exist in the world. The author of the Madman’s Manuscript, of the disease of Monk and the death of Krook, cannot be considered fastidious in the matter of revolting realism or of revolting mysticism. If artistic horror is to be kept from the young, it is at least as necessary to keep little boys from reading Pickwick or Bleak House as to refrain from telling them the story of Captain Murderer or the terrible tale of Chips. If there was something appalling in the rhyme of Chips and pips and ships, it was nothing compared to that infernal refrain of “Mudstains, bloodstains” which Dickens himself, in one of his highest moments of hellish art, put into Oliver Twist.

I take this one instance of the excellent article called “Nurse’s Stories” because it is quite typical of all the rest. Dickens (accused of superficiality by those who cannot grasp that there is foam upon deep seas) was really deep about human beings; that is, he was original and creative about them. But about ideas he did tend to be a little superficial. He judged them by whether they hit him, and not by what they were trying to hit. Thus in this book the great wizard of the Christmas ghosts seems almost the enemy of ghost stories; thus the almost melodramatic moralist who created Ralph Nickleby and Jonas Chuzzlewit cannot see the point in original sin; thus the great denouncer of official oppression in England may be found far too indulgent to the basest aspects of the modern police. His theories were less important than his creations, because he was a man of genius. But he himself thought his theories the more important, because he was a man.
SKETCHES BY BOZ

The greatest mystery about almost any great writer is why he was ever allowed to write at all. The first efforts of eminent men are always imitations; and very often they are bad imitations. The only question is whether the publisher had (as his name would seem to imply) some subconscious connection or sympathy with the public, and thus felt instinctively the presence of something that might ultimately tell; or whether the choice was merely a matter of chance and one Dickens was chosen and another Dickens left. The fact is almost unquestionable: most authors made their reputation by bad books and afterwards supported it by good ones. This is in some degree true even in the case of Dickens. The public continued to call him “Boz” long after the public had forgotten the Sketches by Boz. Numberless writers of the time speak of “Boz” as having written Martin Chuzzlewit and “Boz” as having written David Copperfield. Yet if they had gone back to the original book signed “Boz” they might even have felt that it was vulgar and flippant. This is indeed the chief tragedy of publishers: that they may easily refuse at the same moment the wrong manuscript and the right man. It is easy to see of Dickens now that he was the right man; but a man might have been very well excused if he had not realised that the Sketches was the right book. Dickens, I say, is a case for this primary query: whether there was in the first work any clear sign of his higher creative spirit. But Dickens is much less a case for this query than almost all the other great men of his period. The very earliest works of Thackeray are much more unimpressive than those of Dickens. Nay, they are much more vulgar than those of Dickens. And worst of all, they are much more numerous than those of Dickens. Thackeray came much nearer to being the ordinary literary failure than Dickens ever came. Read some of the earliest criticisms of Mr. Yellowplush or Michael Angelo Titmarsh and you will realise that at the very beginning there was more potential clumsiness and silliness in Thackeray than there ever was in Dickens. Nevertheless there was some potential clumsiness and silliness in Dickens; and what there is of it appears here and there in the admirable Sketches by Boz.

Perhaps we may put the matter this way: this is the only one of Dickens’s works of which it is ordinarily necessary to know the date. To a close and delicate comprehension it is indeed very important that Nicholas Nickleby was written at the beginning of Dickens’s life, and Our Mutual Friend towards the end of it. Nevertheless anybody could understand or enjoy these books,
whenever they were written. If Our Mutual Friend was written in the Latin of the Dark Ages we should still want it translated. If we thought that Nicholas Nickleby would not be written until thirty years hence we should all wait for it eagerly. The general impression produced by Dickens’s work is the same as that produced by miraculous visions; it is the destruction of time. Thomas Aquinas said that there was no time in the sight of God; however this may be, there was no time in the sight of Dickens. As a general rule Dickens can be read in any order; not only in any order of books, but even in any order of chapters. In an average Dickens book every part is so amusing and alive that you can read the parts backwards; you can read the quarrel first and then the cause of the quarrel; you can fall in love with a woman in the tenth chapter and then turn back to the first chapter to find out who she is. This is not chaos; it is eternity. It means merely that Dickens instinctively felt all his figures to be immortal souls who existed whether he wrote of them or not, and whether the reader read of them or not. There is a peculiar quality as of celestial pre-existence about the Dickens characters. Not only did they exist before we heard of them, they existed also before Dickens heard of them. As a rule this unchangeable air in Dickens deprives any discussion about date of its point. But as I have said, this is the one Dickens work of which the date is essential. It is really an important part of the criticism of this book to say that it is his first book. Certain elements of clumsiness, of obviousness, of evident blunder, actually require the chronological explanation. It is biographically important that this is his first book, almost exactly in the same way that it is biographically important that The Mystery of Edwin Drood was his last book. Change or no change, Edwin Drood has this plain point of a last story about it: that it is not finished. But if the last book is unfinished, the first book is more unfinished still.

The Sketches divide themselves, of course, into two broad classes. One half consists of sketches that are truly and in the strict sense sketches. That is, they are things that have no story and in their outline none of the character of creation; they are merely facts from the street or the tavern or the town hall, noted down as they occurred by an intelligence of quite exceptional vivacity. The second class consists of purely creative things: farces, romances, stories in any case with a non-natural perfection, or a poetical justice, to round them off. One class is admirably represented, for instance, by the sketch describing the Charity Dinner, the other by such a story as that of Horatio Sparkins. These things were almost certainly written by Dickens at very various periods of his youth; and early as the harvest is, no doubt it is a harvest and had ripened during
a reasonably long time. Nevertheless it is with these two types of narrative that the young Charles Dickens first enters English literature; he enters it with a number of journalistic notes of such things as he has seen happen in streets or offices, and with a number of short stories which err on the side of the extravagant and even the superficial. Journalism had not then, indeed, sunk to the low level which it has since reached. His sketches of dirty London would not have been dirty enough for the modern Imperialist press. Still these first efforts of his are journalism, and sometimes vulgar journalism. It was as a journalist that he attacked the world, as a journalist that he conquered it.

The biographical circumstances will not, of course, be forgotten. The life of Dickens had been a curious one. Brought up in a family just poor enough to be painfully conscious of its prosperity and its respectability, he had been suddenly flung by a financial calamity into a social condition far below his own. For men on that exact edge of the educated class such a transition is really tragic. A duke may become a navvy for a joke, but a clerk cannot become a navvy for a joke. Dickens’s parents went to a debtors’ prison; Dickens himself went to a far more unpleasant place. The debtors’ prison had about it at least that element of amiable compromise and kindly decay which belonged (and belongs still) to all the official institutions of England. But Dickens was doomed to see the very blackest aspect of nineteenth-century England, something far blacker than any mere bad government. He went not to a prison but to a factory. In the musty traditionalism of the Marshalsea old John Dickens could easily remain optimistic. In the ferocious efficiency of the modern factory young Charles Dickens narrowly escaped being a pessimist. He did escape this danger; finally he even escaped the factory itself. His next step in life was, if possible, even more eccentric. He was sent to school; he was sent off like an innocent little boy in Eton collars to learn the rudiments of Latin grammar, without any reference to the fact that he had already taken his part in the horrible competition and actuality of the age of manufactures. It was like giving a sacked bank manager a satchel and sending him to a dame’s school. Nor was the third stage of this career unconnected with the oddity of the others. On leaving the school he was made a clerk in a lawyer’s office, as if henceforward this child of ridiculous changes was to settle down into a silent assistant for a quiet solicitor. It was exactly at this moment that his fundamental rebellion began to seethe; it seethed more against the quiet finality of his legal occupation than it had seethed against the squalor and slavery of his days of poverty. There must have been in his mind, I think, a dim feeling: “Did all my dark crises mean only this; was I
crucified only that I might become a solicitor’s clerk?” Whatever be the truth about this conjecture there can be no question about the facts themselves. It was about this time that he began to burst and bubble over, to insist upon his own intellect, to claim a career. It was about this time that he put together a loose pile of papers, satires on institutions, pictures of private persons, fairy tales of the vulgarity of his world, odds and ends such as come out of the facility and the fierce vanity of youth. It was about this time at any rate that he decided to publish them, and gave them the name of Sketches by Boz.

They must, I think, be read in the light of this youthful explosion. In some psychological sense he had really been wronged. But he had only become conscious of his wrongs as his wrongs had been gradually righted. Similarly, it has often been found that a man who can patiently endure penal servitude through a judicial blunder will nevertheless, when once his cause is well asserted, quarrel about the amount of compensation or complain of small slights in his professional existence. These are the marks of the first literary action of Dickens. It has in it all the peculiar hardness of youth; a hardness which in those who have in any way been unfairly treated reaches even to impudence. It is a terrible thing for any man to find out that his elders are wrong. And this almost unkindly courage of youth must partly be held responsible for the smartness of Dickens, that almost offensive smartness which in these earlier books of his sometimes irritates us like the showy gibes in the tall talk of a school-boy. These first pages bear witness both to the energy of his genius and also to its unenlightenment; he seems more ignorant and more cocksure than so great a man should be. Dickens was never stupid, but he was sometimes silly; and he is occasionally silly here.

All this must be said to prepare the more fastidious modern for these papers, if he has never read them before. But when all this has been said there remains in them exactly what always remains in Dickens when you have taken away everything that can be taken away by the most fastidious modern who ever dissected his grandmother. There remains that primum mobile of which all the mystics have spoken: energy, the power to create. I will not call it “the will to live,” for that is a priggish phrase of German professors. Even German professors, I suppose, have the will to live. But Dickens had exactly what German professors have not: he had the power to live. And indeed it is most valuable to have these early specimens of the Dickens work if only because they are specimens of his spirit apart from his matured intelligence. It is well to be able to realise that contact with the Dickens world is almost like a physical
contact; it is like stepping suddenly into the hot smells of a greenhouse, or into the bleak smell of the sea. We know that we are there. Let any one read, for instance, one of the foolish but amusing farces in Dickens’s first volume. Let him read, for instance, such a story as that of Horatio Sparkins or that of The Tuggses at Ramsgate. He will not find very much of that verbal felicity or fantastic irony that Dickens afterwards developed; the incidents are upon the plain lines of the stock comedy of the day: sharpers who entrap simpletons, spinsters who angle for husbands, youths who try to look Byronic and only look foolish. Yet there is something in these stories which there is not in the ordinary stock comedies of that day: an indefinable flavour of emphasis and richness, a hint as of infinity of fun. Doubtless, for instance, a million comic writers of that epoch had made game of the dark, romantic young man who pretended to abysses of philosophy and despair. And it is not easy to say exactly why we feel that the few metaphysical remarks of Mr. Horatio Sparkins are in some way really much funnier than any of those old stock jokes. It is in a certain quality of deep enjoyment in the writer as well as the reader; as if the few words written had been dipped in dark nonsense and were, as it were, reeking with derision. “Because if Effect be the result of Cause and Cause be the Precursor of Effect,” said Mr. Horatio Sparkins, “I apprehend that you are wrong.” Nobody can get at the real secret of sentences like that; sentences which were afterwards strewed with reckless liberality over the conversation of Dick Swiveller or Mr. Mantalini, Sim Tappertit or Mr. Pecksniff. Though the joke seems most superficial one has only to read it a certain number of times to see that it is most subtle. The joke does not lie in Mr. Sparkins merely using long words, any more than the joke lies merely in Mr. Swiveller drinking, or in Mr. Mantalini deceiving his wife. It is something in the arrangement of the words; something in a last inspired turn of absurdity given to a sentence. In spite of everything Horatio Sparkins is funny. We cannot tell why he is funny. When we know why he is funny we shall know why Dickens is great.

Standing as we do here upon the threshold, as it were, of the work of Dickens, it may be well perhaps to state this truth as being, after all, the most important one. This first work had, as I have said, the faults of first work and the special faults that arose from its author’s accidental history; he was deprived of education, and therefore it was in some ways uneducated; he was confronted with the folly and failure of his natural superiors and guardians, and therefore it was in some ways pert and insolent. Nevertheless the main fact about the work is worth stating here for any reader who should follow the chronological order and
read the Sketches by Boz before embarking on the stormy and splendid sea of Pickwick. For the sea of Pickwick, though splendid, does make some people seasick. The great point to be emphasised at such an initiation is this: that people, especially refined people, are not to judge of Dickens by what they would call the coarseness or commonplaceness of his subject. It is quite true that his jokes are often on the same subjects as the jokes in a halfpenny comic paper. Only they happen to be good jokes. He does make jokes about drunkenness, jokes about mothers-in-law, jokes about henpecked husbands, jokes (which is much more really unpardonable) about spinsters, jokes about physical cowardice, jokes about fatness, jokes about sitting down on one’s hat. He does make fun of all these things; and the reason is not very far to seek. He makes fun of all these things because all these things, or nearly all of them, are really very funny. But a large number of those who might otherwise read and enjoy Dickens are undoubtedly “put off” (as the phrase goes) by the fact that he seems to be echoing a poor kind of claptrap in his choice of incidents and images. Partly, of course, he suffers from the very fact of his success; his play with these topics was so good that every one else has played with them increasingly since; he may indeed have copied the old jokes, but he certainly renewed them. For instance, “Ally Sloper” was certainly copied from Wilkins Micawber. To this day you may see (in the front page of that fine periodical) the bald head and the high shirt collar that betray the high original from which “Ally Sloper” is derived. But exactly because “Sloper” was stolen from Micawber, for that very reason the new generation feels as if Micawber were stolen from “Sloper.” Many modern readers feel as if Dickens were copying the comic papers, whereas in truth the comic papers are still copying Dickens.

Dickens showed himself to be an original man by always accepting old and established topics. There is no clearer sign of the absence of originality among modern poets than their disposition to find new themes. Really original poets write poems about the spring. They are always fresh, just as the spring is always fresh. Men wholly without originality write poems about torture, or new religions, of some perversion of obscenity, hoping that the mere sting of the subject may speak for them. But we do not sufficiently realise that what is true of the classic ode is also true of the classic joke. A true poet writes about the spring being beautiful because (after a thousand springs) the spring really is beautiful. In the same way the true humourist writes about a man sitting down on his hat, because the act of sitting down on one’s hat (however often and however admirably performed) really is extremely funny. We must not dismiss a new
poet because his poem is called To a Skylark; nor must we dismiss a humourist because his new farce is called My Mother-in-law. He may really have splendid and inspiring things to say upon an eternal problem. The whole question is whether he has.

Now this is exactly where Dickens, and the possible mistake about Dickens, both come in. Numbers of sensitive ladies, numbers of simple ästhetes, have had a vague shrinking from that element in Dickens which begins vaguely in The Tuggses at Ramsgate and culminates in Pickwick. They have a vague shrinking from the mere subject matter; from the mere fact that so much of the fun is about drinking or fighting, or falling down, or eloping with old ladies. It is to these that the first appeal must be made upon the threshold of Dickens' criticism. Let them really read the thing and really see whether the humour is the gross and half-witted jeering which they imagine it to be. It is exactly here that the whole genius of Dickens is concerned. His subjects are indeed stock subjects; like the skylark of Shelley, or the autumn of Keats. But all the more because they are stock subjects the reader realises what a magician is at work. The notion of a clumsy fellow who falls off his horse is indeed a stock and stale subject. But Mr. Winkle is not a stock and stale subject. Nor is his horse a stock and stale subject; it is as immortal as the horses of Achilles. The notion of a fat old gentleman proud of his legs might easily be vulgar. But Mr. Pickwick proud of his legs is not vulgar; somehow we feel that they were legs to be proud of. And it is exactly this that we must look for in these Sketches. We must not leap to any cheap fancy that they are low farces. Rather we must see that they are not low farces; and see that nobody but Dickens could have prevented them from being so.
There are those who deny with enthusiasm the existence of a God and are happy in a hobby which they call the Mistakes of Moses. I have not studied their labours in detail, but it seems that the chief mistake of Moses was that he neglected to write the Pentateuch. The lesser errors, apparently, were not made by Moses, but by another person equally unknown. These controversialists cover the very widest field, and their attacks upon Scripture are varied to the point of wildness. They range from the proposition that the unexpurgated Bible is almost as unfit for an American girls’ school as is an unexpurgated Shakespeare; they descend to the proposition that kissing the Book is almost as hygienically dangerous as kissing the babies of the poor. A superficial critic might well imagine that there was not one single sentence left of the Hebrew or Christian Scriptures which this school had not marked with some ingenious and uneducated comment. But there is one passage at least upon which they have never pounced, at least to my knowledge; and in pointing it out to them I feel that I am, or ought to be, providing material for quite a multitude of Hyde Park orations. I mean that singular arrangement in the mystical account of the Creation by which light is created first and all the luminous bodies afterwards. One could not imagine a process more open to the elephantine logic of the Bible-smasher than this: that the sun should be created after the sunlight. The conception that lies at the back of the phrase is indeed profoundly antagonistic to much of the modern point of view. To many modern people it would sound like saying that foliage existed before the first leaf; it would sound like saying that childhood existed before a baby was born. The idea is, as I have said, alien to most modern thought, and like many other ideas which are alien to most modern thought, it is a very subtle and a very sound idea. Whatever be the meaning of the passage in the actual primeval poem, there is a very real metaphysical meaning in the idea that light existed before the sun and stars. It is not barbaric; it is rather Platonic. The idea existed before any of the machinery which made manifest the idea. Justice existed when there was no need of judges, and mercy existed before any man was oppressed.

However this may be in the matter of religion and philosophy, it can be said with little exaggeration that this truth is the very key of literature. The whole difference between construction and creation is exactly this: that a thing constructed can only be loved after it is constructed; but a thing created is loved
before it exists, as the mother can love the unborn child. In creative art the essence of a book exists before the book or before even the details or main features of the book; the author enjoys it and lives in it with a kind of prophetic rapture. He wishes to write a comic story before he has thought of a single comic incident. He desires to write a sad story before he has thought of anything sad. He knows the atmosphere before he knows anything. There is a low priggish maxim sometimes uttered by men so frivolous as to take humour seriously—a maxim that a man should not laugh at his own jokes. But the great artist not only laughs at his own jokes; he laughs at his own jokes before he has made them. In the case of a man really humorous we can see humour in his eye before he has thought of any amusing words at all. So the creative writer laughs at his comedy before he creates it, and he has tears for his tragedy before he knows what it is. When the symbols and the fulfilling facts do come to him, they come generally in a manner very fragmentary and inverted, mostly in irrational glimpses of crisis or consummation. The last page comes before the first; before his romance has begun, he knows that it has ended well. He sees the wedding before the wooing; he sees the death before the duel. But most of all he sees the colour and character of the whole story prior to any possible events in it. This is the real argument for art and style, only that the artists and the stylists have not the sense to use it. In one very real sense style is far more important than either character or narrative. For a man knows what style of book he wants to write when he knows nothing else about it.

Pickwick is in Dickens’s career the mere mass of light before the creation of sun or moon. It is the splendid, shapeless substance of which all his stars were ultimately made. You might split up Pickwick into innumerable novels as you could split up that primeval light into innumerable solar systems. The Pickwick Papers constitute first and foremost a kind of wild promise, a pre-natal vision of all the children of Dickens. He had not yet settled down into the plain, professional habit of picking out a plot and characters, of attending to one thing at a time, of writing a separate, sensible novel and sending it off to his publishers. He is still in the youthful whirl of the kind of world that he would like to create. He has not yet really settled what story he will write, but only what sort of story he will write. He tries to tell ten stories at once; he pours into the pot all the chaotic fancies and crude experiences of his boyhood; he sticks in irrelevant short stories shamelessly, as into a scrap-book; he adopts designs and abandons them, begins episodes and leaves them unfinished; but from the first page to the last there is a nameless and elemental ecstasy—that of the man who is
doing the kind of thing that he can do. Dickens, like every other honest and
effective writer, came at last to some degree of care and self-restraint. He learned
how to make his dramatis personæ assist his drama; he learned how to write
stories which were full of rambling and perversity, but which were stories. But
before he wrote a single real story, he had a kind of vision. It was a vision of the
Dickens world—a maze of white roads, a map full of fantastic towns, thundering
coaches, clamorous market-places, uproarious inns, strange and swaggering
figures. That vision was Pickwick.

It must be remembered that this is true even in connection with the man’s
contemporaneous biography. Apart from anything else about it, Pickwick was
his first great chance. It was a big commission given in some sense to an untried
man, that he might show what he could do. It was in a strict sense a sample. And
just as a sample of leather can be only a piece of leather, or a sample of coal a
lump of coal, so this book may most properly be regarded as simply a lump of
Dickens. He was anxious to show all that was in him. He was more concerned to
prove that he could write well than to prove that he could write this particular
book well. And he did prove this, at any rate. No one ever sent such a sample as
the sample of Dickens. His roll of leather blocked up the street; his lump of coal
set the Thames on fire.

The book originated in the suggestion of a publisher; as many more good
books have done than the arrogance of the man of letters is commonly inclined
to admit. Very much is said in our time about Apollo and Admetus, and the
impossibility of asking genius to work within prescribed limits or assist an alien
design. But after all, as a matter of fact, some of the greatest geniuses have done
it, from Shakespeare botching up bad comedies and dramatising bad novels
down to Dickens writing a masterpiece as the mere framework for a Mr.
Seymour’s sketches. Nor is the true explanation irrelevant to the spirit and power
of Dickens. Very delicate, slender, and bizarre talents are indeed incapable of
being used for an outside purpose, whether of public good or of private gain. But
about very great and rich talent there goes a certain disdainful generosity which
can turn its hand to anything. Minor poets cannot write to order; but very great
poets can write to order. The larger the man’s mind, the wider his scope of
vision, the more likely it will be that anything suggested to him will seem
significant and promising; the more he has a grasp of everything the more ready
he will be to write anything. It is very hard (if that is the question) to throw a
brick at a man and ask him to write an epic; but the more he is a great man the
more able he will be to write about the brick. It is very unjust (if that is all) to
point to a hoarding of Colman’s mustard and demand a flood of philosophical eloquence; but the greater the man is the more likely he will be to give it to you. So it was proved, not for the first time, in this great experiment of the early employment of Dickens. Messrs. Chapman and Hall came to him with a scheme for a string of sporting stories to serve as the context, and one might almost say the excuse, for a string of sketches by Seymour, the sporting artist. Dickens made some modifications in the plan, but he adopted its main feature; and its main feature was Mr. Winkle. To think of what Mr. Winkle might have been in the hands of a dull farceur, and then to think of what he is, is to experience the feeling that Dickens made a man out of rags and refuse. Dickens was to work splendidly and successfully in many fields, and to send forth many brilliant books and brave figures. He was destined to have the applause of continents like a statesman, and to dictate to his publishers like a despot; but perhaps he never worked again so supremely well as here, where he worked in chains. It may well be questioned whether his one hack book is not his masterpiece.

Of course it is true that as he went on his independence increased, and he kicked quite free of the influences that had suggested his story. So Shakespeare declared his independence of the original chronicle of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, eliminating altogether (with some wisdom) another uncle called Wiglerus. At the start the Nimrod Club of Chapman and Hall may have even had equal chances with the Pickwick Club of young Mr. Dickens; but the Pickwick Club became something much better than any publisher had dared to dream of. Some of the old links were indeed severed by accident or extraneous trouble; Seymour, for whose sake the whole had perhaps been planned, blew his brains out before he had drawn ten pictures. But such things were trifles compared to Pickwick itself. It mattered little now whether Seymour blew his brains out, so long as Charles Dickens blew his brains in. The work became systematically and progressively more powerful and masterly. Many critics have commented on the somewhat discordant and inartistic change between the earlier part of Pickwick and the later; they have pointed out, not without good sense, that the character of Mr. Pickwick changes from that of a silly buffoon to that of a solid merchant. But the case, if these critics had noticed it, is much stronger in the minor characters of the great company. Mr. Winkle, who has been an idiot (even, perhaps, as Mr. Pickwick says, “an impostor”), suddenly becomes a romantic and even reckless lover, scaling a forbidden wall and planning a bold elopement. Mr. Snodgrass, who has behaved in a ridiculous manner in all serious positions, suddenly finds himself in a ridiculous position—that of a gentleman surprised in a
secret love affair—and behaves in a manner perfectly manly, serious, and honourable. Mr. Tupman alone has no serious emotional development, and for this reason it is, presumably, that we hear less and less of Mr. Tupman towards the end of the book. Dickens has by this time got into a thoroughly serious mood—a mood expressed indeed by extravagant incidents, but none the less serious for that; and into this Winkle and Snodgrass, in the character of romantic lovers, could be made to fit. Mr. Tupman had to be left out of the love affairs; therefore Mr. Tupman is left out of the book.

Much of the change was due to the entrance of the greatest character in the story. It may seem strange at the first glance to say that Sam Weller helped to make the story serious. Nevertheless, this is strictly true. The introduction of Sam Weller had, to begin with, some merely accidental and superficial effects. When Samuel Weller had appeared, Samuel Pickwick was no longer the chief farcical character. Weller became the joker and Pickwick in some sense the butt of his jokes. Thus it was obvious that the more simple, solemn, and really respectable this butt could be made the better. Mr. Pickwick had been the figure capering before the footlights. But with the advent of Sam, Mr. Pickwick had become a sort of black background and had to behave as such. But this explanation, though true as far as it goes, is a mean and unsatisfactory one, leaving the great elements unexplained. For a much deeper and more righteous reason Sam Weller introduces the more serious tone of Pickwick. He introduces it because he introduces something which it was the chief business of Dickens to preach throughout his life—something which he never preached so well as when he preached it unconsciously. Sam Weller introduces the English people.

Sam Weller is the great symbol in English literature of the populace peculiar to England. His incessant stream of sane nonsense is a wonderful achievement of Dickens: but it is no great falsification of the incessant stream of sane nonsense as it really exists among the English poor. The English poor live in an atmosphere of humour; they think in humour. Irony is the very air that they breathe. A joke comes suddenly from time to time into the head of a politician or a gentleman, and then as a rule he makes the most of it; but when a serious word comes into the mind of a coster it is almost as startling as a joke. The word “chaff” was, I suppose, originally applied to badinage to express its barren and unsustaining character; but to the English poor chaff is as sustaining as grain. The phrase that leaps to their lips is the ironical phrase. I remember once being driven in a hansom cab down a street that turned out to be a cul de sac, and brought us bang up against a wall. The driver and I simultaneously said
something. But I said: “This’ll never do!” and he said: “This is all right!” Even in the act of pulling back his horse’s nose from a brick wall, that confirmed satirist thought in terms of his highly-trained and traditional satire; while I, belonging to a duller and simpler class, expressed my feelings in words as innocent and literal as those of a rustic or a child.

This eternal output of divine derision has never been so truly typified as by the character of Sam; he is a grotesque fountain which gushes the living waters for ever. Dickens is accused of exaggeration and he is often guilty of exaggeration; but here he does not exaggerate: he merely symbolises and sublimates like any other great artist. Sam Weller does not exaggerate the wit of the London street arab one atom more than Colonel Newcome, let us say, exaggerates the stateliness of an ordinary soldier and gentleman, or than Mr. Collins exaggerates the fatuity of a certain kind of country clergyman. And this breath from the boisterous brotherhood of the poor lent a special seriousness and smell of reality to the whole story. The unconscious follies of Winkle and Tupman are blown away like leaves before the solid and conscious folly of Sam Weller. Moreover, the relations between Pickwick and his servant Sam are in some ways new and valuable in literature. Many comic writers had described the clever rascal and his ridiculous dupe; but here, in a fresh and very human atmosphere, we have a clever servant who was not a rascal and not ridiculous. Sam Weller stands in some ways for a cheerful knowledge of the world; Mr. Pickwick stands for a still more cheerful ignorance of the world. And Dickens responded to a profound human sentiment (the sentiment that has made saints and the sanctity of children) when he made the gentler and less-travelled type—the type which moderates and controls. Knowledge and innocence are both excellent things, and they are both very funny. But it is right that knowledge should be the servant and innocence the master.

The sincerity of this study of Sam Weller has produced one particular effect in the book which I wonder that critics of Dickens have never noticed or discussed. Because it has no Dickens “pathos,” certain parts of it are truly pathetic. Dickens, realising rightly that the whole tone of the book was fun, felt that he ought to keep out of it any great experiments in sadness and keep within limits those that he put in. He used this restraint in order not to spoil the humour; but (if he had known himself better) he might well have used it in order not to spoil the pathos. This is the one book in which Dickens was, as it were, forced to trample down his tender feelings; and for that very reason it is the one book where all the tenderness there is is quite unquestionably true. An admirable
example of what I mean may be found in the scene in which Sam Weller goes
down to see his bereaved father after the death of his step-mother. The most
loyal admirer of Dickens can hardly prevent himself from giving a slight shudder
when he thinks of what Dickens might have made of that scene in some of his
more expansive and maudlin moments. For all I know old Mrs. Weller might
have asked what the wild waves were saying; and for all I know old Mr. Weller
might have told her. As it is, Dickens, being forced to keep the tale taut and
humorous, gives a picture of humble respect and decency which is manly,
dignified, and really sad. There is no attempt made by these simple and honest
men, the father and son, to pretend that the dead woman was anything greatly
other than she was; their respect is for death, and for the human weakness and
mystery which it must finally cover. Old Tony Weller does not tell his shrewish
wife that she is already a white-winged angel; he speaks to her with an admirable
good nature and good sense:

“‘Susan,’ I says, ‘you’ve been a very good wife to me altogether: keep a good
heart, my dear, and you’ll live to see me punch that ’ere Stiggins’s ’ead yet.’ She
smiled at this, Samivel . . . but she died arter all.”

That is perhaps the first and the last time that Dickens ever touched the
extreme dignity of pathos. He is restraining his compassion, and afterwards he
let it go. Now laughter is a thing that can be let go; laughter has in it a quality of
liberty. But sorrow has in it by its very nature a quality of confinement; pathos
by its very nature fights with itself. Humour is expansive; it bursts outwards; the
fact is attested by the common expression, “holding one’s sides.” But sorrow is
not expansive; and it was afterwards the mistake of Dickens that he tried to make
it expansive. It is the one great weakness of Dickens as a great writer, that he did
try to make that sudden sadness, that abrupt pity, which we call pathos, a thing
quite obvious, infectious, public, as if it were journalism or the measles. It is
pleasant to think that in this supreme masterpiece, done in the dawn of his
career, there is not even this faint fleck upon the sun of his just splendour.
Pickwick will always be remembered as the great example of everything that
made Dickens great; of the solemn conviviality of great friendships, of the
erratic adventures of old English roads, of the hospitality of old English inns, of
the great fundamental kindliness and honour of old English manners. First of all,
however, it will always be remembered for its laughter, or, if you will, for its
folly. A good joke is the one ultimate and sacred thing which cannot be
criticised. Our relations with a good joke are direct and even divine relations.
We speak of “seeing” a joke just as we speak of “seeing” a ghost or a vision. If
we have seen it, it is futile to argue with us; and we have seen the vision of Pickwick. Pickwick may be the top of Dickens’s humour; I think upon the whole it is. But the broad humour of Pickwick he broadened over many wonderful kingdoms; the narrow pathos of Pickwick he never found again.
Romance is perhaps the highest point of human expression, except indeed religion, to which it is closely allied. Romance resembles religion especially in this, that it is not only a simplification but a shortening of existence. Both romance and religion see everything as it were foreshortened; they see everything in an abrupt and fantastic perspective, coming to an apex. It is the whole essence of perspective that it comes to a point. Similarly, religion comes to a point—to the point. Thus religion is always insisting on the shortness of human life. But it does not insist on the shortness of human life as the pessimists insist on it. Pessimism insists on the shortness of human life in order to show that life is valueless. Religion insists on the shortness of human life in order to show that life is frightfully valuable—is almost horribly valuable. Pessimism says that life is so short that it gives nobody a chance; religion says that life is so short that it gives everybody his final chance. In the first case the word brevity means futility; in the second case, opportunity. But the case is even stronger than this. Religion shortens everything. Religion shortens even eternity. Where science, submitting to the false standard of time, sees evolution, which is slow, religion sees creation, which is sudden. Philosophically speaking, the process is neither slow nor quick since we have nothing to compare it with. Religion prefers to think of it as quick. For religion the flowers shoot up suddenly like rockets. For religion the mountains are lifted up suddenly like waves. Those who quote that fine passage which says that in God’s sight a thousand years are as yesterday that is passed as a watch in the night, do not realise the full force of the meaning. To God a thousand years are not only a watch but an exciting watch. For God time goes at a gallop, as it does to a man reading a good tale.

All this is, in a humble manner, true for romance. Romance is a shortening and sharpening of the human difficulty. Where you and I have to vote against a man, or write (rather feebly) against a man, or sign illegible petitions against a man, romance does for him what we should really like to see done. It knocks him down; it shortens the slow process of historical justice. All romances consist of three characters. Other characters may be introduced; but those other characters are certainly mere scenery as far as the romance is concerned. They are bushes that wave rather excitedly; they are posts that stand up with a certain pride; they are correctly painted rocks that frown very correctly; but they are all landscape—they are all a background. In every pure romance there are three
living and moving characters. For the sake of argument they may be called St. George and the Dragon and the Princess. In every romance there must be the twin elements of loving and fighting. In every romance there must be the three characters: there must be the Princess, who is a thing to be loved; there must be the Dragon, who is a thing to be fought; and there must be St. George, who is a thing that both loves and fights. There have been many symptoms of cynicism and decay in our modern civilisation. But of all the signs of modern feebleness, of lack of grasp on morals as they actually must be, there has been none quite so silly or so dangerous as this: that the philosophers of to-day have started to divide loving from fighting and to put them into opposite camps. There could be no worse sign than that a man, even Nietzsche, can be found to say that we should go in for fighting instead of loving. There can be no worse sign than that a man, even Tolstoi, can be found to tell us that we should go in for loving instead of fighting. The two things imply each other; they implied each other in the old romance and in the old religion, which were the two permanent things of humanity. You cannot love a thing without wanting to fight for it. You cannot fight without something to fight for. To love a thing without wishing to fight for it is not love at all; it is lust. It may be an airy, philosophical, and disinterested lust; it may be, so to speak, a virgin lust; but it is lust, because it is wholly self-indulgent and invites no attack. On the other hand, fighting for a thing without loving it is not even fighting; it can only be called a kind of horse-play that is occasionally fatal. Wherever human nature is human and unspoilt by any special sophistry, there exists this natural kinship between war and wooing, and that natural kinship is called romance. It comes upon a man especially in the great hour of youth; and every man who has ever been young at all has felt, if only for a moment, this ultimate and poetic paradox. He knows that loving the world is the same thing as fighting the world. It was at the very moment when he offered to like everybody he also offered to hit everybody. To almost every man that can be called a man this especial moment of the romantic culmination has come. In the first resort the man wished to live a romance. In the second resort, in the last and worst resort, he was content to write one.

Now there is a certain moment when this element enters independently into the life of Dickens. There is a particular time when we can see him suddenly realise that he wants to write a romance and nothing else. In reading his letters, in appreciating his character, this point emerges clearly enough. He was full of the afterglow of his marriage; he was still young and psychologically ignorant; above all, he was now, really for the first time, sure that he was going to be at
least some kind of success. There is, I repeat, a certain point at which one feels that Dickens will either begin to write romances or go off on something different altogether. This crucial point in his life is marked by Nicholas Nickleby.

It must be remembered that before this issue of Nicholas Nickleby his work, successful as it was, had not been such as to dedicate him seriously or irrevocably to the writing of novels. He had already written three books; and at least two of them are classed among the novels under his name. But if we look at the actual origin and formation of these books we see that they came from another source and were really designed upon another plan. The three books were, of course, the Sketches by Boz, the Pickwick Papers, and Oliver Twist. It is, I suppose, sufficiently well understood that the Sketches by Boz are, as their name implies, only sketches. But surely it is quite equally clear that the Pickwick Papers are, as their name implies, merely papers. Nor is the case at all different in spirit and essence when we come to Oliver Twist. There is indeed a sort of romance in Oliver Twist, but it is such an uncommonly bad one that it can hardly be regarded as greatly interrupting the previous process; and if the reader chooses to pay very little attention to it, he cannot pay less attention to it than the author did. But in fact the case lies far deeper. Oliver Twist is so much apart from the ordinary track of Dickens, it is so gloomy, it is so much all in one atmosphere, that it can best be considered as an exception or a solitary excursus in his work. Perhaps it can best be considered as the extension of one of his old sketches, of some sketch that happened to be about a visit to a workhouse or a gaol. In the Sketches by Boz he might well have visited a workhouse where he saw Bumble; in the Sketches by Boz he might well have visited a prison where he saw Fagin. We are still in the realm of sketches and sketchiness. The Pickwick Papers may be called an extension of one of his bright sketches. Oliver Twist may be called an extension of one of his gloomy ones.

Had he continued along this line all his books might very well have been notebooks. It would be very easy to split up all his subsequent books into scraps and episodes, such as those which make up the Sketches by Boz. It would be easy enough for Dickens, instead of publishing Nicholas Nickleby, to have published a book of sketches, one of which was called “A Yorkshire School,” another called “A Provincial Theatre,” and another called “Sir Mulberry Hawk or High Life Revealed,” another called “Mrs. Nickleby or a Lady’s Monologue.” It would have been very easy to have thrown over the rather chaotic plan of the Old Curiosity Shop. He might have merely written short stories called “The Glorious Apollos,” “Mrs. Quilp’s Tea-Party,” “Mrs. Jarley’s Waxwork,” “The
Little Servant,” and “The Death of a Dwarf.” Martin Chuzzlewit might have been twenty stories instead of one story. Dombey and Son might have been twenty stories instead of one story. We might have lost all Dickens’s novels; we might have lost altogether Dickens the novelist. We might have lost that steady love of a seminal and growing romance which grew on him steadily as the years advanced, and which gave us towards the end some of his greatest triumphs. All his books might have been Sketches by Boz. But he did turn away from this, and the turning-point is Nicholas Nickleby.

Everything has a supreme moment and is crucial; that is where our friends the evolutionists go wrong. I suppose that there is an instant of midsummer as there is an instant of midnight. If in the same way there is a supreme point of spring, Nicholas Nickleby is the supreme point of Dickens’s spring. I do not mean that it is the best book that he wrote in his youth. Pickwick is a better book. I do not mean that it contains more striking characters than any of the other books in his youth. The Old Curiosity Shop contains at least two more striking characters. But I mean that this book coincided with his resolution to be a great novelist and his final belief that he could be one. Henceforward his books are novels, very commonly bad novels. Previously they have not really been novels at all. There are many indications of the change I mean. Here is one, for instance, which is more or less final. Nicholas Nickleby is Dickens’s first romantic novel because it is his first novel with a proper and dignified romantic hero; which means, of course, a somewhat chivalrous young donkey. The hero of Pickwick is an old man. The hero of Oliver Twist is a child. Even after Nicholas Nickleby this non-romantic custom continued. The Old Curiosity Shop has no hero in particular. The hero of Barnaby Rudge is a lunatic. But Nicholas Nickleby is a proper, formal, and ceremonial hero. He has no psychology; he has not even any particular character; but he is made deliberately a hero—young, poor, brave, unimpeachable, and ultimately triumphant. He is, in short, the hero. Mr. Vincent Crummles had a colossal intellect; and I always have a fancy that under all his pomposity he saw things more keenly than he allowed others to see. The moment he saw Nicholas Nickleby, almost in rags and limping along the high road, he engaged him (you will remember) as first walking gentleman. He was right. Nobody could possibly be more of a first walking gentleman than Nicholas Nickleby was. He was the first walking gentleman before he went on to the boards of Mr. Vincent Crummles’s theatre, and he remained the first walking gentleman after he had come off.

Now this romantic method involves a certain element of climax which to us
appears crudity. Nicholas Nickleby, for instance, wanders through the world; he takes a situation as assistant to a Yorkshire schoolmaster; he sees an act of tyranny of which he strongly disapproves; he cries out “Stop!” in a voice that makes the rafters ring; he thrashes the schoolmaster within an inch of his life; he throws the schoolmaster away like an old cigar, and he goes away. The modern intellect is positively prostrated and flattened by this rapid and romantic way of righting wrongs. If a modern philanthropist came to Dotheboys Hall I fear he would not employ the simple, sacred, and truly Christian solution of beating Mr. Squeers with a stick. I fancy he would petition the Government to appoint a Royal Commission to inquire into Mr. Squeers. I think he would every now and then write letters to newspapers reminding people that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, there was a Royal Commission to inquire into Mr. Squeers. I agree that he might even go the length of calling a crowded meeting in St. James’s Hall on the subject of the best policy with regard to Mr. Squeers. At this meeting some very heated and daring speakers might even go the length of alluding sternly to Mr. Squeers. Occasionally even hoarse voices from the back of the hall might ask (in vain) what was going to be done with Mr. Squeers. The Royal Commission would report about three years afterwards and would say that many things had happened which were certainly most regrettable; that Mr. Squeers was the victim of a bad system; that Mrs. Squeers was also the victim of a bad system; but that the man who sold Squeers his cane had really acted with great indiscretion and ought to be spoken to kindly. Something like this would be what, after four years, the Royal Commission would have said; but it would not matter in the least what the Royal Commission had said, for by that time the philanthropists would be off on a new tack and the world would have forgotten all about Dotheboys Hall and everything connected with it. By that time the philanthropists would be petitioning Parliament for another Royal Commission; perhaps a Royal Commission to inquire into whether Mr. Mantalini was extravagant with his wife’s money; perhaps a commission to inquire into whether Mr. Vincent Crummles kept the Infant Phenomenon short by means of gin.

If we wish to understand the spirit and the period of Nicholas Nickleby we must endeavour to comprehend and to appreciate the old more decisive remedies, or, if we prefer to put it so, the old more desperate remedies. Our fathers had a plain sort of pity; if you will, a gross and coarse pity. They had their own sort of sentimentalism. They were quite willing to weep over Smike. But it certainly never occurred to them to weep over Squeers. Even those who
opposed the French war opposed it exactly in the same way as their enemies opposed the French soldiers. They fought with fighting. Charles Fox was full of horror at the bitterness and the useless bloodshed; but if any one had insulted him over the matter, he would have gone out and shot him in a duel as coolly as any of his contemporaries. All their interference was heroic interference. All their legislation was heroic legislation. All their remedies were heroic remedies. No doubt they were often narrow and often visionary. No doubt they often looked at a political formula when they should have looked at an elemental fact. No doubt they were pedantic in some of their principles and clumsy in some of their solutions. No doubt, in short, they were all very wrong; and no doubt we are the people, and wisdom shall die with us. But when they saw something which in their eyes, such as they were, really violated their morality, such as it was, then they did not cry “Investigate!” They did not cry “Educate!” They did not cry “Improve!” They did not cry “Evolve!” Like Nicholas Nickleby they cried “Stop!” And it did stop.

This is the first mark of the purely romantic method: the swiftness and simplicity with which St. George kills the dragon. The second mark of it is exhibited here as one of the weaknesses of Nicholas Nickleby. I mean the tendency in the purely romantic story to regard the heroine merely as something to be won; to regard the princess solely as something to be saved from the dragon. The father of Madeline Bray is really a very respectable dragon. His selfishness is suggested with much more psychological tact and truth than that of any other of the villains that Dickens described about this time. But his daughter is merely the young woman with whom Nicholas is in love. We do not care a rap about Madeline Bray. Personally I should have preferred Cecilia Bobster. Here is one real point where the Victorian romance falls below the Elizabethan romantic drama. Shakespeare always made his heroines heroic as well as his heroes.

In Dickens’s actual literary career it is this romantic quality in Nicholas Nickleby that is most important. It is his first definite attempt to write a young and chivalrous novel. In this sense the comic characters and the comic scenes are secondary; and indeed the comic characters and the comic scenes, admirable as they are, could never be considered as in themselves superior to such characters and such scenes in many of the other books. But in themselves how unforgettable they are. Mr. Crummles and the whole of his theatrical business is an admirable case of that first and most splendid quality in Dickens—I mean the art of making something which in life we call pompous and dull, becoming in
literature pompous and delightful. I have remarked before that nearly every one of the amusing characters of Dickens is in reality a great fool. But I might go further. Almost every one of his amusing characters is in reality a great bore. The very people that we fly to in Dickens are the very people that we fly from in life. And there is more in Crummles than the mere entertainment of his solemnity and his tedium. The enormous seriousness with which he takes his art is always an exact touch in regard to the unsuccessful artist. If an artist is successful, everything then depends upon a dilemma of his moral character. If he is a mean artist success will make him a society man. If he is a magnanimous artist, success will make him an ordinary man. But only as long as he is unsuccessful will he be an unfathomable and serious artist, like Mr. Crummles. Dickens was always particularly good at expressing thus the treasures that belong to those who do not succeed in this world. There are vast prospects and splendid songs in the point of view of the typically unsuccessful man; if all the used-up actors and spoilt journalists and broken clerks could give a chorus, it would be a wonderful chorus in praise of the world. But these unsuccessful men commonly cannot even speak. Dickens is the voice of them, and a very ringing voice; because he was perhaps the only one of these unsuccessful men that was ever successful.
OLIVER TWIST

In considering Dickens, as we almost always must consider him, as a man of rich originality, we may possibly miss the forces from which he drew even his original energy. It is not well for man to be alone. We, in the modern world, are ready enough to admit that when it is applied to some problem of monasticism or of an ecstatic life. But we will not admit that our modern artistic claim to absolute originality is really a claim to absolute unsociability; a claim to absolute loneliness. The anarchist is at least as solitary as the ascetic. And the men of very vivid vigour in literature, the men such as Dickens, have generally displayed a large sociability towards the society of letters, always expressed in the happy pursuit of pre-existent themes, sometimes expressed, as in the case of Molière or Sterne, in downright plagiarism. For even theft is a confession of our dependence on society. In Dickens, however, this element of the original foundations on which he worked is quite especially difficult to determine. This is partly due to the fact that for the present reading public he is practically the only one of his long line that is read at all. He sums up Smollett and Goldsmith, but he also destroys them. This one giant, being closest to us, cuts off from our view even the giants that begat him. But much more is this difficulty due to the fact that Dickens mixed up with the old material, materials so subtly modern, so made of the French Revolution, that the whole is transformed. If we want the best example of this, the best example is Oliver Twist.

Relatively to the other works of Dickens Oliver Twist is not of great value, but it is of great importance. Some parts of it are so crude and of so clumsy a melodrama, that one is almost tempted to say that Dickens would have been greater without it. But even if he had been greater without it he would still have been incomplete without it. With the exception of some gorgeous passages, both of humour and horror, the interest of the book lies not so much in its revelation of Dickens’s literary genius as in its revelation of those moral, personal, and political instincts which were the make-up of his character and the permanent support of that literary genius. It is by far the most depressing of all his books; it is in some ways the most irritating; yet its ugliness gives the last touch of honesty to all that spontaneous and splendid output. Without this one discordant note all his merriment might have seemed like levity.

Dickens had just appeared upon the stage and set the whole world laughing with his first great story Pickwick. Oliver Twist was his encore. It was the
second opportunity given to him by those who had rolled about with laughter over Tupman and Jingle, Weller and Dowler. Under such circumstances a stagey reciter will sometimes take care to give a pathetic piece after his humorous one; and with all his many moral merits, there was much that was stagey about Dickens. But this explanation alone is altogether inadequate and unworthy. There was in Dickens this other kind of energy, horrible, uncanny, barbaric, capable in another age of coarseness, greedy for the emblems of established ugliness, the coffin, the gibbet, the bones, the bloody knife. Dickens liked these things and he was all the more of a man for liking them; especially he was all the more of a boy. We can all recall with pleasure the fact that Miss Petowker (afterwards Mrs. Lillyvick) was in the habit of reciting a poem called “The Blood Drinker’s Burial.” I cannot express my regret that the words of this poem are not given; for Dickens would have been quite as capable of writing “The Blood Drinker’s Burial” as Miss Petowker was of reciting it. This strain existed in Dickens alongside of his happy laughter; both were allied to the same robust romance. Here as elsewhere Dickens is close to all the permanent human things. He is close to religion, which has never allowed the thousand devils on its churches to stop the dancing of its bells. He is allied to the people, to the real poor, who love nothing so much as to take a cheerful glass and to talk about funerals. The extremes of his gloom and gaiety are the mark of religion and democracy; they mark him off from the moderate happiness of philosophers, and from that stoicism which is the virtue and the creed of aristocrats. There is nothing odd in the fact that the same man who conceived the humane hospitalities of Pickwick should also have imagined the inhuman laughter of Fagin’s den. They are both genuine and they are both exaggerated. And the whole human tradition has tied up together in a strange knot these strands of festivity and fear. It is over the cups of Christmas Eve that men have always competed in telling ghost stories.

This first element was present in Dickens, and it is very powerfully present in Oliver Twist. It had not been present with sufficient consistency or continuity in Pickwick to make it remain on the reader’s memory at all, for the tale of “Gabriel Grubb” is grotesque rather than horrible, and the two gloomy stories of the “Madman” and the “Queer Client” are so utterly irrelevant to the tale, that even if the reader remember them he probably does not remember that they occur in Pickwick. Critics have complained of Shakespeare and others for putting comic episodes into a tragedy. It required a man with the courage and coarseness of Dickens actually to put tragic episodes into a farce. But they are
not caught up into the story at all. In Oliver Twist, however, the thing broke out with an almost brutal inspiration, and those who had fallen in love with Dickens for his generous buffoonery may very likely have been startled at receiving such very different fare at the next helping. When you have bought a man’s book because you like his writing about Mr. Wardle’s punch-bowl and Mr. Winkle’s skates, it may very well be surprising to open it and read about the sickening thuds that beat out the life of Nancy, or that mysterious villain whose face was blasted with disease.

As a nightmare, the work is really admirable. Characters which are not very clearly conceived as regards their own psychology are yet, at certain moments, managed so as to shake to its foundations our own psychology. Bill Sikes is not exactly a real man, but for all that he is a real murderer. Nancy is not really impressive as a living woman; but (as the phrase goes) she makes a lovely corpse. Something quite childish and eternal in us, something which is shocked with the mere simplicity of death, quivers when we read of those repeated blows or see Sikes cursing the tell-tale cur who will follow his bloody foot-prints. And this strange, sublime, vulgar melodrama, which is melodrama and yet is painfully real, reaches its hideous height in that fine scene of the death of Sikes, the besieged house, the boy screaming within, the crowd screaming without, the murderer turned almost a maniac and dragging his victim uselessly up and down the room, the escape over the roof, the rope swiftly running taut, and death sudden, startling and symbolic; a man hanged. There is in this and similar scenes something of the quality of Hogarth and many other English moralists of the early eighteenth century. It is not easy to define this Hogarthian quality in words, beyond saying that it is a sort of alphabetical realism, like the cruel candour of children. But it has about it these two special principles which separate it from all that we call realism in our time. First, that with us a moral story means a story about moral people; with them a moral story meant more often a story about immoral people. Second, that with us realism is always associated with some subtle view of morals; with them realism was always associated with some simple view of morals. The end of Bill Sikes exactly in the way that the law would have killed him—this is a Hogarthian incident; it carries on that tradition of startling and shocking platitude.

All this element in the book was a sincere thing in the author, but none the less it came from old soils, from the graveyard and the gallows, and the lane where the ghost walked. Dickens was always attracted to such things, and (as Forster says with inimitable simplicity) “but for his strong sense might have fallen into
the follies of spiritualism.” As a matter of fact, like most of the men of strong sense in his tradition, Dickens was left with a half belief in spirits which became in practice a belief in bad spirits. The great disadvantage of those who have too much strong sense to believe in supernaturalism is that they keep last the low and little forms of the supernatural, such as omens, curses, spectres, and retributions, but find a high and happy supernaturalism quite incredible. Thus the Puritans denied the sacraments, but went on burning witches. This shadow does rest, to some extent, upon the rational English writers like Dickens; supernaturalism was dying, but its ugliest roots died last. Dickens would have found it easier to believe in a ghost than in a vision of the Virgin with angels. There, for good or evil, however, was the root of the old diablerie in Dickens, and there it is in Oliver Twist. But this was only the first of the new Dickens elements, which must have surprised those Dickensians who eagerly bought his second book. The second of the new Dickens elements is equally indisputable and separate. It swelled afterwards to enormous proportions in Dickens’s work; but it really has its rise here. Again, as in the case of the element of diablerie, it would be possible to make technical exceptions in favour of Pickwick. Just as there were quite inappropriate scraps of the gruesome element in Pickwick, so there are quite inappropriate allusions to this other topic in Pickwick. But nobody by merely reading Pickwick would even remember this topic; no one by merely reading Pickwick would know what this topic is; this third great subject of Dickens; this second great subject of the Dickens of Oliver Twist.

This subject is social oppression. It is surely fair to say that no one could have gathered from Pickwick how this question boiled in the blood of the author of Pickwick. There are, indeed, passages, particularly in connection with Mr. Pickwick in the debtor’s prison, which prove to us, looking back on a whole public career, that Dickens had been from the beginning bitter and inquisitive about the problem of our civilisation. No one could have imagined at the time that this bitterness ran in an unbroken river under all the surges of that superb gaiety and exuberance. With Oliver Twist this sterner side of Dickens was suddenly revealed. For the very first pages of Oliver Twist are stern even when they are funny. They amuse, but they cannot be enjoyed, as can the passages about the follies of Mr. Snodgrass or the humiliations of Mr. Winkle. The difference between the old easy humour and this new harsh humour is a difference not of degree but of kind. Dickens makes game of Mr. Bumble because he wants to kill Mr. Bumble; he made game of Mr. Winkle because he wanted him to live for ever. Dickens has taken the sword in hand; against what is
he declaring war?

It is just here that the greatness of Dickens comes in; it is just here that the difference lies between the pedant and the poet. Dickens enters the social and political war, and the first stroke he deals is not only significant but even startling. Fully to see this we must appreciate the national situation. It was an age of reform, and even of radical reform; the world was full of radicals and reformers; but only too many of them took the line of attacking everything and anything that was opposed to some particular theory among the many political theories that possessed the end of the eighteenth century. Some had so much perfected the perfect theory of republicanism that they almost lay awake at night because Queen Victoria had a crown on her head. Others were so certain that mankind had hitherto been merely strangled in the bonds of the State that they saw truth only in the destruction of tariffs or of by-laws. The greater part of that generation held that clearness, economy, and a hard common-sense, would soon destroy the errors that had been erected by the superstitions and sentimentalities of the past. In pursuance of this idea many of the new men of the new century, quite confident that they were invigorating the new age, sought to destroy the old sentimental clericalism, the old sentimental feudalism, the old-world belief in priests, the old-world belief in patrons, and among other things the old-world belief in beggars. They sought among other things to clear away the old visionary kindliness on the subject of vagrants. Hence those reformers enacted not only a new reform bill but also a new poor law. In creating many other modern things they created the modern workhouse, and when Dickens came out to fight it was the first thing that he broke with his battle-axe.

This is where Dickens’s social revolt is of more value than mere politics and avoids the vulgarity of the novel with a purpose. His revolt is not a revolt of the commercialist against the feudalist, of the Nonconformist against the Churchman, of the Free-trader against the Protectionist, of the Liberal against the Tory. If he were among us now his revolt would not be the revolt of the Socialist against the Individualist, or of the Anarchist against the Socialist. His revolt was simply and solely the eternal revolt; it was the revolt of the weak against the strong. He did not dislike this or that argument for oppression; he disliked oppression. He disliked a certain look on the face of a man when he looks down on another man. And that look on the face is, indeed, the only thing in the world that we have really to fight between here and the fires of Hell. That which pedants of that time and this time would have called the sentimentalism of Dickens was really simply the detached sanity of Dickens. He cared nothing for
the fugitive explanations of the Constitutional Conservatives; he cared nothing for the fugitive explanations of the Manchester School. He would have cared quite as little for the fugitive explanations of the Fabian Society or of the modern scientific Socialist. He saw that under many forms there was one fact, the tyranny of man over man; and he struck at it when he saw it, whether it was old or new. When he found that footmen and rustics were too much afraid of Sir Leicester Dedlock, he attacked Sir Leicester Dedlock; he did not care whether Sir Leicester Dedlock said he was attacking England or whether Mr. Rouncewell, the Ironmaster, said he was attacking an effete oligarchy. In that case he pleased Mr. Rouncewell, the Ironmaster, and displeased Sir Leicester Dedlock, the Aristocrat. But when he found that Mr. Rouncewell’s workmen were much too frightened of Mr. Rouncewell, then he displeased Mr. Rouncewell in turn; he displeased Mr. Rouncewell very much by calling him Mr. Bounderby. When he imagined himself to be fighting old laws he gave a sort of vague and general approval to new laws. But when he came to the new laws they had a bad time. When Dickens found that after a hundred economic arguments and granting a hundred economic considerations, the fact remained that paupers in modern workhouses were much too afraid of the beadle, just as vassals in ancient castles were much too afraid of the Dedlocks, then he struck suddenly and at once. This is what makes the opening chapters of Oliver Twist so curious and important. The very fact of Dickens’s distance from, and independence of, the elaborate financial arguments of his time, makes more definite and dazzling his sudden assertion that he sees the old human tyranny in front of him as plain as the sun at noon-day. Dickens attacks the modern workhouse with a sort of inspired simplicity as of a boy in a fairy tale who had wandered about, sword in hand, looking for ogres and who had found an indisputable ogre. All the other people of his time are attacking things because they are bad economics or because they are bad politics, or because they are bad science; he alone is attacking things because they are bad. All the others are Radicals with a large R; he alone is radical with a small one. He encounters evil with that beautiful surprise which, as it is the beginning of all real pleasure, is also the beginning of all righteous indignation. He enters the workhouse just as Oliver Twist enters it, as a little child.

This is the real power and pathos of that celebrated passage in the book which has passed into a proverb; but which has not lost its terrible humour even in being hackneyed. I mean, of course, the everlasting quotation about Oliver Twist asking for more. The real poignancy that there is in this idea is a very good study
in that strong school of social criticism which Dickens represented. A modern realist describing the dreary workhouse would have made all the children utterly crushed, not daring to speak at all, not expecting anything, not hoping anything, past all possibility of affording even an ironical contrast or a protest of despair. A modern, in short, would have made all the boys in the workhouse pathetic by making them all pessimists. But Oliver Twist is not pathetic because he is a pessimist. Oliver Twist is pathetic because he is an optimist. The whole tragedy of that incident is in the fact that he does expect the universe to be kind to him, that he does believe that he is living in a just world. He comes before the Guardians as the ragged peasants of the French Revolution came before the Kings and Parliaments of Europe. That is to say, he comes, indeed, with gloomy experiences, but he comes with a happy philosophy. He knows that there are wrongs of man to be reviled; but he believes also that there are rights of man to be demanded. It has often been remarked as a singular fact that the French poor, who stand in historic tradition as typical of all the desperate men who have dragged down tyranny, were, as a matter of fact, by no means worse off than the poor of many other European countries before the Revolution. The truth is that the French were tragic because they were better off. The others had known the sorrowful experiences; but they alone had known the splendid expectation and the original claims. It was just here that Dickens was so true a child of them and of that happy theory so bitterly applied. They were the one oppressed people that simply asked for justice; they were the one Parish Boy who innocently asked for more.
Nothing is important except the fate of the soul; and literature is only redeemed from an utter triviality, surpassing that of naughts and crosses, by the fact that it describes not the world around us or the things on the retina of the eye or the enormous irrelevancy of encyclopædias, but some condition to which the human spirit can come. All good writers express the state of their souls, even (as occurs in some cases of very good writers) if it is a state of damnation. The first thing that has to be realised about Dickens is this ultimate spiritual condition of the man, which lay behind all his creations. This Dickens state of mind is difficult to pick out in words as are all elementary states of mind; they cannot be described, not because they are too subtle for words, but because they are too simple for words. Perhaps the nearest approach to a statement of it would be this: that Dickens expresses an eager anticipation of everything that will happen in the motley affairs of men; he looks at the quiet crowd waiting for it to be picturesque and to play the fool; he expects everything; he is torn with a happy hunger. Thackeray is always looking back to yesterday; Dickens is always looking forward to to-morrow. Both are profoundly humorous, for there is a humour of the morning and a humour of the evening; but the first guesses at what it will get, at all the grotesqueness and variety which a day may bring forth; the second looks back on what the day has been and sees even its solemnities as slightly ironical. Nothing can be too extravagant for the laughter that looks forward; and nothing can be too dignified for the laughter that looks back. It is an idle but obvious thing, which many must have noticed, that we often find in the title of one of an author’s books what might very well stand for a general description of all of them. Thus all Spenser’s works might be called A Hymn to Heavenly Beauty; or all Mr. Bernard Shaw’s bound books might be called You Never Can Tell. In the same way the whole substance and spirit of Thackeray might be gathered under the general title Vanity Fair. In the same way too the whole substance and spirit of Dickens might be gathered under the general title Great Expectations.

In a recent criticism on this position I saw it remarked that all this is reading into Dickens something that he did not mean; and I have been told that it would have greatly surprised Dickens to be informed that he “went down the broad road of the Revolution.” Of course it would. Criticism does not exist to say about authors the things that they knew themselves. It exists to say the things about
them which they did not know themselves. If a critic says that the Iliad has a pagan rather than a Christian pity, or that it is full of pictures made by one epithet, of course he does not mean that Homer could have said that. If Homer could have said that the critic would leave Homer to say it. The function of criticism, if it has a legitimate function at all, can only be one function—that of dealing with the subconscious part of the author’s mind which only the critic can express, and not with the conscious part of the author’s mind, which the author himself can express. Either criticism is no good at all (a very defensible position) or else criticism means saying about an author the very things that would have made him jump out of his boots.

Doubtless the name in this case Great Expectations is an empty coincidence; and indeed it is not in the books of the later Dickens period (the period of Great Expectations) that we should look for the best examples of this sanguine and expectant spirit which is the essential of the man’s genius. There are plenty of good examples of it especially in the earlier works. But even in the earlier works there is no example of it more striking or more satisfactory than The Old Curiosity Shop. It is particularly noticeable in the fact that its opening and original framework express the idea of a random experience, a thing come across in the street; a single face in the crowd, followed until it tells its story. Though the thing ends in a novel it begins in a sketch; it begins as one of the Sketches by Boz. There is something unconsciously artistic in the very clumsiness of this opening. Master Humphrey starts to keep a scrap-book of all his adventures, and he finds that he can fill the whole scrap-book with the sequels and developments of one adventure; he goes out to notice everybody and he finds himself busily and variedly occupied only in watching somebody. In this there is a very profound truth about the true excitement and inexhaustible poetry of life. The truth is not so much that eternity is full of souls as that one soul can fill eternity. In strict art there is something quite lame and lumbering about the way in which the benevolent old story-teller starts to tell many stories and then drops away altogether, while one of his stories takes his place. But in a larger art, his collision with Little Nell and his complete eclipse by her personality and narrative have a real significance. They suggest the random richness of such meetings, and their uncalculated results. It makes the whole book a sort of splendid accident.

It is not true, as is commonly said, that the Dickens pathos as pathos is bad. It is not true, as is still more commonly said, that the whole business about Little Nell is bad. The case is more complex than that. Yet complex as it is it admits of
one sufficiently clear distinction. Those who have written about the death of Little Nell, have generally noticed the crudities of the character itself; the little girl’s unnatural and staring innocence, her constrained and awkward piety. But they have nearly all of them entirely failed to notice that there is in the death of Little Nell one quite definite and really artistic idea. It is not an artistic idea that a little child should die rhetorically on the stage like Paul Dombey; and Little Nell does not die rhetorically upon the stage like Paul Dombey. But it is an artistic idea that all the good powers and personalities in the story should set out in pursuit of one insignificant child, to repair an injustice to her, should track her from town to town over England with all the resources of wealth, intelligence, and travel, and should all—arrive too late. All the good fairies and all the kind magicians, all the just kings and all the gallant princes, with chariots and flying dragons and armies and navies go after one little child who had strayed into a wood, and find her dead. That is the conception which Dickens’s artistic instinct was really aiming at when he finally condemned Little Nell to death, after keeping her, so to speak, so long with the rope round her neck. The death of Little Nell is open certainly to the particular denial which its enemies make about it. The death of Little Nell is not pathetic. It is perhaps tragic; it is in reality ironic. Here is a very good case of the injustice to Dickens on his purely literary side. It is not that I say that Dickens achieved what he designed; it is that the critics will not see what the design was. They go on talking of the death of Little Nell as if it were a mere example of maudlin description like the death of Little Paul. As a fact it is not described at all; so it cannot be objectionable. It is not the death of Little Nell, but the life of Little Nell, that I object to.

In this, in the actual picture of her personality, if you can call it a personality, Dickens did fall into some of his facile vices. The real objection to much of his pathos belongs really to another part of his character. It is connected with his vanity, his voracity for all kinds of praise, his restive experimentalism and even perhaps his envy. He strained himself to achieve pathos. His humour was inspiration; but his pathos was ambition. His laughter was lonely; he would have laughed on a desert island. But his grief was gregarious. He liked to move great masses of men, to melt them into tenderness, to play on the people as a great pianist plays on them; to make them mad or sad. His pathos was to him a way of showing his power; and for that reason it was really powerless. He could not help making people laugh; but he tried to make them cry. We come in this novel, as we often do come in his novels, upon hard lumps of unreality, upon a phrase that suddenly sickens. That is always due to his conscious despotism over the
delicate feelings; that is always due to his love of fame as distinct from his love of fun. But it is not true that all Dickens’s pathos is like this; it is not even true that all the passages about Little Nell are like this; there are two strands almost everywhere and they can be differentiated as the sincere and the deliberate. There is a great difference between Dickens thinking about the tears of his characters and Dickens thinking about the tears of his audience.

When all this is allowed, however, and the exaggerated contempt for the Dickens pathos is properly corrected, the broad fact remains: that to pass from the solemn characters in this book to the comic characters in this book, is to be like some Ulysses who should pass suddenly from the land of shadows to the mountain of the gods. Little Nell has her own position in careful and reasonable criticism: even that wobbling old ass, her grandfather, has his position in it; perhaps even the dissipated Fred (whom long acquaintance with Mr. Dick Swiveller has not made any less dismal in his dissipation) has a place in it also. But when we come to Swiveller and Sampson Brass and Quilp and Mrs. Jarley, then Fred and Nell and the grandfather simply do not exist. There are no such people in the story. The real hero and heroine of The Old Curiosity Shop are of course Dick Swiveller and the Marchioness. It is significant in a sense that these two sane, strong, living, and lovable human beings are the only two, or almost the only two, people in the story who do not run after Little Nell. They have something better to do than to go on that shadowy chase after that cheerless phantom. They have to build up between them a true romance; perhaps the one true romance in the whole of Dickens. Dick Swiveller really has all the half-heroic characteristics which make a man respected by a woman and which are the male contribution to virtue. He is brave, magnanimous, sincere about himself, amusing, absurdly hopeful; above all, he is both strong and weak. On the other hand the Marchioness really has all the characteristics, the entirely heroic characteristics which make a woman respected by a man. She is female: that is, she is at once incurably candid and incurably loyal, she is full of terrible common-sense, she expects little pleasure for herself and yet she can enjoy bursts of it; above all, she is physically timid and yet she can face anything. All this solid rocky romanticism is really implied in the speech and action of these two characters and can be felt behind them all the time. Because they are the two most absurd people in the book they are also the most vivid, human, and imaginable. There are two really fine love affairs in Dickens; and I almost think only two. One is the happy courtship of Swiveller and the Marchioness; the other is the tragic courtship of Toots and Florence Dombey. When Dick Swiveller
wakes up in bed and sees the Marchioness playing cribbage he thinks that he and she are a prince and princess in a fairy tale. He thinks right.

I speak thus seriously of such characters with a deliberate purpose; for the frivolous characters of Dickens are taken much too frivolously. It has been quite insufficiently pointed out that all the serious moral ideas that Dickens did contrive to express he expressed altogether through this fantastic medium, in such figures as Swiveller and the little servant. The warmest upholder of Dickens would not go to the solemn or sentimental passages for anything fresh or suggestive in faith or philosophy. No one would pretend that the death of little Dombey (with its “What are the wild waves saying?”) told us anything new or real about death. A good Christian dying, one would imagine, not only would not know what the wild waves were saying, but would not care. No one would pretend that the repentance of old Paul Dombey throws any light on the psychology or philosophy of repentance. No doubt old Dombey, white-haired and amiable, was a great improvement on old Dombey brown-haired and unpleasant. But in his case the softening of the heart seems to bear too close a resemblance to softening of the brain. Whether these serious passages are as bad as the critical people or as good as the sentimental people find them, at least they do not convey anything in the way of an illuminating glimpse or a bold suggestion about men’s moral nature. The serious figures do not tell one anything about the human soul. The comic figures do. Take anything almost at random out of these admirable speeches of Dick Swiveller. Notice, for instance, how exquisitely Dickens has caught a certain very deep and delicate quality at the bottom of this idle kind of man. I mean that odd impersonal sort of intellectual justice, by which the frivolous fellow sees things as they are and even himself as he is; and is above irritation. Mr. Swiveller, you remember, asks the Marchioness whether the Brass family ever talk about him; she nods her head with vivacity. “‘Complimentary?’ inquired Mr. Swiveller. The motion of the little servant’s head altered. . . . ‘But she says,’ continued the little servant, ‘that you ain’t to be trusted.’ ‘Well, do you know, Marchioness,’ said Mr. Swiveller thoughtfully, ‘many people, not exactly professional people, but tradesmen, have had the same idea. The excellent citizen from whom I ordered this beer inclines strongly to that opinion.’”

This philosophical freedom from all resentment, this strange love of truth which seems actually to come through carelessness, is a very real piece of spiritual observation. Even among liars there are two classes, one immeasurably better than another. The honest liar is the man who tells the truth about his old
lies; who says on Wednesday, “I told a magnificent lie on Monday.” He keeps
the truth in circulation; no one version of things stagnates in him and becomes an
evil secret. He does not have to live with old lies; a horrible domesticity. Mr.
Swiveller may mislead the waiter about whether he has the money to pay; but he
does not mislead his friend, and he does not mislead himself on the point. He is
quite as well aware as any one can be of the accumulating falsity of the position
of a gentleman who by his various debts has closed up all the streets into the
Strand except one, and who is going to close that to-night with a pair of gloves.
He shuts up the street with a pair of gloves, but he does not shut up his mind
with a secret. The traffic of truth is still kept open through his soul.

It is exactly in these absurd characters, then, that we can find a mass of
psychological and ethical suggestion. This cannot be found in the serious
characters except indeed in some of the later experiments: there is a little of such
psychological and ethical suggestion in figures like Gridley, like Jasper, like
Bradley Headstone. But in these earlier books at least, such as The Old Curiosity
Shop, the grave or moral figures throw no light upon morals. I should maintain
this generalisation even in the presence of that apparent exception The Christmas
Carol with its trio of didactic ghosts. Charity is certainly splendid, at once a
luxury and a necessity; but Dickens is not most effective when he is preaching
charity seriously; he is most effective when he is preaching it uproariously; when
he is preaching it by means of massive personalities and vivid scenes. One might
say that he is best not when he is preaching his human love, but when he is
practising it. In his grave pages he tells us to love men; but in his wild pages he
creates men whom we can love. By his solemnity he commands us to love our
neighbours. By his caricature he makes us love them.

There is an odd literary question which I wonder is not put more often in
literature. How far can an author tell a truth without seeing it himself? Perhaps
an actual example will express my meaning. I was once talking to a highly
intelligent lady about Thackeray’s Newcomes. We were speaking of the
character of Mrs. Mackenzie, the Campaigner, and in the middle of the
conversation the lady leaned across to me and said in a low, hoarse, but emphatic
voice, “She drank. Thackeray didn’t know it; but she drank.” And it is really
astonishing what a shaft of white light this sheds on the Campaigner, on her
terrible temperament, on her agonised abusiveness and her almost more agonised
urbanity, on her clamour which is nevertheless not open or explicable, on her
temper which is not so much bad temper as insatiable, bloodthirsty, man-eating
temper. How far can a writer thus indicate by accident a truth of which he is
himself ignorant? If truth is a plan or pattern of things that really are, or in other words, if truth truly exists outside ourselves, or in other words, if truth exists at all, it must be often possible for a writer to uncover a corner of it which he happens not to understand, but which his reader does happen to understand. The author sees only two lines; the reader sees where they meet and what is the angle. The author sees only an arc or fragment of a curve; the reader sees the size of the circle. The last thing to say about Dickens, and especially about books like The Old Curiosity Shop, is that they are full of these unconscious truths. The careless reader may miss them. The careless author almost certainly did miss them. But from them can be gathered an impression of real truth to life which is for the grave critics of Dickens an almost unknown benefit, buried treasure. Here for instance is one of them out of The Old Curiosity Shop. I mean the passage in which (by a blazing stroke of genius) the dashing Mr. Chuckster, one of the Glorious Apollos of whom Mr. Swiveller was the Perpetual Grand, is made to entertain a hatred bordering upon frenzy for the stolid, patient, respectful, and laborious Kit. Now in the formal plan of the story Mr. Chuckster is a fool, and Kit is almost a hero; at least he is a noble boy. Yet unconsciously Dickens made the idiot Chuckster say something profoundly suggestive on the subject. In speaking of Kit Mr. Chuckster makes use of these two remarkable phrases; that Kit is “meek” and that he is “a snob.” Now Kit is really a very fresh and manly picture of a boy, firm, sane, chivalrous, reasonable, full of those three great Roman virtues which Mr. Belloc has so often celebrated, virtus and verucundia and pietas. He is a sympathetic but still a straightforward study of the best type of that most respectable of all human classes, the respectable poor. All this is true; all that Dickens utters in praise of Kit is true; nevertheless the awful words of Chuckster remain written on the eternal skies. Kit is meek and Kit is a snob. His natural dignity does include and is partly marred by that instinctive subservience to the employing class which has been the comfortable weakness of the whole English democracy, which has prevented their making any revolution for the last two hundred years. Kit would not serve any wicked man for money, but he would serve any moderately good man and the money would give a certain dignity and decisiveness to the goodness. All this is the English popular evil which goes along with the English popular virtues of geniality, of homeliness, tolerance and strong humour, hope and an enormous appetite for a hand-to-mouth happiness. The scene in which Kit takes his family to the theatre is a monument of the massive qualities of old English enjoyment. If what we want is Merry England, our antiquarians ought not to revive the Maypole or the
Morris Dancers; they ought to revive Astley’s and Sadler’s Wells and the old solemn Circus and the old stupid Pantomime, and all the sawdust and all the oranges. Of all this strength and joy in the poor, Kit is a splendid and final symbol. But amid all his masculine and English virtue, he has this weak touch of meekness, or acceptance of the powers that be. It is a sound touch; it is a real truth about Kit. But Dickens did not know it. Mr. Chuckster did.

Dickens’s stories taken as a whole have more artistic unity than appears at the first glance. It is the immediate impulse of a modern critic to dismiss them as mere disorderly scrap-books with very brilliant scraps. But this is not quite so true as it looks. In one of Dickens’s novels there is generally no particular unity of construction; but there is often a considerable unity of sentiment and atmosphere. Things are irrelevant, but not somehow inappropriate. The whole book is written carelessly; but the whole book is generally written in one mood. To take a rude parallel from the other arts, we may say that there is not much unity of form, but there is much unity of colour. In most of the novels this can be seen. Nicholas Nickleby, as I have remarked, is full of a certain freshness, a certain light and open-air curiosity, which irradiates from the image of the young man swinging along the Yorkshire roads in the sun. Hence the comic characters with whom he falls in are comic characters in the same key; they are a band of strolling players, charlatans and poseurs, but too humane to be called humbugs. In the same way, the central story of Oliver Twist is sombre; and hence even its comic character is almost sombre; at least he is too ugly to be merely amusing. Mr. Bumble is in some ways a terrible grotesque; his apoplectic visage recalls the “fire-red Cherubimme’s face,” which added such horror to the height and stature of Chaucer’s Sompnour. In both these cases even the riotous and absurd characters are a little touched with the tint of the whole story. But this neglected merit of Dickens can certainly be seen best in The Old Curiosity Shop.

The curiosity shop itself was a lumber of grotesque and sinister things, outlandish weapons, twisted and diabolic decorations. The comic characters in the book are all like images bought in an old curiosity shop. Quilp might be a gargoyle. He might be some sort of devilish door-knocker, dropped down and crawling about the pavement. The same applies to the sinister and really terrifying stiffness of Sally Brass. She is like some old staring figure cut out of wood. Sampson Brass, her brother, again is a grotesque in the same rather inhuman manner; he is especially himself when he comes in with the green shade over his eye. About all this group of bad figures in The Old Curiosity Shop there is a sort of diablerie. There is also within this atmosphere an
extraordinary energy of irony and laughter. The scene in which Sampson Brass draws up the description of Quilp, supposing him to be dead, reaches a point of fiendish fun. “We will not say very bandy, Mrs. Jiniwin,” he says of his friend’s legs, “we will confine ourselves to bandy. He is gone, my friends, where his legs would never be called in question.” They go on to the discussion of his nose, and Mrs. Jiniwin inclines to the view that it is flat. “Aquiline, you hag! Aquiline,” cries Mr. Quilp, pushing in his head and striking his nose with his fist. There is nothing better in the whole brutal exuberance of the character than that gesture with which Quilp punches his own face with his own fist. It is indeed a perfect symbol; for Quilp is always fighting himself for want of anybody else. He is energy, and energy by itself is always suicidal; he is that primordial energy which tears and which destroys itself.
BARNABY RUDGE

Barnaby Rudge was written by Dickens in the spring and first flowing tide of his popularity; it came immediately after The Old Curiosity Shop, and only a short time after Pickwick. Dickens was one of those rare but often very sincere men in whom the high moment of success almost coincides with the high moment of youth. The calls upon him at this time were insistent and overwhelming; this necessarily happens at a certain stage of a successful writer’s career. He was just successful enough to invite offers and not successful enough to reject them. At the beginning of his career he could throw himself into Pickwick because there was nothing else to throw himself into. At the end of his life he could throw himself into A Tale of Two Cities, because he refused to throw himself into anything else. But there was an intervening period, early in his life, when there was almost too much work for his imagination, and yet not quite enough work for his housekeeping. To this period Barnaby Rudge belongs. And it is a curious tribute to the quite curious greatness of Dickens that in this period of youthful strain we do not feel the strain but feel only the youth. His own amazing wish to write equalled or outstripped even his readers’ amazing wish to read. Working too hard did not cure him of his abstract love of work. Unreasonable publishers asked him to write ten novels at once; but he wanted to write twenty novels at once. All this period is strangely full of his own sense at once of fertility and of futility; he did work which no one else could have done, and yet he could not be certain as yet that he was anybody.

Barnaby Rudge marks this epoch because it marks the fact that he is still confused about what kind of person he is going to be. He has already struck the note of the normal romance in Nicholas Nickleby; he has already created some of his highest comic characters in Pickwick and The Old Curiosity Shop, but here he betrays the fact that it is still a question what ultimate guide he shall follow. Barnaby Rudge is a romantic, historical novel. Its design reminds us of Scott; some parts of its fulfilment remind us, alas! of Harrison Ainsworth. It is a very fine romantic historical novel; Scott would have been proud of it. But it is still so far different from the general work of Dickens that it is permissible to wonder how far Dickens was proud of it. The book, effective as it is, is almost entirely devoted to dealings with a certain artistic element, which (in its mere isolation) Dickens did not commonly affect; an element which many men of infinitely less genius have often seemed to affect more successfully; I mean the
element of the picturesque.

It is the custom in many quarters to speak somewhat sneeringly of that element which is broadly called the picturesque. It is always felt to be an inferior, a vulgar, and even an artificial form of art. Yet two things may be remarked about it. The first is that, with few exceptions, the greatest literary artists have been not only particularly clever at the picturesque, but particularly fond of it. Shakespeare, for instance, delighted in certain merely pictorial contrasts which are quite distinct from, even when they are akin to, the spiritual view involved. For instance, there is admirable satire in the idea of Touchstone teaching worldly wisdom and worldly honour to the woodland yokels. There is excellent philosophy in the idea of the fool being the representative of civilisation in the forest. But quite apart from this deeper meaning in the incident, the mere figure of the jester, in his bright motley and his cap and bells, against the green background of the forest and the rude forms of the shepherds, is a strong example of the purely picturesque. There is excellent tragic irony in the confrontation of the melancholy philosopher among the tombs with the cheerful digger of the graves. It sums up the essential point, that dead bodies can be comic; it is only dead souls that can be tragic. But quite apart from such irony, the mere picture of the grotesque gravedigger, the black-clad prince, and the skull is a picture in the strongest sense picturesque. Caliban and the two shipwrecked drunkards are an admirable symbol; but they are also an admirable scene. Bottom, with the ass’s head, sitting in a ring of elves, is excellent moving comedy, but also excellent still life. Falstaff with his huge body, Bardolph with his burning nose, are masterpieces of the pen; but they would be fine sketches even for the pencil. King Lear, in the storm, is a landscape as well as a character study. There is something decorative even about the insistence on the swarthiness of Othello, or the deformity of Richard III. Shakespeare’s work is much more than picturesque; but it is picturesque. And the same which is said here of him by way of example is largely true of the highest class of literature. Dante’s Divine Comedy is supremely important as a philosophy; but it is important merely as a panorama. Spenser’s Faery Queen pleases us as an allegory; but it would please us even as a wall-paper. Stronger still is the case of Chaucer who loved the pure picturesque, which always includes something of what we commonly call the ugly. The huge stature and startling scarlet face of the Somnour is in just the same spirit as Shakespeare’s skulls and motley; the same spirit gave Chaucer’s miller bagpipes, and clad his doctor in crimson. It is the spirit which, while making many other things, loves to make a picture.
Now the second thing to be remarked in apology for the picturesque is, that the very thing which makes it seem trivial ought really to make it seem important; I mean the fact that it consists necessarily of contrasts. It brings together types that stand out from their background, but are abruptly different from each other, like the clown among the fairies or the fool in the forest. And his audacious reconciliation is a mark not of frivolity but of extreme seriousness. A man who deals in harmonies, who only matches stars with angels or lambs with spring flowers, he indeed may be frivolous; for he is taking one mood at a time, and perhaps forgetting each mood as it passes. But a man who ventures to combine an angel and an octopus must have some serious view of the universe. The man who should write a dialogue between two early Christians might be a mere writer of dialogues. But a man who should write a dialogue between an early Christian and the Missing Link would have to be a philosopher. The more widely different the types talked of, the more serious and universal must be the philosophy which talks of them. The mark of the light and thoughtless writer is the harmony of his subject matter; the mark of the thoughtful writer is its apparent diversity. The most flippant lyric poet might write a pretty poem about lambs; but it requires something bolder and graver than a poet, it requires an ecstatic prophet, to talk about the lion lying down with the lamb.

Dickens, at any rate, strongly supports this conception: that great literary men as such do not despise the purely pictorial. No man’s works have so much the quality of illustrating themselves. Few men’s works have been more thoroughly and eagerly illustrated; few men’s works can it have been better fun to illustrate. As a rule this fascinating quality in the mere fantastic figures of the tale was inseparable from their farcical quality in the tale. Stiggins’s red nose is distinctly connected with the fact that he is a member of the Ebenezer Temperance Association; Quilp is little, because a little of him goes a long way. Mr. Carker smiles and smiles and is a villain; Mr. Chadband is fat because in his case to be fat is to be hated. The story is immeasurably more important than the picture; it is not mere indulgence in the picturesque. Generally it is an intellectual love of the comic; not a pure love of the grotesque.

But in one book Dickens suddenly confesses that he likes the grotesque even without the comic. In one case he makes clear that he enjoys pure pictures with a pure love of the picturesque. That place is Barnaby Rudge. There had indeed been hints of it in many episodes in his books; notably, for example, in that fine scene of the death of Quilp—a scene in which the dwarf remains fantastic long after he has ceased to be in any way funny. Still, the dwarf was meant to be
funny. Humour of a horrible kind, but still humour, is the purpose of Quilp’s existence and position in the book. Laughter is the object of all his oddities. But laughter is not the object of Barnaby Rudge’s oddities. His idiot costume and his ugly raven are used for the purpose of the pure grotesque; solely to make a certain kind of Gothic sketch.

It is commonly this love of pictures that drives men back upon the historical novel. But it is very typical of Dickens’s living interest in his own time, that though he wrote two historical novels they were neither of them of very ancient history. They were both, indeed, of very recent history; only they were those parts of recent history which were specially picturesque. I do not think that this was due to any mere consciousness on his part that he knew no history. Undoubtedly he knew no history; and he may or may not have been conscious of the fact. But the consciousness did not prevent him from writing a History of England. Nor did it prevent him from interlarding all or any of his works with tales of the pictorial past, such as the tale of the broken swords in Master Humphrey’s Clock, or the indefensibly delightful nightmare of the lady in the stage-coach, which helps to soften the amiable end of Pickwick. Neither, worst of all, did it prevent him from dogmatising anywhere and everywhere about the past, of which he knew nothing; it did not prevent him from telling the bells to tell Trotty Veck that the Middle Ages were a failure, nor from solemnly declaring that the best thing that the mediæval monks ever did was to create the mean and snobbish quietude of a modern cathedral city. No, it was not historical reverence that held him back from dealing with the remote past; but rather something much better—a living interest in the living century in which he was born. He would have thought himself quite intellectually capable of writing a novel about the Council of Trent or the First Crusade. He would have thought himself quite equal to analysing the psychology of Abelard or giving a bright, satiric sketch of St. Augustine. It must frankly be confessed that it was not a sense of his own unworthiness that held him back; I fear it was rather a sense of St. Augustine’s unworthiness. He could not see the point of any history before the first slow swell of the French Revolution. He could understand the revolutions of the eighteenth century; all the other revolutions of history (so many and so splendid) were unmeaning to him. But the revolutions of the eighteenth century he did understand; and to them therefore he went back, as all historical novelists go back, in search of the picturesque. And from this fact an important result follows.

The result that follows is this: that his only two historical novels are both tales
of revolutions–of eighteenth-century revolutions. These two eighteenth-century revolutions may seem to differ, and perhaps do differ in everything except in being revolutions and of the eighteenth century. The French Revolution, which is the theme of A Tale of Two Cities, was a revolt in favour of all that is now called enlightenment and liberation. The great Gordon Riot, which is the theme of Barnaby Rudge, was a revolt in favour of something which would now be called mere ignorant and obscurantist Protestantism. Nevertheless both belonged more typically to the age out of which Dickens came—the great sceptical and yet creative eighteenth century of Europe. Whether the mob rose on the right side or the wrong they both belonged to the time in which a mob could rise, in which a mob could conquer. No growth of intellectual science or of moral cowardice had made it impossible to fight in the streets, whether for the republic or for the Bible. If we wish to know what was the real link, existing actually in ultimate truth, existing unconsciously in Dickens’s mind, which connected the Gordon Riots with the French Revolution, the link may be defined though not with any great adequacy. The nearest and truest way of stating it is that neither of the two could possibly happen in Fleet Street to-morrow evening.

Another point of resemblance between the two books might be found in the fact that they both contain the sketch of the same kind of eighteenth-century aristocrat, if indeed that kind of aristocrat really existed in the eighteenth century. The diabolical dandy with the rapier and the sneer is at any rate a necessity of all normal plays and romances; hence Mr. Chester has a right to exist in this romance, and Foulon a right to exist in a page of history almost as cloudy and disputable as a romance. What Dickens and other romancers do probably omit from the picture of the eighteenth-century oligarch is probably his liberality. It must never be forgotten that even when he was a despot in practice he was generally a liberal in theory. Dickens and romancers make the pre-revolution tyrant a sincere believer in tyranny; generally he was not. He was a sceptic about everything, even about his own position. The romantic Foulon says of the people, “Let them eat grass,” with bitter and deliberate contempt. The real Foulon (if he ever said it at all) probably said it as a sort of dreary joke because he couldn’t think of any other way out of the problem. Similarly Mr. Chester, a cynic as he is, believes seriously in the beauty of being a gentleman; a real man of that type probably disbelieved in that as in everything else. Dickens was too bracing, one may say too bouncing himself to understand the psychology of fatigue in a protected and leisured class. He could understand a tyrant like Quilp, a tyrant who is on his throne because he has climbed up into it, like a monkey.
He could not understand a tyrant who is on his throne because he is too weary to get out of it. The old aristocrats were in a dead way quite good-natured. They were even humanitarians; which perhaps accounts for the extent to which they roused against themselves the healthy hatred of humanity. But they were tired humanitarians; tired with doing nothing. Figures like that of Mr. Chester, therefore, fail somewhat to give the true sense of something hopeless and helpless which led men to despair of the upper class. He has a boyish pleasure in play-acting; he has an interest in life; being a villain is his hobby. But the true man of that type had found all hobbies fail him. He had wearied of himself as he had wearied of a hundred women. He was graceful and could not even admire himself in the glass. He was witty and could not even laugh at his own jokes. Dickens could never understand tedium.

There is no mark more strange and perhaps sinister of the interesting and not very sane condition of our modern literature, than the fact that tedium has been admirably described in it. Our best modern writers are never so exciting as they are about dulness. Mr. Rudyard Kipling is never so powerful as when he is painting yawning deserts, aching silences, sleepless nights, or infernal isolation. The excitement in one of the stories of Mr. Henry James becomes tense, thrilling, and almost intolerable in all the half hours during which nothing whatever is said or done. We are entering again into the mind, into the real mind of Foulon and Mr. Chester. We begin to understand the deep despair of those tyrants whom our fathers pulled down. But Dickens could never have understood that despair; it was not in his soul. And it is an interesting coincidence that here, in this book of Barnaby Rudge, there is a character meant to be wholly grotesque, who, nevertheless, expresses much of that element in Dickens which prevented him from being a true interpreter of the tired and sceptical aristocrat.

Sim Tappertit is a fool, but a perfectly honourable fool. It requires some sincerity to pose. Posing means that one has not dried up in oneself all the youthful and innocent vanities with the slow paralysis of mere pride. Posing means that one is still fresh enough to enjoy the good opinion of one’s fellows. On the other hand, the true cynic has not enough truth in him to attempt affectation; he has never even seen the truth, far less tried to imitate it. Now we might very well take the type of Mr. Chester on the one hand, and of Sim Tappertit on the other, as marking the issue, the conflict, and the victory which really ushered in the nineteenth century. Dickens was very like Sim Tappertit. The Liberal Revolution was very like a Sim Tappertit revolution. It was vulgar, it was overdone, it was absurd, but it was alive. Dickens was vulgar, was absurd,
overdid everything, but he was alive. The aristocrats were perfectly correct, but quite dead; dead long before they were guillotined. The classics and critics who lamented that Dickens was no gentleman were quite right, but quite dead. The revolution thought itself rational; but so did Sim Tappertit. It was really a huge revolt of romanticism against a reason which had grown sick even of itself. Sim Tappertit rose against Mr. Chester; and, thank God! he put his foot upon his neck.
AMERICAN NOTES

American Notes was written soon after Dickens had returned from his first visit to America. That visit had, of course, been a great epoch in his life; but how much of an epoch men did not truly realise until, some time after, in the middle of a quiet story about Salisbury and a ridiculous architect, his feelings flamed out and flared up to the stars in Martin Chuzzlewit. The American Notes are, however, interesting, because in them he betrays his feelings when he does not know that he is betraying them. Dickens’s first visit to America was, from his own point of view, and at the beginning, a happy and festive experiment. It is very characteristic of him that he went among the Americans, enjoyed them, even admired them, and then had a quarrel with them. Nothing was ever so unmistakable as his good-will, except his ill-will; and they were never far apart. And this was not, as some bloodless moderns have sneeringly insinuated, a mere repetition of the proximity between the benevolent stage and the quarrelsome stage of drink. It was a piece of pure optimism; he believed so readily that men were going to be good to him that an injury to him was something more than an injury: it was a shock. What was the exact nature of the American shock must, however, be more carefully stated.

The famous quarrel between Dickens and America, which finds its most elaborate expression in American Notes, though its most brilliant expression in Martin Chuzzlewit, is an incident about which a great deal remains to be said. But the thing which most specially remains to be said is this. This old Anglo-American quarrel was much more fundamentally friendly than most Anglo-American alliances. In Dickens’s day each nation understood the other enough to argue. In our time neither nation understands itself even enough to quarrel. There was an English tradition, from Fox and eighteenth-century England; there was an American tradition from Franklin and eighteenth-century America; and they were still close enough together to discuss their differences with acrimony, perhaps, but with certain fundamental understandings. The eighteenth-century belief in a liberal civilisation was still a dogma; for dogma is the only thing that makes argument or reasoning possible. America, under all its swagger, did still really believe that Europe was its fountain and its mother, because Europe was more fully civilised. Dickens, under all his disgust, did still believe that America was in advance of Europe, because it was more democratic. It was an age, in short, in which the word “progress” could still be used reasonably; because the
whole world looked to one way of escape and there was only one kind of progress under discussion. Now, of course, “progress” is a useless word; for progress takes for granted an already defined direction; and it is exactly about the direction that we disagree. Do not let us therefore be misled into any mistaken optimism or special self-congratulation upon what many people would call the improved relations between England and America. The relations are improved because America has finally become a foreign country. And with foreign countries all sane men take care to exchange a certain consideration and courtesy. But even as late as the time of Dickens’s first visit to the United States, we English still felt America as a colony; an insolent, offensive, and even unintelligible colony sometimes, but still a colony; a part of our civilisation, a limb of our life. And America itself, as I have said, under all its bounce and independence, really regarded us as a mother country. This being the case it was possible for us to quarrel, like kinsmen. Now we only bow and smile, like strangers.

This tone, as a sort of family responsibility, can be felt quite specially all through the satires or suggestions of these American Notes. Dickens is cross with America because he is worried about America; as if he were its father. He explores its industrial, legal, and educational arrangements like a mother looking at the housekeeping of a married son; he makes suggestions with a certain acidity; he takes a strange pleasure in being pessimistic. He advises them to take note of how much better certain things are done in England. All this is very different from Dickens’s characteristic way of dealing with a foreign country. In countries really foreign, such as France, Switzerland, and Italy, he had two attitudes, neither of them in the least worried or paternal. When he found a thing in Europe which he did not understand, such as the Roman Catholic Church, he simply called it an old-world superstition, and sat looking at it like a moonlit ruin. When he found something that he did understand, such as luncheon baskets, he burst into carols of praise over the superior sense in our civilisation and good management to Continental methods. An example of the first attitude may be found in one of his letters, in which he describes the backwardness and idleness of Catholics who would not build a Birmingham in Italy. He seems quite unconscious of the obvious truth, that the backwardness of Catholics was simply the refusal of Bob Cratchit to enter the house of Gradgrind. An example of the second attitude can be found in the purple patches of fun in Mugby Junction; in which the English waitress denounces the profligate French habit of providing new bread and clean food for people travelling by rail. The point is,
however, that in neither case has he the air of one suggesting improvements or sharing a problem with the people engaged on it. He does not go carefully with a notebook through Jesuit schools nor offer friendly suggestions to the governors of Parisian prisons. Or if he does, it is in a different spirit; it is in the spirit of an ordinary tourist being shown over the Coliseum or the Pyramids. But he visited America in the spirit of a Government inspector dealing with something it was his duty to inspect. This is never felt either in his praise or blame of Continental countries. When he did not leave a foreign country to decay like a dead dog, he merely watched it at play like a kitten. France he mistook for a kitten. Italy he mistook for a dead dog.

But with America he could feel—and fear. There he could hate, because he could love. There he could feel not the past alone nor the present, but the future also; and, like all brave men, when he saw the future he was a little afraid of it. For of all tests by which the good citizen and strong reformer can be distinguished from the vague faddist or the inhuman sceptic, I know no better test than this—that the unreal reformer sees in front of him one certain future, the future of his fad; while the real reformer sees before him ten or twenty futures among which his country must choose, and may, in some dreadful hour, choose the wrong one. The true patriot is always doubtful of victory; because he knows that he is dealing with a living thing; a thing with free will. To be certain of free will is to be uncertain of success.

The subject matter of the real difference of opinion between Dickens and the public of America can only be understood if it is thus treated as a dispute between brothers about the destiny of a common heritage. The point at issue might be stated like this. Dickens, on his side, did not in his heart doubt for a moment that England would eventually follow America along the road towards real political equality and purely republican institutions. He lived, it must be remembered, before the revival of aristocracy, which has since overwhelmed us—the revival of aristocracy worked through popular science and commercial dictatorship, and which has nowhere been more manifest than in America itself. He knew nothing of this; in his heart he conceded to the Yankees that not only was their revolution right but would ultimately be completed everywhere. But on the other hand, his whole point against the American experiment was this—that if it ignored certain ancient English contributions it would go to pieces for lack of them. Of these the first was good manners and the second individual liberty—liberty, that is, to speak and write against the trend of the majority. In these things he was much more serious and much more sensible than it is the fashion
to think he was; he was indeed one of the most serious and sensible critics England ever had of current and present problems, though his criticism is useless to the point of nonentity about all things remote from him in style of civilisation or in time. His point about good manners is really important. All his grumblings through this book of American Notes, all his shrieking satire in Martin Chuzzlewit are expressions of a grave and reasonable fear he had touching the future of democracy. And remember again what has been already remarked—instinctively he paid America the compliment of looking at her as the future of democracy.

The mistake which he attacked still exists. I cannot imagine why it is that social equality is somehow supposed to mean social familiarity. Why should equality mean that all men are equally rude? Should it not rather mean that all men are equally polite? Might it not quite reasonably mean that all men should be equally ceremonious and stately and pontifical? What is there specially Equalitarian, for instance, in calling your political friends and even your political enemies by their Christian names in public? There is something very futile in the way in which certain Socialist leaders call each other Tom, Dick, and Harry; especially when Tom is accusing Harry of having basely imposed upon the well-known imbecility of Dick. There is something quite undemocratic in all men calling each other by the special and affectionate term “comrade”; especially when they say it with a sneer and smart inquiry about the funds. Democracy would be quite satisfied if every man called every other man “sir.” Democracy would have no conceivable reason to complain if every man called every other man “your excellency” or “your holiness” or “brother of the sun and moon.” The only democratic essential is that it should be a term of dignity and that it should be given to all. To abolish all terms of dignity is no more specially democratic than the Roman emperor’s wish to cut off everybody’s head at once was specially democratic. That involved equality certainly, but it was lacking in respect.

Dickens saw America as markedly the seat of this danger. He saw that there was a perilous possibility that republican ideals might be allied to a social anarchy good neither for them nor for any other ideals. Republican simplicity, which is difficult, might be quickly turned into Bohemian brutality, which is easy. Cincinnatus, instead of putting his hand to the plough, might put his feet on the tablecloth, and an impression prevail that it was all a part of the same rugged equality and freedom. Insolence might become a tradition. Bad manners might have all the sanctity of good manners. “There you are!” cries Martin Chuzzlewit
indignantly, when the American has befouled the butter. “A man deliberately makes a hog of himself and that is an Institution.” But the thread of thought which we must always keep in hand in this matter is that he would not thus have worried about the degradation of republican simplicity into general rudeness if he had not from first to last instinctively felt that America held human democracy in her hand, to exalt it or to let it fall. In one of his gloomier moments he wrote down his fear that the greatest blow ever struck at liberty would be struck by America in the failure of her mission upon the earth.

This brings us to the other ground of his alarm—the matter of liberty of speech. Here also he was much more reasonable and philosophic than has commonly been realised. The truth is that the lurid individualism of Carlyle has, with its violent colours, “killed” the tones of most criticism of his time; and just as we can often see a scheme of decoration better if we cover some flaming picture, so you can judge nineteenth-century England much better if you leave Carlyle out. He is important to moderns because he led that return to Toryism which has been the chief feature of modernity, but his judgments were often not only spiritually false, but really quite superficial. Dickens understood the danger of democracy far better than Carlyle; just as he understood the merits of democracy far better than Carlyle. And of this fact we can produce one plain evidence in the matter of which we speak. Carlyle, in his general dislike of the revolutionary movement, lumped liberty and democracy together and said that the chief objection to democracy was that it involved the excess and misuse of liberty; he called democracy “anarchy or no-rule.” Dickens, with far more philosophical insight and spiritual delicacy, saw that the real danger of democracy is that it tends to the very opposite of anarchy; even to the very opposite of liberty. He lamented in America the freedom of manners. But he lamented even more the absence of freedom of opinion. “I believe there is no country on the face of the earth,” he says, “where there is less freedom of opinion on any subject in reference to which there is a broad difference of opinion than in this. There! I write the words with reluctance, disappointment, and sorrow; but I believe it from the bottom of my soul. The notion that I, a man alone by myself in America, should venture to suggest to the Americans that there was one point on which they were neither just to their own countrymen nor to us, actually struck the boldest dumb! Washington Irving, Prescott, Hoffman, Bryant, Halleck, Dana, Washington Allston—every man who writes in this country is devoted to the question, and not one of them dares to raise his voice and complain of the atrocious state of the law. The wonder is that a breathing man can be found with temerity enough to
suggest to the Americans the possibility of their having done wrong. I wish you
could have seen the faces that I saw down both sides of the table at Hartford
when I began to talk about Scott. I wish you could have heard how I gave it out.
My blood so boiled when I thought of the monstrous injustice that I felt as if I
were twelve feet high when I thrust it down their throats.” Dickens knew no
history, but he had all history behind him in feeling that a pure democracy does
tend, when it goes wrong, to be too traditional and absolute. The truth is indeed a
singular example of the unfair attack upon democracy in our own time. Everybody can repeat the platitude that the mob can be the greatest of all tyrants. But few realise or remember the corresponding truth which goes along with it—
that the mob is the only permanent and unassailable high priest. Democracy
drives its traditions too hard; but democracy is the only thing that keeps any
traditions. An aristocracy must always be going after some new thing. The
severity of democracy is far more of a virtue than its liberty. The decorum of a
democracy is far more of a danger than its lawlessness. Dickens discovered this
in his great quarrels about the copyright, when a whole nation acted on a small
point of opinion as if it were going to lynch him. But, fortunately for the purpose
of this argument, there is no need to go back to the forties for such a case.
Another great literary man has of late visited America; and it is possible that
Maxim Gorky may be in a position to state how far democracy is likely to err on
the side of mere liberty and laxity. He may have found, like Dickens, some
freedom of manners; he did not find much freedom of morals.

Along with such American criticism should really go his very characteristic
summary of the question of the Red Indian. It marks the combination between
the mental narrowness and the moral justice of the old Liberal. Dickens can see
nothing in the Red Indian except that he is barbaric, retrograde, bellicose,
uncleanly, and superstitious—in short, that he is not a member of the special
civilisation of Birmingham or Brighton. It is curious to note the contrast between
the cheery, nay Cockney, contempt with which Dickens speaks of the American
Indian and that chivalrous and pathetic essay in which Washington Irving
celebrates the virtues of the vanishing race. Between Washington Irving and his
friend Charles Dickens there was always indeed this ironical comedy of
inversion. It is amusing that the Englishman should have been the pushing and
even pert modernist, and the American the stately antiquarian and lover of lost
causes. But while a man of more mellow sympathies may well dislike Dickens’s
dislike of savages, and even disdain his disdain, he ought to sharply remind
himself of the admirable ethical fairness and equity which meet with that
restricted outlook. In the very act of describing Red Indians as devils who, like so much dirt, it would pay us to sweep away, he pauses to deny emphatically that we have any right to sweep them away. We have no right to wrong the man, he means to say, even if he himself be a kind of wrong. Here we strike the ringing iron of the old conscience and sense of honour which marked the best men of his party and of his epoch. This rigid and even reluctant justice towers, at any rate, far above modern views of savages, above the sentimentalism of the mere humanitarian and the far weaker sentimentalism that pleads for brutality and a race war. Dickens was at least more of a man than the brutalitarian who claims to wrong people because they are nasty, or the humanitarian who cannot be just to them without pretending that they are nice.
PICTURES FROM ITALY

The Pictures from Italy are excellent in themselves and excellent as a foil to the American Notes. Here we have none of that air of giving a decision like a judge or sending in a report like an inspector; here we have only glimpses, light and even fantastic glimpses, of a world that is really alien to Dickens. It is so alien that he can almost entirely enjoy it. For no man can entirely enjoy that which he loves; contentment is always unpatriotic. The difference can indeed be put with approximate perfection in one phrase. In Italy he was on a holiday; in America he was on a tour. But indeed Dickens himself has quite sufficiently conveyed the difference in the two phrases that he did actually use for the titles of the two books. Dickens often told unconscious truths, especially in small matters. The American Notes really are notes, like the notes of a student or a professional witness. The Pictures from Italy are only pictures from Italy, like the miscellaneous pictures that all tourists bring from Italy.

To take another and perhaps closer figure of speech, almost all Dickens’s works such as these may best be regarded as private letters addressed to the public. His private correspondence was quite as brilliant as his public works; and many of his public works are almost as formless and casual as his private correspondence. If he had been struck insensible for a year, I really think that his friends and family could have brought out one of his best books by themselves if they had happened to keep his letters. The homogeneity of his public and private work was indeed strange in many ways. On the one hand, there was little that was pompously and unmistakably public in the publications; on the other hand, there was very little that was private in the private letters. His hilarity had almost a kind of hardness about it; no man’s letters, I should think, ever needed less expurgation on the ground of weakness or undue confession. The main part, and certainly the best part, of such a book as Pictures from Italy can certainly be criticised best as part of that perpetual torrent of entertaining autobiography which he flung at his children as if they were his readers and his readers as if they were his children. There are some brilliant patches of sense and nonsense in this book; but there is always something accidental in them; as if they might have occurred somewhere else. Perhaps the most attractive of them is the incomparable description of the Italian Marionette Theatre in which they acted a play about the death of Napoleon in St. Helena. The description is better than that of Codlin and Short’s Punch and Judy, and almost as good as that of Mrs.
Jarley’s Wax Works. Indeed the humour is similar; for Punch is supposed to be funny, but Napoleon (as Mrs. Jarley said when asked if her show was funnier than Punch) was not funny at all. The idea of a really tragic scene being enacted between tiny wooden dolls with large heads is delightfully dealt with by Dickens. We can almost imagine the scene in which the wooden Napoleon haughtily rebukes his wooden jailor for calling him General Bonaparte—“Sir Hudson Low, call me not thus; I am Napoleon, Emperor of the French.” There is also something singularly gratifying about the scene of Napoleon’s death, in which he lay in bed with his little wooden hands outside the counterpane and the doctor (who was hung on wires too short) “delivered medical opinions in the air.” It may seem flippant to dwell on such flippancies in connection with a book which contains many romantic descriptions and many moral generalisations which Dickens probably valued highly. But it is not for such things that he is valued. In all his writings, from his most reasoned and sustained novel to his maddest private note, it is always this obstreperous instinct for farce which stands out as his in the highest sense. His wisdom is at the best talent, his foolishness is genius. Just that exuberant levity which we associate with a moment we associate in his case with immortality. It is said of certain old masonry that the mortar was so hard that it has survived the stones. So if Dickens could revisit the thing he built, he would be surprised to see all the work he thought solid and responsible wasted almost utterly away, but the shortest frivolities and the most momentary jokes remaining like colossal rocks for ever.
There is a certain quality or element which broods over the whole of Martin Chuzzlewit to which it is difficult for either friends or foes to put a name. I think the reader who enjoys Dickens’s other books has an impression that it is a kind of melancholy. There are grotesque figures of the most gorgeous kind; there are scenes that are farcical even by the standard of the farcical license of Dickens; there is humour both of the heaviest and of the lightest kind; there are two great comic personalities who run like a rich vein through the whole story, Pecksniff and Mrs. Gamp; there is one blinding patch of brilliancy, the satire on American cant; there is Todgers’s boarding-house; there is Bailey; there is Mr. Mould, the incomparable undertaker. But yet in spite of everything, in spite even of the undertaker, the book is sad. No one I think ever went to it in that mixed mood of a tired tenderness and a readiness to believe and laugh in which most of Dickens’s novels are most enjoyed. We go for a particular novel to Dickens as we go for a particular inn. We go to the sign of the Pickwick Papers. We go to the sign of the Rudge and Raven. We go to the sign of the Old Curiosities. We go to the sign of the Two Cities. We go to each or all of them according to what kind of hospitality and what kind of happiness we require. But it is always some kind of hospitality and some kind of happiness that we require. And as in the case of inns we also remember that while there was shelter in all and food in all and some kind of fire and some kind of wine in all, yet one has left upon us an indescribable and unaccountable memory of mortality and decay, of dreariness in the rooms and even of tastelessness in the banquet. So any one who has enjoyed the stories of Dickens as they should be enjoyed has a nameless feeling that this one story is sad and almost sodden. Dickens himself had this feeling, though his breezy vanity forbade him to express it in so many words. In spite of Pecksniff, in spite of Mrs. Gamp, in spite of the yet greater Bailey, the story went lumberingly and even lifelessly; he found the sales falling off; he fancied his popularity waning, and by a sudden impulse most inartistic and yet most artistic, he dragged in the episode of Martin’s visit to America, which is the blazing jewel and the sudden redemption of the book. He wrote it at an uneasy and unhappy period of his life; when he had ceased wandering in America, but could not cease wandering altogether; when he had lost his original routine of work which was violent but regular, and had not yet settled down to the full enjoyment of his success and his later years. He poured into this book genius
that might make the mountains laugh, invention that juggled with the stars. But the book was sad; and he knew it.

The just reason for this is really interesting. Yet it is one that is not easy to state without guarding one’s self on the one side or the other against great misunderstandings; and these stipulations or preliminary allowances must in such a case as this of necessity be made first. Dickens was among other things a satirist, a pure satirist. I have never been able to understand why this title is always specially and sacredly reserved for Thackeray. Thackeray was a novelist; in the strict and narrow sense at any rate, Thackeray was a far greater novelist than Dickens. But Dickens certainly was the satirist. The essence of satire is that it perceives some absurdity inherent in the logic of some position, and that it draws that absurdity out and isolates it, so that all can see it. Thus for instance when Dickens says, “Lord Coodle would go out; Sir Thomas Doodle wouldn’t come in; and there being no people to speak of in England except Coodle and Doodle the country has been without a Government”; when Dickens says this he suddenly pounces on and plucks out the one inherent absurdity in the English party system which is hidden behind all its paraphernalia of Parliaments and Statutes, elections and ballot papers. When all the dignity and all the patriotism and all the public interest of the English constitutional party conflict have been fully allowed for, there does remain the bold, bleak question which Dickens in substance asks, “Suppose I want somebody else who is neither Coodle nor Doodle.” This is the great quality called satire; it is a kind of taunting reasonableness; and it is inseparable from a certain insane logic which is often called exaggeration. Dickens was more of a satirist than Thackeray for this simple reason: that Thackeray carried a man’s principles as far as that man carried them; Dickens carried a man’s principles as far as a man’s principles would go. Dickens in short (as people put it) exaggerated the man and his principles; that is to say he emphasised them. Dickens drew a man’s absurdity out of him; Thackeray left a man’s absurdity in him. Of this last fact we can take any example we like; take for instance the comparison between the city man as treated by Thackeray in the most satiric of his novels, with the city man as treated by Dickens in one of the mildest and maturest of his. Compare the character of old Mr. Osborne in Vanity Fair with the character of Mr. Podsnap in Our Mutual Friend. In the case of Mr. Osborne there is nothing except the solid blocking in of a brutal dull convincing character. Vanity Fair is not a satire on the City except in so far as it happens to be true. Vanity Fair is not a satire on the City, in short, except in so far as the City is a satire on the City. But Mr. Podsnap
is a pure satire; he is an extracting out of the City man of those purely intellectual qualities which happen to make that kind of City man a particularly exasperating fool. One might almost say that Mr. Podsnap is all Mr. Osborne’s opinions separated from Mr. Osborne and turned into a character. In short the satirist is more purely philosophical than the novelist. The novelist may be only an observer; the satirist must be a thinker. He must be a thinker, he must be a philosophical thinker for this simple reason; that he exercises his philosophical thought in deciding what part of his subject he is to satirise. You may have the dullest possible intelligence and be a portrait painter; but a man must have a serious intellect in order to be a caricaturist. He has to select what thing he will caricature. True satire is always of this intellectual kind; true satire is always, so to speak, a variation or fantasia upon the air of pure logic. The satirist is the man who carries men’s enthusiasm further than they carry it themselves. He outstrips the most extravagant fanatic. He is years ahead of the most audacious prophet. He sees where men’s detached intellect will eventually lead them, and he tells them the name of the place—which is generally hell.

Now of this detached and rational use of satire there is one great example in this book. Even Gulliver’s Travels is hardly more reasonable than Martin Chuzzlewit’s travels in the incredible land of the Americans. Before considering the humour of this description in its more exhaustive and liberal aspects, it may be first remarked that in this American part of Martin Chuzzlewit, Dickens quite specially sharpens up his own more controversial and political intelligence. There are more things here than anywhere else in Dickens that partake of the nature of pamphleteering, of positive challenge, of sudden repartee, of pugnacious and exasperating query, in a word of everything that belongs to the pure art of controversy as distinct not only from the pure art of fiction but even also from the pure art of satire. I am inclined to think (to put the matter not only shortly but clumsily) that Dickens was never in all his life so strictly clever as he is in the American part of Martin Chuzzlewit. There are places where he was more inspired, almost in the sense of being intoxicated, as, for instance, in the Micawber feasts of David Copperfield; there are places where he wrote more carefully and cunningly, as, for instance, in the mystery of The Mystery of Edwin Drood; there are places where he wrote very much more humanly, more close to the ground and to growing things, as in the whole of that admirable book Great Expectations. But I do not think that his mere abstract acuteness and rapidity of thought were ever exercised with such startling exactitude as they are in this place in Martin Chuzzlewit. It is to be noted, for instance, that his
American experience had actually worked him up to a heat and habit of argument. A slave-owner in the Southern States tells Dickens that slave-owners do not ill-treat their slaves, that it is not to the interest of slave-owners to ill-treat their slaves. Dickens flashes back that it is not to the interest of a man to get drunk, but he does get drunk. This pugnacious atmosphere of parry and riposte must first of all be allowed for and understood in all the satiric excursus of Martin in America. Dickens is arguing all the time; and, to do him justice, arguing very well. These chapters are full not merely of exuberant satire on America in the sense that Dotheboys Hall or Mr. Bumble’s Workhouse are exuberant satires on England. They are full also of sharp argument with America as if the man who wrote expected retort and was prepared with rejoinder. The rest of the book, like the rest of Dickens’s books, possesses humour. This part of the book, like hardly any of Dickens’s books, possesses wit. The republican gentleman who receives Martin on landing is horrified on hearing an English servant speak of the employer as “the master.” “There are no masters in America,” says the gentleman. “All owners are they?” says Martin. This sort of verbal promptitude is out of the ordinary scope of Dickens; but we find it frequently in this particular part of Martin Chuzzlewit. Martin himself is constantly breaking out into a controversial lucidity, which is elsewhere not at all a part of his character. When they talk to him about the institutions of America he asks sarcastically whether bowie knives and swordsticks and revolvers are the institutions of America. All this (if I may summarise) is expressive of one main fact. Being a satirist means being a philosopher. Dickens was not always very philosophical; but he had this permanent quality of the philosopher about him, that he always remembered people by their opinions. Elijah Pogram was to him the man who said that “his boastful answer to the tyrant and the despot was that his bright home was the land of the settin’ sun.” Mr. Scadder and Mr. Jefferson Brick were to him the men who said (in cooperation) that “the libation of freedom must sometimes be quaffed in blood.” And in these chapters more than anywhere else he falls into the extreme habit of satire, that of treating people as if there were nothing about them except their opinions. It is therefore difficult to accept these pages as pages in a novel, splendid as they are considered as pages in a parody. I do not dispute that men have said and do say that “the libation of freedom must sometimes be quaffed in blood,” that “their bright homes are the land of the settin’ sun,” that “they taunt that lion,” that “alone they dare him,” or “that softly sleeps the calm ideal in the whispering chambers of imagination.” I have read too much American
journalism to deny that any of these sentences and any of these opinions may at some time or other have been uttered. I do not deny that there are such opinions. But I do deny that there are such people. Elijah Pogram had some other business in life besides defending defaulting postmasters; he must have been a son or a father or a husband or at least (admirable thought) a lover. Mr. Chollop had some moments in his existence when he was not threatening his fellow-creatures with his swordstick and his revolver. Of all this human side of such American types Dickens does not really give any hint at all. He does not suggest that the bully Chollop had even such coarse good-humour as bullies almost always have. He does not suggest that the humbug Elijah Pogram had even as much greasy amiability as humbugs almost invariably have. He is not studying them as human beings, even as bad human beings; he is studying them as conceptions, as points of view, as symbols of a state of mind with which he is in violent disagreement. To put it roughly, he is not describing characters, he is satirising fads. To put it more exactly, he is not describing characters; he is persecuting heresies. There is one thing really to be said against his American satire; it is a serious thing to be said: it is an argument, and it is true. This can be said of Martin’s wanderings in America, that from the time he lands in America to the time he sets sail from it he never meets a living man. He has travelled in the land of Laputa. All the people he has met have been absurd opinions walking about. The whole art of Dickens in such passages as these consisted in one thing. It consisted in finding an opinion that had not a leg to stand on, and then giving it two legs to stand on.

So much may be allowed; it may be admitted that Dickens is in this sense the great satirist, in that he can imagine absurd opinions walking by themselves about the street. It may be admitted that Thackeray would not have allowed an absurd opinion to walk about the street without at least tying a man on to it for the sake of safety. But while this first truth may be evident, the second truth which is the complement of it may easily be forgotten. On the one hand there was no man who could so much enjoy mere intellectual satire apart from humanity as Dickens. On the other hand there was no man who, with another and more turbulent part of his nature, demanded humanity, and demanded its supremacy over intellect, more than Dickens. To put it shortly: there never was a man so much fitted for saying that everything was wrong; and there never was a man who was so desirous of saying that everything was right. Thus, when he met men with whom he violently disagreed, he described them as devils or lunatics; he could not bear to describe them as men. If they could not think with him on
essentials he could not stand the idea that they were human souls; he cast them out; he forgot them; and if he could not forget them he caricatured them. He was too emotional to regard them as anything but enemies, if they were not friends. He was too humane not to hate them. Charles Lamb said with his inimitable sleek pungency that he could read all the books there were; he excluded books that obviously were not books, as cookery books, chessboards bound so as to look like books, and all the works of modern historians and philosophers. One might say in much the same style that Dickens loved all the men in the world; that is he loved all the men whom he was able to recognise as men; the rest he turned into griffins and chimeras without any serious semblance to humanity. Even in his books he never hates a human being. If he wishes to hate him he adopts the simple expedient of making him an inhuman being. Now of these two strands almost the whole of Dickens is made up; they are not only different strands, they are even antagonistic strands. I mean that the whole of Dickens is made up of the strand of satire and the strand of sentimentalism; and the strand of satire is quite unnecessarily merciless and hostile, and the strand of sentimentalism is quite unnecessarily humanitarian and even maudlin. On the proper interweaving of these two things depends the great part of Dickens’s success in a novel. And by the consideration of them we can probably best arrive at the solution of the particular emotional enigma of the novel called Martin Chuzzlewit.

Martin Chuzzlewit is, I think, vaguely unsatisfactory to the reader, vaguely sad and heavy even to the reader who loves Dickens, because in Martin Chuzzlewit more than anywhere else in Dickens’s works, more even than in Oliver Twist, there is a predominance of the harsh and hostile sort of humour over the hilarious and the humane. It is absurd to lay down any such little rules for the testing of literature. But this may be broadly said and yet with confidence: that Dickens is always at his best when he is laughing at the people whom he really admires. He is at his most humorous in writing of Mr. Pickwick, who represents passive virtue. He is at his most humorous in writing of Mr. Sam Weller, who represents active virtue. He is never so funny as when he is speaking of people in whom fun itself is a virtue, like the poor people in the Fleet or the Marshalsea. And in the stories that had immediately preceded Martin Chuzzlewit he had consistently concerned himself in the majority of cases with the study of such genial and honourable eccentrics; if they are lunatics they are amiable lunatics. In the last important novel before Martin Chuzzlewit, Barnaby Rudge, the hero himself is an amiable lunatic. In the novel before that, The Old
Curiosity Shop, the two comic figures, Dick Swiveller and the Marchioness, are not only the most really entertaining, but also the most really sympathetic characters in the book. Before that came Oliver Twist (which is, I have said, an exception), and before that Pickwick, where the hero is, as Mr. Weller says, “an angel in gaiters.” Hitherto, then, on the whole, the central Dickens character had been the man who gave to the poor many things, gold and wine and feasting and good advice; but among other things gave them a good laugh at himself. The jolly old English merchant of the Pickwick type was popular on both counts. People liked to see him throw his money in the gutter. They also liked to see him throw himself there occasionally. In both acts they recognised a common quality of virtue.

Now I think it is certainly the disadvantage of Martin Chuzzlewit that none of its absurd characters are thus sympathetic. There are in the book two celebrated characters who are both especially exuberant and amusing even for Dickens, and who are both especially heartless and abominable even for Dickens—I mean of course Mr. Pecksniff on the one hand and Mrs. Gamp on the other. The humour of both of them is gigantesque. Nobody will ever forget the first time he read the words “Now I should be very glad to see Mrs. Todgers’s idea of a wooden leg.” It is like remembering first love: there is still some sort of ancient sweetness and sting. I am afraid that, in spite of many criticisms to the contrary, I am still unable to take Mr. Pecksniff’s hypocrisy seriously. He does not seem to me so much a hypocrite as a rhetorician; he reminds me of Serjeant Buzfuz. A very capable critic, Mr. Noyes, said that I was wrong when I suggested in another place that Dickens must have loved Pecksniff. Mr. Noyes thinks it clear that Dickens hated Pecksniff. I cannot believe it. Hatred does indeed linger round its object as much as love; but not in that way. Dickens is always making Pecksniff say things which have a wild poetical truth about them. Hatred allows no such outbursts of original innocence. But however that may be the broad fact remains—Dickens may or may not have loved Pecksniff comically, but he did not love him seriously; he did not respect him as he certainly respected Sam Weller. The same of course is true of Mrs. Gamp. To any one who appreciates her unctuous and sumptuous conversation it is difficult indeed not to feel that it would be almost better to be killed by Mrs. Gamp than to be saved by a better nurse. But the fact remains. In this book Dickens has not allowed us to love the most absurd people seriously, and absurd people ought to be loved seriously. Pecksniff has to be amusing all the time; the instant he ceases to be laughable he becomes detestable. Pickwick can take his ease at his inn; he can be leisurely,
can be spacious; he can fall into moods of gravity and even of dulness; he is not bound to be always funny or to forfeit the reader’s concern, for he is a good man, and therefore even his dulness is beautiful, just as is the dulness of the animal. We can leave Pickwick a little while by the fire to think; for the thoughts of Pickwick, even if they were to go slowly, would be full of all the things that all men care for—old friends and old inns and memory and the goodness of God. But we dare not leave Pecksniff alone for a moment. We dare not leave him thinking by the fire, for the thoughts of Pecksniff would be too frightful.
CHRISTMAS BOOKS

The mystery of Christmas is in a manner identical with the mystery of Dickens. If ever we adequately explain the one we may adequately explain the other. And indeed, in the treatment of the two, the chronological or historical order must in some degree be remembered. Before we come to the question of what Dickens did for Christmas we must consider the question of what Christmas did for Dickens. How did it happen that this bustling, nineteenth-century man, full of the almost cock-sure common-sense of the utilitarian and liberal epoch, came to associate his name chiefly in literary history with the perpetuation of a half pagan and half Catholic festival which he would certainly have called an antiquity and might easily have called a superstition? Christmas has indeed been celebrated before in English literature; but it had, in the most noticeable cases, been celebrated in connection with that kind of feudalism with which Dickens would have severed his connection with an ignorant and even excessive scorn. Sir Roger de Coverley kept Christmas; but it was a feudal Christmas. Sir Walter Scott sang in praise of Christmas; but it was a feudal Christmas. And Dickens was not only indifferent to the dignity of the old country gentleman or to the genial archaeology of Scott; he was even harshly and insolently hostile to it. If Dickens had lived in the neighbourhood of Sir Roger de Coverley he would undoubtedly, like Tom Touchy, have been always “having the law of him.” If Dickens had stumbled in among the old armour and quaint folios of Scott’s study he would certainly have read his brother novelist a lesson in no measured terms about the futility of thus fumbling in the dust-bins of old oppression and error. So far from Dickens being one of those who like a thing because it is old, he was one of those cruder kind of reformers, in theory at least, who actually dislike a thing because it is old. He was not merely the more righteous kind of Radical who tries to uproot abuses; he was partly also that more suicidal kind of Radical who tries to uproot himself. In theory at any rate, he had no adequate conception of the importance of human tradition; in his time it had been twisted and falsified into the form of an opposition to democracy. In truth, of course, tradition is the most democratic of all things, for tradition is merely a democracy of the dead as well as the living. But Dickens and his special group or generation had no grasp of this permanent position; they had been called to a special war for the righting of special wrongs. In so far as such an institution as Christmas was old, Dickens would even have tended to despise it. He could never have put the
matter to himself in the correct way—that while there are some things whose antiquity does prove that they are dying, there are some other things whose antiquity only proves that they cannot die. If some Radical contemporary and friend of Dickens had happened to say to him that in defending the mince-pies and the mummeries of Christmas he was defending a piece of barbaric and brutal ritualism, doomed to disappear in the light of reason along with the Boy-Bishop and the Lord of Misrule, I am not sure that Dickens (though he was one of the readiest and most rapid masters of reply in history) would have found it very easy upon his own principles to answer. It was by a great ancestral instinct that he defended Christmas; by that sacred sub-consciousness which is called tradition, which some have called a dead thing, but which is really a thing far more living than the intellect. There is a dark kinship and brotherhood of all mankind which is much too deep to be called heredity or to be in any way explained in scientific formulæ; blood is thicker than water and is especially very much thicker than water on the brain. But this unconscious and even automatic quality in Dickens’s defence of the Christmas feast, this fact that his defence might almost be called animal rather than mental, though in proper language it should be called merely virile; all this brings us back to the fact that we must begin with the atmosphere of the subject itself. We must not ask Dickens what Christmas is, for with all his heat and eloquence he does not know. Rather we must ask Christmas what Dickens is—ask how this strange child of Christmas came to be born out of due time.

Dickens devoted his genius in a somewhat special sense to the description of happiness. No other literary man of his eminence has made this central human aim so specially his subject matter. Happiness is a mystery—generally a momentary mystery—which seldom stops long enough to submit itself to artistic observation, and which, even when it is habitual, has something about it which renders artistic description almost impossible. There are twenty tiny minor poets who can describe fairly impressively an eternity of agony; there are very few even of the eternal poets who can describe ten minutes of satisfaction. Nevertheless, mankind being half divine is always in love with the impossible, and numberless attempts have been made from the beginning of human literature to describe a real state of felicity. Upon the whole, I think, the most successful have been the most frankly physical and symbolic; the flowers of Eden or the jewels of the New Jerusalem. Many writers, for instance, have called the gold and chrysolite of the Holy City a vulgar lump of jewellery. But when these critics themselves attempt to describe their conceptions of future happiness, it is
always some priggish nonsense about “planes,” about “cycles of fulfilment,” or “spirals of spiritual evolution.” Now a cycle is just as much a physical metaphor as a flower of Eden; a spiral is just as much a physical metaphor as a precious stone. But, after all, a garden is a beautiful thing; whereas this is by no means necessarily true of a cycle, as can be seen in the case of a bicycle. A jewel, after all, is a beautiful thing; but this is not necessarily so of a spiral, as can be seen in the case of a corkscrew. Nothing is gained by dropping the old material metaphors, which did hint at heavenly beauty, and adopting other material metaphors which do not even give a hint of earthly beauty. This modern or spiral method of describing indescribable happiness may, I think, be dismissed. Then there has been another method which has been adopted by many men of a very real poetical genius. It was the method of the old pastoral poets like Theocritus. It was in another way that adopted by the elegance and piety of Spenser. It was certainly expressed in the pictures of Watteau; and it had a very sympathetic and even manly expression in modern England in the decorative poetry of William Morris. These men of genius, from Theocritus to Morris, occupied themselves in endeavouring to describe happiness as a state of certain human beings, the atmosphere of a commonwealth, the enduring climate of certain cities or islands. They poured forth treasures of the truest kind of imagination upon describing the happy lives and landscapes of Utopia or Atlantis or the Earthly Paradise. They traced with the most tender accuracy the tracery of its fruit-trees or the glimmering garments of its women; they used every ingenuity of colour or intricate shape to suggest its infinite delight. And what they succeeded in suggesting was always its infinite melancholy. William Morris described the Earthly Paradise in such a way that the only strong emotional note left on the mind was the feeling of how homeless his travellers felt in that alien Elysium; and the reader sympathised with them, feeling that he would prefer not only Elizabethan England but even twentieth-century Camberwell to such a land of shining shadows. Thus literature has almost always failed in endeavouring to describe happiness as a state. Human tradition, human custom and folk-lore (though far more true and reliable than literature as a rule) have not often succeeded in giving quite the correct symbols for a real atmosphere of camaraderie and joy. But here and there the note has been struck with the sudden vibration of the vox humana. In human tradition it has been struck chiefly in the old celebrations of Christmas. In literature it has been struck chiefly in Dickens’s Christmas tales.

In the historic celebration of Christmas as it remains from Catholic times in
certain northern countries (and it is to be remembered that in Catholic times the northern countries were, if possible, more Catholic than anybody else), there are three qualities which explain, I think, its hold upon the human sense of happiness, especially in such men as Dickens. There are three notes of Christmas, so to speak, which are also notes of happiness, and which the pagans and the Utopians forget. If we state what they are in the case of Christmas, it will be quite sufficiently obvious how important they are in the case of Dickens.

The first quality is what may be called the dramatic quality. The happiness is not a state; it is a crisis. All the old customs surrounding the celebration of the birth of Christ are made by human instinct so as to insist and re-insist upon this crucial quality. Everything is so arranged that the whole household may feel, if possible, as a household does when a child is actually being born in it. The thing is a vigil and a vigil with a definite limit. People sit up at night until they hear the bells ring. Or they try to sleep at night in order to see their presents the next morning. Everywhere there is a limitation, a restraint; at one moment the door is shut, at the moment after it is opened. The hour has come or it has not come; the parcels are undone or they are not undone; there is no evolution of Christmas presents. This sharp and theatrical quality in pleasure, which human instinct and the mother wit of the world has wisely put into the popular celebrations of Christmas, is also a quality which is essential in such romantic literature as Dickens wrote. In romantic literature the hero and heroine must indeed be happy, but they must also be unexpectedly happy. This is the first connecting link between literature and the old religious feast; this is the first connecting link between Dickens and Christmas.

The second element to be found in all such festivity and all such romance is the element which is represented as well as it could be represented by the mere fact that Christmas occurs in the winter. It is the element not merely of contrast, but actually of antagonism. It preserves everything that was best in the merely primitive or pagan view of such ceremonies or such banquets. If we are carousing, at least we are warriors carousing. We hang above us, as it were, the shields and battle-axes with which we must do battle with the giants of the snow and hail. All comfort must be based on discomfort. Man chooses when he wishes to be most joyful the very moment when the whole material universe is most sad. It is this contradiction and mystical defiance which gives a quality of manliness and reality to the old winter feasts which is not characteristic of the sunny felicities of the Earthly Paradise. And this curious element has been carried out even in all the trivial jokes and tasks that have always surrounded
such occasions as these. The object of the jovial customs was not to make everything artificially easy: on the contrary, it was rather to make everything artificially difficult. Idealism is not only expressed by shooting an arrow at the stars; the fundamental principle of idealism is also expressed by putting a leg of mutton at the top of a greasy pole. There is in all such observances a quality which can be called only the quality of divine obstruction. For instance, in the game of snapdragon (that admirable occupation) the conception is that raisins taste much nicer if they are brands saved from the burning. About all Christmas things there is something a little nobler, if only nobler in form and theory, than mere comfort; even holly is prickly. It is not hard to see the connection of this kind of historic instinct with a romantic writer like Dickens. The healthy novelist must always play snapdragon with his principal characters; he must always be snatching the hero and heroine like raisins out of the fire.

The third great Christmas element is the element of the grotesque. The grotesque is the natural expression of joy; and all the Utopias and new Edens of the poets fail to give a real impression of enjoyment, very largely because they leave out the grotesque. A man in most modern Utopias cannot really be happy; he is too dignified. A man in Morris’s Earthly Paradise cannot really be enjoying himself; he is too decorative. When real human beings have real delights they tend to express them entirely in grotesques—I might almost say entirely in goblins. On Christmas Eve one may talk about ghosts so long as they are turnip ghosts. But one would not be allowed (I hope, in any decent family) to talk on Christmas Eve about astral bodies. The boar’s head of old Yule-time was as grotesque as the donkey’s head of Bottom the Weaver. But there is only one set of goblins quite wild enough to express the wild goodwill of Christmas. Those goblins are the characters of Dickens.

Arcadian poets and Arcadian painters have striven to express happiness by means of beautiful figures. Dickens understood that happiness is best expressed by ugly figures. In beauty, perhaps, there is something allied to sadness; certainly there is something akin to joy in the grotesque, nay, in the uncouth. There is something mysteriously associated with happiness not only in the corpulence of Falstaff and the corpulence of Tony Weller, but even in the red nose of Bardolph or the red nose of Mr. Stiggins. A thing of beauty is an inspiration for ever—a matter of meditation for ever. It is rather a thing of ugliness that is strictly a joy for ever.

All Dickens’s books are Christmas books. But this is still truest of his two or three famous Yuletide tales–The Christmas Carol and The Chimes and The
Cricket on the Hearth. Of these The Christmas Carol is beyond comparison the best as well as the most popular. Indeed, Dickens is in so profound and spiritual a sense a popular author that in his case, unlike most others, it can generally be said that the best work is the most popular. It is for Pickwick that he is best known; and upon the whole it is for Pickwick that he is best worth knowing. In any case this superiority of The Christmas Carol makes it convenient for us to take it as an example of the generalisations already made. If we study the very real atmosphere of rejoicing and of riotous charity in The Christmas Carol we shall find that all the three marks I have mentioned are unmistakably visible. The Christmas Carol is a happy story first, because it describes an abrupt and dramatic change. It is not only the story of a conversion, but of a sudden conversion; as sudden as the conversion of a man at a Salvation Army meeting. Popular religion is quite right in insisting on the fact of a crisis in most things. It is true that the man at the Salvation Army meeting would probably be converted from the punch bowl; whereas Scrooge was converted to it. That only means that Scrooge and Dickens represented a higher and more historic Christianity.

Again, The Christmas Carol owes much of its hilarity to our second source—the fact of its being a tale of winter and of a very wintry winter. There is much about comfort in the story; yet the comfort is never enervating: it is saved from that by a tingle of something bitter and bracing in the weather. Lastly, the story exemplifies throughout the power of the third principle—the kinship between gaiety and the grotesque. Everybody is happy because nobody is dignified. We have a feeling somehow that Scrooge looked even uglier when he was kind than he had looked when he was cruel. The turkey that Scrooge bought was so fat, says Dickens, that it could never have stood upright. That top-heavy and monstrous bird is a good symbol of the top-heavy happiness of the stories.

It is less profitable to criticise the other two tales in detail because they represent variations on the theme in two directions; and variations that were not, upon the whole, improvements. The Chimes is a monument of Dickens’s honourable quality of pugnacity. He could not admire anything, even peace, without wanting to be warlike about it. That was all as it should be.
DOMBEY AND SON

In Dickens’s literary life Dombey and Son represents a break so important as to necessitate our casting back to a summary and a generalisation. In order fully to understand what this break is, we must say something of the previous character of Dickens’s novels, and even something of the general character of novels in themselves. How essential this is we shall see shortly.

It must first be remembered that the novel is the most typical of modern forms. It is typical of modern forms especially in this, that it is essentially formless. All the ancient modes or structures of literature were definite and severe. Any one composing them had to abide by their rules; they were what their name implied. Thus a tragedy might be a bad tragedy, but it was always a tragedy. Thus an epic might be a bad epic, but it was always an epic. Now in the sense in which there is such a thing as an epic, in that sense there is no such thing as a novel. We call any long fictitious narrative in prose a novel, just as we call any short piece of prose without any narrative an essay. Both these forms are really quite formless, and both of them are really quite new. The difference between a good epic by Mr. John Milton and a bad epic by Mr. John Smith was simply the difference between the same thing done well and the same thing done badly. But it was not (for instance) like the difference between Clarissa Harlowe and The Time Machine. If we class Richardson’s book with Mr. Wells’s book it is really only for convenience; if we say that they are both novels we shall certainly be puzzled in that case to say what on earth a novel is. But the note of our age, both for good and evil, is a highly poetical and largely illogical faith in liberty. Liberty is not a negation or a piece of nonsense, as the cheap reactionaries say; it is a belief in variety and growth. But it is a purely poetic and even a merely romantic belief. The nineteenth century was an age of romance as certainly as the Middle Ages was an age of reason. Mediæval liked to have everything defined and defensible; the modern world prefers to run some risks for the sake of spontaneity and diversity. Consequently the modern world is full of a phenomenon peculiar to itself—I mean the spectacle of small or originally small things swollen to enormous size and power. The modern world is like a world in which toadstools should be as big as trees, and insects should walk about in the sun as large as elephants. Thus, for instance, the shopkeeper, almost an unimportant figure in carefully ordered states, has in our time become the millionaire, and has more power than ten kings. Thus again a practical
knowledge of nature, of the habits of animals or the properties of fire and water, was in the old ordered state either an almost servile labour or a sort of joke; it was left to old women and gamekeepers and boys who went birds’-nesting. In our time this commonplace daily knowledge has swollen into the enormous miracle of physical size, weighing the stars and talking under the sea. In short, our age is a sort of splendid jungle in which some of the most towering weeds and blossoms have come from the smallest seed.

And this is, generally speaking, the explanation of the novel. The novel is not so much the filling up of an artistic plan, however new or fantastic. It is a thing that has grown from some germ of suggestion, and has often turned out much larger than the author intended. And this, lastly, is the final result of these facts, that the critic can generally trace in a novel what was the original artistic type or shape of thought from which the whole matter started, and he will generally find that this is different in every case. In one novel he will find that the first impulse is a character. In another novel he will find that the first impulse is a landscape, the atmosphere of some special countryside. In another novel he will find that the first impulse is the last chapter. Or it may be a thrust with sword or dagger, it may be a theology, it may be a song. Somewhere embedded in every ordinary book are the five or six words for which really all the rest will be written. Some of our enterprising editors who set their readers to hunt for banknotes and missing ladies might start a competition for finding those words in every novel. But whether or no this is possible, there is no doubt that the principle in question is of great importance in the case of Dickens, and especially in the case of Dombey and Son.

In all the Dickens novels can be seen, so to speak, the original thing that they were before they were novels. The same may be observed, for the matter of that, in the great novels of most of the great modern novelists. For example, Sir Walter Scott wrote poetical romances before he wrote prose romances. Hence it follows that, with all their much greater merit, his novels may still be described as poetical romances in prose. While adding a new and powerful element of popular humours and observation, Scott still retains a certain purely poetical right—a right to make his heroes and outlaws and great kings speak at the great moments with a rhetoric so rhythmical that it partakes of the nature of song, the same quite metrical rhetoric which is used in the metrical speeches of Marmion or Roderick Dhu. In the same way, although Don Quixote is a modern novel in its irony and subtlety, we can see that it comes from the old long romances of chivalry. In the same way, although Clarissa is a modern novel in its intimacy
and actuality, we can see that it comes from the old polite letter-writing and polite essays of the period of the Spectator. Any one can see that Scott formed in The Lay of the Last Minstrel the style that he applied again and again afterwards, like the reappearances of a star taking leave of the stage. All his other romances were positively last appearances of the positively last Minstrel. Any one can see that Thackeray formed in fragmentary satires like The Book of Snobs or The Yellowplush Papers the style, the rather fragmentary style, in which he was to write Vanity Fair. In most modern cases, in short (until very lately, at any rate), the novel is an enormous outgrowth from something that was not a novel. And in Dickens this is very important. All his novels are outgrowths of the original notion of taking notes, splendid and inspired notes, of what happens in the street. Those in the modern world who cannot reconcile themselves to his method—those who feel that there is about his books something intolerably clumsy or superficial—have either no natural taste for strong literature at all, or else have fallen into their error by too persistently regarding Dickens as a modern novelist and expecting all his books to be modern novels. Dickens did not know at what exact point he really turned into a novelist. Nor do we. Dickens did not know, in his deepest soul, whether he ever really did turn into a novelist. Nor do we. The novel being a modern product is one of the few things to which we really can apply that disgusting method of thought—the method of evolution. But even in evolution there are great gaps, there are great breaks, there are great crises. I have said that the first of these breaks in Dickens may be placed at the point when he wrote Nicholas Nickleby. This was his first serious decision to be a novelist in any sense at all, to be anything except a maker of momentary farces. The second break, and that a far more important break, is in Dombey and Son. This marks his final resolution to be a novelist and nothing else, to be a serious constructor of fiction in the serious sense. Before Dombey and Son even his pathos had been really frivolous. After Dombey and Son even his absurdity was intentional and grave.

In case this transition is not understood, one or two tests may be taken at random. The episodes in Dombey and Son, the episodes in David Copperfield, which came after it, are no longer episodes merely stuck into the middle of the story without any connection with it, like most of the episodes in Nicholas Nickleby, or most of the episodes even in Martin Chuzzlewit. Take, for instance, by way of a mere coincidence, the fact that three schools for boys are described successively in Nicholas Nickleby, in Dombey and Son, and in David Copperfield. But the difference is enormous. Dotheboys Hall does not exist to
tell us anything about Nicholas Nickleby. Rather Nicholas Nickleby exists entirely in order to tell us about Dotheboys Hall. It does not in any way affect his history or psychology; he enters Mr. Squeers’s school and leaves Mr. Squeers’s school with the same character, or rather absence of character. It is a mere episode, existing for itself. But when little Paul Dombey goes to an old-fashioned but kindly school, it is in a very different sense and for a very different reason from that for which Nicholas Nickleby goes to an old-fashioned and cruel school. The sending of little Paul to Dr. Blimber’s is a real part of the history of little Paul, such as it is. Dickens deliberately invents all that elderly pedantry in order to show up Paul’s childishness. Dickens deliberately invents all that rather heavy kindness in order to show up Paul’s predestination and tragedy. Dotheboys Hall is not meant to show up anything except Dotheboys Hall. But although Dickens doubtless enjoyed Dr. Blimber quite as much as Mr. Squeers, it remains true that Dr. Blimber is really a very good foil to Paul; whereas Squeers is not a foil to Nicholas; Nicholas is merely a lame excuse for Squeers. The change can be seen continued in the school, or rather the two schools, to which David Copperfield goes. The whole idea of David Copperfield’s life is that he had the dregs of life before the wine of it. He knew the worst of the world before he knew the best of it. His childhood at Dr. Strong’s is a second childhood. Now for this purpose the two schools are perfectly well adapted. Mr. Creakle’s school is not only, like Mr. Squeers’s school, a bad school, it is a bad influence upon David Copperfield. Dr. Strong’s school is not only a good school, it is a good influence upon David Copperfield. I have taken this case of the schools as a case casual but concrete. The same, however, can be seen in any of the groups or incidents of the novels on both sides of the boundary. Mr. Crummles’s theatrical company is only a society that Nicholas happens to fall into. America is only a place to which Martin Chuzzlewit happens to go. These things are isolated sketches, and nothing else. Even Todgers’s boarding-house is only a place where Mr. Pecksniff can be delightfully hypocritical. It is not a place which throws any new light on Mr. Pecksniff’s hypocrisy. But the case is different with that more subtle hypocrite in Dombey and Son—I mean Major Bagstock. Dickens does mean it as a deliberate light on Mr. Dombey’s character that he basks with a fatuous calm in the blazing sun of Major Bagstock’s tropical and offensive flattery. Here, then, is the essence of the change. He not only wishes to write a novel; this he did as early as Nicholas Nickleby. He wishes to have as little as possible in the novel that does not really assist it as a novel. Previously he had asked with the assistance of what incidents could his hero
wander farther and farther from the pathway. Now he has really begun to ask with the assistance of what incidents his hero can get nearer and nearer to the goal.

The change made Dickens a greater novelist. I am not sure that it made him a greater man. One good character by Dickens requires all eternity to stretch its legs in; and the characters in his later books are always being tripped up by some tiresome nonsense about the story. For instance, in Dombey and Son, Mrs. Skewton is really very funny. But nobody with a love of the real smell of Dickens would compare her for a moment, for instance, with Mrs. Nickleby. And the reason of Mrs. Skewton’s inferiority is simply this, that she has something to do in the plot; she has to entrap or assist to entrap Mr. Dombey into marrying Edith. Mrs. Nickleby, on the other hand, has nothing at all to do in the story, except to get in everybody’s way. The consequence is that we complain not of her for getting in everyone’s way, but of everyone for getting in hers. What are suns and stars, what are times and seasons, what is the mere universe, that it should presume to interrupt Mrs. Nickleby? Mrs. Skewton (though supposed, of course, to be a much viler sort of woman) has something of the same quality of splendid and startling irrelevancy. In her also there is the same feeling of wild threads hung from world to world like the webs of gigantic spiders; of things connected that seem to have no connection save by this one adventurous filament of frail and daring folly. Nothing could be better than Mrs. Skewton when she finds herself, after convolutions of speech, somehow on the subject of Henry VIII., and pauses to mention with approval “his dear little peepy eyes and his benevolent chin.” Nothing could be better than her attempt at Mahomedan resignation when she feels almost inclined to say “that there is no What’s-his-name but Thingummy, and What-you-may-call-it is his prophet!” But she has not so much time as Mrs. Nickleby to say these good things; also she has not sufficient human virtue to say them constantly. She is always intent upon her worldly plans, among other things upon the worldly plan of assisting Charles Dickens to get a story finished. She is always “advancing her shrivelled ear” to listen to what Dombey is saying to Edith. Worldliness is the most solemn thing in the world; it is far more solemn than other-worldliness. Mrs. Nickleby can afford to ramble as a child does in a field, or as a child does to laugh at nothing, for she is like a child, innocent. It is only the good who can afford to be frivolous.

Broadly speaking, what is said here of Mrs. Skewton applies to the great part of Dombey and Son, even to the comic part of it. It shows an advance in art and
unity; it does not show an advance in genius and creation. In some cases, in fact, I cannot help feeling that it shows a falling off. It may be a personal idiosyncrasy, but there is only one comic character really prominent in Dickens, upon whom Dickens has really lavished the wealth of his invention, and who does not amuse me at all, and that character is Captain Cuttle. But three great exceptions must be made to any such disparagement of Dombey and Son. They are all three of that royal order in Dickens’s creation which can no more be described or criticised than strong wine. The first is Major Bagstock, the second is Cousin Feenix, the third is Toots. In Bagstock Dickens has blasted for ever that type which pretends to be sincere by the simple operation of being explosively obvious. He tells about a quarter of the truth, and then poses as truthful because a quarter of the truth is much simpler than the whole of it. He is the kind of man who goes about with posers for Bishops or for Socialists, with plain questions to which he wants a plain answer. His questions are plain only in the same sense that he himself is plain—in the sense of being uncommonly ugly. He is the man who always bursts with satisfaction because he can call a spade a spade, as if there were any kind of logical or philosophical use in merely saying the same word twice over. He is the man who wants things down in black and white, as if black and white were the only two colours; as if blue and green and red and gold were not facts of the universe. He is too selfish to tell the truth and too impatient even to hear it. He cannot endure the truth, because it is subtle. This man is almost always like Bagstock—a sycophant and a toad-eater. A man is not any the less a toad-eater because he eats his toads with a huge appetite and gobbles them up, as Bagstock did his breakfast, with the eyes starting out of his purple face. He flatters brutally. He cringes with a swagger. And men of the world like Dombey are always taken in by him, because men of the world are probably the simplest of all the children of Adam.

Cousin Feenix again is an exquisite suggestion, with his rickety chivalry and rambling compliments. It was about the period of Dombey and Son that Dickens began to be taken up by good society. (One can use only vulgar terms for an essentially vulgar process.) And his sketches of the man of good family in the books of this period show that he had had glimpses of what that singular world is like. The aristocrats in his earliest books are simply dragons and griffins for his heroes to fight with—monsters like Sir Mulberry Hawk or Lord Verisopht. They are merely created upon the old principle, that your scoundrel must be polite and powerful—a very sound principle. The villain must be not only a villain, but a tyrant. The giant must be larger than Jack. But in the books of the Dombey
period we have many shrewd glimpses of the queer realities of English aristocracy. Of these Cousin Feenix is one of the best. Cousin Feenix is a much better sketch of the essentially decent and chivalrous aristocrat than Sir Leicester Dedlock. Both of the men are, if you will, fools, as both are honourable gentlemen. But if one may attempt a classification among fools, Sir Leicester Dedlock is a stupid fool, while Cousin Feenix is a silly fool—which is much better. The difference is that the silly fool has a folly which is always on the borderland of wit, and even of wisdom; his wandering wits come often upon undiscovered truths. The stupid fool is as consistent and as homogeneous as wood; he is as invincible as the ancestral darkness. Cousin Feenix is a good sketch of the sort of well-bred old ass who is so fundamentally genuine that he is always saying very true things by accident. His whole tone also, though exaggerated like everything in Dickens, is very true to the bewildered good nature which marks English aristocratic life. The statement that Dickens could not describe a gentleman is, like most popular animadversions against Dickens, so very thin and one-sided a truth as to be for serious purposes a falsehood. When people say that Dickens could not describe a gentleman, what they mean is this, and so far what they mean is true. They mean that Dickens could not describe a gentleman as gentlemen feel a gentleman. They mean that he could not take that atmosphere easily, accept it as the normal atmosphere, or describe that world from the inside. This is true. In Dickens’s time there was such a thing as the English people, and Dickens belonged to it. Because there is no such thing as an English people now, almost all literary men drift towards what is called Society; almost all literary men either are gentlemen or pretend to be. Hence, as I say, when we talk of describing a gentleman, we always mean describing a gentleman from the point of view of one who either belongs to, or is interested in perpetuating, that type. Dickens did not describe gentlemen in the way that gentlemen describe gentlemen. He described them in the way in which he described waiters, or railway guards, or men drawing with chalk on the pavement. He described them, in short (and this we may freely concede), from the outside, as he described any other oddity or special trade. But when it comes to saying that he did not describe them well, then that is quite another matter, and that I should emphatically deny. The things that are really odd about the English upper class he saw with startling promptitude and penetration, and if the English upper class does not see these odd things in itself, it is not because they are not there, but because we are all blind to our own oddities; it is for the same reason that tramps do not feel dirty, or that niggers do not feel black. I have often
heard a dear old English oligarch say that Dickens could not describe a
gentleman, while every note of his own voice and turn of his own hand recalled
Sir Leicester Dedlock. I have often been told by some old buck that Dickens
could not describe a gentleman, and been told so in the shaky voice and with all
the vague allusiveness of Cousin Feenix.

Cousin Feenix has really many of the main points of the class that governs
England. Take, for an instance, his hazy notion that he is in a world where
everybody knows everybody; whenever he mentions a man, it is a man “with
whom my friend Dombey is no doubt acquainted.” That pierces to the very
helpless soul of aristocracy. Take again the stupendous gravity with which he
leads up to a joke. That is the very soul of the House of Commons and the
Cabinet, of the high-class English politics, where a joke is always enjoyed
solemnly. Take his insistence upon the technique of Parliament, his regrets for
the time when the rules of debate were perhaps better observed than they are
now. Take that wonderful mixture in him (which is the real human virtue of our
aristocracy) of a fair amount of personal modesty with an innocent assumption
of rank. Of a man who saw all these genteel foibles so clearly it is absurd merely
to say without further explanation that he could not describe a gentleman. Let us
confine ourselves to saying that he did not describe a gentleman as gentlemen
like to be described.

Lastly, there is the admirable study of Toots, who may be considered as being
in some ways the masterpiece of Dickens. Nowhere else did Dickens express
with such astonishing insight and truth his main contention, which is that to be
good and idiotic is not a poor fate, but, on the contrary, an experience of
primeval innocence, which wonders at all things. Dickens did not know,
anymore than any great man ever knows, what was the particular thing that he
had to preach. He did not know it; he only preached it. But the particular thing
that he had to preach was this: That humility is the only possible basis of
enjoyment; that if one has no other way of being humble except being poor, then
it is better to be poor, and to enjoy; that if one has no other way of being humble
except being imbecile, then it is better to be imbecile, and to enjoy. That is the
deep unconscious truth in the character of Toots—that all his externals are flashy
and false; all his internals unconscious, obscure, and true. He wears loud clothes,
and he is silent inside them. His shirts and waistcoats are covered with bright
spots of pink and purple, while his soul is always covered with the sacred shame.
He always gets all the outside things of life wrong, and all the inside things right.
He always admires the right Christian people, and gives them the wrong
Christian names. Dimly connecting Captain Cuttle with the shop of Mr. Solomon Gills, he always addresses the astonished mariner as “Captain Gills.” He turns Mr. Walter Gay, by a most improving transformation, into “Lieutenant Walters.” But he always knows which people upon his own principles to admire. He forgets who they are, but he remembers what they are. With the clear eyes of humility he perceives the whole world as it is. He respects the Game Chicken for being strong, as even the Game Chicken ought to be respected for being strong. He respects Florence for being good, as even Florence ought to be respected for being good. And he has no doubt about which he admires most; he prefers goodness to strength, as do all masculine men. It is through the eyes of such characters as Toots that Dickens really sees the whole of his tales. For even if one calls him a half-wit, it still makes a difference that he keeps the right half of his wits. When we think of the unclean and craven spirit in which Toots might be treated in a psychological novel of to-day; how he might walk with a mooncalf face, and a brain of bestial darkness, the soul rises in real homage to Dickens for showing how much simple gratitude and happiness can remain in the lopped roots of the most simplified intelligence. If scientists must treat a man as a dog, it need not be always as a mad dog. They might grant him, like Toots, a little of the dog’s loyalty and the dog’s reward.
DAVID COPPERFIELD

In this book Dickens is really trying to write a new kind of book, and the enterprise is almost as chivalrous as a cavalry charge. He is making a romantic attempt to be realistic. That is almost the definition of David Copperfield. In his last book, Dombey and Son, we see a certain maturity and even a certain mild exhaustion in his earlier farcical method. He never failed to have fine things in any of his books, and Toots is a very fine thing. Still, I could never find Captain Cuttle and Mr. Sol Gills very funny, and the whole Wooden Midshipman seems to me very wooden. In David Copperfield he suddenly unseals a new torrent of truth, the truth out of his own life. The impulse of the thing is autobiography; he is trying to tell all the absurd things that have happened to himself, and not the least absurd thing is himself. Yet though it is Dickens’s ablest and clearest book, there is in it a falling away of a somewhat singular kind.

Generally speaking there was astonishingly little of fatigue in Dickens’s books. He sometimes wrote bad work; he sometimes wrote even unimportant work; but he wrote hardly a line which is not full of his own fierce vitality and fancy. If he is dull it is hardly ever because he cannot think of anything; it is because, by some silly excitement or momentary lapse of judgment, he has thought of something that was not worth thinking of. If his joke is feeble, it is as an impromptu joke at an uproarious dinner-table may be feeble; it is no indication of any lack of vitality. The joke is feeble, but it is not a sign of feebleness. Broadly speaking, this is true of Dickens. If his writing is not amusing us, at least it is amusing him. Even when he is tiring he is not tired.

But in the case of David Copperfield there is a real reason for noting an air of fatigue. For although this is the best of all Dickens’s books, it constantly disappoints the critical and intelligent reader. The reason is that Dickens began it under his sudden emotional impulse of telling the whole truth about himself and gradually allowed the whole truth to be more and more diluted, until towards the end of the book we are back in the old pedantic and decorative art of Dickens, an art which we justly admired in its own place and on its own terms, but which we resent when we feel it gradually returning through a tale pitched originally in a more practical and piercing key. Here, I say, is the one real example of the fatigue of Dickens. He begins his story in a new style and then slips back into an old one. The earlier part is in his later manner. The later part is in his earlier manner.
There are many marks of something weak and shadowy in the end of David Copperfield. Here, for instance, is one of them which is not without its bearing on many tendencies of modern England. Why did Dickens at the end of this book give way to that typically English optimism about emigration? He seems to think that he can cure the souls of a whole cartload, or rather boatload, of his characters by sending them all to the Colonies. Peggotty is a desolate and insulted parent whose house has been desecrated and his pride laid low; therefore let him go to Australia. Emily is a woman whose heart is broken and whose honour is blasted; but she will be quite happy if she goes to Australia. Mr. Micawber is a man whose soul cannot be made to understand the tyranny of time or the limits of human hope; but he will understand all these things if he goes to Australia. For it must be noted that Dickens does not use this emigration merely as a mode of exit. He does not send these characters away on a ship merely as a symbol suggesting that they pass wholly out of his hearer’s life. He does definitely suggest that Australia is a sort of island Valley of Avalon, where the soul may heal it of its grievous wound. It is seriously suggested that Peggotty finds peace in Australia. It is really indicated that Emily regains her dignity in Australia. It is positively explained of Mr. Micawber not that he was happy in Australia (for he would be that anywhere), but that he was definitely prosperous and practically successful in Australia; and that he would certainly be nowhere. Colonising is not talked of merely as a coarse, economic expedient for going to a new market. It is really offered as something that will cure the hopeless tragedy of Peggotty; as something that will cure the still more hopeless comedy of Micawber.

I will not dwell here on the subsequent adventures of this very sentimental and extremely English illusion. It would be an exaggeration to say that Dickens in this matter is something of a forerunner of much modern imperialism. His political views were such that he would have regarded modern imperialism with horror and contempt. Nevertheless there is here something of that hazy sentimentalism which makes some Imperialists prefer to talk of the fringe of the empire of which they know nothing, rather than of the heart of the empire which they know is diseased. It is said that in the twilight and decline of Rome, close to the dark ages, the people in Gaul believed that Britain was a land of ghosts (perhaps it was foggy), and that the dead were ferried across to it from the northern coast of France. If (as is not entirely impossible) our own century appears to future ages as a time of temporary decay and twilight, it may be said that there was attached to England a blessed island called Australia to which the
souls of the socially dead were ferried across to remain in bliss for ever.

This element which is represented by the colonial optimism at the end of David Copperfield is a moral element. The truth is that there is something a little mean about this sort of optimism. I do not like the notion of David Copperfield sitting down comfortably to his tea-table with Agnes, having got rid of all the inconvenient or distressing characters of the story by sending them to the other side of the world. The whole thing has too much about it of the selfishness of a family which sends a scapegrace to the Colonies to starve with its blessing. There is too much in the whole thing of that element which was satirised by an ironic interpretation of the epitaph “Peace, perfect peace, with loved ones far away.” We should have thought more of David Copperfield (and also of Charles Dickens) if he had endeavoured for the rest of his life, by conversation and comfort, to bind up the wounds of his old friends from the seaside. We should have thought more of David Copperfield (and also of Charles Dickens) if he had faced the possibility of going on till his dying day lending money to Mr. Wilkins Micawber. We should have thought more of David Copperfield (and also of Charles Dickens) if he had not looked upon the marriage with Dora merely as a flirtation, an episode which he survived and ought to survive. And yet the truth is that there is nowhere in fiction where we feel so keenly the primary human instinct and principle that a marriage is a marriage and irrevocable, that such things do leave a wound and also a bond as in this case of David’s short connection with his silly little wife. When all is said and done, when Dickens has done his best and his worst, when he has sentimentalised for pages and tried to tie up everything in the pink tape of optimism, the fact, in the psychology of the reader, still remains. The reader does still feel that David’s marriage to Dora was a real marriage; and that his marriage to Agnes was nothing, a middle-aged compromise, a taking of the second best, a sort of spiritualised and sublimated marriage of convenience. For all the readers of Dickens Dora is thoroughly avenged. The modern world (intent on anarchy in everything, even in Government) refuses to perceive the permanent element of tragic constancy which inheres in all passion, and which is the origin of marriage. Marriage rests upon the fact that you cannot have your cake and eat it; that you cannot lose your heart and have it. But, as I have said, there is perhaps no place in literature where we feel more vividly the sense of this monogamous instinct in man than in David Copperfield. A man is monogamous even if he is only monogamous for a month; love is eternal even if it is only eternal for a month. It always leaves behind it the sense of something broken and betrayed.
But I have mentioned Dora in this connection only because she illustrates the same fact which Micawber illustrates; the fact that there is at the end of this book too much tendency to bless people and get rid of them. Micawber is a nuisance. Dickens the despot condemns him to exile. Dora is a nuisance. Dickens the despot condemns her to death. But it is the whole business of Dickens in the world to express the fact that such people are the spice and interest of life. It is the whole point of Dickens that there is nobody more worth living with than a strong, splendid, entertaining, immortal nuisance. Micawber interrupts practical life; but what is practical life that it should venture to interrupt Micawber? Dora confuses the housekeeping; but we are not angry with Dora because she confuses the housekeeping. We are angry with the housekeeping because it confuses Dora. I repeat, and it cannot be too much repeated that the whole lesson of Dickens is here. It is better to know Micawber than not to know the minor worries that arise out of knowing Micawber. It is better to have a bad debt and a good friend. In the same way it is better to marry a human and healthy personality which happens to attract you than to marry a mere housewife; for a mere housewife is a mere housekeeper. All this was what Dickens stood for; that the very people who are most irritating in small business circumstances are often the people who are most delightful in long stretches of experience of life. It is just the man who is maddening when he is ordering a cutlet or arranging an appointment who is probably the man in whose company it is worth while to journey steadily towards the grave. Distribute the dignified people and the capable people and the highly business-like people among all the situations which their ambition or their innate corruption may demand; but keep close to your heart, keep deep in your inner councils the absurd people. Let the clever people pretend to govern you, let the unimpeachable people pretend to advise you, but let the fools alone influence you; let the laughable people whose faults you see and understand be the only people who are really inside your life, who really come near you or accompany you on your lonely march towards the last impossibility. That is the whole meaning of Dickens; that we should keep the absurd people for our friends. And here at the end of David Copperfield he seems in some dim way to deny it. He seems to want to get rid of the preposterous people simply because they will always continue to be preposterous. I have a horrible feeling that David Copperfield will send even his aunt to Australia if she worries him too much about donkeys.

I repeat, then, that this wrong ending of David Copperfield is one of the very few examples in Dickens of a real symptom of fatigue. Having created splendid
beings for whom alone life might be worth living, he cannot endure the thought of his hero living with them. Having given his hero superb and terrible friends, he is afraid of the awful and tempestuous vista of their friendship. He slips back into a more superficial kind of story and ends it in a more superficial way. He is afraid of the things he has made; of that terrible figure Micawber; of that yet more terrible figure Dora. He cannot make up his mind to see his hero perpetually entangled in the splendid tortures and sacred surprises that come from living with really individual and unmanageable people. He cannot endure the idea that his fairy prince will not have henceforward a perfectly peaceful time. But the wise old fairy tales (which are the wisest things in the world, at any rate the wisest things of worldly origin), the wise old fairy tales never were so silly as to say that the prince and the princess lived peacefully ever afterwards. The fairy tales said that the prince and princess lived happily ever afterwards: and so they did. They lived happily, although it is very likely that from time to time they threw the furniture at each other. Most marriages, I think, are happy marriages; but there is no such thing as a contented marriage. The whole pleasure of marriage is that it is a perpetual crisis. David Copperfield and Dora quarrelled over the cold mutton; and if they had gone on quarrelling to the end of their lives, they would have gone on loving each other to the end of their lives; it would have been a human marriage. But David Copperfield and Agnes would agree about the cold mutton. And that cold mutton would be very cold.

I have here endeavoured to suggest some of the main merits of Dickens within the framework of one of his faults. I have said that David Copperfield represents a rather sad transition from his strongest method to his weakest. Nobody would ever complain of Charles Dickens going on writing his own kind of novels, his old kind of novels. If there be anywhere a man who loves good books, that man wishes that there were four Oliver Twists and at least forty-four Pickwicks. If there be any one who loves laughter and creation, he would be glad to read a hundred of Nicholas Nickleby and two hundred of The Old Curiosity Shop. But while any one would have welcomed one of Dickens’s own ordered and conventional novels, it was not in this spirit that they welcomed David Copperfield.

David Copperfield begins as if it were going to be a new kind of Dickens novel; then it gradually turns into an old kind of Dickens novel. It is here that many readers of this splendid book have been subtly and secretly irritated. Nicholas Nickleby is all very well; we accept him as something which is required to tie the whole affair together. Nicholas is a sort of string or clothes-
line on which are hung the limp figure of Smike, the jumping-jack of Mr. Squeers and the twin dolls named Cheeryble. If we do not accept Nicholas Nickleby as the hero of the story, at least we accept him as the title of the story. But in David Copperfield Dickens begins something which looks for the moment fresh and startling. In the earlier chapters (the amazing earlier chapters of this book) he does seem to be going to tell the living truth about a living boy and man. It is melancholy to see that sudden fire fading. It is sad to see David Copperfield gradually turning into Nicholas Nickleby. Nicholas Nickleby does not exist at all; he is a quite colourless primary condition of the story. We look through Nicholas Nickleby at the story just as we look through a plain pane of glass at the street. But David Copperfield does begin by existing; it is only gradually that he gives up that exhausting habit.

Any fair critical account of Dickens must always make him out much smaller than he is. For any fair criticism of Dickens must take account of his evident errors, as I have taken account of one of the most evident of them during the last two or three pages. It would not even be loyal to conceal them. But no honest criticism, no criticism, though it spoke with the tongues of men and angels, could ever really talk about Dickens. In all this that I have said I have not been talking about Dickens at all. I say it with equanimity; I say it even with arrogance. I have been talking about the gaps of Dickens. I have been talking about the omissions of Dickens. I have been talking about the slumber of Dickens and the forgetfulness and unconsciousness of Dickens. In one word, I have been talking not about Dickens, but about the absence of Dickens. But when we come to him and his work itself, what is there to be said? What is there to be said about earthquake and the dawn? He has created, especially in this book of David Copperfield, he has created, creatures who cling to us and tyrannise over us, creatures whom we would not forget if we could, creatures whom we could not forget if we would, creatures who are more actual than the man who made them.

This is the excuse for all that indeterminate and rambling and sometimes sentimental criticism of which Dickens, more than any one else, is the victim, of which I fear that I for one have made him the victim in this place. When I was a boy I could not understand why the Dickensians worried so wearily about Dickens, about where he went to school and where he ate his dinners, about how he wore his trousers and when he cut his hair. I used to wonder why they did not write something that I could read about a man like Micawber. But I have come to the conclusion that this almost hysterical worship of the man, combined with a
comparatively feeble criticism on his works, is just and natural. Dickens was a man like ourselves; we can see where he went wrong, and study him without being stunned or getting the sunstroke. But Micawber is not a man; Micawber is the superman. We can only walk round and round him wondering what we shall say. All the critics of Dickens, when all is said and done, have only walked round and round Micawber wondering what they should say. I am myself at this moment walking round and round Micawber wondering what I shall say. And I have not found out yet.
CHRISTMAS STORIES

The power of Dickens is shown even in the scraps of Dickens, just as the virtue of a saint is said to be shown in fragments of his property or rags from his robe. It is with such fragments that we are chiefly concerned in the Christmas Stories. Many of them are fragments in the literal sense; Dickens began them and then allowed some one else to carry them on; they are almost rejected notes. In all the other cases we have been considering the books that he wrote; here we have rather to consider the books that he might have written. And here we find the final evidence and the unconscious stamp of greatness, as we might find it in some broken bust or some rejected moulding in the studio of Michael Angelo.

These sketches or parts of sketches all belong to that period in his later life when he had undertaken the duties of an editor, the very heavy duties of a very popular editor. He was not by any means naturally fitted for that position. He was the best man in the world for founding papers; but many people wished that he could have been buried under the foundations, like the first builder in some pagan and prehistoric pile. He called the Daily News into existence, but when once it existed, it objected to him strongly. It is not easy, and perhaps it is not important, to state truly the cause of this incapacity. It was not in the least what is called the ordinary fault or weakness of the artist. It was not that he was careless; rather it was that he was too conscientious. It was not that he had the irresponsibility of genius; rather it was that he had the irritating responsibility of genius; he wanted everybody to see things as he saw them. But in spite of all this he certainly ran two great popular periodicals—Household Words and All the Year Round—with enormous popular success. And he certainly so far succeeded in throwing himself into the communism of journalism, into the nameless brotherhood of a big paper, that many earnest Dickensians are still engaged in picking out pieces of Dickens from the anonymous pages of Household Words and All the Year Round, and those parts which have been already beyond question picked out and proved are often fragmentary. The genuine writing of Dickens breaks off at a certain point, and the writing of some one else begins. But when the writing of Dickens breaks off, I fancy that we know it.

The singular thing is that some of the best work that Dickens ever did, better than the work in his best novels, can be found in these slight and composite scraps of journalism. For instance, the solemn and self-satisfied account of the duty and dignity of a waiter given in the opening chapter of Somebody’s
Luggage is quite as full and fine as anything done anywhere by its author in the same vein of sumptuous satire. It is as good as the account which Mr. Bumble gives of out-door relief, which, “properly understood, is the parochial safeguard. The great thing is to give the paupers what they don’t want, and then they never come again.” It is as good as Mr. Podsnap’s description of the British Constitution, which was bestowed on him by Providence. None of these celebrated passages is more obviously Dickens at his best than this, the admirable description of “the true principles of waitering,” or the account of how the waiter’s father came back to his mother in broad daylight, “in itself an act of madness on the part of a waiter,” and how he expired repeating continually “two and six is three and four is nine.” That waiter’s explanatory soliloquy might easily have opened an excellent novel, as Martin Chuzzlewit is opened by the clever nonsense about the genealogy of the Chuzzlewits, or as Bleak House is opened by a satiric account of the damp, dim life of a law court. Yet Dickens practically abandoned the scheme of Somebody’s Luggage; he only wrote two sketches out of those obviously intended. He may almost be said to have only written a brilliant introduction to another man’s book.

Yet it is exactly in such broken outbreaks that his greatness appears. If a man has flung away bad ideas he has shown his sense, but if he has flung away good ideas he has shown his genius. He has proved that he actually has that over-pressure of pure creativeness which we see in nature itself, “that of a hundred seeds, she often brings but one to bear.” Dickens had to be Malthusian about his spiritual children. Critics have called Keats and others who died young “the great Might-have-beens of literary history.” Dickens certainly was not merely a great Might-have-been. Dickens, to say the least of him, was a great Was. Yet this fails fully to express the richness of his talent; for the truth is that he was a great Was and also a great Might-have-been. He said what he had to say, and yet not all he had to say. Wild pictures, possible stories, tantalising and attractive trains of thought, perspectives of adventure, crowded so continually upon his mind that at the end there was a vast mass of them left over, ideas that he literally had not the opportunity to develop, tales that he literally had not the time to tell. This is shown clearly in his private notes and letters, which are full of schemes singularly striking and suggestive, schemes which he never carried out. It is indicated even more clearly by these Christmas Stories, collected out of the chaotic opulence of Household Words and All the Year Round. He wrote short stories actually because he had not time to write long stories. He often put into the short story a deep and branching idea which would have done very well
for a long story; many of his long stories, so to speak, broke off short. This is where he differs from most who are called the Might-have-beens of literature. Marlowe and Chatterton failed because of their weakness. Dickens failed because of his force.

Examine for example this case of the waiter in Somebody's Luggage. Dickens obviously knew enough about that waiter to have made him a running spring of joy throughout a whole novel; as the beadle is in Oliver Twist, or the undertaker in Martin Chuzzlewit. Every touch of him tingles with truth, from the vague gallantry with which he asks, “Would’st thou know, fair reader (if of the adorable female sex)” to the official severity with which he takes the chambermaid down, “as many pegs as is desirable for the future comfort of all parties.” If Dickens had developed this character at full length in a book he would have preserved for ever in literature a type of great humour and great value, and a type which may only too soon be disappearing from English history. He would have eternalised the English waiter. He still exists in some sound old taverns and decent country inns, but there is no one left really capable of singing his praises. I know that Mr. Bernard Shaw has done something of the sort in the delightfully whimsical account of William in You Never Can Tell. But nothing will persuade me that Mr. Bernard Shaw can really understand the English waiter. He can never have ordered wine from him for instance. And though the English waiter is by the nature of things solemn about everything, he can never reach the true height and ecstasy of his solemnity except about wine. What the real English waiter would do or say if Mr. Shaw asked him for a vegetarian meal I cannot dare to predict. I rather think that for the first time in his life he would laugh—a horrible sight.

Dickens’s waiter is described by one who is not merely witty, truthful, and observant, like Mr. Bernard Shaw, but one who really knew the atmosphere of inns, one who knew and even liked the smell of beef, and beer, and brandy. Hence there is a richness in Dickens’s portrait which does not exist in Mr. Shaw’s. Mr. Shaw’s waiter is merely a man of tact; Dickens’s is a man of principle. Mr. Shaw’s waiter is an opportunist, just as Mr. Shaw is an opportunist in politics. Dickens’s waiter is ready to stand up seriously for “the true principles of waitering,” just as Dickens was ready to stand up for the true principles of Liberalism. Mr. Shaw’s waiter is agnostic; his motto is “You never can tell.” Dickens’s waiter is a dogmatist; his motto is “You can tell; I will tell you.” And the true old-fashioned English waiter had really this grave and even moral attitude; he was the servant of the customers as a priest is the servant of
the faithful, but scarcely in any less dignified sense. Surely it is not mere patriotic partiality that makes one lament the disappearance of this careful and honourable figure crowded out by meaner men at meaner wages, by the German waiter who has learnt five languages in the course of running away from his own, or the Italian waiter who regards those he serves with a darkling contempt which must certainly be that either of a dynamiter or an exiled prince. The human and hospitable English waiter is vanishing. And Dickens might perhaps have saved him, as he saved Christmas.

I have taken this case of the waiter in Dickens and his equally important counterpart in England as an example of the sincere and genial sketches scattered about these short stories. But there are many others, and one at least demands special mention; I mean Mrs. Lirriper, the London landlady. Not only did Dickens never do anything better in a literary sense, but he never performed more perfectly his main moral function, that of insisting through laughter and flippancy upon the virtue of Christian charity. There has been much broad farce against the lodging-house keeper: he alone could have written broad farce in her favour. It is fashionable to represent the landlady as a tyrant; it is too much forgotten that if she is one of the oppressors she is at least as much one of the oppressed. If she is bad-tempered it is often for the same reasons that make all women bad-tempered (I suppose the exasperating qualities of the other sex); if she is grasping it is often because when a husband makes generosity a vice it is often necessary that a wife should make avarice a virtue. All this Dickens suggested very soundly and in a few strokes in the more remote character of Miss Wozenham. But in Mrs. Lirriper he went further and did not fare worse. In Mrs. Lirriper he suggested quite truly how huge a mass of real good humour, of grand unconscious patience, of unfailing courtesy and constant and difficult benevolence is concealed behind many a lodging-house door and compact in the red-faced person of many a preposterous landlady. Any one could easily excuse the ill-humour of the poor. But great masses of the poor have not even any ill-humour to be excused. Their cheeriness is startling enough to be the foundation of a miracle play; and certainly is startling enough to be the foundation of a romance. Yet I do not know of any romance in which it is expressed except this one.

Of the landlady as of the waiter it may be said that Dickens left in a slight sketch what he might have developed through a long and strong novel. For Dickens had hold of one great truth, the neglect of which has, as it were, truncated and made meagre the work of many brilliant modern novelists.
Modern novelists try to make long novels out of subtle characters. But a subtle character soon comes to an end, because it works in and in to its own centre and dies there. But a simple character goes on for ever in a fresh interest and energy, because it works out and out into the infinite universe. Mr. George Moore in France is not by any means so interesting as Mrs. Lirriper in France; for she is trying to find France and he is only trying to find George Moore. Mrs. Lirriper is the female equivalent of Mr. Pickwick. Unlike Mrs. Bardell (another and lesser landlady) she was fully worthy to be Mrs. Pickwick. For in both cases the essential truth is the same; that original innocence which alone deserves adventures and because it alone can appreciate them. We have had Mr. Pickwick in England and we can imagine him in France. We have had Mrs. Lirriper in France and we can imagine her in Mesopotamia or in heaven. The subtle character in the modern novels we cannot really imagine anywhere except in the suburbs or in Limbo.
BLEAK HOUSE

Bleak House is not certainly Dickens’s best book; but perhaps it is his best novel. Such a distinction is not a mere verbal trick; it has to be remembered rather constantly in connection with his work. This particular story represents the highest point of his intellectual maturity. Maturity does not necessarily mean perfection. It is idle to say that a mature potato is perfect; some people like new potatoes. A mature potato is not perfect, but it is a mature potato; the mind of an intelligent epicure may find it less adapted to his particular purpose; but the mind of an intelligent potato would at once admit it as being, beyond all doubt, a genuine, fully developed specimen of his own particular species. The same is in some degree true even of literature. We can say more or less when a human being has come to his full mental growth, even if we go so far as to wish that he had never come to it. Children are very much nicer than grown-up people; but there is such a thing as growing up. When Dickens wrote Bleak House he had grown up.

Like Napoleon, he had made his army on the march. He had walked in front of his mob of aggressive characters as Napoleon did in front of the half-baked battalions of the Revolution. And, like Napoleon, he won battle after battle before he knew his own plan of campaign; like Napoleon, he put the enemies’ forces to rout before he had put his own force into order. Like Napoleon, he had a victorious army almost before he had an army. After his decisive victories Napoleon began to put his house in order; after his decisive victories Dickens also began to put his house in order. The house, when he had put it in order, was Bleak House.

There was one thing common to nearly all the other Dickens tales, with the possible exception of Dombey and Son. They were all rambling tales; and they all had a perfect right to be. They were all rambling tales for the very simple reason that they were all about rambling people. They were novels of adventure; they were even diaries of travel. Since the hero strayed from place to place, it did not seem unreasonable that the story should stray from subject to subject. This is true of the bulk of the novels up to and including David Copperfield, up to the very brink or threshold of Bleak House. Mr. Pickwick wanders about on the white English roads, always looking for antiquities and always finding novelties. Poor Oliver Twist wanders along the same white roads to seek his fortune and to find his misfortune. Nicholas Nickleby goes walking across England because he
is young and hopeful; Little Nell’s grandfather does the same thing because he is old and silly. There is not much in common between Samuel Pickwick and Oliver Twist; there is not much in common between Oliver Twist and Nicholas Nickleby; there is not much in common (let us hope) between Little Nell’s grandfather and any other human being. But they all have this in common, that they may actually all have trodden in each other’s footprints. They were all wanderers on the face of the same fair English land. Martin Chuzzlewit was only made popular by the travels of the hero in America. When we come to Dombey and Son we find, as I have said, an exception; but even here it is odd to note the fact that it was an exception almost by accident. In Dickens’s original scheme of the story, much greater prominence was to have been given to the travels and trials of Walter Gay; in fact, the young man was to have had a deterioration of character which could only have been adequately detailed in him in his character of a vagabond and a wastrel. The most important point, however, is that when we come to David Copperfield, in some sense the summit of his serious literature, we find the thing still there. The hero still wanders from place to place, his genius is still gipsy. The adventures in the book are less violent and less improbable than those which wait for Pickwick and Nicholas Nickleby; but they are still adventures and not merely events; they are still things met on a road. The facts of the story fall away from David as such facts do fall away from a traveller walking fast. We are more likely perhaps, to pass by Mr. Creakle’s school than to pass by Mrs. Jarley’s wax-works. The only point is that we should pass by both of them. Up to this point in Dickens’s development, his novel, however true, is still picaresque; his hero never really rests anywhere in the story. No one seems really to know where Mr. Pickwick lived. Here he has no abiding city.

When we come to Bleak House, we come to a change in artistic structure. The thing is no longer a string of incidents; it is a cycle of incidents. It returns upon itself; it has recurrent melody and poetic justice; it has artistic constancy and artistic revenge. It preserves theunities; even to some extent it preserves the unities of time and place. The story circles round two or three symbolic places; it does not go straggling irregularly all over England like one of Mr. Pickwick’s coaches. People go from one place to another place; but not from one place to another place on the road to everywhere else. Mr. Jarndyce goes from Bleak House to visit Mr. Boythorn; but he comes back to Bleak House. Miss Clare and Miss Summerson go from Bleak House to visit Mr. and Mrs. Bayham Badger; but they come back to Bleak House. The whole story strays from Bleak House
and plunges into the foul fogs of Chancery and the autumn mists of Chesney Wold; but the whole story comes back to Bleak House. The domestic title is appropriate; it is a permanent address.

Dickens’s openings are almost always good; but the opening of Bleak House is good in a quite new and striking sense. Nothing could be better, for instance, than the first foolish chapter about the genealogy of the Chuzzlewits; but it has nothing to do with the Chuzzlewits. Nothing could be better than the first chapter of David Copperfield; the breezy entrance and banging exit of Miss Betsy Trotwood. But if there is ultimately any crisis or serious subject-matter of David Copperfield, it is the marred marriage with Dora, the final return to Agnes; and all this is in no way involved in the highly-amusing fact that his aunt expected him to be a girl. We may repeat that the matter is picaresque. The story begins in one place and ends in another place, and there is no real connection between the beginning and the end except a biographical connection.

A picaresque novel is only a very eventful biography; but the opening of Bleak House is quite another business altogether. It is admirable in quite another way. The description of the fog in the first chapter of Bleak House is good in itself; but it is not merely good in itself, like the description of the wind in the opening of Martin Chuzzlewit; it is also good in the sense that Maeterlinck is good; it is what the modern people call an atmosphere. Dickens begins in the Chancery fog because he means to end in the Chancery fog. He did not begin in the Chuzzlewit wind because he meant to end in it; he began in it because it was a good beginning. This is perhaps the best short way of stating the peculiarity of the position of Bleak House. In this Bleak House beginning we have the feeling that it is not only a beginning; we have the feeling that the author sees the conclusion and the whole. The beginning is alpha and omega: the beginning and the end. He means that all the characters and all the events shall be read through the smoky colours of that sinister and unnatural vapour.

The same is true throughout the whole tale; the whole tale is symbolic and crowded with symbols. Miss Flite is a funny character, like Miss La Creevy, but Miss La Creevy means only Miss La Creevy. Miss Flite means Chancery. The rag-and-bone man, Krook, is a powerful grotesque; so is Quilp; but in the story Quilp only means Quilp; Krook means Chancery. Rick Carstone is a kind and tragic figure, like Sidney Carton; but Sidney Carton only means the tragedy of human nature; Rick Carstone means the tragedy of Chancery. Little Jo dies pathetically like Little Paul; but for the death of Little Paul we can only blame Dickens; for the death of Little Jo we blame Chancery. Thus the artistic unity of
the book, compared to all the author’s earlier novels, is satisfying, almost suffocating. There is the motif, and again the motif. Almost everything is calculated to assert and re-assert the savage morality of Dickens’s protest against a particular social evil. The whole theme is that which another Englishman as jovial as Dickens defined shortly and finally as the law’s delay. The fog of the first chapter never lifts.

In this twilight he traced wonderful shapes. Those people who fancy that Dickens was a mere clown; that he could not describe anything delicate or deadly in the human character,—those who fancy this are mostly people whose position is explicable in many easy ways. The vast majority of the fastidious critics have, in the quite strict and solid sense of the words, never read Dickens at all; hence their opposition is due to and inspired by a hearty innocence which will certainly make them enthusiastic Dickensians if they ever, by some accident, happen to read him. In other cases it is due to a certain habit of reading books under the eye of a conventional critic, admiring what we expect to admire, regretting what we are told to regret, waiting for Mr. Bumble to admire him, waiting for Little Nell to despise her. Yet again, of course, it is sometimes due to that basest of all artistic indulgences (certainly far baser than the pleasure of absinthe or the pleasure of opium), the pleasure of appreciating works of art which ordinary men cannot appreciate. Surely the vilest point of human vanity is exactly that; to ask to be admired for admiring what your admirers do not admire. But whatever be the reason, whether rude or subtle, which has prevented any particular man from personally admiring Dickens, there is in connection with a book like Bleak House something that may be called a solid and impressive challenge. Let anyone who thinks that Dickens could not describe the semi-tones and the abrupt instincts of real human nature simply take the trouble to read the stretch of chapters which detail the way in which Carstone’s mind grew gradually morbid about his chances in Chancery. Let him note the manner in which the mere masculinity of Carstone is caught; how as he grows more mad he grows more logical, nay, more rational. Good women who love him come to him, and point out the fact that Jarndyce is a good man, a fact to them solid like an object of the senses. In answer he asks them to understand his position. He does not say this; he does not say that. He only urges that Jarndyce may have become cynical in the affair in the same sense that he himself may have become cynical in the affair. He is always a man; that is to say, he is always unanswerable, always wrong. The passionate certainty of the woman beats itself like battering waves against the thin smooth wall of his insane consistency. I
repeat: let any one who thinks that Dickens was a gross and indelicate artist read that part of the book. If Dickens had been the clumsy journalist that such people represent, he never could have written such an episode at all. A clumsy journalist would have made Rick Carstone in his mad career cast off Esther and Ada and the others. The great artist knew better. He knew that even if all the good in a man is dying, the last sense that dies is the sense that knows a good woman from a bad; it is like the scent of a noble hound.

The clumsy journalist would have made Rick Carstone turn on John Jarndyce with an explosion of hatred, as of one who had made an exposure—who had found out what low people call “a false friend” in what they call “his true colours.” The great artist knew better; he knew that a good man going wrong tries to salve his soul to the last with the sense of generosity and intellectual justice. He will try to love his enemy if only out of mere love of himself. As the wolf dies fighting, the good man gone wrong dies arguing. This is what constitutes the true and real tragedy of Richard Carstone. It is strictly the one and only great tragedy that Dickens wrote. It is like the tragedy of Hamlet. The others are not tragedies because they deal almost with dead men. The tragedy of old Dorrit is merely the sad spectacle of a dotard dragged about Europe in his last childhood. The tragedy of Steerforth is only that of one who dies suddenly; the tragedy of old Dombey only that of one who was dead all the time. But Rick is a real tragedy, for he is still alive when the quicksand sucks him down.

It is impossible to avoid putting in the first place this pall of smoke which Dickens has deliberately spread over the story. It is quite true that the country underneath is clear enough to contain any number of unconscious comedians or of merry monsters such as he was in the custom of introducing into the carnival of his tales. But he meant us to take the smoky atmosphere seriously. Charles Dickens, who was, like all men who are really funny about funny things, horribly serious about serious things, certainly meant us to read this story in terms of his protest and his insurrection against the emptiness and arrogance of law, against the folly and the pride of judges. Everything else that there is in this story entered into it through the unconscious or accidental energy of his genius, which broke in at every gap. But it was the tragedy of Richard Carstone that he meant, not the comedy of Harold Skimpole. He could not help being amusing; but he meant to be depressing.

Another case might be taken as testing the greater seriousness of this tale. The passages about Mrs. Jellyby and her philanthropic schemes show Dickens at his best in his old and more familiar satiric manner. But in the midst of the Jellyby
pandemonium, which is in itself described with the same abandon and irrelevance as the boarding-house of Mrs. Todgers or the travelling theatre of Mr. Crummles, the elder Dickens introduced another piece of pure truth and even tenderness. I mean the account of Caddy Jellyby. If Carstone is a truly masculine study of how a man goes wrong, Caddy is a perfectly feminine study of how a girl goes right. Nowhere else perhaps in fiction, and certainly nowhere else in Dickens, is the mere female paradox so well epitomised, the unjust use of words covering so much capacity for a justice of ultimate estimate; the seeming irresponsibility in language concealing such a fixed and pitiless sense of responsibility about things; the air of being always at daggers-drawn with her own kindred, yet the confession of incurable kinship implied in pride and shame; and, above all, that thirst for order and beauty as for something physical; that strange female power of hating ugliness and waste as good men can only hate sin and bad men virtue. Every touch in her is true, from her first bewildering outbursts of hating people because she likes them, down to the sudden quietude and good sense which announces that she has slipped into her natural place as a woman. Miss Clare is a figure-head, Miss Summerson in some ways a failure; but Miss Caddy Jellyby is by far the greatest, the most human, and the most really dignified of all the heroines of Dickens.

With one or two exceptions, all the effects in this story are of this somewhat quieter kind, though none of them are so subtly successful as Rick Carstone and Caddy. Harold Skimpole begins as a sketch drawn with a pencil almost as airy and fanciful as his own. The humour of the earlier scenes is delightful—the scenes in which Skimpole looks on at other people paying his debts with the air of a kindly outsider, and suggests in formless legal phraseology that they might “sign something” or “make over something,” or the scene in which he tries to explain the advantages of accepting everything to the apoplectic Mr. Boythorn. But it was one of the defects of Dickens as a novelist that his characters always became coarser and clumsier as they passed through the practical events of a story, and this would necessarily be so with Skimpole, whose position was conceivable even to himself only on the assumption that he was a mere spectator of life. Poor Skimpole only asked to be kept out of the business of this world, and Dickens ought to have kept him out of the business of Bleak House. By the end of the tale he has brought Skimpole to doing acts of mere low villainy. This altogether spoils the ironical daintiness of the original notion. Skimpole was meant to end with a note of interrogation. As it is, he ends with a big, black, unmistakable blot. Speaking purely artistically, we may say that this is as great a
collapse or vulgarisation as if Richard Carstone had turned into a common blackguard and wife-beater, or Caddy Jellyby into a comic and illiterate landlady. Upon the whole it may, I think, be said that the character of Skimpole is rather a piece of brilliant moralising than of pure observation or creation. Dickens had a singularly just mind. He was wild in his caricatures, but very sane in his impressions. Many of his books were devoted, and this book is partly devoted, to a denunciation of aristocracy–of the idle class that lives easily upon the toil of nations. But he was fairer than many modern revolutionists, and he insisted on satirising also those who prey on society not in the name of rank or law, but in the name of intellect and beauty. Sir Leicester Dedlock and Mr. Harold Skimpole are alike in accepting with a royal unconsciousness the anomaly and evil of their position. But the idleness and insolence of the aristocrat is human and humble compared to the idleness and insolence of the artist.

With the exception of a few fine freaks, such as Turveydrop and Chadband, all the figures in this book are touched more delicately, even more faintly, than is common with Dickens. But if the figures are touched more faintly, it is partly because they are figures in a fog–the fog of Chancery. Dickens meant that twilight to be oppressive; for it was the symbol of oppression. Deliberately he did not dispel the darkness at the end of this book, as he does dispel it at the end of most of his books. Pickwick gets out of the Fleet Prison; Carstone never gets out of Chancery but by death. This tyranny, Dickens said, shall not be lifted by the light subterfuge of a fiction. This tyranny shall never be lifted till all Englishmen lift it together.
There are works of great authors manifestly inferior to their typical work which are yet necessary to their fame and their figure in the world. It is not difficult to recall examples of them. No one, for instance, would talk of Scott’s Tales of a Grandfather as indicating the power that produced Kenilworth and Guy Mannering. Nevertheless, without this chance minor compilation we should not really have the key of Scott. Without this one insignificant book we should not see his significance. For the truth was that Scott loved history more than romance, because he was so constituted as to find it more romantic than romance. He preferred the deeds of Wallace and Douglas to those of Marmion and Ivanhoe. Therefore his garrulous gossip of old times, his rambles in dead centuries, give us the real material and impulse of all his work; they represent the quarry in which he dug and the food on which he fed. Almost alone among novelists Scott actually preferred those parts of his historical novels which he had not invented himself. He exults when he can boast in an eager note that he has stolen some saying from history. Thus The Tales of a Grandfather, though small, is in some sense the frame of all the Waverley novels. We realise that all Scott’s novels are tales of a grandfather.

What has been said here about Scott might be said in a less degree about Thackeray’s Four Georges. Though standing higher among his works than The Tales of a Grandfather among Scott’s they are not his works of genius; yet they seem in some way to surround, supplement, and explain such works. Without the Four Georges we should know less of the link that bound Thackeray to the beginning and to the end of the eighteenth century; thence we should have known less of Colonel Esmond and also less of Lord Steyne. To these two examples I have given of the slight historical experiments of two novelists a third has to be added. The third great master of English fiction whose glory fills the nineteenth century also produced a small experiment in the popularisation of history. It is separated from the other two partly by a great difference of merit but partly also by an utter difference of tone and outlook. We seem to hear it suddenly as in the first words spoken by a new voice, a voice gay, colloquial, and impatient. Scott and Thackeray were tenderly attached to the past; Dickens (in his consciousness at any rate) was impatient with everything, but especially impatient with the past.

A collection of the works of Dickens would be incomplete in an essential as
well as a literal sense without his Child’s History of England. It may not be important as a contribution to history, but it is important as a contribution to biography; as a contribution to the character and the career of the man who wrote it, a typical man of his time. That he had made no personal historical researches, that he had no special historical learning, that he had not had, in truth, even anything that could be called a good education, all this only accentuates not the merit but at least the importance of the book. For here we may read in plain popular language, written by a man whose genius for popular exposition has never been surpassed among men, a brief account of the origin and meaning of England as it seemed to the average Englishman of that age. When subtler views of our history, some more false and some more true than his, have become popular, or at least well known, when in the near future Carlylean or Catholic or Marxian views of history have spread themselves among the reading public, this book will always remain as a bright and brisk summary of the cock-sure, healthy-minded, essentially manly and essentially ungentlemanly view of history which characterised the Radicals of that particular Radical era. The history tells us nothing about the periods that it talks about; but it tells us a great deal about the period that it does not talk about; the period in which it was written. It is in no sense a history of England from the Roman invasion; but it is certainly one of the documents which will contribute to a history of England in the nineteenth century.

Of the actual nature of its philosophical and technical limitations it is, I suppose, unnecessary to speak. They all resolve themselves into one fault common in the modern world, and certainly characteristic of historians much more learned and pretentious than Dickens. That fault consists simply in ignoring or underrating the variety of strange evils and unique dangers in the world. The Radicals of the nineteenth century were engaged, and most righteously engaged, in dealing with one particular problem of human civilisation; they were shifting and apportioning more equally a load of custom that had really become unmeaning, often accidental, and nearly always unfair. Thus, for instance, a fierce and fighting penal code, which had been perfectly natural when the robbers were as strong as the Government, had become in more ordered times nothing but a base and bloody habit. Thus again Church powers and dues, which had been human when every man felt the Church as the best part of himself, were mere mean privileges when the nation was full of sects and full of freethinkers. This clearing away of external symbols that no longer symbolised anything was an honourable and needful work; but it was so difficult
that to the men engaged in it it blocked up the perspective and filled the sky, so
that they slid into a very natural mental mistake which coloured all their views of
history. They supposed that this particular problem on which they were engaged
was the one problem upon which all mankind had always been engaged. They
got it into their heads that breaking away from a dead past was the perpetual
process of humanity. The truth is obviously that humanity has found itself in
many difficulties very different from that. Sometimes the best business of an age
is to resist some alien invasion; sometimes to preach practical self-control in a
world too self-indulgent and diffused; sometimes to prevent the growth in the
State of great new private enterprises that would poison or oppress it. Above all
it may sometimes happen that the highest task of a thinking citizen may be to do
the exact opposite of the work which the Radicals had to do. It may be his
highest duty to cling on to every scrap of the past that he can find, if he feels that
the ground is giving way beneath him and sinking into mere savagery and
forgetfulness of all human culture. This was exactly the position of all thinking
men in what we call the dark ages, say from the sixth to the tenth century. The
cheap progressive view of history can never make head or tail of that epoch; it
was an epoch upside down. We think of the old things as barbaric and the new
things as enlightened. In that age all the enlightened things were old; all the
barbaric and brutally ignorant things were new and up to date. Republicanism
was a fading legend; despotism was a new and successful experiment.
Christianity was not only better than the clans that rebelled against it;
Christianity was more rationalistic than they were. When men looked back they
saw progress and reason; when they looked forward they saw shapeless tradition
and tribal terror. Touching such an age it is obvious that all our modern terms
describing reform or conservation are foolish and beside the mark. The
Conservative was then the only possible reformer. If a man did not strengthen
the remains of Roman order and the root of Roman Christianity, he was simply
helping the world to roll downhill into ruin and idiocy. Remember all these
evident historical truths and then turn to the account given by Charles Dickens of
that great man, St. Dunstan. It is not that the pert cockney tone of the abuse is
irritating to the nerves: it is that he has got the whole hang of the thing wrong.
His head is full of the nineteenth-century situation; that a priest imposing
discipline is a person somehow blocking the way to equality and light. Whereas
the point about such a man as Dunstan was that nobody in the place except he
cared a button about equality or light: and that he was defending what was left of
them against the young and growing power of darkness and division and caste.
Nevertheless the case against such books as this is commonly stated wrong. The fault of Dickens is not (as is often said) that he “applies the same moral standard to all ages.” Every sane man must do that: a moral standard must remain the same or it is not a moral standard. If we call St. Anthony of Padua a good man, we must mean what we mean when we call Huxley a good man, or else there is no sense in using the word “good.” The fault of the Dickens school of popular history lies, not in the application of a plain rule of right and wrong to all circumstances, but in ignorance of the circumstances to which it was applied. It is not that they wrongly enforce the fixed principle that life should be saved; it is that they take a fire-engine to a shipwreck and a lifeboat to a house on fire. The business of a good man in Dickens’s time was to bring justice up to date. The business of a good man in Dunstan’s time was to toil to ensure the survival of any justice at all.

And Dickens, through being a living and fighting man of his own time, kept the health of his own heart, and so saw many truths with a single eye: truths that were spoilt for subtler eyes. He was much more really right than Carlyle; immeasurably more right than Froude. He was more right precisely because he applied plain human morals to all facts as he saw them. Carlyle really had a vague idea that in coarse and cruel times it was right to be coarse and cruel; that tyranny was excusable in the twelfth century: as if the twelfth century did not denounce tyrants as much or more than any other. Carlyle, in fact, fancied that Rufus was the right sort of man; a view which was not only not shared by Anselm, but was probably not shared by Rufus. In this connection, or rather in connection with the other case of Froude, it is worth while to take another figure from Dickens’s history, which illustrates the other and better side of the facile and popular method. Sheer ignorance of the environment made him wrong about Dunstan. But sheer instinct and good moral tradition made him right, for instance, about Henry VIII.; right where Froude is wildly wrong. Dickens’s imagination could not re-picture an age where learning and liberty were dying rather than being born: but Henry VIII. lived in a time of expanding knowledge and unrest; a time therefore somewhat like the Victorian. And Dickens in his childish but robust way does perceive the main point about him: that he was a wicked man. He misses all the fine shades, of course; he makes him every kind of wicked man at once. He leaves out the serious interests of the man: his strange but real concern for theology; his love of certain legal and moral forms; his half-unconscious patriotism. But he sees the solid bulk of definite badness simply because it was there; and Froude cannot see it at all; because Froude followed
Carlyle and played tricks with the eternal conscience. Henry VIII. was “a blot of blood and grease upon the history of England.” For he was the embodiment of the Devil in the Renascence, that wild worship of mere pleasure and scorn, which with its pictures and its palaces has enriched and ruined the world.

The time will soon come when the mere common-sense of Dickens, like the mere common-sense of Macaulay (though his was poisoned by learning and Whig politics), will appear to give a plainer and therefore truer picture of the mass of history than the mystical perversity of a man of genius writing only out of his own temperament, like Carlyle or Taine. If a man has a new theory of ethics there is one thing he must not be allowed to do. Let him give laws on Sinai, let him dictate a Bible, let him fill the world with cathedrals if he can. But he must not be allowed to write a history of England; or a history of any country. All history was conducted on ordinary morality: with his extraordinary morality he is certain to read it all askew. Thus Carlyle tries to write of the Middle Ages with a bias against humility and mercy; that is, with a bias against the whole theoretic morality of the Middle Ages. The result is that he turns into a mere turmoil of arrogant German savages what was really the most complete and logical, if not the highest, of human civilisations. Historically speaking, it is better to be Dickens than to be this; better to be ignorant, provincial, slap-dash, seeing only the passing moment, but in that moment, to be true to eternal things.

It must be remembered, of course, that Dickens deliberately offers this only as a “child’s” history of England. That is, he only professes to be able to teach history as any father of a little boy of five professes to be able to teach him history. And although the history of England would certainly be taught very differently (as regards the actual criticism of events and men) in a family with a wider culture or with another religion, the general method would be the same. For the general method is quite right. This black-and-white history of heroes and villains; this history full of pugnacious ethics and of nothing else, is the right kind of history for children. I have often wondered how the scientific Marxians and the believers in “the materialist view of history” will ever manage to teach their dreary economic generalisations to children: but I suppose they will have no children. Dickens’s history will always be popular with the young; almost as popular as Dickens’s novels, and for the same reason: because it is full of moralising. Science and art without morality are not dangerous in the sense commonly supposed. They are not dangerous like a fire, but dangerous like a fog. A fire is dangerous in its brightness; a fog in its dulness; and thought without morals is merely dull, like a fog. The fog seems to be creeping up the
street; putting out lamp after lamp. But this cockney lamp-post which the children love is still crowned with its flame; and when the fathers have forgotten ethics, their babies will turn and teach them.
HARD TIMES

I have heard that in some debating clubs there is a rule that the members may discuss anything except religion and politics. I cannot imagine what they do discuss; but it is quite evident that they have ruled out the only two subjects which are either important or amusing. The thing is a part of a certain modern tendency to avoid things because they lead to warmth; whereas, obviously, we ought, even in a social sense, to seek those things specially. The warmth of the discussion is as much a part of hospitality as the warmth of the fire. And it is singularly suggestive that in English literature the two things have died together. The very people who would blame Dickens for his sentimental hospitality are the very people who would also blame him for his narrow political conviction. The very people who would mock him for his narrow radicalism are those who would mock him for his broad fireside. Real conviction and real charity are much nearer than people suppose. Dickens was capable of loving all men; but he refused to love all opinions. The modern humanitarian can love all opinions, but he cannot love all men; he seems, sometimes, in the ecstasy of his humanitarianism, even to hate them all. He can love all opinions, including the opinion that men are unlovable.

In feeling Dickens as a lover we must never forget him as a fighter, and a fighter for a creed; but indeed there is no other kind of fighter. The geniality which he spread over all his creations was geniality spread from one centre, from one flaming peak. He was willing to excuse Mr. Micawber for being extravagant; but Dickens and Dickens’s doctrine were strictly to decide how far he was to be excused. He was willing to like Mr. Twemlow in spite of his snobbishness, but Dickens and Dickens’s doctrine were alone to be judges of how far he was snobbish. There was never a more didactic writer: hence there was never one more amusing. He had no mean modern notion of keeping the moral doubtful. He would have regarded this as a mere piece of slovenliness, like leaving the last page illegible.

Everywhere in Dickens’s work these angles of his absolute opinion stood up out of the confusion of his general kindness, just as sharp and splintered peaks stand up out of the soft confusion of the forests. Dickens is always generous, he is generally kind-hearted, he is often sentimental, he is sometimes intolerably maudlin; but you never know when you will not come upon one of the convictions of Dickens; and when you do come upon it you do know it. It is as
hard and as high as any precipice or peak of the mountains. The highest and hardest of these peaks is Hard Times.

It is here more than anywhere else that the sternness of Dickens emerges as separate from his softness; it is here, most obviously, so to speak, that his bones stick out. There are indeed many other books of his which are written better and written in a sadder tone. Great Expectations is melancholy in a sense; but it is doubtful of everything, even of its own melancholy. The Tale of Two Cities is a great tragedy, but it is still a sentimental tragedy. It is a great drama, but it is still a melodrama. But this tale of Hard Times is in some way harsher than all these. For it is the expression of a righteous indignation which cannot condescend to humour and which cannot even condescend to pathos. Twenty times we have taken Dickens’s hand and it has been sometimes hot with revelry and sometimes weak with weariness; but this time we start a little, for it is inhumanly cold; and then we realise that we have touched his gauntlet of steel.

One cannot express the real value of this book without being irrelevant. It is true that one cannot express the real value of anything without being irrelevant. If we take a thing frivolously we can take it separately, but the moment we take a thing seriously, if it were only an old umbrella, it is obvious that that umbrella opens above us into the immensity of the whole universe. But there are rather particular reasons why the value of the book called Hard Times should be referred back to great historic and theoretic matters with which it may appear superficially to have little or nothing to do. The chief reason can perhaps be stated thus–that English politics had for more than a hundred years been getting into more and more of a hopeless tangle (a tangle which, of course, has since become even worse) and that Dickens did in some extraordinary way see what was wrong, even if he did not see what was right.

The Liberalism which Dickens and nearly all of his contemporaries professed had begun in the American and the French Revolutions. Almost all modern English criticism upon those revolutions has been vitiated by the assumption that those revolutions burst upon a world which was unprepared for their ideas—a world ignorant of the possibility of such ideas. Somewhat the same mistake is made by those who suggest that Christianity was adopted by a world incapable of criticising it; whereas obviously it was adopted by a world that was tired of criticising everything. The vital mistake that is made about the French Revolution is merely this—that everyone talks about it as the introduction of a new idea. It was not the introduction of a new idea; there are no new ideas. Or if there are new ideas, they would not cause the least irritation if they were
introduced into political society; because the world having never got used to them there would be no mass of men ready to fight for them at a moment’s notice. That which was irritating about the French Revolution was this— that it was not the introduction of a new ideal, but the practical fulfilment of an old one. From the time of the first fairy tales men had always believed ideally in equality; they had always thought that something ought to be done, if anything could be done, to redress the balance between Cinderella and the ugly sisters. The irritating thing about the French was not that they said this ought to be done; everybody said that. The irritating thing about the French was that they did it. They proposed to carry out into a positive scheme what had been the vision of humanity; and humanity was naturally annoyed. The kings of Europe did not make war upon the Revolution because it was a blasphemy, but because it was a copy-book maxim which had been just too accurately copied. It was a platitude which they had always held in theory unexpectedly put into practice. The tyrants did not hate democracy because it was a paradox; they hated it because it was a truism which seemed in some danger of coming true.

Now it happens to be hugely important to have this right view of the Revolution in considering its political effects upon England. For the English, being a deeply and indeed excessively romantic people, could never be quite content with this quality of cold and bald obviousness about the republican formula. The republican formula was merely this—that the State must consist of its citizens ruling equally, however unequally they may do anything else. In their capacity of members of the State they are all equally interested in its preservation. But the English soon began to be romantically restless about this eternal truism; they were perpetually trying to turn it into something else, into something more picturesque—progress perhaps, or anarchy. At last they turned it into the highly exciting and highly unsound system of politics, which was known as the Manchester School, and which was expressed with a sort of logical flightiness, more excusable in literature, by Mr. Herbert Spencer. Of course Danton or Washington or any of the original republicans would have thought these people were mad. They would never have admitted for a moment that the State must not interfere with commerce or competition; they would merely have insisted that if the State did interfere, it must really be the State—that is, the whole people. But the distance between the common sense of Danton and the mere ecstasy of Herbert Spencer marks the English way of colouring and altering the revolutionary idea. The English people as a body went blind, as the saying is, for interpreting democracy entirely in terms of liberty. They said in
substance that if they had more and more liberty it did not matter whether they had any equality or any fraternity. But this was violating the sacred trinity of true politics; they confounded the persons and they divided the substance.

Now the really odd thing about England in the nineteenth century is this—that there was one Englishman who happened to keep his head. The men who lost their heads lost highly scientific and philosophical heads; they were great cosmic systematisers like Spencer, great social philosophers like Bentham, great practical politicians like Bright, great political economists like Mill. The man who kept his head kept a head full of fantastic nonsense; he was a writer of rowdy farces, a demagogue of fiction, a man without education in any serious sense whatever, a man whose whole business was to turn ordinary cockneys into extraordinary caricatures. Yet when all these other children of the revolution went wrong he, by a mystical something in his bones, went right. He knew nothing of the Revolution; yet he struck the note of it. He returned to the original sentimental commonplace upon which it is forever founded, as the Church is founded on a rock. In an England gone mad about a minor theory he reasserted the original idea—the idea that no one in the State must be too weak to influence the State.

This man was Dickens. He did this work much more genuinely than it was done by Carlyle or Ruskin; for they were simply Tories making out a romantic case for the return of Toryism. But Dickens was a real Liberal demanding the return of real Liberalism. Dickens was there to remind people that England had rubbed out two words of the revolutionary motto, had left only Liberty and destroyed Equality and Fraternity. In this book, Hard Times, he specially champions equality. In all his books he champions fraternity.

The atmosphere of this book and what it stands for can be very adequately conveyed in the note on the book by Lord Macaulay, who may stand as a very good example of the spirit of England in those years of eager emancipation and expanding wealth—the years in which Liberalism was turned from an omnipotent truth to a weak scientific system. Macaulay’s private comment on Hard Times runs, “One or two passages of exquisite pathos and the rest sullen Socialism.” That is not an unfair and certainly not a specially hostile criticism, but it exactly shows how the book struck those people who were mad on political liberty and dead about everything else. Macaulay mistook for a new formula called Socialism what was, in truth, only the old formula called political democracy. He and his Whigs had so thoroughly mauled and modified the original idea of Rousseau or Jefferson that when they saw it again they positively thought that it
was something quite new and eccentric. But the truth was that Dickens was not a Socialist, but an unspoilt Liberal; he was not sullen; nay, rather, he had remained strangely hopeful. They called him a sullen Socialist only to disguise their astonishment at finding still loose about the London streets a happy republican.

Dickens is the one living link between the old kindness and the new, between the good will of the past and the good works of the future. He links May Day with Bank Holiday, and he does it almost alone. All the men around him, great and good as they were, were in comparison puritanical, and never so puritanical as when they were also atheistic. He is a sort of solitary pipe down which pours to the twentieth century the original river of Merry England. And although this Hard Times is, as its name implies, the hardest of his works, although there is less in it perhaps than in any of the others of the abandon and the buffoonery of Dickens, this only emphasises the more clearly the fact that he stood almost alone for a more humane and hilarious view of democracy. None of his great and much more highly-educated contemporaries could help him in this. Carlyle was as gloomy on the one side as Herbert Spencer on the other. He protested against the commercial oppression simply and solely because it was not only an oppression but a depression. And this protest of his was made specially in the case of the book before us. It may be bitter, but it was a protest against bitterness. It may be dark, but it is the darkness of the subject and not of the author. He is by his own account dealing with hard times, but not with a hard eternity, not with a hard philosophy of the universe. Nevertheless, this is the one place in his work where he does not make us remember human happiness by example as well as by precept. This is, as I have said, not the saddest, but certainly the harshest of his stories. It is perhaps the only place where Dickens, in defending happiness, for a moment forgets to be happy.

He describes Bounderby and Gradgrind with a degree of grimness and sombre hatred very different from the half affectionate derision which he directed against the old tyrants or humbugs of the earlier nineteenth century—the pompous Dedlock or the fatuous Nupkins, the grotesque Bumble or the inane Tigg. In those old books his very abuse was benignant; in Hard Times even his sympathy is hard. And the reason is again to be found in the political facts of the century. Dickens could be half genial with the older generation of oppressors because it was a dying generation. It was evident, or at least it seemed evident then, that Nupkins could not go on much longer making up the law of England to suit himself; that Sir Leicester Dedlock could not go on much longer being kind to his tenants as if they were dogs and cats. And some of these evils the nineteenth
century did really eliminate or improve. For the first half of the century Dickens
and all his friends were justified in feeling that the chains were falling from
mankind. At any rate, the chains did fall from Mr. Rouncewell the Iron-master.
And when they fell from him he picked them up and put them upon the poor.
LITTLE DORRIT

Little Dorrit stands in Dickens’s life chiefly as a signal of how far he went down the road of realism, of sadness, and of what is called modernity. True, it was by no means the best of the books of his later period; some even think it the worst. Great Expectations is certainly the best of the later novels; some even think it the best of all the novels. Nor is it the novel most concerned with strictly recent problems; that title must be given to Hard Times. Nor again is it the most finely finished or well constructed of the later books; that claim can be probably made for Edwin Drood. By a queer verbal paradox the most carefully finished of his later tales is the tale that is not finished at all. In form, indeed, the book bears a superficial resemblance to those earlier works by which the young Dickens had set the whole world laughing long ago. Much of the story refers to a remote time early in the nineteenth century; much of it was actually recalled and copied from the life of Dickens’s father in the old Marshalsea prison. Also the narrative has something of the form, or rather absence of form, which belonged to Nicholas Nickleby or Martin Chuzzlewit. It has something of the old air of being a string of disconnected adventures, like a boy’s book about bears and Indians. The Dorrits go wandering for no particular reason on the Continent of Europe, just as young Martin Chuzzlewit went wandering for no particular reason on the continent of America. The story of Little Dorrit stops and lingers at the doors of the Circumlocution Office much in the same way that the story of Samuel Pickwick stops and lingers in the political excitement of Eatanswill. The villain, Blandois, is a very stagey villain indeed; quite as stagey as Ralph Nickleby or the mysterious Monk. The secret of the dark house of Clennam is a very silly secret; quite as silly as the secret of Ralph Nickleby or the secret of Monk. Yet all these external similarities between Little Dorrit and the earliest books, all this loose, melodramatic quality, only serves to make more obvious and startling the fact that some change has come over the soul of Dickens. Hard Times is harsh; but then Hard Times is a social pamphlet; perhaps it is only harsh as a social pamphlet must be harsh. Bleak House is a little sombre; but then Bleak House is almost a detective story; perhaps it is only sombre in the sense that a detective story must be sombre. A Tale of Two Cities is a tragedy; but then A Tale of Two Cities is a tale of the French Revolution; perhaps it is only a tragedy because the French Revolution was a tragedy. The Mystery of Edwin Drood is dark; but then the mystery of anybody must be dark. In all these other cases of the later books
an artistic reason can be given—a reason of theme or of construction for the slight sadness that seems to cling to them. But exactly because Little Dorrit is a mere Dickens novel, it shows that something must somehow have happened to Dickens himself. Even in resuming his old liberty, he cannot resume his old hilarity. He can re-create the anarchy, but not the revelry.

It so happens that this strange difference between the new and the old mode of Dickens can be symbolised and stated in one separate and simple contrast. Dickens’s father had been a prisoner in a debtors’ prison, and Dickens’s works contain two pictures partly suggested by the personality of that prisoner. Mr. Micawber is one picture of him. Mr. Dorrit is another. This truth is almost incredible, but it is the truth. The joyful Micawber, whose very despair was exultant, and the desolate Dorrit, whose very pride was pitiful, were the same man. The valiant Micawber and the nervous, shaking Dorrit were the same man. The defiant Micawber and the snobbish, essentially obsequious Dorrit were the same man. I do not mean of course that either of the pictures was an exact copy of anybody. The whole Dickens genius consisted of taking hints and turning them into human beings. As he took twenty real persons and turned them into one fictitious person, so he took one real person and turned him into twenty fictitious persons. This quality would suggest one character, that quality would suggest another. But in this case, at any rate, he did take one real person and turn him into two. And what is more, he turned him into two persons who seem to be quite opposite persons. To ordinary readers of Dickens, to say that Micawber and Dorrit had in any sense the same original, will appear unexpected and wild. No conceivable connection between the two would ever have occurred to anybody who had read Dickens with simple and superficial enjoyment, as all good literature ought to be read. It will seem to them just as silly as saying that the Fat Boy and Mr. Alfred Jingle were both copied from the same character. It will seem as insane as saying that the character of Smike and the character of Major Bagstock were both copied from Dickens’s father. Yet it is an unquestionable historical fact that Micawber and Dorrit were both copied from Dickens’s father, in the only sense that any figures in good literature are ever copied from anything or anybody. Dickens did get the main idea of Micawber from his father; and that idea is that a poor man is not conquered by the world. And Dickens did get the main idea of Dorrit from his father; and that idea is that a poor man may be conquered by the world. I shall take the opportunity of discussing, in a moment, which of these ideas is true. Doubtless old John Dickens included both the gay and the sad moral; most men do. My only
purpose here is to point out that Dickens drew the gay moral in 1849, and the sad moral in 1857.

There must have been some real sadness at this time creeping like a cloud over Dickens himself. It is nothing that a man dwells on the darkness of dark things; all healthy men do that. It is when he dwells on the darkness of bright things that we have reason to fear some disease of the emotions. There must really have been some depression when a man can only see the sad side of flowers or the sad side of holidays or the sad side of wine. And there must be some depression of an uncommonly dark and genuine character when a man has reached such a point that he can see only the sad side of Mr. Wilkins Micawber.

Yet this is in reality what had happened to Dickens about this time. Staring at Wilkins Micawber he could see only the weakness and the tragedy that was made possible by his indifference, his indulgence, and his bravado. He had already indeed been slightly moved towards this study of the feebleness and ruin of the old epicurean type with which he had once sympathised, the type of Bob Sawyer or Dick Swiveller. He had already attacked the evil of it in Bleak House in the character of Harold Skimpole, with its essentially cowardly carelessness and its highly selfish communism. Nevertheless, as I have said before, it must have been no small degree of actual melancholia which led Dickens to look for a lesson of disaster and slavery in the very same career from which he had once taught lessons of continual recuperation and a kind of fantastic freedom. There must have been at this time some melancholy behind the writings. There must have existed on this earth at the time that portent and paradox—a somewhat depressed Dickens.

Perhaps it was a reminiscence of that metaphorical proverb which tells us that “truth lies at the bottom of a well.” Perhaps these people thought that the only way to find truth in the well was to drown oneself. But on whatever thin theoretic basis, the type and period of George Gissing did certainly consider that Dickens, so far as he went, was all the worse for the optimism of the story of Micawber; hence it is not unnatural that they should think him all the better for the comparative pessimism of the story of Little Dorrit. The very things in the tale that would naturally displease the ordinary admirers of Dickens, are the things which would naturally please a man like George Gissing. There are many of these things, but one of them emerges pre-eminent and unmistakable. This is the fact that when all is said and done the main business of the story of Little Dorrit is to describe the victory of circumstances over a soul. The circumstances are the financial ruin and long imprisonment of Edward Dorrit; the soul is
Edward Dorrit himself. Let it be granted that the circumstances are exceptional and oppressive, are denounced as exceptional and oppressive, are finally exploded and overthrown; still, they are circumstances. Let it be granted that the soul is that of a man perhaps weak in any case and retaining many merits to the last, still it is a soul. Let it be granted, above all, that the admission that such spiritual tragedies do occur does not decrease by so much as an iota our faith in the validity of any spiritual struggle. For example, Stevenson has made a study of the breakdown of a good man’s character under a burden for which he is not to blame, in the tragedy of Henry Durie in The Master of Ballantrae. Yet he has added, in the mouth of Mackellar, the exact common sense and good theology of the matter, saying “It matters not a jot; for he that is to pass judgment upon the records of our life is the same that formed us in frailty.” Let us concede then all this, and the fact remains that the study of the slow demoralisation of a man through mere misfortune was not a study congenial to Dickens, not in accordance with his original inspiration, not connected in any manner with the special thing that he had to say. In a word, the thing is not quite a part of himself; and he was not quite himself when he did it.

He was still quite a young man; his depression did not come from age. In fact, as far as I know, mere depression never does come from mere age. Age can pass into a beautiful reverie. Age can pass into a sort of beautiful idiocy. But I do not think that the actual decline and close of our ordinary vitality brings with it any particular heaviness of the spirits. The spirits of the old do not as a rule seem to become more and more ponderous until they sink into the earth. Rather the spirits of the old seem to grow lighter and lighter until they float away like thistledown. Wherever there is the definite phenomenon called depression, it commonly means that something else has been closer to us than so normal a thing as death. There has been disease, bodily or mental, or there has been sin, or there has been some struggle or effort, breaking past the ordinary boundaries of human custom. In the case of Dickens there had been two things that are not of the routine of a wholesome human life; there had been the quarrel with his wife, and there had been the strain of incessant and exaggerated intellectual labour. He had not an easy time; and on top of that (or perhaps rather at the bottom of it) he had not an easy nature. Not only did his life necessitate work, but his character necessitated worry about work; and that combination is always one which is very dangerous to the temperament which is exposed to it. The only people who ought to be allowed to work are the people who are able to shirk. The only people who ought to be allowed to worry are the people who have nothing to
worry about. When the two are combined, as they were in Dickens, you are very likely to have at least one collapse. Little Dorrit is a very interesting, sincere, and fascinating book. But for all that, I fancy it is the one collapse.

The complete proof of this depression may be difficult to advance; because it will be urged, and entirely with reason, that the actual examples of it are artistic and appropriate. Dickens, the Gissing school will say, was here pointing out certain sad truths of psychology; can any one say that he ought not to point them out? That may be; in any case, to explain depression is not to remove it. But the instances of this more sombre quality of which I have spoken are not very hard to find. The thing can easily be seen by comparing a book like Little Dorrit with a book like David Copperfield. David Copperfield and Arthur Clennam have both been brought up in unhappy homes, under bitter guardians and a black, disheartening religion. It is the whole point of David Copperfield that he has broken out of a Calvinistic tyranny which he cannot forgive. But it is the whole point of Arthur Clennam that he has not broken out of the Calvinistic tyranny, but is still under its shadow. Copperfield has come from a gloomy childhood; Clennam, though forty years old, is still in a gloomy childhood. When David meets the Murdstones again it is to defy them with the health and hilarious anger that go with his happy delirium about Dora. But when Clennam re-enters his sepulchral house there is a weight upon his soul which makes it impossible for him to answer, with any spirit, the morbidities of his mother, or even the grotesque interferences of Mr. Flintwinch. This is only another example of the same quality which makes the Dickens of Little Dorrit insist on the degradation of the debtor, while the Dickens of David Copperfield insisted on his splendid irresponsibility, his essential emancipation. Imprisonments passed over Micawber like summer clouds. But the imprisonment in Little Dorrit is like a complete natural climate and environment; it has positively modified the shapes and functions of the animals that dwell in it. A horrible thing has happened to Dickens; he has almost become an Evolutionist. Worse still, in studying the Calvinism of Mrs. Clennam’s house, he has almost become a Calvinist. He half believes (as do some of the modern scientists) that there is really such a thing as “a child of wrath,” that a man on whom such an early shadow had fallen could never shake it off. For ancient Calvinism and modern Evolutionism are essentially the same things. They are both ingenious logical blasphemies against the dignity and liberty of the human soul.

The workmanship of the book in detail is often extremely good. The one passage in the older and heartier Dickens manner (I mean the description of the
Circumlocution Office) is beyond praise. It is a complete picture of the way England is actually governed at this moment. The very core of our politics is expressed in the light and easy young Barnacle who told Clennam with a kindly frankness that he, Clennam, would “never go on with it.” Dickens hit the mark so that the bell rang when he made all the lower officials, who were cads, tell Clennam coldly that his claim was absurd, until the last official, who is a gentleman, tells him genially that the whole business is absurd. Even here, perhaps, there is something more than the old exuberant derision of Dickens; there is a touch of experience that verges on scepticism. Everywhere else, certainly, there is the note which I have called Calvinistic; especially in the predestined passion of Tattycoram or the incurable cruelty of Miss Wade. Even Little Dorrit herself had, we are told, one stain from her prison experience; and it is spoken of like a bodily stain; like something that cannot be washed away.

There is no denying that this is Dickens’s dark moment. It adds enormously to the value of his general view of life that such a dark moment came. He did what all the heroes and all the really happy men have done; he descended into Hell. Nor is it irreverent to continue the quotation from the Creed, for in the next book he was to write he was to break out of all these dreams of fate and failure, and with his highest voice to speak of the triumph of the weak of this world. His next book was to leave us saying, as Sydney Carton mounted the scaffold, words which, splendid in themselves, have never been so splendidly quoted—“I am the Resurrection and the Life; whoso believeth in Me though he be dead yet he shall live.” In Sydney Carton at least, Dickens shows none of that dreary submission to the environment of the irrevocable that had for an instant lain on him like a cloud. On this occasion he sees with the old heroic clearness that to be a failure may be one step to being a saint. On the third day he rose again from the dead.
A TALE OF TWO CITIES

As an example of Dickens’s literary work, A Tale of Two Cities is not wrongly named. It is his most typical contact with the civic ideals of Europe. All his other tales have been tales of one city. He was in spirit a Cockney; though that title has been quite unreasonably twisted to mean a cad. By the old sound and proverbial test a Cockney was a man born within the sound of Bow bells. That is, he was a man born within the immediate appeal of high civilisation and of eternal religion. Shakespeare, in the heart of his fantastic forest, turns with a splendid suddenness to the Cockney ideal as being the true one after all. For a jest, for a reaction, for an idle summer love or still idler summer hatred, it is well to wander away into the bewildering forest of Arden. It is well that those who are sick with love or sick with the absence of love, those who weary of the folly of courts or weary yet more of their wisdom, it is natural that these should trail away into the twinkling twilight of the woods. Yet it is here that Shakespeare makes one of his most arresting and startling assertions of the truth. Here is one of those rare and tremendous moments of which one may say that there is a stage direction, “Enter Shakespeare.” He has admitted that for men weary of courts, for men sick of cities, the wood is the wisest place, and he has praised it with his purest lyric ecstasy. But when a man enters suddenly upon that celestial picnic, a man who is not sick of cities, but sick of hunger, a man who is not weary of courts, but weary of walking, then Shakespeare lets through his own voice with a shattering sincerity and cries the praise of practical human civilisation:

If ever you have looked on better days,
If ever you have sat at good men's feasts,
If ever been where bells have knolled to church,
If ever from your eyelids wiped a tear
Or know what 'tis to pity and be pitied.

There is nothing finer even in Shakespeare than that conception of the circle of rich men all pretending to rough it in the country, and the one really hungry man entering, sword in hand, and praising the city. “If ever been where bells have knolled to church”; if you have ever been within sound of Bow bells; if you have ever been happy and haughty enough to call yourself a Cockney.

We must remember this distinction always in the case of Dickens. Dickens is the great Cockney, at once tragic and comic, who enters abruptly upon the Arcadian banquet of the aesthetics and says, “Forbear and eat no more,” and tells
them that they shall not eat “until necessity be served.” If there was one thing he would have favoured instinctively it would have been the spreading of the town as meaning the spreading of civilisation. And we should (I hope) all favour the spreading of the town if it did mean the spreading of civilisation. The objection to the spreading of the modern Manchester or Birmingham suburb is simply that such a suburb is much more barbaric than any village in Europe could ever conceivably be. And again, if there is anything that Dickens would have definitely hated it is that general treatment of nature as a dramatic spectacle, a piece of scene-painting which has become the common mark of the culture of our wealthier classes. Despite many fine pictures of natural scenery, especially along the English roadsides, he was upon the whole emphatically on the side of the town. He was on the side of bricks and mortar. He was a citizen; and, after all, a citizen means a man of the city. His strength was, after all, in the fact that he was a man of the city. But, after all, his weakness, his calamitous weakness, was that he was a man of one city.

For all practical purposes he had never been outside such places as Chatham and London. He did indeed travel on the Continent; but surely no man’s travel was ever so superficial as his. He was more superficial than the smallest and commonest tourist. He went about Europe on stilts; he never touched the ground. There is one good test and one only of whether a man has travelled to any profit in Europe. An Englishman is, as such, a European, and as he approaches the central splendours of Europe he ought to feel that he is coming home. If he does not feel at home he had much better have stopped at home. England is a real home; London is a real home; and all the essential feelings of adventure or the picturesque can easily be gained by going out at night upon the flats of Essex or the cloven hills of Surrey. Your visit to Europe is useless unless it gives you the sense of an exile returning. Your first sight of Rome is futile unless you feel that you have seen it before. Thus useless and thus futile were the foreign experiments and the continental raids of Dickens. He enjoyed them as he would have enjoyed, as a boy, a scamper out of Chatham into some strange meadows, as he would have enjoyed, when a grown man, a steam in a police boat out into the fens to the far east of London. But he was the Cockney venturing far; he was not the European coming home. He is still the splendid Cockney Orlando of whom I spoke above; he cannot but suppose that any strange men, being happy in some pastoral way, are mysterious foreign scoundrels. Dickens’s real speech to the lazy and laughing civilisation of Southern Europe would really have run in the Shakespearian words:
but whoe'er you be
Who in this desert inaccessible,
Under the shade of melancholy boughs
Lose and neglect the creeping hours of time.
If ever you have looked on better things,
If ever been where bells have knolled to church.

If, in short, you have ever had the advantage of being born within the sound of Bow bells. Dickens could not really conceive that there was any other city but his own.

It is necessary thus to insist that Dickens never understood the Continent, because only thus can we appreciate the really remarkable thing he did in A Tale of Two Cities. It is necessary to feel, first of all, the fact that to him London was the centre of the universe. He did not understand at all the real sense in which Paris is the capital of Europe. He had never realised that all roads lead to Rome. He had never felt (as an Englishman can feel) that he was an Athenian before he was a Londoner. Yet with everything against him he did this astonishing thing. He wrote a book about two cities, one of which he understood; the other he did not understand. And his description of the city he did not know is almost better than his description of the city he did know. This is the entrance of the unquestionable thing about Dickens; the thing called genius; the thing which every one has to talk about directly and distinctly because no one knows what it is. For a plain word (as for instance the word fool) always covers an infinite mystery.

A Tale of Two Cities is one of the more tragic tints of the later life of Dickens. It might be said that he grew sadder as he grew older; but this would be false, for two reasons. First, a man never or hardly ever does grow sad as he grows old; on the contrary, the most melancholy young lovers can be found forty years afterwards chuckling over their port wine. And second, Dickens never did grow old, even in a physical sense. What weariness did appear in him appeared in the prime of life; it was due not to age but to overwork, and his exaggerative way of doing everything. To call Dickens a victim of elderly disenchantment would be as absurd as to say the same of Keats. Such fatigue as there was, was due not to the slowing down of his blood, but rather to its unremitting rapidity. He was not wearied by his age; rather he was wearied by his youth. And though A Tale of Two Cities is full of sadness, it is full also of enthusiasm; that pathos is a young pathos rather than an old one. Yet there is one circumstance which does render important the fact that A Tale of Two Cities is one of the later works of Dickens. This fact is the fact of his dependence upon another of the great writers of the
Victorian era. And it is in connection with this that we can best see the truth of which I have been speaking; the truth that his actual ignorance of France went with amazing intuitive perception of the truth about it. It is here that he has most clearly the plain mark of the man of genius; that he can understand what he does not understand.

Dickens was inspired to the study of the French Revolution and to the writing of a romance about it by the example and influence of Carlyle. Thomas Carlyle undoubtedly rediscovered for Englishmen the revolution that was at the back of all their policies and reforms. It is an entertaining side joke that the French Revolution should have been discovered for Britons by the only British writer who did not really believe in it. Nevertheless, the most authoritative and the most recent critics on that great renaissance agree in considering Carlyle’s work one of the most searching and detailed power. Carlyle had read a great deal about the French Revolution. Dickens had read nothing at all, except Carlyle. Carlyle was a man who collected his ideas by the careful collation of documents and the verification of references. Dickens was a man who collected his ideas from loose hints in the streets, and those always the same streets; as I have said, he was the citizen of one city. Carlyle was in his way learned; Dickens was in every way ignorant. Dickens was an Englishman cut off from France; Carlyle was a Scotsman, historically connected with France. And yet, when all this is said and certified, Dickens is more right than Carlyle. Dickens’s French Revolution is probably more like the real French Revolution than Carlyle’s. It is difficult, if not impossible, to state the grounds of this strong conviction. One can only talk of it by employing that excellent method which Cardinal Newman employed when he spoke of the “notes” of Catholicism. There were certain “notes” of the Revolution. One note of the Revolution was the thing which silly people call optimism, and sensible people call high spirits. Carlyle could never quite get it, because with all his spiritual energy he had no high spirits. That is why he preferred prose to poetry. He could understand rhetoric; for rhetoric means singing with an object. But he could not understand lyrics; for the lyric means singing without an object; as every one does when he is happy. Now for all its blood and its black guillotines, the French Revolution was full of mere high spirits. Nay, it was full of happiness. This actual lilt and levity Carlyle never really found in the Revolution, because he could not find it in himself. Dickens knew less of the Revolution, but he had more of it. When Dickens attacked abuses, he battered them down with exactly that sort of cheery and quite one-sided satisfaction with which the French mob battered down the Bastille.
Dickens utterly and innocently believed in certain things; he would, I think, have drawn the sword for them. Carlyle half believed in half a hundred things; he was at once more of a mystic and more of a sceptic. Carlyle was the perfect type of the grumbling servant; the old grumbling servant of the aristocratic comedies. He followed the aristocracy, but he growled as he followed. He was obedient without being servile, just as Caleb Balderstone was obedient without being servile. But Dickens was the type of the man who might really have rebelled instead of grumbling. He might have gone out into the street and fought, like the man who took the Bastille. It is somewhat nationally significant that when we talk of the man in the street it means a figure silent, slouching, and even feeble. When the French speak of the man in the street, it means danger in the street.

No one can fail to notice this deep difference between Dickens and the Carlyle whom he avowedly copied. Splendid and symbolic as are Carlyle’s scenes of the French Revolution, we have in reading them a curious sense that everything is happening at night. In Dickens even massacre happens by daylight. Carlyle always assumes that because things were tragedies therefore the men who did them felt tragic. Dickens knows that the man who works the worst tragedies is the man who feels comic; as for example, Mr. Quilp. The French Revolution was a much simpler world than Carlyle could understand; for Carlyle was subtle and not simple. Dickens could understand it, for he was simple and not subtle. He understood that plain rage against plain political injustice; he understood again that obvious vindictiveness and that obvious brutality which followed. “Cruelty and the abuse of absolute power,” he told an American slave-owner, “are two of the bad passions of human nature.” Carlyle was quite incapable of rising to the height of that uplifted common-sense. He must always find something mystical about the cruelty of the French Revolution. The effect was equally bad whether he found it mystically bad and called the thing anarchy, or whether he found it mystically good and called it the rule of the strong. In both cases he could not understand the common-sense justice or the common-sense vengeance of Dickens and the French Revolution.

Yet Dickens has in this book given a perfect and final touch to this whole conception of mere rebellion and mere human nature. Carlyle had written the story of the French Revolution and had made the story a mere tragedy. Dickens writes the story about the French Revolution, and does not make the Revolution itself the tragedy at all. Dickens knows that an outbreak is seldom a tragedy; generally it is the avoidance of a tragedy. All the real tragedies are silent. Men fight each other with furious cries, because men fight each other with chivalry.
and an unchangeable sense of brotherhood. But trees fight each other in utter stillness; because they fight each other cruelly and without quarter. In this book, as in history, the guillotine is not the calamity, but rather the solution of the calamity. The sin of Sydney Carton is a sin of habit, not of revolution. His gloom is the gloom of London, not the gloom of Paris.
GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Great Expectations, which was written in the afternoon of Dickens’s life and fame, has a quality of serene irony and even sadness, which puts it quite alone among his other works. At no time could Dickens possibly be called cynical, he had too much vitality; but relatively to the other books this book is cynical; but it has the soft and gentle cynicism of old age, not the hard cynicism of youth. To be a young cynic is to be a young brute; but Dickens, who had been so perfectly romantic and sentimental in his youth, could afford to admit this touch of doubt into the mixed experience of his middle age. At no time could any books by Dickens have been called Thackerayan. Both of the two men were too great for that. But relatively to the other Dickensian productions this book may be called Thackerayan. It is a study in human weakness and the slow human surrender. It describes how easily a free lad of fresh and decent instincts can be made to care more for rank and pride and the degrees of our stratified society than for old affection and for honour. It is an extra chapter to The Book of Snobs.

The best way of stating the change which this book marks in Dickens can be put in one phrase. In this book for the first time the hero disappears. The hero had descended to Dickens by a long line which begins with the gods, nay, perhaps if one may say so, which begins with God. First comes Deity and then the image of Deity; first comes the god and then the demi-god, the Hercules who labours and conquers before he receives his heavenly crown. That idea, with continual mystery and modification, has continued behind all romantic tales; the demi-god became the hero of paganism; the hero of paganism became the knight-errant of Christianity; the knight-errant who wandered and was foiled before he triumphed became the hero of the later prose romance, the romance in which the hero had to fight a duel with the villain but always survived, in which the hero drove desperate horses through the night in order to rescue the heroine, but always rescued her.

This heroic modern hero, this demi-god in a top-hat, may be said to reach his supreme moment and typical example about the time when Dickens was writing that thundering and thrilling and highly unlikely scene in Nicholas Nickleby, the scene where Nicholas hopelessly denounces the atrocious Grinde in his hour of grinning triumph, and a thud upon the floor above tells them that the heroine’s tyrannical father has died just in time to set her free. That is the apotheosis of the pure heroic as Dickens found it, and as Dickens in some sense continued it. It
may be that it does not appear with quite so much unmistakable youth, beauty, valour, and virtue as it does in Nicholas Nickleby. Walter Gay is a simpler and more careless hero, but when he is doing any of the business of the story he is purely heroic. Kit Nubbles is a humbler hero, but he is a hero; when he is good he is very good. Even David Copperfield, who confesses to boyish tremors and boyish evasions in his account of his boyhood, acts the strict stiff part of the chivalrous gentleman in all the active and determining scenes of the tale. But Great Expectations may be called, like Vanity Fair, a novel without a hero. Almost all Thackeray’s novels except Esmond are novels without a hero, but only one of Dickens’s novels can be so described. I do not mean that it is a novel without a jeune premier, a young man to make love; Pickwick is that and Oliver Twist, and, perhaps, The Old Curiosity Shop. I mean that it is a novel without a hero in the same far deeper and more deadly sense in which Pendennis is also a novel without a hero. I mean that it is a novel which aims chiefly at showing that the hero is unheroic.

All such phrases as these must appear of course to overstate the case. Pip is a much more delightful person than Nicholas Nickleby. Or to take a stronger case for the purpose of our argument, Pip is a much more delightful person than Sydney Carton. Still the fact remains. Most of Nicholas Nickleby’s personal actions are meant to show that he is heroic. Most of Pip’s actions are meant to show that he is not heroic. The study of Sydney Carton is meant to indicate that with all his vices Sydney Carton was a hero. The study of Pip is meant to indicate that with all his virtues Pip was a snob. The motive of the literary explanation is different. Pip and Pendennis are meant to show how circumstances can corrupt men. Sam Weller and Hercules are meant to show how heroes can subdue circumstances.

This is the preliminary view of the book which is necessary if we are to regard it as a real and separate fact in the life of Dickens. Dickens had many moods because he was an artist; but he had one great mood, because he was a great artist. Any real difference therefore from the general drift, or rather (I apologise to Dickens) the general drive of his creation is very important. This is the one place in his work in which he does, I will not say feel like Thackeray, far less think like Thackeray, less still write like Thackeray, but this is the one of his works in which he understands Thackeray. He puts himself in some sense in the same place; he considers mankind at somewhat the same angle as mankind is considered in one of the sociable and sarcastic novels of Thackeray. When he deals with Pip he sets out not to show his strength like the strength of Hercules,
but to show his weakness like the weakness of Pendennis. When he sets out to describe Pip’s great expectation he does not set out, as in a fairytale, with the idea that these great expectations will be fulfilled; he sets out from the first with the idea that these great expectations will be disappointing. We might very well, as I have remarked elsewhere, apply to all Dickens’s books the title Great Expectations. All his books are full of an airy and yet ardent expectation of everything; of the next person who shall happen to speak, of the next chimney that shall happen to smoke, of the next event, of the next ecstasy; of the next fulfilment of any eager human fancy. All his books might be called Great Expectations. But the only book to which he gave the name of Great Expectations was the only book in which the expectation was never realised. It was so with the whole of that splendid and unconscious generation to which he belonged. The whole glory of that old English middle class was that it was unconscious; its excellence was entirely in that, that it was the culture of the nation, and that it did not know it. If Dickens had ever known that he was optimistic, he would have ceased to be happy.

It is necessary to make this first point clear: that in Great Expectations Dickens was really trying to be a quiet, a detached, and even a cynical observer of human life. Dickens was trying to be Thackeray. And the final and startling triumph of Dickens is this: that even to this moderate and modern story, he gives an incomparable energy which is not moderate and which is not modern. He is trying to be reasonable; but in spite of himself he is inspired. He is trying to be detailed, but in spite of himself he is gigantic. Compared to the rest of Dickens this is Thackeray; but compared to the whole of Thackeray we can only say in supreme praise of it that it is Dickens.

Take, for example, the one question of snobbishness. Dickens has achieved admirably the description of the doubts and vanities of the wretched Pip as he walks down the street in his new gentlemanly clothes, the clothes of which he is so proud and so ashamed. Nothing could be so exquisitely human, nothing especially could be so exquisitely masculine as that combination of self-love and self-assertion and even insolence with a naked and helpless sensibility to the slightest breath of ridicule. Pip thinks himself better than every one else, and yet anybody can snub him; that is the everlasting male, and perhaps the everlasting gentleman. Dickens has described perfectly this quivering and defenceless dignity. Dickens has described perfectly how ill-armed it is against the coarse humour of real humanity—the real humanity which Dickens loved, but which idealists and philanthropists do not love, the humanity of cabmen and
costermongers and men singing in a third-class carriage; the humanity of Trabb’s boy. In describing Pip’s weakness Dickens is as true and as delicate as Thackeray. But Thackeray might have been easily as true and as delicate as Dickens. This quick and quiet eye for the tremors of mankind is a thing which Dickens possessed, but which others possessed also. George Eliot or Thackeray could have described the weakness of Pip. Exactly what George Eliot and Thackeray could not have described was the vigour of Trabb’s boy. There would have been admirable humour and observation in their accounts of that intolerable urchin. Thackeray would have given us little light touches of Trabb’s boy, absolutely true to the quality and colour of the humour, just as in his novels of the eighteenth century, the glimpses of Steele or Bolingbroke or Doctor Johnson are exactly and perfectly true to the colour and quality of their humour. George Eliot in her earlier books would have given us shrewd authentic scraps of the real dialect of Trabb’s boy, just as she gave us shrewd and authentic scraps of the real talk in a Midland country town. In her later books she would have given us highly rationalistic explanations of Trabb’s boy; which we should not have read. But exactly what they could never have given, and exactly what Dickens does give, is the bounce of Trabb’s boy. It is the real unconquerable rush and energy in a character which was the supreme and quite indescribable greatness of Dickens. He conquered by rushes; he attacked in masses; he carried things at the spear point in a charge of spears; he was the Rupert of Fiction. The thing about any figure of Dickens, about Sam Weller or Dick Swiveller, or Micawber, or Bagstock, or Trabb’s boy,—the thing about each one of these persons is that he cannot be exhausted. A Dickens character hits you first on the nose and then in the waistcoat, and then in the eye and then in the waistcoat again, with the blinding rapidity of some battering engine. The scene in which Trabb’s boy continually overtakes Pip in order to reel and stagger as at a first encounter is a thing quite within the real competence of such a character; it might have been suggested by Thackeray, or George Eliot, or any realist. But the point with Dickens is that there is a rush in the boy’s rushings; the writer and the reader rush with him. They start with him, they stare with him, they stagger with him, they share an inexpressible vitality in the air which emanates from this violent and capering satirist. Trabb’s boy is among other things a boy; he has a physical rapture in hurling himself like a boomerang and in bouncing to the sky like a ball. It is just exactly in describing this quality that Dickens is Dickens and that no one else comes near him. No one feels in his bones that Felix Holt was strong as he feels in his bones that little Quilp was strong. No one can feel that even
Rawdon Crawley’s splendid smack across the face of Lord Steyne is quite so living and life-giving as the “kick after kick” which old Mr. Weller dealt the dancing and quivering Stiggins as he drove him towards the trough. This quality, whether expressed intellectually or physically, is the profoundly popular and eternal quality in Dickens; it is the thing that no one else could do. This quality is the quality which has always given its continuous power and poetry to the common people everywhere. It is life; it is the joy of life felt by those who have nothing else but life. It is the thing that all aristocrats have always hated and dreaded in the people. And it is the thing which poor Pip really hates and dreads in Trabb’s boy.

A great man of letters or any great artist is symbolic without knowing it. The things he describes are types because they are truths. Shakespeare may, or may not, have ever put it to himself that Richard the Second was a philosophical symbol; but all good criticism must necessarily see him so. It may be a reasonable question whether the artist should be allegorical. There can be no doubt among sane men that the critic should be allegorical. Spenser may have lost by being less realistic than Fielding. But any good criticism of Tom Jones must be as mystical as the Faery Queen. Hence it is unavoidable in speaking of a fine book like Great Expectations that we should give even to its unpretentious and realistic figures a certain massive mysticism. Pip is Pip, but he is also the well-meaning snob. And this is even more true of those two great figures in the tale which stand for the English democracy. For, indeed, the first and last word upon the English democracy is said in Joe Gargery and Trabb’s boy. The actual English populace, as distinct from the French populace or the Scotch or Irish populace, may be said to lie between those two types. The first is the poor man who does not assert himself at all, and the second is the poor man who asserts himself entirely with the weapon of sarcasm. The only way in which the English now ever rise in revolution is under the symbol and leadership of Trabb’s boy. What pikes and shillelahs were to the Irish populace, what guns and barricades were to the French populace, that chaff is to the English populace. It is their weapon, the use of which they really understand. It is the one way in which they can make a rich man feel uncomfortable, and they use it very justifiably for all it is worth. If they do not cut off the heads of tyrants at least they sometimes do their best to make the tyrants lose their heads. The gutter boys of the great towns carry the art of personal criticism to so rich and delicate a degree that some well-dressed persons when they walk past a file of them feel as if they were walking past a row of omniscient critics or judges with a power of life and death. Here
and there only is some ordinary human custom, some natural human pleasure suppressed in deference to the fastidiousness of the rich. But all the rich tremble before the fastidiousness of the poor.

Of the other type of democracy it is far more difficult to speak. It is always hard to speak of good things or good people, for in satisfying the soul they take away a certain spur to speech. Dickens was often called a sentimentalist. In one sense he sometimes was a sentimentalist. But if sentimentalism be held to mean something artificial or theatrical, then in the core and reality of his character Dickens was the very reverse of a sentimentalist. He seriously and definitely loved goodness. To see sincerity and charity satisfied him like a meal. What some critics call his love of sweet stuff is really his love of plain beef and bread. Sometimes one is tempted to wish that in the long Dickens dinner the sweet courses could be left out; but this does not make the whole banquet other than a banquet singularly solid and simple. The critics complain of the sweet things, but not because they are so strong as to like simple things. They complain of the sweet things because they are so sophisticated as to like sour things; their tongues are tainted with the bitterness of absinthe. Yet because of the very simplicity of Dickens’s moral tastes it is impossible to speak adequately of them; and Joe Gargery must stand as he stands in the book, a thing too obvious to be understood. But this may be said of him in one of his minor aspects, that he stands for a certain long-suffering in the English poor, a certain weary patience and politeness which almost breaks the heart. One cannot help wondering whether that great mass of silent virtue will ever achieve anything on this earth.
OUR MUTUAL FRIEND

Our Mutual Friend marks a happy return to the earlier manner of Dickens at the end of Dickens’s life. One might call it a sort of Indian summer of his farce. Those who most truly love Dickens love the earlier Dickens; and any return to his farce must be welcomed, like a young man come back from the dead. In this book indeed he does not merely return to his farce; he returns in a manner to his vulgarity. It is the old democratic and even uneducated Dickens who is writing here. The very title is illiterate. Any priggish pupil teacher could tell Dickens that there is no such phrase in English as “our mutual friend.” Any one could tell Dickens that “our mutual friend” means “our reciprocal friend,” and that “our reciprocal friend” means nothing. If he had only had all the solemn advantages of academic learning (the absence of which in him was lamented by the Quarterly Review), he would have known better. He would have known that the correct phrase for a man known to two people is “our common friend.” But if one calls one’s friend a common friend, even that phrase is open to misunderstanding.

I dwell with a gloomy pleasure on this mistake in the very title of the book because I, for one, am not pleased to see Dickens gradually absorbed by modern culture and good manners. Dickens, by class and genius, belonged to the kind of people who do talk about a “mutual friend”; and for that class there is a very great deal to be said. These two things can at least be said—that this class does understand the meaning of the word “friend” and the meaning of the word “mutual.” I know that for some long time before he had been slowly and subtly sucked into the whirlpool of the fashionable views of later England. I know that in Bleak House he treats the aristocracy far more tenderly than he treats them in David Copperfield. I know that in A Tale of Two Cities, having come under the influence of Carlyle, he treats revolution as strange and weird, whereas under the influence of Cobbett he would have treated it as obvious and reasonable. I know that in The Mystery of Edwin Drood he not only praised the Minor Canon of Cloisterham at the expense of the dissenting demagogue, Honeythunder; I know that he even took the last and most disastrous step in the modern English reaction. While blaming the old Cloisterham monks (who were democratic), he praised the old-world peace that they had left behind them—an old-world peace which is simply one of the last amusements of aristocracy. The modern rich feel quite at home with the dead monks. They would have felt anything but
comfortable with the live ones. I know, in short, how the simple democracy of Dickens was gradually dimmed by the decay and reaction of the middle of the nineteenth century. I know that he fell into some of the bad habits of aristocratic sentimentalism. I know that he used the word “gentleman” as meaning good man. But all this only adds to the unholy joy with which I realise that the very title of one of his best books was a vulgarism. It is pleasant to contemplate this last unconscious knock in the eye for the gentility with which Dickens was half impressed. Dickens is the old self-made man; you may take him or leave him. He has its disadvantages and its merits. No university man would have written the title; no university man could have written the book.

If it were a mere matter of the accident of a name it would not be worth while thus to dwell on it, even as a preface. But the title is in this respect typical of the tale. The novel called Our Mutual Friend is in many ways a real reaction towards the earlier Dickens manner. I have remarked that Little Dorrit was a reversion to the form of the first books, but not to their spirit; Our Mutual Friend is a reversion to the spirit as well as the form. Compare, for instance, the public figures that make a background in each book. Mr. Merdle is a commercial man having no great connection with the plot; similarly Mr. Podsnap is a commercial man having no great connection with the plot. This is altogether in the spirit of the earlier books; the whole point of an early Dickens novel was to have as many people as possible entirely unconnected with the plot. But exactly because both studies are irrelevant, the contrast between them can be more clearly perceived. Dickens goes out of his way to describe Merdle; and it is a gloomy description. But Dickens goes out of his way to describe Podsnap, and it is a happy and hilarious description. It recalls the days when he hunted great game; when he went out of his way to entrap such adorable monsters as Mr. Pecksniff or Mr. Vincent Crummles. With these wild beings we never bother about the cause of their coming. Such guests in a story may be uninvited, but they are never de trop. They earn their night’s lodging in any tale by being so uproariously amusing; like little Tommy Tucker in the legend, they sing for their supper. This is really the marked truth about Our Mutual Friend, as a stage in the singular latter career of Dickens. It is like the leaping up and flaming of a slowly dying fire. The best things in the book are in the old best manner of the author. They have that great Dickens quality of being something which is pure farce and yet which is not superficial; an unfathomable farce—a farce that goes down to the roots of the universe. The highest compliment that can ever be paid to the humour of Dickens is paid when some lady says, with the sudden sincerity of her
sex, that it is “too silly.” The phrase is really a perfectly sound and acute criticism. Humour does consist in being too silly, in passing the borderland, in breaking through the floor of sense and falling into some starry abyss of nonsense far below our ordinary human life. This “too silly” quality is really present in Our Mutual Friend. It is present in Our Mutual Friend just as it is present in Pickwick, or Martin Chuzzlewit; just as it is not present in Little Dorrit or in Hard Times. Many tests might be employed. One is the pleasure in purely physical jokes—jokes about the body. The general dislike which every one felt for Mr. Stiggins’s nose is of the same kind as the ardent desire which Mr. Lammle felt for Mr. Fledgeby’s nose. “Give me your nose, Sir,” said Mr. Lammle. That sentence alone would be enough to show that the young Dickens had never died.

The opening of a book goes for a great deal. The opening of Our Mutual Friend is much more instinctively energetic and light-hearted than that of any of the other novels of his concluding period. Dickens had always enough optimism to make his stories end well. He had not, in his later years, always enough optimism to make them begin well. Even Great Expectations, the saddest of his later books, ends well; it ends well in spite of himself, who had intended it to end badly. But if we leave the evident case of good endings and take the case of good beginnings, we see how much Our Mutual Friend stands out from among the other novels of the evening or the end of Dickens. The tale of Little Dorrit begins in a prison. One of the prisoners is a villain, and his villainy is as dreary as the prison; that might matter nothing. But the other prisoner is vivacious, and even his vivacity is dreary. The first note struck is sad. In the tale of Edwin Drood the first scene is in an opium den, suffocated with every sort of phantasy and falsehood. Nor is it true that these openings are merely accidental; they really cast their shadow over the tales. The people of Little Dorrit begin in prison; and it is the whole point of the book that people never get out of prison. The story of Edwin Drood begins amid the fumes of opium, and it never gets out of the fumes of opium. The darkness of that strange and horrible smoke is deliberately rolled over the whole story. Dickens, in his later years, permitted more and more his story to take the cue from its inception. All the more remarkable, therefore, is the real jerk and spurt of good spirits with which he opens Our Mutual Friend. It begins with a good piece of rowdy satire, wildly exaggerated and extremely true. It belongs to the same class as the first chapter of Martin Chuzzlewit, with its preposterous pedigree of the Chuzzlewit family, or even the first chapter of Pickwick, with its immortal imbecilities about the
Theory of Tittlebats and Mr. Blotton of Aldgate. Doubtless the early satiric chapter in Our Mutual Friend is of a more strategic and ingenious kind of satire than can be found in these early and explosive parodies. Still, there is a quality common to both, and that quality is the whole of Dickens. It is a quality difficult to define—hence the whole difficulty of criticising Dickens. Perhaps it can be best stated in two separate statements or as two separate symptoms. The first is the mere fact that the reader rushes to read it. The second is the mere fact that the writer rushed to write it.

This beginning, which is like a burst of the old exuberant Dickens, is, of course, the Veneering dinner-party. In its own way it is as good as anything that Dickens ever did. There is the old faculty of managing a crowd, of making character clash with character, that had made Dickens not only the democrat but even the demagogue of fiction. For if it is hard to manage a mob, it is hardest of all to manage a swell mob. The particular kind of chaos that is created by the hospitality of a rich upstart has perhaps never been so accurately and outrageously described. Every touch about the thing is true; to this day any one can test it if he goes to a dinner of this particular kind. How admirable, for instance, is the description of the way in which all the guests ignored the host; how the host and hostess peered and gaped for some stray attention as if they had been a pair of poor relations. Again, how well, as a matter of social colour, the distinctions between the type and tone of the guests are made even in the matter of this unguestlike insolence. How well Dickens distinguishes the ill-bred indifference of Podsnap from the well-bred indifference of Mortimer Lightwood and Eugene Wrayburn. How well he distinguishes the bad manners of the merchant from the equally typical bad manners of the gentleman. Above all, how well he catches the character of the creature who is really the master of all these: the impenetrable male servant. Nowhere in literature is the truth about servants better told. For that truth is simply this: that the secret of aristocracy is hidden even from aristocrats. Servants, butlers, footmen, are the high priests who have the real dispensation; and even gentlemen are afraid of them. Dickens was never more right than when he made the new people, the Veneerings, employ a butler who despised not only them but all their guests and acquaintances. The admirable person called the Analytical Chemist shows his perfection particularly in the fact that he regards all the sham gentlemen and all the real gentlemen with the same gloomy and incurable contempt. He offers wine to the offensive Podsnap or the shrieking Tippins with a melancholy sincerity and silence; but he offers his letter to the aristocratic and unconscious Mortimer with the same
sincerity and with the same silence. It is a great pity that the Analytical Chemist only occurs in two or three scenes of this excellent story. As far as I know, he never really says a word from one end of the book to the other; but he is one of the best characters in Dickens.

Round the Veneering dinner-table are collected not indeed the best characters in Dickens, but certainly the best characters in Our Mutual Friend. Certainly one exception must be made. Fledgeby is unaccountably absent. There was really no reason why he should not have been present at a dinner-party given by the Veneerings and including the Lammles. His money was at least more genuine than theirs. If he had been present the party would really have included all that is important in Our Mutual Friend. For indeed, outside Mr. Fledgeby and the people at the dinner-party, there is something a little heavy and careless about the story. Mr. Silas Wegg is really funny; and he serves the purpose of a necessary villain in the plot. But his humour and his villainy seem to have no particular connection with each other; when he is not scheming he seems the last man likely to scheme. He is rather like one of Dickens’s agreeable Bohemians, a pleasant companion, a quoter of fine verses. His villainy seems an artificial thing attached to him, like his wooden leg. For while his villainy is supposed to be of a dull, mean, and bitter sort (quite unlike, for instance, the uproarious villainy of Quilp), his humour is of the sincere, flowing and lyric character, like that of Dick Swiveller or Mr. Micawber. He tells Mr. Boffin that he will drop into poetry in a friendly way. He does drop into it in a friendly way; in much too really a friendly way to make him convincing as a mere calculating knave. He and Mr. Venus are such natural and genuine companions that one does not see why if Venus repents Wegg should not repent too. In short, Wegg is a convenience for a plot and not a very good plot at that. But if he is one of the blots on the business, he is not the principal one. If the real degradation of Wegg is not very convincing, it is at least immeasurably more convincing than the pretended degradation of Boffin. The passage in which Boffin appears as a sort of miser, and then afterwards explains that he only assumed the character for reasons of his own, has something about it highly jerky and unsatisfactory. The truth of the whole matter I think, almost certainly, is that Dickens did not originally mean Boffin’s lapse to be fictitious. He originally meant Boffin really to be corrupted by wealth, slowly to degenerate and as slowly to repent. But the story went too quickly for this long, double, and difficult process; therefore Dickens at the last moment made a sudden recovery possible by representing that the whole business had been a trick. Consequently, this episode is not an
error merely in the sense that we may find many errors in a great writer like Dickens; it is a mistake patched up with another mistake. It is a case of that ossification which occurs round the healing of an actual fracture; the story had broken down and been mended.

If Dickens had fulfilled what was probably his original design, and described the slow freezing of Boffin’s soul in prosperity, I do not say that he would have done the thing well. He was not good at describing change in anybody, especially not good at describing a change for the worse. The tendency of all his characters is upwards, like bubbles, never downwards, like stones. But at least it would probably have been more credible than the story as it stands; for the story as it stands is actually less credible than any conceivable kind of moral ruin for Boffin. Such a character as his—rough, simple and lumberingly unconscious—might be more easily conceived as really sinking in self-respect and honour than as keeping up, month after month, so strained and inhuman a theatrical performance. To a good man (of that particular type) it would be easier to be bad than to pretend to be bad. It might have taken years to turn Noddy Boffin into a miser; but it would have taken centuries to turn him into an actor. This unreality in the later Boffin scenes makes the end of the story of John Harmon somewhat more unimpressive perhaps than it might otherwise have been. Upon no hypothesis, however, can he be made one of the more impressive figures of Dickens. It is true that it is an unfair criticism to object, as some have done, that Dickens does not succeed in disguising the identity of John Harmon with John Rokesmith. Dickens never intended to disguise it; the whole story would be mainly unintelligible and largely uninteresting if it had been successfully disguised. But though John Harmon or Rokesmith was never intended to be merely a man of mystery, it is not quite so easy to say what he was intended to be. Bella is a possible and pretty sketch. Mrs. Wilfer, her mother, is an entirely impossible and entirely delightful one. Miss Podsnap is not only excellent, she is to a healthy taste positively attractive; there is a real suggestion in her of the fact that humility is akin to truth, even when humility takes its more comic form of shyness. There is not in all literature a more human cri de cœur than that with which Georgiana Podsnap receives the information that a young man has professed himself to be attracted by her—“Oh what a Fool he must be!”

Two other figures require praise, though they are in the more tragic manner which Dickens touched from time to time in his later period. Bradley Headstone is really a successful villain; so successful that he fully captures our sympathies. Also there is something original in the very conception. It was a new notion to
add to the villains of fiction, whose thoughts go quickly, this villain whose thoughts go slow but sure; and it was a new notion to combine a deadly criminality not with high life or the slums (the usual haunts for villains) but with the laborious respectability of the lower, middle classes. The other good conception is the boy, Bradley Headstone’s pupil, with his dull, inexhaustible egoism, his pert, unconscious cruelty, and the strict decorum and incredible baseness of his views of life. It is singular that Dickens, who was not only a radical and a social reformer, but one who would have been particularly concerned to maintain the principle of modern popular education, should nevertheless have seen so clearly this potential evil in the mere educationalism of our time—the fact that merely educating the democracy may easily mean setting to work to despoil it of all the democratic virtues. It is better to be Lizzie Hexam and not know how to read and write than to be Charlie Hexam and not know how to appreciate Lizzie Hexam. It is not only necessary that the democracy should be taught; it is also necessary that the democracy should be taught democracy. Otherwise it will certainly fall a victim to that snobbishness and system of worldly standards which is the most natural and easy of all the forms of human corruption. This is one of the many dangers which Dickens saw before it existed. Dickens was really a prophet; far more of a prophet than Carlyle.
EDWIN DROOD

Pickwick was a work partly designed by others, but ultimately filled up by Dickens. Edwin Drood, the last book, was a book designed by Dickens, but ultimately filled up by others. The Pickwick Papers showed how much Dickens could make out of other people’s suggestions; The Mystery of Edwin Drood shows how very little other people can make out of Dickens’s suggestions.

Dickens was meant by Heaven to be the great melodramatist; so that even his literary end was melodramatic. Something more seems hinted at in the cutting short of Edwin Drood by Dickens than the mere cutting short of a good novel by a great man. It seems rather like the last taunt of some elf, leaving the world, that it should be this story which is not ended, this story which is only a story. The only one of Dickens’s novels which he did not finish was the only one that really needed finishing. He never had but one thoroughly good plot to tell; and that he has only told in heaven. This is what separates the case in question from any parallel cases of novelists cut off in the act of creation. That great novelist, for instance, with whom Dickens is constantly compared, died also in the middle of Denis Duval. But any one can see in Denis Duval the qualities of the later work of Thackeray; the increasing discursiveness, the increasing retrospective poetry, which had been in part the charm and in part the failure of Philip and The Virginians. But to Dickens it was permitted to die at a dramatic moment and to leave a dramatic mystery. Any Thackerayan could have completed the plot of Denis Duval; except indeed that a really sympathetic Thackerayan might have had some doubt as to whether there was any plot to complete. But Dickens, having had far too little plot in his stories previously, had far too much plot in the story he never told. Dickens dies in the act of telling, not his tenth novel, but his first news of murder. He drops down dead as he is in the act of denouncing the assassin. It is permitted to Dickens, in short, to come to a literary end as strange as his literary beginning. He began by completing the old romance of travel. He ended by inventing the new detective story.

It is as a detective story first and last that we have to consider The Mystery of Edwin Drood. This does not mean, of course, that the details are not often admirable in their swift and penetrating humour; to say that of the book would be to say that Dickens did not write it. Nothing could be truer, for instance, than the manner in which the dazed and drunken dignity of Durdles illustrates a certain bitterness at the bottom of the bewilderment of the poor. Nothing could
be better than the way in which the haughty and allusive conversation between Miss Twinkleton and the landlady illustrates the maddening preference of some females for skating upon thin social ice. There is an even better example than these of the original humorous insight of Dickens; and one not very often remarked, because of its brevity and its unimportance in the narrative. But Dickens never did anything better than the short account of Mr. Grewgious’s dinner being brought from the tavern by two waiters: “a stationary waiter,” and “a flying waiter.” The “flying waiter” brought the food and the “stationary waiter” quarrelled with him; the “flying waiter” brought glasses and the “stationary waiter” looked through them. Finally, it will be remembered the “stationary waiter” left the room, casting a glance which indicated “let it be understood that all emoluments are mine, and that Nil is the reward of this slave.” Still, Dickens wrote the book as a detective story; he wrote it as The Mystery of Edwin Drood. And alone, perhaps, among detective-story writers, he never lived to destroy his mystery. Here alone then among the Dickens novels it is necessary to speak of the plot and of the plot alone. And when we speak of the plot it becomes immediately necessary to speak of the two or three standing explanations which celebrated critics have given of the plot.

The story, so far as it was written by Dickens, can be read here. It describes, as will be seen, the disappearance of the young architect Edwin Drood after a night of festivity which was supposed to celebrate his reconciliation with a temporary enemy, Neville Landless, and was held at the house of his uncle John Jasper. Dickens continued the tale long enough to explain or explode the first and most obvious of his riddles. Long before the existing part terminates it has become evident that Drood has been put away, not by his obvious opponent, Landless, but by his uncle who professes for him an almost painful affection. The fact that we all know this, however, ought not in fairness to blind us to the fact that, considered as the first fraud in a detective story, it has been, with great skill, at once suggested and concealed. Nothing, for instance, could be cleverer as a piece of artistic mystery than the fact that Jasper, the uncle, always kept his eyes fixed on Drood’s face with a dark and watchful tenderness; the thing is so told that at first we really take it as only indicating something morbid in the affection; it is only afterwards that the frightful fancy breaks upon us that it is not morbid affection but morbid antagonism. This first mystery (which is no longer a mystery) of Jasper’s guilt, is only worth remarking because it shows that Dickens meant and felt himself able to mask all his batteries with real artistic strategy and artistic caution. The manner of the unmasking of Jasper marks the
manner and tone in which the whole tale was to be told. Here we have not got to do with Dickens simply giving himself away, as he gave himself away in Pickwick or The Christmas Carol. Not that one complains of his giving himself away; there was no better gift.

What was the mystery of Edwin Drood from Dickens’s point of view we shall never know, except perhaps from Dickens in heaven, and then he will very likely have forgotten. But the mystery of Edwin Drood from our point of view, from that of his critics, and those who have with some courage (after his death) attempted to be his collaborators, is simply this. There is no doubt that Jasper either murdered Drood or supposed that he had murdered him. This certainty we have from the fact that it is the whole point of a scene between Jasper and Drood’s lawyer Grewgious in which Jasper is struck down with remorse when he realises that Drood has been killed (from his point of view) needlessly and without profit. The only question is whether Jasper’s remorse was as needless as his murder. In other words the only question is whether, while he certainly thought he had murdered Drood, he had really done it. It need hardly be said that such a doubt would not have been raised for nothing; gentlemen like Jasper do not as a rule waste good remorse except upon successful crime. The origin of the doubt about the real death of Drood is this. Towards the latter end of the existing chapters there appears very abruptly, and with a quite ostentatious air of mystery, a character called Datchery. He appears for the purpose of spying upon Jasper and getting up some case against him; at any rate, if he has not this purpose in the story he has no other earthly purpose in it. He is an old gentleman of juvenile energy, with a habit of carrying his hat in his hand even in the open air; which some have interpreted as meaning that he feels the unaccustomed weight of a wig. Now there are one or two people in the story who this person might possibly be. Notably there is one person in the story who seems as if he were meant to be something, but who hitherto has certainly been nothing; I mean Bazzard, Mr. Grewgious’s clerk, a sulky fellow interested in theatricals, of whom an unnecessary fuss is made. There is also Mr. Grewgious himself, and there is also another suggestion, so much more startling that I shall have to deal with it later.

For the moment, however, the point is this: That ingenious writer, Mr. Proctor, started the highly plausible theory that this Datchery was Drood himself, who had not really been killed. He adduced a most complex and complete scheme covering nearly all the details; but the strongest argument he had was rather one of general artistic effect. This argument has been quite perfectly summed up by
Mr. Andrew Lang in one sentence: “If Edwin Drood is dead, there is not much mystery about him.” This is quite true; Dickens, when writing in so deliberate, nay, dark and conspiratorial a manner, would surely have kept the death of Drood and the guilt of Jasper hidden a little longer if the only real mystery had been the guilt of Jasper and the death of Drood. It certainly seems artistically more likely that there was a further mystery of Edwin Drood; not the mystery that he was murdered, but the mystery that he was not murdered. It is true indeed that Mr. Cumming Walters has a theory of Datchery (to which I have already darkly alluded) a theory which is wild enough to be the centre not only of any novel but of any harlequinade. But the point is that even Mr. Cumming Walters’s theory, though it makes the mystery more extraordinary, does not make it any more of a mystery of Edwin Drood. It should not have been called The Mystery of Drood, but The Mystery of Datchery. This is the strongest case for Proctor; if the story tells of Drood coming back as Datchery, the story does at any rate fulfil the title upon its title-page.

The principal objection to Proctor’s theory is that there seems no adequate reason why Jasper should not have murdered his nephew if he wanted to. And there seems even less reason why Drood, if unsuccessfully murdered, should not have raised the alarm. Happy young architects, when nearly strangled by elderly organists, do not generally stroll away and come back some time afterwards in a wig and with a false name. Superficially it would seem almost as odd to find the murderer investigating the origin of the murder, as to find the corpse investigating it. To this problem two of the ablest literary critics of our time, Mr. Andrew Lang and Mr. William Archer (both of them persuaded generally of the Proctor theory) have especially addressed themselves. Both have come to the same substantial conclusion; and I suspect that they are right. They hold that Jasper (whose mania for opium is much insisted on in the tale) had some sort of fit, or trance, or other physical seizure as he was committing the crime so that he left it unfinished; and they also hold that he had drugged Drood, so that Drood, when he recovered from the attack, was doubtful about who had been his assailant. This might really explain, if a little fancifully, his coming back to the town in the character of a detective. He might think it due to his uncle (whom he last remembered in a kind of murderous vision) to make an independent investigation as to whether he was really guilty or not. He might say, as Hamlet said of a vision equally terrifying, “I’ll have grounds more relative than this.” In fairness it must be said that there is something vaguely shaky about this theory; chiefly, I think, in this respect; that there is a sort of farcical cheerfulness about
Datchery which does not seem altogether appropriate to a lad who ought to be in an agony of doubt as to whether his best friend was or was not his assassin. Still there are many such incongruities in Dickens; and the explanation of Mr. Archer and Mr. Lang is an explanation. I do not believe that any explanation as good can be given to account for the tale being called The Mystery of Edwin Drood, if the tale practically starts with his corpse.

If Drood is really dead one cannot help feeling the story ought to end where it does end, not by accident but by design. The murder is explained. Jasper is ready to be hanged, and every one else in a decent novel ought to be ready to be married. If there was to be much more of anything, it must have been of anticlimax. Nevertheless there are degrees of anticlimax. Some of the more obvious explanations of Datchery are quite reasonable, but they are distinctly tame. For instance, Datchery may be Bazzard; but it is not very exciting if he is; for we know nothing about Bazzard and care less. Again, he might be Grewgious; but there is something pointless about one grotesque character dressing up as another grotesque character actually less amusing than himself. Now, Mr. Cumming Walters has at least had the distinction of inventing a theory which makes the story at least an interesting story, even if it is not exactly the story that is promised on the cover of the book. The obvious enemy of Drood, on whom suspicion first falls, the swarthy and sulky Landless, has a sister even swarthier and, except for her queenly dignity, even sulkier than he. This barbaric princess is evidently meant to be (in a sombre way) in love with Crisparkle, the clergyman and muscular Christian who represents the breezy element in the emotions of the tale. Mr. Cumming Walters seriously maintains that it is this barbaric princess who puts on a wig and dresses up as Mr. Datchery. He urges his case with much ingenuity of detail. Helena Landless certainly had a motive; to save her brother, who was accused falsely, by accusing Jasper justly. She certainly had some of the faculties; it is elaborately stated in the earlier part of her story that she was accustomed as a child to dress up in male costume and run into the wildest adventures. There may be something in Mr. Cumming Walters’s argument that the very flippancy of Datchery is the self-conscious flippancy of a strong woman in such an odd situation; certainly there is the same flippancy in Portia and in Rosalind. Nevertheless, I think, there is one final objection to the theory; and that is simply this, that it is comic. It is generally wrong to represent a great master of the grotesque as being grotesque exactly where he does not intend to be. And I am persuaded that if Dickens had really meant Helena to turn into Datchery, he would have made her from the first in some way more light,
eccentric, and laughable; he would have made her at least as light and laughable as Rosa. As it is, there is something strangely stiff and incredible about the idea of a lady so dark and dignified dressing up as a swaggering old gentleman in a blue coat and grey trousers. We might almost as easily imagine Edith Dombey dressing up as Major Bagstock. We might almost as easily imagine Rebecca in Ivanhoe dressing up as Isaac of York.

Of course such a question can never really be settled precisely, because it is the question not merely of a mystery but of a puzzle. For here the detective novel differs from every other kind of novel. The ordinary novelist desires to keep his readers to the point; the detective novelist actually desires to keep his readers off the point. In the first case, every touch must help to tell the reader what he means; in the second case, most of the touches must conceal or even contradict what he means. You are supposed to see and appreciate the smallest gestures of a good actor; but you do not see all the gestures of a conjuror, if he is a good conjuror. Hence, into the critical estimate of such works as this, there is introduced a problem, an extra perplexity, which does not exist in other cases. I mean the problem of the things commonly called blinds. Some of the points which we pick out as suggestive may have been put in as deceptive. Thus the whole conflict between a critic with one theory, like Mr. Lang, and a critic with another theory, like Mr. Cumming Walters, becomes eternal and a trifle farcical. Mr. Walters says that all Mr. Lang’s clues were blinds; Mr. Lang says that all Mr. Walters’s clues were blinds. Mr. Walters can say that some passages seemed to show that Helena was Datchery; Mr. Lang can reply that those passages were only meant to deceive simple people like Mr. Walters into supposing that she was Datchery. Similarly Mr. Lang can say that the return of Drood is foreshadowed; and Mr. Walters can reply that it was foreshadowed because it was never meant to come off. There seems no end to this insane process; anything that Dickens wrote may or may not mean the opposite of what it says. Upon this principle I should be very ready for one to declare that all the suggested Datcherys were really blinds; merely because they can naturally be suggested. I would undertake to maintain that Mr. Datchery is really Miss Twinkleton, who has a mercenary interest in keeping Rosa Budd at her school. This suggestion does not seem to me to be really much more humorous than Mr. Cumming Walters’s theory. Yet either may certainly be true. Dickens is dead, and a number of splendid scenes and startling adventures have died with him. Even if we get the right solution we shall not know that it is right. The tale might have been, and yet it has not been.
And I think there is no thought so much calculated to make one doubt death itself, to feel that sublime doubt which has created all religion—the doubt that found death incredible. Edwin Drood may or may not have really died; but surely Dickens did not really die. Surely our real detective liveth and shall appear in the latter days of the earth. For a finished tale may give a man immortality in the light and literary sense; but an unfinished tale suggests another immortality, more essential and more strange.
MASTER HUMPHREY’S CLOCK

It is quite indispensable to include a criticism of Master Humphrey’s Clock in any survey of Dickens, although it is not one of the books of which his admirers would chiefly boast; although perhaps it is almost the only one of which he would not have boasted himself. As a triumph of Dickens, at least, it is not of great importance. But as a sample of Dickens it happens to be of quite remarkable importance. The very fact that it is for the most part somewhat more level and even monotonous than most of his creations, makes us realise, as it were, against what level and monotony those creations commonly stand out. This book is the background of his mind. It is the basis and minimum of him which was always there. Alone, of all written things, this shows how he felt when he was not writing. Dickens might have written it in his sleep. That is to say, it is written by a sluggish Dickens, a half automatic Dickens, a dreaming and drifting Dickens; but still by the enduring Dickens.

But this truth can only be made evident by beginning nearer to the root of the matter. Nicholas Nickleby had just completed, or, to speak more strictly, confirmed, the popularity of the young author; wonderful as Pickwick was it might have been a nine days’ wonder; Oliver Twist had been powerful but painful; it was Nicholas Nickleby that proved the man to be a great productive force of which one could ask more, of which one could ask all things. His publishers, Chapman and Hall, seem to have taken at about this point that step which sooner or later most publishers do take with regard to a half successful man who is becoming wholly successful. Instead of asking him for something, they asked him for anything. They made him, so to speak, the editor of his own works. And indeed it is literally as the editor of his own works that he next appears; for the next thing to which he proposes to put his name is not a novel, but for all practical purposes a magazine. Yet although it is a magazine, it is a magazine entirely written by himself; the publishers, in point of fact, wanted to create a kind of Dickens Miscellany, in a much more literal sense than that in which we speak of a Bentley Miscellany. Dickens was in no way disposed to dislike such a job; for the more miscellaneous he was the more he enjoyed himself. And indeed this early experiment of his bears a great deal of resemblance to those later experiences in which he was the editor of two popular periodicals. The editor of Master Humphrey’s Clock was a kind of type or precursor of the editor of Household Words and All the Year Round. There was
the same sense of absolute ease in an atmosphere of infinite gossip. There was
the same great advantage gained by a man of genius who wrote best scrappily
and by episodes. The omnipotence of the editor helped the eccentricities of the
author. He could excuse himself for all his own shortcomings. He could begin a
novel, get tired of it, and turn it into a short story. He could begin a short story,
get fond of it, and turn it into a novel. Thus in the days of Household Words he
could begin a big scheme of stories, such as Somebody’s Luggage, or Seven
Poor Travellers, and after writing a tale or two toss the rest to his colleagues.
Thus, on the other hand, in the time of Master Humphrey’s Clock, he could
begin one small adventure of Master Humphrey and find himself unable to stop
it. It is quite clear I think (though only from moral evidence, which some call
reading between the lines) that he originally meant to tell many separate tales of
Master Humphrey’s wanderings in London, only one of which, and that a short
one, was to have been concerned with a little girl going home. Fortunately for us
that little girl had a grandfather, and that grandfather had a curiosity shop and
also a nephew, and that nephew had an entirely irrelevant friend whom men and
angels called Richard Swiveller. Once having come into the society of Swiveller
it is not unnatural that Dickens stayed there for a whole book. The essential point
for us here, however, is that Master Humphrey’s Clock was stopped by the size
and energy of the thing that had come of it. It died in childbirth.

There is, however, another circumstance which, even in ordinary public
opinion, makes this miscellany important, besides the great novel that came out
of it. I mean that the ordinary reader can remember one great thing about Master
Humphrey’s Clock, besides the fact that it was the frame-work of The Old
Curiosity Shop. He remembers that Mr. Pickwick and the Wellers rise again
from the dead. Dickens makes Samuel Pickwick become a member of Master
Humphrey’s Clock Society; and he institutes a parallel society in the kitchen
under the name of Mr. Weller’s Watch.

Before we consider the question of whether Dickens was wise when he did
this, it is worth remarking how really odd it is that this is the only place where he
did it. Dickens, one would have thought, was the one man who might naturally
have introduced old characters into new stories. Dickens, as a matter of fact, was
almost the one man who never did it. It would have seemed natural in him for a
double reason; first, that his characters were very valuable to him, and second
that they were not very valuable to his particular stories. They were dear to him,
and they are dear to us; but they really might as well have turned up (within
reason) in one environment as well as in another. We, I am sure, should be
delighted to meet Mr. Mantalini in the story of Dombey and Son. And he
certainly would not be much missed from the plot of Nicholas Nickleby. “I am
an affectionate father,” said Dickens, “to all the children of my fancy; but like
many other parents I have in my heart of hearts a favourite child; and his name is
David Copperfield.” Yet although his heart must often have yearned backwards
to the children of his fancy whose tale was already told, yet he never touched
one of them again even with the point of his pen. The characters in David
Copperfield, as in all the others, were dead for him after he had done the book; if
he loved them as children, it was as dead and sanctified children. It is a curious
test of the strength and even reticence that underlay the seeming exuberance of
Dickens, that he never did yield at all to exactly that indiscretion or act of
sentimentalism which would seem most natural to his emotions and his art. Or
rather he never did yield to it except here in this one case; the case of Master
Humphrey’s Clock.

And it must be remembered that nearly everybody else did yield to it. Especially
did those writers who are commonly counted Dickens’s superiors in
art and exactitude and closeness to connected reality. Thackeray wallowed in it;
Anthony Trollope lived on it. Those modern artists who pride themselves most
on the separation and unity of a work of art have indulged in it often; thus, for
instance, Stevenson gave a glimpse of Alan Breck in The Master of Ballantrae,
and meant to give a glimpse of the Master of Ballantrae in another unwritten tale
called The Rising Sun. The habit of revising old characters is so strong in
Thackeray that Vanity Fair, Pendennis, The Newcomes, and Philip are in one
sense all one novel. Certainly the reader sometimes forgets which one of them he
is reading. Afterwards he cannot remember whether the best description of Lord
Steyne’s red whiskers or Mr. Wagg’s rude jokes occurred in Vanity Fair, or
Pendennis; he cannot remember whether his favourite dialogue between Mr. and
Mrs. Pendennis occurred in The Newcomes, or in Philip. Whenever two
Thackeray characters in two Thackeray novels could by any possibility have
been contemporary, Thackeray delights to connect them. He makes Major
Pendennis nod to Dr. Firmin, and Colonel Newcome ask Major Dobbin to
dinner. Whenever two characters could not possibly have been contemporary he
goes out of his way to make one the remote ancestor of the other. Thus he
created the great house of Warrington solely to connect a “blue-bearded”
Bohemian journalist with the blood of Henry Esmond. It is quite impossible to
conceive Dickens keeping up this elaborate connection between all his
characters and all his books, especially across the ages. It would give us a kind
of shock if we learnt from Dickens that Major Bagstock was the nephew of Mr. Chester. Still less can we imagine Dickens carrying on an almost systematic family chronicle as was in some sense done by Trollope. There must be some reason for such a paradox; for in itself it is a very curious one. The writers who wrote carefully were always putting, as it were, after-words and appendices to their already finished portraits; the man who did splendid and flamboyant but faulty portraits never attempted to touch them up. Or rather (we may say again) he attempted it once, and then he failed.

The reason lay, I think, in the very genius of Dickens’s creation. The child he bore of his soul quitted him when his term was passed like a veritable child born of the body. It was independent of him, as a child is of its parents. It had become dead to him even in becoming alive. When Thackeray studied Pendennis or Lord Steyne he was studying something outside himself, and therefore something that might come nearer and nearer. But when Dickens brought forth Sam Weller or Pickwick he was creating something that had once been inside himself and therefore when once created could only go further and further away. It may seem a strange thing to say of such laughable characters and of so lively an author, yet I say it quite seriously; I think it possible that there arose between Dickens and his characters that strange and almost supernatural shyness that arises often between parents and children; because they are too close to each other to be open with each other. Too much hot and high emotion had gone to the creation of one of his great figures for it to be possible for him without embarrassment ever to speak with it again. This is the thing which some fools call fickleness; but which is not the death of feeling, but rather its dreadful perpetuation; this shyness is the final seal of strong sentiment; this coldness is an eternal constancy.

This one case where Dickens broke through his rule was not such a success as to tempt him in any case to try the thing again.

There is weakness in the strict sense of the word in this particular reappearance of Samuel Pickwick and Samuel Weller. In the original Pickwick Papers Dickens had with quite remarkable delicacy and vividness contrived to suggest a certain fundamental sturdiness and spirit in that corpulent and complacent old gentleman. Mr. Pickwick was a mild man, a respectable man, a placid man; but he was very decidedly a man. He could denounce his enemies and fight for his nightcap. He was fat; but he had a backbone. In Master Humphrey’s Clock the backbone seems somehow to be broken; his good nature seems limp instead of alert. He gushes out of his good heart; instead of taking a good heart for granted as a part of any decent gentleman’s furniture as did the
older and stronger Pickwick. The truth is, I think, that Mr. Pickwick in complete repose loses some part of the whole point of his existence. The quality which makes the Pickwick Papers one of the greatest of human fairy tales is a quality which all the great fairy tales possess, and which marks them out from most modern writing. A modern novelist generally endeavours to make his story interesting, by making his hero odd. The most typical modern books are those in which the central figure is himself or herself an exception, a cripple, a courtesan, a lunatic, a swindler, or a person of the most perverse temperament. Such stories, for instance, are Sir Richard Calmady, Dodo, Quisante, La Bête Humaine, even the Egoist. But in a fairy tale the boy sees all the wonders of fairyland because he is an ordinary boy. In the same way Mr. Samuel Pickwick sees an extraordinary England because he is an ordinary old gentleman. He does not see things through the rosy spectacles of the modern optimist or the green-smoked spectacles of the pessimist; he sees it through the crystal glasses of his own innocence. One must see the world clearly even in order to see its wildest poetry. One must see it sanely even in order to see that it is insane.

Mr. Pickwick, then, relieved against a background of heavy kindliness and quiet club life does not seem to be quite the same heroic figure as Mr. Pickwick relieved against a background of the fighting police constables at Ipswich or the roaring mobs of Eatanswill. Of the degeneration of the Wellers, though it has been commonly assumed by critics, I am not so sure. Some of the things said in the humorous assembly round Mr. Weller’s Watch are really human and laughable and altogether in the old manner. Especially, I think, the vague and awful allusiveness of old Mr. Weller when he reminds his little grandson of his delinquencies under the trope or figure of their being those of another little boy, is really in the style both of the irony and the domesticity of the poorer classes. Sam also says one or two things really worthy of himself. We feel almost as if Sam were a living man, and could not appear for an instant without being amusing.

The other elements in the make-up of Master Humphrey’s Clock come under the same paradox which I have applied to the whole work. Though not very important in literature they are somehow quite important in criticism. They show us better than anything else the whole unconscious trend of Dickens, the stuff of which his very dreams were made. If he had made up tales to amuse himself when half-awake (as I have no doubt he did) they would be just such tales as these. They would have been ghostly legends of the nooks and holes of London, echoes of old love and laughter from the taverns or the Inns of Court. In a sense
also one may say that these tales are the great might-have-beens of Dickens. They are chiefly designs which he fills up here slightly and unsatisfactorily, but which he might have filled up with his own brightest and most incredible colours. Nothing, for instance, could have been nearer to the heart of Dickens than his great Gargantuan conception of Gog and Magog telling London legends to each other all through the night. Those two giants might have stood on either side of some new great city of his invention, swarming with fanciful figures and noisy with new events. But as it is, the two giants stand alone in a wilderness, guarding either side of a gate that leads nowhere.
Those abuses which are supposed to belong specially to religion belong to all human institutions. They are not the sins of supernaturalism, but the sins of nature. In this respect it is interesting to observe that all the evils which our Rationalist or Protestant tradition associates with the idolatrous veneration of sacred figures arises in the merely human atmosphere of literature and history. Every extravagance of hagiology can be found in hero-worship. Every folly alleged in the worship of saints can be found in the worship of poets. There are those who are honourably and intensely opposed to the atmosphere of religious symbolism or religious archæology. There are people who have a vague idea that the worship of saints is worse than the imitation of sinners. There are some, like a lady I once knew, who think that hagiology is the scientific study of hags. But these slightly prejudiced persons generally have idolatries and superstitions of their own, particularly idolatries and superstitions in connection with celebrated people. Mr. Stead preserves a pistol belonging to Oliver Cromwell in the office of the Review of Reviews; and I am sure he worships it in his rare moments of solitude and leisure. A man, who could not be induced to believe in God by all the arguments of all the philosophers, professed himself ready to believe if he could see it stated on a postcard in the handwriting of Mr. Gladstone. Persons not otherwise noted for their religious exercise have been known to procure and preserve portions of the hair of Paderewski. Nay, by this time blasphemy itself is a sacred tradition, and almost as much respect would be paid to the alleged relics of an atheist as to the alleged relics of a god. If any one has a fork that belonged to Voltaire, he could probably exchange it in the open market for a knife that belonged to St. Theresa.

Of all the instances of this there is none stranger than the case of Dickens. It should be pondered very carefully by those who reproach Christianity with having been easily corrupted into a system of superstitions. If ever there was a message full of what modern people call true Christianity, the direct appeal to the common heart, a faith that was simple, a hope that was infinite, and a charity that was omnivorous, if ever there came among men what they call the Christianity of Christ, it was in the message of Dickens. Christianity has been in the world nearly two thousand years, and it has not yet quite lost, its enemies being judges, its first fire and charity; but friends and enemies would agree that it was from the very first more detailed and doctrinal than the spirit of Dickens.
The spirit of Dickens has been in the world about sixty years; and already it is a superstition. Already it is loaded with relics. Already it is stiff with antiquity.

Everything that can be said about the perversion of Christianity can be said about the perversion of Dickens. It is said that Christ’s words are repeated by the very High Priests and Scribes whom He meant to denounce. It is just as true that the jokes in Pickwick are quoted with delight by the very bigwigs of bench and bar whom Dickens wished to make absurd and impossible. It is said that texts from Scripture are constantly taken in vain by Judas and Herod, by Caiaphas and Annas. It is just as true that texts from Dickens are rapturously quoted on all our platforms by Podsnap and Honeythunder, by Pardiggle and Veneering, by Tigg when he is forming a company, or Pott when he is founding a newspaper. People joke about Bumble in defence of Bumbledom; people allude playfully to Mrs. Jellyby while agitating for Borrioboola Gha. The very things which Dickens tried to destroy are preserved as relics of him. The very houses he wished to pull down are propped up as monuments of Dickens. We wish to preserve everything of him, except his perilous public spirit.

This antiquarian attitude towards Dickens has many manifestations, some of them somewhat ridiculous. I give one startling instance out of a hundred of the irony remarked upon above. In his first important book, Dickens lashed the loathsome corruption of our oligarchical politics, their blaring servility and dirty diplomacy of bribes, under the name of an imaginary town called Eatanswill. If Eatanswill, wherever it was, had been burned to the ground by its indignant neighbours the day after the exposure, it would have been not inappropriate. If it had been entirely deserted by its inhabitants, if they had fled to hide themselves in holes and caverns, one could have understood it. If it had been struck by a thunderbolt out of heaven or outlawed by the whole human race, all that would seem quite natural. What has really happened is this: that two respectable towns in Suffolk are still disputing for the honour of having been the original Eatanswill; as if two innocent hamlets each claimed to be Gomorrah. I make no comment; the thing is beyond speech.

But this strange sentimental and relic-hunting worship of Dickens has many more innocent manifestations. One of them is that which takes advantage of the fact that Dickens happened to be a journalist by trade. It occupies itself therefore with hunting through papers and magazines for unsigned articles which may possibly be proved to be his. Only a little time ago one of these enthusiasts ran up to me, rubbing his hands, and told me that he was sure he had found two and a half short paragraphs in All the Year Round which were certainly written by
Dickens, whom he called (I regret to say) the Master. Something of this archæological weakness must cling to all mere reprints of his minor work. He was a great novelist; but he was also, among other things, a good journalist and a good man. It is often necessary for a good journalist to write bad literature. It is sometimes the first duty of a good man to write it. Pot-boilers to my feeling are sacred things; but they may well be secret as well as sacred, like the holy pot which it is their purpose to boil. In the collection called Reprinted Pieces there are some, I think, which demand or deserve this apology. There are many which fall below the level of his recognised books of fragments, such as The Sketches by Boz, and The Uncommercial Traveller. Two or three elements in the compilation, however, make it quite essential to any solid appreciation of the author.

Of these the first in importance is that which comes last in order. I mean the three remarkable pamphlets upon the English Sunday, called Sunday under Three Heads. Here, at least, we find the eternal Dickens, though not the eternal Dickens of fiction. His other political and sociological suggestions in this volume are so far unimportant that they are incidental, and even personal. Any man might have formed Dickens’s opinion about flogging for garrotters, and altered it afterwards. Any one might have come to Dickens’s conclusion about model prisons, or to any other conclusion equally reasonable and unimportant. These things have no colour of the great man’s character. But on the subject of the English Sunday he does stand for his own philosophy. He stands for a particular view, remote at present both from Liberals and Conservatives. He was, in a conscious sense, the first of its spokesmen. He was in every sense the last.

In his appeal for the pleasures of the people, Dickens has remained alone. The pleasures of the people have now no defender, Radical or Tory. The Tories despise the people. The Radicals despise the pleasures.
GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

G. K. CHESTERTON
NEW YORK

JOHN LANE COMPANY

MCMIX

COPYRIGHT, 1909, BY JOHN LANE COMPANY

THE PLIMPTON PRESS, NORWOOD, MASS.

THIS WORK IS PUBLISHED FOR THE GREATER GLORY OF JESUS CHRIST THROUGH HIS MOST HOLY MOTHER MARY AND FOR THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE MILITANT CHURCH AND HER MEMBERS.

THE TYPOGRAPHY OF THIS BOOK IS THE PROPERTY OF CATHOLIC WAY PUBLISHING AND MAY NOT BE REPRODUCED, IN WHOLE OR IN PART, WITHOUT WRITTEN PERMISSION OF THE PUBLISHER.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**INDEX**

**GEORGE BERNARD SHAW**

- TABLE OF CONTENTS
- INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EDITION
- THE PROBLEM OF A PREFACE
- GEORGE BERNARD SHAW
- THE IRISHMAN
- THE PURITAN
- THE PROGRESSIVE
- THE CRITIC
- THE DRAMATIST
- THE PHILOSOPHER
INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EDITION

Most people either say that they agree with Bernard Shaw or that they do not understand him. I am the only person who understands him, and I do not agree with him.

G. K. C.
THE PROBLEM OF A PREFACE

A peculiar difficulty arrests the writer of this rough study at the very start. Many people know Mr. Bernard Shaw chiefly as a man who would write a very long preface even to a very short play. And there is truth in the idea; he is indeed a very prefatory sort of person. He always gives the explanation before the incident; but so, for the matter of that, does the Gospel of St. John. For Bernard Shaw, as for the mystics, Christian and heathen (and Shaw is best described as a heathen mystic), the philosophy of facts is anterior to the facts themselves. In due time we come to the fact, the incarnation; but in the beginning was the Word.

This produces upon many minds an impression of needless preparation and a kind of bustling prolixity. But the truth is that the very rapidity of such a man’s mind makes him seem slow in getting to the point. It is positively because he is quick-witted that he is long-winded. A quick eye for ideas may actually make a writer slow in reaching his goal, just as a quick eye for landscapes might make a motorist slow in reaching Brighton. An original man has to pause at every allusion or simile to re-explain historical parallels, to re-shape distorted words. Any ordinary leader-writer (let us say) might write swiftly and smoothly something like this: “The element of religion in the Puritan rebellion, if hostile to art, yet saved the movement from some of the evils in which the French Revolution involved morality.” Now a man like Mr. Shaw, who has his own views on everything, would be forced to make the sentence long and broken instead of swift and smooth. He would say something like: “The element of religion, as I explain religion, in the Puritan rebellion (which you wholly misunderstand) if hostile to art—that is what I mean by art—may have saved it from some evils (remember my definition of evil) in which the French Revolution—of which I have my own opinion—involved morality, which I will define for you in a minute.” That is the worst of being a really universal sceptic and philosopher; it is such slow work. The very forest of the man’s thoughts chokes up his thoroughfare. A man must be orthodox upon most things, or he will never even have time to preach his own heresy.

Now the same difficulty which affects the work of Bernard Shaw affects also any book about him. There is an unavoidable artistic necessity to put the preface before the play; that is, there is a necessity to say something of what Bernard Shaw’s experience means before one even says what it was. We have to mention
what he did when we have already explained why he did it. Viewed
superficially, his life consists of fairly conventional incidents, and might easily
fall under fairly conventional phrases. It might be the life of any Dublin clerk or
Manchester Socialist or London author. If I touch on the man’s life before his
work, it will seem trivial; yet taken with his work it is most important. In short,
one could scarcely know what Shaw’s doings meant unless one knew what he
meant by them. This difficulty in mere order and construction has puzzled me
very much. I am going to overcome it, clumsily perhaps, but in the way which
affects me as most sincere. Before I write even a slight suggestion of his relation
to the stage, I am going to write of three soils or atmospheres out of which that
relation grew. In other words, before I write of Shaw I will write of the three
great influences upon Shaw. They were all three there before he was born, yet
each one of them is himself and a very vivid portrait of him from one point of
view. I have called these three traditions: “The Irishman,” “The Puritan,” and
“The Progressive.” I do not see how this prefatory theorising is to be avoided;
for if I simply said, for instance, that Bernard Shaw was an Irishman, the
impression produced on the reader might be remote from my thought and, what
is more important, from Shaw’s. People might think, for instance, that I meant
that he was “irresponsible.” That would throw out the whole plan of these pages,
for if there is one thing that Shaw is not, it is irresponsible. The responsibility in
him rings like steel. Or, again, if I simply called him a Puritan, it might mean
something about nude statues or “prudes on the prowl.” Or if I called him a
Progressive, it might be supposed to mean that he votes for Progressives at the
County Council election, which I very much doubt. I have no other course but
this: of briefly explaining such matters as Shaw himself might explain them.
Some fastidious persons may object to my thus putting the moral in front of the
fable. Some may imagine in their innocence that they already understand the
word Puritan or the yet more mysterious word Irishman. The only person,
indeed, of whose approval I feel fairly certain is Mr. Bernard Shaw himself, the
man of many introductions.
GEORGE BERNARD SHAW
THE IRISHMAN

The English public has commonly professed, with a kind of pride, that it cannot understand Mr. Bernard Shaw. There are many reasons for it which ought to be adequately considered in such a book as this. But the first and most obvious reason is the mere statement that George Bernard Shaw was born in Dublin in 1856. At least one reason why Englishmen cannot understand Mr. Shaw is that Englishmen have never taken the trouble to understand Irishmen. They will sometimes be generous to Ireland; but never just to Ireland. They will speak to Ireland; they will speak for Ireland; but they will not hear Ireland speak. All the real amiability which most Englishmen undoubtedly feel towards Irishmen is lavished upon a class of Irishmen which unfortunately does not exist. The Irishman of the English farce, with his brogue, his buoyancy, and his tender-hearted irresponsibility, is a man who ought to have been thoroughly pampered with praise and sympathy, if he had only existed to receive them. Unfortunately, all the time that we were creating a comic Irishman in fiction, we were creating a tragic Irishman in fact. Never perhaps has there been a situation of such excruciating cross-purposes even in the three-act farce. The more we saw in the Irishman a sort of warm and weak fidelity, the more he regarded us with a sort of icy anger. The more the oppressor looked down with an amiable pity, the more did the oppressed look down with a somewhat unamiable contempt. But, indeed, it is needless to say that such comic cross-purposes could be put into a play; they have been put into a play. They have been put into what is perhaps the most real of Mr. Bernard Shaw’s plays, John Bull’s Other Island.

It is somewhat absurd to imagine that any one who has not read a play by Mr. Shaw will be reading a book about him. But if it comes to that it is (as I clearly perceive) absurd to be writing a book about Mr. Bernard Shaw at all. It is indefensibly foolish to attempt to explain a man whose whole object through life has been to explain himself. But even in nonsense there is a need for logic and consistency; therefore let us proceed on the assumption that when I say that all Mr. Shaw’s blood and origin may be found in John Bull’s Other Island, some reader may answer that he does not know the play. Besides, it is more important to put the reader right about England and Ireland even than to put him right about Shaw. If he reminds me that this is a book about Shaw, I can only assure him that I will reasonably, and at proper intervals, remember the fact.

Mr. Shaw himself said once, “I am a typical Irishman; my family came from
Yorkshire.” Scarcely anyone but a typical Irishman could have made the remark. It is in fact a bull, a conscious bull. A bull is only a paradox which people are too stupid to understand. It is the rapid summary of something which is at once so true and so complex that the speaker who has the swift intelligence to perceive it, has not the slow patience to explain it. Mystical dogmas are much of this kind. Dogmas are often spoken of as if they were signs of the slowness or endurance of the human mind. As a matter of fact, they are marks of mental promptitude and lucid impatience. A man will put his meaning mystically because he cannot waste time in putting it rationally. Dogmas are not dark and mysterious; rather a dogma is like a flash of lightning—an instantaneous lucidity that opens across a whole landscape. Of the same nature are Irish bulls; they are summaries which are too true to be consistent. The Irish make Irish bulls for the same reason that they accept Papal bulls. It is because it is better to speak wisdom foolishly, like the Saints, rather than to speak folly wisely, like the Dons.

This is the truth about mystical dogmas and the truth about Irish bulls; it is also the truth about the paradoxes of Bernard Shaw. Each of them is an argument impatiently shortened into an epigram. Each of them represents a truth hammered and hardened, with an almost disdainful violence until it is compressed into a small space, until it is made brief and almost incomprehensible. The case of that curt remark about Ireland and Yorkshire is a very typical one. If Mr. Shaw had really attempted to set out all the sensible stages of his joke, the sentence would have run something like this: “That I am an Irishman is a fact of psychology which I can trace in many of the things that come out of me, my fastidiousness, my frigid fierceness and my distrust of mere pleasure. But the thing must be tested by what comes from me; do not try on me the dodge of asking where I came from, how many batches of three hundred and sixty-five days my family was in Ireland. Do not play any games on me about whether I am a Celt, a word that is dim to the anthropologist and utterly unmeaning to anybody else. Do not start any drivelling discussions about whether the word Shaw is German or Scandinavian or Iberian or Basque. You know you are human; I know I am Irish. I know I belong to a certain type and temper of society; and I know that all sorts of people of all sorts of blood live in that society and by that society; and are therefore Irish. You can take your books of anthropology to hell or to Oxford.” Thus gently, elaborately and at length, Mr. Shaw would have explained his meaning, if he had thought it worth his while. As he did not he merely flung the symbolic, but very complete sentence, “I am a typical Irishman; my family came from Yorkshire.”
What then is the colour of this Irish society of which Bernard Shaw, with all his individual oddity, is yet an essential type? One generalisation, I think, may at least be made. Ireland has in it a quality which caused it (in the most ascetic age of Christianity) to be called the “Land of Saints”; and which still might give it a claim to be called the Land of Virgins. An Irish Catholic priest once said to me, “There is in our people a fear of the passions which is older even than Christianity.” Everyone who has read Shaw’s play upon Ireland will remember the thing in the horror of the Irish girl at being kissed in the public streets. But anyone who knows Shaw’s work will recognize it in Shaw himself. There exists by accident an early and beardless portrait of him which really suggests in the severity and purity of its lines some of the early ascetic pictures of the beardless Christ. However he may shout profanities or seek to shatter the shrines, there is always something about him which suggests that in a sweeter and more solid civilisation he would have been a great saint. He would have been a saint of a sternly ascetic, perhaps of a sternly negative type. But he has this strange note of the saint in him: that he is literally unworldly. Worldliness has no human magic for him; he is not bewitched by rank nor drawn on by conviviality at all. He could not understand the intellectual surrender of the snob. He is perhaps a defective character; but he is not a mixed one. All the virtues he has are heroic virtues. Shaw is like the Venus of Milo; all that there is of him is admirable.

But in any case this Irish innocence is peculiar and fundamental in him; and strange as it may sound, I think that his innocence has a great deal to do with his suggestions of sexual revolution. Such a man is comparatively audacious in theory because he is comparatively clean in thought. Powerful men who have powerful passions use much of their strength in forging chains for themselves; they alone know how strong the chains need to be. But there are other souls who walk the woods like Diana, with a sort of wild chastity. I confess I think that this Irish purity a little disables a critic in dealing, as Mr. Shaw has dealt, with the roots and reality of the marriage law. He forgets that those fierce and elementary functions which drive the universe have an impetus which goes beyond itself and cannot always easily be recovered. So the healthiest men may often erect a law to watch them, just as the healthiest sleepers may want an alarum clock to wake them up. However this may be, Bernard Shaw certainly has all the virtues and all the powers that go with this original quality in Ireland. One of them is a sort of awful elegance; a dangerous and somewhat inhuman daintiness of taste which sometimes seems to shrink from matter itself, as though it were mud. Of the many sincere things Mr. Shaw has said he never said a more sincere one than
when he stated he was a vegetarian, not because eating meat was bad morality, but because it was bad taste. It would be fanciful to say that Mr. Shaw is a vegetarian because he comes of a race of vegetarians, of peasants who are compelled to accept the simple life in the shape of potatoes. But I am sure that his fierce fastidiousness in such matters is one of the allotropic forms of the Irish purity; it is to the virtue of Father Matthew what a coal is to a diamond. It has, of course, the quality common to all special and unbalanced types of virtue, that you never know where it will stop. I can feel what Mr. Shaw probably means when he says that it is disgusting to feast off dead bodies, or to cut lumps off what was once a living thing. But I can never know at what moment he may not feel in the same way that it is disgusting to mutilate a pear-tree, or to root out of the earth those miserable mandrakes which cannot even groan. There is no natural limit to this rush and riotous gallop of refinement.

But it is not this physical and fantastic purity which I should chiefly count among the legacies of the old Irish morality. A much more important gift is that which all the saints declared to be the reward of chastity: a queer clearness of the intellect, like the hard clearness of a crystal. This certainly Mr. Shaw possesses; in such degree that at certain times the hardness seems rather clearer than the clearness. But so it does in all the most typical Irish characters and Irish attitudes of mind. This is probably why Irishmen succeed so much in such professions as require a certain crystalline realism, especially about results. Such professions are the soldier and the lawyer; these give ample opportunity for crimes but not much for mere illusions. If you have composed a bad opera you may persuade yourself that it is a good one; if you have carved a bad statue you can think yourself better than Michael Angelo. But if you have lost a battle you cannot believe you have won it; if your client is hanged you cannot pretend that you have got him off.

There must be some sense in every popular prejudice, even about foreigners. And the English people certainly have somehow got an impression and a tradition that the Irishman is genial, unreasonable, and sentimental. This legend of the tender, irresponsible Paddy has two roots; there are two elements in the Irish which made the mistake possible. First, the very logic of the Irishman makes him regard war or revolution as extra-logical, an ultima ratio which is beyond reason. When fighting a powerful enemy he no more worries whether all his charges are exact or all his attitudes dignified than a soldier worries whether a cannon-ball is shapely or a plan of campaign picturesque. He is aggressive; he attacks. He seems merely to be rowdy in Ireland when he is really carrying the
war into Africa—or England. A Dublin tradesman printed his name and trade in archaic Erse on his cart. He knew that hardly anybody could read it; he did it to annoy. In his position I think he was quite right. When one is oppressed it is a mark of chivalry to hurt oneself in order to hurt the oppressor. But the English (never having had a real revolution since the Middle Ages) find it very hard to understand this steady passion for being a nuisance, and mistake it for mere whimsical impulsiveness and folly. When an Irish member holds up the whole business of the House of Commons by talking of his bleeding country for five or six hours, the simple English members suppose that he is a sentimentalist. The truth is that he is a scornful realist who alone remains unaffected by the sentimentalism of the House of Commons. The Irishman is neither poet enough nor snob enough to be swept away by those smooth social and historical tides and tendencies which carry Radicals and Labour members comfortably off their feet. He goes on asking for a thing because he wants it; and he tries really to hurt his enemies because they are his enemies. This is the first of the queer confusions which make the hard Irishman look soft. He seems to us wild and unreasonable because he is really much too reasonable to be anything but fierce when he is fighting.

In all this it will not be difficult to see the Irishman in Bernard Shaw. Though personally one of the kindest men in the world, he has often written really in order to hurt; not because he hated any particular men (he is hardly hot and animal enough for that), but because he really hated certain ideas even unto slaying. He provokes; he will not let people alone. One might even say that he bullies, only that this would be unfair, because he always wishes the other man to hit back. At least he always challenges, like a true Green Islander. An even stronger instance of this national trait can be found in another eminent Irishman, Oscar Wilde. His philosophy (which was vile) was a philosophy of ease, of acceptance, and luxurious illusion; yet, being Irish, he could not help putting it in pugnacious and propagandist epigrams. He preached his softness with hard decision; he praised pleasure in the words most calculated to give pain. This armed insolence, which was the noblest thing about him, was also the Irish thing; he challenged all comers. It is a good instance of how right popular tradition is even when it is most wrong, that the English have perceived and preserved this essential trait of Ireland in a proverbial phrase. It is true that the Irishman says, “Who will tread on the tail of my coat?”

But there is a second cause which creates the English fallacy that the Irish are weak and emotional. This again springs from the very fact that the Irish are lucid
and logical. For being logical they strictly separate poetry from prose; and as in prose they are strictly prosaic, so in poetry they are purely poetical. In this, as in one or two other things, they resemble the French, who make their gardens beautiful because they are gardens, but their fields ugly because they are only fields. An Irishman may like romance, but he will say, to use a frequent Shavian phrase, that it is “only romance.” A great part of the English energy in fiction arises from the very fact that their fiction half deceives them. If Rudyard Kipling, for instance, had written his short stories in France, they would have been praised as cool, clever little works of art, rather cruel, and very nervous and feminine; Kipling’s short stories would have been appreciated like Maupassant’s short stories. In England they were not appreciated but believed. They were taken seriously by a startled nation as a true picture of the empire and the universe. The English people made haste to abandon England in favour of Mr. Kipling and his imaginary colonies; they made haste to abandon Christianity in favour of Mr. Kipling’s rather morbid version of Judaism. Such a moral boom of a book would be almost impossible in Ireland, because the Irish mind distinguishes between life and literature. Mr. Bernard Shaw himself summed this up as he sums up so many things in a compact sentence which he uttered in conversation with the present writer, “An Irishman has two eyes.” He meant that with one eye an Irishman saw that a dream was inspiring, bewitching, or sublime, and with the other eye that after all it was a dream. Both the humour and the sentiment of an Englishman cause him to wink the other eye. Two other small examples will illustrate the English mistake. Take, for instance, that noble survival from a nobler age of politics—I mean Irish oratory. The English imagine that Irish politicians are so hot-headed and poetical that they have to pour out a torrent of burning words. The truth is that the Irish are so clear-headed and critical that they still regard rhetoric as a distinct art, as the ancients did. Thus a man makes a speech as a man plays a violin, not necessarily without feeling, but chiefly because he knows how to do it. Another instance of the same thing is that quality which is always called the Irish charm. The Irish are agreeable, not because they are particularly emotional, but because they are very highly civilised. Blarney is a ritual; as much of a ritual as kissing the Blarney Stone.

Lastly, there is one general truth about Ireland which may very well have influenced Bernard Shaw from the first; and almost certainly influenced him for good. Ireland is a country in which the political conflicts are at least genuine; they are about something. They are about patriotism, about religion, or about
money: the three great realities. In other words, they are concerned with what commonwealth a man lives in or with what universe a man lives in or with how he is to manage to live in either. But they are not concerned with which of two wealthy cousins in the same governing class shall be allowed to bring in the same Parish Councils Bill; there is no party system in Ireland. The party system in England is an enormous and most efficient machine for preventing political conflicts. The party system is arranged on the same principle as a three-legged race: the principle that union is not always strength and is never activity. Nobody asks for what he really wants. But in Ireland the loyalist is just as ready to throw over the King as the Fenian to throw over Mr. Gladstone; each will throw over anything except the thing that he wants. Hence it happens that even the follies or the frauds of Irish politics are more genuine as symptoms and more honourable as symbols than the lumbering hypocrisies of the prosperous Parliamentarian. The very lies of Dublin and Belfast are truer than the truisms of Westminster. They have an object; they refer to a state of things. There was more honesty, in the sense of actuality, about Piggott’s letters than about the Times’ leading articles on them. When Parnell said calmly before the Royal Commission that he had made a certain remark “in order to mislead the House” he proved himself to be one of the few truthful men of his time. An ordinary British statesman would never have made the confession, because he would have grown quite accustomed to committing the crime. The party system itself implies a habit of stating something other than the actual truth. A Leader of the House means a Misleader of the House.

Bernard Shaw was born outside all this; and he carries that freedom upon his face. Whether what he heard in boyhood was violent Nationalism or virulent Unionism, it was at least something which wanted a certain principle to be in force, not a certain clique to be in office. Of him the great Gilbertian generalisation is untrue; he was not born either a little Liberal or else a little Conservative. He did not, like most of us, pass through the stage of being a good party man on his way to the difficult business of being a good man. He came to stare at our general elections as a Red Indian might stare at the Oxford and Cambridge boat-race, blind to all its irrelevant sentimentalities and to some of its legitimate sentiments. Bernard Shaw entered England as an alien, as an invader, as a conqueror. In other words, he entered England as an Irishman.
THE PURITAN

It has been said in the first section that Bernard Shaw draws from his own nation two unquestionable qualities, a kind of intellectual chastity, and the fighting spirit. He is so much of an idealist about his ideals that he can be a ruthless realist in his methods. His soul has (in short) the virginity and the violence of Ireland. But Bernard Shaw is not merely an Irishman; he is not even a typical one. He is a certain separated and peculiar kind of Irishman, which is not easy to describe. Some Nationalist Irishmen have referred to him contemptuously as a “West Briton.” But this is really unfair; for whatever Mr. Shaw’s mental faults may be, the easy adoption of an unmeaning phrase like “Briton” is certainly not one of them. It would be much nearer the truth to put the thing in the bold and bald terms of the old Irish song, and to call him “The anti-Irish Irishman.” But it is only fair to say that the description is far less of a monstrosity than the anti-English Englishman would be; because the Irish are so much stronger in self-criticism. Compared with the constant self-flattery of the English, nearly every Irishman is an anti-Irish Irishman. But here again popular phraseology hits the right word. This fairly educated and fairly wealthy Protestant wedge which is driven into the country at Dublin and elsewhere is a thing not easy superficially to summarise in any term. It cannot be described merely as a minority; for a minority means the part of a nation which is conquered. But this thing means something that conquers, and is not entirely part of a nation. Nor can one even fall back on the phrase of aristocracy. For an aristocracy implies at least some chorus of snobbish enthusiasm; it implies that some at least are willingly led by the leaders, if only towards vulgarity and vice. There is only one word for the minority in Ireland, and that is the word that public phraseology has found; I mean the word “Garrison.” The Irish are essentially right when they talk as if all Protestant Unionists lived inside “The Castle.” They have all the virtues and limitations of a literal garrison in a fort. That is, they are valiant, consistent, reliable in an obvious public sense; but their curse is that they can only tread the flagstones of the court-yard or the cold rock of the ramparts; they have never so much as set their foot upon their native soil.

We have considered Bernard Shaw as an Irishman. The next step is to consider him as an exile from Ireland living in Ireland; that, some people would say, is a paradox after his own heart. But, indeed, such a complication is not really difficult to expound. The great religion and the great national tradition
which have persisted for so many centuries in Ireland have encouraged these
clean and cutting elements; but they have encouraged many other things which
serve to balance them. The Irish peasant has these qualities which are somewhat
peculiar to Ireland, a strange purity and a strange pugnacity. But the Irish
peasant also has qualities which are common to all peasants, and his nation has
qualities that are common to all healthy nations. I mean chiefly the things that
most of us absorb in childhood; especially the sense of the supernatural and the
sense of the natural; the love of the sky with its infinity of vision, and the love of
the soil with its strict hedges and solid shapes of ownership. But here comes the
paradox of Shaw; the greatest of all his paradoxes and the one of which he is
unconscious. These one or two plain truths which quite stupid people learn at the
beginning are exactly the one or two truths which Bernard Shaw may not learn
even at the end. He is a daring pilgrim who has set out from the grave to find the
cradle. He started from points of view which no one else was clever enough to
discover, and he is at last discovering points of view which no one else was ever
stupid enough to ignore. This absence of the red-hot truisms of boyhood; this
sense that he is not rooted in the ancient sagacities of infancy, has, I think, a
great deal to do with his position as a member of an alien minority in Ireland. He
who has no real country can have no real home. The average autochthonous
Irishman is close to patriotism because he is close to the earth; he is close to
domesticity because he is close to the earth; he is close to doctrinal theology and
elaborate ritual because he is close to the earth. In short, he is close to the
heavens because he is close to the earth. But we must not expect any of these
elemental and collective virtues in the man of the garrison. He cannot be
expected to exhibit the virtues of a people, but only (as Ibsen would say) of an
enemy of the people. Mr. Shaw has no living traditions, no schoolboy tricks, no
college customs, to link him with other men. Nothing about him can be supposed
to refer to a family feud or to a family joke. He does not drink toasts; he does not
keep anniversaries; musical as he is I doubt if he would consent to sing. All this
has something in it of a tree with its roots in the air. The best way to shorten
winter is to prolong Christmas; and the only way to enjoy the sun of April is to
be an April Fool. When people asked Bernard Shaw to attend the Stratford
Tercentenary, he wrote back with characteristic contempt: “I do not keep my
own birthday, and I cannot see why I should keep Shakespeare’s.” I think that if
Mr. Shaw had always kept his own birthday he would be better able to
understand Shakespeare’s birthday—and Shakespeare’s poetry.

In conjecturally referring this negative side of the man, his lack of the smaller
charities of our common childhood, to his birth in the dominant Irish sect, I do not write without historic memory or reference to other cases. That minority of Protestant exiles which mainly represented Ireland to England during the eighteenth century did contain some specimens of the Irish loungers and even of the Irish blackguard; Sheridan and even Goldsmith suggest the type. Even in their irresponsibility these figures had a touch of Irish tartness and realism; but the type has been too much insisted on to the exclusion of others equally national and interesting. To one of these it is worth while to draw attention. At intervals during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there has appeared a peculiar kind of Irishman. He is so unlike the English image of Ireland that the English have actually fallen back on the pretence that he was not Irish at all. The type is commonly Protestant; and sometimes seems to be almost anti-national in its acrid instinct for judging itself. Its nationalism only appears when it flings itself with even bitterer pleasure into judging the foreigner or the invader. The first and greatest of such figures was Swift. Thackeray simply denied that Swift was an Irishman, because he was not a stage Irishman. He was not (in the English novelist’s opinion) winning and agreeable enough to be Irish. The truth is that Swift was much too harsh and disagreeable to be English. There is a great deal of Jonathan Swift in Bernard Shaw. Shaw is like Swift, for instance, in combining extravagant fancy with a curious sort of coldness. But he is most like Swift in that very quality which Thackeray said was impossible in an Irishman, benevolent bullying, a pity touched with contempt, and a habit of knocking men down for their own good. Characters in novels are often described as so amiable that they hate to be thanked. It is not an amiable quality, and it is an extremely rare one; but Swift possessed it. When Swift was buried the Dublin poor came in crowds and wept by the grave of the broadest and most free-handed of their benefactors. Swift deserved the public tribute; but he might have writhed and kicked in his grave at the thought of receiving it. There is in G. B. S. something of the same inhumane humanity. Irish history has offered a third instance of this particular type of educated and Protestant Irishman, sincere, unsympathetic, aggressive, alone. I mean Parnell; and with him also a bewildered England tried the desperate dodge of saying that he was not Irish at all. As if any thinkable sensible snobbish law-abiding Englishman would ever have defied all the drawing-rooms by disdaining the House of Commons! Despite the difference between taciturnity and a torrent of fluency there is much in common also between Shaw and Parnell; something in common even in the figures of the two men, in the bony bearded faces with their almost Satanic self-possession. It will
not do to pretend that none of these three men belong to their own nation; but it is true that they belonged to one special, though recurring, type of that nation. And they all three have this peculiar mark, that while Nationalists in their various ways they all give to the more genial English one common impression; I mean the impression that they do not so much love Ireland as hate England.

I will not dogmatise upon the difficult question as to whether there is any religious significance in the fact that these three rather ruthless Irishmen were Protestant Irishmen. I incline to think myself that the Catholic Church has added charity and gentleness to the virtues of a people which would otherwise have been too keen and contemptuous, too aristocratic. But however this may be, there can surely be no question that Bernard Shaw’s Protestant education in a Catholic country has made a great deal of difference to his mind. It has affected it in two ways, the first negative and the second positive. It has affected him by cutting him off (as we have said) from the fields and fountains of his real home and history; by making him an Orangeman. And it has affected him by the particular colour of the particular religion which he received; by making him a Puritan.

In one of his numerous prefaces he says, “I have always been on the side of the Puritans in the matter of Art”; and a closer study will, I think, reveal that he is on the side of the Puritans in almost everything. Puritanism was not a mere code of cruel regulations, though some of its regulations were more cruel than any that have disgraced Europe. Nor was Puritanism a mere nightmare, an evil shadow of eastern gloom and fatalism, though this element did enter it, and was as it were the symptom and punishment of its essential error. Something much nobler (even if almost equally mistaken) was the original energy in the Puritan creed. And it must be defined with a little more delicacy if we are really to understand the attitude of G. B. S., who is the greatest of the modern Puritans and perhaps the last.

I should roughly define the first spirit in Puritanism thus. It was a refusal to contemplate God or goodness with anything lighter or milder than the most fierce concentration of the intellect. A Puritan meant originally a man whose mind had no holidays. To use his own favourite phrase, he would let no living thing come between him and his God; an attitude which involved eternal torture for him and a cruel contempt for all the living things. It was better to worship in a barn than in a cathedral for the specific and specified reason that the cathedral was beautiful. Physical beauty was a false and sensual symbol coming in between the intellect and the object of its intellectual worship. The human brain
ought to be at every instant a consuming fire which burns through all conventional images until they were as transparent as glass.

This is the essential Puritan idea, that God can only be praised by direct contemplation of Him. You must praise God only with your brain; it is wicked to praise Him with your passions or your physical habits or your gesture or instinct of beauty. Therefore it is wicked to worship by singing or dancing or drinking sacramental wines or building beautiful churches or saying prayers when you are half asleep. We must not worship by dancing, drinking, building or singing; we can only worship by thinking. Our heads can praise God, but never our hands and feet. That is the true and original impulse of the Puritans. There is a great deal to be said for it, and a great deal was said for it in Great Britain steadily for two hundred years. It has gradually decayed in England and Scotland, not because of the advance of modern thought (which means nothing), but because of the slow revival of the mediæval energy and character in the two peoples. The English were always hearty and humane, and they have made up their minds to be hearty and humane in spite of the Puritans. The result is that Dickens and W. W. Jacobs have picked up the tradition of Chaucer and Robin Hood. The Scotch were always romantic, and they have made up their minds to be romantic in spite of the Puritans. The result is that Scott and Stevenson have picked up the tradition of Bruce, Blind Harry and the vagabond Scottish kings. England has become English again; Scotland has become Scottish again, in spite of the splendid incubus, the noble nightmare of Calvin. There is only one place in the British Islands where one may naturally expect to find still surviving in its fulness the fierce detachment of the true Puritan. That place is the Protestant part of Ireland. The Orange Calvinists can be disturbed by no national resurrection, for they have no nation. In them, if in any people, will be found the rectangular consistency of the Calvinist. The Irish Protestant rioters are at least immeasurably finer fellows than any of their brethren in England. They have the two enormous superiorities: first, that the Irish Protestant rioters really believe in Protestant theology; and second, that the Irish Protestant rioters do really riot. Among these people, if anywhere, should be found the cult of theological clarity combined with barbarous external simplicity. Among these people Bernard Shaw was born.

There is at least one outstanding fact about the man we are studying; Bernard Shaw is never frivolous. He never gives his opinions a holiday; he is never irresponsible even for an instant. He has no nonsensical second self which he can get into as one gets into a dressing-gown; that ridiculous disguise which is yet
more real than the real person. That collapse and humorous confession of futility was much of the force in Charles Lamb and in Stevenson. There is nothing of this in Shaw; his wit is never a weakness; therefore it is never a sense of humour. For wit is always connected with the idea that truth is close and clear. Humour, on the other hand, is always connected with the idea that truth is tricky and mystical and easily mistaken. What Charles Lamb said of the Scotchman is far truer of this type of Puritan Irishman; he does not see things suddenly in a new light; all his brilliancy is a blindingly rapid calculation and deduction. Bernard Shaw never said an indefensible thing; that is, he never said a thing that he was not prepared brilliantly to defend. He never breaks out into that cry beyond reason and conviction, that cry of Lamb when he cried, “We would indict our dreams!” or of Stevenson, “Shall we never shed blood?” In short he is not a humorist, but a great wit, almost as great as Voltaire. Humour is akin to agnosticism, which is only the negative side of mysticism. But pure wit is akin to Puritanism; to the perfect and painful consciousness of the final fact in the universe. Very briefly, the man who sees the consistency in things is a wit—and a Calvinist. The man who sees the inconsistency in things is a humorist—and a Catholic. However this may be, Bernard Shaw exhibits all that is purest in the Puritan; the desire to see truth face to face even if it slay us, the high impatience with irrelevant sentiment or obstructive symbol; the constant effort to keep the soul at its highest pressure and speed. His instincts upon all social customs and questions are Puritan. His favourite author is Bunyan.

But along with what was inspiring and direct in Puritanism Bernard Shaw has inherited also some of the things that were cumbersome and traditional. If ever Shaw exhibits a prejudice it is always a Puritan prejudice. For Puritanism has not been able to sustain through three centuries that native ecstasy of the direct contemplation of truth; indeed it was the whole mistake of Puritanism to imagine for a moment that it could. One cannot be serious for three hundred years. In institutions built so as to endure for ages you must have relaxation, symbolic relativity and healthy routine. In eternal temples you must have frivolity. You must “be at ease in Zion” unless you are only paying it a flying visit.

By the middle of the nineteenth century this old austerity and actuality in the Puritan vision had fallen away into two principal lower forms. The first is a sort of idealistic garrulity upon which Bernard Shaw has made fierce and on the whole fruitful war. Perpetual talk about righteousness and unselfishness, about things that should elevate and things which cannot but degrade, about social purity and true Christian manhood, all poured out with fatal fluency and with
very little reference to the real facts of anybody’s soul or salary—into this weak and lukewarm torrent has melted down much of that mountainous ice which sparkled in the seventeenth century, bleak indeed, but blazing. The hardest thing of the seventeenth century bids fair to be the softest thing of the twentieth.

Of all this sentimental and deliquescent Puritanism Bernard Shaw has always been the antagonist; and the only respect in which it has soiled him was that he believed for only too long that such sloppy idealism was the whole idealism of Christendom and so used “idealists” itself as a term of reproach. But there were other and negative effects of Puritanism which he did not escape so completely. I cannot think that he has wholly escaped that element in Puritanism which may fairly bear the title of the taboo. For it is a singular fact that although extreme Protestantism is dying in elaborate and over-refined civilisation, yet it is the barbaric patches of it that live longest and die last. Of the creed of John Knox the modern Protestant has abandoned the civilised part and retained only the savage part. He has given up that great and systematic philosophy of Calvinism which had much in common with modern science and strongly resembles ordinary and recurrent determinism. But he has retained the accidental veto upon cards or comic plays, which Knox only valued as mere proof of his people’s concentration on their theology. All the awful but sublime affirmations of Puritan theology are gone. Only savage negations remain; such as that by which in Scotland on every seventh day the creed of fear lays his finger on all hearts and makes an evil silence in the streets.

By the middle of the nineteenth century when Shaw was born this dim and barbaric element in Puritanism, being all that remained of it, had added another taboo to its philosophy of taboos; there had grown up a mystical horror of those fermented drinks which are part of the food of civilised mankind. Doubtless many persons take an extreme line on this matter solely because of some calculation of social harm; many, but not all and not even most. Many people think that paper money is a mistake and does much harm. But they do not shudder or snigger when they see a cheque-book. They do not whisper with unsavoury slyness that such and such a man was “seen” going into a bank. I am quite convinced that the English aristocracy is the curse of England, but I have not noticed either in myself or others any disposition to ostracise a man simply for accepting a peerage, as the modern Puritans would certainly ostracise him (from any of their positions of trust) for accepting a drink. The sentiment is certainly very largely a mystical one, like the sentiment about the seventh day. Like the Sabbath, it is defended with sociological reasons; but those reasons can
be simply and sharply tested. If a Puritan tells you that all humanity should rest once a week, you have only to propose that they should rest on Wednesday. And if a Puritan tells you that he does not object to beer but to the tragedies of excess in beer, simply propose to him that in prisons and workhouses (where the amount can be absolutely regulated) the inmates should have three glasses of beer a day. The Puritan cannot call that excess; but he will find something to call it. For it is not the excess he objects to, but the beer. It is a transcendental taboo, and it is one of the two or three positive and painful prejudices with which Bernard Shaw began. A similar severity of outlook ran through all his earlier attitude towards the drama; especially towards the lighter or looser drama. His Puritan teachers could not prevent him from taking up theatricals, but they made him take theatricals seriously. All his plays were indeed “plays for Puritans.” All his criticisms quiver with a refined and almost tortured contempt for the indulgencies of ballet and burlesque, for the tights and the double entente. He can endure lawlessness but not levity. He is not repelled by the divorces and the adulteries as he is by the “splits.” And he has always been foremost among the fierce modern critics who ask indignantly, “Why do you object to a thing full of sincere philosophy like The Wild Duck while you tolerate a mere dirty joke like The Spring Chicken?” I do not think he has ever understood what seems to me the very sensible answer of the man in the street, “I laugh at the dirty joke of The Spring Chicken because it is a joke. I criticise the philosophy of The Wild Duck because it is a philosophy.”

Shaw does not do justice to the democratic ease and sanity on this subject; but indeed, whatever else he is, he is not democratic. As an Irishman he is an aristocrat, as a Calvinist he is a soul apart; he drew the breath of his nostrils from a land of fallen principalities and proud gentility, and the breath of his spirit from a creed which made a wall of crystal around the elect. The two forces between them produced this potent and slender figure, swift, scornful, dainty and full of dry magnanimity; and it only needed the last touch of oligarchic mastery to be given by the overwhelming oligarchic atmosphere of our present age. Such was the Puritan Irishman who stepped out into the world. Into what kind of world did he step?
THE PROGRESSIVE

It is now partly possible to justify the Shavian method of putting the explanations before the events. I can now give a fact or two with a partial certainty at least that the reader will give to the affairs of Bernard Shaw something of the same kind of significance which they have for Bernard Shaw himself. Thus, if I had simply said that Shaw was born in Dublin the average reader might exclaim, “Ah yes—a wild Irishman, gay, emotional and untrustworthy.” The wrong note would be struck at the start. I have attempted to give some idea of what being born in Ireland meant to the man who was really born there. Now therefore for the first time I may be permitted to confess that Bernard Shaw was, like other men, born. He was born in Dublin on the 26th of July, 1856.

Just as his birth can only be appreciated through some vision of Ireland, so his family can only be appreciated by some realisation of the Puritan. He was the youngest son of one George Carr Shaw, who had been a civil servant and was afterwards a somewhat unsuccessful business man. If I had merely said that his family was Protestant (which in Ireland means Puritan) it might have been passed over as a quite colourless detail. But if the reader will keep in mind what has been said about the degeneration of Calvinism into a few clumsy vetoes, he will see in its full and frightful significance such a sentence as this which comes from Shaw himself: “My father was in theory a vehement teetotaler, but in practice often a furtive drinker.” The two things of course rest upon exactly the same philosophy; the philosophy of the taboo. There is a mystical substance, and it can give monstrous pleasures or call down monstrous punishments. The dipsomaniac and the abstainer are not only both mistaken, but they both make the same mistake. They both regard wine as a drug and not as a drink. But if I had mentioned that fragment of family information without any ethical preface, people would have begun at once to talk nonsense about artistic heredity and Celtic weakness, and would have gained the general impression that Bernard Shaw was an Irish wastrel and the child of Irish wastrels. Whereas it is the whole point of the matter that Bernard Shaw comes of a Puritan middle-class family of the most solid respectability; and the only admission of error arises from the fact that one member of that Puritan family took a particularly Puritan view of strong drink. That is, he regarded it generally as a poison and sometimes as a medicine, if only a mental medicine. But a poison and a medicine are very closely akin, as
the nearest chemist knows; and they are chiefly akin in this; that no one will
drink either of them for fun. Moreover, medicine and a poison are also alike in
this; that no one will by preference drink either of them in public. And this
medical or poisonous view of alcohol is not confined to the one Puritan to whose
failure I have referred, it is spread all over the whole of our dying Puritan
civilisation. For instance, social reformers have fired a hundred shots against the
public-house; but never one against its really shameful feature. The sign of
decay is not in the public-house, but in the private bar; or rather the row of five
or six private bars, into each of which a respectable dipsomaniac can go in
solitude, and by indulging his own half-witted sin violate his own half-witted
morality. Nearly all these places are equipped with an atrocious apparatus of
ground-glass windows which can be so closed that they practically conceal the
face of the buyer from the seller. Words cannot express the abysses of human
infamy and hateful shame expressed by that elaborate piece of furniture.
Whenever I go into a public-house, which happens fairly often, I always
carefully open all these apertures and then leave the place, in every way
refreshed.

In other ways also it is necessary to insist not only on the fact of an extreme
Protestantism, but on that of the Protestantism of a garrison; a world where that
religious force both grew and festered all the more for being at once isolated and
protected. All the influences surrounding Bernard Shaw in boyhood were not
only Puritan, but such that no non-Puritan force could possibly pierce or
counteract. He belonged to that Irish group which, according to Catholicism, has
hardened its heart, which, according to Protestantism has hardened its head, but
which, as I fancy, has chiefly hardened its hide, lost its sensibility to the contact
of the things around it. In reading about his youth, one forgets that it was passed
in the island which is still one flame before the altar of St. Peter and St. Patrick.
The whole thing might be happening in Wimbledon. He went to the Wesleyan
Connexional School. He went to hear Moody and Sankey. “I was,” he writes,
“wholly unmoved by their eloquence; and felt bound to inform the public that I
was, on the whole, an atheist. My letter was solemnly printed in Public Opinion,
to the extreme horror of my numerous aunts and uncles.” That is the
philosophical atmosphere; those are the religious postulates. It could never cross
the mind of a man of the Garrison that before becoming an atheist he might stroll
into one of the churches of his own country, and learn something of the
philosophy that had satisfied Dante and Bossuet, Pascal and Descartes.

In the same way I have to appeal to my theoretic preface at this third point of
the drama of Shaw’s career. On leaving school he stepped into a secure business position which he held steadily for four years and which he flung away almost in one day. He rushed even recklessly to London; where he was quite unsuccessful and practically starved for six years. If I had mentioned this act on the first page of this book it would have seemed to have either the simplicity of a mere fanatic or else to cover some ugly escapade of youth or some quite criminal looseness of temperament. But Bernard Shaw did not act thus because he was careless, but because he was ferociously careful, careful especially of the one thing needful. What was he thinking about when he threw away his last halfpence and went to a strange place; what was he thinking about when he endured hunger and smallpox in London almost without hope? He was thinking of what he has ever since thought of, the slow but sure surge of the social revolution; you must read into all those bald sentences and empty years what I shall attempt to sketch in the third section. You must read the revolutionary movement of the later nineteenth century, darkened indeed by materialism and made mutable by fear and free thought, but full of awful vistas of an escape from the curse of Adam.

Bernard Shaw happened to be born in an epoch, or rather at the end of an epoch, which was in its way unique in the ages of history. The nineteenth century was not unique in the success or rapidity of its reforms or in their ultimate cessation; but it was unique in the peculiar character of the failure which followed the success. The French Revolution was an enormous act of human realisation; it has altered the terms of every law and the shape of every town in Europe; but it was by no means the only example of a strong and swift period of reform. What was really peculiar about the Republican energy was this, that it left behind it, not an ordinary reaction but a kind of dreary, drawn out and utterly unmeaning hope. The strong and evident idea of reform sank lower and lower until it became the timid and feeble idea of progress. Towards the end of the nineteenth century there appeared its two incredible figures; they were the pure Conservative and the pure Progressive; two figures which would have been overwhelmed with laughter by any other intellectual commonwealth of history. There was hardly a human generation which could not have seen the folly of merely going forward or merely standing still; of mere progressing or mere conserving. In the coarsest Greek Comedy we might have a joke about a man who wanted to keep what he had, whether it was yellow gold or yellow fever. In the dullest mediæval morality we might have a joke about a progressive gentleman who, having passed heaven and come to purgatory, decided to go further and fare worse. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries were an age of quite
impetuous progress; men made in one rush, roads, trades, synthetic philosophies, parliaments, university settlements, a law that could cover the world and such spires as had never struck the sky. But they would not have said that they wanted progress, but that they wanted the road, the parliaments, and the spires. In the same way the time from Richelieu to the Revolution was upon the whole a time of conservation, often of harsh and hideous conservation; it preserved tortures, legal quibbles, and despotism. But if you had asked the rulers they would not have said that they wanted conservation; but that they wanted the torture and the despotism. The old reformers and the old despots alike desired definite things, powers, licenses, payments, vetoes, and permissions. Only the modern progressive and the modern conservative have been content with two words.

Other periods of active improvement have died by stiffening at last into some routine. Thus the Gothic gaiety of the thirteenth century stiffening into the mere Gothic ugliness of the fifteenth. Thus the mighty wave of the Renaissance, whose crest was lifted to heaven, was touched by a wintry witchery of classicism and frozen for ever before it fell. Alone of all such movements the democratic movement of the last two centuries has not frozen, but loosened and liquefied. Instead of becoming more pedantic in its old age, it has grown more bewildered. By the analogy of healthy history we ought to have gone on worshipping the republic and calling each other citizen with increasing seriousness until some other part of the truth broke into our republican temple. But in fact we have turned the freedom of democracy into a mere scepticism, destructive of everything, including democracy itself. It is none the less destructive because it is, so to speak, an optimistic scepticism—or, as I have said, a dreary hope. It was none the better because the destroyers were always talking about the new vistas and enlightenments which their new negations opened to us. The republican temple, like any other strong building, rested on certain definite limits and supports. But the modern man inside it went on indefinitely knocking holes in his own house and saying that they were windows. The result is not hard to calculate: the moral world was pretty well all windows and no house by the time that Bernard Shaw arrived on the scene.

Then there entered into full swing that great game of which he soon became the greatest master. A progressive or advanced person was now to mean not a man who wanted democracy, but a man who wanted something newer than democracy. A reformer was to be, not a man who wanted a parliament or a republic, but a man who wanted anything that he hadn’t got. The emancipated man must cast a weird and suspicious eye round him at all the institutions of the
world, wondering which of them was destined to die in the next few centuries. Each one of them was whispering to himself, “What can I alter?”

This quite vague and varied discontent probably did lead to the revelation of many incidental wrongs and to much humane hard work in certain holes and corners. It also gave birth to a great deal of quite futile and frantic speculation, which seemed destined to take away babies from women, or to give votes to tom-cats. But it had an evil in it much deeper and more psychologically poisonous than any superficial absurdities. There was in this thirst to be “progressive” a subtle sort of double-mindedness and falsity. A man was so eager to be in advance of his age that he pretended to be in advance of himself. Institutions that his wholesome nature and habit fully accepted he had to sneer at as old-fashioned, out of a servile and snobbish fear of the future. Out of the primal forests, through all the real progress of history, man had picked his way obeying his human instinct, or (in the excellent phrase) following his nose. But now he was trying, by violent athletic exertions, to get in front of his nose.

Into this riot of all imaginary innovations Shaw brought the sharp edge of the Irishman and the concentration of the Puritan, and thoroughly thrashed all competitors in the difficult art of being at once modern and intelligent. In twenty twopenny controversies he took the revolutionary side, I fear in most cases because it was called revolutionary. But the other revolutionists were abruptly startled by the presentation of quite rational and ingenious arguments on their own side. The dreary thing about most new causes is that they are praised in such very old terms. Every new religion bores us with the same stale rhetoric about closer fellowship and the higher life. No one ever approximately equalled Bernard Shaw in the power of finding really fresh and personal arguments for these recent schemes and creeds. No one ever came within a mile of him in the knack of actually producing a new argument for a new philosophy. I give two instances to cover the kind of thing I mean. Bernard Shaw (being honestly eager to put himself on the modern side in everything) put himself on the side of what is called the feminist movement; the proposal to give the two sexes not merely equal social privileges, but identical. To this it is often answered that women cannot be soldiers; and to this again the sensible feminists answer that women run their own kind of physical risk, while the silly feminists answer that war is an outworn barbaric thing which women would abolish. But Bernard Shaw took the line of saying that women had been soldiers, in all occasions of natural and unofficial war, as in the French Revolution. That has the great fighting value of being an unexpected argument; it takes the other pugilist’s breath away for one
important instant. To take the other case, Mr. Shaw has found himself, led by the same mad imp of modernity, on the side of the people who want to have phonetic spelling. The people who want phonetic spelling generally depress the world with tireless and tasteless explanations of how much easier it would be for children or foreign bagmen if “height” were spelt “hite.” Now children would curse spelling whatever it was, and we are not going to permit foreign bagmen to improve Shakespeare. Bernard Shaw charged along quite a different line; he urged that Shakespeare himself believed in phonetic spelling, since he spelt his own name in six different ways. According to Shaw, phonetic spelling is merely a return to the freedom and flexibility of Elizabethan literature. That, again, is exactly the kind of blow the old speller does not expect. As a matter of fact there is an answer to both the ingenuities I have quoted. When women have fought in revolutions they have generally shown that it was not natural to them, by their hysterical cruelty and insolence; it was the men who fought in the Revolution; it was the women who tortured the prisoners and mutilated the dead. And because Shakespeare could sing better than he could spell, it does not follow that his spelling and ours ought to be abruptly altered by a race that has lost all instinct for singing. But I do not wish to discuss these points; I only quote them as examples of the startling ability which really brought Shaw to the front; the ability to brighten even our modern movements with original and suggestive thoughts.

But while Bernard Shaw pleasantly surprised innumerable cranks and revolutionists by finding quite rational arguments for them, he surprised them unpleasantly also by discovering something else. He discovered a turn of argument or trick of thought which has ever since been the plague of their lives, and given him in all assemblies of their kind, in the Fabian Society or in the whole Socialist movement, a fantastic but most formidable domination. This method may be approximately defined as that of revolutionising the revolutionists by turning their rationalism against their remaining sentimentalism. But definition leaves the matter dark unless we give one or two examples. Thus Bernard Shaw threw himself as thoroughly as any New Woman into the cause of the emancipation of women. But while the New Woman praised woman as a prophetess, the new man took the opportunity to curse her and kick her as a comrade. For the others sex equality meant the emancipation of women, which allowed them to be equal to men. For Shaw it mainly meant the emancipation of men, which allowed them to be rude to women. Indeed, almost every one of Bernard Shaw’s earlier plays might be called an argument between
a man and a woman, in which the woman is thumped and thrashed and outwitted until she admits that she is the equal of her conqueror. This is the first case of the Shavian trick of turning on the romantic rationalists with their own rationalism. He said in substance, “If we are democrats, let us have votes for women; but if we are democrats, why on earth should we have respect for women?” I take one other example out of many. Bernard Shaw was thrown early into what may be called the cosmopolitan club of revolution. The Socialists of the S.D.F. call it “L’Internationale,” but the club covers more than Socialists. It covers many who consider themselves the champions of oppressed nationalities—Poland, Finland, and even Ireland; and thus a strong nationalist tendency exists in the revolutionary movement. Against this nationalist tendency Shaw set himself with sudden violence. If the flag of England was a piece of piratical humbug, was not the flag of Poland a piece of piratical humbug too? If we hated the jingoism of the existing armies and frontiers, why should we bring into existence new jingo armies and new jingo frontiers? All the other revolutionists fell in instinctively with Home Rule for Ireland. Shaw urged, in effect, that Home Rule was as bad as Home Influences and Home Cooking, and all the other degrading domesticities that began with the word “Home.” His ultimate support of the South African war was largely created by his irritation against the other revolutionists for favouring a nationalist resistance. The ordinary Imperialists objected to Pro-Boers because they were anti-patriots. Bernard Shaw objected to Pro-Boers because they were pro-patriots.

But among these surprise attacks of G. B. S., these turnings of scepticism against the sceptics, there was one which has figured largely in his life; the most amusing and perhaps the most salutary of all these reactions. The “progressive” world being in revolt against religion had naturally felt itself allied to science; and against the authority of priests it would perpetually hurl the authority of scientific men. Shaw gazed for a few moments at this new authority, the veiled god of Huxley and Tyndall, and then with the greatest placidity and precision kicked it in the stomach. He declared to the astounded progressives around him that physical science was a mystical fake like sacerdotalism; that scientists, like priests, spoke with authority because they could not speak with proof or reason; that the very wonders of science were mostly lies, like the wonders of religion. “When astronomers tell me,” he says somewhere, “that a star is so far off that its light takes a thousand years to reach us, the magnitude of the lie seems to me inartistic.” The paralysing impudence of such remarks left everyone quite breathless; and even to this day this particular part of Shaw’s satiric war has
been far less followed up than it deserves. For there was present in it an element very marked in Shaw’s controversies; I mean that his apparent exaggerations are generally much better backed up by knowledge than would appear from their nature. He can lure his enemy on with fantasies and then overwhelm him with facts. Thus the man of science, when he read some wild passage in which Shaw compared Huxley to a tribal soothsayer grubbing in the entrails of animals, supposed the writer to be a mere fantastic whom science could crush with one finger. He would therefore engage in a controversy with Shaw about (let us say) vivisection, and discover to his horror that Shaw really knew a great deal about the subject, and could pelt him with expert witnesses and hospital reports. Among the many singular contradictions in a singular character, there is none more interesting than this combination of exactitude and industry in the detail of opinions with audacity and a certain wildness in their outline.

This great game of catching revolutionists napping, of catching the unconventional people in conventional poses, of outmarching and outmanoeuvring progressives till they felt like conservatives, of undermining the mines of Nihilists till they felt like the House of Lords, this great game of dishing the anarchists continued for some time to be his most effective business. It would be untrue to say that he was a cynic; he was never a cynic, for that implies a certain corrupt fatigue about human affairs, whereas he was vibrating with virtue and energy. Nor would it be fair to call him even a sceptic, for that implies a dogma of hopelessness and definite belief in unbelief. But it would be strictly just to describe him at this time, at any rate, as a merely destructive person. He was one whose main business was, in his own view, the pricking of illusions, the stripping away of disguises, and even the destruction of ideals. He was a sort of anti-confectioner whose whole business it was to take the gilt off the gingerbread.

Now I have no particular objection to people who take the gilt off the gingerbread; if only for this excellent reason, that I am much fonder of gingerbread than I am of gilt. But there are some objections to this task when it becomes a crusade or an obsession. One of them is this: that people who have really scraped the gilt off gingerbread generally waste the rest of their lives in attempting to scrape the gilt off gigantic lumps of gold. Such has too often been the case of Shaw. He can, if he likes, scrape the romance off the armaments of Europe or the party system of Great Britain. But he cannot scrape the romance off love or military valour, because it is all romance, and three thousand miles thick. It cannot, I think, be denied that much of Bernard Shaw’s splendid mental
energy has been wasted in this weary business of gnawing at the necessary pillars of all possible society. But it would be grossly unfair to indicate that even in his first and most destructive stage he uttered nothing except these accidental, if arresting, negations. He threw his whole genius heavily into the scale in favour of two positive projects or causes of the period. When we have stated these we have really stated the full intellectual equipment with which he started his literary life.

I have said that Shaw was on the insurgent side in everything; but in the case of these two important convictions he exercised a solid power of choice. When he first went to London he mixed with every kind of revolutionary society, and met every kind of person except the ordinary person. He knew everybody, so to speak, except everybody. He was more than once a momentary apparition among the respectable atheists. He knew Bradlaugh and spoke on the platforms of that Hall of Science in which very simple and sincere masses of men used to hail with shouts of joy the assurance that they were not immortal. He retains to this day something of the noise and narrowness of that room; as, for instance, when he says that it is contemptible to have a craving for eternal life. This prejudice remains in direct opposition to all his present opinions, which are all to the effect that it is glorious to desire power, consciousness, and vitality even for one’s self. But this old secularist tag, that it is selfish to save one’s soul, remains with him long after he has practically glorified selfishness. It is a relic of those chaotic early days. And just as he mingled with the atheists he mingled with the anarchists, who were in the eighties a much more formidable body than now, disputing with the Socialists on almost equal terms the claim to be the true heirs of the Revolution. Shaw still talks entertainingly about this group. As far as I can make out, it was almost entirely female. When a book came out called A Girl among the Anarchists, G. B. S. was provoked to a sort of explosive reminiscence. “A girl among the anarchists!” he exclaimed to his present biographer; “if they had said ‘A man among the anarchists’ it would have been more of an adventure.” He is ready to tell other tales of this eccentric environment, most of which does not convey an impression of a very bracing atmosphere. That revolutionary society must have contained many high public ideals, but also a fair number of low private desires. And when people blame Bernard Shaw for his pitiless and prosaic coldness, his cutting refusal to reverence or admire, I think they should remember this riff-raff of lawless sentimentalism against which his commonsense had to strive, all the grandiloquent “comrades” and all the gushing “affinities,” all the sweetstuff
sensuality and senseless sulking against law. If Bernard Shaw became a little too fond of throwing cold water upon prophecies or ideals, remember that he must have passed much of his youth among cosmopolitan idealists who wanted a little cold water in every sense of the word.

Upon two of these modern crusades he concentrated, and, as I have said, he chose them well. The first was broadly what was called the Humanitarian cause. It did not mean the cause of humanity, but rather, if anything, the cause of everything else. At its noblest it meant a sort of mystical identification of our life with the whole life of nature. So a man might wince when a snail was crushed as if his toe were trodden on; so a man might shrink when a moth shrivelled as if his own hair had caught fire. Man might be a network of exquisite nerves running over the whole universe, a subtle spider’s web of pity. This was a fine conception; though perhaps a somewhat severe enforcement of the theological conception of the special divinity of man. For the humanitarians certainly asked of humanity what can be asked of no other creature; no man ever required a dog to understand a cat or expected the cow to cry for the sorrows of the nightingale.

Hence this sense has been strongest in saints of a very mystical sort; such as St. Francis who spoke of Sister Sparrow and Brother Wolf. Shaw adopted this crusade of cosmic pity but adopted it very much in his own style, severe, explanatory, and even unsympathetic. He had no affectionate impulse to say “Brother Wolf”; at the best he would have said “Citizen Wolf,” like a sound republican. In fact, he was full of healthy human compassion for the sufferings of animals; but in phraseology he loved to put the matter unemotionally and even harshly. I was once at a debating club at which Bernard Shaw said that he was not a humanitarian at all, but only an economist, that he merely hated to see life wasted by carelessness or cruelty. I felt inclined to get up and address to him the following lucid question: “If when you spare a herring you are only being oikonomikal, for what oikos are you being nomikal?” But in an average debating club I thought this question might not be quite clear; so I abandoned the idea. But certainly it is not plain for whom Bernard Shaw is economising if he rescues a rhinoceros from an early grave. But the truth is that Shaw only took this economic pose from his hatred of appearing sentimental. If Bernard Shaw killed a dragon and rescued a princess of romance, he would try to say “I have saved a princess” with exactly the same intonation as “I have saved a shilling.” He tries to turn his own heroism into a sort of superhuman thrift. He would thoroughly sympathise with that passage in his favourite dramatic author in which the Button Moulder tells Peer Gynt that there is a sort of cosmic housekeeping; that
God Himself is very economical, “and that is why He is so well to do.”

This combination of the widest kindness and consideration with a consistent ungraciousness of tone runs through all Shaw’s ethical utterance, and is nowhere more evident than in his attitude towards animals. He would waste himself to a white-haired shadow to save a shark in an aquarium from inconvenience or to add any little comforts to the life of a carrion-crow. He would defy any laws or lose any friends to show mercy to the humblest beast or the most hidden bird. Yet I cannot recall in the whole of his works or in the whole of his conversation a single word of any tenderness or intimacy with any bird or beast. It was under the influence of this high and almost superhuman sense of duty that he became a vegetarian; and I seem to remember that when he was lying sick and near to death at the end of his Saturday Review career he wrote a fine fantastic article, declaring that his hearse ought to be drawn by all the animals that he had not eaten. Whenever that evil day comes there will be no need to fall back on the ranks of the brute creation; there will be no lack of men and women who owe him so much as to be glad to take the place of the animals; and the present writer for one will be glad to express his gratitude as an elephant. There is no doubt about the essential manhood and decency of Bernard Shaw’s instincts in such matters. And quite apart from the vegetarian controversy, I do not doubt that the beasts also owe him much. But when we come to positive things (and passions are the only truly positive things) that obstinate doubt remains which remains after all eulogies of Shaw. That fixed fancy sticks to the mind; that Bernard Shaw is a vegetarian more because he dislikes dead beasts than because he likes live ones.

It was the same with the other great cause to which Shaw more politically though not more publicly committed himself. The actual English people, without representation in Press or Parliament, but faintly expressed in public-houses and music-halls, would connect Shaw (so far as they have heard of him) with two ideas; they would say first that he was a vegetarian, and second that he was a Socialist. Like most of the impressions of the ignorant, these impressions would be on the whole very just. My only purpose here is to urge that Shaw’s Socialism exemplifies the same trait of temperament as his vegetarianism. This book is not concerned with Bernard Shaw as a politician or a sociologist, but as a critic and creator of drama. I will therefore end in this chapter all that I have to say about Bernard Shaw as a politician or a political philosopher. I propose here to dismiss this aspect of Shaw: only let it be remembered, once and for all, that I am here dismissing the most important aspect of Shaw. It is as if one dismissed the
sculpture of Michael Angelo and went on to his sonnets. Perhaps the highest and purest thing in him is simply that he cares more for politics than for anything else; more than for art or for philosophy. Socialism is the noblest thing for Bernard Shaw; and it is the noblest thing in him. He really desires less to win fame than to bear fruit. He is an absolute follower of that early sage who wished only to make two blades of grass grow instead of one. He is a loyal subject of Henri Quatre, who said that he only wanted every Frenchman to have a chicken in his pot on Sunday; except, of course, that he would call the repast cannibalism. But cæteris paribus he thinks more of that chicken than of the eagle of the universal empire; and he is always ready to support the grass against the laurel.

Yet by the nature of this book the account of the most important Shaw, who is the Socialist, must be also the most brief. Socialism (which I am not here concerned either to attack or defend) is, as everyone knows, the proposal that all property should be nationally owned that it may be more decently distributed. It is a proposal resting upon two principles, unimpeachable as far as they go: first, that frightful human calamities call for immediate human aid; second, that such aid must almost always be collectively organised. If a ship is being wrecked, we organise a lifeboat; if a house is on fire, we organise a blanket; if half a nation is starving, we must organise work and food. That is the primary and powerful argument of the Socialist, and everything that he adds to it weakens it. The only possible line of protest is to suggest that it is rather shocking that we have to treat a normal nation as something exceptional, like a house on fire or a shipwreck. But of such things it may be necessary to speak later. The point here is that Shaw behaved towards Socialism just as he behaved towards vegetarianism; he offered every reason except the emotional reason, which was the real one. When taxed in a Daily News discussion with being a Socialist for the obvious reason that poverty was cruel, he said this was quite wrong; it was only because poverty was wasteful. He practically professed that modern society annoyed him, not so much like an unrighteous kingdom, but rather like an untidy room. Everyone who knew him knew, of course, that he was full of a proper brotherly bitterness about the oppression of the poor. But here again he would not admit that he was anything but an Economist.

In thus setting his face like flint against sentimental methods of argument he undoubtedly did one great service to the causes for which he stood. Every vulgar anti-humanitarian, every snob who wants monkeys vivisected or beggars flogged has always fallen back upon stereotyped phrases like “maudlin” and
“sentimental,” which indicated the humanitarian as a man in a weak condition of tears. The mere personality of Shaw has shattered those foolish phrases for ever. Shaw the humanitarian was like Voltaire the humanitarian, a man whose satire was like steel, the hardest and coolest of fighters, upon whose piercing point the wretched defenders of a masculine brutality wriggled like worms.

In this quarrel one cannot wish Shaw even an inch less contemptuous, for the people who call compassion “sentimentalism” deserve nothing but contempt. In this one does not even regret his coldness; it is an honourable contrast to the blundering emotionalism of the jingo and flagellomaniacs. The truth is that the ordinary anti-humanitarian only manages to harden his heart by having already softened his head. It is the reverse of sentimental to insist that a nigger is being burned alive; for sentimentalism must be the clinging to pleasant thoughts. And no one, not even a Higher Evolutionist, can think a nigger burned alive a pleasant thought. The sentimental thing is to warm your hands at the fire while denying the existence of the nigger, and that is the ruling habit in England, as it has been the chief business of Bernard Shaw to show. And in this the brutalitarians hate him not because he is soft, but because he is hard, because he is not to be softened by conventional excuses; because he looks hard at a thing—and hits harder. Some foolish fellow of the Henley-Whibley reaction wrote that if we were to be conquerors we must be less tender and more ruthless. Shaw answered with really avenging irony, “What a light this principle throws on the defeat of the tender Dervish, the compassionate Zulu, and the morbidly humane Boxer at the hands of the hardy savages of England, France, and Germany.” In that sentence an idiot is obliterated and the whole story of Europe told; but it is immensely stiffened by its ironic form. In the same way Shaw washed away for ever the idea that Socialists were weak dreamers, who said that things might be only because they wished them to be. G. B. S. in argument with an individualist showed himself, as a rule, much the better economist and much the worse rhetorician. In this atmosphere arose a celebrated Fabian Society, of which he is still the leading spirit—a society which answered all charges of impracticable idealism by pushing both its theoretic statements and its practical negotiations to the verge of cynicism. Bernard Shaw was the literary expert who wrote most of its pamphlets. In one of them, among such sections as Fabian Temperance Reform, Fabian Education and so on, there was an entry gravely headed “Fabian Natural Science,” which stated that in the Socialist cause light was needed more than heat.

Thus the Irish detachment and the Puritan austerity did much good to the
country and to the causes for which they were embattled. But there was one thing they did not do; they did nothing for Shaw himself in the matter of his primary mistakes and his real limitation. His great defect was and is the lack of democratic sentiment. And there was nothing democratic either in his humanitarianism or his Socialism. These new and refined faiths tended rather to make the Irishman yet more aristocratic, the Puritan yet more exclusive. To be a Socialist was to look down on all the peasant owners of the earth, especially on the peasant owners of his own island. To be a Vegetarian was to be a man with a strange and mysterious morality, a man who thought the good lord who roasted oxen for his vassals only less bad than the bad lord who roasted the vassals. None of these advanced views could the common people hear gladly; nor indeed was Shaw specially anxious to please the common people. It was his glory that he pitied animals like men; it was his defect that he pitied men only too much like animals. Foulon said of the democracy, “Let them eat grass.” Shaw said, “Let them eat greens.” He had more benevolence, but almost as much disdain. “I have never had any feelings about the English working classes,” he said elsewhere, “except a desire to abolish them and replace them by sensible people.” This is the unsympathetic side of the thing; but it had another and much nobler side, which must at least be seriously recognised before we pass on to much lighter things.

Bernard Shaw is not a democrat; but he is a splendid republican. The nuance of difference between those terms precisely depicts him. And there is after all a good deal of dim democracy in England, in the sense that there is much of a blind sense of brotherhood, and nowhere more than among old-fashioned and even reactionary people. But a republican is a rare bird, and a noble one. Shaw is a republican in the literal and Latin sense; he cares more for the Public Thing than for any private thing. The interest of the State is with him a sincere thirst of the soul, as it was in the little pagan cities. Now this public passion, this clean appetite for order and equity, had fallen to a lower ebb, had more nearly disappeared altogether, during Shaw’s earlier epoch than at any other time. Individualism of the worst type was on the top of the wave; I mean artistic individualism, which is so much crueler, so much blinder and so much more irrational even than commercial individualism. The decay of society was praised by artists as the decay of a corpse is praised by worms. The æsthete was all receptiveness, like the flea. His only affair in this world was to feed on its facts and colours, like a parasite upon blood. The ego was the all; and the praise of it was enunciated in madder and madder rhythms by poets whose Helicon was
absinthe and whose Pegasus was the nightmare. This diseased pride was not even conscious of a public interest, and would have found all political terms utterly tasteless and insignificant. It was no longer a question of one man one vote, but of one man one universe.

I have in my time had my fling at the Fabian Society, at the pedantry of schemes, the arrogance of experts; nor do I regret it now. But when I remember that other world against which it reared its bourgeois banner of cleanliness and common sense, I will not end this chapter without doing it decent honour. Give me the drain pipes of the Fabians rather than the panpipes of the later poets; the drain pipes have a nicer smell. Give me even that business-like benevolence that herded men like beasts rather than that exquisite art which isolated them like devils; give me even the suppression of “Zæo” rather than the triumph of “Salome.” And if I feel such a confession to be due to those Fabians who could hardly have been anything but experts in any society, such as Mr. Sidney Webb or Mr. Edward Pease, it is due yet more strongly to the greatest of the Fabians. Here was a man who could have enjoyed art among the artists, who could have been the wittiest of all the flâneurs; who could have made epigrams like diamonds and drunk music like wine. He has instead laboured in a mill of statistics and crammed his mind with all the most dreary and the most filthy details, so that he can argue on the spur of the moment about sewing-machines or sewage, about typhus fever or twopenny tubes. The usual mean theory of motives will not cover the case; it is not ambition, for he could have been twenty times more prominent as a plausible and popular humorist. It is the real and ancient emotion of the salus populi, almost extinct in our oligarchical chaos; nor will I for one, as I pass on to many matters of argument or quarrel, neglect to salute a passion so implacable and so pure.
THE CRITIC

It appears a point of some mystery to the present writer that Bernard Shaw should have been so long unrecognised and almost in beggary. I should have thought his talent was of the ringing and arresting sort; such as even editors and publishers would have sense enough to seize. Yet it is quite certain that he almost starved in London for many years, writing occasional columns for an advertisement or words for a picture. And it is equally certain (it is proved by twenty anecdotes, but no one who knows Shaw needs any anecdotes to prove it) that in those days of desperation he again and again threw up chances and flung back good bargains which did not suit his unique and erratic sense of honour. The fame of having first offered Shaw to the public upon a platform worthy of him belongs, like many other public services, to Mr. William Archer.

I say it seems odd that such a writer should not be appreciated in a flash; but upon this point there is evidently a real difference of opinion, and it constitutes for me the strangest difficulty of the subject. I hear many people complain that Bernard Shaw deliberately mystifies them. I cannot imagine what they mean; it seems to me that he deliberately insults them. His language, especially on moral questions, is generally as straight and solid as that of a bargee and far less ornate and symbolic than that of a hansom-cabman. The prosperous English Philistine complains that Mr. Shaw is making a fool of him. Whereas Mr. Shaw is not in the least making a fool of him; Mr. Shaw is, with laborious lucidity, calling him a fool. G. B. S. calls a landlord a thief; and the landlord, instead of denying or resenting it, says, “Ah, that fellow hides his meaning so cleverly that one can never make out what he means, it is all so fine spun and fantastical.” G. B. S. calls a statesman a liar to his face, and the statesman cries in a kind of ecstasy, “Ah, what quaint, intricate and half-tangled trains of thought! Ah, what elusive and many-coloured mysteries of half-meaning!” I think it is always quite plain what Mr. Shaw means, even when he is joking, and it generally means that the people he is talking to ought to howl aloud for their sins. But the average representative of them undoubtedly treats the Shavian meaning as tricky and complex, when it is really direct and offensive. He always accuses Shaw of pulling his leg, at the exact moment when Shaw is pulling his nose.

This prompt and pungent style he learnt in the open, upon political tubs and platforms; and he is very legitimately proud of it. He boasts of being a demagogue; “The cart and the trumpet for me,” he says, with admirable good
sense. Everyone will remember the effective appearance of Cyrano de Bergerac in the first act of the fine play of that name; when instead of leaping in by any hackneyed door or window, he suddenly springs upon a chair above the crowd that has so far kept him invisible; “les bras croisés, le feutre en bataille, la moustache hérissée, le nez terrible.” I will not go so far as to say that when Bernard Shaw sprang upon a chair or tub in Trafalgar Square he had the hat in battle, or even that he had the nose terrible. But just as we see Cyrano best when he thus leaps above the crowd, I think we may take this moment of Shaw stepping on his little platform to see him clearly as he then was, and even as he has largely not ceased to be. I, at least, have only known him in his middle age; yet I think I can see him, younger yet only a little more alert, with hair more red but with face yet paler, as he first stood up upon some cart or barrow in the tossing glare of the gas.

The first fact that one realises about Shaw (independent of all one has read and often contradicting it) is his voice. Primarily it is the voice of an Irishman, and then something of the voice of a musician. It possibly explains much of his career; a man may be permitted to say so many impudent things with so pleasant an intonation. But the voice is not only Irish and agreeable, it is also frank and as it were inviting conference. This goes with a style and gesture which can only be described as at once very casual and very emphatic. He assumes that bodily supremacy which goes with oratory, but he assumes it with almost ostentatious carelessness; he throws back the head, but loosely and laughingly. He is at once swaggering and yet shrugging his shoulders, as if to drop from them the mantle of the orator which he has confidently assumed. Lastly, no man ever used voice or gesture better for the purpose of expressing certainty; no man can say “I tell Mr. Jones he is totally wrong” with more air of unforced and even casual conviction.

This particular play of feature or pitch of voice, at once didactic and yet not uncomrade-like, must be counted a very important fact, especially in connection with the period when that voice was first heard. It must be remembered that Shaw emerged as a wit in a sort of secondary age of wits; one of those stale interludes of prematurely old young men, which separate the serious epochs of history. Oscar Wilde was its god; but he was somewhat more mystical, not to say monstrous, than the average of its dried and decorous impudence. The two survivals of that time, as far as I know, are Mr. Max Beerbohm and Mr. Graham Robertson; two most charming people; but the air they had to live in was the devil. One of its notes was an artificial reticence of speech, which waited till it
could plant the perfect epigram. Its typical products were far too conceited to lay down the law. Now when people heard that Bernard Shaw was witty, as he most certainly was, when they heard his mots repeated like those of Whistler or Wilde, when they heard things like “the Seven deadly Virtues” or “Who was Hall Caine?” they expected another of these silent sarcastic dandies who went about with one epigram, patient and poisonous, like a bee with his one sting. And when they saw and heard the new humorist they found no fixed sneer, no frock coat, no green carnation, no silent Savoy Restaurant good manners, no fear of looking a fool, no particular notion of looking a gentleman. They found a talkative Irishman with a kind voice and a brown coat; open gestures and an evident desire to make people really agree with him. He had his own kind of affectations no doubt, and his own kind of tricks of debate; but he broke, and, thank God, forever the spell of the little man with the single eye glass who had frozen both faith and fun at so many tea-tables. Shaw’s humane voice and hearty manner were so obviously more the things of a great man than the hard, gem-like brilliancy of Wilde or the careful ill-temper of Whistler. He brought in a breezier sort of insolence; the single eye-glass fled before the single eye.

Added to the effect of the amiable dogmatic voice and lean, loose swaggering figure, is that of the face with which so many caricaturists have fantastically delighted themselves, the Mephistophelean face with the fierce tufted eyebrows and forked red beard. Yet those caricaturists in their natural delight in coming upon so striking a face, have somewhat misrepresented it, making it merely Satanic; whereas its actual expression has quite as much benevolence as mockery. By this time his costume has become a part of his personality; one has come to think of the reddish brown Jaeger suit as if it were a sort of reddish brown fur, and were, like the hair and eyebrows, a part of the animal; yet there are those who claim to remember a Bernard Shaw of yet more awful aspect before Jaeger came to his assistance; a Bernard Shaw in a dilapidated frock-coat and some sort of straw hat. I can hardly believe it; the man is so much of a piece, and must always have dressed appropriately. In any case his brown woollen clothes, at once artistic and hygienic, completed the appeal for which he stood; which might be defined as an eccentric healthy-mindedness. But something of the vagueness and equivocation of his first fame is probably due to the different functions which he performed in the contemporary world of art.

He began by writing novels. They are not much read, and indeed not imperatively worth reading, with the one exception of the crude and magnificent Cashel Byron’s Profession. Mr. William Archer, in the course of his kindly
efforts on behalf of his young Irish friend, sent this book to Samoa, for the 
opinion of the most elvish and yet efficient of modern critics. Stevenson 
summed up much of Shaw even from that fragment when he spoke of a romantic 
griffin roaring with laughter at the nature of his own quest. He also added the not 
wholly unjustified postscript: “I say, Archer,—my God, what women!”

The fiction was largely dropped; but when he began work he felt his way by 
the avenues of three arts. He was an art critic, a dramatic critic, and a musical 
critic; and in all three, it need hardly be said, he fought for the newest style and 
the most revolutionary school. He wrote on all these as he would have written on 
anything; but it was, I fancy, about the music that he cared most.

It may often be remarked that mathematicians love and understand music 
more than they love or understand poetry. Bernard Shaw is in much the same 
condition; indeed, in attempting to do justice to Shakespeare’s poetry, he always 
calls it “word music.” It is not difficult to explain this special attachment of the 
mere logician to music. The logician, like every other man on earth, must have 
sentiment and romance in his existence; in every man’s life, indeed, which can 
be called a life at all, sentiment is the most solid thing. But if the extreme 
logician turns for his emotions to poetry, he is exasperated and bewildered by 
discovering that the words of his own trade are used in an entirely different 
meaning. He conceives that he understands the word “visible,” and then finds 
Milton applying it to darkness, in which nothing is visible. He supposes that he 
understands the word “hide,” and then finds Shelley talking of a poet hidden in 
the light. He has reason to believe that he understands the common word “hung”;
and then William Shakespeare, Esquire, of Stratford-on-Avon, gravely assures 
him that the tops of the tall sea waves were hung with deafening clamours on the 
slippery clouds. That is why the common arithmetician prefers music to poetry. 
Words are his scientific instruments. It irritates him that they should be anyone 
else’s musical instruments. He is willing to see men juggling, but not men 
juggling with his own private tools and possessions—his terms. It is then that he 
turns with an utter relief to music. Here are all the same fascination and 
inspiration, all the same purity and plunging force as in poetry; but not requiring 
any verbal confession that light conceals things or that darkness can be seen in 
the dark. Music is mere beauty; it is beauty in the abstract, beauty in solution. It 
is a shapeless and liquid element of beauty, in which a man may really float, not 
indeed affirming the truth, but not denying it. Bernard Shaw, as I have already 
said, is infinitely far above all such mere mathematicians and pedantic reasoners; 
still his feeling is partly the same. He adores music because it cannot deal with
romantic terms either in their right or their wrong sense. Music can be romantic without reminding him of Shakespeare and Walter Scott, with whom he has had personal quarrels. Music can be Catholic without reminding him verbally of the Catholic Church, which he has never seen, and is sure he does not like. Bernard Shaw can agree with Wagner, the musician, because he speaks without words; if it had been Wagner the man he would certainly have had words with him. Therefore I would suggest that Shaw’s love of music (which is so fundamental that it must be mentioned early, if not first, in his story) may itself be considered in the first case as the imaginative safety-valve of the rationalistic Irishman.

This much may be said conjecturally over the present signature; but more must not be said. Bernard Shaw understands music so much better than I do that it is just possible that he is, in that tongue and atmosphere, all that he is not elsewhere. While he is writing with a pen I know his limitations as much as I admire his genius; and I know it is true to say that he does not appreciate romance. But while he is playing on the piano he may be cocking a feather, drawing a sword or draining a flagon for all I know. While he is speaking I am sure that there are some things he does not understand. But while he is listening (at the Queen’s Hall) he may understand everything, including God and me. Upon this part of him I am a reverent agnostic; it is well to have some such dark continent in the character of a man of whom one writes. It preserves two very important things—modesty in the biographer and mystery in the biography.

For the purpose of our present generalisation it is only necessary to say that Shaw, as a musical critic, summed himself up as “The Perfect Wagnerite”; he threw himself into subtle and yet trenchant eulogy of that revolutionary voice in music. It was the same with the other arts. As he was a Perfect Wagnerite in music, so he was a Perfect Whistlerite in painting; so above all he was a Perfect Ibsenite in drama. And with this we enter that part of his career with which this book is more specially concerned. When Mr. William Archer got him established as dramatic critic of the Saturday Review, he became for the first time “a star of the stage”; a shooting star and sometimes a destroying comet.

On the day of that appointment opened one of the very few exhilarating and honest battles that broke the silence of the slow and cynical collapse of the nineteenth century. Bernard Shaw the demagogue had got his cart and his trumpet; and was resolved to make them like the car of destiny and the trumpet of judgment. He had not the servility of the ordinary rebel, who is content to go on rebelling against kings and priests, because such rebellion is as old and as established as any priests or kings. He cast about him for something to attack
which was not merely powerful or placid, but was unattacked. After a little quite sincere reflection, he found it. He would not be content to be a common atheist; he wished to blaspheme something in which even atheists believed. He was not satisfied with being revolutionary; there were so many revolutionists. He wanted to pick out some prominent institution which had been irrationally and instinctively accepted by the most violent and profane; something of which Mr. Foote would speak as respectfully on the front page of the Freethinker as Mr. St. Loe Strachey on the front page of the Spectator. He found the thing; he found the great unassailed English institution—Shakespeare.

But Shaw’s attack on Shakespeare, though exaggerated for the fun of the thing, was not by any means the mere folly or firework paradox that has been supposed. He meant what he said; what was called his levity was merely the laughter of a man who enjoyed saying what he meant—an occupation which is indeed one of the greatest larks in life. Moreover, it can honestly be said that Shaw did good by shaking the mere idolatry of Him of Avon. That idolatry was bad for England; it buttressed our perilous self-complacency by making us think that we alone had, not merely a great poet, but the one poet above criticism. It was bad for literature; it made a minute model out of work that was really a hasty and faulty masterpiece. And it was bad for religion and morals that there should be so huge a terrestrial idol, that we should put such utter and unreasoning trust in any child of man. It is true that it was largely through Shaw’s own defects that he beheld the defects of Shakespeare. But it needed someone equally prosaic to resist what was perilous in the charm of such poetry; it may not be altogether a mistake to send a deaf man to destroy the rock of the sirens.

This attitude of Shaw illustrates of course all three of the divisions or aspects to which the reader’s attention has been drawn. It was partly the attitude of the Irishman objecting to the Englishman turning his mere artistic taste into a religion; especially when it was a taste merely taught him by his aunts and uncles. In Shaw’s opinion (one might say) the English do not really enjoy Shakespeare or even admire Shakespeare; one can only say, in the strong colloquialism, that they swear by Shakespeare. He is a mere god; a thing to be invoked. And Shaw’s whole business was to set up the things which were to be sworn by as things to be sworn at. It was partly again the revolutionist in pursuit of pure novelty, hating primarily the oppression of the past, almost hating history itself. For Bernard Shaw the prophets were to be stoned after, and not before, men had built their sepulchres. There was a Yankee smartness in the man which
was irritated at the idea of being dominated by a person dead for three hundred years; like Mark Twain, he wanted a fresher corpse.

These two motives there were, but they were small compared with the other. It was the third part of him, the Puritan, that was really at war with Shakespeare. He denounced that playwright almost exactly as any contemporary Puritan coming out of a conventicle in a steeple-crowned hat and stiff bands might have denounced the playwright coming out of the stage door of the old Globe Theatre. This is not a mere fancy; it is philosophically true. A legend has run round the newspapers that Bernard Shaw offered himself as a better writer than Shakespeare. This is false and quite unjust; Bernard Shaw never said anything of the kind. The writer whom he did say was better than Shakespeare was not himself, but Bunyan. And he justified it by attributing to Bunyan a virile acceptance of life as a high and harsh adventure, while in Shakespeare he saw nothing but profligate pessimism, the vanitas vanitatum of a disappointed voluptuary. According to this view Shakespeare was always saying, “Out, out, brief candle,” because his was only a ballroom candle; while Bunyan was seeking to light such a candle as by God’s grace should never be put out.

It is odd that Bernard Shaw’s chief error or insensibility should have been the instrument of his noblest affirmation. The denunciation of Shakespeare was a mere misunderstanding. But the denunciation of Shakespeare’s pessimism was the most splendidly understanding of all his utterances. This is the greatest thing in Shaw, a serious optimism—even a tragic optimism. Life is a thing too glorious to be enjoyed. To be is an exacting and exhausting business; the trumpet though inspiring is terrible. Nothing that he ever wrote is so noble as his simple reference to the sturdy man who stepped up to the Keeper of the Book of Life and said, “Put down my name, Sir.” It is true that Shaw called this heroic philosophy by wrong names and buttressed it with false metaphysics; that was the weakness of the age. The temporary decline of theology had involved the neglect of philosophy and all fine thinking; and Bernard Shaw had to find shaky justifications in Schopenhauer for the sons of God shouting for joy. He called it the Will to Live—a phrase invented by Prussian professors who would like to exist, but can’t. Afterwards he asked people to worship the Life-Force; as if one could worship a hyphen. But though he covered it with crude new names (which are now fortunately crumbling everywhere like bad mortar) he was on the side of the good old cause; the oldest and the best of all causes, the cause of creation against destruction, the cause of yes against no, the cause of the seed against the stony earth and the star against the abyss.
His misunderstanding of Shakespeare arose largely from the fact that he is a Puritan, while Shakespeare was spiritually a Catholic. The former is always screwing himself up to see truth; the latter is often content that truth is there. The Puritan is only strong enough to stiffen; the Catholic is strong enough to relax. Shaw, I think, has entirely misunderstood the pessimistic passages of Shakespeare. They are flying moods which a man with a fixed faith can afford to entertain. That all is vanity, that life is dust and love is ashes, these are frivolities, these are jokes that a Catholic can afford to utter. He knows well enough that there is a life that is not dust and a love that is not ashes. But just as he may let himself go more than the Puritan in the matter of enjoyment, so he may let himself go more than the Puritan in the matter of melancholy. The sad exuberances of Hamlet are merely like the glad exuberances of Falstaff. This is not conjecture; it is the text of Shakespeare. In the very act of uttering his pessimism, Hamlet admits that it is a mood and not the truth. Heaven is a heavenly thing, only to him it seems a foul congregation of vapours. Man is the paragon of animals, only to him he seems a quintessence of dust. Hamlet is quite the reverse of a sceptic. He is a man whose strong intellect believes much more than his weak temperament can make vivid to him. But this power of knowing a thing without feeling it, this power of believing a thing without experiencing it, this is an old Catholic complexity, and the Puritan has never understood it. Shakespeare confesses his moods (mostly by the mouths of villains and failures), but he never sets up his moods against his mind. His cry of vanitas vanitatum is itself only a harmless vanity. Readers may not agree with my calling him Catholic with a big C; but they will hardly complain of my calling him catholic with a small one. And that is here the principal point. Shakespeare was not in any sense a pessimist; he was, if anything, an optimist so universal as to be able to enjoy even pessimism. And this is exactly where he differs from the Puritan. The true Puritan is not squeamish: the true Puritan is free to say “Damn it!” But the Catholic Elizabethan was free (on passing provocation) to say “Damn it all!”

It need hardly be explained that Bernard Shaw added to his negative case of a dramatist to be depreciated a corresponding affirmative case of a dramatist to be exalted and advanced. He was not content with so remote a comparison as that between Shakespeare and Bunyan. In his vivacious weekly articles in the Saturday Review, the real comparison upon which everything turned was the comparison between Shakespeare and Ibsen. He early threw himself with all possible eagerness into the public disputes about the great Scandinavian; and though there was no doubt whatever about which side he supported, there was
much that was individual in the line he took. It is not our business here to explore that extinct volcano. You may say that anti-Ibsenism is dead, or you may say that Ibsen is dead; in any case, that controversy is dead, and death, as the Roman poet says, can alone confess of what small atoms we are made. The opponents of Ibsen largely exhibited the permanent qualities of the populace; that is, their instincts were right and their reasons wrong. They made the complete controversial mistake of calling Ibsen a pessimist; whereas, indeed, his chief weakness is a rather childish confidence in mere nature and freedom, and a blindness (either of experience or of culture) in the matter of original sin. In this sense Ibsen is not so much a pessimist as a highly crude kind of optimist. Nevertheless the man in the street was right in his fundamental instinct, as he always is. Ibsen, in his pale northern style, is an optimist; but for all that he is a depressing person. The optimism of Ibsen is less comforting than the pessimism of Dante; just as a Norwegian sunrise, however splendid, is colder than a southern night.

But on the side of those who fought for Ibsen there was also a disagreement, and perhaps also a mistake. The vague army of “the advanced” (an army which advances in all directions) were united in feeling that they ought to be the friends of Ibsen because he also was advancing somewhere somehow. But they were also seriously impressed by Flaubert, by Oscar Wilde and all the rest who told them that a work of art was in another universe from ethics and social good. Therefore many, I think most, of the Ibsenites praised the Ibsen plays merely as choses vues, aesthetic affirmations of what can be without any reference to what ought to be. Mr. William Archer himself inclined to this view, though his strong sagacity kept him in a haze of healthy doubt on the subject. Mr. Walkley certainly took this view. But this view Mr. George Bernard Shaw abruptly and violently refused to take.

With the full Puritan combination of passion and precision he informed everybody that Ibsen was not artistic, but moral; that his dramas were didactic, that all great art was didactic, that Ibsen was strongly on the side of some of his characters and strongly against others, that there was preaching and public spirit in the work of good dramatists; and that if this were not so, dramatists and all other artists would be mere panders of intellectual debauchery, to be locked up as the Puritans locked up the stage players. No one can understand Bernard Shaw who does not give full value to this early revolt of his on behalf of ethics against the ruling school of l’art pour l’art. It is interesting because it is connected with other ambitions in the man, especially with that which has made
him somewhat vainer of being a Parish Councillor than of being one of the most popular dramatists in Europe. But its chief interest is again to be referred to our stratification of the psychology; it is the lover of true things rebelling for once against merely new things; it is the Puritan suddenly refusing to be the mere Progressive.

But this attitude obviously laid on the ethical lover of Ibsen a not inconsiderable obligation. If the new drama had an ethical purpose, what was it? and if Ibsen was a moral teacher, what the deuce was he teaching? Answers to this question, answers of manifold brilliancy and promise, were scattered through all the dramatic criticisms of those years on the Saturday Review. But even Bernard Shaw grew tired after a time of discussing Ibsen only in connection with the current pantomime or the latest musical comedy. It was felt that so much sincerity and fertility of explanation justified a concentrated attack; and in 1891 appeared the brilliant book called The Quintessence of Ibsenism, which some have declared to be merely the quintessence of Shaw. However this may be, it was in fact and profession the quintessence of Shaw’s theory of the morality or propaganda of Ibsen.

The book itself is much longer than the book that I am writing; and as is only right in so spirited an apologist, every paragraph is provocative. I could write an essay on every sentence which I accept and three essays on every sentence which I deny. Bernard Shaw himself is a master of compression; he can put a conception more compactly than any other man alive. It is therefore rather difficult to compress his compression; one feels as if one were trying to extract a beef essence from Bovril. But the shortest form in which I can state the idea of The Quintessence of Ibsenism is that it is the idea of distrusting ideals, which are universal, in comparison with facts, which are miscellaneous. The man whom he attacks throughout he calls “The Idealist”; that is the man who permits himself to be mainly moved by a moral generalisation. “Actions,” he says, “are to be judged by their effect on happiness, and not by their conformity to any ideal.” As we have already seen, there is a certain inconsistency here; for while Shaw had always chucked all ideals overboard the one he had chucked first was the ideal of happiness. Passing this however for the present, we may mark the above as the most satisfying summary. If I tell a lie I am not to blame myself for having violated the ideal of truth, but only for having perhaps got myself into a mess and made things worse than they were before. If I have broken my word I need not feel (as my fathers did) that I have broken something inside of me, as one who breaks a blood vessel. It all depends on whether I have broken up
something outside me; as one who breaks up an evening party. If I shoot my father the only question is whether I have made him happy. I must not admit the idealistic conception that the mere shooting of my father might possibly make me unhappy. We are to judge of every individual case as it arises, apparently without any social summary or moral ready-reckoner at all. "The Golden Rule is that there is no Golden Rule." We must not say that it is right to keep promises, but that it may be right to keep this promise. Essentially it is anarchy; nor is it very easy to see how a state could be very comfortable which was Socialist in all its public morality and Anarchist in all its private. But if it is anarchy, it is anarchy without any of the abandon and exuberance of anarchy. It is a worried and conscientious anarchy; an anarchy of painful delicacy and even caution. For it refuses to trust in traditional experiments or plainly trodden tracks; every case must be considered anew from the beginning, and yet considered with the most wide-eyed care for human welfare; every man must act as if he were the first man made. Briefly, we must always be worrying about what is best for our children, and we must not take one hint or rule of thumb from our fathers. Some think that this anarchism would make a man tread down mighty cities in his madness. I think it would make a man walk down the street as if he were walking on egg-shells. I do not think this experiment in opportunism would end in frantic license; I think it would end in frozen timidity. If a man was forbidden to solve moral problems by moral science or the help of mankind, his course would be quite easy—he would not solve the problems. The world instead of being a knot so tangled as to need unravelling, would simply become a piece of clockwork too complicated to be touched. I cannot think that this untutored worry was what Ibsen meant; I have my doubts as to whether it was what Shaw meant; but I do not think that it can be substantially doubted that it was what he said.

In any case it can be asserted that the general aim of the work was to exalt the immediate conclusions of practice against the general conclusions of theory. Shaw objected to the solution of every problem in a play being by its nature a general solution, applicable to all other such problems. He disliked the entrance of a universal justice at the end of the last act; treading down all the personal ultimatums and all the varied certainties of men. He disliked the god from the machine—because he was from a machine. But even without the machine he tended to dislike the god; because a god is more general than a man. His enemies have accused Shaw of being anti-domestic, a shaker of the roof-tree. But in this sense Shaw may be called almost madly domestic. He wishes each private
problem to be settled in private, without reference to sociological ethics. And the only objection to this kind of gigantic casuistry is that the theatre is really too small to discuss it. It would not be fair to play David and Goliath on a stage too small to admit Goliath. And it is not fair to discuss private morality on a stage too small to admit the enormous presence of public morality; that character which has not appeared in a play since the Middle Ages; whose name is Everyman and whose honour we have all in our keeping.
THE DRAMATIST

No one who was alive at the time and interested in such matters will ever forget the first acting of Arms and the Man. It was applauded by that indescribable element in all of us which rejoices to see the genuine thing prevail against the plausible; that element which rejoices that even its enemies are alive. Apart from the problems raised in the play, the very form of it was an attractive and forcible innovation. Classic plays which were wholly heroic, comic plays which were wholly and even heartlessly ironical, were common enough. Commonest of all in this particular time was the play that began playfully, with plenty of comic business, and was gradually sobered by sentiment until it ended on a note of romance or even of pathos. A commonplace little officer, the butt of the mess, becomes by the last act as high and hopeless a lover as Dante. Or a vulgar and violent pork-butcher remembers his own youth before the curtain goes down. The first thing that Bernard Shaw did when he stepped before the footlights was to reverse this process. He resolved to build a play not on pathos, but on bathos. The officer should be heroic first and then everyone should laugh at him; the curtain should go up on a man remembering his youth, and he should only reveal himself as a violent pork-butcher when someone interrupted him with an order for pork. This merely technical originality is indicated in the very title of the play. The Arma Virumque of Virgil is a mounting and ascending phrase, the man is more than his weapons. The Latin line suggests a superb procession which should bring on to the stage the brazen and resounding armour, the shield and shattering axe, but end with the hero himself, taller and more terrible because unarmed. The technical effect of Shaw’s scheme is like the same scene, in which a crowd should carry even more gigantic shapes of shield and helmet, but when the horns and howls were at their highest, should end with the figure of Little Tich. The name itself is meant to be a bathos; arms—and the man.

It is well to begin with the superficial; and this is the superficial effectiveness of Shaw; the brilliancy of bathos. But of course the vitality and value of his plays does not lie merely in this; any more than the value of Swinburne lies in alliteration or the value of Hood in puns. This is not his message; but it is his method; it is his style. The first taste we had of it was in this play of Arms and the Man; but even at the very first it was evident that there was much more in the play than that. Among other things there was one thing not unimportant; there was savage sincerity. Indeed, only a ferociously sincere person can produce such
effective flippancies on a matter like war; just as only a strong man could juggle with cannon balls. It is all very well to use the word “fool” as synonymous with “jester”; but daily experience shows that it is generally the solemn and silent man who is the fool. It is all very well to accuse Mr. Shaw of standing on his head; but if you stand on your head you must have a hard and solid head to stand on. In Arms and the Man the bathos of form was strictly the incarnation of a strong satire in the idea. The play opens in an atmosphere of military melodrama; the dashing officer of cavalry going off to death in an attitude, the lovely heroine left in tearful rapture; the brass band, the noise of guns and the red fire. Into all this enters Bluntschli, the little sturdy crop-haired Swiss professional soldier, a man without a country but with a trade. He tells the army-adoring heroine frankly that she is a humbug; and she, after a moment’s reflection, appears to agree with him. The play is like nearly all Shaw’s plays, the dialogue of a conversion. By the end of it the young lady has lost all her military illusions and admires this mercenary soldier not because he faces guns, but because he faces facts.

This was a fitting entrance for Shaw to his didactic drama; because the commonplace courage which he respects in Bluntschli was the one virtue which he was destined to praise throughout. We can best see how the play symbolises and summarises Bernard Shaw if we compare it with some other attack by modern humanitarians upon war. Shaw has many of the actual opinions of Tolstoy. Like Tolstoy he tells men, with coarse innocence, that romantic war is only butchery and that romantic love is only lust. But Tolstoy objects to these things because they are real; he really wishes to abolish them. Shaw only objects to them in so far as they are ideal; that is in so far as they are idealised. Shaw objects not so much to war as to the attractiveness of war. He does not so much dislike love as the love of love. Before the temple of Mars, Tolstoy stands and thunders, “There shall be no wars”; Bernard Shaw merely murmurs, “Wars if you must; but for God’s sake, not war songs.” Before the temple of Venus, Tolstoy cries terribly, “Come out of it!”; Shaw is quite content to say, “Do not be taken in by it.” Tolstoy seems really to propose that high passion and patriotic valour should be destroyed. Shaw is more moderate; and only asks that they should be desecrated. Upon this note, both about sex and conflict, he was destined to dwell through much of his work with the most wonderful variations of witty adventure and intellectual surprise. It may be doubted perhaps whether this realism in love and war is quite so sensible as it looks. Securus judicat orbis terrarum; the world is wiser than the moderns. The world has kept
sentimentalities simply because they are the most practical things in the world. They alone make men do things. The world does not encourage a quite rational lover, simply because a perfectly rational lover would never get married. The world does not encourage a perfectly rational army, because a perfectly rational army would run away.

The brain of Bernard Shaw was like a wedge in the literal sense. Its sharpest end was always in front; and it split our society from end to end the moment it had entrance at all. As I have said he was long unheard of; but he had not the tragedy of many authors, who were heard of long before they were heard. When you had read any Shaw you read all Shaw. When you had seen one of his plays you waited for more. And when he brought them out in volume form, you did what is repugnant to any literary man—you bought a book.

The dramatic volume with which Shaw dazzled the public was called, Plays, Pleasant and Unpleasant. I think the most striking and typical thing about it was that he did not know very clearly which plays were unpleasant and which were pleasant. “Pleasant” is a word which is almost unmeaning to Bernard Shaw. Except, as I suppose, in music (where I cannot follow him), relish and receptivity are things that simply do not appear. He has the best of tongues and the worst of palates. With the possible exception of Mrs. Warren’s Profession (which was at least unpleasant in the sense of being forbidden) I can see no particular reason why any of the seven plays should be held specially to please or displease. First in fame and contemporary importance came the reprint of Arms and the Man, of which I have already spoken. Over all the rest towered unquestionably the two figures of Mrs. Warren and of Candida. They were neither of them pleasant, except as all good art is pleasant. They were neither of them really unpleasant except as all truth is unpleasant. But they did represent the author’s normal preference and his principal fear; and those two sculptured giantesses largely upheld his fame.

I fancy that the author rather dislikes Candida because it is so generally liked. I give my own feeling for what it is worth (a foolish phrase), but I think that there were only two moments when this powerful writer was truly, in the ancient and popular sense, inspired; that is, breathing from a bigger self and telling more truth than he knew. One is that scene in a later play where after the secrets and revenges of Egypt have rioted and rotted all round him, the colossal sanity of Cæsar is suddenly acclaimed with swords. The other is that great last scene in Candida where the wife, stung into final speech, declared her purpose of remaining with the strong man because he is the weak man. The wife is asked to
decide between two men, one a strenuous self-confident popular preacher, her husband, the other a wild and weak young poet, logically futile and physically timid, her lover; and she chooses the former because he has more weakness and more need of her. Even among the plain and ringing paradoxes of the Shaw play this is one of the best reversals or turnovers ever effected. A paradoxical writer like Bernard Shaw is perpetually and tiresomely told that he stands on his head. But all romance and all religion consist in making the whole universe stand on its head. That reversal is the whole idea of virtue; that the last shall be first and the first last. Considered as a pure piece of Shaw therefore, the thing is of the best. But it is also something much better than Shaw. The writer touches certain realities commonly outside his scope; especially the reality of the normal wife’s attitude to the normal husband, an attitude which is not romantic but which is yet quite quixotic; which is insanely unselfish and yet quite cynically clear-sighted. It involves human sacrifice without in the least involving idolatry.

The truth is that in this place Bernard Shaw comes within an inch of expressing something that is not properly expressed anywhere else; the idea of marriage. Marriage is not a mere chain upon love as the anarchists say; nor is it a mere crown upon love as the sentimentalists say. Marriage is a fact, an actual human relation like that of motherhood which has certain human habits and loyalties, except in a few monstrous cases where it is turned to torture by special insanity and sin. A marriage is neither an ecstasy nor a slavery; it is a commonwealth; it is a separate working and fighting thing like a nation. Kings and diplomats talk of “forming alliances” when they make weddings; but indeed every wedding is primarily an alliance. The family is a fact even when it is not an agreeable fact, and a man is part of his wife even when he wishes he wasn’t. The twain are one flesh—yes, even when they are not one spirit. Man is duplex. Man is a quadruped.

Of this ancient and essential relation there are certain emotional results, which are subtle, like all the growths of nature. And one of them is the attitude of the wife to the husband, whom she regards at once as the strongest and most helpless of human figures. She regards him in some strange fashion at once as a warrior who must make his way and as an infant who is sure to lose his way. The man has emotions which exactly correspond; sometimes looking down at his wife and sometimes up at her; for marriage is like a splendid game of see-saw. Whatever else it is, it is not comradeship. This living, ancestral bond (not of love or fear, but strictly of marriage) has been twice expressed splendidly in literature. The man’s incurable sense of the mother in his lawful wife was uttered
by Browning in one of his two or three truly shattering lines of genius, when he
makes the execrable Guido fall back finally upon the fact of marriage and the
wife whom he has trodden like mire:

“Christ! Maria! God,
Pompilia, will you let them murder me?”

And the woman’s witness to the same fact has been best expressed by Bernard
Shaw in this great scene where she remains with the great stalwart successful
public man because he is really too little to run alone.

There are one or two errors in the play; and they are all due to the primary
error of despising the mental attitude of romance, which is the only key to real
human conduct. For instance, the love making of the young poet is all wrong. He
is supposed to be a romantic and amorous boy; and therefore the dramatist tries
to make him talk turgidly, about seeking for “an archangel with purple wings”
who shall be worthy of his lady. But a lad in love would never talk in this mock
heroic style; there is no period at which the young male is more sensitive and
serious and afraid of looking a fool. This is a blunder; but there is another much
bigger and blacker. It is completely and disastrously false to the whole nature of
falling in love to make the young Eugene complain of the cruelty which makes
Candida defile her fair hands with domestic duties. No boy in love with a
beautiful woman would ever feel disgusted when she peeled potatoes or trimmed
lamps. He would like her to be domestic. He would simply feel that the potatoes
had become poetical and the lamps gained an extra light. This may be irrational;
but we are not talking of rationality, but of the psychology of first love. It may
be very unfair to women that the toil and triviality of potato peeling should be
seen through a glamour of romance; but the glamour is quite as certain a fact as
the potatoes. It may be a bad thing in sociology that men should deify
domesticity in girls as something dainty and magical; but all men do. Personally
I do not think it a bad thing at all; but that is another argument. The argument
here is that Bernard Shaw, in aiming at mere realism, makes a big mistake in
reality. Misled by his great heresy of looking at emotions from the outside, he
makes Eugene a cold-blooded prig at the very moment when he is trying, for his
own dramatic purposes, to make him a hot-blooded lover. He makes the young
lover an idealistic theoriser about the very things about which he really would
have been a sort of mystical materialist. Here the romantic Irishman is much
more right than the very rational one; and there is far more truth to life as it is in
Lover’s couplet—

“AND ENVIED THE CHICKEN
than in Eugene’s solemn, æsthetic protest against the potato-skins and the lamp-oil. For dramatic purposes, G. B. S., even if he despises romance, ought to comprehend it. But then, if once he comprehended romance, he would not despise it.

The series contained, besides its more substantial work, tragic and comic, a comparative frivolity called The Man of Destiny. It is a little comedy about Napoleon, and is chiefly interesting as a foreshadowing of his after sketches of heroes and strong men; it is a kind of parody of Cæsar and Cleopatra before it was written. In this connection the mere title of this Napoleonic play is of interest. All Shaw’s generation and school of thought remembered Napoleon only by his late and corrupt title of “The Man of Destiny,” a title only given to him when he was already fat and tired and destined to exile. They forgot that through all the really thrilling and creative part of his career he was not the man of destiny, but the man who defied destiny. Shaw’s sketch is extraordinarily clever; but it is tinged with this unmilitary notion of an inevitable conquest; and this we must remember when we come to those larger canvases on which he painted his more serious heroes. As for the play, it is packed with good things, of which the last is perhaps the best. The long duologue between Bonaparte and the Irish lady ends with the General declaring that he will only be beaten when he meets an English army under an Irish general. It has always been one of Shaw’s paradoxes that the English mind has the force to fulfil orders, while the Irish mind has the intelligence to give them, and it is among those of his paradoxes which contain a certain truth.

A far more important play is The Philanderer, an ironic comedy which is full of fine strokes and real satire; it is more especially the vehicle of some of Shaw’s best satire upon physical science. Nothing could be cleverer than the picture of the young, strenuous doctor, in the utter innocence of his professional ambition, who has discovered a new disease, and is delighted when he finds people suffering from it and cast down to despair when he finds that it does not exist. The point is worth a pause, because it is a good, short way of stating Shaw’s attitude, right or wrong, upon the whole of formal morality. What he dislikes in young Doctor Paramore is that he has interposed a secondary and false conscience between himself and the facts. When his disease is disproved, instead of seeing the escape of a human being who thought he was going to die of it, Paramore sees the downfall of a kind of flag or cause. This is the whole contention of The Quintessence of Ibsenism, put better than the book puts it; it is
a really sharp exposition of the dangers of “idealism,” the sacrifice of people to principles, and Shaw is even wiser in his suggestion that this excessive idealism exists nowhere so strongly as in the world of physical science. He shows that the scientist tends to be more concerned about the sickness than about the sick man; but it was certainly in his mind to suggest here also that the idealist is more concerned about the sin than about the sinner.

This business of Dr. Paramore’s disease while it is the most farcical thing in the play is also the most philosophic and important. The rest of the figures, including the Philanderer himself, are in the full sense of those blasting and obliterating words “funny without being vulgar,” that is, funny without being of any importance to the masses of men. It is a play about a dashing and advanced “Ibsen Club,” and the squabble between the young Ibsenites and the old people who are not yet up to Ibsen. It would be hard to find a stronger example of Shaw’s only essential error, modernity—which means the seeking for truth in terms of time. Only a few years have passed and already almost half the wit of that wonderful play is wasted, because it all turns on the newness of a fashion that is no longer new. Doubtless many people still think the Ibsen drama a great thing, like the French classical drama. But going to “The Philanderer” is like going among periwigs and rapiers and hearing that the young men are now all for Racine. What makes such work sound unreal is not the praise of Ibsen, but the praise of the novelty of Ibsen. Any advantage that Bernard Shaw had over Colonel Craven I have over Bernard Shaw; we who happen to be born last have the meaningless and paltry triumph in that meaningless and paltry war. We are the superiors by that silliest and most snobbish of all superiorities, the mere aristocracy of time. All works must become thus old and insipid which have ever tried to be “modern,” which have consented to smell of time rather than of eternity. Only those who have stooped to be in advance of their time will ever find themselves behind it.

But it is irritating to think what diamonds, what dazzling silver of Shavian wit has been sunk in such an out-of-date warship. In The Philanderer there are five hundred excellent and about five magnificent things. The rattle of repartees between the doctor and the soldier about the humanity of their two trades is admirable. Or again, when the colonel tells Chartaris that “in his young days” he would have no more behaved like Chartaris than he would have cheated at cards. After a pause Chartaris says, “You’re getting old, Craven, and you make a virtue of it as usual.” And there is an altitude of aerial tragedy in the words of Grace, who has refused the man she loves, to Julia, who is marrying the man she
doesn’t, “This is what they call a happy ending—these men.”

There is an acrid taste in The Philanderer; and certainly he might be considered a super-sensitive person who should find anything acrid in You Never Can Tell. This play is the nearest approach to frank and objectless exuberance in the whole of Shaw’s work. Punch, with wisdom as well as wit, said that it might well be called not “You Never Can Tell” but “You Never Can be Shaw.” And yet if anyone will read this blazing farce and then after it any of the romantic farces, such as Pickwick or even The Wrong Box, I do not think he will be disposed to erase or even to modify what I said at the beginning about the ingrained grimness and even inhumanity of Shaw’s art. To take but one test: love, in an “extravaganza,” may be light love or love in idleness, but it should be hearty and happy love if it is to add to the general hilarity. Such are the ludicrous but lucky love affairs of the sportsman Winkle and the Maestro Jimson. In Gloria’s collapse before her bullying lover there is something at once cold and unclean; it calls up all the modern supermen with their cruel and fishy eyes. Such farces should begin in a friendly air, in a tavern. There is something very symbolic of Shaw in the fact that his farce begins in a dentist’s.

The only one out of this brilliant batch of plays in which I think that the method adopted really fails, is the one called Widower’s Houses. The best touch of Shaw is simply in the title. The simple substitution of widowers for widows contains almost the whole bitter and yet boisterous protest of Shaw; all his preference for undignified fact over dignified phrase; all his dislike of those subtle trends of sex or mystery which swing the logician off the straight line. We can imagine him crying, “Why in the name of death and conscience should it be tragic to be a widow but comic to be a widower?” But the rationalistic method is here applied quite wrong as regards the production of a drama. The most dramatic point in the affair is when the open and indecent rack-renter turns on the decent young man of means and proves to him that he is equally guilty, that he also can only grind his corn by grinding the faces of the poor. But even here the point is undramatic because it is indirect; it is indirect because it is merely sociological. It may be the truth that a young man living on an unexamined income which ultimately covers a great deal of house-property is as dangerous as any despot or thief. But it is a truth that you can no more put into a play than into a triolot. You can make a play out of one man robbing another man, but not out of one man robbing a million men; still less out of his robbing them unconsciously.

Of the plays collected in this book I have kept Mrs. Warren’s Profession to the
last, because, fine as it is, it is even finer and more important because of its fate, which was to rouse a long and serious storm and to be vetoed by the Censor of Plays. I say that this drama is most important because of the quarrel that came out of it. If I were speaking of some mere artist this might be an insult. But there are high and heroic things in Bernard Shaw; and one of the highest and most heroic is this, that he certainly cares much more for a quarrel than for a play. And this quarrel about the censorship is one on which he feels so strongly that in a book embodying any sort of sympathy it would be much better to leave out Mrs. Warren than to leave out Mr. Redford. The veto was the pivot of so very personal a movement by the dramatist, of so very positive an assertion of his own attitude towards things, that it is only just and necessary to state what were the two essential parties to the dispute; the play and the official who prevented the play.

The play of Mrs. Warren’s Profession is concerned with a coarse mother and a cold daughter; the mother drives the ordinary and dirty trade of harlotry; the daughter does not know until the end the atrocious origin of all her own comfort and refinement. The daughter, when the discovery is made, freezes up into an iceberg of contempt; which is indeed a very womanly thing to do. The mother explodes into pulverising cynicism and practicality; which is also very womanly. The dialogue is drastic and sweeping; the daughter says the trade is loathsome; the mother answers that she loathes it herself; that every healthy person does loathe the trade by which she lives. And beyond question the general effect of the play is that the trade is loathsome; supposing anyone to be so insensible as to require to be told of the fact. Undoubtedly the upshot is that a brothel is a miserable business, and a brothel-keeper a miserable woman. The whole dramatic art of Shaw is in the literal sense of the word, tragi-comic; I mean that the comic part comes after the tragedy. But just as You Never Can Tell represents the nearest approach of Shaw to the purely comic, so Mrs. Warren’s Profession represents his only complete, or nearly complete, tragedy. There is no twopenny modernism in it, as in The Philanderer. Mrs. Warren is as old as the Old Testament; “for she hath cast down many wounded, yea, many strong men have been slain by her; her house is in the gates of hell, going down into the chamber of death.” Here is no subtle ethics, as in Widowers’ Houses; for even those moderns who think it noble that a woman should throw away her honour, surely cannot think it especially noble that she should sell it. Here is no lighting up by laughter, astonishment, and happy coincidence, as in You Never Can Tell. The play is a pure tragedy about a permanent and quite plain human problem;
the problem is as plain and permanent, the tragedy is as proud and pure, as in Oedipus or Macbeth. This play was presented in the ordinary way for public performance and was suddenly stopped by the Censor of Plays.

The Censor of Plays is a small and accidental eighteenth-century official. Like nearly all the powers which Englishmen now respect as ancient and rooted, he is very recent. Novels and newspapers still talk of the English aristocracy that came over with William the Conqueror. Little of our effective oligarchy is as old as the Reformation; and none of it came over with William the Conqueror. Some of the older English landlords came over with William of Orange; the rest have come by ordinary alien immigration. In the same way we always talk of the Victorian woman (with her smelling salts and sentiment) as the old-fashioned woman. But she really was a quite new-fashioned woman; she considered herself, and was, an advance in delicacy and civilisation upon the coarse and candid Elizabethan woman to whom we are now returning. We are never oppressed by old things; it is recent things that can really oppress. And in accordance with this principle modern England has accepted, as if it were a part of perennial morality, a tenth-rate job of Walpole’s worst days called the Censorship of the Drama. Just as they have supposed the eighteenth-century parvenus to date from Hastings, just as they have supposed the eighteenth-century ladies to date from Eve, so they have supposed the eighteenth-century Censorship to date from Sinai. The origin of the thing was in truth purely political. Its first and principal achievement was to prevent Fielding from writing plays; not at all because the plays were coarse, but because they criticised the Government. Fielding was a free writer; but they did not resent his sexual freedom; the Censor would not have objected if he had torn away the most intimate curtains of decency or rent the last rag from private life. What the Censor disliked was his rending the curtain from public life. There is still much of that spirit in our country; there are no affairs which men seek so much to cover up as public affairs. But the thing was done somewhat more boldly and baldly in Walpole’s day; and the Censorship of plays has its origin, not merely in tyranny, but in a quite trifling and temporary and partisan piece of tyranny; a thing in its nature far more ephemeral, far less essential, than Ship Money. Perhaps its brightest moment was when the office of censor was held by that filthy writer, Colman the younger; and when he gravely refused to license a work by the author of Our Village. Few funnier notions can ever have actually been facts than this notion that the restraint and chastity of George Colman saved the English public from the eroticism and obscenity of Miss Mitford.
Such was the play; and such was the power that stopped the play. A private man wrote it; another private man forbade it; nor was there any difference between Mr. Shaw’s authority and Mr. Redford’s, except that Mr. Shaw did defend his action on public grounds and Mr. Redford did not. The dramatist had simply been suppressed by a despot; and what was worse (because it was modern) by a silent and evasive despot; a despot in hiding. People talk about the pride of tyrants; but we at the present day suffer from the modesty of tyrants; from the shyness and the shrinking secrecy of the strong. Shaw’s preface to Mrs. Warren’s Profession was far more fit to be called a public document than the slovenly refusal of the individual official; it had more exactness, more universal application, more authority. Shaw on Redford was far more national and responsible than Redford on Shaw.

The dramatist found in the quarrel one of the important occasions of his life, because the crisis called out something in him which is in many ways his highest quality—righteous indignation. As a mere matter of the art of controversy of course he carried the war into the enemy’s camp at once. He did not linger over loose excuses for licence; he declared at once that the Censor was licentious, while he, Bernard Shaw, was clean. He did not discuss whether a Censorship ought to make the drama moral. He declared that it made the drama immoral. With a fine strategic audacity he attacked the Censor quite as much for what he permitted as for what he prevented. He charged him with encouraging all plays that attracted men to vice and only stopping those which discouraged them from it. Nor was this attitude by any means an idle paradox. Many plays appear (as Shaw pointed out) in which the prostitute and the procuress are practically obvious, and in which they are represented as revelling in beautiful surroundings and basking in brilliant popularity. The crime of Shaw was not that he introduced the Gaiety Girl; that had been done, with little enough decorum, in a hundred musical comedies. The crime of Shaw was that he introduced the Gaiety Girl, but did not represent her life as all gaiety. The pleasures of vice were already flaunted before the playgoers. It was the perils of vice that were carefully concealed from them. The gay adventures, the gorgeous dresses, the champagne and oysters, the diamonds and motor-cars, dramatists were allowed to drag all these dazzling temptations before any silly housemaid in the gallery who was grumbling at her wages. But they were not allowed to warn her of the vulgarity and the nausea, the dreary deceptions and the blasting diseases of that life. Mrs. Warren’s Profession was not up to a sufficient standard of immorality; it was not spicy enough to pass the Censor. The acceptable and the accepted plays were
those which made the fall of a woman fashionable and fascinating; for all the world as if the Censor’s profession were the same as Mrs. Warren’s profession.

Such was the angle of Shaw’s energetic attack; and it is not to be denied that there was exaggeration in it, and what is so much worse, omission. The argument might easily be carried too far; it might end with a scene of screaming torture in the Inquisition as a corrective to the too amiable view of a clergyman in The Private Secretary. But the controversy is definitely worth recording, if only as an excellent example of the author’s aggressive attitude and his love of turning the tables in debate. Moreover, though this point of view involves a potential overstatement, it also involves an important truth. One of the best points urged in the course of it was this, that though vice is punished in conventional drama, the punishment is not really impressive, because it is not inevitable or even probable. It does not arise out of the evil act. Years afterwards Bernard Shaw urged this argument again in connection with his friend Mr. Granville Barker’s play of Waste, in which the woman dies from an illegal operation. Bernard Shaw said, truly enough, that if she had died from poison or a pistol shot it would have left everyone unmoved, for pistols do not in their nature follow female unchastity. Illegal operations very often do. The punishment was one which might follow the crime, not only in that case, but in many cases. Here, I think, the whole argument might be sufficiently cleared up by saying that the objection to such things on the stage is a purely artistic objection. There is nothing wrong in talking about an illegal operation; there are plenty of occasions when it would be very wrong not to talk about it. But it may easily be just a shade too ugly for the shape of any work of art. There is nothing wrong about being sick; but if Bernard Shaw wrote a play in which all the characters expressed their dislike of animal food by vomiting on the stage, I think we should be justified in saying that the thing was outside, not the laws of morality, but the framework of civilised literature. The instinctive movement of repulsion which everyone has when hearing of the operation in Waste is not an ethical repulsion at all. But it is an æsthetic repulsion, and a right one.

But I have only dwelt on this particular fighting phase because it leaves us facing the ultimate characteristics which I mentioned first. Bernard Shaw cares nothing for art; in comparison with morals, literally nothing. Bernard Shaw is a Puritan and his work is Puritan work. He has all the essentials of the old, virile and extinct Protestant type. In his work he is as ugly as a Puritan. He is as indecent as a Puritan. He is as full of gross words and sensual facts as a sermon of the seventeenth century. Up to this point of his life indeed hardly anyone
would have dreamed of calling him a Puritan; he was called sometimes an anarchist, sometimes a buffoon, sometimes (by the more discerning stupid people) a prig. His attitude towards current problems was felt to be arresting and even indecent; I do not think that anyone thought of connecting it with the old Calvinistic morality. But Shaw, who knew better than the Shavians, was at this moment on the very eve of confessing his moral origin. The next book of plays he produced (including The Devil’s Disciple, Captain Brassbound’s Conversion, and Cæsar and Cleopatra), actually bore the title of Plays for Puritans.

The play called The Devil’s Disciple has great merits, but the merits are incidental. Some of its jokes are serious and important, but its general plan can only be called a joke. Almost alone among Bernard Shaw’s plays (except of course such things as How he Lied to her Husband and The Admirable Bashville) this drama does not turn on any very plain pivot of ethical or philosophical conviction. The artistic idea seems to be the notion of a melodrama in which all the conventional melodramatic situations shall suddenly take unconventional turns. Just where the melodramatic clergyman would show courage he appears to show cowardice; just where the melodramatic sinner would confess his love he confesses his indifference. This is a little too like the Shaw of the newspaper critics rather than the Shaw of reality. There are indeed present in the play two of the writer’s principal moral conceptions. The first is the idea of a great heroic action coming in a sense from nowhere; that is, not coming from any commonplace motive; being born in the soul in naked beauty, coming with its own authority and testifying only to itself. Shaw’s agent does not act towards something, but from something. The hero dies, not because he desires heroism, but because he has it. So in this particular play the Devil’s Disciple finds that his own nature will not permit him to put the rope around another man’s neck; he has no reasons of desire, affection, or even equity; his death is a sort of divine whim. And in connection with this the dramatist introduces another favourite moral; the objection to perpetual playing upon the motive of sex. He deliberately lures the onlooker into the net of Cupid in order to tell him with salutary decision that Cupid is not there at all. Millions of melodramatic dramatists have made a man face death for the woman he loves; Shaw makes him face death for the woman he does not love—merely in order to put woman in her place. He objects to that idolatry of sexualism which makes it the fountain of all forcible enthusiasms; he dislikes the amorous drama which makes the female the only key to the male. He is Feminist in politics, but Anti-feminist in emotion. His key to most problems is, “Ne cherchez pas la femme.”
As has been observed, the incidental felicities of the play are frequent and memorable, especially those connected with the character of General Burgoyne, the real full-blooded, free-thinking eighteenth century gentleman, who was much too much of an aristocrat not to be a liberal. One of the best thrusts in all the Shavian fencing matches is that which occurs when Richard Dudgeon, condemned to be hanged, asks rhetorically why he cannot be shot like a soldier. “Now there you speak like a civilian,” replies General Burgoyne. “Have you formed any conception of the condition of marksmanship in the British Army?” Excellent, too, is the passage in which his subordinate speaks of crushing the enemy in America, and Burgoyne asks him who will crush their enemies in England, snobbery and jobbery and incurable carelessness and sloth. And in one sentence towards the end, Shaw reaches a wider and more genial comprehension of mankind than he shows anywhere else; “it takes all sorts to make a world, saints as well as soldiers.” If Shaw had remembered that sentence on other occasions he would have avoided his mistake about Cæsar and Brutus. It is not only true that it takes all sorts to make a world; but the world cannot succeed without its failures. Perhaps the most doubtful point of all in the play is why it is a play for Puritans; except the hideous picture of a Calvinistic home is meant to destroy Puritanism. And indeed in this connection it is constantly necessary to fall back upon the facts of which I have spoken at the beginning of this brief study; it is necessary especially to remember that Shaw could in all probability speak of Puritanism from the inside. In that domestic circle which took him to hear Moody and Sankey, in that domestic circle which was teetotal even when it was intoxicated, in that atmosphere and society Shaw might even have met the monstrous mother in The Devil’s Disciple, the horrible old woman who declares that she has hardened her heart to hate her children, because the heart of man is desperately wicked, the old ghoul who has made one of her children an imbecile and the other an outcast. Such types do occur in small societies drunk with the dismal wine of Puritan determinism. It is possible that there were among Irish Calvinists people who denied that charity was a Christian virtue. It is possible that among Puritans there were people who thought a heart was a kind of heart disease. But it is enough to make one tear one’s hair to think that a man of genius received his first impressions in so small a corner of Europe that he could for a long time suppose that this Puritanism was current among Christian men. The question, however, need not detain us, for the batch of plays contained two others about which it is easier to speak.

The third play in order in the series called Plays for Puritans is a very
charming one; Captain Brassbound’s Conversion. This also turns, as does so much of the Cæsar drama, on the idea of vanity of revenge—the idea that it is too slight and silly a thing for a man to allow to occupy and corrupt his consciousness. It is not, of course, the morality that is new here, but the touch of cold laughter in the core of the morality. Many saints and sages have denounced vengeance. But they treated vengeance as something too great for man. “Vengeance is Mine, saith the Lord; I will repay.” Shaw treats vengeance as something too small for man—a monkey trick he ought to have outlived, a childish storm of tears which he ought to be able to control. In the story in question Captain Brassbound has nourished through his whole erratic existence, racketting about all the unsavoury parts of Africa—a mission of private punishment which appears to him as a mission of holy justice. His mother has died in consequence of a judge’s decision, and Brassbound roams and schemes until the judge falls into his hands. Then a pleasant society lady, Lady Cicely Waynefleet tells him in an easy conversational undertone—a rivulet of speech which ripples while she is mending his coat—that he is making a fool of himself, that his wrong is irrelevant, that his vengeance is objectless, that he would be much better if he flung his morbid fancy away for ever; in short, she tells him he is ruining himself for the sake of ruining a total stranger. Here again we have the note of the economist, the hatred of mere loss. Shaw (one might almost say) dislikes murder, not so much because it wastes the life of the corpse as because it wastes the time of the murder. If he were endeavouring to persuade one of his moon-lighting fellow-countrymen not to shoot his landlord, I can imagine him explaining with benevolent emphasis that it was not so much a question of losing a life as of throwing away a bullet. But indeed the Irish comparison alone suggests a doubt which wriggles in the recesses of my mind about the complete reliability of the philosophy of Lady Cicely Waynefleet, the complete finality of the moral of Captain Brassbound’s Conversion. Of course, it was very natural in an aristocrat like Lady Cicely Waynefleet to wish to let sleeping dogs lie, especially those whom Mr. Blatchford calls under-dogs. Of course it was natural for her to wish everything to be smooth and sweet-tempered. But I have the obstinate question in the corner of my brain, whether if a few Captain Brassbounds did revenge themselves on judges, the quality of our judges might not materially improve.

When this doubt is once off one’s conscience one can lose oneself in the bottomless beatitude of Lady Cicely Waynefleet, one of the most living and laughing things that her maker has made. I do not know any stronger way of
stating the beauty of the character than by saying that it was written specially for Ellen Terry, and that it is, with Beatrice, one of the very few characters in which the dramatist can claim some part of her triumph.

We may now pass to the more important of the plays. For some time Bernard Shaw would seem to have been brooding upon the soul of Julius Cæsar. There must always be a strong human curiosity about the soul of Julius Cæsar; and, among other things, about whether he had a soul. The conjunction of Shaw and Cæsar has about it something smooth and inevitable; for this decisive reason, that Cæsar is really the only great man of history to whom the Shaw theories apply. Cæsar was a Shaw hero. Cæsar was merciful without being in the least pitiful; his mercy was colder than justice. Cæsar was a conqueror without being in any hearty sense a soldier; his courage was lonelier than fear. Cæsar was a demagogue without being a democrat. In the same way Bernard Shaw is a demagogue without being a democrat. If he had tried to prove his principle from any of the other heroes or sages of mankind he would have found it much more difficult. Napoleon achieved more miraculous conquest; but during his most conquering epoch he was a burning boy suicidally in love with a woman far beyond his age. Joan of Arc achieved far more instant and incredible worldly success; but Joan of Arc achieved worldly success because she believed in another world. Nelson was a figure fully as fascinating and dramatically decisive; but Nelson was “romantic”; Nelson was a devoted patriot and a devoted lover. Alexander was passionate; Cromwell could shed tears; Bismarck had some suburban religion; Frederick was a poet; Charlemagne was fond of children. But Julius Cæsar attracted Shaw not less by his positive than by his negative enormousness. Nobody can say with certainty that Cæsar cared for anything. It is unjust to call Cæsar an egoist; for there is no proof that he cared even for Cæsar. He may not have been either an atheist or a pessimist. But he may have been; that is exactly the rub. He may have been an ordinary decently good man slightly deficient in spiritual expansiveness. On the other hand, he may have been the incarnation of paganism in the sense that Christ was the incarnation of Christianity. As Christ expressed how great a man can be humble and humane, Cæsar may have expressed how great a man can be frigid and flippant. According to most legends Antichrist was to come soon after Christ. One has only to suppose that Antichrist came shortly before Christ; and Antichrist might very well be Cæsar.

It is, I think, no injustice to Bernard Shaw to say that he does not attempt to make his Cæsar superior except in this naked and negative sense. There is no
suggestion, as there is in the Jehovah of the Old Testament, that the very cruelty of the higher being conceals some tremendous and even tortured love. Cæsar is superior to other men not because he loves more, but because he hates less. Cæsar is magnanimous not because he is warm-hearted enough to pardon, but because he is not warm-hearted enough to avenge. There is no suggestion anywhere in the play that he is hiding any great genial purpose or powerful tenderness towards men. In order to put this point beyond a doubt the dramatist has introduced a soliloquy of Cæsar alone with the Sphinx. There is anywhere he would have broken out into ultimate brotherhood or burning pity for the people. But in that scene between the Sphinx and Cæsar, Cæsar is as cold and as lonely and as dead as the Sphinx.

But whether the Shavian Cæsar is a sound ideal or no, there can be little doubt that he is a very fine reality. Shaw has done nothing greater as a piece of artistic creation. If the man is a little like a statue, it is a statue by a great sculptor; a statue of the best period. If his nobility is a little negative in its character, it is the negative darkness of the great dome of night; not as in some “new moralities” the mere mystery of the coal-hole. Indeed, this somewhat austere method of work is very suitable to Shaw when he is serious. There is nothing Gothic about his real genius; he could not build a medievæal cathedral in which laughter and terror are twisted together in stone, molten by mystical passion. He can build, by way of amusement, a Chinese pagoda; but when he is in earnest, only a Roman temple. He has a keen eye for truth; but he is one of those people who like, as the saying goes, to put down the truth in black and white. He is always girding and jeering at romantics and idealists because they will not put down the truth in black and white. But black and white are not the only two colours in the world. The modern man of science who writes down a fact in black and white is not more but less accurate than the medievæal monk who wrote it down in gold and scarlet, sea-green and turquoise. Nevertheless, it is a good thing that the more austere method should exist separately, and that some men should be specially good at it. Bernard Shaw is specially good at it; he is pre-eminently a black and white artist.

And as a study in black and white nothing could be better than this sketch of Julius Cæsar. He is not so much represented as “bestriding the earth like a Colossus” (which is indeed a rather comic attitude for a hero to stand in), but rather walking the earth with a sort of stern levity, lightly touching the planet and yet spurning it away like a stone. He walks like a winged man who has chosen to fold his wings. There is something creepy even about his kindness; it
makes the men in front of him feel as if they were made of glass. The nature of the Cæsarian mercy is massively suggested. Cæsar dislikes a massacre, not because it is a great sin, but because it is a small sin. It is felt that he classes it with a flirtation or a fit of the sulks; a senseless temporary subjugation of man’s permanent purpose by his passing and trivial feelings. He will plunge into slaughter for a great purpose, just as he plunges into the sea. But to be stung into such action he deems as undignified as to be tipped off the pier. In a singularly fine passage Cleopatra, having hired assassins to stab an enemy, appeals to her wrongs as justifying her revenge, and says, “If you can find one man in all Africa who says that I did wrong, I will be crucified by my own slaves.” “If you can find one man in all the world,” replies Cæsar, “who can see that you did wrong, he will either conquer the world as I have done or be crucified by it.” That is the high water mark of this heathen sublimity; and we do not feel it inappropriate, or unlike Shaw, when a few minutes afterwards the hero is saluted with a blaze of swords.

As usually happens in the author’s works, there is even more about Julius Cæsar in the preface than there is in the play. But in the preface I think the portrait is less imaginative and more fanciful. He attempts to connect his somewhat chilly type of superman with the heroes of the old fairy tales. But Shaw should not talk about the fairy tales; for he does not feel them from the inside. As I have said, on all this side of historic and domestic traditions Bernard Shaw is weak and deficient. He does not approach them as fairy tales, as if he were four, but as “folk-lore” as if he were forty. And he makes a big mistake about them which he would never have made if he had kept his birthday and hung up his stocking, and generally kept alive inside him the firelight of a home. The point is so peculiarly characteristic of Bernard Shaw, and is indeed so much of a summary of his most interesting assertion and his most interesting error, that it deserves a word by itself, though it is a word which must be remembered in connection with nearly all the other plays.

His primary and defiant proposition is the Calvinistic proposition: that the elect do not earn virtue, but possess it. The goodness of a man does not consist in trying to be good, but in being good. Julius Cæsar prevails over other people by possessing more virtus than they; not by having striven or suffered or bought his virtue; not because he has struggled heroically, but because he is a hero. So far Bernard Shaw is only what I have called him at the beginning; he is simply a seventeenth-century Calvinist. Cæsar is not saved by works, or even by faith; he is saved because he is one of the elect. Unfortunately for himself, however,
Bernard Shaw went back further than the seventeenth century; and professing his opinion to be yet more antiquated, invoked the original legends of mankind. He argued that when the fairy tales gave Jack the Giant Killer a coat of darkness or a magic sword it removed all credit from Jack in the “common moral” sense; he won as Cæsar won only because he was superior. I will confess, in passing, to the conviction that Bernard Shaw in the course of his whole simple and strenuous life was never quite so near to hell as at the moment when he wrote down those words. But in this question of fairy tales my immediate point is, not how near he was to hell, but how very far off he was from fairyland. That notion about the hero with a magic sword being the superman with a magic superiority is the caprice of a pedant; no child, boy, or man ever felt it in the story of Jack the Giant Killer. Obviously the moral is all the other way. Jack’s fairy sword and invisible coat are clumsy expedients for enabling him to fight at all with something which is by nature stronger. They are a rough, savage substitute for psychological descriptions of special valour or unwearied patience. But no one in his five wits can doubt that the idea of “Jack the Giant Killer” is exactly the opposite to Shaw’s idea. If it were not a tale of effort and triumph hardly earned it would not be called “Jack the Giant Killer.” If it were a tale of the victory of natural advantages it would be called “Giant the Jack Killer.” If the teller of fairy tales had merely wanted to urge that some beings are born stronger than others he would not have fallen back on elaborate tricks of weapon and costume for conquering an ogre. He would simply have let the ogre conquer. He would not have felt it in the story of Jack the Giant Killer. I will not speak of my own emotions in connection with this incredibly caddish doctrine that the strength of the strong is admirable, but not the valour of the weak. It is enough to say that I have to summon up the physical presence of Shaw, his frank gestures, kind eyes, and exquisite Irish voice, to cure me of a mere sensation of contempt. But I do not dwell upon the point for any such purpose; but merely to show how we must be always casting back to those concrete foundations with which we began. Bernard Shaw, as I have said, was never national enough to be domestic; he was never a part of his past; hence when he tries to interpret tradition he comes a terrible cropper, as in this case. Bernard Shaw (I strongly suspect) began to disbelieve in Santa Claus at a discreditably early age. And by this time Santa Claus has avenged himself by taking away the key of all the prehistoric scriptures; so that a noble and honourable artist flounders about like any German professor. Here is a whole fairy literature which is almost exclusively devoted to the unexpected victory of the weak over the strong; and Bernard Shaw manages to make it mean the inevitable victory of the strong over the weak—which,
among other things, would not make a story at all. It all comes of that mistake about not keeping his birthday. A man should be always tied to his mother’s apron strings; he should always have a hold on his childhood, and be ready at intervals to start anew from a childish standpoint. Theologically the thing is best expressed by saying, “You must be born again.” Secularly it is best expressed by saying, “You must keep your birthday.” Even if you will not be born again, at least remind yourself occasionally that you were born once.

Some of the incidental wit in the Cæsarian drama is excellent although it is upon the whole less spontaneous and perfect than in the previous plays. One of its jests may be mentioned in passing, not merely to draw attention to its failure (though Shaw is brilliant enough to afford many failures) but because it is the best opportunity for mentioning one of the writer’s minor notions to which he obstinately adheres. He describes the Ancient Briton in Cæsar’s train as being exactly like a modern respectable Englishman. As a joke for a Christmas pantomime this would be all very well; but one expects the jokes of Bernard Shaw to have some intellectual root, however fantastic the flower. And obviously all historic common sense is against the idea that that dim Druid people, whoever they were, who dwelt in our land before it was lit up by Rome or loaded with varied invasions, were a precise facsimile of the commercial society of Birmingham or Brighton. But it is a part of the Puritan in Bernard Shaw, a part of the taut and high-strung quality of his mind, that he will never admit of any of his jokes that it was only a joke. When he has been most witty he will passionately deny his own wit; he will say something which Voltaire might envy and then declare that he has got it all out of a Blue book. And in connection with this eccentric type of self-denial, we may notice this mere detail about the Ancient Briton. Someone faintly hinted that a blue Briton when first found by Cæsar might not be quite like Mr. Broadbent; at the touch Shaw poured forth a torrent of theory, explaining that climate was the only thing that affected nationality; and that whatever races came into the English or Irish climate would become like the English or Irish. Now the modern theory of race is certainly a piece of stupid materialism; it is an attempt to explain the things we are sure of, France, Scotland, Rome, Japan, by means of the things we are not sure of at all, prehistoric conjectures, Celts, Mongols, and Iberians. Of course there is a reality in race; but there is no reality in the theories of race offered by some ethnological professors. Blood, perhaps, is thicker than water; but brains are sometimes thicker than anything. But if there is one thing yet more thick and obscure and senseless than this theory of the omnipotence of race it is, I think,
that to which Shaw has fled for refuge from it; this doctrine of the omnipotence of climate. Climate again is something; but if climate were everything, Anglo-Indians would grow more and more to look like Hindoos, which is far from being the case. Something in the evil spirit of our time forces people always to pretend to have found some material and mechanical explanation. Bernard Shaw has filled all his last days with affirmations about the divinity of the non-mechanical part of man, the sacred quality in creation and choice. Yet it never seems to have occurred to him that the true key to national differentiations is the key of the will and not of the environment. It never crosses the modern mind to fancy that perhaps a people is chiefly influenced by how that people has chosen to behave. If I have to choose between race and weather I prefer race; I would rather be imprisoned and compelled by ancestors who were once alive than by mud and mists which never were. But I do not propose to be controlled by either; to me my national history is a chain of multitudinous choices. It is neither blood nor rain that has made England, but hope, the thing that all those dead men have desired. France was not France because she was made to be by the skulls of the Celts or by the sun of Gaul. France was France because she chose.

I have stepped on one side from the immediate subject because this is as good an instance as any we are likely to come across of a certain almost extraneous fault which does deface the work of Bernard Shaw. It is a fault only to be mentioned when we have made the solidity of the merits quite clear. To say that Shaw is merely making game of people is demonstrably ridiculous; at least a fairly systematic philosophy can be traced through all his jokes, and one would not insist on such a unity in all the songs of Mr. Dan Leno. I have already pointed out that the genius of Shaw is really too harsh and earnest rather than too merry and irresponsible. I shall have occasion to point out later that Shaw is, in one very serious sense, the very opposite of paradoxical. In any case if any real student of Shaw says that Shaw is only making a fool of him, we can only say that of that student it is very superfluous for anyone to make a fool. But though the dramatist’s jests are always serious and generally obvious, he is really affected from time to time by a certain spirit of which that climate theory is a case—a spirit that can only be called one of senseless ingenuity. I suppose it is a sort of nemesis of wit; the skidding of a wheel in the height of its speed. Perhaps it is connected with the nomadic nature of his mind. That lack of roots, this remoteness from ancient instincts and traditions is responsible for a certain bleak and heartless extravagance of statement on certain subjects which makes the author really unconvincing as well as exaggerative; satires that are saugrenu,
jokes that are rather silly than wild, statements which even considered as lies have no symbolic relation to truth. They are exaggerations of something that does not exist. For instance, if a man called Christmas Day a mere hypocritical excuse for drunkenness and gluttony that would be false, but it would have a fact hidden in it somewhere. But when Bernard Shaw says that Christmas Day is only a conspiracy kept up by poulterers and wine merchants from strictly business motives, then he says something which is not so much false as startlingly and arrestingly foolish. He might as well say that the two sexes were invented by jewelers who wanted to sell wedding rings. Or again, take the case of nationality and the unit of patriotism. If a man said that all boundaries between clans, kingdoms, or empires were nonsensical or non-existent, that would be a fallacy, but a consistent and philosophical fallacy. But when Mr. Bernard Shaw says that England matters so little that the British Empire might very well give up these islands to Germany, he has not only got hold of the sow by the wrong ear but the wrong sow by the wrong ear; a mythical sow, a sow that is not there at all. If Britain is unreal, the British Empire must be a thousand times more unreal. It is as if one said, “I do not believe that Michael Scott ever had any existence; but I am convinced, in spite of the absurd legend, that he had a shadow.”

As has been said already, there must be some truth in every popular impression. And the impression that Shaw, the most savagely serious man of his time, is a mere music-hall artist must have reference to such rare outbreaks as these. As a rule his speeches are full, not only of substance, but of substances, materials like pork, mahogany, lead, and leather. There is no man whose arguments cover a more Napoleonic map of detail. It is true that he jokes; but wherever he is he has topical jokes, one might almost say family jokes. If he talks to tailors he can allude to the last absurdity about buttons. If he talks to the soldiers he can see the exquisite and exact humour of the last gun-carriage. But when all his powerful practicality is allowed, there does run through him this erratic levity, an explosion of ineptitude. It is a queer quality in literature. It is a sort of cold extravagance; and it has made him all his enemies.
THE PHILOSOPHER

I should suppose that Cæsar and Cleopatra marks about the turning tide of Bernard Shaw’s fortune and fame. Up to this time he had known glory, but never success. He had been wondered at as something brilliant and barren, like a meteor; but no one would accept him as a sun, for the test of a sun is that it can make something grow. Practically speaking the two qualities of a modern drama are, that it should play and that it should pay. It had been proved over and over again in weighty dramatic criticisms, in careful readers’ reports, that the plays of Shaw could never play or pay; that the public did not want wit and the wars of intellect. And just about the time that this had been finally proved, the plays of Bernard Shaw promised to play like Charley’s Aunt and to pay like Colman’s Mustard. It is a fact in which we can all rejoice, not only because it redeems the reputation of Bernard Shaw, but because it redeems the character of the English people. All that is bravest in human nature, open challenge and unexpected wit and angry conviction, are not so very unpopular as the publishers and managers in their motor-cars have been in the habit of telling us. But exactly because we have come to a turning point in the man’s career I propose to interrupt the mere catalogue of his plays and to treat his latest series rather as the proclamations of an acknowledged prophet. For the last plays, especially Man and Superman, are such that his whole position must be restated before attacking them seriously.

For two reasons I have called this concluding series of plays not again by the name of “The Dramatist,” but by the general name of “The Philosopher.” The first reason is that given above, that we have come to the time of his triumph and may therefore treat him as having gained complete possession of a pulpit of his own. But there is a second reason: that it was just about this time that he began to create not only a pulpit of his own, but a church and creed of his own. It is a very vast and universal religion; and it is not his fault that he is the only member of it. The plainer way of putting it is this: that here, in the hour of his earthly victory, there dies in him the old mere denier, the mere dynamiter of criticism. In the warmth of popularity he begins to wish to put his faith positively; to offer some solid key to all creation. Perhaps the irony in the situation is this: that all the crowds are acclaming him as the blasting and hypercritical buffoon, while he himself is seriously rallying his synthetic power, and with a grave face telling himself that it is time he had a faith to preach. His final success as a sort of charlatan coincides with his first grand failures as a theologian.
For this reason I have deliberately called a halt in his dramatic career, in order to consider these two essential points: What did the mass of Englishmen, who had now learnt to admire him, imagine his point of view to be? and second, What did he imagine it to be? or, if the phrase be premature, What did he imagine it was going to be? In his latest work, especially in Man and Superman, Shaw has become a complete and colossal mystic. That mysticism does grow quite rationally out of his older arguments; but very few people ever troubled to trace the connection. In order to do so it is necessary to say what was, at the time of his first success, the public impression of Shaw’s philosophy.

Now it is an irritating and pathetic thing that the three most popular phrases about Shaw are false. Modern criticism, like all weak things, is overloaded with words. In a healthy condition of language a man finds it very difficult to say the right thing, but at last says it. In this empire of journalese a man finds it so very easy to say the wrong thing that he never thinks of saying anything else. False or meaningless phrases lie so ready to his hand that it is easier to use them than not to use them. These wrong terms picked up through idleness are retained through habit, and so the man has begun to think wrong almost before he has begun to think at all. Such lumbering logomachy is always injurious and oppressive to men of spirit, imagination or intellectual honour, and it has dealt very recklessly and wrongly with Bernard Shaw. He has contrived to get about three newspaper phrases tied to his tail; and those newspaper phrases are all and separately wrong. The three superstitions about him, it will be conceded, are generally these: first that he desires “problem plays,” second that he is “paradoxical,” and third that in his dramas as elsewhere he is specially “a Socialist.” And the interesting thing is that when we come to his philosophy, all these three phrases are quite peculiarly inapplicable.

To take the plays first, there is a general disposition to describe that type of intimate or defiant drama which he approves as “the problem play.” Now the serious modern play is, as a rule, the very reverse of a problem play; for there can be no problem unless both points of view are equally and urgently presented. Hamlet really is a problem play because at the end of it one is really in doubt as to whether upon the author’s showing Hamlet is something more than a man or something less. Henry IV and Henry V are really problem plays; in this sense, that the reader or spectator is really doubtful whether the high but harsh efficiency, valour, and ambition of Henry V are an improvement on his old blackguard camaraderie; and whether he was not a better man when he was a thief. This hearty and healthy doubt is very common in Shakespeare; I mean a
doubt that exists in the writer as well as in the reader. But Bernard Shaw is far too much of a Puritan to tolerate such doubts about points which he counts essential. There is no sort of doubt that the young lady in Arms and the Man is improved by losing her ideals. There is no sort of doubt that Captain Brassbound is improved by giving up the object of his life. But a better case can be found in something that both dramatists have been concerned with; Shaw wrote Caesar and Cleopatra; Shakespeare wrote Antony and Cleopatra and also Julius Caesar. And exactly what annoys Bernard Shaw about Shakespeare’s version is this: that Shakespeare has an open mind or, in other words, that Shakespeare has really written a problem play. Shakespeare sees quite as clearly as Shaw that Brutus is unpractical and ineffectual; but he also sees, what is quite as plain and practical a fact, that these ineffectual men do capture the hearts and influence the policies of mankind. Shaw would have nothing said in favour of Brutus; because Brutus is on the wrong side in politics. Of the actual problem of public and private morality, as it was presented to Brutus, he takes actually no notice at all. He can write the most energetic and outspoken of propaganda plays; but he cannot rise to a problem play. He cannot really divide his mind and let the two parts speak independently to each other. He has never, so to speak, actually split his head in two; though I daresay there are many other people who are willing to do it for him.

Sometimes, especially in his later plays, he allows his clear conviction to spoil even his admirable dialogue, making one side entirely weak, as in an Evangelical tract. I do not know whether in Major Barbara the young Greek professor was supposed to be a fool. As popular tradition (which I trust more than anything else) declared that he is drawn from a real Professor of my acquaintance, who is anything but a fool, I should imagine not. But in that case I am all the more mystified by the incredibly weak fight which he makes in the play in answer to the elephantine sophistries of Undershaft. It is really a disgraceful case, and almost the only case in Shaw of there being no fair fight between the two sides. For instance, the Professor mentions pity. Mr. Undershaft says with melodramatic scorn, “Pity! the scavenger of the Universe!” Now if any gentleman had said this to me, I should have replied, “If I permit you to escape from the point by means of metaphors, will you tell me whether you disapprove of scavengers?” Instead of this obvious retort, the miserable Greek professor only says, “Well then, love,” to which Undershaft replies with unnecessary violence that he won’t have the Greek professor’s love, to which the obvious answer of course would be, “How the deuce can you prevent my loving you if I
choose to do so?” Instead of this, as far as I remember, that abject Hellenist says nothing at all. I only mention this unfair dialogue, because it marks, I think, the recent hardening, for good or evil, of Shaw out of a dramatist into a mere philosopher, and whoever hardens into a philosopher may be hardening into a fanatic.

And just as there is nothing really problematic in Shaw’s mind, so there is nothing really paradoxical. The meaning of the word paradoxical may indeed be made the subject of argument. In Greek, of course, it simply means something which is against the received opinion; in that sense a missionary remonstrating with South Sea cannibals is paradoxical. But in the much more important world, where words are used and altered in the using, paradox does not mean merely this: it means at least something of which the antinomy or apparent inconsistency is sufficiently plain in the words used, and most commonly of all it means an idea expressed in a form which is verbally contradictory. Thus, for instance, the great saying, “He that shall lose his life, the same shall save it,” is an example of what modern people mean by a paradox. If any learned person should read this book (which seems immeasurably improbable) he can content himself with putting it this way, that the moderns mistakenly say paradox when they should say oxymoron. Ultimately, in any case, it may be agreed that we commonly mean by a paradox some kind of collision between what is seemingly and what is really true.

Now if by paradox we mean truth inherent in a contradiction, as in the saying of Christ that I have quoted, it is a very curious fact that Bernard Shaw is almost entirely without paradox. Moreover, he cannot even understand a paradox. And more than this, paradox is about the only thing in the world that he does not understand. All his splendid vistas and startling suggestions arise from carrying some one clear principle further than it has yet been carried. His madness is all consistency, not inconsistency. As the point can hardly be made clear without examples, let us take one example, the subject of education. Shaw has been all his life preaching to grown-up people the profound truth that liberty and responsibility go together; that the reason why freedom is so often easily withheld, is simply that it is a terrible nuisance. This is true, though not the whole truth, of citizens; and so when Shaw comes to children he can only apply to them the same principle that he has already applied to citizens. He begins to play with the Herbert Spencer idea of teaching children by experience; perhaps the most fatuously silly idea that was ever gravely put down in print. On that there is no need to dwell; one has only to ask how the experimental method is to
be applied to a precipice; and the theory no longer exists. But Shaw effected a further development, if possible more fantastic. He said that one should never tell a child anything without letting him hear the opposite opinion. That is to say, when you tell Tommy not to hit his sick sister on the temple, you must make sure of the presence of some Nietzscheite professor, who will explain to him that such a course might possibly serve to eliminate the unfit. When you are in the act of telling Susan not to drink out of the bottle labelled “poison,” you must telegraph for a Christian Scientist, who will be ready to maintain that without her own consent it cannot do her any harm. What would happen to a child brought up on Shaw’s principle I cannot conceive; I should think he would commit suicide in his bath. But that is not here the question. The point is that this proposition seems quite sufficiently wild and startling to ensure that its author, if he escapes Hanwell, would reach the front rank of journalists, demagogues, or public entertainers. It is a perfect paradox, if a paradox only means something that makes one jump. But it is not a paradox at all in the sense of a contradiction. It is not a contradiction, but an enormous and outrageous consistency, the one principle of free thought carried to a point to which no other sane man would consent to carry it. Exactly what Shaw does not understand is the paradox; the unavoidable paradox of childhood. Although this child is much better than I, yet I must teach it. Although this being has much purer passions than I, yet I must control it. Although Tommy is quite right to rush towards a precipice, yet he must be stood in the corner for doing it. This contradiction is the only possible condition of having to do with children at all; anyone who talks about a child without feeling this paradox might just as well be talking about a merman. He has never even seen the animal. But this paradox Shaw in his intellectual simplicity cannot see; he cannot see it because it is a paradox. His only intellectual excitement is to carry one idea further and further across the world. It never occurs to him that it might meet another idea, and like the three winds in Martin Chuzzlewit, they might make a night of it. His only paradox is to pull out one thread or cord of truth longer and longer into waste and fantastic places. He does not allow for that deeper sort of paradox by which two opposite cords of truth become entangled in an inextricable knot. Still less can he be made to realise that it is often this knot which ties safely together the whole bundle of human life.

This blindness to paradox everywhere perplexes his outlook. He cannot understand marriage because he will not understand the paradox of marriage; that the woman is all the more the house for not being the head of it. He cannot
understand patriotism, because he will not understand the paradox of patriotism; that one is all the more human for not merely loving humanity. He does not understand Christianity because he will not understand the paradox of Christianity; that we can only really understand all myths when we know that one of them is true. I do not under-rate him for this anti-paradoxical temper; I concede that much of his finest and keenest work in the way of intellectual purification would have been difficult or impossible without it. But I say that here lies the limitation of that lucid and compelling mind; he cannot quite understand life, because he will not accept its contradictions.

Nor is it by any means descriptive of Shaw to call him a Socialist; in so far as that word can be extended to cover an ethical attitude. He is the least social of all Socialists; and I pity the Socialist state that tries to manage him. This anarchism of his is not a question of thinking for himself; every decent man thinks for himself; it would be highly immodest to think for anybody else. Nor is it any instinctive licence or egoism; as I have said before, he is a man of peculiarly acute public conscience. The unmanageable part of him, the fact that he cannot be conceived as part of a crowd or as really and invisibly helping a movement, has reference to another thing in him, or rather to another thing not in him.

The great defect of that fine intelligence is a failure to grasp and enjoy the things commonly called convention and tradition; which are foods upon which all human creatures must feed frequently if they are to live. Very few modern people of course have any idea of what they are. “Convention” is very nearly the same word as “democracy.” It has again and again in history been used as an alternative word to Parliament. So far from suggesting anything stale or sober, the word convention rather conveys a hubbub; it is the coming together of men; every mob is a convention. In its secondary sense it means the common soul of such a crowd, its instinctive anger at the traitor or its instinctive salutation of the flag. Conventions may be cruel, they may be unsuitable, they may even be grossly superstitious or obscene; but there is one thing that they never are. Conventions are never dead. They are always full of accumulated emotions, the piled-up and passionate experiences of many generations asserting what they could not explain. To be inside any true convention, as the Chinese respect for parents or the European respect for children, is to be surrounded by something which whatever else it is is not leaden, lifeless or automatic, something which is taut and tingling with vitality at a hundred points, which is sensitive almost to madness and which is so much alive that it can kill. Now Bernard Shaw has always made this one immense mistake (arising out of that bad progressive
education of his), the mistake of treating convention as a dead thing; treating it as if it were a mere physical environment like the pavement or the rain. Whereas it is a result of will; a rain of blessings and a pavement of good intentions. Let it be remembered that I am not discussing in what degree one should allow for tradition; I am saying that men like Shaw do not allow for it at all. If Shaw had found in early life that he was contradicted by Bradshaw’s Railway Guide or even by the Encyclopædia Britannica, he would have felt at least that he might be wrong. But if he had found himself contradicted by his father and mother, he would have thought it all the more probable that he was right. If the issue of the last evening paper contradicted him he might be troubled to investigate or explain. That the human tradition of two thousand years contradicted him did not trouble him for an instant. That Marx was not with him was important. That Man was not with him was an irrelevant prehistoric joke. People have talked far too much about the paradoxes of Bernard Shaw. Perhaps his only pure paradox is this almost unconscious one; that he has tended to think that because something has satisfied generations of men it must be untrue.

Shaw is wrong about nearly all the things one learns early in life and while one is still simple. Most human beings start with certain facts of psychology to which the rest of life must be somewhat related. For instance, every man falls in love; and no man falls into free love. When he falls into that he calls it lust, and is always ashamed of it even when he boasts of it. That there is some connection between a love and a vow nearly every human being knows before he is eighteen. That there is a solid and instinctive connection between the idea of sexual ecstasy and the idea of some sort of almost suicidal constancy, this I say is simply the first fact in one’s own psychology; boys and girls know it almost before they know their own language. How far it can be trusted, how it can best be dealt with, all that is another matter. But lovers lust after constancy more than after happiness; if you are in any sense prepared to give them what they ask, then what they ask, beyond all question, is an oath of final fidelity. Lovers may be lunatics; lovers may be children; lovers may be unfit for citizenship and outside human argument; you can take up that position if you will. But lovers do not only desire love; they desire marriage. The root of legal monogamy does not lie (as Shaw and his friends are for ever drearily asserting) in the fact that the man is a mere tyrant and the woman a mere slave. It lies in the fact that if their love for each other is the noblest and freest love conceivable, it can only find its heroic expression in both becoming slaves. I only mention this matter here as a matter which most of us do not need to be taught; for it was the first lesson of life. In
after years we may make up what code or compromise about sex we like; but we all know that constancy, jealousy, and the personal pledge are natural and inevitable in sex; we do not feel any surprise when we see them either in a murder or in a valentine. We may or may not see wisdom in early marriages; but we know quite well that wherever the thing is genuine at all, early loves will mean early marriages. But Shaw had not learnt about this tragedy of the sexes, what the rustic ballads of any country on earth would have taught him. He had not learnt, what universal common sense has put into all the folk-lore of the earth, that love cannot be thought of clearly for an instant except as monogamous. The old English ballads never sing the praises of “lovers.” They always sing the praises of “true lovers,” and that is the final philosophy of the question.

The same is true of Mr. Shaw’s refusal to understand the love of the land either in the form of patriotism or of private ownership. It is the attitude of an Irishman cut off from the soil of Ireland, retaining the audacity and even cynicism of the national type, but no longer fed from the roots with its pathos or its experience.

This broader and more brotherly rendering of convention must be applied particularly to the conventions of the drama; since that is necessarily the most democratic of all the arts. And it will be found generally that most of the theatrical conventions rest on a real artistic basis. The Greek Unities, for instance, were not proper objects of the meticulous and trivial imitation of Seneca or Gabriel Harvey. But still less were they the right objects for the equally trivial and far more vulgar impatience of men like Macaulay. That a tale should, if possible, be told of one place or one day or a manageable number of characters is an ideal plainly rooted in an æsthetic instinct. But if this be so with the classical drama, it is yet more certainly so with romantic drama, against the somewhat decayed dignity of which Bernard Shaw was largely in rebellion. There was one point in particular upon which the Ibsenites claimed to have reformed the romantic convention which is worthy of special allusion.

Shaw and all the other Ibsenites were fond of insisting that a defect in the romantic drama was its tendency to end with wedding-bells. Against this they set the modern drama of middle-age, the drama which described marriage itself instead of its poetic preliminaries. Now if Bernard Shaw had been more patient with popular tradition, more prone to think that there might be some sense in its survival, he might have seen this particular problem much more clearly. The old playwrights have left us plenty of plays of marriage and middle-age. Othello is
as much about what follows the wedding-bells as The Doll's House. Macbeth is about a middle-aged couple as much as Little Eyolf. But if we ask ourselves what is the real difference, we shall, I think, find that it can fairly be stated thus. The old tragedies of marriage, though not love stories, are like love stories in this, that they work up to some act or stroke which is irrevocable as marriage is irrevocable; to the fact of death or of adultery.

Now the reason why our fathers did not make marriage, in the middle-aged and static sense, the subject of their plays was a very simple one; it was that a play is a very bad place for discussing that topic. You cannot easily make a good drama out of the success or failure of a marriage, just as you could not make a good drama out of the growth of an oak tree or the decay of an empire. As Polonius very reasonably observed, it is too long. A happy love-affair will make a drama simply because it is dramatic; it depends on an ultimate yes or no. But a happy marriage is not dramatic; perhaps it would be less happy if it were. The essence of a romantic heroine is that she asks herself an intense question; but the essence of a sensible wife is that she is much too sensible to ask herself any questions at all. All the things that make monogamy a success are in their nature undramatic things, the silent growth of an instinctive confidence, the common wounds and victories, the accumulation of customs, the rich maturing of old jokes. Sane marriage is an untheatrical thing; it is therefore not surprising that most modern dramatists have devoted themselves to insane marriage.

To summarise; before touching the philosophy which Shaw has ultimately adopted, we must quit the notion that we know it already and that it is hit off in such journalistic terms as these three. Shaw does not wish to multiply problem plays or even problems. He has such scepticism as is the misfortune of his age; but he has this dignified and courageous quality, that he does not come to ask questions but to answer them. He is not a paradox-monger; he is a wild logician, far too simple even to be called a sophist. He understands everything in life except its paradoxes, especially that ultimate paradox that the very things that we cannot comprehend are the things that we have to take for granted. Lastly, he is not especially social or collectivist. On the contrary, he rather dislikes men in the mass, though he can appreciate them individually. He has no respect for collective humanity in its two great forms; either in that momentary form which we call a mob, or in that enduring form which we call a convention.

The general cosmic theory which can so far be traced through the earlier essays and plays of Bernard Shaw may be expressed in the image of Schopenhauer standing on his head. I cheerfully concede that Schopenhauer
looks much nicer in that posture than in his original one, but I can hardly suppose that he feels more comfortable. The substance of the change is this. Roughly speaking, Schopenhauer maintained that life is unreasonable. The intellect, if it could be impartial, would tell us to cease; but a blind partiality, an instinct quite distinct from thought, drives us on to take desperate chances in an essentially bankrupt lottery. Shaw seems to accept this dingy estimate of the rational outlook, but adds a somewhat arresting comment. Schopenhauer had said, “Life is unreasonable; so much the worse for all living things.” Shaw said, “Life is unreasonable; so much the worse for reason.” Life is the higher call, life we must follow. It may be that there is some undetected fallacy in reason itself. Perhaps the whole man cannot get inside his own head any more than he can jump down his own throat. But there is about the need to live, to suffer, and to create that imperative quality which can truly be called supernatural, of whose voice it can indeed be said that it speaks with authority, and not as the scribes.

This is the first and finest item of the original Bernard Shaw creed: that if reason says that life is irrational, life must be content to reply that reason is lifeless; life is the primary thing, and if reason impedes it, then reason must be trodden down into the mire amid the most abject superstitions. In the ordinary sense it would be specially absurd to suggest that Shaw desires man to be a mere animal. For that is always associated with lust or incontinence; and Shaw’s ideals are strict, hygienic, and even, one might say, old-maidish. But there is a mystical sense in which one may say literally that Shaw desires man to be an animal. That is, he desires him to cling first and last to life, to the spirit of animation, to the thing which is common to him and the birds and plants. Man should have the blind faith of a beast: he should be as mystically immutable as a cow, and as deaf to sophistries as a fish. Shaw does not wish him to be a philosopher or an artist; he does not even wish him to be a man, so much as he wishes him to be, in this holy sense, an animal. He must follow the flag of life as fiercely from conviction as all other creatures follow it from instinct.

But this Shavian worship of life is by no means lively. It has nothing in common either with the braver or the baser forms of what we commonly call optimism. It has none of the omnivorous exultation of Walt Whitman or the fiery pantheism of Shelley. Bernard Shaw wishes to show himself not so much as an optimist, but rather as a sort of faithful and contented pessimist. This contradiction is the key to nearly all his early and more obvious contradictions and to many which remain to the end. Whitman and many modern idealists have talked of taking even duty as a pleasure; it seems to me that Shaw takes even
pleasure as a duty. In a queer way he seems to see existence as an illusion and yet as an obligation. To every man and woman, bird, beast, and flower, life is a love-call to be eagerly followed. To Bernard Shaw it is merely a military bugle to be obeyed. In short, he fails to feel that the command of Nature (if one must use the anthropomorphic fable of Nature instead of the philosophic term God) can be enjoyed as well as obeyed. He paints life at its darkest and then tells the babe unborn to take the leap in the dark. That is heroic; and to my instinct at least Schopenhauer looks like a pigmy beside his pupil. But it is the heroism of a morbid and almost asphyxiated age. It is awful to think that this world which so many poets have praised has even for a time been depicted as a man-trap into which we may just have the manhood to jump. Think of all those ages through which men have talked of having the courage to die. And then remember that we have actually fallen to talking about having the courage to live.

It is exactly this oddity or dilemma which may be said to culminate in the crowning work of his later and more constructive period, the work in which he certainly attempted, whether with success or not, to state his ultimate and cosmic vision; I mean the play called Man and Superman. In approaching this play we must keep well in mind the distinction recently drawn: that Shaw follows the banner of life, but austerely, not joyously. For him nature has authority, but hardly charm. But before we approach it it is necessary to deal with three things that lead up to it. First it is necessary to speak of what remained of his old critical and realistic method; and then it is necessary to speak of the two important influences which led up to his last and most important change of outlook.

First, since all our spiritual epochs overlap, and a man is often doing the old work while he is thinking of the new, we may deal first with what may be fairly called his last two plays of pure worldly criticism. These are Major Barbara and John Bull’s Other Island. Major Barbara indeed contains a strong religious element; but, when all is said, the whole point of the play is that the religious element is defeated. Moreover, the actual expressions of religion in the play are somewhat unsatisfactory as expressions of religion—or even of reason. I must frankly say that Bernard Shaw always seems to me to use the word God not only without any idea of what it means, but without one moment’s thought about what it could possibly mean. He said to some atheist, “Never believe in a God that you cannot improve on.” The atheist (being a sound theologian) naturally replied that one should not believe in a God whom one could improve on; as that would show that he was not God. In the same style in Major Barbara the heroine
ends by suggesting that she will serve God without personal hope, so that she may owe nothing to God and He owe everything to her. It does not seem to strike her that if God owes everything to her He is not God. These things affect me merely as tedious perversions of a phrase. It is as if you said, “I will never have a father unless I have begotten him.”

But the real sting and substance of Major Barbara is much more practical and to the point. It expresses not the new spirituality but the old materialism of Bernard Shaw. Almost every one of Shaw’s plays is an expanded epigram. But the epigram is not expanded (as with most people) into a hundred commonplaces. Rather the epigram is expanded into a hundred other epigrams; the work is at least as brilliant in detail as it is in design. But it is generally possible to discover the original and pivotal epigram which is the centre and purpose of the play. It is generally possible, even amid that blinding jewellery of a million jokes, to discover the grave, solemn and sacred joke for which the play itself was written.

The ultimate epigram of Major Barbara can be put thus. People say that poverty is no crime; Shaw says that poverty is a crime; that it is a crime to endure it, a crime to be content with it, that it is the mother of all crimes of brutality, corruption, and fear. If a man says to Shaw that he is born of poor but honest parents, Shaw tells him that the very word “but” shows that his parents were probably dishonest. In short, he maintains here what he had maintained elsewhere: that what the people at this moment require is not more patriotism or more art or more religion or more morality or more sociology, but simply more money. The evil is not ignorance or decadence or sin or pessimism; the evil is poverty. The point of this particular drama is that even the noblest enthusiasm of the girl who becomes a Salvation Army officer fails under the brute money power of her father who is a modern capitalist. When I have said this it will be clear why this play, fine and full of bitter sincerity as it is, must in a manner be cleared out of the way before we come to talk of Shaw’s final and serious faith. For his serious faith is in the sanctity of human will, in the divine capacity for creation and choice rising higher than environment and doom; and so far as that goes, Major Barbara is not only apart from his faith but against his faith. Major Barbara is an account of environment victorious over heroic will. There are a thousand answers to the ethic in Major Barbara which I should be inclined to offer. I might point out that the rich do not so much buy honesty as curtains to cover dishonesty: that they do not so much buy health as cushions to comfort disease. And I might suggest that the doctrine that poverty degrades the poor is
much more likely to be used as an argument for keeping them powerless than as an argument for making them rich. But there is no need to find such answers to the materialistic pessimism of Major Barbara. The best answer to it is in Shaw’s own best and crowning philosophy, with which we shall shortly be concerned.

John Bull’s Other Island represents a realism somewhat more tinged with the later transcendentalism of its author. In one sense, of course, it is a satire on the conventional Englishman, who is never so silly or sentimental as when he sees silliness and sentiment in the Irishman. Broadbent, whose mind is all fog and his morals all gush, is firmly persuaded that he is bringing reason and order among the Irish, whereas in truth they are all smiling at his illusions with the critical detachment of so many devils. There have been many plays depicting the absurd Paddy in a ring of Anglo-Saxons; the first purpose of this play is to depict the absurd Anglo-Saxon in a ring of ironical Paddies. But it has a second and more subtle purpose, which is very finely contrived. It is suggested that when all is said and done there is in this preposterous Englishman a certain creative power which comes from his simplicity and optimism, from his profound resolution rather to live life than to criticise it. I know no finer dialogue of philosophical cross-purposes than that in which Broadbent boasts of his commonsense, and his subtler Irish friend mystifies him by telling him that he, Broadbent, has no commonsense, but only inspiration. The Irishman admits in Broadbent a certain unconscious spiritual force even in his very stupidity. Lord Rosebery coined the very clever phrase “a practical mystic.” Shaw is here maintaining that all practical men are practical mystics. And he is really maintaining also that the most practical of all the practical mystics is the one who is a fool.

There is something unexpected and fascinating about this reversal of the usual argument touching enterprise and the business man; this theory that success is created not by intelligence, but by a certain half-witted and yet magical instinct. For Bernard Shaw, apparently, the forests of factories and the mountains of money are not the creations of human wisdom or even of human cunning; they are rather manifestations of the sacred maxim which declares that God has chosen the foolish things of the earth to confound the wise. It is simplicity and even innocence that has made Manchester. As a philosophical fancy this is interesting or even suggestive; but it must be confessed that as a criticism of the relations of England to Ireland it is open to a strong historical objection. The one weak point in John Bull’s Other Island is that it turns on the fact that Broadbent succeeds in Ireland. But as a matter of fact Broadbent has not succeeded in Ireland. If getting what one wants is the test and fruit of this mysterious strength,
then the Irish peasants are certainly much stronger than the English merchants; for in spite of all the efforts of the merchants, the land has remained a land of peasants. No glorification of the English practicality as if it were a universal thing can ever get over the fact that we have failed in dealing with the one white people in our power who were markedly unlike ourselves. And the kindness of Broadbent has failed just as much as his commonsense; because he was dealing with a people whose desire and ideal were different from his own. He did not share the Irish passion for small possession in land or for the more pathetic virtues of Christianity. In fact the kindness of Broadbent has failed for the same reason that the gigantic kindness of Shaw has failed. The roots are different; it is like tying the tops of two trees together. Briefly, the philosophy of John Bull’s Other Island is quite effective and satisfactory except for this incurable fault: the fact that John Bull’s other island is not John Bull’s.

This clearing off of his last critical plays we may classify as the first of the three facts which lead up to Man and Superman. The second of the three facts may be found, I think, in Shaw’s discovery of Nietzsche. This eloquent sophist has an influence upon Shaw and his school which it would require a separate book adequately to study. By descent Nietzsche was a Pole, and probably a Polish noble; and to say that he was a Polish noble is to say that he was a frail, fastidious, and entirely useless anarchist. He had a wonderful poetic wit; and is one of the best rhetoricians of the modern world. He had a remarkable power of saying things that master the reason for a moment by their gigantic unreasonableness; as, for instance, “Your life is intolerable without immortality; but why should not your life be intolerable?” His whole work is shot through with the pangs and fevers of his physical life, which was one of extreme bad health; and in early middle age his brilliant brain broke down into impotence and darkness. All that was true in his teaching was this: that if a man looks fine on a horse it is so far irrelevant to tell him that he would be more economical on a donkey or more humane on a tricycle. In other words, the mere achievement of dignity, beauty, or triumph is strictly to be called a good thing. I do not know if Nietzsche ever used the illustration; but it seems to me that all that is creditable or sound in Nietzsche could be stated in the derivation of one word, the word “valour.” Valour means valeur; it means a value; courage is itself a solid good; it is an ultimate virtue; valour is in itself valid. In so far as he maintained this Nietzsche was only taking part in that great Protestant game of see-saw which has been the amusement of northern Europe since the sixteenth century. Nietzsche imagined he was rebelling against ancient morality; as a matter of fact
he was only rebelling against recent morality, against the half-baked impudence of the utilitarians and the materialists. He thought he was rebelling against Christianity; curiously enough he was rebelling solely against the special enemies of Christianity, against Herbert Spencer and Mr. Edward Clodd. Historic Christianity has always believed in the valour of St. Michael riding in front of the Church Militant; and in an ultimate and absolute pleasure, not indirect or utilitarian, the intoxication of the spirit, the wine of the blood of God.

There are indeed doctrines of Nietzsche that are not Christian, but then, by an entertaining coincidence, they are also not true. His hatred of pity is not Christian, but that was not his doctrine but his disease. Invalids are often hard on invalids. And there is another doctrine of his that is not Christianity, and also (by the same laughable accident) not commonsense; and it is a most pathetic circumstance that this was the one doctrine which caught the eye of Shaw and captured him. He was not influenced at all by the morbid attack on mercy. It would require more than ten thousand mad Polish professors to make Bernard Shaw anything but a generous and compassionate man. But it is certainly a nuisance that the one Nietzsche doctrine which attracted him was not the one Nietzsche doctrine that is human and rectifying. Nietzsche might really have done some good if he had taught Bernard Shaw to draw the sword, to drink wine, or even to dance. But he only succeeded in putting into his head a new superstition, which bids fair to be the chief superstition of the dark ages which are possibly in front of us—I mean the superstition of what is called the Superman.

In one of his least convincing phrases, Nietzsche had said that just as the ape ultimately produced the man, so should we ultimately produce something higher than the man. The immediate answer, of course, is sufficiently obvious: the ape did not worry about the man, so why should we worry about the Superman? If the Superman will come by natural selection, may we leave it to natural selection? If the Superman will come by human selection, what sort of Superman are we to select? If he is simply to be more just, more brave, or more merciful, then Zarathustra sinks into a Sunday-school teacher; the only way we can work for it is to be more just, more brave, and more merciful; sensible advice, but hardly startling. If he is to be anything else than this, why should we desire him, or what else are we to desire? These questions have been many times asked of the Nietzscheites, and none of the Nietzscheites have even attempted to answer them.

The keen intellect of Bernard Shaw would, I think, certainly have seen
through this fallacy and verbiage had it not been that another important event about this time came to the help of Nietzsche and established the Superman on his pedestal. It is the third of the things which I have called stepping-stones to Man and Superman, and it is very important. It is nothing less than the breakdown of one of the three intellectual supports upon which Bernard Shaw had reposed through all his confident career. At the beginning of this book I have described the three ultimate supports of Shaw as the Irishman, the Puritan, and the Progressive. They are the three legs of the tripod upon which the prophet sat to give the oracle; and one of them broke. Just about this time suddenly, by a mere shaft of illumination, Bernard Shaw ceased to believe in progress altogether.

It is generally implied that it was reading Plato that did it. That philosopher was very well qualified to convey the first shock of the ancient civilisation to Shaw, who had always thought instinctively of civilisation as modern. This is not due merely to the daring splendour of the speculations and the vivid picture of Athenian life, it is due also to something analogous in the personalities of that particular ancient Greek and this particular modern Irishman. Bernard Shaw has much affinity to Plato—in his instinctive elevation of temper, his courageous pursuit of ideas as far as they will go, his civic idealism; and also, it must be confessed, in his dislike of poets and a touch of delicate inhumanity. But whatever influence produced the change, the change had all the dramatic suddenness and completeness which belongs to the conversions of great men. It had been perpetually implied through all the earlier works not only that mankind is constantly improving, but that almost everything must be considered in the light of this fact. More than once he seemed to argue, in comparing the dramatists of the sixteenth with those of the nineteenth century, that the latter had a definite advantage merely because they were of the nineteenth century and not of the sixteenth. When accused of impertinence towards the greatest of the Elizabethans, Bernard Shaw had said, “Shakespeare is a much taller man than I, but I stand on his shoulders”—an epigram which sums up this doctrine with characteristic neatness. But Shaw fell off Shakespeare’s shoulders with a crash. This chronological theory that Shaw stood on Shakespeare’s shoulders logically involved the supposition that Shakespeare stood on Plato’s shoulders. And Bernard Shaw found Plato from his point of view so much more advanced than Shakespeare that he decided in desperation that all three were equal.

Such failure as has partially attended the idea of human equality is very largely due to the fact that no party in the modern state has heartily believed in
it. Tories and Radicals have both assumed that one set of men were in essentials superior to mankind. The only difference was that the Tory superiority was a superiority of place; while the Radical superiority is a superiority of time. The great objection to Shaw being on Shakespeare’s shoulders is a consideration for the sensations and personal dignity of Shakespeare. It is a democratic objection to anyone being on anyone else’s shoulders. Eternal human nature refuses to submit to a man who rules merely by right of birth. To rule by right of century is to rule by right of birth. Shaw found his nearest kinsman in remote Athens, his remotest enemies in the closest historical proximity; and he began to see the enormous average and the vast level of mankind. If progress swung constantly between such extremes it could not be progress at all. The paradox was sharp but undeniable; if life had such continual ups and downs, it was upon the whole flat. With characteristic sincerity and love of sensation he had no sooner seen this than he hastened to declare it. In the teeth of all his previous pronouncements he emphasised and re-emphasised in print that man had not progressed at all; that ninety-nine hundredths of a man in a cave were the same as ninety-nine hundredths of a man in a suburban villa.

It is characteristic of him to say that he rushed into print with a frank confession of the failure of his old theory. But it is also characteristic of him that he rushed into print also with a new alternative theory, quite as definite, quite as confident, and, if one may put it so, quite as infallible as the old one. Progress had never happened hitherto, because it had been sought solely through education. Education was rubbish. “Fancy,” said he, “trying to produce a greyhound or a racehorse by education!” The man of the future must not be taught; he must be bred. This notion of producing superior human beings by the methods of the stud-farm had often been urged, though its difficulties had never been cleared up. I mean its practical difficulties; its moral difficulties, or rather impossibilities, for any animal fit to be called a man need scarcely be discussed. But even as a scheme it had never been made clear. The first and most obvious objection to it of course is this: that if you are to breed men as pigs, you require some overseer who is as much more subtle than a man as a man is more subtle than a pig. Such an individual is not easy to find.

It was, however, in the heat of these three things, the decline of his merely destructive realism, the discovery of Nietzsche, and the abandonment of the idea of a progressive education of mankind, that he attempted what is not necessarily his best, but certainly his most important work. The two things are by no means necessarily the same. The most important work of Milton is Paradise Lost; his
best work is Lycidas. There are other places in which Shaw’s argument is more fascinating or his wit more startling than in Man and Superman; there are other plays that he has made more brilliant. But I am sure that there is no other play that he wished to make more brilliant. I will not say that he is in this case more serious than elsewhere; for the word serious is a double-meaning and double-dealing word, a traitor in the dictionary. It sometimes means solemn, and it sometimes means sincere. A very short experience of private and public life will be enough to prove that the most solemn people are generally the most insincere. A somewhat more delicate and detailed consideration will show also that the most sincere men are generally not solemn; and of these is Bernard Shaw. But if we use the word serious in the old and Latin sense of the word “grave,” which means weighty or valid, full of substance, then we may say without any hesitation that this is the most serious play of the most serious man alive.

The outline of the play is, I suppose, by this time sufficiently well known. It has two main philosophic motives. The first is that what he calls the life-force (the old infidels called it Nature, which seems a neater word, and nobody knows the meaning of either of them) desires above all things to make suitable marriages, to produce a purer and prouder race, or eventually to produce a Superman. The second is that in this effecting of racial marriages the woman is a more conscious agent than the man. In short, that woman disposes a long time before man proposes. In this play, therefore, woman is made the pursuer and man the pursued. It cannot be denied, I think, that in this matter Shaw is handicapped by his habitual hardness of touch, by his lack of sympathy with the romance of which he writes, and to a certain extent even by his own integrity and right conscience. Whether the man hunts the woman or the woman the man, at least it should be a splendid pagan hunt; but Shaw is not a sporting man. Nor is he a pagan, but a Puritan. He cannot recover the impartiality of paganism which allowed Diana to propose to Endymion without thinking any the worse of her. The result is that while he makes Anne, the woman who marries his hero, a really powerful and convincing woman, he can only do it by making her a highly objectionable woman. She is a liar and a bully, not from sudden fear or excruciating dilemma; she is a liar and a bully in grain; she has no truth or magnanimity in her. The more we know that she is real, the more we know that she is vile. In short, Bernard Shaw is still haunted with his old impotence of the unromantic writer; he cannot imagine the main motives of human life from the inside. We are convinced successfully that Anne wishes to marry Tanner, but in the very process we lose all power of conceiving why Tanner should ever
consent to marry Anne. A writer with a more romantic strain in him might have imagined a woman choosing her lover without shamelessness and magnetising him without fraud. Even if the first movement were feminine, it need hardly be a movement like this. In truth, of course, the two sexes have their two methods of attraction, and in some of the happiest cases they are almost simultaneous. But even on the most cynical showing they need not be mixed up. It is one thing to say that the mousetrap is not there by accident. It is another to say (in the face of ocular experience) that the mousetrap runs after the mouse.

But whenever Shaw shows the Puritan hardness or even the Puritan cheapness, he shows something also of the Puritan nobility, of the idea that sacrifice is really a frivolity in the face of a great purpose. The reasonableness of Calvin and his followers will by the mercy of heaven be at last washed away; but their unreasonableness will remain an eternal splendour. Long after we have let drop the fancy that Protestantism was rational it will be its glory that it was fanatical. So it is with Shaw. To make Anne a real woman, even a dangerous woman, he would need to be something stranger and softer than Bernard Shaw. But though I always argue with him whenever he argues, I confess that he always conquers me in the one or two moments when he is emotional.

There is one really noble moment when Anne offers for all her cynical husband-hunting the only defence that is really great enough to cover it. “It will not be all happiness for me. Perhaps death.” And the man rises also at that real crisis, saying, “Oh, that clutch holds and hurts. What have you grasped in me? Is there a father’s heart as well as a mother’s?” That seems to me actually great; I do not like either of the characters an atom more than formerly; but I can see shining and shaking through them at that instant the splendour of the God that made them and of the image of God who wrote their story.

A logician is like a liar in many respects, but chiefly in the fact that he should have a good memory. That cutting and inquisitive style which Bernard Shaw has always adopted carries with it an inevitable criticism. And it cannot be denied that this new theory of the supreme importance of sound sexual union, wrought by any means, is hard logically to reconcile with Shaw’s old diatribes against sentimentalism and operatic romance. If Nature wishes primarily to entrap us into sexual union, then all the means of sexual attraction, even the most maudlin or theatrical, are justified at one stroke. The guitar of the troubadour is as practical as the ploughshare of the husbandman. The waltz in the ballroom is as serious as the debate in the parish council. The justification of Anne, as the potential mother of Superman, is really the justification of all the humbugs and
sentimentalists whom Shaw had been denouncing as a dramatic critic and as a dramatist since the beginning of his career. It was to no purpose that the earlier Bernard Shaw said that romance was all moonshine. The moonshine that ripens love is now as practical as the sunshine that ripens corn. It was vain to say that sexual chivalry was all rot; it might be as rotten as manure—and also as fertile. It is vain to call first love a fiction; it may be as fictitious as the ink of the cuttle or the doubling of the hare; as fictitious, as efficient, and as indispensable. It is vain to call it a self-deception; Schopenhauer said that all existence was a self-deception; and Shaw’s only further comment seems to be that it is right to be deceived. To Man and Superman, as to all his plays, the author attaches a most fascinating preface at the beginning. But I really think that he ought also to attach a hearty apology at the end; an apology to all the minor dramatists or preposterous actors whom he had cursed for romanticism in his youth. Whenever he objected to an actress for ogling she might reasonably reply, “But this is how I support my friend Anne in her sublime evolutionary effort.” Whenever he laughed at an old-fashioned actor for ranting, the actor might answer, “My exaggeration is not more absurd than the tail of a peacock or the swagger of a cock; it is the way I preach the great fruitful lie of the life-force that I am a very fine fellow.” We have remarked the end of Shaw’s campaign in favour of progress. This ought really to have been the end of his campaign against romance. All the tricks of love that he called artificial become natural; because they become Nature. All the lies of love become truths; indeed they become the Truth.

The minor things of the play contain some thunderbolts of good thinking. Throughout this brief study I have deliberately not dwelt upon mere wit, because in anything of Shaw’s that may be taken for granted. It is enough to say that this play which is full of his most serious quality is as full as any of his minor sort of success. In a more solid sense two important facts stand out: the first is the character of the young American; the other is the character of Straker, the chauffeur. In these Shaw has realised and made vivid two most important facts. First, that America is not intellectually a go-ahead country, but both for good and evil an old-fashioned one. It is full of stale culture and ancestral simplicity, just as Shaw’s young millionaire quotes Macaulay and piously worships his wife. Second, he has pointed out in the character of Straker that there has arisen in our midst a new class that has education without breeding. Straker is the man who has ousted the hansom-cabman, having neither his coarseness nor his kindliness. Great sociological credit is due to the man who has first clearly
observed that Straker has appeared. How anybody can profess for a moment to be glad that he has appeared, I do not attempt to conjecture.

Appended to the play is an entertaining though somewhat mysterious document called “The Revolutionist’s Handbook.” It contains many very sound remarks; this, for example, which I cannot too much applaud: “If you hit your child, be sure that you hit him in anger.” If that principle had been properly understood, we should have had less of Shaw’s sociological friends and their meddling with the habits and instincts of the poor. But among the fragments of advice also occurs the following suggestive and even alluring remark: “Every man over forty is a scoundrel.” On the first personal opportunity I asked the author of this remarkable axiom what it meant. I gathered that what it really meant was something like this: that every man over forty had been all the essential use that he was likely to be, and was therefore in a manner a parasite. It is gratifying to reflect that Bernard Shaw has sufficiently answered his own epigram by continuing to pour out treasures both of truth and folly long after this allotted time. But if the epigram might be interpreted in a rather looser style as meaning that past a certain point a man’s work takes on its final character and does not greatly change the nature of its merits, it may certainly be said that with Man and Superman, Shaw reaches that stage. The two plays that have followed it, though of very great interest in themselves, do not require any revaluation of, or indeed any addition to, our summary of his genius and success. They are both in a sense casts back to his primary energies; the first in a controversial and the second in a technical sense. Neither need prevent our saying that the moment when John Tanner and Anne agree that it is doom for him and death for her and life only for the thing unborn, is the peak of his utterance as a prophet.

The two important plays that he has since given us are The Doctor’s Dilemma and Getting Married. The first is as regards its most amusing and effective elements a throw-back to his old game of gazing the men of science. It was a very good game, and he was an admirable player. The actual story of the Doctor’s Dilemma itself seems to me less poignant and important than the things with which Shaw had lately been dealing. First of all, as has been said, Shaw has neither the kind of justice nor the kind of weakness that goes to make a true problem. We cannot feel the Doctor’s Dilemma, because we cannot really fancy Bernard Shaw being in a dilemma. His mind is both fond of abruptness and fond of finality; he always makes up his mind when he knows the facts and sometimes before. Moreover, this particular problem (though Shaw is certainly, as we shall see, nearer to pure doubt about it than about anything else) does not
strike the critic as being such an exasperating problem after all. An artist of vast power and promise, who is also a scamp of vast profligacy and treachery, has a chance of life if specially treated for a special disease. The modern doctors (and even the modern dramatist) are in doubt whether he should be specially favoured because he is aesthetically important or specially disregarded because he is ethically anti-social. They see-saw between the two despicable modern doctrines, one that geniuses should be worshipped like idols and the other that criminals should be merely wiped out like germs. That both clever men and bad men ought to be treated like men does not seem to occur to them. As a matter of fact, in these affairs of life and death one never does think of such distinctions. Nobody does shout out at sea, “Bad citizen overboard!” I should recommend the doctor in his dilemma to do exactly what I am sure any decent doctor would do without any dilemma at all: to treat the man simply as a man, and give him no more and no less favour than he would to anybody else. In short, I am sure a practical physician would drop all these visionary, unworkable modern dreams about type and criminology and go back to the plain business-like facts of the French Revolution and the Rights of Man.

The other play, Getting Married, is a point in Shaw’s career, but only as a play, not, as usual, as a heresy. It is nothing but a conversation about marriage; and one cannot agree or disagree with the view of marriage, because all views are given which are held by anybody, and some (I should think) which are held by nobody. But its technical quality is of some importance in the life of its author. It is worth consideration as a play, because it is not a play at all. It marks the culmination and completeness of that victory of Bernard Shaw over the British public, or rather over their official representatives, of which I have spoken. Shaw had fought a long fight with business men, those incredible people, who assured him that it was useless to have wit without murders, and that a good joke, which is the most popular thing everywhere else, was quite unsalable in the theatrical world. In spite of this he had conquered by his wit and his good dialogue; and by the time of which we now speak he was victorious and secure. All his plays were being produced as a matter of course in England and as a matter of the fiercest fashion and enthusiasm in America and Germany. No one who knows the nature of the man will doubt that under such circumstances his first act would be to produce his wit naked and unashamed. He had been told that he could not support a slight play by mere dialogue. He therefore promptly produced mere dialogue without the slightest play for it to support. Getting Married is no more a play than Cicero’s dialogue De Amicitia, and not half so
much a play as Wilson’s Noctes Ambrosianæ. But though it is not a play, it was played, and played successfully. Everyone who went into the theatre felt that he was only eavesdropping at an accidental conversation. But the conversation was so sparkling and sensible that he went on eavesdropping. This, I think, as it is the final play of Shaw, is also, and fitly, his final triumph. He is a good dramatist and sometimes even a great dramatist. But the occasions when we get glimpses of him as really a great man are on these occasions when he is utterly undramatic.

From first to last Bernard Shaw has been nothing but a conversationalist. It is not a slur to say so; Socrates was one, and even Christ Himself. He differs from that divine and that human prototype in the fact that, like most modern people, he does to some extent talk in order to find out what he thinks; whereas they knew it beforehand. But he has the virtues that go with the talkative man; one of which is humility. You will hardly ever find a really proud man talkative; he is afraid of talking too much. Bernard Shaw offered himself to the world with only one great qualification, that he could talk honestly and well. He did not speak; he talked to a crowd. He did not write; he talked to a typewriter. He did not really construct a play; he talked through ten mouths or masks instead of through one. His literary power and progress began in casual conversations—and it seems to me supremely right that it should end in one great and casual conversation. His last play is nothing but garrulous talking, that great thing called gossip. And I am happy to say that the play has been as efficient and successful as talk and gossip have always been among the children of men.

Of his life in these later years I have made no pretence of telling even the little that there is to tell. Those who regard him as a mere self-advertising egotist may be surprised to hear that there is perhaps no man of whose private life less could be positively said by an outsider. Even those who know him can make little but a conjecture of what has lain behind this splendid stretch of intellectual self-expression; I only make my conjecture like the rest. I think that the first great turning-point in Shaw’s life (after the early things of which I have spoken, the taint of drink in the teetotal home, or the first fight with poverty) was the deadly illness which fell upon him, at the end of his first flashing career as a Saturday Reviewer. I know it would goad Shaw to madness to suggest that sickness could have softened him. That is why I suggest it. But I say for his comfort that I think it hardened him also; if that can be called hardening which is only the strengthening of our souls to meet some dreadful reality. At least it is certain that the larger spiritual ambitions, the desire to find a faith and found a church, come
after that time. I also mention it because there is hardly anything else to mention; his life is singularly free from landmarks, while his literature is so oddly full of surprises. His marriage to Miss Payne-Townsend, which occurred not long after his illness, was one of those quite successful things which are utterly silent. The placidity of his married life may be sufficiently indicated by saying that (as far as I can make out) the most important events in it were rows about the Executive of the Fabian Society. If such ripples do not express a still and lake-like life, I do not know what would. Honestly, the only thing in his later career that can be called an event is the stand made by Shaw at the Fabians against the sudden assault of Mr. H. G. Wells, which, after scenes of splendid exasperations, ended in Wells’ resignation. There was another slight ruffling of the calm when Bernard Shaw said some quite sensible things about Sir Henry Irving. But on the whole we confront the composure of one who has come into his own.

The method of his life has remained mostly unchanged. And there is a great deal of method in his life; I can hear some people murmuring something about method in his madness. He is not only neat and business-like; but, unlike some literary men I know, does not conceal the fact. Having all the talents proper to an author, he delights to prove that he has also all the talents proper to a publisher; or even to a publisher’s clerk. Though many looking at his light brown clothes would call him a Bohemian, he really hates and despises Bohemianism; in the sense that he hates and despises disorder and uncleanness and irresponsibility. All that part of him is peculiarly normal and efficient. He gives good advice; he always answers letters, and answers them in a decisive and very legible hand. He has said himself that the only educational art that he thinks important is that of being able to jump off tram-cars at the proper moment. Though a rigid vegetarian, he is quite regular and rational in his meals; and though he detests sport, he takes quite sufficient exercise. While he has always made a mock of science in theory, he is by nature prone to meddle with it in practice. He is fond of photographing, and even more fond of being photographed. He maintained (in one of his moments of mad modernity) that photography was a finer thing than portrait-painting, more exquisite and more imaginative; he urged the characteristic argument that none of his own photographs were like each other or like him. But he would certainly wash the chemicals off his hands the instant after an experiment; just as he would wash the blood off his hands the instant after a Socialist massacre. He cannot endure stains or accretions; he is of that temperament which feels tradition itself to be a coat of dust; whose temptation it is to feel nothing but a sort of foul accumulation or living disease even in the
creeper upon the cottage or the moss upon the grave. So thoroughly are his tastes those of the civilised modern man that if it had not been for the fire in him of justice and anger he might have been the most trim and modern among the millions whom he shocks: and his bicycle and brown hat have been no menace in Brixton. But God sent among those suburbs one who was a prophet as well as a sanitary inspector. He had every qualification for living in a villa—except the necessary indifference to his brethren living in pigstyes. But for the small fact that he hates with a sickening hatred the hypocrisy and class cruelty, he would really accept and admire the bathroom and the bicycle and asbestos-stove, having no memory of rivers or of roaring fires. In these things, like Mr. Straker, he is the New Man. But for his great soul he might have accepted modern civilisation; it was a wonderful escape. This man whom men so foolishly call crazy and anarchic has really a dangerous affinity to the fourth-rate perfections of our provincial and Protestant civilisation. He might even have been respectable if he had had less self-respect.

His fulfilled fame and this tone of repose and reason in his life, together with the large circle of his private kindness and the regard of his fellow-artists, should permit us to end the record in a tone of almost patriarchal quiet. If I wished to complete such a picture I could add many touches: that he has consented to wear evening dress; that he has supported the Times Book Club; and that his beard has turned grey; the last to his regret, as he wanted it to remain red till they had completed colour-photography. He can mix with the most conservative statesmen; his tone grows continuously more gentle in the matter of religion. It would be easy to end with the lion lying down with the lamb, the wild Irishman tamed or taming everybody, Shaw reconciled to the British public as the British public is certainly largely reconciled to Shaw.

But as I put these last papers together, having finished this rude study, I hear a piece of news. His latest play, The Showing Up of Blanco Posnet, has been forbidden by the Censor. As far as I can discover, it has been forbidden because one of the characters professes a belief in God and states his conviction that God has got him. This is wholesome; this is like one crack of thunder in a clear sky. Not so easily does the prince of this world forgive. Shaw’s religious training and instinct is not mine, but in all honest religion there is something that is hateful to the prosperous compromise of our time. You are free in our time to say that God does not exist; you are free to say that He exists and is evil; you are free to say (like poor old Renan) that He would like to exist if He could. You may talk of God as a metaphor or a mystification; you may water Him down with gallons of
long words, or boil Him to the rags of metaphysics; and it is not merely that nobody punishes, but nobody protests. But if you speak of God as a fact, as a thing like a tiger, as a reason for changing one’s conduct, then the modern world will stop you somehow if it can. We are long past talking about whether an unbeliever should be punished for being irreverent. It is now thought irreverent to be a believer. I end where I began: it is the old Puritan in Shaw that jars the modern world like an electric shock. That vision with which I meant to end, that vision of culture and commonsense, of red brick and brown flannel, of the modern clerk broadened enough to embrace Shaw and Shaw softened enough to embrace the clerk, all that vision of a new London begins to fade and alter. The red brick begins to burn red-hot; and the smoke from all the chimneys has a strange smell. I find myself back in the fumes in which I started.

Perhaps I have been misled by small modernities. Perhaps what I have called fastidiousness is a divine fear. Perhaps what I have called coldness is a predestinate and ancient endurance. The vision of the Fabian villas grows fainter and fainter, until I see only a void place across which runs Bunyan’s Pilgrim with his fingers in his ears.

Bernard Shaw has occupied much of his life in trying to elude his followers. The fox has enthusiastic followers, and Shaw seems to regard his in much the same way. This man whom men accuse of bidding for applause seems to me to shrink even from assent. If you agree with Shaw he is very likely to contradict you; I have contradicted Shaw throughout, that is why I come at last almost to agree with him. His critics have accused him of vulgar self-advertisement; in his relation to his followers he seems to me rather marked with a sort of mad modesty. He seems to wish to fly from agreement, to have as few followers as possible. All this reaches back, I think, to the three roots from which this meditation grew. It is partly the mere impatience and irony of the Irishman. It is partly the thought of the Calvinist that the host of God should be thinned rather than thronged; that Gideon must reject soldiers rather than recruit them. And it is partly, alas, the unhappy Progressive trying to be in front of his own religion, trying to destroy his own idol and even to desecrate his own tomb. But from whatever causes, this furious escape from popularity has involved Shaw in some perversities and refinements which are almost mere insincerities, and which make it necessary to disentangle the good he has done from the evil in this dazzling course. I will attempt some summary by stating the three things in which his influence seems to me thoroughly good and the three in which it seems bad. But for the pleasure of ending on the finer note I will speak first of
those that seem bad.

The primary respect in which Shaw has been a bad influence is that he has encouraged fastidiousness. He has made men dainty about their moral meals. This is indeed the root of his whole objection to romance. Many people have objected to romance for being too airy and exquisite. Shaw objects to romance for being too rank and coarse. Many have despised romance because it is unreal; Shaw really hates it because it is a great deal too real. Shaw dislikes romance as he dislikes beef and beer, raw brandy or raw beefsteaks. Romance is too masculine for his taste. You will find throughout his criticisms, amid all their truth, their wild justice or pungent impartiality, a curious undercurrent of prejudice upon one point: the preference for the refined rather than the rude or ugly. Thus he will dislike a joke because it is coarse without asking if it is really immoral. He objects to a man sitting down on his hat, whereas the austere moralist should only object to his sitting down on someone else’s hat. This sensibility is barren because it is universal. It is useless to object to man being made ridiculous. Man is born ridiculous, as can easily be seen if you look at him soon after he is born. It is grotesque to drink beer, but it is equally grotesque to drink soda-water; the grotesqueness lies in the act of filling yourself like a bottle through a hole. It is undignified to walk with a drunken stagger; but it is fairly undignified to walk at all, for all walking is a sort of balancing, and there is always in the human being something of a quadruped on its hind legs. I do not say he would be more dignified if he went on all fours; I do not know that he ever is dignified except when he is dead. We shall not be refined till we are refined into dust. Of course it is only because he is not wholly an animal that man sees he is a rum animal; and if man on his hind legs is in an artificial attitude, it is only because, like a dog, he is begging or saying thank you.

Everything important is in that sense absurd from the grave baby to the grinning skull; everything practical is a practical joke. But throughout Shaw’s comedies, curiously enough, there is a certain kicking against this great doom of laughter. For instance, it is the first duty of a man who is in love to make a fool of himself; but Shaw’s heroes always seem to flinch from this, and attempt, in airy, philosophic revenge, to make a fool of the woman first. The attempts of Valentine and Charteris to divide their perceptions from their desires, and tell the woman she is worthless even while trying to win her, are sometimes almost torturing to watch; it is like seeing a man trying to play a different tune with each hand. I fancy this agony is not only in the spectator, but in the dramatist as well. It is Bernard Shaw struggling with his reluctance to do anything so ridiculous as
make a proposal. For there are two types of great humorist: those who love to see a man absurd and those who hate to see him absurd. Of the first kind are Rabelais and Dickens; of the second kind are Swift and Bernard Shaw.

So far as Shaw has spread or helped a certain modern reluctance or mauvaise honte in these grand and grotesque functions of man I think he has definitely done harm. He has much influence among the young men; but it is not an influence in the direction of keeping them young. One cannot imagine him inspiring any of his followers to write a war-song or a drinking-song or a love-song, the three forms of human utterance which come next in nobility to a prayer. It may seem odd to say that the net effect of a man so apparently impudent will be to make men shy. But it is certainly the truth. Shyness is always the sign of a divided soul; a man is shy because he somehow thinks his position at once despicable and important. If he were without humility he would not care; and if he were without pride he would not care. Now the main purpose of Shaw’s theoretic teaching is to declare that we ought to fulfil these great functions of life, that we ought to eat and drink and love. But the main tendency of his habitual criticism is to suggest that all the sentiments, professions, and postures of these things are not only comic but even contemptibly comic, follies and almost frauds. The result would seem to be that a race of young men may arise who do all these things, but do them awkwardly. That which was of old a free and hilarious function becomes an important and embarrassing necessity. Let us endure all the pagan pleasures with a Christian patience. Let us eat, drink, and be serious.

The second of the two points on which I think Shaw has done definite harm is this: that he has (not always or even as a rule intentionally) increased that anarchy of thought which is always the destruction of thought. Much of his early writing has encouraged among the modern youth that most pestilent of all popular tricks and fallacies; what is called the argument of progress. I mean this kind of thing. Previous ages were often, alas, aristocratic in politics or clericalist in religion; but they were always democratic in philosophy; they appealed to man, not to particular men. And if most men were against an idea, that was so far against it. But nowadays that most men are against a thing is thought to be in its favour; it is vaguely supposed to show that some day most men will be for it. If a man says that cows are reptiles, or that Bacon wrote Shakespeare, he can always quote the contempt of his contemporaries as in some mysterious way proving the complete conversion of posterity. The objections to this theory scarcely need any elaborate indication. The final objection to it is that it amounts
to this: say anything, however idiotic, and you are in advance of your age. This kind of stuff must be stopped. The sort of democrat who appeals to the babe unborn must be classed with the sort of aristocrat who appeals to his deceased great-grandfather. Both should be sharply reminded that they are appealing to individuals whom they well know to be at a disadvantage in the matter of prompt and witty reply. Now although Bernard Shaw has survived this simple confusion, he has in his time greatly contributed to it. If there is, for instance, one thing that is really rare in Shaw it is hesitation. He makes up his mind quicker than a calculating boy or a county magistrate. Yet on this subject of the next change in ethics he has felt hesitation, and being a strictly honest man has expressed it.

“I know no harder practical question than how much selfishness one ought to stand from a gifted person for the sake of his gifts or on the chance of his being right in the long run. The Superman will certainly come like a thief in the night, and be shot at accordingly; but we cannot leave our property wholly undefended on that account. On the other hand, we cannot ask the Superman simply to add a higher set of virtues to current respectable morals; for he is undoubtedly going to empty a good deal of respectable morality out like so much dirty water, and replace it by new and strange customs, shedding old obligations and accepting new and heavier ones. Every step of his progress must horrify conventional people; and if it were possible for even the most superior man to march ahead all the time, every pioneer of the march towards the Superman would be crucified.”

When the most emphatic man alive, a man unmatched in violent precision of statement, speaks with such avowed vagueness and doubt as this, it is no wonder if all his more weak-minded followers are in a mere whirlpool of uncritical and unmeaning innovation. If the superior person will be apparently criminal, the most probable result is simply that the criminal person will think himself superior. A very slight knowledge of human nature is required in the matter. If the Superman may possibly be a thief, you may bet your boots that the next thief will be a Superman. But indeed the Supermen (of whom I have met many) have generally been more weak in the head than in the moral conduct; they have simply offered the first fancy which occupied their minds as the new morality. I fear that Shaw had a way of encouraging these follies. It is obvious from the passage I have quoted that he has no way of restraining them.

The truth is that all feeble spirits naturally live in the future, because it is featureless; it is a soft job; you can make it what you like. The next age is blank, and I can paint it freely with my favourite colour. It requires real courage to face
the past, because the past is full of facts which cannot be got over; of men certainly wiser than we and of things done which we could not do. I know I cannot write a poem as good as Lycidas. But it is always easy to say that the particular sort of poetry I can write will be the poetry of the future.

This I call the second evil influence of Shaw: that he has encouraged many to throw themselves for justification upon the shapeless and the unknown. In this, though courageous himself, he has encouraged cowards, and though sincere himself, has helped a mean escape. The third evil in his influence can, I think, be much more shortly dealt with. He has to a very slight extent, but still perceptibly, encouraged a kind of charlatanism of utterance among those who possess his Irish impudence without his Irish virtue. For instance, his amusing trick of self-praise is perfectly hearty and humorous in him; nay, it is even humble; for to confess vanity is itself humble. All that is the matter with the proud is that they will not admit that they are vain. Therefore when Shaw says that he alone is able to write such and such admirable work, or that he has just utterly wiped out some celebrated opponent, I for one never feel anything offensive in the tone, but, indeed, only the unmistakable intonation of a friend’s voice. But I have noticed among younger, harder, and much shallower men a certain disposition to ape this insolent ease and certitude, and that without any fundamental frankness or mirth. So far the influence is bad. Egoism can be learnt as a lesson like any other “ism.” It is not so easy to learn an Irish accent or a good temper. In its lower forms the thing becomes a most unmilitary trick of announcing the victory before one has gained it.

When one has said those three things, one has said, I think, all that can be said by way of blaming Bernard Shaw. It is significant that he was never blamed for any of these things by the Censor. Such censures as the attitude of that official involves may be dismissed with a very light sort of disdain. To represent Shaw as profane or provocatively indecent is not a matter for discussion at all; it is a disgusting criminal libel upon a particularly respectable gentleman of the middle classes, of refined tastes and somewhat Puritanical views. But while the negative defence of Shaw is easy, the just praise of him is almost as complex as it is necessary; and I shall devote the last few pages of this book to a triad corresponding to the last one—to the three important elements in which the work of Shaw has been good as well as great.

In the first place, and quite apart from all particular theories, the world owes thanks to Bernard Shaw for having combined being intelligent with being intelligible. He has popularised philosophy, or rather he has repopularised it, for
philosophy is always popular, except in peculiarly corrupt and oligarchic ages like our own. We have passed the age of the demagogue, the man who has little to say and says it loud. We have come to the age of the mystagogue or don, the man who has nothing to say, but says it softly and impressively in an indistinct whisper. After all, short words must mean something, even if they mean filth or lies; but long words may sometimes mean literally nothing, especially if they are used (as they mostly are in modern books and magazine articles) to balance and modify each other. A plain figure 4, scrawled in chalk anywhere, must always mean something; it must always mean $2 + 2$. But the most enormous and mysterious algebraic equation, full of letters, brackets, and fractions, may all cancel out at last and be equal to nothing. When a demagogue says to a mob, “There is the Bank of England, why shouldn’t you have some of that money?” he says something which is at least as honest and intelligible as the figure 4. When a writer in the Times remarks, “We must raise the economic efficiency of the masses without diverting anything from those classes which represent the national prosperity and refinement,” then his equation cancels out; in a literal and logical sense his remark amounts to nothing.

There are two kinds of charlatans or people called quacks to-day. The power of the first is that he advertises—and cures. The power of the second is that though he is not learned enough to cure he is much too learned to advertise. The former give away their dignity with a pound of tea; the latter are paid a pound of tea merely for being dignified. I think them the worse quacks of the two. Shaw is certainly of the other sort. Dickens, another man who was great enough to be a demagogue (and greater than Shaw because more heartily a demagogue), puts for ever the true difference between the demagogue and the mystagogue in Dr. Marigold: “Except that we’re cheap-jacks and they’re dear-jacks, I don’t see any difference between us.” Bernard Shaw is a great cheap-jack, with plenty of patter and I dare say plenty of nonsense, but with this also (which is not wholly unimportant), with goods to sell. People accuse such a man of self-advertisement. But at least the cheap-jack does advertise his wares, whereas the don or dear-jack advertises nothing except himself. His very silence, nay his very sterility, are supposed to be marks of the richness of his erudition. He is too learned to teach, and sometimes too wise even to talk. St. Thomas Aquinas said: “In auctore auctoritas.” But there is more than one man at Oxford or Cambridge who is considered an authority because he has never been an author.

Against all this mystification both of silence and verbosity Shaw has been a splendid and smashing protest. He has stood up for the fact that philosophy is
not the concern of those who pass through Divinity and Greats, but of those who pass through birth and death. Nearly all the most awful and abstruse statements can be put in words of one syllable, from “A child is born” to “A soul is damned.” If the ordinary man may not discuss existence, why should he be asked to conduct it? About concrete matters indeed one naturally appeals to an oligarchy or select class. For information about Lapland I go to an aristocracy of Laplanders; for the ways of rabbits to an aristocracy of naturalists or, preferably, an aristocracy of poachers. But only mankind itself can bear witness to the abstract first principles of mankind, and in matters of theory I would always consult the mob. Only the mass of men, for instance, have authority to say whether life is good. Whether life is good is an especially mystical and delicate question, and, like all such questions, is asked in words of one syllable. It is also answered in words of one syllable, and Bernard Shaw (as also mankind) answers “yes.”

This plain, pugnacious style of Shaw has greatly clarified all controversies. He has slain the polysyllable, that huge and slimy centipede which has sprawled over all the valleys of England like the “loathly worm” who was slain by the ancient knight. He does not think that difficult questions will be made simpler by using difficult words about them. He has achieved the admirable work, never to be mentioned without gratitude, of discussing Evolution without mentioning it. The good work is of course more evident in the case of philosophy than any other region; because the case of philosophy was a crying one. It was really preposterous that the things most carefully reserved for the study of two or three men should actually be the things common to all men. It was absurd that certain men should be experts on the special subject of everything. But he stood for much the same spirit and style in other matters; in economics, for example. There never has been a better popular economist; one more lucid, entertaining, consistent, and essentially exact. The very comicality of his examples makes them and their argument stick in the mind; as in the case I remember in which he said that the big shops had now to please everybody, and were not entirely dependent on the lady who sails in “to order four governesses and five grand pianos.” He is always preaching collectivism; yet he does not very often name it. He does not talk about collectivism, but about cash; of which the populace feel a much more definite need. He talks about cheese, boots, perambulators, and how people are really to live. For him economics really means housekeeping, as it does in Greek. His difference from the orthodox economists, like most of his differences, is very different from the attacks made by the main body of
Socialists. The old Manchester economists are generally attacked for being too gross and material. Shaw really attacks them for not being gross or material enough. He thinks that they hide themselves behind long words, remote hypotheses or unreal generalisations. When the orthodox economist begins with his correct and primary formula, “Suppose there is a Man on an Island——” Shaw is apt to interrupt him sharply, saying, “There is a Man in the Street.”

The second phase of the man’s really fruitful efficacy is in a sense the converse of this. He has improved philosophic discussions by making them more popular. But he has also improved popular amusements by making them more philosophic. And by more philosophic I do not mean duller, but funnier; that is more varied. All real fun is in cosmic contrasts, which involve a view of the cosmos. But I know that this second strength in Shaw is really difficult to state and must be approached by explanations and even by eliminations. Let me say at once that I think nothing of Shaw or anybody else merely for playing the daring sceptic. I do not think he has done any good or even achieved any effect simply by asking startling questions. It is possible that there have been ages so sluggish or automatic that anything that woke them up at all was a good thing. It is sufficient to be certain that ours is not such an age. We do not need waking up; rather we suffer from insomnia, with all its results of fear and exaggeration and frightful waking dreams. The modern mind is not a donkey which wants kicking to make it go on. The modern mind is more like a motor-car on a lonely road which two amateur motorists have been just clever enough to take to pieces, but are not quite clever enough to put together again. Under these circumstances kicking the car has never been found by the best experts to be effective. No one, therefore, does any good to our age merely by asking questions—unless he can answer the questions. Asking questions is already the fashionable and aristocratic sport which has brought most of us into the bankruptcy court. The note of our age is a note of interrogation. And the final point is so plain; no sceptical philosopher can ask any questions that may not equally be asked by a tired child on a hot afternoon. “Am I a boy?—Why am I a boy?—Why aren’t I a chair?—What is a chair?” A child will sometimes ask questions of this sort for two hours. And the philosophers of Protestant Europe have asked them for two hundred years.

If that were all that I meant by Shaw making men more philosophic, I should put it not among his good influences but his bad. He did do that to some extent; and so far he is bad. But there is a much bigger and better sense in which he has been a philosopher. He has brought back into English drama all the streams of
fact or tendency which are commonly called undramatic. They were there in Shakespeare’s time; but they have scarcely been there since until Shaw. I mean that Shakespeare, being interested in everything, put everything into a play. If he had lately been thinking about the irony and even contradiction confronting us in self-preservation and suicide, he put it all into Hamlet. If he was annoyed by some passing boom in theatrical babies he put that into Hamlet too. He would put anything into Hamlet which he really thought was true, from his favourite nursery ballads to his personal (and perhaps unfashionable) conviction of the Catholic purgatory. There is no fact that strikes one, I think, about Shakespeare, except the fact of how dramatic he could be, so much as the fact of how undramatic he could be.

In this great sense Shaw has brought philosophy back into drama—philosophy in the sense of a certain freedom of the mind. This is not a freedom to think what one likes (which is absurd, for one can only think what one thinks); it is a freedom to think about what one likes, which is quite a different thing and the spring of all thought. Shakespeare (in a weak moment, I think) said that all the world is a stage. But Shakespeare acted on the much finer principle that a stage is all the world. So there are in all Bernard Shaw’s plays patches of what people would call essentially undramatic stuff, which the dramatist puts in because he is honest and would rather prove his case than succeed with his play. Shaw has brought back into English drama that Shakespearian universality which, if you like, you can call Shakespearian irrelevance. Perhaps a better definition than either is a habit of thinking the truth worth telling even when you meet it by accident. In Shaw’s plays one meets an incredible number of truths by accident.

To be up to date is a paltry ambition except in an almanac, and Shaw has sometimes talked this almanac philosophy. Nevertheless there is a real sense in which the phrase may be wisely used, and that is in cases where some stereotyped version of what is happening hides what is really happening from our eyes. Thus, for instance, newspapers are never up to date. The men who write leading articles are always behind the times, because they are in a hurry. They are forced to fall back on their old-fashioned view of things; they have no time to fashion a new one. Everything that is done in a hurry is certain to be antiquated; that is why modern industrial civilisation bears so curious a resemblance to barbarism. Thus when newspapers say that the Times is a solemn old Tory paper, they are out of date; their talk is behind the talk in Fleet Street. Thus when newspapers say that Christian dogmas are crumbling, they are out of date; their talk is behind the talk in public-houses. Now in this sense Shaw has
kept in a really stirring sense up to date. He has introduced into the theatre the things that no one else had introduced into a theatre—the things in the street outside. The theatre is a sort of thing which proudly sends a hansom-cab across the stage as Realism, while everybody outside is whistling for motor-cabs.

Consider in this respect how many and fine have been Shaw’s intrusions into the theatre with the things that were really going on. Daily papers and daily matinées were still gravely explaining how much modern war depended on gunpowder. Arms and the Man explained how much modern war depends on chocolate. Every play and paper described the Vicar who was a mild Conservative. Candida caught hold of the modern Vicar who is an advanced Socialist. Numberless magazine articles and society comedies describe the emancipated woman as new and wild. Only You Never Can Tell was young enough to see that the emancipated woman is already old and respectable. Every comic paper has caricatured the uneducated upstart. Only the author of Man and Superman knew enough about the modern world to caricature the educated upstart—the man Straker who can quote Beaumarchais, though he cannot pronounce him. This is the second real and great work of Shaw—the letting in of the world on to the stage, as the rivers were let in upon the Augean Stable. He has let a little of the Haymarket into the Haymarket Theatre. He has permitted some whispers of the Strand to enter the Strand Theatre. A variety of solutions in philosophy is as silly as it is in arithmetic, but one may be justly proud of a variety of materials for a solution. After Shaw, one may say, there is nothing that cannot be introduced into a play if one can make it decent, amusing, and relevant. The state of a man’s health, the religion of his childhood, his ear for music, or his ignorance of cookery can all be made vivid if they have anything to do with the subject. A soldier may mention the commissariat as well as the cavalry; and, better still, a priest may mention theology as well as religion. That is being a philosopher; that is bringing the universe on the stage.

Lastly, he has obliterated the mere cynic. He has been so much more cynical than anyone else for the public good that no one has dared since to be really cynical for anything smaller. The Chinese crackers of the frivolous cynics fail to excite us after the dynamite of the serious and aspiring cynic. Bernard Shaw and I (who are growing grey together) can remember an epoch which many of his followers do not know: an epoch of real pessimism. The years from 1885 to 1898 were like the hours of afternoon in a rich house with large rooms; the hours before tea-time. They believed in nothing except good manners; and the essence of good manners is to conceal a yawn. A yawn may be defined as a silent yell.
The power which the young pessimist of that time showed in this direction would have astonished anyone but him. He yawned so wide as to swallow the world. He swallowed the world like an unpleasant pill before retiring to an eternal rest. Now the last and best glory of Shaw is that in the circles where this creature was found, he is not. He has not been killed (I don’t know exactly why), but he has actually turned into a Shaw idealist. This is no exaggeration. I meet men who, when I knew them in 1898, were just a little too lazy to destroy the universe. They are now conscious of not being quite worthy to abolish some prison regulations. This destruction and conversion seem to me the mark of something actually great. It is always great to destroy a type without destroying a man. The followers of Shaw are optimists; some of them are so simple as even to use the word. They are sometimes rather pallid optimists, frequently very worried optimists, occasionally, to tell the truth, rather cross optimists: but they not pessimists; they can exult though they cannot laugh. He has at least withered up among them the mere pose of impossibility. Like every great teacher, he has cursed the barren fig-tree. For nothing except that impossibility is really impossible.

I know it is all very strange. From the height of eight hundred years ago, or of eight hundred years hence, our age must look incredibly odd. We call the twelfth century ascetic. We call our own time hedonist and full of praise and pleasure. But in the ascetic age the love of life was evident and enormous, so that it had to be restrained. In an hedonist age pleasure has always sunk low, so that it has to be encouraged. How high the sea of human happiness rose in the Middle Ages, we now only know by the colossal walls that they built to keep it in bounds. How low human happiness sank in the twentieth century our children will only know by these extraordinary modern books, which tell people that it is a duty to be cheerful and that life is not so bad after all. Humanity never produces optimists till it has ceased to produce happy men. It is strange to be obliged to impose a holiday like a fast, and to drive men to a banquet with spears. But this shall be written of our time: that when the spirit who denies besieged the last citadel, blaspheming life itself, there were some, there was one especially, whose voice was heard and whose spear was never broken.
ROBERT BROWNING

G. K. CHESTERTON
COPYRIGHT © 2014 BY CATHOLIC WAY PUBLISHING.
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
PUBLISHED 1903.

THIS WORK IS PUBLISHED FOR THE GREATER GLORY OF JESUS CHRIST THROUGH HIS
MOST HOLY MOTHER MARY AND FOR THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE MILITANT CHURCH
AND HER MEMBERS.

THE TYPOGRAPHY OF THIS BOOK IS THE PROPERTY OF CATHOLIC WAY PUBLISHING AND
MAY NOT BE REPRODUCED, IN WHOLE OR IN PART, WITHOUT WRITTEN PERMISSION OF
THE PUBLISHER.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

ROBERT BROWNING

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I
BROWNING IN EARLY LIFE

CHAPTER II
EARLY WORKS

CHAPTER III
BROWNING AND HIS MARRIAGE

CHAPTER IV
BROWNING IN ITALY

CHAPTER V
BROWNING IN LATER LIFE

CHAPTER VI
BROWNING AS A LITERARY ARTIST

CHAPTER VII
THE RING AND THE BOOK

CHAPTER VIII
THE PHILOSOPHY OF BROWNING
CHAPTER I

BROWNING IN EARLY LIFE

On the subject of Browning’s work innumerable things have been said and remain to be said; of his life, considered as a narrative of facts, there is little or nothing to say. It was a lucid and public and yet quiet life, which culminated in one great dramatic test of character, and then fell back again into this union of quietude and publicity. And yet, in spite of this, it is a great deal more difficult to speak finally about his life than about his work. His work has the mystery which belongs to the complex; his life the much greater mystery which belongs to the simple. He was clever enough to understand his own poetry; and if he understood it, we can understand it. But he was also entirely unconscious and impulsive, and he was never clever enough to understand his own character; consequently we may be excused if that part of him which was hidden from him is partly hidden from us. The subtle man is always immeasurably easier to understand than the natural man; for the subtle man keeps a diary of his moods, he practises the art of self-analysis and self-revelation, and can tell us how he came to feel this or to say that. But a man like Browning knows no more about the state of his emotions than about the state of his pulse; they are things greater than he, things growing at will, like forces of Nature. There is an old anecdote, probably apocryphal, which describes how a feminine admirer wrote to Browning asking him for the meaning of one of his darker poems, and received the following reply: “When that poem was written, two people knew what it meant—God and Robert Browning. And now God only knows what it means.” This story gives, in all probability, an entirely false impression of Browning’s attitude towards his work. He was a keen artist, a keen scholar, he could put his finger on anything, and he had a memory like the British Museum Library. But the story does, in all probability, give a tolerably accurate picture of Browning’s attitude towards his own emotions and his psychological type. If a man had asked him what some particular allusion to a Persian hero meant he could in all probability have quoted half the epic; if a man had asked him which third cousin of Charlemagne was alluded to in Sordello, he could have given an account of the man and an account of his father and his grandfather. But if a man had asked him what he thought of himself, or what were his emotions an hour before his wedding, he would have replied with perfect sincerity that God alone knew.
This mystery of the unconscious man, far deeper than any mystery of the conscious one, existing as it does in all men, existed peculiarly in Browning, because he was a very ordinary and spontaneous man. The same thing exists to some extent in all history and all affairs. Anything that is deliberate, twisted, created as a trap and a mystery, must be discovered at last; everything that is done naturally remains mysterious. It may be difficult to discover the principles of the Rosicrucians, but it is much easier to discover the principles of the Rosicrucians than the principles of the United States: nor has any secret society kept its aims so quiet as humanity. The way to be inexplicable is to be chaotic, and on the surface this was the quality of Browning’s life; there is the same difference between judging of his poetry and judging of his life, that there is between making a map of a labyrinth and making a map of a mist. The discussion of what some particular allusion in Sordello means has gone on so far, and may go on still, but it has it in its nature to end. The life of Robert Browning, who combines the greatest brain with the most simple temperament known in our annals, would go on for ever if we did not decide to summarise it in a very brief and simple narrative.

Robert Browning was born in Camberwell on May 7th 1812. His father and grandfather had been clerks in the Bank of England, and his whole family would appear to have belonged to the solid and educated middle class—the class which is interested in letters, but not ambitious in them, the class to which poetry is a luxury, but not a necessity.

This actual quality and character of the Browning family shows some tendency to be obscured by matters more remote. It is the custom of all biographers to seek for the earliest traces of a family in distant ages and even in distant lands; and Browning, as it happens, has given them opportunities which tend to lead away the mind from the main matter in hand. There is a tradition, for example, that men of his name were prominent in the feudal ages; it is based upon little beyond a coincidence of surnames and the fact that Browning used a seal with a coat-of-arms. Thousands of middle-class men use such a seal, merely because it is a curiosity or a legacy, without knowing or caring anything about the condition of their ancestors in the Middle Ages. Then, again, there is a theory that he was of Jewish blood; a view which is perfectly conceivable, and which Browning would have been the last to have thought derogatory, but for which, as a matter of fact, there is exceedingly little evidence. The chief reason assigned by his contemporaries for the belief was the fact that he was, without doubt, specially and profoundly interested in Jewish matters. This suggestion, worthless
in any case, would, if anything, tell the other way. For while an Englishman may
be enthusiastic about England, or indignant against England, it never occurred to
any living Englishman to be interested in England. Browning was, like every
other intelligent Aryan, interested in the Jews; but if he was related to every
people in which he was interested, he must have been of extraordinarily mixed
extraction. Thirdly, there is the yet more sensational theory that there was in
Robert Browning a strain of the negro. The supporters of this hypothesis seem to
have little in reality to say, except that Browning’s grandmother was certainly a
Creole. It is said in support of the view that Browning was singularly dark in
early life, and was often mistaken for an Italian. There does not, however, seem
to be anything particular to be deduced from this, except that if he looked like an
Italian, he must have looked exceedingly unlike a negro.

There is nothing valid against any of these three theories, just as there is
nothing valid in their favour; they may, any or all of them, be true, but they are
still irrelevant. They are something that is in history or biography a great deal
worse than being false—they are misleading. We do not want to know about a
man like Browning, whether he had a right to a shield used in the Wars of the
Roses, or whether the tenth grandfather of his Creole grandmother had been
white or black: we want to know something about his family, which is quite a
different thing. We wish to have about Browning not so much the kind of
information which would satisfy Clarendieux King-at-Arms, but the sort of
information which would satisfy us, if we were advertising for a very
confidential secretary, or a very private tutor. We should not be concerned as to
whether the tutor were descended from an Irish king, but we should still be
really concerned about his extraction, about what manner of people his had been
for the last two or three generations. This is the most practical duty of biography,
and this is also the most difficult. It is a great deal easier to hunt a family from
tombstone to tombstone back to the time of Henry II. than to catch and realise
and put upon paper that most nameless and elusive of all things—social tone.

It will be said immediately, and must as promptly be admitted, that we could
find a biographical significance in any of these theories if we looked for it. But it
is, indeed, the sin and snare of biographers that they tend to see significance in
everything; characteristic carelessness if their hero drops his pipe, and
characteristic carefulness if he picks it up again. It is true, assuredly, that all the
three races above named could be connected with Browning’s personality. If we
believed, for instance, that he really came of a race of mediæval barons, we
should say at once that from them he got his pre-eminent spirit of battle: we
should be right, for every line in his stubborn soul and his erect body did really express the fighter; he was always contending, whether it was with a German theory about the Gnostics, or with a stranger who elbowed his wife in a crowd. Again, if we had decided that he was a Jew, we should point out how absorbed he was in the terrible simplicity of monotheism: we should be right, for he was so absorbed. Or again, in the case even of the negro fancy; it would not be difficult for us to suggest a love of colour, a certain mental gaudiness, a pleasure “When reds and blues were indeed red and blue,”
as he says in The Ring and the Book. We should be right; for there really was in Browning a tropical violence of taste, an artistic scheme compounded as it were, of orchids and cockatoos, which, amid our cold English poets, seems scarcelyly European. All this is extremely fascinating; and it may be true. But, as has above been suggested, here comes in the great temptation of this kind of work, the noble temptation to see too much in everything. The biographer can easily see a personal significance in these three hypothetical nationalities. But is there in the world a biographer who could lay his hand upon his heart and say that he would not have seen as much significance in any three other nationalities? If Browning’s ancestors had been Frenchmen, should we not have said that it was from them doubtless that he inherited that logical agility which marks him among English poets? If his grandfather had been a Swede, should we not have said that the old sea-roving blood broke out in bold speculation and insatiable travel? If his great-aunt had been a Red Indian, should we not have said that only in the Ojibways and the Blackfeet do we find the Browning fantasticality combined with the Browning stoicism? This over-readiness to seize hints is an inevitable part of that secret hero-worship which is the heart of biography. The lover of great men sees signs of them long before they begin to appear on the earth, and, like some old mythological chronicler, claims as their heralds the storms and the falling stars.
A certain indulgence must therefore be extended to the present writer if he declines to follow that admirable veteran of Browning study, Dr. Furnivall, into the prodigious investigations which he has been conducting into the condition of the Browning family since the beginning of the world. For his last discovery, the descent of Browning from a footman in the service of a country magnate, there seems to be suggestive, though not decisive evidence. But Browning’s descent from barons, or Jews, or lackeys, or black men, is not the main point touching his family. If the Brownings were of mixed origin, they were so much the more like the great majority of English middle-class people. It is curious that the
romance of race should be spoken of as if it were a thing peculiarly aristocratic; that admiration for rank, or interest in family, should mean only interest in one not very interesting type of rank and family. The truth is that aristocrats exhibit less of the romance of pedigree than any other people in the world. For since it is their principle to marry only within their own class and mode of life, there is no opportunity in their case for any of the more interesting studies in heredity; they exhibit almost the unbroken uniformity of the lower animals. It is in the middle classes that we find the poetry of genealogy; it is the suburban grocer standing at his shop door whom some wild dash of Eastern or Celtic blood may drive suddenly to a whole holiday or a crime. Let us admit then, that it is true that these legends of the Browning family have every abstract possibility. But it is a far more cogent and apposite truth that if a man had knocked at the door of every house in the street where Browning was born, he would have found similar legends in all of them. There is hardly a family in Camberwell that has not a story or two about foreign marriages a few generations back; and in all this the Brownings are simply a typical Camberwell family. The real truth about Browning and men like him can scarcely be better expressed than in the words of that very wise and witty story, Kingsley’s Water Babies, in which the pedigree of the Professor is treated in a manner which is an excellent example of the wild common sense of the book. “His mother was a Dutch woman, and therefore she was born at Curaçoa (of course, you have read your geography and therefore know why), and his father was a Pole, and therefore he was brought up at Petropaulowski (of course, you have learnt your modern politics, and therefore know why), but for all that he was as thorough an Englishman as ever coveted his neighbour’s goods.”

It may be well therefore to abandon the task of obtaining a clear account of Brownings family, and endeavour to obtain, what is much more important, a clear account of his home. For the great central and solid fact, which these heraldic speculations tend inevitably to veil and confuse, is that Browning was a thoroughly typical Englishman of the middle class. He may have had alien blood, and that alien blood, by the paradox we have observed, may have made him more characteristically a native. A phase, a fancy, a metaphor may or may not have been born of eastern or southern elements, but he was, without any question at all, an Englishman of the middle class. Neither all his liberality nor all his learning ever made him anything but an Englishman of the middle class. He expanded his intellectual tolerance until it included the anarchism of Fifine at the Fair and the blasphemous theology of Caliban; but he remained himself an
Englishman of the middle class. He pictured all the passions of the earth since the Fall, from the devouring amorousness of Time’s Revenges to the despotic fantasy of Instans Tyrannus; but he remained himself an Englishman of the middle class. The moment that he came in contact with anything that was slovenly, anything that was lawless, in actual life, something rose up in him, older than any opinions, the blood of generations of good men. He met George Sand and her poetical circle and hated it, with all the hatred of an old city merchant for the irresponsible life. He met the Spiritualists and hated them, with all the hatred of the middle class for borderlands and equivocal positions and playing with fire. His intellect went upon bewildering voyages, but his soul walked in a straight road. He piled up the fantastic towers of his imagination until they eclipsed the planets; but the plan of the foundation on which he built was always the plan of an honest English house in Camberwell. He abandoned, with a ceaseless intellectual ambition, every one of the convictions of his class; but he carried its prejudices into eternity.

It is then of Browning as a member of the middle class, that we can speak with the greatest historical certainty; and it is his immediate forebears who present the real interest to us. His father, Robert Browning, was a man of great delicacy of taste, and to all appearance of an almost exaggerated delicacy of conscience. Every glimpse we have of him suggests that earnest and almost worried kindliness which is the mark of those to whom selfishness, even justifiable selfishness, is really a thing difficult or impossible. In early life Robert Browning senior was placed by his father (who was apparently a father of a somewhat primitive, not to say barbaric, type) in an important commercial position in the West Indies. He threw up the position however, because it involved him in some recognition of slavery. Whereupon his unique parent, in a transport of rage, not only disinherited him and flung him out of doors, but by a superb stroke of humour, which stands alone in the records of parental ingenuity, sent him in a bill for the cost of his education. About the same time that he was suffering for his moral sensibility he was also disturbed about religious matters, and he completed his severance from his father by joining a dissenting sect. He was, in short, a very typical example of the serious middle-class man of the Wilberforce period, a man to whom duty was all in all, and who would revolutionise an empire or a continent for the satisfaction of a single moral scruple. Thus, while he was Puritan at the core, not the ruthless Puritan of the seventeenth, but the humanitarian Puritan of the eighteenth century, he had upon the surface all the tastes and graces of a man of culture. Numerous
accomplishments of the lighter kind, such as drawing and painting in water colours, he possessed; and his feeling for many kinds of literature was fastidious and exact. But the whole was absolutely redolent of the polite severity of the eighteenth century. He lamented his son’s early admiration for Byron, and never ceased adjuring him to model himself upon Pope.

He was, in short, one of the old-fashioned humanitarians of the eighteenth century, a class which we may or may not have conquered in moral theory, but which we most certainly have not conquered in moral practice. Robert Browning senior destroyed all his fortunes in order to protest against black slavery; white slavery may be, as later economists tell us, a thing infinitely worse, but not many men destroy their fortunes in order to protest against it. The ideals of the men of that period appear to us very unattractive; to them duty was a kind of chilly sentiment. But when we think what they did with those cold ideals, we can scarcely feel so superior. They uprooted the enormous Upas of slavery, the tree that was literally as old as the race of man. They altered the whole face of Europe with their deductive fancies. We have ideals that are really better, ideals of passion, of mysticism, of a sense of the youth and adventurousness of the earth; but it will be well for us if we achieve as much by our frenzy as they did by their delicacies. It scarcely seems as if we were as robust in our very robustness as they were robust in their sensibility.

Robert Browning’s mother was the daughter of William Wiedermann, a German merchant settled in Dundee, and married to a Scotch wife. One of the poet’s principal biographers has suggested that from this union of the German and Scotch, Browning got his metaphysical tendency; it is possible; but here again we must beware of the great biographical danger of making mountains out of molehills. What Browning’s mother unquestionably did give to him, was in the way of training—a very strong religious habit, and a great belief in manners. Thomas Carlyle called her “the type of a Scottish gentlewoman,” and the phrase has a very real significance to those who realise the peculiar condition of Scotland, one of the very few European countries where large sections of the aristocracy are Puritans; thus a Scottish gentlewoman combines two descriptions of dignity at the same time. Little more is known of this lady except the fact that after her death Browning could not bear to look at places where she had walked.

Browning’s education in the formal sense reduces itself to a minimum. In very early boyhood he attended a species of dame-school, which, according to some of his biographers, he had apparently to leave because he was too clever to be tolerable. However this may be, he undoubtedly went afterwards to a school kept
by Mr. Ready, at which again he was marked chiefly by precocity. But the boy’s education did not in truth take place at any systematic seat of education; it took place in his own home, where one of the quaintest and most learned and most absurdly indulgent of fathers poured out in an endless stream fantastic recitals from the Greek epics and mediæval chronicles. If we test the matter by the test of actual schools and universities, Browning will appear to be almost the least educated man in English literary history. But if we test it by the amount actually learned, we shall think that he was perhaps the most educated man that ever lived; that he was in fact, if anything, overeducated. In a spirited poem he has himself described how, when he was a small child, his father used to pile up chairs in the drawing-room and call them the city of Troy. Browning came out of the home crammed with all kinds of knowledge—knowledge about the Greek poets, knowledge about the Provençal Troubadours, knowledge about the Jewish Rabbis of the Middle Ages. But along with all this knowledge he carried one definite and important piece of ignorance, an ignorance of the degree to which such knowledge was exceptional. He was no spoilt and self-conscious child, taught to regard himself as clever. In the atmosphere in which he lived learning was a pleasure, and a natural pleasure, like sport or wine. He had in it the pleasure of some old scholar of the Renascence, when grammar itself was as fresh as the flowers of spring. He had no reason to suppose that every one did not join in so admirable a game. His sagacious destiny, while giving him knowledge of everything else, left him in ignorance of the ignorance of the world.

Of his boyish days scarcely any important trace remains, except a kind of diary which contains under one date the laconic statement, “Married two wives this morning.” The insane ingenuity of the biographer would be quite capable of seeing in this a most suggestive foreshadowing of the sexual dualism which is so ably defended in Fifine at the Fair. A great part of his childhood was passed in the society of his only sister Sariana; and it is a curious and touching fact that with her also he passed his last days. From his earliest babyhood he seems to have lived in a more or less stimulating mental atmosphere; but as he emerged into youth he came under great poetic influences, which made his father’s classical poetic tradition look for the time insipid. Browning began to live in the life of his own age.

As a young man he attended classes at University College; beyond this there is little evidence that he was much in touch with intellectual circles outside that of his own family. But the forces that were moving the literary world had long
passed beyond the merely literary area. About the time of Browning’s boyhood a very subtle and profound change was beginning in the intellectual atmosphere of such homes as that of the Brownings. In studying the careers of great men we tend constantly to forget that their youth was generally passed and their characters practically formed in a period long previous to their appearance in history. We think of Milton, the Restoration Puritan, and forget that he grew up in the living shadow of Shakespeare and the full summer of the Elizabethan drama. We realise Garibaldi as a sudden and almost miraculous figure rising about fifty years ago to create the new Kingdom of Italy, and we forget that he must have formed his first ideas of liberty while hearing at his father’s dinner-table that Napoleon was the master of Europe. Similarly, we think of Browning as the great Victorian poet, who lived long enough to have opinions on Mr. Gladstone’s Home Rule Bill, and forget that as a young man he passed a bookstall and saw a volume ticketed “Mr. Shelley’s Atheistic Poem,” and had to search even in his own really cultivated circle for some one who could tell him who Mr. Shelley was. Browning was, in short, born in the afterglow of the great Revolution.

The French Revolution was at root a thoroughly optimistic thing. It may seem strange to attribute optimism to anything so destructive; but, in truth, this particular kind of optimism is inevitably, and by its nature, destructive. The great dominant idea of the whole of that period, the period before, during, and long after the Revolution, is the idea that man would by his nature live in an Eden of dignity, liberty and love, and that artificial and decrepit systems are keeping him out of that Eden. No one can do the least justice to the great Jacobins who does not realise that to them breaking the civilisation of ages was like breaking the cords of a treasure-chest. And just as for more than a century great men had dreamed of this beautiful emancipation, so the dream began in the time of Keats and Shelley to creep down among the dullest professions and the most prosaic classes of society. A spirit of revolt was growing among the young of the middle classes, which had nothing at all in common with the complete and pessimistic revolt against all things in heaven or earth, which has been fashionable among the young in more recent times. The Shelleyan enthusiast was altogether on the side of existence; he thought that every cloud and clump of grass shared his strict republican orthodoxy. He represented, in short, a revolt of the normal against the abnormal; he found himself, so to speak, in the heart of a wholly topsy-turvy and blasphemous state of things, in which God was rebelling against Satan. There began to arise about this time a race of young men like Keats, members of a not
highly cultivated middle class, and even of classes lower, who felt in a hundred ways this obscure alliance with eternal things against temporal and practical ones, and who lived on its imaginative delight. They were a kind of furtive universalist; they had discovered the whole cosmos, and they kept the whole cosmos a secret. They climbed up dark stairs to meagre garrets, and shut themselves in with the gods. Numbers of the great men, who afterwards illuminated the Victorian era, were at this time living in mean streets in magnificent daydreams. Ruskin was solemnly visiting his solemn suburban aunts; Dickens was going to and fro in a blacking factory; Carlyle, slightly older, was still lingering on a poor farm in Dumfriesshire; Keats had not long become the assistant of the country surgeon when Browning was a boy in Camberwell. On all sides there was the first beginning of the aesthetic stir in the middle classes which expressed itself in the combination of so many poetic lives with so many prosaic livelihoods. It was the age of inspired office-boys.

Browning grew up, then, with the growing fame of Shelley and Keats, in the atmosphere of literary youth, fierce and beautiful, among new poets who believed in a new world. It is important to remember this, because the real Browning was a quite different person from the grim moralist and metaphysician who is seen through the spectacles of Browning Societies and University Extension Lecturers. Browning was first and foremost a poet, a man made to enjoy all things visible and invisible, a priest of the higher passions. The misunderstanding that has supposed him to be other than poetical, because his form was often fanciful and abrupt, is really different from the misunderstanding which attaches to most other poets. The opponents of Victor Hugo called him a mere windbag; the opponents of Shakespeare called him a buffoon. But the admirers of Hugo and Shakespeare at least knew better. Now the admirers and opponents of Browning alike make him out to be a pedant rather than a poet. The only difference between the Browningite and the anti-Browningite, is that the second says he was not a poet but a mere philosopher, and the first says he was a philosopher and not a mere poet. The admirer disparages poetry in order to exalt Browning; the opponent exalts poetry in order to disparage Browning; and all the time Browning himself exalted poetry above all earthly things, served it with single-hearted intensity, and stands among the few poets who hardly wrote a line of anything else.

The whole of the boyhood and youth of Robert Browning has as much the quality of pure poetry as the boyhood and youth of Shelley. We do not find in it any trace of the analytical Browning who is believed in by learned ladies and
gentlemen. How indeed would such sympathisers feel if informed that the first poems that Browning wrote in a volume called Incondita were noticed to contain the fault of “too much splendour of language and too little wealth of thought”? They were indeed Byronic in the extreme, and Browning in his earlier appearances in society presents himself in quite a romantic manner. Macready, the actor, wrote of him: “He looks and speaks more like a young poet than any one I have ever seen.” A picturesque tradition remains that Thomas Carlyle, riding out upon one of his solitary gallops necessitated by his physical sufferings, was stopped by one whom he described as a strangely beautiful youth, who poured out to him without preface or apology his admiration for the great philosopher’s works. Browning at this time seems to have left upon many people this impression of physical charm. A friend who attended University College with him says: “He was then a bright handsome youth with long black hair falling over his shoulders.” Every tale that remains of him in connection with this period asserts and reasserts the completely romantic spirit by which he was then possessed. He was fond, for example, of following in the track of gipsy caravans, far across country, and a song which he heard with the refrain, “Following the Queen of the Gipsies oh!” rang in his ears long enough to express itself in his soberer and later days in that splendid poem of the spirit of escape and Bohemianism, The Flight of the Duchess. Such other of these early glimpses of him as remain, depict him as striding across Wimbledon Common with his hair blowing in the wind, reciting aloud passages from Isaiah, or climbing up into the elms above Norwood to look over London by night. It was when looking down from that suburban eyrie over the whole confounding labyrinth of London that he was filled with that great irresponsible benevolence which is the best of the joys of youth, and conceived the idea of a perfectly irresponsible benevolence in the first plan of Pippa Passes. At the end of his father’s garden was a laburnum “heavy with its weight of gold,” and in the tree two nightingales were in the habit of singing against each other, a form of competition which, I imagine, has since become less common in Camberwell. When Browning as a boy was intoxicated with the poetry of Shelley and Keats, he hypnotised himself into something approaching to a positive conviction that these two birds were the spirits of the two great poets who had settled in a Camberwell garden, in order to sing to the only young gentleman who really adored and understood them. This last story is perhaps the most typical of the tone common to all the rest; it would be difficult to find a story which across the gulf of nearly eighty years awakens so vividly a sense of the sumptuous folly of
an intellectual boyhood. With Browning, as with all true poets, passion came first and made intellectual expression, the hunger for beauty making literature as the hunger for bread made a plough. The life he lived in those early days was no life of dull application; there was no poet whose youth was so young. When he was full of years and fame, and delineating in great epics the beauty and horror of the romance of southern Europe, a young man, thinking to please him, said, “There is no romance now except in Italy.” “Well,” said Browning, “I should make an exception of Camberwell.”

Such glimpses will serve to indicate the kind of essential issue that there was in the nature of things between the generation of Browning and the generation of his father. Browning was bound in the nature of things to become at the outset Byronic, and Byronism was not, of course, in reality so much a pessimism about civilised things as an optimism about savage things. This great revolt on behalf of the elemental which Keats and Shelley represented was bound first of all to occur. Robert Browning junior had to be a part of it, and Robert Browning senior had to go back to his water colours and the faultless couplets of Pope with the full sense of the greatest pathos that the world contains, the pathos of the man who has produced something that he cannot understand.

The earliest works of Browning bear witness, without exception, to this ardent and somewhat sentimental evolution. Pauline appeared anonymously in 1833. It exhibits the characteristic mark of a juvenile poem, the general suggestion that the author is a thousand years old. Browning calls it a fragment of a confession; and Mr. Johnson Fox, an old friend of Browning’s father, who reviewed it for Tait’s Magazine, said, with truth, that it would be difficult to find anything more purely confessional. It is the typical confession of a boy laying bare all the spiritual crimes of infidelity and moral waste, in a state of genuine ignorance of the fact that every one else has committed them. It is wholesome and natural for youth to go about confessing that the grass is green, and whispering to a priest hoarsely that it has found a sun in heaven. But the records of that particular period of development, even when they are as ornate and beautiful as Pauline, are not necessarily or invariably wholesome reading. The chief interest of Pauline, with all its beauties, lies in a certain almost humorous singularity, the fact that Browning, of all people, should have signalised his entrance into the world of letters with a poem which may fairly be called morbid. But this is a morbidity so general and recurrent that it may be called in a contradictory phrase a healthy morbidity; it is a kind of intellectual measles. No one of any degree of maturity in reading Pauline will be quite so horrified at the sins of the young
gentleman who tells the story as he seems to be himself. It is the utterance of that bitter and heartrending period of youth which comes before we realise the one grand and logical basis of all optimism—the doctrine of original sin. The boy at this stage being an ignorant and inhuman idealist, regards all his faults as frightful secret malformations, and it is only later that he becomes conscious of that large and beautiful and benignant explanation that the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. That Browning, whose judgment on his own work was one of the best in the world, took this view of Pauline in after years is quite obvious. He displayed a very manly and unique capacity of really laughing at his own work without being in the least ashamed of it. “This,” he said of Pauline, “is the only crab apple that remains of the shapely tree of life in my fool’s paradise.” It would be difficult to express the matter more perfectly. Although Pauline was published anonymously, its authorship was known to a certain circle, and Browning began to form friendships in the literary world. He had already become acquainted with two of the best friends he was ever destined to have, Alfred Domett, celebrated in “The Guardian Angel” and “Waring,” and his cousin Silverthorne, whose death is spoken of in one of the most perfect lyrics in the English language, Browning’s “May and Death.” These were men of his own age, and his manner of speaking of them gives us many glimpses into that splendid world of comradeship which Plato and Walt Whitman knew, with its endless days and its immortal nights. Browning had a third friend destined to play an even greater part in his life, but who belonged to an older generation and a statelier school of manners and scholarship. Mr. Kenyon was a schoolfellow of Browning’s father, and occupied towards his son something of the position of an irresponsible uncle. He was a rotund, rosy old gentleman, fond of comfort and the courtesies of life, but fond of them more for others, though much for himself. Elizabeth Barrett in after years wrote of “the brightness of his carved speech,” which would appear to suggest that he practised that urbane and precise order of wit which was even then old-fashioned. Yet, notwithstanding many talents of this kind, he was not so much an able man as the natural friend and equal of able men.

Browning’s circle of friends, however, widened about this time in all directions. One friend in particular he made, the Comte de Ripert-Monclar, a French Royalist with whom he prosecuted with renewed energy his studies in the mediæval and Renaissance schools of philosophy. It was the Count who suggested that Browning should write a poetical play on the subject of Paracelsus. After reflection, indeed, the Count retracted this advice on the
ground that the history of the great mystic gave no room for love. Undismayed by this terrible deficiency, Browning caught up the idea with characteristic enthusiasm, and in 1835 appeared the first of his works which he himself regarded as representative—Paracelsus. The poem shows an enormous advance in technical literary power; but in the history of Browning’s mind it is chiefly interesting as giving an example of a peculiarity which clung to him during the whole of his literary life, an intense love of the holes and corners of history. Fifty-two years afterwards he wrote Parleyings with certain Persons of Importance in their Day, the last poem published in his lifetime; and any reader of that remarkable work will perceive that the common characteristic of all these persons is not so much that they were of importance in their day as that they are of no importance in ours. The same eccentric fastidiousness worked in him as a young man when he wrote Paracelsus and Sordello. Nowhere in Browning’s poetry can we find any very exhaustive study of any of the great men who are the favourites of the poet and moralist. He has written about philosophy and ambition and music and morals, but he has written nothing about Socrates or Cæsar or Napoleon, or Beethoven or Mozart, or Buddha or Mahomet. When he wishes to describe a political ambition he selects that entirely unknown individual, King Victor of Sardinia. When he wishes to express the most perfect soul of music, he unearths some extraordinary persons called Abt Vogler and Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha. When he wishes to express the largest and sublimest scheme of morals and religion which his imagination can conceive, he does not put it into the mouth of any of the great spiritual leaders of mankind, but into the mouth of an obscure Jewish Rabbi of the name of Ben Ezra. It is fully in accordance with this fascinating craze of his that when he wishes to study the deification of the intellect and the disinterested pursuit of the things of the mind, he does not select any of the great philosophers from Plato to Darwin, whose investigations are still of some importance in the eyes of the world. He selects the figure of all figures most covered with modern satire and pity, the à priori scientist of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. His supreme type of the human intellect is neither the academic nor the positivist, but the alchemist. It is difficult to imagine a turn of mind constituting a more complete challenge to the ordinary modern point of view. To the intellect of our time the wild investigators of the school of Paracelsus seem to be the very crown and flower of futility, they are collectors of straws and careful misers of dust. But for all that Browning was right. Any critic who understands the true spirit of medæval science can see that he was right; no critic can see how right he was unless he understands the spirit
of mediaeval science as thoroughly as he did. In the character of Paracelsus, Browning wished to paint the dangers and disappointments which attend the man who believes merely in the intellect. He wished to depict the fall of the logician; and with a perfect and unerring instinct he selected a man who wrote and spoke in the tradition of the Middle Ages, the most thoroughly and even painfully logical period that the world has ever seen. If he had chosen an ancient Greek philosopher, it would have been open to the critic to have said that that philosopher relied to some extent upon the most sunny and graceful social life that ever flourished. If he had made him a modern sociological professor, it would have been possible to object that his energies were not wholly concerned with truth, but partly with the solid and material satisfaction of society. But the man truly devoted to the things of the mind was the mediaeval magician. It is a remarkable fact that one civilisation does not satisfy itself by calling another civilisation wicked—it calls it uncivilised. We call the Chinese barbarians, and they call us barbarians. The mediaeval state, like China, was a foreign civilisation, and this was its supreme characteristic, that it cared for the things of the mind for their own sake. To complain of the researches of its sages on the ground that they were not materially fruitful, is to act as we should act in telling a gardener that his roses were not as digestible as our cabbages. It is not only true that the mediaeval philosophers never discovered the steam-engine; it is quite equally true that they never tried. The Eden of the Middle Ages was really a garden, where each of God’s flowers—truth and beauty and reason—flourished for its own sake, and with its own name. The Eden of modern progress is a kitchen garden.

It would have been hard, therefore, for Browning to have chosen a better example for his study of intellectual egotism than Paracelsus. Modern life accuses the mediaeval tradition of crushing the intellect; Browning, with a truer instinct, accuses that tradition of over-glorifying it. There is, however, another and even more important deduction to be made from the moral of Paracelsus. The usual accusation against Browning is that he was consumed with logic; that he thought all subjects to be the proper pabulum of intellectual disquisition; that he gloried chiefly in his own power of plucking knots to pieces and rending fallacies in two; and that to this method he sacrificed deliberately, and with complete self-complacency, the element of poetry and sentiment. To people who imagine Browning to have been this frigid believer in the intellect there is only one answer necessary or sufficient. It is the fact that he wrote a play designed to destroy the whole of this intellectualist fallacy at the age of twenty-three.
Paracelsus was in all likelihood Browning’s introduction to the literary world. It was many years, and even many decades, before he had anything like a public appreciation, but a very great part of the minority of those who were destined to appreciate him came over to his standard upon the publication of Paracelsus. The celebrated John Forster had taken up Paracelsus “as a thing to slate,” and had ended its perusal with the wildest curiosity about the author and his works. John Stuart Mill, never backward in generosity, had already interested himself in Browning, and was finally converted by the same poem. Among other early admirers were Landor, Leigh Hunt, Horne, Serjeant Talfourd, and Monckton-Milnes. One man of even greater literary stature seems to have come into Browning’s life about this time, a man for whom he never ceased to have the warmest affection and trust. Browning was, indeed, one of the very few men of that period who got on perfectly with Thomas Carlyle. It is precisely one of those little things which speak volumes for the honesty and unfathomable good humour of Browning, that Carlyle, who had a reckless contempt for most other poets of his day, had something amounting to a real attachment to him. He would run over to Paris for the mere privilege of dining with him. Browning, on the other hand, with characteristic impetuosity, passionately defended and justified Carlyle in all companies. “I have just seen dear Carlyle,” he writes on one occasion; “catch me calling people dear in a hurry, except in a letter beginning.” He sided with Carlyle in the vexed question of the Carlyle domestic relations, and his impression of Mrs. Carlyle was that she was “a hard unlovable woman.” As, however, it is on record that he once, while excitedly explaining some point of mystical philosophy, put down Mrs. Carlyle’s hot kettle on the hearthrug, any frigidity that he may have observed in her manner may possibly find a natural explanation. His partisanship in the Carlyle affair, which was characteristically headlong and human, may not throw much light on that painful problem itself, but it throws a great deal of light on the character of Browning, which was pugnaciously proud of its friends, and had what may almost be called a lust of loyalty. Browning was not capable of that most sagacious detachment which enabled Tennyson to say that he could not agree that the Carlyles ought never to have married, since if they had each married elsewhere there would have been four miserable people instead of two.

Among the motley and brilliant crowd with which Browning had now begun to mingle, there was no figure more eccentric and spontaneous than that of Macready the actor. This extraordinary person, a man living from hand to mouth in all things spiritual and pecuniary, a man feeding upon flying emotions,
conceived something like an attraction towards Browning, spoke of him as the very ideal of a young poet, and in a moment of peculiar excitement suggested to him the writing of a great play. Browning was a man fundamentally indeed more steadfast and prosaic, but on the surface fully as rapid and easily infected as Macready. He immediately began to plan out a great historical play, and selected for his subject “Strafford.”

In Browning’s treatment of the subject there is something more than a trace of his Puritan and Liberal upbringing. It is one of the very earliest of the really important works in English literature which are based on the Parliamentarian reading of the incidents of the time of Charles I. It is true that the finest element in the play is the opposition between Strafford and Pym, an opposition so complete, so lucid, so consistent, that it has, so to speak, something of the friendly openness and agreement which belongs to an alliance. The two men love each other and fight each other, and do the two things at the same time completely. This is a great thing of which even to attempt the description. It is easy to have the impartiality which can speak judicially of both parties, but it is not so easy to have that larger and higher impartiality which can speak passionately on behalf of both parties. Nevertheless, it may be permissible to repeat that there is in the play a definite trace of Browning’s Puritan education and Puritan historical outlook.

For Strafford is, of course, an example of that most difficult of all literary works—a political play. The thing has been achieved once at least admirably in Shakespeare’s Julius Cæsar, and something like it, though from a more one-sided and romantic stand-point, has been done excellently in L’Aiglon. But the difficulties of such a play are obvious on the face of the matter. In a political play the principal characters are not merely men. They are symbols, arithmetical figures representing millions of other men outside. It is, by dint of elaborate stage management, possible to bring a mob upon the boards, but the largest mob ever known is nothing but a floating atom of the people; and the people of which the politician has to think does not consist of knots of rioters in the street, but of some million absolutely distinct individuals, each sitting in his own breakfast room reading his own morning paper. To give even the faintest suggestion of the strength and size of the people in this sense in the course of a dramatic performance is obviously impossible. That is why it is so easy on the stage to concentrate all the pathos and dignity upon such persons as Charles I. and Mary Queen of Scots, the vampires of their people, because within the minute limits of a stage there is room for their small virtues and no room for their enormous
crimes. It would be impossible to find a stronger example than the case of Strafford. It is clear that no one could possibly tell the whole truth about the life and death of Strafford, politically considered, in a play. Strafford was one of the greatest men ever born in England, and he attempted to found a great English official despotism. That is to say, he attempted to found something which is so different from what has actually come about that we can in reality scarcely judge of it, any more than we can judge whether it would be better to live in another planet, or pleasanter to have been born a dog or an elephant. It would require enormous imagination to reconstruct the political ideals of Strafford. Now Browning, as we all know, got over the matter in his play, by practically denying that Strafford had any political ideals at all. That is to say, while crediting Strafford with all his real majesty of intellect and character, he makes the whole of his political action dependent upon his passionate personal attachment to the King. This is unsatisfactory; it is in reality a dodging of the great difficulty of the political play. That difficulty, in the case of any political problem, is, as has been said, great. It would be very hard, for example, to construct a play about Mr. Gladstone’s Home Rule Bill. It would be almost impossible to get expressed in a drama of some five acts and some twenty characters anything so ancient and complicated as that Irish problem, the roots of which lie in the darkness of the age of Strongbow, and the branches of which spread out to the remotest commonwealths of the East and West. But we should scarcely be satisfied if a dramatist overcame the difficulty by ascribing Mr. Gladstone’s action in the Home Rule question to an overwhelming personal affection for Mr. Healy. And in thus basing Strafford’s action upon personal and private reasons, Browning certainly does some injustice to the political greatness, of Strafford. To attribute Mr. Gladstone’s conversion to Home Rule to an infatuation such as that suggested above, would certainly have the air of implying that the writer thought the Home Rule doctrine a peculiar or untenable one. Similarly, Browning’s choice of a motive for Strafford has very much the air of an assumption that there was nothing to be said on public grounds for Strafford’s political ideal. Now this is certainly not the case. The Puritans in the great struggles of the reign of Charles I. may have possessed more valuable ideals than the Royalists, but it is a very vulgar error to suppose that they were any more idealistic. In Browning’s play Pym is made almost the incarnation of public spirit, and Strafford of private ties. But not only may an upholder of despotism be public-spirited, but in the case of prominent upholders of it like Strafford he generally is. Despotism indeed, and attempts at despotism, like that of Strafford, are a kind
of disease of public spirit. They represent, as it were, the drunkenness of responsibility. It is when men begin to grow desperate in their love for the people, when they are overwhelmed with the difficulties and blunders of humanity, that they fall back upon a wild desire to manage everything themselves. Their faith in themselves is only a disillusionment with mankind. They are in that most dreadful position, dreadful alike in personal and public affairs—the position of the man who has lost faith and not lost love. This belief that all would go right if we could only get the strings into our own hands is a fallacy almost without exception, but nobody can justly say that it is not public-spirited. The sin and sorrow of despotism is not that it does not love men, but that it loves them too much and trusts them too little. Therefore from age to age in history arise these great despotic dreamers, whether they be Royalists or Imperialists or even Socialists, who have at root this idea, that the world would enter into rest if it went their way and forswore altogether the right of going its own way. When a man begins to think that the grass will not grow at night unless he lies awake to watch it, he generally ends either in an asylum or on the throne of an Emperor. Of these men Strafford was one, and we cannot but feel that Browning somewhat narrows the significance and tragedy of his place in history by making him merely the champion of a personal idiosyncrasy against a great public demand. Strafford was something greater than this; if indeed, when we come to think of it, a man can be anything greater than the friend of another man. But the whole question is interesting, because Browning, although he never again attacked a political drama of such palpable importance as Strafford, could never keep politics altogether out of his dramatic work. King Victor and King Charles, which followed it, is a political play, the study of a despotic instinct much meaner than that of Strafford. Colombe’s Birthday, again, is political as well as romantic. Politics in its historic aspect would seem to have had a great fascination for him, as indeed it must have for all ardent intellects, since it is the one thing in the world that is as intellectual as the Encyclopædia Britannica and as rapid as the Derby.

One of the favourite subjects among those who like to conduct long controversies about Browning (and their name is legion) is the question of whether Browning’s plays, such as Strafford, were successes upon the stage. As they are never agreed about what constitutes a success on the stage, it is difficult to adjudge their quarrels. But the general fact is very simple; such a play as Strafford was not a gigantic theatrical success, and nobody, it is to be presumed, ever imagined that it would be. On the other hand, it was certainly not a failure,
but was enjoyed and applauded as are hundreds of excellent plays which run only for a week or two, as many excellent plays do, and as all plays ought to do. Above all, the definite success which attended the representation of Strafford from the point of view of the more educated and appreciative was quite enough to establish Browning in a certain definite literary position. As a classical and established personality he did not come into his kingdom for years and decades afterwards; not, indeed, until he was near to entering upon the final rest. But as a detached and eccentric personality, as a man who existed and who had arisen on the outskirts of literature, the world began to be conscious of him at this time.

Of what he was personally at the period that he thus became personally apparent, Mrs. Bridell Fox has left a very vivid little sketch. She describes how Browning called at the house (he was acquainted with her father), and finding that gentleman out, asked with a kind of abrupt politeness if he might play on the piano. This touch is very characteristic of the mingled aplomb and unconsciousness of Browning’s social manner. “He was then,” she writes, “slim and dark, and very handsome, and—may I hint it?—just a trifle of a dandy, addicted to lemon-coloured kid gloves and such things, quite the glass of fashion and the mould of form. But full of ‘ambition,’ eager for success, eager for fame, and, what is more, determined to conquer fame and to achieve success.” That is as good a portrait as we can have of the Browning of these days—quite self-satisfied, but not self-conscious young man; one who had outgrown, but only just outgrown, the pure romanticism of his boyhood, which made him run after gipsy caravans and listen to nightingales in the wood; a man whose incandescent vitality, now that it had abandoned gipsies and not yet immersed itself in casuistical poems, devoted itself excitedly to trifles, such as lemon-coloured kid gloves and fame. But a man still above all things perfectly young and natural, professing that foppery which follows the fashions, and not that sillier and more demoralising foppery which defies them. Just as he walked in coolly and yet impulsively into a private drawing-room and offered to play, so he walked at this time into the huge and crowded salon of European literature and offered to sing.
CHAPTER II

EARLY WORKS

In 1840 Sordello was published. Its reception by the great majority of readers, including some of the ablest men of the time, was a reception of a kind probably unknown in the rest of literary history, a reception that was neither praise nor blame. It was perhaps best expressed by Carlyle, who wrote to say that his wife had read Sordello with great interest, and wished to know whether Sordello was a man, or a city, or a book. Better known, of course, is the story of Tennyson, who said that the first line of the poem—

"Who will, may hear Sordello’s story told,"
and the last line—
"Who would, has heard Sordello’s story told,"
were the only two lines in the poem that he understood, and they were lies.

Perhaps the best story, however, of all the cycle of Sordello legends is that which is related of Douglas Jerrold. He was recovering from an illness; and having obtained permission for the first time to read a little during the day, he picked up a book from a pile beside the bed and began Sordello. No sooner had he done so than he turned deadly pale, put down the book, and said, “My God! I’m an idiot. My health is restored, but my mind’s gone. I can’t understand two consecutive lines of an English poem.” He then summoned his family and silently gave the book into their hands, asking for their opinion on the poem; and as the shadow of perplexity gradually passed over their faces, he heaved a sigh of relief and went to sleep. These stories, whether accurate or no, do undoubtedly represent the very peculiar reception accorded to Sordello, a reception which, as I have said, bears no resemblance whatever to anything in the way of eulogy or condemnation that had ever been accorded to a work of art before. There had been authors whom it was fashionable to boast of admiring and authors whom it was fashionable to boast of despising; but with Sordello enters into literary history the Browning of popular badinage, the author whom it is fashionable to boast of not understanding.

Putting aside for the moment the literary qualities which are to be found in the poem, when it becomes intelligible, there is one question very relevant to the fame and character of Browning which is raised by Sordello when it is considered, as most people consider it, as hopelessly unintelligible. It really
throws some light upon the reason of Browning’s obscurity. The ordinary theory of Browning’s obscurity is to the effect that it was a piece of intellectual vanity indulged in more and more insolently as his years and fame increased. There are at least two very decisive objections to this popular explanation. In the first place, it must emphatically be said for Browning that in all the numerous records and impressions of him throughout his long and very public life, there is not one iota of evidence that he was a man who was intellectually vain. The evidence is entirely the other way. He was vain of many things, of his physical health, for example, and even more of the physical health which he contrived to bestow for a certain period upon his wife. From the records of his early dandyism, his flowing hair and his lemon-coloured gloves, it is probable enough that he was vain of his good looks. He was vain of his masculinity, his knowledge of the world, and he was, I fancy, decidedly vain of his prejudices, even, it might be said, vain of being vain of them. But everything is against the idea that he was much in the habit of thinking of himself in his intellectual aspect. In the matter of conversation, for example, some people who liked him found him genial, talkative, anecdotal, with a certain strengthening and sanative quality in his mere bodily presence. Some people who did not like him found him a mere frivolous chatterer, afflicted with bad manners. One lady, who knew him well, said that, though he only met you in a crowd and made some commonplace remark, you went for the rest of the day with your head up. Another lady who did not know him, and therefore disliked him, asked after a dinner party, “Who was that too-exuberant financier?” These are the diversities of feeling about him. But they all agree in one point—that he did not talk cleverly, or try to talk cleverly, as that proceeding is understood in literary circles. He talked positively, he talked a great deal, but he never attempted to give that neat and aesthetic character to his speech which is almost invariable in the case of the man who is vain of his mental superiority. When he did impress people with mental gymnastics, it was mostly in the form of pouring out, with passionate enthusiasm, whole epics written by other people, which is the last thing that the literary egotist would be likely to waste his time over. We have therefore to start with an enormous psychological improbability that Browning made his poems complicated from mere pride in his powers and contempt of his readers.

There is, however, another very practical objection to the ordinary theory that Browning’s obscurity was a part of the intoxication of fame and intellectual consideration. We constantly hear the statement that Browning’s intellectual complexity increased with his later poems, but the statement is simply not true.
Sordello, to the indescribable density of which he never afterwards even approached, was begun before Strafford, and was therefore the third of his works, and even if we adopt his own habit of ignoring Pauline, the second. He wrote the greater part of it when he was twenty-four. It was in his youth, at the time when a man is thinking of love and publicity, of sunshine and singing birds, that he gave birth to this horror of great darkness; and the more we study the matter with any knowledge of the nature of youth, the more we shall come to the conclusion that Browning’s obscurity had altogether the opposite origin to that which is usually assigned to it. He was not unintelligible because he was proud, but unintelligible because he was humble. He was not unintelligible because his thoughts were vague, but because to him they were obvious.

A man who is intellectually vain does not make himself incomprehensible, because he is so enormously impressed with the difference between his readers’ intelligence and his own that he talks down to them with elaborate repetition and lucidity. What poet was ever vainer than Byron? What poet was ever so magnificently lucid? But a young man of genius who has a genuine humility in his heart does not elaborately explain his discoveries, because he does not think that they are discoveries. He thinks that the whole street is humming with his ideas, and that the postman and the tailor are poets like himself. Browning’s impenetrable poetry was the natural expression of this beautiful optimism. Sordello was the most glorious compliment that has ever been paid to the average man.

In the same manner, of course, outward obscurity is in a young author a mark of inward clarity. A man who is vague in his ideas does not speak obscurely, because his own dazed and drifting condition leads him to clutch at phrases like ropes and use the formulæ that every one understands. No one ever found Miss Marie Corelli obscure, because she believes only in words. But if a young man really has ideas of his own, he must be obscure at first, because he lives in a world of his own in which there are symbols and correspondences and categories unknown to the rest of the world. Let us take an imaginary example. Suppose that a young poet had developed by himself a peculiar idea that all forms of excitement, including religious excitement, were a kind of evil intoxication, he might say to himself continually that churches were in reality taverns, and this idea would become so fixed in his mind that he would forget that no such association existed in the minds of others. And suppose that in pursuance of this general idea, which is a perfectly clear and intellectual idea, though a very silly one, he were to say that he believed in Puritanism without its theology, and were
to repeat this idea also to himself until it became instinctive and familiar, such a man might take up a pen, and under the impression that he was saying something figurative indeed, but quite clear and suggestive, write some such sentence as this, “You will not get the godless Puritan into your white taverns,” and no one in the length and breadth of the country could form the remotest notion of what he could mean. So it would have been in any example, for instance, of a man who made some philosophical discovery and did not realise how far the world was from it. If it had been possible for a poet in the sixteenth century to hit upon and learn to regard as obvious the evolutionary theory of Darwin, he might have written down some such line as “the radiant offspring of the ape,” and the maddest volumes of mediaeval natural history would have been ransacked for the meaning of the allusion. The more fixed and solid and sensible the idea appeared to him, the more dark and fantastic it would have appeared to the world. Most of us indeed, if we ever say anything valuable, say it when we are giving expression to that part of us which has become as familiar and invisible as the pattern on our wall paper. It is only when an idea has become a matter of course to the thinker that it becomes startling to the world.

It is worth while to dwell upon this preliminary point of the ground of Browning’s obscurity, because it involves an important issue about him. Our whole view of Browning is bound to be absolutely different, and I think absolutely false, if we start with the conception that he was what the French call an intellectual. If we see Browning with the eyes of his particular followers, we shall inevitably think this. For his followers are pre-eminently intellectuals, and there never lived upon the earth a great man who was so fundamentally different from his followers. Indeed, he felt this heartily and even humorously himself. “Wilkes was no Wilkite,” he said, “and I am very far from being a Browningite.” We shall, as I say, utterly misunderstand Browning at every step of his career if we suppose that he was the sort of man who would be likely to take a pleasure in asserting the subtlety and abstruseness of his message. He took pleasure beyond all question in himself; in the strictest sense of the word he enjoyed himself. But his conception of himself was never that of the intellectual. He conceived himself rather as a sanguine and strenuous man, a great fighter. “I was ever,” as he says, “a fighter.” His faults, a certain occasional fierceness and grossness, were the faults that are counted as virtues among navvies and sailors and most primitive men. His virtues, boyishness and absolute fidelity, and a love of plain words and things are the virtues which are counted as vices among the æsthetic prigs who pay him the greatest honour. He had his more objectionable side, like
other men, but it had nothing to do with literary egotism. He was not vain of being an extraordinary man. He was only somewhat excessively vain of being an ordinary one.

The Browning then who published Sordello we have to conceive, not as a young pedant anxious to exaggerate his superiority to the public, but as a hot-headed, strong-minded, inexperienced, and essentially humble man, who had more ideas than he knew how to disentangle from each other. If we compare, for example, the complexity of Browning with the clarity of Matthew Arnold, we shall realise that the cause lies in the fact that Matthew Arnold was an intellectual aristocrat, and Browning an intellectual democrat. The particular peculiarities of Sordello illustrate the matter very significantly. A very great part of the difficulty of Sordello, for instance, is in the fact that before the reader even approaches to tackling the difficulties of Browning’s actual narrative, he is apparently expected to start with an exhaustive knowledge of that most shadowy and bewildering of all human epochs—the period of the Guelph and Ghibelline struggles in mediæval Italy. Here, of course, Browning simply betrays that impetuous humility which we have previously observed. His father was a student of mediæval chronicles, he had himself imbibed that learning in the same casual manner in which a boy learns to walk or to play cricket. Consequently in a literary sense he rushed up to the first person he met and began talking about Ecelo and Taurello Salinguerra with about as much literary egotism as an English baby shows when it talks English to an Italian organ grinder. Beyond this the poem of Sordello, powerful as it is, does not present any very significant advance in Browning’s mental development on that already represented by Pauline and Paracelsus. Pauline, Paracelsus, and Sordello stand together in the general fact that they are all, in the excellent phrase used about the first by Mr. Johnson Fox, “confessional.” All three are analyses of the weakness which every artistic temperament finds in itself. Browning is still writing about himself, a subject of which he, like all good and brave men, was profoundly ignorant. This kind of self-analysis is always misleading. For we do not see in ourselves those dominant traits strong enough to force themselves out in action which our neighbours see. We see only a welter of minute mental experiences which include all the sins that were ever committed by Nero or Sir Willoughby Patterne. When studying ourselves, we are looking at a fresco with a magnifying glass. Consequently, these early impressions which great men have given of themselves are nearly always slanders upon themselves, for the strongest man is weak to his own conscience, and Hamlet flourished to a certainty even inside
Napoleon. So it was with Browning, who when he was nearly eighty was destined to write with the hilarity of a schoolboy, but who wrote in his boyhood poems devoted to analysing the final break-up of intellect and soul.

Sordello, with all its load of learning, and almost more oppressive load of beauty, has never had any very important influence even upon Browningites, and with the rest of the world the name has passed into a jest. The most truly memorable thing about it was Browning’s saying in answer to all gibes and misconceptions, a saying which expresses better than anything else what genuine metal was in him, “I blame no one, least of all myself, who did my best then and since.” This is indeed a model for all men of letters who do not wish to retain only the letters and to lose the man.

When next Browning spoke, it was from a greater height and with a new voice. His visit to Asolo, “his first love,” as he said, “among Italian cities,” coincided with the stir and transformation in his spirit and the breaking up of that splendid palace of mirrors in which a man like Byron had lived and died. In 1841 Pippa Passes appeared, and with it the real Browning of the modern world. He had made the discovery which Byron never made, but which almost every young man does at last make—the thrilling discovery that he is not Robinson Crusoe. Pippa Passes is the greatest poem ever written, with the exception of one or two by Walt Whitman, to express the sentiment of the pure love of humanity. The phrase has unfortunately a false and pedantic sound. The love of humanity is a thing supposed to be professed only by vulgar and officious philanthropists, or by saints of a superhuman detachment and universality. As a matter of fact, love of humanity is the commonest and most natural of the feelings of a fresh nature, and almost every one has felt it alight capriciously upon him when looking at a crowded park or a room full of dancers. The love of those whom we do not know is quite as eternal a sentiment as the love of those whom we do know. In our friends the richness of life is proved to us by what we have gained; in the faces in the street the richness of life is proved to us by the hint of what we have lost. And this feeling for strange faces and strange lives, when it is felt keenly by a young man, almost always expresses itself in a desire after a kind of vagabond beneficence, a desire to go through the world scattering goodness like a capricious god. It is desired that mankind should hunt in vain for its best friend as it would hunt for a criminal; that he should be an anonymous Saviour, an unrecorded Christ. Browning, like every one else, when awakened to the beauty and variety of men, dreamed of this arrogant self-effacement. He has written of himself that he had long thought vaguely of a being passing through the world,
obscure and unnameable, but moulding the destinies of others to mightier and better issues. Then his almost faultless artistic instinct came in and suggested that this being, whom he dramatised as the work-girl, Pippa, should be even unconscious of anything but her own happiness, and should sway men’s lives with a lonely mirth. It was a bold and moving conception to show us these mature and tragic human groups all at the supreme moment eavesdropping upon the solitude of a child. And it was an even more precise instinct which made Browning make the errant benefactor a woman. A man’s good work is effected by doing what he does, a woman’s by being what she is.

There is one other point about Pippa Passes which is worth a moment’s attention. The great difficulty with regard to the understanding of Browning is the fact that, to all appearance, scarcely any one can be induced to take him seriously as a literary artist. His adversaries consider his literary vagaries a disqualification for every position among poets; and his admirers regard those vagaries with the affectionate indulgence of a circle of maiden aunts towards a boy home for the holidays. Browning is supposed to do as he likes with form, because he had such a profound scheme of thought. But, as a matter of fact, though few of his followers will take Browning’s literary form seriously, he took his own literary form very seriously. Now Pippa Passes is, among other things, eminently remarkable as a very original artistic form, a series of disconnected but dramatic scenes which have only in common the appearance of one figure. For this admirable literary departure Browning, amid all the laudations of his “mind” and his “message,” has scarcely ever had credit. And just as we should, if we took Browning seriously as a poet, see that he had made many noble literary forms, so we should also see that he did make from time to time certain definite literary mistakes. There is one of them, a glaring one, in Pippa Passes; and, as far as I know, no critic has ever thought enough of Browning as an artist to point it out. It is a gross falsification of the whole beauty of Pippa Passes to make the Monseigneur and his accomplice in the last act discuss a plan touching the fate of Pippa herself. The whole central and splendid idea of the drama is the fact that Pippa is utterly remote from the grand folk whose lives she troubles and transforms. To make her in the end turn out to be the niece of one of them, is like a whiff from an Adelphi melodrama, an excellent thing in its place, but destructive of the entire conception of Pippa. Having done that, Browning might just as well have made Sebald turn out to be her long lost brother, and Luigi a husband to whom she was secretly married. Browning made this mistake when his own splendid artistic power was only growing, and its merits and its faults in
a tangle. But its real literary merits and its real literary faults have alike remained unrecognised under the influence of that unfortunate intellectualism which idolises Browning as a metaphysician and neglects him as a poet. But a better test was coming. Browning’s poetry, in the most strictly poetical sense, reached its flower in Dramatic Lyrics, published in 1842. Here he showed himself a picturesque and poignant artist in a wholly original manner. And the two main characteristics of the work were the two characteristics most commonly denied to Browning, both by his opponents and his followers, passion and beauty; but beauty had enlarged her boundaries in new modes of dramatic arrangement, and passion had found new voices in fantastic and realistic verse. Those who suppose Browning to be a wholly philosophic poet, number a great majority of his commentators. But when we come to look at the actual facts, they are strangely and almost unexpectedly otherwise.

Let any one who believes in the arrogantly intellectual character of Browning’s poetry run through the actual repertoire of the Dramatic Lyrics. The first item consists of those splendid war chants called “Cavalier Tunes.” I do not imagine that any one will maintain that there is any very mysterious metaphysical aim in them. The second item is the fine poem “The Lost Leader,” a poem which expresses in perfectly lucid and lyrical verse a perfectly normal and old-fashioned indignation. It is the same, however far we carry the query. What theory does the next poem, “How they brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix,” express, except the daring speculation that it is often exciting to ride a good horse in Belgium? What theory does the poem after that, “Through the Metidja to Abd-el-Kadr,” express, except that it is also frequently exciting to ride a good horse in Africa? Then comes “Nationality in Drinks,” a mere technical oddity without a gleam of philosophy; and after that those two entirely exquisite “Garden Fancies,” the first of which is devoted to the abstruse thesis that a woman may be charming, and the second to the equally abstruse thesis that a book may be a bore. Then comes “The Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister,” from which the most ingenious “Browning student” cannot extract anything except that people sometimes hate each other in Spain; and then “The Laboratory,” from which he could extract nothing except that people sometimes hate each other in France. This is a perfectly honest record of the poems as they stand. And the first eleven poems read straight off are remarkable for these two obvious characteristics—first, that they contain not even a suggestion of anything that could be called philosophy; and second, that they contain a considerable proportion of the best and most typical poems that Browning ever
wrote. It may be repeated that either he wrote these lyrics because he had an artistic sense, or it is impossible to hazard even the wildest guess as to why he wrote them.

It is permissible to say that the Dramatic Lyrics represent the arrival of the real Browning of literary history. It is true that he had written already many admirable poems of a far more ambitious plan—Paracelsus with its splendid version of the faults of the intellectual, Pippa Passes with its beautiful deification of unconscious influence. But youth is always ambitious and universal; mature work exhibits more of individuality, more of the special type and colour of work which a man is destined to do. Youth is universal, but not individual. The genius who begins life with a very genuine and sincere doubt whether he is meant to be an exquisite and idolised violinist, or the most powerful and eloquent Prime Minister of modern times, does at last end by making the discovery that there is, after all, one thing, possibly a certain style of illustrating Nursery Rhymes, which he can really do better than any one else. This was what happened to Browning; like every one else, he had to discover first the universe, and then humanity, and at last himself. With him, as with all others, the great paradox and the great definition of life was this, that the ambition narrows as the mind expands. In Dramatic Lyrics he discovered the one thing that he could really do better than any one else—the dramatic lyric. The form is absolutely original: he had discovered a new field of poetry, and in the centre of that field he had found himself.

The actual quality, the actual originality of the form is a little difficult to describe. But its general characteristic is the fearless and most dexterous use of grotesque things in order to express sublime emotions. The best and most characteristic of the poems are love-poems; they express almost to perfection the real wonderland of youth, but they do not express it by the ideal imagery of most poets of love. The imagery of these poems consists, if we may take a rapid survey of Browning’s love poetry, of suburban streets, straws, garden-rakes, medicine bottles, pianos, window-blinds, burnt cork, fashionable fur coats. But in this new method he thoroughly expressed the true essential, the insatiable realism of passion. If any one wished to prove that Browning was not, as he is said to be, the poet of thought, but pre-eminently one of the poets of passion, we could scarcely find a better evidence of this profoundly passionate element than Browning’s astonishing realism in love poetry. There is nothing so fiercely realistic as sentiment and emotion. Thought and the intellect are content to accept abstractions, summaries, and generalisations; they are content that ten
acres of ground should be called for the sake of argument X, and ten widows’ incomes called for the sake of argument Y; they are content that a thousand awful and mysterious disappearances from the visible universe should be summed up as the mortality of a district, or that ten thousand intoxications of the soul should bear the general name of the instinct of sex. Rationalism can live upon air and signs and numbers. But sentiment must have reality; emotion demands the real fields, the real widows’ homes, the real corpse, and the real woman. And therefore Browning’s love poetry is the finest love poetry in the world, because it does not talk about raptures and ideals and gates of heaven, but about window-panes and gloves and garden walls. It does not deal much with abstractions; it is the truest of all love poetry, because it does not speak much about love. It awakens in every man the memories of that immortal instant when common and dead things had a meaning beyond the power of any dictionary to utter, and a value beyond the power of any millionaire to compute. He expresses the celestial time when a man does not think about heaven, but about a parasol. And therefore he is, first, the greatest of love poets, and, secondly, the only optimistic philosopher except Whitman.

The general accusation against Browning in connection with his use of the grotesque comes in very definitely here; for in using these homely and practical images, these allusions, bordering on what many would call the commonplace, he was indeed true to the actual and abiding spirit of love. In that delightful poem “Youth and Art” we have the singing girl saying to her old lover—

“No harm! It was not my fault
If you never turned your eye’s tail up
As I shook upon E in alt,
Or ran the chromatic scale up.”

This is a great deal more like the real chaff that passes between those whose hearts are full of new hope or of old memory than half the great poems of the world. Browning never forgets the little details which to a man who has ever really lived may suddenly send an arrow through the heart. Take, for example, such a matter as dress, as it is treated in “A Lover’s Quarrel.”

“See, how she looks now, dressed
In a sledging cap and vest!
’Tis a huge fur cloak—
Like a reindeer’s yoke
Falls the lappet along the breast:
Sleeves for her arms to rest,
Or to hang, as my Love likes best.”
That would almost serve as an order to a dressmaker, and is therefore poetry, or at least excellent poetry of this order. So great a power have these dead things of taking hold on the living spirit, that I question whether any one could read through the catalogue of a miscellaneous auction sale without coming upon things which, if realised for a moment, would be near to the elemental tears. And if any of us or all of us are truly optimists, and believe as Browning did, that existence has a value wholly inexpressible, we are most truly compelled to that sentiment not by any argument or triumphant justification of the cosmos, but by a few of these momentary and immortal sights and sounds, a gesture, an old song, a portrait, a piano, an old door.

In 1843 appeared that marvellous drama The Return of the Druses, a work which contains more of Browning’s typical qualities exhibited in an exquisite literary shape, than can easily be counted. We have in The Return of the Druses his love of the corners of history, his interest in the religious mind of the East, with its almost terrifying sense of being in the hand of heaven, his love of colour and verbal luxury, of gold and green and purple, which made some think he must be an Oriental himself. But, above all, it presents the first rise of that great psychological ambition which Browning was thenceforth to pursue. In Pauline and the poems that follow it, Browning has only the comparatively easy task of giving an account of himself. In Pippa Passes he has the only less easy task of giving an account of humanity. In The Return of the Druses he has for the first time the task which is so much harder than giving an account of humanity—the task of giving an account of a human being. Djabal, the great Oriental impostor, who is the central character of the play, is a peculiarly subtle character, a compound of blasphemous and lying assumptions of Godhead with genuine and stirring patriotic and personal feelings: he is a blend, so to speak, of a base divinity and of a noble humanity. He is supremely important in the history of Browning’s mind, for he is the first of that great series of the apologiae of apparently evil men, on which the poet was to pour out so much of his imaginative wealth—Djabal, Fra Lippo, Bishop Blougram, Sludge, Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, and the hero of Fifine at the Fair.

With this play, so far as any point can be fixed for the matter, he enters for the first time on the most valuable of all his labours—the defence of the indefensible. It may be noticed that Browning was not in the least content with the fact that certain human frailties had always lain more or less under an implied indulgence; that all human sentiment had agreed that a profligate might be generous, or that a drunkard might be high-minded. He was insatiable: he
wished to go further and show in a character like Djabal that an impostor might be generous and that a liar might be high-minded. In all his life, it must constantly be remembered, he tried always the most difficult things. Just as he tried the queerest metres and attempted to manage them, so he tried the queerest human souls and attempted to stand in their place. Charity was his basic philosophy; but it was, as it were, a fierce charity, a charity that went man-hunting. He was a kind of cosmic detective who walked into the foulest of thieves’ kitchens and accused men publicly of virtue. The character of Djabal in The Return of the Druses is the first of this long series of forlorn hopes for the relief of long surrendered castles of misconduct. As we shall see, even realising the humanity of a noble impostor like Djabal did not content his erratic hunger for goodness. He went further again, and realised the humanity of a mean impostor like Sludge. But in all things he retained this essential characteristic, that he was not content with seeking sinners—he sought the sinners whom even sinners cast out.

Browning’s feeling of ambition in the matter of the drama continued to grow at this time. It must be remembered that he had every natural tendency to be theatrical, though he lacked the essential lucidity. He was not, as a matter of fact, a particularly unsuccessful dramatist; but in the world of abstract temperaments he was by nature an unsuccessful dramatist. He was, that is to say, a man who loved above all things plain and sensational words, open catastrophes, a clear and ringing conclusion to everything. But it so happened, unfortunately, that his own words were not plain; that his catastrophes came with a crashing and sudden unintelligibleness which left men in doubt whether the thing were a catastrophe or a great stroke of good luck; that his conclusion, though it rang like a trumpet to the four corners of heaven, was in its actual message quite inaudible. We are bound to admit, on the authority of all his best critics and admirers, that his plays were not failures, but we can all feel that they should have been. He was, as it were, by nature a neglected dramatist. He was one of those who achieve the reputation, in the literal sense, of eccentricity by their frantic efforts to reach the centre.

A Blot on the ‘Scutcheon followed The Return of the Druses. In connection with the performance of this very fine play a quarrel arose which would not be worth mentioning if it did not happen to illustrate the curious energetic simplicity of Browning’s character. Macready, who was in desperately low financial circumstances at this time, tried by every means conceivable to avoid playing the part; he dodged, he shuffled, he tried every evasion that occurred to
him, but it never occurred to Browning to see what he meant. He pushed off the part upon Phelps, and Browning was contented; he resumed it, and Browning was only discontented on behalf of Phelps. The two had a quarrel; they were both headstrong, passionate men, but the quarrel dealt entirely with the unfortunate condition of Phelps. Browning beat down his own hat over his eyes; Macready flung Browning’s manuscript with a slap upon the floor. But all the time it never occurred to the poet that Macready’s conduct was dictated by anything so crude and simple as a desire for money. Browning was in fact by his principles and his ideals a man of the world, but in his life far otherwise. That worldly ease which is to most of us a temptation was to him an ideal. He was as it were a citizen of the New Jerusalem who desired with perfect sanity and simplicity to be a citizen of Mayfair. There was in him a quality which can only be most delicately described; for it was a virtue which bears a strange resemblance to one of the meanest of vices. Those curious people who think the truth a thing that can be said violently and with ease, might naturally call Browning a snob. He was fond of society, of fashion and even of wealth: but there is no snobbery in admiring these things or any things if we admire them for the right reasons. He admired them as worldlings cannot admire them: he was, as it were, the child who comes in with the dessert. He bore the same relation to the snob that the righteous man bears to the Pharisee: something frightfully close and similar and yet an everlasting opposite.
CHAPTER III

BROWNING AND HIS MARRIAGE

Robert Browning had his faults, and the general direction of those faults has been previously suggested. The chief of his faults, a certain uncontrollable brutality of speech and gesture when he was strongly roused, was destined to cling to him all through his life, and to startle with the blaze of a volcano even the last quiet years before his death. But any one who wishes to understand how deep was the elemental honesty and reality of his character, how profoundly worthy he was of any love that was bestowed upon him, need only study one most striking and determining element in the question—Browning’s simple, heartfelt, and unlimited admiration for other people. He was one of a generation of great men, of great men who had a certain peculiar type, certain peculiar merits and defects. Carlyle, Tennyson, Ruskin, Matthew Arnold, were alike in being children of a very strenuous and conscientious age, alike in possessing its earnestness and air of deciding great matters, alike also in showing a certain almost noble jealousy, a certain restlessness, a certain fear of other influences. Browning alone had no fear; he welcomed, evidently without the least affectation, all the influences of his day. A very interesting letter of his remains in which he describes his pleasure in a university dinner. “Praise,” he says in effect, “was given very deservedly to Matthew Arnold and Swinburne, and to that pride of Oxford men, Clough.” The really striking thing about these three names is the fact that they are united in Browning’s praise in a way in which they are by no means united in each other’s. Matthew Arnold, in one of his extant letters, calls Swinburne “a young pseudo-Shelley,” who, according to Arnold, thinks he can make Greek plays good by making them modern. Mr. Swinburne, on the other hand, has summarised Clough in a contemptuous rhyme:

“There was a bad poet named Clough,
Whom his friends all united to puff.
But the public, though dull,
Has not quite such a skull
As belongs to believers in Clough.”

The same general fact will be found through the whole of Browning’s life and critical attitude. He adored Shelley, and also Carlyle who sneered at him. He
delighted in Mill, and also in Ruskin who rebelled against Mill. He excused Napoleon III. and Landor who hurled interminable curses against Napoleon. He admired all the cycle of great men who all contemned each other. To say that he had no streak of envy in his nature would be true, but unfair; for there is no justification for attributing any of these great men’s opinions to envy. But Browning was really unique, in that he had a certain spontaneous and unthinking tendency to the admiration of others. He admired another poet as he admired a fading sunset or a chance spring leaf. He no more thought whether he could be as good as that man in that department than whether he could be redder than the sunset or greener than the leaf of spring. He was naturally magnanimous in the literal sense of that sublime word; his mind was so great that it rejoiced in the triumphs of strangers. In this spirit Browning had already cast his eyes round in the literary world of his time, and had been greatly and justifiably struck with the work of a young lady poet, Miss Barrett.

That impression was indeed amply justified. In a time when it was thought necessary for a lady to dilute the wine of poetry to its very weakest tint, Miss Barrett had contrived to produce poetry which was open to literary objection as too heady and too high-coloured. When she erred it was through an Elizabethan audacity and luxuriance, a straining after violent metaphors. With her reappeared in poetry a certain element which had not been present in it since the last days of Elizabethan literature, the fusion of the most elementary human passion with something which can only be described as wit, a certain love of quaint and sustained similes, of parallels wildly logical, and of brazen paradox and antithesis. We find this hot wit, as distinct from the cold wit of the school of Pope, in the puns and buffooneries of Shakespeare. We find it lingering in Hudibras, and we do not find it again until we come to such strange and strong lines as these of Elizabeth Barrett in her poem on Napoleon:—

“Blood fell like dew beneath his sunrise—sooth,
But glittered dew-like in the covenanted
And high-rayed light. He was a despot—granted,
But the [Greek: autos] of his autocratic mouth
Said ‘Yea’ i’ the people’s French! He magnified
The image of the freedom he denied.”

Her poems are full of quaint things, of such things as the eyes in the peacock fans of the Vatican, which she describes as winking at the Italian tricolor. She often took the step from the sublime to the ridiculous: but to take this step one must reach the sublime. Elizabeth Barrett contrived to assert, what still needs but
then urgently needed assertion, the fact that womanliness, whether in life or poetry, was a positive thing, and not the negative of manliness. Her verse at its best was quite as strong as Browning’s own, and very nearly as clever. The difference between their natures was a difference between two primary colours, not between dark and light shades of the same colour.

Browning had often heard not only of the public, but of the private life of this lady from his father’s friend Kenyon. The old man, who was one of those rare and valuable people who have a talent for establishing definite relationships with people after a comparatively short intercourse, had been appointed by Miss Barrett as her “fairy godfather.” He spoke much about her to Browning, and of Browning to her, with a certain courtly garrulity which was one of his talents. And there could be little doubt that the two poets would have met long before had it not been for certain peculiarities in the position of Miss Barrett. She was an invalid, and an invalid of a somewhat unique kind, and living beyond all question under very unique circumstances.

Her father, Edward Moulton Barrett, had been a landowner in the West Indies, and thus, by a somewhat curious coincidence, had borne a part in the same social system which stung Browning’s father into revolt and renunciation. The parts played by Edward Barrett, however, though little or nothing is known of it, was probably very different. He was a man Conservative by nature, a believer in authority in the nation and the family, and endowed with some faculties for making his conceptions prevail. He was an able man, capable in his language of a certain bitter felicity of phrase. He was rigidly upright and responsible, and he had a capacity for profound affection. But selfishness of the most perilous sort, an unconscious selfishness, was eating away his moral foundations, as it tends to eat away those of all despots. His most fugitive moods changed and controlled the whole atmosphere of the house, and the state of things was fully as oppressive in the case of his good moods as in the case of his bad ones. He had, what is perhaps the subllest and worst spirit of egotism, not that spirit merely which thinks that nothing should stand in the way of its ill-temper, but that spirit which thinks that nothing should stand in the way of its amiability. His daughters must be absolutely at his beck and call, whether it was to be brow-beaten or caressed. During the early years of Elizabeth Barrett’s life, the family had lived in the country, and for that brief period she had known a more wholesome life than she was destined ever to know again until her marriage long afterwards. She was not, as is the general popular idea, absolutely a congenital invalid, weak, and almost moribund from the cradle. In early girlhood she was slight and
sensitive indeed, but perfectly active and courageous. She was a good horsewoman, and the accident which handicapped her for so many years afterwards happened to her when she was riding. The injury to her spine, however, will be found, the more we study her history, to be only one of the influences which were to darken those bedridden years, and to have among them a far less important place than has hitherto been attached to it. Her father moved to a melancholy house in Wimpole Street; and his own character growing gloomier and stranger as time went on, he mounted guard over his daughter’s sickbed in a manner compounded of the pessimist and the disciplinarian. She was not permitted to stir from the sofa, often not even to cross two rooms to her bed. Her father came and prayed over her with a kind of melancholy glee, and with the avowed solemnity of a watcher by a deathbed. She was surrounded by that most poisonous and degrading of all atmospheres—a medical atmosphere. The existence of this atmosphere has nothing to do with the actual nature or prolongation of disease. A man may pass three hours out of every five in a state of bad health, and yet regard, as Stevenson regarded, the three hours as exceptional and the two as normal. But the curse that lay on the Barrett household was the curse of considering ill-health the natural condition of a human being. The truth was that Edward Barrett was living emotionally and aesthetically, like some detestable decadent poet, upon his daughter’s decline. He did not know this, but it was so. Scenes, explanations, prayers, fury, and forgiveness had become bread and meat for which he hungered; and when the cloud was upon his spirit, he would lash out at all things and every one with the insatiable cruelty of the sentimentalist.

It is wonderful that Elizabeth Barrett was not made thoroughly morbid and impotent by this intolerable violence and more intolerable tenderness. In her estimate of her own health she did, of course, suffer. It is evident that she practically believed herself to be dying. But she was a high-spirited woman, full of that silent and quite unfathomable kind of courage which is only found in women, and she took a much more cheerful view of death than her father did of life. Silent rooms, low voices, lowered blinds, long days of loneliness, and of the sickliest kind of sympathy, had not tamed a spirit which was swift and headlong to a fault. She could still own with truth the magnificent fact that her chief vice was impatience, “tearing open parcels instead of untying them;” looking at the end of books before she had read them was, she said, incurable with her. It is difficult to imagine anything more genuinely stirring than the achievement of this woman, who thus contrived, while possessing all the excuses of an invalid,
to retain some of the faults of a tomboy.

Impetuosity, vividness, a certain absoluteness and urgency in her demands, marked her in the eyes of all who came in contact with her. In after years, when Browning had experimentally shaved his beard off, she told him with emphatic gestures that it must be grown again “that minute.” There we have very graphically the spirit which tears open parcels. Not in vain, or as a mere phrase, did her husband after her death describe her as “all a wonder and a wild desire.”

She had, of course, lived her second and real life in literature and the things of the mind, and this in a very genuine and strenuous sense. Her mental occupations were not mere mechanical accomplishments almost as colourless as the monotony they relieved, nor were they coloured in any visible manner by the unwholesome atmosphere in which she breathed. She used her brains seriously; she was a good Greek scholar, and read Æschylus and Euripides unceasingly with her blind friend, Mr. Boyd; and she had, and retained even to the hour of her death, a passionate and quite practical interest in great public questions. Naturally she was not uninterested in Robert Browning, but it does not appear that she felt at this time the same kind of fiery artistic curiosity that he felt about her. He does appear to have felt an attraction, which may almost be called mystical, for the personality which was shrouded from the world by such sombre curtains. In 1845 he addressed a letter to her in which he spoke of a former occasion on which they had nearly met, and compared it to the sensation of having once been outside the chapel of some marvellous illumination and found the door barred against him. In that phrase it is easy to see how much of the romantic boyhood of Browning remained inside the resolute man of the world into which he was all external appearance solidifying. Miss Barrett replied to his letters with charming sincerity and humour, and with much of that leisurely self-revelation which is possible for an invalid who has nothing else to do. She herself, with her love of quiet and intellectual companionship, would probably have been quite happy for the rest of her life if their relations had always remained a learned and delightful correspondence. But she must have known very little of Robert Browning if she imagined he would be contented with this airy and bloodless tie. At all times of his life he was sufficiently fond of his own way; at this time he was especially prompt and impulsive, and he had always a great love for seeing and hearing and feeling people, a love of the physical presence of friends, which made him slap men on the back and hit them in the chest when he was very fond of them. The correspondence between the two poets had not long begun when Browning suggested something which was
almost a blasphemy in the Barrett household, that he should come and call on her as he would on any one else. This seems to have thrown her into a flutter of fear and doubt. She alleges all kinds of obstacles, the chief of which were her health and the season of the year and the east winds. “If my truest heart’s wishes avail,” replied Browning obstinately, “you shall laugh at east winds yet as I do.”

Then began the chief part of that celebrated correspondence which has within comparatively recent years been placed before the world. It is a correspondence which has very peculiar qualities and raises many profound questions.

It is impossible to deal at any length with the picture given in these remarkable letters of the gradual progress and amalgamation of two spirits of great natural potency and independence, without saying at least a word about the moral question raised by their publication and the many expressions of disapproval which it entails. To the mind of the present writer the whole of such a question should be tested by one perfectly clear intellectual distinction and comparison. I am not prepared to admit that there is or can be, properly speaking, in the world anything that is too sacred to be known. That spiritual beauty and spiritual truth are in their nature communicable, and that they should be communicated, is a principle which lies at the root of every conceivable religion. Christ was crucified upon a hill, and not in a cavern, and the word Gospel itself involves the same idea as the ordinary name of a daily paper. Whenever, therefore, a poet or any similar type of man can, or conceives that he can, make all men partakers in some splendid secret of his own heart, I can imagine nothing saner and nothing manlier than his course in doing so. Thus it was that Dante made a new heaven and a new hell out of a girl’s nod in the streets of Florence. Thus it was that Paul founded a civilisation by keeping an ethical diary. But the one essential which exists in all such cases as these is that the man in question believes that he can make the story as stately to the whole world as it is to him, and he chooses his words to that end. Yet when a work contains expressions which have one value and significance when read by the people to whom they were addressed, and an entirely different value and significance when read by any one else, then the element of the violation of sanctity does arise. It is not because there is anything in this world too sacred to tell. It is rather because there are a great many things in this world too sacred to parody. If Browning could really convey to the world the inmost core of his affection for his wife, I see no reason why he should not. But the objection to letters which begin “My dear Ba,” is that they do not convey anything of the sort. As far as any third person is concerned, Browning might as well have been expressing the most noble and universal sentiment in the dialect
of the Cherokees. Objection to the publication of such passages as that, in short, is not the fact that they tell us about the love of the Brownings, but that they do not tell us about it.

Upon this principle it is obvious that there should have been a selection among the Letters, but not a selection which should exclude anything merely because it was ardent and noble. If Browning or Mrs. Browning had not desired any people to know that they were fond of each other, they would not have written and published “One Word More” or “The Sonnets from the Portuguese.” Nay, they would not have been married in a public church, for every one who is married in a church does make a confession of love of absolutely national publicity, and tacitly, therefore, repudiates any idea that such confessions are too sacred for the world to know. The ridiculous theory that men should have no noble passions or sentiments in public may have been designed to make private life holy and undefiled, but it has had very little actual effect except to make public life cynical and preposterously unmeaning. But the words of a poem or the words of the English Marriage Service, which are as fine as many poems, is a language dignified and deliberately intended to be understood by all. If the bride and bridegroom in church, instead of uttering those words, were to utter a poem compounded of private allusions to the foibles of Aunt Matilda, or of childish secrets which they would tell each other in a lane, it would be a parallel case to the publication of some of the Browning Letters. Why the serious and universal portions of those Letters could not be published without those which are to us idle and unmeaning it is difficult to understand. Our wisdom, whether expressed in private or public, belongs to the world, but our folly belongs to those we love.

There is at least one peculiarity in the Browning Letters which tends to make their publication far less open to objection than almost any other collection of love letters which can be imagined. The ordinary sentimentalist who delights in the most emotional of magazine interviews, will not be able to get much satisfaction out of them, because he and many persons more acute will be quite unable to make head or tail of three consecutive sentences. In this respect it is the most extraordinary correspondence in the world. There seem to be only two main rules for this form of letter-writing: the first is, that if a sentence can begin with a parenthesis it always should; and the second is, that if you have written from a third to half of a sentence you need never in any case write any more. It would be amusing to watch any one who felt an idle curiosity as to the language and secrets of lovers opening the Browning Letters. He would probably come upon some such simple and lucid passage as the following: “I ought to wait, say
a week at least, having killed all your mules for you, before I shot down your dogs...

But not being Phoibos Apollon, you are to know further that when I did think I might go modestly on . . . [Greek: Ómoi], let me get out of this slough of a simile, never mind with what dislocated ankles.”

What our imaginary sentimentalist would make of this tender passage it is difficult indeed to imagine. The only plain conclusion which appears to emerge from the words is the somewhat curious one—that Browning was in the habit of taking a gun down to Wimpole Street and of demolishing the live stock on those somewhat unpromising premises. Nor will he be any better enlightened if he turns to the reply of Miss Barrett, which seems equally dominated with the great central idea of the Browning correspondence that the most enlightening passages in a letter consist of dots. She replies in a letter following the above: “But if it could be possible that you should mean to say you would show me. . . Can it be? or am I reading this ‘Attic contraction’ quite the wrong way. You see I am afraid of the difference between flattering myself and being flattered . . . the fatal difference. And now will you understand that I should be too overjoyed to have revelations from the Portfolio . . . however incarnated with blots and pen scratches . . . to be able to ask impudently of them now? Is that plain?” Most probably she thought it was.

With regard to Browning himself this characteristic is comparatively natural and appropriate. Browning’s prose was in any case the most roundabout affair in the world. Those who knew him say that he would often send an urgent telegram from which it was absolutely impossible to gather where the appointment was, or when it was, or what was its object. This fact is one of the best of all arguments against the theory of Browning’s intellectual conceit. A man would have to be somewhat abnormally conceited in order to spend sixpence for the pleasure of sending an unintelligible communication to the dislocation of his own plans. The fact was, that it was part of the machinery of his brain that things came out of it, as it were, backwards. The words “tail foremost” express Browning’s style with something more than a conventional accuracy. The tail, the most insignificant part of an animal, is also often the most animated and fantastic. An utterance of Browning is often like a strange animal walking backwards, who flourishes his tail with such energy that every one takes it for his head. He was in other words, at least in his prose and practical utterances, more or less incapable of telling a story without telling the least important thing first. If a man who belonged to an Italian secret society, one local branch of
which bore as a badge an olive-green ribbon, had entered his house, and in some
sensational interview tried to bribe or blackmail him, he would have told the
story with great energy and indignation, but he would have been incapable of
beginning with anything except the question of the colour of olives. His whole
method was founded both in literature and life upon the principle of the “ex pede
Herculem,” and at the beginning of his description of Hercules the foot appears
some sizes larger than the hero. It is, in short, natural enough that Browning
should have written his love letters obscurely, since he wrote his letters to his
publisher and his solicitor obscurely. In the case of Mrs. Browning it is
somewhat more difficult to understand. For she at least had, beyond all question,
a quite simple and lucent vein of humour, which does not easily reconcile itself
with this subtlety. But she was partly under the influence of her own quality of
passionate ingenuity or emotional wit of which we have already taken notice in
dealing with her poems, and she was partly also no doubt under the influence of
Browning. Whatever was the reason, their correspondence was not of the sort
which can be pursued very much by the outside public. Their letters may be
published a hundred times over, they still remain private. They write to each
other in a language of their own, an almost exasperatingly impressionist
language, a language chiefly consisting of dots and dashes and asterisks and
italics, and brackets and notes of interrogation. Wordsworth when he heard
afterwards of their eventual elopement said with that slight touch of bitterness he
always used in speaking of Browning, “So Robert Browning and Miss Barrett
have gone off together. I hope they understand each other—nobody else would.”
It would be difficult to pay a higher compliment to a marriage. Their common
affection for Kenyon was a great element in their lives and in their
correspondence. “I have a convenient theory to account for Mr. Kenyon,” writes
Browning mysteriously, “and his otherwise unaccountable kindness to me.” “For
Mr. Kenyon’s kindness,” retorts Elizabeth Barrett, “no theory will account. I
class it with mesmerism for that reason.” There is something very dignified and
beautiful about the simplicity of these two poets vying with each other in giving
adequate praise to the old dilettante, of whom the world would never have heard
but for them. Browning’s feeling for him was indeed especially strong and
typical. “There,” he said, pointing after the old man as he left the room, “there
goes one of the most splendid men living—a man so noble in his friendship, so
lavish in his hospitality, so large-hearted and benevolent, that he deserves to be
known all over the world as ‘Kenyon the Magnificent.’“ There is something
thoroughly worthy of Browning at his best in this feeling, not merely of the use
of sociability, or of the charm of sociability, but of the magnificence, the heroic largeness of real sociability. Being himself a warm champion of the pleasures of society, he saw in Kenyon a kind of poetic genius for the thing, a mission of superficial philanthropy. He is thoroughly to be congratulated on the fact that he had grasped the great but now neglected truth, that a man may actually be great, yet not in the least able.

Browning’s desire to meet Miss Barrett was received on her side, as has been stated, with a variety of objections. The chief of these was the strangely feminine and irrational reason that she was not worth seeing, a point on which the seeker for an interview might be permitted to form his own opinion. “There is nothing to see in me; nor to hear in me.—I never learned to talk as you do in London; although I can admire that brightness of carved speech in Mr. Kenyon and others. If my poetry is worth anything to any eye, it is the flower of me. I have lived most and been most happy in it, and so it has all my colours; the rest of me is nothing but a root, fit for the ground and dark.” The substance of Browning’s reply was to the effect, “I will call at two on Tuesday.”

They met on May 20, 1845. A short time afterwards he had fallen in love with her and made her an offer of marriage. To a person in the domestic atmosphere of the Barretts, the incident would appear to have been paralysing. “I will tell you what I once said in jest . . .” she writes, “If a prince of El Dorado should come with a pedigree of lineal descent from some signory in the moon in one hand and a ticket of good behaviour from the nearest Independent chapel in the other!—‘Why, even then,’ said my sister Arabel, ‘it would not do.’ And she was right; we all agreed that she was right.”

This may be taken as a fairly accurate description of the real state of Mr. Barrett’s mind on one subject. It is illustrative of the very best and breeziest side of Elizabeth Barrett’s character that she could be so genuinely humorous over so tragic a condition of the human mind.

Browning’s proposals were, of course, as matters stood, of a character to dismay and repel all those who surrounded Elizabeth Barrett. It was not wholly a matter of the fancies of her father. The whole of her family, and most probably the majority of her medical advisers, did seriously believe at this time that she was unfit to be moved, to say nothing of being married, and that a life passed between a bed and a sofa, and avoiding too frequent and abrupt transitions even from one to the other, was the only life she could expect on this earth. Almost alone in holding another opinion and in urging her to a more vigorous view of her condition, stood Browning himself. “But you are better,” he would say; “you
look so and speak so.” Which of the two opinions was right is of course a complex medical matter into which a book like this has neither the right nor the need to enter. But this much may be stated as a mere question of fact. In the summer of 1846 Elizabeth Barrett was still living under the great family convention which provided her with nothing but an elegant deathbed, forbidden to move, forbidden to see proper daylight, forbidden to receive a friend lest the shock should destroy her suddenly. A year or two later, in Italy, as Mrs. Browning, she was being dragged up hill in a wine hamper, toiling up to the crests of mountains at four o’clock in the morning, riding for five miles on a donkey to what she calls “an inaccessible volcanic ground not far from the stars.” It is perfectly incredible that any one so ill as her family believed her to be should have lived this life for twenty-four hours. Something must be allowed for the intoxication of a new tie and a new interest in life. But such exaltations can in their nature hardly last a month, and Mrs. Browning lived for fifteen years afterwards in infinitely better health than she had ever known before. In the light of modern knowledge it is not very difficult or very presumptuous, of us to guess that she had been in her father’s house to some extent inoculated with hysteria, that strange affliction which some people speak of as if it meant the absence of disease, but which is in truth the most terrible of all diseases. It must be remembered that in 1846 little or nothing was known of spine complaints such as that from which Elizabeth Barrett suffered, less still of the nervous conditions they create, and least of all of hysterical phenomena. In our day she would have been ordered air and sunlight and activity, and all the things the mere idea of which chilled the Barretts with terror. In our day, in short, it would have been recognised that she was in the clutch of a form of neurosis which exhibits every fact of a disease except its origin, that strange possession which makes the body itself a hypocrite. Those who surrounded Miss Barrett knew nothing of this, and Browning knew nothing of it; and probably if he knew anything, knew less than they did. Mrs. Orr says, probably with a great deal of truth, that of ill-health and its sensations he remained “pathetically ignorant” to his dying day. But devoid as he was alike of expert knowledge and personal experience, without a shadow of medical authority, almost without anything that can be formally called a right to his opinion, he was, and remained, right. He at least saw, he indeed alone saw, to the practical centre of the situation. He did not know anything about hysteria or neurosis, or the influence of surroundings, but he knew that the atmosphere of Mr. Barrett’s house was not a fit thing for any human being, alive, dying, or dead. His stand upon this matter has really a certain human interest, since it is an
example of a thing which will from time to time occur, the interposition of the average man to the confounding of the experts. Experts are undoubtedly right nine times out of ten, but the tenth time comes, and we find in military matters an Oliver Cromwell who will make every mistake known to strategy and yet win all his battles, and in medical matters a Robert Browning whose views have not a technical leg to stand on and are entirely correct.

But while Browning was thus standing alone in his view of the matter, while Edward Barrett had to all appearance on his side a phalanx of all the sanities and respectabilities, there came suddenly a new development, destined to bring matters to a crisis indeed, and to weigh at least three souls in the balance. Upon further examination of Miss Barrett’s condition, the physicians had declared that it was absolutely necessary that she should be taken to Italy. This may, without any exaggeration, be called the turning-point and the last great earthly opportunity of Barrett’s character. He had not originally been an evil man, only a man who, being stoical in practical things, permitted himself, to his great detriment, a self-indulgence in moral things. He had grown to regard his pious and dying daughter as part of the furniture of the house and of the universe. And as long as the great mass of authorities were on his side, his illusion was quite pardonable. His crisis came when the authorities changed their front, and with one accord asked his permission to send his daughter abroad. It was his crisis, and he refused.

He had, if we may judge from what we know of him, his own peculiar and somewhat detestable way of refusing. Once when his daughter had asked a perfectly simple favour in a matter of expediency, permission, that is, to keep her favourite brother with her during an illness, her singular parent remarked that “she might keep him if she liked, but that he had looked for greater self-sacrifice.” These were the weapons with which he ruled his people. For the worst tyrant is not the man who rules by fear; the worst tyrant is he who rules by love and plays on it as on a harp. Barrett was one of the oppressors who have discovered the last secret of oppression, that which is told in the fine verse of Swinburne:—

“The racks of the earth and the rods
Are weak as the foam on the sands;
The heart is the prey for the gods,
Who crucify hearts, not hands.”

He, with his terrible appeal to the vibrating consciences of women, was, with regard to one of them, very near to the end of his reign. When Browning heard
that the Italian journey was forbidden, he proposed definitely that they should marry and go on the journey together.

Many other persons had taken cognisance of the fact, and were active in the matter. Kenyon, the gentlest and most universally complimentary of mortals, had marched into the house and given Arabella Barrett, the sister of the sick woman, his opinion of her father’s conduct with a degree of fire and frankness which must have been perfectly amazing in a man of his almost antiquated social delicacy. Mrs. Jameson, an old and generous friend of the family, had immediately stepped in and offered to take Elizabeth to Italy herself, thus removing all questions of expense or arrangement. She would appear to have stood to her guns in the matter with splendid persistence and magnanimity. She called day after day seeking for a change of mind, and delayed her own journey to the continent more than once. At length, when it became evident that the extraction of Mr. Barrett’s consent was hopeless, she reluctantly began her own tour in Europe alone. She went to Paris, and had not been there many days, when she received a formal call from Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who had been married for some days. Her astonishment is rather a picturesque thing to think about.

The manner in which this sensational elopement, which was, of course, the talk of the whole literary world, had been effected, is narrated, as every one knows, in the Browning Letters. Browning had decided that an immediate marriage was the only solution; and having put his hand to the plough, did not decline even when it became obviously necessary that it should be a secret marriage. To a man of his somewhat stormily candid and casual disposition this necessity of secrecy was really exasperating; but every one with any imagination or chivalry will rejoice that he accepted the evil conditions. He had always had the courage to tell the truth; and now it was demanded of him to have the greater courage to tell a lie, and he told it with perfect cheerfulness and lucidity. In thus disappearing surreptitiously with an invalid woman he was doing something against which there were undoubtedly a hundred things to be said, only it happened that the most cogent and important thing of all was to be said for it.

It is very amusing, and very significant in the matter of Browning’s character, to read the accounts which he writes to Elizabeth Barrett of his attitude towards the approaching coup de théâtre. In one place he says, suggestively enough, that he does not in the least trouble about the disapproval of her father; the man whom he fears as a frustrating influence is Kenyon. Mr. Barrett could only walk into the room and fly into a passion; and this Browning could have received with
perfect equanimity. “But,” he says, “if Kenyon knows of the matter, I shall have the kindest and friendliest of explanations (with his arm on my shoulder) of how I am ruining your social position, destroying your health, etc., etc.” This touch is very suggestive of the power of the old worldling, who could manoeuvre with young people as well as Major Pendennis. Kenyon had indeed long been perfectly aware of the way in which things were going; and the method he adopted in order to comment on it is rather entertaining. In a conversation with Elizabeth Barrett, he asked carelessly whether there was anything between her sister and a certain Captain Cooke. On receiving a surprised reply in the negative, he remarked apologetically that he had been misled into the idea by the gentleman calling so often at the house. Elizabeth Barrett knew perfectly well what he meant; but the logical allusiveness of the attack reminds one of a fragment of some Meredithian comedy.

The manner in which Browning bore himself in this acute and necessarily dubious position is, perhaps, more thoroughly to his credit than anything else in his career. He never came out so well in all his long years of sincerity and publicity as he does in this one act of deception. Having made up his mind to that act, he is not ashamed to name it; neither, on the other hand, does he rant about it, and talk about Philistine prejudices and higher laws and brides in the sight of God, after the manner of the cockney decadent. He was breaking a social law, but he was not declaring a crusade against social laws. We all feel, whatever may be our opinions on the matter, that the great danger of this kind of social opportunism, this pitting of a private necessity against a public custom, is that men are somewhat too weak and self-deceptive to be trusted with such a power of giving dispensations to themselves. We feel that men without meaning to do so might easily begin by breaking a social by-law and end by being thoroughly anti-social. One of the best and most striking things to notice about Robert Browning is the fact that he did this thing considering it as an exception, and that he contrived to leave it really exceptional. It did not in the least degree break the rounded clearness of his loyalty to social custom. It did not in the least degree weaken the sanctity of the general rule. At a supreme crisis of his life he did an unconventional thing, and he lived and died conventional. It would be hard to say whether he appears the more thoroughly sane in having performed the act, or in not having allowed it to affect him.

Elizabeth Barrett gradually gave way under the obstinate and almost monotonous assertion of Browning that this elopement was the only possible course of action. Before she finally agreed, however, she did something, which
in its curious and impulsive symbolism, belongs almost to a more primitive age. The sullen system of medical seclusion to which she had long been subjected has already been described. The most urgent and hygienic changes were opposed by many on the ground that it was not safe for her to leave her sofa and her sombre room. On the day on which it was necessary for her finally to accept or reject Browning’s proposal, she called her sister to her, and to the amazement and mystification of that lady asked for a carriage. In this she drove into Regent’s Park, alighted, walked on to the grass, and stood leaning against a tree for some moments, looking round her at the leaves and the sky. She then entered the cab again, drove home, and agreed to the elopement. This was possibly the best poem that she ever produced.

Browning arranged the eccentric adventure with a great deal of prudence and knowledge of human nature. Early one morning in September 1846 Miss Barrett walked quietly out of her father’s house, became Mrs. Robert Browning in a church in Marylebone, and returned home again as if nothing had happened. In this arrangement Browning showed some of that real insight into the human spirit which ought to make a poet the most practical of all men. The incident was, in the nature of things, almost overpoweringly exciting to his wife, in spite of the truly miraculous courage with which she supported it; and he desired, therefore, to call in the aid of the mysteriously tranquillising effect of familiar scenes and faces. One trifling incident is worth mentioning which is almost unfathomably characteristic of Browning. It has already been remarked in these pages that he was pre-eminently one of those men whose expanding opinions never alter by a hairsbreadth the actual ground-plan of their moral sense. Browning would have felt the same things right and the same things wrong, whatever views he had held. During the brief and most trying period between his actual marriage and his actual elopement, it is most significant that he would not call at the house in Wimpole Street, because he would have been obliged to ask if Miss Barrett was disengaged. He was acting a lie; he was deceiving a father; he was putting a sick woman to a terrible risk; and these things he did not disguise from himself for a moment, but he could not bring himself to say two words to a maidservant. Here there may be partly the feeling of the literary man for the sacredness of the uttered word, but there is far more of a certain rooted traditional morality which it is impossible either to describe or to justify. Browning’s respectability was an older and more primeval thing than the oldest and most primeval passions of other men. If we wish to understand him, we must always remember that in dealing with any of his actions we have not to ask
whether the action contains the highest morality, but whether we should have felt inclined to do it ourselves.

At length the equivocal and exhausting interregnum was over. Mrs. Browning went for the second time almost on tiptoe out of her father’s house, accompanied only by her maid and her dog, which was only just successfully prevented from barking. Before the end of the day in all probability Barrett had discovered that his dying daughter had fled with Browning to Italy.

They never saw him again, and hardly more than a faint echo came to them of the domestic earthquake which they left behind them. They do not appear to have had many hopes, or to have made many attempts at a reconciliation. Elizabeth Barrett had discovered at last that her father was in truth not a man to be treated with; hardly, perhaps, even a man to be blamed. She knew to all intents and purposes that she had grown up in the house of a madman.
CHAPTER IV

BROWNING IN ITALY

The married pair went to Pisa in 1846, and moved soon afterwards to Florence. Of the life of the Brownings in Italy there is much perhaps to be said in the way of description and analysis, little to be said in the way of actual narrative. Each of them had passed through the one incident of existence. Just as Elizabeth Barrett’s life had before her marriage been uneventfully sombre, now it was uneventfully happy. A succession of splendid landscapes, a succession of brilliant friends, a succession of high and ardent intellectual interests, they experienced; but their life was of the kind that if it were told at all, would need to be told in a hundred volumes of gorgeous intellectual gossip. How Browning and his wife rode far into the country, eating strawberries and drinking milk out of the basins of the peasants; how they fell in with the strangest and most picturesque figures of Italian society; how they climbed mountains and read books and modelled in clay and played on musical instruments; how Browning was made a kind of arbiter between two improvising Italian bards; how he had to escape from a festivity when the sound of Garibaldi’s hymn brought the knocking of the Austrian police; these are the things of which his life is full, trifling and picturesque things, a series of interludes, a beautiful and happy story, beginning and ending nowhere. The only incidents, perhaps, were the birth of their son and the death of Browning’s mother in 1849.

It is well known that Browning loved Italy; that it was his adopted country; that he said in one of the finest of his lyrics that the name of it would be found written on his heart. But the particular character of this love of Browning for Italy needs to be understood. There are thousands of educated Europeans who love Italy, who live in it, who visit it annually, who come across a continent to see it, who hunt out its darkest picture and its most mouldering carving; but they are all united in this, that they regard Italy as a dead place. It is a branch of their universal museum, a department of dry bones. There are rich and cultivated persons, particularly Americans, who seem to think that they keep Italy, as they might keep an aviary or a hothouse, into which they might walk whenever they wanted a whiff of beauty. Browning did not feel at all in this manner; he was intrinsically incapable of offering such an insult to the soul of a nation. If he could not have loved Italy as a nation, he would not have consented to love it as
an old curiosity shop. In everything on earth, from the Middle Ages to the amoeba, who is discussed at such length in “Mr. Sludge the Medium,” he is interested in the life in things. He was interested in the life in Italian art and in the life in Italian politics.

Perhaps the first and simplest example that can be given of this matter is in Browning’s interest in art. He was immeasurably fascinated at all times by painting and sculpture, and his sojourn in Italy gave him, of course, innumerable and perfect opportunities for the study of painting and sculpture. But his interest in these studies was not like that of the ordinary cultured visitor to the Italian cities. Thousands of such visitors, for example, study those endless lines of magnificent Pagan busts which are to be found in nearly all the Italian galleries and museums, and admire them, and talk about them, and note them in their catalogues, and describe them in their diaries. But the way in which they affected Browning is described very suggestively in a passage in the letters of his wife. She describes herself as longing for her husband to write poems, beseeching him to write poems, but finding all her petitions useless because her husband was engaged all day in modelling busts in clay and breaking them as fast as he made them. This is Browning’s interest in art, the interest in a living thing, the interest in a growing thing, the insatiable interest in how things are done. Every one who knows his admirable poems on painting—“Fra Lippo Lippi” and “Andrea del Sarto” and “Pictor Ignotus”—will remember how fully they deal with technicalities, how they are concerned with canvas, with oil, with a mess of colours. Sometimes they are so technical as to be mysterious to the casual reader. An extreme case may be found in that of a lady I once knew who had merely read the title of “Pacchiarotto and how he worked in distemper,” and thought that Pacchiarotto was the name of a dog, whom no attacks of canine disease could keep from the fulfilment of his duty. These Browning poems do not merely deal with painting; they smell of paint. They are the works of a man to whom art is not what it is to so many of the non-professional lovers of art, a thing accomplished, a valley of bones: to him it is a field of crops continually growing in a busy and exciting silence. Browning was interested, like some scientific man, in the obstetrics of art. There is a large army of educated men who can talk art with artists; but Browning could not merely talk art with artists—he could talk shop with them. Personally he may not have known enough about painting to be more than a fifth-rate painter, or enough about the organ to be more than a sixth-rate organist. But there are, when all is said and done, some things which a fifth-rate painter knows which a first-rate art critic does not
know; there are some things which a sixth-rate organist knows which a first-rate judge of music does not know. And these were the things that Browning knew.

He was, in other words, what is called an amateur. The word amateur has come by the thousand oddities of language to convey an idea of tepidity; whereas the word itself has the meaning of passion. Nor is this peculiarity confined to the mere form of the word; the actual characteristic of these nameless dilettanti is a genuine fire and reality. A man must love a thing very much if he not only practises it without any hope of fame or money, but even practises it without any hope of doing it well. Such a man must love the toils of the work more than any other man can love the rewards of it. Browning was in this strict sense a strenuous amateur. He tried and practised in the course of his life half a hundred things at which he can never have even for a moment expected to succeed. The story of his life is full of absurd little ingenuities, such as the discovery of a way of making pictures by roasting brown paper over a candle. In precisely the same spirit of fruitless vivacity, he made himself to a very considerable extent a technical expert in painting, a technical expert in sculpture, a technical expert in music. In his old age, he shows traces of being so bizarre a thing as an abstract police detective, writing at length in letters and diaries his views of certain criminal cases in an Italian town. Indeed, his own Ring and the Book is merely a sublime detective story. He was in a hundred things this type of man; he was precisely in the position, with a touch of greater technical success, of the admirable figure in Stevenson’s story who said, “I can play the fiddle nearly well enough to earn a living in the orchestra of a penny gaff, but not quite.”

The love of Browning for Italian art, therefore, was anything but an antiquarian fancy; it was the love of a living thing. We see the same phenomenon in an even more important matter—the essence and individuality of the country itself.

Italy to Browning and his wife was not by any means merely that sculptured and ornate sepulchre that it is to so many of those cultivated English men and women who live in Italy and enjoy and admire and despise it. To them it was a living nation, the type and centre of the religion and politics of a continent; the ancient and flaming heart of Western history, the very Europe of Europe. And they lived at the time of the most moving and gigantic of all dramas—the making of a new nation, one of the things that makes men feel that they are still in the morning of the earth. Before their eyes, with every circumstance of energy and mystery, was passing the panorama of the unification of Italy, with the bold
and romantic militarism of Garibaldi, the more bold and more romantic
diplomacy of Cavour. They lived in a time when affairs of State had almost the
air of works of art; and it is not strange that these two poets should have become
politicians in one of those great creative epochs when even the politicians have
to be poets.

Browning was on this question and on all the questions of continental and
English politics a very strong Liberal. This fact is not a mere detail of purely
biographical interest, like any view he might take of the authorship of the “Eikon
Basilike” or the authenticity of the Tichborne claimant. Liberalism was so
inevitably involved in the poet’s whole view of existence, that even a thoughtful
and imaginative Conservative would feel that Browning was bound to be a
Liberal. His mind was possessed, perhaps even to excess, by a belief in growth
and energy and in the ultimate utility of error. He held the great central Liberal
doctrine, a belief in a certain destiny of the human spirit beyond, and perhaps
even independent of, our own sincerest convictions. The world was going right
he felt, most probably in his way, but certainly in its own way. The sonnet which
he wrote in later years, entitled “Why I am a Liberal,” expresses admirably this
philosophical root of his politics. It asks in effect how he, who had found truth in
so many strange forms after so many strange wanderings, can be expected to
stifle with horror the eccentricities of others. A Liberal may be defined
approximately as a man who, if he could by waving his hand in a dark room,
stop the mouths of all the deceivers of mankind for ever, would not wave his
hand. Browning was a Liberal in this sense.

And just as the great Liberal movement which followed the French Revolution
made this claim for the liberty and personality of human beings, so it made it for
the liberty and personality of nations. It attached indeed to the independence of a
nation something of the same wholly transcendental sanctity which humanity has
in all legal systems attached to the life of a man. The grounds were indeed much
the same; no one could say absolutely that a live man was useless, and no one
could say absolutely that a variety of national life was useless or must remain
useless to the world. Men remembered how often barbarous tribes or strange and
alien Scriptures had been called in to revive the blood of decaying empires and
civilisations. And this sense of the personality of a nation, as distinct from the
personalities of all other nations, did not involve in the case of these old Liberals
international bitterness; for it is too often forgotten that friendship demands
independence and equality fully as much as war. But in them it led to great
international partialities, to a great system, as it were, of adopted countries which
made so thorough a Scotchman as Carlyle in love with Germany, and so thorough an Englishman as Browning in love with Italy.

And while on the one side of the struggle was this great ideal of energy and variety, on the other side was something which we now find it difficult to realise or describe. We have seen in our own time a great reaction in favour of monarchy, aristocracy, and ecclesiasticism, a reaction almost entirely noble in its instinct, and dwelling almost entirely on the best periods and the best qualities of the old régime. But the modern man, full of admiration for the great virtue of chivalry which is at the heart of aristocracies, and the great virtue of reverence which is at the heart of ceremonial religion, is not in a position to form any idea of how profoundly unchivalrous, how astonishingly irreverent, how utterly mean, and material, and devoid of mystery or sentiment were the despotic systems of Europe which survived, and for a time conquered, the Revolution.

The case against the Church in Italy in the time of Pio Nono was not the case which a rationalist would urge against the Church of the time of St. Louis, but diametrically the opposite case. Against the mediæval Church it might be said that she was too fantastic, too visionary, too dogmatic about the destiny of man, too indifferent to all things but the devotional side of the soul. Against the Church of Pio Nono the main thing to be said was that it was simply and supremely cynical; that it was not founded on the unworldly instinct for distorting life, but on the worldly counsel to leave life as it is; that it was not the inspirer of insane hopes, of reward and miracle, but the enemy, the cool and sceptical enemy, of hope of any kind or description. The same was true of the monarchical systems of Prussia and Austria and Russia at this time. Their philosophy was not the philosophy of the cavaliers who rode after Charles I. or Louis XIII. It was the philosophy of the typical city uncle, advising every one, and especially the young, to avoid enthusiasm, to avoid beauty, to regard life as a machine, dependent only upon the two forces of comfort and fear. That was, there can be little doubt, the real reason of the fascination of the Napoleon legend—that while Napoleon was a despot like the rest, he was a despot who went somewhere and did something, and defied the pessimism of Europe, and erased the word “impossible.” One does not need to be a Bonapartist to rejoice at the way in which the armies of the First Empire, shouting their songs and jesting with their colonels, smote and broke into pieces the armies of Prussia and Austria driven into battle with a cane.

Browning, as we have said, was in Italy at the time of the break-up of one part of this frozen continent of the non-possumus, Austria’s hold in the north of Italy
was part of that elaborate and comfortable and wholly cowardly and unmeaning compromise, which the Holy Alliance had established, and which it believed without doubt in its solid unbelief would last until the Day of Judgment, though it is difficult to imagine what the Holy Alliance thought would happen then. But almost of a sudden affairs had begun to move strangely, and the despotic princes and their chancellors discovered with a great deal of astonishment that they were not living in the old age of the world, but to all appearance in a very unmanageable period of its boyhood. In an age of ugliness and routine, in a time when diplomatists and philosophers alike tended to believe that they had a list of all human types, there began to appear men who belonged to the morning of the world, men whose movements have a national breadth and beauty, who act symbols and become legends while they are alive. Garibaldi in his red shirt rode in an open carriage along the front of a hostile fort calling to the coachman to drive slower, and not a man dared fire a shot at him. Mazzini poured out upon Europe a new mysticism of humanity and liberty, and was willing, like some passionate Jesuit of the sixteenth century, to become in its cause either a philosopher or a criminal. Cavour arose with a diplomacy which was more thrilling and picturesque than war itself. These men had nothing to do with an age of the impossible. They have passed, their theories along with them, as all things pass; but since then we have had no men of their type precisely, at once large and real and romantic and successful. Gordon was a possible exception. They were the last of the heroes.

When Browning was first living in Italy, a telegram which had been sent to him was stopped on the frontier and suppressed on account of his known sympathy with the Italian Liberals. It is almost impossible for people living in a commonwealth like ours to understand how a small thing like that will affect a man. It was not so much the obvious fact that a great practical injury was really done to him; that the telegram might have altered all his plans in matters of vital moment. It was, over and above that, the sense of a hand laid on something personal and essentially free. Tyranny like this is not the worst tyranny, but it is the most intolerable. It interferes with men not in the most serious matters, but precisely in those matters in which they most resent interference. It may be illogical for men to accept cheerfully unpardonable public scandals, benighted educational systems, bad sanitation, bad lighting, a blundering and inefficient system of life, and yet to resent the tearing up of a telegram or a post-card; but the fact remains that the sensitiveness of men is a strange and localised thing, and there is hardly a man in the world who would not rather be ruled by despots.
chosen by lot and live in a city like a mediaeval Ghetto, than be forbidden by a policeman to smoke another cigarette, or sit up a quarter of an hour later; hardly a man who would not feel inclined in such a case to raise a rebellion for a caprice for which he did not really care a straw. Unmeaning and muddle-headed tyranny in small things, that is the thing which, if extended over many years, is harder to bear and hope through than the massacres of September. And that was the nightmare of vexatious triviality which was lying over all the cities of Italy that were ruled by the bureaucratic despotisms of Europe. The history of the time is full of spiteful and almost childish struggles—struggles about the humming of a tune or the wearing of a colour, the arrest of a journey, or the opening of a letter. And there can be little doubt that Browning’s temperament under these conditions was not of the kind to become more indulgent, and there grew in him a hatred of the Imperial and Ducal and Papal systems of Italy, which sometimes passed the necessities of Liberalism, and sometimes even transgressed its spirit. The life which he and his wife lived in Italy was extraordinarily full and varied, when we consider the restrictions under which one at least of them had always lain. They met and took delight, notwithstanding their exile, in some of the most interesting people of their time—Ruskin, Cardinal Manning, and Lord Lytton. Browning, in a most characteristic way, enjoyed the society of all of them, arguing with one, agreeing with another, sitting up all night by the bedside of a third.

It has frequently been stated that the only difference that ever separated Mr. and Mrs. Browning was upon the question of spiritualism. That statement must, of course, be modified and even contradicted if it means that they never differed; that Mr. Browning never thought an Act of Parliament good when Mrs. Browning thought it bad; that Mr. Browning never thought bread stale when Mrs. Browning thought it new. Such unanimity is not only inconceivable, it is immoral; and as a matter of fact, there is abundant evidence that their marriage constituted something like that ideal marriage, an alliance between two strong and independent forces. They differed, in truth, about a great many things, for example, about Napoleon III. whom Mrs. Browning regarded with an admiration which would have been somewhat beyond the deserts of Sir Galahad, and whom Browning with his emphatic Liberal principles could never pardon for the Coup d’État. If they differed on spiritualism in a somewhat more serious way than this, the reason must be sought in qualities which were deeper and more elemental in both their characters than any mere matter of opinion. Mrs. Orr, in her excellent Life of Browning, states that the difficulty arose from Mrs. Browning’s firm
belief in psychical phenomena and Browning’s absolute refusal to believe even in their possibility. Another writer who met them at this time says, “Browning cannot believe, and Mrs. Browning cannot help believing.” This theory, that Browning’s aversion to the spiritualist circle arose from an absolute denial of the tenability of such a theory of life and death, has in fact often been repeated. But it is exceedingly difficult to reconcile it with Browning’s character. He was the last man in the world to be intellectually deaf to a hypothesis merely because it was odd. He had friends whose opinions covered every description of madness from the French legitimism of De Ripert-Monclar to the Republicanism of Landor. Intellectually he may be said to have had a zest for heresies. It is difficult to impute an attitude of mere impenetrable negation to a man who had expressed with sympathy the religion of “Caliban” and the morality of “Time’s Revenges.” It is true that at this time of the first popular interest in spiritualism a feeling existed among many people of a practical turn of mind, which can only be called a superstition against believing in ghosts. But, intellectually speaking, Browning would probably have been one of the most tolerant and curious in regard to the new theories, whereas the popular version of the matter makes him unusually intolerant and negligent even for that time. The fact was in all probability that Browning’s aversion to the spiritualists had little or nothing to do with spiritualism. It arose from quite a different side of his character—his uncompromising dislike of what is called Bohemianism, of eccentric or slovenly cliques, of those straggling camp followers of the arts who exhibit dubious manners and dubious morals, of all abnormality and of all irresponsibility. Any one, in fact, who wishes to see what it was that Browning disliked need only do two things. First, he should read the Memoirs of David Home, the famous spiritualist medium with whom Browning came in contact. These Memoirs constitute a more thorough and artistic self-revelation than any monologue that Browning ever wrote. The ghosts, the raps, the flying hands, the phantom voices are infinitely the most respectable and infinitely the most credible part of the narrative. But the bragging, the sentimentalism, the moral and intellectual foppery of the composition is everywhere, culminating perhaps in the disgusting passage in which Home describes Mrs. Browning as weeping over him and assuring him that all her husband’s actions in the matter have been adopted against her will. It is in this kind of thing that we find the roots of the real anger of Browning. He did not dislike spiritualism, but spiritualists. The second point on which any one wishing to be just in the matter should cast an eye, is the record of the visit which Mrs. Browning insisted on making while on their
honeymoon in Paris to the house of George Sand. Browning felt, and to some extent expressed, exactly the same aversion to his wife mixing with the circle of George Sand which he afterwards felt at her mixing with the circle of Home. The society was “of the ragged red, diluted with the low theatrical, men who worship George Sand, à genou bas between an oath and an ejection of saliva.”

When we find that a man did not object to any number of Jacobites or Atheists, but objected to the French Bohemian poets and to the early occultist mediums as friends for his wife, we shall surely be fairly right in concluding that he objected not to an opinion, but to a social tone. The truth was that Browning had a great many admirably Philistine feelings, and one of them was a great relish for his responsibilities towards his wife. He enjoyed being a husband. This is quite a distinct thing from enjoying being a lover, though it will scarcely be found apart from it. But, like all good feelings, it has its possible exaggerations, and one of them is this almost morbid healthiness in the choice of friends for his wife.

David Home, the medium, came to Florence about 1857. Mrs. Browning undoubtedly threw herself into psychical experiments with great ardour at first, and Browning, equally undoubtedly, opposed, and at length forbade, the enterprise. He did not do so however until he had attended one séance at least, at which a somewhat ridiculous event occurred, which is described in Home’s Memoirs with a gravity even more absurd than the incident. Towards the end of the proceedings a wreath was placed in the centre of the table, and the lights being lowered, it was caused to rise slowly into the air, and after hovering for some time, to move towards Mrs. Browning, and at length to alight upon her head. As the wreath was floating in her direction, her husband was observed abruptly to cross the room and stand beside her. One would think it was a sufficiently natural action on the part of a man whose wife was the centre of a weird and disturbing experiment, genuine or otherwise. But Mr. Home gravely asserts that it was generally believed that Browning had crossed the room in the hope that the wreath would alight on his head, and that from the hour of its disobliging refusal to do so dated the whole of his goaded and malignant aversion to spiritualism. The idea of the very conventional and somewhat bored Robert Browning running about the room after a wreath in the hope of putting his head into it, is one of the genuine gleams of humour in this rather foolish affair. Browning could be fairly violent, as we know, both in poetry and conversation; but it would be almost too terrible to conjecture what he would have felt and said if Mr. Home’s wreath had alighted on his head.

Next day, according to Home’s account, he called on the hostess of the
previous night in what the writer calls “a ridiculous state of excitement,” and told her apparently that she must excuse him if he and his wife did not attend any more gatherings of the kind. What actually occurred is not, of course, quite easy to ascertain, for the account in Home’s Memoirs principally consists of noble speeches made by the medium which would seem either to have reduced Browning to a pulverised silence, or else to have failed to attract his attention. But there can be no doubt that the general upshot of the affair was that Browning put his foot down, and the experiments ceased. There can be little doubt that he was justified in this; indeed, he was probably even more justified if the experiments were genuine psychical mysteries than if they were the hocus-pocus of a charlatan. He knew his wife better than posterity can be expected to do; but even posterity can see that she was the type of woman so much adapted to the purposes of men like Home as to exhibit almost invariably either a great craving for such experiences or a great terror of them. Like many geniuses, but not all, she lived naturally upon something like a borderland; and it is impossible to say that if Browning had not interposed when she was becoming hysterical she might not have ended in an asylum.

The whole of this incident is very characteristic of Browning; but the real characteristic note in it has, as above suggested, been to some extent missed. When some seven years afterwards he produced “Mr. Sludge the Medium,” every one supposed that it was an attack upon spiritualism and the possibility of its phenomena. As we shall see when we come to that poem, this is a wholly mistaken interpretation of it. But what is really curious is that most people have assumed that a dislike of Home’s investigations implies a theoretic disbelief in spiritualism. It might, of course, imply a very firm and serious belief in it. As a matter of fact it did not imply this in Browning, but it may perfectly well have implied an agnosticism which admitted the reasonableness of such things. Home was infinitely less dangerous as a dexterous swindler than he was as a bad or foolish man in possession of unknown or ill-comprehended powers. It is surely curious to think that a man must object to exposing his wife to a few conjuring tricks, but could not be afraid of exposing her to the loose and nameless energies of the universe.

Browning’s theoretic attitude in the matter was, therefore, in all probability quite open and unbiased. His was a peculiarly hospitable intellect. If any one had told him of the spiritualist theory, or theories a hundred times more insane, as things held by some sect of Gnostics in Alexandria, or of heretical Talmudists at Antwerp, he would have delighted in those theories, and would very likely
have adopted them. But Greek Gnostics and Antwerp Jews do not dance round a man’s wife and wave their hands in her face and send her into swoons and trances about which nobody knows anything rational or scientific. It was simply the stirring in Browning of certain primal masculine feelings far beyond the reach of argument—things that lie so deep that if they are hurt, though there may be no blame and no anger, there is always pain. Browning did not like spiritualism to be mentioned for many years.

Robert Browning was unquestionably a thoroughly conventional man. There are many who think this element of conventionality altogether regrettable and disgraceful; they have established, as it were, a convention of the unconventional. But this hatred of the conventional element in the personality of a poet is only possible to those who do not remember the meaning of words. Convention means only a coming together, an agreement; and as every poet must base his work upon an emotional agreement among men, so every poet must base his work upon a convention. Every art is, of course, based upon a convention, an agreement between the speaker and the listener that certain objections shall not be raised. The most realistic art in the world is open to realistic objection. Against the most exact and everyday drama that ever came out of Norway it is still possible for the realist to raise the objection that the hero who starts a subject and drops it, who runs out of a room and runs back again for his hat, is all the time behaving in a most eccentric manner, considering that he is doing these things in a room in which one of the four walls has been taken clean away and been replaced by a line of footlights and a mob of strangers. Against the most accurate black-and-white artist that human imagination can conceive it is still to be admitted that he draws a black line round a man’s nose, and that that line is a lie. And in precisely the same fashion a poet must, by the nature of things, be conventional. Unless he is describing an emotion which others share with him, his labours will be utterly in vain. If a poet really had an original emotion; if, for example, a poet suddenly fell in love with the buffers of a railway train, it would take him considerably more time than his allotted three-score years and ten to communicate his feelings.

Poetry deals with primal and conventional things—the hunger for bread, the love of woman, the love of children, the desire for immortal life. If men really had new sentiments, poetry could not deal with them. If, let us say, a man did not feel a bitter craving to eat bread; but did, by way of substitute, feel a fresh, original craving to eat brass fenders or mahogany tables, poetry could not express him. If a man, instead of falling in love with a woman, fell in love with a
fossil or a sea anemone, poetry could not express him. Poetry can only express what is original in one sense—the sense in which we speak of original sin. It is original, not in the paltry sense of being new, but in the deeper sense of being old; it is original in the sense that it deals with origins.

All artists, who have any experience of the arts, will agree so far, that a poet is bound to be conventional with regard to matters of art. Unfortunately, however, they are the very people who cannot, as a general rule, see that a poet is also bound to be conventional in matters of conduct. It is only the smaller poet who sees the poetry of revolt, of isolation, of disagreement; the larger poet sees the poetry of those great agreements which constitute the romantic achievement of civilisation. Just as an agreement between the dramatist and the audience is necessary to every play; just as an agreement between the painter and the spectators is necessary to every picture, so an agreement is necessary to produce the worship of any of the great figures of morality—the hero, the saint, the average man, the gentleman. Browning had, it must thoroughly be realised, a real pleasure in these great agreements, these great conventions. He delighted, with a true poetic delight, in being conventional. Being by birth an Englishman, he took pleasure in being an Englishman; being by rank a member of the middle class, he took a pride in its ancient scruples and its everlasting boundaries. He was everything that he was with a definite and conscious pleasure—a man, a Liberal, an Englishman, an author, a gentleman, a lover, a married man.

This must always be remembered as a general characteristic of Browning, this ardent and headlong conventionality. He exhibited it pre-eminently in the affair of his elopement and marriage, during and after the escape of himself and his wife to Italy. He seems to have forgotten everything, except the splendid worry of being married. He showed a thoroughly healthy consciousness that he was taking up a responsibility which had its practical side. He came finally and entirely out of his dreams. Since he had himself enough money to live on, he had never thought of himself as doing anything but writing poetry; poetry indeed was probably simmering and bubbling in his head day and night. But when the problem of the elopement arose he threw himself with an energy, of which it is pleasant to read, into every kind of scheme for solidifying his position. He wrote to Monckton Milnes, and would appear to have badgered him with applications for a post in the British Museum. “I will work like a horse,” he said, with that boyish note, which, whenever in his unconsciousness he strikes it, is more poetical than all his poems. All his language in this matter is emphatic; he would be “glad and proud,” he says, “to have any minor post” his friend could obtain.
for him. He offered to read for the Bar, and probably began doing so. But all this vigorous and very creditable materialism was ruthlessly extinguished by Elizabeth Barrett. She declined altogether even to entertain the idea of her husband devoting himself to anything else at the expense of poetry. Probably she was right and Browning wrong, but it was an error which every man would desire to have made.

One of the qualities again which make Browning most charming, is the fact that he felt and expressed so simple and genuine a satisfaction about his own achievements as a lover and husband, particularly in relation to his triumph in the hygienic care of his wife. “If he is vain of anything,” writes Mrs. Browning, “it is of my restored health.” Later, she adds with admirable humour and suggestiveness, “and I have to tell him that he really must not go telling everybody how his wife walked here with him, or walked there with him, as if a wife with two feet were a miracle in Nature.” When a lady in Italy said, on an occasion when Browning stayed behind with his wife on the day of a picnic, that he was “the only man who behaved like a Christian to his wife,” Browning was elated to an almost infantile degree. But there could scarcely be a better test of the essential manliness and decency of a man than this test of his vanities. Browning boasted of being domesticated; there are half a hundred men everywhere who would be inclined to boast of not being domesticated. Bad men are almost without exception conceited, but they are commonly conceited of their defects.

One picturesque figure who plays a part in this portion of the Brownings’ life in Italy is Walter Savage Landor. Browning found him living with some of his wife’s relations, and engaged in a continuous and furious quarrel with them, which was, indeed, not uncommonly the condition of that remarkable man when living with other human beings. He had the double arrogance which is only possible to that old and stately but almost extinct blend—the aristocratic republican. Like an old Roman senator, or like a gentleman of the Southern States of America, he had the condescension of a gentleman to those below him, combined with the jealous self-assertiveness of a Jacobin to those above. The only person who appears to have been able to manage him and bring out his more agreeable side was Browning. It is, by the way, one of the many hints of a certain element in Browning which can only be described by the elementary and old-fashioned word goodness, that he always contrived to make himself acceptable and even lovable to men of savage and capricious temperament, of detached and erratic genius, who could get on with no one else. Carlyle, who
could not get a bitter taste off his tongue in talking of most of his contemporaries, was fond of Browning. Landor, who could hardly conduct an ordinary business interview without beginning to break the furniture, was fond of Browning. These are things which speak more for a man than many people will understand. It is easy enough to be agreeable to a circle of admirers, especially feminine admirers, who have a peculiar talent for discipleship and the absorption of ideas. But when a man is loved by other men of his own intellectual stature and of a wholly different type and order of eminence, we may be certain that there was something genuine about him, and something far more important than anything intellectual. Men do not like another man because he is a genius, least of all when they happen to be geniuses themselves. This general truth about Browning is like hearing of a woman who is the most famous beauty in a city, and who is at the same time adored and confided in by all the women who live there.

Browning came to the rescue of the fiery old gentleman, and helped by Seymour Kirkup put him under very definite obligations by a course of very generous conduct. He was fully repaid in his own mind for his trouble by the mere presence and friendship of Landor, for whose quaint and volcanic personality he had a vast admiration, compounded of the pleasure of the artist in an oddity and of the man in a hero. It is somewhat amusing and characteristic that Mrs. Browning did not share this unlimited enjoyment of the company of Mr. Landor, and expressed her feelings in her own humorous manner. She writes, “Dear, darling Robert amuses me by talking of his gentleness and sweetness. A most courteous and refined gentleman he is, of course, and very affectionate to Robert (as he ought to be), but of self-restraint he has not a grain, and of suspicion many grains. What do you really say to dashing down a plate on the floor when you don’t like what’s on it? Robert succeeded in soothing him, and the poor old lion is very quiet on the whole, roaring softly to beguile the time in Latin alcaics against his wife and Louis Napoleon.”

One event alone could really end this endless life of the Italian Arcadia. That event happened on June 29, 1861. Robert Browning’s wife died, stricken by the death of her sister, and almost as hard (it is a characteristic touch) by the death of Cavour. She died alone in the room with Browning, and of what passed then, though much has been said, little should be. He, closing the door of that room behind him, closed a door in himself, and none ever saw Browning upon earth again but only a splendid surface.
CHAPTER V

BROWNING IN LATER LIFE

Browning’s confidences, what there were of them, immediately after his wife’s death were given to several women-friends; all his life, indeed, he was chiefly intimate with women. The two most intimate of these were his own sister, who remained with him in all his later years, and the sister of his wife, who seven years afterwards passed away in his presence as Elizabeth had done. The other letters, which number only one or two, referring in any personal manner to his bereavement are addressed to Miss Haworth and Isa Blagden. He left Florence and remained for a time with his father and sister near Dinard. Then he returned to London and took up his residence in Warwick Crescent. Naturally enough, the thing for which he now chiefly lived was the education of his son, and it is characteristic of Browning that he was not only a very indulgent father, but an indulgent father of a very conventional type: he had rather the chuckling pride of the city gentleman than the educational gravity of the intellectual.

Browning was now famous, Bells and Pomegranates, Men and Women, Christmas Eve, and Dramatis Personæ had successively glorified his Italian period. But he was already brooding half-unconsciously on more famous things. He has himself left on record a description of the incident out of which grew the whole impulse and plan of his greatest achievement. In a passage marked with all his peculiar sense of material things, all that power of writing of stone or metal or the fabric of drapery, so that we seem to be handling and smelling them, he has described a stall for the selling of odds and ends of every variety of utility and uselessness:—

“picture frames
White through the worn gilt, mirror-sconces chipped,
Bronze angel-heads once knobs attached to chests,
(Handled when ancient dames chose forth brocade)
Modern chalk drawings, studies from the nude,
Samples of stone, jet, breccia, porphyry
Polished and rough, sundry amazing busts
In baked earth, (broken, Providence be praised!)
A wreck of tapestry proudly-purposed web
When reds and blues were indeed red and blue,
Now offer’d as a mat to save bare feet
(Since carpets constitute a cruel cost).
This sketch embodies indeed the very poetry of débris, and comes nearer than any other poem has done to expressing the pathos and picturesqueness of a low-class pawnshop. “This,” which Browning bought for a lira out of this heap of rubbish, was, of course, the old Latin record of the criminal case of Guido Franceschini, tried for the murder of his wife Pompilia in the year 1698. And this again, it is scarcely necessary to say, was the ground-plan and motive of The Ring and the Book.

Browning had picked up the volume and partly planned the poem during his wife’s lifetime in Italy. But the more he studied it, the more the dimensions of the theme appeared to widen and deepen; and he came at last, there can be little doubt, to regard it definitely as his magnum opus to which he would devote many years to come. Then came the great sorrow of his life, and he cast about him for something sufficiently immense and arduous and complicated to keep his brain going like some huge and automatic engine. “I mean to keep writing,” he said, “whether I like it or not.” And thus finally he took up the scheme of the Franceschini story, and developed it on a scale with a degree of elaboration, repetition, and management, and inexhaustible scholarship which was never perhaps before given in the history of the world to an affair of two or three characters. Of the larger literary and spiritual significance of the work, particularly in reference to its curious and original form of narration, I shall speak subsequently. But there is one peculiarity about the story which has more direct bearing on Browning’s life, and it appears singular that few, if any, of his critics have noticed it. This peculiarity is the extraordinary resemblance between the moral problem involved in the poem if understood in its essence, and the moral problem which constituted the crisis and centre of Browning’s own life. Nothing, properly speaking, ever happened to Browning after his wife’s death; and his greatest work during that time was the telling, under alien symbols and the veil of a wholly different story, the inner truth about his own greatest trial and hesitation. He himself had in this sense the same difficulty as Caponsacchi, the supreme difficulty of having to trust himself to the reality of virtue not only without the reward, but even without the name of virtue. He had, like Caponsacchi, preferred what was unselfish and dubious to what was selfish and honourable. He knew better than any man that there is little danger of men who
really know anything of that naked and homeless responsibility seeking it too often or indulging it too much. The conscientiousness of the law-abider is nothing in its terrors to the conscientiousness of the conscientious law-breaker. Browning had once, for what he seriously believed to be a greater good, done what he himself would never have had the cant to deny, ought to be called deceit and evasion. Such a thing ought never to come to a man twice. If he finds that necessity twice, he may, I think, be looked at with the beginning of a suspicion. To Browning it came once, and he devoted his greatest poem to a suggestion of how such a necessity may come to any man who is worthy to live.

As has already been suggested, any apparent danger that there may be in this excusing of an exceptional act is counteracted by the perils of the act, since it must always be remembered that this kind of act has the immense difference from all legal acts—that it can only be justified by success. If Browning had taken his wife to Paris, and she had died in an hotel there, we can only conceive him saying, with the bitter emphasis of one of his own lines, “How should I have borne me, please?” Before and after this event his life was as tranquil and casual a one as it would be easy to imagine; but there always remained upon him something which was felt by all who knew him in after years—the spirit of a man who had been ready when his time came, and had walked in his own devotion and certainty in a position counted indefensible and almost along the brink of murder. This great moral of Browning, which may be called roughly the doctrine of the great hour, enters, of course, into many poems besides The Ring and the Book, and is indeed the mainspring of a great part of his poetry taken as a whole. It is, of course, the central idea of that fine poem, “The Statue and the Bust,” which has given a great deal of distress to a great many people because of its supposed invasion of recognised morality. It deals, as every one knows, with a Duke Ferdinand and an elopement which he planned with the bride of one of the Riccardi. The lovers begin by deferring their flight for various more or less comprehensible reasons of convenience; but the habit of shrinking from the final step grows steadily upon them, and they never take it, but die, as it were, waiting for each other. The objection that the act thus avoided was a criminal one is very simply and quite clearly answered by Browning himself. His case against the dilatory couple is not in the least affected by the viciousness of their aim. His case is that they exhibited no virtue. Crime was frustrated in them by cowardice, which is probably the worse immorality of the two. The same idea again may be found in that delightful lyric “Youth and Art,” where a successful cantatrice reproaches a successful sculptor with their failure to understand each other in
And this conception of the great hour, which breaks out everywhere in Browning, it is almost impossible not to connect with his own internal drama. It is really curious that this correspondence has not been insisted on. Probably critics have been misled by the fact that Browning in many places appears to boast that he is purely dramatic, that he has never put himself into his work, a thing which no poet, good or bad, who ever lived could possibly avoid doing.

The enormous scope and seriousness of The Ring and the Book occupied Browning for some five or six years, and the great epic appeared in the winter of 1868. Just before it was published Smith and Elder brought out a uniform edition of all Browning’s works up to that time, and the two incidents taken together may be considered to mark the final and somewhat belated culmination of Browning’s literary fame. The years since his wife’s death, that had been covered by the writing of The Ring and the Book, had been years of an almost feverish activity in that and many other ways. His travels had been restless and continued, his industry immense, and for the first time he began that mode of life which afterwards became so characteristic of him—the life of what is called society. A man of a shallower and more sentimental type would have professed to find the life of dinner-tables and soirées vain and unsatisfying to a poet, and especially to a poet in mourning. But if there is one thing more than another which is stirring and honourable about Browning, it is the entire absence in him of this cant of dissatisfaction. He had the one great requirement of a poet—he was not difficult to please. The life of society was superficial, but it is only very superficial people who object to the superficial. To the man who sees the marvellousness of all things, the surface of life is fully as strange and magical as its interior; clearness and plainness of life is fully as mysterious as its mysteries. The young man in evening dress, pulling on his gloves, is quite as elemental a figure as any anchorite, quite as incomprehensible, and indeed quite as alarming.

A great many literary persons have expressed astonishment at, or even disapproval of, this social frivolity of Browning’s. Not one of these literary people would have been shocked if Browning’s interest in humanity had led him into a gambling hell in the Wild West or a low tavern in Paris; but it seems to be tacitly assumed that fashionable people are not human at all. Humanitarians of a
material and dogmatic type, the philanthropists and the professional reformers go to look for humanity in remote places and in huge statistics. Humanitarians of a more vivid type, the Bohemian artists, go to look for humanity in thieves’ kitchens and the studios of the Quartier Latin. But humanitarians of the highest type, the great poets and philosophers, do not go to look for humanity at all. For them alone among all men the nearest drawing-room is full of humanity, and even their own families are human. Shakespeare ended his life by buying a house in his own native town and talking to the townsmen. Browning was invited to a great many conversaziones and private views, and did not pretend that they bored him. In a letter belonging to this period of his life he describes his first dinner at one of the Oxford colleges with an unaffected delight and vanity, which reminds the reader of nothing so much as the pride of the boy-captain of a public school if he were invited to a similar function and received a few compliments. It may be indeed that Browning had a kind of second youth in this long-delayed social recognition, but at least he enjoyed his second youth nearly as much as his first, and it is not every one who can do that.

Of Browning’s actual personality and presence in this later middle age of his, memories are still sufficiently clear. He was a middle-sized, well set up, erect man, with somewhat emphatic gestures, and, as almost all testimonies mention, a curiously strident voice. The beard, the removal of which his wife had resented with so quaint an indignation, had grown again, but grown quite white, which, as she said when it occurred, was a signal mark of the justice of the gods. His hair was still fairly dark, and his whole appearance at this time must have been very well represented by Mr. G.F. Watts’s fine portrait in the National Portrait Gallery. The portrait bears one of the many testimonies which exist to Mr. Watts’s grasp of the essential of character, for it is the only one of the portraits of Browning in which we get primarily the air of virility, even of animal virility, tempered but not disguised, with a certain touch of the pallor of the brain-worker. He looks here what he was—a very healthy man, too scholarly to live a completely healthy life.

His manner in society, as has been more than once indicated, was that of a man anxious, if anything, to avoid the air of intellectual eminence. Lockhart said briefly, “I like Browning; he isn’t at all like a damned literary man.” He was, according to some, upon occasion, talkative and noisy to a fault; but there are two kinds of men who monopolise conversation. The first kind are those who like the sound of their own voice; the second are those who do not know what the sound of their own voice is like. Browning was one of the latter class. His
volubility in speech had the same origin as his voluminousness and obscurity in literature—a kind of headlong humility. He cannot assuredly have been aware that he talked people down or have wished to do so. For this would have been precisely a violation of the ideal of the man of the world, the one ambition and even weakness that he had. He wished to be a man of the world, and he never in the full sense was one. He remained a little too much of a boy, a little too much even of a Puritan, and a little too much of what may be called a man of the universe, to be a man of the world.

One of his faults probably was the thing roughly called prejudice. On the question, for example, of table-turning and psychic phenomena he was in a certain degree fierce and irrational. He was not indeed, as we shall see when we come to study “Sludge the Medium,” exactly prejudiced against spiritualism. But he was beyond all question stubbornly prejudiced against spiritualists. Whether the medium Home was or was not a scoundrel it is somewhat difficult in our day to conjecture. But in so far as he claimed supernatural powers, he may have been as honest a gentleman as ever lived. And even if we think that the moral atmosphere of Home is that of a man of dubious character, we can still feel that Browning might have achieved his purpose without making it so obvious that he thought so. Some traces again, though much fainter ones, may be found of something like a subconscious hostility to the Roman Church, or at least a less full comprehension of the grandeur of the Latin religious civilisation than might have been expected of a man of Browning’s great imaginative tolerance. Æstheticism, Bohemianism, the irresponsibilities of the artist, the untidy morals of Grub Street and the Latin Quarter, he hated with a consuming hatred. He was himself exact in everything, from his scholarship to his clothes; and even when he wore the loose white garments of the loungers in Southern Europe, they were in their own way as precise as a dress suit. This extra carefulness in all things he defended against the cant of Bohemianism as the right attitude for the poet. When some one excused coarseness or negligence on the ground of genius, he said, “That is an error: Noblesse oblige.”

Browning’s prejudices, however, belonged altogether to that healthy order which is characterised by a cheerful and satisfied ignorance. It never does a man any very great harm to hate a thing that he knows nothing about. It is the hating of a thing when we do know something about it which corrodes the character. We all have a dark feeling of resistance towards people we have never met, and a profound and manly dislike of the authors we have never read. It does not harm a man to be certain before opening the books that Whitman is an obscene ranter
or that Stevenson is a mere trifler with style. It is the man who can think these things after he has read the books who must be in a fair way to mental perdition. Prejudice, in fact, is not so much the great intellectual sin as a thing which we may call, to coin a word, “postjudice,” not the bias before the fair trial, but the bias that remains afterwards. With Browning’s swift and emphatic nature the bias was almost always formed before he had gone into the matter. But almost all the men he really knew he admired, almost all the books he had really read he enjoyed. He stands pre-eminent among those great universalists who praised the ground they trod on and commended existence like any other material, in its samples. He had no kinship with those new and strange universalists of the type of Tolstoi who praise existence to the exclusion of all the institutions they have lived under, and all the ties they have known. He thought the world good because he had found so many things that were good in it—religion, the nation, the family, the social class. He did not, like the new humanitarian, think the world good because he had found so many things in it that were bad.

As has been previously suggested, there was something very queer and dangerous that underlay all the good humour of Browning. If one of these idle prejudices were broken by better knowledge, he was all the better pleased. But if some of the prejudices that were really rooted in him were trodden on, even by accident, such as his aversion to loose artistic cliques, or his aversion to undignified publicity, his rage was something wholly transfiguring and alarming, something far removed from the shrill disapproval of Carlyle and Ruskin. It can only be said that he became a savage, and not always a very agreeable or presentable savage. The indecent fury which danced upon the bones of Edward Fitzgerald was a thing which ought not to have astonished any one who had known much of Browning’s character or even of his work. Some unfortunate persons on another occasion had obtained some of Mrs. Browning’s letters shortly after her death, and proposed to write a Life founded upon them. They ought to have understood that Browning would probably disapprove; but if he talked to them about it, as he did to others, and it is exceedingly probable that he did, they must have thought he was mad. “What I suffer with the paws of these black-guards in my bowels you can fancy,” he says. Again he writes: “Think of this beast working away, not deeming my feelings, or those of her family, worthy of notice. It shall not be done if I can stop the scamp’s knavery along with his breath.” Whether Browning actually resorted to this extreme course is unknown; nothing is known except that he wrote a letter to the ambitious biographer which reduced him to silence, probably from stupefaction.
The same peculiarity ought, as I have said, to have been apparent to any one who knew anything of Browning’s literary work. A great number of his poems are marked by a trait of which by its nature it is more or less impossible to give examples. Suffice it to say that it is truly extraordinary that poets like Swinburne (who seldom uses a gross word) should have been spoken of as if they had introduced moral license into Victorian poetry. What the Non-conformist conscience has been doing to have passed Browning is something difficult to imagine. But the peculiarity of this occasional coarseness in his work is this—that it is always used to express a certain wholesome fury and contempt for things sickly, or ungenerous, or unmanly. The poet seems to feel that there are some things so contemptible that you can only speak of them in pothouse words. It would be idle, and perhaps undesirable, to give examples; but it may be noted that the same brutal physical metaphor is used by his Caponsacchi about the people who could imagine Pomphilia impure and by his Shakespeare in “At the Mermaid,” about the claim of the Byronic poet to enter into the heart of humanity. In both cases Browning feels, and perhaps in a manner rightly, that the best thing we can do with a sentiment essentially base is to strip off its affectations and state it basely, and that the mud of Chaucer is a great deal better than the poison of Sterne. Herein again Browning is close to the average man; and to do the average man justice, there is a great deal more of this Browningesque hatred of Byronism in the brutality of his conversation than many people suppose.

Such, roughly and as far as we can discover, was the man who, in the full summer and even the full autumn of his intellectual powers, began to grow upon the consciousness of the English literary world about this time. For the first time friendship grew between him and the other great men of his time. Tennyson, for whom he then and always felt the best and most personal kind of admiration, came into his life, and along with him Gladstone and Francis Palgrave. There began to crowd in upon him those honours whereby a man is to some extent made a classic in his lifetime, so that he is honoured even if he is unread. He was made a Fellow of Balliol in 1867, and the homage of the great universities continued thenceforth unceasingly until his death, despite many refusals on his part. He was unanimously elected Lord Rector of Glasgow University in 1875. He declined, owing to his deep and somewhat characteristic aversion to formal public speaking, and in 1877 he had to decline on similar grounds the similar offer from the University of St. Andrews. He was much at the English universities, was a friend of Dr. Jowett, and enjoyed the university life at the age
of sixty-three in a way that he probably would not have enjoyed it if he had ever been to a university. The great universities would not let him alone, to their great credit, and he became a D.C.L. of Cambridge in 1879, and a D.C.L. of Oxford in 1882. When he received these honours there were, of course, the traditional buffooneries of the undergraduates, and one of them dropped a red cotton nightcap neatly on his head as he passed under the gallery. Some indignant intellectuals wrote to him to protest against this affront, but Browning took the matter in the best and most characteristic way. “You are far too hard,” he wrote in answer, “on the very harmless drolleries of the young men. Indeed, there used to be a regularly appointed jester, ‘Filius Terrae’ he was called, whose business it was to gibe and jeer at the honoured ones by way of reminder that all human glories are merely gilded baubles and must not be fancied metal.” In this there are other and deeper things characteristic of Browning besides his learning and humour. In discussing anything, he must always fall back upon great speculative and eternal ideas. Even in the tomfoolery of a horde of undergraduates he can only see a symbol of the ancient office of ridicule in the scheme of morals. The young men themselves were probably unaware that they were the representatives of the “Filius Terrae.”

But the years during which Browning was thus reaping some of his late laurels began to be filled with incidents that reminded him how the years were passing over him. On June 20, 1866, his father had died, a man of whom it is impossible to think without a certain emotion, a man who had lived quietly and persistently for others, to whom Browning owed more than it is easy to guess, to whom we in all probability mainly owe Browning. In 1868 one of his closest friends, Arabella Barrett, the sister of his wife, died, as her sister had done, alone with Browning. Browning was not a superstitious man; he somewhat stormily prided himself on the contrary; but he notes at this time “a dream which Arabella had of Her, in which she prophesied their meeting in five years,” that is, of course, the meeting of Elizabeth and Arabella. His friend Milsand, to whom Sordello was dedicated, died in 1886. “I never knew,” said Browning, “or ever shall know, his like among men.” But though both fame and a growing isolation indicated that he was passing towards the evening of his days, though he bore traces of the progress, in a milder attitude towards things, and a greater preference for long exiles with those he loved, one thing continued in him with unconquerable energy—there was no diminution in the quantity, no abatement in the immense designs of his intellectual output.

In 1871 he produced Balaustion’s Adventure, a work exhibiting not only his
genius in its highest condition of power, but something more exacting even than genius to a man of his mature and changed life, immense investigation, prodigious memory, the thorough assimilation of the vast literature of a remote civilisation. Balaustion’s Adventure, which is, of course, the mere framework for an English version of the Alcestis of Euripides, is an illustration of one of Browning’s finest traits, his immeasurable capacity for a classic admiration. Those who knew him tell us that in conversation he never revealed himself so impetuously or so brilliantly as when declaiming the poetry of others; and Balaustion’s Adventure is a monument of this fiery self-forgetfulness. It is penetrated with the passionate desire to render Euripides worthily, and to that imitation are for the time being devoted all the gigantic powers which went to make the songs of Pippa and the last agony of Guido. Browning never put himself into anything more powerfully or more successfully; yet it is only an excellent translation. In the uncouth philosophy of Caliban, in the tangled ethics of Sludge, in his wildest satire, in his most feather-headed lyric, Browning was never more thoroughly Browning than in this splendid and unselfish plagiarism. This revived excitement in Greek matters; “his passionate love of the Greek language” continued in him thenceforward till his death. He published more than one poem on the drama of Hellas. Aristophanes’ Apology came out in 1875, and The Agamemnon of Æschylus, another paraphrase, in 1877. All three poems are marked by the same primary characteristic, the fact that the writer has the literature of Athens literally at his fingers’ ends. He is intimate not only with their poetry and politics, but with their frivolity and their slang; he knows not only Athenian wisdom, but Athenian folly; not only the beauty of Greece, but even its vulgarity. In fact, a page of Aristophanes’ Apology is like a page of Aristophanes, dark with levity and as obscure as a schoolman’s treatise, with its load of jokes.

In 1871 also appeared Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau: Saviour of Society, one of the finest and most picturesque of all Browning’s apologetic monologues. The figure is, of course, intended for Napoleon III., whose Empire had just fallen, bringing down his country with it. The saying has been often quoted that Louis Napoleon deceived Europe twice—once when he made it think he was a noodle, and once when he made it think he was a statesman. It might be added that Europe was never quite just to him, and was deceived a third time, when it took him after his fall for an exploded mountebank and nonentity. Amid the general chorus of contempt which was raised over his weak and unscrupulous policy in later years, culminating in his great disaster, there are few things finer than this
attempt of Browning’s to give the man a platform and let him speak for himself. It is the apologia of a political adventurer, and a political adventurer of a kind peculiarly open to popular condemnation. Mankind has always been somewhat inclined to forgive the adventurer who destroys or re-creates, but there is nothing inspiring about the adventurer who merely preserves. We have sympathy with the rebel who aims at reconstruction, but there is something repugnant to the imagination in the rebel who rebels in the name of compromise. Browning had to defend, or rather to interpret, a man who kidnapped politicians in the night and deluged the Montmartre with blood, not for an ideal, not for a reform, not precisely even for a cause, but simply for the establishment of a régime. He did these hideous things not so much that he might be able to do better ones, but that he and every one else might be able to do nothing for twenty years; and Browning’s contention, and a very plausible contention, is that the criminal believed that his crime would establish order and compromise, or, in other words, that he thought that nothing was the very best thing he and his people could do. There is something peculiarly characteristic of Browning in thus selecting not only a political villain, but what would appear the most prosaic kind of villain. We scarcely ever find in Browning a defence of those obvious and easily defended publicans and sinners whose mingled virtues and vices are the stuff of romance and melodrama—the generous rake, the kindly drunkard, the strong man too great for parochial morals. He was in a yet more solitary sense the friend of the outcast. He took in the sinners whom even sinners cast out. He went with the hypocrite and had mercy on the Pharisee.

How little this desire of Browning’s, to look for a moment at the man’s life with the man’s eyes, was understood, may be gathered from the criticisms on Hohenstiel-Schwangau, which, says Browning, “the Editor of the Edinburgh Review calls my eulogium on the Second Empire, which it is not, any more than what another wiseacre affirms it to be, a scandalous attack on the old constant friend of England. It is just what I imagine the man might, if he pleased, say for himself.”

In 1873 appeared Red-Cotton NightCap Country, which, if it be not absolutely one of the finest of Browning’s poems, is certainly one of the most magnificently Browningesque. The origin of the name of the poem is probably well known. He was travelling along the Normandy coast, and discovered what he called

“Meek, hitherto un-Murrayed bathing-places,
Best loved of sea-coast-nook-full Normandy!”
Miss Thackeray, who was of the party, delighted Browning beyond measure by calling the sleepy old fishing district “White Cotton NightCap Country.” It was exactly the kind of elfish phrase to which Browning had, it must always be remembered, a quite unconquerable attraction. The notion of a town of sleep, where men and women walked about in nightcaps, a nation of somnambulists, was the kind of thing that Browning in his heart loved better than Paradise Lost. Some time afterwards he read in a newspaper a very painful story of profligacy and suicide which greatly occupied the French journals in the year 1871, and which had taken place in the same district. It is worth noting that Browning was one of those wise men who can perceive the terrible and impressive poetry of the police-news, which is commonly treated as vulgarity, which is dreadful and may be undesirable, but is certainly not vulgar. From The Ring and the Book to Red-Cotton NightCap Country a great many of his works might be called magnificent detective stories. The story is somewhat ugly, and its power does not alter its ugliness, for power can only make ugliness uglier. And in this poem there is little or nothing of the revelation of that secret wealth of valour and patience in humanity which makes real and redeems the revelation of its secret vileness in The Ring and the Book. It almost looks at first sight as if Browning had for a moment surrendered the whole of his impregnable philosophical position and admitted the strange heresy that a human story can be sordid. But this view of the poem is, of course, a mistake. It was written in something which, for want of a more exact word, we must call one of the bitter moods of Browning; but the bitterness is entirely the product of a certain generous hostility against the class of morbidities which he really detested, sometimes more than they deserved. In this poem these principles of weakness and evil are embodied to him as the sicklier kind of Romanism, and the more sensual side of the French temperament. We must never forget what a great deal of the Puritan there remained in Browning to the end. This outburst of it is fierce and ironical, not in his best spirit. It says in effect, “You call this a country of sleep, I call it a country of death. You call it ‘White Cotton NightCap Country’; I call it ‘Red Cotton NightCap Country.’”

Shortly before this, in 1872, he had published Fifine at the Fair, which his principal biographer, and one of his most uncompromising admirers, calls a piece of perplexing cynicism. Perplexing it may be to some extent, for it was almost impossible to tell whether Browning would or would not be perplexing even in a love-song or a post-card. But cynicism is a word that cannot possibly be applied with any propriety to anything that Browning ever wrote. Cynicism
denotes that condition of mind in which we hold that life is in its nature mean and arid; that no soul contains genuine goodness, and no state of things genuine reliability. Fifine at the Fair, like Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, is one of Browning’s apologetic soliloquies—the soliloquy of an epicurean who seeks half-playfully to justify upon moral grounds an infidelity into which he afterwards actually falls. This casuist, like all Browning’s casuists, is given many noble outbursts and sincere moments, and therefore apparently the poem is called cynical. It is difficult to understand what particular connection there is between seeing good in nobody and seeing good even in a sensual fool.

After Fifine at the Fair appeared the Inn Album, in 1875, a purely narrative work, chiefly interesting as exhibiting in yet another place one of Browning’s vital characteristics, a pleasure in retelling and interpreting actual events of a sinister and criminal type; and after the Inn Album came what is perhaps the most preposterously individual thing he ever wrote, Of Pacchiarotto, and How He Worked in Distemper, in 1876. It is impossible to call the work poetry, and it is very difficult indeed to know what to call it. Its chief characteristic is a kind of galloping energy, an energy that has nothing intellectual or even intelligible about it, a purely animal energy of words. Not only is it not beautiful, it is not even clever, and yet it carries the reader away as he might be carried away by romping children. It ends up with a voluble and largely unmeaning malediction upon the poet’s critics, a malediction so outrageously good-humoured that it does not take the trouble even to make itself clear to the objects of its wrath. One can compare the poem to nothing in heaven or earth, except to the somewhat humorous, more or less benevolent, and most incomprehensible catalogues of curses and oaths which may be heard from an intoxicated navvy. This is the kind of thing, and it goes on for pages:—

“Long after the last of your number
Has ceased my front-court to encumber
While, treading down rose and ranunculus,
You Tommy-make-room-for-your-uncle-us!
Troop, all of you man or homunculus,
Quick march! for Xanthippe, my housemaid,
If once on your pates she a souse made
With what, pan or pot, bowl or skoramis,
First comes to her hand—things were more amiss!
I would not for worlds be your place in—
Recipient of slops from the basin!
You, Jack-in-the-Green, leaf-and-twiggishness
Won’t save a dry thread on your priggishness!”
You can only call this, in the most literal sense of the word, the brute-force of language.

In spite however of this monstrosity among poems, which gives its title to the volume, it contains some of the most beautiful verses that Browning ever wrote in that style of light philosophy in which he was unequalled. Nothing ever gave so perfectly and artistically what is too loosely talked about as a thrill, as the poem called “Fears and Scruples,” in which a man describes the mystifying conduct of an absent friend, and reserves to the last line the climax—

“Hush, I pray you!
What if this friend happen to be—God.”

It is the masterpiece of that excellent but much-abused literary quality, Sensationalism.

The volume entitled Pacchiarotto, moreover, includes one or two of the most spirited poems on the subject of the poet in relation to publicity—“At the Mermaid,” “House,” and “Shop.”

In spite of his increasing years, his books seemed if anything to come thicker and faster. Two were published in 1878—La Saisiaz, his great metaphysical poem on the conception of immortality, and that delightfully foppish fragment of the ancien régime, The Two Poets of Croisic. Those two poems would alone suffice to show that he had not forgotten the hard science of theology or the harder science of humour. Another collection followed in 1879, the first series of Dramatic Idylls, which contain such masterpieces as “Pheidippides” and “Ivàn Ivànovitch.” Upon its heels, in 1880, came the second series of Dramatic Idylls, including “Muléykeh” and “Clive,” possibly the two best stories in poetry, told in the best manner of story-telling. Then only did the marvellous fountain begin to slacken in quantity, but never in quality. Jocoseria did not appear till 1883. It contains among other things a cast-back to his very earliest manner in the lyric of “Never the Time and the Place,” which we may call the most light-hearted love-song that was ever written by a man over seventy. In the next year appeared Ferishtah’s Fancies, which exhibit some of his shrewdest cosmic sagacity, expressed in some of his quaintest and most characteristic images. Here perhaps more than anywhere else we see that supreme peculiarity of Browning—his sense of the symbolism of material trifles. Enormous problems, and yet more enormous answers, about pain, prayer, destiny, liberty, and conscience are suggested by cherries, by the sun, by a melon-seller, by an eagle flying in the sky, by a man tilling a plot of ground. It is this spirit of grotesque allegory which
really characterises Browning among all other poets. Other poets might possibly have hit upon the same philosophical idea—some idea as deep, as delicate, and as spiritual. But it may be safely asserted that no other poet, having thought of a deep, delicate, and spiritual idea, would call it "A Bean Stripe; also Apple Eating."

Three more years passed, and the last book which Browning published in his lifetime was Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in their Day, a book which consists of apostrophes, amicable, furious, reverential, satirical, emotional to a number of people of whom the vast majority even of cultivated people have never heard in their lives—Daniel Bartoli, Francis Furini, Gerard de Lairesse, and Charles Avison. This extraordinary knowledge of the fullness of history was a thing which never ceased to characterise Browning even when he was unfortunate in every other literary quality. Apart altogether from every line he ever wrote, it may fairly be said that no mind so rich as his ever carried its treasures to the grave. All these later poems are vigorous, learned, and full-blooded. They are thoroughly characteristic of their author. But nothing in them is quite so characteristic of their author as this fact, that when he had published all of them, and was already near to his last day, he turned with the energy of a boy let out of school, and began, of all things in the world, to re-write and improve "Pauline," the boyish poem that he had written fifty-five years before. Here was a man covered with glory and near to the doors of death, who was prepared to give himself the elaborate trouble of reconstructing the mood, and rebuilding the verses of a long juvenile poem which had been forgotten for fifty years in the blaze of successive victories. It is such things as these which give to Browning an interest of personality which is far beyond the more interest of genius. It was of such things that Elizabeth Barrett wrote in one of her best moments of insight—that his genius was the least important thing about him.

During all these later years, Browning’s life had been a quiet and regular one. He always spent the winter in Italy and the summer in London, and carried his old love of precision to the extent of never failing day after day throughout the year to leave the house at the same time. He had by this time become far more of a public figure than he had ever been previously, both in England and Italy. In 1881, Dr. Furnivall and Miss E.H. Hickey founded the famous "Browning Society.” He became President of the new "Shakespeare Society” and of the “Wordsworth Society.” In 1886, on the death of Lord Houghton, he accepted the post of Foreign Correspondent to the Royal Academy. When he moved to De Vere Gardens in 1887, it began to be evident that he was slowly breaking up. He
still dined out constantly; he still attended every reception and private view; he still corresponded prodigiously, and even added to his correspondence; and there is nothing more typical of him than that now, when he was almost already a classic, he answered any compliment with the most delightful vanity and embarrassment. In a letter to Mr. George Bainton, touching style, he makes a remark which is an excellent criticism on his whole literary career: “I myself found many forgotten fields which have proved the richest of pastures.” But despite his continued energy, his health was gradually growing worse. He was a strong man in a muscular, and ordinarily in a physical sense, but he was also in a certain sense a nervous man, and may be said to have died of brain-excitement prolonged through a lifetime. In these closing years he began to feel more constantly the necessity for rest. He and his sister went to live at a little hotel in Llangollen, and spent hours together talking and drinking tea on the lawn. He himself writes in one of his quaint and poetic phrases that he had come to love these long country retreats, “another term of delightful weeks, each tipped with a sweet starry Sunday at the little church.” For the first time, and in the last two or three years, he was really growing old. On one point he maintained always a tranquil and unvarying decision. The pessimistic school of poetry was growing up all round him; the decadents, with their belief that art was only a counting of the autumn leaves, were approaching more and more towards their tired triumph and their tasteless popularity. But Browning would not for one instant take the scorn of them out of his voice. “Death, death, it is this harping on death that I despise so much. In fiction, in poetry, French as well as English, and I am told in American also, in art and literature, the shadow of death, call it what you will, despair, negation, indifference, is upon us. But what fools who talk thus! Why, amico mio, you know as well as I, that death is life, just as our daily momentarily dying body is none the less alive, and ever recruiting new forces of existence. Without death, which is our church-yardy crape-like word for change, for growth, there could be no prolongation of that which we call life. Never say of me that I am dead.”

On August 13, 1888, he set out once more for Italy, the last of his innumerable voyages. During his last Italian period he seems to have fallen back on very ultimate simplicities, chiefly a mere staring at nature. The family with whom he lived kept a fox cub, and Browning would spend hours with it watching its grotesque ways; when it escaped, he was characteristically enough delighted. The old man could be seen continually in the lanes round Asolo, peering into hedges and whistling for the lizards.
This serene and pastoral decline, surely the mildest of slopes into death, was suddenly diversified by a flash of something lying far below. Browning’s eye fell upon a passage written by the distinguished Edward Fitzgerald, who had been dead for many years, in which Fitzgerald spoke in an uncomplimentary manner of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Browning immediately wrote the “Lines to Edward Fitzgerald,” and set the whole literary world in an uproar. The lines were bitter and excessive to have been written against any man, especially bitter and excessive to have been written against a man who was not alive to reply. And yet, when all is said, it is impossible not to feel a certain dark and indescribable pleasure in this last burst of the old barbaric energy. The mountain had been tilled and forested, and laid out in gardens to the summit; but for one last night it had proved itself once more a volcano, and had lit up all the plains with its forgotten fire. And the blow, savage as it was, was dealt for that great central sanctity—the story of a man’s youth. All that the old man would say in reply to every view of the question was, “I felt as if she had died yesterday.”

Towards December of 1889 he moved to Venice, where he fell ill. He took very little food; it was indeed one of his peculiar small fads that men should not take food when they are ill, a matter in which he maintained that the animals were more sagacious. He asserted vigorously that this somewhat singular regimen would pull him through, talked about his plans, and appeared cheerful. Gradually, however, the talking became more infrequent, the cheerfulness passed into a kind of placidity; and without any particular crisis or sign of the end, Robert Browning died on December 12, 1889. The body was taken on board ship by the Venice Municipal Guard, and received by the Royal Italian marines. He was buried in the Poets’ Corner of Westminster Abbey, the choir singing his wife’s poem, “He giveth His beloved sleep.” On the day that he died Asolando was published.
CHAPTER VI

BROWNING AS A LITERARY ARTIST

Mr. William Sharp, in his Life of Browning, quotes the remarks of another critic to the following effect: “The poet’s processes of thought are scientific in their precision and analysis; the sudden conclusion that he imposes upon them is transcendental and inept.”

This is a very fair but a very curious example of the way in which Browning is treated. For what is the state of affairs? A man publishes a series of poems, vigorous, perplexing, and unique. The critics read them, and they decide that he has failed as a poet, but that he is a remarkable philosopher and logician. They then proceed to examine his philosophy, and show with great triumph that it is unphilosophical, and to examine his logic and show with great triumph that it is not logical, but “transcendental and inept.” In other words, Browning is first denounced for being a logician and not a poet, and then denounced for insisting on being a poet when they have decided that he is to be a logician. It is just as if a man were to say first that a garden was so neglected that it was only fit for a boys’ playground, and then complain of the unsuitability in a boys’ playground of rockeries and flower-beds.

As we find, after this manner, that Browning does not act satisfactorily as that which we have decided that he shall be—a logician—it might possibly be worth while to make another attempt to see whether he may not, after all, be more valid than we thought as to what he himself professed to be—a poet. And if we study this seriously and sympathetically, we shall soon come to a conclusion. It is a gross and complete slander upon Browning to say that his processes of thought are scientific in their precision and analysis. They are nothing of the sort; if they were, Browning could not be a good poet. The critic speaks of the conclusions of a poem as “transcendental and inept”; but the conclusions of a poem, if they are not transcendental, must be inept. Do the people who call one of Browning’s poems scientific in its analysis realise the meaning of what they say? One is tempted to think that they know a scientific analysis when they see it as little as they know a good poem. The one supreme difference between the scientific method and the artistic method is, roughly speaking, simply this—that a scientific statement means the same thing wherever and whenever it is uttered, and that an artistic statement means something entirely different, according to
the relation in which it stands to its surroundings. The remark, let us say, that the
whale is a mammal, or the remark that sixteen ounces go to a pound, is equally
true, and means exactly the same thing, whether we state it at the beginning of a
conversation or at the end, whether we print it in a dictionary or chalk it up on a
wall. But if we take some phrase commonly used in the art of literature—such a
sentence, for the sake of example, as “the dawn was breaking”—the matter is
quite different. If the sentence came at the beginning of a short story, it might be
a mere descriptive prelude. If it were the last sentence in a short story, it might
be poignant with some peculiar irony or triumph. Can any one read Browning’s
great monologues and not feel that they are built up like a good short story,
etirely on this principle of the value of language arising from its arrangement.
Take such an example as “Caliban upon Setebos,” a wonderful poem designed to
describe the way in which a primitive nature may at once be afraid of its gods
and yet familiar with them. Caliban in describing his deity starts with a more or
less natural and obvious parallel between the deity and himself, carries out the
comparison with consistency and an almost revolting simplicity, and ends in a
kind of blasphemous extravaganza of anthropomorphism, basing his conduct not
merely on the greatness and wisdom, but also on the manifest weaknesses and
stupidities, of the Creator of all things. Then suddenly a thunderstorm breaks
over Caliban’s island, and the profane speculator falls flat upon his face— “Lo!
‘Lieth flat and loveth Setebos!
‘Maketh his teeth meet through his upper lip,
Will let those quails fly, will not eat this month
One little mess of whelks, so he may ‘scape!”
Surely it would be very difficult to persuade oneself that this thunderstorm
would have meant exactly the same thing if it had occurred at the beginning of
“Caliban upon Setebos.” It does not mean the same thing, but something very
different; and the deduction from this is the curious fact that Browning is an
artist, and that consequently his processes of thought are not “scientific in their
precision and analysis.”
No criticism of Browning’s poems can be vital, none in the face of the poems
themselves can be even intelligible, which is not based upon the fact that he was
successfully or otherwise a conscious and deliberate artist. He may have failed
as an artist, though I do not think so; that is quite a different matter. But it is one
thing to say that a man through vanity or ignorance has built an ugly cathedral,
and quite another to say that he built it in a fit of absence of mind, and did not
know whether he was building a lighthouse or a first-class hotel. Browning knew
perfectly well what he was doing; and if the reader does not like his art, at least the author did. The general sentiment expressed in the statement that he did not care about form is simply the most ridiculous criticism that could be conceived. It would be far nearer the truth to say that he cared more for form than any other English poet who ever lived. He was always weaving and modelling and inventing new forms. Among all his two hundred to three hundred poems it would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that there are half as many different metres as there are different poems.

The great English poets who are supposed to have cared more for form than Browning did, cared less at least in this sense—that they were content to use old forms so long as they were certain that they had new ideas. Browning, on the other hand, no sooner had a new idea than he tried to make a new form to express it. Wordsworth and Shelley were really original poets; their attitude of thought and feeling marked without doubt certain great changes in literature and philosophy. Nevertheless, the “Ode on the Intimations of Immortality” is a perfectly normal and traditional ode, and “Prometheus Unbound” is a perfectly genuine and traditional Greek lyrical drama. But if we study Browning honestly, nothing will strike us more than that he really created a large number of quite novel and quite admirable artistic forms. It is too often forgotten what and how excellent these were. The Ring and the Book, for example, is an illuminating departure in literary method—the method of telling the same story several times and trusting to the variety of human character to turn it into several different and equally interesting stories. Pippa Passes, to take another example, is a new and most fruitful form, a series of detached dramas connected only by the presence of one fugitive and isolated figure. The invention of these things is not merely like the writing of a good poem—it is something like the invention of the sonnet or the Gothic arch. The poet who makes them does not merely create himself—he creates other poets. It is so in a degree long past enumeration with regard to Browning’s smaller poems. Such a pious and horrible lyric as “The Heretic’s Tragedy,” for instance, is absolutely original, with its weird and almost blood-curdling echo verses, mocking echoes indeed—“And dipt of his wings in Paris square,
They bring him now to lie burned alive.
[And wanteth there grace of lute or clavicithern,
ye shall say to confirm him who singeth—
We bring John now to be burned alive.”
A hundred instances might, of course, be given. Milton’s “Sonnet on his
Blindness,” or Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” are both thoroughly original, but still we can point to other such sonnets and other such odes. But can any one mention any poem of exactly the same structural and literary type as “Fears and Scruples,” as “The Householder,” as “House” or “Shop,” as “Nationality in Drinks,” as “Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis,” as “My Star,” as “A Portrait,” as any of “Ferishtah’s Fancies,” as any of the “Bad Dreams.”

The thing which ought to be said about Browning by those who do not enjoy him is simply that they do not like his form; that they have studied the form, and think it a bad form. If more people said things of this sort, the world of criticism would gain almost unspeakably in clarity and common honesty. Browning put himself before the world as a good poet. Let those who think he failed call him a bad poet, and there will be an end of the matter. There are many styles in art which perfectly competent aesthetic judges cannot endure. For instance, it would be perfectly legitimate for a strict lover of Gothic to say that one of the monstrous rococo altarpieces in the Belgian churches with bulbous clouds and oaken sun-rays seven feet long, was, in his opinion, ugly. But surely it would be perfectly ridiculous for any one to say that it had no form. A man’s actual feelings about it might be better expressed by saying that it had too much. To say that Browning was merely a thinker because you think “Caliban upon Setebos” ugly, is precisely as absurd as it would be to call the author of the old Belgian altarpiece a man devoted only to the abstractions of religion. The truth about Browning is not that he was indifferent to technical beauty, but that he invented a particular kind of technical beauty to which any one else is free to be as indifferent as he chooses.

There is in this matter an extraordinary tendency to vague and unmeaning criticism. The usual way of criticising an author, particularly an author who has added something to the literary forms of the world, is to complain that his work does not contain something which is obviously the speciality of somebody else. The correct thing to say about Maeterlinck is that some play of his in which, let us say, a princess dies in a deserted tower by the sea, has a certain beauty, but that we look in vain in it for that robust geniality, that really boisterous will to live which may be found in Martin Chuzzlewit. The right thing to say about Cyrano de Bergerac is that it may have a certain kind of wit and spirit, but that it really throws no light on the duty of middle-aged married couples in Norway. It cannot be too much insisted upon that at least three-quarters of the blame and criticism commonly directed against artists and authors falls under this general objection, and is essentially valueless. Authors both great and small are, like
everything else in existence, upon the whole greatly under-rated. They are blamed for not doing, not only what they have failed to do to reach their own ideal, but what they have never tried to do to reach every other writer’s ideal. If we can show that Browning had a definite ideal of beauty and loyally pursued it, it is not necessary to prove that he could have written In Memoriam if he had tried.

Browning has suffered far more injustice from his admirers than from his opponents, for his admirers have for the most part got hold of the matter, so to speak, by the wrong end. They believe that what is ordinarily called the grotesque style of Browning was a kind of necessity boldly adopted by a great genius in order to express novel and profound ideas. But this is an entire mistake. What is called ugliness was to Browning not in the least a necessary evil, but a quite unnecessary luxury, which he enjoyed for its own sake. For reasons that we shall see presently in discussing the philosophical use of the grotesque, it did so happen that Browning’s grotesque style was very suitable for the expression of his peculiar moral and metaphysical view. But the whole mass of poems will be misunderstood if we do not realise first of all that he had a love of the grotesque of the nature of art for art’s sake. Here, for example, is a short distinct poem merely descriptive of one of those elfish German jugs in which it is to be presumed Tokay had been served to him. This is the whole poem, and a very good poem too—“Up jumped Tokay on our table, Like a pigmy castle-warder, Dwarfish to see, but stout and able, Arms and accoutrements all in order; And fierce he looked North, then, wheeling South Blew with his bugle a challenge to Drouth, Cocked his flap-hat with the tosspot-feather, Twisted his thumb in his red moustache, Jingled his huge brass spurs together, Tightened his waist with its Buda sash, And then, with an impudence nought could abash, Shrugged his hump-shoulder, to tell the beholder, For twenty such knaves he would laugh but the bolder: And so, with his sword-hilt gallantly jutting, And dexter-hand on his haunch abutting, Went the little man, Sir Ausbruch, strutting!”
I suppose there are Browning students in existence who would think that this
poem contained something pregnant about the Temperance question, or was a
marvellously subtle analysis of the romantic movement in Germany. But surely
to most of us it is sufficiently apparent that Browning was simply fashioning a
ridiculous knick-knack, exactly as if he were actually moulding one of these
preposterous German jugs. Now before studying the real character of this
Browningesque style, there is one general truth to be recognised about
Browning’s work. It is this—that it is absolutely necessary to remember that
Browning had, like every other poet, his simple and indisputable failures, and
that it is one thing to speak of the badness of his artistic failures, and quite
another thing to speak of the badness of his artistic aim. Browning’s style may
be a good style, and yet exhibit many examples of a thoroughly bad use of it. On
this point there is indeed a singularly unfair system of judgment used by the
public towards the poets. It is very little realised that the vast majority of great
poets have written an enormous amount of very bad poetry. The unfortunate
Wordsworth is generally supposed to be almost alone in this; but any one who
thinks so can scarcely have read a certain number of the minor poems of Byron
and Shelley and Tennyson.

Now it is only just to Browning that his more uncouth effusions should not be
treated as masterpieces by which he must stand or fall, but treated simply as his
failures. It is really true that such a line as “Irks fear the crop-full bird, frets
doubt the maw-crammed beast?”
is a very ugly and a very bad line. But it is quite equally true that Tennyson’s
“And that good man, the clergyman, has told me words of peace,”
is a very ugly and a very bad line. But people do not say that this proves that
Tennyson was a mere crabbed controversialist and metaphysician. They say that
it is a bad example of Tennyson’s form; they do not say that it is a good example
of Tennyson’s indifference to form. Upon the whole, Browning exhibits far
fewer instances of this failure in his own style than any other of the great poets,
with the exception of one or two like Spenser and Keats, who seem to have a
mysterious incapacity for writing bad poetry. But almost all original poets,
particularly poets who have invented an artistic style, are subject to one most
disastrous habit—the habit of writing imitations of themselves. Every now and
then in the works of the noblest classical poets you will come upon passages
which read like extracts from an American book of parodies. Swinburne, for
example, when he wrote the couplet— “From the lilies and languors of virtue
To the raptures and roses of vice,”
 wrote what is nothing but a bad imitation of himself, an imitation which seems
indeed to have the wholly unjust and uncritical object of proving that the Swinburnian melody is a mechanical scheme of initial letters. Or again, Mr. Rudyard Kipling when he wrote the line—“Or ride with the reckless seraphim on the rim of a red-maned star,”—

was caricaturing himself in the harshest and least sympathetic spirit of American humour. This tendency is, of course, the result of the self-consciousness and theatricality of modern life in which each of us is forced to conceive ourselves as part of a dramatis personæ and act perpetually in character. Browning sometimes yielded to this temptation to be a great deal too like himself.

“Will I widen thee out till thou turnest
From Margaret Minnikin mou’ by God’s grace,
To Muckle-mouth Meg in good earnest.”

This sort of thing is not to be defended in Browning any more than in Swinburne. But, on the other hand, it is not to be attributed in Swinburne to a momentary exaggeration, and in Browning to a vital æsthetic deficiency. In the case of Swinburne, we all feel that the question is not whether that particular preposterous couplet about lilies and roses redounds to the credit of the Swinburnian style, but whether it would be possible in any other style than the Swinburnian to have written the Hymn to Proserpine. In the same way, the essential issue about Browning as an artist is not whether he, in common with Byron, Wordsworth, Shelley, Tennyson, and Swinburne, sometimes wrote bad poetry, but whether in any other style except Browning’s you could have achieved the precise artistic effect which is achieved by such incomparable lyrics as “The Patriot” or “The Laboratory.” The answer must be in the negative, and in that answer lies the whole justification of Browning as an artist.

The question now arises, therefore, what was his conception of his functions as an artist? We have already agreed that his artistic originality concerned itself chiefly with the serious use of the grotesque. It becomes necessary, therefore, to ask what is the serious use of the grotesque, and what relation does the grotesque bear to the eternal and fundamental elements in life?

One of the most curious things to notice about popular æsthetic criticism is the number of phrases it will be found to use which are intended to express an æsthetic failure, and which express merely an æsthetic variety. Thus, for instance, the traveller will often hear the advice from local lovers of the picturesque, “The scenery round such and such a place has no interest; it is quite flat.” To disparage scenery as quite flat is, of course, like disparaging a swan as quite white, or an Italian sky as quite blue. Flatness is a sublime quality in
certain landscapes, just as rockiness is a sublime quality in others. In the same way there are a great number of phrases commonly used in order to disparage such writers as Browning which do not in fact disparage, but merely describe them. One of the most distinguished of Browning’s biographers and critics says of him, for example, “He has never meant to be rugged, but has become so in striving after strength.” To say that Browning never tried to be rugged is to say that Edgar Allan Poe never tried to be gloomy, or that Mr. W.S. Gilbert never tried to be extravagant. The whole issue depends upon whether we realise the simple and essential fact that ruggedness is a mode of art like gloominess or extravagance. Some poems ought to be rugged, just as some poems ought to be smooth. When we see a drift of stormy and fantastic clouds at sunset, we do not say that the cloud is beautiful although it is ragged at the edges. When we see a gnarled and sprawling oak, we do not say that it is fine although it is twisted. When we see a mountain, we do not say that it is impressive although it is rugged, nor do we say apologetically that it never meant to be rugged, but became so in its striving after strength. Now, to say that Browning’s poems, artistically considered, are fine although they are rugged, is quite as absurd as to say that a rock, artistically considered, is fine although it is rugged. Ruggedness being an essential quality in the universe, there is that in man which responds to it as to the striking of any other chord of the eternal harmonies. As the children of nature, we are akin not only to the stars and flowers, but also to the toadstools and the monstrous tropical birds. And it is to be repeated as the essential of the question that on this side of our nature we do emphatically love the form of the toadstools, and not merely some complicated botanical and moral lessons which the philosopher may draw from them. For example, just as there is such a thing as a poetical metre being beautifully light or beautifully grave and haunting, so there is such a thing as a poetical metre being beautifully rugged. In the old ballads, for instance, every person of literary taste will be struck by a certain attractiveness in the bold, varying, irregular verse— “He is either himsell a devil frae hell,
Or else his mother a witch maun be;
I wadna have ridden that wan water
For a’ the gowd in Christentie,”
is quite as pleasing to the ear in its own way as
“There’s a bower of roses by Bendemeer stream,
And the nightingale sings in it all the night long,”
is in another way. Browning had an unrivalled ear for this particular kind of
staccato music. The absurd notion that he had no sense of melody in verse is only possible to people who think that there is no melody in verse which is not an imitation of Swinburne. To give a satisfactory idea of Browning’s rhythmic originality would be impossible without quotations more copious than entertaining. But the essential point has been suggested.

“They were purple of raiment and golden,
Filled full of thee, fiery with wine,
Thy lovers in haunts unbefelthen,
In marvellous chambers of thine,”

is beautiful language, but not the only sort of beautiful language. This, for instance, has also a tune in it— “I—‘next poet.’ No, my hearties,
I nor am, nor fain would be!
Choose your chiefs and pick your parties,
Not one soul revolt to me!
Which of you did I enable
Once to slip inside my breast,
There to catalogue and label
What I like least, what love best,
Hope and fear, believe and doubt of,
Seek and shun, respect, deride,
Who has right to make a rout of
Rarities he found inside?”

This quick, gallantly stepping measure also has its own kind of music, and the man who cannot feel it can never have enjoyed the sound of soldiers marching by. This, then, roughly is the main fact to remember about Browning’s poetical method, or about any one’s poetical method—that the question is not whether that method is the best in the world, but the question whether there are not certain things which can only be conveyed by that method. It is perfectly true, for instance, that a really lofty and lucid line of Tennyson, such as— “Thou art the highest, and most human too”
and

“We needs must love the highest when we see it”
would really be made the worse for being translated into Browning. It would probably become
“High’s human; man loves best, best visible,”

and would lose its peculiar clarity and dignity and courtly plainness. But it is quite equally true that any really characteristic fragment of Browning, if it were only the tempestuous scolding of the organist in “Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha”— “Hallo, you sacristan, show us a light there!
Down it dips, gone like a rocket.
What, you want, do you, to come unawares,
>Sweeping the church up for first morning-prayers,
And find a poor devil has ended his cares
At the foot of your rotten-runged rat-riddled stairs?
Do I carry the moon in my pocket?”
—it is quite equally true that this outrageous gallop of rhymes ending with a frantic astronomical image would lose in energy and spirit if it were written in a conventional and classical style, and ran— “What must I deem then that thou dreamest to find
Disjected bones adrift upon the stair
Thou sweepest clean, or that thou deemest that I
Pouch in my wallet the vice-regal sun?”
Is it not obvious that this statelier version might be excellent poetry of its kind, and yet would be bad exactly in so far as it was good; that it would lose all the swing, the rush, the energy of the preposterous and grotesque original? In fact, we may see how unmanageable is this classical treatment of the essentially absurd in Tennyson himself. The humorous passages in The Princess, though often really humorous in themselves, always appear forced and feeble because they have to be restrained by a certain metrical dignity, and the mere idea of such restraint is incompatible with humour. If Browning had written the passage which opens The Princess, descriptive of the “larking” of the villagers in the magnate’s park, he would have spared us nothing; he would not have spared us the shrill uneducated voices and the unburied bottles of ginger beer. He would have crammed the poem with uncouth similes; he would have changed the metre a hundred times; he would have broken into doggerel and into rhapsody; but he would have left, when all is said and done, as he leaves in that paltry fragment of the grumbling organist, the impression of a certain eternal human energy. Energy and joy, the father and the mother of the grotesque, would have ruled the
poem. We should have felt of that rowdy gathering little but the sensation of which Mr. Henley writes—“Praise the generous gods for giving,
In this world of sin and strife,
With some little time for living,
Unto each the joy of life,”
the thought that every wise man has when looking at a Bank Holiday crowd at Margate.

To ask why Browning enjoyed this perverse and fantastic style most would be to go very deep into his spirit indeed, probably a great deal deeper than it is possible to go. But it is worth while to suggest tentatively the general function of the grotesque in art generally and in his art in particular. There is one very curious idea into which we have been hypnotised by the more eloquent poets, and that is that nature in the sense of what is ordinarily called the country is a thing entirely stately and beautiful as those terms are commonly understood. The whole world of the fantastic, all things top-heavy, lop-sided, and nonsensical are conceived as the work of man, gargoyles, German jugs, Chinese pots, political caricatures, burlesque epics, the pictures of Mr. Aubrey Beardsley and the puns of Robert Browning. But in truth a part, and a very large part, of the sanity and power of nature lies in the fact that out of her comes all this instinct of caricature. Nature may present itself to the poet too often as consisting of stars and lilies; but these are not poets who live in the country; they are men who go to the country for inspiration and could no more live in the country than they could go to bed in Westminster Abbey. Men who live in the heart of nature, farmers and peasants, know that nature means cows and pigs, and creatures more humorous than can be found in a whole sketch-book of Callot. And the element of the grotesque in art, like the element of the grotesque in nature, means, in the main, energy, the energy which takes its own forms and goes its own way. Browning’s verse, in so far as it is grotesque, is not complex or artificial; it is natural and in the legitimate tradition of nature. The verse sprawls like the trees, dances like the dust; it is ragged like the thunder-cloud, it is top-heavy like the toadstool. Energy which disregards the standard of classical art is in nature as it is in Browning. The same sense of the uproarious force in things which makes Browning dwell on the oddity of a fungus or a jellyfish makes him dwell on the oddity of a philosophical idea. Here, for example, we have a random instance from “The Englishman in Italy” of the way in which Browning, when he was most Browning, regarded physical nature.

“And pitch down his basket before us,
All trembling alive
With pink and grey jellies, your sea-fruit;
You touch the strange lumps,
And mouths gape there, eyes open, all manner
Of horns and of humps,
Which only the fisher looks grave at.”

Nature might mean flowers to Wordsworth and grass to Walt Whitman, but to Browning it really meant such things as these, the monstrosities and living mysteries of the sea. And just as these strange things meant to Browning energy in the physical world, so strange thoughts and strange images meant to him energy in the mental world. When, in one of his later poems, the professional mystic is seeking in a supreme moment of sincerity to explain that small things may be filled with God as well as great, he uses the very same kind of image, the image of a shapeless sea-beast, to embody that noble conception.

“The Name comes close behind a stomach-cyst,
The simplest of creations, just a sac
That’s mouth, heart, legs, and belly at once, yet lives
And feels, and could do neither, we conclude,
If simplified still further one degree.”

(SLUDGE.)
These bulbous, indescribable sea-goblins are the first thing on which the eye of the poet lights in looking on a landscape, and the last in the significance of which he trusts in demonstrating the mercy of the Everlasting.

There is another and but slightly different use of the grotesque, but which is definitely valuable in Browning’s poetry, and indeed in all poetry. To present a matter in a grotesque manner does certainly tend to touch the nerve of surprise and thus to draw attention to the intrinsically miraculous character of the object itself. It is difficult to give examples of the proper use of grotesqueness without becoming too grotesque. But we should all agree that if St. Paul’s Cathedral were suddenly presented to us upside down we should, for the moment, be more surprised at it, and look at it more than we have done all the centuries during which it has rested on its foundations. Now it is the supreme function of the philosopher of the grotesque to make the world stand on its head that people may look at it. If we say “a man is a man” we awaken no sense of the fantastic, however much we ought to, but if we say, in the language of the old satirist, “that man is a two-legged bird, without feathers,” the phrase does, for a moment, make us look at man from the outside and gives us a thrill in his presence. When the author of the Book of Job insists upon the huge, half-witted, apparently
unmeaning magnificence and might of Behemoth, the hippopotamus, he is appealing precisely to this sense of wonder provoked by the grotesque. “Canst thou play with him as with a bird, canst thou bind him for thy maidens?” he says in an admirable passage. The notion of the hippopotamus as a household pet is curiously in the spirit of the humour of Browning.

But when it is clearly understood that Browning’s love of the fantastic in style was a perfectly serious artistic love, when we understand that he enjoyed working in that style, as a Chinese potter might enjoy making dragons, or a mediæval mason making devils, there yet remains something definite which must be laid to his account as a fault. He certainly had a capacity for becoming perfectly childish in his indulgence in ingenuities that have nothing to do with poetry at all, such as puns, and rhymes, and grammatical structures that only just fit into each other like a Chinese puzzle. Probably it was only one of the marks of his singular vitality, curiosity, and interest in details. He was certainly one of those somewhat rare men who are fierily ambitious both in large things and in small. He prided himself on having written The Ring and the Book, and he also prided himself on knowing good wine when he tasted it. He prided himself on re-establishing optimism on a new foundation, and it is to be presumed, though it is somewhat difficult to imagine, that he prided himself on such rhymes as the following in Pacchiarotto:— “The wolf, fox, bear, and monkey,
By piping advice in one key—
That his pipe should play a prelude
To something heaven-tinged not hell-hued,
Something not harsh but docile,
Man-liquid, not man-fossil.”
This writing, considered as writing, can only be regarded as a kind of joke, and most probably Browning considered it so himself. It has nothing at all to do with that powerful and symbolic use of the grotesque which may be found in such admirable passages as this from “Holy Cross Day”:— “Give your first groan—compunction’s at work;
And soft! from a Jew you mount to a Turk.
Lo, Micah—the self-same beard on chin
He was four times already converted in!”
This is the serious use of the grotesque. Through it passion and philosophy are as well expressed as through any other medium. But the rhyming frenzy of Browning has no particular relation even to the poems in which it occurs. It is not a dance to any measure; it can only be called the horse-play of literature. It
may be noted, for example, as a rather curious fact, that the ingenious rhymes are generally only mathematical triumphs, not triumphs of any kind of assonance. “The Pied Piper of Hamelin,” a poem written for children, and bound in general to be lucid and readable, ends with a rhyme which it is physically impossible for any one to say:— “And, whether they pipe us free, from rats or from mice,
If we’ve promised them aught, let us keep our promise!”
This queer trait in Browning, his inability to keep a kind of demented ingenuity even out of poems in which it was quite inappropriate, is a thing which must be recognised, and recognised all the more because as a whole he was a very perfect artist, and a particularly perfect artist in the use of the grotesque. But everywhere when we go a little below the surface in Browning we find that there was something in him perverse and unusual despite all his working normality and simplicity. His mind was perfectly wholesome, but it was not made exactly like the ordinary mind. It was like a piece of strong wood with a knot in it.

The quality of what, can only be called buffoonery which is under discussion is indeed one of the many things in which Browning was more of an Elizabethan than a Victorian. He was like the Elizabethans in their belief in the normal man, in their gorgeous and over-loaded language, above all in their feeling for learning as an enjoyment and almost a frivolity. But there was nothing in which he was so thoroughly Elizabethan, and even Shakespearian, as in this fact, that when he felt inclined to write a page of quite uninteresting nonsense, he immediately did so. Many great writers have contrived to be tedious, and apparently aimless, while expounding some thought which they believed to be grave and profitable; but this frivolous stupidity had not been found in any great writer since the time of Kabelais and the time of the Elizabethans. In many of the comic scenes of Shakespeare we have precisely this elephantine ingenuity, this hunting of a pun to death through three pages. In the Elizabethan dramatists and in Browning it is no doubt to a certain extent the mark of a real hilarity. People must be very happy to be so easily amused.

In the case of what is called Browning’s obscurity, the question is somewhat more difficult to handle. Many people have supposed Browning to be profound because he was obscure, and many other people, hardly less mistaken, have supposed him to be obscure because he was profound. He was frequently profound, he was occasionally obscure, but as a matter of fact the two have little or nothing to do with each other. Browning’s dark and elliptical mode of speech, like his love of the grotesque, was simply a characteristic of his, a trick of is
temperament, and had little or nothing to do with whether what he was expressing was profound or superficial. Suppose, for example, that a person well read in English poetry but unacquainted with Browning’s style were earnestly invited to consider the following verse:— “Hobbs hints blue—straight he turtle eats.
Nobbs prints blue—claret crowns his cup.
Nokes outdares Stokes in azure feats—
Both gorge. Who fished the murex up?
What porridge had John Keats?”
The individual so confronted would say without hesitation that it must indeed be an abstruse and indescribable thought which could only be conveyed by remarks so completely disconnected. But the point of the matter is that the thought contained in this amazing verse is not abstruse or philosophical at all, but is a perfectly ordinary and straightforward comment, which any one might have made upon an obvious fact of life. The whole verse of course begins to explain itself, if we know the meaning of the word “murex,” which is the name of a sea-shell, out of which was made the celebrated blue dye of Tyre. The poet takes this blue dye as a simile for a new fashion in literature, and points out that Hobbs, Nobbs, etc., obtain fame and comfort by merely using the dye from the shell; and adds the perfectly natural comment:— “. . . Who fished the murex up?
What porridge had John Keats?”
So that the verse is not subtle, and was not meant to be subtle, but is a perfectly casual piece of sentiment at the end of a light poem. Browning is not obscure because he has such deep things to say, any more than he is grotesque because he has such new things to say. He is both of these things primarily, because he likes to express himself in a particular manner. The manner is as natural to him as a man’s physical voice, and it is abrupt, sketchy, allusive, and full of gaps. Here comes in the fundamental difference between Browning and such a writer as George Meredith, with whom the Philistine satirist would so often in the matter of complexity class him. The works of George Meredith are, as it were, obscure even when we know what they mean. They deal with nameless emotions, fugitive sensations, subconscious certainties and uncertainties, and it really requires a somewhat curious and unfamiliar mode of speech to indicate the presence of these. But the great part of Browning’s actual sentiments, and almost all the finest and most literary of them, are perfectly plain and popular and eternal sentiments. Meredith is really a singer producing strange notes and cadences difficult to follow because of the delicate rhythm of the song he sings.
Browning is simply a great demagogue, with an impediment in his speech. Or rather, to speak more strictly, Browning is a man whose excitement for the glory of the obvious is so great that his speech becomes disjointed and precipitate: he becomes eccentric through his advocacy of the ordinary, and goes mad for the love of sanity.

If Browning and George Meredith were each describing the same act, they might both be obscure, but their obscurities would be entirely different. Suppose, for instance, they were describing even so prosaic and material an act as a man being knocked downstairs by another man to whom he had given the lie, Meredith’s description would refer to something which an ordinary observer would not see, or at least could not describe. It might be a sudden sense of anarchy in the brain of the assaulter, or a stupefaction and stunned serenity in that of the object of the assault. He might write, “Wainwood’s ‘Men vary in veracity,’ brought the baronet’s arm up. He felt the doors of his brain burst, and Wainwood a swift rushing of himself through air accompanied with a clarity as of the annihilated.” Meredith, in other words, would speak queerly because he was describing queer mental experiences. But Browning might simply be describing the material incident of the man being knocked downstairs, and his description would run:— “What then? ‘You lie’ and doormat below stairs Takes bump from back.”

This is not subtlety, but merely a kind of insane swiftness. Browning is not like Meredith, anxious to pause and examine the sensations of the combatants, nor does he become obscure through this anxiety. He is only so anxious to get his man to the bottom of the stairs quickly that he leaves out about half the story.

Many who could understand that ruggedness might be an artistic quality, would decisively, and in most cases rightly, deny that obscurity could under any conceivable circumstances be an artistic quality. But here again Browning’s work requires a somewhat more cautious and sympathetic analysis. There is a certain kind of fascination, a strictly artistic fascination, which arises from a matter being hinted at in such a way as to leave a certain tormenting uncertainty even at the end. It is well sometimes to half understand a poem in the same manner that we half understand the world. One of the deepest and strangest of all human moods is the mood which will suddenly strike us perhaps in a garden at night, or deep in sloping meadows, the feeling that every flower and leaf has just uttered something stupendously direct and important, and that we have by a prodigy of imbecility not heard or understood it. There is a certain poetic value, and that a genuine one, in this sense of having missed the full meaning of things.
There is beauty, not only in wisdom, but in this dazed and dramatic ignorance.

But in truth it is very difficult to keep pace with all the strange and unclassified artistic merits of Browning. He was always trying experiments; sometimes he failed, producing clumsy and irritating metres, top-heavy and over-concentrated thought. Far more often he triumphed, producing a crowd of boldly designed poems, every one of which taken separately might have founded an artistic school. But whether successful or unsuccessful, he never ceased from his fierce hunt after poetic novelty. He never became a conservative. The last book he published in his life-time, Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in their Day, was a new poem, and more revolutionary than Paracelsus. This is the true light in which to regard Browning as an artist. He had determined to leave no spot of the cosmos unadorned by his poetry which he could find it possible to adorn. An admirable example can be found in that splendid poem “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.” It is the hint of an entirely new and curious type of poetry, the poetry of the shabby and hungry aspect of the earth itself. Daring poets who wished to escape from conventional gardens and orchards had long been in the habit of celebrating the poetry of rugged and gloomy landscapes, but Browning is not content with this. He insists upon celebrating the poetry of mean landscapes. That sense of scrubbiness in nature, as of a man unshaved, had never been conveyed with this enthusiasm and primeval gusto before.

“If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk
   Above its mates, the head was chopped; the bents
   Were jealous else. What made those holes and rents
   In the dock’s harsh swarth leaves, bruised as to baulk
   All hope of greenness? ’tis a brute must walk
   Pashing their life out, with a brute’s intents.”

This is a perfect realisation of that eerie sentiment which comes upon us, not so often among mountains and water-falls, as it does on some half-starved common at twilight, or in walking down some grey mean street. It is the song of the beauty of refuse; and Browning was the first to sing it. Oddly enough it has been one of the poems about which most of those pedantic and trivial questions have been asked, which are asked invariably by those who treat Browning as a science instead of a poet, “What does the poem of ‘Childe Roland’ mean?” The only genuine answer to this is, “What does anything mean?” Does the earth mean nothing? Do grey skies and wastes covered with thistles mean nothing? Does an old horse turned out to graze mean nothing? If it does, there is but one further
truth to be added—that everything means nothing.
CHAPTER VII

THE RING AND THE BOOK

When we have once realised the great conception of the plan of The Ring and the Book, the studying of a single matter from nine different stand-points, it becomes exceedingly interesting to notice what these stand-points are; what figures Browning has selected as voicing the essential and distinct versions of the case. One of the ablest and most sympathetic of all the critics of Browning, Mr. Augustine Birrell, has said in one place that the speeches of the two advocates in The Ring and the Book will scarcely be very interesting to the ordinary reader. However that may be, there can be little doubt that a great number of the readers of Browning think them beside the mark and adventitious. But it is exceedingly dangerous to say that anything in Browning is irrelevant or unnecessary. We are apt to go on thinking so until some mere trifle puts the matter in a new light, and the detail that seemed meaningless springs up as almost the central pillar of the structure. In the successive monologues of his poem, Browning is endeavouring to depict the various strange ways in which a fact gets itself presented to the world. In every question there are partisans who bring cogent and convincing arguments for the right side; there are also partisans who bring cogent and convincing arguments for the wrong side. But over and above these, there does exist in every great controversy a class of more or less official partisans who are continually engaged in defending each cause by entirely inappropriate arguments. They do not know the real good that can be said for the good cause, nor the real good that can be said for the bad one. They are represented by the animated, learned, eloquent, ingenious, and entirely futile and impertinent arguments of Juris Doctor Bottinius and Dominus Hyacinthus de Archangelis. These two men brilliantly misrepresent, not merely each other’s cause, but their own cause. The introduction of them is one of the finest and most artistic strokes in The Ring and the Book.

We can see the matter best by taking an imaginary parallel. Suppose that a poet of the type of Browning lived some centuries hence and found in some cause célèbre of our day, such as the Parnell Commission, an opportunity for a work similar in its design to The Ring and the Book. The first monologue, which would be called “Half-London,” would be the arguments of an ordinary educated and sensible Unionist who believed that there really was evidence that the
Nationalist movement in Ireland was rooted in crime and public panic. The “Otherhalf-London” would be the utterance of an ordinary educated and sensible Home Ruler, who thought that in the main Nationalism was one distinct symptom, and crime another, of the same poisonous and stagnant problem. The “Tertium Quid” would be some detached intellectual, committed neither to Nationalism nor to Unionism, possibly Mr. Bernard Shaw, who would make a very entertaining Browning monologue. Then of course would come the speeches of the great actors in the drama, the icy anger of Parnell, the shuffling apologies of Pigott. But we should feel that the record was incomplete without another touch which in practice has so much to do with the confusion of such a question. Bottinius and Hyacinthus de Archangelis, the two cynical professional pleaders, with their transparent assumptions and incredible theories of the case, would be represented by two party journalists; one of whom was ready to base his case either on the fact that Parnell was a Socialist or an Anarchist, or an Atheist or a Roman Catholic; and the other of whom was ready to base his case on the theory that Lord Salisbury hated Parnell or was in league with him, or had never heard of him, or anything else that was remote from the world of reality. These are the kind of little touches for which we must always be on the look-out in Browning. Even if a digression, or a simile, or a whole scene in a play, seems to have no point or value, let us wait a little and give it a chance. He very seldom wrote anything that did not mean a great deal.

It is sometimes curious to notice how a critic, possessing no little cultivation and fertility, will, in speaking of a work of art, let fall almost accidentally some apparently trivial comment, which reveals to us with an instantaneous and complete mental illumination the fact that he does not, so far as that work of art is concerned, in the smallest degree understand what he is talking about. He may have intended to correct merely some minute detail of the work he is studying, but that single movement is enough to blow him and all his diplomas into the air. These are the sensations with which the true Browningite will regard the criticism made by so many of Browning’s critics and biographers about The Ring and the Book. That criticism was embodied by one of them in the words “the theme looked at dispassionately is unworthy of the monument in which it is entombed for eternity.” Now this remark shows at once that the critic does not know what The Ring and the Book means. We feel about it as we should feel about a man who said that the plot of Tristram Shandy was not well constructed, or that the women in Rossetti’s pictures did not look useful and industrious. A man who has missed the fact that Tristram Shandy is a game of digressions, that
the whole book is a kind of practical joke to cheat the reader out of a story, simply has not read Tristram Shandy at all. The man who objects to the Rossetti pictures because they depict a sad and sensuous day-dream, objects to their existing at all. And any one who objects to Browning writing his huge epic round a trumpery and sordid police-case has in reality missed the whole length and breadth of the poet’s meaning. The essence of The Ring and the Book is that it is the great epic of the nineteenth century, because it is the great epic of the enormous importance of small things. The supreme difference that divides The Ring and the Book from all the great poems of similar length and largeness of design is precisely the fact that all these are about affairs commonly called important, and The Ring and the Book is about an affair commonly called contemptible. Homer says, “I will show you the relations between man and heaven as exhibited in a great legend of love and war, which shall contain the mightiest of all mortal warriors, and the most beautiful of all mortal women.” The author of the Book of Job says, “I will show you the relations between man and heaven by a tale of primeval sorrows and the voice of God out of a whirlwind.” Virgil says, “I will show you the relations of man to heaven by the tale of the origin of the greatest people and the founding of the most wonderful city in the world.” Dante says, “I will show you the relations of man to heaven by uncovering the very machinery of the spiritual universe, and letting you hear, as I have heard, the roaring of the mills of God.” Milton says, “I will show you the relations of man to heaven by telling you of the very beginning of all things, and the first shaping of the thing that is evil in the first twilight of time.” Browning says, “I will show you the relations of man to heaven by telling you a story out of a dirty Italian book of criminal trials from which I select one of the meanest and most completely forgotten.” Until we have realised this fundamental idea in The Ring and the Book all criticism is misleading.

In this Browning is, of course, the supreme embodiment of his time. The characteristic of the modern movements par excellence is the apotheosis of the insignificant. Whether it be the school of poetry which sees more in one cowslip or clover-top than in forests and waterfalls, or the school of fiction which finds something indescribably significant in the pattern of a hearth-rug, or the tint of a man’s tweed coat, the tendency is the same. Maeterlinck stricken still and wondering by a deal door half open, or the light shining out of a window at night; Zola filling note-books with the medical significance of the twitching of a man’s toes, or the loss of his appetite; Whitman counting the grass and the heart-shaped leaves of the lilac; Mr. George Gissing lingering fondly over the third-
class ticket and the dilapidated umbrella; George Meredith seeing a soul’s tragedy in a phrase at the dinner-table; Mr. Bernard Shaw filling three pages with stage directions to describe a parlour; all these men, different in every other particular, are alike in this, that they have ceased to believe certain things to be important and the rest to be unimportant. Significance is to them a wild thing that may leap upon them from any hiding-place. They have all become terribly impressed with and a little bit alarmed at the mysterious powers of small things. Their difference from the old epic poets is the whole difference between an age that fought with dragons and an age that fights with microbes.

This tide of the importance of small things is flowing so steadily around us upon every side to-day, that we do not sufficiently realise that if there was one man in English literary history who might with justice be called its fountain and origin, that man was Robert Browning. When Browning arose, literature was entirely in the hands of the Tennysonian poet. The Tennysonian poet does indeed mention trivialities, but he mentions them when he wishes to speak trivially; Browning mentions trivialities when he wishes to speak sensationally. Now this sense of the terrible importance of detail was a sense which may be said to have possessed Browning in the emphatic manner of a demoniac possession. Sane as he was, this one feeling might have driven him to a condition not far from madness. Any room that he was sitting in glared at him with innumerable eyes and mouths gaping with a story. There was sometimes no background and no middle distance in his mind. A human face and the pattern on the wall behind it came forward with equally aggressive clearness. It may be repeated, that if ever he who had the strongest head in the world had gone mad, it would have been through this turbulent democracy of things. If he looked at a porcelain vase or an old hat, a cabbage, or a puppy at play, each began to be bewitched with the spell of a kind of fairyland of philosophers: the vase, like the jar in the Arabian Nights, to send up a smoke of thoughts and shapes; the hat to produce souls, as a conjuror’s hat produces rabbits; the cabbage to swell and overshadow the earth, like the Tree of Knowledge; and the puppy to go off at a scamper along the road to the end of the world. Any one who has read Browning’s longer poems knows how constantly a simile or figure of speech is selected, not among the large, well-recognised figures common in poetry, but from some dusty corner of experience, and how often it is characterised by smallness and a certain quaint exactitude which could not have been found in any more usual example. Thus, for instance, Prince Hohenstiel—Schwangau explains the psychological meaning of all his restless and unscrupulous activities
by comparing them to the impulse which has just led him, even in the act of talking, to draw a black line on the blotting-paper exactly, so as to connect two separate blots that were already there. This queer example is selected as the best possible instance of a certain fundamental restlessness and desire to add a touch to things in the spirit of man. I have no doubt whatever that Browning thought of the idea after doing the thing himself, and sat in a philosophical trance staring at a piece of inked blotting-paper, conscious that at that moment, and in that insignificant act, some immemorial monster of the mind, nameless from the beginning of the world, had risen to the surface of the spiritual sea.

It is therefore the very essence of Browning’s genius, and the very essence of The Ring and the Book, that it should be the enormous multiplication of a small theme. It is the extreme of idle criticism to complain that the story is a current and sordid story, for the whole object of the poem is to show what infinities of spiritual good and evil a current and sordid story may contain. When once this is realised, it explains at one stroke the innumerable facts about the work. It explains, for example, Browning’s detailed and picturesque account of the glorious dust-bin of odds and ends for sale, out of which he picked the printed record of the trial, and his insistence on its cheapness, its dustiness, its yellow leaves, and its crabbed Latin. The more soiled and dark and insignificant he can make the text appear, the better for his ample and gigantic sermon. It explains again the strictness with which Browning adhered to the facts of the forgotten intrigue. He was playing the game of seeing how much was really involved in one paltry fragment of fact. To have introduced large quantities of fiction would not have been sportsmanlike. The Ring and the Book therefore, to re-capitulate the view arrived at so far, is the typical epic of our age, because it expresses the richness of life by taking as a text a poor story. It pays to existence the highest of all possible compliments—the great compliment which monarchy paid to mankind—the compliment of selecting from it almost at random.

But this is only the first half of the claim of The Ring and the Book to be the typical epic of modern times. The second half of that claim, the second respect in which the work is representative of all modern development, requires somewhat more careful statement. The Ring and the Book is of course, essentially speaking, a detective story. Its difference from the ordinary detective story is that it seeks to establish, not the centre of criminal guilt, but the centre of spiritual guilt. But it has exactly the same kind of exciting quality that a detective story has, and a very excellent quality it is. But the element which is important, and which now requires pointing out, is the method by which that centre of spiritual
guilt and the corresponding centre of spiritual rectitude is discovered. In order to make clear the peculiar character of this method, it is necessary to begin rather nearer the beginning, and to go back some little way in literary history.

I do not know whether anybody, including the editor himself, has ever noticed a peculiar coincidence which may be found in the arrangement of the lyrics in Sir Francis Palgrave’s Golden Treasury. However that may be, two poems, each of them extremely well known, are placed side by side, and their juxtaposition represents one vast revolution in the poetical manner of looking at things. The first is Goldsmith’s almost too well known

“When lovely woman stoops to folly,
And finds too late that men betray,
What charm can soothe her melancholy?
What art can wash her guilt away?”

Immediately afterwards comes, with a sudden and thrilling change of note, the voice of Burns:—

“Ye banks and braes o’ bonnie Doon,
How can ye bloom sae fair?
How can ye chant, ye little birds,
And I sae fu’ of care?
Thou’ll break my heart, thou bonny bird,
That sings upon the bough,
Thou minds me of the happy days
When my fause Love was true.”

A man might read those two poems a great many times without happening to realise that they are two poems on exactly the same subject—the subject of a trusting woman deserted by a man. And the whole difference—the difference struck by the very first note of the voice of any one who reads them—is this fundamental difference, that Goldsmith’s words are spoken about a certain situation, and Burns’s words are spoken in that situation.

In the transition from one of these lyrics to the other, we have a vital change in the conception of the functions of the poet; a change of which Burns was in many ways the beginning, of which Browning, in a manner that we shall see presently, was the culmination.

Goldsmith writes fully and accurately in the tradition of the old historic idea of what a poet was. The poet, the vates, was the supreme and absolute critic of human existence, the chorus in the human drama; he was, to employ two words, which when analysed are the same word, either a spectator or a seer. He took a situation, such as the situation of a woman deserted by a man before-mentioned, and he gave, as Goldsmith gives, his own personal and definite decision upon it, entirely based upon general principles, and entirely from the outside. Then, as in
the case of The Golden Treasury, he has no sooner given judgment than there comes a bitter and confounding cry out of the very heart of the situation itself, which tells us things which would have been quite left out of account by the poet of the general rule. No one, for example, but a person who knew something of the inside of agony would have introduced that touch of the rage of the mourner against the chattering frivolity of nature, “Thou’ll break my heart, thou bonny bird.” We find and could find no such touch in Goldsmith. We have to arrive at the conclusion therefore, that the vates or poet in his absolute capacity is defied and overthrown by this new method of what may be called the songs of experience.

Now Browning, as he appears in The Ring and the Book, represents the attempt to discover, not the truth in the sense that Goldsmith states it, but the larger truth which is made up of all the emotional experiences, such as that rendered by Burns. Browning, like Goldsmith, seeks ultimately to be just and impartial, but he does it by endeavouring to feel acutely every kind of partiality. Goldsmith stands apart from all the passions of the case, and Browning includes them all. If Browning were endeavouring to do strict justice in a case like that of the deserted lady by the banks of Doon, he would not touch or modify in the smallest particular the song as Burns sang it, but he would write other songs, perhaps equally pathetic. A lyric or a soliloquy would convince us suddenly by the mere pulse of its language, that there was some pathos in the other actors in the drama; some pathos, for example, in a weak man, conscious that in a passionate ignorance of life he had thrown away his power of love, lacking the moral courage to throw his prospects after it. We should be reminded again that there was some pathos in the position, let us say, of the seducer’s mother, who had built all her hopes upon developments which a mésalliance would overthrow, or in the position of some rival lover, stricken to the ground with the tragedy in which he had not even the miserable comfort of a locus standi. All these characters in the story, Browning would realise from their own emotional point of view before he gave judgment. The poet in his ancient office held a kind of terrestrial day of judgment, and gave men halters and haloes; Browning gives men neither halter nor halo, he gives them voices. This is indeed the most bountiful of all the functions of the poet, that he gives men words, for which men from the beginning of the world have starved more than for bread.

Here then we have the second great respect in which The Ring and the Book is the great epic of the age. It is the great epic of the age, because it is the expression of the belief, it might almost be said, of the discovery, that no man
ever lived upon this earth without possessing a point of view. No one ever lived who had not a little more to say for himself than any formal system of justice was likely to say for him. It is scarcely necessary to point out how entirely the application of this principle would revolutionise the old heroic epic, in which the poet decided absolutely the moral relations and moral value of the characters. Suppose, for example, that Homer had written the Odyssey on the principle of The Ring and the Book, how disturbing, how weird an experience it would be to read the story from the point of view of Antinous! Without contradicting a single material fact, without telling a single deliberate lie, the narrative would so change the whole world around us, that we should scarcely know we were dealing with the same place and people. The calm face of Penelope would, it may be, begin to grow meaner before our eyes, like a face changing in a dream. She would begin to appear as a fickle and selfish woman, passing falsely as a widow, and playing a double game between the attentions of foolish but honourable young men, and the fitful appearances of a wandering and good-for-nothing sailor-husband; a man prepared to act that most well-worn of melodramatic rôles, the conjugal bully and blackmailer, the man who uses marital rights as an instrument for the worse kind of wrongs. Or, again, if we had the story of the fall of King Arthur told from the stand-point of Mordred, it would only be a matter of a word or two; in a turn, in the twinkling of an eye, we should find ourselves sympathising with the efforts of an earnest young man to frustrate the profligacies of high-placed paladins like Lancelot and Tristram, and ultimately discovering, with deep regret but unshaken moral courage, that there was no way to frustrate them, except by overthrowing the cold and priggish and incapable egotist who ruled the country, and the whole artificial and bombastic schemes which bred these moral evils. It might be that in spite of this new view of the case, it would ultimately appear that Ulysses was really right and Arthur was really right, just as Browning makes it ultimately appear that Pompilia was really right. But any one can see the enormous difference in scope and difficulty between the old epic which told the whole story from one man’s point of view, and the new epic which cannot come to its conclusion, until it has digested and assimilated views as paradoxical and disturbing as our imaginary defence of Antinous and apologia of Mordred.

One of the most important steps ever taken in the history of the world is this step, with all its various aspects, literary, political, and social, which is represented by The Ring and the Book. It is the step of deciding, in the face of many serious dangers and disadvantages, to let everybody talk. The poet of the
old epic is the poet who had learnt to speak; Browning in the new epic is the poet who has learnt to listen. This listening to truth and error, to heretics, to fools, to intellectual bullies, to desperate partisans, to mere chattering, to systematic poisoners of the mind, is the hardest lesson that humanity has ever been set to learn. The Ring and the Book is the embodiment of this terrible magnanimity and patience. It is the epic of free speech.

Free speech is an idea which has at present all the unpopularity of a truism; so that we tend to forget that it was not so very long ago that it had the more practical unpopularity which attaches to a new truth. Ingratitude is surely the chief of the intellectual sins of man. He takes his political benefits for granted, just as he takes the skies and the seasons for granted. He considers the calm of a city street a thing as inevitable as the calm of a forest clearing, whereas it is only kept in peace by a sustained stretch and effort similar to that which keeps up a battle or a fencing match. Just as we forget where we stand in relation to natural phenomena, so we forget it in relation to social phenomena. We forget that the earth is a star, and we forget that free speech is a paradox.

It is not by any means self-evident upon the face of it that an institution like the liberty of speech is right or just. It is not natural or obvious to let a man utter follies and abominations which you believe to be bad for mankind any more than it is natural or obvious to let a man dig up a part of the public road, or infect half a town with typhoid fever. The theory of free speech, that truth is so much larger and stranger and more many-sided than we know of, that it is very much better at all costs to hear every one’s account of it, is a theory which has been justified upon the whole by experiment, but which remains a very daring and even a very surprising theory. It is really one of the great discoveries of the modern time; but, once admitted, it is a principle that does not merely affect politics, but philosophy, ethics, and finally poetry.

Browning was upon the whole the first poet to apply the principle to poetry. He perceived that if we wish to tell the truth about a human drama, we must not tell it merely like a melodrama, in which the villain is villainous and the comic man is comic. He saw that the truth had not been told until he had seen in the villain the pure and disinterested gentleman that most villains firmly believe themselves to be, or until he had taken the comic man as seriously as it is the custom of comic men to take themselves. And in this Browning is beyond all question the founder of the most modern school of poetry. Everything that was profound, everything, indeed, that was tolerable in the aesthetes of 1880, and the decadent of 1890, has its ultimate source in Browning’s great conception that
every one’s point of view is interesting, even if it be a jaundiced or a blood-shot 
point of view. He is at one with the decadents, in holding that it is emphatically 
profitable, that it is emphatically creditable, to know something of the grounds of 
the happiness of a thoroughly bad man. Since his time we have indeed been 
somewhat over-satisfied with the moods of the burglar, and the pensive lyrics of 
the receiver of stolen goods. But Browning, united with the decadents on this 
point, of the value of every human testimony, is divided from them sharply and 
by a chasm in another equally important point. He held that it is necessary to 
listen to all sides of a question in order to discover the truth of it. But he held 
that there was a truth to discover. He held that justice was a mystery, but not, 
like the decadents, that justice was a delusion. He held, in other words, the true 
Browning doctrine, that in a dispute every one was to a certain extent right; not 
the decadent doctrine that in so mad a place as the world, every one must be by 
the nature of things wrong.

Browning’s conception of the Universe can hardly be better expressed than in 
the old and pregnant fable about the five blind men who went to visit an 
elephant. One of them seized its trunk, and asserted that an elephant was a kind 
of serpent; another embraced its leg, and was ready to die for the belief that an 
elephant was a kind of tree. In the same way to the man who leaned against its 
side it was a wall; to the man who had hold of its tail a rope, and to the man who 
ran upon its tusk a particularly unpleasant kind of spear. This, as I have said, is 
the whole theology and philosophy of Browning. But he differs from the 
psychological decadents and impressionists in this important point, that he thinks 
that although the blind men found out very little about the elephant, the elephant 
was an elephant, and was there all the time. The blind men formed mistaken 
theories because an elephant is a thing with a very curious shape. And Browning 
firmly believed that the Universe was a thing with a very curious shape indeed. 
No blind poet could even imagine an elephant without experience, and no man, 
however great and wise, could dream of God and not die. But there is a vital 
distinction between the mystical view of Browning, that the blind men are 
misled because there is so much for them to learn, and the purely impressionist 
and agnostic view of the modern poet, that the blind men were misled because 
there was nothing for them to learn. To the impressionist artist of our time we 
are not blind men groping after an elephant and naming it a tree or a serpent. We 
are maniacs, isolated in separate cells, and dreaming of trees and serpents 
without reason and without result.
CHAPTER VIII

THE PHILOSOPHY OF BROWNING

The great fault of most of the appreciation of Browning lies in the fact that it conceives the moral and artistic value of his work to lie in what is called “the message of Browning,” or “the teaching of Browning,” or, in other words, in the mere opinions of Browning. Now Browning had opinions, just as he had a dress-suit or a vote for Parliament. He did not hesitate to express these opinions any more than he would have hesitated to fire off a gun, or open an umbrella, if he had possessed those articles, and realised their value. For example, he had, as his students and eulogists have constantly stated, certain definite opinions about the spiritual function of love, or the intellectual basis of Christianity. Those opinions were very striking and very solid, as everything was which came out of Browning’s mind. His two great theories of the universe may be expressed in two comparatively parallel phrases. The first was what may be called the hope which lies in the imperfection of man. The characteristic poem of “Old Pictures in Florence” expresses very quaintly and beautifully the idea that some hope may always be based on deficiency itself; in other words, that in so far as man is a one-legged or a one-eyed creature, there is something about his appearance which indicates that he should have another leg and another eye. The poem suggests admirably that such a sense of incompleteness may easily be a great advance upon a sense of completeness, that the part may easily and obviously be greater than the whole. And from this Browning draws, as he is fully justified in drawing, a definite hope for immortality and the larger scale of life. For nothing is more certain than that though this world is the only world that we have known, or of which we could even dream, the fact does remain that we have named it “a strange world.” In other words, we have certainly felt that this world did not explain itself, that something in its complete and patent picture has been omitted. And Browning was right in saying that in a cosmos where incompleteness implies completeness, life implies immortality. This then was the first of the doctrines or opinions of Browning: the hope that lies in the imperfection of man. The second of the great Browning doctrines requires some audacity to express. It can only be properly stated as the hope that lies in the imperfection of God. That is to say, that Browning held that sorrow and self-denial, if they were the burdens of man, were also his privileges. He held that these stubborn sorrows
and obscure valours might, to use a yet more strange expression, have provoked the envy of the Almighty. If man has self-sacrifice and God has none, then man has in the Universe a secret and blasphemous superiority. And this tremendous story of a Divine jealousy Browning reads into the story of the Crucifixion. If the Creator had not been crucified He would not have been as great as thousands of wretched fanatics among His own creatures. It is needless to insist upon this point; any one who wishes to read it splendidly expressed need only be referred to “Saul.” But these are emphatically the two main doctrines or opinions of Browning which I have ventured to characterise roughly as the hope in the imperfection of man, and more boldly as the hope in the imperfection of God. They are great thoughts, thoughts written by a great man, and they raise noble and beautiful doubts on behalf of faith which the human spirit will never answer or exhaust. But about them in connection with Browning there nevertheless remains something to be added.

Browning was, as most of his upholders and all his opponents say, an optimist. His theory, that man’s sense of his own imperfection implies a design of perfection, is a very good argument for optimism. His theory that man’s knowledge of and desire for self-sacrifice implies God’s knowledge of and desire for self-sacrifice is another very good argument for optimism. But any one will make the deepest and blackest and most incurable mistake about Browning who imagines that his optimism was founded on any arguments for optimism. Because he had a strong intellect, because he had a strong power of conviction, he conceived and developed and asserted these doctrines of the incompleteness of Man and the sacrifice of Omnipotence. But these doctrines were the symptoms of his optimism, they were not its origin. It is surely obvious that no one can be argued into optimism since no one can be argued into happiness. Browning’s optimism was not founded on opinions which were the work of Browning, but on life which was the work of God. One of Browning’s most celebrated biographers has said that something of Browning’s theology must be put down to his possession of a good digestion. The remark was, of course, like all remarks touching the tragic subject of digestion, intended to be funny and to convey some kind of doubt or diminution touching the value of Browning’s faith. But if we examine the matter with somewhat greater care we shall see that it is indeed a thorough compliment to that faith. Nobody, strictly speaking, is happier on account of his digestion. He is happy because he is so constituted as to forget all about it. Nobody really is convulsed with delight at the thought of the ingenious machinery which he possesses inside him; the thing which delights
him is simply the full possession of his own human body. I cannot in the least understand why a good digestion—that is, a good body—should not be held to be as mystic a benefit as a sunset or the first flower of spring. But there is about digestion this peculiarity throwing a great light on human pessimism, that it is one of the many things which we never speak of as existing until they go wrong. We should think it ridiculous to speak of a man as suffering from his boots if we meant that he had really no boots. But we do speak of a man suffering from digestion when we mean that he suffers from a lack of digestion. In the same way we speak of a man suffering from nerves when we mean that his nerves are more inefficient than any one else’s nerves. If any one wishes to see how grossly language can degenerate, he need only compare the old optimistic use of the word nervous, which we employ in speaking of a nervous grip, with the new pessimistic use of the word, which we employ in speaking of a nervous manner. And as digestion is a good thing which sometimes goes wrong, as nerves are good things which sometimes go wrong, so existence itself in the eyes of Browning and all the great optimists is a good thing which sometimes goes wrong. He held himself as free to draw his inspiration from the gift of good health as from the gift of learning or the gift of fellowship. But he held that such gifts were in life innumerable and varied, and that every man, or at least almost every man, possessed some window looking out on this essential excellence of things.

Browning’s optimism then, since we must continue to use this somewhat inadequate word, was a result of experience—experience which is for some mysterious reason generally understood in the sense of sad or disillusioning experience. An old gentleman rebuking a little boy for eating apples in a tree is in the common conception the type of experience. If he really wished to be a type of experience he would climb up the tree himself and proceed to experience the apples. Browning’s faith was founded upon joyful experience, not in the sense that he selected his joyful experiences and ignored his painful ones, but in the sense that his joyful experiences selected themselves and stood out in his memory by virtue of their own extraordinary intensity of colour. He did not use experience in that mean and pompous sense in which it is used by the worldling advanced in years. He rather used it in that healthier and more joyful sense in which it is used at revivalist meetings. In the Salvation Army a man’s experiences mean his experiences of the mercy of God, and to Browning the meaning was much the same. But the revivalists’ confessions deal mostly with experiences of prayer and praise; Browning’s dealt pre-eminently with what may
be called his own subject, the experiences of love.

And this quality of Browning’s optimism, the quality of detail, is also a very typical quality. Browning’s optimism is of that ultimate and unshakeable order that is founded upon the absolute sight, and sound, and smell, and handling of things. If a man had gone up to Browning and asked him with all the solemnity of the eccentric, “Do you think life is worth living?” it is interesting to conjecture what his answer might have been. If he had been for the moment under the influence of the orthodox rationalistic deism of the theologian he would have said, “Existence is justified by its manifest design, its manifest adaptation of means to ends,” or, in other words, “Existence is justified by its completeness.” If, on the other hand, he had been influenced by his own serious intellectual theories he would have said, “Existence is justified by its air of growth and doubtfulness,” or, in other words, “Existence is justified by its incompleteness.” But if he had not been influenced in his answer either by the accepted opinions, or by his own opinions, but had simply answered the question “Is life worth living?” with the real, vital answer that awaited it in his own soul, he would have said as likely as not, “Crimson toadstools in Hampshire.” Some plain, glowing picture of this sort left on his mind would be his real verdict on what the universe had meant to him. To his traditions hope was traced to order, to his speculations hope was traced to disorder. But to Browning himself hope was traced to something like red toadstools. His mysticism was not of that idle and wordy type which believes that a flower is symbolical of life; it was rather of that deep and eternal type which believes that life, a mere abstraction, is symbolical of a flower. With him the great concrete experiences which God made always come first; his own deductions and speculations about them always second. And in this point we find the real peculiar inspiration of his very original poems.

One of the very few critics who seem to have got near to the actual secret of Browning’s optimism is Mr. Santayana in his most interesting book Interpretations of Poetry and Religion. He, in contradistinction to the vast mass of Browning’s admirers, had discovered what was the real root virtue of Browning’s poetry; and the curious thing is, that having discovered that root virtue, he thinks it is a vice. He describes the poetry of Browning most truly as the poetry of barbarism, by which he means the poetry which utters the primeval and indivisible emotions. “For the barbarian is the man who regards his passions as their own excuse for being, who does not domesticate them either by understanding their cause, or by conceiving their ideal goal.” Whether this be or
be not a good definition of the barbarian, it is an excellent and perfect definition of the poet. It might, perhaps, be suggested that barbarians, as a matter of fact, are generally highly traditional and respectable persons who would not put a feather wrong in their head-gear, and who generally have very few feelings and think very little about those they have. It is when we have grown to a greater and more civilised stature that we begin to realise and put to ourselves intellectually the great feelings that sleep in the depths of us. Thus it is that the literature of our day has steadily advanced towards a passionate simplicity, and we become more primeval as the world grows older, until Whitman writes huge and chaotic psalms to express the sensations of a schoolboy out fishing, and Maeterlinck embodies in symbolic dramas the feelings of a child in the dark.

Thus, Mr. Santayana is, perhaps, the most valuable of all the Browning critics. He has gone out of his way to endeavour to realise what it is that repels him in Browning, and he has discovered the fault which none of Browning’s opponents have discovered. And in this he has discovered the merit which none of Browning’s admirers have discovered. Whether the quality be a good or a bad quality, Mr. Santayana is perfectly right. The whole of Browning’s poetry does rest upon primitive feeling; and the only comment to be added is that so does the whole of every one else’s poetry. Poetry deals entirely with those great eternal and mainly forgotten wishes which are the ultimate despots of existence. Poetry presents things as they are to our emotions, not as they are to any theory, however plausible, or any argument, however conclusive. If love is in truth a glorious vision, poetry will say that it is a glorious vision, and no philosophers will persuade poetry to say that it is the exaggeration of the instinct of sex. If bereavement is a bitter and continually aching thing, poetry will say that it is so, and no philosophers will persuade poetry to say that it is an evolutionary stage of great biological value. And here comes in the whole value and object of poetry, that it is perpetually challenging all systems with the test of a terrible sincerity. The practical value of poetry is that it is realistic upon a point upon which nothing else can be realistic, the point of the actual desires of man. Ethics is the science of actions, but poetry is the science of motives. Some actions are ugly, and therefore some parts of ethics are ugly. But all motives are beautiful, or present themselves for the moment as beautiful, and therefore all poetry is beautiful. If poetry deals with the basest matter, with the shedding of blood for gold, it ought to suggest the gold as well as the blood. Only poetry can realise motives, because motives are all pictures of happiness. And the supreme and most practical value of poetry is this, that in poetry, as in music, a note is struck
which expresses beyond the power of rational statement a condition of mind, and all actions arise from a condition of mind. Prose can only use a large and clumsy notation; it can only say that a man is miserable, or that a man is happy; it is forced to ignore that there are a million diverse kinds of misery and a million diverse kinds of happiness. Poetry alone, with the first throb of its metre, can tell us whether the depression is the kind of depression that drives a man to suicide, or the kind of depression that drives him to the Tivoli. Poetry can tell us whether the happiness is the happiness that sends a man to a restaurant, or the much richer and fuller happiness that sends him to church.

Now the supreme value of Browning as an optimist lies in this that we have been examining, that beyond all his conclusions, and deeper than all his arguments, he was passionately interested in and in love with existence. If the heavens had fallen, and all the waters of the earth run with blood, he would still have been interested in existence, if possible a little more so. He is a great poet of human joy for precisely the reason of which Mr. Santayana complains: that his happiness is primal, and beyond the reach of philosophy. He is something far more convincing, far more comforting, far more religiously significant than an optimist: he is a happy man.

This happiness he finds, as every man must find happiness, in his own way. He does not find the great part of his joy in those matters in which most poets find felicity. He finds much of it in those matters in which most poets find ugliness and vulgarity. He is to a considerable extent the poet of towns. “Do you care for nature much?” a friend of his asked him. “Yes, a great deal,” he said, “but for human beings a great deal more.” Nature, with its splendid and soothing sanity, has the power of convincing most poets of the essential worthiness of things. There are few poets who, if they escaped from the rowdiest waggonette of tripers, could not be quieted again and exalted by dropping into a small wayside field. The speciality of Browning is rather that he would have been quieted and exalted by the waggonette.

To Browning, probably the beginning and end of all optimism was to be found in the faces in the street. To him they were all the masks of a deity, the heads of a hundred-headed Indian god of nature. Each one of them looked towards some quarter of the heavens, not looked upon by any other eyes. Each one of them wore some expression, some blend of eternal joy and eternal sorrow, not to be found in any other countenance. The sense of the absolute sanctity of human difference was the deepest of all his senses. He was hungrily interested in all human things, but it would have been quite impossible to have said of him that
he loved humanity. He did not love humanity but men. His sense of the difference between one man and another would have made the thought of melting them into a lump called humanity simply loathsome and prosaic. It would have been to him like playing four hundred beautiful airs at once. The mixture would not combine all, it would lose all. Browning believed that to every man that ever lived upon this earth had been given a definite and peculiar confidence of God. Each one of us was engaged on secret service; each one of us had a peculiar message; each one of us was the founder of a religion. Of that religion our thoughts, our faces, our bodies, our hats, our boots, our tastes, our virtues, and even our vices, were more or less fragmentary and inadequate expressions.

In the delightful memoirs of that very remarkable man Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, there is an extremely significant and interesting anecdote about Browning, the point of which appears to have attracted very little attention. Duffy was dining with Browning and John Forster, and happened to make some chance allusion to his own adherence to the Roman Catholic faith, when Forster remarked, half jestingly, that he did not suppose that Browning would like him any the better for that. Browning would seem to have opened his eyes with some astonishment. He immediately asked why Forster should suppose him hostile to the Roman Church. Forster and Duffy replied almost simultaneously, by referring to “Bishop Blougram’s Apology,” which had just appeared, and asking whether the portrait of the sophistical and self-indulgent priest had not been intended for a satire on Cardinal Wiseman. “Certainly,” replied Browning cheerfully, “I intended it for Cardinal Wiseman, but I don’t consider it a satire, there is nothing hostile about it.” This is the real truth which lies at the heart of what may be called the great sophistical monologues which Browning wrote in later years. They are not satires or attacks upon their subjects, they are not even harsh and unfeeling exposures of them. They are defences; they say or are intended to say the best that can be said for the persons with whom they deal. But very few people in this world would care to listen to the real defence of their own characters. The real defence, the defence which belongs to the Day of Judgment, would make such damaging admissions, would clear away so many artificial virtues, would tell such tragedies of weakness and failure, that a man would sooner be misunderstood and censured by the world than exposed to that awful and merciless eulogy. One of the most practically difficult matters which arise from the code of manners and the conventions of life, is that we cannot properly justify a human being, because that justification would involve the
admission of things which may not conventionally be admitted. We might explain and make human and respectable, for example, the conduct of some old fighting politician, who, for the good of his party and his country, acceded to measures of which he disapproved; but we cannot, because we are not allowed to admit that he ever acceded to measures of which he disapproved. We might touch the life of many dissolute public men with pathos, and a kind of defeated courage, by telling the truth about the history of their sins. But we should throw the world into an uproar if we hinted that they had any. Thus the decencies of civilisation do not merely make it impossible to revile a man, they make it impossible to praise him.

Browning, in such poems as “Bishop Blougram’s Apology,” breaks this first mask of goodness in order to break the second mask of evil, and gets to the real goodness at last; he dethrones a saint in order to humanise a scoundrel. This is one typical side of the real optimism of Browning. And there is indeed little danger that such optimism will become weak and sentimental and popular, the refuge of every idler, the excuse of every ne’er-do-well. There is little danger that men will desire to excuse their souls before God by presenting themselves before men as such snobs as Bishop Blougram, or such dastards as Sludge the Medium. There is no pessimism, however stern, that is so stern as this optimism, it is as merciless as the mercy of God.

It is true that in this, as in almost everything else connected with Browning’s character, the matter cannot be altogether exhausted by such a generalisation as the above. Browning’s was a simple character, and therefore very difficult to understand, since it was impulsive, unconscious, and kept no reckoning of its moods. Probably in a great many cases, the original impulse which led Browning to plan a soliloquy was a kind of anger mixed with curiosity; possibly the first charcoal sketch of Blougram was a caricature of a priest. Browning, as we have said, had prejudices, and had a capacity for anger, and two of his angriest prejudices were against a certain kind of worldly clericalism, and against almost every kind of spiritualism. But as he worked upon the portraits at least, a new spirit began to possess him, and he enjoyed every spirited and just defence the men could make of themselves, like triumphant blows in a battle, and towards the end would come the full revelation, and Browning would stand up in the man’s skin and testify to the man’s ideals. However this may be, it is worth while to notice one very curious error that has arisen in connection with one of the most famous of these monologues.

When Robert Browning was engaged in that somewhat obscure quarrel with
the spiritualist Home, it is generally and correctly stated that he gained a great number of the impressions which he afterwards embodied in “Mr. Sludge the Medium.” The statement so often made, particularly in the spiritualist accounts of the matter, that Browning himself is the original of the interlocutor and exposer of Sludge, is of course merely an example of that reckless reading from which no one has suffered more than Browning despite his students and societies. The man to whom Sludge addresses his confession is a Mr. Hiram H. Horsfall, an American, a patron of spiritualists, and, as it is more than once suggested, something of a fool. Nor is there the smallest reason to suppose that Sludge considered as an individual bears any particular resemblance to Home considered as an individual. But without doubt “Mr. Sludge the Medium” is a general statement of the view of spiritualism at which Browning had arrived from his acquaintance with Home and Home’s circle. And about that view of spiritualism there is something rather peculiar to notice. The poem, appearing as it did at the time when the intellectual public had just become conscious of the existence of spiritualism, attracted a great deal of attention, and aroused a great deal of controversy. The spiritualists called down thunder upon the head of the poet, whom they depicted as a vulgar and ribald lampooner who had not only committed the profanity of sneering at the mysteries of a higher state of life, but the more unpardonable profanity of sneering at the convictions of his own wife. The sceptics, on the other hand, hailed the poem with delight as a blasting exposure of spiritualism, and congratulated the poet on making himself the champion of the sane and scientific view of magic. Which of these two parties was right about the question of attacking the reality of spiritualism it is neither easy nor necessary to discuss. For the simple truth, which neither of the two parties and none of the students of Browning seem to have noticed, is that “Mr. Sludge the Medium” is not an attack upon spiritualism. It would be a great deal nearer the truth, though not entirely the truth, to call it a justification of spiritualism. The whole essence of Browning’s method is involved in this matter, and the whole essence of Browning’s method is so vitally misunderstood that to say that “Mr. Sludge the Medium” is something like a defence of spiritualism will bear on the face of it the appearance of the most empty and perverse of paradoxes. But so, when we have comprehended Browning’s spirit, the fact will be found to be.

The general idea is that Browning must have intended “Sludge” for an attack on spiritual phenomena, because the medium in that poem is made a vulgar and contemptible mountebank, because his cheats are quite openly confessed, and he
himself put into every ignominious situation, detected, exposed, throttled, horsewhipped, and forgiven. To regard this deduction as sound is to misunderstand Browning at the very start of every poem that he ever wrote. There is nothing that the man loved more, nothing that deserves more emphatically to be called a speciality of Browning, than the utterance of large and noble truths by the lips of mean and grotesque human beings. In his poetry praise and wisdom were perfected not only out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, but out of the mouths of swindlers and snobs. Now what, as a matter of fact, is the outline and development of the poem of “Sludge”? The climax of the poem, considered as a work of art, is so fine that it is quite extraordinary that any one should have missed the point of it, since it is the whole point of the monologue. Sludge the Medium has been caught out in a piece of unquestionable trickery, a piece of trickery for which there is no conceivable explanation or palliation which will leave his moral character intact. He is therefore seized with a sudden resolution, partly angry, partly frightened, and partly humorous, to become absolutely frank, and to tell the whole truth about himself for the first time not only to his dupe, but to himself. He excuses himself for the earlier stages of the trickster’s life by a survey of the border-land between truth and fiction, not by any means a piece of sophistry or cynicism, but a perfectly fair statement of an ethical difficulty which does exist. There are some people who think that it must be immoral to admit that there are any doubtful cases of morality, as if a man should refrain from discussing the precise boundary at the upper end of the Isthmus of Panama, for fear the inquiry should shake his belief in the existence of North America. People of this kind quite consistently think Sludge to be merely a scoundrel talking nonsense. It may be remembered that they thought the same thing of Newman. It is actually supposed, apparently in the current use of words, that casuistry is the name of a crime; it does not appear to occur to people that casuistry is a science, and about as much a crime as botany. This tendency to casuistry in Browning’s monologues has done much towards establishing for him that reputation for pure intellectualism which has done him so much harm. But casuistry in this sense is not a cold and analytical thing, but a very warm and sympathetic thing. To know what combination of excuse might justify a man in manslaughter or bigamy, is not to have a callous indifference to virtue; it is rather to have so ardent an admiration for virtue as to seek it in the remotest desert and the darkest incognito.

This is emphatically the case with the question of truth and falsehood raised in
“Sludge the Medium.” To say that it is sometimes difficult to tell at what point the romancer turns into the liar is not to state a cynicism, but a perfectly honest piece of human observation. To think that such a view involves the negation of honesty is like thinking that red is green, because the two fade into each other in the colours of the rainbow. It is really difficult to decide when we come to the extreme edge of veracity, when and when not it is permissible to create an illusion. A standing example, for instance, is the case of the fairy-tales. We think a father entirely pure and benevolent when he tells his children that a beanstalk grew up into heaven, and a pumpkin turned into a coach. We should consider that he lapsed from purity and benevolence if he told his children that in walking home that evening he had seen a beanstalk grow half-way up the church, or a pumpkin grow as large as a wheelbarrow. Again, few people would object to that general privilege whereby it is permitted to a person in narrating even a true anecdote to work up the climax by any exaggerative touches which really tend to bring it out. The reason of this is that the telling of the anecdote has become, like the telling of the fairy-tale, almost a distinct artistic creation; to offer to tell a story is in ordinary society like offering to recite or play the violin. No one denies that a fixed and genuine moral rule could be drawn up for these cases, but no one surely need be ashamed to admit that such a rule is not entirely easy to draw up. And when a man like Sludge traces much of his moral downfall to the indistinctness of the boundary and the possibility of beginning with a natural extravagance and ending with a gross abuse, it certainly is not possible to deny his right to be heard.

We must recur, however, to the question of the main development of the Sludge self-analysis. He begins, as we have said, by urging a general excuse by the fact that in the heat of social life, in the course of telling tales in the intoxicating presence of sympathisers and believers, he has slid into falsehood almost before he is aware of it. So far as this goes, there is truth in his plea. Sludge might indeed find himself unexpectedly justified if we had only an exact record of how true were the tales told about Conservatives in an exclusive circle of Radicals, or the stories told about Radicals in a circle of indignant Conservatives. But after this general excuse, Sludge goes on to a perfectly cheerful and unfeeling admission of fraud; this principal feeling towards his victims is by his own confession a certain unfathomable contempt for people who are so easily taken in. He professes to know how to lay the foundations for every species of personal acquaintance, and how to remedy the slight and trivial slips of making Plato write Greek in naughts and crosses.
It would be difficult to imagine any figure more indecently confessional, more entirely devoid of not only any of the restraints of conscience, but of any of the restraints even of a wholesome personal conceit, than Sludge the Medium. He confesses not only fraud, but things which are to the natural man more difficult to confess even than fraud—effeminacy, futility, physical cowardice. And then, when the last of his loathsome secrets has been told, when he has nothing left either to gain or to conceal, then he rises up into a perfect bankrupt sublimity and makes the great avowal which is the whole pivot and meaning of the poem. He says in effect: “Now that my interest in deceit is utterly gone, now that I have admitted, to my own final infamy, the frauds that I have practised, now that I stand before you in a patent and open villainy which has something of the disinterestedness and independence of the innocent, now I tell you with the full and impartial authority of a lost soul that I believe that there is something in spiritualism. In the course of a thousand conspiracies, by the labour of a thousand lies, I have discovered that there is really something in this matter that neither I nor any other man understands. I am a thief, an adventurer, a deceiver of mankind, but I am not a disbeliever in spiritualism. I have seen too much for that.” This is the confession of faith of Mr. Sludge the Medium. It would be difficult to imagine a confession of faith framed and presented in a more impressive manner. Sludge is a witness to his faith as the old martyrs were witnesses to their faith, but even more impressively. They testified to their religion even after they had lost their liberty, and their eyesight, and their right hands. Sludge testifies to his religion even after he has lost his dignity and his honour.

It may be repeated that it is truly extraordinary that any one should have failed to notice that this avowal on behalf of spiritualism is the pivot of the poem. The avowal itself is not only expressed clearly, but prepared and delivered with admirable rhetorical force:—

“Now for it, then! Will you believe me, though?
You’ve heard what I confess: I don’t unsay
A single word: I cheated when I could,
Rapped with my toe-joints, set sham hands at work,
Wrote down names weak in sympathetic ink.
Rubbed odic lights with ends of phosphor-match,
And all the rest; believe that: believe this,
By the same token, though it seem to set
The crooked straight again, unsay the said,
Stick up what I've knocked down; I can't help that,
It's truth! I somehow vomit truth to-day.
This trade of mine—I don't know, can't be sure
But there was something in it, tricks and all!"

It is strange to call a poem with so clear and fine a climax an attack on spiritualism. To miss that climax is like missing the last sentence in a good anecdote, or putting the last act of Othello into the middle of the play. Either the whole poem of “Sludge the Medium” means nothing at all, and is only a lampoon upon a cad, of which the matter is almost as contemptible as the subject, or it means this—that some real experiences of the unseen lie even at the heart of hypocrisy, and that even the spiritualist is at root spiritual.

One curious theory which is common to most Browning critics is that Sludge must be intended for a pure and conscious impostor, because after his confession, and on the personal withdrawal of Mr. Horsfall, he bursts out into horrible curses against that gentleman and cynical boasts of his future triumphs in a similar line of business. Surely this is to have a very feeble notion either of nature or art. A man driven absolutely into a corner might humiliate himself, and gain a certain sensation almost of luxury in that humiliation, in pouring out all his imprisoned thoughts and obscure victories. For let it never be forgotten that a hypocrite is a very unhappy man; he is a man who has devoted himself to a most delicate and arduous intellectual art in which he may achieve masterpieces which he must keep secret, fight thrilling battles, and win hair’s-breadth victories for which he cannot have a whisper of praise. A really accomplished impostor is the most wretched of geniuses; he is a Napoleon on a desert island. A man might surely, therefore, when he was certain that his credit was gone, take a certain pleasure in revealing the tricks of his unique trade, and gaining not indeed credit, but at least a kind of glory. And in the course of this self-revelation he would come at last upon that part of himself which exists in every man—that part which does believe in, and value, and worship something. This he would fling in his hearer’s face with even greater pride, and take a delight in giving a kind of testimony to his religion which no man had ever given before—the testimony of a martyr who could not hope to be a saint. But surely all this sudden tempest of candour in the man would not mean that he would burst into tears and become an exemplary ratepayer, like a villain in the worst parts of Dickens. The moment the danger was withdrawn, the sense of having given himself away, of having betrayed the secret of his infamous freemasonry, would add an indescribable violence and foulness to his reaction of rage. A man in such
a case would do exactly as Sludge does. He would declare his own shame, declare the truth of his creed, and then, when he realised what he had done, say something like this:—

“R-r-r, you brute-beast and blackguard! Cowardly scamp!
I only wish I dared burn down the house
And spoil your sniggering!”

and so on, and so on.

He would react like this; it is one of the most artistic strokes in Browning. But it does not prove that he was a hypocrite about spiritualism, or that he was speaking more truthfully in the second outburst than in the first. Whence came this extraordinary theory that a man is always speaking most truly when he is speaking most coarsely? The truth about oneself is a very difficult thing to express, and coarse speaking will seldom do it.

When we have grasped this point about “Sludge the Medium,” we have grasped the key to the whole series of Browning’s casuistical monologues—Bishop Blaugram’s Apology, Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Fra Lippo Lippi, Fifine at the Fair, Aristophanes’ Apology, and several of the monologues in The Ring and the Book. They are all, without exception, dominated by this one conception of a certain reality tangled almost inextricably with unrealities in a man’s mind, and the peculiar fascination which resides in the thought that the greatest lies about a man, and the greatest truths about him, may be found side by side in the same eloquent and sustained utterance.

“For Blougram, he believed, say, half he spoke.”

Or, to put the matter in another way, the general idea of these poems is, that a man cannot help telling some truth even when he sets out to tell lies. If a man comes to tell us that he has discovered perpetual motion, or been swallowed by the sea-serpent, there will yet be some point in the story where he will tell us about himself almost all that we require to know.

If any one wishes to test the truth, or to see the best examples of this general idea in Browning’s monologues, he may be recommended to notice one peculiarity of these poems which is rather striking. As a whole, these apologies are written in a particularly burly and even brutal English. Browning’s love of what is called the ugly is nowhere else so fully and extravagantly indulged. This, like a great many other things for which Browning as an artist is blamed, is perfectly appropriate to the theme. A vain, ill-mannered, and untrustworthy egotist, defending his own sordid doings with his own cheap and weather-beaten
philosophy, is very likely to express himself best in a language flexible and pungent, but indelicate and without dignity. But the peculiarity of these loose and almost slangy soliloquies is that every now and then in them there occur bursts of pure poetry which are like a burst of birds singing. Browning does not hesitate to put some of the most perfect lines that he or anyone else have ever written in the English language into the mouths of such slaves as Sludge and Guido Franceschini. Take, for the sake of example, “Bishop Blougram’s Apology.” The poem is one of the most grotesque in the poet’s works. It is intentionally redolent of the solemn materialism and patrician grossness of a grand dinner-party à deux. It has many touches of an almost wild bathos, such as the young man who bears the impossible name of Gigadibs. The Bishop, in pursuing his worldly argument for conformity, points out with truth that a condition of doubt is a condition that cuts both ways, and that if we cannot be sure of the religious theory of life, neither can we be sure of the material theory of life, and that in turn is capable of becoming an uncertainty continually shaken by a tormenting suggestion. We cannot establish ourselves on rationalism, and make it bear fruit to us. Faith itself is capable of becoming the darkest and most revolutionary of doubts. Then comes the passage:—

“Just when we are safest, there’s a sunset-touch,
A fancy from a flower-bell, some one’s death,
A chorus ending from Euripides,—
And that’s enough for fifty hopes and fears
As old and new at once as Nature’s self,
To rap and knock and enter in our soul,
Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring,
Round the ancient idol, on his base again,—
The grand Perhaps!”

Nobler diction and a nobler meaning could not have been put into the mouth of Pompilia, or Rabbi Ben Ezra. It is in reality put into the mouth of a vulgar, fashionable priest, justifying his own cowardice over the comfortable wine and the cigars.

Along with this tendency to poetry among Browning’s knaves, must be reckoned another characteristic, their uniform tendency to theism. These loose and mean characters speak of many things feverishly and vaguely; of one thing they always speak with confidence and composure, their relation to God. It may seem strange at first sight that those who have outlived the indulgence, and not only of every law, but of every reasonable anarchy, should still rely so simply upon the indulgence of divine perfection. Thus Sludge is certain that his life of
lies and conjuring tricks has been conducted in a deep and subtle obedience to the message really conveyed by the conditions created by God. Thus Bishop Blougram is certain that his life of panic-stricken and tottering compromise has been really justified as the only method that could unite him with God. Thus Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau is certain that every dodge in his thin string of political dodges has been the true means of realising what he believes to be the will of God. Every one of these meagre swindlers, while admitting a failure in all things relative, claims an awful alliance with the Absolute. To many it will at first sight appear a dangerous doctrine indeed. But, in truth, it is a most solid and noble and salutary doctrine, far less dangerous than its opposite. Every one on this earth should believe, amid whatever madness or moral failure, that his life and temperament have some object on the earth. Every one on the earth should believe that he has something to give to the world which cannot otherwise be given. Every one should, for the good of men and the saving of his own soul, believe that it is possible, even if we are the enemies of the human race, to be the friends of God. The evil wrought by this mystical pride, great as it often is, is like a straw to the evil wrought by a materialistic self-abandonment. The crimes of the devil who thinks himself of immeasurable value are as nothing to the crimes of the devil who thinks himself of no value. With Browning’s knaves we have always this eternal interest, that they are real somewhere, and may at any moment begin to speak poetry. We are talking to a peevish and garrulous sneak; we are watching the play of his paltry features, his evasive eyes, and babbling lips. And suddenly the face begins to change and harden, the eyes glare like the eyes of a mask, the whole face of clay becomes a common mouthpiece, and the voice that comes forth is the voice of God, uttering His everlasting soliloquy.
LORD KITCHENER

G. K. CHESTERTON
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

LORD KITCHENER

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LORD KITCHENER
LORD KITCHENER

Horatio Herbert Kitchener was Irish by birth but English by extraction, being born in County Kerry, the son of an English colonel. The fanciful might see in this first and accidental fact the presence of this simple and practical man amid the more mystical western problems and dreams which were very distant from his mind, an element which clings to all his career and gives it an unconscious poetry. He had many qualities of the epic hero, and especially this—that he was the last man in the world to be the epic poet. There is something almost provocative to superstition in the way in which he stands at every turn as the symbol of the special trials and the modern transfiguration of England; from this moment when he was born among the peasants of Ireland to the moment when he died upon the sea, seeking at the other end of the world the other great peasant civilisation of Russia. Yet at each of these symbolic moments he is, if not as unconscious as a symbol, then as silent as a symbol; he is speechless and supremely significant, like an ensign or a flag. The superficial picturesqueness of his life, at least, lies very much in this—that he was like a hero condemned by fate to act an allegory.

We find this, for instance, in one of the very first and perhaps one of the most picturesque of all the facts that are recorded or reported of him. As a youth, tall, very shy and quiet, he was only notable for intellectual interests of the soberest and most methodical sort, especially for the close study of mathematics. This also, incidentally, was typical enough, for his work in Egypt and the Soudan, by which his fame was established, was based wholly upon such calculations. It was not merely mathematical but literally geometrical. His work bore the same relation to Gordon’s that a rigid mathematical diagram bears to a rough pencil sketch on which it is based. Yet the student thus bent on the strictest side of his profession, studying it at Woolwich and entering the Engineers as the most severely scientific branch of the army, had as a first experience of war something so romantic that it has been counted incredible, yet something so relevant to the great reality of to-day that it might have been made up centuries after his death, as a myth is made up about a god. He happened to be in France in the most tragic hour that France has ever known or, please God, will ever know. She was bearing alone the weight of that alien tyranny, of that hopeless and almost lifeless violence, which the other nations have since found to be the worst of all the terrors which God tolerates in this world. She trod that winepress alone; and
of the peoples there were none to help her. In 1870 the Prussian had already encircled Paris, and General Chanzy was fighting against enormous odds to push northwards to its relief, when his army was joined by the young and silent traveller from England. All that was in Kitchener’s mind or motives will perhaps never be known. France was still something of an ideal of civilisation for many of the more generous English gentry. Prussia was never really an ideal for anybody, even the Prussians, and mere success, which could not make her an ideal, had not yet calamitously made her a model. There was in it also, no doubt, a touch of the schoolboy who runs away to sea—that touch of the schoolboy without the sense of which the staidest Englishman will always be inexplicable. But considered historically there is something strangely moving about the incident—the fact that Kitchener was a French soldier almost before he was an English one. As Hannibal was dedicated in boyhood to war against the eagles of Rome, Kitchener was dedicated, almost in boyhood, to war against the eagles of Germany. Romance came to this realist, whether by impulse or by accident, like a wind from without, as first love will come to the woman-hater. He was already, both by fate and choice, something more than he had meant to be. The mathematician, we might almost say the calculating boy, was already gambling in the highest lottery which led to the highest and most historic loss. The engineer devoted to discipline was already a free lance, because already a knight-errant.

He returned to England to continue his comparatively humdrum order of advancement; and the next call that came to him was of a strangely different and yet also of a strangely significant kind. The Palestine Exploration Fund sent him with another officer to conduct topographical and antiquarian investigations in a country where practical exertions are always relieved against a curiously incongruous background—as if they were setting up telegraph-posts through the Garden of Eden or opening a railway station at the New Jerusalem. But the contrast between antiquity and modernity was not the only one; there was still the sort of contrast that can be a collision. Kitchener was almost immediately to come in contact with what was to be, in various aspects, the problem of his life—the modern fanaticisms of the Near East. There is an English proverb which asks whether the mountain goes to Mahomet or he to the mountain, and it may be a question whether his religion be the cause or the effect of a certain spirit, vivid and yet strangely negative, which dwells in such deserts. Walking among the olives of Gaza or looking on the Philistine plain, such travellers may well feel that they are treading on cold volcanoes, as empty as the mountains of the
moon. But the mountain of Mahomet is not yet an extinct volcano.

Kitchener, in these first days of seemingly mild and minute duties, was early aware of it. At Safed, in the Galilean hills, his small party had found itself surrounded by an Arab mob, stricken suddenly mad with emotions unintelligible to the political mobs of the West. He was himself wounded, but, defending himself as best he could with a walking-stick, not only saved his own life but that of his fellow-officer, Lieutenant Conder, who had been beaten to the earth with an Arab club. He continued his work indeed with prosaic pertinacity, and developed in the survey of the Holy Land all that almost secretive enthusiasm for detail which lasted all his life. Of the most famous English guide-book he made the characteristic remark, “Where Murray has seven names I have a hundred and sixteen.” Most men, in speaking or writing of such a thing, would certainly have said “a hundred.” It is characteristic of his type that he did not even think in round numbers. But there was in him, parallel to this almost arithmetical passion, another quality which is, in a double sense, the secret of his life. For it was the cause of at least half his success; and yet he very successfully concealed it—especially from his admirers.

The paradox of all this part of his life lies in this—that, destined as he was to be the greatest enemy of Mahomedanism, he was quite exceptionally a friend of Mahomedans. He had been first received in that land, so to speak, with a blow on the head with a club; he was destined to break the sword of the last Arab conqueror, to wreck his holy city and treat all the religious traditions of it with a deliberate desecration which has often been held oppressive and was undoubtedly ruthless. Yet with the individual Moslem he had a sort of natural brotherhood which has never been explained. Had it been shown by a soldier of the Crusades, it would have been called witchcraft. In this, as in many other cases, the advance of a larger enlightenment prevents us from calling it anything. There was mixed with it, no doubt, the deep Moslem admiration for mere masculinity, which has probably by its exaggeration permitted the Moslem subordination of women. But Kitchener (who was himself accused, rightly or wrongly, of a disdain for women) must have himself contributed some other element to the strangest of international sympathies. Whatever it was, it must be constantly kept in mind as running parallel to his scientific industry and particularity; for it was these two powers, used systematically for many years before the event, that prepared the ground for the overthrow of that wild papacy and wandering empire which so long hung in the desert, like a mirage to mislead and to destroy.
Kitchener was called away in 1878 to similar surveying duties in Cyprus, and afterwards in Anatolia, where the same faculty obtained him a firman, making him safe in all the Holy Cities of Islam. He also dealt much with the Turkish fugitives fleeing from the Russian guns to Erzerum—whither, so long after, the guns were to follow. But it is with his later summons to Egypt that we feel he has returned to the theatre of the great things of his life. It is not necessary in this rough sketch to discuss the rights and wrongs or the general international origin of the British occupation of Egypt; the degree of praise or blame to be given to the Khedive, who was the nominal ruler, or to Arabi, the Nationalist leader, who for a time seized the chief power in his place. Kitchener’s services in the operations by which Arabi was defeated were confined to some reconnaissance work immediately preceding the bombardment of Alexandria; and the problem with which his own personality became identified was not that of the Government of Egypt, but of the more barbaric power beyond, by which Egypt, and any powers ruling it, came to be increasingly imperilled. And what advanced him rapidly to posts of real responsibility in the new politics of the country was the knowledge he already had of wilder men and more mysterious forces than could be found in Egyptian courts or even Egyptian camps. It was the combination, of which we have already spoken, of detailed experience and almost eccentric sympathy. In practice it was his knowledge of Arabic, and still more his knowledge of Arabs.

There is in Islam a paradox which is perhaps a permanent menace. The great creed born in the desert creates a kind of ecstasy out of the very emptiness of its own land, and even, one may say, out of the emptiness of its own theology. It affirms, with no little sublimity, something that is not merely the singleness but rather the solitude of God. There is the same extreme simplification in the solitary figure of the Prophet; and yet this isolation perpetually reacts into its own opposite. A void is made in the heart of Islam which has to be filled up again and again by a mere repetition of the revolution that founded it. There are no sacraments; the only thing that can happen is a sort of apocalypse, as unique as the end of the world; so the apocalypse can only be repeated and the world end again and again. There are no priests; and yet this equality can only breed a multitude of lawless prophets almost as numerous as priests. The very dogma that there is only one Mahomet produces an endless procession of Mahomets. Of these the mightiest in modern times were the man whose name was Ahmed, and whose more famous title was the Mahdi; and his more ferocious successor Abdullahi, who was generally known as the Khalifa. These great fanatics, or
great creators of fanaticism, succeeded in making a militarism almost as famous and formidable as that of the Turkish Empire on whose frontiers it hovered, and in spreading a reign of terror such as can seldom be organised except by civilisation. With Napoleonic suddenness and success the Mahdist hordes had fallen on the army of Hicks Pasha, when it left its camp at Omdurman, on the Nile opposite Khartoum, and had cut it to pieces in a fashion incredible. They had established at Omdurman their Holy City, the Rome of their nomadic Roman Empire. Towards that terrible place many adventurous men, like poor Hicks, had gone and were destined to go. The sands that encircled it were like that entrance to the lion’s cavern in the fable, towards which many footprints pointed, and from which none returned.

The last of these was Gordon, that romantic and even eccentric figure of whom so much might be said. Perhaps the most essential thing to say of him here is that fortune once again played the artist in sending such a man, at once as the leader and the herald of a man like Kitchener; to show the way and to make the occasion; to be a sacrifice and a signal for vengeance. Whatever else there was about Gordon, there was about him the air not only of a hero, but of the hero of a tragedy. Something Oriental in his own mysticism, something most of his countrymen would have called moonshine, something perverse in his courage, something childish and beautiful in that perversity, marked him out as the man who walks to doom—the man who in a hundred poems or fables goes up to a city to be crucified. He had gone to Khartoum to arrange the withdrawal of the troops from the Soudan, the Government having decided, if possible, to live at peace with the new Mahdist dictatorship; and he went through the deserts almost as solitary as a bird, on a journey as lonely as his end. He was cut off and besieged in Khartoum by the Mahdist armies, and fell with the falling city. Long before his end he had been in touch with Kitchener, now of the Egyptian Intelligence Department, and weaving very carefully a vast net of diplomacy and strategy in which the slayers of Gordon were to be taken at last.

A well-known English journalist, Bennet Burleigh, wandering near Dongola, fell into conversation with an Arab who spoke excellent English, and who, with a hospitality highly improper in a Moslem, produced two bottles of claret for his entertainment. The name of this Arab was Kitchener; and the two bottles were all he had. The journalist obtained, along with the claret, his first glimpse of the great and extraordinary schemes with which Kitchener was already working to avenge the comrade who had fallen in Khartoum. This part of the work was as personal as that of a private detective plotting against a private murderer in a
modern detective story. Kitchener had learned to speak the Arab tongue not only freely but sociably. He wore the Arab dress and fell into the Arab type of courtesy so effectively that even his blue northern eyes did not betray him. Above all, he sympathised with the Arab character; and in a thousand places sprinkled over the map of North-East Africa he made friends for himself and therefore enemies for the Mahdi. This was the first and superficially the most individual of the converging plans which were to checkmate the desert empire; and its effects were very far-reaching. Again and again, in subsequent years, when the missionaries of the Mahdist religion pushed northward, they found themselves entangled among tribes which the English power had not so much conquered as converted. The legend of the great Prophet encountered something more elusive than laws or military plans; it encountered another legend—an influence which also carried the echoes of the voice of a man. The Ababdeh Arabs, it was said, made a chain across the desert, which the new and awful faith could not pass. The Mudir of Dongola was on the point of joining the ever-victorious Prophet of Omdurman. Kitchener, clad as an Arab, went out almost alone to speak with him. What passed, perhaps, we can never tell; but before his guest had even left him the Mudir flew to arms, fell upon the Prophet’s hosts at Korti, and drove them before him.

The second and superficially more solid process of preparation is much better known. It was the education of the native Egyptian army. It is not necessary to swallow all the natural jingoism of English journalism in order to see something truly historic about the English officer’s work with the Fellaheen, or native race of Egypt. For centuries they had lain as level as the slime of the Nile, and all the conquerors in the chronicles of men had passed over them like a pavement. Though professing the challenging creed of the Moslems, they seem to have reached something like the pessimist patience of the Hindoos. To have turned this slime once more into a human river, to have lifted this pavement once more into a human rampart or barricade, is not a small thing, nor a thing that could possibly be done even by mere power, still less by mere money—and this Kitchener and his English companions certainly did. There must have been something much more than a mere cynical severity in “organisation” in the man who did it. There must be something more than a mere commercial common-sense in the nation in whose name it was done. It is easy enough, with sufficient dulness and greed of detail, to “organise” anything or anybody. It is easy enough to make people obey a bugle (or a factory hooter) as the Prussian soldiers obey a bugle. But it is no such trumpet that makes possible the resurrection of the dead.
The success of this second of the three converging designs of Kitchener, the making of a new Egyptian army, was soon seen in the expedition against Dongola. It had been foreshadowed in a successful defence of Suakin, in which Kitchener was wounded; a defence against Osman Digna, perhaps the first of the Mahdist generals whose own strongholds were eventually stormed at Gemaizeh; and in the victory at Toski, where fell the great warrior Wad el Njume, whose strategy had struck down both Hicks and Gordon. But the turn of the tide was Dongola. In 1892 General, now Lord Grenfell, who had been Sirdar, or Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Army, and ordered the advance at Toski, retired and left his post vacant. The great public servant known latterly as Lord Cromer had long had his eye on Kitchener and the part he had played, even as a young lieutenant, in the new military formation of the Fellahaen. He was now put at the head of the whole new army; and the first work that fell to him was leading the new expedition. In three days after the order was received the force started at nightfall and marched southward into the night. The detail is something more than picturesque; for on all accounts of that formidable attack on the Mahdi’s power a quality of darkness rests like a kind of cloud. It was, for one thing, a surprise attack and a very secret one, so that the cloud was as practical as a cloak; but it was also the re-entrance of a territory which an instinct has led the English to call the Dark Continent even under its blazing noon. There vast distances alone made a veil like that of darkness, and there the lives of Gordon and Hicks and hundreds more had been swallowed up in an ancient silence. Perhaps we cannot guess to-day, after the colder completion of Kitchener’s work, what it meant for those who went on that nocturnal march; who crept up in two lines, one along the river and the other along an abandoned railway track, moving through the black night; and in the black night encamped, and waited for the rising of the moon. Anyhow, the tale told of it strikes this note, especially in one touch of what can only be called a terrible triviality. I mean the reference to the new noise heard just before day-break, revealing the nearness of the enemy: the dreadful drum of Islam, calling for prayer to an awful God—a God not to be worshipped by the changing and sometimes cheerful notes of harp or organ, but only by the drum that maddens by mere repetition.

But the third of Kitchener’s lines of approach remains to consider. The surprise attack, which captured the riverside village of Firket, had eventually led, in spite of storms that warred on the advance like armies, and in one place practically wiped out a brigade, to the fall of Dongola itself. But Dongola was not the high place of the enemy; it was not there that Gordon died or that
Abdullahi was still alive. Far away up the dark river were the twin cities of the tragedy, the city of the murder and the city of the murderer. It was in relation to this fixed point of fact that Kitchener’s next proceeding is seen to be supremely characteristic. He was so anxious to do one thing that he was cautious about doing it. He was more concerned to obtain a success than to appear to deserve it; he did not want a moral victory, but a mathematical certainty. So far from following up the dash in the dark, upon Firket or Dongola, with more romantic risks, he decided not to advance on the Mahdi’s host a minute faster than men could follow him building a railway. He created behind him a colossal causeway of communications, going out alone into wastes where there was and had been no other mortal trace or track. The engineering genius of Girouard, a Canadian, designed and developed it with what was, considering the nature of the task, brilliant rapidity; but by the standards of desert warfare it must have seemed that Kitchener and his English made war as slowly as grass grows or orchards bear fruit. The horsemen of Araby, darting to and fro like swallows, must have felt as if they were menaced by the advance of a giant snail. But it was a snail that left a shining track unknown to those sands; for the first time since Rome decayed something was being made there that could remain. The effect of this growing road, one might almost say this living road, began to be felt. Mahmoud, the Mahdist military leader, fell back from Berber, and gathered his hosts more closely round the sacred city on the Nile. Kitchener, making another night march up the Atbara river, stormed the Arab camp and took Mahmoud prisoner. Then at last he moved finally up the western bank of the Nile and came in sight of Omdurman. It is somewhat of a disproportion to dwell on the fight that followed and the fall of the great city. The fighting had been done already, and more than half of it was working; fighting a long fight against the centuries, against ages of sloth and the great sleep of the desert, where there had been nothing but visions, and against a racial decline that men had accepted as a doom. On the following Sunday a memorial service for Charles Gordon was held in the place where he was slain.

The fact that Kitchener fought with rails as much as with guns rather fixed from this time forward the fashionable view of his character. He was talked of as if he were himself made of metal, with a head filled not only with calculations but with clockwork. This is symbolically true, in so far as it means that he was by temper what he was by trade, an engineer. He had conquered the Mahdi, where many had failed to do so. But what he had chiefly conquered was the desert—a great and greedy giant. He brought Cairo to Khartoum; we might say
that he brought London or Liverpool with him to the gates of the strange city of Omdurman. Some parts of his action supported, even regrettably, the reputation of rigidity. But if any admirer had, in this hour of triumph, been staring at him as at a stone sphinx of inflexible fate, that admirer would have been very much puzzled by the next passage of his life. Kitchener was something much more than a machine; for in the mind, as much as in the body, flexibility is far more masculine than inflexibility.

A situation developed almost instantly after his victory in which he was to show that he was a diplomatist as well as a soldier. At Fashoda, a little farther up the Nile, he found something more surprising, and perhaps more romantic, than the wildest dervish of the desert solitudes. A French officer, and one of the most valiant and distinguished of French officers, Major Marchand, had penetrated to the place with the pertinacity of a great explorer, and seemed prepared to hold it with all the unselfish arrogance of a patriot. It is said that the Frenchman not only welcomed Kitchener in the name of France, but invited him, with courteous irony, to partake of vegetables grown on the spot, a symbol of stable occupation. The story, if it be true, is admirably French; for it reveals at once the wit and the peasant. But the humour of the Englishman was worthily equal to the wit of the Frenchman; and it was humour of that sane sort which we call good humour. Political papers in pacific England and France raved and ranted over the crisis, responsible journals howled with jingoism; but through it all, until the moment when the French agreed to retire, the two most placable and even sociable figures were the two grim tropical travellers and soldiers who faced each other on the burning sands of Fashoda. As we see them facing each other, we have again the vague sense of a sign or a parable which runs through this story. For they were to meet again long afterwards as allies, when both were leading their countrymen against the great enemy in the Great War.

Something of the same shadow of prophecy is perhaps the deepest memory left by the last war of Kitchener before the greatest. After further activities in Egypt and the Soudan, of which the attempt to educate the Fellahine by the Gordon Memorial College was the most remarkable, he was abruptly summoned to South Africa to be the right hand of Lord Roberts in the war then being waged against the Boers. He conducted the opening of the determining battle of Paardeberg, and was typically systematic in covering the half-conquered country with a system of block-houses and enclosures like a diagram of geometry. But to-day, and for many reasons, Englishmen will think first of the last scene of that war. When Botha and the Boer Generals surrendered to Kitchener, there was the
same goodwill among the soldiers to contrast with the ill-will of the journalists. Botha also became almost a friend; and Botha also was to be in the far future an ally, smiting the German in Africa as Kitchener smote him in Europe. There was the same hint of prophecy about the war that ended at Vereeniging as about that other war that so nearly began at Fashoda. It seemed almost as if God were pitting his heroes against each other in tournament, before they all rode together against the heathen pouring upon them out of Germany.

It is with that name of Germany that this mere skeleton of the facts must end. After the South African War Kitchener had been made Commander-in-Chief in India, where he effected several vital changes, notably the emancipation of that office from the veto of the Military Member of the Council of the Viceroy, and where he showed once more, in his dealings with the Sepoys, that obscure yet powerful sympathy with the mysterious intellect of the East. Thence he had been again shifted to Egypt; but the next summons that came to him swallowed up all these things. A short time after war broke out with Germany he was made Minister of War, and held that post until the dark season when he set out on a mission to Russia, which never reached its goal. But when his ship went down he had already done a work and registered a change in England, with some words about which this sketch may well conclude. Journalistic attacks were indeed made upon him, but in writing for a foreign reader I pass them by. In such a place I will not say even of the meanest of Englishmen what they were not ashamed to say of one of the greatest. In his new work he was not only a very great man, but one dealing with very great things; and perhaps his most historic moment was when he broke his customary silence about the deeper emotions of life, and became the mouthpiece of the national horror at the German fashion of fighting, which he declared to have left a stain upon the whole profession of arms. For, by a movement unusually and unconsciously dramatic, he chose that moment to salute across the long stretch of years the comparative chivalry and nobility of his dead enemies of the Soudan, and to announce that in the heart of Europe, in learned academies and ordered government offices, there had appeared a lunacy so cruel and unclean that the maddest dervish dead in the desert had a right to disdain it where he lay.

Kitchener, like other Englishmen of his type, made his name outside England and even outside Europe. But it was in England, and after his return to England, that he did what will perhaps make his name most permanent in history. That return to England was indeed as symbolic as his last and tragic journey to Russia. Both will stand as symbols of the deepest things which are moving
mankind in the Great War. In truth the whole of that great European movement which we call the cause of the Allies is in itself a homeward journey. It is a return to native and historic ideals, after an exile in the howling wilderness of the political pessimism and cynicism of Prussia. After his great adventures in Africa and Asia, the Englishman has re-discovered Europe; and in the very act of discovering Europe, the Englishman has at last discovered England. The revelation of the forces still really to be found in England itself, when all is said that can possibly or plausibly be said against English commercialism and selfishness, was the last work of Lord Kitchener. He was the embodiment of an enormous experience which has passed through Imperialism and reached patriotism. He had been the supreme figure of that strange and sprawling England which lies beyond England; which carries the habits of English clubs and hotels into the solitudes of the Nile or up the passes of the Himalayas, and is infinitely ignorant of things infinitely nearer home. For this type of Englishman Cairo was nearer than Calais. Yet the typical figure which we associated with such places as Cairo was destined before he died to open again the ancient gate of Calais and lead in a new and noble fashion the return of England to Europe. The great change for which his countrymen will probably remember him longest was what we should call in England the revolution of the New Armies.

It is almost impossible to express how great a revolution it was so as to convey its dimensions to the citizens of any other great European country where military service has long been the rule and not the exception, where the people itself is only the army in mufti. In its mere aspect to the eye it was something like an invasion by a strange race. The English professional soldier of our youth had been conspicuous not only by his red coat but by his rarity. When rare things become common they do not become commonplace. The memory of their singularity is still strong enough to give them rather the appearance of a prodigy, as anyone can realise by imagining an army of hunchbacks or a city of one-eyed men. The English soldier had indeed been respected as a patriotic symbol, but rather as a priest or a prince can be a symbol, as being the exception and not the rule. A child was taken to see the soldier outside Buckingham Palace almost as he was taken to see the King driving out of Buckingham Palace. Hence the first effect of the enlargement of the armies was something almost like a fairy-tale—almost as if the streets were crowded with kings, walking about and wearing crowns of gold. This merely optical vision of the revolution was but the first impression of a reality equally vast and new. The first levies which came to be called popularly Kitchener’s Army, because of the energy and inspiration with
which he set himself to their organisation, consisted entirely of volunteers. It was not till long after the whole face of England had been transformed by this mobilisation that the Government resorted to compulsion to bring in a mere margin of men. Save for the personality of Kitchener, the new militarism of England came wholly and freely from the English. While it was as universal as a tax, it was as spontaneous as a riot. But it is obvious that to produce so large and novel an effect out of the mere psychology of a nation, apart from its organisation, was something which required tact as well as decision: and it is this which illustrated a side of the English general’s character without which he may be, and indeed has been, wholly misunderstood.

It is of the nature of national heroes of Kitchener’s type that their admirers are unjust to them. They would have been better appreciated if they had been less praised. When a soldier is turned into an idol there seems an unfortunate tendency to turn him into a wooden idol, like the wooden figure of Hindenburg erected by the ridiculous authorities of Berlin. In a more moderate and metaphorical sense there has been an unfortunate tendency to represent Kitchener as strong by merely representing him as stiff—to suggest that he was made of wood and not of steel. There are two maxims, which have been, I believe, the mottoes of two English families, both of which are boasts but each the contrary of the other. The first runs, “You can break me, but you cannot bend me”; and the second, “You can bend me, but you cannot break me.” With all respect to whoever may have borne it, the first is the boast of the barbarian and therefore of the Prussian; the second is the boast of the Christian and the civilised man—that he is free and flexible, yet always returns to his true position, like a tempered sword. Now too much of the eulogy on a man like Kitchener tended to praise him not as a sword but as a poker. He happened to rise into his first fame at a time when much of the English Press and governing class was still entirely duped by Germany, and to some extent judged everything by a Bismarckian test of blood and iron. It tended to neglect the very real disadvantages, even in practical life, which lie upon the man of blood and iron, as compared with the man of blood and bone. It is one grave disadvantage, for instance, that if a man made of iron were to break his bones, they would not heal. In other words, the Prussian Empire, with all its perfections and efficiencies, has one notable defect—that it is a dead thing. It does not draw its life from any primary human religion or poetry; it does not grow again from within. And being a dead thing, it suffers also from having no nerves to give warning or reaction; it reads no danger signals; it has no premonitions; about its
own spiritual doom its sentinels are deaf and all its spies are blind. On the other hand, the British Empire, with all its blunders and bad anomalies, to which I am the last person to be blind, has one noticeable advantage—that it is a living thing. It is not that it makes no mistakes, but it knows it has made them, as the living hand knows when it has touched hot iron. That is exactly what a hand of iron would not know; and that is exactly the error in the German ideal of a hand of iron. No candid critic of England can read its history fairly and fail to see a certain flexibility and self-modification; illiberal policies followed by liberal ones; men failing in something and succeeding in something else; men sent to do one thing and being wise enough to do another; the human power of the living hand to draw back. As it happens, Kitchener was extraordinarily English in this lively and vital moderation. And it is to be feared that the more German idealisation of him, in the largely unenlightened England before the war, has already done some harm to his reputation, and in missing what was particularly English has missed what was particularly interesting.

Lord Kitchener was personally a somewhat silent man; and his social conventions were those of the ordinary English officer, especially the officer who has lived among Orientals—conventions which in any case tend in the direction of silence. He also really had, and to an extent of which some people complained, a certain English embarrassment about making all his purposes clear, especially before they were clear to himself. He probably liked to think a thing out in his own way and therefore at his own time, which was not always the time at which people thought they had a right to question him. In this way it is true of him, as of such another strong man as the Irish patriot Parnell, that his very simplicity had an effect of secrecy. But it is a complete error about him, as it was a complete error about Parnell, to suppose that he took the Prussian pose of disdaining and disregarding everybody; that he settled everything in solitary egoism; that he was a Superman too self-sufficing to listen to friends and too philosophical to listen to reason. It will be noted that every crisis of his life that is lit up by history contradicts the colours of this picture. He could not only take counsel with his friends, but he was abnormally successful in taking counsel with his foes. It is notable that whenever he came in personal contact with a great captain actually or potentially in arms against him, the result was not a mere collision but a mutual comprehension. He established the friendliest relations with the chivalrous and adventurous Marchand, standing on the deadly debatable land of Fashoda. He established equally friendly relations with the Boer generals, gathered under the dark cloud of national disappointment and
defeat. In all such instances, so far as his individuality could count, it is clear that he acted as a moderate and, in the universal sense, as a liberal. The results and the records of those who met him in such hours are quite sufficient to prove that he did not leave the impression of a Prussian arrogance. If he was silent, his silence must have been more friendly, I had almost said more convivial, than many men’s conversation. But on the larger platform of the European War, this quiet but unique gift of open-mindedness and intellectual hospitality was destined to do two very decisive things, which may profoundly affect history. In the first he dealt with the more democratic and even revolutionary elements in England; and in the second he represents a very real change that has passed over the English traditions about Russia.

Personally, as has already been noted, Lord Kitchener never was and never pretended to be anything more or less than the good military man, and by the time of the Great War he was already an elderly military man. The type has much the same standards and traditions in all European countries; but in England it is, if anything, a little more traditional, for the very reason that the army has been something separate, professional, and relatively small—a sort of club. The military man was all the more military because the nation was not military. Such a man is inevitably conservative in his views, conventional in his manners, and simplifies the problem of patriotism to a single-eyed obedience. When he took over the business of raising the first levies for the present war he was confronted with the problem of the English Trades Unions—the very last problem in the world which one could reasonably expect such a man to understand. And yet he did understand it; he was perhaps the only person in the governing class who did. If it be hard to explain to the richer classes in England, it is almost impossible to explain to any classes in any other country, because the English situation is largely unique. There is the same difficulty as we have already found in describing how vast and even violent a transformation scene the growth of the great army appeared; it has been almost impossible to describe it to the chief conscript countries, which take a great army for granted. The key to the parallel problem of the Trades Unions is simply this—that England is the only European country that is practically industrial and nothing else. Trades Unions can never play such a part in countries where the masses live on the land; such masses always have some status and support—yes, even if they are serfs. The status of the English workman is not in the earth; it is, so to speak, in the air—in a scaffolding of artificial abstractions, a framework of rules and rights, of verbal bargains or paper resolutions. If he loses this, he becomes nothing so human or
homely as a slave. Rather he becomes a wild beast, a sort of wandering vermin with no place in the state at all. It would be necessary to explain this, and a great deal more which cannot possibly be explained here, before we could measure the enormity of the enigma facing the British official who had to propose to the English the practical suspension of the Trades Unions. To this must be added the fact that the Unions, already national institutions, had just lately been in a ferment with new and violent doctrines: Syndicalists had invoked them as the future seats of government; historical speculators had seen in them the return to the great Christian Guilds of the Middle Ages; a more revolutionary Press had appeared to champion them; gigantic strikes had split the country in every direction. Anyone would have said that under these circumstances the very virtues and attainments of Kitchener would at least make it fairly certain that he would quarrel with the Trades Unions. It soon became apparent that the one man who was not going to quarrel with the Trades Unions was Kitchener. Politicians and parliamentary leaders, supposed actually to be elected by the working classes, were regarded, rightly or wrongly, with implacable suspicion. The elderly and old-fashioned Anglo-Egyptian militarist, with his doctrine and discipline of the barrack-room and the drumhead court-martial, was never regarded by the workers with a shade of suspicion. They simply took him at his word, and the leader of the most turbulent Trades Union element paid to him after his death the simplest tribute in the plainest and most popular language —“He was a straight man.” I am so antiquated as to think it a better epitaph than the fashionable phrase about a strong man. Some silent indescribable geniality of fairness in the man once more prevailed against the possibility of passionate misunderstandings, as it had prevailed against the international nervousness of the atmosphere of Fashoda or the tragic border feud of the Boers. I suspect that it lay largely in the fact that this great Englishman was sufficiently English to guess one thing missed by many more sophisticated people—that the English Trades Unions are very English. For good or evil, they are national; they have very little in common with the more international Socialism of the Continent, and nothing whatever in common with the pedantic Socialism of Prussia. Understanding his countrymen by instinct, he did not make a parade of efficiency; for the English dislike the symbols of dictatorship much more than dictatorship. They hate the crown and sceptre of the tyrant much more than his tyranny. They have a national tradition which allows of far too much inequality so long as it is softened with a certain camaraderie, and in which even snobs only remember the coronet of a nobleman on condition that he shall himself
seem to forget it.

The other matter is much more important. Though the reverse of vivacious, Kitchener was very vital; and he had one unique mark of vitality—that he had not stopped growing. “An oak should not be transplanted at sixty,” said the great orator Grattan when he was transferred from the Parliament of Dublin to the Parliament of Westminster. Kitchener was sixty-four when he turned his face westward to the problem of his own country. There clung to him already all the traditional attributes of the oak—its toughness, its angularity, its closeness of grain and ruggedness of outline—when he was uprooted from the Arabian sands and replanted in the remote western island. Yet the oak not only grew green again and put forth new leaves; it was almost as if, as in a legend, it could put forth a new kind of leaves. Kitchener, with all his taciturnity, really began to put forth a new order of ideas. If a change of opinions is unusual in an elderly man, it is almost unknown in an elderly military man. If the hardening of time was felt even by the poetic and emotional Grattan, it would not have been strange if the hardening had been quite hopeless in the rigid and reticent Kitchener. Yet it was not hopeless; and the fact became the spring of much of the national hope. The grizzled martinet from India and Egypt showed a certain power which is in nearly all great men, but of which St. Paul has become the traditional type—the power of being a great convert as well as a great crusader. It is the real power of re-forming an opinion, which is the very opposite of that mere formlessness which we call fickleness. Nor is the comparison to such an example as St. Paul altogether historically disproportionate; for the point upon which this very typical Englishman changed his mind was a point which is now the pivot of the whole future and perhaps of the very existence of Christendom. For many such Englishmen it might almost be called the discovery of Christendom. It can be called with greater precision, and indeed with almost complete precision, the discovery of Russia.

Military bureaucratic systems everywhere have too much tendency to work upon one idea, and there was a time when the military and bureaucratic system of the British in the East worked on the idea of the fear of Russia. It is needless here to explain that sentiment, and useless to explain it away. It was partly a mere tradition from the natural jingoism of the Crimean War; it was partly in itself a tribute to the epic majesty of the Russian march across mysterious Asia to the legendary Chinese Wall. The point here is that it existed; and where there exists such an idea in such military rulers, they very seldom alter their idea. But Kitchener did alter his idea. Not in mere military obedience, but in genuine
human reasonableness, he came late in life to see the Russian as the friend and the Prussian as the enemy. In the inevitable division of British ministerial councils about the distribution of British aid and attention he was the one man who stood most enthusiastically, one might say stubbornly, for the supreme importance of munitioning the magnificent Russian defence. He mystified all the English pessimists, in what seemed to them the blackest hour of pessimism, by announcing that Germany had “shot her bolt”; that she had already lost her chance, not by any of the Allied attacks, but by the stupendous skill and valour of that Russian retreat, which was more triumphant than any attack. It is this discovery that marks an epoch; for that great deliverance was not only the victory of Russia, but very specially the victory of the Russians. Never before was there such a war of men against guns—as awful and inspiring to watch as a war of men against demons. Perhaps the duel of a man with a modern gun is more like that between a man and an enormous dragon; nor is there anything on the weaker side save the ultimate and almost metaphysical truth, that a man can make a gun and a gun cannot make a man. It is the man—the Russian soldier and peasant himself—who has emerged like the hero of an epic, and who is now secure for ever from the sophisticated scandal-mongering and the cultured ignorance of the West.

And it is this that lends an epic and almost primeval symbolism to the tragedy of Kitchener’s end. Somehow the very fact that it was incomplete as an action makes it more complete as an allegory. English in his very limitations, English in his late emancipation from them, he was setting forth on an eastward journey different indeed from the many eastward journeys of his life. There are many such noble tragedies of travel in the records of his country; it was so, silently without a trace, that the track of Franklin faded in the polar snows or the track of Gordon in the desert sands. But this was an adventure new for such adventurous men—the finding not of strange foes but of friends yet stranger. Many men of his blood and type—simple, strenuous, somewhat prosaic—had threaded their way through some dark continent to add some treasure or territory to the English name. He was seeking what for us his countrymen has long been a dark continent—but which contains a much more noble treasure. The glory of a great people, long hidden from the English by accidents and by lies, lay before him at his journey’s end. That journey was never ended. It remains like a mighty bridge, the mightier for being broken, pointing across a chasm, and promising a mightier thoroughfare between the east and west. In that waste of seas beyond the last northern islets where his ship went down one might fancy his spirit
standing, a figure frustrated yet prophetic and pointing to the East, whence are the light of the world and the reunion of Christian men.
INDEX

—POETRY—

THE BALLAD OF THE WHITE HORSE

THE BALLAD OF SAINT BARBARA

THE WILD KNIGHT AND OTHER POEMS

WINE, WATER AND SONG

GREYBEARDS AT PLAY
THE BALLAD OF
THE WHITE HORSE

G. K. CHESTERTON
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**INDEX**

**THE BALLAD OF THE WHITE HORSE**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**PREFATORY NOTE**

**DEDICATION**

**BOOK I**
**THE VISION OF THE KING**

**BOOK II**
**THE GATHERING OF THE CHIEFS**

**BOOK III**
**THE HARP OF ALFRED**

**BOOK IV**
**THE WOMAN IN THE FOREST**

**BOOK V**
**ETHANDUNE: THE FIRST STROKE**

**BOOK VI**
**ETHANDUNE: THE SLAYING OF THE CHIEFS**

**BOOK VIII**
**ETHANDUNE: THE LAST CHARGE**

**BOOK VIII**
**THE SCOURING OF THE HORSE**
PREFATORY NOTE

This ballad needs no historical notes, for the simple reason that it does not profess to be historical. All of it that is not frankly fictitious, as in any prose romance about the past, is meant to emphasize tradition rather than history. King Alfred is not a legend in the sense that King Arthur may be a legend; that is, in the sense that he may possibly be a lie. But King Alfred is a legend in this broader and more human sense, that the legends are the most important things about him.

The cult of Alfred was a popular cult, from the darkness of the ninth century to the deepening twilight of the twentieth. It is wholly as a popular legend that I deal with him here. I write as one ignorant of everything, except that I have found the legend of a King of Wessex still alive in the land. I will give three curt cases of what I mean. A tradition connects the ultimate victory of Alfred with the valley in Berkshire called the Vale of the White Horse. I have seen doubts of the tradition, which may be valid doubts. I do not know when or where the story started; it is enough that it started somewhere and ended with me; for I only seek to write upon a hearsay, as the old balladists did. For the second case, there is a popular tale that Alfred played the harp and sang in the Danish camp; I select it because it is a popular tale, at whatever time it arose. For the third case, there is a popular tale that Alfred came in contact with a woman and cakes; I select it because it is a popular tale, because it is a vulgar one. It has been disputed by grave historians, who were, I think, a little too grave to be good judges of it. The two chief charges against the story are that it was first recorded long after Alfred’s death, and that (as Mr. Oman urges) Alfred never really wandered all alone without any thanes or soldiers. Both these objections might possibly be met. It has taken us nearly as long to learn the whole truth about Byron, and perhaps longer to learn the whole truth about Pepys, than elapsed between Alfred and the first writing of such tales. And as for the other objection, do the historians really think that Alfred after Wilton, or Napoleon after Leipsic, never walked about in a wood by himself for the matter of an hour or two? Ten minutes might be made sufficient for the essence of the story. But I am not concerned to prove the truth of these popular traditions. It is enough for me to maintain two things: that they are popular traditions; and that without these popular traditions we should have bothered about Alfred about as much as we bother about Eadwig.
One other consideration needs a note. Alfred has come down to us in the best way (that is, by national legends) solely for the same reason as Arthur and Roland and the other giants of that darkness, because he fought for the Christian civilization against the heathen nihilism. But since this work was really done by generation after generation, by the Romans before they withdrew, and by the Britons while they remained, I have summarised this first crusade in a triple symbol, and given to a fictitious Roman, Celt, and Saxon, a part in the glory of Ethandune. I fancy that in fact Alfred’s Wessex was of very mixed bloods; but in any case, it is the chief value of legend to mix up the centuries while preserving the sentiment; to see all ages in a sort of splendid foreshortening. That is the use of tradition: it telescopes history.

G.K.C.
DEDICATION

Of great limbs gone to chaos,
A great face turned to night—
Why bend above a shapeless shroud
Seeking in such archaic cloud
Sight of strong lords and light?

Where seven sunken Englands
Lie buried one by one,
Why should one idle spade, I wonder,
Shake up the dust of thanes like thunder
To smoke and choke the sun?
In cloud of clay so cast to heaven
What shape shall man discern?
These lords may light the mystery
Of mastery or victory,
And these ride high in history,
But these shall not return.

Gored on the Norman gonfalon
The Golden Dragon died:
We shall not wake with ballad strings
The good time of the smaller things,
We shall not see the holy kings
Ride down by Severn side.

Stiff, strange, and quaintly coloured
As the broidery of Bayeux
The England of that dawn remains,
And this of Alfred and the Danes
Seems like the tales a whole tribe feigns
Too English to be true.
Of a good king on an island
That ruled once on a time;
And as he walked by an apple tree
There came green devils out of the sea
With sea-plants trailing heavily
And tracks of opal slime.

Yet Alfred is no fairy tale;
His days as our days ran,
He also looked forth for an hour
On peopled plains and skies that lower,
From those few windows in the tower
That is the head of a man.
But who shall look from Alfred’s hood
Or breathe his breath alive?
His century like a small dark cloud Drifts far; it is an eyeless crowd, Where the tortured trumpets scream aloud And the dense arrows drive.

Lady, by one light only
We look from Alfred’s eyes,  
We know he saw athwart the wreck
The sign that hangs about your neck, Where One more than Melchizedek Is dead and never dies.

Therefore I bring these rhymes to you Who brought the cross to me,  
Since on you flaming without flaw I saw the sign that Guthrum saw When he let break his ships of awe, And laid peace on the sea.

Do you remember when we went Under a dragon moon,  
And ‘mid volcanic tints of night  
Walked where they fought the unknown fight And saw black trees on the battle-height, Black thorn on Ethandune? And I thought, “I will go with you, As man with God has gone,  
And wander with a wandering star, The wandering heart of things that are, The fiery cross of love and war That like yourself, goes on.”

O go you onward; where you are  
Shall honour and laughter be,  
Past purpled forest and pearled foam, God’s winged pavilion free to roam, Your face, that is a wandering home, A flying home for me.

Ride through the silent earthquake lands, Wide as a waste is wide, Across these days like deserts, when Pride and a little scratching pen Have dried and split the hearts of men, Heart of the heroes, ride.

Up through an empty house of stars, Being what heart you are,  
Up the inhuman steeps of space  
As on a staircase go in grace,

Carrying the firelight on your face Beyond the loneliest star. Take these; in memory of the hour We strayed a space from home And saw the smoke-hued hamlets, quaint With Westland king and Westland saint, And watched the western glory faint Along the road to Frome.
BOOK I

THE VISION OF THE KING

Before the gods that made the gods Had seen their sunrise pass,
The White Horse of the White Horse Vale Was cut out of the grass.
Before the gods that made the gods Had drunk at dawn their fill,
The White Horse of the White Horse Vale Was hoary on the hill.
Age beyond age on British land,
Aeons on aeons gone,
Was peace and war in western hills, And the White Horse looked on.
For the White Horse knew England
When there was none to know;
He saw the first oar break or bend, He saw heaven fall and the world end, O
God, how long ago.
For the end of the world was long ago, And all we dwell to-day
As children of some second birth,
Like a strange people left on earth After a judgment day.
For the end of the world was long ago, When the ends of the world waxed free,
When Rome was sunk in a waste of slaves, And the sun drowned in the sea.
When Caesar’s sun fell out of the sky And whoso hearkened right
Could only hear the plunging
Of the nations in the night.

When the ends of the earth came marching in To torch and cresset gleam.
And the roads of the world that lead to Rome Were filled with faces that moved
like foam, Like faces in a dream.
And men rode out of the eastern lands, Broad river and burning plain;
Trees that are Titan flowers to see, And tiger skies, striped horribly, With tints of
tropic rain.
Where Ind’s enamelled peaks arise
Around that inmost one,
Where ancient eagles on its brink, Vast as archangels, gather and drink The
sacrament of the sun.
And men brake out of the northern lands, Enormous lands alone,
Where a spell is laid upon life and lust And the rain is changed to a silver dust
And the sea to a great green stone.
And a Shape that moveth murkily
In mirrors of ice and night,
Hath blanched with fear all beasts and birds, As death and a shock of evil words
Blast a man’s hair with white.
And the cry of the palms and the purple moons, Or the cry of the frost and foam,
Swept ever around an inmost place, And the din of distant race on race Cried and
replied round Rome.
And there was death on the Emperor
And night upon the Pope:
And Alfred, hiding in deep grass,
Hardened his heart with hope.

A sea-folk blinder than the sea
Broke all about his land,
But Alfred up against them bare
And gripped the ground and grasped the air, Staggered, and strove to stand.
He bent them back with spear and spade, With desperate dyke and wall,
With foemen leaning on his shield
And roaring on him when he reeled; And no help came at all.
He broke them with a broken sword
A little towards the sea,
And for one hour of panting peace, Ringed with a roar that would not cease,
With golden crown and girded fleece Made laws under a tree.
The Northmen came about our land
A Christless chivalry:
Who knew not of the arch or pen,
Great, beautiful half-witted men
From the sunrise and the sea.

Misshapen ships stood on the deep
Full of strange gold and fire,
And hairy men, as huge as sin
With horned heads, came wading in
Through the long, low sea-mire.

Our towns were shaken of tall kings With scarlet beards like blood:
The world turned empty where they trod, They took the kindly cross of God
And cut it up for wood.
Their souls were drifting as the sea, And all good towns and lands
They only saw with heavy eyes,
And broke with heavy hands,

Their gods were sadder than the sea, Gods of a wandering will,
Who cried for blood like beasts at night, Sadly, from hill to hill.
They seemed as trees walking the earth, As witless and as tall,
Yet they took hold upon the heavens And no help came at all.
They bred like birds in English woods, They rooted like the rose,
When Alfred came to Athelney
To hide him from their bows

There was not English armour left, Nor any English thing,
When Alfred came to Athelney
To be an English king.

For earthquake swallowing earthquake Uprent the Wessex tree;
The whirlpool of the pagan sway
Had swirled his sires as sticks away When a flood smites the sea.
And the great kings of Wessex
Wearied and sank in gore,
And even their ghosts in that great stress Grew greyer and greyer, less and less,
With the lords that died in Lyonesse And the king that comes no more.
And the God of the Golden Dragon
Was dumb upon his throne,
And the lord of the Golden Dragon
Ran in the woods alone.

And if ever he climbed the crest of luck And set the flag before,
Returning as a wheel returns,
Came ruin and the rain that burns, And all began once more.
And naught was left King Alfred
But shameful tears of rage,
In the island in the river
In the end of all his age.

In the island in the river
He was broken to his knee:
And he read, writ with an iron pen, That God had wearied of Wessex men And given their country, field and fen, To the devils of the sea.
And he saw in a little picture,
Tiny and far away,
His mother sitting in Egbert’s hall, And a book she showed him, very small, Where a sapphire Mary sat in stall With a golden Christ at play.
It was wrought in the monk’s slow manner, From silver and sanguine shell, Where the scenes are little and terrible, Keyholes of heaven and hell.
In the river island of Athelney,
With the river running past,
In colours of such simple creed
All things sprang at him, sun and weed, Till the grass grew to be grass indeed And the tree was a tree at last.
Fearfully plain the flowers grew,
Like the child’s book to read,
Or like a friend’s face seen in a glass; He looked; and there Our Lady was, She stood and stroked the tall live grass As a man strokes his steed.
Her face was like an open word
When brave men speak and choose,
The very colours of her coat
Were better than good news.

She spoke not, nor turned not,
Nor any sign she cast,
Only she stood up straight and free, Between the flowers in Athelney,
And the river running past.

One dim ancestral jewel hung
On his ruined armour grey,
He rent and cast it at her feet:
Where, after centuries, with slow feet, Men came from hall and school and street And found it where it lay.
“Mother of God,” the wanderer said, “I am but a common king,
Nor will I ask what saints may ask, To see a secret thing.
“The gates of heaven are fearful gates Worse than the gates of hell;
Not I would break the splendours barred Or seek to know the thing they guard,
Which is too good to tell.
“But for this earth most pitiful,
This little land I know,
If that which is for ever is,
Or if our hearts shall break with bliss, Seeing the stranger go?
“When our last bow is broken, Queen, And our last javelin cast,
Under some sad, green evening sky, Holding a ruined cross on high,
Under warm westland grass to lie,
Shall we come home at last?”

And a voice came human but high up, Like a cottage climbed among
The clouds; or a serf of hut and croft That sits by his hovel fire as oft, But hears
on his old bare roof aloft A belfry burst in song.
“The gates of heaven are lightly locked, We do not guard our gain,
The heaviest hind may easily
Come silently and suddenly
Upon me in a lane.

“And any little maid that walks
In good thoughts apart,
May break the guard of the Three Kings And see the dear and dreadful things I
hid within my heart.
“The meanest man in grey fields gone Behind the set of sun,
Heareth between star and other star, Through the door of the darkness fallen ajar,
The council, eldest of things that are, The talk of the Three in One.
“The gates of heaven are lightly locked, We do not guard our gold,
Men may uproot where worlds begin, Or read the name of the nameless sin; But
if he fail or if he win
To no good man is told.

“The men of the East may spell the stars, And times and triumphs mark,
But the men signed of the cross of Christ Go gaily in the dark.
“The men of the East may search the scrolls For sure fates and fame,
But the men that drink the blood of God Go singing to their shame.
“The wise men know what wicked things Are written on the sky,
They trim sad lamps, they touch sad strings, Hearing the heavy purple wings,
Where the forgotten seraph kings
Still plot how God shall die.
“The wise men know all evil things Under the twisted trees,
Where the perverse in pleasure pine And men are weary of green wine
And sick of crimson seas.

“But you and all the kind of Christ Are ignorant and brave,
And you have wars you hardly win
And souls you hardly save.

“I tell you naught for your comfort, Yea, naught for your desire,
Save that the sky grows darker yet And the sea rises higher.
“Night shall be thrice night over you, And heaven an iron cope.
Do you have joy without a cause,
Yea, faith without a hope?”

Even as she spoke she was not,
Nor any word said he,
He only heard, still as he stood
Under the old night’s nodding hood, The sea-folk breaking down the wood Like a high tide from sea.
He only heard the heathen men,
Whose eyes are blue and bleak,
Singing about some cruel thing
Done by a great and smiling king
In daylight on a deck.

He only heard the heathen men,
Whose eyes are blue and blind,
Singing what shameful things are done Between the sunlit sea and the sun When the land is left behind.
BOOK II

THE GATHERING OF THE CHIEFS

Up across windy wastes and up
Went Alfred over the shaws,
Shaken of the joy of giants,
The joy without a cause.

In the slopes away to the western bays, Where blows not ever a tree,
He washed his soul in the west wind And his body in the sea.
And he set to rhyme his ale-measures, And he sang aloud his laws,
Because of the joy of the giants,
The joy without a cause.

The King went gathering Wessex men, As grain out of the chaff
The few that were alive to die,
Laughing, as littered skulls that lie After lost battles turn to the sky
An everlasting laugh.

The King went gathering Christian men, As wheat out of the husk;
Eldred, the Franklin by the sea,
And Mark, the man from Italy,
And Colan of the Sacred Tree,
From the old tribe on Usk.

The rook croaked homeward heavily,
The west was clear and warm,
The smoke of evening food and ease
Rose like a blue tree in the trees
When he came to Eldred’s farm.

But Eldred’s farm was fallen awry,
Like an old cripple’s bones,
And Eldred’s tools were red with rust, And on his well was a green crust,
And purple thistles upward thrust,
Between the kitchen stones.
But smoke of some good feasting
Went upwards evermore,
And Eldred’s doors stood wide apart For loitering foot or labouring cart, And
Eldred’s great and foolish heart Stood open like his door.
A mighty man was Eldred,
A bulk for casks to fill,
His face a dreaming furnace,
His body a walking hill.

In the old wars of Wessex
His sword had sunken deep,
But all his friends, he signed and said, Were broken about Ethelred;
And between the deep drink and the dead He had fallen upon sleep.
“Come not to me, King Alfred, Save always for the ale: Why should my harmless hinds be slain Because the chiefs cry once again,
As in all fights, that we shall gain, And in all fights we fail?
“Your scalds still thunder and prophesy That crown that never comes;
Friend, I will watch the certain things, Swine, and slow moons like silver rings, And the ripening of the plums.”
And Alfred answered, drinking,
And gravely, without blame,
“Nor bear I boast of scald or king, The thing I bear is a lesser thing, But comes in a better name.
“Out of the mouth of the Mother of God, More than the doors of doom,
I call the muster of Wessex men
From grassy hamlet or ditch or den, To break and be broken, God knows when, But I have seen for whom.
“Out of the mouth of the Mother of God Like a little word come I;
For I go gathering Christian men
From sunken paving and ford and fen, To die in a battle, God knows when, By God, but I know why.
“And this is the word of Mary,
The word of the world’s desire
‘No more of comfort shall ye get,
Save that the sky grows darker yet
And the sea rises higher.’ “
Then silence sank. And slowly
Arose the sea-land lord,
Like some vast beast for mystery,
He filled the room and porch and sky, And from a cobwebbed nail on high
Unhooked his heavy sword.

Up on the shrill sea-downs and up
Went Alfred all alone,
Turning but once e’er the door was shut, Shouting to Eldred over his butt,
That he bring all spears to the woodman’s hut Hewn under Egbert’s Stone.
And he turned his back and broke the fern, And fought the moths of dusk,
And went on his way for other friends Friends fallen of all the wide world’s ends, From Rome that wrath and pardon sends And the grey tribes on Usk.
He saw gigantic tracks of death
And many a shape of doom,
Good steadings to grey ashes gone
And a monk’s house white like a skeleton In the green crypt of the combe.
And in many a Roman villa
Earth and her ivies eat,
Saw coloured pavements sink and fade In flowers, and the windy colonnade
Like the spectre of a street.
But the cold stars clustered
Among the cold pines
Ere he was half on his pilgrimage
Over the western lines.

And the white dawn widened
Ere he came to the last pine,
Where Mark, the man from Italy,
Still made the Christian sign.

The long farm lay on the large hill-side, Flat like a painted plan,
And by the side the low white house, Where dwelt the southland man.
A bronzed man, with a bird’s bright eye, And a strong bird’s beak and brow,
His skin was brown like buried gold, And of certain of his sires was told That they came in the shining ship of old, With Caesar in the prow.
His fruit trees stood like soldiers Drilled in a straight line,
His strange, stiff olives did not fail, And all the kings of the earth drank ale, But
he drank wine.
Wide over wasted British plains
Stood never an arch or dome,
Only the trees to toss and reel,
The tribes to bicker, the beasts to squeal; But the eyes in his head were strong like steel, And his soul remembered Rome.
Then Alfred of the lonely spear
Lifted his lion head;
And fronted with the Italian’s eye, Asking him of his whence and why,
King Alfred stood and said:

“I am that oft-defeated King
Whose failure fills the land,
Who fled before the Danes of old,
Who chaffered with the Danes with gold, Who now upon the Wessex wold
Hardly has feet to stand.

“But out of the mouth of the Mother of God I have seen the truth like fire,
This—that the sky grows darker yet
And the sea rises higher.”

Long looked the Roman on the land;
The trees as golden crowns
Blazed, drenched with dawn and dew-empearled While faintlier coloured, freshlier curled, The clouds from underneath the world Stood up over the downs.
“These vines be ropes that drag me hard,”
He said. “I go not far;
Where would you meet? For you must hold Half Wiltshire and the White Horse wold, And the Thames bank to Owsenfold,
If Wessex goes to war.

“Guthrum sits strong on either bank And you must press his lines
Inwards, and eastward drive him down; I doubt if you shall take the crown Till you have taken London town.
For me, I have the vines.”

“If each man on the Judgment Day
Meet God on a plain alone,”
Said Alfred, “I will speak for you
As for myself, and call it true
That you brought all fighting folk you knew Lined under Egbert’s Stone.
“Though I be in the dust ere then,
I know where you will be.”
And shouldering suddenly his spear
He faded like some elfin fear,
Where the tall pines ran up, tier on tier Tree overtoppling tree.
He shouldered his spear at morning
And laughed to lay it on,
But he leaned on his spear as on a staff, With might and little mood to laugh, Or ever he sighted chick or calf
Of Colan of Caerleon.

For the man dwelt in a lost land
Of boulders and broken men,
In a great grey cave far off to the south Where a thick green forest stopped the mouth, Giving darkness in his den.
And the man was come like a shadow, From the shadow of Druid trees,
Where Usk, with mighty murmurings,
Past Caerleon of the fallen kings,
Goes out to ghostly seas.

Last of a race in ruin—
He spoke the speech of the Gaels;
His kin were in holy Ireland,
Or up in the crags of Wales.

But his soul stood with his mother’s folk, That were of the rain-wrapped isle,
Where Patrick and Brandan westerly
Looked out at last on a landless sea And the sun’s last smile.
His harp was carved and cunning,
As the Celtic craftsman makes,
Graven all over with twisting shapes Like many headless snakes.
His harp was carved and cunning,
His sword prompt and sharp,
And he was gay when he held the sword, Sad when he held the harp.
For the great Gaels of Ireland
Are the men that God made mad,
For all their wars are merry,
And all their songs are sad.

He kept the Roman order,
He made the Christian sign;
But his eyes grew often blind and bright, And the sea that rose in the rocks at night Rose to his head like wine.
He made the sign of the cross of God, He knew the Roman prayer,
But he had unreason in his heart
Because of the gods that were.

Even they that walked on the high cliffs, High as the clouds were then,
Gods of unbearable beauty,
That broke the hearts of men.

And whether in seat or saddle,
Whether with frown or smile,
Whether at feast or fight was he,
He heard the noise of a nameless sea On an undiscovered isle.
Lifting the great green ivy
And the great spear lowering,
One said, “I am Alfred of Wessex,
And I am a conquered king.”

And the man of the cave made answer, And his eyes were stars of scorn,
“And better kings were conquered
Or ever your sires were born.

“What goddess was your mother,
What fay your breed begot,
That you should not die with Uther
And Arthur and Lancelot?

“But when you win you brag and blow, And when you lose you rail,
Army of eastland yokels
Not strong enough to fail.”
“I bring not boast or railing,”
Spake Alfred not in ire,
“I bring of Our Lady a lesson set,
This—that the sky grows darker yet
And the sea rises higher.”

Then Colan of the Sacred Tree
Tossed his black mane on high,
And cried, as rigidly he rose,
“And if the sea and sky be foes,
We will tame the sea and sky.”

Smiled Alfred, “Seek ye a fable
More dizzy and more dread
Than all your mad barbarian tales
Where the sky stands on its head?

“A tale where a man looks down on the sky That has long looked down on him;
A tale where a man can swallow a sea That might swallow the seraphim.
“Bring to the hut by Egbert’s Stone All bills and bows ye have.”
And Alfred strode off rapidly,
And Colan of the Sacred Tree
Went slowly to his cave.
BOOK III

THE HARP OF ALFRED

In a tree that yawned and twisted
The King’s few goods were flung,
A mass-book mildewed, line by line, And weapons and a skin of wine,
And an old harp unstrung.

By the yawning tree in the twilight The King unbound his sword,
Severed the harp of all his goods, And there in the cool and soundless woods
Sounded a single chord.
Then laughed; and watched the finches flash, The sullen flies in swarm,
And went unarmed over the hills,
With the harp upon his arm,

Until he came to the White Horse Vale And saw across the plains,
In the twilight high and far and fell, Like the fiery terraces of hell,
The camp fires of the Danes—

The fires of the Great Army
That was made of iron men,
Whose lights of sacrilege and scorn Ran around England red as morn,
Fires over Glastonbury Thorn—
Fires out on Ely Fen.

And as he went by White Horse Vale He saw lie wan and wide
The old horse graven, God knows when, By gods or beasts or what things then
Walked a new world instead of men
And scrawled on the hill-side.

And when he came to White Horse Down The great White Horse was grey,
For it was ill scoured of the weed, And lichen and thorn could crawl and feed,
Since the foes of settled house and creed Had swept old works away.
King Alfred gazed all sorrowful
At thistle and mosses grey,
Then laughed; and watched the finches flash, Till a rally of Danes with shield
and bill Rolled drunk over the dome of the hill, And, hearing of his harp and skill, They dragged him to their play.
And as they went through the high green grass They roared like the great green sea; But when they came to the red camp fire They were silent suddenly.
And as they went up the wastes away They went reeling to and fro; But when they came to the red camp fire They stood all in a row.
For golden in the firelight,
With a smile carved on his lips,
And a beard curled right cunningly, Was Guthrum of the Northern Sea,
The emperor of the ships—

With three great earls King Guthrum Went the rounds from fire to fire, With Harold, nephew of the King,
And Ogier of the Stone and Sling,
And Elf, whose gold lute had a string That sighed like all desire.
The Earls of the Great Army
That no men born could tire,
Whose flames anear him or aloof
Took hold of towers or walls of proof, Fire over Glastonbury roof
And out on Ely, fire.

And Guthrum heard the soldiers’ tale And bade the stranger play;
Not harshly, but as one on high,
On a marble pillar in the sky,
Who sees all folk that live and die— Pigmy and far away.
And Alfred, King of Wessex,
Looked on his conqueror—
And his hands hardened; but he played, And leaving all later hates unsaid, He sang of some old British raid
On the wild west march of yore.

He sang of war in the warm wet shires, Where rain nor fruitage fails, Where England of the motley states Deepens like a garden to the gates In the purple walls of Wales.
He sang of the seas of savage heads And the seas and seas of spears, Boiling all over Offa’s Dyke,
What time a Wessex club could strike The kings of the mountaineers.
Till Harold laughed and snatched the harp, The kinsman of the King,
A big youth, beardless like a child, Whom the new wine of war sent wild, Smote, and began to sing— And he cried of the ships as eagles That circle fiercely and fly, And sweep the seas and strike the towns From Cyprus round to Skye.
How swiftly and with peril They gather all good things, The high horns of the forest beasts, Or the secret stones of kings. “For Rome was given to rule the world, And gat of it little joy— But we, but we shall enjoy the world, The whole huge world a toy. “Great wine like blood from Burgundy, Cloaks like the clouds from Tyre, And marble like solid moonlight, And gold like frozen fire. “Smells that a man might swill in a cup, Stones that a man might eat, And the great smooth women like ivory That the Turks sell in the street.” He sang the song of the thief of the world, And the gods that love the thief; And he yelled aloud at the cloister-yards, Where men go gathering grief. “Well have you sung, O stranger, Of death on the dyke in Wales, Your chief was a bracelet-giver; But the red unbroken river Of a race runs not for ever, But suddenly it fails.
“Doubtless your sires were sword-swingers When they waded fresh from foam, Before they were turned to women By the god of the nails from Rome;
“But since you bent to the shaven men, Who neither lust nor smite, Thunder of Thor, we hunt you A hare on the mountain height.”
King Guthrum smiled a little, And said, “It is enough, Nephew, let Elf retune the string; A boy must needs like bellowing, But the old ears of a careful king Are glad of songs less rough.” Blue-eyed was Elf the minstrel, With womanish hair and ring,
Yet heavy was his hand on sword,
Though light upon the string.
And as he stirred the strings of the harp To notes but four or five,
The heart of each man moved in him Like a babe buried alive.
And they felt the land of the folk-songs Spread southward of the Dane,
And they heard the good Rhine flowing In the heart of all Allemagne.
They felt the land of the folk-songs, Where the gifts hang on the tree,
Where the girls give ale at morning And the tears come easily.
The mighty people, womanlike,
That have pleasure in their pain
As he sang of Balder beautiful,
Whom the heavens loved in vain.

As he sang of Balder beautiful,
Whom the heavens could not save,
Till the world was like a sea of tears And every soul a wave.
“There is always a thing forgotten When all the world goes well;
A thing forgotten, as long ago,
When the gods forgot the mistletoe, And soundless as an arrow of snow
The arrow of anguish fell.

“The thing on the blind side of the heart, On the wrong side of the door,
The green plant groweth, menacing
Almighty lovers in the spring;
There is always a forgotten thing, And love is not secure.”
And all that sat by the fire were sad, Save Ogier, who was stern,
And his eyes hardened, even to stones, As he took the harp in turn;
Earl Ogier of the Stone and Sling
Was odd to ear and sight,
Old he was, but his locks were red, And jests were all the words he said Yet he was sad at board and bed
And savage in the fight.

“You sing of the young gods easily In the days when you are young;
But I go smelling yew and sods,
And I know there are gods behind the gods, Gods that are best unsung.
“And a man grows ugly for women,
And a man grows dull with ale,
Well if he find in his soul at last Fury, that does not fail.
“The wrath of the gods behind the gods Who would rend all gods and men,
Well if the old man’s heart hath still Wheels sped of rage and roaring will, Like cataracts to break down and kill, Well for the old man then— “While there is one tall shrine to shake, Or one live man to rend;
For the wrath of the gods behind the gods Who are weary to make an end.
“There lives one moment for a man
When the door at his shoulder shakes, When the taut rope parts under the pull, And the barest branch is beautiful One moment, while it breaks.
“So rides my soul upon the sea
That drinks the howling ships,
Though in black jest it bows and nods Under the moons with silver rods,
I know it is roaring at the gods,
Waiting the last eclipse.

“And in the last eclipse the sea
Shall stand up like a tower,
Above all moons made dark and riven, Hold up its foaming head in heaven, And laugh, knowing its hour.
“And the high ones in the happy town Propped of the planets seven,
Shall know a new light in the mind, A noise about them and behind, Shall hear an awful voice, and find Foam in the courts of heaven.
“And you that sit by the fire are you young, And true love waits for you;
But the king and I grow old, grow old, And hate alone is true.”
And Guthrum shook his head but smiled, For he was a mighty clerk, And had read lines in the Latin books When all the north was dark.
He said, “I am older than you, Ogier; Not all things would I rend, For whether life be bad or good
It is best to abide the end.”

He took the great harp wearily,
Even Guthrum of the Danes,
With wide eyes bright as the one long day On the long polar plains.
For he sang of a wheel returning,
And the mire trod back to mire,
And how red hells and golden heavens Are castles in the fire.
“It is good to sit where the good tales go, To sit as our fathers sat;
But the hour shall come after his youth, When a man shall know not tales but
truth, And his heart fail thereat.
“When he shall read what is written So plain in clouds and clods,
When he shall hunger without hope
Even for evil gods.

“For this is a heavy matter,
And the truth is cold to tell;
Do we not know, have we not heard, The soul is like a lost bird,
The body a broken shell.

“And a man hopes, being ignorant,
Till in white woods apart
He finds at last the lost bird dead: And a man may still lift up his head But never
more his heart.
“There comes no noise but weeping
Out of the ancient sky,
And a tear is in the tiniest flower Because the gods must die.
“The little brooks are very sweet, Like a girl’s ribbons curled,
But the great sea is bitter
That washes all the world.

“Strong are the Roman roses,
Or the free flowers of the heath,
But every flower, like a flower of the sea, Smelleth with the salt of death.
“And the heart of the locked battle Is the happiest place for men;
When shrieking souls as shafts go by And many have died and all may die;
Though this word be a mystery,
Death is most distant then.

“Death blazes bright above the cup, And clear above the crown;
But in that dream of battle
We seem to tread it down.

“Wherefore I am a great king,
And waste the world in vain,
Because man hath not other power,
Save that in dealing death for dower, He may forget it for an hour
To remember it again.”

And slowly his hands and thoughtfully Fell from the lifted lyre,
And the owls moaned from the mighty trees Till Alfred caught it to his knees
And smote it as in ire.
He heaved the head of the harp on high And swept the framework barred,
And his stroke had all the rattle and spark Of horses flying hard.
“When God put man in a garden
He girt him with a sword,
And sent him forth a free knight
That might betray his lord;

“He brake Him and betrayed Him,
And fast and far he fell,
Till you and I may stretch our necks And burn our beards in hell.
“But though I lie on the floor of the world, With the seven sins for rods,
I would rather fall with Adam
Than rise with all your gods.

“What have the strong gods given?
Where have the glad gods led?
When Guthrum sits on a hero’s throne And asks if he is dead?
“Sirs, I am but a nameless man,
A rhymester without home,
Yet since I come of the Wessex clay And carry the cross of Rome,
“I will even answer the mighty earl That asked of Wessex men
Why they be meek and monkish folk, And bow to the White Lord’s broken
yoke; What sign have we save blood and smoke?
Here is my answer then.

“That on you is fallen the shadow, And not upon the Name;
That though we scatter and though we fly, And you hang over us like the sky,
You are more tired of victory,
Than we are tired of shame.

“That though you hunt the Christian man Like a hare on the hill-side,
The hare has still more heart to run Than you have heart to ride.
“That though all lances split on you, All swords be heaved in vain,
We have more lust again to lose
Than you to win again.

“Your lord sits high in the saddle, A broken-hearted king,
But our king Alfred, lost from fame, Fallen among foes or bonds of shame, In I
know not what mean trade or name, Has still some song to sing;
“Our monks go robed in rain and snow, But the heart of flame therein,
But you go clothed in feasts and flames, When all is ice within;
“Nor shall all iron dooms make dumb Men wondering ceaselessly,
If it be not better to fast for joy Than feast for misery.
“Nor monkish order only
Slides down, as field to fen,
All things achieved and chosen pass, As the White Horse fades in the grass, No
work of Christian men.
“Ere the sad gods that made your gods Saw their sad sunrise pass,
The White Horse of the White Horse Vale, That you have left to darken and fail,
Was cut out of the grass.
“Therefore your end is on you,
Is on you and your kings,
Not for a fire in Ely fen,
Not that your gods are nine or ten, But because it is only Christian men Guard
even heathen things.
“For our God hath blessed creation, Calling it good. I know
What spirit with whom you blindly band Hath blessed destruction with his hand;
Yet by God’s death the stars shall stand And the small apples grow.”
And the King, with harp on shoulder, Stood up and ceased his song;
And the owls moaned from the mighty trees, And the Danes laughed loud and long.
BOOK IV

THE WOMAN IN THE FOREST

Thick thunder of the snorting swine, Enormous in the gloam,
Rending among all roots that cling, And the wild horses whinnying,
Were the night’s noises when the King Shouldering his harp, went home.
With eyes of owl and feet of fox,
Full of all thoughts he went;
He marked the tilt of the pagan camp, The paling of pine, the sentries’ tramp,
And the one great stolen altar-lamp Over Guthrum in his tent.
By scrub and thorn in Ethandune
That night the foe had lain;
Whence ran across the heather grey The old stones of a Roman way;
And in a wood not far away
The pale road split in twain.

He marked the wood and the cloven ways With an old captain’s eyes,
And he thought how many a time had he Sought to see Doom he could not see;
How ruin had come and victory,
And both were a surprise.

Even so he had watched and wondered Under Ashdown from the plains;
With Ethelred praying in his tent, Till the white hawthorn swung and bent, As
Alfred rushed his spears and rent The shield-wall of the Danes.
Even so he had watched and wondered, Knowing neither less nor more,
Till all his lords lay dying,
And axes on axes plying,
Flung him, and drove him flying
Like a pirate to the shore.

Wise he had been before defeat,
And wise before success;
Wise in both hours and ignorant,
Knowing neither more nor less.
As he went down to the river-hut
He knew a night-shade scent,
Owls did as evil cherubs rise,
With little wings and lantern eyes, As though he sank through the under-skies;
But down and down he went.
As he went down to the river-hut
He went as one that fell;
Seeing the high forest domes and spars.
Dim green or torn with golden scars, As the proud look up at the evil stars, In the red heavens of hell.
For he must meet by the river-hut
Them he had bidden to arm,
Mark from the towers of Italy,
And Colan of the Sacred Tree,
And Eldred who beside the sea
Held heavily his farm.

The roof leaned gaping to the grass, As a monstrous mushroom lies;
Echoing and empty seemed the place; But opened in a little space
A great grey woman with scarred face And strong and humbled eyes.
King Alfred was but a meagre man,
Bright eyed, but lean and pale:
And swordless, with his harp and rags, He seemed a beggar, such as lags
Looking for crusts and ale.

And the woman, with a woman’s eyes Of pity at once and ire,
Said, when that she had glared a span, “There is a cake for any man
If he will watch the fire.”

And Alfred, bowing heavily,
Sat down the fire to stir,
And even as the woman pitied him
So did he pity her.

Saying, “O great heart in the night, O best cast forth for worst,
Twilight shall melt and morning stir, And no kind thing shall come to her, Till
God shall turn the world over And all the last are first.
“And well may God with the serving-folk Cast in His dreadful lot;
Is not He too a servant,
And is not He forgot?

“For was not God my gardener
And silent like a slave;
That opened oaks on the uplands
Or thicket in graveyard gave?

“And was not God my armourer,
All patient and unpaid,
That sealed my skull as a helmet,
And ribs for hauberk made?

“Did not a great grey servant
Of all my sires and me,
Build this pavilion of the pines,
And herd the fowls and fill the vines, And labour and pass and leave no signs
Save mercy and mystery?
“For God is a great servant,
And rose before the day,
From some primordial slumber torn; But all we living later born
Sleep on, and rise after the morn, And the Lord has gone away.

“On things half sprung from sleeping, All sleepy suns have shone,
They stretch stiff arms, the yawning trees, The beasts blink upon hands and knees, Man is awake and does and sees— But Heaven has done and gone.

“For who shall guess the good riddle Or speak of the Holiest,
Save in faint figures and failing words, Who loves, yet laughs among the swords, Labours, and is at rest?
“But some see God like Guthrum,
Crowned, with a great beard curled, But I see God like a good giant,
That, labouring, lifts the world.

“Wherefore was God in Golgotha,
Slain as a serf is slain;
And hate He had of prince and peer, And love He had and made good cheer, Of them that, like this woman here, Go powerfully in pain.
“But in this grey morn of man’s life, Cometh sometime to the mind
A little light that leaps and flies, Like a star blown on the wind.
“A star of nowhere, a nameless star, A light that spins and swirls,
And cries that even in hedge and hill, Even on earth, it may go ill
At last with the evil earls.

“A dancing sparkle, a doubtful star, On the waste wind whirled and driven; But
it seems to sing of a wilder worth, A time discrowned of doom and birth, And
the kingdom of the poor on earth Come, as it is in heaven.
“But even though such days endure, How shall it profit her?
Who shall go groaning to the grave, With many a meek and mighty slave, Field-
breaker and fisher on the wave, And woodman and waggoner.
“Bake ye the big world all again
A cake with kinder leaven;
Yet these are sorry evermore—
Unless there be a little door,
A little door in heaven.”

And as he wept for the woman
He let her business be,
And like his royal oath and rash
The good food fell upon the ash
And blackened instantly.

Screaming, the woman caught a cake Yet burning from the bar,
And struck him suddenly on the face, Leaving a scarlet scar.
King Alfred stood up wordless,
A man dead with surprise,
And torture stood and the evil things That are in the childish hearts of kings An
instant in his eyes.
And even as he stood and stared
Drew round him in the dusk
Those friends creeping from far-off farms, Marcus with all his slaves in arms,
And the strange spears hung with ancient charms Of Colan of the Usk.
With one whole farm marching afoot The trampled road resounds,
Farm-hands and farm-beasts blundering by And jars of mead and stores of rye,
Where Eldred strode above his high And thunder-throated hounds.
And grey cattle and silver lowed
Against the unlifted morn,
And straw clung to the spear-shafts tall.
And a boy went before them all
Blowing a ram’s horn.

As mocking such rude revelry,
The dim clan of the Gael
Came like a bad king’s burial-end, With dismal robes that drop and rend And demon pipes that wail— In long, outlandish garments,
Torn, though of antique worth,
With Druid beards and Druid spears, As a resurrected race appears
Out of an elder earth.

And though the King had called them forth And knew them for his own,
So still each eye stood like a gem, So spectral hung each broidered hem, Grey carven men he fancied them,
Hewn in an age of stone.

And the two wild peoples of the north Stood fronting in the gloam,
And heard and knew each in its mind The third great thunder on the wind, The living walls that hedge mankind, The walking walls of Rome.
Mark’s were the mixed tribes of the west, Of many a hue and strain,
Gurth, with rank hair like yellow grass, And the Cornish fisher, Gorlias,
And Halmer, come from his first mass, Lately baptized, a Dane.
But like one man in armour
Those hundreds trod the field,
From red Arabia to the Tyne
The earth had heard that marching-line, Since the cry on the hill Capitoline, And the fall of the golden shield.
And the earth shook and the King stood still Under the greenwood bough,
And the smoking cake lay at his feet And the blow was on his brow.
Then Alfred laughed out suddenly,
Like thunder in the spring,
Till shook aloud the lintel-beams, And the squirrels stirred in dusty dreams, And the startled birds went up in streams, For the laughter of the King.
And the beasts of the earth and the birds looked down, In a wild solemnity,
On a stranger sight than a sylph or elf, On one man laughing at himself
Under the greenwood tree—

The giant laughter of Christian men That roars through a thousand tales, Where
greed is an ape and pride is an ass, And Jack’s away with his master’s lass, And the miser is banged with all his brass, The farmer with all his flails; Tales that tumble and tales that trick, Yet end not all in scorning— Of kings and clowns in a merry plight, And the clock gone wrong and the world gone right, That the mummers sing upon Christmas night And Christmas Day in the morning.

“Now here is a good warrant,”
Cried Alfred, “by my sword;
For he that is struck for an ill servant Should be a kind lord.

“He that has been a servant
Knows more than priests and kings, But he that has been an ill servant, He knows all earthly things.

“Pride flings frail palaces at the sky, As a man flings up sand,
But the firm feet of humility
Take hold of heavy land.

“Pride juggles with her toppling towers, They strike the sun and cease,
But the firm feet of humility
They grip the ground like trees.

“He that hath failed in a little thing Hath a sign upon the brow;
And the Earls of the Great Army
Have no such seal to show.

“The red print on my forehead,
Small flame for a red star,
In the van of the violent marching, then When the sky is torn of the trumpets ten,
And the hands of the happy howling men Fling wide the gates of war.

“This blow that I return not
Ten times will I return
On kings and earls of all degree,
And armies wide as empires be
Shall slide like landslips to the sea If the red star burn.

“One man shall drive a hundred,
As the dead kings drave;
Before me rocking hosts be riven,
And battering cohorts backwards driven, For I am the first king known of Heaven That has been struck like a slave.
“Up on the old white road, brothers, Up on the Roman walls!
For this is the night of the drawing of swords, And the tainted tower of the
heathen hordes Leans to our hammers, fires and cords, Leans a little and falls.
“Follow the star that lives and leaps, Follow the sword that sings,
For we go gathering heathen men,
A terrible harvest, ten by ten,
As the wrath of the last red autumn—then When Christ reaps down the kings.
“Follow a light that leaps and spins, Follow the fire unfurled!
For riseth up against realm and rod, A thing forgotten, a thing downtrod, The last
lost giant, even God,
Is risen against the world.”

Roaring they went o’er the Roman wall, And roaring up the lane,
Their torches tossed a ladder of fire, Higher their hymn was heard and higher,
More sweet for hate and for heart’s desire, And up in the northern scrub and
brier, They fell upon the Dane.
BOOK V

ETHANDUNE: THE FIRST STROKE

King Guthrum was a dread king,
Like death out of the north;
Shrines without name or number
He rent and rolled as lumber,
From Chester to the Humber
He drove his foemen forth.

The Roman villas heard him
In the valley of the Thames,
Come over the hills roaring
Above their roofs, and pouring
On spire and stair and flooring
Brimstone and pitch and flames.

Sheer o’er the great chalk uplands And the hill of the Horse went he, Till high on Hampshire beacons
He saw the southern sea.

High on the heights of Wessex
He saw the southern brine,
And turned him to a conquered land, And where the northern thornwoods stand,
And the road parts on either hand, There came to him a sign.
King Guthrum was a war-chief,
A wise man in the field,
And though he prospered well, and knew How Alfred’s folk were sad and few,
Not less with weighty care he drew Long lines for pike and shield.
King Guthrum lay on the upper land, On a single road at gaze,
And his foe must come with lean array, Up the left arm of the cloven way, To the meeting of the ways.
And long ere the noise of armour,
An hour ere the break of light,
The woods awoke with crash and cry, And the birds sprang clamouring harsh
and high, And the rabbits ran like an elves’ army Ere Alfred came in sight.
The live wood came at Guthrum,
On foot and claw and wing,
The nests were noisy overhead,
For Alfred and the star of red,
All life went forth, and the forest fled Before the face of the King.
But halted in the woodways
Christ’s few were grim and grey,
And each with a small, far, bird-like sight Saw the high folly of the fight;
And though strange joys had grown in the night, Despair grew with the day.
And when white dawn crawled through the wood, Like cold foam of a flood,
Then weakened every warrior’s mood, In hope, though not in hardihood;
And each man sorrowed as he stood
In the fashion of his blood.

For the Saxon Franklin sorrowed
For the things that had been fair; For the dear dead woman, crimson-clad, And the great feasts and the friends he had; But the Celtic prince’s soul was sad For the things that never were.
In the eyes Italian all things
But a black laughter died;
And Alfred flung his shield to earth And smote his breast and cried— “I wronged a man to his slaying,
And a woman to her shame,
And once I looked on a sworn maid
That was wed to the Holy Name.

“And once I took my neighbour’s wife, That was bound to an eastland man, In the starkness of my evil youth, Before my griefs began.
“People, if you have any prayers,
Say prayers for me:
And lay me under a Christian stone In that lost land I thought my own, To wait till the holy horn is blown, And all poor men are free.”
Then Eldred of the idle farm
Leaned on his ancient sword,
As fell his heavy words and few;
And his eyes were of such alien blue As gleams where the Northman saileth new
Into an unknown fiord.
“I was a fool and wasted ale—
My slaves found it sweet;
I was a fool and wasted bread,
And the birds had bread to eat.

“The kings go up and the kings go down, And who knows who shall rule;
Next night a king may starve or sleep, But men and birds and beasts shall weep
At the burial of a fool.
“O, drunkards in my cellar,
Boys in my apple tree,
The world grows stern and strange and new, And wise men shall govern you,
And you shall weep for me.

“But yoke me my own oxen,
Down to my own farm;
My own dog will whine for me,
My own friends will bend the knee, And the foes I slew openly
Have never wished me harm.”

And all were moved a little,
But Colan stood apart,
Having first pity, and after
Hearing, like rat in rafter,
That little worm of laughter
That eats the Irish heart.

And his grey-green eyes were cruel, And the smile of his mouth waxed hard,
And he said, “And when did Britain Become your burying-yard?
“Before the Romans lit the land,
When schools and monks were none,
We reared such stones to the sun-god As might put out the sun.
“The tall trees of Britain
We worshipped and were wise,
But you shall raid the whole land through And never a tree shall talk to you,
Though every leaf is a tongue taught true And the forest is full of eyes.
“On one round hill to the seaward
The trees grow tall and grey
And the trees talk together
When all men are away.

“O’er a few round hills forgotten
The trees grow tall in rings,
And the trees talk together
Of many pagan things.

“Yet I could lie and listen
With a cross upon my clay,
And hear unhurt for ever
What the trees of Britain say.”

A proud man was the Roman,
His speech a single one,
But his eyes were like an eagle’s eyes That is staring at the sun.
“Dig for me where I die,” he said, “If first or last I fall— Dead on the fell at the first charge, Or dead by Wantage wall;
“Lift not my head from bloody ground, Bear not my body home,
For all the earth is Roman earth
And I shall die in Rome.”

Then Alfred, King of England,
Bade blow the horns of war,
And fling the Golden Dragon out,
With crackle and acclaim and shout, Scrolled and aflame and far.
And under the Golden Dragon
Went Wessex all along,
Past the sharp point of the cloven ways, Out from the black wood into the blaze Of sun and steel and song.
And when they came to the open land They wheeled, deployed and stood;
Midmost were Marcus and the King,
And Eldred on the right-hand wing, And leftwards Colan darkling,
In the last shade of the wood.

But the Earls of the Great Army
Lay like a long half moon,
Ten poles before their palisades,
With wide-winged helms and runic blades Red giants of an age of raids,
In the thornland of Ethandune.

Midmost the saddles rose and swayed, And a stir of horses’ manes,
Where Guthrum and a few rode high
On horses seized in victory;
But Ogier went on foot to die,
In the old way of the Danes.

Far to the King’s left Elf the bard
Led on the eastern wing
With songs and spells that change the blood; And on the King’s right Harold stood, The kinsman of the King.
Young Harold, coarse, with colours gay, Smoking with oil and musk,
And the pleasant violence of the young, Pushed through his people, giving
tongue Foewards, where, grey as cobwebs hung, The banners of the Usk.
But as he came before his line
A little space along,
His beardless face broke into mirth, And he cried: “What broken bits of earth
Are here? For what their clothes are worth I would sell them for a song.”
For Colan was hung with raiment
Tattered like autumn leaves,
And his men were all as thin as saints, And all as poor as thieves.
No bows nor slings nor bolts they bore, But bills and pikes ill-made;
And none but Colan bore a sword,
And rusty was its blade.

And Colan’s eyes with mystery
And iron laughter stirred,
And he spoke aloud, but lightly
Not labouring to be heard.

“Oh, truly we be broken hearts,
For that cause, it is said,
We light our candles to that Lord
That broke Himself for bread.

“But though we hold but bitterly
What land the Saxon leaves,
Though Ireland be but a land of saints, And Wales a land of thieves,
“I say you yet shall weary
Of the working of your word,
That stricken spirits never strike Nor lean hands hold a sword.
“And if ever ye ride in Ireland,
The jest may yet be said,
There is the land of broken hearts, And the land of broken heads.”
Not less barbarian laughter
Choked Harold like a flood,
“And shall I fight with scarecrows That am of Guthrum’s blood?
“Meeting may be of war-men,
Where the best war-man wins;
But all this carrion a man shoots
Before the fight begins.”

And stopping in his onward strides, He snatched a bow in scorn
From some mean slave, and bent it on Colan, whose doom grew dark; and shone
Stars evil over Caerleon,
In the place where he was born.

For Colan had not bow nor sling,
On a lonely sword leaned he,
Like Arthur on Excalibur
In the battle by the sea.

To his great gold ear-ring Harold
Tugged back the feathered tail,
And swift had sprung the arrow,
But swifter sprang the Gael.

Whirling the one sword round his head, A great wheel in the sun,
He sent it splendid through the sky, Flying before the shaft could fly— It smote
Earl Harold over the eye, And blood began to run.
Colan stood bare and weaponless,
Earl Harold, as in pain,
Strove for a smile, put hand to head, Stumbled and suddenly fell dead;
And the small white daisies all waxed red With blood out of his brain.
And all at that marvel of the sword, Cast like a stone to slay,
Cried out. Said Alfred: “Who would see Signs, must give all things. Verily Man shall not taste of victory
Till he throws his sword away.”

Then Alfred, prince of England,
And all the Christian earls,
Unhooked their swords and held them up, Each offered to Colan, like a cup
Of chrysolite and pearls.

And the King said, “Do thou take my sword Who have done this deed of fire,
For this is the manner of Christian men, Whether of steel or priestly pen,
That they cast their hearts out of their ken To get their heart’s desire.
“And whether ye swear a hive of monks, Or one fair wife to friend,
This is the manner of Christian men, That their oath endures the end.
“For love, our Lord, at the end of the world, Sits a red horse like a throne,
With a brazen helm and an iron bow, But one arrow alone.
“Love with the shield of the Broken Heart Ever his bow doth bend,
With a single shaft for a single prize, And the ultimate bolt that parts and flies
Comes with a thunder of split skies, And a sound of souls that rend.
“So shall you earn a king’s sword, Who cast your sword away.”
And the King took, with a random eye, A rude axe from a hind hard by
And turned him to the fray.

For the swords of the Earls of Daneland Flamed round the fallen lord.
The first blood woke the trumpet-tune, As in monk’s rhyme or wizard’s rune,
Beginneth the battle of Ethandune
With the throwing of the sword.
BOOK VI

ETHANDUNE: THE SLAYING OF THE CHIEFS

As the sea flooding the flat sands Flew on the sea-born horde,
The two hosts shocked with dust and din, Left of the Latian paladin,
Clanged all Prince Harold’s howling kin On Colan and the sword.
Crashed in the midst on Marcus,
Ogier with Guthrum by,
And eastward of such central stir, Far to the right and faintlier,
The house of Elf the harp-player,
Struck Eldred’s with a cry.

The centre swat for weariness,
Stemming the screaming horde,
And warily went Colan’s hands
That swung King Alfred’s sword.

But like a cloud of morning
To eastward easily,
Tall Eldred broke the sea of spears As a tall ship breaks the sea.
His face like a sanguine sunset,
His shoulder a Wessex down,
His hand like a windy hammer-stroke; Men could not count the crests he broke,
So fast the crests went down.
As the tall white devil of the Plague Moves out of Asian skies,
With his foot on a waste of cities And his head in a cloud of flies;
Or purple and peacock skies grow dark With a moving locust-tower;
Or tawny sand-winds tall and dry,
Like hell’s red banners beat and fly, When death comes out of Araby,
Was Eldred in his hour.

But while he moved like a massacre He murmured as in sleep,
And his words were all of low hedges And little fields and sheep.
Even as he strode like a pestilence, That strides from Rhine to Rome,
He thought how tall his beans might be If ever he went home.
Spoke some stiff piece of childish prayer, Dull as the distant chimes,
That thanked our God for good eating And corn and quiet times— Till on the helm of a high chief
Fell shatteringly his brand,
And the helm broke and the bone broke And the sword broke in his hand.
Then from the yelling Northmen
Driven splintering on him ran
Full seven spears, and the seventh Was never made by man.
Seven spears, and the seventh
Was wrought as the faerie blades,
And given to Elf the minstrel
By the monstrous water-maids;

By them that dwell where luridly
Lost waters of the Rhine
Move among roots of nations,
Being sunken for a sign.

Under all graves they murmur,
They murmur and rebel,
Down to the buried kingdoms creep, And like a lost rain roar and weep O’er the red heavens of hell.
Thrice drowned was Elf the minstrel, And washed as dead on sand;
And the third time men found him
The spear was in his hand.

Seven spears went about Eldred,
Like stays about a mast;
But there was sorrow by the sea
For the driving of the last.

Six spears thrust upon Eldred
Were splintered while he laughed;
One spear thrust into Eldred,
Three feet of blade and shaft.

And from the great heart grievously Came forth the shaft and blade,
And he stood with the face of a dead man, Stood a little, and swayed— Then
fell, as falls a battle-tower, On smashed and struggling spears.
Cast down from some unconquered town That, rushing earthward, carries down
Loads of live men of all renown— Archers and engineers.
And a great clamour of Christian men Went up in agony,
Crying, “Fallen is the tower of Wessex That stood beside the sea.”
Centre and right the Wessex guard
Grew pale for doubt and fear,
And the flank failed at the advance, For the death-light on the wizard lance—
The star of the evil spear.
“Stand like an oak,” cried Marcus, “Stand like a Roman wall!
Eldred the Good is fallen—
Are you too good to fall?

“When we were wan and bloodless
He gave you ale enow;
The pirates deal with him as dung, God! are you bloodless now?”
“Grip, Wulf and Gorlias, grip the ash!
Slaves, and I make you free!
Stamp, Hildred hard in English land, Stand Gurth, stand Gorlias, Gawen stand!
Hold, Halfgar, with the other hand, Halmer, hold up on knee!
“The lamps are dying in your homes, The fruits upon your bough;
Even now your old thatch smoulders, Gurth, Now is the judgment of the earth,
Now is the death-grip, now!”

For thunder of the captain,
Not less the Wessex line,
Leaned back and reeled a space to rear As Elf charged with the Rhine maids’
spear, And roaring like the Rhine.
For the men were borne by the waving walls Of woods and clouds that pass,
By dizzy plains and drifting sea,
And they mixed God with glamoury,
God with the gods of the burning tree And the wizard’s tower and glass.
But Mark was come of the glittering towns Where hot white details show,
Where men can number and expound,
And his faith grew in a hard ground Of doubt and reason and falsehood found,
Where no faith else could grow.
Belief that grew of all beliefs
One moment back was blown
And belief that stood on unbelief
Stood up iron and alone.

The Wessex crescent backwards
Crushed, as with bloody spear
Went Elf roaring and routing,
And Mark against Elf yet shouting, Shocked, in his mid-career.
Right on the Roman shield and sword
Did spear of the Rhine maids run;
But the shield shifted never,
The sword rang down to sever,
The great Rhine sang for ever,
And the songs of Elf were done.

And a great thunder of Christian men Went up against the sky,
Saying, “God hath broken the evil spear Ere the good man’s blood was dry.”
“Spears at the charge!” yelled Mark amain.
“Death on the gods of death!
Over the thrones of doom and blood Goeth God that is a craftsman good, And
gold and iron, earth and wood, Loveth and laboureth.
“The fruits leap up in all your farms, The lamps in each abode;
God of all good things done on earth, All wheels or webs of any worth,
The God that makes the roof, Gurth, The God that makes the road.
“The God that heweth kings in oak
Writeth songs on vellum,
God of gold and flaming glass,
Confregit potentias
Acrceu, scutum, Gorlias,
Gladium et bellum.”

Steel and lightning broke about him, Battle-bays and palm,
All the sea-kings swayed among
Woods of the Wessex arms upflung,
The trumpet of the Roman tongue,
The thunder of the psalm.

And midmost of that rolling field
Ran Ogier ragingly,
Lashing at Mark, who turned his blow, And brake the helm about his brow, And broke him to his knee.
Then Ogier heaved over his head
His huge round shield of proof;
But Mark set one foot on the shield, One on some sundered rock upheeled, And towered above the tossing field, A statue on a roof.
Dealing far blows about the fight, Like thunder-bolts a-roam,
Like birds about the battle-field, While Ogier writhed under his shield Like a tortoise in his dome.
But hate in the buried Ogier
Was strong as pain in hell,
With bare brute hand from the inside He burst the shield of brass and hide, And a death-stroke to the Roman’s side Sent suddenly and well.
Then the great statue on the shield Looked his last look around
With level and imperial eye;
And Mark, the man from Italy,
Fell in the sea of agony,
And died without a sound.

And Ogier, leaping up alive,
Hurled his huge shield away
Flying, as when a juggler flings
A whizzing plate in play.

And held two arms up rigidly,
And roared to all the Danes:
“Fallen is Rome, yea, fallen
The city of the plains!

“Shall no man born remember,
That breaketh wood or weald,
How long she stood on the roof of the world As he stood on my shield.
“The new wild world forgetteth her As foam fades on the sea,
How long she stood with her foot on Man As he with his foot on me.
“No more shall the brown men of the south Move like the ants in lines,
To quiet men with olives
Or madden men with vines.
“No more shall the white towns of the south, Where Tiber and Nilus run,
Sitting around a secret sea
Worship a secret sun.

“The blind gods roar for Rome fallen, And forum and garland gone,
For the ice of the north is broken, And the sea of the north comes on.
“The blind gods roar and rave and dream Of all cities under the sea,
For the heart of the north is broken, And the blood of the north is free.
“Down from the dome of the world we come, Rivers on rivers down,
Under us swirl the sects and hordes And the high dooms we drown.
“Down from the dome of the world and down, Struck flying as a skiff
On a river in spate is spun and swirled Until we come to the end of the world
That breaks short, like a cliff.
“And when we come to the end of the world For me, I count it fit
To take the leap like a good river, Shot shrieking over it.
“But whatso hap at the end of the world, Where Nothing is struck and sounds, It
is not, by Thor, these monkish men These humbled Wessex hounds— “Not this
pale line of Christian hinds, This one white string of men,
Shall keep us back from the end of the world, And the things that happen then.
“It is not Alfred’s dwarfish sword, Nor Egbert’s pigmy crown,
Shall stay us now that descend in thunder, Rending the realms and the realms
thereunder, Down through the world and down.”
There was that in the wild men back of him, There was that in his own wild
song, A dizzy throbbing, a drunkard smoke, That dazed to death all Wessex folk,
And swept their spears along.
Vainly the sword of Colan
And the axe of Alfred plied—
The Danes poured in like a brainless plague, And knew not when they died.
Prince Colan slew a score of them, And was stricken to his knee;
King Alfred slew a score and seven And was borne back on a tree.
Back to the black gate of the woods, Back up the single way,
Back by the place of the parting ways Christ’s knights were whirled away.
And when they came to the parting ways Doom’s heaviest hammer fell,
For the King was beaten, blind, at bay, Down the right lane with his array, But
Colan swept the other way,
Where he smote great strokes and fell.
The thorn-woods over Ethandune
Stand sharp and thick as spears,
By night and furze and forest-harms Far sundered were the friends in arms; The loud lost blows, the last alarms, Came not to Alfred's ears.

The thorn-woods over Ethandune
Stand stiff as spikes in mail;
As to the Haut King came at morn
Dead Roland on a doubtful horn,
Seemed unto Alfred lightly borne
The last cry of the Gael.
BOOK VIII

ETHANDUNE: THE LAST CHARGE

Away in the waste of White Horse Down
An idle child alone
Played some small game through hours that pass,
And patiently would pluck the grass,
Patiently push the stone.
On the lean, green edge for ever,
Where the blank chalk touched the turf,
The child played on, alone, divine,
As a child plays on the last line
That sunders sand and surf.

For he dwelleth in high divisions
Too simple to understand,
Seeing on what morn of mystery
The Uncreated rent the sea
With roarings, from the land.

Through the long infant hours like days
He built one tower in vain— Piled up small stones to make a town,
And evermore the stones fell down,
And he piled them up again.

And crimson kings on battle-towers,
And saints on Gothic spires,
And hermits on their peaks of snow,
And heroes on their pyres,
And patriots riding royally,
That rush the rocking town,
Stretch hands, and hunger and aspire,
Seeking to mount where high and higher,
The child whom Time can never tire,
Sings over White Horse Down.

And this was the might of Alfred,
At the ending of the way;
That of such smiters, wise or wild,
He was least distant from the child,
Piling the stones all day.

For Eldred fought like a frank hunter
That killeth and goeth home;
And Mark had fought because all arms
Rang like the name of Rome.
And Colan fought with a double mind,
Moody and madly gay;
But Alfred fought as gravely
As a good child at play.

He saw wheels break and work run back And all things as they were;
And his heart was orbed like victory And simple like despair.
Therefore is Mark forgotten,
That was wise with his tongue and brave; And the cairn over Colan crumbled,
And the cross on Eldred’s grave.

Their great souls went on a wind away, And they have not tale or tomb;
And Alfred born in Wantage
Rules England till the doom.

Because in the forest of all fears
Like a strange fresh gust from sea, Struck him that ancient innocence
That is more than mastery.

And as a child whose bricks fall down Re-piles them o’er and o’er,
Came ruin and the rain that burns,
Returning as a wheel returns,
And crouching in the furze and ferns He began his life once more.
He took his ivory horn unslung
And smiled, but not in scorn:
“Endeth the Battle of Ethandune
With the blowing of a horn.”

On a dark horse at the double way
He saw great Guthrum ride,
Heard roar of brass and ring of steel, The laughter and the trumpet peal,
The pagan in his pride.

And Ogier’s red and hated head
Moved in some talk or task;
But the men seemed scattered in the brier, And some of them had lit a fire,
And one had broached a cask.

And waggons one or two stood up,
Like tall ships in sight,
As if an outpost were encamped
At the cloven ways for night.

And joyous of the sudden stay
Of Alfred’s routed few,
Sat one upon a stone to sigh,
And some slipped up the road to fly, Till Alfred in the fern hard by
Set horn to mouth and blew.

And they all abode like statues—
One sitting on the stone,
One half-way through the thorn hedge tall, One with a leg across a wall,
And one looked backwards, very small, Far up the road, alone.
Grey twilight and a yellow star
Hung over thorn and hill;
Two spears and a cloven war-shield lay Loose on the road as cast away,
The horn died faint in the forest grey, And the fleeing men stood still.
“Brothers at arms,” said Alfred,
“On this side lies the foe;
Are slavery and starvation flowers, That you should pluck them so?
“For whether is it better
To be prodded with Danish poles,
Having hewn a chamber in a ditch,
And hounded like a howling witch,
Or smoked to death in holes?

“Or that before the red cock crow
All we, a thousand strong,
Go down the dark road to God’s house, Singing a Wessex song?
“To sweat a slave to a race of slaves, To drink up infamy?
No, brothers, by your leave, I think Death is a better ale to drink,
And by all the stars of Christ that sink, The Danes shall drink with me.
“To grow old cowed in a conquered land, With the sun itself discrowned,
To see trees crouch and cattle slink— Death is a better ale to drink,
And by high Death on the fell brink That flagon shall go round.
“Though dead are all the paladins
Whom glory had in ken,
Though all your thunder-sworded thanes With proud hearts died among the Danes, While a man remains, great war remains: Now is a war of men.
“The men that tear the furrows,  
The men that fell the trees,  
When all their lords be lost and dead  
The bondsmen of the earth shall tread  
The tyrants of the seas.

“The wheel of the roaring stillness  
Of all labours under the sun,  
Speed the wild work as well at least  
As the whole world’s work is done.

“Let Hildred hack the shield-wall  
Clean as he hacks the hedge;  
Let Gurth the fowler stand as cool  
As he stands on the chasm’s edge;

“Let Gorlias ride the sea-kings  
As Gorlias rides the sea,  
Then let all hell and Denmark drive,  
Yelling to all its fiends alive,  
And not a rag care we.”

When Alfred’s word was ended  
Stood firm that feeble line,  
Each in his place with club or spear,  
And fury deeper than deep fear,  
And smiles as sour as brine.

And the King held up the horn and said, “See ye my father’s horn,  
That Egbert blew in his empery,  
Once, when he rode out commonly,  
Twice when he rode for venery,  
And thrice on the battle-morn.

“But heavier fates have fallen  
The horn of the Wessex kings,  
And I blew once, the riding sign,  
To call you to the fighting line  
And glory and all good things.

“And now two blasts, the hunting sign, Because we turn to bay;  
But I will not blow the three blasts, Till we be lost or they.  
“And now I blow the hunting sign,  
Charge some by rule and rod;  
But when I blow the battle sign,
Charge all and go to God.”

Wild stared the Danes at the double ways Where they loitered, all at large,
As that dark line for the last time Doubled the knee to charge— And caught their weapons clumsily,
And marvelled how and why—
In such degree, by rule and rod,
The people of the peace of God Went roaring down to die.

And when the last arrow
Was fitted and was flown,
When the broken shield hung on the breast, And the hopeless lance was laid in rest, And the hopeless horn blown,
The King looked up, and what he saw Was a great light like death,
For Our Lady stood on the standards rent, As lonely and as innocent
As when between white walls she went And the lilies of Nazareth.
One instant in a still light
He saw Our Lady then,
Her dress was soft as western sky,
And she was a queen most womanly—
But she was a queen of men.

Over the iron forest
He saw Our Lady stand,
Her eyes were sad withouten art,
And seven swords were in her heart— But one was in her hand.
Then the last charge went blindly,
And all too lost for fear:
The Danes closed round, a roaring ring, And twenty clubs rose o’er the King,
Four Danes hewed at him, halloing,
And Ogier of the Stone and Sling Drove at him with a spear.

But the Danes were wild with laughter, And the great spear swung wide,
The point stuck to a straggling tree, And either host cried suddenly,
As Alfred leapt aside.
Short time had shaggy Ogier
To pull his lance in line—
He knew King Alfred’s axe on high,
He heard it rushing through the sky,

He cowered beneath it with a cry—
It split him to the spine:
And Alfred sprang over him dead,
And blew the battle sign.

Then bursting all and blasting
Came Christendom like death,
Kicked of such catapults of will,
The staves shiver, the barrels spill, The waggons waver and crash and kill The waggoners beneath.
Barriers go backwards, banners rend, Great shields groan like a gong— Horses like horns of nightmare
Neigh horribly and long.

Horses ramp high and rock and boil
And break their golden reins,
And slide on carnage clamorously,
Down where the bitter blood doth lie, Where Ogier went on foot to die,
In the old way of the Danes.

“The high tide!” King Alfred cried.
“The high tide and the turn!
As a tide turns on the tall grey seas, See how they waver in the trees,
How stray their spears, how knock their knees, How wild their watchfires burn!
“The Mother of God goes over them,
Walking on wind and flame,
And the storm-cloud drifts from city and dale, And the White Horse stamps in the White Horse Vale, And we all shall yet drink Christian ale In the village of our name.
“The Mother of God goes over them,
On dreadful cherubs borne;
And the psalm is roaring above the rune, And the Cross goes over the sun and moon, Endeth the battle of Ethandune
With the blowing of a horn."

For back indeed disorderly
The Danes went clamouring,
Too worn to take anew the tale,
Or dazed with insolence and ale,
Or stunned of heaven, or stricken pale Before the face of the King.
For dire was Alfred in his hour
The pale scribe witnesseth,
More mighty in defeat was he
Than all men else in victory,
And behind, his men came murderously, Dry-throated, drinking death.
And Edgar of the Golden Ship
He slew with his own hand,
Took Ludwig from his lady’s bower,
And smote down Harmar in his hour,
And vain and lonely stood the tower— The tower in Guelderland.
And Torr out of his tiny boat,
Whose eyes beheld the Nile,
Wulf with his war-cry on his lips,
And Harco born in the eclipse,
Who blocked the Seine with battleships Round Paris on the Isle.
And Hacon of the Harvest-Song,
And Dirck from the Elbe he slew,
And Cnut that melted Durham bell
And Fulk and fiery Oscar fell,
And Goderic and Sigael,
And Uriel of the Yew.

And highest sang the slaughter,
And fastest fell the slain,
When from the wood-road’s blackening throat A crowning and crashing wonder
smote The rear-guard of the Dane.
For the dregs of Colan’s company—
Lost down the other road—
Had gathered and grown and heard the din, And with wild yells came pouring in,
Naked as their old British kin,
And bright with blood for woad.

And bare and bloody and aloft
They bore before their band
The body of the mighty lord,
Colan of Caerleon and its horde,
That bore King Alfred’s battle-sword Broken in his left hand.
And a strange music went with him,
Loud and yet strangely far;
The wild pipes of the western land,
Too keen for the ear to understand, Sang high and deathly on each hand
When the dead man went to war.

Blocked between ghost and buccaneer, Brave men have dropped and died;
And the wild sea-lords well might quail As the ghastly war-pipes of the Gael
Called to the horns of White Horse Vale, And all the horns replied.
And Hildred the poor hedger
Cut down four captains dead,
And Halmar laid three others low,
And the great earls wavered to and fro For the living and the dead.
And Gorlias grasped the great flag, The Raven of Odin, torn;
And the eyes of Guthrum altered,
For the first time since morn.

As a turn of the wheel of tempest
Tilts up the whole sky tall,
And cliffs of wan cloud luminous
Lean out like great walls over us,
As if the heavens might fall.

As such a tall and tilted sky
Sends certain snow or light,
So did the eyes of Guthrum change,
And the turn was more certain and more strange Than a thousand men in flight.
For not till the floor of the skies is split, And hell-fire shines through the sea, Or the stars look up through the rent earth’s knees, Cometh such rending of certainties, As when one wise man truly sees
What is more wise than he.
He set his horse in the battle-breech Even Guthrum of the Dane,  
And as ever had fallen fell his brand, A falling tower o’er many a land,  
But Gurth the Fowler laid one hand  
Upon this bridle rein.

King Guthrum was a great lord,  
And higher than his gods—  
He put the popes to laughter,  
He chid the saints with rods,  

He took this hollow world of ours  
For a cup to hold his wine;  
In the parting of the woodways  
There came to him a sign.

In Wessex in the forest,  
In the breaking of the spears,  
We set a sign on Guthrum  
To blaze a thousand years.

Where the high saddles jostle  
And the horse-tails toss,  
There rose to the birds flying  
A roar of dead and dying;  
In deafness and strong crying  
We signed him with the cross.

Far out to the winding river  
The blood ran down for days,  
When we put the cross on Guthrum  
In the parting of the ways.
BOOK VIII

THE SCOURING OF THE HORSE

In the years of the peace of Wessex, When the good King sat at home;
Years following on that bloody boon
When she that stands above the moon
Stood above death at Ethandune
And saw his kingdom come—

When the pagan people of the sea
Fled to their palisades,
Nailed there with javelins to cling
And wonder smote the pirate king,
And brought him to his christening
And the end of all his raids.

(For not till the night’s blue slate is wiped Of its last star utterly,
And fierce new signs writ there to read, Shall eyes with such amazement heed,
As when a great man knows indeed
A greater thing than he.)

And there came to his chrism-loosing Lords of all lands afar,
And a line was drawn north-westerly
That set King Egbert’s empire free,
Giving all lands by the northern sea To the sons of the northern star.
In the days of the rest of Alfred,
When all these things were done,
And Wessex lay in a patch of peace,
Like a dog in a patch of sun—

The King sat in his orchard,
Among apples green and red,
With the little book in his bosom
And the sunshine on his head.

And he gathered the songs of simple men That swing with helm and hod,
And the alms he gave as a Christian
Like a river alive with fishes ran;
And he made gifts to a beggar man
As to a wandering god.

And he gat good laws of the ancient kings, Like treasure out of the tombs;
And many a thief in thorny nook,
Or noble in sea-stained turret shook, For the opening of his iron book,
And the gathering of the dooms.

Then men would come from the ends of the earth, Whom the King sat welcoming,
And men would go to the ends of the earth Because of the word of the King.
For folk came in to Alfred’s face
Whose javelins had been hurled
On monsters that make boil the sea,
Crakens and coils of mystery.
Or thrust in ancient snows that be
The white hair of the world.

And some had knocked at the northern gates Of the ultimate icy floor,
Where the fish freeze and the foam turns black, And the wide world narrows to a track, And the other sea at the world’s back Cries through a closed door.
And men went forth from Alfred’s face, Even great gift-bearing lords,
Not to Rome only, but more bold,
Out to the high hot courts of old,
Of negroes clad in cloth of gold,
Silence, and crooked swords,

Scrawled screens and secret gardens
And insect-laden skies—
Where fiery plains stretch on and on To the purple country of Prester John And the walls of Paradise.
And he knew the might of the Terre Majeure, Where kings began to reign;
Where in a night-rout, without name, Of gloomy Goths and Gauls there came White, above candles all aflame,
Like a vision, Charlemagne.
And men, seeing such embassies,
Spake with the King and said:
“The steel that sang so sweet a tune
On Ashdown and on Ethandune,
Why hangs it scabbarded so soon,
All heavily like lead?

“Why dwell the Danes in North England,
And up to the river ride?
Three more such marches like thine own
Would end them; and the Pict should own
Our sway; and our feet climb the throne
In the mountains of Strathclyde.”

And Alfred in the orchard,
Among apples green and red,
With the little book in his bosom,
Looked at green leaves and said:

“When all philosophies shall fail,
This word alone shall fit;
That a sage feels too small for life,
And a fool too large for it.

“Asia and all imperial plains
Are too little for a fool;
But for one man whose eyes can see
The little island of Athelney
Is too large a land to rule.

“Haply it had been better
When I built my fortress there,
Out in the reedy waters wide,
I had stood on my mud wall and cried: ‘Take England all, from tide to tide—Be Athelney my share.’

“Those madmen of the throne-scramble—Oppressors and oppressed—
Had lined the banks by Athelney,
And waved and wailed unceasingly,
Where the river turned to the broad sea, By an island of the blest.

“An island like a little book
Full of a hundred tales,
Like the gilt page the good monks pen, That is all smaller than a wren,
Yet hath high towns, meteors, and men, And suns and spouting whales;
“A land having a light on it
In the river dark and fast,
An isle with utter clearness lit,
Because a saint had stood in it;
Where flowers are flowers indeed and fit, And trees are trees at last.
“So were the island of a saint;
But I am a common king,
And I will make my fences tough
From Wantage Town to Plymouth Bluff, Because I am not wise enough
To rule so small a thing.”

And it fell in the days of Alfred,
In the days of his repose,
That as old customs in his sight
Were a straight road and a steady light, He bade them keep the White Horse white
As the first plume of the snows.
And right to the red torchlight,
From the trouble of morning grey,
They stripped the White Horse of the grass As they strip it to this day.
And under the red torchlight
He went dreaming as though dull,
Of his old companions slain like kings, And the rich irrevocable things
Of a heart that hath not openings,
But is shut fast, being full.

And the torchlight touched the pale hair Where silver clouded gold,
And the frame of his face was made of cords, And a young lord turned among the lords And said: “The King is old.”
And even as he said it
A post ran in amain,
Crying: “Arm, Lord King, the hamlets arm, In the horror and the shade of harm, They have burnt Brand of Aynger’s farm— The Danes are come again!
“Danes drive the white East Angles
In six fights on the plains,
Danes waste the world about the Thames, Danes to the eastward—Danes!”
And as he stumbled on one knee,
The thanes broke out in ire,
Crying: “Ill the watchmen watch, and ill The sheriffs keep the shire.”
But the young earl said: “Ill the saints, The saints of England, guard
The land wherein we pledge them gold; The dykes decay, the King grows old,
And surely this is hard,
“That we be never quit of them;
That when his head is hoar
He cannot say to them he smote,
And spared with a hand hard at the throat, ‘Go, and return no more.’ “
Then Alfred smiled. And the smile of him Was like the sun for power.
But he only pointed: bade them heed
Those peasants of the Berkshire breed, Who plucked the old Horse of the weed
As they pluck it to this hour.
“Will ye part with the weeds for ever?
Or show daisies to the door?
Or will you bid the bold grass
Go, and return no more?

“So ceaseless and so secret
Thrive terror and theft set free;
Treason and shame shall come to pass While one weed flowers in a morass;
And like the stillness of stiff grass The stillness of tyranny.
“Over our white souls also
Wild heresies and high
Wave prouder than the plumes of grass, And sadder than their sigh.
“And I go riding against the raid,
And ye know not where I am;
But ye shall know in a day or year,
When one green star of grass grows here; Chaos has charged you, charger and spear, Battle-axe and battering-ram.
“And though skies alter and empires melt, This word shall still be true:
If we would have the horse of old,
Scour ye the horse anew.

“One time I followed a dancing star
That seemed to sing and nod,
And ring upon earth all evil’s knell; But now I wot if ye scour not well
Red rust shall grow on God’s great bell And grass in the streets of God.”
Ceased Alfred; and above his head
The grand green domes, the Downs,
Showed the first legions of the press, Marching in haste and bitterness
For Christ’s sake and the crown’s.

Beyond the cavern of Colan,
Past Eldred’s by the sea,
Rose men that owned King Alfred’s rod, From the windy wastes of Exe untrod,
Or where the thorn of the grave of God Burns over Glastonbury.
Far northward and far westward
The distant tribes drew nigh,
Plains beyond plains, fell beyond fell, That a man at sunset sees so well,
But dark and thick as thronged the host, With drum and torch and blade,
The still-eyed King sat pondering,
As one that watches a live thing,
The scoured chalk; and he said,

“Though I give this land to Our Lady, That helped me in Athelney,
Though lordlier trees and lustier sod And happier hills hath no flesh trod Than
the garden of the Mother of God Between Thames side and the sea,
“I know that weeds shall grow in it
Faster than men can burn;
And though they scatter now and go,
In some far century, sad and slow,
I have a vision, and I know
The heathen shall return.

“They shall not come with warships,
They shall not waste with brands,
But books be all their eating,
And ink be on their hands.

“Not with the humour of hunters
Or savage skill in war,
But ordering all things with dead words, Strings shall they make of beasts and
birds, And wheels of wind and star.
“They shall come mild as monkish clerks, With many a scroll and pen;
And backward shall ye turn and gaze, Desiring one of Alfred’s days,
When pagans still were men.
“The dear sun dwarfed of dreadful suns, Like fiercer flowers on stalk,  
Earth lost and little like a pea  
In high heaven’s towering forestry,  
—These be the small weeds ye shall see Crawl, covering the chalk.  
“But though they bridge St. Mary’s sea, Or steal St. Michael’s wing—  
Though they rear marvels over us,  
Greater than great Vergilius  
Wrought for the Roman king;  

“By this sign you shall know them,  
The breaking of the sword,  
And man no more a free knight,  
That loves or hates his lord.  

“Yea, this shall be the sign of them, The sign of the dying fire;  
And Man made like a half-wit,  
That knows not of his sire.  

“What though they come with scroll and pen, And grave as a shaven clerk,  
By this sign you shall know them,  
That they ruin and make dark;  

“By all men bond to Nothing,  
Being slaves without a lord,  
By one blind idiot world obeyed,  
Too blind to be abhorred;  

“By terror and the cruel tales  
Of curse in bone and kin,  
By weird and weakness winning,  
Accursed from the beginning,  
By detail of the sinning,  
And denial of the sin;  

“By thought a crawling ruin,  
By life a leaping mire,  
By a broken heart in the breast of the world, And the end of the world’s desire;  
“By God and man dishonoured,
By death and life made vain,
Know ye the old barbarian,
The barbarian come again—

“When is great talk of trend and tide, And wisdom and destiny,
Hail that undying heathen
That is sadder than the sea.

“In what wise men shall smite him,
Or the Cross stand up again,
Or charity or chivalry,
My vision saith not; and I see
No more; but now ride doubtfully
To the battle of the plain.”

And the grass-edge of the great down Was cut clean as a lawn,
While the levies thronged from near and far, From the warm woods of the western star, And the King went out to his last war On a tall grey horse at dawn.
And news of his far-off fighting Came slowly and brokenly
From the land of the East Saxons,
From the sunrise and the sea.

From the plains of the white sunrise, And sad St. Edmund’s crown,
Where the pools of Essex pale and gleam Out beyond London Town— In mighty and doubtful fragments,
Like faint or fabled wars,
Climbed the old hills of his renown, Where the bald brow of White Horse Down Is close to the cold stars.
But away in the eastern places
The wind of death walked high,
And a raid was driven athwart the raid, The sky reddened and the smoke swayed,
And the tall grey horse went by.
The gates of the great river
Were breached as with a barge,
The walls sank crowded, say the scribes, And high towers populous with tribes Seemed leaning from the charge.
Smoke like rebellious heavens rolled Curled over coloured flames,
Mirrored in monstrous purple dreams
In the mighty pools of Thames.

Loud was the war on London wall,
And loud in London gates,
And loud the sea-kings in the cloud
Broke through their dreaming gods, and loud Cried on their dreadful Fates.
And all the while on White Horse Hill The horse lay long and wan,
The turf crawled and the fungus crept, And the little sorrel, while all men slept,
Unwrought the work of man.
With velvet finger, velvet foot,
The fierce soft mosses then
Crept on the large white commonweal
All folk had striven to strip and peel, And the grass, like a great green witch’s wheel, Unwound the toils of men.
And clover and silent thistle throve, And buds burst silently,
With little care for the Thames Valley Or what things there might be— That away on the widening river,
In the eastern plains for crown
Stood up in the pale purple sky
One turret of smoke like ivory;
And the smoke changed and the wind went by, And the King took London Town.
THE BALLAD OF
SAINT BARBARA

G. K. CHESTERTON
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

THE BALLAD OF SAINT BARBARA

TABLE OF CONTENTS
TO F. C. IN MEMORIAM PALESTINE, '19
THE BALLAD OF ST. BARBARA
ELEGY IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD
THE SWORD OF SURPRISE
A WEDDING IN WAR-TIME
THE MYSTERY
“THE MYTH OF ARTHUR”
THE OLD SONG
THE TRINKETS
THE PHILANTHROPIST
ON THE DOWNS
THE RED SEA
FOR A WAR MEMORIAL
MEMORY
THE ENGLISH GRAVES
NIGHTMARE
A SECOND CHILDHOOD
“MEDIÆVALISM”
POLAND
THE HUNTING OF THE DRAGON
SONNET
FANTASIA
A CHRISTMAS CAROL
TO CAPTAIN FRYATT
FOR FOUR GUILDS:
   I. The Glass-Stainers
FOR FOUR GUILDS:
   II. The Bridge-Builders
FOR FOUR GUILDS:
   III. The Stone-Masons
FOR FOUR GUILDS:
   IV. The Bell-Ringers

THE CONVERT

SONGS OF EDUCATION
SONGS OF EDUCATION:
   I. History
SONGS OF EDUCATION:
   II. Geography
SONGS OF EDUCATION:
   III. For the Crèche
SONGS OF EDUCATION:
   IV. Citizenship
SONGS OF EDUCATION:
   V. The Higher Mathematics
SONGS OF EDUCATION:
   VI. Hygiene
TO F. C. IN MEMORIAM PALESTINE, ’19
THE BALLAD OF ST. BARBARA

(St. Barbara is the patron saint of artillery and of those in danger of sudden death.) When the long grey lines came flooding upon Paris in the plain, We stood and drank of the last free air we never could taste again: They had led us back from the lost battle, to halt we knew not where And stilled us; and our gaping guns were dumb with our despair. The grey tribes flowed for ever from the infinite lifeless lands And a Norman to a Breton spoke, his chin upon his hands.

“There was an end to Ilium; and an end came to Rome; And a man plays on a painted stage in the land that he calls home; Arch after arch of triumph, but floor beyond falling floor, That lead to a low door at last; and beyond there is no door.”

And the Breton to the Norman spoke, like a small child spoke he, And his sea-blue eyes were empty as his home beside the sea: “There are more windows in one house than there are eyes to see, There are more doors in a man’s house, but God has hid the key: Ruin is a builder of windows; her legend witnesseth Barbara, the saint of gunners, and a stay in sudden death.”

It seemed the wheel of the world stood still an instant in its turning, More than the kings of the earth that turned with the turning of Valmy mill: While trickled the idle tale and the sea-blue eyes were burning, Still as the heart of a whirlwind the heart of the world stood still.

“Barbara the beautiful Had praise of lute and pen: Her hair was like a summer night Dark and desired of men.

Her feet like birds from far away That linger and light in doubt; And her face was like a window Where a man’s first love looked out.
Her sire was master of many slaves
A hard man of his hands;
They built a tower about her
In the desolate golden lands,

Sealed as the tyrants sealed their tombs,
Planned with an ancient plan,
And set two windows in the tower
Like the two eyes of a man.”

Our guns were set toward the foe; we had no word, for firing.
Grey in the gateway of St. Gond the Guard of the tyrant shone;
Dark with the fate of a falling star, retiring and retiring,
The Breton line went backward and the Breton tale went on.

“Her father had sailed across the sea
From the harbour of Africa
When all the slaves took up their tools
For the bidding of Barbara.

She smote the bare wall with her hand
And bad them smite again;
She poured them wealth of wine and meat
To stay them in their pain.

And cried through the lifted thunder
Of thronging hammer and hod
‘Throw open the third window
In the third name of God.’

Then the hearts failed and the tools fell,
And far towards the foam,
Men saw a shadow on the sands
And her father coming home.”

Speak low and low, along the line the whispered word is flying
Before the touch, before the time, we may not loose a breath:
Their guns must mash us to the mire and there be no replying,
Till the hand is raised to fling us for the final dice to death.

“There were two windows in your tower,
Barbara, Barbara,
For all between the sun and moon
In the lands of Africa.

Hath a man three eyes, Barbara,
A bird three wings,
That you have riven roof and wall
To look upon vain things?”

Her voice was like a wandering thing
That falters yet is free,
Whose soul has drunk in a distant land
Of the rivers of liberty.

“There are more wings than the wind knows
Or eyes than see the sun
In the light of the lost window
And the wind of the doors undone.

For out of the first lattice
Are the red lands that break
And out of the second lattice
Sea like a green snake,

But out of the third lattice
Under low eaves like wings
Is a new corner of the sky
And the other side of things.”

It opened in the inmost place an instant beyond uttering,
A casement and a chasm and a thunder of doors undone,
A seraph’s strong wing shaken out the shock of its unshuttering,
That split the shattered sunlight from a light behind the sun.

“Then he drew sword and drave her
Where the judges sat and said
‘Caesar sits above the gods,
Barbara the maid.

Caesar hath made a treaty
With the moon and with the sun,
All the gods that men can praise
Praise him every one.

There is peace with the anointed
Of the scarlet oils of Bel,
With the Fish God, where the whirlpool
Is a winding stair to hell,

With the pathless pyramids of slime,
Where the mitred negro lifts
To his black cherub in the cloud
Abominable gifts,

With the leprous silver cities
Where the dumb priests dance and nod,
But not with the three windows
And the last name of God.’”

They are firing, we are falling, and the red skies rend and shiver us,
Barbara, Barbara, we may not loose a breath—
Be at the bursting doors of doom, and in the dark deliver us,
Who loosen the last window on the sun of sudden death.

“Webara the beautiful
Stood up as queen set free,
Whose mouth is set to a terrible cup
And the trumpet of liberty.

‘I have looked forth from a window
That no man now shall bar,
Caesar’s toppling battle-towers
Shall never stretch so far.
The slaves are dancing in their chains,
The child laughs at the rod,
Because of the bird of the three wings,
And the third face of God.’

The sword upon his shoulder
Shifted and shone and fell,
And Barbara lay very small
And crumpled like a shell.”

What wall upon what hinges turned stands open like a door?
Too simple for the sight of faith, too huge for human eyes,
What light upon what ancient way shines to a far-off floor,
The line of the lost land of France or the plains of Paradise?

“Caesar smiled above the gods,
His lip of stone was curled,
His iron armies wound like chains
Round and round the world,

And the strong slayer of his own
That cut down flesh for grass,
Smiled too, and went to his own tower
Like a walking tower of brass, And the songs ceased and the slaves were dumb;
And far towards the foam
Men saw a shadow on the sands;
And her father coming home. . . .

Blood of his blood upon the sword
Stood red but never dry.
He wiped it slowly, till the blade
Was blue as the blue sky.

But the blue sky split with a thunder-crack,
Spat down a blinding brand,
And all of him lay back and flat
As his shadow on the sand.”
The touch and the tornado; all our guns give tongue together
St. Barbara for the gunnery and God defend the right,
They are stopped and gapped and battered as we blast away the weather.
Building window upon window to our lady of the light.
For the light is come on Liberty, her foes are falling, falling,
They are reeling, they are running, as the shameful years have run,
She is risen for all the humble, she has heard the conquered calling,
St. Barbara of the Gunners, with her hand upon the gun.
They are burst asunder in the midst that eat of their own flatteries,
Whose lip is curled to order as its barbered hair is curled. . .
Blast of the beauty of sudden death, St. Barbara of the batteries!
That blow the new white window in the wall of all the world.

For the hand is raised behind us, and the bolt smites hard
Through the rending of the doorways, through the death-gap of the Guard,
For the cry of the Three Colours is in Condé and beyond
And the Guard is flung for carrion in the graveyard of St. Gond,
Through Mondemont and out of it, through Morin marsh and on
With earthquake of salutation the impossible thing is gone,
Gaul, charioted and charging, great Gaul upon a gun,
Tip-toe on all her thousand years and trumpeting to the sun:
As day returns, as death returns, swung backwards and swung home,
Back on the barbarous reign returns the battering-ram of Rome.
While that that the east held hard and hot like pincers in a forge,
Came like the west wind roaring up the cannon of St. George,
Where the hunt is up and racing over stream and swamp and tarn
And their batteries, black with battle, hold the bridgeheads of the Marne
And across the carnage of the Guard, by Paris in the plain,
The Normans to the Bretons cried and the Bretons cheered again. . .
But he that told the tale went home to his house beside the sea
And burned before St. Barbara, the light of the windows three,
Three candles for an unknown thing, never to come again,
That opened like the eye of God on Paris in the plain.
ELEGY IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD

The men that worked for England
They have their graves at home:
And bees and birds of England
About the cross can roam.

But they that fought for England,
Following a falling star,
Alas, alas for England
They have their graves afar.

And they that rule in England,
In stately conclave met,
Alas, alas for England
They have no graves as yet.
THE SWORD OF SURPRISE

Sunder me from my bones, O sword of God,
Till they stand stark and strange as do the trees;
That I whose heart goes up with the soaring woods
May marvel as much at these.

Sunder me from my blood that in the dark
I hear that red ancestral river run,
Like branching buried floods that find the sea
But never see the sun.

Give me miraculous eyes to see my eyes,
Those rolling mirrors made alive in me,
Terrible crystal more incredible
Than all the things they see.

Sunder me from my soul, that I may see
The sins like streaming wounds, the life’s brave beat;
Till I shall save myself, as I would save
A stranger in the street.
A WEDDING IN WAR-TIME

Our God who made two lovers in a garden,
And smote them separate and set them free,
Their four eyes wild for wonder and wrath and pardon
And their kiss thunder as lips of land and sea:
Each rapt unendingly beyond the other,
Two starry worlds of unknown gods at war,
Wife and not mate, a man and not a brother,
We thank thee thou hast made us what we are.

Make not the grey slime of infinity
To swamp these flowers thou madest one by one;
Let not the night that was thine enemy
Mix a mad twilight of the moon and sun;
Waken again to thunderclap and clamour
The wonder of our sundering and the song,
Or break our hearts with thine hell-shattering hammer
But leave a shade between us all day long.

Shade of high shame and honourable blindness
When youth, in storm of dizzy and distant things,
Finds the wild windfall of a little kindness
And shakes to think that all the world has wings.
When the one head that turns the heavens in turning
Moves yet as lightly as a lingering bird,
And red and random, blown astray but burning,
Like a lost spark goes by the glorious word.

Make not this sex, this other side of things,
A thing less distant than the world’s desire;
What colour to the end of evening clings
And what far cry of frontiers and what fire
Fallen too far beyond the sun for seeking,
Let it divide us though our kingdom come;
With a far signal in our secret speaking
To hang the proud horizon in our home.
Once we were one, a shapeless cloud that lingers
Loading the seas and shutting out the skies,
One with the woods, a monster of myriad fingers,
You laid on me no finger of surprise.
One with the stars, a god with myriad eyes,
I saw you nowhere and was blind for scorn:
One till the world was riven and the rise
Of the white days when you and I were born.

Darkens the world: the world-old fetters rattle;
And these that have no hope behind the sun
May feed like bondmen and may breed like cattle,
One in the darkness as the dead are one;
Us if the rended grave give up its glory
Trumpets shall summon asunder and face to face:
We will be strangers in so strange a story
And wonder, meeting in so wild a place.

Ah, not in vain or utterly for loss
Come even the black flag and the battle-hordes,
If these grey devils flee the sign of the cross
Even in the symbol of the crossing swords.
Nor shall death doubt Who made our souls alive
Swords meeting and not stakes set side by side,
Bade us in the sunburst and the thunder thrive
Earthquake and Dawn; the bridegroom and the bride.

Death and not dreams or doubt of things undying,
Of whose the holy hearth or whose the sword;
Though sacred spirits dissever in strong crying
Into Thy hands, but Thy two hands, O Lord,
Though not in Earth as once in Eden standing
So plain again we see Thee what thou art,
As in this blaze, the blasting and the branding
Of this wild wedding where we meet and part.
THE MYSTERY

If sunset clouds could grow on trees
It would but match the may in flower;
And skies be underneath the seas
No topsyturvier than a shower.

If mountains rose on wings to wander
They were no wilder than a cloud;
Yet all my praise is mean as slander,
Mean as these mean words spoken aloud.

And never more than now I know
That man’s first heaven is far behind;
Unless the blazing seraph’s blow
Has left him in the garden blind.

Witness, O Sun that blinds our eyes,
Unthinkable and unthankable King,
That though all other wonder dies
I wonder at not wondering.
“THE MYTH OF ARTHUR”

O learned man who never learned to learn,
Save to deduce, by timid steps and small,
From towering smoke that fire can never burn
And from tall tales that men were never tall.
Say, have you thought what manner of man it is
Of whom men say “He could strike giants down”?
Or what strong memories over time’s abyss
Bore up the pomp of Camelot and the crown.
And why one banner all the background fills,
Beyond the pageants of so many spears,
And by what witchery in the western hills
A throne stands empty for a thousand years.
Who hold, unheeding this immense impact,
Immortal story for a mortal sin;
Lest human fable touch historic fact,
Chase myths like moths, and fight them with a pin.
Take comfort; rest—there needs not this ado.
You shall not be a myth, I promise you.
THE OLD SONG

(On the Embankment in stormy weather.) A livid sky on London
And like iron steeds that rear
A shock of engines halted,
And I knew the end was near:
And something said that far away, over the hills and far away,
There came a crawling thunder and the end of all things here.
For London Bridge is broken down, broken down, broken down,
As digging lets the daylight on the sunken streets of yore,
The lightning looked on London town, the broken bridge of London town,
The ending of a broken road where men shall go no more.

I saw the kings of London town,
The kings that buy and sell,
That built it up with penny loaves
And penny lies as well:
And where the streets were paved with gold, the shrivelled paper shone for gold,
The scorching light of promises that pave the streets of hell.
For penny loaves will melt away, melt away, melt away,
Mock the mean that haggled in the grain they did not grow;
With hungry faces in the gate, a hundred thousand in the gate,
A thunder-flash on London and the finding of the foe.

I heard the hundred pin-makers
Slow down their racking din,
Till in the stillness men could hear
The dropping of the pin:
And somewhere men without the wall, beneath the wood, without the wall,
Had found the place where London ends and England can begin.
For pins and needles bend and break, bend and break, bend and break,
Faster than the breaking spears or the bending of the bow
Of pageants pale in thunder-light, ’twixt thunder-load and thunder-light,
The Hundreds marching on the hills in the wars of long ago.

I saw great Cobbett riding,
The horseman of the shires;
And his face was red with judgment
And a light of Luddite fires:
And south to Sussex and the sea the lights leapt up for liberty,
The trumpet of the yeomanry, the hammer of the squires;
For bars of iron rust away, rust away, rust away,
Rend before the hammer and the horseman riding in,
Crying that all men at the last, and at the worst and at the last,
Have found the place where England ends and England can begin.

His horse-hoofs go before you,
Far beyond your bursting tyres;
And time is bridged behind him
And our sons are with our sires.
A trailing meteor on the Downs he rides above the rotting towns,
The Horseman of Apocalypse, the Rider of the Shires.
For London Bridge is broken down, broken down, broken down;
Blow the horn of Huntingdon from Scotland to the sea—
. . . Only a flash of thunder-light, a flying dream of thunder-light,
Had shown under the shattered sky a people that were free.
THE TRINKETS

A wandering world of rivers,
A wavering world of trees,
If the world grow dim and dizzy
With all changes and degrees,
It is but Our Lady’s mirror
Hung dreaming in its place,
Shining with only shadows
Till she wakes it with her face.

The standing whirlpool of the stars,
The wheel of all the world,
Is a ring on Our Lady’s finger
With the suns and moons empearled
With stars for stones to please her
Who sits playing with her rings
With the great heart that a woman has
And the love of little things.

Wings of the whirlwind of the world
From here to Ispahan,
Spurning the flying forests
Are light as Our Lady’s fan:
For all things violent here and vain
Lie open and all at ease
Where God has girded heaven to guard
Her holy vanities.
THE PHILANTHROPIST

(With apologies to a beautiful poem.) Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe decrease
By cautious birth-control and die in peace)
Mellow with learning lightly took the word
That marked him not with them that love the Lord,
And told the angel of the book and pen
“Write me as one that loves his fellow-men:
For them alone I labour; to reclaim
The ragged roaming Bedouin and to tame
To ordered service; to uproot their vine
Who mock the Prophet, being mad with wine,
Let daylight through their tents and through their lives,
Number their camels, even count their wives,
Plot out the desert into streets and squares;
And count it a more fruitful work than theirs
Who lift a vain and visionary love
To your vague Allah in the skies above.”

Gently replied the angel of the pen:
“Labour in peace and love your fellow-men:
And love not God, since men alone are dear,
Only fear God; for you have cause to fear.”
ON THE Downs

When you came over the top of the world
In the great day on the Downs,
The air was crisp and the clouds were curled,
When you came over the top of the world,
And under your feet were spire and street
And seven English towns.

And I could not think that the pride was perished
As you came over the down;
Liberty, chivalry, all we cherished,
Lost in a rattle of pelf and perished;
Or the land we love that you walked above
Withering town by town.

For you came out on the dome of the earth
Like a vision of victory,
Out on the great green dome of the earth
As the great blue dome of the sky for girth,
And under your feet the shires could meet
And your eyes went out to sea.

Under your feet the towns were seven,
Alive and alone on high,
Your back to the broad white wall of heaven;
You were one and the towns were seven,
Single and one as the soaring sun
And your head upheld the sky.

And I thought of a thundering flag unfurled
And the roar of the burghers’ bell:
Beacons crackled and bolts were hurled
As you came over the top of the world;
And under your feet were chance and cheat
And the slime of the slopes of hell.
It has not been as the great wind spoke
On the great green down that day:
We have seen, wherever the wide wind spoke,
Slavery slaying the English folk:
The robbers of land we have seen command
The rulers of land obey.

We have seen the gigantic golden worms
In the garden of paradise:
We have seen the great and the wise make terms
With the peace of snakes and the pride of worms,
and them that plant make covenant
With the locust and the lice.

And the wind blows and the world goes on
And the world can say that we,
Who stood on the cliffs where the quarries shone,
Stood upon clouds that the sun shone on:
And the clouds dissunder and drown in thunder
The news that will never be.

Lady of all that have loved the people,
Light over roads astray,
Maze of steading and street and steeple,
Great as a heart that has loved the people:
Stand on the crown of the soaring down,
Lift up your arms and pray.

Only you I have not forgotten
For wreck of the world’s renown,
Rending and ending of things gone rotten,
Only the face of you unforgotten:
And your head upthrown in the skies alone
As you came over the down.
THE RED SEA

Our souls shall be Leviathans
In purple seas of wine
When drunkenness is dead with death,
And drink is all divine;
Learning in those immortal vats
What mortal vineyards mean;
For only in heaven we shall know
How happy we have been.

Like clouds that wallow in the wind
Be free to drift and drink;
Tower without insolence when we rise,
Without surrender sink:
Dreams dizzy and crazy we shall know
And have no need to write
Our blameless blasphemies of praise,
Our nightmares of delight.

For so in such misshapen shape
The vision came to me,
Where such titanian dolphins dark
Roll in a sunset sea:
Dark with dense colours, strange and strong
As terrible true love,
Haloed like fish in phospher light
The holy monsters move.

Measure is here and law, to learn,
When honour rules it so,
To lift the glass and lay it down
Or break the glass and go.
But when the world’s New Deluge boils
From the New Noah’s vine,
Our souls shall be Leviathans
In sanguine seas of wine.
FOR A WAR MEMORIAL

(Suggested Inscription probably not selected by the Committee.) The hucksters haggle in the mart
The cars and carts go by;
Senates and schools go droning on;
For dead things cannot die.

A storm stooped on the place of tombs
With bolts to blast and rive;
But these be names of many men
The lightning found alive.

If usurers rule and rights decay
And visions view once more
Great Carthage like a golden shell
Gape hollow on the shore, Still to the last of crumbling time
Upon this stone be read
How many men of England died
To prove they were not dead.
MEMORY

If I ever go back to Baltimore,
The city of Maryland,
I shall miss again as I missed before
A thousand things of the world in store,
The story standing in every door
That beckons with every hand.

I shall not know where the bonds were riven
And a hundred faiths set free,
Where a wandering cavalier had given
Her hundredth name to the Queen of Heaven,
And made oblation of feuds forgiven
To Our Lady of Liberty.

I shall not travel the tracks of fame
Where the war was not to the strong;
When Lee the last of the heroes came
With the Men of the South and a flag like flame,
And called the land by its lovely name
In the unforgotten song.

If ever I cross the sea and stray
To the city of Maryland,
I will sit on a stone and watch or pray
For a stranger’s child that was there one day:
And the child will never come back to play,
And no-one will understand.
THE ENGLISH GRAVES

Were I that wandering citizen whose city is the world,
I would not weep for all that fell before the flags were furled;
I would not let one murmur mar the trumpets volleying forth
How God grew weary of the kings, and the cold hell in the north.
But we whose hearts are homing birds have heavier thoughts of home,
Though the great eagles burn with gold on Paris or on Rome,
Who stand beside our dead and stare, like seers at an eclipse,
At the riddle of the island tale and the twilight of the ships.

For these were simple men that loved with hands and feet and eyes,
Whose souls were humbled to the hills and narrowed to the skies,
The hundred little lands within one little land that lie,
Where Severn seeks the sunset isles or Sussex scales the sky.

And what is theirs, though banners blow on Warsaw risen again,
Or ancient laughter walks in gold through the vineyards of Lorraine,
Their dead are marked on English stones, their loves on English trees,
How little is the prize they win, how mean a coin for these—
How small a shrivelled laurel-leaf lies crumpled here and curled:
They died to save their country and they only saved the world.
NIGHTMARE

The silver and violet leopard of the night
Spotted with stars and smooth with silence sprang;
And though three doors stood open, the end of light
Closed like a trap; and stillness was a clang.

Under the leopard sky of lurid stars
I strove with evil sleep the hot night long,
Dreams dumb and swollen of triumphs without wars,
Of tongueless trumpet and unanswering gong.

I saw a pale imperial pomp go by,
Helmet and hornèd mitre and heavy wreath;
Their high strange ensigns hung upon the sky
And their great shields were like the doors of death.

Their mitres were as moving pyramids
And all their crowns as marching towers were tall;
Their eyes were cold under their carven lids
And the same carven smile was on them all.

Over a paven plain that seemed unending
They passed unfaltering till it found an end
In one long shallow step; and these descending
Fared forth anew as long away to wend.

I thought they travelled for a thousand years;
And at the end was nothing for them all,
For all that splendour of sceptres and of spears,
But a new step, another easy fall.

The smile of stone seemed but a little less,
The load of silver but a little more:
And ever was that terraced wilderness
And falling plain paved like a palace floor.
Rust red as gore crawled on their arms of might
And on their faces wrinkles and not scars:
Till the dream suddenly ended; noise and light
Loosened the tyranny of the tropic stars.

But over them like a subterranean sun
I saw the sign of all the fiends that fell;
And a wild voice cried “Hasten and be done,
Is there no steepness in the stairs of hell?”

He that returns, He that remains the same,
Turned the round real world, His iron vice;
Down the grey garden paths a bird called twice,
And through three doors mysterious daylight came.
A SECOND CHILDHOOD

When all my days are ending
And I have no song to sing,
I think I shall not be too old
To stare at everything;
As I stared once at a nursery door
Or a tall tree and a swing.

Wherein God’s ponderous mercy hangs
On all my sins and me,
Because He does not take away
The terror from the tree
And stones still shine along the road
That are and cannot be.

Men grow too old for love, my love,
Men grow too old for wine,
But I shall not grow too old to see
Unearthly daylight shine,
Changing my chamber’s dust to snow
Till I doubt if it be mine.

Behold, the crowning mercies melt,
The first surprises stay;
And in my dross is dropped a gift
For which I dare not pray:
That a man grow used to grief and joy
But not to night and day.

Men grow too old for love, my love,
Men grow too old for lies;
But I shall not grow too old to see
Enormous night arise,
A cloud that is larger than the world
And a monster made of eyes.
Nor am I worthy to unloose
The latchet of my shoe;
Or shake the dust from off my feet
Or the staff that bears me through
On ground that is too good to last,
Too solid to be true.

Men grow too old to woo, my love,
Men grow too old to wed:
But I shall not grow too old to see
Hung crazily overhead
Incredible rafters when I wake
And find I am not dead.

A thrill of thunder in my hair:
Though blackening clouds be plain,
Still I am stung and startled
By the first drop of the rain:
Romance and pride and passion pass
And these are what remain.

Strange crawling carpets of the grass,
Wide windows of the sky:
So in this perilous grace of God
With all my sins go I:
And things grow new though I grow old,
Though I grow old and die.
“MEDIÆVALISM”

If men should rise and return to the noise and time of the tourney,
The name and fame of the tabard, the tangle of gules and gold,
Would these things stand and suffice for the bourne of a backward journey,
A light on our days returning, as it was in the days of old?

Nay, there is none rides back to pick up a glove or a feather,
Though the gauntlet rang with honour or the plume was more than a crown:
And hushed is the holy trumpet that called the nations together
And under the Horns of Hattin the hope of the world went down.

Ah, not in remembrance stored, but out of oblivion starting,
Because you have sought new homes and all that you sought is so,
Because you had trodden the fire and barred the door in departing,
Returns in your chosen exile the glory of long ago.

Not then when you barred the door, not then when you trod the embers,
But now, at your new road’s end, you have seen the face of a fate,
That not as a child looks back, and not as a fool remembers,
All that men took too lightly and all that they love too late.

It is you that have made no rubric for saints, no raiment for lovers,
Your caps that cry for a feather, your roofs that sigh for a spire:
Is it a dream from the dead if your own decay discovers
Alive in your rotting graveyard the worm of the world’s desire?

Therefore the old trees tower, that the green trees grow and are stunted:
Therefore these dead men mock you, that you the living are dead:
Since ever you battered the saints and the tools of your crafts were blunted,
Or shattered the glass in its glory and loaded yourselves with the lead.

When the usurer hunts the squire as the squire has hunted the peasant,
As sheep that are eaten of worms where men were eaten of sheep:
Now is the judgment of earth, and the weighing of past and present,
Who scorn to weep over ruins, behold your ruin and weep.
Have ye not known, ye fools, that have made the present a prison,
That thirst can remember water and hunger remember bread?
We went not gathering ghosts; but the shriek of your shame is arisen
Out of your own black Babel too loud; and it woke the dead.
Augurs that watched archaic birds
Such plumèd prodigies might read,
The eagles that were double-faced,
The eagle that was black indeed;
And when the battle-birds went down
And in their track the vultures come,
We know what pardon and what peace
Will keep our little masters dumb.

The men that sell what others make,
As vultures eat what others slay,
Will prove in matching plume with plume
That naught is black and all is grey;
Grey as those dingy doves that once,
By money-changers palmed and priced,
Amid the crash of tables flapped
And huddled from the wrath of Christ.

But raised for ever for a sign
Since God made anger glorious,
Where eagles black and vultures grey
Flocked back about the heroic house,
Where war is holier than peace,
Where hate is holier than love,
Shone terrible as the Holy Ghost
An eagle whiter than a dove.
THE HUNTING OF THE DRAGON

When we went hunting the Dragon
In the days when we were young,
We tossed the bright world over our shoulder
As bugle and baldrick slung;
Never was world so wild and fair
As what went by on the wind,
Never such fields of paradise
As the fields we left behind:
For this is the best of a rest for men
That men should rise and ride
Making a flying fairyland
Of market and country-side,
Wings on the cottage, wings on the wood,
Wings upon pot and pan,
For the hunting of the Dragon
That is the life of a man.

For men grow weary of fairyland
When the Dragon is a dream,
And tire of the talking bird in the tree,
The singing fish in the stream;
And the wandering stars grow stale, grow stale,
And the wonder is stiff with scorn;
For this is the honour of fairyland
And the following of the horn; Beauty on beauty called us back
When we could rise and ride,
And a woman looked out of every window
As wonderful as a bride:
And the tavern-sign as a tabard blazed,
And the children cheered and ran,
For the love of the hate of the Dragon
That is the pride of a man.

The sages called him a shadow
And the light went out of the sun:
And the wise men told us that all was well
And all was weary and one:
And then, and then, in the quiet garden,
With never a weed to kill,
We knew that his shining tail had shone
In the white road over the hill:
We knew that the clouds were flakes of flame,
We knew that the sunset fire
Was red with the blood of the Dragon
Whose death is the world’s desire.

For the horn was blown in the heart of the night
That men should rise and ride,
Keeping the tryst of a terrible jest
Never for long untried;
Drinking a dreadful blood for wine,
Never in cup or can,
The death of a deathless Dragon,
That is the life of a man.
SONNET

High on the wall that holds Jerusalem
I saw one stand under the stars like stone.
And when I perish it shall not be known
Whether he lived, some strolling son of Shem,
Or was some great ghost wearing the diadem
Of Solomon or Saladin on a throne:
I only know, the features being unshown,
I did not dare draw near and look on them.

Did ye not guess . . . the diadem might be
Plaited in stranger style by hands of hate . . .
But when I looked, the wall was desolate
And the grey starlight powdered tower and tree:
And vast and vague beyond the Golden Gate
Heaved Moab of the mountains like a sea.
FANTASIA

The happy men that lose their heads
They find their heads in heaven,
As cherub heads with cherub wings,
And cherub haloes even:
Out of the infinite evening lands
Along the sunset sea,
Leaving the purple fields behind,
The cherub wings beat down the wind
Back to the groping body and blind
As the bird back to the tree.

Whether the plumes be passion-red
For him that truly dies
By headsmen’s blade or battle-axe,
Or blue like butterflies,
For him that lost it in a lane
In April’s fits and starts,
His folly is forgiven then:
But higher, and far beyond our ken,
Is the healing of the unhappy men,
The men that lost their hearts.

Is there not pardon for the brave
And broad release above,
Who lost their heads for liberty
Or lost their hearts for love?
Or is the wise man wise indeed
Whom larger thoughts keep whole?
Who sees life equal like a chart,
Made strong to play the saner part,
And keep his head and keep his heart,
And only lose his soul.
A CHRISTMAS CAROL

(The Chief Constable has issued a statement declaring that carol singing in the streets by children is illegal, and morally and physically injurious. He appeals to the public to discourage the practice.—Daily Paper.) God rest you merry gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay;
The Herald Angels cannot sing,
The cops arrest them on the wing,
And warn them of the docketing
Of anything they say.

God rest you merry gentlemen,
May nothing you dismay:
On your reposeful cities lie
Deep silence, broken only by
The motor horn’s melodious cry,
The hooter’s happy bray.

So, when the song of children ceased
And Herod was obeyed,
In his high hall Corinthian
With purple and with peacock fan,
Rested that merry gentleman;
And nothing him dismayed.
TO CAPTAIN FRYATT

Trampled yet red is the last of the embers,
Red the last cloud of a sun that has set;
What of your sleeping though Flandes remembers,
What of your waking, if England forget?

Why should you share in the hearts that we harden,
In the shame of our nature, who see it and live?
How more than the godly the greedy can pardon,
How well and how quickly the hungry forgive.

Ah, well if the soil of the stranger had wrapped you,
While the lords that you served and the friends that you knew
Hawk in the marts of the tyrants that trapped you,
Tout in the shops of the butchers that slew.

Why should you wake for a realm that is rotten,
Stuffed with their bribes and as dead to their debts?
Sleep and forget us, as we have forgotten;
For Flandes remembers and England forgets.
FOR FOUR GUILDS:

I. THE GLASS-STAINERS

To every Man his Mystery,
A trade and only one:
The masons make the hives of men,
The domes of grey or dun,
But we have wrought in rose and gold
The houses of the sun.

The shipwrights build the houses high,
Whose green foundations sway
Alive with fish like little flames,
When the wind goes out to slay.
But we abide with painted sails
The cyclone of the day.

The weavers make the clothes of men
And coats for everyone;
They walk the streets like sunset clouds;
But we have woven and spun
In scarlet or in golden-green
The gay coats of the sun.

You whom the usurers and the lords
With insolent liveries trod,
Deep in dark church behold, above
Their lance-lengths by a rod,
Where we have blazed the tabard
Of the trumpeter of God.
FOR FOUR GUILDS:

II. THE BRIDGE-BUILDERS

In the world’s whitest morning
As hoary with hope,
The Builder of Bridges
Was priest and was pope:
And the mitre of mystery
And the canopy his,
Who darkened the chasms
And domed the abyss.

To eastward and westward
Spread wings at his word
The arch with the key-stone
That stoops like a bird;
That rides the wild air
And the daylight cast under;
The highway of danger,
The gateway of wonder.

Of his throne were the thunders
That rivet and fix
Wild weddings of strangers
That meet and not mix;
The town and the cornland;
The bride and the groom:
In the breaking of bridges
Is treason and doom.

But he bade us, who fashion
The road that can fly,
That we build not too heavy
And build not too high:
Seeing alway that under
The dark arch’s bend  
Shine death and white daylight  
Unchanged to the end.

Who walk on his mercy  
Walk light, as he saith,  
Seeing that our life  
Is a bridge above death;  
And the world and its gardens  
And hills, as ye heard,  
Are born above space  
On the wings of a bird.

Not high and not heavy  
Is building of his:  
When ye seal up the flood  
And forget the abyss,  
When your towers are uplifted,  
Your banners unfurled,  
In the breaking of bridges  
Is the end of the world.
FOR FOUR GUILDS:

III. THE STONE-MASONS

We have graven the mountain of God with hands,
As our hands were graven of God, they say,
Where the seraphs burn in the sun like brands
And the devils carry the rains away;
Making a thrift of the throats of hell,
Our gargoyles gather the roaring rain,
Whose yawn is more than a frozen yell
And their very vomiting not in vain.

Wilder than all that a tongue can utter,
Wiser than all that is told in words,
The wings of stone of the soaring gutter
Fly out and follow the flight of the birds;
The rush and rout of the angel wars
Stand out above the astounded street,
Where we flung our gutters against the stars
For a sign that the first and the last shall meet.

We have graven the forest of heaven with hands,
Being great with a mirth too gross for pride,
In the stone that battered him Stephen stands
And Peter himself is petrified:
Such hands as have grubbed in the glebe for bread
Have bidden the blank rock blossom and thrive,
Such hands as have stricken a live man dead
Have struck, and stricken the dead alive.

Fold your hands before heaven in praying,
Lift up your hands into heaven and cry;
But look where our dizziest spires are saying
What the hands of a man did up in the sky:
Drenched before you have heard the thunder,
White before you have felt the snow;
For the giants lift up their hands to wonder
How high the hands of a man could go.
FOR FOUR GUILDS:

IV. THE BELL-RINGERS

The angels are singing like birds in a tree
In the organ of good St. Cecily:
And the parson reads with his hand upon
The graven eagle of great St. John:
But never the fluted pipes shall go
Like the fifes of an army all a-row,
Merrily marching down the street
To the marts where the busy and idle meet;
And never the brazen bird shall fly
Out of the window and into the sky,
Till men in cities and shires and ships
Look up at the living Apocalypse.

But all can hark at the dark of even
The bells that bay like the hounds of heaven,
Tolling and telling that over and under,
In the ways of the air like a wandering thunder,
The hunt is up over hills untrod:
For the wind is the way of the dogs of God:
From the tyrant’s tower to the outlaw’s den
Hunting the souls of the sons of men.
Ruler and robber and pedlar and peer,
Who will not harken and yet will hear;
Filling men’s heads with the hurry and hum
Making them welcome before they come.

And we poor men stand under the steeple
Drawing the cords that can draw the people,
And in our leash like the leaping dogs
Are God’s most deafening demagogues:
And we are but little, like dwarfs underground,
While hang up in heaven the houses of sound,
Moving like mountains that faith sets free,
Yawning like caverns that roar with the sea,
As awfully loaded, as airily buoyed,
Armoured archangels that trample the void:
Wild as with dancing and weighty with dooms,
Heavy as their panoply, light as their plumes.

Neither preacher nor priest are we:
Each man mount to his own degree:
Only remember that just such a cord
Tosses in heaven the trumpet and sword;
Souls on their terraces, saints on their towers,
Rise up in arms at alarum like ours:
Glow like great watchfires that redden the skies
Titans whose wings are a glory of eyes,
Crowned constellations by twelves and by sevens,
Domed dominations more old than the heavens,
Virtues that thunder and thrones that endure
Sway like a bell to the prayers of the poor.
THE CONVERT

After one moment when I bowed my head
And the whole world turned over and came upright,
And I came out where the old road shone white,
I walked the ways and heard what all men said,
Forests of tongues, like autumn leaves unshed,
Being not unlovable but strange and light;
Old riddles and new creeds, not in despite
But softly, as men smile about the dead.

The sages have a hundred maps to give
That trace their crawling cosmos like a tree,
They rattle reason out through many a sieve
That stores the sand and lets the gold go free:
And all these things are less than dust to me
Because my name is Lazarus and I live.
SONGS OF EDUCATION
SONGS OF EDUCATION:

I. HISTORY

Form 991785, Sub-Section D

The Roman threw us a road, a road,
And sighed and strolled away:
The Saxon gave us a raid, a raid,
A raid that came to stay;
The Dane went west, but the Dane confessed
That he went a bit too far;
And we all became, by another name,
The Imperial race we are.

Chorus

The Imperial race, the inscrutable race,
The invincible race we are.

Though Sussex hills are bare, are bare,
And Sussex weald is wide,
From Chichester to Chester
Men saw the Norman ride;
He threw his sword in the air and sang
To a sort of a light guitar;
It was all the same, for we all became
The identical nobs we are.

Chorus

The identical nobs, individual nobs
Unmistakable nobs we are.

The people lived on the land, the land,
They pottered about and prayed;
They built a cathedral here and there
Or went on a small crusade:
Till the bones of Becket were bundled out
For the fun of a fat White Czar,
And we all became, in spoil and flame,
The intelligent lot we are.

Chorus

The intelligent lot, the intuitive lot,
The infallible lot we are.

O Warwick woods are green, are green,
But Warwick trees can fall:
And Birmingham grew so big, so big,
And Stratford stayed so small.
Till the hooter howled to the morning lark
That sang to the morning star;
And we all became, in freedom’s name,
The fortunate chaps we are.

Chorus

The fortunate chaps, felicitous chaps,
The fairy-like chaps we are.

The people they left the land, the land,
But they went on working hard;
And the village green that had got mislaid
Turned up in the squire’s back-yard:
But twenty men of us all got work
On a bit of his motor car;
And we all became, with the world’s acclaim,
The marvellous mugs we are: Chorus

The marvellous mugs, miraculous mugs,
The mystical mugs we are.
SONGS OF EDUCATION:

II. GEOGRAPHY

Form 17955301, Sub-Section Z

The earth is a place on which England is found,
And you find it however you twirl the globe round;
For the spots are all red and the rest is all grey,
And that is the meaning of Empire Day.

Gibraltar’s a rock that you see very plain,
And attached to its base is the district of Spain.
And the island of Malta is marked further on,
Where some natives were known as the Knights of St. John.
Then Cyprus, and east to the Suez Canal,
That was conquered by Dizzy and Rothschild his pal
With the Sword of the Lord in the old English way;
And that is the meaning of Empire Day.

Our principal imports come far as Cape Horn;
For necessities, cocoa; for luxuries, corn;
Thus Brahmins are born for the rice-field, and thus,
The Gods made the Greeks to grow currants for us;
Tobacco and petrol and Jazzing and Jews:
The Jazzing will pass but the Jews they will stay;
And that is the meaning of Empire Day.

Our principal exports, all labelled and packed,
At the ends of the earth are delivered intact:
Our soap or our salmon can travel in tins
Between the two poles and as like as two pins;
So that Lancashire merchants whenever they like
Can water the beer of a man in Klondike
Or poison the meat of a man in Bombay;
And that is the meaning of Empire Day.
The day of St. George is a musty affair
Which Russians and Greeks are permitted to share;
The day of Trafalgar is Spanish in name
And the Spaniards refuse to pronounce it the same;
But the Day of the Empire from Canada came
With Morden and Borden and Beaverbrook’s fame
And saintly seraphical souls such as they:
And that is the meaning of Empire Day.
SONGS OF EDUCATION:

III. FOR THE CRÊCHE

Form 8277059, Sub-Section K

I remember my mother, the day that we met,
A thing I shall never entirely forget;
And I toy with the fancy that, young as I am,
I should know her again if we met in a tram.
But mother is happy in turning a crank
That increases the balance at somebody’s bank;
And I feel satisfaction that mother is free
From the sinister task of attending to me.

They have brightened our room, that is spacious and cool,
With diagrams used in the Idiot School,
And Books for the Blind that will teach us to see;
But mother is happy, for mother is free.
For mother is dancing up forty-eight floors,
For love of the Leeds International Stores,
And the flame of that faith might perhaps have grown cold,
With the care of a baby of seven weeks old.

For mother is happy in greasing a wheel
For somebody else, who is cornering Steel;
And though our one meeting was not very long,
She took the occasion to sing me this song:
“O, hush thee, my baby, the time soon will come
When thy sleep will be broken with hooting and hum;
There are handles want turning and turning all day,
And knobs to be pressed in the usual way; O, hush thee, my baby, take rest while I croon,
For Progress comes early, and Freedom too soon.”
SONGS OF EDUCATION:

IV. CITIZENSHIP

Form 8889512, Sub-Section Q

How slowly learns the child at school
The names of all the nobs that rule
From Ponsonby to Pennant;
Ere his bewildered mind find rest,
Knowing his host can be a Guest,
His landlord is a Tennant.

He knew not, at the age of three,
What Lord St. Leger next will be
Or what he was before;
A Primrose in the social swim
A Mr. Primrose is to him,
And he is nothing more.

But soon, about the age of ten,
He finds he is a Citizen,
And knows his way about;
Can pause within, or just beyond,
The line ’twixt Mond and Demi-Mond,
’Twixt Getting On—or Out.

The Citizen will take his share
(In every sense) as bull and bear;
Nor need this oral ditty
Invoke the philologic pen
To show you that a Citizen
Means Something in the City.

Thus gains he, with the virile gown,
The fasces and the civic crown,
The forum of the free;
Not more to Rome’s high law allied
Is Devonport in all his pride
Or Lipton’s self than he.

For he will learn, if he will try,
The deep interior truths whereby
We rule the Commonwealth;
What is the Food-Controller’s fee
And whether the Health Ministry
Are in it for their health.
SONGS OF EDUCATION:

V. THE HIGHER MATHEMATICS

Form 339125, Sub-Section M

Twice one is two,
Twice two is four,
But twice two is ninety-six if you know the way to score.
Half of two is one,
Half of four is two,
But half of four is forty per cent. if your name is Montagu:
For everything else is on the square
If done by the best quadratics;
And nothing is low in High Finance
Or the Higher Mathematics.

A straight line is straight
And a square mile is flat:
But you learn in trigonometrics a trick worth two of that.
Two straight lines
Can’t enclose a Space,
But they can enclose a Corner to support the Chosen Race:
For you never know what Dynamics do
With the lower truths of Statics;
And half of two is a touring car
In the Higher Mathematics.

There is a place apart
Beyond the solar ray,
Where parallel straight lines can meet in an unofficial way.
There is a room that holds
The examiner or his clerks,
Where you can square the circle or the man that gives the marks.
Where you hide in the cellar and then look down
On the poets that live in the attics;
For the whole of the house is upside down
In the Higher Mathematics.
SONGS OF EDUCATION:

VI. HYGIENE

Form 394411102, Sub-Section X

“All practical Eugenists are agreed on the importance of sleep.”—The Eugenic Congress.

When Science taught mankind to breathe
A little while ago,
Only a wise and thoughtful few
Were really in the know:
Nor could the Youth his features wreathe,
Puffing from all the lungs beneath:
When Duty whispered softly “Breathe!”
The Youth would answer “Blow!”

When Science proved with lucid care
The need of Exercise,
Our thoughtless Youth was climbing trees
Or lightly blacking eyes:
To reckless idlers breaking bounds
For football or for hare-and-hounds,
Or fighting hard for fourteen rounds,
It came as a surprise.

But when she boldly counsels Sleep
To persons when in bed,
Then, then indeed men blush to see
The daybreak blushing red:
The early risers whom we term
Healthy, grow sickly and infirm;
The Early Bird who caught the Worm
Will catch the Germ instead.

For this at least be Science praised
If all the rest be rot,
That now she snubs the priggish child
That quits too soon his cot:
The pharisaic pachyderm
Of spiritual pride shall squirm:
The Early Bird catches the worm,
The Worm that dieth not.
THE WILD KNIGHT AND OTHER POEMS

G. K. CHESTERTON
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

THE WILD KNIGHT AND OTHER POEMS

TABLE OF CONTENTS
 Note

THE WILD KNIGHT
BY THE BABE UNBORN
THE WORLD’S LOVER
THE SKELETON
A CHORD OF COLOUR
THE HAPPY MAN
THE UNPARDONABLE SIN
A NOVELTY
ULTIMATE
THE DONKEY
THE BEATIFIC VISION
THE HOPE OF THE STREETS
ECCLESIASTES
THE SONG OF THE CHILDREN

THE FISH
GOLD LEAVES
THOU SHALT NOT KILL
A CERTAIN EVENING
A MAN AND HIS IMAGE
THE MARINER

THE TRIUMPH OF MAN
CYCLOPEAN
JOSEPH
MODERN ELFLAND
ETERNITIES
A CHRISTMAS CAROL
ALONE
KING’S CROSS STATION
THE HUMAN TREE
TO THEM THAT MOURN
THE OUTLAW
BEHIND
THE END OF FEAR
THE HOLY OF HOLIES
THE MIRROR OF MADMEN
E.C.B.
THE DESECRATERS
AN ALLIANCE
THE ANCIENT OF DAYS
THE LAST MASQUERADE
THE EARTH’S SHAME
VANITY
THE LAMP POST
THE PESSIMIST
A FAIRY TALE
A PORTRAIT
FEMINA CONTRA MUNDUM
TO A CERTAIN NATION
THE PRAISE OF DUST

THE BALLAD OF THE BATTLE OF GIBEON

‘VULGARISED’

THE BALLAD OF GOD-MAKERS

AT NIGHT

THE WOOD-CUTTER

ART COLOURS

THE TWO WOMEN

THE WILD KNIGHT

THE WILD KNIGHT

GOOD NEWS
NOTE

My thanks are due to the Editors of the Outlook and the Speaker for the kind permission they have given me to reprint a considerable number of the following poems. They have been selected and arranged rather with a view to unity of spirit than to unity of time or value; many of them being juvenile.
THE WILD KNIGHT

Another tattered rhymster in the ring,
With but the old plea to the sneering schools,
That on him too, some secret night in spring
Came the old frenzy of a hundred fools To make some thing: the old want dark
and deep,
The thirst of men, the hunger of the stars,
Since first it tinged even the Eternal’s sleep,
With monstrous dreams of trees and towns and mars.

When all He made for the first time He saw,
Scattering stars as misers shake their pelf.
Then in the last strange wrath broke His own law,
And made a graven image of Himself.
BY THE BABE UNBORN

If trees were tall and grasses short,
As in some crazy tale,
If here and there a sea were blue
Beyond the breaking pale, If a fixed fire hung in the air
To warm me one day through,
If deep green hair grew on great hills,
I know what I should do.

In dark I lie: dreaming that there
Are great eyes cold or kind,
And twisted streets and silent doors,
And living men behind.

Let storm-clouds come: better an hour,
And leave to weep and fight,
Than all the ages I have ruled
The empires of the night.

I think that if they gave me leave
Within that world to stand,
I would be good through all the day
I spent in fairyland.

They should not hear a word from me
Of selfishness or scorn,
If only I could find the door,
If only I were born.
THE WORLD’S LOVER

My eyes are full of lonely mirth:
Reeling with want and worn with scars,
For pride of every stone on earth,
I shake my spear at all the stars.

A live bat beats my crest above,
Lean foxes nose where I have trod,
And on my naked face the love
Which is the loneliness of God.

Outlawed: since that great day gone by—
When before prince and pope and queen
I stood and spoke a blasphemy—
‘Behold the summer leaves are green.’

They cursed me: what was that to me
Who in that summer darkness furled,
With but an owl and snail to see,
Had blessed and conquered all the world?

They bound me to the scourging-stake,
They laid their whips of thorn on me;
I wept to see the green rods break,
Though blood be beautiful to see.

Beneath the gallows’ foot abhorred
The crowds cry ‘Crucify!’ and ‘Kill!’
Higher the priests sing, ‘Praise the Lord,
The warlock dies’; and higher still Shall heaven and earth hear one cry sent
Even from the hideous gibbet height,
‘Praise to the Lord Omnipotent,
The vultures have a feast to-night.’
THE SKELETON

Chattering finch and water-fly
Are not merrier than I;
Here among the flowers I lie
Laughing everlastingly.
No: I may not tell the best;
Surely, friends, I might have guessed
Death was but the good King’s jest,
It was hid so carefully.
A CHORD OF COLOUR

My Lady clad herself in grey,
That caught and clung about her throat;
Then all the long grey winter day
On me a living splendour smote;
And why grey palmers holy are,
And why grey minsters great in story,
And grey skies ring the morning star,
And grey hairs are a crown of glory.

My Lady clad herself in green,
Like meadows where the wind-waves pass;
Then round my spirit spread, I ween,
A splendour of forgotten grass.
Then all that dropped of stem or sod,
Hoarded as emeralds might be,
I bowed to every bush, and trod
Amid the live grass fearfully.

My Lady clad herself in blue,
Then on me, like the seer long gone,
The likeness of a sapphire grew,
The throne of him that sat thereon.
Then knew I why the Fashioner
Splashed reckless blue on sky and sea;
And ere ’twas good enough for her,
He tried it on Eternity.

Beneath the gnarled old Knowledge-tree
Sat, like an owl, the evil sage:
‘The World’s a bubble,’ solemnly
He read, and turned a second page.
‘A bubble, then, old crow,’ I cried,
‘God keep you in your weary wit!
‘A bubble—have you ever spied
‘The colours I have seen on it?’
THE HAPPY MAN

To teach the grey earth like a child,
To bid the heavens repent,
I only ask from Fate the gift
Of one man well content.

Him will I find: though when in vain
I search the feast and mart,
The fading flowers of liberty,
The painted masks of art.

I only find him at the last,
On one old hill where nod
Golgotha’s ghastly trinity—
Three persons and one god.
THE UNPARDONABLE SIN

I do not cry, beloved, neither curse.
Silence and strength, these two at least are good.
He gave me sun and stars and ought He could,
But not a woman’s love; for that is hers.

He sealed her heart from sage and questioner—
Yea, with seven seals, as he has sealed the grave.
And if she give it to a drunken slave,
The Day of Judgment shall not challenge her.

Only this much: if one, deserving well,
Touching your thin young hands and making suit,
Feel not himself a crawling thing, a brute,
Buried and bricked in a forgotten hell; Prophet and poet be he over sod,
Prince among angels in the highest place,
God help me, I will smite him on the face,
Before the glory of the face of God.
A NOVELTY

Why should I care for the Ages
Because they are old and grey?
To me, like sudden laughter,
The stars are fresh and gay;
The world is a daring fancy,
And finished yesterday.

Why should I bow to the Ages
Because they were drear and dry?
Slow trees and ripening meadows
For me go roaring by,
A living charge, a struggle
To escalade the sky.

The eternal suns and systems,
Solid and silent all,
To me are stars of an instant,
Only the fires that fall
From God’s good rocket, rising
On this night of carnival.
ULTIMATE

The vision of a haloed host
That weep around an empty throne;
And, aureoles dark and angels dead,
Man with his own life stands alone.

‘I am,’ he says his bankrupt creed:
‘I am,’ and is again a clod:
The sparrow starts, the grasses stir,
For he has said the name of God.
THE DONKEY

When fishes flew and forests walked
And figs grew upon thorn,
Some moment when the moon was blood
Then surely I was born; With monstrous head and sickening cry
And ears like errant wings,
The devil’s walking parody
On all four-footed things.

The tattered outlaw of the earth,
Of ancient crooked will;
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,
I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour;
One far fierce hour and sweet:
There was a shout about my ears,
And palms before my feet.
THE BEATIFIC VISION

Through what fierce incarnations, furled
In fire and darkness, did I go,
Ere I was worthy in the world
To see a dandelion grow?

Well, if in any woes or wars
I bought my naked right to be,
Grew worthy of the grass, nor gave
The wren, my brother, shame for me.

But what shall God not ask of him
In the last time when all is told,
Who saw her stand beside the hearth,
The firelight garbing her in gold?
THE HOPE OF THE STREETS

The still sweet meadows shimmered: and I stood
And cursed them, bloom of hedge and bird of tree,
And bright and high beyond the hunch-backed wood
The thunder and the splendour of the sea.

Give back the Babylon where I was born,
The lips that gape give back, the hands that grope,
And noise and blood and suffocating scorn
An eddy of fierce faces—and a hope That ‘mid those myriad heads one head
find place,
With brown hair curled like breakers of the sea,
And two eyes set so strangely in the face
That all things else are nothing suddenly.
ECCLESIASTES

There is one sin: to call a green leaf grey,
Whereat the sun in heaven shuddereth.
There is one blasphemy: for death to pray,
For God alone knoweth the praise of death.

There is one creed: ‘neath no world-terror’s wing
Apples forget to grow on apple-trees.
There is one thing is needful—everything—
The rest is vanity of vanities.
THE SONG OF THE CHILDREN

The World is ours till sunset,
Holly and fire and snow;
And the name of our dead brother
Who loved us long ago.

The grown folk mighty and cunning,
They write his name in gold;
But we can tell a little
Of the million tales he told.

He taught them laws and watchwords,
To preach and struggle and pray;
But he taught us deep in the hayfield
The games that the angels play.

Had he stayed here for ever,
Their world would be wise as ours—
And the king be cutting capers,
And the priest be picking flowers.

But the dark day came: they gathered:
On their faces we could see
They had taken and slain our brother,
And hanged him on a tree.
THE FISH

Dark the sea was: but I saw him,
One great head with goggle eyes,
Like a diabolic cherub
Flying in those fallen skies.

I have heard the hoarse deniers,
I have known the wordy wars;
I have seen a man, by shouting,
Seek to orphan all the stars.

I have seen a fool half-fashioned
Borrow from the heavens a tongue,
So to curse them more at leisure—
—And I trod him not as dung.

For I saw that finny goblin
Hidden in the abyss untrod;
And I knew there can be laughter
On the secret face of God.

Blow the trumpets, crown the sages,
Bring the age by reason fed!
(He that sitteth in the heavens,
‘He shall laugh’—the prophet said.)
GOLD LEAVES

Lo! I am come to autumn,
When all the leaves are gold;
Grey hairs and golden leaves cry out
The year and I are old.

In youth I sought the prince of men,
Captain in cosmic wars,
Our Titan, even the weeds would show
Defiant, to the stars.

But now a great thing in the street
Seems any human nod,
Where shift in strange democracy
The million masks of God.

In youth I sought the golden flower
Hidden in wood or wold,
But I am come to autumn,
When all the leaves are gold.
THOU SHALT NOT KILL

I had grown weary of him; of his breath  
And hands and features I was sick to death.  
Each day I heard the same dull voice and tread;  
I did not hate him: but I wished him dead.  
And he must with his blank face fill my life—  
Then my brain blackened; and I snatched a knife.

But ere I struck, my soul’s grey deserts through  
A voice cried, ‘Know at least what thing you do.’  
‘This is a common man: knowest thou, O soul,  
What this thing is? somewhere where seasons roll  
There is some living thing for whom this man  
Is as seven heavens girt into a span,  
For some one soul you take the world away—  
Now know you well your deed and purpose. Slay!’

Then I cast down the knife upon the ground  
And saw that mean man for one moment crowned.  
I turned and laughed: for there was no one by—  
The man that I had sought to slay was I.
A CERTAIN EVENING

That night the whole world mingled,
The souls were babes at play,
And angel danced with devil.
And God cried, ‘Holiday!’

The sea had climbed the mountain peaks,
And shouted to the stars
To come to play: and down they came
Splashing in happy wars.

The pine grew apples for a whim,
The cart-horse built a nest;
The oxen flew, the flowers sang,
The sun rose in the west.

And ‘neath the load of many worlds,
The lowest life God made
Lifted his huge and heavy limbs
And into heaven strayed.

To where the highest life God made
Before His presence stands;
But God himself cried, ‘Holiday!’
And she gave me both her hands.
A MAN AND HIS IMAGE

All day the nations climb and crawl and pray
In one long pilgrimage to one white shrine,
Where sleeps a saint whose pardon, like his peace,
Is wide as death, as common, as divine.

His statue in an aureole fills the shrine,
The reckless nightingale, the roaming fawn,
Share the broad blessing of his lifted hands,
Under the canopy, above the lawn.

But one strange night, a night of gale and flood,
A sound came louder than the wild wind’s tone;
The grave-gates shook and opened: and one stood
Blue in the moonlight, rotten to the bone.

Then on the statue, graven with holy smiles,
There came another smile—tremendous—one
Of an Egyptian god. ‘Why should you rise?
‘Do I not guard your secret from the sun?

The nations come; they kneel among the flowers
Sprung from your blood, blossoms of May and June,
Which do not poison them—is it not strange?
Speak!’ And the dead man shuddered in the moon.

Shall I not cry the truth?’—the dead man cowered—
Is it not sad, with life so tame and cold,
What earth should fade into the sun’s white fires
With the best jest in all its tales untold?

‘If I should cry that in this shrine lie hid
Stories that Satan from his mouth would spew;
Wild tales that men in hell tell hoarsely—speak!
Saint and Deliverer! Should I slander you?’
Slowly the cowering corse reared up its head,  
‘Nay, I am vile . . . but when for all to see, 
You stand there, pure and painless—death of life! 
Let the stars fall—I say you slander me!

‘You make me perfect, public, colourless; 
You make my virtues sit at ease—you lie! 
For mine were never easy—lost or saved, 
I had a soul—I was. And where am I?

Where is my good? the little real hoard,  
The secret tears, the sudden chivalries;  
The tragic love, the futile triumph—where?  
Thief, dog, and son of devils—where are these?

I will lift up my head: in leprous loves  
Lost, and the soul’s dishonourable scars—  
By God I was a better man than This  
That stands and slanders me to all the stars.

‘Come down!’ And with an awful cry, the corse  
Sprang on the sacred tomb of many tales,  
And stone and bone, locked in a loathsome strife,  
Swayed to the singing of the nightingales.

Then one was thrown: and where the statue stood  
Under the canopy, above the lawn,  
The corse stood; grey and lean, with lifted hands  
Raised in tremendous welcome to the dawn.

‘Now let all nations climb and crawl and pray;  
Though I be basest of my old red clan,  
They shall not scale, with cries or sacrifice,  
The stature of the spirit of a man.’
THE MARINER

The violet scent is sacred
Like dreams of angels bright;
The hawthorn smells of passion
Told in a moonless night.

But the smell is in my nostrils,
Through blossoms red or gold,
Of my own green flower unfading,
A bitter smell and bold.

The lily smells of pardon,
The rose of mirth; but mine
Smells shrewd of death and honour,
And the doom of Adam’s line.

The heavy scent of wine-shops
Floats as I pass them by,
But never a cup I quaff from,
And never a house have I.

Till dropped down forty fathoms,
I lie eternally;
And drink from God’s own goblet
The green wine of the sea.
THE TRIUMPH OF MAN

I plod and peer amid mean sounds and shapes,  
I hunt for dusty gain and dreary praise,  
And slowly pass the dismal grinning days,  
Monkeying each other like a line of apes.

What care? There was one hour amid all these  
When I had stripped off like a tawdry glove  
My starriest hopes and wants, for very love  
Of time and desolate eternities.

Yea, for one great hour’s triumph, not in me  
Nor any hope of mine did I rejoice,  
But in a meadow game of girls and boys  
Some sunset in the centuries to be.
CYCLOPEAN

A mountainous and mystic brute
No rein can curb, no arrow shoot,
Upon whose domed deformed back
I sweep the planets scorching track.

Old is the elf, and wise, men say,
His hair grows green as ours grows grey;
He mocks the stars with myriad hands.
High as that swinging forest stands.

But though in pigmy wanderings dull
I scour the deserts of his skull,
I never find the face, eyes, teeth.
Lowering or laughing underneath.

I met my foe in an empty dell,
His face in the sun was naked hell.
I thought, ‘One silent, bloody blow.
No priest would curse, no crowd would know.’

Then cowered: a daisy, half concealed,
Watched for the fame of that poor field;
And in that flower and suddenly
Earth opened its one eye on me.
JOSEPH

If the stars fell; night’s nameless dreams
Of bliss and blasphemy came true,
If skies were green and snow were gold,
And you loved me as I love you; O long light hands and curled brown hair,
And eyes where sits a naked soul;
Dare I even then draw near and burn
My fingers in the aureole?

Yes, in the one wise foolish hour
God gives this strange strength to a man.
He can demand, though not deserve,
Where ask he cannot, seize he can.

But once the blood’s wild wedding o’er,
Were not dread his, half dark desire,
To see the Christ-child in the cot,
The Virgin Mary by the fire?
MODERN ELFLAND

I Cut a staff in a churchyard copse,
I clad myself in ragged things,
I set a feather in my cap
That fell out of an angel’s wings.

I filled my wallet with white stones,
I took three foxgloves in my hand,
I slung my shoes across my back,
And so I went to fairyland.

But Lo, within that ancient place
Science had reared her iron crown,
And the great cloud of steam went up
That telleth where she takes a town.

But cowled with smoke and starred with lamps
That strange land’s light was still its own;
The word that witched the woods and hills
Spoke in the iron and the stone.

Not Nature’s hand had ever curved
That mute unearthly porter’s spine.
Like sleeping dragon’s sudden eyes
The signals leered along the line.

The chimneys thronging crooked or straight
Were fingers signalling the sky;
The dog that strayed across the street
Seemed four-legged by monstrosity.

‘In vain,’ I cried, ‘though you too touch
The new time’s desecrating hand,
Through all the noises of a town
I hear the heart of fairyland.’
I read the name above a door,
Then through my spirit pealed and passed:
‘This is the town of thine own home,
And thou hast looked on it at last.’
ETERNITIES

I cannot count the pebbles in the brook.
Well hath He spoken: ‘Swear not by thy head,
Thou knowest not the hairs,’ though He, we read,
Writes that wild number in his own strange book.

I cannot count the sands or search the seas,
Death cometh, and I leave so much untrod.
Grant my immortal aureole, O my God,
And I will name the leaves upon the trees.

In heaven I shall stand on gold and glass,
Still brooding earth’s arithmetic to spell;
Or see the fading of the fires of hell
Ere I have thanked my God for all the grass.
A CHRISTMAS CAROL

The Christ-child lay on Mary’s lap,
His hair was like a light.
(O weary, weary were the world,
But here is all aright.)
The Christ-child lay on Mary’s breast,
His hair was like a star.
(O stern and cunning are the kings,
But here the true hearts are.)
The Christ-child lay on Mary’s heart,
His hair was like a fire.
(O weary, weary is the world,
But here the world’s desire.)
The Christ-child stood at Mary’s knee,
His hair was like a crown,
And all the flowers looked up at him.
And all the stars looked down.
ALONE

Blessings there are of cradle and of clan,
Blessings that fall of priests’ and princes’ hands;
But never blessing full of lives and lands,
Broad as the blessing of a lonely man.

Though that old king fell from his primal throne,
And ate among the cattle, yet this pride
Had found him in the deepest grass, and cried
An ‘Ecce Homo’ with the trumpets blown.

And no mad tyrant, with almighty ban,
Who in strong madness dreams himself divine,
But hears through fumes of flattery and of wine
The thunder of this blessing name him man.

Let all earth rot past saints’ and seraphs’ plea,
Yet shall a Voice cry through its last lost war,
‘This is the world, this red wreck of a star,
That a man blessed beneath an alder-tree.’
KING’S CROSS STATION

This circled cosmos whereof man is god
Has suns and stars of green and gold and red,
And cloudlands of great smoke, that range o’er range
Far floating, hide its iron heavens o’erhead.

God! shall we ever honour what we are,
And see one moment ere the age expire,
The vision of man shouting and erect,
Whirled by the shrieking steeds of flood and fire?

Or must Fate act the same grey farce again,
And wait, till one, amid Time’s wrecks and scars,
Speaks to a ruin here, ‘What poet-race
Shot such cyclopean arches at the stars?’
THE HUMAN TREE

Many have Earth’s lovers been,
Tried in seas and wars, I ween;
Yet the mightiest have I seen:
Yea, the best saw I.
One that in a field alone
Stood up stiller than a stone
Lest a moth should fly.

Birds had nested in his hair,
On his shoon were mosses rare.
Insect empires flourished there,
Worms in ancient wars;
But his eyes burn like a glass,
Hearing a great sea of grass
Roar towards the stars.

From, them to the human tree
Rose a cry continually,
‘Thou art still, our Father, we
Fain would have thee nod.
Make the skies as blood below thee,
Though thou slay us, we shall know thee.
Answer us, O God!

‘Show thine ancient flame and thunder,
Split the stillness once asunder,
Lest we whisper, lest we wonder
Art thou there at all?’
But I saw him there alone,
Standing stiller than a stone
Lest a moth should fall.
TO THEM THAT MOURN

(W.E.G., May 1898) Lift up your heads: in life, in death, 
God knoweth his head was high. 
Quit we the coward’s broken breath 
Who watched a strong man die. 

If we must say, ‘No more his peer 
Cometh; the flag is furled.’ 
Stand not too near him, lest he hear 
That slander on the world. 

The good green earth he loved and trod 
Is still, with many a scar, 
Writ in the chronicles of God, 
A giant-bearing star. 

He fell: but Britain’s banner swings 
Above his sunken crown. 
Black death shall have his toll of kings 
Before that cross goes down. 

Once more shall move with mighty things 
His house of ancient tale, 
Where kings whose hands were kissed of kings 
Went in: and came out pale. 

O young ones of a darker day, 
In art’s wan colours clad, 
Whose very love and hate are grey— 
Whose very sin is sad. 

Pass on: one agony long-drawn 
Was merrier than your mirth, 
When hand-in-hand came death and dawn, 
And spring was on the earth.
THE OUTLAW

Priest, is any song-bird stricken?
Is one leaf less on the tree?
Is this wine less red and royal
That the hangman waits for me?

He upon your cross that hangeth,
It is writ of priestly pen,
On the night they built his gibbet,
Drank red wine among his men.

Quaff, like a brave man, as he did,
Wine and death as heaven pours—
This is my fate: O ye rulers,
O ye pontiffs, what is yours?

To wait trembling, lest yon loathly
Gallows-shape whereon I die,
In strange temples yet unbuilted,
Blaze upon an altar high.
BEHIND

I saw an old man like a child,
His blue eyes bright, his white hair wild,
Who turned for ever, and might not stop,
Round and round like an urchin’s top.

‘Fool,’ I cried, ‘while you spin round,
‘Others grow wise, are praised, are crowned.’
Ever the same round road he trod,
‘This is better: I seek for God.’

‘We see the whole world, left and right,
Yet at the blind back hides from sight
The unseen Master that drives us forth
To East and West, to South and North.

‘Over my shoulder for eighty years
I have looked for the gleam of the sphere of spheres.’
‘In all your turning, what have you found?’
‘At least, I know why the world goes round.’
THE END OF FEAR

Though the whole heaven be one-eyed with the moon,
Though the dead landscape seem a thing possessed,
Yet I go singing through that land oppressed
As one that singeth through the flowers of June.

No more, with forest-fingers crawling free
O’er dark flint wall that seems a wall of eyes,
Shall evil break my soul with mysteries
Of some world-poison maddening bush and tree.

No more shall leering ghosts of pimp and king
With bloody secrets veiled before me stand.
Last night I held all evil in my hand
Closed: and behold it was a little thing.

I broke the infernal gates and looked on him
Who fronts the strong creation with a curse;
Even the god of a lost universe,
Smiling above his hideous cherubim.

And pierced far down in his soul’s crypt unriven
The last black crooked sympathy and shame,
And hailed him with that ringing rainbow name
Erased upon the oldest book in heaven.

Like emptied idiot masks, sin’s loves and wars
Stare at me now: for in the night I broke
The bubble of a great world’s jest, and woke
Laughing with laughter such as shakes the stars.
THE HOLY OF HOLIES

‘Elder father, though thine eyes
Shine with hoary mysteries,
Canst thou tell what in the heart
Of a cowslip blossom lies?

‘Smaller than all lives that be,
Secret as the deepest sea,
Stands a little house of seeds,
Like an elfin’s granary, ‘Speller of the stones and weeds,
Skilled in Nature’s crafts and creeds,
Tell me what is in the heart
Of the smallest of the seeds.’

‘God Almighty, and with Him
Cherubim and Seraphim,
Filling all eternity—
Adonai Elohim.’
THE MIRROR OF MADMEN

I dreamed a dream of heaven, white as frost,
The splendid stillness of a living host;
Vast choirs of upturned faces, line o’er line.
Then my blood froze; for every face was mine.

Spirits with sunset plumage throng and pass,
Glassed darkly in the sea of gold and glass.
But still on every side, in every spot,
I saw a million selves, who saw me not.

I fled to quiet wastes, where on a stone,
Perchance, I found a saint, who sat alone;
I came behind: he turned with slow, sweet grace,
And faced me with my happy, hateful face.

I cowered like one that in a tower doth bide,
Shut in by mirrors upon every side;
Then I saw, islanded in skies alone
And silent, one that sat upon a throne.

His robe was bordered with rich rose and gold,
Green, purple, silver out of sunsets old;
But o’er his face a great cloud edged with fire,
Because it covereth the world’s desire.

But as I gazed, a silent worshipper,
Methought the cloud began to faintly stir;
Then I fell flat, and screamed with grovelling head,
‘If thou hast any lightning, strike me dead!

‘But spare a brow where the clean sunlight fell,
The crown of a new sin that sickens hell.
Let me not look aloft and see mine own
Feature and form upon the Judgment-throne.’
Then my dream snapped: and with a heart that leapt
I saw across the tavern where I slept,
The sight of all my life most full of grace,
A gin-damned drunkard’s wan half-witted face.
E.C.B.

Before the grass grew over me,
I knew one good man through and through,
And knew a soul and body joined
Are stronger than the heavens are blue.

A wisdom worthy of thy joy,
O great heart, read I as I ran;
Now, though men smite me on the face,
I cannot curse the face of man.

I loved the man I saw yestreen
Hanged with his babe’s blood on his palms.
I loved the man I saw to-day
Who knocked not when he came with alms.

Hush!—for thy sake I even faced
The knowledge that is worse than hell;
And loved the man I saw but now
Hanging head downwards in the well.
THE DESECRATERS

Witness all: that unrepenting, 
Feathers flying, music high, 
I go down to death unshaken 
By your mean philosophy.

For your wages, take my body, 
That at least to you I leave; 
Set the sulky plumes upon it, 
Bid the grinning mummers grieve.

Stand in silence: steep your raiment 
In the night that hath no star; 
Don the mortal dress of devils, 
Blacker than their spirits are.

Since ye may not, of your mercy, 
Ere I lie on such a hearse, 
Hurl me to the living jackals 
God hath built for sepulchres.
AN ALLIANCE

This is the weird of a world-old folk,
That not till the last link breaks,
Not till the night is blackest,
The blood of Hengist wakes.
When the sun is black in heaven,
The moon as blood above,
And the earth is full of hatred,
This people tells its love.

In change, eclipse, and peril,
Under the whole world’s scorn,
By blood and death and darkness
The Saxon peace is sworn;
That all our fruit be gathered,
And all our race take hands,
And the sea be a Saxon river
That runs through Saxon lands.

Lo! not in vain we bore him;
Behold it! not in vain,
Four centuries’ dooms of torture
Choked in the throat of Spain,
Ere priest or tyrant triumph—
We know how well—we know—
Bone of that bone can whiten,
Blood of that blood can flow.

Deep grows the hate of kindred,
Its roots take hold on hell;
No peace or praise can heal it,
But a stranger heals it well.
Seas shall be red as sunsets,
And kings’ bones float as foam,
And heaven be dark with vultures,
The night our son comes home.
THE ANCIENT OF DAYS

A child sits in a sunny place,
Too happy for a smile,
And plays through one long holiday
With balls to roll and pile;
A painted wind-mill by his side
Runs like a merry tune,
But the sails are the four great winds of heaven,
And the balls are the sun and moon.

A staring doll’s-house shows to him
Green floors and starry rafter,
And many-coloured graven dolls
Live for his lonely laughter.
The dolls have crowns and aureoles,
Helmets and horns and wings.
For they are the saints and seraphim,
The prophets and the kings.
THE LAST MASQUERADE

A wan new garment of young green
Touched, as you turned your soft brown hair
And in me surged the strangest prayer
Ever in lover’s heart hath been.

That I who saw your youth’s bright page,
A rainbow change from robe to robe,
Might see you on this earthly globe,
Crowned with the silver crown of age.

Your dear hair powdered in strange guise,
Your dear face touched with colours pale:
And gazing through the mask and veil
The mirth of your immortal eyes.
THE EARTH’S SHAME

Name not his deed: in shuddering and in haste
We dragged him darkly o’er the windy fell:
That night there was a gibbet in the waste,
And a new sin in hell.

Be his deed hid from commonwealths and kings,
By all men born be one true tale forgot;
But three things, braver than all earthly things,
Faced him and feared him not.

Above his head and sunken secret face
Nested the sparrow’s young and dropped not dead.
From the red blood and slime of that lost place
Grew daisies white, not red.

And from high heaven looking upon him,
Slowly upon the face of God did come
A smile the cherubim and seraphim
Hid all their faces from.
VANITY

A wan sky greener than the lawn,
A wan lawn paler than the sky.
She gave a flower into my hand,
And all the hours of eve went by.

Who knows what round the corner waits
To smite? If shipwreck, snare, or slur
Shall leave me with a head to lift,
Worthy of him that spoke with her.

A wan sky greener than the lawn,
A wan lawn paler than the sky.
She gave a flower into my hand,
And all the days of life went by.

Live ill or well, this thing is mine,
From all I guard it, ill or well.
One tawdry, tattered, faded flower
To show the jealous kings in hell.
THE LAMP POST

Laugh your best, O blazoned forests,
Me ye shall not shift or shame
With your beauty: here among you
Man hath set his spear of flame.

Lamp to lamp we send the signal,
For our lord goes forth to war;
Since a voice, ere stars were builded,
Bade him colonise a star.

Laugh ye, cruel as the morning,
Deck your heads with fruit and flower,
Though our souls be sick with pity,
Yet our hands are hard with power.

We have read your evil stories,
We have heard the tiny yell
Through the voiceless conflagration
Of your green and shining hell.

And when men, with fires and shouting,
Break your old tyrannic pales;
And where ruled a single spider
Laugh and weep a million tales.

This shall be your best of boasting:
That some poet, poor of spine.
Full and sated with our wisdom,
Full and fiery with our wine, Shall steal out and make a treaty
With the grasses and the showers,
Rail against the grey town-mother,
Fawn upon the scornful flowers; Rest his head among the roses,
Where a quiet song-bird sounds,
And no sword made sharp for traitors,
Hack him into meat for hounds.
THE PESSIMIST

You that have snarled through the ages, take your answer and go—
I know your hoary question, the riddle that all men know.
You have weighed the stars in a balance, and grasped the skies in a span:
Take, if you must have answer, the word of a common man.

Deep in my life lies buried one love unhealed, unshriven,
One hunger still shall haunt me—yea, in the streets of heaven;
This is the burden, babbler, this is the curse shall cling,
This is the thing I bring you; this is the pleasant thing.

‘Gainst you and all your sages, no joy of mine shall strive,
This one dead self shall shatter the men you call alive.
My grief I send to smite you, no pleasure, no belief,
Lord of the battered grievance, what do you know of grief?

I only know the praises to heaven that one man gave,
That he came on earth for an instant, to stand beside a grave,
The peace of a field of battle, where flowers are born of blood.
I only know one evil that makes the whole world good.

Beneath this single sorrow the globe of moon and sphere
Turns to a single jewel, so bright and brittle and dear
That I dread lest God should drop it, to be dashed into stars below.

You that have snarled through the ages, take your answer and go.
A FAIRY TALE

All things grew upwards, foul and fair:
The great trees fought and beat the air
With monstrous wings that would have flown;
But the old earth clung to her own,
Holding them back from heavenly wars,
Though every flower sprang at the stars.

But he broke free: while all things ceased,
Some hour increasing, he increased.
The town beneath him seemed a map,
Above the church he cocked his cap,
Above the cross his feather flew
Above the birds and still he grew.

The trees turned grass; the clouds were riven;
His feet were mountains lost in heaven;
Through strange new skies he rose alone,
The earth fell from him like a stone,
And his own limbs beneath him far
Seemed tapering down to touch a star.

He reared his head, shaggy and grim,
Staring among the cherubim;
The seven celestial floors he rent,
One crystal dome still o’er him bent:
Above his head, more clear than hope,
All heaven was a microscope.
A PORTRAIT

Fair faces crowd on Christmas night
Like seven suns a-row,
But all beyond is the wolfish wind
And the crafty feet of the snow.

But through the rout one figure goes
With quick and quiet tread;
Her robe is plain, her form is frail—
Wait if she turn her head.

I say no word of line or hue,
But if that face you see,
Your soul shall know the smile of faith’s
Awful frivolity.

Know that in this grotesque old masque
Too loud we cannot sing,
Or dance too wild, or speak too wide
To praise a hidden thing.

That though the jest be old as night,
Still shaketh sun and sphere
An everlasting laughter
Too loud for us to hear.
FEMINA CONTRA MUNDUM

The sun was black with judgment, and the moon
Blood: but between
I saw a man stand, saying, ‘To me at least
The grass is green.

‘There was no star that I forgot to fear
With love and wonder.
The birds have loved me’; but no answer came—
Only the thunder.

Once more the man stood, saying, ‘A cottage door,
Wherethrough I gazed
That instant as I turned—yea, I am vile;
Yet my eyes blazed.

‘For I had weighed the mountains in a balance,
And the skies in a scale,
I come to sell the stars—old lamps for new—
Old stars for sale.’

Then a calm voice fell all the thunder through,
A tone less rough:
‘Thou hast begun to love one of my works
Almost enough.’
TO A CERTAIN NATION

We will not let thee be, for thou art ours.
We thank thee still, though thou forget these things,
For that hour’s sake when thou didst wake all powers
With a great cry that God was sick of kings.

Leave thee there grovelling at their rusted greaves,
These hulking cowards on a painted stage,
Who, with imperial pomp and laurel leaves,
Show their Marengo—one man in a cage.

These, for whom stands no type or title given
In all the squalid tales of gore and pelf;
Though cowed by crashing thunders from all heaven.
Cain never said, ‘My brother slew himself.’

Tear you the truth out of your drivelling spy,
The maniac whom you set to swing death’s scythe.
Nay; torture not the torturer—let him lie:
What need of racks to teach a worm to writhe?

Bear with us, O our sister, not in pride,
Nor any scorn we see thee spoiled of knaves,
But only shame to hear, where Danton died,
Thy foul dead kings all laughing in their graves.

Thou hast a right to rule thyself; to be
The thing thou wilt; to grin, to fawn, to creep:
To crown these clumsy liars; ay, and we
Who knew thee once, we have a right to weep.
THE PRAISE OF DUST

‘What of vile dust?’ the preacher said.
Methought the whole world woke,
The dead stone lived beneath my foot,
And my whole body spoke.

‘You, that play tyrant to the dust,
And stamp its wrinkled face,
This patient star that flings you not
Far into homeless space.

‘Come down out of your dusty shrine
The living dust to see,
The flowers that at your sermon’s end
Stand blazing silently.

‘Rich white and blood-red blossom; stones,
Lichens like fire encrust;
A gleam of blue, a glare of gold,
The vision of the dust.

‘Pass them all by: till, as you come
Where, at a city’s edge,
Under a tree—I know it well—
Under a lattice ledge, ‘The sunshine falls on one brown head.
You, too, O cold of clay,
Eater of stones, may haply hear
The trumpets of that day ‘When God to all his paladins
By his own splendour swore
To make a fairer face than heaven,
Of dust and nothing more.’
THE BALLAD OF THE BATTLE OF GIBEON

Five kings rule o’er the Amorite,  
Mighty as fear and old as night;  
Swathed with unguent and gold and jewel,  
Waxed they merry and fat and cruel.  
Zedek of Salem, a terror and glory,  
Whose face was hid while his robes were gory;  
And Hoham of Hebron, whose loathly face is  
Heavy and dark o’er the ruin of races;  
And Piram of Jarmuth, drunk with strange wine,  
Who dreamed he had fashioned all stars that shine;  
And Debir of Eglon wild, without pity,  
Who raged like a plague in the midst of his city;  
And Japhia of Lachish, a fire that flameth,  
Who did in the daylight what no man nameth.

These five kings said one to another,  
‘King unto king o’er the world is brother,  
Seeing that now, for a sign and a wonder,  
A red eclipse and a tongue of thunder,  
A shape and a finger of desolation,  
Is come against us a kingless nation.  
Gibeon hath failed us: it were not good  
That a man remember where Gibeon stood.’  
Then Gibeon sent to our captain, crying,  
‘Son of Nun, let a shaft be flying,  
For unclean birds are gathering greedily;  
Slack not thy hand, but come thou speedily.  
Yea, we are lost save thou maintain’st us,  
For the kings of the mountains are gathered against us.’

Then to our people spake the Deliverer,  
‘Gibeon is high, yet a host may shiver her;  
Gibeon hath sent to me crying for pity,  
For the lords of the cities encompass the city
With chariot and banner and bowman and lancer,  
And I swear by the living God I will answer.  
Gird you, O Israel, quiver and javelin,  
Shield and sword for the road we travel in;  
Verily, as I have promised, pay I  
Life unto Gibeon, death unto Ai.’

Sudden and still as a bolt shot right  
Up on the city we went by night.  
Never a bird of the air could say,  
‘This was the children of Israel’s way.’

Only the hosts sprang up from sleeping,  
Saw from the heights a dark stream sweeping;  
Sprang up straight as a great shout stung them,  
And heard the Deliverer’s war-cry among them,  
Heard under cupola, turret, and steeple  
The awful cry of the kingless people.

Started the weak of them, shouted the strong of them,  
Crashed we a thunderbolt into the throng of them,  
Blindly with heads bent, and shields forced before us,  
We heard the dense roar of the strife closing o’er us.  
And drunk with the crash of the song that it sung them,  
We drove the great spear-blade in God’s name among them.

Redder and redder the sword-flash fell.  
Our eyes and our nostrils were hotter than hell;  
Till full all the crest of the spear-surge shocking us,  
Hoham of Hebron cried out mocking us,  
‘Nay, what need of the war-sword’s plying,  
Out of the desert the dust comes flying.  
A little red dust, if the wind be blowing—  
Who shall reckon its coming or going?’  
Back the Deliverer spake as a clarion,  
‘Mock at thy slaves, thou eater of carrion!  
Laughest thou at us, in thy kingly clowning,  
We, that laughed upon Ramases frowning.
We that stood up proud, unpardoned,
When his face was dark and his heart was hardened?
Pharaoh we knew and his steeds, not faster
Than the word of the Lord in thine ear, O master.

Sheer through the turban his wantons wove him,
Clean to the skull the Deliverer clove him;
And the two hosts reeled at the sign appalling,
As the great king fell like a great house falling.

Loudly we shouted, and living and dying.
Bore them all backward with strength and strong crying;
And Caleb struck Zedek hard at the throat,
And Japhia of Lachish Zebulon smote.
The war-swords and axes were clashing and groaning,
The fallen were fighting and foaming and moaning;
The war-spears were breaking, the war-horns were braying,
Ere the hands of the slayers were sated with slaying.
And deep in the grasses grown gory and sodden,
The treaders of all men were trampled and trodden;
And over them, routed and reeled like cattle,
High over the turn of the tide of the battle,
High over noises that deafen and cover us,
Rang the Deliverer’s voice out over us.

‘Stand thou still, thou sun upon Gibeon,
Stand thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon!
Shout thou, people, a cry like thunder,
For the kings of the earth are broken asunder.
Now we have said as the thunder says it,
Something is stronger than strength and slays it.
Now we have written for all time later,
Five kings are great, yet a law is greater.
Stare, O sun! in thine own great glory,
This is the turn of the whole world’s story.
Stand thou still, thou sun upon Gibeon,
Stand thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon!'
'Smite! amid spear-blades blazing and breaking. 
More than we know of is rising and making. 
Stab with the javelin, crash with the car! 
Cry! for we know not the thing that we are. 
Stand, O sun! that in horrible patience 
Smiled on the smoke and the slaughter of nations. 
Thou shalt grow sad for a little crying, 
Thou shalt be darkened for one man’s dying— 
Stand thou still, thou sun upon Gibeon, 
Stand thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon!’ 

After the battle was broken and spent 
Up to the hill the Deliverer went, 
Flung up his arms to the storm-clouds flying, 
And cried unto Israel, mightily crying, 
‘Come up, O warriors! come up, O brothers! 
Tribesmen and herdsmen, maidens and mothers; 
The bondman’s son and the bondman’s daughter, 
The hewer of wood and the drawer of water, 
He that carries and he that brings, 
And set your foot on the neck of kings.’ 

This is the story of Gibeon fight— 
Where we smote the lords of the Amorite; 
Where the banners of princes with slaughter were sodden. 
And the beards of seers in the rank grass trodden; 
Where the trees were wrecked by the wreck of cars, 
And the reek of the red field blotted the stars; 
Where the dead heads dropped from the swords that sever, 
Because His mercy endureth for ever.
‘VULGARISED’

All round they murmur, ‘O profane,
Keep thy heart’s secret hid as gold’;
But I, by God, would sooner be
Some knight in shattering wars of old, In brown outlandish arms to ride,
And shout my love to every star
With lungs to make a poor maid’s name
Deafen the iron ears of war.

Here, where these subtle cowards crowd,
To stand and so to speak of love,
That the four corners of the world
Should hear it and take heed thereof.

That to this shrine obscure there be
One witness before all men given,
As naked as the hanging Christ,
As shameless as the sun in heaven.

These whimperers—have they spared to us
One dripping woe, one reeking sin?
These thieves that shatter their own graves
To prove the soul is dead within.

They talk; by God, is it not time
Some of Love’s chosen broke the girth,
And told the good all men have known
Since the first morning of the earth?
THE BALLAD OF GOD-MAKERS

A bird flew out at the break of day
From the nest where it had curled,
And ere the eve the bird had set
Fear on the kings of the world.

The first tree it lit upon
Was green with leaves unshed;
The second tree it lit upon
Was red with apples red; The third tree it lit upon
Was barren and was brown,
Save for a dead man nailed thereon
On a hill above a town.

That right the kings of the earth were gay
And filled the cup and can;
Last night the kings of the earth were chill
For dread of a naked man.

‘If he speak two more words,’ they said,
‘The slave is more than the free;
If he speak three more words,’ they said,
‘The stars are under the sea.’

Said the King of the East to the King of the West,
I wot his frown was set,
‘Lo; let us slay him and make him as dung,
It is well that the world forget.’

Said the King of the West to the King of the East,
I wot his smile was dread,
‘Nay, let us slay him and make him a god,
It is well that our god be dead.’

They set the young man on a hill,
They nailed him to a rod;
And there in darkness and in blood
They made themselves a god.

And the mightiest word was left unsaid,
And the world had never a mark,
And the strongest man of the sons of men
Went dumb into the dark.

Then hymns and harps of praise they brought,
Incense and gold and myrrh,
And they thronged above the seraphim,
The poor dead carpenter.

‘Thou art the prince of all,’ they sang,
‘Ocean and earth and air.’
Then the bird flew on to the cruel cross,
And hid in the dead man’s hair.

‘Thou art the sun of the world,’ they cried,
‘Speak if our prayers be heard.’
And the brown bird stirred in the dead man’s hair,
And it seemed that the dead man stirred.

Then a shriek went up like the world’s last cry
From all nations under heaven,
And a master fell before a slave
And begged to be forgiven.

They cowered, for dread in his wakened eyes
The ancient wrath to see;
And the bird flew out of the dead Christ’s hair,
And lit on a lemon-tree.
How many million stars there be,
That only God hath numberéd;
But this one only chosen for me
In time before her face was fled.
Shall not one mortal man alive
Hold up his head?
THE WOOD-CUTTER

We came behind him by the wall,
My brethren drew their brands,
And they had strength to strike him down—
And I to bind his hands.

Only once, to a lantern gleam,
He turned his face from the wall,
And it was as the accusing angel’s face
On the day when the stars shall fall.

I grasped the axe with shaking hands,
I stared at the grass I trod;
For I feared to see the whole bare heavens
Filled with the face of God.

I struck: the serpentine slow blood
In four arms soaked the moss—
Before me, by the living Christ,
The blood ran in a cross.

Therefore I toil in forests here
And pile the wood in stacks,
And take no fee from the shivering folk
Till I have cleansed the axe.

But for a curse God cleared my sight,
And where each tree doth grow
I see a life with awful eyes,
And I must lay it low.
ART COLOURS

On must we go: we search dead leaves,
We chase the sunset’s saddest flames,
The nameless hues that o’er and o’er
In lawless wedding lost their names.

God of the daybreak! Better be
Black savages; and grin to gird
Our limbs in gaudy rags of red,
The laughing-stock of brute and bird; And feel again the fierce old feast,
Blue for seven heavens that had sufficed,
A gold like shining hoards, a red
Like roses from the blood of Christ.
THE TWO WOMEN

Lo! very fair is she who knows the ways
Of joy: in pleasure’s mocking wisdom old,
The eyes that might be cold to flattery, kind;
The hair that might be grey with knowledge, gold.

But thou art more than these things, O my queen,
For thou art clad in ancient wars and tears.
And looking forth, framed in the crown of thorns,
I saw the youngest face in all the spheres.
THE WILD KNIGHT

The wasting thistle whitens on my crest,
The barren grasses blow upon my spear,
A green, pale pennon: blazon of wild faith
And love of fruitless things: yea, of my love,
Among the golden loves of all the knights,
Alone: most hopeless, sweet, and blasphemous,
The love of God:
I hear the crumbling creeds
Like cliffs washed down by water, change, and pass;
I hear a noise of words, age after age,
A new cold wind that blows across the plains,
And all the shrines stand empty; and to me
All these are nothing: priests and schools may doubt
Who never have believed; but I have loved.
Ah friends, I know it passing well, the love
Wherewith I love; it shall not bring to me
Return or hire or any pleasant thing—
Ay, I have tried it: Ay, I know its roots.
Earthquake and plague have burst on it in vain
And rolled back shattered—
Babbling neophytes!
Blind, startled fools—think you I know it not?
Think you to teach me? Know I not His ways?
Strange-visaged blunders, mystic cruelties.
All! all! I know Him, for I love Him. Go!

So, with the wan waste grasses on my spear,
I ride for ever, seeking after God.
My hair grows whiter than my thistle plume,
And all my limbs are loose; but in my eyes
The star of an unconquerable praise:
For in my soul one hope for ever sings,
That at the next white corner of a road
My eyes may look on Him. . . .
Hush—I shall know
The place when it is found: a twisted path
Under a twisted pear-tree—this I saw
In the first dream I had ere I was born,
Wherein He spoke. . . .
But the grey clouds come down
In hail upon the icy plains: I ride,
Burning for ever in consuming fire.
THE WILD KNIGHT

A dark manor-house shuttered and unlighted, outlined against a pale sunset: in front a large, but neglected, garden. To the right, in the foreground, the porch of a chapel, with coloured windows lighted. Hymns within.

Above the porch a grotesque carved bracket, supporting a lantern. Astride of it sits CAPTAIN REDFEATHER, a flagon in his hand.

REDFEATHER.

I have drunk to all I know of,
To every leaf on the tree,
To the highest bird of the heavens,
To the lowest fish of the sea.
What toast, what toast remaineth,
Drunk down in the same good wine,
By the tippler’s cup in the tavern,
And the priest’s cup at the shrine?

[A Priest comes out, stick in hand, and looks right and left.]

 VOICES WITHIN.
The brawler . . .

 PRIEST.
He has vanished REDFEATHER.

To the stars.

[The Priest looks up.]

 PRIEST [angrily].
What would you there, sir?

REDFEATHER.
Give you all a toast.
[Lifts his flagon. More priests come out.]

I see my life behind me: bad enough—
Drink, duels, madness, beggary, and pride,
The life of the unfit: yet ere I drop
On Nature’s rubbish heap, I weigh it all,
And give you all a toast— [Reels to his feet and stands.]

The health of God!

[They all recoil from him.]

Let’s give the Devil of the Heavens His due!
He that made grass so green, and wine so red,
Is not so black as you have painted him.

[Drinks.]

PRIEST.

Blaspheming profligate!

REDFEATHER [hurls the flagon among them.]

Howl! ye dumb dogs,
I named your King—let me have one great shout,
Flutter the seraphim like startled birds;
Make God recall the good days of His youth
Ere saints had saddened Him: when He came back
Conqueror of Chaos in a six days’ war,
With all the sons of God shouting for joy . . .

PRIEST.

And you—what is your right, and who are you,
To praise God?

REDFEATHER.

A lost soul. In earth or heaven
What has a better right?
PRIEST.

Go, pagan, go!
Drink, dice, and dance: take no more thought than blind
Beasts of the field. . . .

REDFEATHER.

Or . . . lilies of the field,
To quote a pagan sage. I go my way.

PRIEST [solemnly].

And when Death comes. . . .

REDFEATHER.

He shall not find me dead.

[_puts on his plumed hat. The priests go out.]

REDFEATHER.

These frozen fools. . . .

[The Lady Olive comes out of the chapel. He sees her.]

Oh, they were right enough.
Where shall I hide my carrion from the sun?

[_buries his face. His hat drops to the ground.]

OLIVE [looking up.]

Captain, are you from church? I saw you not.

REDFEATHER.

No, I am here.

[Lays his hand on a gargoyle.]

I, too, am a grotesque,
And dance with all the devils on the roof.

OLIVE [with a strange smile.]

For Satan, also, I have often prayed.

REDFEATHER [roughly].

Satan may worry women if he will,  
For he was but an angel ere he fell,  
But I—before I fell—I was a man.

OLIVE.

He too, my Master, was a man: too strong  
To fear a strong man’s sins: ’tis written He  
Descended into hell.

REDFEATHER.

Write, then, that I

Descended into heaven. . . .  
You are ill?

OLIVE.

No, well. . . .

REDFEATHER.

You speak the truth—you are the Truth—  
Lady, say once again then, ‘I am well.’

OLIVE.

I—ah! God give me grace—I am nigh dead.

REDFEATHER [quietly.]

Lord Orm?

OLIVE.
Yes—yes.

REDFEATHER.

Is in your father’s house—
Having the title-deeds—would drive you forth.
Homeless, and with your father sick to death,
Into this winter, save on a condition
Named. . . .

OLIVE.

And unnameable. Even so; Lord Orm—
Ah! do you know him?

REDFEATHER.

Ay, I saw him once.
The sun shone on his face, that smiled and smiled,
A sight not wholesome to the eyes of man.

OLIVE.

Captain, I tell you God once fell asleep.
And in that hour the world went as it would;
Dogs brought forth cats, and poison grew in grapes,
And Orm was born. . . .

REDFEATHER.

Why, curse him! can he not
Be kicked or paid?

OLIVE [feverishly].

Hush! He is just behind
There in the house—see how the great house glares,
Glares like an ogre’s mask—the whole dead house
Possessed with bestial meaning. . . .

[Screams]
Ah! the face!
The whole great grinning house—his face! his face!
His face!

REDFEATHER [in a voice of thunder, pointing away from the house].

Look there—look there!

OLIVE.

What is it? What?

REDFEATHER.

I think it was a bird.

OLIVE.

What thought you, truly?

REDFEATHER.

I think a mighty thought is drawing near.

[Enter THE WILD KNIGHT.]

THE WILD KNIGHT.

That house. . . .

[Points.]

OLIVE.

Ah Christ! [Shudders.] I had forgotten it.

THE WILD KNIGHT [still pointing].

That house! the house at last, the house of God, Wherein God makes an evening feast for me.
The house at last: I know the twisted path Under the twisted pear-tree: this I saw In the first dream I had ere I was born. It is the house of God. He welcomes me.
[Strides forward.]

REDFEATHER.

That house. God’s blood!

OLIVE [hysterically].

Is not this hell’s own wit?

THE WILD KNIGHT.

God grows impatient, and His wine is poured,
His bread is broken.

[Rushes forward.]

REDFEATHER [leaps between].

Stand away, great fool,
There is a devil there!

THE WILD KNIGHT [draws his sword, and waves it as he rushes].

God’s house!—God’s house!

REDFEATHER [plucks out his own sword].

Better my hand than his.

[The blades clash.]

God alone knows
What That within might do to you, poor fool,
I can but kill you.

[They fight. OLIVE tries to part them.]

REDFEATHER.

Olive, stand away!

OLIVE.
I will not stand away!

[Steps between the swords.]

Stranger, a word,
Yes—you are right—God is within that house.

REDFEATHER.

Olive!

OLIVE.

But He is all too beautiful
For us who only know of stars and flowers.
The thing within is all too pure and fair, [Shudders.]

Too awful in its ancient innocence,
For men to look upon it and not die;
Ourselves would fade into those still white fires
Of peace and mercy.

[Struggles with her voice.]

There . . . enough . . . the law—
No flesh shall look upon the Lord and live.

REDFEATHER [sticking his sword in the ground].

You are the bravest lady in the world.

THE WILD KNIGHT [dazed].

May I not go within?

REDFEATHER.

Keep you the law—
No flesh shall look upon the Lord and live.

THE WILD KNIGHT [sadly].

Then I will go and lay me in the flowers,
For He may haply, as in ancient time,
Walk in the garden in the cool of day.

[He goes out.]

[OLIVE reels. REDFEATHER catches her.]

You are the strongest woman upon earth.
The weakest woman than the strongest man
Is stronger in her hour: this is the law.
When the hour passes—then may we be strong.

OLIVE [wildly.]
The House . . . the Face.

REDFEATHER [fiercely].

I love you. Look at me!

OLIVE [turns her face to him.]

I hear six birds sing in that little tree,
Say, is the old earth laughing at my fears?
I think I love you also. . . .

REDFEATHER.

What I am
You know. But I will never curse a man,
Even in a mirror.

OLIVE [smiling at him].

And the Devil’s dance?

REDFEATHER.

The Devil plotted since the world was young
With alchemies of fire and witches’ oils
And magic. But he never made a man.

OLIVE.
No; not a man.

REDFEATHER.

Not even my Lord Orm.
Look at the house now— [She starts and looks.]

Honest brick and tiles.

OLIVE.

You have a strange strength in this hour.

REDFEATHER.

This hour
I see with mortal eye as in one flash
The whole divine democracy of things,
And dare the stars to scorn a scavenge-heap.
Olive, I tell you every soul is great.
Weave we green crowns—how noble and how high;
Fling we white flowers—how radiant and how pure
Is he, who’er he be, who next shall cross
This scrap of grass. . . .

[Enter LORD ORM. ]

OLIVE [screams].

Ah!

REDFEATHER [pointing to the chapel].

Olive, go and pray for a man soon to die. Good-day, my Lord.

[She goes in.]

LORD ORM.

Good-day.

REDFEATHER.
I am a friend to Lady Olive.

LORD ORM.

Sir, you are fortunate.

REDFEATHER.

Most fortunate
In finding, sword on thigh and ready, one
Who is a villain and a gentleman.

LORD ORM [picks up the flagon].

Empty, I see.

REDFEATHER.

Oh sir, you never drink.
You dread to lose yourself before the stars—
Do you not dread to sleep?

LORD ORM [violently].

What would you here?

REDFEATHER.

Receive from you the title-deeds you hold.

LORD ORM.

You entertain me.

REDFEATHER.

With a bout at foils?

LORD ORM.

I will not fight.

REDFEATHER.

I know you better, then.
I have seen men grow mangier than the beasts,
Eat bread with blood upon their fingers, grin
While women burned: but one last law they served.
When I say ‘Coward,’ is the law awake?

    LORD ORM.

Hear me, then, too: I have seen robbers rule,
And thieves go clad in gold—age after age—
Because, though sordid, ragged, rude, and mean,
They saw, like gods, no law above their heads.
But when they fell—then for this cause they fell,
This last mean cobweb of the fairy tales
Of good and ill: that they must stand and fight
When a man bade, though they had chose to stand
And fight not. I am stronger than the world.

[Folds his arms.]

    REDFEATHER [lifts his hand].

If in your body be the blood of man, [ Strikes him.]

Now let it rush to the face—
God! Have you sunk
Lower than anger?

    LORD ORM.

How I triumph now.

    REDFEATHER [stamps wildly].

Damned, whimpering dog! vile, snivelling, sick poltroon!
Are you alive?

    LORD ORM.

Evil, be thou my good;
Let the sun blacken and the moon be blood:
I have said the words.
REDFEATHER [studying him].

And if I struck you dead,
You would turn to daisies!

LORD ORM.

And you do not strike.

REDFEATHER [dreamily].

Indeed, poor soul, such magic would be kind
And full of pity as a fairy-tale:
One touch of this bright wand [Lifts his sword]
and down would drop
The dark abortive blunder that is you.
And you would change, forgiven, into flowers.

LORD ORM.

And yet—and yet you do not strike me dead.
I do not draw: the sword is in your hand—
Drive the blade through me where I stand.

REDFEATHER.

Lord Orm,
You asked the Lady Olive (I can speak
As to a toad to you, my lord)—you asked
Olive to be your paramour: and she— LORD ORM.

Refused.

REDFEATHER.

And yet her father was at stake,
And she is soft and kind. Now look at me,
Ragged and ruined, soaked in bestial sins:
My lord, I too have my virginity—
Turn the thing round, my lord, and topside down,
You cannot spell it. Be the fact enough,
I use no sword upon a swordless man.
LORD ORM.

For her?

REDFEATHER.

I too have my virginity.

LORD ORM.

Now look on me: I am the lord of earth,
For I have broken the last bond of man.
I stand erect, crowned with the stars—and why?
Because I stand a coward—because you
Have mercy—on a coward. Do I win?

REDFEATHER.

Though there you stand with moving mouth and eyes,
I think, my lord, you are not possible—
God keep you from my dreams.

[ Goes out. ]

LORD ORM.

Alone and free.
Since first in flowery meads a child I ran,
My one long thirst—to be alone and free.
Free of all laws, creeds, codes, and common tests,
Shameless, anarchic, infinite.
Why, then,
I might have done in that dark liberty—
If I should say ‘a good deed,’ men would laugh,
But here are none to laugh.
The godless world
Be thanked there is no God to spy on me,
Catch me and crown me with a vulgar crown
For what I do: if I should once believe
The horror of that ancient Eavesdropper
Behind the starry arras of the skies,
I should—well, well, enough of menaces—
should not do the thing I come to do.
What do I come to do? Let me but try
To spell it to my soul.
Suppose a man
Perfectly free and utterly alone,
Free of all love of law, equally free
Of all the love of mutiny it breeds,
Free of the love of heaven, and also free
Of all the love of hell it drives us to;
Not merely void of rules, unconscious of them;
So strong that naught alive could do him hurt,
So wise that he knew all things, and so great
That none knew what he was or what he did—
A lawless giant.

[A pause: then in a low voice.]

Would he not be good?
Hate is the weakness of a thwarted thing,
Pride is the weakness of a thing unpraised.
But he, this man. . .
He would be like a child
Girt with the tomes of some vast library,
Who reads romance after romance, and smiles
When every tale ends well: impersonal
As God he grows—melted in suns and stars;
So would this boundless man, whom none could spy,
Taunt him with virtue, censure him with vice,
Rejoice in all men’s joys; with golden pen
Write all the live romances of the earth
To a triumphant close. . .
Alone and free—
In this grey, cool, clean garden, washed with winds,
What do I come to do among the grass,
The daisies, and the dews? An awful thing,
To prove I am that man.
That while these saints
Taunt me with trembling, dare me to revenge,
I breathe an upper air of ancient good
And strong eternal laughter; send my sun
And rain upon the evil and the just,
Turn my left cheek unto the smiter. He
That told me, sword in hand, that I had fallen
Lower than anger, knew not I had risen
Higher than pride. . . .
Enough, the deeds are mine.

[Takes out the title-deeds.]

I come to write the end of a romance.
A good romance: the characters—Lord Orm.
Type of the starvéd heart and storéd brain,
Who strives to hate and cannot; fronting him—
Redfeather, rake in process of reform,
At root a poet: I have hopes of him:
He can love virtue, for he still loves vice.
He is not all burnt out. He beats me there
(How I beat him in owning it!); in love
He is still young, and has the joy of shame.
And for the Lady Olive—who shall speak?
A man may weigh the courage of a man,
But if there be a bottomless abyss
It is a woman’s valour: such as I
Can only bow the knee and hide the face
(Thank God there is no God to spy on me
And bring this curséd crowns).
No, there is none:
The old incurable hunger of the world
Surges in wolfish wars, age after age.
There was no God before me: none sees where,
Between the brute-womb and the deaf, dead grave,
Unhoping, unrecorded, unrepaid,
I make with smoke, fire, and burnt-offering
This sacrifice to Chaos. [Lights the papers.] None behold
Me write in fire the end of the romance.
Burn! I am God, and crown myself with stars.
Upon creation day: before was night
And chaos of a blind and cruel world.
I am the first God; I will trample hell,
Fight, conquer, make the story of the stars,
Like this poor story, end like a romance: [The paper burns.]

Before was brainless night: but I am God
In this black world I rend. Let there be light!

[The paper blazes up, illuminating the garden.]

I, God . . .

THE WILD KNIGHT [rushes forward].

God’s Light! God’s Voice; yes, it is He
Walking in Eden in the cool of the day!

LORD ORM [screams].

Tricked! Caught!
Damned screeching rat in a hole!

[Stabs him again and again with his sword; stamps on his face.]

THE WILD KNIGHT [faintly].

Earth grows too beautiful around me: shapes
And colours fearfully wax fair and clear,
For I have heard, as thro’ a door ajar,
Scraps of the huge soliloquy of God
That moveth as a mask the lips of man,
If man be very silent: they were right,
No flesh shall look upon the Lord and live.

[Dies.]

LORD ORM [staggers back laughing].
Saved, saved, my secret.

REDFEATHER [rushing in, sword in hand].

The drawn sword at last!
Guard, son of hell!

[They fight. ORM falls. OLIVE comes in.]

He too can die. Keep back!
Olive, keep back from him! I did not fear
Him living, and he fell before my sword;
But dead I fear him. All is ended now;
A man’s whole life tied in a bundle there,
And no good deed. I fear him. Come away.
GOOD NEWS

Between a meadow and a cloud that sped
In rain and twilight, in desire and fear.
I heard a secret—hearken in your ear,
‘Behold the daisy has a ring of red.’

That hour, with half of blessing, half of ban,
A great voice went through heaven, and earth and hell,
Crying, ‘We are tricked, my great ones, is it well?
Now is the secret stolen by a man.’

Then waxed I like the wind because of this,
And ran, like gospel and apocalypse,
From door to door, with new anarchic lips,
Crying the very blasphemy of bliss.

In the last wreck of Nature, dark and dread,
Shall in eclipse’s hideous hieroglyph,
One wild form reel on the last rocking cliff,
And shout, ‘The daisy has a ring of red.’
WINE, WATER AND SONG

G. K. CHESTERTON
THIRD EDITION

METHUEN & CO. LTD.
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.

LONDON


THIS WORK IS PUBLISHED FOR THE GREATER GLORY OF JESUS CHRIST THROUGH HIS MOST HOLY MOTHER MARY AND FOR THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE MILITANT CHURCH AND HER MEMBERS.

THE TYPOGRAPHY OF THIS BOOK IS THE PROPERTY OF CATHOLIC WAY PUBLISHING AND MAY NOT BE REPRODUCED, IN WHOLE OR IN PART, WITHOUT WRITTEN PERMISSION OF THE PUBLISHER.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

WINE, WATER AND SONG

TABLE OF CONTENTS
THE ENGLISHMAN
WINE AND WATER
THE SONG AGAINST GROCERS
THE ROLLING ENGLISH ROAD
THE SONG OF QUOODLE
PIONEERS, O PIONEERS
THE LOGICAL VEGETARIAN
“THE SARACEN’S HEAD”
THE GOOD RICH MAN
THE SONG AGAINST SONGS
ME HEART
THE SONG OF THE OAK
THE ROAD TO ROUNDABOUT
THE SONG OF THE STRANGE ASCETIC
THE SONG OF RIGHT AND WRONG
WHO GOES HOME?
THE ENGLISHMAN

St. George he was for England,
And before he killed the dragon He drank a pint of English ale
Out of an English flagon.
For though he fast right readily In hair-shirt or in mail,
It isn’t safe to give him cakes Unless you give him ale.
St. George he was for England,
And right gallantly set free
The lady left for dragon’s meat And tied up to a tree;
But since he stood for England
And knew what England means,
Unless you give him bacon
You mustn’t give him beans.
St. George he is for England,
And shall wear the shield he wore When we go out in armour
With the battle-cross before.
But though he is jolly company
And very pleased to dine,
It isn’t safe to give him nuts
Unless you give him wine.
WINE AND WATER

Old Noah he had an ostrich farm and fowls on the largest scale,
He ate his egg with a ladle in an egg-cup big as a pail,
And the soup he took was Elephant Soup and the fish he took was Whale, But
they all were small to the cellar he took when he set out to sail, And Noah he
often said to his wife when he sat down to dine,
“I don’t care where the water goes if it doesn’t get into the wine.”
The cataract of the cliff of heaven fell blinding off the brink
As if it would wash the stars away as suds go down a sink,
The seven heavens came roaring down for the throats of hell to drink, And Noah
he cocked his eye and said, “It looks like rain, I think,
The water has drowned the Matterhorn as deep as a Mendip mine,
But I don’t care where the water goes if it doesn’t get into the wine.”
But Noah he sinned, and we have sinned; on tipsy feet we trod,
Till a great big black teetotaller was sent to us for a rod,
And you can’t get wine at a P.S.A., or chapel, or Eisteddfod,
For the Curse of Water has come again because of the wrath of God,
And water is on the Bishop’s board and the Higher Thinker’s shrine, But I don’t
care where the water goes if it doesn’t get into the wine.
THE SONG AGAINST GROCERS

God made the wicked Grocer
For a mystery and a sign,
That men might shun the awful shops And go to inns to dine;
Where the bacon’s on the rafter
And the wine is in the wood,
And God that made good laughter
Has seen that they are good.
The evil-hearted Grocer
Would call his mother “Ma’am,”
And bow at her and bob at her,
Her aged soul to damn,
And rub his horrid hands and ask What article was next,
Though mortis in articulo
Should be her proper text.
His props are not his children,
But pert lads underpaid,
Who call out “Cash!” and bang about To work his wicked trade;
He keeps a lady in a cage
Most cruelly all day,
And makes her count and calls her “Miss”
Until she fades away.
The righteous minds of innkeepers Induce them now and then
To crack a bottle with a friend
Or treat unmoneyed men,
But who hath seen the Grocer
Treat housemaids to his teas
Or crack a bottle of fish-sauce
Or stand a man a cheese?
He sells us sands of Araby
As sugar for cash down;
He sweeps his shop and sells the dust The purest salt in town,
He crams with cans of poisoned meat Poor subjects of the King,
And when they die by thousands
Why, he laughs like anything.
The wicked Grocer groces
In spirits and in wine,
Not frankly and in fellowship
As men in inns do dine;
But packed with soap and sardines And carried off by grooms,
For to be snatched by Duchesses
And drunk in dressing-rooms.
The hell-instructed Grocer
Has a temple made of tin,
And the ruin of good innkeepers
Is loudly urged therein;
But now the sands are running out From sugar of a sort,
The Grocer trembles; for his time, Just like his weight, is short.
THE ROLLING ENGLISH ROAD

Before the Roman came to Rye or out to Severn strode,
The rolling English drunkard made the rolling English road.
A reeling road, a rolling road, that rambles round the shire, And after him the parson ran, the sexton and the squire;
A merry road, a mazy road, and such as we did tread
The night we went to Birmingham by way of Beachy Head.
I knew no harm of Bonaparte and plenty of the Squire,
And for to fight the Frenchman I did not much desire;
But I did bash their baggonets because they came arrayed
To straighten out the crooked road an English drunkard made, Where you and I went down the lane with ale-mugs in our hands, The night we went to Glastonbury by way of Goodwin Sands.
His sins they were forgiven him; or why do flowers run
Behind him; and the hedges all strengthing in the sun?
The wild thing went from left to right and knew not which was which, But the wild rose was above him when they found him in the ditch.
God pardon us, nor harden us; we did not see so clear
The night we went to Bannockburn by way of Brighton Pier.
My friends, we will not go again or ape an ancient rage,
Or stretch the folly of our youth to be the shame of age,
But walk with clearer eyes and ears this path that wandereth, And see undrugged in evening light the decent inn of death;
For there is good news yet to hear and fine things to be seen, Before we go to Paradise by way of Kensal Green.
THE SONG OF QUOODLE

They haven’t got no noses,
The fallen sons of Eve;
Even the smell of roses
Is not what they supposes;
But more than mind discloses
And more than men believe.
They haven’t got no noses,
They cannot even tell
When door and darkness closes The park a Jew encloses,
Where even the Law of Moses
Will let you steal a smell.
The brilliant smell of water, The brave smell of a stone,
The smell of dew and thunder, The old bones buried under,
Are things in which they blunder And err, if left alone.
The wind from winter forests, The scent of scentless flowers, The breath of brides’ adorning, The smell of snare and warning, The smell of Sunday morning, God gave to us for ours.

And Quoodle here discloses
All things that Quoodle can,
They haven’t got no noses,
They haven’t got no noses,
And goodness only knowses
The Noselessness of Man.
PIONEERS, O PIONEERS

Nebuchadnezzar the King of the Jews
Suffered from new and original views,
He crawled on his hands and knees, it’s said, With grass in his mouth and a crown on his head.
With a wowtyiddly, etc.
Those in traditional paths that trod
Thought the thing was a curse from God,
But a Pioneer men always abuse
Like Nebuchadnezzar the King of the Jews.
Black Lord Foulon the Frenchman slew
Thought it a Futurist thing to do.
He offered them grass instead of bread.
So they stuffed him with grass when they cut off his head.
With a wowtyiddly, etc.
For the pride of his soul he perished then— But of course it is always of Pride
that men, A Man in Advance of his Age accuse,
Like Nebuchadnezzar the King of the Jews.
Simeon Scudder of Styx, in Maine,
Thought of the thing and was at it again.
He gave good grass and water in pails
To a thousand Irishmen hammering rails.
With a wowtyiddly, etc.
Appetites differ; and tied to a stake
He was tarred and feathered for Conscience’ Sake.
But stoning the prophets is ancient news,
Like Nebuchadnezzar the King of the Jews.
“Why shouldn’t I have a purely vegetarian drink? Why shouldn’t I take vegetables in their highest form, so to speak? The modest vegetarians ought obviously to stick to wine or beer, plain vegetarian drinks, instead of filling their goblets with the blood of bulls and elephants, as all conventional meat-eaters do, I suppose.”—Dalroy.

You will find me drinking rum,
Like a sailor in a slum,
You will find me drinking beer like a Bavarian.
You will find me drinking gin
In the lowest kind of inn,
Because I am a rigid Vegetarian.
So I cleared the inn of wine,
And I tried to climb the sign,
And I tried to hail the constable as “Marion.”
But he said I couldn’t speak,
And he bowled me to the Beak
Because I was a Happy Vegetarian.
Oh, I knew a Doctor Gluck,
And his nose it had a hook,
And his attitudes were anything but Aryan; So I gave him all the pork
That I had, upon a fork;
Because I am myself a Vegetarian.
I am silent in the Club,
I am silent in the pub.,
I am silent on a bally peak in Darien; For I stuff away for life
Shoving peas in with a knife,
Because I am at heart a Vegetarian.
No more the milk of cows
Shall pollute my private house
Than the milk of the wild mares of the Barbarian; I will stick to port and sherry,
For they are so very, very,
So very, very, very Vegetarian.
“THE SARACEN’S HEAD”

“The Saracen’s Head” looks down the lane,
Where we shall never drink wine again,
For the wicked old women who feel well-bred
Have turned to a tea-shop “The Saracen’s Head.”
“The Saracen’s Head” out of Araby came,
King Richard riding in arms like flame,
And where he established his folk to be fed
He set up a spear—and the Saracen’s Head.
But “The Saracen’s Head” outlived the Kings,
It thought and it thought of most horrible things,
Of Health and of Soap and of Standard Bread,
And of Saracen drinks at “The Saracen’s Head.”
So “The Saracen’s Head” fulfils its name,
They drink no wine—a ridiculous game—
And I shall wonder until I’m dead,
How it ever came into the Saracen’s Head.
THE GOOD RICH MAN

Mr. Mandragon, the Millionaire, he wouldn’t have wine or wife, He couldn’t endure complexity: he lived the Simple Life.
He ordered his lunch by megaphone in manly, simple tones, And used all his motors for canvassing voters, and twenty telephones; Besides a dandy little machine,
Cunning and neat as ever was seen,
With a hundred pulleys and cranks between,
Made of metal and kept quite clean,
To hoist him out of his healthful bed on every day of his life, And wash him and dress him and shave him and brush him —to live the Simple Life.
Mr. Mandragon was most refined and quietly, neatly dressed, Say all the American newspapers that know refinement best; Quiet and neat the hat and hair and the coat quiet and neat, A trouser worn upon either leg, while boots adorn the feet; And not, as any one would expect,
A Tiger's Skin all striped and specked,
And a Peacock Hat with the tail erect,
A scarlet tunic with sunflowers decked,
Which might have had a more marked effect,
And pleased the pride of a weaker man that yearned for wine or wife; But Fame and the Flagon, for Mr. Mandragon —obscured the Simple Life.
Mr. Mandragon, the Millionaire, I am happy to say, is dead; He enjoyed a quiet funeral in a Crematorium shed.
And he lies there fluffy and soft and grey and certainly quite refined; When he might have rotted to flowers and fruit with Adam and all mankind, Or been eaten by wolves athirst for blood,
Or burnt on a good tall pyre of wood,
In a towering flame, as a heathen should,
Or even sat with us here at food,
Merrily taking twopenny ale and pork with a pocket-knife; But this was luxury not for one that went for the Simple Life.
THE SONG AGAINST SONGS

The song of the sorrow of Melisande is a weary song and a dreary song, The glory of Mariana’s grange had got into great decay, The song of the Raven Never More has never been called a cheery song, And the brightest things in Baudelaire are anything else but gay.
But who will write us a riding song,
Or a hunting song or a drinking song,
Fit for them that arose and rode
When day and the wine were red?
But bring me a quart of claret out,
And I will write you a clinking song,
A song of war and a song of wine
And a song to wake the dead.
The song of the fury of Fragolette is a florid song and a torrid song, The song of the sorrow of Tara is sung to a harp unstrung, The song of the cheerful Shropshire Lad I consider a perfectly horrid song, And the song of the happy Futurist is a song that can’t be sung.
But who will write us a riding song
Or a fighting song or a drinking song,
Fit for the fathers of you and me,
That knew how to think and thrive?
But the song of Beauty and Art and Love
Is simply an utterly stinking song,
To double you up and drag you down
And damn your soul alive.
ME HEART

I come from Castlepatrick, and me heart is on me sleeve,  
And any sword or pistol boy can hit it with me leave,  
It shines there for an epaulette, as golden as a flame,  
As naked as me ancestors, as noble as me name.  
For I come from Castlepatrick, and me heart is on me sleeve, But a lady stole it from me on St. Gallowglass’s Eve.  
The folk that live in Liverpool, their heart is in their boots; They go to hell like lambs, they do, because the hooter hoots.  
Where men may not be dancin’, though the wheels may dance all day; And men may not be smokin’; but only chimneys may.  
But I come from Castlepatrick, and me heart is on me sleeve, But a lady stole it from me on St. Poleander’s Eve.  
The folk that live in black Belfast, their heart is in their mouth, They see us making murders in the meadows of the South;  
They think a plough’s a rack, they do, and cattle-calls are creeds, And they think we’re burnin’ witches when we’re only burnin’ weeds; But I come from Castlepatrick, and me heart is on me sleeve; But a lady stole it from me on St. Barnabas’s Eve.
THE SONG OF THE OAK

The Druids waved their golden knives And danced around the Oak
When they had sacrificed a man;
But though the learned search and scan, No single modern person can
Entirely see the joke.
But though they cut the throats of men They cut not down the tree,
And from the blood the saplings sprang Of oak-woods yet to be.
But Ivywood, Lord Ivywood,
He rots the tree as ivy would,
He clings and crawls as ivy would
About the sacred tree.
King Charles he fled from Worcester fight And hid him in an Oak;
In convent schools no man of tact
Would trace and praise his every act, Or argue that he was in fact
A strict and sainted bloke,
But not by him the sacred woods
Have lost their fancies free,
And though he was extremely big
He did not break the tree.
But Ivywood, Lord Ivywood,
He breaks the tree as ivy would,
And eats the woods as ivy would
Between us and the sea.
Great Collingwood walked down the glade And flung the acorns free,
That oaks might still be in the grove As oaken as the beams above,
When the great Lover sailors love
Was kissed by Death at sea.
But though for him the oak-trees fell To build the oaken ships,
The woodman worshipped what he smote And honoured even the chips.
But Ivywood, Lord Ivywood,
He hates the tree as ivy would,
As the dragon of the ivy would
That has us in his grips.
THE ROAD TO ROUNDABOUT

Some say that Guy of Warwick,
The man that killed the Cow
And brake the mighty Boar alive
Beyond the Bridge at Slough;
Went up against a Loathly Worm
That wasted all the Downs,
And so the roads they twist and squirm (If I may be allowed the term)
From the writhing of the stricken Worm That died in seven towns.
I see no scientific proof
That this idea is sound,
And I should say they wound about
To find the town of Roundabout,
The merry town of Roundabout,
That makes the world go round.
Some say that Robin Goodfellow,
Whose lantern lights the meads
(To steal a phrase Sir Walter Scott In heaven no longer needs),
Such dance around the trysting-place The moonstruck lover leads;
Which superstition I should scout
There is more faith in honest doubt (As Tennyson has pointed out)
Than in those nasty creeds.
But peace and righteousness (St. John) In Roundabout can kiss,
And since that’s all that’s found about The pleasant town of Roundabout,
The roads they simply bound about
To find out where it is.
Some say that when Sir Lancelot
Went forth to find the Grail,
Grey Merlin wrinkled up the roads
For hope that he should fail;
All roads led back to Lyonesse
And Camelot in the Vale,
I cannot yield assent to this
Extravagant hypothesis,
The plain, shrewd Briton will dismiss Such rumours (Daily Mail).
But in the streets of Roundabout
Are no such factions found,
Or theories to expound about,
Or roll upon the ground about,
In the happy town of Roundabout,
That makes the world go round.
THE SONG OF THE STRANGE ASCETIC

If I had been a Heathen,
I’d have praised the purple vine, My slaves should dig the vineyards, And I would drink the wine;
But Higgins is a Heathen,
And his slaves grow lean and grey, That he may drink some tepid milk Exactly twice a day.
If I had been a Heathen,
I’d have crowned Neœra’s curls, And filled my life with love affairs, My house with dancing girls;
But Higgins is a Heathen, And to lecture rooms is forced, Where his aunts, who are not married, Demand to be divorced.
If I had been a Heathen,
I’d have sent my armies forth, And dragged behind my chariots The Chieftains of the North.
But Higgins is a Heathen, And he drives the dreary quill, To lend the poor that funny cash That makes them poorer still.
If I had been a Heathen,
I’d have piled my pyre on high, And in a great red whirlwind Gone roaring to the sky;
But Higgins is a Heathen, And a richer man than I; And they put him in an oven, Just as if he were a pie.
Now who that runs can read it, The riddle that I write, Of why this poor old sinner, Should sin without delight—?
But I, I cannot read it (Although I run and run),
Of them that do not have the faith, And will not have the fun.
THE SONG OF RIGHT AND WRONG

Feast on wine or fast on water,
And your honour shall stand sure, God Almighty’s son and daughter
He the valiant, she the pure;
If an angel out of heaven
Brings you other things to drink, Thank him for his kind attentions, Go and pour them down the sink.
Tea is like the East he grows in, A great yellow Mandarin
With urbanity of manner
And unconsciousness of sin;
All the women, like a harem,
At his pig-tail troop along;
And, like all the East he grows in, He is Poison when he’s strong.
Tea, although an Oriental,
Is a gentleman at least;
Cocoa is a cad and coward,
Cocoa is a vulgar beast,
Cocoa is a dull, disloyal,
Lying, crawling cad and clown,
And may very well be grateful
To the fool that takes him down.
As for all the windy waters,
They were rained like tempests down When good drink had been dishonoured
By the tipplers of the town;
When red wine had brought red ruin And the death-dance of our times, Heaven sent us Soda Water
As a torment for our crimes.
WHO GOES HOME?

In the city set upon slime and loam
They cry in their parliament “Who goes home?”
And there comes no answer in arch or dome, For none in the city of graves goes home.
Yet these shall perish and understand,
For God has pity on this great land.
Men that are men again; who goes home?
Tocsin and trumpeter! Who goes home?
For there’s blood on the field and blood on the foam And blood on the body when Man goes home.
And a voice valedictory. . . . Who is for Victory?
Who is for Liberty? Who goes home?
GREYBEARDS AT PLAY

G. K. CHESTERTON
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

GREYBEARDS AT PLAY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A DEDICATION TO E.C.B.

THE ONENESS OF THE PHILOSOPHER WITH NATURE.

OF THE DANGERS ATTENDING ALTRUISM ON THE HIGH SEAS

MORAL

ON THE DISASTROUS SPREAD OF ÆSTHETICISM IN ALL CLASSES

ENVOY
A DEDICATION TO E.C.B.

He was, through boyhood’s storm and shower, My best, my nearest friend;
We wore one hat, smoked one cigar, One standing at each end.
We were two hearts with single hope, Two faces in one hood;
I knew the secrets of his youth;
I watched his every mood.
The little things that none but I Saw were beyond his wont,
The streaming hair, the tie behind, The coat tails worn in front.
I marked the absent-minded scream, The little nervous trick
Of rolling in the grate, with eyes By friendship’s light made quick.
But youth’s black storms are gone and past, Bare is each aged brow;
And, since with age we’re growing bald, Let us be babies now.
Learning we knew; but still to-day, With spelling-book devotion,
Words of one syllable we seek
In moments of emotion.

Riches we knew; and well dressed dolls— Dolls living—who expressed
No filial thoughts, however much
You thumped them in the chest.
Old happiness is grey as we,
And we may still outstrip her;
If we be slippered pantaloons,
Oh let us hunt the slipper!
The old world glows with colours clear; And if, as saith the saint,
The world is but a painted show,
Oh let us lick the paint!

Far, far behind are morbid hours, And lonely hearts that bleed.
Far, far behind us are the days,
When we were old indeed.
Leave we the child: he is immersed With scientists and mystics:
With deep prophetic voice he cries Canadian food statistics.
But now I know how few and small, The things we crave need be— Toys and
the universe and you—
A little friend to tea.
Behold the simple sum of things,
Where, in one splendour spun,
The stars go round the Mulberry Bush, The Burning Bush, the Sun.
Now we are old and wise and grey, And shaky at the knees;
Now is the true time to delight
In picture books like these.
Hoary and bent I dance one hour:
What though I die at morn?
There is a shout among the stars, “To-night a child is born.”
THE ONENESS OF THE PHILOSOPHER WITH NATURE.

I love to see the little stars
All dancing to one tune;
I think quite highly of the Sun,
And kindly of the Moon.

The million forests of the Earth
Come trooping in to tea.
The great Niagara waterfall Is never shy with me.
I am the tiger’s confidant,
And never mention names:
The lion drops the formal “Sir,”
And lets me call him James.

Into my ear the blushing Whale
Stammers his love. I know
Why the Rhinoceros is sad,
—Ah, child! ’twas long ago.

I am akin to all the Earth
By many a tribal sign:
The aged Pig will often wear
That sad, sweet smile of mine.

My niece, the Barnacle, has got
My piercing eyes of black;
The Elephant has got my nose,
I do not want it back.

I know the strange tale of the Slug; The Early Sin—the Fall— The Sleep—the Vision—and the Vow—
The Quest—the Crown—the Call.

And I have loved the Octopus,
Since we were boys together.
I love the Vulture and the Shark:
I even love the weather.

I love to bask in sunny fields,
And when that hope is vain,
I go and bask in Baker Street, All in the pouring rain.
Come snow! where fly, by some strange law, Hard snowballs—without noise
— Through streets untenanted, except By good unconscious boys.
Come fog! exultant mystery—
Where, in strange darkness rolled, The end of my own nose becomes
A lovely legend old.

Come snow, and hail, and thunderbolts, Sleet, fire, and general fuss;
Come to my arms, come all at once— Oh photograph me thus!
OF THE DANGERS ATTENDING ALTRUISM ON THE HIGH SEAS

Observe these Pirates bold and gay, That sail a gory sea:
Notice their bright expression:—
The handsome one is me.

We plundered ships and harbours,
We spoiled the Spanish main; But Nemesis watched over us,
For it began to rain.
Oh all well-meaning folk take heed!
Our Captain’s fate was sore;
A more well-meaning Pirate,
Had never dripped with gore.

The rain was pouring long and loud, The sea was drear and dim;
A little fish was floating there:
Our Captain pitied him.

“How sad,” he said, and dropped a tear Splash on the cabin roof,
“That we are dry, while he is there Without a waterproof.
“We’ll get him up on board at once; For Science teaches me,
He will be wet if he remains
Much longer in the sea.”

They fished him out; the First Mate wept, And came with rugs and ale:
The Boatswain brought him one golosh, And fixed it on his tail.
But yet he never loved the ship;
Against the mast he’d lean;
If spoken to, he coughed and smiled, And blushed a pallid green.
Though plied with hardbake, beef and beer, He showed no wish to sup:
The neatest riddles they could ask, He always gave them up.
They seized him and court-martialled him, In some excess of spleen,
For lack of social sympathy,
(Victoria xii. 18).
They gathered every evidence
That might remove a doubt:
They wrote a postcard in his name, And partly scratched it out.
Till, when his guilt was clear as day, With all formality
They doomed the traitor to be drowned, And threw him in the sea.
The flashing sunset, as he sank,
Made every scale a gem;
And, turning with a graceful bow,
He kissed his fin to them.
MORAL

I am, I think I have remarked,
Terrifically old,
(The second Ice-age was a farce, The first was rather cold.)
A friend of mine, a trilobite
Had gathered in his youth,
When trilobites were trilobites, This all-important truth.
We aged ones play solemn parts— Sire—guardian—uncle—king.
Affection is the salt of life,
Kindness a noble thing.
The old alone may comprehend
A sense in my decree;
But—if you find a fish on land, Oh throw it in the sea.
ON THE DISASTROUS SPREAD OF ÆSTHETICISM IN ALL CLASSES

Impetuously I sprang from bed,
Long before lunch was up,
That I might drain the dizzy dew
From day’s first golden cup.

In swift devouring ecstasy
Each toil in turn was done;
I had done lying on the lawn
Three minutes after one.
For me, as Mr. Wordsworth says,
The duties shine like stars;
I formed my uncle’s character,
Decreasing his cigars.

But could my kind engross me? No!
Stern Art—what sons escape her?
Soon I was drawing Gladstone’s nose On scraps of blotting paper.
Then on—to play one-fingered tunes Upon my aunt’s piano.
In short, I have a headlong soul,
I much resemble Hanno.
(Forgive the entrance of the not
Too cogent Carthaginian.
It may have been to make a rhyme;
I lean to that opinion).

Then my great work of book research Till dusk I took in hand— The forming of a final, sound
Opinion on The Strand.
But when I quenched the midnight oil, And closed The Referee, Whose thirty volumes folio
I take to bed with me,
I had a rather funny dream,
Intense, that is, and mystic;
I dreamed that, with one leap and yell, The world became artistic.
The Shopmen, when their souls were still, Declined to open shops— And
Cooks recorded frames of mind
In sad and subtle chops.

The stars were weary of routine:
The trees in the plantation
Were growing every fruit at once,
In search of a sensation.
The moon went for a moonlight stroll, And tried to be a bard,
And gazed enraptured at itself:
I left it trying hard.

The sea had nothing but a mood
Of ‘vague ironic gloom,’
With which t’explain its presence in My upstairs drawing-room.
The sun had read a little book
That struck him with a notion:
He drowned himself and all his fires Deep in the hissing ocean.
Then all was dark, lawless, and lost: I heard great devilish wings:
I knew that Art had won, and snapt The Covenant of Things.
I cried aloud, and I awoke,
New labours in my head.
I set my teeth, and manfully
Began to lie in bed.
Toiling, rejoicing, sorrowing,
So I my life conduct.
Each morning see some task begun,
Each evening see it chucked.
But still, in sudden moods of dusk, I hear those great weird wings,
Feel vaguely thankful to the vast
Stupidity of things.
ENVOY

Clear was the night: the moon was young: The larkspurs in the plots
Mingled their orange with the gold Of the forget-me-nots.
The poppies seemed a silver mist:
So darkly fell the gloom.
You scarce had guessed yon crimson streaks Were buttercups in bloom.
But one thing moved: a little child Crashed through the flower and fern: And all my soul rose up to greet
The sage of whom I learn.

I looked into his awful eyes:
I waited his decree:
I made ingenious attempts
To sit upon his knee.
The babe upraised his wondering eyes, And timidly he said,
“A trend towards experiment
In modern minds is bred.
“I feel the will to roam, to learn By test, experience, nous, That fire is hot and ocean deep,
And wolves carnivorous.

“My brain demands complexity.”
The lisping cherub cried.
I looked at him, and only said,
“Go on. The world is wide.”
A tear rolled down his pinafore,
“Yet from my life must pass
The simple love of sun and moon,
The old games in the grass;
“Now that my back is to my home
Could these again be found?”
I looked on him, and only said,
“Go on. The world is round.”
INDEX

—PLAYS—

MAGIC
MAGIC

A FANTASTIC COMEDY

G. K. CHESTERTON
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

MAGIC

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE CHARACTERS

NOTE

THE PRELUDE: ACT I

ACT II

ACT III
THE CHARACTERS

The Duke
Doctor Grimthorpe
The Rev. Cyril Smith
Morris Carleon
Hastings, the Duke’s Secretary
The Stranger
Patricia Carleon
NOTE

This play was presented under the management of Kenelm Foss at The Little Theatre, London, on November 7, 1913, with the following cast: The Stranger

Franklin Dyall
Patricia Carleon
Miss Grace Croft
The Rev. Cyril Smith O.P. Heggie
Dr. Grimthorpe
William Farren
The Duke
Fred Lewis
Hastings
Frank Randell
Morris Carleon
Lyonel Watts
THE PRELUDE: ACT I

Scene: A plantation of thin young trees, in a misty and rainy twilight; some woodland blossom showing the patches on the earth between the stems.

The Stranger is discovered, a cloaked figure with a pointed hood. His costume might belong to modern or any other time, and the conical hood is so drawn over the head that little can be seen of the face.

A distant voice, a woman’s, is heard, half-singing, half-chanting, unintelligible words. The cloaked figure raises its head and listens with interest. The song draws nearer and Patricia Carleon enters. She is dark and slight, and has a dreamy expression. Though she is artistically dressed, her hair is a little wild. She has a broken branch of some flowering tree in her hand. She does not notice the stranger, and though he has watched her with interest, makes no sign. Suddenly she perceives him and starts back.

Patricia. Oh! Who are you?

Stranger. Ah! Who am I? [Commences to mutter to himself, and maps out the ground with his staff.]

I have a hat, but not to wear;
I wear a sword, but not to slay,
And ever in my bag I bear
A pack of cards, but not to play.

Patricia. What are you? What are you saying?

Stranger. It is the language of the fairies, O daughter of Eve.

Patricia. But I never thought fairies were like you. Why, you are taller than I am.

Stranger. We are of such stature as we will. But the elves grow small, not large, when they would mix with mortals.

Patricia. You mean they are beings greater than we are.
Stranger. Daughter of men, if you would see a fairy as he truly is, look for his head above all the stars and his feet amid the floors of the sea. Old women have taught you that the fairies are too small to be seen. But I tell you the fairies are too mighty to be seen. For they are the elder gods before whom the giants were like pigmies. They are the Elemental Spirits, and any one of them is larger than the world. And you look for them in acorns and on toadstools and wonder that you never see them.

Patricia. But you come in the shape and size of a man?

Stranger. Because I would speak with a woman.

Patricia. [Drawing back in awe.] I think you are growing taller as you speak.

[The scene appears to fade away, and give place to the milieu of Act One, the Duke’s drawing-room, an apartment with open French windows or any opening large enough to show a garden and one house fairly near. It is evening, and there is a red lamp lighted in the house beyond. The Rev. Cyril Smith is sitting with hat and umbrella beside him, evidently a visitor. He is a young man with the highest of High Church dog-collars and all the qualities of a restrained fanatic. He is one of the Christian Socialist sort and takes his priesthood seriously. He is an honest man, and not an ass.

[To him enters Mr. Hastings with papers in his hand.

Hastings. Oh, good evening. You are Mr. Smith. [Pause.] I mean you are the Rector, I think.

Smith. I am the Rector.

Hastings. I am the Duke’s secretary. His Grace asks me to say that he hopes to see you very soon; but he is engaged just now with the Doctor.

Smith. Is the Duke ill?

Hastings. [Laughing.] Oh, no; the Doctor has come to ask him to help some cause or other. The Duke is never ill.

Smith. Is the Doctor with him now?
Hastings. Why, strictly speaking, he is not. The Doctor has gone over the road to fetch a paper connected with his proposal. But he hasn’t far to go, as you can see. That’s his red lamp at the end of his grounds.

Smith. Yes, I know. I am much obliged to you. I will wait as long as is necessary.

Hastings. [Cheerfully.] Oh, it won’t be very long.

[Exit.]

[Enter by the garden doors Dr. Grimthorpe reading an open paper. He is an old-fashioned practitioner, very much of a gentleman and very carefully dressed in a slightly antiquated style. He is about sixty years old and might have been a friend of Huxley’s.

Doctor. [Folding up the paper.] I beg your pardon, sir, I did not notice there was anyone here.

Smith. [Amicably.] I beg yours. A new clergyman cannot expect to be expected. I only came to see the Duke about some local affairs.

Doctor. [Smiling.] And so, oddly enough, did I. But I suppose we should both like to get hold of him by a separate ear.

Smith. Oh, there’s no disguise as far as I’m concerned. I’ve joined this league for starting a model public-house in the parish; and in plain words, I’ve come to ask his Grace for a subscription to it.

Doctor. [Grimly.] And, as it happens, I have joined in the petition against the erection of a model public-house in this parish. The similarity of our position grows with every instant.

Smith. Yes, I think we must have been twins.

Doctor. [More good-humouredly.] Well, what is a model public-house? Do you mean a toy?

Smith. I mean a place where Englishmen can get decent drink and drink it
decently. Do you call that a toy?

Doctor. No; I should call that a conjuring trick. Or, in apology to your cloth, I will say a miracle.

Smith. I accept the apology to my cloth. I am doing my duty as a priest. How can the Church have a right to make men fast if she does not allow them to feast?

Doctor. [Bitterly.] And when you have done feasting them, you will send them to me to be cured.

Smith. Yes; and when you’ve done curing them you’ll send them to me to be buried.

Doctor. [After a pause, laughing.] Well, you have all the old doctrines. It is only fair you should have all the old jokes too.

Smith. [Laughing also.] By the way, you call it a conjuring trick that poor people should drink moderately.

Doctor. I call it a chemical discovery that alcohol is not a food.

Smith. You don’t drink wine yourself?

Doctor. [Mildly startled.] Drink wine! Well—what else is there to drink?

Smith. So drinking decently is a conjuring trick that you can do, anyhow?

Doctor. [Still good-humouredly.] Well, well, let us hope so. Talking about conjuring tricks, there is to be conjuring and all kinds of things here this afternoon.

Smith. Conjuring? Indeed? Why is that?

Enter Hastings with a letter in each hand.

Hastings. His Grace will be with you presently. He asked me to deal with the business matter first of all.
[He gives a note to each of them.

Smith. [Turning eagerly to the Doctor.] But this is rather splendid. The Duke’s given £50 to the new public-house.

Hastings. The Duke is very liberal.

[Collects papers.

Doctor. [Examining his cheque.] Very. But this is rather curious. He has also given £50 to the league for opposing the new public-house.

Hastings. The Duke is very liberal-minded.

[Exit.

Smith. [Staring at his cheque.] Liberal-minded! . . . Absent-minded, I should call it.

Doctor. [Sitting down and lighting a cigar.] Well, yes. The Duke does suffer a little from absence [puts his cigar in his mouth and pulls during the pause] of mind. He is all for compromise. Don’t you know the kind of man who, when you talk to him about the five best breeds of dog, always ends up by buying a mongrel? The Duke is the kindest of men, and always trying to please everybody. He generally finishes by pleasing nobody.

Smith. Yes; I think I know the sort of thing.

Doctor. Take this conjuring, for instance. You know the Duke has two wards who are to live with him now?

Smith. Yes. I heard something about a nephew and niece from Ireland.

Doctor. The niece came from Ireland some months ago, but the nephew comes back from America to-night. [He gets up abruptly and walks about the room.] I think I will tell you all about it. In spite of your precious public-house you seem to me to be a sane man. And I fancy I shall want all the sane men I can get to-night.
Smith. [Rising also.] I am at your service. Do you know, I rather guessed you did not come here only to protest against my precious public-house.

Doctor. [Striding about in subdued excitement.] Well, you guessed right. I was family physician to the Duke’s brother in Ireland. I knew the family pretty well.

Smith. [Quietly.] I suppose you mean you knew something odd about the family?

Doctor. Well, they saw fairies and things of that sort.

Smith. And I suppose, to the medical mind, seeing fairies means much the same as seeing snakes?

Doctor. [With a sour smile.] Well, they saw them in Ireland. I suppose it’s quite correct to see fairies in Ireland. It’s like gambling at Monte Carlo. It’s quite respectable. But I do draw the line at their seeing fairies in England. I do object to their bringing their ghosts and goblins and witches into the poor Duke’s own back garden and within a yard of my own red lamp. It shows a lack of tact.

Smith. But I do understand that the Duke’s nephew and niece see witches and fairies between here and your lamp.

[He walks to the garden window and looks out.

Doctor. Well, the nephew has been in America. It stands to reason you can’t see fairies in America. But there is this sort of superstition in the family, and I am not easy in my mind about the girl.

Smith. Why, what does she do?

Doctor. Oh, she wanders about the park and the woods in the evenings. Damp evenings for choice. She calls it the Celtic twilight. I’ve no use for the Celtic twilight myself. It has a tendency to get on the chest. But what is worse, she is always talking about meeting somebody, some elf or wizard or something. I don’t like it at all.

Smith. Have you told the Duke?
Doctor. [With a grim smile.] Oh, yes, I told the Duke. The result was the conjurer.

Smith. [With amazement.] The conjurer?

Doctor. [Puts down his cigar in the ash-tray.] The Duke is indescribable. He will be here presently, and you shall judge for yourself. Put two or three facts or ideas before him, and the thing he makes out of them is always something that seems to have nothing to do with it. Tell any other human being about a girl dreaming of the fairies and her practical brother from America, and he would settle it in some obvious way and satisfy some one: send her to America or let her have her fairies in Ireland. Now the Duke thinks a conjurer would just meet the case. I suppose he vaguely thinks it would brighten things up, and somehow satisfy the believers’ interest in supernatural things and the unbelievers’ interest in smart things. As a matter of fact the unbeliever thinks the conjurer’s a fraud, and the believer thinks he’s a fraud, too. The conjurer satisfies nobody. That is why he satisfies the Duke.

[Enter the Duke, with Hastings, carrying papers. The Duke is a healthy, hearty man in tweeds, with a rather wandering eye. In the present state of the peerage it is necessary to explain that the Duke, though an ass, is a gentleman.

Duke. Good-morning, Mr. Smith. So sorry to have kept you waiting, but we’re rather in a rush to-day. [Turns to Hastings, who has gone over to a table with the papers.] You know Mr. Carleon is coming this afternoon?

Hastings. Yes, your Grace. His train will be in by now. I have sent the trap.

Duke. Thank you. [Turning to the other two.] My nephew, Dr. Grimthorpe, Morris, you know, Miss Carleon’s brother from America. I hear he’s been doing great things out there. Petrol, or something. Must move with the times, eh?

Doctor. I’m afraid Mr. Smith doesn’t always agree with moving with the times.

Duke. Oh, come, come! Progress, you know, progress! Of course I know how busy you are; you mustn’t overwork yourself, you know. Hastings was telling me you laughed over those subscriptions of mine. Well, well, I believe in looking at both sides of a question, you know. Aspects, as old Buffle called
them. Aspects. [With an all-embracing gesture of the arm.] You represent the tendency to drink in moderation, and you do good in your way. The Doctor represents the tendency not to drink at all; and he does good in his way. We can’t be Ancient Britons, you know.

[A prolonged and puzzled silence, such as always follows the more abrupt of the Duke’s associations or disassociations of thought.]

Smith. [At last, faintly.] Ancient Britons. . .

Doctor. [To Smith in a low voice.] Don’t bother. It’s only his broad-mindedness.

Duke. [With unabated cheerfulness.] I saw the place you’re putting up for it, Mr. Smith. Very good work. Very good work, indeed. Art for the people, eh? I particularly liked that woodwork over the west door—I’m glad to see you’re using the new sort of graining . . . why, it all reminds one of the French Revolution.

[Another silence. As the Duke lounges alertly about the room, Smith speaks to the Doctor in an undertone.]

Smith. Does it remind you of the French Revolution?

Doctor. As much as of anything else. His Grace never reminds me of anything.

[A young and very high American voice is heard calling in the garden. “Say, could somebody see to one of these trunks?”

[Mr. Hastings goes out into the garden. He returns with Morris Carleon, a very young man: hardly more than a boy, but with very grown-up American dress and manners. He is dark, smallish, and active; and the racial type under his Americanism is Irish.

Morris. [Humorously, as he puts in his head at the window.] See here, does a Duke live here?

Doctor. [Who is nearest to him, with great gravity.] Yes, only one.

Morris. I reckon he’s the one I want, anyhow. I’m his nephew.
[The Duke, who is ruminating in the foreground, with one eye rather off, turns at the voice and shakes Morris warmly by the hand.

Duke. Delighted to see you, my dear boy. I hear you’ve been doing very well for yourself.

Morris. [Laughing.] Well, pretty well, Duke; and better still for Paul T. Vandam, I guess. I manage the old man’s mines out in Arizona, you know.

Duke. [Shaking his head sagaciously.] Ah, very go-ahead man! Very go-ahead methods, I’m told. Well, I dare say he does a great deal of good with his money. And we can’t go back to the Spanish Inquisition.

[Silence, during which the three men look at each other.

Morris. [Abruptly.] And how’s Patricia?

Duke. [A little hazily.] Oh, she’s very well, I think. She. . . .

[He hesitates slightly.

Morris. [Smiling.] Well, then, where’s Patricia?

[There is a slightly embarrassed pause, and the Doctor speaks.

Doctor. Miss Carleon is walking about the grounds, I think.

[Morris goes to the garden doors and looks out.

Morris. It’s a mighty chilly night to choose. Does my sister commonly select such evenings to take the air—and the damp?

Doctor. [After a pause.] If I may say so, I quite agree with you. I have often taken the liberty of warning your sister against going out in all weathers like this.

Duke. [Expansively waving his hands about.] The artist temperament! What I always call the artistic temperament! Wordsworth, you know, and all that.

[Silence.]
Morris. [Staring.] All what?

Duke. [Continuing to lecture with enthusiasm.] Why, everything’s temperament, you know! It’s her temperament to see the fairies. It’s my temperament not to see the fairies. Why, I’ve walked all round the grounds twenty times and never saw a fairy. Well, it’s like that about this wizard or whatever she calls it. For her there is somebody there. For us there would not be somebody there. Don’t you see?

Morris. [Advancing excitedly.] Somebody there! What do you mean?

Duke. [Airily.] Well, you can’t quite call it a man.

Morris. [Violently.] A man!

Duke. Well, as old Buffle used to say, what is a man?

Morris. [With a strong rise of the American accent.] With your permission, Duke, I eliminate old Buffle. Do you mean that anybody has had the tarnation coolness to suggest that some man. . . .

Duke. Oh, not a man, you know. A magician, something mythical, you know.

Smith. Not a man, but a medicine man.

Doctor. [Grimly.] I am a medicine man.

Morris. And you don’t look mythical, Doc.

[He bites his finger and begins to pace restlessly up and down the room.]

Duke. Well, you know, the artistic temperament. . . .

Morris. [Turning suddenly.] See here, Duke! In most commercial ways we’re a pretty forward country. In these moral ways we’re content to be a pretty backward country. And if you ask me whether I like my sister walking about the woods on a night like this! Well, I don’t.

Duke. I am afraid you Americans aren’t so advanced as I’d hoped. Why! as old
Buffle used to say. . . .

[As he speaks a distant voice is heard singing in the garden; it comes nearer and nearer, and Smith turns suddenly to the Doctor.

Smith. Whose voice is that?

Doctor. It is no business of mine to decide!

Morris. [Walking to the window.] You need not trouble. I know who it is.

Enter Patricia Carleon

[Still agitated.] Patricia, where have you been?

Patricia. [Rather wearily.] Oh! in Fairyland.

Doctor. [Genially.] And whereabouts is that?

Patricia. It’s rather different from other places. It’s either nowhere or it’s wherever you are.

Morris. [Sharply.] Has it any inhabitants?

Patricia. Generally only two. Oneself and one’s shadow. But whether he is my shadow or I am his shadow is never found out.

Morris. He? Who?

Patricia. [Seeming to understand his annoyance for the first time, and smiling.] Oh, you needn’t get conventional about it, Morris. He is not a mortal.

Morris. What’s his name?

Patricia. We have no names there. You never really know anybody if you know his name.

Morris. What does he look like?

Patricia. I have only met him in the twilight. He seems robed in a long cloak,
with a peaked cap or hood like the elves in my nursery stories. Sometimes when I look out of the window here, I see him passing round this house like a shadow; and see his pointed hood, dark against the sunset or the rising of the moon.

Smith. What does he talk about?

Patricia. He tells me the truth. Very many true things. He is a wizard.

Morris. How do you know he’s a wizard? I suppose he plays some tricks on you.

Patricia. I should know he was a wizard if he played no tricks. But once he stooped and picked up a stone and cast it into the air, and it flew up into God’s heaven like a bird.

Morris. Was that what first made you think he was a wizard?

Patricia. Oh, no. When I first saw him he was tracing circles and pentacles in the grass and talking the language of the elves.

Morris. [Sceptically.] Do you know the language of the elves?

Patricia. Not until I heard it.

Morris. [Lowering his voice as if for his sister, but losing patience so completely that he talks much louder than he imagines.] See here, Patricia, I reckon this kind of thing is going to be the limit. I’m just not going to have you let in by some blamed tramp or fortune-teller because you choose to read minor poetry about the fairies. If this gipsy or whatever he is troubles you again. . . .

Doctor. [Putting his hand on Morris’s shoulder.] Come, you must allow a little more for poetry. We can’t all feed on nothing but petrol.

Duke. Quite right, quite right. And being Irish, don’t you know, Celtic, as old Buffle used to say, charming songs, you know, about the Irish girl who has a plaid shawl—and a Banshee. [Sighs profoundly.] Poor old Gladstone!

[Silence as usual.

Smith. [Speaking to Doctor.] I thought you yourself considered the family
superstition bad for the health?

Doctor. I consider a family superstition is better for the health than a family quarrel. [He walks casually across to Patricia.] Well, it must be nice to be young and still see all those stars and sunsets. We old buffers won’t be too strict with you if your view of things sometimes gets a bit—mixed up, shall we say? If the stars get loose about the grass by mistake; or if, once or twice, the sunset gets into the east. We should only say, “Dream as much as you like. Dream for all mankind. Dream for us who can dream no longer. But do not quite forget the difference.”

Patricia. What difference?

Doctor. The difference between the things that are beautiful and the things that are there. That red lamp over my door isn’t beautiful; but it’s there. You might even come to be glad it is there, when the stars of gold and silver have faded. I am an old man now, but some men are still glad to find my red star. I do not say they are the wise men.

Patricia. [Somewhat affected.] Yes, I know you are good to everybody. But don’t you think there may be floating and spiritual stars which will last longer than the red lamps?

Smith. [With decision.] Yes. But they are fixed stars.

Doctor. The red lamp will last my time.

Duke. Capital! Capital! Why, it’s like Tennyson. [Silence.] I remember when I was an undergrad. . . .

[The red light disappears; no one sees it at first except Patricia, who points excitedly.

Morris. What’s the matter?

Patricia. The red star is gone.

Morris. Nonsense! [Rushes to the garden doors.] It’s only somebody standing in front of it. Say, Duke, there’s somebody standing in the garden.
Patricia. [Calmly.] I told you he walked about the garden.

Morris. If it’s that fortune-teller of yours. . . .

[Disappears into the garden, followed by the Doctor.

Duke. [Staring.] Somebody in the garden! Really, this Land Campaign. . . .

[Silence.

Morris reappears rather breathless.

Morris. A spry fellow, your friend. He slipped through my hands like a shadow.

Patricia. I told you he was a shadow.

Morris. Well, I guess there’s going to be a shadow hunt. Got a lantern, Duke?

Patricia. Oh, you need not trouble. He will come if I call him.

[She goes out into the garden and calls out some half-chanted and unintelligible words, somewhat like the song preceding her entrance. The red light reappears; and there is a slight sound as of fallen leaves shuffled by approaching feet. The cloaked Stranger with the pointed hood is seen standing outside the garden doors.

Patricia. You may enter all doors.

[The figure comes into the room

Morris. [Shutting the garden doors behind him.] Now, see here, wizard, we’ve got you. And we know you’re a fraud.

Smith. [Quietly.] Pardon me, I do not fancy that we know that. For myself I must confess to something of the Doctor’s agnosticism.

Morris. [Excited, and turning almost with a snarl.] I didn’t know you parsons stuck up for any fables but your own.

Smith. I stick up for the thing every man has a right to. Perhaps the only thing
that every man has a right to.

Morris. And what is that?

Smith. The benefit of the doubt. Even your master, the petroleum millionaire, has a right to that. And I think he needs it more.

Morris. I don’t think there’s much doubt about the question, Minister. I’ve met this sort of fellow often enough—the sort of fellow who wheedles money out of girls by telling them he can make stones disappear.

Doctor. [To the Stranger.] Do you say you can make stones disappear?

Stranger. Yes. I can make stones disappear.

Morris. [Roughly.] I reckon you’re the kind of tough who knows how to make a watch and chain disappear.

Stranger. Yes; I know how to make a watch and chain disappear.

Morris. And I should think you were pretty good at disappearing yourself.

Stranger. I have done such a thing.

Morris. [With a sneer.] Will you disappear now?

Stranger. [After reflection.] No, I think I’ll appear instead. [He throws back his hood, showing the head of an intellectual-looking man, young but rather worn. Then he unfastens his cloak and throws it off, emerging in complete modern evening dress. He advances down the room towards the Duke, taking out his watch as he does so.] Good-evening, your Grace. I’m afraid I’m rather too early for the performance. But this gentleman [with a gesture towards Morris] seemed rather impatient for it to begin.

Duke. [Rather at a loss.] Oh, good-evening. Why, really—are you the . . . ?

Stranger. [Bowing.] Yes. I am the Conjurer.

[There is general laughter, except from Patricia. As the others mingle in talk, the
Stranger goes up to her.

Stranger. [Very sadly.] I am very sorry I am not a wizard.

Patricia. I wish you were a thief instead.

Stranger. Have I committed a worse crime than thieving?

Patricia. You have committed the cruelest crime, I think, that there is.

Stranger. And what is the cruelest crime?

Patricia. Stealing a child’s toy.

Stranger. And what have I stolen?

Patricia. A fairy tale.

CURTAIN
ACT II

The same room lighted more brilliantly an hour later in the evening. On one side a table covered with packs of cards, pyramids, etc., at which the Conjurer in evening dress is standing quietly setting out his tricks. A little more in the foreground the Duke; and Hastings with a number of papers.

Hastings. There are only a few small matters. Here are the programmes of the entertainment your Grace wanted. Mr. Carleon wishes to see them very much.

Duke. Thanks, thanks. [Takes the programmes.]

Hastings. Shall I carry them for your Grace?

Duke. No, no; I shan’t forget, I shan’t forget. Why, you’ve no idea how businesslike I am. We have to be, you know. [Vaguely.] I know you’re a bit of a Socialist; but I assure you there’s a good deal to do—stake in the country, and all that. Look at remembering faces now! The King never forgets faces. [Waves the programmes about.] I never forget faces. [Catches sight of the Conjurer and genially draws him into the discussion.] Why, the Professor here who performs before the King [puts down the programmes]—you see it on the caravans, you know—performs before the King almost every night, I suppose. . . .

Conjurer. [Smiling.] I sometimes let his Majesty have an evening off. And turn my attention, of course, to the very highest nobility. But naturally I have performed before every sovereign potentate, white and black. There never was a conjurer who hadn’t.

Duke. That’s right, that’s right! And you’ll say with me that the great business for a King is remembering people?

Conjurer. I should say it was remembering which people to remember.

Duke. Well, well, now. . . . [Looks round rather wildly for something.] Being really businesslike. . . .

Hastings. Shall I take the programmes for your Grace?
Duke. [Picking them up.] No, no, I shan’t forget. Is there anything else?

Hastings. I have to go down the village about the wire to Stratford. The only other thing at all urgent is the Militant Vegetarians.

Duke. Ah! The Militant Vegetarians! You’ve heard of them, I’m sure. Won’t obey the law [to the Conjurer] so long as the Government serves out meat.

Conjurer. Let them be comforted. There are a good many people who don’t get much meat.

Duke. Well, well, I’m bound to say they’re very enthusiastic. Advanced, too—oh, certainly advanced. Like Joan of Arc.

[Short silence, in which the Conjurer stares at him.]

Conjurer. Was Joan of Arc a Vegetarian?

Duke. Oh, well, it’s a very high ideal, after all. The Sacredness of Life, you know—the Sacredness of Life. [Shakes his head.] But they carry it too far. They killed a policeman down in Kent.

Conjurer. Killed a policeman? How Vegetarian! Well, I suppose it was, so long as they didn’t eat him.

Hastings. They are asking only for small subscriptions. Indeed, they prefer to collect a large number of half-crowns, to prove the popularity of their movement. But I should advise. . . .

Duke. Oh, give them three shillings, then.

Hastings. If I might suggest. . . .

Duke. Hang it all! We gave the Anti-Vegetarians three shillings. It seems only fair.

Hastings. If I might suggest anything, I think your Grace will be wise not to subscribe in this case. The Anti-Vegetarians have already used their funds to form gangs ostensibly to protect their own meetings. And if the Vegetarians use
 theirs to break up the meetings—well, it will look rather funny that we have paid roughs on both sides. It will be rather difficult to explain when it comes before the magistrate.

Duke. But I shall be the magistrate. [Conjuror stares at him again.] That’s the system, my dear Hastings, that’s the advantage of the system. Not a logical system—no Rousseau in it—but see how well it works! I shall be the very best magistrate that could be on the Bench. The others would be biassed, you know. Old Sir Lawrence is a Vegetarian himself; and might be hard on the Anti-Vegetarian roughs. Colonel Crashaw would be sure to be hard on the Vegetarian roughs. But if I’ve paid both of ’em, of course I shan’t be hard on either of ’em—and there you have it. Just perfect impartiality.

Hastings. [Restrainedly.] Shall I take the programmes, your Grace?

Duke. [Heartily.] No, no; I won’t forget ’em. [Exit Hastings.] Well, Professor, what’s the news in the conjuring world?

Conjuror. I fear there is never any news in the conjuring world.

Duke. Don’t you have a newspaper or something? Everybody has a newspaper now, you know. The—er—Daily Sword-Swallow or that sort of thing?

Conjuror. No, I have been a journalist myself; but I think journalism and conjuring will always be incompatible.

Duke. Incompatible—Oh, but that’s where I differ—that’s where I take larger views! Larger laws, as old Buffle said. Nothing’s incompatible, you know—except husband and wife and so on; you must talk to Morris about that. It’s wonderful the way incompatibility has gone forward in the States.

Conjuror. I only mean that the two trades rest on opposite principles. The whole point of being a conjurer is that you won’t explain a thing that has happened.

Duke. Well, and the journalist?

Conjuror. Well, the whole point of being a journalist is that you do explain a thing that hasn’t happened.
Duke. But you’ll want somewhere to discuss the new tricks.

Conjurer. There are no new tricks. And if there were we shouldn’t want ’em discussed.

Duke. I’m afraid you’re not really advanced. Are you interested in modern progress?

Conjurer. Yes. We are interested in all tricks done by illusion.

Duke. Well, well, I must go and see how Morris is. Pleasure of seeing you later.

[Exit Duke, leaving the programmes.

Conjurer. Why are nice men such asses? [Turns to arrange the table.] That seems all right. The pack of cards that is a pack of cards. And the pack of cards that isn’t a pack of cards. The hat that looks like a gentleman’s hat. But which, in reality, is no gentleman’s hat. Only my hat; and I am not a gentleman. I am only a conjurer, and this is only a conjurer’s hat. I could not take off this hat to a lady. I can take rabbits out of it, goldfish out of it, snakes out of it. Only I mustn’t take my own head out of it. I suppose I’m a lower animal than a rabbit or a snake. Anyhow they can get out of the conjurer’s hat; and I can’t. I am a conjurer and nothing else but a conjurer. Unless I could show I was something else, and that would be worse.

[He begins to dash the cards rather irregularly about the table. Enter Patricia.

Patricia. [Coldly] I beg your pardon. I came to get some programmes. My uncle wants them.

[She walks swiftly across and takes up the programmes.

Conjurer. [Still dashing cards about the table.] Miss Carleon, might I speak to you a moment? [He puts his hands in his pockets, stares at the table; and his face assumes a sardonic expression.] The question is purely practical.

Patricia. [Pausing at the door.] I can hardly imagine what the question can be.

Conjurer. I am the question.
Patricia. And what have I to do with that?

Conjurer. You have everything to do with it. I am the question: you. . . .

Patricia. [Angrily.] Well, what am I?

Conjurer. You are the answer.

Patricia. The answer to what?

Conjurer. [Coming round to the front of the table and sitting against it.] The answer to me. You think I’m a liar because I walked about the fields with you and said I could make stones disappear. Well, so I can. I’m a conjurer. In mere point of fact, it wasn’t a lie. But if it had been a lie I should have told it just the same. I would have told twenty such lies. You may or may not know why.

Patricia. I know nothing about such lies.

[She puts her hand on the handle of the door, but the Conjurer, who is sitting on the table and staring at his boots, does not notice the action, and goes on as in a sincere soliloquy.

Conjurer. I don’t know whether you have any notion of what it means to a man like me to talk to a lady like you, even on false pretences. I am an adventurer. I am a blackguard, if one can earn the title by being in all the blackguard societies of the world. I have thought everything out by myself, when I was a guttersnipe in Fleet Street, or, lower still, a journalist in Fleet Street. Before I met you I never guessed that rich people ever thought at all. Well, that is all I have to say. We had some good conversations, didn’t we? I am a liar. But I told you a great deal of the truth.

[He turns and resumes the arrangement of the table.

Patricia. [Thinking.] Yes, you did tell me a great deal of the truth. You told me hundreds and thousands of truths. But you never told me the truth that one wants to know.

Conjurer. And what is that?
Patricia. [Turning back into the room.] You never told me the truth about yourself. You never told me you were only the Conjurer.

Conjurer. I did not tell you that because I do not even know it. I do not know whether I am only the Conjurer. . . .

Patricia. What do you mean?

Conjurer. Sometimes I am afraid I am something worse than the Conjurer.

Patricia. [Seriously.] I cannot think of anything worse than a conjurer who does not call himself a conjurer.

Conjurer. [Gloomily.] There is something worse. [Rallying himself.] But that is not what I want to say. Do you really find that very unpardonable? Come, let me put you a case. Never mind about whether it is our case. A man spends his time incessantly in going about in third-class carriages to fifth-rate lodgings. He has to make up new tricks, new patter, new nonsense, sometimes every night of his life. Mostly he has to do it in the beastly black cities of the Midlands and the North, where he can’t get out into the country. Now and again he does it at some gentleman’s country-house, where he can get out into the country. Well, you know that actors and orators and all sorts of people like to rehearse their effects in the open air if they can. [Smiles.] You know that story of the great statesman who was heard by his own gardener saying, as he paced the garden, “Had I, Mr. Speaker, received the smallest intimation that I could be called upon to speak this evening. . . .” [Patricia controls a smile, and he goes on with overwhelming enthusiasm.] Well, conjurers are just the same. It takes some time to prepare an impromptu. A man like that walks about the woods and fields doing all his tricks beforehand, and talking all sorts of gibberish because he thinks he is alone. One evening this man found he was not alone. He found a very beautiful child was watching him.

Patricia. A child?

Conjurer. Yes. That was his first impression. He is an intimate friend of mine. I have known him all my life. He tells me he has since discovered she is not a child. She does not fulfil the definition.
Patricia. What is the definition of a child?

Conjurer. Somebody you can play with.

Patricia. [Abruptly.] Why did you wear that cloak with the hood up?

Conjurer. [Smiling.] I think it escaped your notice that it was raining.

Patricia. [Smiling faintly.] And what did this friend of yours do?

Conjurer. You have already told me what he did. He destroyed a fairy tale, for he created a fairy tale that he was bound to destroy. [Swinging round suddenly on the table.] But do you blame a man very much, Miss Carleon, if he enjoyed the only fairy tale he had had in his life? Suppose he said the silly circles he was drawing for practice were really magic circles? Suppose he said the bosh he was talking was the language of the elves? Remember, he has read fairy tales as much as you have. Fairy tales are the only democratic institutions. All the classes have heard all the fairy tales. Do you blame him very much if he, too, tried to have a holiday in fairyland?

Patricia. [Simply.] I blame him less than I did. But I still say there can be nothing worse than false magic. And, after all, it was he who brought the false magic.

Conjurer. [Rising from his seat.] Yes. It was she who brought the real magic.

[Enter Morris, in evening-dress. He walks straight up to the conjuring-table; and picks up one article after another, putting each down with a comment.

Morris. I know that one. I know that. I know that. Let’s see, that’s the false bottom, I think. That works with a wire. I know that; it goes up the sleeve. That’s the false bottom again. That’s the substituted pack of cards—that. . . .

Patricia. Really, Morris, you mustn’t talk as if you knew everything.

Conjurer. Oh, I don’t mind anyone knowing everything, Miss Carleon. There is something that is much more important than knowing how a thing is done.

Morris. And what’s that?
Conjuror. Knowing how to do it.

Morris. [Becoming nasal again in anger.] That’s so, eh? Being the high-toned conjurer because you can’t any longer take all the sidewalk as a fairy.

Patricia. [Crossing the room and speaking seriously to her brother.] Really, Morris, you are very rude. And it’s quite ridiculous to be rude. This gentleman was only practising some tricks by himself in the garden. [With a certain dignity.] If there was any mistake, it was mine. Come, shake hands, or whatever men do when they apologize. Don’t be silly. He won’t turn you into a bowl of goldfish.

Morris. [Reluctantly.] Well, I guess that’s so. [Offering his hand.] Shake. [They shake hands.] And you won’t turn me into a bowl of goldfish anyhow, Professor. I understand that when you do produce a bowl of goldfish, they are generally slips of carrot. That is so, Professor?

Conjurer. [Sharply.] Yes. [Produces a bowl of goldfish from his tail pockets and holds it under the other’s nose.] Judge for yourself.

Morris. [In monstrous excitement.] Very good! Very good! But I know how that’s done—I know how that’s done. You have an india-rubber cap, you know, or cover. . . .

Conjurer. Yes.

[ Goes back gloomily to his table and sits on it, picking up a pack of cards and balancing it in his hand.]

Morris. Ah, most mysteries are tolerably plain if you know the apparatus. [Enter Doctor and Smith, talking with grave faces, but growing silent as they reach the group.] I guess I wish we had all the old apparatus of all the old Priests and Prophets since the beginning of the world. I guess most of the old miracles and that were a matter of just panel and wires.

Conjurer. I don’t quite understand you. What old apparatus do you want so much?

Morris. [Breaking out with all the frenzy of the young free-thinker.] Well, sir, I
just want that old apparatus that turned rods into snakes. I want those smart appliances, sir, that brought water out of a rock when old man Moses chose to hit it. I guess it’s a pity we’ve lost the machinery. I would like to have those old conjurers here that called themselves Patriarchs and Prophets in your precious Bible. . . .

Patricia. Morris, you mustn’t talk like that.

Morris. Well, I don’t believe in religion. . . .


Patricia. [Humorously.] I think this is a fitting opportunity to show you another ancient conjuring trick.

Doctor. Which one is that?

Patricia. The Vanishing Lady!

[Exit Patricia.

Smith. There is one part of their old apparatus I regret especially being lost.

Morris. [Still excited.] Yes!

Smith. The apparatus for writing the Book of Job.

Morris. Well, well, they didn’t know everything in those old times.

Smith. No, and in those old times they knew they didn’t. [Dreamily.] Where shall wisdom be found, and what is the place of understanding?

Conjurer. Somewhere in America, I believe.

Smith. [Still dreamily.] Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living. The deep sayeth it is not in me, the sea sayeth it is not with me. Death and destruction say we have heard tell of it. God understandeth the way thereof and He knoweth the place thereof. For He looketh to the ends of the earth and seeth under the whole Heaven. But to man He hath said: Behold the
fear of the Lord that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding. [Turns suddenly to the Doctor.] How’s that for Agnosticism, Dr. Grimthorpe? What a pity that apparatus is lost.

Morris. Well, you may just smile how you choose, I reckon. But I say the Conjurer here could be the biggest man in the big blessed centuries if he could just show us how the Holy old tricks were done. We must say this for old man Moses, that he was in advance of his time. When he did the old tricks they were new tricks. He got the pull on the public. He could do his tricks before grown men, great bearded fighting men who could win battles and sing Psalms. But this modern conjuring is all behind the times. That’s why they only do it with schoolboys. There isn’t a trick on that table I don’t know. The whole trade’s as dead as mutton; and not half so satisfying. Why he [pointing to the Conjurer] brought out a bowl of goldfish just now—an old trick that anybody could do.

Conjurer. Oh, I quite agree. The apparatus is perfectly simple. By the way, let me have a look at those goldfish of yours, will you?

Morris. [Angrily.] I’m not a paid play-actor come here to conjure. I’m not here to do stale tricks; I’m here to see through ’em. I say it’s an old trick and . . . .

Conjurer. True. But as you said, we never show it except to schoolboys.

Morris. And may I ask you, Professor Hocus Pocus, or whatever your name is, whom you are calling a schoolboy?

Conjurer. I beg your pardon. Your sister will tell you I am sometimes mistaken about children.

Morris. I forbid you to appeal to my sister.

Conjurer. That is exactly what a schoolboy would do.

Morris. [With abrupt and dangerous calm.] I am not a schoolboy, Professor. I am a quiet business man. But I tell you in the country I come from, the hand of a quiet business man goes to his hip pocket at an insult like that.

Conjurer. [Fiercely.] Let it go to his pocket! I thought the hand of a quiet business man more often went to someone else’s pocket.
Morris. You. . . .

[Puts his hand to his hip. The Doctor puts his hand on his shoulder.

Doctor. Gentlemen, I think you are both forgetting yourselves.

 Conjurer. Perhaps. [His tone sinks suddenly to weariness.] I ask pardon for what I said. It was certainly in excess of the young gentleman’s deserts. [Sighs.] I sometimes rather wish I could forget myself.

Morris. [Sullenly, after a pause.] Well, the entertainment’s coming on; and you English don’t like a scene. I reckon I’ll have to bury the blamed old hatchet too.

Doctor. [With a certain dignity, his social type shining through his profession.] Mr. Carleon, you will forgive an old man, who knew your father well, if he doubts whether you are doing yourself justice in treating yourself as an American Indian, merely because you have lived in America. In my old friend Huxley’s time we of the middle classes disbelieved in reason and all sorts of things. But we did believe in good manners. It is a pity if the aristocracy can’t. I don’t like to hear you say you are a savage and have buried a tomahawk. I would rather hear you say, as your Irish ancestors would have said, that you have sheathed your sword with the dignity proper to a gentleman.

Morris. Very well. I’ve sheathed my sword with the dignity proper to a gentleman.

 Conjurer. And I have sheathed my sword with the dignity proper to a conjurer.

Morris. How does the Conjurer sheath a sword?

 Conjurer. Swallows it.

Doctor. Then we all agree there shall be no quarrel.

Smith. May I say a word? I have a great dislike of a quarrel, for a reason quite beyond my duty to my cloth.

Morris. And what is that?
Smith. I object to a quarrel because it always interrupts an argument. May I bring you back for a moment to the argument? You were saying that these modern conjuring tricks are simply the old miracles when they have once been found out. But surely another view is possible. When we speak of things being sham, we generally mean that they are imitations of things that are genuine. Take that Reynolds over there of the Duke’s great-grandfather. [Points to a picture on the wall.] If I were to say it was a copy. . . .

Morris. Wal, the Duke’s real amiable; but I reckon you’d find what you call the interruption of an argument.

Smith. Well, suppose I did say so, you wouldn’t take it as meaning that Sir Joshua Reynolds never lived. Why should sham miracles prove to us that real Saints and Prophets never lived. There may be sham magic and real magic also.

[The Conjurer raises his head and listens with a strange air of intentness.

Smith. There may be turnip ghosts precisely because there are real ghosts. There may be theatrical fairies precisely because there are real fairies. You do not abolish the Bank of England by pointing to a forged bank-note.

Morris. I hope the Professor enjoys being called a forged bank-note.

Conjurer. Almost as much as being called the Prospectus of some American Companies.

Doctor. Gentlemen! Gentlemen!

Conjurer. I am sorry.

Morris. Wal, let’s have the argument first, then I guess we can have the quarrel afterwards. I’ll clean this house of some encumbrances. See here, Mr. Smith, I’m not putting anything on your real miracle notion. I say, and Science says, that there’s a cause for everything. Science will find out that cause, and sooner or later your old miracle will look mighty mean. Sooner or later Science will botanise a bit on your turnip ghosts; and make you look turnips yourselves for having taken any. I say. . . .

Doctor. [In a low voice to Smith.] I don’t like this peaceful argument of yours.
The boy is getting much too excited.

Morris. You say old man Reynolds lived; and Science don’t say no. [He turns excitedly to the picture.] But I guess he’s dead now; and you’ll no more raise your Saints and Prophets from the dead than you’ll raise the Duke’s great-grandfather to dance on that wall.

[The picture begins to sway slightly to and fro on the wall.

Doctor. Why, the picture is moving!

Morris. [Turning furiously on the Conjurer.] You were in the room before us. Do you reckon that will take us in? You can do all that with wires.

Conjurer. [Motionless and without looking up from the table.] Yes, I could do all that with wires.

Morris. And you reckoned I shouldn’t know. [Laughs with a high crowing laugh.] That’s how the derned dirty Spiritualists do all their tricks. They say they can make the furniture move of itself. If it does move they move it; and we mean to know how.

[A chair falls over with a slight crash.

[Morris almost staggers and momentarily fights for breath and words.

Morris. You . . . why . . . that . . . every one knows that . . . a sliding plank. It can be done with a sliding plank.

Conjurer. [Without looking up.] Yes. It can be done with a sliding plank.

[The Doctor draws nearer to Morris, who faces about, addressing him passionately.

Morris. You were right on the spot, Doc, when you talked about that red lamp of yours. That red lamp is the light of science that will put out all the lanterns of your turnip ghosts. It’s a consuming fire, Doctor, but it is the red light of the morning. [Points at it in exalted enthusiasm.] Your priests can no more stop that light from shining or change its colour and its radiance than Joshua could stop
the sun and moon. [Laughs savagely.] Why, a real fairy in an elfin cloak strayed too near the lamp an hour or two ago; and it turned him into a common society clown with a white tie.

[The lamp at the end of the garden turns blue. They all look at it in silence.

Morris. [Splitting the silence on a high unnatural note.] Wait a bit! Wait a bit! I’ve got you! I’ll have you! . . . [He strides wildly up and down the room, biting his finger.] You put a wire . . . no, that can’t be it . . .

Doctor. [Speaking to him soothingly.] Well, well, just at this moment we need not inquire. . . .

Morris. [Turning on him furiously.] You call yourself a man of science, and you dare to tell me not to inquire!

Smith. We only mean that for the moment you might let it alone.

Morris. [Violently.] No, Priest, I will not let it alone. [Pacing the room again.] Could it be done with mirrors? [He clasps his brow.] You have a mirror. . . . [Suddenly, with a shout.] I’ve got it! I’ve got it! Mixture of lights! Why not? If you throw a green light on a red light. . . .

[Sudden silence.

Smith. [Quietly to the Doctor.] You don’t get blue.

Doctor. [Stepping across to the Conjurer.] If you have done this trick, for God’s sake undo it.

[After a silence, the light turns red again.

Morris. [Dashing suddenly to the glass doors and examining them.] It’s the glass! You’ve been doing something to the glass!

[He stops suddenly and there is a long silence.

Conjurer. [Still without moving.] I don’t think you will find anything wrong with the glass.
Morris. [Bursting open the glass doors with a crash.] Then I’ll find out what’s wrong with the lamp.

[Disappears into the garden.

Doctor. It is still a wet night, I am afraid.

Smith. Yes. And somebody else will be wandering about the garden now.

[Through the broken glass doors Morris can be seen marching backwards and forwards with swifter and swifter steps.

Smith. I suppose in this case the Celtic twilight will not get on the chest.

Doctor. Oh, if it were only the chest!

Enter Patricia.

Patricia. Where is my brother?

[There is an embarrassed silence, in which the Conjurer answers.

Conjurer. I am afraid he is walking about in Fairyland.

Patricia. But he mustn’t go out on a night like this; it’s very dangerous!

Conjurer. Yes, it is very dangerous. He might meet a fairy.

Patricia. What do you mean?

Conjurer. You went out in this sort of weather and you met this sort of fairy, and so far it has only brought you sorrow.

Patricia. I am going out to find my brother.

[She goes out into the garden through the open doors.

Smith. [After a silence, very suddenly.] What is that noise? She is not singing those songs to him, is she?
Conjurer. No. He does not understand the language of the elves.

Smith. But what are all those cries and gasps I hear?

Conjurer. The normal noises, I believe, of a quiet business man.

Doctor. Sir, I can understand your being bitter, for I admit you have been uncivilly received; but to speak like that just now. . . .

[Patricia reappears at the garden doors, very pale.

Patricia. Can I speak to the Doctor?

Doctor. My dear lady, certainly. Shall I fetch the Duke?

Patricia. I would prefer the Doctor.

Smith. Can I be of any use?

Patricia. I only want the Doctor.

[Quietly.] That last was a wonderful trick of yours.

Smith. [Quietly.] That last was a wonderful trick of yours.

Conjurer. Thank you. I suppose you mean it was the only one you didn’t see through.

Smith. Something of the kind, I confess. Your last trick was the best trick I have ever seen. It is so good that I wish you had not done it.

Conjurer. And so do I.

Smith. How do you mean? Do you wish you had never been a conjurer?

Conjurer. I wish I had never been born.

[Exit Conjurer.

[A silence. The Doctor enters, very grave.]
Doctor. It is all right so far. We have brought him back.

Smith. [Drawing near to him.] You told me there was mental trouble with the girl.

Doctor. [Looking at him steadily.] No. I told you there was mental trouble in the family.

Smith. [After a silence.] Where is Mr. Morris Carleon?

Doctor. I have got him into bed in the next room. His sister is looking after him.

Smith. His sister! Oh, then do you believe in fairies?

Doctor. Believe in fairies? What do you mean?

Smith. At least you put the person who does believe in them in charge of the person who doesn’t.

Doctor. Well, I suppose I do.

Smith. You don’t think she’ll keep him awake all night with fairy tales?

Doctor. Certainly not.

Smith. You don’t think she’ll throw the medicine-bottle out of window and administer—er—a dewdrop, or anything of that sort? Or a four-leaved clover, say?

Doctor. No; of course not.

Smith. I only ask because you scientific men are a little hard on us clergymen. You don’t believe in a priesthood; but you’ll admit I’m more really a priest than this Conjurer is really a magician. You’ve been talking a lot about the Bible and the Higher Criticism. But even by the Higher Criticism the Bible is older than the language of the elves—which was, as far as I can make out, invented this afternoon. But Miss Carleon believed in the wizard. Miss Carleon believed in the language of the elves. And you put her in charge of an invalid without a flicker of doubt: because you trust women.
Doctor. [Very seriously.] Yes, I trust women.

Smith. You trust a woman with the practical issues of life and death, through sleepless hours when a shaking hand or an extra grain would kill.

Doctor. Yes.

Smith. But if the woman gets up to go to early service at my church, you call her weak-minded and say that nobody but women can believe in religion.

Doctor. I should never call this woman weak-minded—no, by God, not even if she went to church.

Smith. Yet there are many as strong-minded who believe passionately in going to church.

Doctor. Weren’t there as many who believed passionately in Apollo?

Smith. And what harm came of believing in Apollo? And what a mass of harm may have come of not believing in Apollo? Does it never strike you that doubt can be a madness, as well be faith? That asking questions may be a disease, as well as proclaiming doctrines? You talk of religious mania! Is there no such thing as irreligious mania? Is there no such thing in the house at this moment?

Doctor. Then you think no one should question at all.

Smith. [With passion, pointing to the next room.] I think that is what comes of questioning! Why can’t you leave the universe alone and let it mean what it likes? Why shouldn’t the thunder be Jupiter? More men have made themselves silly by wondering what the devil it was if it wasn’t Jupiter.

Doctor. [Looking at him.] Do you believe in your own religion?

Smith. [Returning the look equally steadily.] Suppose I don’t: I should still be a fool to question it. The child who doubts about Santa Claus has insomnia. The child who believes has a good night’s rest.

Doctor. You are a Pragmatist.
Enter Duke, absent-mindedly.

Smith. That is what the lawyers call vulgar abuse. But I do appeal to practise. Here is a family over which you tell me a mental calamity hovers. Here is the boy who questions everything and a girl who can believe anything. Upon which has the curse fallen?

Duke. Talking about the Pragmatists. I’m glad to hear. . . . Ah, very forward movement! I suppose Roosevelt now. . . . [Silence.] Well, we move you know, we move! First there was the Missing Link. [Silence.] No! First there was Protoplasm—and then there was the Missing Link; and Magna Carta and so on. [Silence.] Why, look at the Insurance Act!

Doctor. I would rather not.


Doctor. [Breaking the silence in unusual exasperation.] Any what?


[Exit Duke, aimlessly.

Doctor. [Exploding.] Well, of all the. . . . [Turns to Smith.] You asked me just now which member of the family had inherited the family madness.

Smith. Yes; I did.

Doctor. [In a low, emphatic voice.] On my living soul, I believe it must be the Duke.

CURTAIN
ACT III

Room partly darkened, a table with a lamp on it, and an empty chair. From room next door faint and occasional sounds of the tossing or talking of the invalid.

Enter Doctor Grimthorpe with a rather careworn air, and a medicine bottle in his hand. He puts it on the table, and sits down in the chair as if keeping a vigil.

Enter Conjurer, carrying his bag, and cloaked for departure. As he crosses the room the Doctor rises and calls after him.

Doctor. Forgive me, but may I detain you for one moment? I suppose you are aware that—[he hesitates] that there have been rather grave developments in the case of illness which happened after your performance. I would not say, of course, because of your performance.

Conjurer. Thank you.

Doctor. [Slightly encouraged, but speaking very carefully.] Nevertheless, mental excitement is necessarily an element of importance in physiological troubles, and your triumphs this evening were really so extraordinary that I cannot pretend to dismiss them from my patient’s case. He is at present in a state somewhat analogous to delirium, but in which he can still partially ask and answer questions. The question he continually asks is how you managed to do your last trick.

Conjurer. Ah! My last trick!

Doctor. Now I was wondering whether we could make any arrangement which would be fair to you in the matter. Would it be possible for you to give me in confidence the means of satisfying this—this fixed idea he seems to have got. [He hesitates again, and picks his words more slowly.] This special condition of semi-delirious disputation is a rare one, and connected in my experience with rather unfortunate cases.

Conjurer. [Looking at him steadily.] Do you mean he is going mad?

Doctor. [Rather taken aback for the first time.] Really, you ask me an unfair
question. I could not explain the fine shades of these things to a layman. And even if—if what you suggest were so, I should have to regard it as a professional secret.

Conjurer. [Still looking at him.] And don’t you think you ask me a rather unfair question, Dr. Grimthorpe? If yours is a professional secret, is not mine a professional secret too? If you may hide truth from the world, why may not I? You don’t tell your tricks. I don’t tell my tricks.

Doctor. [With some heat.] Ours are not tricks.

Conjurer. [Reflectively.] Ah, no one can be sure of that till the tricks are told.

Doctor. But the public can see a doctor’s cures as plain as . . .

Conjurer. Yes. As plain as they saw the red lamp over his door this evening.

Doctor. [After a pause.] Your secret, of course, would be strictly kept by everyone involved.

Conjurer. Oh, of course. People in delirium always keep secrets strictly.

Doctor. No one sees the patient but his sister and myself.

Conjurer. [Starts slightly.] Yes, his sister. Is she very anxious?

Doctor. [In a lower voice.] What would you suppose?

[Conjurer throws himself into the chair, his cloak slipping back from his evening dress. He ruminates for a short space and then speaks.]

Conjurer. Doctor, there are about a thousand reasons why I should not tell you how I really did that trick. But one will suffice, because it is the most practical of all.

Doctor. Well? And why shouldn’t you tell me?

Conjurer. Because you wouldn’t believe me if I did.

[A silence, the Doctor looking at him curiously.]
[Enter the Duke with papers in his hand. His usual gaiety of manner has a rather forced air, owing to the fact that by some vague sick-room associations he walks as if on tip-toe and begins to speak in a sort of loud or shrill whisper. This he fortunately forgets and falls into his more natural voice.

Duke. [To Conjurer.] So very kind of you to have waited, Professor. I expect Dr. Grimthorpe has explained the little difficulty we are in much better than I could. Nothing like the medical mind for a scientific statement. [Hazily.] Look at Ibsen.

[Silence.]

Doctor. Of course the Professor feels considerable reluctance in the matter. He points out that his secrets are an essential part of his profession.

Duke. Of course, of course. Tricks of the trade, eh? Very proper, of course. Quite a case of noblesse oblige [Silence.] But I dare say we shall be able to find a way out of the matter. [He turns to the Conjurer.] Now, my dear sir, I hope you will not be offended if I say that this ought to be a business matter. We are asking you for a piece of your professional work and knowledge, and if I may have the pleasure of writing you a cheque. . . .

Conjurer. I thank your Grace, I have already received my cheque from your secretary. You will find it on the counterfoil just after the cheque you so kindly gave to the Society for the Suppression of Conjuring.

Duke. Now I don’t want you to take it in that way. I want you to take it in a broader way. Free, you know. [With an expansive gesture.] Modern and all that! Wonderful man, Bernard Shaw!

[Silence.]

Doctor. [With a slight cough, resuming.] If you feel any delicacy the payment need not be made merely to you. I quite respect your feelings in the matter.

Duke. [Approvingly.] Quite so, quite so. Haven’t you got a Cause or something? Everybody has a cause now, you know. Conjurers’ widows or something of that kind.
Conjurer. [With restraint.] No; I have no widows.

Duke. Then something like a pension or annuity for any widows you may—er—procure. [Gaily opening his cheque-book and talking slang to show there is no ill-feeling.] Come, let me call it a couple of thou.

[The Conjurer takes the cheque and looks at it in a grave and doubtful way. As he does so the Rector comes slowly into the room.

Conjurer. You would really be willing to pay a sum like this to know the way I did that trick?

Duke. I would willingly pay much more.

Doctor. I think I explained to you that the case is serious.

Conjurer. [More and more thoughtful.] You would pay much more. . . . [Suddenly.] But suppose I tell you the secret and you find there’s nothing in it?

Doctor. You mean that it’s really quite simple? Why, I should say that that would be the best thing that could possibly happen. A little healthy laughter is the best possible thing for convalescence.

Conjurer. [Still looking gloomily at the cheque.] I do not think you will laugh.

Duke. [Reasoning genially.] But as you say it is something quite simple.

Conjurer. It is the simplest thing there is in the world. That is why you will not laugh.

Doctor. [Almost nervously.] Why, what do you mean? What shall we do?

Conjurer. [Gravely.] You will disbelieve it.

Doctor. And why?

Conjurer. Because it is so simple. [He springs suddenly to his feet, the cheque still in his hand.] You ask me how I really did the last trick. I will tell you how I did the last trick. I did it by magic.
[The Duke and Doctor stare at him motionless; but the Rev. Smith starts and takes a step nearer the table. The Conjurer pulls his cloak round his shoulders. This gesture, as of departure, brings the Doctor to his feet.]

Doctor. [Astonished and angry.] Do you really mean that you take the cheque and then tell us it was only magic?

 Conjurer. [Pulling the cheque to pieces.] I tear the cheque, and I tell you it was only magic.

Doctor. [With violent sincerity.] But hang it all, there’s no such thing.

Conjurer. Yes there is. I wish to God I did not know that there is.

Duke. [Rising also.] Why, really, magic. . . .

Conjurer. [Contemptuously.] Yes, your Grace, one of those larger laws you were telling us about.

[He buttons his cloak up at his throat and takes up his bag. As he does so the Rev. Smith steps between him and the door and stops him for a moment.]

Smith. [In a low voice.] One moment, sir.

Conjurer. What do you want?

Smith. I want to apologize to you. I mean on behalf of the company. I think it was wrong to offer you money. I think it was more wrong to mystify you with medical language and call the thing delirium. I have more respect for conjurer’s patter than for doctor’s patter. They are both meant to stupify; but yours only to stupify for a moment. Now I put it to you in plain words and on plain human Christian grounds. Here is a poor boy who may be going mad. Suppose you had a son in such a position, would you not expect people to tell you the whole truth if it could help you?

Conjurer. Yes. And I have told you the whole truth. Go and find out if it helps you.

[Turns again to go, but more irresolutely.]
Smith. You know quite well it will not help us.

Conjurer. Why not?

Smith. You know quite well why not. You are an honest man; and you have said it yourself. Because he would not believe it.

Conjurer. [With a sort of fury.] Well, does anybody believe it? Do you believe it?

Smith. [With great restraint.] Your question is quite fair. Come, let us sit down and talk about it. Let me take your cloak.

Conjurer. I will take off my cloak when you take off your coat.

Smith. [Smiling.] Why? Do you want me to fight?

Conjurer. [Violently.] I want you to be martyred. I want you to bear witness to your own creed. I say these things are supernatural. I say this was done by a spirit. The Doctor does not believe me. He is an agnostic; and he knows everything. The Duke does not believe me; he cannot believe anything so plain as a miracle. But what the devil are you for, if you don’t believe in a miracle? What does your coat mean, if it doesn’t mean that there is such a thing as the supernatural? What does your cursed collar mean if it doesn’t mean that there is such a thing as a spirit? [Exasperated.] Why the devil do you dress up like that if you don’t believe in it? [With violence.] Or perhaps you don’t believe in devils?

Smith. I believe. . . . [After a pause.] I wish I could believe.

Conjurer. Yes. I wish I could disbelieve.

[Enter Patricia pale and in the slight négligée of the amateur nurse.

Patricia. May I speak to the Conjurer?

Smith. [Hastening forward.] You want the Doctor?

Patricia. No, the Conjurer.
Doctor. Are there any developments?

Patricia. I only want to speak to the Conjurer.

[They all withdraw, either at the garden or the other doors. Patricia walks up to Conjurer.

Patricia. You must tell me how you did the trick. You will. I know you will. O, I know my poor brother was rude to you. He’s rude to everybody! [Breaks down.] But he’s such a little, little boy!

Conjurer. I suppose you know there are things men never tell to women. They are too horrible.

Patricia. Yes. And there are things women never tell to men. They also are too horrible. I am here to hear them all.

Conjurer. Do you really mean I may say anything I like? However dark it is? However dreadful it is? However damnable it is?

Patricia. I have gone through too much to be terrified now. Tell me the very worst.

Conjurer. I will tell you the very worst. I fell in love with you when I first saw you.

[Sits down and crosses his legs.

Patricia. [Drawing back.] You told me I looked like a child and . . .

Conjurer. I told a lie.

Patricia. O; this is terrible.

Conjurer. I was in love, I took an opportunity. You believed quite simply that I was a magician? but I . . .

Patricia. It is terrible. It is terrible. I never believed you were a magician.

Conjurer. [Astounded.] Never believed I was a magician . . .!
Patricia. I always knew you were a man.

Conjurer. [Doing whatever passionate things people do on the stage.] I am a man. And you are a woman. And all the elves have gone to elfland, and all the devils to hell. And you and I will walk out of this great vulgar house and be married. . . . Every one is crazy in this house to-night, I think. What am I saying? As if you could marry me! O my God!

Patricia. This is the first time you have failed in courage.

Conjurer. What do you mean?

Patricia. I mean to draw your attention to the fact that you have recently made an offer, I accept it.

Conjurer. Oh, it’s nonsense, it’s nonsense. How can a man marry an archangel, let alone a lady. My mother was a lady and she married a dying fiddler who tramped the roads; and the mixture plays the cat and banjo with my body and soul. I can see my mother now cooking food in dirtier and dirtier lodgings, darning socks with weaker and weaker eyes when she might have worn pearls by consenting to be a rational person.

Patricia. And she might have grown pearls, by consenting to be an oyster.

Conjurer. [Seriously.] There was little pleasure in her life.

Patricia. There is little, a very little, in everybody’s. The question is, what kind? We can’t turn life into a pleasure. But we can choose such pleasures as are worthy of us and our immortal souls. Your mother chose and I have chosen.

Conjurer. [Staring.] Immortal souls! . . . And I suppose if I knelt down to worship you, you and every one else would laugh.

Patricia. [With a smile of perversity.] Well, I think this is a more comfortable way. [She sits down suddenly beside him in a sort of domestic way and goes on talking.] Yes. I’ll do everything your mother did, not so well, of course; I’ll darn that conjurer’s hat—does one darn hats?—and cook the Conjurer’s dinner. By the way, what is a Conjurer’s dinner? There’s always the goldfish, of course. . . .
Conjurer. [With a groan.] Carrots.

Patricia. And, of course, now I come to think of it, you can always take rabbits out of the hat. Why, what a cheap life it must be! How do you cook rabbits? The Duke is always talking about poached rabbits. Really, we shall be as happy as is good for us. We’ll have confidence in each other at least, and no secrets. I insist on knowing all the tricks.

Conjurer. I don’t think I know whether I’m on my head or my heels.

Patricia. And now, as we’re going to be so confidential and comfortable, you’ll just tell me the real, practical, tricky little way you did that last trick.

Conjurer. [Rising, rigid with horror.] How I did that trick? I did it by devils. [Turning furiously on Patricia.] You could believe in fairies. Can’t you believe in devils?

Patricia. [Seriously.] No, I can’t believe in devils.

Conjurer. Well, this room is full of them.

Patricia. What does it all mean?

Conjurer. It only means that I have done what many men have done; but few, I think, have thriven by. [He sits down and talks thoughtfully.] I told you I had mixed with many queer sets of people. Among others, I mixed with those who pretend, truly and falsely, to do our tricks by the aid of spirits. I dabbled a little in table-rapping and table-turning. But I soon had reason to give it up.

Patricia. Why did you give it up?

Conjurer. It began by giving me headaches. And I found that every morning after a Spiritualist séance I had a queer feeling of lowness and degradation, of having been soiled; much like the feeling, I suppose, that people have the morning after they have been drunk. But I happen to have what people call a strong head; and I have never been really drunk.

Patricia. I am glad of that.
Conjurer. It hasn’t been for want of trying. But it wasn’t long before the spirits with whom I had been playing at table-turning, did what I think they generally do at the end of all such table-turning.

Patricia. What did they do?

Conjurer. They turned the tables. They turned the tables upon me. I don’t wonder at your believing in fairies. As long as these things were my servants they seemed to me like fairies. When they tried to be my masters . . . I found they were not fairies. I found the spirits with whom I at least had come in contact were evil . . . awfully, unnaturally evil.

Patricia. Did they say so?

Conjurer. Don’t talk of what they said. I was a loose fellow, but I had not fallen so low as such things. I resisted them; and after a pretty bad time, psychologically speaking, I cut the connexion. But they were always tempting me to use the supernatural power I had got from them. It was not very great, but it was enough to move things about, to alter lights, and so on. I don’t know whether you realize that it’s rather a strain on a man to drink bad coffee at a coffee-stall when he knows he has just enough magic in him to make a bottle of champagne walk out of an empty shop.

Patricia. I think you behaved very well.

Conjurer. [Bitterly.] And when I fell at last it was for nothing half so clean and Christian as champagne. In black blind pride and anger and all kinds of heathenry, because of the impudence of a schoolboy, I called on the fiends and they obeyed.

Patricia. [Touches his arm.] Poor fellow!

Conjurer. Your goodness is the only goodness that never goes wrong.

Patricia. And what are we to do with Morris? I—I believe you now, my dear. But he—he will never believe.

Conjurer. There is no bigot like the atheist. I must think.
[Walks towards the garden windows. The other men reappear to arrest his movement.

Doctor. Where are you going?

Conjurer. I am going to ask the God whose enemies I have served if I am still worthy to save a child.

[Exit into garden. He paces up and down exactly as Morris has done. As he does so, Patricia slowly goes out; and a long silence follows, during which the remaining men stir and stamp very restlessly. The darkness increases. It is long before anyone speaks.


Duke. What’s what, eh? What’s what?

Doctor. I swear I heard a footstep.

Enter Hastings with papers.

Duke. Why, Hastings—Hastings—we thought you were a ghost. You must be—er—looking white or something.

Hastings. I have brought back the answer of the Anti-Vegetarians . . . I mean the Vegetarians.

[Drops one or two papers.

Duke. Why, Hastings, you are looking white.

Hastings. I ask your Grace’s pardon. I had a slight shock on entering the room.

Doctor. A shock? What shock?

Hastings. It is the first time, I think, that your Grace’s work has been disturbed by any private feelings of mine. I shall not trouble your Grace with them. It will not occur again.
[Exit Hastings.


[Suddenly stops speaking.

Doctor. [After a long silence, in a low voice to Smith.] How do you feel?

Smith. I feel I must have a window shut or I must have it open, and I don’t know which it is.

[Another long silence.

Smith. [Crying out suddenly in the dark.] In God’s name, go!

Doctor. [Jumping up rather in a tremble.] Really, sir, I am not used to being spoken to. . . .

Smith. It was not you whom I told to go.

Doctor. No. [Pause.] But I think I will go. This room is simply horrible.

[He marches towards the door.

Duke. [Jumping up and bustling about, altering cards, papers, etc., on tables.] Room horrible? Room horrible? No, no, no. [Begins to run quicker round the room, flapping his hands like fins.] Only a little crowded. A little crowded. And I don’t seem to know all the people. We can’t like everybody. These large at-homes. . . .

[Tumbles on to a chair.

Conjurer. [Reappearing at the garden doors.] Go back to hell from which I called you. It is the last order I shall give.

Doctor. [Rising rather shakily.] And what are you going to do?

Conjurer. I am going to tell that poor little lad a lie. I have found in the garden what he did not find in the garden. I have managed to think of a natural explanation of that trick.
Doctor. [Warmly moved.] I think you are something like a great man. Can I take your explanation to him now?

Conjurer. [Grimly.] No thank you. I will take it myself.

[Exit into the other room.]

Duke. [Uneasily.] We all felt devilish queer just now. Wonderful things there are in the world. [After a pause.] I suppose it’s all electricity.

[Silence as usual.]

Smith. I think there has been more than electricity in all this.

Enter Patricia, still pale, but radiant.

Patricia. Oh, Morris is ever so much better! The Conjurer has told him such a good story of how the trick was done.

Enter Conjurer.

Duke. Professor, we owe you a thousand thanks!

Doctor. Really, you have doubled your claim to originality!

Smith. It is much more marvellous to explain a miracle than to work a miracle. What was your explanation, by the way?

Conjurer. I shall not tell you.

Smith. [Starting.] Indeed? Why not?

Conjurer. Because God and the demons and that Immortal Mystery that you deny has been in this room to-night. Because you know it has been here. Because you have felt it here. Because you know the spirits as well as I do and fear them as much as I do.

Smith. Well?
Conjurer. Because all this would not avail. If I told you the lie I told Morris Carleon about how I did that trick. . . .

Smith. Well?

Conjurer. You would believe it as he believed it. You cannot think [pointing to the lamp] how that trick could be done naturally. I alone found out how it could be done—after I had done it by magic. But if I tell you a natural way of doing it. . .


Conjurer. Half an hour after I have left this house you will be all saying how it was done.

[Conjurer buttons up his cloak and advances to Patricia.]

Conjurer. Good-bye.

Patricia. I shall not say good-bye.

Conjurer. You are great as well as good. But a saint can be a temptress as well as a sinner. I put my honour in your hands . . . oh, yes, I have a little left. We began with a fairy tale. Have I any right to take advantage of that fairy tale? Has not that fairy tale really and truly come to an end?

Patricia. Yes. That fairy tale has really and truly come to an end. [Looks at him a little in the old mystical manner.] It is very hard for a fairy tale to come to an end. If you leave it alone it lingers everlastingly. Our fairy tale has come to an end in the only way a fairy tale can come to an end. The only way a fairy tale can leave off being a fairy tale.

Conjurer. I don’t understand you.

Patricia. It has come true.

CURTAIN
G. K. CHESTERTON

A CRITICISM

CECIL CHESTERTON
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**INDEX**

**G. K. CHESTERTON**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PREFACE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I ORIGINS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II THE FIRST PHASE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III A CRITIC OF LETTERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV THE DRIFT TOWARDS ORTHODOXY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER V THE ASSAULT ON THE MODERNS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER VI G. K. C. AS ANTI-LIBERAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER VII A TELLER OF TALES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER VIII THE GLADIATOR AS ARTIST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IX THE PERSONAL EQUATION</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PREFACE

IT may be thought by some that this book demands an apology. Mr. G. K. Chesterton is still a young man, not much over thirty. In all reasonable probability much of his best work lies before him. His opinions may undergo a considerable change before he dies; his style may develop; he may attempt all sorts of new artistic experiments. Why, then, it may be asked, try to sum him up at a time when in the nature of things he cannot be summed up? Why not wait till he is dead, perhaps till he has been dead for some twenty years, when the world will have decided whether he is really worth writing a book about at all?

I admit the force of such arguments. But I submit that (waiving the point that if I waited till Mr. Chesterton were dead I might quite probably be dead myself) there is something to be said on the other side, especially in the case of such a writer as Mr. Chesterton.

If a writer be a pure artist and aims solely at creating beautiful things, or, not to beg the “art for art’s sake” controversy, at depicting the eternal things in beautiful forms, we can hardly wait too long before we judge him. But Mr. Chesterton is not and does not profess to be such an artist. He is primarily a propagandist, the preacher of a definite message to his own time. He is using all the power which his literary capacity gives him to lead the age in a certain direction. It is surely important to consider, firstly, whether he has the power to lead it at all, and secondly, whether, if he does lead it, he is likely to lead it right or wrong. When dealing with such a man, especially when he has, as Mr. Chesterton undoubtedly has, great influence over many young and developing brains, it is as absurd to say that we ought to postpone discussing him till time has shown how far his fame will be permanent. As well might one suggest that Mr. Balfour should defer replying to a speech by Mr. Asquith till time has shown whether Mr. Asquith will be classed with Fox or with Addington. Discussing Mr. Chesterton is not a question of literary criticism; it is a question of practical politics.

I have in the book itself disclaimed any intention of speculating on the durability of Mr. Chesterton’s reputation. What is quite clear is that at the present moment he is profoundly influencing a great number of people. How far he is influencing them for good and how far for evil is surely a matter well worth discussing.

Mr. Kipling was worth discussing in the ‘nineties quite apart from the
permanence of his position in literature (in which personally I believe profoundly), because Mr. Kipling stood for Imperialism—a force to be reckoned with. Mr. Chesterton stands for Anti-Imperialism and for much else besides, for Catholicism with its back to the wall, for the hunger of a perplexed age for the more lucid life of the Ages of Faith, for the revolt against Modernity—in a word, for what may legitimately be called “reaction.” That word, which I use because it really conveys my meaning, may be used without the slightest moral bias. You cannot tell whether reaction is good or bad until you know what it is reacting against. To distinguish the good from the evil in Mr. Chesterton’s violent reaction against his age is partly the object of this book.

Another object is to estimate Mr. Chesterton’s value as a literary artist. This object naturally falls within the scope of the other, for Mr. Chesterton’s artistic talents are simply the weapons that he uses in his war against his controversial enemies. No doubt there are great chunks of his work that can be enjoyed frankly for their own sake without reference to his teaching; but those little know G. K. C. who imagine that it was for their own sake that he enjoyed them.

I think that the time has just about arrived when it is important that the modern world should make up its mind just what it does think of G. K. Chesterton. When a man, quite obviously in earnest, planks down a view of life unlike that of most of his contemporaries, it is silly to think you can dispose of him by calling him “paradoxical.” He may be right or he may be wrong, or he may be (as he probably will be) partly right and partly wrong. If he is right, let us do all we can to strengthen his hands, and let us welcome his humour and fascination, not merely because they amuse us, but also because they are weapons to be used in the fight against the evil of our world. If he is wrong, let him be denounced, let him be, if you will, burnt as a heretic. But do not let him be praised as a buffoon. If he is partly right and partly wrong, it becomes a matter of urgent importance that we rightly distinguish his truths from his errors. Otherwise the tares may grow up and choke the wheat.

Buck, in dealing with Adam Wayne in “The Napoleon of Notting Hill,” was saner than most of Mr. Chesterton’s readers. “He may be God. He may be the Devil. But we think it more likely as a matter of human probability that he is mad.” If people said that about G. K. C. I should respect them. It would be better than calling him “paradoxical.”

Another point upon which I may say an apologetic word or two is the free use which I have made of Mr. Chesterton’s personal characteristics and private life to illustrate my view of his position. I do not think such action needs any excuse
to sensible people. There may be men whose art work is a thing utterly separate from their personality. I do not know. I cannot conceive what they can be like; but they may exist. One thing is certain. Mr. Chesterton is not such a man. To him thought and conduct are alike expressions of human personality. Whenever, therefore, circumstances have put me in possession of facts concerning Mr. Chesterton personally which may throw light upon the origin or development of his ideas, I have used them without scruple, so long as I could do so without violation of kindliness or honour. To “good taste,” the modern name for snobbery, I hope I am indifferent. Some people will probably blame me for this; but one person will not, I think, blame me, and that person is Gilbert Keith Chesterton.
CHAPTER I

ORIGINS

“JT is a great deal easier,” writes Mr. Chesterton in his study of Browning, “to
hunt a family from tombstone to tombstone back to the time of Henry II, than to
catch and realize and put upon paper that most nameless and elusive of all things
—social tone.” In studying Mr. Chesterton himself in his turn, it is as well to
keep this very just opinion in mind. There is but little to be learned from what
can be known of his ancestry; his heredity is a mixed one, but so probably is that
of most middle-class Englishmen. One strand leads back to a burgher family of
Aberdeen; it gives G. K. C. his second name of “Keith,” and can be traced back
further than other lines, because it comes from a country where the bourgeoisie
have all the family pride of a noblesse. There is also Swiss blood in his veins,
and a legend of a great-great-grandfather buried while still alive in the trenches
after the Battle of the Pyramids, dug out in consequence of an accidentally heard
groan, and surviving to be a father and an ancestor. The Chestertons themselves
seem to have been small landowners in Cambridgeshire until their fortunes were
apparently dissipated by an Edward Chesterton, who flourished about the time
of the Regency. Students of heredity may find in this gentleman the source of his
descendant’s literary turn, for his letters, still preserved in the family, and most
dated from debtors’ prisons, are models of polished eighteenth-century
elocution. His son, reacting to respectability, became a coal—merchant, and
subsequently founded an estate-agency business, which in the fourth generation
still flourishes. In this business Mr. Edward Chesterton, the father of the subject
of this sketch, was a partner.

But all this tells us little. It is not important to know who Gilbert Chesterton’s
great-grandfather was. It is important to know in what sort of a home he grew
up. It is important to understand the particular kind of educated middle-class
household in which he passed his most impressionable years; and you can only
understand this by understanding the nineteenth century. I propose to approach
G. K. C. after his own fashion, by means of a stupendous digression.

The Socialist writers and orators of the ‘eighties (themselves almost
exclusively drawn from the middle classes) were very fond of denouncing the
middle class, or, as they generally called it, the bourgeoisie, for its stupidity,
narrowness, and inaccessibility to ideas. Never was a charge more undiscerning.
As a matter of fact, all the ideas, including Socialism, which were then fermenting in the minds of men came from the middle class. It was, indeed, the only section of the community in which ideas as such had any chance of taking root.

“Geist,” as Matthew Arnold said long ago, “is forbidden by its nature to flourish in an aristocracy “; nor did our aristocracy, when it was vigorous and sincere, ever pretend to possess it. Of late years, it is true, an attempt has been made to defend our oligarchical system on the ground that it gives us a leisured class, able to devote itself wholly to the cultivation of the intellect. But, as a matter of fact, our European aristocracies never did so devote themselves, and, for my part, I am glad they did not. An intellectual aristocracy is the most horrible tyranny under which mankind can groan; I would rather, any day, be ruled by barons than by Brahmmins. But whether it would be well to have such an aristocracy or not, it is quite certain that we have not got it and never have had it.

Our aristocrats were proud of being strong, of being brave, of being handsome, of being chivalrous, of being honourable, of being happy, but never of being clever. The idea that brains were any part of the make-up of a gentleman was never dreamed of in Europe until our rulers fell into the hands of Hebrew moneylenders, who, having brains and not being gentlemen, read into the European idea of aristocracy an intellectualism quite alien to its traditions.

Nor have ideas ever had any better chance with the working classes. Even such ideas as they have borrowed from the middle class, because they suited their immediate class interests, have been de-intellectualized in the process. Socialism is a case in point. Socialism, as preached by its middle-class inventors, was an idea. In the form in which it has been adopted by a section of the labouring classes it is half sentiment, half eye-to-business. Its popularity is due partly to the trade unionist’s desire for better wages and conditions of labour, partly to that ready sympathy and compassion for suffering which is the most beautiful of all the virtues of the English poor. All this is, doubtless, both honourable and salutory. But if we wish to hear Socialism preached as an idea, we still have to go to Hyndman, to Belfort Bax, to Bernard Shaw, to H. G. Wells—in a word, to middle-class men.

Now, during the second half of the nineteenth century the middle class was absolutely bubbling over with ideas. It had just broken down the iron doors which since the seventeenth century had barred its escape from the prison of Calvinism. It was rioting in its new-found intellectual liberty as heartily as the men of the Restoration rioted in their new-found moral liberty. Everywhere you
found households where new theories of politics, philosophy, religion, or science were eagerly welcomed, debated, and assimilated. Most of us have come across dozens of such households. Into such a household, on 29 May, 1874, G. K. C. was born.

His father was by profession a surveyor; by temperament something of a craftsman and something of a philosopher. Of his mother I need only say that, though, so far as I know, she has never written a line for publication, anyone who wishes to know from whence G. K. C. gets his wit need only listen for a few minutes to her conversation.

The politics and religion of his parents were emphatically Liberal. That intellectual activity, that voracious curiosity of the mind, which I have endeavoured to suggest, was itself the product of the great Liberal movement. We, its children, have revolted against it—and often rightly—but still we are its children. No one, as I shall endeavour to show, is more typical of the revolt against it than Mr. Chesterton, but no one is more typically its child. It was a movement of destruction rather than of construction, of doubt rather than of faith. But a faith it had; for no movement can live without a faith. It believed, without question, in the right and power of the human mind, if left free, to judge the world. It proved all things, but because it felt assured that men would hold fast to that which was good.

In this atmosphere of free inquiry was developed a theology which was called undogmatic, because its dogmas were so simple and humane that they seemed to their exponents to be selfevident. The Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man, the non-eternity of evil, the final salvation of all souls—these seemed to many in that era to form a faith at once sufficient and unassailable. Since then that free method of thought which created this system has largely destroyed it, forcing some of its children back to a more orthodox creed, others onward to a completer denial. But at that time thousands found rest in a vague but noble theo-philanthropy, such as G. K. C. absorbed in his youth. He was never made to read the Bible, and therefore read it—much to the advantage of his literary style. No one in the family was ever pressed to go to church, but, when they did go, it was to Bedford Chapel to hear the sermons of the Rev. Stopford Brooke. There, more than fifteen years ago, the young Chesterton learned from the lips of a genuine poet and orator the whole of that system of religious thought which has been discovered by certain Nonconformist ministers within the last eighteen months, and is now emphatically called “The New Theology.”

The politics of the family bore some resemblance to its religious atmosphere.
They were not Jacobin, but they were decidedly Liberal. The childhood of G. K. C. coincided more or less with the St. Martin’s Summer of Liberalism, from 1880 to 1885. Political controversy was so much in the air of the household that even as an infant he must have heard echoes of that last stand of Gladstonian Liberalism; he was certainly beginning to be politically conscious when the “flowing tide” in which Gladstone had trusted suddenly turned and overwhelmed him.

But though Mr. Chesterton must have been tolerably familiar with religious and political controversies almost before he could speak, it can hardly be supposed that he had developed ideas of his own on these subjects until well on in his schooldays. He went to St. Paul’s School when he was about twelve and stayed there some five years, interesting the more intelligent masters by his mental originality, and irritating the stupider ones by his refusal to take the routine of the place seriously. The records that one has of him during this period supply a picture of a tall, thin, rather good-looking boy, incredibly absent-minded (almost all the anecdotes of his boyhood turn on this trait), passionately fond of reading, covering all his school-books with drawings till the printing was unrecognizable, delightfully indifferent to ordinary school work, and quite equally indifferent to athletics.

The High Master of St. Paul’s School at that time was Mr. F. W. Walker, a man who left a deep impress of his personality, not only on the school over which he presided, but also on the characters of all those who came in contact with him. He was one of those forceful characters that instinctively suggest greatness. He was, I believe, a very fine scholar; he was certainly a remarkable organizer, and the school, moulded by his hands, won triumph after triumph. But it was neither scholarship nor organizing capacity that one thought of in connection with him; it was mere bigness and irresistible natural power. His head was leonine, and his voice, when raised in anger, was not unlike the roar of a lion. His geniality was scarcely less deafening than his wrath. His laughter, in particular, used to make the corridors rock, and it was currently believed that it could be heard at Hammersmith Broadway. I have sometimes wondered whether some reminiscence of his old High Master may be traced in Mr. Chesterton’s description of the huge personality of the terrible “Sunday,” just as old Paulines of his epoch will certainly recognize memories of one of the assistant masters in some of the humours of Auberon Quin.

Mr. Walker could be a sufficiently stern and even terrible disciplinarian when he liked, but he had in his nature vast reserves of good humour and tolerance.
Also there was in him a touch of unconventionality; he lived the kind of life he liked, and not the kind of life a schoolmaster was expected to live. With a little change in his circumstances he might almost have been a Bohemian. He had a shrewd sense of human character and a keen eye to types of talent alien from his own. He always liked G. K. C. and prophesied great things of him, though the latter was, I fear, by no means a model pupil.

While at school he gained what was known as the “Milton” prize for English verse. It was considered a remarkable achievement, because that prize had been regarded hitherto as a monopoly of the “eighth,” and G. K. C. was still in one of the lower forms. The subject of the poem (selected, of course, by the examiners) was “St. Francis Xavier.” What G. K. C. made of that singularly unpromising theme I have forgotten—if I ever knew. But it served to direct attention to him as one who might do honour to the school, in spite of his somewhat casual treatment of his official studies.

But the most important event of his school career, so far as its influence on his own future is concerned, was undoubtedly the formation of the Junior Debating Club (or J.D.C.), of which he became chairman.

This remarkable institution, which has already given three journalists to the Liberal press, one excellent short story writer to the magazines, one parliamentary candidate to the Liberal Party, one professor to University College, and another to an educational institution in the Midlands, was founded, I believe, for the purpose of reading Shakespeare, but this intention was abandoned by general consent after the first meeting. It subsequently turned itself into a general debating society, and prospered so far as to be able to produce a monthly magazine called “The Debater,” in which will be found numerous essays and poems, signed with the familiar initials “G. K. C.”

Some of these contributions are extremely interesting. From the point of view of literary merit the verse is certainly much better and maturer than the prose. Some of the poems are quite startlingly vigorous for a boy of sixteen, the best, I think, being the first ever printed—a soliloquy of Danton on the scaffold. Others are somewhat crude, and many of them frankly imitative. When one comes across a line like

"As wholly a hideous dream from the gloom of the gateway of Hell one does not need to ask what poet the writer has just been reading. But the especial interest of these boyish verses lies in the light they throw upon their author’s point of view at the time. Most of them deal with religious and moral problems with all the sumptuous responsibility of extreme youth; indeed, there is hardly a
touch anywhere of the humour and fantasy of the later G. K. C. The old atmosphere of the faith of his childhood still remains, but the grip of its positive dogmas is weakening—he is leaning towards Agnosticism; while, on the other hand, a note of pugnacity personal to himself has been added to it. This note is struck with a certain force in a poem called “Ave Maria,” written very obviously under the influence of Swinburne’s style, and as obviously in a mood of revolt against Swinburne’s teaching. It begins:

Hail Mary! Thou blest among women; generations shall rise up to greet, After ages of wrangle and dogma, I come with a prayer to thy feet. Where Gabriel’s red plumes are a wind in the lanes of thy lilies at eve, We pray, who have done with the churches we worship, who may not believe! The human origin of all religions is admitted, but the argument is turned against the NeoPagans effectively enough: We know that men prayed to their image, and crowned their own passions as Powers; We know that their Gods were as shadows, nor are shamed of this Queen, that was ours! We know as the people the priest is, as men are, the Goddess shall bet—All harlots were worshipped in Cypris: all maidens and mothers in thee!

He left school when about seventeen. His father, whose own tastes were far more literary and artistic than commercial, and whose judgment was sane and just to a most unusual degree, wisely refrained from attempting to force him into business. During his boyhood Gilbert Chesterton had been at least as fond of scribbling drawings as of scribbling verses. Some of these were thought by good judges to show great promise, and it was decided that he should study art. The experiment was not wholly a success. That Mr. Chesterton has considerable gift as a draftsman no competent critic who studies the illustrations to Mr. Belloc’s “Immanuel Burden” will be disposed to deny. But it was not in that direction that his deepest impulses led. He proved this by the fact that he shrank from the technical toils of art as he has never shrank from the technical toils of writing.

But the years during which this experiment was being made were certainly not wasted. During the whole time he was writing incessantly and publishing practically nothing. He entered it crude and unformed; he left it almost mature. These silent years were full of reading and of thinking. He was brought face to face with the modern world, the creation of that liberal philosophy in which he had been trained, and it failed to satisfy him. The disappointment, aggravated by his loathing for the decadent school which then dominated “advanced “ literature, must have set him thinking. Perhaps it touched the nerve of humour in
him, for we find little humour in what he wrote before this time, while in all that he wrote after it is dominant and clamorous. The change that came over his temperament was, perhaps, mirrored in his changed appearance. The tall, slender idealist became the full-girthed giant, shaking with Gargantuan laughter.

One reminiscence of his art-school days he gave to the world not long ago in a “Daily News” article. It may be worth recalling, firstly because it gives a glimpse of his impressions of the world he was then living in, secondly because it marks the beginning of that change of view which we shall follow in future chapters, thirdly because Mr. Chesterton himself says that it was “by far the most terrible thing that ever happened to him in his life “:

“An art school is different from almost all other schools or colleges in this respect; that, being of new and crude creation and of lax discipline, it presents a specially strong contrast between the industrious and the idle. People at an art school either do an atrocious amount of work or do no work at all. I belonged, along with other charming people, to the latter class; and this threw me often into the society of men who were very different from myself, and who were idle for reasons very different from mine. I was idle because I was very much occupied; I was engaged about that time in discovering, to my own extreme and lasting astonishment, that I was not an atheist. But there were others also at loose ends who were engaged in discovering what Carlyle called (I think with needless delicacy) the fact that ginger is hot in the mouth.

“I value that time, in short, because it made me acquainted with a good representative number of blackguards. In this connection there are two very curious things which the critic of human life may observe. The first is the fact that there is one real difference between men and women; that women prefer to talk in twos, while men prefer to talk in threes. The second is that when you find (as you often do) three young cads and idiots going about together and getting drunk together every day you generally find that one of the three cads and idiots is (for some extraordinary reason) not a cad and not an idiot. In those small groups devoted to a drivelling dissipation there is almost always one man who seems to have condescended to his company; one man who, while he can talk a foul triviality with his fellows, can also talk politics with a Socialist, or philosophy with a Catholic.

“It was just such a man whom I came to know well. It was strange, perhaps, that he liked his dirty, drunken society; it was stranger still, perhaps, that he liked my society. For hours of the day he would talk with me about Milton or Gothic architecture; for hours of the night he would go where I have no wish to follow him, even in speculation. He was a man with a long, ironical face, and close and red hair; he was by class a gentleman, and could walk like one, but preferred, for some reason, to walk like a groom carrying two pails. He looked like a sort of super-jockey; as if some archangel had gone on the Turf. And I shall never forget the half-hour in which he and I argued about real things for the first and the last time.”

The man asked him why he was becoming more orthodox, and was met by the now familiar Chestertonian argument for religion and humility; illustrated by the symbol the sparks from the fire that was burning in front of them: “Seduce a woman, and that spark will be less bright. Shed blood, and that spark will be less red “:
“He had a horrible fairness of the intellect that made me despair of his soul. A common, harmless atheist would have denied that religion produced humility or humility a simple joy; but he admitted both. He only said, ‘But shall I not find in evil a life of its own? Granted that for every woman I ruin one of those red sparks will go out; will not the expanding pleasure of ruin . . .”

“Do you see that fire?” I asked. ‘If we had a real fighting democracy, some one would burn you in it; like the devil-worshipper that you are.’

“Perhaps,’ he said, in his tired, fair way. ‘Only what you call evil I call good.’

“He went down the great steps alone, and I felt as if I wanted the steps swept and cleaned. I followed later, and as I went to find my hat in the low, dark passage where it hung, I suddenly heard his voice again, but the words were inaudible. I stopped, startled; then I heard the voice of one of his vilest associates saying, ‘Nobody can possibly know.’ And then I heard those two or three words which I remember in every syllable and cannot forget. I heard the Diabolist say, ‘I tell you I have done everything else. If I do that I shan’t know the difference between right and wrong.’ I rushed out without daring to pause; and as I passed the fire I did not know whether it was hell or the furious love of God.

“I have since heard that he died; it may be said, I think, that he committed suicide; though he did it with tools of pleasure, not with tools of pain. God help him, I know the road he went; but I have never known or even dared to think what was that place at which he stopped and refrained.”

A few of his writings found their way into print. While he was still at school, a poem of his called “A Song of Labour” was published in “The Speaker.” To one of the fugitive artistic periodicals of the ‘nineties, “The Quarto,” he contributed a tale called “A Picture of Tuesday,” which has a certain interest in that it anticipates one of the minor ideas of his latest novel. Then, while still an art student, he began to do a certain amount of art criticism for “The Bookman,” and later attempted some reviewing for the same paper. Meanwhile, having abandoned art, he passed through the offices of two publishers, who probably found him something lacking on the commercial side of his duties. Finally, in 1900, he took the plunge into journalism.

But I am anticipating. Before I record Mr. Chesterton’s entrance into the fields of journalism and literature I must say a word of the forces which had helped to mould him. Reading, no less than discussion, was in the air of his home, and from his childhood he was a voracious reader. His memory was and is almost as astounding as Macaulay’s, and he always had pages of his favourite authors stored in his head. His taste, then as now, was always for the romantic school. Shakespeare, Dickens, Scott (both prose and verse), Macaulay, were the writers he devoured, I think, most eagerly in his boyhood. I do not think that he gave much attention to contemporary or even to later Victorian writers. Swinburne caught him in his later schooldays; Browning, I believe, later still; Tennyson I do not fancy he ever fully appreciated. But just about the time that he was leaving
school he met with a book which had a profound and decisive influence on the
growth of his mind. That book was Walt Whitman’s “Leaves of Grass.”

The effect which Whitman’s poems produced on him was electric. They
seemed to sum up the aspirations of his own youth. They gave him a faith to
hold to, and a gospel to preach. He set himself to proclaim “the whole divine
democracy of things,” as he calls it in the “Wild Knight.” He idealized the
remnant of the J.D.C. into the Mystical City of Friends. He embraced
passionately the three great articles of Whitman’s faith, the ultimate goodness of
all things implying the acceptance of the basest and meanest no less than the
noblest in life, the equality and solidarity of men, and the redemption of the
world by comradeship. You will find Whitman’s influence everywhere present
in his earlier work, especially in “The Wild Knight” and “The Defendant.” The
preface to “The Defendant” is instinct with his spirit. “The Wild Knight “ itself
is a Whitmanite poem; so is “ Ecclesiastes “; so is “ World Lover “; so is “The
Earth’s Shame.” Other forces have since compelled him to modify the
Whitmanite faith, and even to emphasize doctrines antagonistic to it—the
existence of positive evil and the need of authority and definition. But the robust
faith in life which Whitman drove into him he has never abandoned, and in the
dedication of his latest book, “ The Man who was Thursday,” he pays a fine
tribute to Whitman’s influence on his youth.

In another respect his opinions changed about this time, and the change is
worth mentioning, although it was not permanent, and probably throws more
light on the mental atmosphere of the time than on Mr. Chesterton’s personal
feelings and opinions. Hitherto, unlike his brother Cecil, who early rebelled
against Liberalism, learned to hate the name of Gladstone before his own views
were at all defined, and finally formulated his revolt in that particular brand of
TorySocialism which he still, I believe, professes, Gilbert Chesterton had
remained faithful to the family traditions in politics as in religion. The only point
of departure was Home Rule, about which his father had doubts, but of which he
was always a warm advocate. We shall see, I think, later how insignificant it was
that he should have chosen this doubtful article of the Liberal creed for special
championship. But for the present we are concerned with his temporary
conversion to Socialism. I do not think his grip on economic Socialism was ever
very firm. I should be disposed to attribute his adoption of its tenets partly to the
example of some of his J.D.C. friends who had gone to the University and joined
the Oxford Fabian Society, partly to the indirect influence of Whitman, which
coloured so much of his life during this period. For, though Whitman himself
was an Anarchist rather than a Socialist, his influence on the Socialist movement
was immense, and young Socialists talked continually the language of
Whitmanism, preaching comradeship, equality, and good will among men—in a
word, the very things which G. K. Chesterton was then intent on proclaiming.

However that may be, it is certain his Socialism left very little impression
upon his mind. For some years he continued to call himself a Socialist. His first
published poem was, in its general tendency, at least, a Socialist poem. He also
wrote one or two poems and sketches for “The Clarion.” But he took no active
part in the Socialist movement, and soon drifted out of it, silently but
completely.

He was once more a Liberal. Indeed, even during his Socialist period, he had
always believed in working with the Liberals. That fundamental Conservatism,
which, as I shall endeavour to show, is the key to his maturer opinions, was even
then strong with him, and, by a paradox as wild as any that he has propounded, it
kept him and keeps him faithful to the Liberal party. From the time when he
practically abandoned Socialism to the time when he emerged from obscurity
into public fame, his political views may best be described as vaguely
progressive. He believed in the ultimate amelioration of the human lot; he
believed (as he no longer believes) in Progress with a capital P; he believed in
liberty and democracy. But his views on many current issues were undefined. He
was something of an Imperialist, as his poem, “ An Alliance,” in “The Wild
Knight “ proves. He was decidedly a patriot. He always, as I say, called himself
a Liberal. But his convictions had not been hammered into coherence by the
necessities of battle.

Suddenly there came a change. Forces, moral and material, which had been
gathering strength for years, appealed to the supreme arbitrament of the sword.
Far to the South half a continent sprang to arms, and the heavy sleep of English
politics was broken by a sound as of the Trumpets of Armageddon.
CHAPTER II

THE FIRST PHASE

IN the autumn of the year 1899 no one outside his own circle had ever heard of G. K. Chesterton. In the spring of 1900 every one was asking every one else, “Who is ‘G. K. C.’? Before the year was over his name and writings were better known than those of men who had made reputations while he was still an infant. I do not know any example in the last fifty years of so dizzy a rise from obscurity to fame as that which I shall try to describe and analyze in this chapter.

His first serious publication (excluding a volume of nonsense verses called “Greybeards at Play”) was “The Wild Knight,” published at the beginning of 1900. How absolutely unknown was its author at that time may be gathered from one rather amusing incident. Mr. James Douglas, in the “Star,” concluded an enthusiastic review with the declaration that the new poet could be none other than Mr. John Davidson, writing under a pseudonym. Mr. Davidson promptly repudiated the suggestion, not without symptoms of considerable annoyance, and a denial not less emphatic, though somewhat more urbane, appeared over the signature of “Gilbert Chesterton.”

But, though Mr. Chesterton thus claimed proprietary rights in his own name, that name remained comparatively unknown. “The Wild Knight” was, on the whole, well reviewed, and it drew warm praise from many competent judges—among others, from Mr. George Meredith. But commercially it was a failure, and it attracted comparatively little attention even from the minority who habitually read current poetry.

Nevertheless these early poems are particularly well worth studying. It is extraordinary that so able a critic as Mr. James Douglas should have thought that they could be the work of Mr. John Davidson. It is true that there are some technical resemblances in the styles of the two poets. Both are daringly indifferent to poetic conventions; both use words and imagery shocking to critics of the classical school; both boldly introduce references to modern things—trains and lamp-posts. Both aim at vigour and strength rather than at beauty. But when we turn from the manner to the substance we find a philosophy farther removed from Mr. Davidson’s than Mr. Davidson’s is from Tennyson’s or Wordsworth’s.

The gospel of “The Wild Knight” and of nearly all the poems bound up with it
is in essentials the gospel of Whitman. What, for instance, could be more in the spirit of “Leaves of Grass” than the poem called “Ecclesiastes”? I will quote it in full, not because I think it a good specimen from the literary point of view, but because it summarizes so succinctly the poet’s early creed: There is one sin: to call a green leaf grey,
Whereat the sun in heaven shuddereth.

There is one blasphemy: for death to pray,
For God alone knoweth the praise of death.

There is one creed: ‘neath no world-terror’s wing
Apples forget to grow on apple trees.

There is one thing is needful—everything—
The rest is vanity of vanities.

A much finer poem, “The Earth’s Shame,” I will also quote, because it emphasizes the Whitmanite idea of the ultimate acceptance of all things, however apparently evil: Name not his deed: in shuddering and in haste
We dragged him darkly o’er the windy fells;
That night there was a gibbet in the waste,
And a new sin in hell.

Be his deed hid from Commonwealths and Kings;
By all men born be one true tale forgot;
But three things, braver than all earthly things,
Faced him and feared him not.

Above his head and sunken secret face
Nestled the sparrow’s young, and dropped not dead. From the red blood and slime of that lost place
Grew daisies white, not red.

And from high heaven looking upon him,
Slowly upon the face of God did come
A smile that Cherubim and Seraphim
Hid all their faces from.

The religion of the poems, too, is Whitmanite. That is to say, it combines the almost contemptuous rejection of conscious dogmas with the assertion of unconscious dogmas of vast extent—dogmas quite unprovable, but so deeply impressed upon the soul of the believer that they seem to him self-evident. That the whole universe is the expression of a Supreme Will, that that Will is benign and full of love for its creatures, that all things are making for good—these doctrines are written on every page. But there is no trace of the writer’s later
sympathy for religious orthodoxy. The word “priest“ is never used, save in the
spirit of Whitman’s—” Allons, from all formules! From your formules, O bat-
eyed and materialistic priests!” The Founder of Christ tianity is praised to the
point of worship as Whitman praised him, but historic Christianity is almost
everywhere represented as a ghastly parody of His teaching. In what is, perhaps,
the most powerful poem in the book, “The Ballad of God-Makers,” we are
shown “the kings of the Earth “ planning Christianity as a defence against
Christ: Said the King of the East to the King of the West (I wot his frown was
set),
Lo, let us slay him—and make him as dung,
It is well that the world forget.’

Said the King of the West to the King of the East (I wot his smile was dread),
Nay, let us slay him—and make him a god,
It is well that our god be dead.’

They set the young man on a hill,
They nailed him to a rod;
And there in darkness and in blood
They made themselves a god.

Here, then, we have a fairly coherent philosophy, which is practically the
humane optimistic Modernism of Mr. Chesterton’s up-bringing modified by the
influence of Whitman, but retaining its main outlines undisturbed. In the articles
contributed to “The Speaker,” some of the most characteristic of which were
shortly afterwards published under the title of “The Defendant,” much of that
philosophy subsists. But there is a marked change—the first step in the
transformation which was to turn the author of “The Ballad of God-Makers “
into the author of “Heretics.” To what was this change due? In order to answer
that question, we must turn for a moment from private to public affairs. For it is
a most significant fact, and one which had a profound effect upon his subsequent
development, that it was a public crisis which first forced G. K. C. to the front.

The history of England during the last quarter of the nineteenth century is the
history of the growth of Imperialism. That great movement, foreseen more than
thirty years ago by the genius of Disraeli, was not to reach fruition in his time.
The Manchester tradition in the middle class, the Radical-Chartist tradition in the
most intelligent section of the working class, were still too strong. It was not till
the great Gladstonian age was over, till the Socialists had cut much ground from
under the feet of the Radicals, and till Churchill and his Tory Democracy had
created that alliance between the aristocracy and a large section of the proletariat
which Disraeli had desired but had never been quite able to accomplish, that the ground was cleared for the new force.

It is not my business to discuss the merits or demerits of Imperialism. That it was often exploited by faithless politicians for frivolous, and by unscrupulous traders and financiers for sordid purposes, would be admitted by all its intelligent advocates. But whether it was wholly a gross materialistic and immoral movement is quite another matter. It showed that it had some roots in that part of the soul which is noble and aspirant by the one unfailing test—the fact that it produced literature which had the note of greatness. The stories and poems of Mr. Rudyard Kipling gave to the silent movement of public sentiment and opinion an articulate voice, a voice at which the petty critics of the academies might carp, but to which no man with blood in his veins could refuse to listen. They summed up a movement; they roused an Empire. They did more than all the speeches of Mr. Chamberlain to raise the spirit of Imperialism to acting point. For good or evil, they made possible the South African War.

I am only concerned with these things in so far as they help to make clear the position of Mr. Chesterton, who was to do for the Anti-Imperialist reaction much of what Mr. Kipling had done for the Imperialist movement. First, then, let us see what it was that drove him into the camp of those who were called “Pro-Boers.”

The young Chesterton had caught Imperialism as he had caught Socialism. Under its influence he wrote at least one poem, included in “The Wild Knight,” which contains four lines such as even Mr. Kipling might have thought a trifle extravagant: That all our seed be gathered, That all our race take hands, And the sea be a Saxon river, That flows through Saxon lands.

Moreover, he was a disciple of Stevenson; Stevenson was the only writer who could be said to compete with Whitman in forming the philosophy of his adolescence. Stevenson may not have been an Imperialist, but he had taught the gospel of the sword which was being vigorously invoked on behalf of Imperialism by his old friend and collaborator, Henley, and by a host of younger men who had learned it from him. Never at any time had the doctrine of Tolstoi, which has so powerfully influenced other British democrats, obtained the faintest hold on Mr. Chesterton. He was not in the least averse either to violence or to bloodshed in themselves. He was passionately patriotic, and detested all that modern theory which condemns flags and frontiers as inherently immoral.
Everything seemed to point to the probability that he would be found on the Imperialist side in that fierce controversy in regard to which hardly anyone found it possible to be impartial. How came it that he finally chose the other?

Many minor causes might be suggested; his traditional Liberalism, his sympathy with Irish Nationalism (which had remained unabated even when he half yielded to the Imperial idea), the example of most of his intimate personal friends. But I think the real cause lay deeper.

He interpreted the Stevensonian gospel of fighting in a manner altogether different from that of Mr. Henley and his school. Fighting was noble and romantic, but only if you fought against odds. Alan Breck at the round-house door was a figure to be admired, because he was one man against a ship’s crew. But who thought Captain Hoseason romantic? Yet the British Empire appeared to be rather in Hoseason’s position than in Alan’s. It was a fine thing that the weak should take the sword and conquer the strong. But here we were the strong, and we were endeavouring, without much success, to conquer the weak. As he put it in a striking Christmas poem, written while the war was still raging: Hard out of English bone my curse falls on an idle war, That men of other blood have found the secret of the Star.

So, too, he interpreted differently the doctrine of Nationalism. Mr. Chesterton is, as I shall suggest, not always an entirely coherent thinker; but he could think. And thinking was at a discount in the hot days of the war, when men snatched up the first fragment of doctrine they could lay their hands on if it seemed for the moment to tell in their favour. Thus Pro-Boers would denounce patriotism as an obsolete superstition, and then go on to praise the Boers for defending their country! Similarly the Imperialists would alternately acclaim and decry national sentiment as it suited their turn. Now, Mr. Chesterton was one of the comparatively few people who had on the subject a clear and 3 definable doctrine. He erected the sanctity of nationality into a religious dogma, and he denied the right of any nation or Empire, on the pretence of being more civilized, more progressive, more democratic, or more efficient, to take away from another nation its birthright of independence. This creed he was prepared to defend alike against Imperialist and Cosmopolitan critics.

His conviction was probably defined and intensified by the appearance of a school of political thinkers who were prepared to defend Imperialism on the specific ground that it was opposed to Nationalism. This was the position taken up by Mr. Bernard Shaw and other Fabian leaders, and Mr. Chesterton has always maintained that it is the only logical ground upon which Imperialism can
be defended. And so, no doubt, it would be if human institutions and the sentiments which gather round them were as immutable and as strictly definable as the lines and angles of Euclid. It is not, however, my business here to debate the issue, but merely to point out that the Fabian defence of Imperialism tended to confirm Mr. Chesterton in his growing conviction that Imperialism was the mortal enemy of patriotism. On that paradox most of his political philosophy is built.

This thesis is the subject of the last essay in a The Defendant “—” A Defence of Patriotism.” It is still further developed in the first essay in a volume called “England a Nation,” which was produced by an institution calling itself “The Patriots’ Club.” The Patriots’ Club was Mr. Chesterton’s own idea; its aim was to provide a rallying point for those who disapproved alike of the Cosmopolitan and the Imperialist ideals. It never did anything as far as I know except to produce the aforesaid volume, which contained contributions from persons as diverse and typical as Mr. Masterman, Mr. Ensor, Mr. Hugh Law, M.P., Mr. Nevinson, Mr. Hammond, Mr. Reginald Bray, and the Rev. Conrad Noel on various aspects of the Nationalist doctrine. Mr. Chesterton himself wrote the introductory essay on “The Patriotic Idea,” which contains perhaps the most lucid expression of the political dogma which has exercised so dominant an influence over his opinions. It opens with an attack upon the Cosmopolitan ideals, based upon the refusal of their humanitarianism to recognize the common needs of humanity: “Because the modern intellectuals who disapprove of patriotism do not do this, a strange coldness and unreality hangs about their love for men. If you ask them whether they love humanity, they will say, doubtless sincerely, that they do. But if you ask them touching any of the classes that go to make up humanity, you will find that they hate them all. They hate kings, they hate priests, they hate soldiers, they hate sailors, they distrust men of science, they denounce the middle classes, they despair of working men, but they adore humanity. Only they always speak of humanity as if it were a curious foreign nation. They are dividing themselves more and more from men to exalt the strange race of mankind. They are ceasing to be human in the effort to be humane.”

Then comes the turn of the Imperialists. The attack is directed mainly against the contention that “a great conglomeration of peoples like the British Empire may be a unification of varied merits.” Mr. Chesterton meets this with a denial: empires do not absorb the great qualities of the races they subdue: “. . . Why did we know so much about German mythology and nothing about Irish mythology?
Any person with even the simplest knowledge of the world as it is must realize that the reason lies in the fact that our material conquest of Ireland put us in an utterly artificial position towards everything Irish. The Irish would not sing to us any more than the Jews, as described in their stern and splendid psalm, would sing to the Babylonians. I find it difficult to believe that there can be anyone so ignorant of practical existence as not to know that any attempt on the part of the Irish for centuries after their conquest to say to us what they had to say about their history and legends would have been met with nothing except jokes about Brian Baroo. We all know in reality that England would never have consented to learn from Ireland. It has learnt from France because it failed to conquer her. If Edward III or Henry V had succeeded in adding France to the Empire, we may be absolutely certain that we should have learnt as little from the song of Roland as we have from the legend of Maive, and that we should have profited as little from the genius of Mirabeau as we did from the genius of Parnell.

Perhaps the best passage in the essay is that which deals with the fugitive native character of empires and the permanence of nations: “Spain had once a colonial empire, far more brilliant and original than ours. Its empire has vanished, but there are still men who will die for Spain; there are still men who will strike you in the face if you say that they are not Spaniards.

“France had an empire covering all Europe after the great ecstasy of the Revolution. It vanished utterly, and all its ideas are at a low ebb in Europe. But there are still men who will die for France. And when from our mortal nation also this immortal fallacy is passed, when all the colonies of England have gone the wild way of the colonies of Spain, when some strange and sudden Waterloo has made the little dream of Beaconsfield as mad as the great dream of Napoleon, something will remain, I am very certain, which matters more than all these levities. There will still be men who will die for England.”

Mr. Chesterton is by no means on such strong ground when he appeals to the common sense of humanity as distinguishing between Imperialism and Patriotism. Indeed, here I think is the weak point in his case. He is always appealing to us to ask what the great mass of ordinary men want. Now, there can be no manner of doubt what the great mass of ordinary men wanted in the year 1899. They wanted the South African War and the annexation of the Dutch Republics. And they wanted it in the name of Patriotism. If anyone had told them that such a desire was unpatriotic they would have replied, as Mr. Chesterton replies to the imaginary humanitarian in “Heretics “: “What a great deal of trouble you must have taken in order to feel like that.” And they would have said so, six years later even, when they were in a mood of reaction against Imperialism. The ordinary man, the balancing elector, who voted Conservative
in 1900 because he liked Imperialism, and Liberal in 1906 largely because he had grown to dislike it, would not have said in 1906 any more than in 1900 that Imperialism was unpatriotic. He would have said: “Patriotism is all very well, but I think you can have too much of it.” And I think he would have been right. To say that an Imperialist is deficient in patriotism because he does not respect other people’s patria seems to me like saying that a selfish man is deficient in egoism because he does not respect other people’s ego.

On the eve of the war “The Speaker,” then the leading Liberal weekly, passed practically into the hands of a group of young Liberals fresh from the Universities, who were resolved to make it the organ of vigorous opposition to the New Imperialism. Among these were several of Mr. Chesterton’s old J.D.C. friends, and to the combination he readily lent the aid of his pen. The now-familiar initials “G. K. C.” appeared at the bottom of several articles and reviews. And then, as I have already said, every one began to ask every one else, “Who is ‘G. K. C’?” In a few months he was almost famous.

What was it in these articles which struck the imagination of the reading world and captured its attention as by a cavalry charge? It was not, I think, merely the cleverness of the writing. There are many clever writers who do not find so easy a victory. Nor was it any astonishing originality in the views expressed. The really individual opinions of the author were then only struggling into being. He said little that might not have been said, comparatively little that had not been said, by Whitman or Stevenson or some other hero of his youth. Yet every one felt that he was striking a new note.

That note, I think, was the note of pugnacity. The opinions expressed may have been expressed before, may even be pretty generally accepted, but he throws into each a note of challenge. He writes, not like an essayist weaving a fascinating theory, but like a political leader with his eye on the division lobby. He sees his adversary; he sees his audience. He fights like a man fighting to win.

Let me take a single instance—the “Defence of Penny Dreadfuls,” subsequently reprinted in “The Defendant.” The idea that Penny Dreadfuls are defensible is one that might have occurred to any paradoxical essayist. We can imagine Mr. Max Beerbohm producing a very delightful phantasia on such a theme on the lines of his attack on the Fire Brigade. Stevenson might have treated it a little more seriously, as in “The Lantern Bearers.” But it is safe to say that neither they nor anyone else would have treated it as it is treated here. Mr. Chesterton defends Penny Dreadfuls—not ironically, not with a halfserious, romantic sympathy, but as if he were the counsel retained to defend a man
accused of selling them!

He begins quietly enough, pointing out a perfectly fair logical distinction between the desire of artistic people for artistic fiction and the desire of all normal men for stories. The latter desire is as legitimate as the former, and we ought not to condemn the story-teller merely because he does not produce a good work of art. “Bad story-telling is not a crime. Mr. Hall Caine walks the streets openly and cannot be put in prison for an anti—climax.” Later he warms to his work, and begins to distribute powerful forensic blows right and left. “If some grimy urchin runs away with an apple, the magistrate shrewdly points out that the child’s knowledge that apples appease hunger is traceable to some curious literary researches.” The evidence of the readers of these stories that they have been led into crime is brushed aside just as a clever barrister would brush it aside. “If I had forged a will, and could obtain sympathy by tracing the incident to the influence of Mr. George Moore’s novels, I should find the greatest entertainment in the diversion.” Another stroke rapidly follows: “At any rate, it is firmly fixed in the minds of most people that gutterboys, unlike everybody else in the community, find their principal motives for conduct in printed books.

Then, after the introduction of “Rob Roy” and “Ivanhoe” as precedents for the sympathetic treatment of criminals, comes the really sensational effect, for the sake of which one feels the article was written. The tables are turned on the prosecution. The accusers of Penny Dreadfuls are themselves put in the dock: “If the authors and publishers of ‘Dick Deadshot’ and such remarkable works were suddenly to make a raid upon the educated class, were to take down the names of every man, however distinguished, who was caught at a University Extension Lecture, were to confiscate all our novels and warn us all to correct our lives, we should be seriously annoyed. Yet they have far more right to do so than we; for they, with all their idiocy, are normal and we are abnormal. It is the modern literature of the educated, not of the uneducated, which is avowedly and aggressively criminal. Books recommending profligacy and pessimism, at which the high-souled errand boy would shudder, lie upon all our drawing-room tables. If the dirtiest old owner of the dirtiest old bookstall in Whitechapel dared to display works really recommending polygamy or suicide, his stock would be seized by the police. These things are our luxuries. And with a hypocrisy so ludicrous as to be almost unparalleled in history, we rate the gutterboys for their immorality at the very time that we are discussing (with equivocal German Professors) whether morality is valid at all. At the very instant that we curse the Penny Dreadful for encouraging thefts upon property, we canvass the
proposition that all property is theft. At the very instant we accuse it (quite unjustly) of lubricity and indecency, we are cheerfully reading philosophies which glory in lubricity and indecency. At the very instant that we charge it with encouraging the young to destroy life, we are placidly discussing whether life is worth preserving.”
You will find that sense of being at grips with a real or imaginary enemy in nearly everything that Mr. Chesterton has written. It permeates his criticisms and reviews, his poems, and even (in defiance of artistic canons) his stories. In the old “Speaker” articles it is particularly prominent. The very title of “The Defendant“ bears witness to it, but it is by no means confined to the articles that were thought worth reprinting. All subjects are alike to him, if only a fight can be extracted from them. Those who think that the South African War was justifiable are not subjected to a fiercer fire than those who think that Bacon wrote Shakespeare’s plays. We see him laughing, like the war-horse in Job, at the shaking of the spears, dealing thwacking blows with enormous enjoyment and good humour, keeping a dozen controversies going at once as a juggler keeps billiard balls.
It is the combative spirit which has been from the first apparent in Mr. Chesterton which has led to his being labelled “paradoxical.” The term may be suffered to pass, but it must be insisted that there is no affinity between Mr. Chesterton’s paradoxes and those polished inversions which Oscar Wilde brought into fashion.
Wilde’s paradoxes were purely artistic products fashioned solely for the sake of their own wit, neatness, and humour. “Divorces are made in Heaven,” is a typical and very admirable specimen. The phrase is intended to startle and amuse, but certainly not to provoke thought, much less controversy. It is wholly self-sufficient, a perfect work of art, which further elaboration, above all, anything in the nature of argument, would utterly spoil. Finally, it has no reference to the serious philosophy of Wilde or of anybody else. Now, Mr. Chesterton occasionally indulges in inversions of this type—”a good bush needs no wine” and “nothing fails like success.” He is not, I think, very successful in inventing these phrases—certainly no one would think of comparing them with Wilde’s exquisite inventions. But the difference lies deeper than any question of relative merit. The difference is one of aim. Wilde’s paradoxes would, as I say, be spoilt altogether by explanation. But the whole value—indeed, the whole meaning—of the expressions quoted above lies in the explanation which accompanies them. They are not toys fashioned and tossed about at random.
They are shots fired in a campaign.

The typical Chestertonian paradox consists not in the inversion of a proverb, but in the deliberate presentation of some unusual and unpopular thesis with all its provocative features displayed, with all the consequences which are likely to startle or anger opponents insisted on to the point of wild exaggeration. It is unnecessary to give instances, for almost every essay that Mr. Chesterton has written is an instance. That on Rudyard Kipling in “Heretics” is perhaps one of the strongest. Mr. Chesterton does not gently suggest, as another writer of his opinions would have done, that Mr. Kipling’s patriotism is not of the highest and purest type. He boldly flings down the statement that a complete absence of patriotism is his dominant characteristic. Closely connected with this provocative method of attack is a marked refusal to present his own position in pleasing or soothing colours, a determination that his opponents shall miss nothing in it that they will dislike. This peculiarity perhaps lends some colour to Mr. Shaw’s suggestion that Mr. Chesterton is French. For Frenchmen often display that fierce refusal to disguise the ugly parts of their creed. Where, for instance, an English Freethinker would say: “The human reason will give men better and truer illumination than the outworn lamps of theology,” the French Freethinker exclaims: “With a superb gesture we have put out in Heaven the lights that shall never be lighted again!” Despite the complete antagonism of doctrine, there is something very Chestertonian about that defiant outburst.

Later an incident occurred which gave him a new opportunity and a wider public. At the beginning of the South African War the “Daily Chronicle,” under the editorship of Mr. Massingham, was the principal Pro-Boer organ; while the “Daily News,” under Mr. Cook, was the organ of the Liberal Imperialists. Later the two papers changed sides. The proprietors of the “Daily Chronicle” supplanted Mr. Massingham by an Imperialist editor, and subsequently a syndicate of wealthy Radicals bought the “Daily News” and ousted Mr. Cook. The new “Daily News” was naturally anxious to enlist all the talent that was available for opposing the Imperialist war policy, and the eyes of its proprietors and editors naturally turned to G. K. C. Then began that series of Saturday articles which have continued without a break ever since.

Every one, I think, must have been struck by the incongruity of Mr. Chesterton’s weekly appearance in the “Daily News.” The insertion of a story by Guy de Maupassant in the “Christian Herald” would hardly seem more fantastic. The fact is that the accident of concurrence on the overmastering issue of the war (and even on that the conclusion was reached by wholly different roads) had
thrown G. K. C. into the company of those who had really least in common with him. The strong loyalty of old ties and old associations which is characteristic of him has kept him faithful to the “News,” with the result that he is almost the only writer of the day who has the ear of his adversaries, whose congregation is, indeed, almost wholly composed of his adversaries. Generally speaking, people buy the papers that express their own views, and find therein the articles of people who agree with them. But the odd accident of Mr. Chesterton’s connection with the “Daily News” provides a notable exception. Thousands of peaceful semiTolstoian Nonconformists have for six years been compelled to listen every Saturday morning to a fiery apostle preaching consistently the praise of the three things which seem to them most obviously the signs-manual of Hell—War, Drink, and Catholicism.

Shortly afterwards Mr. Chesterton collected another volume of his articles and published them under the title of “Twelve Types.” The book is interesting, as I shall show in another chapter, as indicating a further movement of his mind away from the philosophy of” The Wild Knight” and towards the philosophy of “Heretics.” It is also interesting as the first publication which exhibits him as a critic. To call it a book of criticism would, however, be a complete misnomer. In most of the essays there is really hardly any criticism properly so called. What Mr. Chesterton does is merely to put forward his own views with immense vigour and pugnacity, using the views of some other man as a foil. It is not criticism; but it is immensely entertaining.

All this time his interest in politics continued unabated. It was not only in prose that he assailed the current political philosophy of the day. Week after week verses, terse and vigorous and charged with the fiercest irony or indignation, appeared in “The Speaker” from his pen. One of these is a defiance launched at the disturbers of Pro-Boer meetings. Another, in a different vein, is a metrical version of Mr. Chamberlain’s election speech. I will quote two verses of it, because it is a good specimen of the kind of jeu d’esprit which G. K. C. can do extraordinarily well when he chooses: At Birmingham among my own Dear People I appear.

For I was born at Camberwell, Not very far from here; And, if you choose another man, My public life is closed; But you will find it difficult, Since I am unopposed.
Have we not armies at the front That we can turn to mobs, “Which out of love for me have shown Some deference to “Bobs”? They’re sensitive, and, if they heard Their Joseph had been hissed, They’d have no nerve to meet the foe That does not now exist!

In marked contrast to this charming absurdity is the almost brutal violence of the
poem written on the morrow of the General Election, with its torrent of bitter taunts: Never so low as this we blundered.

Dead we have been; but not so dead As these, that live on the life they squandered, As these, that drink of the blood they shed.

We never boasted the thing we bungled, We never flaunted the thing that fails, We never quailed from the living laughter To howl to the dead who tell no tales.
'Twas another finger at least that pointed Our wasted men and our empty bags, It was not we who sounded the trumpet In front of the triumph of wrecks and rags!

Altogether, then, the pen of G. K. C. was pretty well occupied during the three years of the war. He fought hard for his side, and he has left on record only recently his memories of the contest. In a poem in the “Daily News” on last year’s London County Council election he wrote: I dream of the days when work was scrappy, And rare in our pockets the mark of the mint; When we were angry and poor and happy, And proud of seeing our names in print.

For so they conquered, and so we scattered, When the Devil rode, and his dogs smelt gold, And the peace of a harmless folk was shattered, When I was twenty and odd years old.

When mongrel men that the market classes, Had slimy hands upon England’s rod; And sword in hand upon Afric’s passes, Her last Republic cried to God!

The three years of war mark the three years of Mr. Chesterton’s journalistic apprenticeship. When it began in 1899 he was still a beginner. Its last embers had not been stamped out when Mr. John Morley asked him to do for the “English Men of Letters” series a monograph on Browning.

With the publication of that book he definitely passes from journalism to literature.
CHAPTER III

A CRITIC OF LETTERS

I HAVE taken the publication of his “Robert Browning” as the point at which Mr. Chesterton definitely enters the world of permanent, as distinguished from ephemeral, letters. This entrance was accompanied by much the same buzz of curiosity, excitement, and admiration as greeted his growing reputation as a journalist, but with this difference, that the dissentient voices were now louder and more numerous, so that blame and even violent denunciation were more freely mingled with the enthusiasm of praise.

It was natural that it should be so, nor would it be fair to attribute the attitude of his most hostile critics to personal motives of spite or jealousy. Such motives may have operated in some cases—indeed, they are the inevitable price of so sudden and startling a success. But in the great majority of instances the irritation of his critics was quite natural and intelligible.

Mr. Chesterton had served his apprenticeship in journalism, and even among journalists—at any rate, among what may be called literary journalists—his manner had seemed almost provocatively journalistic. He now entered on a new career as a man of letters. In that there is nothing unusual; many men have graduated in Fleet Street for the salons of literature. But what many thought almost indecent was the extent to which the neophyte seemed to be at ease in the intellectual and artistic Zion which ought to have put him on his best behaviour. He walks into its holy places (metaphorically speaking) with his hat on, and utterly refuses to be impressed with its dignity or his own unworthiness. He does not modify or subdue his riotous journalistic style; what was good enough for the readers of “The Speaker” and the “Daily News” ought to be good enough for the students of literature. At any rate, it is all he has to give them, and if they do not like it they can leave it. They did not like it, but to leave it was no easy matter, for the most hardened academic could not disguise from himself the fact that these extraordinary books of criticism which violated every canon of literary decency were uproariously readable.

The cause of their pre-eminence in this respect is identical with the cause of their irritant effect on the epicures of art—they are the work of a journalist, and a journalist must be readable or perish. Of course, in these books, as, for the matter of that, in his purely journalistic work, Mr. Chesterton is much more than
readable—he is often profound, nearly always forcible, generally suggestive. But the fact that struck the world as startling in a solid piece of literary criticism and appreciation was not that it should be profound, forcible, or suggestive, but that by some strange portent it should actually be readable.

I have said that in approaching serious criticism Mr. Chesterton made no change in his method of writing. There is, indeed, in the “Browning” ample indication that the author is writing with more care and conscience than he gave to his weekly contributions to the Press. But the only effect of this is that what he has been doing all along he now does better. The brilliance is better sustained, the effects are better prepared, but it is the same kind of brilliance, the same kind of effect.

You can hardly turn to any page of the “Browning” without lighting on a passage which you can no more imagine occurring in any other volume of the “English Men of Letters” series than you can imagine a rowdy, topical song occurring in one of Racine’s Tragedies. For instance, Mr. Chesterton wishes to contrast the obscurity of Mr. George Meredith, which arises from the subtility and complexity of the ideas to be expressed, with the obscurity of Browning, which is due to a sort of swift impatience. The distinction is a sound and a valuable one. But who but Mr. Chesterton would have dared to illustrate it by making up imaginary descriptions of a man being knocked downstairs in the styles of the two great writers? Who, again, would have ventured to translate a passage from Tennyson into Browningese, and a passage from Browning into Tennysonese, to show the suitability of their respective styles to their respective subjects? These are no isolated instances; the same defiance of literary conventions runs through the whole of the “Browning,” and is hardly less marked in the later monograph on Dickens.

Lord Macaulay prided himself on having destroyed “the dignity of history,” and it may be that, when sufficient time has passed to enable men to weigh fairly his merits and defects, that service will remain his greatest and most permanent title to gratitude. In the same way Mr. Chesterton might not unfairly claim to have helped to destroy the equally pernicious “dignity of literary criticism.” Of both Macaulay and Mr. Chesterton it may be said that they never omit an anecdote or a reference which may help to make the impression more vivid because the anecdote or reference is in itself trivial or grotesque. Macaulay at the most exciting crisis of the Revolution does not forget to remind us that Charles II said of the Prince of Denmark “that he had tried him drunk and he had tried him sober, and that, drunk or sober, there was nothing in him.” Similarly Mr.
Chesterton introduces into a book of grave criticism such stories as that of the lady who, meeting Robert Browning at dinner and ignorant of his identity, asked: “Who is that too exuberant stockbroker?” He has his reward. Doubts may exist as to the correctness of the judgments passed in the “Browning” and the “Dickens.” But there can be no doubt about the amazing graphic vigour of the portraiture.

In these violations of academic orthodoxy Mr. Chesterton is abundantly justified by the result. But more valid objection may be taken to another habit which he had acquired in journalism and which he continued to use in his books—the habit of illustrating his thesis by references to obviously ephemeral phenomena in life or literature. In the “Browning,” for example, we find the obscurity of the poet illustrated by a reference to Miss Marie Corelli. In the “Dickens” the popularity of the novelist is contrasted with the popularity of Mr. William Le Queux. Now, in a M Daily News” article such references would be perfectly defensible, for such an article is only intended to be ephemeral, and it may fairly be assumed that every one who reads it has heard of the two authors referred to. But a serious study of a great man like Robert Browning or Charles Dickens ought to aim at permanence. It should be written with an eye on that posterity which will certainly read Browning and Dickens, and which is hardly likely to be familiar with Miss Corelli or Mr. Le Queux. If they read Mr. Chesterton, they will necessarily find these passages as unintelligible as we find the obscurest parts of the “Dunciad.” The same objection applies to the frequent reference to the transient fashions of politics which meets us on almost every page. These things must tend to hinder the books from being what in many ways they deserve to be—durable monuments of a durable fame.

Another criticism commonly brought against Mr. Chesterton’s critical works has reference to the digressions in which they abound. Here, I think, a distinction must be made. Mr. Chesterton’s habit of creating before he draws a man’s portrait an impression of the forces which have moulded him, and the background against which he is to be relieved, appears to me wholly admirable. To do this intelligently and effectively it may be necessary to go back to very remote origins, and discuss problems apparently far removed from the immediate subject of study. Many of the greatest and most perfect architects of letters—Newman, for example, and Burke—do this constantly, and where Mr. Chesterton does it he is often at his best. We could ill spare the admirable analysis of the temper of the nineteenth century which introduces the little monograph on Watts, or the presentation of the angry yet optimistic Radicalism
of the ‘thirties in the “Dickens.” These passages are not only good in themselves; they are good in their places, and they make the whole work better, more intelligible, and more complete.

But Mr. Chesterton does undoubtedly from time to time indulge in a kind of digression which is not so easy to defend. Every now and then some comparatively unimportant incident or remark which he thinks it necessary to chronicle will remind him of an issue quite irrelevant to his subject, but supremely interesting to himself. When this happens he frequently deserts his subject without scruple, and begins what is in effect an entirely independent essay on the issue raised.

Several examples of this tendency will be found in the “Browning.” Mr. Chesterton has to chronicle that Browning was very fond of Italy, and that he and his wife went to live there. But the mention of Italy in the ‘forties immediately calls up memories of the struggle for Italian liberty which was then commencing. The subject fires his blood, and he goes ahead for five pages, recalling the French Revolution, the victories of Napoleon, the triumph of the Holy Alliance, and the ultimate break-up of “the frozen continent of non-possumus” which that triumph established. It is very fine writing—perhaps one of the finest passages in the book—but what light does it throw on Robert Browning? Had Mr. Chesterton been writing a study of Elizabeth Barrett Browning I would not have complained; for Mrs. Browning celebrated the struggle for Italian freedom and unity in some of her noblest poems, and a full understanding of her would be impossible without some comprehension of the cause into which she threw so much of her energy. Browning as a private citizen may have shared her sympathies, but so far as his work is concerned, the movement might never have existed. That it influenced the bent of his mind or genius in any way is not obvious, nor does Mr. Chesterton make any attempt to show that it did so. He is writing about the Italian Revolution, not because it affected Robert Browning, but because it affects G. K. Chesterton. The whole passage is in reality a “Daily News” article on “Garibaldi” which has accidentally got into the wrong place.

In order to understand properly the peculiar traits of Mr. Chesterton’s books of criticism there is another fact to be borne in mind. Just as he was a journalist before he was an author, so he was a writer on philosophical questions before he was a critic. His early reviews in “The Speaker” and “Daily News” use the particular book under discussion only as a peg on which to hang some general doctrine. This will be seen very clearly in the “Twelve Types.” That volume
contains studies of some of the most interesting figures in literary history—Pope, Byron, Carlyle, Scott, Charlotte Bronte, Tolstoy, Stevenson, and William Morris. Yet hardly one of them deals exhaustively with the literary quality or position of the author, and several of them are random essays on some theme suggested by the author’s name.

The worst case of this is the essay on Byron—the worst essay, I think, that Mr. Chesterton has ever written. Byron is an almost ideally fruitful subject for serious criticism and appreciation. In that most remarkable artistic insurrection which overthrew the dynasty of Pope, and made possible the whole school of naturalistic poets from Shelley to Kipling, he occupies a unique place—a place analogous to that filled by Erasmus in the Reformation and by Mirabeau in the French Revolution. He saw the need of a change, but he would have made it a constitutional one. He would have relaxed the extreme rigours of the classical school, brought it into closer touch with nature, fulfilled it with new energy and passion. But he would have left its fundamental principles unquestioned, its gods undethroned, its permanent tradition unbroken. Of all this there is not a hint in Mr. Chesterton’s essay. As little realization is there of the immense importance of Byron to European thought as the Liberal aristocrat with the Liberal’s hatred of despotism and an aristocrat’s hatred of authority, whose voice ringing through Europe told the banded kings that the Revolution had been conquered too late. All that Mr. Chesterton has to say about Byron is that he was not a pessimist, but an optimist, because he enjoyed his own poetry! There is just about enough truth and value in this to justify a single epigram. Spread thin over fourteen pages, it produces a sense of intense and quite justifiable irritation.

Nevertheless, “Twelve Types“ gives pregnant hints of unused powers as a critic. Two of the essays—those on Charlotte Bronte and Scott—are real criticism, so far as they go, and extraordinarily illuminating and convincing, though they are rather sketches of their subjects taken from one particular angle than exhaustive studies of them. In some of the others there are phrases and sentences full of insight. The following description of the literary quality of Tolstoy’s stories is almost perfect:

“The curious cold white light of morning that shines over all the tales, the folk-lore simplicity with which ‘a man or a woman’ is spoken of without further identification, the love—one might almost say the lust—for the qualities of brute materials, the hardness of wood and the softness of mud, the ingrained belief in a certain ancient kindliness sitting beside the very cradle of the race of man—these influences are truly moral.”

In that there is the quick eye for essentials which is the first quality of a good
And, indeed, when Mr. Chesterton allows himself to be a critic pure and simple, he is always good. If some of his critical efforts have been failures, it has not been from any defect in the critical faculty, but rather from that permanent temptation of his to leave the work of criticism for that of philosophizing which becomes irresistible when the philosophy of the author under consideration is in violent conflict with his own. He is always at his best when he is analyzing a writer with whose root point of view he is sympathetic. No critic ever had a keener sense of Wordsworth’s maxim that “style is the sacrament of thought.” This sense, which gets in his way when he is discussing a writer whose view of life he does not understand, helps him when he is dealing with a sympathetic mind. For then he can not only give free play to his remarkable power of selecting truly and describing vividly the external qualities of an artist, but he can see these externals in the light of the author’s conscious or sub-conscious intention.

I think I can best illustrate this by a quotation from his solitary essay in the criticism of painting, the monograph on Watts. He has been repudiating the suggestion that the mysticism of Watts is “Celtic,” and has for this purpose been contrasting him with Burne-Jones:

“It is remarkable that even the technical style of Watts gives a contradiction to this Celtic theory. Watts is strong precisely where the Celt is weak, and weak precisely where the Celt is strong. The only thing that the Celt has lacked in art is that hard mass, that naked outline, that apxiTeivov which makes Watts a sort of sculptor of draughtsmanship. It is as well for us that the Celt has not had this: if he had, he would rule the world with a rod of iron; for he has everything else. There are no hard black lines in Burke’s orations, or Tom Moore’s songs, or the plays of Mr. W. B. Yeats. Burke is the greatest of political philosophers, because in him only are there distances and perspectives, as there are on the real earth, with its mists of morning and evening, and its blue horizons and broken skies. Moore’s songs have neither a pure style nor deep realization, nor originality of form, nor thought nor wit nor vigour, but they have something else which is none of these things, which is nameless and the one thing needful. In Mr. Yeats’ plays there is only one character, the hero who rules and kills all the others, and his name is Atmosphere. Atmosphere and the gleaming distances are the soul of Celtic greatness as they were of Burne-Jones, who was, as I have said, weak precisely where Watts is strong, in the statuesque quality in drawing, in the love of heavy hands like those of Mammon, of a strong back like that of Eve Repentant, in a single fearless and austere outline like that of the angel in The Court of Death, in the frame-filling violence of Jonah, in the halfwitted brutality of The Minotaur. He is deficient, that is to say, in what can only be called the godlike materialism of art. Watts, on the other hand, is peculiarly strong in it. Idealist as he is, there is nothing frail or phantasmal about the things or the figures he loves. Though not himself a robust man, he loves robustness; he loves a great bulk of shoulder, an abrupt bend of neck, a gigantic stride, a large and swinging limb, a breast bound as with bands of brass. Of course, the deficiency in such a case is very far from being altogether on one side. There are abysses in Burne-Jones which Watts could not understand—the Celtic madness, older than any sanity, the hunger that will remain after the longest feast, the sorrow that is built up of stratified delights. From the point of view of the true Celt,
Watts, the Watts who painted the great stoical pictures *Love and Death*, *Time, Death, and Judgment*, *The Court of Death*, *Mammon*, and *Cain*, this pictorial Watts would probably be, must almost certainly be, simply a sad, sane, strong, stupid Englishman. He may or may not be Welsh by extraction or by part of his extraction, but in spirit he is an Englishman, with all the faults and all the disadvantages of an Englishman. He is a great Englishman like Milton or Gladstone, of the type, that is to say, that were too much alive for anything but gravity, and who enjoyed themselves far too much to trouble to enjoy a joke. Matthew Arnold has come near to defining that kind of idealism, so utterly different from the Celtic kind, which is to be found in Milton and again in Watts. He has called it, in one of his finest and most accurate phrases, ‘the imaginative reason.’

No better example than this could be found of the co-relation between the spirit and the form of an artist. But there are several passages in both the “Browning” and the “Dickens” where the same thing is done incomparably well. Let every one turn to the analysis of Browning’s taste for the grotesque, and say whether among all the multitudinous commentators on the most discussed of modern poets the truth has ever been put so forcibly or with such unerring insight before.

I think the “Dickens” a better book than the “Browning”; certainly it is a more perfect book. The principal literary fault of the “Browning” was a certain carelessness of perspective. The character of Mrs. Browning’s father, for example, is examined with a minuteness of detail which is quite out of proportion to the importance of that gentleman in the poet’s life. Again, as we have seen, any little incident which happened to Browning, and which appeals to Mr. Chesterton’s imagination, is enough to set him off on a side issue and lead him to devote to it pages which might well have been given to matter more germane to the subject. In “Dickens” these defects either disappear or are greatly diminished. The proportions of the book are natural and harmonious. The digressions have nearly always some relation to the essentials; they are not introduced, as they often were in the former book, merely for their own sake. Nor has this advance in technical method been purchased by any sacrifice of the old originality or the old exuberant vigour.

“Dickens” is, I think, Mr. Chesterton’s masterpiece in criticism, because Dickens is the author whose way of looking at life was most like his own. Dickens had the same pugnacity, the same sense of the extravagant possibilities of life, the same incurable romanticism. Mr. Chesterton can therefore get thoroughly inside Dickens, and some of his appreciations have the note of that finest critical genius—the genius that tells us about an author not what we did not know before, but what we always knew but could never say. I do not know a better example of this than the passage in which he describes the eternal quality of the great Dickens characters:
“Dickens was a mythologist rather than a novelist; he was the last of the mythologists, and perhaps the greatest. He did not always manage to make his characters men, but he always managed, at the least, to make them gods. They are creatures like Punch or Father Christmas. They live statically, in a perpetual summer of being themselves. It was not the aim of Dickens to show the effect of time and circumstance upon a character; it was not even his aim to show the effect of character on time and circumstance. It is worth remark, in passing, that whenever he tried to describe change in a character, he made a mess of it, as in the repentance of Dombey or the apparent deterioration of Boffin. It was his aim to show character hung in a kind of happy void, in a world apart from time—yes, and essentially apart from circumstance, though the phrase may seem odd in connection with the godlike horseplay of Pickwick.’ But all the Pickwickian events, wild as they often are, were only designed to display the greater wildness of souls, or sometimes merely to bring the reader within touch, so to speak, of that wildness. The author would have fired Mr. Pickwick out of a cannon to get him to Wardle’s by Christmas; he would have taken the roof off to drop him into Bob Sawyer’s party. But once put Pickwick at Wardle’s, with his punch and a group of gorgeous personalities, and nothing will move him from his chair. Once he is at Sawyer’s party, he forgets how he got there; he forgets Mrs. Bardell and all his story. For the story was but an incantation to call up a god, and the god (Mr. Jack Hopkins) is present in divine power. Once the great characters are face to face, the ladder by which they climbed is forgotten and falls down, the structure of the story drops to pieces, the plot is abandoned, the other characters deserted at every kind of crisis; the whole crowded thoroughfare of the tale is blocked by two or three talkers, who take their immortal ease as if they were already in Paradise. For they do not exist for the story; the story exists for them, and they know it.”

It is impossible to deny to anyone who could write this passage the possession of critical power of the highest type. Yet that power is not without its limitations, and the worst limitation is this, that his passion for generalization is liable to seduce him from the true work of criticism and to lead him not only into irrelevance, but sometimes into flat nonsense. If a generalization can be expressed with some epigrammatic force, and is in harmony with his own broad philosophy of life, he seems sometimes to care nothing at all whether it is consistent with his own argument or with the facts as he himself has stated them.

I will take a curious and striking instance from the “Browning.” Discussing Mr. Santayana’s description of Browning as a poet of barbarism, he says:

“Thus Mr. Santayana is, perhaps, the most valuable of all the Browning critics. He has gone out of his way to endeavour to realize what it is that repels him in Browning, and he has discovered the fault which none of Browning’s opponents have discovered. And in this he has discovered the merit which none of Browning’s admirers have discovered. Whether the quality be a good or a bad quality, Mr. Santayana is perfectly right. The whole of Browning’s poetry does rest upon primitive feeling; and the only comment to be added is that so does the whole of every one else’s poetry”

Now, it must surely be obvious to every one—it would have been obvious to Mr. Chesterton if he had stopped to think about it—that the clause which I have italicized makes nonsense of his own argument. If there was a specific quality in Browning which repelled Mr. Santayana, it must have been a quality peculiar to Browning. To say that Mr. Santayana was repelled by Browning (in
contradistinction to other poets) on account of a quality which Browning shared with all other poets is palpably absurd. Moreover, if the quality in question was not specially Browningesque, but only generally poetical, where does the extraordinary merit of Mr. Santayana’s “discovery “ come in? Why is he “ the most valuable of all the Browning critics “? It is quite obvious that Mr. Chesterton, when he began to discuss Mr. Santayana’s criticism, did intend to maintain that the quality complained of was specially characteristic of Browning. But seeing a chance of scoring effectively off Mr. Santayana, and at the same time of propounding a theory of poetry in general harmony with his own critical leanings, he ruthlessly sacrificed an interesting critical thesis to a casual epigram.

That is an example of Mr. Chesterton’s occasional indifference to the inconsistency of his generalizations with his previous argument. I will now take a case of his indifference to their inconsistency with facts. In the course of his book on Dickens he had maintained the thesis that Dickens’ humane sense of fun made it impossible for him to feel any very vindictive anger towards his great comic characters even when they were great villains—that, for instance, he loved rather than hated Pecksniff. This appears to me to be generally true. But in the introduction to “Martin Chuzzlewit” (one of a series of very brilliant introductions to the individual novels which he undertook immediately afterwards) he makes on the subject of Dickens’ humane mirth a much more startling statement. “This,” he says, “ may be broadly said and yet with confidence, that Dickens is always at his best when he is laughing at the people whom he really admires.” He goes on to give instances—Pickwick and Sam Weller, Dick Swiveller and the Marchioness. Doubtless many other instances could be given of sympathetic characters who are incomparably entertaining. But what a formidable list could be made on the other side. Stiggins, Bumble, Mantilini, Squeers, Quilp, the Brasses, Pecksniff, Mrs. Gamp, Elijah Pogram and his circle, Major Bagstock, Mrs. Skewton, Skimpole, Chadband, Guppy, Turveydrop, Podsnap, Fascination Fledgeby, Silas Wegg. All these and many more that could be named, considered as we consider our neighbours, are either contemptible or vile, yet all are painted in undying colours, and all are full of an eternal laughter. If I were asked to quote the funniest thing in Dickens (an impossible choice, I admit), I think I should choose the speech of Mr. Chadband referring to his requiring “ corn and wine and oil.” And this is precisely the place where Chadband’s wickedness is at its blackest.

The fact is that evidence never matters much to Mr. Chesterton. He has
abundant imagination, sympathy, and insight, and he can reason clearly and correctly in the abstract; indeed, he is one of the most effective controversialists of the day. But of the temper which we call scientific, the power of deducting general principles from a vast mass of facts, he shows little at any time, and none at all when his judgment is warped by a general theory.

One thing must be said, in conclusion, about Mr. Chesterton’s critical exploit. He is often a good critic, but he is never a critic for criticism’s sake. At heart he is always a pamphleteer, a crusader, almost a swashbuckler. That characteristic which I have already noticed more than once, the tendency to write with his eye on an opponent, is as noticeable in his critical works as elsewhere. Watts is studied worthily as a great painter, but he is also studied because his sense of the seriousness and responsibility of art is a foil to the aesthetic frivolity of the modern world. Browning is praised with discrimination as a great poet, but he is also praised because his robust optimism is a challenge to the doubt and despair of the modern world. Dickens is honoured triumphantly as an incomparable humorist and draughtsman of character, but he is also honoured because his fierce, almost rowdy Radicalism is an offence to the oligarchic decencies of the modern world. These dead men are led out as the dead Cid was led out to rout the Saracens. And at the bridle rein of each rides G. K. C. with drawn sword ready for battle.
CHAPTER IV

THE DRIFT TOWARDS ORTHODOXY

I MUST turn aside for a moment at this point to consider the change which was gradually coming over Mr. Chesterton’s opinions, a change which grew more marked year by year till it culminated in the controversy with Mr. Blatchford, when for the first time, I think, he publicly avowed his belief in the central doctrines of orthodox Christianity.

Anyone comparing “The Defendant” with “The Wild Knight” will be struck by a very marked difference, and it is none the less real because so far it is a difference of attitude rather than a cognate difference of doctrine. I do not know of any specific opinion expressed in the poems which is recanted in the essays. But, all the same, the spiritual atmosphere is changed.

I think I can best express my sense of the change something in this fashion. I have already pointed out that it is one of the characteristic notes of G. K. C. that he writes with his eye always on a real or hypothetical opponent. Now, in “The Wild Knight” the foes against whom the attack is directed are principally the orthodox, the contented supporters of the established order in Church and State. In “The Defendant” it is the heretics, the revolutionaries, the impugners of existing things who are primarily assailed. The fundamental sanctities recognized are much the same in both cases, but in the poems they are preached to a conventional world which has forgotten them; in the essays they are defended against an unconventional world which is bent on destroying them. The” Kings “ and “Priests” who receive so formidable a castigation in “The Wild Knight,” escape without censure in “The Defendant.” It is the anarchists, the atheists, the people who want to abolish marriage, the people who deny the validity of patriotism, against whom the defences are set up.

At the same time there is abundant evidence that his feelings were softening towards the old faiths. At the time when he was writing the “Defences” he wrote an article for “The Speaker,” defending the Ritualists. The attitude he took up was that of a fairminded outsider, indifferent to doctrinal differences, but disliking persecution by whomsoever practised. Nevertheless there may be noted in that essay a more sympathetic tone towards Catholicism, which is absent from his earlier utterances. In “Twelve Types” he goes further, and in the essay on “Francis of Assisi” enters upon something like a defence of Monasticism, an
institution upon which he would certainly have poured scorn and indignation in
his “Wild Knight” period.

Before I endeavour to trace the further progress of the change it may be well
to suggest some of the causes which, even while he was writing the “ Defences”
for “ The Speaker,” were tending to accelerate it.

In June, 1900, Mr. Chesterton married Miss Frances Blogg. She was a lady of
a type of which a generation of “ advanced “ culture is producing a plentiful crop
—the conservative rebel against the conventions of the unconventional. Living
amidst the aesthetic anarchism of Bedford Park, she was in a state of seething
revolt against it. Her husband was not at all the man to discourage such a revolt,
and her influence on him (which has been considerable) was, one may guess, all
on the side of his growing orthodoxy.

The other personal influence which made itself felt in his life about this time,
and told in the same direction, was his friendship with Mr. Hilaire Belloc. Mr.
Belloc would require a whole book to himself if he were to be properly
described, and I do not propose to attempt such a task in this place. But to omit
all mention of him would be to omit one of the most potent influences in the
development of the writer whom we are considering. The two men had not only
a temperamental affinity, but from the first many points of intellectual sympathy,
notably the fact that they were of the few who disliked the war without disliking
war. But there was this difference, that while Mr. Chesterton’s views were still
in process of formation, those of Mr. Belloc had already, so to speak, solidified
and solidified round the iron framework of Catholic dogma. In his own phrase,
“they formed a system and were final.” Now, it may be taken as an almost
invariable rule that if two persons are closely associated, and one of them has
unsettled opinions while the opinions of the other are fixed, the former will
gravitate towards the philosophy of the latter as a meteor gravitates towards a
planet. So, under the probably unconscious influence of Mr. Belloc, Mr.
Chesterton was drawn towards the Catholic Faith.

But there were other than personal influences tending to sway him. I have
already dwelt upon the importance of the South African War and the
controversies to which it gave rise in determining the bent of his mind. Now,
there was this peculiarity about the war disputes, that both sides appealed to the
same ideals—marched, so to speak, under the same banner. It was not defended,
as the great French War, for instance, was defended, as a war for the
preservation of authority and tradition. On the contrary, it was defended as a
democratic war, a war for the purpose of breaking a narrow, corrupt, and
oldfashioned oligarchy which obstructed the progress of the world. Nor could it
be denied that there was at least this measure of truth in the claim—that the
Boers unmistakably represented the old order, and the Outlanders the new. The
Rhodesian party in South Africa called itself “Progressive,” and it was perfectly
justified in doing so, if a progressive be taken to mean a man who goes the way
the world appears to be going. It is not altogether surprising if Mr. Chesterton,
who hated the whole spirit and ideal of that party, felt that the way the world
appeared to be going was the way to Hell!

This conviction brought him into sharp conflict with one of those vast dogmas
which the nineteenth century had assumed without ever proving or even
distinctly formulating—the dogma of Progress. All the great writers of that
century are full of the idea of Progress—the idea that the world is inevitably
getting better and better. Men of opinion and temperaments as diverse as Shelley
and Macaulay accepted it without question. It received an additional impetus
from the current misinterpretations of Darwin’s doctrine of Evolution; that
biological speculation, which in its inventor’s mind involved nothing more than
a hypothesis concerning the causes which led organisms to approximate to their
environment, was interpreted by poets and rhetoricians as a promise of the
ultimate triumph of good over evil—” good” and “evil” being just the two words
that no true man of science ever uses. Thus Tennyson held that man would Move
upwards, working out the brute, and let the ape and tiger die. until, in the slow
processes of time, all mankind became gradually more and more like the Prince
Consort! In a word, Progressive Evolutionism became a new religion. It is as a
conspicuous rebel against the dogmas of this religion that Mr. Chesterton is most
notable in his generation.

Of course, he did not achieve his emancipation from a doctrine so inextricably
bound up with all the traditions of his youth without hesitation and doubt. In
“The Wild Knight” you will find the idea of Progress everywhere. In “ The
Defendant “ and in the articles written for “ The Speaker” about the same time it
is less prominent—indeed, opinions are advanced fundamentally inconsistent
with it; but its truth is still tacitly assumed. The first tentative challenge, so far as
I can discover, will be found in the essay on “ Carlyle “ included in “ Twelve
Types,” where he says:

“He denied the theory of progress which assumed that we must be better off than the people of the
Twelfth Century. Whether we were better than the people of the Twelfth Century according to him
depended entirely on whether we chose or deserved to be.”

But here he leaves himself a loop-hole for escape. He is summarizing Carlyle’s
doctrine, not avowedly formulating his own, and he leaves his reader free to suppose that this is one of the opinions of which he speaks in the context where he says that “even where his view was not the highest truth, it was always a refreshing and beneficent heresy.” In the controversy with Mr. Blatchford, on the other hand, he expresses similar views in *propria persona*. In “The Napoleon of Notting Hill” the denial of Progress becomes almost the main thesis of the book. In “Heretics” it is assumed as confidently as the assertion of Progress was assumed by the great Victorian Liberals.

Closely related to this change was another—the complete transformation of his views in regard to the existence of positive evil. The cause of G. K. C.’s return to a dogmatic faith was not, as has been the case with others, his discovery of the need for a personal God. In that he had always believed; it is assumed in “The Wild Knight” as unhesitatingly as in “Heretics.” His epoch-making discovery was his discovery of the need for a personal Devil.

Now, it was of the essence of the new Evolutionary Religion in all its varying forms that it denied the Devil, even where it confessed God. Mr. Campbell, the typical exponent of what I may call Christian Evolutionism, describes evil as a thing merely negative—”a shadow where light should be.” Mr. Chesterton himself held the same view, a view obviously incompatible with the belief in any Devil worthy of the name, at the time when he wrote “The Wild Knight,” as the quotations given in a previous chapter pretty clearly prove. He continued to hold it, though with some signs of doubt and reservation, at the time when he was writing his literary articles for “The Speaker,” for in a review of “Mark Rutherford” we find him distinguishing between a belief in the Devil and a belief in Devils, doubting whether “there is an abyss of evil as deep as the tower of holiness is high,” and expressing a hope for the final salvation of all souls. But evidently his hold on the confident optimism of his childhood is slipping.

I have called this current modern philosophy “Evolutionary Religion,” but the phrase is liable to misinterpretation. There is not, of course, the slightest foundation for its dogmas in the facts of physical science or in the scientific speculations of Darwin and his followers. The men who really understood those speculations saw this clearly. No one insisted on the positive existence of evil more emphatically than Huxley; no man had less belief in the ultimate certainty of human perfection. Indeed, Huxley avowed on more than one occasion his conviction that the old theological systems, with their stern and pitiless judgments, and their hell-fire for wrong-thinkers as well as for wrongdoers, corresponded more closely with the facts of the universe as revealed by science
than the amiable visions of the Broad Churchmen. But the truth is that the progenitors of the New Theology owed little to the doctrine of Evolution save few inspiring words and a false analogy, which might seem to justify to the unscientific multitude the optimistic humanitarian fatalism which they believed on altogether different, and for the most part subjective, grounds.

For that doctrine there was undoubtedly much to be said. Considered intellectually as a theory of the universe addressed to the human reason, it must seem to many hopelessly inadequate. But considered morally as a revolt of the human heart against what Mr. Chesterton has since called “that unique dispensation which theologians call Calvinism and Christians Devil-worship,” it is wholly to be admired. It was humane, idealistic, generous, lofty in its thoughts of God and Man. There is only one thing to be said against it; it will not fit the facts.

In order to get over the obvious difficulties presented by the existence of unmistakable evil, the New Theologians once more called pseudoscience to their aid. For the Devil they substituted “the Brute,” which, according to Tennyson, was to be “worked out” as Man moved upwards. The evil in human nature was merely the fading trace of its animal origin, which would disappear altogether as the race approached its ultimate perfection.

But during the contests which raged round the South African problem Mr. Chesterton had seen evil face to face, and he felt it to be emphatically not the “shadow where light should be” of Mr. Campbell, but rather the “darkness visible” of Milton. He had seen the dark features of the Asiatic adventurers who had, as he believed, plotted a gigantic crime and set two simpler and braver peoples to kill each other for their profit, and they seemed to him the foul faces of Devils. Could the existence of these men be explained by saying that they were “undeveloped,” that the animal was still too strong in them? Surely it was obvious that they were very much further removed from mere animals than the decent British soldiers, the decent Boer farmers, whom they were sending to the slaughter. They were no relics of barbarism; they were the very latest product of an elaborate civilization. The Enemy of Man was not, it seemed, the Brute, a thing ruder and more senseless than Man, but a thing infinitely subtler than Man—in a word, the Devil.

To a combination of these causes may be traced, I think, the growing orthodoxy of Mr. Chesterton’s religious convictions. But just as the sharp contests concerning South Africa had forced him to define his political doctrines to himself, so it was a sudden outbreak of theological controversy which forced
him to define for himself and for others the position at which he had arrived in religious matters. The immediate cause of this outbreak was the sudden attack made on the Christian religion by Mr. Robert Blatchford, the Editor of the “Clarion.”

Mr. Blatchford was a consummate master of all the weapons of popular controversy. He could put his case, whatever it might be, forcibly, yet in language so simple that the most ignorant workman could understand it. He had also at his command a certain strong colloquial eloquence and could make his plain English ring suddenly like a sword on an anvil. His Socialist tracts and pamphlets were incomparably the best work of their kind that had been done, and have contributed incalculably to the spread of Socialism in this country. He was undoubtedly less well qualified for philosophical than for economic discussion. He did not know his facts so well. He sometimes displayed a quite startling absence of familiarity with older controversies on the subject, as when he seemed to claim that the obvious argument against Free Will that it is inconsistent with the omnipotence of God was his own discovery. His science was rather crude, and there were undoubtedly plenty of weak points which a skilful adversary might find in his case. But a skilful adversary was not so easy to find.

Indeed, the response to Mr. Blatchford did little credit to the intellectual equipment of modern Christianity. Half its defenders called Mr. Blatchford a blasphemer; the other half, with much greater impertinence, called him a Christian. On the question in regard to which Mr. Blatchford was somewhat at sea they showed themselves more at sea, while their replies lacked altogether the lucidity and boldness in which Mr. Blatchford never failed. Their controversial strategy was infantile. They gave up without a struggle strong positions which could easily have been defended. They put forward weak hypotheses, invented by themselves, and then defended them as if they were of the essence of Christianity. Of all those who took a prominent part on the Christian side only two put up an effective fight—the Rev. Charles Marson and G. K. Chesterton.

The principal interest for us of the “Clarion” controversy lies in the fact that it led Mr. Chesterton to make his first public declaration of faith in the orthodox system of Christian dogma. Mr. Blatchford had put a series of questions to his Christian antagonists. Here they are, together with Mr. Chesterton’s answers:

“(1) Are you a Christian?—Certainly.
“(2) What do you mean by the word Christianity?—The belief that a certain human being whom we call Christ stood to a certain superhuman Being whom we call God in a certain unique transcendental relation which we call sonship.

“(3) What do you believe?—A considerable number of things. That Mr. Blatchford is an honest man, for instance, and (though less firmly) that there is a place called Japan. If he means, what do I believe in religious matters, I believe the above statement (answer No. 2) and a large number of other mystical dogmas ranging from the mystical dogma that man is the image of God to the mystical dogma that all men are equal, and that babies should not be strangled.

“(4) Why do you believe it?—Because I perceive life to be logical and workable with these beliefs, and illogical and unworkable without them.”

These answers are explicit enough, and the fourth is particularly interesting because it supplies the clue to the kind of defence he afterwards set up.

That defence was wholly pragmatic. He makes no adequate attempt to show that the Christian creed is an intellectually coherent and reasonable explanation of the Universe. He almost admits that it is not so. But he contends that it is a philosophy by which men can live, and that more logical philosophies smash themselves against elemental human necessities.

“Some Determinists fancy that Christianity invented a dogma like free will for fun—a mere contradiction. This is absurd. You have the contradiction, whatever you are. Determinists tell me, with a degree of truth, that Determinism makes no difference to daily life. That means that although the Determinist knows men have no free will, yet he goes on treating them as if they had.

“The difference, then, is very simple. The Christian puts the contradiction into his philosophy. The Determinist puts it into his daily habits. The Christian states as an avowed mystery what the Determinist calls nonsense. The Determinist has the same nonsense for breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper every day of his life.

“The Christian, I repeat, puts the mystery into his philosophy. That mystery by its darkness enlightens all things. Once grant him that, and life is life, and bread is bread, and cheese is cheese; he can laugh and fight. The Determinist makes the matter of the will logical and lucid; and in the light of that lucidity all things are darkened, words have no meaning, actions no aim. He has made his philosophy a syllogism and himself a gibbering lunatic.

“It is not a question between mysticism and rationality. It is a question between mysticism and madness. For mysticism, and mysticism alone, has kept men sane from the beginning of the world. All the straight roads of logic lead to some Bedlam, to Anarchism or to passive obedience, to treating the universe as a clockwork of matter or else as a delusion of mind. It is only the Mystic, the man who accepts the contradictions, who can laugh and walk easily through the world.
“Are you surprised that the same civilization which believed in the Trinity discovered steam?”

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. The proof of the truth of Christianity lies, according to Mr. Chesterton, in the comparative practical success of the Christian civilization.

“Christianity, which is a very mystical religion, has nevertheless been the religion of the most practical section of mankind. It has far more paradoxes than the Eastern philosophies, but it also builds far better roads.

“The Moslem has a pure and logical conception of God, the one Monistic Allah. But he remains a barbarian in Europe, and the grass will not grow where he sets his foot. The Christian has a Triune God, ‘a tangled trinity,’ which seems a mere capricious contradiction in terms. But in action he bestrides the earth, and even the cleverest Eastern can only fight him by imitating him first. The East has logic and lives on rice. Christendom has mysteries—and motor.

When Mr. Chesterton comes to the explicit defence of Christian doctrines he pursues the same line of argument. Man must have some philosophy to live by. “We are all Agnostics until we discover that Agnosticism will not work.” “It is all very well to tell a man, as the Agnostics do, to cultivate his garden. But suppose a man ignores everything outside his garden, and among them ignores the sun and the rain?” Man cannot live by a philosophy which denies the existence of anything good behind the Universe. Such a philosophy leads to pessimism and despair. As little can he live by a philosophy which recognizes the visible Universe itself as divinity and exemplar—by Pantheism or Nature Worship. Such a philosophy leads to Anarchism and crime. “The one leads logically to murder and the other to suicide.” But “then comes a fantastic thing cars. and says to us: ‘You are right to enjoy the birds, but wicked to copy them. There is a good thing behind all these things, yet all these things are lower than you. The Universe is right, but the world is wicked. The thing behind all is not cruel, like a bird; but good, like a man.’ And the wholesome thing in us says: ’I have found the high road.’ . . . After an agony of thought the world saw the sane path . . .

It was the Christian God. He made Nature, but He was Man.”

In similar fashion he deals with Mr. Blatchford’s Determinism. Mr. Blatchford had made the doctrine of Free Will the main object of his attack, had maintained that, if there were a God who created Man, he must be held responsible for all Man’s acts, and that, if supernatural powers were left out of account, Man must be held to be the creature of heredity and environment. Mr. Chesterton again replied by an appeal to human necessity. Everybody, including Determinists, did, as a matter of fact, act on the assumption that Man possessed Free Will.
There might be a contradiction in that doctrine, but it was a contradiction in the nature of things. The choice was between introducing the contradiction into your philosophy and introducing it into your practice.

Unfortunately for his own case, Mr. Blatchford played his opponent’s game by persistently mixing up his Determinism with a theory about the uselessness of punishment, with which it had really nothing to do. The ablest exponents of a fatalistic philosophy have constantly pointed out that a Determinist can quite logically punish. It may be true that the burglar whom Society sends to prison is what he is in consequence of his heridity and environment. But the fact that burglars are sent to prison is part of the burglar’s environment, and may perfectly well modify his actions. To say that threatening the criminal with punishment cannot change his conduct because that conduct is governed by the laws of human nature is as absurd as it would be to say that a brake cannot check the speed of a train because that speed is regulated by the laws of motion. Mr. Blatchford, however, thought well to reinforce his logical argument by an appeal to the world’s sentimental compassion for offenders, and by so doing gave G. K. C. his chance.

How he used it the following typical example will show. Mr. Blatchford had explained that if he found a small boy hitting his sister he would not punish the boy, but would make an appeal to him in these words:

“My dear lad, you mustn’t hit a girl. It is cowardly. Men don’t hit women. And you must not allow yourself to get into a passion. If you do, your temper will master you. Come, laddie, be a gentleman. Who will love Sis if you don’t? What if she did tease you? Let her. She likes it, bless her. And you are not a baby. Pooh! don’t be a muff. Go and put your cap on, and we’ll have a game of cricket.”

The opening was too good a one for Mr. Chesterton to lose. He replied, with considerable humour and really unanswerable logic:

“You say you would talk like this to the little boy. I hope you will forgive me if I say that I think you are wise to choose a little boy: I should recommend a very little boy. But do not talk like that to anyone who has read your philosophical works. If the little boy, instead of confining himself to adventure stories (which may be called the literature of Free Will), were to equip himself largely, from back numbers of the ‘Clarion,’ with your philosophy and phraseology, he would, I think, open his infant lips and deliver a crushing reply as follows:

‘What meaning am I to attach, my dear father, to your extraordinary statement that I must not hit Zenobia? That I have already done it proves that I must have done it. That blow was the inevitable outcome of heridity and environment. My rather ferocious heredity (derived possibly from yourself) the environment (otherwise Zenobia) produced a result like a result in chemistry. You say it is cowardly. I assure you, with scientific calm, that I was born cowardly. As for your assertion that ‘Men don’t hit women,’ my very slight knowledge of life enables me to meet it with a direct negative. Men do. I am Agnostic upon the question you raise of who is to love Sis if I don’t. But I am quite clear that somebody
or nobody must do it if I can't. Barring the expression, “Bless her”—which, as probably an abbreviation of “God bless her,” I cannot but regard as a relic of barbarism—I am quite ready to allow you to love the young woman if you can. It is a trick of your inherent temperament to love Zenobia. It is a trick of mine to hit her. Are you answered?"

The weak point in Mr. Chesterton’s defence of Christianity was left almost unnoticed throughout the controversy. That weak point was that he made no real attempt to defend the Christian philosophy at all. He defended the doctrine of Free Will; but the doctrine of Free Will is in practice assumed by all ordinary men. He defended the doctrine of Original Sin; but the doctrine of Original Sin is self-evident to any man with eyes in his head. Of the more mystical and questionable Christian dogmas he says little or nothing. He leaves it open for an independent Freethinker to reply: “Granted that you have scored off Mr. Blatchford; granted that you have shown his system to be untenable and unworkable—what is that to me? I am not committed to that system. Let us assume, if you will, that Man appears to have in him a power of choice; let us assume that in human nature there is an element of permanent weakness and evil. Now prove your strange story of a Heavenly Father, of a God incarnate in Flesh, of an eternal life beyond the grave—prove that incredible story to be true.” Mr. Chesterton has never so far answered that challenge. Whether he will ever answer it I do not know. Possibly his promised book on “Orthodoxy” will prove the answer. Until it appears we must register the fact that Mr. Chesterton has only made out half his case.
CHAPTER V

THE ASSAULT ON THE MODERNS

In the time the “Clarion” discussion was over Mr. Chesterton’s mental transformation was complete. His old confidence in the destiny of the modern world (of which his early poems and essays are full) had given place to a rooted repugnance and antagonism. He hated it in all its aspects, even in those aspects of which the most conservative thinkers have generally spoken with respect. For, whatever his faults, timidity and irresolution were never among them. Having initiated the campaign, he joined battle all along the line.

One example will illustrate the change. Nothing in our civilization has seemed to most people more unmistakably creditable than our advance in physical science. Of that advance G. K. C. had in his earlier days spoken with respect—even with enthusiasm. In a poem called “King’s Cross Station” in “The Wild Knight,” he speaks of—

The vision of Man, shouting and erect,
Whirled by the raging steeds of flood and fire.

But in his later books the words “science” and u scientists” are used only as terms of flippant abuse. “The people has no disbelief in the temples of theology. The people has a very fiery and practical disbelief in the temples of physical science.” “Both realists and dynamiters are well-meaning people engaged in the task, so obviously ultimately hopeless, of using science to promote morality.”

“Heretics,” the controversial book which followed close on the “ Clarion “ episode, is an outspoken attack on Modernity. The form it takes is a series of essays in criticism of typical modern writers. But it would be unjust to judge it, as I have judged the “Browning” and the “Dickens,” by canons of literary criticism. The intention of literary criticism is disclaimed from the start:

“I wish to deal with my most distinguished contemporaries, not personally or in a merely literary manner, but in relation to the real body of doctrine which they teach. I am not concerned with Mr. Rudyard Kipling as a vivid artist or a vigorous personality: I am concerned with him as a heretic—that is to say, a man whose view of things has the hardihood to differ from mine. I am not concerned with Mr. Bernard Shaw as one of the most brilliant and one of the most honest men alive: I am concerned with him as a heretic—that is to say, a man whose philosophy is quite solid, quite coherent, and quite wrong.”

The justification of the book in its author’s eyes is that it calls attention to the
neglected truth of “the importance of Orthodoxy”—that is to say, the importance of having a right view of the meaning of the Universe. In the modern world men seem to think the Universe the one entirely unimportant subject. “A man’s opinion on tramcars matters: his opinion on Boticelli matters. . . . Everything matters—except everything.” Men of our day refuse altogether to believe that doctrines will influence conduct. They never think that the man who says in a drawing-room that life is not worth living will really treat life as an evil, will reward murderers for saving men from life, or root out the Royal Humane Society like a horde of assassins. We are convinced that theories do not matter.

Hence: “Never has there been so little discussion about the nature of men as now, when, for the first time, anyone can discuss it. The old restrictions meant that only the orthodox were allowed to discuss religion. Modern liberty means that nobody is allowed to discuss it. . . . Emancipation has only locked the saint in the same tower of silence as the heresiarch. Then we talk about Lord Anglesey and the weather, and call it the complete liberty of all the creeds.”

Against this tendency Mr. Chesterton planks down his own proposition that “the most practical and important thing about a man is still his view of the Universe”: and that “the question is not whether the theory of the cosmos affects matters, but whether in the long run anything else affects them.”

It appears to me that this proposition is by far the most important in the book. The criticisms directed against individual writers may be sound or unsound, but there can surely be no doubt that we moderns have grossly underrated the practical importance of men’s philosophy. How many of our mistakes in Ireland might have been avoided if we had once realized that the most important thing about the Irish is that they are Catholics. Thanks to our neglect of that fact our hands have continually been forced by Orangemen, because the Orangemen, at any rate, understood it and paid to Catholicism at least the tribute of hatred. All this is summed up by Mr. Chesterton in an admirable parable with which the introductory essay ends:

“Suppose that a great commotion arises in the street about something, let us say a lamppost, which many influential persons desire to pull down. A grey-clad monk, who is the spirit of the Middle Ages, is approached upon the matter, and begins to say, in the arid manner of the Schoolmen, ‘Let us first of all consider, my brethren, the value of Light. If light be in itself good ‘At this point he is somewhat excusably knocked down. All the people make a rush for the lamppost, the lamppost is down in ten minutes, and they go about congratulating each other on their unmediaeval practicality. But as things go on they do not work out so easily. Some people have pulled the lamppost down because they wanted the electric light: some because they wanted old iron: some because they wanted darkness, because their deeds were evil. Some thought it was not enough of a lamppost, some too much s some acted because
they wanted to smash municipal machinery: some because they wanted to smash something. And there is war in the night, no man knowing whom he strikes. So, gradually and inevitably, to-day, to-morrow, or the next day, there comes back the conviction that the monk was right after all, and that all depends on what is the philosophy of Light. Only what we might have discussed under the gas-lamp, we now must discuss in the dark.”

The aim of “Heretics,” then, is to show that the philosophy current in the modern world and professed by its leading writers is a bad philosophy, and that to the reactions of this bad philosophy may be traced the worst of the evils with which we are confronted.

Such an aim at once absolves the author from any condemnation which might be passed on the essays for their inadequacy as criticisms. What we have to ask is, firstly, whether Mr. Chesterton has rightly apprehended and fairly summed up the body of doctrine taught by the various writers with whom he deals; and, secondly, whether his criticisms of their body of doctrine are valid.

In regard to the first question, the verdict must, in most cases, I think, be in Mr. Chesterton’s favour. Nothing, for instance, could be truer and fairer than his statement of the message of Mr. Rudyard Kipling—the writer to whom, above all others, he seems most hostile:

“And unconsciously Mr. Kipling has proved this, and proved it admirably. For in so far as his work is earnestly understood, the military trade does not by any means emerge as the most important or attractive. He has not written so well about soldiers as he has about railway men or bridge builders, or even journalists. The fact is that what attracts Mr. Kipling to militarism is not the idea of courage, but the idea of discipline. There was far more courage to the square mile in the Middle Ages, when no king had a standing army, but every man had a bow or sword. But the fascination of the standing army upon Mr. Kipling is not courage, which scarcely interests him, but discipline, which is, when all is said and done, his primary theme. The modern army is not a miracle of courage: it has not enough opportunities, owing to the cowardice of everybody else. But it is really a miracle of organization, and that is the truly Kiplingite ideal. Kipling’s subject is not that valour which properly belongs to war, but that interdependence and efficiency which belongs quite as much to engineers, or sailors, or mules, or railway engines. And thus it is that when he writes of engineers, or sailors, or mules, or steam-engines, he writes at his best. The real poetry, the ‘true romance’ which Mr. Kipling has taught, is the romance of the division of labour and the discipline of all the trades. He sings the arts of peace much more accurately than the arts of war. And his main contention is vital and valuable. Everything is military in the sense that everything depends upon obedience. There is no perfectly epicurean corner: there is no perfectly irresponsible place. Everywhere men have made the way for us with sweat and submission. We may fling ourselves into a hammock in a fit of divine carelessness. But we are glad that the netmaker did not make the hammock in a fit of divine carelessness. We may jump upon a child’s rocking-horse for a joke. But we are glad that the carpenter did not leave the legs of it unglued for a joke. So far from having merely preached that a soldier cleaning his side-arm is to be adored because he is military, Kipling at his best and clearest has preached that the baker baking loaves and the tailor cutting coats are as military as anybody.”

Mr. Bernard Shaw, again, receives full and fair recognition for his great
intellectual virtue:

“The whole force and triumph of Mr. Bernard Shaw lie in the fact that he is a thoroughly consistent man. So far from his * power consisting in jumping through hoops or standing on his head, his power consists in holding his own fortress night and day. He puts the Shaw test rapidly and rigorously to everything that happens in heaven or earth. His standard never varies. The thing which weakminded revolutionists and weakminded Conservatives really hate (and fear) in him is exactly this, that his scales, such as they are, are held even, and that his law, such as it is, is justly enforced. You may attack his principles, as I do: but I do not know of any instance in which you can attack their application. If he dislikes lawlessness, he dislikes the lawlessness of Socialists as much as that of Individualists. If he dislikes the fever of patriotism, he dislikes it in Boers and Irishmen as well as in Englishmen. If he dislikes the vows and bonds of marriage, he dislikes still more the fiercer bonds and wilder vows that are made by lawless love. If he laughs at the authority of priests, he laughs louder at the pomposity of men of science. If he condemns the irresponsibility of faith, he condemns with a sane consistency the equal irresponsibility of art. He has pleased all the Bohemians by saying that women are equal to men: but he has infuriated them by suggesting that men are equal to women. He is almost mechanically just: he has something of the terrible quality of a machine.”

These two passages prove pretty conclusively that Mr. Chesterton is not debarred from understanding other men’s point of view by the mere fact that that point of view is violently antagonistic to his own. When he does fail to understand, his failure appears to arise from some wayward blast of prejudice against the man himself, which sometimes appears to warp and dwarf his intellect like the spell of a magician. One great man of the nineteenth century has suffered many things from Mr. Chesterton, owing, as it seems to me, solely to Mr. Chesterton’s incurable inability (or, it may be, obstinate unwillingness) to comprehend his method and meaning. That great man is Henrik Ibsen.

At first sight one would have thought that no man would be better able to appreciate Ibsen than Mr. Chesterton. His literary method is perhaps the supreme demonstration of Mr. Chesterton’s favourite theory—the compatibility of profound truth to the essential things of the soul with extravagant impossibility in externals. Those who call Ibsen a “Realist” in the ordinary sense can surely never have read “The Lady from the Sea,” or “The Master Builder,” or “Little Eyolf.” Can we conceive any true Realist—can we conceive Zola, for instance, or George Gissing—introducing into the middle of a tragedy of modern suburban married life a figure that seems to have stepped straight out of Grimm—a Rat Wife who lures away children and drowns them? We cannot conceive them doing such a thing. We cannot conceive any modern story-teller doing such a thing—except G. K. Chesterton. It is not easy to find in literature anything exactly of a kind with Mr. Chesterton’s wild, symbolic farces of modern life—”The Napoleon of Notting Hill,” “The Club of Queer Trades,” “The Man who was Thursday.” But, if it can be found anywhere, it will be found in the changing
atmosphere and grotesque symbolism of “Peer Gynt.”

Nor would the ideas of Ibsen seem less likely to be acceptable to G. K. C. than his form. In his controversy with Mr. Blatchford, and on many subsequent occasions, Mr. Chesterton has emphasized continually the cardinal importance of the doctrine of Free Will. Now, Ibsen is, above all things, the prophet of Free Will. That the brave man is the man who defies circumstance, that the strong man is the man who conquers circumstance, that the lot even of the man or woman who is beaten and broken in pieces in the fight with circumstance, like Solness, is happier and nobler than that of one who slavishly accepts circumstance, like Hedda Gabler—these are the lessons enforced again and again in every one of Ibsen’s plays. Yet, Will-Worshipper as he was, Ibsen carefully guarded himself against the Self-Worship of later thinkers. The Neitszchian Superman is actually introduced by Ibsen, but he is introduced to be satyrized, humiliated, presented as a village waster and coward turned fraudulent stock-jobber and sham mystic, and finally to be crowned “Emperor of Himself” by a company of escaped lunatics who are thoroughly convinced (as all lunatics are) that they also are emperors of themselves. The real strong man of Ibsen is quite a different sort of person. He is the man “who stands most alone”—indeed, but the man who stands alone for others. It is curious that Mr. Chesterton should not have seen a Pro-Boer analogy in Dr. Stockman’s famous outburst: “I love my native town so well that I would rather ruin it than see it flourishing upon a lie.” It is still more curious that he should have failed to realize the force of the Doctor’s comparison of himself to “a certain person who was more good-natured than he. In a fine Christmas poem which appeared in the Commonwealth,” Mr. Chesterton wrote the lines:

For we are for all men under the sun
And they are against us every one, lines which might almost be the motto of “The Enemy of the People.”

It is true that Ibsen must naturally appear to Mr. Chesterton in his later phases as too much of an optimist, as trusting the naked human will too completely, as neglecting—so G. K. C. would probably put it—the doctrine of Original Sin. But all this applies much more strongly to Whitman, of whom Mr. Chesterton always speaks with an admiration amounting almost to devotion, than to Ibsen, of whom he never speaks without a curious note of resentment.

As to Mr. Chesterton’s specific criticisms of Ibsen in the essay on “The Negative Spirit” in “Heretics,” they are almost childish enough to have been
written by Dr. Max Nordau. Ibsen is accused of “a negative spirit,” “a vagueness and a changing attitude towards what is really wisdom and virtue,” because “falsehood works ruin in ‘The Pillars of Society,’ but truth works equal ruin in ‘The Wild Duck.’” As well might Shakespeare be accused of “vagueness and a changing attitude” because feminine influence is a destructive force in “Macbeth” and a beneficent force in “The Merchant of Venice.” Dickens might be reproached in the same way because avarice works the moral ruin of Gradgrind, while profusion works the moral ruin of Harold Skimpole. In his “Dickens” Mr. Chesterton himself quotes this latter case, and quotes it as an example of his hero’s honesty. Why should the same thing which in Dickens is a sign of “a kind of uncontrollable honesty” be a sign of “the negative spirit “ in Ibsen?

As for the complaint that Ibsen cannot tell us “how virtue and happiness are brought about,” of course he cannot! Nobody can. Mr. Chesterton would presumably say that they are brought about by the grace of God; and Ibsen, in different phraseology, would probably have given much the same answer. It is much easier to point out that it is generally desirable to avoid rape and murder than to give people a recipe for becoming saints and heroes. But, though Ibsen could not give a prescription warranted to produce heroism, he could do something else. He could do what Shakespeare could not do, what Dickens could not do, what Thackeray could not do, what no one, save perhaps Bunyan, has done since the intellectualism of the Renaissance destroyed the heroic tradition of Europe—he could draw a hero. And to draw a hero is to make men believe again in the heroic. And to make them believe in the heroic is to make them love it.

In a recent article Mr. Chesterton ventured the suggestion that Mr. Bernard Shaw had never read Shakespeare’s “Julius Caesar.” With equal diffidence I venture the suggestion that Mr. Chesterton has never read Ibsen—never, at any rate, read him fairly and with an open-minded desire to get at his meaning. He has read Mr. Shaw’s “Quintessence of Ibsenism,” and has disagreed with it. He has met people who liked Ibsen and has disliked them. But Mr. Shaw’s book is nothing more than the Quintessence of Shawism, and the Ibsenites have no more claim to represent Ibsen than the readers of the “Daily News” have to represent Mr. Chesterton. Mr. Chesterton, however, appears to have allowed an ineradicable association to grow in his mind between Ibsen and long-haired vegetarians, similar to the association which our ancestors formed between Frenchmen and frog-eating, and to have based upon that association a very
similar prejudice.

But this by the way. If we turn from the authors whom Mr. Chesterton does not understand to the authors whom he does, we may take as the four typical heretics Mr. Bernard Shaw, Mr. Kipling, Mr. H. G. Wells, and Mr. Lowes Dickinson.

Let us now turn to these writers to whom Mr. Chesterton does some reasonable justice. The essay on Mr. Kipling may be postponed until we come to deal with the critic’s politics. Those on Whistler and on Mr. George Moore are rather criticisms of temperament than of doctrine. That wherein Mr. McCabe is urged to cultivate “a divine frivolity” is more an amusing piece of sparring than a serious criticism of philosophy. This leaves three essays in criticism of the critics of orthodoxy—Mr. Bernard Shaw, Mr. H. G. Wells, and Mr. Lowes Dickinson, a statement of what appears to the author the sound theory of drinking in contradistinction to that of Omar as interpreted by Fitzgerald, and a number of miscellaneous essays, in which the influence of a wrong conception of life is traced in various developments of modern life and literature—” The Yellow Press,” “Sandals and Simplicity,” “Smart Novelists and the Smart Set,” “Slum Novelists and the Slums,” “Christmas and the Esthetes.”

What is the essence of Mr. Chesterton’s attack on modern thought? Briefly, I think it may be summarized as follows. The scepticism of the cleverest thinkers has made men doubtful about those axioms which cannot safely be the subject of doubt, and has consequently left their minds derelict on a sea of indecision. Mr. Shaw doubts the existence of any permanent element in morality, affirming that “the Golden Rule is that there is no Golden Rule.” Mr. Wells goes further, and doubts that there is any permanent element in anything—” nothing endures, nothing is precise and certain. . . . Being, indeed!—there is no being, but a universal becoming of individualities.” This sort of scepticism seems to Mr. Chesterton not only anarchic, but reactionary. It destroys all possibility of human effort, for unless our aim is clearly defined beyond possibility of question progress is unmeaning.

“North and south are relative in the sense that I am north of Bournemouth and south of Spitzbergen. But if there be any doubt of the position of the North Pole, there is in equal degree a doubt of whether I am south of Spitzbergen at all. The absolute idea of light may be practically unattainable. We may not be able to procure pure light. We may not be able to get to the North Pole. But because the North Pole is unattainable, it does not follow that it is indefinable. And it is only because the North Pole is not indefinable that we can make a satisfactory map of Brighton and Worthing.”

Since in the hands of the philosophers ideas have thus become self-destructive,
the common man abandons ideas altogether and puts his trust in phrases like “progress” and “efficiency.” Now, progress implies that you are going somewhere, and efficiency that you are doing something, and unless you know where you want to go and what you want to do both words are useless and unmeaning. So at last scepticism lands most men in the worship of material success, with its consequences, the corruption and cowardice of the Press and of politics, the revival of aristocracy, the paralysis of all effort for human improvement. As Mr. Chesterton has put it in his introduction to “The Book of Job,” “we give up the hard task of making good men successful in favour of the much easier task of making out successful men good.”

Mr. Chesterton vehemently denies that this materialistic success-worship leads even to material success:

“The time of big theories was the time of big results. In the era of sentiment and fine words, at the end of the eighteenth century, men were really robust and effective. The sentimentalists conquered Napoleon. The cynics could not catch De Wet. A hundred years ago our affairs for good or evil were wielded triumphantly by rhetoricians. Now our affairs are hopelessly muddled by strong, silent men.”

The revolutionists Mr. Chesterton finds equally shackled by materialism. Some are trusting to “economic forces” and “the materialist conception of history.” Others are trusting to science, whose “chief use is to find long words to cover the errors of the rich.” Others, again, seek simplicity by living on vegetables and wearing sandals. But simplicity must be sought in the soul. “It does not very much matter whether a man eats a grilled tomato or a plain tomato; it does very much matter whether he eats a plain tomato with a grilled mind. . . . There is more simplicity in the man who eats caviare on impulse than in the man who eats grape-nuts on principle. . . . And at those who talk to us with interfering eloquence about Jaeger and the pores of the skin, and about Plasmon and the coats of the stomach, at them shall only be hurled the words that are hurled at fops and gluttons, ‘Take no thought what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, or wherewith ye shall be clothed. For after all these things do the Gentiles seek. But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.’”

So we come back to the necessity for general ideals. What, then, shall be the ideal that man shall follow? Mr. Shaw’s Superman is rejected. He is non-human, even anti-human. “Mr. Shaw cannot understand that the thing which is valuable and lovable in our eyes is man—the old beerdrinking, creed-making, fighting, failing, respectable man.” Equally unsatisfactory is the more prosaic ideal of Mr. Wells, the production of “satisfactory fathers and mothers.” This, like the talk
about progress, is a mere evasion of the issue. “What is the good of begetting a man until we have settled what is the good of being a man?” But perhaps the most interesting essay in the book is the reply to Mr. Lowes Dickinson, who had boldly put forward the Pagan ideal as superior to the Christian.

Mr. Chesterton’s attack on Mr. Lowes Dickinson’s Paganism is exceedingly clever debating. But it seems to me that his main argument proves too much, and would, if accepted, destroy the rest of the book. “There is one broad fact about the relations of Christianity and Paganism . . . that one came after the other. Mr. Lowes Dickinson . . . suggests that the Pagan ideal will be the ultimate good of man; but, if that is so, we must ask, with more curiosity than he allows for, why it was that man actually found his ultimate good on earth under the stars and threw it away again.” And so, at the conclusion of the essay, Mr. Dickinson is accused of “ignoring definite human discoveries in the moral world.” “If we do revive and pursue the pagan ideal of a simple and rational self-completion we shall end—where Paganism ended. I do not mean that we shall end in destruction. I mean that we shall end in Christianity.”

Now, it is surely obvious that this line of argument is one that can be used against Mr. Chesterton himself with fully equal force. Mr. Chesterton is never tired of telling us that the modern world must be considered as definitely nonChristian. He is never tired of telling us that the Christian ideal is “the ultimate good of man.” Why, then, Mr. Dickinson might reply, was it that “man actually found his ultimate good on earth under the stars and threw it away again?” If the absurd theory of uninterrupted progress be valid, then no doubt Christianity must have been an improvement on Paganism, and the Dark Ages must have been an improvement on the Roman Empire, and modern industrialism must be an improvement on feudalism, and modern Rationalism on Catholicism. But if the contrary doctrine, which Mr. Chesterton has so continually proclaimed, be true, then there is no more inherent impossibility in the theory that the change from Paganism and Christianity was a disastrous fall, a submersion of the human spirit in error and sin, than in the theory that the break up of Christian unity and faith was such a fall.

Mr. Chesterton’s position is much stronger and more consistent when he undertakes the specific defence of the Christian as against the Pagan ideal. Nothing, I think, could be truer and more vividly expressed than his defence of the Christian virtue of humility—”the psychological discovery that, whereas it had been supposed that the fullest possible enjoyment is to be found in extending our ego to infinity, the truth is that the fullest possible enjoyment is to be found
by reducing our ego to zero.” Nothing could be more suggestive than his contrast between the Pagan virtues of justice and temperance, which are reasonable and sad, and the Christian virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity, which are unreasonable and joyous.

But the same fact may be noted in regard to “Heretics,” as we have already noticed in connection with the “Clarion” controversy. Mr. Chesterton criticizes his opponents with much vigour and acumen. But he does not very clearly define, much less defend, his own position. Doubtless that position can be roughly deduced from his criticisms of others, but from one who lays such stress upon the importance of clearly defined doctrines we have a right to expect something more than this negative method of definition. His forthcoming book, to be called “Orthodoxy,” proposes, I understand, to meet the objection. But, so far, almost the only exposition we have of Mr. Chesterton’s own system of doctrine is to be found in the wild last chapter of “The Man who was Thursday.”

It could hardly be expected that Mr. Chesterton, whose main reason for accepting Christianity was that it supplied a dogmatic system, would look very favourably on an attempt to make it acceptable to the modern world by stripping it of its dogmas. When the Rev. R. J. Campbell electrified the churches by his preaching of the New Theology, Mr. Chesterton “went for” him with much less restraint and respect than he had exhibited in dealing with the avowedly anti—Christian polemics of Mr. Blatchford. “Your True Christianity,” he wrote in a letter to the “Nation,” “seems to me very like True Free Trade, which dogmatists and coarse fellows call Protection.” G. K. C. undoubtedly dealt some shrewd blows at the new religious movement, which indeed sometimes laid itself dangerously open. The attempts of Mr. Campbell and others to minimize and explain away the problem of evil, their rejection of the doctrines of Original Sin and of the Fall, gave a particularly good opportunity for the controversial methods which he had used so effectively against Mr. Blatchford.

But probably his real objection to the New Theology was based upon a deeper ground. The avowed aim of that movement was the reconciliation of Christianity with the modern world. Now, we have seen that, so far from desiring such a reconciliation, it was just his violent reaction against the modern world that had driven Mr. Chesterton into a reconciliation with Christianity. To have convinced G. K. C. that the Christian Faith could be “reconciled with modern thought” would have gone a long way towards convincing him that it was untrue.

I have mentioned “The Man who was Thursday” as containing the only
exposition I know of what I may call Mr. Chesterton’s constructive theology. It is, of course, a wild book—” A Nightmare”—the author calls it. But there is nothing more characteristic of G. K. C. than that he becomes farcical in proportion as he becomes serious. With the central artistic idea, which is a good one, I deal elsewhere. Here I am concerned with the last chapter only, the chapter in which the symbolism of the book is made clear. Six men, sworn to wage war on the Anarchy of the modern world, have received their commissions from a mysterious hand in a dark room. Their unknown general appears in the story as “Sunday,” the Arch-Anarchist, the man they are sworn to fight. At the end of their adventures, when his identity has been discovered, they are summoned to a great festival, and Sunday speaks to them:

“‘We will eat and drink later,’ he said. ‘Let us remain together a little, we who have loved each other so sadly, and have fought so long. I seem to remember only centuries of heroic war, in which you were always heroes—epic on epic, iliad on iliad, and you always brothers in arms. Whether it was but recently (for time is nothing), or at the beginning of the world, I sent you out to war. I sat in the darkness, where there is not any created thing, and to you I was only a voice commanding valour and an unnatural virtue. You heard the voice in the dark, and you never heard it again. The sun in heaven denied it, the earth and sky denied it, all human wisdom denied it. And when I met you in the daylight I denied it myself.’

“There was complete silence in the starlit garden, and then the black-browed Secretary, implacable, turned in his chair towards Sunday, and said in a harsh voice:

“‘Who and what are you?’

“I am the Sabbath,’ said the other without moving. ‘I am the peace of God.’

“The Secretary started up, and stood crushing his costly robe in his hand.

“I know what you mean,’ he cried, ‘and it is exactly that that I cannot forgive you. I know you are contentment, optimism, what do they call the thing, an ultimate reconciliation. Well, I am not reconciled. If you were the man in the dark room, why were you also Sunday, an offence to the sunlight? If you were from the first our father and our friend, why were you also our greatest enemy? We wept, we fled in terror, the iron entered into our souls—and you are the peace of God! Oh, I can forgive God His anger, though it destroyed nations; but I cannot forgive Him His peace.’

Then the others, one by one, take up the complaint. One says, “It seems so silly that you should have been on both sides and fought yourself.” And another, “You let me stray a little too near to hell.” And yet another, “I wish I knew why I was hurt so much.” And Sunday answers, “I have heard your complaints in order. And here, I think, comes another to complain, and we will hear him also.”

Enters Gregory, the real Anarchist, and hurls his accusation at the Paladins of Order:
I know what you are all of you from-first to last—you are the people in power! You are the police—the great fat, smiling men in blue and buttons! You are the Law, and you have never been broken. But is there a free soul alive that does not long to break you, only because you have never been broken? We in revolt talk all kind of nonsense doubtless about this crime or that crime of the Government. It is all folly! The only crime of the Government is that it governs. The unpardonable sin of the supreme power is that it is supreme. I do not curse you for being cruel. I do not curse you (though I might) for being kind. I curse you for being safe! You sit in your chairs of stone, and have never come down from them. You are the seven angels of heaven, and you have had no troubles. Oh, I could forgive you everything, you that rule all mankind, if I could feel for once that you had suffered for one hour a real agony such as I’

“Syme sprang to his feet, shaking from head to foot.

“... I see everything,’ he cried, ‘everything that there is. Why does each thing on the earth war against each other thing? Why does each small thing in the world have to fight against the world itself? Why does a fly have to fight the whole universe? Why does a dandelion have to fight the whole universe? For the same reason that I had to be alone in the dreadful Council of the Days. So that each thing that obeys law may have the glory and isolation of the anarchist. So that each man fighting for order may be as brave and good a man as the dynamiter. So that the real lie of Satan may be flung back in the face of this blasphemer, so that by tears and torture we may earn the right to say to this man, “You lie!” No agonies can be too great to buy the right to say to this accuser, “We also have suffered.”

“... It is not true that we have never been broken. We have been broken upon the wheel. It is not true that we have never descended from these thrones. We have descended into hell. We were complaining of unforgettable miseries even at the very moment when this man entered insolently to accuse us of happiness. I repel the slander; we have not been happy. I can answer for every one of the great guards of Law whom he has accused. At least’

“He had turned his eyes so as to see suddenly the great face of Sunday, which wore a strange smile.

“... Have you,’ he cried in a dreadful voice, ‘have you ever suffered?’

“As he gazed the great face grew to an awful size, grew larger than the colossal mask of Memnon, which had made him scream as a child. It grew larger and larger, filling the whole sky; then everything went black. Only in the blackness before it entirely destroyed his brain he seemed to hear a distant voice saying a commonplace text that he had heard somewhere, ‘Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?’“

I leave this quotation without comment. It is, I think, the best expression of the foothold of faith which G. K. C. has found for himself at the last.
CHAPTER VI

G. K. C. AS ANTI-LIBERAL

WE have seen that Mr. Chesterton, growing up in an atmosphere of theological Liberalism, has slowly thought himself out of it and become the avowed champion of a strict Catholic orthodoxy. In politics, he has not yet severed himself wholly from the traditions of his youth, but I shall endeavour to suggest that when the process of self-realisation is complete, he will come to see that just as he has become a Catholic in religion he has in effect become a Tory in politics.

The change has, I think, been hidden from Mr. Chesterton’s own eyes by reason of the fact that his views on certain problems which especially interested him coincided more or less with the views of a section of the Liberal Party and were diametrically opposed to the opinions fashionable among Conservatives. It may be noted that it is only a comparatively few items in the Liberal programme (and those the items which most Liberals studiously avoid mentioning) which have power to rouse his enthusiasm. In all his many political polemics you will hardly find a word about Free Trade or about Church Disestablishment. You will find no pleas for the reduction of armaments or for a pacific foreign policy. You will find a number of very definite protests against the current Liberal policy in relation to licensing and education. Only two Liberal principles are preached with any decision or emphasis—the principle of Nationality and the principle of Democracy.

Now the identification of Nationalism with Liberalism is an entirely modern and mainly accidental phenomenon. Irish Nationalism, for instance, which especially excites Mr. Chesterton’s sympathies, was in past times associated with Toryism (the very name “Tory” means an Irish rebel), with Jacobitism, with what Liberals call “reaction.” The Boers again, whatever their claims to admiration, were certainly not Liberals in the ordinary sense of the word. They were a landed squirearchy, proud and tenacious as the slave-owners of Virginia (towards whom Mr. Chesterton is also, I believe, sympathetic), and as untouched by modern ideas in their politics as in their religion. It may also be recalled that for the hundred years at least which intervened between the English and the French Revolutions the Tory party was emphatically the Anti-Imperialist party. Indeed it would not be unreasonable to suggest that the country squire whose
point of view was at the back of real Toryism was by his nature an Anti-Imperialist, absorbed in the thought of his own fireside and his own estates and indifferent to everything that did not immediately affect them. On the other hand, the larger ideas of more progressive classes tend to neglect frontiers and local customs, and to become either cosmopolitan or Imperialist. The French Revolutionists drove the steam-roller of a highly centralized bureaucracy over the rights and franchises of the provinces with a ruthlessness which no modern Imperialist would dare to imitate, and took Belgium by a cool act of annexation, without the slightest regard for Nationalist sentiment.

Mr. Chesterton’s constantly avowed belief in democracy may seem to wed him more deeply to the Liberal creed. But even in this respect the case, when examined, is by no means so clear as it at first appears.

The French Revolution is for Mr. Chesterton the fountain of Liberalism, and he is never tired of boasting himself its child. But both assumptions may be questioned. Modern English Liberalism is a mixed human product, and derived from many sources. In a sense no doubt it is a product of the French Revolution, but only because we are all its products—Tories and Socialists and Anarchists, no less than Liberals and Radicals. Nothing after that astounding cataclysm could be quite the same as it was before it. But Liberalism existed before the Revolution, and many of its most characteristic traits can be traced to movements wholly unconnected with it. The philosophy of the eighteenth century, the tradition of the great Whig houses “that had eaten the Abbey’s fruits,” as Mr. Chesterton himself puts it, the Puritanism of the middle classes dating from the great struggle with the Stuarts, the economic claims of the new trading interests created by the industrial revolution, the humanitarian and pacifist idealism (characteristically un-Gallic) which Shelley and others popularized in this country—all these have gone to mould modern Liberalism, and the inheritance of each is plainly visible in its features.

The non-identity of English Liberalism with the tradition of the French Revolution can be seen by a very simple test. In the first half of the nineteenth century a party arose in this country which really was imbued with what Frenchmen call “the principles of ’89.” They were called Chartists. So far from seeing in Liberalism the expression of their ideas, they were as violently AntiLiberal as the Social Democratic Federation, and much more AntiLiberal than the Independent Labour Party. Their hostility, it must be remembered, was by no means confined to the old-fashioned Whigs. They denounced Villiers and Bright as vehemently as Palmerston and Russell. They repeatedly broke up Free
Trade meetings called by the Anti-Corn Law League. And therein they acted like true successors of the men of ’93, for the French Revolutionists were all Protectionists, just as they were Conscriptionists, Unionists, Imperialists, and everything else that the modern Liberal detests.

Mr. Chesterton finds the common foundation of Liberalism and the French Revolution in Democracy. But it may well be questioned whether Democracy is an essential part of Liberalism at all. Lord Macaulay would have justly claimed the title of Liberal; yet he declared that if the working classes ever obtained a preponderance in the State the nation would be ruined. Robert Lowe was a lifelong Liberal; but he looked forward with dread to the enfranchisement, even of the seven-pound householder. It is true that this Liberal opposition to democracy has ceased, but so, it might plausibly be urged, has the Conservative opposition to democracy. No one, Liberal or Tory, now ventures to say that the will of the people ought not to prevail. Even frankly aristocratic institutions like the House of Lords are now defended, as Mr. Chesterton has himself pointed out, on the rather paradoxical ground that the Peers are better interpreters of the will of the people than the Commons.

When we make anything like a careful examination of Mr. Chesterton’s theory of democracy we shall find less cause than ever to identify it with the doctrine of Liberalism. Liberals have generally held high the authority of Parliaments, even when those Parliaments were in their composition almost entirely oligarchical. Mr. Chesterton, on the other hand, while he professes to “believe very strongly in the mass of the common people,” seems always exceedingly sceptical about the value of representative assemblies. He makes it a matter of praise in Dickens that “he realized the thing that Frenchmen and Irishmen understand . . . the fact that popular government is one thing and representative government another.”

His conception of democracy would seem to be satisfied by any system, however undemocratic in seeming, under which the Government was in fact conducted in harmony with the general wishes of the people. Now in all this there is nothing inconsistent with Toryism. That doctrine underlies the whole of Bolingbroke’s pamphlet “The Patriot King”—perhaps the clearest exposition of the Tory philosophy that has ever appeared in this country—the doctrine that the will of the people can be carried out by other means than those of election and representation.

Another fact which has tended to confirm Mr. Chesterton in the illusion that he is a Liberal is his love of revolutions. He is never tired of asserting the sacred right of insurrection, the necessity of blood and violence for the redemption of
our civilization. In the dedicatory poem at the beginning of “The Napoleon of Notting Hill,” he says, after speaking of the confident prophecies of political evolutionists:

Likelier across these flats afar,
These sulky levels, smooth and free,
The drums shall crash the valse of war
And death shall dance with liberty!
Likelier the barricades shall blare
Slaughter below and smoke above,
And death and hate and hell declare
That men have found a thing to love!

And again in criticizing (in the columns of the “Daily News”) Mr. H. G. Wells’s statement that Socialism would come slowly, and would not “be announced by a blast of trumpets from -Tower Hill,” he asks why, if Socialism be really the redemption of mankind, it should not be so announced. “I shall not blame you,” he writes, “if you blow trumpets from the Tower or fire guns from the Tower. You have blown trumpets and fired guns for much meaner things.”

But here again his doctrine has no necessary connection with Liberalism. He has said quite truly that all revolutions are doctrinal, and that to lose faith in dogma is to lose faith in revolution. But it is obvious that any doctrine in which a man can believe will serve as the basis of revolution. The Jacobins rebelled for the sake of the Rights of Man, but the Jacobites rebelled as fiercely for the sake of the Divine Right of Kings. The peasants of La Vendee who guarded the passage of the Loire, the gentlemen of Lancashire who rode to Derby with Charles Edward—these also were revolutionaries. These also “had found a thing to love”—and that thing was Toryism.

The one doctrine that is thoroughly and universally characteristic of Liberalism is the doctrine of Progress. The theory that the world is becoming gradually but inevitably better is a dogma common to Macaulay and Dickens, to Lord Rosebery and Mr. Morley, to John Bright and John Burns. It is the real sign manual of Liberalism, and it is the object of Mr. Chesterton’s fiercest attacks.

In an article published in the “Independent Review” in 1905 Mr. Chesterton makes this substitution of the idea of Progress for certain denned dogmas the special heresy of the Liberal Imperialists. He wrote:

“When Liberalism met its great debacle there were necessarily two kinds of critics left in the defeated army, with two different plans of campaign, indeed, with two different conceptions of the nature of war. The first formed the coherent and philosophical Liberal Imperialist Party . . . the other formed the party of which I am a humble member. The first said: * The French Revolution succeeded because it was
progressive, because it was the fresh and forward thing at that moment.’ The second said: ‘The French Revolution succeeded because it was religious, because it gave a key of principle which cannot grow old.’ The first said: ‘The old Liberals won, because they were men of their time.’ The second said: ‘They won because they were men of all time; or rather, because the ideas they dealt with are outside time altogether.’ The first said: ‘Old Liberal ideas conquered because they were new; but they are new no longer.’ The second said: ‘Not so. Old Liberal ideas conquered because they were true. And they are true still.’

Now the analysis here given of the attitude of the first party, the Liberal Imperialists, is sound enough; but I cannot help feeling that the second party, of which Mr. Chesterton declares himself “a humble member,” consisted exclusively of Mr. Chesterton himself, with the possible addition of Mr. Belloc. The ordinary “Pro-Boer” certainly did not repudiate the doctrine of Progress. He proclaimed it on all occasions—only he called Anti-Imperialism “progressive” and Imperialism “reactionary.” Mr. Chesterton’s own personal friend, Mr. Masterman, wrote an essay on the decline of the Imperialist movement, and called it “After the Reaction”—a phrase which for Mr. Chesterton and his imaginary “party” would have no meaning. The opponents of Imperialism were just as ready as their opponents to claim a monopoly in “the flowing tide,” and they always endeavoured to represent the Imperialist movement as a sort of atavistic reversion to barbarism. The fact is that the doctrine of Progress is common to Liberals of every school; the only difference of opinion is as regards its application.

Mr. Chesterton diverges sharply from Liberalism in that he repudiates altogether this identification of good and bad with progress and reaction. He has a certain vision of a normal human life, and in his view reforms and revolutions must be undertaken not for the purpose of helping mankind on its march to an unattained ideal, but in helping it back to a sanity and health away from which it is constantly tending to fall. This sanity and health (qualified, as, in his view, it always must be qualified, by permanent human imperfection) he finds, for example, in the best period of the Middle Ages, a period which he eulogizes to an extent which must startle and shock the ordinary modern man, especially when coming from a professed Liberal. But he finds the instinct for it still abiding in the great mass of the people. In an article in “The New Age” he wrote of the working classes:

“For the Revolution, if they make it, there will be all the features which they like and I like; the strong sense of English cosiness, the instinct for special festival, the distinction between the dignities of man and woman, responsibility of a man under his roof. If you make the Revolution it will be marked by all the things that democracy detests and I detest; the talk about the inevitable, the love of statistics, the materialist theory of history, the trivialities of Sociology, and the uproarious folly of Eugenics. I know
the answer you have; I know the risk I run. Perhaps democracy will never move. Perhaps the English people, if you gave it beer enough, would accept even Eugenics. It is enough for me for the moment to say that I cannot believe it. The poor are so obviously right, I cannot fancy that they will never enforce theirrightness against all the prigs of your party and mine."

Now this belief in an ancient tradition abiding in the mass of men may be Democracy, but it is certainly not Liberalism. If it is Democracy it is Tory Democracy. Indeed there is one of Lord Randolph Churchill’s speeches about the function of the masses as the guardians of a permanent Conservative tradition, which is almost identical with many passages in Mr. Chesterton’s political writings.

It is hardly necessary to point out the discrepancy between Mr. Chesterton’s views and those of most Liberals on many minor matters—on the drink question, for example, and on the effectiveness of “undenominational” religious teaching. Mr. Chesterton would doubtless reply that these matters are not of the essence of Liberalism; nay, he would, perhaps, go further, and contend that what may be called the Nonconformist view of such problems is inconsistent with Liberal principles. But he has largely discounted this argument by refusing to accept it in the case of Socialists. In the article quoted above, an article called “Why I am not a Socialist,” he deliberately maintains the position that a propaganda must be judged not merely by the specific doctrine preached, but by the general temper and attitude of the preachers. Certain normal human needs he holds to be inconsistent, not so much with Socialism, but with the visions and ideals of Socialists. “I do not say these things would not occur under Socialism; I say they do not occur to Socialists.” Now in such a case it is reasonable to demand one weight and one measure. It would be manifestly unfair that Socialism should be judged by the Socialists unless Liberalism is also to be judged by the Liberals. And surely Mr. Chesterton’s human needs which he regards as especially important—drink, for instance, and dogma—are wholly left out of the general vision and propaganda of modern Liberalism.

“The Napoleon of Notting Hill” is Mr. Chesterton’s political confession of faith. He has written many serious articles on political questions, but, just as none of his excursions into theological controversy throw so clear a light on his fundamental religious beliefs as the “Nightmare” of “The Man who was Thursday,” so none of his political essays sum up his view of politics so completely as this extravagant romance of King Auberon and Adam Wayne. It will be well, therefore, to examine it more closely.

The novel is a prophetic romance of the year 1950 or thereabouts. Men having
lost their faith in doctrine, and having come to believe in “a thing called Evolution,” have allowed things to drift until a dull oligarchy governs the whole world, its prosaic disillusionment being admirably illustrated by the fact that the despotic King who is at its head is selected like a juryman from an alphabetical rotation list of the governing classes. Unfortunately the lot falls on one Auberon Quinn, a humorist who resolves to use his despotic powers for the purpose of forcing his subjects to assume all the splendour and ritual of feudal times. With this intent he frames the Charter of Cities whereby the various districts of London are provided with Lord High Provosts, flags, city guards with uniforms and halberds, and even with heroic legends conceived by the expansive imagination of King Auberon. The respectable vestrymen who have to perform these antics are annoyed, but they are obliged to acquiesce and go sullenly on with their work. The principal task before them at the moment is the construction of a great road from Westbourne Grove to Hammersmith Broadway. But their schemes are suddenly upset by the appearance of a young man named Adam Wayne, to whom the King’s joke is a serious thing, a religion. Having become Provost of Notting Hill, he refuses to allow the road to pass through his Free City, and especially objects to a sacrilegious hand being laid upon Pump Street, to which he feels an especially passionate patriotic devotion. Instantly all the forgotten enthusiasms, which men had thought to have vanished from the world for ever when the last Dervishes were exterminated and when the last little Republic in South America was absorbed, flare up and destroy the empire of Modernity. Notting Hill defends itself like Athens, hurls back its enemies, and finally infects the other London districts with its own fiery patriotism and romance. The King’s joke has redeemed the world.

With the literary quality of the story I shall deal in another chapter. What concerns us here is its political doctrine, and in this aspect there are several interesting points to be noted.

First of all it is characteristic of Mr. Chesterton that, while most writers who have endeavoured to sketch the future of humanity instinctively conceive it as better than the present, he as instinctively thinks of it as worse. Until men definitely make up their minds to change the world, the world will steadily deteriorate. So far from Progress being the law of life, the law of life is Degeneration. Satan is the Prince of this World.

Then we may observe that the things which Mr. Chesterton selects as the symbols of oppression are the modern things, the progressive things. Buck and Barker, the villains of the piece, are not dull and reactionary landlords or
oligarchs obstructing the march of reform. They might quite reasonably be
represented as enlightened and public-spirited citizens, intent on a public
improvement.

Lastly we may note that the sanctity in defence of which Adam Wayne draws
the sword is nothing less than our old friend “the sanctity of private property.”
No doubt Wayne’s enthusiasm for the rights of property is untainted by the
sordid desire for gain and power which often prompts such enthusiasm. No
doubt also he proves his sincerity by carrying it to lengths from which the most
obscurantist member of the Liberty and Property Defence League would shrink.
No sane Conservative that I have ever heard of, however much he might
denounce the mildest measures of social reform as robbery and confiscation,
ever suggested that the State had not the right, after giving full compensation, to
take private property for the purposes of a public improvement. Yet Adam
Wayne (and apparently Mr. Chesterton also) is willing to deluge Western
London with blood rather than admit such a right. Of course, it may be suggested
that I am taking the fantastic politics of King Auberon’s realm too seriously.
But, when all allowance has been made for legitimate exaggeration, the fact
remains that the cause for which Adam Wayne was willing to shed oceans of
blood was the cause of property. He is less the Napoleon than the Penrhyn of
Notting Hill. No one who had read “The Napoleon of Notting Hill” with
reasonable care and intelligence had any right to be surprised when Mr.
Chesterton proclaimed himself an opponent of Socialism.

I have already dealt with Mr. Chesterton’s attitude towards the idea of
Progress, and I need say no more on the subject. But a word maybe said with
advantage about his hatred of the civic type represented in his tale by Barker and
Buck, because that hatred, though it seems to ally him with the cause of
democracy, is really, I think, only another sign of his fundamental Toryism.

Mr. Chesterton undoubtedly dislikes the moneyed man, the commercial
magnate, the capitalist. This dislike seems to many to imply democracy, but it
might equally well imply very old-fashioned Toryism. The alliance of such men
with Conservatism is a very recent phenomenon. Down to the middle of the
nineteenth century at least they were nearly all Liberals. When commercial
interests first began to exercise power in this country that power was always on
the Whig or Liberal side. The Tory party from the seventeenth century onwards
fought it tooth and nail, and the fight was continued by the bulk of the party even
after their leader Peel had gone over to the commercialists. It was only when
Toryism was transformed into Conservatism and lost some of its most
characteristic features in the process that it became a possible party for capitalists and traders.

The doctrine of property stated in “The Napoleon of Notting Hill” and elsewhere, is, as I have said, markedly opposed to the modern tendency which we call Collectivism. It is true that Mr. Chesterton does not like the present state of wealth and poverty. As he himself has put it, “No one but Satan or Beelzebub could like the present state of wealth and poverty.” But the remedy, in his view, is not to deny property, but to assert it. “It is the negation of property that the Duke of Westminster should own whole streets and squares of London; just as it would be the negation of marriage if he had all living women in one great harem.” Mr. Chesterton would like a state in which each man should own his own land and his own tools, and, I think, he would permit no tools too large or complex for a single man to own and use them.

Indeed, there is in Mr. Chesterton’s later work a tone towards machinery which reminds one sometimes of Ruskin. He seems to see, not merely in the abuse of machinery, not merely in its ownership and exploitation by a limited class, but in the machinery itself a menace to the human soul. He believes, one gathers, that it tends to give men a sense of large knowledge when they have no knowledge, a sense of great power when they have no power.

“. . . And under all this vast illusion of the cosmopolitan planet, with its empires and its Reuter’s agency, the real life of man goes on concerned with this tree or that temple, with this harvest or that drinking-song, totally uncomprehended, totally untouched. And it watches from its splendid parochialism, possibly with a smile of amusement, motor-car civilization going its triumphant way, outstripping time, consuming space, seeing all and seeing nothing, roaring on at last to the capture of the solar system, only to find the sun cockney and the stars suburban.”

These feelings seem to have begun to affect him very early. In the essay on “The Patriotic Idea” in “England a Nation,” written before his political creed had developed along lines antagonistic to modern Progressivism, we find a passage instinct with dislike and distrust of modern invention:

“There is a decadence possible for our modern civilization, and it is just at this point that my difference from the Imperialists comes in. They think Imperialism (otherwise Cosmopolitanism) is the cure. I think that Imperialism (otherwise Cosmopolitanism) is the disease. I ignore for the moment the question of whether, in the abstract, combinations and centralizations and steamboats and Marconi wires are good things or bad. But to attempt to cure the evil of Birmingham and save the soul of Chicago by more combinations and centralizations and more steamboats and more Marconi wires seems to me stark lunacy; it is like a doctor ordering brandy to a man in delirium tremens. It is precisely from these things that we are suffering—from a loose journalism, from a vague geography, from an excitable smattering of everything, from an officious interest in everybody, from a loss of strong national types, of strong religious restraints, of the sense of memory, and the fear of God. We are not suffering from any very
painful or dangerous resemblance to the arrogant and cruel zealots who ruled in Sparta or died in the fall of Jerusalem. We are suffering from a resemblance to the mob in decaying Rome.”

This attitude is the more curious because you would rather expect to find Mr. Chesterton, with his continual deification of the human will, and his refusal to admit that any obedience is due to Nature from Man, to regard the victories of Man over Nature with approving eyes. He actually did so in the days of “The Wild Knight,” as witness the poems on “King’s Cross Station “ and “ The Lamppost.” I think he would do so still if you confined the question to Man’s earlier triumphs. The plough, the axe, the ship, the arch, and the sword he would, I am sure, still acclaim enthusiastically as witnesses to the godlike supremacy of Man. But when you bring him face to face with the steam engine and the telephone his tone becomes dubious and even hostile. Even in things mechanical he has become a Tory.

Note again his Tory love of authority and of permanent tradition. This is almost the central idea of “ The Man who was Thursday,” where a new police force is organized to fight against Anarchism. It is true that the Anarchy to be combatted is rather the moral and intellectual Anarchy of modern thought symbolically treated than the ordinary political Anarchy with which we are familiar. But all the same the sympathies of the author are on the side of the police. Of course a man need not be a Tory in order not to be an Anarchist. But the man who instinctively feels the peril of Society to lie in the direction of Anarchy is an instinctive Tory, as the man who instinctively feels its peril to lie in the direction of slavery is an instinctive Liberal. Mr. Chesterton clearly belongs to the former class of mind.

In the course of the controversy in “ The New Age” which raged round the article above referred to, Mr. Chesterton was challenged by both Mr. Wells and Mr. Shaw to “ plank down his Utopia.” He declined the invitation, but I think that any reasonably intelligent and industrious student of his writings could frame one for him. His ideal state would be very small—perhaps no larger than Notting Hill. Its population would be either peasant farmers owning each his own land or craftsmen working each in his own workshop. They would be devout Catholics, keen patriots, and heavy drinkers. Such a state is clearly not the ideal aimed at by modern Liberals. It is certainly nearer to (though not identical with) the older Tory ideal. It would imply almost necessarily such Tory proposals as Conscription and Protection—not, of course, Imperial Protection, but National or possibly Civic Protection. If Notting Hill is to have a City Wall, why not a City Tariff?
I may mention in passing that my view may find some confirmation in the amusing trialogues which Mr. Chesterton contributed to the “Fortnightly Review,” wherein a Tory, a Socialist, and an Irish Nationalist discussed public affairs month by month. Liberated by the dramatic form from the necessity of pretending to be a Liberal, the author threw himself into the views of the Tory Colonel with unconcealed gusto, and generally gave him (to my way of thinking, at least) the best of the debate. It is notable that no really typical representative of Liberalism was introduced. Mr. Chesterton could not so completely change his skin.

I cannot leave Mr. Chesterton’s politics without referring to one subject which has been much before the public lately, and upon which he holds strong and what would generally be described as reactionary opinions. I mean the question of the political status of women.

It has been noted by many that “The Napoleon of Notting Hill” does not introduce a single woman from beginning to end. “The Man who was Thursday” does contain a woman, but she is a mere influence, doing nothing herself, but vaguely supposed to be inspiring other people to do things—in a word, the romantically conceived Queen of Love and Beauty. It would be unfair to call Mr. Chesterton an Anti-Feminist, for his doctrine is rather one of the division of labour between the sexes than of the exaltation of one sex above the other. But he is certainly a pronounced opponent of the modern movement for the political enfranchisement of women. His statement of the case against it has, at any rate, the virtue of originality, and is worth a moment’s thought. Democratic politics, he says, rest on comradeship, that is, on the recognition of a certain affinity with men in the lump. But women have no capacity for comradeship. They can love individuals, but they cannot feel a casual yet genial interest in people generally. “They understand everything,” he wrote in the “Illustrated London News,” “except three things—Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.” Therefore they are unfitted for politics. I do not propose to argue the question here, or to express my own views on it. But I may remark that it appears to me a tenable criticism that Mr. Chesterton does not sufficiently distinguish between the natural and the acquired characteristics of womanhood. It is quite true that few ordinary women are capable of what Mr. Chesterton calls comradeship. But it is also true that where women are leading a type of life approximating to the masculine type—women in the theatrical world, for example—the capacity for it does develop in them. Mr. Chesterton would quite possibly say that such a development was undesirable; but that is not the point. What that development does seem to show
is that incapacity for comradeship is rather a result of the present training and life of women than an innate limitation of the sex.

I think also that inconsistency seems to exist between Mr. Chesterton’s denial to the woman of the present day of a claim to a public career, and his admiration of women who in past ages carried that claim to the most extreme point. Of no women has he written with more enthusiasm than of Catherine of Siena who held in her hand all the complicated threads of Italian politics, or of Joan of Arc who, dressed in a man’s armour, led great armies to victory. Surely it is a rather strange position that a modern woman may not vote for a vestryman while a mediaeval woman might negotiate a treaty or direct a campaign.

Briefly, I think we may summarize Mr. Chesterton’s politics by saying that he is a Tory of the seventeenth or early eighteenth century, born out of his due time. In the Cabinet of Bolingbroke he would have found quite a sympathetic atmosphere. He would have found men, by comparison with their opponents at any rate, sympathetic with the national aspirations of the native Irish. He would have found men who disliked Imperialism and foreign complications, and held that our fleets and armies ought to confine their energies to the defence of the actual soil of England. He would have found men who hated plutocracy and the power of riches created by trade, who loved the life of the cornfields and desired a free peasantry. But, alas! he was born two centuries too late, and by dint of keeping so far behind his time has acquired the reputation of an advanced Radical.
CHAPTER VII

A TELLER OF TALES

WE have more than once had occasion to remark that the key to nearly all Mr. Chesterton’s merits and defects is to be found in the combative and propagandist impulse which is at the back of nearly all his work. He has been throughout not an artist seeking for the most perfect instrument of self-expression, but a soldier seeking the most effective engine of destruction. He tried to preach his crusade in verse; he tried to preach it in prose. In “The Napoleon of Notting Hill” and the tales which have followed it he tried to use for the same purpose the very old method of parable or fable.

It is very necessary that this should be understood, because without it both the intention and the achievement of the stories will be wholly misjudged. They are not novels—I will not say in the ordinary sense, but in any sense based upon a sound critical classification of artforms. It is not the mere extravagance of the incidents that makes the difference. A story may have a wildly impossible plot, like “The Dynamiter” or “The Wrong Box,” or, for the matter of that, “Wuthering Heights,” and yet be a novel. But all novels, realistic or fantastic or semisupernatural, have this in common, that they show life as an interplay of human personalities and temperaments. Mr. Chesterton’s tales, on the other hand, show life as an interplay of spiritual forces transcending humanity, of which the human characters are merely the embodiments. They are not novels, but mysteries.

It is natural Mr. Chesterton’s stories should be mysteries—stories in which life is shown as a conflict of spiritual forces—because he really sees life in that way. Indeed, his judgment is often warped by his tendency to see only ideas when others see only persons. Modern politics, for instance, are, at present, almost wholly personal, being concerned with the contest between two teams of statesmen into whose conflicts principles enter hardly more than they do into the Oxford and Cambridge boat race. Yet for a long while Mr. Chesterton insisted on reading into the struggle between the Outs and the Ins a set battle between rival doctrines of the State. There have been signs of late, since his growing fame has enabled him to see something of politics from the inside, that he has begun to understand the true state of the case. But the effect of this knowledge upon him has not been to make him modify his rigid idealism, but it has rather
led him to regard current politics with increasing apathy and distaste.

If indeed he were only an Idealist (I use the word in the Platonic rather than in the current sense) he would probably have been content to express his views directly in the form of essays. But he is a peculiar and rare combination, a Romantic Idealist. Usually the Romantic sees persons much more clearly than ideas; one remembers how Carlyle, the most romantic of historians, exaggerated the importance of personalities in history, and underrated the influence of doctrines. Mr. Chesterton’s intellect sees ideas more clearly than persons, yet his temperament leads him to think about ideas as romantically as romanticists think about persons. He wants to give every idea a feather and a sword, and a trumpet to blow and a good ringing voice to speak. From this eccentric wedding—of Idealism and Romance, is born the Chestertonian novel.

Without the romance, indeed, Mr. Chesterton’s stories would be lost. For he does not possess at all the specific talent of the dramatist-novelist, the power, I mean, of creating characters who talk and act from within. It was the possession of this power in the highest degree of genius that saved Ibsen’s symbolic plays from dullness. Ibsen’s sense of individual character was so intense that even when he began by conceiving a man as a mere symbol, the living man grew under his hand. He could not help clothing every figure he introduced with a vivid and unmistakable human character, and endowing it with language and action absolutely native and appropriate. Mr. Chesterton never does this—never really attempts it. He never creates figures who talk or act from within, whose quality and dialect is their own and not their author’s. Throughout “The Napoleon of Notting Hill,” still more throughout “The Man who was Thursday,” every one is talking in the Chesterton style, even when he is repudiating the Chesterton doctrines. Read the long exposition of Barker of the virtues of the “alphabetical monarchy” which he serves. The opinions are the opinions of Barker, but the voice is the voice of G. K. C. It is not in the least the way in which Barker would talk—Barker, who is supposed to be a dull and decorous official. He would not defend his dull and decorous opinions with such a wealth of paradox. Nor are the speeches of Buck, the “great man of business,” in the least like anything that Buck could be conceived as saying. The only two people who are always themselves, and who talk and act from within, are Wayne and Auberon, and that is because Wayne and Auberon are the two lobes of Mr. Chesterton’s brain.

And yet it remains true that the stories are almost Mr. Chesterton’s best, as they are quite his most characteristic work. “The Napoleon of Notting Hill “ is, I
am inclined to think, quite his best. And this is because the tales, and that tale in particular, though the characters are for the most part but embodied opinions, are so drenched with romance, with colour, movement, humour, and animal spirits and show, moreover, so genuine a gift of pure story-telling, that it is quite impossible for the sternest artistic critic to resist the fascination.

Mr. Chesterton was not mistaken in his vocation when he set out to write stories. He is a born story-teller, which is quite a different thing from being a born novelist. The old trade of story-telling is, as he himself has said, a much older thing than the modern art of fiction. The Oriental who spread his carpet in the marketplace, the medieval bard who sang a ballad at his master’s feast, made no appeal to that curiosity about the varieties of the human soul which is increasingly the inspiration of the modern novel. If he touched on human psychology at all he dealt only with those primal passions and desires which are common to all normal men. But, for the interest of his art, he depended simply upon his capacity to tell a good story, and to tell it well. In the last resort, Mr. Chesterton’s novels depend for their interest on the same power.

Take “The Napoleon of Notting Hill.” It not only lacks the subtle qualities of fiction. It is not, even of its kind, an artistic whole. There are pages of insanity, pages of horseplay, pages of swash-bucklering slaughter, pages of thoroughly undramatic discussion. But the whole is carried forward by the mere zest of the author for his narrative. From the moment that the story is fairly launched it never flags or stops till it has reached its consummation. From the moment, especially, when the fighting begins, there is never one pause, never one slackening of the tension, never one moment in which to take breath and remember one’s common sense.

This is really something of a tour de force, because the fighting is avowedly preposterous and farcical. A war between modern suburbs conducted with seventeenth-century halberds is not at first sight a thing that anyone can be expected to take seriously. It is a genuine triumph that, as you read it, you do take it seriously. You forget for the moment everything serious and modern, and agonize, as did King Auberon, with alternate hope and fear over the extravagant fight round the Water Works Tower. When the great and really unexpected climax comes, and Wayne and his few exhausted followers, outnumbered by fifteen or sixteen to one, and clinging desperately to their last refuge on Campden Hill, reduces the vast army of the south to instant submission by threatening to open the reservoir and flood the streets thirty feet deep in water, one is simply too stunned to remember for the moment the absurdity of the
London Water Board’s property being used for such a purpose. One forgets the exuberant folly of the whole story as men forgot the exuberant folly of King Auberon. Adam Wayne with his “uncanny blue eyes,” has hypnotized us as he hypnotized the King and all his subjects.

The best parts of “The Napoleon of Notting Hill” are the battles, and especially the last great battle in Hyde Park, where the Empire of Notting Hill is ultimately overthrown. The last fight of Wayne, when all his followers have fallen around him, is a passage that will bear quoting, for it is a vigorous example of Mr. Chesterton’s manner when his blood is up:

“With a shout the West Kensington men closed round Wayne, the great yellow banner flapping over his head.

“Where is your favour now, Provost f* cried the West Kensington leader.

“And a laugh went up.

“Adam struck at the standard-bearer and brought him reeling forward. As the banner stooped, he grasped the yellow folds and tore off a shred. A halberdier struck him on the shoulder, wounding bloodily.

“Here is one colour! he cried, pushing the yellow into his belt; ‘and here!’ he cried, pointing to his own blood—’here is the other.’

“At the same instant the shock of a sudden and heavy halberd laid the King stunned or dead. In the wild visions of vanishing consciousness he saw again something that belonged to an utterly forgotten time, something that he had seen somewhere long ago in a restaurant. He saw, with his swimming eyes, red and yellow, the colours of Nicaragua.

“Quin did not see the end. Wilson, wild with joy, sprang again at Adam Wayne, and the great sword of Notting Hill was whirled above once more. Then men ducked instinctively at the rushing noise of the sword coming down out of the sky, and Wilson of Bayswater was smashed and wiped down upon the floor like a fly. Nothing was left of him but a wreck; but the blade that had broken him was broken. In dying he had snapped the great sword and the spell of it; the sword of Wayne was broken at the hilt. One rush of the enemy carried Wayne by force against the tree. They were too close to use halberd or even sword; they were breast to breast, even nostrils to nostrils. But Buck got his dagger free.

“Kill him!’ he cried, in a strange stifled voice. ‘Kill him! Good or bad, he is none of us! Do not be blinded by the face! . . . God! have we not been blinded all along!’ and he drew his arm back for a stab, and seemed to close his eyes.

“Wayne did not drop the hand that hung on to the tree-branch. But a mighty heave went over his breast and his whole huge figure, like an earthquake over great hills. And with that convulsion of effort he rent the branch out of the tree, with tongues of torn wood; and, swaying it once only, he let the splintered club fall on Buck, breaking his neck. The planner of the Great Road fell face foremost dead, with his dagger in a grip of steel.”

Romanticism is in Mr. Chesterton’s bones. It leads him not only to worship the good romantic writers—Scott and Dumas and Stevenson—but to devour even
bad romantic writers, if no others are available. He goes about London j with his pockets stuffed with sixpenny boob and penny magazines, which it would seem incredible that any man of his literary status should look at, merely because there is plenty of blood and combat in them. He is particularly fond of detective stories. And out of that enthusiasm grew, I fancy, the idea of his latest novel.

Mr. Chesterton is a lover of detective stories. But he is also a mystic and a philosopher. It occurs to him, I should imagine, that it would be rather fun to write a philosophic detective story.

He first played with the idea in a series of short stories called “The Club of Queer Trades,” dealing, as the title implies, with a society, every member of which has to have invented the profession by which he earns his living. One is the founder of an “Adventure and Romance Agency,” for surrounding the lives of its subscribers with thrilling and melodramatic incidents. Another was an “Organizer of Repartee,” who allowed himself to be scored off publicly by his employers, whose epigrams were invented and led up to by their victim. Some of these stories were exceedingly good; one in particular, “The Awful Reason of the Vicar’s Visit,” showed, not only Mr. Chesterton’s usual qualities of energy and humour, but a certain careful artistry which is not so commonly his. But the chief connecting link between the stories with which I am here concerned is the creation of a sort of transcendental Sherlock Holmes, who probes mysteries, not by attention to facts and clues, but by understanding the spiritual atmosphere. Thus, when in the story of the Adventure and Romance Agency a letter is produced, found upon the mysterious assailant of Major Brown, beginning “Dear Mr. Plover—I am annoyed to hear that some delay has occurred in the arrangements re Major Brown. Please see that he is attacked as per arrangement to-morrow,” etc. etc., Basil Grant confines himself to remarking, “I don’t think it’s the sort of letter one criminal would write to another.”

“‘Facts,’ murmured Basil, like one mentioning some strange, far-off animals, ‘how facts obscure the truth. I may be silly—in fact, I’m off my head—but I never could believe in that man—what’s his name, in those capital stories?—Sherlock Holmes. Every detail points to something, certainly; but generally to the wrong thing. Facts point in all directions, it seems to me, like the thousands of twigs on a tree. It’s only the life of the tree that has unity and goes up—only the green blood that springs, like a fountain, at the stars.’"

But the possibilities of the philosophic detective story were not exhausted with “The Club of Queer Trades.” Why should not the universe itself be the subject of a detective story? After all, the essence of a detective story is that certain facts are known of which the cause and explanation is hidden. And that, when one
comes to think of it, is the essence of our knowledge of the universe. “The Man who was Thursday” is a detective story in which the criminal to be hunted and brought to bay is—God.

The idea is a good one. So is the subsidiary idea, the gradual realization that the whole wild story is a dream. By making each chapter just the slightest shade more incredible than the last, Mr. Chesterton gets a really harmonious gradation from the comparatively possible scene between the two poets to the pursuit of the flying President, where the atmosphere of a nightmare is very skilfully caught. Also there are good incidental scenes sometimes ending with a really strong and unexpected climax, such as that where Syme and his companions imagine the whole of civilization to have gone over to the side of Anarchy. That chapter, as also the one in which Syme is pursued by the paralytic professor, is an excellent example of Mr. Chesterton’s gift of rapid and entertaining storytelling. But there is nothing in the book that one remembers as one remembers the fight round the Water Tower or the scene where Wayne flings his great sword at the feet of King Auberon.

As for the defects in characterization on which I have already commented, they are more conspicuous than ever. Mr. Chesterton evidently intended to differentiate the characters of the six detectives, but except, perhaps, in the case of Dr. Bull, it is given up almost as soon as it is attempted. When they are supposed to be Anarchists they are distinct and vivid enough, for then their externals only are described, and the author has a quick and picturesque eye for externals. When, however, they all turn out to be detectives, they all at the same moment turn out to be Mr. Chesterton! They do not again become distinct until the last chapter but one, when they describe severally how Sunday (in other words, the Universe) appears to them. And here they are only real because they have ceased to be human beings and become embodied points of view.

As Mr. Chesterton saved “The Napoleon of Notting Hill” by his instinct for Romance and his gift for spirited narration, so he saves “The Man who was Thursday” by his keen sense of fun and his indomitable joie de vivre. There are whole chapters that are driven forward by mere force of animal spirits. A good example is the scene where Syme, who has been indulging freely in what Mr. Chesterton has called “the traditional drink of our civilization,” makes his preparation for challenging the Marquis de Saint Eustache.

“I shall approach. Before taking off his hat, I shall take off my own. I shall say, “The Marquis de Saint Eustache, I believe.” He will say, “The celebrated Mr. Syme, I presume.” He will say in the most exquisite French, “How are you?” I shall reply in the most exquisite cockney, “Oh, just the Syme”
“‘Oh, shut it!’ said the man in spectacles. Pull yourself together, and chuck away that bit of paper. What are you really going to do?’

“‘But it was a lovely catechism,’ said Syme pathetically. ‘Do let me read it you. It has only forty-three questions and answers, and some of the Marquis’s answers are wonderfully witty. I like to be just to my enemy.’

“‘But what’s the good of it all?’ asked Dr. Bull in exasperation.

“‘It leads up to tojny challenge, don’t you see?’ said Syme, beaming. ‘When the Marquis has given the thirty-ninth reply, which runs’

“‘Has it by any chance occurred to you,’ asked the Professor, with a ponderous simplicity, ‘that the Marquis may not say all the forty-three things you have put down for him? In that case, I understand, your own epigrams may appear somewhat more forced.’

“Syme struck the table with a radiant face.

“‘Why, how true that is,’ he said, ‘and I never thought of it. Sir, you have an intellect beyond the common. You will make a name.’

“‘Oh, you’re as drunk as an owl!’ said the Doctor.”

Then comes the actual challenge:

“‘This man has insulted me!’ said Syme, with gestures of explanation.

“‘Insulted you?’ cried the gentleman with the red rosette, ‘when?’

“‘Oh, just now,’ said Syme recklessly. ‘He insulted my mother.’

“‘Insulted your mother!’ exclaimed the gentleman incredulously.

“‘Well, anyhow,’ said Syme, conceding a point, ‘my aunt.’

“‘But how can the Marquis have insulted your aunt just now?’ said the second gentleman with some legitimate wonder. ‘He has been sitting here all the time.’

“‘Ah, it was what he said!’ said Syme darkly.

“‘I said nothing at all,’ said the Marquis, ‘except something about the band. I only said that I liked Wagner played well.’

“‘It was an allusion to my family,’ said Syme firmly. ‘My aunt played Wagner badly. It was a painful subject. We are always being insulted about it.’

“‘This seems most extraordinary,’ said the gentleman who was decore, looking doubtfully at the Marquis.

“‘Oh, I assure you,’ said Syme earnestly, ‘the whole of your conversation was simply packed with sinister allusions to my aunt’s weaknesses.’

“‘This is nonsense!’ said the second gentleman. ‘I for one have said nothing for half an hour, except that
I liked the singing of that girl with black hair.

"Well, there you are again!" said Syme indignantly. "My aunt’s was red."

"It seems to me," said the other, "that you are simply seeking a pretext to insult the Marquis."

"By George!" said Syme, facing round and looking at him, "what a clever chap you are!"

"The Man who was Thursday" is not so good a book as "The Napoleon of Notting Hill." Yet one feels it was planned to be a better book. It is more lucidly conceived and in some ways more carefully written. It has two coherent artistic ideas which are genuinely good artistic ideas of their kind and admirably suited to Mr. Chesterton’s method. Yet, after the former book, it is disappointing. In "The Napoleon of Notting Hill" Mr. Chesterton was wildly irresponsible, yet he produced a masterpiece. In "The Man who was Thursday" he took his art much more seriously. Yet he produced something which by comparison may be described as a failure.

From this it would seem that it would be unwise to urge Mr. Chesterton to write more carefully or to be on his guard against his characteristic faults. The faults are certainly there, but one fears that an attempt to correct them might only lead to the sacrifice of those vital qualities which will keep his stories alive after many more perfectly artistic stories have perished. In imaginative writing, at any rate, Mr. Chesterton is never better than when, as in the best parts of "The Napoleon of Notting Hill," he gives his romantic and humorous imagination full rein, and lets it carry him by what wild and perilous paths it will.

One cannot leave Mr. Chesterton’s imaginative work without noticing that there is one artform which he has left untried. Mr. Bernard Shaw has repeatedly and publicly urged him to try his hand at writing for the stage; but so far he has remained deaf to such entreaties. Except for "The Wild Knight," a poem written in his early youth, and obviously never intended for representation, he has written nothing which is dramatic even in form. a sublimated musical comedy which would take the world by storm. Musical comedy, with its freedom from necessity of external or psychological realism, and its abundant opportunities for humour, imagination, and romance, would suit him down to the ground. If he could find a composer who suited him as well as Sullivan suited Sir William Gilbert he might do great things.

Personally I regret this abstention on his part, and hope it will not be permanent. It is quite true that his qualities are not those which go to the construction either of the ordinary "wellmade" play or of the great drama of human character. But these two do not exhaust the possible types of drama any
more than the novels of Miss Braddon and those of Mr. George Meredith (neither of which Mr. Chesterton could write) exhaust the possible types of fiction. In story-writing he has got over the difficulty by inventing a new kind of novel to suit himself. There is no reason why he should not do the same in relation to the stage.

It should encourage Mr. Chesterton that he might bear a part in restoring another popular but despised, and in its present state largely despicable art to fine uses. Just as ”The Man who was Thursday” is a sublimated detective story, so I can imagine Mr. Chesterton writing.

Failing this, might not we have from Mr. Chesterton some prose phantasy on the lines of “The Napoleon” or “The Man who was Thursday”? The stage gives a specially good opportunity for that direct appeal to the emotions that Mr. Chesterton’s romantic method implies, while it almost requires a simplification of psychology which would cover his weaknesses more than written fiction does. He would have to write with his eye on the stage, and that would imply learning a new trade, but his quick power of visualizing his scenes should make such learning easy to him.

Of course he would have to be given a free hand to preach his philosophy. We cannot imagine G. K. C. ceasing to be controversial. His songs in musical comedy, his dialogue in prose drama, like his poems, his essays, and his stories, would be full of fight. For when he ceases to fight he will cease to be G. K. C. At that moment he may become a classic, but I for one shall no longer read him.
CHAPTER VIII

THE GLADIATOR AS ARTIST

CHESTERTON has tried his hand upon almost every description of literary work which man can attempt: essays, criticisms, religious controversy, political polemic, biography, fiction, and poetry. One quality alone is common to all, the fact that whether as critic, as novelist, or as poet, he is incurably and impenitently didactic. In this he is thoroughly consistent with his own doctrine, for no man has ever spoken with more scorn of the doctrine of “Art for Art’s Sake.” He has repeatedly denied that for art’s sake any great art can be produced. “Just as this repudiation of big words and big visions,” he says in “Heretics,” “has brought forth a race of small men in politics, so it has brought forth a race of small men in the arts. . . . Our new artistic philosophers call for the same moral licence, for a freedom to wreck heaven and earth with their energy; but the upshot of it all is that a mediocrity is Poet Laureate.” And again, later in the same book—” In the fin de siècle atmosphere every one was crying out that literature should be free from all causes and all ethical creeds. Art was to produce only exquisite workmanship, and it was especially the note of those days to demand brilliant plays and brilliant short stories. And when they got them they got them from a pair of moralists. The best short stories were written by a man trying to preach Imperialism; the best plays were written by a man trying to preach Socialism. All the art of all the artists looked tiny and tedious beside the art which was a byproduct of propaganda.” Whether Mr. Chesterton’s theory in this matter be right or wrong, he has at any rate carried it into practice. His own art is certainly a byproduct of propaganda. Beauty and wit, rhetoric and creative energy—these things to him are not ornaments, but weapons.

And yet it is a curious fact that it is Mr. Chesterton’s artistic qualities, and not his message, which create the unity of his work. Most writers, indeed most artists of all kinds, retain their root point of view all through their lives, while they continually modify their mode of expression. Mr. Chesterton, on the other hand, has, as we have seen, almost wholly outgrown the opinions which were his when he first emerged into notice, but his method of conveying them has hardly varied by a hair’s-breadth. Take a passage from “The Defendant “ and put it side by side with a passage from “Heretics,” or with his last week’s article in the “Daily News” or the “Illustrated.” You will very likely find a considerable
change in the opinions expressed; in the mode of expression you will find no change, and even in the technique little improvement. A very able critic, who was also a great admirer of Mr. Chesterton, told me the other day that he considered “The Defendant” still held the field as his best work, and, after carefully rereading it, I am unable to say that it is an untenable view. Different people will prefer different books according to their individual tastes, but it may safely be said that all the artistic qualities which Mr. Chesterton’s admirers like in his later work will be found in as full a measure in his first volume as in his last.

Mr. Chesterton is generally regarded as primarily a humorist, and unquestionably his humour is the freshest and most original quality of his work. Humour is probably the most difficult thing in the world to analyse. As Mr. Chesterton himself says of Dickens, “Perfect absurdity is a direct thing, like physical pain or a strong smell.” Mr. Chesterton’s humour generally consists in the sudden and violent introduction of a grotesque image when it is least expected. In the conception of such images he really, I think, reaches most unmistakably the mark of genius. Such a matter can only be indicated by examples. In an entirely serious article in the “Daily News,” in defence of what may be called the romantic view of politics, he contrasted “the great rhetoricians who beat Napoleon” with **the strong silent men who could not catch De Wet.” I do not know whether the image of those “strong silent men“ sends everybody into fits of laughter, as it sends me. As Mr. Chesterton says, “A joke is a direct thing.” But, to me, that is almost the most perfect sentence Mr. Chesterton ever wrote. Another example I may give from “Heretics,” a particularly good case, which deserves quoting at length, because it shows how the seriousness and even eloquence of the context can make a grotesque image more wildly and shatteringly funny: “... When Christianity was heavily bombarded in the last century, upon no point was it more persistently and brilliantly attacked than upon that of its alleged enmity to human joy. Shelley and Swinburne and all their armies have passed again and again over the ground, but they have not altered it. They have not set up a single new trophy or ensign for the world’s merriment to rally to. They have not given a name or a new occasion to gaiety. Mr. Swinburne does not hang up his stocking on the eve of the birthday of Victor Hugo. Mr. William Archer does not sing carols descriptive of the infancy of Ibsen outside people’s doors in the snow.”

There is another artistic quality in Mr. Chesterton’s work which bears a close
analogy to his type of humour, but for which, as yet, criticism has found no name. I can only indicate it by saying that just as he can produce a supremely humorous effect by the sudden introduction of a grotesque image into a serious passage, so he often gets an effect extraordinarily thrilling by the sudden introduction into a passage apparently trivial of a reference to something felt by most people to be profoundly solemn and moving. He is particularly fond of using the Bible in this way; indeed, there was never so accomplished a blasphemer as this strenuous defender of the faith. The explanation of this fact may be perhaps that which he gives in “Heretics.” “Blasphemy depends on belief, and is fading with it. If anyone doubts this let him sit down seriously and try to think blasphemous thoughts about Thor.” Anyhow, Mr. Chesterton’s skill in using the Bible in a startling manner is unquestionable. The most striking example of it will be found in the “Dickens,” where he is blaming the novelist for granting to Micawber a prosperous ending: “But how did it happen, how could it happen that the man who created this Micawber could pension him off at the end of the story, and make him a successful Colonial mayor? Micawber never did succeed, never ought to succeed; his kingdom is not of this world.”

There is also a passage in “Heretics” about “the drunkard’s liver of the New Testament which is marred for us, which we take in remembrance of him,” a passage which has naturally shocked many, but which seems to me profoundly right and exceedingly dramatic.

Many who have been accustomed to think of Mr. Chesterton as a modern and an artistic rebel, a lover of the grotesque in poetry, a romantic and a mystic, must have been surprised in reading his essay on Pope in “Twelve Types” to notice the unstinted praise which he gives to the coldest and most correct of English classical poets. I think the explanation of his admiration for Pope may be found in his liking for those sharp antitheses in which Pope loved to indulge.

And without sneering teach the rest to sneer, or so obliging that he ne’er obliged are not much in Mr. Chesterton’s poetic style, but they bear some resemblance, in their balance of phrasing and their antithetical use of the same word, as well as in their smoothness and pungency, to the epigrams which are scattered so thickly over his essays. One of the best of these, which achieved the honour of being twice quoted in Parliament, referred to the secret funds of the two great political parties. “Rich men pay into them and are made peers; poor men are paid out of them and are made slaves.” It would be difficult to put the state of the case with more biting brevity.

Mr. Chesterton’s preoccupation with propaganda has undoubtedly made him a
less perfect artist than he might have been. His sense of pure beauty has to an extent been blunted by it. His first object is always to make his point effective, and beauty of expression only comes to him when his theme so inspires him as to make it instinctive. In his style you will sometimes find ugly flaws and careless discords which would be impossible to a man who valued the beauty of words for its own sake. Yet when it suits his mood, he can make his prose sing as nobly as that of any living writer. The “Defence of Rash Vows” is for the most part just such a clever tour de force of advocacy as the “Defence of Penny Dreadfuls” which I have already noticed. But in its peroration Mr. Chesterton suddenly catches the note of genuine poetry, and produces a rhetorical passage of which Ruskin need not have been ashamed.

"... There are thrilling moments, doubtless, for the spectator, the amateur, and the aesthete; but there is one thrill that is known only to the soldier who fights for his own flag, to the ascetic who starves himself for his own illumination, to the lover who makes finally his own choice. And it is this transfiguring self-discipline that makes the vow a truly sane thing. It must have satisfied even the giant hunger of the soul of a lover or a poet to know that in consequence of some one instant of decision that strange chain would hang for centuries in the Alps among the silences of stars and snows. All around us is the city of small sins, abounding in backways and retreats, but surely, sooner or later, the towering flame will rise from the harbour, announcing that the reign of the cowards is over and a man is burning his ships."

I know nothing better of its kind in contemporary literature than that, unless it be the passage in “The Napoleon of Notting Hill,” where Adam Wayne propounds to the King his remedy for the prosaic flippancy of modern life: “I know,’ he said, in a strange, almost sleepy voice; ‘there is truth in what you say, too. It is hard not to laugh at the common names—I only say we should not. I have thought of a remedy; but such thoughts are rather terrible.’

“‘What thoughts?’ asked Auberon.

“The Provost of Notting Hill seemed to have fallen into a kind of trance; in his eyes was an elvish light.

“‘I know of a magic wand, but it is a wand that only one or two may rightly use, and only seldom. It is a fairy wand of great fear, stronger than those who use it—often frightful, often wicked to use. But whatever is touched with it is never again wholly common; whatever is touched with it takes a magic from outside the world. If I touch with this fairy wand the railways and the roads of Notting Hill, men will love them, and be afraid of them for ever.’

“‘What the Devil are you talking about?’ asked the King.

“‘It has made mean landscapes magnificent, and hovels outlast cathedrals,’ went on the madman. ‘Why should it not make lamp-posts fairer than Greek lamps, and an omnibus ride like a painted ship? The touch of it is the finger of a strange perfection.’

“‘What is your wand?’ cried the King impatiently.
Of late years Mr. Chesterton has shown some sign of relaxing of extreme vehemence of his controversial method. Often in his stories, and now and again in his weekly articles in the “Daily News,” he drops the propagandist attitude for a moment, and lets his humour, imagination, and sense of poetry have free play. The result certainly justifies us in believing that Mr. Chesterton has been partly spoiled as an artist by his persistent preoccupation with his gospel. Some of these more irresponsible articles are among the best things he has done. It is true that the humorous ones seem occasionally little more than school-boyish exhibitions of high spirits, delightful to read, but simply impossible to treat critically. I remember an extraordinary article in the “Daily News” about various people who wanted to rebuild St. Paul’s Cathedral. I suppose there was some symbolism behind it, but to me it was valuable in virtue of its quite exquisite insanity. One man wanted it built of cubes one on top of the other, each a little smaller than the one below. “If it were built like that it would never fall down.” “Does it not occur to you that if it were built like that, we should want it to fall down?” Then there was another (a German) who wanted the top to be larger than the bottom, “like the trees that from the bosom of the great NatureMother spring.” I am quoting from memory; I would not profane my recollections of that gorgeous piece of absurdity by coldly looking it up. I don’t know what it all meant, but it gave me great delight at the time.

As some of these lighter fragments were pure humour, others were pure poetry. And some of them served to show how rich is the imagination, and how really keen the sense of beauty of which Mr. Chesterton only allows himself to give us glimpses in his more responsible work.

That reminds me that I want very much to know why we have not had another volume of poetry from Mr. Chesterton. Since “The Wild Knight” (his first serious publication) he has given us no book of verse. Yet, curiously enough, his verse, judged by the occasional samples contributed to the Press, shows a decided improvement on his earlier efforts which is not noticeable in his prose. His latest essays, as I have said, are not from a technical point of view observably better than those in “The Defendant”; but some of the poetry which has recently appeared from his pen is quite unmistakably better than the best of “The Wild Knight.”

His sense of beauty and of the music of words has developed. Vigorous and original as was much of “The Wild Knight,” there was hardly any beauty in it. His work aimed at strength rather than grace; it startled and thrilled rather than
moved and melted. But there is real beauty, and that of a high order, in such lines as these, taken from a fragment of a “Ballad Epic of Alfred,” published in the “Daily News”: And every English maid that walks In good thought apart May break the guard of the three Kings And know the dear and dreadful things I hid within my heart.

Again, there is poetry and music of a kind quite alien from that of “The Wild Knight” in the Christmas poem which he wrote for the “Daily News,” beginning: Step softly under snow and rain To find the place where men can stay,— The way is all so very plain That we may lose the way.

And later:
Step humbly; humble are the skies And very lone and fierce the star; So very near the manger lies That we may travel far.

The best and most original quality of Mr. Chesterton’s recent poetry is the skill with which he has learned to blend the poignancy of epigram with the poignancy of poetry. This very poem, after its perfect introduction, goes on: We have gone round and round the hill And lost the wood among the trees, And found long names for every ill, And served the mad gods, naming still The Furies, the Eumenides.

The Gods of violence took the veil Of vision and philosophy; The Serpent that brought all men bale, He bites his own accursed tail, And calls himself Eternity.

But perhaps the most admirable example of this wedding of epigram and poetry will be found in a poem called “The Secret People,” which appeared in “The Neolith.” It was on a very characteristic theme, the silence of the English people throughout their history: Smile at us, pay us, pass us, but do not quite forget, For we are the people of England, and we have not spoken yet.

In this poem he really contrives, without once dropping out of the key of high poetry, to sum up whole epochs of English history in swift and unforgettable phrases. What, for instance, could more fully describe the state of England after the Wars of the Roses than the line: And there was only a naked people under a naked Crown.

Or again, how could you more concisely express the change from Tudor to Stuart times than by the phrase: The name of the King’s Servants grew greater than the King.

Then after a spirited description of the great French War, when: We did and died like lions to keep ourselves in chains, comes the two powerful verses in which, as it seems to me, Mr. Chesterton touches his highwater mark: Our patch of
glory ended, we never heard guns again. But the squire seemed struck in the saddle, he was foolish, as if in pain.

He leant on a chattering lawyer, he clutched at a cringing Jew.

He was stricken, may-be after all he was stricken at Waterloo: Or perhaps the ghosts of the shaven men whose gold was in his house Came back in shining shapes at last to spoil his last carouse, Only we see the last sad squires ride slowly towards the sea. And a new people takes the land. And still it is not we.

They have given us over into the hands of the new unhappy lords, Lords without anger or honour, who dare not carry their swords.

They fight by shuffling papers; they have dead, bright alien eyes: They look at our labour and laughter as a tired man looks at flies.

The load of their loveless pity is worse than the ancient wrongs.

Their doors are shut in the evening; and they have no songs.

That last line will serve well to show Mr. Chesterton’s increased power over his instrument. Notice the deliberate irregularity of “and they have no songs,” compared with the dactylic “worse than the ancient wrongs” of the line before, so swiftly suggesting the desolation of the atmosphere described. The same improved technique may be seen in another Christmas poem which appeared in “The Commonwealth,” where two metres were employed alternately to suggest the two sides of the Christian religion: The happy, silent hill and wood Are bowed about the Holy Birth, And for one little hour the Earth Is lazy with the love of good.

But ready are you and ready am I When the trumpets blow and the guns go by.
For we are for all men under the Sun, And they are against us every one.
And so on, through a rattle of eight lines.

It seems rather a pity that, with such rich capabilities almost unexploited, Mr. Chesterton has not found time to get together and publish another volume of verse. Of course it might be urged that the greater advance which he has made in verse than in prose is in part due to his having permitted the soil of his talents in this a direction to He fallow for a season. Perhaps, if he had written verse as unremittingly as he has written essays, his poetic style would have shown as little progress as his prose style. Perhaps, on the other hand, if he had given himself as much rest from essay writing as from poetry, the technique of “Heretics “ might have shown as marked an improvement on that of “The Defendant” as the technique of “The Secret People” does on that of “The Wild Knight.” I am willing to leave the question an open one. All the same, I should
like to see another volume of verse from his pen, and I would give a good many introductions to various people to get it.

But his gift for serious verse is by no means the only talent which Mr. Chesterton has allowed to lie almost unused so far at any rate as his public utterance goes. He has a rare and genuine gift for the sort of verse of which I gave an example in an earlier chapter—the “report” of Mr. Chamberlain’s speech. Of this sort of light verse he pours out an enormous amount for the amusement of his personal friends, but hardly any of it has ever got published—indeed, some of the most delightful specimens are much too irresponsibly violent in their personalities for publication.

Mr. Chesterton may almost be said to have invented a new form of light verse, though few specimens of it have seen the light. He has abundant wit and deep-seated humour, and that trick of smooth and easy rhythm which adds so much to the fun of Calverley and of Gilbert. But he adds to these a new and very characteristic touch of his own. He will often end a poem, the bulk of which is simply gorgeous fooling, with a sudden and thrilling note of seriousness. It is difficult to give examples, because nearly all the poems concerned are unpublished, and most of them are unpublishable. But one that has already found its way (though obscurely) into print will give an idea of what I mean. The “Tribune” newspaper, by some odd confusion, described G. K. C. as having been born in 1856. The maligned writer immediately sent the Editor a “ballade” repudiating the suggestion. The first verse ran: I am not fond of anthropoids as such.

I never went to Mr. Darwin’s school.  
Old Tyndall’s ether, that he liked so much, Leaves me, I fear, comparatively cool.  
I cannot say my heart with hope is full Because a donkey, by continual kicks, Turns slowly into something like a mule— I was not born in 1856.

Then follows another verse in the same vein; and then the third, with its ringing change of tone: Age of my fathers! Truer at the touch Than mine! Great age of Dickens, youth and yule! Had your strong virtues stood without a crutch, I might have deemed man had no need of rule, But I was born when petty poets pule, When madmen used your liberty to mix Lucre and lust, bestial and beautiful, I was not born in 1856.

To summarize Mr. Chesterton’s position as a writer we may say that, while he lacks the careful workmanship, the regard for true proportion, the sensitive aesthetic conscience which would make him a great artist, he has enough artistry
for the work he wants to do, and a little to spare, and this is backed by so prodigious a stock of vital energy, by so much humour, imagination, pugnacity, and sense of romance, that one forgets the slips and defects in the great mass of achievement. Probably, to a Chesterton, at any rate, that achievement would be impossible without those defects. We have seen that he is by no means always at his best when he is writing most carefully. It is when he seems to be writing at post haste, careless of details, carried forward by the stream of his own invention, that his force is greatest. I have already quoted part of the description of the great fight in Hyde Park which closes the career of Adam Wayne. Nowhere does Mr. Chesterton strike more markedly the note of genius. Yet anyone who carefully examines the passage will perceive that it has been written at such break neck pace, and with so little revision, that Wilson “seemingly smashed like a fly” on page 285, is again “smashed and wiped down on the floor like a fly” on page 287. It is a real tribute to Mr. Chesterton’s power that his narrative carries you readily past all such details, and makes you forget everything in the swing and clash of the swords.

Vitality—that is the key to all that is valuable in Mr. Chesterton’s work. As an essayist and critic, his work has a thousand defects, both in substance and form. But it is saved by his vigorous pugnacity, his Donnybrook joie de vivre, his readiness to challenge anybody and everybody to instant combat. As a storyteller he lacks all the qualities which one would suppose were needful, yet he has the one thing that is really needful. His tales are carried forward on a tide of vital energy, sometimes expressing itself as sheer fun, sometimes as wild romance, but always full of vigour and life. The verse often contains ugly lines which would have been impossible to a careful artist, but there is hardly a poem, even among his bad poems, which is not alive with its own movements.

We must conclude, then, that Mr. Chesterton’s success is at least as much due to qualities of character as to qualities of art, to his personality as to his works. It is with a study of his personality, then, that this essay on criticism may fitly conclude.
CHAPTER IX

THE PERSONAL EQUATION

HERE is probably at present no figure better known in literary circles than that of G. K. Chesterton. His huge form, half of which, as Mr. Shaw has said, is usually out of the range of vision, his great flapping hat and romantic cloak, his walk and his laugh are familiar to every one who knows the world of Fleet Street and the Strand. Whatever else he may become in the future, he has certainly become a public personality. There can, therefore, be no harm in touching upon such of his peculiarities as really throw some light upon his personality, and thence upon his work.

Mr. Chesterton carries into his private life that incurable romanticism which is so marked a feature of all that he has written. The scenes which he haunts are not generally regarded as very perilous. Both Battersea and Fleet Street are, I believe, adequately policed. But Mr. Chesterton insists on traversing them armed with a sword-stick, and generally carrying a revolver in his pocket. This is not an affectation; he does not parade it to the world as a self-advertizer would. He hugs it to himself as did the lanternbearing boys in Stevenson’s delightful essay. He does it because he is really romantic, the essence of romance being a sense of the unexplored possibilities of life. I believe that in his heart of hearts G. K. C. hopes that one day some impossible thing will happen to him, and compel him to use his lethal weapons. At any rate, the sense of having them to use if he wanted to gladdens his secret heart.

Because he has this romantic temperament, this lust for unexplored possibilities, London and all great cities have a fascination for him. To Nature I do not think he has any great devotion. In the dedicatory poem to “The Napoleon of Notting Hill,” he says to Mr. Belloc: You saw a moon on Sussex downs A Sussex moon, untravelled still; I saw a moon that was the town’s— The largest lamp on Campden Hill.

If he sees the country at all he sees it only as a background to human figures. But for his holidays he likes other cities, cities steeped in a different civilization— cities of France, or Belgium, or Italy. About these he has written some of his best light articles. And it is noticeable that these are never about the “sights” of the city, but only about the things seen there. He has, one might almost say, a horror
of deliberate sight-seeing. He holds that only when you come upon a historic monument or a great work of art accidentally do you really see it. Moreover, he points out in the “Dickens,” the things peculiar to a country are not the historic things, but the trivial things. “Westminster Abbey is not especially a piece of English architecture. But the hansom cab is a piece of English architecture. The imaginative Englishman will be found all day in a café, the imaginative Frenchman in a hansom cab.”

It is the colour and atmosphere of the existing civilization that interests him, and the opportunities which they furnish as a background for human romance. When he has travelled in the North of France it is safe to say that he was thinking less of churches and chateaux than of such wild possibilities of what might happen there, as are recorded in “The Man who was Thursday.”

Another symptom of his romanticism is his love of toy theatres. In a previous chapter I ventured to suggest that Mr. Chesterton might do well to try writing for the stage, but, after all, I fancy the toy-theatre stage is the one which would suit him best. It gives unparalleled opportunities for colour and romance, and subtle psychology is hardly possible within the limit of its conventions. “The Man who was Thursday,” impossible of dramatization for the ordinary stage, might be dramatized on the pasteboard stage of our childhood with remarkable effect. Or why should it not be performed on the lines which “Punch and Judy” has made popular? “Sunday” would make a most impressive doll, and the paralytic professor would strike terror into the infant heart—to say nothing of Dr. Bull and his spectacles.

The growth of Mr. Chesterton’s public reputation has made comparatively little difference to his mode of life. Of course his fame has carried him into new circles, and made him acquainted with men of what may roughly be called the governing class, with bishops and cabinet ministers, members of parliament, and men eminent in letters and art. But among these he has, I always fancy, something of the air of a man who has strayed into an environment interesting and even congenial, but at bottom alien to him. His type of life is still the journalistic type. The atmosphere really native to him is still the atmosphere of Fleet Street. And he is never more at his ease, never more amusing, never more wholly himself, than when he is talking to his old brothers of the craft.

It would indeed be a strange thing if anyone with his keen scent for romance did not love Fleet Street. For Fleet Street is a place that really fulfils the true romantic ideal—it is a place where anything may happen. Nowhere else does one meet so many incredible people—people who seem to have stepped straight
out of some wild Rabelaisian caricature. Its lies are extravagant beyond the possibilities of ordinary human imagination, yet they are often less extravagant than the truth which they cover. With all its ghastly background of tragedy, it is a paradise for the man who is expecting the unexpected. And such a man is G. K. C.

He has a genuine love for Fleet Street, and he gives the impression of wasting a great deal of time there, as most journalists do, even those who are really working themselves to death. For hours he will sit over a bumper of burgundy in one of his favourite haunts, especially in a certain wine-bar which from the other side of the main road confronts the Puritanism of the “Daily News,” and pour out torrents of conversation to anyone who happens to be about. He talks, especially in argument, with powerful voice and gesture. He laughs at his own jokes loudly and with quite unaffected enjoyment. He seems at such moments quite unconscious of the flight of time.

G. K. C. gives many people the impression of being a lazy man. His extraordinary lavishness in the taking of cabs has tended to enforce that view. He will take a cab half-way up a street, keep it waiting an hour or so, and then drive half-way down the street again. I know a man who met him in a little bookshop just opposite the Law Courts. A cab was, of course, waiting outside. G. K. C. drove my friend to a neighbouring hostelry about six doors farther down, just opposite St. Clement Danes. There they went in and talked over their wine for three-quarters of an hour, the cab still waiting. The other man naturally thought that the cab was to take G. K. C. back to Battersea. But he was in error. When they got out it appeared that the eminent journalist was only going to the office of the “Illustrated London News,” which is just about another six doors down the Strand. The total distance traversed could not have been more than a hundred and fifty yards. The time occupied was something over an hour. What the cabman charged I do not know, but as, from what I know of Mr. Chesterton, he probably got at least double his proper fare, he presumably did not do badly.

Also he is casual in his methods of work. You will find him writing, usually in penny exercise books, not only in restaurants, tea-shops, and public houses, but in cabs, on the tops of omnibuses, and even walking along the street. He is absent-minded to a degree almost incredible. He himself once announced his intention of writing a series of stories of the Sherlock Holmes type, only for the purpose of illustrating his own inattention to detail. There was to be the “Incident of the Curate’s Trousers” and “The Adventure of the Pro-Boer’s Corkscrew.” But the story I like best myself (which I believe to be strictly true)
is that of his calling on a publisher at the hour appointed for a meeting, and placing in the publisher’s own hands a letter explaining elaborately why he could not keep the appointment. All this gives a general impression of unbusinesslike slackness.

Yet it is unquestionable that Mr. Chesterton must in fact be one of the hardest workers now living. The amount of writing from his pen which actually gets published is amazing, and it is nothing to the mass that doesn’t get published, that could not possibly ever be published, that is written solely for his own amusement or that of his personal friends. Every week he has a column article in the “Daily News” and a full-page article in the “Illustrated London News.” A continual stream of prose and verse flows from him into the presses of the other newspapers and reviews. He is indefatigable in writing introductions to everything, from “The Book of Job” to the latest novel of Gorki.

His lectures are without number. Indeed, such is his activity that he is ever ready to undertake tasks which cannot possibly add either to his fame or his income. Any humble Nonconformist minister anxious to amuse his P. S. A., any group of Tooley Street tailors who call themselves the Social Democratic League of the Human Race, can draw a lecture from G. K. C. for which many reputable societies would gladly pay more than ten pounds. This may seem to recall the propagandist fervour of Mr. Bernard Shaw in his earlier days. But there is a distinction.

Mr. Shaw was a Socialist, a member of a fighting society, trying to help on a practical movement which he really hoped to see succeed. But Mr. Chesterton stands for no one but himself, and, however much he may deny the existence of “the inevitable,” can hardly seriously hope for the conversion of modern London to Chestertonism through his lectures. He is merely a man expressing his opinions because he enjoys expressing them. He would express them as readily and as well to a man he met in an omnibus.

The force that keeps him so continually stirring is clearly a force that comes from within. It is not ambition or the desire for fame. He has little or none of either, at any rate in their ordinary sense. He is certainly not the sort of man either to be indifferent to other people’s opinion of him, or to pretend to be so. Comradeship is a necessity of life to him. He enjoys the sound of his own voice; he laughs openly at his own jokes. But for him the moment’s satisfaction is enough. He is, I should say, the last man in the world to be moved powerfully by ambition, and most of his activities are the last upon which a really ambitious man would ever enter. It is sheer pugnacity and the zest of self-exposition that
keeps him so constantly to the front, and forbids him to allow any opportunity of displaying and defending his ideas to pass unused.

It seems a little curious that at a time when politics are being flooded with men of letters of all types and colours, the most polemic of contemporary writers, and one who can never be persuaded to keep off political topics for more than a hundred lines together, should so far have shown no desire for a political career. I believe that he was once asked to stand for Parliament, and replied that he would stand if he were quite sure he would be defeated. The answer was probably sincere enough. He would keenly enjoy the fun of electioneering, in which he has several times indulged on other people’s behalf before now, and would, I should say, be a very popular candidate on the hustings. Whether he would be equally popular with his own party if he got into the House of Commons I do not know. But I doubt if fear of his in dependence would prevent his being selected. He calls himself a Liberal, and the leaders and organizers of the party are not clever enough to know how much he disagrees with them. If his friend Mr. Belloc could manage it, I do not see why he cannot. No doubt he might find the House a bore at times, and might be tempted, like Mr. Cunninghame Graham, to startle it with a “damn.” But, after all, it is a good club, and Mr. Chesterton is very clubable. The drink is excellent, and some of the members are quite intelligent when they are not engaged in performing their legislative functions. Ideas are wanted in politics, and a mild eruption of G. K. C. would do His Majesty’s faithful Commons no harm. As for himself, it would only add one more to activities already so numerous as to be past counting.

Mr. Chesterton’s extraordinary versatility and copiousness of output is beyond question a danger to his permanent position in literature, if he cares to have one. It is true that, considering the amount he writes, his level of work is remarkably high. But, unless he controls his effervescent desire to write everything that comes into his head, he will never write the best that he might have written. Of course, it is silly to quarrel with a man for his temperament; without that pugnacity and vitality which inevitably results in over-production, G. K. C. would not be G. K. C. But I am not blaming him; I am only pointing out the defects of his qualities. It is quite certain that he could do more than he has done if he could only make up his mind exactly what he wanted to do. Sometimes he seems to want to be a theologian, sometimes a political pamphleteer, sometimes a story-teller, sometimes a critic, sometimes a historian. He has power and vitality enough, I should say, to be any of these things, if he really wills it. But no man alive has power and vitality enough to be all of them. It must be
remembered that a similar versatility (though accompanied with less interest in practical affairs and a much more careful artistic conscience) has prevented us from ever knowing how great a man Robert Louis Stevenson really was. If Mr. Chesterton seriously wants to leave a permanent name behind, he cannot begin a moment too soon to concentrate on whatever he really thinks he can do best.

But probably he has no such ambition. It would indeed, I fancy, waken in him nothing but Rabelaisian laughter to be told that he ought to crave for the position of a classic or for an immortality of fame. It would be quite out of his character to care for posthumous reputation. In the controversies raging round him he has dealt shrewd blows, blows that will leave their mark. He has fought hard and well, and he will certainly go on fighting till he dies. Whether his words will live (that problem which has tortured so many men of genius) he probably cares nothing. If his name were to be remembered among men at all he would probably prefer the tribute that Heine demanded—the sword of a brave soldier in the Liberation War of Humanity.

I have endeavoured in this book to sketch Mr. Chesterton as he is, to differentiate between what is strong and what is weak in the quality of his work, between what is sound and what is unsound in the doctrines he has preached. I have tried to do this in a sympathetic spirit, but keeping well “this side idolatry.” I doubt if any good end would be served by attempting to forecast his career or the fate of his reputation. He would enjoy such a forecast, no doubt, as it would enable him to practise his own game of “Cheat the Prophet.” But I have no desire to adopt that character. All I will say is that, if any of his work survives, I think it will be some of his poems, if he can be persuaded to publish the best of them in permanent form, “The Napoleon of Notting Hill,” perhaps, some of the best essays in “The Defendant,” and, I am inclined to think, despite the reservations I made in discussing it, the “Dickens.” “Heretics,” clever and even brilliant as much of it is, I do not think will live. It deals too largely with transitory phenomena and transitory reputations. Kipling, I imagine, our children will read, and probably Bernard Shaw. They will certainly not have forgotten Omar. But I do not imagine that the name of Mr. McCabe will be familiar to them, and one may hope that there will no longer be either vegetarians or yellow pressmen in the happier times to come. Of course, it is not safe to assume that a book will not live because it is journalistic and deals with the passing hour. The comedies of Aristophanes are as crammed with topical allusions and contemporary satire as any modern musical comedy. Yet over two thousand years have failed to age them. Horace again built a monument more enduring
than brass out of what were largely in effect vers de societe. But I do not think that Mr. Chesterton’s work has quite the quality that gives to fugitive themes a permanence of its own. If he lives at all it will be by virtue of those parts of his work which deal with things in their nature eternal.

Of course there is another kind of immortality which Mr. Chesterton might conceivably attain. We have seen that the force behind all his work which gives it its value is the force of his personality—that the fascination of that personality often saves him where his technical skill and artistic taste are at fault. Is it possible that the personality divorced from the work might survive—that men might remember his personal idiosyncrasies and the casual sayings dropped in conversation after they had ceased to read a single line that he had written? I need not point out that that has happened with one great figure in English literature. Every one remembers Macaulay’s epigram about Dr. Johnson, that he was “regarded in his own time as a classic and in ours as a contemporary.” Mr. Chesterton is certainly not regarded as a classic, but will he be a contemporary to our children i Thousands of persons who have never opened “Rasselas “ or “ The Vanity of Human Wishes” know all about Johnson’s habit of counting posts, and his inordinate love of tea. Will Mr. Chesterton’s sword-stick and his toy-theatre be remembered by people who have forgotten “Heretics” and “The Napoleon of Notting Hill”? I suppose the answer to that question depends on whether he should have the good fortune to find a Boswell.

I will leave G. K. C. without further speculation as to his destiny.

It may be that the Gulfs will wash him down; It may be he will touch the Happy Isles.

But, if he does, they will not be less enjoyable for his presence.
GILBERT KEITH CHESTERTON

PATRICK BRAYBROOKE
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**INDEX**

**GILBERT KEITH CHESTERTON**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter One</th>
<th>THE ESSAYIST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two</td>
<td>DICKENS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td>THACKERAY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four</td>
<td>BROWNING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five</td>
<td>CHESTERTON AS HISTORIAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Seven</td>
<td>THE POET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Eight</td>
<td>THE NOVELIST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Nine</td>
<td>CHESTERTON ON DIVORCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Ten</td>
<td>‘THE NEW JERUSALEM’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Eleven</td>
<td>MR. CHESTERTON AT HOME</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Twelve</td>
<td>HIS PLACE IN LITERATURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Thirteen</td>
<td>G.K.C. AND G.B.S.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Fourteen
CONCLUSION
IT is certain that up to a point in the evolution of Self most people find life quite exciting and thrilling. But when middle age arrives, often prematurely, they forget the thrill and excitements; they become obsessed by certain other lesser things that are deficient in any kind of Cosmic Vitality. The thrill goes out of life: a light dies down and flickers fitfully; existence goes on at a low ebb—something has been lost. From this numbed condition is born much of the blind anguish of life.

It is one of the tragedies of human existence that the divine sense of wonder is eventually destroyed by inexcusable routine and more or less mechanical living. Mental abandon, the exercise of fancy and imagination, the function of creative thought—all these things are squeezed out of the consciousness of man until his primitive enjoyment of the mystical part of life is affected in a very serious way. Nothing could be more useful, therefore, than to write a book about a man who has done more than any other living writer to stimulate and preserve the primitive sense of wonder and joy in human life. Gilbert Keith Chesterton has never lost mental contact with the cosmic simplicity of human existence. He knows, as well as anybody has ever known, that the life of man goes wrong simply because we are too lazy to be pleased with simple, fundamental things.

We grow up in our feverish, artificial civilization, believing that the real, satisfying things are complex and difficult to obtain. Our lives become unnaturally stressed and tormented by the pitiless and incessant struggle for social conditions which are, at best, second-rate and ultimately disappointing.

G. K. Chesterton would restore the primitive joys of wonder and childlike delight in simple things. His ideal is the real, not the merely impossible. Unlike most would-be saviours of the race, he seeks not to merge a new humanity into a brand new glittering civilization. He would have us awaken once more to the ancient mysteries and eternal truths. He would have us turn back in order to progress.

Science makes us proud, but it does not make us happy. Efficiency makes us slaves—we have forgotten the truth about freedom. Success is our narcotic deity, and weans more men into despair than failure; for, as G.K.C. has said, ‘Nothing fails like Success.’ We have yet to rediscover the spiritual health that comes with a clear recognition of the part that life cannot be great until it is lived madly and wildly. We have to learn all over again that grass really is green, and the sky, at
times, very blue indeed.

ARTHUR F. THORN
(Author of ‘Richard Jefferies’),
Assistant-Director of Studies,
London School of Journalism.
AUTHOR’S NOTE

THIS book is the outcome of many and repeated requests to the author to write it. While realizing the difficulties involved, he feels that the opportunities he has enjoyed give him at least some qualifications for the task, for not only is he a kinsman of Mr. Chesterton, but also has spent much time in his company.

The book aims to be a popular study of the Writer and the Man. It is dedicated to lovers of the works of G.K.C. and to the wider public who wish to know about one of the most brilliant minds of the day.

PATRICK BRAYBROOKE.

46 Russell Square, W.C. 1
1922.
Chapter One

THE ESSAYIST

IT is extremely difficult in the somewhat limited space of a chapter to give the full attention that should be given to such a brilliant and original essayist (which is not always an ipso facto of brilliant essayists) as Chesterton. Essayists are of all men extremely elastic. Occasionally they are dull and prosy, very often they are obscure, quite often they are wearisome. The only criticism which applies adversely to Chesterton as an essayist is that he is very often—and I rather fear he likes being so—obscure. He is brilliant in an original manner, he is original in a brilliant way; scarcely any thought of his is not expressed in paradox. What is orthodox to him is heresy to other people; what is heresy to him is orthodox to other people; and the surprising fact is that he is usually right when he is orthodox, and equally right when he is heretical. An essayist naturally has points of view which he expresses in a different way to a novelist. A novelist, if he adheres to what a novel should be—that is, I think, a simple tale—does not necessarily have a particular point of view when he starts his book. An essayist, on the other hand, starts with an idea and clothes it. Of course, Chesterton is not an essayist in the really accepted manner of an essayist. He is really more a brilliant exponent of an original point of view. In other words, he essays to knock down opinions held by other essayists, whether writers or politicians. It would be manifestly absurd to praise Chesterton as being equal to Hazlitt, or condemn him as being inferior to J.S. Mill. Comparisons are usually odious, which is precisely the reason so much use is made of them. In this case any comparison is not only odious; it is worse, it is merely futile, for the very simple fact that there has been no essayist ever quite like Chesterton, which is a compliment to him, because it proves what every one who knows is assured, that he is unique.

There are, of course, as is to be expected, people who do not like his essays. The reason is not far to seek, as in everything else people set up for themselves standards which they do not like to see set aside. Consequently people who had read Lamb, Hazlitt, Hume, and E.V. Lucas astutely thought that no essayist could be such who did not adhere to the style of one of these four. Therefore they were a little alarmed and upset when there descended upon them a strange genius who not only upset all the rules of essay writing, but was at the same time
acclaimed by all sections of the Press as one of the finest essayists of the day.

With the advent of Chesterton the essay received a shock. It had to realize that it was a larger and wider thing than it had been before. As it had been almost insular, so it became international; as it had been almost theological in its orthodoxy, so it became in its catholicity well-nigh heretical. Which is the best possible definition of a heresy? It is the expanding of orthodoxy or the lessening of it. Thus Chesterton was a pioneer. He gave to the essay a new impetus—almost, we might say, a ‘sketch’ form; it dealt with subjects not so much in a dissertation as in a dissection. Having dissected one way so that we are quite sure no other method would do, he calmly dissects again in the opposite manner, leaving us gasping, and finding that there really are two ways of looking at every question—a thing we never realize till we think about it. I have in this chapter taken five of Chesterton’s most characteristic books of essays, displaying the enormous depth of his intellect, the vast range of subject, the unique use of paradox. Of these five books I have again taken rather necessarily at random subjects depicting the above Chestertonian attributes, with an attempt to give some idea of what it really means when we say that he is an essayist.

That Chesterton’s book of essays, entitled ‘Heretics,’ should have an introductory and a concluding chapter on the importance of orthodoxy is exactly what we should expect to find. There is a great deal of what is undeniably true in this book; there is also, I venture to think, a good deal that is undeniably untrue. I do not think it is unfair to say that in some respects Chesterton allows his cleverness to lead him to certain errors of judgment, and a certain levity in dealing with matters that are to a number of people so sacred that to reinterpret them is almost to blaspheme.

I am thinking of the chapter in this book that is a reply to Mr. McCabe, an ex-Roman Catholic, who, being a keen logician, is now a rationalist. He accuses Chesterton of joking with the things de profundis.

Certain clergymen have also taken exception to Chesterton’s writings on the ground of this supposed levity. It is merely that he sees that the Bible has humour, because it has said that ‘God laughed and winked.’ I do not think he intends to offend, but for many people any idea of humour in the Bible is repugnant, and this view is not confined to clergymen.

In an absolutely charming chapter Chesterton writes of the literature of the servant girl, which is really the literature of Park Lane. It is the literature of Park Lane, for the very obvious reason that it is probably never read there; but the literature is about Park Lane, and is read by those who may live as near it as
Balham or Surbiton. What he contends, and rightly, is that the general reader likes to hear about an environment outside his own. It is inherent in us that we always really want to be somewhere else; which is fortunate, as it makes it certain that the world will never come to an end through a universal contentment. It has been said that contentment is the essence of perfection. It is equally true that the essence of perfection is discontent, a striving for something else. This, I think, Chesterton feels when he says of the penny novelette that it is the literature to ‘teach a man to govern empires or look over the map of mankind.’

Rudyard Kipling finds a warm spot in Chesterton’s heart, but he is a little too militaristic, which is exactly what he is not. Kipling loves soldiers, which is no real reason why he should be disliked as a militarist. Many a servant girl loves a score of soldiers, she may even write odes to her pet sergeant, but she is not necessarily a militarist. Rudyard Kipling likes soldiers and writes of them. He does not, as Chesterton lays to his charge, ‘worship militarism.’ He accuses Kipling of a want of patriotism, which is about as absurd as accusing Chesterton of a love of politics. But when he says that Kipling only knows England as a place, he is on safe ground, because England is something that is not bound by the confines of space.

Not being exactly a champion of Kipling, Chesterton turns to a different kind of man, George Moore, and has nothing to say for him beyond that he writes endless personal confessions, which most people do if there are those who will read them. But not only this, poor George Moore ‘doesn’t understand the Roman Catholic Church, he doesn’t understand Thackeray, he misunderstands Stevenson, he has no understanding of Christianity.’ It is, in fact, a hopeless case, but it is also possible that Chesterton has not troubled to understand George Moore.

Mr. Bernard Shaw is, so Chesterton contends, a really horrible eugenist, because he wants to get a super-man who, having more than two legs, will be a vastly superior person to a man. Chesterton loves men. He tells us why St. Peter was used to found the Church upon. It was because he ‘was a shuffler, a coward, and a snob—in a word, a man.’ Even the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Councils of Trent have failed to find a better reason for the founding of the Church. It is a defence of the fallibility of the Church, the practical nature of that Body, an organization founded by a Man who had Divine powers in a unique way and was God.

Presumably, then, the mistake of Shaw is that instead of trying to improve
man he wishes to invent a kind of demi-god.

Chesterton has a great deal to say for Christmas; in fact, he has no sympathy for those superior beings who find Christmas out of date. Even Swinburne and Shelley have attacked Christianity in the grounds of its melancholy, showing a lamentable forgetfulness that this religion was born at a time that had always been a season of joy. Chesterton is annoyed with them, and is sure that Swinburne did not hang up his socks on Christmas Eve, nor did Shelley. I wonder whether Chesterton hangs up his socks on the eve of Christmas?

‘Heretics’ is a book that deals with a great number of subjects universal in their scope. The writing is at times too paradoxical, leading to obscurity of thought. There are splendid passages in this book, which is, when all is said, brilliantly original, even if at times a little puzzling.

‘Orthodoxy’ is, I think, one of the most important of Chesterton’s books. The lasting importance of a book depends not so much on its literary qualities or on its popularity, but rather on the theme handled.

There are really two central themes handled in this book. One is of Fairyland, the other is of the defence of Christianity; not that it is either true or false, but that it is rational, or the most shuffle-headed nonsense ever set to delude the human race. The method of apology that Chesterton takes is one that would cause the average theological student to turn white with fear.

The theological colleges, excellent as they are in endeavouring to train efficient laymen into equally efficient priests, usually assume that the best way to know about Christianity is to study Christian books. It is the worst way, because these books are naturally biased in favour of it. It is better to study any religion by seeing what the attackers have to say against it. Then a personal judgment can be formed.

This is, I feel, the method that Chesterton adopts in his deep and original treatise, ‘Orthodoxy,’ which is more than an essay and less than a theological work.

The Chestertonian contention is that philosophers like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche have embarked on the suicide of thought, and that a later disciple to this self-destruction is Bernard Shaw.

In the same way these pseudo philosophers have attacked the Christian religion, ‘tearing the soul of Christ into silly strips labelled altruism and egoism. They are alike puzzled by His insane magnificence and His insane meekness.’

As I have said, the method to realize the worth of Christianity is to read all the attacks on it. This is what Chesterton does. In doing so he discovers that these
attacks are the one thing that demonstrate the strength of Christianity. Because the attackers reject it upon reasons that are contradictory to each other. Thus some complain that it is a gloomy religion; others go to the opposite extreme and accuse it of pointing to a state of perpetual chocolate cream; yet again it is attacked on grounds of effeminancy, it is upbraided as being fond of a sickly sentimentalism.

Thus it is attacked on opposite grounds at once. It is condemned for being pessimistic, it is blamed for being optimistic. From this position Chesterton deduces that it is the only rational religion, because it steers between the Scylla of pessimism and avoids the Charybdis of a facile optimism. Regarding presumably the early Church she has also kept from extremes. She has ignored the easy path of heresy, she has adhered to the adventurous road of orthodoxy. She has avoided the Arian materialism by dropping a Greek Iota; she has not succumbed to Eastern influences, which would have made her forget she was the Church on earth as well as in heaven. With tremendous commonsense she has remained rational and chosen the middle course, which was one of the cardinal virtues of the ancient Greek philosophers.

The Christian religion is, then, rational because attacked along irrational grounds; the Church is also reasonable because she has not been swayed by the attraction of heresy nor listened to the glib fallacies of those who always want to make her something more or something less.

The other and lesser contention of the book is the wisdom of the land of the Fairies. This is, Chesterton feels, the land where is found the philosophy of the nursery that is expressed in fairy tales—tales that every grown-up should read at Christmas.

Fairyland is for Chesterton the sunny land of commonsense. It is more, it is a place that has a very definite religion; it is, in fact, really the child’s land of Christ. Take the lesson of Cinderella, says Chesterton; it is really the teaching of the Prayer Book that the humble shall be exalted, because humility is worthy of exaltation.

Or the Sleeping Beauty. Is it not the significance of how love can bridge time? The prince would have been there to wake the princess had she slept a thousand instead of a hundred years.

Yet again the land of the Fairies is the abode of reason. If Jack is the son of a miller, then a miller is the father of Jack. It is no good in Fairyland trying to prove that two and two do not make four, but it is quite possible to imagine that the witch really did turn the unlucky prince into a pig. After all, such a procedure
is not a monopoly of the fairies. Lesser persons than princes have been turned into pigs, not by the wand of a witch, but by the wand of good or bad fortune.

‘Orthodoxy’ is probably the sanest book that Chesterton has ever written. It is, I venture to think, the work that will gain for him immortality. It is a book on the greatest of themes, the reasonableness of the Christian religion. There have been many books written to attack the Christian religion, equally many to defend it, but Chesterton has made his apology for the religion on original grounds—the contradictories of the detractors of it. ‘Orthodoxy’ goes alone with Christ into the mountain, and the eager multitudes receive the real philosophy of Chesterton.

The child who has eaten too much jam and feels that too much of a good thing is a truism is rather like the philosopher who, having studied everything, comes to the sad conviction that there is something wrong with the world. The child finds that large quantities of jam are a delusion; the philosopher discovers that the world is even more wrong than he thought it was.

Sitting in this study, Chesterton, looking out on the garden which is the world, discovers that there is something wrong with it, and it is caused by the machinations of the 1,500 odd millions of people who, like ants, crawl about its surface. ‘What’s wrong with the World?’ is the result, and a very entertaining book it is. Like many other sociological treatises it leaves us still convinced that the world is wrong, because we don’t know what we really want.

The pessimist is convinced that the world is a bad place, the optimist is sure that it can be good. That is the point of the book. Chesterton has his own ideas of what is wrong, and he says so with astonishing paradox.

When this book was written, Feminism was demanding votes, and, not getting them at once, became naughty, and tied itself to the House of Commons or pushed policemen over. Chesterton devotes a large section of this book to demanding what is the mistake of Feminism.

‘The Feminists probably agree that womanhood is under shameful tyranny in the shops and mills. I want to destroy this tyranny. They (the Feminists) want to destroy womanhood.’ They do this by attempting to drive women into the world and turn them away from the home. This is what is wrong with the woman’s world: they have it that the home is narrow, that the world is wide. The converse is the truth: woman is the star of the home. It is a pity if she has to make chains—significant word—at Cradley Heath.

Education is not for Chesterton an unqualified success; there is a mistake about it somewhere. In fact, there is ‘no such thing as education.’ Education is
not an object, it is a ‘transmission’ or an ‘inheritance.’ It means that a certain standard of conduct is passed on from generation to generation. The keynote of education for Chesterton is undoubtedly dogma, and dogma is certainly the result of a narrowing tendency.

At this present time there is a controversy about the use of our public schools. Whenever a harassed editor in Fleet Street cannot think what to put in those two spare columns, he works up a ‘stunt’ on the use or otherwise of the public schools. This is always exciting, as the public schools hardly ever see the controversy, being blissfully immersed in the military strategy of Hannibal or the political intrigues of the Caesars. Thus the controversy is conducted by those who generally think that commerce is superior to Greek, money-grubbing to good manners.

Even Chesterton must say something about these schools that are the backbone of England. Unfortunately he thinks that they are weakening the country, that the headmasters ‘are teaching only the narrowest of manners.’ But the public schools ‘manufacture gentlemen; they are factories for the making of aristocrats.’ If he is right, the more of these schools there are the better it is for the country.

It is well that he is not averse to Greek. In these days the classics are looked upon as waste of time. Political economy and profiteering are more useful. As he says, a man of the type of Carnegie would die in a Greek city. I am not sure whether this is not unfair. The real use of Greek is that it teaches culture. There is use in Plato’s philosophy; it is quite as useful as the knowledge acquired that results in peers made, not born. I don’t think Chesterton understands the public schools at all well; they are both bad and good, but at least they are very English.

He hasn’t a great deal to say for Imperialism. Imperialism is a very difficult ethic; it is not easy to say whether it is a selfish or an unselfish policy.

Thus we may quite conceivably pat ourselves on the back and say that, as English rule is good for natives, it is only right that we should keep India; but we might find that an equally good and more popular reason for doing so would be to prevent any one else having her. Thus our Imperial policy is a little selfish and a little unselfish.

For Chesterton, Imperialism is something that is both weak and perilous. It is really, he contends, a false idealism which tends to try and make people locally discontented, contented with pseudo visions of distant realms where the cities are of gold, where blue skies are never hidden by yellow fog. But is it a false idealism? If it is, it is that conception which has made men leave their homes in
England to build up the Imperial Empire which is the daughter of the Great
Imperial Island. The vision may not be always useful, but Imperialism has done
much to make England and Empire synonymous.

Business is, according to Chesterton, a nasty thing that will not wait. It hates
leisure, it has no use for brotherhood, it is one of the things that is wrong in the
world—not, of course, that business is wrong in itself, but the method. Thus he
disagrees that if a soap factory cannot be run on brotherhood lines the
brotherhood must be scrapped. He would have the converse to be better.

He contends that it is better to be without soap than without society. As a
matter of fact, society without soap would be an abomination. Society without
any brotherhood would soon cease to be a society at all. Utopia is a little soap, a
little society, with a flavouring of brotherhood in each.

Another and obviously good reason that the world is wrong is that it is only
half finished. This is a matter for extreme optimism; it is the one great thing that
makes it certain that the world will be found all right if it comes to an end. That
is, if it delays long enough for the Irish question to be settled.

This is what Chesterton contends in this fine book, that reforms are not
reforms at all, rather the same things dressed up in other clothes. Values are set
up on false standards. Women in trying to become emancipated are likely to
become slaves; the fear of the past is given over to a too delicate introspection of
the probable vices and virtues of generations not yet born.

Imperialism is liable to a false idealism, drawing men from Seven Dials to
find Utopia in Brixton. The public schools are weakening the country in some
respects. Education is not education at all; in fact, we really must start the wrong
world over again. I don’t quite see where Chesterton proposes we are to start, or
exactly how, whether backwards or forwards. Perhaps, as in ‘Orthodoxy,’ the
middle course is the happy and safe one.

‘Tremendous Trifles’ is a Chestertonian philosophy of the importance and
interest of small things. It is a remarkable thing that we never see the things that
we daily gaze upon. Chesterton finds scope for all kinds of subjects in this book,
from a ‘Piece of Chalk’ to ‘A Dragon’s Grandmother.’ Provided we believe in
dragons, there is good reason to suppose that they have grandmothers. It is not so
easy to write a good essay on the subject. Chesterton does so with great skill,
and it makes it quite certain to be so intellectual as to hate fairies is a piteous
condition.

What he brings out in this particular essay is that what modern intellectualism
has done is to make ‘the hero extraordinary, the tale ordinary,’ whereas the fairy
tale makes ‘the hero ordinary, the tale extraordinary.’

In this book of short essays it is only possible to take a few, but care has been taken to attempt to show the enormous versatility of Chesterton’s mind. It has been said quite wrongly that Chesterton cannot describe pathos. This is certainly untrue. He can so admirably describe humour that he cannot help knowing the pathetic, which is often so akin to humour. I am not sure that this ability to describe the melancholy is not to be seen in one of these essays that narrates how he travelled in a train in which there was a dead man whose end he never knew.

Perhaps there is nothing more interesting than turning out one’s pockets—all sorts of long forgotten mementoes cause a lump in the throat or a gleam in the eye; but it is very annoying, on arriving at a station where tickets are collected, to find everything that relates to your past twenty years of life and be unable to find the ticket that makes you a legitimate rider on the iron way. This is what Chesterton describes in a delightful essay.

One day, so Chesterton tells us in the ‘Riddle of the Ivy,’ he happened to be leaving Battersea, and being asked where he was going, calmly replied to ‘Battersea.’ Which is really to say that we find our way to Brixton more eagerly by way of Singapore than by way of Kennington. In a few words, it is what we mean when we say, as every traveller says at times, ‘Home, sweet home.’ I fancy this is what Mr. Chesterton means. It is a beautiful thought—a fine love of the home, a strange understanding of the wish of the traveller who once more wishes to see the old cottage before he journeys ‘across the Bar.’

The sight of chained convicts being taken to a prison causes Chesterton to essay on the ‘filthy torture’ of our prisons, the whole system of which is a ‘relic of sin.’ Perhaps he is right! But is it that the prisons are wrong, or is it that society makes criminals? After all, convicts are chained that they shall not endure a worse penalty for attempted escape. At present prisons are as necessary to the State as milk is to a baby; the thing against them is that they turn criminal men into criminal devils.

At his home in Beaconsfield, Chesterton has a wonderful toy theatre. He writes in this book a sketch about it. This toy theatre has a certain philosophy. ‘It can produce large events in a small space; it could represent the earthquake in Jamaica or the Day of Judgment.’ We must take Chesterton’s word for it. I am not convinced that the toy theatre of Chesterton has added to philosophy; I don’t think it has made any remarkable contribution to thought, nor is it, as he claims, more interesting and better than a West-end theatre; but I do believe that in having amused a few hundred children it has a place in the Book of Life—
perhaps near the name of Santa Claus.

While it is true that ‘Tremendous Trifles’ is not nearly as important as some of the Chesterton books, it is true to say that it is a remarkably pleasant book about small things that are really tremendous when we come to study them.

‘The Defendant’ is, as the title suggests, a defence of all kinds of things that are usually attacked by other people.

It takes a brave man to defend ‘penny dreadfuls.’ Chesterton assumes this rôle. He defends them on their remarkable powers of imagination. One has only to study Sexton Blake to discover the intricate psychology of that wondrous personality who can solve the foulest murder or unravel stories that the divorce courts would quail before.

There is something to be said for the skeleton so long as he doesn’t come out of his cupboard. Chesterton defends skeletons. ‘The truth is that man’s horror of the skeleton is not horror of death at all; it is that the skeleton reminds him that his appearance is shamelessly grotesque.’ But he sees no objection to this at all. After all, he says, the frog and the hippopotamus are happy. Why, then, should man dislike it that his anatomy without flesh is inelegant?

It is to be expected that Chesterton would write a defence of baby worship, because they are so ‘very serious and in consequence very happy.’ ‘The humorous look of children is perhaps the most endearing of all the bonds that hold the Cosmos together.’ Probably we are all agreed that the defence of baby worship is a desirable thing; possibly it is the only point upon which there is universal agreement with Chesterton.

‘The Defendant’ is a series of papers that are light, but conceal a depth of thought behind them. They demonstrate that there is something to be said for everything which may be a slight solution of the eternal problem that theological professors are paid to try and discover, the problem of evil. It may be that there is really no such thing, but it would be disastrous to these professors to discover this, so the dear old problem goes on from year to year.

As an essayist, Chesterton is never dull: the philosophy contained in his essays is not prosy. The only fault is that he is at times so clever that it is a little difficult to know what he means. But this really does not matter, as a shrewd critic of one of his books made it public through the Press that Chesterton did not know himself what he meant. But I wonder if he did really know?
Chapter Two

DICKENS

If there is fault to be found in Chesterton’s masterly study of Charles Dickens it lies in the fact that in parts of the book the meaning is not always clear, or, rather, it is not always so at a first reading. Whether this may be justly termed a fault depends largely upon what the reader of a critical study demands.

If he desires that he shall read Chesterton superficially and yet understand, he will be doomed to disappointment. Perhaps of all writers Chesterton must be read with the head between the hands, with a fierce determination that the meaning veiled in brilliant paradox shall be sought out.

He is not only a keen critic, he is also a deliberate commentator. The difference is fundamental. The commentator builds upon the foundation the critic has erected; he does not merely state what he thinks about a book or character, rather he explains the criticism already made.

This is the method adopted with regard to Dickens. Chesterton has written a commentary on the soul of Dickens, he has not in any strict sense written a biography; this was not necessary; the difficulty of Dickens lies in the interpretation of his work; his life, though having a great influence on his writings, has been written so often that Chesterton has refrained from building on ‘another’s foundation.’ In a word, it is an intensely original work, far more than our critic’s companion book on Browning.

As was Browning born to a world in the throes of the aftermath of the French Revolution, so was Dickens. Chesterton lays great stress on the youth of Dickens; it is only right that he should do this; the early life of Dickens was probably responsible for the wonderful genius of his art. The blacking factory that nearly killed the physical Dickens gave birth to the literary Dickens. Dickens was, in fact, born at the psychological moment, which is not to say that we are born at the unpsychological moment, but that Dickens was born at a time that allowed his natural powers to be used to the best advantage.

Chesterton feels this strongly. ‘The background of the Dickens era was just that background that was eminently suitable to him’; it was a background that needed a Dickens as much as the pagan world, with all its Greek philosophies, had needed a Christ.

He begins his study of Dickens with a keen survey of the Dickens period. ‘It
was,’ he says, ‘a world that encouraged anybody to anything. And in England and literature its living expression was Dickens. It is useless for us to attempt to imagine Dickens and his life unless we are able to imagine his confidence in common men.’

It is this supreme confidence in common men that was the keynote to the wonderful power of Dickens in making characters from those who were in a world sense undistinguished. On this position Chesterton lays great stress. It was this, he thinks, that made him an optimist. It was the same position that made Browning an optimist. It is the disbelief in the Divine image in Man that makes the cynic and the pessimist.

Swift hated men because they were capable of better things but would not realize it. Dickens knew men were kings, though ordinary men; the result was that he loved humanity. It is a queer point of psychology that with the same wish two such minds as Swift and Dickens came to the extremes of the emotions of love and hate.

In some ways Dickens was more than a maker of books, he was a maker of worlds; he tried to make ‘not only a book but a cosmos.’ This may be a curious and obscure kind of clericalism that popularly expresses itself as an effort to run with the hare and follow with the hounds, but is really an heroic attempt to see both sides of the question, and is not a cheap pandering after popularity.

Many critics have disliked Dickens because of this tendency of universalism, a tendency liable to intrude on minds of a giant intellect and a ready sympathy. Chesterton does not think that Dickens was right in this attitude of universalism, and says so with, I think, a certain amount of cheap disdain. ‘He was inclined to be a literary Whiteley, a universal provider.’ Really Dickens wanted to have a say about everything, in which he is strangely like Chesterton.

The result of this was a result that meant the greatest value: it meant and was ‘David Copperfield.’ The book was for Chesterton a classic, and it was so because it was an autobiography. It is in this work that Dickens makes his defence of the rather exaggerated situations in some of his books, for in this book Dickens proves that his greatest romance is based on the experiences of his own life. ‘David Copperfield is the great answer of a romancer to the realists. David says in effect, “What! you say that the Dickens tales are too purple really to have happened. Why, this is what happened to me, and it seemed the most purple of all. You say that the Dickens heroes are too handsome and triumphant! Why, no prince or paladin in Ariosto was ever so handsome and triumphant as the head boy seemed to me walking before me in the sun. You say the Dickens
villains are too black. Why, there was no ink in the Devil’s inkstand black enough for my own stepfather when I had to live in the same house with him.”

This is the point that Chesterton brings out so well. The Dickens characters are not overdrawn because, though they move between book covers, their originals have moved on the face of the earth; they have moved with Dickens and he has made them his own. His brilliant apology for this alleged ‘overdrawing’ is one of the most effective replies ever penned to superior Dickens detractors. It is effective because it is true; it is true because it is obvious that Dickens created that which lay hidden in his own mind, the misery of his factory days.

It is, I think, with this view in mind that Chesterton pays so much attention to that period of Dickens’ life which he spent in the blacking factory, with its crude noise, its blatant vulgarity, its vile language that left the small boy Dickens’ sick, but with a sickness that discovered his literary genius. The factory was the germ that made the great writer. Chesterton is a true critic of Dickens because he has this somewhat singular insight of seeing the importance of the early miseries of Dickens’ life with regard to their influence on his literary output and his queerly favoured delineation of common folks, the sort of people we always meet but hardly ever talk about because we are foolish enough to think them ordinary.

It is from the account of the early life of Dickens that Chesterton gently leads us to the birth of the immortal Mr. Pickwick, that supreme Englishman who is a byword amongst even those who scarcely know Dickens. The birth pangs of the advent of Pickwick was a sharp quarrel ‘that did no good to Dickens, and was one of those which occurred far too frequently in his life.’

Without any hesitation for Chesterton, ‘Pickwick Papers’ is Dickens’ finest achievement, which is a pleasant enough problem if we happen to remember that he also wrote ‘David Copperfield.’ Possibly it is really unfair to compare them. ‘Pickwick Papers’ is not in the strict sense a novel; ‘David Copperfield’ is a novel even if it is an autobiography. At any rate Pickwick was a fairy, and as fairies are pretty elastic he probably was in that category of beings, but he was even more a royal fairy, none other than the ‘fairy prince.’

In Pickwick, Dickens made a great discovery, which was that he could write ordinary stuff like the ‘Sketches by Boz,’ and also could produce Mr. Pickwick and write ‘David Copperfield,’ which was to say that Dickens discovered he had a good chance of being the Shakespeare of literature.

‘It is in “Pickwick Papers” that Dickens became a mythologist rather than a novelist; he dealt with men who were gods.’ That is, no doubt, that they became household gods; in other words, as familiar as the characters of Shakespeare.
There is one tremendous outstanding characteristic of Dickens which Chesterton brings out with considerable force. It is that above all things Dickens created characters. It is almost as if the setting of his books were on a stage where the environment changes but the essentials of the characters remain unchanged.

The story is almost subordinated to the drawing of the principal character; it is almost a modern idea of the psychoanalytical kind of novel that our young novelists love to draw. But still there is the great difference that the characters of Dickens pursue their own way regardless of the trend of events round them.

Naturally the modern novel is inferior to some of Dickens’ works, but they do not deserve the hard things Chesterton says about them. Thus he remarks in passing that the modern novel is ‘devoted to the bewilderment of a weak young clerk who cannot decide which woman he wants to marry or which new religion he believes in; we still give this knock-kneed cad the name of hero.’

This is, I think, unfair. The modern novel is very often still a good healthy love tale; the hero is more often than not a gentleman who has not the brains to be a cad; his trouble about marriage is that he wants to marry the right woman to their mutual well being; he is neither a cad nor a hero, but an ordinary Englishman whom we need not walk half a mile to see; he usually marries a girl who can be seen in any suburb or at any church bazaar. I have dwelt on this at some length, as Chesterton has a tendency to despise modern novelists while being one himself.

At this period, when ‘Pickwick’ had once and for all brought fame to Dickens, it will be interesting to see why Dickens attained the enormous popularity he did. He was, our critic thinks, a ‘great event not only in literature but also in history.’

He considers that Dickens was popular in a sense that we of the twentieth century cannot understand. In fact, he goes so far as to say that there are no really popular authors to-day.

This is probably not entirely true. When we say an author is popular we do not mean that necessarily, as Chesterton seems to suggest, he is a ‘best seller’; rather we call him popular in the sense that a large number of people find pleasure in reading him, even if the subject is not a pleasant one. Dickens was popular in a different way: he was read by a public who wished his story might never end. They not only loved his books, they loved his characters even more. No matter that there might be five sub-stories running alongside of the main one, the central character retained the public affection. His characters were known outside their particular stories, and not only that, this was by no means confined
to the principal ones.

They were known, as Chesterton points out, as Sherlock Holmes is known today. But even so there is again a difference. People do not speak of the minor characters of Conan Doyle’s tales as they do, for instance, of Smike.

It is now convenient to turn to the Christmas literature of Dickens. I am convinced that Chesterton has very badly misconstrued the character of Scrooge, that delightful person whose one virtue was consistency.

Above everything, Scrooge was consistent; he hated Christmas as we hate anything that does not agree with our temperament. Merry Christmas was nonsense to him because he did not know how to be merry. He was a cold, cynical bachelor, and at that, so far, was perfectly within the law, moral and legal.

But Chesterton, by rather an unfortunate attempt to be too original, has turned him into a filthy hypocrite who needed no appearances of spirits whatever; for he says of Scrooge, ‘He is only a crusty old bachelor, and had, I strongly suspect, given away turkeys secretly all his life.’

When Chesterton says that Scrooge gave away turkeys secretly all his life it is merely saying that the whole attitude of Scrooge to life was a silly and unmeaning pose, which makes him ridiculous, and robs the ‘Christmas Carol’ of all its real worth, that of the miraculous conversion of Scrooge.

But, then, the actual story does not mean much for Chesterton: ‘the repentance of Scrooge is highly improbable.’ If it is true that Scrooge really did give away turkeys secretly, then it is quite obvious that Scrooge never did repent; he was past it. But I fancy that Chesterton has erred badly here; he has attempted without success to put a secret meaning into a simple and beautiful story.

‘Chimes’ is, for Chesterton, an attack on cant. It was a story written by Dickens to protest against all he hated in the nature of oppression. Dickens hated the vulgar cant that only helps to bring self-advertisement: the ethic that the poor must listen to the rich, not because the rich are the best law-givers, but because society is at present so constituted that no other method can be adopted.

Dickens loved the attitude the poor always take to Christmas; it is that attitude which is the proof that at its bedrock humanity is extremely lovable. Chesterton is entirely in agreement with Dickens on this matter. ‘There is nothing,’ he says, ‘upon which the poor are more criticized than on the point of spending large sums on small feasts; there is nothing in which they are more right.’

Dickens did not in any way forget that the real spirit of Christmas is to be found in the cheery group round the blazing fire. ‘The Cricket on the Hearth’ is a
pleasant tale about all that we associate with Christmas, that very thing that has made Hearth and Christmas synonymous; yet Chesterton considers this one of the weakest of the Dickens’ stories, which is a surprising criticism for a writer who really loves Christmas as he does.

In a later period of Dickens, Chesterton informs us of his brief entry into the complex and exciting world that has its headquarters in Fleet Street. For a short period Dickens occupied the editorship of the Daily News, but the environment was not a very congenial one. Dickens was unsettled with that strange restlessness that seizes all literary men at some time or other. This was the time that saw the publication of ‘Dombey and Son.’ Chesterton thinks that the essential genius found its most perfect expression in this work though the treatment is grotesque. This book is almost, so our critic thinks, ‘a theological one: it attempts to distinguish between the rough pagan devotion of the father and the gentler Christian affection of the mother.’

The grotesque manner of treatment of this work was as natural as the employment of the grotesque by Browning. Dickens must work in his own way, in the manner that suited his inmost soul; he could not be made to write to order. In a brilliant paradox Chesterton says of ‘Dombey and Son’: the ‘story of Florence Dombey is incredible, although it is true,’ which is what many people feel about Christianity. ‘Dombey and Son’ was the outlet for that curious psychology of Dickens which could get the best out of a pathetic incident by approaching it from a grotesque angle. It came, as Chesterton points out in his own inimitable way, ‘into the inner chamber by coming down the chimney.’ Which demonstrates the ever nearness of pathos to humour, of the absurd to the pathetic.

It will not be out of place to refer at this time to some of the defects with which people have charged Dickens. Chesterton does not agree with the critics on these points, but admits that these charges have been levelled against Dickens. It will be advisable to take one or two examples of these alleged flaws.

There is that most popular thing of which Dickens is accused, that of exaggeration. Many people are quite incredulous that there could ever have existed such a character as Little Nell. Chesterton, however, thinks that Dickens did know a girl of this nature, and that Little Nell was based on her. Little Nell is not really more improbable than ‘Eric,’ the famous hero of Dean Farrar, and he was certainly based on a living boy.

People who live in these enlightened days are piously shocked at the amount of drinking described by Dickens. Well-bred and garrulous ladies have
shuddered at the scenes described, and have declared that Dickens was at least fond of the Bacchanalian element. So he was, but the reason was not that he loved hard drinking, but that, as our critic brings out, drinking was the symbol of hospitality as roast beef is the symbol of a Sunday in a thousand English rectories. As Dickens described the social life of England he could not leave out its most characteristic feature and shudder in pious horror that the red wine dyed old England a merry crimson.

It would be no doubt an exaggeration to call Dickens a socialist. What he saw was that there was a mass of beings that was called humanity, that the two ends of the political pole were indifferent to this mass. The party to which a man gave his allegiance did not matter as long as that party worked for man’s ultimate good. Chesterton is quite sure that Dickens was not a socialist; he was not the kind that ranted at street corners and dined in secret at the Ritz, nor was he of the kind who said all men are equal but I am a little better. He was a socialist in the sense that he hated oppression of any kind.

‘Hard Times’ strikes a note that is a little short of being harsh. The reason that Dickens may have exaggerated Bounderby is that he really disliked him. The Dickensian characters undoubtedly suffered from their delineator’s likes and dislikes.

About this time Dickens wrote a book that was unique for him; it was a book that dealt with the French Revolution, and was called ‘The Tale of Two Cities.’ Chesterton does not think that Dickens really understood this gigantic upheaval; in fact, he says his attitude to it was quite a mistaken one. Even, thinks our critic, Carlyle didn’t know what it meant. Both see it as a bloody riot, both are mistaken. The reason that Carlyle and Dickens didn’t know all about it was that they had the good fortune to be Englishmen; a very good supposition that Chesterton has still something to learn of that Revolution.

After all, the main point of ‘The Tale of Two Cities’ is the exquisite pathos of it. Whether its attitude to the French Revolution is absolutely accurate does not matter very much for the reader who is not a keen historical student.

With ‘Hard Times’ and ‘A Tale of Two Cities’ Dickens has struck a graver note. This is peculiarly emphasized in ‘Great Expectations.’ This story is ‘characterized by a consistency and quietude of individuality which is rare in Dickens.’ It is really a book with a moral—that life in the limelight is not always synonymous with getting the best out of it. Really, the hero behaves in a sneakish manner. Probably Dickens doesn’t like him, and the writer is still on the stern side.
In 1864, so Chesterton tells us, Dickens was in a merrier mood, and published 'Our Mutual Friend,' a book that has, as our critic says, 'a thoroughly human hero and a thoroughly human villain.' This work is 'a satire dealing with the whims and pleasures of the leisured class.' But this is by no means a monopoly of the so-called idle rich: the hardworking middle and poorer classes have whims and pleasures in a like manner, but have not so much opportunity in indulging in them.

As I have indicated, the story is not the principal part of the Dickens' literature; it is the drawing of characters to which he pays so much attention. It will not be out of place at this time to see what our critic has to say with regard to this tendency of Dickens. It is an essential of Dickens, and is therefore of vast import to any critique on him.

The essence of Dickens, for Chesterton, is that he makes kings out of common men: those folks who are the ordinary people of this strange, fascinating world, those who have no special claim to a place in the stars, those who, when they die, do not have two lines in any but a local paper, those who are common but are never commonplace.

There is a vast difference between the common and the commonplace, as Chesterton points out. Death is common to all, yet it is never commonplace; it is in its very essence a grand and noble thing, because it is a proof of our common humanity; it gives the lie that the Pope is of more importance than the dustman; it makes the busy editor equal to the newsboy shouting the papers under his office windows.

The common man is he who does not receive any special distinction: universities do not compete to do him honour, his name is but mentioned in a small circle. These are those of whom Dickens wrote. ‘It is,’ says Chesterton, ‘in private life that we find the great characters. They are too great to get into the public world.’ They are people who are natural—natural in a sense that the holders of high office never can be. Dickens could only write of natural people, so he wrote of common men: ‘You will find him adrift as an impecunious commercial traveller like Micawber; you will find him but one of a batch of silly clerks like Swiveller; you will find him as an unsuccessful actor like Crumple; you will find him as an unsuccessful doctor like Sawyer; you will always find the rich and reeking personality where Dickens found it among the poor.’

Not only were the characters Dickens chose common men, they were also ‘great fools,’ because Chesterton will have us believe that a man can be entirely great while he is entirely foolish. It is no doubt in the spiritual sense so
admirably expressed in the Pauline Epistles, where ‘foolish in the eyes of the world but wise before God’ is a condition that is of merit.

‘Mr. Toots is great because he is foolish.’ He is great because he has a soul that glorifies his weak and foolish body, not that he is great because, ipso facto, he is foolish.

There is a great and permanent value in the writings of Dickens. I cannot do better than quote our critic: ‘If we are to look for lessons, here at least are the last and deepest lessons of Dickens. It is in our own daily life that we are to look for the portents and the prodigies. This is the truth, not merely of the fixed figures of our life, the wife, the husband, the fool that fills the day. Every day we neglect Tootses and Swivellers, Guppyys and Joblings, Simmeryys and Flashers. This is the real gospel of Dickens, the inexhaustible opportunities offered by the liberty and variety of man. It is when we pass our own private gate and open our own secret door that we step into the land of the giants.’

It will now be convenient to consider the question of the attitude of our critic to the ‘Mystery of Edwin Drood,’ that tale that has produced one of those literary mysteries that are so dear to a number of folks of the kind who would be disappointed were the problem to be finally solved. ‘The Mystery of Edwin Drood’ was cut short by the sudden death that fell upon Dickens on a warm June night some half century ago.

For Chesterton the book ‘might have proved to be the most ambitious that Dickens ever planned.’ It is non-Dickensian in the sense that its value depends entirely on a story. The workmanship is very fine. The book was purely and simply a detective story. ‘Bleak House’ was the nearest approach to its style, but the mystery there was easy to unravel. It was as though Dickens wished in ‘Edwin Drood’ to make one last ‘splendid and staggering’ appearance before the curtain rang down, not to be rung up again until the last Easter morning.

‘Yes,’ says Chesterton, ‘there were many other Dickenses, ‘an industrious Dickens, a public spirited Dickens, but the last one (that is Edwin Drood) was the great one. The wild epitaph of Mrs. Sapsea, “Canst thou do likewise?” should be the serious epitaph of Dickens.’

It is more than fifty years since Dickens died. What is the future of Dickens likely to be? At least, Chesterton has no doubt of the permanent influence of Dickens; he is as sure of immortality as is Shakespeare. The kings of the earth die, yet their works remain; the princes pass on but are not entirely forgotten; writers write and in their turn sleep; but there is that to which in every age we inscribe the word Immortal. It is enough to say that Dickens is immortal because
he is Dickens. There is a further reason, that he proved what all the world had been saying, that common humanity is a holy thing. To quote Chesterton: ‘He did for the world what the world could not do for itself.’ Dickens’ creation was poetry—it dealt with the elementals; it is therefore permanent.

In final words he says, ‘We shall not be further troubled with the little artists who found Dickens too sane for their sorrows and too clear for their delights. But we have a long way to travel before we get back to what Dickens meant; and the passage is a long, rambling English road, a twisting road such as Mr. Pickwick travelled.’

‘But the road leads to eternity, because the inn is at the end of the road, and at that inn is a goodly company of common men who are immortal because Dickens made them. Here we shall meet Dickens and all his characters, and when we shall drink again it shall be from great flagons in the tavern at the end of the world.’

What, then, is the essential part of Chesterton’s study of Charles Dickens? It is certainly not a biography; it is for all practical purposes a keen study of what Dickens was, what he wrote, why he wrote as he did, why he has a place in literature no one else has.

There are faults in the book—it would be a poor book if it had none. At times I think Chesterton allows his genius to overcome his critical judgment. Particularly is this so in his strange misconstruction of the character of Scrooge. But this merely demonstrates yet once more that Dickens, like Christ, is unique, because no one has ever completely understood him.

The book is a tribute by a great writer to a greater writer, by a great man to a great man, by a complex personality to a complex personality; above all it is a tribute by a lover of the things of the ‘doorstep’ to a writer who has made the doorstep and the street the road to heaven, because the beings who pass along have been made immortal.

When the critics of Dickens meet at the inn there will be none more worthy of a place close to the Master Writer than Chesterton.
Chapter Three

THACKERAY

THERE are no doubt thousands of people who would be annoyed to be thought the reverse of well read who nevertheless know Thackeray only as a name. They know that he was a really great English novelist—they may even know that he lived as a contemporary of Dickens—but they do not know a line of any of his works.

In lesser manner Dickens is unknown to very many people of the present day who could tell you intelligently of every modern book that is produced. The reason is, I think, one that is not so generally thought of as might be expected.

It is often said that Thackeray and Dickens are out of date, that they have had their day, that this era of tube trains and other abominations cannot fall into the background of lumbering stage coaches.

This is, I think, a profound and grave error. It is an error because it presupposes that human interest changes with the advent of different means of transport: that Squeers is no longer of interest because he would now travel to Yorkshire by the Great Northern Railway and would have lunch in a luncheon car instead of inside a four-horse stage coach.

The fundamental reason that modern people do not read these great authors is that they are not encouraged to do so. The very best way to instil a love of Thackeray into the modern world is to make the modern world read just so much of him that its voracious appetite is sharpened to wish for more.

In an altogether admirable series of the masters of literature Thackeray finds a place, and treatment of him is left to Chesterton, who writes a fine introductory ‘Biography’ and then takes picked passages from his writings. This is, I think, the most useful means possible of popularizing an author. It requires a good deal of pluck in these days to sit down and steadily pursue a way through a long book of Thackeray unless it has been proved, by the perusal of a selected passage, that riches in the book warrant the act of courage in beginning the work.

In this chapter it will be convenient to pay special attention to the introduction that is so ably contributed by Chesterton. It will only be possible to refer to the passages he has selected from Thackeray, and the reader must judge of the merit of the choosing. It is one of the hardest things possible to choose representative passages from a great writer. Shall he choose those that display the literary
qualities of the writer, shall he choose those which depict his powers of drama, shall he select those which bring out the humour of the writer, shall he pick at random and let the passage stand or fall on its own merits? These are questions that must be faced in a work of the nature of Chesterton’s Thackeray. What the method has been will, I hope, be clear at the end of this chapter.

It was Thackeray’s expressed wish that there should be no biography written of him, a position that might indicate extreme modesty, colossal conceit, or distinct cowardice. Whatever the reason, it has not been entirely obeyed, and rightly. A man of the power of Thackeray cannot live without the world being in some way better; it is only good that those who never knew him in the flesh should at least know him in a book. It is not enough that, as Chesterton points out, he ‘was of all novelists the most autobiographical,’ which is not to say that he wrote unending personal confessions with a very large I, but rather that his books were drawn from the experiences of his life, a field that is productive of the richest literary worth.

Thackeray was born, we are told, in the year 1811, so that he was a year old when the world received two babies who were like ten thousand other babies, except that they happened to be Browning and Dickens. It was the time when the world trembled, because that mighty soldier Napoleon stood with arms folded, waiting to strike, it knew not where. It was the time when military genius reached its height, a height that could be only brought low by one thing, and that was an English General with a long nose and a cocked hat.

Although Thackeray was born in Calcutta, he was as English as he could possibly be. But he did not forget his Eastern beginning. ‘A certain vague cosmological quality was always mixed with his experience, and it was his favourite boast that he had seen men and cities like Ulysses.’ Which is to say that he had not only seen the world, he had felt it; if he had not seen a one-eyed giant, he had at least seen a two-eyed Hindu.

His early life followed the ordinary life of a thousand other boys born of Anglo-Indian parents; that was, he went to school, where ‘a girl broke his heart and a boy broke his nose,’ and he discovered that the nose took longer to mend.

At Cambridge, Chesterton tells us, Thackeray found that it was a quite easy thing to sit down and play cards and lose £1,500 in an evening, a fact that very probably was more useful to him than twenty degrees. Trinity College was the Thackeray College: it has had no more famous son. It was said that Thackeray could order a dinner in every language in Europe, which is to say he could have dined in comfort in any restaurant in Soho.
From Cambridge, we learn, he made his way to the Bar, and at the same time wrote articles in the hope that some editor might keep them from the waste-paper basket. Chesterton tells us an interesting legend that about this time Thackeray offered to illustrate the books of Dickens. The offer was declined, which he thinks was ‘a good thing for Dickens’ books and a good thing for Thackeray’s.’ Whether Thackeray ever really did meet Dickens does not matter much; it is at least picturesque; ‘it affects the imagination as much as the meeting with Napoleon.’

There has always been what is for Chesterton a silly discussion—a controversy as to whether Thackeray was a cynic. This was because he happened to write first about villains, then about heroes; villains are always more interesting than heroes, and not infrequently are much better mannered. A cynic is a person who doesn’t take the trouble to find the motives for things, or he takes it for granted that the motives are never disinterested ones. To say that Thackeray was a cynic because he drew a large number of villains is as untrue as to say Swift was a cynic because he wrote satire. Thackeray wrote about villains because he wished to also write about heroes; Swift was satirical because he had the intelligence to see that his contemporaries were fools when they might have been wise. The cynics are the people of to-day who write books which attribute low motives to every one, which turn love into lust, which care not what is written so long as it can be made certain that there is nothing in the world which has not a hidden meaning.

The first appearance of Thackeray in literature was in ‘Fraser’s Magazine,’ under the pseudo name of Michael Angelo Titmarsh. It is on these unimportant papers that Chesterton thinks was based the attack on Thackeray for being a cynic.

In passing, it is not necessary to say more than that Thackeray’s marriage ended in a horrible manner: Mrs. Thackeray was sent to an asylum. ‘I would do it over again,’ said Thackeray; which was a ‘fine thing to say.’ It was really carrying out ‘for better or worse,’ which often enough really means for better only.

It will now be well at once to plunge into the very heart of Thackeray, that heart which beat beneath the huge, gaunt frame. The two books which have made his name famous, and what Chesterton thinks of them, must be now gone into.

‘The Book of Snobs’ was one of those literary rarities that has genius in its very name. No one probably really thinks himself a snob; every one likes to read
of one. Thackeray brought snobbishness to a classic. There had been books of scoundrels, there had been books of heroes, there had been books of nincompoops, now there was a book of those people who abound in every community, and who are snobs.

‘This work was much needed and very admirably done. The solemn philosophic framework, the idea of treating snobbishness as a science, was original and sound; for snobbishness is indeed a disease in our Society.’

Unfortunately Chesterton is not nearly hard enough on snobbishness. Were it a disease, it might be excusable as being at times unavoidable; it is nothing of the sort, it is a deliberate thing that undermines society more than anything; it is entirely spontaneous, and flourishes in every community, from the Church to the Jockey Club.

‘Aristocracy does not have snobs any more than democracy’; but this ‘Thackeray was too restrained and early Victorian to see.’ There are at the present day a great number of people who will not see that Bolshevism is as snobbish as Suburbia, that the poor man in the Park Lodge is as much a snob as his master, who only knows the county folks. Snobbery is not the monopoly of any one set; even also is it, as Thackeray says, ‘a mean admiration’ that thinks it is better to be a ‘made’ peer than an honest gardener.

‘The true source of snobs in England was the refusal to take one side or the other in the crisis of the French Revolution.’

The title of ‘Vanity Fair’ was an inspiration. It gives the ideas of the disharmonies that can be found in any market place in any English market town on any English market day. It brings out ‘the irrelevancy of Thackeray.’ A good motto for the book is, for Chesterton, that attributed to Cardinal Newman: ‘Evil always fails by overleaping its aim and good by falling short of it.’ Our critic feels that the critics have been unfair to Thackeray with respect to their denouncement of the character of Amelia Sedley as being much too soft, whereas Chesterton thinks she was really a fool, which is the logical outcome of being the reverse of hard.

But Amelia was soft in a very delightful way. She was ‘open to all emotions as they came’—in fact, she was a fool who was wise because she has retained her power of happiness, while the hard Rebecca has arrived at hell, ‘the hell of having all outward forces open, but all receptive organs closed.’

It is necessary again to refer to the charge of cynicism that is levelled against Thackeray. The mistake is, as our critic points out, ‘taking a vague word and applying it precisely.’ It all depends upon what cynicism really means. ‘If it
means a war on comfort, then Thackeray was, to his eternal credit, a cynic’; ‘if it means a war on virtue, then Thackeray, to his eternal honour, was the reverse of a cynic.’ His object is to show that silly goodness is better than clever vice. As I have indicated, the long and the short of the matter is that Thackeray created a lot of villains, and has therefore been called a cynic by those who don’t even know what the word means, or that there is a literary blessedness in the making of villains to bring out the more excellent virtues of the heroes.

From these two monumental works that were original in every way and might almost be called propaganda, Thackeray passed on to a novel which bore the name of ‘Pendennis.’ It was ‘a novel with nothing else but a hero, only that the hero is not very heroic,’ which makes him all the more interesting, for it makes him all the more human.

But Pendennis is more than a man—he is a type or symbol. He is ‘the old mystical tragedian of the Middle Ages, Everyman.’ It is an epic, because it celebrates the universal man with all his glorious failings and glorious virtues. The love of Pendennis for Miss Fotheringay is a different thing to the ordinary love of man for woman; it is rather the love that is in every man for every woman. This is what I think Chesterton means when he says ‘it is the veritable Divine disease, which seems a part of the very health of youth.’

The Everyman of the Middle Ages was a symbol of what man really was. Chesterton feels that every outside force that came to Everyman had to be abnormal—for instance, ‘Death had to be bony’—so he contends in ‘Pendennis’ that the shapes that intrude on the life of Arthur Pendennis have aggressive and allegorical influences.

‘Pendennis’ is an epic because it celebrates not the strength of man but his weakness. In the character of Major Pendennis, Chesterton feels that Thackeray did a great work, because he showed that the life of the so-called man of the world is not the gay and careless one that fiction depicts. It is the religious people who can afford to be careless. ‘If you want carelessness you must go to the martyrs.’ The reason is fairly obvious. The worldling has to be careful, as he wants to remain in the world; the religious man, of whom the martyr was the true prototype, can afford to be careless; he is not necessarily careless of life, but he can put things at their proper value. The martyr facing the lions in the Roman arena knew what life really was; the worldly woman spending her life trying to be in the company of titled people has no real idea of the value of it. It is the religious people who know the world; it is the worldly people who know nothing of it.
With the publication of ‘Pendennis’ the reputation of Thackeray reached that position which is sought by all authors, that of being able to write a book that should not, on publication, be put to the indignity of being asked who the writer was. Thackeray was now in the delightful position of being well established, a position that very often results in careless and poor work. It has been said with some truth that once a writer is established he can write anything he likes. This is to an extent true, and such work may even be published and fairly popular, but he will find sooner or later that his influence is on the wane.

In the ‘Newcomes’ Thackeray drew a character in Colonel Newcome, to whom was given the highest of literary honours, that of being spoken of apart from the book—I mean in the way that people speak of Micawber or Scrooge, almost unconsciously, without really having the actual work in which the character appears in mind. Of this book Chesterton says ‘the public has largely forgotten all the Newcomes except one, the Colonel who has taken his place with Don Quixote, Sir Roger de Coverley, Uncle Toby, and Mr. Pickwick.’

Chesterton feels that Thackeray at times falls into the trick common to many writers, that of repeating himself, a trick that is natural, as it does seem in some ways that the human mind, like history, is apt to move in circles. The reason was that in some way Thackeray became tired of Barnes Newcome; the result was that from being a convincing villain he develops into a stereotyped one, the type who fires pistols into the air and is the squire’s runaway son, so often found at the Lyceum.

If Thackeray ‘sprawled’ in the Newcomes he atones for this in ‘Esmond,’ if any atonement is needed for sprawling, which is probably only that Thackeray felt that there is nothing so elastic and sprawling as a human person, whether he be a villain or the reverse.

For Chesterton, ‘Esmond’ is in the modern sense a work of art, which is to say that it was a book that could be read anywhere. ‘It had no word that might not have been used at the court of Queen Anne.’ It is a highly romantic tale, but it is a sad story. It is a great Queen Anne romance; but, ‘there broods a peculiar conviction that Queen Anne is dead.’ The whole tale moves round a complicated situation in which a young man loves a mother and her daughter, and finally marries the mother. This work is, for Chesterton, Thackeray’s ‘most difficult task.’ It is difficult for the reason that the situation of the tale is placed between possibilities of grace and possibilities even of indecency. It is not hard to write a graceful tale, it is easy to write a loose story; it is extremely difficult to write a story that may by a stroke of the pen be either beautiful or merely sordid. But
Thackeray manipulates the keys of the tale so that ‘it moves like music,’ an extremely apt metaphor, where harmonies can be made disharmonies by a single note.

It is a strange fact that a sequel is seldom to be compared to its forerunner: ‘Tom Brown’s Schooldays’ is of a schoolboy who is an eternal type; ‘Tom Brown at Oxford’ is a poor book that does not in the least understand Oxford. The fact is, I think, that an author cannot be inspired twice on the same subject—the gods give but sparingly, their gifts do not fall as the rains.

The sequel to ‘Esmond’ that Thackeray wrote, ‘The Virginians,’ is an ‘inadequate sequel,’ which is not to say that it is a poor book, but rather that it is an unnecessary one. Yet, as Chesterton says, ‘Thackeray never struck a smarter note than when, in “The Virginians,” he created the terrible little Yankee Countess of Castlewood.’ In the same way as ‘The Virginians’ was a sequel to ‘Esmond,’ so ‘Philip’ was a sequel (also an inadequate one) to the ‘Newcomes.’

It is strange that in two things at least Thackeray’s life followed the same course as Dickens. Both occupied the editorial chair: Dickens that of the Daily News, Thackeray that of the Cornhill Magazine. Both left unfinished works: Dickens that of ‘The Mystery of Edwin Drood,’ Thackeray that of ‘Denis Duval.’

Thackeray’s last work, ‘Lovell the Widower,’ is ‘a very clever sketch, but as a novel is rather drawn out.’ ‘The Roundabout Papers’ make very pleasant reading. In one ‘he compares himself to a pagan conqueror driving in his chariot up the Hill of Coru, with a slave behind him to remind him that he is only mortal.’ In 1863, suddenly, Thackeray died, seven years before Dickens also passed away.

Chesterton has in the space of a short introduction given a very clear account of the chief characteristics of Thackeray’s works; it is no easy matter to give in a few lines the essence of a great novel, and Chesterton is not always the most concise of writers. It will now be convenient to take a few of the characteristics of Thackeray and observe what he says of them.

At once he is aware of the fact that there is no writer from whom it is more difficult to make extracts than from Thackeray. The reason is that Thackeray worked by ‘diffuseness of style.’ If he wished to be satirical about a character he was not so directly; rather he worked his way to the inside of the character, got to know all about it, and then began to be satirical. This is what Chesterton feels about the matter; it is no doubt the fairest way of being satirical and the most effective. Many people and writers are satirical without first of all demonstrating
upon what grounds they have the right to be so. Satire is a wholly laudable thing if it is directed in a fair minded manner, but if it is only an excuse for bitter cynicism it is altogether contemptible. Thus he says of the Thackerean treatment of ‘Vanity Fair,’ ‘he was attacking “Vanity Fair” from the inside.’ It comes to this: if you want to make an extract from Thackeray you must dive about all over the place to make apparent irrelevancy become relevancy.

If the use of the grotesque was a strength of Browning (as Chesterton contends against other critics), so in the case of Thackeray that which some critics have held to be a weakness—I mean his ‘irrelevancy’—is for our critic a strength. It was a strength, because it was ‘a very delicate and even cunning literary approach.’ It is the perfect art of Thackeray to get the right situation, not by an assumption of it, but by so approaching it that there is no way out, which is arriving at the situation by the fairest means possible.

‘No other novelist ever carried to such perfection as Thackeray the art of saying a thing without saying it. Thus he may say that a man drinks too much, yet it may be false to say that he drinks.’ What he did was not to say that a man had arrived at such and such a state, but rather that things must change. If, as Chesterton says, Miss Smith finds marriage the reverse of the honeymoon, Thackeray does not say that the marriage is a failure, but that joy cannot last forever; that if there are roses there are also thorns. It is an admirable method, far better than saying a thing straight out. It is better to tell a man who is a cad that there is such a thing as being a gentleman, than to tell him he is a cad.

In his later life Thackeray was inclined to imitate himself. It is, I think, that the human brain is prone to move in circles. In the case of Thackeray, as our critic points out, in later days he used his rambling style, and, as was to be expected, he rather lost himself. ‘He did not merely get into a parenthesis, he never got out of it,’ which is to say that as Thackeray got older he inherited the tendencies of old age.

I have said earlier in this chapter that the charge against Thackeray of cynicism was one that was founded on a false premise. The charge that his irrelevancy was a weakness is based on another false but popular premise, that the direct method is always the best. It is usually the worst. It is the worst in warfare, it is the worst in literature, but it is possibly the best in literary criticism.

Thackeray had another quality that has laid him open to adverse criticism; that is, his ‘perpetual reference to the remote past.’ This repeated reference to the past may be a matter of conceit, or it may be that the influence of the past is genuinely felt. The reason that, as Chesterton points out, Thackeray referred so
much to the remote past, was that he wished it to be known that ‘there was nothing new under the sun’; not even, as our critic says, ‘the sunstroke.’ Chesterton admits that at times Thackeray carried this tendency to an excess; also Thackeray wanted to show that the oldest thing in the world was its youth. Thus in writing of a fashionable drawing-room in Mayfair, if he referred to some classic, it was to ‘remind people how many débutantes had come out since the age of Horace.’ It was quite a different thing to the pompous bishop quoting Greek at the squire’s house to show that his doctor’s degree, though an honorary one, had some classical learning behind it, or the small boy translating Horace to avoid the headmaster’s cane. In the case of the bishop and the schoolboy, the use of the classics is, on the one hand, pomposity; on the other, discretion. In the case of Thackeray it was a reverence for the past, that it was a very large part of the present.

There are, then, roughly three main characteristics of Thackeray: his irrelevancy, his rambling style, and his frequent reference to the past. All these, Chesterton makes it clear, are matters in which the strength of Thackeray lies. Not that they are free always from exaggerations. Sometimes Thackeray became lost in his irrelevancy, sometimes he became almost unintelligible in his rambling style, now and then his use of ancient quotation became irritating. ‘Above all things, Thackeray was receptive. The world imposed on Thackeray, and Dickens imposed on the world.’ But it could not be put more truly than that Thackeray represents, in that gigantic parody called genius, the spirit of the Englishman in repose. ‘This spirit is the idle embodiment of all of us; by his weakness we shall fail, and by his enormous sanities we shall endure.’ This is the crux of the matter which Chesterton brings out, that the weaknesses of Thackeray are his strength. He loved liberty, not because it meant restraint from law, but because he ‘was a novelist’; he was open to all the influences round him, not because he had no standpoint, but because he could see merit in selection; he had an open mind, but knew when to shut it.

The passages selected from the various works have been chosen with care. It was evidently by no means an easy task. The passage chosen to show Colonel Newcome in the ‘Cave of Harmony’ gives in one poignant incident his character; the selection from ‘Pendennis’ does much the same. In the passage from ‘Esmond’ the story of the duel is a fine selection; the chapter on ‘Some Country Snobs’ is an apt choosing; the celebrated ‘Essay on George IV’ demonstrates Thackeray in a very different mood. The ‘Fall of Becky Sharp,’ taken from ‘Vanity Fair,’ has not been included without forethought.
Of Thackeray’s poems, Chesterton has included the most significant, and not without due ‘The Cane-Bottomed Chair’ finds a prominent place.

Enough has been said to show that Chesterton is not a critic of Thackeray who has no discrimination in choosing from his works. He knows what Thackeray was, wherein lay his strength and weakness. He has added a worthy companion to his fuller works on Browning and Dickens.
Chapter Four

BROWNING

It will be convenient for our purpose to adhere as closely as possible to the order of Chesterton’s book. It is a hard task to do justice to Browning even in a long book; the task is not simplified when, in a chapter, it is hoped to give a criticism of an intricate criticism of Browning.

There are two ways to approach such a task: The first is to take the book as a whole and write a review of it, which is a method liable to a superficiality; the second is to take such a work chapter by chapter, and to piece the various criticisms into an ordered whole. This I have attempted to do. I make no attempt to criticize the method of Chesterton’s approach to Browning, or his combination of the effect of his life on his work; rather I wish to take what the critic says and comment on his remarks.

There is undoubtedly a fundamental difference between Browning and Dickens which is at once clear to any critic of these two writers. Dickens was, as I have said in an earlier chapter, born at the psychological moment. Browning happened to be born early in the nineteenth century. I cannot see that it would have mattered had he been born at the beginning of the twentieth. His early life, unlike Dickens, was normal, but it did not affect Browning adversely. Had Dickens’ life been uneventful, I think it not improbable that his literary output would have been commonplace instead of, as nearly as possible, divine.

There is no particular account of Browning’s family, which was probably a typical middle-class family, which is to say that they were, like many thousands of their kind, lovers of the normal—a very good reason why later Browning should have acquired a love for the grotesque, which many people quite wrongly define as the abnormal.

The grotesque is a queer psychological state of mind; the abnormal is an extreme kind of individualism that is probably insane, provided the opposite is sane.

What is important, as Chesterton feels, is that we shall get some account of Browning’s home. It is in the home that we can usually detect the embryo of future activity. The germ, although sometimes hidden, is nevertheless there, which is exactly why the commonplace home life of a genius, before the public has discovered the fact, is interesting.
To quote our critic: ‘Browning was a thoroughly typical Englishman of the middle class,’ and he remained so through his life.

But this middle-class Englishman walking through the streets of Camberwell, as the boys played in the gutters, was Browning, not then the master poet of the Victorian Era, but the young man who could ‘pass a bookstall and find no thrill in beholding on a placard the name of Shelley.’

Browning found his early life in an age ‘of inspired office boys,’ an age that emerged from the shadow of the French Revolution, that extreme method of optimism which Chesterton believes no Englishman can understand, not even Carlyle himself. It was an optimism that was so, because it held that man was worthy of liberty, which is to say that no man is by his nature ever meant to be a slave.

While Browning was living his daily life in Camberwell, Dickens was existing in the blacking factory; yet again it was an age of the beginning of intellectual giants.

The Chestertonian standpoint with regard to the early days of Browning is interesting. It is a ready acknowledgment of the poetic instinct that was being slowly but surely nurtured in the heart of the unknown young man of Camberwell.

It is in this early period of his life that Browning attempts what Chesterton rightly describes as the most difficult of literary propositions, that of writing a good political play. This Browning essayed to do, and wrote ‘Strafford,’ a play that dealt with that most controversial part of history, the time when kings could be executed in Whitehall under the shadow of their own Parliament.

For our critic, Strafford was one of the greatest men ever born with the sacred name of England on his brow. The play was not a gigantic success, it was not a failure; it was, as was to be expected, popular with a limited public, which is very often one of the surest criterions of merit in a book or play. The success of the play was sufficient to assure the public that Browning had brains and, what was more unusual, could put them to a good advantage.

Browning became then ‘a detached and eccentric personality who had arisen on the outskirts; the world began to be conscious of him at this time.’

In 1840 our critic tells us ‘Sordello’ was published. It was a poem that caused people to wonder whether it was really deep, or merely pure nonsense, a distinction some people cannot ever discover in regard to Browning.

Of this poem, its unique reception by the literary world lies in the fact ‘that it was fashionable to boast of not understanding,’ which, as I have said, was an
indication that it might be termed extremely clever or extremely stupid. It was not a poem, as has been held by some critics, that was a piece of intellectual vanity. Browning was far too great a man to stoop down to such mere banal conceit. The poem was a very different thing. It was a creature created by the obscurity of Browning’s mind, which, as Chesterton thinks, was the natural reaction for a genius, born in a villa street in South London.

What is the explanation of this poem? What is its meaning? Wherein lies its soul? These are questions every lover of Browning has constantly to ask. Our critic supplies an answer, an answer that is original, and is, I think, true—the poem is an epic on ‘the horror of great darkness,’ that darkness that strangely enough seems to attack the young more frequently than the old.

That which is levelled against Browning, his obscurity, is a very bulwark protecting a subtle and clear mind. This is specially so with a poet who probably of all men so lives in his own poetic world that he forgets his ideas, though clear to himself, are vague to the world occupied with conventionalities.

The real difficulty of ‘Sordello’ lies in the fact that it is written about an obscure piece of Italian history of which Browning happened to have knowledge—the struggles of mediæval Italy. This obscurity is not studied, as in the case of academic distinction; it is natural. The obscurity of many of the passages of St. John’s Gospel is natural because the mind of St. John dwelt on the ‘depths,’ as did Browning’s dwell on the grotesque. The result is the same. Each needs an interpreter, each has an abundance of the richest philosophy, each has an imprint of the Finger of God.

With all the controversy it has caused, ‘Sordello’ has had no great influence on Browningites; its name has passed into almost contempt. Chesterton has done much to give the true meaning of this strange work. With his next poem Browning spoke with a voice that, as our critic says, proved that he had found that he was not Robinson Crusoe, which is to say that he had found that the world contained a great number of people. Despite the 1,500 millions amongst whom we ‘live and move and have our being’ we are apt to think that we alone are important, which is not conceit but a mere proposition demonstrating that man is a universe in himself while being but an infinitesimal part of the universe.

‘Pippa Passes’ is a poem which expresses a love of humanity; it is an epic of unconscious influence which, no doubt, Browning felt was the key to all that is best and noble in human activity. ‘The whole idea of the poem lies in the fact that “Pippa Passes” is utterly remote from the grand folk whose lives she troubles and transforms.’
Browning’s poetry in the poetical sense was now nearing its zenith. The ‘Dramatic Lyrics’ were published in 1842, possibly about the time that Dickens was returning from his triumphant American tour. These showed, Chesterton thinks, the two qualities most often denied to Browning, passion and beauty. They are the contradiction to critics, other than ours, who regard Browning as wholly a philosophic poet, which is to say a poet who wrote poetry not for its own sake but for purely utilitarian purpose; not that poetry of the emotions is not useful—it is on a different plane.

The poems were those that ‘represent the arrival of the real Browning of literary history’; for in these he discovered what was, for Chesterton, Browning’s finest achievement, his dramatic lyrical poems.

Critics have said that Browning’s poetry lacks passion and the most poignant emotion of human nature, love. Chesterton, on the other hand, considers that Browning was the finest love poet of the world. It is real love poetry, because it talks about real people, not ideals; it does not muse of the Prince Charming meeting the Fairy Princess, and forget the devoted wife meeting her husband on the villa doorstep with open arms and a nice dinner in the parlour. Sentiment must be based on reality if it is to have worth. This is the strong point, for our critic, of Browning’s love poetry.

The next work of importance that came from Browning’s pen was the ‘Return of the Druses,’ which shows Browning’s interest in the strange religions of the East, that queer phantastic part of the world that gave birth to a Western religion which has transformed the West, leaving the East to gaze afar off. This poem is, for Chesterton, a psychological one. It is an attempt to give an account of a human being; perhaps the most difficult task in the world, because it can never hope to solve all sides of the question. The central character of this splendid poem is one ‘Djubal,’ a queer mixture of the virtues of the Deity with the vices of Humanity. He is for Browning the first of a series of characters on which he displays his wonderful powers of apologizing for apparently bad men.

He attempted, to quote our critic, ‘to seek out the sinners whom even sinners cast out,’ which Christ always did, and which His Church does not always do.

Again Browning turned his hand to writing plays, but he was always a ‘neglected dramatist’ in the sense that he had to push his plays; his plays did not push him.

His next play, ‘A Blot on the “Scutcheon,”‘ is chiefly interesting, as it was the occasion of a quarrel between its author and that most eccentric of theatrical personalities, Macready. The quarrel was, our critic points out, a matter of
money. But Browning failed to see this; he was a man of the world in his poems, but not in his life.

It is interesting here to see what our critic says of Browning about this period before we consider the question of his marriage. ‘There were people who called Browning a snob. He was fond of wealth and fond of society; he admired them as the child who comes in from the desert. He bore the same relation to the snob that the righteous man bears to the Pharisee—something frightfully close and similar and yet an everlasting opposite.’

It has been left for Chesterton to give the truest definition of a Pharisee that has yet been penned, because it is exactly what every man feels but has never expressed in so brilliant a paradox.

That Browning had faults Chesterton would be the last to deny. Faults are as much a part of a great man as virtues. The more pronounced the fault, the more exquisite is the virtue, especially in a man of the character of Browning, a character that had a certain ‘uncontrollable brutality of speech,’ together with a profound and unaffected respect for other people.

Chesterton’s chapter on Browning and his marriage is one of the most homely chapters of the book; it gives the lie to those critics who have glibly said that he has no way in which to reach our hearts or cause a lump in our throats.

The very method of describing how a great man wooed a great woman, how the two loved, married, and disagreed upon certain matters, is one that has an essential appeal to the heart. The exquisite description of the effect of the death of his wife on Browning is pathetic by its very simplicity.

It is enough to say that Browning’s marriage was a successful one, which is not to say that it was entirely free from certain disagreements. The domestic relations of great writers and poets have not always been of the rosiest. Swift did not make an ideal marriage—at least, not on conventional lines. Milton had a wife who utterly misunderstood that her husband was a genius. Dickens was not blessed with matrimonial bliss. Shelley found faith in one woman hard.

But Browning and his wife had no disagreements on their life interests. They were both poets, though of a different calibre. What they really did not see eye to eye upon was something which the human race is still much divided about. This great point of difference was with regard to spiritualism. Browning did not dislike spiritualism; he disliked spiritualists. The difference is tremendous. Unfortunately many of the interpreters of spiritualism have degraded it into a kind of blatant necromancy which is in no way dignified or useful. It is entirely opposed to proper psychic research.
Miss Barrett had been an invalid. Therefore Browning feared that spiritualism might have a really bad effect on his wife. ‘He was sensible to put a stop to it.’

The theory, on the other hand, held by other critics of Browning than Chesterton was that his dislike of spiritualism was fostered by a direct disbelief in immortality, which is as absurd a statement as is possible to make. Spiritualism and Immortality have no necessary connection whatever, though to a certain extent Spiritualism is presumed on the belief in a future life.

But this, as Chesterton points out, was not the reason for Browning’s position; it was entirely that Browning thought ‘if he had not interposed when she was becoming hysterical she might have ended in a lunatic asylum.’

As Browning spent so much of his life in Italy it will be well to see what our critic considers he thought of that country under the blue skies jutting on to the blue seas of the Mediterranean.

‘Italy,’ says Chesterton, ‘to Browning and his wife, was not by any means merely that sculptured and ornate sepulchre that it is to so many of those cultured Englishmen who live in Italy and despise it. To them it was a living nation, the type and centre of the religion and politics of a continent, the ancient and flaming heart of Western history, the very Europe of Europe.’

Browning’s life in Italy was more or less uneventful. It consisted of a conventional method—the meeting of famous Englishmen visiting Italy, the writing of numerous poems, the pleasant domestic life of a literary genius and his wife.

There was only one thing that could break it, and it came in 1861. Mrs. Browning died. ‘Alone in the room with Browning. He, closing the door of that room behind him, closed a door in himself, and none ever saw Browning upon earth again but only a splendid surface.’

During his wife’s life Browning had planned his great work, that of the ‘Ring and the Book.’ In the meantime came the death of his wife, and Browning moved on the earth alone. Of this period of his life, shortly after the death of Mrs. Browning, Chesterton gives us a clear picture. ‘Browning liked social life, he liked the excitement of the dinner, the exchange of opinions, the pleasant hospitality that is so much a part of our life. He was a good talker because he had something to say.’

One of his chief faults, according to our critic, was prejudice. Prejudice is probably an unconscious obeying of instinct; it may even be a warning. Yet it can be and often is entirely unreasonable.

Browning’s prejudice was, Chesterton thinks, the type that hated a thing it
knew nothing about, a state of mind that is comparatively harmless. What is
dangerous is disliking a thing when we know what it is. The prejudice of
Browning was synonymous with his profound contempt for certain things of
which he can only speak ‘in pothouse words.’

About this period Browning produced ‘Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Saviour
of Society.’ This is ‘one of the most picturesque of Browning’s apologetic
monologues.’ It is Browning’s courageous attempt to allow Napoleon III to
speak for himself. Yet again Browning ‘took in those sinners whom even sinners
cast out.’

Two years later, we are told, Browning produced one of his most
characteristic works, ‘Night-cap Country.’ It is an elegant poem of the sicklier
side of the French Revolution and the more sensual side of the French
temperament.

This is the period in Browning’s life when he produced his most characteristic
work. It was that time when he was nearly middle aged, when the lamp of youth
was just flickering, and when the lamp of old age was about to be lighted.

Chesterton treats the whole of this period with a calm straightforwardness that
we are not accustomed to in his writings. There is no doubt, I think, of all our
critic’s books, that his work on Browning is the least Chestertonian, which is not
in any way to disparage it, but rather to state that the book might have been
written by any biographer who knew Browning’s works and had the sense to see
that his characteristics were such that many of his critics were unfair to him.
Chesterton will never allow for an instant that Browning suffered from anything
but an evident ‘naturalness,’ which expressed itself in a rugged style, concealing
charity in an original grotesqueness of manner.

It is now convenient to turn to Browning’s greatest work, ‘The Ring and the
Book,’ and see what Chesterton has to say about it.

Rumour is really distorted truth, or rather very often originates from a
different standpoint being taken of the same thing. Thus a man may say that
another man is a good fellow but borrows money too often; another may say of
the same man he is a good fellow but talks too much; a third that he is a good
fellow but would be better without a moustache. The essential man is the same,
but his three critics make really a different person, or, at least, each sees him
from a different angle.

As Chesterton so finely points out, the conception of ‘The Ring and the Book’
is the studying of a single matter from nine different standpoints. In successive
monologues Browning is endeavouring to depict the various strange ways a fact
gets itself presented to the world.

Further, the work indicates the extraordinary lack of logic used by those who would be ashamed to be denied the name of dialectician. Probably, thinks Chesterton, very many people do harm in their cause, not by want of propaganda, but by the fallaciousness of their arguments for it.

There have been critics who have denied to this work the right of immortality. Chesterton is not one of these; rather he contends such a criticism is a gross misunderstanding of the work. For our critic the greatness of this poem is the very point upon which it is attacked, that of environment. For once and all Browning has demonstrated that there are riches and depths in small things that are often denied to what we think is greater.

‘It is an epic round a sordid police court case.’ ‘The essence of “The Ring and the Book” is that it is the great epic of the nineteenth century, because it is the great epic of the importance of small things.’ Browning says, ‘I will show you the relation of man to heaven by telling you a story out of a dirty Italian book of criminal trials, from which I select one of the meanest and most completely forgotten.’

It is then that Chesterton sees that this poem is more than a mere poem; it is a natural acknowledgment of the monarchy of small things, the same idea that made Dickens believe that common men could be kings—that is, in the same category as the Divine care of the hairs of the head. It gives the lie to the rather popular fallacy that events are important by their size. It is once more a position that the stone on the hillside is as mighty as the mountain of which it is only a small part.

Again, ‘The Ring and the Book’ is an embodiment of the spiritual in the material, the good that can be contained in a sordid story; it is the typical epic of our age, ‘because it expresses the richness of life by taking as a text a poor story. It pays to existence the highest of all possible compliments, the great compliment of selecting from it almost at random.’

There is a second respect, he feels, which makes this poem the epic of the age. It is that every man has a point of view. And, what is more, every man probably has a different point of view at least in something.

‘The Ring and the Book,’ to sum up briefly why Chesterton thinks so highly of it, is an epic; it is a national expression of a characteristic love of small things, the germination of great truths; it pays a compliment to humanity by asserting the value of every opinion, it demonstrates that even in so sordid a thing as a police court there is a spiritual spark; in a word, it is an attempt to see God, not
on the hill-tops or in the valleys, but in the back streets teeming with common men.

It is now time to turn to two qualities of Browning that are full of the deepest interest, and which are dealt with by Chesterton with the greatest skill and judgment. These two qualities may be described as Browning as a literary artist and Browning as a philosopher. For our purpose it will be useful to take Browning as a literary artist first and see what was his position. Philosophy is usually in the nature of a summing up. The philosophy of a poet is best looked at when the poet has been studied; therefore it is best to follow Chesterton’s order and take Browning’s philosophical position at the end of this chapter.

He feels that in some ways the critics want Browning to be poet and logician, and are rather cross when he is either. They want him to be a poet and are annoyed that he is a logician; they want him to be a logician and are annoyed that he is a poet. The fact of the matter is he was probably a poet!

Chesterton is convinced that Browning was a literary artist—that is to say, he was a symbolist. The wealth of Browning’s poetry depends on arrangement of language. It is so with all great literature: it is not so much what is said as how it is said, in what way the sentences are formed so that the climax comes in the right place.

For all practical purposes Browning was, our critic thinks, a deliberate artist. The suggestion that Browning cared nothing for form is for Chesterton a monstrous assertion. It is as absurd as saying that Napoleon cared nothing for feminine love or that Nero hated mushrooms. What Browning did was always to fall into a different kind of form, which is a totally different thing to saying he disregarded it.

There is rather an assumption among a certain class of critics that the artistic form is a quality that is finite. As a matter of fact, it is infinite; it cannot be bound up with any particular mode of expression; it is elastic, and so elastic that certain critics cannot adjust their minds to such lucidity.

There is, our critic feels, another suggestion—that if Browning had a form, it was a bad one. This really does not matter very much. Whether form in an artistic sense is good or bad can only be determined by setting up a criterion; this is not possible in the case of Browning, because, though he has many forms, they are original ones, which render them impervious to values of good and bad.

Chesterton is naturally aware that Browning wrote a great deal of bad poetry—every poet does. The way to take with Browning’s bad poetry is not to condemn him for it, but to say quite frankly this poem or that poem was a
failure. It is by his masterpieces that Browning must be judged.

Perhaps, as he points out, the peculiar characteristic of Browning’s art lay in his use of the grotesque, which, as I said at the beginning of this chapter, is a totally different thing from the abnormal.

In other words, Browning was rugged. It was as natural for him to be rugged as for Ruskin to be polished, for Swift to be cynical (in an optimistic sense), for Chesterton to be paradoxical. Ruggedness is a form of beauty, but it is a beauty that is quite different from the commonly accepted grounds. A mountain is rugged and it is beautiful, a woman is beautiful; but the two features of the aesthetic are quite different. It is the same with poetry. There is (and Browning proved it) a ‘beautifulness’ in the rugged; it is a sense of being ‘beautifully’ rugged.

Enough has been said to make it quite clear that Browning was a literary artist; but, as Chesterton contends, an original one. He did not confine himself to any one form: his beauty lay in the placing of the ‘rugged’ before his readers, the method he used of employing the grotesque.

It is now an excellent time in which to look at Browning’s philosophy and Chesterton’s interpretation of it.

As it is perfectly true to say that every man has a point of view, a position so admirably brought out by Browning in his ‘Ring and the Book,’ so it is also, I think, a truism that every man has (not always consciously) a philosophy. A philosophy is, after all, a point of view; it is not necessarily an abstract academic position; nor is it always a well-defined attempt to discover the ultimate purpose of things. It can be, and very often is, a point of view really acquired by experience.

Naturally a man of the intellect of Browning would have a philosophy, and he had, as our critic points out, a very definite one.

In his quaint way Chesterton tells us ‘Browning had opinions as he had a dress suit or a vote for Parliament.’ And he had no hesitation in expressing these opinions. There was no reason why he should; at least part of his philosophy, as I have indicated, lay in his knowledge of the value of men’s opinions—yet again brought out in ‘The Ring and the Book.’

He had, so we are told, two great theories of the universe: the first, the hope that lies in man, imperfect as he is; the second, a bold position that has offended many people but is nevertheless at least a reasonable one, that God is in some way imperfect; that is, in some obscure way He could be made jealous.

This is, no doubt, a highly unorthodox position. Yet it is a position that
thousands have felt does make it plainer (as it did to Browning)—the necessity of the Crucifixion; it was a pandering to Divine jealousy.

These are, as Chesterton admits, great thoughts, and, as such, are liable to be disliked by those Christians and others who will not think and dislike any one else doing so.

This strange theological position of Browning is, I think, indicated in ‘Saul.’

Chesterton usually does not agree with the other critics about most things, but he does at least agree in regard to the fact that Browning was an optimist. His theory of the use of men, though imperfect, is as good an argument for optimism as could well be found. Browning’s optimism was, as our critic says, founded on experience, it was not a mere theory that had nothing practical behind it.

As I have said, Browning disliked Spiritualists; but that is not, our critic thinks, the reason he wrote ‘Sludge the Medium.’ What this poem showed was that Spiritualism could be of use in spite of insincere mediums. It was in no way an attack on the tenets of Spiritualism.

The understanding of this poem gives the key to other poems of Browning’s, as ‘Bishop Blougram’s Apology,’ and some of the monologues in ‘The Ring and the Book’; which is, that ‘a man cannot help telling some truth, even when he sets out to tell lies.’

This may be the right interpretation of these poems, but I think Browning really meant that there is an end somewhere to lying; in other words, lying is negative and temporary; truth is positive and eternal.

The summing up of Browning’s knaves cannot be better expressed than by Chesterton. ‘They are real somewhere. We are talking to a garrulous and peevish sneak; we are watching the play of his paltry features, his evasive eyes and babbling lips. And suddenly the face begins to change and harden, the eyes glare like the eyes of a mask, the whole face of clay becomes a common mouthpiece, and the voice that comes forth is the voice of God uttering his everlasting soliloquy.

It is the essence of Browning; it is the certainty that however far distant there is the face of God behind the human features.

If there is one characteristic about this study of Browning it lies in the fact that it is a very clear exposition of a remarkable poet. A man might take up the book knowing Browning only as a name; he might well lay it down knowing what Browning was, what he achieved, what his essence was. The book is a masterly study—it lays claim to our sympathies; and never more so than when our critic describes that moment when Browning, alone in the room, saw his wife die.
Chapter Five

CHESTERTON AS HISTORIAN

The reason that Chesterton has written a history of England is that he says no member of the public has ever done so before. This is a thing to be supremely thankful for if true; but it is entirely untrue, for the very obvious fact that history has never been written by any one who is not a member of the public. Every historian is a member of the public. Let him imagine he is not, let him carry this imagination out to a logical conclusion, and he will have a good chance of landing in a prison for failing to pay the king’s taxes.

The very best people to write histories are historians, but they will never deal with history in a popular way. This Chesterton laments. He wants a history that shall be about the things that never ordinarily get into history. If he is told about the charters of the barons, he wishes to hear of the charters of the carpenters. This, he thinks, would make history popular, that word which is always used to denote something rather slight and superficial. He exclaims that the people are ignored, whereas the historian really would not be one at all if he was guilty of this charge.

The fact of the matter is, that the whole of the history of England has been so misunderstood that Chesterton has come to the rescue and has told us what really happened—in fact, all we learnt at school was waste of time; poor Green really wrote an anti-history of this country. The Romans are not of the remote past; the whole of present-day England is the remains of Rome, which is merely to say that our civilization comes down from Rome, a statement that quite able historians have hinted at now and again. No one for an instant is so foolish as to think that the chief remains of the Romans consist of the few broken-up baths and villas up and down the country, when a splendid high road stares them in the face.

Chesterton pays enormous attention to the Middle Ages. They have, he thinks, been rather badly dealt with by historians. Too much attention is, he contends, paid to the time of the Stuarts onwards. Chesterton asks us to contemplate history as we should if we had never learnt it at school. It is, of course, true that we do not learn the essentials of our country in our schooldays. It is of no real importance that William conquered Harold in 1066, but it is of vast importance to know how he behaved as a conqueror, a fact seldom taught. But if we forgot
all the history we ever knew, we should not be able to appreciate Chesterton’s history, which aims to reconstruct all that we had believed while pouring over Green in the fifth form.

Chesterton covers so much ground in this book, his treatment is so intricate, his method so full of various peculiar contentions, that the only possible method in a chapter is to take some of the more important points he touches upon and try and discover what he feels about them. It will be well to realize at once that however he may differ from recognized historians, his history loses all its meaning unless the standard historians are known fairly well.

There are probably two tremendous turning points in history—the one occurred at the moment that the fatal arrow entered the eye of Harold at Senlac, the other when Henry VIII set fire to the ecclesiastical faggots that ended in the Reformation. That period which lay between them may roughly be called the Middle Ages, which part of history Chesterton thinks has been badly treated.

Whether this is so is a question that opens up a broader one: Has the history of England ever received the attention it deserves? Has right proportion been given to the most important events? Should history be made popular in the modern sense of this much misinterpreted word? These are questions to which no adequate answer can be given in the space of a chapter, nor is it within the scope of this book.

Chesterton is very annoyed to find that to possess Norman blood is, to many people, a hallmark of aristocracy: ‘This fashionable fancy misses what is best in the Normans.’ What he contends, and I think rightly, is that William was a conqueror until he had conquered. Then England passed out of his hands. He had wished it to be an autocracy; instead, it developed into a monarchy—‘William the Conqueror became William the Conquered.’ This is a line that the ordinary historians do not appear to take, though I fancy they imply it when they say that feudalism didn’t exist in the time of the Georges.

Perhaps one of the most picturesque parts of history is that time when men looked across the sea and saw in the far distance a huge cross that seemed to beckon as the voices later called to Joan of Arc. The Crusades were a time when wars were holy because they were waged for a holy thing. Six hundred years, so Chesterton tells us, had elapsed since Christianity had arisen and covered the world like a dust-storm, when there arose ‘a copy and a contrary: the creed of the Moslems’; in a sense Islam was ‘like a Christian heresy.’ Historians, so he thinks, have not understood the Crusades. They have taken them to be aristocratic expeditions with a Cross as the prey instead of a deer, whereas really
they were ‘unanimous risings.’ ‘The Holy Land was much nearer to a plain man’s house than Westminster, and immeasurably nearer than Runnymede.’ But I am not sure that Chesterton has scored over the orthodox historians who made a good deal out of the fact that Crusade had a close affinity to Crux, which word meant a cross that was not necessarily bound up with Calvary.

In dealing with the Middle Ages, he propounds the proposition that the best way to understand history is to read it backwards—that is, if we are to understand the Magna Charta we must be on speaking terms with Mary. ‘If we really want to know what was strongest in the twelfth century, it is no bad way to ask what remained of it in the fourteenth.’ This is a very excellent method, as it demonstrates what were the historical events and what were the mere local and temporary.

Becket was one of those queer people of history who was half a priest and half a statesman, and he had to deal with a king who was half a king and half a tyrant. Every schoolboy knows about Becket, and delights to read of the wild ride to Canterbury, which began with the spilling of Becket’s brains and ended with the spilling of the King’s blood by his tomb.

For Chesterton, Becket ‘may have been too idealistic: he wished to protect the Church as a sort of earthly paradise, of which the rules might seem to him as paternal as those of heaven, but might well seem to the king as capricious as those of Fairyland.’ The tremendously suggestive thing of the whole story of Becket is that Henry II submitted to being thrashed at Becket’s tomb. It was like ‘Cecil Rhodes submitting to be horsewhipped by a Boer as an apology for some indefensible death incidental to the Jameson Raid.’ Undoubtedly Chesterton has got at the kernel of the story that made an Archbishop a saint (a rare occurrence) and an English king a sportsman (a rarer occurrence).

But clever as Chesterton is in regard to this particular story, the ordinary schoolboy would do better to stick to the common tale of Becket that came on the hasty words spoken by a hasty king; he will better understand the significance of the whipping of the king when he can read history back to the days when kings could not only not be whipped, but could whip whom they chose, and put men’s eyes out when they used them to shoot at the king’s deer.

A great part of the Middle Ages is concerned with the French wars, those wars that staggered the English exchequer and made the English kings leaders of armies. The reason of these wars was, Chesterton tells us, the fact that Christianity was a very local thing. It was more—it was a national thing that was bound up with England. ‘Men began to feel that foreigners did not eat or drink
like Christians,’ which is to say that the Englishman began his contempt for the foreigner which has resulted in nearly all our wars, and has made the Englishman abroad a supercilious creature, and has made the English schoolboy put his tongue out at the French master.

The French wars were something more than a national hatred, they were a national dislike of foreigners, a dislike that had its probable origin in the Tower of Babel. But this was not the only reason of the incessant French wars—there was a question of policy. France began to be a nation, and ‘a true patriotic applause hailed the later victory of Agincourt.’ France had become something more than a nation; it had become a religion, because it had as its figure a simple girl who believed in voices, and took her part in the struggles of a defeated country.

Chesterton’s chapter is a fine understanding of the French wars; it is an amplification of the mere skeletons of ordinary history, and as such is very valuable.

From being a reasonable national dislike, the French wars ‘gradually grew to be almost as much a scourge to England as they were to France.’ ‘England was despoiled by her own victories; luxury and poverty increased at the extremes of society, and the balance of the better mediaevalism was lost.’ It resulted in the revolt connected with Wat Tyler, a revolt that ‘was not only dramatic but was domestic’; it ended in the death of Tyler and the intervention of the boy king, who, in swaying the multitude that was a dangerous mob, ‘gives us a fleeting and final glimpse of the crowned sacramental man of the Middle Ages.’

From this period Chesterton tells us that a rather strange thing happened—men began to fight for the crown. The Wars of the Roses was the result. The English rose was then the symbol of party, as ever since it has been the symbol of an English summer.

Chesterton makes no attempt to follow the difficult path that the Wars of the Roses travel, from the military standpoint, nor the adventures that followed the king-maker Warwick and the warlike widow of Henry V, one Margaret. There was, so he says, a moral difference in this conflict that took the name of a Rose to fight for a Crown. ‘Lancaster stood, as a whole, for the new notion of a king propped by parliaments and powerful bishops; and York, on the whole, for the remains of the older idea of a king who permits nothing to come between him and his people. This is everything of permanent political interest that could be traced by counting all the bows of Barnet or all the lances of Tewkesbury.’

The time when the Middle Ages was drawing near to the Tudors is interesting,
because of the riddle of Richard III. Chesterton’s description of this strange king is full of fascination if also it is full of truth: ‘He was not an ogre shedding rivers of blood, yet a crimson cloud cannot be dispelled from his memory. Whether or not he was a good man, he was apparently a good king, and even a popular one. He anticipated the Renaissance in an abnormal enthusiasm for art and music, and he seems to have held to the old paths of religion and charity.’

He was indeed, as Chesterton says, the last of the mediæval kings, and he died hard; his blood flowed over an England that did not know what loyalty was, a country that had nobles who would fly from their king on the first sign of danger; the Last Post of the old kings was sounding, and Richard answered its challenge. His description of this remarkable king is perhaps the best thing in the book, and is certainly far better than the ordinary history that attempts to give the character of a king in a couple of lines.

With the end of the mediæval kings we pass to a period that is none other than the Renaissance, one of the most important epochs in English history, ‘that great dawn of a more rational daylight which for so many made mediævalism seem a mere darkness.’

The character of Henry VIII is one that is a veritable battleground. He is attacked because he found a variety of wives pleasing; he is condoned as a young man who promised to be a great king. There are, as Chesterton points out, two great things that intruded into his reign: the one was the difficulty of his marriages, the other was the question of the monasteries. If Henry was a Bluebeard, he was such because his wives were not a fortunate selection. ‘He was almost as unlucky in his wives as they were in their husband.’ But the one thing that Chesterton feels broke Henry’s honour was the question of his divorce. In doing this he mistook the friendship of the Pope for something that would make him go against the position of the Church. ‘Henry sought to lean upon the cushions of Leo and found he had struck his arm upon the rock of Peter.’ The result was that Henry finished with the Papacy in the pious hope that it had done with him; Henry became head of the Church that was national, and soon Wolsey fell, to die in a monastery at Leicester.

But this terrible king ‘struck down the noblest of the Humanists, Thomas More, who died the death of a saint, gloriously jesting.’ The question of the monasteries is one that is solved by the simple statement that the King wanted money and the monasteries supplied it. Is there any justification for the crimes of Henry? For Chesterton ‘it is unpractical to discuss whether Froude finds any justification for Henry’s crimes in the desire to create a strong national
monarchy. For whether or not it was desired, it was not created.’

Chesterton in an original way has given a very clear account of the difficulties of the reign of Henry VIII, a reign that had perhaps more influence on English history than any other, a reign that showed what the licence of an English monarchy could do and, what is of more importance, what it could not, a reign that showed that the fall of a great man could be so precipitate that the significance of it could not be felt at the time, a reign that showed that the Pope was something more than the friend of the English throne—he was in matters of Church discipline its checkmate. This was the time that England trembled at the devilry of a king and rejoiced at the sun of a new learning that was slowly dispelling the fog of the Dark Ages.

It is usually assumed that Mary was a bad woman because she burned people who were so unwise as not to be at least officially Catholics. Historians have applied the word ‘bloody’ to her, whereas the better word would be fanatic. ‘Her enemies were wrong about her character,’ says Chesterton. ‘She was in a limited sense a good woman.’ If Chesterton means she was a good Catholic he is right, if the burning of heretics is a good thing for a Christian Church. But the fortunate part of the whole affair was that not even burning could restore the power of the Papacy in England in Mary’s time any more than the arrogance of the Roman Catholics to-day can restore the Pope to London and unfrock the Archbishop of Canterbury. Mary was a sincere fanatic, and like most fanatics was an extremely ignorant woman; consequently she could not see that the fire that burnt Cranmer also burnt the last hope of England bowing to the Pope of Rome. I cannot feel that Chesterton has in the least vindicated the character of Mary.

Historians are apt to think that the days of Queen Elizabeth were those in which England first realized that she was great. On the other hand, Chesterton is convinced that it is in this period that ‘she first realized that she was small.’ The business of the Armada was to her what Bannockburn was to the Scots, or Majuba to the Boers—a victory that astonished the victors. The fact of the matter was that Spain realized after the battle that the victory does not always go to the big battalions, which the present Kaiser is no doubt writing in his ‘Imperial’ copybook to-day.

The ‘magnificence of the Elizabethan times has traces in mediæval times and far fewer traces in modern times.’ ‘Her critics indeed might reasonably say that in replacing the Virgin Mary by the Virgin Queen, the English reformers merely exchanged a true virgin for a false one.’ If Elizabeth was crafty it was because it
was good she should be so. If she had not been so, the history of England might have found Philip of Spain on the English throne and Mary Queen of Scots a worse menace in England, a menace that by the skill of Elizabeth developed into a headless corpse. Had Elizabeth had a different historical background, she might have been a different Queen; but, as it was, she dealt with it as only a genius could who had followed a maniacal Queen who failed in everything she did.

From the times of Elizabeth, Chesterton moves on to the age of the Puritans, those rather dull people who have always been the byword for those who are more popularly known as Prigs. ‘The Puritans were primarily enthusiastic for what they thought was pure religion. Their great and fundamental idea was that the mind of man can alone directly deal with the mind of God. Consequently they were anti-sacramental.’ Not only in ecclesiastical matters, they were in doctrine Calvinistic—that is, they believed ‘that men were created to be lost and saved,’ a theological position that makes God a Person who wastes a lot of valuable time. It was to a large extent this belief in Calvin that made the Puritans dislike a sacramental principle; it was, of course, quite unnecessary to have one. If a man was either lost or saved, the need of any human meditators was not felt.

It is, of course, true, as Chesterton says, that ‘England was never Puritan.’ Neither was it ever entirely Catholic, neither has it ever been entirely Protestant. It is one of the things to be thankful for that men have ever held different religious opinions. It would be the greatest mistake if ever the Church was so misguided as to listen to the cries that come for unity, a unity that could only be founded on the subordinating of the opinions of the many to the opinion of the few.

I have said at the beginning of this chapter that Chesterton has said that the Middle Ages have not had the historical attention they deserve. Whether this is so is a question that cannot be answered here. What we have to say is whether this book is a valuable one. There are, of course, many opinions expressed in it that do not take the usual historical standpoint, or they have a more original way of expression. I cannot feel that this book is the best of Chesterton’s works, not because it has not some very sound opinions expressed in it, but rather because to understand its import the ordinary histories must be well known. It is perhaps a matter of an unsuitable title, ‘A Short History of England.’ It would have been better to have called it a ‘History of the Histories of England, and the Mistakes therein.’ It would be no use as an historical book in the school sense, but as an original book on some of the turning-points of English history it is valuable. Mr.
Chesterton tells us to read history backwards to understand it. This we may well do if we have read it as fully forward as he evidently has.
Chapter Six

THE POET

AMONGST the many outstanding qualities of Chesterton there is one that is pre-eminent—his extraordinary versatility. It cannot be said that this quality is always an advantage; a too ready versatility is not always synonymous with valuable work; especially is this so in literary matters. There are quite a number of writers who, without success, attempt to be a little of everything. This is not the case with Chesterton; if he is better as an essayist than as a historian, he is at least good as the latter; if he is better at paradox than at concise statements, he can be, if he chooses, quite free from paradox; if he excels in satire of a light nature, he can also be the most serious of critics if the subject needs such treatment.

It has often been said that a good prose writer seldom makes a good poet. This may be to a certain extent a truism; the opposite is more often the case; that a good poet is quite often a poor producer of prose. There is a good reason for this: the mind of a poet is probably of a different calibre to that of a prose writer; a poet must have a poetical outlook on life and nature; the tree to him is something more than a tree, it is probably a symbol, but to a prose writer more often than not a tree is merely a mass of bark and leaves that adorns the landscape.

Chesterton has written a great many poems, all of which can claim to be poetical in the true sense, but he has only written one really important poetical work. It is a ballad that is important for two things; firstly, it is about a very English thing; secondly, the style of the writing is nothing short of delightful, a statement that is not true of all good poetry. It has been said that Chesterton might well be the Poet Laureate; at least, it is a matter for extreme joy that he is not, not because he is not worth that honour, but because anything that tended to reduce his poetical output would be a serious thing in these days when good poets are as scarce as really good novelists.

The poem that has established Chesterton for all time as a poet is the one he has called with true poetical genius ‘The Ballad of the White Horse.’ There have been many white horses, but there is The White Horse, and he lies alone on the side of a hill down Wiltshire way, where he has watched with a mournful gaze the centuries pass away as the horizon passes away in a liquid blue.

The White Horse stands for something that year by year we are forgetting,
those quaint old English feasts that have done so much to make England merry, and have made history into a beautiful legend that bears the name of Alfred. Yet the White Horse is falling into neglect. The author of ‘Tom Brown’s Schooldays’ lamented the fact that people flew past the White Horse in stuffy first class carriages; were he alive now he would lament still more that English men and English women can pass the White Horse without a glance up from the novel they are reading bound in a flaring yellow cover. But there is one great Englishman who will never do this, and that is Chesterton; rather he writes of the White Horse, the lonely horse that is worthy of this splendid poem.

In connection with the Vale of White Horse there are three traditions—one, that Alfred fought a great battle there; another, that he played a harp in the camp of the Danes; a third, that Alfred proved himself a very bad cook who wasted a poor woman’s cake, a poor woman who would willingly have sacrificed cakes every day to have the honour of the king under her roof.

It is of these three traditions that Chesterton writes his poem. Whether they may be historically accurate does not much matter; there is no doubt that the Vale had something to do with the King of Wessex, and popular tradition has made the name of Alfred a national legend.

When Chesterton writes of the vision of the king he is no doubt writing of his own vision of the events that led up to the gathering of the chiefs. The Danes had descended on England like a cloud of locusts; it was the time that needed a National Champion, as time and again in the past the Israelites had needed one. It is one of the strange things of history that a champion has always appeared when he was most needed. The name of the Danes inspired terror; Wessex was shattered—‘For earthquake following earthquake
Uprent the Wessex tree . . . ‘
The kings of Wessex were weary and disheartened: fire and pillage had laid the countryside bare with that horrible bareness that only lies in the wake of conqueror: ‘There was not English armour left, Nor any English thing,
When Alfred came to Athelney
To be an English king.’
This was the vision that Alfred had, and he gathered the disheartened chiefs to his side till, in victory, he could bear the name of king.

In the wake of national champions there have ever appeared popular tales demonstrating the human qualities of these giants; if Napoleon could conquer empires, tradition has never forgotten that he once pardoned a sentry he found
asleep at his post. If Wellington won the battle of Waterloo by military genius, so popular hearsay has urged that he commanded the Guards to charge ‘La Grande Armée’ in cockney terms. Around the almost sacred name of Alfred many and various are the old wives’ tales, among which the story of his harp is not the least picturesque; it is one on which Chesterton expends a good deal of poetic energy.

From the gist of the poem it is evident that Alfred, in the course of his wanderings, came near to the White Horse, but as though for very sorrow—‘The great White Horse was grey.’

Down the hill the Danes came in headlong flight and carried Alfred off to their camp; his fame as a harpist had pierced the ears of the invaders: ‘And hearing of his harp and skill, They dragged him to their play.’

The Danes might well laugh at the song of the king, but it was a laugh that was soon to be turned to weeping when the king had finished his song: ‘And the king with harp on shoulder Stood up and ceased his song; And the owls moaned from the mighty trees, And the Danes laughed loud and long.’

There is in this poem a pleasant rhythm and a clearness of meaning that is absent from much good poetry. Chesterton has caught the wild romantic background of the time when the King of England could play a harp in the camp of his enemies; when he could, by a note, bring back the disheartened warriors to renew the fight; when he could be left to look after the cakes and be scolded when, like the English villages, they were burnt. One of the most popular of the legends is the one connected with Alfred and the woman of the forest. It has made Chesterton write some of his most charming verse.

And Alfred came to the door of a woman’s cottage and there rested, with the promise that in return he would watch the cakes that they did not burn.

But—

‘The good food fell upon the ash, And blackened instantly.’

The woman was naturally annoyed that this unknown tramp should let her cooking spoil: ‘Screaming, the woman caught a cake Yet burning from the bar, And struck him suddenly on the face,
Leaving a scarlet scar.’
The scar was on the king’s brow, a scar that tens of thousands should follow to victory: ‘A terrible harvest, ten by ten,
As the wrath of the last red autumn—then
When Christ reaps down the kings.’
In a prefaced to this poem, with regard to that part which deals with the battle of Enthandune, Chesterton says: ‘I fancy that in fact Alfred’s Wessex was of very mixed bloods; I have given a fictitious Roman, Celt, and Saxon a part in the glory of Enthandune.’

The battle of Enthandune is divided into three parts. The poetry is specially noticeable for the great harmony of the words with the subject of the lines; it is one of the great characteristics of Chesterton’s poetry that he uses language that intimately expresses what he wants to describe. He can, in a few lines, describe the discipline of an army: ‘And when they came to the open land
They wheeled, deployed, and stood.’
It is perfect poetry concerning the machine-like movements of highly-trained troops.
The death of an earl that occurs in a moment of battle: we can almost see the blow, the quick change on the face from life to death; we can almost hear the death gurgle: ‘Earl Harold, as in pain,
Strove for a smile, put hand to head,
Stumbled and suddenly fell dead,
And the small white daisies all waxed red
With blood out of his brain.’
Of the tremendous power of a charge, Chesterton can give us the meaning in two lines that might otherwise take a page of prose: ‘Spears at the charge!’ yelled Mark amain,
‘Death to the gods of Death.’
Whether it be to victory or defeat, the last charge grips the imagination, just as the latest words of a great man are remembered long after he has turned to dust. The final charge of the Old Guard, the remnant of Napoleon’s ill-fated army at Waterloo, the dying words of Nelson, these are the things that produce great poetry.

Some of the verses describing the last charge at Enthandune are the finest lines Chesterton has so far written. It will not be out of place to quote one or two of the best—the challenge of Alfred to his followers to make an effort against the dreaded Danes, at whose very name strong men would pale: ‘Brothers-at-
arms,’ said Alfred,
‘On this side lies the foe;
Are slavery and starvation flowers,
That you should pluck them so?’
Or the death of the Danish leader, who would have pierced Alfred through and through: ‘Short time had shaggy Ogier
To pull his lance in line—
He knew King Alfred’s axe on high,
He heard it rushing through the sky;
He cowered beneath it with a cry—
It split him to the spine;
And Alfred sprang over him dead,
And blew the battle sign.’
The last part of the poem is that which gives an account of the scouring of the White Horse, in the years of peace: ‘When the good king sat at home.’
But through everything the White Horse remained— ‘Untouched except by the hand of Nature:
The turf crawled and the fungus crept,
And the little sorrel, while all men slept,
Unwrought the work of man.’
‘The Ballad of the White Horse’ is in its way one of the best things Chesterton has done: it is a fine poem about a very picturesque piece of English legend, which may or may not be based on history. Poetry can, and very often does, fulfil a great patriotic mission in arousing interest in those distant times when Englishmen, with their backs to the wall, responded to the cry of Alfred, as they did when, centuries later, the hordes of Germans attempted to cut the knot of Haig’s army.

For hundreds of years Alfred has been turned to dust, but the White Horse remains, a perpetual monument to the great days when England was invaded by the Danes. ‘The Ballad of the White Horse’ is a ballad worthy of the immortal horse that will remain centuries after the author of the poem has passed out of mortal sight.

In an early volume of light verse Chesterton wrote of the kind of games that old men with beards would delight in. ‘Greybeards at Play’ is a delightful set of satirical verses in which the ardent philosopher confers a favour on Nature by being on intimate and patronising terms with her.

This dear old philosopher, with grey beard and presumably long nose and
large spectacles, is full of admiration for the heavenly beings: ‘I love to see the little stars
All dancing to one tune;
I think quite highly of the Sun,
And kindly of the Moon.’
Coming to earth, this same philosopher is full of friendly relations with America, for— ‘The great Niagara waterfall
Is never shy with me.’
In the same volume Chesterton writes of the spread of æstheticism, and that the cult of the Soul had a terrible effect on trade: ‘The Shopmen, when their souls were still,
Declined to open shops—
And Cooks recorded frames of mind
In sad and subtle chops.’
In a small volume of poems called ‘Wine, Water, and Song,’ we have some of the poems that appear in Chesterton’s novels. They have a delightful air of brilliancy and satire, about dogs and grocers and that peculiar king of the Jews, Nebuchadnezzar, who, when he is spoken of by scholars, alters his name to Nebuchadrezzar. We have but room for one quotation, and the place of honour must be given to the epic of the grocer who, like many of other trades, makes a fortune by giving short weights: ‘The Hell-Instructed Grocer
Has a Temple made of Tin,
And the Ruin of good innkeepers
Is loudly urged therein;
But now the sands are running out
From sugar of a sort,
The Grocer trembles, for his time,
Just like his weight, is short.’
The hymn that Mr. Chesterton has written, called ‘O God of Earth and Altar,’ is unfortunately so good and so entirely sensible that the clergy on the whole have not used it much; rather they prefer to sing of heaven with a golden floor and a gate of pearl, ignoring a really fine hymn that pictures God as a sensible Being and not a Lord Chief Justice either of sickly sentimentality or of the type of a Judge Jeffreys.

It must be said that to many people who know Chesterton he is first and foremost an essayist and lastly a poet. The reason is that he has written comparatively little serious poetry; this is, I think, rather a pity—not that
quantity is always consistent with quality, but that in some way it may not be too much to say that Chesterton is the best poet of the day; and I do not forget that he has as contemporaries Alfred Noyes and Walter de la Mare.

The strong characteristic of his poetry, as I have said, is the wealth of language; to this must be added the exceedingly pleasant rhythm that runs as easily as a well-oiled bicycle. If Mr. Chesterton is not known to posterity as one of the leading poets of the twentieth century it will be because his prose is so well known that his poetry is rather crowded out.
Chapter Seven

THE PLAYWRIGHT

NEARLY eight years ago all literary and dramatic London focused its eyes on a theatre that was known as the Little Theatre. On the night of November 7th the critics might have been seen making their way along John Street with just the faintest suspicion of mirth in their eyes.

The reason was that the most eccentric genius of the day had written a play, and it was to be produced that night, and had the name of Magic, a title that might indicate something that turned princes into wolves, or transported people on carpets to distant lands, or might be more simply a play that dealt with Magic in the sense that there really was such a thing.

The play was a success—I could see that it would be at the moment Mr. Bernard Shaw so forgot himself as to be interested in something he had not himself written. The Press was charmed with the play and went so far as to say, with a gross burlesque of Chesterton, that it was ‘real phantasy and had soul.’ Chesterton by his one produced play had earned the right to call himself a dramatic author, who could make the public shiver and think at the same time, an unusual combination.

I rather fancy that Magic is a theological argument, disguised in the form of a play, that relies for its effects on clever conversation, the moving of pictures, and a mysterious person who may have been a conjurer and may have also been a magician.

When I say that the play is really a theological one, I do not mean to say that it has anything to do with the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Validity of the Anglican Orders, or even the truth of the Virgin Birth; rather it is about an indefinable ‘something’ that is so simple that it is misunderstood by every one.

The play turns upon five people who are thrown together in a room that has a nasty habit of becoming ghostly at times.

The five people are a doctor who is a scientist, who does not believe in anything not material being scientific; a vicar who is a typical clergyman, who thoroughly believes in supernatural things until they are proved, when he becomes an agnostic; a young American who is a cad and a fool; a girl who believes in fairies and goes to Holy Communion, which is the one thing that depicts she has a certain amount of sense; a duke who ends every sentence with
a quotation from Tennyson to Bernard Shaw.

These five people are influenced by a Pied Piper kind of fellow who calls himself a conjurer, and is rather too clever for the company.

Apparently the conjurer has been strolling about the garden when he meets Patricia, who thinks he can produce fairies. In due course the conjurer comes into the room, where he has encounters with the various occupants, who don’t believe in his tricks; the conjurer is unlucky enough to meet the young American cad Morris Carleon, who is really quite rude to the conjurer and discovers (so he thinks) all the tricks except one in which the conjurer turns the red lamp at the doctor’s gate blue. This so worries Morris that he goes up to his room with a chance of going mad.

The others beseech the conjurer to explain the trick; he does so, and says it is done by magic, which is the whole point of the play, that we are left to wonder whether it was by magic or by a natural phenomenon.

The conjurer gets the better of the parson, the Rev. Cyril Smith, who believes in a model public house and the Old Testament, and takes a good stipend for pretending to believe in the supernatural.

The result of the whole matter is magic, by which we presume the trick may have been done.

The play is in some ways a difficult one: we are left wondering whether or not Chesterton believes in magic; if he does, then the conjurer need not have been so upset that he had gained so much power of a psychic nature; if he does not, then the conjurer was a clever fraud or a brilliant hypnotist.

One thing is quite certain, Chesterton brings out the weaknesses of the dialectic of the parson and doctor in a remarkable way; he makes us realise that there are some things we really know nothing about; if lamps turn blue suddenly it may quite well be a ‘Something’ that may be magic and might be God or Satan; anyhow, it cannot be explained by an American young man; it is of the things that the clergy profess to believe in and very often do not.

It is, I think, undoubtedly a problem play, and I doubt very much if Chesterton knows what was the agency that did the trick, but I rather think that ‘Magic’ is a great play, not because of the situations, but rather because the more the play is studied the more difficult is it to say exactly what is the lesson of it.

Magic is called a phantastic comedy; it might well be called a phantastic tragedy.
Chapter Eight

THE NOVELLIST

THERE is perhaps no word in the English language which is more elastic than the word novel as applied to what is commonly known as fiction. The word novel is used to describe stories that are as far apart as the Poles. Thus it is used to describe a classic by Thackeray or Dickens, or a clever love tale by Miss Dell, or a brilliantly outspoken sex tale by Miss Elinor Glyn, or a romance by Miss Corelli, or a tale of adventure by Joseph Conrad, or a very modern type of analytical novel by very modern writers who are a little bit young and a big bit old.

I do not think that it is an exaggeration to say that Chesterton as a novelist carries the art yet a step farther and has added elasticity to the word. It would, I think, be probably untrue to say that Chesterton is a popular novelist; he is much too unlike one to be so. That he is read by a wide public is not the same thing; he has not the following of the millions that Charles Garvice had, for the millions who understood him might find Chesterton difficult. Really Chesterton is read by a select number of people who would claim to be intellectual; very up-to-date clergymen rave about his catholicity, high-brow ladies of smart clubs delight in his knave whimsicalities, but the girl in the suburban train to Wimbledon passes by on the other side.

One of the characteristic features of Chesterton’s novels is his clever selection of titles that are by their very nature fit to designate his original works. If in journalism nine-tenths of the importance of an article depends upon its title, it is equally true that the title of a novel is of the same import. Either a title should give some indication of the nature of the book, or it should be of the kind that makes us want to read it; this is the case with regard to the Chesterton novels, their designations are so phantastic that our curiosity is aroused. Thus ‘The Man who was Thursday’ gives no possible explanation of what it is about, but it does suggest that it is interesting to know about a man who was Thursday; ‘The Flying Inn’ may be a forecast of prohibition or it may be a romance of the time when inns shall fly to the ends of the earth; ‘The Napoleon of Notting Hill’ leads us to suppose that perhaps there was a hidden history of that part of London, that Notting Hill can boast of a past that makes it worthy of having been a station on the first London tube.
It is unsafe to prophesy any limit to the versatility of Chesterton, but it is improbable that he could write an ordinary novel; the reason is, I fancy, that he cannot write of the ordinary emotions with the ease that he can construct grotesque situations. This is why I have said that, as a novelist, Chesterton is not popular in the sense that he is read by the masses (that word that the Church always uses to indicate those who form the bulk of the community). As a novelist, Chesterton stands apart, not because he is better than contemporary writers of fiction, but because his books are unlike those of any one else.

I have taken Chesterton’s most famous novels and have written a short survey of their character. They are not always easy to understand—sometimes they seem to indicate alternative points of view; they teem with pungent wit and shrewd observations, they are without doubt phantastic, they are in the true sense clever.

‘THE NAPOLEON OF NOTTING HILL’

At the time of the publication of this book the critics with astounding frankness admitted that, while this was a fine book, they had difficulty in deciphering what it meant. One, now a well-known Fleet Street editor, went farther, and said that possibly the author himself did not know what he meant—a situation in which quite a number of authors have found themselves, especially when they read the reviews of their books.

‘The Napoleon of Notting Hill’ is not an easy book to understand: it may be a satire, it may be a serious book, it may be a prophecy, it may be a joke, it may even be a novel! I think that it is a little bit of a joke, in a degree serious—something of a satire, possibly a prophecy.

The main thing about the book is that a king is so unwise as to make a joke, and an obscure poet is more unwise in taking this Royal joke seriously. Many who have laughed at monarchical wit have found that their heads had an alarming trick of falling on Tower Hill.

In ‘The Napoleon of Notting Hill’ we are living a hundred years on, and we are to believe that London hasn’t much changed; a certain respectable gentleman has been made a king for no special reason—a very good way of having a versatile monarchy and a selection of kings.

Not far off in the kingdom of Notting Hill there resides a poet who has written poems that no one reads. He is a romantic youth, and loves Notting Hill with the love of a Roman for Rome or of a Jew for Whitechapel. The new king, by way
of a joke, suggests that it would be quite a good idea to take the various parts of London and restore them to a mediaeval dignity; thus ‘Clapham should have a city guard, Wimbledon a city wall, Surbiton tolling a bell to raise its citizens.’

It so happens that the obscure poet, Adam Wayne, has always seen in Notting Hill a glory that her citizens cannot see; he determines to make the grocers and barbers of that neighbourhood realise their rich inheritance. The new king, for some reason, desires to possess Pump Street in Notting Hill, and this gives the poet’s dream a chance to mature; and he gets together a huge army, with himself as Lord High Provost of Notting Hill. There are some frightful battles in the adjacent states of Kensington and Bayswater, and, after varying fortunes, the Notting Hill Army is defeated, the Napoleon becomes again the poet of Notting Hill, while his citizens have developed from grocers to romanticists, from barbers to fanatics.

That there might be in the future a Napoleon of Notting Hill is highly improbable, that London will ever return to the pomp and heraldry of the Middle Ages is not at all likely; but that in a hundred years Notting Hill will be different is quite possible. If it is not likely that there will be fights between Bayswater and Notting Hill, there may at least be battles in the air unthought of; it may well be that its citizens in times of peace will take a half-day trip, not to Kew Gardens or to Hampton Court, but to Bombay and Cape Town.

‘MANALIVE’

One of the strangest complications that man has to face is the criminal mind. It is so complex that no society has ever understood it; very often it has not taken the trouble to try. No method of punishment has stamped out the criminal; no reformers, however ardent, have freed the world from those who live by violence, kill by violence, and are themselves killed by violence. If crime is a disease, then to treat criminals as wrongdoers is absurd. If every murderer is insane, then hanging is nonsense; if a murderer is sane, then sanity is capable of being more revolting than insanity.

‘Manalive’ may, perhaps, be called a philosophy of the motive for crime; it may be a pseudo philosophy—at least it is an entertaining one—which cannot be said about all serious attempts at moulding the universe into a tiresome system, that is uprooted generally by the next thinker. The book opens with a very strong gale that ends with the arrival at a boarding house of a man who can stand on his head and has the name of Innocent Smith. He is somewhat like the person in the
‘Passing of the Third Floor Back,’ in that he revolutionizes the household, who cannot determine whether he is a lunatic or not; anyhow, he falls in love with the girl of the house. Unfortunately, rumour—a nasty, ill-natured thing—has it that Smith is a criminal. Evidence is collected, and a Grand Jury inquire into the charges, which include Bigamy, Murder, Polygamy, Burglary. It looks as if Smith is in for a very uncomfortable time, and the wedding bells are a long way from ringing.

The second part of the book is concerned with these charges and the conduct and motives of Smith. But Chesterton is a clever barrister, and shows that the motives behind the ‘crimes’ are not only within the law, but are extremely useful and throw a new light on criminology.

The crime of murder of which Smith is accused is one that he is supposed to have perpetrated in his college days. It was nothing less than firing at the Warden. The reason was not at all that Smith wanted to murder the Warden, but, rather, to discover if his theory of ‘the elimination of life being desirable’ was a sincere one. It was not. As soon as the Professor thought he might attain the desired bliss of death, he desired more than anything that he might live. The fact, then, that Smith pointed a pistol at his Warden was perfectly justifiable; it had the eminently good principle of wishing to test a theory.

If Smith was a bigamist he was so with his own wife, only that he happened to like to live with her in various places; if he was a burglar, he was perfectly justified, because he merely robbed his own house—in fact, he does not wish to steal, because he can covet his own goods. Chesterton, on these grounds, acquits the prisoner.

At the end of the book another or the same great gale springs up, and Smith, accompanied by Mary of the boarding-house, disappears. Clever as Chesterton’s explanations of the crimes are, we shall not probably shoot at the Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge in order to demonstrate to him how desirable life really is; we shall not burgle our own sitting-room for the mere excitement of it; we shall not flit with our wife from Peckham to Marylebone, from Singapore to Bagdad, to imagine that we are bigamists or polygamists; rather, we shall sit at home and sigh that all crimes cannot be as easily settled as those Chesterton propounds and shows are not crimes at all.

‘THE BALL AND THE CROSS’

It is usually assumed that a theological argument is a dull and prosy affair that
has as its perpetrators either Professors of Theology or Professors of Rationalism. It is, of course, true that many Professors of Theology are dull, but they do not usually argue about theology at all. Professors of Rationalism are equally dull and are seldom happy when not engaged on the hopeless task of trying to understand God when they know nothing about Man and little about Satan.

‘The Ball and the Cross’ is a theological novel. It is, without any doubt, the most brilliant of Chesterton’s novels; it is an argument between a Christian ass and a very decent atheist. Atheists, if they are sincere, are on the way to becoming good Christians; Christians, if they are insincere, are on the way to becoming atheists.

The book opens with a theological argument in the air between a professor and a monk. This becomes to the professor so wearisome that, with great good sense, he leaves the monk clinging to the cross at the top of St. Paul’s Cathedral while he disappears into the clouds in his silver airship.

Having successfully climbed into the gallery, the monk is arrested as a wandering lunatic and taken off to an asylum. Meanwhile, a great deal of excitement is agitating Ludgate Hill, where an atheistic editor runs a paper that propounds (with all the usual insults at Christ, which culminate in an attack on the method of the birth of Christ) the creed of atheism. A particularly slanderous attack on the Virgin Mary results in an ardent Roman Catholic throwing a stone through the blasphemer’s window.

The result is that they are both brought up before the magistrate, and the two men decide to fight a duel.

The whole book really, then, consists of a theological argument between the two, interspersed with attempts to settle their differences by a duel, which is always interrupted at the crucial moment. Finally, after queer adventures, the two arrive in a lunatic asylum, in which they are kept until the place is burned down. It so happens that the chief doctor of the place turns out to be Professor Lucifer, who had left the monk clinging to the Cross at the top of the Cathedral. He is burnt to death in an airship disaster, and the atheist and the Catholic end their adventures.

‘The Ball and the Cross’ is very full of fine passages. It presents the side of the atheist and the Catholic in a brilliant manner. The chapter that describes the trial before the magistrate has got the atmosphere of the police-court to perfection. Not less good is the Chestertonian satire of the comments of the Press on the case, in which Chesterton makes some pungent remarks about Fleet Street
‘stunts.’ Perhaps one of the best things in the book is the argument between the French Catholic girl and Turnbull the atheist on the doctrine of Transubstantiation. This passage must be quoted; it is one of the best arguments for the Sacrament that has been written for those people who can see that (even in these days) bread is a symbol for the Presence of the Life Giver, and wine a symbol for the Presence of the Life Force.

‘I am sure,’ cried Turnbull, ‘there is no God.’

‘But there is,’ said Madeleine quietly; ‘why, I touched His body this morning.’

‘You touched a bit of bread,’ said Turnbull.

‘You think it is only a bit of bread,’ said the girl.

‘I know it is only a bit of bread,’ said Turnbull, with violence.

‘Then why did you refuse to eat it?’ she said.

If ‘Orthodoxy’ is the finest of Chesterton’s essays, ‘Browning’ the best of his critical studies, ‘The Ballad of the White Horse’ the best of his poems, there is, I think, little doubt that this strange theological exposition, ‘The Ball and the Cross,’ is the best of his novels. It should be read by all rationalists, by all self-satisfied Christians, by all heretics, by those who are orthodox, and, above all, it should be read by those millions who pass St. Paul’s Cathedral and seldom if ever give a thought to the ‘Ball and the Cross’ that has made the title of Chesterton’s best novel.

‘THE FLYING INN’

Chesterton is once more a laughing prophet in this book, and he has as sad a state of things to prophesy as had Jeremiah to the Israelites, those people who, if it were not that they find a place in the sacred writings, would be the most silly and futile race of ancient history.

The scene of the story is England, and the last inn is there. We are to imagine that the non-drinking wine dogma of Islam has permeated England. It is a sorry state of things when—

‘The wicked old women who feel well-bred,
Have turned to a teashop the Saracen’s Head.’

The great charm of the book is the poetry that the Irish captain recites to Pump, the innkeeper, the gallant innkeeper who, against all opposition, keeps the flag flying and the flagon full. If the book is a little overdrawn it is, no doubt, because the subject is slightly farcical; the arguments of the Oriental are well put, and, if the discussion of the merits of vegetarianism are a little wearisome,
the poetry of a vegetarian is splendid:

‘For I stuff away for life
Shoving peas in with a knife,
Because I am at heart a vegetarian.’

Thus, if we observe queer manners at Eustace Miles we shall know the reason.

No doubt the adventures of the last innkeeper in England would be wonderful; there would be half-day trips to see him; bishops would flock to gaze upon the last relic of a pagan England; the Poet Laureate might so forget himself as to write an ‘Epic of the Last Innkeeper’; editors would be sending lady reporters to give the feminine view of the finish of drinking; publishers would fall over one another in their eagerness to secure the ‘Memoirs of the Last Publican’; the Salvation Army would put the last drunkard in the British Museum as a prehistoric specimen; on the death of this National Hero, the Dean of Westminster would politely offer the Abbey for a memorial service, with no tickets for the best places.

Chesterton gives other adventures to this last innkeeper. He is, we hope, a false prophet for this once. Were there to be no beer perhaps not even the pen of Chesterton would be able to describe the scenes that would take place in England.

‘THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY’

Anarchy is a very interesting subject and is used to denote very different things. It may be something that puts a bullet through a king with the insane hope of ending the monarchy; it may be an act of a God-fearing Protestant clergyman when he attempts to harry the Catholics by denying that the crucifix is the proper symbol of the Christian religion; it may be the act of God when a village is destroyed by an earthquake or an island created by a seaquake.

‘The Man who was Thursday’ is about an anarchist, and we are not sure whether Chesterton is not pulling our respectable legs and laughing that we really believed the party of desperadoes were real anarchists. The fact is, the book starts in a highly respectable suburb that might be anywhere near London and could not be far from it.

There are two poets strolling about under the canopy of a lovely sky; one believes in anarchy, the other doesn’t—the one who does invites the one who does not to come with him and see what anarchy is. This he does, and, after a good supper of lobster mayonnaise, the two get down to a subterranean cavern
where are assembled half the anarchists of the world, precisely six; they call themselves by the names of the week, with a leader, who is met with later, Sunday.

Syme, the visitor, is appointed as a member, and becomes, Thursday; he has a great many adventures, including breakfast, overlooking Leicester Square, and gradually discovers that the said anarchists, unknown at first to each other, are really Scotland Yard detectives.

The only real anarchist is the poet who believed in it, whose name is Gregory. He has the pious wish to destroy the world; he may be Satan, if that person could ever pretend to be a poet.

What does Chesterton mean by this strange weird tale that is almost like a romance of Oppenheim and is yet like an old-world allegory? Is he laughing at anarchists that they are but policemen in disguise? Is he saying that policemen are really only anarchists? Or does he mean that the Devil masquerades as the spirit of the Holy Day of the week ‘Sunday,’ or is ‘Sunday’ really Christ?

Chesterton calls this novel a nightmare; a nightmare is usually a muddled kind of thing with no connections at all; it is a dream turned into a blasphemy. The book may mean several things; it is quite possible that it may mean nothing; there is no need for a novel to mean anything so long as it is readable. ‘The Man who was Thursday’ certainly is that, but it leaves us with an uneasy suspicion that it is a very serious book and at the same time it may be merely a farce.

Space does not permit us to more than mention Chesterton’s two detective books, ‘The Innocence of Father Brown’ and ‘The Wisdom of Father Brown.’ They are a highly original series of detective tales. ‘The Club of Queer Trades’ is a volume of quaint short stories full of Chesterton’s genius.

Since Chesterton wrote these books an event has occurred to him which may have a considerable effect on his writings. His novels have always shown a Catholic tendency when they have touched at all on religion. They have not, of course, the propagandist setting of the works of Father R.H. Benson, nor do they have a contempt for other Churches that so often blackens the writings of Roman Catholic apologists.

The event is one that has occasioned the usual mistake in the Press. They have said with loud emphasis, ‘Mr. Chesterton has joined the Catholic Church.’ He has not; there is, unfortunately, no Catholic Church that he could have joined; what he has done is to be received into the Roman part of the Catholic Church.

This is a matter of importance to Chesterton; it is a matter of far greater importance to the Roman Catholics. If the Roman Church is wise she will not
put her ban on Chesterton’s writings—his intellect is far beyond the ken of the Pope; his utterances are of more import than all the Papal Bulls. She has secured, as her ally, one of the finest intellects of the day, one of the best Christian apologists.

If, then, we have further novels from the pen of Chesterton we shall expect them to have a Roman bias, but we shall hope that they will not bear any signs that Rome has dictated the policy that has made many of her best priests mere puppets, afraid, not of the Church, but of the Pope, who often enough in history has been a very ignorant man.

Of present-day novelists it is in no way fair to compare them to Chesterton; ‘some contemporary novelists are better than he is, some are worse.’ These are statements the writer of this book has often heard; they are entirely unfair. Chesterton, as I have said, stands apart; his works are for the most part symbolic. This is their difficulty: any of his books may be the symbol for several points of view with the exception of his religious position, which is always on the side of Christianity, and, I think, the Roman Catholic interpretation of it; his dialogue is worthy of Anthony Hope, his dramatic power is intense, his satire is never ill-natured, it is always cutting, his humour is gentle, pathos is rare in his novels, he has never described a woman, he is undoubtedly a philosopher, but he is not one who is academic, above all he is the genial writer of phantastic tales that are as wide as the universe.
Chapter Nine

CHESTERTON ON DIVORCE

IT may be somewhat arbitrary to proceed straight away to nearly the end of Chesterton’s ‘Superstition of Divorce’ to find an argument that shows that he doesn’t quite understand what divorce aims at; but it is well, when taking note of a book on an alleged abuse of modern society, to also see that the writer has got hold of the right end of the stick. It is no doubt unfortunate that many marriages said to be made in heaven end in hell. Divorce may be a sign that men have no reverence for marriage, it may equally be an argument that they reverence it very much; but there is no good reason for attributing to divorce only very low motives and one of the lowest that can be found; consequently I have started in the middle of this book.

In a chapter on the tragedies of marriage, Chesterton remarks that ‘the broad-minded are extremely bitter because a Christian, who wishes to have several wives when his own promise bound him to one, is not allowed to violate his vow at the same altar at which he made it.’ What most people who wish for a divorce want is that they shall have, not several wives, but one, who shall prove that Christian marriage is not a horrible farce, that the words of the priest were not a miserable blasphemy. Chesterton has made a very big mistake if he thinks that the exponents of divorce wish the Church to be a party to polygamy; what they want is that the Church shall show a little common sense and not rely on the tradition of hotly disputed texts.

I think it is perfectly clear that Chesterton can see no good in divorce at all. I have said it may be a very good argument for those who wish to make marriage what it is said by the Church to be—a Divine institution. Many people seek divorce, not that, as Chesterton implies, they shall run away with the wife of the man across the square, but that, having been unlucky in a speculation, they wish quite naturally and quite rightly to try again, to the infinite satisfaction of all parties. If the Church does not agree that divorce is ever right, so much the worse for that Divine institution; if the Church is right in holding that marriages are made by God, then civil marriages are not marriages at all, and there is no need to worry about divorce, because the most ardent reformer does not imagine that man can undo the Divine decree; on the other hand, the Church never will face the fact that, if all marriages in a church by a priest are Divine, then it is
rather strange that the result of them very often would be more consistent with a Satanic origin.

I am dwelling at some length on this theological argument because, though Chesterton does not base his case on that argument, he undoubtedly considers that divorce is against the Church’s teaching, and the Church to which he now belongs would not allow him to think otherwise. Before I finally leave this side of the question there is one other consideration that must be faced. Whatever the texts in the New Testament relating to divorce may mean, it is rather unfortunate that they are attributed to a bachelor. Whether Christ had any good reason for knowing anything about divorce is not an irreverent one, but it is one that the Church must face to-day.

Another thing that Chesterton does not seem to realize is that many people do not want divorce to marry again, but to be free of a partner who is not one in the most superficial sense of the word; at the same time a separation does not meet the case, as it is always possible that a man or woman may wish to take the matrimonial plunge again. Chesterton seems to think it is amusing to poke fun at those who are sensible enough to wish to make lunacy a sufficient ground for divorce. ‘The process’ he says, ‘might begin by releasing somebody from a homicidal maniac and end by dealing with a rather dull conversationalist.’ He might have added, to make the joke complete, or from some one who snores, or keeps cats, or reads Bernard Shaw.

‘To put it roughly,’ says Chesterton, ‘we are prepared in some cases to listen to a man who complains of having a wife. But we are not prepared to listen at such length to the same man when he comes back and complains that he has not got a wife. In a word, divorce is a controversy about remarriage; or, rather, about whether it is marriage at all.’ To a certain extent Chesterton is right when he says that the controversy about divorce is really about remarriage, but what he forgets is, that for the hundreds who want divorce to be remarried, there are thousands who want it to be unmarried. The reason a man complains of having a wife is, of course, often that he prefers a mistress; but it is equally true that another cause for complaint is that his wife has for him none of the recognized attributes of the normal state of wifehood.

I have always understood that in some sense Chesterton was a journalist of the kind who is rather hard on journalism, but I did not know until I read this book on divorce that he so little understood newspapers and their writers. Commenting on the fact that the Press is sensible enough to use divorce as a news item, he says: ‘The newspapers are full of an astonishing hilarity about the
rapidity with which hundreds of thousands of human families are being broken up by the lawyers; and about the undisguised haste of the “hustling” judges who carry on the work.’ I wonder if Mr. Chesterton ever reads the leaders of certain papers, leaders which never fail to regret the enormous amount of divorce there is. If it be true that there is a great deal of news of divorce in the Press, it is because the Press does not give news of an imaginary world that is a Utopia, but of the dear old muddle-headed world as it is. Does Chesterton fail to see that if the newspapers did not report the Divorce Courts, the numbers of cases would increase from thousands to millions. It is useless Chesterton sighing that lawyers have become breakers of families; they have also become restrainers of suicide. If the judges hustle, it is because they are sensible enough to see that most of the divorces are justifiable; when they have not been, they have not been slow to say so.

Yet again Chesterton repeats the somewhat superficial argument against divorce that its obvious effect would be frivolous marriage. The normal person on his or her wedding day luckily does not think about anything beyond the supreme happiness they have found at least at the time. It is lightly said that the modern Adam and Eve think of the chances of divorce before marriage whatever may be the cause of divorce afterwards; at least it will be agreed that it is a failure of a particular two people who thought that their lives together would be a mutual happiness. Therefore, when Chesterton says that divorce is likely to make frivolous marriages he is saying that couples about to marry do so expecting it to be a failure. If this be so, then the young men and women of today are more hopeless than they are commonly made to appear by correspondence about them in the papers. If, on the other hand, every couple on marriage knew for a certainty that it was ‘till death us do part,’ it is more than likely that marriage would be a thing that was abnormal, not normal. It might even be that the Church would have to listen to reason, and be disturbed over worse things than divorce, and whether she should endeavour to take a Christian attitude to those who had been unfortunate or indiscreet.

Chesterton is very concerned that the time will come when ‘there will be a distinction between those who are married and those who are really married.’ This is precisely to state what is Utopia. At present many people who are really married are in the chains of slavery; the more who get out of it the better. As the number of those whose marriages are a farce will gradually diminish, thus will divorce be a godsend. Divorce is, in certain cases, a godsend, but the priests refuse to listen to the Divine revelation.
Chesterton sketches at some length the nature of a vow. He considers that Henry the VIII broke the civilization of vows when he wished to have done with his wife. It is quite possible that he did, but it is also possible that she did precisely the same thing. The question in regard to our inquiry is: Is the marriage vow entirely binding even when the other party to the contract has broken it? The opponents of divorce, amongst whom are Chesterton, will quite easily say that it is, yet they cheerfully ignore the fact that in a marriage two persons make a contract, and if one breaks it there is quite a good reason that the vow made is no longer one at all. It is a very interesting question whether a vow should ever be broken. Should Jephthah have broken the vow that sacrificed his daughter? Should Herod have broken his vow that laid the head of John the Baptist on a charger? Should two people remain together when (if they have not broken their actual vows) they have lost the spirit of them? The opponents of divorce, who are so eager over the keeping of the marriage vow, are they as eager that it shall be but a miserable skeleton?

Chesterton does not see any particular reason why the exponents should be anxious to secure easier divorce for the poor man. It is, he thinks, ‘encouraging him to look for a new wife.’ If he has a wife who isn’t one at all, the best thing for him is to look for another who will prove to be so, otherwise he will search for the nearest public-house and a cheap prostitute. Surely it is better that it be granted his first marriage was a failure and let him try decently for a better.

Of course, the most sensible plan would be to give divorce for all sorts of small things; people would soon then tire of it. Chesterton tells us that already in America there is demand for less divorce consequent on the increased facilities over there. In England there is demand for more. Let it be given freely and the demand will soon cease. Why should our policy be dictated by a celibate priesthood? Does Chesterton think that people who hate one another are going to live together as though they were the most ardent lovers? Does he consider that it would be better to have no divorce and no marriage as a consequence? Does he consider that ill-assorted couples will make happy nations? Does he really consider that divorce can destroy marriage? Does he consider that the newspapers print the divorce cases because they have no other copy?

Chesterton’s book is, I think, unfair on some points. He considers divorce is a superstition; he holds that it is pernicious from a social standpoint; he considers that it encourages adultery; he considers that it is the breaking of a vow; but has he ever seriously considered that if all divorce is wrong, that marriage very often is the most miserable caricature of Divinity possible? Has he thought what the
state of the country would be if no marriage could ever be broken or a fresh matrimonial start made? If such a thing happened it might make him write a book on the ‘Superstition of Non-Divorce.’
Chapter Ten

‘THE NEW JERUSALEM’

THERE are four ways of going to Jerusalem—the one is to go as a pilgrim would go to Mecca; another is to go as a tourist in much the way that an American staying in Russell Square might start for a trip round London. Again, it is possible to go to Jerusalem for yet a third reason, that of wishing quite humbly to be in some way a modern Crusader. There is yet a fourth way, which is to be made to go for reasons that are called military and are really political.

‘The New Jerusalem’ is, above all, a massive book. It is the record of a tour, and it is something more, it is an appreciation of the Sacred City on a Hill. It is, in a limited sense, a philosophy of the Holy Land; it deals in a masterly way with problems connected with the Jews; it is so unscholarly as to insist that the scholars who refuse to call the Mosque of Omar that at all are pedantic; it has a fine chapter on Zionism; it describes Jerusalem, not so much as a city, but as an impression that fastened itself on the mind of Mr. Chesterton.

There are some very fine passages in the book that deal with the curious question of Demonology, that peculiar belief which finds a place in the New Testament in the story of the Gadarene swine, and who, Chesterton felt, might still be found at the bottom of the Dead Sea—‘sea swine or four-legged fishes swollen over with evil eyes, grown over with sea grass for bristles, the ghosts of Gadara.’

One of the most interesting chapters of this book is that which is entitled ‘The Philosophy of Sightseeing.’ There is, of course, a philosophy of everything, of boiling eggs, of race-horses, of the relations of space and time—in fact, Philosophy is a sort of Harrods, that sums up anything from a Rolls Royce to a packet of pins.

To some people there must be almost something incongruous in the idea of sightseeing in the Holy Land, yet it is probable that of the crowds round the foot of the Cross, on which was enacted the world’s greatest blessing, a great part were idle sightseers who, twenty centuries later, might have been a bank holiday crowd on Hampstead Heath. Chesterton found that there was a philosophy in sightseeing; he had been warned that he would find Jerusalem disappointing, but he did not. He could be interested in the guide who ‘made it very clear that Jesus Christ was crucified in case any one should suppose that He was beheaded.’ He
could see that the ‘Christianity of Jerusalem, after a thousand years of Turkish tyranny, survived even in the sense of dying daily’; fascinating as Chesterton found Jerusalem, much as he insists that the ‘sights’ of the city must be seen in their right perspective, yet he has sympathy with the man who only ‘sees in the distance Jerusalem sitting on the hill and keeping that vision’ lest going further he might understand the city and weep over it.

Chesterton devotes a long and careful chapter to the question of the Jews, of whom Christ was the chief; but, notwithstanding, thousands of His so-called followers quite forget this, and scarcely will admit that the Jew has a right to live. The reason is, no doubt, that the Fourth Gospel uses the word ιουδαιος in the sense of those who were hostile, consequently many entirely orthodox Christians are anti-Jewists, quite oblivious of the very reasonable request of St. Paul that in Christ are neither Jew nor Gentile. This is, in brief, the theological side of the vexed question of Zionism. Chesterton makes it quite clear that he thinks it desirable that ‘Jews should be represented by Jews, should live in a society of Jews, should be judged by Jews and ruled by Jews,’ which is of course to say that the Jews should be a nation. But the fact remains, do they wish to be so, and, if they do, is it necessary to them, or even congenial, that it shall be in Palestine? It is no way the province of this book to go into this question; it has been enough to say that it is perfectly evident that Chesterton desires for the Jew the dignity of being a separate nation.

Is there any particular characteristic in this record of Chesterton’s visit to Jerusalem? Is it anything more than an impression of a wonderful experience, when a great writer left his home in Buckinghamshire and passed over the sea and the desert to the city that is older than history and is now new? I do not think that the book can be called more than a Chestertonian impression of Jerusalem, with an appreciation of the vexed history of that strange city which is Holy. It does not forget the problems in connection with Palestine, but it has no particular claim to having said very much that was new about the New Jerusalem. Yet it has avoided the obvious: it is not of the type of book that is read at drawing-room missionary meetings, which are more often than not written in a surprised style, that the places mentioned in the Bible are really somewhere.

I almost feel as if this book is something of a guide-book—in fact, it was inevitable that it should be so. I rather fancy that descriptive writing is for Chesterton difficult; it is a little bit too descriptive, which is to say it is not always easy to imagine the scene he is trying to describe. I am not sure that the Jews will be flattered to be told that Chesterton thinks they are worthy of being a
nation; it is slightly patronizing.

Yet the New Jerusalem is a book to read, but it is not of the Holy City that St. John saw in the Revelation; it is of the New Jerusalem of the twentieth century, which is very imperfect, yet is Holy. It is a book of a city that was visited by God, Who did not deem Himself too important to walk in its streets; it is of a city teeming with difficulties; it is of a city that has felt the iron hand of the conqueror; it is finally Jerusalem made into a symbol by the hand of Mr. Chesterton.
Chapter Eleven

MR. CHESTERTON AT HOME

THERE is a very remarkable fascination about the home life of a great man whatever branch of activity he may adorn. If he is an archbishop, it is interesting to know what he looks like when he has exchanged his leggings for a human dress; if he is a pork millionaire, we like to see whether he enjoys Chopin; if he is a great writer, the interest of his home life is intensified. For the tens of thousands who know an author by his books, the number who know him at home may quite well be measured by the score.

There is always an idea that a great man is not as others; that he may quite conceivably eat mustard with mutton, or peas with a spoon; that his conversation will be of things the ordinary man knows nothing about; that he is unapproachable; that he is, in short, on a glorified pedestal. This love of the personal is demonstrated in the absurd wish people have to know about the private doings of Royalty, it is shown in the remarkable fact that thousands will hang about a church door to see the wedding of some one who is of no particular interest beyond the fact that they are in some way well known; it is again seen in the interest that people display in those parts of a biography that deal with the life of the public man in his private surroundings.

When I first knew Chesterton he was living in a flat in Battersea, a charming place overlooking a green park in front and a mass of black roofs behind. Here Chesterton lived in the days when he was becoming famous, when the inhabitants of that part of London began to realize that they had a great man in their midst, and grew accustomed to seeing a romantic figure in a cloak and slouch hat hail a hansom and drive off to Fleet Street.

Later, Chesterton moved to Beaconsfield, a delightful country town, built in the shape of a cross, on the road from London to Oxford. He has here a queer kind of house that is mostly doors and passages, and looks like a very elaborate dolls’-house; it is rather like one of the Four Beasts, who had eyes all round, except that instead of having eyes all round it has doors all round; and I have never yet discovered which is really the front door, for the very good reason that either of the sides may be the front.

In a very charming essay, Max Beerhobm, one of the best essayists of the day, gives warning to very eminent men that if they wish to please their admirers a
great deal depends on how they receive those who would pay them homage. He tells us of how Coventry Patmore paid a visit to Leigh Hunt and was so overcome by the poet’s greeting—‘This is a beautiful world, Mr. Patmore’—that he remembered nothing else of that interview. I remember one day it so happened that I had to pay a visit to Anthony Hope. I knocked tremulously at his door in Gower Street and followed the trim housemaid into the dining-room. Here I found an oldish man with his back to me. Turning round at my entrance he said, without any asking who I was, ‘Have a cigarette?’ And this is all that I remembered of this visit.

The best way, according to Max Beerbohm, is for the visitor to be already seated, and for the very eminent man to enter, for ‘Let the hero remember that his coming will seem supernatral to the young man.’

I cannot remember the first time I saw Chesterton, whether he was seated or whether I was; whether his entrance was like a god or whether he was sitting on the floor drawing pirates of foreign climes or whether he was wandering up and down the passage. Chesterton is so remarkable-looking that any one seeing him cannot fail to be impressed by his splendid head, his shapely forehead, his eyes that seem to look back over the forgotten centuries or forward to those yet to come.

If there is one thing that is characteristic of Chesterton, it is that he always seems genuinely pleased to see you. Many people say they are pleased to see you, yet at the same time there is the uncomfortable feeling that they would be much more pleased to see you leaving. This is not the case with Chesterton: he has the happy advantage of making you feel that he really is glad that you have come to his house. This is not so with all great writers. Carlyle, if he liked to see a person, did not say so; Tennyson did not always trouble to be polite; Swift would receive his guests with a gloomy moroseness; Dickens was a man of moods; conversation with Browning was not always easy. Great men do not always trouble to be polite to smaller ones.

What a wonderful laugh Chesterton has. It is like a clap of thunder that suddenly startles the echoes in the valley; it is the very soul of geniality. There is nothing that so lays bare a man’s character as his laugh—it cannot pretend. We can pretend to like; we can pretend to be pleased; we can pretend to listen; we can’t pretend to laugh. Chesterton laughs because he is amused; he is amused at all the small things, but he seldom laughs at a thing.

I have often and often sat at his table. He talks incessantly. There is no subject upon which he has not something worth while to say. His memory is remarkable;
he can quote poet after poet, or compose a poem on anything that crops up at the table. I do not think it can be said that Chesterton is a good listener. This is not in any way conceit or boredom, but is rather that he is always thinking out some new story or article or poem. Yet he is a good host in the niceties of the table; he knows if you want salt; he does not forget that wine is the symbol of hospitality.

It has been said that Chesterton is one of the best conversationalists of the day. Conversation is a queer thing; so many people talk without having anything to say; others have a great deal to say and never say it. Chesterton can undoubtedly talk well; he has a knack of finding subjects suitable to the company; though he does not talk very much of things of the day; he is naturally mostly interested in books. Given a kindred soul the two will talk and laugh by the hour.

Naturally, Chesterton has to pay the price of greatness: he has visitors who will make any pretence to get into his presence. But many are the interesting people to be found at his home. I remember one day, some years ago, when Sir Herbert Tree called to see him. I do not recollect what they talked about, but the time came for the famous actor to go. The last I saw of him was the sight of his motor-car disappearing and Sir Herbert waving a great hat, while Chesterton waved a great stick. I never saw Tree again. Not long after, the world waved farewell to him for ever.

One of the most frequent visitors to his home is Mr. Belloc, and it is said that he always demands beer and bacon. One day it so happened that Mr. Wells came in about tea-time. He seemed, it is said, gloomy during the meal, and finally the cause was discovered! Mr. Wells also wanted beer and bacon. It was forthcoming, and the great novelist was satisfied. It is at least interesting to know that on one point at least Belloc and Wells are agreed—that beer and bacon are very excellent things.

No word of Chesterton’s home life would be complete without reference to his dog Winkle. Winkle was more than a dog, he was an institution; he had the most polished manners—the more you hurt him the more he wagged his tail; if you trod on his tail he would almost apologize for being in the way. He knew his master was a great man; he had a certain dignity, but was never a snob. But the day came that Winkle died, and was, I am sure, translated into Abraham’s Bosom. Chesterton has now another dog, but he will never get another Winkle. Such dogs are not found twice. I am not sure, but I think one day Winkle will greet Chesterton in the Land that lies the other side of the grave.

It is, I think, well known that Chesterton has a great liking for children. He is often to be seen playing games with them or telling them fairy stories; he is an
optimist, and no optimist can dislike children. He probably likes children for the very good reason that he is quite grown up; it is no uncommon thing to see him sitting on the floor drawing pictures to illustrate his stories. Which reminds me that Chesterton is a remarkably clever artist. I would solemnly warn any one who does not like his books defaced not to lend them to Chesterton. He will not cut them, he will not leave them out in the sun, he will not scorch them in front of the fire, but he will draw pictures on them. I have looked through many books at his home—nearly all of them have sketches in them. I have not the qualifications to speak of his art; I do not know whether he can be considered a great artist; I do not know whether it is a pity that he does not do more drawing; I do not know whether he can really be called an artist in the modern sense at all—but I do know that at his home there are many indications that he likes drawing, especially sketches of a fantastic nature.

Chesterton does nearly all his work in his little study, a sanctum littered with innumerable manuscripts. He, like most authors of the day, dictates to a secretary, who types what he says. It is, I think, in many ways a pity that so many authors type their manuscripts; for not only are they machine-made, they have not the interest that they should have for posterity. What would the British Museum have lost if all the manuscripts had been typewritten! Chesterton’s written hand is extremely elegant. At one time I believe he used to write his own manuscripts. The typewriter is, after all, but one more indication that we live in times when nothing is done except by some kind of machinery; all the same, I could wish that even if typewriters are used famous authors would keep one copy of their writings in their own hand.

It is remarkable the amount of work that Chesterton gets through. He has masses of correspondence, he has articles to write, books to get ready for press, and yet he finds time to help in local theatricals, to give lectures in places as wide apart as Oxford and America (and what is wider in every way than those two places?), that mean all that is best in the ancient world and all that is best in the modern. He can also find time to take a long tour to Palestine to find the New Jerusalem, that city that Christ wept over, not because it was to be razed to the ground, but because its inhabitants were fools.

What are the general impressions that a stranger visiting Chesterton would get? He would, I think, be impressed by his genial kindliness; he would be amazed by his extraordinary powers of memory and the depths of his reading; he would be gratified by the interest that Chesterton displays in him; he would be charmed by the quaintness of his home. That Chesterton has humour is abundant
by his conversation; that he has pathos is not so apparent. I am not perfectly sure that he can appreciate the things that make ordinary men sad. It has been said that he is not concerned with the facts of everyday life; if he is not, it is because he can see beyond them—he can see that this is a good world, which makes him a good host; he can look forward across the ages to the glorious stars that shine in the night sky for those who are optimists, as Chesterton is, and are great men in their own homes.
Chapter Twelve

HIS PLACE IN LITERATURE

In a very admirable discussion on the word 'great,' in his study of Dickens, Chesterton remarks that 'there are a certain number of people who always think dead men great and live men small.' The tendency is natural and is entirely worthy of blame. If a man is great when he is dead, then he was great when he was alive. It is but a re-echo of much of the folly talked during the war, when we were so credulous as to believe that every dead soldier was a saint and every live one a hero. Then, when the war was over, these hero worshippers quietly forgot that the soldiers had been heroes, put up stone crosses to the dead, and did little to remove the crosses from the living.

There are a number of quite well meaning people who will say, without much thought, that Chesterton is a great man, and if you ask them why, they will answer, 'He is a great writer, he is a great lecturer, he must be great; look at the times he appears in the Press, look at the wealth of caricature that is displayed on him.' No doubt these are good reasons in their way, but they rather indicate that Chesterton is well known in a popular sense; they are not a true indication that he is great. The public of to-day is inclined to measure greatness by the number of times a person appears in the newspapers, it seldom realizes that greatness is, above all, a moral quality, not a quantity; the fact that a person is in front of the public eye (very often a blind eye) is no indication of true greatness. If it was, then of necessity every Prime Minister would be a great man, every revue actress would be a great woman, every ordinary person would be small.

It is one of the most difficult things possible to determine what is the place a writer takes in literature. It does not make the task easier when the writer is not only alive but is still a comparatively young man in the height of his powers. A pure and simple biography cannot always determine with any satisfaction its subject’s literary standing. Critical studies of classic authors do not usually give any preciseness about the exact niche the subject fills.

Literature is one of the most elastic qualities of the day, of human activity; it cannot be bound by rules, yet has a more or less artificial standard, which is, perhaps, an imaginary line which has style on the one side and lack of style on the other. Yet there is a further difficulty: it is in no way fair to award an author his place in literature entirely by his style, nor is it fair to literature to disregard
I have anticipated in earlier chapters some of what must be said in this, but it is not, I think, out of place to attempt to write of the literary qualities of Chesterton and of his place in contemporary literature. With regard to his position in respect of former writers I must say something, but it would not be wise to give any comment of what may be the permanent place of Chesterton in the world of books. He has, I hope, many years of literary output in front of him. It cannot be ignored that his reception into the Roman Catholic Church may greatly influence his future writings; it is too soon to make any effort to predict whether his writings will stand the test of time, whether he will be popular in a hundred years or whether he will have the neglect that has attended some of the greatest of authors.

There is a question that must be faced. Has Chesterton a place in literature at all, if, as is the usual thing, we have to compare him with contemporary writers, or is it that he has such a unique place that it is impossible to compare him to any living writer? Probably, although it is not necessary, it is best to compare Chesterton with some of the greatest writers of the day, and see why it is that he is worthy of a place in the foremost rank. There are, at the present day, a great number of writers who would appear worthy of a foremost place in literature. Those I have chosen have been selected because, in a sort of vague way, people couple them with the name of Chesterton. They are, I think, H.G. Wells, Bernard Shaw and Hilaire Belloc.

I do think that all these writers have a unique place in contemporary literature. Perhaps, of the three, Wells is the greatest, because there is possibly no greater thing than a scientific prophet who is also a brilliant novelist. If Belloc and Shaw are smaller men it is because they deal with smaller matters.

At the present day Chesterton does occupy in contemporary literature a place that no one else does. He is, in a sense, a Dickens of the twentieth century; he is something more, he may even be a prophet. Of course Chesterton has not the enormous following that Dickens had at the height of his powers, but he has that kind of monumental feeling in the twentieth century that belonged to Dickens in the nineteenth: he is typical of this century, being an optimist when ordinary men are pessimistic. As in the nineteenth century Dickens made common men realise their greatness when they themselves felt immeasurably small, so Chesterton makes great men feel small when they are really so.

But in another sense he cannot really be compared to Dickens. Dickens undoubtedly was a delineator of supreme characters. I do not think it can be said
that any of the characters of Chesterton would ever be known with the knowledge with which Mr. Pickwick is known. Dickens was not in any sense an essayist; Chesterton is one in every sense. Dickens was a man who really cared very much that all kinds of oppression should be put down; Chesterton, no doubt, cares also, but he rather imagines that things ordinary people quite rightly call welfare work are but forms of slavery. If Dickens hated factories it was because he had hateful experience of them; if Chesterton hates factories it is because he thinks they destroy family life and the home. I have attempted to suggest that Dickens and Chesterton are alike as regards their being monuments of their respective centuries. I have also suggested that they are extremely unlike. Yet I can think of no writer of the nineteenth century who, in ideal, is so near to Chesterton as Dickens; but that at the same time they are also so far apart is but another indication that to place Chesterton in regard to the past is almost impossible.

One thing that Chesterton is not, is an Eclectic; if he is an original thinker, it is because he can see that though black is not really white there is no particular reason why it should not be grey; if Notting Hill can boast of forty fried fish shops he does not see any reason why it could fail to produce a Napoleon. If a party of Dons are sitting round a table discussing how desirable is the elimination of life, he sees that it is a perfectly good ethic for one of the undergraduates to test the theory by brandishing a loaded pistol at the warden’s head. If, as a novelist, he is different to all his contemporaries, it is because he has discovered that the word novel sometimes means something new, sometimes something original, very often something extremely old.

Yet another difficulty for finding an exact niche for Chesterton lies in the fact that he is a bit of everything, and, what is more, these bits are very big and make a large kaleidoscope. He is a theological professor who is so entirely sensible that the public hardly discovers the fact; he does not wear a cap and gown, and quote quite easily from all the Fathers of the ancient Church. He does not apologize for Christianity by reading Christian books. Rather to learn the Christian standpoint he discovers the tenets of Rationalism; he writes a theological philosophy that might be a discussion between Satan and Christ and puts it into a novel; he writes a dissertation on Transubstantiation and puts it into a tale of anarchy that is so untheological that it mentions Leicester Square and lobster mayonnaise; he is a historian who not only writes history but understands it; he does not consider that William conquered England, but that England conquered William; he says the best way to read history is to read it backwards;
he is a historian who does not consider the most important facts are the dates of kings who lived and died.

It has been said that Chesterton is the finest essayist of the day. It would be perhaps fairer to say he is like no living essayist; if he is not a finer essayist than Dean Inge, he is at least as good; he may not be so academic, but he is as learned; if he has not quite the charm of Mr. Lucas he is at least more versatile. His essays sparkle with epigrams, they are full of paradox. He has said that Plato said silly things and yet was the wonder of the ancient world. He can lament that H.G. Wells has come to the awful conclusion that two and two are four, and at the same time be thankful that not even in fairyland can two and two make five; he can state quite calmly that the weakness of Feminism is that it drives the woman from the freedom of the home to the slavery of the world; he can make priggish clergymen, who accuse him of joking and taking the name of the Lord in vain, bite their words by explaining that to make a joke of anything is not to take it in vain. As an essayist, Chesterton stands apart from his contemporaries. Of older essayists I can think of none who could in any way be said to have a similarity to Chesterton.

One of the most interesting things about Chesterton is his position as a poet. I have said, in an earlier chapter, that he might have been the Poet Laureate. I have ventured to say that if posterity did not place him among great poets it would be because he had given more attention to prose. The particular question of Chesterton as a poet opens up a more general one, which is something in the nature of a problem. Would the great classic poets of the last century have been as great if they had not written so much poetry? Had Tennyson written but two long poems; had Browning never written anything but short lyrics; had Wordsworth been content to write few poems, provided these had been an indication of the best work of these particular poets, would posterity have granted them immortality? Will Chesterton go down to posterity as a poet on account of his fine achievement in his ‘Ballad of the White Horse,’ or will people forget him because he has not written more? I am rather afraid this may be so. Posterity, it is true, likes quality, but it likes it better with quantity.

But I feel that I am dealing with what I had said it would be well to avoid—anything to do with the future of Chesterton. What is Chesterton’s position as a poet to-day? He is, I think, one of the finest of the day; he has a fine sense of humour in poetry; he has great powers of recasting scenes of long-forgotten centuries; he has a fine musical rhythm; but he has not, I think, pathos. I think it is a pity that he does not write epics on events of the day; he might easily find
the Poet Laureate’s silence an inspiration; he might write another great poem; it might be better than any more novels.

It is difficult to say whether or not Chesterton is a playwright. His one play was a fine one about a fine subject, but I do not think it had the qualities that would be popular in an ordinary theatre in London. There is a certain suggestion of a problem about it which is a little obscure. We are not sure whether Chesterton is in earnest or joking; it has not probably sufficient action to suit this century, that wishes aeroplanes to dash through the house on the stage, or two or three people to meet with violent deaths in three acts. It is in the nature of a discussion and might be almost anti-Shavian; it would be absurd to attempt to place Chesterton among contemporary dramatic authors, but it is not too much to predict that he might quite easily soon be very near the front rank.

By his critical studies of Browning, Dickens, and Thackeray, Chesterton has proved that there was a great deal more to be said about these classic authors than the critics had seemed to think. Chesterton seldom agreed with those who had written before. What they had considered weaknesses he had considered strength; what he had considered weakness they had considered strength. Possibly no author had been written about more than Dickens, yet there remained for Chesterton to add much that was vital. No poet had been more misunderstood than Browning; no poet had been more attacked for his grotesque style; no critic has written with the understanding of Browning as has Chesterton. In taking extracts from Thackeray, Chesterton has shown a fine appreciation of that novelist’s best work.

It is a difficult thing for a great writer to be a great critic. He is liable to be either condescending or supercilious; he is liable unconsciously to judge all standards by his own; he is likely to be rather intolerant of any opinions but his own; it is easier for a great critic to be a great writer. In the case of Chesterton, because he is a great and original writer he has a brilliant critical acumen that probes deep into the minds of other authors and sees what is stored there in a way that other critics have, perhaps, failed to see, not because they did not choose to look for it, but rather because, almost without knowing it, critics who set out to be critics exclusively are liable to work rather too much by a fixed rule.

It is, I hope, now apparent how difficult it is to say where exactly Chesterton finds a place in literature. Is it as an essayist? Is it as a novelist? Is it as a historian? Is it as a critic? If it is as a novelist, then it is as a writer of peculiar phantasy; if it is as an essayist, it is as a brilliant controversialist; if it is as a
historian, it is as a unique critic of history; if it is as a critic, it is as a broad-minded one of not only past great authors but of current events.

I do not know of any writer who is so difficult to place. Wells can quite well be a fine novelist and prophet; Bernard Shaw can easily be called a playwright and a philosopher; Galsworthy is a serious novelist and a playwright who takes the art with proper regard for its powers of social redress; Sir James Barrie is a mystical writer with a message. There are fifty novelists who are interpreters of manners and problems of the twentieth century. But Chesterton is not like any of these. He is not in any sense a specialist; he is really a general practitioner with the hand of a specialist in everything he touches except divorce. In a word, he is that thing in literature that occurs once or twice in every century—an epic. He is the laughing, genial writer of the twentieth century who, in everything he does, earns the highest of all literary honours—to be unique.
Chapter Thirteen

G.K.C. AND G.B.S.

It would be a very interesting problem to try and discover how it is that Gilbert Keith Chesterton and George Bernard Shaw have come to be known so familiarly as G.K.C. and G.B.S. If any of my readers can suggest a solution of this, I hope they will let me know; because, if I calmly headed this chapter G.K.C. and J.M.B. I do not think that any one would guess that I was attempting to compare Chesterton to James Matthew Barrie unless I told them. It would be really quite amusing to do all comparisons by this initial method; we might find in the Hibbert Journal an article on the need of Episcopacy headed H.H. Dunelm and Frank Zanzibar, which would be quite simply the Bishop of Durham and the Bishop of Zanzibar on Episcopacy; or, for a rest, we might turn to the Daily Herald and find ‘J.R.C. attacks L.G.,’ which would be quite simply that Mr. Clynnes did not see eye to eye with the Premier that a Coalition Government was a national asset.

If we refer to the past, it is not easy to suggest any one who might be known by initials. Charles Dickens was never known as C.D.; Thackeray, when he wrote his ‘Essay on the Four Georges’ was probably not known as W.M.T. on the Four Georges; but if Chesterton writes a book on America, the Press affirms that there is a new book on America by G.K.C., or we pick up a morning paper and find a large headline on ‘G.B.S. on Prisons,’ and every one knows who it is. But put a headline, ‘Randall on Divorce,’ and it is not seen at once that the Archbishop of Canterbury has been addressing the Upper House on a matter of grave ecclesiastical import.

There is a saying about some people being born great, others having that state thrust upon them, others as having achieved it. There is no doubt that Chesterton was born to be great, so no doubt was Shaw, but they went about it in a different way. The public caught hold of the remarkable personality of Chesterton and scarcely a day passed that the Press did not either quote him or caricature him; on the other hand, Shaw caught hold of the public, annoyed its susceptibilities, held it in supreme contempt, raved at it from the stage and platform, and the public, amazed at his cleverness, received him as the rude philosopher who looked a genius, talked like a whirlwind, said that he was greater than Shakespeare, said he was the Molière of the twentieth century, and posed until it
was expected of him.

But Chesterton does not pose. If he comes to lecture on Cobbett and talks for three-quarters of an hour on how his hat blew off, it is not a pose, it is the natural inconsequence of Chesterton on the platform. If Shaw is invited to a dinner and writes that he does not eat dinner and does not care to see others doing nothing else, he is posing; but, if so, it is because he is expected to do so.

On almost every subject Shaw and Chesterton disagree; yet they are both men who, in some way, attempt to be reformers. Shaw proceeds by satire and contempt; Chesterton proceeds by originality and good nature, except on the question of divorce, which makes him very angry, and, as I have said, uncritical. Shaw chastises the world and is angry; Chesterton laughs, and, in a genial way, asks what is wrong; and, having found out, attempts to put things right. Shaw would rather have a new sort of world with a super-man.

Shaw and Chesterton approach reform from two different ways. Chesterton suggests them by queer novels and paradoxical essays; Shaw puts his ideas into the mouthpieces of those who are known as Shavian characters; he interprets his theories by the Stage, therefore his sermons reach tens of thousands who would not read him if he preached from a pulpit. Thus, if he wants to show that there are no rules for getting married, he puts the problem into a play and wants an extension of divorce; Chesterton, on the other hand, believes that marriage is Divine and that divorce is but a superstition. If Shaw believed that the home narrowed life, was a domestic monarchy, meant a loss of individuality between husband and wife, Chesterton, far from agreeing to this proposition, takes the opposite view that it is the home which is large and the world which is small and narrowing. Probably neither is quite right. For some people the home is narrowing, for others it is the place that affords the widest scope; for some the world is narrow, for others the world is extremely broad—in fact, so broad that they never are able to get free from its immensity.

With regard to religion, whatever opinions Chesterton may hold—as he is now a Roman Catholic—they are no longer of interest. Shaw, on the other hand, is much too elastic a man to imagine for a moment that religion is a thing that is necessarily bound up with an organization which is mainly political; he is not so credulous as to believe that the spiritual can fall vertically to earth because a man kneels before a bishop and becomes a priest. Rather he had a much better plan. He started by being an atheist, the best possible foundation for subsequent theism. From this he became an Immanist, which is that God is in some way dispersed throughout the earth.
If there is one thing upon which we may say that Shaw and Chesterton are identical, it is in the strange fact that neither of them has, I think, ever described an ordinary lover—the sort of person who is nothing of a biological surprise, the kind of person who woos on a suburban court in Surbiton or Wimbledon and marries in a hideous red brick church to the cheerful accompaniment of confetti and the Wedding March. I do not think either of them can really enter into the ordinary emotions of life. They could neither of them write, I fancy, a really typical novel—that is, a tale about the folks who do the conventional things. Chesterton always sees everything upside down. If the man on Notting Hill sees it as a bustling area, Chesterton sees it as a place upon which a Napoleon might fall. Shaw, on the other hand, could not write of ordinary things because he is usually contemptuous of them. If Chesterton thinks education is a failure it is because the conventional method irritates him; Shaw considers that education does not educate a man, it ‘merely moulds him.’

I am not sure that Mr. Skimpole, in his brilliant study of Bernard Shaw, is quite correct when he says ‘the whole case against Chesterton, of course, is that he is a Romantic.’ Why is it a something against him that he chooses to be an idealist? Because, says Mr. Skimpole, ‘he does not seem to have grasped the fact that the most important difference between the Real and the Ideal aspects of anything is that while the Ideal is permanent and unchangeable as an angel, the Real requires an everlasting circle of changes.’ I am rather afraid Mr. Skimpole is talking through a certain covering that adorns his head. Cannot he see that very often the ideal is nothing less than the real? It is no case against Chesterton that he is a Romantic so long as the fact is duly recognized. If he considers certain institutions are permanent which may be said to be ideal (for instance, that marriage is a sacrament), he is just as likely to be as right as is Mr. Shaw when he contends that marriage must be made to fit the times, even if it be granted it is a Divine thing.

If Shaw is unable to see that most earthly things have a heavenly meaning, as Chesterton does, it is so much the worse for Shaw and so much the better for Chesterton. If Chesterton is a dangerous Romantic who likes Fairyland, at least Shaw is a dangerous eugenist who wants a super-man, and I am not sure that the fairies of Chesterton are not more useful than the ethics of Shaw; there is no doubt that they are less grown up. If Shaw is a philosopher, he is not one of this Universe; he is of another that shall be entirely sub-Shavian. If Chesterton is a philosopher, it is because he can see this universe better upside down than Shaw understands it the right way up.
In fact, the difference between Shaw and Chesterton may, I think, be something like this. They are, as I have said, both reformers, but Chesterton wishes to keep man as he is essentially, and gradually make him something better. Shaw wants to have done with man and produce a super-man. In this way Shaw admits the failure of man to rise above his environment. Chesterton not only thinks he is able to, but tries to prove it in his writings. Thus, if a man is an atheist he can show that he is in time capable of becoming a good theist, but Shaw if he allows some of his characters to be in hell, gets them out of it by attempting to make them strive for the super-man. For Chesterton, Man is the Super-Man; for Shaw, the Super-Man is not Man at all.

In fact, this no doubt is the reason that Shaw is really a pessimist and Chesterton an optimist.

There is, I think, little doubt that Chesterton is a far more important man than Shaw. He has the facility for getting hold of the things that matter; he is never ill-natured; he does not make fun of other people. Much as the writer admires the wit and brilliancy of Shaw, he cannot help feeling that Shaw is a rather cynical personality; Shaw loves to laugh at people, he is inclined to make fun of the martyrs. They were possibly quite mistaken in their enthusiasm, but at least they were consistent. I do not feel convinced that Shaw would stand in the middle of Piccadilly Circus and keep his ideals if he knew that it would involve being eaten by lions that came up Regent Street, as the martyrs faced them centuries ago in Rome, but I have little doubt that Chesterton would remain in Piccadilly Circus if he knew that he would be eaten unless he denied that marriage was a Divine institution.

In a word, Shaw bases his Philosophy and Plays on a contempt for all existing institutions. Chesterton bases his Writings and Philosophy on genial good nature and a respect for the things that are important. Therefore I think that Shaw has not made such a permanent contribution to thought as Chesterton certainly has; even if it is only in showing that the Christian religion is reasonable.
Chapter Fourteen

CONCLUSION

THERE was a time in history when the ancient world searched in vain for the truth. It produced men of the type of Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates; they were great philosophers who looked at the world in which they lived and asked what it meant. Was it material? Was it spiritual? Was it temporary? Was it eternal? Men were dissatisfied. And about that time a greater Philosopher came in the wake of a star, and men called Him Christ.

It is the twentieth century, and the Man the ancient world called Christ founded the religion which His followers were to take to the ends of the earth. Yet men are still dissatisfied; philosophers look out of their high-walled windows and watch the modern world, which goes on; men die and are forgotten; creeds spring up for a day and pass; writers produce books, and in their turn pass away.

Of this century Chesterton is one of the great thinkers. It is, I think, a mistake not to take him seriously. If he is phantastic, there is a meaning behind his phantasy; if he laughs, the world need not think that he is frivolous. He is a prophet, and he has honour in his own country.

Chesterton is still a young man; he is young in soul and body. Like Peter Pan he does not grow up, yet he is a famous man; he has written great books, he has written fine poems, he has written brilliant essays, but he has never written a book with an appeal to an unthinking public that reads to kill thought. I wonder whether Chesterton would write a ‘Philosophy for the Unthinking Man’? I think he is the one man of the day who could do it, and I think it might be his greatest book.

I have attempted in this book to draw a picture of the works of Chesterton. They are not easy to deal with; they may mean many things. I have not attempted to forecast the future of Chesterton, strong as the temptation has been, but I have endeavoured to place before those who know Chesterton what it is they admire in him; and for those who only know him as a name, I hope that this book may induce them to read the most arresting writer of the day, who is known in every country as the Master of Paradox, which is to say that he is the Master of the Temple of Understanding.
OTHER G. K. CHESTERTON CRITIQUES

ROBERT LYND AND JOHN KELMAN
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INDEX

OTHER G. K. CHESTERTON CRITIQUES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE OF CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MR. G.K. CHESTERTON AND MR. HILAIRE BELLOC BY ROBERT LYND</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. THE HEAVENLY TWINS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. THE COPIOUSNESS OF MR. BELLOC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. THE TWO MR. CHESTERTONS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| MR. G.K. CHESTERTON’S POINT OF VIEW BY JOHN KELMAN |
| LECTURE IX |
1. THE HEAVENLY TWINS

It was Mr. Shaw who, in the course of a memorable controversy, invented a fantastic pantomime animal, which he called the “Chester-Belloc.” Some such invention was necessary as a symbol of the literary comradeship of Mr. Hilaire Belloc and Mr. Gilbert Chesterton. For Mr. Belloc and Mr. Chesterton, whatever may be the dissimilarities in the form and spirit of their work, cannot be thought of apart from each other. They are as inseparable as the red and green lights of a ship: the one illumines this side and the other that, but they are both equally concerned with announcing the path of the good ship “Mediaevalism” through the dangerous currents of our times. Fifty years ago, when philology was one of the imaginative arts, it would have been easy enough to gain credit for the theory that they are veritable reincarnations of the Heavenly Twins going about the earth with corrupted names. Chesterton is merely English for Castor, and Belloc is Pollux transmuted into French. Certainly, if the philologist had also been an evangelical Protestant, he would have felt a double confidence in identifying the two authors with Castor and Pollux as the GREAT TWIN BRETHREN, WHO FOUGHT SO WELL FOR ROME.

A critic was struck some years ago by the propriety of the fact that Mr. Chesterton and Mr. Belloc brought out books of the same kind and the same size, through the same publisher, almost in the same week. Mr. Belloc, to be sure, called his volume of essays This, That, and the Other, and Mr. Chesterton called his A Miscellany of Men. But if Mr. Chesterton had called his book This, That, and the Other and Mr. Belloc had called his A Miscellany of Men, it would not have made a pennyworth of difference. Each book is simply a ragbag of essays—the riotous and fantastically joyous essays of Mr. Chesterton, the sardonic and arrogantly gay essays of Mr. Belloc. Each, however, has a unity of outlook, not only an internal unity, but a unity with the other. Each has the outlook of the mediaevalist spirit—the spirit which finds crusades and miracles more natural than peace meetings and the discoveries of science, which gives Heaven and Hell a place on the map of the world, which casts a sinister eye on Turks and Jews, which brings its gaiety to the altar as the tumbler in the story brought his cap and bells, which praises dogma and wine and the rule of the
male, which abominates the scientific spirit, and curses the day on which Bacon was born. Probably, neither of the authors would object to being labelled a mediaevalist, except in so far as we all object to having labels affixed to us by other people. Mr. Chesterton’s attitude on the matter, indeed, is clear from that sentence in What’s Wrong with the World, in which he affirms: “Mankind has not passed through the Middle Ages. Rather mankind has retreated from the Middle Ages in reaction and rout.” And if, on learning some of the inferences he makes from this, you protest that he is reactionary, and is trying to put back the hands of the clock, he is quite unashamed, and replies that the moderns “are always saying ‘you can’t put the clock back.’ The simple and obvious answer is, ‘You can.’ A clock, being a piece of human construction, can be restored by the human finger to any figure or hour.” The effrontery of an answer like that is so magnificent that it takes one’s breath away. The chief difficulty of Mr. Chesterton and Mr. Belloc, however, seems to be that they want their clock to point to two different hours at the same time, neither of which happens to be the hour which the sun has just marked at Greenwich. They want it to point at once to 878 and 1789—to Ethandune and the French Revolution.

Similar though they are in the revolutio-mediaevalist background of their philosophy, however, Mr. Chesterton and Mr. Belloc are as unlike as possible in the spirit in which they proclaim it. If Mr. Chesterton gets up on his box to prophesy against the times, he seems to do so out of a passionate and unreasoning affection for his fellows. If Mr. Belloc denounces the age, he seems also to be denouncing the human race. Mr. Chesterton is jovial and democratic; Mr. Belloc is (to some extent) saturnine and autocratic. Mr. Chesterton belongs to the exuberantly lovable tradition of Dickens; indeed, he is, in the opinion of many people, the most exuberantly lovable personality which has expressed itself in English literature since Dickens. Mr. Belloc, on the other hand, has something of the gleaming and solitary fierceness of Swift and Hazlitt. Mr. Chesterton’s vision, coloured though it is with the colours of the past, projects itself generously into the future. He is foretelling the eve of the Utopia of the poor and the oppressed when he speaks of

the riot that all good men, even the most conservative, really dream of, when the sneer shall be struck from the face of the well-fed; when the wine of honour shall be poured down the throat of despair; when we shall, so far as to the sons of flesh is possible, take tyranny, and usury, and public treason, and bind them into bundles, and burn them.

There is anger, as well as affection, in this eloquence—anger as of a new sort
of knight thirsting to spill the blood of a new sort of barbarian in the name of Christ. Mr. Belloc’s attack on the barbarians lacks the charity of these fiery sentences. He concludes his essay on the scientific spirit, as embodied in Lombroso, for instance, with the words, “The Ass!” And he seems to sneer the insult where Mr. Chesterton would have roared it. Mr. Chesterton and he may be at one in the way in which they regard the scientific criminologists, eugenists, collectivists, pragmatists, post-impressionists, and most of the other “ists” of recent times, as an army of barbarians invading the territories of mediaeval Christendom. But while Mr. Chesterton is in the gap of danger, waving against his enemies the sword of the spirit, Mr. Belloc stands on a little height apart, aiming at them the more cruel shafts of the intellect. It is not that he is less courageous than Mr. Chesterton, but that he is more contemptuous. Here, for example, is how he meets the barbarian attack, especially as it is delivered by M. Bergson and his school:—

In its most grotesque form, it challenges the accuracy of mathematics; in its most vicious, the processes of the human reason. The Barbarian is as proud as a savage in a top hat when he talks of the elliptical or the hyperbolic universe, and tries to picture parallel straight lines converging or diverging—but never doing anything so vulgarly old-fashioned as to remain parallel.

The Barbarian, when he has graduated to be a “pragmatist,” struts like a nigger in evening clothes, and believes himself superior to the gift of reason, etc., etc.

It would be unfair to offer this passage as an example of Mr. Belize’s dominating genius, but it is an excellent example of his domineering temper. His genius and his temper, one may add, seem, in these essays, to, be always trying to climb on one another’s shoulders, and it is when his genius gets uppermost that he becomes one of the most biting and exhilarating writers of his time. On such occasions his malice ceases to be a talent, and rises into an enthusiasm, as in The Servants of the Rich, where, like a mediaeval bard, he shows no hesitation in housing his enemies in the circles of Hell. His gloating proclamation of the eternal doom of the rich men’s servants is an infectious piece of humour, at once grim and irresponsible:—

Their doom is an eternal sleeplessness and a nakedness in the gloom. . . . These are those men who were wont to come into the room of the Poor Guest at early morning, with a steadfast and assured step, and a look of insult. These are those who would take the tattered garments and hold them at arm’s length, as much as to say: “What rags these scribblers wear!” and then, casting them over
the arm, with a gesture that meant: “Well, they must be brushed, but Heaven knows if they will stand it without coming to pieces!” would next discover in the pockets a great quantity of middle-class things, and notably loose tobacco.

... Then one would see him turn one’s socks inside out, which is a ritual with the horrid tribe. Then a great bath would be trundled in, and he would set beside it a great can, and silently pronounce the judgment that, whatever else was forgiven the middle-class, one thing would not be forgiven them—the neglect of the bath, of the splashing about of the water, and of the adequate wetting of the towel.

All these things we have suffered, you and I, at their hands. But be comforted. They writhe in Hell with their fellows.

Mr. Belloc is not one of those authors who can be seen at their best in quotations, but even the mutilated fragment just given suggests to some extent the mixture of gaiety and malice that distinguishes his work from the work of any of his contemporaries. His gifts run to satire, as Mr. Chesterton’s run to imaginative argument. It is this, perhaps, which accounts for the fact that, of these two authors, who write with their heads in the Middle Ages, it is Mr. Chesterton who is the more comprehensive critic of his own times. He never fights private, but always public, battles in his essays. His mediaevalism seldom degenerates into a prejudice, as it often does with Mr. Belloc. It represents a genuine theory of the human soul, and of human freedom. He laments as he sees men exchanging the authority of a spiritual institution, like the Church, for the authority a carnal institution, like a bureaucracy. He rages as he sees them abandoning charters that gave men rights, and accepting charters that only give them prohibitions. It has been the custom for a long time to speak of Mr. Chesterton as an optimist; and there was, indeed, a time when he was so rejoiced by the discovery that the children of men were also the children of God, that he was as aggressively cheerful as Whitman and Browning rolled into one. But he has left all that behind him. The insistent vision of a world in full retreat from the world of Alfred and Charlemagne and the saints and the fight for Jerusalem—from this and the allied world of Danton and Robespierre, and the rush to the Bastille—has driven him back upon a partly well-founded and partly ill-founded Christian pessimism. To him it now seems as if Jerusalem had captured the Christians rather than the Christians Jerusalem. He sees men rushing into Bastilles, not in order to tear them down, but in order to inhabit the accursed cells.

When I say that this pessimism is partly ill-founded, I mean that it is arrived at
by comparing the liberties of the Middle Ages with the tyrannies of to-day, instead of by comparing the liberties of the Middle Ages with the liberties of to-day, or the tyrannies of the Middle Ages with the tyrannies of to-day. It is the result, sometimes, of playing with history and, sometimes, of playing with words. Is it not playing with words, for instance, to glorify the charters by which medieval kings guaranteed the rights and privileges of their subjects, and to deny the name of charter to such a law as that by which a modern State guarantees some of the rights and privileges of children—to deny it simply on the ground that the latter expresses itself largely in prohibitions? It may be necessary to forbid a child to go into a gin-palace in order to secure it the privilege of not being driven into a gin-palace. Prohibitions are as necessary to human liberty as permits and licences.

At the same time, quarrel as we may with Mr. Chesterton’s mediaevalism, and his application of it to modern problems, we can seldom quarrel with the motive with which he urges it upon us. His high purpose throughout is to keep alive the human view of society, as opposed to the mechanical view to which lazy politicians are naturally inclined. If he has not been able to give us any very, coherent vision of a Utopia of his own, he has, at least, done the world a service in dealing some smashing blows at the Utopia of machinery. None the less, he and Mr. Belloc would be the most dangerous of writers to follow in a literal obedience. In regard to political and social improvements, they are too often merely Devil’s Advocates of genius. But that is a necessary function, and they are something more than that. As I have suggested, above all the arguments and the rhetoric and the humours of the little political battles, they do bear aloft a banner with a strange device, reminding us that organized society was made for man, and not man for organized society. That, in the last analysis, is the useful thing for which Mr. Chesterton and Mr. Belloc stand in modern politics. It almost seems at times, however, as though they were ready to see us bound again with the fetters of ancient servitudes, in order to compel us to take part once more in the ancient struggle for freedom.

2. THE COPIOUSNESS OF MR. BELLOC

Mr. Belloc has during the last four or five years become a public man. Before that he had been acknowledged a man of genius. But even the fact that he had sat in the House of Commons never led any great section of Englishmen to regard him as a figure or an institution. He was generally looked on as one who made
his bed aggressively among heretics, as a kind of Rabelaisian dissenter, as a settled interrupter, half-rude and half-jesting. And yet there was always in him something of the pedagogue who has been revealed so famously in these last months. Not only had he a passion for facts and for stringing facts upon theories. He had also a high-headed and dogmatic and assured way of imparting his facts and theories to the human race as it sat—or in so far as it could be persuaded to sit—on its little forms.

It is his schoolmasterishness which chiefly distinguishes the genius of Mr. Belloc from the genius of his great and uproarious comrade, Mr. Chesterton. Mr. Belloc is not a humorist to anything like the same degree as Mr. Chesterton. If Mr. Chesterton were a schoolmaster he would give all the triangles noses and eyes, and he would turn the Latin verbs into nonsense rhymes. Humour is his breath and being. He cannot speak of the Kingdom of Heaven or of Robert Browning without it any more than of asparagus. He is a laughing theologian, a laughing politician, a laughing critic, a laughing philosopher. He retains a fantastic cheerfulness even amid the blind furies—and how blindly furious he can sometimes be!—of controversy. With Mr. Belloc, on the other hand, laughter is a separate and relinquishable gift. He can at will lay aside the mirth of one who has broken bounds for the solemnity of the man in authority. He can be scapegrace prince and sober king by turns, and in such a way that the two personalities seem scarcely to be related to each other. Compared with Mr. Chesterton he is like a man in a mask, or a series of masks. He reveals more of his intellect to the world than of his heart. He is not one of those authors whom one reads with a sense of personal intimacy. He is too arrogant even in his merriment for that.

Perhaps the figure we see reflected most obtrusively in his works is that of a man delighting in immense physical and intellectual energies. It is this that makes him one of the happiest of travellers. On his travels, one feels, every inch and nook of his being is intent upon the passing earth. The world is to him at once a map and a history and a poem and a church and an ale-house. The birds in the greenwood, the beer, the site of an old battle, the meaning of an old road, sacred emblems by the roadside, the comic events of way-faring—he has an equal appetite for them all. Has he not made a perfect book of these things, with a thousand fancies added, in The Four Men? In The Four Men he has written a travel-book which more than any other of his works has something of the passion of a personal confession. Here the pilgrim becomes nearly genial as he indulges in his humours against the rich and against policemen and in behalf of
Sussex against Kent and the rest of the inhabited world.

Mr. Chesterton has spoken of Mr. Belloc as one who “did and does humanly and heartily love England, not as a duty but as a pleasure, and almost an indulgence.” And The Four Men expresses this love humorously, inconsequently, and with a grave stepping eloquence. There are few speeches in modern books better than the conversations in The Four Men. Mr. Belloc is not one of those disciples of realism who believe that the art of conversation is dead, and that modern people are only capable of addressing each other in one-line sentences. He has the traditional love of the fine speech such as we find it in the ancient poets and historians and dramatists and satirists. He loves a monologue that passes from mockery to regret, that gathers up by the way anecdote and history and essay and foolery, that is half a narrative of things seen and half an irresponsible imagination. He can describe a runaway horse with the farcical realism of the authors of Some Experiences of an Irish R.M., can parody a judge, can paint a portrait, and can steep a landscape in vision. Two recent critics have described him as “the best English prose writer since Dryden,” but that only means that Mr. Belloc’s rush of genius has quite naturally swept them off their feet.

If Mr. Belloc’s love of country is an indulgence, his moods of suspicion and contempt are something of the same kind. He is nothing of a philanthropist in any sense of the word. He has no illusions about the virtue of the human race. He takes pleasure in scorn, and there is a flavour of bitterness in his jests. His fiction largely belongs to the comedy of corruption. He enjoys—and so do we—the thought of the poet in Sussex who had no money except three shillings, “and a French penny, which last some one had given him out of charity, taking him for a beggar a little way-out of Brightling that very day.” When he describes the popular rejoicings at the result of Mr. Clutterbuck’s election, he comments: “The populace were wild with joy at their victory, and that portion of them who as bitterly mourned defeat would have been roughly handled had they not numbered quite half this vast assembly of human beings.” He is satirist and ironist even more than historian. His ironical essays are the best of their kind that have been written in recent years.

Mr. Mandell and Mr. Shanks in their little study, Hilaire Belloc: the Man and his Work, are more successful in their exposition of Mr. Belloc’s theory of history and the theory of politics which has risen out of it—or out of which it has risen—than they are in their definition of him as a man of letters. They have written a lively book on him, but they do not sufficiently communicate an
impression of the kind of his exuberance, of his thrusting intellectual ardour, of his pomp as a narrator, of his blind and doctrinaire injustices, of his jesting like a Roman Emperor’s, of the strength of his happiness upon a journey, of his buckishness, of the queer lack of surprising phrases in his work, of his measured omniscience, of the immense weight of tradition in the manner of his writing. There are many contemporary writers whose work seems to be a development of journalism. Mr. Belloc’s is the child of four literatures, or, maybe, half a dozen. He often writes carelessly, sometimes dully but there is the echo of greatness in his work. He is one of the few contemporary men of genius whose books are under-estimated rather than over-estimated. He is an author who has brought back to the world something of the copiousness, fancy, appetite, power, and unreason of the talk that, one imagines, was once to be heard in the Mermaid Tavern.

3. THE TWO MR. CHESTERTONS

I cannot help wishing at times that Mr. Chesterton could be divided in two. One half of him I should like to challenge to mortal combat as an enemy of the human race. The other half I would carry shoulder-high through the streets. For Mr. Chesterton is at once detestable and splendid. He is detestable as a doctrinaire: he is splendid as a sage and a poet who juggles with stars and can keep seven of them in the air at a time. For, if he is a gamester, it is among the lamps of Heaven. We can see to read by his sport. He writes in flashes, and hidden and fantastic truths suddenly show their faces in the play of his sentences.

Unfortunately, his two personalities have become so confused that his later books sometimes strike one as being not so much a game played with light as a game of hide-and-seek between light and darkness. In the darkness he mutters incantations to the monstrous tyrannies of old time: in the light he is on his knees to liberty. He vacillates between superstition and faith. His is a genius at once enslaved and triumphantly rebel. This fatal duality is seen again and again in his references to the tyrannies of the Middle Ages. Thus he writes: “It need not be repeated that the case despotism is democratic. As a rule its cruelty to the strong is kindness to the weak.” I confess I do not know the “rule” to which Mr. Chesterton refers. The picture of the despot as a good creature who shields the poor from the rich is not to be found among the facts of history. The ordinary despot, in his attitude to the common people suffering from the oppressions of their lords, is best portrayed in the fable—if it be a fable—of Marie Antoinette
and her flippancy about eating cake.

I fancy, however, Mr. Chesterton’s defence of despots is not the result of any real taste for them or acquaintance with their history: it is due simply to his passion for extremes. He likes a man, as the vulgar say, to be either one thing or the other. You must be either a Pope or a revolutionist to please him. He loves the visible rhetoric of things, and the sober suits of comfortable citizens seem dull and neutral in comparison with the red of cardinals on the one hand, and of caps of liberty on the other. This, I think, explains Mr. Chesterton’s indifference to, if not dislike of, Parliaments. Parliaments are monuments of compromise, and are guilty of the sin of unpicturesqueness. One would imagine that a historian of England who did not care for Parliaments would be as hopelessly out of his element as a historian of Greece who did not care for the arts. And it is because Mr. Chesterton is indifferent to so much in the English genius and character that he has given us in his recent short History of England, instead of a History of England, a wild and wonderful pageant of argument. “Already,” he cries, as he relates how Parliament “certainly encouraged, and almost certainly obliged” King Richard to break his pledge to the people after the Wat Tyler insurrection:

Already Parliament is not merely a governing body, but a governing class.

The history of England is to Mr. Chesterton largely the history of the rise of the governing class. He blames John Richard Green for leaving the people out of his history; but Mr. Chesterton himself has left out the people as effectually as any of the historians who went before him. The obsession of “the governing class” has thrust the people into the background. History resolves itself with him into a disgraceful epic of a governing class which despoiled Pope and King with the right hand, and the people with the left. It is a disgraceful epic patched with splendid episodes, but it culminates in an appalling cry of doubt whether, after all, it might not be better for England to perish utterly in the great war while fighting for liberty than to survive to behold the triumph of the “governing class” in a servile State of old-age pensions and Insurance Acts.

This theory of history, as being largely the story of the evolution of the “governing class,” is an extremely interesting and even “fruitful” theory. But it is purely fantastic unless we bear in mind that the governing class has been continually compelled to enlarge itself, and that its tendency is reluctantly to go on doing so until in the end it will be coterminous with the “governed class.” History is a tale of exploitation, but it is also a tale of liberation, and the over-emphasis that Mr. Chesterton lays on exploitation by Parliaments as compared
with exploitation by Popes and Kings, can only be due to infidelity in regard to some of the central principles of freedom. Surely it is possible to condemn the Insurance Act, if it must be condemned, without apologizing either for the Roman Empire or for the Roman ecclesiastical system. Mr. Chesterton, however, believes in giving way to one’s prejudices. He says that history should be written backwards; and what does this mean but that it should be dyed in prejudice? thus, he cannot refer to the Hanoverian succession without indulging in a sudden outburst of heated rhetoric such as one might expect rather in a leading article in war-time. He writes:—

With George there entered England something that had scarcely been seen there before; something hardly mentioned in mediaeval or Renascence writing, except as one mentions a Hottentot—the barbarian from beyond the Rhine.

Similarly, his characterization of the Revolution of 1688 is largely a result of his dislike of the governing classes at the present hour:—

The Revolution reduced us to a country wholly governed by gentlemen; the popular universities and schools of the Middle Ages, like their guilds and abbeys, had been seized and turned into what they are—factories of gentlemen when they are not merely factories of snobs.

Both of these statements contain a grain of truth, but neither of them contains enough truth to be true. One might describe them as sweetmeats of history of small nutritious value. One might say the same of his comment on the alliance between Chatham and Frederick the Great:—

The cannibal theory of a commonwealth, that it can of its nature eat other commonwealths, had entered Christendom.

How finely said! But, alas! the cannibal theory of a commonwealth existed long before Chatham and Frederick the Great. The instinct to exploit is one of the most venerable instincts of the human race, whether in individual men or in nations of men; and ancient Hebrew and ancient Greek and ancient Roman had exhausted the passion of centuries in obedience to it before the language spoken either by Chatham or by Frederick was born. Christian Spain, Christian France, and Christian England had not in this matter disowned the example of their Jewish and Pagan forerunners.

What we are infinitely grateful to Mr. Chesterton for, however, is that he has sufficient imagination to loathe cannibalism wherever he sees it. True, he seems to forgive certain forms of cannibalism on the ground that it is an exaggeration to describe the flesh of a rich man as the flesh of a human being. But he does rage with genius at the continual eating of men that went on in England,
especially after the spoliation of the monasteries in the reign of Henry the Eighth gave full scope to the greed of the strong. He sees that the England which Whig and Tory combined to defend as the perfection of the civilized world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was an England governed by men whose chief claim to govern was founded on the fact that they had seized their country and were holding it against their countrymen. Mr. Chesterton rudely shatters the mirror of perfection in which the possessing class have long seen themselves. He writes in a brilliant passage:—

It could truly be said of the English gentleman, as of another gallant and gracious individual, that his honour stood rooted in dishonour. He was, indeed, somewhat in the position of such an aristocrat of romance, whose splendour has the dark spot of a secret and a sort of blackmail. . . . His glory did not come from the Crusades, but from the Great Pillage. . . . The oligarchs were descended from usurers and thieves. That, for good or evil, was the paradox of England; the typical aristocrat was the typical upstart.

But the secret was worse; not only was such a family founded on stealing, but the family was stealing still. It is a grim truth that, all through the eighteenth century, all through the great Whig speeches about liberty, all through the great Tory speeches about patriotism, through the period of Wandiwash and Plassey, through the period of Trafalgar and Waterloo, one process was steadily going on in the central senate of the nation. Parliament was passing Bill after Bill for the enclosure by the great landlords of such of the common lands as had survived out of the great communal system of the Middle Ages. It is much more than a pun, it is the prime political irony of our history that the Commons were destroying the commons.

It would be folly to suggest, however, that, conscious though Mr. Chesterton is of the crimes of history, he has turned history into a mere series of floggings of criminals. He is for ever laying down the whip and inviting the criminals to take their seats while he paints gorgeous portraits of them in all the colours of the rainbow. His praise of the mighty rhetoricians of the eighteenth century could in some passages scarcely be more unstinted if he were a Whig of the Whigs. He cannot but admire the rotund speech and swelling adventures of those days. If we go farther back, we find him portraying even the Puritans with a strange splendour of colour:—

They were, above all things, anti-historic, like the Futurists in Italy; and there was this unconscious greatness about them, that their very sacrilege was public and solemn, like a sacrament; and they were ritualists even as iconoclasts. It was,
properly considered, but a very secondary example of their strange and violent simplicity that one of them, before a mighty mob at Whitehall, cut off the anointed head of the sacramental man of the Middle Ages. For another, far away in the western shires, cut down the thorn of Glastonbury, from which had grown the whole story of Britain.

This last passage is valuable, not only because it reveals Mr. Chesterton as a marvellous rhetorician doing the honours of prose to his enemies, but because it helps to explain the essentially tragic view he takes of English history. I exaggerated a moment ago when I said that to Mr. Chesterton English history is the story of the rise of a governing class. What it really is to him is the story of a thorn-bush cut down by a Puritan. He has hung all the candles of his faith on the sacred thorn, like the lights on a Christmas-tree, and lo! it has been cut down and cast out of England with as little respect as though it were a verse from the Sermon on the Mount. It may be that Mr. Chesterton’s sight is erratic, and that what he took to be the sacred thorn was really a Upas-tree. But in a sense that does not matter. He is entitled to his own fable, if he tells it honestly and beautifully; and it is as a tragic fable or romance of the downfall of liberty in England that one reads his History. He himself contends in the last chapter of the book that the crisis in English history came “with the fall of Richard II, following on his failures to use mediaeval despotism in the interests of mediaeval democracy.” Mr. Chesterton’s history would hardly be worth reading, if he had made nothing more of it than is suggested in that sentence. His book (apart from occasional sloughs of sophistry and fallacious argument) remains in the mind as a song of praise and dolour chanted by the imagination about an England that obeyed not God and despised the Tree of Life, but that may yet, he believes, hear once more the ancestral voices, and with her sons arrayed in trade unions and guilds, march riotously back into the Garden of Eden.
MR. G.K. CHESTERTON’S POINT OF VIEW BY JOHN KELMAN

LECTURE IX

There is on record the case of a man who, after some fourteen years of robust health, spent a week in bed. His illness was apparently due to a violent cold, but he confessed, on medical cross-examination, that the real and underlying cause was the steady reading of Mr. Chesterton’s books for several days on end.

No one will accuse Mr. Chesterton of being an unhealthy writer. On the contrary, he is among the most wholesome writers now alive. He is irresistibly exhilarating, and he inspires his readers with a constant inclination to rise up and shout. Perhaps his danger lies in that very fact, and in the exhaustion of the nerves which such sustained exhilaration is apt to produce. But besides this, he, like so many of our contemporaries, has written such a bewildering quantity of literature on such an amazing variety of subjects, that it is no wonder if sometimes the reader follows panting, through the giddy mazes of the dance. He is the sworn enemy of specialisation, as he explains in his remarkable essay on “The Twelve Men.” The subject of the essay is the British jury, and its thesis is that when our civilisation “wants a library to be catalogued, or a solar system discovered, or any trifle of that kind, it uses up its specialists. But when it wishes anything done which is really serious, it collects twelve of the ordinary men standing round. The same thing was done, if I remember right, by the Founder of Christianity.” For the judging of a criminal or the propagation of the gospel, it is necessary to procure inexpert people—people who come to their task with a virgin eye, and see not what the expert (who has lost his freshness) sees, but the human facts of the case. So Mr. Chesterton insists upon not being a specialist, takes the world for his parish, and wanders over it at will.

This being so, it is obvious that he cannot possibly remember all that he has said, and must necessarily abound in inconsistencies and even contradictions. Yet that is by no means always unconscious, but is due in many instances to the very complex quality and subtle habit of his mind. Were he by any chance to read this statement he would deny it fiercely, but we would repeat it with perfect calmness, knowing that he would probably have denied any other statement we might have made upon the subject. His subtlety is partly due to the extraordinary rapidity with which his mind leaps from one subject to another, partly to the fact
that he is so full of ideas that many of his essays (like Mr. Bernard Shaw’s plays) find it next to impossible to get themselves begun. He is so full of matter that he never seems to be able to say what he wants to say, until he has said a dozen other things first.

The present lecture is mainly concerned with his central position, as that is expounded in Heretics and Orthodoxy. Our task is not to criticise, nor even to any considerable extent to characterise his views, but to state them as accurately as we can. It is a remarkable phenomenon of our time that all our literary men are bent on giving us such elaborate and solemnising confessions of their faith. It is an age notorious for its aversion to dogma, and yet here we have Mr. Huxley, Mr. Le Gallienne, Mr. Shaw, Mr. Wells (to mention only a few of many), who in this creedless age proclaim in the market-place, each his own private and brand-new creed.

Yet Mr. Chesterton has perhaps a special right to such a proclamation. He believes in creeds vehemently. And, besides, the spiritual biography of a man whose mental development has been so independent and so interesting as his, must be well worth knowing. Amid the many weird theologies of our time we have met with nothing so startling, so arresting, and so suggestive since Mr. Mallock published his New Republic and his Contemporary Superstitions. There is something common to the two points of view. To some, they come as emancipating and most welcome reinforcements, relieving the beleaguered citadel of faith. But others, who differ widely from them both, may yet find in them so much to stimulate thought and to rehabilitate strongholds held precariously, as to awaken both appreciation and gratitude.

Mr. Chesterton’s political opinions do not concern us here. It is a curious fact, of which innumerable illustrations may be found in past and present writers, that political radicalism so often goes along with conservative theology, and vice versa. Mr. Chesterton is no exception to the rule. His orthodoxy in matters of faith we shall find to be altogether above suspicion. His radicalism in politics is never long silent. He openly proclaims himself at war with Carlyle’s favourite dogma, “The tools to him who can use them.” “The worst form of slavery,” he tells us, “is that which is called Cæsarism, or the choice of some bold or brilliant man as despot because he is suitable. For that means that men choose a representative, not because he represents them but because he does not.” And if it be answered that the worst form of cruelty to a nation or to an individual is that abuse of the principle of equality which is for ever putting incompetent people into false positions, he has his reply ready: “The one specially and
peculiarly un-Christian idea is the idea of Carlyle—the idea that the man should rule who feels that he can rule. Whatever else is Christian, this is heathen.”

But this, and much else of its kind, although he works it into his general scheme of thinking, is not in any sense an essential part of that scheme. Our subject is his place in the conflict between the paganism and the idealism of the times, and it is a sufficiently large one. But before we come to that, we must consider another matter, which we shall find to be intimately connected with it.

That other matter is his habit of paradox, which is familiar to all his readers. It is a habit of style, but before it became that it was necessarily first a habit of mind, deeply ingrained. He disclaims it so often that we cannot but feel that he protesteth too much. He acknowledges it, and explains that “paradox simply means a certain defiant joy which belongs to belief.” Whether the explanation is or is not perfectly intelligible, it must occur to every one that a writer who finds it necessary to give so remarkable an explanation can hardly be justified in his astonishment when people of merely average intelligence confess themselves puzzled. His aversion to Walter Pater—almost the only writer whom he appears consistently to treat with disrespect—is largely due to Pater’s laborious simplicity of style. But it was a greater than either Walter Pater or Mr. Chesterton who first pointed out that the language which appealed to the understanding of the common man was also that which expressed the highest culture. Mr. Chesterton’s habit of paradox will always obscure his meanings for the common man. He has a vast amount to tell him, but much of it he will never understand.

Paradox, when it has become a habit, is always dangerous. Introduced on rare and fitting occasions, it may be powerful and even convincing, but when it is repeated constantly and upon all sorts of subjects, we cannot but dispute its right and question its validity. Its effect is not conviction but vertigo. It is like trying to live in a house constructed so as to be continually turning upside down. After a certain time, during which terror and dizziness alternate, the most indulgent reader is apt to turn round upon the builder of such a house with some asperity. And, after all, the general judgment may be right and Mr. Chesterton wrong.

Upon analysis, his paradox reveals as its chief and most essential element a certain habit of mind which always tends to see and appreciate the reverse of accepted opinions. So much is this the case that it is possible in many instances to anticipate what he will say upon a subject. It is on record that one reader, coming to his chapter on Omar Khayyám, said to himself, “Now he will be saying that Omar is not drunk enough”; and he went on to read, “It is not
poetical drinking, which is joyous and instinctive; it is rational drinking, which is as prosaic as an investment, as unsavoury as a dose of camomile.” Similarly we are told that Browning is only felt to be obscure because he is too pellucid. Such apparent contradictoriness is everywhere in his work, but along with it goes a curious ingenuity and nimbleness of mind. He cannot think about anything without remembering something else, apparently out of all possible connection with it, and instantly discovering some clever idea, the introduction of which will bring the two together. Christianity “is not a mixture like russet or purple; it is rather like a shot silk, for a shot silk is always at right angles, and is in the pattern of the cross.”

In all this there are certain familiar mechanisms which constitute almost a routine of manipulation for the manufacture of paradoxes. One such mechanical process is the play with the derivatives of words. Thus he reminds us that the journalist is, in the literal and derivative sense, a journalist, while the missionary is an eternalist. Similarly “lunatic,” “evolution,” “progress,” “reform,” are etymologically tortured into the utterance of the most forcible and surprising truths. This curious word-play was a favourite method with Ruskin; and it has the disadvantage in Mr. Chesterton which it had in the earlier critic. It appears too clever to be really sound, although it must be confessed that it frequently has the power of startling us into thoughts that are valuable and suggestive.

Another equally simple process is that of simply reversing sentences and ideas. “A good bush needs no wine.” “Shakespeare (in a weak moment, I think) said that all the world is a stage. But Shakespeare acted on the much finer principle that a stage is all the world.” Perhaps the most brilliant example that could be quoted is the plea for the combination of gentleness and ferocity in Christian character. When the lion lies down with the lamb, it is constantly assumed that the lion becomes lamblike. “But that is brutal annexation and imperialism on the part of the lamb. That is simply the lamb absorbing the lion, instead of the lion eating the lamb.”

By this process it is possible to attain results which are extraordinarily brilliant in themselves and fruitful in suggestion. It is a process not difficult to learn, but the trouble is that you have to live up to it afterwards, and defend many curious propositions which may have been arrived at by its so simple means. Take, for instance, the sentence about the stage being all the world. That is undeniably clever, and it contains an idea. But it is a haphazard idea, arrived at by a short-cut, and not by the high road of reasonable thinking. Sometimes a truth may be reached by such a short-cut, but such paradoxes are occasionally no better than
chartered errors.

Yet even when they are that, it may be said in their favour that they startle us into thought. And truly Mr. Chesterton is invaluable as a quickener and stimulator of the minds of his readers. Moreover, by adopting the method of paradox, he has undoubtedly done one remarkable thing. He has proved what an astonishing number of paradoxical surprises there actually are, lying hidden beneath the apparent commonplace of the world. Every really clever paradox astonishes us not merely with the sense of the cleverness of him who utters it, but with the sense of how many strange coincidences exist around us, and how many sentences, when turned outside in, will yield new and startling truths. However much we may suspect that the performance we are watching is too clever to be trustworthy, yet after all the world does appear to lend itself to such treatment.

There is, for example, the paradox of the love of the world—"Somehow one must love the world without being worldly." Again, "Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die." The martyr differs from the suicide in that he cherishes a disdain of death, while the motive of the suicide is a disdain of life. Charity, too, is a paradox, for it means "one of two things—pardoning unpardonable acts, or loving unlovable people." Similarly Christian humility has a background of unheard-of arrogance, and Christian liberty is possible only to the most abject bondsmen in the world.

This long consideration of Mr. Chesterton’s use of paradox is more relevant to our present subject than it may seem. For, curiously enough, the habit of paradox has been his way of entrance into faith. At the age of sixteen he was a complete agnostic, and it was the reading of Huxley and Herbert Spencer and Bradlaugh which brought him back to orthodox theology. For, as he read, he found that Christianity was attacked on all sides, and for all manner of contradictory reasons; and this discovery led him to the conviction that Christianity must be a very extraordinary thing, abounding in paradox. But he had already discovered the abundant element of paradox in life; and when he analysed the two sets of paradoxes he found them to be precisely the same. So he became a Christian.

It may seem a curious way to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Those who are accustomed to regard the strait gate as of Gothic architecture may be shocked to find a man professing to have entered through this Alhambra-like portal. But it is a lesson we all have to learn sooner or later, that there are at least eleven gates besides our own, and that every man has to enter by that which he finds
available. Paradox is the only gate by which Mr. Chesterton could get into any place, and the Kingdom of Heaven is no exception to the rule.

His account of this entrance is characteristic. It is given in the first chapter of his Orthodoxy. There was an English yachtsman who set out upon a voyage, miscalculated his course, and discovered what he thought to be a new island in the South Seas. It transpired afterwards that he had run up his flag on the pavilion of Brighton, and that he had discovered England. That yachtsman is Mr. Chesterton himself. Sailing the great sea of moral and spiritual speculation, he discovered a land of facts and convictions to which his own experience had guided him. On that strange land he ran up his flag, only to make the further and more astonishing discovery that it was the Christian faith at which he had arrived. Nietzsche had preached to him, as to Mr. Bernard Shaw, his great precept, “Follow your own will.” But when Mr. Chesterton obeyed he arrived, not at Superman, but at the ordinary old-fashioned morality. That, he found, is what we like best in our deepest hearts, and desire most. So he too “discovered England.”

He begins, like Margaret Fuller, with the fundamental principle of accepting the universe. The thing we know best and most directly is human nature in all its breadth. It is indeed the one thing immediately known and knowable. Like R.L. Stevenson, he perceives how tragically and comically astonishing a phenomenon is man. “What a monstrous spectre is this man,” says Stevenson, “the disease of the agglutinated dust, lifting alternate feet or lying drugged with slumber; killing, feeding, growing, bringing forth small copies of himself; grown upon with hair like grass, fitted with eyes that move and glitter in his face; a thing to set children screaming;—and yet looked at nearer, known as his fellows know him, how surprising are his attributes!” In like manner Mr. Chesterton discovers man—that appalling mass of paradox and contradiction—and it is the supreme discovery in any spiritual search.

Having discovered the fundamental fact of human nature, he at once gives in his allegiance to it. “Our attitude towards life can be better expressed in terms of a kind of military loyalty than in terms of criticism and approval. My acceptance of the universe is not optimism, it is more like patriotism. It is a matter of primary loyalty. The world is not a lodging-house at Brighton, which we are to leave because it is miserable. It is the fortress of our family, with the flag flying on the turret, and the more miserable it is, the less we should leave it.”

There is a splendid courage and heartiness in his complete acceptance of life and the universe. In a time when clever people are so busy criticising life that
they are in danger of forgetting that they have to live it, so busy selecting such parts of it as suit their taste that they ignore the fact that the other parts are there, he ignores nothing and wisely accepts instead of criticising. Mr. Bernard Shaw, as we have seen, will consent to tolerate the universe minus the three loyalties to the family, the nation, and God. Mr. Chesterton has no respect whatever for any such mutilated scheme of human life. His view of the institution of the family is full of wholesome common sense. He perceives the immense difficulties that beset all family life, and he accepts them with immediate and unflinching loyalty, as essential parts of our human task. His views on patriotism belong to the region of politics and do not concern us here. In regard to religion, he finds the modern school amalgamating everything in characterless masses of generalities. They deny the reality of sin, and in matters of faith generally they have put every question out of focus until the whole picture is blurred and vague. He attacks this way of dealing with religion in one of his most amusing essays, “The Orthodox Barber.” The barber has been sarcastic about the new shaving—presumably in reference to M. Gillett’s excellent invention. “‘It seems you can shave yourself with anything—with a stick or a stone or a pole or a poker’ (here I began for the first time to detect a sarcastic intonation) ‘or a shovel or a——‘ Here he hesitated for a word, and I, although I knew nothing about the matter, helped him out with suggestions in the same rhetorical vein. ‘Or a button-hook,’ I said, ‘or a blunderbuss or a battering-ram or a piston-rod——’ He resumed, refreshed with this assistance, ‘Or a curtain-rod or a candlestick or a——‘ ‘Cow-catcher,’ I suggested eagerly, and we continued in this ecstatic duet for some time. Then I asked him what it was all about, and he told me. He explained the thing eloquently and at length. ‘The funny part of it is,’ he said, ‘that the thing isn’t new at all. It’s been talked about ever since I was a boy, and long before.’” Mr. Chesterton rejoins in a long and eloquent and most amusing sermon, the following extracts from which are not without far-reaching significance.

“‘What you say reminds me in some dark and dreamy fashion of something else. I recall it especially when you tell me, with such evident experience and sincerity, that the new shaving is not really new. My friend, the human race is always trying this dodge of making everything entirely easy; but the difficulty which it shifts off one thing it shifts on to another. . . . It would be nice if we could be shaved without troubling anybody. It would be nicer still if we could go unshaved without annoying anybody—

“‘But, O wise friend, chief Barber of the Strand, Brother, nor you nor I have made the world.
Whoever made it, who is wiser, and we hope better than we, made it under strange limitations, and with painful conditions of pleasure. . . . But every now and then men jump up with the new something or other and say that everything can be had without sacrifice, that bad is good if you are only enlightened, and that there is no real difference between being shaved and not being shaved. The difference, they say, is only a difference of degree; everything is evolutionary and relative. Shavedness is immanent in man. . . . I have been profoundly interested in what you have told me about the New Shaving. Have you ever heard of a thing called the New Theology?’ He smiled and said that he had not.”

In contrast with all this, it is Mr. Chesterton’s conviction that the facts must be unflinchingly and in their entirety accepted. With characteristic courage he goes straight to the root of the matter and begins with the fact of sin. “If it be true (as it certainly is) that a man can feel exquisite happiness in skinning a cat, then the religious philosopher can only draw one of two deductions. He must either deny the existence of God, as all atheists do; or he must deny the present union between God and man, as all Christians do. The new theologians seem to think it a highly rationalistic solution to deny the cat.” It is as if he said, Here you have direct and unmistakable experience. A man knows his sin as he knows himself. He may explain it in either one way or another way. He may interpret the universe accordingly in terms either of heaven or of hell. But the one unreasonable and impossible thing to do is to deny the experience itself.

It is thus that he treats the question of faith all along the line. If you are going to be a Christian, or even fairly to judge Christianity, you must accept the whole of Christ’s teaching, with all its contradictions, paradoxes, and the rest. Some men select his charity, others his social teaching, others his moral relentlessness, and so on, and reject all else. Each one of these aspects of the Christian faith is doubtless very interesting, but none of them by itself is an adequate representation of Christ. “They have torn the soul of Christ into silly strips, labelled egoism and altruism, and they are equally puzzled by His insane magnificence and His insane meekness. They have parted His garments among them, and for His vesture they have cast lots; though the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout.”

The characteristic word for Mr. Chesterton and his attitude to life is vitality. He has been seeking for human nature, and he has found it at last in Christian idealism. But having found it, he will allow no compromise in its acceptance. It is life he wants, in such wholeness as to embrace every element of human nature. And he finds that Christianity has quickened and intensified life all along the
line. It is the great source of vitality, come that men might have life and that they might have it more abundantly. He finds an essential joy and riot in creation, a “tense and secret festivity.” And Christianity corresponds to that riot. “The more I considered Christianity, the more I found that while it had established a rule and order, the chief aim of that order was to give room for good things to run wild.” It has let loose the wandering, masterless, dangerous virtues, and has insisted that not one or another of them shall run wild, but all of them together. The ideal of wholeness which Matthew Arnold so eloquently advocated, is not a dead mass of theories, but a world of living things. Christ will put a check on none of the really genuine elements in human nature. In Him there is no compromise. His love and His wrath are both burning. All the separate elements of human nature are in full flame, and it is the only ultimate way of peace and safety. The various colours of life must not be mixed but kept distinct. The red and white of passion and purity must not be blended into the insipid pink of a compromising and consistent respectability. They must be kept strong and separate, as in the blazing Cross of St. George on its shield of white.

Chaucer’s “Daisy” is one of the greatest conceptions in all poetry. It has stood for centuries as the emblem of pure and priceless womanhood, with its petals of snowy white and its heart of gold. Mr. Chesterton once made a discovery that sent him wild with joy—

“Then waxed I like the wind because of this, And ran like gospel and apocalypse From door to door, with wild, anarchic lips, Crying the very blasphemy of bliss.”

The discovery was that “the Daisy has a ring of red.” Purity is not the enemy of passion; nor must passion and purity be so toned down and blent with one another, as to give a neutral result. Both must remain, and both in full brilliance, the virgin white and the passionate blood-red ring.

In the present age of reason, the cry is all for tolerance, and for redefinition which will remove sharp contrasts and prove that everything means the same as everything else. In such an age a doctrine like this seems to have a certain barbaric splendour about it, as of a crusader risen from the dead. But Mr. Chesterton is not afraid of the consequences of his opinions. If rationalism opposes his presentation of Christianity, he will ride full tilt against reason. In recent years, from the time of Newman until now, there has been a recurring habit of discounting reason in favour of some other way of approach to truth and life. Certainly Mr. Chesterton’s attack on reason is as interesting as any that have gone before it, and it is even more direct. Even on such a question as the
problem of poverty he frankly prefers imagination to study. In art he demands
instinctiveness, and has a profound suspicion of anybody who is conscious of
possessing the artistic temperament. As a guide to truth he always would follow
poetry in preference to logic. He is never tired of attacking rationality, and for
him anything which is rationalised is destroyed in the process.

In one of his most provokingly unanswerable sallies, he insists that the true
home of reason is the madhouse. “The madman is not the man who has lost his
reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason.”
When we say that a man is mad, we do not mean that he is unable to conduct a
logical argument. On the contrary, any one who knows madmen knows that they
are usually most acute and ingeniously consistent in argument. They isolate
some one fixed idea, and round that they build up a world that is fiercely and
tremendously complete. Every detail fits in, and the world in which they live is
not, as is commonly supposed, a world of disconnected and fantastic
imaginations, but one of iron-bound and remorseless logic. No task is more
humiliating, nor more likely to shake one’s sense of security in fundamental
convictions, than that of arguing out a thesis with a lunatic.

Further, beneath this rationality there is in the madman a profound belief in
himself. Most of us regard with respect those who trust their own judgment more
than we find ourselves able to trust ours. But not the most confident of them all
can equal the unswerving confidence of a madman. Sane people never wholly
believe in themselves. They are liable to be influenced by the opinion of others,
and are willing to yield to the consensus of opinion of past or present thinkers.
The lunatic cares nothing for the views of others. He believes in himself against
the world, with a terrific grip of conviction and a faith that nothing can shake.

Mr. Chesterton applies his attack upon rationality to many subjects, with
singular ingenuity. In the question of marriage and divorce, for instance, the
modern school which would break loose from the ancient bonds can present their
case with an apparently unassailable show of rationality. But his reply to them
and to all other rationalists is that life is not rational and consistent but para
doxical and contradictory. To make life rational you have to leave out so many
elements as to make it shrink from a big world to a little one, which may be
complete, but can never be much of a world. Its conception of God may be a
complete conception, but its God is not much of a God. But the world of human
nature is a vast world, and the God of Christianity is an Infinite God. The huge
mysteries of life and death, of love and sacrifice, of the wine of Cana and the
Cross of Calvary—these outwit all logic and pass all understanding. So for sane
men there comes in a higher authority. You may call it common sense, or mysticism, or faith, as you please. It is the extra element by virtue of which all sane thinking and all religious life are rendered possible. It is the secret spring of vitality alike in human nature and in Christian faith.

At this point it may be permissible to question Mr. Chesterton’s use of words in one important point. He appears to fall into the old error of confounding reason with reasoning. Reason is one thing and argument another. It may be impossible to express either human nature or religious faith in a series of syllogistic arguments, and yet both may be reasonable in a higher sense. Reason includes those extra elements to which Mr. Chesterton trusts. It is the synthesis of our whole powers of finding truth. Many things which cannot be proved by reasoning may yet be given in reason—involved in any reasonable view of things as a whole. Thus faith includes reason—it is reason on a larger scale—and it is the only reasonable course for a man to take in a world of mysterious experience. If the matter were stated in that way, Mr. Chesterton would probably assent to it. Put crudely, the fashion of pitting faith against reason and discarding reason in favour of faith, is simply sawing off the branch on which you are sitting. The result is that you must fall to the ground at the feet of the sceptic, who asks, “How can you believe that which you have confessed there is no reason to believe?” We have abundant reason for our belief, and that reason includes those higher intuitions, that practical common sense, and that view of things as a whole, which the argument of the mere logician necessarily ignores.

With this reservation, Mr. Chesterton’s position in regard to faith is absolutely unassailable. He is the most vital of our modern idealists, and his peculiar way of thinking himself into his idealism has given to the term a richer and more spacious meaning, which combines excellently the Greek and the Hebrew elements. His great ideal is that of manhood. Be a man, he cries aloud, not an artist, not a reasoner, not any other kind or detail of humanity, but be a man. But then that means, Be a creature whose life swings far out beyond this world and its affairs—swings dangerously between heaven and hell. Eternity is in the heart of every man. The fashionable modern gospel of Pragmatism is telling us to-day that we should not vex ourselves about the ultimate truth of theories, but inquire only as to their value for life here and now, and the practical needs which they serve. But the most practical of all man’s needs is his need of some contact with a higher world than that of sense. “To say that a man is an idealist is merely to say that he is a man.” In the scale of differences between important and unimportant earthly things, it is the spiritual and not the material that counts.
“An ignorance of the other world is boasted by many men of science; but in this matter their defect arises, not from ignorance of the other world, but from ignorance of this world.” “The moment any matter has passed through the human mind it is finally and for ever spoilt for all purposes of science. It has become a thing incurably mysterious and infinite; this mortal has put on immortality.”

Here we begin to see the immense value of paradox in the matter of faith. Mr. Chesterton is an optimist, not because he fits into this world, but because he does not fit into it. Pagan optimism is content with the world, and subsists entirely in virtue of its power to fit into it and find it sufficient. This is that optimism of which Browning speaks with scorn—

“Tame in earth’s paddock as her prize,”
and which he repudiates in the famous lines,
“Then, welcome each rebuff
That turns earth’s smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
Be our joys three parts pain!

Strive, and hold cheap the strain;

Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throes!”

Mr. Chesterton insists that beyond the things which surround us here on the earth there are other things which claim us from beyond. The higher instincts which discover these are not tools to be used for making the most of earthly treasures, but sacred relics to be guarded. He is an idealist who has been out beyond the world. There he has found a whole universe of mysterious but commanding facts, and has discovered that these and these alone can satisfy human nature.

The question must, however, arise, as to the validity of those spiritual claims. How can we be sure that the ideals which claim us from beyond are realities, and not mere dream shapes? There is no answer but this, that if we question the validity of our own convictions and the reality of our most pressing needs, we have simply committed spiritual suicide, and arrived prematurely at the end of all things. With the habit of questioning ultimate convictions Mr. Chesterton has little patience. Modesty, he tells us, has settled in the wrong place. We believe in ourselves and we doubt the truth that is in us. But we ourselves, the crude reality which we actually are, are altogether unreliable; while the vision is always trustworthy. We are for ever changing the vision to suit the world as we find it, whereas we ought to be changing the world to bring it into conformity with the unchanging vision. The very essence of orthodoxy is a profound and reverent
conviction of ideals that cannot be changed—ideals which were the first, and shall be the last.

If Mr. Chesterton often strains his readers’ powers of attention by rapid and surprising movements among very difficult themes, he certainly has charming ways of relieving the strain. The favourite among all such methods is his reversion to the subject of fairy tales. In “The Dragon’s Grandmother” he introduces us to the arch-sceptic who did not believe in them—that fresh-coloured and short-sighted young man who had a curious green tie and a very long neck. It happened that this young man had called on him just when he had flung aside in disgust a heap of the usual modern problem-novels, and fallen back with vehement contentment on Grimm’s Fairy Tales. “When he incidentally mentioned that he did not believe in fairy tales, I broke out beyond control. ‘Man,’ I said, ‘who are you that you should not believe in fairy tales? It is much easier to believe in Blue Beard than to believe in you. A blue beard is a misfortune; but there are green ties which are sins. It is far easier to believe in a million fairy tales than to believe in one man who does not like fairy tales. I would rather kiss Grimm instead of a Bible and swear to all his stories as if they were thirty-nine articles than say seriously and out of my heart that there can be such a man as you; that you are not some temptation of the devil or some delusion from the void.’” The reason for this unexpected outbreak is a very deep one. “Folk-lore means that the soul is sane, but that the universe is wild and full of marvels. Realism means that the world is dull and full of routine, but that the soul is sick and screaming. The problem of the fairy tale is—what will a healthy man do with a fantastic world? The problem of the modern novel is—what will a madman do with a dull world? In the fairy tale the cosmos goes mad; but the hero does not go mad. In the modern novels the hero is mad before the book begins, and suffers from the harsh steadiness and cruel sanity of the cosmos.”

In other words, the ideals, the ultimate convictions, are the trustworthy things; the actual experience of life is often matter not for distrust only but for scorn and contempt. And this philosophy Mr. Chesterton learned in the nursery, from that “solemn and star-appointed priestess,” his nurse. The fairy tale, and not the problem-novel, is the true presentment of human nature and of life. For, in the first place it preserves in man the faculty most essential to human nature—the faculty of wonder, without which no man can live. To regain that faculty is to be born again, out of a false world into a true. The constant repetition of the laws of Nature blunts our spirits to the amazing character of every detail which she reproduces. To catch again the wonder of common things—
—is to pass from darkness into light, from falsehood to truth. “All the towering materialism which dominates the modern mind rests ultimately upon one assumption: a false assumption. It is supposed that if a thing goes on repeating itself it is probably dead: a piece of clockwork.” But that is mere blindness to the mystery and surprise of everything that goes to make up actual human experience. “The repetition in Nature seemed sometimes to be an excited repetition, like that of an angry schoolmaster saying the same thing over and over again. The grass seemed signalling to me with all its fingers at once; the crowded stars seemed bent on being understood. The sun would make me see him if he rose a thousand times.”

That is one fact, which fairy tales emphasise—the constant demand for wonder in the world, and the appropriateness and rightness of the wondering attitude of mind, as man passes through his lifelong gallery of celestial visions. The second fact is that all such vision is conditional, and “hangs upon a veto. All the dizzy and colossal things conceded depend upon one small thing withheld. All the wild and whirling things that are let loose depend upon one thing which is forbidden.” This is the very note of fairyland. “You may live in a palace of gold and sapphire, if you do not say the word ‘cow’; or you may live happily with the King’s daughter, if you do not show her an onion.” The conditions may seem arbitrary, but that is not the point. The point is that there always are conditions. The parallel with human life is obvious. Many people in the modern world are eagerly bent on having the reward without fulfilling the condition, but life is not made that way. The whole problem of marriage is a case in point. Its conditions are rigorous, and people on all sides are trying to relax them or to do away with them. Similarly, all along the line, modern society is seeking to live in a freedom which is in the nature of things incompatible with the enjoyment or the prosperity of the human spirit. There is an if in everything. Life is like that, and we cannot alter it. Quarrel with the seemingly arbitrary or unreasonable condition, and the whole fairy palace vanishes. “Life itself is as bright as the diamond, but as brittle as the window-pane.”

From all this it is but a step to the consideration of dogma and the orthodox Christian creed. Mr. Chesterton is at war to the knife with vague modernism in all its forms. The eternal verities which produce great convictions are incomparably the most important things for human nature. No “inner light” will serve man’s turn, but some outer light, and that only and always. “Christianity came into the world, firstly in order to assert with violence that a man had not
only to look inwards, but to look outwards, to behold with astonishment and enthusiasm a divine company and a divine captain.” This again is human nature. No man can live his life out fully without being mastered by convictions that he cannot challenge, and for whose origin he is not responsible. The most essentially human thing is the sense that these, the supreme conditions of life, are not of man’s own arranging, but have been and are imposed upon him.

At almost every point this system may be disputed. Mr. Chesterton, who never shrinks from pressing his theories to their utmost length, scoffs at the modern habit of “saying that such-and-such a creed can be held in one age, but cannot be held in another. Some dogma, we are told, was credible in the twelfth century, but is not credible in the twentieth. You might as well say that a certain philosophy can be believed on Mondays, but cannot be believed on Tuesdays. You might as well say of a view of the cosmos that it was suitable to half-past three, but not suitable to half-past four.” That is precisely what many of us do say. Our powers of dogmatising vary to some extent with our moods, and to a still greater extent with the reception of new light. There are many days on which the dogmas of early morning are impossible and even absurd when considered in the light of evening.

But it is not our task to criticise Mr. Chesterton’s faith nor his way of dealing with it. Were we to do so, most of us would probably strike a balance. We would find many of his views and statements unconvincing; and yet we would acknowledge that they had the power of forcing the mind to see fresh truth upon which the will must act decisively. The main point in his orthodoxy is unquestionably a most valuable contribution to the general faith of his time and country. That point is the adventure which he narrates under the similitude of the voyage that ended in the discovery of England. He set out to find the empirical truth of human nature and the meaning of human life, as these are to be explored in experience. When he found them, it was infinitely surprising to him to become aware that the system in which his faith had come at last to rest was just Christianity—the only system which could offer any adequate and indeed exact account of human nature. The articles of its creed he recognised as the points of conviction which are absolutely necessary to the understanding of human nature and to the living of human life.

Thus it comes to pass that in the midst of a time resounding with pagan voices old and new, he stands for an unflinching idealism. It is the mark of pagans that they are children of Nature, boasting that Nature is their mother: they are solemnised by that still and unresponsive maternity, or driven into rebellion by
discovering that the so-called mother is but a harsh stepmother after all. Mr. Chesterton loves Nature, because Christianity has revealed to him that she is but his sister, child of the same Father. “We can be proud of her beauty, since we have the same father; but she has no authority over us; we have to admire, but not to imitate.”

It follows that two worlds are his, as is the case with all true idealists. The modern reversion to paganism is founded on the fundamental error that Christianity is alien to Nature, setting up against her freedom the repellent ideal of asceticism, and frowning upon her beauty with the scowl of the harsh moralist. For Mr. Chesterton the bleakness is all on the side of the pagans, and the beauty with the idealists. They do not look askance at the green earth at all. They gaze upon it with steady eyes, until they are actually looking through it, and discovering the radiance of heaven there, and the sublime brightness of the Eternal Life. The pagan virtues, such as justice and temperance, are painfully reasonable and often sad. The Christian virtues are faith, hope, and charity—each more unreasonable than the last, from the point of view of mere mundane common sense; but they are gay as childhood, and hold the secret of perennial youth and unfading beauty, in a world which upon any other terms than these is hastening to decay.
TRUE DEVOTION TO MARY: WITH PREPARATION FOR TOTAL CONSECRATION:

Paperback Hardback Kindle